



Kids in the Kitchen

When the kids are restless and looking for something fun to do, get them involved in the kitchen. The kitchen is a great place for children to learn about the foods they eat. And if you let go of angst about messes and use caution (and common sense) where basic safety is concerned, you'll end up teaching them and having fun. And talk about a great investment: your child just might become an exceptional cook and invite *you* over for Sunday meals! At the very least you'll help build a healthy appreciation and love for cooking that will be with them throughout their lives.

Depending on the age of your child, you can teach them about colors, shapes, counting, and sorting. Stimulate speech by asking them to describe the foods they are working with or have them tell you about how foods are similar or different. If you have a child who craves physical stimulation, let them knead dough, or stir a thick batter. Buy fruits and vegetables with varying types of skins and compare textures.

As food transforms you can introduce basic science principles. Butter melts when warmed; vegetables get softer as you sauté them; gelatin becomes firm when cooled; oil and vinegar don't mix. Talk about the smell or sound that foods make while they're cooking.

If you're looking for a recipe that will guarantee a good time together, try your hand at Brown Sugar Lolli-Pops. These whimsical sweet treats are made with popcorn, a whole-grain food, and coated with a magical dusting of brown sugar and cinnamon. You can pop popcorn on the stovetop or in a popcorn popper for a firsthand look

at how a simple seed can change into a snack. After you've mixed the caramelized sugar with the popcorn and it's cool enough to handle, let the kids help shape them into balls.

Brown Sugar Lolli-Pops

- 6 cups air-popped popcorn
- 1 cup brown sugar
- ¼ cup honey
- 1/3 cup water
- 1 tbsp. light margarine
- Butter flavored cooking spray
- 3 tbsp. cinnamon-sugar mixture (2 tbsp. sugar to 1 tbsp. cinnamon)
- Mini pretzel sticks

Combine sugar, honey, and water in a 2-quart saucepan; bring to a boil over high heat, stirring constantly until sugar is dissolved. Cook until sugar forms thick, "ropy" threads that drip from the spoon. Add butter and stir to mix. Slowly pour mixture over popcorn, tossing to mix. When popcorn has cooled slightly, spray hands with cooking spray and shape into small balls. Insert pretzel stick to create a lollipop. Roll in cinnamon-sugar mixture and wrap in plastic wrap or store in zip-style bags.