Some rules to cook by:

- Wash hands with soap and water before cooking or eating.
- Always supervise young cooks.
- Read recipes all the way through and make sure you have the equipment and ingredients before you start. Follow the directions exactly.
- Children have short attention spans. Give them quick, simple jobs to do, and give them instructions one at a time. They may get excited and forget a step or two. Repeat directions as often as needed.
- Use a plastic cutting board, not the counter, for slicing and dicing.
- Clean up as you go and make sure everything is clean and put up when cooking and eating are finished.

Puting Knowledge to Work

When you have a question, call or visit your local office of The University of Georgia’s Cooperative Extension Service.

You’ll find a friendly, well-trained staff ready to help you with information, advice, and free publications covering agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer sciences, 4-H and youth development.

REVISED BY DON BOWER,
Extension Human Development Specialist,
from publications originally prepared by
Mary White and Mary Anne Pace-Nichols.

The University of Georgia and Ft. Valley State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and counties of the state cooperating. The Cooperative Extension Service, The University of Georgia College of Family and Consumer Sciences, and College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences offer educational programs, assistance, and materials to all people without regard to race, color, national origin, age, sex, or disability.

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY/AFFIRMATIVE ACTION ORGANIZATION COMMITTED TO A DIVERSE WORK FORCE

CHFD-E 19-23 August 2001

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914. The University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences and the U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating.

Gale A. Buchanan, Dean & Director

The University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service
College of Family and Consumer Sciences and College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences cooperating
What adult wouldn’t like to come home after a hard day of work to a tasty, healthy meal on the table and a clean kitchen? Many parents work full-time, and family schedules can be hectic. It makes sense that school-age and older children should be able to help prepare simple meals. Does it sound like a dream? Children can help in the kitchen in many ways, even during their preschool years. How can you teach your child his way around the kitchen? Can he really learn to create safe, tasty and nutritious meals?

Knowing the capabilities of each age will help you plan which activities are best for your child.

**Preschool Children**

Three- and four-year-olds can help with big-muscle activities. Let them tear lettuce for salad, snap beans for cooking, or wash fruits and vegetables.

They probably prefer working by themselves, with their own bowl and spoon, instead of taking turns stirring, for example.

A single activity may last only 5-10 minutes. Encourage their continued interest by letting them identify colors and shapes of foods as you work.

Put liquid ingredients in small containers so your child can pour them into a bigger bowl. Let them try spreading soft ingredients.

Spills are to be expected at this age. Keep sponges close so kids as young as four can help wipe up spills.

Look for cookbooks that have simple recipes that are drawn in pictures. Help them to develop their language skills by asking them to tell you their “recipe” for a favorite food.

Let them set the table (help them by carrying the knives, though).

Let them wrap foods for storing or the microwave.

**Primary-school age**

Smaller muscles are more coordinated at this age. Children are usually able to shuck corn, peel shrimp, peel cooked eggs, roll out cookie dough, and mash bananas for banana bread, or mash cooked beans for dip.

They usually enjoy working with other people and can help you measure and combine ingredients.

**Middle-school age or older**

Turning a pre-teen or older child into a competent cook takes time and practice, but the rewards are worth it: help in the kitchen, a tasty meal ready and waiting, and a more responsible young person who is aware of nutritious food.

Take time to show young cooks how to use various appliances and kitchen tools safely.

Demonstrate safe knife use and make sure your fire extinguisher works and is easily reached and operated by a child.

Help your child put together a basic step-by-step cookbook of simple menus and nutritious recipes for which you keep a supply of ingredients on hand.

Discuss kitchen safety and cleanliness rules with your young cook so you will feel more confident when he uses the kitchen.