

Experiential Activities Grades 3-5



Cherry-Picking!

Read the info below on cherry picking – it is a lot, so pick out some key points to share with your children, and their parents if you have the opportunity!

There are two types of cherries: sweet cherries and sour (or pie) cherries. The difference is simple: sweet cherries taste sweeter and are eaten fresh. Pie cherries are very tart and most people prefer to use them in pies, jams, preserves, jellies and butters, adding sugar to sweeten them.



Cherry picking tips

- Cherries, like peaches, continue to increase in size until they are ripe. They should be picked when they are of maximum size and full-flavored.
- Cherries picked before they are fully mature will not ripen off the tree.
- Sweet cherries become firm when ripe (the stems usually stay attached when you pick a sweet cherry), and sour cherries part easily from the stem.
- Look for heavy, firm cherries with a shiny skin and fresh stem.
- Cherries will keep longer if the stems are left attached.
- For immediate use, they can be picked with or without the stems.

How to pick the cherries from the tree

1. Gently grasp the berry with your fingers and thumb, and tug gently.
2. If it is ripe, it will easily come off in your hand, with the stem attached.
3. Repeat these operations using both hands until each holds 3 or 4 cherries.
4. Carefully place - don't throw - the fruit into your containers. Repeat the picking process with both hands.
5. Don't overfill your containers or try to pack the cherries down.

General Picking Tips

Whether you pick Cherries from your own trees, a market, or at a Pick-Your-Own farm, here are a few tips to keep in mind:

1. Pick only the cherries that are fully red (or whatever color they are supposed to be when ripe!). Part the leaves with your hands to look for hidden cherries ready for harvest.
2. Avoid placing the picked cherries in the sunshine any longer than necessary. It is better to put them in the shade of a tree or shed than in the car trunk or on the car seat.
3. Cool them as soon as possible after picking. Cherries may be kept fresh in the refrigerator for two or three days, depending upon the initial quality of the berry.



Community and Home Gardening Kid Friendly Fun

Before you leave to go to the farm:

1. Always call before you go to the farm - Cherries are affected by weather (especially rain and cooler temperatures) more than most crops. And when they are in season, a large turnout can pick a field clean before noon, so CALL first!
2. Leave early. On weekends, then fields may be picked clean by NOON!
3. Most growers furnish picking containers designed for Cherries, but they may charge you for them; be sure to call before you go to see if you need to bring containers.
If you use your own containers, remember that heaping Cherries more than 3 inches deep will smush the lower cherries. Plastic dishpans, metal oven pans with 3 inch tall sides and large pots make good containers.
4. Bring something to drink and a few snacks; you'd be surprised how you can work up a thirst and appetite! And don't forget hats and sunscreen for the sun. Bugs usually aren't a problem, but some bug repellent might be good to bring along if it has been rainy.

When you get home

1. DON'T wash the cherries until you are ready to use them. Washing makes them more prone to spoiling.
2. Cherries are more perishable than blueberries or strawberries, so make a point of refrigerating them as immediately as possible after purchase. Temperatures between 34 F and 38 F are best, but, be careful not to freeze cherries! (Fresh cherries are highly prone to freeze damage).
3. Pour them out into shallow pans and remove any mushed, soft or rotting cherries.
4. Even under ideal conditions cherries will only keep for a few days in a refrigerator, so for best flavor and texture, consume as soon as possible after purchase.

Source: <http://pickyourown.org/cherrypickingtips.htm>

GARDEN PARTY – Decorate a Flower Pot!

Materials Needed

- 4-inch clay pot for each child
- craft paints
- inexpensive brushes
- old shirts to use as smocks (or ask each child to bring one from home)
- potting soil
- seeds or seedlings

Instructions

- Paint the pots, then set them aside to dry.
- Once the pots are dry, let each child pot up a flower or vegetable seedling to take home, or even a small, easy-to-grow houseplant such as spider plants or African violets. Ask an adult for help – they love to get their hands dirty too!
- If plants are not available, planting seeds is another option. Waiting for a seed to push through the soil is an exciting prospect for children, especially if it's one he or she has planted. Choose large seeds that are easy to handle, such as pumpkins, beans or zinnias.
- If doing this at a garden party, consider making the pots ahead of time and use them to decorate at the party. Do the “planting” at the party. Make extras to give away to your guests!



Source: <https://www.kidsgardening.org/garden-activities-throw-a-garden-birthday-party>





Community and Home Gardening Kid Friendly Fun

GARDEN PARTY – Fruit Bowl Game

Everyone stands in a circle and gets labelled with one of four fruits (you might have three bananas, three oranges, three pears and three apples, for example). Have someone shout out a fruit at random (or have someone draw from a basket), and everyone who's labelled with that fruit has to run and switch places with another. Shout out 'fruit bowl' and EVERYONE has to run and find a new place. There's no winners, but lots of fun!

Source: <https://www.tescoliving.com/articles/8-outdoor-party-games-for-an-action-packed-picnic>





Community and Home Gardening

Kid Friendly Fun

GARDEN PARTY – Planting a Garden Game

Sit everyone down in a circle, and begin by saying

“I’m going to plant a garden and I’m planting _____”.

The next person repeats the phrase, but has to remember your fruit/vegetable/herb as well as saying their own. Continue going around, with each person adding a plant until people start forgetting. Whoever can remember the most wins! If you have a lot of people, make two or even three circles – try mixing friends of all ages!

Adapted from: <https://www.tescoliving.com/articles/8-outdoor-party-games-for-an-action-packed-picnic>



FRUIT AND/OR HERB INFUSED WATER!!

Want to find a way to make water super special?!! Try making your own no-sugar-added fruit-herb-infused water!! Great for parties, club meetings, or just enjoying water at home! Check out these recipes below – and remember, wash the ingredients before you put them in the water! Also, you may want to make some of these infused waters the day before you want to enjoy them so they have time to “infuse” well – just make them and store in the refrigerator till you are ready to enjoy.

Strawberry Mint:

- Drop sliced strawberries and a handful of mint leaves into the water; add as much as you want! Expert tip: Tear and mash/muddle the leaves before you add them to the mix to release even more robust flavor; also, consider mashing some of the strawberries as well to release more flavor.

Citrus Mint:

- Drop peeled and sliced grapefruit; peeled and sliced lemons; a sliced cucumber; and a handful of fresh mint leaves, torn and muddled, into the water. Mash the fruit to release more flavor.

Blueberry Orange:

- Drop peeled and mashed mandarin oranges, a handful of mashed blueberries into water.

Citrus Rainbow:

- Drop a variety of peeled and sliced citrus (different oranges, clementine, lemon, lime) into water, add a handful of mint or basil, muddled, if desired!



Sources: <http://dailyburn.com/life/recipes/fruit-infused-water-recipes>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-obittiqlOs>



GARDEN PARTY – Make Garden Markers!

Materials

- clean rocks of various sizes/shapes (flat work best)
- acrylic paint
- brushes
- clear varnish
- permanent markers (optional)

Instructions

- Paint a rock to look like a fruit or vegetable or paint it in a fun way and write the name of the fruit/vegetable on the rock.
- Use permanent markers for small details/writing.
- No need to paint the bottom of the rock.
- If you will be keeping the rock outdoors, coat with clear varnish (adults only).
- If using this activity for a garden party, set supplies out for guests to paint rocks during the party. Let the different coats of paint dry while doing other activities.



Sources:

<http://www.adventure-in-a-box.com/how-to-make-garden-markers-by-painting-stones-art-tuesday>

<http://craftsbyamanda.com/painted-rock-garden-markers>



GARDEN PARTY – Make a Plant Pal!

Materials

- old pantyhose
- potting soil
- grass seed
- wiggle eyes, buttons, pipe cleaners, etc.
- craft glue
- small plastic trays/soap dishes, or shallow bowls for each child

Instructions

- Cut a 6 to 8 inch long piece of panty hose (any color will work). If your piece does not include a toe, then knot one end of the hose and turn it inside out. It will end up looking like a little pantyhose bag.
- Next scoop 2 to 3 teaspoons of grass seed into the closed end. Fill the rest of the hose with potting mix and tie the hose closed. Use your hands to gently shape the ball into a head shape.
- Place the head in a shallow dish with the grass seed side on top. Use craft pieces such as wiggle eyes, buttons, pompom balls, felt and chenille sticks to make eyes, a nose, mouth and arms. Attach with craft glue.
- Find a warm place to set the Plant Pals, or send them home. Either way, after glue has dried, tell them to carefully water their Plant Pal until the soil is thoroughly moist. Place it in a warm location. Within 3 to 5 days, the Plant Pal will begin to grow hair.

Send us pictures of your Plant Pals!!!

Source: <https://www.kidsgardening.org/garden-activities-throw-a-garden-birthday-party>



Garden Party – Snacks!

Throwing a garden party? This can be a fun activity, even if you don't have your own garden!!

If you have a garden, offer tastes of the produce you have grown! If not, try to feature produce commonly grown in your area. Here are a few ideas and recipes to get you started!

Snack Ideas

- Cucumber Tree:** Slice 1-2" end off of a cucumber, place flat side down on plate. Insert skewer into this piece. Slice cucumber diagonally (see photo) and let older children place slices on skewer as shown, alternating the pieces as shown. Top with cherry tomato, red pepper or another veggie to cover top of skewer.
- Veggie Cups:** Clean and cut various vegetables (carrots, celery, peppers) into strips. Let children put ranch dressing (make your own protein-rich ranch dressing using Greek yogurt <http://bit.ly/ranchprotein>) into the bottom of small clear cups, then add colorful veggie sticks!
- Celery Butterflies:** Clean and slice celery; let children put cream cheese or peanut butter in the ridge of the celery to hold the mini-pretzels (wings) and raisins (antennae).



Help your children throw an **End-of-the-Summer Edible Garden Party!!**

Throw a fun, educational and nutritious “**End-of-the-Summer Edible Garden Party!!**” Find some suggestions below, and on page 2:

- Decorate your dining and serving tables with your garden bounty, serve foods using your bounty (see page 2 for more information)!
- Invite local chefs from restaurants that use local produce, ask them to do short demonstrations and/or provide some items for tastings using produce you grew.
- Ask parents, grandparents, and children to share gardening strategies for various types of edible gardens.
- Ask each guest at your party if they have a garden, and if so, how they planned it, planted it, tended it, and what they harvested – get people talking about gardening so others can see that it is something they can do!
- Use this garden party to celebrate the success of your P&R gardens, home gardens, and/or community gardens, small in containers or large in the ground, to inspire others to grow at home or in the community.
- As part of your celebration, showcase infused water in pretty bowls or dispensers – use your favorite herbs, veggies, and/or fruits to add yummy flavors to the water! For examples,



see: <http://bit.ly/CHGinfusedwater>, <http://bit.ly/CHGinfusedwater2>, <http://bit.ly/CHGinfusedwater3>.

- At the end of the party, formally launch a growing challenge for fall – perhaps challenges families and P&R agencies to grow kale or fall lettuces, which are quick to germinate and grow to harvest! Ask them to share pictures with you and post to social media (facebook, Instagram, etc.)!





Community and Home Gardening Kid Friendly Fun

Peach and Nectarine Facts & Picking Tips!

In the U.S., Peaches typically peak during late June through July in the South, and July and August in the North. In order to produce good local peaches, producers depend on ideal spring and early summer weather conditions, and no late frosts.



Before you leave to go to the farm:

1. Always call before you go to the farm - Peaches are affected by weather (both rain and cooler temperature) more than most crops. And when they are in season, a large turnout can pick a field clean before noon, so CALL first!
2. Leave early. On weekends, then fields may be picked clean by NOON!
3. Most growers furnish picking containers designed for peaches, but they may charge you for them; be sure to call before you go to see if you need to bring containers.
If you use your own containers, remember that heaping Peaches more than 14 inches deep will bruise the fruit on the bottom. Plastic dishpans, metal oven pans with 3 inch tall sides and large pots make good containers.
4. Bring something to drink and a few snacks, hats and sunscreen, and bug spray.
5. You might want to ask what kind of peaches they have! There are two major types of peaches: "Freestone" and "Clingstone". Freestone peaches and nectarines have flesh that slips easily away from the pit. Clingstones are a REAL pain, because the fruit tenaciously clings to the stone or pit! Most peach varieties grown today are freestone and are usually available (depending upon your location) from June through September. Some nectarines are freestone and some are clingstone. Freestone nectarines are available in June and July. Most plum varieties are clingstone.

How to pick peaches

A peach is softer than most fruit, so it is important to pick a peach gently, with little pressure. Using the sides of your fingers rather your fingertips helps to avoid bruising. Grab the peach firmly and pull it straight off the branch. DON'T drop the peach into the basket, but set it in gently!

Marks on the Peaches

Bugs (particularly squash bugs and stink bugs) bite fruit during development and this results in some imperfections in the peach. This is especially the case with organically raised fruit. These look like dents in the peaches if the peaches were bitten by a bug when they were young. This causes a spot that does not grow properly and makes a wrinkle in the peach. There's nothing wrong with these peaches. They may look funny, but they will taste just as good as blemish-free peaches, and it's better not to have the pesticides!

How to tell if the peaches are ripe!

- **Attached to the tree:** Peaches are best picked when the fruit separates easily from the twigs. If it is hard to pull off the tree, it isn't ripe! Peaches will not ripen further once removed from the tree (they only "soften").
- **Color:** Green is definitely unripe, but you can't use red color as an indicator of how ripe a peach is. Different peach varieties have differing amounts of red blush in their natural coloring. Pick them when the ground color changes from green to yellow, orange, red (or a combination). The skin of yellow-fleshed varieties ripens to an orange tint, while the skin of white-fleshed varieties changes from greenish to yellow-white.
- **Softness:** Unless you like your peaches very firm, pick your peaches with just a little "give" when gently pressed. Peaches at this stage are great for eating, freezing, and baking. Peaches won't ripen very much after picking!
- **Odor:** It should smell sweet and ripe!

When you get home

- Spread the fruit out on towels or newspapers and separate any mushy or damaged fruit to use immediately.
- Put a couple of days' supply into the fridge, wash and cut the others and freeze them up!
- Even under ideal conditions peaches will only keep for a week in a refrigerator, so for best flavor and texture, use them as soon as possible after purchase.

