



SEED
TO
Stomach
 Clayton Early Learning

[Click here to watch a video about Seed to Stomach](#)



DENVER
 PUBLIC HEALTH &
 ENVIRONMENT

**HEALTHY
 FOOD FOR
 DENVER'S** Kids

Made possible by a grant from Healthy Food for Denver's Kids Initiative through the Denver Department of Public Health & Environment.



Healthy early development, including good nutrition, optimal physical and mental health, and social-emotional wellness, lays the foundation for a child's success in school, life, and beyond. Seed to Stomach offers early education experiences that are organically driven by children's inquiry and imagination, with wonder, creativity, confidence, and fun that can be easily incorporated into classroom settings and duplicated at home as part of everyday life.

This activity guide, appropriate for children ages five and younger, is designed to introduce the wonders of our natural environment. The activities can be enjoyed by children, teachers, and families in any environment but may be especially enriching for children in urban settings who may not have easy access to nature.



Did You Know?

By the age of three, 80% of brain development is complete. That is why it is critically important to fill every day with healthy and happy experiences.



Seed to Stomach through the Seasons

Much like the rhythm of seasons in nature, a child's growth and development can flow and move in similar cycles. Seed to Stomach is presented in the framework of our four seasons, with material that promotes learning and healthy development with the theme of nature and is created to instill health and well-being practices that can last a lifetime.

With activities for the garden and the kitchen, this program encourages curiosity about where our food comes from, how we can be better stewards of our natural resources, and some simple, fun, and delicious ways young children and their families can enjoy healthy lifestyles.



Learning through Sensory Experiences

Seed to Stomach is designed to be a full sensory experience, engaging sight, touch, smell, taste, and hearing as natural paths to exploration. Encouraging children to use their senses supports their healthy growth and development and builds healthful practices for the entire family. Throughout the Seed to Stomach activities, look for these sensory icons for reminders to incorporate simple sensory engagement moments to immerse fully in the pleasures of nature. Provide samples of the item being explored and engage new vocabulary words.



What does it look like; colors, textures, shapes, and sizes?



What does it smell like; compare it to other scents and work on descriptive vocabulary – fresh or rotten, sweet, clean or sour?



What does it feel like; smooth, bumpy, or rough; solid or squishy; warm or cool, wet or dry?



Does it make a sound, or can other things in nature cause it to make a sound?



If edible, how does it taste; work on descriptive vocabulary to name characteristics of the taste – sweet or sour, salty, or spicy.



Did You Know?

When young children engage their senses, they are more likely to try new things, gaining confidence and independence through the experience.



Learning in the Garden

Seed to Stomach uses the garden as an extension of the classroom and home to not only grow fruits and vegetables but also healthy minds and bodies. It's a wholesome process that fosters well-being, nurtures learning, builds community, and increases access to healthy and delicious food. As the activities in this guide will show, gardening can take place in traditional outdoor settings, or if space is scarce, patio or even indoor spaces are sufficient to enjoy the benefits of connecting with nature to grow delicious and healthful food.



Tip

For information and access to community gardens and other opportunities to garden with limited space, please connect with these partners:

[Denver Urban Gardens](#)

[Big Green](#)



Tip

Set up meals for family-style dining at school and at home. It encourages hand-eye coordination as children handle dishes and utensils, decision-making and problem-solving as children make food and portion selections, fosters independence, and provides opportunities to model and teach manners.

Learning in the Kitchen

The kitchen is a space that provides nourishing conversation, deep connection, and delicious food. With activities that start in the garden, Seed to Stomach comes to fruition in the kitchen by using fresh, often homegrown produce to create simple, nutritious, delicious meals and offering additional learning opportunities by involving the whole family in meal planning, cooking, serving, and, of course, eating. We know that children are more likely to try new foods when they develop an understanding of where food comes from and have been given a role in its creation.



Making Connections



All learning begins with connection. External connections with other people actually create and strengthen neural connections internally in the brain. Decades of research have shown that our brains are wired for relationships. In other words, we need connections to not only survive but to thrive. Through attuned connections, children learn valuable skills like self-regulation, composure, empathy, problem-solving, and resilience. The building blocks of connection are rooted in simple sensory moments of eye contact, touch, presence, and playful interactions.

- Eye Contact creates connections in the brain that let children know they are safe and loved. When eyes meet, neural structures in the brain are activated to support empathy and matching emotions.
- Touch is one of the most important aspects of connecting, absorbing, and storing information without even realizing it. Appropriate and caring sensations of touch are essential to neural functioning and learning, leading to the development of smart, happy children.
- Presence involves joining in the moment and sharing the emotion and connection together. Especially in our increasingly digital world, it's more important than ever to free our minds from all the clutter to really see and be seen by others. Being present offers that gift.
- Playfulness builds a bond based on biochemistry. When we are having fun, laughing, and smiling, our brains release so-called feel-good hormones that increase attention spans and boost social development.



Learning for Infants and Toddlers

Babies begin to learn from the moment they are born. When including infants and toddlers in activities, allow them to participate and explore at their own pace, providing help only when needed for safety. As infants and toddlers explore their environment, their rapidly developing brains are being sent messages to create connections and learning.

Infants and toddlers learn through repetition, basically trial and error, and by engaging their senses. Creating safe spaces for free exploration gives them countless opportunities for development.

In the garden, provide simple opportunities for this age group to engage in digging, exploring worms, and touching or holding different fruits and vegetables. Even smelling herbs or other fragrant plants can be a lesson. Find areas for sitting, standing, and climbing, such as small benches, logs, walkways, and bridges. You can also use sandboxes, dirt-digging spots, mud kitchens, and water play areas.



Tip

Never leave children unattended when they are in or near water. Young children can drown in as little as one inch of water, so it's important to stay present, undistracted, and within arm's reach.



Allowing infants and toddlers to taste new foods (as they are age-appropriately introduced) is a wonderful way to engage this age group in new flavors and textures. Early and repeated exposure to a variety of garden-grown produce can reduce aversion to fresh, healthy foods, influencing their ability to make healthy food choices from an early age.



Did You Know?

More than one million new neural connections are formed every second in the first few years of a child's life.

Vocabulary

Early childhood teachers and parents play a crucial role in supporting language development by providing children with a rich vocabulary during their daily interactions and helping children expand their understanding and use of language. Encourage vocabulary development through interactive activities, such as singing songs, reading aloud, and playing games. These methods help create a language-rich environment that encourages children to expand their vocabulary and express themselves.

Families can also reinforce language development at home by reading books, telling stories, and engaging in conversations about everyday activities and routines. This exposure helps children connect words to objects and actions, which enhances their use of language. By actively participating in language-building activities, families can support their child's language development and future academic success. Look for opportunities to introduce and reinforce these words throughout Seed to Stomach activities.

Autumn	Insects	Seedlings
Basil	Kale	Shovel
Bean	Lavender	Soil
Blossom	Leaves	Spinach
Blueberry	Lemon	Spring
Branches	Lettuce	Sprout
Broccoli	Melon	Squash
Carrots	Mint	Sweet Potato
Celery	Onion	Stem
Cilantro	Peach	Strawberry
Cucumber	Oranges	Summer
Dig	Pear	Sun
Dill	Pepper	Sunflower
Dirt	Plant	Tomato
Earth	Potato	Vegetables
Eggplant	Pots	Vine
Flowers	Pumpkin	Water
Garden	Rain	Watermelon
Fruit	Raspberry	Weed
Ginger	Rosemary	Winter
Grow	Roots	Worm
Harvest	Seasons	Zucchini
Herbs	Seeds	

