



Cheesy Mash Monsters



It's September down on the farm and Tractor Ted is helping to harvest potatoes. Potatoes are a staple food for many families in the UK and naturally coloured mashed potato makes a good canvas for this fun arty recipe.

THIS ACTIVITY...

- encourages children to eat potatoes and other fruit and veg
- introduces a variety of food preparation and cooking techniques
- offers lots of opportunity for hand and arm movements, including chopping, mashing and stirring
- offers lots of opportunity for exploring tastes, smells and textures
- encourages children to make creative decisions about their edible artwork

WHAT TO DO

Making colourful mash

Make colourful mash with the children. Steam chunks of potato, add a little milk and mash until the consistency is smooth. Puree steamed spinach to make green colouring, roasted peppers to make red colouring and steamed or baked sweet potato to make orange colouring. Let the children choose whether to stir in red, green, orange or all three purees to colour their potato. Add grated cheddar cheese to the mash and spread the colourful cheesy mash onto round plates to create circular shapes.

If children in your setting are dairy intolerant use oat milk, non-dairy spreads and non-dairy cheese.

Making monsters

Give the children a variety of small food items, such as carrot sticks, red, green and yellow peppers cut into strips and chunks, pieces of ham and sliced black olives. Name the different foods and encourage the children to explore their shape, colour, taste, smell and texture. Show the children how to use the food items to turn their cheesy mash plates into monster faces.

Making a record

Before the cheesy mash is eaten, photograph the works of art to create a permanent record. Talk to each child about their artwork, make a note of their thoughts and comments, and write them on labels. Turn the photos and words into a 'Cheesy Mash Artwork' album for children to look through.



THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Involve the children in chopping the raw potatoes, pouring in the milk, mashing the cooked potatoes and stirring in the vegetable purees and grated cheese.
- Encourage the children to compare peeled and unpeeled potatoes, raw and cooked potatoes, and potatoes before and after they are mashed.
- Prioritise the process over the end result. Although making monster faces is fun, let the children come up with their own artistic ideas. Younger children who are not yet ready to create representative artwork can produce random patterns.
- Chat to older children about ways of using the food items to create their monster faces; for example, they might choose a red pepper strip to represent the mouth, green grapes to make googly eyes, a carrot matchstick for the nose and ham cut into triangles to create monstrous teeth.
- Involve the children in designing the 'Cheesy Mash Monsters' album. Ask them to help you choose card for the cover, stick photos onto the pages and decorate the book.
- Double check for dairy allergies. If necessary, make a batch of mashed potato using non-dairy milk, and leave out the cheese. See the 'Healthy eating' box for more ways of adapting the recipe to suit different diets.



Food for thought

There are numerous food items that work well for food art, although it's important to be aware of choking hazards. Supervise the children closely and take care with hard food such as raw carrots - particularly for the under threes. Watch out for foods that can form a 'plug'; cut grapes and cherry tomatoes into halves or quarters, chop raw carrot into sticks rather than circles and consider softening hard veg such as carrots and peppers by steaming. Young children can also struggle with apple and cucumber skins (if you want to use these items, peel them first). Soft or easy-to-chew items are less of a concern and also offer some interesting sticky, slimy and squidgy textures to explore. Try banana circles, courgettes, avocado chunks and fruit canned in juice.



Healthy eating

Adding spinach, pureed pepper and sweet potato to the mashed potato increases the nutritional content of this recipe. If you include yellow and purple food items for making the monster's face (yellow pepper pieces, blueberries, red and black grapes) you can turn the recipe into a healthy 'rainbow' dish.

The vegetables used in this recipe are a good source of nutrients, including -

- **Vitamin C** - white potatoes, red peppers, spinach, sweet potatoes
- **Vitamin B6** - white potatoes, sweet potatoes, red peppers
- **Vitamin A** - spinach
- **Vitamin E** - red pepper, sweet potatoes
- **Calcium** - spinach
- **Potassium** - all the veg
- **Fibre** - all the veg, particularly if you leave the skins on the potatoes

Wherever possible, steam, bake or roast the vegetables to preserve their nutrients.

