

ENTERTAINMENT

FOOD & DINING

Picky eaters: Give kids ingredients and they can customize menus

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Special to *The Denver Post*



LITTLETON, CO - AUGUST 19: For picky eaters the secret to grow ing taste buds is too create lots of choices to add to dishes. This tostada w as photographed at the home of Rebecca Caro w ith a collection of options to add on Tuesday, August 19, 2014. (Denver Post Photo by Cyrus McCrimmon) (Cyrus McCrimmon, THE DENVER POST)

Parents with a picky eater get skilled at navigating the challenges of adapting recipes by serving a version of favorites adjusted to children's taste buds or skipping ingredients that appeal to our more sophisticated ones. We fall into a rut, eating from the blandscape of "kid food," longing for the tastes we used to enjoy.

Being discouraged by a child's unwillingness to eat everything on the table comes with the turf. It's easy to serve only foods guaranteed to please when new, exciting dishes are met with resistance.



(Photos by Cyrus McCrimmon, The Denver Post)

The cure for the common meal can be found in the "build your own" concept. Instead of a traditional plate, it starts with a foundation and is created with a bunch of toppings that round out the meal. The concept is a great strategy for adults who crave diversity or those with food allergies or dietary restrictions, since adaptation is key and the range includes simple as well as complex flavors.



For picky eaters, the secret to cultivating taste buds is to offer lots of choices. Vietnamese Rice Paper Wraps fill the bill: lettuce, cucumber, carrots, basil, rice noodles, dipping sauces, steak or shrimp. Cyrus McCrimmon, The Denver Post

Choice is important when getting kids on board, and variety motivates kids to taste. Children need try a new food 10 to 15 times to get used to a new flavor and like it.

"Kids are encouraged to try new things when they participate in making food and have some choices on what goes into the meal, for example, chicken or beef as the protein, says Bonnie Jortberg, a registered dietitian. "Color and texture are important, too — have them choose a green or red vegetable that they'd like."

Another bonus: Most of the components are simple to prepare or can be made ahead of time, adding to the beauty of the build-it-yourself meal. But what if your kids, instead of taking advantage of the plethora of foods to choose from, end up eating only rice noodles? Will their nutritional needs be met? "It's a process," says Jortberg, an assistant professor at the University of Colorado's Department of Family Medicine. "As a parent, think big picture — you shouldn't panic if for one meal they eat just rice — you should look at what they are eating throughout the day for balance." We all worry to some extent about our picky eaters but have to remind ourselves that with time, exposure and repetition, they and their finicky taste buds will change. Even if it takes them until they leave home.

A Fresh Take on Pizza Night

Make-your-own or take-out dough is easily customized, and the possibilities are endless. In addition to the regular pizza-night favorites, these more grown-up flavors can be added into the rotation.

Ingredients:

(Shortcut: pick up dough at a pizzeria or premade dough)

1L cups warm water

1 teaspoon sugar

1 teaspoon active dry yeast (or one packet)

2 tablespoons olive oil

$\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon salt

$3\frac{3}{4}$ cups flour

Directions

In a large bowl, combine the water, sugar and yeast, and mix to blend. Let stand until foamy, about 5 minutes. Mix in oil and salt, then begin adding the flour about a half cup at a time, until most of the flour has been mixed in and the dough forms a ball. Put the dough on a floured work surface and knead until soft and satiny, about 4 to 5 minutes more, adding flour as needed to prevent sticking.

Transfer the dough to an oil-lined bowl and let rise until doubled in size. Punch the dough down, roll the dough out, and put into an oiled pizza pan. Top as desired with ingredients (suggestions follow) and bake at 350 degrees until lightly browned, about 15 minutes.

Ingredient ideas

Cheeses: fresh mozzarella, Asiago, pecorino, Brie

Vegetables, fruits and herbs: Wild mushrooms, roasted red pepper, artichoke hearts, asparagus, arugula, Greek olives, fresh basil or rosemary, pine nuts, walnuts, hazelnuts, fresh figs, grapes, pineapple, sauteed fennel, radicchio Meats: bacon, prosciutto, ham, chorizo

Vietnamese Rice Paper Wraps with Steak or Shrimp

Ingredients can be prepared the day before; cook the steak right before you serve it. Rice paper wrappers can be found at most super markets. They need to be soaked in warm water until pliable. Shrimp can be used instead of steak; simply marinate for one hour instead of overnight. Serves 4

Ingredients

1 pound flank steak

1/4 cup soy sauce

2 tablespoons rice vinegar

1 tablespoon sesame oil

1 tablespoon chile oil

1/4 teaspoon chile flakes

2 cloves garlic, minced

1 tablespoon fresh ginger, minced

3 green onions, white and green parts, chopped

FOR THE WRAPS

10-12 rice paper wrappers

2 cups red lettuce leaves

1 cup cucumber, julienned

1 cup carrots, julienned

Fresh basil and cilantro leaves

1 package rice noodles, prepared according to package instructions, and cut into smaller pieces

Sriracha sauce, peanut sauce, nuoc cham, or other dipping sauces

Directions

For the steak: combine all the ingredients in a large zip-top bag and marinate for at least one hour, or refrigerate and marinate overnight.

Grill the steak at medium high heat for 4-5 minutes; turn and repeat. Let rest for 5 minutes and slice thinly. Place the rice-paper wrappers on a plate next to a pie plate filled with warm water. Place the other ingredients, buffet-style, into bowls for serving. Each person can take turns dipping their wrapper into the water until softened, then placing it flat on the plate and filling it with steak and other ingredients. Fold over the ends, roll up, and dip in sauces as desired.

Tostadas with Calabacitas, Black Beans and Queso Fresco

Corn tortillas you can stack are a whole-grain and fun riff on taco night. Bonus: The calabacitas can be made ahead of time and reheated. Serves 4.

FOR THE CALABACITAS

1 tablespoon olive oil

1 yellow onion, diced

1 red pepper, cored and diced

1 cup zucchini, diced 1 cup yellow (summer) squash, diced 1 cup corn kernels Salt, to taste

TOSTADAS:

8-12 tostada shells

1 (14 oz.) can of black beans, drained and rinsed 1 cup avocado, diced 1 cup green leaf or romaine lettuce, shredded 8 ounces *queso fresco* 1/2 cup chopped fresh cilantro Salsas of your choice

Directions

Add the oil in a medium skillet over medium heat. Saute the onion until translucent, about 2 minutes. Add in the red pepper, zucchini, and yellow squash, and salt and sauté until soft, about 3 minutes. Add the corn kernels and cook until heated through, about one minute more.

Prepare the calabacitas. Put the other ingredients in serving bowls, buffet-style, and let everyone prepare their own tostadas. A possible combination is beans, calabacitas, avocado, lettuce, queso fresco and salsa.

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