



Kids at Camp Echo prepare pizza, chicken wraps and salad.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CAMP ECHO

Camp directors credit popular shows such as Food Network's *Iron Chef* and Bravo's *Top Chef* with nurturing young foodies.

"The [campers] see chefs doing something that maybe they don't see too much at home. It sparks their interest," says Felecia Dupczak, a Costco member and camp pathway manager, who oversees camp directors of resident and day camps for Girl Scouts of Northern Illinois.

Dupczak says scouts especially like campfire cooking using tinfoil, cast iron and Dutch ovens. "Adults are there to help them," she says, "but otherwise they do it all themselves, and they really enjoy that."

Skill development

At many camps, every camper participates in one cooking unit, but some choose to focus on culinary activities throughout the

Kids are cooking

Culinary adventures at summer camps

By Christa Melnyk Hines

YOUNGSTERS MAY look forward to horseback riding, woodland hikes and songs around the fire at camp this summer, but many of them also crave an adventure that tempts the taste buds.

"Excuse the pun, but cooking has become one of the hottest areas of camp," says Jeff Grabow, a Costco member and camp director at Camp Echo. The traditional coed resident summer camp in Bloomingburg, New York, started focusing on more healthful foods and culinary activities about six years ago.

"A lot of people say, 'I don't know how to cook.' Everyone knows how to cook. It's just

being encouraged to try a little bit. Cooking ... is an essential life skill," Grabow says.

Regardless of what children may aspire to be when they grow up, culinary camps give them skills they can utilize, beyond being able to feed themselves. "Cooking helps our campers develop self-reliance and confidence, and helps develop real-world skills while doing an activity they enjoy," Grabow adds.

Kids at Camp Echo sample Jewish, Chinese, Mexican and Italian dishes and use tomatoes and herbs grown in the camp's greenhouse to prepare individual pizzas and strombolis in a pizza oven.

week. Children practice math by learning to multiply recipes to cook for large groups of their peers and problem-solve to accommodate different dietary requirements.

"They're also learning how to stick with something, work as a team, prepare under stress and [develop] patience as they wait for something to cook," Lauren Shapiro, a Costco member and camp pathway manager for Girl Scouts of Oregon and Southwest Washington, tells *The Connection*.

Camp directors hope children will continue to foster these life skills long after the last campfire is extinguished.



Healthy living

Camp O'Malley, a Boys & Girls Club camp near Grand Rapids, Michigan, enables hundreds of children, ages 6 to 17, from low-income families to attend camp. The campers participate in a healthy-living workshop, learning to integrate an active lifestyle with wholesome food choices and appropriate portions.

"During that time, [instructors] teach the kids how to make a healthy snack at home," says Becky Missad, camp director and Costco member. The kids bake breads and assemble snacks such as

fruit kebabs and cheese and crackers. "It's not intense cooking," Missad says, "but something for their age level and something that's simple for them to do."

Whether they're learning persistence and confidence with each successful recipe, or how to make healthier food choices, this year's campers are learning life skills that will last beyond their summer tans.

Camps tend to fill up early, so be sure to research camps in advance to ensure your child gets a spot. To find camps featuring culinary activities, visit www.acacamps.org or www.summercamps.com. [E]

Costco member Christa Melnyk Hines is a freelance journalist and author. She and her husband share their love of cooking and food with their two sons, ages 6 and 8.

"Cooking helps us be creative," says Jenna Prosen, 12, who attended Camp Echo last summer. "I have been able to take cooking skills [such as kitchen safety] that I learned at camp and use them at home."

Shapiro encourages parents to invite their kids to help plan menus, shop for groceries and prepare meals.

Dietre Griesinger, 7, loved making pizza and scrambled-eggs-in-a-bag at Camp Dean, a Girl Scout camp in northern Illinois, last summer and practices at home when she can. She says, "I like to cook cheesy potatoes and [also] spaghetti with my mom."

Passing the taste test

Even picky eaters typically taste at least one new food before leaving camp. "It's fun to eat something that you created, designed and had a role in [preparing]," Shapiro says.

Grabow agrees. When he took a group of fourth graders fishing as part of an "outdoor adventure cooking" expedition, they tried the fish "because they [caught] it, they cleaned it and they cooked it."

Often campers sample new foods because they see their friends trying them. Last summer, Shapiro's young chefs chose to prepare sushi and pad thai, which many of the campers had never eaten before. "One girl thinks it's cool, then everyone else thinks it's cool," Shapiro says.

The Costco Connection

Whether your young campers are headed into the backyard for an overnight adventure or spending a week at a summer camp, Costco warehouses carry a variety of foods to help develop culinary interests beyond s'mores.

Tinfoil Dinners (Pocket Stew)

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| 1 pepper | 1 uncooked hamburger patty or precooked piece of chicken |
| 1 onion | 1 to 2 tablespoons margarine or butter |
| 2 carrots | Salt and pepper to taste |
| 2 potatoes | |
| Aluminum foil | |

Chop the pepper, onion, carrots and potatoes into 1 to 2-inch pieces. Take a large piece (at least a 12-inch square) of heavy-duty aluminum foil and lay it flat on the table. Place an uncooked hamburger patty or precooked chicken in the center of the foil. Top the meat with the chopped vegetables. Add 1 to 2 tablespoons of margarine or butter and salt and pepper to taste. Wrap tightly in the foil. You may need a second piece to seal in all the vegetables. Place the packet on coals for 15 to 20 minutes, turning after about 10 minutes. Check the packet to make sure that the meat is cooked and vegetables are soft. Makes 1 serving.

Courtesy of Girl Scouts of Northern Illinois.

Cucumber Bread

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| 3 eggs | 1 cup chopped nuts |
| 2 cups sugar | 1½ teaspoons ground cinnamon |
| 2 cups grated, seeded, peeled cucumbers | 1 teaspoon baking soda |
| 1 cup vegetable oil | 1 teaspoon salt |
| 1½ teaspoons vanilla extract | ¼ teaspoon baking powder |
| 3 cups all-purpose flour | |

In a bowl, beat eggs. Beat in sugar, cucumbers, oil and vanilla until well blended. Combine the remaining ingredients; add to cucumber mixture and beat until just combined. Pour into two greased 9 x 5-inch loaf pans. Bake at 350 F for 60 to 65 minutes or until a toothpick inserted near the center comes out clean. Let the bread cool in the pans on wire racks for 10 minutes before removing. Makes 2 loaves.

Courtesy of Camp O'Malley (Boys & Girls Club camp).

