



Summer foods can make healthy eating easy, nutritionist says

Farmer's markets, gardening provide opportunities for kids to learn about good health

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MANHATTAN, Kan. – Kansas State University nutrition specialist Sandy Procter says that an abundance of healthy summer foods is a double dose of good news for parents and their kids.

“Many of the foods that are available now are delicious and there’s a real health benefit to them,” Procter said.

Because of that, she said, it’s also an opportunity for children to learn more about good nutrition.

“It’s a good time to think about getting out to the farmer’s market,” Procter said. “We know there are social distancing rules in place, but those farmers are bringing in that fresh product, so it’s a good time to go make some choices and then talk about the selections you’ve picked. Getting out and seeing what’s available is a good way to learn.”

Procter talked about the importance of the [USDA’s MyPlate program](#), which encourages eating a mixture of healthy foods.

“When you look at MyPlate, you see that at least half of your plate should be fruits and vegetables,” Procter said. “This is where summer foods make it really easy. There are so many opportunities to put colorful fruits and vegetables on your plate and really make that the focus of the meal.”

Procter said MyPlate makes it easier for kids to learn about eating a balanced meal. For example, a healthy meal might include half a plate of fruit or vegetables, some pasta and small amount of meat, fish or proteins.

“There are a lot of ways to look at MyPlate and think that this is maybe just a bit easier to accomplish in the summertime,” Procter said.

Procter said summer gardening provides another opportunity for learning and good health.

“A lot of people are very interested in gardening right now because, first of all, they are home more and they have the time to be there and oversee the garden,” she said. “We’ve had a lovely spring for planting and rains seemed to be have been nicely spaced for starting a garden.”

For kids, growing even a single plant or a small plot can be educational and fun. It can start with picking out seeds, planting them in a pot, watering their plant and harvesting the fruit. Tomatoes and herbs can be popular choices.

“All of those lessons are great to instill the love and excitement of gardening, which can last a lifetime,” Procter said. “But it’s also exciting to see a plant grow and be able to pick cherry tomatoes, or look under the leaves and find a cucumber.”

She cited research that indicates when kids grow healthy food, they’re also more likely to eat it.

“It’s a good way to learn a healthful practice, but also a good way for kids to appreciate the flavor and nutrition of some of the produce that they will be lucky enough to take part in,” Procter said.

Parents can also spur their child’s learning by including them in preparing food.

“It’s not too early to talk about reading labels and figuring out what’s in the foods they’re eating,” Procter said. “That’s kind of a fun task for kids and it can inform their healthy choices. Young minds are very fertile, and those lessons have a very good chance of sticking with them throughout their lives.”

More nutrition and food safety tips from K-State Research and Extension [are available online.](#)