

Activity: Food/Cooking Goal: Sensory Populations: All

TH Activity Plan – Bruschetta Snack

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Photo by Marcellina in Cucina, NC State University, A&T State University Cooperative Extension



ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will make bruschetta snack using fresh tomatoes & herbs from the garden.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Focus on product, process & task performance

Physical: Manage food as one example of improving lifestyle choices

Psychological/Emotional: Take responsibility for personal wellness; use strategies including improved nutrition

Sensory: Improve nutrition as a healthy lifestyle choice

Social: Make & consume plant food as a social activity

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Prep:** Harvest tomatoes & basil from the program garden. Preheat oven to 450 degrees. The facilitator should be responsible for handling the oven and placing the bruschettas in the oven. Prepare ingredients – slicing cheese, washing & dicing tomatoes. Place ingredients on the table or counter at a convenient height for participants to take turns working.
2. Facilitator presents the activity showing the ingredients to be used. Safe food handling protocols should be discussed. Participants can write the recipe for their own use. Facilitator demonstrates how to cut cheese & tomatoes. The bread should be cut into individual slices.
3. Participants (wearing plastic gloves) make their own bruschetta slice taking turns with the ingredients, adding fresh mozzarella, then the chopped tomato, then the basil and finally the parmesan cheese on top of their bread slice. Place on cookie sheets.
4. The facilitators will then be responsible for baking the bruschetta until the cheese just begins to melt. Let cool slightly before serving. Try to arrange bruschetta so that participants get the piece they prepared.
5. Discussion of nutritional values of tomatoes, basil & other ingredients can lead to topics of personal choices, food insecurity, home gardens, community service at community gardens.

Materials

2 large loaves of Italian bread
in ½” slices
Fresh sliced mozzarella
cheese
1 cup fresh grated parmesan
cheese
12-15 fresh Roma tomatoes,
chopped or diced
basil leaves
Several baking sheets,
spatula, oven mitts
Large spoons, cutting boards
Sharp knife for slicing bread
Plastic gloves, wipes (for
everyone involved)
Paper plates and napkins for
each participant

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: Appropriate for most populations. The activity can include harvesting tomatoes and basil from the program’s garden or it can be preparing and eating the bruschetta snack as a stand

alone activity. The obvious focus of this therapeutic horticulture activity is nutrition, healthy nutrient dense food, home-grown produce and healthy lifestyle choices. Most populations can benefit from this focus with several approaches and goals interwoven into the session – taking pleasure and pride in making bruschetta, managing food as one component of healthy choices and nutrition impacting other aspects of wellness including sleep, decision-making and physical fitness. Incorporating a social element into the activity can foster group cohesion, sense of belonging and positive peer interactions. Populations with particular need for nutrition-focused

interventions—people with chronic disease or health issues, food insecurity, eating disorders, or people experiencing homelessness (of all ages) will enjoy the session with food while learning about ideas and strategies that can improve their nutrition. Sensory enjoyment of the ingredients using taste, touch and smell can extend the activity, focusing on fresh (vs frozen) ingredients.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Prior determination of food allergies, swallowing issues, medication-food interactions and food preferences should be done. Allergies to tomatoes are not uncommon; participants may not be able to identify their own allergies. Caution is urged when activity involves heating elements/ovens. Facilitator as noted previously should handle all hot equipment and be the sole person to use the oven. Access to oven may be difficult to restrict if it is in a kitchen area and excited participants may want to be quite close. Sharp knives may be appropriately used by some populations; other programs may choose to have facilitator use them.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Safe food handling protocols should be covered prior to any food being in work area. Gloves and washing station will support this important element. The main food handling practices include keeping work area clean, separating raw from cooked ingredients, cooking thoroughly, keeping food at safe temperatures and using safe water (World Health Organization, 2023). Additionally, if tomatoes and basil are harvested from the program's garden, they should be washed thoroughly, stored in clean bins and surfaces (not previously used cardboard boxes), and stored appropriately. Referring to guidelines for food grown in school and community gardens will provide good directions for all programs.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

NC State University, A&T State University, Cooperative Extension. (n.d.). *A Handbook for Beginning + Veteran Garden Organizers: How to Reduce Food Safety Risks*.
<https://chapmanfoodsafety.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/food-safety-for-school-and-community-gardens.pdf>
USDA. (2009). Food safety tips for school gardens (section: Using school garden produce in your school meal program). https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/foodsafety_schoolgardens.pdf
World Health Organization. (2023). Five keys to safer food manual.
<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241594639>



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TH Activity Plan form developed by Lesley Fleming, Susan Morgan and Kathy Brechner (2012), revised in 2023.