

Activity: Food/Cooking Goal: Sensory Populations: Children/Youth

TH Activity Plan – Pita Pizzas

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Materials

Pita pocket bread
Tomato sauce, fresh or canned
Grated mozzarella cheese
Fresh toppings: onions, peppers, mushrooms, broccoli, carrots, other herbs such as oregano, basil, thyme, tarragon
Several baking sheets
Spatulas or spoons
Chopper (safety type), slicer, or safety scissors for herbs & vegetables
Pizza cutter, cutting boards, cooling racks, oven mitts
Plates, napkins, utensils, disposable gloves, wipes
Grill or oven (450F)

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Prepare and eat pizzas with fresh herbs and vegetables.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Practice reading skills & following step-by-step instructions; practice executive function skills

Physical: Manage food intake practicing health lifestyle choices

Psychological/Emotional: Practice self-initiating steps; increase awareness of healthy eating/lifestyle opportunities within group setting

Sensory: Engage gustatory & olfactory senses when preparing garden produce for consumption; address sensory challenges using gustatory stimuli

Social: Work cooperatively within a group; practice interpersonal skills – respectful communication with others, sharing opinions/feedback

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Preheat oven to 450° F. Keep participants out of reach, as appropriate. Place tools and food items on the table for everyone to share.
2. Demonstrate preparation of herbs and vegetables. Assist participants in putting on gloves as needed. Wash produce.
3. Finely chop herbs with scissors or a safety chopper.
4. Slice or chop vegetables into bite-sized pieces with a safety slicer.
5. Prepare pitas by placing them on the baking sheets and spooning small amounts of tomato sauce onto each pita.
6. Choose which fresh toppings to have on the personal pitas, keeping participant dietary restrictions and needs in mind.
7. Add toppings (with assistance or supervision as needed).
8. Add cheese before or after the vegetables or not at all.
9. Place pita pizzas in 450° F oven. Bake pita pizzas until cheese melts, toppings are tender, and top begins to brown.
10. Remove pita pizzas from oven with an oven mitt. Transfer pizzas to cooling racks. Allow pizzas to cool until they can be safely eaten.
11. Serve pita pizzas on paper plates. Cut pizzas into small slices, bite sized pieces, or left whole, depending on individual preferences.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: To help youth make connection about where this food comes from, harvest vegetables and herbs directly from the garden or, if needed to supplement produce, purchase from grocery or farmer's market. Host an age appropriate group discussion about the process, timeline, and seasonality of growing produce in the garden. Research and discuss the 5 primary gustatory tastes: sweet, salty, sour, bitter,

and umami. Ask what garden produce (fruit, veggies, herbs) and other pizza ingredients fall under each taste category. Encourage opportunities for participants to help and collaborate with each other, such as task sharing on cutting up veggies, sharing and rationing ingredients amongst participants, and offering advice on next steps.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: The facilitator should pay attention to specific dietary requirements of participants. Monitor safe use of kitchen equipment, especially cutting tools/knives/scissors, and high heat items and equipment, such as hot food, pans, grills, or ovens. Use safety kitchen tools, such as lettuce or plastic knives and non-slip cutting boards, as alternatives for young ones to safely practice cutting produce. The facilitator can pre-cut any produce, like onions, that requires sharper tools. Practice handwashing and other sanitary practices when handling food items. Wash all produce prior to using.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Connect pizza ingredients with the plants they come from and people (farmers/growers) and processes involved to grow and prepare the ingredients for consumption. This includes wheat/grain for the pizza crust/pita, tomatoes for tomato sauce (are there other sauces like pesto?), and other toppings. If there is no garden to show live plants or it is out of season, print or project color pictures of the plants from which the pizza ingredients come.

Refer to THAD *Harvesting Herbs Grown for their Leaves* and *Air Drying Leafy Herbs* activity plans.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

Harbstreet, C. (2020). Learn how to make vegetables taste good: Flavor pairings and cooking strategies. Street Smart Nutrition. <https://streetsmartnutrition.com/how-to-make-vegetables-taste-good/>
Slow Food USA. School garden curriculum. <https://slowfoodusa.org/school-gardens/curriculum/> (free)

Edits were made for THAD purposes in 2023.

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