

Midwest Food Connection gets kids to eat their vegetables!

by Ginger Pearson
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Some people think they have to trick children into eating vegetables. A couple of books published recently made a splash in the parenting pool—or reservoir, so to speak—by offering suggestions

parents can use to get kids to eat healthy foods. Here's one tactic: puree vegetables and slip them into spaghetti or pizza sauce so your child will never know he or she is eating them. Very clever, you might think. Certainly, the aim of these books, and of most concerned

parents, is to provide a healthy diet for their children. Mine is the same, but I take issue with that tactic. I prefer a more direct approach.

As an educator for the Midwest Food Connection, I bring a variety of fresh vegetables to class for the kids to taste. After learning how the vegetables grow and what part of the plant we eat, we begin the tasting. I show them how I want them to take just a little nibble of the vegetable at first, then decide if they like it based on the texture and taste. I never say they have to like it or finish the whole slice. I just want them to taste it. I'm not surprised most kids will taste the vegetables and most of them like what they taste, but many kids and teachers are surprised. After class kids often gather around me as I'm packing to leave asking for seconds or tastes of other vegetables I've introduced.

We shouldn't assume kids won't like vegetables. As a species we're hardwired to need them for our wellbeing. Our bodies rely on the nutrients they provide and vegetables have been a part of our culinary traditions since we formed cultures and banded together socially. Until about a hundred years ago most children would not have had a choice

as to what appeared on their plate. So why has this become a parenting issue, even a battleground, now? And why do we think we have to deceive our kids into eating vegetables?

I believe the answers lie in our own and the underlying culture's attitudes toward food. We live in a society that creates and markets highly-processed convenience foods and a relentless array of high fat, sugary treats. We can buy our meals at drive-thru windows and graze through our busy days with nary a vegetable in sight. Of course, we know better, and certainly our kids deserve better. We try to do the right thing by serving broccoli for dinner. But if we have to eat a vegetable because it's good for us, it becomes a task and is viewed as no fun. And when the subtle taste of vegetables can't compete for a rank on a kid's palette with sugary or salty snack foods—or even healthy choices like apple juice or yogurt—we may resort to desperate means. A meal can become a power struggle.

I believe most kids will enjoy a wide selection of vegetables if vegetables are a part of the family's regular meal offerings AND if they see their parents eating them. So expand your own palette by trying new vegetables. If you're a new parent, offer a wide variety of vegetables as soon as your baby begins to eat table food. And if you can limit the sugar, you'll have an easier time of it.

Midwest Food Connection has been teaching about natural foods in schools for over 15 years. We offer children the opportunity to taste fresh fruits and vegetables as they learn about the plants, the agriculture that produces them, and a little about their cultural and historical significance as well. In this setting, vegetables seem pretty awesome and are well worth a try.

Mississippi Market has supported Midwest Food Connection with generous funding and fresh vegetables since 1993.

For more information visit our website.
www.midwestfoodconnection.org



kiwi!



kohlrabi!