

The Farm to Table Toddler

Getting your child excited about fresh food.

BY DONALD FRASER

Earlier this summer, Clara mastered the art of berry picking. At the tender age of 18 months, she was able to differentiate between ripe and unripe strawberries and pick only the good ones. The fact that each and every one went directly to mouth rather than basket only means that she's got a different set of priorities than her parents.

This was but one of many lessons that Clara has learned this summer about where her food comes from and how it is prepared. These lessons have made her both more interested in what goes onto her plate and a much less picky eater.

Off to market

Clara is involved in most aspects of our day-to-day lives. When we go to the market or butcher shop, she goes too. She meets the farmers and butchers and helps pick out the produce. You wouldn't believe the samples that get offered to her.

When we get the food home and are cooking, we always take her through the process that links the farm to the table. "Remember when we were at market and you helped pick out that lettuce?" we'll remind her. Or "That

nice lady grew that lettuce and now we're going to make a salad from it. Isn't that fun?"

What's cooking?

Both Krista and I will place Clara in her kitchen tower in order to let her "help" with meals. Note to dads here: If your kid is already helping in the kitchen, there is absolutely no excuse for you not to!

Often this means having her own pot or bowl for mixing ingredients or letting her be a "taster" for the fruits and veggies that are going into the dish. Throughout this process, she ends up eating raw vegetables that she would otherwise turn her nose up at in her high chair. And once she's in her chair, she's a lot more willing to try new foods that she had a hand in preparing.

We're not in the least shy about Clara understanding that cows and chickens aren't just figurines that come with her toy farm. "Mooo" and "bock bock" are noises that happen both during play and when she's tucking into something fresh from the BBQ. It's pretty much a guarantee that she'll never be squeamish about the origins of her meats. And as she grows older, she'll learn to value and respect the food that she consumes.



Photo: Donald Fraser

A little garden

Of course the best way to grow an understanding of where food comes from is to have a little garden of your own. Clara will use sign language to say "hungry" or "food" whenever we enter the garden. Earlier this year, she was eating snow peas off the vine. She even decided to gnaw on a piece of extremely tart rhubarb – an unusual taste that she's really become fond of – just because it was freshly picked from our plot.

While she hasn't really picked up the art of delayed gratification, our child has become a fearlessly unpicky eater. As far as we're concerned, that's a great start!

Donald Fraser writes for television, radio, print, and web. He and his family are passionate about local/seasonal food.

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