

# Cookery corner

## Sweet potato, butternut squash, chickpea and green bean tagine

Tagines are flavourful Moroccan stews loaded with soft cooked vegetables and signature spices like cumin, coriander and ginger. This tagine is a vegetarian dish that we serve with couscous and the children love it! It is a great meal for introducing children to new flavours and is easy to pack full of different vegetables. It also contains broccoli and chickpeas, which are excellent sources of protein – essential for multiple functions, including building tissue, cells and muscle, fighting off disease, and keeping energy levels high.

Serves 6 children

### Ingredients

- ✓ 2 tbsp olive oil
- ✓ 4 shallots, chopped
- ✓ 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ✓ 5cm piece peeled fresh ginger root, minced
- ✓ 1 stalk celery, chopped
- ✓ 1½ tsp ground cumin
- ✓ 1½ tsp paprika
- ✓ 1 can crushed or diced tomatoes
- ✓ 1 large carrot, peeled and cut into chunks (1 cup)
- ✓ 150g green beans, ends trimmed (2 cups)
- ✓ 1 small butternut squash, peeled and cut into chunks (3½ cups)
- ✓ 2 sweet potatoes peeled and cut into chunks (3½ cups)
- ✓ ½ head broccoli, cut into florets (3 cups)

Vegetable stock or water

- ✓ 1 cup cooked or canned chickpeas (rinsed if canned)
- ✓ 3 tbsp chopped fresh parsley

### Method

- ✓ Preheat oven to 350°F/175°C.
- ✓ Add shallots, garlic, ginger, cumin, paprika and celery to a pan and cook, stirring often, until shallots and celery begin to soften – after about five minutes.
- ✓ Stir in tomatoes, carrot, green beans, squash, sweet potato and broccoli. Add enough vegetable stock to cover vegetables.
- ✓ Cover and bake until vegetables are tender – after 40 to 45 minutes.
- ✓ About five minutes before the stew is done, stir in the chickpeas.
- ✓ Stir in parsley just before serving.
- ✓ Serve with couscous.



Oakwood House was highly commended in the Nursery World Awards 2016

# Centre of attention

One award-winning setting in Yorkshire has made healthy food a key part of its provision. By *Karen Faux*

**T**he willingness of staff to be ambassadors for healthy eating has been a powerful driver for the success of Oakwood House Nursery and Forest School, which was the first nursery in England to receive the Soil Association's Food for Life Award. It enjoys a high level of local renown for the variety and quality of its menus and its ability to meet the dietary needs of individual children. As one parent says, 'A big reason for choosing Oakwood is that it reflects how we like to cook at home, using fresh, local and seasonal produce. Staff are knowledgeable and have been very supportive of our wish for our daughter to continue with baby-led weaning and avoiding desserts.'

This attention to detail is something staff are well trained to deal with and their personal enthusiasm for nutritious food comes across in the way they embed it in learning and how they celebrate healthy choices.

Samantha Richmond, manager at the nursery which is part of the four-strong Portland Nurseries group based in Huddersfield, says, 'All our staff are aware of the importance of becoming more health-conscious and promoting positive attitudes to healthy eating. They do this through involvement in children's meal-times, discussions, play opportunities and engaging with parents. It is great to see staff proactively contributing to our food management policy, and pursuing a healthy lifestyle themselves.'





According to Teresa Lee, team leader of pre-school, some of the best sustained shared thinking happens during mealtimes, when one practitioner is allocated to sit at each table. ‘We have some fantastic conversations about what they are eating,’ she says. ‘We talk about colours, and tastes and types of food. Children describe what they have to eat at home and one little boy recently observed that he had chips at home but not at nursery, which showed he had identified different foods. Children sometimes compare broccoli to eating a tree, and there is a lot of talk about carrots helping you to see in the dark.’

Staff themselves eat well at the nursery, with fresh fruit and water bottles provided daily. Fizzy drinks are banned. Information is posted in staff areas to help them make healthy choices and they have the option to eat the nursery lunch as an adult portion. ‘This has certainly raised my personal awareness of nutrition,’ says Ms Lee. ‘I’ve also got my own little girl and it has helped me to gain a much better idea of portion sizes. At one time I was giving her too much and worrying that she wasn’t eating it, but now I understand how much to serve.’

### HEALTHY EATING WORKSHOPS

The nursery’s commitment to continuous improvement is reflected in accolades that include the Kirklees Gold Healthy Choice Award, which acknowledges businesses that practise high standards in food hygiene and healthy food, and a highly commended in the Nursery World Awards’ food category in 2016. Its standards for core training are high, with all staff completing induction training in nutrition, food handling, mealtime etiquette, food hygiene and allergies/dietary requirements. Senior staff are responsible for mentoring through this process.

‘Staff also undertake the Kirklees Fine Project course, with trainers delivering it on-site,’ says Samantha Richmond. ‘This training is geared to those working with very young children and covers when to introduce solid foods and why, the different stages of weaning and general healthy eating for toddlers. It also covers the Eatwell Guide with a focus on under-fives’ nutrition.’

All staff are involved in ongoing accreditation for the Kirklees Gold

### NURSERY WORLD AWARDS 2017

The Nursery World Awards 2017, including the category for Nursery Food, are now open for entries. Go to [www.nurseryworldawards.com](http://www.nurseryworldawards.com)



### MORE INFORMATION

- Kirklees Food Initiatives Nutrition Education Project, [www.kirklees.gov.uk/beta/public-health-partners/kirklees-food-initiatives-nutrition-education.aspx](http://www.kirklees.gov.uk/beta/public-health-partners/kirklees-food-initiatives-nutrition-education.aspx)
- Kirklees Healthy Choice Award, [www.kirklees.gov.uk/beta/health-safety-and-food-regulations/healthy-choice-award.aspx](http://www.kirklees.gov.uk/beta/health-safety-and-food-regulations/healthy-choice-award.aspx)
- Early Years Food for Life Award, [www.foodforlife.org.uk/about-us](http://www.foodforlife.org.uk/about-us)
- Oakwood House Nursery and Forest School, [www.portlandnurseries.co.uk/our-nurseries/oakwood-house](http://www.portlandnurseries.co.uk/our-nurseries/oakwood-house)

Healthy Choice Award, and for the Soil Association’s Early Years Food for Life Award. Ms Richmond says, ‘This really helps to embed healthy eating across everything we do – from the growing of fruit and vegetables and preparation of the meals, to the seasonal, low-salt, low-sugar menu, appropriate portion sizes and educational activities.’

Staff are confident in supporting children to take part in food preparation as part of their learning activities. They often help to peel vegetables, chop fruit, butter bread, crack eggs, knead and roll dough and measure and weigh ingredients for their meals. Children put gross and fine motor skills they have developed in Forest School activities to good use.

The next step for staff training is to send some team members on Kirklees’ ‘Plan and Cook for a Healthy Lifestyle’ training to enable Oakwood to roll out healthy eating workshops for parents.

Ms Richmond says, ‘We want to give parents an improved understanding of how a healthy diet boosts children’s concentration, learning and behaviour, and resistance to infection.’

This promises to go down well as parents have recently proved very willing to engage with staff at food events. Ms Lee says, ‘We invited parents to a “Sugar Smart” talk, to expose how much sugar is in everyday foods. Parents had to guess sugar content in two sets of food we laid out, and they were shocked by the quantities involved. One parent told me that the next day she had picked out a can of Pepsi on her way to work, but had then put it back. It’s lovely to hear that we can make that kind of difference.’ ■



Children at Oakwood take part in food preparation

### TABLE TALK

Since being graded Outstanding in 2013, the nursery’s food policy has continued to evolve and it now presents a clear mandate for all staff. Mealtime etiquette is particularly important and staff receive training in this, so they can set an example for good table manners, supporting children to understand that they need to say ‘please’ and ‘thank you’ and remain seated during the meal.

Staff eat a portion at each meal, having a small piece of everything on their plate, and arrange seating in keyworker groups where possible. Most importantly, they understand how to make the most of mealtimes as social and educational opportunities, ensuring that they are unhurried and conversational, but that certain rules – such as no shouting – apply.