

Nature, Science and Health



Creative Cooking

Creative cooking is a great way to express yourself. Meals can be prepared to reflect the color, climate, and “flavor” of a place. If you can’t visit a faraway place now, you can still take a “taste-full” journey by enjoying international cuisine right in your own kitchen. Here’s your chance to be a creative cook.

Each interest project contains activities which are organized into four different categories: Skill Builders, Technology, Service Projects, and Career Exploration. By doing these activities, you will gain insights about yourself—your strengths and weaknesses, your likes and dislikes. You will have a range of new experiences, and you will develop valuable skills and expertise in specific areas. *To earn an interest project award, you must complete at least seven activities as follows: two Skill Builders activities; one Technology activity; one service project activity; one Career Exploration activity; Two activities from any category that you choose.*

Skill Builders

1. Become familiar with the United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Food Pyramid or Vegetarian Food Pyramid. You can write to the USDA in Washington, D.C., or find this information in a nutrition textbook. Compare your own daily diet to the dietary recommendations of the USDA models. Is your diet lacking in some nutrients? If so, what changes would you make?
2. Learn how to select the freshest and most healthful foods at the store—fruits, vegetables, meats, dairy, eggs, prepared foods, etc. Check the labels to find food that is low in salt, low in fat, and low in chemical additives. Look for color and firmness in fruits and vegetables.
3. Find a food, canned or fresh, that is not native to your area. Find out what region of the U.S. or other country it is from, and where and how it is produced. Use this food as an ingredient in the preparation of two different recipes.
4. Go to the cookware section of a store and familiarize yourself with the tools of the trade. When would you use such items as a mortar and pestle, peelers and choppers, mashers and ricers, spatulas and other “flippers,” knives, food processors, juicers, bread makers, pressure cookers, and various pots and pans? What is the difference in cost of items designed to do the same thing (knives, choppers, and food processors, for example)? Is the extra cost worth it?

January Online IP for Girl Scouts 11 - 17, Page 2

Nature, Science, Health: Creative Cooking

5. Choose a recipe that can be easily prepared while camping or hiking. Test that recipe while hiking or camping.
6. Pick a cuisine (Mexican, Caribbean, Indian, vegetarian, etc.) and prepare two meals using recipes that included appetizers, entrees, and desserts. Familiarize yourself with the basic ingredients and seasonings of the cuisine you choose.
7. Adapt a standard recipe for someone with special dietary needs: low fat, low salt, low sugar, lactose intolerant, vegetarian, etc.

Technology

1. Look at the technology used in cooking. Examine the advantages and disadvantages of different heat sources: electric or gas stoves, microwave ovens, pressure cookers, grills, crock pots. Name two foods that cook best in each of these.
2. There is a lot of chemistry behind many cooking tips and recipe directions. Questions to consider: What items serve as thickeners in a recipe? As leavening? What would happen when baking a cake if you left out or changed one ingredient? For instance, lemon juice will curdle milk. Take a recipe and substitute similar ingredients such as currants instead of raisins, or walnuts instead of almonds. Does the substitution improve the recipe, or not? How about the texture?
3. Visit the Web site of a cooking school or food company. Compare the recipes that you find with those that appear in older cookbooks. What has changed? How do these changes reflect the eating and health habits of today's consumers?
4. New scientific discoveries have brought a lot of change to cooking, from how we create and store food to how we cook it. Investigate a new procedure that affects food in some way such as irradiated food, genetically engineered food, plants grown by hydroponics, or freeze drying. Describe the advantages and disadvantages of two such foods to your troop or group.

Service Projects

1. Volunteer at a soup kitchen for at least two weeks for several hours a week. Find out how food is prepared and served for a large number of people.
2. Organize a basic cooking class for a community center or homeless shelter with some friends.
3. Organize a food drive for a local shelter. Consult the proper nutritional guidelines or a professional dietitian for a list of recommended foods.
4. Work with a local service that helps provide nutritious means to people who cannot leave home. Help prepare at least three different meals. Make sure your meals meets the dietary needs of these homebound people.

January Online IP for Girl Scouts 11 - 17, Page 3

Nature, Science and Health: Creative Cooking

5. Using the Food Pyramid or other guidelines, evaluate the food service in a local facility you use (school, camp, or activity center). Discuss your evaluation with the personnel in charge. Offer alternative food suggestions and your reasons for them.
6. Plan a menu for a full, festive meal. Cook and serve it to a group as a celebration of a cultural heritage, a holiday, or other event.

Career Exploration

1. Interview a food critic at your local newspaper. Ask about her experience, education, and work history. Or read several newspaper restaurant reviews. Then, write two review of popular restaurants in your area.
2. Find out how institutional cooking differs from restaurant cuisine or home-cooked food. Take a poll in your school cafeteria and ask people what they like/don't like about school lunches. See if you can come up with one or two suggestions based on the poll to improve the choices or quality of the school lunches. Share them with school personnel.
3. Visit a local cooking class or culinary school. Talk to an administrator or instructor about the types of jobs their students are prepared for.
4. Arrange to job-shadow a chef, baker, caterer, pizza-maker, etc. Write down the skills and techniques that you've observed, as well as lifestyle pros and cons: for example, flexible hours, late night hours, etc.
5. Get a part-time job in a restaurant or working for a caterer.

And Beyond

Explore the Fantastic World of Food with these related interest projects:

The Food Connection
Home Improvement
From Fitness to Fashion
Women's Health
Travel
A World of Understanding

This badge can be found in the book *Interest Projects for girls 11 - 17*, page 54. This text has been reproduced with permission from Girl Scouts of the USA—this document may not be copied or reproduced in any way.