



PLAYGROUP SA
Playing, learning, supporting families

SPRING to it!

There's no better time to get out in the garden to share the joys of growing, cooking and eating fresh food with your kids.

The sun is shining, the bees are buzzing... why not introduce gardening activities into your playgroup sessions this spring?

It's a great way to teach kids about where their food comes from and to enjoy the outdoors with your little ones. And there are many benefits to nature play, including boosting health and immunity, building confidence and connecting with the environment.

For a fun, easy activity, start with a clean, recycled two-litre plastic container.



Watering can

Secure the lid tightly, then with the help of an adult, punch small holes in the lid with a fork. Decorate the bottle with anything you have available. (Foam stickers work well). Fill up the water bottle with enough water so that it is not too heavy for children to lift and you're ready to head outside to water plants, trees and grass.



Bird feeder

With help from an adult, cut out a piece from the front of the container.

Decorate with stickers and add a piece of string for a handle. Fill the base with bird seed and find a branch where you can hang your feeder. Keep a look out for what kinds of birds visit the feeder.

Planter pot

Use the same method as the bird feeder, but make sure the base is deep enough to hold the plant and its roots. Add some potting mix and plant some seeds or seedlings and hang outside.

Note: Choose pesticide-free potting mix. Encourage children to wear gloves, use a spade and always wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after use.

Let's grow!

Spring is a good time to start a playgroup shared garden. Children learn

how plants grow by planting seeds or seedlings, watering them each week, watching them flourish and waiting for them to ripen, then getting involved in harvesting and preparing food in the kitchen.

If you have time, it's best to start with seeds. Plant them in pots or a garden bed, water and weed weekly, taking care to follow instructions on how to grow and care for each variety.

See our recipes below for some easy ways to cook using your own plants, or bring in fresh shop-bought produce and talk to your group about where the food comes from and how it is grown.



Plant any of the following now and they'll be ready to harvest by the end of term:

Baby carrots are quick to mature and prefer full sun. When planting seedlings, check their size after about six weeks by pulling one carrot out of the ground. If it's about 10cm long,

it's ready. (They can be eaten smaller, too). Enjoy them fresh by removing the carrot tops and giving them a good wash. They're ready to eat as they are, or try them with a dip – yum!

Mint grows better when planted as a seedling. Grow it in a pot and watch it develop throughout the term. Mint prefers a cool, moist position in partial shade and, once established, will grow for many years. Mint dies down in winter and sends up new shoots in spring. When required, cut leaves from the top using scissors.

Strawberries are delicious, easy to grow and prefer full sun. They are ready to harvest after about 11 weeks and they are always popular among playgroup-age children. Given that strawberries can ripen at different times, you may like to freeze them in snap lock bags when ripe. Keep adding more as they ripen until you have enough to use.

Tomatoes prefer full sun and may need a stake to grow up against. Some varieties can be ready within eight weeks if planted from seedlings. You may like to try growing cherry tomatoes. Tomatoes can be eaten fresh or made into a pasta or pizza sauce.

Mint yoghurt

Ingredients

- 2/3 cup Greek-style natural yoghurt
- 1/3 cup fresh mint, chopped
- 1 tablespoon caster sugar (optional)

Method

1. Mix ingredients together.
2. Serve with pita bread triangles or vegetable sticks such as carrot, celery and cucumber.



Strawberry smoothie

If using fresh strawberries, add a frozen banana or use other fresh fruits with a cup of ice (optional).

Ingredients

- 1 cup frozen strawberries
- 1 ripe banana
- ¾ cup milk or alternative

Method

1. Place all ingredients into a blender and mix until smooth and creamy.
2. Leftovers can be poured into ice cube trays with a pop stick and frozen.

Microwave tomato sauce

This sauce is great on cooked pasta or added to pizza bases, and can be puréed if preferred. Makes approximately ¾ cup.

Ingredients

- 250g (20 to 30) whole cherry tomatoes (or large tomatoes, diced into chunks)
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- ½ teaspoon oregano
- ½ teaspoon sugar (optional)

Method

1. Wash cherry tomatoes and place in a microwave-safe container with soy sauce and oregano.
2. Microwave, covered, on high for five minutes.
3. Remove from microwave and stir or mash with a fork.
4. Add sugar if required (depends on sweetness of the tomatoes used).
5. Replace the lid and microwave for a further minute.