

kids in the kitchen

It's all about getting your hands dirty at this Kids' Club, where youngsters learn about (and eat!) healthy food

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The talk is of lemons, berry jams and vanilla beans, plump sultanas, soft white bread and Rosie's eggs. Fifteen children crowd around a narrow table, their white hats askew, waiting for directions from chef Kate Sparrow. It's Sunday morning and it's time for Kids' Club at the Adelaide Showground Farmers Market.

Whether it's Jammy Thumbprint Cookies, Bread and Butter Pudding or a Spring Salad on the menu, you can be sure that in the next hour, the kids will be smelling, tasting and touching the best produce of the season and creating something delicious.

My own daughter, India, who is six, is a first-timer but Kate soon has her in the thick of things, handing her a piece of dough to shape for biscuits. Her little hands, made expert from years of Play-Doh, roll the mixture into balls and then she contentedly plunges her thumb into the middle to make way for a jam drop. "The fingerprint biscuits were my favourite," she tells me later, "because they were yummy. It was fun making the holes and putting the jam in because it spilt everywhere." Funny that!

As a devoted follower of the show *MasterChef* and a some-time helper at home, India is no stranger to the kitchen but it adds a new dimension of fun to be cooking with other kids. Around the table, the older children help out the younger: India holds the bowl steady, as three-year-old Emily enthusiastically mixes

her ingredients, sending the contents flying. And an older girl, called Sophie, makes sure that India gets her turn at spooning jam into the biscuits.

The Kids' Club started in May, 2008, by the founder of the market, Zannie Flanagan. When funding became available through SA Health, chef Kate Sparrow (who was formerly of Hutt Street's Nediz tu), became the coordinator. Since taking over in July last year, Kate says she's had more than 500 kids take part in the club. It's been popular from the start and as numbers are limited to about 17 children, you need to get to the market early to register your child.

The Kids' Club is all about reconnecting children with the food chain and teaching them how to make healthy choices in the food that they eat. "It's getting back to nature. It's smelling things, it's cracking eggs. It's all the things that I did as a child," says Kate. "We've lost a great deal of the simplicity of life. I like bringing back the old magic to childhood. And you see the joy in their faces; their eyes light up."

Kate offers a bottle of vanilla extract for the kids to smell. "Did you know that vanilla beans are grown in tropical countries?" Kate asks. "It actually comes from an orchid." As the children lean forward to smell the liquid sweetness, their little faces shine. "I love vanilla," sighs one girl, who can't be more than eight.

The children load trays of dough for the oven and higgledy-piggledy rows of cookies form like the nests

of a gang of messy birds. "You need to make rows like soldiers," Kate corrects. The cookies are all different shapes, but the children will learn that no matter how they look, they still taste great.

India makes sure that I have the recipe for the Jammy Thumbprint Cookies so that we can make them at home. We buy organic butter and raspberry jam at the market - "It's the same one we used in the Kids' Club, Mummy" - just to be sure we can replicate the experience at home.

Kate never talks down to the children, catering to an audience that often ranges from four to 12. And she knows her young crowd, declaring, "The knave of hearts, he stole a tart. That's what we've made. Just like in *Alice in Wonderland*."

The children twist the season's fresh lemons on colourful juice squeezers, extracting juice for lemon cordial. As they work, delicious smells waft from the oven, prompting Kate to lead a conversation about the senses, all of which come into play in the kitchen, she explains. She tells me later how we have lost this connection between food and our senses through fast foods and supermarket shopping.

Then, as a juicer slips out of small hands and lemon juice spills all over the workbench, come the words these kids may not hear at home. "I don't mind if you make a mess," chirps Kate, with a smile on her face. "I'm quite happy to clean up after you."





At the end of the session the children gather stools and sit together to taste what they have just created. They've reached what Kate calls "tummy time" when work and concentration have built an appetite and it's time to taste the goodies. Parents who have stayed in the background come forward to taste the biscuits or help little ones capture sultanas from the Bread and Butter Pudding and guide them into their mouths.

I hear stories of children eating all kinds of things at the Kids' Club that they would never eat at home, including fresh herbs and all things green. It's amazing what the group dynamic can do to the palate. I make a mental note to bring India back when peas and broad beans are in season.

Cooking is only part of the activities of the Kids' Club. There's a monthly 'Culinary Science' session when Belinda Barr from Primary Industries entertains the kids with science demonstrations. And on the first Sunday of the month the children tend an Edible Garden on the showground site. Even in the winter months they have 14 vegetables and herbs growing in the garden, Kate tells me proudly.

"We grow things that we can pick and eat in the garden, hands-on, there and then," says Kate. "One exciting day they pulled all the carrots out, washed them and nibbled them straight from the garden. There was glee on the kids' faces."

Before we've even left the kids' kitchen India pleads with me to bring her again the next week. "They're going to have a real cow here," she exclaims. "And we actually get to milk it!"

I can see the excitement in her eyes and realise that a journey has begun. A child's interest has been stimulated in food and where it comes from. And it's all been good fun. But India does have a suggestion. "I wish the Kids' Club was called Mini Masters," she says to me. "And Mum, can I watch the next series of *MasterChef* when it comes on?"

Held each Sunday (except during Royal Adelaide Show) at Adelaide Showground Farmers Market, Leader St, Goodwood, at 10am. Register kids from 9am. Kids' Club is free but numbers are limited. Recipes available at www.asfm.org.au.



How to grow sweet corn

As soon as the weather starts to warm up you can start planting sweet corn in your garden. Sow kernels 5cm-7cm deep directly where you would like them to grow. Allow 25cm between kernels and 60cm between rows. Place 2-3 kernels in each hole. Do not allow the soil to dry out too much. The corn will germinate in 10 to 14 days. Sweet corn likes warmth, sunshine, protection from strong winds, plenty of nutrients and water.

What does germinate mean?

When the conditions are right, the tiny embryo plant inside the seed takes in water and begins to grow. At this stage, we say the seed germinates.

From the market

Sweet corn seeds are available at the market from Geoff Page at the Gooseberry Hill stall.

Popcorn

Popcorn is made from dried sweet corn seeds, which are called kernels. You can have fun making your own popcorn at home. Here are two ways:

The microwave, kid-friendly way

1. Grab a paper sandwich bag and put in a handful of popcorn kernels.
2. Tightly roll the top of the bag down a bit to seal it and prevent the popped corn from escaping.
3. With an adult's assistance place the bag in the microwave and close the door.
4. Nuke for 2-3 minutes on high.
5. You'll get a blast from hearing it POP!

The old-fashioned way

1. Get a grown up to supervise while doing this on the stove.
2. Heat a tablespoon of olive oil or vegetable oil in a saucepan until quite hot, be very careful.
3. Pour a 1/4 cup of popcorn kernels into the pan and put on the lid.
4. Holding the lid down firmly swish the pan around occasionally.
5. When you hear the popcorn exploding shake the pan around every 10secs to cook the corn evenly and prevent it from sticking.
6. Serve with a little melted Paris Creek butter and sea salt. YUMMY!