Encourage Creativity

Art is a wonderful way to encourage creative self-expression for young children.

However, research has found that creativity is compromised when coloring books, tracing patterns, dot-to-dot sheets and other packaged resources are used in place of allowing the child to create their own work.

Depending on the age of your child, there are many art supplies to choose from to create fun, inspirational projects to develop their interests. Consider what you have on hand. For example, construction paper, magazines, catalogs, or used greeting cards could all be used to create interesting, colorful projects. Paints such as tempera, watercolors, and finger paints provide for lots of fun applications. Seasonal leaves, nuts, and cones provide many different project ideas.

Display your child’s work for everyone to enjoy. Remember to display the artwork where they can easily see it.

MU Extension contributors:

Create Space for Artistic Development

Plan ahead for a creative, messy, fun experience!

Art experiences can be so rewarding for young children, and can actually begin as babies, and continue to develop as toddlers and preschoolers, and on to adulthood.

According to Marsha Alexander, MU Extension housing and environmental design specialist, “Art helps the child to see and explore new textures, colors, and expand their creativity. It also allows children to practice self-expression, develop fine motor skills, explore and express their feelings, and much more. Some of my earliest and fondest memories as a young child are painting and drawing with my grandmother who was an elementary teacher and artist. Those experiences greatly enhanced my childhood and continue today, to inspire me.”

In order for young children to create art, they need a stimulating and convenient place to express themselves. Whether you have a large or small home, it can sometimes be challenging to find a space. However, with a little planning and organization, you can setup a terrific art studio that will allow for a lot of fun and self-expression. The concept of a studio can be a spare room or simply a storage unit that is organized to hold the needed art supplies for the budding artist.

First, consider finding a location near a window. That allows not only natural light for the art project development, but also the child can look outside for inspiration.

Convenient access to a sink allows for easy clean up. A floor surface that can be easily cleaned is important. You may need to use a large mat that can be stored when it is not being used.

Use furniture that provides a smooth tabletop surface and easy clean-up. A plastic tablecloth over the surface that can be wiped clean works well.

Seating is important. Using children’s tables and chairs provides extra comfort for the little ones.

While working on a table surface, children are often developing their fine motor skills. Art easels provide a large area where the child can move their arms up and down, developing their gross motor skills. Art easels can be moved outdoors so the projects can be in a totally different environment and provide for lots of different experiences.

Art project development can be messy. That is part of the fun! Even so, the art area should be neat and organized. A space that is organized will encourage the child to help keep it that way.

Children often become easily bored using the same materials over and over. To maintain their interest, provide a wide variety of materials that vary by size, color, and texture.

Children should never be forced to create art when they are not interested. However, an inspiring location where the child can access the supplies encourages self-expression and creativity.
During elementary school, or roughly between the ages of 6 and 12, children grow one to two feet and nearly double their weight. According to Tammy Roberts, MU Extension nutrition and health education specialist, “A healthful lunch contributes to that growth and development. It is also an important factor in your child having enough energy for a successful day at school.”

Children are much more likely to eat their lunch if they have helped to plan or pack it. There are many healthful choices that your child can choose from:

- **Protein** - peanut or other nut butter, nuts, seeds, hard boiled eggs, turkey, chicken, or tuna
- **Calcium** - low-fat milk, cottage cheese, string and other types of cheese, yogurt, or pudding
- **Grains** - mini bagels, round flat buns, English muffins, rice cakes, tortillas, pita bread, pretzels
- **Fruit** - orange slices, apple slices (soak them in fruit juice to prevent browning), peaches, applesauce, grapes, bananas, mixed fruit, any dried fruit or fruit leather or 100% juice
- **Vegetables** - raw vegetables such as carrots, broccoli, cauliflower or celery. Edamame is also becoming popular among lunch packers.

It is also important to make sure the food stays safe. If you are packing foods that need refrigeration or to stay hot be sure to purchase an insulated lunch bag. There are small ice packs that can be frozen and added to the lunch box to assure the cold food will be safe. You can also freeze juice boxes to assure the food stays cool until lunch.

Use some of these ideas to get children started and then let them create their own gourmet lunches.

### Look for “whole” for healthy grains

September is whole grains month, so now is a good time to get your family on board and eat more whole grains.

Whole grains contain the entire grain kernel (bran, endosperm, and germ) and are more nutritious than processed grains. They contain many nutrients, including fiber, B vitamins (thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, and folate), and minerals (iron, magnesium, and selenium).

Eating whole grains helps prevent heart disease, lower cholesterol, prevent constipation and keep us regular, give us energy, and keep our body healthy.

According to Melissa Bess, MU Extension nutrition and health education specialist, “The current MyPlate recommendation is that half of our grain intake should be from whole grains. Examples of whole grains are 100% whole wheat bread, whole grain cereals, brown rice, whole wheat tortillas, whole grain crackers, quinoa, barley, and oatmeal.”

The key to finding whole grains is to look at the ingredient list. The first word must have the word “whole” to indicate a whole grain.

Many think the word “wheat” means a food is healthier or has whole grains, but unless it has the word “whole” in it, it may not be healthier than other options and is not 100% whole grain.

The color of the food and the words “multi-grain,” “stone ground,” or “wheat” do not indicate the food is 100% whole grain. Brown rice, oats, and wild rice also indicate a whole grain food.

### West Central Region

- **Bates County**
  - 660.679.4167
- **Benton County**
  - 660.438.5012
- **Camden County**
  - 573.346.2644
- **Cass County**
  - 816.380.8460
- **Cedar County**
  - 417.276.3313
- **Cooper County**
  - 660.882.5661
- **Dallas County**
  - 417.345.7551
- **Henry County**
  - 660.885.5556
- **Hickory County**
  - 417.745.6767
- **Johnson County**
  - 660.747.3193
- **Laclede County**
  - 417.532.7126
- **Moniteau County**
  - 573.378.5358
- **Morgan County**
  - 573.378.5358
- **Petts County**
  - 660.827.0591
- **Pettis County**
  - 417.326.4916
- **St. Clair County**
  - 417.646.2419
- **Vernon County**
  - 417.448.2560

Popcorn is also a whole grain and when served with little or no salt or butter, can be a healthy snack.

Slowly switch your family to eating more whole grains by choosing 100% whole wheat bread, whole grain cereals, whole grain pastas, brown rice, whole wheat crackers, or oats.

Try serving sandwiches on 100% whole wheat bread, using whole wheat crackers for snacks, serving oatmeal with fruit or whole grain cereals for breakfast, or using brown rice, quinoa, barley, whole grain tortillas, or whole grain pastas when cooking.