



Try-Days offer both children and school staff the chance to try new foods in a fun and supportive environment.

Objective

Encourage favorable attitudes among students about unfamiliar fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy items.

The Event

Try-Day is a recurring event during which students sample new healthy food options such as kale, butternut squash, or quinoa. On each Try-Day, students and staff sample a food and indicate how much they like or dislike it, using the *Try-Day Ballot* (see appendix, page 81) or other scoring method. Hand out “I tried it” stickers to encourage students to taste-test new items. Classrooms that collect the most stickers for the month can be recognized by the principal and receive a nonfood reward. Foods that are a hit can then be incorporated into the school menu.

To distribute food samples, some schools offer students small cups of new foods on the serving line as students get their lunch. **Rockville Elementary School** in **Rockville, IN**, set up tasting tables in the cafeteria as an alternative. Consider inviting students to visit a tasting table one group at a time, to allow for greater participation and crowd control. If you do not have room for a table, consider having student, parent, or teacher volunteers bring samples to the students on a tray or cart. Another option is to hold a taste-testing in the classroom as part of a lesson. Food samples may be prepared by the cafeteria and brought to the classroom by parent volunteers for sampling.

Planning

Gather a Try-Day team. Wellness committee members, teachers, parent organization members (e.g., PTO or PTA), the school nutrition director, students, and garden coordinators may have ideas about foods to highlight during Try-Days that link to the school curricula or other activities. For instance, consider produce grown in a particular State, a past president’s favorite vegetables, or produce that may be easy for students to grow.

Create your Try-Day calendar. Monthly Try-Days are suggested. Your Try-Days do not have to be held on Fridays or even on the same day of the week every month. Coordinate dates and times with the principal and school staff; it’s critical for them to serve as role models by taste-testing the Try-Day foods along with students.

Choose your Try-Day foods. Your school nutrition director may have ideas for new ways to prepare selected items for future school meals and how to incorporate USDA Foods into the tasting event. For a full list of USDA Foods, visit the *USDA Foods Toolkit* (see appendix, page 101). Dark green, red, and orange vegetables; beans and peas; and whole grains are great options. Consider highlighting fruits and vegetables that are in season. Schools can also solicit donations from local grocery stores, farms, or restaurants. Pick methods that best support your school’s space, food policies, and resources.

Plan how to present the food items and conduct voting. Consider how and where the food will be served, and prepare volunteers to help. Decide how you’ll make the ingredients look appetizing and attractive; options include pairing a new vegetable with a familiar favorite or low-fat dip. Talk with your school district and principal about food policies (e.g., food in the classroom, allergies). Create a ballot (see appendix, page 81) for students to offer feedback on the foods.

Planning (cont'd)

Get kids excited. Promote your event with posters, announcements, emails, and in the school newsletter (see “How Do I Promote Our Event?” on page 3). Elementary schools can display the *Make Today a Try-Day* poster (see appendix, page 96) and *Be Brave and Try New Foods* poster (see appendix, page 96) at events nearby the tasting area. Make the event memorable with balloons, table tents, songs, food preparation demonstrations, or the school mascot or food ambassadors dressed in costume. See page 94 for other Team Nutrition resources that can help.

Promote favorites. Once students have selected their favorite foods, spotlight them on the menu, perhaps with a “kid-approved” symbol. Have kids create posters and signs about these foods to decorate the cafeteria. Let families know what their kids tried – and liked – so they can serve those foods at home too.

Team Up ~~FOR~~ Success



School

- Create a bulletin board with photographs of school staff, the school mascot, and students enjoying new foods on Try-Days. Post findings from the school ballots.
- Promote Try-Day events during morning announcements, and have a student organization create posters featuring the Try-Day food.
- Follow the example of **Slater Junior High School in Pawtucket, RI**, which recruited students to serve as “food ambassadors” to inform other students about new foods and offer samples.



Classroom

- Incorporate relevant Team Nutrition materials, such as tasting activities outlined in *The Great Garden Detective Adventure* for third and fourth grade, and in the *Dig In!* curriculum for fifth and sixth grade, into classroom discussions. See page 94 for a full list of Team Nutrition resources.
- Language arts teachers can develop writing assignments about students’ experiences trying new food items; in math class, students can tally the results of the voting.



Cafeteria

- Ask school nutrition staff to encourage students to choose the new food during school meals. If it has been a while since the original Try-Day event, offer additional samples of the new food on the first day it is featured on the menu.
- Team Nutrition’s *Healthier Middle Schools* materials for school nutrition staff (see appendix, page 98) provide additional suggestions for implementing tasting events in the cafeteria.

Team Up for Success (cont'd)



Community

- Ask a local chef or registered dietitian to demonstrate healthful ways the featured food can be incorporated into a recipe. Ask a local farmer or cooperative extension professional to talk about how and where the food is produced.
- Give the chef the National Food Service Management Institute's *Chefs' Recipe for Success* guide to demonstrate using USDA Foods (see <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/RecipeForSuccess.pdf>).
- Ask local grocery stores to post a sign near a Try-Day winning food. For example, "Kiwi: Elementary School Favorite of the Month."



Media

- Post student-written blog posts and photos about Try-Days.
- After a couple of successful Try-Days, invite a local political figure and local reporters to attend an event.
- Use the talking points in the *USDA Foods Toolkit* (see appendix, page 101) to showcase USDA Foods that are used in the Try-Day events.



Home

- Ask your school's parent organization (e.g., PTA or PTO) to assist as volunteers for your Try-Day team and during the day of the event, or provide funding for purchasing food and supplies.
- Host a Try-Day event at a parent meeting or family night.
- Send a letter or email to families describing the taste-tests and the foods their child tried (see appendix, page 90). Include recipes families can try at home.

Schools **IN** Action

California schools have incorporated a *Harvest of the Month* program into their curricula for several years. *Harvest of the Month* helps students establish a preference for selected produce items through classroom activities such as taste-testing, cooking in class, and school garden activities, as well as through menu offerings in the school meals program. The program typically features 36 produce items, with at least 4-5 available across each season. For ideas, see the California Department of Health *Harvest of the Month* program's *How to Grow Healthy Students* guide at <http://www.harvestofthemonth.cdph.ca.gov/download/How-To-Guide.pdf> and extensive toolkit at <http://www.harvestofthemonth.cdph.ca.gov/program-overview.asp>.

At **Tuba City Primary School** and **Eagles Nest Intermediate School** in **Tuba City, AZ**, students taste-tested two items, turtle beans and kiwi. Foodservice staff set up a table with large signs describing both foods. Each student received cards to place in bags with smiling or frowning faces to indicate whether they liked the food they tried. Most students loved both foods – and most had never tasted kiwi before.