

Cooking with Kids – Pizza Time

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What's more fun than eating pizza? Making it!

Turn that favorite dinner into an afternoon of creativity. If you can put up with a little mess, making pizza is easy and fun.

If you have plenty of time on your hands, by all means make your own pizza dough. For the rest of us, there's Trader Joe's. Ninety nine cents buys you a choice of whole wheat, plain or rosemary pizza dough, in the refrigerated section.

Roll up your kid's sleeves and get a tray ready. Your child will love spreading the flour or cornmeal on the tray. Forget flinging the pizza dough up like the Italians do – unless you want an even bigger mess. A rolling pin works just fine, and can easily be used by little ones, with a bit of guidance. No rolling pin? Use a wine bottle (with supervision) or an aerosol can (like cooking spray) wrapped in tin foil. Who cares how perfectly round the pizza is, as long as your child is doing it.

Pizza sauce is as easy as premade pasta sauce or canned tomato sauce. Or if your child likes gourmet foods, buy or make pesto.

The usual shredded mozzarella cheese works, but your child might also like goat cheese or blue cheese, or throw on some cheddar. Goat cheese is easy to cut up with a spoon, dropping pieces on the dough. Sprinkle some shredded parmesan on top for added flavor.

Be creative with the toppings, and even let your child shop for them with you. This may be a good time to experiment with foods your kid doesn't normally eat. If you're out of topping ideas, look at a take-out menu from your local pizzeria. Mix traditional ingredients like mushrooms and red peppers, with chicken, Julianne carrots, broccoli, vegetarian sausage, nuts or anything else that strikes you. With your child spreading the ingredients around, there shouldn't be too much fuss.

The cheese and toppings will most likely end up somewhere other than the pizza, like your kid's mouth or the floor.

For a special treat (for your child, not necessarily for you), consider a dessert pizza. Use sugar cookie or pie dough, or even purchase a frozen pie crust, and have your child throw on some sweeter ingredients. Jarred butterscotch sauce topped with chocolate chips, shredded coconut, diced fruit, candy corn, marshmallows and M&Ms may sound gross to you, but the kids will love it.

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