

## Start Planning For Safe School Lunches

Are you dreading the thought of packing school lunches again this fall? Here are some hints to make them more appealing.

Packed lunches should have three ingredients: nutrition, taste and safety.

When considering nutrition:  
— Include at least one fruit and vegetable. For vegetables, try

carrot or celery sticks, cherry or grape tomatoes, or bell pepper strips.

— Include fruits and vegetables your children enjoy. Fresh produce is always a good choice, but also consider small pop-top cans of pineapple, peaches and other fruits.

— Avoid juice drinks or punch with a lot of added sugar. Look for "100 percent fruit juice" on labels.

— Avoid prepackaged cheese-and-crackers or similar treats — they are generally high in fat and calories. Check the label. Small packs of chips are often better choices, if your child can afford the calories.

Kids also insist that lunches be tasty:

Vary sandwich breads. Whole-grain bread, kaiser rolls, hamburger buns or bagels are good alternatives to plain white bread, if your child enjoys that variety.

— Wrap tomatoes and lettuce for a sandwich separately so the bread doesn't get soggy.

— Include a favorite pasta salad or hot soup in an insulated wide-mouth container.

For safety's sake, make sure perishable items stay cold until the time your child eats lunch. If lunch is packed at 7:30 a.m. and lunchtime is at noon, the lunch could sit at room temperature far longer than the two hours food safety specialists recommend. To reduce risk:

— Use an insulated lunch box or bag and include a frozen gel pack to keep the contents cool.

— Pack a frozen juice box with the lunch. It will thaw by the time lunch rolls around and will keep other items cool.

— Lunch-meat sandwiches can be frozen overnight and should thaw by lunchtime. Freezing tuna salad or other similar spreads isn't a good idea, though, because mayonnaise doesn't freeze well.

Also, rinse fruits and vegetables before packing the lunch so they don't cross-contaminate other items. And, don't re-use paper bags. Food particles — and any germs with them — can't be wiped out. See other safe-lunch tips in "Quick Tips To Packing A Safe Lunch" at <http://www.fightback.org/school—press.cfm>.

ripening with a yellowish-smooth skin over the sweetened, green-fleshed melon imaginable. Their yield, though skimpy, was positively luscious.

Hope I can figure out what they were so I could plant more next year.

Not to forget the watermelons, both the small, round deep-green-skinned, Sugar Baby variety and, my favorite gourmet "yellow fellows." We gobble watermelon from the time it becomes seasonally-priced at the supermarket right on through the summer. Our homegrown, refrigerator-sized, baby reds and yellows always ripen just in time to add their juicy sweetness to the bountiful buffets of Messy Munchin' Month.

Often the messiest part of August, though, is the kitchen, overrun with kettles, pots, canning equipment, freezer containers, food mill, as we hustle to squirrel away some of this tasty stuff. After about third trip to pitch hulls, skins, peels, cobs and seeds out into the field for recycling on a recent day, "messy munchin' took on a whole new meaning.

The baskets, buckets and boxes of garden and market fresh things do keep the kitchen busier during this time of the year, especially noticeable on some of these August "dog days" when we'd rather not do the kitchen thing at all. But then we realize how quickly summer is slipping by — and that schools are about to gear up — and decide that the biggest downside of August is not that it's messy.

It's just too short.

ing.) If you don't have even a single stalk of your own, repeat the directions given above for getting corn.

Now, on to dessert. We'll start with peaches. Red-blushed skins, fragrant aroma, just gently "giving" to a slight finger pressure. Sliced, diced, tucked into a pie shell, smothered with a cobbler-top, or with fresh vanilla ice cream for a peach sundae. Or, as another fast, finger food, fuzz rinsed off and munched into like an apple. The epitome of messy munchin'.

Watch out for that juice dripping off your elbow.

For variety, we alternate with cantaloupe, all these little netted orbs coming ready at the same time in the garden regardless of how carefully I space out the plantings. So we have cantaloupe with breakfast, cantaloupe for post-milking snack, cantaloupe at lunch, and if there's any handy, as a bedtime snack.

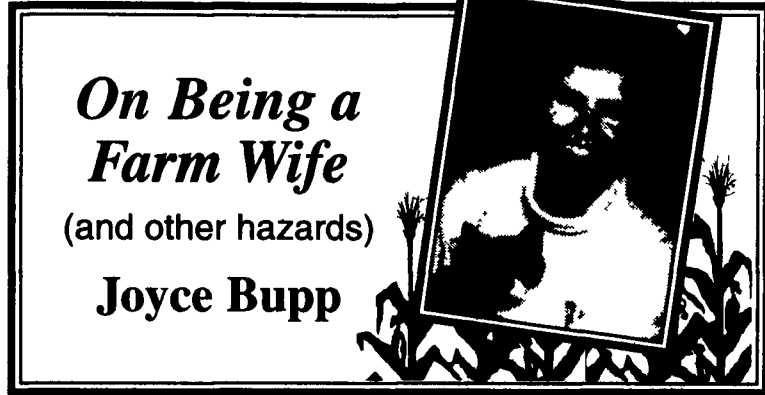
One hill of what was supposed to be honeydew turned out to be a cantaloupe cousin of some sort,

your nearest fresh produce grower and get corn just pulled from the stalk.

After one of those recent sweltering evenings of milking, when the fans blew 95-degree air over us and the steamy, sticky cows, which had hunted any damp spot in search of relief (and dragged their tails across our faces to prove it), a couple of ears of corn proved perfect to appease late-day hunger pangs. Microwaved in their husk for a couple of minutes and twirled over a stick of butter, they are the ultimate fast food.

Sure, they are messy. Announce that you are celebrating Messy Munchin' Mouth.

By their side, slice or chunk up a couple of bright-red, fully-ripened, fresh-from-the-stalk tomatoes. Sprinkle on a dab of salt and pepper, maybe a bit of Italian seasoning. Low calorie, high nutrition, great-tasting, minimal-effort health food. (Minimal effort if you don't count the digging, planting, weeding, mulch-



**On Being a Farm Wife**  
(and other hazards)  
**Joyce Bupp**

Pardon the juice dropping off my elbow.

It's just that we're celebrating August. Which is officially — at our house, anyway, a 31-day marathon of eating our way through Messy Munchin' Month.

Messy Munchin' Month lets us revel in mouth-watering, direct-from-the-patch foods, which the shipped stuff can't even come close to approximating in taste. And, as usual, the bout of extreme heat has pushed our stretched-out plantings of all these goodies into ripening within a short time frame.

We start with the ultimate in finger-linkin', juice drippin', butter-lathered, steamy-hot sweet corn. If your mouth isn't watering by now...back up and read that again. Sweet corn, at its absolute best, should go from the patch to the table in about a half-hour. If you happen to have a patch right behind your house, as we are blessed with particular crop-rotation season, that's doable. As an alternative, cultivate



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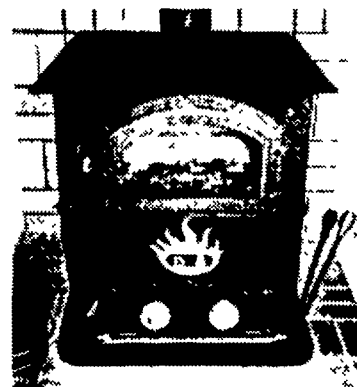
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