

Play is how children learn. They can explore, problem solve and model what they see happening around them daily. Playing in the kitchen can be done using items from your pantry, play food, grocery bags. Using what you have at home is the easiest way to play.

When we set up the kitchen in our classrooms, we have lots of real-life items familiar to the children. We also have plastic fruits, vegetables, and egg containers (we will add the plastic eggs used around Easter). Plastic cups, plates, silverware, napkins, little pots, spatulas, etc. Each child is at their stage of play, and our goal is to meet them right where they are. Watching them see what they are drawn to and then play right there—putting eggs into the carton, following their lead, and imitating their actions, sounds, and following their directions.



1. **Materials Needed:** Play food – plastic, wood, items from your pantry, recycled empty boxes, items to set the table, pretend to eat with - whatever you have in your home to use. You can set up on a coffee table, around a play kitchen if you have one, or near some shelves where your child can grab the items to play with you.
2. **How to:** This activity can be done whenever you have time to set up, something you can keep set up for a week to allow for growth on the play, or something you set up for a day and put away to do again at a different time.
3. **Developmentally this activity encourages:** This type of play reinforces so many skills. You are making a familiar real-life activity accessible to your child. They know this – they've watched you make food, they've watched you cook, they have held the fruit snacks. You can support them as they add items to their plates, pots, bowls. Language is encouraged throughout this play, such as labeling, naming, and choosing what they want to play within their "kitchen." Eye-hand coordination is also encouraged, as they pick items, put them in a bag, basket, do heavy work lifting and carrying items, open up lids, stacking items on shelves. Again, we want to use 1-2 word phrases to help keep the communication clear and straightforward 'Yum, cereal,' "red apples," 'heavy can' 'lift – so heavy.' If there are siblings, this is a great group play activity. Each child will be at their level of play, and having models of those levels of play is a natural way to help grow in all areas.
4. **Sidenote:** My daughter was never a big TV watcher. *But, if she heard Paula Deen say, "Hey, Y'all," she would come running into the living room!* My 15-month-old was obsessed with the kitchen. I had her help everywhere I could see in the kitchen. She would decorate cookies at her highchair, help 'wash' dishes, spread butter on something, sprinkle, pound crumble. She is 12 now, and she LOVES cooking and baking. Our children learn through their play.

[Fall Themed Dramatic Play Center for Preschool and Kindergarten \(dreambig-littleone.com\)](http://dreambig-littleone.com)

Lesson plan submitted by AnnMarie Adams October 2021

Link for reference by the blog "Dream Big Little One" & Photo credit from "Dream Big Little One"

Photo credit from AnnMarie Adams, daughter (15 mo-18 mo)

