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We Be Cookin'

Take your child on an island adventure while preparing Caribbean mango salsa.

The weather is warming up, and it's the perfect time to throw a beach party in your kitchen. Be inspired by the Caribbean—a fusion of many islands, cultures, histories, languages, musical styles and, of course, foods. Here are some facts and activities to share with your kids while making the dish.

Geography: Look at a map. Although there are more than 7,000 islands in the area, the most populated include Jamaica, the Bahamas, Bermuda, Cuba, Aruba, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico and the Cayman Islands.

Social Science: Appreciate the blended culture, which is a result of the diverse peoples who have moved to the region. In the 17th century European countries like England, France, Spain and the Netherlands began to colonize the islands, which were originally populated by native Indians. Africans also played an integral role in Caribbean history.

Music: Get moving to the beautiful beats of the islands. The sound is a rich mixture of steel pan, calypso, reggae, salsa, mambo, soca and jazz. Listen to the album *Putumayo Kids Presents: Caribbean Playground*. Use a stockpot and wooden spoon to play along with the music.

Science: Discuss the tropical climate of the region and how it directly affects the types of produce grown. Plant cilantro in a pot and watch it grow this summer.

Math: Ask younger children to count how many colors they see in the salsa.

Food: Taste some of the native flavors. The islands share many of the same crops, including sugarcane, banana, plantain, pumpkin, coconut, sweet potato, corn, papaya, citrus fruit, pineapple and mango. These foods are used to make some of the most common dishes: fried plantains, banana bread, pumpkin soup and coconut custard.

The mango, one of the area's most popular fruits, grows on trees and, interestingly, is a relative of the cashew. It's an excellent source of vitamins A and C, potassium and fiber.

Cricket Azima is a chef and children's cooking expert. She is the founder of The Creative Kitchen based in New York City.



CARIBBEAN MANGO SALSA

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 4 small tomatoes | 1½ cups corn kernels
(fresh or frozen) |
| 1 mango, peeled | 2 limes |
| 1 cucumber | 1 cup fresh cilantro |
| 1 red onion | olive oil, to taste |
| 1 red bell pepper | salt and pepper, to taste |
| 1 yellow or orange
bell pepper | 1 bag baked corn tortilla chips |
| 1 15.5 oz. can black beans | |

child: Before cooking, wash fruits, vegetables and cilantro.

PARENT: Cut tomatoes, mango, cucumber, onion and peppers into strips that are easier for small hands to handle and cut.

child: Using a plastic knife, cut vegetable and mango strips into small dice. Then place the pieces into a medium bowl.

PARENT: Open the can of beans and remove the lid completely.

child: Pour beans in strainer and rinse under running water. Add corn and beans to the bowl contents.

PARENT: Cut limes in half.

child: Squeeze lime juice over contents of bowl. Remove cilantro leaves from stem, and sprinkle over mixture.

PARENT: Allow child to help dress salsa with oil, salt and pepper—a little at a time. Serve with chips and enjoy.

SERVES 12