

# THE NEWS-TIMES



Tyler Sizemore/Staff photograph

Elliott Borione, 4, of New Fairfield, picks apart basil leaves during a cooking class at Whole Foods Market in Danbury.

## Fun ways to get kids to eat their veggies

### Nutrition experts say you can get children excited about produce

By Linda Tuccio-Koonz

Some kids happen to like vegetables, but there are plenty who would rather not eat them.

When Danbury resident Ellen Hogan was raising her three children, she came up with a way to make sure her kids didn't miss out. "If I made chicken soup, I'd blend all the carrots and celery so it became part of the broth," she said.

Things are easier now that she has a granddaughter who likes vegetables — or at least likes to try them. And Hogan enjoys taking her to learn about veggies at kid-friendly cooking classes, such as those offered twice a month through the Veggiecation program at Whole Foods Market in Danbury.

"Vegetables are probably the most important things you can eat," said Judy Prager, a registered dietitian who leads some of the classes. "They have vitamins, minerals and antioxidants; they have fiber, too, and are very low in calories."

Prager, of New Fairfield, said getting kids to eat vegetables may not always be easy, but there are different ways to get them started, and it can be fun.

The first step, she said, is exposing kids to vegetables, so they're not a foreign food. And parents have to set a good example. "If you don't eat vegetables, you can't expect your kids to eat them."

It also helps to explain to children why vegetables are good, but to do it in a way they can easily understand.

"At Veggiecation classes we talk about what nutrients are in what vegetable, and what those nutrients help," Prager said. "If something is high in fiber, I say it's good for your tummy. If I said it's good for your digestion, (the younger



Raw asparagus pesto is garnished with carrots, above, while nutritionist Judy Prager, below, talks about asparagus.



Shamkar Bahadur, 8, of Ridgefield, tries tasty tomatoes on toast.

kids are) going to say, 'Huh?'"

It also can help to give vegetables interesting or amusing names. "Carrots can become Super Vision Veggies," she said, adding that's a good name "because they contain carotenoids, which are antioxidants that help our vision — night vision in particular."

However, one of the most important things you can do is have kids participate when it's time to choose and prepare vegetables. "One of the reasons we do an interactive cooking class is because when kids are cooking things themselves, they're more likely to taste those foods," Prager said.

That's what happened during a class Hogan attended with her granddaughter, Mackenzie Lynch, 3, of Brookfield. One of the dishes the class made was "Tasty Tomatoes on Toast" — actually a simple bruschetta-type snack.

Prager started the class by having the kids sanitize their hands. Then she showed everyone how tomatoes come in many shapes, sizes and colors. She explained how "tomatoes have vitamin C, which gives you strong muscles, potassium for fast healing, and fiber for a happy tummy."

Kids helped dice the tomatoes and combine them with such foods as chopped bits of onion, basil leaves and balsamic vinegar. The recipe also involved the mincing of garlic. Before seeking a volunteer for that task, Prager told the kids, "I love the smell of garlic; your fingers will smell delicious."

"Mackenzie loves to cook," Hogan said. "(Each class) gets her to try new things, for sure. She tries everything (at Veggiecation) that she won't try at home."

Hogan said Mackenzie liked the "Tasty Tomatoes on Toast," but normally doesn't eat

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