

Fresh from the outdoor mud kitchen or role-play area come fruit salad, poached fruit, fruit tarts and pies. As children enjoy some creative cooking, there will be plenty of opportunities for descriptive language, counting and talking about healthy eating.

## Fruitful talk

The fruit stones are beautifully visual and tactile, providing sensory feedback as children feel with their fingers the same details they observe with their eyes. There's plenty to examine and discuss together, building on children's knowledge and understanding of the world:

- You might like to place the fruit in an intriguing setting for children to discover, such as tucked among straw in a wooden crate or wrapped in colourful pieces of paper in a basket.
- Ask questions about the stones to develop children's thinking, vocabulary and observation skills. Do the children recognise any of the fruits? Have they eaten any of them before? Which is their favourite fruit? What colours and shapes are they? How hard or soft are they? Do any of the fruits have seeds, stones or segments?
- Compare the fruit stones with real pieces of fruit. Look at the outside of a fruit – what do the children think it will look like on the inside? Will it be the same colour or will it feel different? Cut it open and see! Giving children the opportunity to cut pieces of fruit themselves under supervision will allow them to learn about knife safety and develop fine motor skills. Can the children find any real seeds? Where in or on the fruit are they? How many can the children find?
- Where do these fruits grow – on a tree, bush or plant? Show pictures of fruit trees, bushes and plants, and find out whether they grow in this country. Have the children ever seen any of these fruits growing?



## In the kitchen

The stones are equally at home in an outdoor mud kitchen and a role-play home corner, with invitations for open-ended creative play:



- In the mud kitchen, as well as a collection of pots, pans and utensils to use with mud and water, offer plenty of natural ingredients such as acorns, bark, fragrant herbs, flowers and dried lentils. Other sensory materials could include corn flour paste, washing up liquid bubbles, water in a spray bottle, ice cubes and coloured rice or pasta. A simple creamy 'sauce' can be made using water, a small amount of milk and yellow food colouring. You might also like to offer ingredients for making 'fruit juice', such as water dyed a variety of colours.

- In a home corner, children can have the flexibility to role-play cooking, serving or eating the fruits. You might like to offer cooking utensils, serving dishes, plates and cutlery, as well as a selection of other 'foods'. Children might enjoy adding special touches such as salt shakers (with real salt), flower arrangements (real or artificial), real herbs, and fabric for table mats and runners.
- The fruits could feature in other open-ended role-play invitations, such as food for soft toy animals, a market stall or supermarket, or a farm.



## Fruit, fabulous fruit

The stones allow you to take the learning into other fruitful areas:

- Talk about healthy eating and how our bodies need lots of different fruits and vegetables. One straightforward way to do this is to eat the rainbow – choosing fruit and vegetables in a variety of colours. To illustrate this visually, make fruit skewers together using fruit in plenty of different colours. Children might like to create their skewer in a rainbow design. Talk about the taste of the different fruits.
- Make fruit juice together – either with a single fruit or a combination. If you choose to make orange juice, children could be shown how to carefully cut and juice the fruit themselves using a manual juicer.



- Make a mixed fruit crumble together, involving children in tasks such as cutting up the fruit and rubbing the fat into the flour to make the crumble topping. How does the fruit change when we heat it? Does it become softer? Does it taste different? How do the children prefer the fruit – uncooked or cooked?
- Use hard fruits such as apple or unripe pears for printing to create pictures or patterns.
- Explore the story of The Very Hungry Caterpillar using the fruit stones and other food props, as well as a caterpillar. If you don't have a suitable caterpillar, you could glue green and red pompoms onto a bendy pipe cleaner using a hot glue gun, adding a face and pipe cleaner antennae at one end. Encourage children to retell the story. If they were as hungry as the caterpillar, what would they like to munch through?

## Books about fruit

*Handa's Surprise* by Eileen Browne

*The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle

*Fruit Bowl* by Mark Hoffman

*Strawberries are Red* by Petr Horáček

### *Get talking – useful words*

Seed, stone, segment, skin, core, ripe, soft, juicy, crunchy, sweet, tangy, sharp, slice, chop, peel, cut.