



Early Reading Connects

Cooking up a storm

Children love getting their hands dirty so what better way to encourage language development than through cooking. Lucy Giffen, a childminder from South Croydon, explains how she linked pesto with literacy and includes her 'do it yourself' activity templates.

One of the children I child mind is Kester, who is aged 3 and a half. I decided cooking would be an excellent way to encourage Kester to enjoy matching pictures to words whilst having fun planning a menu and cooking up something delicious. Kester chose to make pesto. I created a recipe for him to follow. I bought the ingredients and then gave him the list to search for the items around the kitchen. He really enjoyed ticking the items off on the laminated sheets and was thrilled to be getting so involved in collecting the ingredients.



Kester ripping off the basil leaves



Morgan gets stuck in too

I then gave Kester the "How To Make" sheet and set him and my one year old son, Morgan, up at the kitchen table with a bowl and a basil plant each and got them to rip the leaves off. Both of them enjoyed this part immensely and Kester spent the majority of the time checking that Morgan was following the instructions properly. He even told me that "Morgan isn't allowed to use the blender, it's for big boys".

Kester then completed the rest of the recipe by grating the cheese, with some help, adding everything to the blender and pouring the olive oil in. We tasted it every once in a while to see if the recipe needed tweaking. Once it had been made

Kester and I talked about branding and how products need a name so that people know what they are. He quickly came up with: "Kesto's Pesto Mesto". He and Morgan

then spent time colouring on paper, which we wrapped around the pot as a label. Lunch was served to visitors and family. Kester proudly announced, "I made this". Kester's mum said, "He was so proud and excited when he got home, and made us all taste it".



Pot of pesto coming right up!

Kester was so excited about making the pesto. He was involved in the process from start to finish and it was the first time he had had the opportunity to pick and then make food with me. We had several extra people round for lunch, including his best friend and he was really excited that he had cooked for so many people.

Kester is not particularly interested in eating unless it is a roast dinner. His direct involvement in this activity really encouraged him to think about other types of food. He was excited about having a list of items to find and treated it as a treasure hunt. I extended this to outside the home too. We went to the local market with a list for a roast dinner and Kester had fun running around searching for the ingredients.








Kesto's Pesto Mesto

Whilst not normally interested in holding pens, Kester enjoyed being able to mark the ingredients off against his list. He clearly followed the instructions on the second sheet where we read the words together. The tactile part of ripping the leaves was also exciting for a child of any age. Although Kester is happy to listen to stories and is






imaginative when playing with toys, he does not like drawing, painting

or writing. So this very physical activity encouraged him to have fun with words. What a success!

Why not try it yourself. Below are templates for the list of ingredients and instructions:

	Basil	
	Pine Nuts	
	Grated Parmesan	
	Olive Oil	
	Fusilli Pasta	

How to Make Pesto

1	Tear up the basil and put it in the food processor	
2	Add the pine nuts	
3	Add the grated parmesan cheese	
4	Pour in the olive oil and blend together	
5	Add to the cooked pasta	

How to Make Pesto

