July 5

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Patriotic Fruit

As hot summer days begin to stretch out before us, there's nothing quite like the taste of watermelon. It's cool, crisp and refreshingly sweet. The best part about it is that it's even got a healthy boost of vitamins and fiber. It's a great snack for kids to munch on, especially when there are seeds to spit! This 4th of July, try making this patriotic fruit platter that is not only festive but nutritious and delicious as well.

This no-cook recipe is great for any age, but for kindergarteners who are working on developing their fine motor skills, this is an especially fun project. To make your watermelon-blueberry platter, your child will use cookie cutters and kabobs, and she'll practice the "pincer grip" that will help her later with handwriting. This is a recipe that friends and family will definitely enjoy!

What You Need:

- 1 seedless Watermelon
- 1–2 cartons of blueberries (amount depends on the size of your watermelon!)
- 5-point star cookie cutter, about 1 ½ inches to 2 inches across (or one of each size, if you have a couple!)
- Package of 7–8-inch bamboo barbecue skewers (50-75)
- Bunch of fresh mint leaves

What You Do:

1. Before you begin, make sure you have washed your fruit thoroughly, including the outside of the watermelon. For this dish, you will be using the rind as well as the flesh of the melon, and you'll need to make sure that everything is clean!
2. Use a sharp knife to cut the watermelon exactly in half, making two bowl shapes of watermelon. Then place one half on a table, so that the flesh is facing up, and use the knife to dig around the edge of the flesh, and separate it from the rind. Try to remove the flesh in one big chunk—or as big a chunk as possible!
3. Then slice the watermelon flesh into large circles, each about ¾ of an inch thick.
4. You will be left with one half of the watermelon with the flesh and rind intact together, the watermelon slices, and one round bowl of rind. Turn the rind over so that it makes a dome, and place it on a platter lined with fresh mint. Put it aside—you'll be using it soon.
5. The remaining half of your melon will be cut up as well, but this one will be a little easier, because you don't need to keep the rind "dome" intact. For the second half, cut your watermelon into circles, rind attached. Each circle should be about ¾ of an inch thick (for this recipe, it's better to make them thicker, not thinner if you're unsure of the size). Then use a sharp knife to cut off the rinds, leaving a circle of juicy red watermelon intact.
6. Now's the time for your child to get in on the action! Lay all of the watermelon circles on a clean cutting surface and invite your child to use the cookie cutter to cut the flesh into star shapes. For your young learner, this is a great time to point out some early lessons in spatial thinking: many star cutters can "tessellate," i.e. their points can be lined up side by side to make a repeating pattern—which will minimize your watermelon waste. See how many complete stars your child can make from one watermelon circle.
7. You can expect to end up with some scraps, so feel free to munch on these along the way. Or you and your child can save them to use in our recipe for Patriotic Punch! When you and your child are done, you'll have a lovely array of bright pink watermelon stars.
8. Take out your skewers and have some fun! Help your child run a skewer through each star (through the length of the star rather than the width), leaving at least a half an inch at the top for people to grab. Make sure the pointed end of the skewer ends up on the bottom. Use the pointed end to poke the hole in the watermelon.
9. Keep going to create a ton of watermelon star skewers! You can put as many watermelon stars as you would like on one skewer, depending on the size of each skewer and the size of your stars, but 3 or 4 should be the maximum amount for one any skewer.
10. Help your child stick the watermelon skewers into the melon dome on your platter. You and your child can arrange them in whatever design you like.
11. On separate skewers, have your child stick 5–6 blueberries on a skewer, again with half an inch sticking out on top, and place these blueberry skewers into your watermelon dome in the spaces between your watermelon stars. (For added color, if the fruit is available in your area, you can also try alternating blueberries with red raspberries or cherries!)
12. When you and your child are done, you'll have a simple, yet festive platter of delicious and healthy summer treats to serve at your next Fourth of July party. It's sure to be a real crowd pleaser!

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Revolutionary War Game

This outdoor game, a modification of "Capture the Flag", uses ball, baskets, and foam to re-enact the fight between the Redcoats and the Patriots in Massachusetts in 1775.

Can your foam-armed "Patriots" stop the "Redcoats" from capturing Concord's armory? You'll find out!

What You Need:

- 10-20 tennis balls, or other soft, rubber balls, at least two per person
- Three empty baskets—laundry baskets work great
- 2-3 short sticks of foam, such as a section from an old pool "noodle", about 12-18"
- 8 sport cones or other markers to place on the field
- Optional: red, white, and blue streamers; duct tape

Set-Up:

1. Assemble the props and clear the field area. Collect tennis balls (or any rubber balls of any size) that you have on hand or that you can borrow from friends and family. Place the balls in one of the baskets, and take a quick count. These balls will be the "cannonballs" in the armory for the game.
2. Gather the foam sticks which will act as the "bayonet muskets" for the patriots. These foam sticks will help young kids extend their reach, so they should be soft to avoid injury. To add more color to the game, have the kids decorate their foam sticks by wrapping red, blue, and white streamers around them, so everyone can be very clear who and where the "Patriots" are!
3. Set up the field. Find an open space that will accommodate all the kids. At one end of the space, place one empty basket and put four cones around it. This basket represents the British headquarters in "Boston". At the other end, place the basket full of balls and put four cones around it. This basket represents the "Concord Armory." In the middle of the field, place the third basket. This middle basket will represent the patriots' "secret stash" basket that was the property of the Continental Army.

What You Do:

1. Choose the teams. Depending on the size of the group, select three or so "Patriots" (more, if the group is large). Have the patriots stand in the middle of the field, and give each of them a "bayonet musket" to hold. Everyone else will be a Redcoat.
2. The Redcoats' goal is to run across the field without being tagged, grab no more than two "cannonballs" from the armory, and make it back to the other end of the field, or "Boston". As long as they have not been tagged, the Redcoats can keep running back and forth until they have brought all their arms back to their side.
3. The Patriot's goal is to tag the Redcoats with their "bayonet muskets". If a Patriot tags a Redcoat, the Redcoat must sit down where he was tagged on the field until the round is over. Any cannonballs the tagged Redcoat was carrying will be confiscated by the Continental Army and placed them in the "secret stash" basket in the middle of the field.
4. Each round ends either when all the Redcoats are tagged, or when all the cannonballs have been removed from the "Concord Armory".
5. The final cannonball count signals the victory: if the majority of the balls have returned to "Boston", then the Redcoats have won, but if the majority of the balls are in the Patriots' stash or in the armory, the Patriots win!

Did You Know?

What really happened in Massachusetts on April 19, 1775?

On that day, American colonists in the Massachusetts towns of Lexington and Concord entered a decisive moment in history. Early that morning, British General Thomas Gage sent 700 "Redcoat" soldiers from Boston to capture the Patriots Samuel Adams and John Hancock in Lexington, and to destroy the Patriots' armory in Concord.

But thanks to the famous warning from Paul Revere (with help from Dr. Samuel Prescott), Samuel Adams and John Hancock were able to escape the night before the battle. When the British troops did make it to Concord on the morning of April 19, 1775, they began seizing gunpowder and arms until the colonists stood their ground at the Old North Bridge at the edge of the town. Astonished by the colonists' resistance, the British tried to retreat back to Boston. However, by that time, colonists from local towns had poured out of their homes and lined the road to fight.

By the end of the day, the British had lost nearly 300 men, and a clear message had been sent by the colonists: the Americans wanted their independence, and they weren't going to give up the fight. They didn't, and today, centuries later, we can still thank them for their gift.

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Patriotic Poem

Personal freedom is one topic children love to discuss with their parents. Even at a young age, some kids feel they have limited rights and very few choices. This 4th of July, end the battle for independence in your house, and show your child just how much freedom she can enjoy. Here's a creative, reflective activity that your child can display as a visual reminder of what it really means to be free.

What You Need:

- Construction paper
- Multi-colored markers
- Glue stick, glitter, stickers (optional)

What You Do:

1. In order to find out what your child already knows about the 4th of July, have a brief conversation about why we celebrate this national holiday. Ask your child how her life would be different if the United States was not a free country. Could she play outside anytime she wanted? Could she go to school?
2. Tell your second grader that she is going to create an Independence Day keepsake. She will make her name into a work of art: each letter of her name will form a word that tells about her personal freedoms, and she has the "freedom" to decorate it however she chooses.
3. Ask your child to brainstorm a list of personal freedoms she enjoys, such as talking on the phone, playing outside, and dressing as she chooses.
4. Now, show your child how to design her name by forming the letters out of the words in her list. From far away, it will look like her name. But as you get closer, her name will be revealed as lots of meaningful words put together.
5. When her project is finished, offer lots of praise and display the piece in a prominent spot. Offer her a red, white and blue treat for creating such a memorable keepsake!

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