

# Making Your Own Local Baby Food



*A guide for early care and education sites on how to make your own local baby food from fresh, in-season fruits and vegetables.*

Making your own local baby food may sound daunting, but with this guide, you will learn the ins and outs of preparing, serving, and storing your own local baby food.

## WHY make your own local baby food?

- **Nutrition** - By making your own baby food, you know exactly what ingredients are incorporated and can avoid added sugars and salts.<sup>1</sup>
- **Save money** - When bought in season, local food is typically much cheaper than store bought. On average, homemade baby food can save people up to 27 cents per ounce.<sup>2</sup>
- **Babies love it!** Because it is fresh, local baby food tastes great and helps to encourage an infant's preferences for fruits and vegetables.
- **Support your local community** - By buying local, you are supporting your local economy and helping to foster beneficial relationships with farmers.



*By making your own local baby food, as a provider, you know exactly what ingredients are going into your children.*

## WHERE can I find local food?

- **Farmers' Market** - find a farmer's market near you at [www.wifarmersmarkets.org](http://www.wifarmersmarkets.org) or at [WI Farm Fresh Atlas](#)
- **Grocery Store/Co-op** - look for local stickers and sections
- **Sign-up for a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture)** - find one at <https://www.csacoalition.org/>
- **Food Distributor** - ask what local options they have!
- **On-site garden**

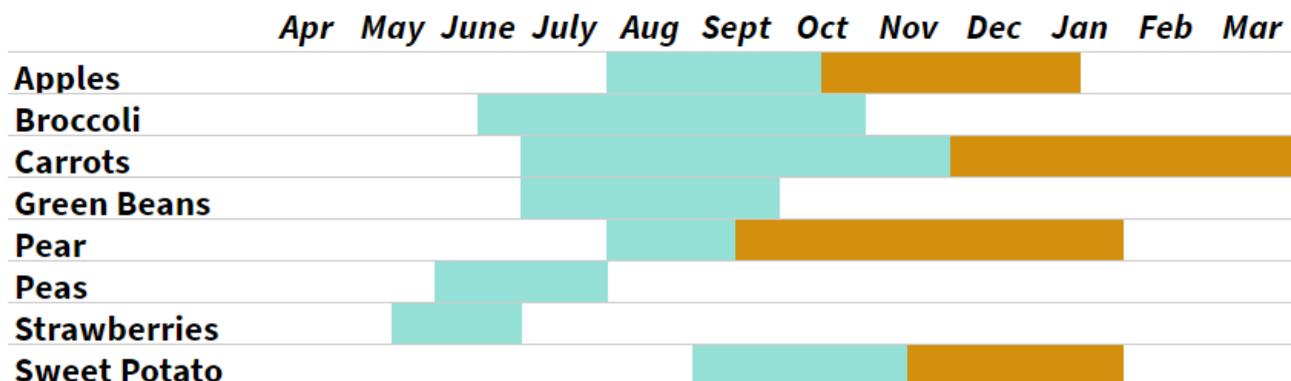
### Pro Tip!

At Gretchen's family child care site, HomeGrown Nature School, she loves her weekly CSA box. It's easy to just cook up whatever veggies are inside for her kids to try.

### WI Seasonality Chart:

Harvest season

Available from storage



<sup>1</sup> Cizkova, H ; Sevcik, R ; Rajchl, A ; Voldrich, M. (2009). Nutritional Quality of Commercial Fruit Baby Food. *Czech Journal Of Food Sciences*, 27, S134-S137.

<sup>2</sup> Halifax, N.S. (2018). Benefits of homemade baby food. *Chronicle - Herald*, A8.

## HOW do I make local baby food?

Here is a step-by-step guide with varying options on how to make your own baby food. Make sure to follow all food safety guidelines when preparing, cooking, serving, and preserving the food. Recipes are at the end to help you get you started!

### STEP 1: Purchase and Prepare

- Purchase whole fruits and vegetables from locations perviously mentioned.
- Wash, peel (if needed), and chop food into pieces.

*\*\*Note that on-site and home-prepared green beans, carrots, squash, spinach, turnips, collard greens, or beets should not be fed to babies under 6 months old.<sup>3</sup>*

### STEP 2: Cook

- In the microwave, stove top, or slow cooker, cook the fruits and/or vegetables by boiling, steaming, or microwaving (see below for details).
- Fruits and vegetables are done when they can be pierced or mashed easily with a fork.

### Basic equipment needed depending on cooking

#### method:

- Cutting board
- Knife and veggie peeler
- Cooking pot with lid and steamer basket (ideally)
- Spoon, fork, or potato masher
- Blender or food processor or food mill
- Ice cube trays or cookie sheets or muffin tins
- Freezer containers or freezer bags
- Sharpie or labels

#### How to BOIL fruits and vegetables

- Obtain a pot (with a lid) large enough for your vegetables or fruit to fit.
- Pour cold water into the pot, until the food is completely covered by a half an inch of water.
- Place the lid on the pot, turn on the stove to medium-high heat, and bring to a boil.
- Once boiling, turn down the heat, until the water is simmering.
- Simmer until the vegetables are done!

#### How to STEAM fruits and vegetables

- Obtain a pot (with a lid) large enough for your vegetables or fruit to fit.
- Fill up the pot with water to around one inch deep.
- Place a steamer basket inside of the pot, place vegetables or fruits inside of the basket (Note: If you do not have a basket, simply place the food into the inch of water).
- Place the lid on the pot, turn on the stove to mid-high heat, and bring to a boil.
- Continue to boil, leaving the lid on until the vegetables are done!

#### How to MICROWAVE fruits and vegetables

- Put the fruits or vegetables into a large microwave safe bowl.
- Add a little bit of water (around 2-4 tablespoons) to the bowl.
- Cover lightly with a ceramic plate or paper towel (avoid using plastic).
- Microwave on high until the vegetables are done (typically around 3-5 minutes).

#### Pro Tip!

Karen, from LifeCycle Kids, likes to use the Vitamix to crush up her carrots. The Vitamix is so powerful it eliminates the need to cook them!



<sup>3</sup> Greer, F., Shannon, M., (2005). Infant Methemoglobinemia: The Role of Dietary Nitrate in Food and Water. *Committee on Nutrition, and the Committee on Environmental Health: American Academy of Pediatrics*, 3, 116.

### STEP 3: Process

There are two major types of baby foods you can make - pureed foods and finger foods.

#### **Pureed Foods:**

- Equipment Needed: Blender, food processor, immersion blender, or food mill
- How: Once cooked, use equipment listed above to puree food into a soft texture, removing all of the lumps. You can add some of the cooking water to help smooth out the texture if needed.
- Carrots, peas, zucchini, yellow squash, sweet potato, red apple, and blueberries all make great pureed foods.

#### **Finger Foods:**

- Equipment Needed: Fork, masher, food processor, or food mill
- How: Once cooked, make sure the food is cut up into appropriate sized pieces and/or lightly mash-up the foods.
- Sweet potatoes, green beans, tomatoes, carrots, and white potatoes all make great first finger foods.

### STEP 4: Serve and/or Store

Serve baby food immediately or place in refrigerator for no more than 2 days. If you need to store the baby food longer, freeze the food using one of the methods below.

#### • **For pureed foods:**

- Ice cube trays or muffin tins
  - Pour out baby food into ice cube trays or muffin tins.
  - Once frozen, food can be popped out and put into freezer safe plastic storage bags.
- Food containers
  - Wash, rinse, and reuse large food containers (i.e yogurt, cottage cheese, take-out).
  - Make sure to save around 1 inch of space for food expansion at the top.
  - Engage families by asking them to save containers for you!

#### • **For finger foods:**

- Baking sheet
  - Cut fresh produce into small pieces, cook, and then distribute evenly onto baking sheet.
  - Place baking sheet in freezer, leave for around 1 hour.
  - Place pieces into freezer safe plastic storage bags or containers.

Options for thawing baby food:

- **Microwave** - Thaw your baby food in the microwave by adding some water and cooking the food for a couple of minutes.
- **Stove Top** - Place frozen food in pan and cook until heated through.
- **Refrigerator** - Place frozen food in the fridge for up to 48 hours.

#### **Reminders:**

- Don't forget to date and label your food.
- You can store food in the freezer for up to one month later.
- Do not refreeze food that has thawed.

#### **Remember!**

Breastfeeding is the original "local" food! Make sure your site is welcoming to mothers by providing a lactation space.



## Recipes

Here are a couple of favorite recipes used by child care sites from around Wisconsin.

### Broccoli Pear Puree

#### Ingredients:

- 3 cups broccoli
- 1 pear
- 3 TBS water

#### Directions:

1. Wash broccoli
2. Cut bottom 1-2 inches off the main broccoli stem. Cut broccoli into sections or chunks.
3. Place broccoli into glass bowl. Add 3 TBS of water, cover, and microwave until soft, about 5-8 minutes. You can also cook broccoli on stove top or slow cooker to soften.
4. Put broccoli and the water it was cooked with into the blender.
5. Wash and cut pear into quarters (and remove seeds). Place pear into blender.
6. Blend until all chunks are smooth and pureed.
7. Serve and/or place into ice cube trays and freeze.

#### Pro Tip!

Karen from LifeCycle Kids likes to match a strong-tasting veggie with a fruit to help add some sweetness to the dish and slip in those extra nutrients! Substitute green beans for broccoli and apple for pear to try new flavor combinations.

### Roasted Veggie Sticks (or pieces)

#### Ingredients

- Vegetables of your choice - carrots, sweet potatoes, butternut squash, turnip, or potato
- Cooking oil
- Spices (optional)

#### Directions

1. Wash and peel vegetables. Cut into thin sticks or pieces.
2. Place the veggie sticks or pieces in a bowl. Sprinkle with a little oil, toss to coat.
3. Lay veggie sticks or pieces on a metal baking pan.
4. Bake at 400 degrees for 12 - 15 minutes or until they are very soft.
5. Remove from the oven and cool. Serve and/or freeze in freezer safe plastic storage bags or containers.

*\*\*Sweet potatoes and carrots are great local sources of vitamin A and fun for babies to hold in their hands!*

#### Other recipes:

- [Carrot Puree](#)
- [Green Bean Puree](#)
- [Sweet Potato Puree](#)

Go to [parenting.com/recipes](http://parenting.com/recipes) for more recipes

#### Additional Resources:

- If you are a visual learner, check out this great [video](#) on how to make your own baby food from [University of Maine Extension](#)
- DPI's [Farm to Early Care and Education - Food Safety](#)
- [Full Wisconsin Seasonality Chart](#)

## Questions? Comments? Get in touch!

Contact our Farm to ECE team at [wifarmtoece@rootedwi.org](mailto:wifarmtoece@rootedwi.org). Visit our website at [rootedwi.org](http://rootedwi.org) for more Farm to ECE resources.

*Thanks to Shelbi Jentz, Karen Peterson, Brittany Zerbe, and Jenn Sattler for their contribution and review of this piece.*

*This project is funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation of Battle Creek, Michigan.*

