



Edible Schoolyard Kitchen Equipment, Infrastructure, and Systems

Overview

Our kitchen infrastructure and systems directly inform how we run our classes. In the Edible Schoolyard kitchen, our space has been specifically designed to enable students to operate independently and create rich opportunities for exploratory learning. Every choice—from the number and size of our tables, the location of cooking tools and equipment, to the layout of our toolboxes—has been made with the intention of creating intuitive, user-friendly systems. Below, we describe our key kitchen equipment and systems, and discuss the role each element plays in a typical kitchen class. At the end, we include inventories of the tools and equipment we use in our kitchen classroom for reference. We hope that this context will allow you to understand how our specific infrastructure and systems support the curriculum we teach and enable you to more easily adapt what you find useful or interesting in the lessons that follow to your own kitchen classroom.

A Typical Kitchen Class: An Infrastructure and Systems View

Cubbies

The first thing students do when they enter the kitchen classroom for a kitchen lesson is to put their backpacks and any other stuff (including their phones) in a cubby. This reduces clutter and keeps the space safe by limiting potential distractions, reducing the possibility of unwanted materials or germs entering the food, and eliminating the tripping hazard of stray backpacks and sweatshirts.

Three Groups, Three Tables, Three Cooking Stations

The most fundamental design feature of our kitchen space is that it is set up to support three small groups cooking relatively independently from one another. In the center of the room are three main tables, each of which seats up to about 15 people. At the start of each class, everyone meets around the center table for the Chef Meeting, and then students break into their small groups, one group at each table. Tables are labeled by color (red, green, and blue), and each has a toolbox and small compost bin, also labeled with colored tape that matches the table color. Each toolbox contains basic knives and measuring devices, and each cooking station has a sink, two electric burners, basic pots and pans, and cleaning supplies (for a comprehensive list of toolbox and cooking stations tools and items, see “Kitchen Station Inventory”). The drawers and cabinets of the cooking station bear signs and other visual cues that remind students what goes where. Students in the table groups are responsible for the care of all tools and equipment in their toolbox and at their cooking station.



Toolboxes

We emphasize the use of real tools in the kitchen. Professional tools instill a feeling of responsibility in students as well as an expectation of serious effort. Our toolboxes contain all the tools students most commonly used in class, including chef knives and paring knives (for a comprehensive list, see “Toolbox Inventory”). The toolboxes and tools are all labeled with colored tape that matches the table color, helping students to easily return tools to the correct place after use. Toolboxes are open and have a clearly defined place for every tool. This allows students to easily and safely take knives out of the toolbox and replace them when they’re done. Before every class, we wet two small towels and place them on the toolboxes—students use these towels to wipe down their knives after using them as opposed to washing them in the sink. This means that during class, knives never leave the tables, a key to keeping the space safe while the students use sharp knives.

Spice Table

We keep our spices, vinegars, and sauces on the Spice Tables. Putting these ingredients in a single, visible place with counter space allows students from all three groups to easily experiment with different flavors, keeps ingredients accessible by all three groups, and prevents the main working tables from becoming overcrowded with jars, bottles, and cutting boards. Below the spice table are containers for students to take leftover food to go.

Dish Cupboard, Dish Tower, and Metro Shelf

Dishes for setting the table and eating are stored in the Dish Cupboard; the Dish Tower stores platters and various serving bowls; and the Metro Shelf stores larger stockpots, mixing bowls, and a variety of cooking tools like spatulas, tongs, ladles, and sieves. All three are open-face and clearly labeled to show the correct place for the tools and utensils that belong there.

Altar

Each time students set the table to eat they have the opportunity to decorate their table with bouquets, items harvested from the garden, and other beautiful or interesting objects that the kitchen has collected over the years. We keep all of the items for table decorating on a side table called the Altar. We’ve found that table decorating is consistently a favorite job among our students, and often can engage students who are otherwise less interested in the cooking jobs. The Altar, boasting a range of beautiful seasonal harvest items, is an excellent physical reminder of the kitchen’s link to the garden. It is also a place in the kitchen where students can find a large variety of physical touchstones that represent a diversity of cultures.

Bussing Table and Dish Station

Cleanup is an integral part of every kitchen class. At their table groups, students practice “clean as you go” to wash the dishes and tools they use to prepare the meal. After eating, all three groups bring their plates, cups, and utensils to the Bussing Table. At the Bussing Table students scrape any leftover food from their plates into a small compost bin, pour



leftover water in their glasses into a graywater bucket, and place their plate, cup, and utensils in three corresponding bus tubs. Cleanup is a rotating responsibility. One table group washes all the dishes from the Bussing Table in our commercial dishwasher at the Dish Station. The other two groups clear the tables, sweep their areas, and finish any cleanup still remaining from cooking.

Recipe Files

The recipe files hanging on the wall by our door contain a rotating supply of paper copies of the recipes we're preparing in the kitchen. We label the recipes clearly, and remind students at the end of every class that the recipes are available for them to grab and take home at any time. Placing them right next to the door makes them easily accessible for students on their way out.

Equipment

We have the following equipment in our kitchen classroom:

- Electric burners—six total; two at each of our three cooking stations
- Oven—freestanding convection oven
- Electric griddle—34" x 18" cooking surface
- Convection burners—kept in storage; used for lessons in which we need extra burners
- Refrigerator—three-door commercial-size refrigerator
- Commercial dishwasher
- Washer and dryer—regular front-loading