

Recommended Grade Level:

3-5

Season:

All

Indoor/Outdoor

The History of Herbs and Spices

Description:

Students will investigate scents and flavors to identify herbs and spices. They will learn how herbs and spices have helped cure illnesses throughout history and how herbs and spices are used today to help add flavor to food.

Background:

Using herbs and spices are a great way to add flavor to our food without using salt and other unhealthy ways to season food. However, throughout history many different cultures used herbs and spices to help prevent and treat illnesses because many modern day medicines had not been discovered and people only had access to plants. Knowledge about herbal medicine was passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth, since there were no written records at that time. Medicine men were a traditional healer among Native Americans, who used herbs and spices to treat illnesses. Chinese herbal remedies date to more than 5,000 years ago. Apothecaries were similar to modern day pharmacists. They stored and sold spices and herbs in shops, mixing ingredients to form remedies to sell to the public. Even today, some people still use herbs and spices to treat illness.

Materials:

- Computers with Internet access

Preparation:

Determine how to group students. This activity can be done individually; however, small groups can brainstorm and work together to discuss and prescribe the correct herbs or spices for specific historical ailments.

Activity:

1. Head out to the garden to sniff herbs and gather information about the different herbs growing in the garden. If herbs aren't available in your garden, you can purchase them at the grocery store (fresh or dried) or get small plants at a garden center. Students can share what they know about herbs.
2. Explain that people used many herbs and spices throughout history to prevent or treat illnesses and diseases. Review the information from the Background with the students. Explain that today herbs and spices are used to season food – a great way to add flavor without using salt.

3. Review the following list of herbs and spices with the students and have them pick one herb or spice that they want to research.

- Oregano
- Fennel
- Turmeric
- Cinnamon
- Mint
- Clove
- Basil
- Dill
- Ginger
- Sage
- Black pepper
- Rosemary
- Garlic
- Thyme
- Cayenne
- Parsley

4. Tell students that they're going to become historic garden doctors and research an herb or spice and how it was used historically. Have students share their findings with the class.

Tying it Together:

1. How have herbs and spices been used throughout history?
2. What are some herbs and spices in our garden and how can they be used today?

Special Care:

Students can sniff the herbs and match pictures of the herbs with the plants. They can sort the pictures into herbs that they think smell good and those that don't.

Digging Deeper:

Students can choose a herb or spice make an oil or vinegar infused herb dressing to take home.

National Standards:

CCSS.ELA: Reading: Informational text: Key ideas and details.

CCSS.ELA: Writing: Text types and purposes.

CCSS.ELA: Writing: Research to build and present knowledge.

NCSS: Time, continuity and change: Knowledge and understanding of the past enable us to analyze the causes and consequences of events and developments, and to place these in the context of the institutions, values and beliefs of the periods in which they took place.

NHES: Students will comprehend concepts related to health promotion and disease prevention to enhance health.

Lesson Extensions:

Language Arts: Create posters that highlight a herb or spice and advertise the benefits of including it in their diet.

Literature Connections:

The Yummy Alphabet Book: Herbs, Spices and Other Natural Flavors by Jerry Pallotta