

There's a world of delicious fruit and vegetables out there – and these stones will help children discover more about produce enjoyed around the globe. From the mud kitchen to a role play market stall, the stones offer plenty of opportunities for descriptive language, counting and talking about healthy eating. For children from a variety of cultural backgrounds, seeing familiar foods in play settings will also help recognise the value of their own heritage.

Fruitful discoveries

The stones are beautifully visual and tactile, providing sensory feedback as children feel with their fingers the same details they observe with their eyes. As they examine them and talk about the different fruits and vegetables, ask questions to develop children's observational skills, vocabulary and knowledge of the world:



- You might like to hide the stones somewhere intriguing for children to uncover, such as tucked among straw in a wooden crate or under a colourful cloth in a basket. Alternatively, hide them outside for children to find and collect.
- Do the children recognise any of these fruits or vegetables? What are their names? Are they similar to any other fruits or vegetables that the children know? Have they ever eaten any of them – if so, what did they taste like?
- What colours are they? What shapes are they? How hard or soft might they be? Would any of them be larger in real life? Encourage children to sort them by colour, shape or size.
- Which of them have seeds, a stone, a core or even milk inside? How big are the seeds or stones? Can you eat them?
- Which of them have a shell, rind or skin? Can you eat this outer part?
- Which of these fruits and vegetables need to be cooked before eating? Which can you enjoy raw? Are there any that you can eat both raw and cooked?
- Are there any that are great for enjoying when the weather is hot?
- Compare the stones with real fruits and vegetables. Look at the outside – what do the children think the inside will be like? Will it be a different colour, and will it feel different? Cut it open and see! Allow children to cut the softer fruits and vegetables themselves under supervision, to learn about knife safety and develop fine motor skills. Can the children find any real seeds? Encourage children to try some of the real fruits or vegetables. Which words could you use to describe the taste or texture? Are they sweet, tangy, juicy, soft or crunchy?

- Why is it important to eat fruits and vegetables? One way to make sure you eat a variety of fruit and vegetables is to 'eat the rainbow'. Can the children think of a fruit or vegetable for each colour?

Cooking up a tropical treat

The stones are equally at home in an outdoor mud kitchen and a role-play home corner, with invitations for open-ended creative play:

- In the mud kitchen, as well as a collection of pots, pans and utensils to use with mud and water, offer plenty of natural ingredients such as acorns, bark, fragrant herbs, flowers and dried lentils. Other sensory materials could include cornflour paste, washing up liquid bubbles, water in a spray bottle, ice cubes and coloured rice or pasta. A simple creamy 'sauce' can be made using water, a small amount of milk and yellow food colouring. You might also like to offer ingredients for making pretend fruit juice or smoothies, such as water dyed a variety of colours.
- In a home corner, opportunities for role play include cooking, serving or eating the fruits and vegetables. You might like to offer cooking utensils, serving dishes, plates and cutlery, as well as a selection of other 'foods' – these could also be international, such as the Foods of the World Sensory Play Stones. Children might enjoy adding special touches such as fresh herbs, real salt in a salt cellar, and real or artificial flower arrangements.
- The stones are also ideal for creating a market stall. Display the produce in open boxes or baskets, perhaps nestled in straw or fabric. Provide a cash register, pieces of card for price labels, a chalkboard for special offers and aprons for stallholders to wear.



The world on a plate

Expand children's horizons using the stones to build their knowledge and understanding of other cultures:

- Talk about what you could make using some of the fruits or vegetables from this set. Have a go at making a real recipe using corresponding ingredients – this could be a vegetable stir fry, a tropical fruit salad, roasted vegetables or a fruit smoothie. Children may have family members who are used to eating or preparing some of the less familiar produce in this set, and they may be willing to talk about or even prepare some for you.
- Take a closer look at the texture of these fruits and vegetables by imprinting the stones in play dough. Can children see the imprint of any seeds or stones?
- Find out more about where these fruits and vegetables are grown and eaten. Do they grow in hot or cooler places, in places with lots of rain or drier places? Some of these fruits are the national fruit of a particular country – such as mango being the national fruit of India. If you are focusing on a particular country or part of the world, you might like to include stones showing fruits and vegetables in a collection of items linked to the country or area.
- Enjoy a global picnic together, featuring a variety of food from around the world.



- Link the stones to a book, such as *Handa's Surprise*. (To complete Handa's basket, use the plantain as a banana and add an orange and avocado from a fruit set such as the Fruit Sensory Play Stones. For the basketful of tangerines, you could use orange pompoms, orange ping-pong balls or even real tangerines.) Children might like to find a fruit for each page as you read the book together, or you could offer the fruits alongside a large flat basket and ring, African fabrics and animal figures, for children to reenact the story.

Books about global produce

Lift and Look: Fruit and Vegetables by Tracy Cottingham

Off to the Market by Alice Oehr

Which Food Will You Choose? by Claire Potter

Farah Loves Mangos by Sarthak Sinha

Get talking – useful words

Seed, stone, core, milk, shell, rind, skin, leaves, stem, ripe, soft, juicy, crunchy, sweet, tangy, sharp, slice, chop, peel, cut, bake, roast, fry, steam, boil.