



FLAVOR STATIONS

A flavor station (also called a spice station or flavor bar) is a great way to get kids excited about trying new foods and participating in school lunch!

What is a flavor station?

Any area where kids can self-select spices to add pizzazz to their meal. They can be on the serving line, attached to or next to the salad bar, or on a freestanding cart or table. It is a good idea to offer suggestions for which spices can go on which foods, as a way of making kids feel willing to try new flavors and expanding their taste horizons.

Why are they popular with kids?

Kids love being able to customize their meals and personalize their dining experience. They can experiment with different flavors.

What spices can I include?

Variety is the spice of life! Check out the sample flavor station for ideas. Popular favorites include black pepper, crushed red pepper (anything spicy, really), cinnamon, nutmeg, chili or curry powder, garlic powder, oregano, basil, and balsamic vinegar. Customize to your popular foods – in schools in the Pacific Northwest where salmon is served regularly, for instance, dill and low-sodium soy sauce would be fun options.

This is a great opportunity for taste tests – let the students sample different flavors and vote for the ones they like best. Pair new spices with new menu options, especially vegetables, soups, and ethnic foods.

Is this an opportunity for nutrition education and outreach?

Absolutely! Students can assist with the taste tests described above: organizing, writing surveys, and tallying and sharing results. Teachers of home economics and nutrition can include these flavors in class, art and photography teachers can include them as subject ideas in art projects.

What should I be wary of?

Check all spices and sauces for sodium content, refrigeration requirements, and allergens (such as pine nuts in an Italian spice mix). Discuss this with your vendor. Most spices are shelf-stable, but a few possible flavor station items (such as lemon wedges) are not.

What is the cost?

Spices themselves are often less expensive when purchased in sets – ask your vendor. You will need a cart or rack to hold the spices, which you might already have in the kitchen! Other costs, such as printing labels and flavor suggestions, may take an hour or so to print and post.