

# PHOTOGRAPHING SCHOOL FOOD

A practical guide to making California school meals look great



# YOUR FOOD DESERVES GREAT PHOTOGRAPHY.

Appetizing photos boost enthusiasm for school meals. Whether you use professional equipment or your cell phone camera, improving how you light, style, and shoot school meals can make an enormous difference in how your food and the California Thursdays® program are appreciated by students, parents, and your school community.

What follows are simple guidelines that will help improve the quality and visual impact of your work.



# USE NATURAL LIGHT

Good lighting is the single most important factor in successful food photography. Natural light is usually the best lighting source to bring out the attractiveness and appeal of your meals.

For best results, **use soft, diffused light.** Try shooting on a table or other surface in front of a window.

**Light your food from the side,** not the front. Side lighting brings out detail, and makes your food look richer and fresher.



**Don't use a flash.** A flash will wash out your photos and create harsh shadows and contrasts.

# CHOOSE YOUR ANGLE

Choosing the correct angle helps your food look its best. The angle you choose will depend on a number of factors, including how the food is served or plated, how the ingredients are presented, and what is the best overall arrangement of color and ingredients.



Some food looks best shot from **above**.



Some food looks best shot from the **side**.

# SHOW OFF THE INGREDIENTS

Feature fresh ingredients rather than packaged or processed. Highlighting fresh ingredients makes your meals more attractive and helps to promote your work and the California Thursdays® program.

**Include fruits and vegetables of different colors** to make meals more appetizing and appealing.



**Don't hide ingredients** or arrange them so that they are not featured.



# USE NEUTRAL BACKGROUNDS

Colored, damaged, or reflective surfaces can interfere with showing your work at its best. Use uncluttered, neutral backgrounds so that your food shines and becomes the star.

**White or wood surfaces work well.** A simple cutting board, tabletop, or white tablecloth provide a warm, attractive background for your shots.



**Avoid stainless steel** or other reflective surfaces that produce glare. Stage your photos away from stoves, trash cans, and other elements that can clutter your photograph. Make sure gloves, buckets, and sanitizing rags are out of the shot.



# TAKE PHOTOS IN A SPARKLING CLEAN ENVIRONMENT

Your kitchen is essential for making good food, but often it is not the best place to take photographs. Cooking vapor can hang in the air and although you might not be able to see it with your eyes, it can cloud or even ruin a shot.

For crisp photos, **stage your shots away from stoves, grills, and cooktops**, or anywhere smoke, grease, or steam might be present.

To avoid other imperfections, **be sure your lens is sparkling clean**. If you are using photographic lights, clean them, too. Dirty light bulbs can project spots and flaws on to your photos. Make sure the surface and plates are wiped down and free of crumbs, drips, or food smudges.



# ABOUT THE CENTER



The Center for Ecoliteracy is an internationally recognized leader in systems change innovations in education for sustainable living. Since 1995, the Center has engaged with thousands of educators in California, across the United States, and on six continents. Its Rethinking School Lunch initiative integrates systemic school food reform with learning about food systems. Through its California Food for California Kids® initiative and California Thursdays® program, the Center offers statewide conferences, work with individual districts, strategic consultations, and numerous resources.

The Center offers publications, seminars, coaching for teaching and learning, in-depth curriculum development, keynote presentations, and technical assistance. Books authored or coauthored by the Center for Ecoliteracy include *Ecoliterate: How Educators Are Cultivating Emotional, Social, and Ecological Intelligence* (Jossey-Bass, 2012); *Smart by Nature: Schooling for Sustainability* (Watershed Media, 2009); and *Ecological Literacy: Educating Our Children for a Sustainable World* (Sierra Club Books, 2005). Among the Center's food-related publications are the cookbook and professional development guide *Cooking with California Food in K-12 Schools*; the conceptual teaching framework *Big Ideas: Linking Food, Culture, Health, and the Environment*; and discussion guides to the Oscar award-nominee, *Food, Inc.* and the PBS-aired documentary, *Nourish*.

# CREDITS

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**CALIFORNIA FOOD FOR CALIFORNIA KIDS® resource**

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