



Courtesy photos

Siletz Tribal Head Start students in Lincoln City get ready for Halloween (above) with a trip to a local pumpkin patch. They also participated in Fire Prevention Week (right) with Safety Officer Jim Kusz from North Lincoln Fire & Rescue.



Sweetness of life not found in sugar

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As part of my role as a consultant nutritionist to Siletz Tribal Head Start, I offer information for families. This segment focuses on the idea of social confusion around sugar and love. The sweetness in life is not found in sugar – it is in the heart. Recipe ideas are provided to make unsweetened gifts from the heart.

The fall tends to be a time of depletion for many. I know it is difficult for me. We get so busy and have so many intentions and unfinished projects as the daylight grows shorter.

In December, many people compensate for the lack of light with sugar. Think about your childhood memories. Do you remember cookies, candies and treats all through December? If not, hooray!

Please step forward as leaders and role models. Teach your traditions. If sweets fill your memories, I invite you to look for the deeper meaning to decide what example and traditions you want to set for your children.

Does sugar really bring you the happiness you seek? Often it provides a temporary high followed by low mood, irritability and a feeling of emptiness.

Unfortunately, overuse of sugar can rob us of health by decreasing our immunity, displacing important nutrients, promoting weight gain and tooth decay as well as keeping us in an unhealthy cycle of cravings.

Because sugary foods often are nutrient-poor, they don't really satisfy your body – which leaves you looking for more food and/or sugar.

Sugar cravings can be difficult to control. For some people, sugar can be addictive. When sugar is combined with the stress of busy schedules, it can be used as a "pick me up" or a "happy time." This is eerily similar to other addictions.

Giving up sugar isn't easy, especially when we see it everywhere we look. A few ideas may help shift us in a healthier direction, such as a gradual decrease in sweet foods to make the change less noticeable.

The use of sour foods may help to cut sweet cravings. Adding protein to each meal or snack can stabilize blood sugar, thereby reducing cravings.

Furthermore, when our habits say "I love you" with sugar, it is even harder to

break the cycle. How can you say "I love you" in a more healthy way?

Well, there are many everyday non-food ways to communicate love through gifts of time and attention, such as playing games, taking walks, coloring and doing puzzles together.

In December, food plays a big roll in gifts as well as celebrations. Think about it: How frequently do we eat and share sugary foods? What healthy foods would you like to include in your celebrations and gift giving?

This year, I had access to many apples when the November winds blew all my neighbor's apples down at once. They were not prepared to process them. I picked up and sorted the "intact" apples for eating later and left them for my neighbor.

I took the apples with bruises and punctures that would soon be rotting if not processed. Some apples were already at the stage where they should be left to rot – either beneath the tree or in the compost.

My method of making applesauce and apple butter has become more efficient and more flexible through the years. I now rely on my slow cooker to cook it down until I have a window of time. I use one piece of specialized equipment, an applesauce strainer or mill (photo below; these can be shared in a community).



Recipes for easy apple and pumpkin butters follow. Other non-sugary gifts from the heart can include dried blackberry leaves for tea (collect them while pruning in late fall – have your children snip off the leaves to dry).

Don't forget that canned or dried meat or fish also make lovely gifts from the heart.

Apple Butter

Ingredients

Apples – 12 pounds or fill one big stockpot and cook down to a full slow cooker, approx. 4-5 quarts (if it doesn't all fit in the slow cooker, you may need to keep some applesauce in the refrigerator to add as the apple butter thickens)

1 tablespoon cinnamon

1½ teaspoons cloves

½ teaspoon allspice

Lemon peel (optional to taste)

Honey (optional to taste)

Equipment

Big stockpot

Slow cooker

Applesauce strainer (see photo)

Canning jars

Paring knife

There is no single best way to make apple butter. Take note of my journey and adjust it to make it work for you.

I start with bruised apples and cut out the problem parts. I do not remove the core or skin. I wash the somewhat whole apples and place them in a big pot with about 2-3 inches of water. I heat them slowly to allow the liquid from the apples to come out and make more water without burning.

If I start this process in the evening, I keep them on low heat all night (temperatures are adjusted to make it convenient for me, as needed).

When the apples are soft, I push them through the applesauce strainer, which removes the skin and seeds. The waste goes into the compost (this volume is quite small in comparison to the yield).

I could stop there with my unsweetened applesauce and place it into jars. When the apple skins are red, the applesauce is usually a beautiful pink at this point.

To continue the apple butter, I add it to the slow cooker to make it thicker and sweeter (by cooking out the water). I adjust the heat to cook faster or slower depending on when I will have time to complete my batch.

When I like the consistency (thickness), I add the spices. This way I can taste and adjust if needed (without the yield changing). I usually find that I don't need to add sweeteners or sugar because the sweetness has concentrated.

Sometimes I add lemon zest to pick up the flavor. Sometimes I add a touch of honey to balance the lemon. Then I place it into jars and process them in a water bath to assure proper sealing and a long shelf life. These make excellent "gifts from the heart."

Pumpkin Butter Variation

I also like to use winter squash in a similar process of making fruit butter. Replace apples with roasted squash to create pumpkin butter.

Roast the squash by baking it in the oven to make it soft before cutting it to remove the seeds. Use a large spoon to scoop out the squash meat from the skin.

Mash or blend the squash (with your choice of a potato masher, the applesauce strainer, a food processor or blender) and cook it down further in a slow cooker if it is too watery.

Season it with the same spices as the apple butter. If sweetening is needed, consider a small amount maple syrup or honey.

Siletz Tribal Head Start offers my time to support family nutrition over the telephone (503-588-5446). Please contact me if you have nutrition concerns about your Head Start child.