

# Learning to ski: How to know when your child is ready

By BETH J. HARPAZ  
AP Travel Editor

Ski season is starting. For parents, that may mean getting kids on the slopes for the first time. But is there a perfect age to learn to ski?

Nate Gardner, ski and snowboard school training manager at Stowe Mountain Resort in Vermont, says that what's more important than a child's age is his or her readiness. How well does the child handle other physical activities? Does the child separate well from parents so that she or he is comfortable spending a few hours with a ski instructor and other kids on the slopes, away from mom and dad?

"Every child develops at their own rate both physically and emotionally," Gardner said in an interview for the AP Travel podcast series "Get Outta Here." "That's going to be a big factor in whether the child is ready to learn to ski."

Here's some other advice from Gardner on everything from planning a family ski trip to tailoring ski instruction to a child's learning style.

## Private versus group lessons

"Private lessons are great for one-on-one attention," Gardner said. "The experience gets tailored to you."

But he added that "kids learn a lot from their peers." Children sometimes have more fun and get more out of a group lesson where they can interact with kids their age.

Or do a bit of both: "Maybe a two-hour introduction when we first arrive, then the next lesson is this full day group where they're getting to hang out with other kids."

## Pizza, french fries

You may hear and see



This undated photo provided by Stowe Mountain Resort in Stowe, Vt., shows an instructor with young children in a ski lesson. Kids differ in their readiness and learning styles when it comes to learning to ski, but experts say the most important thing for parents to consider is making the experience fun.

ski instructors exhorting kids with the words: "Pizza! French fries!"

Gardner says it's a creative way to help students configure their skis right: angle the tips inward to slow down, like a pizza slice, or straighten them like French fries to go a little faster.

"One thing almost all kids know is what a slice of pizza looks like," he said. "It's a triangle! It gets a little closer at one end and a little bit wider at the other end."

## Learning styles

How long does it take for kids to learn to ski?

"It has to do entirely with the kids themselves, their age, their developmental

level, their emotional readiness, their willingness to learn from a stranger," he said. "Parents need to gauge their expectations based on what they know of their child's previous experiences."

A child's learning style matters too. "Everybody learns a different way," he said. Instructors are trained to assess the kids and get the ones who are "doers" into the activity as soon as possible, while talking through the process with kids who are "thinkers and listeners and want some more of the information."

And always make things fun and positive. "If each time is a fun experience,

you're going to have a lot more success than you are dragging them to the hill kicking and screaming."

## Rent or buy?

Gardner says when it comes to equipment — skis, boots, bindings, helmets — you're better off renting. It takes the burden out of lugging gear from where you live to the mountain. It also ensures that you're getting the latest, high-quality gear and that it fits your fast-growing child every time. If you end up doing a lot of skiing, consider a lease program where you can trade gear in at the end of the season.

## Be prepared

Dress kids in layers so

they can peel off midday when the sun is out and bundle up early morning and late afternoon when it's chillier. Don't forget goggles and sunscreen. The snow reflects ultraviolet light with greater intensity than even the beach, Gardner said.

"Goggles are key to keeping that brightness off the eyes and keeping the wind out of the face," he said.

## Where to go

While Colorado, Utah, Vermont and other snowy states with big mountains get the headlines when it comes to skiing, many states have ski areas on smaller mountains that are less expensive and easier for

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— Nate Gardner, ski and snowboard school training manager at Stowe Mountain Resort in Vermont

families to get to, especially if they're just starting their kids out in the sport. Online listings show the U.S. has ski areas in some 40 states.

On the other hand, if you're looking for a full-fledged vacation where skiing is just one part of it, "then look for more of a destination resort that's going to offer the fine dining, the nice hotel rooms, maybe a spa," Gardner said, in addition to good skiing and a ski school.

## Booking

Plan ahead and call the resort to get the best value. "The best prices are typically for folks who buy in advance so that's going to help you save a few dollars," he said. "If you come to the resort with no information and just walk up to the ticket counter, I can tell you almost every resort in the country, that's where you're going to pay the most."

January is the industry's "learn to ski and snowboard" month, when many resorts offer discounts and special programming. Some states also offer freebies or discounts to kids in fourth, fifth or other grades.



This photo provided by The Culinary Institute of America shows a charcuterie box. Edible gifts are always a huge hit, especially at busy times of the year.

## The gift of some mind-blowing cheeses is just a click away

By THE CULINARY INSTITUTE OF AMERICA  
Associated Press

Gift-giving is supposed to be fun, but if you're an adult, by now you've learned that choosing gifts is one of the more stress-inducing aspects of the holiday. Luckily, here at The Culinary Institute of America, we've learned a no-fail strategy for gifts that keeps us on the "nice" list.

Food is almost always the answer, and your holiday gift list is no exception. Edible gifts are always a huge hit, especially at busy times of the year. We can enjoy them in our pajamas at the end of a long day and they are usually something that you don't get to eat every day.

The best presents are ones that we wouldn't get for ourselves (we're all set on socks this year, Mom), and for food, that usually translates to something a little bit decadent, unusual, or hard-to-find. And decadent, unusual, and hard-to-find just happen to be three of the defining characteristics of a good cheese.

Sure, most of us eat cheese every day. But most of us don't eat amazing cheese every day. It's expensive, it's not a health food, and it's not readily available at everyone's

local grocery store. Luckily, in today's global marketplace, mind-blowing cheese is one click away, with high-end sellers offering delivery of the aged stuff, the grated stuff, and even the smelly stuff, right to your doorstep.

Cheese preference is personal, but unless you know your loved-one's favorites, you can never go wrong with a nice assortment. Cheeses, like wines, are hard to narrow down into a few categories, but in very general terms, you can classify them as hard, soft, and semi-soft/semi-firm. For a nice gift, if you choose one from each of those categories, you have a well-rounded selection.

CIA instructor and cheese guru John Fischer says, "I like to have both a theme and variety at the same time. For instance, the basket could be all French items, but there should be a range of cheese from soft to aged, mild to stinky." Themes that relate to a friend's interest are also a fun way to explore new flavors. If they spend a week skiing in Vermont every year, give them a sampling from the state's abundant creameries.

If you just don't know where to start, we've put together a collection of our favorites. Use it as a cheat

sheet for a gift basket that anyone will love.

For cheeses, we started with Garrotxa, a Catalan goat's milk cheese that is semi-firm (so, not dry like an aged Manchego, but not soft and runny). It has a touch of sweetness to contrast its peppery flavor that makes it an ideal dessert cheese, though it's no slouch at a cocktail party.

Next, we chose a Camembert. This one is more familiar to even indifferent cheese-eaters. It is soft and creamy, with an edible, bloomy rind (yes, it's mold. No, it's not gross).

Though Camembert comes from the same-named region in France, true Camemberts are becoming harder to find, due to increased regulations on raw milk cheeses. Luckily, several American dairies are producing Camembert-style cheeses that hold up to the classic iteration.

Finally, the little Bijou from Vermont Creamery is made in the style of a traditional French Crottin de Chavignol. This soft-ripened goat cheese is velvety in its creaminess, slightly tart, and relatively mild. You might think goat cheese isn't your thing, but this is not like the dollops of chevre you've picked out of your salad.

## Apricot Almond Coffee Cake is a special treat for holidays

By SARA MOULTON  
Associated Press

If you're expecting overnight guests during the holiday season, you might want to stock up on the ingredients for this recipe. Doing so will allow you to throw together a knockout coffee cake for breakfast, a special treat that features a cream biscuit dough packed with intensely flavored dried apricots, layered with almond paste and glazed with apricot jam.

The right ingredients are crucial. You want California apricots because they're much more tart and apricot-y than the Turkish variety. As for the jam, the first ingredient listed on the label should be apricots, not sugar, because this cake is all about the balance between the sweet almond paste and the tart apricots and jam. Likewise, be sure you're using almond paste and not marzipan. The latter is too sugary.

The dough is also key, so take care to measure it correctly. The best way is with a scale, not a measuring cup. One cup of flour should weigh 4 ¼ ounces, but if you pack it tightly into a measuring cup, it'll weigh much more, and your cake will turn out tough and dry. If you don't own a scale, fluff up your flour, sprinkle it loosely into a one-cup dry-cup measure and scrape off the excess with a straight edge.

Finally, when adding the heavy cream to the flour mixture, take care not to overmix the dough. The longer you work it, the more the gluten develops and the chewier the dough becomes. Not good. It takes a careful baker to make a tender coffee cake.

Sara Moulton is host of public television's "Sara's Weeknight Meals." She was executive chef at Gourmet magazine for nearly 25 years and spent a decade hosting several Food Network shows, including "Cooking Live." Her latest cookbook is "HomeCooking 101."



Apricot almond coffee cake.

## Apricot Almond Coffee Cake

Start to finish: 1 hour 10 minutes (40 active)  
Servings: 12

- 8 ½ ounces (about 2 cups) all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon table salt
- ¾ cup (about 3 ½ ounces) finely chopped apricots, preferably California apricots
- 1 tablespoon grated lemon zest
- 1 ¼ cups heavy cream
- 6 tablespoons apricot jam
- 3 ounces very thinly sliced almond paste

Preheat oven to 425 F.

Into a large bowl sift together the flour, sugar, baking powder and salt. Add the apricots and lemon zest; stir well. Pour in the heavy cream and stir just until combined. Dump the dough on the kitchen counter and knead it a few times or just until it comes together. Divide the dough into two parts and roll out one-half on a lightly floured surface into a 9-inch round. Transfer the round to an ungreased 9-inch round pan and gently press it to fit evenly. Brush the top of the rolled-out dough in the pan all over with about ½ of the jam and arrange all of the almond paste slices in one layer on top.

Roll out the second piece of dough into a 9-inch round and transfer the round to the pan, placing it on top of the almond paste. Press gently to fit in the pan and make sure the cake is even in thickness.

Bake the cake on the middle shelf of the oven for 18 minutes or until a toothpick, when inserted in the middle, comes out clean. Meanwhile, in a small saucepan over medium-low heat, melt the remaining jam. When the cake comes out of the oven run a knife around the edge of the cake to loosen it and let it stand for 5 minutes. Invert the cake onto a large plate, re-invert it on to a rack and brush the top with the warm apricot jam. Let stand for 10 minutes before serving.

Nutrition information per serving: 229 calories; 100 calories from fat; 11 g fat (6 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 34 mg cholesterol; 200 mg sodium; 29 g carbohydrate; 1 g fiber; 11 g sugar; 3 g protein.