

Literacy from Kitchen to Garden

A 12-Week Community Food Literacy Programme

Developed by Our Shared Plate – Neighbourhood Network

Delivered in partnership with Newbridge Family Resource Centre, Platinum Clubhouse and Maynooth University

1. Programme Overview

Literacy from Kitchen to Garden is a 12-week practical food literacy programme combining gardening and cooking to build confidence, planning skills, and healthy food decision-making.

The programme responds directly to participant feedback and research findings from the Maynooth University evaluation which identified:

- A strong desire to learn planning and shopping skills
- Time and energy as major barriers to healthy eating
- The importance of community-based, hands-on learning
- The need for accessible tools and environments

The programme runs in two phases:

- 6-week Garden Series (Spring)
- 6-week Kitchen Series (Autumn)

2. Programme Aims

The programme aims to:

- Strengthen practical food literacy skills
- Build confidence in growing and cooking
- Improve meal planning and shopping skills
- Reduce food waste
- Promote healthy, sustainable food choices
- Create social connection through shared learning

3. Target Participants

Adults in community settings including:

- Family Resource Centre participants
- Recovery and wellbeing groups
- Adults experiencing time, financial, or energy barriers
- Adults with unmet literacy or numeracy needs

4. Session Structure Template

(Used consistently across all 12 weeks)

Each session follows this format:

1. **Welcome & Check-In (10–15 mins)**
2. **Core Practical Activity (45–60 mins garden / 60–75 mins kitchen)**
3. **Food Literacy Focus (15–20 mins)**
4. **Reflection & Documentation (15 mins)**
5. **Close & Preview Next Week (5 mins)**

All worksheets, reflections, and plans are kept in the participant's individual **Food Literacy Portfolio** (garden diary + recipe & planning folder). Photos and group reflections are captured in a group scrapbook.

PART 1: GARDEN SERIES

Duration: 6 Weeks

Timing: Late April – Early June

Session Length: 75–90 minutes

Week 1 – Introduction to the Garden

Learning Outcomes:

Participants will be able to:

- Identify key areas of the garden
- Describe basic plant needs
- Contribute ideas about what to grow
- Begin a Garden Diary

Core Activity:

- Guided garden tour
- Group brainstorm: “What would we like to eat?”
- Soil observation

Food Literacy Focus:

- What is food literacy?
- How growing connects to health and planning

Reflection & Documentation:

- Write or draw one food they would like to grow
- Record first diary entry

Materials Needed:

- Flipchart & markers
- Garden maps
- Garden diary
- Pens

Week 2 – Seeds & Beginnings

Learning Outcomes:

Participants will:

- Sow seeds correctly.
- Interpret seed packet instructions.
- Record planting information.

Core Activity:

- Seed sowing in trays
- Direct sowing into beds

Food Literacy Focus:

- Planning ahead: why planting dates matter
- Connecting growth to future meals

Reflection:

- Diary entry: “In 4 weeks this plant will...”
- Sketch planted area

Materials:

- Garden Diary
- Seed trays
- Compost
- Seeds
- Labels & markers

Week 3 – Garden Maintenance

Learning Outcomes:

Participants will:

- Demonstrate watering techniques.
- Install plant supports.
- Identify plant health issues.

Core Activity:

- Watering
- Installing tomato supports
- Plant health walk

Food Literacy Focus:

- Maintenance as planning
- Small habits that prevent waste

Reflection:

- “What happens if we don’t plan?” discussion
- Diary maintenance log

Materials:

- Garden Diary
- Watering cans
- Stakes & ties

Week 4 – Soil & Nutrients

Learning Outcomes:

Participants will:

- Identify soil textures.
- Describe compost benefits.
- Explain nutrients (basic NPK - nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), and potassium (K)).

Core Activity:

- Soil squeeze test
- Compost layering demo

Food Literacy Focus:

- Linking soil nutrients to human nutrients
- “What feeds plants feeds us”

Reflection:

- Draw soil layers
- One sentence: “Healthy soil means...”

Materials:

- Soil samples
- Compost
- Visual nutrient chart
- Garden diary

Week 5 – Garden Planning

Learning Outcomes:

Participants will:

- Identify garden jobs.
- Plan succession planting.
- Estimate simple quantities.

Core Activity:

- Planting beans / succession crops
- Garden planning sheet

Food Literacy Focus:

- Planning meals begins in the garden
- Estimating quantities for a household

Reflection:

- Complete simple garden plan template

Materials:

- Garden diary
- Flipchart paper
- Seeds
- Measuring tape

Week 6 – Mini Harvest & Garden Celebration

Learning Outcomes:

Participants will:

- Harvest safely
- Prepare simple fresh produce
- Reflect on growth

Core Activity:

- Harvest salad produce
- Fire pit or simple garden dish

Food Literacy Focus:

- Seasonality & freshness

Reflection:

- Circle discussion: “One thing I’ve learned”
- Add photos to portfolio

Materials:

- Knives
- Bowls
- Fire pit equipment
- Camera / phone

PART 2: KITCHEN SERIES

Duration: 6 Weeks

Timing: Late September – Early November

Session Length: 2 Hours

Week 1 – Cooking from the Garden

Food Literacy Focus: Using seasonal produce

- Identifying vegetables & herbs
- Knowing when food is ready to harvest
- Kitchen hygiene & safe food handling

Activities:

- Prepare a Vegetable Soup + Soda Bread
- Hygiene discussion
- Measuring skills

Learning Outcomes:

Participants will be able to:

- Follow a simple recipe
- Measure ingredients accurately
- Apply food hygiene principles

Reflection:

- Write one change they would make at home

Materials

- Recipe sheets
- Seasonal Harvest ID Sheet
- Kitchen Hygiene Poster
- Measuring tools
- Ingredients

Week 2 – Meal Planning & Batch Cooking

Food Literacy Focus: Planning ahead

- Balanced meal “plate model”
- Weekly meal planning
- Portioning & freezing

Activities:

- Create 3-day meal plan
- Write shopping list
- Batch cook and portion a One-Pot Bean & Veg Stew

Learning Outcomes:

Participants will be able to:

- Develop a basic meal plan
- Write a practical shopping list
- Explain how planning reduces waste

Reflection:

- Discuss various balanced meal options

Materials:

- Planning Sheets
- Plate Model Visual
- Picture Meal Planner Template
- Freezing & Storage Guide
- Pens
- Storage Containers
- Ingredients

Week 3 – Shopping & Label Reading

Food Literacy Focus: Making informed choices

- Making a visual shopping list
- Reading ingredient lists & nutrition labels

Activities:

- Interpret food labels
- Compare price per kg
- Discuss marketing influence
- Cook a Veggie Stir-Fry + Rice/Noodles

Learning Outcomes:

Participants will be able to:

- Identify key ingredients and nutrients
- Compare product value
- Recognise common marketing tactics

Reflection

- Complete shopping list template

Materials

- Sample Packaging
- Label Decoder Sheet
- Visual Shopping List
- Price Comparison Worksheet
- Ingredients

Week 4 – Quick & Low-Energy Meals

Food Literacy Focus: Cooking when time or energy is limited

- Quick meal strategies
- Knife cutting techniques
- Understanding fractions ($\frac{1}{2}$ onion) and sequencing under time pressure

Activities:

- 15-minute meal challenge: Omelette with Herbs, Tomato Salad & Courgette Fritters
- Adapt recipes
- Discuss shortcuts

Learning Outcomes:

Participants will be able to:

- Prepare a quick healthy meal
- Adapt recipes using available ingredients
- Identify strategies to reduce cooking effort

Reflection:

- “My realistic weekday meal” conversation

Materials:

- Simple ingredients
- Timers (mobile phone clock and timer)
- Easy grip knives
- Ingredients

Week 5 – Storage & Reducing Waste

Food Literacy Focus: Maximising food use

- Safe freezing & defrosting
- Using Pumpkin scraps creatively
- Portion control

Activities:

- Freezer labelling
- Cook Pumpkin & Thyme Soup, a Pumpkin & Lentil Curry, Roasted Pumpkin Seeds
- Make Vegetable Stock from scraps
- Match foods to storage times

Learning Outcomes:

Participants will be able to:

- Store food safely
- Reduce household waste
- Label and freeze meals correctly

Reflection:

- Write one waste-reduction strategy

Materials:

- Containers
- Labels
- Marker pens
- Freezer & Storage Guide
- Leftover Recipe Sheet
- Waste Reduction Tip Sheet
- Ingredients

Week 6 – Reflection & Shared Meal

Food Literacy Focus: Confidence, empowerment and celebration

- Menu planning as a group
- Reflecting on learning

Activities:

- Prepare a group planned meal
- Share and enjoy the food
- Reflect on personal progress

Learning Outcomes:

Participants will be able to:

- Reflect on personal progress
- Identify new skills developed
- Share strategies they will continue using

Reflection & Evaluation:

- Group discussion
- Participation certificates
- Individuals completed folders

Materials:

- Evaluation stickers
- Certificates
- Camera
- Ingredients

4. Embedded Literacy & Numeracy

Throughout the programme participants develop:

- Reading skills (labels, recipes, seed packets)
- Writing skills (diaries, lists, reflections)
- Numeracy skills (measuring, budgeting, comparing prices)
- Planning and decision-making skills
- Critical thinking about food systems

5. Evaluation Approach

Impact is measured through:

- Workshop observation
- Garden diaries
- Scrapbook documentation
- Participant reflection
- Research workshops facilitated by Maynooth University

6. Accessibility & Inclusion

The programme:

- Uses plain English
- Includes visual supports
- Encourages peer learning
- Adapts tools and layout for accessibility
- Includes ongoing check-ins with participants. Each week ask “What could make this easier for you?”