

## Pick Your Own Berries

In summer, your preschooler is full of anticipation, wondering what her first year of Elementary School will be like. Summer is a great time for family adventures in the sun. It's also a great time to work on some of those skills that will serve your child well in kindergarten.

Why not take your child to a strawberry patch? Picking fresh strawberries with your child is a fantastic way to spend quality time together, and incorporate some learning fun into a family adventure. At the strawberry patch, your child can learn a little about plants and life cycles, practice her counting skills and her colors, and work on developing fine motor skills, using the intricate muscles in her hands to pick all those berries. After the picking's done, bring the strawberries home for some more sweet activities!



### What You Need:

- Containers for berries (plastic sand buckets for the beach work great!)
- Digital camera
- Refrigerator jam ingredients (for when you get home): berries, sugar, and a heavy saucepan, jar, and stirring spoon

### What You Do:

1. Find a local berry "you-pick" berry patch. Call ahead to be sure berries are ready for picking. Be sure to bring everything you need for an afternoon in the sun: cold drinks, sunscreen, washcloths for clean-up, and containers for the berries. Bring the digital camera, too.
2. In the berry patch, let your child spend a few minutes exploring the plants and berries. What color berries can she find. How many berries can she count on a plant?
3. Also spend some time explaining to your child how a strawberry grows. (e.g. plant, blossom, white berry, red berry and then, eventually jam!)
4. Assist your child in taking pictures of the green plants, blossoms, white berries, and ripe red berries. (When you get home, print out the pictures, and let your child glue them onto pages to make a book about the strawberry's life cycle.)
5. Show your child how to use both of her hands to pick berries so she doesn't hurt the plant. She should hold the stem above the berry with one hand, and grasp the berry with the other. Using both hands can be tough for preschoolers, but it's great practice for kindergarten.
6. When you get home, the learning continues! Have your child pick out three berries of varying sizes. Can she put them in order from the smallest to the biggest?
7. Get those fine motor skills working...Have her use tongs to pick up berries by their husks one at a time and move them to a colander so they can be washed. As she picks up a berry, she counts it aloud. How high can she count?
8. After the berries have been washed, have her assist you in husking them. This is an activity that involves the use of both hands. Encourage her to use her thumb and index finger to pinch and twist the husks, or provide her with a strawberry huller. Either way, she's using those intricate hand muscles again, making them stronger and more adept for kindergarten activities, such as cutting, writing, and tracing.
9. Finally, make a batch of fresh refrigerator jam! Assist your child in mashing about a pint of strawberries (2 ½ cups). Put in a heavy saucepan. Add ¾ cups sugar. Cook over medium-high heat, stirring constantly. Bring to a full rolling boil. Continue boiling for two full minutes. Remove

from heat, and add to a clean jar. Store in the refrigerator and enjoy your homemade jam for up to two weeks!

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