



## **My Plate, My Garden**

**Recommended Grade Level:** 3-8

### **Description:**

In this lesson, students learn to categorize foods into five food groups: vegetables, fruits, grains, protein, and dairy. They look for real and illustrated examples of these groups in the garden. As they find examples, students draw them onto plates divided proportionally according to how much of each food is recommended to constitute a balanced meal.

### **Background:**

The USDA considers vegetables, fruits, grains, protein (meat/beans), and dairy (milk products/calcium-fortified soy milk) to be "the building blocks of a healthy diet." The My Plate graphic demonstrates the proportions of each of these food groups recommended by the USDA for a balanced diet.

### **Materials:**

- Food Card Pictures, models or real examples of foods from each food group
- 1 blank My Plate worksheet for each student
- Crayons or colored pencils

### **Preparation:**

1. Copy Food Card Pictures and cut out each one. Copy onto cardstock or laminate for durability.
2. Look around your garden for various food groups growing. In addition to fruits and vegetables, you may have grains, such as wheat, or proteins, such as beans, nut trees or even chickens or eggs.
3. For any food groups not represented, scatter various Food Card Pictures or models in the garden. Reserve at least one sample card from each food group to show students in the class discussion.
4. Make a photocopy of the blank My Plate worksheet for each student.

### **Class Discussion:**

1. Show students My Plate and brainstorm a few examples of foods that belong to each group.

**Excerpted from Life Lab's Plant It, Grow It, Eat It! Workshop Series**  
**[www.lifelab.org](http://www.lifelab.org)**

2. Ask a volunteer to share what he or she had for breakfast, and have students discuss which food groups were in it.
3. Shuffle a few food pictures and hand out to students. Together, classify each food within a food group. Start with simple foods, like apples, and then discuss a more complex food, like a sandwich or taco with meat and vegetables inside.

**Action:**

1. Hand out the My Plate worksheet and send students on a scavenger hunt in the garden to see if they can find as many examples as possible from each food group. When they find an example, have them draw it into that section of their My Plate worksheet.
2. Gather together and have students share all of the examples they found of foods from each food group. For any food that was not growing in the garden, ask where they might find that food growing.
3. Give students time to design their own, ideal balanced meals. *Your job is to design a meal that you would like, using appropriate amounts of food from each group. For example, I love spaghetti with meatballs, which give me grains and protein, so I'll draw those in these sections. Now I'm going to add tomato sauce and a salad with lots of beets, because those are all vegetables I like. I'll add sliced apple for my fruit.* Give students time to design and illustrate their own ideal, balanced meals.

**Tying it Together:**

Have students share their ideal, balanced meals. As they share, the class can provide any support they need to identify foods within each group that appeal to them.

**Digging Deeper:**

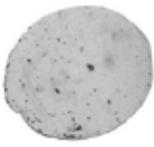
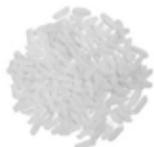
- Hand out Food Cards out to all students, and have them walk around and group themselves into balanced meals. Once they've grouped themselves, have them brainstorm a meal that would include those five things (i.e. sliced apples and carrot on a salad, yogurt dressing, chicken, and rice). Have each group share out their balanced meal.
- Have each student plan a day or week's worth of meals that include all of the food groups. You can find meal planning and tracking tools at [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov).
- Grow fruits, vegetables, grains, and beans together with students in the garden and include them in classroom snacks. You can grow them in the shape and proportions of My Plate, and place a cow statue off to the side to represent the dairy group. For a sample plant list for the other four food groups, visit: <http://suite101.com/article/myplate-inspires-mygarden-a374463>

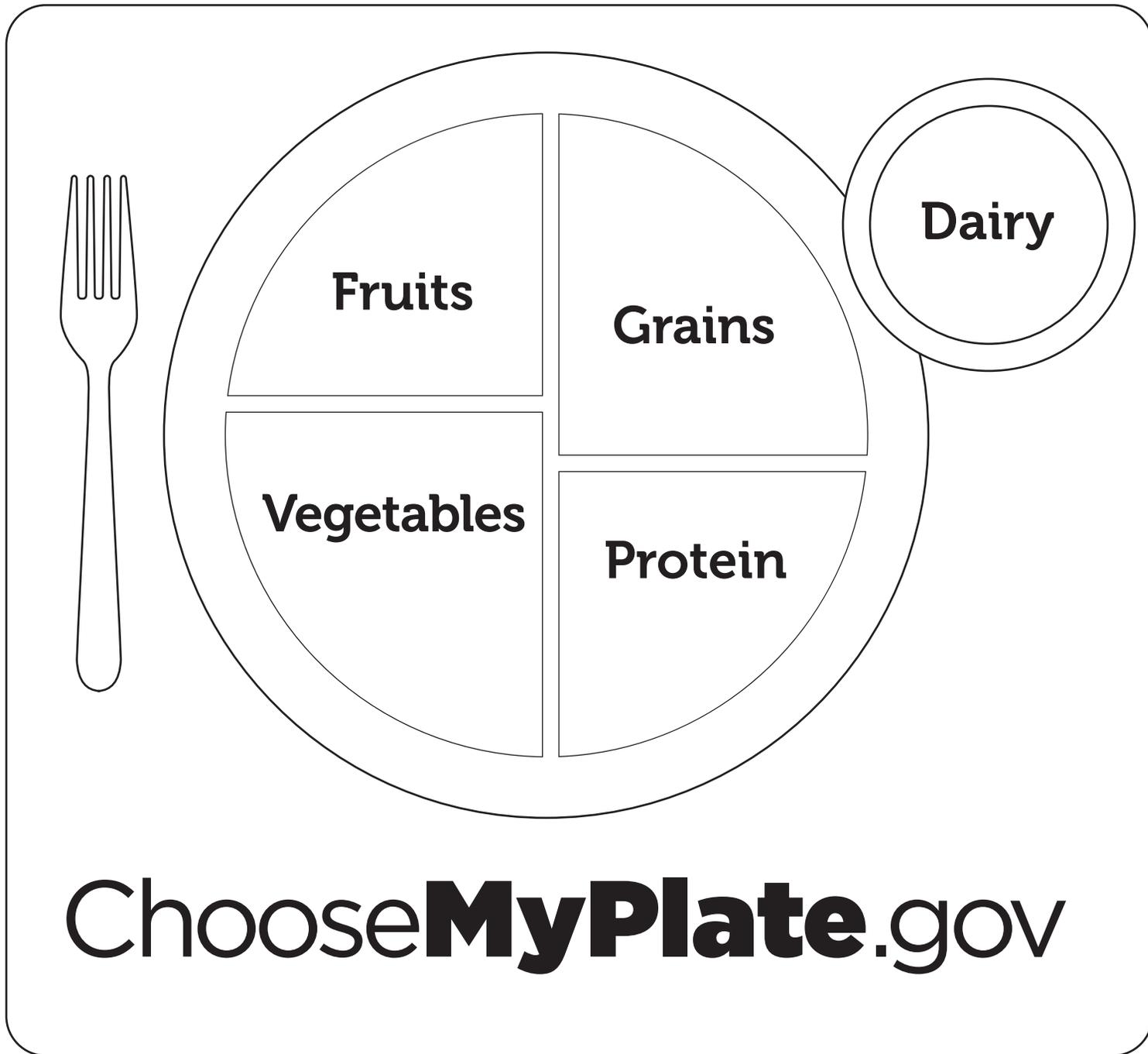
**California Health Standards:**

Grade 5 - 1.1.N. Describe the food groups, including recommended portions to eat from each food group.

Grade 7 - 1.8.N. Identify ways to prepare food that are consistent with current research-based guidelines for a nutritionally balanced diet.

### 5 Fantastic Food Groups: Food Group Pictures

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
|  <p>Glass of 1% or skim milk</p> |  <p>Low-fat or fat-free cheese</p> |  <p>Low-fat or fat-free yogurt</p> |
|  <p>Lean meat</p>                |  <p>Chicken (no skin)</p>          |  <p>Bowl of beans</p>              |
|  <p>Whole wheat bread</p>        |  <p>Whole wheat pasta</p>          |  <p>Whole wheat tortilla</p>       |
|  <p>Apple</p>                  |  <p>Orange</p>                   |  <p>Grapes</p>                   |
|  <p>Tomato</p>                 |  <p>Green beans</p>              |  <p>Lettuce</p>                  |
|  <p>Carrot</p>                 |  <p>Candy</p>                    |  <p>Bell pepper</p>              |
|  <p>100% Fruit juice</p>       |  <p>Oil</p>                      |  <p>Strawberry</p>               |
|  <p>Rice</p>                   |  <p>Walnuts</p>                  |  <p>Peanut butter</p>            |



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