

Fun Foods

HELP HEALTHY EATERS SPROUT

Shannon Payette Seip (pictured at right below) grew up in California in the 1970s and '80s in a house that wasn't too adventurous when it came to food, but still was pretty healthy. "We weren't trying sushi and eating mangoes. It was like chicken and rice and go get a burger," she says. "But we didn't have a lot of junk food in our house."

Flash forward to 2007, when Seip, as a mom of two little kids, found herself struggling to find restaurants offering healthy food that appealed to the whole family. In response, Seip and Kelly Parthen (at left in photo), a fellow mom and friend, created Bean Sprouts, a chain of hip and healthy eateries that you can find at children's museums, zoos and other family destinations across the country - including a new location at Kidspace Children's Museum.

"We wanted to take the problems when dining out with kids and create solutions," Seip explains. One of those problems is that the healthy food in many eateries isn't appealing to kids, while the appealing food isn't healthy, so parents find themselves saying "no" all the time. "Here are your two healthy items, but then everywhere else you look, there's something you want, a monster-size brownie or whatever," she says.

Without backgrounds in food service, but with plenty of experience as moms and in marketing and branding, Seip and Parthen surrounded themselves with experts and got to work creating dishes

that were appealing but wholesome and made from clean ingredients. "We knew that we needed playful items that we could produce very quickly, because we also knew that our kids could be disasters when they had to wait too long," Seip says.

The resulting menu, continually shaped by customer feedback and rigorous taste testing, includes "grown-up" sandwiches, soup, salads and pizza



PHOTO BY KAIT MCKAY

and cute kid foods such as the Grilledzilla grilled cheese sandwich with veggies and the Whoopsie Daisy tuna-salad flower.

But does cute get kids to eat their vegetables? Maybe, since studies show it takes up to 10 tries for a child to decide they like a food. "If we can provide one of those times in a really positive, playful way that speaks their language, we

feel like we've succeeded," says Seip, whose kids are now 13 and 15. She offers the case of a friend's son, who likes avocados but doesn't like olives. "He got the Crocamole, tried an olive and still decided he hated it, but he tried it," she says.

Seip and Parthen shared recipes for Crocamole and one other Bean Sprouts specialty with us, and you can find even more of their fun food in the "Bean Sprouts Kitchen" cookbook available at their cafes and online at amazon.com and barnesandnoble.com.

Your kids can definitely get into the act. Seip recommends sharing photos of the finished recipes if you like, but letting kids go their own way. "The more hands-on, the more empowered they are and the more ownership they have over it," she says, recalling one girl who, "instead of making teeth, she gives this crocodile like 20 eyelashes," and a boy who made his UFOats into a flower instead of a spaceship. You can use any store-bought or homemade hummus you like for the Crocamole and any nut butter your kids prefer for the UFOats (Seip likes MaraNatha, Sunbutter and Yum Butter).

Seip also wants to remind parents that, cute or not, no one likes every food, and parents should feel free to relax a bit. "I feel like we all are doing our best," she says. "If your kid doesn't like something, try it different ways, but then realize, 'Oh, I don't like everything.' We don't all need to like everything."



UFOATS FROM BEAN SPROUTS CAFÉ

Makes 8 to 10 UFOats

- ¼ cup (65g) nut, seed or soy butter**
- ¼ cup (56g) mashed sweet potato**
- 2 tablespoons (40g) honey**
- ¼ teaspoon pumpkin-pie spice**
- ½ cup (78g) old-fashioned oats**
- 2 tablespoons (22g) mini chocolate chips**
- 10 dried pineapple rings**
- Child scissors, for cutting pineapple rings**

In a large bowl, blend the nut butter, sweet potato, honey and pumpkin pie spice. Add the oats and stir until evenly distributed.

Use your hands to roll little chunks of the mixture into 1-inch (2.5 cm) balls. Place six to eight mini chocolate chips around the top of the ball for UFO portholes. Place on a plate and chill in the fridge for 30 minutes.

Use child scissors to enlarge the center hole of the pineapple rings so that they fit onto the center of the oat balls.



CROCAMOLE FROM BEAN SPROUTS CAFÉ

Makes 2 Crocamoles

- 1 avocado, sliced in half lengthwise**
- ½ cup (113 grams) hummus**
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice**
- 4 zucchini rounds, plus more for dipping**
- 4 olive slices**
- 14 matchstick carrots**
- Other favorite veggies, such as baby carrots or celery sticks, for dipping**

Use a spoon to scoop out the avocado pulp and place in a bowl. Set avocado skins aside.

Add the hummus and lemon juice to the bowl with the avocado and use a fork to mash the ingredients until smooth. Scoop the green hummus back into the avocado skins. Place two zucchini rounds and olive slices in the hummus at the wider end of each avocado skin for eyes. Add carrot matchsticks at the narrow end for teeth.

Enjoy with your favorite veggie dippers. ♦