

# Vegetable Carvings

**Overview:** Carving vegetables is a great way to promote creativity, hone fine motor skills, and learn about global cultures with kids. It can also be a fun way to get picky eaters interested in trying out new foods, and to create festive decorations.



## Materials:

- Root vegetables of choice: radishes, turnips, rutabagas, and potatoes work well *\*Note: Vegetables with contrasting skin and flesh colors make for bolder carvings*
- Kid-safe carving tools: Spoons, table knives, wooden skewers or toothpicks, melon ballers, cookie cutters, etc.

**Approximate Time to Complete:** 30 Minutes

**Location:** Indoor or Outdoor

**Ages:** All Ages

**Season:** All Seasons

## Background Information

The art of fruit and vegetable carving is common to many cultures across the globe. Its origins are disputed, but the practice reaches back more than seven hundred years in Thailand and more than a thousand years in Japan and China.

- In Japan, vegetable carving is called [Mukimono](#) and generally applies to decorative garnishes that are an important part of every Japanese chef's training.
- In Thailand, the carving of banana stalks has become its own distinct artform called [Thaeng yuak](#), and vegetable carving is taught to children in school.
- In China, fruit is carved into legendary creatures and animals. Carving watermelons into beautiful shapes is a common practice when having guests over.
- In the United States, pumpkins are carved into [jack-o'-lanterns](#) to celebrate Halloween. This is a carryover of the tradition of carving turnips into lanterns that is believed to have originated in Scotland centuries ago as part of the Gaelic harvest festival Samhain.
- Gourd carving is a time-honored tradition in Africa and Asia as well as among the indigenous peoples of the Americas – notably the [central highland people of Peru](#), the Navajo, Hopi and Pueblo nations of the American Southwest, and the Nuxálk and Haida nations of British Columbia.

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One of the most spectacular traditions surrounding vegetable carving is [Noche de Rábanos or Night of the Radishes](#), an annual event held on December 23 in Oaxaca, Mexico. Oversized radishes are used to create elaborate scenes, and more than a hundred artists compete for prizes in various categories. Noche de Rábanos has become an extremely popular holiday event attracting thousands of visitors each year.

### Instructions:

1. Discuss global traditions surrounding vegetable carving and look at some of the incredible examples of vegetable carvings found online together for inspiration (see links above).
2. Gather your materials, considering what size of vegetable and what tools might work best for the age and ability level of the carvers. A mix of small and large vegetables allows kids to test different techniques with different tools.
3. Provide kids with tools and vegetables and let their creativity shine!
4. Soak finished carvings in ice water for up to an hour to increase color contrast and open up scored marks further. Alternatively, if using turnips or rutabagas you can leave your carving somewhere dry and cool to dry out into a longer-lasting work of art.
5. Finished carvings make for fun snacks, colorful garnishes, or whimsical table decorations.



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