

Nursery Food Award

WINNER

**Blossom Tree
Montessori
Northwood Hills
Pinner, Greater London**

Staff at Blossom Tree Montessori believe that a healthy, nourishing diet is the foundation of a happy, thriving child. They are incredibly proud of the food they provide and regard it as not just meeting nutritional guidelines but creating a joyful, respectful relationship with food for children from the very beginning.

All of the setting's meals and snacks are freshly prepared on-site by an experienced nursery chef using high-quality ingredients, fresh fruit and vegetables and minimal salt and sugar. They serve non-processed food, even down to the tomato ketchup, which is homemade in the nursery kitchen. Rotating menus are carefully balanced in line with the Eat Better, Start Better guidance, offering a wide variety of flavours and textures to support growing bodies and developing tastes. Cultural and dietary preferences are embraced with menus reflecting the diversity of the setting's families – from a vegetarian dhal or lentil shepherd's pie to a homemade couscous.

All nutritional needs are considered. Staff work with parents to support weaning in a way that feels right for them, offering puréed, mashed or finger foods and encouraging independence when the time comes.

The visiting judge commented how she was particularly impressed by the mealtime

FINALISTS

- **Beech House Nursery School**
– Hereford
- **The Alphabet House Nursery**
– Beckton, London

CRITERION

Open to early years settings, which can be part of a group, whose approach to and provision of food promotes children's health and wellbeing.



“The head chef clearly takes great pride in her work – crafting dishes with care and creativity that children genuinely love. Both staff and children showed remarkable enthusiasm around mealtimes, which speaks volumes” – judge

environment and the way children were actively involved. Mealtimes are regarded as a key opportunity for learning, bonding and growing in independence – whether it is a baby being gently weaned in a cosy, quiet space or a pre-schooler confidently serving their own food and drink. Staff sit alongside the children, modelling good manners, healthy habits and warm conversation. This helps build trusting relationships and a positive association with food.

Food is also a meaningful part of the nursery's curriculum. Babies and toddlers begin with sensory-rich activities such as exploring textures, smells and simple mixing. As children grow, they are invited to help with preparing snacks, chopping soft fruits, baking different goods, making healthy smoothies or assembling their own wraps and sandwiches. These experiences help refine fine motor skills, promote independence and support their understanding of healthy eating.

Parents are encouraged to share favourite recipes and the staff welcome parents into the setting for popular Food Tasting Evenings. These shared experiences strengthen home-nursery links and reinforce a shared understanding of nutrition and food values.

‘I greatly admire the setting's proactive approach to encouraging children to explore a wide variety of foods,’ added the judge. ‘[They] not only support food exploration but also nurture children's knowledge, skills and confidence around food – laying the groundwork for healthy habits.’



HIGHLY COMMENDED Holly Grange Montessori Nursery – Lymm, Cheshire

At Holly Grange they are not simply serving meals but growing healthy, curious and empowered eaters. Before introducing new food, staff lead sensory-based ‘Taste Ed’ sessions. For example, when courgette was introduced, the children explored it with their hands, observed its colours, predicted what it might look like inside and shared their ideas. After cooking it together, they then experienced its smell and taste. This hands-on, respectful approach encourages children to connect with food in a joyful and meaningful way.

Meadow Lane Children's Nursery – Cambridgeshire

The majority of children at Meadow Lane eat their three fresh, homemade meals in the setting's on-site café. This is an environment away from the distraction of toys and resources, meaning that the children can be fully focused on the food they are eating. Mealtimes are valuable social and learning opportunities where children can develop independence, explore new foods and enjoy eating in a relaxed, calm environment. Older children are supported to help set the tables, make some of the food they are going to be eating, clean away their own bowls when finished and wipe down tables.