

BUDGET-FRIENDLY COOKING

We first met Lisa Kivirist and John Ivanko when we featured them in “Off-the-Grid Living at Inn Serendipity” in our Oct–Nov 2010 issue. Now, we’d like to introduce you to their new nifty-thrifty cookbook, *Farmstead Chef* (www.farmsteadchef.com).

From breakfasts to mouth-watering desserts, *Farmstead Chef* showcases the creative and budget-friendly side to eating lower on the food chain more often while taking responsibility for the food we put into our bodies—by growing it, sharing it, and savoring it. Their cookbook transforms traditional farmstead cooking skills for the modern kitchen gardener, urban homesteader, and homestead cook in all of us. It whips up a quirky, homespun tale of how we can eat well, nourish our bodies without breaking the bank, and restore the planet. And it allows us to rediscover the benefits of homegrown and homemade cooking, preserving the harvest, and stocking the pantry, all while building community.

Sidebar include sun-oven cooking and starting a victory garden. Recipes range from classics like Eggs Benedict to Indonesian-influenced peanut sauce for asparagus and Grecian Souvlaki with home-baked pitas.



“She was always holding up a lettuce or a bunch of radishes with an air of resolute courage, as though she had shot them herself.”

— Renata Adler

SUN-OVEN CUISINE: COOKING UNPLUGGED

(from *Farmstead Chef*)

“Where do you plug it in?” asked my father-in-law, staring at the boxy thing with aluminum reflectors that focused the sunlight down into the black, glass-covered chamber known as the solar Sun Oven, placed on the ground, facing south, in front of our garage.

“Don’t need to,” I replied as his daughter (Lisa) sent an icy, watch-what-you-say glare my way. Her father was 83, so give him a flippin’ break; he rode to school on a horse-drawn buggy.

“We just point it toward the sun, adjust the tilt so that the sun hits perpendicular to the glass-covered chamber, and give it a little time to heat up to 350 degrees,” I continued pleasantly, pointing to the built-in thermometer. “When we’re done, we just fold down the aluminum reflectors and put it away.”

Thus began, in 2008, our adventure in cooking with the sun. We should have invested \$150 in one year earlier. Since we use the sun to completely power our homestead, it was about time we did some of our cooking with it.

As long as it’s at least partially sunny out—and not too windy (the wind will topple over the reflectors)—we use the Sun Oven (sunoven.com) to bake our bread, simmer our soups, steam our green beans, cook our appetizers, and reheat our leftovers. All without a penny of purchased energy. On a bright, warm summer day, the Sun Oven does it in just about the same time as in our kitchen oven. The Sun Oven has no moving air and the oven temperatures rise slowly and evenly, so the foods stay moist, tender, and flavorful.

The key to success with a solar oven is, simply, the sun. Point it toward the sun and leave it be. The challenge is remembering that (a) the sun moves across the sky during the day and (b) the sun is higher in sky, almost directly overhead, in the summer and hangs lower in the sky as you head through the winter. Instead of the timer ringing in the house, you’ll need to pass by the solar oven about every 30 minutes to check on cooking progress and refocus the oven on the sun by turning it. A leg in the back of the box lets us adjust the tilt appropriate for the season. Things can occasionally burn in the oven, just like we can get sunburn. So you’ll need to keep an eye on it.

You’ll be able to cook the most during the longer days with plentiful sunshine around the Summer Solstice (June 21); we’ve managed an egg dish in the late morning, fresh bread for a mid-day lunch, and a warm-up of some nibbles in the early evening. But don’t count on much cooking during the Winter Solstice (December 21) period, especially if you’re in the more northern climates; you’ll be lucky to reheat some leftovers mid-day—if it’s sunny, that is.

In general, most items you’d cook in a kitchen oven can be done in the solar one, just leave a little more time and remember to keep adjusting the direction of the oven to follow the sun. For the better part of late spring, summer and early fall, we can achieve an average oven temperature of about 325 degrees, pretty good for most items you may be cooking. There are times, however, when we get the oven just right and the thermometer breaks 400 degrees. Peanut Butter Pumpkin Bread, anyone?



Bread baking in the solar Sun Oven at Inn Serendipity (www.innserendipity.com).

Peanut Butter Pumpkin Bread

(from *Farmstead Chef*)

Pumpkins aren’t just for Jack-O-Lanterns. After growing New England Pie and Long Pie (we stack these elongated pumpkins on our front porch like cordwood), we found cooking varieties glow with flavors, not candles. Who knew a silken pumpkin purée and peanut butter made such good partners? This loaf-style recipe yields two loaves; if that’s more than you need, these loaves freeze well or are always appreciated by neighbors. We’ve learned the hard way that lightly oiling and flour-dusting the pans are crucial steps to ensure the loaf smoothly pops out of the pan.

- 1 T oil (for oiling pans)
- 1 T flour (for dusting pans)
- 3 c sugar
- 2 c pumpkin purée
- 4 eggs
- 1 c vegetable oil
- ¾ c water
- ⅔ c peanut butter
- 3½ c flour
- 2 t baking soda
- 1½ t salt
- 1 t cinnamon
- 1 t nutmeg

- Prepare two 8" x 4" x 3" loaf pans by lightly oiling them, then dust the inside of the pans with flour.

- In a large mixing bowl, combine the sugar, pumpkin, eggs, oil, water, and peanut butter. Blend pumpkin mixture well.

- Combine the flour, baking soda, salt, cinnamon, and nutmeg. Gradually add to pumpkin mixture; mix well.

- Pour into prepared loaf pans. Bake at 350°F for 60–70 minutes or until a toothpick inserted into the centers comes out clean.

- Cool for 10 minutes before removing from pans to wire racks. Yield: 2 loaves.