



Solar Cooking 101

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(will soon be the go to place for solar cooking info!)

1. **Patience.** In a solar oven food cooks slower and often better—much harder to burn food in a solar oven, but ovens can technically start cooking at 180 degrees, though I think noticeable cooking happens around 200+. I cooked 6 cups of dry beans soaked overnight in my cooker, set it out when I left for work in the morning and they were tender when I got home—Solar Oven Society Sport Oven.
2. **Preheat.** Like with any oven if you stick it out empty while you prepare the food, it'll be a bit faster.
3. **Dark Pots (or cover and capture):** You want to capture and absorb heat. Cast Iron, dark enamel or any other dark pot works well. If using a reflective oven a clear plastic oven bag will also assist in preventing heat loss. If you have an open pan, you can place a baking tray on top as a cover.
4. **More Food equals More Energy.** Commercial and more elaborate ovens may do a better job gathering energy than simple homemade ovens. I probably wouldn't try and cook more than 2 cups of dry beans in my cardboard oven in the summer. But I used a window shade cooker to make the vegan custard for my coconut cream pie (something otherwise would have been done in the stove top). That was 4 cups of filling that cooked about 40 minutes after the oven heated up.
5. **Time of Year and Time of Day.** In the winter you get much less sun—you're effective cooking time is probably 11 a.m. until 2 p.m., a pretty limited window and the intensity of the heat is less. So you'll likely need to cut in half or to one-third to one-fourth what you put in the oven as you balance both less energy and less time to cook. Whereas, around the vernal equinox you can cook from about 10 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. and by the summer time it's even better than that.
6. **Plan ahead.** If we have clouds they are more likely to show up in the afternoon. Cooking also takes time. I'm still perfecting this but I start counting time when my oven reaches 200 degrees—and if it's going to peak at 250 degrees-then about 3 times the 350 degree time works well. If it peaks at 225 degrees, then probably 4.5 times. My SOS Sport Oven is not recommended to go above 300 degrees—so in the summer I don't use the reflectors unless I have a lot of food. Global Sun Ovens can reach 400 degrees and can brown (or burn) food—and do need a bit more tending. Some people pre-orient their ovens perhaps a bit toward the afternoon sun so their food is ready for dinner.
7. **Conserve late afternoon heat!** Those last 1 to 2 hours or so of good cooking time in the day are also when it's important to conserve the heat—open the oven to check on something, and you'll lose heat and may not recover.
8. **Explore Cookers!** There are lots of cookers that work on different principles—one of which is the parabolic—these work most like conventional stovetops which spot heat—they need the most tending, but allow real time frying. While most cookers can handle some clouds-parabolics turn off with clouds.
9. **Solar Cooking is incredibly fun and amazing and planet healthy!** I've been actively solar cooking for only 15 months, but I've made pies, cakes, brownies, veggie burgers, veggie crab cakes, pasta, enchiladas, chili, refried beans, pizza (that was with the parabolic and a dutch oven), and I expect to work on bagels and breads soon. Meat cookers do need to be a bit more aware of safe temperatures (mainly if it's not tended and starts cooling down)—sorry I'm a vegetarian so can't help there.