

---

# Cooking in the Desert

by: Jim Blackburn

SOLAR COOKING IS ANOTHER WAY TO ENJOY OUR UNIQUE DESERT CLIMATE

---

Here in the desert there is one of the best cookers around, the blazing sun. I like our kitchen stove top, our oven and nowadays our precious microwave - does potatoes in six minutes - but Marla, my wife, has awakened me these past couple of years to using our sun for cooking. She reminds me it's free, no gas or electric bills, saves on air conditioning in the summer, doesn't burn, and the food only gets better if dinner's unavoidably delayed! Does the best job on barbecue ribs by far, even better than the Satisfied Frog<sup>1</sup> and our other fine local restaurants. Comes out more moist, falling off the bone.



examples of solar cookers  
Wikipedia

Sun's got its drawbacks.

Doesn't work at night and not too good on cloudy days. Solar cooking is slow, but moist and tenderizing. (Do the steaks, hot dogs and other broiling on the barbecue pit.) Takes all day and you've got to realign the oven to the sun every hour or so as you walk by.

---

<sup>1</sup> Article first published May 1998



Temperatures in our oven run 295 °F degrees midday and down to 200 degrees or so by evening. It's best to use darker colored dishes or roasters to better absorb the sun's rays. If the food has a lot of moisture, use a covered dish to keep from steaming the oven window. If the window steams because the food is boiling you may need to lift the lid momentarily and perhaps wipe if necessary. Solar cooker also browns, if there's fat.

Are solar cookers expensive? No. Sure, you can find a deluxe model but they're also made all over the world cheaply, usually from locally available materials. There's even instruction on the Internet for making them from pizza boxes!

Look in the yellow pages, under Solar Equipment, Supplies & Parts. Included in the list: [Kerr-Cole Solar Box Cookers](#), 331 E. 14th Street, locally in Tempe. This is where I got my Christmas present for Marla a couple of years ago.

Our cooker is an inexpensive insulated cardboard box that sits outside on the picnic table. She brings it in if it's going to rain. Marla keeps trying new recipes all the time that she'd otherwise do in the kitchen. A couple of my favorites are:

### **Blackburn's Spaghetti Squash (Serves two)**

1 small spaghetti squash

½ lb. Sausage (I like Jimmy Dean's Hot but it's your choice)

1 small onion (and celery, peppers, chili, etc. Again your choice)

1 small can of spaghetti sauce

Parmesan cheese if you like.

Prick the squash with a fork to let out the steam and place in the cooker for a couple of hours. Don't overdo - I like the spaghetti squash a little crunchy.

Crumble sausage onto a shallow plate or frying pan and place in the cooker to brown while the squash is cooking. About an hour later add a little chopped up onion, celery, peppers, chili, garlic perhaps, and sauté al dente. Remove squash and cut in half lengthwise. Discard seeds, then loosen squash flesh down to the skin with a fork and shape a cavity in the center of each half.



Pack sausage, et al, from the skillet into each pocket and pour a little spaghetti sauce over each. Top with grated Parmesan cheese if you like. Return to cooker for half an hour or so to finish cooking. Ah!

### **Chile Rellenos Casserole (serves two)**

based on Chile, Cooperative Extension Service Circular 325, New Mexico State University.

4 Pablano Chilies (you can use canned chilies but we like these pablanos and don't bother to skin 'em!)

Stuffing:

Chopped onion and cheddar cheese

Batter:

4 eggs

¼ teaspoon baking powder

4 teaspoons flour

¼ teaspoon salt

Core chilies and stuff.

Beat egg whites until stiff. Beat yolks until thick. Add flour, baking powder, salt and yolks to whites, blend mixture and pour over chilies in a casserole dish. Solar cook about two hours to heat through. Um-umm good.

Solar cooking is another way to enjoy our unique desert climate. It's a lot like cooking in a crock-pot but the oven has space for additional dishes, frying pan or whatever. Save a little money on air conditioning in the summer. It's fun.

Does the best ribs around.

