

Cooking Articles

Beat the Summer Heat with Crock Pot Cooking

When the weather outside warms up, the kitchen can be a terrible place to be. There are many things you can do however, when it comes to cooking a nice home made meal that doesn't require traditional stove top or oven cooking. Learn to utilize some of the lesser heat producing equipment in your kitchen, such as the crock pot, in order to truly beat the summer heat and keep your cool while preparing a nice hot meal for friends and family.

So, how does crock pot cooking really help beat the heat? Simply put, the crock pot in and of itself puts off far less heat when cooking than an oven or stove top. This is the first and possibly the best reason to utilize the crock pot in your summer meal planning. You should also consider the fact that by not heating the house by using your stove top or oven you are also preventing your air conditioning (or other cooling methods) from working overtime in order to compensate for the additional heat that other cooking methods introduce.

This makes crock pot cooking a win-win situation as the costs involved in operating a crock pot are far less than the costs involved in operating a stove or oven in general. Whether electric or gas, your stove and oven are often serious energy hogs. Add to that the fact that you are not raising the temperature in your home by traditional means of cooking and you are using even less electricity.

Unfortunately for most, the general consensus has been that crock pots were meant for comfort foods and hearty winter meals. The truth is that the crock pot should be one of your best loved and most often utilized cooking methods if you can manage it. When it comes to cooking with a crock pot, the options are almost limitless. Almost anything that can be baked can be made in the crock pot and many, many more wonderful and enticing meals and treats as well.

Benefits of Crock Pot Cooking

In addition to the cost benefits mentioned above when it comes to crock pot cooking there are many other benefits that are well worth mentioning. First of all, the bulk of the work involved in crock pot cooking takes place early in the day when you are refreshed rather than at the end of a hectic work or play day. This means that you are less likely to forget an ingredient or make other mistakes that often occur as we hurriedly prepare a dinner when we are exhausted from the activities of our day.

Second, many great crock pot recipes include the vegetables that insure we are getting the nutrients we need. So often, when preparing a meal at the last minute, vegetables and other side dishes are left out in favor of expedience. Crock pot cooking in many instances is a meal in one dish.

Another great reason to use a crock pot for your summertime cooking is the ease of clean up. Unlike pots and pans, most crock pot meals are made in one dish. This means that there will not be mountains of dishes to be either hand washed or loaded into the dishwasher (or if you are like me-both) afterwards. You can spend less time cleaning just as you spent less time slaving over a hot stove. Oh wait! Make that no time slaving over a hot stove. Once clean up is complete you can get back to enjoying the sun set, chasing the lightening bugs with your little ones, or waiting for the first star.

While there will never be a one size fits all best cooking method, crock pot cooking comes very close. If you have a crock pot collecting dust somewhere in the back of your pantry it is time to get it out, dust it off, and dig up some great summertime crock pot cooking recipes.

Cooking Basics for Beginners

When it comes to cooking, it is important to keep in mind that everyone started somewhere. I do not know of a single person who was born with a wooden cooking spoon and ready to go. There is a lot of learning that must be done in order to become a prolific cook and then there is always room for improvement. Not only do you need to begin with the basics when it comes to cooking but you almost need to begin again when learning to cook a new cuisine such as Chinese, Thai, or Indian food.

This means that at any given time in your cooking learning cycles there is quite probably someone somewhere that is better and/or worse at cooking than you. Take heart from this because even the best have bad days when it comes to cooking. There are many people who cook for different reasons. Some cook in order to eat and survive while others cook because they actually enjoy the process of cooking. Some cook during times of emotional upheaval and others cook out of sheer boredom. Whatever your reason for cooking or learning to cook you should always begin with the basics.

The first thing that you need to learn is what the different terminology you will find in recipes actually means. There are many new and sometimes foreign sounding terms that you will find in common recipes. These terms can mean the difference in recipe success or failure. You should be able to find a good section in any inclusive cookbook that explains the different definitions for unfamiliar terminology. If you aren't absolutely certain what is meant by "folding in the eggs" it is in your best interests to look it up.

Another great bit of advice when it comes to cooking basics is to try simpler recipes for a while and then expand your horizons to the more complex recipes that abound. Most recipes will have a little note about their degree of difficulty and you can read through the recipe to see whether or not it is something you are interested in preparing or confident that you can prepare. Remember Rome wasn't built in a day and it will take quite some time to build a reliable 'repertoire' of recipes to work into your meal planning rotation.

The good news is that once you've learned the basics of cooking it is unlikely that you will ever need to relearn them. This means that you can constantly build up and expand your cooking skills. As you learn new recipes and improve your culinary skills and talents you will discover that preparing your own meals from scratch is much more rewarding than preparing prepackaged meals that are purchased from the shelves of your local supermarkets.

You will also discover as your experience and confidence grows that you will find yourself more and more often improvising as you go and adjusting recipes to meet your personal preferences. If you prefer more or less of ingredients or want to make a recipe a little more or less spicy in flavor you can make simple adjustments along the way in order to achieve this goal. In other words you will begin in time to create recipes of your very own. And that is something you won't necessarily learn when it comes to basic cooking skills for beginners but you would never learn if you didn't master those basic cooking skills.

Cooking Cajun Food

Cooking in the heart of Cajun country is an art form. There really is very little science to this particular form of cooking that includes a lot more than mere lagniappe from the pantry or the spice cabinet. Cajun cooking is something that has often been imitated around the country and around the world but can very rarely be accurately duplicated.

One of the fascinating things about Cajun cooking is the fact that there are very few exact recipes. Most, if not all authentic Cajun cooking is done to taste rather than measurements. Even more amazing is that from day to day one person can make the same dish over and over and it is quite likely to taste a little bit different each and every time it is made. The major reason for this is that in addition to being an art form in and of itself, Cajun food is often made even more delicious or mysterious simply by the mood of the one doing the cooking.

I'm sure that many of you have watched as Emeril Lagasse makes some special concoction and exclaims "Bam!" there is a good bit of that when it comes to Cajun cooking. Something that goes far beyond the ingredients in the recipe and somewhere into the heart and the soul of the cook in question. There is a reason that many southern cooked dishes are referred to as soul food and you should not for one second forget that New Orleans is in the heart of the Deep South.

The most difficult thing, perhaps when it comes to preparing good Cajun dishes outside of the New Orleans region is finding the right ingredients. It is nearly impossible to find the fresh seasonings and spices that are essential to most Cajun cuisine outside the heart of the old south. Not only that, but fresh crawfish and andouille sausage are a little difficult to come by during the heart of a Michigan winter.

If you are determined to learn to make Cajun food of your own, you must first find the ingredients. Specialty food shops or those that will special order might be your best bet. There are some grocers that will carry a limited stock of Cajun seasonings on their international food aisles. Keep in mind that these sources are extremely limited. Once you have the ingredients, it's time to let a little jazz blare from your

speakers in order to set the mood. Most of the best Cajun dishes require a substantial amount of time for simmering and this should be considered. Cajun food is not to be rushed-much like the citizens of the Big Easy. The food will be ready in time and as the one cooking the food you must learn to accept that about Cajun food. It has a way of letting you know when it is ready that is almost mythical until you've experienced it for yourself.

Cooking Cajun food will try your patience, try your talents, and in some cases zap your energy, as it tends to be an emotional process for many. On the other end however, Cajun food is some of the richest and most delicious food on the planet. Mastering the ability to cook this wonderful food will make you a slave to its flavor for many years to come.

Cooking Classes for the Masses

Whether you are a seasoned pro when it comes to the fine art of cooking or an utter novice there should be some cooking classes or resources in your area that can help you learn and improve your existing skills. Surprisingly few people manage to utilize the many wonderful opportunities that are available to them when it comes to cooking classes.

If you are considering a cooking class you should be glad to know that many communities offer them for a nominal fee at night and sometimes on the weekend. These classes are rather basic and often designed to help women learn the basics of a few economical and healthy meals to prepare for their beginning families. If you fit the bill for this, then you should check out your local library for possible leads for these sorts of classes in your area. Even if they do not have the information available it is quite likely that they can point you in the right direction.

If you are looking for cooking classes that you can take with your children, check out your library once again for the first resource. There are also many gourmet food shops that offer cooking classes for parents to take with their children. This is a great opportunity to bond with your child while you both learn to prepare a new dish or two together. It is quite likely that you will be quite surprised by the things you can learn from your child as well as the things you can learn by simply taking the class.

For those among us who are seeking culinary experience with very specific cuisines you will have to search a little more for the perfect cooking classes in which you can achieve your goal. They do exist however, though your chances of learning Thai cooking are much greater in a larger city than in smaller towns throughout the country. If you are really interested in learning some exotic cooking techniques perhaps you should consider a vacation in which you can try out a few new cooking classes while you are there. If you prefer other things on your vacation to cooking you could make a point of attempting one basic class in the cuisine of your choice for each vacation you take. This will give you a little more than the same old souvenir to bring

back from your trip and an experience that in many cases is quite memorable.

Finally, if you are looking for a romantic idea, how about signing up to take a couples cooking class? Believe it or not, these classes are often offered in both big and smaller cities. They seem to be all the rage around Valentine's day, perhaps the hint is that the other partner in a relationship can share some of the cooking responsibility or perhaps the idea is that there is more than one way to steam up the kitchen.

Regardless of the reason for taking cooking classes they can bring not only a great deal of enjoyment to your dining room, but also increase your ease in your kitchen. If you've never taken a cooking class, there is no time like the present to do so. No matter how skilled you are in the kitchen there is always something that can be learned.

Cooking for Crowds Shouldn't be a Frightening Proposition

Most people balk at the idea of cooking for large crowds of people. With images of huge stockpots boiling over and becoming chained to a hot stove and oven for countless hours on end, it's no wonder that so many people avoid the idea of cooking food for large crowds with more tenacity than they avoid being last in the dinner line.

The good news is that it doesn't have to be the frightening proposition that so many make it out to be. When it comes to cooking for a large crowd, the planning phase is the most important. You absolutely must plan your meals when feeding a large group of people. This goes far beyond the notion of spaghetti or fried chicken as the meals you are planning. You need to know how many servings you will need. While obviously you never know how hungry people will be or who will eat how much when it comes to cooking for a large crowd it is a good idea to always plan for a few extra mouths in case some need a little more than you may think (you might want to double servings for teen and college aged men that will be dining).

You need to know at least a general number of servings to prepare and adjust your recipe in order to accommodate those needs. Some people find it much simpler if they can double or triple recipes rather than scaling them to specific serving sizes. If this works best for you then by all means incorporate this practice when cooking for crowds. One thing you must be aware of is that you will need to include in order to create the meal you are planning.

Having the proper ingredients and the proper amounts of ingredients is more important in bulk recipes than is often necessary in smaller recipes as there is less leeway when it comes to creating the proper consistency. You should keep this in mind when making purchases for your cooking for a large crowd event.

Some people find the best route to take when it comes to cooking for crowds is to keep everything as close to their normal cooking routine as possible. This would mean that instead of cooking one really huge pan of lasagna for a triple sized crowd, they would instead cook three normal sized pans of lasagna. This accomplishes two things really and

is something you may wish to keep in mind despite the extra time spent in the kitchen.

First of all, if something goes, wrong only one third of the meal is in shambles rather than the entire dinner. Second, you have a greater possibility of finding consistency issues before the baking begins if you are using measurements and cooking containers that you are familiar with and comfortable using. It is always best to discover errors and omissions sooner rather than later when it comes to cooking as very few ingredients can be properly added after the fact.

While cooking for crowds may send some into dizzying spells with heart palpitations it helps if you take a few deep breaths, sit down, plan your menu, plan your meals, make a list of your ingredients, and cook in a manner that is comfortable for you. If you would rather get it all over with in one fell swoop, then by all means do just that. If you are more comfortable making multiple dishes of family favorites then that is probably going to be the best course of action in order to meet your large crowd cooking needs.

Most importantly you should remember when cooking for crowds is that you might have just earned yourself a well-deserved night off afterwards. Cooking for crowds is time consuming and should be approached when well rested (if that is even possible) for the best results. There is something that is actually very satisfying about knowing that you have fed a crowd and fed them well.

Cooking for Little Ones

Cooking for toddlers and growing children presents some unique challenges along the way. While you want to provide them with those ever so important nutrients, it is often difficult to get them to eat those foods that are best for their growing bodies. We are all probably well aware of the food pyramid and the number of servings our children need of healthy grains, proteins, fruits, vegetables, and calcium products. Getting them to eat these nourishing products is another matter all together unfortunately.

The good news when cooking for children is that you do not necessarily need to incorporate all the important nutrients into dinner food. The truth of the matter is that raw cucumbers, which are thinly sliced and sprinkled with salt make a much healthier snack than potato chips and many little ones love this for a snack. You get a vegetable in their system and they are getting a treat at snack time. The same holds true for melon and cantaloupes. These make excellent snacks and are a much-needed fruit in these important diets for little ones.

When it comes to cooking for little ones, however man, woman, and child cannot live on macaroni and cheese alone. It's been tried and tested and failed miserably. Try mixing things up whenever you can while keeping meals kid friendly. It is important that you try to introduce whole grains, proteins, and vegetables whenever possible at meal times around your home. The good news is that there are many prepackaged convenience foods that are introducing whole grains like never before in order to meet the growing demand of consumers for healthier meals that can be prepared with little fan fare or fuss.

Cooking healthier meals for kids is now easier than ever before. Fresh fruits and vegetables are best whenever possible. However, if you cannot manage fresh, you should avoid canned (fruits especially as they are often swimming in sugary sweetness) whenever possible. Frozen is far preferable to canned when it comes to both fruit and vegetables, as there are often fewer additives.

If you need some great meal ideas that are kid friendly and easy on

the budget, you can often find recipes readily available online. You can meet your child's calcium and dairy product needs by adding milk as the drink of choice for meals or a slice of cheese melted over their favorite vegetable. Ice cream, yogurt, and pudding also make excellent calcium rich treats, in moderation of course.

Encourage your children to try new things rather than cooking the same few meals over and over again that you know they are likely to eat. This prevents two things from happening. First of all, it helps you not to get bored when cooking for your children. Second, it allows your children to try new flavors and textures and form opinions about them. By trying new things they will learn not only about the things they dislike but also the foods they really enjoy.

You should also keep in mind that your children are people too when cooking for them. Just as you have foods you like and dislike they also will develop tastes over time. Those tastes may also change in time as well. It's frustrating, I know, to spend time and money preparing a meal only to have your child push the plate away and refuse to even try the meal. For this, I recommend enlisting their help in the kitchen. Children are much more likely to eat the things they had a hand in preparing as a matter of accomplishment and pride. It's psychological warfare I know but all is fair in war and dinnertime.

Perhaps the greatest gift you can give yourself (much greater than the help in the kitchen) by 'forcing' your little ones to help prepare dinner is that they will learn to better appreciate your culinary efforts and eat peacefully rather than sullenly. This tactic has met with great success in my household when cooking for little ones. I hope you will enjoy the same degree of success as well.

Cooking for Special Occasions

We all have those moments in our lives when we feel as if everything needs to be exactly right. It is these moments that we often refer to as special occasions. When it comes to cooking for special occasions, many of us find that we drop the ball in our anticipation and feel as though we have ruined the moment. While this is often far from the truth, it does serve to diminish the moment in many of our minds. For this reason, you need to work up a repertoire, if you will, of simple to make special occasion cooking recipes.

You will be shocked and amazed at all the sinfully rich and delicious meals and side dishes that are out there, that are amazingly quick and easy to prepare. This means that you will not run the all too common disaster scenarios that you hear about and will still manage to have a wonderful meal that is enjoyed by all.

The trick is in choosing a rather simple meat dish and dressing it up with the more decadent side dishes. Incredibly rich side dishes that are simple to prepare are greater in number than meat dishes that require little culinary effort. You should also keep in mind the audience for your special occasion. Sometimes a family favorite makes the occasion seem much more special than an all out effort for chicken cordon bleu or veal Marsala. There is no point in going to an extreme effort to create a culinary masterpiece if it is going to be riddled with picky children proclaiming that they do not like this or that about your meal.

Another great idea when it comes to cooking for special occasions is to prepare as much as possible ahead of time in order to alleviate the pressure during the event and to allow you more time to enjoy the event rather than dealing with the details of meal preparation. The greatest gift you can really give yourself when cooking for special occasions is the time necessary in order to enjoy these special occasions. This is not to say that there isn't some cooking that will need to be done.

Foods that can be prepared ahead of time and reheated just prior to serving are often the best when it comes to cooking for special

occasions. There are all kinds of appetizers, entrees, and desserts that will work perfectly in this particular instance. You can often find them by performing a simple Google search online or by sorting through many of your favorite cookbooks at home. The important thing is that you do not get so caught up in the idea of cooking for special occasions that you forget to actually enjoy the occasion.

If this is not the way you prefer to do things that is perfectly understandable. Some of us do thrive in high stress situations. The key for those who prefer to do all the meal preparation when cooking for special occasions at the time of cooking is planning properly and allowing plenty of time for possible hiccups in the process. Mistakes occur when people feel rushed and hurried in their culinary efforts.

Another common mistake that is made when cooking for special occasions is cooking outside of your comfort zone. When you are preparing a challenging recipe it is best if you do this during a time when you are not going through the stress of potential visitors or insuring the best possible of circumstances. In other words, it is best to challenge your culinary talents when you do not have a vested interest in success.

Special occasions are a great time for friends and family. The hope is that you will have many special occasions throughout your life. Do not waste too much time and energy fretting over cooking for special occasions. Instead, put all of your effort into enjoying those occasions.

Cooking for Sunday Dinner

From as far back as I can remember there have been special church occasions when dinner on the church grounds was the order for the day. Far too many times I watched as person after person walked in with store purchased fried chicken. Whether the reason for this was lack of time, lack of planning, or lack of ideas I was never quite certain. I was certain however, that this was not isolated to my church alone.

It may seem odd but I have traveled all over the country and lived in many different areas of the culture. One thing that seems constant no matter where I live is that someone inevitably brings fried chicken from a local restaurant or deli as his or her potluck offering. There is nothing wrong with this of course, but there are so many great recipes available for Sunday dinner cooking that it seems odd that so many would resort to this tired old tradition rather than spicing things up with a spicy taco casserole or sweetening the deal with some delightfully delicious and simple to make dessert.

Sunday dinners obviously aren't the only time when cooking a casserole or making a dessert is a good decision for the day. They are, however, the most common from my childhood, which is why I often refer to them. There are also 'pitch ins' at work that require a contribution and these are an excellent opportunity to make coworkers envy your culinary talents. Even for those who are health conscious however, there are many wonderful types of salads that can be prepared for occasions such as this that will provide you with a guilt free entrée at the event for which you are preparing your offering.

You do not have to choose calorie or fat filled dishes for your Sunday dinner cooking. In fact, when you are doing the cooking you should cook the things you enjoy eating. Most of us are much more likely to put our best efforts into preparing the foods we enjoy rather than those that feel as though they are a chore for us to make. The same holds true when cooking for potlucks and such. Just be careful that you do not prepare the exact same dish every time or people will think that it is the only dish you can prepare.

I recommend checking out casserole recipes online and in your favorite magazines. Even magazines that offer healthier eating options often have a casserole, large salad, or even a healthy dessert you can prepare for these events. My personal solution has always been to collect recipes over time that I would like to try out and use the potluck audience as my recipe guinea pigs. This way if my family or I do not like it, we won't be stuck with leftovers for a week and if we do like it, we can put it into our rotation of recipes for use at home.

Sunday dinner cooking doesn't have to be nearly as stressful as many of us make it out to be. Many wonderful crock-pot recipes can actually be prepared while you sleep. Just load your slow cooker with the proper ingredients and turn it on before turning in. You should awaken to the wonderful aroma of whatever delightful dish you have prepared and still manage to get ready for church in record time. This tried and true technique is a great way to make Sunday dinner cooking quick and easy.

Even if you are one of the many who have very limited culinary talents it is quite possible to wow your friends, relatives, and fellow church members with the correct 'simple to make' recipe. Desserts are by far the best way to go in this effort and can also be made the night before (in many cases) and stored in the refrigerator. Desserts are almost always a good bet and very few people ever complain about them regardless. The Kraft foods website offers some fabulously easy to make and delicious desserts if you are in need. The next time it is your turn to join in on the potluck preparation don't resort to fried chicken. Dish up something that will truly turn heads instead.

Cooking for Two

Whether you are cooking for two out of a sense of romance or necessity you will find that there are many resources online and off when it comes to finding the perfect combinations for those terrific twosomes. One thing to keep in mind however is that when cooking for two, it is sometimes best if two are doing the cooking. This gives cooking an opportunity to become a communication event rather than a chore.

Despite the fact that there are many resources and recipes available to those that are cooking for two there are also equal occasions to take traditional recipes that are designed to feed four and make them an opportunity to stretch your food dollars even further. By cooking traditional meals for four and feeding a portion you have managed to cook two meals for the time investment of one. It's a good deal for many, particularly those that do not relish the idea of cooking at all, much less of cooking for two.

Young couples and older couples alike often find that it is easier and almost as inexpensive to hit the fast food or other casual dining establishments than it is to prepare a nice healthy meal for two at home. The one thing they often forget is that cooking for two can be an interesting way to bring a little romance into the evening when done right of course.

Cooking is an art that most people have forgotten as it is also a necessary act unless you wish to live on sushi and raw vegetables. Even in these situations however there is typically some degree of preparation that is involved in the process. Food is beautiful and can be beautifully arranged if you are of the mind to do so. This means that you can spend a great deal of time not only creating new and delicious foods, but also visually appealing food combinations as well.

When cooking for two you will have the most opportunity for experimentation when it comes to food as any other time in your life. You have the option of trying great new cuisines and the knowledge that if you do not like the food, you are not wasting multiple servings. You can try to mix and match flavors and textures. You can make

works of art on your plate or go for the guts, gore, and eyeballs galore. Cooking for two opens doors that aren't necessarily available when cooking for larger crowds with more limiting tastes.

Cooking for two is a great way to get your partner involved in the cooking process as well. When cooking for two you can discover the many great things that you both enjoy and those that aren't so appealing to one or the other of you. Make sure that when you are cooking for two that you invite an open and honest dialog about the things that you like and dislike about the meals being prepared. This will help you discover things to add to your regular menu as well as things to avoid making a part of your dinner rotation.

Perhaps the greatest thing about cooking for two is the fact that you can afford to enjoy special occasion cuisine more often when you are only feeding two than when you are feeding larger crowds. Bring on the steaks and lobster tail. Learn how to make shrimp scampi and filet mignon. Take the time, when cooking for two, to prepare those dishes that you love most. After all, it is really living when you live to dine rather than when you dine to live.

Cooking for two is so much more than a cliché. It is a great way to explore the culinary universe while exposing your palates to some wonderful surprises along the way. The Internet, bookstores, and libraries are filled with books about cooking for two. Take advantage of the opportunity to do just that and you'll be amazed at the world of flavors you've invited into your kitchen.

Cooking On the Grill

Summertime is rapidly approaching. This means it is time to begin preparing meals without heating the house whenever possible. If you haven't considered the value of cooking on the grill in the past, perhaps now is a great time to adjust your way of thinking.

Cooking on the grill is a great way to keep the heat of cooking outside your home as well as to bring the family together for the entire cooking process. Moms read: this is a great way to get dad to help out with meal preparation. While this is said somewhat in jest, there is some truth to the fact that men are much more inclined to slave away over a hot grill than a hot stove. More importantly, most of the mess of cooking on the grill remains outside your kitchen. I don't know about you, but that is a huge bonus for me, when it comes to cooking.

Cooking on the grill is also a great way to get the kids involved in the meal preparation and clean up process. We like to use disposable plates when grill cooking and keep the dining *al fresco*. If you are hoping for instant family unity over the picnic table you might want to think again but there isn't anything quite like it when it comes to not worrying about spills or dropped food as you can rest fairly certain that the animals will take care of anything that gets left behind.

Even small children can help when cooking on the grill by bringing utensils to the grill, holding plates, and 'setting' the picnic table for your dining experience. If you intend to do a good deal of cooking on the grill you may want to invest in some portable and 'kid friendly' containers for things such as condiments, napkins, plastic ware, and tablecloth holders. Be sure to find containers that can handle a decent gust of wind without flying off too. These may be a little heavier for your little ones to hold but they won't be nearly as difficult to chase when blowing across the lawn.

Cooking on the grill is a great way to enjoy nature after a long day of work. Be careful that you do not reserve this as a weekend event as you will find you miss out on some of the relaxing qualities it can

bring to your midweek slump. One thing that can definitely be said about grill cooking is that the selections are almost as limitless as they are when cooking on the stove. You must use your imagination for maximum effect though very few meats and vegetables are truly off limits when it comes to cooking on the grill.

In addition to cooking meats on the grill, it is important to keep in mind that you can also cook all kinds of fresh fruit and vegetables on the grill as well. You should also keep in mind the awesome side dishes that go great with grilled foods such as baked beans, potato salad, and nice cool deserts and pies.

Cooking on the grill is a great way to bring family and friends together. The next time you plan to have a get together why not make it a night of cooking on the grill? You can have the best of all worlds with no muss, no fuss clean up and great food with good friends. Cooking on the grill is certainly a great way to get the neighbors out and about. There's nothing on earth that can quite compare to the aroma of meat, fruit, and vegetables grilling over hot charcoal. If you don't remember and your mouth isn't watering just reading about, it's been far too long since your last barbecue experience.

The most important thing to remember about cooking on the grill is that it should be an experience rather than a chore. Most of us truly enjoy the thought of having a good dinner under the sun or stars (whichever applies in your case). If you haven't tried this in a while, it's time to dust off the grill and refresh your memory and your taste buds.

The Wonderful Tools of Cooking

Far too often people overlook the importance of using the proper tools when cooking fine meals. While there is nothing in the world that can quite compare to cooking with the finest and freshest of ingredients, these things can only be enhanced by making use of the perfect tools for the job at hand.

When it comes to pots and pans and skillets you should keep in mind that conductivity is of extreme importance. You should also select pots and pans that are made of a heavier gauge. This allows your pans to heat evenly avoiding hot spots, which can lead to food that may 'stick' to your pan or scorch during the cooking process. This means that simply stopping in at your local mass market retailer and purchasing any old set of pots and pans is probably not the best course of action for the best possible quality in your kitchen.

Kitchen knives are also important ingredients in the kitchens of today. If you plan to prepare many meals in your kitchen, then the quality of your knives is of the utmost importance. Your knives are an investment you shouldn't have to make too often in your lifetime. For this reason, select a really good set and be prepared to make a sizeable investment in your knives. You will never understand, unless you've tried to prepare foods with knives of inferior quality, just how important it is to purchase good quality and well-balanced knives for your kitchen. You should also try the handles in your hand to see how comfortable they feel before purchasing a set of knives. If you do a lot of chopping and cutting during your meal preparation and cooking you will want to make sure that the knives you are using feel comfortable in your hands.

If you are like me and plan on cooking a great deal of meat then you should also invest in a jacquard. This useful tool helps not only when it comes to tenderizing rather rough and tumble cuts of meat but also pierces the surface so that rubs and marinades can penetrate for a more flavorful experience. This is by far one of my favorite kitchen gadgets and it isn't a sizeable investment for the added value it provides to meals.

A good quality grater is another tool that no kitchen should be complete without. There are many who feel that with all the pre shredded cheese products on the market today this tool is obsolete but nothing could be further from the truth. First of all, pre grated and pre packaged cheese simply doesn't touch the quality of flavor that freshly grated cheese provides. Second, cheese isn't the only thing that these graters are useful for grating. Graters are excellent tools for grating citrus fruits, spices, garlic, chocolate, and even onions. If you do a good deal of baking in addition to your cooking you should not overlook the value of having a quality grater in your kitchen.

Of course there are many more cooking tools than I could possibly mention here. Those mentioned above simply happen to be among my personal favorites. There are all kinds of appliances that in my humble opinion no kitchen is truly complete without. In addition to these great appliances there are many tools that are simple matters of preference. Do you peel enough potatoes to warrant a special device for doing so or do you simply opt to purchase an ergonomically designed potato peeler and peel them by hand? There are no one size fits all answers when it comes to kitchen tools and many of us are often limited by serious budget constraints and restrictions. My best advice if this is the situation for you is to purchase the best possible quality you can afford and build from there. Even if it means replacing one pot or knife at a time until you can manage a complete set of superior quality cooking tools you will find it well worth the price you've paid in the long run.

Trouble Free Cooking?

Believe it or not, trouble free cooking is a common desire around the world. Even those among us who love cooking and eating almost equally will be the first to confess that being able to cook without the worry of creating a mess, spilling, or burning would be a blessing. Truthfully speaking there really is no such thing as trouble free cooking though there are things you can do that will take a good deal of trouble out of your cooking.

Most of the tips here will be beneficial to novice or beginners in the culinary arts however, there are some great refresher tips for those who are more experienced when it comes to cooking as well. Hopefully you will learn some things through the next few paragraphs or at least remember some things you had forgotten.

First of all, cleaning as you go will take a lot of the trouble out of what comes after the cooking. When asked the least favorite thing about cooking a wide margin of women proclaim without a second of hesitation that the clean up by far is the worst thing about cooking. To make things easier, clean as you go. Keep a sink of hot sudsy water ready to go the entire time you are cooking and wipe up any spills that occur immediately to avoid sticky messes that are much more difficult to clean afterwards. You should also note that if you transfer your food to serving dishes and immediately wash your pots and pans they will be much easier to clean than if the food is allowed to sit in them while your family dines.

My best friend is constantly burning her dinners. The reason? She believes in high or low when it comes to cooking and there is nothing in between. Very few meals should be cooked on high truth be told. You are much better off to begin the food preparation at a medium or medium high temperature and to adjust accordingly.

Make sure your oven is preheated. The temperature of the oven does indeed make a difference in the cooking process. While there are those that believe preheating is a simple waste of electricity it is what is required in order to achieve the optimal results when cooking. Most modern electric ovens will signal when the proper temperature has

been achieved.

Select recipes that fall within your comfort zone in order to avoid making mistakes or becoming too stressed about the cooking process. Once you've decided on your recipe read it through a couple of times in order to be certain that you not only understand all the steps involved but also have all the necessary ingredients before beginning.

Wash your hands thoroughly and wash your hands often. Remember the sink of sudsy water I mentioned above? You'll want to use it quite frequently in order to wash any surface, cutting board, plate, or utensil that has come into contact with raw meat in order to avoid cross contamination. The same holds true for your hands.

While to some degree these tips may seem a bit simplistic, when it comes to trouble free cooking there really is no such thing. The more you do to make the cooking process seem as effortless as possible the more trouble free your cooking will really be.