

Making Ripples

Solar Cooking with the All American Sun Oven

by Amanda Bancroft

August is hot enough to fry an egg. So why not use August to literally fry an egg? Or at least make a quiche. Or roast a chicken. With the All American Sun Oven, it's possible to bake, broil, roast, or slow cook just about anything up to around 400 degrees.

The All American Sun Oven costs about \$300 and up, depending on whether or not you purchase a kit with pots, cookie sheets and accessories. You don't need anything extra besides potholders, but black cookware is better than reflective cookware for efficiency. The All American model is a large black box with a tightly sealed glass door surrounded by reflective panels. It's almost entirely made in the USA and is user-friendly.

I've discovered that the easiest, fastest way to cook or bake is during the middle of a sunny day with the oven perfectly positioned (the oven includes a thermometer and alignment device for this purpose). It gets very hot around the oven door, including the clasps that seal the door tightly. A towel helps undo and redo the clasps when removing food from the oven.

You can even use a sun oven in winter; the temperature is less important than the amount of sunlight. There is certainly a learning curve, and some conveniences are gained while others are lost. For instance, you can't burn anything in a sun oven and no stirring is required, so it frees up one's time. However, to get the maximum temperature, adjusting the oven's position every twenty to thirty minutes is necessary, so you'll be dashing to and fro unless you don't need high heat and can put out the oven before leaving for work in a position that will ensure cooked food by dinner time. Placing the oven in such a way as to give it some sunlight at all times, and on-target sunlight during the middle of the day, accomplishes this task.

I have enjoyed baking cookies, muffins, cornbread, lasagna, rice and vegetarian curries in our sun oven. Baking in the sun oven keeps the products moist and doesn't dry them out or bake them unevenly. Here's a recipe for "northern style" gluten-free vegan cornbread baked in a sun oven:

Ingredients

1 cup milk of choice

2 teaspoons apple cider vinegar

1/3 cup Earth Balance spread

1/2 cup sugar

1/2 teaspoon vanilla

2/3 cup gluten-free cornmeal

1½ cup Bob's Red Mill All-Purpose Gluten-Free Flour

¾ teaspoon salt

2½ teaspoons baking powder

½ teaspoon baking soda

Set out the sun oven to preheat as early as possible. Add the vinegar to the milk and let sit 5 minutes. Combine all ingredients, adding the dry into the wet, mixing until just combined. Pour into black, non-reflective muffin cups or pie pans and bake at 350 degrees for about 30 minutes. Be sure to use a leveling tray for your oven to allow air flow on all sides. Cornbread is done when a toothpick inserted comes out clean. Eat it warm or within a few days. Enjoy!

Amanda Bancroft is a Master Naturalist and volunteers with her husband Ryan for their solar-powered online educational center on how to make a difference with everyday choices at: www.RipplesBlog.org.