

# Home & Heart



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**A**t the end of last summer, I was introduced to a new production model solar cooker. It is made to cook efficiently in the summer, and also in the winter, when the sun is lower in our sky.

## The Sunlight Cooker

The Sunlight Cooker came to me in a custom-made corrugated cardboard shipping box. It was well protected from dings and dents. The boxed unit was light enough that I had no problem carrying it.

There are three different models of the Sunlight Cooker. The Small is 16 by 13 by 13 inches, with the inside area 10.5 by 9.5 by 4.5 inches deep, sloping to 9.5 inches in back. It costs US\$239. The Medium is 19 by 15 by 16 inches, with the inside area 15 by 12.5 by 4.5 inches deep, sloping to 11.5 inches in back. It costs US\$279. The Large is 24 by 18 by 20 inches, with the inside area 19.5 by 17 by 4.5 inches deep, sloping to 13.5 inches in back. Its price is US\$349. I have the Medium model.

The cooker is a multiple-reflector style. This style is sometimes called the 30°/60° cooker. It was patented and popularized by solar pioneer Dan Halacy in the 1970s. The makers of the Sunlight Cooker worked with the Halacys many years ago. This cooker is made so that two different sides can become the bottom of the cooker, resulting in a choice of two different glass angles, 30 or 60 degrees. This allows the cooker to focus when the sun is either high or low in the sky.

The polished aluminum reflectors fold out easily and set up quickly. It takes me less than one minute to unfold and position the cooker for use. There are four main reflectors (top, bottom, right, and left). The right and left reflectors each have two additional wedge-shaped, piano-hinged reflectors attached to their sides. These slip into slots on the main reflectors, and are secured with Velcro tape on the non-reflective side. When folded for moving or storage, the hook-and-loop tape secures the reflectors closed on the unit. There is also a sturdy handle on the shortest side for easy carrying.

The oven box is made of 3/8 inch plywood covered with marine canvas. The material is used for many marine applications, and is UV and water resistant. With 1 1/2 inches of oven-type insulation, there is no danger of outgassing. The interior of the cooker is sheathed in sheet metal painted with high temperature flat black paint.

The wood-framed, glazed door is plate glass with a secure leather tab for a handle. If the inside paint is scratched or rubbed off, it is easily repainted. Since the door glazing is plate glass, it is also easily replaced if damaged.

There is an ingenious focusing target drawn on the outside of the cooking box. It corresponds with a small hole cut into one reflector. When the sunlight comes through the hole and hits the direct center of the target, the cooker is in perfect focus.

## Performance

I've used the Sunlight Cooker in winter and in summer, and I'm excited by its performance. It is sturdy and stable in a wind. This is an important point for me, since we live in a canyon with a mountain at one end and a lake at the other. The cooler upper air and warmer lower air act like a thermal flywheel. In short, the canyon is usually windy. Winter also brings shorter daylight hours in our canyon. I was able to utilize the 30°/60° feature of the cooker to my great satisfaction.

I have cooked the usual array of chickens, roasts, casseroles, and breads. I've found the Sunlight Cooker

**Kathleen's medium sized Sunlight Cooker.**



to be efficient, effective, and easy to use. No matter what the ambient temperature, if it's sunny, the Sunlight Cooker cooks. It takes about twenty minutes to preheat the cooker to 350°F. The temperature goes down some when I put the food in, but it rises again as it cooks.

In the winter, I did tend the cooker more carefully. I refocused the cooker about every hour, being careful to set it up so that the sun was always moving into focus, therefore getting hotter, not leaving full focus and getting cooler. We did not have much snow this year, so I never did cook in the snow.

This is a really swell solar cooker. It is easy to use and store, portable for long or short distances, and big enough to cook a family's meals. I really enjoy using the Sunlight Cooker. It is very well made and will last a long time. I feel it is well worth the price. The manufacturer has a great Web site with more pictures, and other products and background.

#### Accidental Cookware

Quite by accident I discovered some unique and effective solar cookware. My friend Lynne had given me a two quart heat-proof glass measuring bowl. It immediately became my favorite bowl. I use it for everything. It's big, it pours, it microwaves, it's easy to clean, it has a handle—I love it.

I could probably get rid of half of my mixing bowls now because I never use them. This would please Bob-O. He says I have way too much cooking equipment. I argue that these things are *my* tools. You have to have the right tool for the right job. I don't go through his tool box (heaven forbid!) and tell him he should get rid of two of the four 1/2 inch box-end wrenches he has. I haven't let any bowls go yet—I might need them.

April Fool's day was sunny and clear—perfect conditions to roast a whole chicken in the Sunlight Cooker. I had mixed up a marinade of sesame oil, White Zinfandel wine, Bragg Liquid Amino, black pepper, and garlic. I had the chicken and marinade in the two quart measuring bowl. When I wanted to pour the marinade over the chicken, all I had to do was hold the chicken in the bowl with a wooden spoon, pour the marinade into a small canning jar, and repour the marinade over the chicken. Short and sweet.

I was then struck by a scathingly brilliant idea. If I covered the top of the measuring bowl with microwave-proof plastic wrap, I could just roast the chicken in the bowl! By using the same method I used to marinate, I could easily baste the cooking chicken. Voila! Victory! Success!

Now I can mix and bake in the same bowl. I need another two-quart model, and a one-quart model of

these heat-proof glass measuring bowls. There are several brands available. Heat-proof glass measuring cups and bowls are sold all over. It is a common retail item in any cookware store and in a lot of other non-specialty stores.

Another type of glass solar cookware I have been using for years is Visionware. So I knew about the effectiveness of cooking in glass, tinted or clear. Visionware has the added attraction of having lids. I have used the amber and cranberry Visionware with equal success.

#### Just Solar Cook It!

Solar cooking season is here. Get out and do it! Experiment with recipes and cookware. Make your family a solar-cooked meal. It will turn out delicious more often than not. You'll be surprised at how easy it is.

#### Access

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