

## Energy-Saving Tips for Cooking

By Nancy Reigel

In the February 1 edition of Mountain Keeping, Nancy Spann shared some “easy-to-do” tips for making our homes more energy efficient, more “green.”

This week we will focus on one significant daily activity, cooking, and share some of what we learned from the Consumer Guide to Home Energy Savings (their list of tips can be found at <http://www.aceee.org/consumerguide/cooking.htm#top>) as well as some wise tips from others.

- Size Counts - Fit the size to the task. Rule of thumb, small is better!
  - If possible, fit the oven size to the task. For small- to medium-sized meals consider using smaller microwave ovens, toaster ovens, or slow-cook crock-pots.
  - As with the oven size, use the smallest pan that works for the task.
  - Now that you have downsized the pan, make sure it is on the right-sized burner -- big burner + small pan = lots of energy wasted.
- Fit Counts – Fit the shape of the pans to the cook surface you are using. Flat element cook surfaces such as electric burners, solid disk elements and ceramic under glass call for flat-bottomed cookware so there is good contact between the two.
- Smart Oven Habits Count
  - Keep preheat time to a minimum. Despite recipe instructions, most foods other than bread and pastries do not require that the oven be preheated at all.
  - Kick the peeping habit. Every time you open the oven door, heat (energy) bellows out.
  - Let the air roam free – it improves the efficiency and food takes less time to cook. That means:
    - No foil on racks
    - Stagger pans on the racks to allow better airflow
- Smart Cooking Habits Count
  - Use a crock-pot for long simmering soups or stews.
  - Defrost frozen foods before you start cooking them. Let fresh air not dirty fossil fuel do that chore.
  - Cook more at once. Cook enough for two meals and freeze the second portion. Still takes less energy overall and saves some of the work for you as well!
  - Don't cook longer than the dish needs. Use thermometers, timers, etc.
  - Keep the lid on the pan and save up to three times the energy. Unless your recipe calls for an open pan, close it up. Otherwise, just as from an opened oven door, the heat (energy) just bellows out.
  - Use “energy efficient” pans. Glass and ceramic pans allow you to turn the temperature down by about 25°F without changing the cooking time or results.
  - When using a microwave oven, try cooking foods right in their serving dishes. Saves time and dishes, and dishwashing and dishwashing water!
- Clean Counts

- Keep the inside surface of your microwave oven clean. Spills will absorb energy waves just as readily as the cooking food.
- Clean and shine those burner pans (the metal pans under the burners that catch grease). Shiny means they reflect more heat up to the cookware.

So there we have a few straightforward ways to be more energy efficient as we cook. My bet is that we have but scratched the surface and that you, the wise readers of this column, have many other clever and choice “cooks secrets” you could share. So we say... “send them on!!” We’ll compile them and either publish them as another article or include them as sidebars as we share other “green living” tips. Just mail them to MountainKeepers, PO Box 21, Boone, NC 28607 and join us to “green”!