

A SOLAR COOKING DAY

The day opens bright without much cloud. So, it is time to take the covers off the solar cookers at about 8.30 a.m.. The kids are very keen to volunteer for the job because mom has promised them something special today. The aluminum covers are, in fact, all-weather covers that protect the solar box cookers from rain and shine, and an occasional cricket ball, when they are not cooking.



The cover needs the help of two pairs of little hands to be lifted. It is better to familiarize the younger generation at the earliest about the benefits of solar cooking because these will be the ones that will face the shortages of conventional fuels. So, I seek their active involvement in the solar cooking venture.



Once the outer cover is removed, the glass top of the solar cooker is opened, and any condensation that has settled on the glass during the night is wiped off. The solar box cooker the children are holding has approximately 1m × 1m glass top.



The children put some water in the solar cooking vessels for disinfection by boiling.

A hot place like Tiruchirapalli needs a lot of clean disinfected drinking water. What best way there is to get clean disinfected water other than to use the solar energy?



The children are off to school and the solar cook (that is Mrs. Bennet) steps into the picture. Well, what is she going to cook today? The usual fare of course: rice and dal.



The rice and dal have been well soaked from the morning so that they will cook faster.

She has to get the lunch ready before one o'clock. Otherwise, she will have to contend with two hungry kids from the school.



But wait! That is not all that she is going to cook. She has a surprise for the children!

Aha, looks like there are two cakes also. This shows the versatility of the solar box cooker. You can cook a variety of dishes using the same box cooker.



Yummy, these cakes look delicious even before they are cooked!



Clear blue sky and bright sunshine! A wonderful day for solar cooking. The solar cook closes the solar box cookers with the blackened vessels inside. No need to worry about gas flames, overcooking and sweating it out in the kitchen.



Time moves on. It is 12.30 p.m. The cooking goes on inside the solar box cookers.

No flames! No electricity! Only thing needed is, plenty of sunshine.



Time to check the status of the food. Then to give the finishing touches to the food, like frying or the final addition of spices if necessary. That is the only time the solar cook has to use the conventional fuels.



The tell-tale sign of good solar cooking is the appearance of condensed water vapour near the edges of the glass top.



Can you see the drops of water ?



The solar cooker is opened and the solar cook checks the rice. The rice has cooked well. It is fluffy ! No trace of the rice sticking together. There is no trace of overcooking.

But the vessel is hot. Real hot! That is why the solar cook needs mittens to protect her hands.



The dal is well cooked too!



See! All the water has been absorbed during the cooking and no water is left behind after the rice and dal are cooked.



Now to the cakes. They look delicious. But there is no browned crust. There is no burnt layer near the cake tin also. Even the butter paper used is not charred. This is the advantage of solar baking.



Again, the solar cook removes the cakes from the solar cooker using mittens. The temperature inside the solar cooker can get very high when all the water inside has evaporated. Hence, all precautions must be taken to prevent bad burns to the skin.



The solar cook is one happy woman at the end of the solar cooking session. The children are sure to enjoy the surprise cakes she has baked for them along with her routine cooking. She certainly did not sweat it out in a conventional kitchen to make these delicious items.



**THAT IS ALL FOLKS AT THE END OF A SUNNY DAY.
WHY DON'T YOU TRY YOURSELF.**