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NEWS RELEASE

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Pressure Cooking Saves Energy

I received a phone call from a lady, recently, suggesting that I write an article about using a pressure cooker. She said she was using her pressure cooker to save energy. She was very excited about the idea. That is actually a great idea! Foods cook about 3 to 10 times faster in a pressure cooker than with ordinary cooking methods.

You can save as much as \$325 per year if you cook under pressure regularly. For example, according to Robin McKenzie of Kuhn Rikon, manufacturers of pressure cookers, a whole chicken cooked in the oven for 1½ hours costs \$0.90 in an electric oven, \$0.17 in a gas oven, \$0.08 using the pressure cooker on an electric stove, and \$0.04 using the pressure cooker on a gas stove. The savings can be as high as \$0.86. Now, that might not sound like much. However, these savings can add up. At my house, for example, we prepare chicken at least once a week. My yearly savings on cooking chicken alone could be \$44.72. Note: the energy calculations are based on actual hourly rates for California provided by Pacific Gas and Electric Company. Energy costs may vary in other areas of the state.

Pressure cooking has been around for a long time. The pressure cooker was invented over 300 years ago. Today's cooks have probably replaced this method of cooking with the microwave and convenience foods. I know that when I went looking for my pressure cooker it took me awhile to "dig it out" from the back of my cupboard. I hadn't used it in quite awhile.

Many people have told me that they are afraid of a pressure cooker. They tell me stories about how they tried to use a pressure cooker and it exploded! Most of those people were "new brides" many years ago. I assure them that pressure cookers have many safety features, which prevent pressure build up to that point.

Pressure cookers have pressure regulators, which controls and maintains pressure inside the cooker and indicates when the desired cooking pressure is reached. They have vent pipes that allow excess pressure to be released. They have an air vent cover that locks and automatically exhausts air. When the pressure begins to build, it slides up, causing the lock pin to lock the cover on. They have sealing rings that form a pressure-tight seal between the cover and the pressure cooker body during cooking. And, they have an over pressure plug which automatically releases pressure in case the vent pipe becomes clogged and pressure cannot be released normally. So, if you follow the manufacturers directions, you should have no trouble using your pressure cooker.

Follow the manufacturer's directions for securing the cooker lid, developing pressure, and maintaining pressure. Begin timing the food once the recommended pressure is reached. A good quality timer is a must as it's important to time the recipes accurately to avoid over cooking. Cool the pressure down adhering to the instructions.

You can use the pressure cooker to prepare a wide variety of foods in healthful ways. Be sure to still trim the excess fat from meats and try to have all the pieces about the same size for more even cooking. Since fish contains little fat and muscle, it cooks very quickly. Allow two minutes per inch of thickness on low pressure (220°F).

The pressure cooker is ideal for vegetables. Colors remain brilliant, nutrients are retained, and flavors become more intense. Prepare the vegetables in uniform sizes for best results and be careful not to cook them too long.

For really quick cooking of dried beans, peas and lentils, the pressure cooker quickly soaks them in two minutes under steam as compared to over night at room temperature. After rinsing, and an additional 10 to 20 minutes of high pressure cooking (250°F), the beans are ready to serve or use in chili, stews or soups.

Sources: Column, Nancy Feldman
Presto Pressure Cooking Information Center
Kuhn Rikon, Switzerland

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