



OPB OREGON PUBLIC BROADCASTING

HOME
NEWSROOM
INSIDE OPB
SUPPORT OPB

LIVE RADIO
SEARCH

OPB NEWSROOM

JOIN / RENEW

Last updated 6:41AM PST September 17, 2004

Top Stories | [OPB News](#) | [US](#) | [World](#) | [Business](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Science](#)

Arts | [Reuters News](#) | [Sports](#) | [Learning](#) | [Weather](#)

Advanced Search

OPB News

[Harnessing the Sun for Dinner](#)

By Gretchen Lehmann

CANYON CITY, OR 2004-09-16 (Oregon Considered) - When you talk about cooking outdoors, you usually mean grilling in the backyard or roasting food over a campfire. But for one Central Oregon woman, cooking outdoors means baking in a solar oven.



Over the last few years, Jennifer Barker has become a solar cooking guru of sorts writing her own solar oven cookbooks and leading classes on cooking with the sun. Gretchen Lehmann visited Barker and her husband Lance at their home south of John Day.

You couldn't get more outdoors than Jennifer and Lance Barker's home on the edge of the Malheur National Forest. They live in a small solar-powered house and grow most of their own food. When it comes to cooking, Jennifer relies primarily on a woodstove and her solar oven.

On this late summer day it's raining, so Jennifer's got a back-up plan.

Jennifer Barker: On days when the sun doesn't shine or I don't get it together early enough in the day, I cook on this two burner Coleman camp stove.
 Gretchen Lehmann: What do we have here?
 Barker: We have pasta sauce in one pot and water for the pasta in the other pot.

GL: Let's say today had been a nice sunny day. What would you have made today?
 Barker: I might have cooked a baked risotto; I bake it instead of stirring it for hours on a stovetop because a solar cooker bakes like an oven. Or alternatively you can cook anything that you can cook in a slow cooker.

GL: So it's not fast food.
 Barker: It's not fast food it's slow food. And some people say the long slow process in the sunshine develops the natural sugars in the food, therefore it's healthier and better for you.

OPB News

[Making Music at the Old Library Studio](#)

[Man-Made Logjams May be Answer to Washouts](#)

[Senate Approves Lewis & Clark National Historic Park](#)

[Primary System Key Issue in Secretary of State Race](#)

[Harnessing the Sun for Dinner](#)

US

[Poll Finds Bush Lead Surging Among Likely Voters](#)

[U.S. Report to Say No WMD Found in Iraq](#)

[Bush Unveils Intel Plan, Falls Short of 9/11 Panel](#)

World

[Darfur Rebels Expect to Take Talks Decision Friday](#)

[S.Korea Says There Was No Big Blast in N.Korea](#)

[Suicide Car Bomber Kills at Least 13 in Baghdad](#)

On OPB Radio

[Morning Edition](#)

[All Things Considered](#)

On OPB TV

[History Detectives](#)

OPB Original Production. Mondays at 9-10pm, OPB TV.

LINKS






[Feedback](#)

healthier and better for you.

Jennifer Barker does most of her solar cooking in two stoves that sit in a small clearing about 100 feet from her house. Here the stoves can be in full sunlight. That's important because solar ovens don't store energy, like solar water heaters or solar panels; they depend on the sun actually being out.

Jennifer Barker: This is a solar chef and this cooker is no longer being made, but it was made in Grant Pass. This cooker has got glass mirrors not only a work of art, but it reflects the sun it intensifies the sun very well with the glass mirrors so gets to a hotter temperature than any other cooker. I've burned a few cakes in here. It has an octagonal glass dome at the center with a handle on it and you can use the handle to take the dome off and put the food on the shelf inside.

Barker has baked raisin spice bread, bean casseroles and chocolate-mint ricotta mousse in her solar cookers. Her husband Lance is the I can barely boil water type, but says the solar ovens are very forgiving.

Lance Barker: Yeah it's really handy for heating leftovers in the sun oven. Because I'm kind of an inattentive cook, but I can put the leftovers in a casserole and aim it at where the sun will be at lunchtime. Then if I'm working on something when I get hungry the leftovers will be hot, and if I don't remember the sun kind of goes by and they don't burn up like on the stove.

Jennifer Barker: I do something at least 5 or 6 days a week for dinner in my solar cookers in the summer.

Gretchen Lehmann: Is there anything you thought, this is never gonna work but I'm gonna try it?

Barker: Yeah, actually, the first time I put brownies in the solar cooker on a partly cloudy day, I thought there's not enough sun to cook these. And I discovered brownies bake great even if there's marginal sun. And since the denser they are the better they taste it doesn't matter if they take a long time to bake and they kind of fall in the process.

Gretchen Lehmann: So you're in the woods, you've chosen a lifestyle where you're cooking like this, you're living off grid. What about somebody who lives in the heart of Portland or the middle of Salem?

Jennifer Barker- You know when I first started solar cooking, I went back to Seattle to visit a place I used to work. And I found that my former boss Joanne had joined Solar Cookers International and she had gotten a box cooker and put it on her front lawn in Seattle with what we used to fondly call in Girl Scouts a hobos meal--the kind of meal we used to wrap in foil and throw in the coals I think it's like a chicken leg a carrot and potatoes. She would put that in a cooking bag into her solar cooker on her front lawn in Seattle and her dinner would be there when she got home.

Jennifer Barker admits the hobos meal wouldn't cook on a cloudy day, but she says you could still bake something in a solar oven in late December.

Jennifer Barker: At the winter solstice when we had a sunny day just to see if I could, I put some soup something I call red soup (it's kind of a borscht with a lot of chunks in it) into my solar chef cooker and I actually got it cooked on December 21st.

[Jennifer's Solar Cookery Page](#)

[Solar Cookers International](#)

© Copyright 2004, OPB

Download the free



[email article](#)



[print article](#)