

Solar Brunch Guide

for the Big Blue Sun Museum of Solar Cooking*

Since 2018 we've been working our way up to frequently hosting a "Solar Saturday Brunch" in our backyard, lounging about our "dock." The idea is to expose as many neighbors as possible to solar cooking, while building community in general. I'd urge all with a yen for solar cooking to give these get-togethers a try. It's a small but effective way of spreading the word about this solution to deforestation, preventing of violence in refugee camps near war zones, and reducing pollution/keeping carbon where it belongs.

The challenge we have in Minnesota, anyone in the north central states and provinces of North America can tell you, is that we live in "The Variety Weather Belt". It could almost be called a Random Weather Zone, as there is no consistent set of weather conditions from one day, or even one hour, to the next. You who live in Albuquerque or San Diego or in the "sun rich" countries might have more consistent weather forecasts and can plan perhaps a week or longer in advance for your solar get-togethers. For Minneapolis, we can't in good conscience send an invitation for a Saturday until the Thursday before--the kind of short notice most people resent when it involves a party or family milestone event. So after my first two brunches we figured we'd better put together a "Fine Sun Print" statement after the signature block, to explain that we know it's short notice, but that's the nature of the solar cooking business :) We call it the "Brigadoon Clause" and hope that people put extra value on the serendipitous nature of solar cooking in the center of the continent.

With that said, the following are a few simple steps we take to assure our Solar Brunches are successful. And don't give up if only one person shows up--that's one more person who can spread the word about the energy independence, the simplicity, and the world-changing mission of solar cooking.

** The "Big Blue Sun" is the bright blue (most tell me it's purple) house we own in south Minneapolis. It's on the third combination of shades of blue paint since we moved here in 1991. Blue: Because Jo's Grandma Teigen, on a winter walk through Ashland Wisconsin 50+ years ago, asked Jo, "Don't you think blue houses look good in snow?" And we get plenty of sun in the winter, so it looks fantastic half of each Minnesota year. Looks great in the summer too! Museum: Because we've accumulated over fifty cookers since Luther got the solar cooking bug in 2004.*



Solar Brunch Tip #1:

Have as many types of cookers for guests to use--Not just for display!

There's nothing like seeing a contraption in action. It may look like it was devised by Rube Goldberg, but if it works, people will accept it.

Not everyone is as maniacal about solar cooking as me, so you may only have your one or two favorite cookers. If you'd like to organize a Solar Brunch, we'd encourage you to acquire the other types of cookers you don't have in your garden shed. Here are just a few commercially available:

Panel Cookers: Cookit, Hot Pot, Copenhagen, All-Season, SunFlair--many DIY designs are online..

Box Cookers: Sun Oven, Solar Oven Society/Solavore Sport, Sun Cook. The Halacy 30/60 box cooker's plans are yours for buying the book "Cooking With the Sun", a few dollars worth of plywood, glue, screws, aluminum foil.

Parabolic Reflector Cookers: Sunplicity, SK-14, SolSource Sport. "Cooking With The Sun" includes plans for a parabolic cooker made just with plywood and aluminum foil or aluminized mylar.

Vacuum Tube Cookers: GoSun Go-Grill, Sport or Fusion, Himin Solar Kitchen/BBQ. Many solar cookers around the world buy their own vacuum tubes and construct their own simply tube cookers.

Fresnel Lens Cookers: If you're adventurous and have some practice with them, a fresnel *lens* cooker will demonstrate the immense power of sunlight much like a parabolic cooker. A rather expensive one, custom-built for each order, is available through California Sunlight in Sacramento. GreenPowerScience.com includes several videos showing how to cook with an improvised frame for the lens and a platform for a pot or pan.

But don't wait to build up your collection: If you only have one or two cookers, but enough sunny space on your property for more, reach out to your network of fellow cookers to borrow more--especially to add to the variety of cookers your guests can choose to try out with their own recipes.



Solar Brunch Tip #2: Let your guests do the cooking!

Encourage guests to bring their own entree, desert, or snack to cook. We've had people bring everything from already-cooked-frozen egg rolls to a very fancy lamb roast. Youngsters brought eggs laid by their own urban chickens to fry! And everyone loves a fresh-baked dessert, we never lack for cakes and cookies at our brunches.

There's no reason to delay some hands-on learning for those unfamiliar with solar cooking. The best museums out there let patrons touch everything, rather than set up things in sterile glass cubes with threatening signage.



Solar Brunch Tip #3: Keep everything outside!

That means utensils, spices, cutting mats, prep tables, etc. The gift of solar energy means you can cook while you tend to your garden, do yard projects, putz around in the garage... Why go inside for everything when you can enjoy the fresh air and end up with a great meal with friends? The one brunch I had to prepare a dish inside, it threw my whole rhythm off, not to mention the delay in getting it into the right cooker and the risk of a dish already out there overcooking or scorching.

I built several 2'x4' 40" high carts to hold our most-used cookers and utensils. It takes no more than 10 minutes to deploy enough cookers to keep your guests busy and your docent giving a thorough museum tour.



Urgent note! Solar cooking isn't just for summer time! Although the above picture was taken on a particular warm day, it was in March with a near-record amount of snowfall on our garden. Yet over the course of the brunch a dozen neighbors, friends and relatives stopped by to cook and eat.

Solar Brunch Tip #4: Use thermometers!

I know--Joe Radabaugh and many other forepersons of solar cooking advise against using thermometers. And most who cook solar on a regular basis pay *less and less attention* to the thermometer inside the box cooker or the infrared thermometer reading the temp of the surface of the wok in the parabolic cooker frame.

But for the uninitiated, having a standard oven thermometer showing serious heat is a reassuring visual. I still put an oven thermometer in any new box cooker I get, and an infrared thermometer is great for parabolics or fresnel lens cookers insofar as you can tell when a lightly overcast or hazy sky is still letting enough wattage through to cook.



This DIY through-the-wall box cooker hits nearly 300° F--it is the first cooker my guests see when they enter the museum from the alley. If I set something out early enough, they'll smell the stew, cake, or beans cooking away.

Solar Brunch Tip #5:

Invite everyone! There is nothing like the breaking of bread, especially fresh baked *pan del sol*.

Our first brunch invitations went to our inner circle of friends, neighbors and relatives, but has since expanded to NextDoor, broadcast to our neighborhood of about 20x15 city blocks. We've also posted on the humble Minnesota Solar Cookers Group FaceBook page. The narrow window for invitations and the exotic nature (to most people) of the event means we've never been overwhelmed with visitors. Over time we hope to network with sol-cialists across Minnesota.

The following is my standard broadcast invitation, patterned after Jo's brother Nathaniel's monthly brunches. As a teacher and community activist, he held brunches with monthly topics and presenters for fellow educators, neighbors, and friends. For those who've asked to get emailed notices, I include my address and phone #. For social media postings I ask to be "messed" though I'm not squeamish about including my email address:

You're invited to our next "Sun Brunch" May 25 2019, 10am to 2pm or as late as you'd like to cook! Message me for directions to "The Big Blue Sun Museum of Solar Cooking"!

Come to the back gate by our garage or if coming from the front of our house, slide on by the north side to reach our "dock" :)

"Are kids welcome?" YES! Bring family and friends, anyone interested in one of the best ways to cook without fossil fuels, and learn of other benefits that solar cooking holds for the planet.

"Can I bring my own food to cook?" ABSOLUTELY! We'll put it in the best solar cooker for the job--our "museum" has over 50 cookers you can try out.

"Why the short notice?" No offense intended, you aren't getting a late notice, it's always just gotta follow the forecast for sun a couple days out :) See our "Brigadoon Clause" below.

"Hey you aren't using those evil plastic ware forks, spoons, plates, right?" Nope, we dine in solar style, with durable Corelle dishes, real silverware, glasses, coffee/tea cups. And we try to be as waste free as possible.

"I came last time, what's new?" The Solar Oven Society's "Sport" box cooker, with its green pedigree (body made from recycled pop bottles!) will be the featured cooker, we'll have two on hand to bake anything you like... And our favorite cooker from France--the SUNplicity Freedom parabolic cooker, will make entree after entree and maybe even dessert. As always we hope to set out a few more cookers from the Museum's Archives!!

Still in the dark and want more information? Email me at kruegerian@gmail.com !



Solar Brunch Tip #6: Relax! Everything will be all right :)

Clouds roll in? Hopefully you've got your own food cooking by the time your neighbors arrive, and even if it starts to cloud over in the middle of your brunch, a parabolic or two having prepared some appetizers will show the power of sunlight--especially in contrast to the absence thereof! If it looks like the clouds get stubborn and take their time moving out of the way of the sun, place the already cooking dishes into a retained heat or "hay box" cooker.

If people bring their own fixings, dough, and ingredients, let them do the mixing, moulding, folding, spicing etc., as if they are in their own kitchen. They'll feel right at home!



Solar Brunch miscellantous notes:

** The "Brigadoon Clause": If we lived in Albuquerque or Tuscon, we could easily schedule a solar cooking demo two weeks or even months out, but we live in the "Variety Weather Belt" so short notice is par for the course for scheduling solar cooking in Minnesota. For any other event such a short notice would be a faux pas, but it's the nature of the beast for solar stuff here... So for Minneapolis, I can't in good conscience send an invitation for a Saturday until the Thursday before and the only if the forecast is 90%+ sure to include sun. Even at that, we could get skunked by rogue clouds...I know, it's the kind of short notice most people resent when it involves a party or family milestone event. Please consider this the cordial "Fine Sun Print" statement, to explain that I know it's short notice, but that's the nature of the solar cooking business ... Or better to think of it as having stumbled upon Brigadoon, that fabled town that only appears once every hundred years--and all the more valued for the brief time it exists :)

