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Reducing your kitchen 'cookprint'

The new push in living a greener lifestyle is being more energy-conscious in the kitchen

By Jill Rosen

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Lore Rosenthal doesn't buy plastic bags anymore. Or paper napkins. Or fancy packaging when she can help it.

She doesn't use her dishwasher or a big burner on her stove when a smaller one will do.

She's aware of how long the water streams from her faucet. And how long the heat pumps from the oven.

Rosenthal, a sign-language interpreter from Greenbelt, just wants to live as green as she can.

"I am striving for a sustainable lifestyle," she says. "I want to reduce my carbon footprint and my ecological footprint."

Just as they pushed Americans to buy organic and to shop locally, environmentalists are now urging people to try to reduce their "cookprint," or the strain they put on the planet each time they prepare a meal.

"Consider how you cook your food, the type of energy, the amount of fuel consumed, the amount of water you use - the amount of fuel and water you waste," writes Kate Heyhoe in *Cooking Green*. "In places and times where fuel is scarce, people never take fuel consumption for granted. Neither should we."

Heyhoe and author of other recently released guides to greening our kitchens, recommend hundreds of ways we can be more efficient when we cook.

Some are small and almost effortless - saving leftovers in glass containers rather than plastic containers or bags, frying with energy-efficient skilletts or trying bulgur instead of rice because it cooks quicker.

Other tips require more effort or initial expense - things like using a convection oven instead of a traditional one or opting for a crockpot when possible.

Even restaurants are realizing there are steps they can take that don't at all affect the quality of the food.

At Dogwood in Hampden, a restaurant that strives for sustainability by using local ingredients when possible, Chef Galen Sampson says he's on his staff about turning off lights and burners.

"I'm constantly yelling at them about that," Sampson says.

Rosenthal, who co-founded the Simplicity Matters Earth Institute (www.simplicity-matters.org), a group dedicated to helping people lead more sustainable lives, says the changes she's made haven't been difficult or expensive.

"It really doesn't take anything new. It just takes a different approach to using what you have," she says. "It's just mindfulness."

Things like microwaving water for tea or using a hot water pot instead of turning on the stove. Things like parboiling vegetables in the microwave. Things like soaking dishes in the sink and using the dishwasher as merely a drying rack.

"We're just so used to doing things the way we're used to doing them," Rosenthal says. "Once you doing things in the new way, you'll find it's actually more convenient."

Simplicity Matters organizes discussion groups in the Baltimore/D.C. area where people talk about ways to raise their environmental consciousness. The group's "Menu for the Future" discussion circle specifically works on food and sustainability issues.

Cooking Green fills chapters on ways to be more efficient when cooking with your stove or oven, cookware that's more efficient, and types of food to buy that are actually easier on the planet to cook.

Here are a few ideas to try at home that the book offers:

- Set your refrigerator between 37 to 40 degrees to cool sufficiently without wasting electricity.
- A convection oven cooks 25 to 30 percent quicker than a traditional oven.
- Run your dishwasher at midnight instead of during peak hours.
- Skip the garbage disposal and try composting instead.
- Use "passive boiling" whenever possible. Don't boil pasta or potatoes as long as a recipe calls for. Boiled water takes a long time to cool. Turn off the burner soon after you hit a boil, put a lid on the pot, and the "cooking" will be done fuel-free.

Looks Like Greek To Me Salad

Makes: 6 servings

1 cup whole-wheat orzo

3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

juice and zest of 1/2 large lemon or to taste (about 2 tablespoons juice)

3/4 teaspoon sea salt, or to taste

2 cups baby arugula or fresh baby spinach leaves

6 ounces organic or locally produced feta or soft goat cheese, crumbled (about 1 1/2 cups; optional)

2 scallions, green and white parts, thinly sliced

1 cup grape tomatoes, halved lengthwise

1/2 cup chopped fresh herbs, such as mixture of basil, flat-leaf parsley and mint

1/3 cup finely diced unpeeled hothouse cucumber or celery

1/4 cup raw pine nuts

Add the orzo and 3 cups water to a small saucepan. Bring to a boil over high heat. Cover and turn off the heat. Let "lid cook" (cook covered while the burner is off) until the orzo is al dente, about 7 minutes. Drain well. Do not rinse. Meanwhile, whisk together the oil, lemon juice and salt in a large bowl.

Add the hot, drained orzo to the lemon dressing and toss. Set aside to cool slightly, about 30 minutes, stirring occasionally to help prevent sticking. Then chill in the refrigerator. When the orzo is at room temperature or cooler, add the arugula, cheese if using, scallions, tomatoes, herbs and cucumber and gently tossy. Stir in the lemon zest. Taste and adjust seasonings if necessary. Sprinkle with pine nuts. Serve at room temperature.

Nutrition information: Per serving: 152 calories, 10 grams fat, 2 grams saturated fat, 0 milligrams cholesterol, 4 grams protein, 13 grams carbohydrate, 2 grams fiber, 295 milligrams sodium

From "Big Green Cookbook," by Jackie Newgent

Chicken Curry for One

Makes: 1 serving

1 thick slice of onion, coarsely chopped

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

1 garlic clove, finely chopped

2 thin slices of peeled fresh ginger, finely chopped

a small pinch each of ground cumin, ground cilantro, black mustard seeds and fenugreek

chile powder or dried chile flakes to taste

1 teaspoon cornstarch

1 tablespoon Greek yogurt, or yogurt with active cultures, plus extra to serve

8 to 9 ounces skinless, boneless chicken, in chunks or strips

fresh cilantro leaves, chopped to serve

Put the onion in a deep bowl with the vegetable oil and toss them together. Microwave at full power for 1 minute, then add the garlic and ginger and microwave again for 1 minute. Stir in the spices and cook for another 30 seconds.

Mix the cornstarch into the spice mixture, then the yogurt, then the chicken. Microwave at full power for 4 to 5 minutes, stirring after every minute.

Serve with extra yogurt and the chopped cilantro.

Nutrition information: Per serving: 534 calories, 33 grams fat, 5 grams saturated fat, 127 milligrams cholesterol, 47 grams protein, 9 grams carbohydrate, 1 grams fiber, 120 milligrams sodium *From "The Green Kitchen," by Richard Ehrlich*

Feta Pesto and 2-Minute Pasta

Makes: 3 to 4 servings

2 cloves garlic

1 cup fresh flat-leaf parsley, tough lower stems removed

1/2 cup shelled walnut halves or pieces

1 cup crumbled feta (divided use)

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

1/2 teaspoon coarsely ground black pepper

2 teaspoons white or red wine vinegar

2 teaspoons salt

12 ounces dried spaghetti

If using a hand blender or small food processor, finely chop the garlic. Add the parsley and coarsely chop. Add the walnuts and chop until grainy. Add 1/2 cup of the feta and all of the oil. Process just until the mixture turns to a coarse paste.

Pulse in the pepper just until combined. Set aside, and stir in the vinegar just before tossing with the pasta (to prevent discoloration.)

Fill a large pot with about 5 quarts of water and the salt. Cover and bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Stir in the spaghetti until completely submerged. Partially cover and cook two minutes, making sure the water doesn't boil over. Stir again to mix up the pasta. Cover, turn off the heat, and let stand until al dente, 8 minutes. (Remove the pot from an electric burner so it doesn't boil over from residual heat.)

Taste to see if the pasta is al dente. If not, allow another 1 to 2 minutes. Scoop out the pasta to drain.

When the pasta is mostly drained, toss with the pesto. If the mixture seems dry, mix in a spoonful of the pasta cooking water. Serve warm or at room temperature, passing remaining 1/2 cup feta on the side.

Nutrition information: Per serving: 608 calories, 32 grams fat, 9 grams saturated fat, 33 milligrams cholesterol, 18 grams protein, 64 grams carbohydrate, 5 grams fiber, 1592 milligrams sodium
From "Cooking Green," by Kate HeyHoe

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