

## one last word

*No oven, no grill ...  
No Problem*

by Ming Xu and Angie Morfeld  
photograph by Scott Myers

You've heard the old saying, "It's hot enough to fry an egg on the sidewalk!" As you prepare for the 2013 camping season, the Missouri Department of Natural Resources' Division of Energy challenges you to put this old adage to the test, sort of.

"Make your campouts a little different this year by incorporating solar cooking," said Llona Weiss, director of the division. "Whether you utilize a commercial or homemade cooker, you'll enjoy easy, fuel-free cooking using a renewable energy source."

The benefits of solar cooking are abundant. First, food generally tastes better when cooked by the sun's natural heat. The temperature within a solar cooker rises slowly and more evenly, preventing overcooking and allowing the food time to release its natural flavors. In addition, because there is no air movement with solar cookers as there is with conventional ovens, food tends to stay moist and tender. Since solar cooking doesn't require electricity or conventional fuels like propane or wood, it is pollution free. You can bake, boil or steam any kind of food by harnessing the power of the sun, without hurting the environment. Best of all, it's a fun, personal or family activity.

"Solar cooking offers a wonderful learning opportunity, especially for kids," said Doug Dunn, a maintenance worker with the department.

Dunn started solar cooking three years ago with his Boy Scout troop and has done demonstrations at the department's Earth Day celebration, the Missouri State Fair and other events. He views it as a reliable cooking source, even during low temperatures or when the use of an open flame is neither practical nor safe.

"During the 2012 drought, many camping areas banned the use of traditional campfires," Weiss said. "You will never have that problem with solar cooking. It can be used in any circumstance. All you need is strong sunlight."

Dunn agrees, "The first time I baked cookies in a solar oven was in the fall, and the tempera-



**Doug Dunn, a DNR General Services employee, prepares chocolate chip cookies on his solar cooker. Although it was a cool April morning, ample sunshine provided more than enough heat.**

ture was 38 degrees. The cookies baked just the same as they would on a warmer day."

A variety of commercial solar cookers are available, ranging from less than \$20 to more than \$300. You also can build one with aluminum foil and cardboard, which allows you to experiment with solar cooking without a big investment.

Dunn reminds solar cooks to think safety first. "Always remember to wear sunglasses and use pot holders to protect yourself when cooking with the sun."

The following links provide more information about creating your own, inexpensive solar cookers: [solarcooking.wikia.com/wiki/Category:Solar\\_cooker\\_plans](http://solarcooking.wikia.com/wiki/Category:Solar_cooker_plans), and; [www1.eere.energy.gov/education/pdfs/solar\\_oven.pdf](http://www1.eere.energy.gov/education/pdfs/solar_oven.pdf).

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*Ming Xu is an energy specialist and Angie Morfeld is a public information coordinator with the department's Division of Energy.*