As the temperatures outside increase, the desire to cook decreases. This isn’t due to a lack of wanting to cook, but rather the need to keep your house as cool as possible. Keeping cool in the kitchen doesn’t mean you have to limit yourself to cold sandwiches every meal. You can still provide your family with tasty, healthful meals without heating up the home. Consider the variety of cooking appliances available to us these days. Here are just a few to choose from.

**Rice steamer** – This appliance makes perfect rice every time without excess heat to fog up your kitchen.

**Slow cooker** – It is not just for soups and stews. Slow cookers are great for recipes that typically take a long time to prepare. Did you know you can do lasagna or a small turkey in a crock pot?

**Microwave** – Just about anything can be cooked in a microwave in much less time than conventional cooking. Find the recipe book that came with your microwave and try a new technique. Be sure to follow recipes exactly in order to avoid overcooked, dry food. This versatile appliance can be used to bake potatoes, cook a roast and vegetables or bake a low-fat, healthy dessert.

**Electric skillet** – This appliance is oftentimes larger than your regular skillet. Several servings of food can be prepared at one time, and you can use this to double up on meals so you just have to reheat on another day. You won’t add heat to your kitchen and you can finish your meal preparation in no time.

**Wok** – Foods cook quickly and at high temperatures with this appliance. Since foods cook faster, your risk of raising the temperature of your kitchen is much less. There are woks for the stove top and also electric stand-alone styles. You can make similar meals using a normal skillet, too.

**Pressure cooker** – This is not used as often these days, but it can be used to cook a meal in less time. As a result of this cooking method, there is less heat generated and, therefore, less heat noted in the kitchen.

**Other tips for summer cooking and a “cool” kitchen**

- Prepare meals earlier in the day. Plan for the majority of your cooking to be done in the early morning while it is still cool. Once items are prepared, allow them to cool and then place them in the refrigerator to add other items to when it is mealtime. Reheat in the microwave.
- Fire up the grill. Meat, vegetables and fruits can all go on the grill, so you can make a balanced meal. Consider cooking extra meat for use in meals later on in the week.
- Pack a packet. Making individual foil packets is a great way to please everyone at dinner time. If you want fish but everyone else wants chicken, it’s easy to do, without creating a big clean-up. It’s also a perfect way to cook low-fat meals in general. The food is essentially steamed, which makes for moist and succulent meat or fish. Place each family member’s choice of entree in the center of their own 12-inch by 18-inch sheet of foil wrap. Top with condiments and toppings of their choice – say, some salsa, black beans and sweet corn, or tomatoes, olives and herbs, or simply a brush of olive oil, a squeeze of lemon and assorted vegetables. Seal the foil packets by folding the top edge and sides, leaving enough room inside the packet for air to circulate. Grill for about 45 minutes over medium heat, turning each packet once. Be careful when unsealing the foil packets as the escaping steam will be very hot. Prepare some whole grain rice or couscous to accompany the meal, and an almost mess-free dinner is served.
- Don’t forget to drink plenty of water as always, too.
Fruit burritos  
Makes 4 servings  
• 1 banana, halved lengthwise  
• ½ c. Splenda  
• 1 c. strawberries, sliced  
• 2 (10-inch) flour tortillas  
• ½ c. pineapple tidbits  
• Nonstick cooking spray  

Instructions: Place strawberries and pineapple in a small bowl. Add Splenda and gently stir to combine. Coat tortilla with cooking spray. Place a slice of banana on each tortilla. Spoon the berry mixture over the banana and gently roll the tortillas into a burrito. Fasten with 1 or 2 toothpicks. Grill burritos on medium for 3-5 minutes, or until tortilla is browned. Serve immediately.  

Nutritional information per serving: Calories: 120; total fat: 2 g; saturated fat: 0.5 g; sodium: 135 mg; carbohydrates: 25 g; dietary fiber: 2 g  

Vegetable casserole  
Makes 8 servings  
• 1 lb. whole baby carrots  
• 1 small onion, chopped  
• 2 tomatoes, chopped  
• 1 Tbsp sugar  
• 2 c. celery, cut in 1-inch pieces  
• ½ tsp Mrs. Dash or other sodium-free seasoning  
• 1 (10 oz.) pkg frozen green beans  
• 2 Tbsp tapioca  
• 1 small green pepper, chopped  
• 2 Tbsp light margarine  

Instructions: Combine all ingredients in a crock pot. Cook on low for 6 hours.  

Nutritional information per serving: Calories: 80; total fat: 2 g; saturated fat: <0.5 g; sodium: 85 mg; carbohydrates: 14 g; dietary fiber: 4 g.  

Pork chop supper  
Makes 4 servings  
• Nonstick cooking spray  
• 4 medium carrots, pared and cut up  
• 4 pork chops, tenderloin, lean (4-5 oz. each)  
• 1 small onion, chopped  
• ½ c. reduced sodium chicken broth  
• 4 small potatoes, pared and quartered  

Instructions: Season chops with ¼ tsp salt, a dash of pepper and garlic powder. Brown on both sides in pan sprayed with cooking spray. Place in 4-quart pressure pan. Add broth. Place vegetables atop chops. Sprinkle with additional pepper, garlic powder and/or other sodium-free seasoning (such as Mrs. Dash). Close cover securely. Cook 10 minutes at 15 pounds pressure. Cool quickly under cold running water. Remove chops and vegetables to serving platter.  

Nutritional information per serving: Calories: 360; total fat: 6 g; saturated fat: 2.5 g; sodium: 190 mg; carbohydrates: 33 g; dietary fiber: 6 g.  

Get on your bike – burn calories, not money!  
Biking is fun! Consider adding this great form of exercise to your weekly fitness routine. Biking can help improve your health and burn calories. Also, since it is a weight-supported activity, it is a good starter exercise that is easy on the joints. At a modest pace of 10 miles per hour, a 160-pound person can burn about 300 calories during a 45-minute ride. Bike three times per week at this pace and you could potentially lose 13 pounds during one year. Additionally, biking tones muscles, increases endurance and improves lung capacity. This activity can be social, or a great outing for the whole family. So, grab your helmet and start peddling this summer!!