

Handy Tools for Easy Plant-Based Cooking

By Kay Bushnell

Handy kitchen tools make cooking fun and easy. A good quality chef's knife, a slicing knife, and a paring knife are basic tools, along with a good knife sharpener. Also, a blender may be a cook's best helper. Blenders produce smoothies in seconds, remove the lumps from gravies and sauces, and puree soups. While food processors are nice to have and are a great boon when cooking in quantity, many cooks find that they can chop an onion or two in less time than with a food processor. It takes time to wash and put away the parts of the processor. A microwave oven can cook food quickly as well as warm food up, although many feel that there is a noticeable difference in the flavor and texture of microwaved food. The *Vegan Microwave Cookbook* by Chef Nancy Berkoff, R.D. is a new cookbook with all plant-based recipes.

Slow cookers that cook while you are asleep or at work can save hours of time. Some busy cooks use them regularly. My preference for speedy cooking is the pressure cooker. It is my second favorite appliance (after the blender) for making cooking easy. I use my Swiss-made 7-liter Kuhn Rikon Duromatic pressure cooker frequently. There are many good pressure cookers to choose from, including a stand-alone electric made by Farberware. All can produce richly-flavored and complex dishes in a fraction of stove-top cooking time.

Pressure cookers today are much improved over those that were popular in the 1950s and are extremely safe. Today's modern, energy-efficient, state-of-the-art pressure cookers can produce outstanding soups, vegetable stews, bean dishes, and steamed puddings as well as fluffy rice and grains. For example, giant artichokes become soft and tender in a mere 18 minutes of pressure cooking.

As with most quality cookware, good pressure cookers can be costly. However, this appliance lasts a lifetime. For wonderful recipes and everything you need to know about pressure cooking, consult *Great Vegetarian Cooking Under Pressure* by Lorna Sass.

Split pea soup is a universal favorite that tastes good in both winter and summer. Cooks can save about 45 minutes of cooking time by using a pressure cooker rather than simmering the soup on top of the stove. Bringing the contents up to pressure takes just a few minutes. After a mere 9-10 minutes of cooking at pressure the soup is ready to eat, steaming hot and full of exquisite flavor. The following recipe makes a large quantity of soup. Leftovers freeze well. For a smaller amount of soup, halve the recipe. What can be easier than a meal of this nourishing split pea soup, a steaming baked potato, a salad from the garden, fresh bread, and a dessert of seasonal fruit? The soup is also wonderful for breakfast with some whole grain muffins and fresh fruit.
