

Haybox Cooking

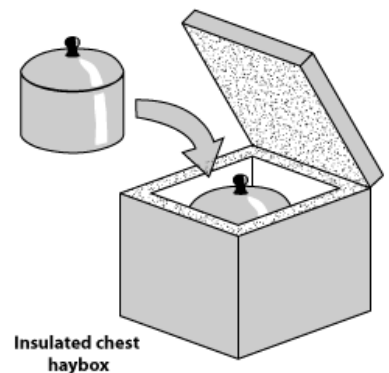
Haybox cooking, or retained-heat cooking, is an age-old slow cooking method used to conserve energy, both in fuel and labor. Working off thermodynamic principles, food is brought to a boil, simmered for a few minutes then put into a well insulated box where it will continue to cook slowly for hours. Since the insulated haybox cooker prevents most of the heat in the food from escaping into the surrounding environment, no additional energy is needed to complete the cooking process. While cooking time takes about twice as long as stovetop cooking, haybox cooking can save between 20% and 80% of the energy normally needed. Your pot only needs to remain on the stove for a quarter of the time needed in conventional cooking. Haybox cooking also prevents food from boiling over, overcooking, sticking to the bottom or burning. Food turns out perfectly cooked every time.

Quick Facts

- Green Technology – uses less energy therefore generates less pollution
- Reduces up to 80% of energy costs used in stovetop cooking
- Cuts up to 75% of labor
- Healthier meals since nutrients aren't lost through evaporation
- Don't need to use as much water since it won't be lost in evaporation
- Keeps food warm for up to 8 hours – no energy spent in reheating!
- Can also be used as a cooler for short periods of time

Make Your Own Haybox

The box itself can easily be made of inexpensive, locally available materials. It can be constructed out of wood, or you can use an old tea chest or even just a sturdy cardboard box. If you use wood, it's better to not to use particle board because of potential toxins – untreated woods are best. The haybox should be made to fit your largest pot, allowing for at least 3 inches on each interior side for insulation. The best pots have securely fitting lids and side handles for easy lifting from the hay box.



Insulating the Haybox

Traditionally, hay was used as insulation (thus the name), but has the disadvantage of needing to be replaced periodically. Contemporary hayboxes work well by lining the interior (and the inside of the box lid) with 3 inch thick rigid Polystyrene foam boards. They can be easily attached into the inside of the box using a silicone glue. For even better heat retention, cover the polystyrene insulation with heat radiant material like silver Mylar or heavy duty aluminum foil, which can also be glued or stapled to the polystyrene. Be aware that materials used must be able to withstand temperatures up to 212 °F without melting. It's also a good idea to put little strips of wood on the inside bottom to keep the hot pots directly off the insulation. Of course, you can always go the natural route and use hay.





Using Your Haybox

There are a range of foods that cook well in a haybox, including soups, stews, sauces, puddings, rices and stocks. The haybox may also be used to keep pots of food warm, to make yogurt, or to keep food cold for short periods of time. For cooking, bring the contents of your pot to a boil, covered. Then open the haybox and place the pot inside, closing the haybox lid to prevent heat from escaping. Remember, the less space there is around the pot, the less heat will be lost; for smaller pots, fill small jars with hot tap water tap or use towels to reduce air space between the pot and the insulation. Cooking will continue at a little below simmering point!

Important! All beans, especially red beans, should be boiled on a stove for at least 20 minutes prior to placing in haybox to ensure that the toxic antitrypsins are destroyed.

Care and Maintenance of Your Haybox

Taking care of your haybox is easy – just make sure to keep it dry. Using the reflective Mylar or aluminum foil makes cleaning spills simple, but if you prefer to use organic materials like hay, remove them frequently and either replace or allow them to dry out in the sun. You can leave your haybox out on the kitchen counter for convenience or store it away when not in use. Hopefully, you'll be using it often enough to make it a permanent fixture in your green kitchen. Happy cooking!

Sourcing Materials from Local Suppliers

All materials needed for your haybox can be found locally, either new or reused! Here are your best bets locally for reusable and recycled materials:

Ohio University Campus Recycling	(740) 593-0231
Athens County Recycling	(740) 797-4208
New to You Shoppe	(740) 592-1842
ReUse Industries	(740) 594-5103
ReUse Thrift Store	(740) 698-8200
APAC Bargain Furniture Store	(740) 797-2608

For Further Reading

Hay Box: How to and Description, Lost Valley Education Center, 2006.
www.lostvalley.org/haybox1.html

The Hay Box. Moscow Foods Co-op, 2006.
www.moscowfood.cooplarchive/hay_box

The Haybox: Why Every Household Needs One. Talking Leaves, 2006.
www.talkingleaves.org/s03haybox.htm

Rediscover The Hay-Box Cooker. Mother Earth News, 2006.
www.motherearthnews.com/library/1980_January_February/Rediscover_the_Hay_Box_Cooker

Retained Heat Cooking. Solar Cooking, 2006.
www.solarcooking.org/ret-heat.htm

Safe Slow Cooking. Ellen's Kitchen, 2006.
www.ellenskitchen.com/faqs/safecrock.html

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