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Deborah Rhoades, MA, RD

Extension Educator, Family & Consumer Sciences

TOO HOT TO COOK!

Are you avoiding the kitchen? Does the thought of preparing dinner seem even more of an effort than usual? Does the idea of heating the oven confirm that it's just too hot to cook? Well, carryout is an option, but here are some healthy "meals in minutes" suggestions.

#1. Concentrate on what can be done quickly on top of the stove or in an electric skillet! Preparation time is short for a stir-fry, and just a little extra heat is added to the temperature of the kitchen. If your garden, or better yet, your neighbors, is at its peak for summer squash and tomatoes, start out with a small amount of oil (2 teaspoons) in a non-stick skillet, add onion then add your squash, perhaps some leftover corn from last night's corn on the cob, a handful of snap beans and stir fry until tender crisp. Top your dish with cherry tomatoes, and you have a quick meal with little effort. Specific recipes follow, but the above suggestion is to illustrate that *You're the Chef!* Be bold, be creative as you utilize what you have on hand.

#2. Do not forget the grill! Get the heat out of the kitchen and onto the patio. For a quick easy summer super with little effort, slice some tomatoes drizzle with some balsamic vinegar and a tablespoon of olive oil, snip some fresh herbs – oregano, basil or even parsley and set aside at room temperature while you take the meat to the grill. Remember to keep food safety in mind. Bring the meat platter back to the kitchen for a thorough washing before returning it to the grill for the cooked meat, fish or poultry. Add a mixed green salad and a whole, grain bread and another quick summer meal is ready to serve.

#3. Make weekend meals count! Plan ahead to best utilize your weekend cooking. If a roast chicken or turkey, roast beef or steak, or grilled fish is on the menu, keep "planned overs" in mind. Prepare enough of the main dish to add to meals later in the week. Certainly grilled meats or fish added to a salad would be healthy and delicious, but you probably have some family favorites that would make a quick and easy meal.

#4. Its summertime, so now is definitely the time to capitalize on all the fresh fruits and vegetables while they are at their peak. Some of us can make a meal out of corn on the cob! If that not the case for you, then add some grilled chicken and honeydew soup. It is a cool, refreshing start to a summer dinner or serve it for dessert.

Enjoy these recipes for some healthy meals in minutes, because *it is too hot to cook!*

FRESH BASIL, TOMATO AND ONION SALAD

4 lettuce leaves
4 small ripe tomatoes, cored and thinly sliced
2 slices sweet red onion, separated into rings
2 tablespoons snipped fresh basil
1/4 cup Italian salad dressing
Fresh basil (optional)

Line four salad plates with lettuce. Arrange tomato slices and onion rings on lettuce. Sprinkle with chopped basil; drizzle with dressing. Garnish with additional fresh basil if desired.

GRILLED CITRUS CHICKEN AND VEGETABLES

4 skinless, boneless chicken breast halves
Citrus Spice marinade
1 medium orange, sliced
1 small sweet onion, cut into 1/2-inch slices
1 small eggplant, cut crosswise into 1-inch strips
1 large red sweet pepper, cut into 1-inch strips
1 medium zucchini or summer squash, quartered lengthwise
Salt and Pepper (optional)

Rinse chicken; pat dry with paper towels. Place in plastic bag set in a shallow dish; add 1 cup Citrus-Spice Marinade and the orange slices. Refrigerate remaining marinade. Seal bag; turn to coat. Marinate in the refrigerator for 6 to 24 hours, turning bag occasionally.

Remove chicken from bag, discard marinade. Place chicken and vegetables on the rack of an uncovered grill directly over medium coals. Grill chicken for 12 to 15 minutes or until tender and no longer pink, turning and brushing with the remaining marinade halfway through grilling. Grill vegetables for 8 to 10 minutes or until tender brushing occasionally with the marinade. Season with salt and pepper, if desired. Makes 4 servings.

CITRUS SPICE MARINADE

3/4 cup orange juice
1/4 cup lemon juice
1 tablespoon cooking oil
2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
2 cloves garlic; minced
3/4 teaspoon ground cumin
1/2 teaspoon onion powder
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon pepper

Combine ingredients in a screw top jar. Cover and shake well.

MINTY HONEYDEW SOUP

4 cups cubed honeydew melon (1 large melon)
1 to 2 tablespoons honey*
2 tablespoons chopped mint
1 tablespoon lemon or limejuice

In food processor or blender, combine all ingredients. Process until smooth. Serve chilled.

*Depending upon the ripeness of the honeydew, you may adjust the added honey.

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Deborah Rhoades, MA, RD, LDN, is a licensed Registered Dietitian and Extension Educator in Family and Consumer Sciences.

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