

Too hot to cook?



Delicious, low-effort recipes can deliver mealtime satisfaction and healthy nutrition—without heating up your house or your body.

by Elizabeth Yarnell, ND, CLT

What's the secret to preparing healthy, tasty meals in the heat of summer without making your kitchen—or your body—feel scorched? Don't be afraid to let some common appliances and prepackaged foods do the work for you.

Cool confections

Try this sweet, healthy [watermelon-mint granita recipe](#) to cool off in the heat of summer.

Blending in

Consider the common blender. Sure, you've probably used it to whip up frothy drinks or smoothies in the summer, but you can also put your blender to good use making cold soups out of fresh produce. Try making a cold melon soup by blending cantaloupe with almond milk on low speed, along with a dash of cinnamon and nutmeg.

For a refreshingly creamy, cold cucumber soup with a bite, blend 1 English or other seedless cucumber with 1 pitted ripe avocado, ½ cup ice, 1 tablespoon white vinegar, ½ teaspoon of Asian wasabi powder (or substitute horseradish), and ½ teaspoon sea salt. Adjust the amount

of wasabi and salt to taste, pour into four shallow bowls and top with chopped chives.

Gazpacho, another summertime favorite, comes together as easily as tossing veggies into a blender. While traditional gazpacho usually includes a base of tomatoes, garlic, salt and pepper, almost any other vegetable is fair game. Kale, cucumbers, carrots, celery, bell peppers, onions—whatever you have on hand can go into the pitcher. Switch the blender on until you like the texture—gazpacho can run the gamut from chunky to smooth, depending on personal taste—and serve in bowls or mugs.

Cold gazpacho soup

Try this slightly spicy [gazpacho recipe](#), packed full of vegetables.

Don't overlook other kitchen appliances that could be pressed into service to prepare easy and deliciously healthy meals without heating up the house. Broil fish in a toaster oven; grill chicken on an electric indoor grill; stew vegetables and meats at low heat in a crockpot; or steam grains, vegetables and meats in an electric rice steamer. Little appliances can do big jobs without generating a lot of heat in your home.

Package deals

Prepackaged foods may cost a bit more but can save time and reduce heat generated by preparation. For example, a piece of salmon pulled from the fridge, whether smoked, cured or poached, can be a cool addition to a chopped salad or cabbage slaw. Purchase prepared salmon in vacuum-sealed packs from your grocer's cooler or from the fish counter; then, all that's left to do is open it and flake it onto your salad, or serve it with crispy rice crackers, diced red onion and a couple teaspoons of capers.

Craving pasta salad, but don't want to heat up the house boiling water? Use this energy-saving method of cooking noodles and the stove will only be on for a few minutes rather than the half-hour or more usually needed for cooking pasta:

Fill a pot with about half as much water as you would normally use, add a tablespoon of salt, cover with a lid and bring to a rapid boil. Add the pasta (penne, fusilli or rigatoni are good for salads), return the water to a boil, stir, and then cover and turn off the heat on the stove. Stir again a few minutes later and re-cover. The pasta should cook completely in 20 minutes or less. (Test it intermittently so it doesn't overcook.) Drain and rinse the noodles, and then place them in the fridge to chill until you are ready to toss the salad together.

Once the pasta is chilled, try adding cans of drained and rinsed beans, jarred artichoke hearts, grape tomatoes, thawed frozen organic green peas, or jarred roasted red peppers to add color, nutrition and interest without extra prep work. Toss it all together with your favorite Italian marinade or pesto from the supermarket.

If you're keen to make your own pesto, remember that it doesn't have to be made exclusively from basil. You can create a delicious pesto with a bunch of washed spinach or kale leaves, a handful of fresh basil leaves, a cup or so of shelled pistachios or walnuts, a couple cloves of peeled garlic, and olive oil, pulsed together in a food processor until it reaches the consistency of paste.

And pestos aren't only for dressing pasta. Slather some on a tortilla along with creamy goat cheese, roll it up and cut it into rings for a fun finger-food meal or snack. Or layer pesto onto deli-sliced roast beef on bread with sliced tomatoes for a summery sandwich that helps you stay full—and stay cool.

Elizabeth Yarnell, ND, CLT, is the author of the best-selling cookbook, *Glorious One-Pot Meals*. Connect with her at ElizabethYarnell.com.

Do you have favorite no-cook recipes? Share them on MSconnection.org.