

SOLAR COOKING ARCHIVE: THE NEXT GENERATION

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ABSTRACT

The Solar Cooking Archive (“Archive”) is the most comprehensive solar cooking Web site in existence, and the preeminent Internet resource for solar cooker news, construction plans, articles, etc. Though the Archive is quite useful as-is, there is always room for improvement. The author would like to take this opportunity to brainstorm with this knowledgeable group of solar cooking promoters and develop some future goals for the Archive.

Keywords: solar, cooking, archive, web, site, internet, resource.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since its launch over a decade ago, the Solar Cooking Archive, on the Internet at <http://solarcooking.org>, has been visited nearly 2 million times. As the number and diversity of site visitors (“visitors”) grows, so does the need for additional content. However, as the content grows, the ease with which site visitors can quickly access pertinent information declines.

The author proposes to lead a discussion of interested parties that would generally review the content, organization and functionality of the Archive, and specifically look at ideas for site organization and new content that will be useful in the future. Two relatively recent examples of new content on the Archive are audio interviews with solar cooking promoters, and human-translated mini-sites in a number of non-English languages.

Questions to be addressed include: How can current and future content be organized to facilitate quick access? What current content is most useful? What future content is needed? Who is interested in helping

to develop new content? Given that Solar Cookers International (SCI) has limited time and resources, what are the most important next steps?

The author would also like to acknowledge the extraordinary work of Tom Sponheim, creator and Webmaster of the Archive. He has been an active volunteer in solar cooker promotion for over 15 years. He remains dedicated to improving people's lives through solar cooking education.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 What is Archive content?

Broadly speaking, content — as it is referred to here — is the information available to the end user of the Archive. It comes in many forms: text/html files, audio files, video files, etc. This content can reside on the Archive (“resident files”) or outside the Archive (“external files”). An advantage to resident files is their relative permanency; they are available until the Webmaster decides to remove them. External files, on the other hand, are available only through links and can be altered or removed whenever the owner chooses. The Archive, having a mixture of resident and external files, serves as both a portal to — and repository of — content.

2.2 Where does Archive content come from?

Archive content comes from a variety of sources. Much of it is submitted to the Webmaster from solar cooker promoters and users across the globe. Some of it was discovered by happenstance or through Internet news services. A small portion of it is authored and maintained by SCI — notably, the International Directory of Solar Cooking Promoters, and the *Solar Cooker Review* and *SuNews* newsletters.

The Solar Cooking Archive
Sponsored by Solar Cookers International

- **Featured**
Newsletter - November 2005
2006 Conference in Spain
SCI seeks new Exec. Director
- **Plans**
Box-style
Panel
Parabolic
- **Documents**
Frequently-Asked Questions
Newsletters
General Information
Technical Information
Country Reports
Water Pasteurization
Retained-Heat Cooking
Food Drying
- **Translated Mini-Sites**
Contenido en Español
Conteúdo em Português
Contenu en Français
Contingut en Català
- **Multimedia**
Photo Gallery
Slideshow
Audio and Video
- **Resources**
International Directory
Manufacturers
Supplies
Recipes
Books
Links
- **Discussion**
How to join the discussion
Message archives

What you can do!
Solar cooking online survey
Topics needing research

The Latest News
(Items marked with **NE**)

- Extensive Japanese
- Coffee fans buzzing
- New French recipes
- Video interviews with Ovens International
- Environmental Studies World Congress on and sustainable living
- New French plans [Les plans comple disponibles](#)

Donate Now!

Fig. 1 Solar Cooking Archive homepage

2.3 How is Archive content organized?

Archive content is broadly organized into seven categories, accessible directly from the homepage (Fig. 1). These categories are as follows: Featured, Plans, Documents, Translated Mini-Sites, Multimedia, Resources, and Discussion. Each of these is divided into anywhere from two to eight sub-categories, as described below.

Featured - Content that is timely and of special significance either to the solar cooking community as a whole or to SCI specifically. Content in this section varies over time, but always contains, at a minimum, links to Solar Cooking News and Additions, and to the current edition of the *Solar Cooker Review* newsletter. (The most current “news” items and site additions are viewable directly on the homepage — see Fig. 1.)

Plans - Solar cooker construction plans, grouped by general cooker type: Box-style, Panel, or Parabolic.

Documents - A wide variety of documents and publications, grouped into the following sub-categories: Frequently-Asked Questions, Newsletters,

General Information, Technical Information, Country Reports, Water Pasteurization, Retained-Heat Cooking, and Food Drying. This section houses much of the information on the Archive, and can also be the most daunting.

Translated Mini-Sites - Human-translated, abridged versions of the Archive. At this time the represented languages are Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Catalan.

Multimedia - Audiovisual resources, grouped by media type: Photo Gallery, Slideshow, or Audio and Video. (At this time, the “slideshow” is a single slideshow, not a collection of them.)

Resources - Promoters, suppliers, and other materials of use to solar cooks. Links to external solar cooking resources on the Internet are also provided here. The subcategories are as follows: International Directory, Manufacturers, Supplies, Recipes, Books, and Links.

Discussion - Information about joining the solar cooking e-mail discussion group and accessing past discussion group archives.

3. REVIEW OF CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION

The Archive has grown significantly over the years, and will continue to do so. Now, more than a decade after its launch, is a good time to assess this growth: Is the content easily navigated? Is the content accurate? Is the content current? (Does it have to be?) What content is most useful? The author looks to you, the site end-users (and content providers), to help answer these questions.

3.1 Organization

The author would suggest that the organization of the Archive is useful, and has served the site well, but could be improved upon. A number of factors inform the design of a logical organizational scheme, and the broad purpose and diverse audience of the Archive make this difficult. Ideas will be discussed and your input solicited.

3.2 Content

As for content, the author is of the opinion that the Archive contains many excellent documents and files, though some of them are quite outdated and/or somewhat inaccurate. The quality of the content varies dramatically given that it comes from hundreds of sources. How important is quality control, and who determines what is good?

From the author's vantage point, some of the best — or at least most useful — content includes the newsletters, the solar cooker construction plans, and the international directory of promoters, as well as a number of documents on specific topics listed in the "Documents" section of the Archive. Usefulness, however, is subjective and closely tied to audience. For instance, the "Recipes" section is extremely useful to solar cooks, but perhaps less useful to journalists.

As stated earlier, the purpose of the Archive has always been quite broad and general; it exists to provide its visitors with comprehensive information about solar cookers, solar cooking and related skills and technologies. The audience is made up of, but not limited to, the following: solar cooks and potential solar cooks, solar cooking promoters and advocates, current and potential solar cooking project leaders, researchers, teachers and students, and journalists. Does the Archive fulfill its purpose and meet the needs of its audiences? How can it be made better?

4. IDEAS FOR SITE ORGANIZATION AND NEW CONTENT

4.1 Organization

There are any number of ways the Archive could be organized. In its current form, content is broadly organized into seven categories (listed earlier), and further divided into subcategories. This approach seems logical, and is quite common across many Web sites. Are the categories and subcategories logical, given the purpose and audiences listed above? How can content be better organized to facilitate quick access? It may be that the current organizational scheme works fine and doesn't need any changing. What ideas do you have?

One idea the author has is to restructure the "Documents" category. This category contains a wealth of information that could be divided into *beginner* and *advanced* content. In this way, beginners could easily access basic information without being overwhelmed. Advanced content could be further divided according to a detailed categorization scheme such as this:

Solar Cookers

- Benefits of solar cooking
- Design of solar cookers
- Types of solar cookers
 - Box
 - Curved concentrator
 - Panel
 - Institutional
 - Other
- Science of solar cookers
- Performance testing and standards
- Pots
- Solar recipes
- Other uses of solar cookers

Related/compatible technologies

- Solar dryers/dehydrators
- Heat-retention cookers
- Fuel-efficient cookers

Water

- Solar cookers as water pasteurizers
- Other solar water pasteurization devices
- Water pasteurization indicators (WAPIs)
- Other solar water treatments
- Water-borne pathogens
- Water testing

Teaching

- Workshops/Demonstrations
- Academic

Promotion

- Solar cooking history
- Solar cooker projects

Planning
Funding
Examples
Solar cookers businesses
 Business plans
 Business financing
 Business marketing
Advocacy
Publicity

A system like this would help direct visitors to content that more specifically addresses their needs. Content addressing several of these topics could be easily cross-referenced with links. However, classifying content in this manner would be more labor intensive, as well as subjective. (Visitors that know exactly what they are looking for can always use the site search feature.)

4.2 Content

At times the author is overwhelmed by the amount of information on the Archive. Yet, the author often finds himself daydreaming of exciting new possibilities. (At least the author thinks they're exciting!) What additional content would be helpful to you? What file types and formats work best to communicate ideas?

Here are a few ideas the author has come up with for new content on the Archive. (Some are more realistic than others.) What would you add or subtract from this list?

Mini-sites for manufacturers and sellers of solar cookers (expanding upon what is already listed in the "Manufacturers" section). Or, possibly even a full-blown solar cooker marketplace.

Mini-sites for solar cooking promoters and project leaders, whereby they can periodically update information about their work, post pictures, etc. (Primarily for those who don't currently have Web sites.)

Instructional videos and PowerPoint-type presentations, downloadable for use at conferences, events, etc. Topics could include such things as:

- Why solar cook
- How solar cookers work
- Types of solar cookers
- Construction steps for building and using a variety of solar cookers

Virtual decision-making tools for assessing project potential, including variables like climate, fuel availability, and income.

5. CONCLUSION

Though sponsored and maintained by SCI, the Solar Cooking Archive is a resource for everyone. It would not be what it is today without input and content from you, the end users of the site. If you haven't done so already, the author encourages you to spend some time using the Archive and to provide feedback as to its usefulness and ways it can be improved. The author also encourages you to think about what else you can contribute, in terms of content and/or time, to help make the Archive even better.