

GreyGreen (SE) Ltd

Kitchen and bedroom design, and installation

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GreyGreen - Steam Ovens

Training Manager at Miele's Experience Centre, Nicky Youngjohns explains the benefits of steam cooking.

Steam cooking has been around for thousands of years. It's a method steeped in tradition, with some believing that prehistoric man used steam as a cooking method before fire was discovered. The popularity of cooking with steam continues to spread around the world with a growth rate of 60% year-on-year yet many consumers are still unaware of the full capabilities.

Understanding steam cooking

The principle of using steam is simple. Instead of being immersed in water, as in conventional cooking, food is placed in a container over boiling water. Hot steam rises and passes through perforations in the container base. This accesses the food and transfers heat from all sides. Because the food is not immersed in liquid, colours do not leach out, so vitamins and nutrients, essential to the human body, are retained. And, because the natural flavour is retained, there is no need to use fat or add salt and seasoning. The finished result is food, which tastes terrific and can be enjoyed in its most natural state. With this, there are obvious health benefits and with the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition recommending no more than six grams of salt intake per day, steam is the simplest way to achieving a healthier diet without compromising on taste.

Replacement for microwaves

Most consumers love the idea of steam cooking, but there's a common misconception that you can only cook fish and vegetables. So when they are faced with the price tag they are often put off. In reality a steam oven can do virtually everything a microwave can, apart from baked potato because of the water content - oh and microwavable popcorn! Although using the steam oven will take slightly longer than a microwave, the results are far better. Unlike microwave cooking the quantity of food inside a steam oven makes no difference to the total cooking time, for example, one boiled egg will take the same amount of time as 12!

Steam ovens are a great way of cooking soup, pate, mousse, casseroles, stews, curries, chill con came, spaghetti bolognaise, rice, pasta, pulses and fruit compote, to name a few. And for those who like to indulge a little, a steam oven can also create delicious, flavourful puddings such as, creme caramel and creme brulee, not to mention the very best syrup sponge and spotted dick! And that's not all, the steam oven will do lots of other jobs; you can reheat dinners, melt chocolate, blanch or even use it as a sterilizer. The steamer is also a great way of ensuring barbequed food is cooked thoroughly. By pre-steaming chicken at 75°C for four minutes bacteria is killed, so there is no need to overcook or even burn your food. Although unlike cooking in a steam oven the latter comes down to the cook!

In addition, unlike cooking on a hob, once the food is in the steam oven there is no monitoring to be done, no extractor hood to switch on and the kitchen is left cool and comfortable, which is ideal for the growing trend of open-plan living spaces.

Sorting out steamers

So what's on offer? There are numerous steamers on the market, including:

Table Top Tower Systems

This comprises a tower of containers with perforated casing, where the food is placed. Water is added at the bottom of the tower and heated. As the water gains heat, steam is transferred through the container to the food.

Because food is left sitting during the generating stage it cannot be sealed so some of the nutrition and colour will be lost. It is also a slower process with carrots taking around 15 minutes compared to just six to eight minutes in an injection steamer

Steam/Sauna effect

Available as both built-in and freestanding appliances, many manufacturers use a heating mechanism through the floor cavity, within their steamers. A plate situated at the base of the oven is heated and water is dripped from a tube onto the heat to create a steam effect. Again because the food is being gradually steamed the food is not sealed and nutrients are left to escape.

Injection Steam

Food cooked in an injection steam oven is a true delight. Not only is the intensive, natural flavour maintained, but it's also the quickest way to steam your food reducing times by up to 50% compared to other steaming methods.

Miele's steam oven works differently to others in the market. It has an external generator situated outside the cavity in a separate compartment. A heater element in the water tank heats the water, and steam is injected into the cavity at exactly the right point. The rapid transfer of heat together with automatic controls, ensure that cooking times are kept short and food is instantly sealed, locking in colour, flavours and vitamins and textures. What's more, because the food is sealed there is no transfer of tastes. So you can cook your kippers and fruit or curry and treacle pudding at the same time.

Simple to fit

Installation is even made easy. Because the steam is contained with-in the cavity, all heating is done within the product so there is no need for ventilation. A steam oven can simply be built into a wall unit and with plumbed in versions, connected to the mains supply. Although, manufacturers do recommend to store the oven above chest height, simply to keep out of the reach of young children.

Steam ovens are an ideal choice for those who enjoy eating healthily and for those who simply value speed, convenience and great tasting food every time. They are a perfect partner to a hob and oven and whether you are cooking individual side dishes or a complete menu, there is virtually no limit to what can be cooked in a steam oven.