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FAVORITE HEALTHY SUMMER MEALS

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With the temperatures rising, the idea of cooking dinner over a hot stove or heating up an already hot house with a 350-degree oven makes even the healthiest of eaters reach for the closest take out menu. Instead stock your fridge and pantry with an arsenal of ingredients that can be combined to feed your family a healthy, satisfying meal all without turning up the heat in the kitchen.

Kitchen tools such as Crock Pots, woks and electric frying pans are perfect for those warm summer nights. Add a few chicken breasts and bottle of low-sugar salsa to the crockpot, and enjoy delicious chicken tacos only hours later. Simply shred the chicken using two forks or a kitchen aide mixer, then add them to your favorite whole grain tortillas topped with fresh cilantro and avocado.

A wok or electric frying pan can be used to whip up a healthy stir-fry. Slice fresh vegetables such as red and yellow bells peppers, zucchini, mushrooms and onions and toss them in to cook with a small amount of healthy fat, such as avocado oil. Keep it heavy on the vegetables by substituting cauliflower "rice" for the regular stuff, and add in a healthy protein like chicken, shrimp or pre-cooked chicken sausage.

Speaking of essential summer kitchen tools, don't forget the most basic of them all: a cutting board and knife. A quick summer salad keeps things cool while providing a multitude of important vitamins and minerals. Keep fresh chopped lettuce, cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers and carrots on hand to throw together for lunch or dinner. You can also utilize fresh berries and pears to add sweetness and extra nutrients. Dress it up with a healthy vinaigrette and chopped nuts for a boost of healthy fat.

Outside grilling is always a favorite summer activity as it allows the house to stay cool at dinnertime. Colorful shish kebabs are both delicious and healthy. Create beautiful patterns with chicken, steak, shrimp and a variety of vegetables such as zucchini, squash, red onion, sweet potatoes and bell peppers. You can even add fresh pineapple for a hint of sweetness and it's tenderizing properties thanks to the enzyme, Bromelian.

Keep these dinners on your weekly menu and your summer meals will be healthy and delicious without causing you to break a sweat.

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Delicious Meat Marinade

Source: www.melskitchencafe.com

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 pounds meat (chicken, beef, pork), preferably in pieces, like chicken breasts, steaks, pork chops, or thin pork tenderloins
- 4 tablespoons fresh lemon juice (from about 2-3 lemons)
- 1 cup soy sauce (I always use low-sodium) OR ½ cup soy sauce and ½ cup pineapple juice (see note)
- 2 cloves garlic, finely minced
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon freshly grated ginger (or ginger paste) or 1 teaspoon dried ginger
- 1 tablespoon onion powder
- ½ teaspoon pepper

DIRECTIONS:

Place the meat in a shallow dish or Ziploc bag.

In a medium bowl or liquid measuring cup, whisk together the lemon juice, soy sauce, garlic, olive oil, ginger, onion powder and pepper.

Pour the marinade over the meat to cover. Refrigerate for 8-12 hours (or up to two days).

Grill the meat, discarding excess marinade, until cooked through (exact time will depend on the cut of the meat and temperature of your grill). Let the meat rest for 10-15 minutes before serving to seal in the juices.