

Better Living

Advantages of microwave cooking

By JOANNE FALLS
Home Economics Extension Agent

Cooking with microwaves has several advantages, but the most important is speed. It saves cooking time, clean-up time and allows you to cook frozen food in record time.

In addition, it is convenient to use and can contribute significantly to saving energy. It is especially helpful in cooking individual foods.

If you are planning to buy a microwave oven, these are some basic facts that you should know.

Microwave cooking is a matter of heat transfer from the source to the food. There are three methods of transfer: Conduction, convection and radiation. Conduction is direct transfer from one surface to another, as from cooktop to utensil to food. Convection is the conventional oven method where heated air surrounds and cooks the food. Radiation is the process of emitting radiant energy in waves. It is this method that is used in microwave cooking. The waves travel at the speed of light carrying bundles of energy called photons which vibrate at various frequencies.

There are two basic types of radiation, one producing heat when present in sufficient quantity, the other causing chemical changes without heat. Microwaves, along with radio, light and infrared rays, are of the first type. The second group which is not related to microwave cooking includes x-rays, gamma, cosmic and ultraviolet rays.

Microwaves traveling in straight lines are reflected by metals, absorbed by food and have no effect on glass, paper, air and some plastics, passing right through them. When microwave energy penetrates food, the food molecules vibrate millions of times per second, creating friction and heat. This heat is conducted through the food to cook it.

You may have heard that food does not brown when cooked with microwaves. Some food does not, but meat with a fair amount of surface fat that cooks more than eight to 10 minutes will brown. Many microwave ovens have a browning coil that will do the job and almost every manufacturer offers a browning dish. The browning dish is a specially-made utensil that absorbs microwaves when preheated prior to placing food in it.

All ovens must meet government standards concerning leakage, door interlocks, switches that turn the oven off when the door is opened and other safety devices.

Some ovens have an electric coil for browning foods that cook too quickly or have too little sur-

face fat to brown. Usually, browning cannot be done simultaneously with cooking.

Some units may be preset to come on automatically at the end of cooking and some operate separately.

Most microwave ovens have an automatic defrost cycle, where power is cycled on and off at set intervals to speed defrosting.

Most cooking is done on the high power setting, but the oven is more flexible when it has additional settings. Some ovens have solid state variable controls, varying the power from very low to high.

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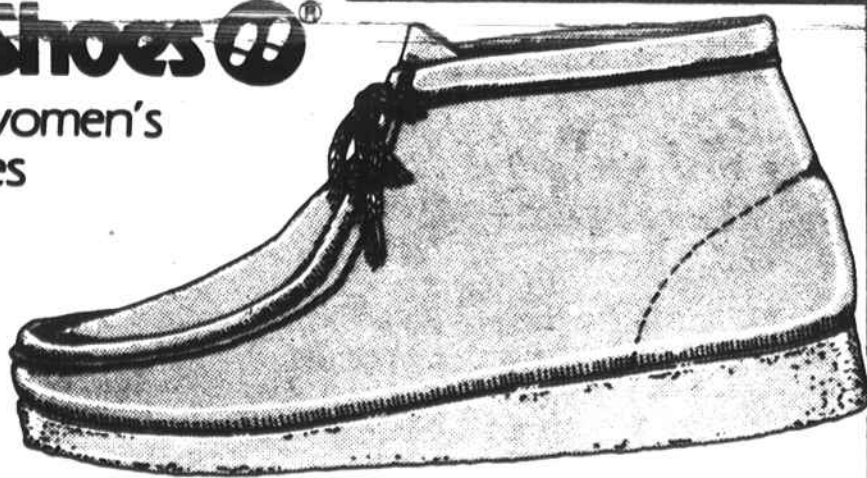
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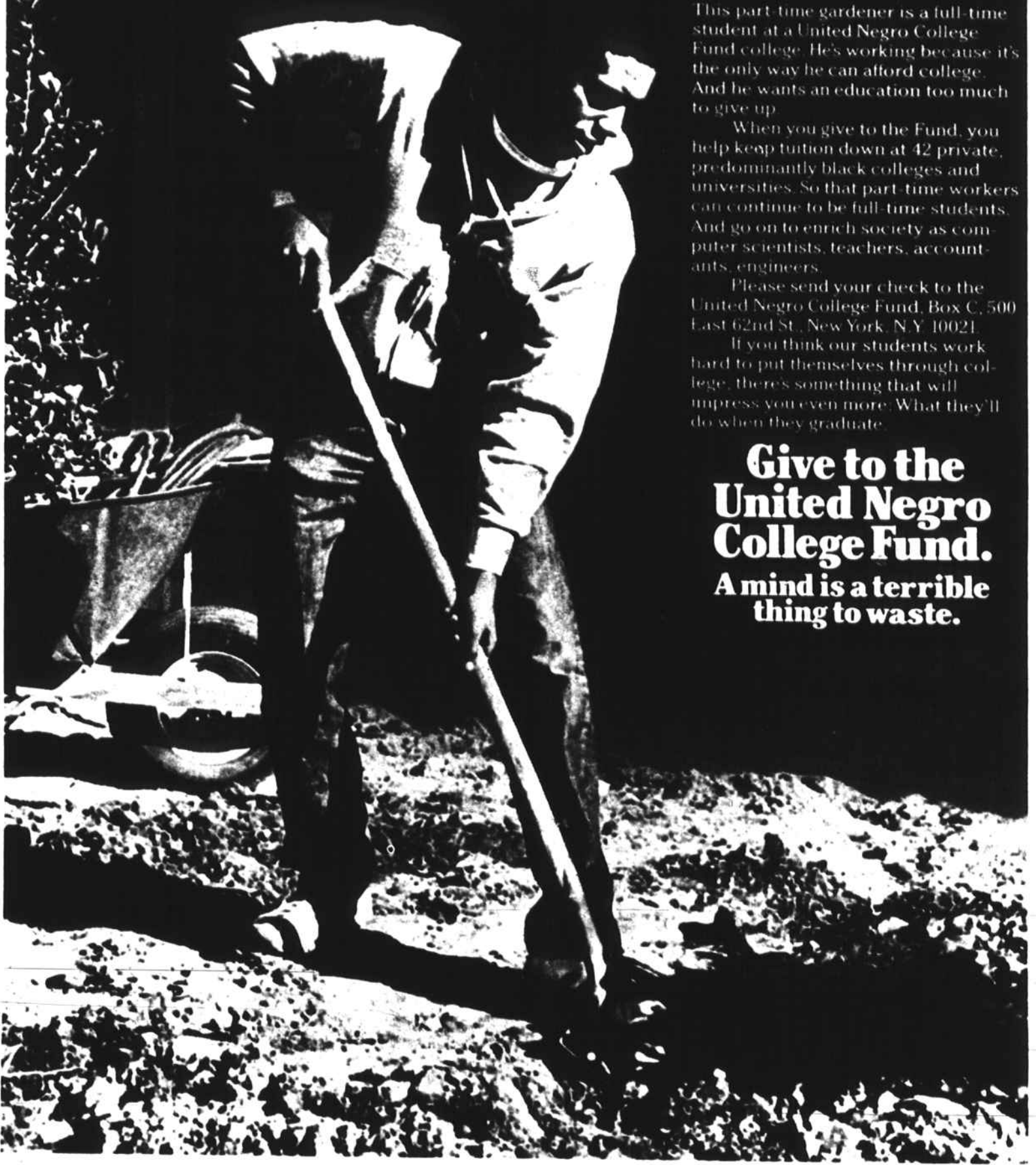
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