

FCD 3-001
December 2002
Leader's Guide

The Magic of Slow Cooker



One-Pot Meals

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The Magic of Slow Cooker One-Pot Meals

Leader's Guide

Program Materials:

For Leaders

The Magic of Slow Cooker One-Pot Meals - Leader's Guide (FCD 3-001)

For Participants

The Magic of Slow Cooker One-Pot Meals - Member's Guide (FCD 3-002)

Informed Consent Statement & Lesson Evaluation (FCD 3-003)

Program Objectives

As a result of this program, participants will be able to:

1. Use basic slow cooker techniques to save time and money in meal preparation.
2. Use basic cooking skills to create quick and easy one-pot meals.
3. Know about the different kinds of slow cookers on the market.
4. Use food safety tips when using a slow cooker.
5. Adapt recipes to slow cookers.

THE MAGIC OF SLOW COOKER ONE-POT MEALS

Welcome/Introductions/Details

A slow cooker is a unique appliance that cooks dinner by itself while you're away. The "go-off and leave-it" feature makes slow cookers a popular appliance for working families and busy people.

The slow cooker is an appliance that is convenient, low energy and low maintenance. It can be used year-round – it makes "cool" cooking during the hot summer months and is wonderful for hot "comfort foods" when it's cold outside. The slow cooker is great for motor homes, cabins and college dorm rooms. Best of all it eliminates the need for lots of pots and pans.

Test Your Slow Cooker Knowledge – True/False Questionnaire

These questions can serve as a good discussion tool to introduce the lesson.

Questions and answers are in Leader's Guide.

Questions also found in Member's Guide.

Review Agenda and Goals

Objectives:

- Learn basic slow cooker techniques to save time and money in meal preparation.
- Learn basic cooking skills to create quick and easy one-pot meals.
- Learn about the different kinds of slow cookers on the market.
- Learn about food safety tips when using a slow cooker.
- Learn how to adapt recipes for use in slow cookers.

Bonding Exercise – Share name and favorite kitchen appliance and why it's your favorite.

Introduction to Slow Cookers

Kinds of slow cookers

- Continuous slow cooker.
- Intermittent crockery cooker.

Kitchen Appliance Discussion Exercise...

Why talk about a slow cooker when everyone is looking for faster, easier ways to prepare meals?

Ask who in the group uses a slow cooker.

- Do you feel it saves you time?
- What are some of the advantages of a slow cooker?

Ask your participants to list all the kitchen appliances that they own.

Cross off your list appliances that **DON'T**:

- Have lids.
- Have heat-resistant legs and handles.
- Conduct heat evenly.
- Have temperature or heat controls.
- Have an indicator light to tell you when the desired temperature is reached.
- Perform a variety of cooking as opposed to single purpose cookers such as an egg cooker and a rice cooker.
- Clean easily.

With those remaining ask: Which ones would you use more if you knew and understood them better? Which ones are left that you do not use because of their storage location?

Allow time for discussion.

Purpose: Most of us have appliances we seldom use, either because of their storage location or because they are not used to their full potential. The list remaining should suggest appliances already owned that could be used for slow cooking.

Remaining Examples: Use remaining examples to show that “slow cookers” can be a variety of appliances. In order for the term “slow cooker” to apply: 1) an appliance must cook slowly and evenly, 2) the materials from which it is constructed must conduct heat evenly to avoid hot spots where foods could stick, scorch and burn.

Considerations When Selecting Slow Cookers

- UL approved and safe to use.
- Is the size and shape suitable for your family?
- Features: heating element, cord, indicator light, switches and settings.
- Controls easy to reach, read and clean.
- Ease of cleaning – is it submersible? Does it have a removable liner? Is it dishwasher safe?
- Are the handles, shell and legs heat resistant?
- Multi-use options, complete directions and recipes.
- Accessories useful such as racks, grills, etc.

Food Safety Issues to Remember

As with any food we prepare for our families, and ourselves, food safety is of utmost importance.

- Never add frozen or refrigerated foods to slow cooker dishes; heat to room temperature or defrost first.
- As soon as food is served, refrigerate leftovers; never leave foods in a turned-off slow cooker for long periods.
- Heat foods to 140° F on high first and then turn to low to finish cooking.

Cooking Tips

- Spray with cooking spray for ease of cleaning.
- Should be at least one-half to two-thirds full to cook efficiently.
- Avoid lifting the lid.
- Root vegetables (potatoes and carrots, etc.) take longer to cook.
- Add sour cream, milk or cream in the last one-half hour of cooking to prevent curdling.

Meat Cooking Tips

- Brown meat before putting in the slow cooker.
- Cook and drain fat from ground meat. Remove skin from poultry.
- Use condensed soups or gravy mixes or coat the meat in flour to help thicken the liquids.

Seasoning Tips

- Use dried seasonings instead of fresh.
- Concentrate flavors by leaving lid off the last hour of cooking.
- Cayenne pepper or red pepper sauce tends to become bitter.

Cooking Beans and Legumes

- Dried beans can be tricky.
- Beans need time to tenderize.
- Four ways to cook beans:
 1. Cook on high until tender.
 2. Cook on high 2-3 hours, then reduce to low for 8-10 hours.
 3. Soak overnight, then add to slow cooker bean dish.
 4. Cook on high for 2-3 hours, turn off cooker, let stand overnight. Add additional ingredients and cook on low for 8-12 hours or until done.
 5. Add molasses and tomato products only after beans are partially cooked. Acid products prolong cooking time.

Adapting a Recipe

- Look for similar recipes.
- Typically reduce volume of liquids by half.
- Add thawed frozen peas, corn, green beans or fresh mushrooms last hour of cooking for better color and density.
- Recipe calls for cooked pasta, cook pasta until slightly tender then add to slow cooker.
- If adding raw rice, add an extra cup of liquid for each cup of uncooked rice. Long grain converted rice works best.
- Allow sufficient cooking times.

Determining Cooking Times

- See chart in Member's Guide.

Review of Recipes

Appetizer—Broccoli Cheese Dip

Breakfast—Apple Oatmeal

Soup—Beef Barley Soup

Main Dish—Beef Stroganoff

Dessert—Rice Pudding

Resources to Consider

There are a lot of good cookbooks and resources on the market. For our purposes, we're only giving you a small taste of what's possible with your slow cooker.

For your convenience we've included a short list of the higher rated cookbooks for slow cookers.

Additional Activities

- Check out some of the slow cooker cookbooks from the local library for examples.
- Work with a local appliance retailer to have "display samples" of the variety of slow cookers on the market today.

Case Study Review

As a review of what we've learned today, divide into groups; give each group a case study. Each group can then share ideas on food safety. Refer to answer sheet for correct answers.

Evaluations

Please have your members complete the evaluation form, collect them and return to the Extension Service office.

Prepared by Susan Busler and Nellie Oehler, OSU/Lane Extension Service FCD Faculty

Test Your Slow Cooker Knowledge

Please circle True or False to the following questions.

1. T F It's OK to put frozen meat in my slow cooker. It eventually reaches a safe temperature.
2. T F A slow cooker can be used only for soups and stews.
3. T F A slow cooker is actually very expensive to use because it takes so long to cook and uses a lot of energy.
4. T F In a slow cooker, the vegetables can get mushy and lose their color.
5. T F A slow cooker is handy to use for hot beverages like spiced apple juice and mulled wines.
6. T F Slow cookers should never be used for lower price cuts of meat because they will become tough.
7. T F When I use my slow cooker, I need to add additional spices in order for the flavors to come through.
8. T F Slow cookers are a great time saver. After the meal just leave the food in the slow cooker and set it in the refrigerator and reheat the next meal.
9. T F Foods like rice and pasta get all gummy and never cook all the way in the slow cooker.
10. T F When entertaining, you can safely use the slow cooker for appetizers and dips that need to be kept warm but not hot.

Test Your Slow Cooker Knowledge Answers

These questions can serve as a good discussion tool for your introduction to the lesson.

1) ***It's OK to put frozen meat in my slow cooker. It eventually reaches a safe temperature.***

FALSE – Slow cookers cook very slowly at low temperatures, and frozen meat won't reach a safe temperature fast enough. Foods should be at room temperature before putting into the cooker. The meat should reach 140° F within the first 2 hours of cooking to assure safety.

2) ***A slow cooker can be used only for soups and stews.***

FALSE – They can be used for a wide variety of foods including breakfast dishes, hot dips, warm beverages, and main course meals as well as soups and stews.

3) ***A slow cooker is actually very expensive to use because it has to cook so long and uses a lot of energy.***

FALSE – A slow cooker uses a very low wattage so therefore is very economical to use.

4) ***In a slow cooker, the vegetables can get mushy and lose their color.***

TRUE – You can add ingredients like corn, peas, and mushrooms, during the last hour of cooking to maintain good color and texture.

5) ***A slow cooker is handy to use for hot beverages like spiced apple juice and mulled wines.***

TRUE – The slow cooker works to keep beverages warm. Also try it for dips and appetizers.

6) ***Slow cookers should never be used for lower price cuts of meat because they will become tough.***

FALSE – Slow cookers are excellent for low-price meats because the long cooking time tenderizes the meat and improves the flavor.

7) ***When I use my slow cooker, I need to add additional spices in order for the flavors to come through.***

FALSE – You actually need less because flavors intensify with prolonged cooking. When adapting recipes, use only half the recommended amounts. You can always add additional seasoning when the dish is done.

8) ***Slow cookers are a great time saver. After the meal just leave the food in the slow cooker and set it in the refrigerator and reheat the next meal.***

FALSE – Cooked food should never be left in the slow cooker to cool. Leftovers should be transferred to shallow containers and cooled quickly in the refrigerator or placed in a sink with cold water to cool before refrigerating.

9) ***Foods like rice and pasta get all gummy and never cook all the way in the slow cooker.***

TRUE – These ingredients tend to get gummy if over cooked. If adding raw rice, add an extra cup of liquid for each cup of uncooked rice. If a recipe calls for pasta, cook before adding to the slow cooker. Don't overcook. Cook just until slightly tender.

10) ***When entertaining, you can safely use the slow cooker for appetizers and dips that need to be kept warm but not hot.***

TRUE – Slow cookers are popular for appetizers, dips and fondues. They are a quick and easy way to keep foods at safe temperatures without having to rely on other heat sources.

CASE STUDY 1

Jane decided to have a pot roast for dinner. She thawed the chuck roast, browned it with onions and put the roast and onions in the slow cooker with raw potatoes and carrots. She added a can of mushroom soup and brown gravy mix and left for work.

At 5:30 p.m. Jane arrived home expecting to smell dinner ready to eat. Instead all she smelled were the remnants of the sautéed onions. Upon investigation, she discovered she plugged the slow cooker in, but forgot to turn it on. She put the whole thing in the refrigerator and ordered pizza instead.

The next morning she took the slow cooker out of the refrigerator and plugged it back in. This time she remembered to turn it on. About noon, Jane had second thoughts. She calls the Extension office to see whether the food is safe to feed her family.

What advice would you give her? What should she have done?



CASE STUDY 2

Carol is getting ready for an afternoon tail-gate party. She prepares a large slow cooker with hot BBQ meatballs for her guests. They've been kept hot the entire duration of the pre-game and half-time party. The second half is about to begin so she just cleans up the big stuff and figures the half-full slow cooker of meatballs can wait till morning. Being efficient, Carol just puts the lid back on the slow cooker, unplugs it and puts the entire pot in the camper refrigerator, figuring she will deal with it in the morning.

Is this safe or unsafe and why?

CASE STUDY 3

Marsha takes a frozen chicken from the freezer and puts it in the slow cooker with some chicken broth and seasonings, turns the slow cooker on low and rushes out the door to work.

Marsha returns home from work to the smell of cooked chicken. However, when she lifts the lid of the slow cooker the chicken doesn't appear to be done completely. It smells OK, the outside appears to be done but there's still bloody juice coming from the chicken. The family is running late for soccer practice so they go ahead and eat the outside part that looks done. They put the rest in the refrigerator to finish the next day.

The next day the entire family isn't feeling well. They've got nausea and diarrhea. One of the younger children has vomited.

What should they have done differently to avoid this problem in the future?



CASE STUDY 4

Sarah made a beef stew in the slow cooker. She then unplugged it to serve to her family one Sunday afternoon. After lunch the family sat down to watch TV and they all fell asleep. The leftovers were left on the table for four hours.

When Sarah awoke she cleaned up after their lunch and portioned out the stew into small shallow storage containers so it could cool adequately in the refrigerator.

Why is the food not safe?

ANSWER TO CASE STUDY 1

The slow cooker provides a wonderful insulated environment for bacteria to grow and flourish. Since the onions and meat were warm when put into the slow cooker, they stayed in the danger zone (40-140° F) too long.

The entire slow cooker meal should be disposed of properly. Next time, Jane should double-check the switches or, better yet, turn the cooker on high until it begins to boil and then turn it to low to complete cooking.

ANSWER TO CASE STUDY 2

The BBQ meatballs are a low-acid food. Since the slow cooker is insulated it will cool very slowly, even if refrigerated overnight. Since the food was served from the same container, chances of contamination are great. The nice warm environment (even in the camper refrigerator) will allow bacteria to multiply at a rapid rate. It would be better to cool the food quickly in a sink filled with ice water before putting the food into the refrigerator.

ANSWER TO CASE STUDY 3

Marsha should have finished cooking the chicken before serving. Be sure meat is thawed before adding it to the slow cooker. Either thaw the meat in the refrigerator, defrost it in the microwave or in a sink of cold water.

Cook a whole chicken on high until it begins to boil. Next turn it to low to finish cooking, or cut the thawed chicken into pieces to cook if you start the pot on low. The temperature needs to reach 140° F within two-hours.

ANSWER TO CASE STUDY 4

There is the potential of food poisoning since the family was served from the same pot the stew was cooked in. Reheating does not kill the toxins.

Sarah should have portioned out the stew into small, shallow containers and refrigerated them before she took her nap.

Additional Resources

Crockery Cookbook: Over 120 Delicious Recipes for Your Crock-Pot Slow Cooker. Sunset Publishing Co.; ISBN 0376022248; (September 1992).

Better Homes and Gardens New Crockery Cooker Cook Book, Second Edition. Meredith Books; ISBN: 0696017407; (September 1987).

Betty Crocker's Slow Cooker Cookbook, by Betty Crocker Editors. Hungry Minds, Inc.; ISBN 0028634691; (October 1999).

Mable Hoffman's Crockery Cookery, revised edition, by Mable Hoffman. H.P. Books; ISBN 1557882177; (October 1995).

America's Best Slow Cooker Recipes, by Donna-Marie Pye. Firefly Books; ISBN 0778800229; (October 7, 2000).

Pillsbury One-Dish Meals Cookbook: More Than 300 Recipes for Casseroles, Skillet Dishes and Slow-Cooker Meals, by The Pillsbury Co. Clarkson N. Potter; ISBN 0609602829; (November 1999).

Ultimate Slow Cooker Cookbook, by Carol Heding Munson. Lark Books; ISBN 0806944439; (December 2001).