The Magic of Slow Cooker

One-Pot Meals

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THE MAGIC OF SLOW COOKER ONE-POT MEALS

A slow cooker is a unique appliance that cooks dinner by itself while you are away. The “go-off-and-leave-it” feature makes slow cookers a popular appliance with working families.

The slow cooker is a convenient, low-energy, low-maintenance appliance that can be used all year-round. It’s a popular appliance in motor homes, cabins and college dorms. The appliance eliminates the need for lots of pots and pans.

A popular use for slow cookers is potlucks, parties and other social events because it keeps the foods hot without overcooking them. You don’t have to be a clock-watcher when using slow cookers.

Foods can be prepared ahead of time and then put in the slow cooker just before you leave the house. The meal will be ready when you return home in the evening.

Kinds of Slow Cookers
There are basically two kinds of slow cookers on the market. One is the continuous slow cooker and the other the intermittent crockery cooker. The cookers come in a variety of sizes from small (1-2 cups) to large (5-6 quart).

Continuous Slow Cooker
- This type continuously cooks on a very low wattage. The heating coils, in the outer metal shell, become hot and stay on continuously to heat the crockery liner.
- It has 2-3 heat settings: low (about 200°F), medium (about 250°F), and high (about 300°F). Some of the newer models have a setting that starts on high and then automatically shifts to a low setting to finish cooking and hold the food until time to serve.

Intermittent Crockery Cooker
- This type has the heating element in the base on which the cooking container stands.
- The heat cycles on and off like an oven to maintain a constant temperature.
- With this type of cooker you need to be sure to read the owner’s manual to see what the low setting really does. On some models it only keeps the food warm and does not cook the food.

Considerations
Consider some of these features when you are choosing a slow cooker for your family:
- 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 are 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 such as racks, grills, etc. are useful.
Food Safety for Slow Cookers

- Because the cooker heats and cooks at low temperatures, food should be at room temperature before it goes into the cooker. If the food is refrigerator temperature, then heat it on the high setting for about 1-hour to heat the contents to 140°F before putting on the low setting.
- As soon as the food is served, remove leftovers from the cooker and refrigerate in shallow pans to cool quickly. The food can also be transferred to another container and placed in a sink with cold water to cool before refrigerating.
- If you plan to freeze food cooked in the slow cooker, be sure to cool ahead of time.
- Do not add frozen food such as meat or vegetables to slow cooker dishes. Heat to room temperature before adding.
- Whole poultry is not recommended for slow cookers because it takes too long to heat to the center of the bird.

Cooking Tips

- Spray the inside of the slow cooker with cooking spray for easy cleaning.
- Fill the cooker half to two-thirds full.
- Sour cream, milk or cream should be added during the last 30 minutes to 1 hour of cooking. These products tend to break down during the long cooking process. You can substitute condensed soups for milk and cook for extended times.
- Processed cheeses or cheese spreads, such as American, are usually more satisfactory than Cheddar cheese.
- Root vegetables, such as carrots and potatoes, take longer to cook, so cut these vegetables into small uniform pieces or slice thinly.
- Place vegetables like carrots near the sides and bottom and meat on the top. In slow cooking, the meat generally cooks faster than most vegetables. The sides and bottom will cook faster because they are nearer the heating coils.
- Avoid removing the lid, if possible. If you leave the lid off for 2 minutes you can lose as much as 20°F of cooking heat. This adds 15-20 minutes to the cooking time each time you peek.
- High setting cooks twice as fast as the low setting. (1 hour on high equals 2-2 ½ hours on low.)

Meat Cooking Tips

- You do not need to brown meat, but some people prefer to brown the meat for flavor and to remove some of the fat.
- Cook and drain ground meats before adding to a slow cooker.
- When placing pieces of meat in the cooker, allow space between the meat so the heat can circulate around the pieces.
- Coat pot roast and stew meat with flour before putting in the cooker. This will help to thicken the liquids.
- Use less liquid for dishes containing meat. The liquid does not evaporate when cooking so you will tend to end up with more liquid than you started with.
- Before serving meat dishes, skim off fat and then thicken the gravy. To thicken gravy, remove the meat and vegetables and turn the cooker on high. Add a mixture of flour and water and stir to thicken.

Seasoning Tips

- Use dried seasonings instead of fresh because flavor intensifies with prolonged cooking. Use only half of the recommended amount in conventional recipes. You can always add more at the end if you desire more flavor. Fresh herbs should be added during the last hour of cooking.
• Concentrate the flavor of juices by taking the lid off the last hour
• Ground red pepper (cayenne) and red pepper sauce tends to get bitter.

Dried Bean Cooking Tips
Cooking dried beans can be tricky because of the variation in electrical power and the types of minerals found in the local water. Beans need time to tenderize. There are four ways to cook dried beans.

• Cook on high until the beans are tender.
• Cook 2-3 hours on high and then reduce to a low setting for 8-10 hours or until beans are tender.
• Soak overnight and then add to the slow cooker.
• Cover the dried beans with water in the slow cooker and cook on high for 2-3 hours, turn off the cooker and let stand overnight. Add remaining ingredients and cook on low heat setting 8-12 hours or until done.
• Only add molasses and tomato products after beans are partially cooked. Acid products may prolong cooking time.

Adapting Recipes to Slow Cookers
• Use a similar recipe to the one you want to adapt to help determine the amount of liquid and cooking time.
• You can make recipes that use less expensive cuts of meat because they become very tender in the moist-heat, low-temperature slow cooker. Be sure to trim away as much fat as possible.
• When a recipe says to sauté the vegetables before adding to a dish, it is not necessary except for eggplant, which should be parboiled or sautéed to prevent a strong flavor.
• Add sliced mushrooms, thawed frozen peas and corn during the last hour of cooking, for better color.
• If a recipe calls for cooked pasta, cook before adding to slow cooker. Don’t overcook. Cook just until slightly tender.
• If cooked rice is called for in a recipe, stir it in with the other ingredients. If adding raw rice, add an extra cup of liquid for each cup of uncooked rice. Note: Converted rice is best for all-day cooking.
• Be sure to allow sufficient cooking time. Most soups, stews and one-dish meals require 8-10 hours on low heat.

Determine Cooking Times
Most slow cooker recipes take 6 to 10 hours to cook. Use the following guidelines when converting favorite recipes to the slow cooker

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cooking Times</th>
<th>Traditional Recipes</th>
<th>Slow Cooker Low Setting</th>
<th>Slow Cooker High Setting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>45 minutes</td>
<td>6-10 hours</td>
<td>3-4 hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-60 minutes</td>
<td>8-10 hours</td>
<td>4-5 hours</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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.
Appetizers, Snacks and Spreads

**Broccoli Cheese Dip**
- 1 cup chopped celery
- ½ cup chopped onion
- 10-oz. pkg. frozen chopped broccoli, cooked
- 1 cup cooked rice
- 10 ¾ -oz. can cream of mushroom soup
- 16-oz. jar cheese spread, or 15 slices American cheese, melted and mixed with 2/3 cup milk
- snack breads or crackers

Combine all ingredients in a slow cooker (except breads or crackers). Cover, heat on low for 2 hours. Serve with snack breads or crackers.

Breakfast Foods

**Apple Oatmeal**
- 2 cups milk
- 2 Tbsp. honey
- 1 Tbsp. butter or margarine
- ¼ tsp. cinnamon
- 1 cup dry old-fashioned oats
- 1 cup chopped apples
- ½ cup chopped walnuts
- 2 Tbsp. brown sugar

Mix together all ingredients in greased slow cooker. Cover and cook on low for 5-6 hours. Serve with milk or ice cream.

Variation:
Add ½ cup light or dark raisins to mixture.

Soups

**Beef Barley Soup**
- 1 lb. of lean stew meat (cut into small pieces)
- 1 small bell pepper, chopped
- ¾ cup chopped onion
- 2 carrots, diced
- 2/3 cup canned or frozen thawed whole kernel corn
- 2/3 cup uncooked barley
- 1½ cups water
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 Tbsp. sugar (optional)
- ½ tsp. each, dried basil, oregano and thyme
- ½ tsp. black pepper
- 2 cans (14½-oz. each) beef broth
- 2 cans (14½-oz. each) diced tomatoes
- 1 can (8-oz.) tomato sauce

Mix all ingredients in 3½-6 quart slow cooker. Cover and cook on low setting 8-9 hours or until vegetables and barley are tender. For faster cooking, set on high and cook for 4-5 hours.
Main Dishes

Beef Stroganoff
- 2 lb. ground beef
- 2 medium onions, chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 4-oz can mushrooms
- 2 1/2 tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. pepper
- 1 cup beef bouillon
- 3 Tbsp. tomato paste (optional)
- 1 1/2 cups sour cream
- 4 Tbsp. flour

In skillet, brown beef, onions and garlic. Drain fat and pour beef mixture into slow cooker. Add mushrooms, salt, pepper, bouillon and tomato paste (optional). Cover and cook on low 4-8 hours. Thirty minutes before serving mix sour cream and flour together. Then stir into stroganoff and cook on high until thickened. Serve over hot butter noodles or rice.

Dessert

Rice Pudding
- 3 cups cooked white rice
- ½ cup raisins
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- 1 can (14-oz.) sweetened condensed milk
- 1 can (12-oz.) evaporated milk
- 1 Tbsp. sugar
- 1 tsp. cinnamon

Spray inside of 2-3 1/2 quart slow cooker with cooking spray. Mix all ingredients except sugar and cinnamon in cooker. Cover and cook on low setting 3-4 hours or until liquid is absorbed. Stir pudding. Sprinkle pudding with sugar and cinnamon. Serve warm. Can be served with whipped cream.

Prepared by Susan Busler and Nellie Oehler,
OSU/Lane County Extension Service Family and Community Development Faculty
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