

Slow Cooker Success

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Imagine coming home from a day of activities to the aroma of stew greeting you at the door. Using a slow cooker can make this a common occurrence. Purchasing fast food, or ordering takeout can be costly and unhealthy. Taking a few minutes to add ingredients to a slow cooker in the morning can ensure a hot balanced meal to close out a busy day. Slow cookers are a common countertop appliance. Cooks from beginner to gourmet can use a slow cooker with ease.

Advantages of a Slow Cooker for a Busy Lifestyle

- A slow cooker uses less electricity than an oven.
- Slow cookers are a year round appliance. Slow cookers are also a way to cook a meal in the hot summer months without heating up the house.
- As a result of the long, low-temperature cooking, slow cookers help tenderize less-expensive cuts of meat.
- Slow cookers usually allow one-step preparation. Placing all the ingredients in the slow cooker saves preparation time and cuts down on cleanup.
- A variety of foods can be cooked in a slow cooker, including soups, stews, and casseroles.

Types of Slow Cookers

There are two types of control functions found in most slow cookers:

- The basic that has a manual knob. The options include “off,” “low,” “medium” and “high” when choosing the appropriate or desired temperature.
- Programmable slow cookers are high-tech and allow the user to input the exact time and temperature. Programmable slow cookers usually



have a “keep warm” feature which shifts automatically after the cooking of the food is done.

Food Safety When Using a Slow Cooker

Here are some basic safety rules to follow when using a slow cooker:

- Wash your hands before, during, and after food preparation.
- Always start with a clean slow cooker, utensils, and work surface.
- **Always thaw meat and poultry** in the refrigerator before cooking in the slow cooker. This will ensure complete cooking.
- Consult the instructions that came with your slow cooker for recommendations on large cuts of meat and poultry. Slow cookers are available in different sizes, so the instructions will vary. If you cannot find the instructions, you can cut the meat into smaller chunks to ensure thorough, safe cooking.

Add the liquid, such as broth, water or barbecue sauce, suggested in the recipe and keep the lid in place during cooking.

- If you cut up meats or vegetables ahead of cooking, refrigerate these perishable foods in separate containers until you are ready to use them.
- Because vegetables cook slower than meat and poultry, place the vegetables in the slow cooker first. Place the meat on top of the vegetables and top with liquid, such as broth, water or a sauce.
- For easy cleanup and care of your slow cooker, spray the inside of the cooker with nonstick cooking spray before using it. Slow cooker liners also ease cleanup.
- Fill the slow cooker no less than half full and no more than two-thirds full. Cooking too little or too much food in the slow cooker can affect cooking time, quality, and/or safety (if filled too full).
- If possible, set your slow cooker on high for the first hour, then turn the heat setting to low to finish cooking. Keep the lid in place. Removing the lid slows cooking time.
- If you are not home during the entire slow-cooking process and the power goes out, throw away food even if it looks done. If you are home during the cooking process, finish cooking the ingredients by some other means, such as on an outdoor grill. If the food was completely cooked before the power went out, the food will remain safe for up to two hours.
- Measure the temperature of your foods before eating them. Follow the recommended safe internal temperatures below:

145°F	Fresh beef, veal, lamb, pork (steaks, roasts, chops); allow a three-minute rest time after removing from heat
145°F	Fin fish (or cook until flesh is opaque)
160°F	Eggs; ground meat and meat mixtures (beef, pork, veal, lamb, turkey, chicken)
165°F	Casseroles; poultry (chicken, turkey, duck, goose)

Cooking Rice, Dry Beans and Root Vegetables in a Slow Cooker

In order to get the best results with your slow cooker, the following foods, rice, dried beans, and root vegetables need special consideration.

PASTA AND RICE

If you are converting a recipe that calls for uncooked noodles, macaroni, or pasta, cook them on the stovetop just until slightly tender before adding to slow cooker.

If you are converting a recipe that calls for cooked rice, stir in raw rice with other ingredients; add 1/4 cup extra liquid per 1/4 cup of raw rice. Use long grain converted rice for best results in all-day cooking.

BEANS

Beans must be softened completely before combining with sugar and/or acidic foods. Sugar and acid have a hardening effect on beans and will prevent softening.

Dried beans, especially red kidney beans, should be boiled before adding to a recipe. Cover the beans with three times their volume of unsalted water and bring to a boil. Boil 10 minutes, reduce heat, cover and allow to simmer 1 1/2 hours or until beans are tender. Soaking in water, if desired, should be completed before boiling. Discard water after soaking or boiling.

Fully cooked canned beans may be used as a substitute for dried beans.

ROOT VEGETABLES

Many vegetables benefit from slow cook times and low temperatures and are able to develop their full flavor, specifically those with roots (ex. potatoes, carrots, turnips). They tend not to overcook in your slow cooker as they might in your oven or on your stovetop.

When cooking recipes with rooted vegetables and meat, place vegetables in slow cooker before meat. Rooted vegetables usually cook slower than meat in the slow cooker.

SLOW COOKER



RECIPES

COWBOY BEANS

- 4 strips bacon, fried crisp, drained and crumbled
- 1 lb. lean or extra-lean ground beef, browned and drained
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- ¼ c. brown sugar
- 1 c. ketchup (low-sodium)
- ¼ c. vinegar
- ¼ c. mustard
- 1 (15-oz.) can kidney beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 (15-oz.) can butter beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 (15-oz.) can lima beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 (28-oz.) can baked beans (do not drain)



DIRECTIONS:

Brown meat and fry bacon. Mix all ingredients and cook in a slow cooker on high for three hours or low for eight hour.

Makes 12 servings.

NUTRIENTS PER SERVING:

Each serving has 260 calories | 6 g fat |
34 g carbohydrate | 8 g fiber | 490 mg sodium.

EASY SLOW COOKER SWEET POTATOES

This is a great recipe, just 3 steps! Sweet potatoes are chocked full of nutrients and fiber. These sweet potatoes can be eaten as it or stuffed with vegetables and a protein source for a quick nutritious meal.

DIRECTIONS:

1. Wash & pat dry sweet potatoes
2. Prick all over with a fork
3. Cook on low for 8 hours*

Store for meal prep or enjoy right away!

****Note if you are cooking small potatoes they can be done in 6 hours.**



GOLDEN CAULIFLOWER

- 2 (10 oz.) pkgs. frozen cauliflower, thawed
- 6 oz. prepared cheese sauce
- 3 Tablespoons bacon bits



DIRECTIONS:

Place cauliflower in greased slow cooker. Pour cheese sauce on top. Add bacon bits. Cover. Cook on High for 1 ½ hours and reduce to low for an additional 2 hours. OR Cook on Low only for 4-5 hours.

Makes 6 servings.

NUTRIENTS PER SERVING:

80 calories | 4 g. total fat | 2 g. sat fat | 332 mg. sodium

BBQ PULLED PORK

- 1-2 pound pork loin, trimmed of any fat
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 cup barbecue sauce
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 6 hamburger buns or hard rolls

DIRECTIONS:

1. Place pork loin in slow cooker.
2. Top with onion and barbeque sauce.
3. Cover and cook on Low for 7-8 hours or on High for 4-5 hours, or until meat is tender.
4. Remove pork from slow cooker and shred with a fork.
5. Add back into slow cooker and coat with sauce.
6. Serve pulled pork on hamburger buns or hard rolls.

NUTRIENTS PER SERVING:

183 calories | 10.5 g. total fat | 4 g. sat fat | 60 mg cholesterol | 47 mg. sodium



SLOW COOKER BEEF STEW

2 pounds stew meat (cut into 1 inch cubes)
1/4 cup flour (all purpose)
salt and pepper (optional, to taste)
2 cups water
2 teaspoons or two cubes beef bouillon (2 cubes)
1 garlic clove (finely chopped)
3 carrot (sliced)
3 potatoes (diced)
1 onion (chopped)
1 celery stalk (sliced)
Add herbs as desired: bay leaf, basil, oregano, etc

DIRECTIONS:

1. Place meat in slow cooker.
2. Mix flour, salt, and pepper in a medium bowl, and pour over meat; stir to coat.
3. Add remaining ingredients and stir to mix.
4. Cover and cook on LOW for 8 to 10 hours or HIGH for 4 to 6 hours.
5. Stir stew thoroughly before serving. If using bay leaf, discard before serving

NUTRIENTS PER SERVING:

282 calories | 2 g total fat | 68 mg cholesterol | 216 mg sodium | 29 g carbohydrates | 4 g total sugar | 30 mg protein | 42 mg calcium | 3 mg iron | 833 mg potassium



References:

Colorado State University Extension. (2013, February). Crockpot and slow cooker food safety. Fort Collins, CO: Author. Retrieved from www.farmtotable.colostate.edu/docs/crockpot-foodsafety.pdf.

Montana State University Extension Service, Montana Extension Nutrition Education Program Website Recipes.

USDA. Slow Cookers and Food Safety. https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/appliances-and-thermometers/slow-cookers-and-food-safety/ct_index