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Cold Weather Cooking
with Your Slow Cooker

10 Tips for Safe Slow Cooking

Make sure your slow cooker cooks safe food for you and your family. Use these simple rules to help prevent food borne illness:

1. Always start with a clean cooker, utensils and work area.
2. Wash hands before and during food preparation, especially after handling raw meat and poultry.
3. Refrigerate perishable foods until preparation time. You can chop meat and vegetables in advance, but they must be stored separately in covered containers in the refrigerator.
4. Use only thawed meat or poultry.
5. Do not place large pieces of meat or a whole chicken in the slow cooker. Instead, cut into small pieces. Otherwise, the food will cook so slowly that it could stay in the danger zone (for bacterial growth) too long.
6. Fill the cooker between 1/2 and 2/3 full. Vegetables cook slower than meat or poultry so place them on the bottom, add the meat, then cover with liquid (broth or sauce).
7. Don't peek! Every time you remove the lid, it can take 20 minutes to regain the lost heat.
8. If you are not home during the entire slow-cooking process and the power goes out, throw out the food, even if it looks done!
9. Use a food thermometer to make sure meat and poultry dishes have reached a safe internal temperature.
10. Store leftovers in shallow covered containers and refrigerate within two hours after cooking.



Testing Your Slow Cooker

If your slow cooker has been living in the back of a cabinet for a while, you may want to test it for accuracy. The University of Minnesota Extension Service offers the following directions for testing slow cooker accuracy:

1. Fill the cooker with 8 cups of water. Heat the water on **low** for 8 hours.
2. Check the water temperature with a food thermometer. Do this quickly as the temperature drops 10 to 15 degrees once the lid is removed.
3. If the temperature is less than 185 degrees, the cooker is not safe to use and should be replaced.

Adapting Traditional Recipes for the Slow Cooker

Converting traditional recipes for use in a slow cooker takes a little practice and patience, but can be done. The key to adapting recipes is to find a slow cooker recipe that is similar to the traditional recipe and then use it as a guide. Here are some additional tips:

1. Unless preparing soups, sauces, chili, or chowders, use half of the liquid listed in the traditional recipe.
2. Vegetables that cook quickly (such as peas) should be added during the last 20 or 30 minutes of the cooking process.
3. If the traditional recipe calls for rice or pasta, cook rice or pasta on the stove and add to the slow cooker a few minutes before serving.
4. Fish and shellfish cook very fast and tend to overcook and fall apart during a long cooking process. Add them to the cooker during the final 30 to 60 minutes of cooking.

When adapting a recipe to the slow cooker, choose a recipe that traditionally takes 45 to 60 minutes to cook. These recipes usually contain ingredients that hold up well to long cooking times. Use the following chart as a guide when adapting traditional recipes to the slow cooker. If using meat or other potentially hazardous foods in the recipe, be sure to use a food thermometer to check for doneness.

Cooking time for traditional recipes	Cooking time in slow cooker on Low Setting	Cooking time in slow cooker on High Setting
45 minutes	6 to 10 hours	3 to 4 hours
50 to 60 minutes	8 to 10 hours	4 to 5 hours

Slow Cooking Hints and Tips



Slow cooking is the best way to keep pace with our busy lives, because the meal you are making requires little or no attention while it cooks. Slow cookers range in size from 1- to 6- quart capacity. The 1-quart size is perfect for making and keeping dips and spreads warm for a party. The other sizes are ideal for one-dish meals.

Most slow cookers have low and high control settings. At low, the long cooking time of 8 to 10 hours fits with working schedules. At the high setting, food cooks approximately twice as fast on low heat.

The following tips – and a slow cooker - are all you need for a delicious, home cooked fix-and-forget meal!

Slow Cooker Tips

- Know your appliance. A slow cooker is different than a warming pot! Slow cookers are self-contained, with the heating elements wrapping around the cooker. Warming pots have the heating element below the container. Because warming pots cannot reach a safe cooking temperature, they should not be used for slow-cooker recipes.
- For easy cleanup, spray the inside of the slow cooker with cooking spray before adding the food.
- Enjoy the rewards of slow cooking by using less-expensive (and less tender) cuts of meat. The moist, gentle heat slowly tenderizes these cuts as they cook.
- Cut any extra fat from meats before placing them in the slow cooker to reduce fat in the final recipe. Skim the fat for soups or stews with a spoon, or place a slice of bread on top of the mixture for a few minutes to absorb the fat.
- Cook and drain ground meats before adding them to the slow cooker. This destroys harmful bacteria.
- Chop or slice vegetables as directed in the recipe. Some vegetables, such as carrots and potatoes, may take longer to cook than meats. Place larger pieces of vegetables near the bottom or along the sides of the slow cooker, and place meat on top.
- Thaw frozen vegetables before placing them in the slow cooker, or rinse them in water to separate.
- Use the amount of liquid called for in the recipe. Liquids do not evaporate and reduce.
- Processed cheese tends to work better than Cheddar cheese.
- Use dried leaf herbs rather than ground because they keep their flavor better over the long cooking time. Or stir in fresh herbs during the last hour of cooking.
- Add dairy products such as milk and cheese toward the end of the cooking time. Dairy products tend to separate and curdle if cooked for a long time.
- Fish and seafood can fall apart or get tough if they are slow cooked too long. Add these ingredients in the last hour of cooking.
- Pasta and rice will be at their best if you cook them according to package directions first, then add them to the slow cooker just before serving.
- Add tender vegetables such as fresh mushrooms, tomatoes and zucchini during the last 30 to 45 minutes to prevent overcooking.
- Add only thawed or partially cooked foods such as browned poultry to your slow cooker - no frozen meats or vegetables.
- Do not cook whole poultry in a slow cooker because safe cooking temperatures can not be reached quickly enough near the bone.
- Fill your slow cooker one-half to three-quarters full of food to ensure that the liquid does not simmer away during the long hours of cooking.
- Keep an eye on the clock. For food-safety reasons, slow cooker recipes containing raw poultry or beef should cook a minimum of three hours.
- Keep the lid on! Removing the lid allows heat to escape and delays the cooking time by 15 to 20 minutes. Be sure to check for doneness just at the minimum cook time.
- Cool the slow cooker slightly before adding water for cleaning. Otherwise, the liner could crack.

Stirring

Due to the nature of a slow cooker, there is no need to stir the food unless it specifically says to in your recipe. In fact, taking the lid off to stir food causes the slow cooker to lose a significant amount of heat, extending the cooking time required. Therefore, it is best not to remove the lid for stirring.

Cooking for Larger Quantity Yields

Most slow cooking recipes are recommended for 3 to 4½ quart sizes. When preparing recipes in a larger unit, such as a 5- to 7- quart slow cooker, here are guidelines for doubling or tripling ingredients:

- When preparing dishes with beef or pork in a larger unit, browning the meat in a skillet before adding to the slow cooker yields the best results; the meat will cook more evenly. Roasted meats, chicken, and turkey quantities may be doubled or tripled, and seasonings adjusted by half. Caution: Flavorful spices such as garlic and chili powder will intensify during long slow cooking. Adjust spices as needed to balance the flavors.
- When preparing a soup or a stew, you may double all ingredients except liquids, seasonings, and dried herbs. Increase liquid volume by half, or as needed. The slow cooker lid collects steam, which condenses to keep foods moist and maintain liquid volume. Do not double thickeners, such as cornstarch, at the beginning. You may always add more thickener later if needed.
- When preparing baked goods or cheesecakes, it is best to simply prepare the original recipe as many times as needed to serve more people.

Adding Ingredients at the End of the Cooking Time

Certain ingredients tend to break down during extended cooking. When possible add these ingredients toward the end of the cooking time. These include:

- Milk, cream and sour cream - add during the last 15 minutes of cooking time.
- Seafood - add in the last hour of cooking time, unless the recipe specifies otherwise.

Pasta and Rice

- For best results with pasta, cook in a pot of boiling water until just tender. Add the pasta to the stoneware during the last half hour of cooking.
- For best results with rice, always use long grain converted rice. If it doesn't seem to cook completely after the suggested time, you may try adding an extra 1 to 1 2/3 cup of liquid per cup of rice.

Beans

Beans must be softened completely before combining with sugar and/or acid foods (NOTE: 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 3 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.

Meats

- Due to the nature of a slow cooker, meat does not brown as it would if it were cooked in a skillet or oven. It is not necessary to brown meat before slow cooking, however, if you prefer the flavor and look of browned meat, brown your meat in a skillet with a little oil, then place the meat in the stoneware and follow the recipe as usual.
- Trim fats and wipe meats well to remove residue. (If meats contain fats, brown in a separate skillet or broiler and drain well before adding to cooker). Season with salt and pepper. Place meat in stoneware on top of vegetables.
- For roasts and stews, pour liquid over meat. Use no more liquid than specified in the recipe. More juices in meats and vegetables are retained in slow cooking than in conventional cooking.

Liquids

- A specific liquid called for in a recipe may be varied if an equal quantity is substituted (such as substituting a 10 1/2 ounce can of soup plus 4 ounces of water for a 14 1/2 ounce can of tomatoes OR 1/2 cup beef or chicken broth for 1/2 cup of wine, etc).
- Roasts can be cooked without water when set on LOW. A small amount, however, is recommended because the gravies are especially tasty. The more fat or "marbling" the meat has, the less liquid you need. The liquid is needed to properly soften and cook vegetables.

Herbs and Spices

When cooking with your slow cooker, it is best to use whole herbs and spices rather than crushed or ground. The flavor of crushed or ground herbs and spices seems to lessen during the extended cooking time with the slow cooker. Fresh herbs and spices take longer to release their flavor, and therefore withstand the extended cooking times required of slow cooking.

Vegetables

Most vegetables should be thinly sliced or placed near the sides or bottom of the stoneware. Meats generally cook faster than most vegetables in a slow cooker.

Cooking Breads and Cakes

- Do not over-beat breads and cakes. Follow all recommended mixing times.
- Do not add water to the slow cooker unless it specifically says to in the recipe.
- After breads and cakes have finished cooking, allow them to cool for 5 minutes before removing from the cake pan.

Cooking Temperatures and Food Safety

- Cooking meats in your slow cooker is perfectly safe. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, bacteria in food is killed at a temperature of 165°F. Meats cooked in the slow cooker reach an internal temperature of 170° in beef and as high as 190°F in poultry. It is important to follow the recommended cooking times and to keep the cover on your slow cooker during the cooking process.
- If your food isn't done after 8 hours when the recipe calls for 8 to 10 hours, this could be due to voltage variations which are commonplace everywhere; due to altitude or even extreme humidity. The slight fluctuations in power do not have a noticeable effect on most appliances; however, it can slightly alter the cooking times. Allow plenty of time, and remember, it is practically impossible to overcook.

Removable Stoneware

The removable stoneware in your slow cooker makes cleaning easy. Here are some tips on the use and care of your stoneware:

- Do not preheat the slow cooker.
- Your slow cooker makes a great server for hot beverages or dips. Keep it on the Low setting to maintain the proper serving temperature.
- Because there is no direct heat at the bottom, always fill the stoneware at least half full to conform to recommended times. Small quantities may be prepared, however, cooking time will be affected.

References:

- Driessen S, Slow Cookers - How to Test for Accuracy. University of Minnesota Extension Service, 2003.
- Food Safety and Inspection Service, United States Department of Agriculture, Slow Cooker Safety, July, 2000.
- Nutri-Facts #24, Fast Food with Slow Cookers, Prepared by Jenna D. Anding, Ph.D., R.D., L.D, Associate Professor & Extension Nutrition Specialist, 12/03.
- <http://www.bettycrocker.com>
- <http://www.crockpot.com>

Cold Weather Cooking

Please complete this short evaluation form after completing the Cold Weather Cooking Click and Learn Course. Return to the Rockwall County Extension Office by:

- email – j-squier@tamu.edu
- FAX – 972-882-0374
- Mail – Janie E. Squier, 101 S. Fannin, Rockwall, Texas 75087
- Drop off at the Extension office located in the Courthouse Annex

In December, the participants who submit a completed satisfaction survey will be eligible for a drawing for a free cookbook of their choice (valued at \$25.00.)

Overall, how satisfied are you with the online method of receiving information?

- Not at all Slightly Somewhat Mostly Completely

How satisfied are you with the content of the Cold Weather Cooking Click and Learn Course?

1. Accuracy of information

- Not at all Slightly Somewhat Mostly Completely

2. Helpfulness of the information for you and your family

- Not at all Slightly Somewhat Mostly Completely

3. Length of the information given in the Home Study Course

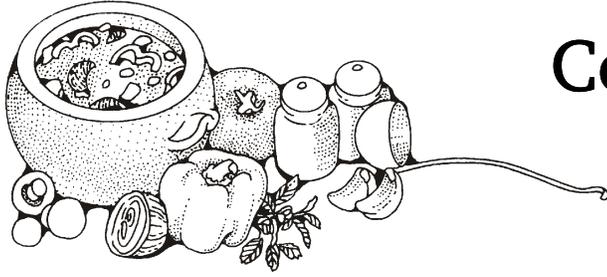
- Not at all Slightly Somewhat Mostly Completely

4. Quality of course materials

- Not at all Slightly Somewhat Mostly Completely

What additional information in this subject area would be helpful to you?

Name and Address or Phone Number (so we can contact you after the drawing for prizes):



Cold Weather Cooking

Favorite Crock Pot Recipes

Janie E. Squier, County Extension Agent
Family & Consumer Sciences
Rockwall County

Chilies Rellonos Casserole

- 2 pounds lean ground beef
- 1 cup chopped onions
- 1 (15 oz.) can tomato sauce
- 1 (1.25 oz.) pkg. taco seasoning
- 1 Tablespoon cumin
- 1 teaspoon chopped garlic
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 4 (4 oz.) cans whole green chiles
- 1 (8 oz.) bag grated Cheddar cheese (2 cups)
- 1 (8 oz.) bag grated Monterey Jack cheese (2 cups)
- 4 eggs
- 1 (12 oz.) can evaporated milk

Brown ground beef in a large pot and drain off fat. Add next 6 ingredients and mix well. Rinse all chiles, removing seeds. Pat dry. Place $\frac{1}{3}$ of the chiles in slow cooker first - top with $\frac{1}{3}$ of the meat mixture and then $\frac{1}{3}$ of the cheese. Repeat layers twice more, ending with cheese. Place eggs in a mixing bowl, beat lightly. Add milk to eggs, mix well. Pour egg mixture over casserole. Push a plain knife through the casserole to allow some of the egg mixture to soak down through the casserole. Cook 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours on High. Serves 8.

Nutritional analysis per serving: 625 Calories; 42 g Protein; 44 g Fat; 15 mg Carbohydrates; 247 mg Cholesterol; 2.5 g Fiber; 1078 mg Sodium

Norwegian Pot Roast

- 2 to 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ pounds pork chops
- 1 can whole-berry cranberry sauce
- 1 envelope onion soup mix
- 1 Tablespoon minced garlic

Place in crock pot that has been sprayed with oil. Sprinkle onion soup mix over meat. Combine cranberry sauce and garlic, stir and pour over mixture in crock pot. Cook on Low for 6 hours or High for 4 hours. Serve sauce over mashed potatoes. Serves 4. **Note:** Chicken breasts and turkey breasts may also be used in this recipe.

Nutritional analysis per serving: 294 Calories; 23 g Protein; 16 g Fat; 14 mg Carbohydrates; 68 mg Cholesterol; .5 g Fiber; 134 mg Sodium

Creamy Potatoes with Sausage

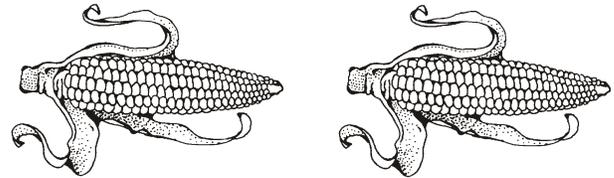
- 2 lbs. large link smoked sausage cut into 3" to 4" pieces
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ pounds small red potatoes, quartered

Mix the following 3 ingredients:

- 1 (8 oz.) tub cream cheese with chives
- 1 (1 oz.) envelope Ranch dressing mix
- 1 (10 oz.) can cream of potato soup

Place all ingredients in slow cooker in the order listed. Pour soup mixture on top of potatoes. Cook 6 hours on Low. Serves 8.

Nutritional analysis per serving: 369 Calories; 12 g Protein; 26 g Fat; 22 mg Carbohydrates; 69 mg Cholesterol; 2 g Fiber; 877 mg Sodium



Corn Pudding

- 3 (15 oz.) cans cream style corn
- 1 (12 oz.) can evaporated milk
- 3 eggs
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup flour
- 1 Tablespoon baking powder
- $\frac{1}{2}$ stick butter OR margarine, melted

Place corn into slow cooker, add milk. Place eggs in medium bowl and beat lightly with a fork. Add sugar, flour and baking powder to eggs. Add melted butter, mix well. Add egg mixture to corn, mix well. Cook 3 hours on High. Serves 6.

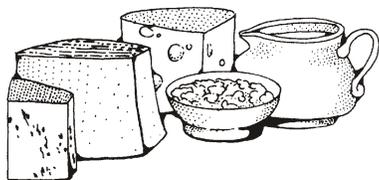
Nutritional analysis per serving: 454 Calories; 11 g Protein; 23 g Fat; 58 mg Carbohydrates; 122 mg Cholesterol; 3 g Fiber; 1123 mg Sodium

Crock Pot Chicken

4 chicken breasts, boned and skinned
1 can 98% fat-free cream of chicken soup
1 can 98% fat-free cream of mushroom soup
1 can tomatoes with chiles

Combine soups and tomatoes with chiles. Place chicken breasts into crock pot. Pour soup mixture over chicken breasts. Cook on low 6-8 hours. (You can put this on in the morning if you place frozen chicken breasts in the crock pot - the chicken will be done to perfection when you arrive home from work.) Serve over noodles. Serves 4.

Nutritional analysis per serving: 288 Calories; 31 g Protein; 12 g Fat; 14 mg Carbohydrates; 75 mg Cholesterol; .5 g Fiber; 1445 mg Sodium



Rich Macaroni & Cheese

2 cups elbow macaroni
¼ cup oil
1 stick margarine, cut into pieces
1 pound processed cheese, cut into cubes
¼ teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon black pepper
Dash of Cayenne pepper (optional)
1 egg
1 cup milk + a little more milk
1 (8oz) bag shredded sharp Cheddar cheese (2 cups)

Cook macaroni in boiling water with oil added. Place margarine into slow cooker. Turn pot on to start melting margarine. Drain macaroni, but do not rinse it. Place in slow cooker. Add cubed processed cheese, salt and peppers. Mix gently. Mix egg and milk. Pour over macaroni. Add milk if necessary to come up to 1" from the top of the macaroni. (Do not cover the macaroni with milk.) Sprinkle cheddar over top of macaroni. Cook 4 hours on low or 2 hours on high. Stir well. Serves 8.

Nutritional analysis per serving: 386 Calories; 14 g Protein; 29 g Fat; 18 mg Carbohydrates; 64 mg Cholesterol; .5 g Fiber; 558 mg Sodium

"Awesome" Sunday Pot Roast

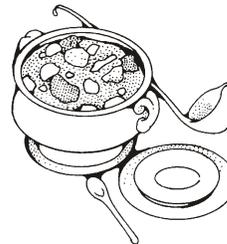
1 beef pot roast
2 packages Au Jus dry gravy mix
1 package dry Italian salad dressing mix
5 cups water

Preheat oven to 250 degrees. Place pot roast in Dutch oven. Mix Au Jus gravy, Italian salad dressing, and water in bowl. Pour over pot roast. Bake roast for approximately 3 to 4 hours, depending on size of roast or until falls apart with fork touch.

Take roast from pan and pull or tear apart, removing all fat. Place pulled beef in glass baking dish, pour remaining gravy mixture over meat and cover with foil. Put back in oven for about 30 minutes, until simmering. Serve over mashed potatoes or rice. Serves 8

For the crock pot: I used a 2 pound Chuck Boneless Shoulder Pot Roast and reduced the water to 4 cups. Cook on High for 2 hours. Reduce heat to Low and cook 4 to 4½ more hours. Shred the meat and proceed with the recipe.

Nutritional analysis per serving: 360 Calories; 37 g Protein; 10 g Fat; 29 mg Carbohydrates; 104 mg Cholesterol; .5 g Fiber; 6700 mg Sodium



No Peek Chicken

1 cup uncooked long grain rice (not instant rice)
1 (10 oz.) can cream of celery soup
1 (10 oz.) can of cream of chicken soup
½ cup water
1 packet dry onion soup mix
1 (7oz.) can mushroom stems and pieces, drained
1 whole chicken, cut into pieces
½ teaspoon pepper

Pull off the chicken skin and discard. Mix all ingredients except chicken in the slow cooker. Stir well. Place chicken pieces in pot last. Sprinkle chicken with pepper. Cook 6 hours on low or 3 hours on high. Serves 4.

Nutritional analysis per serving: 245 Calories; 12 g Protein; 7 g Fat; 34 mg Carbohydrates; 33 mg Cholesterol; 1.5 g Fiber

Sweet Cinnamon and Orange Pecans

6 Tbsp butter
3 Tbsp sugar
3 Tbsp brown sugar
2 Tbsp ground cinnamon
½ tsp vanilla extract
½ tsp orange extract
6 cups pecan halves (1½ pounds)
1 Tbsp grated orange rind

Melt butter in a slow cooker over high heat. Add sugars, stirring with a whisk until dissolved. Reduce heat to low. Add cinnamon and extracts, stirring well. Add pecans, stirring to coat them well. Cover and cook one hour. Stir. Cook another 30 minutes. Stir. Cook another 30 minutes. (2 hours total). Place in a large bowl to cool. Toss with orange rind. Store in airtight containers or zip loc bags for up to 1 week.

Number of servings: 24 (1oz. or approx. 16 pecans)

Nutritional Analysis for one serving: 241 Calories; 3 g Protein; 8 g Carbohydrates; 3 g Fiber; 24 g Fat; 8 mg Cholesterol; 22 mg Sodium

Homestyle Apple Brown Betty

6 cups apples, peeled, cored and cut into slices
3 cups bread crumbs
½ cup brown sugar
1 tsp cinnamon and 1 tsp nutmeg
⅛ tsp salt
½ cup butter or margarine, melted
¼ cup walnuts, finely chopped (optional)

Place the apples in the bottom of the stoneware. In a mixing bowl, combine the bread crumbs, cinnamon, nutmeg, salt, brown sugar, butter and walnuts. Spread mixture over the apples in the stoneware. Cover cook on Low for 3 - 4 hours or on High for 1½ - 2 hours.

Nutritional Analysis for one serving: 218 Calories; 4 g Protein; 36 g Carbohydrates; 2 g Fiber; 7 g Fat; 0 mg Cholesterol; 270 mg Sodium

Peach Cobbler

2 pounds fresh or canned peaches, sliced
⅔ cup oats
⅔ cup flour
⅔ cup brown sugar
½ tsp ground cinnamon
¼ tsp nutmeg
½ cup softened butter

Place the peaches in the stoneware. Combine oats, flour, brown sugar, cinnamon and nutmeg, and pour over peaches. Add the butter and stir until crumbly. Cook on Low for 3 hours.

Number of servings: 12

Nutritional Analysis for one serving: 188 Calories; 2 g Protein; 29 g Carbohydrates; 1.5 g Fiber; 8 g Fat; 0 mg Cholesterol; 98 mg Sodium