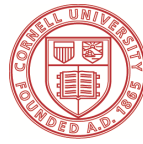


Cooking Classes!



Cornell University
Cooperative Extension
Fulton and Montgomery Counties

50 East Main Street, Canajoharie, NY 13317 518-673-5525 www.ccefm.com Office Hours: M-Th 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.



Using Your Slow Cooker 101

General Tips For Using Your Slow Cooker

- ◆ Only fill the crockpot one half to two thirds full. The foods will not cook properly if the appliance is filled to the brim. If the food and liquid level is lower, the foods will cook too quickly.
- ◆ Foods cooked on the bottom of the slow cooker cook faster and will be moister because they are immersed in the simmering liquid.
- ◆ You can thicken the juices and concentrate flavors by removing the lid and cooking on HIGH for the last half hour of cooking time.
- ◆ Most meats require 8 hours of cooking on LOW. Use cheaper cuts of meat - not only do you save money, but these meats work better in the slow cooker. Cheaper cuts of meat have less fat, which makes them more suited to crockpot cooking. Moist, long cooking results in tender meats.
- ◆ Follow the layering instructions carefully. Vegetables do not cook as quickly as meat, so they should be placed in the bottom of the appliance.
- ◆ Don't lift the lid to stir, especially if you are cooking on the low setting. Each time you lift the lid, enough heat will escape that the cooking time should be extended by 20 minutes to half an hour.
- ◆ For best results, ground meats must be cooked in a skillet before cooking in the crockpot.
- ◆ Seafood should be added during the last hour of cooking time, or it will overcook and have a rubbery texture.
- ◆ Add tender vegetables like tomatoes, mushrooms and zucchini during the last 45 minutes of cooking time so they don't overcook.
- ◆ One hour on HIGH is equal to two hours on LOW.

How to Adapt a Recipe for a Slow Cooker

Soups: Unless the recipe is rice or soup, reduce the liquid by $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ since liquids don't boil away like they do in conventional cooking. Usually there will be MORE liquid at the end of cooking instead of less.

Meats: Slow cookers don't brown food, therefore you may want to sear meats or poultry in a skillet. This step is optional, but gives extra flavor and added eye-appeal.

Removing Excess Fat: Fats will not bake off in the slow cooker as in the oven. Remove the skin from poultry and trim excess fat from meats. To remove fat from meat, trim the fat with a sharp knife, wipe the meat well and pat dry, or brown the meat and drain the fat before adding the meat to the slow cooker. Fats will melt with long cooking times, and will add unpleasant texture to the finished dish. Fatty foods also cook too quickly.

Vegetables: Most vegetables do not overcook as they do when roasted in the oven or simmered on the stovetop, so they can all be added at the beginning. (Exceptions: Add tender vegetables like tomatoes, mushrooms, and zucchini during the last 45 minutes of cooking time so they don't overcook.)

Seafood: Do not precook seafood or frozen vegetables; just rinse and drain thoroughly before adding to other ingredients. These foods cook quickly, so add during last hour of cooking. Overcooked seafood will have a rubbery texture.

Herbs & Spices: Fresh herbs and spices are better than the dried variety for extended cooking times, as they take longer to release their flavors. Add these at the beginning of cooking time. When using the dried variety, leaf or whole herbs and spices are preferred over crushed or ground in slow cookers. If ground herbs and spices are used, add them during the last hour of cooking. They will lose the flavor if cooked with the rest of the ingredients for a long period of time. Cayenne pepper and Tabasco sauce actually tend to become bitter if cooked too long, so use small amounts and add during the last hour.

Pasta: If a recipe calls for cooked noodles, macaroni, pasta, etc., cook till slightly tender, then add to the slow cooker within the last hour of cooking.

Rice: If cooked rice is called for, stir raw rice in with the other ingredients; add 1 cup extra liquid per cup of raw rice. Use long grain 'converted' rice for best results in all-day cooking.

Dry Beans: Dry beans can be cooked in the slow cooker. To lessen their famous “gassy” effect, pre-soak them (using overnight or quick-soak method – boil 2 minutes then let sit for 1 hour) and then rinse, add more water and boil for at least 10 minutes. You can skip the pre-soak if you are not bothered by the gasses beans give off during cooking. Dry beans take longer to tenderize if combined with sugar and acid. *To achieve desired texture, add sugar, salt or acid (tomatoes, vinegar, etc.) only after beans have cooked until tender.*

Soups: Some soup recipes call for 2 to 3 quarts of water. To adjust for a slow cooker, add the other soup ingredients to the slow cooker; then add water to cover the ingredients (don’t fill slow cooker more than 2/3 full. If thinner soup is desired, add more liquid at serving time).

Milk-Based Recipes: If milk-based recipes have no other liquid for initial cooking, add 1 or 2 cups water; then within last 30 minutes of cooking time, stir in milk or cream as called for. Dairy products such as milk, cream or sour cream tend to break down during extended cooking, so add during the last hour of cooking. Condensed soups may be substituted for milk, etc., and can cook for longer periods of time. Evaporated milk does not curdle and can be substituted for fresh milk in most recipes.

To Thicken Gravies: To thicken gravies before serving, remove ½ cup liquid from slow cooker, stir recommended amount of flour or cornstarch into liquid, return to slow cooker and simmer on high for 15 minutes. Or, stir in ¼ cup quick-cooking tapioca or instant potato flakes at start of cooking, and gravy will thicken as it cooks.

Wait to Add Toppings: Add toppings such as crumbs, bacon bits, tomato wedges or grated cheese just before serving.

Cakes & Desserts You can make cakes and desserts in the crockpot! Use a small round rack or vegetable steamer to lift the cake pan off the bottom of the crockpot so heat circulates evenly around the pan. You do need a larger crockpot for 'baking' cakes and other desserts. A 5 quart slow cooker will hold an 8" or 9" cake pan or springform pan. You may need to increase cooking times if you live at a high altitude, usually by 40-50%.

Adapting Cooking Times*

If standard recipe says:	Cook in slow cooker on high heat	Cook in slow cooker on low heat
15 to 30 minutes	1½ to 2½ hours	4-6 hours
35 to 45 minutes	3-4 hours	6-10 hours
50 minutes to 3 hours	4-6 hours	8-18 hours

**The new hotter cooking crockpots change the rules. If you have a crockpot that is less than five years old, you'll probably need to reduce the cooking time. Check the food at four hours on low, using an instant read meat thermometer to see if the food is done.*

Cleaning the Crockpot

Fill the appliance with hot soapy water when the cooker has cooled. Let soak for 15-20 minutes, then scrub with a cloth, nylon net pad or a plastic sponge. Do not use a harsh abrasive cleaner, SOS pad or metal pad. Rinse well in hot water and dry.

To remove mineral stains, fill crockpot 3/4 full with hot water and 1 cup white vinegar. Cover and cook on high for 2 hours. Then let the crockpot cool and soak and clean as directed above.

To remove water marks from glazed crockery, rub the surface with vegetable oil and let stand for 2-3 hours. Then fill with hot soapy water, rub the surface, and scrub with a nylon net pad. Rinse and dry well.

References: Using a Slow Cooker, the Utah Food Sense program, Utah State University Extension, USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, "Slow Cookers and Food Safety" About.com, <http://busycooks.about.com/od/slowcookerrecipes/a/crockpot101.htm>, 1/6/12.

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