

EASY SLOW COOKER METHODS

*A Guide to Using Your Slow Cooker
All Year Round to Eat Well
and Save Money*



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WHAT'S IN THIS GUIDE

Cooking with a slow cooker is one of the best ways to feed the whole family nutritiously yet inexpensively, all in one pot. You can save on shopping, cooking time and clean up once you start cooking with a slow cooker.

Cooking with a slow cooker has many advantages over other forms of cooking. You can use a great number of ingredients you will probably already have on hand at home in your pantry or freezer to whip up amazing meals. Place your items in the slow cooker, turn it to the right setting, and in 4 to 10 hours you can have a delicious slow-cooked meal with all of the nutrition of the food simmered right in.

There is nothing quite like a hearty meal on a cold winter's day, but you can use your slow cooker all year round to create superb home-cooked meals that will help you save money and watch your weight. If you cook it yourself, you are in control of your calories. There will no longer be any need to rush to the fast food joint or takeaway to grab something quick to eat. Just arrive home, walk into the kitchen, stir and serve.'

In this guide, the authors take you step by step through slow cooking basics, from choosing your slow cooker, to the importance of putting the right ingredients in the right order into your slow cooker for best results.

They give detailed instructions on how to stock your pantry to get the most from your slow cooker, food safety issues when cooking with your slow cooker, how to cook great dishes from around the world in your slow cooker, and much more.

A slow cooker is one of the best ways to save time and feed your family great meals even on a tight budget. If you are looking for better ways to manage meals and money in your house, a slow cooker could just be the solution you are looking for. You can use it all year round, even in the summer, eliminating the need to slave over a hot stove.

You will learn the top tips and tricks for getting the most out of your slow cooker, plus half-dozen recipes to get you started experimenting with all that your slow cooker can do.

If you are looking for ways to save time in the kitchen and stretch your food budget even further, this guide can help get you started cooking with a slow cooker today, so you will see all the satisfied smiles on your family's faces tonight.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Mara Michaels and Carolyn Stone are the authors of more than 20 cooking and entertaining guides designed to help you live better for less.

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INTRODUCTION

In our modern world, every family seems to be busy all the time. There never seem to be enough hours in the day to get everything done. Whether it is your schedule or your children's setting the pace, it seems that for most people, a good home-cooked meal can be hard to come by.

But with obesity levels at an all-time high in the United States, and Type 2 diabetes at epidemic proportions, even being found in children as young as nine, we think it is time to get back to basics and re-enter the kitchen to wage the war against fat and disease.

Enter the slow cooker. It provides families with another way to prepare delicious meals without spending a fortune on takeaway or convenience food. You can eat more healthily than ever, and sample delicious cuisines from all over the world at the same time. You will know exactly what is going into your food if you start from scratch and use only fresh ingredients.

Best of all, you will be able to cook a great meal without slaving over a hot stove, which is ideal if you live in a warmer part of the country or want to have hearty meals even in the summer to cut down on cravings and bad snacking habits. Using a slow cooker is a modern miracle because you don't even have to be at home while your fabulous meal is cooking. Set it, and forget it, until you get home and it is time to eat.

A slow cooker, is a great way to create a delicious meal the whole family will love with only a bit of preparation of the ingredients. In this guide we will be offering the benefit of our experience of using our slow cookers to make a variety of slow-cooked meals the whole family will love.

So long as you follow a few basic rules, you should have success rather than mess when it comes to your using your slow cooker. Let's begin now with the best ways to get started with slow cooking.

CHAPTER 1: GETTING STARTED WITH A SLOW COOKER

One of the most exciting things about cooking with a slow cooker is the wonderful aroma when you come into the house, and the thought that a delicious, hearty meal is less than 30 minutes away (if you have to finish off the dish in some way before serving), but paying attention to the instructions is key. No one wants to come home with a hearty appetite to find a slow cooker pot full of mush.

Let's look at slow cooker basics, then, starting with your decision to buy a slow cooker. Once you decide to buy a slow cooker, it will be time to do your research and comparison shop. You can find slow cookers in various sizes, from as small as one quart to as large as five quarts. Your main consideration will be how many people you have to feed in your family, and where you will locate your slow cooker so that it is not in the way while cooking. If you have a small kitchen, you will want to consider a model that does not take up too much counter space.

Some slow cookers are all one unit; they are the most basic models available, and quite inexpensive. The most convenient ones come with removable inner pots that allow for easier serving at the dinner table and fast clean-ups. A removable inner core allows everyone to sit and relax as they spoon their food onto the plate instead of standing at the countertop filling plates with a large spoon or ladle. Some even come equipped with a non-stick inner pot, making clean up even more of a breeze. These will be the more expensive models, but you will want to read reviews of the slow cooker and then shop around to find the best price.

Once you have considered the size and construction of the slow cooker, you will need to think about the mechanism itself, and how power-efficient your slow cooker will be. Temperature settings vary among slow cookers, from basic models with only a few simple settings to ones with a full range. For example, some have as little as two setting (high and low). Others include five settings that vary from high (two hours) to really slow cooking (ten hours).

There may also be a warm setting in case the food has finished cooking but any accompanying side dishes still need to be prepared or assembled. This setting is also great for times when everyone isn't ready to eat their meal just yet, or you want to keep it warm until the last member of the family comes home to eat.

You will want to be sure to choose a slow cooker with a good energy star rating and one that can be brought easily from the appliance to the table and even to the refrigerator with any leftovers. You need to consider not just the initial cost of any appliance you purchase, but the ongoing costs in terms of your electric bill.

With a slow cooker, it is designed to use only a small amount of power. You will probably find that any increase in your electric bill will be more than offset by the amount of money you will be saving on convenience food, take away, pizza and so on.

The heat settings will be the most essential part of the mechanism, so you will want to be careful with your heat settings. As with ovens, the temperatures and settings on the dial are a rough estimate only. This will be a matter of trial and error, but as our friend Evelyn Trimborn always says, test the food for doneness easily. You can always cook it more, but you can't cook it less if it is overdone. The same will be true of any seasonings you put into the food. People can always add more of their own seasonings if the food is too bland, but it is impossible to take out too much salt or pepper, for example.

When are shopping for a slow cooker, read the reviews, compare prices, models and more. Once you get it home, give it a good cleaning and then start to experiment. Follow any recipes exactly the first time around, with no variations in ingredients. Then see how long it actually takes for it to cook when it is on the lowest setting. Experiment with it on the weekend, and have some handy fast foods standing by in case it takes longer than you think it will and your family ends up famished.

Make notes on every single dish you create, and what was most successful in terms of time, setting and recipes. Also make notes as to what your family loved, and what they would like skip.

We are not just talking about taste, but consistency as well. Some will love soup, while others will love stew (see our Easy Soups and Stews guide for more information.)

Keep in mind that everything will be cooking healthfully in whatever liquid you put in the slow cooker. As with any soup or stew, all of the food is being cooked in one single pot, thus preserving the nutritional value of all the foods, as opposed to boiling it away and then discarding it when you drain the cooking water.

A slow cooker is a useful tool for any busy household. All that is required of you is to add your ingredients to the slow cooker and be ready to eat a sumptuous meal when you return home. But without enough liquid or the proper temperature settings on your slow cooker, your meal will start to stick to the bottom and eventually burn.

There doesn't need to be a lot of liquid in most cases, just enough to cover the bottom in most cases. The juices within the meat will mingle with the other liquid during cooking to create more of a stock and help part boil, part steam the food.

You will not want to add too much water, however, so that you do not end up with mush. If you are planning to make a soup or stew, some liquid will be preserved, but with some trial and error you will be able to get your meals to a desired thickness of consistency depending on your family's preferences.

Do also keep in mind, however that a slow cooker should be at least half full for maximum cooking potential. Keep in mind that the more food you add to the cooker, the slower it will cook. Therefore, buy a slow cooker that is large enough to cook regular meals for your whole family, but not so large that you will have an issue if you cut back to cook for fewer people because not everyone will be home for dinner that night (though of course you can cook the

usual amount and leave the leftovers for them until the next day, when they can heat them up in the microwave).

The temperature selected will cook the food evenly without overcooking if the heat settings are adjusted accordingly. If you aren't careful and don't adjust the slow cooker heat settings, you may find that an eight-hour setting cooked your dinner in two, but spent the other six drying it out.

This is a waste of food and of electricity as well, so be sure to follow instructions carefully when you are first using your slow cooker so that you can get a clear sense of its capabilities and start to produce consistently good meals.

Any meat used needs to be thoroughly drained before adding it to the cooker. Since meat takes longer to cook than other components of a recipe, such as vegetables, meat will almost always need to make up the bottom layer of ingredients when you are assembling your slow cooker recipes. This will also help keep the meat moist since it will cook in the liquid underneath.

For safety, cook meat and poultry at least three hours so that an internal temperature that is high enough for proper cooking and the killing off of bacteria can be reached.

This is not usually a problem, since many people use the slow cooker at its lowest setting (six to ten hours depending on the brand of cooker) and therefore, the meat will definitely be cooked through. There is a danger in undercooked chicken or turkey of getting salmonella poisoning. With undercooked pork, there is a danger of trichinosis.

Just a word of advice, whole chickens should not be used in a slow cooker. The internal temperature needed to safely cook that much chicken properly can't be reached at such low temperature settings. Boneless chicken parts will work much better, or the carcass of a bird that has already been roasted, such as a turkey that you want to make the most of once you have had a roast dinner with it, but there is still a lot of meat on the bones.

If you plan to cook vegetables in your slow cooker, there are a number of things you will want to be careful of. The first is to wash them well. The next is to pace the cooking according to the kinds of vegetables and their general cook times.

Tough, fibrous veggies like carrots and potatoes can be tossed in at the beginning with the meat. It takes longer for the fibers to be broken down and the vegetables to be cooked all the way through when cooking at quite a slow temperature.

More delicate vegetables like tomatoes, peppers, and mushrooms should be added half an hour before the meal is done in most cases, since they need very little cooking time.

Your slow cooker meals can be a super way to get all of the ingredients cooked in only one pot, but do keep in mind that you might have to do some additional preparation of the ingredients or the dish in the last remaining minutes of the cook time, and plan accordingly.

Slow cooking makes dinner a cinch when you are on the run, so long as you give yourself a bit

of a time cushion in the run up to the meal.

Just be sure to experiment with various dishes the first time to get an idea of how long your slow cooker takes to create the particular meal from start to finish. Layering foods correctly and testing heat settings, as well as preparing other items like a tossed salad, sandwiched and more, will ensure your meal will be delicious every time.

Now that we have covered the most important things to consider when you are thinking about buying a slow cooker, let's look at some of the essential ingredients you will want to have on hand for your best cooking with a slow cooker.

CHAPTER 2: ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS FOR SLOW COOKING

A slow cooker in the kitchen will pay for itself in no time. The time it saves when preparing meals makes it an invaluable tool that will help you feed your family in a healthy manner without going over budget.

If you plan on using your slow cooker quite often, there are a few essential ingredients you may want to keep on hand to enhance your dishes and be able to whip up a great meal, set it, and forget it until you have a steaming soup or stew at supper time. These ingredients are inexpensive and nutritious, and help add texture, flavor and consistency to your meals.

1. Beans

Beans are a cheap source of protein that cooks well. Each bean has its own flavor which is enhanced by the spices you use to cook them. Beans can be used as a meal base all by itself you are a vegetarian looking to create an easy dish without much fuss. Or, you can add it to some meat to enhance the protein and fiber and stretch the meal without adding a lot to the cost of it. Whether navy, lentil, Northern, kidney beans in every color, black, or chickpeas, beans can help you create some amazing and hearty slow cooker meals.

You can buy them dry and soak them overnight to prepare them for cooking, or use the convenient canned varieties. Goya makes a great range of beans in both small and family-sized cans with low sodium at a great price. Look for them in the vegetable section of your supermarket, or in the Latino foods section.

2. Fibrous Vegetables

The average household should have at least a couple of pounds of potatoes stored in a cool, dry place. They are a versatile food that can be used in a variety of ways. Mash them, fry them, stew them, or throw them in the slow cooker. Potatoes add density to soups, stews, and meals with meat.

Because potatoes and other fibrous veggies like turnips and carrots, take longer to cook, they can be thrown in the cooker with the meat and allowed to cook slowly all day.

3. Fresh Herbs

Herbs can dramatically change the flavor of almost any meal. Herbs come dried, but release a better flavor if they are fresh. You can grow your own herbs in the house in small pots. All you need is a sunny spot, good soil in the pot, cuttings, and water. Home grown herbs can be dried to extend their life, making them easy to keep around without worrying about wasting them. Herbs are added at various times, but often near the end of the slow cooker cycle so their flavor will permeate the cooked meal.

4. Broth

Anything cooked in the slow cooker needs some sort of liquid to start the process. Instead of

always adding water, try broth. Chicken, beef, and vegetable broth are available in most grocery stores for very little money. Many varieties come already seasoned, and it is a quick and easy way to add flavor to meat dishes.

The main drawback is the amount of sodium in a lot of American convenience foods, so opt for low sodium varieties whenever possible. Carrying a lot of broth back and forth from the supermarket can also be a nuisance, so you might want to consider bouillon cubes or powder and simply reconstitute it in water. We use a vegetarian low sodium version our friend Evelyn discovered, which is packed full of flavor and no salt, as a basis for all of our cooking.

5. Flour or Cornstarch

Flour and cornstarch are used for thickening and sautéing. Applying a light coating of flour to meats and sautéing them in a little olive oil will create flavorful bits of thickener that can be added to the slow cooker. At the end of a meal, adding cornstarch to the remaining liquid can create a creamy gravy for dishes like creamed soups or stews. Flour can also be used as a thickener if you add it carefully by mixing it well outside of the slow cooker in a pan or bowl to get rid of any lumps and then carefully adding it to the slow cooker. However, if you want to add thickener directly to the slow cooker, then cornstarch is easier and makes smoother gravies.

6. Protein

We have already discussed the importance of beans in cooking in a slow cooker, but for most families, the protein will usually come from meat or poultry. You don't have to spring for really expensive cuts of meat if you are cooking in a slow cooker. A cheap, tougher cut of meat will usually cook better in a slow cooker and almost melt in your mouth when the dish is ready. Look for stewing beef, chuck and round. Slow cooking will add moisture and tenderize meat that would otherwise dry out and be tough when cooked in the oven. The same will be true of chicken. You can buy an inexpensive fryer rather than a magnificent roaster and get a great flavorful meal with no waste by pre-cooking the chicken in the oven and then putting the quartered chicken pieces into the slow cooker with a variety of ingredients to transform a stringy and tough bird into a succulent soup or stew.

7. Canned Vegetables

Some recipes will call for canned vegetables such as mushrooms and tomatoes. Sometimes the liquid will be called for, while at other times, it will need to be discarded. Be sure to follow all the instructions carefully. As a general rule, canned veggies tend to be quite salty, so read the labels to look for low sodium varieties if you can find them. If you are going to discard the liquid, put the vegetables into a sieve or colander and give them a good rinse with clear water under the tap.

8. Frozen Vegetables

Certain recipes will call for frozen vegetables to be added right to the slow cooker in their frozen state. Look for frozen root vegetables, stew mixes, and other vegetables that are often a nuisance to prepare from fresh and whole (like a turnip or parsnip).

9-Pop and fresh dough rolls

Dinner biscuits can be great as dumplings right in your soup or stew in your slow cooker. You

can also use them as hot bread to sop up gravy, or a fast, fresh roll or serving base for a recipe. You can even use them as fast and fun dessert shells. The tubes of dough are inexpensive but versatile and can really round off a meal and make it more hearty and filling for pennies.

These are the essentials for almost any slow cooker meal. By stocking up at your local warehouse store or taking advantage of sales, you can fill your larder and/or freezer with all of the essential ingredients for great slow cooker meals without constantly having to run to the store to figure out what is for dinner. Organize your ingredients at the start of each day, then set and forget until dinner that evening.

Now that we have covered all of the essential ingredients you will want to have on hand for tasty and economical cooking with a slow cooker, it is time to start getting creative with your new slow cooker.

CHAPTER 3: CREATIVITY USING A SLOW COOKER

A slow cooker is a great addition to your arsenal of cooking equipment. It is definitely a help when you have no idea what to cook for dinner. Throw in a bit of this and toss in a little of that, and you've got a meal of your own creation for a hungry family. They don't need to know that it's mostly made up of leftovers. All they will care about is a yummy hot meal.

If you have an adventurous cooking spirit and a cabinet, pantry or freezer full of goodies, it will be easy to create a variety of slow cooker meals from scratch. In fact, it can be so easy that almost anyone in the family, even small children, will be able to help you with the cooking once they know the essentials we have covered in Chapter 1. If they can use a measuring cup and open a can of beans (many have flip-top lids, such as the Goya beans) and a bag of vegetables, they can cook a slow cooker meal.

When putting together a potluck slow cooker meal, you need a base or main ingredient. Meat or beans make the perfect base. Although grains also make a good base for meals, they will usually cook too quickly to be of any use to you in a slow cooker. Rice quickly becomes mushy when it is overcooked and pastas work best when boiled rapidly for about 8 to 10 minutes. Therefore, slow cooking these types of foods would potentially ruin them. They are so fast cooking that you can make them while you are waiting for the slow cooker cycle to finish and are setting the table.

Your cooking base for each slow cooker meal will need to be something that can stand up to the length of time required for cooking with a slow cooker and the temperature settings of your slow cooker. Chicken, turkey, beef, pork, and lamb are all good choices for a meat base, though we recommend that they be pre-cooked rather than raw in order to avoid any food-borne illnesses caused by the meat not reaching a sufficiently high internal temperature in the slow cooker. A roast chicken or turkey cut up, sautéed beef, pork and lamb can all be cooked in a pan for about 10 minutes or until no longer pink in the center, and then drained of their unhealthy fat and then added to the bottom of the slow cooker where the temperature will be hottest.

Most beans can stand up to the heating process of a slow cooker, especially if they have been soaked overnight but have not yet been cooked. Read the instructions on all beans, particularly kidney beans, to avoid any gastric distress.

Once you have made a choice for your meal base, wash it thoroughly and put it in the cooker. Don't forget to add a bit of liquid to the bottom before of the slow cooker first.

The next step is to decide what will go well with the base chosen. Most meat types share the fact that they are compatible with many of the same vegetables. First, check the fridge. A bag of baby carrots, an onion, and some celery can be the simplest ways to start. Cut them into finger-sized chunks and layer them right on top of your meat or bean base.

Once you get the slow cooker started, you can start looking for other and preparing your other

ingredients, such as red-skinned or fingerling potatoes, which do not have to be peeled. Simply, wash the outer skin thoroughly and pop them into the cooker as well. Unless they are really large, there will be no need to slice or dice them beforehand. If they are large, cut into 4 to 8 wedges and put in the pot.

Now it will be time to think about spices and seasonings. What will go well with your base? For some spiciness, add some turmeric, cumin, and cilantro or curry powder, which goes well with chicken or pork for a more Indian flavor.

On the Italian side, choose rosemary, basil, oregano, bay leaf, and coriander. Just remember to remove the bay leaf before serving. Remember, fresh herbs have a more distinctive taste than powdered spices, so if you have some on hand, use those instead.

About an hour before time zero, it might be time to add more veggies or thickener, and check the consistency of your dish. If there is still too much liquid left for your liking, turn the cooker up on high and remove the lid. The liquid will evaporate and you can return to low after the desired consistency of broth or stew is attained.

Let's look a bit more closely at the best ways to make slow cooked soups and stews in your handy slow cooker, for great one-dish meals your family will love.

CHAPTER 4: SLOW COOKER SOUPS AND STEWS

It seems like the slow cooker was practically made for soups and stews. On a cold fall or winter day, you can combine the ingredients for your favorite soup in the pot and fill the house with a delicious aroma while it cooks. Everyone will probably make at least one soup or stew in their slow cooker every week that they can serve as a family standby meal that everyone will love.

Why do we like soups? They are fun and easy to make. Many cultures rely on soup as their main dish for lunch or dinner. A soup can be thin like chicken noodle or some Thai soups. A soup can also be thick like vichyssoise or borscht, two more great ethnic recipes you might want to try to add variety to your cooking with a slow cooker.

Thicker soups keep you full longer between meals. Add a bit of bread and you have a complete meal. Start with a salad and end with a dessert for a family feast any night of the week for pennies on the dollar compared to what you would pay at a restaurant or spend on take away or those frozen convenience foods that are so popular these days.

Throughout this guide we have been discussing the importance of whatever liquid you put into the slow cooker to help control the slow cooking process. Soups require more liquid than a regular meal in a slow cooker. Don't be afraid to add two or three cups of broth or water to your cooker when creating soup dishes. If you have a larger slow cooker, you may need to add a bit more liquid depending on how many other ingredients you also add.

If your main ingredient is meat, add it first. For soups it is a good idea to cut raw chicken into small cubes. For beef, buy already cubed beef for stew to avoid having to cube it yourself. Meat should be thawed for soups and stews before adding to the slow cooker. Sear meats in a frying pan in a bit of oil before adding them to the cooker. Once the meat is cooked, a small amount of water and a fork will help you remove those tasty little fragments from the bottom of the skillet so they can be added to the soup for flavor.

Add your vegetables to the soup once the meat has been put in. Cut your potatoes, carrots, squash, zucchini, and onions into soup-sized pieces. Celery is another great choice for soups, adding lots of flavor with hardly any calories. For a firmer celery texture, wait to add the celery until a couple of hours before the end of cooking.

Frozen veggies can also be added to the soup at any time in the cooking process. The larger the vegetable, the earlier it should be added.

Creamier soups are also a good choice for slow cooker meals. Heavy cream can stand up to the longer cooking time without scorching. If milk is called for in your dish, use evaporated milk in its place. Evaporated milk has had the water component removed and provides a creamier texture without the curdling effect that can be common when using regular milk.

Your soup will be just about ready when you get home at the end of the day, but you might need to finish off your recipes in the last 10 to 30 minutes before serving. You can do this easily while you set the table, before you get changed out of your work clothes, and so on.

When making soups like potato soup or chowders that call for cheese, wait until the soup is close to finished before adding the cheese. Herbs like rosemary, dill, basil, oregano, and parsley can be added now too. Chives, leeks, shallots, and garlic also add flavor to soups and stews and can be added in the last half an hour of cook time. Chives, parsley, and leeks can be used as a garnish as well when you are serving. You can cook them in a little oil in a frying pan and then serve with the soup or stew.

Stews will be more hearty again, with more chunky vegetables and meat, and less liquid than a soup. You can also add thickener in the form of flour, cornstarch, potato flour, dried mashed potato flakes, and more. Once you are sure it is the right consistency, you can serve as is, or add a few more finishing touches.

Add pop and fresh dough rounds to the top of the pot about 30 minutes before the stew will be done and get great dumplings by the time it is ready to serve.

Can you taste that soup or stew now? The best thing about these dishes is that they can be frozen in plastic containers with covers, and thawed in the microwave any time you feel like some warm and hearty food. A slow cooker makes a batch large enough to feed an army or a large family of hungry eaters.

You can also make these great meals at any time, even in the hot weather, without heating up your whole kitchen or slaving over the stove. We will look at this aspect of cooking with a slow cooker later in this guide. But first, let's have a look at the creative things you can do with chicken in your slow cooker recipes.

CHAPTER 5: SLOW COOKER CHICKEN RECIPES

For a quick dinner, what can be more perfect than chicken? It is economical and there is an entire library's worth of recipes for every part and piece of it. Here are some ideas for cooking chicken in a slow cooker.

Chicken is a favorite staple of the American diet. People raise chickens and other poultry on farms. They are plentiful and can be prepared more readily than a cow or a pig. If you visit any relatives in the Deep South, you are sure to have a chicken dinner at least once or twice a week.

In a slow cooker, all parts of the chicken work well, but you must be careful with your temperature settings. White and dark meat portions of the chicken will cook at different rates. You will notice this when you fry or barbecue chicken as well. The thighs and legs finish cooking sooner, mostly due to the high fat content of these portions (they are three times more fatty than the breast meat). Wings are usually next in terms of cooking time, followed last by the much thicker chicken breasts.

Another difference in chicken pieces is the bone. Pieces of chicken with the bone in cook better in the slow cooker because they are less likely to dry out. On the other hand, boneless chicken breasts can dry out if they are cooked too long.

One way to avoid drying out is to cook chicken pieces from frozen. The great thing about a slow cooker is that it works well whether the meat is frozen or thawed. Thawed meat will of course need less cooking time because the heat works directly to cook the meat. If the chicken is frozen, the heat defrosts the chicken first before actually cooking it.

However, with chicken comes the risk of food-borne illnesses, such as salmonella poisoning. Therefore, we do not recommend that you put frozen or raw chicken into a slow cooker unless it is cut into very small pieces and you put it right in the bottom of the slow cooker and cook it for at least 6 hours.

Prepare your chicken pieces as you would if you were cooking them in the oven. Clean the chicken thoroughly and season it. This will help to remove Salmonella bacteria commonly found in raw chicken. This will also avoid getting any bloody chicken juice in the bottom of the slow cooker.

A liquid will always be needed at the start of cooking in your slow cooker. Instead of water, add some seasoned chicken broth to infuse the meat with flavor. Another way to start off a thicker soup or stew is to lightly flour and sauté the chicken for a couple of minutes in a frying pan before slow cooking it in the slow cooker. In this way you can be sure it is not raw and has been heated to an internal temperature of at least 160 degrees to kill off any harmful bacteria.

Once you have cooked the chicken, remove it from the pan and put it into the slow cooker. Then

add the dregs from the pan, adding a bit of water and scraping lightly with a fork. The bits from the pan will flavor the broth in the slow cooker even more.

Frozen chicken needs very little liquid as liquid will be created as the chicken defrosts, but do not use frozen chicken if you plan a quick slow cooker meal or the pieces have the bone in and are very thick. Never try to put a whole chicken, fresh and raw, or frozen, into your slow cooker.

Once you have got your chicken organized and safe to be cooked in the slow cooker, it will be time to consider the other ingredients to add to your soup or stew.

Tougher veggies like carrots and potatoes can be added at the beginning because they take longer to cook. A dish that calls for a tomato base such as a chicken cacciatore will have the tomatoes added near the end of cooking. Tomatoes are one vegetable that doesn't stand up well to long periods of cooking. Instead of whole tomatoes, you will have mush after six hours if you are not careful.

Chicken pieces need to cook for four hours or more in a slow cooker to be sure that they are done. With a slow cooker, two hours on a low setting would be equal to about one hour on the highest setting. Frozen chicken will need the maximum time to cook to keep you and your family safe and incorporate all of the flavors of the dish.

Before serving, check the doneness of the dish. Take out a thigh, bone in, and cut right through. Make sure that there is no pink near the bone and the juices run clear. If this is not the case, you can turn up the pot for about 30 minutes, or remove the pieces that you plan to serve and heat them in the microwave for at least 2 minutes just to be sure that the internal temperature is high enough to kill off any lingering bacteria.

Any spices you add to chicken dishes can be left for last. Fresh herbs will infuse quickly throughout the meal so an hour in the cooker is sufficient. Dried spices can take a bit longer to flavor so you can add them about two hours before the meal is done if you are home, or add when you walk in the door and then turn up the heat and stir well. In this way the herbs and spices will be evenly distributed and add flavor to any dish you want to cook.

A slow cooker is a great way to cook a delicious dinner for the whole family in one pot, slow cooked to perfection, so long as you follow a few simple rules to stay safe from salmonella.

In the next chapter we will look at another delicious, but even more dangerous meat, pork, and how it can be cooked in your slow cooker safely.

CHAPTER 6: SLOW COOKER PORK RECIPES

Pork has been nicknamed "The Other White Meat." It is a healthy alternative to fattier cuts of beef and chicken and can be both flavorful and versatile as a substitute in dishes that would usually call for chicken and/or beef. You can try a number of pork dishes in your slow cooker so long as you keep safety in mind.

Like chicken and salmonella poisoning, pork can give you food poisoning as well in the form of trichinosis. If you have ever seen the Exorcist, you will know how sick you can get from BOTH ends if you are ever unfortunate enough to have trichinosis poisoning. There are reasons why it is a 'non-kosher' food forbidden in many religions. In the days before refrigeration, eating old or poorly cooked pork would have been deadly.

That being said, as with any other food, if you put food safety first and cook your pork until it is fully heated to a proper internal temperature of at least 180 degrees, you can be sure of killing off bacteria and being able to eat the meat safely. There is no such thing as eating your pork rare.

Having got all of the safety essentials out of the way, we can now look at the different choices of meat you have from the humble little pig. Pork provides many different cuts of meat: bacon, ground sausage, ham, pork butt steaks, ribs, loin, and chops. Each has its own characteristics and provides different options for how it can be cooked. In the slow cooker you can use just about all of those cuts if you like. The leaner cuts will give you the least fat if you are watching your diet.

Boneless pork chops and pork tenderloin will not take as long to cook. Your slow cooker should be set on four hours instead of eight. Pork can be bought seasoned from the store. If yours is not, try a trick I like to use for pork and poultry. Add a packet of onion soup mix to the meat. It can be regular onion or golden onion, whichever you prefer.

Once you have added your pork cut and onion soup mix, pour about one cup of water and any other flavorful sauces, such as soy or teriyaki sauce into your slow cooker. Veggies can be tossed in now if you want to add them. You can use fresh or frozen veggies either one.

Sausage balls can be made by rolling out ground pork sausage. If you don't have fresh pork, frozen sausage balls will do. Again, be sure to add your favorite sauce and a bit of water to the cooker. Depending on how many sausage balls you are preparing and whether they are fresh or frozen, cooking time is approximately two to four hours, with frozen pork sausage and higher quantities requiring the higher amount of time. Remember, with pork you can never be too careful when it comes to making sure it is cooked through. After two hours of cooking, check for doneness.

Another favorite cut of pork for the slow cooker is pork ribs. They can be country style (little to no bone and more meat) or spareribs. You may choose to season and marinate the ribs with your favorite store bought or homemade marinade. For best results, marinate overnight before

cooking them in the slow cooker. They will be in there for six to eight hours so there is no need to parboil on the stove for tenderness.

Yes, you guessed it. Be sure to add enough water before cooking to create the kind of consistency you are aiming for. You can then add other items later. For example, up to an hour or two before cooking is complete, add your favorite barbeque sauce. The spicy sauce will find its way through the meat and add flavoring. By the time they finish cooking, the ribs will be so tender the meat will fall away from the bone. It could end up better than any barbecue on the grill, with a more succulent and less charred taste.

You can even slow cook a pre-cooked (not raw) ham for a special Sunday dinner. Glaze it with honey or brown sugar and pineapples an hour or so before it is cooked. The meat will be juicy, flavorful, and tender when sliced.

Pork is a great meat to use in the slow cooker. Just be aware of your cooking times for boneless meat as opposed to bone-in varieties. The last thing you want is a dangerous piece of meat full of bacteria, or a dried out piece of meat that is like shoe leather.

Of course, no pork dish would really be complete with some sort of beans, so let's look at a few ways to use beans in your slow cooker.

CHAPTER 7: SLOW COOKING WITH BEANS

Many people overlook the fact that beans are a wonderful source of protein. They come in all shapes, sizes, colors, and unique tastes. They have fiber, protein and fill you up without adding a lot of fat and calories to a meal. Cooking beans in the slow cooker is a great idea and is very easy to do, whether you are starting with pre-prepared dry beans or convenient canned beans.

Unfortunately, most of the time if you even mention the word bean, it elicits giggles or rolling of eyes or a wrinkle to the nose. Most people avoid eating them in mixed company for obvious reasons. The gas that people get from eating them can be a combination of the enzymes from the bean, or the byproduct of eating so much high-quality vegetable protein at one sitting.

There are over the counter remedies like Beano to help with this problem, but the truth is that eating beans regularly will usually not be such a shock to the digestive system and most stomachs should settle down to the new protein and fiber routine.

Compared to animal proteins, which contain more fat, beans are made up of vegetable proteins, which only includes about two grams of fat per serving. There is no cholesterol in non-animal product sources of fat.

Another great thing about beans is that they don't take as much to fill you up. A meal that has a bean component will leave you feeling fuller faster. This helps you avoid overeating. You will also stay fuller longer.

Many people are turning to gardening to grow their own healthy foods and supplement their budget with home grown foods. Beans are ideal for this, since they usually grow up a vine and do not need to take up a lot of room in the ground in your garden. Growing beans can also help enrich the soil they are planted in.

Beans are cheap and go well with a variety of sauces and spices. In several cultures, beans are a main staple of everyone's daily diet.

When looking for beans to use in for slow cooker recipes, opt for dried beans or canned beans, or fresh. If you use canned, be sure to rinse them well in order to get rid of the salty water that they will be packed in.

Dried beans that have been pre-prepared according to the instructions on the package are ideal for slow cooking for up to 10 hours in the slow cooker.

Water is a bean's best friend for a few reasons. First, soaking beans before cooking removes the substances that causes lot of flatulence in bean eaters. If you are using kidney beans, you may want to change the water several times, and will also need to pre-cook them for at least 20 minutes to get rid of the harmful enzyme.

For best results, allow the beans to soak overnight in a bowl of fresh water. When you wake up, you can parboil the kidney beans while you get ready for your day, and then discard the water and add them to the slow cooker.

Popular beans used in recipes are kidney, black, Lima, chickpeas, Northern, navy, and pintos. No matter which type of bean a recipe calls for, make sure the liquid in the cooker is sufficient to cover the beans completely. Be aware that as the beans cook, the water will evaporate to steam and may need replacing depending on how high of a setting you are using, so if you are leaving the house for the rest of the day, be sure to add plenty of water and keep things on a low setting to be sure your beans do not boil dry.

It's best to set your slow cooker on the lowest setting and cook until the beans are tender. Many bean recipes call for diced tomatoes and/or chilies as well. To save time, use a can of diced tomatoes or chilies. By using the lowest temperature they are less likely to overcook and become mushy in the recipe while the beans are cooking.

To add flavor to your beans, you can incorporate any onions and seasonings during the last hour to forty-five minutes. It won't take long for onions to cook due to the heat and steam, which will soften them rather quickly. You may even choose to sauté the onions in a pan with a bit of olive oil prior to adding them to the cooker and add them to the slow cooker in the last 15 minutes or so of cooking time.

Beans can be seasoned using almost any time of herb or spice depending on your own tastes and the ethnic flavor you are aiming for. Fresh herbs like cilantro, cumin, and coriander can work well for Mexican dishes. Ginger and soy can work well for a more Oriental taste.

To complete your meal, serve your beans over piping hot rice, mashed potatoes, or if you have a tomato base to your dish, a piping hot nest of egg noodles with sour cream and a sprinkle of paprika. You can also add in some pre-cooked pasta for a hearty and filling soup or stew, seasoned with oregano and basil.

If you are looking for more ethnic inspiration for your dishes, we will discuss cooking with a slow cooker ideas from around the world.

CHAPTER 8: SLOW COOKER IDEAS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

It used to be that you had to go to a special store to find ethnic spices and foods. They were more expensive, but of great quality. Today, ethnic cooking is all around us, even in the regular supermarket, as just about every grocery store has an ethnic section. If you are still stuck searching for items for your slow cooker meals, then you could always head to your local ethnic market in Chinatown or another district to get the supplies that you need.

The most common ethnic cuisine is Italian, but did you know that spaghetti and pasta were brought back from the Far East by Marco Polo in the Middle Ages? Foods that are most common to the climates in a particular country will usually dictate the types of dishes that are produced.

Therefore, it is no wonder that Asian dishes include so much rice. Rice paddies produced this cheap main staple of the diet. They are also major tea growers, along with India now, so you will often find recipes infused with tea or meant to be accompanied by a pot of tea.

In poorer countries where meat tends to be scarce, heavy vegetables like potatoes, beets or turnips became the staple of choice for filling meals. Root vegetables in particular take little maintenance in the ground compared with growing grains or raising cattle.

When it comes to ethnic foods, each dish will often tell us something about the culture it comes from. Indian dishes are filled with aromatic spices that are earthy and hot, with plenty of vegetables and beans

Indian dishes are often vegetarian, due to many of the people in that country being Hindus and their beliefs about harming living creatures. But you will find they may also include chicken or seafood dishes depending on the style of cooking, the region, and how strict their religious observance is.

In India, the cow is sacred to Hindus, so you won't be seeing very many beef in recipes from India unless they are from the Moslem or Sikh parts of the country (which has 47 states in total). Pakistani and Bangladeshi cooking will be similar, with more meat dishes because they are not Hindus.

Carrots, potatoes, lentils, and onions, along with Indian cheese, will often be the base for many Indian slow cooker dishes. Slow cooking these items can take between six and eight hours. Meals can be seasoned with curry powder, ginger, saffron, cumin, and turmeric. Fruit juices like lime and lemon are also used to flavor Indian dishes. Then there is cardamom, a small green pod with a lot of flavor which you can put in dishes and take out before eating, cinnamon sticks and cassia bark, and a resin called asafetida that is an acquired taste but can be used sparingly to give meals an authentic Indian flavor. The meals will be completed with aromatic rice and perhaps naan bread or chapatis.

Mexican is another ethnic food that can be cooked in a slow cooker. As most of us know, Mexican foods are spicy. Spices are used to enhance the flavor of the food and in Mexico, the hotter the better. Hot chili pepper varieties that most wouldn't even dare to try are par for the course in some Mexican dishes.

With Mexican food, sausage, chicken and beef will be the main meats, but don't rule out a bit of pork. Beans such as black beans, navy beans, and chick peas (garbanzo beans) will be present in these dishes too. Believe it or not, you can make chili or taco filling in a slow cooker as a great family meal. Brown the ground beef before adding it to a slow cooker. Chicken or selected cuts of beef can be sliced into strips before putting them into a slow cooker.

Tomatoes and peppers are diced or sliced for many Mexican recipes. Onions and garlic are also good for adding authentic flavor to a Mexican themed dish. You can also serve with rice and soft or crispy tortillas.

When it comes to spices, choices like cumin, cayenne pepper, cilantro, black pepper, and chili powder are all great for these types of meals. Fresh vegetables and herbs make the flavors more delectable as well. If you have to use canned beans for instance, try to select fresh herbs and veggies to balance out the taste. Black beans with cheese have a lot of flavor and protein, for very few calories.

The United States has been called a "melting pot." The country is a hodgepodge of people from all walks of life, races, nations, and religions. Nowhere else can you go and find people who can prepare an authentic dish from several countries around the world.

There are some foods that can be termed typical "American" dishes. We were once a nation of meat and potatoes eaters, because working hard all day tilling the land required a filling meal to keep hunger away and energy levels up. Farms raised pigs, cows, and chickens for eggs, milk, and dinner. Meat was traditionally slaughtered and salted and stored right at home. So, what traditional American meals can be cooked in a slow cooker?

Pork, chicken, and beef dishes cook very well in a slow cooker. Pulled pork and chicken are favorite dishes in the South. Meat can be slow cooked in a bit of water or broth to give a richer taste.

When the meat is tender and most of the liquid is gone, the meat can be "pulled." This is done with two forks or two knives. The meat is teased apart or chopped with the knives. Barbeque sauce or a sauce with a vinegar base is then added to flavor the meat. You can serve it as is, on a roll to sop up all the juices and sauce, or with some biscuits on the side.

The most common meal which has become an American classic is pot roast. It is based on the German sauerbraten and also relies on a bit of vinegar to give the meat a sharper taste. The secret of any good pot roast is to sear the meat in a hot pan before cooking it over a low flame in a good amount of liquid before then adding the potatoes, carrots, and onions. In a slow cooker, you would chunk the meat into cubes and cook it for about six to eight hours. Fresh ground pepper, a pinch of salt, and a dash of vinegar can help season the meal and it is ideal as is or with thick slices of bread to mop up the liquid.

Asian foods can also be adapted to the slow cooker. The rice or noodles can be cooked on the stove and the noodles added when the food is done cooking and ready to eat. Asian cooking makes use of fresh ginger, fish sauce, mushrooms, corn, Asian cabbage (bok choy), miso, tofu, noodles, and several spices. All of these ingredients can be used alone or in combination in order to come up with various taste treats. The taste can be mild and flavorful or hot and spicy depending on your preference. You can also find Singaporean or Malaysian style curries which are influenced by those in India, but with their own unique fruity ingredients like pineapple. You will also find great deal of broccoli and nuts like peanuts, almonds and cashews in these dishes.

Many people are concerned about nuts because they feel that they have too much fat in them, but again, if it is not a fat from an animal, it will be a more healthy vegetable based fat, and some fats are good for you (such as olive oil). Fat also helps you to feel full and therefore prevents you from overeating. Try a handful of nuts before a meal and see how well it curbs your appetite. Putting a sprinkle of them in your Asian food can make it more hearty and filling.

All meats, including seafood, are common to Asian dishes. When adding seafood to a slow cooker, it is best to wait until the sauce and vegetables are close to being done before adding it. Seafood and fish cook quickly and can turn rubbery if overcooked.

To achieve a smoother consistency, sauces should be thickened with cornstarch for these dishes, rather than flour. Adding fresh ginger gives Asian meals a sharper taste. Ground ginger can be used, but the taste will not be as distinctive (we used to both complain to our parents that it tasted like soap).

Soy sauce and sesame oil is great for flavoring soups and noodle dishes. Japanese miso soup or hot and spicy chicken with peanuts can also be created in the slow cooker. We have included a family favorite, egg drop soup, in the recipe section in the last chapter of this guide for you to try.

Ethnic foods can be adapted for the slow cooker once you know the basic ways that each food should be prepared. As always, test your slow cooker with some ethnic dishes the first time when you are able to be around and monitor the entire cooking process. You just might be surprised at the ethnic dishes you can create in your slow cooker with very little time and effort.

Look up your favorite restaurant dishes online, cook them according to the recipes that you find, and then see if you can adapt them to the slow cooker. This will help you expand your menus so the family does not complain that they are eating nothing but soups and stews.

Most of the time we think of cooking with a slow cooker as a way of whipping up huge vats of warming comfort food to help ward off the winter cold. It might surprise you to know that you can also get a lot of use out of your slow cooker even in the summer. Let's look at this topic in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 9: SLOW COOKER USE EVEN IN SUMMER

When the weather outside warms up, the kitchen can be a hellish place. There are many things you can do, however, when it comes to cooking a nice homemade meal, that does not require traditional stove top or oven cooking.

A slow cooker produces a lot less heat than either of those cooking methods. Until the grill or a barbecue, it also keeps food nice and moist and does not radiate heat or smoke. You are also not in danger of burning the food if you have to step away for a few minutes. In fact, you can set your slow cooker for up to 10 hours ahead of time so that you can enjoy the best of what the summer day has to offer and still come home to a great hot meal. You also don't need to worry about your barbecue getting rained out. Your slow cooker works in the kitchen no matter what the weather so long as you remember to turn it on.

Cooking in your slow cooker can save you time and electricity in the summer by helping you conserve air conditioning by keeping the kitchen cool. Also remember that the bulk of the work involved in cooking with a slow cooker takes place early in the day when you are refreshed, rather than at the end of a hot and hectic summer day. Even if you have had a great day at the beach, who wants to start worrying about what to have for dinner? And no one wants to continually resort to takeaways meals throughout the summer just to beat the heat. This can get expensive and unhealthy over time.

You also do not want to have to resort to just salad all the time when the temperature soars or you need to get something in everyone's stomach quickly. You also don't need to dirty every pot and pan in the house. Most slow cooker meals are one dish, with perhaps a knife, cutting board and frying pan and spoon to dirty.

If you have a slow cooker to table unit, you will be able to serve quickly, give the dishes a rinse, and pop the leftovers into a plastic container. You can then rinse out the slow cooker and have it ready to use again in the morning, all in a matter of minutes.

While there will never be a one size fits all best cooking method, cooking with a slow cooker comes very close. If you have never used a slow cooker before, it might be time to try one. Or, if you have a slow cooker collecting dust somewhere in the back of your cupboard, it is time to get it out, dust it off, and start planning some great recipes you can have at any time of the year. In the next chapter, we will give you a few suggestions.

CHAPTER 10: SLOW COOKER RECIPES TO TRY

Slow Cooker Cheese Corn

3 (16 oz.) pkgs. frozen corn
1 (8 oz.) and 1 (3 oz.) pkg. cream cheese, cubed
1/4 C butter, cubed
3 T water
3 T milk
2 T sugar
4 ounces of Cheddar cheese, cubed

Place the corn into the slow cooker.
Add in the cubed cream cheese and the butter.
Pour the water then the milk over the top.
Sprinkle in the sugar into the slow cooker.
Add the pieces of cheese to the top of the ingredients.
Use a wooden spoon and mix the ingredients together well.
Cover the slow cooker and cook the low temperature for 4 hours.
Remove the lid and stir making sure the cheese has completely melted.
If the cheese has not melted, cover again and continue to cook it at 15 minutes intervals, stirring after each cooking time, until the cheese has melted completely.

Serves: 12

This recipe makes a creamy corn casserole just like the one grandma used to make. The only difference is it frees up the oven for other foods.

Beefy Rice and Mushroom Soup

1 lb. whole mushrooms, halved
1/2 C uncooked wild rice
1 stalk celery, chopped
2 carrots, chopped
1 (1.8 oz) envelope onion mushroom soup mix
1 T sugar
1 C water
1 (32 oz) can beef broth
1 C frozen sweet peas, thawed

Layer the ingredients into the slow cooker starting with the mushrooms.

Add the rice, then the celery and carrots.

Sprinkle in the dry soup mix and the sugar.

Pour the water over the top of the ingredients and do not stir.

Pour the can of beef broth over the top of all the ingredients and do not stir.

Cover and cook on the low temperature setting for 7 hours.

Uncover and stir in the thawed peas.

Recover and continue cooking on low for 15 minutes or until the peas are tender.

Serving Size: 6

Have a lot left over at the end of this meal? That's fine. This soup can be placed in airtight containers and frozen for up to 6 months.

Onion Soup with Mozzarella French Bread

4 C low-sodium beef broth
1/4 C butter
3 C onion, sliced
1 t salt
1 T sugar
2 T flour
1/4 C dry Vermouth
1 loaf French bread cut into slices
1 C Mozzarella cheese, shredded

Pour the beef broth in the slow cooker and cover.

Set the slow cooker on high and allow the broth to cook while preparing the onions.

Place the butter into a small skillet over medium heat.

Once the butter has completely melted, add the onions and stir to cover with the melted butter.

Reduce the heat to low and cook the onions for 15 minutes, 'sweating' them, stirring occasionally.

Stir in the salt and sugar and continue cooking about 5 minutes or until the onions are a nice golden brown.

Stir in the flour being sure it is completely incorporated into the mixture.

Place the mixture into the slow cooker.

Pour the dry Vermouth into the slow cooker and stir to incorporate.

Cover and cook on the high temperature setting for 3 hours.

When the soup is ready to serve fill oven proof bowls about 2/3 full with the soup.

Turn on the broiler and allow it to heat up.

Place a slice of the bread onto the top of each bowl of soup.

Sprinkle the bread slice with the cheese.

Place the bowls on a baking sheet and place them in broiler just long enough for the cheese to melt.

Serving Size: 6

The dry Vermouth gives this soup a bold taste. Cognac or even water can be used in its place if you prefer. You can also top this recipe with a variety of cheeses, ranging from brie to Swiss, for different taste treats.

Penne Pasta and Cannellini Bean Soup

2 (19 oz) cans cannellini beans, drained
1 (1 lb) pkg. frozen mixed vegetables
1 (14.5 oz) can diced tomatoes, with liquid
1/4 t basil
1/4 t garlic
1/4 t oregano
1/2 t salt
1 (12 oz) bottle vegetable juice cocktail such as V-8
1 C water
1/2 C uncooked penne pasta

Place the beans, mixed vegetables and tomatoes into the slow cooker.

Sprinkle in the basil, garlic, oregano and salt.

Pour the vegetable juice cocktail and water into the mixture and stir to combine.

Cover and cook on the low setting for 7 1/2 hours.

Stir in the uncooked pasta and increase the heat to high.

Recover and cook an additional 20 to 30 minutes or until the pasta is tender.

Serving Size: 6

1/2 C of the pasta may look a little skimpy but in all reality by the time it has cooked in the slow cooker, you will have just the right amount for your soup. If you purchase diced tomatoes with the garlic, basil and oregano added already, then you won't need to add those spices to your soup.

Taco Seasoned Chili

1 lb ground chuck
2 (15 oz) cans seasoned tomato sauce
1 (15 oz) can diced tomatoes
1 (15 oz) can chili beans with sauce
1 (15 oz) can hominy with liquid
1 (1.25 oz) envelope taco seasoning

Brown the ground chuck in a large skillet over medium heat.

Drain well and crumble into bite size chunks.

Place the drained meat into the slow cooker.

Add the tomato sauce, diced tomatoes and beans, stirring to combine.

Add in the hominy, including the juice.

Sprinkle in the taco seasoning and stir again to incorporate all the ingredients together.

Cover and cook on low temperature 5 hours.

Serving Size: 4

If you don't like hominy, whole kernel corn will work just as well in this recipe. Just be sure to add additional liquid, about 3/4 of a cup of broth or water. Add a few diced onions and green peppers for a little extra flavor to this hearty chili.

Trouble-Free Egg Drop Soup

2 (14 1/2 oz) cans fat free sodium free chicken broth
1 qt water
2 T Chinese fish sauce
1/4 t salt
4 T cornstarch
1 C cold water
2 eggs, beaten
1 scallion, chopped
1/4 t pepper

Pour the chicken broth into a large saucepan and place over medium heat.
Pour in the 1 qt of water.
Stir in the fish sauce and salt and bring the mixture to a brisk boil.
Whisk the cornstarch and the cold water together in a separate bowl until smooth.
Stir the mixture into the soup.
Continue stirring continuously until the soup boils briskly again.
Turn off the heat under the sauce pan and remove the sauce pan from the stove.
Add the beaten eggs to the soup mixture but do not stir.
Use a fork and pull it through the soup using 2 strokes.
Pour the mixture into the slow cooker.
Add the scallions and pepper.
Cover the slow cooker and cook the soup on low for 1 hour.

Serving Size: 8

This soup is so very easy to make, and it tastes great. If after 1 hour of cooking on low you are not ready to eat it, turn the slow cooker to warm and leave it all day if you wish. You never have to run to the Chinese takeaway again once you add this to your repertoire of slow cooker dishes.

CONCLUSION

Cooking with a slow cooker can be one of the most convenient ways to feed your family all year round, even in summer, without slaving over a hot stove or spending endless hours preparing meals and then having to wash up a sink full of dishes. A slow cooker is versatile, creating tender, moist hot meals in a few hours, up to 10 hours, for you to come home to and be able to serve in a matter of minutes. In most cases it is a one-dish meal that can go from slow cooker to table and from table to refrigerator.

We hope that this guide has inspired you to try cooking with a slow cooker to save time and money, while improving your family's nutrition and eating habits at the same time. There is nothing quite like the taste of a home cooked meal, and with a slow cooker, it is will be like having all the convenience of takeaway, but without the price tag and wait. Walk in, stir and serve, in most cases. It is so simple, anyone in the family can do it, even your partner.

Cooking with a slow cooker is fast, fun and tasty once you follow your few simple rules for cooking with a slow cooker success. Your slow cooker can become a great pot luck creator too, saving you money by helping you use up leftovers in all sorts of delicious and creative ways. (Did you know that the USDA estimates we throw away over \$25 BILLION in food in this country this year? And that rotting food produces methane gas, which is dangerous to the environment?)

Cook, and freeze leftovers for another time. Do not put them in the fridge and hope that you will eventually get around to them.

Or, buy and cook strategically, with a waste-free, money-saving plan in place. If you cook carefully, the family will never even know that what they are digging into now was last night's turkey or pork roast. All you have to do is dress it up with vegetables, beans and some seasonings. They also really won't recognize it if you use herbs and spices with an ethnic flair, for your own amazing Chinese, Mexican or Italian food at a fraction of the cost of eating in a restaurant.

So what are you waiting for? Get out that slow cooker and get cooking. Experiment with a variety of recipes and keep notes. See which ones quickly become family favorites and ones the neighbors love at your next block party or other special occasion.

Cooking with a slow cooker is nutritious, fun and economical. Anything that can save you time and effort in the kitchen when you are leading such a busy modern life is a device that is worth its weight in gold. Like a crock of gold at the end of the rainbow, start cooking and see what treasures will pour out of your pot.

Happy cooking and eating!

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FURTHER READING

Also by the authors:

Simple Soups and Stews from Your Slow Cooker

Please visit Amazon and click on the links to our names to see all of our latest titles.

Resources:

[#1 Crockpot at Amazon](#) as of May 2, 2015.

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