

Fix It & Forget It

Crock Pot Cooking

Basic Tips for Crock Pot Successes

Testing Your Crock Pot Temperature

- Place 2 quarts of water in your crock pot. Cover and heat on Low for 8 hours. Lift lid and immediately check the water temperature with an accurate thermometer. The temperature should be 180 degrees – 200 degrees. If the temperature is higher than 200 degrees, your food may overcook. If the temperature is lower than 180 degrees, you should discard the crock pot since your food will not reach a safe temperature quickly enough.

Easy Clean Up

- If you do not have a removable liner in your crock pot, use a cooking bag to line your crock pot for easier clean up.
- Always spray the inside of the crock liner prior to placing food and starting the cooking process.

Using the Crock Pot

- Cooking temperatures: Low is about 180 - 200°F; High is about 300°F. One hour on High = 2 to 2 ½ hours on Low. Most crock pot recipes require 8 to 10 hours on Low.
- Fill at least half full and no more than three quarters full.
- Remove visible fat from meat and skin from poultry. The fat melts and layers on the top of the food causing it to insulate the food. Then the food is more likely to overcook, which can cause a mushy texture.
- Vegetables take longer to cook than meat so place vegetables on the bottom of the crock pot, then add the meat.
- When preparing a roast or meatloaf, make handles to lift roast or loaf out once it is done. For handles: Use 2 – 15 inch sheets of aluminum foil. Fold the foil so that it makes two strips each 2 inches by 15 inches. Place the strips perpendicular to each other in the bottom of the crock pot prior to adding meat.
- If recipe calls for milk, recommend using evaporated milk for a creamy consistency.
- Don't remove the lid during the first ¾ of the cooking time.
- Once the food is cooked, do not store the food in the crock pot liner. Due to the liner's thickness, it will not cool down fast enough to prevent the growth of harmful bacteria.

Converting Recipes to the Crock Pot

- Look for recipes that benefit from long, slow cooking and steam. Some include: soups, stews, less tender cuts of meat, casseroles, and fruit desserts.
- Conversion Chart for oven and stovetop cooking times to crock pot cooking times:

<i>Oven or Stovetop</i>	<i>Low Cooking Time</i>	<i>High Cooking Time</i>
15 to 30 minutes	4 to 6 hours	1 ½ to 2 ½ hours
35 to 45 minutes	6 to 8 hours	3 to 4 hours
50 minutes to 3 hours	8 to 16 hours	4 to 6 hours

Liquid

- Reduce by ½ since the moisture doesn't evaporate during the cooking.
- The exception is if you are cooking rice, beans or pasta; do not reduce the liquid called for in the recipe.
- Generally you would use 2 cups of liquid for every 1 cup of rice, pasta or beans.

Meats

- Remove visible fat.
- Browning meat isn't necessary unless you prefer it. It can give the meat added flavor and color.
- Large pieces of meat or whole chickens should be cut into smaller pieces to ensure food gets hot faster.
- Ground meats are cooked in a skillet prior to adding to crock pot, except for meat loaves.
- Meat should be thawed prior to going into crock pot to insure a safe dish.
- Season meat lightly and place liquid (1/2 cup) in crock pot. Choice of liquid: water, drinking wine, regular soft drink such as Coke or 7-Up, lemon juice, orange juice, tomato juice, bouillon, etc.

Vegetables

- Cut in uniform size pieces for more uniform cooking.
- Sautéing isn't necessary; except with eggplant. Eggplant should be precooked or sauté prior to placing in the crock pot to prevent a bitter taste from developing.
- You may want to limit the use of strong flavored vegetables such as cauliflower, turnips, etc. since their flavor may permeate the other foods in the crock pot.

Dried Beans

- Rinse beans and remove damaged beans or non food items.
- Place beans, flavorings and cold water in crock pot; cook on Low 8 to 10 hours.
- Do not add sugar or tomato mixture to beans till the beans are softened.

Soups

- Cut vegetables in uniform sizes.
- Place vegetables on the bottom and meat on top of the vegetables.
- Add water only to cover vegetables.
- If thinner soup is desired, more liquid can be added at the end of the cooking.

To Thicken Juices

- Once the food is done, remove the lid and cook on High for the last 30 minutes to concentrate the juices and flavor.
- One can also mix a solution of cornstarch (1 ½ teaspoons) and cold water (1/2 cup) and stir into hot broth or juices to thicken. Leave lid off crock pot, turn on High, add cornstarch and water solution and stir to thicken juices.

Seasonings

- Whole herbs and spices tend to increase in flavor while cooking in the crock pot, so if you're adapting a recipe for cooking in the crock pot you may want to use half of the whole herbs or spices.
- Ground spices tend to lose flavor; so I recommend adding ground spices during the last hour of cooking, if feasible.

Food Safety Issues

- Foods need to reach a minimum internal temperature of 140°F within 4 hours to prevent bacteria growth.
- Therefore, it is not recommended to cook frozen food in the crock pot or reheat in the crock pot. You can reheat food in the microwave or stovetop, and then place it in the crock pot on Low to keep it warm. Remember, most Low settings, run 180 - 200°F.
- Cut food into chunks or small pieces to ensure thorough cooking. Large roast and whole chickens should be cut up so the food will not be in the temperature danger zone of 40°F - 140°F longer than 4 hours.

Power Out

- If you are not at home during the entire slow-cooking process and the power goes out, throw away the food even if it looks done.
- If you are at home, finish cooking the ingredients immediately by some other means: on a gas stove, on an outdoor grill, or at someone else's home.

Handling Leftovers

- Store leftovers in shallow covered container and refrigerate within two hours after cooking is finished.
- Not recommended to reheat in the crock pot; but use other means to heat till steaming and then it can be transferred to the crock pot and held on a Low setting.