

HOW TO MAKE ANY RECIPE IN YOUR CROCKPOT



A little Guide

By Salty Vixen

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Using a crockpot or slow cooker is very easy; just add the food, cover, turn on low heat and cook all day. But there are always more things to learn.

The newest crockpots on the market come with divided liners, timers to adjust the cooking start time. The newer appliances seem to be hotter than models only a few years old, so it's best to learn how your particular crockpot cooks



How to Convert Recipes

Many recipes can be converted to cooking in the crockpot. Soups and stews, of course, are natural slowcooker favorites. Casseroles and most meats benefit from the low temperatures and even cooking heat.

Reduce the amount of liquid a recipe calls for, since liquids do not evaporate during crockpot cooking. However, if you are cooking rice, beans, or pasta, don't reduce the liquid called for. You generally need twice as much liquid as product to cook these ingredients. Here are basic conversion times:

- If conventional time is: 15 to 30 minutes, then cooking time on low should be 4 to 6 hours.
- If conventional time is 35 to 45 minutes, cooking time on low should be 6 to 8 hours.
- If conventional time is 50 minutes to 3 hours, cooking time on low should be 8 to 16 hours.

How to Convert Recipes

I generally prefer cooking most raw meat and vegetable combinations at least 8 hours on LOW. This gives the vegetables time to soften, the meat time to tenderize and all the flavors to blend.

Of course, 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. In fact, some of the newer recipes I've seen in magazines cook the food for only 3-4 hours on low.

That's not really 'slow cooking', but it's the reality of the crockpot manufacturing today. Check the food at four hours on low, using an instant read meat thermometer to see if the food is done.

Preparing Ingredients

- **Surprisingly, vegetables cook more slowly than meats in the moist heat of the slow cooker. So vegetables should be cut or chopped roughly the same size and placed in the bottom of the crockpot.**
- **Browning meats helps reduce the fat content in large cuts of meat like roasts. It also caramelizes the sugars in the meat, adding to appearance and flavor.**
- **Trim off any visible fat from cuts of meat. Fat will make the dishes cook faster.**

For Your Health

- **Studies have shown that the low, constant heat crockpots cook by may help prevent disease! Some compounds called "advanced glycation end products" are formed when sugars, fats, and proteins are heated at high temperatures, as when food is grilled, broiled, or microwaved.**
- **These AGE's irritate cells and may be a factor in the formation of heart disease, cancer, and diabetes. Since slow cookers only heat between 200 and 300 degrees, fewer of these compounds form in crockpot cooked meals, so slow-cooked meals are healthier.**

General Tips

- **Most crockpot recipes don't need to be stirred during cooking, especially if cooked on low heat. When you lift the lid, the crockpot loses so much heat that the cooking time should be increased by 20 minutes each time.**
- **Use whole leaf herbs and spices instead of ground for better flavor. Some spices, especially pepper, can become bitter over a long cooking time. Add those in the last hour of cooking for best flavor.**
- **Some of the newer crockpots seem to cook at a hotter temperature, probably because manufacturers are concerned about food safety. You can check the temperature of your crockpot this way:**
- **Place 2 quarts of water in your crockpot**
- **Cover and heat on low for 8 hours**
- **Lift the lid and immediately check the water temperature with an accurate thermometer**

General Tips

- **The temperature of the water should be 185 degrees Fahrenheit. If the temperature is higher foods may overcook and you should reduce the overall cooking time. If the temperature is lower your foods will probably not reach a safe temperature quickly enough, and the crockpot should be discarded.**
- **Pasta and rice can be cooked in the crockpot. Pasta needs lots of liquid to cook properly, and should be added during the last hour of cooking time, depending on the consistency of doneness you prefer. Rice can be more difficult to cook. I prefer using brown or wild rice for better results. Make sure you have enough liquid in the recipe so the rice becomes tender.**
- **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%.**

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.**

Food Safety

- Many people cook frozen foods in the crockpot. And others like to reheat foods in the crockpot. Most food experts do not recommend these practices, as foods need to reach a temperature of 140 degrees within 1-1/2 hours to prevent bacteria growth.
- Even if the foods do eventually reach a safe temperature and cook thoroughly, bacteria in the food can produce toxins that aren't destroyed by heat and that can make you sick.
- Many people have experienced food poisoning and don't even know it. They may have some digestive discomfort or feel ill for a day or two and then recover. Unfortunately, a person in a high risk group (elderly, persons with compromised immune systems, small children, and pregnant women) can suffer serious consequences from food poisoning.

Food Safety

- **More than 5,000 people die each year in the U.S. as a result of food poisoning. If you decide to cook frozen foods or reheat foods in the crockpot, do so at your own risk.**
- **One thing you can do is to warm the liquid used in the recipe and add it along with the frozen foods, to help raise the temperature more quickly.**
- **Taking a calculated risk may be acceptable to you as long as you know the consequences AND as long as no member of your family is in a high risk group.**

Learning to safely use your crockpot will help maintain your family's health. And once you become an expert at using this appliance, the time you spend in the kitchen will be greatly reduced.

Do I have to brown meats before adding them?

Question: Do I have to brown meats before adding them?

Answer:

Browning many meats helps reduce the fat content and can enhance the flavor and texture of dishes, but it is not necessary. For stews, meat cubes can be dredged in seasoned flour before browning then slow cooking.

Ground beef is usually browned first, and some people brown large amounts of ground beef ahead and freeze in 1-pound packs.

Slow Cooker and Crock Pot Cooking Tips

Many of your favorite recipes can be successfully adapted to the Crock-Pot® or slow cooker if you follow a few simple rules. Here you'll find a basic time/temperature guide for converting recipes, some do's and don'ts for specific ingredients and a few tips for making your slow cooker dishes more flavorful.

Ingredients:

Vegetables:

Dense vegetables like potatoes, carrots, and other root vegetables should be cut no larger than 1" thick, and placed in the bottom of the pot, since they take longer to cook.

Liquids:

Usually liquids may be decreased in slow cooking - about half the recommended amount. Unless the dish contains rice or pasta, one cup of liquid is usually enough.

Slow Cooker and Crock Pot Cooking Tips

Pasta and Rice:

If a recipe calls for cooked pasta to be added, cook it until just slightly tender before adding to the pot.

Add 1/4 extra liquid per 1/4 cup uncooked rice, and use long grain converted rice for the best results. For long-cooking recipes, add cooked rice shortly before serving.

Beans:

I find it best to soak beans overnight before cooking them in the crockery cooker. The Rival brochure recommends pre-soaking then boiling for at least 10 minutes in unsalted water, draining, then add to the recipe. Before adding sugar or acidic ingredients, the beans should be softened first, either in the slow cooker or on the stove top.

Slow Cooker and Crock Pot Cooking Tips

If your recipe includes tomatoes, salt, or other acidic ingredients, the beans should be tender before beginning. Someone wrote recently that instead of pre-soaking, she cooks her beans (in the crockery cooker) on low for about 8 hours through the night in water with a little baking soda. In the morning, she drains the beans, adds the ingredients with fresh liquid, then cooks per recipe directions. Cooking times might be shorter using this method.

Herbs and Spices

Ground herbs and spices tend to dissipate over long cooking times, so it's best to add them near the end of cooking.

Whole herbs release flavors over time, so are a good choice for crockery cooking. You should taste and adjust seasonings, if necessary, before serving.

Slow Cooker and Crock Pot Cooking Tips

Milk/Cheese

Milk, sour cream, and cream break down over long periods of cooking, and should be added during the last hour. Condensed cream soups are good substitutions for milk and can be cooked for extended times. "Healthy," or reduced fat condensed soups can be used in any recipe as a substitute.

Cheeses don't generally hold up over extended periods of cooking, so should be added near the end of cooking, or use processed cheeses and spreads.

Soups

Add water only to cover ingredients in soup, and add more after cooking if necessary for a thinner soup. For milk based soups, add 1 or 2 cups of water and during the last hour, stir in milk, evaporated milk, or cream as called for.

Slow Cooker and Crock Pot Cooking Tips

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Some General Preparation Tips

Over long cooking, some dishes may lack flavor, but some extra preparation steps can be worthwhile. Though it isn't necessary to brown most meats first, flavor is often enhanced by browning, and fat is decreased.

Dredging meat or chicken in flour, browning, then deglazing the pan with wine, a little vinegar, or broth and adding that to the pot can make quite a big difference in flavor. For the best color and texture, ground beef is best browned before using, except in meatloaf or other similar dishes.

To simplify preparation, brown ground beef, drain, and freeze in batches for your crockpot meals. To make a flavorful sauce or gravy from your cooking liquid, first make a roux of flour and water (roughly 1 tablespoon of each for each cup of liquid) in a medium saucepan.

Some General Preparation Tips

Skim the fat from the cooking liquid in the slow cooker then add the liquid to the roux. Simmer, stirring, until the sauce is thickened and reduced.

Serve with or over meat and/or vegetables. You can also add cornstarch dissolved in water (1 or 2 tablespoons cornstarch to 2 or 3 tablespoons cold water, depending on how much liquid you have) directly to the slow cooker near the end of cooking to thicken the liquids.

General Time Guide for Adapting Recipes

Conventional Recipe	Low (200°):	High (300°):
15 - 30 min	4 - 6 hrs	1 1/2 - 2 hrs
35 - 45 min	6 - 10 hrs	3 - 4 hrs
50 min - 3 hrs	8 - 18 hrs	4 - 6 hrs

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