

Savvy Slow Cooking

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

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

These tips below- and a slow cooker- are all you need for a delicious, home-cooked fix-and-forget meal!

- * Know your appliance. A slow cooker is different than a warming pot! Slow cookers are self-contained, with the heating elements wrapping around the cooker. Warming pots have the heating element below the container. Because warming pots cannot reach a safe cooking temperature, they should not be used for slow-cooker recipes.
- * For easy cleanup, spray the inside of slow cooker with cooking spray before adding the food.
- * Enjoy the rewards of slow cooking by using less expensive (and less tender) cuts of meat. The moist, gentle heat slowly tenderizes these cuts as they cook.
- * Cut any extra fat from meats before placing them in the slow cooker to reduce the fat in the final recipe. Skim the fat from soups and stews with a spoon, or place a slice of bread on top of the mixture for a few minutes to absorb the fat.
- * Cook and drain ground meats before adding them to the slow cooker. This destroys harmful bacteria.
- * Do not cook whole poultry, such as chicken or Rock Cornish hens, in a slow cooker because safe cooking temperatures cannot be reached quickly enough near the bone.

- * Chop or slice vegetables as directed in the recipe. Some vegetables, such as carrots and potatoes, may take longer to cook than meats. Place larger pieces of vegetables near the bottom or along the sides of the slow cooker, and place the meat on top.
- * Thaw frozen vegetables before placing them in the slow cooker, or rinse them with warm water to separate.
- * Use the amount of liquid called for in the recipe. Liquids don't evaporate and reduce.
- * Use dried leaf herbs rather than ground because they keep their flavor better over the long cooking time. Or stir in fresh herbs during the last hour of cooking.
- * Add dairy products such as milk and cheese toward the end of the cooking time. Dairy products tend to separate and curdle if cooked for a long time.
- * Fish and seafood can fall apart or get tough if they're slow cooked too long. Add these ingredients in the last hour of cooking.
- * Pasta and rice will be at their best if you cook them according to package directions first, then add them to the slow cooker just before serving.
- * Add only thawed or partially cooked foods such as browned poultry to your slow cooker—no frozen meats or vegetables.
- * Keep an eye on the clock. For food safety reasons, slow cooker recipes containing raw poultry or beef should cook a minimum of 3 hours.
- * Keep the lid on. Removing the lid allows heat to escape and delays cooking time by 15 to 20 minutes. Be sure to check for doneness just at the minimum cook time.
- * Cool the slow cooker before adding water for cleaning. Otherwise, the liner could crack.

Slow Cooker Chili

1 pound beef boneless round steak, cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ inch pieces
1 large onion, chopped (1 cup)
2 medium celery stalks, cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ inch pieces
2 cans (14 $\frac{1}{2}$ ounces each) diced tomatoes, undrained
1 can (15 ounces) tomato sauce
3 teaspoons chili powder
2 teaspoons ground cumin
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon dried oregano leaves
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 medium bell pepper, cut into 1-inch pieces (1 cup)
1 can (15-16 ounces) kidney beans, rinsed and drained
Shredded cheddar cheese, if desire

1. Mix all ingredients except bell pepper, beans and cheese in 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ to 4 quart slow cooker.
2. Cover and cook on low heat setting 6-7 hours or until beef and vegetables are tender.
3. Stir in bell pepper and beans. Uncover and cook on high heat setting about 15 minutes or until slightly thickened. Serve with cheese.

1 serving: 165 calories, 2 grams fat, 3 mg cholesterol, 670 mg sodium, 24 grams carbohydrate, 2 grams protein.

Recipe and tip adapted from www.bettycrocker.com

