



*the* **Hungry Family**  
**slow cooker**

COOKBOOK



**CHRISTINA DYMCK**

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slow cooker  
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WELCOME TO

*the* Hungry Family  
slow cooker  
COOKBOOK

If you're reading this book, then you are probably looking for a way to provide healthy, filling meals for your family, meals that don't take hours out of your afternoon to prepare. Let's face it—life is busy! When the kids step off that bus, the crazy part of the day really begins.

I discovered the joy of slow cooker cooking when I had a gaggle of little kids around the house and no time to do anything except feed them, burp them, and scrub stains out of the carpet. I had two sections of time in my day to make dinner, and neither of them landed between the hours of five and six in the evening. I tenderly called these precious windows *morning nap time* and *afternoon nap time*. With the slow cooker, I was able to use the blessed morning nap time to cut veggies, season meat, open cans, and throw a dinner in the slow cooker. Afternoon nap time had me creating side dishes, also in the slow cooker, to dress up even the most horrible stovetop concoction (sigh). Those were the good ol' days.

As the kids grew, morning nap time slowly disappeared. Before I knew it, afternoon nap time was a thing of the past, and once again I scrambled for dinners that would give my growing family the nutrients they needed to pass

their placement tests and run their sneakers off at recess. When the kids opened the pantry to grab the cereal one night, I caught a glimpse of my patiently waiting slow cooker. Before the door slammed shut, I heard it call out, “I’m still here—come back to me!” Oh, how I longed for the lovely meals we created together, the short prep times, and the easy cleanup.

There had to be a way! Working, volunteering, chauffeuring, cleaning, doing the laundry, helping kids with homework, and keeping up with life in general was like running around with a squirt gun, trying to put out fires. I had more excuses for not making dinner than a kid who forgot his homework. However, forcing myself to choke down a mushy bowl of cereal had me seriously rethinking my priorities. The next morning, after the kids rushed for the bus, I pulled out my old recipes. The papers creaked as I shuffled through. Their well-loved, liquid-splattered recipes welcomed me back like old friends. Within ten minutes I had a roast, some minced garlic, and a bag of mini carrots set on low, and I was out the door. I didn’t give it another thought until I came home to the delicious aroma of slow-cooked beef. Heaven.

“What’s that smell?” asked Mr. Six-Year-Old.

“Dinner.” I smiled to myself. Dinner. A real meal with veggies and everything.

“Smells good,” replied Mr. Six.

“Don’t I know it.”

And with one little toe dipped back into the slow cooker waters, I was once again hooked. Over the years, I’ve tried some great recipes and some not-so-great ones. I’ve had the power go out in the middle of a snowstorm and had to chuck the stew I’d been looking forward to all day. That was not a happy day. However, moments like that are rare. My experiences with slow cooking have been rewarding in many different ways.

# Benefits of Slow Cooking

- 1. Saves time:** While the slow cooker takes longer to cook than a conventional oven or cooktop, the prep time is drastically reduced. This allows you to redistribute your time during the day to prepare dinner when it is convenient for you.
- 2. Lots of food:** According to the US Census Bureau, the average-sized family is 3.14 people.<sup>[1]</sup> While that's not a lot of people to prepare a meal for, the Census Bureau also states that 5.1 million American families currently live in a multigenerational household.<sup>[2]</sup> A large family can make preparing dinners much more difficult and time consuming, but slow cookers can cook a lot of food in one pot, therefore decreasing your pre- and post-meal efforts.
- 3. No “babysitting”:** One of the biggest benefits of slow cooking is that you don't have to stand over the stove and “babysit” the food. There's no need to stir constantly or turn the meat. With a slow cooker, you can set it and walk away for hours. There's no need to check back until the cooking time has expired.
- 4. Saves money:** A slow cooker can save you money in multiple ways. The first way is through the type of meat you buy. Because tough cuts of meat cook better in the slow cooker, you can buy the cheap stuff and still create a delicious meal. The meat will break down as it cooks and turn out quite tender. Second, a slow cooker requires less electricity than a conventional oven. Using your slow cooker a couple of times a week can make a difference in your power bill. Third, your conventional oven will heat not only your food but your house as well. When you cook in your oven in the summer, your air conditioner will have to work overtime to keep your house cool. A slow cooker puts off relatively small amounts of heat and will not affect your cooling bill.

- 5. Flexibility:** Let's say you are running home and hit a bit of traffic. You panic, thinking that the six-hour cook time is almost up. Relax! A slow cooker can take hours to burn your food. Since slow cookers are so easy to operate (with just three settings—high, low, and off—even a child can work one) and do not reach unsafe temperatures on the exterior (like the interior of a stove), you can call ahead and have someone turn it off. The ceramic liner will keep food safely warm for up to two hours.
- 6. Clean cooking:** With a slow cooker, you will not have crumbs, splatters, spills, or dirty pots and pans all over your counter. There's one pot and one lid. That's it. All the mess is contained in the cooker. Thank you, lovely cooking machine—you are amazing at what you do.

## Caring for Your Slow Cooking Partner

My first slow cooker was a four-quart cooker, and I soon found out that I needed a larger one the second time around. I could still make some foods in the smaller cooker, but, at times, my growing family needed more food. One crisp fall day, my wonderful grandma gifted me her ten-quart slow cooker. I know I'll never be able to repay her. Although I have upgraded to a new high-tech model with blinking lights, I still use both of my older cookers. While they are built to last, you can do some things to extend the life of your slow cooker.

- 1. Before you start** any type of cleaning, unplug your slow cooker, remove the stoneware (liner) and allow it to cool. This includes putting it in the dishwasher or soaking it. Your stoneware is ceramic. Ceramic will crack when exposed to extreme changes in temperature. For example, if you have a hot or even slightly warm slow cooker and you add cold water, you're in Cracksville.

2. **Check the cleaning instructions** on your slow cooker. Always buy a model that is dishwasher safe. You'll be super glad you did!
3. **Never, ever, ever scrub your stoneware** with abrasive cleaners or scouring pads. Seriously—this is a bad idea. The stoneware is treated with a glaze during the manufacturing process. This glaze can be rubbed away by harsh scrubbing. If you do have stuck-on crud, soak your slow cooker overnight in soapy water and then use a plastic spoon or spatula to scrape it away.
4. **To avoid stuck-on goo**, spray your stoneware with a nonstick cooking spray. This will work for everything from roasts and potatoes to desserts.
5. **Clean the outside, or heating base**, with a mild cleaner and soft cloth. Do not submerge it in the sink! Water and electricity don't mix.
6. **Treat your slow cooker with respect**. When removing the stoneware, use hot pads. Also, don't slam the stoneware on the table or counter. Use a trivet to protect the counter from the heat of the slow cooker liner and to protect the warm liner from the cool counter.

## Shopping Around

I have a friend who swears by her avocado-green slow cooker and would consider it a personal insult to imply that she acquire a newer model. With lasting power like that, a slow cooker can live longer than a marriage. When it does come time to pick a new model—slow cooker, not husband—here are a few things to put on your *must have* list.

1. **Two words: Dishwasher safe!** Find a slow cooker with a dishwasher-safe removable liner. Trust me on this one—you don't want to spend all your time trying to wash a slow cooker. The point is to save time, not create more of a mess to clean up at the end of the evening.

2. **Get the size you need.** Consider your family size and buy your first slow cooker according to that size. When your family grows, you can buy a larger cooker—but, since you need to fill your slow cooker at least halfway to achieve the correct cooking time and temperature, you don't want to get one that's too big. Slow cookers range in size from one to seven quarts.
3. **Consider the shape of your slow cooker.** Round ones are traditional, but the oval shape is gaining a movement. The oval makes it easier to fit long cuts of meat or whole birds.
4. **The basic slow cooker** with an off, low, and high setting has worked well for many years. Today, you can find a programmable slow cooker that will start and stop when you tell it to. They also come with a *keep warm* setting that will maintain a safe temperature for your food if you are delayed. You can find slow cookers with temperature probes to monitor your meat and locking lids for easy transport.
5. **Price is always a concern.** If you use it enough, the slow cooker will eventually pay for itself. Buy a quality appliance but don't bother paying for bells and whistles you won't use.
6. **Make sure it's pretty.** This is so vain, but it must be said. My slow cooker sits on my counter four to six days a week. I wanted it to fit in with my appliances and look like it belonged. It wasn't hard to make that happen; you can choose from many wonderful options. Because my slow cooker blends seamlessly in with the decor, I don't fret about hiding it, storing it, or pulling it out in front of company.

## Food Safety Tips

As great, perfect, wonderful, and beautiful as slow cookers are, here are a few things you shouldn't use them for and a few whoa-there-big-fellas you should

be aware of before you crack open the box and take in that new slow cooker smell.

- 1. A slow cooker is not made to reheat food.** Slow cookers take time to reach optimum temperature. If food sits too long at a low temperature, then bacteria found in leftover foods will take that opportunity to grow, which means using the slow cooker to reheat food is an unsafe practice.
- 2. Unless specified in the recipe, do not lift the lid while cooking.** Every time you lift the lid, the cooker takes twenty minutes to heat back up to the previous temperature. Also, when cooking with steam, the interior of your slow cooker needs to reach between 170 and 280 degrees to kill off harmful bacteria. If you feel that you absolutely must lift the lid, smack the back of your hand with a wooden spoon. If you still feel the need, and not just a dull ache in your hand, then adjust your cooking time accordingly.
- 3. Although slow cookers are designed to be countertop appliances,** the bottoms can sometimes get very hot. To avoid singeing your counter, place a wooden cutting board underneath the slow cooker. Or, if you have a solid-surface stove, you can place your slow cooker on the cooktop, which is made to absorb and conduct heat. Keep the cooker well away from the wall and other countertop appliances. If you have a gas stove, it's not a good idea to put your slow cooker on the stovetop.
- 4. The manufacturers of slow cookers will tell you not to use frozen meat** in a slow cooker because of the possibility of foodborne bacteria growing as the meat thaws in the cooker. There are hundreds of recipes floating around out there that call for frozen meat, and there are a few in this book. If you are worried, have had problems in the past with your slow cooker not heating fast enough, or don't have frozen meat on hand, then feel free to use thawed meat in those recipes and reduce the cooking time accordingly.

- 5. Do not store leftovers in the stoneware.** The liner will retain heat even when placed in the refrigerator. Because of the difference in temperature, the food inside the liner will be at risk for spoiling or developing salmonella, E. coli, or staph bacteria.
- 6. Avoid putting an uncooked meal in the slow cooker** and storing it in the fridge overnight to be made the next day. Mixing veggies and raw meat for long periods of time is a bad idea. The stoneware will retain the cold temperatures from its overnighter in the fridge and won't heat up fast enough to kill harmful bacteria.

## Generic FYIs

Now that you know the things you should not do, here are a few generic FYIs to help you with your slow cooking adventures.

- 1. Generally, the low setting** heats to 200 degrees, while the **high setting** heats to 300.
- 2. One hour on high = two hours on low**
- 3. Your recipe should always have a little bit of liquid in it.** The slow cooker cooks with steam and will use the liquid for fuel.
- 4. Feel free to spray your slow cooker** with nonstick cooking spray for all your dishes except soups, stews, and chilies. If you get a stuck potato, you'll be thinking you should have sprayed.
- 5. Dairy products should be added in the last half hour to hour** of cooking. If added before that, the slow cooking process breaks down the dairy, and you'll end up with lumpy soups and such. (It's not pretty and tastes awful. *Blech.*)
- 6. Many of my recipes do not ask you to brown meat** before you add it to the slow cooker. That's because, on most days of your busy life, you simply won't have time to brown meat. I'll

often use the method on [page 26](#) to cook ground beef and have it ready for when I need it. If you'd like to brown the meat and get a bit of the caramelized flavor going, you certainly can.

7. **Slow cooking drains herbs of their natural flavors** and may leave your dishes tasting bland. For that reason, the amounts used in slow cooking are generally greater than what you'd use for conventional oven cooking. There's no harm in cooking the dish all day long and adding an extra dash of flavor for the last half hour of cook time.
8. **Meat releases liquid as it cooks.** Liquids do not evaporate in the slow cooker like they do in a conventional oven. Therefore, it doesn't take as much liquid to cook something in the slow cooker as it does in the oven. You can usually cut the liquid by half when converting recipes from conventional oven cooking to slow cooking.

You might need to try a couple recipes before you and your slow cooker come to an understanding with one another. Not all slow cookers are created equal. Some leak moisture while others cook at a higher temperature. Take time to learn your slow cooker's quirks and adjust accordingly. It's unlikely that you'll ruin a whole meal in the process, but you may have a dry pork chop one night, which isn't the end of the world. You can adjust the liquid requirements in the recipe and move forward.

## Notes

1. Daphne Lofquist, Terry Lugaila, Martin O'Connell, and Sarah Feliz, "Households and Families: 2010," in *2010 Census Briefs* (n.p.: United States Census Bureau, 2012): 5, <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-14.pdf>.  
[\[return\]](#)
2. *Ibid.*, 15.  
[\[return\]](#)

# Beef

**S**low cookers and beef go together like dumbbells and weight lifting; it's almost impossible to find one without the other.

The beef in your local meat section is muscle tissue. Muscle that is used often will be tough, and muscles that are used less will be tender. It makes sense if you think about it. When you work out, you get rock-hard abs and bone-crushing biceps. When a cow works out, she gets a bone-crushing brisket.

The toughness of the meat is what determines the price of the cut. When it comes to slow cooking, you want the cheap stuff. No wimpy cows allowed! Buy cuts marked *chuck*, *brisket*, *round*, *roast*, or *shank*. Don't they totally sound like weight lifting terms?

As the moisture and the heat infuse the beef, the muscle breaks down to become tender. Think of what a deep tissue massage or an hour in the steam room does for your muscles. The slow cooking process also allows the beef to absorb the herbs and spices, making it much more flavorful.

Ground beef is a bit different. Because of the way it's processed, you have to cook ground beef all the way through. That means the meat has to reach a temperature of 165 degrees. A slow cooker on low will reach an internal temperature of 200 degrees. To be safe, cook the ground beef for the entire cook time. No shortcuts!

Finally, you know all those cans of beef stock in your pantry? You can make your own. Seriously. Simply strain your drippings, cover them, and refrigerate them overnight. The next morning you can scrape off the fat,

and what's left will be wonderful beef stock. Transfer it to the freezer or store it in the fridge and use it within two days.



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# Apple Roast Beef

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**Serves 8**

**6 hours on low**

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1 (3- to 4-lb.) beef roast 2 cups apple juice

2 apples, cored and sliced 1 (1-lb.) bag baby carrots 2 tsp.  
thyme

¼ cup onion flakes

***T**he really great surprise in this recipe is the carrots. They are the perfect combination of natural sugars and herbs. My family loves them! And the roast — well, it ain't half bad either.*

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## directions

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**PLACE THE MEAT** in the bottom of a 6-quart slow cooker. Pour the juice over the top of the roast. Lay the apples over the roast and then dump the carrots over the top of the apples. Sprinkle the thyme and onion flakes over the carrots. Cover and cook on low for 6 hours.

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# Traditional Pot Roast & Veggies

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**Serves 10-12**

**8 hours on low**

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1 (4- to 5-lb.) beef roast 4 medium red potatoes, cut into 1- to 2-inch sections 1 (1-lb.) bag baby carrots 1 yellow onion, cut into rings  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup Worcestershire sauce 1 Tbsp. garlic powder

1½ tsp. oregano

**A** roast was one of the first things I ever made in a slow cooker. It came out all tender and juicy, which made me believe I was a kitchen goddess. Don't you just love when that happens? This recipe is my basic roast recipe. The veggies and meat will fill your slow cooker to at least two-thirds full, so the meal takes a little longer to cook than the meat would on its own. This roast is for Sunday dinners and, since we usually have leftovers, Monday lunches too. I hope your family enjoys it as much as ours has over the years.

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## directions

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**PLACE THE ROAST** in the bottom of a 6-quart slow cooker. Add the potatoes, carrots, and onions. Pour the Worcestershire sauce over the top of the beef and sprinkle with the garlic and oregano. Cover and cook for 8 hours on low.

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# Citrus Roast

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**Serves 6-8**

**8 hours on low**

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1 (3- to 4-lb.) beef roast, frozen  $\frac{1}{8}$  cup oil

2 Tbsp. vinegar

$\frac{1}{4}$  tsp. salt

$\frac{1}{8}$  tsp. pepper

2 tsp. garlic powder

1/8 tsp. paprika

1/4 cup lime juice

3 Tbsp. orange juice

**T**his isn't your grandmother's roast. By putting the roast in when it's frozen, the meat marinates as it thaws. If you want, you can flip the roast over after five hours so that both the top and the bottom get plenty of time to soak in the juices. The meat has a tangy blend of flavors your family will love at first bite. Not only is it good on its own, but the lime zing is the perfect addition to any taco or burrito made from leftovers. Of course, with a roast this good, you might not have leftovers.

## directions

**PLACE THE FROZEN ROAST** in a 4-quart slow cooker. Set aside. In a small bowl, stir together the remaining ingredients for the marinade. Pour the marinade over the roast. Cover and cook on low for 8 hours.

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# Pepper Steak Sandwiches

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**Serves 8**

**6-8 hours on low**

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- 1 (2-lb.) top round steak
- 1 medium onion, sliced thin
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 stalk celery, sliced

1 green bell pepper, sliced thin 1 yellow bell pepper, sliced thin ¼ tsp. sugar

½ tsp. pepper

1 (14.5-oz.) can beef broth

¼ cup light soy sauce

1 (14.5-oz.) can chopped tomato, drained ¼ cup water

8 hoagie rolls, toasted

2 cups shredded mozzarella cheese pepper to taste

**A** (optional) cross between a pepper steak dish served with rice and a French dip sandwich served with a thin dipping sauce, this steak sandwich is the best of both worlds. The peppers come out decidedly mild and sweet, while the meat is all sorts of hearty and deep. Finished with the mozzarella, this sandwich will have you begging for seconds.

## directions

**CUT THE STEAK** into 1-inch strips and place in the bottom of a 6-quart slow cooker. Add the onion, garlic, celery, green and yellow peppers, sugar, and pepper. Stir. Add the beef broth, soy sauce, tomato, and water. Cover and cook on low for 6–8 hours.

**TO MAKE SANDWICHES**, use a slotted spoon to arrange meat mixture on a toasted hoagie roll. Add ¼ cup of mozzarella cheese and a dash of pepper, if desired. Repeat for all hoagie rolls. Broil open-faced sandwiches until the cheese melts. Serve hot with a side of cooking juices for dipping.

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