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How to Make a Slow Cooker Meal

Making a slow cooker meal is ideal for a day when you will not have time to watch something in the oven or on the stove.

SLOW COOKER RECIPES ARE EASY!

Simply prepare the ingredients and place them all in the slow cooker. Then set the temperature, leave it to cook, and have a meal ready when you need it.

- Vegetables and meat can be cut up the night before you need them. Store them in the refrigerator in airtight containers. Do not store them in the liner. If the liner is left in the refrigerator, it cannot heat up quickly enough for the food to be safe to eat. It may break if exposed to cold then exposed to heat.
- To ensure that vegetables are tender, cut hard vegetables into smaller chunks and soft vegetables into larger chunks, or wait to put the soft vegetables in until the last hour of cooking.
- If meat needs to be browned, it is best to brown it right before adding to the slow cooker.
- To avoid sticking, spray the slow cooker with non-stick spray before adding the ingredients.
- Fill the slow cooker at least half full and no more than two thirds full to ensure proper cooking.

- Do not open the lid of the slow cooker during cooking. Only open it towards the end to check for doneness. Each time you lift the lid you prolong the cooking time.
- Many recipes can easily be adapted to your slow cooker. Recipes that are typically simmered on the stove top are easiest to adapt. Just reduce the liquid by 1/3 to 1/2 and adjust the cooking time. Find helpful tips: www.pillsbury.com/cooking-occasions/easy-meals/slow-cooker-recipe-guide/slow-cooker-recipe-conversion-table.

SLOW COOKERS HAVE MANY BENEFITS

- They are cost effective when used for cooking beans or tougher cuts of meat that tend to be less expensive.
- Nutritionally, they can be a healthy choice because they are a great way to cook vegetables, beans, and lean cuts of meat.
- They safely cook food when you cannot watch it closely.
- Slow cookers use less electricity and do not heat up the house like stoves and ovens.

KEEP FOOD SAFE TO EAT IN THE SLOW COOKER

- Follow food safety procedures that you would follow for any other recipe.
- Foods cooked in the slow cooker need to reach appropriate internal temperatures and be held at 140°F or above. Food cooked on either low or high in the slow cooker will get the food to the appropriate internal temperature. Once the food reaches the appropriate temperature, it can be held on the warm setting.
- Completely thaw frozen ingredients before putting them in the slow cooker. Frozen ingredients will not be able to reach the appropriate temperature within two hours, which can cause foodborne illness.
- Ensure thorough cooking of meat by cutting it into chunks or small pieces.
- Refrigerate leftovers in shallow containers to ensure that they cool quickly. Foods should be re-heated in the microwave or on the stove top, not in the slow cooker.

**GARBANZO BEAN SOUP**

Get the recipe: spendsmart.extension.iastate.edu/recipe/garbanzo-bean-soup

This is a Spend Smart. Eat Smart. recipe that can be adapted for the slow cooker by cooking all the ingredients on low for 4 to 6 hours.

CHECK OUT OUR VIDEOS

spendsmart.extension.iastate.edu/videos for more information on basic food preparation, safety, storage, and easy recipes!

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