

Crock pot; so easy, so tasty!

Do you remember coming home from school and smelling a delicious dinner stewing in the crock pot? I do. Little did I know that delicious meal only took, at the most, 15 minutes to prepare. My mom was busy with school and work, so she did not have a lot of time to prepare meals. Lucky for me, we had a crock pot. She would do all of the grocery shopping on the weekend and we would use the crock pot two or three times a week. The main ingredients were chicken and some type of bean. Some of my favorite meals included baby back ribs, ham hocks and beans and roast beef.

Before you begin, there are a few guidelines that you should follow when using a crock pot. Whether you are cooking for a big group or a nice dinner, these tips will enhance your slow cooking experience.

Crock Pot Hints and Tips

Beans

Beans must be softened completely before combining with sugar and/or acid foods (NOTE: Sugar and acid have a hardening effect on beans and will prevent softening). Dried beans, especially red kidney beans, should be boiled before adding to a recipe. Cover the beans with 3 times their volume of unsalted water and bring to a boil. Boil 10 minutes, reduce heat, cover and allow to simmer 1 1/2 hours or until beans are tender. Soaking in water, if desired, should be completed before boiling. Discard water after soaking or boiling.

Meats

? Due to the nature of a crock pot, meat does not brown as it would if it were cooked in a skillet or oven. It is not necessary to brown meat before slow cooking, however, if you prefer the flavor and look of browned meat, brown your meat in a skillet with a little oil, then place the meat in the stoneware and follow the recipe as usual.

? Trim fats and wipe meats well to remove residue. (If meats contain fats, brown in a separate skillet or broiler and drain well before adding to cooker). Season with salt and pepper. Place meat in stoneware on top of vegetables.

? For roasts and stews, pour liquid over meat. Use no more liquid than specified in the recipe. More juices in meats and vegetables are retained in slow cooking than in conventional cooking.

Liquids

? A specific liquid called for in a recipe may be varied if an equal quantity is substituted (such as substituting a 10 1/2 ounce can of soup plus 4 ounces of water for a 14 1/2 ounce can of tomatoes OR 1/2 cup beef or chicken broth for 1/2 cup of wine, etc).

? Roasts can be cooked without water when set on LOW. We recommend a small amount, however, because the gravies are especially tasty. The more fat or "marbling" the meat has, the less liquid you need. The liquid is needed to properly soften and cook vegetables.

Vegetables

Most vegetables should be thinly sliced or placed near the sides or bottom of the stoneware. Meats generally cook faster than most vegetables in a crock pot.

Cooking with Frozen Foods You can cook frozen meats in your crock pot, however it is best to use the following guidelines:

? Add at least 1 cup of warm liquid to the stoneware before placing meat in the stoneware.

? Do not preheat the crock pot.

? Cook recipes containing frozen meats for an additional 4 to 6 hours on Low, or an additional 2 hours on High.

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About the Author

Michael K. Sasaki is the founder of [RecipeMatcher](#) , where you can find delicious [crock pot recipes](#) , salsa recipes and barbecue recipes.