

SBL Cooking Demo: Tips for using a slow cooker

1. Save time and effort

One of the main attractions for many is the ease of a slow-cooker so when you're looking for recipes, avoid those that suggest a lot of prep. For many dishes, particularly soups and stews, you can really just throw all the ingredients in. It can be nice to cook the onions beforehand as the flavor is different when you put them in raw, but experiment both ways as you may find you prefer one. IT can also be good to brown meat to give it some color but this is not essential.

2. Get ahead

If you're short on time in the morning, prepare everything you need for your slow-cooked meal the night before, put it in the slow-cooker, cover and store in the fridge overnight. Ideally the dish should be as close to room temperature as possible, so get it out of the fridge when you wake up and leave it for 20 minutes before turning the cooker on. If you need to heat your dish beforehand, then put the ingredients in a different container and transfer them in the morning.

3. Save money

Slow cookers are great for cooking cheaper cuts like beef brisket, pork shoulder, lamb shoulder and chicken thighs. You can also use less meat as slow-cooking really extracts a meaty flavor that permeates the whole dish. Bulk up with vegetables instead.

4. Trim the fat

You don't need to add oil to a slow cooker; the contents won't catch as long as there is enough moisture in there. You don't need a lot of fat on your meat either. Normally when you fry meat, a lot of fat drains away, this won't happen in a slow cooker so trim it off; otherwise you might find you have pools of oil in your stew. This will give you healthier results and it will still be tasty.

5. Go easy on the liquid

Because your slow cooker will have a tightly sealed lid, the liquid won't evaporate so if you're adapting a standard recipe, its best to reduce the liquid by roughly 1/3. Liquid should just cover the meat and vegetables. Don't overfill your slow cooker or it may start leaking out the top and food won't cook as well. Half to two thirds full is ideal and certainly no more than three quarters.

6. Thickening

Just as the liquid doesn't reduce it also doesn't thicken. You can roll meat in a small amount of seasoned flour before adding it to the slow cooker or use a little cornflour at the end. If you

want to do latter, take a teaspoon or two of cornflour, mix it to a paste with a little cold water. Stir into your simmering slow cooker contents, and then replace the lid.

7. Slow is good

Use the Low setting as much as you can. Most dishes really benefit from a slow, gentle heat to really bring out the flavors. This also means you won't have to worry if you're heading out for the day. It will take care of itself.

8. Leave it alone

Slow cookers are designed to do their own thing so you don't need to keep checking the contents. Every time you take the lid off, it will release some of the heat. So if you keep doing this you'll have to increase the cooking time.

9. When to add food

Ideally you want to choose recipes where most, if not all, of the ingredients can be added at the beginning, leaving you free to do other things. However in most cases, pasta, rice and fresh herbs will need to be added towards the end.

10. How long should I cook it for?

If a dish usually takes:

- 15-30 minutes, cook it for 1-2 hours on high or 4-6 hours on low
- 30-60 minutes, cook it for 2-3 hours on high or 5-7 hours on low
- 1-2 hours, cook it for 3-4 hours on high or 6-8 hours on low
- 2-4 hours, cook it for 4-6 hours on high or 8-12 hours on low

11. For easy cleanup

Try a slow cooker liner. These heat-resistant, disposable liners fit neatly inside the insert and help prevent food from sticking to the bottom and sides of your slow cooker.