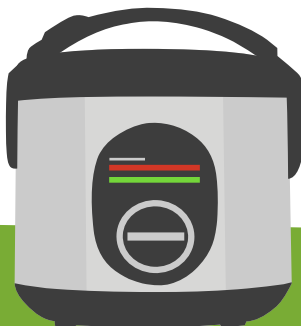




Guide to Slow Cooking

The ultimate guide to
slow cooking, including
recipes!





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Why a slow cooker?

Slow cooking transforms cheaper cuts of meat into beautiful tender dishes. Beef cuts such as brisket, shin, neck and chuck are all great choices for slow cooking. Lamb and pork shoulders are great also, along with chicken thighs. That said, your choice of meat isn't limited to these - gammon joints, loins of pork and lamb shanks are also great choices as they benefit from long slow cooking.

This type of cooking suits many of us with little time but it also allows flavours to develop in a way that rapid cooking cannot. It gently coaxes out flavours which are slower to develop and encourages individual ingredients to marry together and blend in a unique way.

When we think about slow cooking, we naturally relate it to winter cooking because of its association with stews and casseroles. As a slow cooker does not generate anywhere near the same amount of heat as your hob or oven, it's a good appliance to use in the summer too. Your kitchen will be kept cooler.



Energy Efficiency

Slow cookers are energy efficient, allowing you to save money – compared to a conventional oven. Some slow cookers can save up to five times the energy of stove top cooking since heat is retained within the unit, rather than lost in the air.

Slow cookers are an efficient way to batch cook large quantities of food, such as a stew, soup or curry.

Which? magazine states that the most efficient slow cookers only cost between 2p and 5p an hour to run on their lowest setting. This means one stew could cost you as little as 16p over eight hours. The least energy efficient will cost almost 40p to cook the same stew. By contrast, it costs about 30p an hour to keep your oven on.

A good rule of thumb is that every litre in volume the slow cooker can cook equates to one serving. So a four litre slow cooker is good for four servings, a five litre is good for five servings, and so on.



How safe is slow cooking?

A slow cooker will operate from about 77-97°C. In England, 75° c is deemed adequate to destroy any harmful bacteria.

Once food has reached that temperature, it can be kept at a lower temperature for up to two hours and still be consumed safely. If you are in doubt, invest in a thermometer to insert into ingredients to test the core temperature.

You shouldn't reheat food in your slow cooker as it may not reach the adequate temperature to kill harmful bacteria. Always reheat slow cooked food the way you normally would.

Don't leave food to cool down in your slow cooker as this will create a perfect environment for bacteria to grow and multiply. Remove food to another container to cool and refrigerate within two hours to ensure safety.



Do I always need to add liquid to my slow cooker?

Always check the instruction manual. Most do require at least some liquid in the base to operate properly. However, you may come across recipes that don't require this. This will be because the ingredients have a naturally high level of moisture or a large level of ingredients which will create additional condensation quickly, and therefore create moisture on their own.

In some cases, using this method enables some caramelisation of the ingredients in the slow cooker with great results.

Can I leave my slow cooker unattended?

A slow cooker can be left unattended as long as you follow the manufacturing instructions for safety precautions and don't exceed cooking times in recipes.

Always place it on a heat proof surface and ensure it's not touching anything else which may be heat sensitive.



Which function should I use?

Most slow cookers operate with just a High/Low setting. Generally, something set to low will take twice as long as something set to high. So four hours on high is equivalent to eight hours on low.

How much preparation do I do?

This is a frequently asked question. The answer is, it's totally up to you and the time you have. If you want to throw everything in the slow cooker before you go to work in the morning, it can be as easy as that! However, some people prefer to prepare their food on the stove as they may do if using the oven to cook a stew.

If you want to prepare your food but don't have enough time in the morning, a tip is to prepare it all the night before and refrigerate until the morning.

The difference in methods here is purely personal and depends whether the difference in taste when food is prepped outweighs the time element and convenience of not prepping.



How to cook with your slow cooker

Slow cooked food should be left to its own devices. Unless the recipe tells you, don't stir and leave the lid sealed. Lifting the lid will cause it to lose heat and moisture. This not only means it will take time to reach the heat again but it may also affect the quality of the final dish. This is particularly important in the first hour of cooking as this is the time it takes to reach a safe and optimal temperature.

Try not to fill your slow cooker more than two thirds full and certainly no more than 4cm from the top. Place the ingredients that take the longest to cook at the bottom such as large cuts of meat and root vegetables so they have maximum heat exposure.

Cooking liquid is an important part of success. As water is not lost in slow cooking in the way it is during stove cooking, the amount used is reduced to a half to a third. Any evaporation that happens is retained by the condensation it creates. This will vary from dish to dish. You can use stocks, wine, beer, cider fruit juice or similar to cook food in and add flavour.



Temperatures and timings

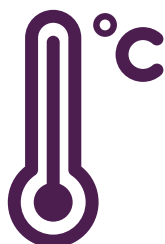
Personal preferences and differences will create variations in cooking times. Most can be adapted to slow cooking.

As a general rule, something that cooks for 1.5-2 hours on the hob will probably take four hours in the slow cooker on a high setting and eight hours on low setting.

When do I add seasoning?

Slow cooking affects the flavouring in a different way to conventional cooking. It is a good idea to add seasoning at the end. This is unless it is stated differently in the recipe.

Certain vegetables may benefit from seasoning at the beginning and it helps concentrate their flavour. Also add delicate soft herbs at the end, like basil, parsley and mint to avoid discolouration and loss of flavour.



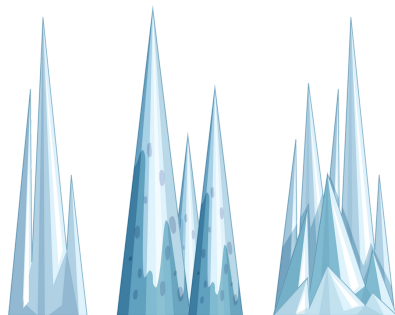
Can I freeze food?

Quite often, food such as curry, stew and casseroles are undoubtedly better if left to cool, refrigerated and heated the next day.

Freezing these types of food can further enhance their flavours and they freeze brilliantly. Remember to transfer out of the slow cooker to cool. Store them in a shallow covered container and refrigerate or freeze within two hours of cooking.

Do I need to brown meat and veg?

As stated, the final result will depend on personal choice but many say that browning gives extra flavour and colour. In addition it will render fattier cuts of meat removing some excess fat which is healthier and can result in a better dish. If time and convenience are your main priority, then this may not matter to you.



How do I treat fatty meat?

For more even cooking, trim excess fat from meats as high fat foods cook more quickly than other ingredients such as vegetables.

If you make a recipe with both root vegetables and meat, place the root veg at the bottom of the dish and meat on top, so it cooks evenly. Root vegetables take a surprisingly long time to cook.

It's worth saying that fatty meats are not a bad thing for slow cooking. This good fat comes from the intramuscular fat running through certain cuts of meat, as opposed to the layer of fat on the surface.



Can I bake in a slow cooker?

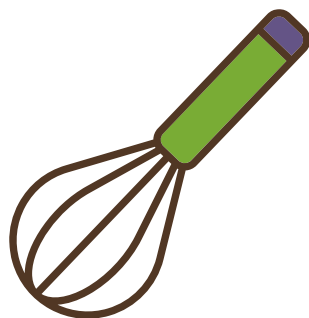
Yes, you can! You can use a bain-marie and put a dish in if you like.

Some cakes can be baked straight into your slow cooker and will take the shape as such.

You will need to ensure you line your slow cooker with the appropriate foil/paper.

How much liquid do I need to add?

Liquid can be reduced by up to 50% to a normal cooking oven method. Always follow recipe guidelines.



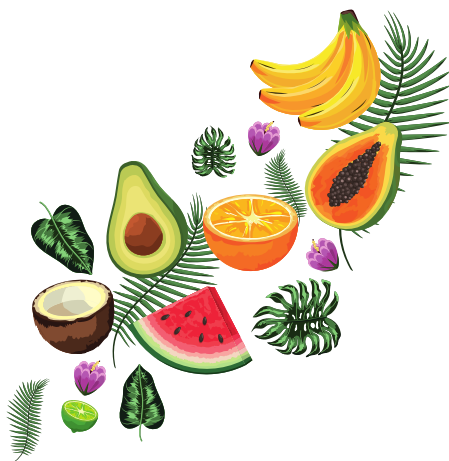
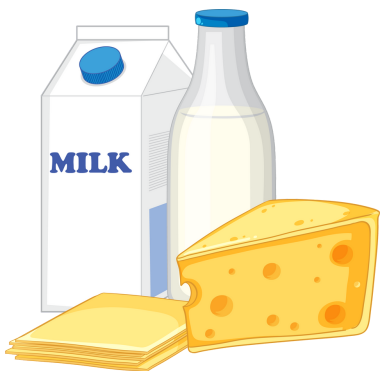
What type of ingredients should you use?

Meat - Beef, such as stewing beef and brisket, pork and lamb shoulder all work well, along with lamb shanks and most chicken. Cheaper cuts of meats are very good in the slow cooker as well.

Vegetables - Root vegetables take longer, and potatoes must be in liquid or they will discolour

Fruit – Some fruits are more resilient than others. Apples, pears and bananas must be in liquid or they will discolour.

Dairy – Milk, cheese, cream, and yogurt tend to break down over six hours . A few hours should be ok. If in doubt, stir these in at the end of cooking time.



What type of ingredients should you use?

Pasta - Pasta can be added approximately 30 mins from the end of cooking time. Cooking for longer than this may turn it mushy and unpleasant. Lasagne and cannelloni are more successful if cooked for longer but always follow recipe guidelines.

Rice - Will absorb flavours and moisture and therefore will take on flavours. Add approximately 30-50 mins before the end of the cooking and stir a couple of times to ensure it cooks evenly. Risotto can also work well.

Frozen ingredients - Frozen ingredients must be defrosted before using in the slow cooker otherwise they are unlikely to reach a safe cooking temperature, making them unsafe.



Hints and Tips

Always cut your meat into the same size pieces, as well as your vegetables.

Cream-based products should be added towards the end of cooking time.

If you like your vegetables crunchy, add them 15-20 minutes from the end, (peppers and broccoli would be good for this, although they can be cooked a lot longer if required).

To save time in the morning, consider filling your slow cooker the night before and keeping it in the fridge overnight.

Ingredients can be prepped and kept in a smaller container or food bag ready for the morning.

If your liquid looks runny or watery, try folding a clean tea towel and placing under the lid. This will absorb some of the moisture. This could be good if you wanted to dry out a chicken skin towards the end of cooking as it should crisp up the skin to some degree.





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Ratatouille

Preparation Time: 10 minutes

Cooking Time: 6 hrs and 20 minutes

Servings: 6

Ingredients

2 tbsp olive oil

1 red onion, sliced

2 garlic cloves, chopped

2 large aubergines, cut into 1.5cm pieces

3 courgettes, halved and cut into 2cm pieces

3 mixed peppers, cut into 2cm pieces

1 tbsp tomato purée

6 large ripe tomatoes, roughly chopped

small bunch of basil, roughly chopped, plus a few extra leaves to serve

few thyme sprigs

400g can plum tomatoes

1 tbsp red wine vinegar

1 tsp brown sugar



Method

- Heat the oil in a large frying pan and fry the onion for 8 minutes until translucent
- Add the garlic and fry for 1 minute
- Turn the heat to medium-high, add the aubergines and fry for 5 minutes until golden
- Stir in the courgettes and peppers and fry for 5 minutes or more until slightly soft
- Add the tomato purée, fresh tomatoes, herbs, canned tomatoes, vinegar, sugar and 1 tsp salt and bring to the boil
- Transfer to the slow cooker and cook on low for 5-6 hours or until everything is soft and the sauce has thickened
- Season, scatter over some extra basil, and serve with sourdough, if you like

Beef stew

Preparation Time: 20 mins

Cooking Time: 4 Hours on high or 8 on low

Servings: 4

Ingredients

900g stewing beef

4 carrots chopped

2 onions chopped

2 sticks of celery chopped

2 tbsp any flavourless oil

2 bay leaves

Thyme

2 tbsp tomato purée

2 tbsp Worcestershire sauce

2 beef stock cubes or stock pot

2 tsp cornflour (optional)

Fresh parsley to serve - chopped



Method

- Add 1 tbsp oil to a pan
- Add the onion and celery and gently fry for a few minutes until they start to soften
- Add the carrots, bay and thyme, fry for 2 mins, stir in the purée and Worcestershire sauce, add 600ml boiling water, stir and tip everything into a slow cooker
- Crumble over the stock cubes or add the stock pots and stir, then season with pepper
- Fry the beef in the remaining oil in batches until it is well browned, then tip each batch into the slow cooker
- Cook on low for 8-10 hrs, or on high for 4 hrs
- If you want to thicken the gravy, mix the cornflour with a splash of cold water to make a paste, then stir in 2 tbsp of the liquid from the slow cooker
- Tip back into the slow cooker, stir and cook for a further 30 mins on high
- Stir in the parsley and season again to taste
- This stew will taste better the next day and freezes well

Chicken Tikka Masala

Preparation Time: 20 minutes

Cooking Time: 4 hrs and 30 mins - 7 hrs and 30 mins

Servings:4

Ingredients

10 boneless, chicken thighs (skinless), each cut into 3 cubes

2-3 tbsp flavourless oil

1 large onion, chopped

2 garlic cloves, crushed or chopped.

thumb-sized piece ginger, finely grated or chopped

3 tbsp tikka curry paste

500ml passata

1 tbsp tomato purée

1 tbsp malt vinegar

1 tbsp light brown soft sugar

1 cinnamon stick

5 cardamom pods

100ml double cream

handful chopped coriander



Method

- Heat the slow cooker
- Season the chicken, then put the oil in a wide frying pan and, once hot, add the chicken (don't overcrowd the pan – you may want to do this in batches)
- Cook over a high heat until the chicken is browned, then transfer it to the slow cooker
- Add the onion, garlic and ginger to the pan and cook for a few mins until softened
- Add a splash of water and scrape any bits from the bottom of the pan, then tip everything into the slow cooker
- Add the remaining ingredients, except the cream and coriander, then season well and cover with a lid
- Cook on low for 5-7 hours or on high for 4-5 hours.
- Add the cream and check the seasoning, adding more vinegar, sugar or salt if needed
- Cook for another 10-15 mins until hot
- Ladle between bowls and garnish with the coriander and serve with rice

Vegetable Curry

Preparation Time: 10 minutes

Cooking Time: 6–8 hours on low

Servings: 4

Ingredients:

- 1 tbsp oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 1 tbsp curry powder
- 1 tsp turmeric
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- 2 carrots, chopped
- 1 sweet potato, cubed
- 1 red pepper, chopped
- 1 courgette (zucchini), chopped
- 400g (14 oz) canned chopped tomatoes
- 200ml (7 oz) coconut milk
- 100g (3.5 oz) frozen peas
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Fresh coriander (optional)



Method

- Sauté onion and garlic in oil, and then add the spices
- Transfer onion, garlic and spice mix to the slow cooker and add the vegetables (without the peas), tomatoes, and coconut milk
- Stir together, then cook on a low heat for 6–8 hours.
Add the frozen peas 30 mins before end



Sausage Casserole

Preparation Time: 10 minutes

Cooking Time: 6–8 hours on low / 4 hours on high

Servings: 4

Ingredients:

8 pork sausages

1 large onion, sliced

2 garlic cloves, crushed

2 carrots, peeled and sliced

1 red pepper, chopped

400g (14 oz) canned chopped tomatoes

1 tbsp tomato purée

1 tsp dried mixed herbs

300ml (10 fl oz) chicken stock

1 tbsp oil

Salt and pepper to taste



Method

- Brown sausages in a frying pan and set aside
- In the same pan, sauté onion, garlic, carrots, and pepper until softened
- Transfer vegetables and sausages to the slow cooker
- Add tomatoes, tomato purée, herbs, and stock season
- Cook on low for 6–8 hours or high for 4 hours

Hungarian Goulash

Preparation Time: 15 minutes

Cooking Time: 7–8 hours on low / 4 hours on high

Servings: 4

Ingredients

3 pounds beef chuck roast cut into 1" cubes

Salt to taste

Freshly ground pepper to taste (or at least 10 peppercorns)

1 tablespoon vegetable oil

5 medium carrots peeled and sliced into 2" diagonals

¼ celery root

If you can get hold of it: 2 parsley roots (from Eastern-European shops)

4 medium salad potatoes peeled and cut into 3" cubes

1 large onion chopped

3 large cloves garlic minced

1 beef stock cube and 1 vegetable stock cube

¼ cup Hungarian sweet paprika (or Spanish) and some hot paprika if you like it

fresh chopped parsley for garnish optional



Method

- Preheat the slow cooker
- Season the meat with salt and pepper
- Mix the oil with the paprika
- Put all the ingredients into the slow cooker. Mix all the ingredients together, then add as much hot water as covers the ingredients (if you like to sear your meat first, do that in a pan with the finely chopped onion and the oil)
- Cover slow cooker and turn heat to high. Cook for 4 to 6 hours, or until beef is ultra tender (if you prepare the meal in the morning for dinner you may turn it on low and cook it for 8-9 hrs.)
- Sometimes the beef is fork-tender in 4 hours, and sometimes it takes 6 hours or even a bit more, it just depends on the cut of meat (I always allow 6 hours, because the goal is fork-tender beef)
- To serve, ladle goulash into individual bowls
- Sprinkle with fresh parsley, if desired
- A warm loaf of fresh crusty bread works great for dipping

Rice pudding

Preparation Time: 5 minutes

Cooking Time: 3–4 hours on high / 6 hours on low

Servings: 4

Ingredients:

100g (3.5 oz) pudding rice

1 litre (4 cups) full-fat milk

75g (2.5 oz) sugar

1 tsp vanilla extract

Pinch of nutmeg or cinnamon (optional)

Method

- Rinse rice. Place all ingredients in slow cooker.
- Stir well. Cook on high for 3–4 hours or low for 6 hours, stirring occasionally.



Chocolate Cake

Preparation Time: 20 mins

Cooking Time: 1hr40 – 2 hrs on high

Servings: 10-16 portions

Ingredients

300g self-raising flour

70g cocoa Powder

275g fine caster sugar

2 large eggs

150ml oil - flavourless

150 ml water

50ml milk – any milk can be used

1 ½ tsp baking powder

1 tsp vanilla essence

Grease proof paper

Kitchen Foil



Method

- Create a foil base for the slow cooker. Place this in the base
- Create a cake case out of baking parchment, ensure this is lined at least half way up the side of the slow cooker
- Heat the slow cooker on high for 20 minutes
- Place all the ingredients in a large bowl. Combine well. Beat gently for 2-3 minutes until smooth
- Pour the mixture into the baking parchment cake case. You will need to do this very carefully or the mixture will leak out of the case
- Put a tea cloth under the lid of the slow cooker. Bake on high for two hours or until well risen and a skewer can be inserted and comes out dry. Do not lift the lid for the first hour and 40 mins
- Once baked, remove from the slow cooker by lifting the edges of the baking parchment case and allow to cool on a wire rack
- This cake can be portioned and frozen to suit



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