

Introduction

Choosing a Slow Cooker

Slow cookers have come a long way from the orange and brown colored models of the past. Perhaps the most important new feature is the removable crockery insert, which allows for easy cleaning by hand or in the dishwasher.

Cookers come in round or oval shapes, and in various sizes. Many of the recipes in this book were developed using an oval 3.5 quart slow cooker, but most can be prepared just as well in a round cooker. Oval cookers are nice for dishes like stuffed bell peppers or lasagne, or recipes that require the use of a loaf pan. The size of the cooker depends on the size of your family and your eating habits. We think it more efficient to cook a little more than needed and freeze the leftovers, but either way the capacity of your cooker should suit your individual needs. Whatever you decide, you can purchase an adequate slow cooker for less than \$30. Sure, there are pricier models, but we aren't convinced that they cook better or that the electronic timers and gizmos are worth it.

If you are new to slow cooking or if you would like to purchase a new model, we suggest that you consider one with these options:

- Removable ceramic insert — a must for easy clean-up
- Metal-rimmed lids — these are more resistant to chips and cracks
- “Keep warm” setting — foods will stay hot for as long as you like

In addition to these key features, you may want to consider purchasing a few accessories. Cooks that enjoy the breads and cakes in this book may like using a special cake pan that is made to fit inside round slow cookers. Also, some

companies sell metal racks that sit inside the cookers, which are great for evenly supporting ramekins or loaf pans. An insulated carrying case is another nice accessory that will help you to share your slow-cooked meals at potlucks or parties.

If you really fall in love with slow cooking, you may find that having only one is not enough. We own several and find that they each have their own unique charms. For example, the large oval cooker can be busy making dinner (Vegetable Tofu Lasagna) while the small round one cooks dessert (Apple Raspberry Crisp). At large get-togethers like Thanksgiving, several slow cookers can really ease the burden of preparing the meal by keeping everything hot until serving time.

Preparation

If your slow cooker has a removable insert, you can prepare many of our recipes the night before cooking. Simply refrigerate the insert and its contents overnight, but be sure to add a few minutes more to the cooking time to compensate.

Measurements

You'll notice right away that our recipes usually call for whole fruits or vegetables versus a specific measurement of prepared fruit or vegetables. We created this cookbook specifically for the busy cook. We want you to spend more time enjoying the food than shopping for or cooking it... and no-one wants to spend time figuring out how many whole carrots equal a cup of chopped. We're no-fuss cooks at heart; we know that glazed carrots made with four large carrots might be slightly different when made with four small ones. But it's really nothing to worry ourselves about. Variety makes for interesting dining.