

What Slow Cooker is best

Size Matters!

Slow cookers are available in a range of sizes, from 1 quart to 8 1/2 quarts. The popular sizes are 3 1/2-, 4-, and 5-quart models which work well for soups, stews and casseroles. The extra small 1 to 2-quart models is ideal for party dips or very small cooking tasks. If cooking for 1-2 people, a 2 1/2- to 3 1/2-quart slow cooker might be large enough. 5-7 quarts are generally used by large families ***or to bring to pot lucks***. The larger round and oval sizes have the advantage of being able to accommodate a smaller casserole or souffle dish, springform pan, and small round baking pan (for which most recipes do not call for).

Crockpots are designed to operate with a **fill level of at least ½ full to ¾ full** for best results. So a too large of crock pot might not provide the optimal fill level.

To make sure your meal is finished in the time listed on your recipe don't overfill your slow cooker. Likewise, your meal might overcook if the slow cooker is underfilled.

Instapot (IP) slow cooker vs ceramic slow cooker-The main differences between an IP and a ceramic slow cooker are placement of cooking elements and the cooking surface. The IP compared to the ceramic pot is a thin metal bowl that dissipates heat differently than a thick ceramic bowl. The IP heating element is in the bottom of the IP only whereas most ceramic slow cookers are placed in a metal casing that has heating elements all along the sides in addition to the bottom. **So you will get more uniform cooking with the surrounding heat of a ceramic slow cooker.** One advantage the IP has is a timer function to both start and stop the cooking time that a less expensive slow cooker might lack.

The IP also has a saute function so you can saute onions and other ingredients before adding other ingredients if you desire for a one pot meal. **Sautéing vegetables, such as carrots and onions, prior to slow cooking softens them and improves the flavor of the meal.**

Slow Cooker Tips

- 1 **Layer wisely:** For even cooking, cut food into uniform-size pieces. Place firm, slow-cooking root vegetables like potatoes and carrots at the bottom of the crock.
- 2 Foods cooked on the bottom of the slow cooker cook faster and will be moister because they are immersed in the simmering liquid.
- 3 Add **tender vegetables** like tomatoes, mushrooms and zucchini during the last 45 minutes of cooking time so they don't overcook.
- 4 **Heat level:** A general rule of thumb is that cooking on the low setting (170 degrees F for most models) takes about twice as long as cooking on high (280 degrees F on most models).
- 5 **Cooking Beans:** Place soaked beans in a crock pot with about 2.5 cups of water per 1 cup of beans. Turn crock pot on low and cook for 7-9 hours or turn the crock pot on high and cook for 3-5 hours. Pinto beans do best cooked on high. If they are not as soft as you desire, turn them up to high their last hour or two of cooking.
- 6 **Spices:** Dried herbs lose their flavor after a few hours of slow cooking and leave the dish bland. Fresh leafy versions like basil and cilantro fall apart. Some recommend that spices may need to be increased because of the lack of liquid evaporation, including rosemary, lemon, and garlic.
- 7 **Add at the beginning:** Whole leaf dried spices like Bay Leaves. Chili powder, black pepper, paprika, cinnamon, cumin, cardamom and coriander, "many of which can taste harsh and bitter when uncooked but become sublime when cooked over time." Fresh garlic. Also 3 of "the woodies: rosemary, sage and thyme."
- 8 **Add at the end:** All other spices including Cayenne pepper, vegetables that add flavor like onion, and condiments like hot sauce, chili sauce, liquid smoke or oriental sauces, should be added just an hour before serving so that the flavors have time to blend but will not dissipate. When cooking beans, add any salt at the end or the beans may not soften properly.

Inside Information

Lid: Resist the urge to take off the lid. Opening the slow cooker lets heat escape. It takes 20 minutes for the slow cooker to recover which might extend cooking time. Only open it 30 to 45 minutes before the low end of the cooking range to check doneness. Especially avoid opening the lid the first two hours. One can thicken the juices and concentrate flavors by removing the lid and cooking on HIGH for the last half hour of cooking time.

Care for your crock: The ceramic insert in a slow cooker can crack if exposed to abrupt temperature shifts. In other words, don't place a hot ceramic insert directly on a cold counter; put down a dishtowel first. The same goes for using a filled insert you've stowed overnight in the refrigerator: Never place your stoneware (whether it has been refrigerated or is at room temperature) in a pre-heated slow cooker base-let the crock warm up with the base.

Converting recipes for a slow cooker: Because the liquid will not evaporate like during other cooking, if you're adapting a standard recipe, it is best to reduce the liquid by roughly a third.

If a dish usually takes:

- 30 mins, cook it for 1 - 2 hours on High or 4 - 6 hours on Low
- 30 mins - 1 hour, 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
- 3 - 4 hours, cook it for 4 - 6 hours on High or 8 - 12 hours on Low

Additional resources:

Source: <http://www.oprah.com/food/Cooking-With-a-Crock-Pot-Crock-Pot-Ingredients-Leigh-Newman>

Cookbooks:

Vegan Slow Cooker for Beginners- "150 easy recipes to make every day of the week; range of different recipes from breakfast all the way to desert."

Fresh from the Vegan Slow Cooker- Robin Robertson has written this book as a way to demonstrate creative ways to use the slow cooker in the kitchen. uses a breadth of ingredients to create new and exciting vegan recipes.

The Vegan Slow Cooker- allows you to create impress, gourmet style meals with minimal effort and to support a busy lifestyle.

The Vegan Slow Cooker Cookbook-"38 healthy, filling recipes which taste great and involve minimal effort to cook.