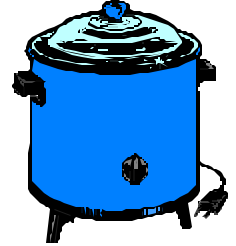




## Using Your Slow Cooker Safely



Slow cookers have been a staple of many kitchens since the 1970's. Foods that take several hours to cook can be prepared and cooked slowly while the family is away or busy. Slow cookers have also been one way for us to take less tender cuts of meat, cook them slowly, and end up with a tender, flavorful, moist food.

Today's slow cooker has changed a little from the original one. The basics of the cookers have remained the same – a glazed ceramic crock that is housed in an outer heating element casing. First of all, you can find them in various sizes and shapes. Choose the one that suits your family size best.

Newer slow cookers have a removable crock – that makes cleanup a lot easier. Controls can be anywhere from the simple two to three temperature settings to more complicated settings that you can program to cook food.

Slow cookers are used for a variety of reasons:

- \* Convenience and saves time
- \* Saves money
- \* Nutritional content is high
- \* Great for less tender cuts of meat
- \* Long cooking time develops flavors
- \* You can prepare family meals "from scratch"

Are they safe? Slow cookers should cook food slowly enough that they can be left unattended yet fast enough to make sure food is not in the food safety danger zone (between 40 and 140 degrees F). You can make sure that your slow cooker gets hot enough by doing a simple test:

1. Fill the slow cooker one-half to two-thirds full of water.
2. Heat by setting the controls on high for 8 hours and leave the lid on.
3. Check the water temperature at the end of the 8 hours – it should be at least 185 degrees F. If it is lower than this, replace your slow cooker.

### Cooking Safely:

- ✓ Start with a clean cooker, utensils and kitchen.
- ✓ Wash your hands before and during food preparation.
- ✓ Keep perishables refrigerated until it is time to put them in the cooker.
- ✓ Thaw meats before putting them in a slow cooker. Cut meats into pieces.
- ✓ Vegetables should go in first, on the bottom and around the sides because they take longer to cook.
- ✓ Fill the cooker no less than half-full but no more than two-thirds full.
- ✓ Cover the food with liquid.
- ✓ Keep the lid in place.
- ✓ If possible start the food on high and shift to low after an hour of cooking.

If the power goes out while you are using your slow cooker, finish the cooking process immediately using some other heat source such as a gas stove or outdoor grill. If the food was completely cooked before the power went out, it should be safe for up to two hours in the cooker.

Leftovers should be placed in shallow containers and refrigerated within two hours after the end of the cooking time. Do not reheat leftovers in a slow cooker – instead reheat them rapidly in a microwave oven or conventional cooking until the temperature reaches 165 degrees F. You can then safely place the food in a preheated slow cooker but make sure the food stays at 140 degrees F. or higher.

**Fill in the blanks:**

1. The food safety danger zone is \_\_\_\_\_ degrees F to \_\_\_\_\_ degrees F.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ should be placed in the bottom and around the sides of the cooker.
3. The slow cooker should be filled \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ full.
4. Leftovers should be heated to \_\_\_\_\_ degrees F. and then placed in the slow cooker.
5. Keep the \_\_\_\_\_ in place during cooking.



**Cashew Chicken**  
(Makes 3 servings)

- 3 chicken breasts
- ½ cup green onion, chopped
- ½ cup mushrooms, sliced
- ½ cup celery, sliced
- ½ can cream soup (chicken or mushroom)
- 1 ½ tsp. soy sauce
- ½ cup cashews

Place thawed chicken breasts in bottom of slow cooker. Add onion, mushrooms, and celery. Top vegetables with soup and soy sauce. Cover and cook on Low for 6 hours or High for 4 hours. Top each serving with cashews.

Nutritional Information Per Serving: 320 calories, 15 g total fat, 3.5 g saturated fat, 70 mg cholesterol, 850 mg sodium, 13 g. carbohydrate, 1 g fiber.

Note: reduce the sodium content by using reduced sodium soup and low-sodium soy sauce

Answers 1. 40 140 2. Vegetables 3. 1/2 2/3 4. 165 5. lid

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