

Keepin' it simple

Some days you might consider dumping everything in a crockpot to still be too much work. I know some of you have great intentions, but that crockpot is still sitting in a box in your basement. Or, the idea of scrubbing the caramelized tidbits from the sides might convince you not to try. Trust me, one pot meals are the easiest way to save time in prep and clean up. Once you start with your crock pot, you'll realize that it is the best kitchen small appliance you have— other than your coffee pot, of course.

So let's start simple. Here are some easy things to try that don't require a lot of work, clean up or preparation.

1. Rice: your crock pot can also be a rice cooker. 1 cup rice to 2 cups water on high. You need to check it to see when it's fluffy and done because the time can vary depending on the rice, but the ratio should be the same for all varieties.

2. Sweet potatoes: wash them (don't pat dry), leave the skin on and put them in the crockpot for 4-6 hours on low. They will create enough liquid to cook all the way through. If you want to make it fancy, peel and cube the potatoes, then add a couple T. of butter and brown sugar to the pot for a sweet treat. I wouldn't be offended if you added mini-marshmallows at the end either!

3. Sauces: Many times you will read that I've created a sauce or a glaze or thickened up a gravy. But honestly, you can use most bottled sauces on meats and veggies just fine. BBQ, sweet and sour, teriyaki, italian dressing and broth all make for excellent flavors in the crock pot. The only down side is that these sauces are typically higher in sugar, which means it might make for tougher clean up, and also higher in sodium, which might make the cooked foods a little saltier. But by all

means, you can totally keep it simple and use prepped sauces.

4. Owner's Manual: If you own a crock pot, you have some great resources to help you figure it out. This may sound silly, but check your owner's manual! There may be a conversion guide of oven cooking time to crock pot cooking time. It means you can crock pot so many more things now that you know how long to cook them! It might even have some great recipes to try. It also has the warranty information— if you find that your crock pot doesn't cook evenly, that it burns, that the lid doesn't keep a good seal, that it has a weird electrical smell, or any other bizarre cooking experience, then you should definitely call the company and follow up. Crock pot cooking should be simple and easy, if it isn't, then let's work together and figure out why!

5. Crock pot liners: One of the best accessories a girl can have. Except you can't wear this. But your crock pot can! You open it, put it in the crock pot and then dump everything into it. Cooking directions are exactly the same, but now there isn't any clean up. When it cools, you just pull it out and throw it away. It doesn't get any easier than that. Take my advice and put this item on your next grocery list.

I hope these nuggets are helpful to you and maybe this ounce of encouragement will motivate you to give crock pot cooking a try. Have fun with it! **Food isn't just about sustenance, it should entertain all of your senses!**