

Crock Pot Turkey Legs

Thanksgiving might just be one of my favorite holidays. There is something about preparing so many amazing dishes all day long and then sitting around the table with friends and family as we all oooh and ahhh about the foods. That feeling should not just be reserved for one or two days a year! Therefore, I am offering up a delicious new way of preparing turkey and I suggest serving it with ONE of your favorite side dishes from Thanksgiving.

I think most people are fans of turkey's white meat, but I actually prefer the dark meat. It's juicier, has more flavor and has a much less likelihood of getting dried out when cooked. Also, turkey legs are really inexpensive to buy, compared to buying a whole bird, and still tastes amazing. When you make this recipe, the meat will literally fall off of the bone, it is soft and moist without tasting greasy or fatty.

Herbs de provence sounds more foreign than it tastes. I like easy seasonings that blend together in harmony. It's a sultry combination of thyme, rosemary, basil, tarragon and lavender flowers. It's great on meats or can add lots of flavor to soups and vegetable dishes.

My brother said this recipe is "caveman chic". There's no need to be savage, all the meat falls off the bones before serving it. But if you prefer to dive in without silverware, at least you have the lavender flowers in the herbs de provence to make you seem a little civilized.

3-4 turkey legs (about 2-2.5 lbs)

1 T. olive oil

2 T. herbs de provence

Coat crock pot with non-stick spray so the turkey skin doesn't stick to the pot too much. Place legs in pot and then brush lightly with olive oil. Shake herbs de provence all over turkey legs. Cook for 6 hours on low.

Crock Pot Ratatouille

In the Pixar movie by this name, the character Linguini says "Ratatouille. It's like a stew, right? Why do they call it that? If you're gonna name a food, you should give it a name that sounds delicious. Ratatouille doesn't sound delicious. It sounds like "rat" and "patootie." Rat-patootie, which does not sound delicious. " But with Remy's help, Linguini learned to cook, to enjoy it and to share great delicious dishes to others.

In our house, this movie is a favorite because it also teaches lots of great lessons. For example: we shouldn't judge others based on their families or where they came from, you should pursue your interests with passion and dedication, you shouldn't steal from others, in order to have great success we all need to work together and there will always be people to criticize, but even more people we can make happy.

This recipe is easy to make, maybe even for a movie night with your friends or family. Enjoy and remember "anyone can cook!"

1 medium eggplant, peeled and cubed
2-3 zucchini, sliced $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick
2-3 yellow squash, sliced $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick
1 medium onion, sliced into strips
2 cans diced tomatoes, NOT drained
2-3 cloves chopped garlic

Salt and pepper

Parmesan cheese

Sauté onion and garlic in a little bit of olive oil, just until onion is soft. Put eggplant, zucchini and squash in crockpot. Add onion and garlic on top, then both cans of diced tomatoes. Add salt and pepper to your liking. Cook on high for 3-4 hours.

Serve on top of egg noodles. Top with a bit of fresh parmesan cheese. Enjoy!

The methods of my madness



I had a tough workout at the gym this morning, getting brutalized by my trainer for a solid hour. After a quick shower, I threw on my clothes and slumped down by the lockers to apply some quick makeup. Another woman asked me, “how can you put your makeup on without a mirror??” I replied, “well, this has been my face for a really long time. I guess I just know it.”

That’s how I feel about my recipes too. I have to remake some of these dishes so I can write down how it’s done, what to measure and how to cook it. I’ve been cooking for most of my life and while I might search a cookbook for inspiration, I am hardly an engineer about my cooking. So writing this blog is a fun way for me to examine my favorites so I can share them with you.

I’ve been asked to post more “how to” suggestions about crock potting. Here are some tried and true methods to make your meals even easier.

1. The crockpot is meant to cook everything without burning it. But, it needs enough liquid to create steam and enough contents to prevent dehydration. No one wants to eat crocked beef jerky. You can always thicken too much liquid to make gravy.

2. Frozen vegetables and meats are fine to use without thawing, but you might need to add a little cooking time to compensate.

3. It's a great idea to freeze a crockpot meal— let it cool first and then put it in a plastic container with a tight-fitted lid. I prefer ones that are more sturdy, some are even specified as freezer-friendly. Label the meal and date it. You can also put a meal in a freezer bag, lay it flat to freeze and then stand it up in the freezer to store it-- you can make a library of good meals! Most crockpot meals are fine for at least 3 months, but remember that the freezer only makes food spoil slower, it doesn't preserve foods forever.

4. Thawing a meal should take as long as it did to cook it. Take a frozen meal out at least a day ahead and put it in the refrigerator to thaw. If you want it to speed up this process, put the plastic container/freezer bag in warm water in the sink to help it thaw. You can microwave the thawed meal or put it in a pan to simmer back to life.

5. Don't refreeze meats that have already been frozen though, so cook them fresh and then freeze the entire meal.

6. Crockpot meals are great for guests and for gifts. It's ok if you don't know exactly what time your guests are arriving— crock pot beef can be done perfectly without an exact time— beef wellington in the oven cannot! Crockpot meals are also great to take to new neighbors, ill friends or new parents. You can deliver the meal fresh or frozen easily.

7. Meat to liquid ratios might vary depending if your crockpot is more vertical or more horizontal. If you want a glaze to

form, make sure your meat isn't entirely covered by liquid. If you want to make pulled or stewed meat, then you need more coverage.

8. Don't just think about dinner ideas, you can crockpot any meal, side dishes, dips, drinks, sauces, jellies and desserts. The possibilities are easy and endless! Please continue to visit this page often for inspiration and ideas.

Now that the crock pot seems a little more approachable, what are YOU making for dinner??

Crock Pot Vegetarian Lentil Soup

There used to be this great Greek restaurant that I frequented that served lentil soup in a styrofoam cup. It was always hot and fresh and the lentils were soft without being mushy. I would frame my entire meal around saving room and money for the soup. This recipe mirrors the flavors and warmth of the soup but without a disposable cup. Unlike my vegetarian vegetable soup which is savory and chunky, this lentil soup is hearty and robust with even more amazing health benefits. Lentils are high in protein, iron, amino acids and when you add in the lycopene in the tomatoes and then all the vitamins, folic acid and antioxidants in the spinach... this soup is like a power boost for your whole system. Oh yeah, and it tastes amazing too.

Feel free to serve it in a real bowl and maybe with some crusty bread instead of saltines.

2 cups lentils
8 cups vegetable broth
1 onion, diced
3 stalks celery, diced
2 carrots, chopped
6 oz. fresh spinach, chopped
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 t. salt
1/2 t. pepper
1 t. oregano
1 t. cumin
2 bay leaves
1/4 t. cayenne pepper
1 14 oz. can diced tomatoes
1 T. red wine vinegar

Put everything in the crockpot and cook on low for 8 hours, but add the vegetable broth LAST. Most likely, you won't have room to pour all the liquid in yet. Once the vegetables have all cooked down, then add the rest of the liquid. My 5-qt crock pot is filled to the rim by the time everything is included.

This soup also freezes really well, so save half the pot for a meal another time.

Crock Pot Green Bean Casserole

It doesn't have to be Thanksgiving to enjoy a side dish that can be a year round favorite. I like to go to restaurants and just order an array of side dishes as my meal- green bean casserole, mac and cheese, mashed potatoes and scalloped apples are some of my favorites. Let's be honest, it's a good thing Cracker Barrel doesn't have a buffet.

Side dishes can be dangerous though. All these creamy, cheesy, salty tastes can be brief in moments, but high in fat and calories. This crockpot version of green bean cassarole saves some calories by using fresh onions instead of fried ones and also adds water chestnuts for the crunchy texture.

Try this crockpot cassarole with any of your favorite meals. And if you eat it as a main course... I'm ok with that too.

1 28 oz. can green beans

1 can diced water chestnuts

1 can cream of mushroom soup

1/2 c. milk

1 t. soy sauce

1 clove garlic, minced

1/2 medium onion, sliced thin

1/2 t. pepper

Mix together soup, milk and soy sauce. Put green beans, water chestnuts and onion in crockpot and then dump liquid mixture and mix through once. Don't overmix it or else the canned green beans will fall apart. Cook 4 hours on low.

Crock Pot Vegetarian Vegetable Soup

I love these days that are halfway between winter and spring.

I'm pretty sure by mid-afternoon I'm going to be suffocating in whatever I decided to wear because I was in fear of getting cold when I got dressed in the morning. Yeah, I think it's one of those days. Any day that starts with a gray sky is perfect for a crockpot soup. It means dinner will be fresh and filling, but you didn't have to turn the oven on in the late afternoon and warm up the whole house to 350 degrees.

You can definitely add variety to this soup depending on what vegetables you like. The cabbage adds some sweetness to the soup and depth to the flavor, so if you aren't a huge fan, then cut it down to 1/4 head of cabbage, but I wouldn't remove it completely. If you are a fan of gumbo, try adding some fresh or frozen okra halfway through cooking so it doesn't get too gooey by the end of the day.

If you prefer things with a little intensity, use spicy v8 instead and 1/2 t. of cayenne pepper for the whole pot or top your individual bowl off with a few shakes of Tabasco.

1/2 small head of cabbage, chopped

1/2 sweet onion

2-3 red potatoes, peeled and diced

1 bag frozen mixed vegetables
2 stalks celery, chopped
2 cans petite diced tomatoes, no salt added
1 c. V8 juice
1 c. water
salt, pepper
2-3 bay leaves

Put everything in the crockpot on low for 8-10 hours or on high for 5-6 hours.

Remove bay leaves before serving.

Crock Pot Fruity Oatmeal

Good morning, friends! While this is technically breakfast and not dinner, I figured a nice, warm meal would be a good way to start Monday morning. After reading pages of posts online, I decided that the only way to figure this recipe out would just be to avoid all the major complaints that people had about the other recipes. So, to save you the time of researching everyone else's negativity, here is the insight and recipe that I have to share with you.

1. Cook time: I suggest 8 hours on the "keep warm" setting. Everyone else said to cook the oatmeal for 4 hours on low, but who wants to get up in the middle of the night to start breakfast?! Cooking on "keep warm" means you can wake up looking rested, too.

2. Burnt edges: The downside of crockpot cooking is the clean up. I've been known to let a burnt pot sit for a couple days. My mother-in-law and I used to joke that we were just letting the dirty ones soak in hopes that someone else would scrub

them clean. You can buy [crockpot liners](#) which makes clean up super easy and keeps complaining and procrastination to a minimum.

3. Oats: There are usually three types of oats at the grocery store— quick oats, regular oats and steel-cut oats. If you vary the recipe, you can use any of these, but since I have quick oats in the pantry at all times, that is what I use. Steel cut oats are probably best for crockpotting because of their tough exterior. And yes, I might have just made up that word— crockpotting does look pretty funny, but it's grammatically correct if “to crockpot” was an actual verb.

2 c. **quick** oats

2 cups water

1 cup milk

1 apple, peeled, cored and diced

1/2 c. dried cranberries

1/2 c. applesauce

1/2 t. cinnamon

1 t. vanilla

1/4 c. brown sugar

Add everything to the pot and give it a stir. Set crockpot to “keep warm” setting for 8 hours or to low for 4 hours. Cook overnight for breakfast in the morning, then reheat leftovers with a little bit of water and half and half for breakfast the following day.

Crock Pot Beef Stew

Last night I used my foodie knowledge to help a friend through a stressful moment. I described my love affair with Trader Joe's grocery store in such detail that she learned about my secret ongoing shopping list, what each item is that I crave and how I use one dish, three ways. By the end of my "foodologue" I think I had actually BORED her out of her anxiety attack.

It made me start thinking about comfort foods. For many people, it's what our mommies used to make for us or maybe what we had at favorite holidays. I wonder what my boys will recall as their favorite foods, twenty years from now. Today's recipe might top the list. The last time I made my beef stew, my boys and my husband all were members of the clean plate club. Definitely a recipe to repeat often! It's also easy to throw half of the finished product into tupperware and freeze it for another dinner, another time.

1 to 1 and 1/2 lbs beef stew meat, cubed
8 oz. baby carrots
5 stalks celery, cleaned and cut
6-7 red potatoes, peeled and cut into quarters
1 medium onion, cut into chunks
8 oz. frozen green beans
2 cloves garlic, chopped fine
2 bay leaves
1/2 t. rosemary
1 cup beef bouillion
3/4 cup leftover red wine
1 can condensed tomato soup (don't add any water)
salt and pepper
(1 T. corn starch and 1/2 c. water to finish it off)

Dump everything into the crockpot. Set on low and cook for 8-9

hours until meat and vegetables are soft. Remove the meat and veggies and then mix in 1 T. corn starch that has been dissolved into 1/2 cup water. When the gravy thickens up, dump the meat and veggies back into the crockpot, mix it all together and serve.

Crock Pot Cabbage Rolls

This is already in the pot for dinner tonight! It helps to cook the cabbage the night before so you don't scald your hands trying to peel off the perfect leaves.

1 head cabbage
1 lb ground meat (I'm pretty sure anything will work, I've used beef and turkey)
1/4 cup brown rice, uncooked
1 egg, beaten
1 onion, diced
1/2 t. salt
1/2 t. pepper
1/3 cup cider vinegar
1/2 cup brown sugar
1 can tomato soup
1/2 cup Catalina dressing

1. Put cabbage in boiling water. Simmer for 5-10 minutes. Let cool completely before handling.
2. Mix meat, rice, egg, onion, salt and pepper.
3. In another bowl mix vinegar, sugar, soup and dressing.
4. Remove 12 large cabbage leaves from head and then chop remaining cabbage and put it in bottom of crock pot.
5. Put 2-4 T. of meat mixture in center of cabbage leave. Roll

up, envelope style and place in crock pot, seam side down.
(you can use toothpicks to hold the rolls together if you need to)

6. Pour tomato mixture over all of it.

7. Cover and cook on low for 8-10 hours.

(recipe is adapted from one on www.recipezaar.com)