

Crock Pot Dirty Rice

Do you ever stock up on meat when it's on sale and freeze it, only to then have to come up with a meal that specifically uses that "great deal" before it gets freezer burnt?! Yeah, that's what I'm going through today. I thawed out a package of sweet italian ground sausage. I'm sure I bought it with some sort of intention... but then it got buried in the freezer under half a dozen packages of frozen vegetables. After making winter vegetable soup, I found my meat stash and now had to face the task of figuring out what to make with the ground sausage.

Normally, you can substitute ground sausage in most ground beef or ground turkey recipes. It makes great chili, an incredible lasagna and even is creative in meatloaf. But I wanted to work on a recipe that truly highlighted the spices of the sweet italian sausage. You can use any variety of sausage, just understand that the flavors will ultimately completely change up the overall dish— so if you want hot sausage or you want to un-case a beer bratwurst, that's totally fine. You can play with the flavors by changing up your meat selection— or using up something you find in the bottom of your freezer!

So tonight, we're having crock pot dirty rice. I love that this dish uses the word "dirty", but it's so true. This is the antithesis of steamed, white rice. It muddles together all the flavors from the spicy meat and the sweet vegetables and somehow the tomato paste marries it all together. Yes, that's what this is— a "dirty" "marriage" of flavors. Ha! I hope you enjoy this classic spicy one-pot meal and that it warms up your winter night.

1 lb sausage, crumbled and browned

3 cups water

1 cup uncooked long grain rice

1/2 large onion, finely chopped

1/2 large red bell pepper, finely chopped

1/2 large yellow bell pepper, finely chopped

3 stalks finely chopped celery

1 15 oz. can kidney beans, not drained

1 6 oz. can tomato paste

1 beef bouillion cube

1 tsp salt

1/2 tsp red pepper flakes

1 T. chopped fresh parsley

Brown meat and put in crock pot first. Then using same pan, brown onions and peppers until soft, then add to crock pot. Add remaining ingredients, except for parsley. Stir. Cook on low for 4 hours. Serve into bowls and sprinkle with fresh parsley.

Crock Pot Sweet Potato Soup

I've always been a fan of our grill... really, for two reasons. 1. In the summertime, it's a great way to eat healthy and not heat up the kitchen and 2. when we grill, my husband is usually the one cooking! Since it's been such a mild winter,

we've been taking advantage of the unseasonably warm evenings and grilling our food. But since local produce isn't as plentiful in January, I've been getting creative.

So I've been grilling sweet potatoes. Sure, they get their glory at Thanksgiving when they are smothered and covered by marshmallows or syrup or sugar. Sometimes they even make a repeat performance at Christmas or Easter or Passover, but my new absolute favorite way to eat a sweet potato is by grilling it to perfection.



It's so easy, let me tell you the few easy steps... Wash your sweet potatoes. Poke fork holes all over. Wrap sweet potato in aluminum foil. Grill on med-high heat for one hour, turning the sweet potato halfway through. That's it! When the sweet vibrant goodness is done, it will be easy to squeeze the flesh with tongs. Please be cautious though, sometimes the sweet juices will run out of the foil (and I don't want you to get burned).

So a couple nights ago, I grilled five sweet potatoes. I figured we would eat the leftovers so I made a couple extra. And these extra potatoes became the inspiration for tonight's new recipe! With a few ingredients I already had on hand, I was able to literally "whip together" this amazing meal. This crock pot sweet potato soup is thick and hearty and even though soup might not be fresh and exciting for a winter meal, adding in the flavor from the grill really makes a difference.

2 medium sweet potatoes, already cooked in grill or oven, cooled and then skinned

3 c. chicken broth

1/2 c. [caramelized onions](#)

1/4 t. nutmeg

1/4 t. chili powder

1/4 t. celery seed

1/4 t. curry powder

1 clove garlic, minced

1/2 c. heavy cream

Put all ingredients (except heavy cream) in crock pot, stir and then cook on low for 3-4 hours. Use a hand blender and puree mixture until smooth, then stir in heavy cream. Serve hot with a tiny sprinkle of nutmeg or curry on top.

Crock Pot Pork Chops in Spaghetti Sauce

This is such an easy recipe, I'm almost ashamed to post it. But it made the best spaghetti sauce I've EVER tasted. Honestly, I considered licking the pot. I always try to "amp up" store-bought spaghetti sauce and this is now my favorite way to do it. This might just revolutionize pasta night at your house too.

I used bone-in pork chops because I think they have great texture and just the right amount of fat. By searing them first, you keep the moistness in the meat, but by prolonging the cooking process and finishing them in the crock pot, the meat becomes so tender, it will literally fall off the bone and you can cut it with a fork.

The leftover sauce in the crock pot can be used on the meat, the pasta, on garlic bread... or cook a little extra and then freeze the pork-infused sauce for another dinner. Seriously... sometimes I even impress myself. This sauce is now a new family favorite after just one meal. Enjoy!

1.5-2 lbs bone-in pork chops

2 T. olive oil

3 cups spaghetti sauce (traditional style)

1 lb box thin spaghetti

Heat oil in flat skillet. Cook pork chops for 4-5 minutes on each side or until brown sear forms. Pour half of the spaghetti sauce into crock pot, put pork chops onto sauce and then cover them with remaining sauce. Cook on high for four hours or until meat is soft enough that it pulls away easily from the bone. Cook pasta according to package directions. Serve meat with pasta and cover both with sauce.

Crock Pot Barbecue Beer Chicken



One of our local organic grocery stores ran a deal last month for free boneless, skinless chicken breasts so I made the trip and bought the meat. I brought it home and stuck it in the freezer and the pretty brown paper has been staring at me every day since then. You've read in my other posts that I'm not a huge fan of plain chicken breasts, but it was such a good deal, I couldn't pass it up.

Living in North Carolina, barbecue here is done two different ways— sloppy, smokey and sweet OR vinegar-based and tart. I'm more a fan of the first, so it's easy to go out and buy a barbecue dinner, but even more difficult to find a good bottled sauce to use at home. I've tried A BUNCH of store-bought sauces and have found a few favorites.

My #1 choice above all else is [Montgomery Inn Barbecue Sauce](#), from Cincinnati, Ohio. It isn't distributed everywhere, but you can buy it online. It's smokey and just the right thickness and I love it on the meat on the grill or in the crock pot.

I also recently discovered Budweiser's Sweet Barbecue Sauce. It's sweet and sticky, but great flavor for pulled chicken sandwiches. I added some additional flavors in today's meal, but this sauce was delicious.

Make this recipe and then serve it on warmed sesame buns or in a wrap with some shredded cheddar cheese. You can vary the flavors by switching out what kind of beer and what kind of barbecue sauce you choose to use. Enjoy!

2 lbs boneless, skinless chicken breast

1/2 c. [caramelized onions](#)

6 oz. beer (your choice!)

1 28 oz. bottle Montgomery Inn Barbecue Sauce (or your favorite)

Put chicken in crock pot and pour beer over meat. Add caramelized onions on top of meat. Cook on low for 6 hours. Use a baster and remove the excess liquid from the pot and then shred the meat with a couple of forks. If cooked properly, the meat should fall apart very easily. Pour enough barbecue sauce over the meat that it coats it well but isn't soupy. (You can always add more, you can't really get it back out!) Cook on low for one additional hour.

Crock Pot Caramelized Onions

I can't believe I haven't published this recipe for you yet! I make this once a month and then use it in other dishes. This is so easy and tasty and lasts for up to a month in the refrigerator— unless you are like me and use it all up first! Three pounds of onions fits in a one quart plastic container when cooked. Make sure the lid shuts air tight (tupperware, rubbermaid, gladware, mason jars, etc.).

Suggested uses for caramelized onions: put a scoop in any dish that you usually would use fresh chopped onions, like meatloaf, hamburgers or potato soup) or make it into super easy french onion soup— put a scoop in a bowl, cover with beef broth. Then put a crostini on top and some cheese and broil until cheese is melted. Seriously— french onion soup in five minutes or less!

You will save so much time if you take 8 hours and make this

in advance. Enjoy the extra time and the extra flavor!

3 lb. yellow onions, sliced 1/4 inch thick

1 stick butter

Put onion slices into the crock pot. Put one stick butter on top. Cook on low for 7-8 hours. Cool. Store in airtight container in the refrigerator for up to one month.

Crock Pot Turkey Pot Roast

This afternoon, I went with my family to an apple orchard to pick fresh, local produce to enjoy. It felt organic. Not in the “lacking chemicals and pesticides” way, but in the “feeling connected to the earth and supporting something good”. My kids loved picking the fruit and sampling all the different kinds of apples. I am eager to make my [escaloped apples](#) recipe as soon as possible.

But the best part of the day was coming home to dinner already made and a very hungry family to feed!

One of my favorite meals to cook and eat is pot roast– meat, potatoes, carrots, celery, onions... all the basics. It’s so filling and full of great nutrients. One crock pot is a whole meal. But sometimes I like to vary it up a little. I made a very similar recipe today, but instead of beef, I used three turkey legs as our protein.



The meat becomes so tender it falls off the bone. I used whole carrots because they make such a nice presentation and they don't get soggy when they cook. The key to keeping the meat tender is to use the meat rack for the crock pot and keep it elevated. It still absorbs all the flavors

as it cooks, but it doesn't deteriorate as it cooks.

I highly recommend making this dish for a family dinner or even for the holidays! Trust me— I'm sure you can think of 100 other ways to spend a weekend afternoon than staying in the kitchen cooking. Get out there and enjoy life a little, then come home for a great meal. Enjoy!

3-4 turkey legs (2-3 lbs)

6 whole carrots, peeled

1/2 sweet onion, cut into chunks

4 stalks celery, cut into 2-3 inch sections

1 t. minced garlic

1 white potato, cut into chunks

2 c. chicken broth

1 T. olive oil

1/2 t. salt

1/2 t. black pepper

2 t. Mrs. Dash seasoning

Put all produce (carrots, onions, celery, potato) in crock pot and arrange in bottom. Using an oval shaped crock pot is best.

Put crock pot meat rack in so that the meat will sit just above the produce. Pour chicken broth in, but do not let the volume of it reach the meat rack. Place turkey legs on meat rack. Brush meat with olive oil and then sprinkle with seasonings. Cook on low for 6 hours.

(If you like gravy, put the remaining liquid in a pot on the stove and bring it to a boil. Add 1 T. corn starch that has been dissolved into 1/4 c. warm water. When gravy thickens, serve with turkey pot roast.)

Crock Pot Yogurt

Typically, we don't cook dairy items in the crock pot, especially not on low, because we don't want to run the risk of spoilage. But when you are making yogurt, this is exactly what you want to happen! I was skeptical of making yogurt in the crock pot, but a friend of mine asked me to give it a go, so I did. And I'm thrilled with this delicious, healthy snack!

There are so few ingredients in this that you won't believe how good it will actually turn out. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

1. You need time to make this recipe... there are three separate steps. I started mine at 11 am and it was finally done at midnight.
2. It sounds silly, but you actually need to buy yogurt in order to make yogurt. Much like a sourdough bread, you need a "starter" to get the process going and plain yogurt has the live cultures needed to make this work. Once you make your first big batch of crock pot yogurt, you can save the last cup

of it to use in the next batch and then the next and the next...

3. Regular yogurt is TART! But you don't need to add high fructose corn syrup, food dyes, sugar or junk to make this yogurt yummy. But be prepared that your first taste will be fresh tasting.

4. This is not the recipe to try and be homemade and low-fat. Use whole milk and yogurt to have the best final product. But it's worth it and one serving is a great snack or breakfast, especially when you use a variety of add-ins to adapt the flavor.

Ingredients:

1/2 gallon whole milk

1 c. plain yogurt

3 T. honey (local, if possible)

1 T. vanilla

Pour milk into crock pot and cook on low for 2.5 hours. Turn crock pot off and let it sit undisturbed on the counter for 3 hours. Then add in yogurt and stir into lumps are gone. Cover crock pot with a big dish towel to keep all moisture inside and let it sit for another 8 hours. Add honey and vanilla to the yogurt and stir. The yogurt is now finished and should be transferred to an air-tight container and stored in the refrigerator until eaten.

Save the last cup of this batch to use at the starter yogurt in your next batch.

Other great add-ins would be cut-up strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, canned crushed pineapple, chocolate chips, jelly/jam or any combination of all these great flavors!

(This recipe is based off of a fellow blogger's *A Year of Slow*

Cooking.)

Crock Pot Corned Beef and Cabbage



If you have survived your St. Patty's Day green beer hangover and still haven't had enough Irish fun, then go to the grocery store and get another corned beef and another head of cabbage– this recipe is SO EASY and is a total crowd pleaser. Honestly– you can't mess this up and it tastes so good. Try it with different beer... both IN the pot and IN your belly. The variety of beers will alter the flavor of the meat and the cabbage, so try it

light or dark, bitter or brown, cheap or expensive–beer and beef, what a great combination!

1 corned beef (I don't care what size, as long as it fits in your crock pot)

1 head of cabbage

2 bottles of beer

water

Put the corned beef in the crock pot and throw out the extra packet of seasonings. Pour in the bottles of beer and then add enough water to reach the top of the meat. Cook on high for three hours. Add cabbage and make sure it is immersed in the

liquid. Cook on high for one hour more. Remove meat to a cutting board and let it rest for a few minutes. Slice it thin and remove the top inch of fat. Serve with the beer-and-beef-infused cabbage and a cold beer.

Crock Pot Buffalo Chicken

I have a real problem with breasts. Even when they are big and juicy, I just don't like them.

Haha, now that I have your attention, let me explain. I'm not really a fan of boneless, skinless chicken breasts. I know that they are healthy and lean and great protein, but I just don't love the texture or the challenge of cooking them. When we grill them, I always feel like they get too done on the outside to make sure that they are cooked all the way through. In the oven, they just have too much of a tendency to dry out. So of course— I cook mine in the crock pot so that they stay moist and soft.

I thawed out a package of four chicken breasts and after staring at them for three days in the refrigerator, I knew I either had to cook them or throw them out. So here's what I did... I cooked them, I shredded them, I covered them in hot sauce and I served them on a bun with some cheese and ranch dressing. THERE WERE NO LEFTOVERS!!! It worked! I like (chicken) breasts!

I used a bottle of Ken's Steakhouse Buffalo Wing Sauce on my

chicken, but if you'd rather have barbeque sauce or even something sweet like teriyaki, it would work well for this recipe. We really like chicken wings at restaurants, but it makes such a mess to fry them at home— this recipe gives the flavor without the mess or the fat. When you cook the chicken in the apple juice, it gives it a little extra zing and then the sauce just saturates the meat with flavor. Enjoy!!



1.5-2 lbs boneless, skinless chicken breasts

3/4 c. 100% apple juice

1 bottle Ken's Steakhouse Buffalo Wing Sauce

(hot dogs buns, cheddar cheese, ranch dressing... and celery sticks on the side, of course!)

Put chicken breasts in crock pot, then pour apple juice in. Cook on high for three hours. Use a baster to remove the excess liquid, then using two forks or a fork and a knife, shred the meat in the crock pot. Pour sauce in next and stir until all meat is coated. It's hard to say exactly how many ounces of sauce because it depends on how much meat you used. But add a little sauce at a time until you have enough, but the meat isn't swimming. Cook for one more hour on low. Serve meat on a hot dog bun with cheese and ranch (or blue cheese) dressing.

Crock Pot Parsnip and Potato Soup

I'm totally enjoying soups this week and I hope you are getting a chance to enjoy some of these recipes too. I love it when I can make an entire meal in ONE pot and feed the whole family. This soup is a variation on my crock pot potato soup recipe (search for it in the recipe index) and adds in the unique sweetness of parsnips and carrots and sweet onions.

Even though it's almost spring, we still need to survive on the rest of winter's vegetables. If you can already grow things in your garden or windowsill, try adding fresh herbs like flat parsley, dill or chives to your soup when it is done cooking. I think you'll find the promise of spring in the soothing warmth of this chowder. Enjoy!

4 medium potatoes, peeled and diced

3 medium parsnips, peeled and diced

3 medium carrots, peeled and diced

2 stalks celery, diced

2 cloves garlic, minced

1/2 medium sweet onion, chopped

3 c. water

1 t. salt

1/2 t. black pepper

1 t. celery seed

1 c. milk

1 T. corn starch

1 can cream-style corn

Put all vegetables and seasonings in crock pot, cover with water. Cook on high for 4 hours. When vegetables are all soft, dissolve corn starch in milk and then add to crock pot. Add cream-style corn and mix ingredients together. Cook on low one more hour. Use an immersion blender and puree the soup until thick and creamy. Serve with fresh parsley, dill or chives on top.