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 the 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??