

Crock Pot Cream of Mushroom Soup (#2)



Get ready for fall flavors with this easy to make, robust mushroom soup!

On the cusp of summer turning into fall, I'm already getting excited about the next season of recipes. I'm not a pumpkin spice anything, but I love pulling in the flavors of butternut squash, roasted root vegetables, and hearty seasonings.

Last night, I made a cream of mushroom soup just as a way of using up leftover vegetables that were starting to age in the refrigerator. I figured I would freeze some or share with friends, but it was certainly better than throwing things out. Turns out— this soup was a nice variety to my normal [Crock Pot Cream of Mushroom Soup](#)! With just a little change up of flavors and ratios, this soup was a little more hearty and robust.

As I wrote in the first mushroom soup recipe, this doesn't need to be an exact recipe with precise measurements. Also-

using a [hand blender](#) does give this soup a lovely smooth consistency. Try it and enjoy this soup as a transition to fall!

Crock Pot Cream of Mushroom Soup

Prep Time: 10 minutes

Cook Time: 6 hours

Serves: 8-10 people

1 lb fresh mushrooms (button, portobello or shiitake or a combination!)

4 stalks celery, cleaned and diced

1 large parsnip, peeled and diced

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

3 cloves garlic

4 c. broth (chicken or vegetable)

1/2 teaspoon EACH: celery seed, salt, dried dill weed, black pepper

1 t. dried parsley

2 c. cold milk

2 T. corn starch

Put all ingredients EXCEPT milk and corn starch into crock pot and stir. Cook on high for 5 hours. Puree with hand blender. Dissolve corn starch into cold milk and add to crock pot and stir. Heat 1 additional hour on high and then serve.

Crock Pot Vegetarian Refried Beans



With just a few ingredients, you can add a rich side dish to Taco Tuesday- on any day of the week!

In our house, every Tuesday is TACO TUESDAY! The kids have become so accustomed to it, that sometimes I like to mess with them and make tacos on the “wrong” day of the week. If we eat something different on a Tuesday, they are a little disappointed... but if we eat tacos on any night other than Tuesday, it’s almost unacceptable. I’ll say “it’s Taco Tuesday on Wednesday!” and they respond, “we can’t eat tacos on Wednesdays!” “But why??” I ask. “Because we’d have to call it Waco Wednesday!” they would shout with despair.

Oh trust me, that scenario is totally legit. It happens. Scripted or not, that’s how it plays out every freaking time.

But this week is an exception, because it's Cinco de Mayo on a Thursday. That's an unwritten acceptable negotiation and my hellions are ok with moving the taco consumption in order to celebrate another nation's announcement of victory in war. (Not to be confused with Mexico's Independence Day, that's September 16– which is also not a Tuesday this year.)

My mini-me's could practically prepare taco night by themselves– hard shells and tortillas. Sour cream. Shredded cheese. Lettuce, tomato, onions, and olives. Jalapeños and [this ridiculous taco sauce](#) for mommy. Homemade tomatillo salsa verde, too. And then ground beef or chicken. By the book, typical American-style taco night. Extra napkins, of course.



The perfect side dish
for your next fiesta!

But since tomorrow is a celebration, I wanted to introduce a new dish into taco night. Growing up, a trip to Taco Bell always included way too many tacos and a side of pintos and cheese. What's that, you ask? A bowl of refried pinto beans and a handful of soft, shredded cheddar cheese. They put a lid on it and by the time you filled your fountain drink and sat down to scarf, the cheese would be goeey and melted perfectly. Ok, it was crap quality, but the taste was so good!

So here's my attempt at recreating a mouth-watering memory and

introducing it to my family. Let's all celebrate our little victories— not just the big war-type ones. Sometimes sitting down to eat as a family is a victory in itself. Ole!

Crock Pot Vegetarian Refried Beans

Serves: 8-12

Prep Time: 5 minutes

Cook Time: 8-10 hours

1 lb. dried pinto beans

1 c. [crock pot caramelized onions](#)

3 cloves garlic, peeled

2 t. cumin

2 t. salt

6 c. water

Put all ingredients in crock pot and give it a stir. The water level should cover everything. Cook on high 8-10 hours or low 12 hours. Remove excess water that isn't absorbed, not do not discard. Puree everything in the crock pot using [an immersion blender](#). Add reserved water 1 tablespoon at a time until desired smooth consistency is reached. Serve immediately with toppings like shredded cheddar cheese, sour cream, jalapeños, bacon bits, or use inside of a taco or burrito.

Crock Pot Winter Vegetable Soup



Crock Pot Winter Vegetable Soup is the comfort of home served in a cup.

You'll often hear me say that food isn't just about sustenance, but also satisfaction. Entertainment. Emotion. Nutritionists focus on the content of food. Dietician focus on the balance of food. But when I sit down to eat— or more importantly— serve a meal to family and friends, it's about the experience and the memories we create around the table. Your food will be through your system in less than 24 hours, but the feeling you had when eating it will last a lifetime.

That's how I feel about this soup. It's based on a recipe my mom used to make when I was a kid. We ate dinner as a family, almost every night. It's just what we did. And we didn't do it in front of a television or on the run, but it was quick and easy meals and meant to create an atmosphere for conversation.

Mom's meals were much like this one— a basic recipe with few

ingredients that when combined received minimal complaints! We called it winter vegetable soup because nothing really is fresh during an Ohio winter. She could keep all of these items on hand and whip this meal up in about half an hour. I prefer to cook it low and slow, of course, and add a few more seasonings. But overall, it's the comfort of home in a cup.

Crock Pot Winter Vegetable Soup

Prep Time: 5 minutes

Cook Time: 5 hours

Serves: 8

2 12 oz. packages frozen vegetables- broccoli, cauliflower and carrot combination

1 32 oz. box of vegetable broth

3 T. butter

1 t. minced garlic

1/2 cup [crock pot caramelized onions](#) (or substitute 1/2 sweet onion, diced)

1/2 t. each: dill weed, celery seed, basil, parsley, salt, black pepper (ALL DRIED SEASONINGS)

1/4 c. corn starch

3 cups cold milk (2% or whole is preferred)

Pour frozen vegetables into crock pot, followed by broth, butter, garlic, onions and seasonings. DO NOT ADD CORN STARCH OR MILK YET. Cook on high for four hours. In a separate bowl, dissolve corn starch into COLD milk and then add to crock pot. Cook on high for another hour. Soup will have thickened. Add salt and pepper to taste preference.

Renovation, Week Five: Dinners and Creatures

Let's break this week's renovation update down day by day. I updated my four-week menu plan to carry us through the rest of the project, the installations are still on schedule, and it's remarkably nice weather still outside. **I want you to understand that while my posts may make this whole process appear to be coated in sugary fairy dust, let me be clear... I'm stressed. I'm hungry. I ran out of coffee filters. And I really hate snakes.**



Crock Pot French Onion Soup is ridiculously easy. And ridiculously delicious!

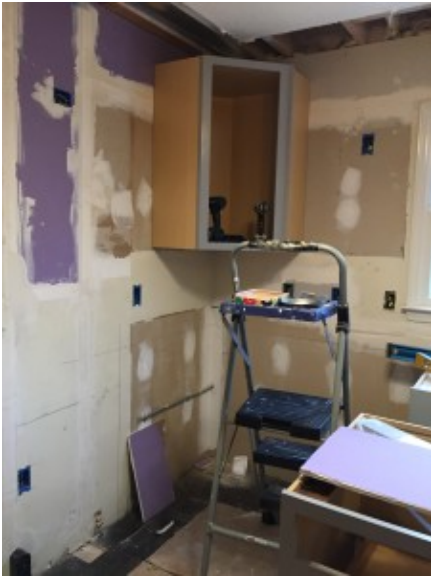
MONDAY: Dinner– french onion soup in the crock pot. [Crock Pot Caramelized Onions](#) are the best and easiest thing you should be making once a month, at least. I had two great electricians and a city inspector in the house today. We've got a gazillion

new outlets installed in order to pass county code and now I can plug my crock pots in anywhere and everywhere. Very cool. What is uncool?? The crazy freaking snake that the electrician met in my crawl space and killed with a crow bar. I'm pretty sure that wasn't in the contract, but I could not be more grateful to him for taking care of it!

TUESDAY: Dinner— Microwaveable tacos that my kids can heat up themselves. Why? Because I spent the afternoon with the pest control company checking my house for undesirable creatures. Want to know something terrifying?? If you have snake(s) in your crawl space, the first place they check for snakes is the ATTIC. If you have a rodent problem in the attic, there is a potential likelihood that the snakes enter through the crawl space and then wiggle through your walls to get to the attic for the mouse buffet. (I may never sleep again if they ever find something up there!) Luckily, no mice were found. No snakes either. After a full house inspection, the only culprit was the one in the crawl space. After all the anxiety over slithery slimy snakes, this mama had a crazy migraine and went straight to bed before dinner. Hence the reason that the kids made their own dinners!

WEDNESDAY: Dinner— Macaroni and cheese, fresh blueberries, grape tomatoes. Ramen noodles and steamed sticky buns for the grown ups. No workers today in the house so I used my time to get out and run errands, get groceries, etc. I feel a little guilty for feeding my kids so much processed stuff during the renovation, so I combat that concern by trying to include fresh produce as much as possible.

By the way, about the sticky buns... I buy them at the asian market's freezer section. Then, they go in my rice cooker on "STEAM" for about 10 minutes. Makes a great quick lunch or dinner. I highly recommend using your small appliances for more than just their primary purpose, I love using [my rice cooker](#) as a steamer as well!



It's a mess, but it's progress!

THURSDAY: Dinner– Stuffed zucchini in the crock pot. This dish takes my favorite pork meatball recipe and puts it inside a vegetable... clearly meaning that this is good for me, right?! Probably need to include a little more of that fresh fruit into dinner tonight, just to be sure it all cancels out. Ha! Electricians are here today finishing up the wiring so that hopefully the inspector comes tomorrow to sign off on everything so far.

Here's the recipe for tonight's dinner.

It's so quick, I'm not even going to write it up in a separate post:

1 lb ground pork or pork sausage for more flavor. 1 c. pancake mix. 1 c. shredded cheddar cheese. Mix all three ingredients. Take two zucchini, cut lengthwise and scoop out the insides. Fill the "boats" with the sausage mixture. Cook on low in the crock pot for 4 hours.

(To do these as just meatballs, roll into golf balls and then bake in the oven– they get a really nice crispiness to the outside.)



Once you learn to make the rolls, the possibilities are endless. So many different filling combinations to try!

FRIDAY: Dinner– sushi rolls. Back to the rice cooker I go.

I'm keeping it simple and just doing spicy tuna rolls tonight (drained canned tuna, a little mayo, and enough sriracha to make the mixture orange). The kids will eat the rice, some steamed edamame, and cut-up mango. Sometimes simple is just so good. Have you tried making sushi before? Once you learn to roll, it's really easy, and you can use a crazy variety of fillings! First you need [these mats](#). I keep mine clean by putting them in a gallon-sized ziplock baggie before rolling. Then just spread the rice thin, lay the toppings in the first 1/3 of the [seaweed sheet](#) and then roll it tight! Once my kitchen is back together, I'll make a video for you on making sushi rolls.

Oh, and the kitchen work?? The electric inspection was passed! And cabinets started going in! (insert happy dance here!)

Crock Pot Creamy Potato Soup



Today was the first day that actually felt like fall. I don't mean like a specialty coffee... I mean hooded sweatshirts, warm blankets, steamy bowls of soup and the sound of rustling leaves. And if you are lucky, you can enjoy all of those things at the same time.

Tonight's Crock Pot Creamy Potato Soup made me think of Friday night football games in high school. And cold walks on first dates. And craving ice cream on a cold winter's night. It's like everything that it supposed to feel cold on the outside, but makes you feel warm on the inside. That's how satisfying this soup tastes.

So I've already posted another version of [Crock Pot Potato Soup](#) already, but I like this one because it includes more vegetables. I've also posted [Crock Pot Parsnip and Potato Soup](#) because parsnip is my second favorite root vegetable. (*Bonus points if you know what my favorite is!*) I also have [Crock Pot Sweet Potato and Corn Chowder](#), if you prefer the orange to the white. I'm sensing a theme here! I do love potato soup and each recipe is tweaked a little different. I feel like tonight's Crock Pot Creamy Potato Soup is actually a culmination of my favorite things from each of these recipes... but I encourage you to mess around and figure out what your palate prefers with your potatoes.

Crock Pot Creamy Potato Soup

Serves 6-8

6 redskin potatoes, cubed but not peeled

3 parsnips, peeled and cubed

1 c. shredded carrots

4 stalks celery, sliced

1/2 sweet onion, diced

1 12 oz. can cream corn

4 cups vegetable broth

1 t. garlic powder

1/2 t. dried dill weed

1 t. dried basil leaves

up to 1 t. salt (can be added at the end, a little at a time, for flavor)

1 c. cold milk

2 rounded T. corn starch

Clean and prep all vegetables and add to the pot. Add broth and seasonings and give it all a good stir. Do not add milk or corn starch yet. Cook on low for 6 hours. Add corn starch to milk and dissolve, then add to the pot. Cook on high for one additional hour. Remove lid and let soup thicken a little bit before serving.

Crock Pot Apple Butter Pork



Fork-tender meat and an amazing balance of flavor will leave everyone in your family asking for seconds!

I won't lie, tonight's dinner was fantastic. The perfect mix of textures and flavors. It was easy to make and quick to serve and might become a top 10 favorite very soon. I wasn't even offended when my kids put ketchup on the meat, because hey- they were on their second servings and not complaining!

I'm a big fan of pork country ribs but I feel like it's a complete misnomer. When I think about ribs, I think about meat falling off of a bone. But there isn't a bone in country ribs, it's just sections of meat cut into the shape of ribs and contains a wonderful balance of meat and fat (it tends to cook off, so stop worrying). These are great for pulled pork sandwiches too, for future reference.

When you put all of these ingredients in the crock pot, you might worry about not seeing enough liquid— do not add any! The meat and the apples will ooze with flavor and moisture and it will all work out just fine. My apologies for using “ooze” to describe cooking, but when I think about cooking low and slow, it’s totally an ooze, not a rush of flavor. Ooooooze.

This is a great recipe for any time of year, but especially great in the fall if you can get fresh, local apples and make your own apple butter. But there is no shame in buying it pre-made and ready to go... the outcome will be very similar!

Crock Pot Apple Butter Pork

Serves 8

2 lbs country ribs

2 gala apples, cut off the core and then into thick slices

1 sweet onion, cut into half and then into slices

1/2 cup chunky apple butter (chunky apple sauce will work too but the seasonings won’t be as intense)

4 sprigs of fresh thyme

Put meat in the bottom of crock pot, then layer the rest of the flavors. Cook on high 3-4 hours. Meat will be fork-tender and apples and onions should be soft, maybe a little mushy, but not disintegrating. It’s good if the leaves fall off the thyme- please do not ingest the twigs. Enjoy!

Crock Pot Spaghetti Squash



I was walking through the produce aisle this week and excited to see all of the fall produce slowly emerging as the weather starts to cool and the crock pot starts to heat. With squash of every size and variety piled up like presents under a tree, I started loading my cart

with butternut, acorn, and spaghetti squash. But the tipping tower of treasures presents a second issue— how do you prepare and cook these ridiculous looking vegetables? As with most foods that I don't want to fret about, I make them in my crock pot!

If you haven't ever experienced spaghetti squash, you are about to be delighted. I'm pretty sure it's the best diet food ever since it's low in calorie, gluten-free, dairy-free, paleo-friendly, vegan, vegetarian, nut-free, guilt-free, and packed with nutrients and flavor. But what intrigues me most about this cavern of goodness is the bizarre pasta like consistency of the meaty threads.

Here's the prep: waaaaaash the squaaaaaash. I love that you just sounded that out. Seriously though, this thing is going to sit in its entirety in your crock pot all day, let's not harbor fugitives like bugs or germs. Then take a sharp knife and stab the squash 5-6 times so that the heat and moisture can seep in and out to cook the flesh. Yes, it's a vegetable, but I think you can use words like meaty and flesh to describe never-living creatures, too.

Put the 4 lb squash and 2 cups of water in your crock pot for 6 hours on low. When it's done, the squash will deflate a bit

and be awkward to lift out. Watch out– it's HOT and full of juices. Let it cool a bit before you handle it. You will need to cut the spaghetti squash in half and scoop out the seeds inside (Throw the seeds away. This is not a pumpkin.)

Use a fork to shred the cooked pasta-like fresh from inside the squash. Once you have scraped it out, throw out the skins. Much like pasta, this is now a wonderful blank slate to begin preparing a delicious dish! Here are a couple ideas to choose from as far as fun flavors to add into your spaghetti squash:

- Add 1 tablespoon butter, 1 teaspoon minced garlic and 1/4 cup grated parmesan cheese.
- Add 1 cup alfredo sauce, 1 lb. browned ground beef and a can of stewed mushrooms. Oh look- beef stroganoff!
- Top it with [crock pot chicken cacciatore](#) for a low-fat, low-carb hearty dinner. (Yes, this requires two crock pots.)
- Add a scoop of [crock pot caramelized onions](#) and some cubed mozzarella cheese. French onion spaghetti squash!

Trying a new vegetable dish is no longer a challenge or a disappointing dinner. Enjoy your local seasonal vegetables in these new and exciting ways.

[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 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.