

Crock Pot Vegetarian Fiesta

After a great weekend away, it's nice to be back home to cook. But surprise!! Company for dinner tonight. I haven't had a chance to go to the grocery store yet, so I need to whip up something for dinner that is tasty and unique without needing a separate shopping list.

Here's one of my secrets- I always have tortillas in the refrigerator as a quick fix (think... chicken quesadillas, deli wraps, flatbread pizzas) and I also keep random cans of food in the pantry. Voila! Dinner is served. Seriously, it's just that easy. Try stocking your kitchen with some of these easy ingredients and next time you have last minute guests, you'll have a great meal to serve. Enjoy!

2 15 oz. cans of black beans, drained and rinsed

2 10 oz. cans of diced tomatoes with green chiles

1 15 oz. can corn kernels, drained

1 10 oz. can of enchilada sauce

1 lb. bag of frozen mixed pepper strips

1 t. cumin

1 t. dried oregano

1/2 t. black pepper

Pour all canned ingredients and seasonings into crock pot and stir together. Add frozen peppers and stir again. Cook on low for 3-4 hours. Use this as a filling for soft tortillas, serve it on white rice as an entree or on top of shredded lettuce as a salad.

Crock Pot Vegetarian Lasagna

I love lasagna! Anytime you can combine everything into one dish and it hits pretty much every food group, then I'm a happy girl. But oven-baked lasagna takes way too much work... all the boiling and layering and smoothing and baking and spilling, then oven cleaning... I would rather just order lasagna from a nice little Italian restaurant than go through this whole charade.



This one-pot dinner is a great meat-free option that leaves you full and satisfied.

So after doing a little research, I've figured out that crock pot lasagna is very doable. Not only can you assemble it in the pot, but I am convinced that most of the cooking should take place in the pot, too. This dish is easy to cook, doesn't take more than an afternoon to finish and you can even freeze the leftovers for another night. That is, if there are any

leftovers!

I hope you enjoy this take on one of my favorites. Enjoy!

1 12 oz. box of lasagna noodles, uncooked

1 15 oz. container ricotta cheese

2 c. shredded mozzarella cheese

1 24 oz. container chunky spaghetti sauce

2 zucchinis, sliced thick

2 c. fresh spinach leaves

1/2 c. fresh basil leaves

1 egg

2-3 cloves garlic, minced

1/2 t. black pepper

1 t. dried oregano

3/4 c. water

1/2 c. parmesan cheese

This recipe is best made in an oval-shaped crock pot; a round one will work, it just creates a very tall lasagna.

In a separate bowl, combine ricotta cheese, egg, garlic and seasonings. Pour 1 c. of spaghetti sauce into the pot and stir it around so it coats the bottom of the crock pot. Fill the sauce jar up with 1 c. water and shake it around— this watered down sauce helps the noodles soften more when cooking. Place first layer of 3-4 noodles in crock pot. Cover noodles with 1/2 of ricotta mixture. Lay zucchini slices on next, followed by another layer of 3-4 lasagna noodles. Add 1 c. spaghetti sauce and cover noodles with 1 c. shredded

mozzarella cheese, spinach leaves, basil leaves and then the remaining ricotta mixture. Add final layer of noodles. Cover with remaining sauce and then sprinkle with mozzarella cheese and parmesan cheese. Cook on low for 3 hours.

Sarah's Vegetable Chili

I love when my friends and fans share their recipes... everyone loves a good crock pot dish that is worthy of sharing! So from one crock pot fanatic to another, here is Sarah's recipe for vegetable chili. It sounds like a great way to use fresh produce and also make a vegetarian dish that will fill everyones' bellies with happiness. I especially like her tools of measurement. Enjoy!

Chop one metric crap-ton (that's 1 HUGE zucchini, 3 small bell peppers, 2 big handfuls of green and wax beans and 2 ears of corn, hulled) to bite-sized pieces and drop into crock pot. Add 3 (15 oz) cans of beans (I used pinto, kidney and dark kidney). Stir to combine.

Separately, combine 1 (8oz) can tomato sauce, 1 (6 oz) can tomato paste, 4 cloves minced garlic, 4 T chili powder, 1 T dried mustard powder, 1 t oregano and 1 t ground cumin. Plop over veggies.

Add 1 box (4 C) vegetable stock. (I like wetter chilis, but you can use less if you prefer a chunkier chili). Stir to combine and coat all the veggies with the chili goodness.

Pop on low for I think mine was on for about 10 hours, so I'll go with the 8-10 hours on low. At this point, you can add cooked elbow noodles, sour cream, cheese, fresh

onion....whatever you like.

I'm thinking carrots would sweeten it up a bit if that's what you like. OOH! I bet barley would be good too....Lookie at me, cooking without a complete recipe. My sister would be so proud! ☐ Next recipe will be filled with "a pinch of" and "a dash of" and "half an eggshell of"...."

Crock Pot Summer Vegetable Puree



As much as winter is the time for soups and stews, I really like summer soups too. This one isn't too hearty since it's a puree and I think it tastes really light when it is served warm, not hot. I've had to become really creative with vegetables this summer— with so much amazing local produce, I

tend to over buy!

I like to base this recipe on carrots, because the orange color of the puree is so inviting, but feel free to experiment with whatever is in your basket. Just remember to include a starch (potato, sweet potato, kohlrabi, etc.) to help thicken the dish and something sweet (apple, beet, melon, peach) to make this unique for summer. Herbs are totally up to your discretion, too. I like fresh basil, but if you have rosemary or thyme or some oregano, those would be great as well.

Whatever you do, you are making a crock pot of wonderful by using fresh vegetables and your imagination. This should be served in a bowl, but it's perfect when it's thicker than soup, but thinner than mashed potatoes. PS— it's also a GREAT puree for baby food, but you can make it for your whole family to eat. Enjoy!

4 c. fresh carrots

2 stalks celery, chopped

2 yellow squash, cut into chunks

1 medium sweet onion, chopped

2 medium potatoes, cut into chunks

1 medium apple, cut off of core

2-3 cloves garlic, chopped

1 t. salt

1/2 t. black pepper

6-8 leaves fresh basil

2-3 c. vegetable broth

Put all vegetables and herbs into the crock pot, pour broth on top. Cook on high for 6 hours. Using immersion blender, puree in pot. (If you don't have one, then let dish cool and puree in batches in a standard blender.) Serve with a dollop of sour cream or greek yogurt on top and a sprinkle of fresh herbs.

Crock Pot Chicken Cacciatore



Happy birthday to my husband. He is an amazing man, father, lover and friend. And he loves my cooking. So for tonight, I wanted to make him a nice dinner. But of course, I still have the kids to take care of today, a house to clean before company and a dog that is begging to go out, so my options for fine dining were a little limited. I decided to start a crock pot of food at lunchtime instead of at breakfast—our dinner will be done right as the kids are going to bed... so we can eat a meal as adults and maybe even partake in a glass of wine.

I had totally planned on doing chicken fajitas for dinner tonight or some sort of hearty “man” food, but my hubby went out with his coworkers for lunch at a Mexican restaurant, so I needed to reroute my dinner plans. Since I already had the chicken, I decided to make chicken cacciatore (pronounced catch-ahh-toe-ree) instead. It’s robust and filling, but an easy one pot meal.

Cacciatore is usually served over a thin pasta like angel hair, but it can also be served over rice, if you prefer. I like to top mine with grated Parmesan cheese instead of putting the cheese in when it’s cooking. You can also add other vegetables if you’d like—many cacciatore recipes add mushrooms and/or fresh basil leaves.

You don’t need a celebration to dine on this great chicken dish. Enjoy!

4 frozen boneless, skinless chicken breasts

1 small onion, sliced thin

1 green pepper, sliced thin

1/2 red pepper, sliced thin

1/2 yellow pepper, sliced thin

1 medium zucchini, sliced thin

4 cloves garlic, minced

1 28 oz. can petite diced tomatoes

1 c. spaghetti sauce

1 T. parsley flakes

1 t. basil flakes

1 t. oregano flakes

1/2 t. celery seed

1/2 t. black pepper

1/2 t. salt

Combine vegetables in crock pot, top with all seasonings and stir together. Pour in tomatoes and sauce and stir again. Place frozen chicken breasts on top of mixture. Cook on high for 4-6 hours. Serve over thin pasta or rice.

Crock Pot Chimichurri Steak

The word “chimichurri” might make you think of that silly little ditty from Mary Poppin’s chimney sweep friend, but I assure you, there is nothing dirty or British about this recipe (not that the two are synonymous!). I think of chimichurri sauce as an Argentinian version of pesto, but with parsley instead of basil. I love it as a marinade, but it can also be used as a garnish or a dipping sauce for pretty much any meat. I challenge you to try this on as many grilled meats as possible this summer and to find any single one that it doesn’t complement.

But since I don’t feel like firing up the grill and cinging my eyebrows, I’m going to cook my beef in the crock pot. Chimichurri is often served with steak, so I am using a flank steak and I sliced it into half inch sections before cooking it. I think this will help really get all the flavors into the steak. I marinated the meat overnight in the refrigerator, but that isn’t necessary. I would recommend marinating it for at least four hours, just to give it enough time to fester.

I don’t have enough fresh produce on hand to make this with the real ingredients, but if you do– use 1 c. fresh flat-leaf parsley and some fresh oregano, too. I assure you this will taste good with the dried stuff, but even more amazing with fresh herbs.

I’m serving my chimichurri steak with some steamed veggies (at least I know my kids will eat those things!), but you can also try roasting some potatoes with the meat or serving it on a nice bed of salad. Enjoy!

Meat: 2 lbs. beef (flank steak, skirt steak, London Broil, flat iron steak.... if you don’t love beef, use chicken)

Chimichurri sauce:

1/2 c. white wine

1/3. c. vegetable oil

1/4 c. red wine vinegar

2 lemons

3-4 cloves garlic, minced

4 T. parsley flakes

2 T. oregano flakes

1 T. red pepper flakes

1/2 t. salt

1/2 t. black pepper

Combine all seasonings, liquids and the juice of two lemons in a bowl and mix well. Put meat in a sealable bag and pour marinade on top of meat. Mash around and then let it sit for 4-24 hours in the refrigerator. When ready to start cooking, dump meat and marinade into crock pot and cook on low for 6-8 hours.

Crock Pot Vegetarian Chicken Chili



Did you catch the title?? Does it sound like a contradiction to say “vegetarian” and then “chicken” in the same meal?! It is not. Thanks to modern day culinary creativity, I can make chicken chili for friends that don’t want to eat meat. This is a pretty easy recipe, but I like that it is a crowd pleaser and

still meets certain dietary limitations.

Give this chicken chili a try next time you host a friend that is vegetarian or keeps kosher– they will be so happy that you honored their wishes and still served tasty dishes. (yes, that rhyme was intentional.) And don’t think this meal is for light weights– you can serve this at your next party or sporting event and even the men will be raving about your soup– it’s spicy, it’s filling and everyone will enjoy!

4 c. vegetarian chicken broth

2 cans great northern beans (do not drain)

1 4 oz can diced green chiles (do not drain)

1/2 green pepper, chopped

1/2 medium onion, chopped

2 c. frozen corn

1 T. parsley

1 T. chili powder

1 t. oregano

1/2 t. cumin

1/2 t. paprika

1/2 t. cayenne pepper

1/2 t. black pepper

1 package Morning Star Farms chicken strips**

Put everything in the crock pot except for the chicken strips. Stir together and cook on low for 4-5 hours. Add the frozen chicken strips and cook for one hour more. You can divide the chicken strips up into small pieces once they are cooked through.

****IF YOU'D LIKE THIS TO BE AN ACTUAL MEAT DISH, BUY PRE-COOKED FRESH OR FROZEN CHICKEN STRIPS AND FOLLOW THE DIRECTIONS THE EXACT SAME.**

Crock Pot Baked Ziti with Mini Meatballs

We love pasta. Sometimes in a ridiculous way. I don't know if that makes me a carb-a-vore or a carb-a-whore, but either way, it's one of my favorite meals to make... and eat. I especially like when the kids eat pasta because I know that the sauce sneaks in lots of great vegetables and nutrients. The problem with an elaborate dish like baked ziti is that it can take a lot more work and I don't have time to do all the steps in time for dinner. So, I've figured out a way to make some of my favorite dishes using my handy dandy crock pot. Time is no longer a nuisance.



All the parts of this recipe can be made separately and ahead of time, so if it helps you to make the meatballs and boil the pasta the night before, then go ahead and save yourself those steps. But I do recommend making homemade meatballs (recipe is listed below). In fact, you can make them and freeze them

without sauce so that when you want to eat them, you can decide later if you want them in marinara, stroganoff, alfredo, or sweet and sour. (PS— IF YOU ARE LOOKING FOR A VEGETARIAN ENTREE, FOLLOW ALL THESE STEPS EXCEPT FOR THE MINI MEATBALLS. YOU CAN ADD FRESH ZUCCHINI, MUSHROOMS OR SPINACH IF YOU'D LIKE ADDITIONAL FLAVORS.)

After you make the mini meatballs, these are the other things you'll need for the baked ziti:

1 lb cooked ziti (al dente)

2 1/2 c. spaghetti sauce

2 c. shredded mozzarella cheese

1/2 c. parmesan cheese

1 T. oregano

Pour hot, drained pasta into crock pot. Top with spaghetti sauce, but save 1/2 c. for later. Stir until pasta is coated then add cheeses, but save 1/2 c. of mozz cheese for later. Stir until cheese is starting to melt. Top with oregano and stir through one more time. When meatballs are done, line them on top of pasta and sauce mixture. Pour remaining sauce on top of meatballs and then sprinkle with remaining cheese. Warm on low for 2 hours. Enjoy!

Mini Meatballs (makes 48 balls)

1 lb. ground turkey

1 c. bread crumbs

1/2 c. parmesan cheese

1 t. oregano

1 T. parsley

2-3 cloves chopped garlic

1/2 t. black pepper

1 beaten egg (if needed)

Mix all ingredients together with your hands. If consistency isn't wet enough to bind, add egg (I prefer mine without it). Roll meat mixture into small, bite-sized balls and place on foil covered cookie sheet. Cook in oven at 350 degrees for 25 minutes and then broil on high for 3-5 minutes to brown but NOT BURN outside of ball. When cooled, balls can be frozen and saved for later use.

Crock Pot Creamy Tomato Soup

I understand that the red label of canned tomato soup is probably very patriotic and that eating grilled cheese and tomato soup is one of our commandments or laws or requirements as Americans. I support that, I do. But— I don't think my grilled cheese sandwich deserves to bathe in a mixture of weird canned goop and water. It needs more than that. So today I made homemade creamy tomato soup.

I think the key difference here is the spices and the heavy cream, you just can't get those flavors in a can. Another detail that is critical to this recipe is the use of an immersion hand blender. Thirty seconds of power will take this soup from delicious to heavenly. If you don't have an immersion hand blender, then you can cool your soup off and then put it into a blender to puree, then return it to the crock pot, add the heavy cream and heat it back up. That way is more work but will deliver the same smooth result.

Your soup should have an equal counterpart– a perfect grilled cheese sandwich. But you have to define that for yourself. For me, it's swirled pumpnickel/rye bread with swiss and havarti cheeses. For my kids, it's American cheese on whole wheat. For my husband, it's italian bread with sharp cheddar and colby jack. I am willing to entertain everyone's favorites, since the soup is so easy to make. Another trick for your sandwich is to change up from using butter or margarine on the outside of your bread– try using a light smear of mayonnaise instead and get a sweeter, crisper result. Or you can quickly dip the sandwich in a couple beaten eggs and turn your grilled cheese into a monte cristo instead. Discover whatever combination tickles your taste buds and then let it swell with the sweetness of the soup. Enjoy!

2 14 oz. cans of diced tomatoes

1 small onion, diced

2-3 cloves of garlic, chopped

1 bay leaf

1 t. of each seasoning: salt, black pepper, rosemary, oregano and celery seed

1 T. sugar

8 oz. heavy cream

Combine all ingredients except heavy cream in the crock pot. Cook on low for 4 hours. Remove bay leaf. Use immersion hand blender and puree until smooth. Add heavy cream, stir and heat for one more hour. Serve with your favorite grilled cheese sandwich, of course!

Crock Pot Bean Medley

We're going to a BBQ at my brother's house this weekend and since the assumption is that I'll bring something from the crockpot, I know I need to come up with something tasty and creative. The catch is that I don't really want to go grocery shopping today. So, I'm diving into the pantry in the hopes that I will surface with a plan and an amazing side dish. I also want to make this dish over night so that it is ready to go in the morning.

Baked beans are a very typical BBQ side dish, but I would like to make a bean dish that isn't brown and smokey or looks like it's was dumped into a bowl and served. Beans are an easily accessible food— even if they look like they were prepared a little different, everyone still usually takes a scoop to eat. This combination is a nice variation because it is more colorful and the light colors are a nice balance for spring. Enjoy!

NOTE: Assume that each can is about 15 ounces. This recipe works best in a 6-quart pot. Feel free to divide all ingredients in half if you are not cooking for a large gathering of people, a sports team or a small army.

2 cans black beans, drained and rinsed

2 cans dark red kidney beans, drained and rinsed

2 cans great northern or cannellini beans, drained and rinsed

2 cans sweet corn kernels, drained

8 oz. frozen cut green beans

1/2 medium onion, chopped

1/2 red bell pepper

1/4 c. apple cider vinegar

1/4 c. brown sugar

1/2 t. celery seed

1/2 t. oregano

1/2 t. black pepper

3 T. ketchup

3 T. tomato paste

1 T. brown or dijon mustard

Drain and rinse all the beans before putting them in the crockpot. Add the rest of the veggies. Mix together the brown sugar, apple cider vinegar, tomato paste, mustard, ketchup and seasonings and dump in on everything in the crock pot. Give it one good stir and then set it on high for 3 hours or low for 5-6.