

Crock Pot Cheese-Stuffed Meatballs



Already looking good!

While on vacation over the holidays, we stayed at the Happy Pelican, a wonderful beach house on the North Carolina coast. I love the delight of staying somewhere with a fully-stocked kitchen AND a beautiful view. My sister-in-law and I figured out a week's worth of menus, split the to do list, and prepped easy meals to enjoy that required minimal kitchen time and maximum beach time. It was so much easier to dine all together at the house instead of trying to coordinate eating out!



Cheese-Stuffed Meatball Sub, broiled to perfection!

But with eight healthy appetites to satisfy, we needed to cook mass quantity. By the end of the week, we were down to hamburger meat, string cheese and a few wrinkly vegetables. Easy enough! Just what I needed for these cheese-stuffed meatballs. It takes a little more handy work than our normal crock pot meals, but it was delicious! The kids loved the meatballs and the adults enjoyed meatball subs broiled to a crusty perfection.



Forget the bun and just enjoy the cheese-stuffed meatballs!

If you go on vacation and the house isn't well-equipped with small kitchen appliances, I highly suggest bringing your crock pot along. Enjoy!

Crock Pot Cheese-Stuffed Meatballs

Serves 8-10

2 lbs ground beef

2 eggs

1 c. panko bread crumbs

1/2 c. shredded parmesan

1 c. shredded carrots

2 T. Fresh parsley, chopped

1/2 sweet onion, diced

1 32 oz. jar spaghetti sauce

6 individually-wrapped string cheese

4 cups shredded mozzarella cheese

8 hoagie buns

Unwrap the string cheese and cut each log into 5 pieces (30 pieces total). Set the cheese aside. You are going to make approx. 30 meatballs. Mix together the meat, carrots, onion, eggs, parsley, parmesan, and panko. The mixture should not be liquidy. If it is, add a little more bread crumbs. Eggs are not always the same size (did you know that?!). Take about a golf-ball sized portion and roll into a ball. Flatten it between your palms. Place a cut piece of string cheese in the middle of the patty and then carefully form the ball back around the cheese. You want the cheese to be completely surrounded by the meatball mixture. Place it in the crock pot and repeat 29 more times, approximately, or until the meat mixture is gone.

Wash your hands. Don't be gross.

Pour the jar of spaghetti sauce across all of the meatballs

and then cook on high for 3-4 hours or on low for 6 hours. Your sauce will be a little more watery when it's done because of all of the juices escaping the meat and veggies. These meatballs are now ready to serve.

If you want to make meatball subs, put 3-4 meatballs in each hoagie bun, cover with some shredded cheese and place on a cookie sheet. Broil in the oven until the cheese is melted and starting to brown, but not burnt. That would be gross.

Cooked meatballs will fill refrigerate well and freeze well, but be careful reheating as the cheese may ooze out. It will all still taste delicious, it just might not be as pretty.

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 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.

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 cacciato (pronounced catch-ahh-toe-ree) instead. It's robust and filling, but an easy one pot meal.

Cacciato 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 cacciato 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 Cabbage Roll Casserole

One of my favorite dishes that my grandmother made is cabbage rolls, but honestly— who has time for all the steps?! I have made them before in the crock pot (use the search function to

see my recipe) but today's version is even easier. It has almost all the same components, but only takes a cutting board, a knife and a spoon to get everything into the crock pot.

I really like that this casserole is thick, there isn't much broth left in the pot. I suggest serving it over some mashed potatoes. It's like a complete meal in one bowl!

1 lb ground turkey, not cooked

1 c. brown rice, not cooked

2 c. spaghetti sauce

1 c. vegetable juice

1/2 head cabbage, chopped fine

1/2 medium onion, chopped

2 T. brown sugar

2 T. apple cider vinegar

2-3 cloves garlic, minced

1 t. celery seed

1 t. salt

1/2 t. black pepper

1 T. parsley

1/2 c. water

Put cabbage and onion in crock pot first, then top with rice, all seasonings and garlic. Pour sauce and juice in next and stir well. Place ground meat on top of mixture. Cook on low for 4 hours. When meat browns, break up with a spoon and/or fork and stir entire contents. Add water and cook one hour

more.

Crock Pot Baked Ziti with Mini Meatballs

We love pasta. Sometimes in a rediculous 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 Inside Out Stuffed Peppers

Stuffed peppers are a delicious union of textures and are meant for slow cooking. But sometimes, the prep work of cutting and chopping and mixing and stuffing is just too much. Consider this my recipe for "inside out stuffed peppers". I've figured out a way to get that same great result with even less time. It might not have the same presentation as beautifully stuffed bells, but if you are looking for ease and a great meal, this is a good sloppy way to serve a favorite dish. Enjoy!

1 lb. ground turkey or chicken

2 T. dried parsley

1/2 c. uncooked rice

1 t. salt

1/2 t. ground pepper

1/2 t. red pepper flakes

1 t. worchestershire sauce

1 16 oz. bag frozen chopped peppers

1 medium onion, sliced

2 c. spaghetti sauce

Mix together first seven ingredients. Put frozen peppers and onions in bottom of crock pot. Form 12-14 meatballs from the mixture and arrange in a single layer in the crock pot. Pour spaghetti sauce on top evenly. Cook on high for 3-4 hours.