

# Crock Pot Miso Soup



Restaurant quality soup,  
only easier, cheaper and  
more delicious!

Why go out to eat when you can stay in?! This week I'm working on Asian inspired dishes that are easy to make and taste like take-out— only healthier! Today's soup is super easy. So much so, that you should never actually order it in a restaurant, it's so much better to make at home. I add a couple more vegetables to my miso soup so that it's a more filling appetizer or the start of a great main dish. You can add thin egg noodles, vermicelli noodles, or rice to this soup to make it a complete meal in itself. Don't let the tofu fool you; this isn't a crunchy, earthy food, it's the same thing you order in a restaurant, only better for you! Enjoy. ☐

Crock Pot Miso Soup

Serves 6-8

Prep time: 10 minutes

Cook time: 6 hours

6 c. water

4 T. white miso paste

1 zucchini, cut horizontally and then sliced into half moons

2 cloves garlic

1 12 oz package, extra firm tofu, drained and cut into

small cubes

1/2 c. green onions (about 3 inches of the white/green parts),  
sliced into rings

1 100g package of enoki mushrooms, cut off the base

Put water and miso paste into crock pot and stir until dissolved. Add zucchini, garlic, and tofu. Cook on low for 6 hours. Add green onions and enoki mushrooms about 20 minutes before cook time is complete. Serve immediately.

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## Renovation, Week 9: The Finale

I am pleased to present the new Dinner Is A Crock kitchen! It's been months of hard work, intense labor, and intricate planning, but I am thrilled to welcome you to my home and get back to creating new and exciting recipes to share.

**Week NINE**— let's break it down and see how the transition unfolded...

**Tuesday:** [Carolina Custom Surfaces](#) did a beautiful job installing my new countertops on a very cold day. The guys were courteous and skilled. I love it when people show up to work but take a minute to just step back and admire the progress before they begin. This isn't just an office, this is my home, too. I appreciated that the guys asked me my opinion, like on faucet preferences, and even had great recommendations for counter cleaners (they totally recommended [THIS](#) and [THIS](#) to keep my quartz clean and pretty.)



Even the sun wanted to catch a glimpse of my new countertops from Carolina Custom Surfaces!

My counters were installed perfectly, my house was kept clean, and my kitchen is one step closer to complete. They did such a good job that I'm starting to think about using [Carolina Custom Surfaces](#) to update the bathrooms and get a few custom cutting boards! (*TACOS FOR DINNER USING MY LAST BATCH OF FROZEN COOKED TACO MEAT*)

**Wednesday:** My cabinet installer came by this morning to finish up some last little details. Any man that wants to bring me a crown is fine by me... even if it's just the molding to go up against the ceiling. ☐

This afternoon, the tile backsplash was installed under cabinets behind where the hood will go. The subway has never looked this good.

What a difference in the dimensions of the room with the refraction of sunlight from the tile and countertop! I feel shiny and pretty. (*BOLOGNA SANDWICHES AND [CROCK POT TOMATO](#)*)

SOUP FOR DINNER.)



Such a dreamy sight!

**Thursday:** Today was all about regaining functionality. After nine weeks, I think I am most excited to have running water in the kitchen again! Yes, I realize that I had it in other places in the house, but I am so done with washing dishes in the basement bathroom! (SHOUT OUT TO MY HUBBY SINCE HE DID MOST OF THE DISHWASHING!!) My sink and dishwasher are up and running. And— so are my electrical outlets! I can plug it to a gazillion different places now, so you can anticipate seeing crockpots lining the kitchen at some point in the near future. Haha! (*GRILLED CHICKEN AND KALE BURGERS AND FRESH ZUCCHINI TONIGHT...AND A FEW OTHER THINGS IN PREPARATION FOR THE SNOW TOMORROW!*)

**Friday:** Oh snow, you ruined my perfect finale. But we made it so close! Kudos to Piedmont Natural Gas for braving the roads and still coming to install my range today. I'm super impressed with your commitment to deliver and follow-through for your patient (and slightly crazy) customers. It's in! I'm

good! Just one more thing to go. ([CROCK POT POTATO SOUP FOR DINNER AND A GARDEN SALAD. NOTHING TOO EXCITING.](#))



Shout out to Primo Water—love that my family drinks and cooks with this clean and refreshing bottled water.

I also want to give a shout out to [Primo Water](#)— I actually designed the cabinets around my refrigerator to house the [bottom-loading water cooler](#). I love it for easy access to clean water! I use it for hot tea at least once a day. My boys go to it all day for cold water (or room temperature, depending what your teeth prefer!). I also feel good cooking with it. With all the crazy stories on the news right now about tainted water, I feel really good about getting big jugs of Primo for my family instead of tap water. (The bottles are easy to exchange at places like Harris Teeter, Kroger, Lowe's Home Improvements, etc.)

**Monday:** (I'm playing *Pomp and Circumstance* music as I type this...) The hood has been installed and it's like fireworks going off in here. Not like electric short-circuiting or

anything like that, but like we've reached the culmination of this project and the applause is going wild. Unicorns are seen jumping in the backyard and leprechauns are scurrying around stocking my fridge. Ok... maybe not quite. But when my LG oven reaches full temperature, it does actually play a cute little ditty, so that will have to do for now. (*DINNER TONIGHT: ROASTED CHICKEN AND ROASTED BRUSSEL SPROUTS! ROASTED, PEOPLE! LIKE, IN AN OVEN!!*)

There are some small details to still finish (like painting the bay window), but overall, I could not be more thrilled with THIS:



Check out this beautiful panoramic of the new kitchen with all of the upgrades.

Thank you for staying with me on this adventure! I hope it's helped provide some guidance and guilty pleasure of commiserating with me through these 10 weeks. I can't wait to share new recipes with you very soon! #nokitchennoproblem... it's time to save time and cook slower. Welcome to the new and improved Dinner Is A Crock!

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# 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!)

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# Summer Series, Day Two: Crock Pot Steamed Summer Vegetables



Roll out of bed and out onto the hammock as the sun rises and crests over the ocean and dunes.

The sun was beaming in the window when I finally opened my eyes this morning. I had to look around for a minute and remember there wasn't school or camp or work or anything to rush off to this morning. Today's to do list included the pool and the beach. I was pretty sure I could accomplish those tasks so I rolled back off to sleep as the sun soared into the sky and the light in the room subdued. Granted, it was only another hour or so before my kids were knocking at the door and ready for breakfast, but I awoke again with a great calm and a readiness for an adventure.

One thing doesn't change no matter where I sleep— my desperate need for coffee in the morning. Lucky for me, [Ooh La La](#)'s kitchen was totally equipped. Every appliance (COFFEE POT AND KEURIG!) needed was readily available and the cabinets were full of the comforts of home— not just dishes and cups, but tupperware, travel mugs, grill tools, fruit baskets. I was completely at home even though I was still uncaffeinated!

After an easy breakfast, I skipped off to the grocery store,

categorized list in hand. Oh, you missed that in the last post? HERE YOU GO. But whoa- I must warn you... the grocery store was full of crazy people without a plan. It was like playing Supermarket Sweep but with a Hunger Games approach. Despite my greatest organization, it still took longer than anticipated to get through the store, but the good news is that everything I needed was in stock. Since I brought all of my basics and non-perishables with me, I didn't really need the aisles, just a lap around the perimeter of the store.



Crock Pot Steamed Summer Vegetables are a great way to create a healthy and seasonal side dish.

While I know that I'll be at the local Farmer's Market on Tuesday, I still needed some produce today. We were planning on a BBQ tonight with hamburgers and hot dogs, so I decided that I would steam some veggies in the crock pot as my side. The good news was that the store also had great little packages of fresh herbs and I totally stocked up.

The groceries and prep work for dinner tonight took just over an hour and then it was off to the pool! [The house seriously has it's own swimming pool](#). I want to live here. Like, not just this week, but from here on out. The pool is just big enough for all the kids and grown ups to get in and play. The youngest played on the stairs mostly and the oldest kept

trying to see if his cannonball could splash over the fence. Oh wait— you thought I meant my oldest kid? Nope, that was my husband trying to tsunami the pool!



Sand dunes in the Outer Banks help protect these narrow islands from harsh weather.

After the pool and a light lunch we crossed over the sand dunes to the beach. There is something about the waves that is so cathartic. I feel such peace at the waves, listening to them crash and then pull everything negative away. There is something that reaches my soul when I stand at the waves and realize I have to relinquish all control. I can't make them stop. I can't make them crash. I can't protect my sand castle or demand that the water fill the mote. I can just breathe and trust that none of it is my handiwork and that the water will continue to rise and fall and I don't have to do anything. Much like dinner tonight— there is nothing left to do but breathe and enjoy.

## Crock Pot Steamed Summer Vegetables

Serves 6-8

4 zucchini, quartered lengthwise

1 lb asparagus, rinsed and woody ends removed

1 package button mushrooms (doesn't matter what size package, they are mushrooms, they'll fit!)

6-8 twigs of fresh thyme

3-4 twigs of fresh rosemary

1 c. water



Layer vegetables and fresh herbs in the crock pot so the flavors are infused throughout the dish.

Layer vegetables and herbs in the crockpot– I put in zucchini first, then 2-3 sprigs thyme; add asparagus and a couple sprigs of rosemary; then the mushrooms and the remaining seasonings. Pour in the cup of water around the edges so that the water covers the bottom of the crock pot. The vegetables will release enough additional liquid to continue the cooking process. Cook on low for 4 hours, then serve. You can remove the herbs or use them as garnish.



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# Crock Pot Vegetable Soup For Men



I am fortunate to have a husband that loves my cooking and loves to eat. He tries everything I make and is very agreeable about most of it. But today, I had the privilege of watching my husband cook his first crock pot meal. And it turned out great!

Today's soup includes a lot of produce, but unlike my normal vegetarian vegetable soup which has small bits of lots of vegetables, my hubby's recipe includes chunkier cuts of vegetables and not as much variety. The real kicker of this soup is the topping– add a few jalapeno peppers and you've got a treat to eat without any meat! ☐

I definitely encourage you to offer the crock pot up for family cooking adventures. It's great to take with you on road trips to save money instead of eating out. It's a great way to teach kids about cooking because there's less risk of burning food or fingers. It's also a great way to add healthier meals into your busy lives.



So kudos to my husband for coming up with this great recipe. Maybe he'll do the dishes, too. Enjoy!

2 28 oz cans diced tomatoes

1 15 oz. can sweet kernel corn, drained

1 zucchini, chopped

4 stalks celery, cleaned and chopped

1 medium onion, diced

2 medium potatoes, skins left on and diced

2-3 cloves garlic, chopped

1 t. celery seed

1/2 t. salt

1/2 t. black pepper

1 T. dried parsley

TOPPING: jar of jalapeno pepper slices

Add all ingredients (except jalapeno slices) to pot and stir. Cook on high for 4 hours. When serving, add a few chilled jalapeno pepper slices straight from the jar, to each bowl. If your man likes it hotter, try a few shakes of Tabasco sauce, too!

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## [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.

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# 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"..."

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# 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.

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# Crock Pot Beef Stew

So after the amazing stroganoff last week, somehow I still wanted to make more beef. (I think we had BBQ chicken one too many times over the holiday weekend.) So even though it is summer, I thought some hearty beef stew would satisfy my craving for red meat. The nice part about this meal and the hot weather is that a small serving is enough to satisfy and you can use local produce to really enrich the flavors of the stew. I am adding some extra vegetables to my stew that are in season, ripe and fresh right now. Check out your local farmer's market and see what vegetables look good to you. Enjoy!

1 lb. beef, cut into stew meat

1 c. baby carrots

4 stalks celery, cut into 1-inch sections

3 potatoes, skins left on, cut into small chunks

1 small onion, cut into small chunks

1 medium zucchini, cut into 1-inch sections

1 ear of corn, cut kernels off the cob

4-6 oz. fresh green beans, cut into 1-inch sections

2 c. water

3 cloves garlic, chopped

1/2 t. celery seed

1/2 t. paprika

1 T. parsley



1/2 t. salt

1 t. black pepper

To finish: 1 T. corn starch dissolved in 1/3 c. cold water

Put all ingredients into the crock pot and give it all a stir. Cook on low for 4-6 hours. Add water with dissolved corn starch and heat for 1/2 hour on high. Remove bay leaves before serving.

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## 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.