

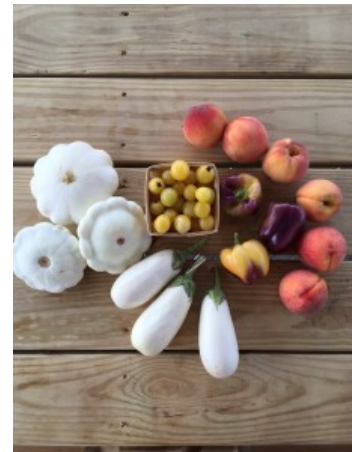
Summer Series, Day Five: Crock Pot White Ratatouille



I'm seriously considering moving to the beach. Sunshine, seafood, salty air... it's all good for my soul. As long as I have a good internet connection, I might just be willing to carry my crock pots up and down the east coast and showcase local flavor and attractions. **Ok, I'm putting it out there— where should I go next and who can hook a girl and her crock pots up?! I'll feed you!**

I used the rest of my finds from this week's farmer's market to make ratatouille for dinner tonight. I love the fact that I used the same kinds of ingredients, but in a new way to make a totally different presentation!

I have never seen pure white patapan squash or white eggplant before in this region, but I was delighted to experiment with these adaptations to the standard variety. I also used yellow cherry tomatoes instead of canned diced red ones. Such a delightful dish to cook low and slow while we played all day.



While we normally do adventures as a family, today we decided to go in two directions— literally. My husband took our oldest to the beach to tiptoe in the shark-infested waters and fly a kite in the salty breeze. I took our youngest on a bike ride down the main road of the island. I'm so glad I bought [a bike rack for my car](#) so we could all bring our bikes to the beach.

It's so much easier than trying to rent them upon arrival! The sidewalks in Avon are flat and easy and the breeze felt fantastic even though it was a scorching day. We all enjoyed the sunshine and a bit of solitude. There is something about experiencing the wind on your face and the sun on your back, just taking a deep breath and exhaling gratitude. I'm not kidding when I tell you that staying [here](#) in the Outer Banks has really been cathartic for all of us.

But back to the food, of course! By the time we hit the beach, the bikes, came back to swim in the pool [at the house](#), and got cleaned up... dinner was ready and no work was needed. Another amazing day is complete and it's time to chill on the porch with a few cold drinks and listen to the birds and cicadas chirping in harmony.

Crock Pot Ratatouille

Serves 4-6

3-4 large white patapan squash, softball sized (about 1-1.5 lbs)

3 small white eggplant, 5-6 inches in length (about 1 lb or less)

1 sweet onion, diced

1 yellow pepper, diced

1 pint yellow cherry tomatoes

2 cloves garlic, minced

4 leaves fresh basil, chopped

1 c. broth (chicken or vegetable)

Mix all ingredients in crock pot and cook on low for 6-8 hours. Serve with rice, noodles or fresh bread and butter. If you can't find patapan squash, you can substitute yellow

squash.

Crock Pot Coconut Butternut Squash



This is a great easy side dish that goes with everything! And it only takes two ingredients to make it.

Are you ever in need of a quick and easy side dish? This vegetarian option only takes TWO INGREDIENTS and cooks on low for about four hours. It also goes with just about anything, so there's no need to amp it up with crazy flavor— just dump it in an hit start.

The prep work for this dish is less than five minutes if you start with a whole squash— or about 30 seconds if you buy it

already prepped. Now I'm a big fan of doing things yourself... I buy whole mushrooms, not the sliced ones, because I don't like the brown edges. I buy the pineapple already cored because otherwise it looks like a porcupine and I don't want to get pricked. And let's not even move to the meat department and the ease and efficiency of getting chicken that is already boneless and skinless!

But I digress. My apologies. Back to making things easy– I often buy butternut squash that's already been prepped. It's fresh and easy and pure in its raw state; it just has the seeds and skins removed which is actually sort of a difficult task to accomplish. You can try [something like this](#) to peel it, but it's a challenging task, especially on a Monday! If you want to prep it yourself, that's fine... the measurements are still the same. Plus, with only two ingredients, you don't really to be too precise.

Crock Pot Coconut Butternut Squash

Serves 6 (as side dishes)

2 lbs. butternut squash, peeled and seeds removed, then cut into chunks

1 13.5 oz can coconut milk (light or regular is fine)

Put both ingredients in the crock pot, cook on low for 4 hours. That's it!

[Crock Pot Pork and Prunes](#)



You will never think of prunes as old people food ever again once you taste this delicious pork!

A few years ago, my husband and I went to France to celebrate our anniversary. It was an amazing adventure and I am forever grateful to everyone that helped coordinate taking over our daily chaos so we could get away. We loved the wine and the micro-brews, but what we found most delectable was the food and how the regional influences changed the flavors depending where we were located. It shouldn't be too much of a surprise—from coast to coast, America certainly offers different flavors and flare when it comes to regional cooking, too!

So I'm going to create two dishes in my crock pot that mirror some of our favorite dinners that we experienced. Unfortunately, I can't run over to the *boulangerie* and grab a baguette for dinner and some croissants for breakfast, but I'm still pretty certain that I can recreate some of the tastes while building new memories as well.

France Revisited Recipe #1: Crock Pot Pork and Prunes

(you can also do this with a turkey tenderloin, if you prefer)



Take a quick trip to France with this delightful dish!

As it turns out, I'm not sure that the combination of pork and prunes is really particular to France. I think that Italy, Scandinavia and other places in Europe also do this dish well and vary the ingredients just enough to claim it's origin!

The most challenging part of this recipe is preparing the pork. So let's go step-by-step through it. First of all, rinse of the tenderloin and pat it dry. This isn't a marbled cut of meat, most of the fat is attached to the outside, including a membrane that might appear cloudy. Remove the membrane (go on and grab it and pull it off) and cut off any excess fat.

In order to stuff the tenderloin, you need a hole through it. The easiest way I've found to do this is with an apple corer. Not kidding! Lay the tenderloin flat and cut my tenderloin in half. Skewer the meat with the apple corer and pull out the perfectly cylindrical meat tube. YES— this is totally gross, but totally easy. You might need to core the meat from both ends in order to have a complete tunnel. I couldn't get a picture of doing this, because both my hands were covered with raw meat and I couldn't grab my phone.

Next step... get over the fact that you just handled all that flesh. Moving on...

It seems like there isn't enough liquid in this recipe, but it's ok. The meat, the prunes and the onions all release enough liquid to keep moisture in the pot. If your crock pot tends to cook hot, then be cautious before going over 4 hours—you don't want the meat to dry out.

Bon appetit!

Crock Pot Pork with Prunes

Serves 4-6

2 lb. pork tenderloin

1/4 sweet onion, minced

12 pitted prunes, diced

1 T. Herbs de Provence



It just takes a few easy steps to create a tunnel in the pork tenderloin and prepare it for the prune stuffing.

Prep tenderloin by removing membrane and excess fat and then slicing a tunnel through the meat with an apple corer (see directions above). In a bowl, mix prunes, onions, and seasonings. Stuff mixture inside tenderloin. Place tenderloin

on rack inside crock pot and top meat with any remaining bits of the mixture. Cook on low for 4 hours or until meat is cooked through. Remove rack from crock pot and let meat stand for 5 minutes before slicing.

Voila! 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 flesh 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 Hot and Sour soup

I had three reasons for creating crock pot hot and sour soup this week...

1. Chinese New Year was on Monday and I forgot to order takeout.
2. I've been trying to do at least one meatless meal each week.
3. Hot and sour soup is amazing for clearing up a stuffy nose and a winter cold!



As with all my soups, I like more “stuff” than “broth” so my hot and sour soup is more crowded than what you get at a Chinese restaurant, but I think you’ll like this as a full meal and not just an appetizer. Plus, it can be made completely vegetarian and I think it’s

gluten-free, so this is a great dish if you are cooking for people with food limitations.

If you didn’t get a chance to celebrate the Chinese New Year either, then whip up a quick batch of this hot and sour soup to start the year out like a fire-breathing dragon! (but you don’t need to make it that spicy if you don’t want!)

3 oz. shiitake mushrooms (I bought a 6 oz. jar of mushrooms in liquid and used half)

2 cups baby carrots, quartered

3 medium green onions, sliced

3 cups bok choy, chopped

4 c. low-sodium chicken broth

1/3 c. rice vinegar

1 T. soy sauce

1 t. ground ginger

1 t. sesame oil

2 t. sriracha sauce (Asian red pepper sauce, also sometimes called rooster sauce)

1 package extra-firm tofu, drained and cut into half-inch cubes

Put all ingredients EXCEPT TOFU into crock pot and stir into mixed. Cook on high for 3-4 hours (or until carrots are soft enough) then add cubed tofu and cook for one more hour.