

Crock Pot Orange Tofu



I think it's a wonderful community celebration when a baby is born. Friends and family gather to welcome the sweet little child and help the new parents with meals and errands and extra hands for diaper changes. Tonight, it's my turn

to bring dinner to some friends and I'm pretty sure that they already assume it's going to be something from the crock pot. The debate begins about what to make— it doesn't have to be for an occasion, let's admit that this debate happens practically every day, right?!

Let's see— vegetarian or dairy is requested and the meal needs to feed two adults and a 2-year-old, too. I'm guessing that pasta dishes and soups have already been dropped off or stocked in the freezer, so I decided to do an Asian tofu dish and serve it with rice. Tofu is a unique protein, but it cooks up nicely and can suck up a whole bunch of flavor from whatever it accompanies. There are different consistencies of tofu sold, but I suggest using an extra firm one, it's easiest to work with as a substitute for meat.

If you are scared of squishy food, you could make this dish with chicken instead. But give it a try— you might actually like tofu! The toughest thing about cooking it, is that sometimes it can really stick to the pan. Let it cook on each side without moving it around in the pan and then flip it quickly with a thin spatula. Enjoy!

1 brick of tofu, drained

3 T. olive oil

1/2 c. orange juice

1/4 c. honey

1/4 c. soy sauce

2 cloves of garlic, minced

1/2 medium onion, sliced thin

2 t. rice vinegar

1/2 t. paprika

12 oz. of any green vegetable (broccoli florets, snow peas, shredded cabbage, green beans or peas)

First you need to prep your tofu, it usually has an excessive amount of water in it that you want to drain off before cooking. Put a paper towel on a plate and then center the tofu on it. Add another paper towel up on top of the tofu and then put another plate on top. It looks like you've made a plate sandwich with the tofu in the middle. Add something heavy on top (can of food, metal pan, small child) and let sit for at least an hour. The paper towels will fill with water and the tofu will still have it's shape. Then cut tofu into 2-bite sized cubes.

Heat oil in a pan on medium heat. Brown tofu for 5-6 minutes on each side. Add the green vegetable, garlic and onion to the crock pot in that order, then put tofu on top. Mix the remaining ingredients in a separate bowl and then pour on top of everything in the crock pot. Cook on high for 3-4 hours and then serve with white rice.

Crock Pot Vegetarian Bean Dip

We're going to a party this weekend and everyone is supposed to bring a side dish to go with a taco bar main course. It sounds like lots of fun (hoping for margaritas, good music and salty lime tortilla chips) and I figured I'd make something in the crock pot that would be hot and spicy, just like the crowd! While other people might bring chips or cold dips, this dish is really easy and yummy and a little unique. It's nice to have a hot dip that doesn't get crusty and weird from sitting out. Feel free to serve this with some additional jalapenos, salsa and sour cream.

1 15 oz. can of vegetarian refried beans

1 c. chunky salsa (mild, medium or hot)

1 c. sliced black olives

1 c. shredded colby jack cheese

1 15 oz. can of black beans, drained and rinsed

1 t. cumin

1 t. chili powder

1/2 c. sour cream

Mix all ingredients together in crock pot, except for sour cream. Cook on low for 3 hours, then add sour cream, mix and heat for 1 more hour on low. Serve with tortilla chips meant for scooping.

(If you have leftovers, try putting a hearty serving into a soft taco shell tomorrow with some shredded lettuce and diced tomatoes, it makes a great second meal!)

Crock Pot Sloppy Joes

Here's your mission if you choose to accept it: *make dinner for four adults and two kids when you are staying at a friends house, you found one pound of ground turkey in the freezer and there is a pantry of assorted cans.* And... GO!

While visiting friends this week, I figured it was only appropriate to help with meals since they are at work all day. I know there is a crock pot on staff in the kitchen, so I accepted this mission without hesitation. Crock pot cooking is just the easiest way to make a crowd-pleasing dish without making a huge mess.

With our mix of adults and kids, I figured crock pot sloppy joes would be great. But with only one pound of meat, I knew that I needed to pump up the dish with some added ingredients. This recipe worked out great because it kept the true flavor of sloppy joes, but included some extra protein. Try this out next time you have to feed friends or family members or are looking for a no-fuss take on an old-time favorite. Enjoy!

1 lb. ground turkey

1/2 medium onion, diced (or 3 T. dried minced onion)

1 green pepper, seeded and diced

1 14 oz. can of black beans, drained and rinsed

1 6 oz. can of tomato paste

1/2 cup brown sugar

1 t. cumin

1 t. black pepper

1 t. chili powder

1 t. garlic powder

1/2 t. salt

1 t. worchestershire sauce

2 t. apple cider vinegar

1 t. yellow mustard

1 c. tomato juice or vegetable juice

1/4 c. water

Brown ground meat thoroughly in 1-2 t. of vegetable oil. Then add green peppers and (fresh) onions, cook until they are soft, and add to crock pot. In a separate bowl, mix together the rest of the ingredients and the pour on top of cooked items in crock pot, stir together. Add in the black beans and stir once more. Cook on low for 4-6 hours. Serve on hamburger buns for traditional presentation or use King's Hawaiian Original Rolls to make cute little sloppy joe sliders.

Crock Pot Fish Chowder

This recipe has evolved from an amazing chowder that I once had at the Columbus International Festival in Ohio. I think it was the Scandanavian table that was honoring their long-standing countrymen's careers of treacherous trips on the ocean. I think it was really to honor the countrywomen's careers of having boatloads of fish to cook and trying to come up with new recipes that didn't resemble a fish face.

Now this recipe can easily be done in a pot on the stove and done in an hour, but then the flavors wouldn't have a chance to fester all together. I prefer it in the crock pot, usually made from leftover salmon or tilapia. You could probably use halibut, red snapper or maybe even some trout if you wanted to, depending on what you like. If you don't have leftovers to use, then just throw the (deboned, please) fish filets into a pan with a little butter, salt and pepper and then bake it, let it cool and flake it. Realistically, a budget-minded mama could also use a couple cans of pink salmon and still have a similar result.

Well, if we wanted to, we could start by sauteeing up some diced bacon with the mirepoix (fancy word for chopped carrots, celery and onions) and then including it all in the pot for a smoky and salty addition. Or, we could throw in half a pound of shrimp at the end of the day and make the chowder heartier. But I keep it simple and it's still a crowd-pleaser and probably a little healthier too.

4 carrots, peeled and diced
3 celery stalks, diced
1 medium onion, diced
1 chopped zucchini, unpeeled
3 cups vegetable broth
2 bay leaves
1 clove garlic, minced
salt and pepper

1/2 – 1 lb fish– no skin, no bones; cooked, cooled and flaked
(1 T. corn starch dissolved into 2 cups cold milk)

Put all ingredients (except corn starch and milk) in the crockpot, with the fish being last. Cook 4-6 hours on high. Remove bay leaves. Dissolve corn starch in cold milk and then add to the pot 1 hour before serving.

If you'd like to add some variety, offer cheddar cheese, chopped scallions and puffy oyster crackers to top your fish chowder. Or a toy boat, if you can find one that hasn't been in the bath.

Crock Pot Vegetable Curry

One of my favorite things about Indian food is that you can have such a variety of purely vegetarian dishes. With the right balance of ingredients, you can have a healthy, protein- and vitamin-rich meal with an array of flavors and nothing in it will have ever had a face.

There is also a misconception about crock pots that I'd like to ruin. Many people think the crock pot is just for cooking the hell out of a piece of meat or else making soup, but indeed there are so many other great dishes that we can make in a matter of minutes! So for the skeptics out there, I invite you to try this vegetable curry. It's hot and spicy, almost sexy, and definitely enjoyable. Experiment today with this cultural culinary specialty.

1 can garbanzo beans, drained and rinsed

1 14 oz. can diced tomatoes

1 16 oz. bag of frozen cauliflower

2 c. baby carrots

1 small onion, diced

3-4 cloves of garlic, chopped

2 potatoes, diced

1 T. curry

1 t. red pepper flakes

1/4 t. cinnamon

1/2 c. vegetable juice

1 14 oz. can of lite coconut milk

Put everything in the crock pot except the coconut milk. Stir once through and then pour coconut milk on top of everything. Cook on low for 6 hours. Serve over white rice or with naan bread.

Easiest Crock Pot Chili-- EVER

If you can work a can opener, you can make this chili. You still need to brown the meat before you put it in the crock pot, but that's the only work that needs done. Open the cans, dump it in, let it fester. Done.

My brother in law taught me this recipe and I love that it is uncomplicated. I usually make this on football Sundays so that when we have people over to watch the game, everyone can have a hot meal whenever they get hungry. Plus, I love all the fun toppings that go on chili. It isn't football season yet, but it is the start of baseball season. So, for sports fans everywhere, here is your game day strategy. Enjoy!

(I SUGGEST USING A 6 QT. CROCK POT TO MAKE THIS. IF YOU HAVE A SMALLER ONE, THEN REMOVE ONE OF THE CANS OF BEANS. ALSO, ALL CANS ARE TYPICALLY ABOUT 14-15 OUNCES.)

2 cans diced tomatoes

1/2 medium onion, chopped

1 can dark red kidney beans

1 can light red kidney beans

1 can great northern beans

1 packet of chili seasoning (FYI– it's a combination of things like onion powder, chili powder, a bit of cumin, salt and pepper, etc. but it's just easier to buy the packet instead of measuring it all out separately)

1 lb. ground beef or turkey

Brown meat completely and then put in crock pot. Dump everything else in. Give it a stir and then cook on high for 4 hours. Serve with shredded cheddar, chopped onion and sour cream. For added flavor, you can add 1 can of sweet corn kernels when you add in all the beans.

Crock Pot Mac and Cheese

Mac and cheese= kid favorite, adult favorite, crowd pleaser. Unless you are lactose intolerant, I'm guessing mac and cheese is a staple in your diet and probably gives you warm fuzzies of memories as a kid. Whether you liked the stove top blue box, orange carton that went in the oven or something homemade with buttery crumbles on top, cheese and noodles are a great combination.

Noodles are a challenge for the crock pot, however. I would recommend cooking the noodles in advance. I know it makes TWO pots to clean instead of just one, but it's the best way. You can reuse the pot to make the sauce before pouring it into the crock pot. You may be saying, but then isn't this a stove top recipe and not a crock pot recipe? But by adding these things

together into the crock pot, you are actually working to increase the creaminess, less the seasoning melt together and ultimately have dinner ready when you get home.

I also would recommend shredding the block of cheese by hand instead of buying preshredded cheese. It makes it a little creamier, although I'm not quite sure why. But if you cook the noodles in advance and shred the cheese too, you are eliminating some of the prep time to make it easier to start this dish over breakfast and then enjoy it at dinner time.

Once this becomes one of your favorite dishes, there are lots of ways to add variety: add 1/2 c salsa or 4 strips of crumbled bacon or freshly snipped chives or some steamed vegetables like broccoli or peas. If you want more protein in the dish, add a packet of drained tuna fish or some fajita-style chicken strips. If you are serving this to adults and want to make it more grown up, try different shape noodles instead of the traditional shell or elbow macaroni. However you make it, I hope this becomes one of your favorite recipes too and helps to make new warm fuzzies for you, your friends and your family.

8 oz pasta, cooked and drained (try shells or elbow macaroni if you want to be traditional)

4 T. butter

4 T. flour

1/2 cup half and half creamer

1 c. milk

1 egg, beaten

8 oz sharp cheddar cheese, shredded

8 oz. mild cheddar cheese, shredded

1 t. white pepper

PINCH of nutmeg (just a weeeee bit)

4 oz. whipped cream cheese

Cook the package of noodles according to the box, this step can be done in advance and should not be done in the crock pot. On the stove, melt the butter in a pot, then slowly stir in the flour until it is all dissolved. Slowly add the creamer, milk, beaten egg and seasonings while still continuing to stir and then remove pot from heat. This mixture should thicken. Now for the crock potting instructions– first, spray pot with non-stick spray. Add noodles, creamy mixture from pot and then the shredded cheeses. Mix this all together. Then, cook on low for 4 hours. About an hour before you want to serve this, add the whipped cream cheese and stir it all together. This last step adds a special creaminess to your mac and cheese.

Crock Pot Potato Soup

My 93-year-old grandmother-in-law was visiting last week and the woman is amazing. She is clear minded and sound of body. She might not win the race, but she will definitely reach the finish line. She loves her grandchildren and great-grandchildren and hates to be idle. So when she was here visiting and offered to help in the kitchen, I was pleased to have her assistance.

My least favorite food prep is cutting onions. Let's be honest– I'm a big baby about it. My eyes first burn and tingle, then water profusely and run all down my face. I

look like I'm in a bad soap opera by the time that innocent white bulb is finally all chopped up. So, I politely asked my "sous-chef" to complete this task and she diced enough onions to fill half of a gallon-sized freezer bag full!

Now I needed to figure out what to do with all these onions. I thought about a side dish of creamed onions or maybe crisping them up with some garlic to start a nice curry dish, but decided instead that it would only be appropriate to make my mother-in-law's recipe for potato soup and to use the onions that her own mama chopped up. My M-I-L didn't make this dish in the crock pot, but all the ingredients are just about the same. Enjoy!

5-6 medium potatoes, peeled and diced

1 medium onion, diced

3 stalks celery, cleaned and diced

3 cups water

1 t. salt

1/2 t. black pepper

1 bay leaf

2 t. dried parsley

1 c. milk

1 T. corn starch

1 can cream-style corn

Put potatoes, onion, celery and seasonings in crock pot. Cover with water (about 3 cups). Cook on high for 3 hours until all veggies are soft. Dissolve corn starch in cold milk and then add to crock pot, dump in can of cream-style corn and cook for 1 more hour.

Crock pot Easter ham

This is the easiest ham recipe ever. No joke. I had Easter dinner at my sister-in-law's house for many years and when I asked for the recipe, I was so entertained to find out that it was so easy! It's delicious and easy and you can spend your time on all the fancy side dishes for your festival meal instead. Enjoy!

1 2-3 lbs. sliced ham from the grocery store (sold as one package in the meat department, or you can get really thick slices from the deli counter)

1 can chunked pineapple in pineapple juice

Put ham in the crock pot (not on a trivet). Pour can of fruit and juice on top of meat. Cook on low for 6 hours. Transfer meat to a serving platter when it is done cooking and decorate around it with the tasty chunks of fruit.

(seriously, that's it! it's easy and yummy and the meat and fruit both taste fantastic!)

Crock Pot Brisket-- easy, medium and hard

I'm pretty sure everyone has a grandmother-aged person in their life that makes the "perfect brisket". It's moist, juicy, flavorful and pulls apart perfectly. We've tried and

tried to repeat the old world secrets, but somehow our ovens continue to dry out the meat or make it tough to chew. Look no further— grandma might not have used a slow cooker, but these recipes are very easy and have amazing results.

Here's a great little nugget for you: my mom always cut off the last inch of the brisket before cooking it. I figured it was because of how she trimmed off the fat, skimming the top of the cut of meat and then cutting off the chunk at the end. I asked her about it and she said that it was how her grandmother did it. So I asked my grandmother why her mom cooked the meat in that particular way and she said, "because her pan was too small, the meat never seemed to fit right so she cut off the end so the brisket would lay flat." It's funny how traditions begin.

If you are looking for a pulled beef sandwich to serve at a spring BBQ, fork apart the meat when it is done, then top it with your favorite BBQ sauce and serve it on a braided roll. Oh— was it mean to say BRAIDED ROLL to those of you celebrating Passover? My bad.

EASY difficulty brisket

1 3 lb. beef brisket

1 bottle italian dressing

Pour half the dressing over the brisket and let it marinate overnight. In the morning, move the meat into the slow cooker and top with the remaining dressing. Cook on low for 8 hours. Now, wasn't that easy?!

MEDIUM difficulty brisket

1 3 lb. brisket

1 medium-sized onion, sliced thin

1 12 oz. can of Coke (not diet)

1/2 c. ketchup

1 t. black pepper

1/2 t. cayenne pepper

pinch of salt

Place brisket into crock pot, use trivet if you have one. Surround meat with sliced onion. Mix together Coke and ketchup and pour on top of meat and onions. Sprinkle seasonings on everything. Cook for 8 hours on low or 4-5 hours on high.

If you want to vary the flavor, try using 12 oz. apple juice or 12 oz. of beer **INSTEAD** of the Coke.

HARD difficulty brisket

1 3 lb. brisket

1 t. of each seasonings: cracked black pepper, rosemary, paprika, parsley, celery seed

2-3 cloves garlic, chopped fine

1 t. olive oil

water

Rinse meat and pat dry. Using your fingers or a pastry brush, lightly coat meat with olive oil. Then mix together all seasonings and coat meat in dry rub. Let marinate overnight in the refrigerator. In the morning, take meat out and sprinkle with garlic. Heat up a pan and brown meat on all sides, then put meat in crock pot. Add enough water to the crock pot to cover the bottom of the pot. Also, if you have a trivet that fits in your crock pot, use that under the meat. Cook on low

for 6 hours.