

Renovation, Week Two: THX and Floors



Here's an easy way to free up space in your oven when you are making Thanksgiving dinner.

While most of you are probably brining your turkeys, whipping your cream, or stuffing that bird, we're being a little non-traditional with our family time this holiday season. Yes— we will still eat a full Thanksgiving dinner, but no... the renovation is not complete. No kitchen? No problem!

The goal this holiday weekend is to install about 600 square feet of hardwood floors in the kitchen (and throughout the family room). Last week, in [Week One](#), we stripped everything down to the subfloors. We received great news about our cabinets being ready ahead of schedule, but we need to get the wood down first!

At this point, most people think I'm crazy for doing so much

of the work ourselves, but it's been really therapeutic. Haven't you ever wanted to take a crow bar to some part of your own house?! The floors though– this was legit remodeling work. Lucky for me, my husband has a masters degree in pure awesomeness and together, with a little help from friends and family, we were able to get the job done.

But let's focus on what is important– what we are eating! Again– I have NO KITCHEN. I've got a workable sink in the basement, a stack of paper/plastic everything from Costco, and some prepped foods in the freezer.

Here's how Week Two panned out in our bellies. Thanksgiving dinner was the big challenge. I was all set to do [Crock Pot Turkey Legs](#)– it's a family favorite. But after checking three grocery stores for turkey legs with no success, I gave in and just bought cooked turkey meat. I did manage to make [Crock Pot Green Bean Casserole](#) and reheated some mashed potatoes. My boys wouldn't call it Thanksgiving dinner though if I didn't have the “secret” cranberry sauce. You know, the one that has the ridges on the sides from the shape of the can. I did find organic cranberry sauce this year that didn't have high fructose corn syrup in it, so that seemed like a win-win to me.



It's easy to keep all of

these ingredients on hand
for a delicious dinner
anytime!

On Friday and Saturday, we worked on THX dinner leftovers. I also made [Crock Pot Chili](#)– it's the easiest recipe ever. You might have also seen my [Crock Pot Tortellini Soup](#) on social media, that was a huge hit. I used [this recipe](#), but also added a can of white beans to add more protein. It's so easy and there was no prep work and no clean up. The ingredients for both of these meals are easy to keep on hand in the pantry and freezer and I recommend adding them to your next shopping trip.

You might not be remodeling this holiday season, but I'm guessing you too will have crazy days, impromptu gatherings and festive celebrations. You don't need a demolition to save yourself time and energy in the kitchen. Save time, cook slower. Savor the flavors and the moments.

[Crock Pot Creamy Potato Soup](#)



Today was the first day that actually felt like fall. I don't mean like a specialty coffee... I mean hooded sweatshirts, warm blankets, steamy bowls of soup and the sound of rustling leaves. And if you are lucky, you can enjoy all of those things at the same time.

Tonight's Crock Pot Creamy Potato Soup made me think of Friday night football games in high school. And cold walks on first dates. And craving ice cream on a cold winter's night. It's like everything that it supposed to feel cold on the outside, but makes you feel warm on the inside. That's how satisfying this soup tastes.

So I've already posted another version of [Crock Pot Potato Soup](#) already, but I like this one because it includes more vegetables. I've also posted [Crock Pot Parsnip and Potato Soup](#) because parsnip is my second favorite root vegetable. (*Bonus points if you know what my favorite is!*) I also have [Crock Pot Sweet Potato and Corn Chowder](#), if you prefer the orange to the white. I'm sensing a theme here! I do love potato soup and each recipe is tweaked a little different. I feel like tonight's Crock Pot Creamy Potato Soup is actually a culmination of my favorite things from each of these recipes... but I encourage you to mess around and figure out what your palate prefers with your potatoes.

Crock Pot Creamy Potato Soup

Serves 6-8

6 redskin potatoes, cubed but not peeled

3 parsnips, peeled and cubed

1 c. shredded carrots

4 stalks celery, sliced

1/2 sweet onion, diced

1 12 oz. can cream corn

4 cups vegetable broth

1 t. garlic powder

1/2 t. dried dill weed

1 t. dried basil leaves

up to 1 t. salt (can be added at the end, a little at a time, for flavor)

1 c. cold milk

2 rounded T. corn starch

Clean and prep all vegetables and add to the pot. Add broth and seasonings and give it all a good stir. Do not add milk or corn starch yet. Cook on low for 6 hours. Add corn starch to milk and dissolve, then add to the pot. Cook on high for one additional hour. Remove lid and let soup thicken a little bit before serving.

Summer Series, COMPLETE!



With the ocean and the inlet both easily accessible, there are many water sports to explore in the Outer Banks.

It felt like a hangover to wake up today. I rolled over and closed my eyes, groaning. It was barely 8 am and to do lists were already swirling in my head. This wasn't an alcohol-induced situation, it was the effect of knowing today was the last day of vacation.

So I took a deep breath and hopped out of bed. The optimistic side of me kicked in (probably because I could already smell coffee!) and I wasn't going to have a pity party for myself when there was a full day ahead. BAM. Back at it. Maybe it's just that I stayed up a little too late reading [Stir, by Jessica Fechter](#), sitting on the top balcony porch last night.

Since it's the last day, I did not have a plan to crock pot anything, but instead it was a feast of leftovers. I had planned well on quantities for meals and snack foods, but there was still enough to cover today's meals. Let's take a moment to reflect on the deliciousness of this week (CLICK ON EACH LINK FOR FULL POSTS):

[Day One: Menu and Shopping List](#)

[Day Two: Crock Pot Steamed Summer Vegetables](#)

[Day Three: Crock Pot Low Country Boil](#)

[Day Four: Crock Pot Peach Crumble](#) and [Crock Pot Grits](#)

[Day Five: Crock Pot White Ratatouille](#)

[Day Six: Crock Pot Seafood Paella](#)



Thank you for joining Dinner
Is A Crock on this Summer
Series adventure!

If this week of meals hasn't inspired you to [travel with your crock pot](#), or at least [buy a crock pot](#), then I'm disappointed. Maybe you don't want to cook every night when you are on vacation, but there is a reason you stay at a beach house and not a hotel— because you want the comforts of home, just in a different location. Next time you go on vacation, try cooking a few dinners all together, then sample the local fare at the restaurants the other days. If you want a maid and room service, you won't find it here. But the blessings and freedom of beach house vacations promises adventure and whim instead of turned down sheets and sample-sized soaps. It's a worthy trade off!

This has been an amazing journey with you, fans. While I certainly got more of tan than you did, and probably a little more rest and relaxation, I hope you have enjoyed the adventure. The [beach house we stayed at in the Outer Banks, known as Ooh La La](#), is available for rental– with spaces still available this year and already booking for next! I cannot stress enough the ease of staying at this location. We've vacationed at other places on the coast and this is by far my favorite so far. I would like to publicly say thank you to the owners for letting Dinner Is a Crock share [Ooh La La](#) with the world!

(SHAMELESS PLUG: IF YOU HAVE A RENTAL PROPERTY AND WOULD LIKE ME TO STAY THERE FOR A VACATION SERIES, I AM OPEN TO OPPORTUNITY! PLEASE EMAIL ME AT DINNERISACROCK@GMAIL.COM!)

Summer Series, Day Six: Seafood Paella



This one pot dish is literally named for being made in a pot. It's the original one-dish cuisine.

This, my friends. This is the quintessential dinner that melds together land and sea and balances the forces of nature to create an amazing meal that would make even mermaids and pirates cheer. With more protein than a Brazilian meat festival, this one pot recipe will make you lift your anchors and set full speed ahead toward the coast. And you'll thank me for it. I thanked me for it— I've never made this dish before, but with so much fresh seafood available here in the Outer Banks, it was a challenge I was eager to attempt and declare victory for all.

There are a few more steps than normal because of the complexity of textures in paella (pronounced PIE-Ay-uhhhh) so bear with me and I'll try to break it down step by step so you can recreate this on your next seaside adventure.

First, gather all of your ingredients. It's helpful to know what goes in at what point so you can simplify your timing.



1. Brown your boneless, skinless chicken thighs over medium-high heat to get a quick sear on the outside. The chicken will have plenty of time to finish cooking the whole way through when it's in the crock pot, but you want to seal in the flavor. After removing from heat, chop chicken into bite-size pieces.



2. Using the same skillet, brown the sliced andouille sausage quickly on both sides and remove from heat.



3. Put brown rice, seasonings, and fresh vegetables in the crock pot. Add broth and give it all a good stir. The turmeric and smoked paprika will flavor the entire dish but begins with this first step. Add bite-size pieces of chicken and cooked andouille sausage. Cook on low for six hours or until all liquid is absorbed.



4. After time is up, it's ok to remove the crock pot lid at this point and give everything a really good stir. Try to keep rice from sticking to the bottom of the crock pot.



5. Add seafoods– shrimp, sea scallops and clams. Be sure to properly clean your seafood before adding to the pot. A sandy clam does not add flavor! If you are peeling and deveining your own shrimp, you need [THIS TOOL](#). Seriously, just get one for yourself at the start of this trip. (You'll use it for the Crock Pot Low Country Boil as well.)

Cook on high for up to one hour– shrimp should be pink and clams should have all opened. You do not want to overcook seafood so try to be nearby for this last step.

And that's it! You have just mastered the Old World, cultivated classic of a seafood paella (technically a mixed paella because of the chicken, but let's focus on the gifts from the sea and the amazing local seafood markets located in the Outer Banks.)

Thank you to the owners of the [Ooh La La beach house](#) here in

Avon. This dish used many of the tools and cooking accessories and your stocked kitchen did not disappoint. I had everything I needed to prep, clean and cook all of my ingredients for this meal. This kitchen set-up made everything easy, including a spacious dishwasher to handle my mess!

Crock Pot Seafood Paella

Serves 6

1.5 cups brown rice

3 chicken thighs

7-8 oz andouille sausage

1 red bell pepper, sliced

2 stalks celery, sliced

1/2 onion, sliced

2 cloves garlic, minced

1 t. turmeric

1 t. smoked paprika

2 cups white wine

2 cups chicken broth

1 lb jumbo shrimp, peeled and deveined

1/2 lb bay scallops

1 dozen clams, in shells

Brown your boneless, skinless chicken thighs over medium-high heat to get a quick sear on the outside. The chicken will have plenty of time to finish cooking the whole way through when it's in the crock pot, but you want to seal in the flavor. After removing from heat, chop chicken into bite-size pieces. Using the same skillet, brown the sliced andouille sausage quickly on both sides and remove from heat. Put brown rice, seasonings, and fresh vegetables in the crock pot. Add broth and give it all a good stir. The turmeric and smoked paprika will flavor the entire dish but begins with this first step. Add bite-size pieces of chicken and cooked andouille sausage. Cook on low for six hours or until all liquid is absorbed. After time is up, it's ok to remove the crock pot lid at this point and give everything a really good stir. Try to keep rice from sticking to the bottom of the crock pot. Add seafoods— shrimp, sea scallops and clams. Be sure to properly

clean your seafood before adding to the pot. Cook on high for up to one hour– shrimp should be pink and clams should have all opened.

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.

Summer Series, Day Four: Crock Pot Grits

I might have found flirty peaches at the weekly Farmer's Market this morning, but we still need to have dinner, right?! Good thing I decided to make a big ol' batch of crock pot grits to cook low and slow all day. I mean, come on... it's three ingredients. That's barely even a recipe. So let me also tell you about the toppings I made for our grits bar tonight.



I like to make a simple

crock pot of grits and then provide a buffet of toppings!

After my morning adventure and an afternoon swim, I popped into the kitchen at [Ooh La La, our beach house for the week](#), to whip up some easy toppings for our crock pot grits. Personally, I love a good dish of [shrimp and grits](#) with just the right balance of textures and a kick of spice, but not everyone is as big a fan of this southern specialty. So I've found that it's better to make toppings and let people make their own concoction.

I have four tonight: 1. shrimp scampi 2. sauteed spinach 3. shredded cheddar cheese 4. maple syrup (but that last one stands alone for those people—AKA kids— that like their grits to be sweet instead of savory). Oh— and a couple adults added sriracha dribbles on top just to crank it up a notch!

This worked out to be a great easy dinner before going to the luau tonight. The what?! Oh yes, there is a luau every Tuesday night at the [Koru Village Resort and Spa](#). It was so much fun to have the kids swashbuckle with pirates, swim with mermaids and party with fire dancers!



So here's the quick recipe for tonight's dinner. We shared it with the owners of [Ooh La La, our beach house for the week](#). They are a fabulous local family that have really done an amazing job updating this vacation home! Since I've been blogging all week from here, I only thought it right to share

some of my cooking! Even the baby enjoyed the grits, and there is nothing better than a gooey grits and toothless grin!

Crock Pot Grits

Serves 12

3 cups stone ground grits (white or yellow)

11 cups water

1 t. salt

Put all ingredients in crock pot and give it a good stir. Cook on low for 8 hours– it's ok to stir it one or twice to make sure it cooks evenly.

Summer Series, Day Four:
Crock Pot Peach Crumble



Local peaches from the Farmers Market produced this delicious and tender dessert for tonight!

Another beautiful day here at [Ooh La La, our beach house for the week](#) in the Outer Banks, NC. I woke up early and decided to get out for a run since there are miles of sidewalks down the main road. It was damn hot out even at 8 am, but I managed my attempt to burn off some of last night's dinner. Remember that [Crock Pot Low Country Boil](#)? It was delicious but I was so full after all that food!

The weekly Farmer's Market here in Avon was more like a farm stand with a couple artists, but it was refreshing to see locals and travelers stopping by to support the event. Even in the heat, the produce looked fresh.

I brought back some interesting varieties of squash and eggplant that I'll cook up later this week, but I also bought half a dozen glorious juicy peaches that were begging me to buy them. I couldn't avoid eye contact. Such flirty little fruit. So I carefully selected my drupes and decided that dessert would be the next crock pot dish to make.



You can make this recipe with lots of different fruits—peach, plums, blueberries, strawberries, blackberries... anything that is juicy and has a good texture that will cook down. I wouldn't recommend trying it with melons or apples since their consistency would be too soft or too hard. It was interesting coming up with this recipe today since I didn't have my normal pantry to pick from, but this was a great way of using what I already brought and still making it work out. At home, I might have used flour and corn starch, but my boxed pancake mix worked just fine.

You can eat this crumble straight up while it's still warm. But those peaches are begging for some sweet company, so I would suggest serving it with ice cream or vanilla greek yogurt. If you want a little kick added to it, try pouring a drizzle of Rumchata on top of it for a really awesome finish.

Looks like I might need another run tomorrow morning after I annihilate this dessert tonight! Good thing [Ooh La La has a pool](#)... an evening swim might just do the trick instead so I can sleep in. It's a good thing we also brought our bicycles— I might try to take my kids out for a ride tomorrow. I thought it was going to be tough to haul all four bicycles, but my [new bike rack](#) actually worked out really well for the long trip.

I talked to the owner today and she mentioned that the house is still available in September and October when it's still hot here, but the tourist season slows down. It sounds like pure bliss to spend an autumn week down by the ocean with the hot days, but cooler nights. [CLICK HERE](#) and reserve your vacation before I beat you to it!

Crock Pot Peach Crumble

Serves 6

6 ripe peaches, sliced and pitted

2 T. maple syrup

1/2 c. pancake mix

1/3 c. steel cut oatmeal

1 stick salted butter, cold and cubed



Put peaches in the crock pot and add maple syrup and pancake mix. Stir together until moist but not gooey.



Sprinkle oats on top of mixture and then place cubes of butter across top. Cook on low for four hours. Serve with ice cream or greek yogurt.

Crock Pot Loaded Potato Casserole



Who doesn't love a baked potato with all the toppings?! The problem is, I rarely ever keep baking-sized potatoes in the pantry. ([Although has anyone ever used one of these?!](#)) So this recipe is a great way to fulfill that salty and savory craving with items that you can keep on hand. I used refrigerated shredded potatoes, but you can totally make this

dish using the frozen kind instead. The quantity and

directions stay the same.

My mother-in-law used to make a potato casserole like this and my recipe is totally inspired by her dish. I remember lots of festive gatherings, summer BBQs, and family dinners with second and third helpings of potato casserole. Some nights, I'd rather just have this as my main dish with a side salad... and save room for dessert! Family recipes are the best—because they satisfy your soul and not just your appetite.

Crock Pot Potato Casserole

Serves 8-12



You can keep these ingredients on hand for an easy side dish anytime.

2 lb. shredded potatoes (just wanted to share... [I use THESE](#))

8 oz. sour cream

2 cups shredded cheddar cheese

1/2 onion, chopped

1 10.5 oz can Cream of Celery Soup

1 cup bacon crumbles

Put all ingredients in crock pot and give it a stir until everything is combined. Cook on low for 4 hours.

Crock Pot Sausage-Stuffed Portobello Mushrooms



These 5-ingredient stuffed caps are a delicious main or side dish!

Two tips with today's amazing recipe.....

1. Find a ground sausage that you like. It can be a prepped tube from the grocery store or a visit to a special deli or anything in between. But when you find it, it becomes a mainstay in your home for breakfast, lunch or dinner. No

endorsement here, but my personal favorite is the country pork sausage from The Fresh Market. I also like that they shape it into the face of a pig each day and that makes me smile. But I really like the combinations of spices that gives it a little kick and a lot of taste.

2. Learn how to clean a mushroom. Because it is a sad sad day when you didn't REALLY get all the dirt out of it and then after 4-6 hours your dinner actually tastes more like mud than anything else. That's disgusting.

[How to Clean a Mushroom Cap](#) *Here's my step by step process to clean a portobello mushroom properly. Sorry for the footage— I had the phone propped on my paper towel holder, but I promise to start uploading better videos soon!*



The BEFORE mushrooms are on the left and the AFTER ones are beautiful on the right.

Now that your mushrooms are prepped, you just need to mix together the ingredients, much like making a meatloaf. This dish will taste much more complex than the basic ingredients because of all the seasonings in the sausage— so remember to pick a good one.

Crock Pot Sausage-Stuffed Portobello Mushrooms

Serves 2-3

4-6 portobello mushroom caps, properly cleaned of skin and “gills”

1/2 c. shredded gruyere cheese

1/2 c. shredded white cheddar cheese

1/2 cup panko bread crumbs

1 egg

Prep and wash mushrooms and then put in crockpot with the smooth side down and the underside facing UP. Mix the remaining ingredients in a separate bowl and then form into patties, much like a hamburger.



Place each patty into each mushroom cap and smush just a little so that the two things join together. Do not push so hard that you break the mushroom cap, but if you just did- it's ok. A broken mushroom tastes just the same.



Cook on high for 3-4 hours. The filling will cook through and brown just a little on top.

Crock Pot Pattypan Squash Salad



While this vegetable might look like a flying saucer, pattypan squash is a wonderful seasonal favorite!

Summer is almost here which means it is officially BBQ season! I love starting side dishes in my crock pot and then finishing

them with fresh veggies and herbs. So for this past weekend's festivities, I picked up some pattypan squash at my local farmer's market. I think they are so cute and fun to eat! I also like them better than regular yellow squash because in a pattypan, the seeds are much smaller. The shape of the vegetable sort of resembles a flying saucer or a spin-top toy.

If you get really small pattypan squash, you can just cook them whole, which is a beautiful presentation. But I bought bigger ones, so I went ahead and cut them up into bite-sized cubes. The prep for this dish was so minimal, I had it done in about a minute.

You can use this vegetable in a number of different ways. It holds its texture well when steamed or stir-fried. I cooked it in the crock pot while I ran some errands and then let it cool completely before mixing it into my salad.

Happy summer BBQs!



Try this side dish at your next summer BBQ!

Crock Pot Pattypan Squash Salad

Serves 10-12 sides dishes

8 Pattypan squash, three-inches in diameter each

2 T. butter

2 green onions, diced

1/3 c. banana pepper rings (hot or mild)

1 8 oz. jar of marinated artichoke hearts (DO NOT DRAIN!)

1 c. sliced carrots

1/2 c. shredded guyere cheese

Cut squash into bite size pieces and put in crock pot, add 2 T. butter distributed across vegetables and cook on low for two hours. Let cool, then mix with remaining ingredients and chill for 2-4 hours. The marinade from the artichoke hearts serves as your dressing.