

Crock Pot Beet Borscht

Dre's got nothing on me—my beets are fresh! Ha! Get it? See what I did there.



Beet borscht tastes great with a few boiled potatoes and a scoop of cold sour cream.

There is nothing that makes me think of the my family history more than a steaming hot bowl of neon pink soup. No, this isn't a serving of chemical warfare, it's a fresh and sweet, soothing bowl of beet borscht. My grandma still makes this and at most Jewish Deli's you can usually find it on the menu right next to corned beef, chopped liver and matzah balls. What can I say? My roots are authentic and so is my cuisine. Except grandma never made this dish in the crock pot!

Now if this was truly home cooking, I would use fresh beets, but I've found that the canned version works just as well and the pink juice adds a certain flavor feature as well. Grandma taught me to cut sliced beets into strips instead of buying the canned variety of matchsticks. Somehow the matchstick ones are too mushy. (According to grandma, of course.)

Authentically, I would hand slice some cabbage, but I love the fine style of angel hair cabbage that I can purchase at my

grocery store. It cooks up quicker and doesn't contrast the texture of the beets as much.



Keep a few of these items on hand in your pantry and you can have beet borscht anytime you want!

If you make this dish with fresh beets, just clean, peel and shred them before throwing them in the crock pot. The taste is very similar to this recipe, but the beautiful pink broth cannot be matched! It truly is extraordinary. But that pink color will most likely stain your cutting board. And your fingers. And your countertops, before you even realize the glow has been dripping!

This soup can be made vegetarian or meat-based. In fact, try cooking down beef bones or chicken bones to make your broth instead of using store bought. I know, I know... this meal is so "processed", but hey, it's a weeknight, and sometimes even the Crock Pot Queen needs a a quick meal to fix.

Give this a try and keep an open mind. Put on those Dre headphones and drop the beat. But not the beet. It will probably stain.

Crock Pot Beet Borscht

Serves 8

2 15 oz. cans of sliced beets (do not drain)

1/2 sweet onion, sliced thin

1 package finely sliced cabbage (approx. 6 cups)

2 bay leaves

2 cloves of garlic, chopped

1 32 oz. box vegetarian stock

8 redskin potatoes

8 T. sour cream

Slice the onion and put in the crock pot with the cabbage, bay leaves, and garlic cloves. Drain the cans of beets into the crock pot and then cut the sliced beets into strips. Add stock and cook on high for 3-4 hours. Clean and quarter the potatoes and bowl separately. To each serving of soup, add a few chunks of boiled potatoes and a dollop of sour cream. Borscht is also refreshingly delicious served cold.

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 refrigerator 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 Spiked Pear Sauce

For years, I've been making my [crock pot spicy applesauce](#) to serve with my Chanukah latkes, but this year I wanted to try something new. But I like a little festiveness in my fruit sauce. Today's recipe is so easy and simple, but creates a smooth mouth feel and just enough twist to raise an eyebrow or two.

Try this on your latkes, but also serve it warm over vanilla ice cream or on a berry cobbler. It has cooked long enough to be tamed down for kids, too, but still keeps true to the spiked flavor. I'm quite certain my family will approve of this dish!

Crock Pot Spiked Pear Sauce

4 ripe bartlett pears, peeled, cored, and chopped into large chunks

1/3 c. Honey Jack Daniels (plus one shot to consume while cooking!)

Put ingredients in crock pot, on low, for 4 hours. After cooking, use immersion blender to puree into a sauce. Enjoy!

Thanksgiving Survival Guide

Happy Thanksgiving, fans! I thought about a long post about family and friends and how food brings us all together... but who has time for that?! Let's keep it simple. I'm all in for a good meal, but I need a good drink to start. Let's begin there...

ADULTS-ONLY Caramel Apple Cider

1/2 gallon apple cider
2 cups caramel flavored vodka

Heat on low and serve to every family member.

Then, here are some quick sides to add to your festivities:

Green bean
casserole: <http://dinnerisacrock.wpenginepowered.com/2010/02/24/green-bean-casserole/>

Creamy corn:
<http://dinnerisacrock.wpenginepowered.com/2010/04/26/crock-pot-creamy-corn/>

Spicy applesauce:
<http://dinnerisacrock.wpenginepowered.com/2010/11/22/crock-pot-spicy-applesauce/>

Stuffing
balls: <http://dinnerisacrock.wpenginepowered.com/2010/06/11/crock-pot-stuffing-balls/>

I've never made a turkey in a crock pot. But I have roasted a chicken, so if you only need to serve 2-4 people, pick a different bird and try this instead: <http://dinnerisacrock.wordpress.com/2010/03/12/crock-pot-roasted-chicken/> This link also includes my curried chicken salad which is an excellent idea for your turkey leftovers, too!

Wishing you and yours a happy and festive celebration. Now pass me some of that apple cider!

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.

Crock Pot Dirty Rice

Do you ever stock up on meat when it's on sale and freeze it, only to then have to come up with a meal that specifically uses that "great deal" before it gets freezer burnt?! Yeah, that's what I'm going through today. I thawed out a package of sweet italian ground sausage. I'm sure I bought it with some sort of intention... but then it got buried in the freezer under half a dozen packages of frozen vegetables. After making winter vegetable soup, I found my meat stash and now had to face the task of figuring out what to make with the ground sausage.

Normally, you can substitute ground sausage in most ground beef or ground turkey recipes. It makes great chili, an incredible lasagna and even is creative in meatloaf. But I wanted to work on a recipe that truly highlighted the spices of the sweet italian sausage. You can use any variety of sausage, just understand that the flavors will ultimately completely change up the overall dish— so if you want hot sausage or you want to un-case a beer bratwurst, that's totally fine. You can play with the flavors by changing up your meat selection— or using up something you find in the bottom of your freezer!

So tonight, we're having crock pot dirty rice. I love that this dish uses the word "dirty", but it's so true. This is the antithesis of steamed, white rice. It muddles together all the flavors from the spicy meat and the sweet vegetables and somehow the tomato paste marries it all together. Yes, that's what this is— a "dirty" "marriage" of flavors. Ha! I hope you enjoy this classic spicy one-pot meal and that it warms up your winter night.

1 lb sausage, crumbled and browned

3 cups water

1 cup uncooked long grain rice

1/2 large onion, finely chopped

1/2 large red bell pepper, finely chopped

1/2 large yellow bell pepper, finely chopped

3 stalks finely chopped celery

1 15 oz. can kidney beans, not drained

1 6 oz. can tomato paste

1 beef bouillion cube

1 tsp salt

1/2 tsp red pepper flakes

1 T. chopped fresh parsley

Brown meat and put in crock pot first. Then using same pan, brown onions and peppers until soft, then add to crock pot. Add remaining ingredients, except for parsley. Stir. Cook on low for 4 hours. Serve into bowls and sprinkle with fresh parsley.

Crock Pot Sweet Potato Soup

I've always been a fan of our grill... really, for two reasons. 1. In the summertime, it's a great way to eat healthy and not heat up the kitchen and 2. when we grill, my husband is usually the one cooking! Since it's been such a mild winter,

we've been taking advantage of the unseasonably warm evenings and grilling our food. But since local produce isn't as plentiful in January, I've been getting creative.

So I've been grilling sweet potatoes. Sure, they get their glory at Thanksgiving when they are smothered and covered by marshmallows or syrup or sugar. Sometimes they even make a repeat performance at Christmas or Easter or Passover, but my new absolute favorite way to eat a sweet potato is by grilling it to perfection.



It's so easy, let me tell you the few easy steps... Wash your sweet potatoes. Poke fork holes all over. Wrap sweet potato in aluminum foil. Grill on med-high heat for one hour, turning the sweet potato halfway through. That's it! When the sweet vibrant goodness is done, it will be easy to squeeze the flesh with tongs. Please be cautious though, sometimes the sweet juices will run out of the foil (and I don't want you to get burned).

So a couple nights ago, I grilled five sweet potatoes. I figured we would eat the leftovers so I made a couple extra. And these extra potatoes became the inspiration for tonight's new recipe! With a few ingredients I already had on hand, I was able to literally "whip together" this amazing meal. This crock pot sweet potato soup is thick and hearty and even though soup might not be fresh and exciting for a winter meal, adding in the flavor from the grill really makes a difference.

2 medium sweet potatoes, already cooked in grill or oven, cooled and then skinned

3 c. chicken broth

1/2 c. [caramelized onions](#)

1/4 t. nutmeg

1/4 t. chili powder

1/4 t. celery seed

1/4 t. curry powder

1 clove garlic, minced

1/2 c. heavy cream

Put all ingredients (except heavy cream) in crock pot, stir and then cook on low for 3-4 hours. Use a hand blender and puree mixture until smooth, then stir in heavy cream. Serve hot with a tiny sprinkle of nutmeg or curry on top.

Crock Pot Caramelized Onions

I can't believe I haven't published this recipe for you yet! I make this once a month and then use it in other dishes. This is so easy and tasty and lasts for up to a month in the refrigerator— unless you are like me and use it all up first! Three pounds of onions fits in a one quart plastic container when cooked. Make sure the lid shuts air tight (tupperware, rubbermaid, gladware, mason jars, etc.).

Suggested uses for caramelized onions: put a scoop in any dish

that you usually would use fresh chopped onions, like meatloaf, hamburgers or potato soup) or make it into super easy french onion soup– put a scoop in a bowl, cover with beef broth. Then put a crostini on top and some cheese and broil until cheese is melted. Seriously– french onion soup in five minutes or less!

You will save so much time if you take 8 hours and make this in advance. Enjoy the extra time and the extra flavor!

3 lb. yellow onions, sliced 1/4 inch thick

1 stick butter

Put onion slices into the crock pot. Put one stick butter on top. Cook on low for 7-8 hours. Cool. Store in airtight container in the refrigerator for up to one month.

Crock Pot Yogurt

Typically, we don't cook dairy items in the crock pot, especially not on low, because we don't want to run the risk of spoilage. But when you are making yogurt, this is exactly what you want to happen! I was skeptical of making yogurt in the crock pot, but a friend of mine asked me to give it a go, so I did. And I'm thrilled with this delicious, healthy snack!

There are so few ingredients in this that you won't believe how good it will actually turn out. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

1. You need time to make this recipe... there are three separate steps. I started mine at 11 am and it was finally done at midnight.

2. It sounds silly, but you actually need to buy yogurt in order to make yogurt. Much like a sourdough bread, you need a “starter” to get the process going and plain yogurt has the live cultures needed to make this work. Once you make your first big batch of crock pot yogurt, you can save the last cup of it to use in the next batch and then the next and the next...

3. Regular yogurt is TART! But you don't need to add high fructose corn syrup, food dyes, sugar or junk to make this yogurt yummy. But be prepared that your first taste will be fresh tasting.

4. This is not the recipe to try and be homemade and low-fat. Use whole milk and yogurt to have the best final product. But it's worth it and one serving is a great snack or breakfast, especially when you use a variety of add-ins to adapt the flavor.

Ingredients:

1/2 gallon whole milk

1 c. plain yogurt

3 T. honey (local, if possible)

1 T. vanilla

Pour milk into crock pot and cook on low for 2.5 hours. Turn crock pot off and let it sit undisturbed on the counter for 3 hours. Then add in yogurt and stir into lumps are gone. Cover crock pot with a big dish towel to keep all moisture inside and let it sit for another 8 hours. Add honey and vanilla to the yogurt and stir. The yogurt is now finished and should be transferred to an air-tight container and stored in the refrigerator until eaten.

Save the last cup of this batch to use at the starter yogurt in your next batch.

Other great add-ins would be cut-up strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, canned crushed pineapple, chocolate chips, jelly/jam or any combination of all these great flavors!

(This recipe is based off of a fellow blogger's *A Year of Slow Cooking*.)