

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 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 Scandinavian 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 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 Bread Pudding



This crock pot bread pudding makes a great breakfast or dessert!

If you could smell my house right now, it is sweet and a little spicy with a creaminess swirling around with every breath. Somehow, it is like a combination of slow Sunday mornings and early weekday diner breakfasts. If you are preparing your house for the Jewish holiday of Passover– this is the ultimate way of using up the last of your *chametz* (leavened bread). You can use any combination of plain breads, but I'd recommend using white, wheat, french, italian... even leftover hamburger or hot dog buns if you've got them. Honestly, this might be for dessert, but if I had more bread to use, I would totally make it again for breakfast.

As this time of year seems to fill with baby and wedding showers in preparation for summer celebrations, I would also absolutely recommend making this to share at a brunch. Since it only takes three hours, you can start it when you wake up and be ready to entertain guests with ease. For my male readers and/or sports fanatics– you might be spending too many

nights staying up and watching March Madness basketball games; start the following day with this hearty dish to help wake you up and fill you up (and maybe even absorb that last bit of “adult beverage” festering in your belly).

So no matter what category you might fit into from this post, I think you all will fall in love with this sweet dish. Enjoy!

6 c. cubed bread

8 eggs, beaten

4 cups milk

1/4 c. sugar

1 t. cinnamon

pinch nutmeg

1 t. vanilla

2 T. maple syrup

1/2 c. raisins

Throw all the bread cubes into the crock pot first. Then, in a separate bowl, mix together the eggs, milk, sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg and vanilla. Pour mixture onto the bread crumbs and make sure all pieces are coated. In another separate (small) bowl, mix together the raisins and maple syrup and then sprinkle the coated fruit on top of the swelling bread in the crock pot. Cook on high for 2.5 to 3 hours. You want to make sure the eggs are cooked through and there isn't any liquid left.

Crock Pot Shrimp and Grits

Anytime I make shrimp, I always feel the need to call everyone “Bubba” and watch a repeat of Forrest Gump. I love the scene where Bubba lists off “shrimp is the fruit of the sea. You can barbecue it, boil it, broil it, bake it, saute it. Dey’s uh, shrimp-kabobs, shrimp creole, shrimp gumbo. Pan fried, deep fried, stir-fried. There’s pineapple shrimp, lemon shrimp, coconut shrimp, pepper shrimp, shrimp soup, shrimp stew, shrimp salad, shrimp and potatoes, shrimp burger, shrimp sandwich. That- that’s about it.” But Bubba forgot about one of my favorites– shrimp and grits.

Living in the South, recipes for grits are as common as dinner rolls– you can have traditional ones, flavorful ones, different recipes for breakfast, lunch or dinner and no matter how you fix it, it’s good. Depending where you go in the South, grits take on different traditions. In Charleston, the beginning of the grits is a few pieces of bacon and that has become a common trend across the country; the smokiness of the bacon is a nice balance against the other flavors. I’ve read that grits is actually the official state food of South Carolina. Maybe we should petition to make it an official food of our whole country!

I prefer this recipe because it’s not too spicy and has a lot of flavor without being overwhelming. Keeping it simple makes it easy to serve for any meal of the day or as a special side dish. If you’d like to spice it up, add a few drops of Tobasco to the whole mix or to your own bowl.

4 cups water or chicken broth

1 c. quick-cooking grits, uncooked

2 garlic cloves, minced

1/2 medium onion, chopped

1 lb small shrimp, peeled and cleaned, vein removed

2 T. butter

1 c. shredded cheddar cheese

1 can diced tomatoes, drained

1 t. Worcestershire sauce

1/2 t. red pepper flakes (optional)

Start by putting the broth, salt and grits in the pot. Most of the cooking needs to happen to these three ingredients. Cook on low for 6-8 hours. Saute the onion and garlic in the 2 tablespoons butter until it's all tender and cooked through, then add the shrimp for another 4-5 minutes of sauteing or until the shrimp are no longer pink. Add this mixture to the grits along with the cheese, red pepper flakes and can of diced tomatoes. Cook for another hour on low.

Crock Pot Bean Medley

We're going to a BBQ at my brother's house this weekend and since the assumption is that I'll bring something from the crockpot, I know I need to come up with something tasty and creative. The catch is that I don't really want to go grocery shopping today. So, I'm diving into the pantry in the hopes that I will surface with a plan and an amazing side dish. I also want to make this dish over night so that it is ready to go in the morning.

Baked beans are a very typical BBQ side dish, but I would like to make a bean dish that isn't brown and smokey or looks like it's was dumped into a bowl and served. Beans are an easily accessible food– even if they look like they were prepared a little different, everyone still usually takes a scoop to eat. This combination is a nice variation because it is more colorful and the light colors are a nice balance for spring. Enjoy!

NOTE: Assume that each can is about 15 ounces. This recipe works best in a 6-quart pot. Feel free to divide all ingredients in half if you are not cooking for a large gathering of people, a sports team or a small army.

2 cans black beans, drained and rinsed

2 cans dark red kidney beans, drained and rinsed

2 cans great northern or cannellini beans, drained and rinsed

2 cans sweet corn kernels, drained

8 oz. frozen cut green beans

1/2 medium onion, chopped

1/2 red bell pepper

1/4 c. apple cider vinegar

1/4 c. brown sugar

1/2 t. celery seed

1/2 t. oregano

1/2 t. black pepper

3 T. ketchup

3 T. tomato paste

1 T. brown or dijon mustard

Drain and rinse all the beans before putting them in the crockpot. Add the rest of the veggies. Mix together the brown sugar, apple cider vinegar, tomato paste, mustard, ketchup and seasonings and dump in on everything in the crock pot. Give it one good stir and then set it on high for 3 hours or low for 5-6.

Crock Pot Escalloped Cabbage Casserole

My husband's family use to have this amazing tradition; every Wednesday night we would all go to his grandmother's house for dinner. Gaga's recipes usually start with butter or oil and a little salt and pepper and from there, it could be chicken or beef or vegetables or any number of simply wonderful simple dishes. But one of my favorites is Gaga's cabbage casserole.

Every time Gaga made this, I knew that the kitchen would be uncomfortably warm from the oven being on and that it would taste so good that there would rarely be leftovers. This dish doesn't even taste like cabbage, it tastes like fluffy goodness that you can say is actually good for you. Save yourself the perspiration and make this dish in your crock pot instead. If you want to finish the casserole off, remove the crock and place it under the broiler for a couple minutes, just so the top layer crisps.

This dish is simple and the salt and pepper really give it most of its flavor, so it's great to make as a complement to pretty much any meat. It's not a main dish, but it will

probably be a favorite! I wouldn't recommend freezing this casserole, but refrigerating it and reheating it is fine.

1/2 head cabbage

1 sleeve of saltine crackers (if you want it to taste more buttery, use a Ritz style cracker instead)

milk

3 T. olive oil

salt and pepper

Shred the cabbage, the smaller the pieces, the better. Put the crackers in a zipper bag and smash them till they are itty bitty, but not powder. Layer the cabbage and then the cracker crumbs in the crock pot; in between layers drizzle about 1 T. of olive oil and a pinch each of salt and pepper. When all of the cabbage, crackers, seasonings and oil have been layered, pour milk into the crock pot until it almost reaches the top layer, but not quite. It usually takes about 4 cups of milk. Cook on high for 3 hours. There shouldn't be much liquid left when the casserole is done— the crackers absorb most of it, but make sure that your cabbage is soft, it shouldn't be crunchy at all.

Enjoy this with pretty much anything. Gaga would be proud if you made this on a Wednesday night at your house, too.

Crock Pot Pomme de Tara

A friend of mine wants to use her crock pot more, but has an allergy to tomatoes. After doing a little research, I agreed

with her– most crock pot recipes seem to have some sort of tomato or tomato-based product in them! It is an injustice that my friend should not be able to embrace easy crock pot cooking more often. So, my next few recipes will definitely not be red. And if it's just that you don't like tomatoes, these might just become some of your new favorites too.

This is an easy potato casserole that gets jazzed up by the cheese and chips. Since the french word for potato is “pomme de terre”, I am honoring my friend Tara with this recipe for “Pomme de Tara”. Enjoy! ☐

(Is there a recipe you'd like to see or an ingredient you'd like to avoid?? Click on my contact page and send me a note– I'm happy to post something just for YOU!)

6-8 potatoes, diced

1 onion, chopped

4 T. butter, melted

1 c. milk

1 c. sour cream

1-2 garlic cloves, chopped fine

1 t. parsley

salt and pepper

1 cup Cool Ranch Doritos– crunched up into little bitty pieces

1 cup shredded cheddar cheese

Put potatoes and onions in the crockpot first. In a separate bowl, mix together melted butter, milk, sour cream and seasonings. Pour mixture over potatoes and onions and stir. Cook on low for 6 hours. Turn pot off and mix shredded cheese and Doritos into pot, but don't overstir– you don't want your

soft potatoes to turn into mashed potatoes. Feel free to top this with crumbled bacon, chives or green onions. Makes a great side dish for breakfast, lunch or dinner!

Crock Pot Sassy Meatballs

I'm too excited about tomorrow's dinner to wait until morning to post this. It's funny— I have been posting all these recipes that are hearty and healthy, but mostly vegetable-based. Not this one! For all you meat lovers, this is simple, sassy and super! (Thank you to my friend BBM for introducing me to this sauce.) This recipe is fantastic to throw together for any occasion. It makes a great appetizer, can be thrown on egg noodles for dinner or on little crusty rolls as sandwiches. While it only has a few ingredients in it, the flavors mingle together in a tangy, unique way. Whether you serve it with toothpicks or forks, you'll be pleased by how little efforts it takes to make great taste.

(Start by making your own meatballs using 1 lb beef, 1 lb turkey, 2 eggs, 1 T. chopped parsley and 1/2 c. breadcrumbs. Mix it all together, form little balls and then bake them on a cookie sheet at 400 degrees for about 25 minutes. I'm going to make these tonight and then do the crock potting tomorrow at lunchtime. Or, if you prefer, you can totally buy frozen meatballs and use those instead. I won't tell!)

2 lb. meatballs

8 oz. grape jelly

1 jar Heinz chili sauce

1 can pineapple chunks, drained

1 green pepper, diced

2 T. fresh minced parsley

Put all solids into the crockpot. Mix jelly and chili sauce together and then pour into crockpot. Cook 4-6 hours on low.