

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.

Crock Pot Cherry Pie Oatmeal



This dish is a perfect weekend breakfast!

This was a crazy weekend! School is back in session, the weather is still warm, and my calendar is booked. I love it. It's this type of crazy that makes me smile— and sleep well! But when I wake up, it feels like I'm set on low for hours. So I decided on Friday night that I would whip up a batch of overnight oatmeal to help brighten up my weekend morning.

When people talk about having a stocked pantry, oatmeal is pretty much a staple. Steel cut, instant, quick oats... there are lots of kinds and they are all pretty basic. I happen to have steel cut oats right now, so that's what I used, but in other recipes, like my [Crock Pot Purple Oatmeal](#), I use regular oats, too. Another staple that I keep on hand, are frozen fruits. They work great in smoothies, but also are the perfect addition to overnight crock pot oatmeal.

There are very few ingredients in this recipe, but the combination is well worth waking up for in the morning. You can handle sunrise, too, if you start it with something that tastes like pie.

Crock Pot Cherry Pie Oatmeal

Serves 6

1 1/3 c. steel cut oats

2 1/2 c. water

1 14 oz. can [sweetened condensed milk](#)

2 c. frozen cherries

Put all ingredients in the crock pot and cook on "KEEP WARM" setting for 8 hours. Serve with greek yogurt and a sprinkle of [cinnamon sugar](#).

Summer Series, Day Five: Crock Pot White Ratatouille

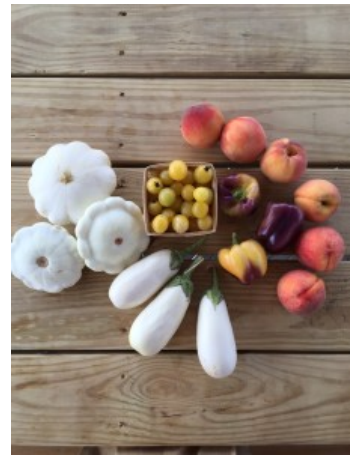


I'm seriously considering moving to the beach. Sunshine, seafood, salty air... it's all good for my soul. As long as I have a good internet connection, I might just be willing to carry my crock pots up and down the east coast and showcase local flavor and attractions. **Ok, I'm putting it out there— 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

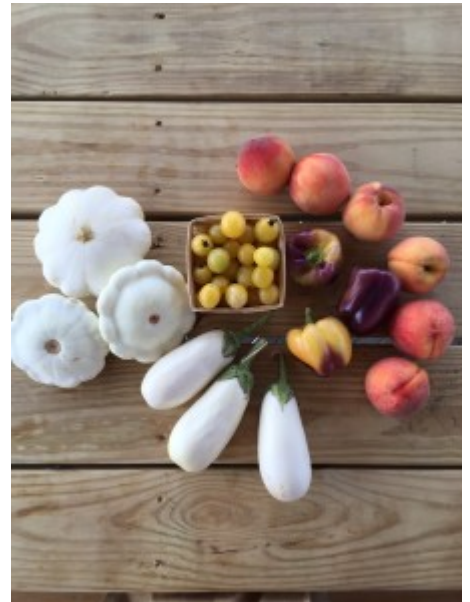


Local peaches from the Farmers Market produced this delicious and tender dessert for tonight!

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 the 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 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 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.

Crock Pot Dulce de Leche



I'm pretty sure this Crock Pot Dulce de Leche would be good on just about anything!

This is the easiest dessert I've ever made. And while this recipe is not new or even really my own creation, I want to share it with you because of WHY I made it, and not just the HOW.

Here's a little story about my family. My youngest son has some crazy food allergies and while he is awesome and outgoing and resilient, he almost always has to miss out on desserts like cake at friends' birthday parties, free cone day at the local ice cream parlor, treats at school and after holiday

services, and always has a heavy sigh when a waiter or waitress says, "would you like to see the dessert menu tonight?"

So for my sweet boy, I started learning to cook desserts. I don't like to bake, but there's something to be said about life being short, so eat dessert first. I bought an [ice cream maker](#) that attaches to my stand up mixer and learned how to make a basic vanilla and then jazz it up with fruit. I learned how to make a [buttermilk pound cake](#) that is an easy crowd-pleaser. I found [chocolate chunks](#) that are good enough to eat alone.

But this crock pot dulce de leche recipe is life-changing. It is simple and sweet and I plan on making it way more often than I probably should! DISCLAIMER: THIS STUFF IS HIGHLY ADDICTIVE~ I want to put it in everything. My coffee. My pound cake. Drizzled on a waffle. Scooped onto ice cream. I plan on making teacher gifts with this stuff, holiday cookie exchange treats, and by mid-summer, I'll probably figure out how to make a pretty delicious dulce de leche martini (for me, not my son!).

I hope someday my kids appreciate the lengths I went to in order to provide them the opportunity to eat well. I like to tell them that I've ruined them for marriage by cooking every night and that their future spouses will hate me for focusing so much on the importance of the family dinner. But I won't apologize for it.



With just one ingredient, dessert is almost ready!

Crock Pot Dulce de Leche

servings: unknown (how much of this is too much?!)

2 14 oz cans sweetened condensed milk

water

Pour sweetened condensed milk into mason jars that will fit in your crock pot. Put lids and rings on tightly, then place in crock pot. Fill crock pot with enough water to cover lids entirely. Cook on low for 10 hours. The ingredient will turn from white to a beautiful caramel color. Turn crock pot off and let cool before removing cans to prevent burning your fingers! Mason jars will be shelf stable, but keep in refrigerator once you open it.

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 and 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 Cream of Mushroom Soup](#)



Try different varieties of mushrooms in your soup to enhance the flavor!

Did you have a great weekend? Yeah, I met a real fungi.

Haha, fungi humor still cracks me up. Get it? Get it? Funguy?! Bwahhh ha ha ha. This recipe calls for at least three different kinds of mushrooms because I love the variety of texture. If you don't like mushrooms, don't make this recipe, make a different soup like [Crock Pot Creamy Tomato Soup](#) or [Crock Pot Cream of Celery and Leek Soup](#). This mushroom soup is earthy and pungent in all the right ways.

You can get mushrooms all year round, but I suggest you try different varieties each time you make this. For example... your standard button mushroom is a great basic, but play around with oysters, enochi, portabello, or bunapi. No, those are not made up words, they are varieties of mushrooms!

This recipe requires very little measuring, which might make some of you uncomfortable. But, rest assured, that you would have to work so very hard to mess this up. Don't over season the soup— it's better to add a little salt and pepper at the end instead of at the beginning.

I like my mushroom soup to be smooth and creamy so I use [a](#)

[hand blender](#). If you like a more chunky soup, then try pulling 2 cups of the soup out and pureeing that, then add it back in. The soup will still feel smooth, but will retain the majority of chunks for bigger texture.

Try adding in other veggies for a more full flavor, if the mushroom intensity is too much for you. You can add chopped celery, green onions, chopped carrots, a can of green chiles or even some corn to adapt the flavor. I am making a simple version of this soup, but feel free to add more fun to your fungi as you experiment.

Crock Pot Cream of Mushroom Soup

Serves 6-8

4 cups mushrooms, cleaned, stems discarded, and caps cut into bite-sized pieces

32 oz. vegetable broth

2 cloves garlic, minced

4 sprigs fresh thyme (just the leaves)

1/4 sweet onion

2 cups milk

2 T. corn starch

Add all of the ingredients into the crock pot EXCEPT the milk and corn starch. Cook on low for 3-4 hours. With one hour left to cook, dissolve corn starch in the milk and then stir into the soup. Puree the soup using [a hand blender](#) until texture is smooth. The soup should thicken in the last hour and then a bit more once served. Add salt and pepper as needed once cooking is complete.