

Crock pot broth

Last night I cooked an entire crock pot of food with no intention of eating it anytime this week. This is the beauty of the crock pot! I know that next week I want to make a big batch of chicken soup. But, I don't want it to be a day long project, I need it to be an easy meal.

So last night, I crock potted four boneless, skinless chicken breasts, 1 c. baby carrots, half an onion, 1 T. parsley and a little salt and pepper. I set it on high for 4 hours. When it was done, all the broth went into plastic containers for the freezer and the chicken and carrots are in the refrigerator for lunches today. Voila— when I want to make my soup, I simply put the brick of frozen chicken broth into a pot and let it simmer back to soup. Then I can add noodles or rice or more vegetables and have my meal done in a matter of minutes.

Homemade chicken broth is a healthier alternative to using boxed broths or bouillion. Store-bought bases are much higher in sodium and usually have that weird yellow tinge. This easy recipe means that my soup will taste flavorful and look authentic.

You can do this recipe with beef as well, but when the broth cools, I would suggest skimming the fat off of the top. BL/SK chicken breasts are very lean and don't leave much to skim off, but since most cuts of beef have a higher fat content, you would want to remove some the excess. You can also make vegetable broth (try using carrots, celery, leeks, onions and parsley) or fish broth (from any part of the fish) in your crock pot.

After you make your broth, your chicken, beef, fish or veggies are cooked very soft, but most of the flavor has been boiled out. But, the meat is a great texture to add sauces too, try

forking the meat apart and adding BBQ sauce for pulled sandwiches or chopping up chicken for curried chicken salad (see roasted chicken post for recipe). The vegetables can be glazed or broiled and served as a side dish with any future meal.

Hopefully, this post has you thinking ahead to future meals and you'll let your crock pot do your base preparations. Enjoy!

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 Roasted Chicken

(and curried chicken salad)

It's Friday! I work hard all week waiting for today. Tonight we get to start our weekend. I can't think of a better way to welcome the weekly 2-day vacation than to have a family meal together at home. To make it more special, we are having guests this evening as well. Ok crock pot, it's time to do your thing and make dinner tonight taste like it was hard to make (but really it's only noon o'clock and it's already done).

The most challenging part of this recipe is making sure that your meat will fit in the crock pot. If you have a round and more vertical design of a crock pot, you might have to use a cornish hen instead of a chicken if you want it to fit! This recipe really works best in a 5-6 qt. crockpot that is **oval shaped**. I just thought you should know this before you start trying to shove everything in and then being disappointed when it doesn't fit. *(check out my next post about buying a new crock pot!)*

If you have leftover chicken after tonight, I'd recommend making curried chicken salad tomorrow. Add a stalk of fresh, chopped celery (not a cooked one from the pot), add a small can of diced water chestnuts, 1/2 c. quartered red grapes and then enough mayo to make it a good consistency. Then, add curry powder, a little salt and pepper— I can't tell you how much because I don't know how much chicken you have left, but remember that curry powder becomes more potent after it gets a chance to fester. Make this salad up and then put it in the fridge for a couple hours— when it turns a darker copper color (from the curry), it's ready to eat!

Well there you go, I guess it's a two recipe day. You have one for today and one for tomorrow!

Now for to the roasted chicken recipe:

1 3-4 lb. fresh chicken, thawed, rinsed and patted dry

2 T. olive oil

2 cloves garlic, chopped

8 oz. baby carrots

3 stalks celery, cut into 2 inch chunks

1/2 med. onion, cut into chunks

dash of paprika

salt and pepper

If you have a trivet that fits in your crock pot, I'd recommend using it. It keeps your chicken just elevated from sitting in it's own juices and makes it MUCH easier to pull the chicken out when it is done (which makes for a nicer presentation too). Place chicken in pot– to know it's on the correct side, you should see the smooth skin covering the chicken breasts. Brush the skin with the olive oil and sprinkle with the chopped garlic. Position the carrots, celery and onions around the bird. Sprinkle all contents with paprika, salt and pepper. Cook on low for 8-10 hours, depending on bird size.

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 Green Bean Casserole

It doesn't have to be Thanksgiving to enjoy a side dish that can be a year round favorite. I like to go to restaurants and just order an array of side dishes as my meal— green bean casserole, mac and cheese, mashed potatoes and scalloped apples are some of my favorites. Let's be honest, it's a good thing Cracker Barrel doesn't have a buffet.

Side dishes can be dangerous though. All these creamy, cheesy, salty tastes can be brief in moments, but high in fat and calories. This crockpot version of green bean cassarole saves some calories by using fresh onions instead of fried ones and also adds water chestnuts for the crunchy texture.

Try this crockpot cassarole with any of your favorite meals. And if you eat it as a main course... I'm ok with that too.

1 28 oz. can green beans

1 can diced water chestnuts

1 can cream of mushroom soup

1/2 c. milk

1 t. soy sauce

1 clove garlic, minced

1/2 medium onion, sliced thin

1/2 t. pepper

Mix together soup, milk and soy sauce. Put green beans, water chestnuts and onion in crockpot and then dump liquid mixture and mix through once. Don't overmix it or else the canned green beans will fall apart. Cook 4 hours on low.

Crock Pot Beef Stew

Last night I used my foodie knowledge to help a friend through a stressful moment. I described my love affair with Trader Joe's grocery store in such detail that she learned about my secret ongoing shopping list, what each item is that I crave and how I use one dish, three ways. By the end of my "foodologue" I think I had actually BORED her out of her anxiety attack.

It made me start thinking about comfort foods. For many people, it's what our mommies used to make for us or maybe what we had at favorite holidays. I wonder what my boys will recall as their favorite foods, twenty years from now. Today's recipe might top the list. The last time I made my beef stew, my boys and my husband all were members of the clean plate club. Definitely a recipe to repeat often! It's also easy to throw half of the finished product into tupperware and freeze it for another dinner, another time.

1 to 1 and 1/2 lbs beef stew meat, cubed

8 oz. baby carrots

5 stalks celery, cleaned and cut

6-7 red potatoes, peeled and cut into quarters

1 medium onion, cut into chunks
8 oz. frozen green beans
2 cloves garlic, chopped fine
2 bay leaves
1/2 t. rosemary
1 cup beef bouillion
3/4 cup leftover red wine
1 can condensed tomato soup (don't add any water)
salt and pepper
(1 T. corn starch and 1/2 c. water to finish it off)

Dump everything into the crockpot. Set on low and cook for 8-9 hours until meat and vegetables are soft. Remove the meat and veggies and then mix in 1 T. corn starch that has been dissolved into 1/2 cup water. When the gravy thickens up, dump the meat and veggies back into the crockpot, mix it all together and serve.

Crock Pot Cabbage Rolls

This is already in the pot for dinner tonight! It helps to cook the cabbage the night before so you don't scald your hands trying to peel off the perfect leaves.

1 head cabbage
1 lb ground meat (I'm pretty sure anything will work, I've used beef and turkey)
1/4 cup brown rice, uncooked
1 egg, beaten
1 onion, diced
1/2 t. salt
1/2 t. pepper

1/3 cup cider vinegar
1/2 cup brown sugar
1 can tomato soup
1/2 cup Catalina dressing

1. Put cabbage in boiling water. Simmer for 5-10 minutes. Let cool completely before handling.
2. Mix meat, rice, egg, onion, salt and pepper.
3. In another bowl mix vinegar, sugar, soup and dressing.
4. Remove 12 large cabbage leaves from head and then chop remaining cabbage and put it in bottom of crock pot.
5. Put 2-4 T. of meat mixture in center of cabbage leave. Roll up, envelope style and place in crock pot, seam side down. (you can use toothpicks to hold the rolls together if you need to)
6. Pour tomato mixture over all of it.
7. Cover and cook on low for 8-10 hours.

(recipe is adapted from one on www.recipezaar.com)