

Renovation, Week Five: Dinners and Creatures

Let's break this week's renovation update down day by day. I updated my four-week menu plan to carry us through the rest of the project, the installations are still on schedule, and it's remarkably nice weather still outside. **I want you to understand that while my posts may make this whole process appear to be coated in sugary fairy dust, let me be clear... I'm stressed. I'm hungry. I ran out of coffee filters. And I really hate snakes.**



Crock Pot French Onion Soup is ridiculously easy. And ridiculously delicious!

MONDAY: Dinner— french onion soup in the crock pot. [Crock Pot Caramelized Onions](#) are the best and easiest thing you should be making once a month, at least. I had two great electricians and a city inspector in the house today. We've got a gazillion new outlets installed in order to pass county code and now I can plug my crock pots in anywhere and everywhere. Very cool. What is uncool?? The crazy freaking snake that the electrician met in my crawl space and killed with a crow bar. I'm pretty sure that wasn't in the contract, but I could not be more

grateful to him for taking care of it!

TUESDAY: Dinner– Microwaveable tacos that my kids can heat up themselves. Why? Because I spent the afternoon with the pest control company checking my house for undesirable creatures. Want to know something terrifying?? If you have snake(s) in your crawl space, the first place they check for snakes is the ATTIC. If you have a rodent problem in the attic, there is a potential likelihood that the snakes enter through the crawl space and then wiggle through your walls to get to the attic for the mouse buffet. (I may never sleep again if they ever find something up there!) Luckily, no mice were found. No snakes either. After a full house inspection, the only culprit was the one in the crawl space. After all the anxiety over slithery slimy snakes, this mama had a crazy migraine and went straight to bed before dinner. Hence the reason that the kids made their own dinners!

WEDNESDAY: Dinner– Macaroni and cheese, fresh blueberries, grape tomatoes. Ramen noodles and steamed sticky buns for the grown ups. No workers today in the house so I used my time to get out and run errands, get groceries, etc. I feel a little guilty for feeding my kids so much processed stuff during the renovation, so I combat that concern by trying to include fresh produce as much as possible.

By the way, about the sticky buns... I buy them at the asian market's freezer section. Then, they go in my rice cooker on "STEAM" for about 10 minutes. Makes a great quick lunch or dinner. I highly recommend using your small appliances for more than just their primary purpose, I love using [my rice cooker](#) as a steamer as well!



It's a mess, but it's progress!

THURSDAY: Dinner– Stuffed zucchini in the crock pot. This dish takes my favorite pork meatball recipe and puts it inside a vegetable... clearly meaning that this is good for me, right?! Probably need to include a little more of that fresh fruit into dinner tonight, just to be sure it all cancels out. Ha! Electricians are here today finishing up the wiring so that hopefully the inspector comes tomorrow to sign off on everything so far.

Here's the recipe for tonight's dinner.

It's so quick, I'm not even going to write it up in a separate post:

1 lb ground pork or pork sausage for more flavor. 1 c. pancake mix. 1 c. shredded cheddar cheese. Mix all three ingredients. Take two zucchini, cut lengthwise and scoop out the insides. Fill the "boats" with the sausage mixture. Cook on low in the crock pot for 4 hours.

(To do these as just meatballs, roll into golf balls and then bake in the oven– they get a really nice crispiness to the outside.)



Once you learn to make the rolls, the possibilities are endless. So many different filling combinations to try!

FRIDAY: Dinner– sushi rolls. Back to the rice cooker I go.

I'm keeping it simple and just doing spicy tuna rolls tonight (drained canned tuna, a little mayo, and enough sriracha to make the mixture orange). The kids will eat the rice, some steamed edamame, and cut-up mango. Sometimes simple is just so good. Have you tried making sushi before? Once you learn to roll, it's really easy, and you can use a crazy variety of fillings! First you need [these mats](#). I keep mine clean by putting them in a gallon-sized ziplock baggie before rolling. Then just spread the rice thin, lay the toppings in the first 1/3 of the [seaweed sheet](#) and then roll it tight! Once my kitchen is back together, I'll make a video for you on making sushi rolls.

Oh, and the kitchen work?? The electric inspection was passed! And cabinets started going in! (insert happy dance here!)

Crock Pot Pulled Pork Tenderloin

Fall is almost here... Starbucks is already serving up pumpkin spice lattes and football seasons have officially started, that means the weather should start to cool off, even here in the South, and the leaves should start to change.



I love making pulled pork, but everyone likes their BBQ sauce a little different, usually depending where you live. [THIS ONE IS MY FAVORITE.](#) Some like it sweet and smoky, some like it vinegar-based, and others (like my kids) just want to top every kind of meat with ketchup. Yes, that actually happens in my house, but at least they are eating protein, right?!

So this recipe is a great SIMPLE way to make pulled pork in the crock pot and then you can decorate it however the hell you want! It's a great meal for football parties, tailgates, birthday parties, and all other fall festivities. Throw it in before you go pick that perfectly round pumpkin. Decorate your table with pretty leaves and then serve a bowl of this deliciousness for the table of fall fans to devour. I don't care how you eat it, it's easy to make and easy to eat. Isn't that the point?!

You won't believe that this is only three ingredients. Here's the catch— not all crockpots cook at the same temperature, so watch the meat the first time you make this and don't let it dry out. Your meat will release enough juices to let it cook

low and slow without any excess. But if your cooker is too hot, it will scorch the meat and dry it out. Don't do that. ONLY COOK THIS RECIPE ON LOW. LOW, I SAY!

Happy Fall. Yay Football! Pass that caffeinated cup of fake gourd goodness.

Crock Pot Pulled Pork Tenderloin

Serves 4-6

1.5 lb pork tenderloin (a little more or less is ok too)

1 large gala apple, sliced into 1/3 inch strips, skins left on

1/2 sweet onion, sliced the same thickness as the apples



After cooking for 6 hours on LOW, use two forks to easily shred the meat.

Put all ingredients in crock pot. Cook on low for 6 hours. ONLY ON LOW. Then, using two forks, shred the meat in the crockpot and stir the apples and onions throughout. Top with your favorite BBQ sauce and serve on squishy white bread buns accompanied by bread and butter pickles or coleslaw.

Crock Pot Pork and Prunes



You will never think of prunes as old people food ever again once you taste this delicious pork!

A few years ago, my husband and I went to France to celebrate our anniversary. It was an amazing adventure and I am forever grateful to everyone that helped coordinate taking over our daily chaos so we could get away. We loved the wine and the micro-brews, but what we found most delectable was the food and how the regional influences changed the flavors depending where we were located. It shouldn't be too much of a surprise—from coast to coast, America certainly offers different flavors and flare when it comes to regional cooking, too!

So I'm going to create two dishes in my crock pot that mirror some of our favorite dinners that we experienced. Unfortunately, I can't run over to the *boulangerie* and grab a baguette for dinner and some croissants for breakfast, but I'm still pretty certain that I can recreate some of the tastes while building new memories as well.

France Revisited Recipe #1: Crock Pot Pork and Prunes

(you can also do this with a turkey tenderloin, if you prefer)



Take a quick trip to France with this delightful dish!

As it turns out, I'm not sure that the combination of pork and prunes is really particular to France. I think that Italy, Scandinavia and other places in Europe also do this dish well and vary the ingredients just enough to claim it's origin!

The most challenging part of this recipe is preparing the pork. So let's go step-by-step through it. First of all, rinse of the tenderloin and pat it dry. This isn't a marbled cut of meat, most of the fat is attached to the outside, including a membrane that might appear cloudy. Remove the membrane (go on and grab it and pull it off) and cut off any excess fat.

In order to stuff the tenderloin, you need a hole through it. The easiest way I've found to do this is with an apple corer. Not kidding! Lay the tenderloin flat and cut my tenderloin in half. Skewer the meat with the apple corer and pull out the perfectly cylindrical meat tube. YES— this is totally gross, but totally easy. You might need to core the meat from both ends in order to have a complete tunnel. I couldn't get a

picture of doing this, because both my hands were covered with raw meat and I couldn't grab my phone.

Next step... get over the fact that you just handled all that flesh. Moving on...

It seems like there isn't enough liquid in this recipe, but it's ok. The meat, the prunes and the onions all release enough liquid to keep moisture in the pot. If your crock pot tends to cook hot, then be cautious before going over 4 hours—you don't want the meat to dry out.

Bon appetit!

Crock Pot Pork with Prunes

Serves 4-6

2 lb. pork tenderloin

1/4 sweet onion, minced

12 pitted prunes, diced

1 T. Herbs de Provence



It just takes a few easy steps to create a tunnel in the pork tenderloin and prepare it for the prune stuffing.

Prep tenderloin by removing membrane and excess fat and then slicing a tunnel through the meat with an apple corer (see directions above). In a bowl, mix prunes, onions, and seasonings. Stuff mixture inside tenderloin. Place tenderloin on rack inside crock pot and top meat with any remaining bits of the mixture. Cook on low for 4 hours or until meat is cooked through. Remove rack from crock pot and let meat stand for 5 minutes before slicing.

Voila! Enjoy!

Crock Pot Apple Butter Pork



Fork-tender meat and an amazing balance of flavor will leave everyone in your family asking for seconds!

I won't lie, tonight's dinner was fantastic. The perfect mix of textures and flavors. It was easy to make and quick to serve and might become a top 10 favorite very soon. I wasn't even offended when my kids put ketchup on the meat, because hey- they were on their second servings and not complaining!

I'm a big fan of pork country ribs but I feel like it's a complete misnomer. When I think about ribs, I think about meat falling off of a bone. But there isn't a bone in country ribs, it's just sections of meat cut into the shape of ribs and contains a wonderful balance of meat and fat (it tends to cook off, so stop worrying). These are great for pulled pork sandwiches too, for future reference.

When you put all of these ingredients in the crock pot, you might worry about not seeing enough liquid- do not add any! The meat and the apples will ooze with flavor and moisture and it will all work out just fine. My apologies for using "ooze" to describe cooking, but when I think about cooking low and slow, it's totally an ooze, not a rush of flavor. Ooooooze.

This is a great recipe for any time of year, but especially great in the fall if you can get fresh, local apples and make your own apple butter. But there is no shame in buying it pre-made and ready to go... the outcome will be very similar!

Crock Pot Apple Butter Pork

Serves 8

2 lbs country ribs

2 gala apples, cut off the core and then into thick slices

1 sweet onion, cut into half and then into slices

1/2 cup chunky apple butter (chunky apple sauce will work too but the seasonings won't be as intense)

4 sprigs of fresh thyme

Put meat in the bottom of crock pot, then layer the rest of the flavors. Cook on high 3-4 hours. Meat will be fork-tender and apples and onions should be soft, maybe a little mushy, but not disintegrating. It's good if the leaves fall off the thyme- please do not ingest the twigs. Enjoy!

Crock Pot Country Ribs

Let's make a play list for today's recipe to put you in the mood! By the time you sing along to *Sweet Home Alabama* (Lynyrd Skynyrd), *Little Bitty* (Alan Jackson) and the beginning of *Sweet Caroline* (Neil Diamond), you'll have a pot full of home cookin' set for a down-home country feast. Whether you live in the north, south, east or west, you'll enjoy this soothingly savory dish that goes great with any variety of side dishes. I'll be serving mine with steamed broccoli and maybe some scalloped potatoes. If I can figure out how to do the potatoes in the crock pot, you'll see it posted later this week!

Once your meal is made, add some more songs to your play list so you can dance around and sing when you are doing the dinner dishes later tonight. Enjoy!

1.5-2 lbs pork country ribs

1 cup ketchup

1/4 c. brown sugar

1/2 c. apple juice

2 T. apple cider vinegar

2-3 cloves garlic, chopped

1 t. celery seed

1/2 t. ground mustard

2 T. parsley flakes

Spray pot with non-stick spray. Place country ribs side by side in one layer (best if using an oval shaped crock pot). Mix remaining ingredients in a separate bowl and then pour on top of meat. Cook on low for 6-8 hours.