

Crock Pot Miso Soup



Restaurant quality soup,
only easier, cheaper and
more delicious!

Why go out to eat when you can stay in?! This week I'm working on Asian inspired dishes that are easy to make and taste like take-out— only healthier! Today's soup is super easy. So much so, that you should never actually order it in a restaurant, it's so much better to make at home. I add a couple more vegetables to my miso soup so that it's a more filling appetizer or the start of a great main dish. You can add thin egg noodles, vermicelli noodles, or rice to this soup to make it a complete meal in itself. Don't let the tofu fool you; this isn't a crunchy, earthy food, it's the same thing you order in a restaurant, only better for you! Enjoy. ☐

Crock Pot Miso Soup

Serves 6-8

Prep time: 10 minutes

Cook time: 6 hours

6 c. water

4 T. white miso paste

1 zucchini, cut horizontally and then sliced into half moons

2 cloves garlic

1 12 oz package, extra firm tofu, drained and cut into

small cubes

1/2 c. green onions (about 3 inches of the white/green parts),
sliced into rings

1 100g package of enoki mushrooms, cut off the base

Put water and miso paste into crock pot and stir until dissolved. Add zucchini, garlic, and tofu. Cook on low for 6 hours. Add green onions and enoki mushrooms about 20 minutes before cook time is complete. Serve immediately.

Crock Pot Vegetarian Refried Beans



With just a few ingredients,
you can add a rich side dish
to Taco Tuesday- on any day
of the week!

In our house, every Tuesday is TACO TUESDAY! The kids have

become so accustomed to it, that sometimes I like to mess with them and make tacos on the “wrong” day of the week. If we eat something different on a Tuesday, they are a little disappointed... but if we eat tacos on any night other than Tuesday, it’s almost unacceptable. I’ll say “it’s Taco Tuesday on Wednesday!” and they respond, “we can’t eat tacos on Wednesdays!” “But why??” I ask. “Because we’d have to call it Waco Wednesday!” they would shout with despair.

Oh trust me, that scenario is totally legit. It happens. Scripted or not, that’s how it plays out every freaking time.

But this week is an exception, because it’s Cinco de Mayo on a Thursday. That’s an unwritten acceptable negotiation and my hellions are ok with moving the taco consumption in order to celebrate another nation’s announcement of victory in war. (Not to be confused with Mexico’s Independence Day, that’s September 16– which is also not a Tuesday this year.)

My mini-me’s could practically prepare taco night by themselves– hard shells and tortillas. Sour cream. Shredded cheese. Lettuce, tomato, onions, and olives. Jalapeños and [this ridiculous taco sauce](#) for mommy. Homemade tomatillo salsa verde, too. And then ground beef or chicken. By the book, typical American-style taco night. Extra napkins, of course.



The perfect side dish
for your next fiesta!

But since tomorrow is a celebration, I wanted to introduce a new dish into taco night. Growing up, a trip to Taco Bell always included way too many tacos and a side of pintos and cheese. What's that, you ask? A bowl of refried pinto beans and a handful of soft, shredded cheddar cheese. They put a lid on it and by the time you filled your fountain drink and sat down to scarf, the cheese would be gooey and melted perfectly. Ok, it was crap quality, but the taste was so good!

So here's my attempt at recreating a mouth-watering memory and introducing it to my family. Let's all celebrate our little victories— not just the big war-type ones. Sometimes sitting down to eat as a family is a victory in itself. Ole!

Crock Pot Vegetarian Refried Beans

Serves: 8-12

Prep Time: 5 minutes

Cook Time: 8-10 hours

1 lb. dried pinto beans

1 c. [crock pot caramelized onions](#)

3 cloves garlic, peeled

2 t. cumin

2 t. salt

6 c. water

Put all ingredients in crock pot and give it a stir. The water level should cover everything. Cook on high 8-10 hours or low 12 hours. Remove excess water that isn't absorbed, do not discard. Puree everything in the crock pot using [an immersion blender](#). Add reserved water 1 tablespoon at a time until desired smooth consistency is reached. Serve immediately with toppings like shredded cheddar cheese, sour cream, jalapeños,

bacon bits, or use inside of a taco or burrito.

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 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 Three: Crock Pot Low Country Boil



This meal requires no silverware– or plates!

Dinner tonight was epic. Seriously. I've been dreaming about a low country boil for weeks now, but not just the flavors fusing together, but enjoying it with the salty ocean air, the sound of the waves, and the openness of a housetop porch. And indeed–my prophecy has come true!

After another fabulous day at [Ooh La La, our amazing beach house for the week](#), we enjoyed this one pot wonder just as the sun was setting. We started today at the [Avon Pier](#), watching skilled fisherman catch buckets of fish and even some shark! Yes, the North Carolina coast has been ridden with shark incidents in recent weeks, but this was intentional baiting and catching of these dangerous creatures. No joke– it was thrilling and terrifying to see even little ones brought to the surface and hauled up to within feet of us.

We attempted to go out for lunch today since dinner was already going and the pier really made us work up an appetite. Lunch was ok– but not the local fare I was hoping for; I'm not convinced that the "Catch of the Day" didn't arrive frozen in

a box the week before. The kids didn't want to eat their fish sticks... because they didn't taste like the ones at home (well, duh!). So while we all enjoyed the air conditioning and endless fountain beverages, I'm not convinced it was worth it to go out to eat.

If the local restaurants aren't appealing, make sure you stop by the local seafood markets instead— you can get fresh (never frozen) fish and creatures that came directly from the ocean. The Outer Banks is a prime location for tuna, soft-shelled crabs, shrimp, and many other options... including the sharks I mentioned before.



It is totally worth the extra buck at the seafood market to have them peel and devein your shrimp instead! But if you do it yourself, click and buy the tool in the link provided!

We then returned “home” for another afternoon of swimming. I peeled and [deveined](#) the pound of shrimp I picked up at the

seafood market to add as the last step of the low country boil. Mental note to self– it is totally worth the up-charge to have someone else [do this process](#). After removing the tubes of excrement from my crustaceans, I was no longer as excited to devour these treats of the sea. I mean, come on... I can't unsee or unfeel that. But fresh is always the best option and local is a total perk. You'll want your own [shrimp tool](#) to peel and devein in one swipe if you are getting fresh raw shrimp.

The Crock Pot Low Country Boil requires a few extra steps than you normally see in Dinner Is A Crock recipes, but since we were in and out of the house all day, it was not challenging at all. Again– the point of taking my [crock pot](#) to the beach was so that we could eat well without interrupting our adventures. Dinner tonight was a total success and everyone ate well after our beautiful day in the Outer Banks. If you haven't checked out the house yet, be sure to [CLICK HERE](#) and see about planning your trip to Ooh La La.

Crock Pot Low Country Bowl

Serves 4

3 ears of yellow corn; peeled, cleaned and broken in half

8 baby red potatoes (golf-ball sized or smaller)

1/2 sweet onion, cut into chunks

4 stalks celery, cut into 3-inch sections

1/4 c. Old Bay Seasonings

3 springs fresh dill

1 12 oz. can of beer (I used Yeungling)

2 c. water

1 14 oz. package Hillshire Farms Lit'l Smokies or other cocktail links

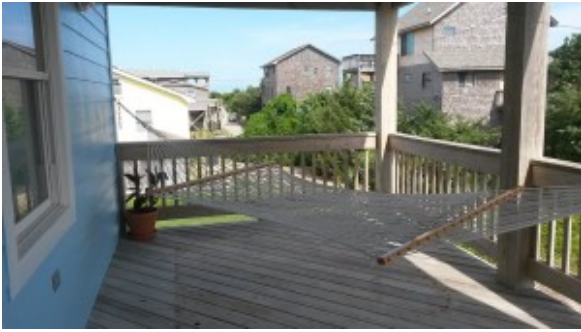
1 lb. large fresh raw shrimp, peeled and deveined



Put all of the vegetables in the [crock pot](#) with the water, seasonings and fresh dill. Add the beer. Cook on low for four hours or until the potatoes are fork tender. Add smokies or cocktail links and add another hour on low. Let the crock pot turn to the “keep warm” setting until you are close to dinner time. When ready, add the shrimp to the pot and set on high for 30 minutes– or just until the shrimp have turned pink. Drain crock pot into a strainer and shake out as much liquid as possible.

Pour the steaming awesomeness directly onto a table (covered in a plastic bag and layers of newspaper) and enjoy with your fingers. No silverware or condiments necessary.

[Summer Series, Day Two: Crock Pot Steamed Summer Vegetables](#)



Roll out of bed and out onto the hammock as the sun rises and crests over the ocean and dunes.

The sun was beaming in the window when I finally opened my eyes this morning. I had to look around for a minute and remember there wasn't school or camp or work or anything to rush off to this morning. Today's to do list included the pool and the beach. I was pretty sure I could accomplish those tasks so I rolled back off to sleep as the sun soared into the sky and the light in the room subdued. Granted, it was only another hour or so before my kids were knocking at the door and ready for breakfast, but I awoke again with a great calm and a readiness for an adventure.

One thing doesn't change no matter where I sleep— my desperate need for coffee in the morning. Lucky for me, [Ooh La La's](#) kitchen was totally equipped. Every appliance (COFFEE POT AND KEURIG!) needed was readily available and the cabinets were full of the comforts of home— not just dishes and cups, but tupperware, travel mugs, grill tools, fruit baskets. I was completely at home even though I was still uncaffeinated!

After an easy breakfast, I skipped off to the grocery store, categorized list in hand. Oh, you missed that in the last post? HERE YOU GO. But whoa— I must warn you... the grocery store was full of crazy people without a plan. It was like playing Supermarket Sweep but with a Hunger Games approach. Despite my greatest organization, it still took longer than anticipated to get through the store, but the good news is

that everything I needed was in stock. Since I brought all of my basics and non-perishables with me, I didn't really need the aisles, just a lap around the perimeter of the store.



Crock Pot Steamed Summer Vegetables are a great way to create a healthy and seasonal side dish.

While I know that I'll be at the local Farmer's Market on Tuesday, I still needed some produce today. We were planning on a BBQ tonight with hamburgers and hot dogs, so I decided that I would steam some veggies in the crock pot as my side. The good news was that the store also had great little packages of fresh herbs and I totally stocked up.

The groceries and prep work for dinner tonight took just over an hour and then it was off to the pool! [The house seriously has it's own swimming pool](#). I want to live here. Like, not just this week, but from here on out. The pool is just big enough for all the kids and grown ups to get in and play. The youngest played on the stairs mostly and the oldest kept trying to see if his cannonball could splash over the fence. Oh wait- you thought I meant my oldest kid? Nope, that was my husband trying to tsunami the pool!



Sand dunes in the Outer Banks help protect these narrow islands from harsh weather.

After the pool and a light lunch we crossed over the sand dunes to the beach. There is something about the waves that is so cathartic. I feel such peace at the waves, listening to them crash and then pull everything negative away. There is something that reaches my soul when I stand at the waves and realize I have to relinquish all control. I can't make them stop. I can't make them crash. I can't protect my sand castle or demand that the water fill the mote. I can just breathe and trust that none of it is my handiwork and that the water will continue to rise and fall and I don't have to do anything. Much like dinner tonight— there is nothing left to do but breathe and enjoy.

Crock Pot Steamed Summer Vegetables

Serves 6-8

4 zucchini, quartered lengthwise

1 lb asparagus, rinsed and woody ends removed

1 package button mushrooms (doesn't matter what size package, they are mushrooms, they'll fit!)

6-8 twigs of fresh thyme

3-4 twigs of fresh rosemary

1 c. water



Layer vegetables and fresh herbs in the crock pot so the flavors are infused throughout the dish.

Layer vegetables and herbs in the crockpot– I put in zucchini first, then 2-3 sprigs thyme; add asparagus and a couple sprigs of rosemary; then the mushrooms and the remaining seasonings. Pour in the cup of water around the edges so that the water covers the bottom of the crock pot. The vegetables will release enough additional liquid to continue the cooking process. Cook on low for 4 hours, then serve. You can remove the herbs or use them as garnish.

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 fresh 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 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 Corned Beef and Cabbage



If you have survived your St. Patty's Day green beer hangover and still haven't had enough Irish fun, then go to the grocery store and get another corned beef and another head of cabbage— this recipe is SO EASY and is a total crowd pleaser. Honestly— you can't mess this up and it tastes so good. Try it with different beer... both IN the pot and IN your belly. The variety of beers will alter the flavor of the meat and the cabbage, so try it

light or dark, bitter or brown, cheap or expensive—beer and beef, what a great combination!

1 corned beef (I don't care what size, as long as it fits in your crock pot)

1 head of cabbage

2 bottles of beer

water

Put the corned beef in the crock pot and throw out the extra packet of seasonings. Pour in the bottles of beer and then add enough water to reach the top of the meat. Cook on high for three hours. Add cabbage and make sure it is immersed in the liquid. Cook on high for one hour more. Remove meat to a cutting board and let it rest for a few minutes. Slice it thin and remove the top inch of fat. Serve with the beer-and-beef-infused cabbage and a cold beer.

Crock Pot Parsnip and Potato Soup

I'm totally enjoying soups this week and I hope you are getting a chance to enjoy some of these recipes too. I love it when I can make an entire meal in ONE pot and feed the whole family. This soup is a variation on my crock pot potato soup recipe (search for it in the recipe index) and adds in the unique sweetness of parsnips and carrots and sweet onions.

Even though it's almost spring, we still need to survive on the rest of winter's vegetables. If you can already grow things in your garden or windowsill, try adding fresh herbs like flat parsley, dill or chives to your soup when it is done cooking. I think you'll find the promise of spring in the soothing warmth of this chowder. Enjoy!

4 medium potatoes, peeled and diced

3 medium parsnips, peeled and diced

3 medium carrots, peeled and diced

2 stalks celery, diced

2 cloves garlic, minced

1/2 medium sweet onion, chopped

3 c. water

1 t. salt

1/2 t. black pepper

1 t. celery seed

1 c. milk

1 T. corn starch

1 can cream-style corn

Put all vegetables and seasonings in crock pot, cover with water. Cook on high for 4 hours. When vegetables are all soft, dissolve corn starch in milk and then add to crock pot. Add cream-style corn and mix ingredients together. Cook on low one more hour. Use an immersion blender and puree the soup until thick and creamy. Serve with fresh parsley, dill or chives on top.