

Do you ever dream of coming home after a long hectic day to a wonderful home cooked meal—you didn't have to cook? Does this sound too good to be true? Not if you have a slow cooker. Slow cookers can help you prepare meals, save you time and money.

Have you forgotten about your slow cooker—out of sight out of mind? If it has been a long time since you used your slow cooker, test it for accurate temperature. To test your slow cooker you will need to:

1. Fill the slow cooker one- half to two- thirds full of water.
2. Turn your slow cooker to low and let it heat for 8 hours with the lid on.
3. Check the water temperature with an accurate food thermometer. Do this quickly because the temperature drops 10 to 15 degrees when the lid is raised.
4. The water temperature should be between 185 and 200 degrees. Temperatures below 185 indicate the slow cooker does not heat the food high enough or fast enough. The slow cooker is unsafe and should be replaced so to avoid potential food safety problems.
5. If the temperature reaches over 200 degrees food cooked for eight hours without stirring will likely be overdone.

A safe slow cooker cooks slow enough for unattended cooking, yet fast enough to keep food out of the bacteria zone (above 40 °F to below 140 °). To prevent potential food safety problems test your slow cooker.

6. If you have a new or older slow cooker model always read the owners guide before use the cooking. There are tips on how to use your cooker, how to place food in the cooker, safety tips, and how to clean the cooker.
7. Here are a few recipes you can you might want to try. Wouldn't it be great to come home one night or several nights this week to a prepared meal?

Stuffed Chicken Breast

Prep Time: 20 minutes

Cook Time: 5 ½ to 6 hours (Low) 4 Hours (High)

6 boneless, skinless chicken breast
8 ounces feta cheese, crumbled
3 cups chopped fresh spinach leaves
1/3 cup oil packed sun dried tomatoes, drained and chopped
1 teaspoon minced lemon zest

1 teaspoon dried basil, oregano or mint
½ teaspoon garlic powder
Freshly ground black pepper to taste
1 can (15 ounces) diced tomatoes, undrained
½ cup oil- cured olives
Hot cooked polenta
If using pitted olives, add to slow cooker in the final hour of cooking

1. Place 1 chicken breast between plastic wrap. Using the back of skillet or tenderizer mallet, pound breast until about ¼ inch thick. Repeat with each breast.
2. Combine feta, spinach, sun-dried tomatoes, lemon zest, basil, garlic powder and pepper in medium bowl.
3. Lay pounded breast, smooth side down, on work surface. Place approximately 2 tablespoons feta mixture on wide end of breast. Roll tightly. Repeat with each breast.
4. Place rolled breasts, seam side down, in the slow cooker. Top with diced tomatoes with juice and olives.
5. Cover; cook on Low for 5 ½ to 6 hours or on HIGH for 4 hours. Serve with polenta.

Cajun Shrimp Creole

1 tablespoon butter
2 cups onion, chopped
2 tablespoons buttermilk biscuit mix
1½ cups water
1 - 6 ounce can tomato paste
1 teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon sugar
1 bay leaf
1/8 cup jalapeno pepper
½ cup celery, chopped
½ cup green pepper, chopped
2 pounds frozen shrimp, thawed, shelled & cleaned

In a skillet, melt the butter, add the onion, and cook slightly. Add the biscuit mix and stir until well blended. Combine remaining ingredients except shrimp and add to stoneware along with onion mixture. Cook on low for 7 to 9 hours. Add the shrimp during the last hour of cooking.