

dinner's waiting at

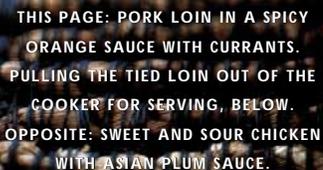
HOME

IT'S THE SLOW COOKER THAT SPENDS H

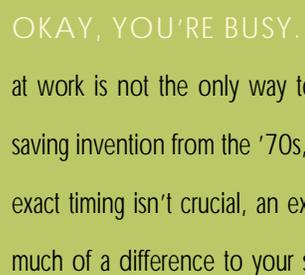
By Holly Rudin-Braschi Photographs by Gus Filgate



S HOURS IN THE KITCHEN—NOT YOU



THIS PAGE: PORK LOIN IN A SPICY ORANGE SAUCE WITH CURRANTS. PULLING THE TIED LOIN OUT OF THE COOKER FOR SERVING, BELOW. OPPOSITE: SWEET AND SOUR CHICKEN WITH ASIAN PLUM SAUCE.



OKAY, YOU'RE BUSY. But ordering from one of those restaurant delivery Web sites while you're at work is not the only way to come home to a delicious, ready-to-eat meal. Remember that career-saving invention from the '70s, the Crock-Pot? It's just as useful for today's harried home cook. Because exact timing isn't crucial, an extra hour while you're stuck in a traffic jam or a late meeting won't make much of a difference to your simmering dinner, especially when your slow cooker is set on low. You

really can “set it and forget it.” The newest crop of Crock-Pots makes it even easier: The pans are removable, so you can mix the recipe the night before and store it in your refrigerator. Then just return the pan to the heating unit, set the temperature, and dinner is on its way. All of our recipes have short prep times (most of them half an hour or less), but still taste like you spent hours in the kitchen. Makes you want to hurry home for dinner, doesn't it? Unless otherwise noted, all of these recipes work in 4- to 6-quart slow cookers. Remember that total cooking times often vary, depending on the type of cooker you're using, the cut of meat, and your own personal preferences for tenderness.

GREEK-STYLE LEMON-DILL LAMB STEW

PREP TIME: 20 minutes

COOK TIME: About 6 to 11 hours, depending on temperature

NOTES: The lemon-egg finishing sauce that thickens this stew, called *avgolemono* in Greek, is also used in that country's cuisine for thickening soups. To save time, use the fresh, peeled baby carrots sold in bags in the produce section. Garnish stew with fresh dill sprigs and accompany with steamed petite peas. Serve with hot cooked orzo pasta. For lamb stew meat, ask the butcher to cut a leg of lamb into bite-size pieces.

MAKES: 10 cups

Stew

- 2 cups chopped yellow or white onion
- 1 tablespoon pressed fresh garlic or garlic purée from a jar
- ¼ cup chopped fresh dill or 2 tablespoons dried dill weed
- 1 tablespoon Safeway SELECT Verdi Olive Oil
- 3 pounds lean, boneless lamb or beef stew meat
- 2 cups sliced carrots (½-inch-thick slices)
- 1 (14.5-oz.) can fat-free low-sodium beef broth
- 2 tablespoons instant tapioca
- ¼ cup lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon finely ground black pepper

Finishing sauce

- ⅓ cup lemon juice
- ¾ cup fat-free low-sodium beef broth
- 3 large eggs
- 2 tablespoons cornstarch

1. **Stew.** In the removable pan of your slow

cooker or a 2-quart microwave-safe dish, mix the onion, garlic, dill, and olive oil. Microwave 10 minutes on high (100% power) until onions are tender, stirring halfway through the cooking time. If you used a microwave-safe dish, transfer mixture to your slow cooker.

2. Return pan to heating unit. Stir in the stew meat, carrots, beef broth, tapioca, lemon juice, salt, and pepper. Cover and cook 8 to 10 hours on low or 4 to 5 hours on high, until meat is tender and no longer pink in center (cut to test).

3. **Finishing sauce.** One hour before serving, in a 4-cup mixing bowl or glass measuring cup, whisk lemon juice, beef broth, eggs, and cornstarch.

4. Stir the egg and lemon mixture into the stew, cover, turn the heat to high, and continue cooking an additional hour.

Per serving: 277 cal., 40% (110 cal.) from fat; 30 g protein; 12 g fat (4.0 g sat.); 10 g carbo (1.5 g fiber); 388 mg sodium; 154 mg chol.

CRAZY CAJUN CROCKERY BABY BACK RIBS

PREP TIME: 15 minutes

COOK TIME: 4 to 8 hours, depending on temperature

NOTES: You can easily scale this recipe up for a 6-quart slow cooker, but it is designed for one with a 4-quart capacity. If you don't want your ribs too spicy, you may want to use less Cajun seasoning mix in Step 1 and not use any in Step 3. Also, use only one bottle of sauce if you're not a big barbecue sauce lover. This dish is great with flavored mashed potatoes, like Safeway SELECT Homestyle Roasted Garlic Mashed Potatoes, and coleslaw from the deli.

MAKES: 4 servings

- About ¼ cup Cajun seasoning mix
- ¼ cup firmly packed brown sugar
- 4 pounds (about 4 1-lb. racks) baby back pork ribs
- 1 to 2 bottles (18 oz. each) Safeway SELECT Honey Smoke Barbecue Sauce

1. In a small bowl using a fork, combine about ¼ cup of the Cajun seasoning mix with the brown sugar. Rub on ribs, then curl the rack, meaty side out. Place each rack upright on the thickest ends in your slow cooker, so each one fits around the next.

2. Cover slow cooker and cook ribs for 7 to 8 hours on low or 3 to 4 hours on high, until tender and no longer pink in center (cut to test).

3. About 15 minutes before serving, in a 2-quart microwave-safe dish, with a fork, mix barbecue sauce with an extra 1 or 2 teaspoons of Cajun seasoning mix, if desired. Cover with plastic wrap, leaving a small vent for steam to escape, then heat on high (100% power) for 3 to 4 minutes. Sauce will be very hot.

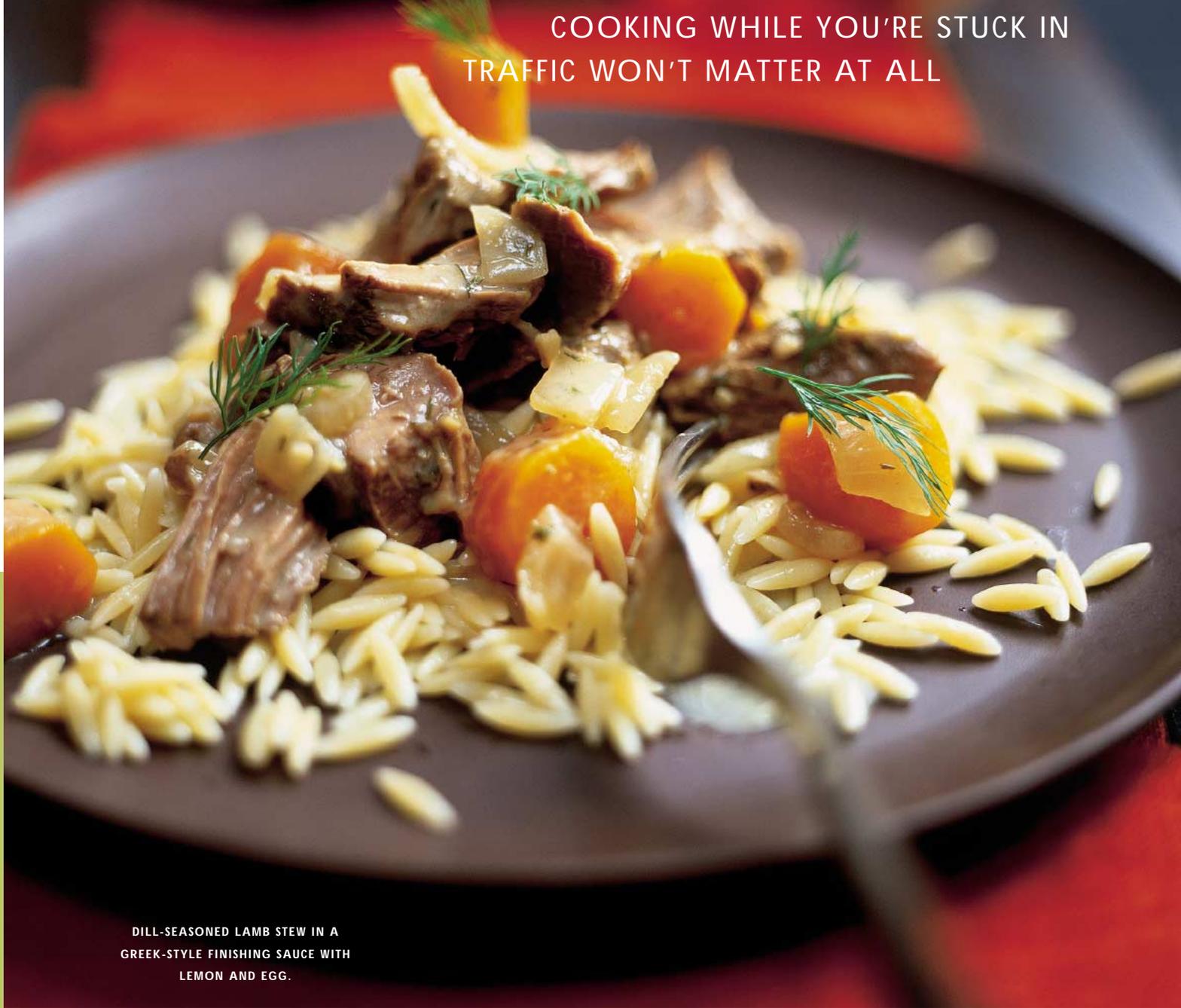
4. Remove ribs from slow cooker and let stand on a cutting board. Remove slow cooker pan from heating unit; drain fat and

the new slow COOKERS

SIGNIFICANT CHANGES have come about since slow cookers made their debut three decades ago. The new slow cookers are available in 4-, 5-, 6-, and even 7-quart sizes (some of the original ones were as small as 3 quarts). Though the traditional round Crock-Pot still exists, you can now purchase an oval slow cooker—great for roasts—or a slow cooker with a divided pot, which enables you to cook two recipes at the same time (a turkey roast and cranberry sauce, for instance). Updated designs include sleek chrome and clean-looking white options, in addition to flower patterns. And the new slow cookers' removable pans are not only refrigerator- but microwave-safe, so you can prepare ingredients that require precooking, like onions and garlic, in the pot in the microwave oven, before adding the remaining recipe ingredients. The removable pans are also great for storing leftovers. Even rice cookers are now being made with a slow cooking feature. You can find these appliances at most major department and discount stores, as well as online.

an extra hour of SLOW

COOKING WHILE YOU'RE STUCK IN
TRAFFIC WON'T MATTER AT ALL



DILL-SEASONED LAMB STEW IN A
GREEK-STYLE FINISHING SAUCE WITH
LEMON AND EGG.

juices from pan. Return pan to heating unit. Turn heat to high.

5. Pour half of the hot barbecue sauce onto pan bottom, then slice each rack into two-rib pieces and return them to the slow cooker.

6. Pour remaining sauce over ribs, then spread evenly with a basting brush. Cover pan and cook for 15 to 20 minutes before serving.

Per serving: 1,052 cal., 57% (587 cal.) from fat; 54 g protein; 65 g fat (24 g sat.); 57 g carbo (0 g fiber); 3,291 mg sodium; 258 mg chol.

PLUM GOOD ASIAN CHICKEN WITH JICAMA

PREP TIME: 20 minutes

COOK TIME: About 3 to 8 hours, depending

on temperature

NOTES: Toss on thinly sliced green onions and toasted pine nuts or chopped dry-roasted peanuts for pizzazz. Serve with steamed sugar peas or broccoli and hot cooked short-grain white or brown rice alongside. If you really like the sweet-heat combination, toss in some hot chili flakes—simmering them will intensify the flavors.

tips for taking it SLOW

ALWAYS COOK with the cover on. If you remove the lid frequently for stirring, the cooking time will have to be extended. A large amount of heat escapes when the lid is removed, and most slow cookers can't recover heat losses quickly when they're set on low.

Most slow cookers have two temperature settings: low (200°) and high (300°). One hour on high equals 2 to 2½ hours on low. Low is the preferred setting for slow cooking; the meat (especially pork and beef) will be more tender. If you're going to leave your cooker on while you're gone during the day, set it on low so the food doesn't overcook. If you come home eager to eat, set the control on high for the last 1 to 2 hours to speed up the cooking.

Instant tapioca added just before cooking helps thicken sauces. If you're preparing the recipe in advance and letting it rest in the refrigerator, don't add the tapioca until you are ready to cook.

If your sauce is too thin after cooking, remove the solid food from your cooker, then prepare a smooth paste of 1 tablespoon cornstarch to 1 tablespoon water for each cup of liquid remaining in the pot. Stir the paste into the sauce. Set the pot on high, cover, and cook for 20 to 30 minutes, stirring once halfway through the cooking time. Cook until the sauce comes to a boil and thickens.

Cooking meats that are still frozen will work only if you add at least 1 cup of very hot liquid to the pot, which will prevent sudden changes in temperature. Cook recipes with frozen meats an additional 4 to 6 hours on low or 2 hours on high.

Milk, cream, and sour cream tend to separate during slow cooking, so it's best to wait until the last hour to add them. Nonfat condensed soups make great substitutes for dairy products because they can cook for extended times.

Most slow cooker leftovers freeze well in airtight containers for up to 3 months. Defrost and reheat in your microwave.

MAKES: 10 cups

- 2 teaspoons pressed fresh garlic or garlic purée from a jar
- 1 tablespoon freshly grated ginger root or ginger purée from a jar
- 1 cup chopped white or yellow onion
- 2 teaspoons canola or peanut oil
- 3 tablespoons instant tapioca
- 1 (14.5-oz.) bottle Safeway SELECT Plum Cook 'n Grill Sauce
- 1 teaspoon Chinese five spice (optional)

- ¼ teaspoon hot chili oil (optional)
- 2½ pounds boned, skinned chicken breasts, cut into 1-inch cubes
- 1 cup diced jicama (½-inch dice)
- 1 (20-oz.) can pineapple chunks in their own juice, well drained
- 1 cup sliced carrots (¼-inch rounds)
- 1 cup diced red, orange, or green bell pepper
- Soy sauce

1. In the removable pan of your slow cooker or a 2-quart microwave-safe dish, combine garlic, ginger, onion, and oil. Cover and microwave 10 minutes on high (100% power), until onions are tender. If you used a microwave-safe dish, transfer mixture to your slow cooker.
2. Return pan to heating unit; stir in tapioca, plum sauce, and five spice and hot chili oil, if desired.
3. Mix in chicken, jicama, pineapple, and carrots. Cover and cook 5 to 7 hours on low or 2½ to 3½ hours on high, until chicken is tender and no longer pink in center (cut to test).
4. About 15 minutes before serving, stir in diced red bell pepper and soy sauce to taste. Cover and cook an additional 15 minutes on low.

Per serving: 307 cal., 18% (55 cal.) from fat; 28 g protein; 6.1 g fat (1.0 g sat.); 35 g carbo (2.8 g fiber); 248 mg sodium; 66 mg chol.

MEXICAN-STYLE ORANGE PORK LOIN

PREP TIME: 30 minutes

COOK TIME: About 4 to 10 hours, depending on temperature

NOTES: The seasonings in this recipe's spicy sauce mimic those in traditional Mexican *picadillo*, a ground or shredded meat mixture used to fill chiles rellenos, empanadas, and tacos. If you have a round crockpot, cut the loin in half so it will fit in the pan. Sour cream, fresh cilantro sprigs, and toasted pumpkin seeds make good garnishes. Serve over hot cooked long-grain white rice with steamed fresh zucchini alongside.

MAKES: 6 to 8 servings

- 1 dried pasilla chili
- 1 cup chopped red or yellow onion
- 2 tablespoons pressed fresh garlic or garlic purée from a jar
- 1 teaspoon canola, corn, or Safeway SELECT Verdi Olive Oil
- 2½ to 3 lb. pork loin roast, tied with string

- 1 (15 oz.) can tomato purée
- ¼ cup thawed frozen orange juice concentrate
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon ground cumin
- ⅛ teaspoon allspice
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 3 tablespoons instant tapioca
- 1 (16-oz.) jar mild or medium Safeway SELECT Garlic Lovers' Salsa
- ⅓ cup currants or raisins
- 2 tablespoons cornstarch

1. Place dried chili pepper in a 3- or 4-cup microwave-safe bowl and cover with boiling water. Place a smaller microwave-safe bowl or plate on top of the chili to weigh it down and prevent it from floating. Microwave on high (100% power) for 5 minutes. Set aside for 5 minutes to cool.
2. In the removable pan of your slow cooker or a 2-quart microwave-safe dish, combine onion, garlic, and oil. Cover and microwave for 7 to 10 minutes on high (100% power), until onions are tender. If you used a microwave-safe dish, transfer mixture to your slow cooker. Return pan to heating unit; place pork loin on top of onions.
3. In a blender or food processor, whirl tomato purée, orange juice concentrate, cinnamon, cumin, allspice, salt, and tapioca.
4. Under cool running water, remove and discard stem and seeds from soaked chili. Add chili to tomato mixture in blender and purée.
5. Add salsa to chili-tomato mixture and pulse to combine. Do not overblend.
6. With a spatula, stir currants into salsa mixture. Pour over pork loin in slow cooker pan. Cover and cook 8 to 10 hours on low or 4 to 5 hours on high, until meat is tender and a thermometer inserted in thickest part reads at least 160°.
7. About 20 minutes before serving, in a small bowl whisk the cornstarch with 4 tablespoons cold water. Stir cornstarch mixture into sauce around meat. Turn heat to high and cook an additional 20 minutes.
8. Remove pork loin from pan to a cutting board; let stand 5 minutes to allow juices to settle. Using scissors, cut strings around meat and remove. Slice pork loin into ¼-inch medallions and serve 2 to 3 slices of meat per person, drizzled with sauce.

Per serving: 396 cal., 42% (169 cal.) from fat; 30 g protein; 19 g fat (6.3 g sat.); 28 g carbo (2.5 g fiber); 844 mg sodium; 89 mg chol.