



## SLOWLY BUT SURELY

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By Heather Lochner

I used to dread the dinner hour. First, there's the continual "what am I going to make," followed by the frustrated "I have nothing defrosted." In my days before kids, the answer was simple - order in. But now, it's not so easy. My kids hate pizza and rarely enjoy anything that is a phone call away.

Frustrated and filled with dinner angst, I turned to a friend for help. Without missing a beat, she suggested the slow cooker. Seeing the look of doubt creep into my eyes she assured me that the slow cooker has come a long way. It is no longer only used for stews, soups, and chilli; a wide variety of foods can be cooked with relative ease. Slow cookers can also be programmed to start at a certain time and switch to a warming setting when cooking is complete. They also come in different sizes, depending on need. And perhaps most importantly, you can find ones in stainless steel, not decorated with pastel flowers.

Her suggestion has revolutionized my life. Seriously.

I now cook most of my meals by slow cooker. Sure, I wake up slightly earlier to prep the food before I leave for the day; but then again, I come home to an aroma of delicious smells from an already-cooked meal.

Early on in my slow cooker days I made some mistakes; I cooked a sirloin tip roast in the slow cooker and it made a better doorstep than a meal; and somehow my chicken overcooked and the bones disintegrated. I then read the directions on how to program it.

But now, thanks to experimentation and some good cookbooks I am well-versed in the slow cooking process. So if you're looking to venture into the world that is slow cooking, here are a few tips to get started:

1. Slow cooking tenderizes so use less expensive cuts of meats. Try beef brisket, pork shoulder roasts or stewing beef or pork.
2. Don't lift the lid during the process - removing it will result in major heat loss. The heat is what cooks the meal.
3. Be careful with liquids. Slow cooking creates steam that cannot escape. The water will drip back into your meal, adding the necessary liquid to the pot.
4. Follow the timing guidelines.
5. Cut all food into pieces of the same size to ensure even cooking.

So, grab a book, experiment, and have fun. And if you fall in love remember, I told you so.

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