



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Crack the Crock Pot Code

Fall is here, which means the days are busy and we're all looking for ways to get a hot meal on the table at dinnertime. When it comes to easy and fast meals, crock pots have long been a favorite cooking tool. What's not to love – for as little as \$20-25 you can buy a kitchen tool that uses very little energy, provides “hands-off” or “no-look” cooking and results in flavorful food that is ready to serve when you're ready to eat! Let's talk more about some tips for success and ways to avoid major safety concerns.

Safety & Tips

1. **Plug in & turn on!** Before starting, make sure your slow cooker is plugged in and turned on. It is easy to miss this step and no one wants to waste all that food!
2. **Fill appropriately-** Ideally, the pot should be half to two-thirds full. Avoid over or under filling
3. **Do not use frozen meat** – always defrost meats before cooking and defrost in the refrigerator. The goal is to avoid meats being in the danger zone for too long
4. **Keep the lid on** – it is important to keep the temperature steady while cooking. Only remove the lid to stir or check temperature before consuming
5. **Cool properly** – Place leftovers in shallow dishes and refrigerate within two hours after cooking is finished
6. **Prep smart** - when prepping ingredients, the night before, refrigerate in separate container. Do NOT place ingredients in the crock pot and refrigerate the pot!
7. **Do not use for reheating** – Crock pots

Tips for success

1. **Place fresh vegetables on the bottom/sides** – fresh vegetables will take longer to cook than the meat
2. **Add dairy last** - stir in any dairy products in the last 15 minutes of cooking to avoid curdling
3. **Adapt recipes** – Reduce the liquid from a regular recipe by about 20% if adapting for crock pot use. Add fresh herbs at the end
4. **Choose your temperature wisely** – for all day cooking, always choose the low setting. Foods will cook about twice as fast on the high setting and likely only need to be cooked for about 4 hours.
5. **Optional flavor boost**- sear meat on the stovetop before adding to the crockpot for added flavor. This step is not necessary, but can add a lot to your dish
6. **Boost meal planning power** – bulk prep slow cooker meals in advance and freeze until ready to use. Just remember to thaw in the refrigerator prior to cooking

There are lots of great, tried & true recipes available online or in cookbooks available at your local library. Crock pots are a great tool that can help you get a low-cost, well balanced meal on the table with just a little prep work.

For additional information, contact the Wildcat Extension District, Crawford County, 620-724-8233, Labette County, 620-784-5337, Montgomery County, 620-331-2690, Pittsburg Office, Expanded Food and Nutrition Education (EFNEP), 620-232-1930 and Wilson County, 620-378-2167. Our website is <http://www.wildcatdistrict.k-state.edu/> or follow us on Facebook: Wildcat Extension District.

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