

# Not Your Mother's Slow Cooker Recipes for Two: For the Small Slow Cooker (NYM Series)

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**Introduction In the 1950s**, my parents used to watch a TV show called the *Loretta Young Theatre*, starring, of course, the famous movie actress Loretta Young. One of the segments featured the star cooking different meals while daydreaming. Loretta prepared her meals with the saddest face, since she was alone, and cooked from an open book to the side of the small stove. The name of the cookbook was *Cooking for One Can Be Fun*. Of course, the gist of the story was that cooking for her was not fun. Our society has come a long way since then. No longer is the large family the norm. There are many singles and couples, and they all want to feed themselves well. Statistics back this up, with at present one-third of American families containing two people. After the publication of *Not Your Mother's Slow Cooker Cookbook* (The Harvard Common Press, 2005), I was deluged with requests for a collection of scaled-down slow cooker recipes designed for one or two people. The larger-capacity slow cookers, which slow cooker recipes are most often geared for, are just too big

for smaller-quantity cooking. Since there is a recommended volume for each cooker for optimum efficiency, using a smaller amount of food in the larger cooker means that the food does not cook as well as the machine is designed to do. The smaller cookers, with a 1½- to 3-quart capacity, fill this need perfectly, and there are new varieties of these smaller cookers emerging, as attractive as they are utilitarian, so that you can now choose from a round or oval shape, multiple heat settings, and a variety of styles. Even though I am cooking for myself, or myself and one other person, I want the food I eat to be imaginative, plentiful, and varied, based on easily obtainable seasonal ingredients. It is interesting to note that, according to research, most people who cook for themselves use and rotate, at most, only a dozen or so recipes. Although these recipes may vary in ingredients from time to time, they remain the core of most meals prepared. Thus, everyday meals can become so routine that any mealtime excitement is lost. The collection of recipes in this book is designed to expand and enhance your existing repertoire of dishes, and I hope that you will enjoy the new variety you will find in these pages. I am a proponent of wholesome, fresh food, and the slow cooker fits into not only my food philosophy but my time schedule as well. I offer here a wide range of recipes focusing on meat, poultry, and beans in one-pot main-dish stews, braises, and soups. Some of the dishes are my adaptations of classic combinations, recipes that are permanently a part of the diet of most Americans, and others are my own invention or contemporary twists on traditional recipes—recipes that reflect the growing interest in light, healthy fare. They have the following taste and technique attributes in common: They are extremely practical, they are simple to assemble and prep, and they cook in the unrushed and unattended style we have come to expect from slow cooker cuisine. They take advantage of wholesome and healthful basic ingredients, a trademark of all my cookbooks. Whether I am out of the house all day or working at home, cooking for myself or for a guest, the convenience offered by the slow cooker style of cooking is remarkable. The food from this humble, inexpensive countertop appliance turns out rich, savory, and satisfying. All the recipes in this book are as suitable for eating alone or in a duo on a busy weeknight as they are for a weekend dinner or a no-fuss holiday meal. There is often enough left over for a second meal, to be refrigerated or frozen and eaten another time. I want the cook, despite any time limitations or even a lag in interest for food preparation, to be relaxed and confident while the flavors develop in the pot, and then to be beautifully fed. Happy slow cooking!

**A NEW TAKE ON SLOW AND SAVORY What is slow cooker cooking?** All foods are cooked by one of two heat methods: moist or dry. Dry-heat cooking methods include roasting, baking, broiling, grilling, toasting, pan-frying, and deep frying. This method uses appliances like microwaves, toasters, and conventional ovens. Moist-heat cooking includes stewing, braising, steaming, and poaching, and uses appliances such as microwaves, ovens, and stovetops. The slow cooker, with its even, low heat in a covered pot, is the master of the moist-heat technique, most specifically braising, to cook food. Slow cookers single-handedly have brought braised food, although always a preferred method of family-style cooking, back into the realm of day-to-day cooking. Recipes that were once reserved for large-quantity cooking or for company only are now no more complex than braising a simple chicken breast or lamb chop. In short, because of the slow cooker, braising for two is now as easy as cooking for a crowd. Moist-heat cooking involves cooking meat and other foods in a constantly moving environment of liquid or steam. It is used for foods that are not naturally tender, such as meat with a lot of connective tissue and plants with lots of fiber, such as beans. It is the most efficient way to transform tough meat into delectably tender morsels. Braising is an excellent way of cooking inexpensive cuts of meat—the flavors heighten and the liquid literally cooks the meat. Braises and stews are creative in that cooks can achieve infinite variety by varying the liquid (such as water, stock, wine, or juice) and by using a combination of two cooking techniques. "Braising" comes from the French word *braise*, which translates to "ember," giving testament to its long use by humans to cook food. Its counterpart is stewing, where the meat is cut into uniform small pieces that are almost submerged; the cooking liquid becomes the sauce. Both techniques call for a deep, thick earthenware cooking pot for optimum efficiency, yet it should be small enough so the meat fits snugly and have a tight lid to retain the cooking steam. While stews may have an image problem—appearing so humble that they are often overlooked by cooks who are more impressed

with stylish plated food—there is nothing as satisfying or fragrant as a well-made country-style stew. While dry-heat cooking circulates hot dry air, moist-heat cooking is a far more efficient method of cooking, since food reaches a temperature that is the same on the surface of the food as it is in the interior. Moist heat reaches a proper cooking temperature quickly and maintains it more consistently; since water heats only to its boiling point of 212°F, foods do not burn and can handle long cooking times without being monitored (in dry-heat cooking, the higher heat is what browns the surface). This style of cooking is known for its ease, economy, tenderness, and flavor. The different types of moist-heat techniques differ from one another in the amount of liquid used. Braising and steaming take a modicum of liquid, stews a bit more, and poaching fully submerges the food. **How Does a Slow Cooker Work?** Today's new machines are a great improvement over those on the market even five years ago, and since they are such an inexpensive appliance, go ahead and upgrade from your mom's hand-me-down or that one you picked up at a tag sale. If you cook a lot, buy a second or third machine in a different size (you won't regret doing so). The slow cooker's low-wattage, wraparound heating coils are sandwiched between inner and outer metal walls for indirect heat; the heat source never makes direct contact with the stoneware crock. The coils inside the walls heat up, and the space between the base wall and the crock heats up, transferring that heat to the stoneware insert. The slow cooker cooks at a temperature between 200° and 300°F. In this book, I never indicate a specific cooking temperature in a recipe, because the cooking process is based on the wattage of the slow cooker and time. The contents of the crock will take 1 to 2 hours to heat up to a simmer, much slower than in any other cooking process, so relax and be prepared for this. Many cooks turn the cooker to the HIGH heat setting for 1 to 2 hours to bring the temperature up as quickly as possible to 140°F, the temperature at which bacteria can no longer proliferate in food, then switch to LOW for the remainder of the cook time. Any time you lift the lid to check the contents or to stir, you release the accumulated steam that cooks the food, and it will take approximately 20 minutes for the internal cook temperature to come back to the stable cooking temperature. Therefore, while you are cooking, do not open the lid repeatedly to examine the contents. The accumulated steam is part of the cooking process (you'll know that the machine is doing its job properly when you cannot see through the clear lid into the pot due to its steaming up), although it is hard not to keep checking the first time you use a slow cooker. But remember that opening the lid more than a couple of times slows down the cooking considerably. During cooking, the outside of the cooker's metal base housing will become hot to the touch, so keep it away from children and walls or low cabinets. The stoneware insert will slowly reach the same high temperature, although you can briefly touch both without oven mitts to check the temperature. If you are transferring the whole dish to a buffet or potluck dinner, just carry the entire portable unit by its handles, then plug it in and set the heat to LOW to reheat the food. There are optional accessories for transporting the slow cooker, such as a Lid Latch from Rival, which keeps the lid in place while you carry the cooker, and a lovely insulated carrying case. **What Is the Best Size Slow Cooker for Cooking Solo and for Two?** This book is specifically geared toward preparing recipes that are suited to the small-capacity slow cooker countertop appliance. The slow cooker has been marketed in past decades as appealing to the needs of larger families and to anyone who needs large quantities of food. *Not Your Mother's Slow Cooker Recipes for Two* is establishing new territory by addressing the needs of singles and couples who also wish to take advantage of the convenience and delicious food that is available from the slow cooker method of cooking. First, here is the overall view. The slow cooker is available in a wide range of volume capacities from 1 quart to 7 quarts, in 2-cup increments. The sizes are divided into three general categories: small (1½-, 2-, 2½-, and 3-quart capacity), medium (3½-, 4-, and 4½-quart capacity), and large (5-, 5½-, 6-, and 7-quart capacity). Almost all sizes come in a choice of round or oval, but be sure to check inside the box and on the carton label when purchasing, as often the picture on the outside of the box is not the shape of the cooker within. If you have a choice, always choose the oval shape. It is a bit more compact than the round and has more cooking surface area, easily fitting a turkey breast or two chops side by side. What is smaller-quantity slow cooking? It is cooking a meal for one or two people, often, but not always, with leftovers, depending on your needs. The most efficient machine for this quantity is the small cooker (specifically a 1½-, 2-, 2½-,

or 3-quart machine). It is an attractive and easy-to-manipulate appliance, since it is not as cumbersome or heavy as the larger crocks. It is comfortable to lift, fits nicely on the counter and does not take up much space, and the crockery insert can even fit on the top rack in the dishwasher. You do not want the smallest machine, the 16-ounce size, dubbed the Little Dipper by Rival. This size is great for keeping dips warm on a buffet table or for melting chocolate, but it is not the size you want to use for daily meals. It is too small for cooking soups, stews, and various cuts of meat. While small cookers used to be designed without removable crocks and only came in the round shape with an ON/OFF function controlled by pulling the plug in and out of the socket, these older cookers will not work best for the recipes in this book. You definitely want a machine with multiple heat settings, preferably with KEEP WARM, LOW, and HIGH settings. For solo cooking I love the 1½-quart oval, but many slow cooker users who cook for one or two people use a 2½- to 3½-quart model, because they want the versatility to be able to cook for guests or have leftovers. Hard-core slow cooker users usually have two or three machines in different sizes, and once you get started cooking, you'll understand why. I have both 1½- and 3-quart oval cookers from Proctor-Silex, with which I tested all the recipes in this book. I also tested recipes using machines from Rival and West Bend. The 3-quart oval became a very popular model with me and co-author Julie Kaufmann during the testing of the recipes in *Not Your Mother's Slow Cooker Cookbook*. For your first foray into slow cooking, this is the size I recommend. It holds 4 servings of stew, a 3-pound roast, or a cut-up whole chicken. This is also a good size for two people who like leftovers, which can be reheated within a few days or frozen for a later meal. Many people use the 3-quart oval to cook for one person, especially for stews, soups, and chili. So, when introduced to the 1½-quart oval and the 2½-quart round cookers, I was not prepared for my reaction: I fell in love with the sizes and wanted to make slow-cooked meals every day. I quickly augmented my 3-quart oval with these smaller sizes. The 1½-quart oval is a boon for the single cook. I do not recommend you use a round cooker in this size; the oval gives so much more possibility to your cooking—it can cook two pork chops, one large osso buco, or boneless chicken breasts side by side. You can cook a whole pork tenderloin in it and make a myriad of soups and stews. You can cook for yourself, yet have enough for another meal or to share with a guest.

**Manufacturers of Small Slow Cookers 1½- and 3-quart oval, 1½-quart round**  
**Proctor-Silex Slow Cookers** 800-851-8900 [www.proctorsilex.com](http://www.proctorsilex.com) 1½- and 2½-quart round, 3- and 3½-quart oval

**Rival Crock-Pots** 800-557-4825 [www.crockpot.com](http://www.crockpot.com)

Rival offers numerous models in round or oval shapes, though all of their small machines are round. You can order accessories via their Web site, such as bake pans, meat racks, disposable bag liners for the crockery insert, vinyl storage covers, and insulated travel bags. **3-quart oval**

**West Bend Housewares Crockery Cookers** 262-334-6949 [www.westbend.com](http://www.westbend.com)

The 3-quart is the smallest size they make. It has a great nonstick interior. **How to Use a Slow Cooker for the First Time** While the slow cooker is very simple to use, there is a sequence of use. There are no moving parts, so your slow cooker is delightfully uncomplicated. When shopping for a slow cooker, do check inside the box before purchasing to make sure that all parts are intact and that its shape, which may be different from what is pictured on the outside of the box, is what you intended to buy. Read the manufacturer's booklet, highlighting warranty information and customer service phone numbers, and fill out the warranty card. Make a note in the back of the booklet regarding the model and capacity—a note that is especially useful as time goes by and you forget what size your crock is. Then familiarize yourself with my Slow Cooker Tips for Success (see [ &t;]). I recommend that you stay in the house during your first use of this appliance to assess how it works and observe the cooking process. Slow cookers do not have a thermostat, so if you are concerned about temperature, use a dial food thermometer inserted into the meat or cooking liquid. Place the cooker on your countertop. Place the machine away from the wall and sink and close to an electrical outlet, since the cord is quite short. *Do not* use an extension cord or plug strip. Remove the lid and stoneware insert and wash them in hot, soapy water, taking care not to scratch them; both the lid and the stoneware are dishwasher safe. Dry the stoneware thoroughly and place it back into the base by sliding it into place. If it is a round machine, line up

the handles on the insert and base. Put on the lid and leave it on the counter until you are ready to cook. After choosing a recipe, read the recipe carefully through to the end before starting to cook to be sure you have all the ingredients and can make any adjustments, know the procedures, assemble the utensils and other appliances, and know how long the cooking time will be. *Then* chop, mince, shred, dice, cut, grate, and do any other food prep required. If you cut up your meat and vegetables in advance, store them separately, covered, in the refrigerator. I prefer to remove the stoneware and fill it outside the base so as not to splash liquid into the base. In general to avoid spillage, do not fill the crock more than three-quarters full, as the heated contents will expand. Also note that the heating coils do not go all the way to the top. Carefully replace the crock into the base, wipe the edges clean, then cover with the lid. Plug in. Set the machine to the ON, LOW, or HIGH heat setting, as directed in the recipe. Some simpler, usually smaller, machines do not have a switch; they are turned on whenever they are plugged in, and you must unplug them to turn them off. Do not ever cook on the KEEP WARM setting, even if you think the LOW setting is cooking at too high a temperature. Set a timer or write down the estimated cooking time as per the recipe instructions. It is best to check the food at the first time suggestion or a bit earlier, especially when making a recipe for the first time. Use a wooden or heat-resistant spoon or spatula to stir or serve (metal utensils, spoons, and whisks are fine as long as you are careful not to chip the crock). If using an immersion blender to puree soups, be sure to keep it from hitting the sides of the crock, and unplug the unit first. When handling the full stoneware crock, always turn off the machine and unplug it first, then use thick oven mitts to transfer the hot crock to a hot pad or heatproof surface. You can serve directly out of the crock, either in or out of its base. At the end of the cook time, you can leave the full crock in the housing base until it is cool enough to handle to transfer the contents to a refrigerator container. Do not ever fill the hot stoneware with cold water to soak; you could crack it. Once the crock has cooled, you can use it to store leftovers in the refrigerator.

**Slow Cooker Tips for Success** There is a saying that what appears to be easy often is not, and the impression of effortless is usually the result of much unseen effort. This is an apt description of bistro-style braising, with its earthy honesty and time-honored methods that go back to home hearth cooking. But the slow cooker has made this axiom true—what looks easy *is* easy, and the effort expended is quite often minimal for the results, which rival arduous and great country-style cooking. Once you become familiar with the new techniques involved with using your slow cooker, you will probably wonder how you ever did without it as an essential kitchen appliance. Once I got past the idea of the "magic pot" (that is, that you randomly throw in some raw ingredients and they are magically transformed into a fabulous meal) and began using the slow cooker in various practical capacities, I gained a new respect for this trendsetting appliance. Please be sure to read this section before your first slow cooking forays and use it as a reference guide thereafter, as the slow cooker requires that you follow some very important guidelines for safe cooking. Unless you are cooking at the wrong temperature, have used too much or too little liquid, have let a dish cook too long, or have overfilled the crockery insert, there will be no burning, sticking, or bubbling over. Exceptions might occur in recipes that specify to cook on HIGH heat with the cover off to encourage evaporation of liquid. Never preheat an empty crockery insert before adding the food. Load the crock with the ingredients and then turn on the heat or plug in to start the heating process. The cord on the slow cooker is deliberately short to minimize danger from tangling or tripping. You may use a heavy-duty extension cord *only* if it has a marked electrical rating at least as great as the electrical rating of your cooker, but I advise against using an extension cord, to minimize risk of overturning the pot. For food safety considerations, most slow cooker appliances do not allow you to pre-program the cooking start time. That means you cannot fill the pot with food, leave home, and have the pot go on an hour or two later. While food is cooking and once it's done, food will stay safe for as long as the cooker is operating. The newer programmable machines have strict food safety guidelines accompanying the appliance. At this writing, this feature is only available on the large machines. When beginning to cook or to hasten the cooking process, switch from the LOW to the HIGH heat setting. In general, the cooking time on HIGH is about half of the cooking time on LOW. One hour on HIGH is 2 to 2½ hours on LOW. These recipes specify the best temperature setting for each recipe to achieve the best results. We

have found that the new slow cookers are much more efficient and run at slightly higher temperatures than do older cookers. Be sure to check the wattage of your unit; there are slight differences between manufacturers. Some recipes turn out better on LOW with a gentle rolling simmer than with the vigorous simmer on HIGH. Many cooks always start their cookers on HIGH for about an hour to get a good start on the cooking, then switch to LOW. The glass lid becomes quite hot during the cooking process. Use a potholder to remove it if necessary, and handle it with care to avoid burns. Keeping the lid in place during cooking is essential for proper cooking of the contents of the crock. The lid is dishwasher-safe. The amount of liquid used varies drastically in the recipes, from a few tablespoons to cover the bottom of the crock to submerging the food completely in liquid. Each recipe will be specific on these points. Fill the cooker with the solid ingredients, place in the base, and then carefully add the liquid, to avoid both splashing and having to lift an overly heavy crock. Ideally, slow cooker crockery inserts should be filled from half full to no more than 1 inch from the rim. The best practice is to fill the insert one-half to three-quarters full, because the heating elements are around the sides of the insert; this will give you the most even cooking and will help avoid spills as the heated contents expand. Root vegetables cook more slowly than meat and poultry in a slow cooker, so if you are using them, place the vegetables in first, at the bottom and around the sides of the cooking vessel, in a layered effect. Then add meat and cover the food with liquid such as broth, water, or tomato or barbecue sauce. Check the food for doneness once toward the middle of the cook time, then again around the time suggested in the recipe for the minimum amount of cooking, especially the first time you make a dish. Tender vegetables and pasta overcook easily, so add them during the last 30 to 60 minutes of cooking. The same goes for cooking with any seafood. For the most control over seasoning, add that during the last hour as well. While dried herbs and spices do work nicely when added at the beginning with the bulk of the ingredients, remember that their flavors will concentrate, so do not add too much; you can always add more at the end of cooking. Fresh herbs are best added at the end, as they tend to break down and dissolve if added in the beginning. Salt and pepper can be added at any point in the cooking process, except when you are cooking legumes or stock; then salt should not be added until the end. While the crockery insert can be used in a conventional oven, it cannot be used on a gas or electric stovetop; it will break in direct contact with a heating element, as will any ceramic dish. If browning ingredients, such as searing meat, do so first in a sauté pan, skillet, or saucepan, as directed in the recipe, then transfer into the crock. The manufacturer's directions will specify if the crock is ovenproof, microwave-safe, or broiler-safe. At the end of the cooking time, remove the lid and stir well, preferably with a wooden or heatproof plastic spoon to prevent chipping the crock. If your dish is not cooked to your preference at the end of the designated cooking time, replace the lid, set the temperature to HIGH, and cook in additional increments of 30 to 60 minutes until the food is done. Don't worry if the dish takes longer than the recipe says; there are many variables among machines and in the temperature of the ingredients that can affect the cooking time. When the food is cooked and ready to be served, turn the cooker to the OFF setting and/or unplug the unit. Many older slow cookers and small units do not have an OFF setting; "off" is when the unit is unplugged. The stoneware crock will retain heat, keeping food warm, for a full hour after turning off the machine. Once the dish is completely cooked, you can keep the food hot by switching to the LOW or KEEP WARM setting. Food can be held safely in the cooker for up to 2 hours before eating. Many digital cookers switch automatically to the KEEP WARM setting when the cooking time is up. Do not use the KEEP WARM setting, if you have one, for cooking; the temperature is too low. The crock will be very hot at the end of cooking, so if not serving directly out of the cooker, use heavy oven mitts to lift the hot crock with its contents carefully out of the base. Transfer to a skid-proof trivet or folded towel. Transfer leftovers to proper refrigerator or freezer storage containers within two hours after finishing cooking. Do not refrigerate your hot cooked food in the crockery insert, as the insert may crack. Ceramic clay cookware cannot withstand quick changes in temperature. Never store the stoneware crock in the freezer. The insert can also crack if you add a lot of frozen food or submerge it in cold water while it is still hot from the cooking cycle. Be sure to let the crock come to room temperature before washing; never pour cold water into a hot crock. If your insert

becomes cracked or deeply scratched, contact the manufacturer for replacement instructions. The crock can be washed by hand with nonabrasive dish soap and a nylon scrub pad, or placed in the dish-washer. Cold cooked food should not be reheated in the crockery insert, as it will take too long to reach an internal temperature that renders the food safe to eat. However, cooked food can be brought to steaming on the stove or in a microwave and then put into a slow cooker crock on the LOW or KEEP WARM setting to keep hot for serving. Never immerse the metal housing base of the slow cooker in water or fill it with liquids for cooking; you must always have the crockery insert in place to cook. To clean the base, let it come to room temperature or fill with the hottest tap water possible, then wipe the inside and outside with a damp, soapy sponge and dry with a towel. Make sure the bottom inside is clean and free of food particles or spillage.

**Cooking Time Conversion Chart** Use this indispensable conversion chart as a guide for translating traditional cooking times to slow cooker times. All times are approximate, and, when making a recipe for the first time, be sure to make notes on the cooking time for further reference. While early slow cooker recipes designated both LOW and HIGH cook times, I have found that almost every dish cooks best on one or the other setting. The recipes in this book provide specific directions for the temperature that gives the best results. Generally, 1 hour of cooking on the HIGH setting equals 2 to 2½ hours on LOW.

### **Conventional Recipe Time Slow Cooker Time on LOW**

15 minutes 1½ to 2 hours

20 minutes 2 to 3 hours

30 minutes 3 to 4 hours

45 minutes 5 to 6 hours

60 minutes 6 to 8 hours

90 minutes 8 to 9 hours

2 hours 9 to 10 hours

3 hours 12 hours plus

**Secrets of Slow Cooking: The Panic-Proof Pantry** You do not need to have a connoisseur's mentality to cook good food. But if you are a busy person, a good survival strategy is to have a well-stocked pantry to make meal preparation easy and avoid constantly having to run to the store to pick up ingredients. The concept revolves around an update of the larder, whether cooking solo or for entertaining 10. But even in the most modest pantry these days it is not unusual to see canned coconut milk next to jarred salsa and spicy hot harissa next to *herbes de Provence*, extra-virgin olive oil along-side sesame oil and grape leaves. Oh, and then there are the many barbecue sauces, dried fruit varieties, and low-sodium condiments. If you cannot make your own stocks or do not have the inclination to do so, keep plenty of your favorite canned vegetable and chicken broth on hand. And also think about purchasing little bottles of red and white wine, and those tiny bottles of liquors, like rum. Many slow cooker cooks comment on how important it is to stock your freezer with pre-portioned meats for the ultimate convenience.

Seasonality affects meat, poultry, and fish, just like produce, as the supermarkets gear up for holiday supplies. At peak availability, prices are lower for such items as turkey parts in early winter, lamb in the spring, and duck and game birds in the fall and winter. Cuts of beef for entertaining are often on sale when shoppers are planning summer barbecues and holiday feasts. With the larger cuts, like brisket, chuck roast, and flank steak, ask the butcher to cut them into smaller portions suitable for two. Cook one portion and freeze the other to use within the next few months. I have included in this recipe collection both very easy, quick-to-assemble recipes (boneless chicken breasts in two hours) and those that take a bit more time (cassoulet or lamb shanks). What all the recipes have in common, however, is that they rely on your pantry. My panic-proof slow cooker pantry is designed for on-the-spot slow cooking preparation and contains foods that are versatile and make vivid, delicious flavor combinations. **The Freezer**

**Meat:** Individually wrapped boneless chicken breasts (the quintessential desperation cooking food), turkey wings for broth, osso buco, lamb shanks, veal or lamb stew meat, beef or pork ribs, pork tenderloins, chuck roasts cut to size, meatballs, and sausages can be thawed in the refrigerator or microwave.

**Vegetables:** Frozen artichoke hearts, pearl onions, petit peas, bell pepper strips, and spinach are

all things you'll be grateful not to have to prep.

**Guide to Internal Meat Temperatures** The most reliable way to tell when meat and poultry have reached a particular stage of doneness is with an instant-read thermometer or accurate meat thermometer. I recommend these tools as basic equipment for testing meat doneness in every slow cooker kitchen. Use this chart as a guide.

**Type of Meat Rare Medium Well-Done**

Beef 125° to 130°F 140° to 145°F 160°F

Veal Not recommended 140° to 145°F 160°F

Lamb 130° to 140°F 140° to 145°F 160°F

Pork and Ham Not recommended 145° to 150°F 160°F

Poultry and Game Birds Not recommended 170° to 175°F 180°F **The Refrigerator**

**Standards:** Butter, sour cream, and crème fraîche or yogurt are used for sauces. Keep bacon or pancetta on hand too for soups and stews, as well as vacuum-packed sausages.

**Sauces and condiments:** Low-sodium soy sauce, hot sauce, hoisin sauce, Asian plum sauce, Dijon mustard, Worcestershire sauce, and maple syrup all come in handy.

**Vegetables:** Keep durable cabbage, apples, potatoes, carrots, celery, garlic, shallots, onions, and turnips on hand for soups, vegetable dishes, and stews. Also stock lemons, limes, fresh Italian parsley, and fresh cilantro. (You can also freeze fresh herbs.)

**Cheeses:** Keep Parmigiano-Reggiano, aged Asiago, or Pecorino Romano on hand for grating. Goat cheese and cheddar are also good and versatile. **The Cupboard**

**Tomatoes:** I use a lot of tomato products in my slow cooker recipes since they are a wonderful and versatile flavor medium. Canned commercial tomatoes come in a wide variety of preparations (whole, diced, pureed), and some versions come in aseptic packaging. They are so convenient, and often they taste way better than fresh. Canned whole or diced peeled tomatoes are certainly better than out-of-season market ones. Keep dehydrated and olive oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes too. Tomato paste is useful for keeping sauces from being too thin, and always keep one good commercial tomato sauce on hand for those on-the-spot rib dishes or a ragú .

**Beans:** Stock up on canned cannellini (Italian white beans), red kidney beans, pinto beans, garbanzo beans, and black beans. Keep dried beans as well, including *flageolets verte*, black turtle beans, cranberry beans, navy beans, pintos, lentils, split peas, moong dal, and Great Northern beans.

**Stock and broth:** Chicken, beef, and vegetable broth are essential. Sample different canned and aseptically packaged varieties to find a favorite. If you indulge in homemade stock, store your stocks in appropriately sized containers in the freezer.

**Dried mushrooms:** Once only a gourmet item, dried mushrooms are now excellent everyday slow cooker ingredients. A well-stocked supermarket will carry an entire selection, usually in a corner of the produce department. Dried porcini and shiitake mushrooms might be found in the Asian food section. Dried mushrooms keep indefinitely and reconstitute easily for sauces, risottos, and stews. I never use canned mushrooms.

**Dried pastas:** While I use limited amounts of pasta in slow cooker dishes, since it tends to get gummy (orzo and macaroni or mini-penne are sometimes used) if not carefully prepared, pasta is one of the best side dishes for most sauces and stews. Fit the shape to your dish: linguine, spaghetti, or thin spaghetti for seafood pastas, and stubby macaroni like penne, fusilli, gemelli, or shells for chunkier sauces, as well as egg noodles and Japanese udon noodles.

**Rice:** Rice is another delicious and staple side dish for slow cooker meals. Some recipes also feature rice, especially converted rice and wild rice, which hold up beautifully in the long cooking process. Italian Arborio and Vialone nano are used for slow cooker risottos and rice pudding. Keep white basmati, Japanese-style short-grain white rice (Calrose), short-grain brown rice, and wild rice on hand as the basics for a delicious starchy side dish.

**Dried fruits:** Apricots, prunes, raisins, dried apples, figs, dried cranberries, and dried tart cherries are great for Moroccan tagines and for accompanying pork roasts and many quick chicken dishes in the slow cooker.

**Vinegars:** Keep a variety on hand for splashing: red and white wine vinegars, white and dark

balsamic vinegars, champagne vinegar, and apple cider vinegar.

**Oils:** I mostly use light and extra-virgin olive oil in my recipes. Walnut oil is a great all-purpose cooking oil and is nutritionally healthy, like olive oil.

**Chocolate:** Unsweetened chocolate and good old-fashioned Hershey bars are used for mole sauces.

**Preserves, jams, jellies:** Not just breakfast-toast fare! Orange marmalade is great for ribs and glazes. Stock some uncommon flavors, like whole sour cherry preserves, currant jelly, quince jelly, and lime or ginger marmalade, all of which can end up as ingredients.

**Cereals:** Steel-cut oats, rolled oats, grits, polenta, and fresh stone-ground cornmeal (refrigerate this, please) can all be cooked in the slow cooker.

**Essential sundries:** Canned evaporated milk, your favorite barbecue sauce, jarred roasted red peppers, canned roasted green chiles, chipotles in adobo sauce, jarred salsa, tuna packed in olive oil or spring water, olives (green, black kalamata, canned ripe California), and capers all make good additions to sauces, soups, and stews. Many recipes also call for all-purpose flour, granulated sugar, and brown sugar.

**High-Altitude Slow Cooking** While it is virtually impossible to overcook food in the slow cooker when cooked on LOW, there are guidelines for slow cooking at altitudes more than 3,000 feet above sea level. Just remember that the higher you go, the more compressed the air is, and liquids take longer to come to a boil. If you are at a high altitude, figure that your food will take approximately 25 percent more time to come up to the proper cooking temperature and to cook. Just as oven temperatures need to be increased (the rule is to increase oven temperature by 1°F for every 100 feet of altitude) to compensate for slower heating at high altitudes, the slow cooker will run at a lower overall temperature at higher altitudes, so cook all foods on HIGH and increase the cooking time slightly. Use the LOW heat setting rather than the KEEP WARM setting for keeping food warm. Use the following chart as a guideline. Be sure to note the adjustments you make to recipes for future cooking.

#### **Altitude Adjustment**

Cook all recipes on HIGH 3,000 feet 5,000 feet 7,000 to 8,000 feet

For each cup of liquid specified in the recipe, decrease by: 1 to 2 tablespoons 2 to 3 tablespoons 3 to 4 tablespoons

#### **HALE AND HEARTY MAIN-DISH SOUPS**

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Nearly 60 percent of American households today consist of only one or two people, yet most cookbooks don't reflect this trend, with recipes designed for large families, yielding 6-8 servings. For individuals and small families who want to cook hearty, healthful meals but don't want to deal with all the leftovers, Beth Hensperger has the solution. The James Beard Award-winning author follows up the best-selling Not Your Mother's® Slow Cooker Cookbook with Not Your Mother's® Slow Cooker Recipes for Two, a collection of 125 new recipes specially designed for the small slow cooker. As always, Hensperger's innovative recipes call for fresh, healthful ingredients and continue to prove that the slow cooker can produce amazing meals. While the recipes yield the perfect amount for two or three people, there is no shortage of flavor with dishes such as Quick Hominy and Zucchini Chili, Moroccan-Spiced Tomato Chicken with Almonds, Lamb Stew with Lemon and Garlic, and Vegetable Polenta with Mascarpone Cheese. The slow cooker is an essential countertop appliance for busy cooks, and this is the only book on the market specifically written for the increasingly popular 1 ½- 3 ½-quart slow cooker. Not Your Mother's® Slow Cooker Recipes for Two is great for the growing population of empty-nesters, working couples, singles, and small families who want the convenience of small slow-cooker cooking without sacrificing wholesomeness and flavor.

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