

Ready And Waiting - Entertaining With Your Slow Cooker By Donna-Marie Pye

Donna-Marie Pye is a Professional Home Economist, food writer and author of “Canada’s Best Slow Cooker Recipes”. She has developed recipes for a number of publications and food marketing boards. Her second slow cooker book “The Best Family Slow Cooker Recipes” has just been published (September 2003). With two active children and a busy family household, she has a first-hand appreciation of how slow cookers can benefit the lives of families.

After many years of slow cooking, and two cookbooks later, I am even more convinced of the marvelous benefits of this appliance. Not only are slow cookers convenient and portable, but cooking foods at low heat produces flavorful, tender results. Slow cooking tenderizes tougher cuts of meat by cooking them in their own juices and slowly breaking down the tough connective tissues. Stews and chilies don’t dry out our stick to the bottom of the pot and the even, low temperature ensures perfect results with more delicate dishes such as puddings and custards.

Slow cooking is for everyone – families, couples, students and seniors. Whether you are on a tight budget or love leisurely cooking, slow cookers can provide good, healthy food without requiring you to spend hours over a hot stove.

The basic premise is simple. Assemble and prepare the ingredients at your convenience – whether it’s the night before or earlier in the day – place them in the slow cooker stoneware, turn it on and let the food cook while you walk away. Delicious aromas greet you when you return at the end of the day. Toss a salad and pour the drinks and a delicious home-prepared meal is ready for you to serve and savor.

While most of us have a hard time trying to figure out what we’re going to have for dinner every night, choosing the perfect dish to offer to friends and company can be even harder. Enter your lifesaver – the slow cooker. Potlucks provide the perfect opportunity to use this handy appliance. It is a great time saver and it will free up important oven space that is needed for other dishes. And, of course, you can serve directly from your slow cooker, which saves on extra dishes and eases clean-up.

One of the best things about slow cooker meals, is they often feed a crowd. What would a football party be without a big pot of simmering chili or a thick, hearty stew after a day of playful winter activities? And everyone’s a winner on games night when you serve up a tasty buffet of appetizers, hot from the slow cooker. Sample a delicious dessert at your monthly book club meeting or show off your talents at your church supper by dishing up a delicious casserole. Holiday celebrations mean lots of friends, family, fun and food. Of course the turkey and stuffing are a given, but oven space is always at a premium. Take advantage of your slow cooker to prepare a few appetizers or condiments a day or two ahead, make the stuffing in the morning and have it warming during the day or keep a hot drink simmering. Use your slow cooker to serve up a soup for starters, an extra dessert, a separate entrée for vegetarians or as an extra server for a delicious array of side

dishes. These are just a few of the popular situations when your slow cooker could come in handy, whether you are the host or you tote along.

In order to take your slow cooker to an event, here are a few tips for transporting :

- Wrap the slow cooker in a towel or in newspapers for insulation, then place in a box (or other container) that will stay flat in your car. Some slow cooker manufacturers sell insulated totes that perfectly hold a slow cooker. You may want to consider investing in one if you travel with yours a lot.
- Attach rubber bands around the handles and lid to secure the lid.
- Serve the food within an hour or plug in the slow cooker and set on **LOW** or **KEEP WARM** so it will stay warm.

Ginger Pork Wraps

These wraps combine the flavours of sweet and sour pork with crisp vegetables. Serve them at your next party and everyone will be asking for seconds and thirds!

¼ cup	hoisin sauce	50 mL
3 tbsp	grated gingerroot	45 mL
3 tbsp	liquid honey	45 mL
1	2 ½ lb (1.25 kg) boneless pork loin rib end roast, trimmed of excess fat	1
2 ½ cups	shredded cabbage	625 mL
½ cup	shredded carrots	125 mL
3	green onions, finely chopped	3
2 tbsp	rice vinegar	25 mL
10 – 12	10-inch (25 cm) flour tortillas	10 – 12

1. In a bowl, combine hoisin sauce, gingerroot and honey.
2. Place pork roast in slow cooker stoneward and brush with sauce to coat completely.
3. Cover and cook on **Low** for 8 to 10 hours or on **High** for 4 to 5 hours, or until meat is very tender.
4. Transfer pork to a bowl and pull meat apart in shreds using two forks. Skim fat from sauce. Return meat to slow cooker.
5. In a bowl, combine cabbage, carrot, green onions and vinegar.
6. Wrap tortillas in foil and heat in a pre-heated 350 F (180 C) oven for 10 minutes.
7. To serve, spread about 1/3 cup (75 mL) pork mixture down center of each warm tortilla. Top with ¼ cup (50 mL) cabbage mixture. Roll up each tortilla tightly.

Makes 6 servings.

Braised Cabbage and Raspberries

This is a perfect side dish at any Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner table. It goes especially well with pork roasts. Tote it along to your next holiday gathering.

1	medium heat green or red cabbage thinly sliced (about 12 cups/3L)	1
2	onions, thinly sliced	2
½ cup	dried cranberries	125 mL
2 cups	fresh raspberries, or 1 10-oz (300 g) package frozen unsweetened raspberries, defrosted	500 mL
¾ cup	raspberry vinegar	175 mL
¼ cup	butter, melted	50 mL
½ cup	granulated sugar	125 mL
1 tsp	salt	5 mL

1. Place cabbage, onions, cranberries and raspberries in slow cooker stoneware.
2. In a small bowl, combine vinegar, butter, sugar and salt. Pour over cabbage mixture and toss to combine.
3. Cover and cook on Low for 4 to 6 hours, or until cabbage is tender.

Makes 6 to 8 servings.