

Slow Cooker Safety

SAFE DEVICES, WHEN USED CORRECTLY

Slow cookers (aka “crock pots”) work by cooking food at a low temperature (generally between 170-280°F) for several hours. Direct heat from the pot, steam, and long cooking times combine to destroy bacteria, making foods safe to consume. Some specific safety considerations include:

ADD LIQUID: Water or some form of liquid is necessary to create steam. When cooking meat or poultry, cover the ingredients to ensure heat transfer. Foods with high moisture content (chili, stews, etc.) are a good choice for slow cookers.

THAW FIRST: Thaw ingredients before adding to the cooker. Frozen meat won’t reach the minimum temperature necessary to ensure safety quickly enough.

PREHEAT THE COOKER: Preheat before adding ingredients. Liquids should preferably be hot before being added.

SET TO HIGH FOR THE FIRST HOUR: This helps ensure a rapid heat start and shortens the time foods are in the “danger zone.” This is highly recommended when cooking meat or poultry.

KEEP THE LID ON: Refrain from lifting the lid unnecessarily during cooking. Each time the cover is opened, steam escapes, the internal temp drops 10-15 degrees, and the cooking process is slowed down by 30 minutes.

SOAK & BOIL DRIED BEANS FIRST: Dried beans contain natural toxins that are destroyed by boiling temperatures (which are not generally reached in slow cookers). Soak beans for 12 hours, rinse, then boil on the stove top for 10 minutes before adding the beans to a slow cooker.

OTHER: Don’t allow food to cool down in the cooker; do not reheat food in a slow cooker; and use a calibrated thermometer to check that food has reached the proper temperature before eating.

For further information on using slow cookers, visit www.fsis.usda.gov.

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