

A Growing Wise Kids Column

The slow-cooker offers the home cook a way of making “fast food.” While it may cook slowly, it has a fix-it-and-forget-it feature that other cooking techniques can't match. Once your ingredients are in the cooker, there is no stirring, no fussing, no additional attention necessary until your dish is ready for the table. This feature can be appreciated by the nine-to-five executive, busy stay-at-home mom, retiree and college student alike—really anyone who desires to eat nutritious meals with a dash of convenience. No matter the dish—breakfast, beverage, lunch, dinner, snack, dip or dessert—once you get friendly with your slow-cooker, it will become your most prized appliance.

WHAT EXACTLY IS A SLOW-COOKER?

First of all, “slow-cooker” is the generic term used for this appliance, but the company who first designed the slow-cooker (Rival) coined their product a Crock-Pot®. The slow cooker and the crock pot are one and the same. Features that make a slow-cooker a slow-cooker are: countertop appliance; low and high settings without a gauge to set a specific temperature; inner container made from stoneware, ceramic or heat-resistant glass; wrap-around heating elements within the metal casing offering indirect heat to the container for even heating to avoid hot spots and the need for stirring; and a tight-fitting lid to contain the heat and steam.

The combination of low temperature, lengthy cooking times and locked-in moisture work together to cook food thoroughly, while inhibiting the growth of bacteria and eliminating the need for attention throughout the cooking process. Beth Hensperger, in her book *Not Your Mother's Slow Cooker Cookbook*, writes, “Think of it as a large oven-to-table casserole or soup tureen. It permits you to cook back-to-basic cuisine at its best—simple and economical, yet sumptuous and hearty.”

Slow-cookers are typically round or oval in shape and range in size from one to seven quarts. Depending on your needs, it may be useful to have two different sizes—a smaller one for side dishes and dips and another larger size for bigger main meals and to allow room to double or triple a dish so you can freeze a portion for later. Current “high-tech” models have digital features, such as an automatic “off” or “keep warm” option, or even an attached meat thermometer that will change the settings once the food has reached a certain temperature. These options allow you to better control how long your dish cooks when you are away from home.

Be aware of the fact that some products on the market called “slow-cookers” do not provide the same features as those discussed above. (Slow cookers with all the features are sometimes referred to as multi-cookers or intermittent cookers). Avoid the units that have a direct heat

source coming from the base, which will result in scorching if left to its own devices.

TRADITIONAL ORIGINS AND BENEFITS OF SLOW-COOKING

Although slow-cooking was introduced in the early 1970s, it can be considered a modern version of the time-honored traditional braising, stewing, pot-roasting and Dutch oven cooking methods. All use long cooking times, low temperatures with liquid and a tight-fitting lid to keep it all enclosed in a moist environment. These methods typically use indirect heat, such as with an oven, compared to the direct heat applied from fire or a stovetop.

As described in *Slow-Cookers for Dummies*, “For generations, women in small towns throughout Europe. . . have been using the town bread baker’s cooling ovens to slow-cook their family’s meals. . . . For a small price, the baker rented oven space to anyone who wanted to slowcook a joint of meat or fish. The food was left in the oven unattended and picked up in the early afternoon for dinner. Although the practice of slow-cooking in a wood-burning oven was also common practice in the United States during the 1800s, it died out with the introduction of castiron stoves. . . .”¹

Just as with any other food preparation technique, flops can happen with a slow-cooker. While it is an easy-to-use appliance, it does take a little more thought to use than just dumping in the ingredients and clicking the on switch.

Slow-cooker critics will argue food cooked this way turns out too wet or overcooked. However, just as with any cooking method, it is important to know how the appliance functions at its best. With a little knowledge, you will experience many more successes than mishaps. Also, the more you learn about how to operate the slow cooker, the easier it will be for you to create new or adapt old family recipes to this nourishing, time-saving method.

WHICH SETTING TO USE AND WHEN?

The settings on most slow-cookers include off, low and high—for safety reasons, smaller sizes may not have a high setting. More “high-tech” models have other goodies, such as a keep-warm function. Most slow-cooker recipes are geared to the low setting, which reaches 180-200 degrees, that is, a gentle simmer. The high setting hovers between 280-300 degrees and will cook food about two to two-and-a-half times faster than when on low.¹⁰ Foods cooked with the high setting may require a little more attention. The high setting is especially useful for thickening a loose sauce or gravy after the food has been removed (see Slow-Cooker Gravy below).

Another option is to start a dish out on high for about an hour to get a jump start on heating the container, and then turn it back down to low for the remainder of the time—this method is especially useful when cooking large cuts of meat or whole chickens. But a fast start is not necessary and may also reduce your cooking time since one hour on high is equivalent to about two hours on low.

The keep-warm setting is a great way to maximize the usefulness of this appliance. Once the food has been thoroughly cooked, this setting will prevent further cooking or drying out, and will keep food ready-to-eat for at least two hours.¹¹

DON'T PEEK!

The vacuum seal created by the tight-fitting lid of a slow-cooker plays a big part in the way the appliance works its magic. Once the meal starts heating up, hot steam is generated, which helps cook the food. Just like the oven door, the lid is best left on throughout the entire cooking time required for the dish unless, of course, you suspect it is going to be overcooked, there is a problem or you need to add additional ingredients. Lifting the lid can result in as much as a 15-degree loss in heat,¹² not to mention loss of the accumulated steam, which can take up to 20 minutes to replace.¹³ Ultimately, the overall time needed for your dish to completely cook could be altered, so keep your curiosity in check and don't lift that lid!

HOW LONG DOES IT REALLY TAKE TO COOK?

Besides the chosen setting (high or low), other factors that influence the speed your dish will cook are the liquid and fat content of the dish, temperature of the food, temperature of the container (such as whether it was left in the fridge with pre-prepared ingredients the night before), altitude, size of the pieces of food and of course your specific slow-cooker.

Judith Finlayson, author of *175 Essential Slow-Cooker Classics* provides advice based on experience: "I've used a variety of slow-cookers and have found that cooking times can vary substantially from one to another. Although it may not seem particularly helpful if you're just starting out, the only firm advice I can give is: Know your slow-cooker."¹⁴ Essentially, at first, stay more involved in the cooking process to see how things are progressing. Once you get a feel for general cooking times for various types of dishes, you will be able to adjust almost any recipe appropriately. Nevertheless, to make sure your slow-cooker is working in tip top shape, see the side bar below. Note: some slow-cookers run hotter than 300 degrees, so test even brand new cookers. You can return a cooker if it does not stay in the proper range.

HOW MUCH FOOD IS TOO MUCH?

For the best outcome, the container of your slow-cooker should be half to three-quarters full. Filling the container less than half full is more likely to result in overcooked or burned food. Food in an overfilled container may not cook thoroughly in the allotted time or get hot enough to inhibit bacteria growth, that is reach 140 degrees in under four hours. Spillage outside the container is also more likely with expansion of the food. A good solution is to have several different sized slow-cookers at your disposal to fit all your meal needs.

DO I STILL HAVE TO BROWN OR SAUTE?

Some slow-cooker recipes require nothing more than chopping up the ingredients, while others

may taste better with a touch more prep. Since slow-cookers don't reach browning temperatures, browning large cuts of meats or sautéing or softening vegetables (especially onions and garlic) outside the slow-cooker in a separate skillet is an option to impart more depth of flavor to a dish. Browning meat consists of partially cooking meat, typically in a preheated frying pan with a small amount of fat to impart a brown color and extract the fats; browning caramelizes the food to release its flavor. Browning also locks in juices, resulting in more tenderness in the finished product.

Browning ground meat usually results in improved color and texture, but this step is not absolutely necessary, and browning is not recommended for meatloaf and similar dishes.

After browning food on the stovetop, deglazing is another flavor enhancer for your dish. Simply add approximately 1/3 cup liquid to the sauté pan to pick up some of the caramelized juices. Bring the liquid to a boil, gently scraping the bottom of the pan to remove stuck-on food particles, and then pour into your slow-cooker right along with your other ingredients. The downside to browning is that it takes away from the slow-and-low concept discussed earlier; however, there may be occasions when browning is the best way to go for sheer taste and tenderness. Bottom line: browning meats and sautéing or softening vegetables are unnecessary, but experiment and see what you and your family's taste buds prefer, given the time you have available.

SPREAD OUT THE PREP

Preparing all or a portion of your slowcooker dish to store in the fridge overnight speeds the whole process for those especially rushed mornings. In most cases, this step is as simple as placing the ingredients in the slow-cooker container, topping it off with its lid and putting the whole thing in the fridge until you are ready to start cooking. Below are a few suggestions to keep in mind:¹⁵

- Turn the slow-cooker on at the same time you place the cold container into the base unit. Placing a cold container in a pre-heated unit may crack the stoneware due to the dramatic temperature change.
- The cooking time may be lengthened slightly with the container starting out cold, especially for dishes with short cooking times.
- Liquid is best added right before cooking.
- Potatoes may discolor if exposed to air for a period of time; however, they will typically do well if layered underneath something like a large roast.
- Fruits do best when prepared right before cooking.

THE LIQUID

Most slow-cooker recipes—outside of soups, stews and chowders—typically don't need a lot of liquid since cooking brings out the natural juices and produces a plentiful amount of steam. A roast can even cook without water, however, adding some liquid will create more of a succulent gravy sauce at the end (see sidebar below). Moreover, the more fat in the food, the less liquid

that will be needed. Fat retains heat, so large amounts may raise the temperature of the cooking liquid and cook the food faster. Too much fat may alter the texture of the end product, so some fat is good, but you may want to trim off easy-to-cut excess and use it some other way outside your slow-cooker dish.

You can be creative with the types of liquids you use for casseroles or cooking a cut of meat or poultry, to jazz up the flavor. Instead of plain water, add nourishing stock (made in your slowcooker, of course). Try adding salsa, powdered chiles or canned tomatoes the next time you cook chicken or a roast. Wine and vinegar also make flavorful additions. Mushroom soup is a classic ingredient for the slow-cooker—but be sure to use a homemade version as canned or dehydrated mushroom soup is loaded with MSG. Gravy is another idea—try mixing various meats, veggies and leftover gravy in the slow cooker for a nourishing and succulent dinner.

STICKING

Sticking or burning in your slow-cooker should not occur if all your ducks are in a row— properly working equipment, correct temperature setting, right amount of liquid, correct amount of food and, of course, the appropriate cooking time. Nevertheless, no matter how much liquid you use, it is usually a good idea to grease your container before placing your ingredients in it, just as a preventative measure. If food sticks regardless of troubleshooting, your slow-cooker container may be worn or scratched.

WHICH FOODS AND WHEN

With a few exceptions, most of the ingredients for your slow-cooker dish can be put in all at the same time and still end up evenly cooked. See the guidelines below.¹⁶

- **Vegetables:** Although it seems counter-intuitive, most vegetables (especially roots such as potatoes, carrots and turnips) cook more slowly than meat and poultry do in the slow-cooker. These do best layered along the bottom under the meat or other ingredients or along the sides of the container. Be sure to cut similar vegetables into same-size pieces. Faster cooking veggies (peas and greens) can be added 20 to 30 minutes before the dish is finished cooking.
- **Poultry:** Poultry is easy to overcook and dry out. Leave the skin on a whole chicken to lock in moisture and add flavor.
- **Beans and legumes:** These dried foods are perfectly suited for the slow-cooker, just be sure to properly prepare them beforehand and don't add salt until after they are cooked, as salt will keep the skins tough. See [Beany Slow-Cooker Creations](#) below.
- **Dairy food:** Milk, cream, sour cream and yogurt tend to curdle with long simmering and cheese can break down and separate. It is best to leave these foods on the table to get the most from their enzymes and live cultures. If provided by evaporated or condensed milk in a slow-cooker recipe, opt for coconut milk or coconut cream instead.
- **Pasta and rice:** Cooking these starchy foods too long can leave you with mush. Either cook them separately on the stove top or add them in 30 to 60 minutes before the dish is finished cooking. Rice should be pre-soaked before it is cooked in the slow cooker.

- Seafood: Foods from the sea also tend to cook fast, thus tend to not fare well with the long cooking times of the slow-cooker. Add them during the last 30 to 60 minutes of cooking.
- Herbs and spices: Whole herbs and spices release their flavors slowly, while ground versions tend to lose their flavor or even become bitter tasting in the slow-cooker. Chopped fresh herbs should be added during the last hour of cooking.¹⁷

CONVERTING RECIPES

“The best and easiest way to adapt a traditional recipe for the slowcooker is to find a similar slow-cooker recipe and use it as your guide,” explains Tom Lacalamita in *Slow-Cookers for Dummies*.¹⁸ Recipes that include some moisture and require longer cooking times (45 minutes to an hour) in the oven or on the stove top are good candidates for converting to the slow-cooker since they will most likely finish cooking within eight hours on low in the slow-cooker. In fact, most uncooked meat and veggie combos will take approximately eight hours. Finally, because the enclosed environment of the slow-cooker discourages evaporation and generates liquid, about half the liquid is needed for the same recipe cooked on the stove top or in the oven (except for soups, sauces, chilies or chowders).¹⁹

SAFETY TIPS—DEPENDS ON QUALITY

The low-and-slow cooking method of the slow cooker warrants a bit more caution in the food safety department. While we want the food to cook slowly, it still needs to cook fast enough to reach temperatures that inhibit bacterial growth; however, the concern of bacterial growth is one thing for conventionally raised feedlot animals and quite another for naturally raised pastured animals. The standard safety mantra from government groups and slow-cooker resources alike is that bacteria grow quickly at temperatures over 40 degrees, slower at 140 degrees and are killed at 165 degrees. While these guidelines may be accurate, they were designed for commercially raised, feedlot animals.

One of the leading experts on pastured animals and author of *Pasture Perfect*, Jo Robinson details several studies regarding the safety of grassfed meats and bacterial infection on her website www.eatwild.com. In an Australian study, 58 percent of feedlot cattle were found to carry campylobacter compared to only 2 percent of pastured cattle. When consumed, this common bacterium is known to cause nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain and muscle pain. Interestingly, symptoms can manifest as many as 10 days after consuming an infected piece of meat.²⁰

E. coli bacteria are another concern in meat. Researchers at Cornell University discovered that feedlot cattle have up to 315 times more *E. coli* than those grazing on pasture. Even more interesting, our digestive systems are better able to take care of the few, if any, *E. coli* bacteria found in meat from pastured animals.

The reason feedlot animals contain more *E. coli* is because their stomachs become over-acidic due to their unsuitable diet. The bacteria actually learn to survive in this more acidic

environment, in essence becoming acid-resistant. In humans, stomach acid is the first line of defense against infectious disease, so when we consume *E. coli* that is acid-resistant, it is more likely to survive and cause trouble. Furthermore, pastured animals are cleaner than those living in the feedlot, meaning they bring less hard-to-remove manure into the slaughterhouse, thus reducing the risk of *E. coli* infection.²¹

Shannon Hayes, author of the excellent resource and cookbook on pastured meats, *The Grassfed Gourmet Cookbook*, writes, "Ground meat is much more likely to be a hazard if not fully cooked because *E. coli* contaminants lie on the outside surface of the muscle tissue. During the grinding process, external tissues are mixed with internal tissues, increasing the likelihood of *E. coli* contamination. This is why steaks and roasts may be eaten rare, but hamburger should always be cooked so that the center of the burger is no redder than light pink. . ."²² But with properly raised, pastured animals, *E. coli* is just not much of a concern, for reasons mentioned above. Shannon goes on to say, "I feel that knowing the source of your meat and how it was produced (on grass, of course!) is the best way to ensure that it is free of contaminants. . ."

Make every effort to obtain the highest quality meats and poultry— it's safer, it's much more nutritious, it's tastier, and the slow-cooker brings out the best in these foods. Anxiety about reaching certain internal safety temperatures is less of a concern with these truly healthy foods. Chicken and pork should be thoroughly cooked but overcooking grassfed meats is a surefire way to destroy their flavor and texture.

Start taking advantage of this fast food technique today! All you need is a high-quality slow-cooker and you are on your way. There are many wonderful slow-cooker cookbooks and the internet is filled with slow-cooker recipes that will get you started. Of course, be sure to make the appropriate traditional food substitutes. Furthermore, with what you know now, you can adapt a family favorite to this time-saving method with ease.

One last, but important, thought to keep in mind: the food that comes from your slow-cooker is well-cooked, so be vigilant to accompany these meals with raw foods and fermented condiments to revitalize your meal with enzymes and healthful bacteria that aid in the digestion and assimilation of your tasty creation.

Sidebars

MANY BENEFITS OF A SLOW-COOKER

Save time in the kitchen: Barbara M. Murray, R.N., in her book *Crock-It* says, "I think of my crockery as a little ol' lady who stands around cooking for me all day." Not only can you fix a dish in the morning and have it ready for lunch or dinner, but you can put a dish in overnight to have ready for breakfast or lunch the next day. Moreover, a dish can be cooked overnight or during the day and refrigerated until you are ready to serve. For example, cook a whole chicken overnight to supply the meat needed for an enchilada casserole or make meatballs during the day for those meatball sandwiches to take to the ball park that night. For even more time savings, many ingredients can be prepared the night before (see Spread Out the Prep above for

details), layered right in the slow-cooker container and stored in the fridge overnight to speed things along in the morning. Breakfast can also be cooked overnight and be ready to fill empty tummies in the morning (see Overnight Creamy Millet Quinoa Porridge below).

Portability: Slow-cookers provide an excellent way to bring dishes to potlucks or buffets, gift meals to a family with a new baby or to keep food warm during a gathering.

Save money on electricity: Compared to the oven, the slow-cooker uses less electricity. On low, it runs on the same amount of energy needed to power a 75 to 100-watt light bulb.⁹

Lower heat production: The lower amount of energy that is used, the lower amount of heat that is produced. This is particularly useful during the hot summer months when the thought of turning on the stove or oven is enough to turn you completely off food altogether. Move the slow-cooker to the garage for even less chance of increasing the inside temperature one more unbearable degree.

Safe to leave home alone: Due to its low energy usage, the slow-cooker is safe to leave to its own devices without any supervision, unlike dishes left in the oven or on the stove top.

Use up those tougher cuts of meat: The slow, moist cooking environment created within a slow-cooker is perfect for breaking down the tough connective tissue of less tender, but more affordable, grass-fed cuts of meat—the portions of muscle that are used the most, such as the chuck, brisket, round and shank.

A second oven: When the oven is being used for another dish, the slow-cooker provides another way of cooking additional dishes—such as for holidays or parties. For example, place four or five washed, but not dried, sweet potatoes in the slow-cooker to bake for 4 to 6 hours for that Thanksgiving side dish.

Seconds as a serving dish: Why dirty another serving dish when your meal is already in one? Simply transfer the slow-cooker container straight to the table (don't forget the trivet).

Brothy liquid: The long, slow-cooking of meats and bones dissolves collagens and gelatins that enrich the dish's liquid with flavor and a bounty of nutrients (see the article "[Why Broth is Beautiful](#)" by Kaayla T. Daniel, PhD). Bone broth is a spectacularly nourishing liquid easily made in the slow-cooker (see the recipe in *Nourishing Traditions* by Sally Fallon and simply make the recipe in the slow cooker).

PREVENTING AGE-RELATED EFFECTS

As with other old-fashioned cooking methods, the slow-cooker dishes up nutritional advantages over other cooking techniques with its low-and-slow ways. Foods cooked or processed at high temperatures create what are called advanced glycation end products (AGEs). They are formed when sugars bind to proteins, fats or other compounds in foods—an effect that becomes visible as food browns. Exposing any food to extreme high heat can result in AGE production.

AGEs increase levels of inflammation, accelerate the aging process² and even contribute to cancer.^{3,4} AGEs accumulate in collagen and skin, the eyes, the brain and the nervous system, as well as in the arteries and other vital organs.^{5,6} Eventually, AGEs cause cells to lose their elasticity, thus contributing to impaired cellular function. Luckily, the slow-cooker provides three out of the four best ways to reduce AGE production:

- Cook foods at a lower temperature for a longer period of time (as with a slow-cooker), instead of high temperatures at shorter periods of time.^{7, 8} Slow-cookers don't produce temperatures high enough to brown food.
- Keep food moist (as with a slow-cooker), since dry heat encourages AGE-production.^{7,8}
- Limit foods that are fried, barbecued, broiled or cooked in the microwave, which are all cooking methods that encourage AGE production. For example, broiling a chicken breast for 15 minutes serves up five times more AGEs than one boiled in broth for one hour.^{7,8}
- Marinate foods when applicable, since it helps reduce AGE production and protect nutrients within the food. Try olive oil, apple cider vinegar, garlic, mustard, wine or lemon juice.⁶

TESTING THE ACCURACY OF YOUR SLOW-COOKER

It's a good idea to test the accuracy of your slow-cooker, especially if it is an older model or just doesn't seem to be cooking appropriately. First fill the slow-cooker with 2 quarts (8 cups) of water. Heat the water on low for 8 hours. Check the temperature of the water with a food thermometer—do this immediately as the water quickly cools 10-15 degrees when the lid is lifted. The temperature of the water should be at least 185 degrees, if not, purchase a new unit or contact the manufacturer for a replacement. If the water does not reach this temperature, the food will not be taken to a safe enough temperature to inhibit bacterial growth.²⁴ On the other hand, if the temperature is much higher than 185 degrees, the appliance is cooking at too high of a temperature to be used as a slow-cooker.

SLOW-COOKER GRAVY

After your beef roast or chicken is done, you should have a nourishing mix of fat and juices at the bottom of your slow-cooker. There are several ways to utilize this nutrient-dense liquid. Make gravy by mixing together equal parts of flour and water (start with a few tablespoons of each), turn the cooker to high and stir the mixture in slowly. Arrowroot is also an excellent thickener; use two tablespoons of arrowroot with one tablespoon cold water and mix in as described. You can also make a simple reduction by turning the cooker on high, removing the lid and simmering approximately 30 to 40 minutes to evaporate excess liquid and concentrate the flavor.

WHEN IS IT COOKED JUST RIGHT?

To achieve the best cooking results with your pastured meats, it is best to check the internal temperature with a meat thermometer. Shannon Hayes's temperature chart in *Grassfed*

Gourmet reflects the safety of pastured meats and internal temperatures best suited for bringing out the most flavor and juiciness (notice they are significantly lower than USDA recommendations).²³ Be sure to insert a food thermometer probe into the thickest part of the food and avoid the bone and cooking container.

Beef /Bison/Venison	120-165°F
Veal	125-155°F
Lamb and Goat	120-145°F
Chicken	160-165°F
Turkey (unstuffed)	160-165°F
Goose	170°F
Duck	160-170 °F
Rabbit	160°F
Pork	145-165°F

BEANY SLOW-COOKER CREATIONS

Katherine Czapp, in her 2006 *Wise Traditions* article "[Putting the Polish on Those Humble Beans](#)," provides the key to this "flatulence-free" method of bean preparation. First, soak legumes in hot, not boiling, water. Add approximately a tablespoon or two of some acidic medium to the water—lemon juice, vinegar or whey—to black beans, lentils and fava beans. Water without an acidic medium is fine for other types of beans—white beans, brown beans and dried peas. Hard, mineral-rich water will hinder the hydrating process. If your water is hard consider adding a pinch of baking soda to make it slightly basic.

Black, brown, white and kidney beans will benefit from a longer soak, from 18 to 24 hours, while lentils, fava beans, and dried split peas do fine with about 10 hours soaking. Adequately hydrated beans will jump-start the enzymatic actions to begin the breakdown of hard-to-digest complex starches. Also, for beans that have longer soaking times, consider draining, rinsing and re-soaking at least once during soak time. After soaking, drain and rinse the beans well—many of the anti-nutrients are released into the soaking water, so be sure to not use this for cooking. For chickpeas, the skins should also be picked off. Add the cooking water—about six cups for every two cups of beans. Add herbs or a stick of kombu if desired, but no salt. Turn on low in the slow-cooker and allow them to cook until tender throughout, approximately 13 to 15 hours (less for the softer legumes). Katherine emphasizes the importance of not boiling beans since this will coagulate their vegetable protein and result in permanently hard, unpalatable beans. Thus, the slow-cooker is the perfect cooking tool for these foods. Foam will rise as the legumes are cooked—simply skim it off. You may need to add more water midway in the cooking process to keep the level high enough.

RECIPES TO WHET YOUR SLOW-COOKER APPETITE

OVERNIGHT CREAMY MILLET-QUINOA PORRIDGE

Ingredients

- 1 cup quinoa
- 1 cup millet
- 5 to 6 cups warm filtered water plus 3 to 4 tablespoons whey, yogurt, kefir or buttermilk
- 5 cups filtered water
- 4 cups raw milk
- 1 cinnamon stick, broken in two

Instructions:

The morning before you want your porridge, soak the quinoa and millet in the warm water mixture until after dinner (roughly 12 hours)—this can even be done right in the slow-cooker container. Rinse and drain well in a colander. Pour the soaked grains into the slow-cooker along with the additional water, milk and cinnamon. Cover and set the unit to low to cook overnight (roughly 7 to 9 hours). In the morning, you should have a rich and creamy porridge. If you like a smoother texture, use a wand hand blender until it reaches the desired consistency. Add butter, coconut oil or ghee and top with dried coconut, chopped nuts and seeds, a dollop of nut butter, fresh fruit, a drizzle of pure maple syrup or a touch of honey. Note: try this using only millet or add different grains, like rice or amaranth, or use bone broth in the cooking liquid for a more savory dish.

EASY BARBECUED BEEF

Ingredients:

- 3 pounds boneless grass-fed chuck roast
- 1 1/2 cups ketchup (preferably homemade and fermented) and/or tomato paste mixture (depends on how sweet you want the dish)
- 2 tablespoons Dijon-style mustard
- 1/4 cup red wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoons MSG-free Worcestershire sauce or fish sauce
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 1 clove fresh garlic, crushed

Instructions:

Place chuck roast in your crock-pot. Combine remaining ingredients in mixing bowl. Pour barbecue sauce mixture over chuck roast. Cover and cook on low 8 to 10 hours or 4 to 5 hours on high. Remove roast from crock-pot and shred meat with a fork. Place shredded meat back into the crock-pot and stir to evenly coat with sauce. If you like your meat a touch sweeter, add a tablespoon or two of Rapadura or date sugar while it is still hot to allow it to dissolve. Spoon meat onto whole grain (preferably sprouted) sandwich buns and top with additional barbecue sauce if desired.

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This article appeared in *Wise Traditions in Food, Farming and the Healing Arts*, the quarterly magazine of the Weston A. Price Foundation, [Winter 2007](#).

About the Author