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A Worldwide Vegetarian Journey to Discover the Foods That Nourish America's Immigrant Soul.

April 2018

THE WONDER OF THE SLOW COOKER

Baked Apples with Peanut Crumble

Slow Cooker Asian Style Soybean and Brussels Sprouts

Slow Cooker Plumped Apricots

Slow Cooker Vegetable *Ragu* with the Flavors of Greece

The Anderson Stove Company of Indianapolis, Indiana, made a duly acclaimed gas range with a cooking well and my parents had one of those wonderful stoves. Mom packed meat and root vegetables into the well each Sunday morning where dinner could slowly cook while we were at church services. Three or four hours later we walked in the door to the aroma of dinner, perfectly cooked and succulent. Inexpensive cuts of meat, that is those with excessively tough connective tissue, and older hens were literally transformed by the slow cooking process.

Slow cooking has been around for centuries. Meat and vegetables were routinely combined in cooking vessels and buried over hot coals. In our own history you will find that the Native Americans taught the floundering European immigrants how to slow cook foods in a fire pit thus avoiding the difficulty of trying to maintain a steady heat under a kettle. The “*tagine slaoui*” is a cooking pot used throughout the Middle East, probably of ancient origin but most often associated with North African cooking. It is a round, shallow, earthenware casserole with a pointed, conical lid and a most efficient casserole for cooking over braziers or for slow oven cooking. Jewish settlements all over the world wrestled with the need to eat versus the importance of keeping the Sabbath. Wrapped casseroles were often allowed to cook overnight at the bakers in the residual heat from bread baking. The Sabbath was observed; the family had a hot meal.



It was his Lithuanian homemaker mother that sparked the imagination of Irving Naxon the man who is actually responsible for the commercial slow cooker. In 1936 he patented the Naxon Beanery. In the 1970s he sold his design to Rival Manufacturing, who marked the appliance as the Crock Pot.

By the late 1970s everybody had to have a slow cooker, but most people did not take the time to explore the possibilities of slow cooking. Yes, everybody probably knows what a fabulous tool it is for pasta sauces, soups, and stews but it can be used as a mini-oven so instead of heating up the whole house to bake/steam a lentil-nut loaf or two apples, this useful appliance can step in and do the job.

Complaints that everything tasted and smelled the same were well-founded. It should be no surprise if you just dump everything into a slow cooker and cook for hours, there will be little definition of flavors. Nutrient loss with over-cooking is a concern due to enzyme activity which continues during the extended exposure to low heat. This should be recognized and the loss of nutrients should be accounted for. One way to minimize this loss is to heat your ingredients in a saucepan or kettle over high heat to deactivate enzyme activity before putting them into the bowl of the slow cooker.

If you are looking for some other ideas, basic recipes for slow cooker bean preparation and for *polenta* can be found along with soups and stews from around the world in *A Worldwide Vegetarian Journey to Discover the Foods That Nourish America's Immigrant Soul.*

BAKED APPLES WITH PEANUT CRUMBLE

TPT - 3 hours and 38 minutes

[slow cooker: about 1 hour at HIGH; 2 hours at LOW]

A baked apple was a frequent dessert for me as a child growing up in apple country. Then, I went to college in Ohio and worked in Michigan where baked apples also show up often on the menu. Retiring to Pennsylvania, I found that my neighbors baked apples also but usually wrapped the peeled and cored fruit in sweet pastry as apple dumplings. Much as I love those incredibly rich and sweet Mennonite apple dumplings, this recipe is still my favorite for a baked apple. The aroma as they cook will drive you quite mad with desire.

2 large, baking apples—Rome Beauty apples are our choice, when available

1 1/2 tablespoons sugar

1 1/2 tablespoons unbleached white flour

1 1/2 tablespoons whole wheat flour

1 1/2 tablespoons old-fashioned, freshly ground (if possible), unsalted peanut butter

1 1/2 tablespoons cold butter

1 1/2 cups boiling water

1/2 cup apple juice

Light cream or half and half or vanilla ice cream

Preheat slow cooker set at HIGH.

Prepare apples by washing *thoroughly* and coring to about 1/2 inch from the bottom. Be sure cavities are generous. Peel about *one-third* of the way down from the top.

In a large mixing bowl, combine sugar with white and whole wheat flours. Mix well.

Using a pastry blender, work peanut butter and *cold* butter into sugar–flour mixture until of the texture of coarse corn meal.

Fill cavities of apples with peanut butter mixture pressing down to fill well. Place in bowl of slow cooker. Pour about 1 cupful of *boiling* water and 1/2 cupful apple juice into the bottom of the pan. *Be sure water does not come above the peel line on your apples.* Cook for 1 hour at HIGH. *Reduce slow cooker temperature to LOW* and cook for 2 more hours. *Add more water if necessary. Apples should be tender but not mushy.*

Cool to room temperature.

Serve with cream or ice cream, as preferred.

Yields 2 servings

Note: This recipe may be doubled, when required. If your slow cooker will not accommodate four apples, use a baking pan and bake them in the oven at 325 degrees F. for about 1 hour.

1/4 SERVING (exclusive of cream or ice cream) –
PROTEIN = 4.3 g.; FAT = 14.3 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 41.7 g.;
CALORIES = 291; CALORIES FROM FAT = 44%



SLOW COOKER ASIAN-STYLE SOYMEAT AND BRUSSELS SPROUTS

TPT - 4 hours and 8 minutes;
[slow cooker: 4 hours at LOW]

*... a busy day ... in and out ... on the phone?
How do you have time to prepare vegetarian meals?
How many times have I been asked that question?
A really tasty dinner can be readied as you pass through the kitchen.*

10 Brussels sprouts—trimmed, halved, and well-rinsed
1/4 cup water
2 tablespoons tamari soy sauce
2 tablespoons Thai sweet chili sauce
1 tablespoon honey or agave nectar, if preferred
2 teaspoons high heat safflower or sunflower oil
1/2 teaspoon apple cider vinegar
3 drops sesame oil

3 ounces frozen soy meat analogue strips



Set the slow cooker to LOW. Coat the slow cooker bowl with non-stick lecithin spray coating.

In the slow cooker bowl combine Brussels sprout halves, water, soy sauce, Thai sweet chili sauce, honey, safflower or sunflower oil, vinegar, and sesame oil. Stir to coat Brussels sprouts. Cover and allow to cook at LOW for 3 hours.

Add frozen soy meat analogue strips. Stir to coat with sauce. Cover and allow to cook at LOW for another hour. Turn onto a heated serving platter or into a heated, shallow serving dish.

Serve at once with steamed rice or barley, as preferred.

Yields 4 servings

Notes: This recipe can be doubled, when required.

1/4 SERVING – PROTEIN = 10.3 g.; FAT = 4.1 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 15.0 g.;
CALORIES = 131; CALORIES FROM FAT = 28%

SLOW COOKER PLUMPED APRICOTS

TPT - 6 hours and 6 minutes;
2 hours = chilling period
[slow cooker: about 4 hours at LOW]

Many versions of the Adam-and-Eve-in-the Garden-of Eden story tell of temptation and the guarding of the fruit of temptation by serpents such as dragons and snakes. A Polish legend tells of a hawk which must be killed by the hero, in the mythological hero tradition of Heracles, the last mortal son of Zeus, who seeks the apples to facilitate the rescue of a princess. There is much speculation that these “apples,” often called Armenian apples, were indeed apricots and that the fruit of temptation in the biblical Garden of Eden may also have been the apricot.

Dried organic apricots are less moist than are the preservative-treated versions so we often plump them for a very luscious dessert using the slow cooker. Prunes and figs profit from this technique as well. Dried fruits, plumped by this technique, are often our “lunch fruit” when we want a change from the winter citrus or the mealy apples of mid-winter.

**1 cup dried, preservative-free, organic apricots
halves**
A 2-inch strip organic orange zest
1 tablespoon sugar, or to taste

Boiling water, to cover

Preheat slow cooker to LOW.

Place apricot halves, orange zest strip, and sugar in the bowl of the slow cooker.

Add *boiling water*, to cover. Stir. Cover and allow to cook for 3-4 hours, stirring occasionally. Transfer to a storage container or bowl. Remove and discard orange zest strip. When cool, cover the bowl tightly and refrigerate for up to 1 week.

Serve chilled with sweetened sour cream or whipped cream, if desired.

Yields 4 servings
adequate for 2 people

Note: This recipe may be doubled, when necessary.

1/4 SERVING – PROTEIN = 0.7 g.; FAT = 0.1 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 14.3 g.;
CALORIES = 55; CALORIES FROM FAT = 2%



SLOW COOKER VEGETABLE RAGÛ WITH THE FLAVORS OF GREECE *Sofegada*

TPT - 3 hours and 33 minutes;
[slow cooker = 3 1/4 hours @ LOW]

The slow-cooked vegetable stew, “sofegada,” found on the Greek island of Crete, may well have originated in Venice since the name seems to have its origins in the Italian verb “sofocazione,” which means to smother or to suffocate. There is also evidence to support a Catalonian connection since a similar, slow-cooked vegetable dish called “sofregita” can be found firmly entrenched in the local cuisine. Although my version was inspired by the slow-cooked Greek classic, it features root vegetables and has become a winter favorite in our family. When I was young, a trip to the root cellar to retrieve one parsnip and one carrot from the soft sand was the job of the grandchildren but parsnips and carrots are sold in bunches or packaged today. As a consequence, there are always orphans of these vegetables in the refrigerator crisper drawers to be used up. Sometimes they can look very much like the wrinkled mid-winter roots I used to collect for my grandmother. The slow cooker gives these vegetables new vigor. To take advantage of the succulence of this ragù, I add noodles. Unlike those convenient little commercial egg noodles available in your grocery store, Italian pasta absorbs the flavorful liquid of the ragù and becomes integral in the taste experience. I added both a pappardelle nest and some egg noodles to this dish; the result was a confirmation of the concept noticed by all who had dinner that evening. The sauce coated the egg noodles, floating, if you will, on the surface, while the sauce penetrated the imported pappardelle pasta.

1 tablespoon butter
1 tablespoon *extra virgin* olive oil
1/2 cup chopped onion

1 1/2 cups canned, *whole* tomatoes canned in tomato purée
1/2 cup red wine—our choice is a high-end Chianti or a Pinot Noir
Pinch ground cinnamon
3 whole allspice seeds
2 whole cloves
1/2 teaspoon crushed, dried basil
Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

1 medium parsnip—peeled and sliced into 1/4-inch rounds
1 long carrot—scraped or pared and cut into 2-inch lengths
1 medium French turnip—peeled and cut into large dice
2 large garlic cloves—*thinly* sliced lengthwise

20 baby spinach leaves—well-rinsed and stems removed
1/3 cup *frozen* corn

1 imported Italian *pappardelle* nest
***Boiling* water**

Crumbled *feta* cheese



Preheat slow cooker to LOW.

In a saucepan set over *MEDIUM* heat, melt butter with olive oil. Add chopped onion and sauté until onion is soft and translucent, *being careful not to allow onion to brown*.

Add tomatoes, red wine, ground cinnamon, whole allspice, whole cloves, crushed, dried basil, and black pepper. Bring to the boil, stirring frequently. Turn into the bowl of the preheated slow cooker.

Add parsnip rounds, carrot pieces, turnip dice, and *thinly* sliced garlic. Cover and allow to cook for 2 hours. Stir occasionally.

Add spinach leaves and *frozen* corn. Cover and continue cooking.

In a saucepan set over *MEDIUM-HIGH* heat, cook *pasta* nest in *boiling* water for 3 minutes less than directed on the package. Drain. Add to ingredients in the bowl of the slow cooker. Cover and continue cooking for 1 hour more. Stir occasionally and *add water or stock if ragu begins to dry*. Vegetables should be succulently soft. Turn into a serving bowl or onto a platter, if preferred.

Serve at once with crumbled *feta*.*

Yields 4 servings

Notes: *The melding of flavors while refrigerated, makes this *ragù* a wonderful candidate for a second appearance. Reheat over *LOW* heat in a non-stick-coated skillet or saucepan.

This recipe can be doubled.

1/4 SERVING (exclusive of *feta* cheese) –
PROTEIN = 4.4 g.; FAT = 6.4 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 33.8 g.;
CALORIES = 170; CALORIES FROM FAT = 34%

*Back in February we explored a soup in which
tortellini played a significant role.
Stock up on the tortellini of your choice during your next shopping trip.
Next month we will look at some ways to enjoy the little
“ombellico” or “cappellacci” or tortellini or whatever you may call them.
Please, do stop by,*

Judy

Please note that all food value calculations are approximate and not the result of chemical analysis.

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