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Slow Cooker Revolution



Synopsis

The 200 recipes in this family-friendly collection deliver a revolution in slow cooking like only America's Test Kitchen can! Who doesn't like the idea of throwing ingredients into a slow cooker and coming back hours later to a finished meal? Too bad most slow cooker recipes deliver mediocre results you'd rather forget than fix again. A team of ten test cooks at America's Test Kitchen spent a year developing recipes, and what they discovered will change the way you use your slow cooker. Did you know that onions, garlic, and spices should be bloomed in the microwave for five minutes before they go into the slow cooker? This simple step intensifies their flavor and requires no extra work. Did you know that a little soy sauce mixed with tomato paste adds meaty flavors to almost any stew and can often replace the tedious step of browning the meat? And do you know the secret to a moist slow-cooker chicken? Start the bird upside down to protect the delicate white meat from drying out.

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Customer Reviews

I'm a big fan of [Cook's Illustrated](#). I get their flagship magazine and [Cook's Country](#) and watch both America's Test Kitchen versions faithfully on PBS. I'm also a frequent buyer of their cookbooks and have found many of my all-time favorite recipes in their pages. Unfortunately, after making three of the recipes from "Slow Cooker Revolution," I'm not sold on this particular effort. All were OK, none spectacular, and, as far as I can tell, just about every one previously published. (A cheat often used by Cook's, but still annoying for its most loyal readers.) My major complaint--and it seems to be in most of the recipes, not just the three I've attempted so far--is that Cook's takes what is best

about the slow cooker, it's convenience (set it and forget it one-pot meals), and throws it out the window by requiring countless pre-cooking steps--far more than just browning meat or sautéing vegetables--that often dirty multiple pots, pans and bowls before you ever even get the ingredients into the slow cooker itself. There's also a good bit of post-cooking in many of these recipes, along with mid-cooking steps/additions that means you're constantly babysitting the slow cooker, even after getting the ingredients going. Not terribly practical for a device specifically designed to cook while you're not here. If I'm going to use a dishwasher full of dishes, what's the point of dragging out the crockpot just to do the heating? Often the recipes I've read and tried seem like they'd be better served being made in a Dutch oven and then cooked in a low oven, thus saving multiple steps and plenty of dishwashing. Kind of defies basic cooking logic. Sorry Cook's, I just can't recommend this one.

EDITED TO ADD: After seeing a trend with these reviews to dismiss negative reviewers as submitted by lazy cooks who just don't get it, I wanted to point out that I'm someone who sincerely enjoys the process of cooking, and a Slow Food devotee. I put a great deal of effort into using organically, locally-sourced, seasonal ingredients in my day-to-day life. I rarely, if ever, use ANY processed food. I bake bread from scratch several times a week. I would never even consider using a cake mix or a condensed soup base. Basically, I'm not really looking for shortcuts. My problem with "Slow Cooker Revolution" isn't so much the prep, but the fact that the recipes, despite all the extra steps, aren't very good. If the end results were outstanding, I wouldn't really question what went into the creation, as many meals I happily prepare take hours and hours to complete. Unfortunately, that just isn't the case from what I've seen here, which seems to be Cook's effort to shoe-horn better, oven or stove-top recipes into a slow cooker with lackluster, at best, results. Does the multi-step beef stew recipe in this cookbook taste better than some meat and potato cubes tossed into the cooker along with canned broth and onion soup mix and left to sit for 12 hours? Most definitely! Does it taste as good as my favorite stove-top to oven recipe that requires approximately the same amount of effort? Nope. Not even close. The same with the turkey chili and short rib recipes I've tried. Other recipes, including Cook's traditionally cooked and previously published versions, are vastly superior to the results you get using the "Slow Cooker Revolution" way. And THAT is my problem with this cookbook. I've long been of the theory that there is very little a slow cooker does better than a low oven and good cast iron pot. Nothing I've tried, or read, in "Slow Cooker Revolution," has made me think I'm going to be pulling my crockpot out of the pantry more than once or twice a year, at best.

The "new" name is "slow cooker" but most of us know the device as a "crockpot" because that's the

name it was first marketed under a couple of decades ago. If you're like me, you got one because you thought, "Hey, I can put in the ingredients in the morning and have a tasty meal when I get home from work - cool". Then you found out that only certain recipes seemed to work well in the crockpot, er, slow cooker. You bought crockpot cookbooks, and found while many of them were beautifully designed with multiple and elaborate fonts, blank spaces for notes, line drawings of cute little collections of vegetables, the recipes either contained about 20 different ingredients or else the recipe required so much pre-browning, pre-saut ing, post-blending, post-broiling of the ingredients that it would just be quicker to cook the darn recipe once you got home from work. I am really happy to say that "Slow Cooker Revolution" is the first sensible slow cooker cookbook in my collection of them. The book is very well designed. There is a page devoted to each recipe, and most recipes have a picture of the finished product. There is a list of ingredients, and from what I saw, everything there is available in my local supermarket. Each recipe starts off with a paragraph entitled, "Why It Works", in which the authors explain the choices behind certain ingredients or methods and why they work better than others. The recipes are clear-cut and easy to follow. Each recipe also has an additional segment - either a "quick prep tip" or a "smart shopping" hint or an "on the side" short recipe. They also recommend products in these segments that have been determined to be the best in their other test processes (if you've ever watched "America's Test Kitchen" on PBS you'll know the tests I'm talking about); I like that they name names of the products. As I read through the recipes, I found myself thinking, "that sounds really tasty" and more importantly, "I can do that". The recipes include both standards and favorites, you know, the kind of food that you would actually cook at home (or order in a favorite restaurant) and that your family would actually eat. The recipes are not just reprints of older crockpot recipes; they have reworked some basics and created totally new versions of others. There is not a lot of elaborate pre-preparation in these recipes. Sensibly, they recommend using the microwave to pre-cook some of the vegetables to both make sure they'll cook thoroughly in the recipe and to release more of the aromatics into the recipe. We're talking like five minutes in the microwave, so that's no big hardship. Some of the recipes do call for browning or saut ing certain meats or vegetables; I suppose there is no real way to avoid that since the name of the game is adding flavor to a process whose innate nature would tend to lose the flavor of some ingredients due to the long cooking time. There are a number of recipes highlighted as "Easy Prep" - they are the ones that are basically "throw everything into the slow cooker and turn it on". What I also like about this cookbook are the extras, the pages that highlight things you should know about the ingredients you're using, e.g. "All About Broths", "Pasta 101", "All About Beef", "All About Using The Microwave And The Slow Cooker", etc. Very useful. This cookbook is definitely going to be a

keeper for me, and I might be buying some other copies for the other cooks in my family. This is a good and useful gifting item.

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