Extension News You Can Use
Slow Cooker Safety

Is a Slow Cooker Safe?
Cooking in a slow cooker is a safe process because of the direct heat from the pot, lengthy cooking time and steam created within the tightly-covered container. These things effectively destroy bacteria making slow cooking safe.

Bacteria need the right temperature and enough time to grow and cause illness. Most bacteria grow best in temperatures between 40 F and 140 F. During that time, they can multiply every 20 minutes, depending on the kind of bacteria. When using a slow cooker, it is important to follow a few basic steps to keep food safe.

Begin with Cleanliness
- Be sure the cooker, utensils, work space and your hands are clean.
- Clean vegetables thoroughly in clean water to remove as much soil and bacteria as possible.
- There is no need to wash meat because this can spread bacteria.

Keep Foods Cold
- Keep all perishable foods, such as meat and cut up fruit and vegetables, cold before adding to the cooker.
- Thaw meat and poultry before adding to the cooker. It takes longer to get frozen meat above the safe temperature of 140 F compared to thawed meat.

Make Sure Foods Fit
- Fill your slow cooker half to two-thirds full to ensure the food cooks thoroughly.
- Check your cooker manual before cooking large cuts of meat.
- Large chunks may take too long to cook all the way through.

Add Ingredients in Order
- Place vegetables on the bottom, they take longer to cook.
- Add the meat and liquid. Dishes with liquid such as chili, soup and stew are good choices for slow cooking because the liquid creates.
Pay Attention to Temperature
• Preheat your cooker before adding food or cook on the highest setting so that your food reaches 140°F or above more quickly. However, if this is not possible, it is still safe to use the low setting.
• Use high or low settings to cook food. Warm settings are not designed for cooking.
• Keep the lid on the cooker unless it is necessary to check for doneness.

Handle Leftovers Safely
• Do not turn the cooker off and leave food to cool down. Refrigerate leftovers in shallow containers.
• Reheat leftovers on the stove, microwave or conventional oven until the temperature of the food reaches 165°F.

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