

Slow-Cooker Beef Stew

SERVES 6 TO 8

You'll need 18-inch heavy-duty aluminum foil or a large oven-ready foil bag to make the vegetable packet. If you're going to be away from your slow cooker for more than 10 hours, cutting the vegetables into larger, 1½- to 2-inch pieces will help them retain their texture. Feel free to add a pound of parsnips, peeled and cut into 1-inch chunks, to the foil packet along with the carrots and potatoes. The stew will thicken further as it sits; add broth or water to thin to the desired consistency before serving.

- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 4 medium onions, minced
- ¼ cup tomato paste
- 6 medium garlic cloves, minced or pressed through a garlic press (about 2 tablespoons)
- Salt
- 1½ cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 1½ cups low-sodium beef broth
- 1 (5-pound) boneless beef chuck-eye roast, trimmed and cut into 1½-inch chunks
- ⅓ cup soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons Minute tapioca
- 2 bay leaves
- 1½ pounds red potatoes, cut into 1-inch chunks
- 1 pound carrots, cut into 1-inch chunks

- 2 teaspoons minced fresh thyme leaves (do not use dried)
- 2 cups frozen peas, thawed
- Ground black pepper

1. Heat 1 tablespoon of the oil in a 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat until shimmering but not smoking. Add the onions, tomato paste, garlic, and ¼ teaspoon salt and cook until the onions are softened and lightly browned, 10 to 15 minutes. Stir in the chicken broth, scraping up any browned bits.

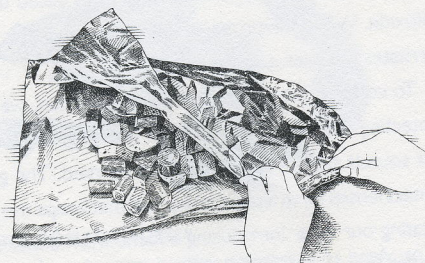
2. Transfer the onion mixture to the slow cooker insert and stir in the beef broth, meat, soy sauce, tapioca, and bay leaves until evenly combined. Toss the potatoes, carrots, 1 teaspoon of the thyme, and the remaining 1 tablespoon oil together and season with salt and pepper. Following the illustrations below, wrap the vegetables in a foil packet. Set the vegetable packet on top of the stew in the slow cooker insert.

3. Cover and cook on low until the meat is tender, 9 to 11 hours. (Alternatively, cover and cook on high for 5 to 7 hours.)

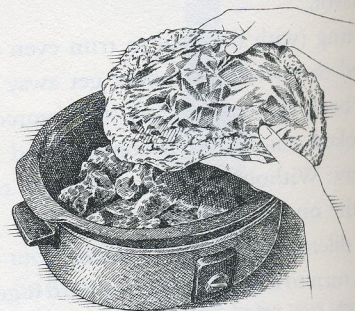
4. Transfer the vegetable packet to a plate. Let the stew settle for 5 minutes then gently tilt the slow cooker insert and degrease as much fat as possible off the surface of the stew using a large

FOILED AGAIN

WE DISCOVERED THAT THE BEST WAY TO KEEP VEGETABLES FROM DISINTEGRATING AFTER 10 or more hours in the slow cooker was to wrap them in a foil packet, or "hobo pack." Keeping the vegetables out of the stewing liquid slows down their cooking time, and keeps their flavors distinct. Here's how you do it:



Place the vegetables on one side of a large piece of foil. Fold the foil over, shaping it into a packet that will fit into your slow cooker, then crimp to seal the edges.



Place the foil packet directly on top of the stew, pressing gently as needed to make it fit inside the cooker.

flat spoon. Remove and discard the bay leaves. Carefully open the foil packet (watch for steam), then stir the vegetables along with any accumulated juices into the stew. Stir in the remaining 1 teaspoon thyme and the peas and let stand until the peas are heated through, about 5 minutes longer. Season with salt and pepper to taste and serve.

PREP-AHEAD TIPS

Store the ingredients below separately.

- Cook the onion mixture as described in step 1, then transfer it to an airtight container and refrigerate.
- Trim and cut the meat and refrigerate.
- Prepare the carrots and refrigerate.

SLOW-COOKER POT ROAST

POT ROAST RECIPES APPEAR IN EVERY COOKBOOK featuring slow cookers and are touted as "starter" recipes in the ubiquitous manuals that come with the appliance. Pot roast is a natural for the slow cooker when done right. The problem is that many slow-cooker pot roasts turn out dry and stringy, floating in a vat of greasy, flavorless, watery liquid. Yet another issue is size; yes, it does matter what size roast you start out with. We found many recipes that called for 2½- to 3-pound roasts pulled a virtual disappearing act. After 10 hours in the slow cooker, the catch phrase "Where's the beef?" took on new meaning. We had our work cut out for us.

Our initial testing showed that the average chuck roast shrunk by as much as two pounds during the prolonged cooking time, quickly eliminating the smaller roasts. To compensate for this shrinkage, we decided to use roasts that weighed 5½ to 6 pounds. Previous pot roast tests had shown that reaching and sustaining an internal temperature of 200 to 210 degrees was necessary for a meltingly tender piece of meat. To determine how long it would take a 5- or 6-pound roast to reach that point in the slow cooker, we conducted tests using temperature

probes inserted into the center of roasts cooked on both low and high. The ideal time (in our 6-quart slow cooker) was 9 to 10 hours on low or 5 to 6 hours on high. Next, we moved on to flavoring our pot roast.

As with our other slow-cooker recipes for this book, we wanted to skip browning the meat before adding it to the slow cooker. We were worried that this would have an adverse affect with such a large cut of meat, but we were actually pleased to find that after 10 hours in the slow cooker, both the flavor and exterior color of the roast were fine. That said, to make up for the loss of flavor that comes with browning meat and deglazing the pan, we added soy sauce to the mix. Combined with sautéed aromatics, chicken broth, red wine, tomato paste, and crushed tomatoes, our braising liquid was now full flavored, and was at a good jumping-off point for our final "gravy." After all, what's pot roast without gravy? We wanted our gravy to be thick enough to coat the slices of pot roast, without being pasty. To that end, we tried cornstarch, flour (neither of which could be added at the onset of cooking), and even corn tortillas. In the end, instant tapioca proved to be the ideal thickener since it could be added at the beginning of cooking without imparting an off-flavor to the dish. Finished with a hefty amount of chopped fresh parsley, this was a tender pot roast with a flavorful gravy.

Slow-Cooker Pot Roast

SERVES 6 TO 8

In most markets, you will have to special order a large 5½- to 6-pound chuck roast. Alternatively, you can use two 3-pound roasts (which are common in most markets). The pot roast will shrink significantly as it cooks. Serve with rice or mashed potatoes.

- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 3 medium onions, minced
- 2 carrots, cut into 1-inch chunks
- 8 medium garlic cloves, minced or pressed through a garlic press (about 8 teaspoons)
- ¼ cup tomato paste