

## IFAS Extension

Get Ahead With Slow Cooker

Tallahassee Democrat

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My slow cooker is a life saver! I can't imagine working 40 hours a week and trying to feed my family without one. But, just like everything else you use in the kitchen to prepare food, slow cookers need to be used safely to help reduce the threat of foodborne illness.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has a news release with food safety recommendations for preparing meals with slow cookers. They make the following recommendations:

1. **Safe Beginnings** - be sure to start with a clean work area, clean cooker, clean utensils and clean hands. That's one of the first battles of defense when it comes to preventing foodborne illness. Also, start with perishable foods that have been stored in the refrigerator until preparation time. Meats and vegetables need to be stored separately until they are added to the recipe.
2. **Thaw & Cut Ingredients** - Meats and poultry used in the slow cooker need to be defrosted. It's also best to cut foods into small pieces for thorough cooking. Foods like chili, soup, stew or spaghetti are good, safe choices. Avoid large pieces like a roast or a whole chicken because the food will cook so slowly it could remain in the bacterial "Danger Zone" for too long.
3. **Use the Right Amount of Food** - Make sure the slow cooker is not over filled (no more than 2/3 full) or under filled (no less than 1/2 full).
4. **Settings** - Use the low setting for all day cooking and less-tender cuts of meat. If possible, turn the cooker on the highest setting for the first hour of cooking time and then to low.
5. **Power Out** - If the power goes out while you are away from home and you don't know how long it was out, it is best to throw the food away. If you're home when the power goes out, you can safely finish cooking immediately by some other means. If you're home, and the food was completely cooked before the power went out, the food should remain safe up to two hours in the cooker.
6. **Handling Leftovers** - It is not recommended to reheat leftovers in a slow cooker. But, you can heat food until steaming on the stovetop or in a microwave oven and then place in a preheated slow cooker to keep hot for serving.

### Slow Cooker Cranberry Pork

1 boneless rolled pork loin roast (3 to 4 pounds), cut in quarters

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

1 can (16 ounces) whole-berry cranberry sauce  
1/4 cup sugar  
3/4 cup cranberry juice  
1 teaspoon ground mustard  
1 teaspoon pepper  
1/8 teaspoon ground cloves  
1/4 cup cornstarch  
1/4 cup cold water  
Salt to taste

In a Dutch oven, brown roast in oil on all sides over medium-high heat. Transfer to a 5-quart slow cooker. Combine the cranberry sauce, sugar, cranberry juice, mustard, pepper and cloves; pour over roast. Cover and cook on low for 6-8 hours or until a meat thermometer reads 160 degrees. Remove roast and keep warm. In a saucepan, combine cornstarch, water and salt until smooth; stir in cooking juices. Bring to a boil; cook and stir for 2 minutes or until thickened. Serve with roast and/or rice. Yield: 9-12 (3oz.) servings.

*Recipe By: Joyce Turley of Slaughters, Kentucky. "Taste of Home" December/January 2004 edition page 39.*