

THE MICRO WAY LANI BLOOMER



tube that makes the microwaves) is turned on during the entire cooking time. High would be 100 percent.

When most ovens are set on a lower speed, the magnetron cycles on-off, on-off, etc. in short bursts during the cooking time. For instance, an oven set at 70 would have the magnetron on for 70 percent of the cooking time and off for 30 percent of the cooking time. An oven set for 40 has the magnetron on for 40 percent of the time and off for 60 percent of the time. (In some ovens, 10 stands for 100 percent, 9 stands for 90 percent, etc. since the manufacturers drop the righthand zeros.)

Very simply, the higher the number the more power and the faster your food cooks; the lower the number the slower the cooking. At lower speeds, when the magnetron is off, the food gets short bits of standing time during the cooking time. This lets the heat move into the middle of the food more evenly than on high power. The edges don't overcook (get hard) before the middle heats up!

These names are becoming

standardized: 100 percent = high; 70 percent = medium high; 50 percent = medium; 30 percent = low; and 10 percent = warm. Most ovens use 30 percent for defrosting, and 70-80 percent for reheating. If you have an oven with only two speeds, high and defrost, you can use defrost (30 percent power) for slow cooking speed.

Now, what does all this mean for your cooking? Well, first of all, anytime you cook on high power (whether it's in your microwave or on your range) the food will need a lot of attention so it doesn't burn. In the microwave, this means stirring frequently, rearranging pieces or turning food over, shielding with foil, or cooking food in a donut shape.

If you don't want to watch your food so closely, turn the power down. But the food will take longer to cook. If you turn the power down to medium (50 percent) from high, you're using half power, so you must double the cooking time. If you turn the oven down to low (30 percent) from high you're using about one third power so you must

triple the time. For instance, 1 scrambled egg takes 1 minute to cook on high, 2 minutes to cook on medium (50 or 5), and 3 minutes on low (30, or 3).

Anytime you can't stir food, such as a layered casserole, it will cook more evenly on medium (50, 5). Lower power (30, 3) is good for tenderizing tough cuts of meat using a covered container and liquid. Start these foods on high for 5 or 10 minutes to heat things up, then turn the power down to finish cooking.

Recipes containing large amounts of dairy foods (cheese, eggs, cream, etc.) should be cooked on medium rather than high. If you have trouble with small whole foods like mushrooms, beans or berries popping (exploding!), turn the power down. Cakes, custards and cheesecakes need gentle cooking at low to medium.

Use medium (50, 5) for best results when roasting meat, and medium high (70, 7) for roasting poultry.

Try this easy pot roast dinner this fall. It's a hearty meal for a cool evening.

Potroast Dinner

13-pound chuck roast
1 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon pepper
1 1/2 cups liquid (I like to use 1/2 cup each: tomato juice, red wine, and water).

1 large onion, sliced
1 pound carrots, cut diagonally in 2-inch pieces

3 pounds 6-8 medium) potatoes, peeled and quartered

1. Trim excess fat from roast and rub with salt and pepper. Place half the onions in a 3 to 4 quart casserole, and put the roast on top. Put remaining onions on top of the roast, and pour the liquids over roast.

2. Cover tightly (with a lid, or plastic wrap) and cook on high for 10 minutes.

3. Reduce power to low (30, 3) and cook, covered, for 45 minutes.

4. Turn roast over, add carrots and potatoes on top, and recover tightly. Cook for 45 minutes more on medium (50, 5), until the vegetables and meat are tender. Let stand 5 minutes before serving.

5. If desired, thicken juices with flour before serving. To do this, put 1-2 tablespoons flour into a 4 cup glass measure. Slowly stir in juices from casserole, stirring until smooth. Cook on high for 1 minute. Stir well, and cook on high for 1 more minute, or until the gravy boils and thickens. Stir well each minute during cooking to prevent lumps.

Tip: Use an oven cooking bag if you don't have a large casserole. Fasten bag loosely closed with a plastic fastener. Do not use a metal twist tie. Turn bag and meat over before adding vegetables to the top.

Note: The times above are for microwaves with 600-700 watts of power; for ovens with 500-600, add 10 seconds to each minute; for 400-500, add 20 seconds to each minute.

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Variable power offers cooking alternatives

Microwave ovens with the variable power have the ability to cook food at different speeds, just like your range. It is much easier to cook in a microwave with five or more power levels than in one with only one or two speeds. Just imagine trying to cook everything on your range on high!

Unfortunately there is little standardization of the different power levels among different brands of microwaves. Some manufacturers call the different

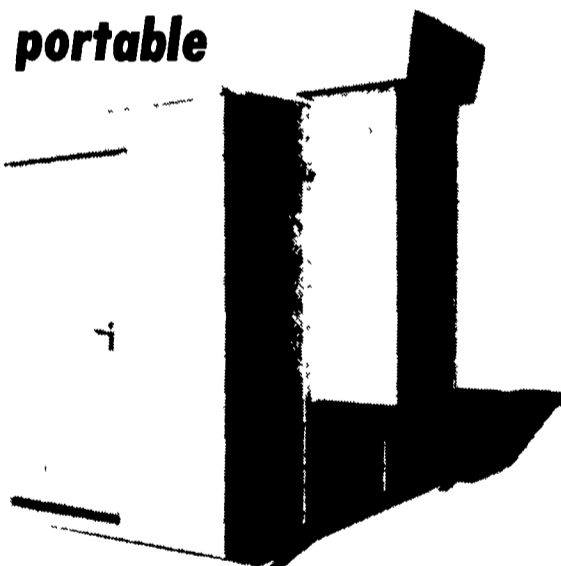
levels names like braise, roast, high, or low; and some just have numbers like 1, 3, 7 or 10, 40, 80. This unfortunate situation is improving, and the number system is almost uniform now. Let me explain what the numbers mean and give you some hints for choosing which power level to use.

The numbers stand for the percent of time that the magnetron is turned on, or the percent of the total power. When a microwave is set on high, the magnetron (the

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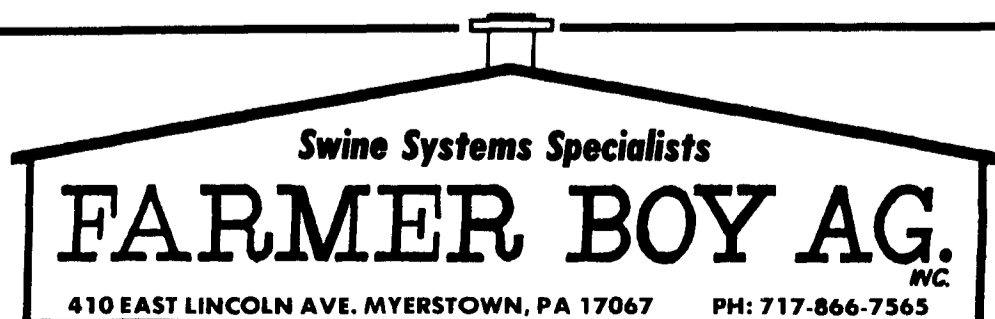
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