

# Return Of The Slow Cooker

HONESDALE (Wayne Co.) — One form of cooking that recently made its way back is slow cooking. Slow cooking took a giant leap forward in the seventies with the introduction of the electric slow cooker.

Promoted as a no-watch, miracle-type appliance that could cook almost any dish better than any other method, the slow cooker enjoyed instant popularity. It was a disappointment when you learned you had to cut the vegetables yourself and the vegetables came out tasting like meat and looking like mush. The claims for effortless, versatile cooking were in a sense unfortunate because

they no doubt caused many consumers to become dissatisfied with the appliance and ban it to the top shelf of the cupboard.

Today's slow cookers have removable linings for easy cleaning and multiple heat settings. Some automatically shift from high to low heat, a nice food-safety feature. Even with these features, slow cookers are best suited for blending flavors in stews and sauces, and breaking down tough meat fibers.

Keep safety in mind when using a slow cooker. The slow cooker does a better job of killing disease-causing microbes than low-temperature cooking in a conven-

tional oven because the heat is direct and is combined with steam in a tightly covered container. Still, take precautions to avoid holding foods in the danger zone (40° to 140°F) for too long.

To maximize the safety of the slow cooker:

- \* make sure everything is clean — a clean cooker, clean utensils, clean work area, clean hands.

- \* thaw meat or poultry in the refrigerator or microwave oven before placing in the slow cooker. If placed in the slow cooker while still frozen, meat may remain in the danger zone for more than three hours.

- \* fill the slow cooker no more

than two thirds full. Heat may not adequately penetrate to all parts of the food if the container is too full.

- \* keep the lid secure. Since considerable heat is lost when the cover is lifted, remove the lid only to stir food or check for doneness.

- \* set the cooker on the highest setting for the first hour of cooking. This high setting speeds the heating process. Then, set the control as directed in the recipe.

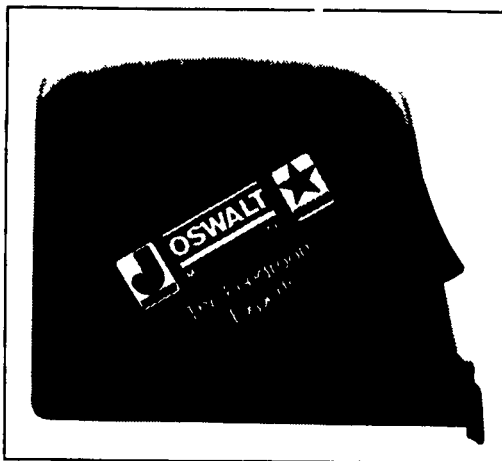
- \* when finished eating, remove leftovers from the slow cooker and refrigerate or freeze. Reheat leftovers quickly on the range or

in the microwave oven, not in the slow heat of the slow cooker.

- \* if using slow cookers to keep food warm for a party or buffet, bring the food to a boil on the range and then use the slow cooker to keep it hot.

If you would be interested in any further information about food safety, contact the Wayne County Cooperative Extension Office in the basement of the original courthouse, 925 Court St., Honesdale, PA 18431 or call (717) 253-5970 ext. 239. The office is open Mon.-Fri. 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

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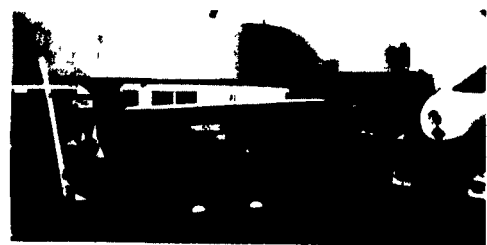
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