



## “Cook Without Looking”

# Try a Slow Cooker!

Wouldn't it be nice to be greeted by the aroma of a steaming pot of homemade soup, stew, chili or chicken fajitas (this month's recipe) at the end of a busy day? You just need to do a little work in advance and use a slow cooker.

Slow cookers have made meal preparation easier since the early 1970s. Slow cookers have the advantage of promoting the use of less expensive, less tender cuts of meat such as a chuck roast. The long, slow cooking process tenderizes the meat.

### Try This Quiz.

How much do you know about slow cookers and their use?

1. True or false: Using a slow cooker uses less electricity than an oven.
2. True or false: The low cooking temperature allows less expensive cuts of meat to tenderize.
3. True or false: You should fill the slow cooker no less than half full and no more than two-thirds full because cooking too little or too much food in the slow cooker can affect cooking time and quality.
4. True or false: Always thaw meat and poultry in the refrigerator before cooking in the slow cooker to help ensure complete cooking.
5. True or false: Keep the lid in place at all times because removing the lid slows cooking time.
6. True or false: If you are not home during the entire slow-cooking process and the power goes out for an undetermined length of time, throw away the food even if it looks done.
7. True or false: You should not reheat food in a slow cooker.
8. True or false: Remove the leftovers from the slow cooker and place in shallow pans and refrigerate.

*(Yes, these are all true statements!)*  
**Answers:** 1. True; 2. True; 3. True; 4. True; 5. True; 6. True; 7. True; 8. True.



Try a slow cooker if you have never tried one, or bring your slow cooker out of storage. You and your family will enjoy the food!

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**Make-ahead tips:** If you plan to assemble your slow cooker meal in the morning, make it easy by doing some preparation the evening before you make it. In the following recipe, cut the peppers and onions and refrigerate. Thaw frozen chicken in the refrigerator. Gather the cans and equipment so you can assemble the recipe quickly.

## Slow Cooker Chicken Fajitas

- 1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breasts
- 1 (16-ounce) can pinto beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 (14.5-ounce) can diced tomatoes with mild green chilies, drained
- 3 medium bell peppers (your choice: green, red, orange, yellow or a mixture), sliced into strips
- 1 medium onion, sliced into strips
- 2 tsp. ground cumin
- 2 tsp. chili powder
- 1 tsp. minced garlic
- 6 8-inch whole wheat tortillas, warmed
- Toppings: shredded lettuce, chunky salsa, fat-free sour cream



1. If the chicken breasts are frozen, thaw in the microwave or in your refrigerator.
2. In a 3-quart slow cooker, combine chicken, beans, tomatoes, peppers, onion and seasonings.
3. Cover and cook on low for five to six hours or until chicken is tender and reaches 165 F.
4. Remove chicken and cool slightly. Shred and return to slow cooker to heat through.
5. Spoon about  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup of chicken mixture down the center of each tortilla.
6. Top with lettuce, tomato and sour cream if desired.

*Makes six servings.*

*Each serving has 350 calories, 5 grams (g) of fat, 49 g of carbohydrate, 26 g of protein and 10 g of fiber.*

*Source: Recipe courtesy of Texas Agrilife Extension.*

Menu idea:

Chicken fajitas, steamed corn, apple slices, low-fat or fat-free milk.



I'm always looking for ways to get more for my money at the grocery store. Do you have any ideas for me?

**We all like to stretch our food dollar.**

**Do you use these cost-savings strategies?**

- Check out the peel-off coupons that may be present on the food packages. Be sure to hand them to the grocery clerk at the register.
- Join the store's loyalty program. You might get coupons right at the store, on the cash register receipt or by email.
- Keep your coupons organized in a recipe box, binder or envelopes. Discard expired coupons regularly.
- Swap coupons with a friend. For example, if you have a new baby and need baby food or diaper coupons, let your friends know.
- Check out the savings in the newspaper. Check out the coupon inserts in many newspapers especially on weekends.
- Check the sale items. If you have coupons for those items, you can maximize your savings.
- Compare brands at the store. Usually the "name brand" and "store brand" are side by side.
- Don't forget to bring your grocery list and stick to it!

**What are your favorite money-savings strategies?**

## FoodWi\$e Tip of the Month

Think twice before you accept a "hand-me-down" slow cooker or buy a used one at a garage sale or thrift store. Older slow cookers can lose their efficiency and might not rise to the proper temperature. New slow cookers can be found at national discount stores, often for less than \$20. They are worth the money you will save on electricity and the peace of mind that your food is safe.

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Contact the local office of the  
NDSU Extension Service  
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