



CUISINE

Joanne Flynn Black

Have You **Slow Cooked** Lately?

NEVER TOOK to the Crock-Pot – because as its name suggests – I always thought of it as full of crock.”

Purnima Renjen says. “So no crock for me. Although I like my curries simmered, I like to be right there, tasting its spice levels as it bubbles.”

Renjen was answering the question I posed to my Indian-American friends: “Do you use a Crock-Pot in your kitchen?” And she was not alone in her thinking.

Meeti Shah replies, “I haven’t heard of a Crock-Pot. I don’t know anybody in New York who uses one.” Dolcy Dsouza was unfamiliar with it, too, but was interested in finding out more about this style of cooking.

Most of the Indian Americans I spoke with for my informal poll do not use a Crock-Pot. The most widely given response was: “What’s a Crock-Pot?”

Well, a Crock-Pot is the brand name of one of the most widely used slow cookers. It was created in 1970 as a bean cooker. In 1971, it was redesigned with a crockery liner in a pot-like shape by the Rival company with the name Crock-Pot.

In the 1970s, the Crock-Pot was used in most homes across America to make mostly beef stews and chili. It was the “must-give” wedding present and sometimes couples wound up getting six of them.

I did find one Indian American who loves the Crock-Pot – award-winning chef Raghavan Iyer,



IRA BLACK

THE GATEWAY TO INDIAN COOKING

660

curries*

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BY **Raghavan Iyer**, IACP AWARD-WINNING TEACHER OF THE YEAR

author of “660 Curries,” “Betty Crocker’s Indian Home Cooking” and “The Turmeric Trail,” and recipient of the prestigious International Award for Culinary Professionals of Excellence (formerly the Julia Child Award), among others.

Iyer thinks that Crock-Pots could be used for making Indian food. “I have one at home and have tested some of my recipes in my ‘660 Curries’ cookbook using the Crock-Pot,” he says.

He uses his to tenderize tougher cuts of meats, allowing them to simmer slowly. Some of his favorite Crock-Pot recipes include Boneless Pork Loin, Lamb with Fenugreek and Rajasthani Chick Pea Dumplings.

Several people who responded to my question were put off by the idea of slow cooking because of the word slow. Deepti Parekh Shah, for instance, feels it will be a long time before she gets comfortable with the idea of using one. “Having grown up watching my mom prepare meals in a jiffy, the idea of slow cooking seems somewhat alien,” she says.

Another Indian American who agrees with her is Matin Nazir. “I’ve never used a Crock-Pot for Indian cooking because I’m worried about overcooking or undercooking the food and mostly because I’m impatient.”

Yes, they are correct about the amount of time it takes to cook in a Crock-Pot; most meals take eight hours with the setting on low. But as Iyer says, “one of



CROCK-POT CUISINE:
Award-winning chef Raghavan Iyer says he owns a Crock-Pot and has used it to test the recipes for his cookbook, "660 Curries," facing page.

◆ the benefits of using a Crock-Pot is that you put the ingredients in, forget about it and then the flavors miraculously come together.”

Cookbook author Stephanie O’Dea agrees with Iyer. In fact, she has a whole book dedicated to slow cooking. “Make it Fast, Cook It Slow” references how you can prepare the food quickly then let it cook all day. Unattended. No stirring. No hanging around the kitchen.

In 2008, O’Dea vowed to cook every day in her slow cooker. She wrote to the “Rachel Ray Show,” and within weeks she was invited to share some of her Crock-Pot secrets on air. She has also appeared on “Good Morning America.”

“Traditionally, slow cookers have been perceived as glorified pot-roast machines, but as people’s attitudes about nutrition have changed, the slow cooker followed suit,” O’Dea says. “You can bake bread, make yogurt, roast vegetables and prepare delicate desserts and fish in your slow cooker.” Add to that Lamb Vindaloo, Chicken Makhani and Vegetarian Curry, which she covers in the ethnic section of her book.

O’Dea’s blog, crockpot365.blogspot.com, has attracted more than 3 million visitors looking for recipes. People try out her recipes and comment on how the meal turned out. However, when I scanned through the comments, I did not come across any Swatis or Purnimas or Taruns. Which brings me back to why the Crock-Pot hasn’t caught on in the Indian-American kitchen.

Swati Bhartey has a thought: “I cook in pressure cookers and covered pots and the reason is (drum roll) that’s how my mom does it. And that’s how my relatives do it. In fact, my mom has brought back pots she likes from India, and she has gotten them for me, too. This may be one of those things where it’s best not to pursue the sparkly new and

improved version, and instead stick to what you know works best.”

Although Bhartey does admit to cooking in a Crock-Pot once,

But, there is some hope. Deepti Parekh Shah did see a Crock-Pot could have use in an Indian kitchen: “It strikes me as a great way to slow-cook some

Lamb Vindaloo recipe from “Make it Fast, Cook It Slow.” I combined lamb with onions, garlic, cloves, cinnamon, cayenne pepper, ginger and cumin and let it marinate overnight. At 10 the next morning, I put the mixture into the Crock-Pot with potatoes and apple cider vinegar. I set the temperature to low and the timer to eight hours.

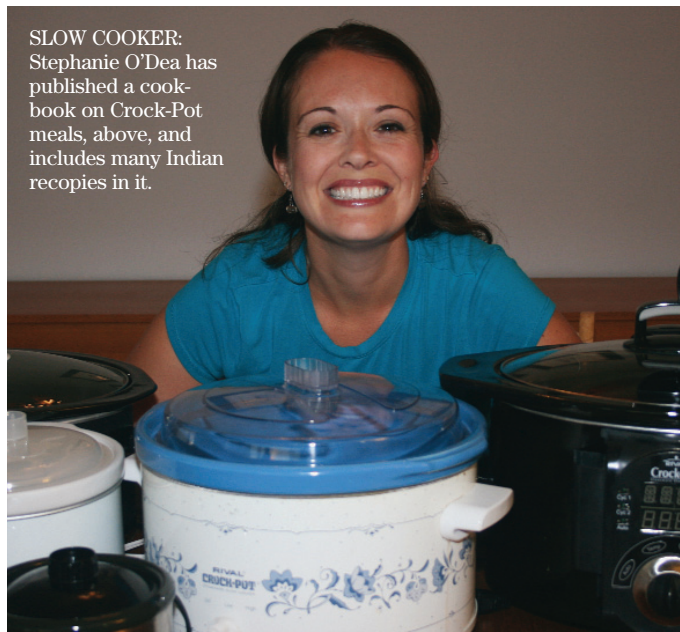
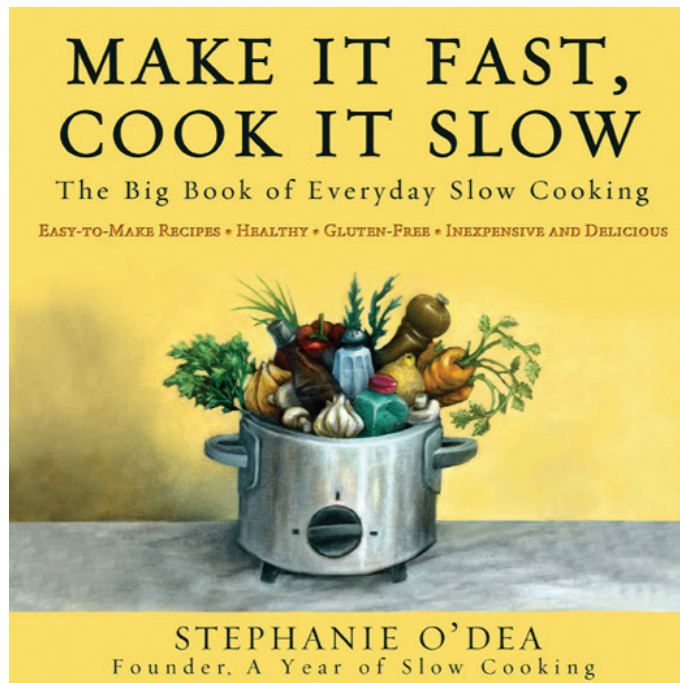
I did nothing all day to it but occasionally peer into the covered pot and watch it bubble away. I also watched the minutes tick down. My mom, Madeline, who was staying with me at the time, said, “These smells are killing me!” I thought that she did not like the aromas coming from the kitchen. But then she clarified, “It’s making me hungry so I keep eating snacks from your pantry.”

I also invited my neighbor and good friend, Davie Cohen, since I know he loves Indian food. His favorite order at an Indian restaurant is lamb kebabs, so I knew I might be in for some “constructive criticism” on my lamb dish. At 5:55 p.m., we stood around the Crock-Pot in a New Year’s Eve-countdown way and watched the last five minutes click away on the timer.

I served the Lamb Vindaloo over rice and waited for the reaction. My husband, Ira, said he loved it. My mom said, “It’s delicious.” But they had to say things like that since they are family. What I really wanted was Cohen’s reaction. As I turned to see what he had to say, I looked down at his plate. It was empty. “A second round?” I asked. He nodded as he chewed his last bite.

As I dished out his second plate, I thought about what Iyer had told me, “It’s a one-pot wonder. A beautiful concoction.” I visualized my article in print. I hoped that from reading this article you might be inspired to surprise your friends and family and cook your favorite Indian dish in a Crock-Pot.

I would love to hear your thoughts. Write to me at: joanneflynblack@gmail.com.



SLOW COOKER: Stephanie O’Dea has published a cookbook on Crock-Pot meals, above, and includes many Indian recipes in it.

she cringes while telling me. “I’m going to get kicked out of my own culture,” she says. “Here’s why: I have only used a Crock-Pot to make beef stew.”

Indian food like dal, whose flavor only intensifies with time.”

During a recent snowstorm, I decided to take my Crock-Pot down from the attic and try the

Recipes From **Stephanie O'Dea's** "Make It Fast, Cook It Slow"

Lamb Vindaloo

Ingredients

3 pounds boneless leg of lamb or stew meat
1 medium yellow onion, chopped
6 garlic cloves, minced
½ tsp ground cloves
1 tsp dried ginger
½ tsp cayenne pepper
1 tbsp ground coriander
1 tbsp ground cumin
1 tsp ground cinnamon
¼ cup apple cider vinegar

2 chopped potatoes
1 (14 ounce) can stewed tomatoes

Method

Use a six-quart slow cooker. Trim the excess fat from the lamb, and cut the meat into 1-inch chunks, or use lamb stew meat. Put into a Ziploc freezer bag with the onion, garlic and dry spices. Close bag tightly and shake to coat lamb with the spices.

Refrigerate overnight. In the morning, put the marinated meat into the cooker, and add the apple cider vinegar, chopped potatoes (I didn't peel) and canned tomatoes. Cover and cook on low for eight to 10 hours. Serve with rice or naan. This freezes well, and the flavors are even more pronounced in the leftovers.

Serves 6

Chicken Makhani

Ingredients

15 cardamom peels (sewn together)
2 lbs boneless, skinless chicken thighs
1 onion, sliced
6 garlic cloves, chopped
2 tsp curry powder
½ tsp cayenne pepper
2 tsp garam masala
½ tsp ground ginger
4 tbsps (½ stick) butter
1 (6 ounce) can tomato paste
2 tbsps lemon juice
1 (14 ounce) can coconut milk
1 cup plain yogurt (to add at end)
Kosher salt

Method

Use a six-quart or larger slow cooker. Carefully sew together the cardamom pods using a needle and thread. You can put in a little cheesecloth bundle, instead. Put the chicken in the slow cooker, and add the onion, garlic and all the spices. Plop in the butter and the tomato paste. Add the lemon juice and coconut milk. Cover and cook on low for eight hours, or on high for four hours. The chicken should shred easily with two forks when fully cooked.

Stir in the plain yogurt 15 minutes before serving, and discard the cardamom pods. Add salt to taste and feel free to tweak the garam masala and

curry to your taste – it's fine to add more at the end of cooking. Serve with basmati rice.

Serves 4



Vegetarian Curry

Ingredients

2 (15-ounce) cans garbanzo beans, drained and rinsed
1 red bell pepper, seeded and diced
1 potato, diced
½ cup diced carrots
½ cup diced celery
1 (16 ounce) can diced tomatoes with its juices
2 cups vegetable broth

3 garlic cloves, minced
2 tbsps curry powder
½ tsp ground coriander
¼ tsp cayenne pepper
¾ cup plain yogurt
1 cup frozen peas

Method

Use a four-quart or larger slow cooker. Put the garbanzo beans into the cooker. Add the vegetables and the can of tomatoes.

Pour in the broth, and stir in the garlic and spices. Cover and cook on low for eight to 10 hours. Stir in yogurt and frozen peas 30 minutes before serving, and turn the cooker to high. Serve the curry over freshly cooked basmati rice, and have naan on hand to scoop.

Serves 6