

Under Pressure

The pressure cooker is being rediscovered as the perfect tool for wonderful, healthy meals — even for those who lead a hectic lifestyle.

By KAREN OLSON

RECIPES BY BETSY NELSON

Lorna Sass discovered the pressure cooker 25 years ago when her mother brought one back from India to make fabulous soups and stews in only 15 minutes. Sass has relied on it ever since.

“In the pressure cooker the flavors meld. It tastes like the dish has been cooking for hours,” says Sass, author of several cookbooks on pressure cooking.

In many parts of the world — especially India, Morocco, and Italy — the time-saving kitchen tool is ubiquitous. But, although the cooking technique is experiencing a renaissance in the United States, many folks here still harbor residual fears about it.

“In the 1940s and 1950s, pressure cookers didn’t have the good backup safety mechanisms that today’s cookers do,” says Sass. “A lot of families [had these] sagas about how the pressure cooker blew up and Aunt Tillie’s pea soup ended up on the ceiling.”

Those accidents used to happen because people forgot to turn down the heat and — since there was no way to release pressure back then — the top blew off or the vent exploded. With today’s well-designed cookers, says Sass, there’s nothing to be afraid of.

When you’re ready to experiment with a pressure cooker, Sass suggests turning it into an event: “Have some friends over, put some water in the pressure cooker [and] bring it up to high pressure so you get used to it.” Then, make a simple dish and have a party.

Sass frequently makes risotto in her pressure cooker because it produces the dish in mere minutes with almost no stirring — instead of an hour of the nearly constant attention required for the traditional version. She also never makes a soup without it.

In the next several pages you’ll learn just how quick — and easy — it is to make pressure-cooked dishes.





Lamb Tagine

Lamb shoulder can be a tough cut of meat, but pressure cooking can make it fall-off-the-bone tender. Serve this over a quinoa, rice, or millet pilaf.

Makes four to six servings

- 2 tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- 1 tsp. ground coriander
- 1 tsp. ground cumin
- 1 tsp. salt
- 2 tbs. minced gingerroot
- 1 cup chopped onion
- 2 pounds lamb shoulder
- 1 can (15 oz.) stewed tomatoes
- 4 cups chopped carrots (cut into 2-inch chunks)
- 8 prunes, soaked in hot water for one hour
- 2 cups chicken stock
- ½ cup chopped fresh parsley

Mix together the olive oil, spices, gingerroot, and onion, and rub over the lamb. Marinate at room temperature for 30 minutes. Heat the pressure cooker over medium-high heat, and sear the lamb on all sides. Add the tomatoes and stir to deglaze. Add the carrots, prunes, and chicken stock. Cover and bring to high pressure. Turn the heat down, and cook for 25 minutes. Turn off the heat, and allow the pressure cooker to come down to normal pressure naturally, about 10 minutes, and uncover. Check to make sure the lamb is tender; if not, cook for another 10 minutes at high pressure. Transfer to a platter, and sprinkle with the parsley.

Wild-Mushroom Risotto

Risotto intimidates many home cooks, but using a pressure cooker eliminates all that endless stirring. Try this recipe with your favorite veggies, herbs, and meat or seafood.

Makes four to six servings

- 2 tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 cup minced onion
- 3 cups chopped wild mushrooms
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 cups arborio rice
- 1 tsp. dried rosemary
- ¼ cup red wine or apple juice
- 4 cups vegetable broth
- 3 cups arugula
- ½ cup grated Parmesan cheese

Heat the olive oil over medium heat in a pressure cooker, then add the onion, mushrooms, and garlic, and sauté until caramelized. Add the rice and rosemary and sauté for five minutes. Deglaze with the red wine, stirring to scrape up any bits. Stir in the vegetable broth. Cover and bring to high pressure. Turn the heat down, and cook for 10 minutes. Use the quick-release method: Run cold water over the lid of the pressure cooker to bring the pressure down to normal, and uncover. Stir in the arugula to wilt, and top with the cheese.



Bean and Root-Vegetable Stew

Once you soak the beans, this hearty stew comes together in roughly 30 minutes and is perfect for a winter day.

Makes eight servings

- 2 tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 cup chopped onion
- 8 cups chopped root vegetables (parsnip, turnip, rutabaga, celery root)
- 3 tbs. tomato paste
- ½ tsp. chopped fresh sage
- 1 tsp. salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 2 cups dry cannellini beans, soaked overnight or for at least three hours, then drained
- 6 cups vegetable broth
- 1 bunch kale, stems removed, leaves coarsely chopped
- Grated Parmesan cheese

Heat the olive oil in the pressure cooker over medium-high heat, then add the onion and root vegetables and sauté together until just beginning to brown, about five minutes. Stir in the tomato paste, sage, salt, pepper, beans, and broth. Cover and bring to high pressure. Turn the heat down, and cook for 15 minutes. Use the quick-release method: Run cold water over the lid of the pressure cooker, and uncover. If the beans are not cooked through, cook at high pressure for another 10 minutes. Stir in kale to wilt, and top with Parmesan cheese.

Collard Greens With Ham

This soulful side dish is a nice accompaniment to a roasted chicken. For a vegetarian version, simply omit the ham and, if you like, add a teaspoon of smoked Spanish paprika.

Makes four to six servings

- 1 tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 cup chopped onion
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 to 2 jalapeños, if desired, minced
- 1 large ham hock, about 1 pound
- Salt and coarsely ground black pepper to taste
- ¼ cup apple-cider vinegar
- 2 cups water
- 25 collard green leaves, stems removed, leaves chopped into 1-inch pieces

Heat the olive oil in the pressure cooker over medium-high heat, and cook the onions, garlic, and jalapeños with the ham hock, turning the ham to sear on all sides. Stir in the salt, pepper, vinegar, water, and collard greens. Cover the pressure cooker and bring to high pressure. Turn the heat down and cook for 10 minutes. Use the quick-release method: Run cold water over the lid of the pressure cooker, and uncover. Remove the greens from the liquid with a slotted spoon. Use a couple of forks to shred the meat off the ham hock and add to the greens. If the meat doesn't come off the bone easily, cook at high pressure for another five to 10 minutes.





Red Lentil Dal With Fresh Cilantro and Lime

Perfect as a light meal, dal is a traditional Indian dish made with lentils, beans, or peas.

Makes four to six servings

- 2 tbs. ghee or coconut oil
- 1 cup chopped onion
- 1 to 2 jalapeños, minced
- 1 tbs. minced gingerroot
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tsp. whole cumin seeds
- 1 tsp. ground coriander
- ½ tsp. ground turmeric
- 3 tomatoes, seeded and diced
- 2 carrots, diced
- 1 cup dry red lentils, rinsed and drained
- 4 cups water
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 lime, cut into wedges
- 1 cup chopped cilantro

Heat the ghee in the pressure cooker over medium-high heat, then add the onion, jalapeños, gingerroot, and garlic, and sauté. Cook until just beginning to brown, about six to eight minutes. Add the cumin seeds, coriander, and turmeric, and cook until fragrant and toasted, a few minutes. Stir in the tomatoes, carrots, lentils, water, and salt. Cover and bring to high pressure. Turn the heat down and cook for 10 minutes. Allow the pressure cooker to come down to normal pressure naturally, about 10 minutes, and uncover. Whisk the dal to make it smooth, and add more water if it seems too thick. Serve with the lime wedges and freshly chopped cilantro.

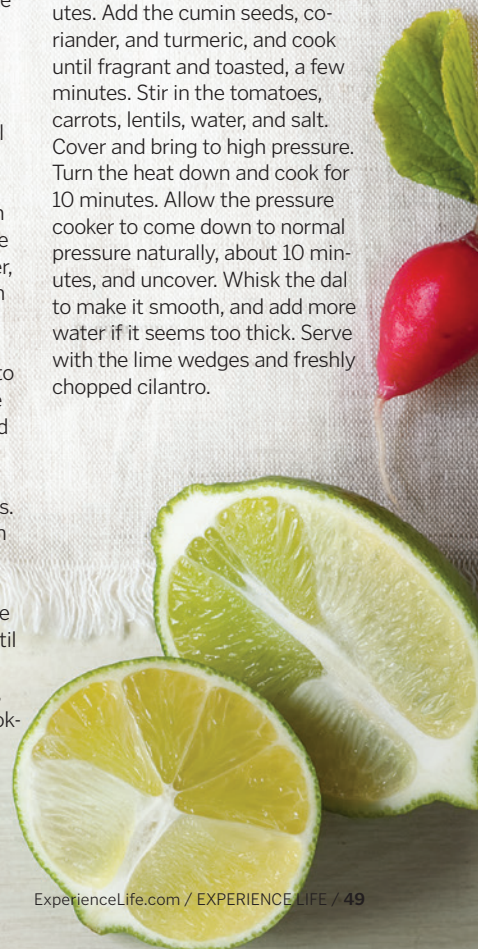
Pork Carnitas

Carnitas — braised or roasted pork that is shredded — is a staple of Mexican cuisine and great to have on hand for eating in tacos and tamales or with rice and beans.

Makes four to six servings

- 4 pounds pork shoulder roast
- 1½ cups chopped onion
- 5 to 6 cloves garlic, mashed with the side of a knife
- 1 tbs. smoked Spanish paprika
- 1 tbs. ground cumin
- 1 tbs. ground coriander
- 2 tsp. salt
- 1 tbs. red-wine vinegar
- 1 tbs. extra-virgin olive oil

Cut slits into the pork shoulder every 2 inches. Mix together the onion, garlic, spices, and salt, and rub over the pork and into the slits. Drizzle the roast with the vinegar. Wrap and refrigerate overnight or at least several hours. Heat the olive oil in the pressure cooker over medium-high heat, and sear the roast on all sides. Add water to cover the roast, cover the pressure cooker, and bring to high pressure. Turn the heat down and cook for 50 minutes. Turn the heat off and allow the pressure cooker to come down to normal pressure naturally, about 10 minutes, and uncover. If the pork is not falling off the bone, return to high pressure for another 10 minutes. Remove the pork shoulder from the cooking liquid. Skim off as much fat as you can, and then simmer the cooking liquid in the pressure cooker, uncovered, until the volume is reduced by half. Shred the pork using two forks, and serve with the reduced cooking liquid poured over it.



Flan

Custards that are traditionally baked in a bain-marie, or water bath, turn out even better in the pressure cooker: They cook more evenly and are less likely to form large bubbles or curdle.

Makes six servings

- ½ vanilla bean, split lengthwise
- 2 cups whole milk
- 1 cup cane sugar
- 4 whole eggs
- 1 egg yolk

Special equipment:
Pressure-cooker rack

Scrape the seeds out of the vanilla bean and add to the milk in a small saucepan along with the bean. Heat until just about to boil. Remove from heat, allowing the vanilla bean to infuse the milk for five minutes, then remove the bean. In a separate small saucepan, melt ½ cup sugar over medium heat. Cook, but do not stir, until it is a rich golden brown. Pour the caramelized sugar into a 1-quart metal bowl and swirl to coat the bottom and ½ inch of the sides evenly. In another bowl, beat the eggs and yolk together with the remaining ½ cup sugar until smooth, then whisk in the milk. Pour the mixture into the caramel-lined bowl, cover tightly with a sheet of foil, and place on a rack in the pressure cooker. Add 2 cups water to the bottom of the pressure cooker, cover, and bring to high pressure. Turn the heat down and cook for 10 minutes. Use the quick-release method: Run cold water over the lid of the pressure cooker. Uncover, and allow to cool undisturbed for at least one hour. Then, refrigerate for at least three hours before serving. To remove from the bowl, run a knife around the edge of the custard, and invert onto a plate. Serve as is, or top with fresh berries. 🍓

Karen Olson is a Minneapolis-based writer and a frequent contributor to *Experience Life*.

All recipes were created by **Betsy Nelson** (a.k.a. “That Food Girl”), a Minneapolis-based food stylist and recipe developer.

WEB EXTRA!

For tips on how to shop for a pressure cooker, see ELmag.com/pressurecooker.

VIDEO EXTRA!

For step-by-step instructions on how to use a pressure cooker, go to ELmag.com/pcvideo.

NOTE: Readers sometimes ask us why we don't publish calorie, carb, and fat counts with our recipes. We believe that if you're eating primarily whole, healthy foods (an array of sustainably raised vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds, legumes, meats, fish, eggs, whole-kernel grains, and healthy fats and oils), you really don't need to stress about the numbers (which are often inaccurate or misleading anyway). We prefer to focus more on food quality and trust our bodies to tell us what we need. — *Eds.*