

## **Crock Pot Creations**

Another school year is winding down and my stuffy head tells me spring is in full “bloom” with summer just around the corner. My 13-year-old informed me this morning he has 23 days left and then he can finally get some much needed rest. (I’ve informed him that these are the tough years and that he just needs to hang in there...after he gets out of high school, life’s pretty much a breeze.)

With both Mom and Dad out working these days the only option for many families is a quick stop for “take out” and we know that isn’t necessarily the best source for a healthy meal or much of a variety depending on where you live. You may have to go into storage to retrieve it but your crock-pot can provide some relief when everyone is running fast and furious.

There are certain dishes that just seem best suited to the type of cooking that a crock-pot provides and also some that need to be avoided. Pasta, for example, will break down and coagulate into a formless lump if slow cooked for any prolonged amount of time. Most recipes that involve pasta or noodles need to have that portion of the recipe prepared traditionally and added to the rest of the ingredients shortly before being served. The great news is that it takes very little time to boil pasta so it’s not a time problem to prepare it last.

A friend prepared this first recipe for my family and we loved it. There’s a lot to be said for simple, down to earth foods and this recipe will satisfy even your most finicky eaters so have at it!

### **Crock-pot Chicken and Noodles**

(Serves 4 to 6 people)

4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts  
1 can condensed cream of chicken soup  
1 can condensed cream of mushroom soup  
1 teaspoon sugar  
¼ cup flour  
1 teaspoon minced garlic  
8 ounces sour cream  
1 package egg noodles

Wash chicken breasts and cut them into ½ inch wide strips. Place strips into the bottom of the crock-pot. Combine soups, sugar and garlic in a bowl and mix thoroughly. Pour over your chicken.

Cover your crock-pot and cook on high for 3 to 4 hours or on low setting 7 to 9 hours. Combine flour and sour cream and stir it into the cooked chicken mixture. Continue cooking for 25 to 30 minutes.

Serve the chicken combination spooned over hot egg noodles that have been prepared according to their package instructions.

Fridays are a great day to make Sloppy Joes that you can serve for your evening meal and also take care of at least one additional meal over the weekend. I know my troops never object to Sloppy Joes and are glad to get double dosed over a weekend. This recipe can be made fairly spicy but I tame it down for the kids. I will note how to turn up the heat if you so choose.

### **Slow Cooked Sloppy Joes** (Makes about 16 sandwiches)

3 pounds lean ground beef, browned and drained  
1 large sweet onion, chopped  
2 tablespoons minced garlic  
4 tablespoons chopped green bell pepper  
1 ½ teaspoons sea salt  
½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper  
1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar  
2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce  
2 tablespoons prepared mustard  
¼ cup brown sugar  
1 teaspoon mustard seed  
3 ½ cups Catsup (buy a brand made in the USA!)  
Shredded Colby cheese

*If you'd like more spice, add:*

2 teaspoons chili powder  
4 tablespoons chopped canned jalapeno peppers in place of green bell pepper  
Tabasco sauce to taste!

Brown your ground beef, onions and garlic in a skillet on your range at medium heat and drain off all excess grease. Transfer the beef to your crock-pot and set your temperature for low.

Add all remaining ingredients other than the Colby cheese to crock-pot and stir well to blend. Cover and cook for 6 to 8 hours.

Serve your Sloppy Joes on buns with a generous sprinkle of shredded Colby cheese. They're even better the next day!

As the warm days of spring and early summer begin to bless us, my corkscrew is drawn to crisp, cold white wines and Pinot Grigio in particular. There's something really unique and captivating about a good one but you'll have to weed through an awful lot of mediocre to poor quality ones to get to the real treats.

When the Santa Margherita Pinot Grigio blew the top off the white Italian wine market several years ago everyone wanted to get a piece of the action and some producers offered wines they should have avoided. I've tasted a bunch of them and here are just a few that have grabbed my heartstrings.

My absolutely top selection right now is one produced by an Austrian family who relocated to Italy a few generations ago. The 2003 Elena Walch (pronounce the "W" like a "V") Alto Adige Pinot Grigio is a standout. The wine has great balance between fruit acidity and the lingering traces of fresh grass, grapefruit, and melon. It would combine beautifully with grilled fowl, a summer green salad, a fruit and cheese tray, or a cold pasta salad.

Another wonderful selection is the Banfi Estate 2003 San Angelo Pinot Grigio. It differs from most Pinot Grigio in that it is produced in the Tuscany region, which is substantially more southern than the areas most often considered key to Pinot Grigio production. This may explain the very ripe styling, which hints more in a tropical fruit direction. This great white would combine really well with all types of seafood, particularly crab, lobster and shrimp. Banfi describes it as a perfect aperitif and I would have to agree.

In the bargain bin we found a really stylish Pinot Grigio from Casa Girelli located in Venice. The 2003 Canaletto Pinot Grigio is one of those great values we never find enough of with a modest price tag followed by a big, enjoyable taste experience. This producer bears watching as almost everything I've tried of their line has real substance and style.

We're here to assist you with any questions about our recipes or wines. Please feel free to call 888-288-0668 or visit us on the web at [www.winedog.com](http://www.winedog.com). Cheers.