

# Kitchen Korner

## Slow Cooking In Warm Weather

(NAPSA)—Home chefs looking for ways to save cash and keep kitchens cool during warm weather might want to consider a slow cooker.

While the devices are often associated with stews and other traditional cold-weather meals, the small electrical appliances can be a great way to avoid using a hot oven on warm days. Plus, because they cook at low heat for extended time periods, slow cookers can make less expensive and leaner cuts of meat more tender. An added bonus: The appliances might help cut utility bills, since they require less power than an electric oven.

To help people prepare food safely in their slow cookers, the USDA and Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) offer these tips:

### Safe Beginnings

Begin with a clean cooker, clean utensils and a clean work area, and wash hands before and during food preparation. Also, keep perishable foods refrigerated until preparation time. If you cut up meat and vegetables in advance, store them in the refrigerator.

### Thaw Ingredients

Always thaw meat or poultry before putting it into a slow cooker. If using a commercially frozen slow cooker meal, prepare according to manufacturer's instructions.

### Use The Right Amount of Food

Fill the cooker no less than half full and no more than two-thirds



**Slow cookers could help you keep your cool and save you money.**

full. Vegetables cook slower than meat and poultry in a slow cooker, so if using them, put the vegetables in first, then layer the meat on top with the desired amount of liquid such as broth, water or barbecue sauce. Keep the lid in place, removing only to stir the food or check for doneness.

### Handling Leftovers

Store leftovers in shallow covered containers and refrigerate within two hours after cooking is finished. Reheating leftovers in a slow cooker is not recommended. Cooked food should be reheated on the stove, in a microwave or in a conventional oven until it reaches 165° F. Then the hot food can be placed in a preheated slow cooker to keep it hot for serving—at least 140° F as measured with a food thermometer.

For more tips, visit [www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov) or call (888) 674-6854.