

Reach for the slow cooker for a winter dinner

BY LEE SVITAK DEAN
STAR TRIBUNE
(MINNEAPOLIS) (TNS)

When important people who cook are asked what their indispensable kitchen tools are, the answers tend to be similar. It usually boils down to a chef's knife and a heavy set of cookware, with a few random culinary gadgets, depending on who answers the question.

And, yes, those are the important tools of the trade, the mainstay of all good cooking.

I have them both. I am ready to cook at all times. Kitchen duty would be tough without those basics.

But here's where some of us veer off along a different culinary path. We may be serious cooks, but we also wear the mantle of "busy," and the prospect of dinner in process while we are away means we're efficient cooks (and, I would argue, smart ones).

So I add "slow cooker" to that must-have list. (You may call it a Crock-Pot, which is a trademarked name that reflects the original. I officially have to stick with the generic label.)

But the slow-cooker neces-

Note: Basically a braised piece of meat, this roast is easy to prepare whether in a slow cooker or in the oven. When prepared in the slow cooker, the roast doesn't need to be marinated in advance because the meat marinates during the all-day cooking time. But for ease of prep in the morning, it's helpful to make the marinade the night before. From "Come One, Come All/ Easy Entertaining With Seasonal Menus" by Lee Svitak Dean.

2 tablespoons sesame seeds
3 or 4 green onions, sliced (about ¼ cup)
½ cup ketchup
¼ cup soy sauce
2 tablespoons ground ginger
2 tablespoons molasses (any type)
2 teaspoons salt
½ teaspoon curry powder
½ teaspoon black pepper

sity is more than having dinner ready when I walk in the door. I reach for this simple small appliance (one big enough to hold half a ham) because I have only a single oven and four stovetop burners. How else will I cook for a crowd when there are too many dishes to prepare? I reach for the slow cooker and

breathe a sigh of relief.

Which brings me to my favorite dish for this low-heat contraption. Sesame Pork Roast serves as my standby in cold weather, as much for its enticing fragrance as for its tender meat.

This recipe has made the rounds of three generations of Svitak cooks and our extended

Sesame Pork Roast

Serves 6

1 cup water
2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
4 pounds pork shoulder roast
3 tablespoons flour for gravy, if desired

Toast sesame seeds in a dry frying pan over medium heat until fragrant and slightly browned, stirring occasionally.

Place seeds in a bowl with the green onions, ketchup, soy sauce, ginger, molasses, salt, curry powder, black pepper, 1 cup water and wine vinegar; stir to mix thoroughly. Place meat in a large bowl and pour the marinade over the meat. If you are not using a slow cooker, marinate the roast, covered and in the refrigerator, for 2 to 3 hours or overnight.

To prepare in a slow cooker: Place meat and marinade in the slow cooker, cover, and cook on low for 8 to 9 hours or on high for about 3 hours. When done, the meat

should be falling apart tender, easy to pull apart with a fork.

To prepare in the oven: Place the meat and marinade in a covered casserole dish, and let it cook at 300 degrees for about 3 hours, or until the meat is very tender.

To serve: Place meat over noodles, rice or mashed potatoes, along with pan juices or with gravy made from the juices. Or pull the meat apart and serve on buns for a variation on pulled pork sandwiches.

To make gravy: Pour pan juices into a 2-cup measure. Skim off fat, returning 2 tablespoons of the fat to a pan. If the pan juices do not equal 2 cups, add enough water to reach the 2-cup measure.

Whisk 3 tablespoons flour into the fat in the pan and cook over medium heat on the stovetop until bubbly. Slowly stir in pan juices and cook until gravy thickens, stirring constantly.

family, it's that good. And like all memorable recipes, it has a story.

Forty-plus years ago, my mother's sister wrote down a recipe she heard on the radio. She was quite the adventurous cook and, with a home in California, always ahead of our Minnesota taste buds. As she often did with recipes,

this one was passed along to my mother, who made it for company because it was far too exotic to serve for everyday.

And, yes, it was unusual for its time, with sesame seeds, soy sauce, ground ginger and curry powder all part of the mix (how un-Minnesotan was that in the early 1970s?).

The recipe had staying power, in great part because of its versatility. Need an unexpected (and efficient) dish for entertaining? Check. A reliable family dinner? Check. Different ways to serve it? Check (atop mashed potatoes, rice or noodles, with or without gravy). What about informal sandwiches, stuffed onto buns? Check.

I've also discovered that it's a great recipe to adapt to ingredients I have on hand. Add more or less green onions, as you prefer. Experiment with fresh ginger instead of ground (but make sure you use a lot). I've prepared it without curry powder when I discovered, too late, I had none. Left out the sesame seeds on another occasion when I hadn't planned ahead (oops). Despite my tinkering and occasional inept planning, the recipe works because, at its basic, it's simply braised meat with seasonings.

For all these reasons, Sesame Pork became part of my repertoire and later for my daughters, who prepare it for guests these days because who serves a roast to company? Once again, it's exotic.



SARAH WALKER CARON | BDN

Slow Cooker Hoisin Wings for Two have a rich, nuanced flavor.

Wings

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hot wing recipe? Check out my Crispy Baked Hot Wings recipe from last year.) They aren't supposed to be. These are for the wing lovers who are looking for rich, nuanced flavors.

You can locate hoisin sauce in the international aisle of most grocery stores — I picked it up at Hannaford — or it can be ordered online in a pinch.

Sarah Walker Caron is the senior features editor for the Bangor Daily News and author of "Grains as Mains: Modern Recipes Using Ancient Grains," available at bookstores everywhere including BAM and Bull Moose in Bangor. For more delicious recipes, check out Maine Course at mainecourse.bangordailynews.com.

Slow Cooker Hoisin Chicken Wings for Two

Serves 2

1 pound split chicken wings
1 teaspoon ground ginger
1 teaspoon smoked paprika
1 teaspoon light brown sugar
1 teaspoon kosher salt
1 tablespoon hoisin sauce
1 teaspoon soy sauce
1 teaspoon seasoned rice vinegar

Place the split chicken wings — that means broken into wingettes and drumettes with tips removed and discarded — in a slow cooker. A mid-sized one — mine is 4 quarts — works perfectly for this amount of wings. If you double the recipe, it should work fine in that size slow cooker as well, but any larger quantities will need a larger slow cooker.

In a small bowl, thoroughly combine the ground ginger, smoked paprika, light brown sugar and salt. Sprinkle over the wings and stir well to combine.

Cook on low for three to four hours, until cooked through. Remove the wings to a baking sheet.

In a small bowl, combine the hoisin, soy sauce and rice vinegar until smooth. Brush on the wings.

Set an oven rack to 4 inches below the broiler coil. Broil the wings for six to eight minutes, flipping once and re-basting with sauce, until browned. Enjoy.



Start with raw potatoes (left), such as Russets, and grate them. Don't cube or slice them; that's for home fries. Browned and crispy outside (right), soft and yielding inside, your perfect hash browns will make your eggs proud.

Crispy

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Now, you add other stuff as well, like a little minced onion, as long as you take care not to let it burn. For garlic, my inclination would be to crush a couple cloves and saute them slightly in the hot fat BEFORE you add the potatoes. Then, remove the garlic and add the potatoes. That way you get the flavor without the risk of burning.

You can also add herbs or spices. A little rosemary is nice, as is a bit of paprika. But, with all this stuff, I prefer it simple: potatoes, fat and salt — yum.

One last thing: the pan. Din-

ers mostly make their hash browns on a flat top griddle. For the home cook, I think a good, nonstick pan works best. Some people love cast iron, too, but those things are so heavy, it makes it hard to flip the hash browns like you could if you're using a light nonstick. If you're going to flip it with a spatula anyway, go ahead with the cast iron. That's probably what Abe Lincoln would have used.

OK, now let's get to the actual making. I figure one big potato makes enough for two servings of hash browns. If you're making a lot, keep potatoes in acidulated water until it's time to cook. That will keep them from discoloring.

1. Peel your potatoes and shred them with the largest

hole of your grater. If you're going to cook them right away, put them in a paper towel or clean dish towel and ring out as much water as you can. This will help them crisp up more quickly.

2. Heat your nonstick skillet over a medium to medium-low flame. While it's heating, season your potatoes with salt and anything else you might be adding (pepper, for example).

3. Now, for most sauteed items, I add just enough fat to coat the bottom of the pan. For hash browns, I add a little more to make sure they really don't stick and to add a little more flavor.

4. Add enough grated potatoes that you can press them into a circle covering the

whole pan. How thick a layer? Excellent question. The thinner the layer, the more crispy the whole thing will be. If you mound your potatoes more thickly, the interior will be soft and white while the exterior is all nice and crispy. I'm not about to tell you which way is better. That's your choice. Aren't you glad we're not living in the Stalin-era Soviet Union? Cook them over medium low heat until the bottom is golden brown and crisp, 5 to 10 minutes. Flip the hash browns and do the same on the other side. Serve immediately, because they'll lose their crisp if you try to hold them.

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MICHAEL TERCHA | CHICAGO TRIBUNE | TNS

A colorful look at Haitian chef Laguerre

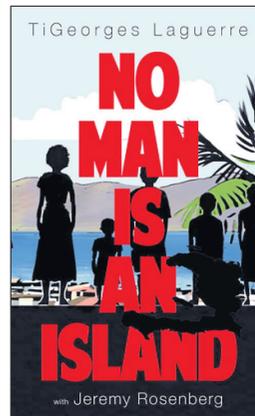
BY AMY SCATTERGOOD
LOS ANGELES TIMES (TNS)

Cookbook of the Week: "No Man Is an Island," by TiGeorges Laguerre with Jeremy Rosenberg (Rare Bird Books, \$15.95)

This isn't so much a cookbook as it is a memoir of a life spent cooking, from a chef whose life probably deserves not one, but a dozen memoirs.

Jean-Marie Montfort Herbert Georges Fils Laguerre goes by the name TiGeorges, as does his restaurant, TiGeorges' Chicken, one of the only Haitian eateries in Los Angeles. It was that restaurant near Echo Park that became the LA center of disaster relief after the earthquake that devastated Haiti in 2010. And that restaurant nearly burned to the ground after an electrical fire only months after the earthquake.

Laguerre's book weaves between these catastrophic events, but it also covers his childhood in Port-de-Paix, Haiti, his early days cooking in Los Angeles, and the genesis of the restaurant, which has reopened after fire repairs.



TiGeorges the restaurant is a cultural center as much as a place to eat, where the Haitian community gathers, where musicians play and where Laguerre continues to make astonishing roast chicken on the grill he built at the front of the eatery, a contraption that looks more like a medieval catapult than a normal rotisserie. TiGeorges the author has created a kind of cultural center with this book, dishing out his food and his life in equal, colorful measure.

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GABOR DEGRE | BDN

The Berry Manor Inn co-owner Cheryl Michaelsen and assistant inn keeper Lori Hayes prepare pies at the Rockland Inn for their guests recently.

Pies

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With reusable forks raised high, 600 people, locals and food tourists alike, are expected to hit the streets to taste sour cherry and goat cheese handpies, drunken pumpkin bourbon tarts, even a kimchee and pork belly pizza. Each venue will offer both sweet and savory offerings.

"You can't hit the dessert pies too fast," warns Michaelsen, who suggests comfortable shoes, expandable pants and power walking between stops. New venues this year include Friends of Maine's Seabird Islands, where butterscotch pie will be served in ode to Scotch Island. Main Street Markets teams up with Bixby & Co. for mini waffle bites and drinking chocolate. Nice twofers.

Back at pie central, The Berry Manor Inn will offer raspberry, blueberry and pecan pies along with artichoke and spinach and broccoli cheddar pies. Does Mi-

chaelsen ever tire of rolling out the dough, which she does 25 times a week in the busy season?

"Making crust and filling is always an adventure."

Adding to the adventure this year is a Downtown Abbey high tea and pie fundraiser (\$5 donation) from 1 to 3 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 30, at the Island Institute. For those that like something stronger, a wine and pie pairing at the Wine Seller in Rockland is open to the public from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. Which vintage best complements shiitake mushroom and leek tarts? Uncork the mystery here.

A silent auction at Trackside Station kicks off the good vibes off Saturday from 5 to 7 p.m. Pie-themed cocktails will be served throughout the evening and the restaurant will donate 5 percent of special cocktail sales to the food pantry.

The parade runs from 1 to 4 p.m. on Sunday, Jan. 31. Tickets are \$30. For more information, visit www.HistoricInnsOfRockland.com or call 207-596-6611.