
Introduction

If you are one of those “hurry-up” cooks who dreams of getting a fork-tender beef stew on the table in half an hour, you’ve discovered the right book. For healthy, homemade fast food, the pressure cooker can’t be beat.

Pressure cooking first became popular in America during the Second World War when Rosie the Riveter came home from her shift and had to make dinner for the kids. The cooker’s popularity waned during the fifties when America discovered frozen food and TV dinners. But, by the late eighties, with the introduction of newly designed, 100-percent safe cookers from Europe, pressure cooking started making an impressive comeback. Who could resist a pot that produced soul-satisfying soups and stews in one-third the standard cooking time?

I certainly couldn’t. I was first introduced to pressure cooking by my mom, who had carted a cooker back from India where she had eaten curries and dals prepared in minutes rather than hours. After eating a few of her delicious creations, I bought my own pressure cooker and began experimenting. My excitement with the results inspired me to write *Cooking Under Pressure*, published in 1989.

Between then and now, I’ve continued to cook under pressure. (Who doesn’t nowadays?) I love good food, but I’m not patient about waiting for it to be done. If I can make that fork-tender beef stew in thirty minutes rather than ninety, there’s a good chance I’ll make the beef stew.

Pressure Perfect is really two books in one: it teaches you how

to make the most of your pressure cooker and also offers you over two hundred recipes to add to your repertoire. I had a lot of fun creating new recipes for this book, largely because I dropped any preconceived notions about what the cooker could and could not do. As a result, I was able to create enticing recipes for pasta, fish, risottos, meatloafs, and cheesecakes (yes, cheesecakes!), in addition to all of the splendid soups, stews, ribs, and pot roasts that the pressure cooker is known to do so well.

And we're not talking about fifties food here: gray pot roast and limp string beans. Glance through the recipes and you'll discover contemporary dishes with vivid color and flavor on every page.

Since the pressure cooker came into my life close to twenty years ago, I've eaten better and saved money as well as time. Now I'd like to share with you all that I've learned. I invite you to experience the surprise and delight that awaits every cook who unlocks the lid of a pressure cooker and sees what magic has transpired within.

Happy Cooking!

Lorna Sass
New York City

If you need information on purchasing a pressure cooker or would like to share your recipes or reactions, I'd be happy to hear from you. (Please enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope if requesting a response.) Write to me c/o Cooking Under Pressure, P.O. Box 704, New York, NY 10024.

The World of Pressure Cooking

Welcome to the world of pressure cooking, where soups and stews develop two-hour taste in twenty minutes. To many cooks of my acquaintance, the pressure cooker has become as useful a tool as the desktop PC, so I've taken the liberty of using these initials to refer to my favorite appliance.

HOW THE PC WORKS

Once you've locked the lid in place and set the cooker over high heat, the liquid inside comes to a boil and produces steam. Because the lid has an airtight seal, the steam gets trapped inside the pot and forces the internal pressure to build up to 15 pounds per square inch (PSI).

When the cooker is operating at high pressure (15 pounds PSI), water boils at 250 degrees Fahrenheit rather than the standard 212 degrees. Since the water is 38 degrees hotter than usual, food fibers break down and flavors mingle in one-third the standard cooking time. That's why a pot roast becomes fork-tender in one hour instead of three, and split peas dissolve into a puree in twenty minutes rather than sixty.

Do you think that this is all too good to be true? Or are you beleaguered by the fear that your pressure cooker will blow up before your dinner is ready? Please read on. . . .

COOKERS, THEN AND NOW

If you were born before 1950, chances are you've heard your family's version of the story about Aunt Tillie's pressure-cooked split

pea soup ending up on the ceiling. Such family legends began during the forties when pressure cookers had simpler designs. If a food particle clogged the vent or the cook forgot to turn down the heat once high pressure was reached, the pressure kept building inside the cooker. Eventually the jiggle-top pressure regulator blew off, taking the contents of the pot along with it.

Nowadays that accident couldn't happen because the redesigned cookers on the market have multiple safety mechanisms. If, for example, the cook forgets to turn down the heat once high pressure is reached, one or more vents will automatically release excess pressure. In addition, most cookers have cutout windows on the sides of their lids. In the unlikely event that the safety vents do not function properly, the increasing pressure will force the rubber sealing gasket to extrude through one of the windows, creating another opening for the steam pressure to escape.

Now that pressure cookers typically have three backup safety mechanisms built into their designs, it seems fair to call them foolproof!

BUYING A NEW PRESSURE COOKER?

There are over a dozen brands of pressure cookers on the market, and most brands sell two or three different designs in various sizes. It's nice to have such a wide range of choices, but it can be a bit confusing. Here are some guidelines to help you select a new cooker. Contact the manufacturers or distributors listed on page 319 to obtain design details and to locate retail outlets.

Lid

Contrary to what they say about books, you *should* judge a pressure cooker by its cover. The lid reveals how the cooker functions and what safety features are built into the design.

First make sure that it's simple to lock the lid into place and remove it after cooking. Then determine what kind of pressure regulator the cooker uses and how easy it is to know when high pressure is reached. There are three types of pressure regulators (so named because they regulate the amount of pressure in the cooker).

The most sophisticated type is a spring-valve pressure regulator, used in many cookers imported from Europe. Although designs vary, most spring-valve regulators have a small brightly colored rod or cylinder that pops up as the pressure builds. When the rod comes up high enough to reveal a designated mark, the cook knows at a glance when high pressure is reached. (See Advantages of Second-Generation Cookers on page 7.)

The second type of pressure regulator is a removable, round metal weight that sits on top of the cooker's vent pipe. This design is used in American pressure cookers and in some imported brands. When high pressure is reached, the weight rocks gently back and forth, a motion that gives this cooker the nickname "jiggle-top." It is quite easy to know when high pressure is reached.

The third type, called a developed-weight pressure regulator, is used in many imports. Think of it as a jiggle-top in disguise since the regulator sits on top of the vent pipe but gets locked into position before cooking begins. This regulator lifts up slightly when high pressure is reached, but since it rarely jiggles, the cook must observe it carefully.

Safety Backups

Make sure the cooker has at least three backup safety mechanisms for releasing excess pressure. See Cookers, Then and Now, on page 3 for details.

Pounds Per Square Inch (PSI)

Look for a cooker that operates at 14 to 16 pounds per square inch when it reaches high pressure. Cookers that reach high pressure at 12 or 13 pounds PSI don't get the job done as quickly.

Bottom

A well-constructed, heavy bottom distributes heat evenly and prevents sticking and scorching. Opt for an 18/10 stainless-steel cooker that has a three-ply bottom with an aluminum or copper sandwich.

Handles

Select a cooker with heat-resistant plastic handles so you won't have to reach for pot holders when you move it from stovetop to sink. Some cookers come with two short handles; others have one short and one long handle. Choose the shape you find more comfortable; keep in mind that the pot can be heavy to lift when it is full.

Liquid Minimum

Choose a cooker that requires 1 cup liquid or less to reach high pressure. A cooker that demands more liquid may result in excess gravy or a watery sauce.

Size

Since you cannot fill a pressure cooker more than two-thirds full, for maximum flexibility, it is wise to buy the biggest cooker you have room to store. Even if you plan to cook for just two, I recommend an 8-quart (7-liter) cooker and certainly nothing smaller than a 6-quart (5-liter) model. Some companies sell sets: an 8-quart and a 4-quart pot with a shared lid. It's handy to have a second small cooker for preparing vegetables or risottos, but your primary cooker should be large.

Advantages of Second-Generation Cookers

Cookers that operate with a spring-valve pressure regulator are commonly referred to as “second generation” since they use a more recently developed technology than jiggle-tops. Second-generation cookers cost two to three times more, but offer numerous advantages.

Versatility: The design of the spring valve reduces concerns about clogging the regulator’s vent, which makes it possible to cook foaming foods like beans and grains without careful monitoring.

Quiet: There is little to no hissing and an absence of the *chug-chug* sounds typical of jiggle-top cookers.

No Guesswork: It is very easy to determine when the cooker has reached high pressure. Just watch for the colorful red or disk to pop up.

Stovetop Quick-Release Option: There is a way to release pressure quickly without setting the cooker under cold running water. This option is particularly convenient when the pot is full, thus heavy to move.

CAN I USE MY OLD JIGGLE-TOP COOKER?

The answer is yes, provided that it is designed for safety and all of the parts are in good working order.

First, check the Owner’s Manual to determine if there are at least three backup safety mechanisms built into the design. (See Cookers, Then and Now on page 3 for details.)

If so, do a test run. Pour 2 cups of water into the cooker. Bring the cooker up to high pressure. If the pressure doesn’t rise or if water drips down the sides, purchase a new gasket. (Check the directory of manufacturers on page 319; use only the gasket made for your model.)

Then take the cooker through the trial run described on page 9. If you are satisfied with the results, use the cooker.

Pressure Cooking Perfected

As with any new appliance, it takes a small investment of time to become acquainted with your pressure cooker. Start by reading the Owner's Manual, which should provide the necessary information for filling in the blanks below. You'll be glad to have this information at your fingertips when you start cooking.

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR PC

Size

My cooker holds _____ quarts.

Pressure cookers come in sizes ranging from 2½ to 8 quarts. Imported cookers are sized in liters: a 5-liter cooker holds approximately 6 quarts, and a 7-liter cooker holds about 8 quarts.

Capacity

For most ingredients, the maximum capacity is _____.

For foaming ingredients, like beans and grains, the maximum capacity is _____.

The maximum capacity is usually two-thirds, but only one-half for foaming ingredients.

Pressure Regulator

My cooker has (check one)

_____ a removable "jiggle-top" pressure regulator

_____ a developed-weight pressure regulator

_____ a spring-valve pressure regulator
Refer to page 5 for descriptions of each type.

Liquid

The minimum liquid requirement is _____ cups.

Most cookers require 1 cup liquid to come up to pressure. A few models require as little as $\frac{1}{2}$ cup or as much as 2 cups.

Pounds Per Square Inch at High Pressure

High pressure in my cooker is _____ pounds per square inch (PSI).

You may have to contact the manufacturer to ascertain this information. For most cookers, high pressure is 15 pounds PSI.

Next consult the Owner's Manual and learn how to do the following:

- 1) Lock the lid in place.
- 2) Recognize when the cooker has reached high pressure.
- 3) Quick-release the pressure.
- 4) Unlock the lid once all of the pressure has been released.

Finally, do a trial run to determine how much liquid your cooker loses while under high pressure. Some cookers don't lose any liquid during the course of an hour-long test. Others lose as much as 3 cups through released steam.

There is very little work involved in this trial run, but you will need to stay near the kitchen for one hour and use a timer. For detailed explanations of key phrases used in these steps, see *The Language of Pressure Cooking*, page 10.

- 1) Pour 4 cups water into the cooker.
- 2) Lock the lid in place.
- 3) Over high heat bring to high pressure.
- 4) Reduce the heat just enough to maintain high pressure and cook for 20 minutes.

- 5) Quick-release the pressure under cold running water.
- 6) Remove the lid, tilting it away from you to allow the steam to escape.
- 7) Pour the remaining water into a measuring cup to see how much water the cooker has lost during 20 minutes under pressure.
- 8) Note how much water was lost in the blank space(s) below.
- 9) Return the remaining water to the cooker.
- 10) Repeat steps 2 through 9 two more times, noting water losses below. Don't be tempted to assume that after 40 minutes your cooker will lose twice the water it lost in 20 minutes. It doesn't always work that way.

After 20 minutes, my cooker lost _____ cups water.

After 40 minutes, my cooker lost _____ cups water.

After 1 hour, my cooker lost _____ cups water.

If your cooker loses more than $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of liquid during the time span that a dish is cooking, you will have to add extra to prevent scorching and to end up with sufficient gravy. In other words, if a dish cooks for an hour and the test reveals that your cooker loses 1 cup of water in an hour, add an extra cup of liquid before you start cooking. The recipes will always direct you when adding extra liquid is necessary.

THE LANGUAGE OF PRESSURE COOKING

The phrases explained below are used repeatedly in the recipes. For a clear picture of the step-by-step process involved in cooking under pressure, read them carefully. Refer to the diagrams in your Owner's Manual as needed.

If you're using an electric cooker or cooking on an electric or high-BTU stove, please see supplementary instructions in Special Situations, page 20.

In a 6-quart or Larger Cooker: There is an important relationship between the size of your cooker and the amount of food you can cook at one time since the top third of the cooker must be

left empty to allow room for the steam pressure to build. The recipes are designed so that ingredients do not exceed the two-thirds limit in a 6-quart cooker since that is the most commonly used size. When preparing foods that expand or foam—like beans and grains—the suggested ingredients fill a 6-quart cooker only halfway.

Those with a 4-quart cooker will find special instructions in recipe footnotes called Pressure Points. Those with an 8-quart cooker can increase quantities as space allows.

Do Not Stir: Tomatoes and other ingredients that have a high sugar content are prone to scorching the bottom of pots when cooked over intense heat. Since the cooker is brought up to pressure over high heat, I've designed the recipes so that such ingredients are added last and set on top. You will be reminded, "Do Not Stir," after adding tomatoes and other ingredients that could cause scorching.

Lock the Lid in Place: After the ingredients are assembled in the cooker, lower the lid onto the pot, using the arrows or other visual markings provided by the manufacturer. Then rotate the lid until the lid and pot handles line up. Some cookers have an additional locking mechanism that involves pushing a small lever into place. Check your instruction booklet for specifics. Cookers are designed so that pressure won't rise if the lid is not properly locked in place.

Over High Heat: Place the cooker on a burner that is the same diameter or a bit smaller (never larger). Turn the heat to high.

Bring to High Pressure: Typically it takes less than 5 minutes for the cooker to reach high pressure; however, if it's filled to capacity, it can take as long as 20 minutes. The time it takes for the cooker to come up to pressure is not calculated as part of the cooking time and rarely impacts the minutes required under pressure for the ingredients to become tender.

As the cooker comes up to pressure, a fair amount of air, then steam, is released from one or more vents. Some of the steam may condense on the lid. This is normal.

Lower the Heat Just Enough to Maintain High Pressure: Once high pressure is reached, you must lower the heat immedi-

ately. If you don't lower it enough, the pressure will continue to rise and the cooker will hiss more loudly than usual or make a warning noise. If this happens, turn off the heat and quick-release excess pressure by one of the methods described in the Owner's Manual, then continue cooking over lower heat. After using your cooker a few times, you'll learn just how much heat is required to maintain (but not exceed) high pressure. For most cookers, a flame akin to simmering is just right.

If you notice that the pressure has fallen, assume that you've lowered the heat too much or that the cooker isn't full enough to dependably maintain the pressure at high. In either case, simply bring the pressure back up to high over high heat and lower the heat to maintain pressure again—only this time don't lower the heat quite so much. A brief period of reduced pressure is not likely to affect the timing or the quality of the finished product.

Cook Under High Pressure for X Minutes: Cooking time is calculated from the moment high pressure is reached. Above each recipe is a phrase such as "3 minutes high pressure." This means that as soon as the cooker reaches high pressure, you should set the timer and cook under high pressure for 3 minutes.

Quick-Release the Pressure: When the cooking time is finished, turn off the heat. Bring down the pressure by setting the cooker under cold running water until all of the pressure has been released—usually between 30 and 60 seconds. It's best to tilt the cooker at a 45 degree angle and run water down one side of the cover, directing the water away from the pressure regulator. Second-generation cookers offer the option of a quick-release method that can be performed without removing the cooker from the stovetop. Check the Owner's Manual for details.

Quick-Release the Pressure by Setting the Cooker Under Cold Running Water: If the recipe specifically recommends that you release pressure this way, assume that a stovetop quick-release method will cause sputtering at the vent. Sputtering generally occurs when the cooker is very full or contains ingredients

that foam, such as barley or split peas. It can be messy and potentially dangerous since the ingredients are quite hot.

Let the Pressure Drop Naturally: When cooking time is completed, turn off the heat. Let the cooker sit until the pressure drops of its own accord, which usually takes about 10 minutes, but can take as long as 25 minutes if the cooker is very full.

The food continues to cook as the pressure drops, and this period of time is needed for some foods to finish cooking. The natural release is preferred for certain foods, such as beans and beef, whose textures can be compromised with a quick-release.

Remove the Lid, Tilting It Away from You to Allow Steam to Escape: Even after all pressure has been released, there is still a significant amount of steam left in the cooker. Take care to tilt the lid away from your face when you remove it. Get into the habit of placing the lid upside down on a heatproof surface away from the burners.

Replace the Lid and Cook for a Minute or Two in the Residual Heat: When delicate foods such as rice, pasta, or fresh vegetables are only slightly underdone after the pressure is released, set (but do not lock) the lid in place and let the food cook in the heat that remains in the pot.

Let the Dish Rest: Pressure-cooked foods benefit significantly from some “breathing time” after pressure release. If you stir well and then let the dish sit uncovered in the pot for 3 to 5 minutes, you will be rewarded with enhanced flavor and texture. The food will remain hot enough to serve without reheating.

TRANSFORMATIONS AND BEYOND

Accompanying each recipe, you’ll find entries labeled Variations, Cook-Alongs, Transformations, and Pressure Points. This bonus information is intended to expand the usefulness of this book in various ways, detailed below.

Variations: These are simple ways to modify the recipe by substituting or adding an ingredient or two.

Cook-Alongs: Optional ingredients—usually potatoes, carrots, or Casserole Rice—that you can cook with the recipe as

space in your cooker permits. Suggestions for Cook-Alongs are listed under Variations.

Transformations: Transformations go a few steps beyond Variations and dramatically expand the repertoire of recipes offered in this book. By making a few simple changes, you can transform the basic recipe into a substantially different dish.

For example, scan the recipe for Goulash with Potatoes, page 122. Then look at the Chicken Paprikash Transformation. You can see that by using chicken broth instead of beer, substituting chicken for the meat, adding mushrooms, and blending in sour cream rather than using it as a garnish that you end up with an entirely different dish.

When preparing a Transformation, I suggest that you note the changes and substitutions to one side of the basic ingredients list and draw a faint pencil line through any omitted items. Make a small mark in the instructions to remind yourself when there is an altered procedure. (If you were taught never to write in a book, please consider cookbooks an exception. Try thinking of them as workbooks.)

Since this approach to following a recipe is unusual, I'd like to walk you step-by-step through the process of cooking the Chicken Paprikash Transformation.

As you reread the Transformation instructions, jot down "chicken broth" next to beer and "4 pounds chicken" next to meat in the Goulash ingredients list. Then write "+ mushrooms" next to "4 pounds chicken" and "+ lemon juice" next to sour cream. Note down the altered cooking time in the margin of the instructions next to the suggested meat timing. Then make a little mark after the words "fat separator" to remind yourself that at this point you blend in the sour cream.

The main thing to remember when doing a Transformation is to keep referring back to the basic recipe. Do everything the recipe says except when the Transformation deviates. The Transformation always starts at the point where the changes from the basic recipe begin, so when making Chicken Paprikash, you do everything in the basic recipe up to the point of adding the beer. After adding the chicken broth (instead of the beer), you add the

bay leaves and salt. After that, you add the chicken (instead of the meat) and toss in the mushrooms. You then return to the basic recipe, which tells you to set the potatoes on top.

After pressure release, you again follow the basic recipe instructions to degrease and season the stew. Then blend the sour cream into the cooking liquid, add lemon juice to taste, and garnish with dill.

This process is much easier than it may sound. After you've done a few Transformations, you'll get the hang of it. Along the way, you'll develop a more intuitive understanding of how cooking works and how new recipes are born.

Pressure Points: Look here for tips that guarantee success and for any adjustments suggested for cookers of different sizes. If you are using a 4-quart cooker, make a habit of checking this section for special instructions.

OTHER USEFUL THINGS TO KNOW

Cutting to Size: Since you need to release the pressure before adding ingredients, it's easiest to have everything in the cooker from the start. To ensure even results among foods with different timing requirements, the recipes will direct you to cut slow-cooking ingredients smaller than quick-cooking ones. For example, when making the Minestrone with Pesto, you'll be asked to cut the potatoes (slow cooking) into 1/2-inch slices and leave the zucchini (quick cooking) whole.

Foil Packets: An excellent way to avoid overcooking and maximize flavor is to wrap ingredients in aluminum foil. For example, if you wrap carrots in foil and float the foil packet on top of a long-cooking stew, the carrots remain firm and full of flavor. On the other hand, if you cook unwrapped carrots in a stew, they become meltingly soft and sacrifice their flavor to the cooking liquid.

To make a foil packet, cut a 1 1/2-foot length of standard width, heavy-duty aluminum foil. Place the prepared vegetables in the center. Bring together the cut ends of the foil and fold over several times to seal. Then fold the two remaining open sides to seal.

Maximizing Seasoning: The high heat in the cooker mutes the flavor of ground spices, dried and fresh herbs, and chopped fresh garlic. To maximize flavor, use whole spices in cooking and add herbs and ground spices after pressure release. When you need to cook ground spices such as curry or chili powder under pressure, use about 30 percent more than you would in a standard recipe. Keep in mind that the taste of granulated or powdered garlic survives much better under pressure than the taste of fresh garlic. If you have a preference for fresh garlic, remember that whole cloves contribute more flavor than chopped.

Liquid Assets: All cookers require liquid to produce sufficient steam to bring up the pressure. Since the minimum liquid requirement for most cookers is 1 cup, the recipes always call for at least that amount. The liquid is usually water or broth but can be juice, wine, or beer.

To save time when preparing large quantities, turn the heat to high as soon as you have added the liquid. The closer the liquid is to boiling, the faster the cooker will come up to pressure once you've locked the lid in place.

Often a cooked dish will contain more liquid than you added initially because ingredients with a high water content—such as onions, celery, and mushrooms—give up at least 50 percent of their volume in liquid as they cook. In addition, because of their tightly sealed lids, most cookers lose relatively little liquid through evaporation.

If the cooking liquid or gravy is thinner or more copious than you'd like, reduce it by boiling vigorously or thicken it as suggested in the recipe. You can also drain some of the liquid off and put it aside for another use.

Getting Out the Fat: Many of the recipes suggest that you degrease the cooking liquid using a fat separator (see page 17) because that is the quickest way to get the job done. However, if you have time to refrigerate the dish overnight, the fat will rise to the top and congeal, making for easier and more complete removal. Another bonus of overnight refrigeration is that most dishes taste better the next day.

USEFUL ACCESSORIES

A good **timer** is indispensable to successful pressure cooking. Buy a three-way electronic timer if you are likely to be cooking more than one dish at a time. If you are satisfied with your oven or watch timer, you'll do fine with those.

An **instant-read thermometer** is essential for judging when meat is sufficiently cooked.

You will need a **steaming basket** for pressure cooking vegetables and making meatloaf (yes, meatloaf!, see page 133). Many cookers come with a steaming basket, but they usually don't have legs to raise them above the water, rendering them useless for proper steaming. This problem can be rectified by setting the basket on a **three-legged trivet**. (If your cooker didn't come with a trivet, you can improvise by crushing aluminum foil into a 1-inch-thick log and shaping the log into a ring that fits snugly around the interior perimeter of the cooker.) An excellent alternative is an inexpensive collapsible **vegetable steaming basket**, available in most kitchen shops. It has built-in feet that raise it above the water. Look for one with a base diameter of about 6 inches.

To make Casserole White Rice (page 182) and bread puddings, you'll need a porcelain or glass **1½- or 2-quart soufflé dish** or **heatproof casserole**. Check to be sure that the dish fits comfortably inside the cooker with at least ½ inch to spare around the perimeter. To make cheesecakes, you'll need a **7-inch spring-form pan**.

If the bottom of your cooker scorches on a regular basis, purchase a **heat diffuser**, an inexpensive disc that evenly distributes heat. Set the diffuser between the burner and cooker. When using one, the cooker will take a few minutes longer to come up to pressure, but recommended cooking time should still be reliable. When releasing pressure, remember to move the cooker off the heat diffuser onto a cool burner. Heat diffusers are available in any well-stocked kitchen store.

An **8-cup Pyrex measuring cup** is the ideal receptacle for large quantities of strained broths. Pour the liquid from the Pyrex cup into a **fat separator** to degrease when you wish to serve a dish soon after it is made. The fat separator's long spout extends

from the base and is designed so that you can easily pour off degreased liquid, leaving behind the fat that has risen to the top.

An **immersion blender** is a very handy tool as it allows you to puree all or part of a soup or gravy right in the cooker, saving you the bother of transferring the ingredients to a standard blender or food processor.

You'll need a **kitchen scale** to weigh vegetables and pasta. **Long-handled tongs** are the best tool for removing individual ingredients from the cooker.

A **food mill** does an excellent job of pureeing cooked fruits and vegetables. It is especially useful when pureeing potatoes, which become gummy in the food processor and blender.

If you have trouble finding any of these items locally, they are all available from Zabar's by mail-order (see page 317).

SOME HANDY TECHNIQUES

The following tips are given in alphabetical order by main ingredient.

Roasting Garlic: Remove any loose, papery skins from a whole head of garlic. Set the garlic in a shallow baking dish and roast in a toaster oven or standard oven preheated to 375 degrees Fahrenheit until soft, 20 to 30 minutes. Squeeze the soft flesh out of each clove as needed. Refrigerate in a sealed container for up to 10 days.

Grating Fresh Ginger: Use a porcelain grater (available in Asian groceries) or the side of a box grater with rice-sized holes. Better yet, use the microplane, a terrific rasp sold in many kitchen shops (or call 800-555-2767). It's not necessary to peel ginger before grating. A 1-inch chunk yields about 1½ teaspoons grated ginger. (Ground, dried ginger has quite a different flavor and does not make a good substitute.)

Making Italian Herb Blend: In a small jar, combine 1 tablespoon each dried oregano and basil leaves, 2 teaspoons each dried thyme and rosemary leaves, 1½ teaspoons whole fennel seeds, and 1 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes (optional). Shake well. Store in a cool, dark place and use within 4 months.

Cleaning and Chopping Leeks: Trim off the root end. Begin slicing from the root end upwards, discarding bruised outer leaves as you go. Even the dark green inner leaves may be used since the cooker does a fine job of softening them. Swish chopped leeks vigorously in several changes of water to release all sand.

Zesting Lemons, Limes, or Oranges: Wash the fruit thoroughly. The best tool for zesting is the microplane, a rasp designed for this purpose, available in many kitchen shops (or call 800-555-2767). You can also use a standard zester or the finest side of a box grater.

Juicing Limes or Making Lime Wedges: To maximize the yield of juice, slice the lime lengthwise a little off-center to avoid the core. Continue slicing wedges around the core. Squeeze wedges to extract juice. Discard core.

Toasting Nuts and Seeds: Toast nuts on a baking pan in a toaster oven (most convenient) or standard oven set to 375 degrees Fahrenheit until nuts are fragrant and lightly browned, 2 to 4 minutes in a toaster oven and slightly longer in a standard oven. Toast seeds in a skillet set over medium-high heat; stir them frequently. Nuts and seeds burn easily, so watch them closely.

Roasting Red Peppers: Set each pepper on a grid raised above a gas burner and turn the heat to high. Rotate with tongs until thoroughly charred. (If using an electric oven, cut the peppers in half, remove the seeds, and core. Press firmly to flatten. Set cut side down, under the broiler, as close to the broiling element as possible.) Wrap each charred pepper in a wet paper towel and enclose in a plastic bag to steam. When cool, use the paper towel to rub off the skin. Remove core and seeds. If not using the peppers immediately, toss in olive oil and refrigerate in a tightly sealed container for up to 5 days.

Toasting Spices: Toast spices in a small skillet over medium-high heat until you can detect their aroma, usually a minute or two. Stir from time to time. When done, transfer immediately from the skillet to avoid burning.

SPECIAL SITUATIONS

Cooking on an Electric Stove

Electric coils create intense heat and are slow to respond to adjustments in temperature. The adjustments you've learned to make for standard stovetop cooking carry over to pressure cooking, but there are a few special considerations:

The cooker is traditionally brought up to pressure over high heat. If utilizing the highest setting causes scorching, try bringing up the pressure using a slightly lower setting.

Alternatively, place a heat diffuser (see page 17) under the cooker before bringing it up to pressure.

Once the cooker reaches high pressure, the heat must immediately be lowered or the pressure will continue to build. To accommodate the coil's slow response, lower the heat a few minutes before high pressure is reached. Alternatively, transfer the cooker to a burner preset to low—or whatever you've determined to be the correct setting for maintaining high pressure.

When the recipe calls for natural pressure release, move the cooker to a cool burner.

Cooking over a High-BTU Flame

To avoid scorching, bring up the pressure over medium heat—or whatever flame you consider equivalent to high on a standard gas range. Alternatively, place a heat diffuser (see page 17) under the cooker before bringing it up to pressure.

Cooking on an Induction Range

Check with the manufacturer to be sure that the cooker will function properly. If so, place the cooker in the middle of a marked heat zone that is the same size or smaller than the base of the cooker. Follow instructions for Cooking on an Electric Stove.

Using an Electric Pressure Cooker

Use the **BROWN** setting to do any cooking required before bringing up the pressure.

Program the cooker for **HIGH PRESSURE**.

If the recipe calls for natural pressure release, reduce cooking time by 2 minutes to adjust for the longer time it takes for the electric cooker to release pressure.

If the recipe calls for quick-releasing the pressure by setting the cooker under cold running water, ignore this instruction.

Instead, subtract 4 minutes from cooking time and allow the pressure to come down naturally for 4 minutes. Then press the quick-release button in very short spurts while averting your face from the steam. If any liquid is ejected from the valve, wait about 30 seconds before proceeding.

Use the **BROWN** setting to do any final cooking after the pressure is released.

Pressure Cooking at High Altitudes

Increase cooking time by 5 percent for every 1,000 feet above sea level. For further information about high-altitude cooking, check the web site at www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/columncc/cc970123.htm.

TAKING CARE OF YOUR COOKER

Pressure cookers require a little more maintenance than the average pot. The pots themselves are usually dishwasher-safe, but the lids are not. Check your Owner's Manual for details.

Removing and Cleaning the Gasket: To preserve the life of the rubber gasket (sealing ring), remove it from the lid and rinse it after each use. Allow the gasket to air-dry thoroughly before setting it back in the lid. Although gaskets usually last for years, it's wise to have a backup on hand for the moment when it gives out.

Cleaning the Vent/Valve Areas: Whenever you wash the lid, examine these areas and, if necessary, scrub them free of debris with a soapy, nonabrasive scouring pad or a toothbrush. If you

own a jiggle-top cooker, you may need to poke a toothpick through the vents to be sure they are clear. If you use a second-generation cooker, you will occasionally need to unscrew the pressure regulator and wash the parts well. Look for detailed cleaning instructions in your Owner's Manual.

Scouring the Bottom: If the bottom is encrusted with scorched food, sprinkle with some nonabrasive cleanser such as Bon Ami. Add about 2 cups water and bring to a boil. Let sit for a few hours or overnight. Scrub clean with a scouring pad.

If the bottom interior or exterior become stained, scrub it with a nonabrasive product called Bar Keepers Friend, available in some supermarkets and many housewares stores. To locate a source in your area, call 800-433-5818.

Tightening the Handles: If the handles become loose, tighten them with a screwdriver.

Storing: Rest the lid against the side of the cooker or set it upside down on top. If the gasket isn't thoroughly dry, drape it loosely on the lid. Don't lock the lid in place for storage, or you'll be greeted by a strong whiff of your last meal when you next open the cooker.

Soups and Broths

Hearty Beef Borscht with Sour Cream–Dill Topping 27

Transformations

Ukrainian-Style Borscht 29

Pureed Summer Borscht 29

Beef, Mushroom, and Barley Soup 30

Transformations

Double-Mushroom Barley Soup 31

Turkey, Barley, and Vegetable Soup 31

Chunky Chicken Noodle Soup 32

Transformations

Chunky Chicken Soup with

Tortellini and Peas 33

Chunky Mexican Chicken Soup with Avocado and Corn 33

Chunky Chicken Soup with Squash and Beans 33

Chunky Turkey Noodle Soup 34

Curried Coconut, Chicken, and Sweet Potato Soup 35

Transformations

Curried Coconut Soup with

Sweet Potatoes and Chickpeas 36

Thai-Inspired Coconut Chicken Soup 36

Sage-Scented Butternut Squash Soup with

Herb Croutons 37

Transformations

Sweet Potato Soup 38

Curried Carrot Soup 38

Creamy Celery Soup with Fennel 39

Rustic Leek and Potato Soup 40

Transformations

Vichyssoise 41

Potato Corn Chowder 41

Potato-Cheddar Soup 41

Chunky Fish Chowder 41

Minestrone with Basil Pesto 42

Transformation

Chicken Vegetable Soup with Basil Pesto 44

Southern Split Pea Soup with Ham 45

Transformations

German-Style Split Pea Soup

with Knockwurst or Franks 46

Curried Coconut Split Pea Soup 46

Five-Minute Red Lentil Soup 46

Lentil Soup with Chickpeas and Mint-Feta Pesto 48

Transformations

Lentil Soup with Chickpeas

and Winter Squash 49

Provençal Lentil and Chickpea Soup with Basil Pesto 49

Lentil Soup with Corn and Cilantro Pesto 49

Black Bean Soup with Avocado Salsa 51

Transformations

Black Bean Stew with Tomatoes and Avocado 52

Black Bean Salsa Salad 53

Elegant Bean Soup du Jour 54

Transformations

Rustic Bean Soup with Pesto 55

Pasta e Fagioli 55

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