

Pressure Cooker Tips

Time and Energy Saving Bean Cookery

One of the most common reasons that cooks give for not using dry beans is that they take too long to cook. The pressure cooker can be an easy and efficient way to solve that problem if you want to use home-cooked beans. The pressure cooker has been billed as the “quickest, safest, cheapest cookery method ever” by Presto, a company that manufactures pressure cookers in the USA. Pressure cookers are energy saving because of the reduced cooking time, normally one third of the usual un-pressured time. Less cooking time saves energy through reduced use of fuel for the stove top burner.

In a conventional pot, no matter how long the water boils or how hot the burner is, the temperature of the water is still 212° F, or its boiling point. In a pressure cooker boiling water is covered and the steam is captured inside the sealed cooker making it possible to raise the temperature above 212° F. The pressure regulator on the cooker controls and maintains the amount of steam buildup at 13 to 15 pounds of pressure depending on the brand of pressure cooker, which raises the temperature to 250° F. As a result, foods are cooked in about a third of the time required in a regular covered un-pressured pan. Only the amount of liquid desired in the finished product plus 1/2 cup. is required because there is very little evaporation.

When a pressure cooker is being used, it should never be left untended because the heat from the burner can vary and cause the pressure to drop or too much liquid to evaporate. Faster cooking time and limited liquid both help to retain more nutrients in the finished product.

The most common error cooks make when pressure-cooking is overcooking food because they assume the time of cooking is too short and/or don't cool the pan properly to stop the cooking.

Pressure cookers are especially valuable for high altitude cooking. Since the boiling point is lower at high altitudes, using a pressure cooker raises the cooking temperature and shortens the cooking time. Dry beans and other foods that take a long time to cook at a lower elevation can also be cooked much more quickly with this handy appliance.

There are three special rules for cooking dry beans, other dry vegetables, rice, and grains in the pressure cooker.

1. Fill the cooker a maximum of half full before beginning to cook. These foods froth and foam so much that the pressure regulator/vent pipe can become clogged if the cooker is filled more than half way. Foods cook so quickly that two batches can be processed rather than over-filling the cooker. Pressure cookers must have a minimum of 1/2 cup of liquid in order to operate correctly. Beans, soaked or unsoaked, normally will require much more than 1/2 cup of liquid to cover the beans. Allowing the cooker to boil dry will damage the cooker.
2. Tests have shown that when oil and salt are added to the traditional cold soak water, dry beans keep their shape and exterior skin intact, and froth and foam less during the pressure-cooking. Therefore, instruction booklets for pressure cookers add 1–4 tablespoons of oil and up to 1 tablespoon of salt to one pound, 2 cups, of beans during the soaking or cooking period.

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3. Allow the pressure to drop of its own accord. This adds another 18 to 20 minutes of cooking without “tending the pot” and finishes the process.

Most pressure cookers made since the mid 1970s have an automatic cover-locking device that prevents opening once the pressure begins to accumulate. Pressure cookers also have a secondary relief device(s) that automatically release pressure in case the vent pipe becomes clogged and pressure cannot be released normally. In summary, some pressure cookers have one safety device and others have two to protect the user. Choosing a pressure cooker with both types of safety features is a wise and inexpensive choice.

Many kitchen tools and appliances including knives, stoves, processors, electric fry pans, waffle makers, etc. can cause injury if used improperly. Everyone assumes that they have enough common sense to use these tools safely. New pressure cookers should be included in that same category. When the directions are read carefully, the pressure regulator and vent pipe are kept clean and clear, and that same common sense is used, a new pressure cooker with its safety devices is a great, time saving, modern appliance.

Quick, easy, economical, and delicious pressure-cooked meals are a bonus for today’s contemporary cooking styles. When today’s cooks realize that most cooking times can be cut by two thirds, pressure cookers can easily compete with micro-

wave ovens for a place in their everyday “most-used” kitchen equipment. Pressure cookers are not a cheap cooking device but most can be purchased for between \$50 and \$100. Most families can afford to invest in the purchase of one or request a gift that will last their lifetime with only minor replacements of rubber parts such as the gasket or sealing ring and over pressure plug. These rubber parts must be replaced when they become hard or soft and sticky. If a pressure cooker becomes difficult to open or close or continually leaks steam consult the instruction booklet that came with the cooker and follow the directions on cleaning and/or replacing the appropriate parts.

Beans may be pressure cooked after soaking. Reduced foaming and optimum retention of shape and skin during pressure-cooking can be produced by the addition of 1–4 tablespoons of oil and 1–3 teaspoons of salt per 2 cups, 1 pound, of dry beans. After extensive testing, Presto recommends 4 tablespoons oil, 3 teaspoons salt for best results. A bouquet garni may be added to the beans during the soaking time and/or during the cooking. Zesty Beans recipe, *The Bean Cookbook*, illustrates adding a bouquet garni. It should be removed before further use or serving.

Carefully reading and following pressure cooker instruction booklet directions will insure safe and positive results. 🍀