

Instant Pot vs. Slow Cooker

Which effort-saving appliance could help you eat better? BY Abigail Libers

IF YOU'RE RESOLVING to make more nutritious meals at home in 2019, good news: These two super-convenient devices can speed and simplify cooking. We asked experts to highlight their best features so you can figure out which is right for you.



PROS

ELECTRIC PRESSURE COOKER

This appliance—Instant Pot is the best-known brand—uses high-temperature steam to cook food quickly. Some models can also act like a rice cooker, yogurt maker, cake maker (desserts can be part of a healthy eating plan, too!), egg cooker, sauté pan, steamer, warmer, sterilizer—and slow cooker.

SLOW COOKER

Here an electric heating element slowly warms a stoneware pot to cook your food. It's a user-friendly, virtually foolproof set-it-and-forget-it device: You can simply throw in your ingredients, flip a switch, and walk away (and stay away—for hours).

CONS

ELECTRIC PRESSURE COOKER

Mastering the cooking functions takes practice; for example, slow-cooker recipes often require tweaks to temperature and liquid level, and still may not come out as expected. No method is truly "instant": Even in pressure-cooker mode, the device may need 20 minutes to build up pressure and another ten to release it.

SLOW COOKER

Slower than slow, it can't rescue you from your 5 p.m. "What's for dinner?" dilemma. And consistent, gentle heat over such a long period can leave some food bland and mushy or rubbery.

BEST FOR

ELECTRIC PRESSURE COOKER

Easy-to-peel hard-boiled eggs, big batches of hearty whole grains in less time than it takes to simmer them on the stove, speedy dried beans (they're not as salty as canned, but usually need to be soaked for 12 hours before cooking, unless you have a pressure cooker!), homemade yogurt (cheaper—and less sugary—than store-bought).

SLOW COOKER

Braised meat as well as any hardy vegetable that can stand up to heat (potatoes, carrots, eggplant, fennel), caramelized cherry tomatoes to top toast or grain bowls, protein-rich bean and lentil dishes like dal, grain dishes such as farro risotto that usually require monitoring.

TIPS

ELECTRIC PRESSURE COOKER

Don't wing it: Read the manual, follow the instructions, and do the recommended water test to get a feel for your product. Maybe even watch a few YouTube videos. Then use the suggested timetables instead of guesstimating cooking durations. And heed the warnings: The steam released during pressure cooking is *hot*!

SLOW COOKER

Go light on liquid, especially with vegetables, which tend to have a high water content; go heavy on seasonings and spices. Because thin pieces of meat are easy to overcook, opt for thicker, fattier cuts of pork or beef, as well as chicken thighs over breasts. To ensure even cooking temps, your pot should be two-thirds to three-quarters full.

BOTTOM LINE: If you find time to prep in the morning, the slow cooker can have a meal ready for you when you get home; if you have 45 minutes to an hour in the evening (and more ambitious or gourmet plans), pressure cooking is the way to go. Dinner, done!

EXPERTS: Coco Morante, author of *The Essential Instant Pot Cookbook*; Laurel Randolph, author of *The Instant Pot Electric Pressure Cooker Cookbook*; Hope Comerford, author of *Fix-It and Forget-It Healthy Slow Cooker Cookbook*; Sarah DiGregorio, author of *Adventures in Slow Cooking*.