

Individual Chocolate Fudge Cakes

Serves 4 **Cooking Time** 1 to 2 hours on Low **Slow Cooker Size** 5½ to 7 Quarts

✓ WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: With a flavor that's intense and rich and a texture that's cakey yet soufflé-like, these little desserts are utterly satisfying. Plus they're easy enough to get into the slow cooker for a sweet finish on a busy weeknight. For ours, we whipped two eggs and an egg yolk, then added sugar, melted chocolate and butter, vanilla, and a single tablespoon of flour before portioning our batter into four ramekins. To ensure that each cake had a dense, super-fudgy center, we simply pressed a small piece of chocolate into the middle of each ramekin before cooking. You will need an oval slow cooker and four 6-ounce round ramekins for this recipe. Serve these cakes warm in their ramekins.

- 6 ounces semisweet chocolate,**
4 ounces chopped and 2 ounces
broken into 4 (½-ounce) pieces
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter**
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract**
- 2 large eggs plus 1 large yolk**
- ¼ cup (1¾ ounces) granulated**
sugar
- ⅛ teaspoon salt**
- 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour**
Confectioners' sugar

1. Fill slow cooker with ½ inch water (about 2 cups water). Microwave chopped chocolate in large bowl at 50 percent power for 1 to 2 minutes; stir, add butter, and continue to heat until melted, stirring once every 30 seconds. Stir in vanilla and let chocolate mixture cool slightly.

2. Using electric mixer set at medium-low speed, whip eggs and yolk until foamy, about 1 minute. Increase speed to medium and gradually whip in granulated sugar and salt, about 30 seconds. Increase speed to medium-high and continue to whip eggs until very thick and pale yellow, 5 to 10 minutes. Scrape whipped egg mixture on top of cooled chocolate mixture, then sift flour over top. Gently fold mixtures together until no streaks remain.

3. Portion batter into four 6-ounce ramekins. Gently press 1 piece broken chocolate into center of each ramekin to submerge and smooth tops. Set ramekins in prepared slow cooker, cover, and cook until cakes are domed, tops are just firm to touch, and centers are gooey when pierced with toothpick, 1 to 2 hours on low. Using tongs and sturdy spatula, remove ramekins from slow cooker. Dust with confectioners' sugar and serve warm. (Cakes can be held in water bath with slow cooker turned off for up to 30 minutes.)

ON THE SIDE WHIPPED CREAM

Using electric mixer set at medium-low speed, whip 1 cup heavy cream, 1 tablespoon sugar, and 1 teaspoon vanilla extract until foamy, about 1 minute. Increase speed to high and whip until soft peaks form, 1 to 3 minutes. Makes about 2 cups.





Penne with Chicken, Sun-Dried Tomatoes, and Spinach

Serves 4 **Cooking Time** 2 to 3 hours on High **Slow Cooker Size** 5½ to 7 Quarts

✓ WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: With its enticing combination of moist chicken, fresh spinach, and sweet sun-dried tomatoes, all enrobed in a rich, creamy sauce and paired with tender penne, this dish offers surprising complexity and flavor with a minimum of effort. For the chicken, we opted for tenderloins, which required no prep and simply needed to be stirred into the sauce and pasta in the slow cooker at the outset of cooking. Adding chicken broth, rather than water, to the slow cooker to help cook the pasta ramped up the savory notes of the dish. As for the cream sauce, homemade sauces took too long to make and separated in the slow cooker, but store-bought Alfredo sauce kept things easy and provided plenty of rich flavor; plus, it didn't taste raw when we added some at the end to freshen the flavor of our dish. Moisture released from the chicken as it cooked infused the sauce with more savory depth and ensured that it was the right consistency. For the spinach, we simply stirred in a few handfuls at the end so it would warm through and wilt. A little Parmesan cheese, sprinkled over the top, added more savory, salty tang. If you can't find chicken tenderloins, you can substitute 1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breasts, trimmed and cut crosswise into ½-inch-thick slices. For more information on cooking pasta in the slow cooker and making a foil collar, see page 180.

- 2½ cups chicken broth**
- 8 ounces (2½ cups) penne**
- 2 teaspoons olive oil**
- 1 (15-ounce) jar Alfredo sauce**
- ½ cup oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes, chopped coarse**
- Salt and pepper**
- 1 pound chicken tenderloins**
- 4 ounces (4 cups) baby spinach**
- ½ cup grated Parmesan cheese**

- 1.** Line slow cooker with aluminum foil collar; spray with vegetable oil spray. Microwave broth in bowl until steaming, about 2 minutes. In separate bowl, microwave penne and oil at 50 percent power, stirring occasionally, until some pieces look toasted and blistered, 3 to 5 minutes. Transfer hot pasta to prepared slow cooker and immediately stir in hot broth (pasta will sizzle). Stir in ½ cup Alfredo sauce, tomatoes, ½ teaspoon pepper, and ¼ teaspoon salt. Season chicken with salt and pepper; nestle into pasta. Cover and cook until pasta is tender, 2 to 3 hours on high.
- 2.** Remove foil collar. Gently stir in remaining Alfredo sauce, adjusting sauce consistency with hot water as needed. Stir in spinach and let sit until spinach is wilted, about 5 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Sprinkle with Parmesan and serve.

SMART SHOPPING SUN-DRIED TOMATOES

Here in the test kitchen, we prefer oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes to their leather-like counterparts. Because the packing oil can impart a musty, herbal flavor to the tomatoes, we recommend rinsing them before using them in any recipe. We've found that washing away excess herbs and spices improves their taste.





Garlicky Shrimp

Serves 8 to 10 **Cooking Time** about 1 hour on High **Slow Cooker Size** 3½ to 7 quarts

✓ WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Delicate, fast-cooking shrimp and the slow cooker may seem like an impossible pairing, but the slow, gentle heat of the slow cooker is actually terrific for producing tender shrimp without the fear of overcooking. With that in mind, we set out to create a classic garlic shrimp recipe that would infuse the shrimp with plenty of rich garlicky flavor. We started by cooking sliced garlic and spices in oil for 30 minutes to soften the raw flavor of the garlic and allow the spices' flavors to bloom. Once the oil was sufficiently flavored, we stirred in the shrimp. A mere 20-minute poach in the garlicky oil was enough to cook and season the shrimp. While we prefer the flavor of smoked paprika in this recipe, you can substitute sweet paprika. Serve with crusty bread for dipping in the infused oil.

- ¾ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 6 garlic cloves, sliced thin
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- Salt and pepper
- ¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 2 pounds large shrimp (26 to 30 per pound), peeled and deveined
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley

1A. FOR A 3½- TO 5-QUART SLOW COOKER: Combine oil, garlic, paprika, 1 teaspoon salt, ¼ teaspoon pepper, and pepper flakes in slow cooker, cover, and cook until flavors meld, about 30 minutes on high. Stir in shrimp, cover, and cook on high until opaque throughout, about 40 minutes, stirring halfway through cooking.

1B. FOR A 5½- TO 7-QUART SLOW COOKER: Combine oil, garlic, paprika, 1 teaspoon salt, ¼ teaspoon pepper, and pepper flakes in slow cooker, cover, and cook until flavors meld, about 30 minutes on high. Stir in shrimp, cover, and cook on high until opaque throughout, about 20 minutes, stirring halfway through cooking.

2. Transfer shrimp and oil mixture to serving dish. Sprinkle with parsley and serve.

QUICK PREP TIP PEELING AND DEVEINING SHRIMP

To devein shrimp, hold shrimp firmly in 1 hand, then use paring knife to cut down back side of shrimp, about ⅛ to ¼ inch deep, to expose vein. Using tip of knife, gently remove vein. Wipe knife against paper towel to remove vein and discard.

