

To make life easier for meal preparations, the 'Food Section' will present an assortment of hearty, healthy and user-friendly winter and holiday recipes. **For recipe requests or suggestions contact:** SharonS@portlandobserver.com **Subject:** Food Section

# FOOD

*"Looking for something to break the bah-hum-bug dinner blues? Eureka! I have just the recipe for you. Try these delicious Greek-style chicken pitas; the cucumber sauce is flavorful but not overpowering."*



## Slow Cooker: Greek Chicken Pitais

Prep Time: 20 Min; Slow Cooker Time: 6 Hrs.  
Yield: 4 Servings

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 medium onion, diced
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1-pound skinless-boneless chicken breast, cut into strips
- 1 tsp. Lemon pepper
- 1/2 tsp. dried oregano
- 1/4 tsp. Allspice
- 1/4 tsp. Greek seasoning (optional)
- 1/4 cup plain yogurt
- 1/4 cup sour cream
- 1/2 cup cucumber, peeled and diced
- 4 pita bread rounds, cut in half

### DIRECTIONS

1. Place onion and garlic in a slow cooker. Season chicken with lemon pepper, oregano, allspice and optional Greek seasoning; place on top of onions.
  2. Cover, and cook on High for 6 hours- minimum.
  3. In a small bowl, stir together yogurt, sour cream, and cucumber. Refrigerate until chicken is done cooking.
  4. When chicken is done, fill pita halves with chicken and top with the cucumber sauce.
- (Optional suggested toppings: lettuce, onion, tomato, cheese, and black olives)

## Slow Cooker Tips

*How many cooks do you need in a kitchen? Only one, a slow cooker*

The opportunity to free up and seize extra 'quality time' just for you or with the family can often be a daunting and illusive task. One of the best-kept secrets in the pursuit to add hours to the day is a slow cooker. A few minutes of preparation the night before can save hours of cooking and cleaning the next day. The slow cooker will do all the work for you. Enjoy the free time to share highlights of your day with someone, read to the kids, help with homework, wrap a gift, take an evening stroll or enjoy a relaxing bubble bath.

• Brown meats and poultry first, if desired. Heat a non-stick skillet on medium for a minute or two. Add just enough oil such as canola or vegetable to coat the bottom of pan. Heat the oil for a minute and add the food to be browned, being sure not to overcrowd the pan. Brown the food evenly on all sides. Although this takes a few extra minutes, it helps to seal the meat, hold in the juices, adds extra flavor and makes it look delicious.

• Cut foods of the same type into equal size pieces to ensure even cooking at the same time. If a recipe calls for potatoes, cut them all into, for example: 2-inch chunks, uniformly as possible. The same principal applies to meat. Remember this is a slow cooker, course raw vegetables (such as carrots) should be cut into smaller pieces.

• Place flavor enhancers such as garlic and onions under the meat as well. This will provide an extra punch of flavor to your dish.

• Remember if the slow cooker is not filled to at least the halfway point, use lower heat settings and adjust cooking time accordingly.

• No matter how tempting it is, don't peek! Lifting the lid off your slow cooker can result in longer cooking time. Because the slow cookers cook at such low temperatures, uncovering it for a minute or two can cause the temperature to drop and the cooking time to increase substantially. If you must peek, do so quickly! If you feel the urge to stir every once in a while, fight it! Unlike stovetop or oven cooking, the slow cooker transfers heat evenly to the food without hot spots, so stirring isn't really necessary (unless the recipe happens to call for it).

• The low temp and long cooking method of a slow cooker often causes pasta and rice to cook up pasty and starchy, which can be disappointing. So often you will find that recipes call for these items to be cooked separately and added to the finished dish, or added raw about one hour before the end of cooking time.

• Your slow cooker is a great appliance to keep 'hot beverages' warm for a prolonged period of time. When it's cold outside, greet guests into your home with the welcoming aroma of spiced cider or a mulled tea, keeping warm in the slow cooker. Keep it on the low setting for the perfect temperature.

• Prepare your recipe selection in the slow cooker the night before. Refrigerate overnight. In the morning when you put the coffee on, start the slow cooker as well (do not place slow cooker on stovetop, place in an uncluttered heat-resistant area, with easy access to an electrical outlet.) Caution: Do not place the slow cookers removable crockery immediately into cold water; allow cooling briefly after usage.

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