

# 10 fresh ideas for slow cooker pulled chicken and pork

By ALISON LADMAN  
Associated Press

Lots of people love their slow cookers. Just as many folks don't. We tend to be in the latter group. Not because we don't appreciate the dump-and-go convenience. And we certainly enjoy being greeted at the end of the day by delicious smells before we've even taken off our coats.

Our objections come down to taste and texture. Too many slow cooker recipes taste just like every other slow cooker recipe, no matter what the ingredients. And after bubbling away for so many hours, most recipes end up with that just-shy-of-mush texture. No thanks. So we decided to see whether we could come up with a stack of slow cooker recipes that didn't sacrifice ease, but satisfied our need for variety. Our inspiration? Barbecue pulled pork and chicken. The process is simple. You start with either boneless, skinless chicken thighs or country-style pork ribs or rib chops. Throw them in the slow cooker with a handful of aromatics and a flavorful liquid. Put your cooker on low and head off to work. When you get home from work, you'll have a tender meat ready to shred and turn into an easy dinner.

## 10 things with crock pot shredded meat

No time for a slow cooker? Combine all the ingredients plus an extra 1/2 cup of liquid in a large saucepan. Simmer, covered, for 1 hour, then proceed with the recipe.

**Start to finish:** 4 to 5 hours on high, 8 to 10 hours on low  
**Servings:** 4

- 1 large yellow onion, thinly sliced
- 1 cup white wine, low-sodium chicken broth or apple cider
- 1 1/2 pounds boneless, skinless chicken thighs or country-style pork ribs or rib chops
- 1 teaspoon whole black peppercorns
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 tablespoon Italian herb mix
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt

In a 4-quart slow cooker, combine the onion, liquid of choice, meat of choice, peppercorns, bay leaves, Italian herbs and salt. Cover and set to cook on low for 8 to 10 hours, or on high for 4 to 5 hours. The meat is ready when it is fork tender and falls apart easily. Remove and discard the peppercorns and bay leaves. Shred the meat using 2 forks, discarding any fat or bones. Use the meat in one of the following dinner ideas: — **Quesadillas:** Drain any extra liquid from the meat. Spread over large tortillas, sprinkle with shredded cheese, black olives, scallions and diced jalapenos. Top each with another tortilla. Toast on



AP Photo/Matthew Mead

Slow cooker pulled chicken coconut curry.



AP Photo/Matthew Mead

Slow cooker pulled chicken pesto pizza.

both sides in a dry skillet. Cut into wedges and serve with sour cream and salsa.

— **Sloppy Joes:** Mix in 1 cup barbecue sauce, 1/4 cup apple cider vinegar and 2 tablespoons brown sugar. Serve on bulky rolls.

— **Coconut curry:** Stir in 1 can of coconut milk, 2 cups chopped cooked vegetables (such as broccoli and roasted red peppers) and 2 tablespoons red curry paste. Serve over rice.

— **Upside down cottage pie:** Whisk together 1/2 cup half-and-half with 1 tablespoon cornstarch. Drain the liquid from the meat into a saucepan. Stir the half-and-half mixture into the meat liquid and cook over medium heat, stirring continuously, until it simmers

and thickens. Stir in 1 1/2 cups thawed corn kernels and 2 tablespoons chopped fresh thyme. Stir together with the shredded meat and serve over mashed potatoes.

— **Pesto pizza:** Stir 1 cup purchased pesto into the shredded meat. Spread over 2 prepared pizza crusts. Sprinkle each with grated Parmesan cheese, then top with slices of fresh mozzarella and sliced roasted red peppers. Bake at 450 F until golden and melted, about 20 minutes.

— **Marmalade nachos:** Drain the meat and stir in 1/2 cup orange marmalade, 1/2 teaspoon red pepper flakes and 1 tablespoon cider vinegar. Spread over tortilla chips. Top with sliced scallions, sliced Peppadew peppers or pickled



AP Photo/Matthew Mead

Slow cooker pulled chicken Greek pitas.

jalapeno peppers, and shredded cheese. Heat in a 350 F oven just until the cheese is melted.

— **Picatta pasta:** Add the meat to a pound of pasta, cooked according to package instructions. Stir in 1/4 cup capers and the zest and juice of 1 lemon. Serve topped with grated Parmesan cheese.

— **Greek pitas:** Drain the meat and mix with the zest of 1 lemon, 1 tablespoon chopped fresh oregano and 2 minced cloves of garlic. Combine 1 peeled, diced and seeded cucumber with 1/2 cup plain Greek yogurt and 1/2 cup crumbled feta cheese. Serve in pita pockets with chopped fresh tomato.

— **Sesame noodles:** Cook an

8-ounce package of udon or soba noodles according to package directions. Whisk together 2 tablespoons honey, 2 tablespoons soy sauce, 2 tablespoons toasted sesame oil and a splash of hot sauce. Toss with the meat, 1 thinly sliced red bell pepper, 1 thinly sliced bunch scallions and the noodles. Top with 2 tablespoons toasted sesame seeds.

— **Lemon-ginger barley soup:** Add 1 quart low-sodium chicken broth, 2 tablespoons grated fresh ginger, the zest and juice of 1 lemon, and 3/4 cup quick-cooking barley to a large saucepan. Cook for 10 minutes, then add the meat and its cooking liquid. Season with salt and pepper.

## Mardi Gras in New Orleans: glitzy balls followed by parades

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Revelers danced into the wee hours Tuesday at glitzy balls, kicking off the annual Mardi Gras bash that spills costumed merry-makers into the streets of New Orleans for partying, parades and trinkets tossed from passing floats.

Al Johnson, singer of the catchy Mardi Gras tune "Carnival Time," served as grand marshal of the Red Beans and Rice foot parade, a Monday prelude to the all-out revelry known as "Fat Tuesday." He and others downed traditional fare of spicy red beans and rice before attending the Orpheus Ball, one of several as the partying began in this Mississippi River port.

Johnson told The Associated Press his catchy song — now synonymous with the annual Carnival seasons

— got its inspiration from the Lower 9th Ward, a New Orleans district devastated by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. "It all started down there," he said of the Louisiana neighborhood where levees broke and surging stormwaters splintered wooden homes. But after Katrina, he said, "Life is going on."

Celebrities and celebrity watchers are also around at Mardi Gras and this year was no exception. The cast of the CBS crime drama "NCIS: New Orleans" got to experience Mardi Gras firsthand as they rode in the Orpheus parade late Monday, tossing beads to revelers lining city streets before heading off to the ball. Their Mardi Gras episode airs Tuesday night at 8 p.m. CST.

Other celebrities joining in this year's revelry were comedian Ron White and country music star Dierks



AP Photo/NOLA.com/The Times-Picayune, David Grunfeld

The parade rolls through on Mardi Gras Tuesday in New Orleans. The crowd was thick along St. Charles Avenue, where the route of Zulu, the day's first big parade, merged with that of Rex, one of the most elaborate. Rex was followed by two long "truck parades," floats built up from flatted trailers and decorated by costumed riders.

Bentley.

Ordinary folks took to dressing up. Friends Alexandra Sergutin and Ashley Dornier of New Orleans said donning elegant gowns for the Carnival balls is one of

their favorite Mardi Gras activities.

"It feels good to be a part of that tradition. It really does. It touches your heart," said Sergutin, draped in colorful beads. "... You're a

part of something amazing and big."

Around daybreak Tuesday, retired clarinetist Peter Fountain was to help kick off the citywide party. The National Weather Service said some early rain was expected to clear out shortly before the first parades, with temperatures in the upper 30s to the lower 40s by midday.

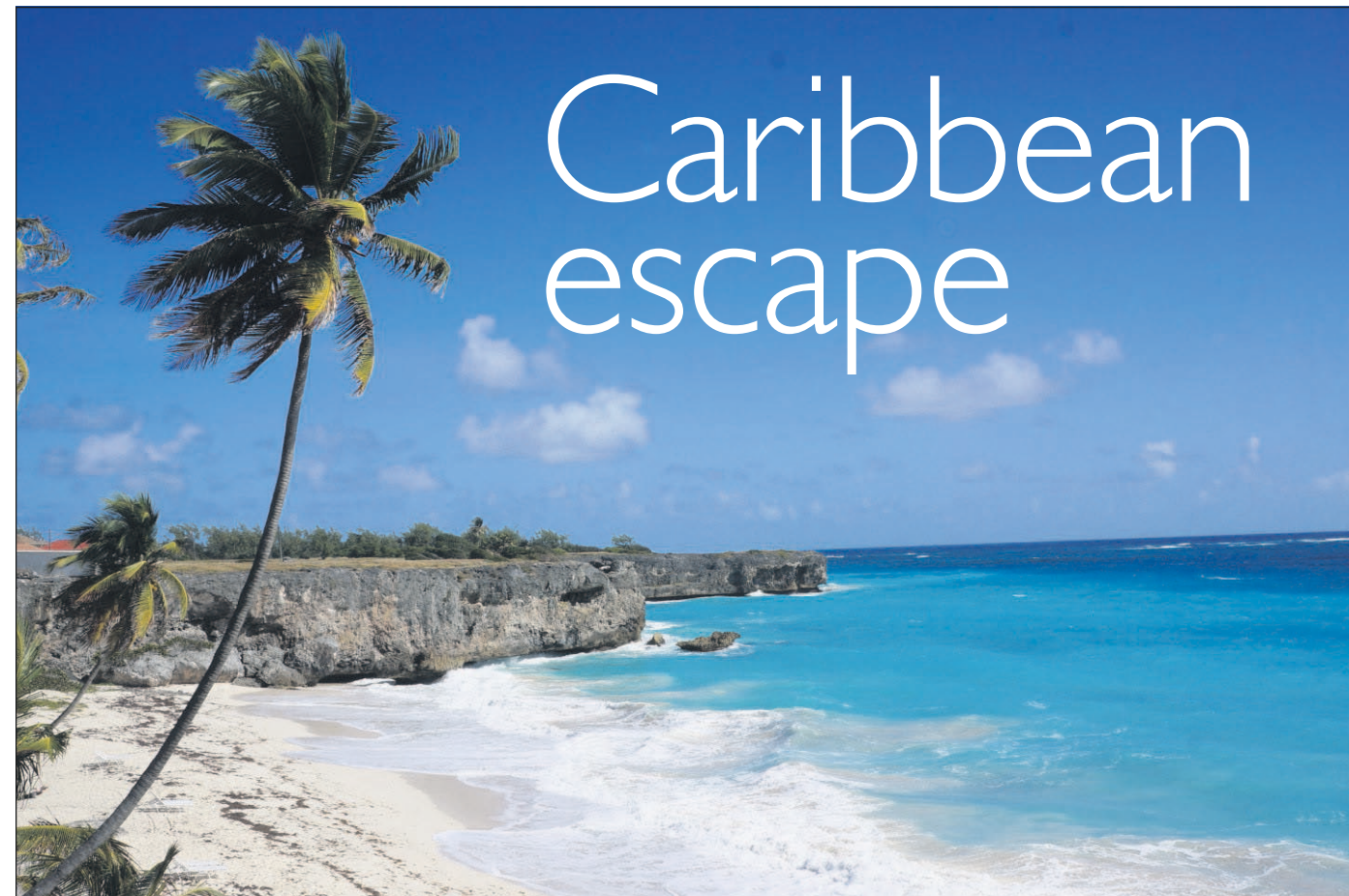
Now 84, Fountain no longer makes the walk of 10 miles or so of his Half-Fast Walking Club, which he helped found more than half a century ago.

Celebrations also were scheduled throughout south Louisiana and in coastal Mississippi and Alabama, sharing the traditions brought by French Catholic colonists in the 18th century. In Louisiana's swampy bayou parishes, costumed riders on horseback go from farm to farm, collecting ingredi-

ents for a huge community gumbo.

After Fountain's Half-Fast Walking Club, parade groups were to follow, including the "krewes of Rex, king of Carnival," who wears a golden crown and carries a golden scepter. That group features some of the season's most wildly fantastic floats. After Rex two groups were to follow in "truck floats" — hundreds of flatted trailers topped by costumed riders — whether families, clubs or other social groups.

The parades wind down late Tuesday afternoon and outdoor celebrations cease at midnight, when the solemn Catholic season of Lent begins. New Orleans police ride horseback down the French Quarter's Bourbon Street to clear the last tipsy revelers at the end, signaling the party is over for another year.



AP Photo/Kavitha Surana

This January 2015 photo shows Bottom Bay in Barbados. The Caribbean island is relatively easy on the wallet, with easy-to-use public vans to beaches around the island, plus dining options like Oistins Fish Fry, an outdoor bazaar of restaurant shacks serving heaping plates of food.

## Dominica adventure, Barbados relaxation

By KAVITHA SURANA  
Associated Press

ROSALIE, Dominica — "Are you sure this is the right way?" I asked, my leg flailing to find another crevice in the tree knots below me. Luca, my husband, responded with a grunt — not very reassuring.

Luca and I are not exactly avid hikers or adrenaline junkies — no skiing, surfing or bungee-jumping for us on a typical vacation. But when the urge to escape the winter grind struck, we didn't just want to relax on the beach. We also wanted some element of inspiration and adventure — however mild. Only question: Where to go? We decided to make our first trip to the Caribbean, to two islands, Dominica and Barbados, each with its own allure.

And that's how we ended up hanging over a cliff face in Dominica.

### Getting dirty in Dominica

A rugged, hard-to-reach, self-proclaimed "nature island" dropped into the Lesser Antilles, Dominica is as far away from the all-inclusive Caribbean experience as you can get. Instead of bands of tranquil beaches crawling with tourists, it's covered with lush rain forest and enough trails to keep you hiking for weeks.

We were climbing down Wayne Cyrique on our first day, a vertical trail of tangled mangrove roots and improvised rope ladders. And we had, in fact, managed to lose our way. There was nothing to do but keep going.

But as we learned throughout the trip, Dominica always rewards a struggle. Safely reaching the bottom, we found ourselves on a scene straight out of "Pirates of the Caribbean" with a secluded black sand beach, a waterfall shooting off the cliff into the rough sea and a coconut tree swaying lazily in the breeze.

Dominica was full of



AP Photo/Kavitha Surana

This January 2015 photo shows Victoria Falls on the Caribbean island of Dominica. Dominica, sometimes called the "nature island," offers hiking trails, lush rain forest, cliffs and black-sand beaches.

small astonishments like that. After scrambling over muddy rocks and wading through rivers for an hour, we'd suddenly find ourselves faced with a powerful waterfall emptying into a basin of turquoise water — perfect for swimming. Snorkeling, we not only enjoyed watching neon fish and sea cucumbers, but thanks to the island's volcanic activity, we were surrounded by sparkling bubbles that give the spot its name: Champagne Reef.

I couldn't have felt farther from my usual busy schedule. In the morning, we'd start the day with a refreshing jump into the river. At night, we curled up in a comfortably furnished yurt at a property called Mermaid's Secret, falling asleep to the calls of crickets and frogs.

because it was on Dominica's flight path (flights also pass through Antigua) but also because we'd heard it was relatively easy on the wallet. Its postcard-perfect beaches are free and public transportation is simple to navigate. Almost every time we stepped onto the street, a van pulled up next to us, ready to whisk us away.

At first, we were a bit dazed by the crowded beaches, overflowing with families on vacation. But thanks to the vans, with a little legwork we found perfectly secluded beaches in Barbados too.

Juma's Restaurant, in Speightstown, was an easy favorite. Pool-calm waters, an immaculate stretch of sand and free use of lounge chairs and umbrellas make it the island's best-kept secret. On the Saturday we visited, the lounge chairs didn't even fill up. For an inexpensive lunch you can buy a sandwich for \$5.

On the other side of the island, try Bottom Bay. With its dramatic cliffs and foamy waters, it was clear to see why it's popular for fashion shoots. There are no restaurants nearby, so pack a picnic, but you can buy a pina colada in a fresh coconut onsite.

Still, there's a time and place for crowds in the Caribbean. On Friday nights, tourists and locals alike descend on Oistins Fish Fry, an outdoor bazaar of restaurant shacks that fix up overflowing plates of fish, plantains and macaroni for \$15. As the night went on, the music turned up, more locals joined in, and the stage became a freewheeling dance scene where everybody showed off their moves.

On our last morning, we woke up with the sunrise. As we took our final dip in the warm waters before heading home to face the rest of winter, I felt satisfied that we'd accomplished our goal: the perfect introduction to the Caribbean.

"And we are definitely coming back," Luca said.

## Getting to know Belgian endive with the help of cheese

By MELISSA D'ARABIAN  
Associated Press

Fresh-faced, yet utterly jet-lagged. That's how I arrived in France for the first time. And that's how I was introduced to Belgian endive.

Madame Gabillet was hosting me for my college semester abroad and she welcomed me pretty much right off the plane into her chilly, dark home. Dinner was waiting, so we sat right down and rather silently (since I didn't yet speak a word of French) began the meal. That's when I saw a vegetable I didn't recognize.

Was it cabbage? No. But whatever it was, it was bathed in a luscious cream sauce with Gruyere bubbling on top. It was a fitting welcome to what would be a cold and rainy few months. I understood precious little of what my host family said to me that night, but I did catch the name of the tender, slightly bitter, delight that we ate — Belgian endive.

Madame Gabillet loved Belgian endive (and luckily, as I discovered, so did I). She served it chopped and sauteed in sweet butter, or sliced and tossed raw in a mustardy vinaigrette, or — my favorite — baked in a white cream

sauce with onions and cheese.

Back in the U.S., I saw Belgian endive slowly make its way into supermarkets. These days you can find it pretty much all year. They look like a cross between an elongated oversized Brussels sprout and a very small head of compacted romaine lettuce, but more yellow. Both Belgian and regular endive are part of the chicory family and sport a slightly bitter flavor.

Each Belgian endive has only 15 calories, but packs tons of fiber, vitamin C and calcium. And for something that sounds so exotically European, it's downright inexpensive.

So grab a few and try them in some of your favorite recipes that star other greens — raw in place of escarole, sauteed instead of cabbage or kale, simply grilled or roasted with olive oil, salt and pepper and squeeze of lemon. Or try my version of the dish that started it all — Madame Gabillet's Belgian endive gratin.

Food Network star Melissa d'Arabian is an expert on healthy eating on a budget. She is the author of the cookbook, "Supermarket Healthy."

### BELGIAN ENDIVE GRATIN

**Start to finish:** 45 minutes (15 minutes active)  
**Servings:** 4

- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1/2 small yellow onion, finely chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon dried tarragon
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 2 cups reduced-fat milk
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- Salt and ground black pepper
- 4 small to medium Belgian endives
- 3/4 cup shredded Gruyere cheese

Heat the oven to 350 F. Coat a medium (9-by-9-inch) baking dish with cooking spray.

In a medium saucepan over medium heat, melt the butter. Add the onion and cook until translucent, about 5 minutes. Add the garlic and tarragon, then cook until fragrant, another minute. Whisk in the flour and cook, stirring, for 2 minutes. Add the milk, whisking constantly. Cook over medium heat, stirring, until the sauce begins to thicken, about 6 minutes. Turn off the heat, stir in mustard, then season with salt and pepper. Set aside.

Cut off the woody stems of the endive and slice them in half lengthwise. Season them with salt and pepper. Place the endive in the



AP Photo/Matthew Mead

Belgian endive gratin.

prepared baking dish. Pour the sauce over the endive halves. Cover with foil and bake for 15 minutes. Remove the foil, then sprinkle the cheese evenly over the top. Return to the oven for another 15 minutes, or until the endive is tender.

If desired, increase heat to broil and broil the gratin until the cheese is bubbly and browned, about 1 minute.

Be careful as the cheese will burn quickly. Let cool for a few minutes before serving.

*Nutrition information per serving:* 230 calories; 120 calories from fat (52 percent of total calories); 14 g fat (8 g saturated); 0 g trans fats; 45 mg cholesterol; 16 g carbohydrate; 3 g fiber; 6 g sugar; 12 g protein; 540 mg sodium.