

How we test

We cooked 95kg of turkey, 67kg of chicken, 40kg of potatoes and 30kg of onions

Safety

Safety is of prime importance, as slow cookers are left switched on unattended for several hours. So we open up the casing on all cookers and carefully inspect the wires for signs of damage. We also test what happens if the cooker overflows. If there are gaps between the body casing and the switch, allowing liquid to enter, the cooker fails the test.

What's cooking?

We cooked two meat dishes and one vegetarian curry in each cooker, first on the high setting and then on the low setting. We then assessed the results, comparing



taste, texture, thickness of the sauces and appearance.

We also asked 15 people to try out the slow cookers for eight weeks and give their verdict.

Simone Johnson was very positive: 'The beef stew turned out well: rich stew and lovely tender meat.' She found that browning the meat and vegetables first improved the taste, texture and look. The only downside was the size: 'I found it a struggle to store. It produced too much delicious stew for two.'

Guy Widdowson, however, found the suggested preparation times of ten minutes actually closer to 45 minutes, as recipes tend not to allow for vegetable preparation time. He did admit that he really liked coming home from work to a fully cooked 'instant' meal, but even so he couldn't see it being used more than once every six months.

Don't get in a stew

Come home from work to a heartwarming casserole, with one of our Best Buy slow cookers

Slow cookers work by applying a small amount of heat (equivalent to about three 100-watt light bulbs) over three to 12 hours. As a result, the fibres in cheap cuts of meat break down, providing great taste at low cost (compare £5 for a kg of braising steak with £23 for a kg of fillet steak).

Three to 12 hours may seem like a long time, but once you've put your prepared ingredients in the pot and turned it on, you don't need to touch it until everything is cooked. With a bit of preparation the night before or in the morning before work, you can come home to piping hot food. If a couple replaced two shop-bought ready meals

a week each (costing about £12) with a slow-cooked meal, they could save around £600 a year.

And slow cookers don't just cook stews. They're great for cooking dried pulses (though be sure to boil them for ten minutes first to get rid of toxins). Large oval slow cookers are also brilliant at roasting chicken, using a tiny amount of power compared with more than 700 watts for the average oven.

Steamed puddings are easy, too: put your pudding bowls in the main ceramic pot, pour in boiling water to halfway up their sides, and leave for eight to ten hours. If you make your Christmas pudding now, it will have four months to mature.



85% Morphy Richards 48715 £27

This model made excellent casseroles as well as the best roast on test: the roast chicken was golden brown all over, and its flesh was tender and juicy, slipping easily off the bone.

The huge capacity of its bowl (4.5 usable litres) means it's great for a large family or bulk cooking, though it does take up a lot of room – make sure you have enough space to prepare ingredients while it heats up. It's also very heavy, and only the ceramic pot is dishwasher-proof.

The instruction book includes recipes for soups, white and red meat dishes, and desserts. The Morphy Richards is available from Argos and Robert Dyas.

WORTH KNOWING This is the only slow cooker we tested with a medium setting, which gives extra flexibility.

Cheapest store Robert Dyas **Size** 25x31x41cm **Usable volume** 4.5 litres. **Pot and lid weight** 4.4kg **Guarantee** Two years **Number of recipes** 26

WHICH?
BEST
BUY

Which should you choose?

Best for large families

MORPHY RICHARDS 48715 £27 With its

huge bowl, the Morphy Richards (1) is one of the best models on test for large families or if you do a lot of cooking for large parties.



doesn't have a keep-warm facility but you can remove the bowl and put it in the microwave (remember to take off the lid).

Best for individuals

KENWOOD CP 666 £20

ONLINE The Kenwood (9) is one of the smallest slow cookers on the market, at two litres, making it perfect for individuals or couples. It won't take up much space either, as it's 10cm narrower than the huge Cuisinart (2). It comes with nine standard recipes and 17 curry recipes.



Best budget buy

PRIMA PS0003 £13

We got great results from this cheap but hard-working model (4). It





84% Cuisinart CSC650MU Cook & Hold £70

The Cuisinart has a keep-warm function, which keeps the food warm after cooking but prevents it from drying out. The large capacity of 4.5 usable litres makes it ideal for large families or dinner parties.

This was the only slow cooker in our test whose instructions say it should not be used to roast a chicken, as it may not reach a safe temperature. But for everything else it's a great machine. It comes with 28 recipes, including sauces, stocks, starters and desserts, printed on wipe-clean pages. This is the heaviest slow cooker we tested – it's best to get it delivered by John Lewis.

WE LIKE The Cuisinart comes with a lengthy five-year guarantee.

Cheapest store John Lewis **Size** 25x32x42cm
Usable volume 4.5 litres **Pot and lid weight** 4.5kg
Guarantee Five years **Number of recipes** 28

WHICH?
BEST BUY



84% Micromark MM9879 £33

This is the lightest large oval model out of our four Best Buys. The 3.5-litre usable capacity is big enough to feed four to six people. It also has one of the lightest combinations of lid and bowl – a good compromise for anyone who wants to cook in bulk but has difficulty lifting. Only the stoneware pot can be washed in the dishwasher.

Stews cooked on the high setting on the Micromark received consistently better ratings for taste and texture than those cooked on the low setting.

The instruction book includes a wide range of recipes, but you'll need good eyesight, as the print is very small. The Micromark is available online.

WORTH KNOWING We found that cooking times are faster than the recipes state, by up to 30 minutes.

Available Online **Size** 24x29x38cm **Usable volume** 3.5 litres **Pot and lid weight** 3.2kg **Guarantee** Two years
Number of recipes 29

WHICH?
BEST BUY

Replacing
two ready
meals a
week with
a slow-
cooked
meal could
save a
couple
£600 a year



83% Prima PS0003 £13

EXCEPTIONAL
VALUE which?

WHICH?
BEST BUY

The Prima is the lowest-powered Best Buy, using 148 watts on the low setting and 249 watts on high (this is less power than three 100-watt light bulbs). It also has an auto cook setting (which starts on high power and drops to low), which we found cooked the food better than using just the high or low setting.

The Prima is convenient – you can prepare food in the ceramic pot and keep it in the fridge for up to two days. So you could brown your meat or veg the night before and then add the other ingredients and switch it on in the morning before you go to work. You can buy it from Robert Dyas.

WE LIKE The white enamelled exterior is much easier to keep clean than stainless steel, which is prone to finger prints.

Cheapest store Robert Dyas **Size** 23x25x34cm
Usable volume 2.3 litres **Pot and lid weight** 2.6kg
Guarantee One year **Number of recipes** 7

Safety concerns

Two cookers failed our safety tests – we recommend you steer clear of the models below

■ **PAUL RANKIN** This model (above, right) is about to be rebranded as Jean Christophe Novelli. When we opened up the base casing we found that one of the screws holding the unit together had caught an internal wire, stripping off the plastic insulating material and exposing the metal conductive core.

If the unit is adequately earthed, the worst that should happen is that the cooker will blow its fuse and stop working – but it's inconvenient.

■ **HINARI SC395SS** A gap between the edge of the switch casing and body in the Hinari (below, right) meant that overflowing liquid ran behind the switch casing and into the electrical switch unit in our tests.

Hinari has shown us its planned redesign, which may solve the problem, but as we went to press we found the old design still on sale. If you have already bought one, take care and check for gaps.



Contacts

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You Are What You Eat (Russell Hobbs)
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What you should look for

CLEANING

The interior ceramic pot is removed for cleaning. Check whether the pot and lid are dishwasher-safe

CAPACITY

For bulk cooking, six litres gives a usable volume of four litres. If you are cooking for only one or two people, 3.5 litres (usable volume two litres) is enough



SETTINGS

The high setting is recommended for white meat, while the low setting is used for cheap cuts of red meat. Auto cook, where a cooker starts on the high setting and switches to low after an hour, gave the best results in our test; three models have this feature. A keep-warm setting stops the food from drying out

USING THE TABLE

We tested the most popular slow cookers from leading brands. The more stars the better.

Specification

Price For Best Buys we give the cheapest widely available high-street price as we went to press. Prices for other models are a guide to what you should expect to pay. If a model is available only online, the price is in *italics*. **Shape** Choose a round pot if you plan to cook only stews and curries. An oval pot gives you the option of roasting poultry as well.

Claimed volume Most manufacturers recommend that you do not fill the pot more than two thirds full, so a six-litre cooker can make only four litres of stew.

Test performance

Cooking How well the cooker cooked stews. Stews cooked in models rated ★★★★★ had an appealing appearance, great taste, thick sauce

and tender texture. **Auto setting** Only three models featured an auto cook setting – see 'What you should look for', left. **Keep warm** How well the cooker kept stew warm, after one hour of using the keep warm setting or after one hour on the low setting for cookers without a keep warm setting. **Roasting** Based on appearance, crispness, ease of removing flesh from the bone, evenness of roasting, meat juice and texture. Cookers rated ★★★★★ produced unevenly roasted chickens, with pale flesh, lacking any browning or crispness. **Ease of use** Based on how easy it was to set up initially, ease of storage and cleaning, readability of settings, clarity of instructions and recipes provided.

Score

This ignores price and is based on:

| | |
|-------------|-----|
| Cooking | 50% |
| Ease of use | 40% |
| Keep warm | 10% |

| MODEL | SPECIFICATION | | | | WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE | | | | | SCORE % |
|----------------------------------|---------------|-------|------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|-----------|----------|-------------|---------|
| | PRICE (£) | SHAPE | SUPPLY CORD (cm) | CLAIMED VOLUME (litres) | COOKING | AUTO SETTING | KEEP WARM | ROASTING | EASE OF USE | |
| 1 MORPHY RICHARDS 48715 | 27 | Oval | 97 | 6.5 | ★★★★★ | n/a | ★★★★★ | ★★★★★ | ★★★★★ | 85 |
| 2 CUISINART CSC650MU Cook & Hold | 70 | Oval | 96 | 5 | ★★★★★ | n/a | ★★★★★ | n/a | ★★★★★ | 84 |
| 3 MICROMARK MM9879 | 33 | Oval | 102 | 5 | ★★★★★ | n/a | ★★★★ | ★★★★ | ★★★★★ | 84 |
| 4 PRIMA PS0003 | 13 | Oval | 102 | 3.5 | ★★★★ | ★★★★★ | ★★★★★ | ★★★★★ | ★★★★★ | 83 |
| 5 ROSEMARY CONLEY CT-HC2 | 15 | Oval | 126 | 3.5 | ★★★★ | n/a | ★★★★★ | ★★★★ | ★★★★★ | 81 |
| 6 YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT 13482 | 33 | Oval | 79 | 3.5 | ★★★★ | ★★★★★ | ★★★★★ | ★★★★ | ★★★★★ | 81 |
| 7 MORPHY RICHARDS 48730 | 30 | Oval | 97 | 6.5 | ★★★★ | n/a | ★★★★★ | ★★★★★ | ★★★★ | 80 |
| 8 ANTONY WORRALL THOMPSON MM18 | 30 | Oval | 112 | 4.5 | ★★★★ | ★★★★★ | ★★★★★ | ★★★★ | ★★★★★ | 79 |
| 9 KENWOOD CP 666 | 20 | Round | 101 | Not stated | ★★★★ | n/a | ★★★★★ | ★★★★ | ★★★★★ | 79 |
| 10 AINSLEY HARRIOTT AH167 | 40 | Oval | 97 | 4.5 | ★★★★★ | n/a | ★★★★★ | ★★★★ | ★★★ | 72 |
| 11 RIVAL SC400W IUK | 20 | Oval | 102 | 3.5 | ★★★★★ | n/a | ★★★★★ | ★★★★ | ★★★ | 71 |
| 12 RIVAL SC7500-IUK | 46 | Round | 83 | 4.7 | ★★★ | n/a | ★★★★★ | ★★★ | ★★★ | 60 |