I honestly believe that one of the best inventions for the kitchen was the crockpot. They can be used for such a wide variety of foods such as cooking soups, casseroles, meats, dips and pastas. I don't know if I could survive without one or two of these magnificent creations neatly placed in my cabinet.

At this specific time, my life has become very hectic. Not only do I have my own family to feed every night, we are also in the process of remodeling our home and building a new garage and office. So, as each day passes it seems that we have more and more people seated pleasantly around our dinner table.

Now, being a working mom, there is only a small window of time when I get home from work to prepare a nice family dinner. On top of that, when there are 2-4 more grown adults to feed in addition to our 4 person family, my little family dinners just don't cut it. Needless to say, for the next several weeks, the crockpot will become my new best friend.

On a positive note, this winter I spent a decent amount of time gathering several simple and easy crockpot specialties due to a combination of heavy snows, cold weather, and a little bit of laziness on the weekends!

All they require you to do is gather a few simple ingredients and throw them together in the morning. When you return home in the evening, you have a hearty meal that is ready to serve when you are. Here are a couple of my quick and simple favorites for you to try.

Most Amazing French Dip

1 large shoulder or rump roast

3 cups water

3/4 cup soy sauce

1 tsp Thyme

1 tsp Rosemary

1 tsp Garlic Powder

3-4 whole peppercorns

1 bay leaf

Place all ingredients into a large crockpot and cook on low heat for 6-8 hours. Shred beef and serve on a hoagie bun or deli roll. Use the left over liquid as au jus dipping sauce.

Chicken and Dumplins

4 boneless chicken breasts

(cut in half or cubed)

2 cans low sodium cream of chicken soup

1 cup water

1 package reduced fat refrigerated jumbo biscuits

Place the chicken in a slow cooker on low heat. Mix together soup and water. Add mixture to the chicken in the slow cooker. Let cook for 4-6 hours on low heat until chicken is no longer pink. Tear refrigerated biscuits into small pieces and add to crock pot. Dough will float and gather on the surface of liquid. Place the lid back on the slow cooker and let sit on low heat for

45 minutes without disturbing. Stir and serve either alone or over rice or pasta.