



# Galley Guide: The Pressure Cooker, a Galley Essential?

**W**hen we bought *Kate* I had both boating experience and cooking skills, but had never needed to combine them in such a small space before. I figured there were a few tricks of the trade I didn't know. So, I went in search of the magic answers and did what we all do these days, I 'Googled' it. Sure enough on every website that talked about voyaging sailboats there was a one must-have piece of galley equipment; a pressure cooker.

The arguments for using a PC made sense. They drastically reduce cooking time, which also reduces the amount of fuel used and heat pumped into the galley. Since there is no need to use premium cuts of meat in a pressure cooker they also save you money. It seemed like a win-win. I dutifully bought one. Well two, really, as I decided on the popular Kuhn Rikor brand that had a pretty duo of two different sized pots with interchangeable lids; one for cooking under pressure and one plain glass.

The first year or so on board I used my pots a lot. I did not, however, use the pressure lid very much at all. It wasn't because I was scared of the pressure cooker, as so many users seem to be. I had no previous bad experiences and thought that after more than half a century the manufacturers probably had things figured out safety wise. The thing is I don't really like the cheap cuts of meat so popular in PC recipes – the briskets and ox tails and lamb shanks.

Using it to cook beans seemed like a good idea but involved a lot of pre-planning; opening a can was always more convenient. I was excited to make a dessert but most of the recipes I found were for cheesecakes and I have a dairy allergy. Besides, we were sailing Central America in July, it was too damn hot to even contemplate eating a hearty stew, let alone cook a hot meal.

Every once in a while I dusted off my PC cookbook, dug out the pressure lid and cooked something marvelous. I roasted a whole chicken under pressure and was amazed at how moist it was. I put a new twist on my Mother's Beef Carbonnade recipe and cut the cooking time in half. I made a batch of black beans that were so flavorful I was tempted to eat them right out of the pot.

Encouraged, I tried a pasta recipe but despite following the instructions to the letter, my pasta cooked under pressure always came out mushy. The same went for all but the hardiest root veggies that were put in my pressure cooker. When I tried cooking rice, quinoa and polenta under pressure my results were hit and miss. Small problems like an improperly seated gasket or getting distracted when the timer went off affected the very short cooking times and made for big mistakes. Pressure cooking definitely had a place in my galley but so did many other cooking methods.

## SO MANY PRESSURE COOKERS, SO LITTLE TIME

Pressure cooking was popular during the war era but lost its following when convenience foods turned up in the 50's. Back then PCs were simpler and the valves were prone to clogging. Without proper over-pressure safety mechanisms many a top blew off spewing molten apple sauce or beans all over the kitchen and the cook. The legend of the dangerous pressure cooker was born. Over the last 20 years pressure cooking has seen a resurgence in popularity. There are now several brands and styles of pressure cookers on the market, all of which are safe and easy to use.

For the majority of sailors a traditional stove-top model is the only option when talking pressure cookers. Although electric pressure cookers have recently become popular they are cumbersome to store and very power hungry. Using such an appliance on board is only practical if you are plugged into shorepower or have a dedicated generator running.

Whether you are cooking for a couple or a crowd, pressure cooking websites and cookbooks recommend purchasing nothing smaller than a 6 quart cooker. A pressure cooker should only be filled to a maximum of 2/3 of its volume when in use to allow for the expansion of food and steam. So the reasoning is that a large pot will give you more cooking options and flexibility. Although this is sound advice I most often cook for two and have found that my 3 quart frying pan-style pressure cooker is more than adequate. However having a large pot is handy if you want to cook big cuts of meat, and is essential if you pressure can.

Most PCs are made from stainless steel and have a heavy bottom to promote even cooking and prevent scorching. There are several aluminum varieties on the market, which

makes for a lighter pot, but not as even heat distribution. The initial cost of a pressure cooker can be daunting; many have a price tag of well over \$100. However, your pressure cooker will no doubt become a valuable tool in your galley and could literally last you a lifetime. It is worth paying for quality.

## HOW TO BE PC

A pressure cooker is simply a heavy pot with a sealed, locking lid. The lid is usually sealed with a silicone gasket and when locked in place it prevents vapor from escaping when the water inside comes to a boil. The trapped vapor, or steam, changes the internal pressure and raises the cooking temperature from 212°F/100°C to 250°F/121°C. The higher the cooking temperature means the shorter the cooking time. In fact foods can cook up to 75% faster in a pressure cooker. Most pressure cookers are rated for 8-15 psi (pounds of pressure per square inch). When the desired pressure inside the pot is reached the pressure regulator will give you a visual or audible signal, depending on the model. My Kuhn Rikor cooker has a spring-valve pressure regulator, and a small rod is lifted to reveal either one or two red lines, denoting that the pressure has reached 8psi (one red line) or 15psi (two red lines). Another common pressure regulator has a small weight that sits on the steam vent. When pressure builds the weight rocks back and forth; this type of PC is often called a 'jiggle-top'. Regardless of the type of pressure release valve used, all modern pressure cookers are equipped with two or three safety mechanisms in case the valve becomes clogged with food or malfunctions.

It can take a little time to get used to the pressure cooking method. Until you are familiar with your cooker, how it signals it is pressurized and how it releases pressure, it is best

to follow directions carefully. Otherwise you might end up with unsavory results and get discouraged.

**COOKING UNDER PRESSURE**

Cooking in a small galley has its own set of challenges but get that galley swaying in a boisterous seaway and the fun really begins. Preparing meals underway is when I find my pressure cooker the most valuable. Not only does it allow me to cook a healthy meal in a hurry, it lets me to do it safely.

Carefully secured on the stove with the lid locked in place I am confident that the steaming, hot food will stay inside the pressure cooker and not end up on the floor or worse, me, when the boat heaves. I can also temporarily walk away from the stove; perhaps to pop up on deck to make a quick scan of the horizon or even just to get a little air. And, at the end of the meal, if conditions are very poor or I am feeling seasick, I simply lock the lid back in place and put the dirty pot in

the sink, saving the dishes for when the weather improves.

I often pre-cook meals for passage, vacuum packing portions of curry or sauces for an especially rough weather day when the motion of the boat could make meal prep not only uncomfortable but potentially dangerous. I place the vac-packed meal over rice or potatoes in the pressure cooker. In the 5 minutes it takes to cook the rice



the precooked meal is reheated and I have a ready-to-eat hearty meal to warm the weary crew. Of course I use my pressure cooker while on the hook in calm anchorages as well, cutting down on the time I have to stand over a hot stove on a sunny afternoon.

Pressure cooking isn't just about making beans and cooking stews; you can do everything from boiling an egg to 'baking' brownies under pressure. Once you've gotten the hang of things there are lots of fun recipes to experiment with. Many people like to proclaim that they pop popcorn or make bread in their pressure cooker by removing the pressure valve or lid gasket. But a pressure cooker without the appropriate valves and seals is just a pot.

**IS A PRESSURE COOKER A GALLEY ESSENTIAL?**

It's been eight years since I first put my PC on the stove, and although I cook "under pressure" much more than I used to I still feel the same way about it. Like every cooking technique, pressure cooking has its strengths and weaknesses. Using a pressure cooker should improve the food cooked, not turn it into mush for the sake of a few saved minutes. My pressure cooker is an essential piece of equipment in my galley, but is not the be-all end-all when it comes to cooking on a boat. **BWS**

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## Curry Chicken Cassoulet

Serves: 2 (Can easily be doubled)

Difficulty: Easy Time: 12 mins @ 15psi

Cassoulet is a French dish that typically combines white beans with a ham hock, sausage and herbs in a tomato broth. Originally concocted from leftovers, I play on those traditional flavors using lentils, bacon and chicken, but with a fun curry twist. This recipe has been refined from its humble, throw-together beginnings and has quickly become a favorite on board our boat. Colorful, healthy and delicious it works well straight from the pot or as a cook-ahead meal for passage.

The success to having all the ingredients cook evenly is in the prep work. Dicing the chicken and potatoes into bite-sized pieces, approximately 1", will allow them to cook to perfection in the 12 minutes it takes the lentils to cook under pressure.

Harissa is a Middle Eastern spice paste that adds a little heat to this dish. If unavailable you can use either a nice smoky hot paprika or chili powder.

When using a pressure cooker it's a good idea to season with salt and pepper AFTER the dish is cooked as cooking under pressure can enhance flavors.

### INGREDIENTS

3 rashers of bacon, diced  
 1 medium onion, diced  
 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped  
 1 lb chicken breast or thighs, diced  
 2 tbsp curry powder  
 1 tsp turmeric  
 1 can of tomatoes,  
 1 cup chicken stock  
 1 tbsp harissa paste  
 1 medium potato, diced  
 1 large carrot, sliced  
 1 cup puy lentils (also called french or beluga lentils)  
 1 tbsp cumin seeds  
 salt & pepper



### METHOD

Using a minimum 3 quart pressure cooker heat a glug of good oil over high heat. Add diced bacon and cook until slightly crispy. Add onions and sauté until translucent, 2-3 minutes, then add garlic and sauté until fragrant, 45-60 seconds. Add diced chicken and sear on all sides, stirring to prevent sticking. Sprinkle the pan with curry and turmeric, stir well and sauté for 30 seconds or so. Add tomatoes, chicken stock and harissa paste. Stir well to combine. Add diced carrots, potatoes and stir to distribute evenly. Sprinkle lentils over top and stir lightly.

Lock lid in place and bring PC to 15 psi, turn burner down to maintain pressure and cook 12 minutes. Naturally release pressure for 5 minutes then use a quick release method to completely release pressure. Test lentils and potatoes for doneness, they should still be slightly firm. Sprinkle with cumin seeds, season with salt and pepper.

### TIPS & TRICKS

- If you are sailing on an extended cruise or to more remote areas it is a good idea to carry a spare valve assembly and lid gasket in case of damage.
- Never store your pressure cooker with the sealed lid locked into place as it can deform the gasket and the pot

will be unable to pressurize.

- To prevent foods like beans from foaming and clogging the valve add a teaspoon of oil to the cooking liquid.
- A pressure cooker requires at least ½-1 Cup of liquid to create steam. NEVER let your PC cook dry.