

Familiarize Yourself with Your Microwave's Power Settings to Make Microwave Cooking a Joy

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The microwave gets a bad rap in cooking circles because it tends to make most foods soggy and nearly inedible. However, The New York Times suggests the microwave might be far better at cooking than most of us think, and all you need to do is familiarize yourself with the power button.

We've mentioned before that your microwave is often just as good (if not better) at cooking certain foods than your stove. But The New York Times points out that the most important thing you can do is learn exactly what all the different power settings on your microwave really mean:

A general rule of thumb: the lowest power settings, 500 watts and under, turn your oven into a makeshift dehydrator... At higher settings, 500 to 800 watts, the device can fry and steam. And if you simply want to heat something quickly, use the highest setting possible, as you do for tea and coffee.

Some microwaves might have special settings for fry and steam, but not all do. Of course, most microwaves don't give you the ease of actually showing you the wattage and instead let you choose a level (1-10 or so). Thankfully, it's not that hard to figure out what wattage that means. First, find your microwave's wattage. It's usually on the inside the door or displayed proudly on the front of the unit. Then you need to do some math:

If you want to steam something at 800 watts and have a 1,000-watt microwave, set the power level to 80 percent, or 8. (Level 9 is 90 percent, and so on. Some microwaves also have shortcut buttons like "medium" and "medium high" that correspond to specific percentages.)

For an 1,100-watt microwave, the math is a bit trickier: 800 watts is about 73 percent of the top output, so you may have to round down and set the power level to 7. (By the way, adjusting the level does not actually change the wattage. It simply means the microwave will pulse on and off at its fixed wattage until the desired level is reached.)

Once you crack the wattage code of your microwave, you can treat it just like an oven or stove for certain dishes. If you're looking for meal inspiration, check out The New York Times post.