- Prep Time: 20 minutes
- Cook Time: 6 to 8 hours (Low) or 3 to 4 hours (High)
- Total Time: 6 hours 20 minutes (on Low)
- Cooking Method: Slow Cooking (Crockpot)
- Servings: 8 hearty bowls (approx. 1.5 cups per serving)
- Difficulty Level: Easy

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Key Equipment Needed

1. Slow Cooker / Crockpot: 6-quart capacity or larger.
2. Large Skillet: For browning ground beef and crisping bacon.
3. Colander: For draining excess grease and rinsing canned beans.
4. Cutting Board & Chef’s Knife: For chopping potatoes and aromatics.
5. Ladle: For serving.

Ingredients Checklist

For the Skillet Prep:

- Lean Ground Beef: 1.5 lbs (85/15 or 90/10 lean ratio works best).
- Bacon: 6 slices, thick-cut, chopped into 1/2-inch pieces.
- Yellow Onion: 1 large, finely diced.

- Garlic: 4 cloves, minced.

For the Crockpot Base:

- Russet Potatoes: 3 medium (about 1 lb), washed, peeled, and cut into 1/2-inch cubes.
- Black Beans: 1 can (15 oz), drained and rinsed.
- Pinto Beans or Ranch-Style Beans: 1 can (15 oz), undrained if using Ranch beans, or rinsed if using plain pinto beans.
- Sweet Whole Kernel Corn: 1 can (15 oz), drained (or 1.5 cups frozen corn).
- Fire-Roasted Diced Tomatoes: 1 can (14.5 oz), with juices.
- Diced Green Chilies: 1 can (4 oz), mild or hot depending on spice preference.
- Condensed Tomato Soup: 1 can (10.5 oz).
- Beef Broth: 3 cups (low-sodium preferred).

Herb & Spice Blend:

- Chili Powder: 1.5 tablespoons

- Ground Cumin: 1 teaspoon
- Smoked Paprika: 1 teaspoon
- Dried Oregano: 1/2 teaspoon
- Salt: 1 teaspoon (adjust to taste)
- Black Pepper: 1/2 teaspoon, freshly cracked

Optional Toppings for Serving:

- Shredded sharp Cheddar or Monterey Jack cheese
- Freshly chopped cilantro
- Diced avocado
- Sour cream or Greek yogurt
- Sliced jalapeños
- Warm cornbread or tortilla chips

Step-by-Step Cooking Instructions

Step 1: Brown the Meat & Aromatics

1. Place a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the chopped bacon pieces and cook for 5 to 6 minutes until crisp. Remove bacon with a slotted spoon and set aside on a paper towel-lined plate, leaving 1 tablespoon of bacon drippings in the skillet.

2. Add the lean ground beef and diced onion to the skillet. Cook for 6 to 8 minutes, breaking up the beef with a wooden spoon, until browned and no pink remains.

3. Add the minced garlic during the last 60 seconds of browning and stir until fragrant.

4. Drain off any excess fat from the skillet to keep the soup from becoming oily, then transfer the beef, onion, and garlic mixture straight into your slow cooker.

Step 2: Layer the Vegetables & Beans

1. To the slow cooker with the beef, add the diced Russet potatoes, drained black beans, pinto beans, drained sweet corn, fire-roasted diced tomatoes, and green chilies.

2. Toss lightly to distribute the ingredients evenly.

Step 3: Add Liquids & Seasonings

1. In a medium bowl or measuring cup, whisk together the beef broth, condensed tomato soup, chili powder, cumin, smoked paprika, dried oregano, salt, and black pepper until combined.

2. Pour the broth mixture over the meat and vegetables in the crockpot. Stir everything together gently to ensure all ingredients are submerged in liquid.

Crockpot Timeline & Heat Intensities

Cook Segment	Slow Cooker Intensity Level	Duration	Expected Progress
Primary Simmer	LOW Intensity *(Recommended)*	6 to 8 hours	Potatoes become fork-tender, beans absorb flavor, and liquid thickens into a rich broth.
Fast Simmer	HIGH Intensity *(Alternative)*	3 to 4 hours	Faster heat curve; check potatoes at 3.5 hours for tenderness.

> Cook’s Tip: For the best depth of flavor and tender potato texture, cook on LOW. Slow-cooking at lower intensity gives the potato starches time to naturally thicken the stew without breaking down into mush.

The Last of the Recipe: Finishing & Serving

1. Thicken & Stir (Final 15 Minutes): Remove the crockpot lid. Give the soup a thorough stir. If you prefer a thicker, stew-like consistency, smash a few of the potato cubes against the side of the crockpot with a spoon and stir them back in.

2. Add Crispy Bacon: Stir half of the set-aside cooked bacon into the soup, saving the rest for topping individual bowls.

3. Seasoning Check: Taste the broth and add extra salt or black pepper if needed.

4. Ladle & Top: Ladle the hot Cowboy Soup into deep bowls. Top each serving with shredded Cheddar cheese, a dollop of sour cream, remaining crispy bacon, fresh cilantro, and sliced jalapeños. Serve hot alongside warm cornbread or crisp tortilla chips.

Chef’s Tips for Success

- Potato Selection: Russet potatoes work great because their starch thickens the soup naturally, but Yukon Gold potatoes are an excellent alternative if you prefer cubes that hold a firmer shape.

- Spice Adjustments: For a spicier kick, use hot diced green chilies, add 1/2 teaspoon of cayenne pepper, or stir in diced pickled jalapeños along with their brine.

- Make Ahead: You can chop the vegetables and brown the beef/bacon the night before. Store the meat and vegetables in separate airtight containers in the fridge, then combine everything in the crockpot in the morning.

Nutritional Information

(Estimated values calculated per serving / 1.5-cup bowl based on an 8-serving yield without extra toppings)

Nutritional Parameter	Amount Per Serving
Calories	390 kcal

Nutritional Parameter	Amount Per Serving
Total Fat	15 g
Saturated Fat	5.5 g
Trans Fat	0.5 g
Cholesterol	55 mg
Sodium	890 mg
Total Carbohydrate	42 g
Dietary Fiber	8 g
Sugars	6 g
Protein	24 g
Calcium	65 mg
Iron	4.2 mg
Potassium	810 mg