

Dutch oven cooking tips!

Almost anything can be cooked in a Dutch Oven. Your favorite recipes used at home can also be cooked in Dutch Ovens. The public library has cookbooks that contain recipes of all types that can be adapted to use in Dutch Ovens.

At least one cookbook would be useful for less experienced Dutch oven cooks. Lots of great information is available on sizes, seasoning, cleaning, heat control, and storage of your pots.

The one book I favor is the World Championship DUTCH OVEN Cookbook.

Dutch ovens are commonly defined to be any covered metal cooking pot. The particular type of oven I am interested in is made of heavy cast-iron, has three short legs on the bottom, and a tight fitting lid with a rim to hold coals. This is commonly referred to as a "Camp" or "Outdoor" Dutch Oven.

Dutch ovens that do not have legs, are flat on the bottom and have a highly domed basting lid without a rim for coals are called "Bean Pots" or "Kitchen" Dutch Ovens. They can be used with coals but are better suited to use on a stove top or in the oven. I have a 10" bean pot purchased just to use on our solid burner range and in the oven to bake bread. It also works great on the wood stove surface in my canvas wall tent.

Dutch ovens are also being manufactured in aluminum. Very light in weight yet they cost about the same as cast-iron. You have to be careful about excessive heat or you could damage your aluminum pot, and they do not ever become seasoned. If weight is a concern then an aluminum pot may fit the bill.

The key to a good Dutch Oven is easy to see. Smooth casting on the interior of the pot and at the lid seal area, uniform thickness and a tight fitting lid.

Dutch ovens are manufactured by several companies today and are available in most cities if you know where to look. Variety, outdoor sports, farm and ranch, and catalog stores are your best choices. Cast-iron is heavy and shipping can be high! I buy only LODGE . Lodge Manufacturing Co.: P.O. Box 380, South Pittsburg, TN. 37380. Lodge pots are consistently better quality than some others available but come at an increased price.

DUTCH OVEN SELECTION

FIRST DECIDE WHAT YOU PLAN TO USE THE OVEN FOR, THEN SELECT ONE OR MORE THAT MEET YOUR NEEDS!

Capacities of various popular oven sizes

Dutch Oven Size	Capacity	Used For	# Served
5"	1 Pint	ANY	1-2
8"	2 Quarts	VEGETABLES, DESSERTS	2-4
10"	4 Quarts	BEANS, ROLLS, & COBBLERS; GOOD FOR TESTING RECIPES	4-7
12"	6 Quarts	MAIN & SIDE DISHES, ROLLS, DESSERTS	12-14
12" DEEP	8 Quarts	TURKEYS, HENS, HAMS, STANDING RIB ROASTS	16-20
14"	8 Quarts	MAIN & SIDE DISHES, ROLLS, POTATOES, DESSERTS	16-20
14" DEEP	10 Quarts	TURKEYS, HENS, HAMS, STANDING RIB ROASTS	22-28
16"	12 Quarts	ANYTHING FOR A LARGE GROUP	22-28

The most popular size is a 12-inch standard oven

The 10-inch and 14-inch pots run a close second depending on the size of crowd you cook for!

The major difference between a 12" Deep and a 14" standard is the amount of surface area top and bottom. You can get more heat on the larger pot for the same volume! If your recipe requires a lot of heat then use the larger size pot. If the recipe requires an average amount of heat or you are cooking a tall item then the Deep oven would be best. I like the "deep" for bread as it gives me more air space at the top and I'm less likely to burn the top!

Cooking with Cast-iron

SEASONING YOUR POT

The only way to successfully cook in a Dutch oven is to properly season it. When you buy a new Dutch oven it is usually coated with a waxy material to protect it.

To obtain the desirable non-stick properties of a well used pot takes a little time and effort. There are several methods given in the various resources but we will discuss the method recommended by LODGE for a new pot.

Warm utensil-Peel off label

Wash with mild soapy water, rinse, and dry completely.

Grease inside and out (pot, legs, and lid) lightly with a good grade of olive or vegetable oil (I prefer solid shortening e.g., Crisco). Do not use lard or other animal products as they will spoil and turn rancid! Do not use a spray in coating but rather use an oil soaked paper towel or new sponge.

Place upside down on oven rack with lid separate and put aluminum foil underneath to catch any excess oil. Bake 300-350 degree oven for at least 1 hour. It will probably smoke and stink up the house! Seasoning outside on a gas grill for example keeps the smell and smoke out of your house.

Cool-store

I usually re-grease and bake again while oven is hot. It will take more than this initial seasoning for the pot to obtain the desired uniform black patina (like a satin black bowling ball) that provides the non-stick qualities and protects the pot from rust.

If your Dutch oven rusts or has a metallic taste this is a sign your seasoning has been removed. Repeat seasoning steps. This can also be required after storage or if it smells rancid.

For serious cases of abuse, steel wool, a "Brillo" pad or sand blasting may be required to get ovens ready to season again.

CARE OF YOUR POT

Avoid at first, acidic foods & water, which removes "seasoning" or you have to re-season.

After cooking remove lid. Do not use as food storage vessel.

Do not use strong detergents or a hard wire brush unless you plan to completely re-season the oven. After scraping out all uneaten food, clean with hot water & natural fiber brush or nylon scrubby. Never scour or use your dishwasher.

Dry oven completely, then lightly oil the entire surface of oven.

Store with lid off in warm dry place or place a paper towel inside and leave lid ajar.

The seasoning on your pot will improve with each use if it is properly oiled and cared for.

A product that I have found useful to help cakes and bread to not stick in my pots is called Baker's Joy. This is a spray mixture of vegetable oil and flour. Spray pot lightly before placing food in if you plan to remove

the dish whole for display or serving or just to reduce sticking

Transport your ovens with care and don't drop or let them bounce around and become damaged. Bags, burlap cloth, the cardboard box they came in, or lidded wooden boxes can be used to protect your ovens. I have bags for most of my ovens and appreciate the protection provided and convenience the handles provide.

I also have a wooden box sized to allow stacking three ovens one inside the other. My 12" standard, the 10" and my 8" all fit in a box 14" X 14" X 12". It gets a little heavy but you can cook a wonderful 3-course meal with just these pots.

NEVER, REPEAT, NEVER! pour very cold water into an empty hot pot or you may cause permanent damage to the oven (cracking).

USEFUL TOOLS

There are a few almost essential tools for safe Dutch Oven cooking.

One is a lid hook. These tools are available in many forms but even the simplest will prevent burns and dropped food.

Long handled tongs (I use 18" clamshell type purchased from the restaurant supply house for ~\$3). Two are better than one as you can use one for the fire and one for your food. I painted the fire tongs black at the tips to help me remember which is which!.

Metal pot scraper (a spatula or putty knife)

Oven mitt or heavy pot holders to protect the hands

Whisk broom (small) to remove ashes from lids

Paper towels

Oil for the pots (solid Crisco is my favorite)

Other tools that can increase your enjoyment of Dutch Oven cooking.

Briquette starter (tower) available in most hardware stores

Kitchen tools: spoons, spatulas (wood is best), cutting board as appropriate

Lid stand (something to put the lid on when working in the pot). This can double as a serving hot pad to protect your table or counter tops.

Picture

Cooking table: I have a metal cooking table that allows me to cook anywhere and not damage the ground. It saves my back also. These are commercially available or you can improvise.

A 55 gal drum on end

An old BBQ fire pan with legs

A piece of steel or expanded metal between cinder blocks

TEMPERATURE CHART

Heat control is the hardest thing to master when learning to cook with a Dutch oven. Here are a few tips to start you on your way!

Remember to start with moderate temperatures. You can always add more heat if desired or necessary. Be cautious as most guests don't enjoy burned food!

High quality briquettes are recommended. Briquettes provide a long lasting, even heat source and are easier to use than wood coals.

Briquettes will last for about an hour and will need to be replenished if longer cooking times are required. Group the smaller briquettes and add new (hot) as required to maintain the desired temperature.

If you use wood coals, remember that the flame will be much hotter than the coals! Avoid direct flames on the pot or turn frequently.

It is important to remember that these tips are only a guide to help you get started. You will need to adjust briquettes (or coals) according to your recipe and keep in mind that the weather, ambient temperature, and ground conditions can affect cooking temperature.

Warm winds or breezes will raise the temperature
High humidity will lower the temperature
Direct sunlight will increase the temperature
Shade will lower temperature
Higher air temperature will raise temperature
High altitude will lower temperature

Each type of recipe will yield best results if you use the correct heat placement:

Stews, soups, chili, and other liquid dishes require more heat on the bottom than on the top.

General rule for stewing: Place 1/3 coals on top and 2/3 on bottom

Meat, poultry, potatoes, beans, vegetables, and cobblers require even distribution of heat on top and bottom

Cakes, breads, biscuits, and cookies require most of the heat on top and little heat on the bottom.

General rule for baking: Place 2/3 coals on top and 1/3 on bottom

Stacking of Dutch ovens is a convenient way of saving space and sharing heat. This is best used for dishes that require even heating.

Stacked ovens can become a nightmare if the types of food do not have similar cooking requirements. The bottom pot seems to be the one that always needs attention and requires moving all others to get to it!

As a general rule of thumb. Take the Dutch oven size, for example a 12 inch. Add three more briquettes to the top for (15), and subtract three from the bottom for (9). Adjust as necessary for local conditions.

Rule of thumb: Each briquette adds between 10 & 20 degrees
Place the required # of briquettes under the oven bottom in a circular pattern so they are at least 1/2" inside ovens edge. Arrange briquettes on top in a checkerboard pattern. Do not bunch briquettes as they can cause hot spots.

To prevent (minimize) hot spots during cooking, get in the habit to lift and rotate the entire oven 1/4 turn and then rotate just the lid 1/4 turn in the opposite direction. Rotate every 10-15 minutes.

SOURDOUGH

I was given my start in Charleston SC. in 1975. I have managed to use and enjoy it ever since. I have shared the start with anyone who wanted to try sourdough cooking. You can substitute sourdough in many recipes by removing equal amounts of flour and water (or other liquids). The public library is a good place to look for recipes. My sourdough bread recipe won at the Eastern Idaho State fair in 1995.

Recipe starts can be home grown or borrowed from someone. Many cookbooks will tell you how to start your own. I also hear that you can now buy a powder that will give the same taste?

Common sourdough recipes include hot cakes, biscuits, cornbread, cakes, cookies, bagels, and bread.

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