

# A Dutch-oven cooking primer

By Tim and Christine Conners

Photographs by W. Garth Dowling

**Learn how you and your Scouts can make delectable Dutch oven creations at your next campout.**

**Dutch-oven cooking** is as much a part of Scouting as tying knots. But learning to cook in a Dutch oven can be a bit intimidating. After all, they can be heavy and kind of messy, and the cooking style involves a little math.



A Dutch oven is such a versatile cooking tool that when you bring one to camp, it's like bringing the kitchen from home. It can be used to fry, sauté, bake, stew, roast or slow cook — any time of day and for nearly any type of meal. It's not uncommon for a single recipe to involve several cooking methods using the same oven.

## Sound tricky?

Fear not! This Dutch-oven cooking guide will start you on the path to creating delicious meals with your Scouts and helping them master these skills.

## Getting Started

A camp-style Dutch oven — which is a cast-iron or aluminum pot — features legs that let the pot sit above coals on the ground. The lid is specially designed with a rim to help keep coals atop the oven.

Dutch ovens come in various sizes. They are most often identified by the diameter of the oven's lid, but can also be described by their volume in quarts.

For example, a 12-inch Dutch oven is by far the most popular oven used in Scouting, and for good reason: It's the perfect size for group cooking.

Cast iron's dark, nonstick coating is called its "patina" or "seasoning," an all-natural layer that continues to build as you use your oven. Many ovens come preseasoned. To help maintain the quality of the patina, wipe the oven with cooking oil before each use. The microporosity within the cast iron will trap and hold the oil, which then hardens into a sterile layer during the cooking process, offering excellent nonstick properties.

There are many different ways to bake with a Dutch oven. Some people cook directly on the inside metal surface of their oven, while others line the bottom and insides with foil or parchment paper. Some even use a device within the oven to set a pan on — this works well when baking breads that would otherwise tend to burn on the bottom of the oven.

Most often, charcoal briquettes are used to cook meals in a Dutch oven (making it easier to control cooking temperatures), but some experts use real wood coals. Take a look at the temperature chart included in this feature to help estimate the number of briquettes needed to cook your desired dish.

## Tools You'll Need

- One 12-inch (or 6-quart) camp Dutch oven to serve eight to 12 people
- One bag of charcoal briquettes of good quality and regular size

- A charcoal chimney starter and newspaper for the charcoal, if lighter fluid isn't used
- Matches or lighter
- Long-handled tongs for handling hot coals
- Lid lifter, a metal device for securely lifting a hot oven lid
- Heavy-duty barbecue gloves (welding gloves work, too)
- Heavy-duty foil or parchment paper, if you wish to line your Dutch oven
- Recipes and ingredients



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**Already a pro? When you're ready to get cooking, check out this series of how-to videos featuring Dutch oven breakfast casserole, lasagna, pineapple upside-down cake, baked apples and more!**

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### **Turn Up the Heat**

When it comes to baking, knowing the size of your oven is key. Coal count and the size of the oven directly affect the internal temperature of the oven. The larger the oven, the more coals needed to maintain a target internal temperature.

Converting recipes to work in different size ovens is actually quite simple. Use the chart below to determine how many coals are needed to achieve the temperature you desire.

Notice that baking calls for a distribution of coals between the lid and underneath the oven, with fewer under the oven than on top. Because heat rises, and the fact that your food is usually directly on the floor of the oven, having fewer coals under the oven helps prevent food from charring on the bottom.



Note that the chart assumes the use of traditional, uniformly sized charcoal briquettes and cast-iron ovens. Bring plenty of charcoal! Additional coal will be required for recipes calling for longer cooking times or when the days are windy or very cold.

*Find a recipe for this delicious Dutch-oven pizza [here](#).*

### **Cleanup and Storage**

For cleanup, a well-seasoned oven requires no more than a sponge or dish rag for wiping, a gentle nonmetallic scrub pad or spatula for scraping, warm water for washing and rinsing, and a towel for drying. Avoid placing very hot cast iron in cool water. This may warp or crack the metal.

Metal scouring pads are a sure way to destroy your Dutch oven's coating. Detergents should also be avoided, because soap will attack the cast iron's patina. Never use a dishwasher to clean your cast-iron Dutch oven.

After you've washed your oven, rub or spray a thin layer of food-grade oil over the entire surface of your cookware, including legs and handles. Store your oven with the lid slightly ajar to provide fresh air and continuous ventilation to the oven's interior. A folded paper towel placed in the bottom of the oven during storage will soak up excess oil and moisture, and will delay or prevent gumming of the oil used to recoat the oven prior to storage.

*A special thanks goes to Steve and Leslie Lovett (of [texasironchef.com](http://texasironchef.com)) for their expertise during the photography of these recipes.*

## COAL-TEMPERATURE CONVERSION CHART

### Oven Temperature

		325°F	350°F	375°F	400°F	425°F	450°F	
<b>Dutch Oven Diameter</b>	<b>8"</b>	Total Briquettes	15	16	17	18	19	20
		On Lid	10	11	11	12	13	14
		Underneath Oven	5	5	6	6	6	6
	<b>10"</b>	Total Briquettes	19	21	23	25	27	29
		On Lid	13	14	16	17	18	19
		Underneath Oven	6	7	7	8	9	10
	<b>12"</b>	Total Briquettes	23	25	27	29	31	33
		On Lid	16	17	18	19	21	22
		Underneath Oven	7	8	9	10	10	11
	<b>14"</b>	Total Briquettes	30	32	34	36	38	40
		On Lid	20	21	22	24	25	26
		Underneath Oven	10	11	12	12	13	14
	<b>16"</b>	Total Briquettes	37	39	41	43	45	47
		On Lid	25	26	27	28	29	30
		Underneath Oven	12	13	14	15	16	17

### Safety tips

Dutch ovens are typically very heavy and should be used only on the ground or a specially designed Dutch oven table.

Select a cooking site away from where others are working or playing. When cooking on the ground, the area should be composed of durable, fireproof material such as rock, gravel or dirt.

Follow any special fire restrictions, if they apply. Always have a bucket of water handy to rapidly douse wayward flames or extinguish coals when finished cooking.

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### Master Chef Contest Winners

Drum roll, please ... find the winners of the *Scouting* magazine **Dutch Oven Master Chef Contest** below. Click on each winning recipe to see photos and find instructions on how to make these on your next campout. The winners will each receive a Lodge prize package, valued at \$200 each.

#### SAVORY Category

- Winner: **Katahdin Surprise** by Jim Rausch
- First Runner-Up: **Dutch-Oven Reuben** by Emily Dresslar
- Second Runner-Up: **Rib-Sticking Biscuits and Gravy** by Mark Daspit

#### SWEET Category

- Winner: **Apple Cheesecake with Caramel Streusel Topping** by Lisa Blodgett
- First Runner-Up: **Harvest Coffee Cake with Crumble Topping** by Ken Selby
- Second Runner-Up: **Chocolatey Chocolate Chip Cake with Cream Cheese Frosting** by Andrea Kippes

## Winning Recipes of *Scouting* and *Boys' Life* Magazines' Campout Cuisine Contest

By Tim and Christine Conners

From the Web exclusive November-December 2013 issue of *Scouting* magazine

**THROUGHOUT THE YEARS**, Tim and Christine Conners have tested nearly 2,000 recipes while writing their outdoor cookbooks, and they've uncovered many excellent ideas and methods from contributors both young and old.

But what makes a Scout recipe *award-winning*? Hundreds of recipes were submitted by Scouts and Scouters in the **Campout Cuisine Contest**. So how did the Conners select the six winners — three youth, three adults — with the most delicious creations?

The duo look for great-tasting dishes that aren't commonly seen in Scouting. They also love creative approaches to cooking: recipes using easier or more dependable preparation techniques score high in judging.

So fire up the stove or coals and sample the top six recipes from this year's competition. In the gallery of recipes, below, you'll find tasty spins on old favorites and perhaps more than a couple of great new ideas to share with your pack, troop or crew.

Campout Cuisine Contest judges Tim and Christine Conners are committee members and merit badge counselors for Troop 340 in Statesboro, Ga. They are proud parents of two recent Eagles. The pair has also authored seven popular outdoor cookbooks, including *The Scout's Outdoor Cookbook*, *The Scout's Dutch Oven Cookbook*, *Lipsmackin' Backpackin'*, and *Lipsmackin' Car Campin'*.

Their latest title, *The Scout's Campfire Cookbook for Kids*, is scheduled for release this coming spring. Visit [lipsmackincampin.com](http://lipsmackincampin.com) for free recipes and cooking demos.