

Dutch Oven Skills and Tips

What Your Dutch Oven Can Do

Cooking techniques such as roasting, baking, simmering, stewing, frying, boiling, steaming, and many others are easily done on the campfire with only a single utensil, the Dutch oven. Think of the possibilities, delicious fresh baked bread that will rise up and lift the lid, cobblers made from berries picked fresh at the campsite, incredible deep-dish pizzas, stews, quiches that melt in your mouth, Cornish game hens roasted to perfection, and imagine a chocolate cake a foot in diameter. These and many, many more are very possible and sometimes easier than they are at home. With very few exceptions, you can duplicate your home recipes on the campfire using the Dutch oven.

So, before you start cutting up the veggies and meat and tossing them in the pot, you may want to learn some of the finer point of Dutch Oven cooking. Temperature control, equipment, helpful tips and how to clean up afterwards. What follows is a collection of knowledge and styles related to the art of Dutch Oven cooking. Enjoy!

Cooking Temperatures

On the kitchen oven is a really cool dial. I turn it to 350 and trust that the oven will heat up to and remain at 350 degrees. I put in the food, set the timer, and go do something productive. When camp cooking in the outdoors, there's a bit more hit-or-miss.

On my Dutch oven, there's no dial, nothing to tell me how hot the oven is. Since cooking food at a fairly consistent and known temperature is important for success, there are many ways I know of for estimating temperature. Depending on your skill level and how you'll be cooking, one of them should work for you.



Also keep in mind that there are many environmental factors that will influence your oven temperature. Wind might blow heat away, colder air temperature, higher humidity and higher elevation reduce heat generated by coals; direct sunlight makes a black oven a bit hotter. You might consider making an aluminum foil wind shield to place around your oven, but if it is that windy, I would recommend you not have an open fire.

Nearly all Dutch oven cooking will come out ok if your Dutch oven is about 350 degrees. Some things should be cooked hotter and some cooler, but that's the temperature for most recipes that fail to include a temperature suggestion.

Temperature Method 1: Counting Charcoal

Lots of Dutch oven cookbooks tell you how many charcoal briquettes to put under and on top of the oven. This is the easiest way to cook since every coal is similar and consistent.

If you are like me and use real wood for your outdoor camp cooking coals, it doesn't help much. Also, different brands of charcoal give off different amounts of heat. But, let's say you are going to use charcoal...



The normal formula for baking is to use twice the number of briquettes as the diameter of the oven with 3/4 of them on the lid. For a 12-inch oven, you would use 24 briquettes with 18 on top and 6 underneath.

For frying, use the same number of coals as the diameter of the oven with all of them underneath. For a 12-inch oven, you would use 12 briquettes under it.

Here is a simple chart:

Baking, Roasting:

More heat from top so the bottom does not burn.
Place 3/4 coals on top and 1/4 underneath.
This provides a uniform heat to the contents.

Frying, Simmering, Boiling:

All heat from the bottom.
Place all coals underneath.
The lid may be on or off.

Baking Temperature Chart for Dutch Oven Cooking by Lodge Cast Iron

Oven top/bottom	325°	350°	375°	400°	425°	450°
8"	15	16	17	18	19	20
*****	10/5	11/5	11/6	12/6	13/6	14/6
10"	19	21	23	25	27	29
*****	13/6	14/7	16/7	17/8	18/9	19/10
12"	23	25	27	29	31	33
*****	16/7	17/8	18/9	19/10	21/10	22/11
14"	30	32	34	36	38	40
*****	20/10	21/11	22/12	24/12	25/13	26/14

Temperature Method 2: Rule of 3

This is a real simple estimate of briquettes. Take the Dutch oven diameter and add 3 briquettes on top. Subtract 3 briquettes underneath. So, a 12-inch oven would have 12+3=15 on top and 12-3=9 underneath. This works for any size Dutch oven. Then you need to adjust briquette placement depending on the type of cooking.

I feel this method puts too much heat under the Dutch oven. Maybe a "Rule of 4" or "Rule of 5" would be closer to what I use. Fortunately, you can always move coals around as needed depending on what you like.

Rings of Coals

As it turns out, the sizes of briquettes work out so that the recommended briquettes count above can be estimated easily. As an experiment, you can take a 12-inch Dutch oven and 24 briquettes. On the lid, make a ring of briquettes all the way around the outer edge. How many did you use? I bet it was 16 or 17.

Now, see how many it takes to make a ring just under the oven. There should be 2 or 3 briquettes between each leg for a total of 6 to 9.

That is pretty close to the recommendation for a 350-degree baking set up, isn't it? It works pretty well for any size Dutch oven and any size briquettes - smaller briquettes means you need more of them, but it's about the same amount of burning mass to make a ring!

- A ring around the top and the bottom is about 350 degrees.
- Remove every other briquette underneath to make about 300 degrees
- Add a second ring to the top to make about 400 degrees.

If your camp cooking calls for stewing or frying, you'll want to drop those top coals down and shove them under the oven. If you're baking breads, then maybe move a couple from underneath up to the top.

Just remember that a ring around the top and a ring around the bottom is your base starting point and tweak it from there.

Oh, I forgot to mention that this is exactly how I do it with real wood coals. Since coals are irregular and you can't count them, I put a ring of coals around the top and bottom and it works out practically perfect. I'm lazy and like the simplest way to do something.



Maintaining Even Heat

No matter how evenly you distribute your coals above and below your Dutch oven, there will be some spots that get hotter than others due to wind, quality of fuel, or just because. To prevent burned and raw portions of your meal, you should just rotate your oven occasionally, maybe every 10 minutes. You can do it however you like, but I've got an easy way - remember, I'm lazy.

- Lift the whole oven off the campfire cooking coals by the wire bail.
- Turn the oven clockwise 1/3 of a revolution.
- Set the oven back down on the coals - with three legs on your oven, it should sit in the exact same spot it started in with coals between the legs.
- With a lid lifter or pliers, grasp the lid handle.
- Twist the lid counter-clockwise 1/3 turn - the logo on the lid should be in the same position it started at.

I like this way because both the top and bottom heat moves in relation to the food inside and there's nothing for me to remember except that the lid logo always looks the same.

Taking a quick look inside at this time, will give you an idea if the coals are cooking too fast or slow. Just be careful to not drop ash in or let too much heat out.

Maintaining Long Heat

Your first batch of coals will probably keep the oven hot for 30 to 45 minutes. That's long enough to cook most things, but you sure don't want to let the oven go out for those 1 hour or longer meals.

Just make sure you check your oven every 20 or 30 minutes to see that the coals are ok. Where you see spaces with just white ash, fill in with a few more coals. Or, you can just brush all the ash and coals away and put on a new batch all at once. If we're just sitting around the campfire cooking s'mores, talking, or playing cribbage, I tend to do the former but if the fish are biting I do the latter so I don't need to keep checking on it.

Stacking Heat

When you really get going and have 3 or 4 Dutch ovens outdoors cooking, there is a lot of ground space chewed up and a large part of the heat from the coals is heating the surrounding countryside instead of the ovens. I recommend that the first Dutch oven you buy is a 12-inch model and then your second purchase is a 10-inch model. This allows you to stack the ovens.

Stacking your Dutch ovens is a great way to save ground space, fuel, and time - besides, it looks really cool to have 3 ovens making a tower.

The coals on the lid of one oven serve as the 'underneath' coals for the oven stacked on top. And, the oven on top helps trap heat for the oven underneath. All this makes heat estimating more difficult so you should only tackle this after you've got some experience and are willing to practice on a few meals.

The most important thing to remember is that items needing more heat should be on top. Your bread or dessert should be the bottom-most oven since it wants very little heat underneath. Then, your meat to roast in the middle and a stew on the top. It takes some planning, but an entire meal can be fixed this way so it all gets done at the same time.

Rotating stacked Dutch ovens takes a bit more work. Take off the top ones, rotate the bottom one, and then work your way back up the stack. Move as fast as you can without spilling so you keep the ovens hot.



Temperature Tips

Finally, just a few tips to tuck away for later:

- You can cook food, but you can't unburn food. Use less heat and cook longer rather than overheating.
- Preheat your Dutch oven for frying or searing meat. Otherwise, put the food in cold and let it all heat up together.
- Keep adding wood to your campfire to ensure you have a supply of camp cooking coals available. If your fire burns too low, it may take extra time to finish your cooking while you make coals.
- Some briquette users just set new briquettes next to burning ones around the Dutch oven so they light and continue providing heat as the first batch burns out.



Dutch Oven Tips

- Keep an eye on your ovens. There should always be someone monitoring any fire.
- If steam is forcing its way out around the lid, the oven is too hot or you have a poorly-seated lid. Re-seat the lid and remove some coals if that doesn't fix it. If the lid is a problem, you'll probably have burned or dried out food along the ream.
- Use a pie tin set on 4 equal sized pebbles in the Dutch oven for rolls, biscuits, pies, or pizza. It keeps a buffer of even, hot air around the dough to prevent burning.
- Prepare as much of your food as possible at home. Cut your vegetables and such in your clean kitchen and then bring along in zip-loc bags.
- Pancake mix can be made in a gallon zip-loc and then easily poured out as needed. Saves clean up too.
- Wait for your fire to have hot coals rather than yellow flames. Cooking over flame is less efficient and gets soot all over your cookware.
- Use hardwoods in your fire for hotter, longer-lasting coals.
- Keep a notebook of the meals you cook and the results. Notice if the food is cooked thoroughly along with the temperature and cooking time for each attempt. Over time, you'll get a better feel for 'just knowing' the right temperature and time.
- A bit of oil or grease rubbed in the oven will really help minimize food sticking.
- Cut bacon strips in half. The shorter pieces can more easily be moved around for even frying.
- A natural fiber (not plastic) whiskbroom is great for brushing ash off the lid before opening your Dutch oven.
- Always clean and dry your Dutch oven after use. Letting it sit wet or in water or rain will rust it.
- Make sure you have food or water in your Dutch oven before placing it on coals, unless you are monitoring the heating. An empty oven can burn off the seasoning easily.
- Dropping a Dutch oven will break or crack it. It's easier than you think!
- Dropping a hot Dutch oven in the creek or pouring water into it or putting cold food in it can destroy it.
- Use wooden or high-temperature silicone utensils. Plastic spatulas touching the Dutch oven sides can melt, and metal can scratch your seasoning off.
- A common mistake is to set the lid on the ground. Make sure you have a clean, sturdy place to set the lid.
- Your Dutch oven will attract lots of curiosity. Be sure you are in control of your kitchen and keep everyone safely away from the fire and oven to prevent accidents.
- You might line the Dutch oven with aluminum foil to help with clean-up of sugary desserts. (I personally don't do this, but it's common.)
- High sugar and tomato based recipes tend to break down the seasoning. Plan on reseasoning your oven after spaghetti!

Replacement Parts

Well, there aren't many moving parts to break on a Dutch oven so replacement parts are rarely needed. But, that dropped lid that hit a rock and cracked or that bail handle that got all mangled might be nice to replace.

[Lodge Manufacturing](#) have replacement bail handles for their Dutch ovens for around \$7.00 Their phone number is (423) 837-7181 and you need to tell them the size of your oven. Lodge also has a selection of replacement lids in their catalog.

If yours is not a Lodge, there's a good chance the handle wouldn't fit but then again it might. Or, you can contact the manufacturer of your Dutch oven and ask them.

Dutch Oven Accessories

A Dutch oven is just the first step on this journey you've begun into the land of outdoors cooking. You've now got Birthday and Christmas presents lined up for the next few years if you don't get in too much of a hurry. There are a few tools you should have for safety and basic cooking, but the rest can be acquired over time.

Prioritized Cooking Tools

Here's the things you can add to your collection in the order I believe they are most needed.

Gloves - thick, lined, leather gloves are an important safety tool. These are red Lodge gloves. I have a pair of grey fireplace gloves that work well. You can get by with a simple pair of work gloves, but the security and safety of a good pair of barbeque gloves makes it a lot more fun. Without gloves, you should make sure you've got plenty of cold water, band aids, and extra food for when you drop the whole pot when you get burned.



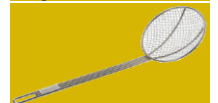
Lid Lifter - handling the lid without dropping ash in the food or losing coals or getting it dirty is probably the part of Dutch oven cooking that requires the most finesse. I started out using pliers to grab the wire bail and lift the oven and then grab the lid handle and lift it. That's hard work and your hands are pretty close to the coals. A lid lifter moves your hands away from the heat, gives you more control, and is a strong, sure hold on the bail or lid. It lifts from underneath rather than using a grip squeeze so there's much less chance of dropping the lid. Make sure to get one with a three-toed foot, similar to the picture. This gives you a firm lift when picking up the lid and reduces swaying. And, remember when you're buying your Dutch oven that you get one with a loop handle rather than a solid handle so there is a place for the lid lifter to stick through.



Shovel or Tongs - I use a small shovel like a garden trowel to scoop coals from the fire to the Dutch oven. A nice stainless-steel pair of tongs like these work very nicely and keep your hands away from the heat. Some sort of scoop or tongs is very important to a successful cookout.



Scoop and Fork - Once the food is done, how are you going to serve it? A long-handled ladle for stews, a long-handled fork for chunks of meat, and a long-handled serving spoon should do fine. Make sure they have no plastic parts that will melt on accident. Barbeque tools don't work too good unless you don't mind bending the neck so you can reach down into the oven. If you are frying, you will appreciate a long-handled fry spider strainer in your kit. I also use wooden spoons to stir food when needed - I like wood because it is easier on the oven sides.



Coal Starter - If you are a briquette user, one of these is very handy to get hot coals quickly. Some crumpled newspaper in the bottom, a load of briquettes on top, and 15 minutes later you're ready to cook. No need for explosive lighter fluid and all the smell that goes with it. If you leave briquettes in too long, they just burn up and all that heat is wasted. Get them going and then use them.



If you are cooking something that takes more than 45 minutes, you should start another batch of briquettes after 30 minutes of cooking so they are ready to go when needed.

Lid Stand - Getting dirt on the lid is very bad form, not to mention bad food. A lid stand gives you a convenient, clean place to set the lid. Three rocks, a couple sticks of wood, or a tuna can work fine too, but what the heck. Get one that folds up so it takes up little room when packing up. This is one of those things I'm pretty sure I'd lose quickly if I ever got one since it's small and black.



Tripod - Now this item is useful for keeping food warm in the Dutch oven. If you got the meal ready and folks are still out fishing, then you can hang it over the fire to keep warm but not overcook. An adjustable hook lets you move the oven higher or lower depending on the amount of heat you want. Having one of these is also useful for other campfire cooking. With a different chain hanging down, you can suspend a grill and do hamburgers and such. It's not high on my list, but would be a fun present.



Storage Bag - Provides protection for your Dutch oven when travelling. Also, keeps the rest of your gear clean and away from the soot and seasoning of your Dutch oven. Wooden boxes are also available for storing your Dutch oven.



Dutch Oven Table - For folks that do Dutch oven cooking every weekend or go to tournaments, cooking tables are great to have. Saves a lot of work for your back and brings the cooking up where other folks can see it better. The walls shield the cooking from wind so a more even heat is produced too. As I get older, I might decide one of these would be nice. Right now, it just seems like way too much work, weight, and clean-up for the cooking I do while camping. And, since I don't use briquettes, I still have to go down to the fire to get coals.



Other Items

Don't forget the things that you need for cooking. I've seen all these things forgotten at one time or another:

bio soap	whiskbroom	veggie peeler	bottle opener	briquettes	knives
spice rack	matches	can opener	water bottle	cheese grater	cutting board
hot pad holder	aluminum foil	pie tins	measuring cups	paper towels	cooking oil

Clean up and re-seasoning your Dutch Oven

Prior to seasoning, wash the Dutch oven with warm water. NO SOAP! Most experts suggest using only a good scrubbing with steel wool and some elbow grease. Dutch ovens need to be seasoned to create a patina which helps prevent food from sticking; makes cleaning easier; prevents rusting; adds flavor; and cooking oil forms a carbon non-stick coating when heated. Cleaning heavily crusted ovens is easy. Boil fresh water until the crusts softens enough to scrub out with scotch-brite or steel wool pads.

Methods to season a cast iron Dutch oven once it's clean again:

Indoor method:

- Preheat oven to 350 F.
- Open windows and turn off the smoke alarm
- Place pot and lid in oven and heat until they are almost too hot to handle
- Remove pot and lid from oven
- Use paper towel to rub a thin layer of oil (can use olive or vegetable oil or solid shortening – do not use margarine or butter).
- Avoid using spray oil as it may leave a sticky residue
- Cover all surfaces including legs
- Place pot and lid on top rack of oven
- Put a cookie sheet on the lower rack to catch any run off and prevent oven from catching fire
- Bake for one hour
- Turn off the oven and let pot and lid cool in the oven
- Repeat the process
- Remove the pot and lid from oven and wipe with clean dry cloth

Outdoor method:

- Use your oven as a deep fryer or fry thick sliced unsalted bacon on the lid and in the pot or

- Using a propane gas grill with a cover turn grill on to low and place the Dutch oven in the grill to preheat
- When warm wipe on a thin layer of oil
- Place lid and oven in the grill and lower the lid
- Cook for one hour
- Repeat the process
- Remove and wipe with clean dry cloth

Easy and Quick Recipes when young visitors come by!

Monkey Bread

4 tube of refrigerator biscuits (10 count)

1 c Sugar

1 c Brown sugar

4 tbs Cinnamon

1 stick butter or margarine

Cut biscuits into quarters. Mix sugar and cinnamon in plastic bag. Drop quarters into bag and coat well. Place in Dutch oven. Melt butter or margarine in lid and pour over quarters. Bake 350 for 35 min.

Sugar Cookies

1/2 c softened butter

1/2 tsp salt

1 c sugar

2 tsp baking powder

1 egg

2 c flour

1/2 tsp vanilla extract

Combine butter and sugar, stirring until well mixed. Blend in egg and vanilla. Add remaining ingredients and mix well. Drop onto greased pie tin or aluminum pan. Place on trivet or inverted pie tin in 400-degree Dutch oven. Bake for 6 to 7 min.

Chocolate Chip Cookies

2-1/4 c all-purpose flour

2 eggs

1 c butter, softened

1 (12oz) semi-sweet morsels

3/4 c sugar

3/4 c brown sugar

1 tsp vanilla extract

In large bowl, combine butter, sugar, brown sugar, and vanilla extract. Beat until smooth. Beat in egg. Gradually add flour. Stir in chocolate chips. Drop onto ungreased pie tin or aluminum pan. Place on trivet or inverted pie tin in 350-degree Dutch oven. Bake for 7 to 9 min.

Cinnamon Sugar Donuts

Several tubes of refrigerator biscuits

Cooking oil

Mixture of sugar and cinnamon in a paper sack

Heat about one and a half inches of cooking oil in the Dutch Oven. Be careful not to allow it to become too hot. Heat over coals, NOT FLAMES! Prepare the biscuits by sticking your thumb through them to make a ring. CAREFULLY drop them from a spoon into the hot oil. Turn them once. Remove them from the oil and roll them in the cinnamon and sugar mixture. WARNING: These are habit forming.

Let's get to the other recipes!!!

The possibilities are endless, you can go fancy (lobster, Cornish hens, etc.), every day (stews, chickens and roast), to somewhat primitive (squirrel, opossum, raccoon, etc.). What are you willing to try?

Some of my favorite Dutch oven cookbook websites include:

- **Dutch Oven Cooking - UI Extension 4-H Youth Development ...** www.uidaho.edu/extension/4h/projects/dutch-oven-cooking.aspx
- **35 Incredibly Easy Dutch Oven Recipes for Camping ...** <http://50campfires.com/35-incredibly-easy-dutch-oven-recipes-camping/>
- **Dutch Oven Recipes for Camping - Camping for Foodies...** <https://www.campingforfoodies.com/dutch-oven-recipes-camping>
- **Camping Food & Dutch Oven Recipes - Scoutorama.com...** www.scoutorama.com/recipe
- **Dutch Oven Recipes - Scouting magazine...** <https://scoutingmagazine.org/dutch-oven-recipes/>

- **17 tasty Dutch oven recipes – Boys' Life magazine...**
<http://boyslife.org/outdoors/outdoorarticles/54956/17-tasty-dutch-oven-recipes/>

Some of my favorite Dutch Oven Printed Cookbooks include:

- **The Scout's Dutch Oven Cookbook;** By Tim and Christine Conners, Falcon Guides, 2012.
- **101 Things to Do with a Dutch Oven;** By Vernon Winterton, Gibbs Smith Publisher, 2006
- **Lodge Cast Iron's Field Guide to Dutch Oven Cooking – From Novice to Champion;** Compiled by the International Dutch Oven Society, 2013

Scout show “Cast Iron Chef” General Rules

There will be three separate categories and awards: Cub Youth, Scout Youth, and Adult. Assuming adequate participation (8 or more entries per category). Promotes cooking and we will admit one entry per REGISTERED unit for adults and one per patrol or cub rank for REGISTERED youth units. SPL's or senior scouts attending from each registered troop are asked to serve as judges.

1. **Each youth entry must have been prepared and cooked and finished on site,** solely by youth scouter(s), with no adult help.
2. **Each adult entry must have been prepared and cooked and finished on site,** solely by adult scouter(s).
3. **Entries must be from units that are registered participants of the Scout Show or camporee.**
4. **Entries must be submitted, to the registration area at the entrance, by no later than 5:30 pm,** and their entrée must be submitted in a Dutch oven, to the contest registrar. 15-minute grace period at a loss of 5 points. Absolute cutoff at 5:45 PM on Registrar's time piece. Alarm will sound. Oven must be on the table with recipe at that time.
5. **When submitting entry, please indicate unit number and type of entry (youth or adult) to contest registrar only,** so entry can be marked in a way to remain identity-blind to the contest judges.
6. **Contest is for entrée dishes (main dish) only.** No desserts!!
7. **Contestants should submit a printed or neatly handwritten recipe with entry.** Organizers may collect emails and request winners to provide a neat digital copy of their recipe for publication.
8. **All ingredients must be cooked in Dutch oven or on Dutch oven lids.** If the recipe calls for melting or warming a sauce in a separate pot that is not a Dutch oven that is permitted over the coals. Garnishing additions such as a bread or tortilla that accompany the main dish are also permitted.
9. **Participating teams are expected to provide their own Dutch ovens,** utensils, recipe, ingredients, charcoal or other heat source. Cooking must be done over charcoal.
10. **No pre-cooked ingredients are permissible.** Pre-cutting or peeling only is fine, but all cooking must be done on site.
11. The judges will judge the entry immediately after submittal to the contest registrar. The decision of the judges shall be final.
12. **Use good fire safety practices.** No fires on direct ground surfaces are permitted. Please burn charcoal in an elevated manner as to prevent contact / burning of park ground surfaces. Contestants are asked to exercise proper care in the cleanliness of their food preparation and cooking. Keep the preparation area and utensils clean. Use a washbasin or wet wipes for hands. Use a cooler for perishables and do not place Dutch oven lids on the ground.

Contestants will be judged on entry appearance/appeal, taste, complexity/technique, using the following point system...

Presentation (Appearance/Appeal):	15 point maximum
Taste:	20 point maximum
Complexity / Technique:	<u>5 point maximum</u>
Total points available to score:	40 points