

All About Dutch Oven Cooking and Temperature Control



ABOUT DUTCH OVEN COOKING

The Easy Wilderness and Troop Resource cookbook is designed with directions for Dutch Ovens and Slow Cookers, so that your Scout may practice his or her cooking skills at home (wouldn't it be nice for them to cook dinner for you?) before they take on the cooking challenge during a camping trip. In addition, if you enjoy RV camping, slow cookers are awesome for starting your dinner in the morning and having it ready when you return from your hike or other outdoor activities.

For those of you who are new to camp cooking, Dutch Ovens are large covered iron cooking pots. They generally have three legs on the bottom to help stabilize them in a campfire and allow them to sit on top of the coals. In addition, the lid generally has a very high lip so that coals may be placed on top of it and not slide off (see image below). There is an Amazon.com link to this model Dutch Oven in the EasyWilderness.com Store. At this writing, we found the best pricing at Dicks Sporting Goods. Dutch ovens that have legs may be used in your standard household oven. The legs of the Dutch Oven will fit down through your oven rack, however, the legs do make it a little more cumbersome to take it out of the oven. As your Scout practices his or her camping cooking, we recommend using a Dutch Oven in your kitchen oven or in a gas grill that has a thermometer.



DON'T BE FOOLED

If you plan on purchasing a Dutch oven and intend on using it for camping, **be sure it has legs and a lid with a large lip** that can hold hot coals. A number of pots for sale call themselves "Dutch Ovens", however they are not as usable for camp cooking because they lack legs and a lip (see image below). These legless "Bean Pots" are great for your kitchen, but much less versatile in the outdoors. We don't recommend anything without legs and without a lid with a lip for camping.



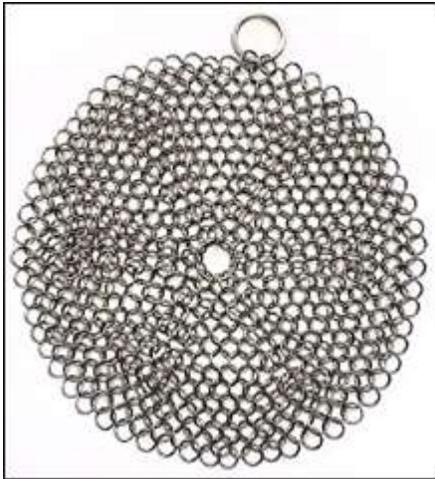
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SEASONING YOUR POT FRESHLY OUT OF THE BOX

When you first purchase your Dutch Oven, be sure to follow the directions to season it. Basically, this means give it a good washing with soap and water to remove any coatings they put on at the factory. Then, using a paper towel wipe it down completely with a thin coating of vegetable oil including the inside and outside of the pot, the top and bottom of the lid, and the legs. Then put it in your oven at 350° on a gas BBQ grill for an hour. This is called “seasoning” and will help prevent food from sticking to it and help prevent it from rusting. Do not use lard or other animal fat, because that coating will go rancid. Also, you may want to put some aluminum foil down in your kitchen oven to catch any vegetable oil that drips while seasoning your pot. The more you use your Dutch oven, the better it will season and the better it will perform.

CLEANING

There are different schools of thought over the best methods to clean your Dutch Oven. Once your Dutch Oven is seasoned, some people say it should never be scrubbed with soap. They prefer, instead, to boil water in it to kill all the germs and remove the stuck-on food. Other people scrub the pot with coarse salt and then boil fresh water. Both these methods have served people well for many years. I, personally, do not fall into either of these schools of thought. I worry about bacteria and germs, so prefer to scrub with soap and water and then re-season it after each camping trip. During the actual camping trip this is frequently not practical. While camping I often fall back on the boiling water method. My wife prefers the coarse salt method. Regardless, one of the best tools I have found to clean cast-iron cookware is something that looks like a [washrag made out of chain mail](#). You can find an Amazon.com link to it in the EasyWilderness.com Store. It is made from stainless steel.



After cleaning, air dry your pot completely and store it with the lid removed or placed on top with a gap for air to flow inside. You can store the dry “chain mail” by draping it over the edge of the pot and this will help keep the lid lifted. You should also re-clean and re-season your pot, after storage, if it smells musty or bad.

Some people feel lining the pot with heavy duty aluminum foil helps with cleanup. That is a personal preference and depends on the dish you are cooking.

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COOKING TIPS:

- Unless you want ashes in your food, cook with the lid on.
- Don't tilt the lid when you lift it, or your coals will roll off and into your dinner.
- Avoid burns by using cooking gloves or a lid lifter. I almost always use both at the same time.
- Don't drop your pot. It may be made of iron, but iron can still crack if dropped on a hard surface.
- Don't clean a hot pot with cold water. Let it cool, first. Otherwise, it may crack.
- It's easier to cook with coals than wood unless you chop your wood into kindling. It's hard to balance a pot on logs and you can't really put logs on your lid in any convenient manor.

CONVERTING COALS TO TEMPERATURE

Converting coals to temperature is NOT an exact science. Unlike your home oven, temperature control with a Dutch Oven is tricky. As you start out, it is easier to cook longer at a slightly lower temperature than to risk burning your food. We use 12" Dutch Ovens in our Troop. So, here are some approximate numbers for approximate temperatures. In addition, the type of cooking you are doing (Stewing, Roasting, or Baking) will determine how to proportion your coals from Bottom to Top.

12" Dutch Oven (For a 14" Dutch Oven, add 7-8 more coals) Approximate

Temperature	Boiling/Stewing (all on bottom)	Roasting (Bottom/Top 2X)	Baking (Bottom/Top 3X)
325 degrees	23-24 coals	8/16	5/18
350 degrees	25-26 coals	9/17	6/20
375 degrees	27-28 coals	10/18	7/21
400 degrees	29-30 coals	11/19	7/23
425 degrees	31-32 coals	12/20	8/24
450 degrees	33-34 coals	13/21	8/26

COAL PLACEMENT

When **Roasting** meats in an oven, the heat should come equally from the top and bottom. Because heat rises, 2X as many coals should be on the lid (because the heat has to travel down through conduction) as under the pot (heat traveling up). So, using the above 12" pot example, if you wanted to roast meat at 350 degrees, you would put 16-17 coals on top and 8-9 on the bottom. If you have a 14" Dutch Oven, add 4-5 more coals to the top and 2-3 more to the bottom.

When **Baking**, the heat needs to come more from the top than the bottom. So, place 3X as many coals on the lid.

When **Boiling, Stewing, Simmering or any other activity that you would traditionally do on a stove top at home**, all of the heat comes from the bottom. You don't need any coals on the lid. Nevertheless, cooking with the lid on helps keep the heat inside the pot and helps prevent ashes from blowing into your dish. If your meal requires stirring or browning of meat, then lid-off as needed or convenient.

When placing coals under the pot, try to keep them all under the pot's edge, NOT stacked around the pot. Arrange the coals on the lid as evenly as possible so that you don't get "hotspots." Expert camping chefs learn to lift and rotate the entire pot 1/4 turn and push the coals around on the lid every 10-15 minutes. This makes things cook more evenly. Posters and advertisements often show people hanging a Dutch Oven over open flames. This looks pretty in the photograph yet promotes a false idea. Unless you

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are cooking soup or stew or something that contains a lot of liquid, my experience is that direct flames tend to cook unevenly and often burns the food. Tripods are fine for keeping things warm once they are cooked, but so is keeping your Dutch Oven near the coals. In addition, it requires a tripod of-sorts from which to hang the pot. That means you are either carrying extra equipment or risking your dinner based on the soundness of your lashing abilities.

Fresh coals last about an hour. For our recipes that have cooking times over an hour, additional coals will be needed. So, you will need to light them 10-15 minutes in advance, because you can't just take charcoal briquettes out of the bag and expect them to work without having time to ignite. There are two schools of thought on this. First, as the old coals are dying, you can build the new ones up around your pot while your meal is still cooking to catch them on fire and then move them into place when they are hot. The second school of thought is just start another pile of coals and move the pot when ready. In my mind, if you have enough room start another pile. I think they light better and if not careful, if you put the extra coals around the pot, they can provide too much heat.

DUTCH OVENS AS SLOW COOKERS

Dutch ovens may be used in your standard household oven as slow cookers, as well. If you use a Dutch Oven in the Kitchen Oven as a slow cooker, set your oven temperature to 300 degrees and use the recipe timing as if the slower cooker is on the "High" setting. A Dutch oven can be used as a slow cooker, but does NOT have to be used as a slow cooker. If your Scout is learning to cook in a Dutch Oven for camping purposes, I recommend you practice with recipes and oven temperatures as if you are using coals, rather than as a slow cooker. No Scout wants to wait around in the campground for 8 hours watching a pot while his or her friends are out having fun.



GTR Seal of Approval