

# The History of Dutch Oven Cooking

A Dutch oven is a thick-walled iron (usually cast iron) cooking pot with a tight-fitting lid. It is commonly referred to as a 'camp oven' in the Australian bush, cocotte in French, as a 'casserole dish' in British English, and is similar to both the Japanese tetsunabe and the Sac, a traditional Balkan cast-iron oven.

During the late 1600s the Dutch system of producing these cast metal cooking vessels was more advanced than the English system. The Dutch used dry sand to make their molds, giving their pots a smoother surface. Consequently, metal cooking vessels produced in the Netherlands were imported into Britain. In 1704, an Englishman named Abraham Darby decided to go to the Netherlands to observe the Dutch system for making these cooking vessels. Four years later, back in England, Darby patented a casting procedure similar to the Dutch process and began to produce cast metal cooking vessels for Britain and her new American Colonies. It is possible that because Darby's patent was based upon his research into the Dutch foundry system that the cooking vessels he produced came to be referred to as "Dutch" ovens. Other researchers believe that this term may have come from the itinerant Dutch traders who sold cooking vessels out of their wagons as they traveled from town to town and door to door. Maybe both accounts are true. In any event, the term "Dutch oven" has endured for over 300 years.

Over time the Dutch oven used in the American Colonies began to change. The pot became shallower and legs were added to hold the oven above the coals. A flange was added to the lid to keep the coals on the lid and out of the food. The cast-iron cookware was loved by colonists and settlers because of its versatility and durability. It could be used for boiling, baking, stews, frying, roasting, and just about any other use. The ovens were so valuable that wills in the 18th and 19th centuries frequently spelled out the desired inheritor of the cast iron cookware. For example, Mary Washington (mother of President George Washington) specified in her will, dated 20 May 1788, that one-half of her "iron kitchen furniture" should go to her grandson, Fielding Lewis, and the other half to Betty Carter, a granddaughter. Several Dutch ovens were among Mary's "iron kitchen furniture".

When the young American country began to spread westward across the North American continent, so did the Dutch oven. A Dutch oven was among the gear Lewis and Clark carried when they explored the great American Northwest in 1804-1806. The pioneers who settled the American West also took along their Dutch ovens. In fact, a statue raised to honor the Mormon handcart companies who entered Utah's Salt Lake Valley in the 1850s proudly displays a Dutch oven hanging from the front of the handcart. The Dutch oven is also the official state cooking pot of Utah.

Mountain men exploring the great American frontier used Dutch ovens into the late

1800s. Dutch oven cooking was also prominent among those who took part in the western cattle drives that lasted from the mid-1800s into the early 1900s.

## How to Season a Dutch Oven

There are many variations on the process for seasoning a Dutch oven. However, they all have the same basic approach. The objective is to bake onto the surface of the oven a coating of oil, which becomes like lacquer. The seasoning does several things. First, it prevents the metal from rusting, second, it creates a non-stick surface making clean up easier, and third, it adds a delicious subtle flavor unmatched by other types of cookware.

Dutch Ovens come from the foundry with a thin waxy coating designed to prevent rusting until the oven can be properly seasoned. This coating will be washed off and any residue burned off in the seasoning process.

1. Warm utensil - Peel off any labels.
2. Wash, rinse, & dry. Grease inside lightly with solid shortening, e.g. Crisco.
3. Bake at 300° in a conventional oven for one hour. [Don't be alarmed by the smoke that will come from your oven as the shortening is burned onto the metal surface of the Dutch oven. Open the doors and windows and temporarily turn off the smoke alarm.]
4. After the oven has cooled, wipe out any excess grease and store with a paper towel in the Dutch oven with the edges hanging out from under the lid to absorb any excess oils and to allow air to enter the oven.
5. It may be necessary to repeat this process if part of the oven did not season properly.

Over time your oven will develop a hard, smooth, black coating on the inside of the oven. When you reach this point you will truly have a "seasoned" oven that you will not want to part with.

## How to Clean a Dutch Oven

For Most Dutch oven enthusiasts there are a few "DO NOTS" when it comes to cleaning a Dutch oven.

1. Do NOT use dish soap or detergent (it can leave a soapy taste in the oven that may transfer to the food.)
2. Do NOT use a metal scrapper or scouring pad (it can remove the "hard-earned" seasoning.)
3. Do NOT put cold water on a hot Dutch Oven (it can cause the oven to crack.)
4. Do NOT "burn out" your Dutch oven over the fire. (It can warp or crack the oven.)

For best results, Dutch Ovens should be cleaned immediately after they are used. If needed, you can put some hot water in the oven to let it soak while you finish your meal.

Using a plastic scrapper, carefully scrap out the excess food.

With a little warm water and a dishcloth finish cleaning the inside of oven. Drain wash water and rinse with warm water.

Thoroughly dry the Dutch oven with paper towel or warm it on the gas stove or over a fire just enough to completely dry the oven.

Using a paper towel or soft cloth, wipe a "thin" coating of oil over the entire oven. (If the oven is well seasoned you will only need to do this step once in a while.)

Make sure to wipe out excess oil so that it doesn't turn rancid when not in use.

To store, place a paper towel under the lid and hanging slightly out the side to absorb any excess oil and moisture and to allow some air into the oven.

Dutch ovens can be stored in wooded boxes or in nylon bags.

Store ovens where they will stay dry.

# How Many Briquettes do I Use?

Keep in mind the briquettes must be applied to both the top and the bottom. Use only quality charcoal briquettes for consistent temperature control. (We recommend Kingsford even though we get no commission for the reference.) The chart below tells how many briquettes to use for a desired temperature. As a rule of thumb to achieve 325 degrees use the following method. Take the size of the oven and take that number of briquettes less three for the bottom and that number plus three for the top. For example with 12" oven you would place 9 briquettes on the bottom (12-3) and 15 briquettes on the top (12+3). This works for Lodge® Dutch ovens and GSI Aluminum ovens.

Temperature	8" Oven		10" Oven		12" Oven		14" Oven		16" Oven	
Degrees F	Top	Bottom	Top	Bottom	Top	Bottom	Top	Bottom	Top	Bottom
300	10	4	12	6	14	8	16	10	18	12
325	11	5	13	7	15	9	17	11	19	13
350	12	6	14	8	16	10	18	12	20	14
375	13	7	15	9	17	11	19	13	21	15

Note: Adding one set of briquettes (one on top and one on bottom) will raise the temperature of the Dutch oven approximately 25 degrees. Or conversely removing one set of briquettes will lower the temperature by 25 degrees.

For the MACA Dutch ovens more briquettes are needed to compensate for the depth and thickness of the ovens. Take the diameter of the MACA Dutch oven and add three briquettes for the bottom heat. Then add six to the diameter of the Dutch oven to get the number of briquettes for your top heat. This gives you a temperature of about 325° F. For example with a 15" Dutch oven you will need 18 charcoal briquettes for the bottom heat and 21 charcoal briquettes for the top heat to achieve a temperature of 325° F.