

Dutch Oven: Quick Guide to Getting Started

Prepare for great cooking in the great outdoors with 3 simple directions. Once you get started, you'll wonder why you've never gone Dutch before. Get ready to make eating outdoors a more regular enjoyment by first making proper preliminary preparations:

1. Purchasing the right Dutch Oven

The difference between choosing a good Dutch Oven and a bad one is essential:

- *Even Casting, or metal thickness*

Choose an Oven without any major inconsistencies in thickness. Areas that are too much thinner will create hot spots. Variances may also leave the Oven susceptible to crack or warp when cooling. Most Dutch Oven enthusiasts will choose a cast iron Oven as opposed to an Aluminum one because of the more inviting campfire flavor and the more evenly cooked result of the meal.

- *Three legged*

Don't buy an Oven without legs. These are important to prop the Oven up over the coals instead of laying it directly on top of coals. Avoiding direct hot spots will prevent creation of burnt spots on the food.

Legs also help with airflow—always an important factor to fuel even a coal fire (Ovens with legs also stack better for cooking).

- *Wire handle*

Find an Oven with a metal handle. The handle should be sturdy and easy enough to maneuver and even move a full Oven.

- *Proper Lid*

See that the Lid fits seamlessly. Make sure the lid has a looped handle firmly attached.

- *Size for your needs*

Look into using a 10-inch or 12-inch Oven. A 10-inch is good for desserts. The deeper the Oven the better it is for cakes and breads. A 12-inch Oven is most common to start with, and then bigger Ovens may be desired as your services attract larger groups.

2. Curing your Oven

Preparing your Oven for a lifetime's use requires proper curing—to prevent rusting and to provide a non-stick coat to the interior—but less time cleaning will be needed, thereafter. The steps for curing are as follows:

#1 Scrub the Oven clean

New Ovens will have a waxy coating the manufacturer applied for storing. But for cooking you won't want that waxy flavor. Scrub it off with hot water and soap, but don't be so abrasive as to scrape the oven itself.

#2 Bake on the Oven coat

Apply shortening evenly to the entire Oven, primarily on the inside. Place Aluminum Foil on the bottom rack to catch grease. Heat the Oven with the Lid firmly in place to 350 degrees. Now heat this coating at 350 degrees for an hour.

Note: This will generate plenty of smoke, so open all doors and windows and turn on the fans. If done right, this only has to be endured once. After each use, just wash with hot water, and then wipe down the Oven with a coat of oil. Store it with a piece of newspaper inside, like you would to keep moisture from stinking up a closed ice chest.

3. Bringing the Tools

Being a minimalist, I just bring what I need:

A Lid Lifter is nice. It can be used to check the food, rotate the lid, or lift and move the whole oven by the wire handle. *A metal spoon* you may have used to prepare the dish can be used to scoop out the food. Other than that your Oven is ready. Are you? (See my next article, **“Dutch Oven: Quick Guide to Great Outdoor Cooking”**)