

Dutch Oven: Quick Guide to Great Outdoor Cooking

Make the great outdoors tasty and easy as 1-2-3. That's right! That picnic, backyard event, or camping trip just got even more exciting. Remember these three basics and remove the hassle of cooking outdoors with the homemade flavor and surprising ease of Dutch Oven cooking:

1. The Ideal Temperature

Most anything will bake well at 350 degrees. To reach that magical temperature, use a formula based on the Oven's diameter: 2 coals per inch of oven diameter. If you have the common 12-inch Oven, therefore, you will want to add 24 coals to reach 350 degrees. How many coals go on top (Along the lid flange every 2 inches or so) and how many coals go on bottom (In a circular design every 2 inches or so is best) will depend on what you are cooking.

(Note: once you reach this temperature, adding a coal will then figure to increase the Oven by 25 degrees for each coal added, which by the way, was not the case for those first 24 coals in our example— $24 \text{ [coals]} \times 25 \text{ [degrees]} = 625$. But, remember, the first 24 coals = 350 degrees. So the first coals are much less in temperature, standing alone, but together the effect will become exponential).

2. Charcoal Briquettes & Placement

Since all foods are not created equal, Dutch Oven cooking categorizes them into three types, which we will call: 1) Watery, 2) Moist, and 3) Dry. While regulating the temperature to 350 degrees is described above, distribution is the key when considering what has been placed within the Oven. As a general rule, placing more heat on the top will allow you to best implement an oven effect, where the food is cooked by the hot air around it rather than by direct heat to the food itself (The food naturally collecting on the bottom of the pot). Placement of coals using a common 12-inch oven (At 350 degrees, requiring the 24 coals as described above) is as follows for each of the categories:

- 1) *Watery*—Place 12 coals on top and 12 coals on bottom.
- 2) *Moist*—Place 14 coals on top and 10 coals on bottom.
- 3) *Dry*—Place 10 coals on top and 14 coals on bottom.

See the patterns here? Most food is in the second category. As a general rule, you may use the diameter of your Oven, such as 10-inch, 12-inch, 14-inch, and apply a formula to adjust by placing 2 more coals than the Oven size on the lid, and place 2 less coals than the Oven size underneath. For example: 10-inch = 12 on top, 8 under. Adjust accordingly, for more dry foods (baking) or for more watery foods (soups), though by displacing the key number of 2 coals from top to bottom or vice versa, accordingly.

3. The Possibilities of an Outdoor Oven

Think of it! Anything you can bake in the oven can be made outdoors in a Dutch Oven (Provided that area allows it. Most places do). In the information age, good recipes are

just a google search away. People who love good food in the outdoors are more than willing to share with you the joys of their secrets. Many of my favorite eats have come from Byron's Dutch Oven Page. You may enjoy several outings before you will have tried all the options available to you. But if you are the experimental type the possibilities are endless. Give it a try your next day off, holiday weekend, or even tonight if you have a Dutch Oven already prepared to go.

Now that you know the basics to remember when Dutch Oven cooking, you're set to cook. Cooking is just a matter of practice and experimentation. If all else fails, look for very prescriptive recipes (Detailing exact ingredients as well as where exact coal amounts get placed and cooking instructions) that have been tried and proven. While you can actually have a bad experience, if you adhere to this article, that will be almost impossible to do. Because in following this outline you will discover what Dutch Oven enthusiasts say, will at least be true for you: that you can't make a bad meal in a Dutch Oven. Happy cooking, and eating, too!