

## ***Dutch Oven Cooking 101*** ***by Kimberly Cook***



### **Why?**

- ***flexibility*** Gives you the ability to cook anything at a campsite you can cook in your oven at home.
- ***easy cleanup*** If you use aluminum or foil liners, you throw away the pan (no KP), wipe up any spills inside the pot and dispose of the ash. Easy! Cast iron pots require little maintenance.
- ***control*** Unlike campfire cooking, you have greater control over your heat source, which gives you more even cooking (no burned spots). The heavy-duty construction provides for less heat loss and greater evenness in cooking temperatures.
- ***taste*** Food cooked in a Dutch oven (DO), like food cooked in your oven at home, tastes good and can serve an entire patrol with one pot.
- ***time*** Once you do the preparation, most DO recipes cook unattended.
- ***nutrition and health*** Food cooked directly on a cast iron surface absorbs iron that will provide added nutrition. Also, cast iron pots do not produce harmful fumes that are sometimes given off by traditional non-stick cookware.

### **When?**

- car camping only: because Dutch ovens and fuel (charcoal) are heavy, you cannot use them when backpacking.

### **How?**

#### **Materials**

- Heavy cast-iron (preferred) or aluminum Dutch Oven with lid
- Tongs for moving charcoal
- Charcoal starter or “chimney” for starting charcoal
- Welder’s or fireproof gloves
- Lid lifter
- aluminum pizza pans, heavy foil, and/or cooking table
- lighter fluid (if not using Match light charcoal)
- charcoal (*Kingsford*® or other high quality, dense charcoal is best because it burns longer and hotter than other brands. Match light charcoal gives easy start capability, but burns faster and will have to be replenished in less than an hour. Regular charcoal will generally burn for an hour, generating 10-15 degrees of heat per briquette.)
- lighter or matches
- whisk broom (optional: for dusting ashes off the lid before serving/storing)

- lid rest (optional: to keep lid off ground when checking/stirring your pot)
- heat-resistant serving utensils

**Safety Considerations:**

- Rope off the cooking area so people do not wander where hot coals and pots might result in a burn.
- Make sure your cooking area is free of debris that might catch fire. If cooking on the ground, gravel or dirt makes a good base surface for cooking.
- Wear closed toe shoes to protect your feet from hot coals or sparks.
- Keep small children away from the cooking area.
- Do not allow small children to serve themselves from hot Dutch ovens, but always provide adult assistance.

**Preparation:**

- **Prepare the cooking area.** To prevent ground scorch, use either a cooking table or roll several layers of **extra heavy duty** aluminum foil on the ground under where you will place your charcoal. Inexpensive aluminum pizza pans (not disposable variety, but heavier variety which can be found at dollar stores) are useful to putting on top of the foil to create an additional heat barrier. When you are done cooking, foil can be rolled up with cool ashes inside for quick disposal.

For safety, rope off the cooking area so people do not wander into the area where hot coals and pots might result in a burn. See ***Safety Considerations*** above for additional ways to keep your cooking area safe.

- **Start your charcoal.** About 5 minutes before intended use, put required number of charcoal briquettes (see temperature/size chart for number of recommended briquettes to generate the desired temperature) in charcoal starter/chimney. If using non-match light charcoal, apply lighter fluid and let soak in for one minute or two. Using a long match or lighter, position your flame inside the bottom starter hole of chimney until charcoal lights. It is also possible to light the charcoal from the top of the chimney.
- **Prepare your Dutch oven.** For ease of use, position an aluminum pan liner (roast or casserole pan, deep enough to contain your ingredients) or a homemade foil liner, using 2-3 layers of extra heavy duty aluminum foil, on the inside of your Dutch oven. One advantage to using a homemade foil liner is that you can extend the edges over the sides of the pot for easier cleanup. It is also possible to use a combination of foil placed inside and over the edge of the pot (for easy cleaning) in conjunction with an aluminum foil pan. It is also possible to cook directly in the Dutch oven, but this will require more cleanup. (See instructions below for cleaning your Dutch oven.)

## **Cooking:**

- **Prepare your recipe ingredients.** Depending on the recipe instructions, you may assemble your recipe before, during, or after starting the charcoal. It will depend on the amount of time required for preparation and whether you desire to preheat your DO before starting cooking. For some recipes, the ingredients can be prepared in the aluminum pan liner while the DO is preheating.

For ease of preparation, some recipe ingredients can be precooked, stored in a cooler, and then used when assembling the recipe. This increases preparation time at home, but reduces preparation time at the campsite. For recipes that call for browning meat, cooking chicken or boiling noodles, this can be done in advance. The same is true for sauces, which can be prepared at home and then repackaged for storage in your cooler until they are needed. Allow time for any ingredients that are cold or frozen to thaw before use, as this will increase cooking time if they are too cold.

- **Cook.** Once the coals are hot (they will be glowing red or have ash on the outer edge) and using tongs, place an appropriate number of briquettes under the pot and on the lid to achieve the desired temperature as directed by your recipe. See Attachment A, *Baking Temperature Chart for Dutch Oven Cooking*, for specific instructions.

**For food you wish to simmer** such as soups, stews, and chili, place 1/3 of the total briquettes on the lid and 2/3 under the oven.

**For food you wish to bake** such as breads and rolls, biscuits, cakes, pies and cobblers (rising), place 2/3 of the total briquettes on the lid and 1/3 underneath the oven.

**For food you wish to roast** such as meats, poultry, casseroles, quiche, vegetables, and cobblers (non-rising), use an even distribution of briquettes on the lid and underneath the oven.

If desired, preheat your oven, which will result in faster cooking times. Some recipes call for more heat on the top than on the bottom and some call for even heat on top and bottom. Follow your recipe instructions for coal placement.

Follow recipe instructions to place your ingredients in the DO. Use the pot lifter to put on the lid. Monitor the progress of your dish to make sure the

correct temperature has been achieved. Every 15 minutes or so, rotate each DO one half turn (90 degrees) and the lid in the **opposite direction** one half turn (90 degrees) to ensure even heating. If you see during the cooking process that your dish is cooking unevenly (you observe hot or burned spots), move, add or remove briquettes to modulate the temperature. Refrain from checking progress too often, as this will reduce the oven temperature.

If your recipe calls for a longer cook time (greater than one hour), replenish coals as they burn out. Make sure that the number of coals and heat generated is constant during the cook time.

Use heatproof utensils when stirring or serving from your hot DO. Make sure all utensils are rated to handle the intense heat of DO cooking.

When lifting the lid, always use the lid lifter and lift slowly, keeping the lid surface level, so that ash will not fall into your food. After your dish is completely cooked, use the whisk broom to remove ash from the lid so it will not fall into your food. Make sure any hot coals and ash from the lid are disposed of properly.

Start early enough and allow sufficient time for your dish to be completely cooked by dinnertime; otherwise, you will have a lot of hungry people hanging over your shoulder while you wait for your dish to be done!

### **Cleanup:**

- **Allow coals to cool completely before disposal. Coals should be cool to the touch before handling or disposal.** When cool, roll up coals in the aluminum foil and dispose of properly, following Leave No Trace guidelines.
- Be careful not to touch hot DO surfaces or lids without protection. Make sure the pots are completely cool before handling without gloves.
- Be careful not to place hot Dutch ovens on plastic or other non-heatproof surfaces.
- Remove foil lining and dispose of properly.
- Brush ash from surface of lid using a whisk broom or rag. If desired, wipe the lid top to remove ash residue. The top of the lid does not have to be completely clean of ash, but keeping it clean will keep ash from ending up on the cooking side of the lid or in your pot and will keep your hands from getting dirty.

- Scrape any food residue from the surface of the DO using a hard plastic utensil. Refrain from using steel wool or a metal scraper, as this will remove the dark protective surface of the DO that makes it non-stick.
- Use hot water only to clean the cast iron surface. Soap or detergent will leave a bad-tasting residue.
- After cleaning, wipe all cast iron surfaces until they are completely dry before storing. Moisture will cause rust, and will damage your cookware. If desired, you can wipe the cast iron surface with a rag containing a small amount of cooking oil. The oil will help protect the surface from moisture and rust.
- Always take care of your DO after a campout to ensure it is ready for the next time you want to use it. It is more difficult to remove rust from cast iron than it is to take care of your cast iron *before* rust occurs. Protect your investment in your cookware and it will provide many years of good use.

*Tips for Quartermasters and Patrols Using Dutch Ovens:*

- *Don't forget to include fuel (charcoal) and all the other materials listed above in your packing list when planning to cook with Dutch ovens.*
- *Check with the Adult Equipment Coordinator to reserve a DO you can use, or bring your own. Do not assume that someone will bring a DO for your patrol unless you have reserved one.*
- *Make sure the Quartermaster or his designee takes ovens home to clean them properly after a campout. Return clean Dutch ovens to the Scout closet.*
- *Experiment with new DO recipes at home. You can use a DO and charcoal at home just as easily or more easily than you can on a campout. You can also try out a recipe in your oven at home to see if you like it. Be adventurous--try something new! Just remember to be careful where you place your DO; they generate a lot of heat and have been known to even melt asphalt.*
- *Don't forget preparation tools like can openers, serving spoons, cutting knives and mixing bowls when creating your equipment list. Don't assume that another patrol will have equipment you can borrow. Food storage bags can be used for mixing ingredients with the added advantage of no cleanup afterwards. Another frequently forgotten item is cooking oil (non-aerosol pump spray is easiest) or margarine/butter for skillet cooking.*
- *A Dutch oven lid placed over the coals or stove upside down can be used as a skillet or griddle. Using the lid in this fashion, you can make virtually error-free pancakes and eggs that don't run all over. This is because most lids are shaped*

*like a shallow bowl so things naturally stay in the center. If using the lid for this purpose, apply a small amount oil/fat to the cooking surface before filling with the food to be cooked so that your food does not stick.*

- *It is better to err on the side of having not enough charcoal than too much charcoal. You can always add more heat, but once something is burned it must be thrown out.*

## Attachment A

### Baking Temperature Chart for Dutch Oven Cooking

Attachment A  
*Baking Temperature Chart*  
*for*  
*Dutch Oven Cooking*

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

Servings Per Dutch Oven- These are approximate as some people can eat more than others but they do serve as an aid:

Oven Size	Persons Served
8"	1-2
10"	4-7
12"	12-14
12"deep	16-20
14"	16-20
14"deep	22-28

Baking temperatures taken from regular cookbooks, sometimes refer to Slow, Moderate, Hot, or Very Hot ovens. Those terms normally reflect following temperatures;  
 Slow-250° to 350°;  
 Moderate-350° to 400°; Hot-400° to 450°;  
 Very Hot-450° to 500°.