

Another useful implement is a shovel. With it you can stir the fire and lay hot coals onto the lid. Some dutch oven cooks also like to use gloves when working with a hot oven.

Seasoning the Oven

A cast iron dutch oven must be seasoned regularly by applying cooking oil, margarine, or butter to its inner surfaces to protect it from rust and to seal the metal pores. This treatment is not necessary for aluminum ovens, although many cooks do it anyway to prepare the oven for the next use. If the oven is new, it should first be washed in soapy water, rinsed, and air dried. Then coat the lid and oven with a thin layer of cooking oil (oil, margarine or butter). Next, pour in enough oil to cover the bottom, put the lid on, and place it in your kitchen oven at home for an hour at moderate temperature.

When the dutch oven has cooled, wipe it out with paper towels, but leave a thin layer of the oil on all surfaces. In storing the oven, leave the lid off so that moisture won't condense on it.

Fires for Dutch Oven Cooking

All dutch oven cooking is done by hot coals—never in a flaming fire. The coals may be from hardwoods like oak and hickory or from charcoal. Hardwoods yield long-burning coals which are necessary for the lengthy cooking process in most dutch oven recipes. Soft woods like pine are unsatisfactory.

In some respects, charcoal is more convenient to use and is necessary in areas where there is no downed hardwood. Either lump charcoal or briquette may be used, but the briquettes are preferred for long-lasting fires. They give an even heat for long periods.

The amount of charcoal needed varies somewhat, depending on wind conditions, air temperature, and the altitude. Obviously, a strong wind will cause the coals to burn faster and become hotter. At high altitude, more coals will be needed because of the thinness of the air. You'll also need more coals on a cold winter day than in the heat of summer.

The following chart will give beginning dutch oven cooks a fairly accurate starting point for the amount of charcoal briquettes needed for various temperatures.

Temperature Chart—Charcoal Briquet Count

This chart was developed to give the beginner a fairly accurate starting point with charcoal fuel. Temperatures will vary some due to the charcoal quality, wind, and other weather elements.

OVEN	ALUMINUM		CAST IRON	
	6½" x 9"	9" x 9"	8" Round	12" Round
TEMP	Under Top	Under Top	Under Top	Under Top
250-300°	4 6	6 8	2 4	3 5
300-350°	5 7	7 10	3 5	4 6
350-400°	6 8	8 12	4 6	5 7
400-450°	7 9	9 14	5 7	6 8

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