

them aside near the pit. If the weather is dry, sprinkle them with water to refresh the soil.

Next, dig the pit just deep enough so that the bail of your oven will be above the ground level when it is standing straight up. Line the bottom and sides of the pit with nonporous rocks. Build a fire in the pit and keep it burning for an hour or more to provide lots of hot coals.

With a shovel, remove most—but not all—of the coals and place them beside the pit. Insert the dutch oven, holding the bail up and making sure the lid is tightly fitted. Shovel coals around the oven to a depth of an inch or two. Also put coals on the lid. Put from three to six inches of loose soil on the coals, while keeping the lid up.

Surround the pit with stakes or markers so that people won't stumble over the pit. Allow four to six hours for cooking a meal that would be done in one or two hours by other methods.

When it's done, carefully shovel out the soil and coals and lift out the oven. Take care in taking off the lid so that you don't tip it and dump bits of soil or coals into the food. Voila! A meal fit for a king—or a Scout.

Don't forget to fill in the pit afterwards and restore the sod, mounding it slightly so that over time it will settle into its original position.

Cleaning a Dutch Oven

Little cleaning is necessary if you have been baking or cooking food in pie pans or oven dishes. But if the food has been in direct contact with the oven, it may be necessary to clean it out. Don't use soap or detergent, which might affect the taste of your next meal.

Instead, preheat the oven, rub it with cooking oil or butter, and wipe clean with a paper towel. If food still sticks to the oven's bottom and sides, put some water in it and bring almost to a boil. Then use a plastic-mesh scrubber to loosen the food. Do not use steel wool because it will harm the oven's patina.

Allow the oven to air dry and then reseason it with cooking oil to prepare it for storage and its next use.

Making a Dutch Oven from Pie Pans

With three nine-inch, heavy gauge aluminum pie pans and a couple of bolts and wing nuts, you can build a lightweight dutch oven that is useful for backpacking. It can also be a backup oven for your regular dutch oven when you are cooking more than one dish.

For an illustration of the pie pan dutch oven, see the Appendix. The top and middle pans are bolted together, bottom to bottom. The bottom pan holds the food. Make two holes near the center of the top and middle pans and bolt them together with brass or steel nuts and bolts that have not been coated. Some cooks believe that the aluminum will retain more heat if all surfaces, except those that come in contact with the food, are painted with black boiler paint.

Tent stakes or nonporous rocks are used to raise the bottom pan a couple of inches so that coals can be put under it.