



# Go Dutch!

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Cooking in a Dutch oven is regarded as an art and somewhat a mystery to many people. However, almost anything that a person can cook in a regular kitchen oven can also be cooked outdoors in a Dutch oven.

A traditional Dutch oven is a cast iron cooking pot with a tight fitting lid. The sturdiness of cast iron and the versatility of the Dutch oven made it a popular cooking vessel in the old West. Dutch ovens with a rimmed lid and tiny legs on the bottom were perfect for cooking outdoors with coals. Pioneers, ranchers and chuckwagon cooks had their favorite recipes and could keep their families and ranch hands happy at the dinner table and around the campfire.

Even in modern days the Dutch oven is useful and fun for cooking meals. During the time of year when it's not hot enough to turn on the air conditioner and not cool enough for the heater, the Dutch oven can allow for a hot meal to be cooked outside and not heat up the kitchen or house. Additionally, it can be a fun way to experience a little bit of the old West.

Some basic equipment is needed for Dutch oven cooking. First and foremost is the basic 12" Dutch oven. Dutch ovens can be purchased at outdoor equipment stores, hardware stores, through online merchants, or even at second hand shops. Although the traditional Dutch oven is cast iron, some companies now offer a cast aluminum Dutch oven. Cast aluminum is lighter weight and is an option to consider if the Dutch oven might be taken on a camping trip or a horse packing trip. For cooking outdoors, it is important that the Dutch oven has a close-fitting lid with a flanged or rimmed lid. The flange or rim keeps the coals from falling off. The Dutch oven should have legs on

the bottom which will allow space for charcoal underneath the pot. The Dutch oven also has a bail handle so that the pot can be lifted and moved easily. The Dutch oven and lid should be examined to ensure that neither is cracked.

Another choice recently available to the Dutch oven shopper is a "pre-seasoned" Dutch oven. Traditional Dutch ovens are cast iron and must be seasoned. This seasoning process will protect the Dutch oven from rust and will provide an almost stick-proof coating. To season a traditional Dutch oven, whether it is brand new or an old treasure found in an attic or second hand shop, the pot and lid must be washed very well. Scrub off any factory applied coating on a new pot, or rust or rancid grease from an old pot. Allow the pot to dry thoroughly and then apply a thin coat of vegetable oil on all surfaces. It is not advisable to use butter or lard in this process as these can become rancid. Fat from other animal sources can have moisture in it and cause your pot to rust. After applying the oil, the Dutch oven and lid should be placed in a 350° oven for 60 minutes. After 60 minutes, the oven should be turned off and the Dutch oven should be allowed to cool down. Do not attempt to hurry the cooling process by immersing or rinsing the Dutch oven with water as the water may crack a hot Dutch oven. This seasoning process can also be done in an outside barbeque grill, provided there is enough space inside the closed grill to accommodate the Dutch oven and the lid. A Dutch oven that is purchased "pre-seasoned" from the factory does not have to be seasoned at home.

Other essential equipment for safety and convenience are a lid lifter to remove the lid during and after cooking; a lid rest, which provides a place to set the lid while preparing, checking cooking

progress or serving food from a Dutch oven; long handled tongs used for moving and arranging hot coals; a leather barbeque mitt or heavy potholder, for protection from a hot Dutch oven.

Safety considerations also include selecting a safe place to cook in a Dutch oven. The source of heat used when cooking with a Dutch oven are coals from a campfire or charcoal briquettes. Since Dutch oven cooking uses hot coals, it is important that fire safety be practiced. The area where the hot coals are placed should not be on or adjacent to anything flammable. Keep this location away from the house or other structures and areas with dry vegetation that might fuel a wildfire. Remember that hot coals may leave a scorch mark on concrete. National forests have various regulations for collecting firewood, which may make it hard to find or illegal to use. Different kinds of firewood burn longer or are reputed to burn hotter, giving variable results. Charcoal briquettes are a fairly standard unit and are easy to use and readily available. Using a charcoal briquette chimney to start charcoal briquettes helps to contain coals and flames when starting a fire. An old charcoal barbeque grill, galvanized oil-changing pan (cleaned), or cinderblocks strategically arranged will provide a safe cooking spot and will also offer some wind protection.

Usually charcoal briquettes will yield about one hour of heat. Allow 20-30 minutes from the time of starting the briquettes until they will be hot and ready to use. If a recipe requires more cooking time, it will be necessary to start another batch of briquettes before the first batch has burned away. The basic rule of thumb for determining the temperature of a Dutch oven and how many briquettes to use is the "four up, four down rule." That is, for a 325° 12" Dutch oven, use 16 coals on top (12+4=16) and 8 coals on the bottom (12-4=8). For every additional 25° desired, add an additional briquette both on top and underneath the oven. For example, 350° would require 17 on top and 9 on the bottom. In written recipes, the combination of coals to use is sometimes noted as a ratio; for example 17/9.

In the past, some people have preferred not to wash cast iron cookware, but because of food safety considerations the Dutch oven should be cleaned by washing with slightly soapy water. Excessive dishwashing

detergent should not be used, nor should the Dutch oven be soaked for an extended period of time because the detergent will remove the seasoning and the soaking will cause the pot to rust. In both cases, the Dutch oven will need to be re-seasoned. When done washing and rinsing, the Dutch oven can be thoroughly dried by hand drying or placing back over any leftover coals. After the Dutch oven has dried, a thin coat of vegetable oil should be applied to the inside, and the Dutch oven then put back over the warm coals for a few minutes. Excess residual oil should be removed with a paper towel. Lining a Dutch oven with aluminum foil can make cleanup much easier, especially with sticky or sugary foods. Store the Dutch oven in a safe, dry location where it would not be subject to many temperature fluctuations. Dutch ovens are very heavy; dropping a Dutch oven can cause it to break. The storage location should be convenient

and facilitate ease of handling. A few paper towels should be nestled between the Dutch oven and the lid to keep them ajar and to absorb any moisture so that the Dutch oven doesn't rust.

Dutch oven recipes can be found by consulting Dutch oven cookbooks available from a bookstore or online, Dutch oven internet websites or family cookbooks. Here is a website with recipes and videos produced through Washington State University.

<http://kwsumentia.org/Programs/DutchOven/DutchOven.aspx>

Once you get started cooking in a Dutch oven, it is fun to adapt recipes from your own kitchen to outdoors in a Dutch oven. Here is a recipe to get you started. The beauty of this recipe is its simplicity. Give it a try. Good luck and go Dutch!

## ***Dutch Oven Dump Cake***

*½ cup butter, divided*

*1 20-ounce can prepared fruit pie filling such as apple, apricot, blueberry, cherry, peach, etc.*

*1 two-layer cake mix*

*1 12-ounce can ginger ale or lemon-lime soda*

*Line a 12" Dutch oven with aluminum foil. Place ¼ cup of butter in the bottom of the Dutch oven and place the Dutch oven over a bed of 8 hot prepared charcoal briquettes. When the butter has melted, pour the can of fruit pie filling on top of the melted butter. Sprinkle the cake mix evenly over the fruit pie filling. Cut the remaining ¼ cup of butter into small bits and distribute evenly over the dry cake mix. Gently pour soda evenly over cake mix. Do not stir. Put lid on Dutch oven and add 16 hot prepared charcoal briquettes on top. Bake for 30-45 minutes. When the top is lightly brown and it smells good, it is done!*