



Dutch Oven Cooking

By

James A. Lofthouse

Preface

This short paper was prompted by friends who often asked questions about Dutch oven cooking. It is in no way intended to be a comprehensive work on the subject, but merely a guide to help those newcomers to the art get started cooking. I have included three easy and tasty recipes, and some tips on care of the Dutch oven Kettle.

There are no big secrets about cooking with a Dutch oven. All the rules and common sense that go along with any cooking apply. Many recipes that can be prepared on the range top, or oven, can be cooked in the Dutch oven. The only big difference is the heat source. You may use coals from a wood fire, charcoal briquettes, or a gas fired burner. The amount of heat is regulated by the amount of coals under, or on top of, the kettle. This is something that I cannot tell you, but you just need to get started, and with some experience you will quickly get the feeling about how to regulate the heat. It pays to lift the lid, now and then, to see how things are coming along.

About the only tools you need are a shovel to manipulate the hot coals, a pair of pliers to lift the lid and kettle, a spatula, a spoon, a roll of paper towels, a Scotch Brite nylon scrubber for cleanup, and whatever other tools you need for food preparation.

Please put your fire out when finished.

It is hard to explain the lure of cooking in a cast iron kettle over coals, but just mention Dutch oven cooking and watch the crowd gather. Good Luck and good eating.

Care Of Your Dutch Oven

Your cast iron kettle will last a lifetime and give you many pleasures, if you will give it the right kind of care. When you get a new kettle you can start to use it immediately. Just wash it gently with warm water and put a light coat of soybean oil on the kettle, both inside and out, then go ahead and cook in it. As you use the kettle it will become seasoned and turn a darker color than when it was new. After use, clean the kettle immediately. Do not let it sit dirty for days or weeks. This can cause rust.

To clean the kettle, first scrape out all of the remaining food, then put some warm water in the kettle, and with a nylon Scotch Brite pad wipe off any remaining food particles. If the kettle is very greasy, you can use a few drops of dish washing detergent. Go over the outside of the kettle and lid too. Rinse with warm water and dry with a paper towel. Set aside for a few minutes to thoroughly dry.

I prefer to use a little detergent to remove most of the animal fats after cooking meats, or recipes with butter in them. The animal fats, if left on the kettle, will turn rancid in a few days giving off foul odors, and possibly giving unpleasant flavors to the next recipe cooked in the kettle. A well seasoned kettle will always appear a little oily even after washing as above. Don't try to wash all of the oil off, and make it squeaky clean; just the bulk of the fresh oil that is from the food just cooked. Too much hot water, detergent and scrubbing will remove the seasoning.

When dry, put about a teaspoonful of soybean oil in the kettle and with a paper towel spread the oil all over the kettle, both inside and out. Do the same with the lid. Soybean oil is recommended because it will dry and stick to the pan, kind of like varnish. Some of the oil will actually penetrate the iron and

result in what is called a "seasoned" pan after several such applications. Food does not readily stick to a seasoned pan, and it will be resistant to rust. Store the kettle in a dry place.

Do not put water in the kettle and let it soak for hours. This will remove the seasoning, and encourage rust. Do not "burn" out the kettle, as I have seen some people do. This is the fastest way there is to remove the oils from the iron kettle, and leave it susceptible to rust. Some oxidation will actually occur while the kettle is being burned. It will come out black, and the next time you use it your food will be discolored by the iron oxide. (rust)

Subjecting the kettle to temperatures hot enough to burn out the food will also cause carcinogens to be produced in the fats that are present. Some of these will remain in the kettle. Who needs it?

Dutch ovens are made of cast iron which will rust if not properly cared for. Rust is the kettle's worst enemy. Food will stick badly to a rusty kettle, and potatoes will come out gray colored. Bread will have a black crust. This surely ruins the appeal of the food. So, what do you do if your kettle becomes rusty? Put some warm water in the kettle, and with a Scotch Brite pad and a lot of "elbow grease" scrub off the rust. This sometimes results in some bright metal showing through, but don't worry about that; it is at least rust free again. Then dry and oil as described above for a new pan.

A new kettle, or one having just undergone a serious scrubbing, will benefit by additional coatings of oil at intervals of about a week apart for several weeks. (Use soybean oil.)

Cooking operations that require a lot of water, like boiled potatoes, or boiling corn on the cob, are very hard on the seasoning of the kettle. The water at boiling temperature will remove the oils (seasoning) from the kettle. You may want to consider obtaining a heavy stainless steel kettle, if you like to do those kind of operations on your cookouts.

All that has been said here about Dutch ovens, applies equally as well to cast iron frying pans and griddles.

What about the "NO WATER ADVOCATES" ? Many times I have heard some Dutch oven cooks swear that they never let a drop of water touch their kettles. "It ruins the seasoning." they say, so they burn them out, scrape them out, or scrub them out with dirt. I have to say, pure, utter, nonsense. They surely must have some dirty, stinky pans! It doesn't hurt a cast iron kettle to wash it, as long as you use just warm water and a few drops of detergent. The key is to do it quickly, and soon after cooking, before food can dry on, then dry and oil the kettle and store it in a dry place.

Washing also removes the ashes from the outside of the kettle. Ashes are caustic and will destroy the seasoning on the outside of the kettle. Remember, caustic substances eat away at organic materials, and the seasoning (oil) on your kettle is organic.

The methods I have outlined here will keep your kettle in fine shape, and it will look and smell good. It will be something you dare let those, who will be eating your cooking, see, without turning their stomachs. Some of the kettles I have seen, showing up at group cookouts, are enough to make one wonder if he would even want to eat anything that had been in that!

Try my methods and see if they work for you. I think you will be happy with the results.

Dutch Oven Potatoes

Ingredients:

5 lb. potatoes peeled and sliced
two tablespoons vegetable oil or margarine
4 ounces grated cheddar cheese
one good sized onion chopped
salt and pepper
a little water

Procedure:

Prepare the vegetables.

Oil the pan with the oil.

Place the vegetables in the pan.

Salt and pepper to taste.

Place the pan on hot coals. Do not put any coals on the lid.

Stir every ten minutes with a flat spatula. Go around the sides and bottom well to prevent over browning. Then add two tablespoons of water to the pan and replace lid.

When the potatoes are quite near done to your satisfaction, stir, then add the cheese. Do not stir the cheese in. Replace the lid for 5 minutes to melt the cheese, then remove from heat.

Dutch Oven Barbecued Ribs

Ingredients:

4 lb. ribs (I prefer boneless ribs with little fat)
one tablespoon vegetable oil
one medium sized onion chopped
two cloves garlic
one bottle of your favorite barbecue sauce

Procedure:

Oil the pan with the oil.

Put the ribs in the pan, put on the lid and place over hot coals. Do not put any coals on the lid.

Cook, stirring occasionally, until the ribs are slightly browned.

Add the sauce, onion, and garlic. Simmer until the ribs are tender.

Check and stir occasionally and if the sauce is getting too thick add a bit of water.

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A suitable sauce can be made with:

One quart catsup
1/2 cup vinegar
1 cup brown sugar
2 tablespoons liquid smoke

Mix all together and heat to dissolve the sugar.

May be used immediately or refrigerated for future use.

Dutch Oven Cobbler

Ingredients:

One Betty Crocker Golden Vanilla cake mix
one cube of margarine
three cans of cherry pie filling (21 oz.)
three eggs
one and one half cup water

Procedure:

Put the pie filling in the kettle and add one half cup of water.
Stir. Place the kettle on the coals to warm while the cake is being mixed.

Into a bowl put the cake mix, then cut the margarine into small pieces and add to the bowl. Add the eggs and 1 cup of water. Stir until the ingredients are mixed, but do not over mix. Too much stirring makes the cake tough. There can still be a bit of dry cake flour visible.

Spoon the cake mix onto the top of the pie filling. Do not stir.
Place the lid on the kettle and put six to seven hot coals on the lid.
Cooking time will be from 45 minutes to one hour. Check the cake by thrusting a knife into the cake and pushing sideways to see if the cake is done. It is a good idea to check the cake after 25 minutes to see how hot the kettle is. A too hot kettle will boil out too much of the liquid in the fruit and it may scorch.

This cake can be cooked with bottom heat only, as on a gas burner or range top. You can also cook it in a kitchen range oven at 325 degrees for 30 to 40 minutes.

