



# Seasoning Your Dutch Oven\*



## Seasoning

**Seasoning** a dutch oven does two things :

- Prevents rust and corrosion
- Creates a non-stick cooking surface for easier clean up

Without a good seasoning coat, your food won't taste as good as it could, your dutch oven will rust, and cleaning up after cooking will be more difficult. So, are you convinced? Good!

Seasoning is a pretty simple process, but does take an hour or more. It is **very important** that you season your brand new dutch oven or one you have just acquired. The initial seasoning will remove any undesirable contaminants and get your oven ready for that first meal. After the initial seasoning, every time you use the dutch oven you will be strengthening the coating and improving the look of your cookware.

By the way, aluminum dutch ovens benefit from seasoning even though they don't *rust* like iron. Aluminum does oxidize and the seasoning layer will prevent that. Seasoning also makes it easier to clean up due to the non-stick surface.

## Initial Seasoning

The first time you season your dutch oven, you are removing a protective waxy coating applied at the factory to prevent rust in shipment as well as starting the non-stick coating process. Some cookware now comes *pre-seasoned* from the factory so you may not need to perform this initial seasoning. If you have an outdoor barbeque grill, see if your dutch oven will fit inside with the grill cover closed. It is **much better** to season your dutch oven outside rather than in your kitchen oven, but you can do it inside. You'll want to do it on a day when you can open the windows because there will be smoke created.

This is how to season a dutch oven:

1. Preheat your grill or oven to 350 degrees.
2. If you are using your kitchen oven, wrap a large cookie sheet with a raised edge in aluminum foil and place it on the lowest possible shelf of the oven. This cookie sheet catches oil that drips from the dutch oven so make sure it is bigger than the diameter of your dutch oven.

\*NOTE: All information in this document contributed by the web site: [www.dutchovendude.com](http://www.dutchovendude.com)

3. This will be **only time** you will ever use soap on your dutch oven! After this, never use soap unless you are stripping your oven to perform a completely new Initial Seasoning. Wash your cookware in soapy hot water. Use a scouring pad or steel wool to scrub away all coatings down to the metal. Remember, after this you don't use soap to clean up.
4. Thoroughly dry the dutch oven and lid with a cotton towel or paper towels. Place it in the grill for a minute or two to really dry it and heat it up a bit. Use an oven mitt to remove the dutch oven from the grill and let it cool just enough so you can touch it.
5. Rub vegetable shortening all over the inside and outside of your dutch oven and its lid. Use plain Crisco or Wesson - do not use butter or butter flavored shortening. Using a paper towel or cotton rag, rub the shortening into all the pockmarks, holes, and dimples in the metal surface.
6. Place the dutch oven upside down in the grill or kitchen oven and close the door or grill lid. By being upside down, the melted shortening will drain out of the dutch oven leaving an even coating rather than a pool in the bottom.
7. Place the lid in the grill also so it bakes along with the dutch oven.
8. Bake the dutch oven for 45 to 60 minutes. Remember to open windows and temporarily disconnect your smoke alarm while doing this.
9. Turn off the grill and leave the dutch oven inside to cool for 15 minutes.
10. Using an oven mitt and paper towels, remove the cookware from the grill.
11. Use paper towels to wipe off excess oil from the inside and outside of the dutch oven and lid.
12. Repeat steps 5 through 9.
13. Allow the cookware to cool until you can pick it up.
14. Wipe off all excess oil with paper or cotton towels and you're ready to go!

## Periodic Seasoning

As you use your dutch oven, the grease, oil, and fat from the food you cook will continue to season the cookware. Some acidic foods such as beans and tomatoes can remove some of the coating. So, frying bacon, deep-frying fish, making doughnuts, or cooking fatty foods will improve the protective layer while acidic foods will harm it.

Once seasoned, your dutch oven will most likely not need to be seasoned again as long as you use it often and clean it correctly. It never hurts to re-season it and some folks like to do that at the start of a cooking season. It also may be necessary to re-season if food seems to be sticking too much or your cookware has been abused or stored incorrectly. If there is rust or the oven just doesn't look well coated, it's a good idea to season it again.

Periodic Seasoning is just like the Initial Seasoning except that you don't wash with soapy water. If there is rust present then you may want to strip down everything and do a complete Initial Seasoning. Otherwise, clean your cookware normally and follow the steps above except for using soap.

The finish on your dutch oven should be dark brown or black, the darker the better. It should be glossy, but not sticky. If it is sticky, you left too much oil on and you'll need to heat it more. Over time, with proper cleaning, this glossy coating will become thicker and stronger. You should notice that foods are easy to remove and clean up is simple.

Now you know how to season a dutch oven!



## Cleaning Your Dutch Oven

As they say, "Cleanliness is next to Godliness."

This is a good saying to keep in mind when caring for your dutch oven. Keeping your dutch oven clean will make heavenly meals possible while a dirty oven will make meals hard to get out of your oven. Cleaning a dutch oven is actually easier than other pots and pans, once it has been seasoned well. So, be sure to season your dutch oven before you use it and periodically as needed.

If you choose to not season your aluminum dutch oven, then the cleaning of it is just like ordinary aluminum camp ware. Use soap and water and scrub until it's clean. But, as I mentioned on other pages, a seasoned aluminum dutch oven makes better meals so I'll assume you decided to season yours or you have cast iron that is well seasoned.

A trick to make clean-up easier is to line your dutch oven with aluminum foil and then put your food in that inner shell. Another trick is to set an aluminum pie tin on 4 or 5 small pebbles in the bottom of the pot and then cook in the pie tin. Both of these methods are useful for keeping the dutch oven clean and they work well, especially for baking breads, cakes, and rolls. But, I feel that you lose a lot of the fun of dutch oven cooking when you do it that way for regular food that is meant to be cooked in the pot. So, keep those in mind, especially if you're just starting, as ways to minimize clean-up.

Cleaning is a two-step process. You first remove all food bits and then maintain the seasoned coating.

**Step #1** - to remove food, make sure everyone has scooped out the last edible parts. Then, ...

- While the dutch oven is not too hot, pour a few inches of clean water into the oven.
- Put the lid on and heat it - you could do this while you're enjoying the meal.
- Remove it from the heat and let it cool a few minutes.
- When it's cool enough to work with, use a plastic food scraper or sponge to scrape off the last bits of food that should be pretty soft and loose now.
- Discard the dirty water and rinse the pot with clean water.
- Check that you've gotten all the food off and repeat if needed.

Remember to never use any soap!

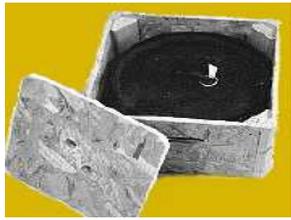
**Step #2** - to maintain the seasoned coating,

- Thoroughly dry the dutch oven. Hang it over or set it by the fire with the lid slightly askew. The heat of the fire will heat up the metal, driving out any moisture and having the lid open a bit will let that moisture escape. This should only be about 5 minutes.
- When the dutch oven is cool enough to work with, use a paper towel to rub a small amount of unflavored vegetable oil all over the inside and outside.
- Use a clean paper towel to wipe off all excess oil so there is just a thin film of protection from moisture until the next time you use it.

Once you have a good, thick seasoned coating developed, you can safely use a bit of soap when washing, but it really shouldn't be needed.

In the Midwest and other humid locations, dutch ovens have a higher risk of rusting and require more care than in drier locations such as the Rocky Mountain States. Maintaining a solid seasoned coating and that thin film of oil will keep your cookware rust-free and ready to use. If (heaven forbid) you do develop rust, please read about how to restore your dutch oven.

At some point, you will probably run into a situation where you have a disaster to clean up. Maybe you went fishing and left the dutch oven cooking for 5 hours instead of 2 or maybe the lid was not on firmly and too much moisture escaped. Whatever the excuse, you now have a lot of hard, cooked-on crust. At this point, you can both cross your fingers, scrape it all out and try to clean as described above or you can tell yourself it's about time to re-season this old pot anyway and start over.



## Storing Your Dutch Oven



So, you've cleaned your dutch oven and the camping season is over. Now, you need to store your dutch oven for a few months and prevent it from rusting and going rancid. It's not difficult, but it is important to take a few cautionary steps.

**Keep It Coated** - a very thin film of light vegetable oil should be applied after the last time you clean your dutch oven. You should try to rub off practically all the oil with paper towels and that which is left will help keep moisture away from the metal. With a good solid seasoning layer, the metal of your oven should be well protected so you may want to skip this if you've got a well-used dutch oven. Leaving too much oil on or in the oven can result in a foul, rancid smell when you pull it out of storage. If that happens, restoring your dutch oven may be required.

**Keep it Dry** - moisture is the worst thing for your dutch oven. Try to store it in a dry location which might be your garage or basement, depending on your house. Here in the Midwest, winters are very dry so I just keep mine in the garage.

**Keep Air Moving** - a useful trick is to prop the lid off the oven to allow a small amount of air circulation inside the oven. A good way to do this is to roll a paper towel into a pencil shape and set one end in the bottom of the oven. Then, put the lid on which should bend the paper towel over but keep the lid open a crack. This absorbent towel will help wick moisture out of the oven and keep it dry. You could use two or three of these paper towel wicks on larger ovens.

**Keep It Protected** - There are dutch oven bags and other accessories in which to store your cookware. I don't personally use these since my dutch ovens get a lot of abuse out in the woods anyway and nothing is going to scratch them up while they're sitting in my garage. But, if you need to transport yours a lot or you want to keep other gear clean around your dutch oven, then covering your oven would take care of that. Covering your oven, even just in a big paper bag, helps keep dust and grime off it and helps pull away moisture.

If you stop to think about it for a minute, your dutch oven is just a big hunk of strong iron. If you were to let it sit in a damp dungeon with pools of water all around for 20 years, it's going to be rusty and ugly, that's true. But, it won't really harm the utensil that much. If that were to actually happen, or if you found a dutch oven in a garage sale that looked like someone had stored it in the barn for 50 years, all you need to do is restore it. By storing your dutch oven carefully, you are just saving yourself a bunch of work next year. If you decide to just toss it in a corner of the basement, it will be just fine the next time you want to use it, but you'll just need to put in some effort seasoning it before cooking in it.

# Restoring Your Dutch Oven

So, you cooked a great peach cobbler and everyone "oohed" and "aahed" about how wonderful it tasted. Then there were some great stories around the campfire and then it suddenly started raining - as you zip your tent shut, you remember the dutch oven is still sitting out on the picnic table. Oh well, we'll just have to take care of it in the morning.



If you've built up a solid seasoning layer, your dutch oven should be just fine in the morning and a normal cleaning will take care of the dried on leftovers. But, if it is still new or the seasoning wasn't thick yet, then you'll most likely have a rusty dutch oven like the photo above. Removing rust isn't too difficult, so don't sweat it. I cleaned up the neglected oven on this page in just an hour and it looks fine now.

To fix up a rusty dutch oven, you really need to scrub all the rust off with coarse steel wool or a metal scouring pad and then re-season it to fix up the protective coating against more rusting.

A worse problem is letting your friend borrow your dutch oven and he doesn't clean out the left-over goulash that he burned to the bottom of the oven for a week while it was sitting in the back of his pickup and now it's covered with fuzzy mold. Now, what are you going to do?



Well, you've got a job ahead of you to clean out all the crud and then re-season. The best way I've found to handle this job is:

- Scrape out what you can with whatever utensil works best - butter knife, putty knife, food scraper, whatever.
- Once you have the big, hairy chunks out, then you'll need to burn out all the stuff that is stubborn. Use your propane grill to turn the crusty stuff to ash. Place the oven upside down over the propane burner, close the grill, and turn it on. The idea here is to heat up the oven to burn everything on it to ash, including the seasoning coating that you worked so hard to make over the last few years.
- Historically, the dutch oven was thrown upside down onto the hot coals of a campfire to burn off residue. I still prefer to do that when I want to redo the seasoning after a cooking disaster. This is because it usually happens on a campout and I want the people responsible to learn how to fix it. ☺
- Once the foodstuff and seasoning has smoked, burned, and dried to ash, you can carefully remove the dutch oven from the heat to cool down.
- When you can handle it, scrape off what you can with a metal scraper.
- Use coarse steel wool and water to scrub everything off down to metal.

Now, you've got a dutch oven just as it was when shipped from the factory. Follow the steps to season your dutch oven immediately and you're back in business. You really need to season it right away - waiting even a few hours in humid weather will let rust form all over the bare metal.