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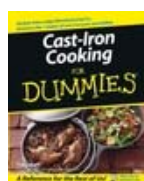
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Caring for Your Cast Iron Cookware

Adapted From: [Cast Iron Cooking For Dummies](#)

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If your cast iron is well seasoned and you can adequately control the cooking temperature, there really isn't anything you can't make in a cast-iron pan. Seasoning and temperature control, more than anything else, can determine whether you become a fan or a foe of cast iron. To nudge you farther over to the fan side, keep reading to get some other cooking tips to keep in mind.

Seasoning new cast iron pots and pans

Following these simple suggestions when your cast-iron is new ensures that your initial journey into the world of cast-iron cooking will be successful:

- **Before you cook anything, season your cast iron.** Seasoning cast iron is simply applying oil or some other fat to the pan and the baking it into the pores of the cast iron, thus creating a smooth, nonstick surface.
- **The first six or seven times that you cook in your cast iron, cook foods that are rich in natural fat or oils.** Cook bacon, hamburgers — not the lean kind — and sausage; fry chicken; or make fried potatoes. Doing so deepens the seasoning and enhances the pan's nonstick surface.
- **Wait until the pan is well seasoned before you cook some foods.** These foods include acidic foods (such as tomato-based dishes, or dishes that require citrus juice or mustard), alkaline foods (such as beans), or anything with a high-moisture content (such as soups or stews). Initially avoiding these types of foods preserves your new pan's seasoning.



If you can't wait until the seasoning builds and just have to cook your grandfather's favorite soup beans, go ahead and enjoy yourself. Just keep in mind that you may need to reseason your pan after you use it. After your cast iron is broken in really well, you can cook just about anything in it.

Do's and don'ts for cast-iron pots and pans

The following list offers a few random recommendations to keep in mind as you cook and serve in cast iron:

- **Never put a cold pan on a hot burner, pour cold liquid into a hot pan, and so forth.** If you do, you run the risk of shocking your cast iron to the breaking point, literally. Let your pan heat up as the burner heats up, and if you have to add water to a hot pan, make sure that the water is warm or hot. (The same rule applies when you clean cast iron.)



All metal cookware is susceptible to *thermal shock*, a drastic and quick change in temperature. Cast iron, being the most brittle of all metal cookware, is more likely to break; aluminum cookware is more likely to warp. Whether the result of thermal shock is a broken or warped pan, the outcome is the same: a pan that's no good for cooking anymore.



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- **Don't store food in cast iron.** The acid in the food breaks down the seasoning, and the food will take on a metallic taste. When you're done serving the food, transfer what's left to another container.
- **Although you shouldn't use your cast iron to store your food, you can use it to serve food.** Follow these suggestions:
 - Keep the food simmering until you're ready to sit down to eat.
 - Be sure to put a hot pad or trivet under the pan. Cast iron stays hot for a long time, and it could burn or mar your tabletop.
 - To keep food warm for second helpings, cover the pan while you eat.
 - As soon as your meal is over, put the food in another container for storage and then wash up.
- **Move your cast iron off an electric burner after you turn the burner off if you want the dish to stop cooking.** Unlike a gas flame, which goes out as soon as you turn the burner off, an electric burner takes a while to cool off. Because cast iron retains heat in proportion to that emitted by the heat source, a dish left over a cooling burner will still cook. This may not present a problem when you're fixing a stew (and a little extra simmer time is not an issue), but it could be a problem if you're thickening a sauce and don't want it to caramelize.
- Before you cook with cast-iron cake pans, corn-stick pans, muffin pans, and other bakeware, oil them or spray them with nonstick cooking spray. Even the fat-free kind can do the trick. Although these pans should be nonstick if they're properly seasoned, why take a chance if you're going for presentation in addition to taste?

Metal utensils and cast-iron pots and pans

Although cast iron does require some care, it isn't particularly persnickety about the type of utensils you use. You can use wooden utensils, plastic utensils, or (believe it or not) the frequently banned pariah of a Teflon-coated kitchen — metal utensils! That's right: Dust off your wire whisk and polish up that metal spoon. They're back in business, baby.

In fact, if you find yourself facing a chunk of food that seems to have permanently attached itself to your cast-iron cookware, you can even scrape it with a (hopefully clean) putty knife to pick it off. If you're so inclined — or so desperate — just remember that you may have to reseason the spot you scratched at.



Scrubbing your pan clean with a wire brush isn't a great idea. First, it isn't necessary. You can usually get even the most stubborn stuck-on food off in less abrasive ways. Second, although this type of brush won't hurt the iron, it will scrub off your seasoning, and then you'll have to start over again.

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