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Why Cast Iron

By Amanda Formaro (www.thefamilycorner.com)



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There are several reasons that people rave about cast iron cookware and many won't use anything else. Besides being an ideal heat conductor, cast iron heats evenly and consistently, is inexpensive, and will last a lifetime with the proper care. When seasoned, a cast iron pan will be stick resistant and provide delectable meals every time.

Seasoning

When you season cast iron, you are embedding grease in to the pores of the cookware. Without proper seasoning, cast iron will rust after coming in contact with water. To season your cookware, first warm your pot or skillet, then rub a thin layer of shortening (or corn oil as some cooks suggest) all over the the surface of the pan, inside and out. Lay the pan upside down inside a 350° F. oven. Most cookware manufacturers suggest heating the pan for one hour, while some cooks suggest up to 4-5 hours for just the right amount of seasoning. The



suggest up to 10 hours for just the right amount of seasoning. The shortening will turn in to a non-sticky, hard coating. Allow the pan to cool overnight as it will be quite hot. Remember, cast iron retains heat very well, so allow for ample cooling time. Some cooks recommend repeating this process one, or even two more times, before using your cookware.

Note: Acidic foods, such as tomatoes, can deteriorate the seasoned coating of your pots and pans.

Using Your Cast Iron

Preheat your cookware before preparing your meal. Water droplets should sizzle, then roll and hop around the pan, when dropped on to the heated surface. If water disappears immediately after being dropped, the pan is too hot and will surely burn your food. If water only rests and bubbles, the pan is not quite hot enough.

Caution: Do not pour significant amounts of cold liquid in to a hot skillet or pot, this can cause the cast iron to break.

Caring For Your Cookware

The conventional method, and most often recommended, is to wash your cast iron pots in boiling water, no soap, and to use a high quality scrub brush. Some cooks say there is nothing wrong with using soap when cleaning your cookware, you can even use synthetic scouring pads, just use extra care when scrubbing. Regardless of the method you choose to wash your cookware, be sure to dry it thoroughly with a lint free towel directly after washing, as cast iron is prone to rust. Seasoning your cookware after each use is also a must to retain the quality and life of the pan (although re-heating it is not necessary).

Advantages

- ✍ Durable and improves with age -- Claims have been made repeatedly that food is more flavorful
- ✍ Good heat conductor --heats evenly and quickly
- ✍ Can place pots and pans directly on glowing coals, making cast iron ideal for camping
- ✍ Inexpensive --lasts a lifetime with minimal or no damage

Disadvantages

- ✍ Weight - cast iron is quite heavy
- ✍ Having to maintain the seasoning
- ✍ Not dishwasher safe

Recommendation

Extremely high. For the value that cast iron provides, the delicious meals that it develops, and the durability that it maintains, the time it takes to care for this cookware is well worth the effort!

Recipes

We got some wonderful Cast Iron specific recipes from [Famous Dave Anderson](#). Dave is one of America's foremost authorities on authentic American "down home"



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cooking (just ask anyone who's every eaten at one of his great restaurants!). These recipes are from Dave's book [Backroads & Sidestreets](#), the proceeds of which benefit charity.



- ✦ [Famous Dave's Blackened Catfish & Shrimp](#)
- ✦ [Famous Dave's Corn Bread with Honey Jalapeño Glaze](#)
- ✦ [Famous Dave's Pineapple Upside-down Cake](#)

Amanda Formaro is the mother of four children. She is also the owner of [thefamilycorner.com](#) magazine, a wonderful online resource for parents and their kids. She and her husband live in southern Nevada.

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