Cooking With Cast Iron

When you are interested in making more comfort foods for your family, you might be thinking about the types of meals and recipes you want to prepare. However, don’t forget about what you are going to use for these meals. While you can use the oven, slow cooker, or other special appliances, the stovetop also provides a lot of amazing options. For one thing, it lets you use a cast iron skillet.

Cast iron is one of the best types of pans you can get. They don’t cost a lot of money, but they come with a lot of exceptional benefits. Your food might even taste better, which is what you want to achieve when you are using cast iron. This report goes over everything you wanted to know about cooking with cast iron, from the benefits and how to season your pan, to some recommended comfort food recipes that use cast iron cookware.

**Benefits of Using Cast Iron**

You might first be wondering why you should use a cast iron skillet, especially if you don’t have much experience with using them. Typically people have their cast iron cookware for a lifetime, but if you are new to using them, you won’t realize all the many excellent benefits that come with them. Here are some of the top reasons to switch to cast-iron:

*They Are Non-Stick*

First of all, you should know that cast iron cookware is extremely easy to take care of. This is due to the fact that the pans are non-stick. Not only are they non-stick, but they are naturally so. If you buy non-stick pans in the store that aren’t cast iron, they usually are made this way by adding Teflon. It has been shown that at extremely high heat, Teflon might not be good for your health. This is why many people are ditching non-stick and going to traditional pans. If you want to have an easy clean-up process, you can get cast iron pans instead. They are very easy to clean and you won’t have a lot of grease and tough buildup left behind.

*Cast Iron Lasts a Long Time*

If you are looking to make an investment in your cookware, instead of replacing it every couple years, then you can’t go wrong with cast iron. This type of cookware is going to last a really long time, perhaps even your entire lifetime. It is not uncommon for someone to get these pans when they are an adult, then pass them down to their children or even grandchildren. They are made of hard iron, which is almost indestructible. If you accidentally drop your pan on the ground, it might dent your tile, but the pan itself will probably be unscathed.

*These Pans Are Budget-Friendly*

Before you assume you have to make a large investment in your cast iron cookware, keep in mind that they are not expensive. Especially compared to some of the pans that are out now, each cast iron skillet should cost you about $25. This is nothing when you compare it to the trendy pans that are out, especially when you want something non-stick and that is going to last more than a couple years. Not only is each pan less expensive, but one pan can replace a lot of other cookware. You are able to use a single cast iron skillet as a cornbread pan, griddle, bread pan, and even stock pot. It has a lot of uses, so you save money by not needing a lot of different pieces in your cookware set.

*The Heat is Distributed Evenly*

As far as cooking goes, many people prefer cast iron because of how well the food cooks. The heat distributes much more evenly with these pans, so that the food it cooked quickly, stays moist, and holds onto its juices. You aren’t going to deal with a grilled cheese sandwich that is burnt on half and uncooked on the other, or bake bread that isn’t completely done on the inside, but done on the outside.

**How to Care For Cast Iron**

Now that you know the reasons why you should consider switching to cast iron, you can start learning how to use, take care of, and cook with the pans. The first lesson that is really important is learning how to actually take care of them. One considerable different between these and other types of pans or skillets is that you can ruin them if you treat them badly. While it is true they are strong and indestructible in the way that the metal lasts a long time, the actual cooking power of the pans could worsen if you don’t follow the right instructions. The following includes some important things to learn when taking care of your cast iron pans.

*Don’t Let Them Air Dry*

This might seem weird, because you would think water sitting on the pans is no big deal, but it is one of the more common mistakes made with cast iron skillets. These pans should be dried after rinsing them, with either s soft dish towel or paper towels. Water droplets that are left on the pan while it air dries could eventually cause rust. This means a pan that should have lasted 100 years, is now only going to last a decade or longer. Another good way to prevent rust is to add a drop of olive oil to the pan after it has been washed and dried.

*Avoid Using Soap*

The only time you should use soap on your cast iron pan is when you first get it from the store. You are going to season it after buying it, so this is really the only time dish soap should be used, with a few other exceptions. For the most part, you are only going to rinse and dry the pans, not use soap. Soap is going to remove everything good from the pan, including the seasonings. Don’t worry about bacteria; you are rinsing the pans with hot water and removing all traces of food particles from the pan. Soap really isn’t necessary to remove food from the pan if you wash it shortly after it cools off. If something is stuck on the pan, let it cool off, rinse and dry. You can then add some sea salt to the pan and use the salt to scrub it.

*Get Rid of the Metal Spatulas*

You also need to be careful about the type of cooking utensils that are used with this pan. You should never use metal spoons or spatulas with the pan since it can cause scratching on the bottom of the pan. These can also lift some of the metal surface, causing flakes in your food. Instead of metal, get some spatulas that are made of wood, silicone, or plastic. If you are making pasta and need to use tongs, metal are okay as long as they are not scraping the surface. Otherwise, try to get plastic or silicone tongs just to be safe.

*Store the Pans in a Dry Place*

When you are finding a good place to store your cast iron skillet, a place where they will remain dry is best. You don’t want any moisture, water, or humidity to end up on the pans and cause them to rust. For this reason, they are not good for hanging from pot hangers in your kitchen. These are great for other types of cookware, but it probably gets humid in your kitchen on hot days and when you are cooking a lot, and the moisture is disastrous for cast iron. Try to find a good place in your pantry or cupboards for the cast iron, and never store them with the lids on top.

**Why Cast Iron Needs to Be Seasoned**

Something you will notice when you start looking up tips for using cast iron pans is that they need to be ‘seasoned’. This is part of the reason why you don’t want to use soap when washing the pans; it can remove the seasoning, requiring you to start over again. Seasoning a cast iron pan is not only going to help your food taste better and cook more evenly, but this coating is what makes your cast iron skillet a non-stick pan.

Seasoning is the process of adding oil to the pan and baking it. This is what is going to give it that non-stick surface you are looking for. Before you begin here are some things to keep in mind:

* You may need to eventually repeat the seasoning process. If food starts sticking to the pan or you get black flakes on your food, it is a good time to wash the pan and repeat the seasoning process.
* Seasoning must be done with brand new cast iron skillets. They never arrive out of the box already seasoned. Try to remember to do this before you cook anything.
* When you are rinsing the cast iron pan, never use boiling hot water. You do want to use warm or hot water to kill food bacteria since you aren’t washing it with soap, but if the water is too hot, it can cause rust on the pan.
* Designate a single dish towel for drying off the pan. This towel might end up with some dark smudges on it, which is why you don’t want to use up all your dish towels on the cast iron skillet.

How to Season Your Cast Iron skillet

The following instructions will guide you through the process of seasoning your cast iron pan or skillet. This should be done with all pans when you first purchase them and whenever you see signs of needing to repeat the process.

**Preheat your oven.** Your oven will need to be nice and hot when you are ready to bake the pan, so preheat it to 325 degrees Fahrenheit. Make sure you don’t make it any hotter than this, or it will be too hot for the skillet during the seasoning process.

**Wash the pan.** While your oven is preheating to the right temperature, wash your skillet. Whether it is brand new or you are re-seasoning it, washing needs to be done. This is the only time when you will use soap to wash the skillet. Scrub the surface with the warm water, dish soap, and a sponge. A stiff brush can also be used, just make sure you don’t use a harsh metal brush, or it might scratch the pan.

**Rinse and dry the pan.** Once you are satisfied with how clean the pan is, you can then rinse it with warm water, making sure all of the soap is gone from the pan. After it is rinsed, dry it immediately using a dish towel or paper towels. You want to use something that won’t leave any lint behind, so you may prefer using a microfiber cloth for drying it.

**Apply your oil.** When the pan is completely dry, you can begin adding the oil to the pan. Use either vegetable oil or shortening that is melted. Apply the oil to the pan’s surface with a paper towel, adding it to the inside and outside of the skillet. You can also use olive oil if you prefer, though vegetable oil is strongly preferred.

**Bake the pan.** By this point, your oven should be preheated. Put a sheet of aluminum foil on the bottom rack of the pan so that it can catch drips from the oil as it melts due to the heat. Put your pan directly on the middle rack, upside down on the rack. Let it bake in the oven for about an hour. After the hour is up, turn the oven off and open the door to let it cool off faster, but don’t remove the pan until it has cooled completely.

**Essential Tips For Cooking With Cast Iron**

By this point, you know about the benefits of using cast iron, how to care for your pans, and the simple instructions for seasoning them. Before getting into some different foods that are good to make in your cast iron skillet, let’s first talk about cooking in general. There are some tips that will help you use your cast iron pans and skillets to have tasty food and protect your pans in the process. Here are some simple tips for cooking with cast iron.

*Cook With Healthy Fats*

While you will be using vegetable oil when you season your pan because it is known to be really good for this purchase, you should try to avoid this type of oil when actually cooking with your pan. A better option for cooking with cast iron is to use healthy fats. Some of the best fats to use when cooking with cast iron pans are butter, olive oil, and coconut oil. Other oils might be needed for certain recipes, but a good rule of thumb is to try to stick to your healthy fats as much as possible.

*Be Careful With the Utensils You Use*

You already know that metal spatulas are a big no-no, but make sure you are following this same rule with other utensils. You might think that a small metal spoon to stir your chili really quick in the cast iron pan is no big deal, but even a small metal spoon can cause scraping of the pan. No matter what utensils you are using in your pan, even if it will only be touching the bottom of the pan for moment, make sure they are not made of metal. However, stainless steel is usually safe, along with bamboo, wood, silicone, and plastic.

*Always Use a Pot Holder*

Something that all cast iron pans have in common is that they get extremely hot. These pans are not like other pans you buy at the store where they have a cool handle. The handle is going to get nearly as hot as the pan itself, so make sure you get into the habit of covering your hands whenever handling the skillet. Keep a pot holder, handle covers, or dish towels around at all times so that you never grab that hot handle with your bare hands and burn yourself.

*Leave Some Oiling the Pan*

When you are finished cooking something with oil, such as when making stir-fry or sautéing vegetables, you probably pour the excess oil into a container, and wipe off the pan with a dish towel to remove the oil before washing. This is often done in order to prevent all that oil from ending up in your drain and leading to a clog. However, with cast iron pans, it is okay to leave a tiny bit of oil at the bottom. Pour out the excess as you normally would, but then just dab it with a paper towel instead of getting rid of every trace. This oil can actually help coat the pan and keep it properly seasoned.

*Dry the Pan on the Stovetop*

If you don’t want to dry your cast iron pan with a towel every time, you can use the stovetop instead. After it has been rinsed following cooking, shake out as much water as you can, then place it on a burner. Turn the burner on just low heat and let it sit there for a few minutes. Once the water evaporates, you can then carefully remove the pan, let it cool off, then store it as you normally would.

**Cast Iron Chicken Recipes**

Now let’s talk about some delicious recipes you can make with your newly seasoned cast iron pan! There are so many things you can make with this type of pan, from main courses and side dishes, to healthy food, bread, desserts, breakfast, and lots more. A popular category of food to make includes dishes made with chicken, which is what is going to be covered in this section. Take a look at some of these chicken recipes to make with your cast iron skillet or pan.

*Chicken Pot Pie*

Think you need a baking dish to make chicken pot pie? Think again! You can make a big chicken pot pie right in your cast iron skillet, then serve it to your family. This is all done in just one pan, so the prep work and clean-up is a lot easier than if you made it the traditional way. This recipe is based on some other recipes for chicken pot pie, so you can always adjust the filling ingredients to whatever you like. The following ingredients list are just recommendations for you to start with. First of all, the pie crust is most likely going to use flour, salt, ice water, butter, and some cheddar cheese if you want it flavored. Here are some recommended ingredients for the filling:

* Chicken broth
* Butter
* Flour
* Salt
* Pepper
* Half and half
* Celery
* Carrots
* Onions
* Chicken
* Egg
* Peas
* Seasonings (thyme, garlic, poultry, anything you like)

You will need to make your pie crust first, which uses a food processor to combine the flour and salt, butter, and then the cheese. Once it is made into a dough, it will be refrigerated, then placed into your pan and spread out evenly. You will then combine the filling ingredients and add them to the crust inside of your pan. You can place the skillet right in your oven to bake your pie after covering the top with the dough. Remember, you can find more detailed recipes, this is just an idea of what you can do.

*Honey Lime Chicken*

Another chicken dish that uses your cast iron skillet is to make chicken right on your stovetop. There are a lot of different ways to make your chicken, but honey lime chicken is definitely a fan favorite! This is perfect for comfort food, whether it is the fall season, or you want something light for a summer lunch. This chicken is great because it has a lot of flavor, but can be combined with many different side dishes to have a different meal every time. Unlike the chicken pot pie, this chicken is going to be made on the stovetop with your cast iron pan.

You are going to heat up your boneless and skinless chicken breasts on the pan with olive oil, honey, lime juice and zest from a lime, and soy sauce. You can choose any combination of seasonings you prefer, though salt, pepper, cumin, chili powder, and garlic are often good with this type of dish.

**Cast Iron Beef Recipes**

Now for some delicious and easy-to-prepare beef recipes! This includes a couple yummy recipes that you can make with your cast iron skillet and very few other pans or bowls for mixing. It makes it to where you can feed your family a nice comfort meal with your brand new pan that has been seasoned to perfection.

*Skillet Meatloaf*

Let’s start with a meal you probably never thought you would cook in a skillet! Meatloaf is often something the entire family can come together and enjoy. It is the ultimate comfort food and allows you to serve it with your favorite potato recipe and vegetable sides, or as a lighter meal with just a side salad. The cast iron skillet is actually perfect for making a meatloaf large enough to feed even a big family.

Just like other meatloaf recipes, you will need ground beef, oats, onion, seasonings, Worcestershire sauce, and plenty of ketchup for this recipe. You can switch up the sauce and seasonings to your family liking. You might prefer some garlic in your meatloaf, or your kids may like a little barbecue sauce in addition to the ketchup to give it a little kick.

When making it in the cast iron skillet, you will still place it in the oven. Combine the meatloaf ingredients, including all sauces and seasonings, and add it into your skillet. Press it down to fit the shape of the inside of the pan, then bake it for about an hour.

*Filet Mignon*

You can also make yourself a delicious filet mignon steak dinner with the cast iron skillet. This type of pan is perfect when you want your filet mignon pan-seared since it cooks evenly. You can make your filet mignon with just olive oil, salt, pepper, and butter, or prepare it with a nice herb butter sauce. If you decide to go with the sauce, add extra butter, garlic, and herbs like rosemary and tarragon. You can make the entire steak on the stovetop, but a better option is to pan-sear it, but also cook it in the oven to perfection. If you choose the latter option, you want your oven to be preheated to 400 or 415 degrees Fahrenheit. Sear filet mignon on the stovetop first, then finish baking it in the oven until cooked to how you like it.

**Cast Iron Full Meals**

In addition to making your main courses with the cast iron skillet, you can also use it to make full meals for your family. This means everything for the main part of the meal is cooked right in the skillet. This really helps to simplify the cooking process and allows you to get some more use out of your cast iron skillet. Like the previous recipes, these full meals might use the oven, stovetop, or both.

*Spaghetti and Meatballs*

Do you love to have spaghetti and meatballs? If so, this is going to be the perfect recipe for you! The cast iron skillet is perfect for this one-pan dish. You are able to cook your spaghetti and sauce in the pan without having to boil the noodles first, so it makes it a little bit easier to prepare this type of dinner. For the spaghetti and meatball dinner, you should start with cooked meatballs. You might want to make them beforehand, or get cooked meatballs that just need to be heated up. You will also need your spaghetti noodles, marinara sauce, seasoning, olive oil, cheese, garlic, and onion.

To make spaghetti and meatballs in a cast iron skillet, you will begin by sautéing your onions and garlic on the stove and adding in your meatballs, followed by remaining seasonings and the jar of marinara sauce. You can heat it up on the stovetop for about 30 minutes or until cooked through. The spaghetti noodles will cook along with the other ingredients, but you can start with cooked noodles if you prefer. You will then top it with cheese and pop it in the oven for a few minutes just to make it bubbly.

*Chili and Cornbread*

Another excellent comfort food meal that you can make with your cast iron skillet is chili and cornbread. Some ingredients you will need for the chili and cornbread dinner, include:

* Ground beef or ground turkey
* Chili beans
* Black beans
* Corn
* Tomato sauce
* Chili seasoned tomatoes
* Shredded cheese
* Cornbread mix
* Milk
* Eggs
* Oil

Keep in mind, like other recipes listed here, this is not a complete recipe. It is simply meant to provide you with some inspiration for the types of meals you can prepare. You will be able to find a full recipe with exact ingredients by doing a quick search. This recipe will be made both on the stovetop and in the oven.

You start by cooking your ground beef on the stovetop and draining out the grease. Combine the other ingredients to the beef, including the beans, corn and tomato sauce. Bring those ingredients to a boil and simmer for a few minutes. You can mix up your cornbread batter in a bowl, then pour it right into the pan where you are making the chili, pushing it off to one side. Bake it according to the direction with the chili also in the pan.

*Corned Beef Breakfast*

If you want to try a breakfast meal in the cast iron skillet, corned beef hash is a great option. This combines a classic corned beef hash with huevos rancheros. For this recipe, you will need canned corned beef hash, seasonings, salsa or chile sauce, eggs, and oil. You need to preheat your oven to get it ready, then heat up your canned hash on the stovetop. Crack your eggs into the pan in open spaces and add in your seasonings. You will then bake until everything is cooked through and top with your salsa and beans.

**Cast Iron Dessert Recipes**

You can also make some amazing dessert recipes in your cast iron skillet! You no longer need a bunch of different casserole and baking dishes just to have an impressive and delicious dessert for your family. When you are talking about comfort cooking, it often includes having a nice dessert you can enjoy after dinner. It gives you a little bit more family time at the dining room table before everyone goes off to do their own things in the evening. Here are some fun and tasty dessert ideas for your cast iron pan.

*Chocolate Chip Cookie*

Yes, you definitely can make a large chocolate chip cookie in your skillet. This is actually really fun because you can add anything you want to it, serve it with toppings or ice cream, and take little pieces of it for each person of the family. Kids also really enjoy putting together a large chocolate chip cookie in a cast iron skillet, just make sure they are super careful when the pan starts heating up.

You will prepare your chocolate chip dough the same way as you would any other chocolate chip cookies, such as ingredients like brown sugar, granulated sugar, butter, vanilla extract, baking soda, flour, and salt. Add in either chocolate chunks, chocolate chips, or a combination of both. You can get a different flavor if you use toffee chips or white chocolate chips instead. You can even add small candy pieces to the dough.

Add your dough to the skillet, smoothing it out as much as you can. You can line it with parchment paper first so it doesn’t stick and that you can peel off the pieces of cookie easily. Bake it for between 15 and 25 minutes, depending on how soft or hard you like your cookies. Consider sprinkling it with some sea salt or drizzling melted caramel on top when it is done.

*Peach Cobbler*

If you want to go for a fruit-based dessert, you can use your cast iron skillet to make a nice peach cobbler. Simple ingredients will help you make your cobbler, including butter, sugar, flour, milk, baking powder, and peaches. You can either get canned peaches or slice them fresh if they are currently in season. You will start by pouring the peaches directly into the cast iron skillet, then melting the butter and pouring it on top. Make a batter for the cobbler by combining baking powder, milk, flour, and sugar, then pouring it on top in the skillet. Bake it for about 35 minutes or until golden brown.

As you can see, there is a lot you are able to do with a cast-iron skillet. Make sure you follow the instructions in this report to clean, take care of, store, and season your skillet properly. As long as you do that, you can use it for an endless amount of delicious recipes for every meal of the day, including dessert.