



BEGINNER'S



**DUTCH
OVEN
COOKBOOK**

MARK HANSEN & MATT PELTON

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INTRODUCTION TO DUTCH OVEN

Why You Should Dutch Oven and Oven Buyer's Guide

MARK HANSEN, *Black Pot for Beginners*

In the five years since I started doing this, I've learned why I love the Dutch oven so much and why it's my cooking method of choice.

IT'S SLOW

We live in a microwave and fast-food world. We grab breakfast as we dash out the door, we pick up dinner on our way home, and we throw things together at the last minute. We cook because we're hungry, and we do it fast because we need to check more things off our to-do lists.

I'm caught up in this as much as the next guy. I rush to work and shuffle my kids off to activities and appointments. My life is way too full, and my head spins as it plunges into my pillow in exhaustion at the end of the day.

Except on Sunday. Sunday, after church, is my cooking day. It's precious time to me. Life slows down. I can cook up something not only because we're all wanting to eat at dinnertime but also because it's going to be delicious. I can take the extra time to cook it slowly to make sure the flavors develop. I can breathe in the aromas deeply and savor

the samples along the way. I can turn a few fresh ingredients into something amazing, I can take a few hours to do it ... and I can sit and watch the coals burn down as dinner cooks. Don't bother me. I'm cooking.

IT'S EASY BUT CHALLENGING

Because, at its core, it's simply the process of heating up food, Dutch oven cooking is no different than cooking in other circumstances, like indoors.

However, it's also a bit more challenging: There are more variables when cooking this way. Regulating the temperature can be tricky, especially in varying weather conditions. Mother nature doesn't always cooperate. Cooking times can change. And ingredients respond differently.

Making a meal on your stove is something you do every day. Making it on your back porch or while camping in the wild is another thing altogether!

IT'S VERSATILE

Really, there are few meals that you can't cook in a Dutch oven. Part of my experimentation is driven toward finding those meals, and I haven't found anything so far. Some things have to be adapted a bit, but really, it's all fair game!

I get a special kick out of sharing something I've just cooked with someone and having them say incredulously, "You cooked that in a Dutch oven?"

IT'S DELICIOUS

Someone once told me that the worst dish in a Dutch oven is still better than most dishes from a regular stove. I don't know if I fully agree. I've cooked a few things (like the Great Corned Beef and Cabbage Disaster of 2007) that might change his mind. Still, Dutch oven cooking has a mystique to it, a magic that translates into flavor.

Part of this magic comes from the way the heavy lid traps the moisture, steaming the food. Another part, I'm sure, comes from the slow, even heat of the cast iron. Part of it even comes from the extra care I take when I'm cooking our Sunday dinners. Whatever the reason, the magic is there. The proof is in the flavor.

IT'S IMPRESSIVE

A long time ago, I made a really fancy dinner for my wife and some friends for Mother's Day. I did a crown roast of pork. I can still remember hefting the huge, 14-inch, deep Dutch oven onto the trivet on the table and lifting off the lid. The steam wafted up, and the smell hit them first. Then, when our vision cleared, that glazed, rich roast was there in the pot with the oranges and the veggies, and it looked soooo good. I heard a collective gasp from everyone around. This was one of my finer culinary moments.

When you pull off something like that (or the family's Thanksgiving turkey or a special treat) and your friends are amazed that it came from your back porch instead of your stove, you feel joy! Even the easy stuff, at a campout or a backyard party, will thrill and delight.

IT'S SOCIAL

It's fun to cook for others, and it's also fun to cook with others. Organizations exist to promote the joys of Dutch oven cooking; we'll talk about these in more detail later on, but there's nothing like coming together with your gear and your ingredients to a "Dutch oven gathering," or DOG, and sharing your food and your fun. I don't experience this joy nearly as often as I would like.

IT'S TRADITIONAL AND HISTORICAL

Part of me, while I'm cooking on my back porch, thinks of my ancestors who crossed the dreary plains in covered wagons and handcarts, cooking their evening meals by the trailside in their own Dutch ovens. True, they probably didn't cook some of the crazy things I do, but I somehow connect with them when I'm cooking.

IT'S PRACTICAL

I know a lady (a fellow Dutch oven blogger: dutchovenmadness.com) who cooked for her family for a whole year in her Dutch ovens and blogged about it. Not long after completing her twelve-month cycle, their regular stove gave out. However, she was ready, and she was still able to feed her family.

I don't have a personal story quite that dramatic. But during the occasional stormy night, when the power has gone out, I've been able to cook for my family as well. It's fun to note that on those nights, we don't just eat, we eat well.

IT'S FUN

To me, this is really what it all comes down to. If I didn't enjoy learning new skills, trying new dishes, and making delicious food, I wouldn't still be doing it years later. I wouldn't be cooking. I wouldn't be blogging about it. And I definitely wouldn't be writing any cookbooks.

HOW TO SHOP FOR A DUTCH OVEN

If you're going to cook in a Dutch oven, of course you'll need to have one. This alone can be an intimidating proposition. Don't be overwhelmed by it. Really, you can cook in any Dutch oven. Read on, and you'll make a smarter first purchase.

Someone posted on my Facebook fan page a while back, asking a question I get asked often: "How do I shop for a Dutch oven? How do I know what to look for? How do I buy one that's the best for me?"

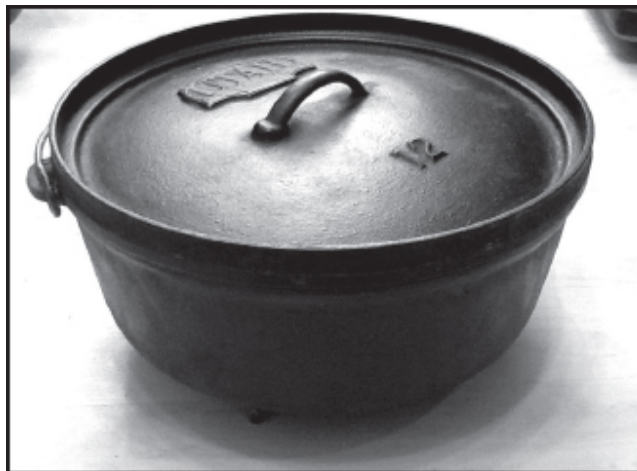
It depends on what you're looking for. That's the simple answer, but let's break it down. I'm presuming, by the way, that those reading this chapter are probably buying their first Dutch oven. If you've already got one or two and you're looking to buy another, you'll still be looking for the same basic things, but your reasons for buying will be different, and you'll possibly have a different result.

Consider four basic variables when deciding which Dutch oven to buy: the type, the size, the material, and the quality.

THE TYPE

You have two basic options for Dutch ovens: “camp” or “stove.” Your best choice will depend on what type of cooking you’ll be doing.

A camp Dutch oven is primarily designed for outdoor cooking using wood coals or charcoal briquettes. This oven type has a lip around the perimeter of the lid, which keeps the coals on the lid and prevents ash from falling down into the food when you lift it. It also has legs on the bottom that elevate the oven above any coals you want to put underneath.



A stove Dutch oven is designed primarily for indoor use. This oven type doesn’t have legs, because you’ll be setting it in your oven or resting it directly on your stove’s burner, and it doesn’t have the lip around the lid because you won’t be setting coals on top. Some of these ovens will even be coated in colored enamels.



It is possible to use a camp Dutch oven indoors, but it's not as convenient. It's also possible to use a stove Dutch oven outdoors, but it's tricky.

SIZE GUIDE

Size	Uses / Comments
8-inch	When I first got my 8-inch, I didn't think I'd use it much, but I use it a lot for rice, veggies, and other sides. I also use it often for sauces and gravies.
10-inch	I don't use my 10-inch much, but it really comes in handy when I'm cooking something that requires less space. Great for breads, cakes, and side dishes.

<p>12-inch shallow</p>	<p>This is the workhorse of my collection. I use them every week. Yes, I said “them.” That means that have more than one! You can make almost anything in this basic Dutch oven.</p>
<p>12-inch deep</p>	<p>For those rare occasions when a whole chicken or roast won’t fit in a 12-inch shallow, it’s nice to have a deep oven. If you’re cooking a stew or chili for lots of people, you can’t beat this.</p>
<p>14-inch shallow</p>	<p>I don’t own one of these, and I’ve only encountered two or three dishes when I really wanted one. I think it would be useful when cooking mair dishes for crowds.</p>
<p>14-inch deep</p>	<p>I have two of these, and I use them lot, for turkeys and hams, especially Our family holidays would not be the same without them.</p>
<p>Larger</p>	<p>Larger sizes and shapes of Dutch ovens do exist. I’ve not felt a compelling urge to be found in</p>

Guinness World Records for owning the biggest Dutch oven of all. I would probably also be there for the man with the most pulled and/or strained muscles at a time.

If this is your first oven and you're merely interested in experimenting a little, I'd recommend a 12-inch, shallow oven. This will have the capacity to feed a family of four with some leftovers, and it can easily cook for a gathering of as many as eight, depending on what you're cooking. Breads, stews, chilis, desserts, and even small roasts can easily be done in a 12-inch Dutch oven.

If you're in the market for a more than one oven, here is my recommendation for a good, basic set of Dutch ovens for family cooking:

- (1) 8-inch Dutch oven
- (1) 12-inch, shallow Dutch oven
- (1) 12-inch, deep Dutch oven

This will allow you to cook almost anything you want. It will also facilitate cooking multiple things at once. You can use the deep 12-inch as if it were a shallow. This small collection won't cost you an arm and a leg either.

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