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nutrichef
THE CARE & KEEPING GUIDE
CASTIRON COOKWARE

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**CAST
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COOKWARE**
THE CARE & KEEPING GUIDE





TAKING CARE OF CAST-IRON PANS

Some people even have cast-iron passed down to them by their parents or grandparents, because the more you use them, the better it gets. It is basically indestructible if you take good care of it. Seasoned it properly, your cast-iron could last a lifetime.

1

SEASON A NEW CAST-IRON PANS

Cast-iron's nonstick coating is a layer of "seasoning" made up of oil that is baked into the surface of the skillet. New cast iron typically has a coating to protect it during shipping and storage.



Preheat the oven to 350 °F (177 °C)

Don't plan on cooking anything else in the oven while you season the cast iron since the process can be affected by steam created by cooking other food.

Wash and dry the cast-iron

Use soap and a scrub brush to completely scour it. This is the only time you'll be using these items to clean your skillet; after it's seasoned, you no longer scour it.

Coat the skillet

Coat the cast-iron in and out with lard, vegetable shortening, or olive oil. Make sure it is completely coated, and rub it in with a paper towel.

Place the skillet in the oven

Let the fat or oil bake into its surface for two hours. Remove the skillet from the oven and allow it to cool.

Repeat this process three times

It takes more than one coating of oil to completely season cast iron cookware. To make sure you have a good nonstick surface that won't strip off when you cook food, give it another coat of fat or oil, cook it, let it cool, and repeat the process again.

2

RESCUE A RUSTY CAST-IRON SKILLET

Old and rusty ones can be restored through the seasoning process. This guide book will help you season rescue a rusty old one and maintain a skillet so it doesn't lose its seasoning.



Scrub your skillet down to its base layer

First things first, you want to scrub your cast iron down with steel wool, hot water, and mild dish soap to get it to the base layer. Scrub the entire pan, including the handle and the bottom and sides of it. These pans are actually one piece of cast iron, and you want to season the whole thing, not just the inside. Once you've finished scrubbing the pan, rinse it under hot water and continue scrubbing with a non-metal scouring pad or the tough side of a sponge.

Completely dry the skillet to prevent rusting

Towel-dry the skillet after rinsing. Then, place in a hot oven or heat on the stovetop to dry completely. This will ensure that any excess moisture boils off and the skillet is completely bone-dry. This is the most crucial step to prevent rusting.

Add a thin layer of oil

Pour a small drop of oil into the skillet and spread it around with a paper towel or dish towel, covering the entire pan. Then take the clean side of your towel and wipe off any excess oil. Cast-iron cookware is porous, and the oil works to fill those pores and create a smooth, nonstick surface. Enough oil soaks into those pores during the initial coating, so you can go ahead and wipe off as much as you can. Leaving too much oil on is a common mistake that will leave your skillet sticky.

Note: Flaxseed oil is the new standard, since it dries the hardest and creates the best, longest-lasting nonstick seasoning, but it's also pretty expensive. If you don't want to spend that much money, canola oil will also work just fine.



Heat in the oven

After coating the skillet in oil, place upside down in your oven at the highest temperature it can go — between 450°F and 500°F. The high heat allows the oil to break down and bond with the cast iron. If your oven isn't hot enough, the oil won't break down and your skillet will come out sticky. This process takes about one hour. After that hour is up, turn off your oven and let the skillet cool off in there.

For regular maintenance, do this process at least twice a year. Just start with adding a thin layer of oil and heating it past the smoking point in the oven.



MAINTAIN A CAST IRON SKILLET

Clean it right away

Cast iron is easiest to clean right after cooking before the food has a chance to become one with the skillet. As soon as it is cool enough to touch, wipe out the food remnants with a towel and rinse it with hot water. For a gentle and very effective cleaning method, scrub your skillet with salt and hot water. Scrubbing your skillet with salt and hot water with a non-metal scouring pad or the tough side of a sponge is the gentlest way to clean it. The salt works as an abrasive to scrub off food without damaging the seasoning.

Caked-on food can also be burned off. Place your skillet in an oven turned to very high heat. The food will turn to ash, which can be brushed off once the skillet has cooled down. If you use this method you'll have to re-season the skillet, since the seasoning will get burned off, too.

Don't use soap or a wire scrub brush on seasoned cast iron. It will scrape off the seasoning, removing the nonstick surface allowing moisture to react with the metal and create rust.

Completely dry the skillet on the stovetop or in a hot oven

After you scrub it with the salt and water, rinse off and towel dry. Again, fully dry the pan in a hot oven or by heating it on the stovetop to evaporate any excess moisture and prevent rusting.

Add a protective layer of oil

Once the skillet is completely dry and still warm, carefully spread a very thin protective layer of oil along the inside of the pan. Heat the pan in a hot oven or on the stovetop until the oil begins smoking. You want to bring the oil to its smoking point so that it doesn't turn rancid.

WHAT IS THE BEST OIL TO SEASON CAST IRON WITH?

Unsaturated oils are best for seasoning because their chemical structure is more reactive than saturated oils. This makes it easier for them to polymerize to the metal. Saturated oils, like bacon grease and lard, were commonly used in the past because they were cheap, readily available, and unsaturated enough to get the job done, but from a molecularly perspective they're less than ideal.

While any unsaturated oil will do, there is a growing consensus that pure, organic flaxseed oil is the best – especially for a major re-seasoning. Its most desirable quality is that it is technically a drying oil. That means Flaxseed oil starts to harden when exposed to air, which can help create a rock hard polymerized layer on your cast iron. Make sure the oil you purchase is organic, and that the only ingredient listed is “organic flaxseed oil”.

If flaxseed oil seems a little too expensive or hard to track down, nearly any unsaturated cooking oil will be fine. Some of the more common ones we use are grapeseed, canola, or vegetable oil.

COOKING WITH CAST IRON

One of the easiest ways to maintain the seasoning on your cast iron is to cook with it regularly! Using your pan to saute, fry, or sear is a great way to continually add to your seasoning. But before you start cooking, there are few things you want to know about first.



Preheat

Cast iron takes longer to heat up than other types of cookware. So before you start cooking, it's a good idea to preheat your pan for a little bit. Additionally, preheating your pan will help prevent food from sticking to it while you cook.

Use Cooking Oil

Using a little cooking oil never hurts when sauteeing. Depending on what we're cooking, we usually add a little bit of oil into the pan, particularly for dishes like eggs.

Avoid super acidic foods

While it's fine to cook a quick tomato sauce or occasionally deglaze with some white wine, you'll want to avoid cooking really acidic foods for an extended period of time. Over time those acids will start to break down the pan's seasoning.

Metal utensils are fine

Unless you are really gouging at it, metal utensils will not damage the seasoning of your cast iron if you have a good layer.

THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN COOKING WITH CAST-IRON PANS

- **MAKE SURE YOU NEVER LEAVE WATER ON THE SKILLET**
- **MAKE SURE LAYERS OF OIL ARE THIN AS POSSIBLE AND HEATED PAST THE OIL'S SMOKE POINT TO BOND WITH THE SKILLET**
- **ALWAYS PREHEAT THE SKILLET**
- **ONLY USE STEEL WOOL WHEN BRINGING THE SKILLET DOWN TO ITS BASE LAYER**



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