



Cast-Iron Skillets:

Friends for Life

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Whether you bought a cast-iron skillet recently from a local store, found it at a thrift shop, or had it handed down from a loved one, it may become a treasured helper in the kitchen. There are other forms of cast-iron cookware, including griddles, muffin pans, casserole dishes, and more. Regardless of the type, cast iron is durable and can serve you in the kitchen for years to come.

History of Cast Iron Cooking

Cast-iron cookware has ancient roots, first crafted in 6th century BCE China by pouring molten metal into sand molds. While the process remains largely unchanged, modern factories now automate production. By the early 1900s, dozens of American companies had joined the cast iron boom, shaping a legacy that still sizzles today.

Cooking in Cast Iron

Cast iron holds heat well and allows for even cooking. It works well with both gas and electric ranges. Check the manufacturer's instructions for use with glass-top ranges. For stovetop use, allow time for the pan to come to temperature over medium or low heat before adding foods or cooking fats (e.g., butter, oil), then adjust the temperature as needed. Since cast iron keeps heat well, it also stays hot longer. Use caution to avoid burns even after pans have been removed from the heat.



Cooking acidic foods in cast iron can increase the amount of iron in the food. Acidic foods include fruit, tomato, and vinegar-based dishes. Examples include braising greens with apple cider vinegar or simmering a tomato-based stew with meat in a large cast-iron skillet. This is helpful for people who may be low in iron or who have iron-deficiency anemia.

When you cook acidic foods in a cast-iron pan, they can sometimes taste a little metallic, especially if the food simmers for a long time. To avoid this:

- ✓ Make sure your pan is well-seasoned before cooking.
- ✓ Keep simmering time short, ideally under 30 minutes.
- ✓ Add acidic ingredients later in the recipe if you can.

Cooking acidic foods often can wear down the pan's seasoning, so you might need to re-season it more often. Even with these steps in place, additional iron can come from the pan for those who are looking to boost iron intake. People with certain health conditions that have naturally high levels of iron in their blood should talk to a health-care provider about using cast-iron cookware often.

Washing Cast Iron

Use and care for cast iron may be a little different than other kinds of cookware. Even though cast iron is very durable, you do need to protect it from rust. Clean by scraping out the remaining food with a wooden or sturdy plastic utensil, then wash with running hot water and a nylon or plain steel wool scrubber. Avoid scraping cast iron with metal utensils, which can scratch and remove the seasoning on the pan. Use a small amount of mild dish soap only if needed, for sticky or strongly flavored food. Rinse thoroughly and dry right away with a cloth or paper towel. Wipe with a thin layer of mildly flavored vegetable oil. Never soak in a sink full of water, place in a dishwasher, or allow to air-dry with water still on it. If stacking pieces for storage, place a paper towel or sheet of parchment paper between them to protect them from damaging each other. Store cast iron away from damp areas and avoid placing them in plastic bags.

Seasoning Cast Iron

Many new pieces of cast iron are sold preseasoned, but an older piece or one you are restoring may need to go through the seasoning process. "Seasoning" cast iron is just a way to create your own nonstick cooking surface. Cast iron has small pores, like a sponge. Layers of mild vegetable oil create the seasoning by filling in the small pores. Well-seasoned cast iron is black, smooth, and shiny. A pan in need of seasoning may be dull gray with a rough surface.



Heating opens the pores, so the high temperature is an important part of the seasoning process.

Follow these steps for developing a perfect seasoning on cast iron:

1. Place a large baking sheet or a sheet of heavy-duty foil on the lower oven rack to catch any drips.
2. Set the oven to 450 degrees F.
3. Wash cast iron as needed to remove any sticky residue. Use steel wool to remove light areas of rust. Dry thoroughly.
4. Coat the cast-iron pan, inside and out, with a light layer of mild vegetable oil. Strong flavors like olive oil may cause an unwanted flavor in foods. Use a paper towel, clean cloth, or basting brush to spread the thin layer of oil on all surfaces of the cookware.
5. Place oiled cast iron on the top rack, upside down.
6. Bake for 1 hour. Turn oven off and allow pan to cool in the oven with the door closed.
7. Repeat the process of oiling and heating the pan 3 or 4 times.

Now your pan is ready to cook! Cast iron will continue to develop a shiny smooth cooking surface with use.

Put Your Cast Iron to Work with Cornbread

Some foods, like cornbread, work best when the pan is preheated. Cornbread is less likely to stick in a hot pan. Place a well-seasoned pan in the oven and preheat both pan and oven according to recipe directions. The pan should be very hot but not smoking. Use caution as you remove the pan from the preheated oven because it will be very hot. Pour the cornbread batter into the sizzling pan and return to the oven. The hot pan will create a firm brown crust with moist, tender cornbread inside. Use your favorite recipe or try this version with an added nutritional boost.

With proper care, cast-iron skillets can remain a staple in your kitchen for years. Cleaning, seasoning, and cooking with cast iron isn't just a process, it's a tradition. Treat your skillet well, and it will reward you with delicious meals for a lifetime.

Broccoli Cornbread

Ingredients

1/4 cup margarine, melted
1/3 cup onion, chopped
1/2 teaspoon salt
3/4 cup low-fat cottage cheese
1 ½ cups fresh or cooked frozen broccoli, finely chopped
4 eggs, slightly beaten
1 (8.5 ounces) box quick corn muffin mix

Directions

1. Preheat oven and lightly oiled 10-inch cast-iron skillet to 400 degrees F.
2. In a mixing bowl, blend melted margarine, onion, salt, cheese, broccoli, and eggs. Stir in muffin mix.
3. Pour into hot skillet. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes, until the top is golden brown.
4. Remove from skillet safely. Cool and cut into 12 servings.

Nutrition facts per serving:

90 calories, 6g total fat; 1.5g saturated fat; 0.5g trans fat; 60mg cholesterol; 240g sodium; 5g carbohydrates; 1g fiber; 2g sugar; 4g protein; 10% Daily Value of vitamin A; 20% Daily Value of vitamin C; 4% Daily Value of calcium; 2% Daily Value of iron

Source: Rosie Allen, Area Nutrition Agent, University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service

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