

Hi Food Fans

Often times when working on a recipe, I recommend using a cast iron skillet. Cast iron provides a ton of great advantage, including high heat use, the ability to go from stove-top to oven, wonderful heat retention and great durability.

One of the major downsides to cast iron, however, is that it has some unique requirements to maintain it. With that in mind, here is my

Cast Iron Care Guide

Part 1: Cleaning

Cleaning your cast iron is the part of its care that you'll do the most and can feel like the most daunting aspect.

The thing that throws people off the most is usually that soap is not recommended for cleaning cast iron. Lodge points out that you can use soap, but most traditionalist will tell you not to.

To clean your cast iron, start by scraping anything that you can out of it. You can use a pan scraper, spatula or just about anything else to scrap things out.

If you haven't already, wait for your pan to cool a little before continuing. Adding cold water to a screaming hot pan can cause it to warp.

Rinse the pan out with water, doing a little extra scraping if you need to.

Next add some water to the bottom of the pan, just enough to completely cover it.

Put the pan on the stove and bring the water to a boil. This will kill any potential bacteria on the pan from cooking and loosen up any stubborn, stuck on food.

While the water boils, scrape the pan one more time if you need to.

Dump out the water that's left. While the pan down with a towel to absorb the remaining moisture. Be careful, the pan will still be hot from the boiling.

Alternatively, put the pan back on the stove and wait for the water to evaporate on its own. Usually, the residual heat from the pan is enough to do this.

Once the pan is completely dry, add roughly a tablespoon of oil to the pan. Ultimately the amount of oil you use will depend on the size of your pan and how much oil it needs to absorb.

You can use a basic vegetable oil for this, or to impart extra flavor, try using saved bacon fat. If you do, be sure to bring the pan up to a heat where it smokes slightly to kill and bacteria.

Avoid using olive oil or other flavored oils to season your cast iron.

With a rag that you use specifically for oiling your cast iron or a paper towel, rub the oil into and all

over your pan.

Be sure to give extra attention to areas that look dryer, but don't skip the handle and outside.

Make sure that there is no water on your cast iron when you store it away to avoid rust.

2. Separation of Flavors

One of the advantages of cast iron is that it absorbs and then imparts the flavors of what is cooked in it over time.

The downside to this is that your pan has the potential to impart flavors that you don't want.

To avoid this, I recommend using separate pans for meat, fish and sweet recipes.

3. Removing Rust

If your cast iron does develop rust, have no fear! It's easy to remove.

Use a stiff cleaning tool, like steel wool or a very coarse sea salt on the back of a damp paper towel to scrub the rust away.

Rinse the cast iron to wash away the rust that has been removed. Repeat as necessary until not rust is visible.

Once the rust is all gone, dry the pan thoroughly and re-season your pan.

4. Seasoning or Re-seasoning your pan

If you have stripped the seasoning off of a cast iron pan for some reason, or if you buy a pan that hasn't come pre-seasoned, seasoning a cast iron pan is easy to do.

Coat the pan in cooking oil on all surfaces, including outside and handles. For this process, I don't recommend using bacon or another grease.

Place the pan upside down in a cold oven and heat to 350 degrees. You may want to put a drip tray on the shelf under your pan.

Once the oven has come up to temperature, bake the pan for 1 hour. Then shut off the oven and allow the cast iron to cool inside.

Your cast iron is now good to use and properly protected.

Maintaining a cast iron pan isn't a daunting task. Hopefully, you now have the confidence and knowledge to use these wonderful pans properly.

Happy eating.