

## Advice from Vintage Kitchen Cast Iron and Collectibles

# Maintaining Your Cast Iron

When it comes to maintaining your cast iron pieces, there are two simple factors to keep in mind:

### **MOISTURE and TEMPERATURE.**

It really is as simple as that.

The key to maintaining your cast iron in good shape is understanding how moisture and temperature affect the metal. Though caring for cast iron may be a little different from how you treat your other cookware, it isn't difficult at all. If you keep your pieces dry and seasoned and if you don't subject them to temperature shock, then you'll use and enjoy them for years. Take good care of them, and you can pass them along to another generation.

### **MOISTURE**

- Cast iron is prone to rust, so it is important to keep it dry. While a little surface rust is easy to fix, serious rust will pit and damage the surface of your pans and mar the smooth polish that makes our vintage pieces so much more “non-stick” than most current-day cast iron (made after the 1970s and 1980s).
- After using your pan, rinse it with warm water and use a plastic scrubber or soft-bristled brush to remove any bits of food clinging to the surface. You don't usually need any soap. If the pan is sticky or overly greasy, you can use a drop or two of mild dishwashing soap. (Ivory is a good choice, but we don't recommend Dawn for this or other grease-cutting brands, as they can affect the seasoning.)
- Once the pot or pan is clean, dry it carefully and put it away. If necessary, warm it a little and oil it to maintain the seasoning and seal out moisture. Using a paper towel, wipe off as much of the oil as possible. You need the lightest possible coat to protect your pan.

### **TEMPERATURE**

- People refer to cast iron as indestructible. And that's mostly true. But if you want to keep your pots and pans in the best possible shape, then DON'T subject them to any kind of temperature shock. When cast iron changes temperature too quickly, it may crack, break, or warp. Steel, which you may be more used to, isn't as susceptible to cracking from immediate high heat. Cast iron is superior in terms of holding heat, but it's more porous and brittle and needs to be treated a bit more gently.
- Cranking your skillet up to a high temperature right off the bat can cause it to warp or crack. This can also damage the seasoning if your skillet is empty. Once hot, the cast iron will maintain heat and cook your food evenly, but it's a good idea to turn it on low-medium first, and then turn it up to medium high. We use high heat only very rarely; medium-high usually does the trick, and sometimes we can even get away with staying at medium.
- Don't ever add cold water to a hot cast iron pan! Let the pan cool down before cleaning. If there are stuck-on bits of food (such as hamburger or cheese), then warm the pan with a little water in it and use a wooden spoon to dislodge the bits. Then, using a plastic scrubber or bristle brush (we don't recommend anything metal or abrasive) run it under warm water and scrub it clean. Dry the pan. If it looks dull, then while it's still warm you can use a piece of paper towel to rub a little oil on the surface and maintain the seasoning. Again, just a light coat. Don't slather it!

- **NEVER, NEVER, NEVER** throw a cast iron pan into a roaring fire. If we find out you're doing this, we will find you, yell at you, and beat you over the head with a #14 skillet! And we don't recommend using the self-cleaning feature of your oven to clean off built-up carbon either. These methods of cleaning have ruined more beautiful vintage pans than we care to tell you about. It's tragic to find a lovely old straight-sided skillet that's light in the hand and has a gorgeous, smooth cooking surface, only to see that the bottom is so warped that the pan rocks and spins even on an electric coil stove.

Cleaning your cast iron appropriately and maintaining the proper seasoning on your pan is also important in keeping it in good shape. We have a separate handout on each of those topics. Just ask us for them if you're interested.

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