

If your fire gets too hot, you can temper it by sprinkling a few drops of water on the coals. If you are using charcoal, douse the coals with water after you have finished cooking. Let the sun dry out the remaining charcoal to be used another time.

For a good method of igniting charcoal, see the Appendix.

Cooking Methods

Whatever you're cooking, the oven should be preheated by placing a few coals under and on top of the oven for a few minutes. This will bring the oven temperature near the optimum for cooking and will help to keep food from sticking to the bottom.

Baking

Since in baking you want to heat the air space inside the oven, put more coals on top than underneath the oven. Most experienced cooks say the rule is to have three-quarters of the coals on top and one-quarter underneath.

If you're baking pastries or a casserole, put three rocks or small pieces of metal on the oven's bottom and place the pie pan or baking dish on them. (Use only nonporous rocks that won't shatter or use unplated metal.) Supporting the pan or dish in this way will keep the bottom of the utensil from overheating.

If you prefer, you can bake cookies or biscuits directly on the oven's bottom. Just be sure that the oven is well greased and that you don't have too many coals underneath, or you may burn the food.

Muffins can be baked in a muffin pan, if you have one in your cook kit. Another way is to put cupcake papers in aluminum gelatin molds and pour in the batter. The cupcake papers can be burned in the fire, and the aluminum molds saved for another day.

Deep Frying, Browning, Boiling, and Stewing

For these cooking methods, there should be greater heat on the bottom than on the top. Experienced cooks recommend using twice as many coals underneath as on top. For deep frying and browning, leave the lid off.

Stacking Dutch Ovens

If you want to cook more than one dish in dutch ovens, you can do it by stacking the ovens on top of each other. The advantage is that the coals on the top of one oven heat the bottom of the one above. The chief disadvantage is that you have to remove the one on top to check the food in the lower oven. Up to three ovens can be stacked in this way.

Fire Pit Cooking

For delicious baked beans, and for slow-cooking any other type of one-pot meal that has plenty of liquid, try using a fire pit. (Before you start, though, make sure that digging is not restricted at your campsite.)

You will want to be able to restore the fire pit area to its original condition after cooking, so start by carefully removing the sod. With a shovel or back-packer's trowel, cut sod from a circle a few inches larger than your dutch oven. Work the tool beneath the sod and remove it in large pieces, laying