

Chicken Feet & Clam Chowdah

Going Dutch: Trying Out the Lodge Cast Iron Dutch Oven

By [Courtney Vien](#), March 15, 2013, In [Baking](#), [Cooking](#), [Equipment](#)

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I swore I didn't need any more kitchen equipment. My cupboards were full, I told myself. I had stockpots and saucepans aplenty. Surely, I didn't need a Dutch oven, too.

Then, you published the December-January 2013 issue, in which every other mouthwatering recipe mandated the use of a Dutch oven. French-Style Chicken and Stuffing? Dutch oven. Pasta all'Amatriciana? Dutch oven. Crispy Orange Beef? Dutch oven.

All right, I thought, Dutch ovens do sound handy. They're supposed to be great for slow cooking. And, besides, they look so cheery and serviceable, cousins to the little teapot of nursery-rhyme fame. I started making some extra room in my cupboards.

Decisions, Decisions: Enamel or Cast Iron?

Dutch ovens basically come in two styles, [enameled](#) cast iron and bare cast iron. Each has its pros and cons. Bare cast iron requires seasoning, and if you cook anything acidic in it you risk ruining the seasoning and having extra iron leached into your food. There are no such restrictions with enamel, but it can chip, rendering your pot useless unless you don't mind noshing on the stray fleck of enamel.

ABOUT US

We are neither chefs nor hardcore food critics. We are just an ordinary couple in the Triangle area in North Carolina who love eating and cooking good food. This blog follows us on our adventure through the culinary cosmos as we make and sample dishes from around the world.



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Top-of-the-line enameled Dutch ovens, like the [Le Creuset](#) and the [Staub](#), are less likely to chip than cheaper versions. They come with warranties, they're cute as can be, and their foodie cred is undeniable, but they'll also set you back hundreds of dollars. Even the "seconds" that sometimes pop up at places like Marshall's or T.J. Maxx are pricey.



The rooster alone will set you back \$50. (Okay, not really. It is pretty cute, though.)

A Cast Iron Convert

Despite my predilection for tomato-based dishes, I opted for a cast iron [Lodge](#) model, figuring that a) I could always re-season, and b) a little extra iron never hurt anybody. So far, I've been thrilled with my purchase. [Seasoning](#) proved a snap: Coat the whole pot with Crisco and bake it for an hour at 400 degrees. And cooking with the Lodge? It's proven surprisingly versatile. I've used it for shallow frying meat, quick-steaming [spinach](#), simmering pasta sauce, and cooking up [chorizo-lentil soup](#). It heats evenly and well and, though it may not be a candy-colored Le Creuset, it's got its own rustic charm. I rather like having something on my stove that could double as a prop for Little House on the Prairie.



A thing of beauty.

Effortless Bread in a Bucket

But the biggest surprise? Discovering that Dutch ovens can be used for baking bread. Their thick walls turn them into miniature ovens-within-ovens, and, covered, they seal in steam to deliver loaves with crispy crusts and airy centers. And they make baking bread virtually foolproof. Some recipes like this [four-ingredient version](#) don't even require kneading, just a bit of advance planning, and deliver pretty impressive results:

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Dutch oven = instant indie bakery.

This bread goes perfectly with soup, which you can make in—what else?—your Dutch oven.

In fact, there's little you can't make in your Dutch oven. The clunky, heavy pot I wasn't sure I needed has become the workhorse of my kitchen.

Notes on the no-knead bread: Adding a teaspoon of sugar to the water helps the yeast get going. Increasing the salt to 1 and 1/2 tsp. improves the flavor. Also, cover the dough bowl with plastic wrap rather than just putting a towel over it, and make sure the plastic touches the dough, or it can develop a tough 'skin.' Wait until the bread's completely cool before cutting it to avoid doughiness.

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Courtney Vien is a freelance writer and editor based in Durham, NC. She enjoys making food the hard way, trying new restaurants, and foraging for honeysuckle. Visit her portfolio at [courtneyvien.com](#)

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