

Cast Iron Enamel Cookware is the Perfect Choice for Fall Comfort Food

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Enameled cast iron cookware has experienced a recent surge in popularity among today's cooks. It provides all the benefits of old-fashioned black cast iron with none of the disadvantages.

Content:

On a recent chilly fall day I had a hankering for beef stew, and the process of preparing it re-acquainted me with the old cast iron Dutch oven found years ago by my mother in an antique store, which I had since ignored and allowed to accumulate dust in the basement.

While vigorously scrubbing it with steel wool, I was reminded of the whole reason the thing was banished to the basement in the first place. It's very difficult to clean, and like all cast iron cookware, it needs proper seasoning before you can use it. It can't be put in the dishwasher because the iron will rust, and must always be coated with a layer of fat in order to keep it properly seasoned. Cast iron enthusiasts regularly debate the merits of shortening versus vegetable oil as the perfect seasoning. In fact, the process of properly seasoning cast iron cookware is an art unto itself. Maybe achieving the perfectly seasoned cast iron pans is a rewarding experience, but who has the time?

You may wonder why anyone would go to all that trouble. Cast iron has excellent heat retention properties that make it very energy efficient. You can achieve ideal cooking temperatures on medium and low heat settings, reducing the risk of burning or drying out your food. It is perfect for the long, slow cooking of our favorite comfort foods. When you remove the cast iron pot or pan from the heat source, it retains the heat for a long period of time, so your food will stay hot longer than food prepared in cookware made of other materials. The heavy, thick metal resists warping and lasts forever. These properties are why so many people, undaunted by hand washing and the need to keep it properly seasoned, swear by cast iron cookware.

Fortunately, there is another kind of cast iron cookware that gives the cook all the benefits of cast iron cooking without the drawbacks. Cast iron can be enameled, a process that seals the iron in layers of vitrified enamel. This process has numerous benefits. It eliminates the need to keep the iron properly seasoned. The smooth, glassy finish of the enamel is much easier to clean, and cast iron enamel cookware can be placed in the dishwasher. The smooth finish also allows you to safely use this type of cookware on all types of heat sources including ceramic and induction cook tops. The enamel layer allows you to cook with tomatoes and other acidic ingredients that usually react unfavorably with cast iron. And the enamel can be produced in any number of colors, like fire engine red or lemon yellow, making it a perfect choice for today's design-conscious kitchen. It's so attractive that your stew or roast cooked in a cast iron enamel Dutch oven can go right from the oven to the tabletop.

I ended up making my beef stew in my old Dutch oven and it was indeed one of the tastiest stews I ever made. It simmered gently in the oven for hours and stayed piping hot when placed on the dinner table. But unfortunately, the cleanup process confirmed that it was going right back down to the basement. Now I have a set of attractive enameled cookware hanging from my kitchen pot rack (with a matching Dutch oven), and my antique cast iron Dutch oven is again in need of a good dusting.

Dutch Oven Beef Stew

1 tablespoon vegetable oil,
2 pounds boneless beef chuck roast, trimmed, and cut into bite-sized pieces
8 ounces kielbasa, sliced in half lengthwise then sliced into bite-sized half circles
2 onions, coarsely chopped
1/2 teaspoon garlic salt
freshly ground black pepper, to taste
1 cup dry red wine
1 (10 ounce) can condensed cream of mushroom soup
1 (10 ounce) can condensed cream of celery soup

1 (8 ounce) can diced stewed tomatoes
5 medium potatoes, peeled and cut into bite-sized cubes
2 cups carrots sliced into bite-sized rounds
1/2 cup barbecue sauce
1 cup frozen green peas
1 (8 ounce) can lima beans, drained

Pre-heat oven to 300 F. In a large Dutch oven with ovenproof handles, heat the vegetable oil over medium-high heat. Add beef to the Dutch oven and brown well, stirring often. If your Dutch oven is rather small, do this in batches rather than trying to brown all the beef at once. Return all beef to the Dutch oven, add onion and kielbasa. Saute until onion is translucent, stirring often. Stir in garlic salt and pepper. Add red wine and stir to loosen browned bits. Stir in both canned soups, tomatoes with their juice, potatoes, carrots and barbecue sauce. Stir well, cover and and bake in oven for at least 3 hours. Before serving, remove the Dutch oven and place it on the stove over medium-high heat. Reduce, stirring often, until sauce thickens to desired consistency. Add green peas and lima beans and stir until heated through. Serves 10.

Mimi Cummins is the food editor for FinerKitchens.com, an online retailer of [gourmet cookware, cooks tools, tableware and small appliances](#). FinerKitchens.com carries a huge selection of [enamel cast iron cookware](#) in a variety of sizes and colors.

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