

THE FOOD CHOPPER

Dutch Oven Checklist

Everything you need to know about buying a dutch oven

Dutch Ovens are considered a culinary staple by many, and their near-cult status has placed these pots in a great variety of kitchens. Here's a quick checklist, to help you determine what model would work best for you.

WHAT IS A DUTCH OVEN?

Dutch ovens are heavy, cast iron pots. They feature a tight fitting lid, and come in a few varieties and finishes, most frequently an enameled, smooth surface. One brand in particular is known for their enameled cast iron: Le Cruset. These pots are typically brightly colored with a creamy white interior, and a hefty price tag.

WHAT TYPE OF DUTCH OVEN SHOULD I BUY?

When purchasing a Dutch oven, it's worth considering:

- The price you are willing to pay.
- The size of your family.
- What you will be making in your Dutch oven.
- Are you cooking indoors, outdoors, or both?
- One recommendation is [this model](#), a round, 6 qt, enameled Dutch oven by Lodge.

It's been tested against other top (read: more expensive) models, and the performance was identical.

Is Pricier Better?

Not necessarily. When exploring price options, factor in:

- Brand recognition
- Color range
- Included warranty coverage
- Location of manufacture
- Craftsmanship and quality

Enameled vs Seasoned Cast Iron?

There are benefits to both styles of Dutch oven, depending on your needs.

Enameled:

- Simple to clean with soap and water.
- Easy transition from stove to oven to tabletop.
- Beautiful, bright colors.
- Can cook a wide range of foods, including acidic dishes.

Seasoned cast iron:

- Maintains a “nonstick,” baked-in coating of oils and grease.
- Flexible cooking conditions; able to cook over a fire or grill.
- Seasoning over time adds depth of flavor to food.

What Material Should I Choose?

Dutch ovens are traditionally made with cast iron, however there are a few materials on the market.

- **Enameled cast iron** - This is your traditional cast iron pan. Few limits on cooking, except over open flame or on a grill.
- **Bare cast iron** - Bare cast iron needs to be seasoned before use, and is suitable for indoor and outdoor cooking, though one should avoid cooking acidic foods for extended periods of time.
- **Stainless steel** - Stainless steel Dutch ovens are mirroring the shape, and not the oven itself. Stainless steel is thinner and doesn't hold onto heat in the same way that a traditional Dutch oven does.
- **Ceramic** - Similar to stainless steel, this pot is the same shape of a Dutch oven, however it lacks the heat distribution and retention. These pots are much lighter, however, which might be beneficial.

What Size Should I Pick?

- **2-4 qts** - Individual or small family
- **5-7 qts** - Small to medium sized family
- **7+ qts** - Medium to large families, as well as for the cooking of larger items.

What About The Shape?

- **Circular**: Good for general use, perfect for soups, stews, pasta, bread, braising meat.
- **Oval**: A great option for roasting meat, such as a chicken or small turkey. No functional difference otherwise.

Does Interior Enamel Color Matter?

- Interior enamel does not generally matter when it comes to Dutch oven functionality. Heat is conducted through the pot, not reflected off any particular surface, like with a cookie sheet.
- Most prefer the visibility of light colored enamel, especially when browning meat.
- Over time, enamel can show signs of wear and aging, which might also be more visible on a lighter interior.
- Staub's Dutch ovens are among the few varieties which favor a dark enamel.

What About Handles?

- When possible, pick up your potential Dutch Oven purchases, to feel the weight distribution through the built in handles.
- Cast iron is heavy, and your comfort and preference is important. Ultimately, as heat is conducted through the pot, you'll need oven mitts or kitchen towels to prevent your hands from burning.

Do Lid Styles Matter?

- Most Dutch ovens have a similarly shaped, slightly domed lid, however some models are more round, while others are flat.
- There are no particular advantages or disadvantages to any set style.

What About The Color Of The Outside?

- One of the most beautiful and distinctive characteristics of Dutch ovens are the rainbow range of colors offered, by many brands.
- Choose one that makes you happy.

What Accessories Do I Need For My Dutch Oven?

- Similarly to nonstick cookware, it's wise to choose utensils which will help preserve the enameled coating of your Dutch ovens.
- Recommended products are wood or bamboo, as well as heatproof rubber or silicone.
- When it comes to cooking with a non-enameled surface, metal utensils are fine.
- Buy a model with a metal knob or handle on the lid. You can buy a metal knob replacement [here](#).

How Do I Clean My Dutch Oven?

- Hot, soapy water and a little bit of elbow grease put behind a sponge should clean up most messes.
- If your regular hand washing isn't working, boiling a few teaspoons of baking soda with water should loosen remaining stuck on food or stains.
- If you're still working on a particularly challenging spot, many users recommend Bar Keeper's Friend, a minimally abrasive cleaner known to work wonders.
- Your enameled Dutch oven is generally considered to be dishwasher safe, however hand washing is recommended.
- General cleaning directions for a non-enameled Dutch oven recommend wiping the surface with a cloth, and if more cleaning power is needed, some salt and a sturdy brush to clear away excess debris.

What About Warranties?

Most Dutch Oven companies offer a lifelong warranty for the wear of the pot. Check with the company you wish to purchase from, for finer details of their warranty coverage.

Does Location Of The Manufacture Matter?

One distinguishing factor of both Le Cruset and Staub Dutch ovens, is that they are both manufactured in France, using the same techniques and methods they've been applying for years.

Other companies (like Lodge) manufacture their products in the United States, while others source from China. This preference is up to you.

Quick FAQ

? Can Dutch ovens be used on glass or induction cooktops?

Yes! Both types of cooktops work well with Dutch ovens.

? Can a Dutch oven replace slow cooker?

Technically yes, in that it can cook food thoroughly and slowly. However, an oven or stovetop is required, and it is not recommended to be left unattended. Dutch ovens are generally thought of as the original slow cooker before our current electric models became popular.

? Can you cook acidic food in a plain cast iron Dutch oven?

Enameled Dutch ovens are perfectly safe for acidic foods. Avoid cooking acidic foods in non-enameled cast iron.

? Which Dutch oven shape is better: round or oval?

Round, though both will work perfectly fine. Oval Dutch ovens are generally preferred for roasting meat, due to the shape.

Our Recommendations

Overwhelmed by choice? Here is a list of our top recommendations, for any need you might have.

1 **Best overall pick: [Lodge 6 Quart Enameled Cast Iron Dutch Oven](#)**

This model from Lodge offers a comparable cooking experience as compared to the pricier Le Cruset or Staub models. The enamel is smooth and evenly applied, the pot is well weighted, the handles are comfortable, and Lodge offers a great warranty on all their products.

2 **For a couple or small family: [Lodge 4.5 Quart Enameled Cast Iron Dutch Oven](#)** - This 4.5 qt Dutch oven is a great size to feed a few, while still fitting in your regular kitchen cabinet.

3 **For a large family, or those hosting frequent dinner parties: [Lodge 7.5 Quart Enameled Cast Iron Dutch Oven](#)** - There are larger Dutch ovens available, however 7.5 qts should be more than large enough to serve a bigger family, while remaining light enough to be carried easily, as well as fit into a sink.

4 **For the Sunday roast: [Lodge 7 Quart Oval Enameled Dutch Oven](#)** - If you're looking to cook a lot of meat or oblong items in your Dutch oven, an oval model may be a good choice. Lodge offers a great oval model at good price, so that you can make a purchase without feeling as though you're stuck with an impossibly pricy, "don't use this!" pan.

- 5 **Best non-enameled Dutch oven: 5 Quart Cast Iron Dutch Oven** - If you're looking for a seasoned cast iron Dutch oven without added enamel, look no further. Made in the USA, Lodge makes some of our favorite enameled Dutch ovens, and their line of non-enameled cast iron is no exception.
- 6 **For the spender: Le Creuset Signature Enameled Cast-Iron 5-1/2-Quart Round French Dutch Oven** - LeCruset are truly placed at the head of the table when it comes to Dutch ovens. Their quality is top of the line, from the texture of the cast iron, to the consistent finish of enamel. The team at LeCruset know what they are doing, and you'll pay for it.
- 7 **The other French favorite: Staub Round Cocotte, 7 qt** - Staub are proud makers of excellent dutch ovens, and easily have quality to match LeCruset. Your choice between the two is quite literally a matter of preference.
- 8 **For double duty: Lodge 5 Quart Cast Iron Double Dutch Oven** - This seasoned (not enameled) Dutch Oven from Lodge offers a lid which transforms into a skillet. This gives you greater flexibility when cooking, and can be an excellent gift for the cast iron enthusiasts and grill masters in your life.
- 9 **For the camper: Lodge Deep Camp Dutch Oven, 8 Quart** - Lodge created this model with small legs to hold up your Dutch oven, keeping it slightly above your heat source, like a camp fire or hot coals. Seasoned cast iron (as opposed to enameled) can reach incredibly high temperatures, and cook a wide variety of foods.

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