

## Basic Tools and Tasks for Successful Outdoor Cooking

Yum! Don't you love to hear this satisfied response to a of homemade lasagna at your campsite? Better, what if it doesn't have to be complicated or require a ton of equipment? In this article, we will focus on the tools for temperature control when cooking with charcoal and an easy lasagna recipe for you to try. In the next article, we will explain the basic techniques for cooking outdoors successfully.

Below are the basic tools we carry with us in the bed of our Chevy 2500 with camper shell. We will explain the "how" and "why" for each item and we will show you how we pack it up.

The big picture is important to establish. Cooking outdoors successfully is essentially about safe fire management with the goal of not burning food or human appendages. When we gave a Dutch oven demonstration to young Girl Scouts, we had each girl repeat this principle: "When cooking with charcoal, consider everything is HOT." A few basic tools help us put this principle into practice.

Task #1: Set up cooking area. Just like hooking up an Airstream to power, electric and perhaps sewer when we arrive at our destination, we need to set up our outdoor cooking area. If the camp site has a grill or fire pit, either can be used as the central cooking area. The central cooking area will be where we fire up charcoal, cook, and then dispose of used charcoal. A grill is ideal because it is up off of the ground at a comfortable height. A camp fire pit is sufficient but it is hard on knees and back while cooking on the ground.

A third option is to have two galvanized drain pans. [https://www.amazon.com/Performance-Tool-W54280-Galvanized-Drain/dp/B002V03GJ4/ref=sr\\_1\\_4?keywords=galvanized%2Bpan&qid=1650495991&sr=8-4&th=1](https://www.amazon.com/Performance-Tool-W54280-Galvanized-Drain/dp/B002V03GJ4/ref=sr_1_4?keywords=galvanized%2Bpan&qid=1650495991&sr=8-4&th=1). Place one upside down and the second on top. This creates a barrier between the ground (and any combustible vegetation) and a container for hot charcoals. This is what we use when we are boon docking and don't have an established fire ring or grill. For this option, we need to establish a way to safely dispose hot, spent charcoal. Here the goal is to prevent destructive, uncontrolled fires. Drowning the spent coals with water is a good way to make sure there are no hot embers still burning.

Task #2: Assemble fire management tools. In the image below, we have laid out the essential tools we use to manage hot charcoal.



Essential Tools

- The bottom left shows channel lock players, a simple lid lifter, and 2-part gripped lid lifter. All three allows us to pick up the lid of camp Dutch oven that has hot charcoal on top.
- To the right of the lifters is a charcoal chimney. It has a handle and a grate across the lower section to hold the charcoal. The sides have holes to allow to flow up and through the charcoals.
- Above the chimney are galvanized steel pan with a lid stand in the middle. The pans are used for multiple tasks (as explained above) and are handy to safely hold spent charcoal until they can be extinguished. The collapsible lid stand inside the pan is used to hold a hot oven or lid until they cool off.
- To the right of the pan and lid stand are charcoal tongs. There are many different designs. We like this simple design. It is durable and rugged and perfect for moving hot charcoals.
- To the right of the chimney are fire starters. This two minute video shows how to make homemade fire starters. Each burns for about 15 minutes and are an efficient way to start a chimney of charcoal or start a camp fire.
- To the right of the fire starters is a 12-inch camp Dutch oven. It holds 6 quarts and is the equivalent volume of a 9x12 baking dish. This means that you can take any recipe for a casserole or breakfast dish in a “regular” cookbook and use it in your 12-inch camp Dutch oven. To read more about camp Dutch ovens, check out this article in Scouting Magazine.
- A pair of red heavy leather gloves are shown on the bottom. These gloves are essential when working with hot charcoal.

Task #3: Store equipment for transport or storage. We purchased this Grenade InstaView Flip Top box to hold the basic tools shown above. With a 12 gallon capacity, holds everything except the feed pan and bag of charcoal. It fits easily in the back of the truck. We purchased this at Costco for \$9.98.



#### Task #4: Charcoal.

- We use Kingsford “The Original” exclusively for several reasons. Reliability is critical and Kingsford is reliable. Other brands may be cheaper, but we get what we pay for. Cheap charcoal may be ok for grilling burgers but not for baking biscuits or other recipes where temperature control is essential. We never use quick light charcoal because it gives off an unpleasant odor that gets into the food and it burns much faster than Kingsford.
- Protect charcoal from damp or wet conditions. This means storing it in a waterproof box or up off the floor. Once charcoal gets wet, it is ruined and won’t burn properly.

Once you’ve accomplished these tasks, you are ready to cook! For those who are new to cooking outdoors with charcoal, I recommend making lasagna. Why? It is easy and very forgiving and best of all it is yummy! Check out this [post](#) about our wonderful time cooking lasagna for the Boy Scouts Scouting Magazine.



Camp Dutch Oven Lasagna

#### Camp Dutch Oven Lasagna

##### Ingredients:

- 2 pounds lean ground beef OR one pound ground beef and one pound sausage
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 large onions, chopped
- 2 26-ounce jars of your favorite marinara sauce
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 tablespoon Italian seasoning

2 15-ounce tubs of ricotta cheese  
6 cups shredded mozzarella cheese  
2 eggs  
1 16-ounce box of lasagna noodles, uncooked  
1 cup grated Parmesan plus more to serve  
Fresh Basil leaves, sliced thinly

1. Fire up a chimney of charcoal. Place a 12-inch camp Dutch oven on top of the chimney. Add beef (and sausage) and onion. Stir constantly, breaking up the meat until it is cooked through, meat is brown and not pink and onions are translucent. Add garlic and stir for two more minutes. Add marinara sauce, salt and pepper. Remove oven from chimney. Place cooked meat mixture into a separate bowl. Set bowl of meat aside. Do not wipe out camp Dutch oven.
2. In a large bowl, mix together ricotta cheese, two cups mozzarella cheese and eggs until everything is evenly incorporated. Set aside.
3. Spread about a third of the marinara sauce on the bottom of the camp Dutch oven. Add a layer of noodles, broken and placed in a solid layer. Spoon a third of the ricotta cheese mixture onto the noodles then spread the cheese out evenly. Spread a third of the meat mixture on top of the cheese mixture. Sprinkle a layer of shredded mozzarella on top of the meat.
4. Repeat step 3 two more times ending with layer of mozzarella and then grated Parmesan cheese.
5. Fire up a new chimney of charcoal. When charcoals have white-grey on the edges, make a ring of 8 charcoal to fit beneath the outside edge of the camp Dutch oven. Place oven with lasagna over the ring. Add oven lid. Place a circle of 17 hot charcoal around the edge of the lid. Bake at 350F for 45 minutes, replacing spent charcoal as needed.
6. When the lasagna is bubbling and hot all the way through, remove charcoal from lid and move oven to lid stand or a heat tolerant surface. Sprinkle basil across the top. Serve with parmesan. Enjoy