

# Cooking & Baking with a Wood Stove

I have found that it's really a continual learning process, because cooking or baking with wood requires a different rhythm and a different timing than cooking with gas or electricity. Most importantly, it requires learning how to adjust to the peculiarities of each individual stove... and that can be quite a challenge.

The easiest way to start is to learn to cook on top of the stove. You have probably already discovered that different areas of the stove top are hotter or less hot than other areas. Finding the right cooking temperature is simply a matter of "knowing" your particular stove. Obviously the stove top will be extremely hot just over the firebox, but if the stove has heat channels that circulate the heat to the oven and reservoir, there will often be very hot spots in other areas of the stove top as well. In [our stove](#) the hottest area is always slightly to the right of the firebox. This is where I put pans for a quick boil or anything that requires really high heat. If a lower or more moderate temperature is needed, or as the food cooks, I move the pans to different areas of heat on the stove top.

Baking in the oven can be more difficult. It helps to have a working, accurate thermometer, so even if your stove has a thermometer in the oven door, you might want to purchase a stand-alone thermometer that is designed to hang from the oven rack. Be aware, though, that the oven temperature in a wood stove will fluctuate as the wood burns and more wood is added. Strive for a temperature range, not an exact temperature.

Almost all ovens will have hot spots. Usually the side of the oven that is next to the firebox will have the hottest temperatures... also the top portion of the oven will be hotter because wood stoves heat the oven from the top down. Your oven may have other hot spots as well. The instruction book that came with my stove suggests baking a large sheet of biscuits for the specified amount of time and using the degree of brown-ness (or burnt-ness) of the crust to determine the hottest areas of the oven.

I should have read the instruction book! When I first started seriously baking in my wood stove oven, I kept having problems with food burning even though I made sure to keep the pans away from the side of the oven near the firebox. One day it finally dawned on me that the burned areas did not correspond to that "standard" hot spot, and that in my oven the hottest areas were actually at the back and the middle. With the pans kept a good distance from those areas, suddenly my loaves of bread were coming out of the oven with a beautiful golden brown crust.

According to the instruction book, there are some techniques you can try if burning continues, like covering the pan loosely with aluminum foil or a large oven-safe cover. I have read that covering with brown paper that has been wet or oiled will also prevent burning, but I have never tried that. Another suggestion from the book that I do use and that works well for even browning is to rotate the pans back to front during the baking process.

More suggestions from the book... The top portion of a wood stove oven is hotter than the bottom, so if food is browning too much on the top, it sometimes helps to move the rack and the food to the floor of the oven. If the food isn't browning enough on top, move the rack nearer to the top of the oven... or build up the fire. With my stove, I have found that if I have a good bed of coals, the oven will usually maintain its temperature for approximately an hour without more wood being added. I keep an eye on the thermometer and if the oven does start to cool, I add one or two small split sticks of dry hardwood. Usually this will keep the temperature fairly steady.

The best advice I can give you is to just keep cooking and baking with your wood stove. Don't give up... it just takes practice.