

Dear Cast Iron Skillet, I Love You!



I have been known, on occasion, to be impatient and to sometimes have a temper. You're not surprised? Good, then this will be easier to explain. A cast iron skillet has many purposes; it's fast cooking, it's a hammer when you've just got to drive in that nail, it's a weight when you need a guarantee that something won't fly away or requires even pressure, it can beat the living daylight outta ANYTHING unwanted but best of all it can be used for searing. Whether meat or veg or bread, nothing sears like a good old fashioned cast iron skillet. Fry an egg.

Growing up in the 70's my mom had Farberware cookware much like my friends moms. And when I got older, lets say, into the 80's when cooking became more important to me, I worked with whatever was there. It was mostly variations of the same things. Cast iron cookware of any kind was foreign to me. Then I went to go live on a mountaintop in GA for three years. Let's just say I received what would be an introduction to a proper education. I admit this education came slowly, but when it hit me, it hit me hard, like a cast iron skillet to the head. I went through the Caphalon, All Clad, LeCruet phase, slowly acquiring bits of "the best" and after getting everything I could possibly wish for in my kitchen, I see that I could happily and inexpensively live on cast iron alone.

Seasoning a new cast iron skillet, or reviving an old one, takes a little work. And it is definitely worth it. And important. But, if you do not mind, I'm going to stick that on the back burner for right now. I want to talk about how hot it is, I want to talk about the SEAR. It's the perfectly browned,

almost to a bark, texture that is a loving result of food and fat hitting hot iron. There is of course the non-stick factor, and I do not want to reduce its importance either, but there is room on that back burner for this too. It's all in the sear. The sizzling sound you hear when the smoke wafts up in threads and tiny fireworks go off in your pan. It's a delight. Searing meat preserves juice and creates bark, searing vegetables provides a quick effective way to intensify the flavor. Of course your choice of fat effects flavor as well. But cast iron is low maintenance, easy to keep clean easy to keep around, once you experience it for yourself you will keep yours living on or near the stove just like I do.

There is the lore around cleaning and keeping cast iron in good condition. This too is going on my third burner (which leaves me with one left). For the way I find myself cooking, eating and feeding my family, my cast iron skillet has been a girl's best friend. And a sons, husbands and daughters as well, we all became proficient in cast iron cooking during the last year we were all home together. Cast iron makes it encouraging to cook everything in one pan. It gets incredibly hot and holds on to its heat long after it has been removed from its heat source or simply turned off. Cast iron will keep on cooking. So I am going to attempt to encourage you to try cast iron cooking and see just how many things you can cook beautifully in these inexpensive, sturdy, classic easily found cookware.



Here is an example. I love thighs. I can eat chicken thigh dishes several times a week and be perfectly happy. Murrays chicken is my personal favorite brand. Thighs have the perfect amount of fat, so I usually cook them first and always start them skin side down. The fat layer just underneath the skin of the thigh meat will release once the seasoned chicken skin hits the hot surface of the cast iron skillet. The sizzle lets me know it's working and I resist. I hold back from nudging the thighs, I want them to turn golden brown and be on their way to juicy before I even try to jiggle them. It takes patience, but I assure you that when you do this part right, getting to the finish is going to be a quickie. Not touching is so important in cast iron cooking, it's self control, restraint. Wait for it. You know the sound, you hear the sizzling, it's clearly hot and doing its job. Use your eyes, look at the curves of your food, the edges that are in contact with the searing hot pan. Look

for golden brown edges all around before of even rattling the pan. Whether it is vegetable or meat or a grilled cheese sandwich, when she is ready, she will give it up with just the right jiggle motion. So make sure you've got strong hands. Speaking of hands while discussing the sear, using a cast iron skillet requires an unusual type of protection, a silicone handle cover. (Or a pair of high heat oven mitts, but they are not anywhere near as good.) And before you complain, yes, it's necessary. So get one, it can be used on all handles sizes, is dishwasher safe and it definitely increases the pleasure of cooking, especially by way of not searing your palm off. See, a cast iron skillet is just is itself. No screws, no parts, no safe place to hold, the handle is going to be as hot as the cooking surface. This is wonderful for your cooking options like stove top to oven, but bad for your distraction. You do not want to forget and reach

to grab the handle of a cast iron skillet with your bare hand. **JUST DON'T DO IT.** I sheath mine when I whip it out to cook and leave it there till were both cooled off enough to handle. Once you notice there is a substantial ring around the thighs, or whatever food you've chosen, give the sheathed handle a little shake. You are looking for food movement; even the slightest quiver is a good response. You want the thigh to slide and come to you. Flip her over and unless the skin is perfectly golden brown just that way you like it, sear the underside. If you have some that seem to be stuck, use a thin flat metal spatula and

potatoes, again, I let them stay where they lay until I see my sign to shake and flip. Last, because it takes the least time to cook, I throw in the broccoli after removing the cooked potatoes to the chicken thighs. The broccoli will sear up giving you lovely caramelized edges and intense vegetable flavor, I recommend that you taste before salting veggies that have been cooked in cast iron, I find they require less salt. Meat, you gotta go in the other direction. Lets say beef, like a burger or steak. You want there to be a light dusting of salt between the meat and the heat. Very



gently scrape maintaining contact with the pan. You do not have to worry about scratching cast iron, I have been using my Grandmother's metal spatula, which is older than I am, and it helps when maybe the pan has gotten too hot or the food is sticking. Normally, if it sticks, it still needs to cook on that side. After the familiar sound of the searing underside of the thighs, I grab a large plate to place the thighs once I consider them done, or done to my liking*. Now, if I am prepared with my sides lets say potatoes and broccoli, there is fat from the chicken in the pan the skillet is still scalding hot I throw in the

important, without it, your meat will loose a lot of potential flavor. Salt loves meat, and meat loves salt, you just have to trust me.

So now I have a complete meal of chicken thighs, potatoes and broccoli. The potatoes and broccoli have used up most of the fat in the pan used for cooking, but there is still a layer of fat or oil or butter, whatever you used. I used to, in the old days, open tiny potato buns and let them soak up the fat and the heat to make toasty dinner rolls, but now, I simply wipe the cooled skillet out with a dry paper

towel. YUK you say? I say nay! And in favor, I say yay. Try it, you will say yay too. Some people cover the pot overnight and reserve the flavorful fat for the next round of cooking. Some people use a soft natural bristle brush to remove any stuck on bits or you can do what I do id go after any hangers-on with the tip of a sharp thin spatula. What you **DON'T WANT TO DO IS WASH IT WITH SOAP AND WATER!!!!!!** I cannot emphasize this point enough.

Unless you are restoring, or starting from the beginning you never wash cast iron with good old soap and water. The pan is seasoned to be non stick naturally by it's coating that has built up over multiple uses of the pan. Soap would strip away that coating and you would loose all that is wonderful about cooking in cast iron. As time

goes by your pan will darken. Note, it is only important to season inside the skillet itself. Do not attempt to season the handle or the bottom outside of the pan. My favorite way to start seasoning a new cast iron is with a full package of bacon and a slow low heat oven. It takes all day but when you are finished you have a seasoned pan,.....and bacon! Set your cast iron skillet on top of a baking sheet and place whatever fat you choose inside, Crisco shortening is a good one for non-meat eaters about three ice cream scoop-fulls, or a high heat oil. Set your timer for 8-10 hours and check the skillet and swirl the fat inside (protecting your hand, remember?) and get the fat all the way up the sides of the inside of the skillet cooking surface. Do this on a day that you have time and ventilation. I am going to show you some



of my recent favorites. We tried a whole new approach to rack of lamb, or maybe we would have to call it deconstructed rack of lamb? I don't know? But it was a culinary gift from the food heavens. We seared morel mushrooms, fiddlehead ferns, and purple asparagus, all with tantalizing results. Like veggies with a soft center, browned edges and bursting with flavor.

I think my proudest accomplishment thus far has been twofold. First, the lamb thing and second the kid thing. I don't mean goat, I mean my kid, my child, offspring if you will? First let me explain "the lamb thing". We, my Husband and one of my kids, have a deep love of eating lamb. Rack style or chops, we are so happy when it's on the dinner menu. Ohh, and the leftovers??? But that, too, is another story. We go with a no fuss no muss approach to cooking rack of lamb and one afternoon Hub and I were cooking and we got daring. I wanted to try and separate the ribs from the loin of the rack of meat. Which Michael did with precision, leaving me with a slab of tiny ribs as well as a long log of luxurious lamb meat. Using the cast iron skillet enabled us to really satisfy our curiosity. I had an idea of searing the long log therefore providing a seasoned bark around the entire loin. Combining lemon citrus salt, dried rosemary, dried thyme, I put the mortar and pestle to work on grinding them into a fine powder, which I then rolled the loin in the seasonings mix. I laid it down in the searing hot skillet, heard my satisfying sear, let it die down and then turn my lamb loin until it was seared all around. I was sure to get it seared on both flat ends, those would be prized. My Husband loves his bark, that crispy sear I keep rambling on about is my Husbands favorite part of eating meat. I call him my bark shark. So, by taking his favorite food, and using the skills of the cast iron skillet, I was able to provide a fantasy fulfilled. Oh, and I didn't even tell you about the bones!!!! I dusted them in the same seasonings and after the loin was fully seared and the pan was scalding hot I placed the now individually cut ribs side down in the scalding skillet, I simply slid it into my 400 degree oven. In 18 - 20 minutes they were a crackling joy.

*When I say that I have cooked thighs done to my liking, I mean to sear the thighs and set them aside before fully cooked only to put them back in with other ingredients and continue to cook for a longer time later. There are documented safe eating temperatures for chicken. 170 degrees is a safe temperature. I use a probe meat thermometer to check.

My entire family has been pitching in with the cooking and I have tried to teach them some of the short cuts that I teach my own clients. But teaching someone who hires you and wants you is totally different from a person who has to live with you. It's just life I guess, teaching family can be, difficult?

Challenging for all involved? Potentially relationship risky maybe? I have gone through all the stages while trying to be a combination of Betty Crocker and Donna friggin Reed. So there have been times I will admit I have fantasized about swinging around that very same iron skillet out of frustration when SOME PEOPLE do not listen to my cooking instructions! See? There's another use. I am telling you, all you need is cast iron and the courage to use it.

I am actually impressed with my families learned talents. They have been quick studies to the cast iron way of life, and therefore I believe that I can inspire you too, to pick up a classic and play a little and get your sizzling sear on without any threats of iron beheading from me? If you are new to cast iron, continue to get an education, it's worth mastering. If you have one, put it back into service. If you need a simple starter, I highly recommend LODGE brand from the hardware store and to begin with a buttery golden grilled cheese. (After the bacon seasoning of course. (I am going to show you some of my more recent favorites in the hopes I will inspire you to at least try. Keep your temper cool and your cast iron hot. **Enjoy.**



MacDonald Marine Inc

1 MARINA DRIVE, MAHOPAC, NY 10541
www.MacDonaldMarineNY.net
MacDonaldMarine@verizon.net

845.628.2333

JOIN US ON
LAKE MAHOPAC

PRE-OWNED BOAT
ENGINES AVAILABLE

NEW INVENTORY 2021 MODELS ARRIVING IN JUNE

Maritou GLASTRON



Ivey's In My Kitchen

We Magically Make You a Better Cook...

Specialty Products

Magic Oil
Rub All Over
Sticks & Buds

Exotic Produce

Gift Baskets
Holiday Baskets
Hostess Baskets
Bridal Shower

Gift Certificates

Private Lessons*

Kitchen Organizing
Meal Planning
Assisted Shopping

Group Lessons

Cooking Parties
Holiday Meals
Special Occasion Lesson*
Bridal Showers
Baby Showers



Phone (914) 736-1318
WWW.Iveysinmykitchen.com

Fax (914) 736-1317
Cook@Iveysinmykitchen.com

* You are left with a prepared dinner and a set table