

Try cooking on top of your heating-stove

By *Marjorie Burris*

The heat from a wood burning heating-stove sure feels great on a raw winter day, but it can be made to do double duty, too. I like to cook on top of my heating-stove; it is very much like using a crock-pot or a low oven. And I always keep a 10-quart cast aluminum pot and a teakettle full of water on top of the stove. I do not cover the pot, so the water can evaporate into the air. Wood heat is extremely drying, and the pot is an efficient humidifier. Most days I have to add an entire gallon of fresh water to the pot, it will evaporate that much.

We use the water in the pot for dish washing, bathing, and cleaning, but not for cooking, because the water stands exposed to the dusty household air. We use the teakettle for quick hot drinks and cooking. It sounds so cheerful to come inside from the cold and hear the teakettle softly singing.

My heating stove has a jacket around it, but a stove without a jacket can be used, too. Most times a trivet or a rack is needed on top of a "bare" heating stove. When we used an unjacketed heating-stove, I found that a rack out of my cook-stove oven or the louvered rack out of an old broiler pan worked very well—just anything to keep the bottom of the cooking pans from getting too hot. One word of caution, however: do not use a rack out of a refrigerator. Most of those racks were not made to be used with heat, and many will give off noxious fumes when they get hot.

I don't always know the true temperature of the top of the stove, but I don't worry about that too much. If the heat is low, I simply allow more cooking time, or if I want something to start cooking quickly, I will start the pot to boil on my cook-stove, then transfer it to the heating stove to simmer. This works quite well with a kettle of vegetable soup or a large pot of beans.

Bake on top of the stove

But the top of the heating stove certainly isn't limited to slow simmer cooking. You can bake many things on top of the stove too. I'm fortunate to have a little tin oven that my mother used 60 years ago over the burners on a kerosene cookstove. It is simply a rectangular box, 19½" long, 12½" wide, 16½" tall, and open on the bottom. The front is a simple door, and the oven has two racks with three sets of slots for changing the height of the racks. It has a wire handle attached to either side on the outside to make it easy to pick up. It must have been the deluxe model, because it has what is labeled a "Heat Indicator" on the front of the door, but the indicator only points to either low, medium, or hot. It takes just a few minutes for the oven to get hot after I set it on top

of the heating-stove, and I've baked many goodies there. It is especially useful for baked beans, casseroles, and fruit cobblers without a bottom crust. I once baked our Thanksgiving turkey in it.

A good metal worker could probably duplicate my antique, but you really don't need a rectangular oven if you have a heavy Dutch oven big enough to hold something as large as a pie pan. You can bake in the Dutch oven set over a heating-stove the same way you would over a campfire, except you don't have to put hot coals on the lid. However, if your Dutch oven has legs on it, you will need to make a skirt around the legs so the heat will be directed up onto the bottom of the oven instead of escaping around the edges. I use a wide band of aluminum foil wrapped tightly around the bottom and legs of my oven to make the skirt.

An even simpler oven is a pie pan covered with a large, heavy lid. After breakfast, I will often wrap enough potatoes in foil to fill a pie pan, set it on the stove, cover it with the lid, and go outside for a morning's work. How good it is to come inside, cold, tired, and hungry at noon, and have a hot baked potato all ready to eat. This is a good way to bake apples, too.

Other good cookware to use

A heavy cast iron skillet works well on top of the heating-stove, too. I've grilled cheese sandwiches, toasted bread, and hard-fried eggs in my iron skillet. The eggs do not brown like they would on a hotter stove, but I don't like my eggs with crisp edges, anyway.

For heating leftovers, a can of "store-bought" soup, or a hot-dog, a copper-bottomed pan works great (or you can use a pan with some other heat-conducting material). One of our favorite evening meals is cheese crisps. I put a tortilla on a cookie sheet, cover it with grated cheese, and put it on the stove to melt.

A double-boiler pan is ideal on top of the heating stove. Whole brown rice (not processed) and corn meal mush are delicious cooked this way. Corn meal mush takes quite a while to cook this way, so I put it on the stove about noon and have our evening meal ready without a lot of watching. When we want an early breakfast in a hurry, I put oat groats (groats are whole oats, not rolled oatmeal) in a double boiler on the stove just before we go to bed, and breakfast is ready when we get up about six to eight hours later. Oat groats take much longer to cook than oatmeal; I use about a half-cup more of water than my recipe calls for to make sure the groats do not get dry and burn during the night. I think oatmeal would become mush and burn if it were cooked so long. For a special treat I add a few raisins to the

groats. The raisins usually cook to pieces, but they sweeten the cereal and make it yummy.

Miscellaneous uses for the top of the heating-stove

The top of the heating-stove is a perfect place to season a cast iron skillet. Clean the skillet, rub the inside generously with un-salted shortening, and let the skillet bake for three or four hours. Remove from the heat, cool slightly, then polish with a paper towel. The skillet will be as smooth as Teflon.

If you have an old-fashioned flatiron, keep it on top of the stove for quick ironing touch-ups. And a heavy metal lid (or a brick) heated on the stove, then wrapped in a thick towel and tucked into a cold bed, will heat the bed as well as an electric blanket.

To ease a hurting muscle, make a salt or sand pouch and keep it in the top of a double-boiler on the stove. A salt pouch is simply a flannel bag or square filled with salt, then sewed shut. I make my pouches with a double layer of flannel so the salt/sand won't sift through the material. Salt and sand both hold heat for a long time and work better than a hot water bottle.

To relieve a stuffy nose or a cough, put a little oil of peppermint or wintergreen or eucalyptus into a pan of water and set it on the stove. It will permeate the whole house. To freshen a house, put whole spices or a teaspoon of vanilla in a pan of water on the stove.

Here are some recipes for stovetop cooking:

Steamed pumpkin pudding

Cream together:

3 tablespoon butter or margarine
¾ cup sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla

Add, then beat well:

2 eggs
1½ cups cooked, pureed pumpkin
¼ cup sour milk or buttermilk

Sift together, then add:

2½ cups flour
1½ teaspoons baking soda
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon cinnamon
½ teaspoon nutmeg
¼ teaspoon cloves

Mix well above ingredients, then add:

1½ cups chopped nuts

Sir well, then spoon into an eight-cup greased mold or a greased two-pound coffee can. Cover with a double piece of waxed paper and tie it on with string or a rubber band. Place on a trivet in a deep kettle. Add boiling water halfway up the mold. Cover kettle, bring to a boil, then reduce heat and boil gently for two hours or until a toothpick comes out clean. Remove from water, let pudding stand in mold for five minutes. Turn out on rack. Slice, serve warm with lemon or vanilla sauce.

Sauce:

½ cup sugar
1 Tablespoon cornstarch
⅛ teaspoon salt
⅛ teaspoon nutmeg
1 cup boiling water
2 Tablespoons butter
1½ Tablespoons lemon juice OR 1 teaspoon vanilla extract.

Mix sugar, cornstarch, salt, and nutmeg in saucepan. Gradually stir in water. Cook over low heat until thick and clear. Add butter and flavoring of choice; blend thoroughly. Serve warm over pudding.

Split pea soup

1 small ham hock OR 1 cup cooked, diced ham
4 cups boiling water
1¾ cups split green peas, sorted & rinsed. (Do not soak.)
2 teaspoons chicken bouillon
¼ teaspoon black pepper
1 finely chopped onion
1 thinly sliced carrot
1 stalk finely chopped celery

In a large pot combine all ingredients. Cover, cook slowly for 3 to 3½ hours. Add salt to taste. This is a very thick soup and can be thinned with either milk or water. Serve with corn bread.

Confit

Developed by thrifty French farm cooks, this is a recipe for tough cuts of beef, pork, or lamb, or for stewing hens or turkeys too far along in years to roast.

4 to 5 pounds of either:
cracked lamb shanks
OR lamb breasts in large sections

OR boned lamb shoulder
OR boned pork butt, leg, or shoulder in one piece
OR whole beef brisket
OR individual lean beef ribs
OR whole turkey or chicken thighs (leave skin on)
6 cloves garlic, minced
1/2 cup water
1/3 cup chopped parsley
2 Tablespoons salt
1 teaspoon *each*:
cracked bay leaves
dry rosemary leaves
dry thyme leaves

Combine salt and spices *except* parsley and garlic, rub mixture over every surface of the meat. Remove any string or netting that may be on meat. Place in heavy plastic bag or a glass or stainless steel container. Cover and refrigerate for 12 to 24 hours. (Chill minimum time for lightest salt flavor.) Thoroughly rinse meat under cold water, rubbing gently to remove as much salt as possible. Drain, pat dry. Can be chilled another 12 hours after rinsing.

Arrange meat as flat as possible in a heavy 12-inch frying pan or a five- to six-quart *heavy* kettle. Cover with a tight-fitting lid. Cook slowly until meat is very tender and slightly browned, about 2½ to 3½ hours, depending on the heat of the stove and the size of the pieces of meat. Turn occasionally to equalize cooking. As the fat cooks out of the meat, and the meat begins to brown, you will hear it sizzling; from this point, check meat frequently and turn more often for even browning.

Lift meat from pan, drain briefly, arrange on warmed platter. Keep warm. Pour off fat in pan, discard fat. Add garlic to pan, cook and stir until soft. Add ½ cup water and bring to boil; stir to free browned particles. Blend in parsley and serve over meat or from a small bowl to add over individual portions. Especially good with french fries or oven-browned potatoes. Δ

Ants

March in a line
Up my wall,
Then march back down.
They appear as two swarms,
Passing through each other like clouds—
But they are one.
Massed together,
They appear to be in confusion.
Yet, individually,
Each is an atom of determination.
I watch one over her whole trek;
She emerges from the crack in the floor,
Climbs the wall,
Disappears for a moment beneath the moulding,
But reappears, steadfast in her journey.
She is relentless.
At her destination,
She takes my meager offering
And returns by the very path on which she came—
Marching down the wall
Until she disappears back into the floor.
They are a fascinating study in purpose and industry.
They are grateful
For what I give them.
They will persevere
Until they carry it all back to their home.
I am poisoning them.

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