

Keep a heat notebook

A burner dial describes a setting, not a measured pan temperature. Record a repeatable setup before changing several things at once.

Begin with the cookware and stove instructions. Note the burner you use, its setting and the pan size. Use the recipe's method and check the food as directed. Do not leave heating cookware unattended or use a smoke cloud as a target.

After cooking, describe the outcome precisely: the onions browned at the edge before the centre softened, or the second batch coloured more quickly than the first. Those observations are more helpful than writing that the pan was bad.

Next time, change one controllable detail, such as the batch size or the setting recommended by your recipe, and compare the result. Keep the other ingredients and preparation similar. This is a kitchen record, not a calibrated temperature test or a guarantee that the same setting will work on a different stove.

If oil smokes unexpectedly, follow the appliance's safety instructions. Never leave the pan to continue heating as an experiment.

Try it on paper

Record pan, burner, recipe, batch size and one observation. Add one change you want to test next time.

The wash, dry, oil routine

For seasoned cast iron, Lodge describes routine care as washing, drying and applying oil. Check your own cookware's instructions first.

Use the washing method recommended for your pan. Lodge's published instructions permit warm, soapy water for seasoned cast iron. Rinse and dry the cookware completely, handling it safely throughout.

After drying, apply a very light coating of cooking oil when instructed by the manufacturer. Wipe away excess rather than leaving a pool. Put the cookware away only when it is cool and dry.

Keep your care record short: what you cooked, the cleaning method, whether the pan was fully dry and anything you want to check before next use. If a concern persists, consult the maker's current care guidance instead of repeating a method that is not helping.

Source: Lodge, Seasoned Cast Iron Cleaning & Care and How to Season. Links are on the last page.

Try it on paper

Write your own pan's routine in a single sentence and keep it with its original instructions.

Keep this page nearby

A quick reference for the next session. It does not replace your cookware instructions or a tested recipe.

Before cooking

Read the recipe, check the cookware instructions and set out dry mitts and a trivet.

While cooking

Stay with the pan. Use recipe checkpoints, not an unattended timer as a substitute for checking.

After cooking

Follow the pan maker's approved wash, dry and oil routine. Store cool and dry.

Safe food temperatures

USDA minimums: poultry and leftovers 165°F (74°C); ground meats 160°F (71°C); whole beef, pork, veal and lamb cuts 145°F (63°C), followed by a 3-minute rest. Use a food thermometer.

Something looks wrong

Stop if you suspect damage. Describe and photograph the issue, then consult the cookware maker.

Food-safety source: USDA FSIS / FoodSafety.gov. Refer to current local guidance for other foods and special situations.