



# Homemade Method™

## Week 5: Learn how to Cook Using your Oven

### Introduction

Is there anything more heart-warming than the aromas of hot, roasting food wafting through the house on a cold winter's day? But if you're like most people, you might think of the oven as something from a bygone era.

The oven is actually a really user-friendly, convenient and fast cooking tool, when you know how. It's perfect for people who live alone because you can bulk cook many meals for the week in one sitting. It's great for families because you can efficiently cook in large volumes to feed the troops, with minimal clean up. And if you do your own roasting at home, you can reduce the amount of added fats, and combine with fresh ingredients to create healthy, balanced meals.

### Our 8 Step Foolproof Oven Cooking Guide

Our 8 Step Foolproof Oven Cooking Guide will teach you how you can use your oven to quickly & easily prepare meals for many days - including nuts, fish, chicken, meats, vegetables & desserts - without using a recipe. Our guide will walk you through the simple steps you need to follow to roast the perfect dish: from choosing your ingredient to cooking fundamentals such as how to properly preheat your oven (and what *not* to do!), what oven settings, temperatures and racks to use, and how to choose the right bakeware and oils for oven cooking.

### Step 1: Preheat your oven & then keep the heat in

The first step is to preheat your oven - and then keep the heat in.

Tips for success:

- Do not skip the preheat step or your food will not cook in the recommended time and may dry out.
- Try to avoid opening the oven door too many times or too wide when placing your ingredients inside or during cooking to check 'doneness'. Every time you do this, the heat escapes and the temp changes. Again this will interfere with cooking time.

## Step 2: Choose your ingredient or dish

Choose from our oven recipes for this week...or keep things **super simple** and use a [single ingredient](#).

Here's some examples of single ingredients that bake & roast well in the oven:

- **Nuts and seeds:**
  - Almonds, cashews, hazelnuts, walnuts, peanuts
  - Sesame seeds, pepitas, sunflower seeds
  
- **Vegetables:**
  - Potatoes, sweet potatoes, yam, squash, pumpkin
  - Portabello mushroom, Crimini mushrooms
  - Tomatoes, Bell Peppers, Onions, Eggplant, Carrots
  - Cauliflower with Cheese
  - Garlic
  
- **Meats, chicken & fish:**
  - Beef, rack of lamb, pork tenderloin,
  - Whole roasted chicken or pieces with or without skin
  - Roasted salmon, trout, snapper, cod
  
- **Fruits:**
  - Stone fruits such as peaches & apricots
  - Strawberries, apples & pears

### Pro tip:

- Experience the efficiency of using your oven by cooking 3 dishes or ingredients in 1 cooking session in under an hour. For example, try to cook a meat, a vegetable and a healthy carb or dessert in one cooking session. The trick is simply to use the 3 oven shelves to place the 3 different dishes or ingredients in at the same time. And start with the ingredient which will take the longest to cook so it's cooking while you prep the other two. This is the beauty of the oven and how it can save you time!

## Step 3: Set your oven to bake or broil

### 1. **Baking:** Use this most of the time to cook in the oven

This is the setting you will use the most to cook things like chicken, potatoes, vegetables, stews and homemade bars. You generally bake by placing the item towards the middle of the oven. Food gets cooked from the 'outside in' (unlike a microwave where the food molecules vibrate).

### 2. **Broiling:** Use this to brown at high heat

This is used to brown or finish meat on the outside, without cooking the inside too much. You use it to cook things like steak or partially cooked chicken under a very hot, very direct heat. You broil towards the very top of the oven where there is a direct heat source.

## Step 4: Know your oven temperature

A moderate oven is around 350°F. Most dishes, recipes and ingredients work well in a moderate oven - so if you remember nothing else, just remember 350°F.

### Tips:

- If you are cooking something which is burning on the outside but raw in the middle, then reduce the heat
- If you are cooking something which just needs browning on the outside (eg. nuts, rare steak), then you can increase the temperature.
- For beginner cooks, we always recommend you use a meat thermometer to test doneness until you gain confidence.
  - As a general rule, you should hit 165°F for chicken and pork
  - And around 135-140°F for medium beef & lamb.
- Your oven may not run at the exact temperature shown on the dial - especially if it is an old oven. The trick is to 'get to know your oven'. For example, if a recipe said cook for 20 mins and your dish needed 23 mins, then you can start learning over time to add a few minutes onto cooking times. Similarly, your oven may have 'cool patches' that you need to avoid when placing items.
- Common oven terms in recipes include 'cool to hot' and 'slow to fast'. Here is how that translates in degrees so you can set your oven correctly:

Description	Degrees F	Description	Degrees F
Cool oven	200°F	Very slow oven	250°F
Moderate oven	350-375°F	Slow oven	300-325°F
Hot oven	400-450°F	Moderate oven	350-375°F
Very hot oven	450-500°F	Fast oven	450-500°F

## Step 5: Choose your oven racks

As a general rule, you can't go too far wrong using the middle rack for most things.

If you are interested in learning more about when to use the other racks, here is the low down:

1. **Top rack:** Use for broiling (see notes on broiling under 'settings')
2. **Middle rack:** Use for most other things
3. **Bottom rack:** Use for pizza or flat breads which require short exposure to intense heat.

## Step 6: Choose your bakeware

There is no magic to bakeware - use whatever is logically the right size, shape and depth for what you are cooking.

Remember: If you want something to brown you need to set it in a single layer on the baking tray and stir & coat with oil in the middle of cooking.

Here are the essentials you should stock at home:

1. **A 9" x 13" glass, ceramic or metal baking pan:** This is a standard pan size and can hold about 3 quarts of liquid. Use glass to make it more presentable. Buy with a lid for easier storage. You can use this for casseroles, roasting meats or chicken and vegetables.
2. **An 8" x 8" metal baking pan:** Great for bars.
3. **Two half sheet pans:** Use these for nuts, seeds and granola. Spend a little more for good quality, heavy pans.
4. **Muffin pan:** Use these for healthy homemade muffins and egg muffins.

5. **A 9" x 5" loaf pan:** If you see yourself baking homemade banana bread, meatloaf or bread.

The bakeware set on our [list of kitchen essentials](#) will do the job on most things.

## Step 6: Choose the right cooking oil & coat the pan

Coconut oil, avocado oil, & ghee are high smoke point oils that you can use in the oven. Even though it's not technically a high-smoke point, olive oil does the job most of the time.

Oven cooking generally involves cooking foods at high temperatures. Therefore, it is recommended to select oils with a high-smoking point. When an oil reaches its 'smoke point' (ie. begins smoking) it releases free radicals bad for your health, linked to cancer, and can create bitter, acrid tasting food. If you want to learn more, check out our [cooking oils guide](#).

## Step 7: Season & prepare your ingredient

As a general rule, all you need is salt, pepper & some oil to create a delicious roasted ingredient. Good cooking is about celebrating the natural, simple flavors of good ingredients and therefore you don't need to add much more.

If you do want to experiment with flavors, try one or two of the following:

- Fresh or dried herbs such as thyme, oregano, sage, parsley, rosemary for roasting meats or vegetables
- Spices such as cumin, cajun, chilli, paprika for chicken, seafood or nuts.
- Slices of lemon wedges for chicken or seafood
- Cinnamon and/or brown sugar for fruits or nuts.

To prepare your ingredient, wrap it in aluminum foil drizzled with oil if the estimated cooking time is more than 15 mins (ie. most meats & vegetables). This will prevent the ingredient from drying out in the oven. Halfway through the cooking process, remove the aluminum foil and drizzle with oil so the ingredient can brown for the remaining cooking time (ie. do not return the aluminum foil cover).

## Step 8: Pop your dish in the oven, set the timer... and relax!

OK so now you're ready to get cooking! One of the best things about oven cooking, is once the ingredient is in the oven, you can set the timer, relax and do something else while the oven does all the work for you!

Or, alternatively, start working on your second and third dishes so you can cook them all in one sitting.

## Make it a Meal

When your roasted ingredient is ready, turn it into a healthy, balanced meal by combining with other fresh & seasonal ingredients. Here's some ideas:

- **Salads:** Toss with mixed greens, salad dressing, tomato, carrot, green onions, parsley, bell peppers, carrots, mushrooms, tofu, cheese, nuts or anything else you care to add!
- **Dips:** Blend with cream cheese or yoghurt to make a delicious dip
- **Soups:** Blend with vegetable stock or milk and boil to make a soup. Add salt & pepper to taste.
- **Sandwiches & Wraps:** Use your roasted ingredient in a sandwich or wrap with lettuce, tomato, basil, cheese - or any other combo of your choice.

Your roasted ingredients can be stored in the fridge of 4-6 days in an airtight, dry container.

Happy Oven Cooking!