

Stoneware 101

Q: Just what are baking stones?

A: Our stoneware is made from natural clay products and is hand-finished. Because they are made from a natural product, there may be subtle variances in color and texture that will not affect baking performance. Each piece is unique.

Q: I keep hearing about seasoning but I really don't understand it. Help!

A: With use, seasoning will naturally occur in Stoneware. Fats and oils are absorbed onto the surface of the stone. The seasoning forms a non-stick coating, making greasing almost obsolete.

Q: My Baking Stone is sticky. Why?

A: If a stone is over-oiled during the seasoning process, a sticky build-up can occur. This build-up can also cause food to stick to the stone. If this occurs, coat stone surface with a baking soda and water paste, let it sit for approximately 30 minutes and clean as usual.

Q: What is the correct seasoning process?

A: To start the seasoning process, simply use a vegetable oil spray for the three to five uses. Baking high fat content foods also helps with the natural seasoning process.

Q: Why are there indentations on the bottoms of some stones?

A: The "indentations" were added to allow air circulation around the stone. This improves baking results.

Q: Why are baking stones better than glass or aluminum?

A: Aluminum simply cannot absorb the heat from the oven and hold it evenly. Aluminum, and glass, does not stop at the temperature of the oven as stoneware does. Aluminum, is actually a good conductor of heat, it continues to rise in temperature. In an oven, heat is not directly applied to the aluminum, as on a stovetop, and therefore does not hold and maintain temperature. This is why underbaking and overbaking occur.

Q: I've seen stoneware in stores (cheaper) what's so special about yours?

A: Please be aware that our stoneware is of a higher quality and is the most superior available. In fact, our stoneware vendor said it best: "Stoneware offered from other companies is definitely different than Pampered Chef's. The Pampered Chef is the cream of the crop--each one hand-finished, fully inspected of the finest quality. I can assure you that no other stones come close to The Pampered Chef in quality." Plus.... our stones all have a 3-year warranty. Try returning that other stone to the Dollar Mart after 30 days--let alone within 3 years! (Plus...most stones are made of a material that may allow oils to soak and drip all the way through to the bottom of the oven--YUCK!!)

Q: There is a baking stone on the market that never breaks and comes with a lifetime guarantee. Why don't we carry stones like this?

A: This type of stoneware is called Kiln Brick (this is the company that makes stones sold through department stores--such as Wal-Mart, etc.) While it (Kiln Brick) is less susceptible to breakage, it has the disadvantage of actually being too porous. When high fat items are baked on a Kiln Brick stone, the grease soaks up into its interior. The next time the stone is heated up, the grease caught in the center of the stone also heats up and starts to smoke, giving of a noxious odor.

Kiln Brick Stones are suited only for baking pizza or bread. Another disadvantage of Kiln Brick is that it must be pre-heated for at least 30 minutes before using it. Also, a 13-inch Kiln Brick weighs well over 2 pounds MORE than our 13-inch stone.

Q: What about the really low-priced stones sold in mail-order catalogs?

A: These stones are from the Far East and are very different. Imported stones do not have the thermal expansion properties that ours do--making them more likely to break. The Far East also may lack the expertise and quality control needed to produce a consistent product. The directions received with these stones is very minimal

Q: Can I use aluminum foil to cover the top of the 9" Square Baker, Rectangular Baker, Deep Dish Baker, etc.?

A: Aluminum foil can be used to cover the top surface of foods, such as pizza, or placed over the top of the 9x13" Baker, etc., to act as a cover. However, foil should not cover the baking surface of the stoneware because it will block the beneficial effects of the stoneware. Remember, you can cover the top of foods with foil or use it as a cover, but you do not want direct contact with the baking surface and aluminum foil.

Q: Is it possible for stoneware to become saturated and not absorb any more fat or oil from foods onto its surface? Would this affect the baking quality if the stoneware were saturated?

A: The stoneware will gradually absorb fats and oils onto its surface to form a non-stick coating. The seasoning on the stoneware will not affect the baking quality. Moisture will still pass through a very seasoned stone and heat will continue to be distributed evenly.

Q: Can the stones be used on a grill?

A: You may use the stoneware on a charcoal grill ONLY IF the proper method of cooking is used: Stones cannot be used on gas grills

because the flames cannot be controlled. Use of stones on any grill is discouraged.

Q: What about a broiler?

A: A stone should not be used under a broiler or on top of a direct heat source. For this reason, we do not recommend cooking with the Stoneware in an oven above 500 degrees because the broiler element will be turned on at or above 500 degrees.

Q: Can my stone be stored in the oven?

A: Yes, your stone can be stored in the oven...however, it is not recommended to leave the stored stone in the oven while baking other foods, could cause thermal shock

Q: Should I preheat Stones before use?

A: It is not necessary to preheat Pampered Chef's Stoneware. However, you should preheat your oven. Bake foods on the Baking Stones at the same temperatures and time-lengths you would normally use.

Q: Why does dish soap leave a flavor but garlic and fish don't?

A: Soap or detergent works to actually form a bond with fats and oils. On our stoneware, fats and oils are part of the seasoning of the stone, so when you try to rinse the soap away, it has actually bonded to the surface seasoning making it difficult to remove. A soap taste may then exist during your next usage. When you bake food with strong odors and flavors, there is nothing in the food that binds to the stone or seasoning. Garlic, fish, onion, etc., are natural food products and do not adhere to the stone. That's why you can bake fish one night and cookies the next without having a "fishy" cookie taste.

Q: If I'm not using soap to clean my stone, then how can it be clean?

A: Soap does not kill bacteria. Soap (and detergent) when combined with water molecules penetrates the pores of food residue to soften it. This softening of food residue just makes it easier for the residue to be removed. Hot water alone makes oil and other food substances more fluid and therefore easier to dislodge, especially when used in combination with the nylon pan scraper. This rubbing action will effectively remove food residue.

Q: Can stoneware be used in a convection oven?

A: Definitely. A convection oven is an oven with a built-in fan that forces superheated air throughout the oven for a quicker, more even browning and baking. Since the oven temperature is uniform and controlled throughout, convection ovens do require cooking temperatures to be lower. You can use your favorite Pampered Chef recipe with a convection oven, but for best results, follow baking time and temperature guidelines that are provided with the oven.

Q: What is the correct rack to put a stone in the oven?

A: The second from the bottom. Some ovens are labeled "A", "B", etc. "B" is the correct position-the most "central" part of the oven. Before pre-heating the oven at your shows, always check rack position and adjust if necessary.

Q: Can I place another pan directly on top of the stoneware to bake?

A: No. This will create thermal shock and break the stone.

Q: Why can't two chicken breasts be baked on the larger stones?

A: It is very important to evenly spread out foods over surface of the stone before baking. When two chicken breasts are placed on a stone, the area on which the food is placed remains cold while the remaining parts of the stone heat up. This puts a strain on that portion of the stone and could cause a thermal shock. Foods should be baked on stoneware pieces that match the size of the food item being baked. Rule of thumb: 2/3 of the surface of the stone should be covered with food.

Q: Can you bake with two stones in the oven at the same time?

A: Yes and no. Two stones can be baked on at the same time if they are on the same rack. "Stacking" or placing stones on separate racks, one over the other, is not an efficient way to use the stones. The stone on the bottom actually absorbs most of the heat from the element and the upper stone does not heat properly.

Q: Can stones be used in the microwave?

A: Yes, food can be baked or reheated in the microwave. Stones actually work best with dry heat, as in a conventional oven, so the results will not be the same in a microwave