



Rick Dorr of Kent lifts the lid

## Going Dutch

Cooking with Dutch ovens offers versatility and unique flavors

BY MARGIE WUEBKER

THE SMELL OF FOOD cooking outdoors wafts across a large grassy area behind Lehman's Hardware.

'Tis the season for the annual Dutch Oven Gathering and a

menu that ranges from beef stew and sourdough bread to fruit cobbler and pineapple upside-down cake.

Matt Buser, a Cleveland-area resident, proposed the event five years ago to Lehman's owners, who stock a large display of cast iron cookware in their landmark store. They quickly agreed that a gathering held merit, and the first drew 40 to 50 people — participants as well as visitors.

Glenda Lehman Ervin, Lehman's vice president of marketing, avidly supports the event, which continues to grow with each passing year. That goes along with renewed interest in cast iron cooking in gen-

eral. The popular event subsequently led to the publication of *Sizzle! Cast Iron Favorites for Cast Iron Cookery* last year. The cookbook, available at the store for \$12.95, features more than 500 recipes that can be prepared outdoors or in the kitchen with relative ease.

Participating cooks bring along all needed equipment as well as ingredients to make one or more favorite dishes on the grounds.

Many choose to prepare samples for visitors, but the favorite part is the post-event potluck for

all the cooks.

"It's some of the best food you'll ever eat," Ervin says. "And it's not all meats and upside-down cakes. There's great creativity in the cast iron cooking community."

Buser agrees wholeheartedly. "A Dutch oven is so versatile," he says. "The truth is anything you can cook on a stove, bake in an oven or prepare in a slow cooker turns out equally well with a little practice in a Dutch oven."

Jim Carter of Belle Vernon, Pa., visits each year, bringing a 16-inch Dutch oven and tricks of the trade acquired through a long association with the Boy Scout program as his sons advanced through the ranks.

"I love Dutch oven cooking —

### PINEAPPLE UPSIDE-DOWN CAKE

3 Tbsp. butter or margarine  
1 can (20 oz.) sliced pineapple  
6 to 10 maraschino cherries  
1-1/2 cups brown sugar  
1 (18 oz.) yellow cake mix  
1-1/4 cup water  
1/3 cup vegetable oil  
3 eggs

Line a 12-inch Dutch oven with foil. Place 9 coals under the oven. Melt butter in foil-lined pan. Arrange pineapple slices with cherries in center of each slice in bottom of the oven. Sprinkle brown sugar evenly over fruit. Prepare cake mix according to package directions (you may use juice drained from pineapple slices for part of the liquid). Carefully pour cake batter over the fruit. Replace lid on Dutch oven. Put 12 coals on the top. Bake 30 to 40 minutes until cake is brown and springs back when touched. Carefully turn upside down onto plate and remove foil. Cut and served when cool.

**Note:** The cake can be baked in a cast iron skillet or a prepared cake pan in the oven at 350 degrees for 30 to 35 minutes. Check the center with a toothpick. If the toothpick comes out clean, the cake is fin-

—Photo by Cheryl Bach



### MEXICALI SOUTHWESTERN CORN BREAD

1 cup coarse ground cornmeal  
1 cup flour  
1/4 cup sugar  
1 tsp. salt  
1 tsp. baking powder  
1 beaten egg  
1 cup milk  
1/4 cup vegetable oil (or use some of the bacon fat from below for flavor)  
1/2 pound bacon (diced and fried crisp in advance)  
2 jalapeño peppers, seeds removed and diced small  
1/2 green pepper, diced small  
1/2 red pepper, diced small  
1 cup corn or Mexican corn (small can)

Fry bacon pieces in advance in the bottom of a Dutch oven or in your cast iron fry pan. Drain off grease and save about 1/4 cup for mixing with the other ingredients. The crisp bacon pieces will add flavor and texture to the finished product; just add them into the mix. Beat the egg first before blending it

into the other ingredients in a medium bowl. Pour batter into a well-greased Dutch oven (this should be preheated rather than cold). Bake at 425 degrees for 20 to 30 minutes. Serve hot with slabs of butter.

**Notes:** I like to pour the batter in a greased disposable aluminum cake pan and put pebbles, a trivet or pennies underneath it so that air can circulate. This will keep you from burning the bottom and make cleanup even easier. Remember that you are baking and that more coals will go on the top than the bottom.

If you don't want the kick of jalapeño, just leave it out. If you don't want to carry fresh produce, use the small can of Mexican corn that already has red and green pepper in it. The color is particularly pleasing. I also have used roasted cornmeal for a different taste. You can also add diced onion. Alternately, this recipe can be baked in a preheated oven at 425 degrees for 20 to 30 minutes. Check the degree of doneness with a toothpick inserted in the center. If the toothpick comes out clean, the cornbread is finished.

well, any kind of cooking with cast iron pots and pans for that matter," he says. "The gathering combines camaraderie along with a definite challenge — getting everything cooked to perfection without burning."

Pataskala residents Christopher and Laurie Smith used to make their tasty upside-down cake in his grandmother's cast iron skillet until they became acquainted with a Dutch oven cooking group at Wolf Run State Park south of Cambridge.

"He's the cooker, and I'm the cleaner-upper," Laurie says, gesturing to their neatly arranged dining tent.

Richard Dorr of Kent is no stranger to the gathering. He and his friend, Bruce Stockstader, carefully unpack seven Dutch ovens for demonstrations followed by tasty sampling.

"Pioneers bound for new homes in the West and prospectors in the California gold fields used cast iron pots when cooking meals outdoors," Dorr says. "Somewhere along the line, those pots moved inside."

Dorr has learned over the years to place such things as cornbread batter or corn soufflé (recipes available online) in a disposable aluminum cake pan that has been greased with butter

or treated with cooking spray. He puts pebbles, a trivet or even pennies in the bottom of the Dutch oven before adding the batter-filled pan. This allows air to circulate and prevents burning. It also simplifies cleaning. ☞

To comment on this story or to share story suggestions, contact Margie at [lwuebker@roadrunner.com](mailto:lwuebker@roadrunner.com).

If you are interested in attending the sixth annual Dutch Oven Gathering, here are the particulars:

• **When:** Saturday, May 25, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

• **Where:** Grassy field behind Lehman's, 4779 Kidron Road, Kidron.

• **Special events:** Hands-on training classes and a Dutch oven cookoff for youth.

• **Details:** Call 330-603-7266 to reserve a spot. Participants also must bring along all needed supplies to cook a favorite dish or two at the site.

Lehman's