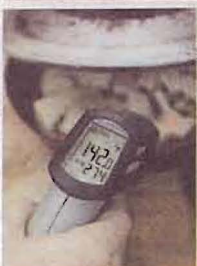


RECIPE BOX



How Hot is Hot?

Testing Backcountry Cooking Temperatures

BY ELISA HITT

A typical frontcountry baking recipe starts with: “Preheat oven to 375 degrees.” When you’re sitting in camp at the end of the day, though, lighting your stove and digging out your fry-bake, that’s not very helpful. Just what is the translation between oven temps and stove temps? How big of a difference does that twiggy fire make? Does stovetop baking sterilize your pizza?

In our never-ending quest for knowledge and backcountry cooking excellence, we rustled up a pyrometer—a handheld, digital device that measures temperatures remotely—to put some field pizza recipes to the test. And while our methods are fairly unscientific, we still got some good answers.

We test-drove two pizza cooking variations—one using the flip fry method (toast the dough on one side, flip brown side up, add toppings and toast again until toppings bubble), and the other using a stove on the bottom and the iconic NOLS twiggy fire on top. We measured all the temps we could think of along the way to answer our nagging question: How hot is hot?

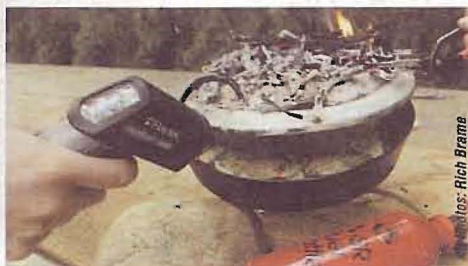
Here’s what our nifty pyrometer had to say:

- 1) Our dough started out at a balmy 60° while our Whisperlite roared to over 800°.
- 2) In our flip fry test, the dough’s toasted side reached 250° after about five minutes of rotated frying.
- 3) We added toppings to the browned side and commenced more rotating frying to finish the pizza. After another five minutes or so the bubbling toppings were at 150° and it was time to eat.
- 4) The alternative twiggy fire method provided plenty of quick heat, too. A 900+° fire atop our pan lid rapidly brought the dough and beautifully gooey toppings to 170°.

Our experiments indicate that both dough and toppings spend five minutes or more between 150–250°. According to Paul Auerbach’s definitive reference, *Wilderness Medicine*, those times and temperatures sterilize most pathogens commonly found in North American backcountry water. That means that both flip frying and twiggy fire baking not only make tasty pizza, they make pizza that is safe to eat. Adapting frontcountry recipes to the backcountry will always be an adventure, but at least now we know how to start: “Preheat stove to 800 degrees.”

We used a Raytek MT6 MiniTemp Infrared Thermometer to obtain temperature ratings, which is priced at around \$60 and is available from www.amazon.com and other retailers. Our stove was an MSR Whisperlite Internationale, the same sort issued on NOLS courses, available at www.msrgear.com for \$79.95, and our pan was a Banks Expedition Model FryBake, available from the NOLS store (www.nols.edu/store) for \$68.

Got a great backcountry recipe? Send it to leader@nols.edu along with your name, NOLS course, and where the recipe was created. If your recipe is chosen, you’ll get a copy of the *NOLS Cookery*!



Photos: Rich Brana