

# How to cook the perfect Pizza in your wood fired oven

From [www.ozpizzaoven.com](http://www.ozpizzaoven.com)

The trick to cooking the perfect pizza lies in the pre-heating of your wood-fired oven. You need to crank it up to allow the heat to soak into the dome and through the base pavers – right through to the heat sink below.

Don't worry about over-heating your oven, you can always let it cool a little before you cook your pizzas. If you under-heat it, all sorts of things will go wrong, I'll explain...

I find the best way to start the fire is with 6 full size broadsheet pages of the newspaper (The Age), scrunched up and covered with fine twigs or timber offcuts, first some 1cm diameter then some 2cm diameter. One small mound of paper and twigs. Light this first then let it catch.

Then put in larger pieces. 3cm diameter, then 6 cm and once they catch you can pretty much go for it. In my oven I put in logs over 20cm in diameter.

The advantage of starting the fire this way is it will produce a whole lot less smoke. If you pile all the timber in before you light it, you'll produce a whole lot of smoke which will pour out your door into your face (your flue won't draw it all) and you'll smoke out your house and your neighbors...

If you use large logs like I do, you'll find during the firing period you sometimes need to put a few smaller pieces in around the larger log(s) to keep the fire burning, you want good flames burning for at least 2 hours to get your oven heated through. I often fire it for 3 hours, but 2 hours is enough if you've got a good fire going.

During the firing stage, you don't want your fire to sit with a log on hot coals and a small slow burning fire, you want flames licking the roof of your oven most of the time. See image below:



If you've got a thermometer, your oven needs to be burning at over 450 degrees for at least an hour of that 2 hour firing period.

When is it ready?

The roof of the oven will be completely white when your oven is ready. If your roof is black, it's not hot enough.

The fire at this stage should be settled down with a bit of fuel (unburned timber) on top of a pile of red hot coals.

Push the fire to the back or to the side of the oven. After trailing various positions, I find it works best with the fire pushed to the back of the oven, I can cook 2 pizzas at a time in front of the fire.

See image below – a chunk of unburned log and a white roof – the oven is ready to cook pizza!



If you are cooking more than 20 pizzas, you want another log on the coals to maintain the heat for over an hour. Put it in before you start cooking to let it catch and start to burn. A decent log will slow burn for an hour maintaining the oven temperature during the pizza cooking stage.

If you're only cooking half a dozen pizzas for a family, you can get away with no additional fuel because you'll have your pizza's done in 20 minutes! (cooking 2 at a time)! So the fire above will be perfect. Note the roof of the oven is completely white are the upright pavers around base of the wall of the oven.

After pushing back the fire, (I use a long handled mortar mixing trowel to do this) I sweep back the coal and ash with a brass broom, then I mop the pavers of the cooking surface with a wet mop. This both cleans the pavers and cools them.

You can't put the pizza straight onto the pavers after you push the fire back or you'll burn the base of the pizza in 15 seconds – yep it'll be that fast. I find it takes at least 10 minutes for the pavers to cool enough for cooking. You can test it by throwing on a bit of flour. If it turns instantly black and goes up in a puff of smoke, you're too hot...

The oven temperature now needs to be 350 degrees. 400 is also ok. 450 is pushing it a bit but so long as the pavers are cool, you can still cook in 450 degrees. Any cooler than 300 and the base will cook faster than the top, you'll have

a crispy base and a mushy topping. If your oven has cooled, go easy on the topping and it'll still be OK – push the pizza closer to the fire to allow the topping to cook from the fire heat rather than the oven heat.

Once the pavers cool, put in your pizza. It should only take 3-4 minutes to cook. If you are using baking paper, you should be able to pull out the baking paper in 30 seconds. If the baking paper disintegrates, you're pavers are still too hot – move the pizza closer to the door or to an area of the oven where the fire wasn't sitting to keep it out of that red hot space.

Within 2 minutes turn your pizza 180 degrees – the side near the fire cooks on top fastest. Another 2 minutes and you should be done.

Enjoy!

Every oven is different, it'll take a few goes to get the hang of your oven. Remember – better to make your oven too hot and let it cool than not hot enough, once you start cooking, you can't increase the heat! Nothing worse than an undercooked pizza (well, there is, a Pizza Hit pizza is worse 😊)

Let me know how you go – [Ross@ozpizzaoven.com](mailto:Ross@ozpizzaoven.com)