



In the Potter's Kitchen

Handmade Pots for Home-Cooked Recipes



Sumi von Dassow

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Ovenware

When you think of ovenware you probably think of a casserole dish first. The lidded baking dish is a staple of both the kitchen and the potter's art, and can be used for casseroles, meats, roasted vegetables, and desserts. The lid can be used to cover the food while it's cooking, or to cover it after it comes out of the oven. It can be round, square, rectangular or oval, and it can be small enough to bake for one or two people, or large enough to serve a crowd.

Of course not all baking dishes have lids. Many wonderful foods are baked in uncovered baking dishes—think lasagna, brownies, pies, and breads. Just about any shape and size of dish can be useful, from a custard cup or ramekin holding a few ounces, to a 9×13-inch lasagna dish. Round baking dishes are used for pies, cakes, and many classic desserts such as crumbles, grunts and crisps. Square or rectangular baking dishes are especially useful for lasagna or some dessert recipes, such as baklava or brownies—though the only reason brownies need a square dish may be to facilitate cutting it into small equal pieces!

Breads and souffles want a deeper dish, to allow the contents to rise and to support them during baking. A loaf pan is usually rectangular, so the slices can all be the same size, while a souffle dish might be round or oval. A souffle dish can't be too wide because the delicate souffle needs to be able to cling to the sides as it bakes, so if it's large it needs to be oval.

What makes a casserole or baking dish useful and enjoyable to use? Is the glaze smooth and easy to clean? Is it deep enough to hold your favorite recipe? Does the lid fit well? Details like handles and knobs are important. Here are some questions to ask yourself when making a baking dish.

Is My Pot Useful?

- Does the lid have an unnecessarily high dome, which wastes oven space?
- Does the knob stick up so high the pot won't fit between the racks?
- Does the pot have a trimmed foot that may add excess height?
- Is the knob easy to grasp even with a pot holder?
- If it has side handles, can you get fingers under them with pot holders?

Robbie Lobell, two casserole dishes, two quart size and four quart size.
Soda-fired flameware. Photo by Michael Stadler

- If it doesn't have handles, can you grasp the pot's body with pot holders?
- Does it need a trimmed foot or should it be thrown flat on the bottom? There is some difference of opinion among potters in this regard. Common practice is to avoid a trimmed foot on bakeware. Most cooks prefer to use a pot with a flat bottom and no foot; in addition to adding unnecessary height, a trimmed foot may catch on an oven rack. Also, a trimmed foot catches water in the dishwasher, although this is easily avoided by cutting a notch into the foot. However, some potters put a foot ring on baking dishes to glaze across the entire bottom. This ensures that the bottom of the pot isn't stressed by having a glaze on one side only, since clay and glaze always expand and contract at slightly different rates with heating and cooling. In addition, if the clay is not fully vitrified—such as an earthenware clay—a trimmed foot ring allows for glazing as much of the surface as possible, thus helping to seal the clay from absorbing moisture. In general, however, a flat bottom with a slightly rounded corner helps protect the pot from heat shock and is an easy form to use.
- Should the pot have a gallery to hold the lid, or should the lid have a flange to hold it in place? Typically, the lid of a casserole dish sits on a gallery built into the rim of the pot. While this is functional, some potters think the pot should have a simple rim with a flange on the lid. To quote Vince Pitelka of the Appalachian Center for Craft at Tennessee Tech University, “With the normal ‘cookie-jar’ socket-style gallery on a casserole, where the gallery is on the pot rather than on the lid, anything that bubbles and spatters onto the underside of the lid flows down onto the gallery and makes

a real mess, sometimes sticking the lid in place. Also, a casserole with this kind of gallery makes a less-attractive presentation when placed on the table



Stoneware casserole dish by Catherine Schroeder Abelson, 10 inches in height and oxidation fired to cone 6. This is classic stoneware—robust form and earthy colors. Photo by Sumi von Dassow

with the lid. In contrast, with the gallery on the lid, anything that bubbles and spatters onto the underside of the lid simply drips back down into the casserole and does not contaminate the gallery. It's a fairly fine point, but worth considering." Also, a gallery built into the rim of the pot might make it more difficult to remove the first serving of a casserole. On the other hand, the traditional simple, slightly domed lid is easier to make and potentially easier to replace if broken. Some users believe that if there is a flange on the lid then it will end up getting into the food when it's placed on the pot. Some potters think that the profile of the dish when the lid is set on a gallery inside the rim of the pot is more clean and compact. Also, this kind of lid stores easily and compactly upside down inside the gallery. The decision about what kind of lid to make might depend on what is being cooked in the casserole, and whether it is being cooked with the lid on or the lid is going to be used to cover the dish after baking.

The Devil is in the Details

Making Lids

A casserole should have a slightly domed lid because a flat lid may slump in the firing, ending up concave; and an extremely domed lid has no function but wastes oven space. There are at least three ways to make the traditional slightly domed lid without a flange. It can be thrown upside down as a shallow bowl form, then turned right side-up when leather-hard, trimmed, and given a thrown knob or a pulled handle. It can also be thrown right side up, with or without a knob, then while still pliable, it can be turned upside down inside the gallery of the leather hard casserole dish and gently pressed until it develops a smooth curve. Alternatively, if thrown right side-up, it can be placed on a



Casserole dish by Lynn Hull. 10 inches in length, reduction-fired stoneware. This casserole is slightly squared off so that the shape matches the rather contemporary decoration. The outer



edge of the lid is thrown flat so that it can be cut slightly square, although the rim of the casserole and the flange on the lid remain round. The lid was fired in place. Photo by Sumi von Dassow

small round hump mold on a bat, which is lifted and gently dropped to cause the rim to settle down around the hump. This method is very quick and easy, as long as you have several hump molds in different sizes to choose from. In either case, if the knob is not thrown on initially, a handle or knob can be added once the lid is formed. Either of these methods yields a lid that may be a bit less perfectly round and centered than one thrown upside down and trimmed, and the underside may need a bit of trimming to clean it up. Also with some clays the lid is more likely to slump and flatten out in the firing if it is thrown flat and reshaped. If you make a casserole dish without a gallery, you'll need to throw a lid with a flange. It will have to be thrown upside down like a shallow bowl with a double rim, one horizontal and one vertical. It will have to be trimmed and a handle or knob must be added after trimming.

Making Knobs

The knob is important—it must be big enough to grab with a pot holder, but no taller than necessary. If too tall, it will be vulnerable to accidents, and it may force the cook to move a rack to get the dish into the oven. It also shouldn't be too thick, or it might cause difficulty in the drying and firing processes. Two alternatives are to throw it as a small dish-shape on a stem, or a hollow round ball (with a hole somewhere to keep it from blowing up in firing). Of course, a handle can also be formed from a pulled or extruded strap.



Casserole dish by Lynn Isaacson. 9 inches in diameter, salt-fired stoneware, unglazed exterior. Photo by Lynn Isaacson.

Making Handles

Side handles make a casserole or baking dish much easier to get out of the oven, as long as they are big enough to get your fingers under them with a pot holder. There are at least three basic ways to make side handles—you can throw a flange off the side of the pot and then cut away all but two sections; you can pull or extrude a strap and add two pieces to the dish when it's leather-hard; or you can attach two wide lugs to the sides of the dish and pull them into a wide strap. If this strap is then folded under itself it makes a very sturdy handle that is easy to grab. Which style you choose may depend on the size of the dish. If the dish is very shallow you'll want the handles at the rim, so you might simply throw the pot with a wide horizontal rim and cut off the excess. Attaching lugs and pulling the handles in place results in a rather bulky handle, so it is most appropriate for a deeper baking dish. For anything in between will you probably want to attach sections of a pulled or extruded strap.

What Will Your Baking Dish Be Used For?

It's important to keep the intended function in mind when making a baking dish. Of course you can make a dish and sell it and leave it up to the customer to figure out what to do with it, but if you know what your dish is suitable for, it will be easier to sell. By the same token, if you don't know what you're making your dish for, it's possible it won't suit any function very well.

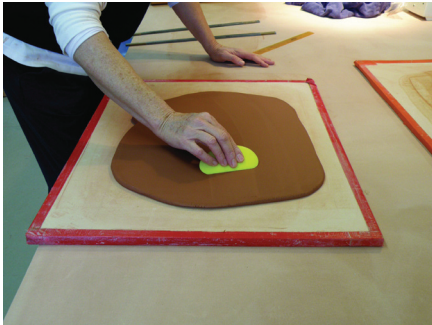


Ramekin by Alice DeLisle. Alice began making ramekins for her favorite custard recipe (see p. 74). Oven-safe, these ramekins are the perfect size for a single serving. Photo by Alice DeLisle



Brie baker by Dana Lehrer Danze, 6¼ inches in diameter, stoneware, oxidation fired to cone 6. Danze sells this very basic Brie baker with a knife and a recipe so customers don't have to ask what to use the dish for. Photo by Dana Lehrer Danze

PROJECT 3: Robbie Lobell Making a Square Baking Dish



Robbie rolls a slab for the bottom of the baking dish and smooths it with a rib.



She then throws a ring without a bottom to form the walls of the baking dish.



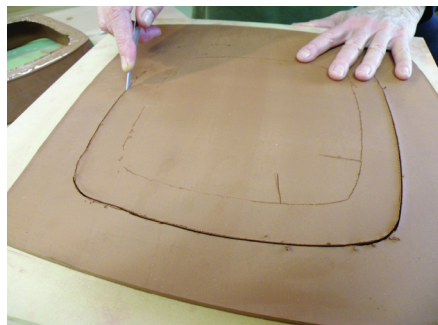
Trimming excess clay from the bottom of the finished ring.



After the ring has set up a bit, it is reshaped into a square. Robbie leaves a little flange of clay inside the ring to aid in attaching it to the slab.



Robbie places the square on the slab and traces around it.



She then cuts the slab to size.



Using sponges and ribs Robbie smooths the join. There's no need to use an extra clay coil to join the pieces because of the flange inside the ring.



Robbie flips the dish over to smooth the bottom and compress it into the wall.



Using a Surform rasp to finish the bottom edge.



Robbie makes a unique style of handle by joining a thick coil of clay to two opposite corners and smoothing and stretching the clay into shape.



Three nested baking dishes by Robbie Lobell, to 13 inches in length, soda-fired flameware. Photo by Michael Stadler

RECIPES FOR OVENWARE

Judy's Russian Rye

2 cups all-purpose flour (preferably King Arthur)
1 cup rye flour
¼ teaspoon instant yeast
1 teaspoon sea salt
Handful of caraway or nigella seeds
1½ cups water

Dry mix everything except water. Add water and stir until uniform and no dry flour remains. Cover bowl tightly with plastic wrap and let dough rest at room temperature for 14 to 18 hours or until top surface is dotted with bubbles. Turn dough out onto a lightly floured countertop. Dust top of dough lightly with flour, and fold the dough over itself once or twice. Cover loosely with plastic wrap and let rest 15 minutes.

Drape a cotton or linen towel over a large bowl, and dust liberally with flour. Dust top of dough lightly with flour, pat gently into a 6-inch circle, and fold edges into center of dough 4 to 6 times to form a ball. Place ball, seam side up, on center of towel, fold corners of towel loosely over dough, and cover loosely with plastic wrap. Let rise 1½ to 2 hours, or until doubled in size.

At least 30 minutes before baking, place bread pot or enameled cast-iron Dutch oven on lower middle rack and heat oven to 450°F. When hot, carefully remove pot from oven. Slide hand beneath towel and turn dough into center of pot (if using Dutch oven, shake pot from side to side to center it, if necessary). Cover with lid and transfer to oven. Bake, covered, for 30 minutes. Remove lid, and bake 15 to 30 minutes longer, or until loaf is golden brown. Transfer to wire rack and cool for at least 2 hours before serving. Experiment with different types of flour; use whole wheat instead of rye, or even soy or oat flour for part of the flour.



Bread pot with
Judy's Rye, by Judith
Motzkin. Photo by
Judith Motzkin

Harvest Season Baked Tomatoes

- 4–5 pounds fresh tomatoes
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 3 tablespoons each chopped fresh basil and rosemary
- Black pepper to taste
- 1 cup bread crumbs
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup ground flax seeds
- 1 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup pine nuts
- 4 tablespoons butter, cut into small chunks
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon pepper
- 1 teaspoon Italian seasoning

Stem tomatoes and cut into 1-inch chunks. Place in a large colander, toss with salt, and drain at least 30 minutes. Grease a large baking dish with olive oil and put tomatoes in it. Add pepper and herbs and toss. Spread evenly. In large bowl mix bread crumbs and the rest of the ingredients, cutting butter into mixture with a fork or fingers until evenly distributed and crumbly. Sprinkle on top of tomato mixture and bake in 350°F oven until slightly browned and bubbly, about 45 minutes.

Roasted Butternut Squash Soup

- 1 butternut squash, peeled, seeded, and chopped
- 1 onion, diced small
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic (2 or 3 cloves)
- Pepper to taste
- 1 bay leaf and two sprigs of fresh thyme if available
- 4 cups chicken or vegetable broth

Mix all ingredients, except for 2 cups of the broth, in bean pot or micaceous clay pot. Roast 30 minutes, then add warmed reserved broth. Stir and roast another 30 minutes. Remove bay leaf and thyme and purée in blender until smooth.

Oven Roasted Butternut Squash in Earthenware

- 1 butternut squash (2–3 pounds), peeled, seeded, and chopped
- 1 onion, diced small, optional
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic (2–3 cloves)
- Pepper to taste
- 2 tablespoons coconut oil, butter or olive oil

Mix all ingredients in a 2 quart earthenware roaster or micaceous clay pot. Cover and place in cold oven set to 450°F and roast for 1 to 1½ hours until tender.

Using a Sauerkraut Crock



Three cabbages will fill this crock.



The cabbages shredded, mixed with caraway seeds and salt, and pounded to release juices.



Press on the disk to push shredded cabbage under the brine. Add additional weight to keep the cabbage from pushing up the disk, cover the crock and set aside for several days or weeks.



This crock is filled with pickling cucumbers and spices. Brine was added and the disk will be placed on top to hold the cucumbers under the brine, with no need for additional weight.



Canister/crock by Catherine Schroeder Abelson, 10 inches in height, stoneware, cone 6 oxidation. This multipurpose lidded jar is equally useful to store cookies or to make sauerkraut in. Photo by Sumi von Dassow

Sauerkraut

- One head of cabbage, about 1½ pounds
- 1 tablespoon non-iodized salt, or sea salt
- 1 tablespoon caraway, fennel, or anise seeds (optional)

Shred cabbage finely. Place in a metal bowl and massage with your hands or pound with a meat mallet until the cabbage wilts and releases moisture. Pack into crock, pressing down firmly until liquid rises above the shredded cabbage. Place weight on top of shredded cabbage to keep it from floating up out of the brine. For additional weight, use any heavy object or a plastic zipper bag filled with brine (1 tablespoon salt per quart of filtered water, in case the Baggie bursts). Store crock below 80°F and taste sauerkraut after a few days. Kraut will develop faster at higher temperatures; if kept below 60°F, it may take a few weeks. When it tastes right, move the kraut to the refrigerator.

Recipe makes one quart; multiply as needed to fill crock. If you don't have enough cabbage to fill your crock, mix in grated or minced turnips, kohlrabi, beets, carrots, onions, leeks, or green onions. Add lemon juice, soy sauce (reduce salt if using soy sauce), crushed red peppers, ginger, or other seasonings if desired. You can be very creative!

Cucumber Pickles

for 1-gallon crock

- 3–4 pounds pickling cucumbers
- 6 tablespoons non-iodized salt or sea salt mixed into ½ gallon filtered (non-chlorinated) water
- 2 tablespoons dill seeds
- 2 tablespoons mustard seeds (optional) or other seasonings of your choice
- Several cloves of garlic
- A few horseradish, grape, or cherry leaves to preserve crispness (optional)

Wash cucumbers and remove blossom end. Pack into crock. Add dill and mustard seeds and garlic. Put in a few grape, horseradish, or cherry leaves if desired. Pour enough brine into crock to cover the cucumbers. Place weight on top of cucumbers to keep them from floating out of the brine. Store crock below 80°F and taste pickles after a few days. Skim mold from surface of brine as needed. Pickles will develop faster at higher temperatures; if kept below 60°F it may take a few weeks. You may use less salt in cooler temperatures, more if it is warm. When sour enough, store in the refrigerator.

Kim Chi

Kim chi is a recipe that isn't usually measured precisely, and the ingredients can vary greatly. This is a very simple version, omitting the traditional rice paste and salted fish, that will make about a gallon.

5 pounds napa cabbage (about two large heads)

5 green onions, sliced

1 cup chopped leeks

1 cup daikon radish, julienned or grated

½–1 cup carrots, julienned or grated

½ cup salt

1 tablespoon red pepper flakes (or more to taste)

1 tablespoon ginger

1 tablespoon or up to ½ cup garlic, minced

½ cup onion, minced

½ cup fish sauce (omit for vegetarian version)

Quarter cabbages and cut out core. Shred or slice cabbages, rinse, and sprinkle with salt. Mix and allow it to rest for 1½ hours, stirring a few times. Drain and rinse thoroughly. Mix the rest of the ingredients, then mix with the cabbage. Pack into a crock or onggi jar, pressing down until liquid rises above the vegetables. Keep in a cool place for a few days until it tastes good. If you omitted the fish sauce you might have to add filtered water, or simply omit the first step; just mix all ingredients with 4 tablespoons salt, then pack into crocks.

Fermented Summer Herbs

1 bunch of parsley or cilantro, chopped

A few cloves of garlic

Handfuls of sweet basil leaves, oregano leaves, chives and other herbs as available: thyme, dill, rosemary, sage

1 teaspoon salt, more or less

Make in the summer to save the flavors through the winter. Place herbs in food processor until everything is chopped fine. Pack tightly into a small crock, adding salt. You will need a smaller crock than you would think; use one teaspoon of salt per pint and pack in until liquid rises to the top. Cover and set aside in a cool place for several days or weeks.



Life in the Sound Jar by Gayle Bair, 8½ inches in height, cone 6 oxidation fired white stoneware with black slip and sgraffito decoration. This jar holds 2½ quarts. Photo by Gayle Bair.

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