



WOOD-FIRED OVEN

COOKING GUIDE

A practical customer handbook for XclusiveDecor pizza ovens

CUSTOMER EDITION | APOLLO NZ

Keep this guide with your oven instructions for future reference.

WELCOME TO WOOD-FIRED COOKING

Your oven is more than a pizza maker

A wood-fired oven combines heat from the cooking floor, radiant heat from the dome and circulating hot air. Once you learn how to build a clean fire and manage the stored heat, the same firing can be used for pizza, flatbreads, vegetables, meat, bread and slow-cooked dishes.

This guide is written for first-time owners. It provides practical starting points, but the operating and installation instructions supplied with your exact oven model always take priority.

IMPORTANT SAFETY NOTICE

Use the oven only as installed and intended. Keep children, pets and combustible materials clear of the working area. The chimney, door, metal frame, tools and cookware can become extremely hot. Never use liquid fuel to light the fire and never use water to cool a hot oven or extinguish the fire.

Owner record

Oven model	_____
Serial or order number	_____
Purchase date	_____
Supplier / installer	_____
Customer notes	_____

What you will learn

Prepare Cure a new oven correctly and gather the essential tools.	Fire Choose suitable wood, establish airflow and heat the oven gradually.
Cook Launch and turn pizza, roast in pans and make use of falling heat.	Care Shut down safely, remove cold ash and protect the oven from moisture.

1 BEFORE THE FIRST COOK

Curing a new oven

A newly manufactured masonry or refractory oven may retain moisture. A staged curing process uses long, low fires to remove that moisture gradually. Heating a new or damp oven too quickly can contribute to surface damage, pitting or cracking.

Stage	Target temperature	Guidance
Day 1	About 100°C	Maintain a very small fire for 6-8 hours, then allow the oven to cool completely.
Day 2	About 175°C	Repeat with a slightly larger fire for 6-8 hours, then cool completely.
Day 3	About 250°C	Repeat for 6-8 hours, staying below the target and avoiding over-firing.

MODEL INSTRUCTIONS TAKE PRIORITY

The curing schedule above reflects published XclusiveDecor guidance. Follow any different instructions supplied with your specific model. If the oven becomes wet, begin with a very weak drying fire before increasing the heat.

Essential equipment

Long pizza peel For launching pizza and moving cookware into the oven.	Turning peel A smaller round peel makes it easier to rotate pizza near the flame.
Infrared thermometer Checks the floor where the food will actually cook.	Probe thermometer Checks the internal temperature of meat and poultry.
Heat-resistant gloves Use gloves rated for high-temperature cooking equipment.	Metal ash tools Use a long brush and metal shovel only after ash is fully cold.

Prepare the cooking area

- Keep the area in front of the oven clear so the peel can be used safely.
- Provide a non-combustible surface for hot pans, doors and tools.
- Keep a suitable fire extinguisher available and know how to use it.
- Check current local fire restrictions before lighting the oven.
- Keep dry ingredients covered and separate raw meat from ready-to-eat food.

2 BUILD A CLEAN, CONTROLLABLE FIRE

Choose the right firewood

Use clean, dry, untreated firewood. Dry wood is easier to light, produces less smoke and gives more predictable heat. Split pieces are easier to control than very large logs.

USE

- Dry untreated firewood
- Small dry kindling
- Suitable solid fire starters
- Split logs added gradually

NEVER BURN

- Painted or treated timber
- Plywood or particle board
- Plastic, rubbish or driftwood
- Petrol, spirits or liquid accelerants

Lighting sequence

1. Place a small piece of firewood on the oven floor and arrange dry kindling around it.
2. Light a suitable solid fire starter. Keep the first flame small while the chimney begins to warm and draw.
3. Add one small piece of wood at a time. Do not crowd the chamber or allow flames to project from the opening.
4. When the fire is established, move it towards the back or one side to create a clear cooking zone.
5. Continue heating until both the dome and cooking floor are ready. Check the floor with an infrared thermometer.



Stay beside the oven while food is cooking and keep the turning peel within reach.

2A UNDERSTANDING OVEN HEAT

Reading the heat

A built-in thermometer shows the general chamber temperature. An infrared thermometer shows the temperature of the cooking floor. Both readings are useful because the floor can lag behind the dome or cool after several pizzas.

Cooking style	Starting range	Fire condition	Typical foods
High heat	300-350°C	Small active flame	Pizza, flatbread, naan-style bread
Hot roasting	220-300°C	Reduced live fire	Quick vegetables, fish, searing
Roasting	160-220°C	Small fire or embers	Chicken, lamb, potatoes, cast-iron dishes
Baking	180-230°C	Falling heat	Bread, focaccia, baked pasta
Slow cooking	120-170°C	Retained heat	Casseroles, slow roasts, desserts

Temperature note: These are practical starting ranges, not fixed recipe settings. XclusiveDecor publishes a maximum cooking temperature of 500°C and recommends pizza cooking at no more than 350°C.

3 YOUR FIRST WOOD-FIRED PIZZA

Set up before the pizza goes on the peel

Pizza cooks quickly, so prepare the full workstation before launching the first one. Keep the peel dry and work with one pizza at a time until you are comfortable with the process.

1 Prepare Bring dough to a workable temperature. Portion toppings and keep them close to the oven.	2 Heat Establish a controllable flame and check the floor temperature in the intended cooking spot.	3 Launch Top lightly, confirm the pizza moves freely on the peel and launch without delay.
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Pizza method

1. Stretch the dough gently from the centre, leaving a slightly thicker edge for the crust.
2. Dust the peel lightly with flour or semolina. Too much flour can burn and taste bitter.
3. Place the dough on the peel and add a thin layer of sauce, cheese and restrained toppings.
4. Shake the peel gently. The uncooked pizza must slide freely before it goes near the oven.
5. Launch onto a clean section of the hot floor, away from burning wood and loose embers.
6. Watch the edge facing the fire. Rotate the pizza several times so the crust colours evenly.
7. Remove when the base is cooked, the crust has risen and the toppings are hot and properly cooked.



Use a light topping load while learning. Heavy, wet toppings slow the centre and increase the risk of sticking.

Cooking several pizzas

- Check the floor between pizzas; cold dough removes heat from the cooking surface.
- Maintain a small steady flame rather than adding a large log during service.
- Allow the floor time to recover if the underside becomes pale or slow to cook.
- Do not assemble all pizzas too early. Dough becomes more likely to stick while waiting.
- Keep unused dough covered so the surface does not dry out.

A STUCK PIZZA IS USUALLY A TIMING PROBLEM

Use a dry peel, only a light dusting of flour or semolina, and launch soon after topping. If the pizza does not slide during the test shake, loosen the edge before attempting to launch it.

4 MAKE USE OF THE FULL HEAT CYCLE

Cook beyond pizza

After the high-heat pizza stage, the oven still contains a large amount of useful heat. Plan the meal in stages so that the same firing can produce several dishes.

Roasted vegetables Use a metal tray or cast-iron pan. Cut dense vegetables evenly and stir or rotate the pan as the fire-facing side cooks faster.	Meat and poultry Cook in suitable pans, rotate during cooking and check the thickest part with a probe thermometer.
Bread and focaccia Bake after the intense fire has reduced. Clean loose ash from the floor and use retained heat.	Cast-iron dishes Ideal for casseroles, skillet bread, baked pasta, seafood and fruit desserts. Handles become extremely hot.
Slow roasts Use falling heat and a covered pan where appropriate. Follow a tested recipe and check food temperature.	Desserts Baked fruit, crumble and skillet desserts make productive use of the final lower-temperature stage.

Food temperature is different from oven temperature

A browned surface does not confirm that meat is safely cooked inside. Insert a clean probe into the centre of the thickest part, avoiding bone where possible.

Internal food temperature	Minimum holding time
75°C	30 seconds
70°C	3 minutes
65°C	15 minutes

NEW ZEALAND FOOD-SAFETY STARTING POINT

NZ Food Safety advises cooking meat to one of the time-and-temperature combinations above. Poultry, pork, sausages, minced-meat products and blade-tenderised meat require particular care. Use separate utensils and plates for raw and cooked food.

Simple first-cook menu

Stage	Dish	Heat use
Start	Garlic and herb flatbread	High heat
Main	Two or three lightly topped pizzas	High heat with active flame
Side	Cast-iron potatoes, onions and capsicum	Reduced fire / roasting heat

5 SHUTDOWN, CLEANING AND CARE

After cooking

1. Stop adding firewood and allow the fire and embers to burn down naturally.
2. Do not pour water into the oven or onto the cooking floor. Sudden cooling can damage hot refractory materials.
3. Keep the area supervised until there is no risk from flame, sparks or hot tools.
4. Remove ash only when it is fully cold. Place it in a suitable metal container away from combustible materials.
5. Brush the cold floor with a long-handled oven brush and clear the opening.
6. Check that the chimney and rain cap remain clear and protect the oven from prolonged wet weather as required by the model instructions.

Moisture and weather

If the exterior or cooking chamber has absorbed moisture, begin the next firing with a very weak drying fire. Increase the temperature only after the oven has dried. Do not take a wet oven directly to normal pizza temperature.

Troubleshooting

Problem	Likely cause	What to try
Excessive smoke	Damp wood, cold chimney or crowded fire	Use dry split wood, start smaller and allow the flue to warm.
Pale pizza base	Floor has not heated or has cooled	Check with an IR thermometer and allow recovery time.
Burnt edge / raw centre	Too close to flame or too many toppings	Move to a cooler zone, turn sooner and reduce topping load.
Pizza sticks to peel	Wet peel, delay after topping or too little release flour	Dry the peel, use a light dusting and launch promptly.
Uneven cooking	Food or pan remains in one orientation	Rotate pizza and cookware regularly.
Temperature rises too fast	Wood added too quickly	Stop adding fuel and spread or reduce the fire with the peel.

Leftovers

- Refrigerate or freeze leftovers as soon as practical and within 2 hours of cooking.
- Divide large hot portions into shallow containers so they cool more quickly.
- Keep leftovers covered in the refrigerator.
- Reheat food until piping hot and avoid reheating the same food more than once.

6 FIRST-COOK QUICK REFERENCE

Before lighting

☐	Oven cured - Complete the model-specific curing procedure before normal cooking.
☐	Fire restrictions checked - Confirm that outdoor fires are permitted in your area.
☐	Dry untreated wood ready - Prepare kindling, small split logs and suitable fire starters.
☐	Tools ready - Peels, thermometers, gloves and a non-combustible pan rest are available.
☐	Work area clear - Children, pets and combustible items are away from the oven opening.

Before launching the first pizza

☐	Fire under control - The flame is established without projecting from the opening.
☐	Floor temperature checked - Use an infrared thermometer at the planned cooking spot.
☐	Ingredients prepared - Sauce, cheese, toppings and serving board are within reach.
☐	Peel dry and lightly dusted - Use only enough flour or semolina to prevent sticking.
☐	Pizza moves freely - Give the peel a test shake before approaching the oven.
☐	Turning peel nearby - Stay beside the oven and rotate the pizza as required.

6A SHUTDOWN CHECKLIST AND NOTES

Before leaving the oven area

☐

No more fuel added - Allow the fire to burn down naturally.

☐

No water used - Never shock-cool the fire, floor or chamber.

☐

Hot tools secured - Place doors, peels and cookware on non-combustible surfaces.

☐

Ash left to cool - Do not remove or discard ash while embers may still be live.

☐

Leftovers chilled - Refrigerate or freeze within 2 hours.

REMEMBER

The best results come from gradual heating, dry wood, a clean cooking floor and close attention. Record what worked during each cook - floor temperature, dough, fire position and cooking time - and your technique will improve quickly.

Cooking notes

CUSTOMER SUPPORT AND REFERENCES

Important document status

This booklet is a general customer cooking guide. It does not replace the installation, curing, operating, maintenance or safety instructions supplied with the selected oven. Requirements may vary by model, installation and location.

Further guidance used in this booklet

XclusiveDecor - Videos & Tips

Curing sequence, fire management, maximum cooking temperature and water-cooling warning.
<https://xclusivedecor.com/videos-tips/>

Apollo NZ - XclusiveDecor Wood-Fired Pizza Ovens

Product range, insulation, heat retention and cooking applications.
<https://apollonzglobal.com/pizza-ovens>

New Zealand Food Safety - Handling Raw Meat Safely

Safe internal meat temperature and cross-contamination guidance.
<https://www.mpi.govt.nz/food-safety-home/preparing-and-storing-food-safely-at-home/how-to-handle-raw-meat-safely>

New Zealand Food Safety - Safe Food Preparation and Storage

Leftover cooling, storage and reheating guidance.
<https://www.mpi.govt.nz/food-safety-home/preparing-and-storing-food-safely-at-home/safe-food-preparation-cooking-and-storage-at-home>

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XclusiveDecor wood-fired pizza ovens - available through Apollo NZ

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