OVEN CARE

Drying & Curing Your Clay Oven

Technical guide to optimizing the performance of Brasa wood-fired ovens · Applies to all Brasa models · Temperatures in °F and °C

Objective

This guide describes the recommended procedure for drying and starting up a new Brasa clay oven, or one that has been out of use, in order to remove internal moisture, properly cure its materials, and optimize its performance.

Before You Begin

- Before lighting the oven, make sure it is completely dry and free of moisture.
- If the oven has been out of use for 10–15 days, carry out a gradual drying process before operating at high temperatures.
- If the oven is installed outdoors, fit the chimney with a suitable flue pipe and rain cap.
- Use only dry, small-sized hardwood (see “Recommended Firewood”).
- Monitor the temperature with a thermometer during each cycle.

Recommended Firewood

Use well-seasoned hardwoods: air-dry them for 6 to 12 months, until moisture content is below 20%. These options are easy to find in the United States and Puerto Rico.

Wood	Where to find it	Characteristics
Oak	Throughout the U.S.	Intense, long-lasting heat. The most versatile choice, and a relative of holm oak.
Hickory	Eastern & southern U.S.	Very dense; high heat and a strong smoky flavor.
Hard maple	Northern & eastern U.S.	Steady flame and mild flavor.
Ash	Throughout the U.S.	Lights easily and produces little smoke.
Pecan & mesquite	Southern & southwestern U.S.	Pecan: mild flavor. Mesquite: very hot; best mixed with another wood.
Fruitwoods: apple, cherry	Throughout the U.S.	Sweet, mild aroma; ideal for pizza, bread and meats.
Guava	Puerto Rico	Highly valued fruitwood; sweet aroma.

Wood	Where to find it	Characteristics
Citrus: orange, lemon, grapefruit	Puerto Rico	Readily available from pruning; pleasant aroma.
Úcar (black olive)	Puerto Rico	Very dense wood; long-lasting embers.
Tamarind & algarrobo	Puerto Rico	Hardwoods with good heat output.

⚠ Woods to Avoid

- Softwoods or resinous woods (pine, cypress, cedar) — heavy smoke and soot (creosote).
- Treated, painted or varnished wood, plywood, pallets and construction scraps — they release toxic substances.
- Toxic plants such as manchineel (common along Puerto Rico's coasts) or oleander — their smoke is toxic.
- Green, damp or moldy wood — it smokes, soils the dome and produces little heat.

Initial Drying Process

Carry out the following heating cycles progressively. During drying, keep the door and the chimney damper fully open to allow moisture to escape.

Cycle	When	Temperature	Duration
1	Day 1	176–212°F (80–100°C)	3–4 h
2	Day 2 (or a few days later)	176–212°F (80–100°C)	3–4 h
3	Next cycle	302–392°F (150–200°C)	3–4 h
4	Next cycle	482–572°F (250–300°C)	2.5–3 h
5	Final curing	788–896°F (420–480°C)	30–45 min

°C values are the equivalents of the temperatures shown in °F.

Why is this necessary?

Gradual heating allows the oven's internal insulation to cure properly. The insulating materials absorb heat, contract slightly, and become harder and more stable.

Hairline cracks & fissures

Small fissures may appear around the flue, the door, or the dome. These are a natural part of curing — after several uses they may open slightly, then seal on their own.

Firing for Full Performance

Once the initial drying is complete, follow this procedure each time you fire the oven. At the start, keep the chimney damper and the door air-intake regulator open.

Step	Action	Temperature
1	Load 4–6 small, dry sticks or branches and light them.	—
2	About 5 minutes after the flame catches, add 3–4 more sticks. If more combustion is needed, open the door slightly to increase the draft.	—
3	At 15 minutes, add 2–3 more sticks.	≈ 572°F (300°C)
4	Keep feeding the fire until it reaches the target temperature, and hold it for 20–30 minutes to heat the clay insulation.	824–860°F (440–460°C)
5	When the flame dies out, the dome turns white and the temperature drops. Remove the embers, leaving a couple of handfuls inside to retain heat longer.	392–464°F (200–240°C)
6	Close the chimney damper to 80% and close the door air-intake regulator. The oven is ready for cooking.	—

During the first few uses, the oven performs below its full capacity. Performance improves progressively: it will reach temperature faster and use less firewood over time.

Summary

- Verify that the oven is completely dry.
- Use dry, small-sized hardwood; avoid resinous, treated or toxic woods.
- Keep the door and chimney damper open during drying.
- Increase the temperature progressively.
- Finish with a cycle at 788–896°F (420–480°C) for 30–45 minutes.
- For each firing, bring the oven to 824–860°F (440–460°C) for 20–30 minutes, then close the damper to 80% and close the air regulator.
- Expect lower performance during the first few uses; it improves progressively.
- Consider small initial fissures caused by insulation curing to be normal.