

HALOGEN OVEN COOKING - THE FACTS

Before you start cooking, it is worth reading this 7 page information section so that you get an overall idea of what the halogen is all about. You can print this off for future reference whilst you get used to your new oven!

The Science Bit – Just how does a halogen oven work?

- Very simply, the heat is generated by a halogen bulb and a fan which is housed under the lid. This radiant infrared heat, which is similar to the heat from a BBQ, is sent anti-clockwise around the glass bowl at a tremendous speed.
- The temperature control switch lets you control the heat from 20°C right up to 250°C, unlike a conventional oven where the limit is 220-230°C. As the heat travels round the food rather than just over it, it allows meat to self-baste, keeping it moist and succulent and allows the bottom of pastries or dough to crisp up, so no more soggy bottoms!
- The radiant heat renders off excess fat far more efficiently than in normal oven cooking. The oils and fats simply fall to the bottom of the glass bowl to be drained off later. This makes it a very healthy way of cooking.
- From an energy-saving point of view, you save right from the onset of cooking as there is no need to pre-heat as you would need to do in a conventional oven. The halogen gives you instant heat.
- The fact that most foods cook at least 20% faster than in a conventional oven, means that as your halogen oven is not on as long and therefore, you use less energy. From a wattage point of view, most halogen ovens use just 1200-1400W of power, whereas standard ovens are around 2500W, so straightaway you can see why the halogen is going to save you money.
- A halogen oven is as efficient and cost effective as a microwave but also browns like a conventional oven so you get all the benefits of both in one small unit.

What is in the kit when you buy a halogen oven?

- A borasilica toughened glass bowl – this is where all the cooking is done.
- A lid which houses the halogen bulb and fan with a 13amp plug – the power house of the oven. The lid also has a handle which not only allows you to remove the lid safely, but also starts or stops the oven. Press the handle down to start and lift up to stop.
- A round metal cradle with side handles in which the bowl sits when in use. This allows you to move the oven safely after use, even when the bowl is hot. The bowl can also be taken out and removed for washing.
- 2 metal wire racks, one low, one high with legs

- A pair of lifting tongs
- A metal extending ring which sits on top of the bowl with the lid on top (it depends on the make as to whether this comes with it)

Basic Tips for using a Halogen Oven

1. When you are positioning your oven for use, do ensure that there is sufficient space around the whole halogen oven itself and no contact with walls, other appliances etc, as the bowl will get hot. I would always recommend you use a heat proof mat or wooden board under it to protect your work surface. This is just precautionary as the metal cradle the bowl sits in does keep it from sitting directly onto the countertop itself. Remember that the lid also gets very hot as this is the power house of the oven. When you remove the lid, try to place it handle side down and again on a heat proof mat to avoid scorching your kitchen worktops.
2. Looking at the knobs on the lid section, you will see a temperature dial which also shows the "wash" and "thaw" sections. To the left of that is the timer, which goes up to 60 minutes. Try not to turn the timer knob anti-clockwise as you will damage the mechanism. Just turn off the heat and allow the timer to run its course.
3. As the oven cooks faster than a conventional oven and is therefore energy saving, you will need to take approximately 20% off the cooking time shown in your recipe book. I say approximately as it does depend on the wattage of your oven as they can vary from 1200-1400 watts (refer to the makers manual). *However, when baking, the cooking time is exactly the same as you would use normally so do not take 20% off when making your cakes or bread.*

This will all take a little getting used to but where meat is concerned, do as you would do in a normal oven and check that the juices run clear and not pink. If it is not quite done, cook for a further 5 minutes and then check again. You will be able to get to the food easily by just removing the lid by lifting the handle.

For a cake, use a skewer to check the inside is done. Once you have mastered things like a chicken and a joint of meat, you will pretty much get the measure of how your halogen timings work.

4. When cooking vegetables, I would strongly recommend that you par-boil first (roast potatoes being an example) and then finish them off in the halogen.
5. If you like oven chips, I suggest that you invest in a silicone mesh tray that will sit on the top rack of your oven. You can get them from pound shops and they are, to coin a phrase, as cheap as chips! I find that they are very useful when cooking chips or smaller foods such as goujons etc as they don't fall through the rack, it allows the hot circulating air to penetrate to the underside of the chips, making them crispy all round, and it is also easier to remove from the oven (always use oven gloves as the mesh will be hot).

6. If you want to eat healthier, the beauty of the halogen is that as you cook foods on the racks, the fats will fall through into the base of the bowl, to be tipped away afterwards.
7. There is no need to preheat a halogen oven as you would do with a conventional oven as it comes to temperature in a fraction of the time, thus saving you money, as you just switch it on and get cooking, saving you time waiting about too.

Which rack do I need when cooking?

Racks need to be used **AT ALL TIMES** and no food should be put directly into the bowl. The reason for this is that the air and the heat need to circulate *around* the food or dish or bake ware that you are cooking in. Think about the fact if you were using a conventional oven, you wouldn't dream of putting the ingredients for a casserole into the bottom of the oven!!!

So let's take the **low rack** first. This is used for roasting, baking and slow cooking or casseroles, steaming and defrosting. You need to use the low rack in these instances as the food needs to be further away from the heat source in the lid, which prevents burning.

Roasting – Low Rack

To roast a joint or a chicken, prepare the meat in the normal way and then place it in the middle of the bottom rack. If you want to catch the juices to make gravy, just place a shallow round dish or plate the same diameter as the rack underneath the rack itself, so that it is easy to remove after cooking is complete.

If you are cooking a particularly large bird or joint, you would need to use the extender ring as this increases the capacity of the oven from 12L to 16L and also takes the main heat element and bulb away from the surface of the meat. If it is too close, it will burn the outside of the meat or certainly overcook it.

For smaller birds and joints, no need to use the extender ring. Do remember though that meat cooks at least 20% quicker than your normal oven so when you are setting the timer, take 20% off your normal cooking time. However, the temperature can remain the same.

Baking – Low Rack

When baking (cakes or bread) – always use the lower rack and really importantly, for *larger* cakes (e.g. Christmas cake), the extender ring is a must. Why? Because it simulates cooking on a middle or lower rack of a conventional oven and by using the ring, the heat element is further away and will not scorch the surface of your baking. It's like putting a cake on the top shelf of your oven – it would burn! If you didn't get an extender ring with your halogen (not all do), you can easily order one from the internet for just a few pounds.

You can use whatever recipe you like in exactly the same way as if you were baking conventionally then bake at the same temperature. If you are concerned that your cake or bread is getting too brown too quickly, simply cover with loose fitting foil and finish it off this way.

Baking is the one area where you really need to experiment to get the gist of how your particular recipes work in the halogen. Once you have mastered this, you will get perfect results every time but be patient and keep trying – it will be worth it!

You might be asking if you can do pastries in the halogen and the answer is a resounding yes! Use exactly as you would in a normal oven (even blind baking) and your pastry will be as good as ever.

Casseroles/Stews – Low Rack

Making a casserole or stew needs to be done on the bottom rack. Do as you would normally in terms of preparation of the ingredients, placing into a casserole dish with lid and place on the bottom rack. Remember though that as it is enclosed, both the temperature *and timing* will be exactly the same as a conventional oven. My big tip here is that you cut the vegetables smaller than you may do normally as it will ensure that they cook through properly, particularly hard veg such as carrots, swede, etc do take longer to cook. Remember if you are slow cooking, you only have a timer that goes up to 1 hour so you will have to keep resetting it. If it says 2 hours in a conventional oven, you would cook for one hour and then reset the timer for another hour, so you could not go out and leave it to reset itself – it requires human intervention, unlike a slow cooker.

Steaming – Low Rack

Steaming is most successful on the bottom rack. You can steam vegetables, fish, and chicken by making a parcel using foil, folded so as not to allow any leakage and easy to remove from the oven when cooked. Timings are a bit trickier as it depends on what ingredients are in the parcel, but if you worked on the same as you would use if you had a steamer insert on top of your saucepan on the hob less 20%, you would be about right. (If you are used to steaming in the microwave, the oven will take longer so it might be best to stick to what you know in that case!). Yorkshire puddings, steamed puddings and soufflés are great done on the bottom rack.

The High Rack (with Legs).... For Frying, Searing, Grilling and Toasting

The best way to remember what needs cooking on the top rack of your halogen is to think what would you cook on a high temperature, close to the heat source. If you fry, grill, toast or use the top rack in your normal oven, then it should go on the top rack of the halogen. This includes food such as pizza, sausages, burgers, chops, chips, crumpets, steaks and toast.

When cooking burgers, sausages, steak etc on the high rack means that the food is closer to the halogen bulb and the heat literally sears the meat, rendering off any excess fat which drops to the bottom of the glass bowl, making it a very much healthier way of cooking than using a fry pan or deep fat fryer. I also find that it cuts down on the amount of oil you may normally need to cook, as the heat from the halogen not only renders out any excess fat but the circulating air keeps the food moist.

Foods such as breads, are always best cooked on the top rack as it simulates a toaster or grill. Remember that you can reach a maximum temperature of 250°C in your halogen, unlike a conventional oven which only gets to 220°C. There is nothing that can beat the halogen for cooking a pizza or garlic bread.

Remember that you don't have to turn the food over as the fan sends the air circulating around the bowl and up under food on the racks, so it cooks evenly on both sides.

What sort of dish/bake ware can I use?

Basically anything that is round is preferably, and fits comfortably inside the oven leaving a gap of at least one inch around the edge. Tin bake ware, silicone, cast iron, stainless steel, nonstick aluminium, enamel, glass such as pyrex, even tinfoil – just about anything that you usually use. However, the only item that I have found is difficult to find is a small Yorkshire pudding tin as we are usually used to using a 6 or 12 hole bun tin. You can get a 4 hole Yorkshire Pudding tin and these fit in easily. I also use individual 3" diameter/1.5cm in height Dariol moulds and just place these into a round baking tin as it's easier to remove when cooking is finished.

How do I use the lifting tongs?

Just open them up and position around the tin or dish that you want to remove and then lift from the oven. Using these will avoid you having to don oven gloves and attempt to get your hands inside what will be a very hot oven. The tongs make removing the food from the oven much safer and should be used as much as possible. Just take care if the dish is likely to be heavy such as a joint of meat – this is where you would need to use your own hands with oven gloves to remove it from the oven to avoid spillage or danger to yourself.

Cleaning

The lid needs to be cleaned separately, with a damp cloth, preferably after each use to avoid build up (remember this is the electrical bit so you cannot immerse in water) - a dry scourer is good for the burnt on splashes and comes off easily.

But here is the good bit – the bowl cleans itself!! Just fill the bowl to half full, about where the frame of the bowl is at the handle height, turn the racks and bake ware you have used upside down so that they are immersed in the water, use warm water with a little washing up liquid, turn the timer knob to wash, set the timer to about 20 minutes and leave to wash whilst you eat your delicious meal!

Alternatively, you can wash the bowl by hand or put in the dishwasher but I find it easier to either let it do it itself or wash in the sink. Either way, it's a doddle!

The cradle around the bowl itself can be wiped clean as it does not really attract any stains, being just a device to move the oven around and avoid burning yourself on the glass bowl.

Where can I use my Halogen?

Don't forget the halogen is a mobile unit, so you can set it up in seconds wherever there is a 13amp socket. This makes it great for camping, caravanning, boating, motor homes, in small flats or where cooking space is of a premium. If you have kids at university, they will thank you for buying them this piece of equipment as it does everything they will need to feed themselves in one unit, though I cannot vouch for the state it will come back in after they leave the college!!

Can I use my halogen to defrost food?

Most certainly you can. If you look at the dials on the lid, you will see a mark that says thaw and clean. Just turn the knob to this point and set the timer to whatever time you would defrost in the microwave. If it needs a bit longer, just reset the timer for a few more minutes. I would always recommend that you defrost on the lower rack, just in case you leave the food in for a little too long. It is a bit trial and error initially until you get used to how your halogen works so don't give up as it is a major advantage of using the halogen.

Are there any foods I cannot cook in my halogen?

There are in fact very few. Eggs, such as a fried, boiled and scrambled, do not cook successfully. You could cook an omelette or scrambled egg but be warned, even slight over-cooking can lead to a rather rubbery result! Having tried this, I would definitely recommend that you stick with your conventional way of cooking eggs – though using eggs is fine if they are mixed with other foods such as in a cake or quiche.

Soups and jam making and melting chocolate does not work in a halogen – you need a hob top and an appropriate pan to do these things. As a rule of thumb, if you wouldn't usually dream of putting it in the oven, don't do it! (Steaming excepted as you could a steamer insert & lid on top of a pan of boiling water or a microwave oven to steam your fish).

Getting used to your Halogen

You will need to have a little patience to work with the halogen for a day or two, to get the feel of it, and once you have done this, you will use nothing else and your conventional oven will become an ornament in your kitchen! Don't get despondent if you cannot get things perfect first time – just keep trying different things and you will soon get the hang of it.

Having read all of the information above, it's now time to try it out! So my suggestions are when you first take it out of the box, is to grab some sausages or bacon, or even a pizza or oven chips, and see how good the results are. Once you are feeling a bit more confident, get yourself a chicken and try out the results and this will convince you once and for all that it's the best thing since sliced bread!

Just a word to the wise – very few manufacturers supply a decent recipe book with their ovens – it's usually a basic leaflet with just a few recipes in it so nothing very exciting! If you want to try a few of my recipes, just visit melandmal.com/halogen recipes for a few ideas, but remember, you can use any recipe book you like and just reduce the cooking time by 20% (except for bread and cakes which remain the same).

A Few Extra Tips

- If you are cooking what I would call "thin" foods that may slip through the rungs of the rack (such as chipolata sausages), I tend to place these in a round baking dish. This means that you will have to move the sausages around during cooking so that they brown either side, as you would do in a pan) but it also prevents your food dropping to the bottom of the bowl and becoming soggy with fats. Any fats collected in the dish can be poured away. For foods such as chips or breaded garlic mushrooms, use the mesh tray as mentioned before as these need to crisp up so need the full effect of the air circulating all round the food.

- If using fresh herbs, either tuck them under heavier foods, or turn the second rack upside down and place on top of the food. This will stop the hot circulating air from blowing the herbs off the surface of the food you are cooking.
- When making Yorkshire Puddings, follow the advice given earlier re what tins you use, and cook them exactly as you would in a normal oven, putting a little lard in first and heat this up until smoking, then add the mixture, place back into the oven, replace the lid and watch them grow and grow! And as you can see directly into the bowl, you will never have any need to remove the lid to check them and risk deflating your puddings as you would if you were cooking them in a conventional oven.
- When making snacks such as cheese on toast, remembering that both sides of the bread will cook at the same time, cook until you can see that the upper side is just turning brown. Remove the half baked toast from the oven, butter and sprinkle on your cheese, then return it to the oven and reset the timer (just a couple of minutes initially – if it isn't done by the time the timer "pings" then just put it back on for another minute). The cheese will be bubbling and the bread underneath cooked to perfection
- In the halogen, the time it takes to cook one single jacket potato or 12 jacket potatoes is exactly the same, unlike the microwave which will only cook a few at a time. You have two choices here – you can start them off in the microwave for 7-10 minutes and then finish in the halogen for around 30 minutes (on the bottom rack, spaced so that the potatoes do not touch each other as this makes for all round crispy skins) or put them from raw straight into the oven at 200°C for 40 minutes (having pricked, oiled and salted them first) onto the lower rack. Either way the result will be fluffy inside and crispy on the outside.

If you need any further help using your halogen oven, please do not hesitate to drop me an email via mel@melandmal.com and either myself or Mel will be pleased to help.

Happy Halogening!!!