

RATINGS

GOOD: ★★★

FAIR: ★★

POOR: ★

TESTING CAST-IRON SKILLETS

We tested eight cast-iron skillets, each approximately 12 inches in diameter, along with our top-rated nonstick and stainless-steel skillets. We compared the performance of these pans in a number of cooking tests. Mail-order sources for the top pans are on page 32.

MATERIAL: Metal and finish of pans.

PRICE: Retail price at Boston-area stores or online cookware sites.

COOKING SURFACE: Diameter of interior cooking surface measured (in inches) across the bottom of the skillet and thickness of pan bottom (in millimeters).

WEIGHT: Weight of skillet.

EGGS: We prepared scrambled eggs in each pan as the first test (after seasoning pans that required it), noting degree of sticking and ease of cleanup. We did it again after completing all other cooking tests, to observe whether pans became more seasoned during testing. Rating reflects performance in the second round.

STEAK: We pan-seared steaks and prepared a tomato-based pan sauce in each pan. We preferred pans that provided a well-browned crust and a good fond that led to a complex, flavorful pan sauce.

CORN BREAD: We put the pans in the oven; we preferred those that made corn bread that released easily from the pan and had a crisp, golden crust and moist interior.

CHICKEN: We looked for shallow-fried breaded chicken cutlets that were crisp and golden brown outside and moist inside, preferring pans that retained heat well, even when food was added, and did not get crowded.

DESIGN: We considered design features such as helper handles, weight, and shape, and performance features that helped make the pan easy to use and clean. Pans that required strong arms lost some points.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED
Lodge Logic 12-Inch Skillet

MATERIAL: Cast iron, preseasoned
PRICE: \$26.95
COOKING SURFACE: diameter 10"; bottom thickness 5.66 mm.
WEIGHT: 7.2 lb.


PERFORMANCE

EGGS: ★★★
STEAK: ★★★
CORN BREAD: ★★★
CHICKEN: ★★★
DESIGN: ★★

TESTERS' COMMENTS

Classic shape provided "plenty of room" in steak and chicken tests, but small handle made pan feel heavy when lifted. Eggs stuck "considerably" and took "tons of scrubbing" to clean the first time around but barely stuck and cleaned up easily the second time. Corn bread was crusty, with perfect release.

The Camp Chef SK-12 Cast Iron Skillet
BEST BUY

MATERIAL: Cast iron, preseasoned
PRICE: \$17.99
COOKING SURFACE: diameter 9 3/4"; bottom thickness 10.37 mm.
WEIGHT: 9.2 lb.



EGGS: ★★★
STEAK: ★★★
CORN BREAD: ★★★
CHICKEN: ★★★
DESIGN: ★★

Heaviest and thickest pan in the lineup was "a beast" to handle, but its heft made it shine in our cooking tests, where a consistent heat and deep sear were desirable. Right out of the box, we made scrambled eggs that didn't stick and corn bread that browned well and released perfectly.

RECOMMENDED
Lodge Pro-Logic 12-Inch Skillet

MATERIAL: Cast iron, preseasoned
PRICE: \$29.95
COOKING SURFACE: diameter 9 1/4"; bottom thickness 5.44 mm.
WEIGHT: 7.4 lb.


PERFORMANCE

EGGS: ★★★
STEAK: ★★★
CORN BREAD: ★★★
CHICKEN: ★★★
DESIGN: ★★

TESTERS' COMMENTS

"Gorgeous" browning on the fried chicken and steak. Eggs improved dramatically, from "horrible sticking" to "very easy to clean" by the end of testing. Handle is wide and well balanced, and loop-shaped helper handle is easy to grasp. Curved (rather than angled) sides make sauces easier to scrape up.

Le Creuset Round Skillet, 11-Inch

MATERIAL: Enameled cast iron with matte-finish black enamel interior
PRICE: \$109.95
COOKING SURFACE: diameter 9 3/4"; bottom thickness 10.26 mm.
WEIGHT: 6.5 lb.



EGGS: ★★★
STEAK: ★★★
CORN BREAD: ★★★
CHICKEN: ★★★
DESIGN: ★★

"Pretty" pan was well proportioned and easier to handle than others. Sloping sides made eggs and sauce easier to scrape up. Achieved "beautiful crust" on steak and corn bread. On first test, eggs stuck ferociously, but results improved dramatically in second round, with minimal sticking. Can't use metal utensils or stack anything inside without damaging enamel finish.

Olvida 13-Inch Skillet

MATERIAL: Cast iron covered with nickel plate
PRICE: \$98.95
COOKING SURFACE: diameter 10 3/4"; bottom thickness 9.87 mm.
WEIGHT: 8.65 lb.



EGGS: ★★
STEAK: ★★★
CORN BREAD: ★★★
CHICKEN: ★★★
DESIGN: ★★

Chicken and steak browned beautifully in this heavy, roomy, silver-colored pan with "steady heating." The fond for pan sauce was a little light on flavor, almost like the nonstick skillet. Eggs stuck a moderate amount, without much change as testing progressed; pan cleaned up easily. Dishwasher-safe.

RECOMMENDED WITH RESERVATIONS
Wagner Collection Skillet, 11 3/4-Inch

MATERIAL: Cast iron, unseasoned
PRICE: \$19
COOKING SURFACE: diameter 9 3/4"; bottom thickness 5.82 mm.
WEIGHT: 6.8 lb.


PERFORMANCE

EGGS: ★★
STEAK: ★★★
CORN BREAD: ★★
CHICKEN: ★★★
DESIGN: ★★

TESTERS' COMMENTS

Slightly less steady heating than higher-ranked pans, but good results shallow-frying chicken and searing steak. Eggs stuck moderately, even as testing progressed, and pan always required some scrubbing. Corn bread browned well but stuck to pan. Thumb-hold on handle is nice feature.

Cajun Classic 12-Inch Cast Iron Skillet

MATERIAL: Cast iron, unseasoned
PRICE: \$16
COOKING SURFACE: diameter 9 1/2"; bottom thickness 8.15 mm.
WEIGHT: 5.85 lb.



EGGS: ★★
STEAK: ★★
CORN BREAD: ★★★
CHICKEN: ★★★
DESIGN: ★★

Straight-sided pan was crowded while shallow-frying two chicken breasts and when searing a pair of steaks. Steak pan sauce had a slight metallic taste, indicating the acid had reacted with the pan. Eggs continued to stick in second round but cleaned up easily.

Bayou Classic Heavy Duty Cast Iron Skillet, 12 Inches

MATERIAL: Cast iron, unseasoned
PRICE: \$11
COOKING SURFACE: diameter 9 1/2"; bottom thickness 4.06 mm.
WEIGHT: 6.15 lb.



EGGS: ★
STEAK: ★★
CORN BREAD: ★★★
CHICKEN: ★★
DESIGN: ★★

Thin bottom caused steep temperature drop when chicken was added to hot oil. Steaks cooked unevenly and with unsteady temperatures (too hot, then too cool). Pan was crowded and began steaming steaks. Scrambled eggs stuck considerably throughout testing. Cooking surface was roughest of the lineup.