STONEWARE – FOR THE BEST BAKING EVER!

By: Maria Atwood-Copyright 2009

Why did I become so enamored with stoneware for all my baking, that I finally decided, not only to use it but to also sell it to others? — Prior to my introduction to the fine product I'm currently using, I was not seriously interested in stoneware, as I'd heard that the major brands would, with time, turn blackish on the inside. Also there were the issues of the need to hand wash only as they were not dishwasher safe, nor was I able to pre-prepare a dish, freeze it, and then take it straight from the freezer to the oven. Last but certainly not least was the ever-looming concern of toxic substances that I had heard could be part of stoneware, and earthenware. I grew up in an era where we were cautioned not to eat from these types of dishes, as they are made in other countries and contained high levels of lead. At the time I did not know the difference between earthenware and stoneware baking pans. No, I would just use my cold lifeless glass pans, or some older metal ones that I had stashed away in my cupboard. Then something happened that changed my mind and I now bake exclusively with stoneware, and encourage others to do the same.

As a member and chapter leader for the Weston A Price Foundation, I have made every effort within my means to return to the times when food was really just that! "Healthy, unprocessed, life-giving food and no more special diets!" Not only my food but also my dishes have undergone a complete transformation from top to bottom. Today I wanted to write specifically about stoneware, and why I consider it the best ever baking media.

I had previously spent an inordinate amount of time reading about, and going from diet to diet. During those years I avoided many of the wonderful baked dishes that I now enjoy with gusto. During my transition from low fat, vegetarian/vegan type eating, I naturally rediscovered the wonderful foods my Mother made in her earlier years. A special neighbor friend of our family was an Italian farmer, Mr. & Mrs. Mello, and Oh, the sweet smell and taste of the fabulous Italian baked bread in their outdoor stone oven, was heaven on earth. In researching many of the foods eaten by our ancestors, it was only a matter of time that I sought out the best cooking and baking pans available, and found the marvelous warmth giving stoneware-baking pans.

Basically true stoneware is impervious to moisture after it has been vitrified (which means that the silica inside of it has fused together.) Some cooking techniques require you to "soak" the pot to allow it to absorb water into the ware, and it releases the moisture as the dish cooks in the oven. The pots used for this are Earthenware.

Earthenware does not vitrify as stoneware does. It is often "Terra Cotta" in color, but does not need to be. You will find many examples of Earthenware on the Internet and in cooking catalogs. Stoneware on the other hand would be more used where you might use a glass or metal baking pan, as what you are cooking does not need the "steaming action" of a soaked earthenware vessel.

The question of safety when using stoneware often comes up, and for good reason. As mentioned above, there is always the perception that it may contain lead or other toxic metal substances. Traditional Cook markets one of the finest USA made stoneware available. All the raw materials used in manufacturing begin as naturally occurring soft clay, sand or stone composites that are removed from the mine site (land reclamation practices are in place), transferred to a processing plant where they are washed clean, blended, ground, sized, and packaged for shipping. All of the materials are palletized and packaged in 50 pounds bags. The pallets are either returned to the supplier or reused.

Firing is done in batches with natural gas at 2100 degrees; the firing process takes approximately 12 hours to complete. Once fired the item is next subjected to a stringent quality assurance process, packaged, and shipped. They are guaranteed to be free of lead, cadmium, and other known carcinogens, assuring that when fired to a greater than 2100°F the finished products will maintain food safe surfaces for the lifetime of the item. They also meet both the FDA and California Proposition 65 standards for food safe surfaces.

The two major reasons why stoneware bakes so much better is due to the microscopic porous surface of stoneware, and even heat distribution that stoneware so adequately provides. Because this porous material circulates the evaporated moisture from the food while baking, it naturally allows the food to bake crispier such as would be the case in pizza crust, and moist in foods such as baked casseroles and meats. Another plus is that it is stick resistant due to the fact that the rough surface decreases the actual surface area in contact with the food item, and reducing the area of contact, reduces the tendency to stick. You may however use oil to coat your stoneware without any worry of reducing its efficiency. These features prevent your foods from burning at the bottom.

Foods baked in stoneware are therefore cooked as Mother Nature intended. Imagine your loaf of bread, apple pie or casserole baked in the warmth of stone that radiates the energy of the earth from which it came. The beauty of the stone is also an asset to any dining experience, and can be placed on the table with pride for your family and guests.

The added features of the stoneware I chose to market, in my humble opinion make it better than any other choice in the market. Not only is it totally non-toxic, but also it will go from freezer to oven to a pre-heated oven at 400 degrees, is dishwasher safe, and requires no preseasoning. The fact that it does not require pre-seasoning, and can be safely put in your dishwasher means that as the product is used for longer terms, the inside will not become blackish on the inside. Stoneware, because it is more costly to produce, and is more durable and impermeable, will require that you spend a bit more than buying mass produced baking pans. That being said, the joy of using your stoneware will far out weigh the small cost difference. This fine stoneware carries a three-year guarantee from the date of purchase.

FOR THE BAKING PLEASURE OF YOUR LIFE!