

# Russian oven

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A **Russian oven** or **Russian stove** (Russian: Русская печь) is a unique type of masonry stove that first appeared in the 15th century.<sup>[1]</sup> It is used both for cooking and domestic heating in traditional Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian households.<sup>[2]</sup> The Russian oven burns firewood or wood manufacturing waste.<sup>[2][3]</sup>

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## Construction

A Russian oven is designed to retain heat for long periods of time. This is achieved by channeling the smoke and hot air produced by combustion through a complex labyrinth of passages, warming the bricks from which the oven is constructed.<sup>[2][3]</sup>

A brick flue (Russian: борова) in the attic, sometimes with a chamber for smoking food, is required to slow down the cooling of the oven.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Design

The Russian oven is usually in the centre of the log hut (izba). The builders of Russian ovens are referred to as "stovemakers" (*pechniki*). Good stovemakers always had a high status among the population. A badly built Russian oven may be very difficult to repair, bake unevenly, smoke, or retain heat poorly.<sup>[2][4][5]</sup>

There are many designs for the Russian oven. For example, there is a variant with two hearths (one of the hearths is used mainly for fast cooking, the other mainly for heating in winter).<sup>[2][4]</sup>

## Fuel

Various types of firewood can be used, for example birch or pine. Aspen is the least efficient for heating a Russian oven because the amount needed is twice that of other woods.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Uses

Besides its use for domestic heating, in winter people may sleep on top of the oven to keep warm.

<sup>[2]</sup> The oven is also used for cooking, for example, to bake pancakes or pies. The porridge or the pancakes prepared in such an oven may differ in taste from the same meal prepared on a modern stove or range. The process of cooking in the Russian oven can be called "languor" — holding dishes for a long period of time at a steady temperature. Foods that are believed to acquire a distinctive character from being prepared in a Russian oven include baked milk, pastila candies, mushrooms cooked in sour cream, or even a simple potato.<sup>[2]</sup> Bread is put in and taken out from the oven using a special wooden paddle on a long shank. Cast iron pots with soup or milk are taken out with a two-pronged metal stick.<sup>[2][6]</sup>



Typical Russian oven in a peasant izba. Oven's tools in the right side. Photo from Belarusian State Museum of Folk Architecture and Everyday Life.



Usage of the Russian oven etched by John Augustus Atkinson (1803)

As well as warming and cooking, the Russian oven can be used for washing. A grown man can easily fit inside, and during World War II some people escaped the Nazis by hiding in ovens.<sup>[2][3][6][7]</sup> In former times the oven was used to treat winter diseases by warming the sick person's body inside it.<sup>[2][3][6][7]</sup>

## In Russian culture

The Russian oven was a major element of Russian life and consequently it often appears in folklore, in particular in Russian fairy tales. The legendary hero Ilya Muromets was able to walk after 33 years of incapacity after being laid on a Russian oven. Emelya, according to the legend, was so reluctant to leave it that he simply flew and rode on it.<sup>[8][9]</sup> Baba Yaga according to the legend baked lost children in her oven. Often in those fairy tales the oven received human characteristics. For example, in "The Magic Swan Geese" a girl meets a Russian oven, and asks it for directions. The oven offers the girl rye buns, and subsequently, on the girl's return, hides her from the swan geese.<sup>[10][11]</sup>

## See also

- Masonry heater
- Timeline of Russian inventions and technology records
- List of cooking appliances



## References

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