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How I Got the Cooked-On Gunk Off an Enamel Pan



by Caroline Lange • February 2, 2016 • 25 Comments

If you also shared two frying pans with upwards of 50 coworkers, perhaps you wouldn't be completely surprised that one of those pans would end up like this:

Ew. This robin's egg blue enameled skillet lives in our staff kitchen, where we all make our coffee and lunches. This poor guy had seen a few too many overzealous fried eggs and grilled cheeses, and was showing some wear—to say the least. (To say the most, it was one of the rougher looking pans I'd seen in a while.) But the issues—the dark grease stains, a weird film—didn't necessarily signify that the pan was dirty. On a baking sheet, you'd call this "patina." But on an enamel (or stainless steel) pot or pan, you'd call it gunk.



I decided to put a few of our community's tips to work in order to get this pan back in shape and see which ideas worked best.

Here's how it went:



1. Left, pre-scrub. ^
Right, post-scrub.

2. Right, a solution of >
baking soda and water
went on with a sponge.

Below, a much cleaner
pan post-baking soda
paste! Right, the fewer
stubborn hangers-on. v



1. Elbow grease

Yep. Just elbow grease—plus the nubby side of a sponge, some dish soap, and hot water—started to bring the pan back from the brink. A strange, whitish film (possibly an egg white's footprint?) came off after a bit of vigorous scrubbing in a circular motion.

2. Baking soda-water paste

No newcomer to the altar of baking-soda-fixes-everything, I next tried a paste of equal parts baking soda and water. More circular scrubbing with the rough side of a sponge ensued, and with avail: It significantly decreased the amount of cooked-on oil stains on the pan.

At this point, I'd gotten pretty far using just upper arm strength and a little assistance (by way of dish soap and baking soda): The pan only had a smattering of dark, cooked-on stains around the edges, and was worlds more serviceable than the pan I'd started out with. If you're really committed to sticking to all-natural methods, this is where to stop and embrace the new "patterns" on the pan's surface.

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But just in case, I took it for a few soaks:

3. Hot water-baking soda soak

Next, I sprinkled on enough baking soda to lightly coat the inside of the pan (as though flouring a pan, but slightly more), poured boiling water over it, and waited two hours. This didn't do much of anything.

4. Hot water-dish soap soak

In an attempt to reach the remaining stains, which were cooked on stains all around the rim of the pan, I placed it in a long, low plastic bin (a 9- x 13-inch roasting pan would have worked well, too). Then I rubbed a layer of dish soap on the offending areas of the pan and filled the whole bin with very hot water. This, unfortunately, didn't do much of anything either.

Alas, having stuck until now to the most natural possible strategies, it was time to call in chemical support to get the job done.

5. The big guns (a.k.a. Bar Keeper's Friend)

If you're committed to getting your pan sparkly and completely stain-free, Bar Keeper's Friend—a gentle, powdered "cleaning polish"—is the way to go.

It's what I used to get the remaining gunk off:

I sprinkled it liberally onto the wet pan and then used an old sponge to scrub the powder around the pan. It did require a fair amount of scrubbing effort, but the result? ***Spotless at last.***



Ta-da! A beautiful thing.