

The Laws of Cooking and Heating Food on Shabbat & Yom Tov

Compiled by Maharat Ruth Friedman

Note: This information serves as guidelines for our community on the proper ways to prepare heat food on Shabbat and Yom Tov. Please contact Maharat Friedman at MaharatRuth@ostns.org if you have any questions.

Cooking on Shabbat

It is not permissible to initiate a cooking process on Shabbat. Therefore, all food that will be consumed on Shabbat must be fully cooked before the onset of Shabbat, and can then be reheated on Shabbat in certain contexts. Because these contexts depend on whether the one initiated the reheating process before the onset of Shabbat, we will explain the permissibility of heating up food on Friday night and Shabbat day.

Friday night:

It is permissible to initiate a process that is a melacha (action that violates Shabbat) if it will continue on its own accord on Shabbat before Shabbat begins (like setting an electric timer to turn on a light on Shabbat.) This is true of cooking as well. Therefore, one may heat up the food for Friday night on the stove and in the oven as long as the process of heating it up is initiated by the time that Shabbat begins. Once Shabbat begins, it is perfectly fine to leave the food in the oven, provided that you turn off the oven light so it does not go on when you open it to remove the food. We do not advise leaving the stove on for the duration of Shabbat, so it is recommended to turn it off before Shabbat begins. One may cover the pots with a towel to help contain the heat.

Shabbat day:

Once Shabbat has begun it is no longer permissible to heat your food using standard cooking devices. Therefore, it is not permissible to put food on the stove or into the oven to heat it for Shabbat lunch. That is why we have platas (electric warming trays) and blechs (a metal sheet to cover the stovetop and retain the heat of one burner, which is left on for Shabbat.) These are not cooking devices, so putting food on them on Shabbat is not considered cooking, and it is therefore permissible to warm food on them. However, if one is using a blech, one should not put food directly on the part of the metal that is directly over the flame. *There are many warming plates (platas) available on Amazon. Please note that if you purchase one with multiple settings, the knobs must be covered. There are specific models available for Shabbat without any knobs, but please check to ensure that they are UL or CTL certified for safety.*

According to Ashkenazi practice, it is only permissible to heat foods that are not liquidy once Shabbat has begun. The definition of liquidy is if the dish has liquid in it when it is at room temperature. Therefore, one should not heat soup or other liquidy dishes to serve for Shabbat lunch.

Chulent:

It is perfectly acceptable to serve chulent for Shabbat lunch because the cooking process was initiated before Shabbat. However, once one has removed the chulent pot from the cooking implement, one should not return it to the implement, or heat other foods in it.

Please note that one should not stir the chulent while it is in the cooking device, for this is connected to cooking. One should also not stir food while it is on the plata or blech, because it has the appearance of cooking.

Cooking on Yom Tov

On Yom Tov, many of the prohibitions on cooking are relaxed and it is perfectly acceptable to cook under certain conditions. For example, although one may not start a flame on Yom Tov and therefore it is not permissible to turn on one's oven or stove (see exceptions below), we can transfer a flame from an outside source, such as a candle.

Stoves:

For those who want to cook, if your stove top is able, you may turn the knob straight to a heat setting, bypassing the "light" stage. That turns on the gas, without lighting it. Then, transfer a flame from a pre-existing source and light the stove. When you are done with the fire, you may turn the knob off. (The main concern over extinguishing a flame is creating coals. But, in this case, no coal can possibly be created because the only material that is burning is gas. So, one is allowed to off the flame completely.)

Ovens:

Many ovens have a "Shabbat Mode," which is a misnomer as they cannot be used to cook or warm on Shabbat, but are perfectly acceptable for use on Yom Tov. If your oven does not have Shabbat mode but does have a pilot light that is always on, you can turn on the flame and turn it off when you're done. For electric ovens, you may leave the oven on low, and turn the temperature up when the light comes on (indicating that the element is on) and turn it down when the light goes off.

Eruv Tavshilin

When Yom Tov begins on a Wednesday night and extends onto Erev Shabbat, we need to make what is called an “Eruv Tavshilin.” Because we are not supposed to prepare anything that we need for the future on yontiv, we should not be able to prepare for Shabbat on Yom Tov. This can present logistical challenges, so there is an opportunity to make what is known as an Eruv Tavshilin on Wednesday so that we can prepare for Shabbat on the second day of yontiv. More information and instructions may be found here: http://halachipedia.com/index.php?title=Eruv_Tavshilin.