

I thought I'd throw a wrench into this topic thread and name the set of tools I use every bake instead of just one tool. I know there is no absolute or perfect list of tools for cooking in a WFO...and certainly not a list upon which everyone agrees. Although you don't need more than just something to push & pull items from the fiery hearth to enjoy a WFO, the following dozen items are my personal WFO essentials for making & baking almost anything in my oven. Items with an asterisk are shown in the page 3 photos.

Working the oven:

- 1) IR temp gun: There are lots of IR guns on the market that are much less than the \$100 version offered on site. I would recommend that you go to either Amazon or Harbor Freight and take a look. That said, I have a cheap model purchased when I started and later I purchased the FB model. What I liked is the quality of the build, the laser pointer option, temp range, and the ability to scan my hearth and then see high, low, and average temps for the hearth. I know there are lots of ways to tell when the temps correct for pizza without "fancy devices" but I sure like my IR gun (also use it to check my proofer, refrigerator, and even the heat vent outputs in the house...).
- 2) Blow tube*: I have a 3' length of 1/2" copper tubing that I flattened at one end. I use it to get my coals & fires going a little bit faster. The flattened end helps direct a much more forceful stream of air towards the coals/embers. It really comes in handy after I've pulled my ash out of the oven and want to clean the hearth surface. I simply take my blow pipe and blow the ash off the oven floor...the heated air flow takes most of the ash right out & up the chimney stack.
- 3) Fire tool*: Something to move oven wood around while it's burning. My favorite for this is an old hand weed whacker. Some people use their banjo peels but that never appealed to me. Fireplace pokers or even old, wood handled hoes will work well for the task.
- 4) Ash brush* or shovel: There's been a lot of discussion about losing brass bristles from a brush and getting it into whatever you're cooking. I still use a brass brush to pull out ash & coals before my bread bakes and then use the copper blow tube to give the hearth a good "dust-off". I feel pretty comfortable that no brass bristles have been left behind on the hearth. Several folks here and other places, simply use their peels to move ash/coals to the side (or ash bucket) and then flop/slap the peel onto the hearth surface to remove the last of the ash--works quite well. For a short time I tried using a damp rag on a stick to wipe off the hearth but the method just didn't work for me.
- 5) Bucket(s): Although I have an ash slot & ash container built into my oven, I believe most people simply shovel out cold ashes after the party is over. A metal bucket is recommended as you'd be surprised how long coals will remain live when the active fire has gone out. When I'm doing a lot of pizza my banjo peel gets pretty hot after turning & doming, so I will have a plastic bucket of water nearby to dunk the peel head and cool it down.
- 6) Hotpads/Gloves: Be prepared to protect your hands from the heat of items coming out of the oven...especially true when you're using pots & pans. Good leather gloves are really helpful when you start working with pots & pans in the oven. Welders gloves and those made for BBQ's cover halfway up your forearms and are pretty inexpensive these days. If you buy a pair of these gloves, make sure they are roomy enough for your hands. Tight gloves will allow heat to transfer through to your hands much quicker. Cabelas has a pair of leather gloves that cover to your elbow (19").

Dough Prep & Baking:

- 7) A good scale: I do larger batches of bread and have a scale that goes from 1 to 7,000 g (My Weigh KD-7000) with options for 5 different weight units. It runs between \$30-\$45 depending on the sale season. But if you are making dough of any sort, a good scale really is an essential item (IMHO). Just make sure you get one that will measure in grams & oz, has a large capacity (10-15 lbs/5-7 KG), has a tare, cleans easily, and that you can see the display when a large bowl is placed on top.
- 8) Lame*: I've noticed that most bread folks are always looking for the perfect lame to score their loaves. I bought a couple spendy lames that didn't work any better than me holding the double-edge razor blade. I now use a plastic coffee stir stick (wood ones also work) and it does the job quite well at minimal expense.
- 9) Internal temperature probe: I currently use a CDN unit with a braided metal probe. It works pretty well and you can even set a temperature alarm that sounds off when that temp is reached...perfect if you get caught up in an interesting conversation (or appetizer) while baking. The CDN unit's response time is a little slow and the connecting wire can be a nuisance. I've just purchased a ThermoWorks ThermoPen (model MK4) Instant Read probe for prep room dough temps, in-house cooking, and checking everything other than my baguettes & pizza in the WFO. It's a little expensive, but the quality and features are unsurpassed (IMHO).
- 10) Pizza bubble popper* or pan hook: I have a stainless steel rod that's bent at 90 degrees on one end and is designed to pop bubbles in pizza dough as the pie is cooking. I use it for that purpose and for moving lighter pots & pans in & out of the oven chamber. Recently I purchased a heavy duty BBQ tool* (for lifting grates I believe)...and it's wonderful for pushing/pulling my big dutch oven around in the oven. With the flat, 90° end piece/hook it's very efficient for pushing half sheets into the far back of the oven (and retrieving them).
- 11) Timer: Having a digital timer with 2-4 separate countdown timers is really handy when you're baking several items (especially when guests are present). I have both an OXO (x3) and an American Innovative (Quad4X model) and use one of them every bake. Since I generally bake my baguettes between 550-575F, timing is pretty important. I set 20, 15, & 10 minutes on the timer checking the oven spring, crusts browning too much near a wall, and opening the baking door partially to release steam and get the crust a little firmer. Also handy when you step into the house and get off on a tangent...I always try to keep my timer with me during a bake.
- 12) Peel(s): Lots of options and personal preference here. Delivery of the pizza into the oven is best done with a larger, wider peel. Once the pizza is in the oven, a good banjo head peel with a slider handle is really useful for turning the pie. One caveat if you choose a peel with a slider handle...I have been unable to find replacement slider handles for the black model whereas the blue GI Metal model handle/slider replacements are inexpensive and readily available. In either case, the black model handle uses a 3/4" shaft diameter hole and the blue model uses 5/8". Although the blue handle sets are cheap, I have a neighbor who loves to turn wood and I traded him some bread for some hand crafted sliders. P.S. - If you haven't already melted a slider during a pizza party, guaranteed one of your guests will do that for you in the near future. When I'm doing bread I use two longer pieces of cedar (old house siding I believe), one smaller plank works as a flip board* and the other is longer and wider and is my baguette peel*.



Ash brush/scraper and weed whacker



Weed whacker (fire tool) head



BBQ tool, Pizza Popper, & Copper Blow Tube (with flattened end)



Lame made with plastic stir stick



Close up of homemade Lame



Baguette peel & flip board



Made from old cedar siding pieces