

Kitchen Safety: *How to Put Out a Grease Fire*



Photo

Cooking doesn't normally present a lot of danger. You might nick your finger while chopping vegetables or manage to burn a pan of roasting potatoes, but in terms of actual danger to ourselves or our homes, not so much. Except for grease fires. Do you know what to do if your cooking oil catches fire?

A grease fire happens when your cooking oil becomes too hot. When heating, oils first start to boil, then they'll start smoking, and *then* they'll catch on fire. Most vegetable oils have a smoking point around 450°F, while animal fats like lard or goose fat will start smoking around 375°F.

The very best safety is prevention. Whenever you're heating oil for pan-frying or deep-fat frying, stay in the kitchen. Use a heavy pot with a lid and clip a thermometer to the side so you know the temperature of the oil.

Keep an eye on the oil as it's heating. If you see wisps of smoke or smell something acrid, immediately turn down the heat or remove the pot from the burner completely. The oil won't immediately catch fire once it starts smoking, but smoke is a danger sign that it's well on its way to getting there.

If the worst happens and your oil does catch on fire, do the following:

- **Turn the Heat Off** - Don't try to move the pot. You might accidentally splash yourself or your kitchen with burning oil. And that would be bad.
- **Cover the Pot with a Metal Lid** - Fire cannot exist in the absence of oxygen. With the lid on (and the heat off), the fire should quickly consume all the oxygen and put itself out. Use a metal lid since glass will shatter.
- **Pour on Baking Soda** - Baking soda will extinguish grease fires, but only if they're small. It takes a lot of baking soda to do the job.
- **Spray the Pot with a Class K Fire Extinguisher** - The other alternative if the fire is getting out of control.

Whatever you do, DO NOT do the following:

- **Do Not Use Water** - Pouring water can cause the oil to splash and spread the fire. The vaporizing water can also carry grease particles in it, also spreading the fire.
- **Do Not Move the Pot or Carry It Outside** - Throwing the pot outside might seem logical in the frenzy of the moment. But trying to move the pot might splash burning oil on you, your home, and anything outside.
- **Do Not Throw Any Other Baking Product On the Fire** - Flour might look like baking soda, but it won't react the same. Only baking soda can help put out a grease fire.