

Building a back garden Tandoor Oven.

Contributed by Nick

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I wanted a tandoor oven for the back garden but as prices range from about £250 upwards for a tiny model, the local takeaway wins almost every time. The domestic grill simply doesn't get hot enough or provide the right flavour and the barbecue doesn't take naan breads. A tandoor is a traditional Indian sub-continent oven, made from clay. It's essentially a chimney placed over a wood or charcoal fire. They can get to around 500°C and are great for cooking kebabs and breads, which are pressed against the internal walls. Every Indian restaurant has one, although they are usually gas fired.

Mine uses a flower pot, half an oil drum, a baked bean tin and some sand:

Downsizer Policy 381/32b, sub-section C, parts 1-34, 36 and 56 demand that at this point I have to warn you to use suitable safety gear, such as eye protection and gloves. Also, please ensure you use the right cutting disc. Using the wrong one can cause damage to the disc, the cutter, your project and the kitten.

Find yourself the largest flower pot you can. Mine stands at around 18 inches high and has a similar base. Using an angle grinder, cut the bottom off the pot so you have a terracotta tube. You could also use a chimney pot, potentially. You will also need to cut a 3 inch square away from the top edge, to act as an air vent.

You also need to use the angle grinder to cut the oil barrel to the same height as the flower pot and cut a three inch hole in the lower surface to line up with the one in the pot. Now, simply put the pot in the barrel, upside down, lining up the two holes. You could construct some fancy metal tube to join these up, and smother with fire cement to ensure you have a perfect seal. However, I cut the end off an empty baked bean can, shoved it in and crushed it slightly to fit.

Fill the gap between the pot and the barrel walls with sand, and you're done! Real tandoors have thick clay walls which insulate them and form part of the cooking surfaces, radiating heat to roast meat, but also to allow fresh dough to be slapped on them to cook breads. This is why a curry house naan has a flat, slightly burnt side and a bubbled side. Flower pots are much thinner walled, so the sand is used to help with this heat bank. Mine is placed on a thick concrete slab in the garden. You could use a patio slab, but I'd worry it'll crack in the heat.

Place a pile of charcoal on the floor of the tandoor, light with fire lighters and use as you would a regular barbecue. Once the coals are grey, and red hot, I bank them to the side away from the air vent. This seems to help them burn better. First fire in the tandoor caused the pot to crack in one place, but it doesn't seem to have prevented it from working.

You should probably remove the kitten from the pot before use. Much of the inspiration for this came from

www.poptastic.com/tandoor although I have adapted mine to fit the materials I had lying about (old oil drum, sandbags). Although some might suggest mine is less permanent than his and less professionally finished, I would counter that mine is collapsible and could be taken, for example, to the beach for a seaside cook-up. Wonder if you could persuade the limpets to stick to the sides...