Colwall Orchard Group:

Safe Way of Working: SWOW04 -

Use of the Cob Oven

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Review: Annually thereafter (or in the event of an accident)

Reviewed by: Chris Blake 1 February 2025

Next review: by 2nd July 2025

**Introduction**

The cob oven is available for use at events organised by Colwall Orchard Group and for hire by other groups and private parties. The hire fee is £10 an hour with a minimum booking of 2 hours. A refundable deposit of £100 is also required. Bookings can be made via the COG Secretary by emailing members@colwallorchardgroup.org. Please check for existing bookings on the Colwall Orchard Group calendar, on our website, when planning your event.

You must use the cob oven sensibly and take responsibility for the safety of yourself and your guests. Please check the weather forecast and do not use the cob oven if it is really windy, as flying embers could start a fire. There are many combustible materials nearby including the wooden buildings, fencing, furniture, wood store, dry grass and other vegetation).

There is a small stock of wood in the store near the cob oven.

**General guidance on Lighting and Using the Cob Oven**

Lighting the oven is simple. Just remember that you need to allow time for the oven to warm up to pizza temperature. You know when that is by the fact that there is no longer any smoke, just hot gases coming off the fire. That will be about one hour after lighting.

Use firewood that is DRY and UNTREATED. Do not use timber that has been treated with chemicals in order to be used outside. This includes painted wood.

You will need some small pieces of wood (kindling) and some larger to maintain the fire. You can add smaller pieces with the larger in order to maintain a flame and keep the fire going. Most local garage/garden centres sell bundles of firewood and kindling.

You can use firelighters. Much easier than screwed up newspaper!

Using kindling, build a small ‘Jenga’ stack in the doorway of the oven - NOT inside the oven.

Drop a lit firelighter into the middle of your stack, or build the stack over a lit fireflighter. Take your time - don’t rush.

Allow the fire to get going before adding more wood. Build a nice fire, and after 10 to 15 minutes, move the fire a little further into the oven using a couple of sticks. Move it about 5 to 10cm into the oven.

Add more wood. Build a nice hot fire. The idea is to allow the fire to put heat into the oven while it still can get air from the outside.

After another 15 minutes or so, and still adding more wood, you can move the fire further into the oven. You have to judge this: if the fire sulks then it needs more time in the doorway. You will reach a point where the fire goes nicely when inside the oven. Air is being drawn in to feed it, and smoke and gases are exhausting at the top of the doorway. Take your time - there is no substitute for time here.

Maintain a fire inside until the smoke starts to decrease. You should find the walls of the oven getting warmer. Once warm enough, a fire will keep running happily and give off little smoke.

You are aiming to be able to have a fire running with no help or blowing. The only way to learn this is by doing and observing.

When you feel the oven is hot, and the fire is burning without lots of smoke, you can use your oven tool to push the fire towards the back and sides of the oven.

Keep adding fuel, but don’t overload it. Try and maintain a flame, rather than a smouldering fire.

Brush the floor of the oven with a SLIGHTLY DAMP (not soaking wet) brush - sweeping the ash to the left and right - to create a clean area where you can put your pizza.

A peel is a special shovel-like tool for sliding pizzas in and out of the oven. Use the one provided to put the pizza in the oven. Watch the pizza closely. You may want to turn the pizza to cook it evenly: use the oven tool and peel to turn the pizza either while in the oven, or bring it out, turn it, and pop it back in.

Decide when it is cooked enough. If the oven is cool, the pizza will take longer. If it’s super hot, then you will have to make sure it doesn’t burn!

When cooking pizza for a long time, you will have to add more wood to maintain the fire. Don’t add lots - a little at a time, and use some kindling too. Think hot!

Once your pizza baking is done, you can either let the fire burn itself out (it is very safe to do this), or rake the fire out using your oven tool into a bucket of water. Do this gently. A few glowing embers will burn themselves out, so don’t think you have to

get it all out. If you wish, you can push the remaining fire to the back and let it burn away.

Don’t put any water into the oven - you could crack the floor stones. You can sweep with a damp brush to make sure the fire is completely out, but the design is very safe.

**Fire Safety**

* Have a bucket of water nearby in case of an accident.
* A ‘Health Safety and Welfare’ kit will be provided to those hiring the fire pit. For COG events the ‘Health Safety and Welfare’ kit is in a plastic box on the shelves in the shed and it includes a burns kit, first aid kit and a fire blanket – ensure you know where to find this in case of emergency.
* Fires in the cob oven must be supervised by adults at all times and should not ever be left unattended
* Fire extinguishers are located in the following locations. If you are hiring the cob oven you will be provided access to at least one of these:
  + Inside the rear pedestrian entrance door to the Orchard Room
  + Inside the main double entrance doors to the Apple Packing Shed
  + Inside the small timber tool shed

**In case of emergency - calling emergency services**

The Apple Packing Shed is on Old Church Road, Colwall at WR13 6HB. The grid reference is SO 747 426.