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[illegible]

is better or worse than more familiar forms of cookery. Photo: Induction cooktops: a road from easy-to-clean toughened glass, look much the same as other ceramic cooktops. It's important to know that only cookware with an iron base will work properly with a cooktop like this. Most new pots and pans are very clearly labeled and it's relatively easy to find cookware products that are compatible. Photo by Juhan Sonin published on Flickr under a Creative Commons Licence. Contents Before you can understand induction cooking, you need to understand induction. And the first thing you will need to know is that "induction" is a shortened way of saying "electromagnetic induction." In a nutshell, induction is the process of generating an electric current in a conductor by exposing it to a changing magnetic field. James Clerk Maxwell, the brilliant Scottish physicist and mathematician, was the first to describe this phenomenon in his equations. Public domain photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons. A handful of brilliant European scientists figured out the science of electromagnetism—the mysterious relationship between electricity and magnetism—in a period of roughly 40 years, spanning the middle of the 19th century. Their findings have proved to be among the most important discoveries ever made: scientists had known about electricity since ancient times, but understanding the science (and technology) of electromagnetism made it possible to power the world with electricity for the first time. It all started in 1820. A Danish physicist named Hans Christian Ørsted found that when an electric current flows down a wire, it creates an invisible pattern of magnetism all around it (a magnetic field, in other words). The next year, French physicist André-Marie Ampère took this experiment a stage further: he found that two wires carrying electric currents, placed near to one another, will either attract or repel one another—a bit like two magnets—because the magnetic fields they produce cause a force between them. So far, the emerging science of electromagnetism was completely theoretical: very interesting, but not much use. Things took a much more practical twist when the brilliant English physicist and chemist Michael Faraday figured out how he could use electricity and magnetism to develop a very primitive electric motor, also in 1821. He placed a magnet near a piece of wire into which he fed an electric current. As the current flowed through the wire, it generated a magnetic field around it (in the way Ørsted had found), pushing itself away from the magnetic field that the permanent magnet generated. Other inventors (notably Englishman William Sturgeon and American Joseph Henry) went on to develop practical electric motors, while Faraday continued to experiment with the science. In 1831, he pulled off the opposite trick: he showed how rotating a coil of wire through a magnetic field would make an electric current flow through it—inventing the electricity generator that would soon (in the 1870s) power the world. Faraday also discovered that a magnetic field could induce an electric current in a wire, a process that we now call electromagnetic induction. This discovery was a key step in the development of the science that would make magnetism and vice-versa: it finally nailed down by Scottish physicist James Clerk Maxwell in the 1860s. Maxwell summarized everything that was then known about electricity and magnetism in four beautifully simple, crystal clear, mathematical formulas. Maxwell's equations, as we now call them, still form the foundations of electromagnetic science today. Read more in James C. Rautio's article The Long Road to Maxwell's equations. You don't need to know much about electromagnetism to understand induction cookery—simply that a changing electric current can make magnetism and a changing magnetic field can make electricity. When you hear someone talking about induction, or something that uses induction, all it means is that magnetism is being used to generate electricity. A common use for induction is in electric toothbrushes, which have one or two rechargeable batteries packed inside. The trouble with electric toothbrushes is that they get wet, so they need to have completely sealed plastic cases to keep their mechanisms safe and dry. But that creates a different problem: if they're completely sealed against water, how can you get electricity inside to recharge them? A conventional charger socket would be an open invitation to water as well. That's where induction comes in. When your toothbrush battery runs flat, you sit it on a little plastic charger unit to recharge it. Although there is no direct electrical connection between the toothbrush and the charger (both are made of plastic), electromagnetic energy flows from the charger into the toothbrush battery through the induction, straight through the plastic that separates them: a coil of wire in the charger produces a magnetic field that induces an electrical current in a coil of wire in the toothbrush battery, recharging it. This is a simple and elegant way of charging a battery without the need for a direct electrical connection between them. How does induction cooktop work? An induction cooktop is simply an electromagnetic "hot" hob in European countries—simply an electromagnet you can cook with inside the glass cooktop, there's an electronically controlled coil of metal. When you turn on the power, you make a current flow through the coil and it produces a magnetic field all around it (and most importantly) directly above it. Now a simple direct electric current (the one that's always flowing in the same direction) produces a constant magnetic field: one of the laws of electromagnetism is that fluctuating magnetic induction is produced only by a constantly changing electric current. So you have to use an alternating current (one that keeps reversing direction) to make a fluctuating magnetic field that will, indirectly, produce heat. And that's all that an induction hob does: it generates a constantly changing magnetic field. It does not generate heat directly. You can put your hand on top of it and you won't feel a thing. (Warning: Don't ever put your hand on a cooktop that has recently been used for cooking because it may have become dangerously hot from the cooking pan that's been standing on top of it.) When you stand a suitable cooking pan on top of an induction cooktop that's powered up, the magnetic field produced by the cooktop penetrates the metal of the pan. So we have a fluctuating magnetic field moving around inside a piece of metal (the base and sides of the pan)—and that makes an electric current flow through the pan too (that's all that induction means). Now this is not quite the same as the electric current that flows through a wire, carrying electrical energy in a straight line from (say) a battery to a flashlight bulb. It's a kind of whirling, swirling electric current with lots of energy but nowhere to go; we call it an eddy current. As it swirls around inside the metal's crystalline structure, it dissipates its energy, making heat. Eddy currents are one source of the heat in induction cooking. There's another source of heat too. When you magnetize and demagnetize something, like a piece of metal, it gets hot. Induction cooking uses this effect too. 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