The Baked-On Rescue Ladder

Start gentle. Climb only when you have to.

Always check your pan maker's care instructions first. Theirs win.

1 Soak and Wait

Fill with hot water (boiling if safe) and a small squirt of dish soap. Soak 30 minutes, ideally 2 to 4 hours, overnight for severe cases. Then scrape and scrub.

Works on: Egg, pasta, starches, caramelized sugar. Less effective on charred oil or fat.

2 Boil and Scrape

Put about an inch of water back on the stove over medium-high heat. Boil 5 to 10 minutes while scraping with a flat wooden spoon. Pour out carefully, then scrub.

Works on: Stubborn residue that survived the soak.

3 Baking Soda Simmer

Add just enough water to cover the bottom, 2 to 3 tablespoons baking soda, and a squirt of dish soap. Simmer 10 minutes. Scrape and scrub while still warm.

Works on: Greasy, carbonized buildup. A go-to for stainless and enamel.

4 Bar Keepers Friend

Wet the pan. Apply the powder dry or as a paste. Let it sit 2 to 5 minutes, then scrub with a non-scratch pad and rinse well.

Works on: Stainless and stainless-clad pans.

Careful: Not for non-stick or cast iron. On aluminum, test a small spot first. Skip it on anodized.

5 Dryer-Sheet Soak

Place a dryer sheet in the pan, fill with hot water, and let it soak overnight. A no-scrub option you can try any time.

Works on: Stainless, enamel, and some glass bakeware.

6 Oven Cleaner

The big gun. Lye-based, so use gloves and ventilation and follow the label. Apply, let it sit as directed, wipe, and rinse thoroughly.

Works on: Oven interiors, stainless that survived everything else, heavily carbonized sheets, cast iron being stripped to re-season.

Careful: Not for non-stick or aluminum.

Which levels are safe for your pan?

● Safe ◐ Gently / with caution — Skip

Pan type	1 Soak	2 Boil	3 Baking soda	4 Bar Keepers	5 Dryer sheet	6 Oven cleaner
Stainless steel	●	●	●	●	●	●
Non-stick	●	◐	—	—	—	—
Cast iron	—	●	●	—	—	◐
Enamel (Le Creuset, etc.)	●	●	●	◐	●	—
Glass and ceramic	●	●	●	—	◐	—
Aluminum baking sheets	●	●	◐	◐	—	—

Cast iron

Skip long soaks (they invite rust). Use oven cleaner only to strip the pan completely before re-seasoning.

Glass and ceramic

Still stuck after Level 3? Try a paste of baking soda and hydrogen peroxide, left for 30 minutes.

Aluminum

Bare aluminum can dull. Test a small spot first, keep it brief, rinse well, and skip Bar Keepers Friend on anodized.

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General guidance only. Follow your cookware maker's instructions.