

## THE COOK'S TOOLS

Today is the first installment of a multi-part series on the Hometown Kitchen, called So You Want to Start Cooking. Today, we'll tackle what you need for equipping your basic kitchen, bearing in mind space and cost. Later programs will cover stocking the larder, basic cookbooks, some basic cooking techniques that every new chef needs to know, and finally other pots and pans and tools that you may want to get as you get more proficient in the kitchen. But first, the basics.

Number one, a 10-inch non-stick frying pan. This is your basic all-around pan, for sautéing, making egg dishes, braising small quantities of food, and more. You don't have to go to a fancy cooking store to find one. The top of the line at Wal-Mart, which runs you about \$25, will do just fine. I bought one a couple of years ago and find that it's the pan I use most often.

Number two, a 10-inch chef's knife. You can perform most of all cutting and slicing chores with this knife. But get a good one. Be prepared to spend close to \$50 for a decent one. That said, my personal favorite knife is a 6-inch chef's utility knife, made by Victorinox, that I got at the Home and Farm Store in downtown Jackson. It's lightweight and perfectly balanced. I like it because most of the time it will also double for item

Number three, a paring knife, for peeling, coring, and trimming fruits and vegetables. Again, get a good one.

Number four, a 3-quart saucepan. With this you can cook vegetables, rice, soups, sauces, and small quantities of pasta. While I personally love my All-Clad and Calphalon pans, you can get a good saucepan at our local box stores. But buy the best they have—cheap pans are made of metal that's too thin, and will end up burning your food.

Number five, an expandable steamer attachment to fit the 3-quart saucepan. This will be used for steaming vegetables, (which is much better than boiling them), fish and shellfish.

Number six, a 10-inch wide stockpot with a lid. This is essential for making large quantities of soups, stews, cooking pasta, and so on. You'll be amazed at how often you use this pot.

Number seven, a heavy-duty roasting pan, for all kinds of roasting, from beef, to lamb, to the Thanksgiving turkey.

Number eight, both a strainer AND a colander. This is essential for all sorts of straining and washing vegetables, draining pasta, and so on. No more draining the spaghetti through your tennis racquet.

Number nine, liquid AND dry measuring cups and spoons. I often cook spontaneously, with a pinch of this and a dash of that. But when a white sauce calls for a cup of milk and two tablespoons of flour, don't guess. Measure.

Number ten, an electric blender. This machine makes wonderful sauces, soups, and purees, not to mention frozen margaritas. Sooner or later you may want a food processor as well, but start with the blender.

Number 11—an instant-read meat thermometer. This is a good cook's secret weapon. Is the roast done yet? Why guess when you can know for sure.

Number 12—the small stuff, a vegetable peeler, a pepper mill, a hand grater, a rubber spatula, a pancake turner, and some wooden spoons. And my most important hand tool is a small pair of tongs. Just get the basic metal ones. I tried the fancier models, but found they didn't work as well as the simple cheaper version.

Next week we'll talk about stocking the pantry, what you need to have in your basic kitchen. This is Steve Muni for the Hometown Kitchen.