

MUST-HAVE EQUIPMENT CHECKLIST FOR COOKING SUCCESS



FEARLESS  FRESH
from STEPHANIE STIAVETTI

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THERE ARE SO MANY KITCHEN GADGETS FOR SALE OUT THERE. Every time I walk into Sur la Table or Williams Sonoma, I get lost in the sea of shiny toys. Do I need this 27-in-1 cheese/garlic/onion/potato slicer?

What's a girl to do? What bits and pieces do you really need to get the job done?

Thankfully there aren't that many things you need to be able to cook like a serious kitchen ninja. Here's a list of what you absolutely must have in your kitchen. With this relatively small list, you'll be able to tackle almost any kitchen project with grace and ease.

PROTIP: You probably have a restaurant supply shop within 20 minutes of your house, and you can buy almost every last item on this list there for nearly half the price. Check out my post for more details.

Here's a general rule: Avoid unitaskers, or things that only do one thing. Exceptions are unitaskers that do their task incredibly well and you use all the time, such as my spiral pineapple corer, which saves me a ton of time when chopping up fresh pineapple. (Which I do a few times a month, so it saves lots of time and energy.)

FYI, I've included **Amazon referral links below**, but you can buy these absolutely anywhere. I suggest shopping around for the best price, or if you're working on a budget, consider buying through Amazon's used section!

STUFF YOU NEED

- ✓ **Sharp knives.** This is probably the most important part of your arsenal. Dull knives slip more often, which leads to cutting yourself. Need to learn the right way to use a kitchen knife? [Click here](#).

8-inch chef's knife. No matter how many knives you have, this will be the most-used in your kitchen. It's used for everything from garlic to pork shoulders.

4-inch paring knife. Need to peel an apple? Or debone a chicken? This little guy will be your best friend for anything your chef's knife is too big to handle.



- ✓ **Oven mitts.** These can be any style or brand, as long as they're thick and don't slip. I prefer the Ove' Glove. They're ugly but they never, ever fail.
- ✓ **Half baking sheet.** This is the thing in my kitchen I use the most. Spring for a thick commercial one that won't warp when heated.



- ✓ **10-inch frying pan (NOT non-stick!).** I recommend splurging on a thick-bottom model, as thin pans can burn food in one area, while it's still raw in another. Bonus points if your pan has a metal handle so you can stick it in the oven. Avoid non-stick pans: the teflon surface is toxic when scratched, and you'll go crazy trying to get anything to brown well.
- ✓ **Lidded pots, 2-quart, 3-quart, and 4-quart.** Stock up on pots, because you'll never have enough. Again, thick-bottom pots cook much more evenly than cheap ones.
- ✓ **Liquid measure cup.** These are the clear cups with measurements printed on the side. Quality doesn't matter too much here. Save your extra pennies for a decent frying pan!
- ✓ **Dry ingredient measuring cup.** These are the ones individual measuring cups that come in a set. Again, quality isn't too important here. Just make sure your set has at least the following: 1/4 cup, 1/3 cup, 1/2 cup, and 1 cup.
- ✓ **Measuring spoons.** Get plastic or metal, it doesn't really matter. Pick up a set with the following measurements: 1/8 teaspoon, 1/4 teaspoon, 1/2 teaspoon, 1 teaspoon, and 1 tablespoon.
- ✓ **Parchment paper.** I use this for everything from lining cookie sheets to wrapping fish and veggies for simple cooking. It's pretty cheap and infinitely useful.
- ✓ **Metal mixing bowls.** Like pots, you'll never have enough bowls so stock up on different sizes. I use the cheap metal bowls from Target, which come in small, medium, and large. Buy extra or I guarantee you'll run out of clean bowl in the middle of cooking. *Fail.*
- ✓ **Prep bowls.** Pro chefs always chop and measure their ingredients beforehand. In order to do that, you'll need small bowls to put everything in. I get the clear glass ones for cheap from Cost Plus, and they also double as pretty serving bowls for garnishes.



- ✓ **8x8-inch Pyrex baking dish.** This square pan does everything: It bakes brownies, roasts chickens, cooks casseroles and gratins, and much more. The ultimate multitasker!
- ✓ **Mini food processor.** Need to chop nuts? Whiz some pesto? Make a fruit puree? This little workhorse has got your back.
- ✓ **Electric hand mixer.** If you plan on baking, you'll need something for beating cream and mixing cake batter. Whipping egg whites to stiff peaks by hand is just not going to happen in your current mortal form. Sorry!
- ✓ **Cutting boards, one each for meat and veg.** You don't have to be too picky here, though make sure you get boards large enough that your stuff isn't falling off the side while you chop (at least 12- x 18-inches). Getting separate boards for meat and non-meat items will help you avoid giving everyone food poisoning, which is a serious party foul.
- ✓ **Fine mesh strainer/sifter/colander.** You'll need this for straining pasta, rinsing veggies, and filtering sauces. If you get a fine mesh version, you can also use it to sift flour. Pick up a larger strainer that can hold a lot of food, or you'll find your gorgeous Brussels sprouts and perfectly-cooked noodles leaping to their death into the garbage disposal. Trust me on this.
- ✓ **A decent, non-fiddly can opener.** This is the most undervalued part of the kitchen... until you need one, that is. Get a good one. The day a cheap can opener dies on you is a day you'll tap into a never ending fountain of new curse words.
- ✓ **A sharp, high-quality vegetable peeler.** Cheap veggie peelers are a serious bummer, as they show an uncanny preference for peeling fingers instead of vegetables. A nice, sharp peeler will stay exactly where you put it on an apple and peel smooth lines without any effort. A good one will easily last you a decade, so consider spending \$10 for quality - with the added bonus that it will also save your digits.



- ✓ **Fire extinguisher.** This should be a given, because even pro chefs set random shit on fire. Get a small one that fits under your sink, and ***make sure it's rated for kitchen-type fires***. Check out this post on the topic, because it's SUPER important.

✓ UTENSILS

Wooden paddle. This is a must-have for saving any sort of sauce or creation that can stick to the bottom of a pot. (Read: *everything*.)

Wooden spoon. I have, like, 6 wooden spoons in my kitchen, and I use them all. Constantly.

Silicon spatulas, large and small. You'll need these for scraping every last lick of goodness out of your pots, bowl, and jars.

Slotted spoon. A slotted spoon is a must for scooping anything out of liquid or fat. Think corn, meatballs, hard boiled eggs, etc. The deeper the spoon, the fewer times you'll have to scoop. Yay, physics!

Tongs. A good set of tongs will be a life-saver for your fingers. Ever tried to turn a searing-hot potato halfway through baking, sans tongs? I don't recommend it. Buy nylon-tipped so they don't scratch your pans.



Balloon whisk. You'll need this endlessly useful utensil for whipping eggs, sauces, frostings, and anything else that needs to either blend smoothly or develop fluffiness. Go for quality, as cheap ones tend to fall apart.

Ladle. Ever tried to transfer boiling hot liquid from one place to another without a ladle? Then you understand its value.

STUFF THAT'S NICE TO HAVE

If you've got more space - or are looking for goodies to put on your Christmas list - I've also included a list of things aren't necessary, but are handy to have:

✓ **Cheese grater.** I'm a Microplane fangirl because they stay super sharp and come in all different styles. Their coarse grater makes quick work of cheese, carrots, or anything else that needs shredding.

✓ **Bench scraper.** If you love baking, get a metal bench scraper. It gets rid of dried dough and egg faster than you can say, "Argh, Formula 409 isn't working."

✓ **Citrus juicer.** Lemons, limes, and oranges are a super easy source of flavor, and juicing them is much easier with a hand-held citrus juicer. Oh, don't get the pointy, stabby-looking kind. They take way more effort and get juice EVERYWHERE.



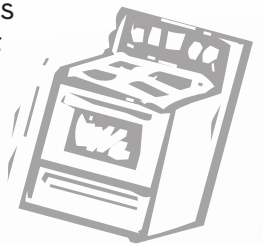
- ✓ **Zester.** Lemon zest is the secret ingredient in many amazing recipes, but it's a pain in the butt to manage without a zester. I seriously ♥ ♥ ♥ my Microplane zester.
- ✓ **Kitchen shears.** I use mine to cut through vegetables, parchment paper, gelatin sheets, even some chicken bones. Get a pair of shears that separates into two pieces, for easy cleaning.




- ✓ **Decent pepper grinder.** I knew I had grown up when I stopped using the pre-ground pepper from Safeway. Nothing says, "I take my cooking skill seriously" than grinding fresh pepper on the fly. Make sure to get one that adjusts to both fine and coarse grinding.

- ✓ **Silicon baking sheets.** These woven mats of silicon and fiberglass sit on your cookie sheet to prevent sticking and promote even heating. Brand name Silpats are expensive, but the good news is that Amazon sells generics that work just as well at half the price. Make sure to get the same size as your baking sheets.
- ✓ **9-inch pie plate.** Because, PIE! Seriously, you can't make a pie without a pie plate. (Gallettes are a whole different beast.) I recommend ceramic or Pyrex, which heat more evenly than metal pie plates.
- ✓ **8-quart stock pot.** You'll need a big pot for making soup, brining a chicken or turkey, and other tasks that take up a lot of space. Working with a pot that's too small is a special kind of culinary hell, so if you have room for a stock pot, it can be a total lifesaver.

- ✓ **9x13 baking pan.** This is my go-to roasting pan for chicken, as well as making big casseroles, gratins, or any sort of braise that needs a lot of liquid. It also doubles as a water bath for making cheesecake. Woot!



- ✓ **8-inch cake pans.** If you want to make cakes, you'll need cake pans. Shoot for lighter pans, as dark-colored pans heat up faster and dry out the edges of your cake before the middle is done. (Dark colors absorb more heat. Boo, physics.) You'll need two pans for a standard cake recipe.
- ✓ **10-inch cast iron skillet.** You can do so many things in a cast iron skillet that I can't even list them here. If you can, look for a vintage pan that is super-smooth on the bottom. Modern cast iron has a textured surface, which food likes to stick to. (link to buy - but seriously, buy vintage!)

- ✓ **Dutch oven.** This is the sexiest beast in my kitchen. There's just something about a huge Dutch oven full of stew that impresses a dinner party. 4- to 5-quart models are a good standard size, either round or oval. (link to buy)
- ✓ **Mortar and pestle.** Ok, this is sort of a fiddly, nerdy tool, but I love it. I use mine for grinding toasted spices for amazingly legit Indian and Thai food.
- ✓ **Digital kitchen scale.** I should have put this on the "must have" list, but most American fear the scale. I can tell you one thing: When you use weight measurements in your baking, you'll notice that the quality of your goodies will be far more consistent.
- ✓ **A good standing blender.** More than just a smoothie machine, I use my blender for making smooth sauces, thick soups, crepe batter, and more. Cheap blenders die quickly and don't liquify very well, so I recommend spending \$50 on a decent model. If you want an awesome but still affordable blender, **try this one.** 
- ✓ **Immersion blender.** While not a necessity, immersion blenders make quick work of sauces and emulsions. Homemade mayo in 60 seconds. Yes, please! (link to buy)
- ✓ **Slow cooker.** This might seem like something from the olden days, but you can make an insane array of things in a Crock Pot. You just turn it on and let your food cook with no fuss for eight hours. It's almost like someone else made you dinner!
- ✓ **Full-size food processor.** Holy smokes, a food processor changes the game. It makes short work of many tasks: Slicing potatoes, chopping produce, it even makes pie crust! This is a bigger expense, but totally worth it. A huge timesaver.
- ✓ **KitchenAid mixer.** If I weren't already attached, I might marry this thing. When I bought my pretty silver KitchenAid, baking suddenly took half the time and effort. Plus it's gorgeous and sexy as hell. (Sorry, Dutch oven.)



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Get fearless in the kitchen!

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