

equipping your kitchen

Equipping your kitchen need not break the bank and you certainly don't need most of the numerous kitchen gadgets available these days. However, there are a number of basic items that are necessary if you cook regularly. This guide to equipping your kitchen includes items I consider essential and would not be without:

Knives

Knives are one item it is worth splurging on and a good knife will last for many years, if not a lifetime. A 20cm cook's or chef's knife is a versatile choice if you only want to own one good knife. You will also need a knife sharpener to keep your knives sharp.

Chopping Boards

There are many types of chopping boards, ranging from wood to plastic to marble and glass. Marble and glass may look great but will blunt your knives, so save these as cheese boards and serving platters. Both plastic and wood chopping boards are recommended, and both are hygienic if washed properly.

Pots and Pans

These can be made from many different materials, including aluminium, stainless steel, cast iron and copper. The average kitchen would require 3 different sized saucepans, and 2 frypans, one with a lid. An enamelled cast-iron casserole is great for making slow-cooked dishes and is a worthwhile addition to your kitchen. A stockpot is useful if you like to make your own stock or for boiling large quantities of pasta or vegetables.

Measuring Cups and Spoons

When following a recipe, a cup is 250ml, not a coffee cup, and a tablespoon is 20ml, not a serving spoon! Even though cooking is supposed to be an art, when following a recipe it pays to have a degree of accuracy, especially for beginner cooks.

Measuring Cups usually come in sets of ¼ cup, 1/3 cup, ½ cup and 1 cup. Measuring Spoons come in sets of ¼ teaspoon, ½ teaspoon, 1 teaspoon and 1 tablespoon. Another useful addition to your kitchen is a pyrex measuring jug.

Electronic Scales

These are invaluable if you are following recipes, especially if you are baking when accuracy is more important.

Mixing Bowls

These are available in plastic, glass, ceramic and stainless steel and are often available for purchase in sets of different sizes.

Food Processor

Some people see this as a luxury but I wouldn't be without one – it really is a time saver and performs a multitude of tasks: chopping, pureeing, grating, slicing to name a few. If you can afford it, I can recommend buying a food processor with 2 bowls – the smaller bowl is perfect for making mayonnaises and pestos as well as for chopping smaller ingredients such as nuts and herbs.

Baking ware

Baking trays or sheets and cake tins are essential if you enjoy baking (which I do!). In addition to baking cookies and the like, baking trays can be used for many other purposes such as reheating small bites, roasting vegetables or even making pizzas, so they are a versatile kitchen addition. Springform cake tins are a great choice as the cake can easily be removed. A pie plate is useful if you intend on making pies or quiches.

Roasting Pans and Baking Dishes

These are multi-purpose and can be used for cooking a roast, a lasagne or gratin or roasting vegetables.

Colanders and Sieves

You'll need a large colander for draining pasta and vegetables, and a smaller sieve for straining smaller items such as olives and capers, which is also useful to sift flour (if you don't own a flour sifter).

Peeler

You can pick these up for next to nothing from the supermarket and they make peeling vegetables and fruits a breeze.

Pepper Mill

Freshly ground pepper is far superior to already ground pepper and you can really taste the difference in your cooking. There are a number of different types available - my husband is a gadget-freak so we own a battery-operated pepper mill with a light!

Electric Hand Mixer

You can pick these up for around \$20 and they are a real time saver when beating eggs (especially whites), cream and making cakes.

Grater

Box-style graters with different-sized holes are an inexpensive and useful kitchen utensil, great for grating cheese or vegetables such as carrots and zucchini. However, these are not ideal for fine grating such as citrus zest or nutmeg – for this purpose I would recommend a Microplane grater.

Spatulas

There are 2 types of spatulas. The first type (also known as a scraper) is used for mixing, stirring or scraping down the sides of a bowl. They are available in heat-resistant silicon which are perfect for stirring over heat. The second type (also known as a turner) is a flipping implement and is used for lifting fish and fried foods.

Tongs

From flipping steaks to fishing something out of boiling water, this is a versatile utensil. I recommend long-handled tongs made from metal.

Whisks

Essential for sauces and useful for lightly beaten eggs (instead of the hand mixer), a balloon whisk will aerate and emulsify.

Spoons

Wooden, stainless steel or silicon spoons, slotted spoons and soup ladles are all useful additions to the utensil drawer.

Kitchen Timer

Most ovens and microwaves have timers on them these days, but if yours doesn't this is a worthwhile inexpensive purchase that may save you from a culinary disaster!

Although not essential, I can highly recommend the following:

Salad Spinner

One of my favourite gadgets, a salad spinner dries salad leaves with a minimum of fuss.

Rice Cooker

An electric rice-cooker cooks rice perfectly every time.

Instant-read digital thermometer

Great for testing whether the roast is ready.



Essential kitchen utensils