



CHEF'S TIP
For simple smoothies, whirl up berries and skim milk; for fast soup, add boiling water to veggie purées right in the blender bowl.

Cook Smart

14 kitchen must-haves that make it easier to whip up tasty meals and cut fat and calories, too

When we asked chefs and our own food and nutrition experts to list the gadgets or appliances that help them rustle up tasty, good-for-you meals, they didn't mention the big-ticket items, like mega-burner professional ranges and sleek induction cooktops. Surprisingly, it was the small stuff—graters, vegetable peelers, food processors, and choppers—that made their must-have lists. On the next few pages, we show the top kitchen essentials chosen by food pros. Using them might encourage you to eat your daily servings of fruit and veggies and to cook without a lot of fat. You can even sneak in naughty treats like chocolate and cheese

without packing on the pounds. Safety counts, too. So you'll see items the pros depend on to reduce the risk of foodborne disease. We also show some gadgets that are just nice to have. Odds are that many of those tools are already in your kitchen, but read on for easy tips on how to use them to make more healthful meals. Special thanks to chef Kathleen Daelemans, author of "Cooking Thin With Chef Kathleen" (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2002); our own executive chef, Hector Rodriguez; and our appliance-testing and nutrition team. (The products tested in our labs are labeled Smart Picks; the other items shown here have features that chefs liked.)

the essentials

*blender or food processor

WHY THEY'RE MUST-HAVES Both are great for making fast soups from tender cooked carrots, squash, lentils, and other vegetables; quickie fruit smoothies; tomato sauce; and dips and spreads from fava or other beans. Another bonus: Processors often come with slicing tools that can cut their way through fresh produce a lot quicker than you can by hand. If you already have a blender or processor and you're not using it, get out that manual!

HOW TO PICK A GOOD ONE Look for a heavy-duty machine that's the right size for your countertop. Make sure you can remove the top without obstruction. If you buy a food processor, get one with mini bowl inserts for small jobs.

SMART PICKS Oster Counterforms BVLB07, \$80 (shown), was among the best in our tests of 33 blenders. KitchenAid KFP715 [WH], \$100, and Cuisinart DLC-2011BCN, \$200, were among the best in our tests of 27 food processors.



OPPOSITE PAGE: WENDELL WEBBER; FOOD STYLING: BRIAN PRESTON-CAMPBELL

*spray-bottle cooking-oil dispenser

WHY IT'S A MUST-HAVE If you keep cooking oil in a spray bottle, you can be a lot stingier with fat (even more-healthy oils run around 120 calories per tablespoon) without worrying about chemicals or propellants.

HOW TO PICK A GOOD ONE To avoid potential risks from chemicals leaching out, get a mister made of stainless steel or food-safe plastic.

Shown: Misto Olive Oil Sprayer, \$10



*sharp knives with a hone or sharpener

WHY THEY'RE MUST-HAVES A good set of sharp knives makes chopping, slicing, and dicing faster and easier. Dull knives require more force, and there's more chance of a knife slipping and cutting you.

HOW TO PICK GOOD ONES Go for forged-steel knives (they have shaped metal blades that extend into the handle and bolsters that protect your hand). In our tests most outdid stamped-steel models.

SMART PICK Henckels Twin Professional "S," \$290



*measuring cups and spoons

WHY THEY'RE MUST-HAVES Measuring ingredients helps to control portion size and calories. If you eyeball the amounts, you might stir in more calories and change the proportions in recipes and end up with dishes that don't look or taste quite right.

HOW TO PICK GOOD ONES Look for metal cups with handles for scooping and measuring dry ingredients; see-through glass cups for liquids, with easy-read or etched-in markings that won't wash off; and anti-rust stainless spoons.

Shown: Oxo Good Grips stainless measuring cups, \$20, and measuring spoons, \$10; Pyrex glass measuring cup, \$8



*metal broiler pan

WHY IT'S A MUST-HAVE If you're not using the broiler pan with the slotted top that probably came with your stove, dust it off. It's a brilliant tool for making healthy meals, like ultra-skinny fish, chicken, or turkey fillets with quick-cooking veggies— asparagus, green beans, cauliflower, or broccoli florets. Plunk fillets on one side of the pan and veggies on the other and roast them at the same temperature. Another bonus: Oils and marinades drip through the slots, so your food doesn't sit in them.

HOW TO PICK A GOOD ONE Look for a sturdy pan with a dark finish; foods heat and cook faster in dark pans than in shiny metal ones.

Shown: Wilton Indulgence Professional Broiler Pan set, 16x11 1/2 inches, \$30

*grill pan

WHY IT'S A MUST-HAVE Searing in a stovetop grill pan infuses food with strong flavors without a lot of fat. Plus any fat from the food drips into the grooves.

HOW TO PICK A GOOD ONE Nonstick surfaces and dishwasher-safe models are easier to clean.

Shown: Le Creuset Square Grill Pan, \$120

CHEF'S TIP
Nonstick pans, including grill pans, are great for cooking delicate fish and fillets of poultry and meat.

*nonstick pan

WHY IT'S A MUST-HAVE The most it requires is a mist of cooking spray or oil, so you slash calories, and it's easy to clean. If you have space for only one nonstick pan, make it a roomy one with a versatile shape, like a 12-inch skillet. Avoid high cooking temps, which can break down chemicals in the coating, and toss pans when the coating starts to flake.

HOW TO PICK A GOOD ONE Handle a pan to see how it feels. Keep in mind that it will be heavier when it's filled with food.

SMART PICK EarthPan with SandFlow, \$190 for a 10-piece set, was among the best in our tests of 32 models.



SPRAYER: MEASURING CUPS, AND SPOONS: WENDELL WEBBER; OPPOSITE PAGE: WENDELL WEBBER; FOOD STYLING: BRIAN PRESTON-CAMPBELL



* salad spinner

WHY IT'S A MUST-HAVE You're more likely to eat salads every day with one of these around because it makes washing greens—herbs, too—a lot easier.

HOW TO PICK A GOOD ONE

You get a better grip with the pump kind than the spin type. Look for large capacity and plenty of holes that will release liquid as you spin. Some have containers that double as serving bowls.

Shown: Oxo Good Grips Little Salad and Herb Spinner, \$25

* tongs

WHY THEY'RE A MUST-HAVE

Rubber- or nylon-tipped tongs help protect the finish of nonstick pans. They're like an extension of your hands and easy to use for plating pasta, tossing a salad, or flipping meat and poultry as you brown, sauté, or slice.

HOW TO PICK GOOD ONES Go with dishwasher-safe metal with nylon or rubber tips and locking handles that stay closed for easy storage.

Shown: Oneida Nylon Head Locking 9-inch Tongs, \$8

CHEF'S TIP

To avoid soggy salads, spin the heck out of your greens. Give them at least three whirls.



* microwave oven

WHY IT'S A MUST-HAVE Your microwave's not just for popcorn (a healthful whole-grain treat if it's not overloaded with butter and salt). It's also great for quick-steaming vegetables and fish. And it's so easy, which can nudge you into eating more zero-fat fare. Go to www.microwaverecipes.com for inspiration. You can steam food in wet paper towels or microwave steam bags, or invest a few dollars in a microwave-safe cover to use over a glass dish.

HOW TO PICK A GOOD ONE Look for models with a sensor, touchpad controls, and auto defrost.

SMART PICK Kenmore 6633[9], \$140, was one of the best countertop ovens out of 25 models tested.



* slow cooker

WHY IT'S A MUST-HAVE Soups and stews that encourage you to toss a lot of veggies or beans into the same pot—with or without meat—are nutritious meals. And a slow cooker makes them a snap because you can start dinner in the morning and it will be ready by evening. No standing over a hot stove to discourage you!

HOW TO PICK A GOOD ONE Look for conveniences like inserts that can be tucked into the pot for a quick reheat and a programmed timer so that you don't have to worry about turning it off.

SMART PICK Rival Crock-Pot SCVC604 H-SS, \$60, has all of the features you need, and it turned out tasty dishes in our tests of 15 models.

the safety musts

* meat thermometer

WHY IT'S A MUST-HAVE It ensures that food is cooked enough to kill disease-causing salmonella and other bacteria.

HOW TO PICK A GOOD ONE Leave-in or instant-read types are good choices.

SMART PICK The digital leave-in Polder THM-360, \$30, has two probes.



OPPOSITE PAGE AND CUTTING BOARDS: WENDELL WEBBER; FOOD STYLING: BRIAN PRESTON-CAMPBELL

* 2 cutting boards

WHY THEY'RE MUST-HAVES You'll need two to avoid cross contamination: one for meat and one for veggies. Get them in different colors or sizes so that you can tell one from the other.

HOW TO PICK GOOD ONES Dishwasher-safe plastic boards are easy to keep clean. Replace them when they're badly worn to prevent bacteria from getting stuck in the grooves. A trough around the edge catches messy juices, and nonskid backs keep the boards from slipping while you're using a knife.

Shown: Gripper Cutting Boards, \$10 each



the nice-to-haves

* kitchen scale

WHY IT'S NICE TO HAVE

By precisely weighing ingredients, you can better control portions; dieters might find that especially useful.

HOW TO PICK A GOOD ONE

Choose a digital or manual type that's easy to read. Some also analyze nutritional values.

Shown: Salter Mechanical Chrome Scale, \$13



* juicer

WHY IT'S NICE TO HAVE You can whip up your own yummy and healthful fruit and veggie blends.

HOW TO PICK A GOOD ONE Look for clear containers, dishwasher-safe parts, and a fat mouth that can take big chunks (less prep time). We're testing juicers now and we'll give you an update in a future issue.

Shown: Hamilton Beach 6-Quart Big Mouth Juice Extractor, \$75.



* immersion blender

WHY IT'S NICE TO HAVE Handheld stick blenders are great for pureeing soup and veggies right in the pot, so there's no need to dirty the big blender.

HOW TO PICK A GOOD ONE Choose a powerful model with dishwasher-safe parts.

Shown: KitchenAid Immersion Blender, \$100

4 smart shopping tips

- **Match your tools to the way you cook.** "If you're not going to use it, don't buy it, and don't let a salesperson talk you into stuff you won't use," chef Daelemans says.
- **Think twice about trendy colors.** If you change your kitchen décor, you don't want to be stuck with an appliance that might not fit in, says chef Rodriguez. Go with a neutral like white or stainless steel.
- **Pick versatile appliances.** A food processor with a mini bowl and juicer attachments can save precious counter space. And slow cookers with an oven-safe pot are great for reheating leftovers!
- **Try before you buy.** Handle pricey cookware, and knives especially, in the store to make sure they feel comfy and aren't too heavy.

and don't forget ...

- box grater** Use it to grate more veggies into salads and other dishes.
- vegetable peeler** It skins fruit and veggies but also shaves chocolate and cheese into flavorful garnishes, so you can get a taste without overdoing it.
- fine mesh strainer** Use it to strain lumps, seeds, and skins from healthful soups and sauces.

WENDELL WEBBER; FOOD STYLING: BRIAN PRESTON-CAMPBELL

* stand mixer

WHY IT'S NICE TO HAVE If you like to bake bread and cookies from scratch, a stand mixer makes mixing and kneading so much easier, plus you can make more healthful goodies (homemade pasta, too) with whole-grain flours, nuts, and other nutritious add-ins. Some have attachments, such as meat grinders for making leaner burgers and meatballs, and food-processor capabilities.

HOW TO PICK A GOOD ONE Look for a sturdy machine (you don't want it jumping around the counter when you knead heavy dough), a paddle, and easy-to-read controls.

SMART PICK KitchenAid Classic K45SS[WH], \$200

Shown: KitchenAid Artisan KSM 150PS, \$300



CHEF'S TIP
Mini choppers make short work of healthful bulbs of garlic. To loosen the skin from whole cloves fast, pulse once and pull off.

* small vegetable chopper

WHY IT'S NICE TO HAVE If you don't want to drag out your food processor, it's handy for small jobs, like mincing herbs or chopping veggies, when you're cooking for just one or two people.

HOW TO PICK A GOOD ONE

Get a sturdy model to handle nuts; electric ones take less elbow grease.

SMART PICK Cuisinart Mini Prep Plus DLC-2A, \$40, tied for top place among eight models.

Shown: the newer Cuisinart Mini-Mate Plus, \$27



* pizza stone

WHY IT'S NICE TO HAVE

You can load on the veggies and cut the grease by making pizza at home. And baking it on a stone prevents a soggy bottom.

HOW TO PICK A GOOD ONE

Choose an unglazed stone; look for one that's lead free.

Shown: Oneida Round Pizza Stone, \$15

