

The Essential Healthy Kitchen

Equipment and Tools

What is needed for the essential healthy kitchen? The items listed here include basic equipment useful in most kitchens and additional items that may be helpful depending on the type of cooking you do. This guide highlights items used to prepare food using healthy cooking techniques.

This guide will help you to stock your kitchen with the tools that you need without wasting money or buying useless clutter. Included here are lists of essential equipment, and helpful additions, and some examples of superfluous items (i.e., those that are generally a waste of time and money). Please remember as you read that these are suggestions, not rules! Criteria are included to help you decide what is best for you, and this may differ from the given lists. For example, if you eat a traditional Chinese diet and have a high-heat gas stovetop, a wok may be an essential or helpful item for you whereas it is superfluous for many. Your family traditions may include making a specific item requiring specialty equipment during a holiday—this equipment then either becomes essential for you or someone in your family.

Happy cooking!

Cost

You can stock your kitchen affordably, with good quality gear, by shopping at restaurant supply stores, second-hand stores, wholesale warehouses, and mass-market online retailers. For costly small appliances, such as food processors, you can often find deals on factory refurbished items or wait for sales. By using these shopping tips, you can stock your entire kitchen for less than a third of the price you would pay at a name-brand kitchen retailer.

Criteria to decide what is essential, helpful, or superfluous

1. Do/would I use this every day, weekly, or at least bi-weekly? (essential)
2. Do/would I use this monthly? (helpful)
3. Do/would I use this less than monthly? (probably superfluous, but might also be a seasonal or holiday-specific item that you would use every year; in which case it may be important for you)
4. Can I use a piece of equipment that is already in my kitchen to do the same task without much extra work? (superfluous) With extra work? (helpful)
5. Is there no (or no convenient) other item that will allow me to complete a specific, regularly used cooking technique? (essential)



ESSENTIAL (SIMPLIFIED LIST)

Cutlery

- ☐ 8- or 10-inch (20- to 25-centimeter) Chef's Knife
- ☐ 3½- or 4-inch (8.75- to 10-centimeter) Paring Knife
- ☐ Poly/Plastic Cutting Board (12- x 18-inch/30- x 45-centimeter)
- ☐ Sharpening Steel (10-inch [25-centimeter] or longer)
- ☐ Kitchen Shears

Pots & Pans

- ☐ 1½- or 2-quart/liter Saucepan with Lid
- ☐ 4-quart/liter Saucepan with Lid
- ☐ 10- to 12-inch (25- to 30-centimeter) Nonstick Frying Pan
- ☐ 14-inch (35-centimeter) Deep/Steep-sided Sauté Pan with Lid
- ☐ 8-quart/liter Stock/Sauce/Pasta Pot with Lid
- ☐ Roasting Pan (approximately 15- to 20-inch x 11- to 16-inch x 3-inch; 37- to 50-centimeter x 27- to 40-centimeter x 7-centimeter)

Bakeware

- ☐ 9- x 13-inch (23- x 33-centimeter) Rectangular Baking Pan
- ☐ 8- x 8-inch or 9- x 9-inch (20- x 20-centimeter or 23- x 23-centimeter) Square Baking Pan
- ☐ 12-cup Muffin Pan
- ☐ 9- x 5-inch (23- x 13-centimeter) Loaf Pan
- ☐ Half-sheet Pan (2 each)
- ☐ Stainless Steel Mixing Bowls (2-, 4-, and 6-quart/liter)

Gadgets & Utensils

- ☐ Steamer Inset
- ☐ Measuring Spoons (¼-, ½-, 1-teaspoon, and 1-tablespoon [1.25-, 2.5-, 5-, and 15-milliliter] at minimum)
- ☐ Dry Measuring Cups (¼-, ⅓-, ½-, and 1-cup [60-, 80-, 120-, and 240-milliliter] at minimum)
- ☐ Liquid Measuring Cups (1-cup and 1-quart [250-milliliter and 1-liter])
- ☐ Can Opener
- ☐ Instant-read Thermometer (digital)
- ☐ Tongs (stainless steel 9- to 12-inch [20- to 30-centimeter])
- ☐ Pastry Brush (bristle or nylon, 1½- to 3-inch [37- to 75-millimeters])
- ☐ Vegetable Peeler
- ☐ Colander (4- to 6-quart/liter)
- ☐ Turner (metal)
- ☐ Heat-resistant Silicone Turner (at least 400°F [200°C])
- ☐ Heat-resistant Silicone Spatula
- ☐ Wooden Spoon
- ☐ Whisk/Whip (stainless steel, 10- to 12-inch [25- to 30-centimeter])
- ☐ Slotted Spoon
- ☐ Serving/Saucing Spoon

- ☐ Ladle (4- to 8-ounce [60- to 240-milliliter] size)
- ☐ Microplane Grater
- ☐ Waiter's Corkscrew
- ☐ Salad Spinner
- ☐ Bench Scraper or Plastic Scraper

Small Appliances

- ☐ Food Processor/Blender

ESSENTIAL (DETAILED LIST)

Pots and Pans

Item	Details
1½- or 2-quart/liter Saucepan with Lid	All pans should have a thick bottom of either cast aluminum or a triple-ply construction of two stainless steel layers sandwiching an aluminum layer between them (copper is great, too, but expensive). Make sure that all parts are oven safe. Lids are nice, but a plate will work in a pinch.
4-quart/liter Saucepan with Lid	The "essential" sizes of pans shown here are what people typically use most often—get others or different sized pans if your needs differ.
10- to 12-inch (25- to 30-centimeter) nonstick Frying Pan	A high-quality, nonstick pan helps reduce the amount of fat needed for cooking and prevents delicate items from sticking. This size is usually best if you only have one; if you purchase two, you may want to consider getting both 7-to 8-inch (18- to 20-centimeter) and 12-to 14-inch (30- to 35-centimeter) pans instead.
14-inch (35-centimeter) Deep/Steep-sided Sauté Pan with Lid	A large, deep sauté pan is perfect for making sauce and reductions or braising on the stovetop. If you are cooking without oil, opt for nonstick varieties.
8-quart/liter Stock/ Sauce/Pasta Pot with Lid	Unless you are making stock for a commercial kitchen or home canning, an 8-quart/ liter pot will cover your soup, stew, sauce, braising, and pasta boiling needs.
Large Roasting Pan	If you are only buying one roasting pan, opt for a large one (approximately 17- to 20-inch x 12- to 16-inch x 3-inch [42- to 50-centimeter x 30- to 40-centimeter x 8-centimeter]). This pan is typically used for a turkey or large roast, but is very useful for roasting vegetables or tofu, etc. You can use a smaller roasting pan or 9- x 13-inch (23- x 33-centimeter) baking/cake pan as a small roasting pan for smaller and/or fewer items in a pinch. For vegetables and tofu, sheet pans will also work.

Bakeware

Item	Details
13- x 9-inch (33- x 23-centimeter) Rectangular Baking Pan	Make sure that baking pans do not have a dark-colored coating as it will cause baked goods to brown too quickly. This pan size often used for cakes or bars also doubles as a small roasting pan.
8- x 8-inch or 9- x 9-inch (20- x 20-centimeter or 23- x 23-centimeter) Square Baking Pan	Common pans size for cornbread, brownies, and the like; many people prefer to have two pans this size on hand.

Item	Details
12-cup Muffin Pan	This pan is good for making individual-sized portions of many things—not just muffins.
9- x 5-inch (23- x 13-centimeter) Loaf Pan	Perfect for plant-based loaves (e.g., meatloaf alternatives), quick breads, and yeast breads. It is helpful to have more than one as many recipes are portioned into two pans.
Half-sheet Pan	This works well for cookies, toasting nuts, and roasting items with little liquid. It is helpful to have more than one for making large or multiple batches of foods.
Stainless Steel Mixing Bowls (3 each, ranging from 2- to 10-quart/liter)	It is best to have 3 bowls of various sizes (2-, 4-, and 6-quart/liter sizes are usually sufficient). Make sure that these do not have rubberized bottoms or other additional materials so they can also be used as a double boiler when set over water steaming in one of your saucepans.

Gadgets and Utensils

Item	Details
Steamer Inset	There is no need to buy a separate steamer unless you cook a lot of steamed dishes. An inexpensive, expandable metal version with a stem and loop in the center can be used in any of your pots or pans.
Measuring Spoons	¼-, ½-, and 1-teaspoon, and 1-tablespoon (1.25-, 2.5-, 5-, and 15-milliliter) should be included at minimum.
Dry Measuring Cups	Sizes ¼-, ⅓-, ½-, and 1-cup (60-, 80-, 120-, and 240-milliliter) should be included at minimum.
Liquid Measuring Cups	Get two: a 1-cup (250-milliliter) measure is more accurate for small amounts but will be awkward when measuring large amounts of liquid. For this, you'll appreciate a 1-quart/liter liquid measuring cup.
Can Opener	A simple, manual can opener is fine for most people. Those with arthritis or other movement conditions should consider an electric version.
Instant-read Thermometer	There are many fancy thermometers available; however, a simple instant-read digital kitchen thermometer is all you need.
Tongs (Stainless Steel 9- to 12-inch [23- to 30-centimeter])	Inexpensive, 9-inch (23-centimeter) stainless steel tongs with a locking mechanism are best for general home use. You may want a longer set for outdoor grilling.
Pastry Brush	Choose a flat brush measuring between 1½- to 3-inches (37- to 75-millimeters) in width. Bristles are usually made of either boar bristles (easier to get clean after brushing oils) or nylon (get a dishwasher/heat safe type); either is fine.
Vegetable Peeler	"Y"-shaped peelers are generally better for peeling squash and other things with broad surfaces or that are stringy/fibrous (i.e., celery). Straight, stainless steel swivel peelers are good for general use.

Item	Details
Turner (metal)	For use in very high-heat cooking, metal pans, removing cookies from a baking sheet, grilling, etc.
Heat-resistant (to 400°F [200°C]) Silicone Turner	For general use and nonstick cookware.
Heat-resistant Silicone Spatula	These have many uses: stirring, scraping bowls, spreading, turning omelets, etc. Heat-resistant versions do not melt and resist staining. It is helpful to have more than one.
Wooden Spoon	Used for many of the same tasks as the heat-resistant spatula but better for stirring dough and stews. It is helpful to have more than one.
Whisk/Whip (stainless steel, 10- to 12-inch [25- to 30-centimeter])	For whipping air into fluffy ingredients, emulsifying, making smooth sauces, and dispersing dry ingredients in baking mixtures.
Slotted Spoon	For retrieving items from a liquid.
Serving/Saucing Spoon	Use for skimming, serving, basting, and stirring.
Ladle (4- to 8-ounce [60- to 240-milliliter] size)	A necessity for serving soup, a 4-ounce (60-milliliter) ladle is also helpful when being mindful of portion sizes.
Microplane Grater	Used for zesting citrus, grating garlic (instead of using a press), grating ginger, or shaving chocolate.
Waiter's Corkscrew	People spend a lot of money on fancy wine openers, but after a quick tutorial, most people find an inexpensive waiter's corkscrew works well for opening wine and other corked items.
Bench Scraper/Plastic Scraper	Often available for only \$1 to \$2 US, they help keep your workspace clean and reduce food waste, quickly paying for themselves.
Salad Spinner	A salad spinner helps to thoroughly wash and dry lettuces, herbs, fruits, and vegetables. It uses centrifugal force to remove nearly all of the water from the surface of items placed within.

Small Appliances

Item	Details
Food Processor/Blender	If you do a lot of processing and blending, it is helpful to have both pieces of equipment. If you can only have one, it's worth the investment to buy a quality version that does a good job with both blending and food processing tasks. This will make quick work of chopping ingredients, grating cheese, slicing, making sauces/salsas, kneading bread dough, and more. It also allows you to make homemade nut butters and pesto (though these can also be made with a mortar and pestle).

HELPFUL (DETAILED LIST)

Cutlery

Item	Details
8- to 10-inch (20- to 25-centimeter) Bread Knife w/ Scalloped Edge	A bread knife makes easy work of slicing breads and cakes, chopping blocks of chocolate, and slicing tomatoes; however, these tasks can also be done with a well-maintained chef's knife. Make sure the knife you purchase is not serrated but rather has a scalloped edge which can be kept up with a steel and sharpened when needed.
Whet or Sharpening Stone (or Home Knife Sharpener)	These stones can be purchased very inexpensively at restaurant supply stores or online. After mastering the use of a steel, most cooks need only use a stone annually or biannually to sharpen their knives. Unless knives are not taken care of properly, they should not need professional sharpening with any frequency.
Mandoline/Slicer (with Steel Mesh Glove)	This tool is useful for making very thin slices, julienne, and waffle-shaped cuts. It is also helpful for making slices of uniform thickness. Every task except the waffle cut can be done with a chef's knife and good knife skills. Some food processors can also perform these functions—if you have one, you can skip the mandoline. Note: be sure to use a guard or steel mesh glove when using a mandoline. It is very sharp and easy to cut oneself with. Guards that come with the device and a separately purchased steel mesh glove significantly reduce the risk of injury.

Pots and Pans

Item	Details
3-quart/liter Saucepan	Many people prefer to have more than two saucepans around—this is another useful size to consider.
Lids for each pan	****
12- or 20-quart/liter Pot	The 12-quart/liter pot is helpful for stock and cooking in bulk. The 20-quart/liter is used mostly by those who do home canning.

Item	Details
Small Roasting Pan	As mentioned next to “Roasting Pan,” this smaller size (approximately 13- to 14-inch x 9- to 11-inch x 3-inch [33- to 35-centimeter x 23- to 28-centimeter x 8-centimeter]) is nice, but not necessary. One perk is that a true roasting pan has a thick enough bottom to deglaze on the stove top, whereas a similarly sized cake pan cannot be used for this purpose.
Cooling Rack	Anyone who bakes will appreciate a place to cool items just removed from the oven. By elevating items from the counter, it allows air to circulate on all sides, which speeds cooling. A cooling rack can also double as a roasting or canning rack if small enough to fit inside the appropriate pans.
Roasting Rack	When roasting, the item being cooked is often elevated so that it does not stew in its own juices. Many roasting pans come with a rack. If yours does not, you can purchase one separately, position a small cooling rack inside your roasting pan, or simply use large dice vegetables to elevate the roasted item from the roasting pan base.
Grill Pan/Reversible Griddle	Grilling is a popular, flavorful cooking technique easily amenable to healthy cooking. If you do not have an outdoor grill or are short on time, a cast iron grill pan is a good solution. It also serves as a broil pan if you have a broiler. Be sure to purchase a double burner version. Many grill pans are also griddles (flat cooking surfaces) on their opposite side which are great when cooking for a crowd.

Bakeware

Item	Details
Both Metal & Pyrex 13- x 9-inch (33- x 23-centimeter) Baking Pans	Because of its versatility (cakes, lasagna, roasting, and more), many kitchens have more than one pan of this size—often made of different materials (metal alloy, Pyrex, ceramic, etc.).
Rolling Pin (straight)	French bakers have long been fond of straight, dowel-style rolling pins without handles. If you are not an avid baker, a wine bottle (or other large glass bottle) will work in a pinch.
Fine Sieve or Strainer	This style of strainer is useful for rinsing grains, sifting ingredients for baking, and serves as a second colander.

Gadgets and Utensils

Item	Details
Fish Spatula/Turner	This style of spatula is not just for fish! It is ideal for delicate items, such as tofu “steaks” or other items that tend to fall apart when flipping in a skillet.
Box-style Grater	Can be used to grate carrots, apples, zucchini, and other vegetables and fruits if you don’t have a food processor.

Item	Details
Mortar and Pestle	The mortar and pestle have been used worldwide for numerous food and medicinal purposes. They can be used for guacamole, pestos and pastes, nut butters, crushing/grinding dry herbs and spices, and much more.

Small Appliances

Item	Details
Hand Mixer	A standing mixer will always out-perform a hand mixer, but they are expensive and take up a lot of space. A good hand-held mixer can accomplish many of the same tasks except kneading bread. Unless you are an avid baker, it may be a waste of money and space to get a stand mixer. Additionally, most tasks that a hand mixer does can also be done by hand with a wooden spoon, spatula, and/or whisk.
Slow Cooker	Slow cookers are ideal for time-limited, low-cost, do-ahead meals. They usually can only be filled $\frac{2}{3}$ -full, so buy at least a 6-quart capacity model to allow room for a large pot of stew or a gallon of soup. Timer features that switch the cooker to warm are great in case you're running late.
Instant Pot or Pressure Cooker	Instant Pots have become popular multicookers and can replace multiple small kitchen appliances. They can function as slow cookers, pressure cookers, rice cookers, steamers, and yogurt makers, and get hot enough to cook beans (unlike a slow cooker). A pressure cooker is likely superfluous for most but is useful if you frequently make large batches of beans or like to do canning.
Air Fryer	These appliances offer a countertop convection cooking device that helps crisp food with little to no oil or fat. These are superfluous if you have a convection oven or convection toaster oven. They are helpful if you live in a hot climate and want to avoid heating the entire oven. Air fryers only cook in small batches.
Blender	A blender generally has 3 to 4 blades angled so that they draw the ingredients inside the pitcher toward them and yield a smooth end-product. They also crush ice. A food processor is not able to make purees as smooth or crush ice well. High-powered blenders can also grind grains, beans, and nuts into flour; produce enough heat to cook soup in the blender itself; and make smoothies.
Food Processor	A separate food processor usually has a wider, shorter bowl and larger blade than a blender. It is good for chopping items fine or in larger pieces, making pastes or purees with less liquid than required in blenders, and they often have various blades for different tasks, such as slicing, shaving, and shredding produce to reducing the need for hand chopping. Some cooks prefer a mortar and pestle over a food processor and/or coffee grinder.
Toaster	For quickly toasting bread and some limited other items. This can be accomplished with an oven broiler or toaster oven as well. Only you can decide if it would be helpful to have a toaster.
Coffee Grinder	Depending on the style(s) of cooking that you do, a coffee grinder may or may not be on your list—Indian, Middle Eastern, and African cuisine, for example, often include whole spices that are toasted and then ground into powders in a grinder. A coffee grinder is also useful for grinding seeds, such as flaxseeds. A mortar and pestle are much more physical work on your part but can also do the job. If you plan to use the coffee grinder for both coffee and spice grinding, make sure to grind a batch or two of rice to a powder before switching back and forth.

SUPERFLUOUS (DETAILED LIST)

Cutlery

Possible examples—these may be helpful or essential for some people.

Item	Details
Carving Knife/Set	Most carving can be done with a chef's knife and regular fork. Unless you do a lot of carving or have extra money to spend, this will not be a good use of your resources.
Fish/Fillet Knife	Unless you fillet whole or large pieces of fish, this is unnecessary.

Pots and Pans

Item	Details
Traditional Wok	Unless you have a wok stove able to produce a much hotter flame than most home stove tops, it is counterproductive to cook with a traditional wok. Instead, use a large sauté or fry pan to stir-fry over maximum heat or get an Electric Wok. If you want to use a wok on a regular stovetop (rather than a wok stove), get a flat-bottomed version or use a wok ring with a rounded bottom wok to maximize contact with the heat source.

Large Appliances

Item	Details
Outdoor Grill	Buying an outdoor grill to suit your needs is a very individual decision (no recommendations given here). Only you can determine if you'd use an outdoor grill enough to warrant purchasing one.

Small Appliances

Item	Details
Stand Mixer	See notes above in the "Hand Mixer" entry under the "Helpful" list for more information. A stand mixer may be essential if you want a machine to knead bread but also do other heavy mixing. Look for a high horsepower/professional stand mixer if considering.
Rice Cooker	When using proper technique, it is easy to make rice in a saucepan on your stove top. Unless you make rice daily, a rice cooker is probably not a good use of money and kitchen space. However, some of the nicer options include the ability to steam or do a variety of types of cooking. If you find rice cookers convenient and reach for them often, they may be helpful for you.