

What Every Home Cook Needs



Yvonne Maffei kicks off her exciting new column with a guide to the basic cooking gadgets, cookware and utensils every home cook needs.

Whether you're a seasoned cook or someone just starting out, here are the most basic essentials every kitchen should be stocked with. You can always include more, but if it's all you have (or want), you should be able to get through simple meals efficiently to confidently put something absolutely delicious on the table, insha Allah.

Measuring spoons

Used to measure small amounts of dry goods as well as liquid ones, such as milk, liquid flavourings, etc.

Measuring cups for liquids

Very different from cups that measure dry goods, you'll need this to measure large amounts of liquids, particularly useful when making soups, stocks and stews.

Measuring cups for dry goods

Perfect for measuring things like baking flour and pancake mix. Just be sure not to pack anything in and level ingredients off perfectly with a butter knife.

Wooden spoon

Wooden utensils are wonderful because they don't impart any

metallic taste into foods and they don't scratch your pans, either.

Metal spatula

Because spatulas come close to the hottest part of your pans while cooking, there is a danger that rubber or plastic will melt, so it's best to use a metal one.

Flexible spatula

These won't be used in cooking, but they're necessary for scraping the sides of your mixing bowls clean when preparing cakes. They can sometimes be used to spread frosting on a cake, too.

Paring, santoku, butcher, and serrated steak knives

Of course you can get an entire set of knives that includes a boning knife and bread knife when you purchase a set, but if you buy them a la carte, these are the most essential. Paring knives help you peel fruit without cutting into the flesh and wasting anything; a santoku knife is the perfect size for chopping things like onions and potatoes; a butcher's knife will aide you in cutting up a whole chicken (which is much more economical than buying cut pieces) and serrated steak knives can double as bread knives, too.

Set of good cutlery

As well as eating with your cutlery, spoons can be used to peel fruits like kiwi and forks can replace a wire whisk to make things like scrambled eggs - no need for extra gadgets!

Scissors

Such an indispensable tool in the kitchen, scissors can be used for just about anything from cutting open a bag of lettuce to cutting a slice of freshly baked pizza.

Tongs

Use them to flip foods when sautéing or when serving salads.

Stand (box) grater

Perfect for grating cheese, one side can also be used as a zester, no extra gadget needed.

Mixing bowls

Not only can these be used as mixing bowls, but when not in use for preparing food they can be used to serve things like salads.

Food mill

Forget about bulky blenders and food processors that take up counter space, food mills can help you reduce foods to a workable texture to make soups, purees, jams and more. The bonus - no electricity required.

Meat thermometer

If you're just starting out cooking, you'll really need to learn how to gauge when meat and poultry are appropriately cooked. Meat thermometers can help in that most have the required cooking temperatures listed directly on them.

Baking sheet

These aren't just for cookies! Some of the best foods like vegetables and meats can be thrown onto a baking sheet with a few added spices and roasted to perfection in no time. Use them

interchangeably for the sweet and the savoury.

Wood cutting board

Contrary to popular belief, you don't really need a separate cutting board for every type of food you cook. After cutting raw poultry or meat products on a wooden board, they can and should be thoroughly washed and sprayed with a vinegar solution to kill any bacteria. The bonus - wooden boards do less damage to your knives than plastic or glass ones.

Large colander

Whether or not you use a colander to make pasta, you'll probably use it to wash fruit and veggies so make sure it's a nice big one.

Sieve

More often than you realise, you'll probably want to strain things like soup and stews for woody herb stems, bones and anything else you don't want to end up in a final dish. Strainers are what you need to retain all the liquid but not the extra stuff.

Small and large sauté pans

Whether you're making one egg for yourself or an entire frittata, sauté pans are absolutely indispensable in the kitchen.

Cast iron skillet

A little different to a sauté pan, a cast iron skillet is deep enough to handle some deep frying and when used and cared for properly, they become non-stick over time.

Small saucepan

When you don't want to bring out that big and heavy Dutch oven to warm a small amount of sauce or soup.

Dutch oven

One of my absolute must-haves in the kitchen, my Dutch oven is used to make everything from soups to stews, pasta and rice dishes. They're perfect for making slow cooked foods and braising them too, serving as a replacement for slow cookers and even tagines if you don't have the space or the budget for those extras.

Roasting pan with a rack

Just about every non-vegetarian family loves a good old-fashioned roast chicken, so a pan with a rack included is essential. It helps to provide air circulation underneath the bird so that it doesn't sit in the bottom of the rack and cheat you out of perfectly crisp skin on the outside.

Is there anything on this list you think you could do without? Anything you would add to it? Let me know by emailing myhalalkitchen@gmail.com.

Join me this year as I take you through cooking basic tutorials that will answer some of the most commonly asked cooking questions that come through My Halal Kitchen. The goal is to help every home cook, whether beginner or advanced, to learn the fundamentals of utilising the kitchen in the most efficient way possible, as well as gain helpful tips and tricks to make cooking simpler and easier.