



# THE ESSENTIAL KITCHEN:

**25 Kitchen Tools  
No Cook Should  
Be Without**

# The Essential Kitchen:

## 25 Kitchen Tools No Cook Should Be Without

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# The Essential Kitchen:

## 25 Kitchen Tools No Cook Should Be Without

Dear Reader,

This list of essential tools is a practical guide to outfitting your kitchen. We use these tools in our test kitchen almost every day, and we think they can make a difference in your kitchen, too, saving you time and trouble.

Despite the glut of appliances, cookware products, and gadgets on the market, we find ourselves reaching for the same ones over and over. Even though the test kitchen shelves carry more than two dozen types of cookware in every shape and size imaginable, we reach for the same four pots and pans on a regular basis. Even with a magnetic strip crowded with knives of all shapes, sizes, and functions, we always reach for one of the same three types. And even though our drawers are overflowing with the latest gadgets, there are just nine that we use daily and so always keep within reach.

This collection has been 10 years in the making. We're passionate about what we do, and we're serious about how we do it. Our equipment tests go well beyond thorough; each piece of equipment is tested in both everyday and extreme conditions. Why? So our readers won't have to find something out the hard way. Since the inception of our magazine in 1993, we have accepted no advertising. That means we don't answer to anyone, so you can be sure our ratings are completely unbiased. They are based on thorough testing, not corporate sponsorship.

We hope you find this guide both enjoyable and useful.

Best Regards,

The Editors at *Cook's Illustrated* Magazine  
Home of America's Test Kitchen

## Small Appliances

Small appliances have the power (literally) to speed up or simplify many kitchen tasks. Take a walk through any housewares store, and you'll find enough options to fill every inch of counterspace in your kitchen. But who has the counterspace (or the wallet) for that many small appliances? More important, do you really need that many? Here are our picks for the three small appliances no kitchen should be without.

### Featured Tools

Food Processor  
Standing Mixer  
Blender

### RATINGS

★★★  
GOOD

★★  
FAIR

★  
POOR

## Small Appliances

### FOOD PROCESSOR



**KitchenAid**

#### Tester's Comments

The KitchenAid food processor has a heavy, well-designed, easy-to-clean base, a mini-bowl, and superior pureeing ability.

Price	Bowl Capacity/ Base Weight	Design/ Features	Slicing	Pureeing	Kneading
\$250.00– \$300.00	11 cups/ 12 lb, 6 oz	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★

Even for those of us who don't mind doing plenty of chopping and dicing with a chef's knife, there are several jobs for which the food processor is the perfect tool. Whether we need a large batch of finely chopped walnuts, are cutting butter into flour for pie dough, or are putting together a quick aioli, the food processor does the job with style, ease, and speed. Sure, we could use a knife for the nuts, a pastry cutter for the pie dough, or a whisk and some elbow grease for the aioli, but why bother when a food processor does it so quickly, consistently, and efficiently?

We put six food processors through their paces in our test kitchen, using each one for chopping, slicing, grating, pureeing, and kneading. We favored larger-sized models with at least an 11-cup capacity. Two models stood out: the KitchenAid and the Cuisinart. Each had its own strengths and weaknesses. Expect to pay about \$250 to \$300 for either model.

## Small Appliances

### STANDING MIXER



**KitchenAid**

Price	Speeds	Cream	Cookie Dough	Cake Batter	Bread Dough
\$350.00 – \$400.00	10	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★

Once you own a standing mixer, you'll wonder how you ever lived without it. A good standing mixer makes short work of mixing bread dough, cookie dough, and cake batter, whipping egg whites and cream, and mashing large batches of potatoes. Today's models are as attractive as they are functional, so there's no need to tuck them out of sight; you'll be proud to display one on your counter.

#### Tester's Comments

The KitchenAid standing mixer is an outstanding performer and has the widest variety of attachments.

Of the seven models we tested, two brands turned in an outstanding performance: KitchenAid and Rival Select. Although they were the most expensive of the bunch (about \$350 to \$400), these mixers were heavy, stable, and easy to use, and had enough power to mix and whip their way through cookie dough, egg whites, cake batter, and whipped cream like champs. Don't waste your money on cheap models; the ineffective, inexpensive brands we tried were no bargain.

## Small Appliances

### BLENDER

Price	Speeds	Capacity	Smoothy/ Frozen Drink	Soup/Berry Puree	Pesto
\$39.99	12	5 cups	★★★	★★★	★★★

Food processors do everything blenders can do and more, so the logical question is, Why bother with a blender? The answer: silky soups, perfect purees, and smoothies that live up to their name. A blender's tall, narrow design forms a vortex inside the jar that makes quick work of mixing and helps incorporate air, resulting in a light, airy puree.

Modern models feature a bevy of bells and whistles, but we found basic to be best. Electronic touch pads, newfangled straight-sided jars, and a huge range of speeds proved to be unnecessary. Of the eight brands we tested, we found the \$39.99 Oster Designer 12-Speed Osterizer Blender to outperform the rest, besting models that cost three times as much.



**Oster Designer**  
12-Speed Osterizer Blender

#### Tester's Comments

Good fit between base and jar, comfortable jar handle, and especially good pouring spout. But on the loud side.

## Gadgets

By their very definition, *gadgets*—highly specialized tools—are probably the least-needed items in a kitchen. Yet every member of the test kitchen staff named several as their most essential tools more often than any other type of kitchen equipment. The reason? These gadgets turn kitchen drudgery into pleasure (or at least keep the drudgery to a minimum). Although their intended purpose is singular, their actual use is not. The nine gadgets we selected are put through their paces daily in our test kitchen.

### Featured Tools

Bench Scraper  
Grater/Zester  
Pepper Mill  
Fine-Mesh Strainer

### RATINGS

★★★  
GOOD  
★★  
FAIR  
★  
POOR

Rubber Spatula  
Tongs  
Vegetable peeler  
Whisk  
Salad Spinner

## Gadgets

### BENCH SCRAPER



Bench Scraper

#### Tester's Comments

Makes working with dough—from handling to portioning to cleaning up—a breeze.

Price	Blade Material	Handle Material
\$8.00 - \$10.00	Metal	Plastic, Wood, or Metal

Though it seems like a perfectly ordinary tool—a rectangle of plastic or metal, usually with a handle running along one long side—a bench scraper is put to use often in our kitchen. We use it for its intended purpose—scraping bits of dough from work tables and countertops—but we also use it to portion dough, cut butter, shape sticky dough, level cups of flour, cut brownies, and so much more. We like a metal version with an easy-to-grip plastic or wooden handle; expect to spend about \$10 for a well-made model.

## Gadgets

### GRATER/ZESTER



Price	Material	Grating Effort	Grip Comfort	Clean-up	Cheese Texture
\$11.50	Metal	★★★	★★★	★★★	Very flaky and feathery

We don't know how we managed before the Microplane grater/zester came along. Adapted from a carpentry tool, the reasonably-priced (\$11.50) Microplane features razor-sharp teeth and a comfortable rubber handle. Our Parmesan has never been fluffier, our zest smoother, or our nutmeg more finely ground. On top of that, performing those previously tedious chores is now not only quick and painless (no scraped knuckles, which often result when using an awkward box grater) but a joy to perform.

#### Tester's Comments

A real winner with super-sharp teeth, a stable, comfortable handle, and a shape that's great for both table use and storage. Blade is a bit narrow and it cannot go into the dishwasher, but that's a small price to pay for its other virtues.

## Gadgets

### PEPPER MILL

Price	Capacity	Grind Quality	Grind Speed	Ease of Filling	Ease of Use
\$45.00	15 tablespoons	★★★	★★★	★★	★★★

Black pepper is one of our favorite spices, second only to salt in popularity and use. When we held a black pepper tasting, we confirmed what we already knew: freshly ground pepper tastes far superior to preground pepper. And the best way to grind your own pepper is with a pepper mill. Sure, we've been known to improvise with the bottom of a skillet or even dust off a mortar and pestle to crush whole peppercorns, but nothing beats the speed and ease of a well-designed mill.

In testing several popular models, we learned that the simple, traditional design of a top that you twist to grind the pepper is still the best. Other designs, such as those employing a hand crank or lever, were more difficult and tiresome to use. Of the 14 models tested, our favorite was the Unicorn Magnum Plus Restaurant Use Peppermill, priced at \$45. Also recommended was the more reasonably priced Chef Specialties Natural Maple Pepper Mill (\$25).



#### Tester's Comments

In looks, at least, the Darth Vader of pepper mills. Very easy to adjust the grind, and dazzlingly effective.

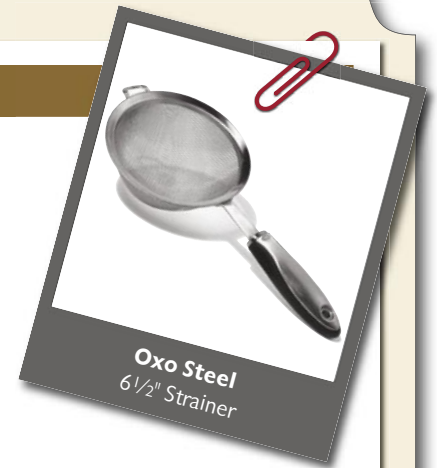
## Gadgets

### FINE-MESH STRAINER

Price	Type	Pea Soup	Raspberry Puree	Pastry Cream
\$19.99	Stainless Steel Fine Mesh	★★★	★★★	★★★

If your goal is a creamy soup, a seedless puree, or a silky pastry cream, success depends on one tool: a fine-mesh strainer. We also love using this tool to sift dry ingredients such as flour and cocoa and to dust cookies and cakes with a fine coating of confectioners' sugar.

Rule number one is to seek out a strainer made of stainless steel; if the mesh is aluminum, it can become discolored by contact with any food containing acid. Rule number two is to avoid strainers labeled "single mesh," which have larger holes that let chunks sneak into your puree. While single-mesh strainers are much less expensive than fine-mesh strainers, our test kitchen was hard pressed to come up with any practical use for them beyond rinsing rice. Of the seven fine-mesh strainers we tested, the Oxo Steel most impressed us with its comfortable handle and solid construction.



**Oxo Steel**  
6 1/2" Strainer

#### Tester's Comments

Most comfortable handle, sturdy construction, and a nice, deep bowl. Those features, combined with sound construction, makes the Oxo a top choice.

## Gadgets

### RUBBER SPATULA

Price	Folding	Heavy Scraping	Light Scraping	Abuse Test	Fatal Flaw
\$13.95	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★	None



**Rubbermaid**  
13.5" High Heat Scraper

#### Tester's Comments

Long, rigid handle is great for leverage, and firm, thin-edged blade is great for scraping. Just don't leave it in tomato sauce (which can turn the blade orange).

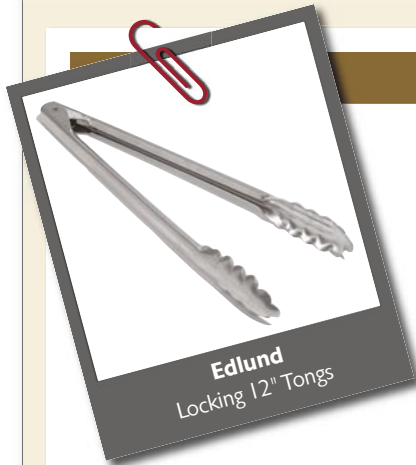
From making scrambled eggs to folding egg whites into a soufflé, a rubber spatula (most of which are now made with silicone) is the first tool we reach for when performing a number of tasks. Nothing is better at scraping out the crevices and crannies of containers or gently combining delicate ingredients.

The keys to a great rubber spatula, we found, are a large, stiff, sharp-edged blade and a comfortable handle. Topping our test of 10 spatulas (two made of rubber, the rest silicone) was the Rubbermaid 13.5-inch High Heat Scraper (\$13.95). Also highly recommended (and a bit less expensive) was the Oxo Good Grips Silicone Turner Spatula (\$8.99), although some testers found its handle bulky.



## Gadgets

### TONGS



Price	Material	Ease of Use	Slippery Items	Small Items	Large Items
\$8.95	Stainless Steel	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★

For many restaurant cooks, tongs are an extension of their hand, used for everything from moving hot pans to pulling down paper ticket orders to, yes, turning steaks on the grill. Tongs are just as effective in home kitchens. We use tongs to stir pasta, lift ramekins out of a water bath, and grill or sauté sturdy meats, vegetables, or fish (some meats and fish are too delicate for tongs).

#### Tester's Comments

These stainless steel tongs turned in a perfect score, excelling in each and every test. They're light, agile, and easy to use.

Our testing showed that basic tongs work best, and they won't break your budget at just \$8.95. Our favorite is the restaurant model, Edlund. We find 12-inch tongs to be practical for most uses, but longer (16-inch) and shorter (8-inch) versions are also available.

## Gadgets

### VEGETABLE PEELER

Price	Blade Position	Blade Type	Thin Skin	Thick Skin	Maneuverability
\$6.00	Straight	Stainless Steel; Swivel	★★★	★★★	★★★

Vegetable peelers are great for peeling vegetables, but they're also great for shaving chocolate and Parmesan, curling butter, and removing zest from citrus. Everyone has a peeler, but not everyone has a good peeler, and a good peeler can make light work of all of these tasks.

A sharp, stainless steel blade is essential, as is a comfortable grip. The best peelers, we found, took off thin strips of peel, removing skin but not the vegetable's flesh beneath. We tested 10 peelers and found the Oxo Good Grips Peeler (\$5.90) to be the best all-around performer, while the Y-shaped Kuhn Rikon Peeler (\$3.50) couldn't be matched when peeling thick-skinned vegetables like squash and celery root.



#### Tester's Comments

Sharp blade, comfortable grip, great on curves. The top-rated peeler for almost all purposes. Easy to control for all but the smallest hands.

## Gadgets

### WHISK

Price	Material	Weight	Balance	Length
\$18.95	Stainless Steel	Moderate-Heavy	★★★	12.5"

Our balloon whisk gets plenty of use at the stovetop, making pan sauces and hearty cream sauces, and it also gets plenty of use at the counter, whipping small amounts of cream and egg whites. There's almost always something to whisk; if one is close by we might use it to fold those egg whites into a batter, to combine dry ingredients in a bowl, or even to mash potatoes.

Our favorite whisk is sturdy and easy to handle, and it didn't give us a cramp in our forearms when whipping cream. At \$18.95, the Rosle Stainless Steel Egg Whisk isn't cheap, but its large size and great balance make whisking a breeze. We also liked the Cuisipro Egg Whisk, significantly less expensive at \$5.95 but still a good all-around model.



#### Tester's Comments

Expensive, but great weight and balance, with long tines that incorporated air very quickly. Larger size was not a problem with smaller amounts of egg whites or cream.

## Gadgets

### SALAD SPINNER

Price	Capacity	Grip Comfort	Ease of Use	Drying Ability	Design/Sturdiness
\$21.00	5 Quarts	★★	★★★	★★★	★★★



#### Tester's Comments

Direction of the basket spin reverses with each pull of cord. Top is very easy to grip, so spinner can be held tight and kept stable during use. Dried the greens exceptionally well in just 30 seconds of spinning.

Wet greens are not only unpleasant to eat, they can be dangerous to cook. Throw a soggy batch of spinach into a pan of hot oil and you'll be ducking for cover. Yes, you can use stacks of paper towels to dry your greens, but why would you when a salad spinner is such an inexpensive investment and does the job more efficiently?

We tested eight salad spinners for drying ability, ease of use, and sturdiness and found two that stood apart from the rest: Zyliss and Oxo Good Grips. Both are reasonably priced (\$21 and \$26, respectively); the Zyliss dried greens slightly more quickly than the Oxo, while the Oxo had a slightly more comfortable grip.

## Cookware

The fact is, you can't cook without cookware. In a world without pots and pans, we'd be roasting a turkey on an oven rack and trying to fan out the flames from the ignited drippings. But when there are as many brands of cookware as there are shapes and sizes, how do you know what you need and what you don't? Here's our shortlist—just four pieces—of the cookware we just couldn't do without.

### Featured Tools

Roasting Pan  
Skillet, 12-inch  
Non-Stick Skillet,  
12-inch  
Dutch Oven

### RATINGS

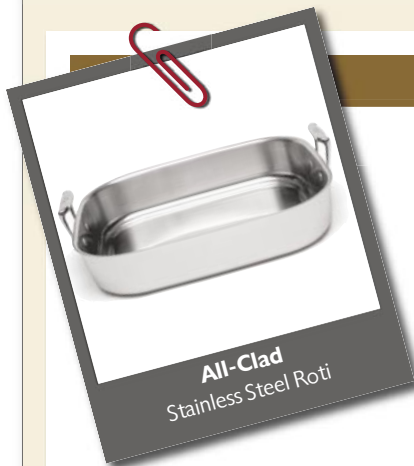
★★★  
GOOD

★★  
FAIR

★  
POOR

## Cookware

### ROASTING PAN



Price	Exterior/ Interior	Handles	Turkey Test	Stove Top	Browning
\$180.00	Stainless Steel/ Aluminum Core	★★★	★★★	★★	★★

Think you don't need a roasting pan? Just wait until you host your first Thanksgiving dinner, and you find yourself at 8 A.M. on Thursday scrambling to find something in which to cook your 15-pound bird. Unlike many other tools that have satisfactory stand-ins, there just isn't any substitution for a roasting pan. Sauté pans and lasagna pans are too small, baking sheets are too low-sided, pots too high-sided.

#### Tester's Comments

This expensive pan had a nice, heavy feel and great handles. Turkey browned and crisped beautifully, although stove top performance was a bit quirky. Cleaned relatively easily.

We gathered eight brands of roasting pans and used them to roast turkeys, sear roasts, and make gravy. We also judged each pan's design and ease of cleanup. Our favorite pan, the All-Clad Stainless Steel Roti, is quite an investment at \$180, but its sturdy design, easy-to-use handles, and solid construction make it worth it for dedicated roasters. However, we also liked the Granite Ware Extra Large Capacity Covered Oval Roaster, which, at \$17.99, may not have performed as well as the All-Clad but will do just fine for the occasional roaster.

## Cookware

### SKILLET, 12-INCH



**All-Clad**  
Stainless 12-inch Frypan

Price	Weight	Diameter/ Bottom Surface	Performance	Sauté Speed	User- Friendliness
\$125.00	2 lb. 14 oz.	12 3/8"/ 9 1/4"	★★★	★★★	★★★

No pan gets more use in our test kitchen than the 12-inch skillet. Its spacious interior can accommodate a cut-up chicken or a couple of steaks with ease. Traditional skillets (ones that are not nonstick) promote fond, the brown, sticky bits that cling to the interior of the pan when food is sautéed and that help flavor sauces. Whenever we cook meat or want a rich, flavorful sauce, we reach for our 12-inch skillet.

#### Tester's Comments

From crêpes to steak to chicken, this pan browned foods perfectly. Sometimes, however, more fond stuck to the pan than was left on the food. Spacious and easy to handle.

The skillet we reach for is made by All-Clad. In a testing of eight 12-inch traditional skillets, we found the All-Clad Stainless to have excellent browning capabilities, fast but steady sauté speed, and an easy-to-handle design. At \$125, the All-Clad is, however, expensive. Our “best buy” pan, the Calphalon Tri-Ply Stainless, didn’t sauté as quickly or brown foods as well as the All-Clad, but costs about half as much, at \$63.95.

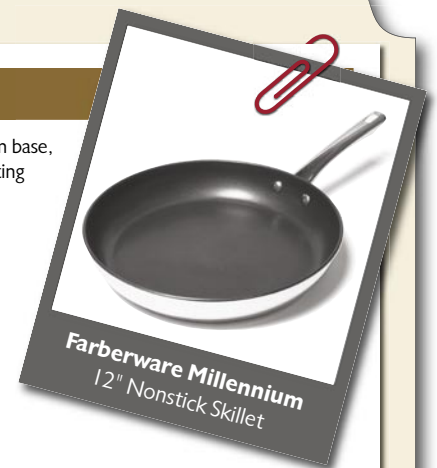
## Cookware

### NONSTICK SKILLET, 12-INCH

Price	Weight	Performance	Sauté Speed	Cleanup/ Release	Materials
\$29.99	3 lb. 6 oz.	★★★	★★★	★★★	Stainless Steel with Aluminum base, Dupont SilverStone Coating

When we’re not trying to develop fond in our dishes, we turn to a 12-inch nonstick skillet. As spacious as its traditional cousin, a nonstick skillet outperforms in numerous areas, including making stir-fries, cooking pancakes, and sautéing vegetables. There’s also no beating the ease of clean up with a nonstick skillet; just rinse and go.

In our tests of nonstick skillets, All-Clad (\$139.99) came out on top. But a test of inexpensive (less than \$50) nonstick skillets uncovered some very good options, including the \$29.99 Farberware Millennium.



**Farberware Millennium**  
12" Nonstick Skillet

#### Tester's Comments

Fantastic omelets, golden brown fish, and evenly sautéed onions. Only with chicken did this pan falter—and not much at that.

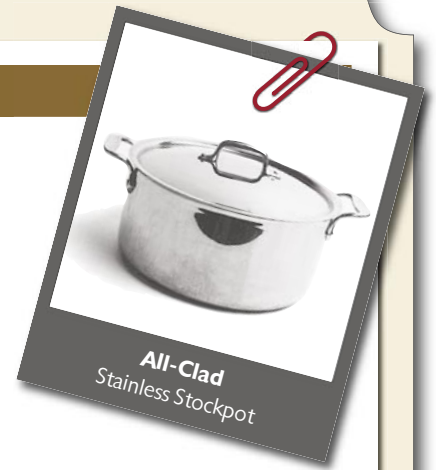
# Cookware

## DUTCH OVEN

Price	Capacity	Weight	Browning	Simmer	Boiling
\$187.00	8 Quarts	5 lb. 8 1/2 oz.	★★★	★★★	★★★

For braises, stews, soups, and sauces—all often dependent on moist-heat cooking procedures that begin with browning—flimsy stockpots will not do. Enter the Dutch oven, a large, lidded pot or kettle designed specifically for these tasks. We also use our Dutch oven for frying, as its design is ideal for holding oil at a constant temperature.

The most expensive model outperformed the rest, with the All-Clad Stainless Stockpot topping the chart (and the cash register, at \$187). But we also saw good performance from our \$45 entry, the Lodge cast-iron Dutch oven. Although this pot is heavy (at almost 17 pounds, three times the weight of the All-Clad) and requires special care (regular seasoning), the Lodge is comparable in performance to the All-Clad (if you can lift it).



**All-Clad**  
Stainless Stockpot

### Tester's Comments

Comfortable heft and great heat distribution. In browning, this pot seemed to need higher heat than the manufacturer's recommended medium.

## Cutting tools

### RATINGS

★★★  
GOOD

★★  
FAIR

★  
POOR

*Featured Tools*  
*Chef's Knife,*  
*8-inch*  
*Paring Knife*  
*Serrated Knife*  
*Cutting Board*

In culinary school, the first thing they teach you is that there is a different knife for every cutting task. Fillet, boning, slicing, carving . . . dozens of choices are available. But we discovered that just three basic knives can accomplish the work of an entire knife set. (And don't forget the cutting board.)

## Cutting Tools

### CHEF'S KNIFE, 8-INCH



Price	Weight	Slicing	Chopping	Mincing	Butchering
\$31.00	7.1 oz.	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★

The most popular knife in our kitchen by far is the 8-inch chef's knife. There are few tasks this knife cannot perform. It's an all-purpose knife, comfortable for mincing garlic, chopping vegetables, slicing prime rib, and cutting up cheese. If you have only one good knife in your kitchen, let this be the one.

Of eight knives tested, two stood out from the crowd. The \$31 Forschner (Victorinox) Fibrox won kudos from testers who prefer a lighter knife, while the \$82.50 Wüsthof Grand Prix won fans that favor a knife with more heft. If price is an issue, let that be your guide; if not, choose a heavy or lighter knife based on your preference.

#### Tester's Comments

The lightest knife in the group, and one of the cheapest, Forschner was a favorite among testers who fancy lighter knives. The grippy material, shape, and overall comfort of the handle drew testers' praise.

## Cutting Tools

### PARING KNIFE



**Wüsthof Trident**  
Grand Prix Utility Knife

Price	Peeling Turnips	Mincing Shallots	Coring Tomatoes	Paring Apples	Paring Oranges
\$27.99	★★★	★★	★★★	★★★	★★★

A paring knife is essential for smaller cutting tasks, such as peeling and slicing turnips; peeling and mincing shallots; coring tomatoes; peeling, quartering, and coring apples; peeling and sectioning oranges; stemming mushrooms; cutting up small pieces of coconut; peeling and mincing fresh ginger; slicing lemons, limes, and hard-cooked eggs . . . well, you get the idea.

The good news is that you don't need to spend a lot of money to get a great paring knife. Our top-rated knife was the Wüsthof Trident Grand Prix Utility Knife (\$27.99), but finishing a close second was the Forschner (Victorinox) Fibrox (\$5.95).

#### Tester's Comments

"This knife just wants to go!" Its thin, "surgically sharp" blade won praise for easy movement, precision, and a welcome degree of flexibility. Some testers had to saw through shallots; all other tasks were performed almost flawlessly.

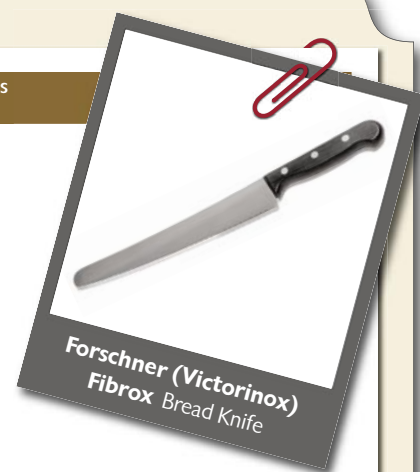
## Cutting Tools

### SERRATED KNIFE

Price	Blade Type/ Length	Crusty Bread	Bagels	Soft Bread	Tomatoes
\$36.00	Stamped/ 10 inches	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★

As useful and accommodating as a chef's knife can be, there are certain tasks it simply doesn't do well, such as slicing bread and tough-skinned tomatoes. That's why you need a serrated, or bread, knife, which also slices through delicate pastries with ease. The saw-toothed edge of a serrated knife makes it seem like it's always sharp; the teeth grab hold of whatever you're cutting and don't let go.

We sliced through 30 loaves of bread, five dozen bagels, and 25 pounds of tomatoes to see whether there was much difference between brands. There was. The reasonably priced Forschner (Victorinox) Fibrox (\$36) was terrifically sharp and easy to use, outperforming models that cost almost twice as much.



**Forschner (Victorinox)**  
Fibrox Bread Knife

#### Tester's Comments

Tough on hard crusts, gentle on tomatoes, and easy on the hands. A terrifically sharp blade with all the best traits—length, curvature, and serration design.

# Cutting Tools

## CUTTING BOARD

Price	Material	Size	Weight	Dishwasher-Safe	Features
\$14.99	Polyethylene	17 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>8</sub> " l, by 9 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>4</sub> " w, by 1/2" thick	3 lb. 1 oz.	Yes	Red disc for the meat side, and a green disc indicating vegetables.

What's a knife without its unsung partner, the cutting board? A good board feels spacious and secure. A bad one can impede the efficiency of any cook. There are dozens of varieties of cutting boards, from clear acrylic and glass to plastic and wood. Does it matter what kind you use?

After testing 10 types of cutting boards, we found plastic to be the best overall performer. Plastic boards are dishwasher-safe and therefore easy to clean, they don't need the extra maintenance (oiling) that wood boards need, they come in innumerable sizes and weights to suit your preference, and they provide stability, control, and a pleasant cutting surface. Equally advantageous but harder to find is the Bemis dishwasher-safe wood board, which, if you don't mind oiling it occasionally, combines the benefits of plastic with the handsome appearance of wood. Expect to spend about \$14 for either board.



### Tester's Comments

Rated high for cushioning the knife strike in the way that wood does. We'd rather have altogether separate boards for meat and other foods, which limits the usefulness of the color discs.



## Measuring Tools

Ingredients, Temperature, Time

Guesstimates have no place in the kitchen. Precision is key to obtaining perfect, consistent results every time. Simply adding “some” cayenne pepper to a dish can mean the difference between subtly seasoned and shockingly spicy. From measuring spices to measuring actual heat, we reach for these five tools more than any others.

*Featured Tools*  
*Measuring Utensils*  
*Digital Scale*  
*Instant Thermometer*  
*Oven Thermometer*  
*Digital Timer*

### RATINGS

★★★  
GOOD

★★  
FAIR

★  
POOR

## Measuring Tools

### MEASURING UTENSILS



Amco Stainless Steel Measuring Cups

#### Tester's Comments

Heavy and sturdy; downgraded only for the handle, which meets the cup below the top, making leveling more difficult.

Price	Material	Leveling	Handle	Ease of Use
\$12.99	Stainless Steel	★★★	★★	★★★

It's hard to pick just one measuring utensil; each one is necessary for different tasks. If you do any kind of baking at all you'll want to invest in both liquid and dry measuring cups. For liquid measures, we use the old standby \$3 Pyrex measuring cup, while for dry measures we use a set of sturdy Amco stainless steel cups (\$12.99). One of our newest favorite tools is the Wonder Cup (\$6), a smart push-up contraption that lets you measure semisolid ingredients like sour cream quickly and neatly. Add a set of measuring spoons to round out that list; we like deep-bowled stainless steel spoons (\$8) for easy and accurate measuring.

## Measuring Tools

### DIGITAL SCALE

Price	Display Visibility	Capacity	Platform Size	Ease of Use	Accuracy
\$124.95	★★★	★★★ 11 lb./5 kg.	★★★ 7 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>4</sub> " diam.	★★	★★★

In our test kitchen, we weigh most baking ingredients, meats such as whole chickens or parts (most recipes call for, say, a three- to four-pound chicken rather than simply “one medium chicken”), as well as fruits and vegetables that are to be cooked. Why is this important? An apple pie recipe that calls for “X” number of medium apples rather than a specific weight can be risky. If you were to choose apples smaller than those intended by the recipe writer, you’d end up with a flat, disappointing pie.

We gathered eight models of digital scales and ran them through a battery of tests. The best performer was also the best looking and the most expensive of the bunch: the Soehnle Cyber Electronic Scale (\$124.95). Easy to use, the Soehnle was accurate and featured a large, readable display. Another top performer, the Salter Electronic Aquatronic (\$59.95), had many of the same great features at half the price.



**Soehnle**  
Cyber Electronic Scale

#### Tester's Comments

Detachable glass measuring platform especially easy to clean, but metric conversion feature was excruciatingly difficult to use. Did not always return to zero when weight was removed from scale.

## Measuring Tools

### INSTANT THERMOMETER

Price	Readability	Response Time	Accuracy	Features	Temperature Range
\$79.95	★★★	★★★ 10 Seconds	★★★	★★★ 4 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> " Stem	★★★ -50° to 550°



**Owen Instruments**  
Thermapen 5

#### Tester's Comments

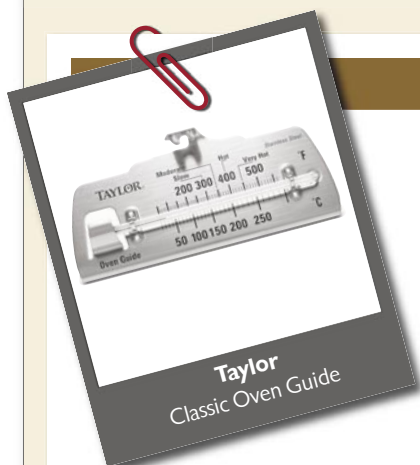
Quick response time and very easy to read, store, and clean. Test kitchen favorite. Odd-sized batteries can be difficult to find.

Sight, touch, and instinct are age-old ways to gauge when food is done, but for consistent results, nothing is as reliable as checking the food’s internal temperature. There are many types of specialty thermometers on the market, designed for everything from meat to cappuccino. Yet for home cooks, the most useful model is the least specialized of them all: the instant-read thermometer. This device can be inserted into almost any kind of food to display a reading of its internal temperature within seconds.

For our tests, we purchased nine instant-read thermometers in various sizes, shapes, and configurations. The best performer was the \$79.95 Owen Instruments Thermapen 5. Coming in a close second was the reasonably priced \$15 Taylor Digital Pocket Thermometer.

## Measuring Tools

### OVEN THERMOMETER



Taylor  
Classic Oven Guide

#### Tester's Comments

Temperature readings were spot on, and this Taylor passed our knock-over test with flying colors. The most stable thermometer of the group, in part because of its 4-inch length.

Price	Readability	Accuracy at 500°	Accuracy at 350°	Accuracy at 200°	Range/Increments
\$12.99	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	50° to 550° in 10° increments

It may have limited use, low visibility, and zero glamour, but every one of our test cooks named an oven thermometer as one of the most important tools in their kitchen. It may sound redundant (isn't the oven supposed to keep track of its own temperature?), but after losing too many cakes and cookies to inaccurate oven temperatures, an oven thermometer has become a fixture in our ovens. Our initial research showed that two ovens set to the same temperature can vary in actual temperature by as much as 90 degrees, so we rounded up eight popular brands, ranging in price from \$5 to \$32, and put them to the test.

Of course, accuracy was the most important factor, but we also tested models for ease of readability and ease of use. Coming out on top across the board was the Taylor Classic Oven Guide Thermometer, reasonably priced at \$12.99 (so reasonable, in fact, that we went out and bought 10, one for each oven in our test kitchens).

## Measuring Tools

### DIGITAL TIMER

Price	Display Visibility	Maximum Time	# of Timers	Counts Up After Time	Clock
\$29.99	★★★	24 Hours	3	Yes	Yes

Does it really matter if a cake bakes for 20 minutes or 30 minutes? Will pasta overcook if you boil it for 45 minutes instead of 20 minutes? Will you really remember to check on those nuts you're toasting in the oven? The answers: Yes, yes, and a categorical no. For those reasons and more, you need a timer.

Kitchen timers are one of those tools taken for granted, typically purchased on impulse without any thought to brand or features. After all, a timer is a timer, right? Wrong. Our favorite timer does a lot more than just count. The West Bend Clock/Triple Timer (\$29.99) measures in seconds, counts up to 24 hours, includes three separate timers, and counts up after the alarm sounds. It also includes interrupt, memory, and stopwatch features. The large displays and buttons are exceptionally easy to read and use.



West Bend  
Clock/Triple Timer

#### Tester's Comments

The West Bend Clock/Triple Timer does it all and was the clear winner in our tests.

# **The Essential Kitchen:** 25 Kitchen Tools No Cook Should Be Without

## **WHERE TO SHOP ONLINE**

Most gadgets and cookware are available at Sur La Table ([www.surlatable.com](http://www.surlatable.com)) and A Cook's Wares ([www.cookswares.com](http://www.cookswares.com)). There are two exceptions: our top-rated strainer, which is available at Williams-Sonoma ([www.williams-sonoma.com](http://www.williams-sonoma.com)), and our favorite peppermill, which can be purchased from Bridge Kitchenware ([www.bridgekitchenware.com](http://www.bridgekitchenware.com)).

Most small appliances and measuring tools can be found at KitchenEtc ([www.kitchenetc.com](http://www.kitchenetc.com)) and The Baker's Catalogue ([www.kingarthurflour.com](http://www.kingarthurflour.com)).

All knives are available at Professional Cutlery Direct ([www.professionalcutlerydirect.com](http://www.professionalcutlerydirect.com)).