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Buy cookware like an expert

These tips will have you cooking like a pro.

LISA JAFFE HUBBELL • JANUARY 3, 2010


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Every household has one: a pot that you took from your parents' home to use in your first apartment. It's usually paired with a cheap, non-stick frying pan that's somewhat warped and another pot with a broken handle and a missing lid.

When it's time to retire the old hand-me-downs and purchase some new cookware, use these expert tips to help you buy the right gear.

Purchase what works with your cooktop. Almost anything works on gas and electric, but that's not the case with ceramic induction cooktops, says Williams-Sonoma buyer Joanna Rosenberg. They require magnetic cookware, such as magnetic stainless steel or cast iron. And on any cooktop, beware: Some stainless-steel pots may warp, which leads to a loss of heat conductivity.

Get the basics. Rosenberg says every house needs a good 10-inch frying pan, probably a non-stick one, a 4-quart saucepan, a 5.5- to 7-quart Dutch oven and a tall stockpot with a pasta insert. Another good addition is a high-sided frying pan: You can sauté in it and also use it as a wok, if you don't have one.

A HIGH-SIDED PAN IS VERSATILE: IT ALSO CAN FUNCTION AS A WOK.

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Pick pieces that fit your lifestyle. If you're always pressed for time and looking for convenience, then a non-stick pan is a good choice and will serve most of your needs, says Chris John, vice president of housewares at Macy's. If you are more interested in gourmet cooking, then a stainless-steel or anodized aluminum pan is a better option for tasks such as browning meats.

Go for quality. Quality pieces definitely cost money, but they last a lifetime. John says that sets offer a good option. Pots and pans are usually a lot cheaper purchased as a set than they would be if bought individually. Prices go up with brand names, thickness and material; for example, copper can be pricey. Check department stores for deals. Macy's, for instance, offers high-end 14-piece sets for \$250 or less.

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