



HOME COOKIN' The Latest Advances in Cookware & Bakeware

Want to emulate Emeril, but find boiling water a challenge? Don't fret. The expanded use of materials such as copper and silicone and features such as easier-to-grip handles allow kitchenware manufacturers to give novices more "bam" for their buck.

By Jessica Goldbogen Harlan

You're watching Mario whip up perfectly browned veal saltimbocca, and your mouth is watering. It's the perfect dish to re-create at home ... if only you had the cookware that he's wielding on TV.

Well, you and the millions of other Americans who tune in to the ever-growing number of cooking programs with the dream of improving their culinary prowess should know this: There are plenty of hardware options on the market that can help you create a kitchen worthy of the pros. Cookware and bakeware manufacturers are using new construction techniques and better design to help you be a better cook.

"Cookware today is thicker, heats better, has better handles," says Hugh Rushing, executive vice president for Cookware Manufacturers Association. "There's just been a general upscaling of cookware manufacturing."

Fortunately, you'll get better quality for your money today than you would have even 3 years ago, no matter your budget. Many manufacturers have increased their efficiency by outsourcing production to Asia, which allows them to maintain product quality and keep prices low.

So, whether you're looking to invest \$700 in a set of copper-core, stainless-steel-clad pots and pans or \$150 in a set of hard-anodized aluminum cookware with nonstick coating, you can get good deals for your dollar.

Material World. Your choices in cookware materials used to be limited to stainless steel and aluminum, but the materials used today in high-end lines—copper, titanium and even diamond dust—would impress a metallurgist or gemologist.

The "clad" construction technique, whereby multiple layers of metal are combined typically with a stainless-steel exterior and cooking surface, creates a heavier pan that has

much better heating capabilities. The technique is being used more often, even by makers of less expensive cookware. Also heating up in popularity are interior layers that consist of metals such as copper, which conducts heat better than aluminum can and provides an evenly heated cooking surface, so you'll avoid hot spots that could burn your food.

Clad construction can involve as few as three layers and as many as nine. The more layers there are, the heavier the pot will be. The weight improves performance, but it might make for a less manageable pan. Some newer, less expensive models have clad construction on only the bottom of pots and skillets, while higher-end makes continue the layers up the sides.

Nonstick cookware still reigns in the marketplace; it constitutes nearly 65 percent of all cookware sales, according to NPD Group/Retail Track. But manufacturers have been working to create a longer-lasting and better-performing nonstick surface that will resist everyday hazards such as the scrape of a metal spatula. Manufacturers at all price points are using multiple coatings for a nonstick finish that will last longer, and higher-end brands are incorporating titanium, ceramic dust and even diamonds to ratchet up durability. This might seem like a gimmick, but in many cases, these tougher new materials create harder surfaces that release food better and last longer than traditional nonstick coatings.

Plus, techniques now in development should alleviate concerns expressed by environmental and consumer groups about the safety of nonstick cookware, Rushing says.

Much of the nonstick controversy stems from the fact that low levels of PFOA, a chemical used to make nonstick coatings, have been found in the environment and in the bloodstream of many Americans, and PFOA has been shown to cause developmental problems in laboratory animals. Environmental Protection Agency has not determined whether PFOA poses a risk to the public, and industry experts point out that using a nonstick pan does not expose you to PFOA. DuPont, a major producer of nonstick coating (including the Teflon brand), asserts that although PFOA is used to make the coating, none

of the compound remains in the finished product. But EPA is working with chemical companies to reduce the companies' release of PFOA during production.

"Everyone in the nonstick business is beaver away to design a product that they can say does not use PFOA in the manufacturing process," Rushing says.



All-Clad Stainless 9-Piece

Meanwhile, scientists and consumer-safety groups have found that empty, overheated nonstick pans can release toxic fumes. Industry experts warn that nonstick cookware should not be used at temperatures of 500 degrees or above and should never be heated while empty.

Experts hint that safer nonstick formulations being tested now could be on new products in the next year or two.

Big Names. It's not enough that Mario, Emeril and others of their ilk are getting you to cook; they want you to use their products, too. The trend of culinary celebs lending their name to cookware lines of moderate and higher prices continues. But buyer beware: The celebrity chef's endorsement doesn't necessarily translate into a quality product.

"Some of it is pretty good, some is pretty awful," says Jack Bishop, editorial director of America's Test Kitchen and *Cook's Illustrated* magazine. Aspiring cooks might not be familiar with certain cookware brands, but, he notes, "People certainly know who Wolfgang Puck or Jamie Oliver is."

The take-home lesson here is that it's a good idea to find out if there's a rec-

ognizable and reputable manufacturer behind the celebrity-stamped product.

One positive example: Last fall, two certified master chefs from the Culinary Institute of America helped design for Robinson Home Products a high-end line of cookware called the Masters Collection (\$950 for a 10-piece set);

pieces in the collection feature ergonomic handles, seven-ply copper and stainless-steel composition, and covers marked with their size.

This attention to detail is cropping up in a variety of manufacturers' products. Handles made of silicone or phenolic resin not only stay cool on the stovetop but can take the high temperatures of an oven, too. Some new designs have finger indentations for a sure grip. Outwardly rolled lips on pot edges reinforce the shape of the pan more than a straight-edge does and make pouring tidier.

In the Oven. If you're more into baking bread than searing salmon, you should know that one of the newest trends is the use of silicone in bakeware. Although silicone accounts for only about 5 percent of the bakeware category, according to NPD Group, the past year or two have seen more products being fashioned from this flexible material. First seen in commercial kitchens in the 1980s as nonstick cookie-pan liners, this rubbery substance is molded into bright-colored, floppy-shaped cake, muffin and specialty pans for the home baker.

"Silicone is everywhere," says P.J.

Hamel, who edits Baker's Catalogue, a catalog and Web retailer specializing in baking ingredients and equipment. "I think it's here to stay for certain things, such as little shapes and pop-out tarts."

Fans of the material like that silicone pans are easy to clean and release freshly baked goods with little effort. Plus, the pans spring back to shape after being bunched up for storage. Expect to pay slightly more for silicone baking pans than for their metal and glass counterparts.

But baking experts are divided on silicone's effectiveness. Hamel thinks

cakes and breads don't brown as well as those baked in metal. Bishop agrees. "It doesn't really brown anything, and most baked goods taste better if they get some browning on them," he says.

Mary Moore, president and owner of Cook's Warehouse, an Atlanta-based kitchenware retailer, likes silicone because it is easy to work with, can compress for storage and is oven-, dishwasher-, microwave- and freezer-safe. As for its effectiveness, she points out that baking author Rose Levy Berenbaum recently endorsed Spanish silicone bakeware brand Lékue. "People

have some comfort knowing that the person who wrote 'The Cake Bible' is actually supporting silicone," Moore says. Berenbaum refutes the assertion that silicone won't brown baked goods. She says a good-quality pan must be made with pure silicone rather than a silicone blend and that pans still should be greased for good browning results.

The bottom line: In our opinion, silicone is great for baking cookies or for creating intricate molded shapes, but you might be better off with metal pans for a nice browned crust on breads and cakes.

If silicone is the hot newcomer,



Best Buys in Cookware & Bakeware

Best Buy Categories:

[P]=Premium selection;
[M]=Midrange selection;
[E]=Economy selection.
See page 72.

Best Buys were selected on the basis of performance, durability and ease of cleaning. For cookware, multiple-piece sets were chosen, and because most consumers make choices based on whether cookware is nonstick or not, the categories were divided as such. Many Best Buy brands offer multiple set configurations, but we recommended the sets that appear to be the best value. For bakeware, we focused on two of the most popular pieces—the cookie pan and the 9-in. round cake pan. For cookware and bakeware made of stainless steel, 18/10 refers to the ratio of chromium to nickel and is an optimal composition for durability, a shiny finish and resistance to corrosion.

Best Price is a reflection of the lowest price available at press time and is subject to change.

Nonstick Cookware

[P] Swiss Diamond Cast-Aluminum 10-Piece

List: \$692; Best Price: \$415

Thanks to the unique, minuscule, diamond crystals, metal utensils won't make a scratch, and the cookware offers stellar food release and easy clean-up. Pots and pans have a satisfying weight, and the handles have an ergonomic curve with finger and thumb indentations for a steady grip. The set includes 8- and 10-in. fry pans, 1.4- and 2.2-qt.

covered sauce pans, an 8.5-qt. covered stock pot and a 9.5-in. covered sauté pan.

Features:

- * Body: Pressure-cast aluminum
- * Surface: Diamond-reinforced nonstick
- * Warranty: Limited lifetime

[M] Revere Convenience Nonstick Stainless Steel 8-Piece

List: \$167; Best Price: \$100

No-spill pour spouts, tempered-glass windows in lids and dishwasher-safe cleanup make the products easy to

use. Steam vents in lids allow you to quickly heat soups or boil vegetables, and the bottom, which offers more efficient heat distribution than other models in this price range, makes short work of sautéing meats or fish. This set includes 2- and 3-qt. covered saucepans, a 6-qt. covered stockpot, 8- and 10-in. pans and a steamer.

Features:

- * Body: Stainless steel with encapsulated aluminum disk in bottom
- * Surface: Metal-safe nonstick
- * Warranty: 25-yr. limited

[E] T-Fal Encore Hard Enamel 10-Piece

List: \$80; Best Price: \$75

T-Fal's patented Thermo-Spot heat indicator lets novice cooks know when the pan is perfectly preheated, so food can brown quickly. Other touches that make this set an excellent value include a strainer lid in the Dutch oven and soft-touch handles that are easy to grip with wet hands. The set includes 8- and 10-in. fry pans, 1- and 2-qt. covered saucepans, and a 5-qt. covered Dutch oven with strainer lid.

Features:

- * Body: Hard enamel exterior
- * Surface: Metal-safe nonstick
- * Warranty: Limited lifetime

Uncoated Cookware

[P] All-Clad Stainless 9-Piece

List: \$539; Best Price: \$539

The clad construction and sleek

design of this set are unmatched; food browns perfectly in the pans, yielding enough flavorful residue to make a rich pan sauce, while sauces and soups heat steadily without burning. Handles, riveted to the body for sturdiness, are long enough to stay cool. The set includes a 2-qt. covered saucepan, a 3-qt. covered sauté pan, a 10-in. fry pan, a 3-qt. covered casserole pan and a 6-qt. covered stockpot.

Features:

- * Body: Pure aluminum core clad in stainless steel
- * Surface: 18/10 stainless steel
- * Warranty: Lifetime

[M] Emerilware Stainless 10-Piece

List: \$200; Best Price: \$200

Emeril Lagasse joined with All-Clad to make a collection that remains the best among celebrity-endorsed cookware. The heavy-gauge cookware allows for the same heat uniformity as in pricier products. A distinctive copper ring along the bottom, self-basting capabilities, tempered-glass lids, stay-cool riveted handles with thumb rests and flared lips for drip-free pouring provide performance unmatched in the price range. The set includes 8-in. and 10-in. fry pans, a 2-qt. covered saucepan and a 3-qt. covered casserole, a 3-qt. covered sauté pan and a 6-qt. covered stockpot.



T-Fal Encore
Hard Enamel
10-Piece

metal bakeware is still the king. Yet even this venerable product is showing off a few innovations bakers will appreciate, such as heavy-gauge aluminized steel, convenient handles (some with heat-resistant grips) and scratch-proof nonstick coatings that allow you to cut brownies right in the pan.

Tomorrow's Kitchen. Rushing says cooking products will continue to evolve. "You're going to see a continuation and maybe even an expansion of design that really melds the fashion world, the cooking stars and functionality," he predicts.

He says to watch for an increased use of color and innovative shapes as big names realize that they need to bring something new to the table—er, stove. Manufacturers also will roll out more products designed specifically for newer cooking appliances, including induction stoves, which require cookware made of magnetic material.

Also, specialized cookware for specific cooking styles will continue to become more widely available. Better-quality woks and grill pans are on the market, and mainstream cookware manufacturers are starting to jump into the

specialty cooking field. All-Clad recently produced a tagine (\$200), a Moroccan cooking vessel with a domed lid, and the company's Emerilware brand now includes a pressure cooker (\$250), a pot made safer through the use of valves and safety locks.

All of this means you'll continue to be able to match Mario, replicate Rachael and emulate Emeril. Bam! ♦

A chef and freelance writer, Jessica Goldbogen Harlan has written about food and cooking for 10 years for trade and consumer magazines.

Features:

- * Body: Heavy gauge, 18/10 stainless steel with encapsulated aluminum and copper bottom
- * Surface: Satin-finish 18/10 stainless steel
- * Warranty: Lifetime

[E] Farberware Classic 10-Piece

List: \$80; Best Price: \$65

This set combines old-school features, such as retro rounded knobs on lids, with contemporary construction. Most sets are either entirely nonstick or uncoated, but this set has nonstick coating where you'd most like it to be—in the skillets. The pieces have a nice heft to them, and the thick bottom means foods heat up better. The set contains 1-, 1.5- and 2-qt. covered saucepans, a 5.5-qt. covered saucepot, and 7- and 9-in. nonstick skillets.

Features:

- * Body: Aluminum core bottom in stainless steel; skillets are aluminum
- * Surface: 18/10 stainless steel; skillets have nonstick coating
- * Warranty: Limited lifetime

Cookie Pans

[P] Kaiser La Forme

List: \$22; Best Price: \$15

Kaiser La Forme's 14-in.-by-16-in. pan is light enough to control browning but constructed with heavy-gauge steel that conducts

heat gently and evenly, reduces cooking time and minimizes warping. Cookies don't spread, and the unusually wide handle makes it easy for even the bulkiest oven mitt to grip the pan without crushing your baked goods. Double nonstick coating, inside and out, allows for easy release of baked goods and quick cleanup.

Features:

- * Body: Commercial-weight steel
- * Warranty: 5-yr. limited

[M] Chicago Metallic Commercial

List: \$13; Best Price: \$11

The weight of this 14-in.-by-16-in. pan will give you heat conductivity, sturdiness and durability—it's safe up to temperatures of 550 degrees. The pan's design—two folded handles and two open sides—enables the user to easily slide baked goods off the pan, and the light color will reflect heat for gradual browning. The surface doesn't have a nonstick coating, but cookies baked on parchment or directly on the surface come out evenly browned and release nicely even without cooking spray.

Features:

- * Body: Heavyweight aluminized steel
- * Warranty: 25-yr. limited

[E] WearEver Smart Bake

List: \$8; Best Price: \$6

This 11-in.-by-17-in. pan has a



Revere Convenience Nonstick Stainless Steel 8-Piece

number of features seen in more-expensive brands. The cookie pan has two layers of scratch- and stain-resistant nonstick coating in a light finish, which won't turn out too-dark cookies, and it's made of heavy-gauge steel, which minimizes warping and bending. Other unusual features include a wide, continuous handle that can be grabbed from any side, an angled rim that makes it easy to remove warm baked goods and markings that indicate fill lines for batter as well as guides for cutting even portions.

Features:

- * Body: Heavy-gauge carbon steel
- * Warranty: 15-yr. limited

9-in. Round Cake Pans

[M] Cuisinart Chef's Classic Nonstick

List: \$20; Best Price: \$8

This bakeware features hefty, sturdy construction, a convenient nonstick coating and rolled edges that keep the pan from warping, even when the oven is at its highest temperature. The pan's 2-in. depth

means that cakes have room to rise without overflowing or peaking—a problem with other pans that skimp on depth.

Features:

- * Body: Heavy-gauge aluminized steel
- * Warranty: Limited lifetime

[E] Chicago Metallic Professional Lifetime Nonstick

List: \$15; Best Price: \$15

A hefty weight and solid construction tell all—this pan will not warp or bend with even the toughest workout. It releases baked goods easily and provides for quick clean-up. It's safe to use at temperatures as high as 550 degrees, making it ideal for roasting or broiling. Cakes brown evenly.

Features:

- * Body: Heavy-duty precoated steel
- * Warranty: Lifetime

For more information on the above Best Buys, contact the manufacturers directly. See page 71.