

MODULE 1: GETTING STARTED | TRANSCRIPT

LESSON 4

Appliances & Tools

You don't need to buy every kitchen gadget on the market to cook good food—most times just a spoon, a knife, a bowl, and a skillet will do. Start using what you already have but when you can, add from the list of essentials. I'll also tell you about a few tools that are nice to have but not essential, and some ideas for kitchen hacking certain appliances and tools to make them into something new.

Essentials

These are must-have items recommended for good food cooking.

Assorted wooden spoon(s): you need at least one large wooden spoon to serve and to stir ingredients for recipes. If you decide to buy (or already have) a set of them, make sure one is a slotted spoon to easily remove ingredients from hot liquids.

General care tips:

- Always clean your wooden spoons with natural soap after every use and dry them well before storing. Don't let food dry on them.
- A few times a month, you'll want to give your wooden spoons a deep deodorizing. To do that, rub them with coarse sea salt and then scrub with a lemon wedge. Rinse and dry.
- For especially tough staining, scrub with baking soda. Note that this can sometimes whiten a spoon, so don't stir stainers like beets and berries with your wooden spoon if it's precious; or embrace the permanent stains as the memory of a delicious meal experienced.

Kitchen hack: of course, a large cereal spoon will work in a pinch.

Basic rimmed baking sheet(s): To start cooking, you'll want 1–2 baking sheets with rims. Use them for baked goods, for roasting veggies, or toasting nuts and seeds. A rim keeps any sauces or juices released during cooking within the pan. Line it with parchment paper (disposable) or a silicone baking mat (reusable) to protect foods—especially acidic ones like tomatoes—from picking up metal flavor from the pan.

Kitchen hack: Flip it over and use as a pizza peel (a mini-shovel-like tool used to slide loaves of bread, pizzas, and other baked goods into and out of an oven) or when you need a rimless baking sheet.

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Chef's knife: A paring knife and a serrated knife are great to have, but the only one you really need is a sharp 6–8" Chef's knife. Choose one that feels good in your hand—a bit of weight, not flimsy, not too large or too small. The handle should feel snug and "at home" in your fingers—almost like a natural extension of your arm.

General care tips:

- Keep the blade sharp, either with a sharpening steel or stone, professional knife sharpening companies, or an automatic at-home sharpening tool. It's recommended to sharpen after every use—a sharp knife is a safer knife, but do whatever you can. If the blade is dull, it can slip when cutting ingredients.
- Always cut on a cutting board—wood and bamboo boards are less likely to dull the blade.
- As soon as you're done using your knife, wash it by hand (not in the dishwasher). Dry it carefully (always running the towel along the non-sharp backside of the blade handle to tip, not along the sharp edge) and put it away. Don't leave it to sit in the sink—it can cut someone, it can come into contact with other dishes that can dull the blade, scratch it, or take off the tip.
- Store knives away from other utensils to minimize damage to the blade.

Colander or a large sieve (with feet): A colander is a perforated bowl used to drain foods like pasta, rice, and grains. It can be used to rinse berries, vegetables, and other ingredients as well. Instead of a colander, a fine-mesh sieve (with feet that fit over the top of a pot) can do the colander's job while doubling as a steaming basket for veggies, or a double-boiler for tempering chocolate. Go for stainless steel (to withstand high temps) if you can.

Cutting board(s): Keep a few cutting boards in the kitchen preferably made of natural material like wood or bamboo. Make sure the length of your longest Chef's knife doesn't go over the edge of the board when placed diagonally across the board. This is for safety reasons: we want the board under the knife at all times. To keep the board from slipping, place a slightly damp dish towel or paper towel under the board before cutting—it grips the counter and the board.

General care tips:

- Always clean your board after use and wash it with natural soap and dry well before storing. Don't let food dry on your board.
- Give boards a deep, deodorizing clean a few times a month, or even weekly, by sprinkling coarse sea salt on the cutting surface and scrub with a lemon wedge. Use a scraper or silicone spatula to scrape the liquid away. Rinse and dry.
- Keep wooden boards from cracking and splitting by "seasoning" them evenly with a cooking oil massage once or twice a month (try grapeseed, olive, avocado, coconut, or almond oil). Just rub the oil completely into the board and wipe off excess.
- For especially tough staining, scrub with baking soda. Note that this can sometimes whiten an area, so don't slice your staining beets and berries on a cutting board if it's precious; or embrace the permanent stains as the memory of a fun time in the kitchen.

- Warping is possible if a board soaks in too much water. This is why drying after each use is so important—don't put them in the dishwasher. If you end up with a warped board, try this: wet all sides and place convex-side up on top of a moderately warm surface like a fridge top or sunny counter. Place a clean, dry towel underneath, and place one large bowl or a few nested bowls (for extra weight) on the board “lump.” Let it dry completely (may take a day). If it looks like the curve is flattening out, repeat until it becomes flat again. Then make sure it's always dried off after use in the future.

Spatula(s): Needed for veggie burgers, pancakes, and any other recipes that require sautéing and flipping in a pan. Also helpful for transferring cookies and baked goods to and from baking sheets. One flipping spatula (choose one that won't scratch your pans) and one scraper-style flat (not curved) silicone spatula make cooking easy. Scraper-style spatulas are terrific at getting every last bit of a mixture out of a bowl, blender, food processor, pot, or pan. Also great for folding ingredients thoroughly.

Food processor: This appliance handles almost any mundane kitchen task in seconds—grating, slicing, whipping, mixing, kneading, and puréeing, which will get us cooking that much faster, and hopefully more often. It's easy to clean, easy to use, and it makes prep time more efficient. In seconds, we can prepare all sorts of ingredients that can be used immediately, throughout the week, or later, if frozen.

General care tips:

- Don't use metal utensils with your food processor, a silicone spatula is ideal for removing all the goods from the bucket, too. Be careful to not slice the spatula on the blade, it's very sharp.

- Always wash, rinse, and dry your food processor after use so no food dries into crevices or dulls the plastic bucket. Check with the manufacturer's guide, but you should be able to wash the bucket and blades in the dishwasher.
- Quick-wash tip: once the bucket is empty, fill with about 1 cup of water and 1 squirt of dish soap. Put the lid on and pulse a few times. Rinse, dry. Done. If it needs extra cleaning, add a sprinkle of baking soda and a squeeze of lemon juice to the soap and water. Pulse, rinse, dry. The latter combination helps clear up food processor buckets that have dulled with age and use.

High-powered blender: If there's one appliance that we'll end up using more than any other, it's a good blender. Ideally, you can get your hands on one with a powerful motor, such as a Vitamix or Blendtec. Of course, those can be a little pricy, and standard blenders are better than no blender at all, so work with what you have! With a standard blender, you may just need to blend for a longer amount of time to get the smoothest consistency for certain ingredients. A standard blender makes sauces, soups, dressings, and milks, just fine, but to break up harder ingredients like nuts into butter and grains into flour, or to get a silky smooth texture in certain creations, look into a high-powered blender. Hop online to research options big and small from every price point. Borrow one from a friend (test drive it and repay said friend in good food), or find a restaurant supply shop in your area to buy one wholesale, pick up a refurbished one, or ask all your family/friends to chip in for it as a birthday or holiday present. After about one month's use, it'll have paid for itself many times over.

General care tips:

- Don't use metal utensils with your blender, a silicone spatula is ideal for removing all the goods from the bottom of the bucket and blades, too. Be careful to not slice the spatula on the blade, it's very sharp.

- Always wash, rinse, and dry your blender after use so no food dries into crevices or dulls the plastic bucket.
- Quick-wash tip: once blender bucket is empty, fill with 1–2 cups of water and 1 squirt of dish soap. Put the lid on and pulse a few times. Rinse, dry. Done. If it needs extra cleaning, add a sprinkle of baking soda and a squeeze of lemon juice to the soap and water. Pulse, rinse, dry. The latter combination helps clear up blender buckets that have dulled with age and use.
- Check with the manufacturer's guide, but you should be able to wash the bucket and blades in the dishwasher.

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Large pot with a lid: You can make sauces, big batches of soups, one-pot meals, compotes, and so much more if you have at least one large pot with a lid. If you want it to also double as a baking/roasting vessel, get a cast-iron pot or Dutch oven (with an oven-safe handle)—they're versatile and can go in the oven as well as work on the range. Make sure the lid handle is oven safe as well.

General care tips:

- Don't use metal utensils on cookware.
- In most cases, except dry roasting at medium heat, lubricate the pan before adding food, either with oil or vegetable stock.
- Unless you're watching things, don't let liquids boil until dry or foods simmer until dry—it can cause irreparable damage.
- Clean with natural soap, water, and a plastic or natural dishwashing scrubber—no metal.
- Check with the manufacturer's guide if your pot is dishwasher safe.

- If food gets stuck on the bottom, pour about 2–4 tablespoons baking soda in the pan, fill with water, and soak overnight. Scrub easily the next day with a plastic or natural-fiber dishwashing brush. Don't use abrasive scouring pads or chemicals. You can also try scrubbing with coarse salt and water, or coarse salt and oil.

Large high-walled pan or skillet with a lid: You can make scrambles, stir fry, pancakes, sauces, and more if you have one large, non-stick saucepan with a lid (skip Teflon-coated pans if possible). Try a cast-iron skillet, a ceramic oven-safe skillet, or oven-safe stainless steel if you want it to also double as a baking/roasting and braising vessel. These are all versatile and can go in the oven as well as work on the range. Make sure the lid handle is oven safe.

General care tips:

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- Check with the manufacturer's guide if your pan is dishwasher safe.

Measuring cups & spoons: There are two different kinds of measuring cups—the kind that measures liquid and the kind that measures dry ingredients. It's a big help when both are in the kitchen at some point, but using one or the other for a while, at first, won't make a big difference with basic recipes (unless we're baking—where exact amounts are crucial). So if you're going to acquire one set of measuring cups, get dry ingredient measuring cups. Liquid and dry ingredients can be measured in dry ingredient cups, but dry ingredients shouldn't be measured in liquid-ingredient measuring cups.

They come in a nesting set of multiple sizes, usually $\frac{1}{8}$ cup, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup, $\frac{1}{3}$ cup, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup, $\frac{2}{3}$ cup, $\frac{3}{4}$ cup, and 1 cup. Measuring spoons usually come in $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon, $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon, and $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon, 1 teaspoon, and 1 tablespoon sizes. Ideally, measuring cups and spoons are flat on top so ingredients can be easily and accurately leveled off with utensils like butter knives. Opt for ceramic or stainless-steel measuring cups and spoons for long-lasting tools.

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Parchment paper: A big roll of parchment paper is incredibly helpful for rolling out dough, tortillas, tart crusts, crackers, and other goodness, without the mess and stickiness factor. All you have to do is place the dough between two sheets of parchment and roll it flat. You can reuse parchment a few times—just wipe off the paper after use and store. You'll know when it's time for a new piece—it browns and becomes covered in other foods that can't be wiped off.

IMPORTANT: there's a big difference between wax paper and parchment paper. Parchment can withstand high heat and is intended for cooking, roasting, steaming, and baking applications. Wax paper is heat sensitive and is for food storage and prep only.

Mixing bowls: No kitchen is complete without a set of mixing bowls, and a nesting set provides a variety of sizes without taking up too much space in a cabinet. They're used for marinating, mixing, even storing and transporting foods if you get a set with lids. If you only want one bowl, get a large one since it will let you whisk and stir everything from a small portion of vinaigrette to batter for the family pancake breakfast. If you need other bowls, grab a cereal bowl for a small one, or a serving bowl, too. Think outside of the box.

We recommend tempered glass or ceramic bowls because they are non-reactive, meaning they won't leach metallic or plastic flavors into your food. For extra cooking help, look for bowls that have features like measurement marks and pour spouts.

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Stackable storage containers: Bulk and package-free items must be stored in airtight containers for maximum shelf life. You can find various sizes, sets, and stackable containers in grocery stores, container supply stores, or online, but you probably have plenty in your home already. Don't underestimate the usefulness of recycled tomato sauce jars, jelly jars, and bottles for storing pantry items, like nuts and flours, or prepared foods, such as salad dressings and sauces. Plastic containers are fine, but glass is less porous and more airtight to protect your ingredients. Stackable containers save space by allowing you to go vertical in the fridge and cabinets.

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Veggie Peeler: This gadget doesn't always get used to its full creative potential. A peeler can make ribbon noodles out of veggies like squash, decorative curls out of fruits, and remove tough skin from root vegetables. It also shaves chocolate, removes strings from celery, and can even zest citrus.

General care tip:

- Always clean your peeler once finished using so foodstuffs don't dry on and dull the blade.

Now that you know what you need to get started, use any interest in new tools or gadgets as a reason to connect with others. Host an appliance and kitchen-gadget swap for your local community, your block, or for friends and family. Share pricy appliances with each other—test drive them to help you decide what to buy. Create a group list of who has what, and when needed, contact each other to share. Set a borrowing time limit and “pay” each other for generosity in some good food cooking.

You can also donate tools and appliances you don’t need to local schools or community centers that do need them. Make it fun.

Lesson Actions

Share with friends, family, or the course community one tool or appliance that you would like to add to your kitchen, either permanently, or by borrowing to test it out.

Be sure to check online resellers like eBay for refurbished and used appliances.