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W. H. Brokaw, Director, Lincoln 5555

The Why In Selecting Kitchen Utensils
Mary Mason

In equipping the kitchen with cooking utensils consideration must be given to the following points - the amount of equipment needed, the cost and quality of each article, the material or ware and the comparative cost of different wares, the durability, the adaptability of the utensil in size, shape and material to the process for which it is used, the comfort, satisfaction and ease in use, the time and attention required in its use and care, the ease with which it may be stored and last and possibly of lesser importance the appearance of the utensil.

Avoid Overstocking your Kitchen

You will agree that an overstocked kitchen is a burden and an understocked kitchen a very definite handicap in your kitchen routine.

You may be tempted into careless habits of procedure by having too many utensils in use for each individual process. This is one of the dangers of an overstocked kitchen. A specific example might be the array of utensils stacked on table and cabinet and in the sink after a cake making process. Have you experimented until you have discovered the minimum set of equipment for this process or do you use pans, bowls, spoons, cups and sifters sufficient for at least two separate preparations? It takes time to assemble these utensils and time to wash and replace them. It means crowded shelves and drawers and if you are hurried it often means a carelessly arranged cupboard. Fewer available utensils might force you into habits of greater efficiency.

It may be that a misdirected idea of thrift influences you to keep on hand utensils that have long outworn their period of usefulness, such as the knife with the broken handle, the egg beater that jumps cogs, the can opener that never has worked, the pan that leaks and so on through the list. It is frequently true that as new utensils are provided the old things are retained for no particular reason except that the housewife, instinctively opposed to wastefulness in any form, hesitates in throwing them away.

Time, energy and patience are saved if broken and worn out utensils are discarded as soon as substitutions are made. The inefficient and unused equipment which is the result of unwise selection may be retained if in good repair, providing there is clinging to it a worthy suggestion of future usefulness. It should, however, be removed from the main storage centers to a top shelf or compactly stored and well labeled in a box in the basement or attic.

Some housewives would be surprised to find that their investment in kitchen utensils mounts up to \$150 or \$200. Such a set may include a fireless cooker, pressure cooker, combination steamer and waterless cooker, eight or a dozen bowls of different sizes, colors and wares, baking pans in three or four different wares but used for the same purpose. Such a kitchen may contain sauce pans and kettles enough to furnish a couple of kitchens and also have other equipment in similar quantities.

Even though the money invested may well be afforded such an overstocked kitchen requires a great deal of time to keep in order and there is a waste of energy
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in moving quantities of equipment in order to find the one thing that is needed.

A Minimum Set of Utensils

A minimum set of utensils for the average size family might consist of the following articles: a dish pan, a sink strainer, a roaster, a teakettle, a double boiler, a coffee pot or percolator, one large kettle of five or six quart capacity, one or two four quart stew pans, three or four smaller stew pans (1 qt., 1½ qt. and 2 qt. sizes), lids to fit each of the pans selected, two square layer cake pans, two loaf cake pans, two pie pans, two muffin pans (8 muffin size) two bread pans, a set of three mixing bowls, one large skillet of cast iron, two frying pans (large and small size), a food grinder, flour sifter, potato masher, rolling pin, can opener, medium size food sieve or strainer, small grater, lemon or orange reamer large enough to hold at least one half cup, a butcher knife, bread knife, spatula, two paring knives, a long handled meat fork, small fork, wooden spoon, two or three mixing spoons, and two measuring cups.

The above list may be purchased for \$30.00 and may be quite satisfactory providing that time is taken in selecting the right utensil. Equipment required for special processes such as care of milk, butter making and butchering have not been included in the above set of equipment.

In order to minimize the cost of this set the following suggestions may be useful: Tin is the least expensive of all wares and is quite satisfactory for many kitchen utensils if properly cared for. A dish pan and a roaster of heavy tin may be very satisfactory if precautions are taken in their care and use. The roaster pan and lid may both be used for other purposes as bread pans or dish draining pans. The teakettle may be equipped with a double boiler inset, thus doing away with the need for a lower boiler pan. Tin might also be used for cake pans, pie pans and muffin pans. Simple mixing bowls may be used as flower bowls if chosen in the right shape and color.

The above economies might make it possible to spend a little more for a few extra utensils or an improved labor saver that might otherwise be considered a luxury. This minimum set of equipment may serve as a foundation set to be added to as the demand arises or as the budget allows. If possible each utensil should be provided in accordance with the points stressed in the first paragraph.

Bargain Equipment is Sometimes Expensive

A few examples will indicate the truth of the above statement. It may be the purchase of a bargain stew pan of light weight material. It has a capacity of four or five quarts. The purchaser argues that it holds just as much as another pan that costs five or six times as much. She may not have considered that the bargain pan has a metal bail with no insulated handle, that this bail may be attached a little off center so that the pan tips when carried, endangering its contents. She may not have noticed that a lid would not fit snugly on this pan or that due to its small base and bulging sides it would be slow to heat and would take up too much room on the kitchen range. She may not have figured on the hard wear the pan was to receive or the comparative length of life of the two pans when subjected to this wear.

Another example is the many purpose tool or utensil demonstrated at the county fair or operated so deftly in the show window. Though it may be a purchase amounting to only a dollar or two, it may not meet a definite need. Uses for the utensil are invented but this may add to the time required for meal preparation which is a situation we are trying to avoid. Therefore, after a few weeks, the article purchased with such interest falls into disrepute. In addition to the fact that it fails to meet a real need it may be poorly constructed and of poor material thus limiting its period of usefulness.

Due to a rather recent awakening to the need of labor savers in the home, many novel contrivances are being placed on the market. The housewife should be sure that these articles are real labor savers instead of labor producers, that they will be used enough to make their purchase worth while and that they are constructed so as to be fool proof and to give a reasonable amount of service.

Factors of Annoyance Should be Minimized

Quarreling at your equipment day after day shows poor judgment and unsound economy.

The coffee pot that topples over every time the lid is open, the pan that will not stand up when empty are examples of purchases made in haste with little thought of satisfaction in use. Too often the housewife waits to purchase the utensil until the need is urgent. She then takes the first thing she finds or the only thing available at the time. She may save time in selection, but she is wasting time and temper in the months to follow in using and caring for an unsatisfactory utensil.

The Budget is a Safeguard Against Extravagant Purchases

The formulation of a plan for household expenditure and the apportionment of a fixed sum each year for replacement and upkeep of equipment will be a safeguard against the temptation to buy unessential equipment because you want something new or because it looks interesting or because it is cheap and a use might be found for it. It might also prove that it was an extravagance to stock up with a new set of enamel ware just so that the color will harmonize with the newly painted kitchen.

Checking up on the latest scientific investigations we find that there is no foundation for the argument that the combination of aluminum with certain foods causes digestive disturbances. This being true you may have no fear in using your aluminum ware and need not give this as a reason for discarding and buying new.

The health of your family is really not endangered if you are using some other pan than a waterless cooker in cooking your vegetables. Again it is true that the light weight waterless cooker produces as tasty and as nutritious a product as the very heavy and expensive cooker that is so highly advertised. Minerals and vitamins are not lost in the steam that escapes in the cooking process, and if very little water is used in cooking vegetables in the ordinary kettle or stew pan, and if this is allowed to boil down the vegetables will reabsorb most of the food stuffs lost in the cooking process.

Things to be Considered in your Equipment Program

The following are a few suggestions of items that might well be included in the list for the housewife who wishes to build up an efficient set of kitchen utensils. No tool or utensil is used more often than kitchen knives. They should be substantial and have a good cutting edge. Such knives are not often found at the ten cent store. Blades of stainless steel, bearing the stamp of a reliable manufacturer of cutlery will usually give satisfaction. The handles should be riveted firmly so that they will not warp. If a metal shield is attached where the blade fits into the handle, this shield should be soldered to the blade and morticed into the handle so that it will protect the handle from moisture.

A cheap can opener is an annoyance. It becomes dull in a short time and makes hard work of what might be a simple process. A can opener which fits into a wall bracket and operates by a crank, with a simple lever clamping the can and holding it in place during the cutting process, is the most satisfactory on the market.

Its increased cost is justified by its ease and simplicity in use.

A convenient knife sharpener may be had consisting of two metal or emery disks through which the knife blade is passed, drawing it down to a fine cutting edge. This sharpener may be attached to the cupboard or work table or is available with a handle attached and may be placed in a drawer when not in use.

The Household Tool Kit

A household tool kit may be a very helpful addition to some kitchens. This kit may be fitted into a shallow drawer or better still into a shallow cupboard built into the wall or taken from the end of the built-in kitchen cabinet with the door opening back against the wall. The tools may be held in place by spring brackets attached to the back of the cupboard.

To make storage simpler and the apprehension of lost tools easier it is well to paint the outline of the tool against the wall in the position where the tool is supposed to hang. A glance indicates whether the tools are all in place. This tool kit might consist of a claw hammer, a small, medium and large size screw driver, a monkey wrench, a pair of substantial six inch pliers, a chisel, tinnerns shears, a broad short blade putty knife, oil cans and an assortment of nails, screws, etc. Other tools may be added if the need exists. These tools should be of good quality and should be marked so that they may not become confused with the garage tools.

Suggestions in Pan Selection

Much time is saved in bringing foods to the boiling point if pans are provided with tightly fitted lids. Pans with broad bottoms and straight sides provide more rapid heating of the pan contents than a pan with small base and flaring sides. Pans with buckled bottoms preventing direct contact with the heating surface are a waste of time and fuel. In selecting small pans be sure that the weight of the handle does not overbalance the pan when it is empty. This is often true of light weight pans. In selecting baking pans keep in mind the size of your oven. Select sizes and shapes of pans that may be fitted together in your oven in preparing an oven meal. Care should be taken to avoid overcrowding of the oven. Proper air circulation must be provided around the sides of the oven and between and over the separate pans of food to insure good results in baking. There is a very substantial argument in favor of the steamer or waterless cooker which has a clamped lid with a steam vent. This particular type of kettle is equipped with a rack and pans to accommodate three different foods, a meat and two vegetables or a meat, a vegetable and a dessert. It requires very little attention and may take the place of one or two extra pans. The flat bottomed, straight sided pans that are known as fireless cooker kettles are very satisfactory pans for top burner cookery. The lids clamp tightly in place. The pans are a convenient size and the set of one large five or six quart pan and two smaller four quart pans make an efficient set for the farm kitchen. There is no greater loss of moisture from light weight aluminum ware than from heavy weight ware if both pans are provided with closely fitted lids. Increased durability and ease of cleaning are the main arguments in favor of the heavy aluminum ware.

Good Equipment and Efficient Methods Mean More Time and Energy for Other Things

It has been assumed in this discussion of equipment that the housewife has developed or is anxious to improve her methods of work in the kitchen routine. There is usually an opportunity for this even though the equipment situation may be either ideal or hopeless. However, with good equipment plus efficient methods the housewife may realize the satisfaction of doing each process well and in the easiest and quickest way possible thus leaving time for other things.