
tools for cooks

contents

introduction

There was a time not so very long ago when the home cook had to search for kitchen tools in dusty hardware shops or make do with the limited selection offered by department stores. If you were more enterprising, you could venture into one of those awe-inspiring but impersonal shops that supply chefs and caterers. Nowadays, the choice of kitchen tools and cookware has proliferated beyond belief. Along with cook books and TV cookery shows, there is an abundance of cookshops, specialist mail order companies and websites, from which an astonishing range of kitchenware can be purchased. Along with quantity, quality has improved too. Knives, pots and pans come in sleek designs and state-of-the-art materials.

While there is no shortage of choice, there is a lack of accessible information on how and what to choose. For example, how do you find out which type of knife should be used for a particular job? Should the blade be straight or curved, rigid or flexible, long or short? Why do some frying pans have lids? Why do some pans have long handles and others short? Is stainless steel better than cast iron?

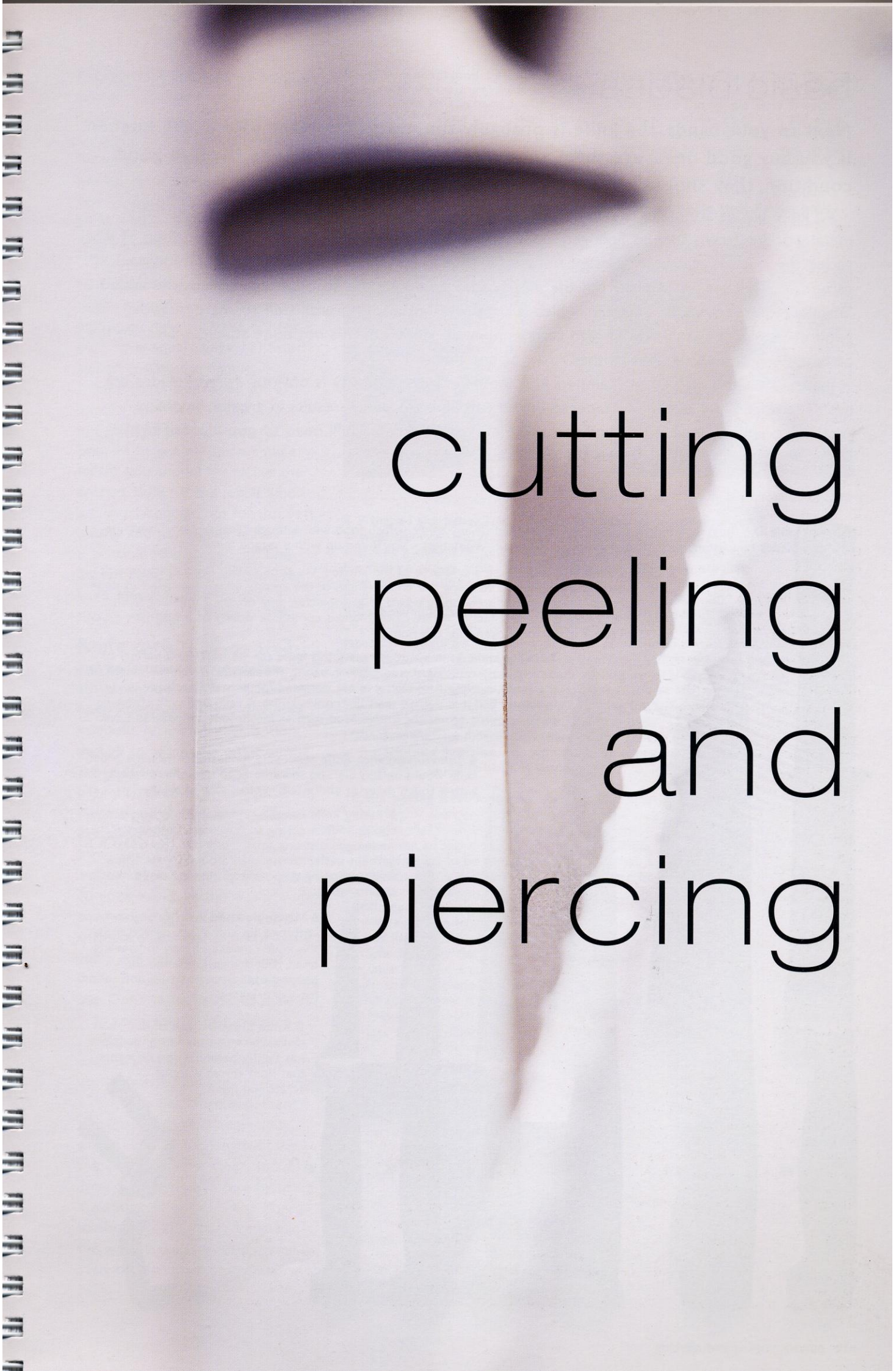
This book answers all these questions and many more. It provides essential information for evaluating and choosing new tools and cookware – whether it's a humble potato peeler or an expensive electric standing mixer. You'll find explanations of how tools work, if not obvious, and how to use them in the most efficient way. There is also a guide to the pros and cons of different materials and how to care for them. With this sort of information under your belt, you can make informed choices when you purchase equipment, and you will be able to cook with greater confidence and efficiency.

As well as detailed information on tools and cookware, the book includes mouth-watering recipes that put them to good use – several contributed by well-known chefs and food writers; the rest are my own.

I have not included every tool or piece of equipment, nor are all the items featured necessarily essential. The main criteria for inclusion were efficiency and comfort in use, durability in relation to cost and, finally, appearance. No matter how design-conscious a tool is, I find that function invariably wins out over style – in other words, if the shape of an item is determined by its use, it tends to be more credible than one that bows to the dictates of fashion. That said, I have included a few 'designer' items simply because they appeal. You will also find some ugly ducklings included for the same reason.

What you have in your kitchen is very much a personal choice, depending on how you live and what you like to cook. Build your 'batterie de cuisine' gradually, allowing it to evolve as your cooking style develops. I tend to use the same trusty old tools and pots and pans for years, but when my cooking changes in some way – perhaps as a result of foreign travel, or reading something inspiring, or discovering a new ingredient – I indulge in a new piece of equipment, and what a pleasure that is. It is always a joy to find a tool that makes preparation easier, or a pan that cooks more efficiently or one that is simply so pleasing that you never want to put it away.

Whether you are a novice or a proficient cook, I hope this book will inspire and inform, as well as open up the path to new and exciting culinary experiences.



cutting peeling and piercing

basic blades

Next to your hands, the knife is probably the most important tool in the kitchen. If you buy good ones, use them with care and respect, and keep them in good condition, they should last your entire cooking life.

All knife blades are made of steel, which is why, traditionally, they have been manufactured in metal-working towns such as Solingen in Germany and Sheffield in England. The composition of steel varies, the amount of carbon present determining the blade's ability to hold its edge. Traditional carbon-steel blades are sharper but the metal stains and corrodes so other agents must be added. 'Stainless' steel contains chromium, which is rustproof but also more difficult to sharpen. Today, good-quality knives are made of high-carbon, no-stain steel, which is not quite stainless. Despite the carbon element, these knives neither rust nor corrode.

Blades are either forged or stamped, and the difference in quality is obvious. Forged blades are evenly balanced and beautifully tapered at the cutting edge, which results in greater flexibility. A stamped-bladed knife is thin and flat, and feels handle-heavy. You'll need to grip it more tightly and exert more pressure towards the front to compensate.

1 Bread knife The long, serrated blade cuts through bread or any other softish food with a tough crust or skin. Don't use serrated blades for cutting meat or dense-fleshed fruit and vegetables – you'll end up with a jagged mess.

2 Cook's knife The undisputed workhorse of the kitchen, the cook's knife has a characteristically wide blade and a graceful curve along the entire length of the cutting edge – designed to cope with repeated impact against a chopping board. Use it for chopping or dicing anything from hefty lumps of meat to the finest of herbs. Cook's knives come in a variety of lengths; a 20–25cm blade is the most useful for the home.

3 Utility knife As its name suggests, this knife can be used for a variety of cutting jobs, including slicing, peeling, paring and, depending on the length of the blade, carving. Although it is not designed for impact (the blade is narrower and less curved than the cook's knife), it can cope with chopping small amounts of not-too-tough food such as mushrooms or prawns. Look for a knife with a 13–18cm blade.

4 Tomato/sandwich knife Invaluable for tasks for which a bread knife would be too big. The serrated edge is useful for slicing food with a tough exterior and a soft centre, such as salami.

5 Paring knife Basically a miniature version of the cook's knife, a paring knife is used for peeling, scraping and slicing small fruits and vegetables. It is perhaps easier to use than a cook's knife when finely chopping garlic and ginger. The blade must be short – about 8–10cm.

6 Vegetable knife With its slightly upturned tip and short, curved blade, this knife comes in handy for peeling small, round vegetables, and for gouging eyes from potatoes and seeds from courgettes.

7 Knife block Instead of the usual slots, which can be fiddly, this block has tightly packed nylon filaments that hold knives without scratching them.

Choosing knives

Choose knives individually – don't be tempted to buy sets. Hold a knife to assess it. It should feel heavy for its size and evenly weighted, neither front- nor back-heavy. Do not be put off by weight – a heavy knife is more effective than a light one, and requires less effort to use.

The handle of the knife should be comfortable to hold. If it has rivets, the tops should be smooth and flush. Make sure the bolster (see 'Knife speak', page 12) fuses smoothly with the handle.

Each knife is designed for a specific purpose, so think about the types of food you regularly prepare before making a choice. Ideally, you should try to use the correct knife for the job. If funds are short, though, opt for the best quality and have fewer knives. It is possible to manage with one decent cook's knife and a paring knife. However, the six basic knives shown will give you more scope.

Knife care

Store your knives in a knife block so the blades are protected and the knives are easily accessible. A wall-mounted magnetic rack is another option, though some people question the safety of these (see 'Knife safety', page 12). Don't store knives loose in a drawer, as the cutting edges can be damaged by impact with other knives and utensils.

Damage will be caused, too, by dumping knives in the washing-up bowl. Some of the better-quality knives are dishwasher-proof, but if yours are not, wash, rinse and dry them individually immediately after use. Don't leave knives to soak.

To keep your knives in prime condition, give each one a few strokes on a steel whenever you use it. Fast, flamboyant sharpening is not essential. More important is maintaining a 20° angle and sharpening the full length of the blade (see 'Using a steel', above). Treat the blade with care by using a wooden or polyethylene board to chop on. Don't use a plate or the work surface, as hard materials such as glass, granite or metal will harm the cutting edge.

Using a steel: method 1 Hold the steel vertically on a firm surface. Grasp the knife low on the handle, with the blade at a 20° angle to the steel. Bring the knife down and across the steel, drawing it to you so the tip meets the steel at the base. Reverse the action, holding the other side of the blade against the other side of the steel and pushing away from you. Repeat both actions until the blade is sharp.

Using a steel: method 2 Grasp the steel in one hand and the knife in the other. Place the handle ends of each together, with the blade at a 20° angle to the steel. Raise the elbows and part your hands so the blade travels up the steel, finishing with the tip of the blade against the steel. Repeat, holding the other side of the blade against the other side of the steel. Repeat both movements until the blade is sharp.

8 V-shaped sharpener The outer casing houses cunningly arranged, crossed pairs of steel rods set on springs and positioned at the 20° sharpening angle. The rods mimic the action of a conventional steel as the blade is drawn across them. This is a good tool for those who have difficulty using a steel.

9 Carborundum stone Carborundum is the trade name for a group of rock-hard abrasives, usually composed of silicon carbide. The stones are useful for smoothing out small scratches or indentations. The best ones have two grades of surface: fairly fine on one side and coarser on the other. Most stones are rectangular in shape, though the one shown here resembles a dumpy steel. To use a stone, first lubricate it with water or cooking oil. Holding the knife blade at a 15–20° angle to the stone, pass the length of the blade over the stone. Turn the knife over and repeat in the opposite direction. Repeat both movements several times until the blade is sharp.

10 Sharpening steel Somewhat surprisingly, a steel works not by sharpening, but by realigning the molecules that form the cuttting edge. They are knocked out of alignment by repeated chopping.

A steel needs to be made of a substance that is harder than the tool to be sharpened. Ceramic or diamond-coated steels are hardest of all. Traditional steels are cylindrical with grooves running along the length of the rod, but some are oval or flat and others still have smoother surfaces. The finer the surface, the keener will be the finish. Choose a steel with a shaft that is longer than the blade of your biggest knife.

This superb steel is diamond-coated and has a flat, relatively smooth surface, providing greater contact than a cylindrical steel.

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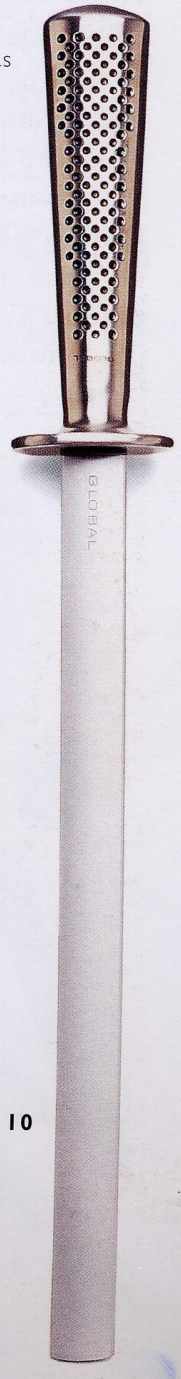

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beyond basics

As you become more experienced, you will undoubtedly want to add to your knife collection. The knives shown here are for specialist tasks or for dealing with specific foods. Some of them are expensive, but good knives are good to have, and once you've got them you can easily justify their existence. Buy oysters, eat grapefruit, or fillet your own fish....

Knife speak

O **Butt** The downward-curving tip of the handle. This cushions your hand against the impact of chopping.

O **Handle** The part attached to the tang. Make sure it feels comfortable and is neither too large nor too small for you to grip firmly.

O **Tang** The unsharpened part of the knife blade that extends into the handle. The longer the tang, the better balanced will be the knife.

O **Bolster** The splayed metal section on a forged blade that butts up flush to the handle. The bolster strengthens the blade and keeps your hand away from the cutting area.

O **Blade** The flattish part of the knife that forms the cutting edge.

Knife safety Knives are dangerous tools. That said, if they are treated with respect rather than with presumption, they will be less likely to cause accidents.

O *Never* test for sharpness by running your finger along the cutting edge. If you cannot resist touching the blade, brush your finger lightly *across* it.

O A sharp knife is safer than a blunt one. A blunt knife needs more pressure to cut and could slip.

O If you use a magnetic rack for storage, make sure it is out of reach of children and pets.

O Don't leave knives hidden under soapy water in the washing-up bowl.

O Don't use a knife with a greasy handle.

O If you leave a knife on the work surface, ensure that neither the handle nor blade protrude over the edge. The knife could easily be grabbed by a child or knocked onto the floor or, worse still, onto someone's foot.

1 Chopping boards Wood is the preferred material for most chopping, but is not recommended for raw poultry as it cannot be sterilized. It is attractive, easy to care for and least damaging to knife blades. Choose the sturdiest board you can find, preferably at least 4cm thick. This one has cleated ends to prevent warping and cracking.

Polyethylene boards, though less pleasing visually, have an advantage over wood in that they can be sterilized with bleach or boiling water – essential after preparing raw poultry. They are also dishwasher-proof. The rough-textured surface prevents both the food and the board from slipping, while a groove around the perimeter helps to stop any liquid from overflowing.

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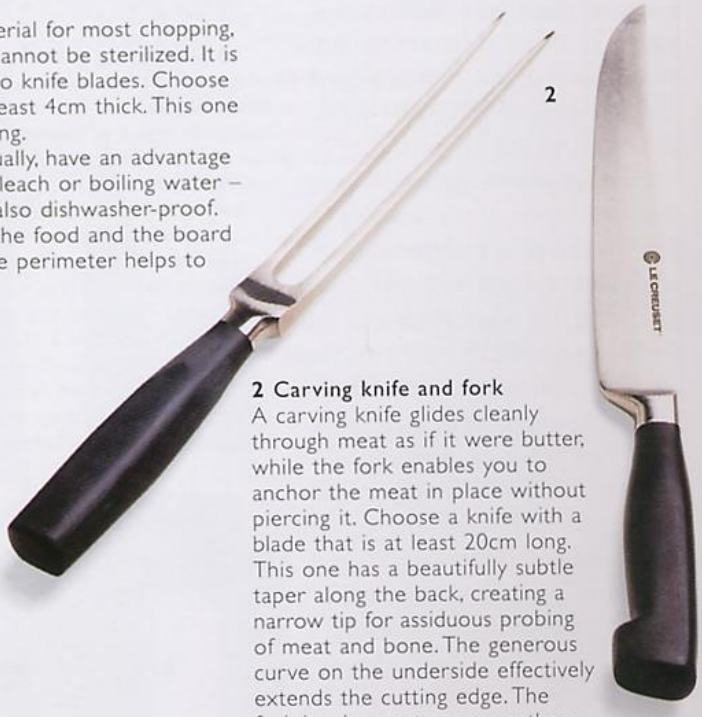

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2 Carving knife and fork A carving knife glides cleanly through meat as if it were butter, while the fork enables you to anchor the meat in place without piercing it. Choose a knife with a blade that is at least 20cm long. This one has a beautifully subtle taper along the back, creating a narrow tip for assiduous probing of meat and bone. The generous curve on the underside effectively extends the cutting edge. The fork has bayonet prongs, rather than the curved type that follow more closely the contours of the meat. Press the sides of the prongs firmly down on the meat to hold it while you carve.

3 Ham/smoked salmon slicer This is used for carving thin, elongated slices. The blade is narrow and reasonably flexible, and must be at least 25cm in length. It has a very slight taper through its thickness, enabling you to produce impressively straight slices, rather than veering diagonally off-course – an effect caused by a more pronounced taper.

4 Freezer knife A freezer knife is not wholeheartedly recommended, as food texture and appearance may suffer if you hack at it while still frozen – it is better to let food defrost before cutting. If you do buy one, a strong, deeply toothed blade is a must. The blade should be longer than the largest item you are likely to cut.

5 Filleting knife This elegant knife has a thin, gently curved blade, which is sufficiently pliable to remain in close contact with the contours of fish or poultry. The blade needs to be at least 18cm long, and should be kept scrupulously sharp in order to do its job.

6 Boning knife A boning knife has a tapered blade with a sharp point. Blades are flexible or rigid, and 1.5–2.5cm in width. A wide, rigid blade is good for a large cut of meat with simple bones, while a narrow, flexible blade copes with poultry or fish.

7 'Universal' cheese knife The blade of this knife has holes that prevent cheese from sticking to it, while the serrated cutting edge copes with hard cheese. The forked tip assists with transferring cheese to a plate.

8 Parmesan knife The rigid, leaf-shaped blade of this dumpy little knife prizes chunks from hard cheeses such as Parmesan. Embed it in the cheese and twist.

9 Grapefruit knife The long, thin, serrated blade, with a curved tip, neatly cuts between the pith and flesh, following the contours of the fruit.

10 Oyster knife Two short, arrow-shaped cutting edges prize open the shell, breaking its vacuum. The guard at the hilt protects the hand and also prevents the knife from thrusting into the shell and out the other side. The pointed tip is used to sever the oyster meat from the shell.

11 Cleaver Equally useful for demolishing bones or shredding spring onions, the blade of the cleaver is thick and rigid throughout most of its width, before tapering abruptly to a sharp bevel. The greater the weight, the less effort required, so buy the heaviest cleaver you can use with comfort. A 15cm blade is about the right length. This modern-style cleaver has a seamless blade and handle, which makes it easy to clean. Use the hole to hang your cleaver on the wall out of harm's way.

Japanese knives

12 Sometimes called a sashimi knife, the long yanagi is single-bevelled like the deba (see below). The blade glides through raw fish, producing immaculately straight, paper-thin slices for sushi. The knife is also used to slice and chop vegetables, and to produce intricate oriental garnishes.

13 Somewhat surprisingly, the medium-length, wide-bladed deba is used for the delicate task of boning and filleting fish. This is made possible by Japanese-style grinding, in which the blade is bevelled over a wide area on one side and the opposite side is left flat. This creates a razor-sharp, acutely angled cutting edge that slips effortlessly between flesh and bone.

more cutting tools

These tools are designed to ease fiddly or time-consuming food preparation tasks, such as slicing, chopping, shredding and peeling. The end result is usually neater than it would be if you had not used the tool. These are not mere gadgets; they've all been around for years and have proved their worth.

Vegetable peelers
1 Practical and economical, the all-metal swivel peeler has a central slot that is wide and long enough not to trap peelings. The slot is sharpened on both sides, so it suits both left- and right-handed users. The swivel action enables the tool to follow more accurately the contours of the item being peeled, reducing wastage.
2 Instantly recognizable by its string-wrapped handle, this traditional British peeler has a V-shaped blade with a narrow slot, which can become clogged. The sharpened tip digs out blemishes.
3 This smart Y-shaped peeler was originally designed for the manually disabled. It has a swivel blade and the handle is made of a non-slip rubber and polypropylene composite. The extra thickness makes it easier to grip.

4 Canelle knife or lemon stripper A protruding, V-shaped tooth gouges out thin lengths of peel from citrus fruits. The knife can also be used to cut narrow grooves from unpeeled cucumbers or mushrooms, creating a scalloped edge when the vegetables are sliced. The tool shown is for right-handed use only, though left-handed models are available.

5 Citrus zester Five sharp-edged holes set into an angled blade tip produce flavoursome wisps of citrus zest to use for decorating cakes and desserts. The blade's shallow angle ensures that it cuts only into the zest, or outer surface of the peel, rather than into the bitter pith.

Bean slicers
8 The small plastic slicer works like magic on runner beans, simultaneously removing the strings and slicing the bean into spaghetti-like strands. Simply insert a bean into the hole and push it through the four blades. When it emerges, grasp the end and pull. Beans need to be crisp and firm, and the tool is practical for small amounts only.
9 This sturdy, cast-iron slicer is useful for processing large quantities of any type of bean. Beans are fed through slots into the path of three very sharp blades set into a disc that revolves as you turn the crank handle. They emerge as paper-thin, diagonally cut slices with no evidence of stringiness. One possible drawback is that the clamp cannot be attached to a work surface that is thicker than 3cm.

6 Pizza wheel When it comes to dividing up pizza, the pizza wheel outclasses even the sharpest knife. The wobble-free, circular blade carves cleanly through topping and crust, giving neat, manageable slices. The guard protects your fingers from slipping onto the blade.

7 Cheese plane This efficient tool was originally designed for shaving wafer-thin slices from Scandinavian cheeses too pungent to be eaten in larger amounts. The angled cutting edge guides slices through a slot and onto the spade-shaped blade. The blade supports the cheese and stops it from splitting as it is transported to your plate.

10 Hard-boiled egg slicer Ten taut wires attached to a frame cut cleanly and evenly through white and yolk. Since the wires do not drag, the yolk does not crumble.

Mandolin

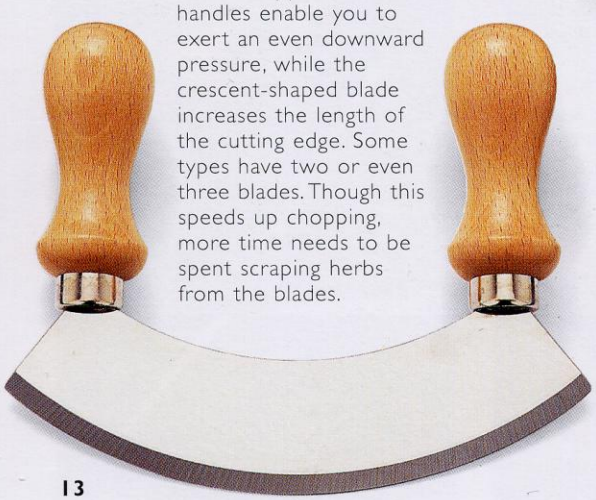
11 The stainless steel and black fibreglass model zips through vegetables with the utmost precision. Depending on the shape and position of the blade, you can quickly cut any firm vegetable into slices, matchsticks, waffles or ripples. Just hold the piece of vegetable firmly and pass it across the blades. There are alternative blades, and an adjustable gauge determines thickness of cut. Rubber feet hold it safely in place, and a guard protects your fingers. However, it is expensive.

12 Much cheaper, but altogether cruder, is the wooden mandolin. Though it has drawbacks – namely a tendency to warp, and a lack of supporting feet – it is a classic and, unless you want one hundred per cent precision, it does the job perfectly well.

11

12

13 Mezzaluna Used mainly for cutting herbs, the mezzaluna ('half-moon' in Italian) works on the same principle as a cook's knife – a curved blade rocks back and forth over the material to be chopped. The two handles enable you to exert an even downward pressure, while the crescent-shaped blade increases the length of the cutting edge. Some types have two or even three blades. Though this speeds up chopping, more time needs to be spent scraping herbs from the blades.



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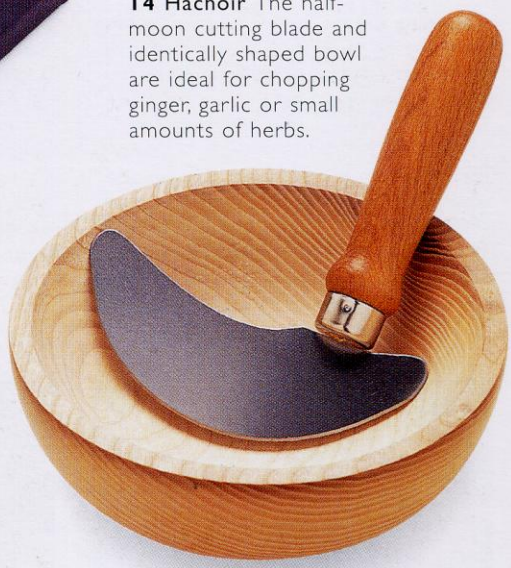
14 Hachoir The half-moon cutting blade and identically shaped bowl are ideal for chopping ginger, garlic or small amounts of herbs.



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15 Chip cutter This is the tool for those who prefer regimented chips to homely hand-cut ones. Push down the handle to force a peeled potato through a cutting grid. Alternative grids provide a choice of chip sizes, ranging from fat to thin.

15

16 Fish tweezers These tweezers alleviate the anxiety that sometimes accompanies eating fish. The 15.5cm shafts terminate in rounded tips that are ridged on the inner sides. When clamped together, there is enough surface area to grasp and tweeze out lurking bones.

16

17

17 Fish scaler The underside of this solid aluminium tool is covered with close-set, sharp-edged studs that catch on the scales, lifting and ripping them out as you pass the scaler over the fish. If possible, descale your fish before gutting it – the fish will be firmer and rounder, and therefore easier to manipulate.

tools for shearing and piercing

Scissors and shears cut cleanly, leaving no jagged edges. Many people prefer to use scissors instead of a knife, as more muscular control can be exercised when cutting, and fingers are kept safely out of the way of the blades. A strong pair of kitchen scissors can be used for a range of tasks, such as cutting paper and string, trimming fins from fish and tips from artichokes, snipping herbs and bacon rind, and cutting dried fruit into bite-size chunks. If they are sturdy enough, kitchen scissors will even sever poultry, though poultry shears make lighter work of it.

There are numerous occasions when food or certain types of container need to be pierced, and there are a variety of tools designed to do the job. Basic piercing tools such as skewers and corkscrews are essential kitchen kit. However, some tools are so specialist they border on mirth-provoking; others still are so flimsily made they aren't worth kitchen drawer space. But there are surprises – you'll often find you get attached to a tool and it becomes indispensable.

1 Kitchen shears The blades of these neat, all-purpose shears have a notch for cutting through poultry joints, while various parts of the handle can be used for opening jars and bottles, prizing off lids, and as a screwdriver. The shears can be taken apart for washing and are dishwasher proof.

2 Kitchen scissors These differ from household scissors in having longer blades, and one is usually serrated, making it easier to cut chicken or fish. The best scissors have forged blades and are made of stainless steel, which will not rust. Choose a pair with a screw rather than a rivet, so you can take the blades apart for cleaning or sharpening. Check handles for comfort.

3 Poultry shears These shears easily sever bones, sinew and flesh. The blades are curved and pointed for intricate cutting, and a notch holds bones firmly during cracking. The strong spring kicks the handles apart, but it is a trap for raw poultry juices and needs thorough cleaning after use. A hook holds the handles together during storage.

Corers
To use a corer, push the circular cutting edge vertically through the middle of a fruit or vegetable, then withdraw it, bringing the core out in the cylinder. If you veer from the vertical, remnants of pip and core will be left embedded in the flesh, as they will if the core's diameter is greater than the cylinder's.

4 The shorter apple corer works reasonably well on apples and pears but is not suitable for anything longer.

5 To core courgettes, aubergines and other elongated vegetables, you will need the longer vegetable corer.

6 Pineapple corer/slicer This tool does work, but it is probably worth buying only if you eat pineapples on a regular basis. Slice the top off the pineapple, then wind the slicer down over the core. When it reaches the bottom, pull upwards and out will come a continuous spiral of pineapple flesh, devoid of unwelcome brown spots. The shell remains intact, ready for retro dishes such as pineapple boats.

7 Melon baller The melon baller is useful for occasions when neat spheres of melon are preferable to rough-cut chunks. To use the baller, press it deep into the flesh until juice flows from the hole in the base of the bowl. Then twist and remove. Some ballers have a smaller scoop at the other end, for removing shallow flesh close to the rind.

8 Cherry pitter There are times when the effort of pitting cherries is either worth it or necessary: for example, when making a cherry pie, when bottling and pickling cherries, or when feeding the very young. Though still laborious, the process is speeded up by a pitter, which also does the job neatly.

Load the cherries into the sloping tray, where they are funnelled one by one into a stoning cradle. When you work the plunger, a metal rod pierces the fruit and removes the stone. The stone drops into the plastic container and the fruit falls into a bowl placed in front of the pitter. The tool also works reasonably well on olives.

1

1 Standing mixer A classic mixer for the serious home baker, this machine has a 4 litre stainless-steel bowl that holds 2.25kg of ingredients. The rotary head 'moves like Elvis', gyrating from the inside to the outside of the bowl in a series of circles, drawing in every scrap of mixture from the sides and base, and mixing it quickly, evenly and thoroughly. The mixer has three basic attachments – a wire whip, a flat beater and a dough hook – as well as numerous optional extras for a wide variety of tasks.

2 Food processor The food processor has become a near-necessity in the modern kitchen. The S-shaped blade effectively chops meat, vegetables and fruit; makes breadcrumbs; mixes dough; purées soups; and whisks dressings. Alternative cutting discs can be fitted to grate, shred and slice.

Choose a processor with the largest container you can find. If the container sits on top of the motor, make sure it is not too tall to fit between the work surface and high-level cupboards. If space is tight, choose a processor with the container set next to the motor.

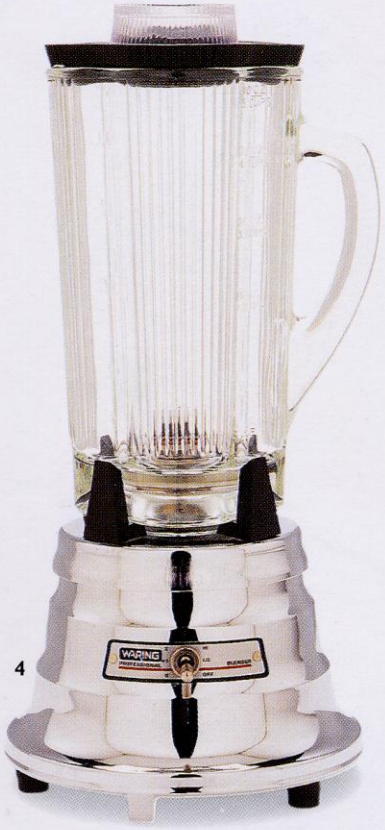
Though it is useful, the processor is not without drawbacks. Pieces of food tend to get stuck between the grating disk and the lid. It is not recommended for chopping herbs, and cannot be used for processing small quantities of food. If the mixture is not sufficiently liquid, the sides of the container will need to be continually scraped down.

2

3 Stick blender Even lighter and more compact than a hand-held mixer, a stick blender is useful for blending small portions of food and frothing up liquids – though for some tasks a whisk would be just as good.

This model is sold with a useful mixing beaker, the diameter of which is slightly larger than that of the blades. This means that even a very small amount of food will come above the top of the blades, so it is ideal for making baby food. A whisk and a chopping attachment are also supplied.

4 Blender A kitchen classic, this deco blender has a powerful two-speed motor and a large, heat-resistant goblet. It blends, mixes and juices, whizzing up the smoothest of smoothies, velvety sauces, soups, purées and crushed ice. With its small diameter, the goblet keeps food within reach of the short, straight blades, so you don't have to keep stopping and stirring. Though a blender copes with smaller amounts of food than a processor, there must be enough to cover the blades. You will also need to add liquid, otherwise the food at the top will not be blended.



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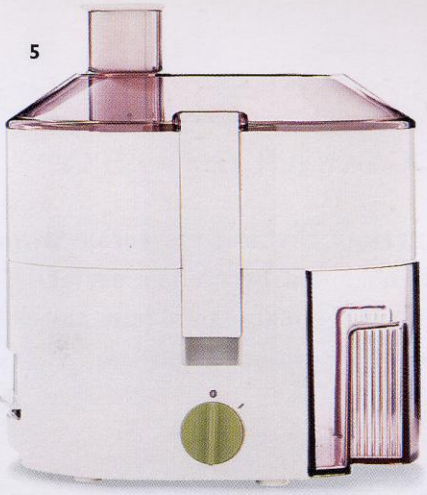

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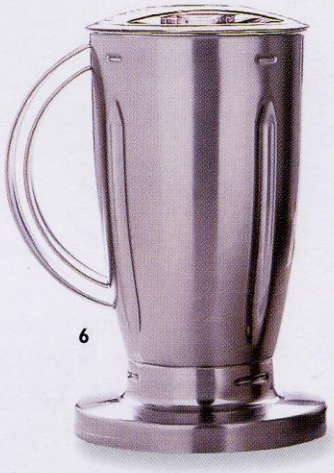
5 Juicer This machine transforms fruit and vegetables into pulp-free, health-promoting juice. Peeled fruit or vegetables are pushed into the filling shaft set over a rotating cutting disc. The disc reduces fibres to pulp, from which juice is extracted by centrifugal force through a fine mesh. The pulp remains behind while the juice drips into an integral container that also serves as a pouring jug. The only drawback is that the mesh needs a good scrub to clear it of pulp.

6 Multipurpose kitchen machine This revolutionary machine has a compact motorized base with a universal coupling device to which various attachments are easily fitted. The machine therefore combines several machines in one – the only drawback is its price. The basic model is supplied with a mixing bowl only, which has as accessories a lid, dough hook, double beater and bowl scraper. The more expensive model comes with a blender and food processor, as well as the mixing bowl. Optional extras for both models include a mincer, a continuous shredder and a grain mill.



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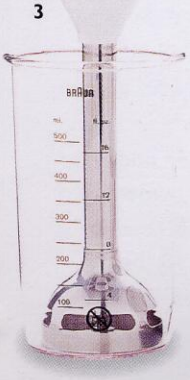
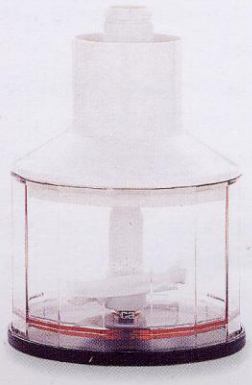
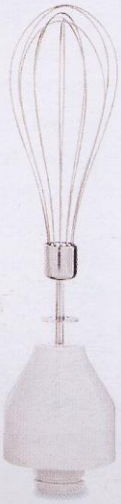
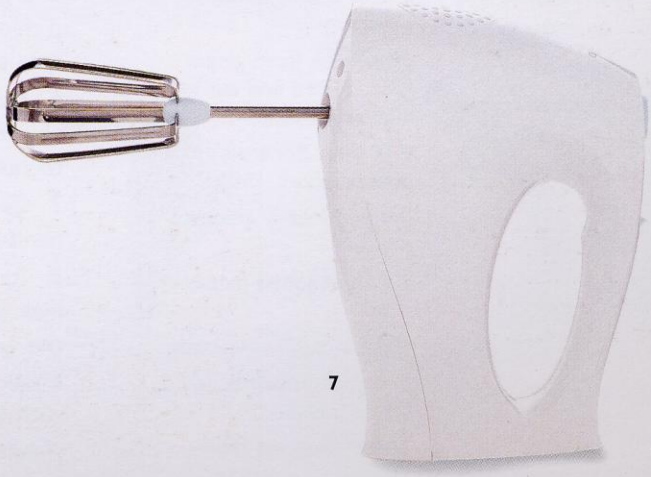






7 Hand-held mixer Lightweight and compact, the hand-held machine is good for mixing relatively small amounts. The two overlapping steel beaters whisk egg whites into snowy clouds, whip cream and emulsify sauces. You can also use the mixer for creaming butter and sugar, though the beaters get clogged up. Unlike the standing mixer, the hand-held version allows you to control the position of the beaters. You can move them over the edge and base of the mixing bowl so everything is evenly mixed. A switch enables you to alter the speed while mixing.



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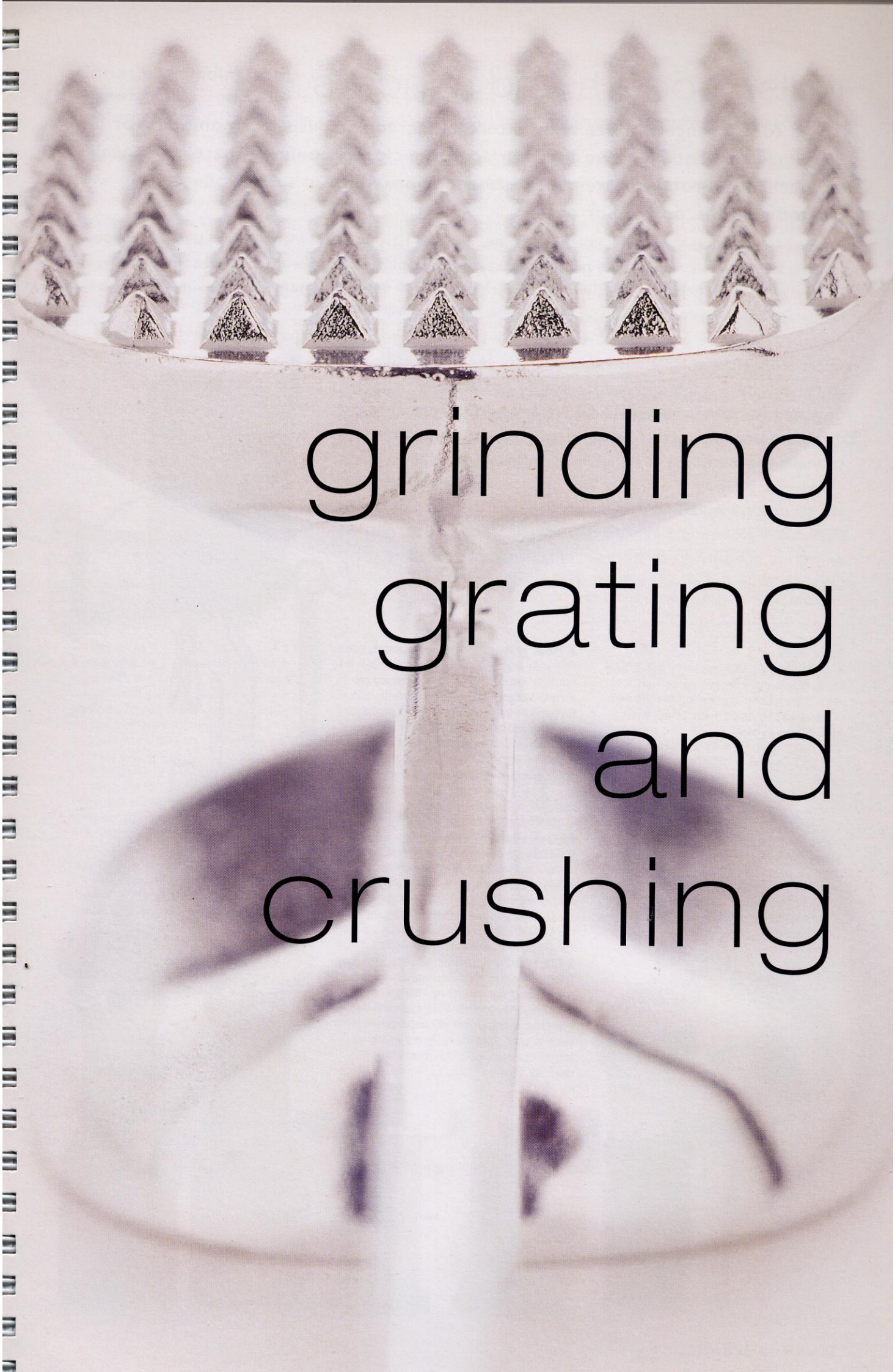


grinding grating and crushing

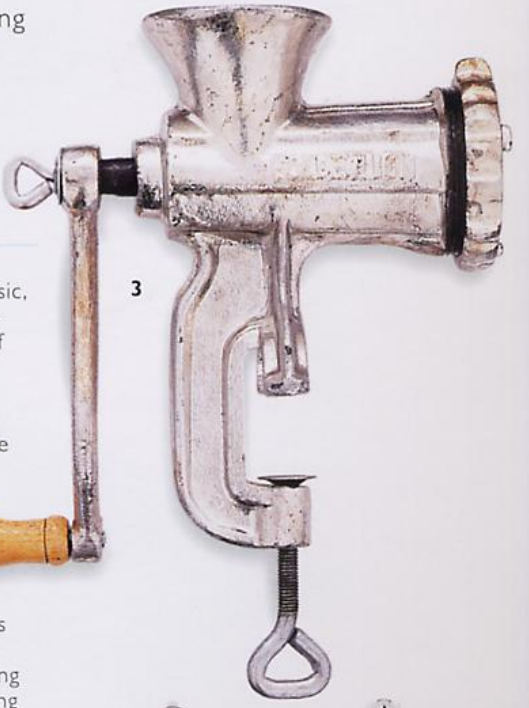
mills, mortars and mincers

These tools change the size and texture of ingredients, usually by abrading or crushing them between two hard surfaces in a closely confined space. A manual or mechanized rotary movement causes friction, which in turn produces the desired grounds, powder or paste.

Using tools of this sort will immeasurably improve the flavour of your cooking, as they allow you to use raw materials rather than processed travesties. Think of the difference between freshly ground black pepper and the brown dust which passes for ready-ground pepper; or between the heady aroma of freshly ground spices and commercial curry powder.

Once crushed or ground, hard-coated ingredients such as coffee beans, peppercorns and other spices release the volatile oils responsible for their distinctive flavours. When they are exposed to the atmosphere, the oils quickly oxidize and lose their pungency. Similarly, the fat in ground or grated Parmesan cheese will oxidize and become rancid before long, and a piece of meat will deteriorate rapidly once ground, because the much greater surface area increases its exposure to the atmosphere and to harmful organisms.

Tools for grinding and grating are therefore invaluable, enabling you to process ingredients at exactly the right moment for maximum flavour and minimum deterioration. Some tools not only grind but also act as storage containers, protecting the contents from the effects of light and air.



3

Spice mills

1 Liven up your curries with this fifties-style, black-and-chrome spice mill. Its rock-hard ceramic grinding mechanism is designed to cope with dried herbs and spices, as well as salt and pepper. The mechanism is fully adjustable for fine and coarse grinds. To maintain its jazzy good looks, however, the mill needs to be kept scrupulously clean.

2 Less glamorous but equally durable is the Crushgrind® spice mill. It, too, has a ceramic grinding mechanism, but there is no adjustment facility. Even so, the mill does its job remarkably well, and looks no less presentable even after a stint in the kitchen. It is sold either as an empty container or filled with interesting spice blends.

3 Meat grinder A true kitchen classic, this cast-iron, hand-cranked grinder funnels meat into the spiral shaft of a revolving screw. From there, it is forced through rotating blades and finally through a perforated cutting disc. Alternative cutting discs can be fitted to regulate the fineness or coarseness of the end product.

Pepper and salt mills

4 These stylish, polished metal mills have a pull-down 'laundry chute' refilling system that saves unscrewing and dismantling the top. The grinding mechanism, made from high-quality hardened steel, adjusts to produce a range of fine and coarse grounds.

5 Designed in a classic hourglass shape, these wooden mills have a chromed steel band for adjusting the grounds from fine to coarse. The stainless-steel grinding mechanism is constructed in such a way that there is no metal-to-metal contact, and it is therefore unlikely to wear out.

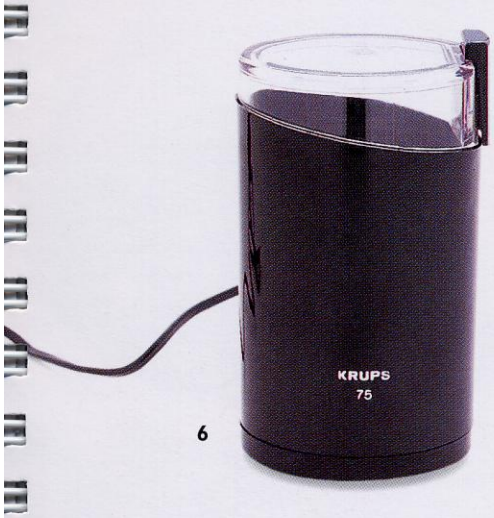
1 2 4 5

Choosing grinding tools

A pepper mill is a must. Choose one that holds at least three tablespoons of peppercorns, or you will be constantly refilling it. The best mills allow you to control the size of the grounds. Invariably sold as a pair with a pepper mill, a salt mill is useful if you live in a humid climate where caking is likely to be a problem.

No kitchen should be without a pestle and mortar. They perform a variety of tasks – grinding spices, making pesto, crushing garlic, for example – and so reduce the need for several different tools. If you like coffee, a coffee mill will give you the unbeatable aroma and flavour of the drink made with freshly ground beans.

The other mills are a matter of personal choice. Whether you need them depends on how often you use an ingredient, and whether you prefer a mill or a grater. If you regularly use ground meat, for example to make burgers or terrines, it's worth buying a meat grinder. Yes, you have to clamp it to a table and wash the parts after use, but it repays the effort. You can choose a decent cut of meat, there is no risk of contamination from meat that has previously passed through the grinder, and you can add your own seasonings.



6

Mill maintenance

O Use a pepper mill for pepper and a salt mill for salt. If you use salt in a pepper mill it will corrode the metal grinding mechanism. (A salt mill's mechanism is usually made from a non-corroding material such as nylon.)

O Lubricate the top of the spindle, where it meets the adjusting screw, with a drop of cooking oil. This will prevent rusting and keep the thread in good working order.

O Don't mill over open pans as steam causes rusting and dampens the grounds, which can clog up the mechanism. It's better to mill into a large spoon or over a plate or piece of paper, then tip the grounds into the pan.

O Keep mill bodies clean by wiping with a damp cloth. Rub wooden mills with vegetable oil occasionally to prevent the wood from drying out.

Coffee mills

6 Working on the same principle as a blender, the two-armed blade of this electric mill pulverizes coffee beans in seconds. Though it is compact and easy to use, the grounds are uneven in size and you have to guess how long to whizz for. It is also noisy. Coffee mills that produce uniform grounds have grinding wheels rather than blades. They will satisfy purists, but are more complex to use and take up more space.

7 A more leisurely way of grinding beans is with a hand-cranked coffee mill. As you turn the handle, the beans are fed into the hopper and through the metal grinding mechanism. The coffee grounds drop into the receiving drawer below. Based on a traditional design, this clear perspex mill allows you to see the beans being ground. It produces reasonable results, but the grounds are quite coarse.

Pestles and mortars

10 This solid metal pestle and mortar is designed primarily for grinding seeds and spices. The interior of the mortar has a flat base and straight, outwardly sloping sides, instead of the usual rounded bowl shape. The flat-tipped pestle mirrors the shape of the mortar and so maximizes the surface area available for grinding.

11 The ceramic mortar has a slightly abrasive, unglazed surface that grinds both dry and moist ingredients. Smooth mortars made from marble or glazed ceramic should have a ground surface on the inside, otherwise dry foods will slide over the surface.

12 The Japanese mortar (suribachi) has a characteristically wide, shallow bowl, with an interior covered with unglazed ridges running in different directions. Used with the broad-tipped wooden pestle (surikogi), it efficiently grinds oily seeds and raw chopped fish or poultry to a coarse paste.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Nutmeg and Parmesan mills

These mills enable you to use up the last fragment of nutmeg or cheese without grating your fingertips.

8 The stainless-steel Parmesan mill will also grind nutmeg and cheese.

9 The chrome and acrylic nutmeg mill stores up to four additional nutmegs.

1 Porcelain grater This thick, flat porcelain grater (oroshigane) from Japan is a pleasure to use. Instead of perforations, it has rows of pyramid-like teeth angled in two directions. Used for ginger root and daikon radish, the resulting pulp is moist, flavourful and not at all fibrous. The grater can also be used for nutmeg.

2 Citrus grater Made of acid-resistant stainless steel, the lemon grater has very fine perforations. This enables you to grate the zest, or outer surface of the rind, without taking up any of the bitter pith.

3 Flat graters Flat graters are easy to store. It is better to buy two or three with different cutting surfaces, rather than a single flat grater with several grades, as the area of each will be small. The fine holes of the top grater are ideal for grating hard and semi-hard cheeses. The middle grater has very small toothed rectangular perforations that work in both directions. They reduce dense-fleshed fruit and vegetables such as apples and carrots to a sweet, moist pulp – perfect baby food or muesli topping. The third grater has coarser holes for grating root vegetables.

7 Rotary grater Ideal for thrifty cooks and for children, the rotary grater deals with scraps of cheese and can also be used for carrots, nuts and chocolate. There is no risk of grating your fingertips as the food is pressed against the rotating drum by a wide covering plate at the end of the upper handle. Extra cylinders provide a choice of perforation sizes.

4 Box grater A box grater provides the greatest choice of cutting surfaces, ranging from very fine to coarse. It also has a slot for slicing cucumbers or shaving Parmesan. The rectangular base makes the grater self-supporting, which allows you to exert downward pressure more easily. The disadvantage is that the boxy shape makes it awkward to remove the raspings from the inside. This grater is also bulky to store and may not fit easily into a drawer.

5 Microplane® grater This state-of-the-art grater has rows of minute, ultra-sharp blades that cut food precisely and cleanly with no shredding, tearing or clogging. No pressure is required from the user. It has two drawbacks: the price, and the fact that you have to buy two graters if you want a choice of fine and coarse perforations.

6 Nutmeg grater Freshly grated nutmeg has a much better taste and aroma than the pre-ground sort, so it is worth investing in a special grater or mill. The nutmeg grater has very fine perforations and a curved surface, both of which reduce the risk of grated fingertips.

mashers, crushers and crackers

These invaluable tools break down the texture of raw or cooked food so that it becomes more palatable. They tenderize tough fibres such as those in raw meat, pierce thick skins, smash impenetrable nuts or lobsters and produce delectable mashes and purées. These tools are not mere gadgets. They have stood the test of time and they do their job efficiently and well. Although their basic structure and function have not altered through the ages, many of these items are produced in stylish modern designs that complement today's kitchens.

1 Tomato press
A good old-fashioned machine that conveniently separates juice and pulp from seeds and peel. As you turn the handle, the flanged drum catches and traps halved tomatoes, pressing them onto a perforated plate that funnels the liquid down a chute. A second flange sweeps the solids towards another chute. It is not very easy to clean, but well worth having if your garden produces a fair-sized tomato harvest.

2 Meat mallet/tenderizer
This hefty lump of cast aluminium is used for pounding and tenderizing meat. The notches on one side break down the fibres; the smooth side bashes the meat flat.

3 Garlic press This sleek, space-age garlic press works in exactly the same way as a traditional one. A flat-faced pusher forces peeled or unpeeled garlic through the holes in the bowl of the press. Some presses have an extra protuberance and bowl for pitting olives or cherries, for example. Others have a spiked self-cleaning device that pushes out every bit of debris from the holes.

4 Vegetable press The wide, gently curved, perforated surface is rocked over soft-textured vegetables and fruit, reducing them to a rough pulp. The wooden handles on this one make the press comfortable to hold and help to exert downward pressure, but the receiving bowl needs to be wide and shallow so the handles do not hit the sides. Some models have a U-shaped handle, which is less comfortable to hold but perhaps more convenient.

5 Food mill Used for mincing fruit and vegetables, this mill has different-textured metal sieving discs that fit in the base. A metal blade on top of the disc forces the food through as you turn the handle. The texture of the food depends on whether you use a disc with fine, medium or coarse perforations. There is even a small model for puréeing baby foods.

6 Potato ricer The potato ricer makes lumpy mash a thing of the past. Peeled, boiled potato is squeezed through a mesh of tiny holes to emerge looking like grains of soft rice. The ricer can be used for mashing all kinds of root vegetables and cooked apples too.

7 Potato masher The potato masher breaks down lumps as you pound. Its main advantage is that potatoes can be mashed in the pan in which they were cooked. Like the potato ricer, it can be used to mash any kind of starchy root vegetable or dense-fleshed cooked fruit.

Nutcrackers

8 The hinged cone nutcracker is designed to accommodate a variety of nuts, both large and small. Furrowed gripping surfaces hold the nuts firmly in place while you crack them open.

9 The ratchet cracker does all the work for you. Simply place the nut between the ratchet and the top of the crackers and work the ratchet up with the lever until the shell cracks and falls apart.

10 The hinged pincer type requires some pressure to use but the pleasure of extracting a whole kernel is worth the effort.

11 Lobster/crab crackers
Resembling lobster claws, these crackers work in the same way as hinged nutcrackers. The inside edges are ridged so you can grip unyielding lobster or crab claws firmly enough to crack them.

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Citrus presses

12 This sturdy little, cone-shaped press is ideal for limes or small lemons. It squeezes out every drop of juice minus the pips, and also squeezes out oils, giving the juice a more intense flavour. The press has a special silicone coating to prevent corrosion and discolouration from fruit acid.

13 A chrome body and an easy-to-grip matt black handle are an update on the time-honoured wooden reamer. The tapered tip penetrates the flesh while the furrows crush and squeeze out the juice as the cone is turned. The reamer literally screws the juice out of half lemons or limes.

14 This glass lemon squeezer is of a traditional design. Place halved fruit over the dome and then press and twist to extract the juice. The pointed teeth arranged around the base of the dome prevent pips from trespassing into the juice-collecting gutter.

15 This magnificent, tall, chrome citrus press is for serious juicing. Place half an orange or large lemon in the press, pull down the handle and the geared mechanism will extract every drop of juice from the fruit.

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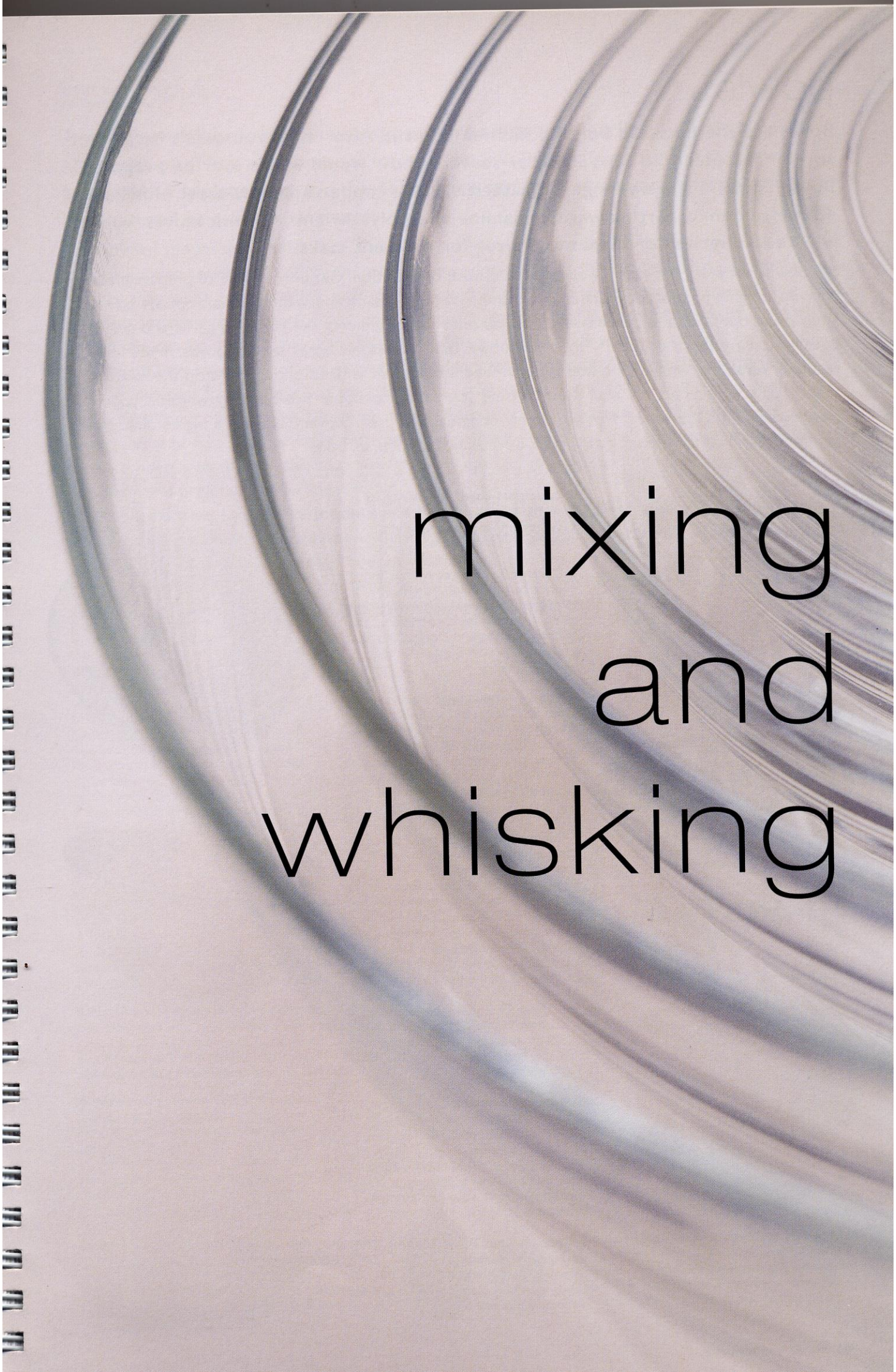

mixing
and
whisking

1

1 Basic glass bowl This plain glass bowl has a rolled rim for easy pouring. It comes with a plastic lid and is available in several sizes.

2

2 Duralex 9-piece set A bowl for every occasion, made from heat-tempered, oven- and microwave-proof glass. Use them for preparation, cooking, serving and storing. This is a useful set to have if your storage space is limited.

3

3 Stainless-steel bowls Stainless-steel is the ideal material for food preparation bowls as it is resistant to acid and is not tainted by smells. Pristine, shiny and indestructible, these bowls are so elegant you won't want to put them away. Use them for preparation, serving and storage.

4

4 Copper bowl An essential piece of equipment for meringue makers, this bowl transforms egg whites into billowing clouds of stable foam like no other bowl, thanks to the alchemy that takes place between copper and egg whites (see 'miraculous meringue', page 49). The sloping sides and rounded base make for effortless whisking, while the bowl's generous diameter allows for rapid expansion of foam. The most useful size is about 30cm in diameter. Make sure your bowl has a rolled rim to keep its shape, and a hook so you can show it off on the wall.

5

5 Melamine bowl Rigid, tough and practically unbreakable, melamine makes ideal bowl material. This one is gleamingly smooth, with a handy pouring lip and a rubber-rimmed base that prevents slipping. It is available in three sizes and a range of cheerful colours.

6

6 Ceramic bowl This traditional mixing bowl is made of glazed ceramic. The flattened area on the side keeps the bowl steady when it is tilted at an angle as you beat.

spoons

Together with bowls and knives, spoons are among the earliest and most basic kitchen tools. They are essential for any job involving mixing, and in many ways are simply a replacement for the hand. They stir, beat, scoop and scrape, and can also be used as a measuring tool.

Wooden spoons are a must. They are strong, inflexible and poor conductors of heat. You can leave a wooden spoon in a pan of simmering soup without fear of the handle heating up; nor will it bend or snap while you stir dense mixtures such as fruit cake. The curved back of a wooden spoon is perfect for pressing moisture out of cooked spinach, and for pushing soft fruit through a sieve. The handle can be used for moulding shaped biscuits such as brandy snaps or cannoli.

Though they may look somewhat crude, wooden spoons are subtly designed to perform a range of different tasks, so it is worth collecting a variety of sizes and shapes. Keep your spoons within easy reach of the stove. Those made from hardwoods, such as beech or boxwood, are strong and taint-free. Pine or other softwoods can impart a resinous smell to food, and they also have a tendency to splinter and crack. Always wash and dry wooden spoons thoroughly after you use them, and preferably allow them to air.

A long-handled, large metal spoon is another must. The thin edge delicately cuts through airy mixtures such as whisked egg whites so they don't collapse as you fold in other ingredients. Use a metal spoon also for basting meat – the long handle will protect you from the heat – and for serving rice – the thin edge will not break up delicate grains as you scoop them up. Buy a spoon that you can hang on a hook, ready for its thousand and one uses.

Wooden spoons
1 A spoon with a straight edge and angled point fits snugly into the corners of a flat-bottomed pan, while the curved side copes with rounded pans. The blunt end can be used to shunt food around a sauté pan and dislodge sticky sediment from the base. This is a good spoon for making gravy.
2 This traditional wooden spoon is an essential tool. It is made of beech and has a beautifully curved oval bowl with thick sides.
3 This smaller basic wooden spoon is made of closely grained golden boxwood. The bowl is a similar shape to the beech spoon (2).
4 A long-handled spoon (at least 40cm) is ideal for stirring continuously over furnace-like heat – when using a wok, for instance – or for stirring polenta.

5 Metal mixing spoon With its perfect oval bowl and long handle, this metal spoon is of a high quality. Made from a single piece of metal, the handle will not work loose from the bowl.

6 Wire mixing spoon This stylish spoon is used with rounded pans. The outer wire skims over any crust that may have built up on the pan base without incorporating it into the mixture. The thicker inner wire is strong enough for mixing, lifting and turning. The spoon can also be used for whisking.

7 Scoop Useful for shovelling up dry goods such as flour or grains, the scoop has a straight-sided, deep bowl that holds a generous amount without spilling. Traditionally made of tinned steel, scoops such as this will rust if used for moist foods.

8 Insulated ice-cream scoop Made of seamless aluminium and filled with salt-based defrosting fluid, this tool is ideal for late-night ice-cream snacks. The tapered rim easily penetrates hard-packed ice-cream. It is not dishwasher proof.

Ladles

1 Salad dressing ladle This ladle has a vertical handle that allows you to dip it into a tall, narrow container. The angle of the handle also makes it easier to pour with care over food that has been arranged on a plate. The bowl has a two-sided lip, designed for right- and left-handed use.

2 Portioning ladle The 6cm bowl has a pouring lip on each side that enables you to pour with precision, and is designed for right- and left-handed use.

3 Soup ladle A generous 9cm bowl will hold nearly 150ml of liquid – ideal for serving soup. The bowl has a continuous rolled lip to prevent drips, and the handle has a hanging hook that stops the ladle from becoming submerged should you leave it sitting in a large pot of liquid.

4 Chinese wok ladle The wide, shallow bowl is perfect for lifting, tossing and turning the contents of a wok. The long handle distances you from the heat, and the 50° angle mirrors the contours of the wok, making the ladle more comfortable to use. Choose a stainless-steel ladle rather than rust-prone carbon steel.

Spatulas

5 Rubber spatula Shaped more like a spoon, this flexible spatula combines the benefits of a slightly concave bowl with straight edges and rounded corners. It will scrape clean a mixing bowl or pan without scratching.

6 Plastic spatula Available in three sizes, the flexible, fine-edged blade cleanly removes the very last scrap of mixture from a bowl, jar or food processor goblet. One side deals with angled corners, the other with rounded.

7 Coloured plastic spatula Similar in design and function, the coloured spatula has the added benefit of being heat resistant. It will not melt or discolour, even at very high temperatures, nor will it damage non-stick cookware. It is available in a range of colours and sizes.

8 Wooden spatula The slightly angled end is useful for scraping mixtures out of corners and shunting food around the pan. More importantly, the blunt edges will not scratch a non-stick surface, however firmly you scrape.

1

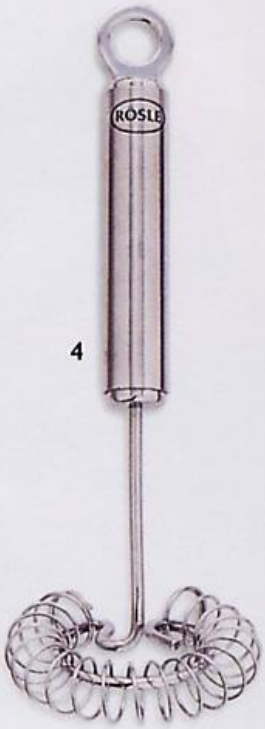
1 Balloon whisk
The balloon whisk's slightly flexible wires will effectively aerate anything from egg whites to heavy cream. Their bulbous shape increases the area that is in contact with the mixture, so the more wires the better.

2

2 Egg whisk The egg or sauce whisk is designed to mix, emulsify and aerate egg-based sauces. More elongated and rigid than a balloon whisk, the wires cut through egg proteins in a hollandaise sauce, for example, preventing coagulation and curdling.

3

3 Twirl whisk
Also called a whip, this is made from one piece of coiled wire, which gives it greater flexibility. Though the shape makes it useful for working into corners and round the entire base of a container, it is not as efficient as a balloon or egg whisk. It is good for whisking in slim containers, however.

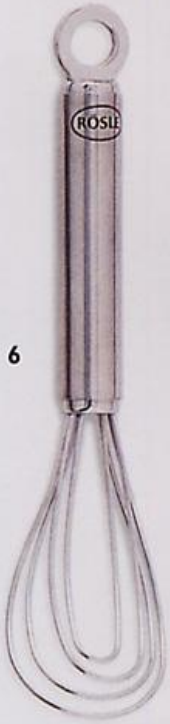


4

4 Spiral whisk
A spiral whisk is made from a coil of fine, springy wire, looped round a circular wire frame. It can be used in a small amount of liquid, so is invaluable for whisking sauces in shallow pans. This whisk also incorporates mixture from around the edge of the mixing bowl.

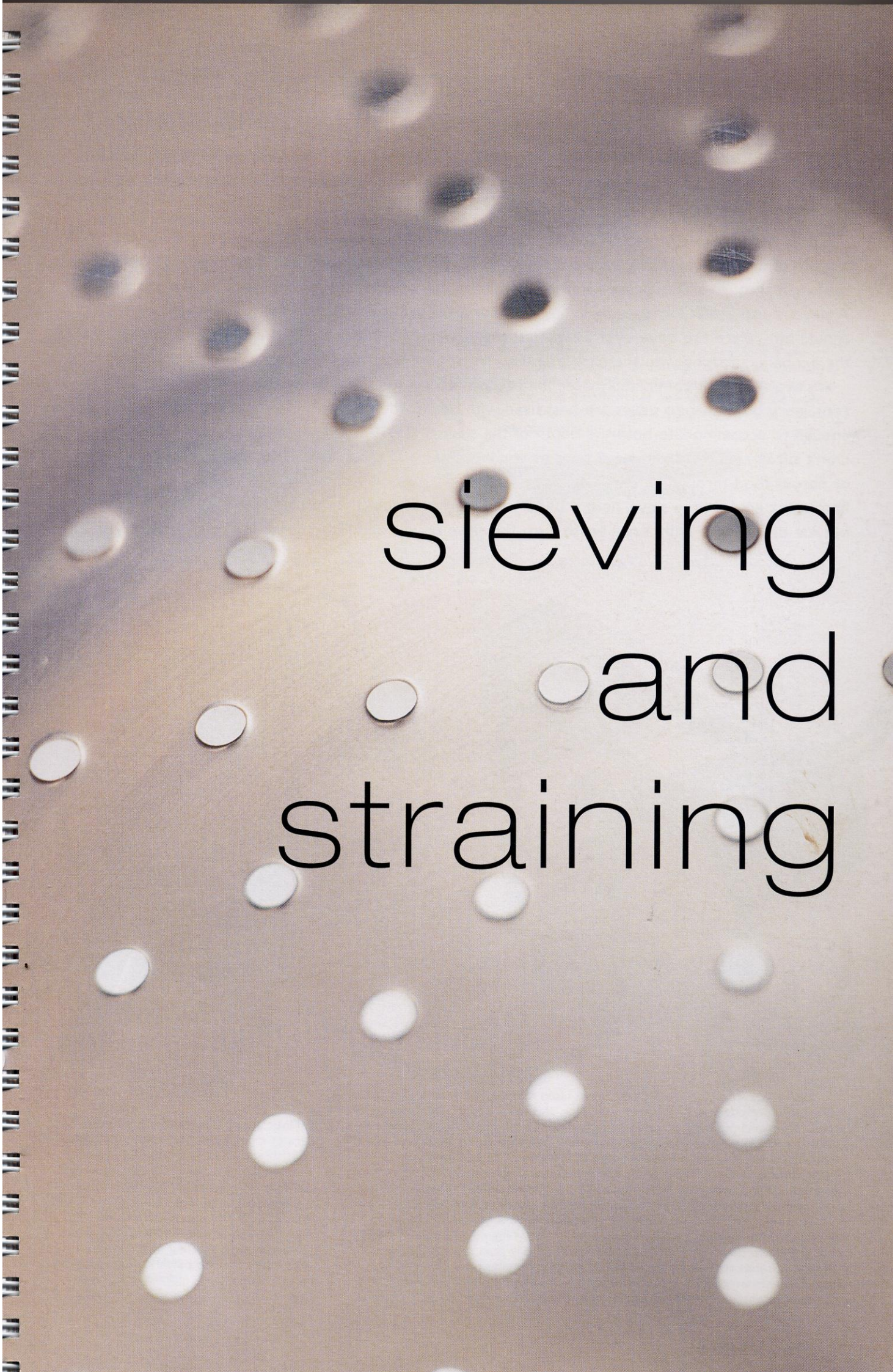
5

5 Jug whisk
Not essential but nevertheless useful, the long jug whisk comes in handy for whisking in narrow glasses, measuring jugs and cocktail shakers.



6

6 Flat whisk
This whisk is excellent for mixing small amounts, or for beating a single egg yolk, stirring delicate items or mixing herbs into cream.


sieving
and
straining

sieves, sifters and dredgers

These tools refine the texture of food. They smooth lumps and coarse particles from free-flowing powders such as flour or icing sugar; and they indirectly lighten mixtures, because the process of sieving or sifting helps to incorporate air as the powder floats down into the receiving bowl.

Sieves are additionally used to separate solids from liquids, as in draining peas, or to alter the texture of food. For example, hard-boiled egg yolk can be transformed into a mimosa-like garnish by pushing it through a fine-meshed sieve. Raspberries can be divested of their seeds in the same way. A sieve is also useful for rescuing lumpy gravy or a béchamel sauce that is not as smooth as it should be – place the sieve over a clean saucepan, pour the mixture into the sieve, and smooth out the lumps by pressing with the back of a wooden spoon.

A sieve should sit comfortably over the receiving container. Conical sieves work best with tall containers; bowl-shaped sieves are best used with bowls. The container needs to be large and deep enough to accommodate both the depth of the sieve and the depth of the ingredients once sieved. Don't sift dry powder in a damp sieve as you'll end up with paste. Nor is it advisable to sieve seedy or fibrous food through an ultra-fine sieve – it will be very difficult to clean. If you do need to clean fibrous material from a sieve, hold it under running water with the inside facing down and scrub the outside of the sieve with a nail brush. Turn the sieve bowl-side up, scrub the inside and rinse again.

1 2 3

1 Dredgers A dredger is used to store and dispense flour (large holes) or sugar (small). Turn the dredger upside down and shake it like a salt cellar. The top unscrews for filling. When refilling a sugar dredger, take care not to let the crystals stick to the thread. They will cause problems with screwing and unscrewing.

2 Drum sieve Used in India and known as a 'tamis' in France, this sieve has a closely woven mesh stretched tightly over its circular frame. Frames come in wood, plastic or metal, and in a wide range of diameters. Meshes are made of nylon, silk or metal, and are usually interchangeable. Depending on the closeness of the weave, the sieve removes lumps from powders and coarse particles from spices and grains. A drum sieve is useful for sieving large amounts, as ingredients pass through a flat mesh more quickly than a concave one. However, dry ingredients tend to randomly sprinkle over a wide area, which may be a problem if you want to confine them to a small space.

3 Flour sifter This spring-set sifter aerates clumpy flour to a light, uniform consistency. It has a fine-meshed base with spokes set above it that agitate the flour as you press the trigger in the handle. The process is somewhat laborious, so the tool is suitable for sifting small quantities of flour only. Try to refrain from washing it, as a damp sifter turns flour to paste. It will remain clean enough if you store it in a plastic bag in a cupboard or drawer.

4

4 Nylon sieve A nylon sieve is non-corroding and therefore preferable for sieving acidic foods that might be tainted by metal. It is moulded from one piece of plastic, and therefore has no joints to break or work loose. This sieve will last a lifetime, so choose a colour you can live with.

5

6

Bowl-shaped sieves The very fine mesh of these attractive stainless-steel sieves is ideal for sifting flour, icing sugar and other fine powders.
5 The larger sieve can also be used to drain small amounts of vegetables.
6 The small sieve is useful for sprinkling icing sugar over cakes, as it enables you to aim more accurately.

7

7 Chinois sieve and pestle Also called a 'bouillon strainer', this conical sieve funnels liquids downwards into the tip for more accurate pouring. The ultra-fine, twill-like mesh clears stocks of every sediment, and strains sauces to velvety smoothness. The sieve is sturdily made with a wide top band to which are welded the handle, hook and frame. The frame protects the mesh from damage.

The pestle is tapered to fit into the bottom of the sieve. Use it to extract flavoursome juices from solid matter, and to produce a very thin purée from softened vegetables – great for thickening and flavouring sauces.

the pan from which you are pouring the food. Smaller colanders do not need feet, but should have a sturdy lip and a handle for resting on the receiving utensil. The base should be fairly flat so food at the bottom is not crushed. To drain efficiently, a colander needs a generous number of holes that are reasonably-sized but not so large that peas slip through them. Check they are evenly distributed and come up the sides of the colander.

If you enjoy properly dressed salads, a spinner for drying leaves is another must. A collapsible wire basket is attractive, but does not do as good a job as an enclosed spinner that strains by centrifugal force. Some spinners have a perforated base – the idea being that you hold it over the sink, and spin and drain in one go. I usually end up showering my feet because I forget the base is perforated, so I prefer a spinner with a solid base.

Other essential straining tools are a large perforated metal spoon (look for one that is made from a single piece of metal) and, if you make tea with loose leaves, a tea strainer.

Colanders

2 This well-designed stainless-steel colander has wide grips for lifting or for resting on a bowl, a solid stand, widely spaced holes and an eyelet for hanging. The flat base helps prevent food from being crushed. It is available in diameters ranging from 16 to 28cm. Buy the largest one possible.

3 Although you can set the long-handled colander down, you are more likely to hold it with one hand and the pan from which you are pouring in the other. It is therefore best used for straining manageable amounts rather than the contents of a vast and heavy pot. A diameter of 18–20cm is a useful size to have.

4 The enamelled colander is the kind of utensil you can become inexplicably attached to. Traditional in appearance, it has three sturdy feet to hold it steady, lots of perforations and two U-shaped handles that won't slip or get hot. The enamel may chip in time, but that adds to its charm.

5 Pan drainer Shaped like a crescent moon, the stainless-steel strainer drains small-to-medium amounts of pasta or vegetables directly from the pan. It is held in place by a rim that attaches to the pan edge, and will fit a range of pan sizes.

6 Perforated spoon This vital utensil simultaneously strains and lifts small amounts of food from pans. Cooking juices, water or fat drains off through the perforations.

7 Tea strainer Made of stainless steel, this smart little strainer has a very fine mesh for straining freshly brewed tea or coffee. The wire ear and handle allow you to rest it on your cup – useful if you need two hands to lift a large teapot.

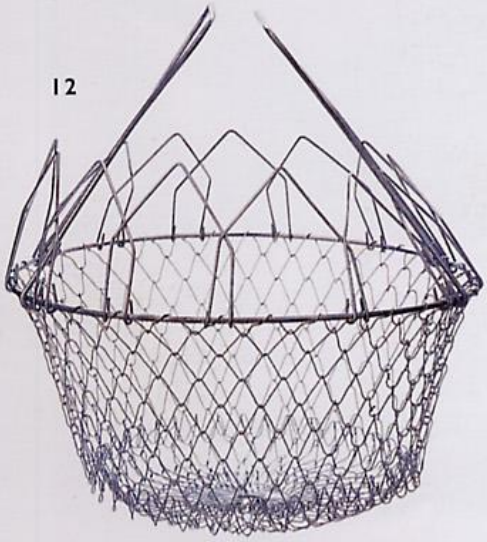
8 Conical strainer This coarse-meshed strainer is handy for straining into a small or narrow container such as a gravy boat or sauce jug. It is available in four diameters ranging from 8 to 20cm.

9 Perforated skimmer The extra-wide, flat bowl skims froth and skin formed by impurities from the surface of stews and stocks. The skimmer can also be used for lifting and draining dumplings, gnocchi or quenelles from broth.

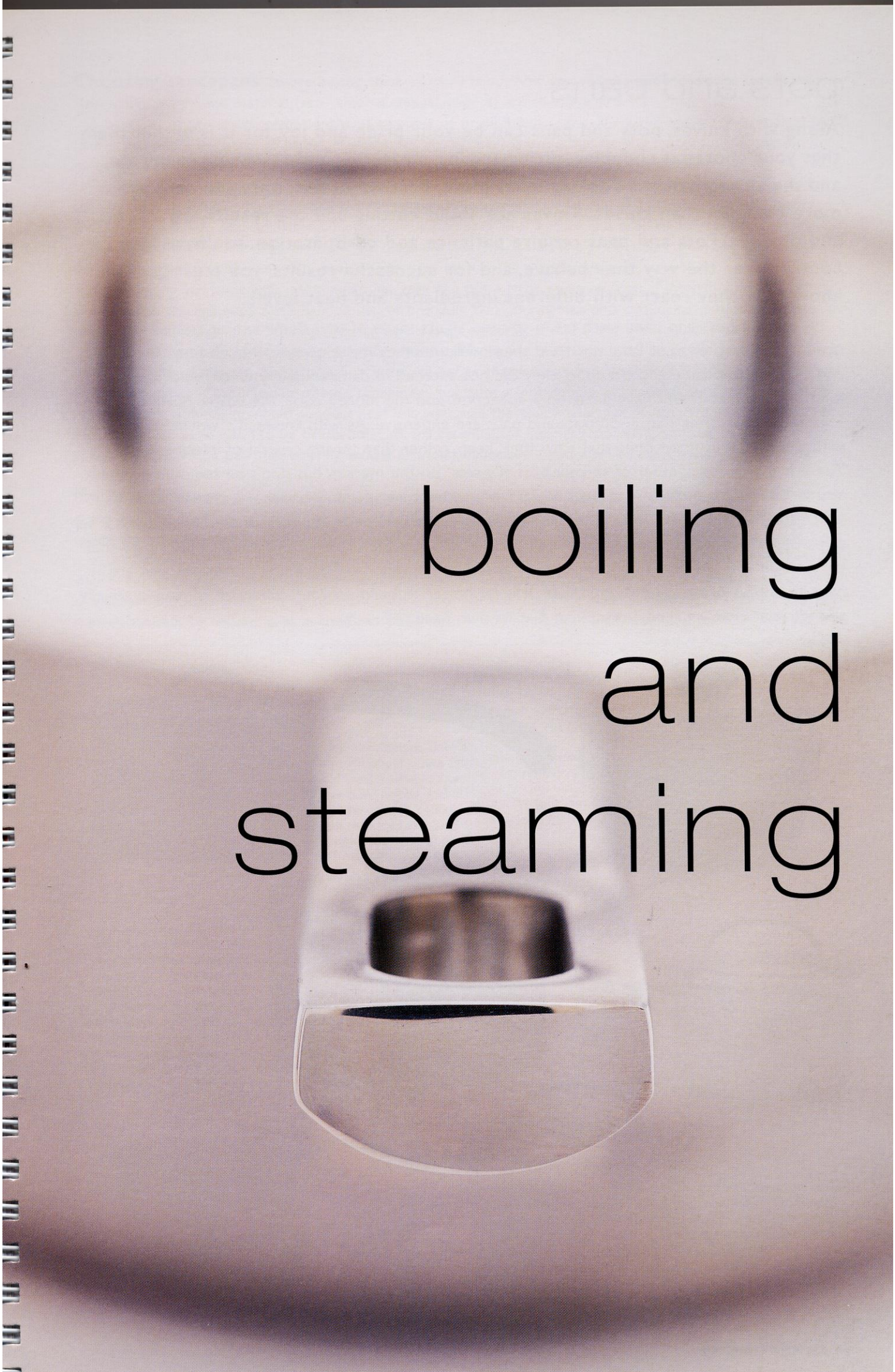
10 Wire skimmer This skimmer is designed for removing fried food from deep fat. The wires allow fat and small bits of sediment to quickly drain away.

11 Noodle/pasta scoop This simply designed wire strainer has a pleasingly deep and generous bowl that is ideal for scooping up and straining gnocchi, dumplings and stuffed pasta or noodles such as ravioli, wontons or pot stickers.

12 Wire shaker Charming though it may be, there is no avoiding the fact that water sprays everywhere when you whirl this shaker round. Shaking it gently over the sink does not do the job effectively, and it is best used in the garden.



13 Salad spinner This superbly designed spinner is effortless to use. Unlike many other models, you don't have to cradle it in your arm – just place it on the work surface and pull the string. Centrifugal force presses the leaves against the internal meshed basket, driving water off into the outer container. The clear perspex outer container is smart enough to use as a salad bowl – once you've emptied out the water. There is a more expensive version with a stainless steel bowl.


boiling
and
steaming

pots and pans

Along with knives, pots and pans can be your pride and joy, for it is within them that your efforts at chopping, slicing, mixing, measuring and seasoning culminate, and the alchemy that is cooking takes place. Because of this, pots and pans are more complex than knives. Knives are about cutting and the results are instant and obvious. Pots and pans require patience and co-operation. You have less control over the way they behave, and for successful results, you must get to know how they react with different ingredients and heat levels.

My earliest pots and pans were mean-spirited affairs made of thin aluminium or coated with quaintly speckled enamel. I did not treat them well, nor they me. However, though they warped and buckled, burnt me and the food, they did not succeed in dampening my embryonic passion for cooking. Since then I have amassed a collection, and the more I cook, the better quality I buy.

There's no denying that good pots and pans are expensive. As with knives, it's worth starting off with three or four good ones that earn their keep, rather than buying several of inferior quality. There is a growing number of so-called 'chef's sets' on the market, but don't be tempted by them. You will inevitably end up with pans you never use because you don't cook the type of food for which they are intended. They also take up valuable storage space. You may of course be given a set of pans, perhaps as a wedding present, but this leaves you the problem of having to live up to their demands. If you are new to cooking, you may feel pressured into embarking on recipes that are over ambitious or simply not your style. It is far better to build up your collection of pans gradually and let your culinary repertoire expand at its own pace.

1

1 Non-stick aluminium saucepan Sturdily built but not too heavy, this pan is made from non-warping cast aluminium, coated inside and out with a SilverStone® non-stick surface. This makes for fat-free cooking and easy cleaning, so it is a good pan for sauces, porridge, scrambled eggs and other foods that stick. Suitable for all hobs except the induction type, the pan has a thick ground base for fast, even heat distribution. The oven-proof glass lid has a heat-resistant knob. This pan is available in blue, green or black, and in three sizes, from 1.1 litres to 2.25 litres.

2

2 Stainless-steel saucepans These sleek, professional pans are made in top-grade 18/10 stainless steel (see 'material choice', page 8). The base has an aluminium/magnetic steel/aluminium core sealed between two layers of stainless steel. This means the pans are suitable for all hobs, including the induction type, which is activated by magnetism. The handles are welded to the body of the pan over a large area so cannot come loose. They are comfortable to hold but tend to get hot when cooking at high temperatures. Despite this minor drawback, these pans are a joy to use. They are available in five sizes, from 1 litre to 4.8 litres, and it's well worth having all five; otherwise aim for the largest, the smallest and one in the middle.

Choosing saucepans Before buying, think carefully about how you will use and store your saucepans. Size, shape, weight and material (see 'material choice', page 8) are all-important.

A basic set of saucepans might consist of a couple of smallish pans, say 1.7–2 litres, one or two medium pans (3–4 litres) and a large pan (5 litres). A very small pan (1 litre) is useful for melting butter, boiling eggs or reheating small amounts of food, and a small non-stick milk pan is a must for heating milk.

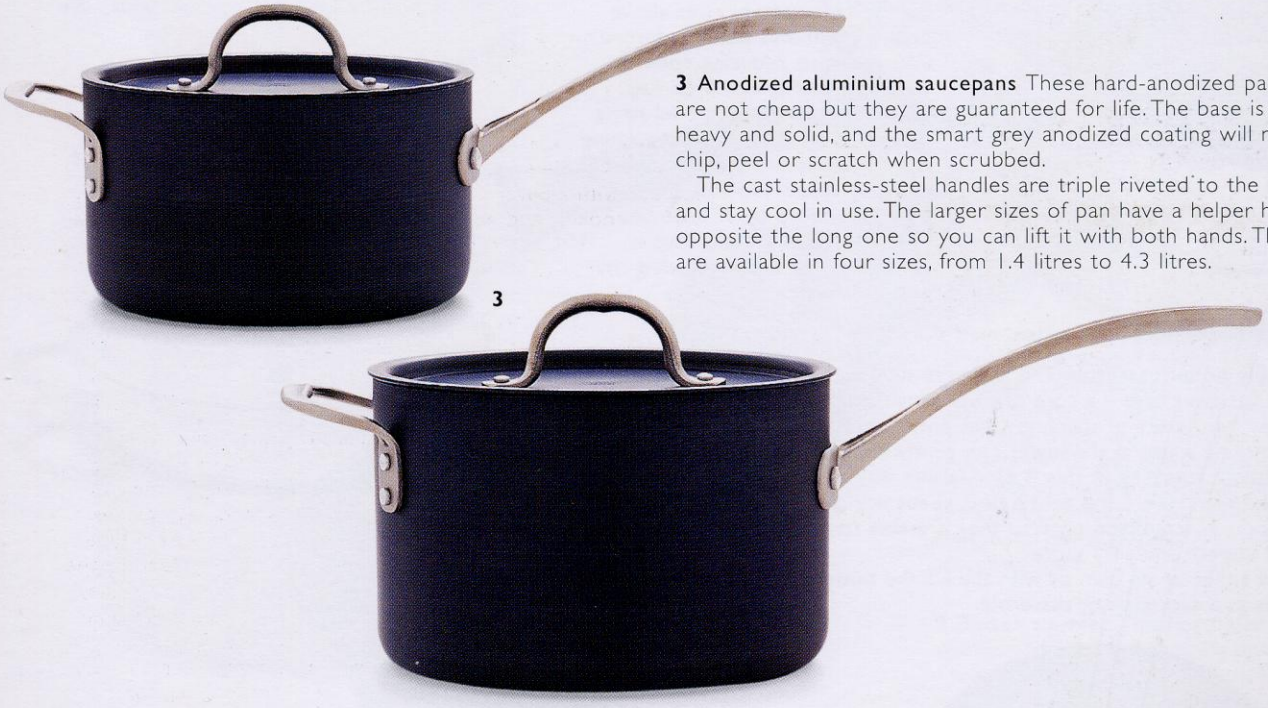
The base should be thick and solid – a thin base will buckle over high heat, making it useless on a sealed cooking plate. The base of a good-quality pan is ground flat as opposed to stamped flat; check for the marks of the grinding machine. Test for flatness by placing the pan on a level surface and pressing to see if it wobbles.

If your hob has radiant rings, measure the rings and buy pans to fit. The perfect pan should fit exactly over the heating element. This keeps the heat where it is meant to be – under the pan.

A pouring lip will cope with a thin liquid like milk, but not a thick sauce or soup. If the pan is to be used by a left hander, you will need a left-handed pan or one with two pouring lips or a continuous pouring rim that lets you pour from any point. A pouring rim also pours large amounts of liquid and thick liquids more efficiently.

Handles should be long enough to distance your hand from the heat. They must be comfortable to hold and firmly attached to the pan. Rivets or a firm weld are better than screws. Pans that hold 3 litres or more should have two handles – either a pair of ears, or one ear opposite a long handle. Lid handles and knobs should be heat-resistant. If metal, it should conduct heat less well than the pan. If your pan is intended to go in the oven, the knob and handle need to be heatproof. Lids are essential for steaming, poaching and stewing, and for bringing water to the boil sooner. They should fit snugly, especially if you want to use the pan for steaming.

Material science The two basic properties required of a material used for pan making are that the surface is non-reactive, so it will not taint the food, and that it conducts heat efficiently and evenly. As no single material meets these requirements, manufacturers use combinations of metals. For example, the base may be made from a layer of aluminium or copper (both chemically reactive but excellent conductors of heat) sandwiched between stainless steel (a poor conductor of heat but non-reactive to chemicals). Another solution is to coat the inside of the pan, and sometimes the outside too, with a non-reactive substance such as vitreous enamel, or to treat it electrolytically by anodizing, as in anodized aluminium. Anodizing hardens aluminium and makes it non-reactive.



3

3 Anodized aluminium saucepans These hard-anodized pans are not cheap but they are guaranteed for life. The base is heavy and solid, and the smart grey anodized coating will not chip, peel or scratch when scrubbed.

The cast stainless-steel handles are triple riveted to the body and stay cool in use. The larger sizes of pan have a helper handle opposite the long one so you can lift it with both hands. They are available in four sizes, from 1.4 litres to 4.3 litres.

4

4 Anodized aluminium milk pan As boiling milk tends to stick to the pan, this is one of the few saucepans that needs a non-stick surface. This one, in heavy-gauge aluminium, has an anodized surface on the exterior and a hard-wearing, easy-to-clean, non-stick interior. The stainless-steel handle is firmly riveted. If you are left handed, make sure your pan has a pouring lip on both sides.

beyond basics

As your cooking skills develop and you gain in confidence, you will undoubtedly start to yearn for more pots and pans. The ones shown here are the next step up from a basic set and will ease tasks such as preserving and making soups and sauces. Buy them according to need. Some of these pans are quite large, which

1

1 Stockpot with pasta insert If you care about good soup, a stockpot is almost a basic requirement. This large stainless-steel pot accommodates several kilos of meat, bones and vegetables. The tall, somewhat narrow shape slows evaporation of liquid and allows solid matter to remain submerged for hours at a time, while coaxing out delicious flavours. A five-layer ground base (see 3 Double boiler) permits prolonged simmering without scorching. The generously sized and firmly welded U-shaped handles make for safe lifting.

The perforated pasta insert lifts out easily, leaving the cooking water behind – a process that is easier and safer than carrying a heavy pot from hob to sink. Those who wear glasses will also appreciate steam-free lenses. The insert doubles up as a strainer when blanching vegetables.

2

2 Pressure cooker Pressure cookers work by trapping steam by means of a specially designed tight-fitting lid. As pressure builds up, the temperature rises above boiling point and steam is forced into the food, reducing cooking time and cutting down on fuel.

This stainless-steel model has a domed lid housing a self-regulating valve, which limits the amount of escaping steam. Normal cooking time is reduced by at least one third. The solid ground base is suitable for all hobs, including the induction type.

3

3 Double boiler/casserole This stainless-steel pan has a well-fitting lid and a solid, five-layer base – a core of silver alloy/copper/silver alloy is sandwiched between two layers of stainless steel, giving excellent heat conduction.

Simmering water in the lower pan gently heats the base of the upper one without touching it. This is an infallible way of making egg-based sauces such as hollandaise – the gentle heat keeps egg proteins from coagulating, as they do in scrambled eggs, so they are able to emulsify with butter to form a smooth and silky sauce.

Used either on its own or with the lid, the bottom part of this pan doubles as a saucepan or casserole.

4

4 Copper saucepan A copper pan is the Rolls Royce of cookware. This splendid saucepan encapsulates the properties of three different metals: copper for speedy and even conduction of heat, a taint-free stainless-steel lining – far more durable than traditional tin – and a stay-cool, cast-iron handle. The only drawback is that once you have one copper pan, you'll want more.

might be off-putting if you have limited storage space. However, because they can perform two or three functions, they may actually help you to economize on space as well as money. For example, a large stockpot is well worth having as it can double up as a pasta pot and, even though it does not have the flaring sides that help evaporation, as a preserving pan. A pressure cooker without its lid makes a very useful large saucepan.

5 Preserving pan This capacious, 13-litre, stainless-steel cauldron will satisfy the needs of the most dedicated jam-maker. It has a solid ground, wide base to ensure even heat distribution, and gently flaring sides that increase the surface area and encourage evaporation. The invaluable helper handle assists with lifting and pouring, while the semi-circular handle across the top can be locked in an upright position to keep the pan cooler.

6 Slant-sided aluminium saucepan Made from heavy-gauge aluminium with a 6mm ground base, this homely-looking pan is perfect for sauces. The narrow base speeds up boiling, and the splayed-out sides increase the surface area, encouraging evaporation and reduction of liquids. A continuous turned edge means you can pour from any position without messy drips. The bakelite handle remains cool during cooking. It is best not used for cooking vegetables as uncoated aluminium will cause them to discolour.

7 Slant-sided anodized aluminium saucepan Altogether smarter with its grey anodized coating and elegant stainless-steel handle, this 1-litre pan is similar in design and function to the uncoated aluminium pan. Use it for reducing sauces, making gravy or warming hot chocolate. Two pouring spouts make it suitable for left or right handers. It is also available in a 2.3-litre size, which makes a brilliant sauté pan. The larger size has a continuous turned rim instead of pouring lips, making it easier to tip out solids and liquids.

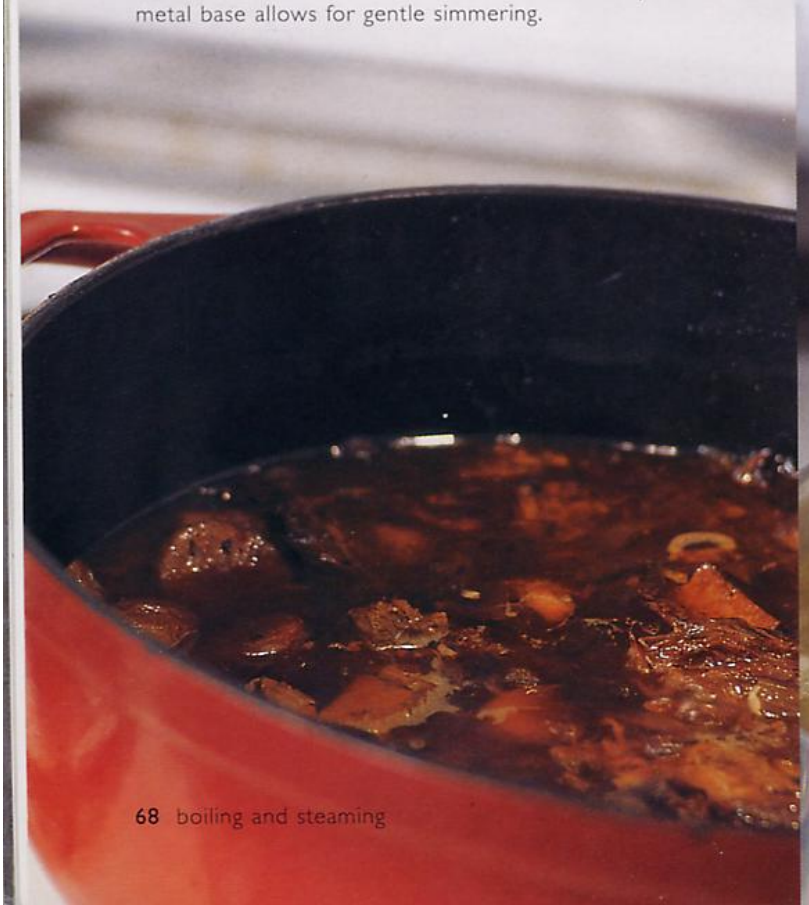
8 Bain marie Any saucepan can be turned into a double boiler with this 'universal' stainless-steel bain marie. Place it in the top of the pan above simmering water and it will heat the contents gently and evenly. This is an ideal way of making egg-based sauces and custards, melting chocolate or cheese, or reheating leftovers without scorching them.

9 Butter warmer This neat little stainless-steel pan, measuring just 11cm in diameter, is specially designed for warming or clarifying small amounts of butter. It is attractive enough to be brought to the table, for example to pour butter over asparagus. You can also use it for warming brandy or melting chocolate. It has just one pouring lip, so left-handers either have to pour 'backwards' or use their right hand.

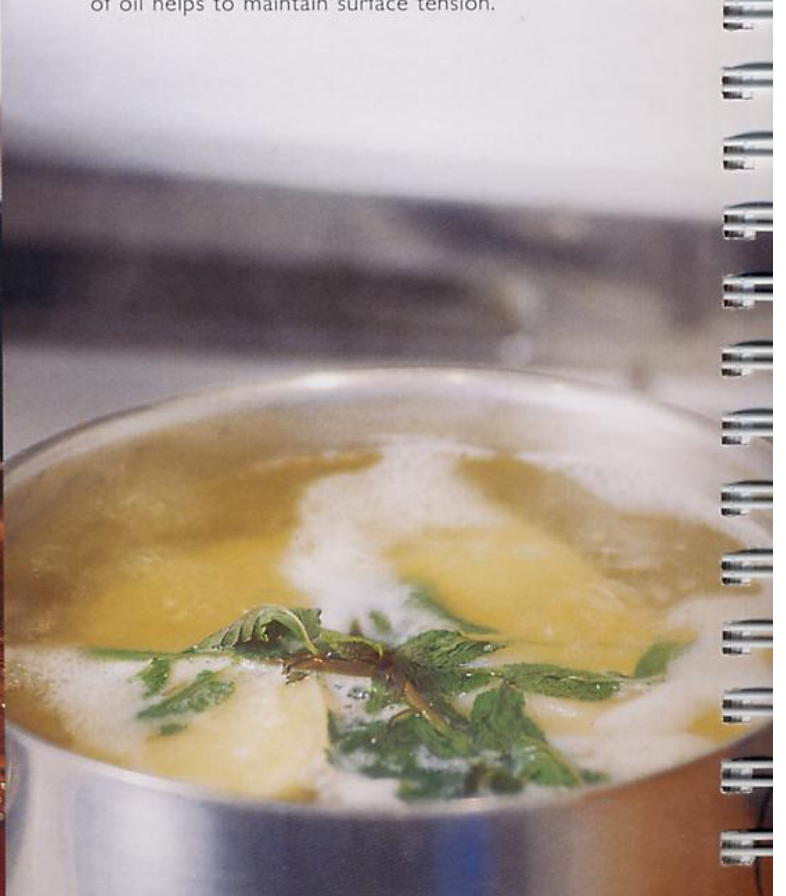
Blanching This is a method of partially cooking vegetables by immersing them briefly in rapidly boiling water. Vegetables that are to be frozen are blanched to halt enzyme activity. It is a method used by chefs to cook vegetables ahead of serving – they can be quickly reheated with no loss of flavour or texture. After blanching, vegetables are best plunged into a bowl of iced water, a process known as 'refreshing'. This also has the effect of heightening the colour, especially of green vegetables.

Reducing You can make quick gravy to serve with pan-fried meats, such as chops or steak, cooked in a sauté pan. After cooking, remove the meat to a serving dish and keep warm. Add a small glass of wine to the pan juices and stir well, scraping up any meaty deposits with a wooden spoon or wooden spatula. Boil rapidly to reduce by a third, then pour in 2–3 tablespoons of cream or crème fraîche. Allow the gravy to bubble for a few seconds, add seasoning and pour over the meat.

Simmering Cooking a casserole or stew at a simmer, with the occasional bubble breaking the surface, helps soften the collagen in meat tissues, making tough meat more tender. The process is further helped by adding acid ingredients such as tomatoes and wine. A casserole dish with a heavy metal base allows for gentle simmering.



Gentle boiling The turbulent action of fast boiling can break up the texture of certain foods, such as floury potatoes, as the starch swells. When boiling point is reached, turn the heat to a gentle boil. Some starchy foods can boil over if the heat is too high, for example pasta and rice. A tablespoon of oil helps to maintain surface tension.



specialist pans

These pans are marvellous to have for those times when you get the urge to whip up zabaglione or boil caramel, for example. Though they tend to be expensive, it is a pleasure to use pans in which form so closely follows function. The rounded shape of the zabaglione pan perfectly echoes the shape of the whisk used to create the foam. The fondue pot is wide and shallow enough for several people to dip their forks at once without being overcrowded. The flared sides of the polenta pan increase the surface area and encourage evaporation.

1 Polenta pan Known as a 'paiolo' in Italy, this beautiful copper pan makes the rather arduous process of stirring polenta a pleasure rather than a chore. The pot heats quickly and evenly, while flared sides make prolonged stirring easier. The shapely wooden handle stays cool and comfortable during stirring. The pan is unlined and should therefore be rubbed with vinegar and salt before and after each use (see 'Meringues', page 49).

2 Zabaglione pan This solid copper pan is designed to froth up the warm, creamy alcoholic custard known as 'zabaglione' in Italy and 'sabayon' in France. Set over a low flame or double boiler, the copper conducts even, gentle heat, which softly coagulates the egg proteins as you whisk. The deep, rounded bowl facilitates the rapid scooping movement needed to create the foam.

3 Sugar boiler This attractive copper pan is ingeniously designed to cope with the very high temperatures produced during sugar boiling. The pan is unlined because the traditional tin lining would melt (see 'material choice', page 8), and sugar does not react adversely with copper. You might expect the handle to be made of wood, which remains cool, but at the temperatures reached wood might catch fire. Even oven gloves are in danger of igniting. The problem is solved by the hollow copper handle, into which chefs traditionally insert a length of broomstick. Because the handle is funnel shaped, the wood is in contact with only a small area of hot metal, so the wood does not catch fire and it prevents heat from being conducted to the end where your hand is.

4 Saucier Normally found only in the professional kitchen, this saucier is made from best-quality 18/10 stainless steel (see 'material choice', page 8). It has an inner core of aluminium, not just in the base but all the way up the sides, for optimum heat conductivity. The pan can be used on all hobs, including the magnetic induction type.

The rounded, slightly flared sides facilitate easy stirring and whisking, and restrict splattering. The pan is perfect for reducing liquids, as well as browning meat and sautéing vegetables. It comes in four sizes, from .9 litre to 5 litres.

5 Cheese-fondue pot A traditional cheese fondue consists of cheese and wine melted together in a pot over a flame. Diners spear chunks of bread on forks and swirl them in the communal pot, which is known as a 'caquelon' in France and Switzerland. As high temperatures make cooked cheese stringy, cheese-fondue pots are traditionally made of glazed earthenware, which withstands only gentle heat. Meat-fondue pots are made of metal. Popular in the seventies, and a ubiquitous item on the wedding-present list, fondue sets seem to be making a comeback.

4 Rice steamer Save on cleaning the pan and cook rice in a perforated rice steamer. The perforations are small enough to prevent uncooked grains of rice escaping. It is important not to overfill the steamer as rice doubles in volume once cooked. The chain has a hook on the end so you can hang it from the side of the pan.

5 Steamer trivet This classic design has not changed much since the days of Mrs Beeton. The trivet sits in the bottom of a pan of simmering water and raises a smaller pan or basin off the surface, creating a makeshift bain marie. The grooved surface helps to prevent pans from slipping off the stand. It can also be used as a trivet to protect the work surface from hot pans.

6 Christmas pudding steamer This solid steamer is perfect for making a traditional round Christmas pudding. A cluster of perforations at the top lets the steam escape. Suspend the steamer from the handle of a wooden spoon resting on opposite sides of the pan.

7 Fold-out steamer Suitable for most saucepans, this compact stainless-steel steamer opens out like the petals of a flower. The perforations and gaps between the overlapping petals allow steam to penetrate well and the feet raise the food above the boiling water. The central stalk limits the ways in which you can arrange the food, but on some models the stalk is removable. The fold-out steamer is available in two sizes, expanding from 14cm to 22.5cm, and from 17.5cm to 27.5cm.

8 Asparagus steamer Some cooks think that if asparagus stalks are cooked until tender, the tips will be overcooked. This tall, narrow steamer allows the stalks to stand upright in boiling water while the tips cook in the steam. However, if you don't mind stalks a little on the crunchy side, you could just lay the spears flat in an ordinary steamer.

9 Fish kettle/poacher Small or medium-sized fish can be poached in any pan into which a rack will fit, but large, round fish such as salmon need an elongated pan that allows the fish to lie flat. The fish is placed on a perforated, two-handled rack that lifts easily from the pan, draining the fish without spoiling its shape. Some fish kettles are so large they will straddle two burners. There is also a glamorous diamond-shaped kettle that is designed especially for poaching flat fish such as halibut and turbot.

10 Egg poacher Though it is not a poacher in the strict sense, as the eggs are cooked by steam, this magnificent pan not only cooks faultless eggs but, without the insert, doubles up as a non-stick sauté pan. Made in top-quality 18/10 stainless steel (see 'material choice', page 8), the poacher has non-stick, removable egg cups, and a 5mm thick, encapsulated base suitable for all types of hob.

11 'Universal' steamer insert Sit the stepped base of this perforated container in any of your saucepans, and you have an instant steamer for cooking vegetables, fish, meat or poultry. It is an indispensable utensil.

frying and grilling

frying pans

Using a frying pan of the right shape, size and material makes a marked difference to the cooking process and your finished dish. There is an enormous choice and a good pan is not cheap, so before buying think carefully about the type of food you cook and the type of hob you cook on.

Different-shaped pans suit different tasks: high-sided pans help prevent splattering; rounded, outward-sloping sides comfortably accommodate spoons and spatulas, making stirring easier; shallow sides help you to deftly slide the contents out of the pan. Size is equally important. Small amounts of food cooked in too large a pan will dry and burn; juices will spread too thinly and evaporate. On the other hand, if you crowd food into a pan, it will steam and stew instead of browning and crisping.

1 Round frying pan The outwardly sloping sides allow you to slide a spatula in and out of the pan with ease, while a wide diameter provides generous food-to-heat contact. It is made of warp-free cast aluminium with a superior Silverstone® non-stick coating and stainless-steel handle.

1

2 Wok Designed for continuous movement over high heat, the wok's conical shape tips food continually back to the centre, where the heat is at its most intense. Because the food is constantly on the move during stir-frying, much less oil is needed, making it a healthy option. Round-bottomed woks are suitable for gas hobs; a slightly flattened bottom works better on ceramic or electric hobs. This one has wooden handles, which remain cool despite the intense heat generated from the wok.

2

3

3 Ridged, square frying pan Falling midway between a frying pan and a stovetop grill, this pan has a ridged base that lifts food clear of fat and gives appetizing stripes to steaks and chops. From the same range as the round pan (1), it is made of cast aluminium with a durable non-stick coating.

4

4 Stainless-steel sauté pan Made from superior 18/10 stainless steel (see 'material choice', page 8), this pan has a thick ground base for maximum heat contact. A wide diameter and high, straight sides allow quick, light frying of chicken quarters or large amounts of potatoes in relatively little fat. The high sides also prevent spattering or spilling as food is turned and shaken. Once the food is evenly browned, the pan can be partly or fully covered, enabling the contents to cook at a more gentle pace.

Which metal? To fry food, it must be heated quickly and evenly, so the best pans are made of heavy-gauge metals that are efficient conductors of heat (see 'material choice', page 8). Copper pans lined with tin or stainless steel are superb, but they are also very expensive. Anodized cast aluminium is one of the best materials as long as it is medium to heavy gauge; lightweight pans tend to buckle and develop hot spots. Stainless steel looks stunning and is easy to clean, but used alone, does not conduct heat well. Combined with a thick layer of copper or aluminium, however, it is hard to beat.

Cast iron is heavy and initially slow to heat, but once hot it maintains its temperature and conducts heat evenly. A small cast-iron frying pan is handy for dry-frying whole spices, but before buying a larger one, check that you can manage the weight – especially if you have weak wrists.

Heavy-gauge, untreated, mild steel is another option. It needs seasoning with oil and in time it builds up a heavy patina that makes the surface non-stick. Until then it needs careful treatment to prevent rusting. Untreated steel pans should never be washed, but simply wiped clean and oiled.

Non-stick pans have improved greatly in recent years, and are worth having not only because they are easy to clean, but also because there is something delectable about the way morsels of food slide around the pan, sizzling in their own tasty juices rather than a bath of oil. A non-stick frying pan not only enables you to cut down on fat, but also allows you to really taste the food.

Choosing frying pans For a basic set, choose two or three round, heavy-based frying pans for general use: one with a 25–28cm diameter base, another with a 20–23cm base and possibly a third with an 18cm base – invaluable for a solitary fry-up. You might also consider buying a large, high-sided sauté pan with a lid for poultry quarters or chunky potatoes. A smallish sloping-sided pan is essential for omelettes or crêpes. If you like stir-fries, you will also need a wok, though a heavy-based frying pan makes a reasonable alternative.

When buying a new pan, check the handle is firmly welded or riveted. If the pan is very big, an ear-shaped helper handle opposite the long one makes lifting safer. Some handles are cast in one piece with the pan. Though less likely to work loose, integral handles tend to become hotter than handles that are attached separately.

5 Splatter screen Frying causes splattering and spitting of fat, especially if moist food is added to hot oil (always pat food dry before frying). When placed over the pan, this fine-meshed screen keeps fat where it belongs.

6 Hard-anodized aluminium stir-fry pan Invaluable for a solo stir-fry, this 20cm pan has a unique, long-lasting, non-stick surface that is covered with minute ridges. The flat bottom is suitable for all hobs.

7 Steel omelette pan Smooth sloping sides and a flat bottom ease the deft manoeuvres necessary for making a perfect omelette. Made from untreated steel (see 'Which metal?', above), this pan deserves respect – use it only for frying omelettes or crêpes and treat it with care.

8 Hard-anodized aluminium chef's pan This invaluable pan can be used as a wok or, with its heat-toughened glass lid, as a casserole. It has a heavy ground base for maximum heat conduction, a durable non-stick interior and two stainless-steel handles for easy lifting.

1 Crêpe/pancake pan Made of heavy-gauge aluminium with a hard-wearing Silverstone® non-stick surface, this pan will have you tossing pancakes like a pro. The smooth 25cm base allows batter to spread evenly and thinly as you rotate the pan, and the shallow sides facilitate flipping.

2 Oval pan This excellent heavy-gauge pan is just right for frying two or three plump fish to crisp perfection. The non-stick surface allows minimal fat to be used and prevents fish skins sticking to the pan. It can be cleaned in seconds.

3 Fajita pan This oval pan is designed for sizzling the cut of beef (skirt steak, resembling a 'fajo' or belt) after which the dish was named. Made from hard-anodized aluminium, the pan rapidly reaches the high temperature needed. Widely flaring, shallow sides permit quick and easy turning and serving.

4 Blini pan From the same professional range as the crêpe pan, this neat 12cm pan has smooth, rounded sides that encourage yeast-leavened batter to rise. The handle is long enough to distance your hand from the heat.

total immersion

The equipment featured here is designed for deep-frying food in boiling fat. An enormous variety of foods, both sweet and savoury, is cooked in this way – batter-coated fish, chips, fritters, meat balls, Spanish churros, Middle Eastern falafel and kibbeh, Asian rice balls and crispy noodles, Indian pakoras and sweets, to name more than a few.

Because so many different foods can be deep fried, it is important that the cooking vessel does not absorb odours and is reasonably easy to clean. And as success depends on frying at the correct temperature, the material from which the pan is made must be able to conduct heat evenly and maintain its temperature. Most important of all, because a large quantity of boiling fat is an obvious hazard, the equipment must be safe to use.

1 Tempura pan This beautiful, heavy, iron pan is the secret to making faultlessly crisp tempura and other deep-fried foods. It transfers heat quickly and evenly, and keeps the oil at a stable 170°–180°C. The pan has a spout for pouring off oil, and a rack for draining and keeping morsels of food warm. It comes with a pair of chopsticks for cooking.

1

2

2 Chip pan Made from high-quality enamelled steel, this pan will not absorb smells or grease, and is easy to clean. It conducts heat well, and can be used on any hob, including the induction type. Fat drains easily from the inner wire basket, the handles of which have extensions that rest on the outer handles and lift the food clear of the fat below. The pan can also be used for blanching vegetables.

3

3 Potato nest fryers Finely shredded potatoes or other starchy foods are fried in the outer basket, while the smaller basket presses the contents into a nest shape. The inner basket is hinged to the outer one at the bowl end, and the two are held in place by a ring that fits over both handles. The handles are long enough to protect your hand from the heat of the fat.

4 Electric deep fryer This sensibly shaped deep fryer makes efficient use of storage space and allows you to deep-fry a whole fish without bending it. Like all electric fryers, this one is thermostatically controlled, but unlike most others, it filters cooking scraps into a cold zone between the heating element and the bottom of the pan. This ensures the oil stays clean and fresh for longer. With the exception of the heating element, all components can be put in a dishwasher. The fryer is supplied with a lid.

4

tools for lifting and turning

When manoeuvring food at high temperatures, you need long-handled tools to protect your hands. The tools should grip well or be shaped in such a way that they are compatible with the nature of the food and/or the shape of the pan. Hang them within easy reach of the hob so you don't have to fumble in a drawer. Avoid lifters and turners with wooden or painted handles, and those with rivets and joins. A continuous piece of metal is easier to clean and will last a lifetime.

1 Fish lifter This efficient tool enables you to lift a whole fish and keep it intact. The bowed blade has a gently chamfered edge that slips easily under the fish without tearing the skin. The perforations allow fat to drain.

2 Wok turner The rapid stirring, turning and lifting of food that stir-frying demands are made simple with this shovel-shaped tool. It is available with or without perforations.

3 Fish turner A thin, rounded blade allows careful handling of fish and other delicate foods. The slots make the blade flexible and allow fat to drain away as you lift.

4 Spring-action tongs Popular with professional cooks, these stainless-steel tongs have a positive spring action and ample scalloped heads that allow you to clasp food securely.

5 Scissor-action tongs With their inwardly curved, pincer-like heads, these tongs are ideal for lifting and turning small pieces of food. The plastic-coated handles are comfortable to hold and remain cool in use.

6 Angled turner Ergonomically designed for comfort, this angled turner is available in right- and left-handed versions.

7 Non-stick turner Even though non-stick pans are more durable than they used to be, it still makes sense to use a non-stick turner. This one is made of die-cast aluminium and has an angled blade with generous slots for efficient drainage of fat.

8 Bamboo rice paddle and fork These are used for serving rice or mixing it with other ingredients. The paddle's tapered edge separates rice grains without crushing them.

9 Wire scoop This is ideal for scooping up french fries, sauté potatoes and any deep-fried food. Oil quickly drains away through the coarse wire mesh. The scoop also makes a useful skimmer.

10 Turning fork A five-pronged fork delicately harpoons slippery food.

6 Fat separators As fat always rises to the top as it cools, a utensil with a spout that joins the jug at the base allows you to draw off liquid, leaving the fat behind. The elegant porcelain fat separator (left) is designed to pour fat-free gravy from a deep spout at one end, and the risen fat from a shallow spout at the other. The more functional-looking acrylic fat separator (right) is available in 1-litre and 360ml sizes, and can be used for gravy, soup or stock.

7 Vertical chicken roaster Cut down on roasting time with this vertical roaster, which is designed to conduct heat directly to the inside of the bird. The bird browns and crisps evenly, while fat and juices drain into the base of the pan.

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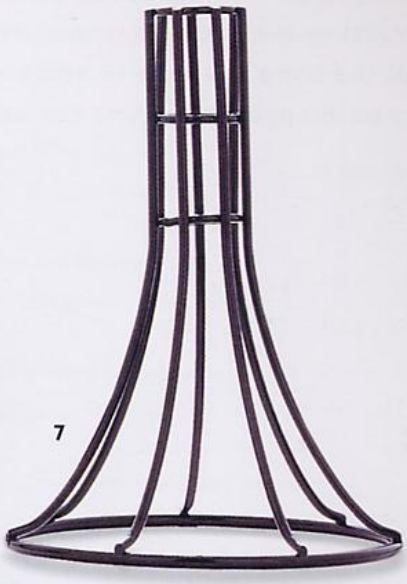

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8 Trussing needle Resembling a giant darning needle with an eye large enough to take a piece of string, a trussing needle makes a more secure job of sealing flaps and openings in poultry or tying a joint into a neat, compact shape. Unlike a skewer, it can pass all the way through the meat, drawing the string with it.

9 Enamelled roasting pan This heavy-duty pan measures 38 x 26cm and is perfect for larger joints. Sturdy handles assist with lifting and fold out of the way so they don't take up space in the oven. A lip in one corner accurately directs fat and juices as you pour them off. The enamelled surface is smooth and easy to clean.

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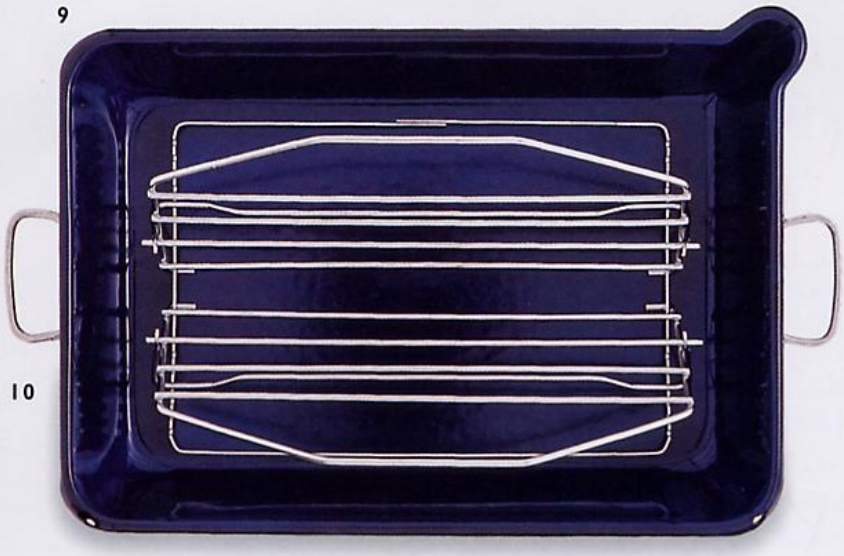

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10 V-shaped roasting rack Fully adjustable, this rack lifts any size of bird or joint well away from the base of the pan. Ordinary flat racks do little more than raise the meat a centimetre or two above the pan, which is of little use if you are cooking a goose or a duck, for example, as they produce copious amounts of fat. The V-shape not only facilitates clearance of fat but allows air to circulate under the meat, resulting in faster, more even cooking and crisper skins.

11 Bulb baster Rather surgical in appearance, this glass tube and rubber squeeze ball is used for basting as well as drawing off fat. Fill the tube with meat juices by squeezing the ball, then release and hold the tube upright. The fat will rise to the top and the fat-free juices can be squirted over the meat or used to make a gravy or sauce. Calibrations show exactly how much liquid the tube has sucked up, which can be useful in sauce-making.

11

12

12 Stainless-steel mini roasting pan People who live on their own need not deprive themselves of the pleasure of a roast. Just 20cm square, this smart little pan is the perfect size for one. It is also useful for roasting whole onions, beetroot or turnips. Made of top-grade stainless steel, it can also be used under the grill and on the hob.

5 Non-stick casserole Made of titanium, the surface of this casserole is hard enough to withstand the use of metal tools. A rock-solid base browns and crisps at high temperatures but is equally good for gentle simmering. The glass lid, sold separately, is heat resistant up to 260°C so can be used in the oven. It is suitable for all hobs except the induction type.

5

Terminology

O **Braising** A moist cooking method in which food is placed in a covered dish with just enough liquid to produce steam during cooking.

O **Casserole** This is a somewhat confusing term that is used interchangeably with 'stew'. It refers to the cooking pot, the method of cooking and the finished dish itself.

O **Pot roasting** This is a similar technique to braising but relies more on moisture from the vegetables and meat being cooked than on added liquid.

O **Stewing** A slow, moist cooking method for tough meats and for developing rich flavours. Just enough liquid is added to cover the ingredients.

6 Enamelled Dutch oven Also known as a 'cocotte', this very heavy, enamelled cast-iron pot has tall, straight sides for holding substantial quantities of meat, vegetables and liquid. The heavy lid can either be sealed with a strip of dough or set slightly askew to allow steam to escape. A thick base allows for even heat transference on the hob. Use it for browning and slowly simmering stews.

6

7 Cast-iron Dutch oven This handsome pot in pre-seasoned, black cast iron was designed by Björn Dahlström and is destined to become a modern classic. Like the traditional Dutch oven, it has a thick, flat base for browning, and tall sides for holding a large volume of meat and liquid. The sides flare slightly to encourage evaporation. It is available in a 5-litre size only.

7

8 Brushed stainless-steel casserole Another modern classic by Björn Dahlström, this pot has the same minimalist lines as the cast-iron Dutch oven. Available in 5- and 8-litre sizes, it is made of superior 18/10 stainless steel with a thick aluminium core that extends all the way up the sides, giving good heat distribution throughout the pan.

8

9 Polished stainless-steel casserole Designed by Robert Welch, this gleaming pan combines looks with functionality. The base has a thick copper core for fast, even heat distribution, and the handles are set away from the pan for safety and comfort (use gloves after prolonged cooking). The lid is reversible for efficient storage and stacking. The casserole is available in 2.7-, 4.2- and 5.8-litre sizes.

9

baking and gratin dishes

These dishes are designed for baking food in the oven or browning toppings of bubbling cheese, crisp potato or crunchy breadcrumbs. Made of good-quality materials, such as porcelain or cast iron, gratin dishes conduct heat well and are not stressed by high temperatures. They are usually brought to the table so are made in attractive shapes and colours.

1 Rectangular ceramic gratin dishes These glazed dishes are strong enough to be transferred directly from freezer to oven. The rectangular shape makes efficient use of oven and fridge space, while gently sloping sides maximize the area for crusty topping and also allow stacking. A thick rim assists with lifting.

The large gratin dish is deep enough to take four or five layers of lasagne. The slightly rounded interior makes serving and cleaning easier.

2 Oval ceramic gratin dishes These are the classic shape for a gratin and are versatile enough to be used as serving dishes or even for carving a small roast. The dishes can be transferred directly from freezer to oven. They conduct heat evenly and retain it well, ensuring food remains warm at the table.

3 Porcelain soufflé dishes Round, deep, and straight sided, these dishes expose soufflé mixtures to maximum heat. This coagulates the egg proteins before the air incorporated during whisking has time to escape. The smooth porcelain interior allows the expanding mixture to rise up the dish. It is available in several sizes, but the preferred one is 0.9 litre. Anything larger and you risk the inside not being properly cooked.

4 Enamelled cast-iron egg dish This shallow dish is specially designed for cooking eggs, either in the oven or on the hob. Widely flaring sides make serving and cleaning easier, but more importantly they increase the surface area and expose the eggs to maximum heat so they cook evenly.

5 Enamelled cast-iron baking dish The deep sides of this dish make it particularly useful for baking eggs that have a layer of vegetables, such as spinach, underneath, or for individual portions of lasagne.

6 Porcelain ramekins These smooth, straight-sided ramekins are used for individual soufflés, as well as baked custards or crème brûlées. Egg-based dishes such as these are cooked in a roasting pan filled with enough hot water to come halfway up the sides of the ramekins. The ramekins have a slightly roughened base to prevent a vacuum forming and making it difficult to lift them from the water bath.

7 Porcelain oval gratin dishes Available in several sizes, these classic white gratin dishes have a beautiful shape. The fluted handles merge with the sides of the dish, which slope gracefully outwards to increase the surface area for browning. The sloping sides increase the surface area.

8 Porcelain chocolate pots These elegant pots are traditionally used for rich chocolate desserts, as well as baked creams and custards.

Gratin dishes are shallow so they fit under the grill or close to the top of the oven. Handles are small and project outwards rather than upwards so food can be positioned close to the grill. Some dishes have a rim round the top edge to make them easy to grasp while wearing an oven glove.

The most indispensable dishes to have are a set of small, medium and large ceramic gratin dishes, either rectangular or square. They will earn their keep by doubling up as serving dishes for vegetables, rice and salads. A set of six or eight individual-sized ramekins is also useful, not only for sweet or savoury baked dishes, but also for serving small snacks to go with drinks.

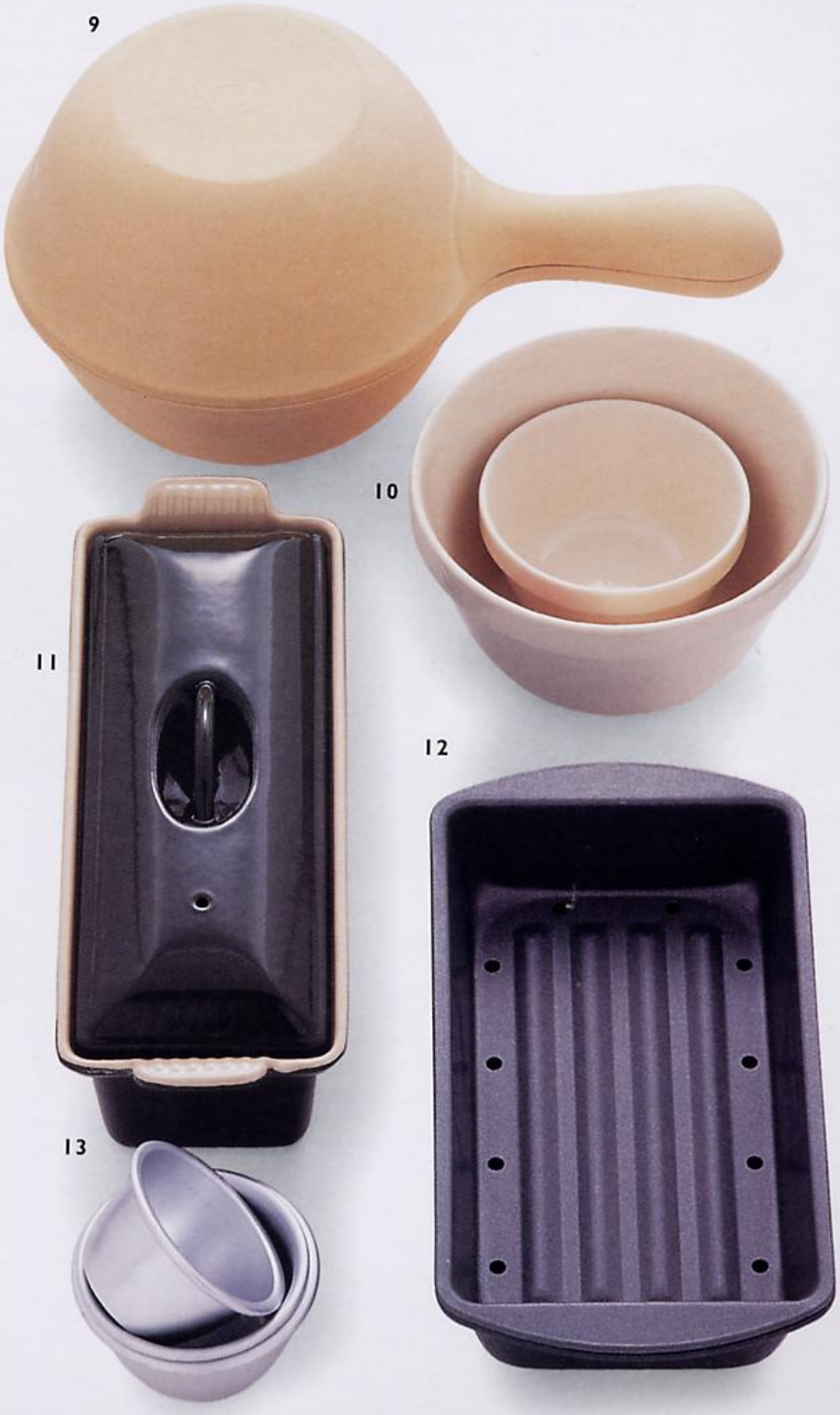
9 Earthenware potato baker
Known in France as a 'diable', this porous, unglazed earthenware baker seals in moisture and effectively steam-cooks the contents. By doing so it conserves both flavour and aroma. To work well, the size and shape of the baker should closely follow those of the contents. There are different shaped bakers for cooking chicken and fish.

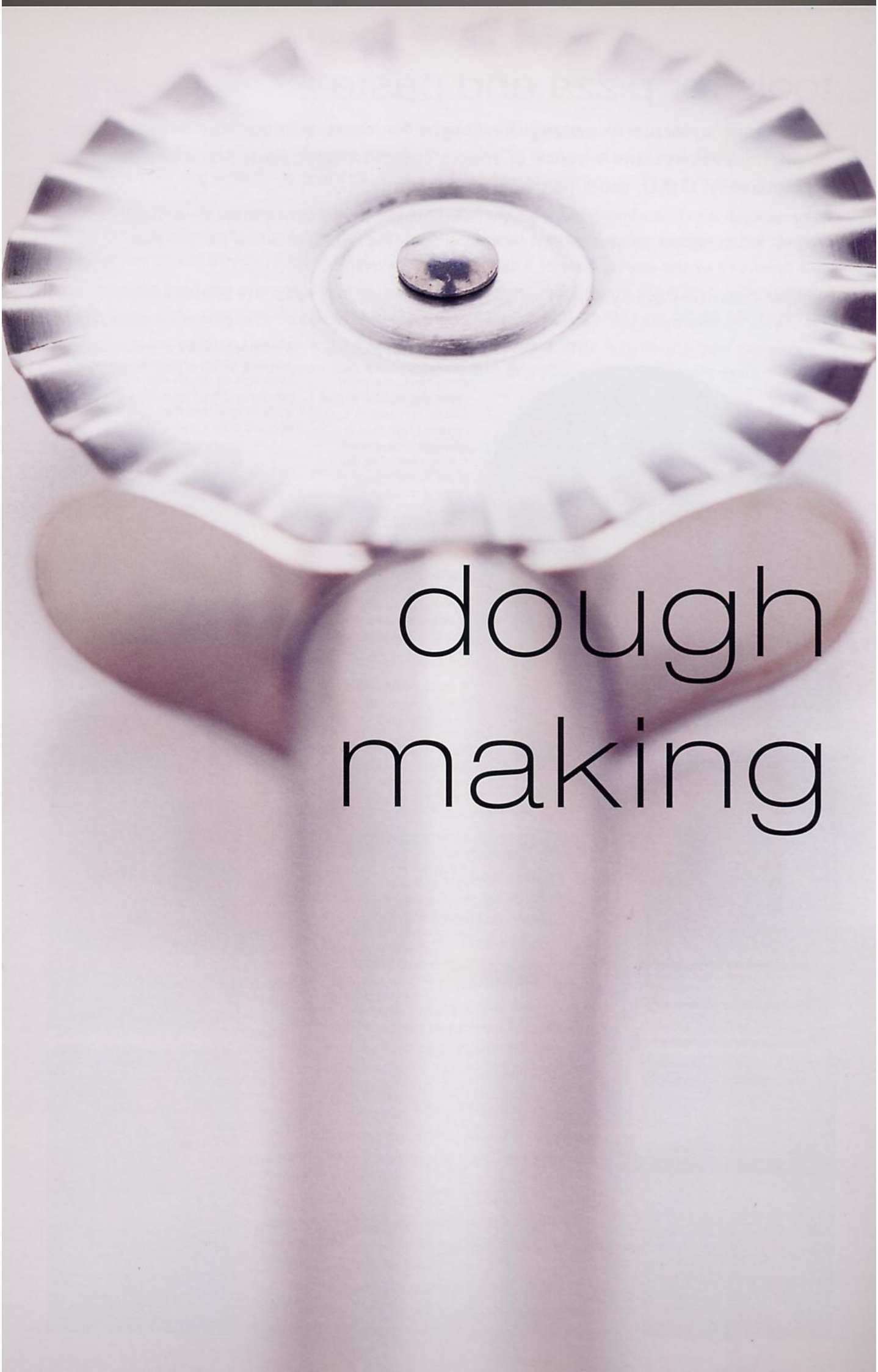
10 Glazed earthenware basins
These are the classic basins for traditional steamed puddings. The mixture is covered with pleated greaseproof paper, held in place with string tied under the thick rim, which is designed for the purpose. These basins are also ideal for chilled summer pudding, and can double as mixing bowls.

11 Cast-iron rectangular terrine
This dish is designed for baking and shaping the dense mixture of finely chopped vegetables, meat or fish that constitutes a terrine. Cast iron permits the necessary slow, even cooking, while the elongated shape facilitates slicing the terrine into neat, cracker-sized portions.

12 Non-stick steel meat loaf pan
This two-part pan has a ridged, perforated base for draining away the fatty liquid that is the bane of cooking a meat loaf. The outer pan doubles as a bread pan.

13 Aluminium pudding basins
These basins can be used for old-fashioned steamed puddings, and as cold moulds for chilled custards and mousses. Aluminium is not a suitable material for cooking fruit puddings unless lined with greaseproof paper (see 'material choice', page 8).





dough making

cake tins and trays

Cake baking is a precise skill requiring accuracy of weighing, temperature and tin size. Tins of the same volume can have different dimensions – one may be wide and shallow, another narrow and deep. A mixture intended to cook quickly in a shallow tin will not cook properly in a tin that is too deep, and vice versa. A good recipe will specify the dimensions of the tin, not just the volume.

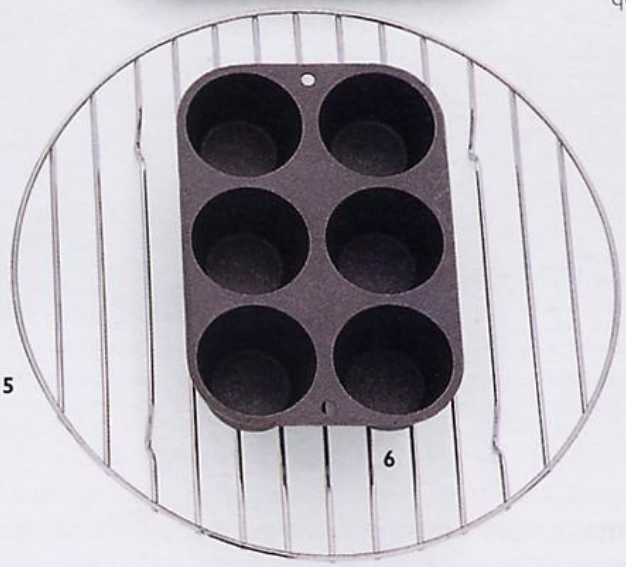
The most useful tins to have are a pair of round, shallow, 20cm tins for sponge cakes, a deep, 23 or 25cm tin for fruit cake, a Swiss roll tin and perhaps a 23cm springform tin for easy release of moulded cakes and desserts. One or two 12-cup trays are useful for muffins, small cakes and tarts, or dough left over from a large cake. Tins with a non-stick surface may not be foolproof, but are worth having nevertheless. For choice of materials, see 'Bread-tin materials', page 117.

1 Joined small tins These differently shaped individual tins are joined together in a row for convenience. Choose from boats, rectangles, waisted ovals and many more. Once you have one sort, you'll want to collect more.

2 Foil and paper cups Useful for light mixes that cook very quickly, these can be placed on a baking sheet or in the indented cups of a muffin tray. If they are left in place until ready to eat, paper cups prevent the cakes from drying out. Children love peeling them off.

3 English bun tray This 12-cup, non-stick tray is ideal for small cakes, tarts and mini-quiches. The ridged handles make the tray easier to grip when sliding it in and out of the oven.

4 Yorkshire pudding tray Similar to the English bun tray, this one has four shallow, flat-bottomed cups for making single portions of Yorkshire pudding. The tray can also be used for baking small sponge cakes, tarts and quiches.



5 Cooling racks An elevated wire rack speeds cooling of cakes by allowing steam to evaporate from all surfaces. A very fragile cake may be damaged by the wires, so cover the rack with a layer of greaseproof paper before placing the cake on it. The paper will absorb evaporating steam.

6 Popover/muffin tray Air circulates quickly between these individual cups pressed into a heavy, cast-iron sheet, promoting rapid rising and setting of dough. The flared, 4cm deep sides increase surface area, which encourages dough to rise and moisture to evaporate.

7 Angel food cake tin The tube allows heat to penetrate to the centre of the cake and provides another surface for the mixture to cling to as it rises. The tube projects beyond the rim so when the tin is inverted to cool the cake, air can pass beneath it. Some tins have small feet on the rim for better balance when inverted.

8 Deep, round cake tins Dense fruit-cake mixtures need long cooking, so should be baked in a deep, heavy-gauge tin to prevent scorching. These tins have a removable base and a reinforced, rolled rim that helps to maintain their shape.

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9 Springform tin This is invaluable for fragile cakes that are hard to unmould. When the clip is unbuckled, the sides of the tin move out from the base, leaving behind a perfectly formed cake. Made of heavy-gauge steel with a durable non-stick coating inside and out, this heavy-duty tin comes with an additional tube base embossed with swirling flutes. It is ideal for cheesecake or mousse-like cakes.

10 Swiss roll tin Extremely shallow, this rectangular tin is specially designed for cooking the thin layer of sponge needed for a Swiss roll. It is made from heavy-gauge tinned steel, which conducts heat quickly and evenly, and will not warp or twist.

11 Shallow cake tin This is used for quickly cooked mixtures such as sponge cakes and sponge sandwiches. It is best to buy a pair. Although it has a non-stick surface, it still needs greasing.

12

12 Madeleine tray The scallop-shaped, fluted indentations increase the area that is exposed to heat. This allows the batter to rise quickly in the middle and produce the characteristic madeleine shapes.

tart tins and pie plates

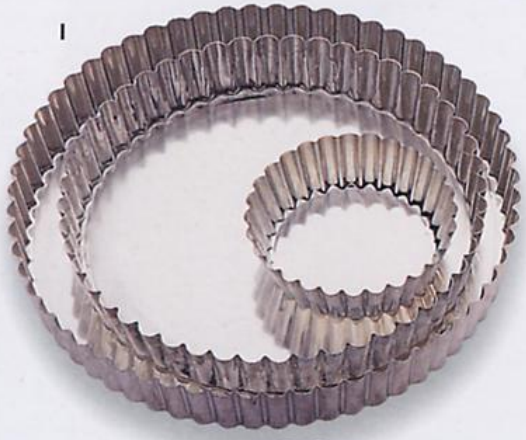
For a meltingly crisp, golden-brown pastry case, use a fluted metal tin with a removable base. Some cooks use a bottomless metal ring set directly on a baking sheet. Though they are attractive, tart dishes made of fluted porcelain absorb heat more slowly than metal and do not produce such a crisp crust.

The most useful diameters for tart tins are 23 and 25cm. If you ever need to cater for a crowd, you might also want to consider a 30cm tin. A high-sided tart tin comes in handy for making quiches. If you are partial to pies, deep and shallow ceramic pie dishes are worth buying, as is a metal pie plate for that spur-of-the-moment pie.

Rigid metal baking trays or sheets are essential for baking small pastry shapes, biscuits and hand-formed breads. They also provide porcelain dishes with a boost of heat from below, which helps to cook the base. It's worth buying two baking trays so you can load one while the other is in the oven. Never put two in the oven simultaneously – the top one will prevent heat circulating over the lower, and you'll end up with unevenly cooked food. Buy the largest baking tray your oven will accommodate, but allow at least 5cm all round for air circulation.

1 Deep fluted tart tins The fluted sides of these metal tins almost double the surface area exposed to heat. This encourages the crust to set more quickly. Being deep, the sides make a particularly strong crust, which is useful for cream- or egg-based fillings containing solid pieces of food. The bases of these tins are removable (see 2).

2 Shallow fluted tart tins Perfect for glazed fruit tarts or shallow custard-filled tarts, these tins are available in sizes ranging from 11 to 31cm. As with the deep-fluted tins, the bases are removable for easy unmoulding. Stand the tin on a jam jar and ease the outer ring down. You can leave the tart on the base when you transfer it to a serving plate.



3 Non-stick sponge tart tin This warp-free tin with a raised centre is used for baking those slightly old-fashioned whisked sponge cases that you load up with whipped cream and fruit. Once turned out, the base is left upside down, leaving a raised rim surrounding a circle for the filling. The base has a dimpled surface, which makes unmoulding easier.

4 Tarte tatin tin Made of copper lined with stainless steel, this elegant pan is ideal for baking the upside-down apple cake known as 'tarte tatin', because copper quickly conducts the high heat necessary for caramelizing syrupy juices. A wide base and shallow sides provide a large surface area, which allows the tart to cook evenly through to the centre.

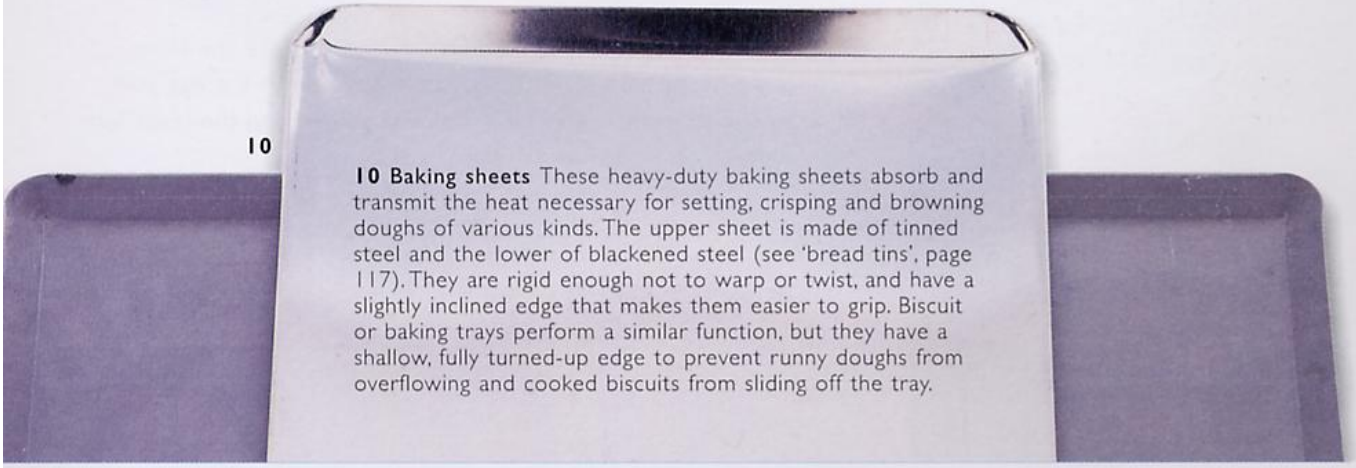
5 Deep pie dish This is one of those impeccably designed dishes that get handed down from generation to generation. It is made of thick, glazed ceramic, which allows steady heat to penetrate the centre of the pie without burning the crust. The wide, flat rim supports the top layer of pastry and gives a generous seal, while the gently rounded interior makes serving and cleaning easier.

6 Pie bird The purpose of this porcelain bird is to support the top crust and vent the steam that would otherwise make the crust soggy. The slightly arced base allows steam to travel upwards and out through the beak. Make sure the beak is wide open. You can also buy special funnels that serve the same purpose.

7 Shallow pie dish Like the deep dish (5), this classic piece of bakeware is made of thick, glazed ceramic with a flat rim for sealing double-crust pies. The round, shallow shape makes it a versatile dish – it can double up as a gratin dish and is elegant enough to be used as a serving bowl for vegetables, salad or fruit.

8 Pie plates These lovely traditional tinned-steel plates are for baking shallow, double-crust pies or open tarts – the kind your grandmother used to make. They are available in a range of sizes, from a single serving to a family-sized 30cm.

9 Non-stick pie plate with insert This pie plate is supplied with a useful perforated insert that can be used on its own instead of baking 'beans' (see page 126) when baking an unfilled pastry case.



10 Baking sheets These heavy-duty baking sheets absorb and transmit the heat necessary for setting, crisping and browning doughs of various kinds. The upper sheet is made of tinned steel and the lower of blackened steel (see 'bread tins', page 117). They are rigid enough not to warp or twist, and have a slightly inclined edge that makes them easier to grip. Biscuit or baking trays perform a similar function, but they have a shallow, fully turned-up edge to prevent runny doughs from overflowing and cooked biscuits from sliding off the tray.

1 Dough scraper Originally used for measuring and dividing dough into equal pieces, this traditional tool is now more often used as a scraper, though it still comes in handy for checking your dough is the right size.

2 Pastry wheel A fluted wheel gives a zigzag edge to lattice strips, pasta ribbons and ravioli squares. The safety guard prevents your finger slipping onto the wheel.

3 Lattice cutter This ingenious tool saves the work of hand-weaving a lattice topping for a tart. Toothed wheels produce a series of broken lines as you roll the cutter over the dough. Gently lift and stretch the dough to open out the lattice.

4 Flexible palette knife Use this tool for evenly spreading and smoothing the surface of soft mixtures and toppings. Wetting the blade helps prevent sticking.

5 Pastry blender A blender is useful for working fat into flour if your fingertips aren't up to it.

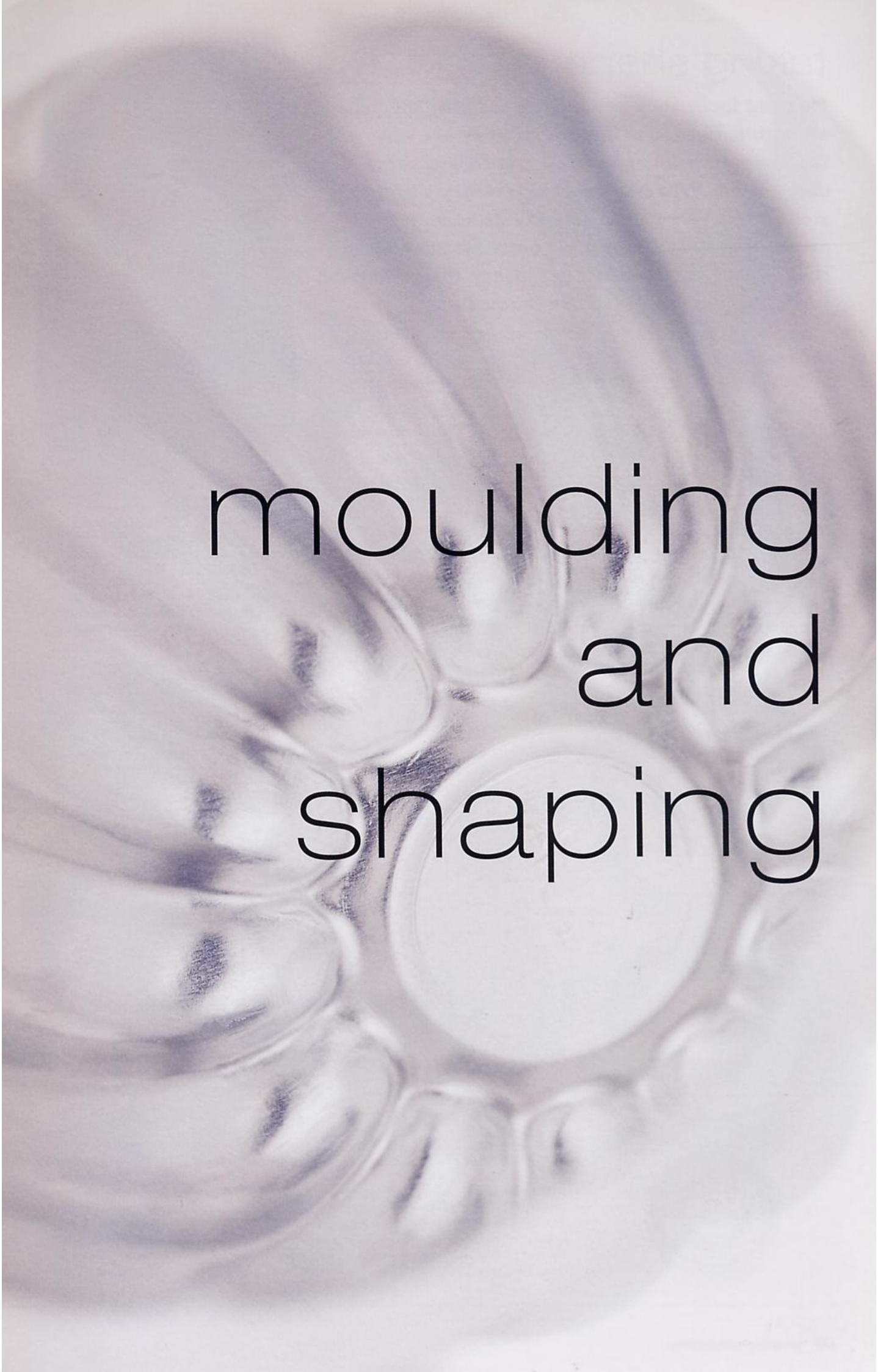
6 Natural bristle pastry brushes Bristles reach into crevices and coat surfaces evenly. These brushes are indispensable for anointing pastry, dusting flour or greasing tins. Wash and dry them carefully after use.

Pastry cutters
7 This covetable professional set includes cutters of every conceivable size. Use them to cut circles not only from dough, but also from firm fleshed vegetables, pineapple, aspic and hard-boiled eggs. A rolled top edge maintains their shape.
8 More homely is this set of three crinkle cutters. Make sure you wash and dry them carefully after use to avoid rusting.
9 This double-ringed doughnut cutter prevents the off-centre holes that may occur when using two separate cutters.

10 Marble pastry board Cool, smooth marble is the ideal surface on which to roll pastry. It needs very little flouring to prevent sticking.

11 Wooden rolling pin This 38cm professional pin sacrifices no rolling surface to handles.

12 Aluminium baking 'beans' These small metal weights help to prevent blistering and shrinking in the first stage of baking a pastry case. Spread them thickly over the base of a foil-lined case, packing them against the sides, and remove them with the foil once the pastry has set.



moulding and shaping

taking shape

Moulded foods such as mousses, custards and jellies seem to hark back to a more leisurely era when there was time for the setting and chilling these dishes need. Whether sweet or savoury, such foods are by their very nature soft and delicate, and perhaps have been somewhat ousted from modern cooking with its insistence on speedy chargrilling and stir-frying, and bold, assertive flavours.

Despite changing trends, moulds do have a place in today's kitchens, even if for only a simple concoction such as a child's birthday jelly. And let's not forget the most basic of modern moulds – the ice-cube tray. Moulds may either be decorative or utilitarian, tall or shallow, patterned or plain. They are often made of metals such as aluminium or copper, because these react very quickly to heat or cold; porcelain or glass is used where heat or cold needs to be retained. Confectionery moulds are made of tinned steel, plastic or rubber. Moulds are often made in the shape of a fish or fruit to indicate the nature of the dish.

Mixtures for tall or ornate moulds need to be more firmly set than for shallow ones, as they are more likely to collapse or leave part of their contents trapped in an intricate crevice. The smoother and shallower the mould, the easier it is to turn out.

1

1 Giant ice-cube tray This brilliant ice-cube tray is flexible so you can remove cubes individually, and is supplied with a metal tray so it stays flat in the freezer.

2 Fish mould Ornate and versatile, this mould is equally suitable for a grown-up fish mousse or a bright orange childrens' jelly.

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3 Ring moulds These seamless aluminium moulds are designed for baking savarins and babas – rich, yeasted cakes that are drenched in syrup or rum after cooking. The cake remains upside down after turning out and the depression in the centre is piled high with whipped cream and/or fruit. A wide, shallow trough and a thick central tube allow maximum exposure to heat, so the mixture cooks quickly as it rises. Ring moulds can also be used for mousses, custards or rice.

4 Bombe mould This smooth, spherical mould with a rounded top has a tightly fitting lid to prevent ice crystals forming during storage.

5 Charlotte mould To make a charlotte, this bucket-shaped aluminium mould is lined with buttered bread or sponge fingers and then filled with a fruit purée or mousse. The outwardly sloping sides make it easier to line and also allow it to be lifted free of its contents once inverted. Charlottes may be served uncooked and chilled, or baked in the oven and served hot – hence the mould's two heart-shaped handles. Either way, aluminium is an excellent conductor, speeding the penetration of heat or cold as appropriate.

6 Dariole moulds These small, simple aluminium moulds are good conductors of heat or cold. Use them for making tiny rum babas (but fill only halfway and allow the dough to rise before baking), small sponge puddings, timbales, jellies and crème caramels.

7 Heart mould A tool for romantic cooks, this mould is ideal for sweet or savoury dishes to celebrate Valentine's Day or anniversaries.

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8 Jelly/blancmange moulds These aluminium moulds are embossed with simple but decorative patterns well suited to a jelly or blancmange. Make sure the top of the unfilled mould is level so that when inverted it does not wobble while the contents are setting.

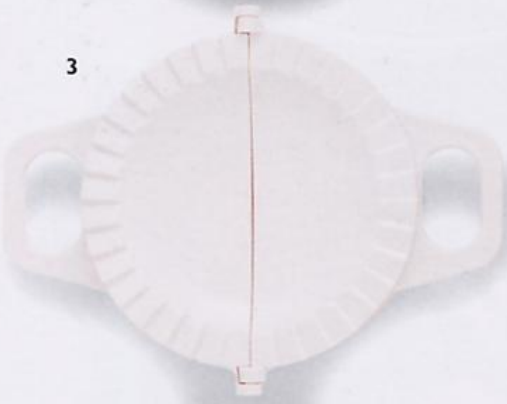
presses and extruders

Some foods depend on special shaping – piped cake icing, for example. Other foods, such as burgers or shortbread, simply look more appetizing if they are neatly formed or have a motif stamped on them.

These tools compress mixtures into a flattish shape, sometimes embossing or sealing it in the process; otherwise they force the mixture through a nozzle or a specially shaped cutter. None of the tools are essential, unless you regularly ice cakes, but they are fun to use and do not cost the earth.

1 Burger press This cast-aluminium, cow-embossed, hinged press produces a compact, perfectly round burger. The press eliminates the air pockets that cause burgers to crack when turned.

2 Tortilla press As you pull down the handle of this ingenious press, two cast-aluminium hinged discs uniformly flatten a small ball of masa harina dough into a paper-thin tortilla.



3 Turnover press Making meat, fruit or vegetable turnovers is easy with this hinged, semi-circular, plastic press, which simultaneously moulds, crimps and seals the pastry.

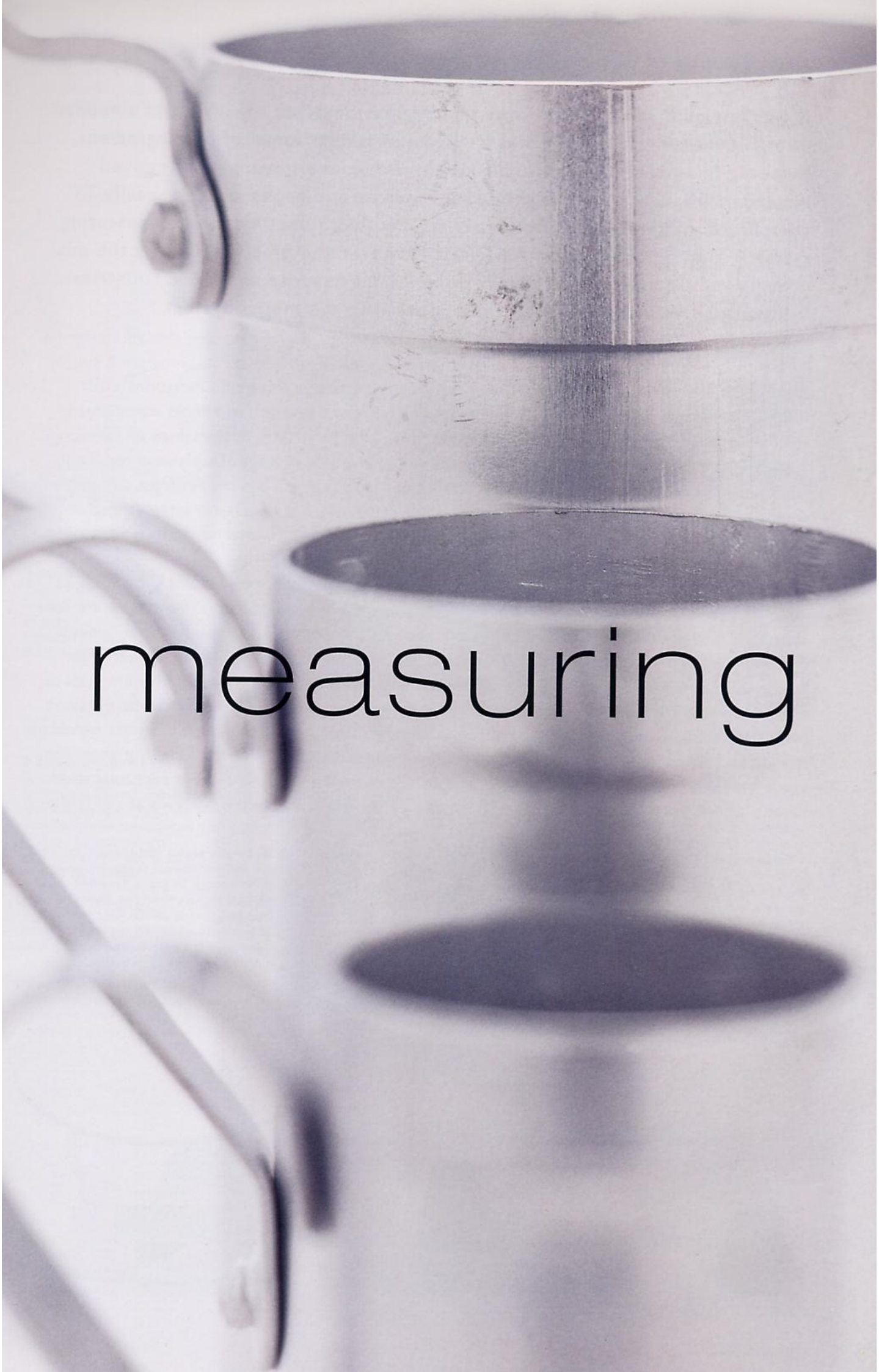
4 Forcing bags Forcing bags are used in conjunction with a nozzle for piping semi-fluid mixtures that hold their shape. The bags are soft and pliable, and respond to the slightest pressure, so may require patience at first. These professional-quality bags are made of waterproof nylon and have a loop for hanging them up to dry.

5 Shortbread mould Beautifully and precisely carved, this hand-made sycamore mould embosses a traditional thistle design on top of shortbread. Sycamore is a dense wood that is particularly suitable for carving intricate designs and producing a crisp imprint.

6 Biscuit press There is no easier way to make biscuits than with this sturdy aluminium press. A plunger forces dough through a decorative cutter, producing flawless biscuits of various shapes. The gun is supplied with nozzles for piping fillings and decorations.

7 Forcing/icing nozzles Used with a forcing bag or syringe, these conical nozzles shape the mixtures that are forced through them. Nozzles are made of metal, nylon or plastic, and come in a wide range of sizes and shapes. Those with well-defined, sharp edges produce the most clean-cut designs. Use them for writing or for piping decorative shapes such as stars, rosettes, ribbons or shells.

8 Icing syringe Icing is forced through the cylinder and nozzle by a plunger attached to a central shaft that passes through the lid. To operate the plunger, put your thumb through the central loop, hook your forefinger and middle finger through the loops on the lid, and press down.


measuring

weight and volume

It was not until relatively recently that recipes began to specify exact amounts of ingredients. In the past, it was a matter of taking 'some' of one ingredient, throwing in a handful of this and a pinch of that, and heating 'until cooked'. Nowadays, though, we go to the other extreme and probably over-specify. To complicate matters, some cookbooks specify two, sometimes three, measuring systems: metric, imperial and American. However, the practice of using the dual imperial/metric system is gradually disappearing as more and more countries make a positive move away from the imperial to the metric system.

American recipes specify the majority of ingredients by mass or volume, even though measuring by weight is more accurate and in some cases easier. For example, how do you measure a cup of tomatoes? Or a cup of something that does not easily fit into the shape of a measuring cup? Recipes from other countries specify solid or dry ingredients by weight, and liquid ingredients by volume. Small amount of dry ingredients are also measured by volume, in teaspoons or tablespoons.

Measuring equipment is not expensive so it is worth investing in a set of scales and measuring jugs marked in imperial and metric measurements, particularly if you use recipes from different countries. You can then use either of the two systems; they are not necessarily interchangeable.

It is also worth buying several sets of measuring spoons, if only to save having to wash a single spoon each time you measure sticky or greasy ingredients.

When buying scales, the choice is between balance, electronic and spring scales – each has its advantages and disadvantages. Balance scales look great, but are fiddly to use. The weights are sold separately, and you will need to buy two sets if you use both metric and imperial measurements. Electronic scales are the most accurate type, but you will need to keep replacing the batteries. Spring scales are easy to use, but need to be well built – once the spring breaks they are useless.

When choosing measuring jugs, remember that a more accurate measurement can be obtained from a tall, narrow jug than from a wide one. A narrow shape causes the contents to rise higher up the jug, so there is a greater distance between the calibrations printed on the side. The wider the space between each increment, the easier it is to see when the contents reach a particular level. Clear jugs are more useful than opaque ones, as they allow you to see the contents at eye level.

1 Balance scales Made to a traditional design, these attractive scales work by force of gravity: when the ingredients in the pan weigh the same as the metal weights on the platform, the beam is horizontal. Balance scales are accurate and built to last, but they are not quite as easy to use as either spring or electronic scales. They are also somewhat unwieldy, so are best kept on the work surface for convenience.

2 Electronic scales Meticulously accurate, these state-of-the-art scales are good-looking enough to grace the most design-conscious kitchen. Their one slight drawback is that the control switch for changing the read-out from metric to imperial is on the underside of the base – other models have a more convenient push-button on top.

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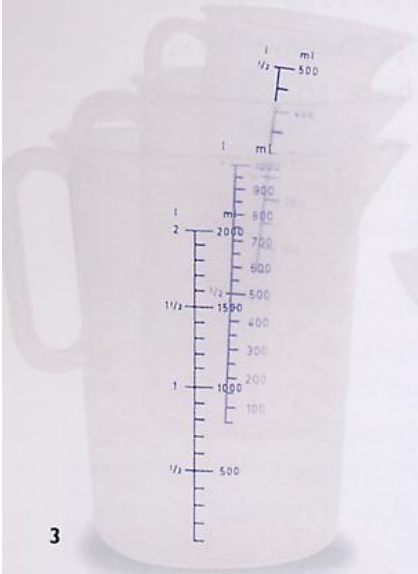
Measuring jugs
3 Invaluable in the kitchen, these tall polypropylene jugs can be used for measuring and pouring anything from a beaten egg to a large volume of stock. Very durable, they will withstand boiling liquids, and will not break if dropped. They are available in 1/2, 1 and 2.2 litre sizes.
4 This wide, 2 litre polypropylene jug can double up as a mixing bowl. It is especially useful for ingredients that need to be whisked, then poured in measured amounts – pancake batter, for example.
5 A small Pyrex jug is useful for transferring hot soup or stock from one container to another. It is heat-proof, easy to keep clean and will not absorb grease or smells.

6 Dry measuring beaker
The inside of this classic aluminium beaker is printed with different scales showing the equivalent volume of a particular weight of various dry ingredients. It also shows American cups and pints, English cups, pints and gills, as well as millilitres. The outside of the beaker is printed with metric/imperial conversions. Cheap, cheerful and extremely useful.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7 European measuring cups
These charming liquid measuring cups are made of aluminium and have finger-friendly handles. They hold 50ml, 100ml and 250ml.

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8 American measuring cups
These stylish stainless-steel cups are used for measuring liquids. The top measurement is printed just below the rim of the cup so the liquid does not overflow. (Dry measuring cups are filled to overflowing and then levelled off with a knife.) They hold 1/4, 1/3, 1/2 and 1 cup.

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9 British measuring spoons
Sensibly designed, these plastic spoons are narrow enough to reach inside spice jars. This comprehensive set includes the elusive 1/8 teaspoon and 1/2 tablespoon. It is worth buying at least three sets.

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10 American measuring spoons
Made of heavy-gauge stainless steel, these measuring spoons are made to last. The set includes the hard-to-find 1/8 teaspoon. Buy several.

11 Diet scales A must for calorie counters, these scales accurately weigh very small portions of food, showing clearly whether or not that morsel of chocolate weighs 5 or 10 grams.

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12 Spring scales Good looking and practical, these stainless-steel scales weigh up to 4kg of ingredients – about 1/2kg more than most kitchen scales. The dial is clearly printed with metric and imperial measurements, and large enough to read 20-gram or 1-ounce calibrations with ease.

10 Rotary electronic timer This easily operated electronic timer is set by rotating the dial forwards or backwards to display the chosen time, and pressing the button. It counts upwards or downwards, has an insistent ring and will clip, hang, stand or magnetize according to your needs.

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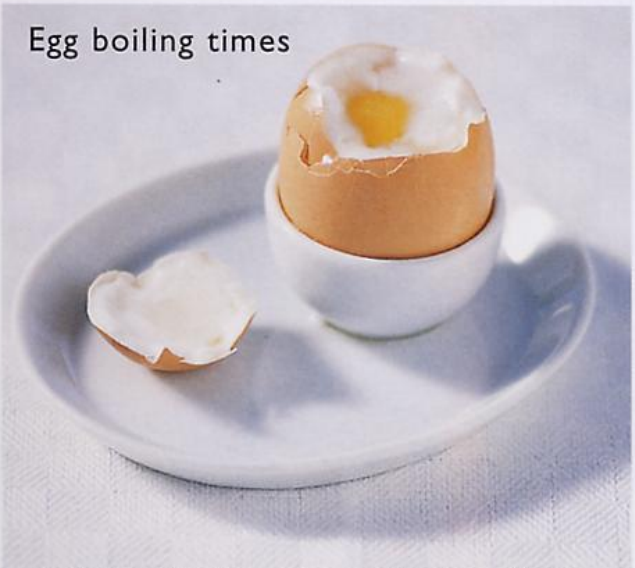
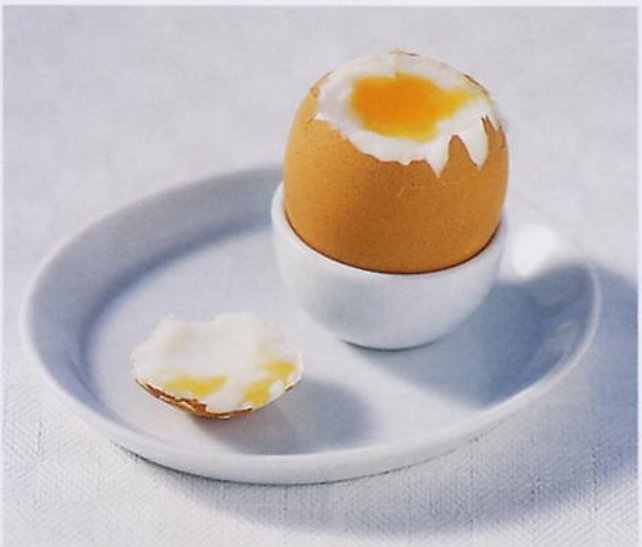
11 Clockwork timer With its resounding ring, this compact 60-minute timer is easily heard. It is also easy to use. It hangs by magnetism or by a convenient hook, and if you are venturing far from the kitchen, you can keep it on a string round your neck.

12 Hourglass timer Designed by Robert Welch, this is a classic, gravity-based timer for those who like their eggs cooked for exactly three minutes. An enamelled cast-iron frame protects the glass.

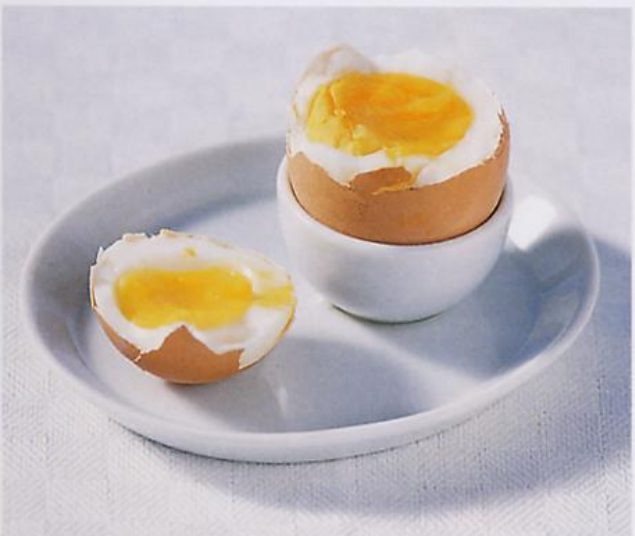
Egg boiling times



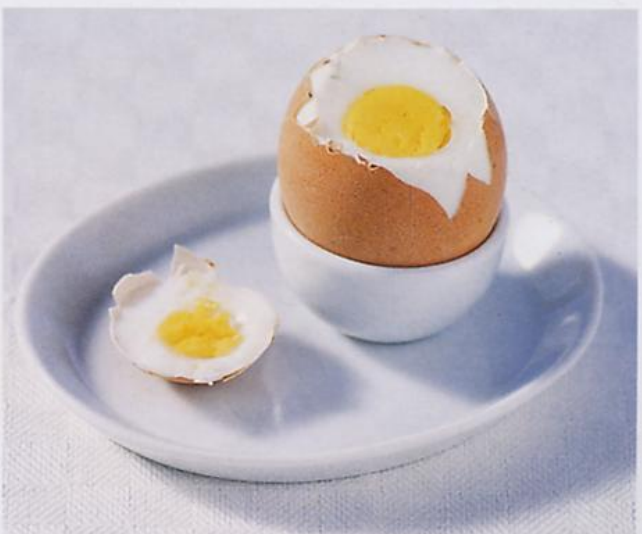
For best results, place an egg in cold water and begin timing the instant the water starts to boil.
At one minute the white starts to set, but the yolk is barely heated. A Caesar's salad dressing uses an egg boiled for one minute.



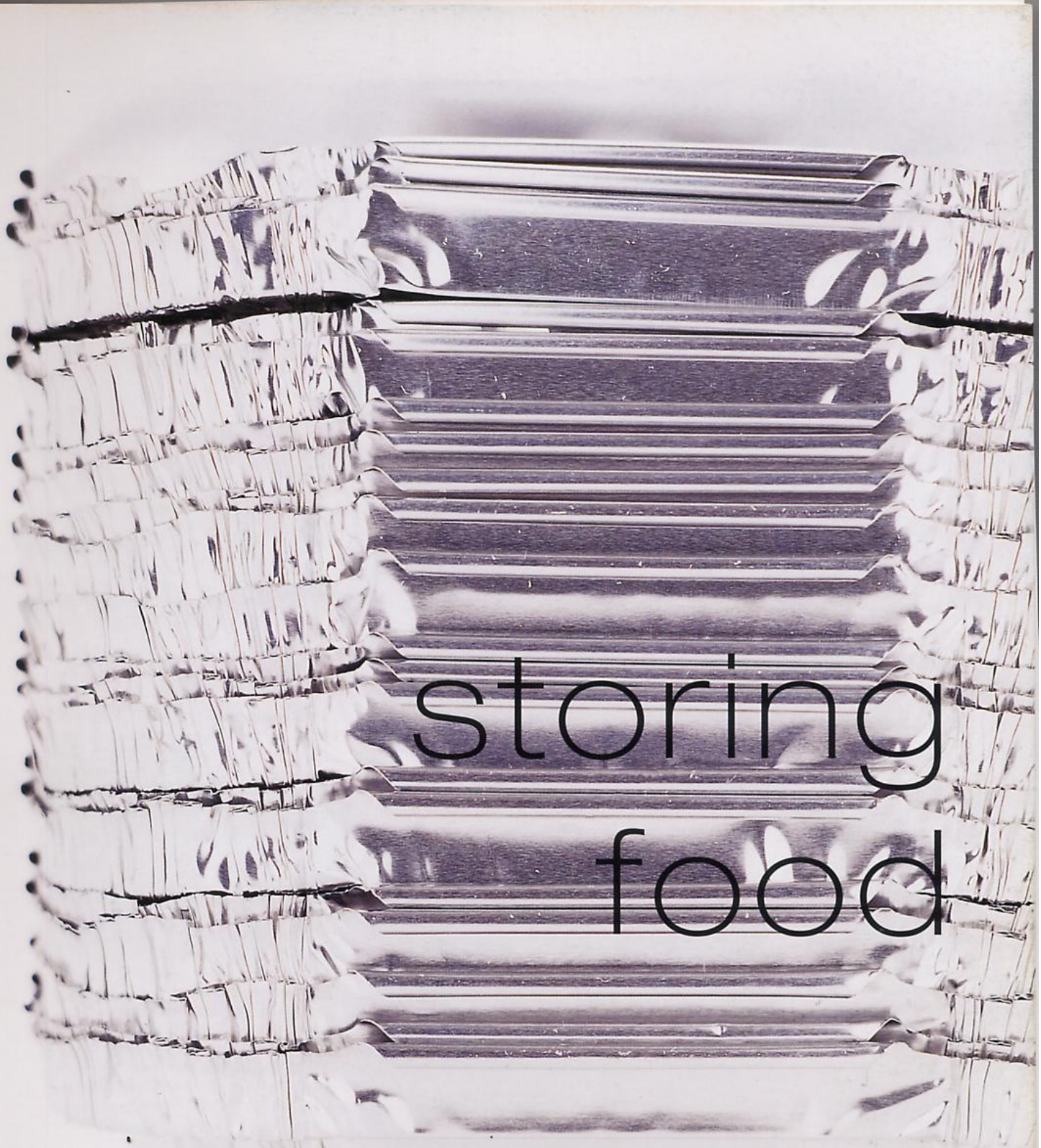
At three minutes the white is lightly set and creamy; the yolk is hot but still runny. French chefs call this an 'oeuf mollet'. This is the classic breakfast egg in which to dip your 'soldiers', or for serving in a bed of spinach, as in eggs Florentine.



At six minutes the white and yolk are set, but the centre of the yolk is very slightly creamy. Halved or quartered, these eggs make attractive garnishes. Halved eggs can be stuffed – remove the yolk, mix with your chosen seasoning and pile back in the egg.



At ten minutes the whites and yolk are tough, with a thin, dark line between the two. However, the whites and yolks can be rubbed through a sieve separately for use as a garnish – for veal schnitzels or Jewish chopped liver, for instance.


storing
food

covering up

All food should be covered, regardless of where you store it. Leaving food exposed not only allows moulds and bacteria to get to work (and they do so even in the fridge), but also allows air, heat and light to destroy valuable nutrients. So, for the sake of your health, it is important to invest in suitable containers and get in the habit of using them.

Top of the list should be a collection of airtight polypropylene boxes. Buy several sizes and shapes: deep, shallow, large and small, remembering that square and rectangular boxes make more efficient use of available space than round ones. Buy self-adhesive labels so you can identify the contents easily.

Equally invaluable are foil and cling film. Both are handy for wrapping things tightly or covering bowls. Polythene bags are essential for sandwiches and for anything that needs gathering together in a flexible container.

Glass storage jars look attractive, but they are not airtight, nor do they protect the contents from light. They are suitable only for non-perishables such as dried pasta and pulses. Spices and dried herbs should be kept in airtight containers away from light. Nuts and wholemeal flour need airtight containers, too, as they contain fats that eventually become rancid if exposed to air. They also need protection from heat, so don't store these items in a cupboard close to a heating pipe or an under-unit strip light.

1 Polythene bags These are a household essential for wrapping sandwiches or for preventing moisture loss from fruit and vegetables while stored in the fridge. Heavy-gauge bags can be used for storing food in the freezer.

2 Aluminium foil Foil is used not only to protect food and pans during cooking, but also to exclude air during storage. Being flexible, it can be wrapped tightly round any awkwardly shaped items, such as a cooked chicken. Foil also keeps sandwiches fresh and prevents loose or chunky fillings from escaping. Unlike cling film, it does not cause cheese to sweat. Buy the heaviest grade possible – though cheaper, thin foil tears easily so what you save in money you waste in damaged foil.

4 Aluminium foil dishes Made from heavyweight aluminium foil, these are versatile containers in which to freeze, transport or reheat food. A flexible rim folds over a flat cardboard lid, which rests on the flattened edge. Though the foil containers are reusable, the perishable lids limit their useful life.

5 Foil bag Strong and flexible, this polythene-lined foil bag is ideal for freezing liquids such as soup.

3 Cling film Use cling film for tightly wrapping food or for covering bowls. Ordinary cling film should never be used in direct contact with very fatty foods, such as butter, high fat cheeses (e.g. Cheddar or Parmesan) or food in an oily medium (e.g. tuna in oil), as harmful substances in the cling film can migrate into the food. When covering bowls for use in a microwave, do not let cling film come in direct contact with the food unless the words 'Safe for use in the microwave' are printed on the packaging.