



Baker's Dozen of Healthy Cooking Gadgets

Today's smart cook has four aims: to get fat out of foods, retain the vitamins and minerals in them, keep salt low and enhance flavor so that a healthy diet is also appealing. For most people, saving time is desirable too. The equipment list that follows will help achieve these goals.

1. **A steamer.** This can be an electric appliance, but you can also use stackable bamboo baskets, a metal colander, or a fold-up wire basket that fits into the pots you already own. A steamer cooks quickly, need no fat, and minimizes nutrient losses. What's more, it makes for easy cleanup.
2. **A wok,** preferably nonstick. You can push vegetables and other foods up the sides of the wok as they cook, allowing for quick sauteing in a minimal amount of oil. A nonstick surface further minimizes the oil you need. (If you overdo the oil, you may wind up creating a high-fat meal in a wok.) You can use almost any frying pan the same way you use a wok.
3. **Fat-removing gravy pitcher, ladles, and racks or strainers** (for bottom of roasting pans). The gravy pitcher looks like a spouted cup: you pour pan juices into it, the fat rises to the top, and you pour off the fat free broth from underneath. Ladles help skim fat from the top of liquid. A rack under poultry or a strainer under a meatloaf allows fat to run to the bottom of the pan. You can also rescue the flavorful broth by refrigerating what's in the pan, the skimming the fat when it rises. (To speed things up, add several ice cubes before you chill it.)
4. **Cheese grater.** This lets you add a lot of cheese flavor to a dish with only a little bit of cheese.
5. **Yogurt funnel.** You can buy one, or else make your own with a coffee cone and filter paper or a strainer and cheesecloth. Spoon the yogurt into the funnel and let the liquid (whey) drain out. This leaves a thick yogurt "cheese," good for dips, spreads, salad dressings, and baked potatoes. Save the whey for other recipes; it's full of nutrients.

6. **Pressure Cooker.** Basically a steamer, this is very fast, even for presoaked dried beans and other legumes.
7. **Blender or food processor.** You can get a small inexpensive, easy to wash model that does a good job. Use it to puree fruits with yogurt, skim milk, or other ingredients for nourishing fruit smoothies; to chop herbs, garlic, onions and other flavor boosters; and to puree vegetables for thick soups.
8. **Nonstick pots, racks, muffin tins, and cake pans.** A great help in minimizing fat, these items also make cleanup easy.
9. **Fish poacher.** If you add herbs and a little wine, lemon juice, clam juice, or fish stock, you get a delicious result without frying. Fish filets bake nicely in almost any shallow pan with a little liquid.
10. **Microwave oven.** Use this for frozen and fresh vegetables, fish and other dishes. As a rule, micro waving destroys fewer vitamins than conventional cooking and requires no added fat. For fat-free popcorn, there are plastic containers specially designed to pop corn in the microwave.
11. **Garlic press.** This lets you add garlic to almost anything. Just throw the unpeeled cloves into the press. A real time saver.
12. **Grill racks with closely spaced holes.** You can broil meat, vegetables, or fish on these-- and you can do it over a regular burner on a gas, electric or charcoal grill. Some models have easy to clean finishes. Stovetop models have a pan to catch drippings.
13. **Kitchen scale.** This can take the guesswork out of portion control.

What items would you put in your "Baker's Dozen"?