

The Evolution of Pots and Pans



Pot, pans, bakeware, and cookware. The choice can be a little daunting for the home cook. What sort of pan do I buy? How many do I need? What shape and size do I buy? How much will it cost and how do I know if I'm getting value?

Here are a few hints and tips on how to answer these questions and make the most of your kitchen utensils at home.

IN THE BEGINNING...

Among the first techniques of cooking was roasting meat over an open fire or hot embers. In some areas of the world they would cover food with leaves, bark or even clay before cooking to preserve moisture.

The greatest difficulty was boiling water - something we take for granted everyday of the week. Sources show that some ancient civilisations would line a pit with river stones and fill it with water, and raise the temperature by adding hot stones from the fire.

In many locations tribes would use giant tortoise shells and sea molluscs, as these proved to be a watertight cooking vessel. The development of earthenware (clay or ceramic) was a vast breakthrough in early cooking.

With the Iron Age came with the luxury of bronze and iron pots. Although production of these vessels was slow and expensive, it provided a much better cooking medium and gave a lot more control. The focal point of most medieval kitchens would be the giant iron cauldron simmering over the fire while shallow earthenware would be used for smaller applications.

By the 17th century it was common in a western kitchen to find an array of iron skillets, pans, baking trays, hooks and trivets. By the 19th and 20th century improvements in metallurgy led to the widespread use of metals such as steel, stainless steel and aluminium for a range of products for every budget.

SO WHAT PAN DO I CHOOSE?

First you must ask yourself how much am I willing to spend on a pan? Pots and pans can range from as low as \$10 and reach up to \$500. In general, the cheaper pans you come across will often be made of coated aluminium, so they are lightweight, have

plastic handles and a thin base.

I would suggest purchasing a pot that has a long guarantee on it. It should look durable, meaning the base feels solid and is made of copper which conducts the heat well. The handle should be attached with quality stainless rivets to avoid loosening. It should have a toughened outer coating to avoid scratching and the effects of harsh cleaning.

It doesn't take long before the base will buckle, then the handle melts and becomes loose and the non-stick coating peels off and leaves you cooking on raw aluminium which taints and discolours food, not to mention they are hard to clean. So it won't be long till you find yourself searching again. I believe if you spend a little bit extra initially and look after your pans you will have them still in 20 years.

The best advice I can give is pick up a pan before you buy it, make sure you feel comfortable with it and its weight - imagine it is hot and full of food as well.

Another tip is buy pots and pans with oven-proof handles which will fit into your oven. This allows you to roast, braise, and oven bake all in the one pan. You can buy a good set of pans for about \$450 - \$500 and provided you look after them, they will last you for years to come.

There is a new material on the market that I rate highly and that is anodised aluminium which has the qualities and durability of steel but the heat transfer of aluminium. Don't get confused thinking that this is a non-stick pan though, its design is to hold on to the food until it browns evenly and caramelises the flesh giving you a better finished product. I find the best anodised pans on the market are those made by Calphalon.

It now brings us to the second question which is how many pans do I need? What shape and size? I think with a little know-how all you really need are a good four pans to start you off. They comprise of:

1. 25-30cm skillet frypan.
2. 32cm sauté pan with lid.
3. 3lt covered saucepan.
4. 8-10lt covered stockpot.

With this combination you can master almost anything.



Casimir Ross is passionate about sharing his knowledge and experience with the *He Cooks* students. This experience has been gathered at restaurants all over the world, including *Pier Restaurant* at *Rose Bay* in *Sydney*, and working with *David Thompson* at *Nahm* in *London*. Returning from *London*, Casimir was *chef de partie* at *Restaurant Balzac* in *Randwick*. Cas teaches *He Cooks* classes in *Sydney*.