

Kitchen basics: the tools you need

Easy · 30 min to shop · Varies; secondhand and dollar stores work

You can cook almost anything with about 15 basic items: a chef's knife, a cutting board, a skillet, a saucepan, a baking sheet, measuring cups and spoons, a mixing bowl, a colander, a can opener, a spatula and a food thermometer. Skip the gadgets until you miss one.

YOU'LL NEED

- ☐ The checklist below
- ☐ A small budget, or a family member's spare pans

WHAT TO KNOW

- 1 **Start with what you'll use every day.** Iowa State Extension says some kitchen items are necessary and used daily, while things like waffle irons, special pans and blenders usually aren't. In a small kitchen, stick to the everyday items.
- 2 **Get the cutting set: a chef's knife, a paring knife, a cutting board and a can opener.** A second cutting board just for raw meat keeps germs off everything else.
- 3 **Get the cooking set: a skillet, a saucepan, a casserole dish, a baking sheet, a pot holder, a spatula and a food thermometer.** The thermometer is how you know chicken is done, not guessing.
- 4 **Get the measuring and mixing set: measuring spoons, dry measuring cups, a liquid measuring cup, a mixing bowl, a mixing spoon and a rubber spatula.** Add a colander and a slotted spoon for draining.
- 5 **Wait on the extras.** A blender, stock pot, whisk, muffin tin, slow cooker, tongs and mixer are handy, not required. Buy one when a recipe you actually make keeps needing it.
- 6 **Learn to read a recipe first.** Read it all the way through before you start, check you have the equipment and ingredients, and set everything out before you cook.
- 7 **Set up for safety.** Turn pot handles inward, stay near the stove while something's cooking, and keep towels and pot holders away from the burners.

Watch out Pick up knives by the handle and cut away from your body.

DAD NOTE *You don't need a fancy kitchen. One good knife, one good pan and a thermometer will feed you well for years.*

Full lesson: apkeys.com/your-place/cooking-on-a-budget/kitchen-basics-the-tools-you-need/

Checked October 3, 2026. Sources: Iowa State University Extension; FoodSafety.gov.