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TIPS FOR BUYING COOKWARE

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There is so much attractive cookware to choose from in so many materials, finishes, shapes and sizes that deciding which to buy is a real puzzler.

The right cookware can help you prepare better food, can make cooking easier and more pleasant and will reduce costly replacements. The wrong pot or pan may let food stick, burn or cook unevenly. Some cookware is hard to keep clean and attractive and will warp and lose handles. It is wise to pay for quality in the cookware you use most often and in different ways. Quality cookware can last a lifetime.

Choosing the best cookware for you depends on many factors. Some of these are the kind and amount of cooking you do, the kind of range you use, your storage space and your preferences.

Before you buy, find out what cookware is available. Know the requirement of your range. Consider your cooking needs and the amount you want to spend. Find out how the different materials and styles perform. Then decide which is right for you.

Both top-of-the stove and oven cookware are made from a large variety of materials including aluminum, steel, iron, glass and ceramic. Many changes are being made in how these materials are finished, inside and out. Many new shapes, sizes and decorations are available. In most instances the result is improved performance.

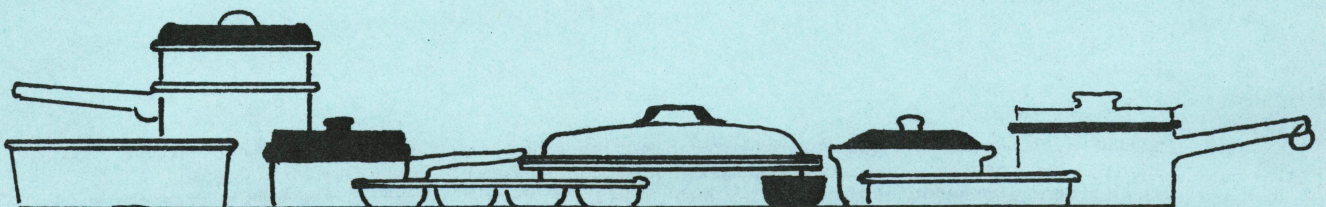
The introduction of new methods of cooking such as the ceramic smooth-top stoves, the microwave oven and now induction cooktops require particular cookware features.

Induction cooktops, for example, have magnetic coils beneath the cooking surface that create a magnetic field which induces energy into the utensil. The pan gets hot, the food cooks and the cooktop stays cool. The cookware must have magnetic properties for the process to work. This eliminates ceramic, glass and aluminum. Any ferrous metal works such as iron and steel.

This publication discusses the possibilities for traditional cooking methods and does not attempt to include specific materials for microwave or induction cooking. However, some of the principles in evaluation are applicable.

What to look for:

- Material should conduct heat evenly and quickly over the bottom of the utensil.
- Utensils should be strong and durable. Dents and warps will reduce effective performance.
- Construction and finish should make the utensils easy to clean. Crevices, seams and rough edges can harbor food and bacteria. Sharp corners are



difficult to get at with scouring pads. Dimpled surfaces can trap burned food and grease.

- Bottom should be flat to make the best contact with the heat source.
- The bottom diameter of the pan should fit the burner size to reduce energy waste and overheating the sides and handle.
- Covers should fit well for a good seal. Vents should be away from the knob to prevent burns.
- Knobs and handles should be of a sturdy, heat resistant material and of sufficient strength to support the weight when the utensil is filled to capacity. Handles should be attached so they will not turn when lifting and should have a heat shield to prevent scorching.

- Versatile sizes should be selected to accommodate many cooking tasks efficiently. Saucepan size is usually rated in inches of diameter. For most cooking tasks, $\frac{3}{4}$ full is the cooking capacity.
- Utensils must be made of a material that will not adversely affect the color, flavor or nutrition of the food being cooked.

No single material is best for all purposes. Select pots and pans individually and vary the material to fit the particular task. Generally, buying full "sets" of cookware is not good economy. Sets usually include pieces that you would never use, or the materials and finishes are not suitable for all cooking tasks. Avoid straining your budget and buy with care. Get quality in your day to day cookware, and supplement with low cost special purpose utensils.

This information was compiled from materials prepared by Susan Holder, Housing Specialist, New Mexico State University, and Kathy Hake, Extension Home Economist, Kootenai County, Idaho.