

Six Kitchen Tools to Simplify Holiday Cooking

It seems like we often try to do *more* cooking in *less* time over the holidays. Our myriad of kitchen activities make the circus juggler seem like an amateur.

Here are some kitchen items you might "gift" yourself with over the holidays to reduce the number of balls you're trying to keep in the air!

1. Hot beverage carafe

Some guests may enjoy their coffee or tea with the meal, others after the meal. A morning spent together with friends and family over coffee or tea is another pleasant holiday activity.

But, let a pot of coffee or tea set around too long and it cools off and flavor diminishes. Or, if left on a heat source for too long, an undesirable flavor may form. Reheating your brew doesn't add to flavor, either.

Rather than make several small, fresh amounts of coffee, keep coffee (and tea) hot and fresh-tasting for hours in a carafe. (NOTE: Some coffee makers come with carafes.)

A carafe also is great for keeping hot chocolate warm to greet family and guests as they straggle out of bed at different times.

Preheat the carafe by filling with it hot water and then emptying the water before adding your beverage. This warms the carafe and helps keep your beverage hot longer. Look for a carafe that is easy to use and clean.



2. Extra cutting board(s)

Avoid cross-contamination when cutting different types of foods for the same meal by owning several cutting boards. This is especially important if you're cutting raw meats, poultry or seafood and then need to cut ready-to-eat foods. With more than one cutting board you can avoid spending extra time washing your board before cutting the next item.

Plastic or other non-porous cutting boards are easier to safely clean as they can be run through the dishwasher. Check for a board that says it won't dull knives.

3. Spoonula (spoon spatula)

While you're busy multi-tasking, make your kitchen utensils multi-task, too. The spoonula is a spoon-shaped spatula that takes on many of the tasks of both a mixing spoon and a spatula.

Its head is usually made of silicon. Check for the degree of heat resistance. Most will resist heat of 400 degrees F or higher, making them suitable for stirring at the stove.

When it comes to cleaning, for some, you can throw the whole spoonula in the dishwasher. For others with a wooden handle, you may need to remove the handle and wash just the head in the dishwasher. Look for one where food is unlikely to stick in cracks where the handle joins the head.



If you want to experiment with this kitchen tool, start with a larger-sized one. Look for one where the head is both firm and flexible. It should be strong enough to mix heavy batters yet flexible enough to conform to the contours of the mixing bowl. The handle should feel comfortable yet be sturdy enough so it doesn't bend when mixing.

Here are some of the things you can do with a heat-resistant spoon-shaped spatula:

- Mix ingredients with fewer strokes using a large spoonula as its head is usually broader than the head of a regular mixing spoon.
- Scrape down the sides of the bowl during mixing.
- Stir foods at the stove.
- Use them for stirring in nonstick pans as they won't scratch the pan.
- Stir scrambled eggs at the stove.



4. Extra set (or two) of measuring spoons

While the chili flavor tasted great in the dip, it doesn't go as well in the sugar cookies. Rather than continually washing and rewashing that single set of measuring spoons, buy an extra set or two.

And while we're on the topic of measuring spoons, why wash several measuring spoons when you didn't use them all. Or hassle with holding on to the remaining spoons while you measure from just one? Consider taking your measuring spoons apart. This works best for sturdier measuring spoons with easy-to-read size markings. Designate a storage compartment just for the spoons in a drawer.



5. Universal pan lid

Every time you lift the lid to peek into a pan to check what is going on, takes time and releases heat, making the food take longer to cook. If you've ever wished your pans had see-through lids, buy a "universal pan lid."

These lids usually have several rings of ridges that let the lid fit over different sizes of pans. Some brands may cover pans from about 8" to 12" in diameter (as measured across the top of the pan). Other brands may offer both a smaller and larger size of universal pan lid.

When comparing features of various universal pan lids, consider whether these factors are important to you for intended uses:

- Dishwasher safe?
- Stay-cool knob?
- Oven-safe? To what temperature?



6. Pinch bowls

Ever pour too much of an ingredient into a recipe OR forget if you've added it? Worse yet, maybe you've added most of the ingredients, only to discover you're out of an essential ingredient! Measuring those small but mighty ingredients into "pinch bowls" before you start mixing your recipe may save the day.

Usually sold in sets of four to six bowls, these bowls hold just a "pinch" of ingredients like herbs, spices, flavorings, eggs, etc. They generally range in size from one to four ounces.

