

I Need Some Pots and Pans To Cook In - What Should I Buy?

If you've shopped for cookware recently, you may have gotten a headache from looking at all the choices and brands available. And all of them seem to be telling you the same things - I'm the best; I'm a great value; buy me.

What should you buy? Before you start considering your cookware options consider the following five questions.

1) Do you cook for a few people or a lot of people? This will determine how many pots and pans you need and also how big you need them to be.

2) What kind of cooking do you most often do? I like to make homemade soup so a large stockpot is essential for me. On the other hand, I never steam anything on the stovetop (I use an electric steamer) so a stovetop steamer is useless to me. Think about what you cook or what you want to learn how to cook so you can determine what pieces of cookware you'll need.

3) How important is ease of cleanup to you? If you hate cleanup you should probably buy non-stick cookware. If you want to be able to put your cookware in the dishwasher you'll need to look at the sets you're considering to see if it's advisable. For example, hard-anodized aluminum cookware is a very popular type of cookware but the outside of the pots will change color and darken if you wash them in your dishwasher. I own this type of cookware and I love it. But there are days when I don't love having to take the time to hand-wash it, but I do because I don't want it to get discolored in my dishwasher. Most professional cooks prefer stainless steel cookware. It's nice to cook with but clean-up can be fairly time-consuming.

4) What type of stove do you have? Do you have a smooth-top electric stovetop? If you do, you need flat-bottom pots and pans. I didn't think about this when I purchased my smooth-top stove. I quickly discovered my pots and pans weren't flat bottomed and that they didn't work well on my new stove. As a result I had to go buy new cookware that had flat bottoms. If you have an induction cooktop you need pots and pans with ferrite in them, which means they need to be magnetic.

5) What is your budget? I highly recommend buying the best quality cookware you can afford. The best quality is not always the most expensive cookware available, but it's never the cheapest. If you buy a \$49.99 set of cookware, you'll be getting a bargain but you won't be getting a good set of cookware.

Now that you've thought about your needs and know how much you can afford to spend, it's time to go look at cookware. You'll likely be using your cookware every day so you want something that you're comfortable working with. But the number one thing to look for in cookware is weight and heft. Heavier weight cookware won't warp over time which causes you to lose the flat, even cooking surface on the bottom of your pan; and you can control the heat better in heavier weight cookware. I'm not saying you have to buy cookware that you need to join the gym to be able to lift out of the cupboard but don't buy cheap flimsy pots and pans.

If a pan feels like you could bend it, don't buy it. I'm not suggesting you walk into a store, pick up every pot and pan and try to bend it, but look at one of the saucepans. If you push a little on the sides and that saucepan has some "give" to it, it's not going to hold up well on your stove.

To get a good quality cookware set you'll probably need to spend a minimum of \$200. If you don't have that much to spend consider buying only the essential pieces you need to get you started such as a 2-quart saucepan, a sauté pan and a stockpot. Add pieces as you can afford them. Although you'll typically get the best value for your money if you buy a cookware set versus buying the individual pieces don't buy a poor quality set just so you have an entire set of cookware. You'll end up spending more money in the long run replacing those pots and pans when they get warped and ruined (which won't take long).

If you take the time to consider your needs, do some shopping around, and purchase the best quality set of cookware you can afford, you're likely to be happy with your purchase for a long time.

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D Ruplinger is a featured writer for <http://www.acooksdelight.com>. For more information on cookware including, cast iron cookware, non-stick cookware, and stainless steel cookware visit <http://www.acooksdelight.com>