

The care and cleaning of cookware



AT HOME WITH
Marni Jameson

Equip Your Kitchen — Part 3

BASED on my reader mail, my cookware columns are stirring up controversy in the kitchen.

Here I thought last year's mattress series crossed the threshold, but how folks feel about their slumber surfaces pales next to the practically umbilical attachment they have to their pans.

Home chefs have come out swinging skillets, defending them to their copper cores. I now know that if some of you had to choose between your 8-inch Teflon omelet pan and your mate, well, you don't have to, thank goodness.

And while I do not want to come between you and that 20-piece set of nonstick cookware you bought in 1972 during a K-Mart Blue Light Special, I would like you all to please simmer down. We can get through this as friends.

In case you missed the frying pan fracas, two weeks ago, I covered the pros and cons of common pan materials: aluminum, stainless steel, cast iron, carbon steel, copper, and combinations.



For whiter enamel — Chefs like Dutch ovens coated in light-colored enamel because it helps them judge doneness. Though these pans won't acquire seasoning like cast iron, their light surfaces can darken. To restore them, make a solution of one part bleach and three parts water and let the mixture soak in the pan overnight. Photo by Steve Klise for America's Test Kitchen.

Steve Klise

Last week, I shared the four essential pans every kitchen should have. I got the scoop straight from Lisa McManus, executive editor for America's Test Kitchen reviews, who can take the heat.

Some of you, including my husband, haven't forgiven me for the fact that since I started writing on this topic, someone in your house whom we shall not name ran out and spent the equivalent of a nice weekend away on new cookware. (But, let's be honest, dinners are better, aren't they?)

Now I am jumping from the frying pan into the fire with advice on how to care for said cookware. I figured, the least I can do is make this investment last the rest of your life.

"Relationships have ended after one partner put an expensive

pan in the dishwasher," McManus warned. "The other partner feels perfectly justified saying, 'We have nothing more to say to each other.'"

So that doesn't happen in your house, follow these relationship-preserving tips to make sure your good cookware and relationship last:

- **Hand wash.** Putting pans in the dishwasher will accelerate their demise and could warp them. Though a cookware maker may say pans are dishwasher safe, dishwashers are harsh environments, said McManus, who recommends hand washing.

- **Cool it.** Do not rush your hot pan into cold water. Thermal shock is hard on metal and could warp pans and shorten their lives. A pan should be cool to the touch before you wash it. Similarly, don't throw a cold pan on a

high flame. Let it warm up gradually.

- **Embrace the grunge.** Pans are not décor items. Cookware that looks used is a badge of honor. "You don't want the carpenter with the hammer that looks brand new; you want one with beat-up tools," she said.

Although the brownness left from burnt-on oil is not bad, if you want to restore some original shine, mix Barkeeper's Friend with water to make a paste, and scour.

- **Stained enamel?** Though enamel-coated pans won't acquire seasoning like cast iron, their light surfaces can darken. To restore them, make a solution of one part bleach and three parts water and let the mixture soak in the pan overnight.

The beauty of stainless-steel pans, which often have a core of aluminum, is their durability.

Hand wash them with soap, scrub all you want with a plastic scrubber (steel ones can scratch the surface), and, if you need to soak them, go ahead.

Cast iron and carbon steel need seasoning, which means creating a coating of oil and fat, so when the pan heats, it has a naturally nonstick surface. For pans that don't come pre-seasoned, or that need re-seasoning, here's one way to do it: Wash pan in warm water. Let dry completely. Spread a thin layer of melted shortening or oil over it. Put it in a 400-degree oven on a rack upside down. Put a baking sheet underneath to catch drips. Bake for one hour. Let cool and wipe.

- **Don't use soap.** When washing cast iron or carbon steel pans, let them cool a few

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