

SHOPPING TO EQUIP A NEW APARTMENT

Kitchen Tools

Pots and pans, knives, small appliances, small kitchen tools, cutting boards, and all those things you'll need to buy so that you can use the kitchen in your new apartment.

A basic rule you should remember about buying kitchen equipment: you can spend a bit more and have tools that will last most of your life, or you can buy cheaper tools and replace them regularly. Which you choose is really up to you and your budget, but remember that cheaper tools also won't work as well during their lifetime.

Pots & Pans. You needn't buy a huge collection; a couple of starter pieces will do you well for most home cooking needs. A 10" saute pan, a 2-qt. pot (with a tight-fitting lid), and a stock pot (again, with a tight-fitting lid) will do nicely for sauteing, frying, making stocks and soups, cooking pasta, making sauces, and even heating up canned and frozen veggies.

Look for heavy stainless steel pots with a non-reactive surface (won't corrode or add nasty flavors when cooking with acids like wine or lemon juice).

Knives. Expensive and scary, but they'll last you a lifetime if treated right. Good knives are a good investment for any home cook. High carbon stainless has the strength of carbon steel and the rust resistance of stainless. Start with an 8" (or 6") chef's knife and a 3" paring knife, and find ones that feel comfortable in your hand and have a securely attached handle (the carbon steel should ideally be sandwiched between the wood of the handle). A steel is also critical as it will keep your knife edge from building up the burrs that dull it. A knife sharpener is optional. Instead, find a good knife sharpening service in your area, and have your knives professionally sharpened twice a year or so.

Another option for knives is ceramic. These are made of a zirconium oxide which is the second hardest substance on earth, maintains a sharp edge for years, and won't rust or discolor food. They are also very easy to clean. Again, look for high quality knives that feel good in your hands.

Cutting Board. I am personally partial to hard, end grain wood cutting boards. They will stand up to years of use, won't dull knives, and are extremely bacteria-resistant (contrary to popular belief, some studies have shown that bacteria actually thrive on plastic cutting boards whereas they die on wooden ones). Get a large one. Actually, if you cook meat regularly, you might want two, one dedicated to meat.

Other things you will probably want:

- Tools
 - hand can opener (works much better than electric, especially when the power's out)
 - box grater
 - measuring cups and spoons
 - wooden spoons (a variety of wooden spoons can be used for everything from stirring to serving)
 - ladle
 - whisk
 - salad spinner
 - mixing bowls
 - potato masher or ricer
 - vegetable peeler
 - corkscrew
 - rolling pin
 - collander/strainer
 - canister set (I have a collection of old bale-top jars that work great)
 - dish drainer (unless you have a dishwasher)
 - sponges, towels, cleaning cloths
- Small Appliances
 - toaster
 - hand blender (immersion blender)
 - food processor
 - crock pot
 - stand mixer
 - microwave oven
 - coffee maker

Now that we've got your birthday and holiday gift lists for the next couple of years taken care of, next we'll look at the things you want to keep in your pantry.

Pantry Essentials

A well-stocked pantry can make cooking a joy and eating a much healthier activity. Of course, the things that any cook keeps on hand depend largely on taste, but these recommendations are pretty basic. This may seem daunting if you're just starting out, but remember: this isn't your weekly shopping list, just stuff to get you started.

Staples

Ready and waiting for baking, snacking and recipes, these are the items you should keep on hand. Many of these will keep for ages in the cupboard, but keep an eye on expiration dates:

- all purpose flour (lives up to its name)
- baking soda (has [101 uses beyond baking](#))
- baking powder

- granulated sugar
- brown sugar
- honey
- salt
- black pepper
- yeast
- oils (canola for frying, olive for dressings, peanut to add great flavor to dishes)
- vegetable shortening
- vinegar (balsamic is great for both cooking and dressings)
- dried pasta
- canned tomatoes
- canned vegetables
- canned and/or dried beans and peas
- stocks (get high quality, unsalted stocks, or better yet make your own and freeze it)
- peanut butter
- dried herbs
- spices (cinnamon, cumin, chili powder, mustard, allspice, get what you like)
- dried chilli peppers
- fresh garlic
- nuts (walnuts, pecans, peanuts for snacking or baking)
- bread
- crackers
- coffee, tea, hot cocoa
- powdered milk
- potatoes
- onions
- cold cereal
- oatmeal
- maple syrup

The Fridge

Many of these items are perishable and should be bought only in sufficient quantities for a week or so.

E.g. if you live alone and only use milk for coffee, there's no reason to buy a gallon at a time; similarly, if you don't bake a lot or eat eggs, there's probably no reason to buy eggs at all until you need them.]

- milk
- butter
- cheese
- frozen veggies
- meat (freeze it if you plan to cook it more than 2-3 days after buying)

- eggs
- pickles *
- jams and/or jellies *
- ketchup *
- mustard *
- relish *
- mayonnaise *
- salad dressing *
- fresh fruits and vegetables
- orange juice

* These items can be kept in a cupboard until opened, after which they should be refrigerated and treated as perishable.

Other "Stuff"

Non-food things you will probably want to have on hand:

- aluminum foil
- plastic wrap
- zip-top bags
- napkins
- paper towels
- sponges
- coffee filters

Hints and Tips

- Watch the dates. Baking powder, dried spices, and other items lose their "punch" after a few months, so mind your purchase dates (write them right on the package) and buy in smaller quantities.
- Don't ignore the freezer. Years of living alone have taught me that almost anything can be frozen, including butter and many cheeses.
- Freeze yourself. Vegetables bought in season and blanched can be frozen for a healthier, fresher tasting alternative to commercial frozen veggies.
- Cook some extra. Making soup? Make extra and freeze it in individual serving sizes — now you've got a quick and easy lunch. The same holds true for pot roast, chilli and lasagna, among others.
- Potatoes and onions should be stored in a cool, dry place (not the refrigerator), separate from each other.

In the Bathroom

These are general lists of things you will want if your bathroom is completely bare. Many of them you may have been buying all along, and there may be other things (like loufa sponges and bath salts) which you will want which aren't listed here.

General Supplies

- bath and hand towels
- bath mat or rug
- shower curtain and hooks
- toothbrush holder and cup
- soap dish
- trash can
- plunger
- toilet brush
- rubber ducky?

Personal Care Products (you've probably been buying these all along)

- shampoo and conditioner
- soap
- facial cleanser
- toothbrushes
- toothpaste
- contact lens solutions
- skin cream

The Medicine Chest

- antibiotic cream
- anti-itch cream

- pain relievers/anti-inflammatories/fever reducers (aspirin, acetaminophen, ibuprofen - no aspirin for children)
- cold medicine
- antihistamine
- anti-diarrheal
- antacid/stomach remedy
- ipecac (to induce vomiting)
- thermometer
- bandages
- tweezers
- gauze and adhesive tape
- instant ice pack
- eye wash
- sun block (SPF 15 with UV-A and UV-B protection)

Hints and Tips

- Store all medicines out of reach of children. Keep purses with medication in them away from children as well.

- Never refer to medications as "candy."
- Pay attention to expiration dates. Some medications simply lose their effectiveness after time, others become dangerous.
- Never take someone else's prescription medications or give anyone yours.
- Store all medications in their original packaging, and read and follow all label directions.
- Dispose of leftover prescription medications.

Cleaning Supplies

The cleaning products you purchase will depend largely on what you have to clean. Here are some basics to get you started.

- broom
- sponge mop
- cleaning cloths (the washable variety)
- furniture polish (if you have unpainted wooden furniture)
- sponges and scrubbing pads
- all-purpose cleaner
- wood soap (for hardwood floors and unpainted woodwork)
- floor cleaner (for tiled and linoleum floors)
- glass cleaner
- oven cleaner
- mildew remover
- all-purpose bathroom cleaner
- toilet cleaner
- toilet brush
- carpet spot cleaner (if you have rugs or carpets)
- laundry soap
- fabric softener (sheets or liquid)
- bleach

Important Note: Read and follow the label directions on all your cleaning products very carefully, and never mix products. Some combinations (like chlorine and ammonia) will produce toxic gasses, other products can burn your skin.