A Quick Guide to My Kitchen Essentials

As the seasons change and the days grow colder I tend to spend more time in the kitchen than the warmer months. The warmth of the oven provides a kind of comfort that somehow previously seemed stifling in the August heat. It's officially *soup season*!

I adore soup season, it is the most comforting nourishing time of year, and while I am a summer girl through and through, I cannot deny that there are few things more satisfying that a good pot roast, or creamy soup. It's the perfect blend of food for the soul, and fuel for the body.

So with a season of heavy cooking upon us, soups stews, thanksgiving dinner and more, I've decided to break down my kitchen essentials, ingredients and tools that I can't live without that help define my dishes in their signature way. It's less extensive than you might think, I'm a simple person at heart. While there are some things that make my kitchen feel like home, such as my pasta maker and my ravioli stamp, they're things I can live without. However, there are things that I try to incorporate into the kitchens of my loved ones wherever I go so I can recreate the magic.

Some of these things have to do with my cooking techniques but even more, most of these items are designed so I can recreate the food I usually make with the same health benefits I implement at home.

Kitchen gadgets

A decent chef's knife:

A good chef is nothing without a good knife, right? I don't think there's actually a saying like that but I feel someone

somewhere has said it before. I don’t bring my knife with me everywhere I go (although I do bring it to Airbnbs when traveling). If someone has a decent chef knife, I can work some magic at a rather efficient pace. A good chef’s knife makes chopping much easier.

A wooden cutting board:

This is also one that I bring with me when I travel to an airbnb. This may seem a bit much but I’m not a fan of microplastics, and all four of the kitchens I cook in regularly have a stock of wooden cutting boards that I reach for before I ever grab plastic. Generally speaking, a wood cutting board is better for your knife than plastic, and the wood cutting boards have antimicrobial properties. Cutting on a plastic cutting board produces microplastics that are scraped up while cutting food. I prefer my food without the side of microplastics! A good wooden cutting board can be easily sanded and refinished, and will last for years to come.

Cast iron pan:

If I was a cartoon character and I had an accessory that I carried around with me everyday, it would be a cast iron pan. Very rarely do I cook in anything but a cast iron pan because I can rarely think of a time when it is prudent. Boiling water for pasta perhaps, and on some occasions I will use a stainless steel pan for sauteing but other than that it’s cast iron.

I will not be caught dead cooking on a non-stick teflon pan. If you’ve been living under a rock and don’t know the health consequences of cooking on a teflon pan, the information is readily available on the internet. The chemicals in forever teflon pans cause cancer, and disrupt your hormones amongst other health problems and can flake off and make their way into your food.

A well seasoned cast iron pan is a thing of beauty, and I use

it to my advantage. I've gifted some, and made sure that there is a cast iron pan in each house that I cook in regularly. Cast iron pans are so versatile. A cast iron pan can be passed down and well loved for decades to come.

Instant pot:

An instant pot is not necessary for success, but it is always nice to have when I'm cooking rice or beans or a stew. Instant pots cook much faster, and are more consistent for rice, and can cook a stew in a third of the time. I will bring my instant pot with me on vacation for ease of cooking certain things. It also has a stainless steel pot so it's one less teflon pan I have to worry about.

Metal spatula:

I always prefer metal to plastic or silicone, it's sturdier and typically lasts longer. With a cast iron or stainless steel pan you never have to worry about a metal spatula damaging your pan.

Spices and seasonings

The herbs and spices in your food make or break the dish. Really, to make a good dish you don't need much. You can make an amazing dish with a high quality sea salt, pepper, and garlic if you have high quality food. While a large variety of spices is something everyone should come to aquire, we'll stick the basics for now.

Black pepper:

High quality, organic pepper corns in a pepper grinder. Need I say more?

Red pepper:

Red pepper is a simple easy seasoning to keep on hand. It can elevate the flavor of any dish beyond your basic black pepper, and add a mild kick. The flavor of red pepper is fairly

neutral making it a good option to add spice to a variety of different cuisines.

Himalayan pink sea salt:

I do my best to only cook with Redmons real pink himalayan sea salt. Other pink himalayan sea salt works. Redmons is generally the highest quality

Garlic:

Fresh NOT POWDERED garlic is essential for elevating most dishes beyond your basic salt and pepper, and it’s so good for you. Rather sliced, minced, or grated, it can add flavor to the most basic of dishes like eggs and rice.

Handy kitchen staples

Avocado oil:

I use avocado oil for almost everything. If I had to pick only one oil to use it would be avocado oil. It’s better than olive oil for cooking things at a high heat, and has a neutral enough flavor that it can be used in sauces and salad dressings in a pinch. For this reason it’s the oil that I bring with me when I travel and I use it for everything from frying eggs, to sauteing vegetables, to making roasts.

Eggs:

I eat eggs every day. Eggs can elevate a simple dish with ease. A well seasoned brown rice with sauteed vegetables is made much better (and more filling) with a fried egg on top. A couple of scrambled eggs and some good vegetables can make a great breakfast or lunch as well. Not to mention they’re frequently used for baking. I say any good cook should do their best to find good local sourced eggs. You’ll never be sorry.

Tapioca flour:

I use tapioca flour for dredging before frying, thickening sauces, baking, and even dry shampoo when I've been without (irrelevant to cooking but it comes in handy on vacation!) For health purposes I generally try to keep my meals gluten free, and having tapioca flour on hand can be the difference between keeping a meal gluten free and resorting to using regular flour to thicken a sauce. I made southern-approved fried green tomatoes, and fried okra with a cornmeal and tapioca flour mixture, and fried chicken that was eaten by even the pickiest of eaters, all gluten free.

Acids:

Acids have saved my life in many recipes. Oftentimes you may think a dish needs salt, when really what you need is an acid. I've learned this through much trial and error, but generally speaking, when you taste your food, the salt will be at the forefront of your taste, and the acid flavor will be in the after taste. If you need acid in the dish, you may feel the dish is lacking depth in the after taste. This is easily fixed by adding Lemon juice, lime juice, balsamic vinegar white vinegar, or apple cider vinegar. You can also use vinegars to deglaze your pan. While any one of these acids will work in a pinch, typically the type of acid that you use will depend on the type of dish but most commonly I use lemon juice or balsamic vinegar.

This is only a short list of the things I keep on hand regularly to impress dinner guests, or even just make a comfort meal for myself, but these are some of my best kept tips to success when it comes to how I cook my food. Of course there are many more spices, herbs, and staples I keep on hand, the actual ingredients I use commonly could be a whole separate list. However, if you don't have these basics on hand, they are good ones to start with.