

## POTS AND PANS

Why is it that when a guy goes into a cooking store with his wife, and she picks out a covered skillet that costs a hundred and fifty bucks, he is just horrified at the thought of shelling out that much money for a stupid frying pan. Yet he has no problem going into Meeks or Lowes and dropping a couple of bills for the latest DeWalt or Mikita power tool. And she'll use that frying pan almost every day, and he'll use his new power tool maybe twice a month, if he's lucky. Go figure.

The sad truth is that good quality cookware costs a lot of money. And like most things, you get what you pay for. Cheap supermarket or box-store cookware is not worth giving houseroom to. It is way too thin, for one thing, and thin cookware makes it far too easy to burn the food you're cooking. Yet for years, that was all that was available to the average home cook. You got Revere wear if you were lucky. No wonder my mother cooked so often using her great-grandmother's cast iron frying pans. Although heavy, they were the best pans in the house. Actually, I still use them today for a lot of things.

Non-stick was a great step forward, although early non-stick pans also tended to be too thin and the non-stick coating came off if you looked at it harshly. Then T-Fal non-stick frying pans came along, which were a great improvement, but still pretty lightweight. In the 1970s, enamel-covered cast iron, such as Le Creuset, came to be all the rage. I still use my mother's Le Creuset covered kettle for stews and pot-roasts, although the enamel is starting to wear off over time. By the 1980s, good cookware started to be readily available in cooking stores and major department stores.

Brands like Calphalon and All-Clad made sturdy well-designed pots and pans, often non-stick, but at a price. I was in a Bed, Bath and Beyond the other day, looking at 10-piece sets of Calphalon and All-Clad that were on sale for between \$500 and \$600. Then I realized that they counted the lids as separate pieces. Ouch.

Calphalon was first, making heavy anodized aluminum pots and pans that, if not exactly non-stick, were still very easy to clean. They were followed by All-Clad, who sandwiched a copper core between two layers of stainless steel, also equally easy to clean. And while Calphalon's handles got hot, the All-Clad handles stayed cool to the touch. I have sets of both, but I find that I turn to the All-Clad more often than the Calphalon.

My favorite frying pan, a 12-inch covered skillet, is actually made in Iceland, by the Look company, and is available in Jackson at the Home and Farm Kitchen Supply. It has a heavy flat base that holds the heat very well, has a non-stick coating that doesn't scratch, (or at least not much), and can go in the oven. It even has a domed glass lid. The significant other who gave it to me for Christmas nine and a half years ago nearly fainted at the price back then, but I've used that pan more than any other in the house, for everything from pancakes to, just a couple of days ago, a pork tenderloin and roasted poblano and jalapeno pepper stew.

So can you find a decent pan at our local box stores? Well, yes, actually. At Wal-mart I bought and use a 10-inch Wearever non-stick frying pan. It was their most expensive frying pan, about \$24 or so, and it's the one I often grab to poach or fry eggs, cook bacon or even do a quick stir-fry.

So do I recommend buying a set of pots and pans or buying them individually? Given the price, you get significant savings if you buy a set of good-quality cookware. While you don't have to pay \$500 for a set, be prepared to spend at least around \$300 for a 10-piece set. And it pays to shop around. Over time, you'll want to supplement it with individual pots and pans for specific purposes.

But don't go overboard. Why buy an asparagus steamer? Even if you eat asparagus every day, you can cook it perfectly well in a large skillet. Why buy a fish poacher—same reason. I do keep a frying pan that I use just for omelets, but the electric crepe pan went to the yard sale a long time ago, along with the electric wok. This is Steve Muni for the Hometown Kitchen.