

Chefs' Favorite Splurges in the Kitchen

Certain cooking tools and ingredients are worth investing in. Others, not so much. Chefs reveal what truly deserves your extra dollars.

BY PAM O'BRIEN

TOP-OF-THE-LINE TOOLS



"My KitchenAid stand mixer. When I was in college, I was using my mother's hand mixer that she'd had since she got married, and I burned it out making Christmas cookies. Immediately after that, I went to Crate & Barrel and got a credit card and bought a \$600 KitchenAid stand mixer, which I still have. It's over 20 years old, and it was a great investment. It costs you, but it lasts, and

it makes cooking and baking easier."
—*Rick Martinez, a food writer, TV host, and author of the new cookbook Mi Cocina: Recipes and Rapture From My Kitchen in Mexico*



Le Creuset Signature Braiser (2.25 quart), \$275; surlatable.com

"A cast-iron braiser! I use mine for anything I'd use a frying pan for, and then some. It's deeper than the average skillet and oven-safe. I build casseroles and hot dishes in my braiser on the stove, finish them in the oven, and transfer them to the table. A braiser is the perfect tool for anyone who hates having too many dirty dishes—so, everyone! It's worth the money because it's so versatile, sturdy, and beautiful. When it's well taken care of, it will last forever."
—*Molly Yeh, cookbook author and host of Food Network's Girl Meets Farm*



"For me, it's high-quality stainless steel tongs that won't bend or break. A good pair is a game changer. People tend to forget how important they are when turning delicate cuts of meat and other foods you want to handle with care. I want to feel like I'm showing the food some love, and I can't do that if I've got a flimsy tool in my hand."
—*Rodney Scott, founder and pitmaster at Rodney Scott's Whole Hog BBQ in Charlestown, South Carolina, and a James Beard Award winner*

MARTINEZ: REN FULLER; YEH: CHANTHELL QUERNEMOEN; SCOTT: ANGIE MOSER; BRAISER: COURTESY OF LE CREUSET

"A Vitamix. Not only does it purée everything and create wonderful textures, like light fluffy purées, but it also can handle anything you throw its way. From a smoothie to a soup to a sauce to gazpacho, it delivers."
—*Alex Guarnaschelli, award-winning executive chef at Butter in New York City, Food Network star, and cookbook author*



Cuisinart 14-Cup Food Processor, \$250; cuisinart.com

"A Cuisinart food processor, which I use in both baking and cooking. It's an excellent way to make pie crust. Also, it saves time and effort—if I don't feel like chopping a bunch of foods, I just put them in the food processor."
—*Vallery Lomas, winner of The Great American Baking Show, the first Black winner of The Great British Bakeoff franchise, and author of Life Is What You Bake It*



"A good chef's knife. Often, home cooks buy a big block of knives. There are 10 knives and you use two, and they're not good quality. For the same money, you can invest in one very good chef's knife. I love the brand Global. It's very sharp, stainless steel from tip to tip, and it's not

heavy. I like a lighter knife that I can chop, carve, peel, and do everything with."
—*Charity Morgan, a private chef to celebrities and top athletes and author of Unbelievably Vegan*

FOOD SPLURGES THAT PAY OFF

"Good butter (usually Kerrygold) and olive oil (usually California Olive Ranch), because these are ingredients I use almost daily, and a little bit of extra quality can really go a long way. A good olive oil not only tastes better, but it also has a higher smoke point, so you can cook at higher temperatures without it burning and smoking. The extra fat in European-style butter makes cakes, cookies, and pie doughs even richer and tastier."
—*Molly Yeh*



"High-quality spice blends. I used to pooh-pooh pre-made Indian spice blends, but now there are many that are delicious—and source their spices fairly and adopt environmentally sustainable practices. I love the Floyd Cardoz Masalas spice blends from Burlap & Barrel that honor the late chef Floyd Cardoz. Use one on roasted vegetables, meats, and soups, and you'll never want to use a generic spice blend again."
—*Priya Krishna, a New York Times food writer and author of Indian-ish*

"I will splurge on a bone-in rib eye from a local butcher shop. The bone is what gives the meat all of the flavor and next-level richness. My local butcher shop knows that when I'm knocking at their door, I'm there for that rib eye."
—*Rodney Scott*



"I am obsessed with Maldon salt. I also love really good-quality spices. One jar of a very good cinnamon, for example, can elevate 40 plates of food."
—*Alex Guarnaschelli*

"I'm an advocate of fresh vegetables. Look at what's in season right now. You've never used rhubarb? Grab it. Google it. See what it's used for, expand your mind. When you work with a new food, it gives you inspiration."
—*Charity Morgan*

"Stone-ground grits. I spent my life eating grits with scrambled eggs, and I always made the five-minute kind. Then I tried stone-ground grits, which take 30 minutes to an hour to cook, but the flavor and the texture are incredible! Also popcorn rice, which is an heirloom rice with Louisiana roots. It smells like popcorn when you cook it. It's nice to take familiar foods and experience them in new ways."
—*Vallery Lomas*

I love vanilla paste. It makes my cakes and cookies so much more flavorful. It's got the muskiness of a vanilla bean, but it's in liquid form, and it's got a bit more sweetness and florality."
—*Rick Martinez*