

IT TAKES TIME

EMPOWERED LIVING, ONE STEP AT A TIME

[Home](#) » How to Choose Safe Cookware

HOW TO CHOOSE SAFE COOKWARE

JANUARY 25, 2014 BY ANDREA FABRY

Safe cookware is foundational to a healthy kitchen. But how do I know which types are truly safe?



From Teflon to stainless steel to cast iron – the choices can be confusing. Here is a brief overview of the three basic categories of cookware.

REACTIVE COOKWARE

This type of cookware is the most hazardous. The compounds react with food and can allow harmful chemicals to leach into foods and, therefore, our bodies.

Aluminum

Aluminum conducts heat well but is highly reactive, particularly with acidic foods. Aluminum is toxic to humans, and while proponents of aluminum cookware contend that the aluminum molecules don't get into the food, is it worth the risk? Aluminum foil is also best avoided for cooking purposes. Aluminum sandwiched inside stainless steel should be okay since there is no contact with the food. (*Anodized aluminum uses an oxidative process designed to keep the product from leaching into the food. However, leakage may occur.)

Teflon-coated

Nonstick chemicals are linked to birth defects, liver toxicity, cancer, and more. The maker of Teflon warns consumers to keep pet birds away from the kitchen when cooking because "cooking

fumes, smoke and odors that have little or no effect on people can seriously sicken and even kill birds, often quite quickly.” Even the EPA admits that one of the chemicals, [perfluorooctanoic acid](#) (PFOA):

- is very persistent in the environment
- is found at very low levels both in the environment and in the blood of the general U.S. population
- remains in people for a very long time
- causes developmental and other adverse effects in laboratory animals

If nonstick cookware must be used, cook at a lower temperature and avoid cooking on high. One additional note: Microwave popcorn bags are commonly coated with nonstick chemicals and are best avoided.

LESS REACTIVE COOKWARE

Stainless Steel

Stainless steel is durable, resists cracks, and is the least reactive of all metals. Good quality stainless steel is essential. Less expensive stainless steel cookware may contain nickel and cadmium, which leach into food. To test your stainless steel, combine one teaspoon baking soda with 1 cup water and bring to a boil, then taste the water. If a metallic taste is present, the cookware may not be suitable for your kitchen.

Most stainless steel pots will have a number on the base. Look for 18/8 or 18/10. (18 indicates the level of chromium; 8 or 10 is the amount of nickel.)

Cast Iron

Cast iron is durable, a supreme heat conductor, and naturally nonstick. It must be maintained properly to avoid undesirable leaching of iron into foods. Some suggest this iron is desirable while others say it's not. Either way, it is best to be diligent in cleaning and maintaining your cast iron. One of the best ways to clean your cast iron is with coarse salt. Add some water and scrub with scrubbing cloth or sponge. Rinse and season. See this [article](#) for more on the chemistry of cast iron seasoning.

NON-REACTIVE COOKWARE

Glass

Glass is quite safe but does not conduct heat well and does not adapt to dramatic temperature changes. Hot glass cookware should not come in contact with wet counter tops, nor be placed in water while still hot. Options for glass cookware include Corning Ware, Pyrex, and Visions cookware.

Enameled Cast Iron

Enameled cast-iron cookware has been used for more than a century, merging the excellent heat conductivity of cast iron with the safety of protective, chemical-free glazing (assuming the old-fashioned methods are used). Enameled cast iron can withstand high cooking temperatures, and the heat is evenly spread throughout the cooking surface. This cookware is quite heavy and more expensive, but it can last a lifetime! Options for enameled cast iron include:

Le Creuset

All of Le Creuset's enameled cast iron products are made in France. Their bakeware is made in Thailand and their mugs in China. All are guaranteed to be free of lead and cadmium. Don't hesitate to contact the company with any questions about the manufacturing process. For a fascinating look at the finishing process for enameled cast iron, see Le Creuset's informative [explanation page](#). Le Creuset is available [online](#) and at many culinary and home stores.

Staub

Staub is also made in France, is also of highly reputable quality, and is slightly cheaper than Le Creuset. It can also be purchased [online](#) and at many culinary and home stores.

WHAT ABOUT BAKING?

When it comes to baking, aluminum, and nonstick cookie sheets can react with foods and are best lined with parchment paper to avoid direct contact. (Parchment paper is commonly found in most grocery and big box stores.) Glass is always a safe option for baking, and porcelain is often used as well. The German company [Villeroy & Boch](#) makes top-of-the-line porcelain bakeware.

WHAT ABOUT CERAMIC?

Ceramic cookware involves the forming, firing and glazing of clay mixtures. The term ceramic includes porcelain, stoneware and earthenware. Ceramic *coated* cookware tends to have a base made from aluminum. Ceramic cookware options include **Xtrema**, Emile Henry, and some Le Creuset products. For more see [Ceramic Cookware – The Ultimate Guide](#).

WHAT ABOUT THERMOLON?

Greenpan promotes a safe alternative to Teflon with a Thermolon coating. Thermolon consists of oxygen, carbon, aluminum, and titanium. An additional ingredient is either silicon, which is natural, or silicone, which is not. The company insists it is silicon. **I remain skeptical about the safety of Thermolon.**

Whether you cook a lot or a little, safe cookware can go a long way toward improved health and simpler living

<http://it-takes-time.com>