

The Kitchen Starter Checklist

Build a kitchen that actually works — the essential gear, the pantry staples, and a simple weekly system. Print it, check the boxes, cook with confidence.

Step 1 • The essential gear (start here)

Nail these basics before anything else. Together they handle ~90% of home cooking.

- 8-inch chef's knife** — the one tool you'll touch every day. Buy a good one.
- Large cutting board** — wood or plastic; big enough to actually work on.
- 10-inch skillet** — non-stick or cast iron for eggs, sautés and searing.
- 3-quart saucepan + lid** — sauces, grains, blanching, reheating.
- 6-quart pot** — pasta, soup, stock, boiling.
- Rimmed sheet pan** — roasting veg, sheet-pan dinners, baking.
- Instant-read thermometer** — the cheapest upgrade to your cooking.
- Mixing bowls** — a nesting set covers prep and storage.
- Silicone + wood tools** — spatula, spoon, tongs that won't scratch.
- Food storage containers** — for leftovers and meal prep.

Step 2 • Smart buying rules

- Splurge** on the knife, one good skillet, and a thermometer. **Save** on bowls, utensils and storage.
- Buy once, cry once** — a quality chef's knife and pan outlast a drawer of cheap ones.
- Skip single-task gadgets. If a good knife or pan can do it, you don't need the gadget.
- Match cookware to your stovetop — if you have induction, confirm "induction compatible."
- Buy a 6-quart size for most pots — the most versatile for families and batch cooking.

Step 3 • Pantry staples to always have

- Olive oil + a neutral oil
- Kosher salt + black pepper
- Garlic, onions, lemons
- Canned tomatoes + beans
- Pasta, rice, and a grain
- Stock or bouillon
- Soy sauce + vinegar
- A few dried spices you actually use

Avoid these 5 kitchen-gear mistakes

1. **Buying a giant block knife set** — you'll use three of them. A great chef's knife beats fourteen mediocre ones.
2. **Cheap non-stick you overheat** — it sheds its coating fast. Don't run it on high, and replace it when it flakes.
3. **A drawer of single-use gadgets** — the avocado slicer collects dust. Buy tools that earn their space.
4. **Ignoring the thermometer** — guesswork is how chicken comes out dry or unsafe. It's a \$10 fix.
5. **Mismatched storage** — random lids are chaos. Buy one uniform set so everything stacks.

The 30-minute Sunday meal-prep system

- Pick 2 proteins + 2 sides** — roast a sheet pan of chicken and veg while a pot of grains cooks.
- Prep once, eat all week** — chop vegetables and portion into containers while things cook.
- Cook a "base," remix daily** — the same roasted chicken becomes bowls, wraps and salads.
- Label + date** everything so nothing gets lost in the back of the fridge.
- Keep a "use first" zone** in the fridge so leftovers don't go to waste.

Rule of thumb: a great chef's knife, one good skillet, a saucepan, a pot, a sheet pan, and a thermometer will cover almost everything you'll ever cook. Everything else is a nice-to-have.

SKIP THE RESEARCH

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