

# Gift Registry 101: Don't Skimp On Cookware

With all the details of a wedding to plan — from invitations to flowers — sometimes the registry is put off until later. When the time comes to register, the dizzying array of choices at the stores can be overwhelming. And while you might spend a lot of time choosing your china or crystal, remember that you'll use cookware virtually every day, often several times a day.

There are seemingly endless options of cookware styles and materials available, and it's a good idea to understand the differences between them before you hit the stores. That way, you and your partner can make the best decision about what cookware will best suit your needs.

Keep in mind that about 85 percent of the world's cookware sales come from three types of materials: stainless steel, aluminum and hard-anodized aluminum.

Within those materials, there are other features that differentiate cookware. It is important to compare like materials to like materials, as they each have their own unique properties. In addition, take care to note lid material, nonstick coating, if used, and other features.

## Hard-Anodized Aluminum

Hard-anodized aluminum cookware is one of the most popular types of material, even though many people don't quite understand the construction.

Hard-anodized aluminum cookware is plain aluminum cookware that has been processed in a series of chemical baths charged with an electric current. The result is a material that has the same superior heat conductivity as aluminum but is non-reactive with acidic foods like tomatoes and twice as hard as stainless steel.

Anolon Advanced marries hard-anodized aluminum cookware with a premium nonstick coating on the interior and exterior for durability and easy cleanup.

The pans' handles combine stainless steel with silicone for a cool and safe grip and the lids are made of tempered glass so you can monitor cooking without removing the lid. The line retails from \$19.99 to \$399.99 for a 12-piece set.

## Nonstick Cookware

Nonstick cookware has made dramatic improvements in quality and durability since it was introduced more than 30 years ago. There are a few things to look for when shopping for nonstick cookware.

Look first at the type of pan surface on which the coating is applied. Because they are harder and more durable, hard-anodized aluminum

nonstick pans will last longer than plain aluminum nonstick pans. Second, look at the thickness of the pan.

The thicker the pan, the better the heat distribution, which will, over time, protect the nonstick coating. Remember to compare like materials to each other, too.

With more than 80 percent of all cookware sold being nonstick, there are choices in virtually every material for a nonstick option. Circulon, for example, is the only cookware with a nonstick system so unique it received a U.S. patent. Circulon Elite features a patented Hi-Low Food Release System that uses a circular groove system to ensure that the nonstick surface lasts longer.

The pans feature a nonstick coating on the exterior as well for easy cleaning, and break-resistant glass lids. The cast stainless handles have a silicone grip for comfort. Retail prices range from \$19.99 to \$250.

## Stainless Steel

Stainless steel looks and works great. It is shiny, resistant to dents and dings, non-reactive with acidic foods and is dishwasher-safe.

Unfortunately, stainless steel by itself is not a good heat conductor. In order to make a stainless steel pan conduct heat evenly, it is combined with another conductive metal like copper or aluminum by attaching a disc to the bottom of the pan or by combining layers of stainless steel with aluminum or copper to make a clad pan.

Make sure you chose a quality pan that has a thick disc that spreads to the edges of the pan. This will eliminate a ring of burnt food in the bottom, prevent hot spots and improve heat distribution.

Several top cookware suppliers have introduced high-quality lines with distinctive features to improve the cookware's performance. KitchenAid Cookware Five-Ply Stainless Clad, for example, has a three-layer aluminum core that ensures even heating, while maintaining the stainless steel interior and exterior.

The line features stainless steel lids and is oven-safe to 500 F, making it versatile for many cooking tasks. It comes in a variety of open stock shapes and sizes, as well as sets, retailing from \$19.99 to \$400.

Advantage by Farberware is another stainless steel line that incorporates several features to maximize the cookware's performance.

The pans have a thick aluminum base for quick and even heating. The bases are encapsulated in 18/0 stainless steel, the type of steel that

makes the pans induction stove compatible.

For added convenience, the saucepans have flared rims and wide openings for easier whisking and pouring. The collection includes open stock pieces, nonstick skillets and a set. Retail prices range from \$19.99 to \$149.99.

## Aluminum

Aluminum is a terrific heat conductor, but it is a soft material that can dent easily and may react with acidic foods.

However, aluminum cookware heats evenly across the bottom and up the walls — hence many restaurant kitchens use thick aluminum cookware because of its great heat conduction properties and relatively low cost. Generally, the thicker the aluminum cookware, the better the heat distribution and cooking performance.

KitchenAid Gourmet Essentials Hard-Base is aluminum cookware that uses a patented technology which treats the interior with a ceramic primer to harden the aluminum.

This also makes the nonstick

coating more durable. The line has colored porcelain enamel exteriors, in either red or navy, to coordinate with many kitchen décors, and the handles are covered in coordinating, heat-resistant silicone for a soft, secure grip. Open stock pieces and sets re to \$199.99.



You're not married to one type of cookware. In fact most cooking professionals work with a variety of cookware materials depending on the type of cooking they're doing. If you're armed with knowledge about what to look for in cookware, you'll make the right choices.

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