

Uncommon Uses for Common Kitchen Tools

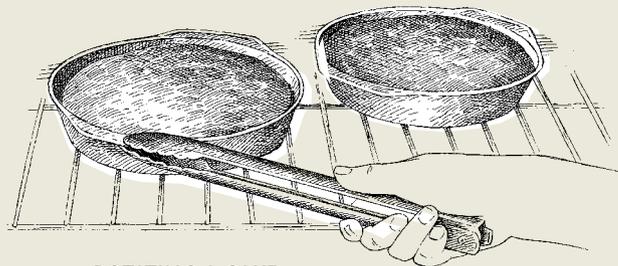
Learn some new ways to use six ordinary kitchen tools. BY

RAQUEL PELZEL

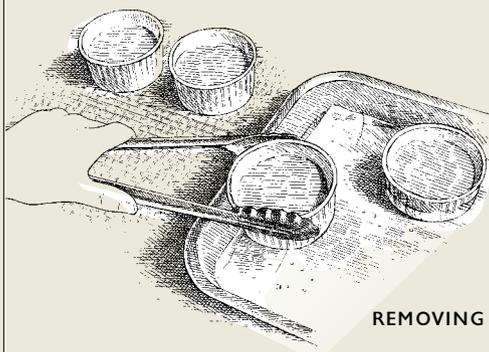
Walk into a restaurant kitchen, or even the test kitchen here at *Cook's*, and you're apt to see tools being used for purposes that their manufacturers never imagined. It's all about efficiency—reaching for the tool that's going to get the job done the easiest way in the least time, with minimal searching through kitchen cabinets and drawers. In the interest of efficiency, we've found that several kitchen staples—a dish towel, vegetable peeler, microplane rasp, pair of tongs, metal dough scraper, scissors, and pastry blender—offer a bounty of uses besides the ordinary. We hope the tips in this guide help you to cook better, faster, and easier in your home kitchen.

TONGS

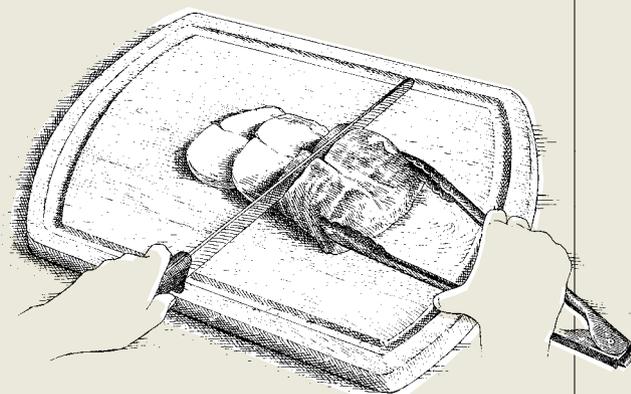
Tongs can be used for more than just flipping a steak on the grill or chicken breasts in a pan. We often use tongs as a more durable extension of our arm, whether for removing ramekins from a hot water bath, reaching for an ingredient on the top shelf of the cupboard, or rotating a cake during baking—the tongs can grab onto the lip of the cake pan, whereas a hand clad in a bulky oven mitt risks marring the surface of the cake. We also use tongs to remove hot pan lids (for this purpose, a long pair of tongs works best) and to steady a roast or large bird during carving.



ROTATING A CAKE



REMOVING RAMEKINS

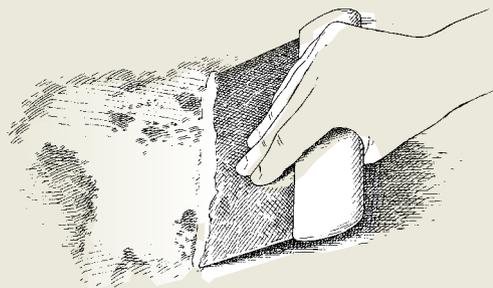
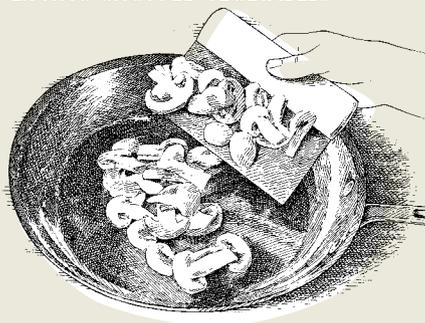


STEADYING A ROAST

METAL DOUGH SCRAPER

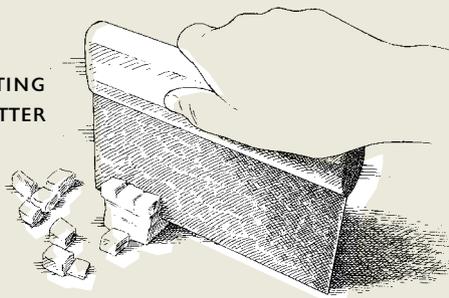
You have probably seen these rectangular metal blades with plastic (or sometimes wood) handles in kitchen supply stores, but have you ever tried using one? Once you have, there's no turning back; it will become one of your most precious pieces of kitchen paraphernalia. We find a dough scraper incredibly handy for transferring chopped vegetables to a sauté pan, cutting butter quickly into small cubes, and cutting bar cookies or brownies. A scraper is also unmatched when it comes to cleaning up a sticky, doughy, work surface, the kind of mess that will ruin a sponge forever.

LIFTING CHOPPED VEGETABLES



CLEANING A WORK SURFACE

CUTTING BUTTER



VEGETABLE PEELER

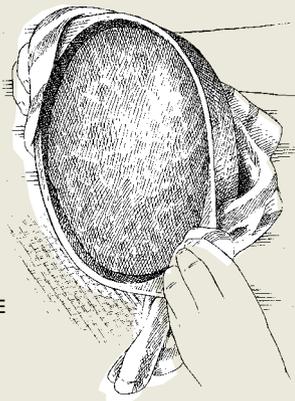
A vegetable peeler can do more than peel potatoes. It's a handy tool for making thin slices of cheddar cheese for a grilled cheese sandwich, shaving coconut, and making thin ribbons of carrots, cucumbers, or Parmesan cheese, as shown here, to elegantly dress a salad.



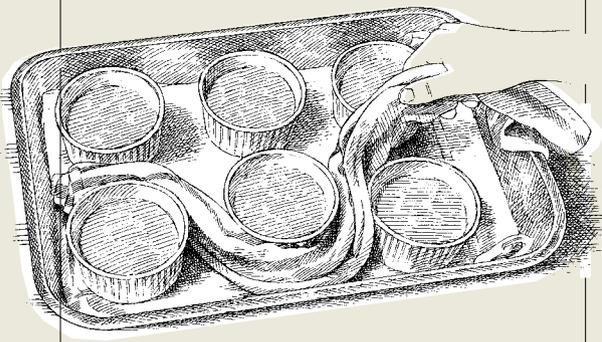
Illustration: John Burgoyne

DISH TOWEL

Dish towels, like T-shirts, seem to stack up in the closet until they reach skyscraper proportions. But don't throw your old ones away—they're good for a lot more than just drying dishes. For one, they can be used to line a pan that will be used as a hot-water bath for baking custards, a tactic that prevents the ramekins from sliding all over the place; another towel can be snaked around the ramekins so that they remain evenly separated and bake evenly. Double- or triple-folded dish towels can be used as potholders, and a dampened dish towel can be used to clean mushrooms or strawberries. A long, thin dish towel comes in handy when flipping a cake out of a still-warm pan, a task for which potholders sometimes seem too bulky. Any dish towel can be draped over a hot pan to alert others to its dangerous temperature, and a towel can also be used to absorb steam from rice just after it comes off the stove.



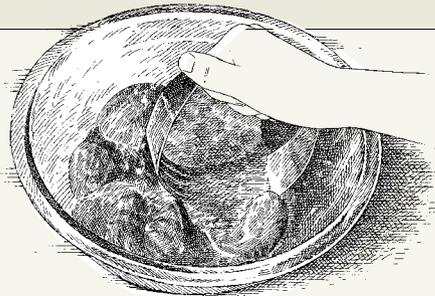
FLIPPING A CAKE



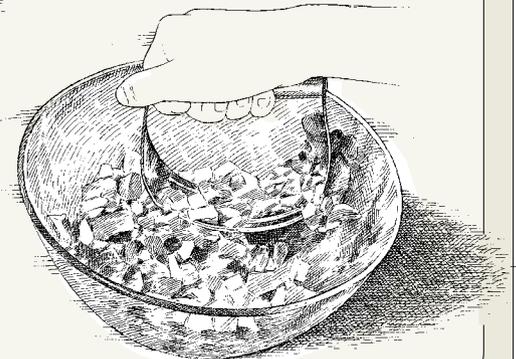
SECURING RAMEKINS



ABSORBING STEAM



MAKING GUACAMOLE



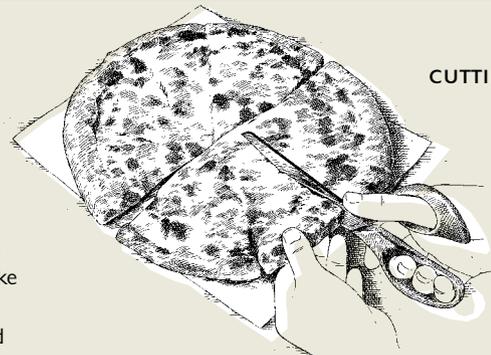
CHOPPING TOMATOES

PASTRY BLENDER

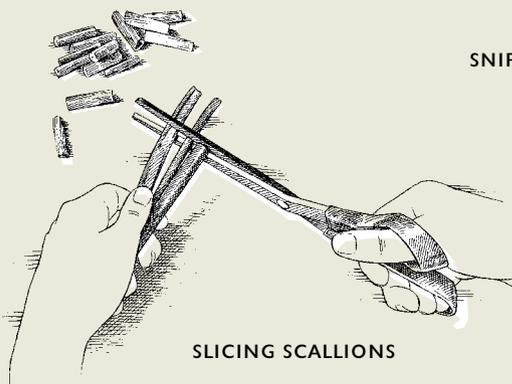
Since the introduction of the food processor, that old standby, the hand pastry blender, probably has not seen the light of day in your kitchen. But we find it useful for lots of kitchen duties, such as mashing avocados for guacamole, chopping eggs for salad, and chopping whole, canned tomatoes for a quick sauce.

SCISSORS

You might not consider them as such, but a pair of scissors can be a great kitchen tool. For pie dough, we use scissors to trim dough and cut vents in the top crust. We also use scissors to slice scallions quickly and thinly and to trim the woody stems from dried shiitake mushrooms. Scissors can also be used to cut phyllo dough for individual-sized appetizer portions, and to cut through hot pizza.

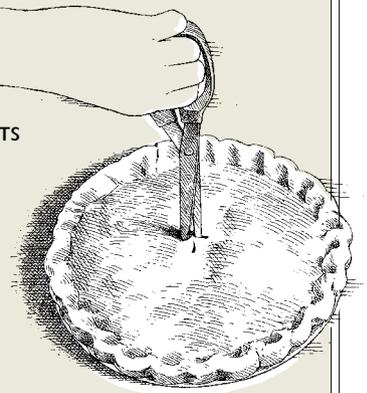


CUTTING PIZZA



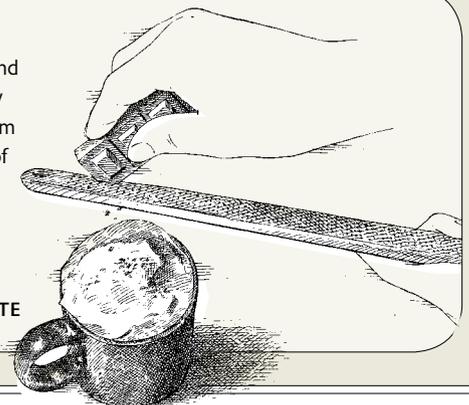
SLICING SCALLIONS

SNIPPING VENTS



MICROPLANE RASP

In 1999 we tested the microplane-style rasp and found its ability to finely grate cheese unparalleled. We now find ourselves using it constantly for much more—from grating nutmeg and ginger to achieving a fine mince of shallot or garlic. We also like to use it to grate chocolate for a final decorative touch on a steaming cup of hot chocolate with whipped cream, as shown.



GRATING CHOCOLATE