

Local chefs: What you need in the kitchen for healthy home cooking

By Sheila Livadas

Home cooks need basic kitchenware, ordinary pantry items and a full spice rack to prepare healthy meals, local chefs say. Certain cooking techniques also help wring excess fat and calories from meals.

Trying new foods often spurs home cooks to lighten up meals, local chefs add.



Matthew Cole, executive chef and director of dining services at Rivers Run Active Adult Community in Henrietta, recommends that health-conscious home cooks own an indoor grill.

"You've never had cardamom? Well, check it out," says Marie Lovenheim, a nutritionist and chef who manages Little Green Café & Juice Bar at Pilates Plus in Brighton.

Equipping a kitchen for healthy cooking doesn't need to cost much, local chefs note. A \$15 citrus zester called a **Microplane**,

for instance, is a particularly useful, says Rosita Caridi-Miller, chef and owner at Mendon-based Cibi Deliziosi. Most home cooks don't need an extensive cutlery collection either, since a chef's knife, paring knife and slicing knife handle nearly every job, she says.

Lovenheim, who teaches consumer nutrition at Monroe Community College, recommends that home cooks own a blender, a stockpot and a wok or a heavy skillet. She also is a fan of a mortar and pestle for breaking down whole spices.

An indoor grill tops chef Matthew Cole's list for essential home cooking equipment.

"I always tell [people] that if you can't grill your vegetables, you can invest in a steamer," says Cole, who is executive chef and director of dining services at Rivers Run Active Adult Community in Henrietta. A standard double boiler also works for steaming, he says.

Basic staples in the home pantry can make healthy cooking less daunting, says Michael Flint, executive chef at Wegmans Food Markets Inc.'s Pittsford store. He always has olive oil on hand at home for various purposes, including making vinaigrettes.

Home cooks who prefer fresh herbs over their dried counterparts can grow them indoors in flowerpots during the



fall and winter, Flint says. Most dried herbs will serve home cooks well if they can't grow their own, with the exception of garlic powder, which makes Flint cringe.

Home cooks should strive to have a light hand with salt, Caridi-Miller of Cibi Deliziosi says.

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flavors while it's cooking, but you don't usually need a ton of it."

Because kosher salt dissolves quickly on the tongue, "you can actually use less of it and still get that full-flavor impact," adds Caridi-Miller. She also uses Hawaiian sea salt because of its lower sodium content.

For those who need to avoid salt, Caridi-Miller suggests turning to black pepper for flavor.

When it comes to convenience foods, Little Green Café's Lovenheim does cook with canned beans. She also uses orange juice concentrate and orange marmalade to make vinaigrettes.

Cooking techniques clearly matter when striving to put healthy meals on the table. When pan-searing fish, for instance, Flint recommends measuring the needed oil instead of eyeballing it so that extra fat and calories don't creep up in the final product. Steaming salmon, cod, haddock or even chicken in a broth seasoned with fresh herbs often helps home cooks slash their fat consumption, Flint adds.

Cole of Rivers Run says poaching can be helpful to health-conscious home cooks, but that method will deplete some foods' nutritional value, he says.

Preparing a few dinners in advance and storing them in the refrigerator helps make healthy cooking less stressful, Cole says.

"It's all about preparation," says Cole, who would whip up several days' worth of dinners and snacks at once when he was training as a body-builder.

Locally grown food available at the



Marie Lovenheim, a nutritionist and chef who manages Little Green Café & Juice Bar at Pilates Plus in Brighton, recommends that home cooks own a blender, a stockpot and a wok or a heavy skillet.

Rochester Public Market and area farmers markets offer the chance for home cooks to redouble their commitment to healthy eating, Lovenheim says. She suggests shopping with a friend and splitting the cost of large shares of fruits and vegetables.

Healthy cooking can even have an immediate impact on grocery bills, especially when the focus shifts away from meat consumption.

"There's nothing wrong with rice and beans," Lovenheim says.

"If there's recipe that calls for a tablespoon of salt in cooking or a spoon of salt in cooking, I'll start out with half of that," says Caridi-Miller, whose business is open by reservation or catering, cooking classes, parties and events. "You need a little bit of salt to season the food and bring out the