

Choose microwave cookware wisely

LANCASTER — If you're the owner of a new microwave oven, you're probably in the market for microwave cookware to help you get the best use out of your new appliance. Luckily, you have a wide variety of products to choose from.

According to Helene B. Reyburn, an Extension program assistant in home management at Penn State, glass and glass ceramic, clay and plastic are the most versatile. They are transparent to microwaves, which means the microwaves easily penetrate them to cook your food, and they can also be used for conventional cooking.

Clay utensils which are specially

designed for microwave cooking are ideal for stews, soups, and other casseroles. However, some pottery utensils may not be suitable for microwave cooking, depending on the amount of metal in the glaze used over the clay or the impurities in the clay.

Many plastics are used in manufacturing microwave cookware today. Some have limited use, and Reyburn feels your best investment is the high quality plastics — polysulfone, thermoset polyester, and polymethyl pentene — because you can use them for all microwave cooking tasks without worrying about melting or distorting. Utensils made from

these three plastics are break and chip resistant. An added plus is the fact that food doesn't stick to the cooking surface.

Before you buy plastic cookware, Reyburn suggests you check manufacturers' labels for indications of high-quality. The phrase "suitable for conventional and microwave ovens" is a clue that the utensil is transparent to microwaves and also can withstand high heat. A label stating that the utensil can be placed on the lower rack of the dishwasher also indicates it can withstand high heat and can be used for cooking foods with a high sugar or fat content.

Wood, straw and paper may also be used in the microwave oven, but have limited use because they can't withstand the higher temperatures. Keep them for warming up foods or for very short term cooking.

Remember to keep the shape of the utensil in mind when you buy, Reyburn says. Round, oval, and doughnut-shaped utensils result in the most even cooking. Square or rectangular dishes tend to concentrate microwaves in corners, resulting in overcooked food in these areas.

The interior size of the oven, of course, determines the maximum

size of the dish you can use. An oblong baking dish may not fit in an oven with a revolving tray since it could hit the sides of the oven as it turns. Dish measurements are given for the inside capacity, and due to the thickness of the material and extended handles, the outside dimensions are larger than the stated size. This may make some of them too big for some ovens.

Whether you are buying microwave cookware for yourself or someone else, you can do a better job picking something really useful if you keep in mind what a particular utensil is made of, its shape and how it can be used.

Remember, children unaware of wood stove danger

LANCASTER — Although much attention has been given to the "do's" and "don'ts" of installing and using wood burning stoves, a problem that hasn't received much attention is what to do with the small child who doesn't understand the potential dangers of wood burners.

Crawling babies are out to explore, and touching objects with their fingers and hands is one of their main modes of learning. Letting them learn the hard way (by touching a hot stove) could result in serious burns, says Martha Plass Shee, Extension

home-economist-nutritionist.

Thinking that the intense heat a few inches from the stove will stop them is wrong, as they simply cannot recognize the danger, she says.

And what about the toddler, the child old enough to climb out of the playpen and half walk, half stumble across the room? Even slightly older children that realize the hazards and do know better than to touch hot objects may become so absorbed in playing that they may roll, fall, or run into the stove.

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