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Hadley Presents

13 Favorite Kitchen Gadgets

Presented by Ricky Enger

Ricky Enger: Welcome to Hadley Presents. I'm your host, Ricky Enger, inviting you to sit back, relax, and enjoy a conversation with the experts. In this episode, Hadley staff join us to share their favorite tools in the kitchen. Welcome to the show everybody.

Jennifer Ottowitz: Hey.

Steve Kelley: Hey Ricky.

Tiffany Mpofu: Hello.

Jessica Smith: Hello.

Ricky Enger: So great to have you all. We have three from our last staff picks, which was a lot of fun. We talked about our favorite apps. If you haven't heard that one, it's definitely worth a listen. So, we have three veterans from that show, and we have a newcomer today. With us, we have Steve Kelley from our technology team, and you may also know him from Get Up and Go, and occasionally on Craft Circle. Welcome, Steve.

Steve Kelley: Hey everybody. Thanks, Ricky.

Ricky Enger: We have Jennifer, who among many, many other things supports a lot of our independent living workshops. And you'll also catch her on Resource Roundtable. Welcome, Jennifer.

Jennifer Ottowitz: Hi everybody.

Ricky Enger: We have Tiffany also on our tech team. You'll hear her in Travel Talk. And so great to have you on the show, Tiffany. Welcome.

Tiffany Mpofu: Hello. Thank you for having me, Ricky.

Ricky Enger: Awesome. And last, but certainly not least, we have Jessica Smith, who is doing a lot with braille these days. So, if you're working with braille or if you're thinking about working on your braille, you may encounter Jessica. You'll also find her on the Embracing Braille discussion group and Book Nook. Welcome, Jessica.

Jessica Smith: Hello everyone. Thanks for having me today.

Ricky Enger: Yes. So good to have you. I like to cook, and I like to eat. And I was thinking about it and it's one of those things that we all spend a little time in the kitchen, whether we really like to cook or whether it's just kind of one of those necessary things. So, I thought we would get to together and just talk about what everybody really can't live without in their kitchen. And it's always very interesting to get these things ahead of time. I know what everyone has picked, but nobody else knows each other's choices. So, this is a fun reveal for sure. And why don't we then get started with Steve. First of all, how much do you like to cook? Is it a chore? Is it a thing that you kind of do under duress or do you enjoy it? And then also, what are your tools that you just can't live without?

Steve Kelley: Cooking, for me, it depends on what's being cooked. Actually, for years, I cooked in a couple of different restaurants. That was a lot of fun. It was also really fast paced. For years, I was a single parent, so there was the cooking whatever my son liked. And sometimes that verged on being a chore. And these days I enjoy cooking from time to time. And yeah, there's a couple of things that I can't live without really. The other day I was looking for a recipe for a quiche. I started looking for the old Betty Crocker because I remembered, oh yeah, there's a great standard recipe in there. Where is that book? Hmm, let me think. So, I looked through a couple boxes on the shelf. I couldn't find it.

And then it was just like, hmm, I'm just going to get one from the Amazon Echo, because that's lately where I've been getting most of my recipes from. It's just really cool because you can ask for a recipe. And what I really love is that you can proceed through the recipe or just get a list of ingredients. I'm wondering if I would still use the Amazon Echo, if back in the day I had 20/20 vision or pretty close to it, I don't anymore. So sometimes it's easier to listen to the recipes rather than running around, looking for a magnifying glass or something to enlarge the print. So that's one of the reasons that I love the Amazon Echo.

Ricky Enger: Plus, you don't have to touch anything.

Steve Kelley: Exactly.

Ricky Enger: Sometimes your hands get messy, and you don't want to be flipping through a page and getting flour all over it.

Steve Kelley: Yeah. I would use, and have used, the iPad in the past for the very same thing. Just get a recipe and zoom it up a little bit, but that's what the problem is. Next thing you know you're touching the iPad and you've got flour fingerprints all over it. That doesn't work as well as the Amazon Echo.

The other thing that's just really great to have, if you're using one of those print cookbooks is just a good handheld magnifier. And I do have one of those. I use a 5X handheld magnifier with an LED light on it. That works for lot of things. And it's super helpful. Again, it's kind of like the iPad. You want to watch what's on your hand before you start picking that up because it can become a real mess.

I also have a really low-cost Husky LED work light. It's got a magnetic bottom. And I think it's really designed for working on the car or something like that out in the tool shed, but it's terrific in the kitchen because the light just kind of flips up. You turn it on, it's got an LED, it's got three different light strengths. And when you need something either to see something on the stove or to look in a pot or something like that, it's just super handy.

Ricky Enger: Great examples of things. And some of them, I never would've thought about. Having a separate little light to look at things, but certainly that makes a lot of sense. And we'll have links to examples of these things in the show notes. So, if you're wondering, hey, where do I get something like that? No worries. We'll have you covered for that. Jennifer, yeah, it looks like you are up next.

Jennifer Ottowitz: All right. Well, thanks Steve. It was so fun learning about everybody's picks. And you mentioned Alexa, hopefully I'm not stealing, but I just wanted to... I use Alexa for timers all the time in the kitchen. So, my two, the first pick is really low tech. So, no batteries, no electricity required, but it's something that can help with something that can be a challenge for many of us. And that's flipping or turning your food. So, whether you're making a hamburger or a grilled cheese or a quesadilla, you want to be able to control where you flip it and to make sure that it doesn't curl up on itself. And so, a double spatula is a really nice tool. Now there's lots of ways that people can do this without this gadget, but I think it's just a really fun and handy device. And it's basically two spatulas that are joined together at the end of the handle.

And they have versions that are made out of plastic, they work in all pans, especially non-stick pans. And they have a version that's two metal spatulas. Basically, they work like tongs. And so, you just kind of spread them apart, slide the bottom spatula underneath your food, close it to trap your food, and then you can turn it and know exactly where it's going to end up.

Once you release the food, you can pinch it together and use it somewhat like a single spatula, just to help make sure your food isn't curled up on itself. Slide it around in the pan if you need to recenter it. These run anywhere from, in terms of US dollars, from about, I've seen them about $10 to about $17.50, something like that. I've had people turn all kinds of food, even fish sticks in the oven. You might cook in the oven; you don't have to just use it for stuff on the stovetop too.

Ricky Enger: That is one of my most hated chores is flipping things. And so, any device that can make that a little easier is definitely a winner.

Jennifer Ottowitz: Well then, you might like my next device too, because it's an alternative so that you don't even have to worry about flipping. That's just a countertop grill. And more specifically, the George Foreman grill. And I've had mine for over like 20 years. They've been around a while. But there are lots of different brands and styles. The OptiGrill is one that's really hot right now. It's a nice, healthy way of cooking because the fat drains from the food. They're great for cooking meat and seafood and grilling vegetables and making sandwiches. They're safer, a lot of folks feel, and myself included, because they enclose the food. You're not cooking over an open pan where there's grease or fat spattering. And you're cooking both sides at the same time so you're actually cooking a little faster. So, you can heat up that chicken breast in a lot quicker time too. And it doesn't take up a lot of room. It's less work area to worry about cleaning.

The cook trays now can come out to make cleaning a lot easier. And so, it's just a nice, easy device for new cooks, for anybody that's a little weary about working over an open pan. And the grills are available from department stores, online. They can run you anywhere from about $40, even up to $250, depending on the models that you're interested in.

Ricky Enger: How fancy you get it.

Jennifer Ottowitz: You got it. And some, you just... Some have buttons or knobs that you can set to a certain setting. Some, you just go by timing if you're not able to see the lights that tell you when it's preheated. You can just, okay. I know I preheated for five minutes and then it's good to go. So, they're really easy to use no matter what your level of vision.

Ricky Enger: Awesome, great picks. With that, we will turn it over to Tiffany. What can you just not live without in the kitchen?

Tiffany Mpofu: Actually, the one that I want to share is more of a technique. Just being organized in the kitchen is really helpful for me. It just makes it easy to find things, just to give just a little brief rundown of how I organize things.

My seasonings and baking ingredients are in a cupboard. Seasonings on one shelf, other ingredients on other shelves. I have jars and canned goods in a different cupboard. Jars on the bottom shelf, canned goods on a different shelf. And even with my cooking utensils, whether it's utensils for grilling or whatever it is, I have those in a drawer. But then the ones I use all the time, I have them in a holder next to my stove.

And to go back to my seasonings, those can be a pain sometimes because of the labels. But I use my magnifier for that, to read the labels. The ones that I use the most, I have those on top of a rack, so that it's easy for me to get to those and use. And also too, we have a workshop on organizing. Those are great tips in there to look for ways to organize the kitchen. As far as a tool, just like Jennifer, this doesn't require any batteries. These little devices, they're just life savers. What I'm talking about are bump dots, or sometimes they're called locator dots. I have my stove and my microwave labeled. These guys can come in different colors and shapes and sizes. For my stove. It has many functions on it. So, I mostly use the bake and the air fryer, and there's like three different rows of functions.

And the bake is on the top row, somewhere in the middle. So, I put a bump dot on there, but the air fryer it's on the second row, but first in the row. So, that one is a little bit more easier to find. Then when it comes to adjusting the temperature, there's a number pad. And I have little clear small ones on those because my husband also uses the stove, and he wants to also be able to see the numbers on there. For the start and the cancel, I use Velcro. For the start, I have soft Velcro. And then for the cancel, I have rough Velcro. And the panel on my stove is black. So, I use white Velcro to give me that contrast. And it's the same type of concept on my microwave too.

Another tool that I also enjoy, or it makes my life easy in the kitchen are using measuring cups. We had received a gift from a housewarming present, and there were measuring cups in there. The measuring cups, they're black, but then the measurement is raised just a little bit. And it's also camouflage in with the color of the cup. And I'm like, what am I going to do with these?

What I did was I took a knife and I cut notches on one side of the measuring cup. So, my half cup, I cut two notches. And then my third cup, three. And quarter cup, four. Just so that I can identify those quicker. And you could do that with either a steak knife or a butter knife. But if you use a butter knife, you'll need to put a little bit more elbow grease. Those are my favorite gadgets and techniques for the kitchen.

Ricky Enger: I love it. And I love how everything that you mentioned revolves in some way around being efficient. So being able to find your numbers and adjustments quickly or being able to find your measurements quickly or being organized. So, yeah, I love it. And finally, Jessica, you're up. What can't you live without?

Jessica Smith: Going off of what Tiffany said about organizing, I have something similar to the measuring cups. But they are the teaspoon set. So having an organized kitchen is something really important to me. And I found that having the measuring spoons, they just ended up in a drawer. So, when I replaced my teaspoon set, I ended up purchasing a teaspoon set that is magnetic. So, they magnetize to each other. They sit together going from largest, which is the teaspoon to the smallest, which is an eighth of a teaspoon. There is a leveler included that also magnetizes to the top that helps if you are measuring out spices or sugar or coffee even, instead of using your finger to scoop across the top to make sure it's level, you just take the leveler and it's flat and it smooths across the top.

They're also stainless steel. So, if you use your teaspoons, like a ladle and bend them, you're able to bend the teaspoons to do that. They're also double sided. So, you can bend one side and then have the other side just flat. They just sit in the drawer, and everything magnetizes together. So that it's one thing that I grab out the drawer when I'm getting ready to bake.

Jennifer Ottowitz: Can I ask a quick question? What's the benefits of having them be a ladle? Why would you use that?

Jessica Smith: So, a lot of times, if you're measuring liquids, especially if you're visually impaired, it's very difficult to tell if you're pouring a liquid into a level measuring spoon. If you make it into a ladle, you're able to ladle, like soup, your ingredients for your wet ingredients. It's really helpful. I've seen people use it for dry ingredients as well.

And then moving on to my second thing, I have a coffee AeroPress. If you haven't heard about the AeroPress, it is a device that's made out of plastic. And it makes one or two cups of coffee. You can also brew espresso in it, which is what I do. I like my morning coffee that is brewed espresso beans. And then I add milk to it. So, what you do is you take the cylinder, and there is a plunger that is inside it. And you take the plunger out, add your coffee beans to it. It also comes with a measuring spoon that gives you the perfect amount of coffee. You put your coffee grinds in it and pour hot water on top. And then you take the plunger and wait five minutes. And after five minutes, you just give it a little stir and then plunge the plunger down through the cylinder. And coffee comes out the other end into your coffee cup. I really like this device because it's small, it's compact. It's easy to clean because it's plastic, you're not worried about it being in the sink full of dishes and breaking. So that's something that I use very frequently. I've also used it to make tea and use tea instead of coffee in it.

Ricky Enger: Nice. I like how versatile that is. And you don't have to make a giant pot of coffee, and maybe you don't want to use coffee pods or whatever. It's versatile enough to do tea and coffee. So, couple of different ways to get that necessary caffeine.

Before we go, I want to share my two. I was thinking about it and didn't want to share something... Much like all of you, didn't want to share something that required batteries or something that you have to plug in or whatever. For the most part, all of this has been very low tech, and mine are too.

So, my first one is just a standard sheet pan cookie sheet. Why would that be a thing I couldn't live without? Well, not only can you put a roasting rack over the sheet pan and cook bacon on it in the oven rather than frying it on the stove, so much easier and very, very yummy. But also, I like to use it because it can really help when you're prepping something and you're measuring ingredients and you're pouring things into things.

I am, maybe, not the most tidy person when it comes to this. And so having just a cookie sheet down where I am prepping things, all of that mess, all of that flour that might get all over the counter is instead going to be contained just in this cookie sheet. So, you just have to wash that and off you go. And then my second one is a set of cutting mats. So, what is a cutting mat? It's the same concept as a cutting board. They come in different colors. So, you can use those to contrast with the food that you're preparing, or you can have certain ones for veggies, certain ones for meat, that kind of thing. The back of the cutting mat is made of a material that it will kind of stick to the counter and not move around. The top of it is just plastic and these are very thin. So once you cut your ingredients and you're ready to transport them somewhere, they're thin enough that they're actually pretty bendy. So, you can more easily bend it to fit the shape of the vessel that you're pouring into. So, if you're trying to pour it into a food processor or a pan, you're able to just bend this cutting mat and almost make it act like a funnel to funnel those ingredients where they belong, rather than picking up the big, hard cutting board and trying to dump it in successfully once you've raked everything to a particular corner. Those are my two.

Before we wrap up, anybody have any other quick thing to mention? I love the A lady, the Amazon Echo, was definitely today's winner, I think, so-

Jennifer Ottowitz: And she's definitely a multitasker, that's for sure.

Ricky Enger: Yes.

Jessica Smith: Right.

Tiffany Mpofu: I just want to quickly mention we do have a workshop called Labels You Touch. And that also gives some really cool ideas for labeling things around the house or inside the kitchen.

Ricky Enger: Yes. I love how our show notes are going to include many, many, many series that are already on Hadley. So, this is kind of like your one stop shopping for figuring out not only where to get some of these kitchen tools that we've mentioned, but also how you might go about using them and getting some other tips and tricks too. Anything else before we wrap up?

Steve Kelley: The whole magnifying series too, for those who-

Ricky Enger: Oh yes.

Steve Kelley: - do want to break out that magnifying glass. And just to balance off the non-technical stuff with one more techy thing. I use Google Lookout an awful lot, sometimes when I need to quickly read some ingredients or something like that, or directions on the back of a package. That is like the handiest little app for the Android phone. I think it's terrific.

Ricky Enger: Ooh, great tip. And Seeing AI would be its kind of sister app on the iPhone.

Steve Kelley: The iPhone, for sure. Yeah.

Jennifer Ottowitz: I think it's just so cool how from low tech to high tech. And even, it's a combination of gadgets and techniques that can really help keep you safe and independent and efficient in the kitchen.

Ricky Enger: Well, thank you all so much for sharing your favorite tools and your favorite techniques. And I'm hungry suddenly. I think we all should get-

Tiffany Mpofu: I second that.

Ricky Enger: And Jessica could brew us up some nice tea or coffee in her AeroPress.

Jessica Smith: Absolutely.

Ricky Enger: Thanks everyone.

Got something to say? Share your thoughts about this episode of Hadley presents or make suggestions for future episodes. We'd love to hear from you. Send us an email at podcast@hadley.edu. That's P-O-D-C-A-S-T@hadley.edu or leave us a message at 847-784-2870. Thanks for listening.