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EQUIPMENT skillets

Testing Skillets to Find the Best

F&W's Kristin Donnelly tried out 50 cast-iron, stainless steel and nonstick skillets to pick the best. Here, the winners, plus ideal recipes for each type of pan.

food photographs by lucy schaeffer
research by ben tepler



CORNMEAL
PANCAKES WITH
MAPLE-CRANBERRY
BUTTER

cast-iron pans

There are two kinds of cast-iron skillets: regular and enameled. Both heat evenly, if slowly, so they're great for cooking pancakes and searing meat. They're also good at keeping oil hot for frying and can withstand the high temperatures of an oven or grill.

what to look for

A SEASONED SURFACE All regular cast-iron pans require periodic seasoning to prevent food from sticking; to season, coat the inside of the pan with oil and heat it in the oven for an hour. The more a skillet is used and seasoned, the less food will stick, so cookware connoisseurs seek out vintage pans. Today, many new cast-iron skillets are preseasoned at the factory.

STRAIGHT SIDES Skillets with nearly straight sides hold oil better for deep-frying and have more surface area for searing.

HELPER HANDLES Because cast-iron skillets are heavy, their handles are usually short, so the pan is easier to pick up. Some styles, like the Lodge Logic (right), have a second, U-shaped helper handle that allows the cook to lift the skillet with two hands.

enameled pans

Compared to regular cast iron, the enameled kind is more stick-resistant; plus, it won't react with acidic ingredients like tomatoes, which can make food taste metallic. But metal utensils can chip the enamel.

caring for cast iron

Soap removes a regular cast-iron pan's seasoning, so it's best to scrub solely with a brush or abrasive sponge and hot water, while the pan is still warm. To prevent rust, set the skillet over a burner on low heat so water can evaporate, then wipe the interior with a few drops of vegetable oil.



THREE CAST-IRON WINNERS

Lodge Logic 12-inch
(ABOVE) \$30;
423-837-7181 or
lodgefmg.com.

Emerilware 12-inch
\$25; 800-255-2523
or emerilware.com.

**Le Creuset
Iron Handle 12-inch**
(enameled) \$120;
877-273-8738
or lecreuset.com.

Cornmeal Pancakes with Maple-Cranberry Butter

TOTAL: 30 MIN
4 SERVINGS

Because cast iron heats so evenly, F&W's Melissa Rubel uses it for pancakes.

- 1 stick softened unsalted butter plus 3 tablespoons butter, melted, and more for brushing
- ¼ cup fresh cranberries
- 3 tablespoons pure maple syrup
- 1½ teaspoons kosher salt
- ¾ cup all-purpose flour
- ¾ cup yellow cornmeal
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1½ teaspoons baking powder
- 1 cup whole milk
- 1 large egg

1. In a mini food processor, pulse the stick of softened butter with the cranberries, maple syrup and ½ teaspoon of the salt until combined; scrape into a bowl.
2. In a bowl, whisk the flour with the cornmeal, sugar, baking powder and the remaining 1 teaspoon of salt. Whisk in the milk, egg and the 3 tablespoons of melted butter.
3. Heat a cast-iron skillet over moderate heat and brush with butter. Ladle in 2 tablespoons of batter for each pancake; cook until just beginning to set. Flip the pancakes and cook until just cooked through. Transfer the pancakes to plates, spread with the cranberry butter and serve.

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new this month on
foodandwine.com



breakfasts for a crowd

Here, 15 fantastic ideas for open houses or overnight guests, from baked eggs on a smoky chorizo-potato hash (above) to ricotta pancakes with blueberries.

 foodandwine.com/breakfast

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