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The green kitchen: Gift aid

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Just a few weeks to Christmas – time, then, to assemble a brief Green Kitchen gift list. A good piece of cookware ranks at the top of any kitchen-hound's list, and this column stands by its recommendation of GreenPan – a line of non-stick pans with a coating made from inorganic sand (020-8974 4750 for details). But if your favourite cook wants to go back to basics this year, the alternative is a cast-iron frying pan.

Cast iron is the cheapest and simplest cookware material to manufacture, containing just three “ingredients” (iron, silicon and carbon) and being formed in sand moulds. As a porous material, it needs “seasoning” to make the surface corrosion-resistant, but leading brands arrive pre-seasoned nowadays. Cleaning is minimal, and the pans are safe for oven use – perfect when you want to sear some chops and finish cooking them in the oven.

The cast-iron king is the American company Lodge, founded in 1896. To add to its green credentials, Lodge cookware is famously long-lasting. My mother has a set dating from around 1910; it is in perfect condition. Best supplier in the UK: Head Cook and Bottle Washer (www.headcook.co.uk). You can learn more at www.lodgemfg.com, and get tips on use at <http://tinyurl.com/5po4a7>.

Beech is not quite as durable as cast iron, but it's a tough wood, excellent for chopping boards if you don't need something dishwasher-safe. Ecotopia sells a trio of beech boards with the imprimatur of the Forest Stewardship Council (from £15.95, www.ecotopia.co.uk).

If you're looking for something between two covers, my choice for reading and cooking is *The Frugal Cook* by Fiona Beckett (Absolute Press, £14.99). Beckett is a whiz at using leftovers and (in timely fashion) humble ingredients, including cheaper cuts of meat. A green book for the lean year ahead.

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