

The Day

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Making Baking Easier

Silicone products help you bake a better cake

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If you don't know what to get the baker in your life, think silicone. Bill Hall, chef and co-owner of Restaurant Bravo Bravo in Mystic, has been using silicone baking sheets for about a dozen years. He bought his first Silpat by Demarle in France and swears by it.

"It's great for baking because it gives you an even temperature across the cooking surface," Hall says.

He uses his mostly to make cookies, bread, tarts and parmesan chips for his restaurant. The nonstick surface means you can easily roll out tart or bread dough without having to add flour, which can affect the texture and flavor of the dough, Hall says. In addition to ensuring that your baked goods are cooked to perfection, silicone sheets make cleanup easy.

The baking pan stays clean, and the silicone sheets are easily washed with warm water and soap. "You never have to scrub a Silpat," Hall says.

Suzanne Lane, owner of Gray Goose Cookery at Olde Mistick Village, sells a variety of silicone baking products. A standard size Silpat sheet sells for \$19.99 at the store.

"They've been around for a while and are gaining in popularity," she says, noting that the sheets withstand temperatures up to 480 degrees.

Lane and Hall both have used their silicone sheets to make candy and say they work well. You simply drop the dollops of candy on the sheet, bake them and then peel them off when done, Lane says.

"I would throw the parchment paper out and go to that," she adds.

To go along with sheets are silicone spatulas by LeCreuset that can withstand heat up to 800 degrees. They come in a variety of bold, fun colors and sell for \$7.99.

"You can literally put it on the burner, and it won't melt," Lane says, demonstrating in the test kitchen at the store. "Silicone really is the innovative product in the kitchen this year."

Barbara Simone, manager of Le Gourmet Chef at Clinton Crossing, uses silicone baking products at home, too. Another feature she likes is that the pans are flexible and can be folded up to fit in a drawer, then when you want to use them again, you take them out and they retain their shape.

The store also sells the Silpat for \$19.99 and has a bigger one, called the Roul'pat for \$35.99.

Le Gourmet Chef also carries silicone oven mitts by Orka in a variety of bright colors. Simone said she was at a product demonstration, and the host had a participant slip on the mitt and then stick their hand in boiling water with no ill effects. They, too, are easy to clean. "I just throw this in the dishwasher and it comes out clean," she says.

The mitts sell for \$19.99.

For the bread or pie baker, Oxo makes a Good Grip silicone rolling pin for \$27 at Gray Goose. The Sil-pin rolling pin, featured on "Oprah" and the Food Network, comes in a variety of colors and sells for \$39.95 at Le Gourmet Chef.

Other silicone baking tools include basting brushes by SilGourmet. The ball-head bristles can be dipped in melted butter or oil for basting bread or piecrusts. A long-handled one by William Bounds Ltd. is designed for the grill and withstands heat up to 500 degrees. It sells for \$14.99.

Everything from brightly colored potholders to muffin pans, loaf pans and Bundt pans come in silicone. Fancy cake molds, resembling a present wrapped with a bow, a rose, a garland or a chrysanthemum come in silicone. At Le Gourmet Chef, these sell for \$27.99 to \$28.99.

Another nice feature of the silicone products is that they can go from the freezer to the microwave or the oven, Lane says. The only thing you can't do on silicone is cut. So you'll want to put those brownies on a cutting board before slicing into them.

At Gray Goose the potholders by Hot Spot sell for \$7; the Kitchen Zone muffin pans are \$18 and the bundt pans are \$19.99.

A handy baking tool that isn't made of silicone is the Microplane grater. The stainless steel grater sells for \$14.95. These are terrific for shaving chocolate or zesting lemon, and you can rub back and forth on the laser-cut surface which initially was designed as a woodworking tool, Lane says. A spice grater, shaker and storer is perfect for dishes that call for fresh cinnamon or nutmeg. It sells for \$11.

If a fresh batch of cookies is what gets you through the winter, you might want to buy some of these products for your favorite chef.

Gray Goose Cookery, Olde Mistick Village, Mystic, 860-536-5306

Le Gourmet Chef, Clinton Crossing, Clinton, 860-669-3616 ■

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