

Choose the pan for the job

A practical guide to daily cooking, traditional vessels, storage, buying and replacement.

A useful starting point: stainless steel for most wet cooking, a seasoned iron or carbon-steel tawa for suitable dry cooking, and food-storage containers suited to their contents. Add a non-stick pan only if it helps with the dishes you cook. You do not need an expensive matching set.

Safety depends on the food-contact surface, the food, temperature, contact time, condition and intended use. No material is perfect for every job. The dish suggestions below are practical applications of the guidance in this booklet, not a ranking of tested products. [\[1\]](#) [\[3\]](#)

Quick dish-to-pan guide

What you are making	A practical choice	Why / key condition
Dal, rice, khichdi, milk	Stainless-steel pot or suitable pressure cooker	Versatile, durable; follow the cooker manual.
Tomato gravy, kadhi, sambar, tamarind or lemon dishes	Stainless steel; intact food-contact enamel	Useful for acidic recipes and longer simmering.
Roti, paratha, dosa, chilla	Seasoned iron / carbon-steel tawa; suitable non-stick if preferred	Iron needs care and technique. Coated pans need controlled heat.
Eggs, delicate fish, pancakes	Suitable non-stick; seasoned iron with practice	A convenience choice; use the specified utensils and heat.
Tadka, bhunao, searing	Suitable uncoated stainless steel or iron	Better default when higher heat is needed; do not overheat oil.
Pakora, puri, deep-frying	Stable, deep, uncoated metal kadai	Leave room for bubbling; never pressure-fry in a household cooker.
Microwave reheating	Container explicitly rated for microwave use	Check the lid separately; ordinary metal pans do not belong in a microwave.

Practical recipe choices; material and microwave guidance is available in the linked sources. [\[1\]](#) [\[4\]](#) [\[9\]](#)

Daily versus occasional: a suitable specialty pan may be used regularly. Calling something "occasional use" does not make an unsuitable glaze, exposed reactive lining or damaged cooker safe.

Stainless steel, iron and steel

Choose for the cooking you do and the care you can realistically maintain.

Stainless steel: a versatile everyday default

Use for: dal, milk, boiling, steaming, curries and acidic gravies. It is durable and easy to clean. A thick or layered base can help distribute heat. Aluminum or copper enclosed inside an intact steel pan is different from an exposed food-contact surface. [4]

Buy for function: a stable base, comfortable handles, a useful size and a clearly identified manufacturer. Ask for the food-contact alloy and construction. "3-ply", "5-ply" and "7-ply" describe construction; the number alone is not a health score. You need not buy the highest-priced grade or most layers.

Use and care: control heat to limit sticking and scorching; clean with methods approved for that surface. A light surface mark is different from deep pitting, cracking or a separating base. If you have a diagnosed nickel allergy with dietary restrictions, discuss material choice with your clinician. [1] [3] [10]

Seasoned cast iron: useful when you want heat retention

Use for: tawas, roasting, searing and many dry sabzis. It holds heat well but can be heavy. Seasoning is a baked-on oil layer that helps food release; it is not the same as a factory PTFE coating. Avoid long acidic simmering and storing tomato, tamarind or lemon dishes in bare iron; choose steel or suitable enamel for these. [1] [4]

Care: wash after use, dry completely and spread a very thin layer of cooking oil. Mild dish soap is acceptable. Avoid soaking or the dishwasher. Surface rust can often be removed and the pan re-seasoned following its maker's method; a cracked vessel needs replacement. [3]

Carbon steel / many traditional iron tawas

Carbon-steel pans are commonly thinner and lighter than cast iron and respond more quickly to heat. They suit tawas and quick cooking. Heat gradually; use the same wash-dry-oil routine. Do not assume that every black pan is bare iron: it may have enamel or another coating.

Iron cookware is not anemia treatment. Some iron can transfer into food, but the amount is not a dependable treatment dose. If you have been advised to limit iron intake, ask your clinician about bare iron cookware. [4]

A useful distinction

Stainless steel and carbon steel are different materials. Stainless steel usually needs no seasoning; bare carbon steel does. A magnet can help check some induction bases, but it cannot certify purity, food safety or the exact alloy. Check the product specification and hob compatibility.

Understand the cooking surface

The material underneath and the coating touching food may be different.

PTFE non-stick: suitable for controlled-heat cooking

PTFE is a fluoropolymer within the broad PFAS family. BfR does not expect adverse health effects from intended use of PTFE-coated cookware. Strong overheating, especially of an empty pan, can release hazardous gases. This is a fumes issue, not simply "chemicals leaching into food". [2]

Use it well: avoid empty preheating and high-heat searing. Use low to medium heat within the maker's limits, ventilation and non-scratching tools. Replace peeling, blistered or badly worn coatings. A small scratch is not proof of poisoning: BfR says tiny swallowed PTFE particles are not expected to cause harm. [2] [3] [4]

Read labels carefully: "PFOA-free" does not mean "PTFE-free" or "PFAS-free". If you wish to avoid fluorinated coatings, choose a clearly documented alternative. Environmental concerns about PFAS and the risk from normal pan use are different questions. [2]

Ceramic-coated, granite, stone, titanium and hybrid

A ceramic-coated metal pan is different from a solid ceramic pot. For example, manufacturers describe ceramic coatings applied to aluminum or stainless-steel bodies. A stone-like appearance or a "titanium" or "hybrid" label does not tell you the full composition. Ask what actually touches the food.

Treat marketing terms as a prompt to ask questions: What is the coating? What temperature and tools are permitted? Is the exact model tested for its intended food use? Follow that model's instructions, and stop using a flaking or blistered food-contact coating. Do not assume a premium price makes it indestructible. [3] [4]

Bare aluminum and hard-anodized aluminum

Aluminum conducts heat well. For bare aluminum, avoid prolonged acidic or salty cooking and storage, which can increase metal transfer. Hard anodizing creates a harder surface that reduces transfer. Stop using badly worn anodized cookware. For frequent gravies, steel is a simpler choice. [1]

A hard-anodized body can also carry a separate non-stick coating. Check both the body and the food-contact finish; apply the coating's care rules when present.

Composition matters more than a familiar trade name. FDA testing has identified aluminum, brass and aluminum-alloy products sold as Hindalium/Hindolium or Indalium/Indolium that can leach lead into food — and the cookware named in that alert was sourced mainly from India and Pakistan. This does not mean every product in these categories is unsafe. Check the alert against what is in your kitchen, buy traceable products, and stop food use of an identified item. [6]

Tradition still needs suitability

Age, a natural appearance or a familiar family practice is not a safety test.

Copper, brass / pital and bronze / kansa

For home use, keep acidic food away from unlined copper and copper-alloy food surfaces. Tomato, tamarind, lemon, vinegar and curd-based preparations are practical examples to avoid. The FDA Food Code restricts copper and copper-alloy contact with acidic foods below pH 6; use this as material guidance, not as Indian law. [3]

Lined cookware: follow the lining's heat and care limits. If tin (kalai) or another lining wears through, stop cooking in it and seek qualified food-safe restoration where appropriate. Inspect wear rather than using a fixed re-tinning interval. [1]

Practical recommendation: reserve these vessels for the dishes and conditions the maker explicitly supports. Do not rely on a copper bottle or kansa bowl to treat disease or make unsafe water safe. For lemon water and other acidic drinks, choose suitable glass or stainless steel. A product identified in a lead alert should leave food use, not be repaired or passed on. [6]

Clay / mitti, terracotta and solid ceramic

Choose products intended for cooking or food storage from a traceable maker. Ask for relevant food-contact migration testing, especially for lead and cadmium where applicable. A "lead-free" label, traditional appearance or "unglazed" claim alone is insufficient evidence of the finished item's suitability. Unknown antiques and decorative pottery are poor choices for food use. [1] [5]

Follow the specific pot's seasoning, cleaning, drying and heating instructions. Oven-safe does not automatically mean safe on direct flame. Stop food use if it develops cracks, flaking glaze or damage that prevents proper cleaning. Washing or boiling cannot make lead-contaminated pottery safe. [3] [5]

Stone vessels / kalchatti and stone-looking cookware

Real stone vessels vary in composition and construction. Without evidence for the exact product, this guide cannot certify a stone as suitable for cooking. Ask for its intended use, food-contact testing and heat-care instructions; do not improvise with decorative stone. A stone-effect coated pan belongs to the coating category on page 3.

Enameled metal: an option for acidic dishes

Intact food-contact enamel is useful for curries and longer acidic simmering. It does not need iron-style seasoning. Heat gently, protect it from impact and sudden temperature changes, and use suitable utensils. Some staining is cosmetic; chips or flaking inside the vessel mean stop use and contact the maker. [3]

Containers are not all cookware

Food-contact, microwave, oven, freezer and direct-flame suitability are separate permissions.

Glass and ceramic containers

Choose a container explicitly rated for the intended heat source. Many glass storage and baking dishes are not stovetop-safe. Avoid sudden temperature changes: do not add cold liquid to hot glass or place it on a wet or cold surface. Use a dry heatproof support. Replace chipped, cracked or severely scratched glass; do not glue it back into food service.

Read lid instructions separately. A glass base may tolerate an oven while its plastic lid does not. For a microwave, follow the model's instructions for removing or venting lids. Do not assume a decorative ceramic bowl is microwave-safe.

Plastic food containers

Use plastic only for its intended food, time and temperature. Reheat only in explicitly microwave-suitable containers. Do not repeatedly reheat in takeaway tubs or reuse single-use packaging unless permitted. Replace warped, cracked or deteriorated containers. Never use non-food chemical containers for food. [1] [9]

Useful buying rule: "BPA-free" and a recycling number are not microwave instructions. For frequent reheating, a clearly rated glass container can simplify the choice. For cold or dry storage, an intact food-storage container used as directed can be practical.

Melamine plates and bowls

Melamine tableware is for serving as directed, not microwave heating. FDA advises against heating food or drinks in it; hot acidic conditions can increase migration. Transfer food to suitable cookware to heat it. Do not treat a hard, glossy plastic bowl as ceramic because it looks similar. [7]

Silicone, wood and cooking tools

Use food-contact silicone within its stated temperature limit; keep it away from flame and hot elements. Choose spatulas suited to the pan. Wood and suitable silicone can protect coatings. Clean and dry tools, and replace split wood, loose parts or deteriorating surfaces that are difficult to clean. [1] [3] [4]

Heat source check: induction compatibility does not imply microwave suitability. Metal baking tins can be appropriate in an oven when rated for it; ordinary metal cookware should not go into microwave mode. Air-fryer and oven accessories must fit the appliance and meet its instructions. [9]

For achar, chutney and acidic leftovers: choose suitable glass or stainless steel. Clean handling and timely refrigeration still matter.

Pressure cookers and purchase checks

A clear manual and reliable replacement parts matter as much as the vessel material.

Pressure-cooker essentials

A well-made cooker may use stainless steel, aluminum or a specified coated body. Buy a suitable size with genuine parts and service support. In India the ISI mark on a domestic pressure cooker is not a preference: certification to IS 2347 has been mandatory since 1 February 2021 under the Domestic Pressure Cooker (Quality Control) Order, 2020. A printed logo is not proof — verify the licence number in BIS Care before you buy. [8]

Before and during use	Why it matters
Check the vent, regulator, gasket, lid and handles. Follow the model's cleaning instructions.	Obstruction, damage or incompatible parts can defeat safe pressure control.
Use the prescribed liquid and fill limit; foaming or expanding foods such as dal and rice often need a lower fill.	One maximum level or water quantity does not suit every food and cooker.
Never force the lid open. Use only the pressure-release method allowed for that recipe and model.	Liquids can remain dangerously hot and erupt during unsuitable rapid release.
Do not add weights to the regulator, modify safety devices, pressure-fry in oil or dry-heat the cooker.	Follow the intended operating conditions. Stop if a safety part malfunctions.

These are general safeguards. Your cooker's own manual determines fill levels, water quantities, release methods and replacement parts. Electric multicookers have their own insert, valve and lid requirements.

Before you buy: seven useful checks

- 1. Identity:** an identifiable maker, exact model, seller, invoice and accessible care instructions.
- 2. Surface:** the material touching food, any coating and the base underneath it.
- 3. Intended use:** suitable foods, stove or induction compatibility, temperature limits, and separate limits for lids and handles.
- 4. Build:** a stable base, secure handles and no visible chips, cracks, peeling or sharp edges.
- 5. Evidence:** applicable certification and product-specific test information, especially for uncertain alloys, clay and glazes.
- 6. Verification:** check a claimed BIS licence in BIS Care; a logo alone is not enough.
- 7. Ownership:** replacement parts, warranty, service and the effort needed to maintain it. [3] [5] [8]

Buy for your cooking needs. Low price does not prove poor material, and high price does not prove safety. Buy fewer suitable pieces. If a seller cannot identify the food-contact surface or explain its intended use, choose a better-documented product.

Keep, restore or replace?

Inspect the actual item. Calendar age alone is not a reliable replacement rule.

What you notice	What to do
Light utensil marks on intact steel; mild enamel staining	Clean as instructed and inspect. Cosmetic changes alone do not establish a hazard.
Surface rust or worn seasoning on otherwise sound bare iron / carbon steel	Remove rust and restore seasoning using the maker's method. Do not confuse this with a damaged factory coating.
Peeling, blistering or extensive wear of a food-contact coating	Stop using it for food and replace the item or follow the maker's approved remedy.
Cracked glass, clay or metal; chipped interior enamel; deep corrosion; separating base	Stop use. Breakage, loose fragments or loss of a cleanable surface are concerns.
Worn copper/brass lining exposing the metal	Pause use; obtain qualified food-safe restoration if appropriate, or replace.
Damaged cooker valve, regulator, gasket, lock or handle	Stop pressure cooking; obtain compatible genuine parts or authorized service.
A recall or credible alert identifies your exact product	Follow the alert. Do not donate it for food use or assume polishing makes it safe.

Practical inspection checklist. General surface requirements and safety alerts are linked below. [\[1\]](#) [\[3\]](#) [\[4\]](#) [\[6\]](#)

Four things the short video didn't have room for

"Cheap cookware is harmful" is too broad. Judge traceability, construction, condition and intended use.

Overheated PTFE can release harmful fumes. Describing this only as leaching misses the main overheating concern.

Copper advice needs the word "unlined". A suitable, intact lining changes the surface contacting the food.

Maintenance is only one part of safety. Cleaning does not fix an unsuitable glaze or contaminated alloy. [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[5\]](#) [\[6\]](#)

Before every cook: choose the right vessel for the recipe; check its surface and handles; use suitable heat and tools; follow its manual; then clean, dry and store it appropriately.

This guide covers common household cookware and containers, not every product formulation. It does not certify individual items or replace appliance instructions. For a diagnosed metal allergy or a condition requiring restricted metal intake, seek individual clinical advice. No cookware should be bought as a substitute for medical treatment.

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Sources you can check

Selected institutional and peer-reviewed references. Tap a source title to open it.

These references support material and health guidance. Dish suggestions and care checklists are practical recommendations to use alongside the exact product manual. Overseas guidance is not presented as Indian law. The list contains government, public-health and peer-reviewed sources.

01 Health Canada - [The safe use of cookware and bakeware](#)

Material-specific precautions; aluminum, plastics and silicone.

02 German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) - [PTFE non-stick cookware: questions and answers](#)

Normal use, overheating, PFAS and small coating particles; revised July 2025.

03 US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) - [Food Code 2022](#)

Sections 4-101.11, 4-101.14 and 4-101.18: surfaces, copper alloys and coating care.

04 MedlinePlus / US National Library of Medicine - [Cooking utensils and nutrition](#)

Stainless steel, iron transfer, utensils and damaged coatings.

05 FDA - [Questions and answers on lead-glazed traditional pottery](#)

Uncertain or decorative pottery and limits of washing.

06 FDA - [Warning about imported cookware that may leach lead](#)

Aluminum, brass and Hindalium/Hindolium or Indalium/Indolium products, mainly from India and Pakistan; updated December 2025.

07 FDA - [Melamine in tableware: questions and answers](#)

Serving versus heating; no microwave heating in melamine.

08 Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) - [BIS apps / BIS Care](#)

Licence verification. Domestic pressure cookers require ISI certification to IS 2347 under the Domestic Pressure Cooker (Quality Control) Order, 2020, in force from 1 February 2021.

09 FDA - [Microwave ovens](#)

Container suitability, plastic heat limits and ordinary metal cookware.

10 Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry - [Stainless Steel Leaches Nickel and Chromium into Foods during Cooking](#)

Peer-reviewed research on metal transfer; relevant to the discussion of metal sensitivity. DOI: 10.1021/jf402400v.

Reading the evidence: detecting a substance is not, by itself, a measure of the dose reaching food or its health risk. A laboratory study is not a blanket verdict on every pan. Food-contact suitability depends on the finished product and expected use. Look for relevant migration testing and credible product information rather than universal "zero chemical" promises.

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