



# Kitchenability

*What's your Kitchenability?*

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## Chapter 1

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### Orientation

#### **Hello, Kitchen**

Your kitchen space might be in a dorm room or in an apartment or shared house. Wherever it is, my best advice to you about cooking is this: Treat your kitchen like a friend.

I know what you're thinking: "Nisa, you're nuts. My kitchen is a friend? Whaaat?"

Think of your kitchen as a friend, a partner, a companion. Part of growing your kitchenability is deepening your kitchen-compatibility.

And as in any friendship, you've got to learn your partner's strengths and weaknesses. You need to figure out how to adapt to its characteristics. In the same way that you wouldn't expect to become BFFs – best friends forever – after just meeting someone, you can't expect to just buy a few appliances, walk into your kitchen and become the next Food Network Star. It doesn't work that way.

Give yourself time to get to know your kitchen space, whatever size it is. When you lived at home you might not have spent much time in the kitchen. Or maybe you do know your way around pots and pans and knives, but you're not sure how to adapt that knowledge to a dorm room or a small, only basically equipped kitchen. Relax. I'm gonna introduce you to your new friend, so you can start cooking with confidence.

Let's go on a walkabout of your cabinets and counters, as I explain utensils and cookware. Then I'll introduce you to some prep techniques and other skills that will expand your kitchenability.

#### **Kitchen Confidential**

Every kitchen is different, so look around and take note of your space. Do you have a lot of cabinet space? Are your counters crammed with stuff already? If you have roommates, do you share everything or does each person have his or her designated space and utensils?

Figure out what can fit in your kitchen, such as a microwave oven, toaster oven, and dishware. If you live in a dorm, find out the rules for cooking in your room—your school may not allow certain appliances in dorm rooms.

Once you have this information you can narrow down the supplies you need to buy or borrow, making the choices less daunting. In the next section I list some basics I recommend for a starter kitchen, although you'll need to adapt this list based on your kitchen's function and your personal tastes and budget. If you're living in a dorm room, the appliances you will need are listed in the section on appliances.

All of these items can be found in a department store, discount store, or kitchen supply store. Be sure to ask Mom, Dad, or Grandma if they have any of these items they are willing to donate—kitchens tend to collect stuff over the years, so a longtime cook is likely to have some unneeded extras.

## Dorm Room Basics

College dorm life can be exciting—new friends, independence, parties, and experiences. You may be away from home for the first time in your life, and probably for two or more years. You might also be sharing a room with a complete stranger.

Life at college is different than life at home. After all, you probably didn't have loud music coming from the next room at all hours of the night at home. And maybe your parents always provided meals and snacks and you never had to figure out where your next bite was coming from.

Now you not only have to get your own food, you really should be keeping tracking of basic nutrition to stay healthy. Even if you did cook at home, you likely had access to a stove, an oven, and other kitchen appliances—none of which you have in your dorm room.

As you glance around the box you're calling home for a few months, you might be thinking, What could I cook in my dorm room, and how would I make it? Yes, you can still make delicious, healthy, and simple food in your dorm room by using a little creativity. Many amazing meals use simple ingredients and can be cooked with a microwave or toaster oven. A small refrigerator is all that's needed to keep ingredients fresh.

Taking time in your day to make yourself a healthy meal not only gives you knowledge about cooking, but it also empowers you because you know what's going in your body. And that's probably not the case with the mystery meat at the cafeteria.

Here is the short list of what will come in handy as you whip up goodies:

## Appliances

Kitchenability means getting to know your space, as well as appliances. In some cases, your place will already have standard appliances, but to personalize it you will need to buy more.

At many colleges and universities, you want to buy basics – within the rules. Some dormitory rules require that appliances have automatic off-switches or thermostat controls. Others do not allow

microwave ovens or appliances with an open heat element. Be sure to check your dorm's rules before purchasing any appliances.

If you live in an apartment or house, you probably have standard appliances, such as a stove and refrigerator. But even stoves can be vastly different. Gas stoves heat up quickly and you can easily control the temperatures, while electric stove temperatures are more difficult to gauge. What is "medium" temperature for one stove may in fact be "high" for another stove.

In my recipes, I've given you general ranges for cooking temperatures, such as "low to medium heat," but you may have to adjust it according to your stove.

Even the serving sizes can be customized. In my recipes, I've provided general serving sizes – one "serving" equals about one cup of food – but again, what works for you may be different, and you can adjust accordingly.

That's part of discovering your personal kitchenability.