Cookware Safety

There are countless types of cookware. The applications and food safety considerations for common cookware are described below. Knowing these qualities will help you to make choices that are ideal for your cooking purposes.

Pottery
Pottery is one of the oldest cooking vessels known to man but not all pottery is safe for cooking. Some pottery contains lead and should not be used for cooking, serving or storing food products. Lead is a common element in the glazes and decorations used in pottery. When pottery is not properly treated, lead can leach into food products during cooking, serving and storage. Leached lead does not change the look or taste of foods but can cause lead poisoning. Lead poisoning is especially dangerous for children and pregnant women as it can cause learning difficulties, behavioral problems and serious illness.

Safety Guidelines:
- Pottery made in the United States must meet safety guidelines for lead. Look for safety labels that state "Safe for food use."
- Do not prepare food in pottery made in Mexico or Latin America because there is a risk for high lead levels. Some foreign manufacturers may label their pottery as “lead free”, but the FDA recommends that these pottery products be avoided for food-contact purposes. Also, beware of imported pottery pitchers and mugs as they may also have large amounts of lead.
- Follow recommendations that state: "Not for food use;" "Plate may poison food;" or "For decorative purposes only." And, keep in mind that warning labels may be erased or painted over.
- Pottery is unsafe to use if a gray powder on the glaze appears after the pottery has been washed.

For more information about lead, call your county health department. The public health department can check your family for lead poisoning and may be able to test your pottery for lead.

Aluminum Cookware
Aluminum is present in air, water, soil, plants, animals, foods and household products. More than half of all cookware sold today is made of aluminum. Aluminum cookware is often coated with nonstick finishes or treated to harden the surface and make it more scratch-resistant.

Storing highly acidic or salty foods such as tomato sauce, rhubarb or sauerkraut in aluminum pots is not recommended. The acid in these foods may cause more aluminum than usual to enter the food and can cause pitting on the pot's surface.

Anodized Aluminum Cookware
Anodized aluminum has been processed to harden the cookware surface. This process creates a non-stick, scratch-resistant and easy to clean product. An anodized surface prevents reactions with acidic foods, so these pots and pans are top choices for cooking rhubarb and sauces with tomato, wine and lemon juice. Manufacturers claim that during the final stage of anodization the aluminum is sealed to prevent leaching of aluminum into food.

Cast Iron Cookware
Cast iron cookware is a classic. It is strong, inexpensive, and an even conductor of heat. Cooking with cast iron provides a source of iron, which is an important nutrient. Cooking foods in
A page from a document discussing different types of cookware. The text is about the safety and handling of various types of cookware, including cast iron, copper, nonstick coatings, and stainless steel, with additional information about ceramic and enameled cookware. The text also includes notes on sources for more information.