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**Is Silicon Bakeware Worth the Cost?**

Silicon bakeware is the rage right now. “Infomercials make silicon bakeware seem like the answer to every cook’s desires, but there are certainly tips to keep in mind when choosing to invest in this bakeware.” says Susan Mills-Gray, Nutrition & Health Specialist with University of Missouri Extension.

Silicone is synthetic rubber made of bonded silicon (a natural element found in sand) and oxygen. According to the FDA, silicone doesn’t react with other compounds or release unsafe compounds when heated. This safety factor makes silicone bakeware a preferred option over Teflon cookware, which has left many consumers concerned about toxins released during high temperatures. There still are some consumers who contend that silicone bakeware could possibly leak silicone oil, but FDA research does not support this claim.

The main advantage of silicone bakeware is that it can go from freezer to oven and vice versa. The bakeware is flexible and easy to clean. “Also, the bakeware cools very quickly, so it’s safer for families with young children.” says Mills-Gray.

Unfortunately there are some drawbacks. While the bakeware is flexible – you can even roll it up for storage – many consumers say the bakeware doesn’t stack well and actually takes up more cabinet space. Because of the bakeware’s flexibility, a solid baking sheet is needed to support the bakeware while in the oven. Consumer Reports testing shows that food often takes on odd shapes and doesn’t brown evenly due to the flexibility of the bakeware. Silicon bakeware claims to be nonstick, but Consumer Reports testing shows that without some type of nonstick spray, food is difficult to remove.

“Also, knowing what quality of silicone you’re buying is crucial,” adds Mills-Gray. While high-quality bakeware is 100% silicone, some lesser quality brands use fillers and may not work as well or last as long. More important, the safety of products that contain fillers isn’t known. To tell if silicone contains fillers, pinch and twist a portion of the pan; if you see any bit or strips of white, then it’s not pure silicone.

“The bottom line is, other than going from oven to freezer in a short time, there doesn’t appear to be that many advantages. “ says Mills-Gray, “if you’re curious and have the money to try a piece or two, then ok. You might find that you like silicone bakeware, and if you don’t like it, you’re only out a few dollars.”

Sources: Environmental Nutrition, March 2009; Helium.com; FDA.

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