Gettin’ somethin’ cookin’ for home cooks

There are literally thousands of options for those who enjoy toiling in the kitchen.

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Strolling into a kitchen-ware store can be daunting for the noncook, but shopping for those who love to make food can be as easy as pie.

Judy Huyck, owner of Chefworks in downtown Santa Cruz, said the store offers everything from peelers and pizza cutters to salad spinners and silicone spatulas.

“We probably have 20,000 different items,” she said.

For about $60, one can buy a five-quart enameled cast-iron Dutch oven, which can last generations, or for about $10 less, a ceramic nonstick pan.

The revolutionary Microplane rasp grater, $15, has become a surprisingly popular item.

“It’s a stocking stuffer, but people really like it,” Huyck said.

Originally a woodworking tool, the rasp found itself into someone’s kitchen years ago and has since become a staple for many who use it for a variety of tasks, including grating ginger and chocolate.

“The microplane is making a heck of a lot more money in the kitchen than the lumberyard,” she said.

Erie Carter, director of the culinary arts and hospitality management program at Cabrillo College, said there are two items every kitchen must have.

“You could probably get by with no more than a chef knife and cutting board,” Carter said.

He suggests buying a knife with a blade that’s forged rather than stamped, and said it’s important that the knife fits the hand of the person who will be using it most.

A large man might like a 16-inch blade while a petite woman may prefer a 6-inch blade, he said.

It’s a joy to use a good one,” he said. “If you get good at it, it’s easier than a food processor.”

Carter, who’s been with Cabrillo for the past 25 years, has given knives as gifts, but said there’s a long-standing superstition surrounding such a thing.

“If you’re going to give someone a knife, you’ve got to pay them,” he said of the tradition.

For a sweet and rather pricey gift, people can consider an ice cream maker.

A quality Italian piece might run upward of $400, but the unit the culinary program has now has lasted an unprecedented four years.

“It’s held up to student abuse for years,” he said.

Handheld citrus juicers can help add zest and flavor to cocktails and salads, and only run about $10 at local retailers.

“They’re really fast and easy,” he said.

DeeDee Lee, owner of Le Chef Kitchenware & More at Rancho Del Mar in Aptos, offers a $21, 12-cavity tray with a removable bottom, perfect for making bite-size goodies.

When buying kitchen goods for the cooks in your life, keep in mind the types of cooking they do and search for gifts that fit the area, Carter said. Also, don’t be afraid to ask questions of the store staff.

Giving someone a treasured kitchen gadget is the kind of gift that comes back around, usually in the form of a great meal prepared by a grateful chef.

For more information about the Culinary Arts and Hospitality Management program at Cabrillo College, visit www.cabrillo.edu/academics/cas.

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said home cooks often come to the store in search of the same thing.

“I find people having a hard time buying a good garlic press,” she said.

Lee offers a garlic press for about $24 that uses a ratchet system.

“It’s a great item,” she said. “It’s a system that does it for you.”

Lee agrees that knives are a kitchen staple, but recommends people look into the ceramic kind, which she said comes back around, usually in the form of a great meal prepared by a grateful chef.

“Can’t say that I’m a very good cook, but I’m a good baker,” she said.

She likes making cheesecake, and the store offers a $21, 12-cavity tray with a removable bottom, perfect for making bite-size goodies.

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ABOVE: From blenders to pots and pans, Chefworks on Pacific Avenue is the place to find the present for the gourmet on your list.

LEFT: Chefworks has a large selection of high-quality knives. If buying one as a gift, take into consideration who will be using it the most, and buy one that fits his or her hand.

SILVIA THALER/SENTINEL PHOTOS