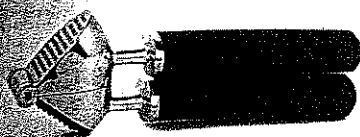


5.16 OXO GOOD GRIPS  
GARLIC PRESS

With its sturdy rubber-cushioned handles, its gleaming, hinged metal top and satisfying, well-balanced heft, this state-of-the-art utensil is

one of the best garlic presses available. The black rubber handles are pleasingly tactile and comfortable to squeeze. The bottom of the weighted head easily holds two, even three, cloves, which the broad, smooth press on top forces smartly through the little holes in the face. The Good Grips press comes with bright-red reverse pins attached; after you press the garlic through, you can flip the arm in the opposite direction and

the cleaning pins push the garlic residue out of the holes and back into the cup, eliminating the tedious task of picking the garlic off. This strikingly designed press should last for many years if its resilience in the wake of relentless "fatigue testing" at the hands of one tester's young son is any indication. The OXO Good Grips garlic press is 6¾" long and comes in chrome-plated die-cast zinc with black rubber-padded handles.

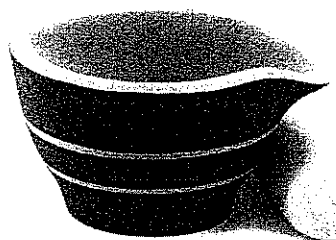
## MORTARS &amp; PESTLES

IN THE BEGINNING, there was a rock and a hard place. Not long thereafter came the mortar and pestle. Thousands of years ago, when Neolithic groups figured out how to plant the seeds of wild grains, farming and cultivation were added to hunting and gathering as methods of procuring food. Raw grains, however, are practically indigestible—not only must the grain be separated from the chaff, but it must also be toasted or dried and ground into meal or flour. The first grinder was a tree stump or flat rock and a stone, and it was from these primitive tools that mortars evolved.

After the cutting edge, the mortar is the most basic cooking tool in common use around the world. If the average home in our industrialized societies survives without one, it is because mechanized mills and electric food processors have taken over its ancient tasks. However, as Alice Waters, the talented chef and cook-

book author, points out, modern electrical blenders and processors remove you from the sensual aspects of cooking and reduce the information you get from direct contact with the food. A mortar and pestle give you touch and control.

Try using a mortar and pestle to pulverize your own ingredients for a pesto or to crush and amalgamate herbs and spices by hand, and you are in for a treat. In fact, the Italian word *pesto* (or the French *pistou*) means "pounding," related in its meaning and origin with our English word *pestle*. When pesto is made in a mortar, each ingredient is pounded into and builds on the next; a food processor merely chops and tears the ingredients instead of marrying them. Using a mortar also gives you greater flexibility when it comes to quantities—just try grinding half a dozen peppercorns in an electric mill.

5.17 MASON CASH VITRIFIED  
CERAMIC MORTAR & PESTLE

Made of vitrified ceramic, a hard, non-porous substance that will not stain or absorb flavors, the Mason

Cash mortar and pestle exemplify the best of breed in their category. The duo has a distinguished lineage, manufactured in England at a factory once managed by Ralph Wedgwood, nephew of Josiah Wedgwood, who created the first vitrified ceramic mortar and pestle at the end of the eighteenth century. The bowl of the Mason Cash mortar, sturdy and well-balanced, is deep and nicely contoured, to keep in what you're grinding. The mortar's matte texture facilitates grinding on the inside of

the bowl while providing nonslip handling on the outside. A small pour spout allows you to easily transfer the contents to a pot or bowl. The weighted conical pestle, of the same vitrified ceramic material, is slim on top for a comfortable grip, then gently widens to a broad bottom to maximize grinding ability. Mortar and pestle rapidly transformed both garlic and pine nuts into pastes and efficiently crushed a mixture of fennel seed, cardamom, peppercorns, and cloves to season a pilaf.

The Mason Cash mortar is 5½" in diameter and comes in green, blue, yellow, or white vitrified ceramic; the 7½" pestle comes in white vitrified ceramic. Many other mortar sizes are available, ranging from 2"-high minis to the largest size, 12" in diameter, each accompanied by a correctly proportioned pestle.

## 5.18 JOYCE CHEN SURIBACHI



At first, this looks like an ordinary Japanese bowl, the light-brown interior framed in a rich brown glaze, but look closer and you see sharp ridges in a wedge-shaped pattern with a

pouring spout. This is a *suribachi*, an earthenware mortar in which the Japanese mash tofu, grind sesame seeds, or work miso (fermented soybean paste) into a smooth consistency. It is 5½" across the top, 2" deep, and is named after the crater of the extinct volcano on Iwo Jima, which was made famous in the United States by flag-raising Marines during World War II. The mortar's pestle, or *surikogi*, is a 4¾" cylinder of unfinished wood, rounded off at the mashing end. Wood is the material of choice because it won't break the interior ridges. You might be wary of pressing down as hard as you would in a bowl of marble, but the baked-clay mortar is surprisingly substantial. Besides the 1½-cup capacity shown here, the *suribachi* comes in a 3-cup version 6" in diameter with a 7"-long *surikogi*. That model, however, lacks a pouring spout.

## 5.19 NORPRO MARBLE MORTAR & PESTLE



A nice example of the classic mortar and pestle, this Norpro set is neatly honed from white marble striated with gray. The mortar is sturdy and heavy, polished on the outside, matte within to add resistance and enhance the grinding surface. The slim pestle, slightly wider at the base, is polished except for its grinding tip, which is matte to match the interior of the mortar. The Norpro

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

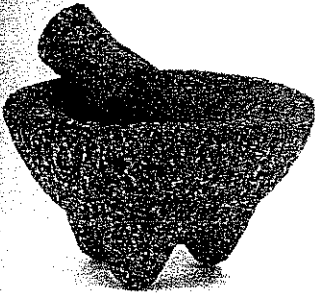
The best and most expensive mortars are made of marble—a hard, clean, and relatively nonporous material that will prevent the garlic you crush for pesto from reappearing as a living memory in the spices you later grind for a fruitcake. The inside of a marble mortar should be fairly smooth but left unpolished to permit the necessary friction. We think the most practical alternative to marble for a mortar and pestle is ceramic. However, in *The Cuisines of Mexico*, Diana Kennedy recommends native black basalt, and Rick Bayless, the chef-owner of the highly respected Frontera Grill in Chicago, agrees; Alain Ducasse, the famous French chef, opts for granite. Ceramic shares the properties of marble or granite, except perhaps for weight and permanence. Wood, another material commonly used for mortars, is not suited for grinding any ingredients liable to exude moisture, even when it is the most closely grained hardwood. Brass, which is common in India and eastern

Europe, is heavy but corrosive and needs polishing. In addition, there are a number of mortars and pestles made of glass—a truly unfortunate choice of material.

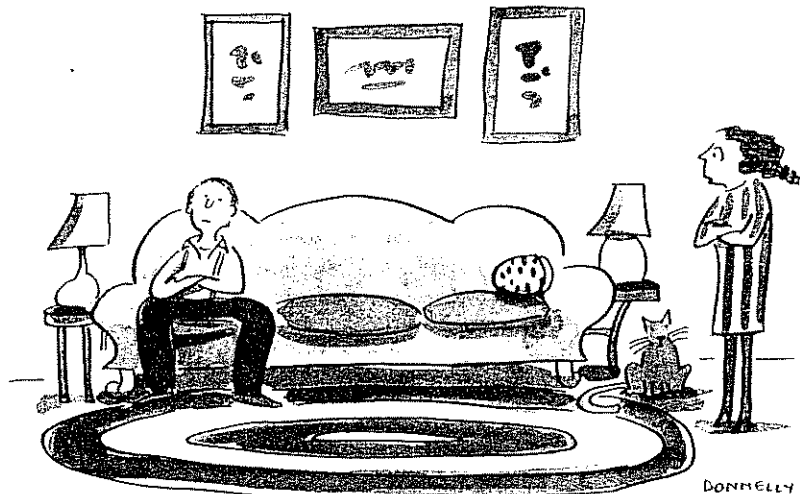
When using a mortar, you first press down on the spices with the pestle to crack them open, then you work the pestle in a circular motion, grinding the grains or seeds against the textured walls of the mortar. A mortar with a 4" diameter and sloping sides deep enough to keep in the ingredients is best for most purposes, although a well-equipped kitchen will have several sizes. The mortar should never be filled more than halfway, or it will overflow during the grinding. Be sure your mortar is heavy enough to withstand vigorous pounding, and that the pestle fits both the mortar and your hand comfortably. It is preferable for the mortar and pestle to be of the same material to help equalize pressure and assure even grinding—marble with marble, ceramic with ceramic.

mortar and pestle made quick work of a cup of basil, garlic, and pine nuts for a pesto, as well as almonds, dried thyme, cardamom pods, and juniper berries. The marble stays cool while you work and is easy to clean afterward. The Norpro mortar is 4" in diameter and 2½" high.

#### 5.20 KITCHEN MARKET LAVA STONE MORTAR & PESTLE



The traditional Mexican mortar and pestle shown here look for all the world like pre-Colombian artifacts, and, indeed, are still known by their ancient names: *molcajete* and *tejolote*. Made of porous, rough-textured, dark-gray volcanic stone, these time-honored kitchen tools are still preferred by discerning Mexican cooks for blending and grinding together their sauce ingredients—chilies, herbs, garlic, onions, nuts, and seeds—which would lose much of their texture if puréed in a blender. New *molcajetes* and *tejolotes*, unless fashioned from superior-quality black basalt, a rarity today, are potentially gritty and must be cured before they are used. To cure, first scour the surfaces with a stiff brush and plenty of water. Then, grind a handful of raw rice into the stone. Wash the tools again, and then repeat the operation at least two or three times. At first the rice picks up the stone's gray color, but eventually a batch will main white. This three-legged *molcajete* stands 4" high, and its shallow

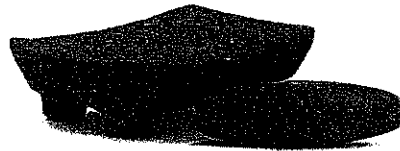


"And when you said that my pesto was the best pesto you ever had and could ever hope to have—was that a lie, too?"

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bowl is 6" in diameter. The stubby, triangular-shaped *tejolote* is 3½" long and 2" across at the base.

#### 5.21 DANCE OF THE ANCESTORS LAVA STONE CORN GRINDER



A large, rectangular lava stone slab, called a *metate*, and its companion stone roller, known as a *mano* or *metlapil*, are still the oldest and by far the most basic cooking tools used in Mexico. They grind corn, mash softened corn kernels into dough for tortillas, and purée ingredients for sauces. Women can still be seen kneeling before their *metates* in country villages, pressing and scrubbing the roller back and forth across the sloping surface of the stone, just as their ancestors did centuries ago. Our *metate* measures 12" by 9" and

stands 3½" high on three sturdy, triangular legs; the accompanying *mano* is 8" long. Clearly designed for durability, these rough-hewn implements have a pleasant, earthy quality to them, and the heavy, coarse volcanic stone provides a most effective grinding surface. Before using the tools, be sure to cure them using the same method prescribed for the lava stone mortar.

#### 5.22 INDIAN BRASS MORTAR & PESTLE



Few things are as important in Indian cooking as freshly ground spices,

and the traditional implements for grinding them are a mortar and pestle. In some areas of India, an upright mortar such as this one is the favored style; in other regions a flat stone tablet and oblong grinding stone are preferred; and often both types are found in the same kitchen. Whatever the shape, a mortar and pestle are so personal and important to an Indian woman that she often takes them with her when she leaves home to marry.

This gleaming mortar is worthy of any dowry. Made of a heavy brass alloy incised with decorative lines, the mortar measures 3" deep and 3" in diameter. The 7"-long, blunt-ended pestle fits the bowl snugly and is heavy enough to easily crush the masala, or spice mixture, for any dish. First dry-toast the spices in a pan over medium heat for a few minutes. Let them cool, then grind them to a powdery consistency. Store the *masala* in an airtight container.

## GRILLED BEEF CROSS RIB WITH ANCHOVY BUTTER

2 or 3 servings

Good beef is more popular in the Basque country than it used to be but still falls behind lamb, pork, and veal. A simple grilled steak with perhaps a sprinkling of *piment d'Espelette* is a staple menu item at the *cidreries*, the cider-tasting restaurants. (*Piment d'Espelette* is a small red pepper found in Basque cooking; it is dried and ground to a fine powder, with a sweet, mild spicy taste. One could substitute sweet paprika or mild chili powder.) This recipe is very easy, the flavor coming from the grill and the flavored butter. You can also treat steaks such as porterhouse or sirloin in the same manner.

- 1 ounce salted anchovy fillets, rinsed and finely diced
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter
- ½ teaspoon minced fresh rosemary
- ¼ teaspoon *piment d'Espelette*
- 2 pounds beef cross rib (in one piece)
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- kosher salt
- freshly ground white pepper

- 1 Preheat a barbecue or grill.
- 2 In a mortar or small bowl, pound the anchovies into a paste. Add the butter, rosemary, and *piment d'Espelette*. Combine well and set aside.
- 3 Brush the meat with the olive oil and season generously with salt and pepper. Place the meat on the grill, turning occasionally until cooked according to taste, about 6 minutes for rare, 8 minutes for medium, and 10 minutes for well done.
- 4 Place the meat on a serving platter and let it rest for 5 minutes before slicing. Spoon the anchovy butter on top of the meat.

*The Basque Kitchen: Tempting Food from the Pyrenees*, by Gerald Hirigoyen with Cameron Hirigoyen

## PEPPER MILLS, SALT MILLS, & SPICE GRINDERS

**P**EPER IS THE FRUIT of an East Indian plant, a bright-red berry that turns black after harvesting and drying. When the outer layer of dried black pepper has been removed, the remaining part is used as white pepper—actually beige in color—which is somewhat milder in flavor than the black. Chefs choose between black and white pepper based on the intensity of flavor but also on color—in most classic European recipes tiny black spots on a white sauce or surface are considered unattractive.

The Oriental spice routes of the past were paved with peppercorns, and precious pepper, like salt, was used as currency. To this day, pepper is the most widely used seasoning in the world. However, unless it has been freshly ground, pepper may not season at all; it should be dispensed at the source, directly from the

pepper mill, the mechanized successor to the mortar and pestle.

Unless you are using a recipe that calls for whole or crushed peppercorns, it is essential that the pepper be ground. The same is not true for salt. Ordinary table salt, however, contains chemical additives that can adversely affect the flavor of food. These days, natural sea salt, fine or coarse, has become widely available in supermarkets, and most people who use it find that it distinctly enhances the flavor of food. We agree and believe that if sea salt is available, there is no reason to use regular table salt. French or English sea salt or kosher salt is a good alternative. Though they usually don't need to be ground finer, some very coarse varieties of sea salt benefit from being brought to a more finely uniform texture.

Salt is born of the purest parents: the sun and the sea.

—PYTHAGORAS