

Non-sticky business: Testing the newest nonstick pans

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Debbie Carlson/Tribune Newspapers

Fried eggs with no oil? Nonstick pans that live up to the hype.

Concerns by consumers about potential health hazards related to nonstick coatings have led manufacturers to create a new generation of nonstick pans that are more healthful for you and the environment. Specifically, concerns center on the potential release of dangerous fumes from perfluorooctanoic acid — or PFOA — that are released from coated pans that are overheated.

The new generation of nonstick pans ditches PFOA in favor of new coatings, with many of them proprietary to each company, and manufacturers boast that cooks can use much less or even no oil. But do these new pans deliver? Absolutely, in the pans I tested. I zeroed in on delicate foods that normally stick to pans — eggs and pancakes — while also testing how well these pans sear chicken breasts and saute peppers. Pans need to cool before cleaning, but all were easy to clean, even with hand-washing. One thing to consider: Except for the Lodge, these pans can be used only under medium and low heat, so adjust cooking times as needed.

Ecolution's Evolve and Symphony 9.5-inch fry pans, \$18 and \$25.22, www.amazon.com

I tested two of Ecolution's pans and found similar performance for each. The significant difference between the two is the Symphony pan's stainless-steel base works on all cooktops, whereas the Evolve does not work on induction cooktops. They use a proprietary nonstick water-based coating and are PFOA-free. I cooked pancakes and eggs without oil and never had any residue left. Peppers softened nicely, and the chicken breasts browned well. Unlike older nonstick pans there wasn't a "char" on the chicken breasts — whether or not that's desirable is up to the cook. The only minor downside of these pans is they are not oven-safe because of their built-in silicone handles. Dishwasher safe, but hand-washing recommended.

Swiss Diamond 9.5-inch nonstick fry pan with lid, \$124.95, www.swissdiamond.com

The nonstick coating used in these pans is made from plasma-deposited diamond crystals and the pan is pressure-cast aluminum to prevent it from warping. It is oven-safe up to 500 degrees, and some models come with a tempered-glass lid that has an adjustable steam vent, which is also oven-safe. Eggs and pancakes cooked perfectly with no oil, and I made a crustless quiche to bake in the oven that slid right out, even without using a spatula. Veggies cooked fine, and the chicken not only browned well but also had a nice bit of char to it. The steam vent on the pan's lid meant I could cover the chicken without worrying about puddles building up inside. Dishwasher safe, but hand-washing recommended.

Lodge 10-inch Skillet, Seasoned Stainless Steel, \$45, www.lodgemfg.com

For those who may not like aluminum pans, Lodge offers a seasoned stainless-steel skillet. This pan is heavier than the aluminum pans but not nearly as heavy as a cast-iron pan. It's made in the U.S. of heavy-gauge steel. Although it comes seasoned, I found using a little oil made for best results. Pancakes cooked without oil in the pan gave a slight tug when removing them. This pan required about a half-teaspoon of oil to cook eggs, chicken and saute vegetables, but it also gave the best color and traditional char to these foods, even nicely browning the vegetables. Lodge says the nonstick surface will improve with use. Oven-safe up to 500 degrees. A potholder is necessary to use when cooking, although Lodge also sells silicone handle holders for the pan.

Cuisinart Green Gourmet, 10-inch skillet, \$39.95, www.Cuisinart.com

Cuisinart uses a proprietary ceramic-based nonstick coating, which is free of polytetrafluoroethylene — or PTFE — another chemical in some nonstick coatings, and PFOA. The pan has a hard-anodized aluminum core and riveted stainless handles that stay cool on the stovetop. Pancakes and eggs cooked up well, and even the shredded cheese I tossed on the eggs didn't stick. I used a tiny bit of oil to cook the peppers to get a bit of brown on them, and chicken developed a decent char. The pan is oven-safe up to 400 degrees. Hand-wash only.

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