

# MAINTAIN YOUR HIGH-END KITCHEN GEAR

If you're making an investment in commercial-style kitchen equipment, you'd better know how to take care of it.

By Rose Kennedy

When you invest in pro-quality kitchen equipment, it looks so substantial and solid that it's easy to think it should keep working indefinitely without much attention. Unfortunately, that's not the case. Even the toughest-looking kitchen gear needs maintenance and TLC, and the efforts will help you protect the value of your investment.

"Not only is any pro equipment expensive to replace, but if you don't follow some basic guidelines it will lose its cooking efficiency and pro look quickly — and isn't that the reason you invest in the quality stuff to begin with?" says Bill Handziuk of Union Gas, a major Canadian natural gas utility.

Handziuk, who oversees the community education efforts for the company's 1.25 million customers, says the first law of caring for pro appliances like gas ranges is to follow the advice outlined in the owner's manual. "If you've lost it, you can almost always Google the manufacturer's name and download a new version from the Internet," he says.

Beyond the manufacturers' user guidelines, you can also follow these expert recommendations for maintaining your pro appliances.

## **Shine, Don't Scrape, Stainless Steel**

It's ironic, but appliances designed to withstand the rigors of a professional kitchen will suffer if you try to clean them with anything more abrasive than a sponge or stronger than soap and water.

"I really only recommend dishwashing liquid like Dawn to safely clean any surface in the kitchen without harming it," says Clark Turney, manager of The Maids Home Service based in Knoxville, Tenn. "If you dilute it right it will also cut grease, and you can buy the antimicrobial version."

Stainless steel surfaces are particularly deceptive, says Turney: "They look solid but they're actually quite porous. They will absorb oil in particular, which is why your fingers will leave prints and smears on stainless steel appliance fronts. Little holes on the surface will also catch and hold anything you use to clean!"

Wiping the surface with a lint-free cloth and just a little dishwashing liquid diluted in warm water is the best idea, at least to start, says Turney. "I always tell people, 'You can go stronger later but it's hard to take soap back out of the water,' so start with the least amount you can and then add more if you're not getting the job done."

Cleaning solutions with citric acid, like some orange cleaners, bleach or even vinegar, can't stay on stainless steel for more than a few seconds before they do damage. Any type of steel wool scouring pad or plastic scrub brush will also age the stainless surface with scratches.

For stronger streaks or crusted-on messes, Turney instead recommends a bit of soft liquid cleanser such as Soft Scrub (non-bleach), thinned about half and half with water and applied with a soft sponge and a bit of rubbing, then rinsed with a damp sponge and dried with soft, white towels.

## **Clean Cooktop Spills Sooner than Later**

When upgrading from an electric range to gas burners, you gain pro-chef heat but you lose the ability to pop out the burner coil if you need to clean or inexpensively replace it.

"If you have a gas-fired stove and you want it to cook safely and at its maximum effective level, you need to keep the burners clean," says Handziuk. "Clean spills right away while you can still get them with water or a little soap and water, and check those little holes in the burners that allow the gas to come out to make sure they're not blocked with debris. If they are, use a toothpick or a very tiny brush to pick out the debris so the gas can flow freely again."

If all you have is a cleaning solution with bleach or another flammable ingredient, put off cleaning the burners for another day. And always make sure the stove is completely cool before you start any wiping. Before you turn the stove back on, ensure cleaning fluid is fully rinsed and the stovetop is dry.

If you haven't yet purchased a gas range and are maintenance-minded, sealed burners ease clean up with rings that surround the burners to keep spills from flowing underneath. Other easy-clean features to look for include a glass or porcelain backguard, seamless corners and edges and a raised edge around the cooktop.

### **Use Your Oven as Designed**

Keeping a pro-style oven clean isn't a tall order because most high-quality models are self-cleaning, but other steps are still necessary to keep them at peak performance over the long haul.

If you're tempted to fit an oversize roaster in the oven by removing the racks and placing it directly on the floor, resist. "That's a good way to damage the heating element or the floor itself, which isn't designed to hold that much weight," says Handziuk. "Always cook with at least one rack inside the oven to help support the weight of the pots."

Covering the entire bottom of the oven with foil to catch drips and speed clean up is also inadvisable. "The foil can block the air circulation, which makes the oven much less efficient over time. It will stop giving you the cooking results you expect."

Another no-no: using commercial oven cleaners on a self-cleaning or continuous cleaning oven. They may damage the finish and could even void your warranty.

### **Only You Can Prevent Oven Fires**

The other way to preserve your investment in gas-fired kitchen equipment is to keep it from catching fire.

"Keep flammables away from sources of gas at all times," says Handziuk. "For example, don't keep the day's mail in a basket on a counter near the oven. It's a great temptation, but always use a pot holder, not a tea towel, to remove hot pots from the oven. And keep aerosol cans away, even the ones with cooking spray inside."

Never cover the temperature controls, air openings or vents of your appliances and don't store boxes on top of, or pressed against, natural gas appliances.

"For the most part, if you follow the guidelines about keeping flammable items away from the stove and not using abrasive cleaners, you can keep your own gas range in shape without any need for professional assistance," says Handziuk.

But there's one notable exception: "A good gas flame on a range is blue, not yellow," says Handziuk. "A gas fireplace has been designed to have yellow flames for a pleasing appearance, but yellow on a stove burner means the gas is not igniting properly. If that happens, do not use it until you've had it checked out by a reliable service professional."

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