

Why are people afraid of pressure cookers?

Don't let your grandma's tale of kitchen terror dissuade you from using this great time-saving device.

(I realize I've been talking incessantly about my new toy, so I hope you'll indulge me a little longer...)

Aside from the rattle of an old-fashioned pressure cooker, and the escaping of steam, there's really nothing on the face of them that make them any different from a regular pot and lid. Except for the possibility of them exploding. And you might even have some family lore that would justify the fear.

The pressure cooker was invented back in the early 20th century, and was used as a method for industrial canning. They didn't make it to the home market until the late 1930's, and were thought to be completely safe. (They were even used on early transcontinental airline flights to provide hot meals for passengers.) Then came World War II, and the US government was hungry for the aluminum that the pressure cookers were made from. Companies that manufactured them were retooled to make military equipment, like airplane engine parts. Housewives were encouraged to donate their pots and pans for the war effort. After the war, the swords returned to ploughshares, and companies retooled once again to make household goods. But the quality of the pots and pans weren't that great. Production methods favored quantity over quality. Tons of cheap, poorly made pressure cookers hit the market in the late 40's and early 50's, and they had the reputation – rightfully so – of exploding under the higher than normal pressures. So if you were a lucky enough cook not to

personally experience an in-kitchen detonation, chances are you were wary enough of them to tuck the pots in the deepest depths of your cupboards – only to have them be resurrected by your heirs in the 70's, who also experienced the same disastrous results.

These days, however, the newer pressure cookers are designed with safety features – pressure regulating systems, and durable, high-quality stainless steel construction. There's little reason to fear them now.

And there's certainly no reason to splurge on the electronic gadgetry that mesmerized me recently. Although I've used it for some aspect of every meal I've made since I bought it – either for the main course, or for a side dish – you can certainly make do with a less expensive, more conventional model. It'll just require a little more attention and care, but you'll save a lot on the price. A good 6 quart [pressure cooker](#) can be had for as little as \$40.

One thing I've really noticed while working with mine is that pressure cookers seem to eat up garlic. No matter how many cloves of garlic I add, the flavor just vanishes.