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Food for Thought

Coming Soon, to a Kitchen Near You

Posted by [Jessica Harlan](#) on March 25, 2009 - 3:49pm.

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I just got back from the **International Home + Housewares Show** in Chicago, which is one of the biggest industry events for the world of kitchen products and home cooking equipment. It's where new products get introduced and retailers decide which ones they're going to put on their shelves.



If there was one common theme for the show, it was **GREEN**. Given that environmental and [sustainability](#) issues are dominating our collective consciousness, this is not a surprise. But in the decade or so that I've been following this industry, environmental and social responsibility is more important than it's ever been.

Here's a look at some of the products and technology that will be turning up in kitchens in the coming year or two:

Portable Induction Cooktops These sleek black squares plug into a regular outlet and can create an extra cooking surface. They use less energy than your gas or electric oven and, because the cooking surface remains cool, they're also very safe and will not heat up your kitchen. I saw versions from [Fagor](#), [Circulon](#) and [Fissler](#), among others.

More Efficient Cooking Methods Besides the induction cooktops, you'll soon be seeing appliances and cookware that function more efficiently so they use less energy. For instance, Fagor is introducing a Halogen Tabletop Oven that cooks food 30 to 50 percent faster. And there is also an increase in cookware, from pressure cookers to regular pots and pans, that can cook food more quickly, saving not only time but also gas and energy.

Recycled and Recyclable Plastic Kitchenware Food storage containers, travel mugs and cooking utensils are increasingly being made with all or part recycled plastic, and are also being made in such a way that they themselves can be recycled when they've outlived their usefulness. EcoLife utensils (from [Lifetime Brands](#)) are even made from 70 percent plant material (and 30 percent plastic), and manufactured with less fossil fuel and fewer emissions of greenhouse gasses. And a company called [NextLife](#) has developed a system in which plastic waste is collected from retailers and turned into a resin that then in turn is given to manufacturers to use in place of plastics. For instance, currently, supermarket carry baskets are being made from recycled plastic shopping bags. Watch for the NextLife seal of sustainability and even an "eco-label" on products that, like a nutrition label, will indicate the use of water, electricity, energy and recyclable materials.

Bamboo and other Sustainable Materials Companies like [Bambu](#) and others are using sustainably grown materials like bamboo in place of wood for kitchen tools, cutting boards, knife blocks, bowls and other kitchenware. Bambu also introduced a line of cork bowls and cutting boards. Cork, which is peeled from the tree without killing it or endangering its health, is another sustainable material.

Eco-Friendly Cookware You've probably heard about the evils of PFOA, a potentially harmful chemical used in the manufacturing of nonstick surfaces for cookware (it is present in only trace amounts in the finished product, but has been found to be persistent in the environment and in low levels in the bloodstream of many Americans). The [Environmental Protection Agency](#) has asked most of the manufacturers that use PFOA to eliminate it from their manufacturing processes by 2015; plenty of cookware companies are getting a jump start by creating PFOA-free nonstick cookware. Brands to watch for include EcoLife, EarthPan (by [Meyer](#)) [GreenPan](#) and [Cuisinart's](#) GreenGourmet.

With all of the emphasis on [organic](#) and [locally grown](#) food that is cleaning up the food industry, won't it be nice to be able to cook environmentally responsible food in a kitchen that's just as eco-friendly?



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