

good living

Aspirational inventions

There are amazing new gadgets on the market, but cooks still want more, writes **Tim Elliott**.

For most of history, human beings have lived without forks. Until the 7th century, people ate with their hands, perhaps with the occasional aid of a knife. As late as the 11th century, using a fork at the table was regarded as the greatest wickedness and vanity. "She [did not] deign to touch her food with her fingers," wrote St Peter Damian of the Byzantine princess Maria Argyropoulina, who introduced forks to Europe at her wedding to the son of the Doge of Venice in 1004. "But would command her eunuchs to cut it up into small pieces, which she would impale on a certain golden instrument with two prongs and thus carry to her mouth."

Lucky, then, that the saint is not

'Someone came in asking for an automatic thyme-picking machine.'

Colleen O'Keefe

around to see the Ningbo Best-Home Improvement company's latest time-saving brainwave, the battery-operated Twirling Spaghetti Fork (\$14.50), which not only helps you carry pasta to your mouth but coils it around those infernal prongs without so much as a twist of the wrist. "Eating pasta has never been more fun!" Ningbo's spiel says. From twirling forks to voice-recognition grocery lists, the kitchen



has proved fertile ground for inventors, whose contributions have ranged from the hilariously misguided to the truly indispensable. Who could imagine life without a microwave or a Mixmaster? Magimix's see-through Vision Toaster also seems a great idea ("Make burnt toast a thing of the

past"), as does the whimsically phallic Banana Guard, if only because it looks like something Woody Allen might pull out on the train to frighten commuters. "Specially designed to fit the vast majority of bananas", the hard-plastic case stops the delicate fruit from bruising or squishing while in transit. It even has ventilation holes to prevent "premature ripening". The best inventions are simple tools that solve genuine problems," says Cate Gransbury, the Australian operations manager for Dreamfarm, a Queensland

company that specialises in kitchen innovation. Dreamfarm's products include the Smood, a potato masher that creates smooth mash in seconds by trapping food and forcing it through the thin gaps between a collapsing stainless-steel spring. "We also won the Best of the Best at the 2011 Red Dot Design Awards in Germany for our Chopula, which is like a cross between a spatula and a knife whose kinked handle keeps the blade off benchtops," Gransbury says. But for all the furious creativity, there are still gaps in the market—

those magical, rare or impossible items only chefs know they need. "An automatic self-washing kitchen spoon would be great," says chef Martin Benn, from Sepia. "We put our spoons in a container, which we have to keep flushing with hot fresh water, and even then they aren't really properly clean." Benn could also do with a fridge equivalent of the Tardis. "The biggest bane of my life in the kitchen is not having enough freezer and coolroom space," he says. At Manly Pavilion, stronger

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All-time unusual kitchen innovations

Tefal's Toast 'n' Egg

This combination toaster and egg cooker allows you to toast bread or muffins and prepare either poached, scrambled or up to four boiled eggs at the same time and all within four minutes. Indispensable for anyone who doesn't know how to boil an egg in a pot, and for the bargain price of \$79.95.



Map Plates

Each plate is shaped like the nation it represents. Serve pasta on Italy, sauerkraut on Germany or paella on Spain. As website Daily Fork points out, these plates are "horribly impractical and ludicrously shaped", and can be easily superseded by using normal plates or "eating off a map".

Roll 'n' Pour

This rocking chair for bottles is billed by its American maker as "taking the worry out of pouring liquids from gallon jugs, half-gallon jugs and two-litre bottles." Which will be a relief to all those folks who lay awake at night worrying how they will pour their juice in the morning.

Grill Right Wireless Talking BBQ/Oven Thermometer

Finally, something for all those cooks who don't possess the basic literacy and numerical skills to read a conventional non-talking thermometer. As manufacturer, Oregon Scientific, say: "We'll let you know when your barbecue is ready from a football field away!" To which we say: why are you cooking so far away in the first place?

Clean Cut Touchless Paper Towel Dispenser

Why use your hands to tear off those hard-to-manage pieces of paper towel when you can pay American retailer Hammacher Schlemmer just \$US129.95 (\$132) for a machine that does it for you?



Festival to feast ... head to Hyde Park for the Night Noodle Markets.

So, we eat again

October is all about the food, writes **Jacqui Taffel**.

FROM THE RIVERS OF TASTE

Daniel Patterson is the type of chef who, if floating down the Amazon River in Peru, is less interested in the local wildlife than the plant life. While other tourists marvel at a sloth, he wonders if the water lily nearby is edible, then chews on a leaf or two. At Col, his two Michelin-starred restaurant in San Francisco, Patterson is famous for putting plants and vegetables at the forefront of the menu. He's one of the growing band of top international chefs who like to forage for their food and inspiration, using ingredients sourced painstakingly and as close to home as possible — "the flavours of place", as he calls it. Sydney diners have a chance to sample his creations at an eight-course dinner at Quay Restaurant with similarly plant-obsessed chef Peter Gilmore. Tonight, \$220, 9241 4565.

ENJOY ASIA IN THE PARK

On Monday, Crave Sydney International Food Festival's enduring outdoor dining hot spot, the Night Noodle Markets, returns to Hyde Park. It's in the style of an Asian hawker market, with 40 food stalls, three bars and free entertainment. At the al fresco event, restaurants represented include Longrain and Nu's, cooking Thai, with Chat Thai doing desserts; Mamak with its popular Malaysian flavours; and modern Chinese from The Eight. Come early with the children or



rock up later for a round with friends in the Coopers Beer Garden. Weeknights, 5-9pm, October 10-14 and 17-21.

EXPERIENCE LUNCH

Here's a terrific excuse to book for some of Sydney's finest restaurants without blowing the budget. Let's Do Lunch is on again, with more than 60 venues taking part across Sydney and NSW. The deal is a set main course, a glass of wine, beer or mineral water, plus coffee, for \$38. The choice and spread of restaurants is enormous. Head to Balmoral Beach for Palmers Island mulloway with braised cuttlefish and sweetcorn puree at Public Dining Room or try spanner crab soufflé followed by pork belly with celeriac puree at Courtney's Brasserie in Parramatta. Selah at Circular Quay offers roast duck breast with muscatel puree, while Blackwater at Sans Souci has roasted lamb loin with pancetta and lentils. Further afield, Biota Dining in Bowral has trout smoked over eucalyptus and The Stunned Mullet at Port Macquarie offers grilled Yamba prawns. Monday to Friday through October.

See cravesydney.com for full listings.



Chefs in need ... (from left)

Martin Benn envisions self-washing spoons; Ajoy Joshi wants a portable tandoori oven; Tomislav Martinovic dreams of bigger potato peelers. Photos: Tamara Dean, Quentin Jones

that we peel and cut ourselves with [a] hand crinkle cutter," he says. "I think McCain has a machine that peels and crinkle cuts at the same time but they are as big as my whole restaurant, so we need one that is smaller."

Quay's Peter Gilmore would like to get the best apprentices he has employed — and clone them. "Most of my people are great but over the years I've had a couple who have been perfect: well balanced, hard working and passionate. If I could get a kitchen full of them, then all my problems would be solved," he says.

Oh, he also wouldn't mind a portable commercial steamer "with a self-feeding water supply and temperature gauge, small enough to fit on a benchtop".

When it comes to the home chef, the requests are less technical than workmanlike. "The more complex tasks tend to be catered for," says the manager of kitchenware shop Chef and the Cook, Colleen O'Keefe. "There are already gadgets for stripping kernels from corn cobs or slicing avocados or cracking macadamia nuts."

"There's even a little garlic peeler. But the other day, someone came in asking for an automatic thyme-picking machine." Is there such a thing? "No."

pipettes are needed. "We get through about 20 tiny pipettes a week," says chef Jonathan Barthelme. "We get disposable ones, from medical labs, which we use to put stuff like dressings, oils, vinegars or even acids on the plate. "But they always break after a while, so it would be great if they could make ones that are a little harder for the kitchen."

Barthelme also wants a "non-leaking teapot... we keep all our sauces warm in teapots but they always drip everywhere after they're poured and it annoys me." Chef Ajoy Joshi, from Nilgiri's,

would "pay very good money" to anyone who can invent a portable, tabletop-sized tandoori oven. "Tandoori ovens have to be big — 4.5 feet by 4.5 feet — to withstand the heat," he says. "But I would love one that I could move from table to table and use in front of guests, because people always love to see fresh bread cooked in front of them. Then I could do kebabs in there, too."

Chef Tomislav Martinovic, from Tomislav, wants an industrial-scale potato peeler and crinkle cutter. "We go through 50 kilograms of potatoes a week

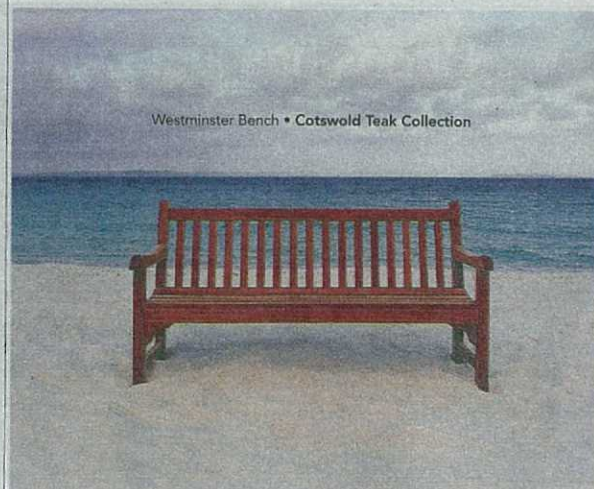
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