

Understanding Heavyweight Food Production Equipment

For many caterers the demand on kitchen equipment is not just for heavy-duty, but for high volumes. To meet this need, equipment manufacturers produce a wide range of equipment that will cook large volumes of food. Typical situations where high volume cooking is needed is hospitals, universities, large banqueting operation, cook-chill units and prisons.

However, manufacturers of high volume equipment have begun to realise there is a demand for the same style of cooking equipment for slightly lower volumes for large hotels, staff restaurants and residential schools.

Bratt pans

A bratt pan gets its unusual name from the German word *brat* meaning to fry, though they are not called bratt pans in German, but kippentopf, meaning tilting pan and do far more than fry. Bratt pans are deep, rectangular cooking pots with a counter-balanced pull down lid. The heat source to the base of the pan can be gas or electric. They all have a tilting feature, operated electrically or by a hand-driven mechanism, so food that has been cooked can be poured into containers through a "vee" in the top edge of the forward side.

Bratt pans are a versatile piece of high production equipment, able to perform eight cooking functions: braising, boiling, steaming, poaching, stewing, roasting, deep-fat frying and shallow frying. Not all bratt pans are suitable for all eight functions, but looking at a model specification sheet will show what is possible.

They can be used for multi-function cooking of one product, such as browning-off meat with the pan set at a fry temperature with the lid open, then liquid added, the temperature turned down and the lid closed to softly braise. Soups and sauces can be similarly prepared using multi-cooking temperature modes.

At the end of cooking the tilt feature is very useful for emptying the contents out and helps with washing the pan. Most bratt pans offer the option of being plumbed in so that a swivel tap is connected to the unit to allow water to be added both for adding liquid for the cooking and for washing out.

In addition to bratt pans that work at normal atmospheric air pressure, a more advanced version is a pressure bratt pan. This performs all the same functions as a standard bratt pan, but the lid can be clamped tightly shut for cooking at a higher water temperature than 100 deg C. As with any pressure cooker, the increase in pressure means the food is cooked much quicker and tenderised, so is very suitable for dishes which use tougher cuts of meat. A pressure bratt pan can also be used in atmospheric mode.

Boiling kettles

Boiling kettles work in a similar way to bratt pans in that they are large multi-function heated cooking pans. The main differences are that instead of the flat cooking bed of a bratt pan, the boiling kettle is an upright cooking pot with an in-built heating system.

An added feature of most boiling kettles is that while they have a tilting mechanism, they may also have a drain tap at the bottom of the kettle. This will be a wide-mouthed tap from which wet dishes such as sauces and soups can be drawn off with the need to tilt the kettle.

The popular use of boiling kettles is not actually to boil, but to gently simmer dishes such as soups, sauces, custard or stews. There are three types of heat source. It can be a direct heat applied to the underside of the kettle, which can cause burning on thick sauces such as custard. The more versatile heat source is indirect heating through a water jacket, a double pan arrangement as with a bains marie. This indirect water-based heat system can work with hot water or steam. Burning of delicate sauces is virtually eliminated and the cooking and holding process can go on with out constant attention.

Most boiling kettles will come plumbed-in with a swivel tap for adding water for cooking and cleaning. They often come configured as a double unit so that two products can be cooked from a single footprint.

How to find out more about Heavyweight Food Production Equipment

Talk to the experts.

The Catering Equipment Suppliers Association

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