

“Generally you don’t see that kind of behavior in a major appliance.”

Bill Murray as Dr. Peter Venkman in *Ghost Busters*

# Hidden Talents

Shred paper with your pasta maker? Believe it. **Surprising new functions for six appliances you never use**

A SURVEY OF your kitchen reveals 17 appliances you have used 1.2 times each over the past 10 years, for an overall return on your initial investment of...well, never mind. Instead of tackling this complicated (and depressing) culinary calculus, try some simple addition. That ice cream maker you assumed only made ice cream? Turns out, it can do one plus many things. Ditto the waffle iron, the rice cooker, the pasta maker.... So pull them out and dust them off, because *Real Simple* has found at least one great, unexpected use for each machine. And that’s good news for the bottom line.

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## Kitchen Caboodle

After polling appliance manufacturers, chefs, foodies, and friends, *Real Simple* testers spent days putting 16 different gadgets through their paces, trying to find brilliant new uses that actually work. The successes are here. (That egg poacher? Stick to poaching eggs with it.)



### Crock-Pot

**INTENDED USE:** Cooking dinner while you're at the office.  
**BRIGHT IDEA:** Use it to bake a moist, light cake you serve in a bowl.

The last thing you want to do in the heat of summer is turn on the oven to bake anything, husband's birthday or no. That slow cooker you've had since the 70s can save the day while you run out to grab a last-minute gift.

#### CROCK-POT CAKE

Prepare cake-mix batter according to the package directions. Coat the bottom and sides of the pot with vegetable cooking spray, then pour in the batter. Cook on the low setting for 2½ to 3 hours. When a toothpick stuck in the center of the cake comes out clean, it's done. Let the cake cool for 30 minutes or until the center is set. Serve it warm or at room temperature, spooned into bowls, drizzled with chocolate sauce, and topped with whipped cream.

#### OTHER USES

- Wrap **marinated chicken or vegetables in parchment paper**, and cook in the pot until done (the timing will depend on the food's size).
- Use the pot to make **hot beverages**, such as mulled cider, and keep them hot during a party.
- Serve **cheese fondue** from your Crock-Pot, kept on a low setting.



### Ice Cream Maker

**INTENDED USE:** Duh.  
**BRIGHT IDEA:** Make cola slushies.

Making ice cream from scratch takes a hefty chunk of time and often a grocery list's worth of froufrou ingredients (vanilla beans, fancy chocolate). You can whip up an equally icy summer treat using nothing more than a can of cola.

#### COLA SLUSHIES

Set up the machine according to the manufacturer's directions. Pour in one 12-ounce can of cola and start the machine. When a thick slush has formed (after 10 to 15 minutes), scoop it into 2 glasses and serve.

#### OTHER USES

- Make **margaritas** by pouring all the ingredients except the alcohol into the ice cream maker. When the liquid has frozen, add the tequila and triple sec.
- To make a **frozen lime rickey**, pour 6 ounces of seltzer, 1 ounce of simple syrup (made by dissolving 2 parts sugar in 1 part boiling water), and 1 ounce of lime juice into the machine. Let freeze for 15 to 20 minutes.
- For **frozen hot chocolate**, prepare instant hot chocolate according to the package directions, then pour it into the machine and freeze for about 20 minutes.



### Rice Cooker

**INTENDED USE:** Steaming sticky rice.  
**BRIGHT IDEA:** Steam hot towels instead.

You stopped trying to make your own spicy tuna rolls long ago, but you still want sushi night to have a bit of Japanese-restaurant authenticity. Solution: Use your rice cooker to heat moist towels to offer guests before dinner. (Or, for a quick moisturizing treatment, slather your hands with lotion, then wrap them in the steamed towels until cool.)

#### STEAMED TOWELS

Wet and wring out several small washcloths. Fold in thirds horizontally, then roll and place inside the steamer. Steam for 5 minutes (or until hot). Remove with tongs, and place on a tray or a plate.

#### OTHER USES

- Use the cooker to make **hot cereal** that's smoother and creamier than the stovetop version. It takes twice as long, but the no-stirring method frees you to attend to other things in the morning—like simultaneously packing lunches, reading the newspaper, and feeding the dog.

### More Fancy Foodwork

What about all those other appliances in your cupboards? Reacquaint them with the light of day using these ideas.

#### Cappuccino Machine

■ Food stylists and professional chefs, such as David Burke of *David Burke & Donatella* restaurant, in New York City, have long known a great—albeit weird-sounding—trick for making delicious **scrambled eggs**: Do it in a cappuccino maker. Just crack an egg into a coffee cup, whip with a fork, then insert the milk foamer (do not use the milk-uptake valve). The steam will cook the egg in seconds—no oil or butter required.

#### Coffee Grinder

■ Use it to make very fine **bread crumbs**. Be sure to clean the grinder thoroughly first, though, unless you want coffee-flavored crumbs.

■ To make **infused sugar** you can sprinkle on cookies or buttered toast or add to a cup of tea for flavor and sweetness, grind together sugar and either a cinnamon stick or dried fruit (blueberries, citrus peel). The sugar can be kept in a sealed jar for up to 6 weeks.

**Note:** Trying either of these ideas with a burr grinder could break it.

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### Waffle Iron

**INTENDED USE:** Preparing everyone's favorite syrup-soaked breakfast.  
**BRIGHT IDEA:** Make grilled cheeses.

Since your kids discovered Eggos, your waffle iron hasn't seen much action. But Bob Blumer, author of *Surreal Gourmet Bites* (Chronicle, \$17), has found the appliance's higher calling: as the perfect grilled-cheese machine. "The dimples double the amount of surface, so the sandwich has a much more satisfying crunch," he says. The iron also divides it into 4 sections—great for toddlers or snacking adults.

#### GRILLED CHEESE

- 1 teaspoon butter (optional)
- 2 slices multigrain bread
- 2 slices cheese
- 1 slice tomato (optional)

Butter the bread on 1 side (or coat the iron with vegetable cooking spray). Place 1 slice in the center of the iron, buttered-side down. Top with the cheese and tomato, if using, and cover with the remaining slice of bread, buttered-side up. Close the lid firmly and cook until golden, 2 to 4 minutes.

#### OTHER USES

■ To make a **calzone**, roll out 2 rounds of pizza dough. Place 1 on the hot iron, top it with whatever you like, then add the second round of dough. Close the lid firmly and cook until the dough is golden, 2 to 4 minutes. Serve with a bowl of pasta sauce for dipping.



### Milk-Shake Machine

**INTENDED USE:** Frothing up shakes.  
**BRIGHT IDEA:** Whip up some aioli.

You probably use this diner-inspired accessory about as often as you attend sock hops. So make aioli with it (it's faster and less wrist-wearying than a whisk) to use on burgers, sandwiches, or grilled chicken or fish; dip cruditées or fries in it. Yum.

#### AIOLI

- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 2 egg yolks\*
- 1 tablespoon freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- Fresh chives, parsley, basil, or dill (optional)

Place all but the oil and herbs in the cup and combine with a fork. Holding the cup so the spindle touches the bottom, turn on the machine and add the oil in a slow, thin stream. When the mixture reaches the consistency of mayonnaise, add the herbs, if using. It will keep for a few days in the refrigerator.

#### OTHER USES

- Makes a perfect **vinaigrette**.
- Crack eggs straight into the cup and spin for fluffier **omelets**.

*\*The USDA says young children, pregnant women, the elderly, and those with compromised immune systems are most at risk of food-borne illness from raw unpasteurized eggs. (Pasteurized are OK.)*



### Pasta Maker

**INTENDED USE:** Cranking out perfect linguine.  
**BRIGHT IDEA:** Shred paper.

As if it were made for the purpose, a pasta maker shreds paper without a hitch or a whine—unlike a regular shredder, which can be louder than a jet on takeoff. Assuming you're pretty much done with the fantasy that you'll one day make your own pasta, just like Marcella Hazan (because shredding paper will probably wear the blades down over time), you can shred mundane things like bills and bank statements to help protect yourself from identity theft. Or try shredding tissue paper and wrapping-paper scraps, then use the shreds to pad gifts or cushion cookies. (Choose the spaghetti setting for delicate fluff, the fettuccine setting for wider strips.)

#### OTHER USES

■ Testers tried everything to find an alternative use for this well-intentioned but frequently abandoned purchase. They thought it might make a good chicken paillard, a tuna carpaccio, maybe a nicely rolled-out cookie dough. It won't.

### More Fancy Foodwork

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#### Coffeemaker

■ Don't toss it because you've sworn off coffee. Give the machine a good cleaning, then use it for brewing **fruit-infused tea**—a perfect summer refresher. For peach tea, place 8 tea bags and 1 chopped ripe peach in the filter and brew, using 4 cups of water. (With loose tea, use 1 1/2 teaspoons per cup of water.) You can also try this with berries, apples, or dried fruits.

■ To make **spiced cider**, place spices, ginger, and orange slices in the filter, then brew using cider instead of water.

#### Sno-cone Machine

■ Use it to create a **bed of ice** for raw oysters or shrimp cocktail.

■ It also makes a great **granita**. For a coffee version, brew coffee and add sugar to taste. Freeze it in an ice-cube tray, then grind the cubes in the machine.

#### Electric Knife

■ You unearth it from its box twice a year, for the Thanksgiving turkey and the Christmas ham, right? Keep it handy and it can help you around the kitchen all year long. It's great at **cutting delicate foods** you don't want to flatten (ripe tomatoes, cinnamon-roll dough) and for carving out clean-as-a-whistle, **crumb-free slices of bread or cake**.