

## Gadgets galore: New things designed to get consumers spending

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May 2--CHICAGO -- Living within our means doesn't mean doing without.

At least not doing without a serrated lettuce knife that won't brown leaves, a grill charm that marks our less-than-spicy chicken breast or a paisley slipcover for an ugly lampshade.

Leslie Haywood invented dime-sized grill charms in the wake of a testy exchange with her husband after a dinner party. Although she wanted a mildly seasoned jerk chicken breast, he got them mixed up and she bit into a spicy one.

"I got mad. He got defensive and said somebody needs to come up with something. So I cleaned up the kitchen and then I started drawing prototypes," she said.

A set of six sells for \$19.95.

The slipcover lampshades were the result of two girlfriends and a bottle of wine. Shelly Dick got an idea, swiped a fabric textbook cover from her son's room and wrapped it around a living room shade. FrockZ was born, and now they offer 29 patterns of washable shades at about \$30 each.

Those new products were among thousands unveiled at the International Home and Housewares Show in Chicago in March. More than 2,000 booths offered products that help us cook, clean and organize our messes. And although no one could walk the 13 miles of aisles and miss the dominant theme of "green," the road to being environmentally friendly has hit a speed bump.

"The downturn in the economy makes consumers want to spend less on green," said Peter Goldman, who spoke on consumer attitudes and behaviors.

What we are willing to do is spend more time in the kitchen because we

don't like paying restaurant prices and those celebrity chefs make us believe we really can make lemon-orange pesto swordfish while the kids are fighting over the computer. Food channels are good for cookware and gadgets, making us think we might need a ginger peeler or a rice cooker that'll cook as little as a half-cup, as firm or as soft as you'd like.

"You can say you want to cook brown rice instead of white rice, and it'll adjust because it has that kind of brain," said Derek Hines, marketing manager for Zojurishi, which makes rice cookers with a sushi setting. "You can set it for an hour, and it'll stop at 57 minutes if it's done."

This may not be the year to buy a set of gourmet cookware, but there are some hot and less-pricey products: slow cookers, pressure cookers, airtight storage containers and can-you-believe-it canning products.

It might surprise you who is in the kitchen. "Gastrosexuals" are men who consider cooking cool and use it to impress their friends. But if that happens to be dad, he just might have some help. Children also want to stir and chop, just like they see on TV.

Chris Grzych of Sassafra, which makes child-sized kitchen tools, believes cooking is becoming more popular with kids because anybody can do it.

"If you're a kid, it's hard to be a rock star. Your chances of being in the NBA aren't too good, but you can still dream of becoming a chef. It's one of those high-profile things that's still attainable."

Another trend noted at the show was that, apparently, we're happy staying home. Trend talker Lee Eiseman said we're cocooning again, just like after 9/11, but the popular term now is "burrowing," and that can lead to major cleaning, reorganization and do-it-yourself projects.

And there's a new source of inspiration for the colors we use: high-definition TV, because it brings those vivid colors into our homes.

"When they see it on TV, they want it in their home as well, indoors and outdoors," said Eiseman, head of the Pantone Color Institute.

Pantone's new color for 2009 is mimosa yellow, which showed up in various shades throughout the show. Sunbeam calls it "yellow pepper," while Fiesta Dinnerware names it "marigold." But Fiesta added another color after the presidential inauguration: lemongrass, the yellow-green color of Michelle Obama's inauguration dress.

Yellow symbolizes warmth and nurturing, Eiseman said. Expect to see it showing up in everything from active wear to men's ties and shirts.

"We live in sobering times and we want to get people excited again. Yellow helps to get that hopefulness back into people's thinking."

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Products designed to make life easier, better

Maybe you don't need eco-friendly salad bowls, a flip-flop rack or a set of rolling penguin salt and pepper shakers that glide across the table, but some inventors think you do. Here are some of the products that debuted at the International Home and Housewares Show in Chicago in March:

--A lasagna pan with interior walls to keep layers stacked and prevent them from collapsing when cut (Bakers Edge).

--A stainless steel flexible cable provides room for at least twice as much food as straight grilling skewers. Drape the tip over the edge of the grill and the end stays cool, allowing you to turn or remove it without tools (Fire Wire, \$14.95 for two).

--Indoor electric turkey fryer -- Butterball and Masterbuilt got together for this fryer that can cook up to a 14-pound bird with no propane or oil in a third of the time it takes an oven (Masterbuilt, \$119.99).

--Veggie-Peel catches and holds scraps in a chamber as you peel (Jaccard Corp.).

--Disposable plates from palm leaves -- Using fallen leaves, steam, pressure and heat, these disposable plates can be used in the oven, microwave or freezer and can be washed and reused. But don't get too attached to them; they biodegrade in about six weeks (Verterra).

--CaliBowl -- An angled lip around the top of the bowl pushes food onto your utensil to avoid slopping that guacamole on the island (www.calibowl.com).

--Collapsible salad spinner compacts to half the size for easy storage (Progressive International Corp.).

--Dish cloth with built-in scrubber (MUKitchen.com, \$5.99).

--Bottoms Up holds bottles upside down so you don't have to shake the ketchup or shampoo out (KitchenArt \$4).

--The Egg Cracker eliminates broken yolks and flecks of eggshell (Kitchen Snobs.com, \$7.99).

--Intak Hydration Bottle has a meter that monitors your daily consumption (Thermos).

--BC-1000 Body Composition Monitor Allows you to wirelessly transmit your data to your computer within seconds of stepping on the platform; Garmin also offers a watch that'll store the readings so you can check your hydration level before your run (Tanita, \$279.99; \$399.99 with watch).

--Wireless bath pillow transmits music through the pillow from as far as 30 feet away (SPI Inc., \$39.99).

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