

review

Box Graters

BY NICKI PENDLETON WOOD

There was a time when every bride could count on receiving a box grater at her wedding shower. Nowadays, pre-shredded ingredients, food processors, and hand-held rasps have taken over some of the box grater's tasks, so a grater has to perform above and beyond to earn a piece of the valuable kitchen cabinet real estate.

In many kitchens, it does so by being the workhorse of mealtime, thanks to a variety of grating surfaces. The large

slicer blades work like a mandoline, quickly turning out thin, even cheese and potato slices. Coarse grater holes give nearly instantaneous vegetable shreds for fritters and slaw, and smaller punched holes are useful for grating nutmeg or zesting citrus.

Our testing turned some of our expectations about box graters on their heads and confirmed others. We thought a nonskid base was important, but it turned out not to be as vital as

other features. We thought the extra faces of the six-sided graters would give them an advantage, but it turned out to be more choice than the average cook needs.

One thing we learned as we tested graters: They are only as good as the cutting surfaces are sharp. Every one we tried was better than my 20-year-old knuckle-buster. So do yourself a favor and upgrade if you're using an old one.

What to look for

For a box grater that will earn its place in your cabinet, look for these qualities:

Thicker-than-average metal.

Graters fabricated with thicker walls feel sturdy, resist bending under pressure, and promise years of use.

Acid-etched blades. Found on the Microplane and Cuisipro models, these blades are made by a photochemical process that creates razorblade-like edges on both sides of each blade surface. Many other graters have a stamped cutting surface, which can tear food rather than cut it.

Deep grater holes, which yield bigger, more uniform, and more attractive shreds and slices.

Two sizes of grating/shredding holes: large for onions, firm cheese, and carrots; small for lemon zest, fresh ginger, and hard cheese, such as pecorino.

Helpful but not essential features include transparent sides marked with measurements, a catch bin that fits on the bottom, and a padded grip.

To protect fingers while grating, see the cut-resistant glove on p. 26.

Overall favorite

Microplane box grater

\$35, Microplane.com

This new model replaces the company's Better Box Grater and made a favorable impression in every testing category, from the easy-to-hang tubular frame construction to the comfortable ergonomic bulb on the handle, to the nonskid feet. The acid-etched blades cranked out big, uniform potato flakes and gorgeous plump cheese curls. Julienne blades work in both directions for fast carrot shreds, while the slicer gave cracker-ready cheese slices.



How we tested

We tested 14 graters between 7½ and 10 inches tall with a minimum of three sides. We assessed each grater for design and construction, storability, and safety, as well as the following performance tests:

- ◆ Slicing and shredding potatoes.
- ◆ Slicing and shredding firm cheese, like Cheddar.
- ◆ Shredding and grating hard cheese, like Parmigiano-Reggiano.
- ◆ Zesting lemons.



Runners-up

Cuisipro Accutec

\$35, Kitchenstoreon10th.com

We liked the Accutec's clever triangular design, which incorporates several appealing features in a reduced footprint. It has a removable bottom, measurements on the transparent sides, and a rubber grip on the handle. The zester left most of the zest on the grater face and the shredder tore the potato into uneven shreds, but the acid-etched blades shredded hard cheese into beautiful thin shreds that melted quickly in hot foods.



Borner Combi-Chef

\$80, Chefsresource.com

All our concerns about reduced footprint for storability went out the window when we used the Borner. At 10 inches high, 4½ inches wide, and 5 inches deep, this was the largest as well as the most expensive grater, but it performed so distinctively and efficiently that it got the nod. Whole potatoes were sliced to wafers in seconds, while the julienne face turned out true matchsticks. A brilliantly designed catch bin and a finger protection device mean you might prefer it to the food processor. The only weak performance came with the spiked food holder, which dug wedges out of sticky cheeses like block Cheddar.



www.finecooking.com

Best values

RSVP Endurance box grater

\$15, Kitchenstoreon10th.com

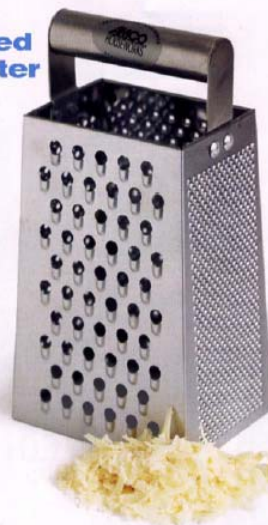
On most tasks, this reduced-footprint grater performed well enough to be considered an all-rounder, earning our nickname, The Little Grater That Could. It has good stability and produced nice potato shreds and slices, fluffy shreds of hard cheese, and uniform shreds of firm cheese. The only downside: The zester removed all the peel from a lemon without yielding any zest; the small shredder holes, however, worked well for zest.



AMCO four-sided shredder & grater

\$14, Cutleryandmore.com

Testers liked the sturdy, professional feel of this full-size grater, though it lacked an ergonomic handle, slicer blade, catch bin, and measurer—the bells and whistles that drew us to other models. All the blades were nicely sharp, and the big faces made short work of a block of cheese and a pile of potatoes, leaving them in even, attractive shreds. The only failure was in zesting: The large holes tore up the lemon's skin.



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