

Your Home

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ZOE MORGAN/TOWN CRIER PHOTO ILLUSTRATION

Induction cooktops save energy and can heat rapidly.

Home cooks explore induction

By Carolyn Snyder
Special to the Town Crier

This is the first – and only – installment of “Kitchen Jeopardy 2021.”

What brings 48 ounces of water to boil in less than three minutes, saves energy and has cooktop surfaces that stay cool?

“What” is an induction hob or cooktop that is an eco-friendly alternative to gas.

With folks stressing about the reach codes banning gas and

requiring new construction to be all-electric, induction cooking may be their salvation. Currently in Los Altos, gas cooking appliances and fireplaces are exempt from the rule for new single-family homes.

Los Altos builder Matt Kinsky replied “very cool” when asked about induction cooktops.

“I try to talk people into them because they’re very safe, especially if they have young children learning to cook,” he said. “But people like those nice

flames on their gas stoves. How much longer will this last?”

For the uninitiated, an induction cooktop is a cooking surface that heats by transferring currents from an electromagnetic field located beneath the glass surface directly to magnetic cookware. Unlike thermal conduction, it heats the cookware directly without flame or burner.

As you can imagine, it’s far more efficient to heat cookware directly instead of indirectly.

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Try these color trends in the new year

By Celeste Randolph

As 2021 gets underway, it is the perfect time to refresh your space. The new year brings with it a new beginning: an opportunity to make small changes in your home that will have maximum impact. One of the easiest ways to breathe new life into your space is by playing with color.

By Design

My friend Juli’s home pops with gorgeous color in unexpected places. Walking through her hallway, I feel enveloped by the bright cobalt blue cabinets saturated in a glossy finish. The right hardware and flush mount lighting make the hallway sing. Using saturated color in small spaces such as hallways, laundry rooms and powder rooms adds interest and glamour to any home.

Neutrals can be a beautiful backdrop for more intense tones. In one client’s sunlit dining room, we selected royal blue velvet chairs around an oak table. The chairs look elegant and rich against a background of cream walls with white trim. A sepia print of a sailboat on the wall creates a modern nautical feel.

Wallpaper or tile can be another easy way to experiment



LAUREN EDITH ANDERSEN/SPECIAL TO THE TOWN CRIER

Adding bold colors can be a simple way to reinvent a space.

with color in small spaces. A bright blue and white patterned wallpaper is fun but not overwhelming when complemented by gold fixtures, a round mirror and black-and-white prints on the wall for balance. A bathroom for a client in Los Altos

Hills features black, blue and white handpainted tiles applied to the wall behind a large round mirror. A cool blue vanity and simple light fixtures finish the look.

Let’s not forget that white is
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Seeding passion for gardening

By Tanya Kucak

Whether you’re an aspiring native gardener or an old hand, knowing more about what you grow can add to your enthusiasm, as well as your knowledge.

Browsing a good reference is an underappreciated pleasure. The most useful overall printed reference, “California Native Plants for the Garden” by Carol Bornstein et al. is out of print, though Larner Seeds (larnerseeds.com) has it in stock as of this writing. It may also be available from Native Sons Nursery (nativeson.com) or local chapters of the California Native Plant Society (cnps.org). Another basic reference is “Growing California Native Plants” by Marjorie G. Schmidt and Katherine S. Greenberg.

For inspiration, the following books can be as absorbing as a good novel.

- **“Hardy Californians”** by Lester Rowntree. A hundred years ago, Rowntree began traveling around California on her own to find native plants, collect seeds and try to grow them in the garden.

- **“Nature’s Best Hope”** by Douglas R. Tallamy. This book chronicles how home gardens with keystone natives can spark ecological renewal.

- **“Secrets of the Oak Woodlands”** by Kate Mari-

Native Plants

anchild. Highlights include engaging chapters on plants and animals associated with California oaks.

Devoted gardeners also will enjoy books focused on ceanothus, manzanitas, oaks, conifers, grasses or bulbs, as well as the following.

- **“California Native Gardening: A Month-by-Month Guide”** by Helen Popper. Read practical advice about what to do each month, poetically written.

- **“California Bees and Blooms”** by Gordon W. Frankie et al. Learn about native bees, and which flowers attract them.

- **“Native Treasures”** by M. Nevin Smith. A veteran horticulturalist writes about his many favorite plants, and how to propagate them.

Other resources

An unexpected benefit of sheltering in place is that talks, workshops and garden tours from around the state are available. Many CNPS chapters are continuing to host talks online, and some of them are archived. Browse the local chapter’s resources online at cnps-scv.org/education/youtube.

For answers to questions,
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active forums such as the CNPS Facebook page or the Growing California Natives email list are invaluable. Subscribe by emailing GardeningWithNatives+subscribe@groups.io.

However, the best way to learn about plants is to grow and observe them. February is not too late to sow some wildflowers or add a perennial or two to your garden. Any seasonal rain can reduce your water bill and help natives get established. If you're planning a new garden, keep an eye out for natives blooming in your neighborhood, and take notes on what you like through the year.

Calflora (calflora.org) and Calscape (calscape.org) are established sites that can tell you bloom times, what's native to your area, which plants attract the most butterflies and moths – which help birds by providing caterpillars for nestlings – and which nurseries might have specific plants. For more

photos and growing information, visit nursery websites such as the aforementioned Native Sons, Las Pilitas (laspilitas.com), Monrovia (monrovia.com) or San Marcos Growers (smgrowers.com).

At less than \$5 per packet, seeds can be an inexpensive way to try something new. Besides many interesting and uncommon varieties, Seedhunt (seedhunt.com) has six native buckwheats, eight clovers, 15 lupines and 13 clarkias. Both Seedhunt and Larner offer seeds of native perennials, shrubs, trees and even bulbs, as well as annual wildflowers.

Even quicker is a native plant that's already growing. A native from Annie's Annuals (anniesannuals.com), along with her enticing description highlighting its beauty and uses, can inspire aspiring and seasoned gardeners alike. Local garden centers carry some plants, or you can mail-order directly from the website.

Tanya Kucak gardens organically. Email her at tanya.garden@gmail.com.

COLORS

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a color, too. I love my all-white kitchen for its clean look, and I make sure to repaint the white cabinets every four years to avoid any dinginess. My white mantel with neutral fixtures and mirror makes a lovely backdrop for a painting gifted to me by close friends while on a trip to Croatia, allowing the deep, varied blues of the ocean, mountains and sky to pop from their silver frame.

Even Pantone's selection for 2021's colors of the year is a combination of rich tones and soft neutrals: a bright lemon yellow with a neutral gray. This combination reflects the feeling that many of us are having as we enter 2021 – optimism, resilience and hope as we imagine what the future may hold.

To try this at home, start by painting a closet door, guest bathroom or hallway cabinet in your color of choice. Right now, I love jewel tones such as emerald or forest green, sapphire blue, and raspberry red. Choose a color you love, one that tells a story about you and your home. Then select your space, add color and create a sense of balance with fixtures in gold or silver, prints in sepia or black-and-white, and neutral elements.

Celeste Randolph is an interior designer in Los Altos. For more information, visit celesterandolphdesigns.com.

INDUCTION

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Induction delivers roughly 80-90% of its electromagnetic energy to the food in the pan. Gas burners waste energy by heating the surrounding air and the cooktop along with the food in the pan.

According to Forbes contributor Sheri Koonen, a major difference between induction and other types of cooktops is the speed with which induction cooks.

This is among the reasons that many of the world's top chefs are induction-cooking enthusiasts. Author/chef Thierry Molinengo of the Cristal Room Baccarat restaurant in Paris is on record as saying, "Powerful, immediate, precise, effective, practical – here in a few words are the qualities of induction."

Growing popularity

Ray Meyer of Meyer Appliance in Mountain View has seen an increase in sales of induction cooktops.

"They're more accessible and their cost has become more in line with other appliances," he said.

University Electric and Airport Home Appliance also have seen an uptick in sales.

Meyer points to the ease of cleanup and safety factors as well as the speed.

"You turn it on, it's on. You turn it off, it's off. The rest of the cooktop surface remains cool. Grease and spills can be easily wiped off," he said.

In addition, an automatic shut-down feature kicks in when a pot is removed from the range or once the set cooking time is over.

"Because of the safety, I'd only go with an induction cooktop in a kitchen designed for clients wishing to age in place," said Jeanette Loretz of JL Designs and Interiors in Los Altos.

Gina Viscusi Elson, principal of Viscusi Elson Interior Designs and Rutt Kitchens of Los Altos, is seeing a trend toward induction cooking – especially in contemporary homes.

"The streamlined aesthetics of an induction cooktop blend seamlessly with a modern home. The cooktop can be installed flush to the counter surface or slightly raised," she said. "It is easy cleanup and more popular with the new generation of clients. You get instant gratification – everything happens faster and you no longer need special pots."

There are pans specifically designed for induction cooking,

but there are less-expensive alternatives that will work, such as cast iron, enamel-coated cast iron and certain stainless-steel pots. If a magnet sticks to the bottom of the pan, it will work. Copper and aluminum pans won't work.

"My kitchen projects were 90% gas, but now they are roughly 70%, with a combination of gas and induction," Viscusi Elson said.

One of her current projects has a four-burner gas cooktop next to a two-burner induction cooktop.

"Clients who are open to induction think a bit more modular. They can now select specific cooktop option to the needs of the chef," she said.

Trial and error

Viscusi Elson attended a recent event staged by University Electric that brought together a small group of professional chefs, each with unique cooking styles.

"They talked about why they loved induction cooktops and encouraged our gas-loving cooks to give induction a chance," she said.

One of them, executive chef and electric kitchen expert Rachelle Boucher, addressed the learning curve. She has cooked for the likes of filmmaker George Lucas, rock band Metallica and legendary sports celebrities.

In a conversation with Viscusi Elson, Boucher said it takes a while to get the hang of induction cooking with its quick heating and precision controls. Determining exactly how to control the heat levels takes a bit of trial and error. First-time users may very well burn the first food they begin to cook.

Many of the standard practices used with a gas or electric stove, like chopping vegetables while waiting for oil to heat in a pan, won't work.

"She explained it can be a challenge recalibrating our traditional family recipes for induction cooking, but once this step is conquered, cooks never go back to gas cooking," Viscusi Elson said.

Viscusi Elson has been spending more time in her new house and kitchen, which has reignited her passion for cooking.

"I have been cooking on a 48-inch Thermador gas range," she said. "Only downside is there is a lot of cleanup around the stove. Rachelle encouraged me to purchase a singular induction hob to add to my kitchen."



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