

## In a Pinch

THIS CHEF'S COOL TOOLS WON'T BREAK THE BANK. BY AMY NANCE PHOTOS BY GENE POLLUX

**There are literally dozens of uses for a toothpick. A little imagination, a bit of pluck and a throw-away thing is transformed into a serviceable tool.**

Under the right circumstances, the modest toothpick can be more valuable than, say, the most exquisitely sharp chef's knife. "I use them to wrap bacon—it's a quick little move," says Harry Christensen, owner and chef of Harry's Continental Kitchens. Aside from the popular bacon trick, Christensen puts toothpicks to task by using them to pierce and hold chicken breast together and in rolling rumaki. Christensen is quick to point out how invaluable said chef's knife is in the kitchen ("and a water stone to sharpen it, that's important"), but on the topic of the toothpick he's proud. "Whatever you have at hand in the kitchen, you can find a use for," he says.

He would know. Harry's Deli & Take-Out, catering service and restaurant on Longboat Key have been around in some form for almost 30 years and together remain a Sarasota institution. Christensen worked for the Green Bay Packers in the '60s, cooking on the world champion buffet circuit. "As a kid I decided to dedicate my life to learning elaborate techniques like making ice sculptures," he laughs, recounting the glamour of his Green Bay days. Soon he was hired as a sous chef at a large hotel. "I had to make breakfast, lunch and dinner for 500. The head chef never showed up so I ascended quickly and became both. I was working so much that I didn't know if it was night or day." Then Christensen opened Harry's, a business selling gourmet take-out that reflected his toothpick-as-kitchen-tool ingenuity. The deli sold individually-wrapped, specially-made gourmet meals from a changing menu, and still does.



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So what gadgets does a successful, award-winning chef and master sommelier rely on in his prolific kitchens? "Parchment paper—it's my most versatile tool," Christensen shares. The paper, which sells for as little as \$3.99 at supermarkets and small supply stores alike, is a cheap essential. Christensen does a lot of baking, and instead of buying pastry bags, he rolls parchment paper into a cone, clips it at the ends and voila, a nifty pastry gadget emerges. He also utilizes parchment to make tidy butter casings, rolling the butter up into the paper, storing it in the fridge and later slicing off neat, perfectly-scaled medallions. Parchment is a big player in his popular pompano entrée, where the fish is wrapped in parchment along with Chinese noodles, water chestnuts and grape cherries, then cooked and served in the opened up paper.

Another cheap trick? "Skewers. You can use these to clean shrimp," says Christensen, who gets his fish from Cortez fishing village and whose seafood menu includes Turbon of Red Snapper and Hot Flounder Salad. Simple implements like wooden spoons (use it to break up meat) and spatulas (perfect for leveling off measuring cups of flour) are rife with mixed-use potential. Chefs may wax rhapsodic about the techy, top-of-the-line devices they deploy in the kitchen or find at the store, but it's their scrappy side that shows off creativity. 

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