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Just a spatula? Sure, but it's a tool you use every day. So having one that really works can be as important as having the right knife.

products tested (listed alphabetically)

Lamsonsharp 2-3-Inch x 4-Inch
OXO Good Grips Flexible Turner—Steel
Rösle Stainless Steel Turner for Non-Stick Pans
WMF ProfiPlus 12 3/4-Inch Stainless Steel Slotted Turner
Wusthof Gourmet Turner/Fish Spatula

See Product Comparison Chart

Few people give much thought to choosing a good turner-style spatula. Most of us simply put up with tools that don’t particularly help us—and may even get in the way of our doing a better job as we flip or transport food. Whether they’re too long or too rigid, whether they have an awkwardly shaped head, a too-thick front edge that can’t slide easily under food, or a handle angle that forces our arm up or elbow out, most of these fly-swatther look-alikes tend to damage food. They can tear the whites and break the yolks of fried eggs, crumple warm cookies instead of lifting them neatly off the pan, or drop your neat square of lasagna into a messy heap as you’re ferrying it to a plate. Because spatulas are fairly cheap, most people own a drawer full of assorted styles and brands. But wouldn’t it be better to own the perfect spatula that feels natural and makes cooking easier? We all need a plastic spatula to protect nonstick pans but we also need a real metal one for traditional pans, where thick, blunt plastic ones just won’t do. In this testing, we looked at metal spatulas.

To this end, we scooped up tools of varying prices, sizes and designs and started the evaluations with a basic challenge: frying eggs in an 8-inch skillet. Shoveling—and breaking—the delicate eggs in such cramped quarters winnowed the lineup to 5 spatulas; these graduated to tests with fresh-baked cookies, pans of lasagna, fluffy pancakes, and oversize hamburgers. To gauge strength, we then tried to balance bricks.

<h3>Measure for Measure</h3>
The initial egg test pointed us to our first conclusion: A good spatula must have a slim front edge that can slip under any food with ease. Thicker-edged heads pushed the eggs around the skillet until the yolks turned dense and dry and the whites were rubbery and tough. (At that point we could have flipped the eggs with a forklift.) Our favorite spatula measured less than 1 millimeter at the front edge and deftly shimmied under the eggs.

But nailing down the ideal head size was a balancing act—literally. If it was too narrow, it didn’t provide enough support. Conversely, super-wide flippers struggled to pick up a single pancake, burger, or cookie without knocking (or crushing) its neighbors. An overly long head was also a detriment—these spatulas literally kept us an arm’s length from the pan. Our conclusion: A rectangular, well-proportioned head—roughly 3 inches wide and 5 inches long—offers support without compromising dexterity.

The handle driving the head also plays a role; its length can mean the difference between a smooth ride and a fatal, food-fracturing accident. One handsome spatula,
with a 9-inch-plus handle, stretched nearly 15 inches long and seemed better proportioned for the blasting heat of a grill than the tame warmth of a griddle (it too was eliminated after the egg test). But there was also such a thing as too small, which felt like a toy. The most successful spatulas fell between those two extremes, with handles measuring roughly 6 inches and a total length of about 11 inches, a distance that kept us safe while letting the spatula maneuver as a natural extension of our hands.

<h3>Turn, Turn, Turn</h3>
Our intuition told us the angled offset style of more traditional spatulas, which follow the curve of a pan, would give us the best leverage. To our surprise, we preferred only a slight offset to the grip; in fact, the handle on our top-rated spatula extended nearly straight out from the head. Steeper angles limited our movement, especially in small or deep pans.

Instead of an angled handle, we got more control with models that had flexible heads, which could bend slightly and slide under foods in any kind of pan. The slotted head on our winner was a bit stiffer but sported a gentle curve that yielded the same result. Besides, a little stiffness could actually be a good thing: When we balanced bricks on each model to test strength and stability, some were too flexible and threatened to drop their cargo.

As for slots, some spatulas had them while others were solid sheets. Manufacturers claim the openings let grease drip off, but we saw little evidence of that. It turns out that the slots actually perform a more important function: They break up the surface of the spatula, reducing the friction of the food across the head and making it easier to slide under food. Our top-rated spatula had long, vertical cuts through the head for just enough slither potential. (Obviously, a good spatula can't be too slippery or the food will slide right off—another point for our winner and its upturned edge.)

In the end, we flipped for the sleek agility and gently cradled head of a traditional metal fish spatula, which performed well beyond its piscine job description and vastly outperformed the rest of the pack. This tool is essential to our everyday cooking arsenal.

**See the Results**