



Cool Tools Show Podcast Episode 309: Lenore Edman

December 2021

Visit [Cool-tools.org](https://cool-tools.org) for shownotes

Mark: Welcome to the Cool Tools Show. I'm Mark Frauenfelder, editor-in-chief of Cool Tools, a website of tool recommendations written by our readers. You can find us at cool-tools.org. I'm joined by my co-host Kevin Kelly, founder of Cool Tools. Hey, Kevin.

Kevin: Hey, it's great to be here.

Mark: In each episode of the Cool Tools show, Kevin and I talk to a guest about some of his or her favorite uncommon and uncommonly good tools they think others should know about. Our guest this week is Lenore Edman. Lenore is a co-founder of Evil Mad Scientist Laboratories. When she's not building pen plotters, she likes to bake, sew, and make jam for relaxation. Hey, Lenore.

Lenore: Hi, Mark.

Kevin: Hi, Lenore. And welcome back.

Lenore: Thank you, Kevin.

Kevin: It's always great to hear your picks. We're really excited to see what kind of cool stuff you're into these days.

Lenore: Yeah. I kind of picked things around my pandemic activities because it's been crazy logistically here at Evil Mad Scientist. And so I've been trying to find things that are more soul-filling and rejuvenating. So it's mostly been in kitchen for me.

Mark: I love it. Well, that sounds good. So, go ahead and tell us the first tool on your list here.

Lenore: Yeah so, one of the things that is very stereotypical that I've been doing is baking. And I have the 1997 edition of The Joy Of Cooking, which I believe the title is, The All New All

Purpose Joy of Cooking. So I don't know if you know this, but The Joy Of Cooking has undergone several major revisions over its decades and decades of publication.

Mark: I didn't know that.

Kevin: Yes. Yes. So, is 97, is that like the last one or is that the middle or what?

Lenore: No, it's the middle.

Mark: It's the best one.

Lenore: No, it's not. The best one is whatever one you use the most.

Kevin: [inaudible 00:02:12] camera.

Lenore: So for me, the 1997 one is the best one, because it's the one that I use the most. We also have the 1952 and it has recipes that the 97 doesn't have, but I don't use it very often. There's like one bread that we usually make for Thanksgiving that's in there. But what's great about the 97 edition is, that it's modern enough that the ingredients are pretty consistently available and it's undergone enough revisions that the recipes are really, really reliable.

Kevin: And what's the matter with the 2019 edition? Are they not reliable?

Lenore: I think they are. There've been a couple of revisions since the 97 one. The 97 one made a bunch of people mad because it took some things out. So they put things back in. I just haven't used the newer ones. I'm not as familiar with them. I think they're probably just as good. I love this one. It's the one that my mom got me when I was basically starting my own cooking adventures. So it's got special meaning for me.

Kevin: I see. I think we might even have that version. I don't remember which version I have, some modern version, but I found that even among my two daughters who bake and cook a lot, that everybody sort of gravitated to going online, even though they could walk over and look up the book, they still kind of use their phone to look it up. Are you not tempted by that or do you find a joy in the book itself?

Lenore: I do some recipe stuff online. I'll confess that the online recipes that I use the most are my own. I go to my blog and I look up my recipes.

Kevin: So your blog is just your recipe? [crosstalk 00:04:18]

Lenore: Like, I need to make chutney, I'm going to go my chutney recipe. So I use my phone for that kind of thing. And I use it for certain things that I don't have in a cookbook, especially like modern cuisine from certain cultures. I don't have a lot of cookbooks that have like Malaysian cooking or things like that, where you want something very specific. I definitely am looking online.

Kevin: Yeah. I mean The Joy Of Cooking is kind of white, I might say if I may be so bold.

Lenore: Yeah. And they have addressed that through some of the later editions. They added a few things. It's interesting because like I said, I chose this because of baking in particular and one of the really reliable bread recipes that we use all the time is the pita dough recipe and the naan dough recipe. They work really, really well. And they're different regional breads that aren't very common in America other than immigrant communities. And I don't use necessarily the cooking techniques, but the dough recipes are really good.

Kevin: Interesting. So this is the 1997 Joy of Cooking. I think you said The All New All Purpose?

Lenore: Yes.

Kevin: Which is available on Amazon new, it looks like.

Lenore: Yeah.

Kevin: As well as a used copy for 36 cents.

Mark: There you go.

Kevin: You go on Amazon. I'd grab that one right now.

Mark: Yeah. Definitely.

Lenore: One of the other recipes that I really like from The Joy Of Cooking is the Belgian waffle recipe, which is a yeasted waffle dough. And it makes a really fluffy waffle with a lot of depth of flavor. And so when you're looking for a specific recipe, that's not just your most basic thing in a genre, The Joy Of Cooking has a lot of variations. They'll have a basic one and then they'll go deeper. And I like that about it that you can improve your skill by trying on a thing over and over with it.

Mark: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kevin: Okay. So that's a great one. The 97 Joy of Cooking.

Mark: What would we have next on our list?

Lenore: Okay. So we call this the red slicing tool.

Kevin: Get out the red slicing tool.

Lenore: Exactly. So it's a mandolin by Borner. I think we have the V 7,000 and we're on our third one. We buy one every few years because the blades gradually get dull and it's made of plastic so it can crack, but we use it so much and it really streamlined a lot of things in

our cooking process and our prep processes. So this is one that has not just a flat slicer, but also a julienne slicer and a course chopping. It has the little extra blades for doing course chopping. And there are a couple of things that we use it for. We use it for onions all the time. Everything that has onions, use the red slicing tool.

Lenore: But there are a couple things that we've found that it's really good at that we didn't anticipate. And this is things like making Banh Mi Slaw where you're going to lightly pickle, the diakon and carrots for sandwich slaw. And normally the recipes will call for you to grate it. But when you grate things, it kind of tears the surface and it damages the cell structure. Whereas if you do a fine julienne, it leaves it crunchier and crispier with a better texture. So similarly, we do this for hash browns and for latkes that if you julienne the potatoes, instead of grating them, you get a really different texture that it retains the moisture inside the pieces instead of getting wet and, and soggy. And it's just really great.

Kevin: Amazing. Wow. But this is sort of like your Cadillac version of a mandolin. I don't know. It looks like it's pretty substantial. Does this particular make, have you tried a lot of them and this is the better than the average or is this...

Lenore: So we've tried a few, we've tried some of like the ceramic blade ones, which are more expensive. I think we got a couple of Kyocera ones, but they're really scary to use because they're so sharp and they don't have good grippers for holding the food that you're slicing it through. One of the things about this one is that it holds something like an onion or a potato really securely in the handle that you sort of mash onto the vegetable.

Mark: Does it have little teeth or spikes on it?

Lenore: It has little spikes on it. Yeah. And that works really well. And so I don't feel like I'm going to slice my fingers off when I use it, because some of the mandolins that I've used have been just terrifying to use.

Kevin: Like a guillotine.

Mark: Yeah. It could slice a little slice off of your finger.

Lenore: And then we've tried other waffle or wave cutters that just aren't sharp enough or don't work well, and this one, like I said, we've gotten the same model three times as it gets. You're like, just doesn't seem like it's working really well and we'll buy ourselves a new one and we'll be like, oh yeah, everything is fine again. And when I say we've gotten three, that's probably over the course of six years. You know, we get one every couple of years and it's like a treat that we have a new slicing tool. So it used to be the green slicing tool.

Mark: Now it's red.

Lenore: Now it's the red slicing tool.

Mark: That sounds good. Yes. I have a mandolin, I think I got in here in LA in little Tokyo and it's just so great for cabbage and cutting it and making coal slaws.

Lenore: Absolutely. A bed of cabbage, if you're making like a chicken katsu or something, I want the super fine cabbage. Yeah. It's just perfect.

Mark: Yes. It's so, so good. Okay. So that's a great one. And it's about 60 bucks. So we have another pandemic related comfort food tool, the potato masher.

Lenore: Right. So it's a potato masher and it's one of the ones that's a wire that is squiggly shaped. And I do use it for mashed potatoes, but we don't make mashed potatoes very often. Only at Thanksgiving. I use it for a couple other things. One is guacamole. I think it makes a nice chunky guacamole because you aren't mashing it as fine as you would with like a fork. And then the other thing that I use it very regularly for is jam. When I'm making jam, I start cooking the fruit and then I mash it with the masher and it breaks up the pieces more and lets the juices and things out so that it gels better. And I don't have to cut the fruit as fine. I don't have to puree it or anything. I just cook it down and then mash it with the masher and it helps it to just make a better consistency. I like a chunky jam. And so I use it for jamming.

Kevin: And this is your classic mashed potato masher.

Lenore: Yeah. I don't have this particular one that I gave you the Amazon link for. Mine, I have no idea where it's from. It has a wooden handle. I would love to have one that I could throw through the dishwasher, but mine works well enough that I'm not going to ever replace it.

Mark: Sure. You're just doing fruit with it. It's probably just an easy matter of rinsing the thing off.

Lenore: Yeah, exactly. Sometimes if you've done potatoes and then you have to let it sit and soak a bit, because it's gotten all starchy. But with jam, I pour the water from the can and kettle over all the tools and then they're all clean and happy.

Mark: What kind of fruit jam do you like to make?

Lenore: We make a lot of plum because we have a plum tree. We have a weeping plum. And so I make plum chutney and plum jam and then we have a Meyer lemon tree. So I make a lot of marmalade as well. Although that one, I don't usually mash because of slightly different process, but marmalade, plum jam. Recently I made strawberry jam for fun, but mostly plum.

Kevin: So your next tool is a Klein... All right. That's already funny.

Lenore: It's a Klein bottle opener, right? Of course everyone knows a Klein bottle is already open.

Kevin: That's the joke. So you have to make an attempt to describe a Klein bottle.

Lenore: So a Klein bottle is like a Mobius strip. So a Mobius strip only has one side. It's a flat piece of, for instance paper that is twisted so that there's only one side to it. Well, a Klein bottle is a bottle that only has one side. It doesn't have an inside or an outside. It just has a side. They usually look a little bit like a figure eight, like the handle is kind of going through the surface and coming out the inside.

Kevin: Right. It's so the Mobius strip is a loop that's twisted. And then this is sort of like a bottle that's twisted.

Lenore: Twisted on itself.

Kevin: Right. The neck goes back into the inside. So mathematically it has only one side, although you look at it and there's the inside but it doesn't work that way. And so this Klein bottle is made out of metal.

Lenore: Right. It's a 3D printed Klein bottle that is also a bottle opener. So you can use it to open a bottle of ginger beer or regular beer and it is made by the artist, Bathsheba Grossman. And I met Bathsheba at the very first Maker Faire back in 2006 and was just blown away by her artworks, which are mathematically generated 3D printed objects, usually in metal, in a centered process. This particular one comes in a bronzed finish. It's really beautiful. And what's wonderful about this Klein bottle opener is the way that it feels in your hand. Like it's the one tool that I use that just feels perfect to use. It's the right shape, has the right amount of leverage. It fits in your palm beautifully. And it's a beautiful object and it's a joke.

Kevin: It's a joke. Because the bottle is open. You almost think that all bottle openers should be that shape.

Lenore: Yes. Yeah. Exactly. So what's really funny is that there are actually two different Klein bottle openers because there's a company called Klein Tools that makes high end tools for [crosstalk 00:16:06] electricians and they make one, that's a bottle opener.

Kevin: But it's not the [crosstalk 00:16:11]

Lenore: It's not a Klein bottle shape, but it's made by Klein Tools. So it's a Klein, it's still a Klein bottle opener, which just, I think is absolutely charming. It's a nice tool. It feels really good, like a good hefty screwdriver handle, but it doesn't have the beauty and perfection of the Klein bottle shaped one.

Kevin: Okay. And the Klein bottle is \$66 because it's art. It's not just a tool.

Lenore: Yeah. But like I said, it's a thing of beauty and it feels amazing in your hand and yes, it's art. It's definitely art.

Mark: That's so cool.

Kevin: I actually have one of her early sculptures from the Maker Faire days. Just a little weird little twisted cube, I guess you would call it.

Lenore: I have one of her cube like sculptures and also a beautiful twisted kind of ball shape. She also does some laser etched sculptures in blocks of glass or acrylic that are wonderful. She's one of the first 3D artists that I knew about and I still find her work to be just amazing.

Kevin: Well, this is really fantastic. Tell us about your recent stuff with your LED book.

Lenore: So it's not too recent, but I got to participate in a project to write a book with some LED projects. And it was put together by folks that we know through Maker Faire, John [inaudible 00:17:56] was the primary person behind it and collected a bunch of projects from a bunch of different people. And we got to participate, especially in the sort of beginner level projects that, getting started with LEDs, learning to use resistors and do creative things. And so we actually had the opportunity to take some of the stories from our blog and put them into the book so that they could have a new life and a new audience that way. So some of the projects from mine, some are [inaudible 00:18:27], but it was, it's fun to see these projects take new life in a new form factor and see them out in the world as a book.

Kevin: And what's in the book? Can you describe some of the ... I guess there are projects that are, or is it instructional?

Lenore: Yeah, it's a project based book. And so the kinds of projects that we included were ones that take as their core, the LED throwie as sort of the basic building block where you have an LED in a coin cell, and you incorporate that into something, whether that's putting it into something beautiful, like a sea urchin shell, or making a greeting card out of it by etching plastic, those kinds of things. And then the later chapters in the book go over more complicated things like adding micro controllers to change the behavior of the LED and those kinds of things.

Mark: What was your particular project for it?

Lenore: So, like I said, there was the sea urchins, 10 LED projects for geeks. So 10 is sort of a loosely defined number where my one project is actually several.

Lenore: So we did the LED lit sea urchins, edge lit greeting cards, a little dark detecting circuit. And then my favorite electric origami.

Mark: How does that work?

Lenore: So you can add circuits to paper using either foil tape, like aluminum foil tape, or copper foil tape, or you can use different methods of fixing things like aluminum foil to paper.

We used a couple different things like transfer paper and ironing it on so that it adheres to toner, but essentially drawing out a circuit that you know is going to work with the origami shape that you have of, and putting the traces on the paper before you fold it up. And then when you fold it up, in this case, we used a little origami balloon, you have pockets in the balloon where you can put the LED and the battery. So you fold it up. Your traces are already on the paper, and then you add the battery and the LED and it lights up.

Mark: That sounds fun. So that book, when did you say the book came out?

Lenore: It was 2018. It's been a long March. The book came out in 2018.

Kevin: And are you still fooling around with LEDs or is there anything kind of new in that world that wasn't present in 2018 when you wrote the book?

Lenore: Not a whole lot has changed. Well, the thing that has changed is the ubiquity of individual addressable LEDs, and they've gotten better over time. So I haven't been messing around with those very much, but I've been seeing a lot of people doing projects based on those, because they've gotten very easy to use, very available, and they've gotten better in terms of brightness and power management and so on. So that's the one big change that we've had over the last few years. We've made a couple of different projects over the last several years to make some of the simple circuits a little bit more accessible. We made one that's a flickery flame kit that is just a circuit board for driving several LEDs at once from a battery box. And by putting it onto a printed circuit board, it makes it easier for people to sort of do wire management and not have to wire it all up themselves. So we've been making a bunch of those kits. They make really good beginner soldering kits because they have more than just one LED so you don't feel like you only had one thing to try out that you had a few LEDs that you could test and make sure you really had good technique and got to practice.

Kevin: I was just wondering if anybody's made a [inaudible 00:22:41] that's narrow like a thread and you could actually weave it into cloth.

Lenore: There are some of the newer fairy lights that are connected with magnet wire. I don't know of anyone who's weaving it in because if you end up with broken traces, they're much harder to track down, but I know that people are using the super thin strands in fabric projects these days.

Kevin: That's cool.

Mark: All right. Well, Lenore, thanks so much. This has been really interesting. I really enjoy hearing about these things and I'm going to snag that 37 cent copy of The All Purpose, Joy of Cooking before any of our readers can. Thanks for letting us know about it, Kevin. So thanks so much, Lenore. This is great.

Lenore: Thanks for having me. It's good to talk to you as always.



Mark:

Hey everybody, it's Mark from the Cool Tools podcast. I want to thank you for being a listener to Cool Tools. And I also would like to let you know about our Patreon page, if you would like to support the Cool Tool show, as well as our video channel, the website and all the newsletters that we do, you can go to [patreon.com/cooltools](https://patreon.com/cooltools). That's just one word, cooltools and pledge any amount you want. You could even pledge a dollar a month. Every little bit helps. We have editors. We pay for transcribing costs. We pay our reviewers every bit of money that you contribute goes towards supporting the show. I'd like to give a shout out to our supporters of the Cool Tools podcast. This week I'd like to thank the following Patreon supporters. Bill Schuller, Bob K, Brian Pelly, Carl D. Patterson, Chad Cosby, Chris Wheland, Chris Weirstook, Craig Tooker, Dan O'Brien, Dean Putney, Denell Cunningham, Evan Barker, Graham Medland, Hans Resback, Helen Hegedus, Jerry Kerns, Jim Lesko, Jim Spofford, John Pollock, John Burdenbowder, Keith O, Ken Altman, Les Howard Lauren Bass, mock nerd. Malton make, Mark Gobel, Matt Romes, Michael Douglas, Michael Jones, and Michael Peckarini. Thanks to all of you for supporting the Cool Tools show. We really appreciate it.