

I am not usually too enamored of new kitchen gadgets. There are some that I use regularly and depend on, but many items, it seems to me, are just there to take up space. We do have a can opener, but I use it so seldom that I have to rummage through the miscellaneous drawer to find it. I bought a zester once, thinking it would be easier to obtain orange or lemon peel than with my old box grater. It wasn't. I have since discarded it and gone back to the 50 year old plus box grater/slicer/shredder that my mother had. I have and use the middle piece of a doughnut cutter, the part that is a little circle to make the holes. But the other part? I have no idea where this small hole cutter came from, but I make the round friedcakes themselves with a mason jar ring. I remember that my mother cut out the holes with a tiny metal container that had held bouillon cubes.

But, occasionally, an idea emerges and results in a tool that is very useful. This time of year, for me, it is a big time saver. As soon as I heard about something called a "salad spinner," I knew that it was the result of a great idea. And, as in regard to all ideas that are both useful and simple, my first thought was, "Why didn't someone think of this sooner?"

Centrifugal force is a very useful power. I had, for a long time, spun out the salad greens using this physical means. I would wash the lettuce, lay it out on a big terrycloth towel, gather the ends together and swing the bundle round and round over my head or in a vertically oriented circle at my side. This process did a pretty good job of removing the excess water from the greens, but, then, each time, I had a wet towel to hang out to dry. I also use the same method, with a pillowcase instead of a towel, for taking our a lot of the water when I have washed raw wool. It dries much more quickly.

I knew a little about the effects of a centrifuge much earlier. My dad explained that it was behind the concept of a cream separator, something we used every day to divide the warm milk into skim milk and cream. He also explained that if you had a solid pail—not like the terry towel I used many years later to dry lettuce—the liquid would stay in the pail even though one swung the pail in a circle by one's side. He demonstrated by putting some water in a calf pail and swinging the pail up and over his head. I was amazed. Even when completely upside down, the water remained in the pail!

For some reason, this idea of centrifugal force was overly interesting to me. Dad had explained other physical laws to me when I was little, by showing me how some things worked. Using a lever was such a useful idea, for example, but it did not have the drama of that upside down water in the pail. Of course, I tried it many times myself. Then, one day, emboldened by the presence of some visiting child, I tried to demonstrate with the cream pail. Unfortunately, I hit the side of my leg with the pail, and the cream—destined for the cream can that went to the butter factory twice a week—spilled on the ground.

Punishment was neither severe nor usual in our household. All I heard about it was this: "You have to be careful."

So, whenever I use the salad spinner— every day this time of year, I renew my longstanding respect for centrifugal force. And, I am careful.

