

Heston and Gordon have got one...

... so is the Thermomix really a kitchen gadget dream come true? **Claire Coleman** gets meal planning and finds out...

WELL it weighs, it chops, it grinds, it mixes, it kneads, it cooks, it steams and, yes, it even washes itself up – but, when talking about the new wifi-connected Thermomix TM5, that’s really just the basics.

Because it can also help you plan your meals for the week, email you the shopping list for all the ingredients you’ll need, and then guide you through each recipe.

Needless to say, I was desperate to give it a go.

For the uninitiated, the Thermomix itself isn’t new. First launched in 1971, it’s become something of a must-have in professional kitchens. Michel Roux has one, Gordon Ramsay has one, Heston Blumenthal has several, and if you’ve been served a super-smooth puree or silky fine soup in a swanky restaurant, chances are it’s been through a Thermomix. So why doesn’t everyone have one?

Well, partly because they’re not sold in shops – you have to book a home demo before you can buy one. And then there’s the price – the latest model costs £1,049.

But if it could replace every other electrical gadget in your kitchen, that might just be good value. Bye bye bread maker, see ya rice cooker. Electrical spice grinder, you can go. And be off



with you blender, steamer, food processor, smoothie maker and the rest.

In the tiny galleys that pass for kitchens in big cities, could I strip away everything but a Thermomix?

I decided to give it a go. The demo was impressive. It made short work of weighing the ingredients needed for bread, and kneaded it without any floury mess. But – newsflash – you do still need an oven. The Thermomix can boil and

steam, but it can’t bake. However, chopping and sautéing an onion took minutes – just throw the quartered onion in with some butter. No tears, no stirring – the machine does it all.

Then there were the veggies that cooked while the chicken steamed above, and the soup was so smooth, I would have had to sieve it through muslin to get it this fine.

And no messing around with recipe books, the touch screen told me what to do every step of the way – weigh this, turn the dial to chop that, or heat the other. Throw in some water and a bit of washing up liquid and it (almost) cleans itself, too.

I also hopped online to plan my meals for the week. There’s a chip called the Cook-Key that attaches to the machine and communicates with the website so you can log on, browse thousands of recipes, save them to your personal meal planner

and then sync it to the Thermomix to be guided through them step by step. You can also email yourself a shopping list for the following week.

It was all easy enough to do. I planned soups for nights in on my own, meatballs to eat one night and freeze for the following week, a three-course meal for a dinner with friends, and it worked like clockwork. The beetroot soup with the steamed herb dumplings, the berry sorbet, the risotto, the green smoothie, the swede and carrot mash... it looked good, tasted fine, I couldn’t fault any of it.

And yet somehow I missed actually cooking. I like cooking. I like the meditative nature of chopping onions, even if it does make me cry. And I like leafing through recipe books. The Thermomix makes cooking an oddly sterile procedure.

Would I ditch all the gadgets in my kitchen for it? Yes, in a heartbeat. But the truth is my gadgets only see the light of day once in a blue moon anyway – I don’t bake enough bread or make enough soups.

With a Thermomix on my worktop, I would probably make more than I do now, and I’d whip up my own mayonnaise and sorbet when friends visit for dinner, but when we’re talking more than a grand – well for now they’re going to have to make do with Hellman’s and Haagen Dazs.

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Claire's beetroot soup
and green smoothie

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