

Knife Skills

The best-quality knives are typically made from stainless steel or carbon steel. Stainless steel knives maintain their shine and do not rust. Carbon steel knives stay sharper but tend to rust more easily.

For Your Information

Knives are invaluable kitchen tools, not toys. The more you practice your knife skills, the more efficient you'll become. Practicing knife safety will enhance your culinary success. Following is a list of safety precautions to help you avoid accidents with knives.

- Keep knives sharp. Dull knives are more likely to slip and may cause you to cut yourself.
- Always cut with the blade of the knife slanting away from you.
- Always hold foods to be cut with your fingertips tucked in.
- Always use a wood or plastic cutting board when you use a knife; other surfaces can damage the knife. Place a wet cloth or paper towel under the cutting board to prevent the board from slipping.
- Never cut foods while holding them in your hand.
- Don't leave a knife on the edge of a counter or table. If you drop a knife, step back and let it fall. Never try to catch it on the way down.
- Wash knives one at a time with the blade pointed away from your hand. Never place them in soapy water where they cannot be seen.

There are many types of knives, each serving a different purpose. The chef generally chooses the knife type based on the food being prepared. For example, chopping celery calls for a different knife than the one used for slicing bread. A brief description of the basic knives follows.

- **Paring knife:** The paring knife usually has a 2- to 4-inch blade and can be used for dicing, slicing, peeling, or chopping fruits and vegetables.



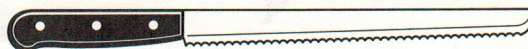
Utility knife: The utility knife is an all-purpose knife and usually has a 5- to 7-inch blade. It's used for the same functions as the paring knife.



Chef's knife: Also called a French knife, the chef's knife has an 8- to 14-inch triangular, pointed-tip blade and is used for chopping, trimming, slicing, and dicing. It's generally used when cutting large amounts of food.



- **Bread knife:** Bread knives have a long serrated blade, usually with a rounded tip. The serrated edge makes it easier to slice foods such as breads and cakes. Use a sawing motion when cutting with a serrated knife.

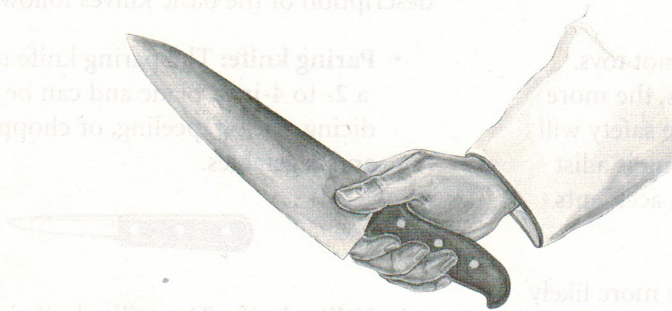


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Cutting Terms and Techniques

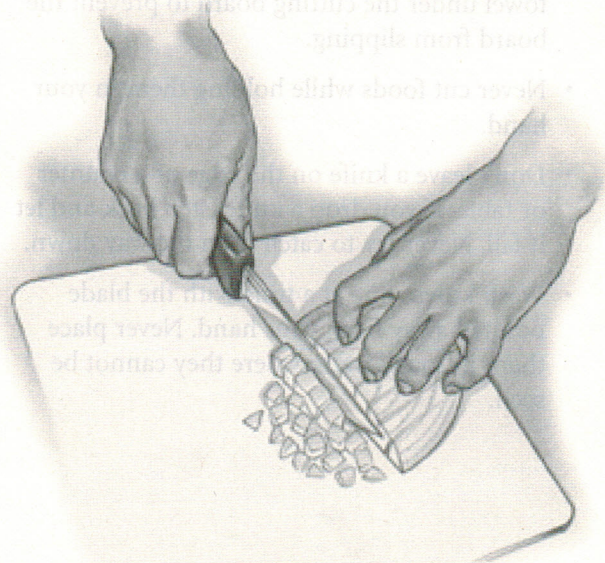
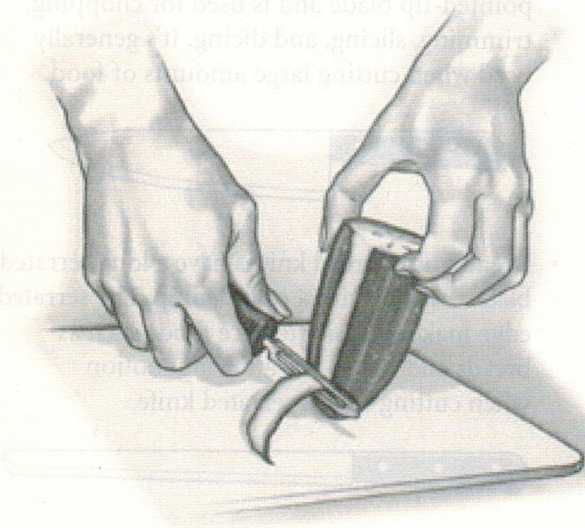
Always hold the handle of the knife securely when cutting food. Try to avoid placing your index finger over the blade. Always use smooth, even strokes and don't force the knife through the food. It is important to keep the sizes and shapes of the food uniform, so that they are attractive and cook evenly.

The basic knife-cutting motion is a fluid down-and-forward motion. For safety, it's best to guide the knife with one hand while firmly holding the food in place with the other hand. Use a "bear claw" position for the hand holding the food, curling your fingers under toward your palm.



- **Pare:** To pare a fruit or vegetable means to cut away the skin. Paring can be done with either a paring knife or a peeler. A peeler removes a thinner layer, leaving more of the vitamins that are concentrated just under the skin.

- **Chop and mince:** To chop food is to cut it into small, irregular pieces. The recipe may tell you what size pieces you need—coarse, medium, or fine. To mince is to chop food until the pieces are as small as you can make them. A food processor may also be used for chopping and mincing.



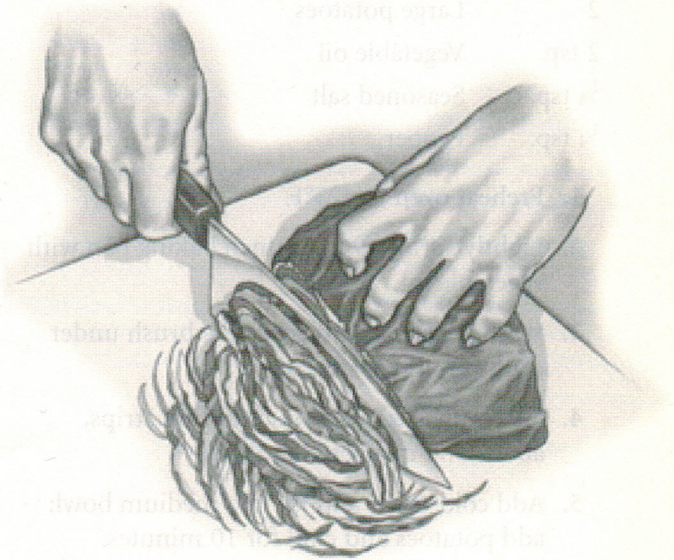
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Knife Skills (continued)

- **Slice:** A sharp knife and a cutting board are usually used to slice food. Steady the food with one hand or with a fork, and use the other hand to cut the food into thin, flat pieces. A food processor may be used to slice some foods.



- **Shred:** Foods such as lettuce and cabbage can be cut into shreds with a knife by placing them flat side down on a cutting board and shaving as close to the edge as possible.



- **Cube and dice:** To cube or dice foods, cut them in three directions. First, slice the food. Next, stack the slices, and cut them first in one direction and then the other. To cube, make the cuts about 1/2 inch apart. To dice, make the cuts about 1/4 inch apart, or as specified in the recipe.



Ideas to Try

- Use a potato to practice the basic knife-cutting techniques. Then cook the potatoes and create mashed potatoes with them.
- At home, select your favorite knife-cutting method and find a recipe in a cookbook or on the Internet that uses this skill.
- Research on the Internet the different types of knives and materials used to make them.
- Create an appetizer menu for a party and discuss the knives and techniques that will be utilized.

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