



The Chef's Knife: Your Edge in the Kitchen

The variety of cooking equipment available today can be overwhelming, but experienced cooks know that although it's fun to try different gadgets, it only takes a few essential items to prepare and cook delicious food. One of those items is a good chef's knife.

A chef's knife is the workhorse in the kitchen and if your budget only allows one major purchase, this is it. You can use it to chop, mince, slice and peel just about any food. Other knives, such as a 5-inch paring knife and a serrated utility knife allow you to do finer work and are great to have in your arsenal if you so desire.

The chef's knife blade can range from 5 inches to 14 inches in length and knives vary in price depending on shape, material and brand. Generally 8 or 10-inch blades are the most common and useful. Choose one that feels comfortable in your hand in terms of weight, balance and length. Most sales associates in cooking supply stores can help you choose one that's right for you.

The Anatomy of the Chef's Knife



Proper Grip

Holding your knife properly is key to using it easily. To get a proper grip, balance the knife handle across the palm of your hand. Then, wrap your lower three fingers around the handle, and then “pinch” the bolster (shown above) with your index finger and thumb. This position gives you the most control over the blade and prevents the knife from slipping out of your hand.



Proper Care

As you invest in your kitchen tools, taking care of them is important for a long life. Hand-wash your knives in warm, soapy water and rinse and dry thoroughly. Avoid soaking them as water can get underneath the handle, separating it from the blade. Dishwashers aren't friends to your knives either, as they can bang up and dull the blades (not to mention potentially damaging your appliance).



Chop, Slice and Dice

Learning how to chop, slice and dice your food will make food preparation simpler and easier. As you try the following techniques, be sure to hold your knife as explained above and go slowly. The more you practice, the quicker you'll become proficient in these techniques.

Chiffonade – a French term that translates to “made of rags.” This technique is used to cut the leaves of herbs, such as basil, or greens, such as lettuce into ribbon-like shapes. Stack the leaves on top of each other, roll lengthwise and then chop crosswise into thin strips.



Chop – to cut food into bite-size pieces. These pieces can be chunky or finely chopped depending on how they will be used in a recipe. Keeping food the same size helps it cook more evenly.

Dice – to cut into a block or cube shape of equal size, usually around ¼-inch square. There are different techniques for various foods, but basically, the food will first be cut (sliced) into strips and then cut crosswise to create the cube. To dice a potato for example, cut (slice) the potato in half lengthwise, then slice each half into strips of even sizes. Line up the strips and cut crosswise to create cubes.

Mince – see dice. Mince is a very small dice – usually 1/8 inch square or smaller.

Slice – the most basic cutting technique and the first motion you make before chopping or dicing. You can slice an item with a rocking back and forth motion. First, place the curved tip of the blade on the cutting board with the heel of the knife lifted. Place food underneath the tip of the blade, then bring the knife downward to the board, cutting into the food. Slide the knife from the front of the food to the back and then return the knife to the first position where the curved tip is against the board.