

Basic Kitchen Techniques

It is of paramount importance that all young chefs master the basic skills of the kitchen. These rudimentary skills are the building blocks of their future success, a measurement of their overall ability and will eventually lead to their status as a good or bad craftsman. When learning the basic skills, I have always found it more beneficial to work at them in stages “learn in steps.” This eliminates frustration and leads to more accurate and well defined skills.

Take the time to practice your skills often and try to utilize items that show skill in your dish creations. It not only gives you the opportunity to hone these skills, but the finished product looks so much more professional. I like to incorporate as many skills in to a menu as I can. This might seem heavy on labor cost but when your staff’s skills improve they will be able to complete the skills quite quickly.

There is always the argument that you might not need certain skills; for example: tournee vegetables, it’s amazing how many times I have seen that skill being used daily in industry. If you pick and choose the skills that you are going to learn then you are narrowing the field of opportunity for future employment and advancement. Nothing measures one chef against another like the skill level that they have. Insignificant as they may appear they all matter, so my advice is to learn them all and learn them well.

Knives and Sharpening Tools

French or Chef's Knife – An all-purpose knife used for chopping, slicing and mincing. Its rigid 8 to 14 inch long blade is wide at the heel and tapers to a point at the tip.

Utility Knife – An all-purpose knife used for cutting fruits and vegetables and carving poultry. Its rigid 6 to 8 inch long blade is shaped like a chef's knife but narrower.

Boning Knife – A smaller knife with a thin blade used to separate meat from bone. The blade is usually 5 to 7 inches long and may be flexible or rigid.

Paring Knife – A short knife used for detail work or cutting fruits and vegetables. The rigid blade is from 2 to 4 inches long. A tourné or **bird's beak knife** is similar to a paring knife but with a curved blade; it is used for cutting curved surfaces or tournéing vegetables.

Channeling Knife – Used to make grooves in vegetables and fruits but more especially citrus fruit.

Slicer – A knife with a long, thin blade used primarily for slicing cooked meat. The tip may be round or pointed and the blade may be flexible or rigid. A similar knife with a serrated edge is used for slicing bread or pastry items.

Butcher Knife – Sometimes known as a **scimitar** because the rigid blade curves up in a 25° angle at the tip, it is used for fabricating raw meat and is available with 6 to 14 inch blades.

Oyster and Clam Knives – The short, rigid blades of these knives are used to open oyster and clam shells. The tips are blunt; only the clam knife has a sharp edge.

Sharpening Stone – Also known as a **whetstone**, it is used to put an edge on a dull blade.

Steel – It is used to hone or straighten a blade immediately after and between sharpening.

Zesting Knife – Used to remove the zest of citrus fruit.

Selecting the Right Knife for the Correct Purpose

Specific tools have been designed for certain functions to be performed in the kitchen so that work can be done successfully. A basic set of tools could comprise:

1. vegetable peelerpeeling vegetables and fruit
2. vegetable knife 4" bladegeneral use, vegetables and fruit
3. filleting knife 6" blade (flexible)filleting fish
4. medium large knife 10" blade.....shredding, slicing, chopping
5. carving knife (in addition when and if needed)carving
6. boning knife (in addition when and if needed)butchery
7. palette knifespreading, turning items over and lifting
8. trussing needletrussing poultry and game
9. forklifting and holding joints of meat
10. steel.....sharpening knives

Having chosen the correct tool there are occasions when extra care needs to be taken.

1. When using a knife to cut side ways there is less control than when cutting downward, e.g. cross cuts when chopping onion or slicing long sandwich loaves lengthwise.
2. When shredding or chopping it is necessary to keep the fingertips and nails clear of the blade since they are not visible all the time. When chopping, keep the fingers on top of the blade.
3. Never bone out or fillet frozen meat or fish in the frozen state; however, when thawed the center may still be very cold and cause the fingertips to be numbed. Cuts are then more likely to occur.
4. When using a large knife use the thumb and first finger on the sides of the blade near the handle so as to control the sideways, as well as the downward, movement of the knife.
5. When using a trussing needle, take extra care when drawing the needle and string upwards towards the face.
6. When scoring pork rind take care that the surface being scored offers varying degrees of resistance, or it could cause the knife to go out of control.

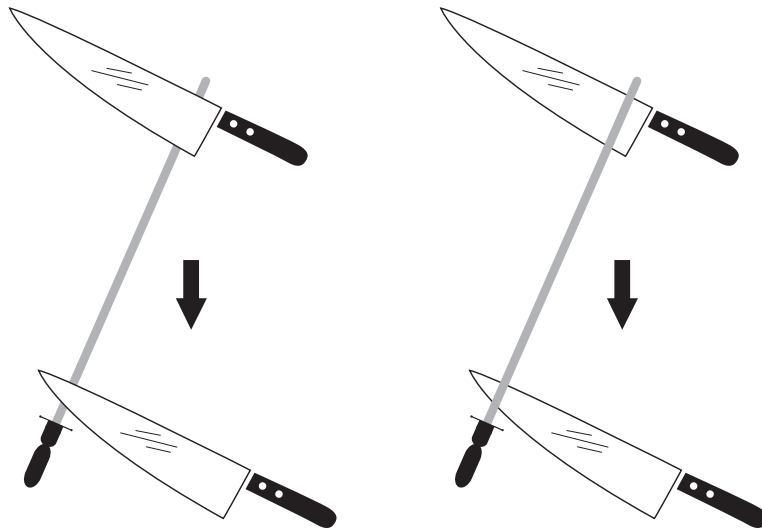
Sharpening

Two tools are available for sharpening knives, a steel, which should be well grooved, and a carborundum stone, which should not be too coarse as a saw edge may result. Periodically, knives will require being ground, which is usually done by a knife grinder.

When using a stone *always* draw the blade of the knife away from the hand holding the stone because few stones are provided with a guard. When using a steel, use one with a guard. Should you, however, have a steel with no guard *always* draw the knife being sharpened, away from you. When using a stone or a steel, angle the blade of the knife to 45° and sharpen alternate sides of the knife using considerable pressure and drawing almost the whole length of the blade edge along the stone or steel. Having used the stone always follow up by using the steel and then wipe the knife on a cloth before use. The reason for drawing the knife across at an angle is to produce an edge to the blade, and to obtain a sharp edge. It is necessary to apply both sides of the blade to the steel or stone. As the stone produces a rough edge it is necessary to follow with a steel to provide a smooth sharp edge. The knife must be wiped after using the stone since small particles of the stone will adhere to the blade.

The steel may be used in three ways. Whichever way is chosen, care must be taken to sharpen the knife safely.

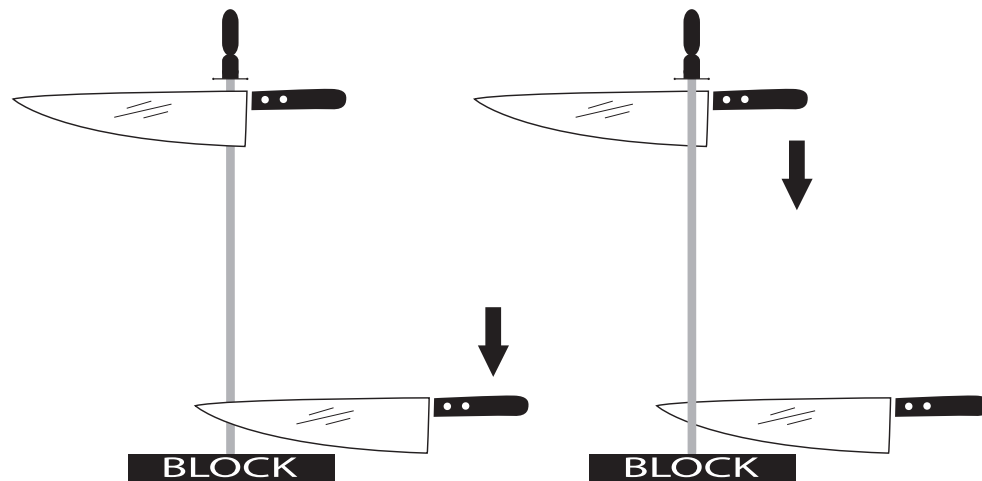
1. Holding the steel in one hand and the knife in the other (right-handed people will hold the knife in their right hand), draw the blade down the steel at an angle of 45° six or seven times on each side of the steel (thus both sides of the blade), exerting pressure. Before doing so, *check* that the steel has a guard. See below.



2. Holding the steel and knife as (1), draw the knife away from you towards the end of the steel at an angle of 45° six or seven times on each side of the steel (thus both sides of the blade), exerting pressure. See below.



3. Placing the pointed end of the steel on the wooden block or heavy board, draw the knife downward towards the block at an angle of 45° exerting pressure and making certain the steel does not slip. As with the two previous methods, both sides of the blade are drawn down the steel some six or seven times for each side. See below.



To test for the sharpness, the skin of a tomato is a good indicator. To retain sharpness always use a wooden surface or suitable cutting surface of a cutting board. Never cut on stainless steel. Clean knives during and after use, particularly after using on acidic items such as lemon. Stains on the blade can be cleaned with a fine cleaning powder or an abrasive pad.

Stainless steel knives for professional cooks are available which may need less sharpening as they retain their sharpness and, of course, do not stain.

It should be remembered that a good craftsman or craftswoman never blames their tools, since they always take care of them.

Blanching

To Whiten and Clean – Bringing slowly to the boil starting with cold water and removing impurities such as fat and blood. Normally done to bones when producing white stocks.

To Skin – Plunging into rapidly boiling water and then refreshing in iced water in order to loosen the skins of fruits and vegetables, for example tomatoes, grapes or peaches.

To Soften – Plunging into boiling water and then refreshing in iced water in order to soften or make pliable. Spinach can be done when it is being used to wrap something; leeks are done when using them for bouquet garni.

To Precook and Set Color – Plunging into lots of heavily salted boiling water. The quantity of water should be large enough so that when adding your vegetables the water does not lose the boil; this ensures maximum retention of color. Refresh then in iced water when desired doneness has been achieved. Fresh peas or beans for service, herbs when making herb oils.

To Remove Acidity and Bitterness – Bringing to the boil in milk several times in order to leach out some of the bitterness. When using whole garlic cloves as a garnish.


To Precook in Oil – Cooking without color in oil until almost fully cooked then cool until ready for service. Fry in hot oil to color and finish for service. When making fries with fresh potatoes or plantains.


Tomato Concasse


1. Remove the eye from the tomato with a sharp knife.
2. Score the top of the tomato several times.
3. Plunge the tomato into lots of boiling salted water for 8-10 seconds.
4. Refresh immediately in an ice bath.
5. Remove skin and all seeds.
6. Chop into an even medium dice.
7. Reserve for further use.

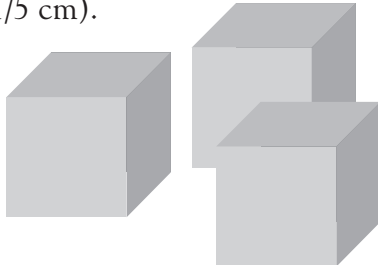
Chopping Garlic


1. Break the head of garlic into individual cloves with your hands. Lightly crush the cloves using the flat edge of a chef's knife or a mallet. They will break open and the peel can be separated easily from the garlic flesh.
2. With a flat hand, hold the knife's tip on the cutting board. Using a rocking motion, chop the garlic cloves to the desired size. Garlic is usually chopped very fine.
3. Garlic paste can be made by first finely chopping the garlic. Then, turning the knife on an angle and repeatedly dragging the edge of the knife along the cutting board, mashing the garlic. Salt can be added at this time as a preserving agent and a seasoning.

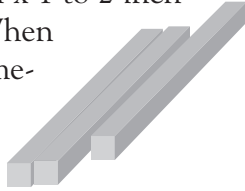
 **Brunoise** – A cube-shaped item with dimensions of 1/8 inch x 1/8 inch x 1/8 inch (3 mm x 3 mm x 3 mm).

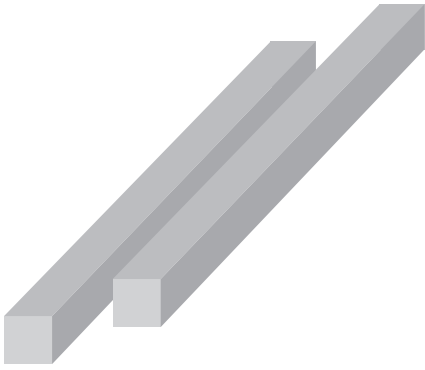
Small Dice – A cube-shaped item with dimensions of 1/4 inch x 1/4 inch x 1/4 inch (6 mm x 6 mm x 6 mm). 

Medium Dice – A cube-shaped item with dimensions of 3/8 inch x 3/8 inch x 3/8 inch (9 mm x 9 mm x 9 mm). 

Large Dice – A cube-shaped item with dimensions of 5/8 inch x 5/8 inch x 5/8 inch (1 1/5 cm x 1 1/5 cm x 1 1/5 cm). 

Paysanne – A flat, square-shaped item with dimensions of 1/2 inch x 1/2 inch x 1/4 inch (1.2 cm x 1.2 cm x 6 mm). 

Julienne – A flat, square-shaped item with dimensions of 1/8 inch x 1/8 inch x 1 to 2 inch (3 mm x 3 mm x 2.5 to 5 cm). When used with potatoes, this cut is sometimes referred to as an allumette. 

Batonnet – A stick-shaped item with dimensions of 1/4 inch x 1/4 inch x 2 to 2 1/2 inch (6 mm x 6 mm x 5 to 6 cm). 

Tourné – Tourné is a cutting technique that results in a football-shaped finished product with seven equal sides and blunt ends. The size of the finished product may vary, the most common being 2 inches (5 cm) long.

Pepper and Chile Preparation

Precautions on Handling Hot Chilies:

First and foremost, take care when handling all chilies. The oils found in the seeds and veins can cause skin irritation or severe burning—often delayed in its action. When handling fresh chilies (especially the hot ones such as Jalapeno and Serrano), either wear gloves or generously oil your hands. If, by chance, you are exposed to the hot veins or oils, rub the area with sugar to neutralize. Soap and water are useless at this point.

Roasting and Peeling Fresh Chilies:

Fresh chilies are roasted and peeled to enhance flavor and remove tough outer skins. (The small chile Serrano and chile Jalapeno are exception and are roasted and peeled only if added to a cooked sauce.) Removing seeds and veins from chilies is optional and will tone down the “hotness.”

To roast fresh chilies, red or green bell peppers, first make a slit in the chile to avoid impromptu “explosions” during the roasting process. Then proceed using one of the following methods:

1. Spear with a long-handled fork and place over the flame of a gas or electric stove.
2. Set, 3 or 4 at a time, on a cake rack over an electric burner on medium to medium high heat.
3. Place on a cookie sheet and set under a preheated broiler 4-6 inches from the heat source.

Chilies are roasted when the skins are blistered and charred—even blackened in some places. Take care, however, not to deeply burn the skin or you may damage the flesh and make the chile bitter. Watch closely and turn until all sides are roasted.

Immediately place the roasted chilies in plastic bags and set in the freezer for about 10 minutes to stop the cooking process and “steam” off the skins. For most uses, the stems should also be removed by pulling outward. This removes some of the seeds in the process. Scrape away any remaining seeds and veins if desired. For Chilies Rellenos or Stuffed Chilies, leave stems intact and use scissors to increase the original slit to allow for the filling. Remove as many seeds as possible, taking special care not to tear the flesh. Some chilies tear easily, so it is sometimes easier to leave the seeds in close to the stem, advising guests of their presence.

Roasting and Skinning a Pepper:

1. Place the pepper over an open flame until the skin blisters and chars slightly.
2. Wrap in plastic and refresh in an ice bath.
3. Remove skin by scraping with a sharp knife.

Important Guidelines:

- Do not over-char your pepper. This will create bitterness.
- Always wrap the pepper well, completely watertight, when refreshing. You will lose some of the flavor from the pepper in the water.
- Scrape your pepper. Don't ever wash it, as you'll wash away all the flavor.

Basic Flavorings for Stocks, Sauces, and Soups

In his work the chef uses many seasonings; these various aromatics, spices, and herbs are specified in all the recipes, but there are a few basic, composed flavorings used so frequently in savory liquors that it is convenient to list them here.

1. Bouquet Garni

- 1 sprig thyme
- 1 bay leaf
- 12 oz. parsley stalk
- 2 pieces green leek
- 1 piece celery

1. Bunch together the thyme, bay leaf, celery and parsley stalk.
2. Wrap the green of leek around the bundle and tie with fine string.

Used for stocks, soups, sauces, and entrees

2. Mirepoix

- 1/2 lb. carrots
- 1 bay leaf
- 1/2 lb. celery
- 1 sprig thyme
- 1/4 lb. onions
- 2 oz. diced fat pork

1. Cut all vegetables into medium dice.
2. Fry off pork to extract fat.
3. Add the vegetables and herbs.
4. Cook to a light golden color.

Used in soups, sauces, stews and for braising.

3. Matignon (for large joints)

- 1/2 lb. carrots
- 1 bay leaf
- 1/2 lb. celery
- 1 sprig
- 3 large onions
- 6 crushed peppercorns

1. Cut the vegetables in large thick slices.
2. Place under large joints.

Used in roasting, poele, and the subsequent flavoring of jus or sauce.

4. Mirepoix Bordelaise

- 1/2 lb. carrots
- 1 oz. raw, lean ham
- 1 sprig thyme
- 1/2 lb. white celery
- 1 oz. butter
- 1/2 lb. onions
- 1 bay-leaf

1. Dice the vegetables as brunoise.
2. Stew the raw ham and butter.
3. Add the vegetables and herbs and continue to sweat until soft.

Used for chicken, game, etc., and for subsequent flavoring of jus (gravy) or sauce.

5. Oignon Cloute (or Pique) Studded Onion

- 1 large onion
- 4 cloves
- 1 bay leaf

1. Stud the peeled onion with the spices, impaling the bay leaf to the onion with cloves.

Used generally; e.g., for infusing in milk or other liquors for sauces, particularly white sauces.

Roasting of Spices

The flavor of most spices can be enhanced greatly by roasting. This can be done by dry roasting over even heat in a pan or by sprinkling the spices on a dry tray and roasting slowly in a moderate oven. As well as improving flavor, this makes the spices more brittle and therefore easier to grind. Store in an airtight container until ready for grinding.

Sweet	Mild	Medium	Strong
	Fenugreek Ginger Green Cardamom	Cinnamon Aniseed Black Cardamom	Clove Star Anise Allspice Caraway Nutmeg
Savory	Mild	Medium	Strong
	Fennel Seeds Cumin Coriander Turmeric Mustard Seeds Paprika	Green Peppercorn Mace Black/Yellow Mustard Seeds Onion Seeds	Juniper Black Pepper White Pepper Bay Leaf Chili Red Pepper

When making spice mixes, take care to use a selection of strengths and flavors so as not to have one spice overpower the others.

Chopping Parsley

1. Wash the parsley well under cold water, shake dry ensuring all water has been removed.
2. Remove the parsley sprigs from the stems. Reserve stems for fish stock or bouquet garni.
3. Gather the parsley into a tight ball and chop fine.
4. Place the parsley in a clear towel or double layer of cheesecloth. Rinse it under cold water by wrapping the opening of the cloth around the tap and running the tap. Squeeze out as much water as possible during the process, and when you turn the tap off, try to get the parsley as dry as possible.
5. Remove from the cloth. The parsley should be dry and fluffy. Reserve for service.

Chiffonade

Chiffonade is a preparation of very finely sliced or shredded leafy vegetables or herbs.

1. Wash leaves very well shaking dry without damaging them. Remove stems.
2. Roll leaves together into a cigar shape.
3. Make very fine slices across the roll while holding very tightly with your other hand.
4. Chiffonade can be used as garnish or sockle.

Mise en Place—“Everything in its place”

Having all ingredients, equipment and staffing in the correct place at the correct time to complete an individual dish or busy service time is of paramount importance to the success of a restaurant. The term “Mise en Place” is constantly used in the kitchen and should be understood by all young chefs. You must always check your mise en place well as one missing ingredient or piece of equipment can lead to major problems.

Sockle

An edible food item that is used to elevate other food items.