

Parts of a Knife



A: Point - The very end of the knife, which is used for piercing

B: Tip - The first third of the blade (approximately), which is used for small or delicate work

C: Edge - The cutting surface of the knife, which extends from the point to the heel

D: Heel - The rear part of the blade, used for cutting activities that require more force

E: Spine - The top, thicker portion of the blade, which adds weight and strength

F: Bolster - The thick metal portion joining the handle and the blade, which adds weight and balance and keeps the cook's hand from slipping

G: Finger Guard - The portion of the bolster that keeps the cook's hand from slipping onto the blade

H: Return - The point where the heel meets the bolster

J: Tang - The portion of the metal blade that extends into the handle, giving the knife stability and extra weight

K: Scales - The two portions of handle material (wood, plastic, composite, etc) that are attached to either side of the tang

L: Rivets - The metal pins (usually 3) that hold the scales to the tang

M: Handle Guard - The lip below the butt of the handle, which gives the knife a better grip and prevents slipping

N: Butt - The terminal end of the handle

How to Sharpen a Knife

A knife is useless if it is not sharp. You can tell if your knife is sharp if it can cut a soft ripe tomato into thin slices with ease. If the knife is dull, it will just crush the tomato.

If you looked at the cutting edge of a knife through a magnifying glass, you'd see that it is made up of hundreds of tiny teeth-like a saw. Through repeated use, these teeth get twisted and bent out of alignment. This is what makes a knife dull; a sharpener gets these little teeth back into alignment.

The harder the metal the knife is made of, the harder it will be to sharpen, but the longer it will hold its edge. A sharpener has to be made of a material that's a shade harder than the metal it is to abrade. (The hardness of metals is measured on the "Rockwell Scale.")

"Steels" are metal sharpeners. They have a fine grain and give a super finish to an already sharp knife. Butchers and professional cooks use a steel constantly, giving the knife a few strokes before each use. A ceramic sharpener is better than a steel for sharpening hard metals such as stainless steel. (Ceramic is harder than the hardest metal on the Rockwell Scale.)

Eventually, repeated sharpening wears away the little teeth of the cutting edge. At this point the knife needs to be ground to thin the blade into a new cutting edge. This is

done with an abrasive stone.

Using a Ceramic Sharpener

1. Start with the heel of the blade at the tip of the sharpener and slide the knife down the length of the sharpener so the cutting edge abrades against it. Apply steady and strong pressure. Keep the knife at the same angle constantly.



2. End with the point of the blade near the base of the sharpener. This is one steady stroke, one hand moving toward the other, every inch of the cutting edge making contact with the sharpener. Repeat on the other side of the sharpener to sharpen the other side of the knife.



Using a Steel Sharpener

3. When using a steel sharpener to sharpen high-carbon-steel knife, start with the heel of the blade at the base of the steel and pull the hands away from one another, finishing with the tip of the sharpener at the tip of the blade. Make sure that the whole blade gets worked against the sharpener. Keep the angle about 25 degrees and the pressure the same.

Using a Grinding Stone

4. Once a year, twice a year, once every two years—depending on the kind of beating your knives get—you will need to grind them down to form a new cutting edge. You can send your knives out and have them ground by a professional or you can do it yourself if you have a sand wheel or a large stone like the one pictured here. This stone is held in place by suction so that you can apply a lot of pressure without having it slide around the way smaller stones do. It has three sides, each of a different coarseness. You begin with the coarsest side and finish with the finest.



5. Rub some mineral oil on the stone to keep stone grindings loose so they can be wiped off with paper and don't seal and glaze the surface of the stone, which would prevent abrasion. Start at the tip of the knife and apply strong pressure down and forward so that the whole side of the blade is in contact with the stone. Move back and forth, applying pressure. Keep the angle constant. Repeat on the other side. As the knife gets sharper and thinner at the end, go to a finer stone. When you are through clean your knife. Keep it sharp with a steel.



Honing Knives: Tips and Techniques

Knife sharpening grinds the blade while honing is done to keep the edge of the knife straight. Unlike sharpening, which removes material **and actually sharpens the blade, honing is more of a "fine tuning" of the blade and should be done often.**

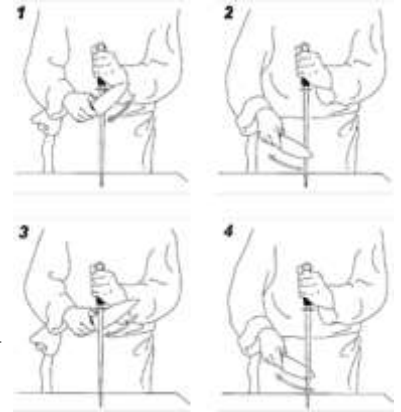
Here is our recommendation on how to steel your blade: Hold the sharpening steel handle side up and rest the tip on a counter. Hold your knife as you would to carve a turkey and slice against the steel at a 20 degree angle making sure to apply even but light pressure as you sweep across the entire blade surface on your way down toward the counter.

Repeat on the other side of the blade and alternate on each side

several times.

Don't grind hard against the steel or slap the blade against it. Listen for a light ringing sound as the blade moves across the steel.

At a certain point, honing the blade will become ineffective as the blade edge degrades from use (usually several months). At this point it should be sharpened using a sharpening stone or other sharpening tool.



How To Hold a Knife

Handling your knife properly is your first concern.

1. Hold the item to be cut with your fingertips tucked under and your thumb behind them.
2. The blade "rests" and slides directly against the middle section of your fingers.
3. As you chop, the knife follows, in fact, "glued" to the fingers, and it slides up and down the fingers at the same rate all the time.
4. The speed at which the fingers move back determines the thickness of the slices.



Setting Up Your Cutting Board

There is nothing more dangerous or frustrating than a cutting board that is not stable.

1. Lightly dampen a kitchen towel and spread it out on the counter top where you will place your cutting board.
2. Position your cutting board on top of the damp towel. This will prevent the board from sliding.

Basic Knife Cuts

Paysanne: $1/2'' \times 1/2'' \times 1/8''$

Large Dice: $3/4''$ square

Medium Dice: $1/3''$ square

Small Dice: $1/4''$ square

Brunoise: $1/8''$ square

Batonnet: $1/4'' \times 1/4'' \times 2''$

Julienne/Allumette*: $1/8'' \times 1/8'' \times 2''$, or basically cut like a wooden match stick.

Fine Julienne: $1/16'' \times 1/16'' \times 2''$

Chiffonade: Herbs or leafy greens cut into long thin strips

Oblique/Roll Cut: Perpendicular cut, with a $1/4$ turn between each cut

Tourne: Vegetables that are cut to resemble a small, slightly tapered cork, but instead of being smooth it is cut to have 7 equally large facets.

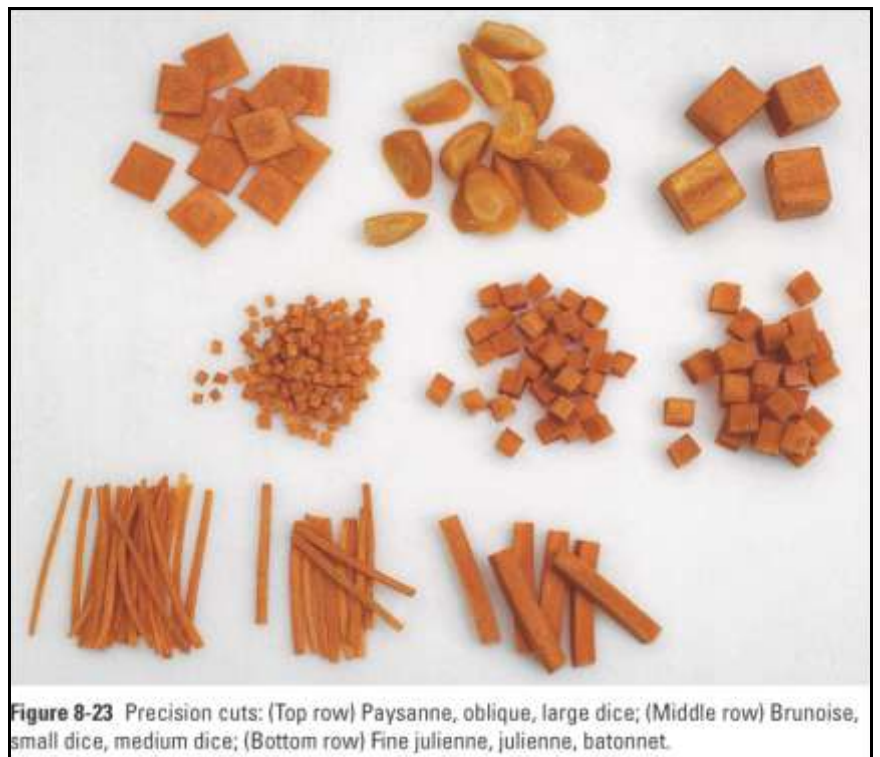


Figure 8-23 Precision cuts: (Top row) Paysanne, oblique, large dice; (Middle row) Brunoise, small dice, medium dice; (Bottom row) Fine julienne, julienne, batonnet.

*only potatoes