



# Knives and Cutting Boards

## Choosing a Knife:

Once you've learned the basics of using a knife safely, let's talk about which knives to use. It's generally easiest to find good quality knives at department stores, restaurant supply stores, and online at stores like *amazon.com*. Expensive isn't always better! The most important things about a good knife is that it is...

- Comfortable in your hand
- Easy for YOU to use
- Sharp, and likely to stay that way

To get comfortable with a basic knife, I recommend that you purchase an inexpensive, serrated utility knife. A large serrated knife can cut up watermelon or partly frozen chicken breasts. It slices bread very well and can be used to chop up veggies for soup. The ones I had when I was a pastry chef cut up a lot of 10-pound blocks of chocolate and countless cases of apples for strudels. A large serrated knife stays sharp and you don't have to feel like you are ruining your finest chef's knife, which is best saved for more delicate operations like finely dicing or mincing vegetables and cutting lettuce for salads.

Once you're happy with your ability to use that knife, you can make an investment in better or bigger knives. I have used all of the major brands like *Forschner*, *Henkels*, and *Wusthof*, along with fancy Japanese brands and cheaper options like

*Chicago Cutlery*. Honestly, I think *Forschner* offers the most value for the money. Plus those knives are easy to sharpen and keep sharp. *Wusthof* knives stay sharpest the longest and feel great while you're using them, but they're definitely the most expensive. *Henkels* have a very heavy but balanced feel, though I always have trouble keeping my *Henkel* knives sharp when I'm using them a lot. *Chicago cutlery* is very inexpensive and easy to wash, but getting and keeping the knives sharp is a real struggle.

## A Note About Knife Maintenance:

I always marvel when I visit friends' houses and find that they don't have decent knives (man, I hope they're not reading this!). The ones they do have are typically hard to find and harder still to use. It is absolute torture for me to cut something up on a small cutting board with a scary, small, dull knife. Don't let this happen to you!

I wasn't kidding when I said that sharp knives are safe knives. Keep yours sharp! A sharpening steel (a.k.a. a knife steel) can help you keep a straight-edged knife sharp in between professional sharpenings. To use it, hold the steel in your non-dominant hand, with the tip pointing down and touching the cutting board. Place the knife across the steel, forming a cross shape with the point facing away from you.



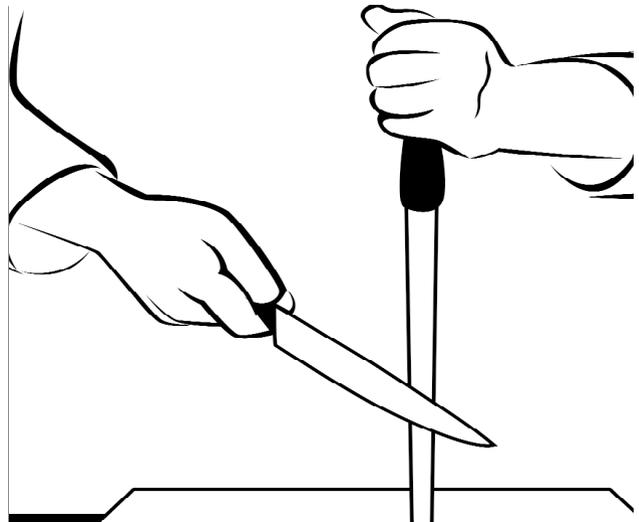
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Position the knife so that the place where the blade meets the handle is against the steel, with the rest of the knife sticking out away from you. Now arrange the knife's edge at a 22.5 degree angle to the steel and draw the knife towards you (handle first). Do this about 10 times on each side, carefully wiping off the knife when you're done.

For a more involved sharpening, I recommend that you find a reputable knife sharpening place that will use a machine to restore a fine edge to your knives. Do this sparingly.

## Choosing a Cutting Board:

The mate to a good knife is a good cutting board. There's a lot of talk in the culinary community about whether wood or plastic boards are better. Personally, I



choose plastic boards because they are easier to keep clean. I have a generous amount of white, non-slip cutting boards in my cabinet, and I bet that I use at least 2-3 per day. With that said, I do have a large wooden cutting board that I use to roll pizza dough. Often, I place a plastic cutting board on top of it for everyday use, giving me the best of both worlds.

It's very important to keep raw meats separate from all other foods while you're preparing a meal. It is a good idea to have a few designated "meat only" cutting boards handy so that you don't feel forced to mix meat that is going to be cooked with vegetables that are not going to be cooked. Using utensils that touched raw meat on foods that aren't going to be cooked is a recipe for food poisoning. It's also why having a whole bunch of cutting boards is a great idea.