

COOKING SKILLS

Cooking Skills: Knife Skills 1

Choosing and holding a knife, onions, herbs, vegetable cuts, fruit, hard vegetables, meat, fish, bread and cheese, with diagrams.

9 Chapters | Philip Osztromok | Generated with Claude

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Cooking Skills: Knife Skills 1

Chapter 1 · Knives, Grip and Safety

SKILL GOAL

Choose, hold, steady and sharpen a knife, and make your first safe cuts.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

A good cook's most-used tool is a knife. You don't need a drawer of them: **three knives** do nearly everything. What matters more is how you hold the knife, how you steady the board, and how sharp the edge is.

The three knives worth having

KNIFE	BLADE LENGTH	USED FOR
Chef's knife	18 to 20 cm	Almost everything: chopping, slicing, dicing, herbs, meat
Paring knife	8 to 10 cm	Small work in the hand: peeling, trimming, hulling strawberries, deveining prawns
Serrated (bread) knife	20 to 23 cm	Bread, tomatoes, citrus, cakes, anything with a tough skin and a soft middle

A decent knife of each kind can cost from about £20 to £80; very expensive knives are not necessary to cook well. Look for a knife that feels **balanced and comfortable** in your hand (go and hold some), a blade that runs the full length of the handle (a 'full tang'), and steel that takes a good edge. Avoid sets with a dozen knives in a block, as most are never used. A Japanese santoku or gyuto can stand in for a chef's knife, and a nakiri is a vegetable-chopping specialist.

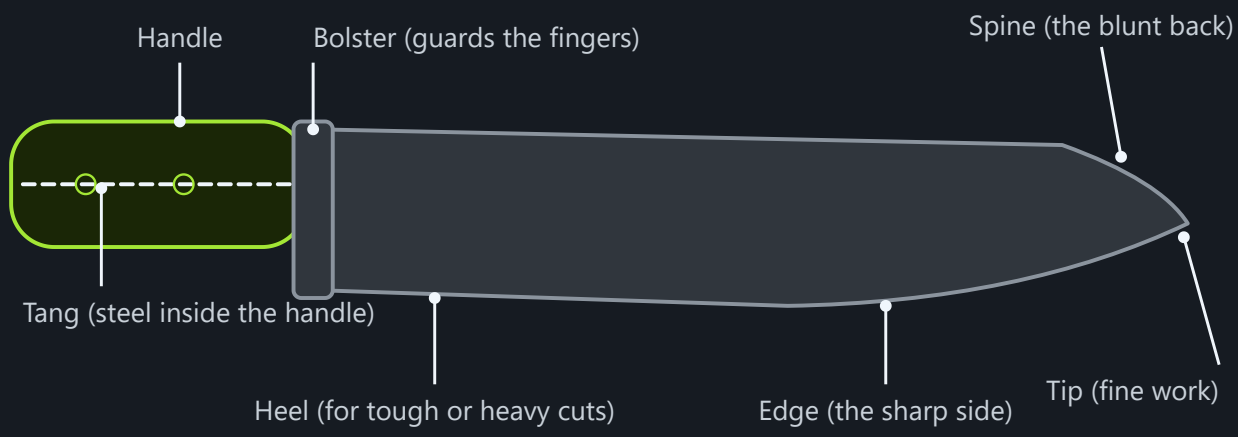


Figure 1. The parts of a chef's knife. Most of the work is done by the middle of the edge; the tip is for fine work and the heel for tough cuts.

Holding the knife: the pinch grip

The best control comes from holding the **blade** as well as the handle. Pinch the blade just in front of the bolster between your thumb and the side of your forefinger, and wrap the other three fingers round the handle. This feels odd at first, as most people grip the handle only, but it gives far more control.

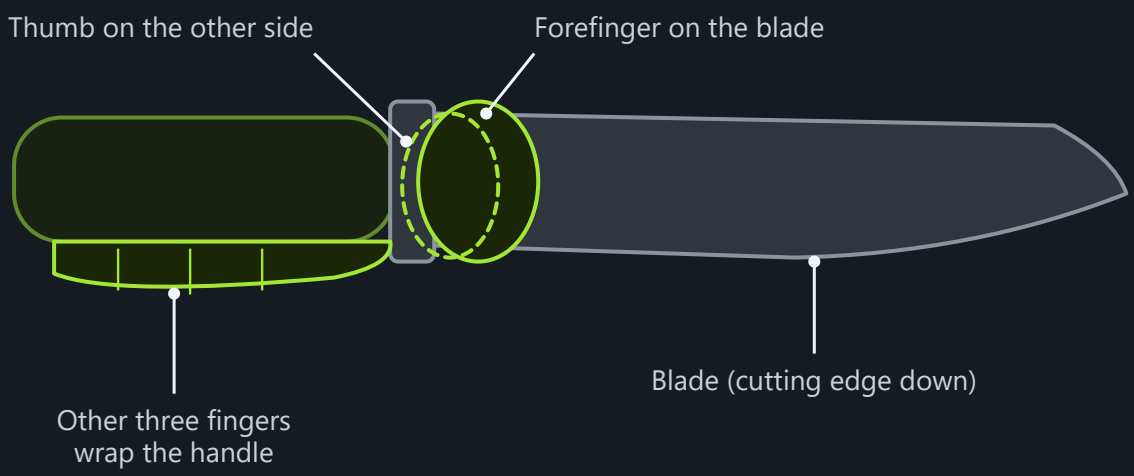


Figure 2. The pinch grip: the thumb and forefinger pinch the blade just in front of the handle, with the other three fingers round the handle.

Steadying the food: the claw

Your other hand holds the food. Curl your fingertips back, like a claw, with your thumb tucked behind. The **flat of the blade rests against your knuckles**, and the knuckles, not the fingertips,

are what the blade runs along. With your fingertips tucked away, the blade can't reach them.

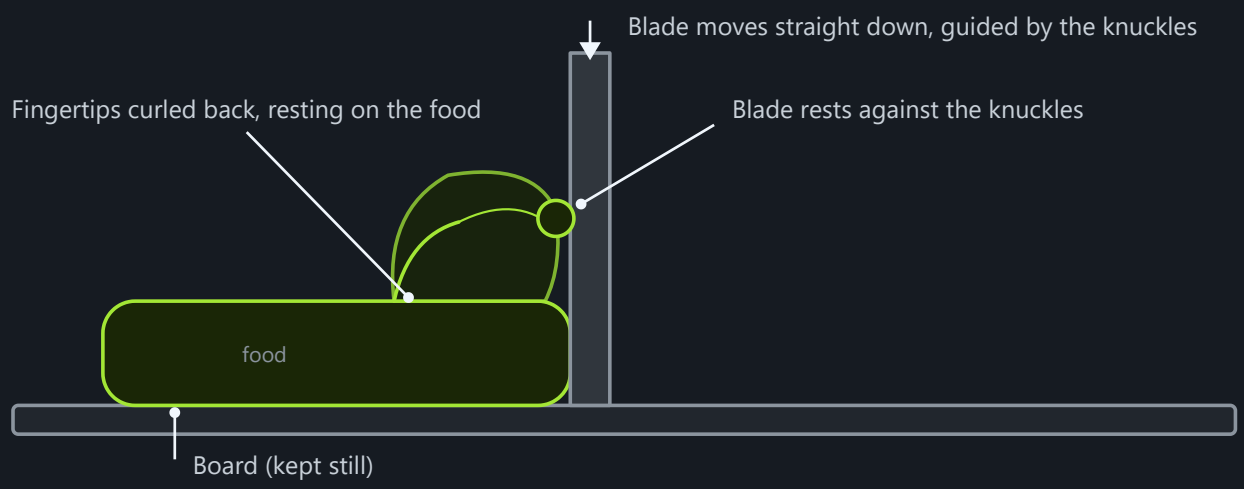


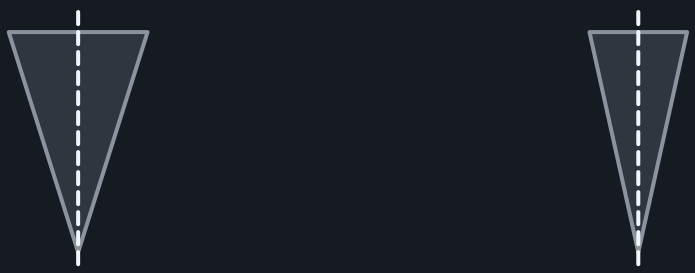
Figure 3. The claw grip: your guiding hand curls into a claw, so the knuckles (not the fingertips) are what the blade runs along.

- **Move your claw back** a little after each slice (about the thickness of the slice).
- **Make the food stable first.** Cut a thin slice off a round vegetable and lay it on that flat side, so it can't roll.
- **Use a push-slice,** not a chop straight down: the blade moves forwards and down at the same time, using the whole length of the edge.
- **Keep the tip on the board** for the rocking motion used for herbs (chapter 3).

Keeping it sharp

A blunt knife is dangerous because it needs force, and slips. There are two different jobs: **honing** and **sharpening**.

JOB	WHAT IT DOES	HOW	HOW OFTEN
Honing	Straightens the edge, which bends microscopically with use. Removes almost no metal.	A honing steel (or a ceramic rod) at the knife's angle, a few light strokes each side	Every use, or every few uses
Sharpening	Grinds a new edge by removing a little metal	A whetstone (best), or a pull-through sharpener (quick, takes more metal)	A few times a year, or when honing no longer works



Western-style knife
about 15 to 20 degrees each side

Many Japanese knives
about 10 to 15 degrees each side

Cross-section of the edge. Thinner and harder means sharper, but more delicate.

Figure 4. A thinner edge cuts more easily but is more delicate, which is why different knives are sharpened and looked after differently.

IF YOU HAVE JAPANESE KNIVES

Japanese knives usually have harder, thinner steel at a narrower angle. They hold an edge longer and cut beautifully, but the hard steel is more brittle: **don't twist them, don't use them on bones or frozen food, and don't use a conventional steel honing rod on them** (it can chip the edge). Many makers recommend a fine whetstone, or a fine ceramic rod used very lightly. Check your maker's care guidance.

Boards and keeping still

- **Wood or plastic** boards are kind to the edge. Avoid glass and stone, which dull a knife at once.
- **The board must not move.** Put a damp cloth or a sheet of damp kitchen paper under it.
- **Big enough** to hold the food and the pieces you cut.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Cucumber and carrot sticks with yoghurt dip

20 minutes | 2 portions | the first cuts: coins, planks, sticks

Two soft, easy vegetables and the simplest cuts. The dip takes 2 minutes, so most of the time is practice.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

1	cucumber (about 300 g)
2	medium carrots, peeled
150 g	plain yoghurt
1 tbsp	chopped mint or chives (optional)
½	lemon, juice only
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Set a damp cloth under the board. Hold the cucumber with your claw hand and cut off both ends, then slice it into **5 mm coins**, letting the blade run along your knuckles.
2. Stack a few coins and cut them into sticks if you like. Or cut the rest of the cucumber lengthways into planks, then into sticks.
3. Cut the carrots in half, and lay each half on its **flat cut side** so it can't roll. Slice into 5 mm planks, then stack and cut into sticks.
4. Mix the yoghurt with the lemon juice, herbs and seasoning. Serve with the sticks.

> **SLOW IS SMOOTH**
>
> Go slowly. Speed comes from practice, and an even cut matters more than a fast one.

LEVEL 1 · PRACTICE

Cucumber, radish and spring onion salad

15 minutes | 1 portion | thin slices of three different shapes

Three small, round or long vegetables, each cut differently: thin coins, fine slices of a radish, and spring onion cut into rings.

INGREDIENTS (1 PORTION)

½	cucumber
4	radishes
2	spring onions
1 handful	salad leaves
1 tbsp	olive oil
1 tsp	lemon juice or vinegar
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Slice the cucumber and radishes as thin as you can with a smooth **push-slice** action (the blade moves forwards and down, not straight down).
2. Trim the spring onion roots and dark green tops. Slice the rest into thin rings, or on the diagonal.
3. Toss everything with the leaves, oil, lemon juice and seasoning.

LEVEL 2 · DICING

Tomato and cucumber salsa

25 minutes | 2 portions | your first dice

Cutting the same size cube from three different shapes is the first real test. Tomatoes slip, so cut them with a sharp knife.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	ripe tomatoes (about 250 g)
½	cucumber
½	small red onion
1 tbsp	chopped coriander or parsley
1 tbsp	lime or lemon juice
1 pinch	salt

1. **Tomatoes:** cut out the green core, halve them, and place cut-side down. Slice into strips about 8 mm wide, then turn and cut across into **8 mm dice**.
2. **Cucumber:** cut into planks 8 mm thick, then sticks, then dice.
3. **Onion:** dice as finely as you can manage (chapter 2 teaches this properly), or slice thin and chop roughly.
4. Mix everything with the herbs, juice and salt. Let it stand for 5 minutes.

LEVEL 2 · SHRED

Coleslaw

25 minutes | 2 to 3 portions | shredding, a new cut

Shredding cabbage thin is a skill in itself: cut a flat face first, then slice across the wedge. Don't use a grater: the knife cuts are crisper.

INGREDIENTS (3 PORTIONS)

150 g	white or red cabbage, cored
1	medium carrot, peeled
½	small red onion or 2 spring onions
3 tbsp	plain yoghurt
1 tbsp	mayonnaise (optional)
1 tsp	lemon juice or cider vinegar
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Cut the cabbage into 2 or 3 wedges through the core. Lay a wedge on its flat side and slice it very thinly across, as thin as you can. Cut out any thick core pieces.
2. Cut the carrot into thin planks, then stack and cut into **thin matchsticks** (about 3 mm).
3. Slice the onion thinly. Mix with the cabbage and carrot.
4. Stir in the yoghurt, mayonnaise, lemon juice and seasoning. Chill for 20 minutes before serving.

> **MANDOLIN**
>
> A mandolin makes the cabbage faster but is a common cause of injuries. Always use the guard (see the safety box).

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Pinch grip or handle grip

Feel the difference in control.

1. Slice a cucumber with a handle-only grip (all four fingers round the handle), concentrating on the evenness of the slices.
2. Then slice another using the pinch grip. Compare the evenness and how steady the blade feels.

Look for: With the pinch grip the blade is steadier, so the slices are more even and the cut goes where you aim it.

EXPERIMENT

Practise the claw with a blunt knife

Learn it safely first.

1. Practise slicing a cucumber with a butter knife and the claw, until tucking your fingers back is automatic.
2. Then repeat with the chef's knife, slowly.

Look for: A safe way to build the habit. Notice how the knuckles guide the blade, and how the fingertips are never in its path.

EXPERIMENT

Damp cloth or not

Does the board stay still?

1. Without a knife: put a dry board on a dry worktop and push it sideways with one hand. Then slide a damp cloth under it and push again.
2. Compare how far it slides.

Look for: A dry board slides easily; a board on a damp cloth stays put. It's the cheapest safety measure in the kitchen.

EXPERIMENT

Sharp or blunt, on a tomato

Why sharp is safer.

1. Cut one tomato with your sharp chef's knife and one with a blunt knife or a butter knife (carefully).
2. Compare the slices and how much force you need.

Look for: The sharp knife slices through the skin cleanly with little pressure. The blunt knife squashes the tomato and needs force. Force is what leads to slips.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Cucumber and carrot sticks				
Cucumber, radish and spring onion salad				
Tomato and cucumber salsa				
Coleslaw				
Pinch vs handle grip				
Blunt-knife claw practice				
Damp cloth				
Sharp vs blunt tomato				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Uneven slices	Fast cutting or unsteady grip	Slow down; use the pinch grip

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Food rolls	Round surface	Cut a thin slice off and lay it flat
Knife slips on skin	Blunt knife	Hone, or sharpen
Board slides	Dry worktop	Put a damp cloth under it
Fingers feel at risk	Not tucking the claw	Tuck the fingertips back; use a cut-resistant glove
Tomatoes squash	Blunt knife, or too much pressure	Use a sharp or serrated knife; slice gently

FOOD AND KNIFE SAFETY

Knife safety: a sharp knife is safer than a blunt one, because it needs less force and slips less. Always cut on a stable board (put a damp cloth underneath), tuck your guiding fingertips back (the claw), carry a knife with the point down and the edge away from you, and **never try to catch a falling knife**: step back and let it fall. Wash knives by hand and dry them at once; never leave one in a sink of water where you can't see it. Store them in a block, on a magnetic strip or in guards, not loose in a drawer. A cut-resistant glove on your guiding hand is a sensible aid while you learn. If you cut yourself, apply firm pressure with a clean cloth, and get medical help for a deep cut or one that won't stop bleeding.

Hygiene: wash your hands, boards and knives in hot soapy water after handling raw meat, fish or eggs, and don't use the same board for raw meat and for food that won't be cooked. Wash fruit, vegetables and herbs that you eat raw.

Leftovers: cool cooked food quickly (within 1 to 2 hours), keep it covered in the fridge, and eat it within **2 days**. Reheat until steaming hot all the way through, and only once.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I know the three knives worth having.
- ☐ I can hold a knife with the pinch grip.
- ☐ I can steady food with the claw.
- ☐ I know the difference between honing and sharpening.
- ☐ I can keep my board still.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Knife Skills 1, chapter 2 is Onions, Garlic and Alliums: dicing an onion and crushing garlic.

Cooking Skills: Knife Skills 1

Chapter 2 · Onions, Garlic and Alliums

SKILL GOAL

Dice an onion, slice evenly, crush garlic and wash and cut leeks.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Onions, garlic, shallots, leeks and spring onions (the **alliums**) are the start of most savoury cooking. They are also the first thing most people have to learn to cut, and the one that makes them cry.

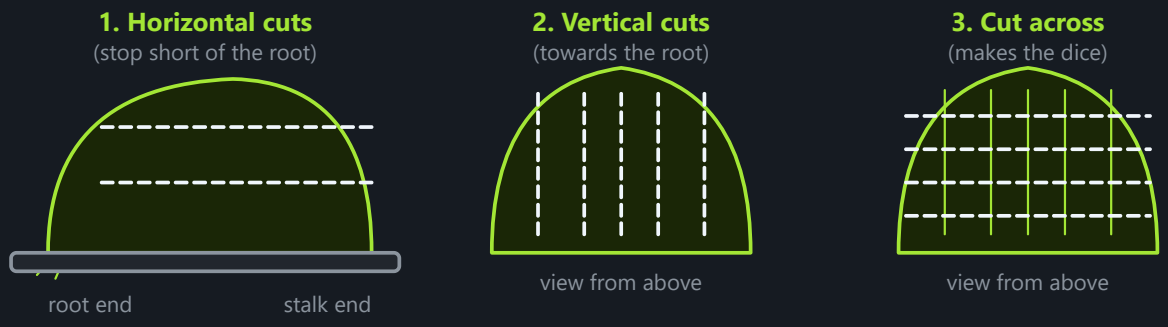


Figure 5. Dicing an onion. The root holds the layers together, so leave it on until the end.

Dicing an onion

1. **Halve** it through the root, from top to bottom. Cut off the stalk end, but **leave the root**: it holds the layers together.
2. **Peel** off the skin and outer layer, and lay a half flat side down.
3. **Horizontal cuts:** with the knife parallel to the board, make 1 to 3 cuts from the stalk end towards the root, stopping short of it. (Optional: for a fine dice, make two or three; for a rough dice, none.)

4. **Vertical cuts:** cut from top to bottom towards the root, with spacing as wide as you want the dice.
5. **Cut across** to make the dice. Throw away the root.

Garlic, shallots and leeks

FOOD	CUT	HOW
Garlic	Crush	Press the flat of the blade down on the clove; the skin slips off
Garlic	Slice or mince	Slice thin, then chop across; or rock the knife over a pile
Garlic	Paste	Mince with a pinch of salt, then press and drag the flat of the blade
Shallot	Dice	Like an onion, but smaller
Leek	Half-rings	Halve lengthways, wash between the layers, then slice across
Spring onion	Rings or diagonal	Trim the roots and tough tops, slice thin

- **Why onions make you cry:** cutting releases a gas that irritates the eyes. A sharp knife damages fewer cells, a cold onion releases less, and a good ventilated space helps. Chilling the onion for 20 minutes helps a little.
- **A sharp knife** is the best onion tool.
- **Garlic burns easily** when cooked: add it to the pan after the onions, for 30 to 60 seconds.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Quick pickled red onion

15 minutes plus 30 minutes standing | makes a small jar | thin slices; the blade does the work

A red onion sliced thin and soaked in vinegar goes bright pink and sharp-sweet. Even thin slices matter: thick pieces stay harsh.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

1	medium red onion
100 ml	cider or white wine vinegar
100 ml	water
1 tbsp	sugar
1 tsp	salt

1. Cut the onion in half from root to tip. Peel off the skin, and cut off the stalk end only (**leave the root**, which holds the layers together).
2. Lay each half flat side down and slice thinly from stalk to root, into half-moons about **2 mm thick**. Cut off the root at the end.
3. Warm the vinegar, water, sugar and salt in a small pan or microwave until the sugar dissolves. Pour over the onions in a jar and press them down.
4. Leave for at least 30 minutes. Keep in the fridge, covered, and use within a week.

LEVEL 1 · GARLIC

Garlic and herb dressing

10 minutes | makes about 100 ml | crush, mince and mash

Fresh garlic can be harsh raw. Crushing it with salt into a paste spreads it through the dressing evenly instead of leaving harsh lumps.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

2	garlic cloves
¼ tsp	salt
1	lemon, juice (about 3 tbsp)
4 tbsp	extra-virgin olive oil
2 tbsp	finely chopped parsley
1 tsp	Dijon mustard (optional)
1 pinch	black pepper

1. Lay the garlic cloves on the board and press down hard with the flat of a chef's knife until they crush. Peel off the skins, and chop the cloves finely.
2. Sprinkle over the salt. **Press and drag the flat of the knife** over the garlic repeatedly until it turns into a smooth paste.
3. Scrape into a bowl. Whisk in the lemon juice, mustard and pepper, then the oil, then stir in the parsley.

> **GARLIC IN OIL**
>
> Raw garlic kept in oil at room temperature can grow the bacteria that cause botulism. Make this dressing fresh, keep it in the fridge, and use it within 2 days.

LEVEL 2 · SLICE

Simple onion soup with cheese toast (no wine)

1 hour | 2 portions | a lot of even slices, then patience

Slice the onions thin and even, so they cook down at the same rate. The soup gets its flavour from slow, gentle softening.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

3	onions (about 450 g), halved and thinly sliced
1 tbsp	olive oil
15 g	butter
1 pinch	salt
1 tsp	thyme leaves
500 ml	hot beef or vegetable stock
2	slices of bread
40 g	Gruyère or Cheddar, grated

1. Halve and peel the onions. Slice each half into thin half-moons, **about 3 mm thick**, root to stalk. Cut away the root.
2. Heat the oil and butter in a wide pan over a low heat. Add the onions and salt and cook for **30 to 35 minutes**, stirring every few minutes, until soft, sweet and golden brown.
3. Add the thyme and stock, bring to the boil, then simmer for 10 minutes.
4. Toast the bread, top with the cheese and grill until bubbling. Ladle the soup into bowls and float the toast on top.

LEVEL 2 · LEEKS

Leek and spring onion frittata

30 minutes | 2 portions | washing and cutting leeks

Leeks hide grit between their layers, so they need washing as well as cutting. Cut the spring onions on the diagonal for a pretty finish.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

1	medium leek, trimmed
3	spring onions
1 tsp	olive oil
4	Lion-marked eggs
30 g	Cheddar, grated
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Trim the root and the tough dark green top off the leek. Cut it in half lengthways, **fan the layers under running water** to wash out any soil, and shake dry. Slice into thin half-rings, about 3 mm.
2. Slice the spring onions thinly on the diagonal. Keep a few for the top.
3. Soften the leek in the oil in an ovenproof frying pan for 5 to 6 minutes over a medium-low heat. Add the spring onions for 1 minute.
4. Beat the eggs with the cheese and seasoning. Pour over the vegetables and cook on a low heat for 4 to 5 minutes, until the edges are set. Finish under a hot grill for 2 to 3 minutes until set all the way through and lightly golden.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Root on or off

Why leave the root?

1. Dice one onion half with the root left on until the end. Cut the root off another half before dicing.
2. Compare how well the layers hold together.

Look for: With the root on, the layers stay together and cut into neat dice. Without it, the layers slide apart and the pieces go uneven.

EXPERIMENT

Chilled onion

Does it help the tears?

1. Chill one onion in the fridge for 20 minutes. Dice it and a room-temperature one, side by side.
2. Notice how much your eyes sting.

Look for: The chilled onion is usually less irritating, though the effect varies by person and onion.

EXPERIMENT

Fine or rough dice

How does the cut change the cooking?

1. Make two small pans of softened onion, one fine dice and one rough dice, cooked for the same time.
2. Compare how soft and how browned each is.

Look for: The fine dice cooks and browns faster and melts into a sauce. The rough dice stays in pieces and takes longer.

EXPERIMENT

Garlic crushed, minced or sliced

How does the cut change the taste?

1. Make three small spoonfuls of the dressing with garlic that is crushed to a paste, finely minced, and thinly sliced.
2. Taste each on a piece of bread.

Look for: The paste is the strongest and most even. Minced is strong but patchy. Sliced is mild and gives occasional bites of garlic.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Quick pickled red onion				
Garlic and herb dressing				
Onion soup				
Leek and spring onion frittata				
Root on vs off				
Chilled vs room-temperature onion				
Fine vs rough dice				
Garlic: paste, minced, sliced				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Dice are uneven	Cuts too far apart, or root cut off early	Keep the root; cut evenly spaced

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Layers slide apart	Root removed	Leave the root until the end
Streaming eyes	Blunt knife, or a strong onion	Sharpen; chill; ventilate
Garlic bitter	Burnt in the pan	Add late; keep the heat moderate
Gritty leeks	Not washed between the layers	Halve and fan under running water
Soup pale	Onions not cooked long enough	Cook slowly for 30 to 35 minutes

KNIFE AND FOOD SAFETY

Knife safety: a sharp knife is safer than a blunt one, because it needs less force and slips less. Always cut on a stable board (put a damp cloth underneath), tuck your guiding fingertips back (the claw), carry a knife with the point down and the edge away from you, and **never try to catch a falling knife**: step back and let it fall. Wash knives by hand and dry them at once; never leave one in a sink of water where you can't see it. Store them in a block, on a magnetic strip or in guards, not loose in a drawer. A cut-resistant glove on your guiding hand is a sensible aid while you learn. If you cut yourself, apply firm pressure with a clean cloth, and get medical help for a deep cut or one that won't stop bleeding.

Onions are slippery once cut: use the flat side as the base. Garlic in oil is a botulism risk at room temperature: keep garlic-and-oil mixtures in the fridge and use them within 2 days. Frittata must be set all the way through; use Lion-marked eggs.

Hygiene: wash your hands, boards and knives in hot soapy water after handling raw meat, fish or eggs, and don't use the same board for raw meat and for food that won't be cooked. Wash fruit, vegetables and herbs that you eat raw.

Leftovers: cool cooked food quickly (within 1 to 2 hours), keep it covered in the fridge, and eat it within **2 days**. Reheat until steaming hot all the way through, and only once.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can dice an onion with the root left on.
- ☐ I can slice onions thinly and evenly.
- ☐ I can crush and mince garlic.
- ☐ I can wash and slice a leek.
- ☐ I know how to store garlic dressings safely.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Knife Skills 1, chapter 3 is Herbs, Zest and Soft Things: chopping herbs, chiffonade, zest and citrus segments.

Cooking Skills: Knife Skills 1

Chapter 3 · Herbs, Zest and Soft Things

SKILL GOAL

Cut soft herbs, zest and citrus cleanly without bruising or bitterness.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Herbs, zest and citrus segments are cut with the same care as any vegetable, but they are soft and easily crushed. **Bruising** (squashing the cells) turns herbs dark, wet and bitter. A sharp knife and light touch prevent it.

Soft herbs (parsley, coriander, mint, basil, dill, chives)

- **Dry them completely** after washing: wet herbs slip and smear. Use a salad spinner or pat with a clean towel.
- **Strip the leaves** from tough stalks. (Coriander and parsley stalks are tender enough to chop finely, and full of flavour.)
- **Bunch them tightly** with the claw, and slice across, then rock the knife over them a few times. Don't keep chopping.
- **Cut basil and mint into ribbons** (chiffonade), not chopped: they bruise and blacken very easily.
- **Cut herbs just before use.** They lose flavour and colour if left.

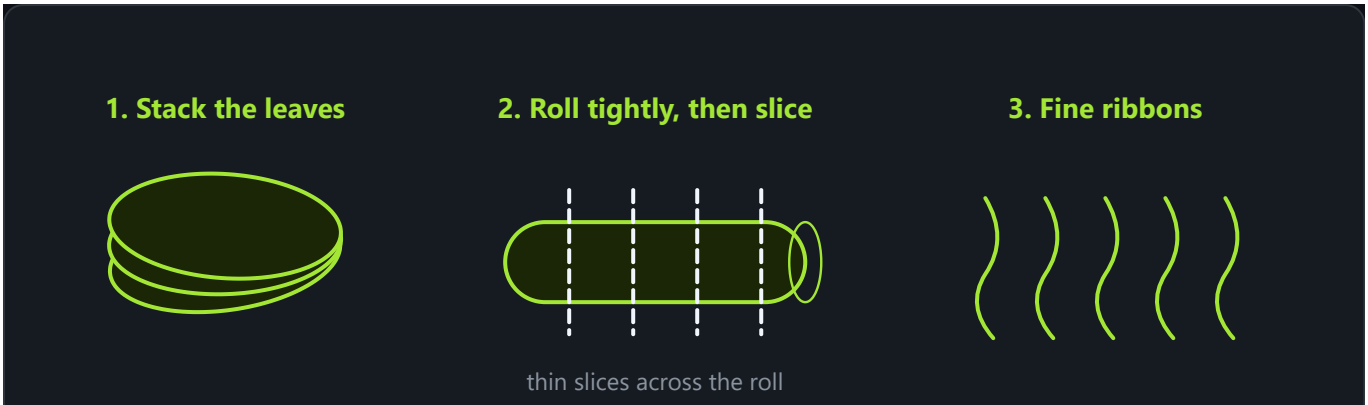


Figure 6. Chiffonade turns broad, soft leaves such as basil and mint into fine ribbons without bruising.

Woody herbs (rosemary, thyme, sage, oregano)

Pull the leaves off the stem (run your fingers down it against the way the leaves grow), then chop. Discard the woody stems.

Zest and citrus

TOOL	RESULT	BEST FOR
Microplane (fine grater)	Fluffy zest	Baking, dressings, gremolata
Vegetable peeler	Wide strips	Infusing, cocktails and slow cooking
Peeler, then knife	Fine julienne zest	Garnishes, salads

- **Only the coloured part** is zest. The white pith beneath is bitter.
- **Zest before you juice** the fruit; it is nearly impossible the other way round.
- **Mind your knuckles on the grater.** Stop when you get close.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Gremolata

10 minutes | makes about 3 tablespoons | the simplest chopped herb mixture

Parsley, lemon zest and a little garlic chopped together. Scatter on soups, fish, roasted vegetables and stews to freshen them.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

2 tbsp	finely chopped flat-leaf parsley
1	lemon, zest only
1	small garlic clove, minced
1 pinch	flaky salt

1. Wash the parsley and **dry it thoroughly**. Pull the leaves from the stalks and gather them into a tight pile.
2. Using the claw, slice across the pile finely, then rock the knife back and forth over the pile, a few times, to chop. Don't keep chopping: bruised parsley turns dark and wet.
3. Zest the lemon with a fine grater (or peel off strips with a peeler and mince them finely), avoiding the white pith.
4. Mix the parsley, zest and garlic with a pinch of flaky salt. Use the same day.

LEVEL 2 · SAUCE

Chimichurri-style herb sauce

15 minutes | makes about 150 ml | hand-chopped, not blended

An Argentinian herb sauce. Chopping by hand keeps the texture loose and the flavour fresh. A blender makes it a purée.

INGREDIENTS (6 PORTIONS)

30 g	flat-leaf parsley, leaves and fine stalks
1 tbsp	fresh oregano leaves, or 1 tsp dried
2	garlic cloves
2 tbsp	red wine vinegar
100 ml	extra-virgin olive oil
½ tsp	chilli flakes
½ tsp	salt

1. Wash the herbs and dry them well. Chop the parsley and oregano finely, as in the gremolata.
2. Mince the garlic. Mix everything in a bowl: herbs, garlic, vinegar, chilli and salt, then stir in the oil.
3. Let it stand for 15 minutes so the flavours combine. Serve with grilled vegetables, fish, chicken or eggs.

> **GARLIC AND OIL**
>
> Keep chimichurri in the fridge and eat it within 2 days: garlic in oil is not safe at room temperature.

LEVEL 2 · SALAD

Tabbouleh-style herb salad

30 minutes | 2 to 3 portions | mostly herbs, with a little grain

In a true tabbouleh the herbs are the main ingredient, not the grain. The parsley must be chopped finely but not crushed.

INGREDIENTS (3 PORTIONS)

40 g	fine bulgur wheat
100 ml	boiling water
40 g	flat-leaf parsley, leaves only
15 g	mint, leaves only
2	tomatoes, diced
½	cucumber, diced
2	spring onions, sliced
1	lemon, juice
2 tbsp	extra-virgin olive oil
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Put the bulgur in a bowl, pour over the boiling water, cover, and leave for 10 to 15 minutes until soft. Fluff with a fork and cool.
2. Wash and thoroughly dry the herbs. **Chop the parsley finely** (as small as you can without turning it to paste), then cut the mint into fine ribbons (see the chiffonade below).
3. Dice the tomatoes and cucumber into small cubes (about 5 mm). Slice the spring onions thinly.
4. Mix everything with the lemon juice, oil and seasoning. Chill for 15 minutes.

LEVEL 3 · CITRUS

Orange segments with mint

20 minutes | 2 portions | cutting away the peel and pith

Cutting citrus into clean segments (also called supremes) removes the bitter white pith and the tough membranes. A sharp knife is essential.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	oranges
6	mint leaves
1 tsp	honey (optional)

1. **Top and tail:** slice a thin layer off the top and bottom of each orange so it stands flat.
2. **Peel:** standing it upright, cut away the peel and white pith in strips, following the curve of the fruit from top to bottom. Turn and repeat until no white remains.
3. **Segment:** holding the orange over a bowl (to catch the juice), cut along both sides of each segment, between the flesh and the membrane, to release it. Let the segments fall into the bowl.
4. Squeeze the leftover membrane over the bowl. Roll the mint leaves up and cut into fine ribbons. Scatter over the oranges and drizzle with the honey, if using.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Dry or damp herbs

Why dry them?

1. Wash two handfuls of parsley. Dry one thoroughly and leave the other damp. Chop both the same way.
2. Compare the chopped piles after 10 minutes.

Look for: The damp parsley clumps and smears. The dry stays light and separate and holds its colour.

EXPERIMENT

Rock or slice

How much chopping is too much?

1. Chop one pile of parsley with a few slices and rocks. Chop another for a full minute.
2. Compare the colour and moisture.

Look for: The over-chopped parsley is darker, wet and mushy and has lost flavour. A few cuts are all you need.

EXPERIMENT

Fine or coarse zest

How does the grater matter?

1. Zest lemons with a fine microplane and with the coarse side of a box grater. Stir equal amounts into plain yoghurt.
2. Taste both.

Look for: The fine zest disappears into the yoghurt and perfumes it. The coarse zest gives bitter pieces. Fine is usually best.

EXPERIMENT

Segments or slices

Is the fuss worth it?

1. Serve one orange as peeled segments and one as slices with the pith left on.
2. Compare the taste and texture.

Look for: The segments are juicy and clean-tasting. The slices have a bitter, chewy pith and membrane.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Gremolata				
Chimichurri-style sauce				
Tabbouleh-style salad				
Orange segments with mint				
Dry vs damp herbs				
Short vs long chopping				
Fine vs coarse zest				
Segments vs slices				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Herbs dark and soggy	Damp, over-chopped, or blunt knife	Dry them; chop lightly; sharpen
Basil blackens	Chopped, bruised	Cut in ribbons just before serving

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Bitter zest	Pith included	Zest only the coloured part
Citrus segments torn	Dull knife or poor cuts	Cut right along the membrane with a sharp paring knife
Herb sauce dull	Blended, or left too long	Chop by hand; eat within 2 days
Bulgur gluey	Too much water	Use just enough boiling water and fluff with a fork

KNIFE AND FOOD SAFETY

Knife safety: a sharp knife is safer than a blunt one, because it needs less force and slips less. Always cut on a stable board (put a damp cloth underneath), tuck your guiding fingertips back (the claw), carry a knife with the point down and the edge away from you, and **never try to catch a falling knife**: step back and let it fall. Wash knives by hand and dry them at once; never leave one in a sink of water where you can't see it. Store them in a block, on a magnetic strip or in guards, not loose in a drawer. A cut-resistant glove on your guiding hand is a sensible aid while you learn. If you cut yourself, apply firm pressure with a clean cloth, and get medical help for a deep cut or one that won't stop bleeding.

Peeled citrus is slippery: cut it with a sharp paring knife and keep your fingers well back. Mind your knuckles on a grater. **Hygiene:** wash your hands, boards and knives in hot soapy water after handling raw meat, fish or eggs, and don't use the same board for raw meat and for food that won't be cooked. Wash fruit, vegetables and herbs that you eat raw. Herb sauces containing raw garlic and oil should be kept in the fridge and eaten within 2 days.

Leftovers: cool cooked food quickly (within 1 to 2 hours), keep it covered in the fridge, and eat it within **2 days**. Reheat until steaming hot all the way through, and only once.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can chop soft herbs without bruising them.
- ☐ I can cut basil and mint into ribbons.
- ☐ I can zest a lemon without the pith.
- ☐ I can cut citrus into segments.
- ☐ I know why herbs must be dry.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Knife Skills 1, chapter 4 is Vegetable Cuts: batons, julienne, dice, rondelles and the diagonal.

Cooking Skills: Knife Skills 1

Chapter 4 · Vegetable Cuts

SKILL GOAL

Cut vegetables to a consistent size so they cook evenly.

Shopping list for this chapter

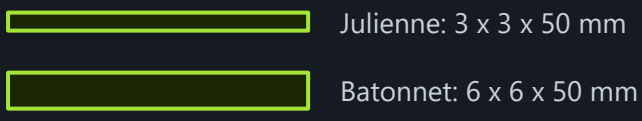
The basics

Standard vegetable cuts have names because they do a job: **the same size means the same cooking time**. If the pieces in a pan are all different, some burn while others are raw. Each cut starts with a flat, stable base.

Cubes (dice)



Sticks



Relative sizes, drawn about 3 pixels per millimetre. On your screen they will not be life size.

Figure 7. Standard vegetable cut sizes. Exact sizes vary between cooks; what matters is that the pieces in one dish are the same size.

Cutting a baton: the method behind most cuts

1. **Trim and square it.** Cut the ends off, and cut a thin slice from one side so the vegetable lies flat and can't roll.
2. **Make planks.** Cut slices of the thickness you want your sticks to be.
3. **Stack and cut** the planks (3 or 4 at a time) into sticks of the same thickness.
4. **Turn the sticks** and cut across them to make cubes: **dice** (the same size as the stick thickness), or **brunoise** (very fine dice from julienne).

CUT	SIZE	TYPICAL USE
Large dice	20 mm	Stews and roasting
Medium dice	12 mm	Soups, roast vegetables
Small dice	6 mm	Salsas, mirepoix, soups
Brunoise	3 mm	Garnishes, fine sauces
Batonnet	6 x 6 x 50 mm	Roasting, crudités, chips
Julienne	3 x 3 x 50 mm	Slaws, stir-fries, garnishes
Rondelle	Coins, 3 to 10 mm thick	Soups, stir-fries, roasting
Diagonal	Angled slices	Stir-fries (more surface, better browning)

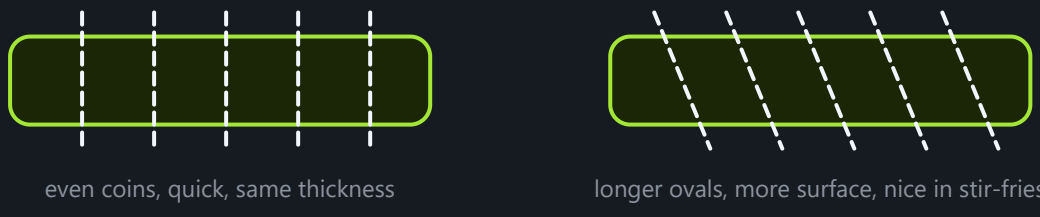


Figure 8. Rondelles and diagonal cuts. A diagonal cut gives a longer oval with more surface for browning.

- **Make the cut stable first.** It is the most important safety rule.
- **Keep your claw** tucked and the blade tip near the board.
- **Choose the size to suit the cooking:** large for long cooking, small for quick.
- **Trimmings aren't waste:** keep the odd ends and peelings for stock.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Roast roots in even batons

45 minutes | 3 portions | even sticks roast at the same rate

Batons (batonnet) are the starting cut for most others. Make them even, and everything on the tray is cooked at the same moment.

INGREDIENTS (3 PORTIONS)

300 g	carrots, peeled
200 g	parsnips, peeled
1 tbsp	sunflower or olive oil
1 tsp	thyme leaves (optional)
1 pinch	salt

1. Heat the oven to **200°C fan (220°C conventional, gas 7)**. Cut the carrots and parsnips in half crossways, so each piece is about 6 cm long. Thick parsnip tops can be quartered lengthways.
2. Turn each piece so it sits on a **flat cut side**. Slice into 6 mm planks, stack the planks and cut into **6 mm sticks**.
3. Toss with the oil, thyme and salt, spread on a tray in a single layer, and roast for **25 to 30 minutes**, turning once, until golden and tender.

> GO FOR GOLD
>
> **Go for gold.** Starchy foods such as potatoes and root vegetables form a chemical called acrylamide when roasted or fried at high temperatures, which the Food Standards Agency says could raise cancer risk. Its advice is to cook to a **golden yellow, not dark brown**. A balanced diet matters more than any single food.

LEVEL 2 · FINE

Julienne carrot and apple slaw

20 minutes | 2 portions | matchsticks, 3 mm

Julienne is a very thin stick, about 3 mm. Each carrot is cut into thin planks first, then stacked and cut into sticks. It takes patience, but the texture is lighter than grated carrot.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	medium carrots, peeled
1	crisp apple
1 tbsp	lemon juice
1 tbsp	extra-virgin olive oil
1 tbsp	chopped parsley or mint
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Cut the carrots into 6 cm lengths. Lay each piece on a flat cut side and slice into **3 mm planks**. Stack 3 or 4 planks and cut lengthways into **3 mm matchsticks**.
2. Cut the apple into planks and then matchsticks the same way, working fast so it doesn't brown, and toss in the lemon juice.
3. Mix the carrot and apple with the oil, herbs and seasoning.

LEVEL 2 · DICE

Mirepoix and red lentil soup

50 minutes | 3 portions | a French base: onion, carrot and celery, diced

A mirepoix is a diced mix of onion, carrot and celery, softened to start a soup, stew or sauce. The dice should be about 8 mm and the same size so they cook together.

INGREDIENTS (3 PORTIONS)

1	onion
2	carrots, peeled
2	celery sticks
1 tbsp	olive oil
1	garlic clove, sliced
60 g	red lentils, rinsed
700 ml	hot vegetable stock
1 tbsp	tomato purée
1 pinch	salt and pepper
1 tbsp	chopped parsley

1. Dice the onion (chapter 2). Peel the carrots and cut into batons, then dice into **8 mm cubes**. Cut the celery lengthways into 2 or 3 sticks, then across into 8 mm dice.
2. Heat the oil in a large pan and soften the onion, carrot and celery for **8 to 10 minutes**. Add the garlic for 1 minute.
3. Add the lentils, stock and tomato purée. Simmer for **20 minutes** until the lentils are soft.
4. Season, and blend partly or fully if you like. Serve with the parsley.

LEVEL 3 · PREP FIRST

Stir-fry with everything prepped in advance

35 minutes | 2 portions | mise en place: cut everything before you turn on the heat

A stir-fry takes 5 minutes, so there is no time to cut once it starts. This is where good knife skills pay off. Cut the vegetables so they cook in the same time: harder ones thin, softer ones thicker.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

1	red pepper, deseeded
1	large carrot, peeled
100 g	broccoli florets
3	spring onions
1 tsp	grated fresh ginger
1	garlic clove, sliced
1 tbsp	sunflower oil
1 tbsp	soy sauce
1 tsp	sesame oil
2 tbsp	water

1. **Prep first, then line up the ingredients next to the stove.** Slice the pepper into 8 mm strips. Cut the carrot into thin diagonal slices, about 3 mm (see the diagram). Cut the broccoli into small florets. Slice the spring onions on the diagonal, keeping the white and green parts separate.
2. Mix the soy sauce, sesame oil and water in a small bowl.
3. Heat the sunflower oil in a wok or large frying pan over a high heat until it just starts to smoke. Add the carrot and broccoli and stir-fry for 2 minutes.
4. Add the pepper, the white spring onion, ginger and garlic and stir-fry for 2 minutes. Pour in the sauce, toss for 30 seconds, and add the green spring onion. Serve at once.

> **HOT WOK**

> Have everything ready before you heat the pan. Hot oil can spit if the vegetables are wet, so dry them well, and never leave a hot wok unattended.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Even or uneven

Does size really matter?

1. Cut two trays of carrot sticks: one even at 6 mm and one deliberately mixed (some 3 mm, some 12 mm).
2. Roast both together for 25 minutes and look at the results.

Look for: On the uneven tray, the thin sticks are dark or burnt while the thick ones are still hard. The even tray is done at once.

EXPERIMENT

Julienne or grated

Which slaw do you prefer?

1. Make a carrot slaw with julienne carrot and another with grated carrot, with the same dressing.
2. Compare texture after 15 minutes.

Look for: The julienne stays crisp and distinct. The grated carrot goes soft and wet, and soaks up more dressing.

EXPERIMENT

Thick or thin rondelles

Coins of different thickness.

1. Cut carrot coins at 3 mm and 10 mm. Cook both in a frying pan with a little oil for 5 minutes.
2. Compare how cooked each is.

Look for: The thin coins are tender and browned, the thick coins are still firm in the middle. Match the cut to the cooking time.

EXPERIMENT

Diagonal or straight

Stir-fry carrots two ways.

1. Cut carrot into straight coins and diagonal slices of the same thickness. Stir-fry both for 3 minutes.
2. Compare the browning and how they look.

Look for: The diagonal slices have more cut surface, so they brown more and cook slightly faster.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Roast root batons				
Julienne carrot slaw				
Mirepoix soup				
Stir-fry				
Even vs uneven				
Julienne vs grated				
Thick vs thin coins				

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Diagonal vs straight				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Pieces uneven	No flat base, or rushing	Square the vegetable first; go slowly
Vegetable rolls	Round surface	Cut a slice off to make a flat side
Sticks bend or break	Planks cut too thin or knife blunt	Cut slightly thicker; sharpen
Pieces cook unevenly	Sizes differ	Cut hard vegetables smaller than soft ones
Stir-fry soggy	Pan crowded or wet vegetables	Dry the vegetables; cook in two batches
Tired hand	Gripping too tight	Relax your grip; use the pinch grip

KNIFE AND FOOD SAFETY

Knife safety: a sharp knife is safer than a blunt one, because it needs less force and slips less. Always cut on a stable board (put a damp cloth underneath), tuck your guiding fingertips back (the claw), carry a knife with the point down and the edge away from you, and **never try to catch a falling knife**: step back and let it fall. Wash knives by hand and dry them at once; never leave one in a sink of water where you can't see it. Store them in a block, on a magnetic strip or in guards, not loose in a drawer. A cut-resistant glove on your guiding hand is a sensible aid while you learn. If you cut yourself, apply firm pressure with a clean cloth, and get medical help for a deep cut or one that won't stop bleeding.

A mandolin cuts all of these quickly, and is also a leading cause of kitchen injuries: always use the guard or a cut-resistant glove. **Go for gold.** Starchy foods such as potatoes and root vegetables form a chemical called acrylamide when roasted or fried at high temperatures, which the Food Standards Agency says could raise cancer risk. Its advice is to cook to a **golden yellow, not dark brown**. A balanced diet matters more than any single food.

Hygiene: wash your hands, boards and knives in hot soapy water after handling raw meat, fish or eggs, and don't use the same board for raw meat and for food that won't be cooked. Wash fruit, vegetables and herbs that you eat raw.

Leftovers: cool cooked food quickly (within 1 to 2 hours), keep it covered in the fridge, and eat it within **2 days**. Reheat until steaming hot all the way through, and only once.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can square a vegetable and cut a baton.
- ☐ I can cut julienne, dice and rondelles.
- ☐ I know why even pieces cook evenly.
- ☐ I can prep a stir-fry before I start cooking.
- ☐ I know how to use a mandolin safely, or I avoid one.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Knife Skills 1, chapter 5 is Fruit, Peppers and Awkward Shapes: cutting round, slippery and hard things safely.

Cooking Skills: Knife Skills 1

Chapter 5 · Fruit, Peppers and Awkward Shapes

SKILL GOAL

Cut round, slippery and hard fruit and vegetables safely by making a flat base first.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Round, slippery and hard things are where most knife accidents happen, because they roll, and the knife slips off the skin. The answer is always the same: **make a flat face first**, so the food sits still.

FOOD	PROBLEM	FIX
Pepper	Seeds and pith, awkward shape	Slice the sides off the core
Tomato	Slippery skin, soft inside	Sharp or serrated knife; cut the core out; seeds optional
Avocado	Stone, slippery	Cut round, twist, use a spoon to remove the stone
Mango	Flat stone, slippery skin	Cut off the cheeks either side of the stone, score, flip
Melon and pineapple	Large and round	Cut off the ends, stand upright, slice off the skin
Apple	Core	Quarter first, then cut out the core

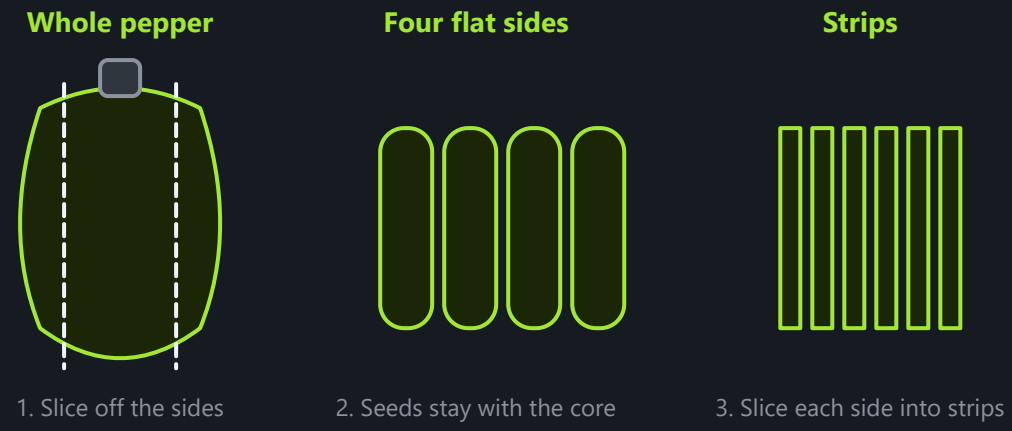


Figure 9. Cutting a pepper. Slicing the sides off leaves the seeds and the bitter pith behind, with no fiddly scooping.

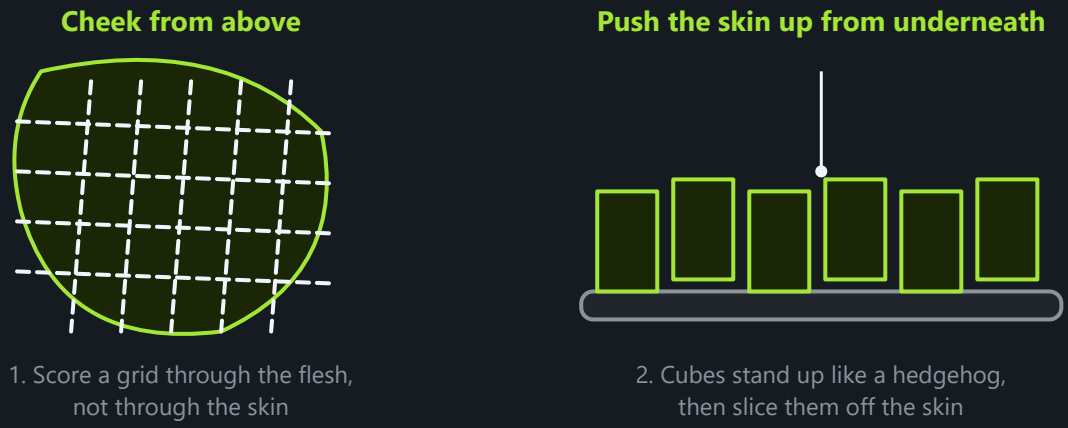


Figure 10. The mango 'hedgehog'. Cut either side of the flat stone, score the flesh, and turn the skin inside out.

- **Use a sharp knife.** A blunt knife skids off tomato and pepper skin.
- **A serrated knife** is good for tomatoes and soft fruits.
- **Wash the outside of melons** and other fruit before cutting: the knife carries any bacteria on the rind into the flesh.
- **Hold the stone side away from your hand** for avocados and mangoes.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Pepper strips with hummus

10 minutes | 2 portions | the no-scooping way to cut a pepper

The fastest way to prepare a pepper: slice the sides off the core, leaving the seeds behind.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	peppers (red, yellow or orange)
100 g	hummus
1 tsp	olive oil
1 pinch	paprika

1. Stand the pepper upright. Slice a lobe off each side of the central core, close to it, so you have 3 or 4 curved pieces and a core with the seeds and pith still attached.
2. Lay each piece skin-side down (the flesh is softer, so the blade bites in) and slice it into strips about 8 mm wide.
3. Serve with the hummus, drizzled with the oil and sprinkled with the paprika.

LEVEL 1 · SLIPPERY

Avocado on toast

10 minutes | 1 portion | stone, scoop and slice

Avocados are slippery, and the stone is a hazard. Never hold the avocado in your hand while you cut it.

INGREDIENTS (1 PORTION)

1	ripe avocado
2	slices of wholemeal bread
½	lemon, juice
1 pinch	chilli flakes, salt and pepper

1. Set the avocado on the board. Cut lengthways all the way round, until the blade touches the stone, then twist the halves apart.
2. **To remove the stone safely:** leave the stone in one half, and use a spoon to lift it out, or tap the blade of a heavy knife into the stone and twist. Don't cut towards your hand.
3. Run a spoon between the flesh and skin to remove each half. Place it flat side down and slice, or mash it with the lemon juice and seasoning.
4. Toast the bread, top with the avocado and sprinkle with chilli flakes.

> **AVOCADO HAND**
>
> Avocado stones cause many hand injuries. Hold the avocado on the board, not in your palm, and never cut towards your hand.

LEVEL 2 · DICE

Tomato, mango and avocado salsa

30 minutes | 3 to 4 portions | three fruits, one dice size

Three foods with three different textures cut into the same size dice. The mango hedgehog is the most fun skill here.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

2	ripe tomatoes
1	ripe mango
1	ripe avocado
½	small red onion, finely diced
1	lime, juice
2 tbsp	chopped coriander
1 pinch	chilli (fresh or flakes) and salt

1. **Tomatoes:** halve, cut out the core and scoop out the seeds with a teaspoon. Cut the flesh into strips, then **8 mm dice**.
2. **Mango:** stand the mango on its end, stalk up. Slice down each side of the flat stone to take off the two 'cheeks'. Score each cheek in a grid through the flesh but not the skin, push the skin up from underneath, and slice the cubes off.
3. **Avocado:** halve, remove the stone, and cut the flesh in the skin into a grid, then scoop out the dice with a spoon.
4. Mix everything gently with the onion, lime juice, coriander, chilli and salt. Eat within 2 hours or chill, as avocado browns.

LEVEL 3 · PROJECT

Mixed fruit salad

45 minutes | 4 portions | melon, pineapple, apple, mango and grapes

Melons and pineapples are big, round, tough-skinned and slippery. The trick is making flat faces before you do anything else.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

¼	small melon (cantaloupe or honeydew)
¼	pineapple
1	crisp apple
1	ripe mango
150 g	grapes
½	lime, juice
4	mint leaves, cut into ribbons

1. **Wash the melon rind** before cutting. Slice a thin piece off each end so it stands on the board. Cut off the rind in strips from top to bottom, following the curve. Cut in half, scoop the seeds, then slice and dice.
2. **Pineapple:** cut off the top and base, stand it upright and slice off the skin in strips from top to bottom. Cut the flesh into quarters lengthways, remove the core from each quarter, and slice into chunks.
3. **Apple:** quarter it, cut out the core from each quarter, and slice or dice. Toss in the lime juice so it doesn't brown.
4. **Mango** as in the salsa. Halve the grapes if they are large.
5. Mix everything with the mint and chill for 15 minutes.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Flat face or rolling

Why a flat base?

1. Cut a thin slice off one side of a round tomato or potato, so it lies flat. Slice both the flat one and a rolling one, slowly.
2. Notice how stable each is and how even the slices are.

Look for: The flat one doesn't move, and you can cut it safely and evenly. The round one rolls and needs constant correcting.

EXPERIMENT

Serrated or plain on tomatoes

Which edge?

1. Slice a tomato with a sharp chef's knife and another with a serrated knife, then with a blunt knife.
2. Compare how clean the slices are.

Look for: A sharp knife and a serrated knife both cut cleanly. The blunt knife squashes the tomato and slips on the skin.

EXPERIMENT

Storing cut avocado

How to stop browning?

1. Cut an avocado into three portions. Leave one plain, brush one with lemon juice, and cover one tightly with cling film pressed onto the surface.
2. Check after 2 hours.

Look for: The plain portion browns quickly. Lemon juice slows it, and pressing film on the surface (keeping air off) works best.

EXPERIMENT

Mango two ways

Hedgehog or peeled cubes?

1. Dice one mango with the hedgehog method and another by peeling the cheeks and cutting them on the board.
2. Compare the speed, mess and shape of the pieces.

Look for: The hedgehog is quicker and less slippery. Peeling and cutting gives tidier cubes but is messier and more dangerous.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Pepper strips				
Avocado on toast				
Tomato, mango and avocado salsa				
Fruit salad				
Flat vs rolling				
Serrated vs plain on tomato				
Avocado storage				
Mango methods				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Knife skids off tomato	Blunt knife	Hone or sharpen; or use a serrated knife

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Food rolls	No flat face	Slice a thin piece off to make a base
Pepper seeds everywhere	Cutting through the core	Slice off the sides instead
Mango slippery	Wet skin	Dry the mango; use the hedgehog method
Avocado brown	Air	Lemon juice and cling film on the surface
Fruit salad watery	Cut too early	Cut near serving; drain the juice

KNIFE AND FOOD SAFETY

Knife safety: a sharp knife is safer than a blunt one, because it needs less force and slips less. Always cut on a stable board (put a damp cloth underneath), tuck your guiding fingertips back (the claw), carry a knife with the point down and the edge away from you, and **never try to catch a falling knife**: step back and let it fall. Wash knives by hand and dry them at once; never leave one in a sink of water where you can't see it. Store them in a block, on a magnetic strip or in guards, not loose in a drawer. A cut-resistant glove on your guiding hand is a sensible aid while you learn. If you cut yourself, apply firm pressure with a clean cloth, and get medical help for a deep cut or one that won't stop bleeding.

Avocado and mango stones cause many hand injuries: never hold them in your palm while cutting. **Hygiene:** wash your hands, boards and knives in hot soapy water after handling raw meat, fish or eggs, and don't use the same board for raw meat and for food that won't be cooked. Wash fruit, vegetables and herbs that you eat raw. Cut fruit should be kept chilled and eaten within 2 days; cut melon especially should not be left out for more than 2 hours.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can cut a pepper without scooping seeds.
- ☐ I can remove an avocado stone safely.
- ☐ I can cut a mango into cubes.
- ☐ I can make a flat face before cutting round fruit.
- ☐ I wash the outside of melons first.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Knife Skills 1, chapter 6 is Squashes, Roots and Hard Vegetables: cutting big hard things without slipping.

Cooking Skills: Knife Skills 1

Chapter 6 · Squashes, Roots and Hard Vegetables

SKILL GOAL

Cut hard, heavy vegetables safely by softening, steadying and working in stages.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

The hardest vegetables are dangerous for a different reason: they need force. If you push hard on a knife, and it slips, it goes where the force was going. The solutions are to **make the vegetable softer, make it stable, and work in stages**.

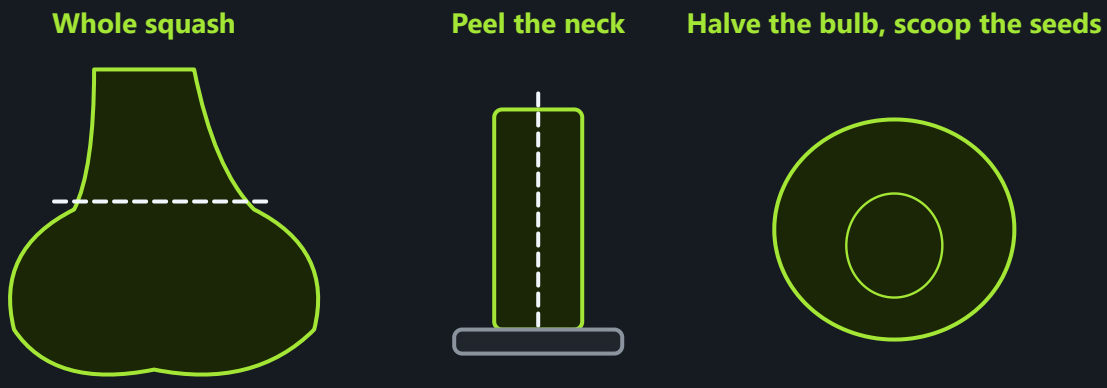


Figure 11. A butternut squash is easiest in stages. Make flat faces first, so every cut is on a stable base.

VEGETABLE	DIFFICULTY	TECHNIQUE
Butternut squash	Hard, slippery skin	Microwave 2 minutes to soften; separate neck from bulb; peel the neck standing upright
Pumpkin	Very hard, big	Cut into wedges, scoop seeds, peel with a knife or roast then scoop

VEGETABLE	DIFFICULTY	TECHNIQUE
Celeriac and swede	Hard and knobbly	Cut a base, stand it up, cut the skin off in strips
Cabbage	Tight head	Quarter through the core, cut the core out, slice across
Cauliflower and broccoli	Dense stalk	Quarter through the core, then cut the florets off
Beetroot	Stains	Wear gloves; roast first and peel when cool

- **Never force a knife.** If the vegetable won't cut, soften it (microwave or roast), or use a heavier knife with a controlled push.
- **Cut towards the board, not towards your hand.** A flat face means the knife travels downwards.
- **A peeler** is quicker and safer than a knife for carrots, parsnips and many squashes.
- **Don't try to cut a whole raw pumpkin** in half with a small knife: use a big knife and tap it through, or roast it first.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Roast butternut squash

50 minutes | 3 to 4 portions | halve, scoop, peel and cube

Butternut squash is hard and heavy, with slippery skin. Soften it for 2 minutes in the microwave, make flat faces, and take it in stages.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

1	butternut squash (about 800 g)
1 tbsp	olive oil
1 tsp	cumin seeds or smoked paprika (optional)
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. **Soften:** prick the whole squash a few times with a fork and microwave for 2 minutes. This softens the skin and flesh enough to cut safely. Let it cool.
2. Cut off the stalk and base to make flat ends. Cut the **neck** from the round **bulb** where they join.
3. Stand the neck upright on its flat end and slice off the skin in strips, top to bottom. Cut the neck into planks, sticks, then 2 cm cubes.
4. Halve the bulb lengthways, scoop out the seeds with a spoon, peel the halves the same way (flat side down) and cut into 2 cm cubes.
5. Heat the oven to **200°C fan (220°C conventional, gas 7)**. Toss with the oil, spice and seasoning, spread on a tray, and roast for **25 to 30 minutes**, turning once, until golden at the edges.

> GO FOR GOLD
>
> **Go for gold.** Starchy foods such as potatoes and root vegetables form a chemical called acrylamide when roasted or fried at high temperatures, which the Food Standards Agency says could raise cancer risk. Its advice is to cook to a **golden yellow, not dark brown**. A balanced diet matters more than any single food.

LEVEL 2 · SHRED

Red cabbage and apple slaw

25 minutes | 3 to 4 portions | fine shreds from a hard head

A cabbage is cut in wedges, with the core removed from each, then sliced very thin. The thinner the shreds, the nicer the slaw.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

200 g	red cabbage
1	crisp apple
1	small carrot, peeled
2 tbsp	plain yoghurt
1 tbsp	cider vinegar or lemon juice
1 tsp	wholegrain mustard
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Cut the cabbage in half through the core, then each half into wedges. Cut the core out at an angle from each wedge.
2. Lay each wedge on a flat side. Slice across as thinly as you can (2 to 3 mm). Separate the shreds with your fingers.
3. Quarter and core the apple. Cut into thin matchsticks. Grate or julienne the carrot.
4. Mix the yoghurt, vinegar, mustard and seasoning, and toss through the vegetables. Leave to stand for 10 minutes.

LEVEL 2 · FLORETS

Roast cauliflower and broccoli with lemon

40 minutes | 3 portions | small florets of even size

Cut florets from the central stalk so they are all about the same size, and use the stalk too: it's good to eat.

INGREDIENTS (3 PORTIONS)

½	cauliflower
1	head of broccoli
1 tbsp	olive oil
1	garlic clove, sliced
½	lemon, juice and zest
1 tbsp	grated parmesan (optional)
1 pinch	chilli flakes, salt and pepper

1. Heat the oven to **200°C fan (220°C conventional, gas 7)** with a tray inside. Trim the base of the cauliflower and cut into quarters through the core. Cut the florets off the core, and trim into 3 to 4 cm pieces.
2. For the broccoli, slice the florets off the stalk the same way. Peel the tough outer layer off the stalk and cut it into 1 cm slices.
3. Toss everything in the oil, garlic, chilli and seasoning. Spread on the hot tray in a single layer.
4. Roast for **20 to 25 minutes**, turning once, until golden at the edges and tender. Finish with the lemon juice, zest and parmesan.

> **GO FOR GOLD**
>
> Cauliflower and broccoli brown quickly. Take them out at golden, not dark.

LEVEL 3 · HARD

Roast swede or celeriac batons

1 hour | 3 portions | peeling a knobbly, hard root

Swede and celeriac are hard and knobbly. Cut the top and bottom off, stand it up, and cut the skin away in strips, as with a melon. A peeler is no use on celeriac.

INGREDIENTS (3 PORTIONS)

1	small swede or celeriac (about 500 g)
1 tbsp	olive oil
1 tsp	thyme leaves
1 pinch	salt and pepper
2 tbsp	plain yoghurt, to serve

1. Heat the oven to 200°C fan (220°C conventional, gas 7). Cut a thin slice off the top and bottom so it sits flat.
2. Stand it on a flat end and **slice the skin off in strips from top to bottom**, following the curve. Cut out any dark spots.
3. Cut into 1 cm planks, then 1 cm batons, as in chapter 4.
4. Toss with the oil, thyme and seasoning. Roast for **30 to 35 minutes**, turning once, until golden and tender. Serve with the yoghurt.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Peeler or knife

Which is faster and safer?

1. Peel half a butternut squash neck with a Y-peeler and the other half with a knife, timing each.
2. Compare the time, the waste, and how controlled it felt.

Look for: The peeler is faster, wastes less and is safer. The knife is for squashes and roots where a peeler can't cope.

EXPERIMENT

Microwave softening

Does 2 minutes help?

1. Cut one butternut squash neck raw and another after 2 minutes in the microwave.
2. Compare how hard each is to cut.

Look for: The softened squash cuts with far less force, which is safer. The raw one needs a heavy, careful push.

EXPERIMENT

Wedge or round slices

Cabbage shredding.

1. Shred one cabbage in wedges (cut the core out) and another by slicing the head across the round.
2. Compare the shreds.

Look for: The wedge shreds are even, and the core is removed. The round slices are uneven, with thick core pieces.

EXPERIMENT

Damp cloth under the board

Stability matters most for hard food.

1. Cut a swede into batons on a dry board and then with a damp cloth under it.
2. Notice how the board moves.

Look for: Hard vegetables need more force, so board movement matters more. With a damp cloth the board stays still.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Roast butternut squash				
Red cabbage and apple slaw				
Roast cauliflower and broccoli				
Roast swede or celeriac				
Peeler vs knife				
Microwave softening				
Wedge vs round				
Damp cloth				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Knife stuck in squash	Forcing it	Don't twist; tap the spine with a rolling pin or soften first

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Pieces uneven	No flat face	Square it first
Cabbage shreds thick	Core included or knife blunt	Remove the core; sharpen
Roast veg burnt	Too hot or cut too small	Aim for golden; cut larger
Cauliflower crumbles	Cutting through florets	Cut the stems, not the heads
Stained hands	Beetroot	Wear gloves; wash with lemon juice

KNIFE AND FOOD SAFETY

Knife safety: a sharp knife is safer than a blunt one, because it needs less force and slips less. Always cut on a stable board (put a damp cloth underneath), tuck your guiding fingertips back (the claw), carry a knife with the point down and the edge away from you, and **never try to catch a falling knife**: step back and let it fall. Wash knives by hand and dry them at once; never leave one in a sink of water where you can't see it. Store them in a block, on a magnetic strip or in guards, not loose in a drawer. A cut-resistant glove on your guiding hand is a sensible aid while you learn. If you cut yourself, apply firm pressure with a clean cloth, and get medical help for a deep cut or one that won't stop bleeding.

Hard vegetables: never force a knife through a hard vegetable, never hold it in your hand while cutting, and soften squash and pumpkin first. Use a heavy knife, not a small one, for large squashes. **Go for gold.** Starchy foods such as potatoes and root vegetables form a chemical called acrylamide when roasted or fried at high temperatures, which the Food Standards Agency says could raise cancer risk. Its advice is to cook to a **golden yellow, not dark brown**. A balanced diet matters more than any single food.

Hygiene: wash your hands, boards and knives in hot soapy water after handling raw meat, fish or eggs, and don't use the same board for raw meat and for food that won't be cooked. Wash fruit, vegetables and herbs that you eat raw.

Leftovers: cool cooked food quickly (within 1 to 2 hours), keep it covered in the fridge, and eat it within **2 days**. Reheat until steaming hot all the way through, and only once.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

☐ I can break down a butternut squash safely.

☐ I can shred cabbage finely.

☐ I can cut florets from cauliflower and broccoli.

☐ I can peel a celeriac or swede with a knife.

☐ I know not to force a knife.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Knife Skills 1, chapter 7 is Chicken and Meat Basics: trimming, jointing and slicing raw meat safely, with hygiene.

Cooking Skills: Knife Skills 1

Chapter 7 · Chicken and Meat Basics

SKILL GOAL

Handle, trim, joint and slice raw meat safely, and slice cooked meat across the grain.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Cutting raw meat is the same skill as cutting vegetables, with one big difference: **hygiene**. The knife, board and your hands will all be contaminated, and anything they touch next can be too.

RULE	WHY
A separate board for raw meat	Stops bacteria spreading to food that won't be cooked
Wash board, knife and hands before touching anything else	Cold water or a wipe doesn't remove bacteria
Never wash raw chicken	Splashing spreads bacteria around the kitchen; cooking kills them
Keep raw meat on the bottom shelf of the fridge, covered	Drips can't reach other food
Cut meat cold	Chilled meat is firmer and easier to cut cleanly
Cook poultry and pork until no pink and juices run clear	Bacteria can be right through the meat, not only on the surface

Which way to slice: the grain

Muscle is made of long fibres, the **grain**. Slicing across the grain cuts them short and gives tender slices. Slicing along it leaves long, chewy fibres. Look for the direction of the lines, rest the meat before cutting it, and cut across them.

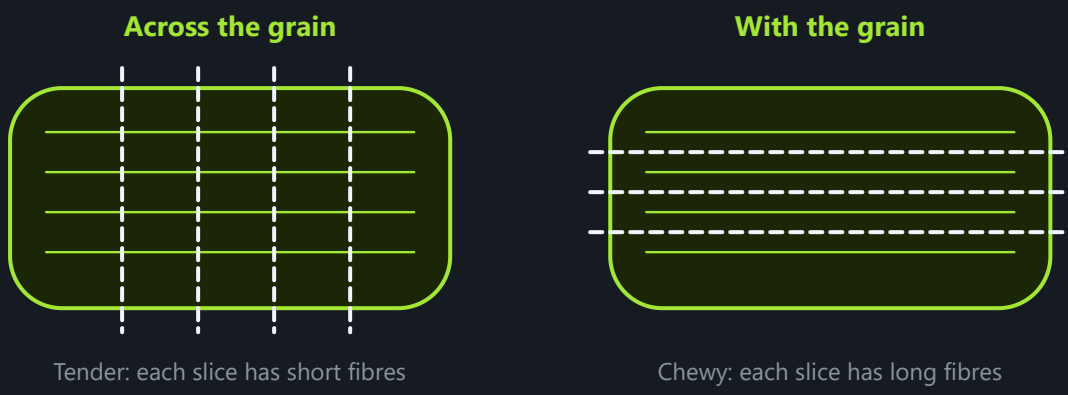


Figure 12. Slicing across the grain shortens the muscle fibres, so the meat is easier to chew.

- **A sharp knife** matters more with meat: a blunt one tears fibres.
- **Trim fat and sinew** before cooking: silver skin and gristle don't soften.
- **Kitchen scissors** are excellent for cutting through chicken skin, bones and the backbone.
- **Rest cooked meat** for 5 to 15 minutes, depending on size, so the juices stay in when you carve.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Chicken and pepper stir-fry (dicing chicken breast)

30 minutes | 2 portions | raw chicken, handled carefully

Chicken breast is easiest to cut when it is cold and a little firm. Use a board for raw meat only, and wash everything that touches it.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	chicken breast fillets (about 300 g)
1	red pepper, cut into strips
1	small onion, sliced
1 tbsp	sunflower oil
1	garlic clove, sliced
1 tsp	grated fresh ginger
2 tbsp	soy sauce
1 tbsp	water
1 tsp	cornflour

1. Take the chicken from the fridge. Put it on a board that you will use **only for raw meat**. Trim off any fat and white sinew.
2. Slice each breast along its length into strips about 1.5 cm wide, holding it with the claw, and then turn and cut across into 1.5 cm cubes. **Don't wash the chicken**.
3. Put the chicken in a bowl and the board and knife straight into hot soapy water. Wash your hands. Slice the vegetables on a different, clean board.
4. Mix the soy sauce, water and cornflour. Heat the oil in a wok over a high heat. Stir-fry the chicken for **4 to 5 minutes**, until golden and white all the way through, then add the onion and pepper for 3 minutes, then the garlic and ginger for 30 seconds, then the sauce.
5. Check the chicken: cut the biggest piece open. It must be **steaming hot, white all the way through, with no pink and with clear juices**.

> COOK IT THROUGH

> Chicken must be cooked until steaming hot throughout, with no pink meat and clear juices. A probe thermometer should read at least 70°C for 2 minutes (or 75°C instantly).

LEVEL 2 · GRAIN

Steak salad (slicing across the grain)

25 minutes | 2 portions | the cut that makes the meat tender

Meat is made of long fibres. Slice across them, so each slice has short fibres and chews easily. The slice direction matters more than the knife.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

250 g	sirloin or rump steak, about 2.5 cm thick
1 tsp	sunflower oil
1 pinch	salt and pepper
1 handful	rocket or salad leaves
6	cherry tomatoes, halved
1 tbsp	extra-virgin olive oil
1 tsp	balsamic vinegar
10 g	parmesan, shaved

1. Take the steak out of the fridge 20 minutes before cooking. Pat dry, rub with the oil and season well.
2. Heat a heavy frying pan until very hot. Cook the steak for **2 to 3 minutes a side** for medium-rare, or longer for medium or well done. Rest on a warm plate for **5 minutes**.
3. **Look for the lines** of the muscle fibres running along the steak. Slice across them, at a slight angle, into slices about 5 mm thick, using a long, sharp knife and a smooth sawing motion.
4. Dress the leaves and tomatoes with the olive oil and vinegar. Lay the steak slices on top and scatter with the parmesan.

> **STEAK SAFETY**
>
> A whole steak can be served rare because bacteria sit on the surface, and searing kills them. This does not apply to minced meat, burgers, sausages, rolled or tied joints or pork, which must be cooked all the way through.

LEVEL 3 · JOINTING

Jointed chicken traybake

1 hour 30 minutes | 4 portions | a whole chicken into 8 pieces

Jointing a chicken is cheaper than buying pieces, and the bones make stock. Use a sharp knife, and cut at the joints, not through the bones. Kitchen scissors help with the backbone.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

1	whole chicken (about 1.5 kg)
1 tbsp	olive oil
1 tsp	dried thyme or paprika
1 pinch	salt and pepper
1	lemon, halved
3	carrots, cut into chunks
2	onions, quartered

1. Put the chicken breast-side up on a board used only for raw meat. Pull a leg away from the body and cut through the skin between the leg and the breast. Bend the leg back until the joint pops, then cut through it. Repeat with the other leg.
2. Cut each leg in two at the joint (you will see a line of fat), giving a thigh and a drumstick.
3. Cut off the wings, cutting through the joint where the wing meets the body.
4. Cut along the breastbone to remove each breast, keeping the knife against the bone. Cut each breast in half, crossways, if large.
5. Wash the board, knife and your hands in hot soapy water before touching anything else. Heat the oven to **200°C fan (220°C conventional, gas 7)**. Toss the vegetables in a tray with half the oil, and lay the chicken pieces on top, skin side up, with the rest of the oil, herbs and seasoning.
6. Roast for **40 to 45 minutes**. The chicken must be **steaming hot throughout, with no pink meat, with clear juices when you cut into the thickest part of the thigh** (70°C for 2 minutes on a probe). Squeeze the lemon over.

DON'T THROW AWAY THE CARCASS

Cover the bones with water, add an onion and a carrot, and simmer for 1.5 hours for stock. Strain, cool and freeze or use within 2 days.

LEVEL 2 · TRIM

Pork medallions with mustard sauce (trimming and slicing)

30 minutes | 2 to 3 portions | trim the silver skin, cut even rounds

A pork tenderloin has a tough, shiny 'silver skin' that doesn't soften in cooking. Trim it off with a thin, sharp knife, then slice into even medallions.

INGREDIENTS (3 PORTIONS)

1	pork tenderloin (about 400 g)
1 tbsp	olive oil
1 tsp	chopped sage or thyme
1 pinch	salt and pepper
100 ml	hot chicken stock
1 tsp	wholegrain mustard
2 tbsp	plain yoghurt

1. On a raw-meat board, find the silver skin (a thin, shiny, silvery membrane). Slide the tip of a sharp, thin knife under one end, and with the blade angled slightly upwards **cut along under the skin**, pulling it away as you go.
2. Cut the tenderloin across into rounds, **2 cm thick**. Press each one lightly flat. Rub with oil, herbs and seasoning.
3. Wash the board, knife and your hands. Heat a frying pan over a medium-high heat. Cook the medallions for **3 to 4 minutes a side**, until golden and **cooked all the way through, with no pink and clear juices**.
4. Lift out onto a warm plate. Pour the stock into the pan, scrape up the browned bits, and simmer for 2 minutes. Take off the heat, stir in the mustard and yoghurt, and spoon over the pork.

> **PORK MUST BE COOKED THROUGH**
>
> Pork should be cooked until steaming hot with no pink meat and clear juices (70°C for 2 minutes). Cut one medallion open to check.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

With or across the grain

Taste the difference.

1. Cook a steak, rest it, and cut half the slices across the grain and half along it.
2. Eat both.

Look for: The across-the-grain slices are tender, the along-the-grain slices are chewy. It's the same meat.

EXPERIMENT

Chilled or part-frozen

Which cuts better?

1. Cut one chicken breast straight from the fridge into strips. Cut another that has been in the freezer for 30 minutes (firm on the outside, not frozen solid).
2. Compare how clean the cuts are.

Look for: The slightly firmed meat cuts into neat, even strips. The fridge-cold meat is softer and slides a little. Never leave raw meat out at room temperature to soften or to thaw.

EXPERIMENT

Scissors or knife

Which is easier for trimming?

1. Trim fat off a chicken thigh with a knife, and trim another with kitchen scissors.
2. Compare the control and the speed.

Look for: Scissors are quicker and safer for trimming skin and fat; the knife is better for precise slicing.

EXPERIMENT

Board hygiene test

What does wiping leave behind?

1. Without raw meat: smear a little cooking oil mixed with flour on a board. Wipe one half with a damp cloth, and wash the other half in hot soapy water.
2. Compare how clean each half is.

Look for: The wiped half is still greasy and smeared. Only washing in hot soapy water gets the board clean, which is why you wash after raw meat.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Chicken and pepper stir-fry				
Steak salad				
Jointed chicken traybake				
Pork medallions				
With vs across grain				
Chilled vs part-frozen chicken				
Scissors vs knife				
Wiped vs washed board				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Meat slides about	Wet board, or warm meat	Pat dry; chill it; damp cloth under the board

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Chewy steak slices	Cut with the grain	Cut across the fibres
Meat torn	Blunt knife	Sharpen
Pink chicken inside	Pieces too thick or heat too low	Cut smaller; cook longer; check with a probe
Cut chicken joints ragged	Cutting through bone	Find the joint; bend and cut through the gap
Cross-contamination worry	Same board or knife used	Use a separate board for raw meat and wash everything

RAW MEAT AND KNIFE SAFETY

Raw meat, poultry and fish: the Food Standards Agency advises using separate chopping boards and knives for raw meat, fish and poultry, for fruit and vegetables, and for ready-to-eat foods such as salad and cheese. Bacteria spread from raw meat to a board and knife, and then to the next food. Wiping a board with a cloth is not enough: wash boards and knives in hot soapy water (or a dishwasher) before they touch anything else, and wash your hands after handling raw food. Keep raw meat, poultry and fish covered on the bottom shelf of the fridge, where juices can't drip onto other food. **Don't wash raw chicken**: it splashes bacteria around the kitchen, and cooking kills them anyway.

Knife safety: a sharp knife is safer than a blunt one, because it needs less force and slips less. Always cut on a stable board (put a damp cloth underneath), tuck your guiding fingertips back (the claw), carry a knife with the point down and the edge away from you, and **never try to catch a falling knife**: step back and let it fall. Wash knives by hand and dry them at once; never leave one in a sink of water where you can't see it. Store them in a block, on a magnetic strip or in guards, not loose in a drawer. A cut-resistant glove on your guiding hand is a sensible aid while you learn. If you cut yourself, apply firm pressure with a clean cloth, and get medical help for a deep cut or one that won't stop bleeding.

Cooking: chicken, pork, burgers, sausages and minced or rolled meat must be cooked until steaming hot all the way through, with no pink meat and clear juices (70°C for 2 minutes with a probe). Whole cuts of beef or lamb, such as steaks, can be served rare because bacteria sit on the surface and searing kills them.

Leftovers: cool cooked food quickly (within 1 to 2 hours), keep it covered in the fridge, and eat it within **2 days**. Reheat until steaming hot all the way through, and only once.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I use a separate board for raw meat and wash it afterwards.
- ☐ I can dice a chicken breast and trim a tenderloin.
- ☐ I can joint a chicken.
- ☐ I can find the grain and slice across it.
- ☐ I know when chicken and pork are cooked through.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Knife Skills 1, chapter 8 is Fish, Bread and Cheese: skinning a fillet, peeling prawns, bread, carving and cheese.

Cooking Skills: Knife Skills 1

Chapter 8 · Fish, Bread and Cheese

SKILL GOAL

Cut delicate and awkward foods with the right knife and technique.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Soft, delicate and crusty foods need different knives and different strokes. **The knife that works for one fails at another.**

FOOD	BEST KNIFE	TECHNIQUE
Bread	Serrated bread knife	Light sawing; let the teeth cut
Hard cheese	Sharp chef's knife or a wire cutter	Firm, even push; peeler for shavings
Soft cheese	Thin knife or a wire, dipped in hot water	Wipe between cuts, don't press
Raw fish and skinning	Long, thin, flexible knife	Nearly flat blade, pressing on the skin
Prawns	Paring knife	Peel by hand, devein with a shallow cut
Cooked roast	Long, thin carving knife	Rest, then long, smooth strokes across the grain

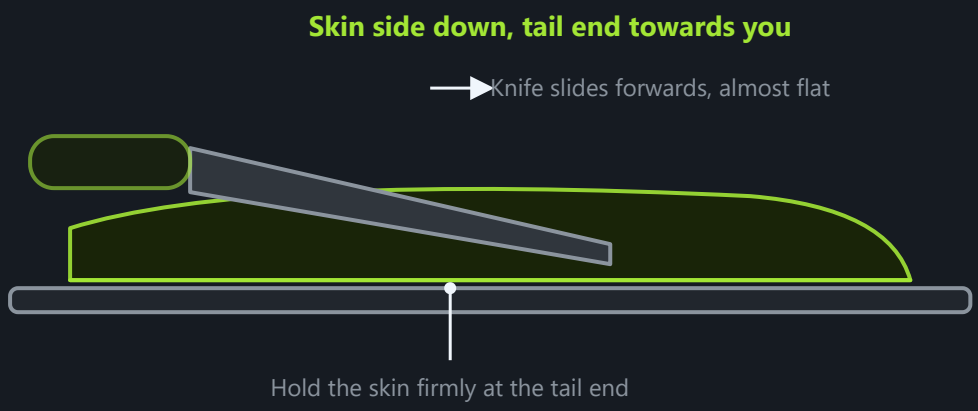


Figure 13. Keep the blade nearly flat and press down on it as it slides, so it stays against the skin.

- **Chill fish** until you cut it. Cold fish is firmer.
- **Check for pin bones** in every fillet.
- **Keep a damp cloth** to wipe the knife on when cutting soft cheese or fish.
- **Rest roasts** before carving: carving at once sends the juices onto the board.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Bread, cheese and fruit board

15 minutes | 2 portions | serrated, wire and plain knives

Bread, cheese and fruit need three different cutting approaches. Slicing each properly is the whole recipe.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

½	crusty loaf (about 200 g)
100 g	hard cheese (Cheddar or Manchego)
80 g	soft cheese (Brie or goat's cheese)
1	crisp apple or pear
1 handful	grapes

1. **Bread:** steady the loaf on the board. Use a long serrated knife with a **light sawing motion**, letting the teeth do the work, and don't press down hard. Slice about 1.5 cm thick.
2. **Hard cheese:** cut with a sharp knife into slices or shavings (a vegetable peeler makes thin shavings), or into small blocks.
3. **Soft cheese:** use a thin knife, wiped clean between cuts, or a wet knife. Cut Brie in wedges from the middle. Cut goat's cheese rounds with dental floss or a wet knife.
4. **Apple or pear:** quarter, core and slice thinly. Arrange everything on a board.

LEVEL 2 · FISH

Skinned and portioned salmon, pan-fried

25 minutes | 2 portions | pin-bone, skin and portion

Salmon fillets have a row of small pin bones, which tweezers or the tip of a knife pull out. Removing the skin is optional (crisp skin is good), but it is a useful skill.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	skin-on salmon fillets (about 150 g each)
1 tsp	sunflower oil
1 pinch	salt and pepper
½	lemon, cut into wedges
1 tbsp	chopped dill or parsley

1. **Pin bones:** run a finger along the middle of the fillet against the grain and feel for small bones. Pull out each with clean tweezers or pliers, and keep it in the direction it lies.
2. **Skinning (optional):** put the fillet skin-side down with the tail towards you. Cut a little way between the flesh and skin at the tail end. Hold the skin firmly (a pinch of salt gives grip), and slide a long, thin knife between the flesh and the skin, the blade nearly flat, pressing down on the skin as you go.
3. **Portioning:** cut the fillet into even portions across the width, using a long sharp knife in one smooth stroke.
4. Pat dry, season, and cook skin-side down (or one side first) in the oil over a medium-high heat for **4 to 5 minutes**. Turn and cook for **2 to 3 minutes** more, until opaque and just flaking all the way through.
5. Serve with the lemon and herbs.

> **COOK IT THROUGH**
>
> Salmon is cooked when it is opaque and flakes easily, with no translucent raw patch in the middle. Use a separate board and wash everything after handling raw fish.

LEVEL 2 · SHELLFISH

Garlic prawns (peeling and deveining)

25 minutes | 2 portions | small, slippery, fiddly work

Raw prawns are peeled with your fingers and a small knife. Taking out the dark vein (the gut) along the back makes them cleaner and less gritty.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

200 g	raw king prawns in the shell
1 tbsp	olive oil
2	garlic cloves, thinly sliced
1 pinch	chilli flakes
½	lemon, juice
1 tbsp	chopped parsley
1 pinch	salt

1. **Peel:** pull off the head, then peel off the shell from the underside, leaving the tail on if you like. Keep the shells for stock.
2. **Devein:** run the tip of a small knife along the back of the prawn, in a shallow cut. Lift out the dark thread with the knife tip or your fingers.
3. Wash your hands and board. Heat the oil over a medium heat, add the garlic and chilli for 30 seconds (don't brown it), then the prawns.
4. Cook for **2 to 3 minutes**, turning once, until they are pink and curled, and opaque all the way through. Add the lemon juice and parsley.

> **SHELLFISH**
>
> Prawns must be cooked until pink and opaque all the way through. Buy them fresh or frozen from a reliable source and keep them cold. Shellfish is a common allergen: tell anyone you cook for.

LEVEL 3 · CARVE

Carving a roast chicken

20 minutes after resting | 4 portions | carving across the grain

Carving a bird is mostly knowing where the joints are. Rest it first, so the juices stay in, then cut the legs off, then the breast.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

1	whole roast chicken, cooked and rested for 15 minutes (see chapter 7)
1 tbsp	gravy or pan juices, to serve

1. **Rest** the cooked chicken on a board with a groove for juices for at least 15 minutes. It must have been cooked until the juices run clear and there is no pink meat.
2. Steady the bird with a carving fork. Cut through the skin between the leg and body, bend the leg out until the joint pops, and cut through it. Split each leg at the joint into thigh and drumstick.
3. Cut along one side of the breastbone and, keeping the knife against the bone, follow the rib cage down to remove the whole breast in one piece. Repeat on the other side.
4. Slice each breast **across the grain** into 1 cm slices. Arrange on a warm plate with the legs and spoon over the juices.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Serrated or plain on bread

Compare the two knives.

1. Slice a crusty loaf with a serrated knife and with a plain chef's knife.
2. Compare how the crust and crumb look after cutting.

Look for: The serrated knife cuts cleanly through the crust with little pressure. The plain knife squashes the crumb and slips on the crust.

EXPERIMENT

Hot or rested roast

When to carve.

1. Carve a slice of roast chicken straight from the oven and another after 15 minutes of resting.
2. Look at the juice on the board and the moisture of the slice.

Look for: The unrested slice floods the board with juice and tastes drier. The rested slice stays moist.

EXPERIMENT

Wet knife on soft cheese

How does a damp blade help?

1. Slice a soft cheese with a dry knife and with a knife dipped in hot water and wiped.
2. Compare how clean the slices are.

Look for: The dry knife drags and sticks. The warm, wet knife glides through cleanly.

EXPERIMENT

Chilled or part-frozen fish

Which skins more easily?

1. Skin a salmon fillet straight from the fridge, and another that has been in the freezer for 20 minutes (firm, not frozen solid).
2. Compare how well the skin separates.

Look for: The firmer fillet skins more cleanly. The softer one tears more easily. Don't leave raw fish out of the fridge to warm up.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Bread and cheese board				
Pan-fried salmon				
Garlic prawns				
Carved roast chicken				
Serrated vs plain on bread				
Hot vs rested roast				
Wet knife on cheese				
Chilled vs part-frozen fish				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Bread squashed	Pressing hard or blunt knife	Use a serrated knife and saw lightly
Cheese sticks to the knife	Dry blade	Dip in hot water; wipe between cuts
Skin tears off in bits	Warm fish, or blade angled up	Chill the fillet; keep the blade flat
Pin bones missed	Not checking	Run a finger along the fillet
Prawns gritty	Vein left in	Devein with a shallow cut along the back
Chicken carved ragged	Not rested or blunt knife	Rest for 15 minutes; use a sharp, thin knife

RAW FISH, SHELLFISH AND CHEESE

Raw meat, poultry and fish: the Food Standards Agency advises using separate chopping boards and knives for raw meat, fish and poultry, for fruit and vegetables, and for ready-to-eat foods such as salad and cheese. Bacteria spread from raw meat to a board and knife, and then to the next food. Wiping a board with a cloth is not enough: wash boards and knives in hot soapy water (or a dishwasher) before they touch anything else, and wash your hands after handling raw food. Keep raw meat, poultry and

fish covered on the bottom shelf of the fridge, where juices can't drip onto other food. **Don't wash raw chicken**: it splashes bacteria around the kitchen, and cooking kills them anyway.

Knife safety: a sharp knife is safer than a blunt one, because it needs less force and slips less. Always cut on a stable board (put a damp cloth underneath), tuck your guiding fingertips back (the claw), carry a knife with the point down and the edge away from you, and **never try to catch a falling knife**: step back and let it fall. Wash knives by hand and dry them at once; never leave one in a sink of water where you can't see it. Store them in a block, on a magnetic strip or in guards, not loose in a drawer. A cut-resistant glove on your guiding hand is a sensible aid while you learn. If you cut yourself, apply firm pressure with a clean cloth, and get medical help for a deep cut or one that won't stop bleeding.

Fish and shellfish: cook fish until opaque and flaking, and prawns until pink and opaque all the way through. Keep raw fish cold, and eat or freeze it by the use-by date. Shellfish and fish are common allergens. **Cheese:** some soft, mould-ripened and blue cheeses are not recommended in pregnancy, so check the label or NHS advice if cooking for anyone pregnant. **Leftovers:** cool cooked food quickly (within 1 to 2 hours), keep it covered in the fridge, and eat it within **2 days**. Reheat until steaming hot all the way through, and only once.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can slice bread cleanly with a serrated knife.
- ☐ I can cut hard and soft cheese without sticking.
- ☐ I can remove pin bones and skin a salmon fillet.
- ☐ I can peel and devein a prawn.
- ☐ I can rest and carve a roast chicken.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Knife Skills 1, chapter 9 is Putting It Together: speed, mise en place, and your skills table.

Cooking Skills: Knife Skills 1

Chapter 9 · Putting It Together

SKILL GOAL

Prepare several dishes at once, safely and tidily, and record your own skills and recipes.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Every cut in this course is easy when you do it slowly and on its own. The skill now is doing several in a row without losing your tidy, safe, accurate habits. **Mise en place** ('everything in its place') is the answer: prepare everything before you start to cook.



Figure 14. A prep station: work from left to right, and keep scraps in a bowl rather than on the board.

The rules of a good prep

- **Start with the slowest or messiest** (onions, garlic), and keep the board clean as you go.
- **Work left to right,** from uncut to cut, with a scrap bowl nearby.
- **Hardest ingredients first.** Cut the hard vegetables when you are fresh.
- **Separate things that cook at different times,** so the stir-fry doesn't need you to cut while cooking.

- **Wipe the board and knife** between ingredients that mix badly (onion then fruit).
- **Don't rush.** Speed arrives with practice and careful habits; it can't be forced.

One prep, three dishes

Cut everything for three dishes in one session: a minestrone, a chopped salad and a noodle stir-fry. Follow the table, and time yourself.

STEP	WHAT	TARGET TIME
1	Set up: board on damp cloth, three bowls (uncut, cut, scraps), knife sharp	2 minutes
2	Onion, garlic (the slowest, so first)	3 minutes
3	Carrots and celery: dice (minestrone) and slice (stir-fry)	5 minutes
4	Courgette, potato: dice	3 minutes
5	Salad: cucumber, tomatoes, pepper, red onion	5 minutes
6	Stir-fry: pepper, mangetout, spring onions, ginger	4 minutes
7	Clear the board, wash it, wipe the surfaces	3 minutes

Try it

LEVEL 2 · DICE

Minestrone (a lot of dicing)

1 hour | 4 portions | an 8 mm dice of everything

A soup that rewards a good dice: onion, carrot, celery, courgette and potato all cut to the same size, so they cook together.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

1	onion
2	carrots
2	celery sticks
1	courgette
1	potato (about 150 g)
2	garlic cloves
1 tbsp	olive oil
1 tin	chopped tomatoes (400 g)
750 ml	hot vegetable stock
1 tin	cannellini beans (400 g), drained
50 g	small pasta shapes
2 tbsp	chopped parsley or basil
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. **Prep first (about 15 minutes):** dice the onion, carrots, celery, courgette and potato into **8 mm cubes**. Mince the garlic. Keep the courgette separate: it goes in later.
2. Soften the onion, carrot and celery in the oil for **8 to 10 minutes**, then add the garlic for 1 minute.
3. Add the potato, tomatoes and stock and simmer for 10 minutes. Add the beans, pasta and courgette and simmer for 10 minutes more, until the pasta is tender.
4. Season and stir in the herbs.

LEVEL 2 · CHOPPED

Chopped salad

20 minutes | 3 to 4 portions | everything cut to the same small size

A salad that is all about the knife: every ingredient diced to about 8 mm, so every forkful has everything in it.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

1	cucumber
4	tomatoes
1	red pepper
1	small red onion
1 tin	chickpeas (400 g), drained
1 tbsp	chopped parsley or mint
2 tbsp	extra-virgin olive oil
1	lemon, juice
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Dice the cucumber, seeded tomatoes and pepper into **8 mm cubes**. Dice the red onion finely.
2. Mix with the chickpeas and herbs. Dress with the oil, lemon juice and seasoning just before serving.

LEVEL 3 · SPEED

Vegetable noodle stir-fry (prep-first cooking)

30 minutes | 2 to 3 portions | 5 minutes of cooking, 20 of prep

The finale: everything is cut and in bowls before the wok is hot. This is mise en place, 'everything in its place'.

INGREDIENTS (3 PORTIONS)

200 g	egg noodles or rice noodles
1	carrot, peeled
1	red pepper
100 g	mangetout or sugar snap peas
4	spring onions
1	garlic clove
1 tsp	fresh ginger
1 tbsp	sunflower oil
2 tbsp	soy sauce
1 tsp	sesame oil

1. Cook the noodles as the packet says, rinse in cold water and drain. **Prep:** slice the carrot into thin diagonal slices, the pepper into strips, and the mangetout in half on the diagonal. Slice the spring onions on the diagonal (white and green separate), and mince the garlic and ginger.
2. Mix the soy sauce and sesame oil in a small bowl.
3. Heat the wok until very hot. Add the sunflower oil, then the carrot for 1 minute, the pepper and mangetout for 2 minutes, the white spring onion, garlic and ginger for 30 seconds.
4. Add the noodles and sauce, toss for 1 to 2 minutes until hot, then add the green spring onion.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Slow and accurate or fast

Does speed matter?

1. Dice an onion twice: once slowly, focusing on even pieces, and once as fast as is comfortable (with the claw).
2. Compare the evenness of the dice and how safe it felt.

Look for: The slow dice is more even. A comfortable, steady speed gives almost the same result in less time. Rushing makes both worse.

EXPERIMENT

One board or two

Does a second board help?

1. Prepare the stir-fry vegetables on one board, wiping between each. Then do it on two boards, one for onion and garlic and one for everything else.
2. Compare the flavours and the washing up.

Look for: One board is fine if you wipe it. Two boards stop onion and garlic tainting the rest, and keep raw meat completely separate.

EXPERIMENT

Your own prep routine

Find what works for you.

1. Time yourself on the table above, writing down how long each step actually takes.
2. Change one thing (order, bowls or knife) and time it again.

Look for: Everyone finds their own order. Write it down in your house recipes.

Your skills table

SKILL	CAN DO IT	STILL PRACTISING	NOTES
Pinch grip and claw			
Sharpening and honing			
Dicing an onion			
Chopping herbs			
Batons, dice and julienne			
Peppers, mango and avocado			
Hard vegetables			
Raw meat hygiene			
Fish, bread and cheese			
Prep for three dishes			

Your house recipes

RECIPE	CUTS USED	TIME	NOTES
Everyday soup			
Favourite salad			
Quick stir-fry			
Weekend roast			

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Minestrone				
Chopped salad				
Noodle stir-fry				

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Timed prep				
Slow vs fast				
One board vs two				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Prep takes far too long	Dull knife, or cutting everything fine	Sharpen; cut only as fine as the dish needs
Board a mess	Scraps on the board	Use a scrap bowl and wipe as you go
Sore hand	Gripping the knife too tight	Relax; use the pinch grip
Pieces uneven when hurried	Rushing	Slow down; steady wins
Cut veg dries or browns	Prepped too early	Prep near cooking time, or cover and chill
Onion on everything	Same board and hands	Wipe the board and wash your hands between

SAFETY: THE WHOLE COURSE

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fish covered on the bottom shelf of the fridge, where juices can't drip onto other food. **Don't wash raw chicken**: it splashes bacteria around the kitchen, and cooking kills them anyway.

Hygiene: wash your hands, boards and knives in hot soapy water after handling raw meat, fish or eggs, and don't use the same board for raw meat and for food that won't be cooked. Wash fruit, vegetables and herbs that you eat raw.

Leftovers: cool cooked food quickly (within 1 to 2 hours), keep it covered in the fridge, and eat it within **2 days**. Reheat until steaming hot all the way through, and only once.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can set up a prep station and work left to right.
- ☐ I can cut for three dishes in one session.
- ☐ I keep my knives sharp and my board still.
- ☐ I use separate boards for raw meat and wash up properly.
- ☐ I have my own skills table and house recipes.

NEXT CHAPTER

That finishes **Cooking Skills: Knife Skills 1**. Choose the next course from the series plan.