

Be a pro in the field of buying and work with kitchen knife

Napísal: PapamPijem
Saturday, 17 March 2007

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There are only three knives that are crucial in a kitchen: **a chef's knife, a paring knife and a serrated knife**. Any other knives are a luxury—they can make cooking easier and more enjoyable, but are unnecessary.

A **chef's knife** (sometimes called a cook's knife) is the most important knife to have in your kitchen. It has a wide blade between six and ten inches long and is used primarily for chopping, though it can be used for anything you want to do. The blade of a classic, French-style chef's knife curves upward toward the tip.

A **paring knife** looks like a miniature chef's knife, with a blade ranging from two to four inches long. It's good for delicate tasks where a larger blade would get in the way. Paring knives are ideal for peeling onions, coring tomatoes or trimming vegetables.

A **serrated knife** is used for bread, tomatoes and even meat. Serrated knives are most useful on foods that have one texture on the outside and another inside, like a hard-crust bread or a tomato. Choose a longer serrated knife to minimize the amount of sawing necessary. An offset serrated knife, sometimes called a deli knife, minimizes the chance of hitting your knuckles on the cutting board once you're done cutting.

The Extras:

A **slicing knife** is for cutting cooked meat, poultry and fish. It should be long enough (eight to 10 inches) to span a large roast, narrow for reduced drag and flexible enough to easily separate flesh from bone.

In skilled hands, a cleaver can do everything a chef's knife can do—slice, chop, fillet, scoop, smash—and more. Its heavy, rectangular blade is designed to hack through the sorts of bones other knives have a hard time with.

A boning knife is for the delicate task of separating raw meat, poultry and fish from bone. Its blade, six or so inches long, is thinner than a slicing knife and flexible enough to follow the contours of a fish or bird.

How to buy the best knife

Good knife is a worthwhile investment. If you buy a quality one and take care of it, you will have it for a lifetime. A good knife will pay for itself over time. Cooking will be much more enjoyable, so you'll spend less money on restaurants and takeouts. A good knife is also safer, so you'll spend less on bandages. Before you buy knives, learn their anatomy. Knives are made up of four parts: the blade, the handle, the bolster, and the tang.

The blade can be made of stainless steel, carbon steel, high-carbon steel or ceramic. Metal blades can either be stamped (pressed out of metal) or forged (molded under high heat). Forged knives are heftier and tend to last longer, though stamped blades are useful for lighter work like filleting.

â ~ **Stainless steel knives** are inexpensive, but cannot be sharpened once they lose their edge.

â ~ **Carbon steel knives** hold their edges remarkably well, require careful cleaning and drying, and

will eventually discolor, turning black over time. There's nothing bad about the discoloration; it's a matter of preference.

â ~ **High-carbon steel** gives you the sharpen-ability of carbon steel without the discoloration. Most professional knives are made of this material.

â ~ **Ceramic knives** stay sharp the longest but can break easily.

The handle can be made of wood, plastic, rubber or metal. Though wood can be beautiful, the other materials are more durable. The handle can either be riveted to the blade or molded around it. Riveted ones are believed to be the strongest, but the most important thing about a handle is that it feels good in your hand and you feel comfortable holding it.

Storage and sharpening of your knives

Your knives are an investment, so follow these easy steps to take care of them.

Storage:

Don't throw your knives in a drawer. Banging around against one another will dull their blades. Use either a knife block or a magnetic strip to keep them separate. If space is an issue and you must put your knives in a drawer, buy blade guards to protect them.

Never put a knife away wet; it'll corrode the blade. Let it air-dry, or dry it with a kitchen towel. And don't put knives in the dishwasher; it will dull its blade.

Sharpening:

Use a sharpening steel regularly, preferably one made of high-carbon steel. A steel doesn't sharpen the blade but instead straightens its edge. Regular use of a steel will keep a knife in relatively good shape. Your knife will inevitably dull, though, and be in need of a proper sharpening. To do that:

â ~ Use a sharpening stone: "wet stones" need to be moistened with water or oil; dry stones don't. Most commercially sold stones require water. Carefully pull the knife across the stone at a 10- to 20-degree angle. Keep your fingers spread out on the blade, applying even, gentle pressure, while dragging the knife from the tip to the handle. Use the same number of strokes on each side of the knife.

â ~ Use a pull-through sharpener. These are easier to use than sharpening stones, but tend to be less precise.

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â ~ Take your knives to a professional sharpener. Check your local kitchen store for a recommendation.

It's worth your while to keep your knife sharp-dull knives are more dangerous than sharp ones as they require more pressure and can slip easier.