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# *Introduction*

Say the word *chef* and you can almost hear the ringing of knives as they flash back and forth on a steel, the rhythmic knocking of a knife chopping, and the whisper of mincing. You can see the gleam of a blade as it flies through an onion. Knives are so much a part of the chef's work that it is impossible to imagine a chef at work without them. As a result, chefs have a strong and personal attachment to their knives.

Today's cooks and chefs have a wide array of cutting tools available to them. A basic selection of tools, the chef's knife kit, is indispensable. Knives (including chef's knives, utility and paring knives, boning and filleting knives, and specialty knives) are part of this selection, along with the appropriate sharpening tools (steels and stones). Other tools, such as peelers, zesters, brushes, palette knives, oyster and clam knives, and metal and wooden spoons, are also so fundamental to kitchen work that they are considered basics.

When you become a good cook, you become a good craftsman first.  
You repeat and repeat and repeat until your hands know how to move  
without thinking about it.

— Jacques Pépin

## *Holding the Knife*

Your ability to control the knife as you work is an important factor in working safely and efficiently. The way you hold the knife can change the way you work. For instance, when you need to exert a lot of pressure, you'll want to hold the knife in a firm grip. Otherwise, the knife could simply glance off whatever it is you are cutting; it might even fly out of your hand. When you need to maneuver the knife blade around delicate fish bones, you hold the knife so that it is more like an extension of your fingers. Basic knife grips are described below, along with basic positions for your guiding hand. The guiding hand controls the food you are cutting. The position for your guiding hand depends upon the cutting technique you are using as well as the food.



Keep the fingers of the guiding hand tucked under.

## Peeling and Cutting an Onion

1. Use a paring knife to remove the stem end of the onion. Peel off the skin and the underlying layer, if it contains brown spots. Trim the root end but leave it intact. Halve the onion lengthwise through the root. Put it cut side down on a cutting board and make a series of evenly spaced, parallel, lengthwise cuts with the tip of a chef's knife, again leaving the root end intact.
2. Make two or three horizontal cuts in the onion (parallel to the board) from the stem end toward the root end (do not cut all the way through) while gently holding the vertical cuts together. Holding the previous cuts together will help to produce a more uniform mince.
3. Make even crosswise cuts with a chef's knife all the way through from stem to root end. The closer the cuts in step 1 and in this step, the finer the dice will be. An alternative method for slicing or dicing an onion calls for a series of cuts to be made following the natural curve of the onion half (this approach eliminates the need to make a horizontal cut, as directed in step 2). Make a series of cuts evenly spaced over the curved surface of the onion (sometimes referred to as radial cuts) and then make crosswise cuts for dice or mince.



Make parallel cuts (step 1).



Make even horizontal cuts (step 2).



Cut the onion crosswise to dice (step 3).

## Pastry Bags and Tips

There are mixtures in the bakeshop and kitchen that are too soft or too wet to effectively form and shape. A pastry bag allows you to pipe soft, pliable substances such as whipped cream, mashed potatoes, or *pâte à choux* into specific shapes and forms. Commonly, pastry bags are made of canvas, but single-use plastic pastry bags are popular. In a pinch, a heavy-duty plastic bag such as a freezer bag can be used. Pastry bags are shaped like triangles, with a mouth on the shorter open side. A metal or plastic tip can be placed at the smaller open end of the bag before adding the food. Different tips create specific effects.



Pastry or piping bags are used as portioning tools. Here one is used to portion the filling onto wonton wrappers.