

TECHNIQUES

Knife Skills: How to Cut Beef For Stir Fries

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The first step to great food is great knife skills. Check out more [Knife Skills this way!](#)

(<http://www.seriousseats.com/tags/knife%20skill>)



All meat—beef, chicken, human, whatever—has a grain to it; It's the direction that the major muscle fibers run in. As we've [demonstrated in the past](#) (<http://www.seriousseats.com/2010/03/why-should-you-cut-meat-steak-against-the-grain.html>), the angle at which you hold your knife in relation to this grain while cutting has a pretty profound effect on the tenderness of the meat. Cut in the same direction as the grain, and your meat comes out tough and ropery. Cut against the grain, and you shorten the muscle fibers, effectively tenderizing the meat.

[Video: Jessica Leibowitz of [my camera eats food](#) (<http://www.mycameraeatsfood.com/>)]

The goal with any stir-fry is to cut the food into bite-size pieces that will cook rapidly and

remain tender. This means that more than almost any other cooking method, **cutting the meat against the grain into the right shape is absolutely essential**. This video will show you how it's done.

SHOPPING AND STORAGE

When it comes to stir-fries, the best cuts of beef are ones that are loose-textured enough to absorb the flavorings, but beefy enough to stand up on its own. Because you're slicing them so thin, expensive super-tender cuts like strip or tenderloin are overkill. Much better are the so-called butcher's cuts. These are my favorites:



- **Skirt steak**, also labeled as "fajita meat" is a cut from the plate, the region near the belly, just behind the front leg of the cow. It comes in a thin strip about 18 inches long and 5 inches wide, with the grain running the short way. It's a little tough but has a deep, robust beef flavor, making it perfect for stir-fries.
- **Flank steak** used to be one of the cheapest cuts at the butcher until it saw a huge boom in popularity in the late '90s and early aughts. Nowadays, it commands prices nearly as high as loin cuts. Its advantage? You can find it pretty much anywhere. Unlike skirt steak, its grain runs the long way. The flavor is lightly metallic and not quite as robust as skirt.
- **Hanger steak**, known in french as the *onglet*, used to be strictly the domain of chefs and butchers, but is becoming more and more widely available these days. Cut from the diaphragm, it is extraordinarily beefy, and when cut right (as I'm sure you'll do after watching the video), is as tender as you'd like. It's got a slightly odd prism shape which can make the grain a little tough to identify. This is probably my favorite cut of beef for quick cooking.
- **Flap Meat**, also sold as sirloin tip in the New England area comes from the sirloin (that's top side of the cow, right in front of its butt). It's tough to track down, but if you can, jump on it, particularly if you can get it as a whole cut rather than the cubes or strips it often comes in. Its texture and flavor are similar to hanger (a little more mild), but its large, uniform size makes it much easier to butcher.

Like all meats, beef should be kept well wrapped and used within a few days of purchase. Don't slice the meat into strips until you are ready to cook it. Pre-slicing will increase its

surface area, increasing oxidation, which can cause the meat to discolor or develop livery off-flavors.

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