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I Illustrated Guide to Kitchen Khe

Do you really need \$400 worth of forged German steel? H (and using) the essential knives—and a a ecdntmtetne

THREE ESSENTIAL KNIVES] anufacturers try to trap you into buying blocks with a dozen knives, but sharp shoppers invest only in the essentials.

8-INCH CHEF'S KNIFE

From chopping an onion to mincing herbs and butchering a chicken this one knife will handle 90 percent of your kitchen cutting work.

Bolster Basics

Most forged knives have a thick collar of metal near the handle called a bolster. Designed to balance

the weight of the blade, it poses a problem for home sharpeners, as its thickness prevents the heel of the blade from passing through the sharpening channel. Over the course of many sharpenings (which gradually wear down the blade), the bolster may start to protrude, preventing the blade from making smooth contact with the cutting board.

Forged or Stamped?

Conventional wisdom dictates that forged blades—made by pouring molten steel into molds—are superior to cheaper stamped blades which are punched out of a sheet of steel. Our tests showed that the forged/stamped distinction is less important than weight. Some testers liked the maneuverability of the lighter knives, while others preferred the sturdiness and balance of a heavier forged blade.

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I Material World Pasal

Most quality blades are made from high- — Getting a Handle onit

carbon stainless steel, a hard metal that, Curve Appeal We prefer molded plastic handles over once sharpened, tends to stay that way. Chef's knives with a long, gently those made from wood (which collects (We recommend them.) Some purists sloping curvature better perform grease and dirt) or metal (which can get prefer carbon steel knives, which may the rocking motion necessary for slippery). Most of our test cooks prefer take a sharper edge initially but don't mincing and chopping than

'those a simple shape (no "ergonomic" bumps retain it for as long. Expensive ceramic with a relatively straight line that and ridges) and a smooth texture rather blades are ultra-sharp but ultra-fragile. curves abruptly at the tip. than a "pebbled" finish. The handle should balance the weight of the blade, making

a tight, comfortable seal with your hand. When shopping for a knife, try out both common grips (see "Two Basic Grips," page 17) before making your choice.

*& AND THE WINNERS ARE... The inexpensive, lightweight FORSCHNER FIBROX (\$36) was the favorite among testers who fancy lighter knives. Those who like a sturdier forged blade preferred the WUSTHOF GRAND PRIX II (\$94) —still reasonably light.

10-INCH BREAD KNIFE

The pointed serrations of a good bread knife glide through crusty breads, bagels, and tomato skins to produce neat slices, while a poorly designed bread knife slips, stutters, and shreds its way through food.

3'2-INCH PARING KNIFE

A paring knife is essential for tasks that require more dexterity and precision than a chef's knife can provide: peeling and coring apples, deveining shrimp, cutting citrus segments, and more.

LE ///

a ict a Knives shorter than The blade of a paring knife should be somewhat A slightly curved blade Pointed serrations 10 inches tended flexible for easy maneuvering into tight spots keeps knuckles from ___ give the blade a good toicatchy had tips (such as tomato cores) and for handling curves scraping the cutting _grip on the food right re rei ' when peeling and paring. board, allowinga away, while WAVY \$e cuttin rocking motion to cut rations slide around 8 8 * AND THE WINNER IS... .*

through tough crusts. before digging in.

With a paring knife, weight and balance are

less important than a sharp, agile blade and *& AND THE WINNER IS...

The FORSCHNER FIBROX (\$36) has tall, including

our guide to choosing Cut. BY SEAN LAWLER

OTHER RECOMMENDED

see | Depending on what you cook, you may

want to expand your arsenal to include some of these other useful blades.

BONING KNIFE

The slim, flexible blade of a boning knife is invaluable for sliding through joints, between bones, and under silver skin. Choose a blade between 5 and 7 inches, with a tapered tip and an easy-to-grip handle, such as the *Forschner Fibrox Boning Knife* (\$18).

SLICING/ CARVING KNIFE

A good carving knife does one thing only: cut thin, uniform slices from large cuts of meat. You either need one or you don't. Look for a straight, nonserrated edge with a uniform width (at least 4 inches) from handle to rounded tip and a rigid 10-inch blade, like that of the *Chef Cutlery Legend 10-inch Granton Slicer* (\$45, see page 32).

CLEAVER

About the only time we reach for a meat

cleaver is when making homemade chicken stock—we've found the best way to release flavor from the bones is to hack them up. If you tackle this task regularly, consider the super-sharp, sturdy *Global* (\$106) or the lighter-weight *Lamson Sharp* (\$40).

ELECTRIC KNIFE

Aside from carving large holiday roasts, electric knives do an excellent job cutting into foods that are made up of layers with

distinctly firm and soft textures—such

as pecan pie and quesadillas—which can get mashed by a regular chef's knife. (For perfectionists, admittedly.) The test kitchen winner is the *Black and Decker EK800*

a firm, comfortable grip. The *FORSCHNER*

FIBROX (\$5.95) has both for a low price. the most comfortable handle.

Slice Right (\$24.99).

KEEPING KNIVES SHARP

A knife loses its sharpness when the fine tip of the cutting edge gets knocked slightly out of alignment, which can happen any time the blade makes contact

with food board. The knife may "act dull" even though the edge is still quite sharp

wrong direction. This can happen very quickly if you are doing—be just as quickly restored by using

proper cutting technique just pointed in the in a lot of heavy cutting work, but the edge can be sharpened with steel, which realigns the edge and removes slight irregularities.

ways to protect your knife's edge are to avoid hard cutting surfaces such as glass or acrylic (stick to wood and plastic cutting boards) and to keep them out of

the dishwasher, where getting knocked around might damage their edge.

Two

IS IT SHARP? To determine if your knife needs to be

sharpened, put it to the paper test.

1. Hold a folded, but not creased, sheet of newspaper by one end.
2. Lay the blade against the top edge at an angle and slice outward. If the knife fails to slice cleanly, try steeling it. If it still fails, it needs sharpening.

CHOOSING—AND USING—A STEEL | Ce | should steel your knives regularly, before each use if possible, but sharpen them

only when necessary. Traditional steels are lightly grooved, magnetized iron rods, prefer the newer diamond steels—hollow oval tubes coated with diamond dust. These grind trace amounts of metal from the knife with each swipe, Partially opening the blade while straightening it and extending the period between sharpenings. However, keep in mind that steeling will only realign a fairly sharp

edge; a dull knife has to be sharpened (see below).

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Step 1. Hold the steel perpendicular to the work surface, with the tip resting on a cutting board

2. Place the heel of the blade against the steel, with the blade at a 20-degree angle away from it.

3. With a locked wrist and light pressure, slide

blade down the length of the steel in a sweeping on, pulling the back of the blade toward you

at the entire length of the blade comes in

Care

th contact with the steel.

4. Repeat the motion on the other side of the blade. Four or five strokes per side should

x

realign the edge.

SHARPENING There are two options for grinding a new edge on a knife at home:

1. Sharpening stone. This method is effective but takes some practice, and it's more work than many home cooks want to do. It involves a double-sided sharpening stone, some elbow grease, and about 15 minutes per blade. (For step-by-step instructions, see Cook's Extra, below at right.)
2. Knife sharpener. An electric home sharpener can restore the edge of even a seriously neglected blade, provided you buy one with a coarse regrinding wheel, such as our favorite, the Chef'sChoice go SA 110 (\$80). Some less expensive models do feature only medium- and fine-grade slots, but are good for perking up a slightly dull blade but are unable to grind a completely new edge. **CAUTION:** These machines do remove a certain amount of metal from the blade with each use, so use them no more than necessary.

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BASIC KNIFE TECHNIQUES ————— TWO BASIC GRIPS

Blade Grip

Handle Grip

Cooks with larger hands often prefer the blade grip, in which the thumb and index finger actually grip the heel of the blade. While this grip requires a bit more hand strength, it also provides

. causes fewer calluses, more control over the tip of the blade.

With the handle grip, the thumb rests on the side of the handle opposite the index finger. This grip is favored by test cooks with smaller hands. For those who work long hours with a knife, it also

SAFE SLICING WITH A 'GUIDING HAND' By properly positioning the hand that is not holding the knife, slippage, control the size of the cut, and protect your fingers.

you can prevent

In this "bear claw" position, the fingertips are curled back away from the knife to hold the food in place, while the knuckles rest against the side of the blade, providing guidance with no danger of being cut.

To cut multiple slices, use the curvature of the blade to guide the knife through a

series of smooth cutting strokes. Some part of the blade should remain in contact with the cutting board at all times. During the upward motion, reposition the guiding hand to set up the next slice.

CAREFUL CARVING

The key to smooth, even cuts is a long stroke with very mild downward pressure. Let the knife do the work, and avoid short, sawing strokes, which yield ragged slices.

CHOPPING AND MINCING

This fast, continuous motion makes quick work of fresh herbs, onions, and the like. It begins with the handle held high and the knife tip on the cutting board, held gently in place with the guiding hand. The front half of the blade remains in contact with the cutting board at all times.

Go to www.cooksillustrated.com

- Key In code 70613 for our Illustrated Guide to Sharpening Knives.

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