

September 9, 2012

Technique Class: Knife Skills

Classic Vegetable Cuts

1. Slice the vegetables.

Cutting vegetables into similar-sized pieces helps them cook evenly and contributes to a nice appearance. Using a chef's knife, cut the vegetables lengthwise into even slices. Discard or save irregular pieces for stock.



4. Julienne the vegetables.

Julienne are very thin rectangular cuts. Follow steps 1 and 2 above, but make the initial slices very thin. For round vegetables such as carrots, you can make the initial slices diagonal instead of lengthwise, if desired.

2. Cut the slices into sticks.

Stack 2 or 3 slices at a time, then cut the slices lengthwise into sticks that are the same width as the thickness of the slices.

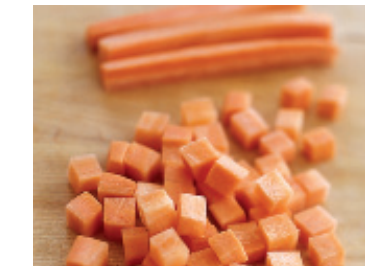


5. Mince the vegetables.

Gather the julienned vegetables into small bundles, then cut them crosswise into very small pieces, or mince. Since the pieces are so small, you don't need to worry about being so precise when mincing.

3. Cut the sticks into dice.

Gather a few sticks at a time into a compact bundle, then cut the sticks crosswise into pieces that are the same length as the width of the sticks. Done properly, you will end up with evenly sized cubes, called dice.



6. Roll-cutting vegetables.

Also called an oblique cut, this is used for round vegetables, especially when roasting. Hold the knife on a diagonal and cut the vegetable. Roll the item a half turn and cut again. Repeat the roll before each cut.

How to Chiffonade



1. Select the herb.

Large-leaved herbs such as basil, sage and mint can be either slivered or chopped. Choose bunches with bright green, fragrant leaves. Avoid those with wilted or discolored leaves.



2. Pull the leaves from the stems.

Rinse the herbs and pat them dry. Use your fingers to pull off the large leaves one at a time from the stems. Discard the stems and any discolored leaves.



3. Stack and roll the leaves.

Stack 5 or 6 herb leaves on top of one another, then roll the stack lengthwise into a tight cylinder.



4. Cut the leaves into ribbons.

Using a chef's knife, cut the leaves crosswise into narrow slivers. These ribbons are known as a chiffonade. To chop the herbs, gather the slivers into a pile and rock the blade over them to cut into small pieces.

For the sherry vinaigrette:

- 3 Tbs. sherry vinegar
- 1 tsp. Dijon mustard
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- ¼ tsp. salt
- ½ tsp. freshly ground pepper
- ¼ cup olive oil

1 small yellow bell pepper, seeded and chopped

1 small orange bell pepper, seeded and chopped

2 cups cherry or grape tomatoes, halved

4 celery stalks, thinly sliced

¾ cup pitted large green olives, quartered

¼ cup finely chopped red onion

1 Tbs. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

1 tsp. chopped fresh thyme

8 oz. Manchego cheese, cut into ¼-inch cubes

Chopped Salad of Peppers, Tomatoes, Olives and Manchego

Use vegetables that have some crunch, like the peppers listed here, or try cucumbers, fennel and carrots. For a more substantial salad, add 6 oz. of diced ham or dry salami.

To make the vinaigrette, in a large bowl, whisk together the vinegar, mustard, garlic, salt and pepper. Add the olive oil in a thin stream, whisking constantly until the dressing is smooth.

Add the bell peppers, tomatoes, celery, olives, onion, parsley, thyme and cheese to the vinaigrette in the bowl. Toss until all of the ingredients are coated with the vinaigrette and serve immediately. Serves 6.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Salad of the Day*, by Georgeanne Brennan (Weldon Owen, 2012).

½ cup pecans

1 Tbs. peanut oil

Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

Pinch of sugar

2 pork tenderloins, each about ¾ lb., trimmed

1 Tbs. olive oil

For the hazelnut vinaigrette:

6 Tbs. olive oil

2½ Tbs. sherry vinegar

Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

1 Tbs. hazelnut oil

2 firm but ripe pears, preferably Bosc

6 handfuls (about 6 oz.) mixed salad greens

Salad of Grilled Pork, Pears and Toasted Pecans

Pork matches well to the sweetness of cider, but instead of braising, sear tenderloins for a quick weeknight salad with slices of fresh green pear. If the weather is too chilly to fire up the grill, the broiler works just as well.

Preheat an oven to 350°F.

In a bowl, combine the pecans, peanut oil, salt, pepper and sugar and toss well to coat the nuts. Spread the pecans evenly on a baking sheet and bake until lightly golden, 5 to 7 minutes. Let cool.

Prepare a hot fire in a grill, or preheat a broiler.

Brush the pork tenderloins with the 1 Tbs. olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Place on the grill rack or on a broiler pan 4 inches from the heat source and cook, turning occasionally to brown evenly, until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the meat registers 150°F or the pork is pale pink when cut in the thickest portion, about 12 minutes. Transfer to a cutting board, cover loosely with foil, and let rest for 2 to 3 minutes before slicing. Cut the pork crosswise into slices ¼ inch thick.

To make the vinaigrette, in a small bowl, whisk together the 6 Tbs. olive oil, the vinegar, salt and pepper. Add the hazelnut oil in a thin stream, whisking constantly until the vinaigrette is smooth.

Halve, core and cut the pears lengthwise into very thin slices. In a large bowl, combine the greens, pecans and vinaigrette and toss to mix well. Arrange the dressed greens on a platter or individual plates, top with the pork and pear slices and serve immediately. Serves 6.

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Slicing Against the Grain



1. Locate the meat's grain. Notice the way the meat fibers are running through the meat; this is called the grain. Brisket and flank steak need to be sliced across the grain to enhance the meat's tenderness.



2. Slice the meat. Holding a meat fork in one hand, use the fork to steady the meat. Try not to insert the tines into the flesh. Hold the knife at a 45-degree angle and cut the meat into thin slices.

Trimming a Beef or Pork Tenderloin

1. Trim the external fat. Use a boning knife or chef's knife to make long, even strokes to remove the fat from the exterior of the tenderloin. Try not to rip the meat as you trim.



3. Pull the silver skin taut. Position the knife where the silver skin meets the flesh and begin to cut, using your fingers to pull away the skin in the direction of the cut. Angle the knife against the skin, not the meat, to avoid tearing it.

2. Locate the silver skin. Look for the thin, white membrane, called silver skin, that runs the length of the meat; it is very tough and needs to be trimmed before cooking. Slide the knife under the silver skin to free the tip of the skin from the flesh.



4. Remove the silver skin. As you work, turn the tenderloin on the board and continue to remove the silver skin in sections. Do not pull too hard or work too fast or you risk tearing off some of the meat with the silver skin.

Sharpening a Knife with a Stone



1. Push the blade over the stone.

Following the manufacturer's instructions, wet the stone with water or mineral oil. Hold the knife blade against the stone at a constant 15- to 20-degree angle, then push the blade across the stone from tip to end in one smooth motion.

2. Pull the blade over the stone.

Turn the knife over and maintaining the same angle, pull the knife back toward you in a long, even stroke. Repeat several times.

Using a Manual Knife Sharpener



1. Grind the knife edge coarsely.

Following the manufacturer's instructions, pass the knife through the slot with the coarsest grinding stone.

2. Smooth and hone the blade.

Pass the knife through the slot of the finest grinding stone to smooth out the edge and hone the knife.

Honing a Knife



1. Run the blade across the steel.

Swipe each side of the cutting edge a few times across and along the length of the steel, alternating sides and holding the knife at a 15- to 20-degree angle.

2. Repeat the strokes.

Repeat 3 to 10 times to realign the sharp cutting edge of the knife. To keep your knives in top form, get in the habit of honing them before or after each use; clean the knife both before and after honing it.

Staying Sharp

Honing vs. Sharpening: The edge of a blade is made up of microscopic cutting teeth that flatten out over time. A magnetized honing steel helps restore the knife's sharp edge by "trueing" it—that is, smoothing and realigning the worn carbon-steel cutting teeth. Virtually all manufacturers recommend you become proficient with a honing steel, which is included in most knife block sets. Honing should be done each time you use your knife, either before or after use. This will realign an edge that has "folded over."

Eventually, however, a new edge will need to be created. This process, known as "sharpening," involves removing steel from the blade. Done correctly, sharpening will involve precise angle control, regardless if it's done by the manufacturer or by a sharpening system.

Cutting Surfaces: Opinions diverge on whether wood or plastic cuttings boards are superior, but steer clear of those made from marble, Corian or glass, which can dull your knives. For the most versatility, choose cutting boards that measure at least 12 by 18 inches. To limit the transfer of food-borne bacteria to different foods, consider reserving one cutting board for meat, poultry and seafood, and a second for vegetables, fruits and other uses.