



# master cuts

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Are you one of those people? You know the ones... the vegetable destroyers. Is your knife block home to a dull set of knives that you routinely use to prepare your meals in a fashion not unlike hacking your way through the Amazon with a blunt machete ?

**OK PERHAPS THAT'S STRETCHING** it a bit far. But for me, there is a sense of quiet confidence and measured intent when you enter the kitchen of someone who knows how to use a knife. They wield it in a such a way that you know they mean to make every motion, rather than haplessly chopping in the hope of whittling the food into a more manageable form. It leaves me looking forward to the meal all the more because I know the thought and effort that has been put into each slice.

Using a knife properly is not hard but it does take practice and there are things you need to know.

First you'll need a sharp knife. For the purpose of the demonstration Michael Snadden (chef, instructor, TAFE lecturer and knifiste extraordinaire) is using a high carbon stainless steel chefs knife. They come in various lengths, but 20 - 30 cm is perfect for the majority of your chopping needs. And remember, a sharp knife is a safe knife. The finer the cutting edge the less pressure needed to slice through the food, and the less chance of slipping.

You'll also need a good flat sturdy surface. A solid wooden chopping board is best, and if it's sliding around, try putting a tea towel underneath it to keep it in one place.



## Dice

Peel the onion by slicing the ends off, just above the root. Slice the onion vertically down the middle and then peel



both halves free of the outer layers. Place half an onion cut side down on a chopping board, with the root end furthest



away from the knife. A traditional method for dicing an onion is to make a series of horizontal and vertical cuts,



## Holding the knife

For the majority of cuts made we will be using the 'pinch grip' as shown. The knife is held at the point where the handle meets the blade, pinching between the thumb and forefinger. The other fingers are wrapped around the handle. This grip works for both vertical and horizontal cuts and for a variety of different knives. It gives you both balance and control, unlike just grabbing the handle like you were shaking hands. You should also try not to put your finger down the spine of the blade, as this immediately weakens the grip.

The next thing to take into account is the position of the guide hand. This hand is responsible for holding the vegetables or

meat, and for guiding the knife to the correct spot for the next cut.

This hand should be face down, with firm pressure, fingernails curled slightly underneath and thumb tucked in behind. Think about making a tiger-style kung fu claw... if that helps.

Now we put it together. The knife point should sit on the cutting surface. We do the majority of the cutting in a saw like motion around the middle of the blade. Keep the wrist of your knife hand fixed, and strong, and the blade against your knuckles on the guide hand. What you're doing is using the point of the knife as a kind of pivot point, and



## Julienne

Lay a peeled carrot on the chopping board, and with a chef's knife in a pinch grip, angle the carrot so you are cutting



diagonally to your body, and making longish thin slices. Now take these slices and lay them on top of each other.



Hold the stack firmly down with your guide hand and position the point of the knife just beyond the stack.





before slicing across the cross sections to create the dice. You could use this kind of dice in a soup, a risotto, or any



number of different dishes by varying the size and number of cuts.

moving the knife up and down in a smooth constant motion with your arm, as your guide hand moves the vegetables into position.

The knife blade should travel as if on rails. Consistent and unflinching from its original course. The moment you start twisting the blade around or trying to cut at irregular angles, you start to make things difficult. It's this smoothness and fluidity of motion that makes it all look so effortless. The mechanics are simple, but when applied properly look very impressive.

For two simple examples we'll dice an onion and julienne a carrot. These are classic cuts which you can apply to a variety of different vegetables in a similar way. ✨



Your forefinger should guide the blade through the stack as the knife slides back and forward creating thin strips.



The same technique applies to a leek and if you chop the julienne, you're a celery stick away from making a mirepoix.



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