



The background of the entire page is a close-up photograph of a light-colored wooden cutting board. The wood grain is clearly visible, running horizontally. On the far left edge, a small portion of a green herb, possibly parsley, is visible. The text is overlaid on the right side of the board.

tools of the trade

We wouldn't get very far in the kitchen without certain timesaving devices. Here are some tools I have found indispensable in preparing the recipes in this book.

'Tis an ill cook that cannot lick his own fingers.

—William Shakespeare

In her book *Cook's Tools: The Complete Manual of Kitchen Implements and How to Use Them*, Susan Campbell lists *hands* before any other tool in the kitchen. I would concur with her opinion that hands are the most important “tool” in the realm of food preparation. Where would we be without hand-tossed pizzas, hand-roll sushi, or finger food? In a professional kitchen, the hands take on multiple tasks. We chefs test the doneness of meat with our sense of touch. We use our cupped hands as measuring spoons. Our fingers are trained to pick up just the right amount of salt for the sauce we are reducing in a pan. And yes, we taste with our fingers.

In the often-chaotic circumstances under which we work, we don't always have the tools at hand that we need. But we do, thank goodness, have our hands at hand. Many is the time that a chef has had to sacrifice the first couple of layers of skin on his hand to pull a hot pan off of the stove. Every chef I know has used his or her hands as tongs to flip sizzling cuts of meat on the grill. And chefs are legendary for their ability to hold plates that are so hot that no other mortal can touch them (much to the dismay of servers the world over).

It is important for those of us who cook to realize that there was a time when food processors, spice grinders, blenders, and cappuccino machines did not exist. While all of these pieces of equipment are great conveniences and timesavers, not one of them (except perhaps the cappuccino machine) is indispensable. Everything that those modern machines of convenience can do, we can do with our own hands and a knife—which happens to be the next most important tool in the kitchen.



The invention of the first cutting tool, however crude, probably advanced the art of cooking more than any other invention since. In the twenty years that I have been cooking, I have collected numerous knives and lost many more. However, there are only four knives that I use on a frequent basis, and those are the knives I would recommend to anyone. With these knives you will be able to perform just about any cutting task in the kitchen.

Chef's knife: This is the most utilized knife in the kitchen. I have been using my Culinary Institute of America-issued chef's knife since 1984 for

everything from cutting meat and fish, to chopping herbs, to opening bottles of beer.

Paring knife: This is one of the best tools for peeling garlic and ginger, paring fruits and vegetables, and other small cutting jobs. I buy inexpensive paring knives by the dozen at restaurant supply stores so that I always have several on hand.

Chinese cleaver: This is my favorite all-around knife. The Chinese cleaver (as opposed to a meat cleaver) is a great tool for chopping garlic, ginger, and herbs; mincing fish or meat; and pounding out cuts of meat or fish for *pail-lard* or carpaccio. The broad blade of the cleaver can be used as a sort of shovel to scoop up large amounts of chopped stuff. A pair of cleavers, one wielded in each hand, make short work of a pile of fresh herbs. Chinese cleavers can be found at Asian markets and are usually under ten dollars. The best ones are made of a solid piece of stainless steel. I still have the same pair of cleavers that I bought in San Francisco's Chinatown in 1986, and they serve me quite well.

Serrated bread knife: The serrated knife is good for more than just bread. It is great for peeling pineapples.

The most important factor in choosing the right knife for you is performance. Price does not always reflect quality. There is nothing a twenty-dollar paring knife can do that can't be done with a two-dollar paring knife. If that worn old knife that you inherited from your grandmother works for you, then there's no need to go out and buy an expensive new model. Having said that, there are some characteristics that all good knives have in common, such as a full tang, meaning that the knife is forged from one piece of metal to which a handle is attached. Good knives are also well balanced. Whatever knives you choose to outfit your kitchen with should be, more than anything, comfortable to handle. A good knife should feel right at home in your hand, not too heavy and not too light.

Along with owning knives comes the responsibility of taking care of them. Don't rely on someone else to keep your knives sharp. Invest in a good two- or three-sided sharpening stone and some honing oil, available at any hardware store. Learn how to sharpen a knife properly, and then do so on a regular basis. Sometimes you may have to trust your knives to an expert to get out

the occasional nicks or gouges that occur. If you must get your knives professionally sharpened, make sure it is someone experienced with honing a knife and not just grinding it down on a belt sander.

Remember, a dull knife is more dangerous than a sharp one.

Here are three other tools that I heavily rely on in my trade. They should be invaluable to you too.

Mandoline: Next to knives, the mandoline is probably the most frequently used tool in my kitchen. While I love cutting things by hand, nothing matches the mandoline for speed and consistency. It is indispensable for slicing cabbage for slaw or julienning vegetables for salads. It is also good for thinly slicing ginger for easier chopping, or for thinly shaving onions.

Wok: If I could have only one cooking vessel in my kitchen, it would be a wok. There is nothing it can't do: stir-fry, steam, boil, poach, smoke, deep-fry, braise, sauté. Woks are reasonably priced and can be found in any Asian market and in most department stores. The best woks are hand-hammered out of a single piece of steel. The typical wok is bowl shaped, requiring a wok ring to hold it over your stove burner. Flat-bottomed woks work reasonably well, but the standard wok tools only work in a curved wok.

Grill: I think every household, however small, should have a grill. Entire books have been written on grilling, with whole chapters devoted to choosing the right grill. While there are nearly as many styles of grills as there are cars on the market, there are only two basic types: charcoal and gas. The fundamental question in deciding which type



of grill you should choose is this: are you a hands-on griller or a one-handed griller? If you enjoy the process of building a fire, anticipating the flames reaching just the right temperature, and banking the coals to create hot and cool spots, then you are definitely a charcoal-grill person. If, on the other hand, you like to grill with one hand so you can have a beer in the other hand, you're probably a gas-grill person. Not that there is anything wrong with having a beer while you work the grill, mind you. It's just that a beer tastes a lot better when you have worked up a little bit of a sweat first.

When choosing a grill, make sure it is the right size for your needs. If you grill for two people most of the time, you don't need to fire up a barrel-sized grill every time you cook out. Likewise, if you more often cook for a bigger group of folks, a small grill just won't cut it. Make sure your grill has a lid, so you can smoke foods and control flareups.

