

Tested & Perfected

It's a given that food editors know tons of tips and tricks, thanks to spending most workdays in a kitchen. Now you can benefit from our experience.

BY SARAH WHARTON

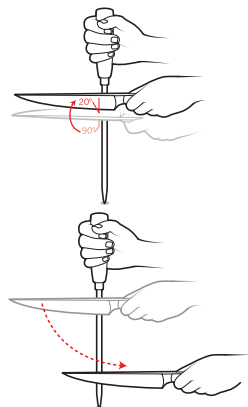
herbal remedies

Store leafy herbs like parsley, cilantro and basil in a glass of water on the counter, as you would flowers. (Refrigerating them may turn the delicate leaves black.)

Wrap hearty herbs like sage, rosemary and thyme in a towel, then refrigerate in an airtight container. For many soup or stew recipes, if you don't feel like stripping the tiny leaves, just throw in whole sprigs and remove stems before serving.

SEAR-IOUSLY DELICIOUS

Searing is simple. All you need to know is: hot pan + dry food + leave it alone. If you want a restaurant-style crusty steak, leave meat out for about 30 minutes so it's at room temperature. Set a dry stainless steel or cast-iron skillet over high heat for about 5 minutes—it will be extremely hot. Pat meat dry and season liberally with salt and pepper. Add a neutral oil (like vegetable or canola) to the pan, give it a minute to heat up, then lay in the steak. Now do nothing but let it sear! If you try to move it and the steak sticks, it's not seared—let it cook a little longer. When you can move it, check that the steak has a nicely browned dry-looking crust. If so, flip it and sear the second side. Thin steaks can be cooked completely in the skillet, while thicker steaks should be finished in the oven. Always let meat rest 5 to 10 minutes (depending on thickness) before slicing.



use your steel

The honing steel is an underutilized tool. Honing is not sharpening, but it can extend the time between sharpenings. Sharpening removes a bit of the metal to reshape the blade. Honing realigns that sharpened blade, which can microscopically “fold over” with use, causing the edge to dull. Many chef's knives (such as Wüsthof or Henckels) have a blade angle of 20°, so try to match that when honing. A trick for finding the angle: Hold the blade perpendicular to the steel. That's 90°. Half of that is 45°, and half of *that* is 22.5°. From there, you can estimate 20°. Be sure to hone safely, keeping the blade away from you.

sharpen your knife skills

→ Comfort is key for a good knife. Make sure you like the style of the handle and that it feels balanced.

→ Your knives aren't interchangeable—each has its special function. Learn the best way to use these three workhorses:

SERRATED KNIFE

for slicing foods that are crusty, like bread, or delicate, like tomatoes or cake

Wüsthof Classic Double-Serrated 9-inch Bread Knife, wusthof.com, \$120



PARING KNIFE

for peeling, coring, slicing and fine work like scraping out vanilla beans or shaping vegetables

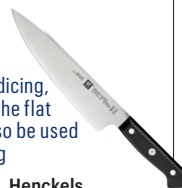
Global 3-inch Paring Knife, global cutleryusa.com, \$45



CHEF'S KNIFE

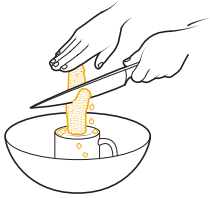
for slicing, dicing, chopping; the flat side can also be used for crushing

Zwilling J.A. Henckels 8-inch Gourmet Chef's Knife, surlatable.com, \$50





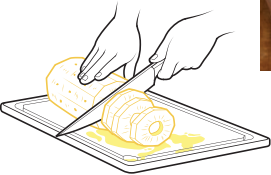
MAKING THE CUT



Cut **corn** off the cob with no mess: Place a small mug or ramekin upside down in a large bowl. Stand the cob on the mug and slice down. Kernels will collect in the bowl.



Keep **scallions** and chives from splaying out by wrapping them in a paper towel and slicing the tube of leaves; slide them forward as needed. Scissors are also a great option.



Slice **pineapple** and other juicy fruit on a grooved cutting board to contain the juices.



Slicing **onions** pole to pole (in line with the root and stem ends) makes them less potent than slicing radially (parallel to the equator). Rinsing onion slices can also help make them milder.

the great tomato debate

If you're squabbling with someone about storing tomatoes in the fridge versus on the countertop...you're both right! Underripe tomatoes will become mealy if kept in the fridge. Let them (and avocados and peaches!) ripen on the counter. But once they're ripe, pop 'em in the refrigerator to preserve them. Then eat—at room temp—after a day or two.



→ Nuts contain fats and can go rancid if not stored properly. Store them—as well as nut flours—in the freezer.

← Label everything! Restaurant kitchens have very specific rules regarding identifying and dating foods (line cooks sometimes learn how to label food before ever learning a recipe). Do the same in your fridge and freezer. When packaging food, include the item name and either the date it was cooked or an “eat by” date. Find the system that works best for you: freezer-weight bags with a panel you can write on, removable sticky mailing labels, good old-fashioned masking tape. Keep a permanent marker in the butter compartment for last-minute notes (such as open marinara sauce and chicken broth, which have a limited life span in your fridge).

→ Get scrappy with scraps: Toss citrus zest into simple syrup and steep for flavored cocktail or soda syrup. Bag up veggie trimmings and herb stems to use in stock. Reuse pickle brine to preserve vegetables. Sprinkle broken chips on salads, soups and chilis.

waste not

→ FYI, FIFO will help you ASAP. FIFO stands for “first in, first out.” It's standard practice in professional kitchens (including our test kitchen) and will benefit your fridge, pantry and wallet. Put new milk/crackers/cereal behind older ones so you'll use the older items first. We like having a staging area in the pantry to keep purchased but not “on deck” items visible if there's no room for them in their usual spot.

A TRUE PAL

The most unexpected secret weapon of chefs: Bar Keepers Friend. It's a powdered cleaner that tackles stainless steel, porcelain, aluminum, enameled cast iron, copper, fiberglass and more. A little sprinkle and a bit of elbow grease can help you restore pans to a like-new shine.



flat-out fantastic

Never underestimate the value of a good rimmed sheet pan. It's wonderful for cooking a full dinner in one shot. But test kitchen cooks also use sheet pans to:

- organize ingredients and tools (like meat, tongs and spices to be carried out to the grill)
- catch crumbs and drips under cooling racks
- serve as a makeshift lid for large pots and pans
- nest inside one another to keep something flat while baking

YES, YOU PAN!

Along with a good knife, you need good cookware. Be sure you select the right pan for the job.

1

STAINLESS STEEL

Best for: searing, sauces and reductions

Pros: can use any utensil

Cons: delicate food can stick; doesn't retain heat very well

Anolon Tri-Ply Clad 12.75-inch Covered Skillet, anolon.com, \$100

2

COATED NONSTICK

Best for: eggs, crepes, fish

Pros: foods don't stick; easy cleanup; durable

Cons: only plastic, silicone or wood utensils (no metal); not good with high heat on the stove or in the oven

Breville Thermal Pro Hard Anodized 12-inch Skillet, potsandpans.com, \$130

3

CERAMIC NONSTICK

Best for: eggs, crepes, fish

Pros: foods don't stick; can use any utensil; good for high-heat cooking

Cons: not as durable as coated nonstick; requires gentle cleanup

Green Pan 12-inch Chatham Open Fry Pan, greenpan.us, \$50

4

CAST IRON

Best for: searing, browning, roasting, baking

Pros: retains heat extremely well; can last forever with proper care

Cons: heavy; requires maintenance

Lodge 12-inch Skillet, shop.lodgechef.com, \$40

5

ENAMELED CAST IRON

Best for: searing, browning, roasting, baking, simmering, braising

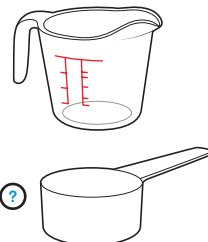
Pros: durable; no need to season

Cons: heavy; can be expensive
Staub 5.5-quart Round Cocotte, williams-sonoma.com, \$325



green party

The best way to keep leafy greens from wilting is by controlling exposure to air and moisture. Choose a container large enough so they won't be cramped, line it with a tea towel, add washed and dried greens, then fold the towel over them. They'll stay fresh for at least a week.



measuring up

A liquid measure is for liquids, and a dry measure is for dry goods. It sounds obvious, but many try to use the same cup for both—and wind up with recipes that don't work well. Using the proper tool will improve your accuracy, which is key when baking.



Spoon flour into a dry measuring cup, then level it with a butter knife. Scooping flour out of the bin compacts it, which means more flour per measure... and dry baked goods.

