

Use Care in Selecting Good Kitchen Knives

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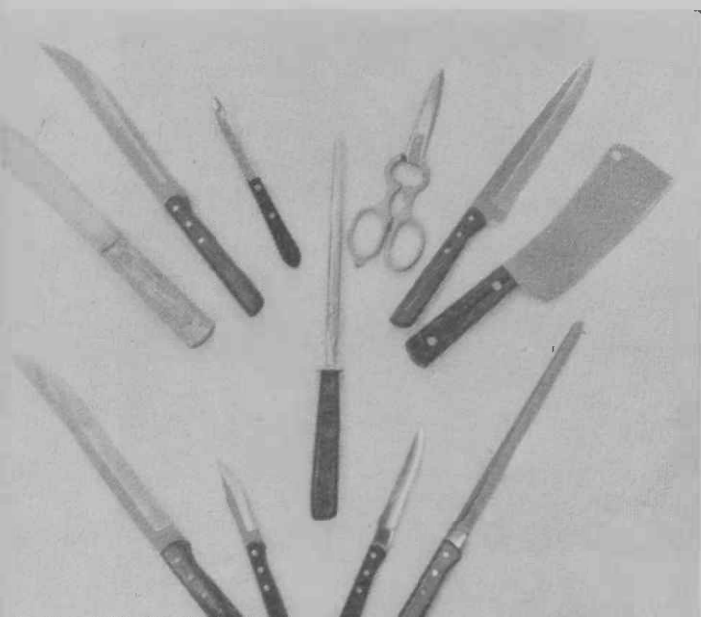
School of Home Economics

On the ranch, in the shop, or in the office, your husband has certain tools of his trade. These are chosen carefully, with an eye to the work they are to perform, whether such "tools" are a stock saddle or an ax, a typewriter or fountain pen, a pair of pliers or a tractor.

By contrast, the knives in your kitchen—if you are a typical housewife—may represent the casual accumulation which comes from inheritance, impulse buying, wedding gifts, box top coupons or chance. Such windfalls usually turn out to be less than bargains, since poor knives are an annoyance and a hazard to the user.

You do not need a large collection of cutlery, but it is important to choose a few excellent knives which will perform

The four knives at bottom of picture are the "basic four"—left to right, the carving knife, paring knife, utility knife and slicing knife. Above, left to right, are the butcher knife, bread knife, grapefruit knife, kitchen shears, French cook's knife and cleaver. In the center is the steel, used for sharpening.



necessary work effectively. A basic set of four knives for the well equipped kitchen includes these:

The Basic Four

A *paring knife* with a 2½ to 3 inch blade. This length of blade gives leverage without undue strain on finger muscles.

A *utility knife*, resembling an overgrown paring knife, has a 4 to 6 inch blade and is good for slicing and trimming.

A *carving knife* with a fairly long blade—from 7 to 9 inches. This knife has a sharp, often curved point which makes it particularly good for getting around bones. Its blade is strong and broad. It is designed especially for slicing hot meats because such food has less tendency to cling to this type of blade than to the longer thinner blades.

A *slicing knife* has a long, thin, flexible blade, tapering or rounding at the point. The slicer is good for cutting the thinnest of slices of cold meats, cakes, and bread.

Others To Add

Although the basic list includes knives which perform most of the essential tasks in the kitchen, many people wish additional pieces. These may be added as individual need arises:

A *butcher knife* with its heavy, curved, strong blade is especially good for cutting raw meat, and for splitting or cutting hard vegetables.

The *French cook's knife* is a very nearly straight bladed, sharp pointed chopping knife.

A *bread knife* has a saw-toothed or scallop edged blade which cuts breads and cakes without crushing.

The *grapefruit knife's* finely serrated and curved blade makes this tool particularly good for loosening segments of the fruit from the rind.

A *cleaver* is useful for such jobs as cracking soup bones or separating parts of frozen meats.

Kitchen shears are useful for many jobs such as cutting up leafy vegetables, dried fruits, marshmallows. Doughs may be quickly divided with shears, and meats are shredded easily.

What To Look For

When selecting kitchen knives it is important to consider these points:

Balance or "hang". When held loosely in the hand the weight of the knife should be in its handle end. In this position it feels comfortable to both hand and wrist.

The handle should fit the hand and feel comfortable. Materials used in the handle are usually plastic or wood. Plastic handles are hard, durable, resistant to dirt and moisture; however, they may break with hard usage. Rosewood is an especially good wood for handles since it is fine grained and resists moisture, staining and warping.

Attachment of blade to handle. In a high quality knife the shank of the blade (tang) extends at least half the length of the handle and is fastened by two or three large rivets. If the rivets are too small the handle is likely to split. In full tang construction the shank extends the full length of the handle. Some poorly constructed knives show the tang attachment as a metal collar secured by a single small nail. With this poor type of construction the blade soon works loose.

The blade. The most important test of a cutting tool is how well the blade will take and hold an edge. A good blade is made of high quality steel, accurately tempered and skillfully ground. For hardness the steel needs a high carbon content. This type of steel produces a fine cutting edge but it stains easily and is likely to rust. Although the high carbon blade is still the choice of professional butchers and chefs, the modern housewife prefers those of stainless steel, which do not require constant scouring and cleaning. High carbon steel knives containing vanadium are fine cutting tools and have the advantage of a non-corrosive finish. Grind of the blade is another point of consideration. In general the two types of grind are "flat" and "hollow". The flat grind is a gradual even grind from back to edge. This gives a strong cutting edge which is an especially good feature for slicers. The hollow grind gives a fast cutting knife which gives good service for a long time if used and stored carefully.

Handle With Care

Good knives deserve good care. Wash separately and do not soak. Do not cut paper, string or metal with kitchen knives. Cut food on a board. Store each one separately in slotted wooden holders either within drawers or upon the wall. A magnetized metal rack, which grasps the knife when placed against it, provides efficient storage and saves time and energy in this operation.