

Choosing and Caring for your Knives

If you only own one good knife, then it should be a cook's knife. This essential tool is the workhorse of the kitchen – chopping, slicing, shredding and trimming its way through a variety of ingredients – and is worth spending money on.

Look for a knife that is fully forged, this means that the knife will have been made from a single piece of metal, which will provide superior strength and rigidity. Cheaper knives are stamped or may be made from inferior metals, can require sharpening more frequently, and are less balanced, so require a firmer grip and more pressure to get the job done. They won't last as long and won't sharpen as well.

Once you have selected a knife, hold it, gripping it around its bolster. It should feel balanced and comfortable in your hand. Like choosing a pen, there will be personal preferences. Some knives offer more contoured grips or weight. Sizes for a cook's knife vary from 15-30cm, but for women's smaller hands 20cm is usually a good size. This is the key to how much you will love your knife and whether you will use it.

Good knives require care. Always wash it by hand, **not in the dishwasher (or the edge will become dull and wooden handles brittle), and towel dry**. Also, learn to use a butcher's steel to keep your knife sharp. It is a good idea to buy one the same brand as your knife. If you prefer not to use a sharpening steel there are also many quality knife sharpening devices available. Make sure you regularly sharpen your knife. If you let it get blunt it is likely to require professional sharpening to get the edge back.

Lastly, don't throw your knife in a draw with other utensils; store it in a knife block, on a magnetic knife strip or covered by a knife sleeve.

Top-of-the-range, fully-forged brands cost more. Look for knives from manufacturers such as Wüsthof-Trident (available in classic handled styles and brushed stainless steel handles). Also forged but more moderately priced are the stylish Global knives (forged blades moulded on to dimpled handles). Some of the best quality and value for money knives are from Victorinox and Scanpan.

It really is worth doing your research before you buy a knife.