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Whittling Down How to Select a Knife

Selecting just the **right** knife requires some time and research. You are making a culinary investment when purchasing a knife. When you choose the right knife, it should be the last one that you ever buy! The **best** knife is always the knife that feels most comfortable in your hand. This must be a hands-on decision. Size of blade and size of handle are important factors and comfort depends on the individual.

The first consideration is the material used to construct your knife. Materials include High-Carbon Steel, High-Carbon Stainless Steel, Stainless Steel, Ceramic and Titanium.

High-Carbon Steel, also called Cutlery Steel, is no longer widely available. Professionals agree this is the best metal used for cutlery primarily because it holds an excellent edge and is quite easy to sharpen. It is somewhat brittle, so care should be taken not to drop it.

High-Carbon Stainless Steel has become the most popular metal used in knife construction because of its rust and stain resistant qualities. It does not hold its edge quite as well as high-carbon steel and is not quite as easy to sharpen; nevertheless, its convenience and availability make it the most popular choice in better cutlery.

Stainless Steel is so hard that it strongly resists sharpening. Although it remains sharp longer, once it loses its edge it can become another disposable item. Recent advances in technology have produced some never-need-sharpening knives that do hold up for many years. Note that knives in this class almost always lack the quality, balance and feel of good tools.

The better **Titanium** knives are made with a sintering process of titanium and carbides, using powder metal technology (instead of metal casting). The carbides in the alloy allow for the blades to be heat-treated to a hardness appropriate for cutlery. Very lightweight and durable, they stay sharper longer than steel and are relatively easy to sharpen.

Ceramic material is both strong and brittle. It is stronger than steel and has an edge that is remarkably thinner than steel, so cutting is made considerably easier, and the edge can last significantly longer with proper care. Because of their brittleness, relative to steel, ceramic knives are best used for slicing, not chopping, because they can be made very thin and with a remarkably sharp edge. Sharpening and repairs are done on diamond hones.

Plastic has the primary goal of keeping veggies from changing color as they're cut, plastic serrated knives have become popular for slicing lettuce. They are not very sharp and some force may be required.

The major differences between knife blades have to do with construction, including forged, stamped and "other". **Forged** is a process whereby metal is treated, in different steps, to enhance its hardness, density and flexibility. **Stamped** knives are cut or stamped from flat metal. **Other** knives such as ceramics and some metals are sintered, that is, melted separately and mixed together to form a stronger alloy or component. For additional information, see www.cookinguptown.com for more in-depth coverage.

Choice of knife also depends on the task, there is different functionality associated with each of the different types of knives. The most useful knife types are the Chef, Paring, Slicing and Utility.

Other types include French Chef, Chinese Chef, (including the wildly popular Santoku) Paring, Slicing, Utility, Bread, Cook's, Cleaver, Boning, Fillet. A **Chef's Knife** is the work-horse of the kitchen. It has a very broad blade, called the Flat, and can range in length from six to twelve inches; the eight inch size being the most popular. This knife is generally used on a cutting board by rocking it on its gently curving edge, using the tip as a stationary pivot. Its broad blade keeps knuckles from hitting the cutting board. A **Paring Knife** has a short blade, usually no more than four inches in length, and comes in a variety of shapes and curves. It is used to peel, carve and prepare vegetables, fruit and other food that can be held in the hand. A **Slicing Knife** has a very narrow, thin blade, usually eight to twelve inches long and is used to cut very thin slices of foods, especially meats. The more flexible it is, the easier it will be to get a thin slice. A **Utility Knife** is just like the one grandma always used, this all-purpose knife is usually about six inches in length and narrow. Folks who feel that a chef's knife is too large and cumbersome will find this knife easier to use. Use it also when you feel that a paring knife is too small for a task.

Stop into Cooking Uptown located at 1707 E 7th Street and have some hands-on with a variety of knife options. We also periodically offer a knife skills class, so if you'd like to know even more about knife selection and care, look for upcoming classes at www.cookinguptown.com. **Knife Sharpening** service is offered weekly at Cooking Uptown. *Call us today for more details* . . . 704-333-7300

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