

SECTION 5.2 GETTING READY TO COOK

You may have heard the phrase, “Well begun is half done.” This saying represents a widely shared philosophy of all good chefs. Before you can begin to cook, you must know how to prepare to cook. Getting ready to cook plays a major part in the success of your recipe. Even if you prepare only one short recipe, you must first do *pre-preparation*. Only then are you ready to begin the actual cooking.

Study Questions

After studying Section 5.2, you should be able to answer the following questions:

- What is *mise en place*?
 - How do you use knives properly?
 - What is the difference between seasoning and flavoring?
 - What are the basic pre-preparation techniques?
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Mise En Place

In the restaurant and foodservice industry, getting ready to cook is called *mise en place*. *Mise en place* (MEEZ ehn plahs) is French for “to put in place.” It refers to the preparation and assembly of ingredients, pans, utensils, equipment, or serving pieces needed for a particular dish or service.

Mise en place solves two basic problems facing the professional chef:

- **Problem #1:** There is too much work to do in a kitchen to leave everything until the last minute. Some work must be done ahead of time.
- **Problem #2:** Most foods are at their best quality immediately after preparation. They deteriorate as they are held, and they begin to lose their nutritional value.

There is only one way to solve these problems—plan ahead. Table 5.1 lists guidelines for proper *mise en place*.

Table 5.1: Planning Ahead
1. Identify each ingredient and piece of equipment needed to prepare, finish, and hold each menu item for service. Do this the night before when possible.
2. Write a time line showing which activities should be done in which order (for instance, peel carrots before cooking them). See Figure 5.17. Make sure to note any critical times—for example, if the beef roast takes 90 minutes to cook and requires 15 minutes of rest time, note those times. Do this the night before when possible as well.
3. Assemble the workstation (cutting board, containers, etc.), tools, and ingredients.
4. Perform advance preparation consistent with providing the best possible product to customers. As each item is finished, store it appropriately to prevent time-temperature abuse, nutrient loss, and moisture loss.
5. Once service begins, balance the need to work quickly with the need to prepare safe, delicious, and high-quality food for guests.
6. After service, clean the station and store any leftover food as quickly as possible, observing food safety rules.
7. Consider what went well during preparation and service. What could have been done better? How could the work have been streamlined? Think about these issues when preparing for the next day's work.

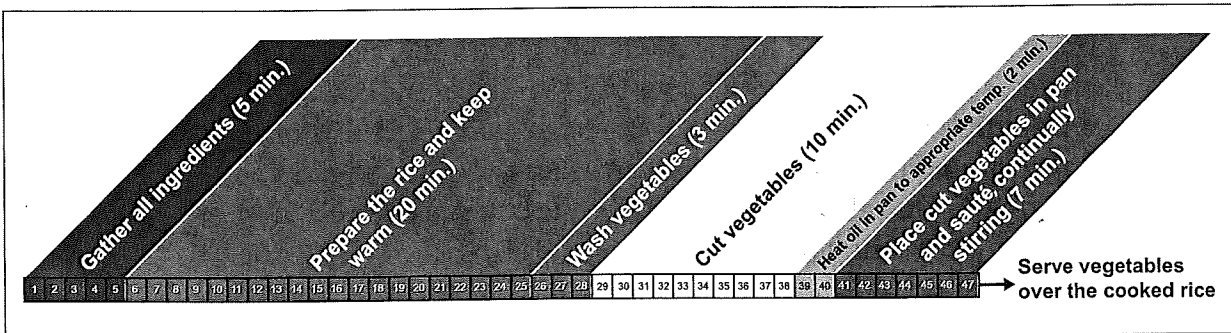


Figure 5.17: Step 2—Planning ahead.

The goal of pre-preparation is to do as much of the work as possible in advance without any loss in ingredient quality. The steps to pre-preparation include the following:

- Assemble the tools.
- Assemble the ingredients.
- Wash, trim, cut, prepare, and measure the ingredients.
- Prepare the equipment (preheat oven, line backing sheets, etc.)

The basic elements of *mise en place*—knife cuts, flavorings, herbs and spices, and basic preparations—are the building blocks of a professional chef's training. These methods and techniques will be essential throughout a professional career in restaurants and foodservice.

Knife Basics

Usually, cleaning and cutting raw foods is one of the first steps of *mise en place*. Fresh vegetables, fruit, and meat often require trimming and cutting. Review Figure 5.4: Types of Knives and their most common uses on page 277.

To use most knives, hold the food on the cutting board with one hand and hold the knife by its handle with the other. There are three basic knife grips. Figure 5.18 illustrates the three basic knife grips.

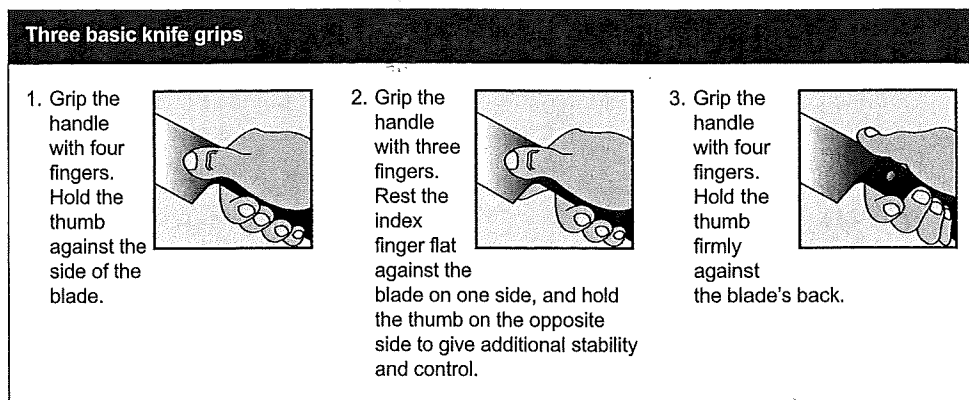


Figure 5.18: Basic knife grips.

In every grip, the hand that is not holding the knife, called the **guiding hand**, prevents slippage and helps to control the size of the cut. Bend the fingers of the guiding hand inward toward the palm, and hold the thumb well back. One finger should be the farthest forward with the other fingers and thumb behind that finger. This allows a clear view while cutting. Figure 5.19 shows the proper place of the guiding hand.

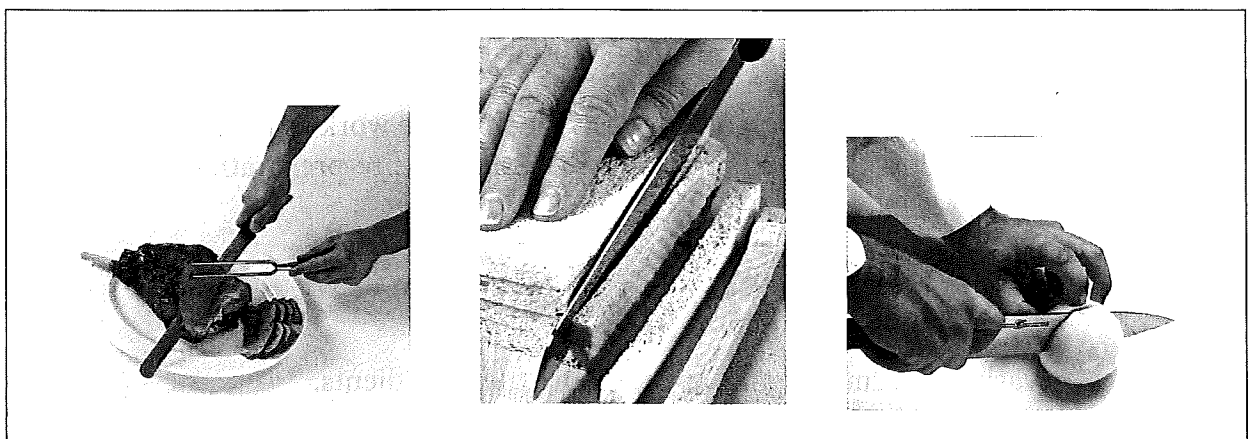


Figure 5.19: Proper placement of the guiding hand.

When using a knife, move the knife in a smooth downward and forward slicing motion.

With practice, a cook is able to cut food in many different ways, increase knife speed, and become more accurate with cuts.

Figure 5.20 shows basic knife cuts.

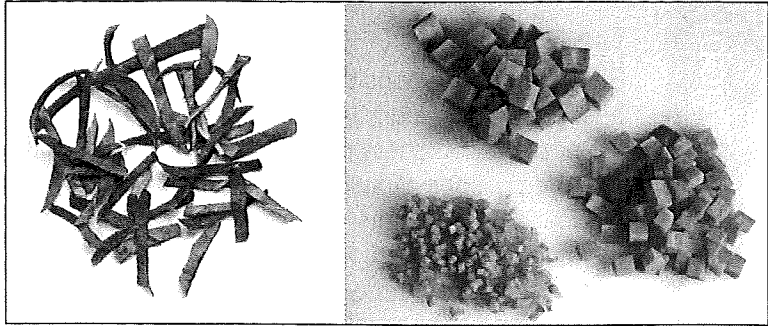


Figure 5.20: Basic knife cuts, including dicing, mincing, and julienning.

Essential Skills

Peeling Technique

Follow these guidelines to peel a vegetable such as a potato or a carrot.

With a peeler:

- ① Hold the item to be peeled in the left hand (if right-handed), and push the peeler across the skin of the item away from the body with long, smooth strokes. In a commercial kitchen, chefs tend to use a back-and-forth method to save time and energy. See Figure 5.21a.

With a paring knife:

- ① If peeling using a paring knife, whether fruit or vegetable, hold the item in the left hand (again, if right-handed).
- ② Grip the paring knife with the last three fingers on the right hand.
- ③ Place the thumb lightly on the upper portion of the item being peeled and glide the blade just below the skin of the item toward the stabilizing thumb using the index finger as a guide. See Figure 5.21b. The goal is to remove only the skin or rind.



Figure 5.21a: Step 1—Push the peeler across the skin of the item away from the body.

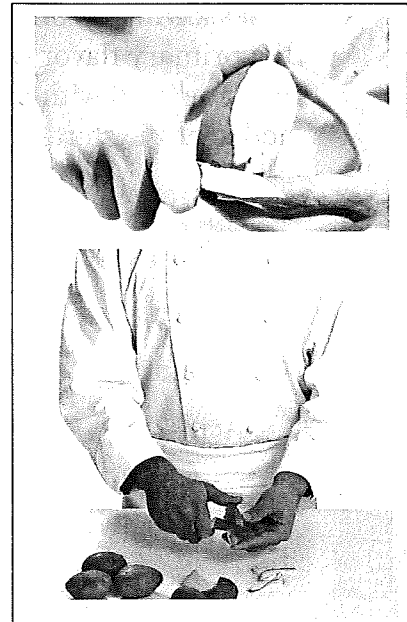


Figure 5.21b: Step 3—Glide the blade just below the skin of the item.

[on the job]

The Butcher

Butchers are responsible for everything involving meat—from the living animal to a neatly trussed roast in a display counter. However, most butchers in the United States are either primal butchers or secondary butchers. Primal butchers select either carcasses or large portions of animals, make primal cuts, and prepare primal cuts for subsequent fabrication. Secondary butchers turn the primal cuts into portions usable by ordinary consumers. Many secondary butchers also produce sausages and other cured or smoked meats. Both types of butchers are responsible for maintaining high levels of hygiene and food safety.

Knives are of critical importance to butchery, especially boning knives. Other tools include meat hooks (for hanging carcasses and sides of meat), band saws, and personal protective gear such as safety gloves and belly guards. Butchers often work in grocery stores, processing plants, or butcher shops. They often work in chilly conditions to maintain the freshness of the meat. At other times, butchers work in open areas, where consumers can ask them questions about various cuts of meat.

No formal education is required to become a butcher, although some choose to attend culinary school. Apprenticeship programs are available in some areas. On-the-job training is also an option. Prospective butchers can start preparing themselves for their careers by improving their physical strength, practicing eye-hand coordination skills, and reading about various meats and how they are processed. Important traits include excellent interpersonal skills, a high level of personal hygiene, and tolerance for cold and damp conditions.

Seasoning and Flavoring

A **seasoning** is something that enhances the flavor of an item without changing the primary flavor of the dish. Basic seasonings include salt and pepper. They must be used with care to prevent overuse, but seasoning generally should be added at the start of the dish to create a depth of flavor.

There are four basic types of seasoning ingredients:

- Salts
- Peppers
- Sugars
- Acids

[fast fact]

Did You Know...?

The United States produces over 40 million tons of salt each year. Only 6 percent of the salt produced in the United States is used in food. Salt is an important preservative, as well as one of the most basic tastes.