

USING KNIFE TECHNIQUES

What you are cooking and how you are cooking it determines how the ingredient should be cut. Here are basic guidelines that you can use as a reference.

VEGETABLES

Stir-frying is the predominant technique used to cook solid and root vegetables. It is best to cut them on the bias into thin slices, between $\frac{1}{16}$ and $\frac{1}{8}$ inch thick. But some tender vegetables, like zucchini, may be cut into large blocks and stir-fried efficiently. When added to soups or braised with meat, the vegetables should be cut into large chunks using the bias or roll cut.

Leafy vegetables are either picked off the stem, or with larger leaves, cut with a knife into bite-size pieces about 2 inches wide.

CHICKEN AND POULTRY

The Chinese consume a wide variety of poultry, but only a handful of birds are eaten regularly at home. They include chicken, duck, goose, squab, quail, and silky chicken. Except for chicken, these fowl are generally butchered in the standard way and are almost always cooked whole. A special technique is reserved for preparing a whole duck for roasting: the abdomen is kept intact and openings to remove the internal organs are made in the neck, under one wing, and in the anus (see page 000).

Chicken is undeniably the most popular type of poultry. Deboned breast meat and thigh meat are regularly used for stir-frying. The breast is best sliced using the bias cut, and the thigh is best diced into about $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch cubes.

PORK

Pork is the staple meat in China. It is so ubiquitous that when the name of a dish simply says “meat,” as in “stir-fried julienned meat with yellow chives,” the meat is understood to be pork.

For braising the popular cuts are pork belly, pork shoulder, and country-style ribs. They are always cut into about 1-inch cubes for easy cooking. For stir-frying the most common cuts of pork are loin and tenderloin. Tenderloin is prepared using the bias cut or julienned.

BEEF AND LAMB

Both beef and lamb are eaten in many parts of China, but they are especially popular among the large Muslim communities in the western and southwestern regions. Properly butchered, both these meats can be halal.

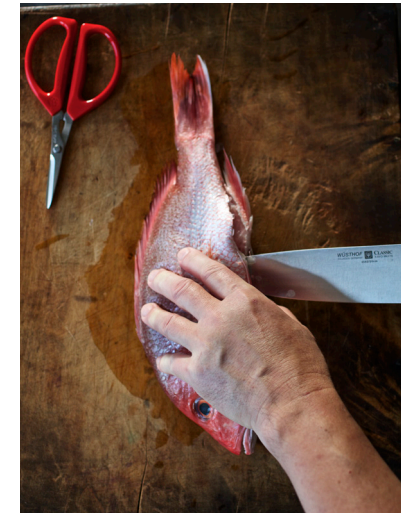
Diced into 1-inch cubes, beef chuck shoulder and lamb shoulder are the best cuts for braising. For stir-frying, beef flank steak and tenderloin or boneless lamb leg are best, sliced using the bias cut.

Cutting Whole Cooked Fowl for Serving

In Chinese cooking, it is customary to cook a whole fowl and then cut it up into pieces for serving. A cleaver or a heavy chef's knife will do a good job.

For small birds, such as squab and quail, cut along the breast all the way to the back to separate the bird into halves, and then cut across the halves to make quarters.

For larger birds such as chicken and duck, first remove the legs and wings at the joint. Then cut each wing into two pieces by separating the drumette from the wingette at the joint. Cut the leg into three pieces by first separating the drumstick from the thigh and then cutting the thigh crosswise into two pieces. Remove the breast meat from the breastbones, and then cut each breast crosswise into four or six pieces. Arrange all the pieces in the shape of the bird on a serving platter. The carcass can be reserved for making stock.



SEAFOOD

Whole Fish | Many Chinese fish recipes call for cooking the fish whole. Not only does a whole fish stay fresh longer than fillets, but by cooking the fish whole, you get the added advantage of extracting delicious flavor from the bones. Ask your fishmonger to clean and scale the fish and remove the gills but leave the tail and fins on. At home, use the back of a knife to scrape off any stray scales, especially on the head and belly area, which can be missed by the fishmonger. Before cooking, cut a few slits on the bias

in the body of the fish, spacing them about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch apart. It will now be ready for steaming, deep-frying, or pan-frying.

Butterflied Fish | To cook fish quickly so the meat doesn't fall apart, you can butterfly it. There are three common ways to butterfly a whole fish Chinese-style.

The first way is to separate the meat from the ribs on both sides of the fish (see photographs, above): Lay the fish on its side. Insert a boning knife between the ribs and the top layer of flesh just behind the gill