

MODULE 3: PREP & COOKING I | TRANSCRIPT

LESSON 6

# Knife Skills II

Now, let's discuss some additional cuts we can use to add pizzazz to a dish and a few tricks for preparing certain go-to fruits and vegetables.

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*Zero Food Waste Tip:* Save all veggie peels and scraps (except any winter squash that's been treated with wax) for making veggie stock.

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## Cutting an Onion

Aside from chopping and dicing, there are a few other ways to cut our friend, the onion, and it's good to learn them since onions are such an important part of building flavor in a dish. But you can also apply these techniques to many other vegetables.

For all of the following cuts, use The Claw to hold the onion in place. Place the knife carefully on top of the onion and run the knife firmly and smoothly through the middle to slice the onion in half longways, through the root and flowering ends. Slice off the flowering ends and peel the outer layers to remove the onion skin—keeping that root end in place. If you like, you can quickly rinse the two onion halves under cool water to reduce the sulphur (crying anyone?) and also remove any dark flecks from under the skins.

**Slicing:** Sliced onions are good for frying, sautés, stir fry, soups, and salads. Simply place the peeled, halved onion cut-side down on the cutting board with the onion's natural lines parallel to the knife blade. Slice off the root and flowering ends (save for stock!). Then, use The Claw—pressing your knuckles against the blade to protect tucked fingertips—as you slice down and away. Again, it helps to press the knife slightly into the top of the onion to first form an incision, then press through completely. Continue using that rocking motion for paper-thin slices or larger ones depending on what your recipe calls for. Make sure the onion is sturdy and gripping the board the entire time.

You can also cut horizontally against the grain of the onion for thicker, shorter slices.

**Petal Cut:** Cut an onion in half through the root and flowering ends. Then, cut off the root and flowering ends of the onion and following the natural grooves of the onion, slice each onion half in half again. Use your hands to release the petal shapes. This cut is great for roasted onions, kabobs, and grilling.

**Rings:** Now, let's cut rings. Peeling is a bit different for this cut. Carefully use The Claw to hold the entire onion in place on its side. Carefully slice off the root end and the flowering end of the onion. Run the knife along the outside of the skin to create a shallow cut from the top to bottom of the band of the onion and then peel. Turn the onion on its side and slowly create an incision to hold the knife in place—be firm with your Claw grip, since the onion will be resting on its curved side—then continue the down-and-away rocking motion to slice the onion rounds as thick or thin as you like. Use hands to release the rings.

## Chiffonade

Mostly used with broad-leaf herbs, or leaves like lettuces and kale, chiffonade is a “vanity” cut used for garnishing or adding good looks to dishes. Here's how it's done: layer the leaves on top of each other in an even stack, then roll the leaves into a tight, long bundle or tube. Turn the bundle so it's perpendicular to the knife blade and slice carefully working right to left along the bundle to make thin ribbons.

## Julienne

You're likely familiar with the julienne, another decorative cut, for carrots, celery, or long veggies like zucchini. You can peel your veggie, or leave the skin on—that's cook's choice—but to start, cut the food into about 2-inch-long segments, then slice lengthwise in half for larger veggies like sweet potato, or just shave the side for vegetables like carrots to create a stable surface to continue to cut.

Cut lengthwise pieces  $\frac{1}{8}$ " wide then stack them up in a tight, neat pile. If the stack is too tall for stable cutting, you can break the stack into two or three mini stacks. But either way, cut down into the stack lengthwise to create  $\frac{1}{8}$ " wide matchsticks. You can decrease the distance between cuts to  $\frac{1}{16}$ " too if you want even more delicate matchsticks. Julienned veggies are great in salads, wraps, spring rolls, sushi, anywhere you want veggies to look extra pretty.

## Bias Cut

If you've ever had a stir fry, you've seen this cut. It simply means the veggie—like carrots or snap peas—are cut on a diagonal. The cuts can range from a short bias (more stumpy), to a medium bias, to a long or wide bias. For veggies like carrots, the wider the bias cut the shorter the cooking time—this is because, on a wider bias cut, the heat doesn't have to penetrate as deep. For snap peas, it's just about aesthetics.

## Cutting Celery & Stalk Vegetables

**Slicing:** Turn your stalk veggie to its flat side (or cut one) so it doesn't roll, and use the Claw grip to hold it in place and slice down and away, down and away, trying to get the width of the cuts consistent as you slice. This goes for all slicing, but you want your slices as consistent as possible instead of having one thin and one thick piece, since a thinner slice will cook faster than the thicker slice.

If using celery for snacks or crudité's, you may want to remove the strings first. To do this, you'll lightly slice into (not through) the surface of each end of the concave side of the stalk, perpendicular to the strings. This is also known as "scoring." Then push back the tips and pull to remove the strings. You can also slice your stalk in half 95% of the way through, then bend back and peel the strings. Use a paring knife or your fingers to help pick up any at the edges that didn't come through on the first pull.

**Dicing:** to dice celery—you can remove strings first or not—use the tip of the knife to slice lengthwise down each stalk—follow the natural grooves in each stalk and make sure the slices are evenly spaced. You can cut long stalks in half for more control and consistency when tracing grooves. Repeat with one to two more stalks and line them up side by side. Turn the stalks so the shortest ends meet the blade and slice down and away, doing your best to make each slice match the distance between the first cuts—this should yield cubes. Adjust the distance between slices to change size of dice.

**Cutting leeks:** slice off the thickest, darkest green part of the stalk and keep the root end intact to hold the leek together while you cut. Starting at the root end, without cutting through the root, use the tip of the knife to slice along the center of the leek. Make a quarter turn and run the tip of the knife through again. Then, starting at the greener end, slice using the down-and-away rocking motion all the way through the length of the entire leek. Save the root for stock.

## Removing Strings from Snap Peas, Snow Peas, and Green Beans

The strings in snap peas, snow peas, and green beans are pretty tough and fibrous, so it's best to remove them. Nestle your fingernail under the stem end of the pea or bean, or use a knife to create a small cut, and pull away along the top length of the pea or bean. Then for peas, pinch the opposite end and pull the bottom string along the length to remove.

## Removing Pits from Dates

Gently slice down into the date lengthwise about  $\frac{1}{4}$ "- $\frac{1}{8}$ ". You should hit the pit. Pull open the date and remove pit.

## Scraping a Vanilla Bean

Lightly squeeze your entire vanilla bean so it's a bit flat. Place on the cutting board and carefully slice all the way down its length. Use the back of your knife or the back of a spoon to open up the pod and scrape out the caviar-like seeds to use in your recipe.

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*Zero Waste Tip:* Instead of tossing the scraped pod, soak it in a jar of maple syrup for infused flavor, or place the pod in a bag or jar with Epsom salt to infuse for 1–2 weeks—use for relaxing bath soaks.

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## Supreming Citrus

Supreming is a fancy way to release and present the segments of citrus fruits like grapefruit, lemon, lime, and orange. In almost all cases it's fine to simply hand-peel citrus—that's how most folks eat an orange—but when you want to step up the looks of a dish, use this technique to completely remove the white membrane that holds the segments of the fruit. To do it, first, slice off the ends of the fruit so you can place it flat on the cutting board. Use the knife to score and then peel the citrus top to bottom, following the shape of the sphere, removing all of the external rind and pith. Now turn the fruit on its side and use the knife to cut along the membrane towards the center of the fruit. Use the membrane as a guide and repeat cuts until they meet and you can easily remove the citrus wedges. With more practice, you should be able to simply hold the fruit in your palm and gently cut out wedges with the knife.

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*Zero Waste Tip:* Save the peel and membrane and pack into a jar. Fill with white vinegar and steep for 2–4 weeks. Strain. Use as a natural kitchen counter cleaner or as a mold prevention spray for produce.

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## Cutting Dark, Leafy Greens

The stack-and-roll technique from chiffonade makes it easy to cut large, dark leafy greens. First you need to de-stem the greens by either using a knife to trace along both edges of the stem or by taking the leaf in a loose fist near the base of the stem and pulling up and away to strip the leaf from the stem. Either way, stack your de-stemmed leaves, and roll them into a tight bundle. For ribbons, simply chiffonade-slice like you would herbs. For a “chopped” result, slice along the bundle lengthwise, and give the bundle a quarter turn. Slice along the bundle again lengthwise. Then, cut across the short edge of the bundle.

## Slicing, Dicing, and De-Seeding a Pepper

There are a few ways to cut a pepper, but this is our go-to: Simply lay the pepper on its side in the center of your cutting board and using a serrated knife or a sharp Chef’s knife, slice off the top of the pepper just below the curve under the stem. You can save this top for veggie stock, or you can pull the stem out and discard, and then cut and use the rest of the top in your recipe. Now, slice off the bottom of the pepper just above the curve and set it aside. Now, turn the pepper upright so it rests on the flat, sturdy surface. Without penetrating the center of the pepper, or cutting the pepper in half, slice through one corner of the pepper and then turn it back on its side. Using the Chef’s knife tip or a paring knife, carefully slice along the inside surface as you roll the pepper to separate the bitter seeds and ribs (aka membranes) from the colorful flesh of the pepper. You can compost or discard the pepper core, and ribs. If you put seeds in the compost, note that they may sprout, so plant them in the garden! Now, flatten the pepper, skin-side down, onto the center of the cutting board and cut in half or quarters for more manageable cutting. At this point you can slice into equally wide julienne strips, or rotate your julienned strips and crosscut to dice the pepper. Use this technique for any pepper from banana to jalapeño to bell.

## Peeling Fruits and Veggies

Some foods need to be peeled, while others can be cook's choice. Refer to recipes for preparation suggestions. Here are tips to get you started.

**Apples:** The easiest—and safest—way to peel an apple is with a vegetable peeler, but to get started, we want to create an edge that the peeler can easily grab onto. So, just slice off the top and bottom of the apple removing as little apple as possible. Now, holding the apple with a firm grip in your non-dominant hand and the peeler in your dominant hand, place the peeler at the top of the apple so it can catch where it was sliced, press into the peel, and pull down from the top towards the base in one slow, controlled peeling motion. Peeling away from yourself may make more of a mess—some folks think peeling towards you provides more control. Veggie peelers are much safer to use than a knife blade, but do what feels safest to you. This method works the same for other pome fruits like pears and quince.

If you'd like to use a knife to peel an apple, slice the top and bottom off of the apple to create a flat surface—taking care to remove as little of the apple inside as possible. Place the apple on a cutting board, flat-bottom in contact. Then shave off the peel from top to bottom, working your way around the entire apple—do your best to not waste any apple as you peel, cut as close to the skin as you can. Flip and trim off any pieces that you missed.

**Potatoes:** You'll peel a potato the same way you do an apple, but you may be able to skip those first cuts on the top and bottom because the skin is less thick. Do what works best for you. Hold the potato with a firm grip in your non-dominant hand, and hold the peeler in your dominant hand. Press the blade of the peeler into the surface of the potato and then pull towards you (or away from you—cook's choice) in slow, controlled motions. If you are peeling more than 2 potatoes for a dish, drop the peeled potatoes in a bowl of water with a few pinches of salt to prevent them from oxidizing (aka browning). Save the peels for veggie stock.

## Preparing Winter Squash

For the most part, the rinds on winter squash are too tough to eat, but that's what makes them great for winter storage—it protects them. There are a few different tricks for preparing different types of common winter squash:

**Butternut squash:** When shopping for a butternut squash, look for one with a long neck. The longer the neck the more squash you get and the easier it is to prepare. Slice the bottom and top of the squash off, then cut the squash in half right where the round bottom-body begins to form the neck of the squash—the round body contains all the seeds. Now set both halves of the squash onto their flat sides and using a Chef's knife or a peeler, peel the rind from top to bottom all the way around the body of the squash. Once peeled, take the round, seed-filled half of the squash and cut it in half from the top down to the base. This makes it easy to access and scoop out the seeds—use a spoon to scoop out the seeds from both halves. Lengthwise, cut the other neck-half of the squash in half. Now, rest all the pieces flat-side down to slice, chop, and dice it as needed.

**Delicata squash:** This is the squash-rind exception. As long as it's not waxed, you can eat roasted delicata rind. (To know if it's waxed, look for a super-shiny surface and a smell like a lit candle while it's roasting.) Slice your delicata into 1–2" rings and then run your knife around the seeded area of each ring to release the seeds.

**Spaghetti squash:** This squash is just plain fun because, when it's cooked and scraped with a fork, the flesh forms long, noodle-like strips. You don't have to peel a spaghetti squash before roasting, and there are a couple ways to cut it depending on the outcome you'd like. You can carefully slice it from top to bottom through the stem, remove the seeds, and roast the two halves face-down until cooked. Then, use a fork to release the strands. Or, to get extra-long, twirl-worthy, strands, turn the squash on its side and slice crossways into 2" rounds. Scoop the seeds out of the rounds and then roast the rounds. Use the fork to gently release the strands around the perimeter of the peel.

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*Zero Food Waste Tip:* For all squashes, instead of discarding the seeds, scoop them out, rinse the sticky membrane off of them and then either dry them for planting in the garden, or salt and roast them for a crunchy snack.

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## Coring

You can core everything from onions to avocados to strawberries, and we'll demonstrate here with a classic, an apple. Place your apple bottom down on the cutting board and use your knife to cut one side off of the apple, as close to the core as possible. Now, place the flat edge of the apple down to hug the cutting board. Slice off the remaining three sides just as you did the first—cutting as close to the core as you can. Turning the apple onto its flat side as you go. Slice and dice as needed and peel first if you like—skin on or off is cook's choice.

*Here's how you also slice and dice an avocado and mango:*

**Avocado:** Holding the avocado firmly in your non-dominant hand, make an incision with a sharp knife lengthwise until the blade hits the pit. Then, rotate the avocado and trace the blade around the entire pit. Now, twist the two avocado halves apart. Place the half with the pit face-up on a cutting board and carefully tap the knife blade into the pit, then twist to release the pit. Tap the knife into a bowl or the trashcan to release the pit from the blade. At this point, you can use a spoon to scoop out the flesh. You can slice or dice on the cutting board. You can also dice the avocado while it's still in the skin by simply using the tip of the knife to vertically score the flesh without piercing the skin. Do the same horizontally to create cubes. Use a spoon to scoop out the diced or sliced flesh.

**Mango:** The seed inside a mango is long and flat, so to start, we core it like we would an apple. Place the mango on a cutting board with the stem away from

you and cut lengthwise  $\frac{1}{4}$ " to the right of the center line from the stem to the bottom. Make the same cut  $\frac{1}{4}$ " to the left of the center line. Like you do to dice an avocado in its skin, trace lines vertically with the knife (don't cut all the way through the skin) along the length of the mango, then rotate the mango half and trace lines perpendicular to the ones you just created to make a grid of cubes. You can use a spoon to scoop out the flesh, or push the center of the skin to flip the mango out. Easily scoop or cut the cubes free from the skin.

If you want mango slices, repeat the steps above, but don't create the grid. Just vertical lines, then flip and cut or scoop with a spoon.

Don't forget about the slice with the pit. Lay it flat on the board and use the knife to trace around the pit to free any mango flesh fit for slicing or dicing.

## Tomatoes

**How to slice a tomato:** You really want a sharp Chef's knife to penetrate the skin here, or use this opportunity to break out a serrated "bread" aka "tomato" knife if you have one. If using the serrated knife, you'll use a different motion than with a Chef's knife—it will be a back-and-forth sawing motion that moves straight down through the tomato, not down and away as with the Chef's knife. Hand position is the same and handle grip is the same, you'll just move the knife back and forth.

**How to dice a tomato:** Once you have thin strips of tomato, switch back to the Chef's knife if you haven't already. You need the curved blade for dicing. Same as when we dice an onion, you'll make horizontal lines in equal distance using the down-and-away motion, then rotate the tomato and make cuts again in equal distance to create equally sized cubes. Cut out hard core or stem pieces and discard.

**How to seed a tomato:** Seeded tomatoes are good for salsas and salads and when you don't want seeds or juice in your recipe. There are a few ways to remove seeds:

1. You can slice the tomato in half through the center or “equator” if the top and bottom are north and south poles. Hold each half over a bowl and firmly squeeze the tomato to release the seeds and juice into the bowl. Use your fingers to help release and scrape out any hangers-on. Cut out hard core or stem pieces and discard.

2. Quarter the tomato lengthwise, by slicing the tomato in half from top to bottom, then slicing those halves in half from top to bottom. Then carefully use the tip of your Chef’s knife to slice/carve out the ribs and seeds. If you’d like to dice your seedless tomato from this point, keep the skin side of the tomato facing the cutting board—it can be trickier to cut through—and use the tip of the knife to slice through the tomato lengthwise, creating even slices. Then, rotate the pieces and slice through again to create diced cubes. Cut out hard core or stem pieces and discard.

## Lesson Actions

### MORE PRACTICE!

Choose at least 3 techniques from this lesson that are new to you and practice them.

Know that the Practice Recipes will guide you through this too.

Save all of these cut veggies and herbs in an airtight container in the fridge or freezer.

Try peeling apples and or pears, too, using the oxidation tips you now know about to preserve their integrity when you save them—you can make an easy cobbler with the slices.