

# KITCHEN ROCK-STAR

*12 Easy Video Tutorials to Teach  
you How to Rock It in the Kitchen  
and Look Like a Pro*



**JEFF AND  
CRYSTAL SYKES**

# Kitchen Rock-Star: 12 Easy Video Tutorials to Teach you How to Rock It in the Kitchen and Look Like a Pro

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## About the Authors



Simply Playful Fare was founded by Crystal in May of 2012. Since then, she's been working hard to bring you healthy recipes that focus on whole foods and lots of fruits and vegetables. Her food philosophy is: Cooking with whole foods and good ingredients will ensure that you are eating healthy.

Crystal has a BA in English with an emphasis in Creative Writing and a Minor in Sociology. She also has an Associate's Degree in Paralegal Studies. She has been cooking since she was a teenager in her Grandmother's kitchen. She is the resident baker.

Jeff is a high school English teacher with a love of Shakespeare, cooking food, and brewing beer. Jeff has created a fair amount of the recipes featured on SPF. He is a Food Network junkie, often getting cooking inspiration from the shows he watches. He is the resident griller.

Jeff and Crystal *are* two ordinary people who love food. Jeff loves cooking it and Crystal loves eating it. The idea for this book was born out of our love of food and cooking techniques.

*~ I would like to dedicate this book to two incredible ladies in my life who have encouraged and shaped my creative growth: my grandmothers, Germaine and Mary. Their examples have taught me what it means to be a strong woman. ~*

Welcome, and thank you so much for purchasing “Kitchen Rock-Star: 12 Easy Video Tutorials to Teach you How to Rock It in the Kitchen and Look Like a Pro.” We have poured our hearts into creating this cooking tutorial book for you. We hope that it will be a powerful resource for you. We think that cooking is, and should be most of all, fun! These basic to advanced cooking techniques that we’ve put together are extremely useful and essential to moving around the kitchen with confidence and skill. You will be able to create wonderful masterpieces while impressing family and friends with your new-found “Pro” skills.

As with everything, you’ll need to practice to hone your skills. Don’t be afraid of making mistakes in the kitchen, because after all, we learn from our mistakes. That’s how you’ll become a better cook. If you don’t believe me, you can check out this blog post on some of my worst kitchen failures: <http://simplyplayfulfare.com/5-of-my-worst-kitchen-failures/>. We encourage you to continue to learn, whether it is from books, TV, magazines, blogs, forums, cooking classes, or other vehicles.

The most important thing to remember when cooking anything is safety. Respect your knives and other kitchen utensils that contain sharp objects (especially mandolins). Even the most skilled chefs cut themselves from time to time, but those injuries come from a lack of attention. Many a “Chopped” competition has been lost due to a cut that came from lack of inattention while using knives. Be aware of your actions while cooking and keep kitchen safety your main focus.

We hope you enjoy this book! Please email us at [crystal@simplyplayfulfare.com](mailto:crystal@simplyplayfulfare.com) if you have any questions.

(Keep in mind that you can join our affiliate program to earn some money by helping others find and purchase this book. Look for details at the end of this book.)

# How to Use a Knife

Having good knife skills in the kitchen is not just for show, it's also for safety. If you don't know how to handle a knife properly, you're more apt to cut yourself and cause some serious harm. Proper knife skills are simple and easy to achieve. It's also important to use sharp knives. This may seem counter-intuitive, but using a knife with a sharp blade will help you cut through your food easier, reducing the amount of force you use, therefore reducing the chance for your knife to end up off balance and in your hand. The majority of knife injuries come from people using dull blades.

## **How to Hold a Knife**

The first place to start is how to hold a knife. There are two ways to properly hold a knife.

1. Place your thumb along the left side of the blade, and wrap the rest of your fingers around the handle. This looks like you are pinching the knife between your thumb and index finger.

2. Place your thumb on the left side of the handle (right if you are left-handed), and wrap your fingers around the left side of the handle.

In both cases, do not put your index finger on top of the blade.

## **Contact on the Board**

There are two ways to hold the knife to the cutting board, but we only recommend one: The tip-fulcrum method. The tip of the blade never leaves the cutting board. The back of the knife does the cutting, slicing, and dicing. The second method is called the wrist-fulcrum method, wherein the back of the knife never leaves the cutting board. Again, we do not recommend this method.

## **Guiding Hand**

Using your free hand as a guide will increase your efficiency with a knife. There are two types of guiding hand grip techniques, both called a "claw grip."

1. Curl your fingers and place the tips of your thumb and pinky on the cutting board. Place your other three fingers on the food. Keep fingers tucked away by touching your middle knuckles to the back of the knife. Use your guiding hand to keep your fingers out of the way and to push the food toward the knife while you pivot the blade.

2. If you don't feel comfortable with the tips of your fingers on the cutting board and food, curl them all the way in and use the knuckles closest to your fingertips to hold the food in place.

## **Basic Cuts**

- a. Slice - to make a cut across and completely through the vegetables. This type of cut is used for large pieces of vegetables such as tomatoes, onions, and pickles for sandwiches.
- b. Julienne - to cut into long thin strips by slicing. This cut is good for stir fry, salads, French fries, etc.
- c. Dice - to cut into square pieces, as close to 90 degrees as possible. Julienne and then cut across the long strips. This cut is good for stir fry, soups, salads, and roasting potatoes or vegetables.
- d. Chop - This is a rough cut with little emphasis on uniformity or shape. The chop is the most versatile of the cuts and can be used for just about anything.
- e. Mince - to chop something so fine it's close to grating. Use this cut when you want the vegetable to be in every bite of the dish. Garlic, herbs, cheese, and certain vegetables lend well to mincing.

## **Tutorial Video**

<http://youtu.be/wg1s3CKA18U>

## **How to Chiffonade**

### **1. Wash the Produce**

You'll want to wash your produce before you start cutting. This will help reduce any dirt or pesticides left over from the farm and/or the grocery store.

Wash the leaves in a gentle stream of cold water to prevent damage. It's possible that produce washed in hot water will cook.

### **2. Remove the Leaves from the Stems**

You need to remove the leaves from the stems before you begin to cut them. Pinch the leaf between your fingers just at the base where the stem connects to the leaf, and tear the leaf away with your other hand. This should be a quick motion. Don't worry if a bit of the leaf tears away with the stem or if a bit of the stem remains connected to the leaf.

### **3. Stack the Leaves**

Stack about 10 leaves on top of each other. The size and uniformity of the leaves don't matter as much as stacking them as close together as possible. Be sure to put the largest leaf on the bottom.

#### 4. Roll the Leaves

Once the leaves have been stacked, begin on one side and start tightly rolling the leaves lengthwise from one end to the other. This roll should resemble a small cigar. Keep hold of the roll as you grab your knife.

#### 5. Cut the Leaves

With your fingers still holding the roll of leaves, take your knife and make a 1/8 – 1/4 inch cut across the top of the roll. Keep hold of the roll for each cut, and continue cutting 1/8 – 1/4 inch cuts until you reach the end of the roll. Gather the ribbons together and add to a dish or use as a garnish.

#### 6. Uses

A Chiffonade of leaves has many uses, especially garnishes. Caprese salad and brushetta chicken, of course, lend well to a chiffonade of basil. Throw a bit of the chiffonaded basil into a marinara sauce right as it's finishing.

#### **Tutorial Video**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6yjl-Z480cw&feature=youtu.be>

## How to Dice an Onion

This is a quick and easy way to dice an onion, but it utilizes cutting toward you, which is usually not something you want to do. You should only attempt this if you feel very comfortable with your knife skills. If you don't, practice until you feel comfortable. Even then, proceed with caution.

#### Prep the Onion

The first thing you want to do is prepare the onion. Leave the roots intact and cut the end where the skin gathers. This will help cut down the release of sulfur into the air. Next, peel the onion, removing the outer skin, leaving the roots intact.

#### First Cuts

Cut the onion in half, lengthwise, from the root to the end, leaving the roots intact still. Next, cut the onion in quarters.

## Second Cuts

Lay the onion on the cutting board on the flat side. Holding the top of the onion with your guiding hand, make a sideways slice across the onion at the very bottom and bring your knife front to back, about 1/2 inch above the bottom. Make another cut above the first, the same size. Continue cutting up until you reach the top.

## Third Cuts

Place your guiding hand on the back of the onion. Starting at the top of the onion, slice into the onion lengthwise from root to end, bringing your knife all the way to the bottom of the onion.

## Fourth Cuts

With your guiding hand still on the back of the onion, slice across the cuts you made through the onion, and bring your knife from the top of the onion all the way to the bottom of the onion. You should see small squares release from the onion. Continue from the front to the back, until the entire onion has been diced. Be careful not to cut yourself when you get to the end, throwing away any pieces when the onion gets too small to continue cutting.

## Tutorial Video

<http://youtu.be/69e5x5wGDww>

# How to Peel Vegetables

This may seem self explanatory, but peeling vegetables one of those simple things that can be difficult if you've never been taught. Learning how to peel vegetables properly for soups, stews, stir fry, veggie trays, and casseroles will make your life a lot easier.

1. Prepare the vegetables by washing them, and slice off both ends of each stalk with a knife.
2. You will need a vegetable peeler. Next, hold one end of the vegetable in your dominant hand, and peel from back to front, away from your body. Repeat until the outer skin is gone.

You can pick one up at any store. We suggest getting a peeler with a comfort grip, especially if you make mashed potatoes a lot. The comfortable handle makes it a lot easier on your hand when you have a lot of vegetables to peel.

3. There are two main uses for peeling vegetables:

1. To remove the outer skin and dirt from a vegetable, and;
2. To create thin strips for a salad or casserole. To do this, continue peeling the vegetable until most of it has been sliced off. Discard the end when it becomes too small.

## **Tutorial Video**

<http://youtu.be/SLwy89t4fr8>

# How to Steam Vegetables

When you steam vegetables, they are left in their most natural state as possible, while also cooking them just enough to aid in the absorption of more vitamins and minerals. It's also the least chemically changing. If you add lemon juice or vinegar as a "dressing" and just a pinch of salt, you've got a very tasty and healthy dish!

## 1. Prepare the Vegetables

Wash the vegetables, and chop them into manageable, bite-sized pieces.

## 2. Prepare the Steamer

Fill a large pot with a small amount of water, about an inch. Add the steam basket to the bottom of the pot. Place the pot on a burner, heat to medium high to high heat, and allow to boil.

## 3. Steam the Vegetables

Once the water starts boiling, add vegetables to steam basket, and cook for about 10 minutes. Remove the vegetables from the steamer, drain, and let sit for 10 minutes before eating.

## **Tutorial Video**

[http://youtu.be/q6Qv5K9\\_2Lc](http://youtu.be/q6Qv5K9_2Lc)

# How to Boil Eggs

## 1. Prep the Pot

Add the eggs to the pot. Add enough cold water to cover the eggs by one inch. Turn the heat on high, and bring the water to a boil.

## 2. Cook Time

Once the water boils, turn the heat off. Cover with a lid, and set a timer for twenty minutes. After twenty minutes, shock the eggs with ice water to stop the cooking

### 3. Peel the eggs

You can peel the eggs one at a time when you need them, or all at once to save yourself time. To peel, gently tap the egg on a hard surface. Next, gently roll the egg until it releases from the shell and peel the shell away. If you do this right, the shell should release in close to one piece.

#### **Tutorial Video**

[http://youtu.be/d\\_UYDqbnSIs](http://youtu.be/d_UYDqbnSIs)

## How to Cook a Boneless, Skinless Chicken Breast

Cooking a chicken breast is a good thing to know how to do, because it's a great source of lean protein. Lean protein helps you stay full longer, without extra fat.

1. Prepare the chicken by removing any excess fat or gristle from the breast. You can tenderize the chicken (if you wish) by using a mallet or poke holes in the flesh with a fork. Season the chicken breast with salt and pepper. You might use seasoning or dried herbs if you want extra flavor.

2. Heat a skillet on medium to medium high heat. You'll need to add fat to the skillet to keep the chicken from sticking to the pan, and to add flavor. About 1 tablespoon will do. There is a wide variety of healthy fats to choose from, such as butter, olive oil, and coconut oil. We recommend using olive oil, but also suggest that you experiment with different types of fat to find one that you like the best.

3. Cook the chicken for 8-10 minutes (4-5 minutes on each side). Watch the chicken closely as it cooks to ensure it doesn't burn. We also suggest using a thermometer to check the internal temperature of the chicken to make sure it's at 160 degrees before you remove it from the pan.

4. This is a very, very important step. Make sure that you tent your chicken loosely with tin foil and let it rest for about 10 minutes before you eat it. It will remain hot, I promise. If you skip this step, the juices will run out of your chicken, and it will be dry.

There are many other ways to cook chicken, but we wanted to show you the most simple way. Other cooking methods include baking, grilling on an outside grill, broiling in the oven, and poaching. Searing your chicken in a pan first and then finishing it in the oven will ensure it's juicy. Reserve poaching for an application like a soup or stew, as the outside of the breast won't get crispy with the poaching method.

#### **Tutorial Video**

<http://youtu.be/A51KniL5vew>

# How to Sauté

## 1. Prepare the Food

Most foods lend well to being sautéed, but what you want to think about when choosing foods to sauté is how sturdy they are. Delicate vegetables can be used in a sauté, but you'll want to add them at the end. This is also true for fresh herbs.

Prepare the food by washing and peeling your vegetables and trimming and cubing your meat. It's important to make sure everything is cut into uniform pieces. If your food is irregular in shape, some pieces will cook faster than other, leaving you with some food overcooked, and some food under cooked.

## 2. Prepare the pan

Prepare the pan by turning the heat on to medium or medium high heat. The pan should be hot before any food touches it. Next, you'll need to add your fat. The smoke point of fat is the temperature in which fats will begin to smoke. Butter is not good to use in a stir fry, because it has a lower smoking point than other fats, meaning that it begins to smoke at a low temperature. Coconut oil and olive oil are the best to use for sautéing, because they have high smoke points and are good healthy fats.

## 3. Cook the food

Add vegetables that take longer to cook at the beginning, such as onions, carrots, and peppers. Zucchini and mushrooms should be added closer to halfway through the cooking process. You need to stir fairly often when sautéing, to keep the vegetables from sticking to the pan. Once your vegetables have a pretty good start, you can add your protein. Remember that fish does not need to be cooked as long as red meat or chicken. Spices should be added at every step of the cooking process to create layers of flavor. Spices need to be cooked to release their aromas and flavors. Spicy heat gets hotter the longer it cooks, so add your cayenne pepper and red pepper flakes at the end if you don't want your dish to be too spicy. Add basil, parsley, and cilantro at the end, just before you plate your food. These fresh herbs are pretty delicate, and will wilt fast with too much heat. Most sautés are done within 15 - 20 minutes, depending on how long your meat will need to be cooked to be safe to eat.

### **Tutorial Video**

<http://youtu.be/OqpsJorj7as>

# How to Pit and Prepare an Avocado

## 1. Cut the avocado

Cut the avocado lengthwise, using a knife. A paring knife is easy to handle and small, so you'll be less likely to cut yourself. Use a chef's knife if you have a steadier hand and don't want to get multiple knives dirty. Carefully slice around the length of the avocado, all the way to the pit.

## 2. Remove the pit

You must use a long chef's knife to remove the pit. Place a towel in your non-dominant hand. Place the avocado on top of the towel, lengthwise. Grasp the knife and with a swift motion, bring the knife down on the middle of the pit with enough force to embed the knife into the pit. Once the knife is embedded into the pit, it should pull out of the avocado with the pit. To remove the pit from your knife, take hold of the back side of your knife and gently pinch the back of the pit until it releases from the knife. It's best to do this over a garbage can.

## 3. Score the avocado

The best tool for this is a paring knife. Drag the knife from one end of the avocado to the other, careful not to cut yourself. Repeat at 1/2 inch to 1 inch intervals until the entire avocado has been scored lengthwise. Turn the avocado 90 degrees and repeat.

## 4. Remove the fruit

Once you have scored the avocado, use a spoon to remove the fruit. Slide the spoon between the skin and the fruit, to loosen the fruit from the skin. Scrape the spoon from one end to the other, under the fruit and empty into a bowl. Typical uses for avocados are in salads, guacamole, and on top of nachos.

### **Tutorial Video**

<http://youtu.be/N3bX-IBj0jQ>

# How to Peel and Chop Garlic

## 1. Remove a Clove of Garlic from the Bunch

Grasp the single clove in your fingers and pull until it separates from the bunch.

## 2. Remove the Outer Skin from the Clove

There is a trick to this, but you'll need to use the right technique and knife to avoid cutting yourself. The only knife to use for this technique is a large chef's knife that you're comfortable using. Anything smaller and you'll risk cutting yourself.

1. Lay the garlic down.
2. Place knife on top of garlic, with the blade away from you.
3. Place the heel of your hand on top of the knife, to find your placement.
4. In one short, swift motion, hit the heel of your hand on top of the knife to smash into the garlic. This will crush the clove just enough to make the outer skin crack. Once this is done, you will be able to peel the skin away from the clove.

### 3. Trim the Garlic Clove

Trim any remaining unwanted pieces away using your knife, especially on the ends, where the garlic connected to the bunch.

4. Mince the garlic by using the knife techniques you learned in the section on how to use a knife. First, you'll want to slice the garlic clove, dice the garlic, and finish it off with a mince to achieve your desired size.

### **Tutorial Video**

<http://youtu.be/6iyoQPo8HgY>

## How to Trim Meat

### 1. Choose your Knife

You'll want to use a knife that's smaller than a chef's knife, as it will give you more control. A paring knife or a slicing knife would both be good choices, depending on your comfort.

### 2. Trim the Fat

You'll be able to distinguish fat from meat by the color. The fat will be a creamy white or translucent. It's a little harder to see fat on chicken breasts. Chicken breasts don't have a lot of fat in general, but what they do have will be at the top of the thick part, where the breast was removed from the bone.

Fat is usually tough and unpleasant to eat, which is why you want to remove it. The exception to this rule is a cut of meat that needs fat for flavor, such as a prime rib or rib eye steaks.

With your meat on the cutting board, using your index finger and thumb on your non dominant hand, pinch a section of the fat and pull to make it easier to work with.

With the knife in your dominant hand, cut the fat away from the meat, remembering to cut away from your body. The fat should come away easily, but if it doesn't, you may need a sharper knife. You can also use a serrated knife, but be careful not to mutilate your cut of meat with the serrations.

### 3. Cut the Meat for Cooking

#### 1. Chicken Breasts

Chicken breasts will cook quicker if they are butterflied. To do this, slice the breast in half, and open it up. Season the chicken liberally with salt and pepper.

#### 2. Steak

Trim as much fat as you can off of the outside of the steak. There is no need to do anything else to a steak to prepare it, except season it liberally with salt and pepper.

#### 3. Pork Chops

Pork Chops shouldn't need a lot of trimming. They tend to have a lot of fat around the edge of the meat; however, a pork chop will stay juicier if it is cooked with the fat still in-tacked, unlike chicken.

In all cases, don't skip the salt and pepper. The seasoning will give the meat a good crust.

### **Tutorial Video**

<http://youtu.be/8zHaYMbgmc8>

## How to Caramelize Onions

### 1. Choose and Chop your Onions

The first thing you'll want to do is choose your onion. Whether you choose red, white, or yellow, the flavors will be a little bit different. You'll want to think about how each onion will taste in the application you're using it in. Red will be best in chilies or on hamburgers, because these dishes need stronger onion flavors. Yellows and whites will be better in French onion soup, or recipes that feature the onions more prevalently. Next, cut onion into quarters and then slice into uniform pieces.

### 2. Prepare the Pan

You can use just about any pan to caramelize onions, but a larger pan is generally better. It allows you to give the onions plenty of room and contact with the hot surface. We used an electric skillet. Heat the pan on medium high heat.

### 3. Add your Fat and Season the Onions

It's best to use olive oil or butter to caramelize onions. Butter tends to burn easier, so make sure the pan is not too hot. Next, you'll want to add a good sprinkling of salt. The salt speeds up the process by removing water from the onions

### 4. Time

Cook the onions for 20-30 minutes, continuously stirring, until they are dark and translucent in color (or your desired done-ness). You may need to deglaze the pan with water or wine to bring up the flavor bits, especially if you are making French onion soup.

### **Tutorial Video**

<http://youtu.be/z7jxxAwpJlY>

You're now well on your way to becoming a Kitchen Rock Star. Continue to practice, and always remember to have fun in the kitchen. You can find more of our recipes at [www.simplyplayfulfare.com](http://www.simplyplayfulfare.com) to help you practice your new skills. Please email us at [crystal@simplyplayfulfare.com](mailto:crystal@simplyplayfulfare.com) if you have any questions.

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