

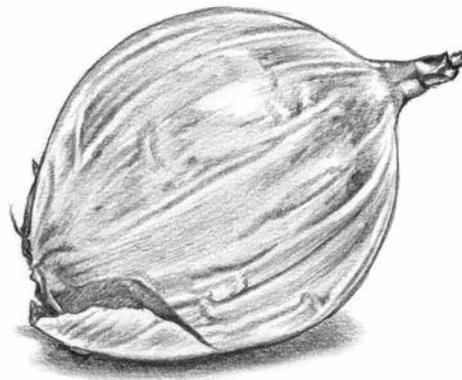
CUTTING ONIONS

THE ONION IS USED IN ALMOST ALL CULTURES. READILY AVAILABLE THE YEAR round, it is inexpensive and versatile. Even though it doesn't cost much, it's a shame that many people waste so much of it when they cut it. The instructions here will help you to maximize the yield from every onion you use.

When dicing an onion, because of its structure, it is impossible to produce uniform cubes. The thickness of an onion's layers partially determine the size of the dice. The skill to be learned here is how to cut an onion so the results appear uniform.

The following section describes two methods for

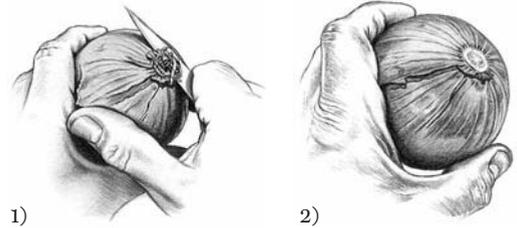
slicing onions. The usual way is to cut the onion crosswise into rounds or half rounds. This technique produces slices of varying size. A superior method is to cut the onion lengthwise from root to stem, which produces slices that appear more uniform. This is sometimes referred to as shredding.



CUTTING ONIONS (*right-hand version*)

Trimming the Root

Hold the onion firmly in your left hand and a sharp paring knife in your right hand, with your forefinger wrapped around the blade. Support your knife hand by resting your right thumb firmly against the side of the onion (1). Cut the tendril-like portion of the root from the onion: using a slight sawing motion, make the cut at the juncture of the skin and the root so that the skin remains intact and the root is cut flush with the surface of the onion (2). The reason for trimming of the root is more aesthetic than practical, but sometimes, if it is not trimmed, loose pieces of root will adhere to the flesh of the onion as it is being sliced or diced.



Trimming the Stem

In the same manner, slice off the stem end, removing only the tiniest amount of flesh so there is minimal waste.



Splitting an Onion

If the onion is not going to be used whole, hold it firmly on a cutting board with the root end up. Using a chef's knife held with a pinch grip, cut the onion in half through the center of the root. If you cut from the stem end, there is a chance that your knife will not travel through the center of the root, and there will be insufficient root remaining on one of the halves to hold it together during subsequent steps.



Peeling an Onion

Hold a half from the previous step firmly in your left hand and hold a sharp paring knife in your right hand, with your forefinger and middle finger wrapped around the blade. With the flat side of the onion toward your knife hand, slide the tip of the blade just under the skin at its edge. With your thumb, hold the skin firmly against the flat side of the blade, near the tip, and pull the skin down toward the root of the onion so it breaks off at the root. Discard the section of skin. Continue removing the skin in strips around the onion half, each time turning the onion toward the knife so a new section of skin is exposed.



CUTTING ONIONS (*right-hand version continued*)

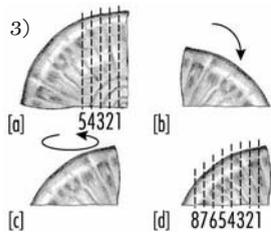
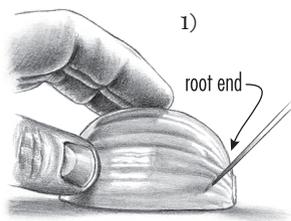
Slicing Half an Onion into Half Rounds



Place a peeled onion half, cut side down, on the cutting board so that the root end is toward the left. Hold the onion with your left hand, with your fingertips pressing straight down toward the board. Position a chef's knife, held with a pinch grip, with the side of the blade against the flat side of the tip of your left forefinger. This way, your forefinger serves as a guide for the knife. Start each slice with the tip of the blade resting on, or near, the cutting board, with the handle angled up. As you bring the knife down, slide it forward through the onion to produce the slice. After each cut, shift your forefinger to the left a distance equal to the desired thickness of the next slice. It is important that the side of the blade always remain in contact with the flat surface of your forefinger.

In this way, onions can be sliced very quickly. There is, however, a better way to slice them if you want all the pieces to be similar in size. This first method produces half rings with blunt ends. With practice, the second method can produce a very nice result almost as quickly.

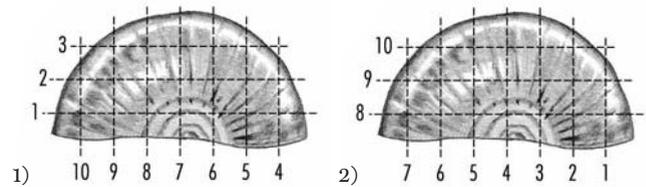
Slicing Half an Onion into Shreds



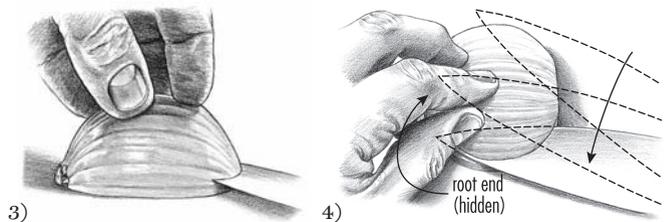
Place a peeled onion half on a cutting board with the cut side down and the root end toward your right. Hold the onion firmly with your left hand. Using a chef's knife held in a pinch grip, make a downward cut at a 45-degree angle to remove the root section; begin by cutting just above the edge of the root (1). Then turn the onion 90 degrees and cut the half into two quarters, from root to stem (2). Next, working with each quarter separately, place it on the board so one side is to your right. Make successive slices, as indicated by the numbers in (3a) in the illustration, until you have cut about half of the quarter. The number of cuts will vary depending on the size of the onion and the thickness of the slices. Next, lay the remaining portion of the quarter over on the board as indicated in (3b). Turn the onion around so that the other cut side is to your right, as indicated in (3c), and continue to slice until the onion is entirely cut, as in (3d).

Dicing an Onion, The Traditional Method

The following paragraphs describe three methods for dicing onions. The first is the most common method. It starts with making either a series of parallel, evenly spaced horizontal cuts, followed by a similar series of vertical cuts, as indicated in (1) in the illustration or a series of parallel, evenly spaced vertical cuts, followed by a similar series of horizontal cuts, as indicated in (2). The numbers represent the order of the cuts.



To make the horizontal cuts, place the onion half near the edge of the cutting board, with the root end toward your left, and press the fingertips of your left hand against the top to hold it. Hold the chef's knife with a pinch grip in your right hand, with the blade parallel to the board, and draw the blade through the onion in



an arc toward you so the tip passes just short of the root (3). As the blade describes its arc through the onion, the handle stays in about the same position and only the blade tip moves (4). Repeat this process, moving through the onion, until you have made the desired number of horizontal slices.

Next, make the vertical cuts through the onion half. Keep the root toward your left hand, and hold the onion on both sides with that hand. Push the tip of the chef's knife down through the onion at a point just short of the root end and draw the blade out toward your knife hand. DO NOT cut through the root, which would cause the onion to fragment into pieces (5).



Finally, rotate the onion 90 degrees away from you with the root still to your left.

Make successive vertical cuts across the cuts to create the individual cubes. Hold the onion firmly with your left hand, with your thumb and little or ring finger holding the sides and your middle fingers on the top of the onion, pressing straight down toward the cutting board. For each slice, rest the flat of the knife blade, held with a pinch grip, against the flat side of your forefinger. This way, your forefinger serves as a guide for the knife. Start each slice with the tip of the blade in contact with, or near, the board, and the handle angled up. As you bring the knife down, also move it slightly forward so the edge of the blade moves easily through the onion as the slice is being made. After each cut, move your forefinger to the left a distance equal to the desired thickness of the next slice. It is important that the flat of the blade always remain in contact with the flat surface of your forefinger (6).

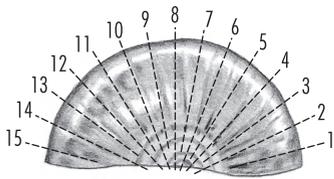


When there is too little onion left to slice, flip the piece over so the just-cut surface is against the cutting board, and trim the remainder into similar-size dice until only the root remains. This minimizes waste (7).



CUTTING ONIONS (*right-hand version continued*)

Dicing an Onion, The Fan Method



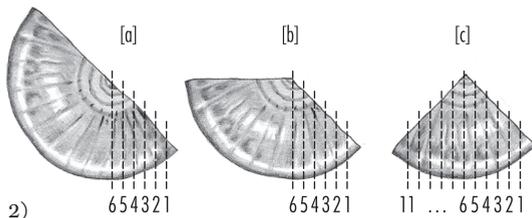
The second method of dicing the onion substitutes a fan-shape pattern of cuts for the initial horizontal and vertical cuts of the first method. Rather than making a series of horizontal cuts followed by a series of vertical cuts, you make one series of cuts by rotating the angle of the knife blade from almost parallel to the cutting board on one side (cut number 1 in the illustration) to almost parallel to the board on the other side (cut number 15). As you make the series of cuts, you alternate the depth of the cuts so some of them go all the way through the onion and some go only partway. The root end still should be toward your left hand, which holds the onion from the sides. Push the tip of the chef's knife through the onion near the root end and draw it the blade straight out toward your knife hand. **DO NOT** cut through the root, which would cause the onion to fragment into pieces. After you've made all the cuts, rotate the onion 90 degrees, so the root is still to your left, and make successive crosswise cuts to separate the cubes, as in the first method.

Dicing Less Than Half an Onion



1)

The third method is appropriate when you need to dice less than half an onion. It is also effective when a recipe calls for a very fine dice. Place an onion half on a cutting board cut side down and with the root end toward your left. Hold the onion firmly with your left hand, with your fingertips positioned straight down toward the cutting board. Position a chef's knife, held with a pinch grip, so the flat of the blade is against the flat side of the tip of your forefinger. This way, your forefinger serves as a guide for the knife. Start each slice with the tip of the blade in contact with, or near, the cutting board and the handle angled up. As you bring the knife down, also move it slightly forward so the edge of the blade moves easily through the onion as the slice is being made. It's important that the flat of the blade always remain in contact with the flat surface of your forefinger. When the knife is partway through the onion, move your forefinger over the spine of the knife to hold the newly cut slice in place. For this method to work well, it is important that the slices remain intact and in position. After each cut, move your forefinger to the left a distance equal to the desired thickness of the next slice. Cut only as many slices as you need (1).



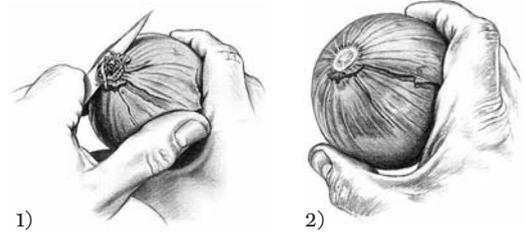
2)

Carefully lay the slices flat on the cutting board, with the smaller slices on top of the larger ones and positioned as shown in (2a). Working from right to left, make successive parallel cuts with the chef's knife until you reach the center of the straight portion of the onion slices. Rotate the onion slices to the right and make another series of cuts from right to left (2b). Rotate the remaining onion slices again and make a final series of cuts (2c).

CUTTING ONIONS (*left-hand version*)

Trimming the Root

Hold the onion firmly in your right hand and a sharp paring knife in your left hand, with your forefinger wrapped around the blade. Support your knife hand by resting your left thumb firmly against the side of the onion (1). Cut the tendril-like portion of the root from the onion: using a slight sawing motion, make the cut at the juncture of the skin and the root so that the skin remains intact



and the root is cut flush with the surface of the onion (2). The reason for trimming the root is more aesthetic than practical, but sometimes, if it is not trimmed, loose pieces of root will adhere to the flesh of the onion as it is being sliced or diced.

Trimming the Stem

In the same manner, slice off the stem end, removing only the tiniest amount of flesh so there is minimal waste.



Splitting an Onion

If the onion is not going to be used whole, hold it firmly on a cutting board with the root end up. Using a chef's knife held with a pinch grip, cut the onion in half through the center of the root. If you cut from the stem end, there is a chance that your knife will not travel through the center of the root, and there will be insufficient root remaining on one of the halves to hold it together during subsequent steps.



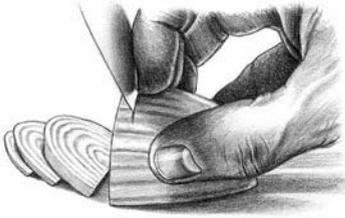
Peeling an Onion

Hold a half from the previous step firmly in your right hand and hold a sharp paring knife in your left hand, with your forefinger and middle finger wrapped around the blade. With the flat side of the onion toward your knife hand, slide the tip of the blade just under the skin at its edge. With your thumb, hold the skin firmly against the flat side of the blade, near the tip, and pull the skin down toward the root of the onion so it breaks off at the root. Discard the section of skin. Continue removing the skin in strips around the onion half, each time turning the onion toward the knife so a new section of the skin is exposed.



CUTTING ONIONS (*left-hand version continued*)

Slicing Half an Onion into Half Rounds

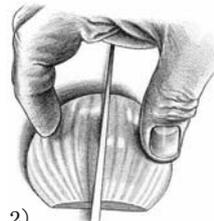
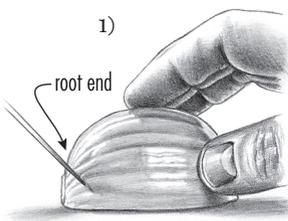


Place a peeled onion half, cut side down, on the cutting board so that the root end is toward the right. Hold the onion with your right hand, with your fingertips pressing straight down toward the board. Position a chef's knife, held with a pinch grip, with the side of the blade against the side of the tip of your right forefinger. This way, your forefinger serves as a guide for the knife. Start each slice with the tip of the blade resting on, or near, the cutting board, with the handle angled up.

As you bring the knife down, slide it forward through the onion to produce the slice. After each cut, shift your forefinger to the right a distance equal to the desired thickness of the next slice. It is important that the side of the blade always remains in contact with the surface of your forefinger.

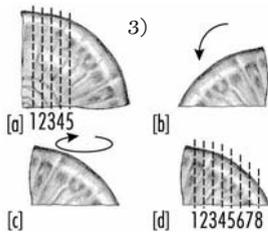
In this way, onions can be sliced very quickly. There is, however, a better way to slice them if you want all the pieces to be similar in size. This first method produces half rings with blunt ends. With practice, the second method can produce a very nice result almost as quickly.

Slicing Half an Onion into Shreds



Place a peeled onion half on a cutting board with the cut side down and the root end toward your left. Hold the onion firmly with your right hand. Using a chef's knife held in a pinch grip, make a downward cut at a 45-degree angle to remove the root section; begin by cutting just above the edge of the root (1).

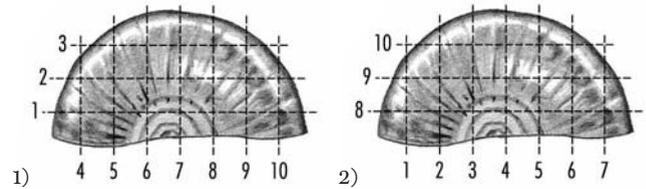
Then turn the onion 90 degrees and cut the half into two quarters from root to stem (2). Next, working with each quarter separately, place it on the board so one cut side is to your left. Make successive slices, as indicated by the numbers in (3a) in the illustration, until you have cut about half of the quarter. The number of cuts will vary depending on to the size of the onion and the thickness of the slices. Next, lay the remaining portion of the quarter on the board as indicated in (3b).



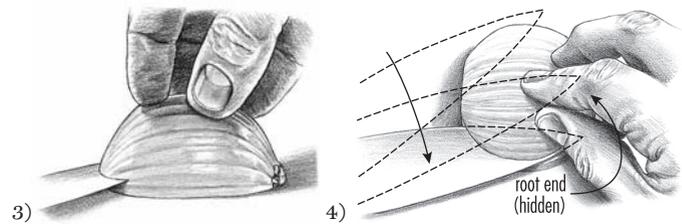
Turn the onion around so that the other cut side is to your left, as indicated in (3c), and continue to slice until the onion is entirely cut, as in (3d).

Dicing an Onion, The Traditional Method

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To make the horizontal cuts, place the onion half near the edge of the cutting board, with the root end toward your right, and press the fingertips of your right hand against the top to hold it. Hold the chef's knife with a pinch grip in your left hand, with the blade parallel to the board, and draw the blade



through the onion in an arc toward you so the tip passes just short of the root (3). As the blade describes its arc through the onion, the handle stays in about the same position and only the blade tip moves (4). Repeat this process, moving up through the onion, until you have made the desired number of horizontal slices.

Next, make the vertical cuts through the onion half. Keep the root toward your right hand, and hold the onion on both sides with that hand. Push the tip of the knife down through the onion at a point just short of the root end and draw the blade out toward your knife hand. DO NOT cut through the root, which would cause the onion to fragment into pieces (5).



Finally, rotate the onion 90 degrees away from you with the root still to your right. Make successive vertical cuts across the cuts just to create the individual cubes. Hold the onion firmly with your right hand, with your thumb and little or ring finger holding the sides and your middle fingers on the top of the onion pressing straight down toward the cutting board. For each slice, rest the flat of the knife blade, held with a pinch grip, against the flat side of your forefinger. This way, your forefinger serves as a guide for the knife. Start each slice with the tip of the blade in contact with, or near, the board, with the handle angled up. As you bring the knife down, also move it slightly forward so the edge of the blade moves easily through the onion as the slice is being made. After each cut, move your forefinger to the right a distance equal to the desired thickness of the next slice. It is important that the flat of the blade always remain in contact with the flat surface of your forefinger (6).

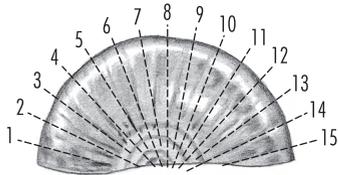


When there is too little onion right to slice, flip the piece over so the just-cut surface is against the cutting board, and trim the remainder into similar-size dice until only the root remains. This minimizes waste (7).



CUTTING ONIONS (*left-hand version continued*)

Dicing an Onion, The Fan Method

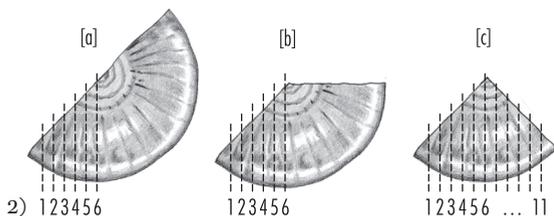


The second method of dicing the onion substitutes a fan-shape pattern of cuts for the initial horizontal and vertical cuts of the first method. Rather than making a series of horizontal cuts followed by a series of vertical cuts, you make one series of cuts by rotating the angle of the knife blade from almost parallel to the cutting board on one side (cut number 1 in the illustration) to almost parallel to the board on the other side (cut number 15). As you make the series of cuts, you alternate the depth of the cuts so some of them go all the way through the onion and some go only partway. The root end should still be toward your right hand, which holds the onion from the sides. Push the tip of the chef's knife through the onion near the root end and draw the blade straight out toward your knife hand. **DO NOT** cut through the root, which would cause the onion to fragment into pieces. After you've made all the cuts, rotate the onion 90 degrees, so the root is still to your right, and make successive crosswise cuts to separate the cubes in the first method.

Dicing Less Than Half an Onion



1) The third method is appropriate when you need to dice less than half an onion. It is also effective when a recipe calls for a very fine dice. Place an onion half on a cutting board cut side down and with the root end toward your right. Hold the onion firmly with your right hand, with your fingertips positioned straight down toward the cutting board. Position a chef's knife, held with a pinch grip, so the flat of the blade is against the flat side of the tip of your forefinger. This way your forefinger serves as a guide for the knife. Start each slice with the tip of the blade in contact with, or near, the cutting board, with the handle angled up. As you bring the knife down, also move it slightly forward so the edge of the blade moves easily through the onion as the slice is being made. It's important that the flat of the blade always remain in contact with the flat surface of your forefinger. When the knife is partway through the onion, move your forefinger over the spine of the knife to hold the newly cut slice in place. For this method to work well, it is important that the slices remain intact and in position. After each cut, move your forefinger to the right a distance equal to the desired thickness of the next slice. Cut only as many slices as you need (1).



Carefully lay the slices flat on the cutting board, with the smaller slices on top of the larger ones and positioned as shown in (2a). Working from left to right, make successive parallel cuts with the chef's knife until you reach the center of the straight portion of the onion slices. Rotate the onion slices to the left and make another series of cuts from left to right (2b). Rotate the remaining onion slices again and make a final series of cuts (2c).