

Knives in the Kitchen Classroom: Habits, Rules, and Skills



Overview

Knife skills are at the foundation of every students' experience in the Edible Schoolyard kitchen classroom. Before students touch knives in the kitchen, they participate in a kitchen orientation. This orientation lays the foundation for safely learning and practicing knife skills. During their first cooking class, students apply the rules and habits to preparing greens over grains and establish a positive culture around the knives that allows us to build towards advanced knife skills.

We use professional quality tools which communicates to our students they are engaging in real work. This instills a sense of pride, ownership, and responsibility. Although we always assume our students' good intent, we also establish that the kitchen needs to be a safe space for everyone, both physically and emotionally. This means we have no tolerance for gestures or references to violence, even when made in jest.

Habits

1. Make sure you have a cutting board before selecting a knife from the toolbox.
2. Choose a knife that is appropriate for the job that you are doing.
3. Pinch the blade of the knife for a stronger grip and more control over the knife. Use the claw (fingertips and thumb tucked under) to protect yourself from cuts.
4. Protect your hands by using a bench scraper to move food off of the blade and to transfer food off of your cutting board.
5. Clean your knife at the table by wiping it down with a washcloth, making sure that the sharp edge is facing away from your hand.
6. Place the knife in the toolbox with the sharp edge down.

Rules

1. When working with a knife you should be looking at what you are doing.
2. When cutting something make sure the knife is moving towards the cutting board.
3. If you are not actively using a knife to cut something, you don't need the knife in your hand.
4. If you must leave the table with a knife, carry it safely by your side with the tip down and the sharp edge facing back.



Skills

1. Slice
2. Mince
3. Dice
4. Angle/Bias Cuts
5. Julienne
6. Chiffonade

Teaching Notes

One way to introduce and teach knife rules is to model the knife rules and then intentionally break them. Ask the students to evaluate your work with a thumbs up thumbs down vote, then call on students to explain their reasoning.

If students aren't following the knife habits and rules, ask them to pause and examine how they are working. Emphasize they are not in trouble but ask them to identify and correct the behavior in order to be safe. If there are concerns, a wavy knife or crinkle cutter is a good training tool for students to use before progressing to sharper knives.