

Garlic Tips and Techniques

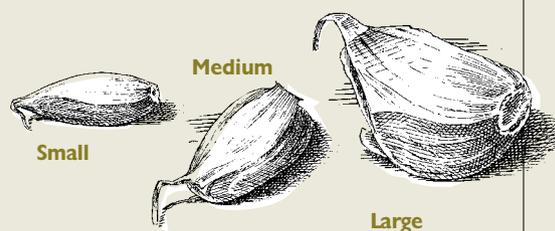
With just a few garlic techniques under your belt, you can master this sometimes frustrating culinary staple. BY RAQUEL PELZEL

Garlic epitomizes the idea that good things come in small packages. Like a meticulously wrapped birthday gift, garlic reveals its true beauty only after its thin, paperlike shell has been removed: slightly sweet and pungent, with spicy undertones and a lingering finish. The types of garlic most people are familiar with are the white, pink, and purple sorts (the latter two being colored in skin only). Another variety often available that is great for roasting, owing to its larger-than-average size,

is the aptly named elephant garlic. Still, it is generally less potent than the smaller, standard-sized garlic. Regular garlic also varies widely in potency.

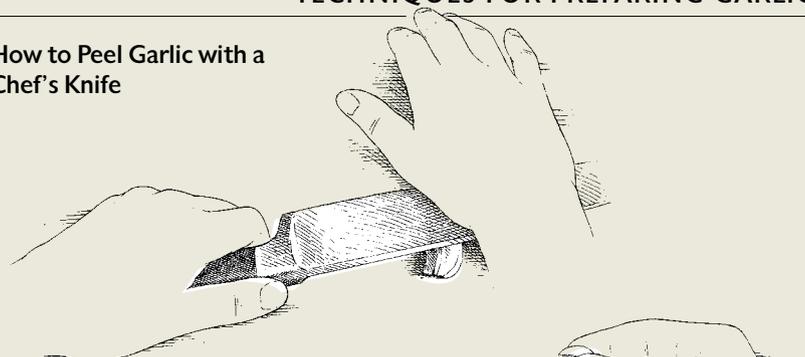
When buying garlic in the store, make sure to buy firm, tightly bound cloves. If your garlic has sprouted, it's still all right to use in a pinch. Just remove the green sprout—it can make your dish taste bitter. Here we present some tried-and-true tricks of the trade to help you work with garlic efficiently and effectively.

CLOVES OF GARLIC: Actual size

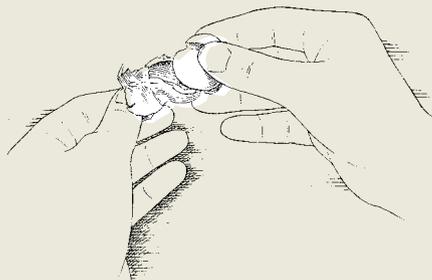


TECHNIQUES FOR PREPARING GARLIC

How to Peel Garlic with a Chef's Knife

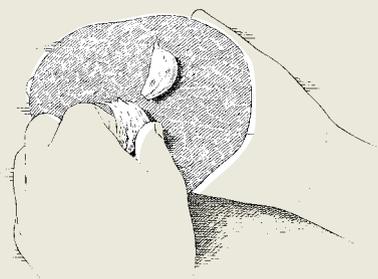


1. Place a clove of garlic on one of its flat sides. Position the chef's knife in your right hand (if you are right-handed), about 1/2 inch above the clove, with the blade facing away from you. With the heel of your free hand, hit the middle of the blade swiftly with moderate force. The harder you hit the blade of the knife, the more flattened the garlic clove will be, so if you are eventually planning to sliver the garlic, take care not to hit the blade with too much force.



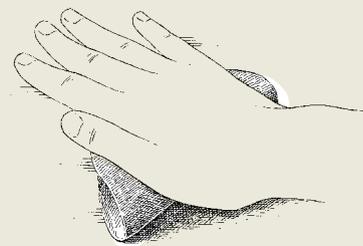
2. The skin of the clove should crack open, enabling you to peel it away from the clove easily.

How to Peel Garlic with a Rubber Jar Opener

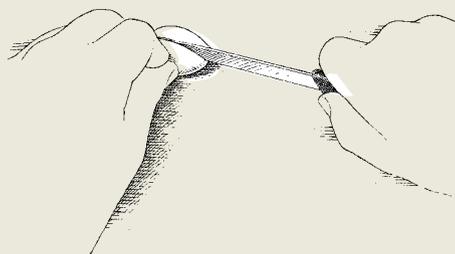


1. Place the unpeeled garlic cloves in the center of the jar opener.

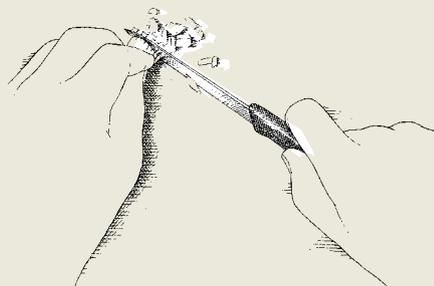
2. Sandwich the cloves inside the jar opener, and, with the palm of your hand, roll the cloves around the inside of the "sandwich." The garlic skins should slip right off.



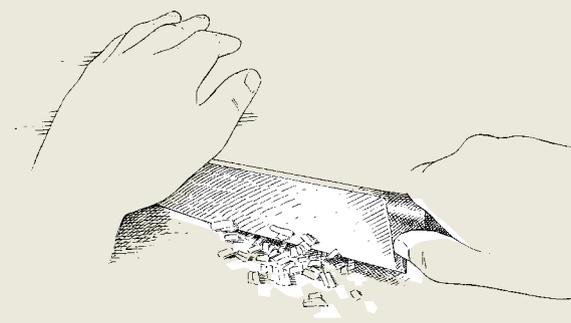
How to Mince Garlic



1. With a paring knife or a chef's knife (depending on what you feel most comfortable with), make pole-to-pole slices lengthwise along the clove, taking care not to cut through the root end.



2. Bring your knife back up and over the garlic and proceed to dice it into small bits.

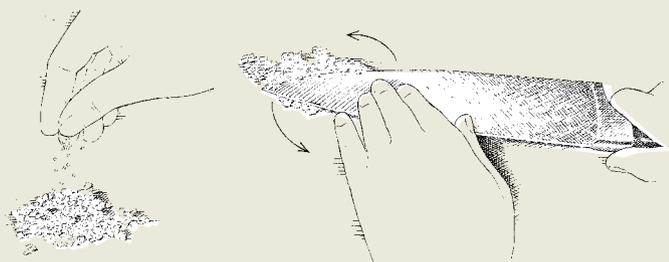


3. Gather the diced garlic into a pile by dragging the knife blade toward you. Holding the chef's knife in your dominant hand, place your other hand flat over the upper-third portion of the blade. With your chef's knife, finely mince the chopped garlic with a firm, rocking motion, swiveling the blade across the chopped pieces. It may take several passes to get the garlic uniformly minced.

Illustration: John Burgoyne

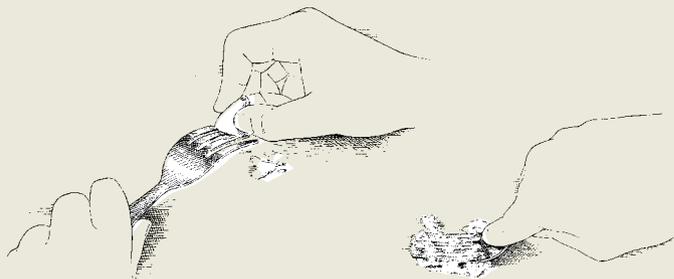
MORE TECHNIQUES FOR PREPARING GARLIC

How to Puree Garlic with a Chef's Knife



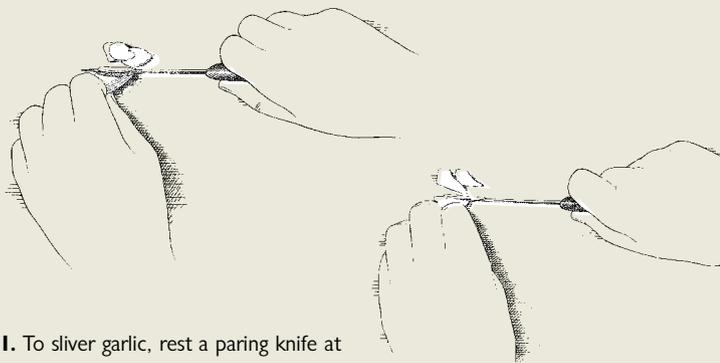
1. After the garlic has been minced, sprinkle it with a generous pinch of kosher salt. (We prefer kosher salt since the large crystals help to puree the garlic).
2. Gently lay the top quarter of the flat portion of your chef knife's blade on top of the salted garlic. Place your free hand on top of the blade and drag the garlic toward you, then push it away in a small circular motion. Repeat this process until the garlic is smooth and partially liquefied.

How to Puree Garlic with a Fork



1. If you need a smaller quantity of garlic puree, this method may work best for you. Hold a fork with its tines facing down on a cutting board. Rapidly rub a peeled garlic clove back and forth against the tines, close to their points.
2. Mash any remaining chunks with the fork turned over.

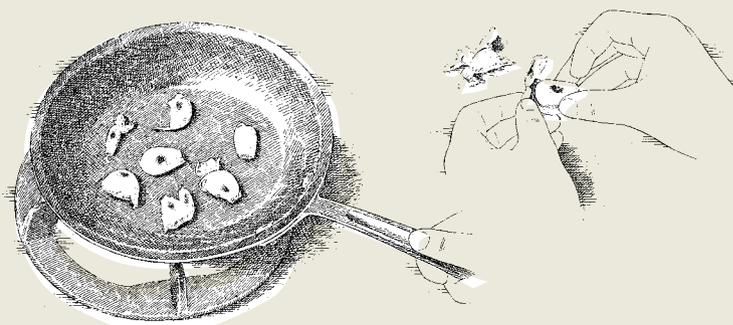
How to Sliver Garlic



1. To sliver garlic, rest a paring knife at a slight angle against the peeled clove. Raise the paring knife above the clove, then bring it down on to the clove in a slow, even motion. Bring the knife back up again and make your next cut, barely moving to the left of your first slice. Continue to slice the garlic, working your way into the clove.
2. When you get to the end of the clove, turn it over so that the flat edge is resting on the cutting board and continue slivering the clove. (If you are making slivers to insert into meat or a portobello mushroom, cut them wider so they can be inserted more easily.)

How to Toast Garlic

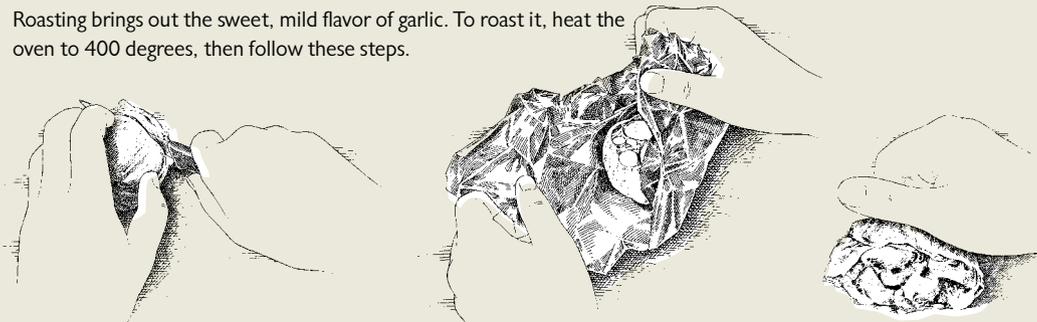
When you want the sweet and caramel flavors of roasted garlic but don't have the time to roast, try toasting it. It's a great quick fix. You can substitute toasted garlic for roasted garlic in some recipes, such as in salad dressings.



1. Heat the unpeeled cloves in a dry skillet over medium heat. Shake the pan occasionally until the garlic becomes fragrant and you notice small brown spots on all sides, about 8 minutes.
2. Remove the garlic from the pan. As soon as it is cool enough to handle, you can slip the skin right off.

How to Roast Garlic

Roasting brings out the sweet, mild flavor of garlic. To roast it, heat the oven to 400 degrees, then follow these steps.



1. Take a large head of garlic and cut about 1/2 inch from the tip end so most clove interiors are exposed.
2. Place the garlic head, cut-side up, in the center of an 8-inch square of aluminum foil. Sprinkle the open end of the garlic with 1/2 teaspoon of olive oil and a pinch of salt, then gather the corners of the foil over the garlic and twist to seal.
3. Roast in a small baking dish until the garlic is soft and golden, about 45 minutes. When cool, squeeze the garlic out by hand or with the flat edge of a chef's knife, starting from the root end and working up.

How size affects flavor

We have heard that the way garlic is prepared—whether sliced, diced, or minced—can influence the flavor of a dish. To test this theory, we made three dishes—an uncooked vinaigrette, a quickly cooked olive oil pasta sauce, and a long-cooked meat sauce—using garlic cut in different ways. In each case, each particular “cut” of garlic affected flavor differently.

After some research, we discovered that what is behind these flavor differences is *allicin*, an enzyme that is released when garlic is cut. The intensity of garlic flavor in your dish depends on how finely you have chopped, minced, or pureed the garlic. If you want a bold garlic flavor, you should puree or mince your garlic, but if you want a more subtle essence, try slivering the clove. If you're not a true fan of garlic's bold flavors, you may want to roast or toast your garlic—the heat breaks down the allicin.