

How to choose a knife

Before purchasing a set of expensive knives, review your needs.

Several factors should be considered when purchasing knives.

Reputable manufactures - Most companies do not manufacture their own knives, but get involved in Branding, A process of using your company name on a knife manufactured by another company. Knife manufacturing is a complex process that involves several factors; the quality of the steel used, the steel itself, & the heating and tempering processes. When used in conjunction these factors produce quality cutlery.

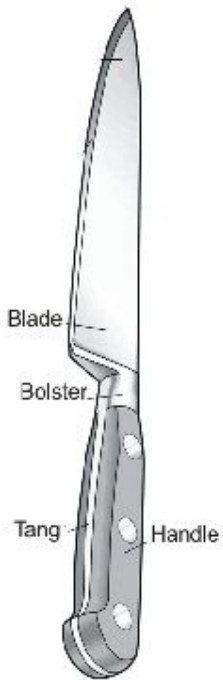
Feel & Comfort of materials - The best knives are those that are the most comfortable. The feel of a knife will determine how you will use it and if you become fatigued while using it.

Quality of materials: One Piece Forged knives are considered to be the standard upon which all knives are compared.

There are two basic types of knives Forged and Stamped.

1. Forged knives are formed by a process called Forging, where a metal is heated until soft and hammered to shape.
 - a. Forged knives have several benefits over Stamped knives.
 - i. Stronger.
 - ii. Better edge holding ability.
 - iii. Durability.
 - iv. Uniformity of the steel.
 - v. Made from a single piece of solid steel.
2. Stamped knives are formed by a process called Stamping, where the knife blank is cut out of a sheet of steel.
 - a. Both forged and stamped knives are manufactured using 7 common steps.
 - i. Hardening - Heating a metal to a specific temperature and rapidly cooling.
 - ii. Tempering - Heating a metal slowly and moderately to a specific temperature, holding and cooling it.
 - iii. This heating and cooling changes the structural form of the steel to achieve specific characteristics.
 - iv. Ground to shape.
 - v. Polished.
 - vi. Sharpened.
 - vii. Etched.
 - viii. Finished.

- b. Fit & Finish - Look at the quality of the workmanship, avoid knives with fillers around the handle.
- c. Other factors that may influence your choice of knives:
 - i. Weight - forged knives can weigh more in comparison to stamped knives. There are no benefits to weight. The weight of a knife is a personnel choice.
- d. A knife can be broken down into four primary parts.



- i. **The Blade** - The goal of a good quality knife is to balance blade strength with blade toughness.
 - 1. As strength increase the steel becomes more brittle.
 - 2. As toughness increases the steel becomes more flexible and reduces strength.
- ii. **The Bolster** - Historically the bolster was an integral part of a forged knife. It is a thick piece of metal between the handle and the blade, made to add weight to the knife, providing better balance. In recent years companies, such as Messermeister, have removed the traditional bolster reducing weight and making it easier to sharpen the entire length of the blade.

iii. The Tang:

- 1. Full Tang - Knives with a “Full Tang” are considered superior due to the knife being made from a solid single piece of steel. The Tang helps in knife balance and feel. This usually increases the weight of the knife.
- 2. ¾” Tang - Knives with a ¾” tang are considered to be full tang knives.
- 3. ½” Tang & ¼” Tang - Knives with ½” & ¼” tangs are usually less expensive.
- 4. Knives with ½” & ¼” tangs can be of equal quality to full and ¾” tang knives.

iv. The Handle - There are 3 primary knife handle materials.

- 1. Soft Molded Plastic (Fibrox) - Knives made from this material usually have ½” & ¼” tangs. These handles are more prone to heat damage.
- 2. Wood - Excellent handle material. Wood handles may require routine maintenance if not cared for properly by using a food grade oil, an oil that does not turn rancid, to renew the wood.
- 3. Hard Molded Plastic (Polyoxymetholene)- These handles are very durable. Knives made from this material usually have full or ¾” tangs.

e. Budgetary Considerations - Setup a budget and balance the advantages and disadvantages of each knife.

- i. Forged knives will cost, per knife, approximately 2 1/2 - 3 times as much as stamped knives.

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- ii. Mixing and matching your knives enables you to get the most for your money.
- f. Conclusion - Whether you choose forged or stamped knives, how well they are maintained will determine how long they will last. Knives should be cleaned after each use and never put away dirty, do not use a dishwasher as heat, detergent and other objects may damage your knives. Store your knives in sheaths, a knife case or block to protect your blades from damage and injury. Your knives should be maintained daily by using a steel to maintain sharpness (See The Sharpening Steel Article).

There are of course other factors. I hope this helps in your decision-making.