

COOKING CLASS

A Cut Above

Look sharp in the kitchen with a knife skills class.

BY LEEANNE JONES

W

When I signed up for a knife skills class,

I wasn't a total novice. I mean, I knew a julienne from a chiffonade. But meal prep routinely took twice as much time as a recipe promised, and I needed to speed up my slice and dice.

In the classroom kitchen at Pleasanton's *Pans on Fire*, a half-dozen students—with our own chef's and paring knives in tow—gathered around an island and watched instructor Linda Wyner make a smoothie while sharing the history of the knife. As she deftly peeled a frozen banana, she told us about different types of knives, how they are made, and how they are best used. I learned that my eight-inch chef's knife—from a Calphalon set I received as a wedding gift—was too long for my height: You shouldn't have to raise your shoulder to start a knife cut.

Between sips of banana-berry smoothie, we practiced basic cuts on zucchini and potatoes—working on the placement of our fingers and angle



of the blade, and perfecting a rolling motion and consistent size. Then, Wyner demonstrated more advanced cuts. My favorite: how to mince a jalapeño without touching the flesh. Cut off the stem end, and run a paring knife in a circle around the inside, removing the veins and seeds. Then, with the blade inside the pepper, make matchstick slices all around, and then small dice. (If you make contact with the oft-irritating flesh, Wyner suggests washing your hands with soothing sour cream, yogurt, or milk.)

After more tips and tricks with tomatoes, onions, cilantro, and garlic, Wyner had assembled a fresh salsa, which we enjoyed with chips after the three-hour class—while our knives were washed and honed, gratis. Back home, I put my new skills to the test, significantly accelerating prep (and reducing stress) on my Blue Apron deliveries. I also purchased my now-favorite knife: a five-inch Santoku.

Knife Skills, \$65, is offered monthly; 3059-J-K Hopyard Rd., Pleasanton, (925) 600-7267, pansonfire.com.

More Pointers

Get a good board: Wooden cutting boards are best because most are soft and naturally self-healing, while plastic can trap bacteria, and glass can wear down knives. To clean, wash immediately with hot water and soap.

Sharpen often: To keep blades efficient, have them professionally sharpened once a year. Touch up at home once a month using the steel that came with your knife set or a honing block.

Add to your collection: Consider a good-quality plastic knife for cheese, tofu, and eggs. The blade isn't as sharp, but food won't stick to it as you slice.