

The Best Petty and Utility Knives

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With a blade that's halfway between that of a chef's knife and that of a paring knife, a petty knife or utility knife is the perfect blade for medium-size kitchen prep tasks. Which is best?

METHODOLOGY

Test 10 petty and utility knives, priced from about \$28 to about \$215

Test sharpness at the beginning and ending of testing, using industrial sharpness-testing machine

Slice tomatoes

Slice blocks of cheese

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We love our chef's and paring knives; we rely on them for most cutting tasks in the kitchen. But

occasionally we find ourselves wishing we had a knife that split the difference between these two workhorses—a midsize knife with more power and coverage than the paring knife but more precision and control than the chef's knife. That's where petty and utility knives come in. While both of these

knives come in a variety of lengths, they're most commonly found with a blade in the 5- to 6-inch range, almost exactly halfway between that of a paring knife and that of a chef's knife. Historically, the two knives had very different origins, shapes, and advantages. Over the years, however, distinctions between petty and utility knives have blurred somewhat (see "**Petty Knives versus Utility Knives: What's the Difference?**"). In practice, both terms refer to any midsize prep knife.

Curious to know which of these knives was best for home cooks, we bought 10 petty or utility knives, priced from about \$28 to about \$215, and put them through their paces, using them to slice tomatoes; mince shallots and parsley; quarter mushrooms; break down chickens and debone chicken breasts; and slice salami, firm cheese, and cooked skin-on chicken breasts.



Petty and utility knives were great for finesse tasks that are performed with the tip of the blade, such as mincing shallots or quartering mushrooms.

Most Knives Performed Well

We found a lot to like about these knives, and we think most home cooks would, too. They particularly excelled at finesse tasks performed with the tip of the blade—they were fantastic for mincing shallots precisely and for quartering mushrooms quickly and cleanly. The blades of most of the knives were very thin and very sharp, so they sliced the cooked chicken breasts beautifully, without shattering or pulling on the crispy skin, allowing for perfect presentation. We were especially impressed with the way the knives allowed us to break down half chickens and debone chicken breasts. Because their blades are smaller and narrower than those of chef's knives, they were more agile and responsive, helping us to maneuver nimbly between joints and ably trimming away slippery skin and fat. And while their blades are stiffer than those of our favorite flexible boning knives, they also did a great job of hewing close to the bone as we removed chicken breasts, leaving very little meat behind. These thin, hard blades are a bit fragile, though; on hard materials such as bones, they can (and did) chip. With this in mind, we

recommend using a pair of shears or a chef's knife to do any heavier-duty butchery, such as removing the backbone or halving a bone-in chicken breast.

Thin and sharp, the blades on most of the knives we tested did a beautiful job of slicing chicken breasts without ripping or tugging on the crispy skins.

Minor Differences in Sharpness

A few factors determined how well the knives handled and performed. First, sharpness. In previous knife reviews, we've found that the sharpness of a knife is determined not only by the edge angle of the blade but also by the extent to which the blades are sharpened at the factory or by hand. To find out which knives were sharpest, we used an

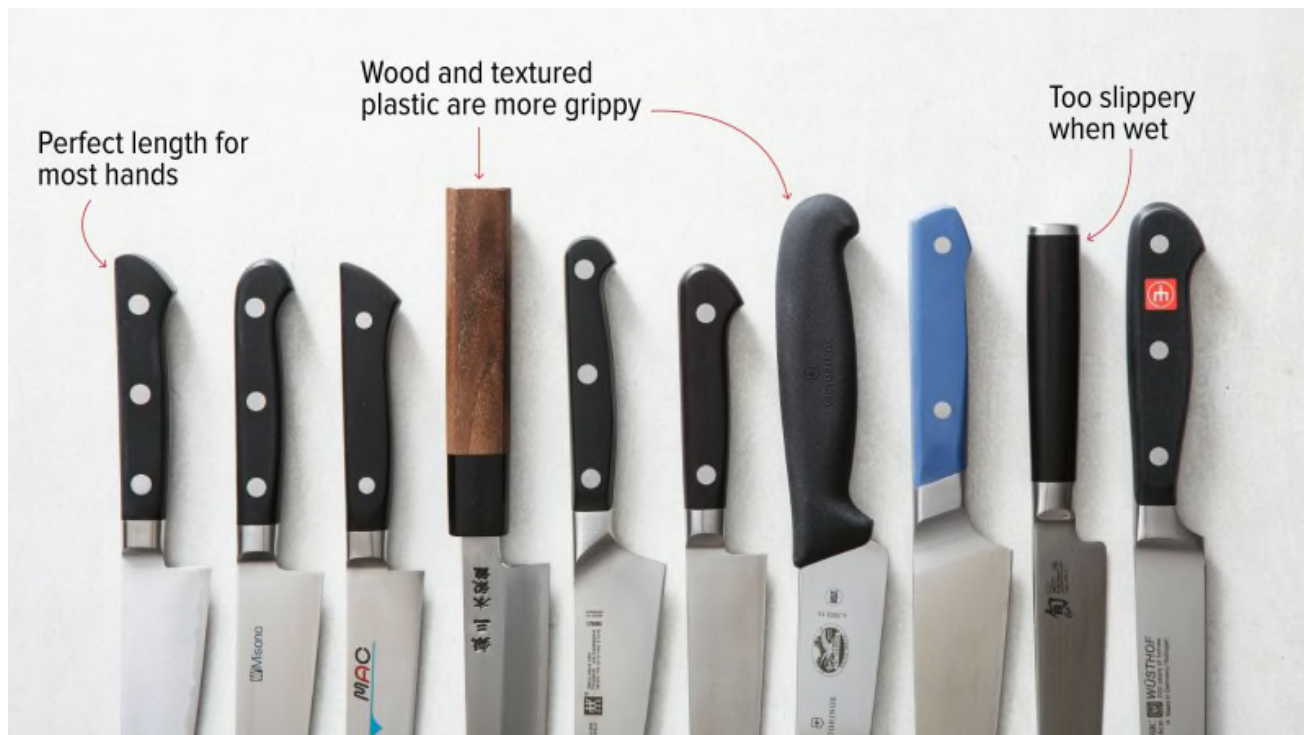


We used an industrial sharpness-testing machine to evaluate how sharp each knife was at the beginning and end of testing.

industrial sharpness-testing machine to evaluate each blade at the beginning of testing. Judging by the results, edge angle wasn't the most important factor in sharpness here. The sharpest knife had one of the largest edge angles (18 degrees), yet it was extraordinarily keen in hand, slicing through tomatoes almost on contact. Most of the knives arrived razor-sharp, though a few were a little less so than we liked; we demoted these slightly.

Weight and Blade Design Matter

Because these knives are built for careful, controlled tasks, we preferred lightweight models, which took less effort to use and direct; models weighing more than 4 ounces felt a bit more cumbersome. We also kept the design of each blade in mind. We liked blades that were thin from spine to edge, as they sliced more cleanly, and with less effort, than blades that had thicker spines, which occasionally wedged into food, making less even cuts. And we slightly preferred knives with blades measuring 6 inches long or less, since they offered a little more control on fine-detail tasks such as mincing shallots than those that were a bit longer. Many of the blades had straight edges, following the traditional petty-knife style; others were slightly curved, per the traditional utility-knife style (see “**Petty Knives versus Utility Knives: What’s the Difference?**”). We don’t think one style is better than the other. If you prefer to rock through your cuts, you might want a curved blade; a straight edge is better for those who like to cut in a more straight up-and-down motion.



When choosing a knife, consider the handle, which can be just as critical to your preferences as the blade.

Handle Length and Material Also Matter

On the other end, we considered the handles. We liked handles that measured at least 4.25 inches long, as they provided enough room for most folks to grip the knives comfortably, though cooks with bigger hands might prefer knives with handles closer to a 5-inch length. And we also appreciated handles that were made of wood or grippy plastic; these were easier to grip than slick plastic handles, especially when slippery or wet.

A Note About Clearance

While testing, we noted something odd about most of the knives. All the knives sailed through fine-detail tasks performed toward the tip of the blade. But when we chopped parsley or sliced cheese and salami—tasks performed on a cutting board using the middle or heel of the blade—there wasn't always a lot of room underneath the handles for our fingers. With some of the models, there was less than half an inch of clearance, so we ended up scraping our knuckles or adjusting our grip slightly to accommodate them. We preferred models that had at least 0.6 inches of clearance, and more was better, especially for large-handed testers, as they gave most hands a bit more space while chopping.



WINNING TRAITS

The Best Petty or Utility

Sharp, thin blade measuring 6 inches long or less in length

Handle measuring at least 4.25 inches in length, with at least 0.6 inches in clearance underneath

Knife: The Tojiro 150mm Petty R-2 Powder Steel

It was hard to choose a single winner—we think any of our five highest-ranked models would be a fantastic addition to your knife collection. But if we had to pick just one, it would be the Tojiro 150mm Petty R-2 Powder Steel. With a straight-edged blade that was just less

than 6 inches long and thin from spine to edge, it was the sharpest knife when it arrived, cutting foods effortlessly and with amazing precision. This knife felt great in our hands; it was lightweight, and its handle was long enough for hands of most sizes to grip comfortably. And it provided just enough clearance under the handle for us to chop parsley and shallots without scraping our knuckles. For more great knives—including a less expensive Best Buy option, a splurge purchase, and a pick for larger hands—consult the chart below.