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Meat Carving

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Introduction

Carving is an art which in the past has been quasi-ceremonial and considered to be an integral part of the presentation of a meal. In the past, carving has often been relegated to the kitchen. Meat was brought to the table already sliced and often not very hot. However, carving at the table is gaining popularity.

Proper carving begins with meat that is carvable. Good knives that are finely honed and razor sharp, the proper cutting surface, and knowledge of the anatomy of meat to be carved are essentials for successful carving. Artful carving is the result of experience, knowledge, and good equipment. Slices of well-carved meat are more tender than pieces that have been hacked with a dull knife.

The preferred thickness of cuts to be carved is 1/4 to 1/2-inch for each slice. Some cuts of meat are easier to carve than others. One can purchase meat that is boned, or partially boned, instead of difficult-to-carve cuts. For example, a leg of lamb is quite easy to carve if the sirloin portion containing the hip bone is removed before the leg is cooked. The sirloin chops could be prepared for another meal. A square cut shoulder is difficult to carve, unless it is boned and rolled. Since some cuts are purchased that are not boneless, this discussion will emphasize those that contain bones.

Carving Is Important

The way meat is cooked can determine ease of carving. If a roast is cooked at a very high temperature, it may form an outer crust that will make carving extremely difficult. Yet if braised meat is overcooked, the meat will fall apart when it is carved, even if the knife is sharp.

Allowing a roast to "set" after cooking will make it firm enough to carve properly. However, steaks and chops should be served immediately after they are removed

from the broiler or skillet. It's preferable to have guests wait for a steak instead of having the steak wait for the guests.

Whenever possible, strings and skewers should be removed in the kitchen. If there is a possibility that a rolled or stuffed roast may fall apart during carving, leave one or two strings in place. Center the roast on a carving board that is long enough to allow the carver to cut the meat without spilling on the tablecloth, and small enough to avoid having the size of the carving board make the roast look small and insignificant.

Proper Equipment Is Important

Proper equipment is essential to carve meat properly. An inadequate carving surface and a dull knife can ruin the most beautifully cooked meat. A good carving board should have either a "well" to catch juices or it should be built on a slight slant with a lip so the juices will collect at the back of the board and not run off onto the table. It is desirable to have at least two carving boards in different sizes—a large one for large roasts (and for turkey) and a smaller one for small roasts and steaks. Good carving boards are expensive but with proper care should last for many years. Carving boards are available in wood and plastic. Plastic boards are easier to clean. Knives should be made of carbon steel (which also means they will be expensive), sharpened regularly, washed properly, and stored in a location where they will not become dull.

Most professional cooks prefer carbon steel because they feel that it will maintain a sharper edge than stainless steel. A well-made knife, if perfectly balanced, has a hand-ground blade, a comfortable handle, and a deep forged shoulder or finger guard. The tang (heel portion of the blade) should extend well into the handle. Knives that are

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held together with glue instead of rivets should be avoided.

When You Carve

Although at one time it was considered improper etiquette to stand while carving, it is acceptable today. Most people find it easier to carve in a standing position. Warm plates on which to serve the meat should be nearby but not in the way.

Determine which way the meat fibers run and where the bone, if any, is located. Anchor the meat firmly with a sturdy two-pronged carving fork. Try to avoid piercing the meat with the fork too often because juices escape each time the fork is plunged into the meat. Most meat should be sliced across the grain. Meat is not made more tender by slicing across the fibers or grain but the shorter fibers from slicing this way make the slices seem more tender.

Use a gentle sawing motion. The angle of the knife should not be changed once the slicing has begun. Make uniform slices and place them neatly to one side on the carving board if there is room, or overlap them “shingle” style on a warm serving platter. It is preferable to carve all meat for the first serving before serving anyone, so the slices can be divided evenly. If leftovers are anticipated, leave some meat unsliced. A solid piece of meat will not dry out in the refrigerator as quickly as slices.

The examples that follow illustrate the best methods for carving certain meat cuts.

Standing Rib Roast

Beef roasts carve easier when cooked rare or medium. A meat thermometer will help take the guesswork out of cooking. Place the meat thermometer in the center of the thickest part of the roast (not touching fat or bone). When the desired internal temperature is obtained, remove the roast from the oven; 140°F for rare roast beef; 160°F for medium; and 170°F for well done. An oven temperature of 300 to 325°F will reduce cooking loss and will provide a tasty roast. High oven temperatures and overcooked roasts increase dryness of the meat and cooking losses. Beef roasts will carve easier if they are allowed to “set” for approximately 10 minutes after removal from the oven.

Recommended carving steps are: (1) remove the shortribs (if present) from the roast and separate the backbone from the ribs by sawing through the ribs at the backbone. The backbone can be easily removed when the roast is cooked. (2) Place the cooked roast on the platter with the small cut surface up and the rib side to the left for a right-handed person or the rib side to the right for someone who

is left-handed. (3) Insert the fork firmly between the top two ribs. (4) From the far outside edge, slice across the grain toward the ribs. (5) Make the slices 1/4-inch to 1/2-inch thick. (6) Release each slice by cutting close along the rib with the knife tip. (7) After each cut, lift the slice on the blade of the knife to the side of the platter. Hot platters should be used unless the slices will be served immediately.

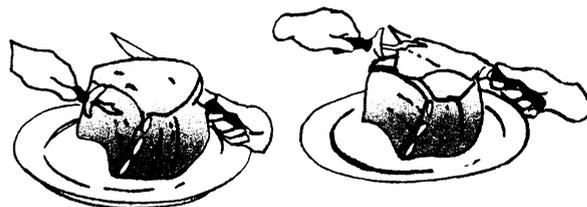


Figure 1. Carving the standing rib roast.

Beef Chuck Roast

(1) Separate the muscles and carve each muscle separately because all fibers do not run in the same direction. (2) Carve each muscle across the grain two or three slices 1/4-inch to 3/8-inch thick depending on size desired for each person.

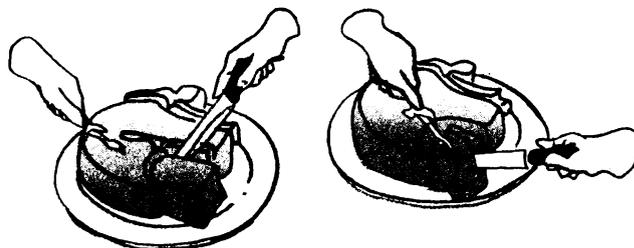


Figure 2. Carving the beef chuck roast.

Crown Roast

(1) Remove any garnish from the center of the crown roast that may interfere with carving. (2) Slice down between the ribs removing one rib at a time.

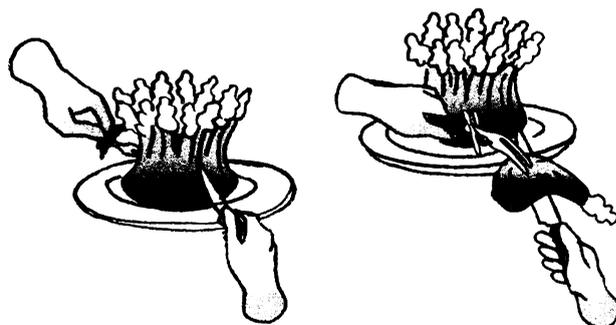


Figure 3. Carving the crown roast.

Rolled Roast

(1) Strings may be removed before the roast is brought to the table or, if necessary, may be removed at the table.

(2) Hold firmly in place with the fork and slice uniformly into 1/4-inch to 1/2-inch servings.

Pork Loin Roast

(1) Remove the backbone, leaving as little meat on it as possible, before the roast is brought to the table. (2) Place the roast on a platter, rib side facing the carver. (3) Insert the fork in the top of the roast. (4) Slice the meat by cutting closely along each side of the rib bone. One slice will contain a rib; whereas, the next slice will be boneless.

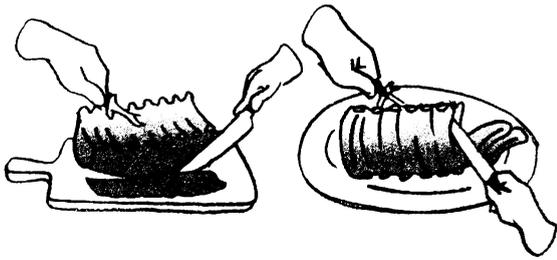


Figure 4. Carving the pork loin roast.

Picnic

(1) Cut two or three slices from the base and turn the roast so that it rests on the surface just cut. (2) Cut down to the arm bone near the elbow bone. (3) Turn the knife and cut along the arm bone to remove boneless arm meat. (4) Carve the boneless arm meat by making perpendicular slices. (5) Remove meat from each side of the arm bone and slice the boneless pieces of meat.

Ham Half

(1) Place the shank end on the carver's left (right-handed person) with the cushion portion of the ham on top. (2) Cut along the top of the bone and lift off the cushion portion. (3) Place the cushion portion on a carving board and make perpendicular slices. (4) Cut along the leg with the knife tip to remove meat from the bone. Turn meat so that the thick side is down and continue to slice. (5) Place on the carving board with the "face" down. (6) Cut along the bone to remove the boneless section. (7) Place

the boneless section on the carving board and carve across the grain. (8) Hold the remaining section with a fork and carve across the aitch bone. (9) Release the cut slice from the bone with the knife tip and lift it onto the platter.

Loin Steak

(1) Hold the steak with the fork inserted at the left (right-handed person) and cut close around the bone. (2) Lift the bone to the side of the platter where it will not interfere with the carving. (3) Hold the tenderloin firmly with the fork and cut across full width of the steak, making wedge slices.

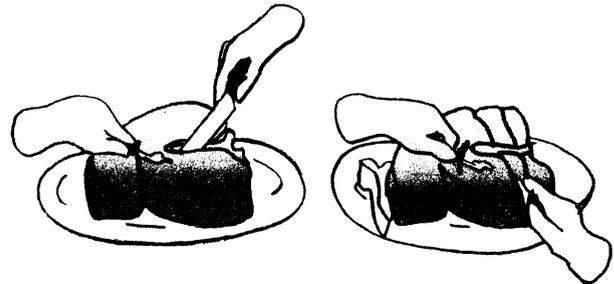


Figure 5. Carving the beef loin steak.

A suggested procedure for carving the Porterhouse steak is to serve each muscle separately. The bone is removed and the sirloin (the large muscle) can be cut into slices or wedges. Slices can also be made from the smaller tenderloin muscle (filet).

A portion of the information given in this publication was obtained from:

1. The Meat Board Meat Book by Barbara Bloch, McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York.
2. "Tips on Meat Carving" by R. L. Reddish, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, University of Florida.