COOK'S ILLUSTRATED

THE COOKS ILLUSTRATED HOW-TO-COOK LIBRARY

An illustrated step-by-step guide to foolproof cooking.

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An illustrated step-by-step guide to foolproof cooking.

By the Editors of COOK'S ILLUSTRATED
Illustrations by John Burgoyne

Brookline, Massachusetts

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America's Test Kitchen
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The Cook's Illustrated How-to-Cook Library
An illustrated step-by-step guide to foolproof cooking
The Editors of *Cook's Illustrated*

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Introduction

There are all sorts of cookbooks out there. Some have 2,000 recipes, others have 200. Some are packed with color photos, others black and white. Some are nothing more than recipes, others are part of a narrative describing a life or place. But I am still struck by a comment made to me over 20 years ago by a Swedish friend and cook, who offered this advice, "It's not how many recipes, it's which recipes." Sometimes expertise turns up where you least expect it, as in the story I'd heard about a New York couple who purchased a farm in

Vermont back in the 1930s. Instead of using the local surveyor to check the property lines, they hired an expensive firm out of the city so they would get a top-notch job. Three men showed up, but after two days of work they still could not find the last corner. The firm finally had to admit defeat and ask for help from the local surveyor, who, in no time at all, found the spot in question. The New York firm received a bill a few days later for $100. They wrote back indicating that they needed the work itemized since the bill was a bit pricey. The new invoice came by return post: "Twenty-five dollars for finding the corner and $75 for knowing where it

was."

The notion of "knowing where it was" is the founding principle for our "How-to-Cook" library. Knowing the best way to produce tender stew meat; knowing the best techniques for preheating a skillet or seeding a tomato; knowing whether Dutch-processed cocoa is better than natural in a particular recipe—years and years of test kitchen work all contributed to this unique collection. Each chapter contains a definitive repertoire of recipes, only the ones you really want and need, recipes tested and developed here at America's Test Kitchen. These are small jewels, just the thing when you want to make a pasta sauce, layer cake, holiday dessert, or

mashed potatoes, or when you want to roast, grill, stew, bake, sauté, or stir-fry.

Every cook has a repertoire, the key recipes that are appealing, practical, useful, and interesting enough to keep in the rotation. To this day, my wife, Adrienne, swears that the Chicken Noodle Soup recipe is the best she has ever made, and we make it for dinner at least twice a month. Or the Ham and Split Pea Soup, Oven Fries, Fruit Cobbler with Butter Cookie Dough Topping, Grill-Roasted Chicken, Quick Lasagne with Meatballs, or the French-Style Potato Salad. These are the staples of our weeknight menus. Sure, in this day and age, access to virtually millions of

recipes is right at your fingertips through the Web. But who needs millions of recipes that might or might not work? What any home cook wants are recipes that work, the first time and every time.

I have always believed that the best way to make a good cook is to give them a good recipe. These are recipes that don't have to be second-guessed, fixed up, or changed around if you don't have a convection oven, are cooking on an electric rather than a gas stovetop, or are using the wrong size skillet. That's our job, to figure out what might go wrong with a recipe and engineer it for the best possible chance of success in your kitchen, with your cookware.

So enjoy this very special Kindle

collection of recipes. It is not available anywhere else. It covers all the culinary ground, from barbecue, grilling, garden vegetables, holiday roasts, potatoes, soups, stews, stir-fries, pasta sauces, pizza, appetizers, salads, shrimp and shellfish, to pies, layer cakes, cookies and brownies, holiday desserts, ice cream, simple fruit desserts, and lots more. It's all you really need in the kitchen and it all sits nice and handy on a Kindle as well. Now your own definitive recipe collection is portable and easy to access, the perfect helper in the kitchen. Just remember to invite us over for dinner!

Christopher Kimball
Founder and Editor
Cook's Illustrated and *Cook's Country*
Host, "America's Test Kitchen" and "Cook's Country From America's Test Kitchen" on PBS

HOW TO MAKE QUICK APPETIZERS

Appetizer Basics

Dips and Salsas

Cheese Appetizers

Vegetable Appetizers

Meat and Chicken Appetizers

Seafood Appetizers

Egg Appetizers

Bread and Pastry Appetizers

Popcorn and Nuts

APPETIZER BASICS

THE DICTIONARY DEFINES *APPETIZER* AS "a food or drink that stimulates the appetite." The French word *hors d'oeuvre* is translated as "apart from the work," and the Italian *antipasto* literally means "before the meal." Both are synonyms for *appetizer* and refer to the fact that these little fingers foods are eaten away from the dining table, often on the hoof. At a cocktail party, appetizers can be a meal unto themselves.

For this book, we have tested

countless recipes for appetizer favorites from around the world, finally selecting the versions that taste best and require the least amount of work. In general, we have limited hands-on work to no more than 20 minutes for each recipe, plus baking and cooling times. Wherever possible we have provided do-ahead instructions to keep the cook out of the kitchen during the party.

The book is divided by the main ingredient in the appetizer (eggs, vegetables, meat, etc.). Within each chapter, we start with the recipes that are the easiest and quickest to make. Recipes at the end of each chapter tend to be a bit more complicated.

DECIDING HOW MANY APPETIZERS TO MAKE

The question we hear most often about appetizers concerns quantity. How many types of appetizers and how many pieces are required? The answer depends how long you plan to serve the appetizers and what follows. Some examples.

If you plan a short cocktail hour (let's say 45 minutes, while you wait for all of your guests to arrive) followed by a multicourse meal, you want to serve just one to two appetizers. (If you are expecting a large crowd, you might consider making three appetizers.) Plan on three or four pieces per person if you

plan on one hour or less for cocktails. For more than one hour, make at least two appetizers and plan on four to six pieces per person.

A true cocktail party (with no dinner to follow) requires more types of appetizer and more pieces. In many cases, guests drink for several hours and some may even make a meal out of the appetizers. In this case, you want to serve at least five or six appetizers and should plan on at least 10 to 12 pieces per person.

Dips can be used to supplement the above recommendations, or, for a simple appetizer, you can serve a single dip and some crudités (raw vegetables) and skip the individual pieces.

Take into account how heavy and filling the appetizers you have chosen are. Guests are likely to be satisfied by two or three pieces of rolled beef but might want four or five large shrimp with cocktail sauce.

CHOOSING SPECIFIC APPETIZERS

The other area that perplexes many cooks is choosing particular appetizers. There are no hard-and-fast rules, but these guidelines should help.

Keep the season in mind, serving lighter foods in summer and heavier fare in winter.

Figure out where you plan to serve

appetizers. If guests will be seated on sofas and can hold forks, knives, and plates, then almost anything will work. If guests will be gathering on foot, limit your selection to true finger foods and dips.

If you are serving dinner, plan the meal first and then use foods not already represented in the appetizers. For example, if your menu calls for steak, potatoes, and asparagus as the main course, you would not want to want to serve any of these foods as appetizers.

If serving more than one or two appetizers, choose appetizers that go well together. It's fine to have one rich appetizer with cheese, but don't serve three cheese appetizers. At cocktail

parties, you will probably want a mix of hot and cold (or room temperature) appetizers.

For a shorter cocktail hour before dinner, you many want to stick with cold appetizers, which don't require any last-minute preparation. If you want to serve a hot appetizer, consider gathering guests in the kitchen so you don't have to slave away in solitude.

DIPS AND SALSAS

DIPS AND SALSAS ARE THE MOST BASIC party food. Put out a bowl of tomato salsa and chips or some creamy spinach dip and vegetables and most people will be satisfied. Cooks generally focus on the dip and don't give the accompaniments much thought. Chips are a given, but flatbreads and crackers work equally well. As for vegetables, we find that platters of raw broccoli and cauliflower are often inedible.

In our testing, we found the preparation of vegetables for crudités to

be essential. There are two key elements: how the vegetable is sliced and whether or not it should be blanched (cooked briefly in salted boiling water) to make the texture more palatable and to improve its flavor.

The information that follows details the findings of our testing. When deciding which vegetables to use together for crudités, consider these factors: First and foremost, use what's in season and looks good at the market. Second, choose a variety of colors. A platter consisting entirely of green vegetables is not as attractive as a platter of green, white, yellow, orange, and red vegetables. Last, consider the texture of the vegetables. Crunchy, hard

carrots work well with crisp, juicy bell peppers and soft cherry tomatoes.

Each of the preparations listed below yields about three cups of vegetables. Plan on serving 12 cups of vegetables with any of the dip recipes that follow. This translates to an average of four vegetables for a crudités platter to accompany a single dip.

ASPARAGUS: Snap tough ends from 12 ounces asparagus. Blanch in boiling salted water until bright green, 20 to 30 seconds. Drain, shock in ice water, drain again, and pat dry.

BROCCOLI: Cut florets from 1 small bunch (about 1 pound) into bite-sized pieces. Blanch in boiling salted water until bright green, about 1 minute. Drain, shock in ice water, drain again, and pat dry.

CARROTS: Blanch $^{3}/_{4}$ pound baby carrots in boiling salted water until bright orange, about 15 seconds. Drain, shock in ice water, drain again, and pat dry.

CAULIFLOWER: Cut florets from $^{1}/_{2}$ medium head (about 1 pound) into bite-sized pieces. Blanch in boiling salted

water until slightly tender, about 1 minute. Drain, shock in ice water, drain again, and pat dry.

CELERY: Trim ends from 4 medium stalks (about $^1/_2$ pound). Cut stalks in half lengthwise, then crosswise into 3-inch lengths.

GREEN BEANS: Trim ends from 8 ounces thin green beans. Blanch in boiling salted water until bright green, 15 to 20 seconds. Drain, shock in ice water, drain again, and pat dry.

PEPPERS: Stem and seed 3 small red, yellow, or orange bell peppers. Cut into strips about 3 inches long and $^{3}/_{4}$ inch wide.

SUGAR SNAP PEAS: Remove ends and strings from 8 ounces sugar snap peas. Blanch in boiling salted water until bright green, about 15 seconds. Drain, shock in ice water, drain again, and pat dry.

TOMATOES: Stem 1 pound cherry tomatoes.

Classic Red Table Salsa

makes about 5 cups

NOTE: *Our favorite Mexican-style salsa is perfect with tortilla chips. To reduce the heat in the salsa, seed the chile.*

3 large, very ripe tomatoes (about 2 pounds), cored and diced small

$^1/_2$ cup tomato juice

1 small jalapeno or other fresh chile, stemmed and minced

1 medium red onion, diced small

1 medium garlic clove, minced

1/2 cup chopped fresh cilantro leaves

1/2 cup lime juice

Salt

INSTRUCTIONS:

Mix all ingredients, including salt to taste, in medium bowl. Cover and refrigerate to meld flavors, at least 1 hour and up to 5 days.

Chunky Guacamole

makes $2^1/_2$ to 3 cups

NOTE: *To prevent discoloration, prepare the minced ingredients first so they are ready to mix with the avocados as soon as they are cut. Ripe avocados are essential here. To test for ripeness, try to flick the small stem off the end of the avocado. If it comes off easily and you can see green underneath it, the avocado is ripe.*

3 medium, ripe avocados (preferably the pebbly skinned Haas)

2 tablespoons minced onion

1 medium garlic clove, minced

1 small jalapeno chile, stemmed and minced

1/4 cup minced fresh cilantro leaves

1/4 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon ground cumin (optional)

2 tablespoons lime juice

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Halve one avocado, remove pit, and scoop flesh into medium bowl. Mash flesh lightly with onion, garlic, chile, cilantro, salt, and cumin (if using) with fork until just combined.

2. Halve and pit remaining two avocados. Following figures 1 and 2, cut flesh into $^{1}/_{2}$-inch cubes. Add cubes to bowl with mashed avocado mixture.

3. Sprinkle lime juice over diced avocado and mix entire contents of bowl lightly with fork until combined but still chunky. Adjust seasonings and serve. (Can be covered with plastic wrap, pressed directly onto surface of mixture, and refrigerated up to 1 day. Return guacamole to room temperature, removing plastic wrap at last moment, before serving.)

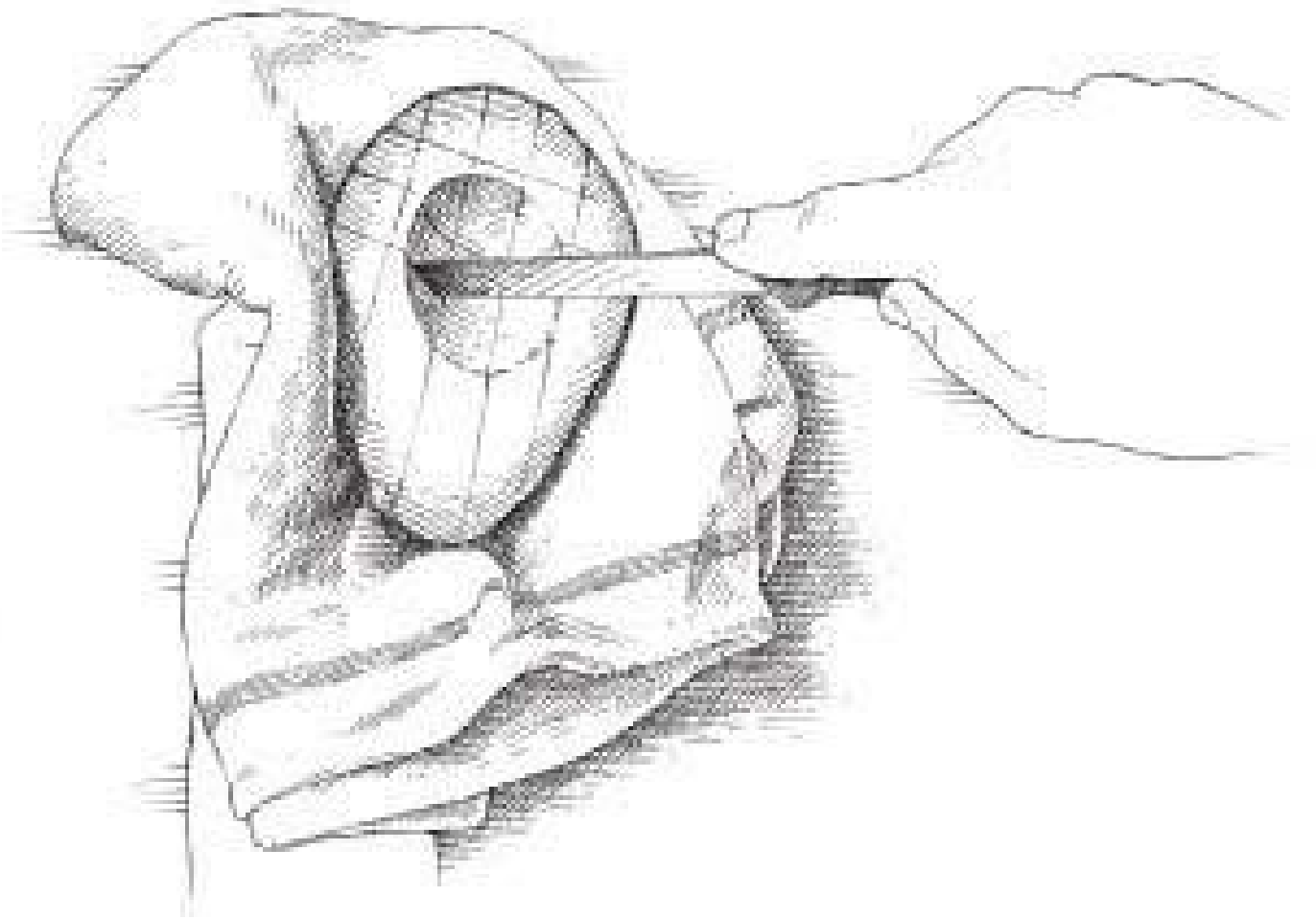

Figure 1.

Use a dish towel to hold avocado half steady. Make $^{1}/_{2}$ -inch crosshatch incisions in the flesh with a paring knife, cutting down to but not through skin.

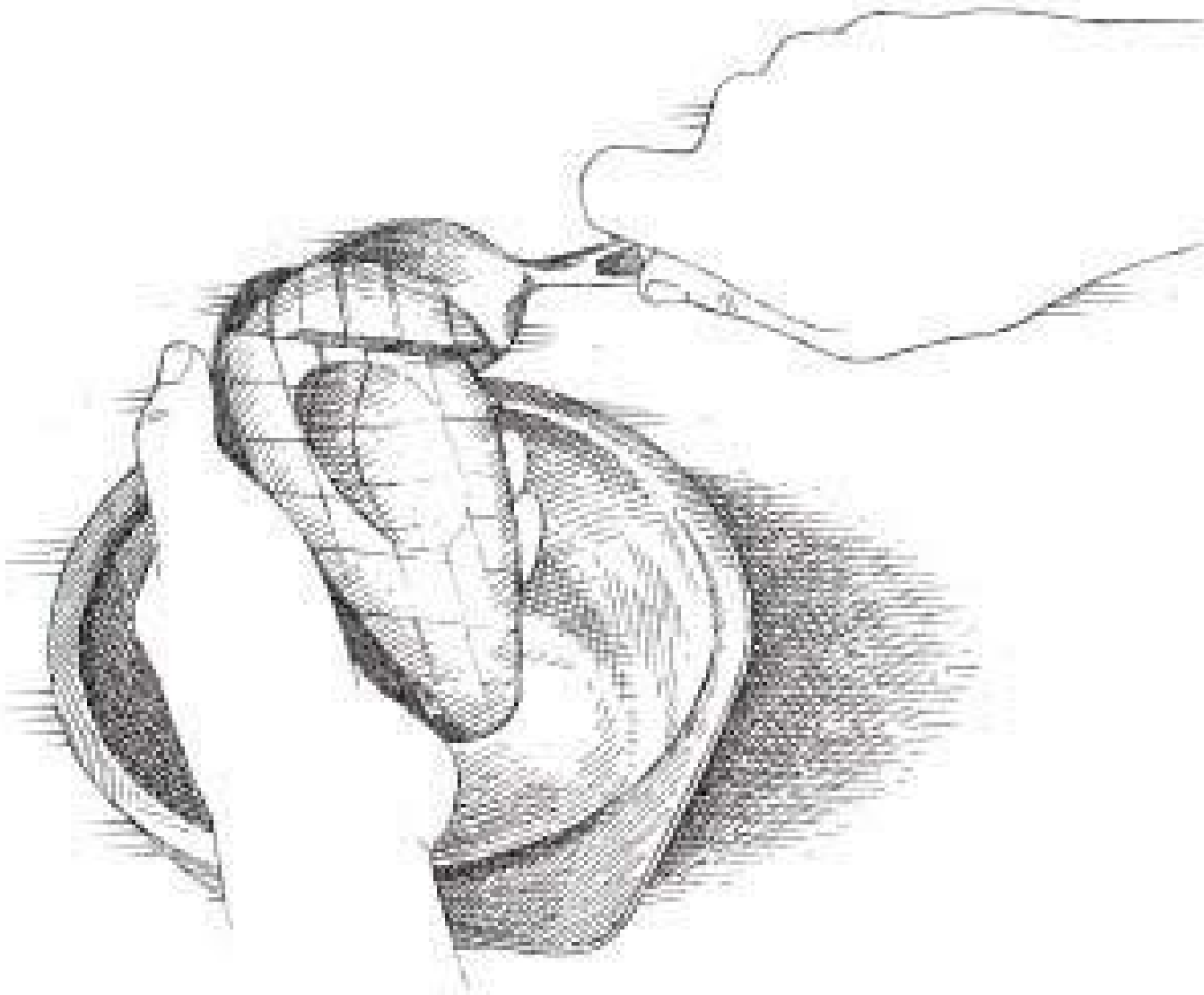

Figure 2.

Separate diced flesh from skin using a spoon inserted between the skin and the flesh, gently scooping out avocado cubes.

Clam Dip with Bacon and Scallions

makes about 2 cups

NOTE: *Regular or light sour cream and mayonnaise can be used in this dip and the one that follows. We found that lighter versions yield a slightly less creamy dip but are surprisingly good.*

4 strips (4 ounces) bacon, cut into 1/4-inch pieces

3/4 cup sour cream (regular or light)

3/4 cup mayonnaise (regular or light)

1 teaspoon lemon juice

1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce

2 cans ($6^1/_2$ ounces each) minced clams, drained

2 medium scallions, sliced thin

Salt and ground black pepper

Cayenne pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Fry bacon in small skillet over medium heat until crisp, 6 to 8 minutes. Transfer bacon with slotted spoon to plate lined with paper towel; let cool.

2. Whisk together sour cream,

mayonnaise, lemon juice, and Worcestershire sauce in serving bowl. Stir in clams, scallions, and bacon. Season to taste with salt, pepper, and cayenne. Cover and chill until flavors meld, at least 1 hour and up to 2 days.

Green Goddess Dip

makes about $1\frac{3}{4}$ cups

NOTE: *Mayonnaise adds body to this dip, while sour cream brings some needed tang and brightness.*

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup sour cream (regular or light)

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup mayonnaise (regular or light)

2 medium garlic cloves, chopped

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup fresh parsley leaves

2 teaspoons chopped fresh tarragon leaves

1 tablespoon lemon juice

2 anchovy fillets, minced

1/4 cup minced fresh chives

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Combine sour cream, mayonnaise, garlic, parsley, tarragon, lemon juice, and anchovies in food processor and process until smooth and creamy, scraping down sides of bowl once or twice.

2. Transfer mixture to serving bowl and stir in chives. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Cover and chill until flavors

meld, at least 1 hour and up to 2 days.

Hummus

makes about $2^1/_2$ cups

NOTE: *This Middle Eastern chickpea dip/spread flavored with tahini (sesame paste) is delicious with pita bread or pita chips as well as vegetables.*

1 can (19 ounces) chickpeas, drained and rinsed

1 large garlic clove, minced

6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

$^1/_4$ cup tahini

$^1/_4$ cup lemon juice

$^1/_4$ cup water

3/4 teaspoon salt

Pinch ground cayenne pepper

Pinch ground paprika

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Combine chickpeas, garlic, 4 tablespoons oil, and tahini in food processor and process until smooth, scraping sides of bowl as necessary, about 30 seconds. Add lemon juice, water, salt, and cayenne and process again until smooth, an additional 10 seconds. Transfer hummus to serving bowl, cover, and chill until flavors meld, at least 1 hour and up to 24 hours.

2. To serve, use back of soup spoon to make a trough in hummus. Pour remaining 2 tablespoons oil into trough. Sprinkle with paprika and serve immediately.

Bagna Cauda

makes about $1^{1}/_{2}$ cups

NOTE: *Bagna cauda is a traditional hot anchovy dip hailing from the Piedmont region of Italy. It must be kept warm, so use a fondue pot or double boiler for serving. If you like your bagna cauda spicy, try the optional red pepper flakes. Serve with vegetables and bread.*

1 cup extra-virgin olive oil
5 tablespoons unsalted butter
3 medium garlic cloves, finely minced

1/2 teaspoon hot red pepper flakes (optional)

1 can (2 ounces) anchovy fillets, rinsed and drained

Salt

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oil and butter in small, heavy-bottomed saucepan over medium-low heat until butter is melted and just begins to foam, about 3 minutes.

2. Add garlic and red pepper flakes (if using), and cook until garlic is fragrant but not colored, about 30 seconds. Add anchovy fillets and cook, stirring and mashing fillets with a wooden spoon

until they become a paste. Season sparingly with salt to taste and serve, keeping mixture warm.

CHEESE APPETIZERS

BUY CHEESE FROM A SOURCE YOU TRUST. Cheeses are fragile, and stores that don't handle them properly should be avoided. Always ask to taste a bit of any cheese before buying it. Cheese should not appear cracked, dried out, or —except for blue cheese—moldy. Buy small portions, no more than you will use in a week or so.

Once purchased, cheeses should be wrapped well. We find that wrapping cheese in layers of parchment (on the inside) and foil is best, followed closely

by placing the cheese in a plastic bag and squeezing out all the air before sealing. While cheese should be stored in the refrigerator, always let cheeses come to room temperature before serving. The flavor and texture of most cheeses is improved at room temperature.

When serving several cheeses together, select a variety based on texture (soft, hard, crumbly), flavor (mild, sharp, pungent), and milk types (cow, sheep, goat).

Dates Stuffed with Parmesan

makes 16 pieces

NOTE: *Use high-quality dates (such as Medjools) and only the finest Parmigiano-Reggiano in this appetizer.*

16 large pitted dates
1 piece (3 ounces) Parmesan cheese
16 walnut halves, toasted

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Slit dates lengthwise with paring knife.

2. Following figures 3 and 4, cut cheese into thin shards about one inch long. Place a piece of cheese and one walnut half in each date and close date around cheese to seal. Place dates on serving platter. (Dates can be wrapped in plastic and kept at room temperature for several hours.)

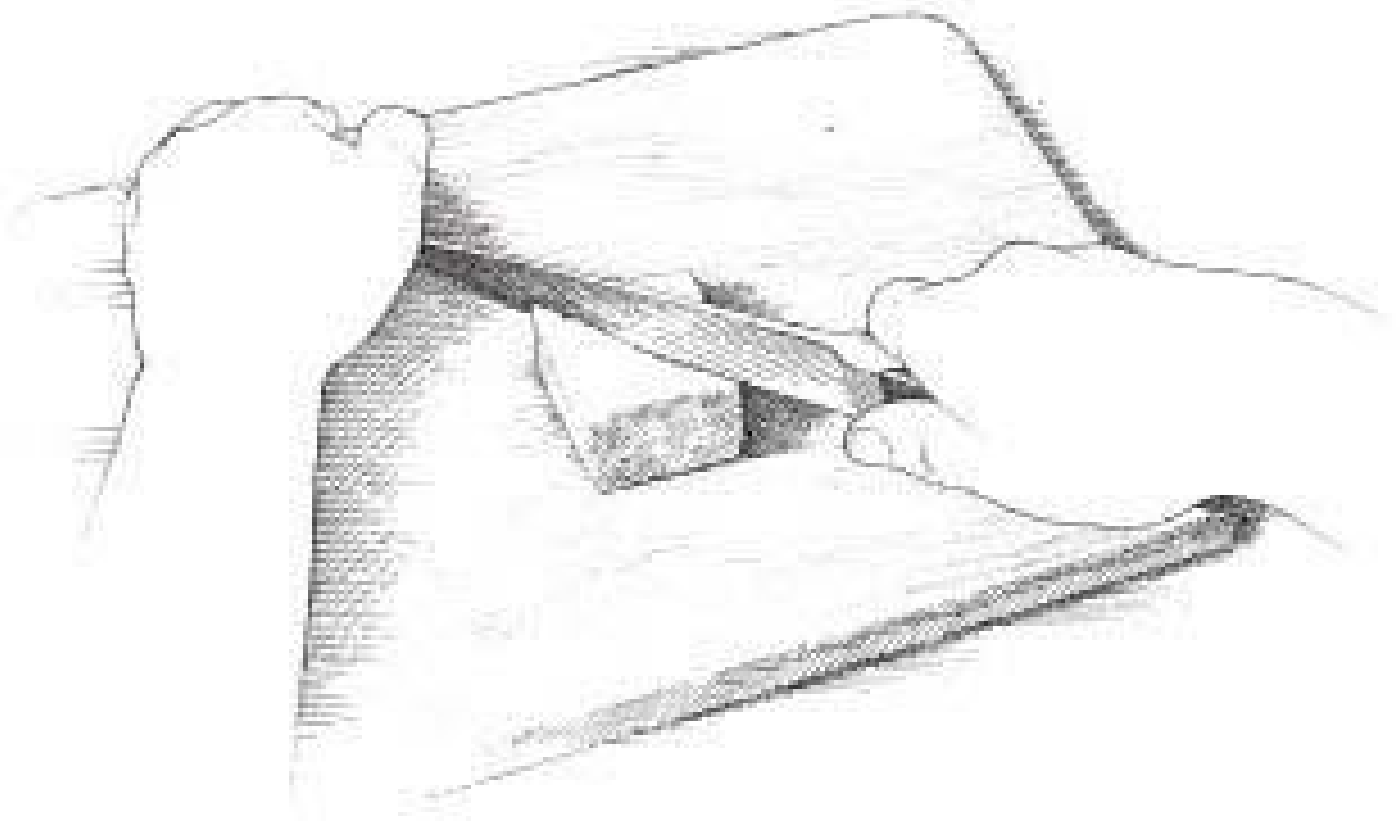

Figure 3.

Use a chef's knife to remove the rind from a square block of Parmesan cheese. Cut the trimmed block in half on the diagonal.

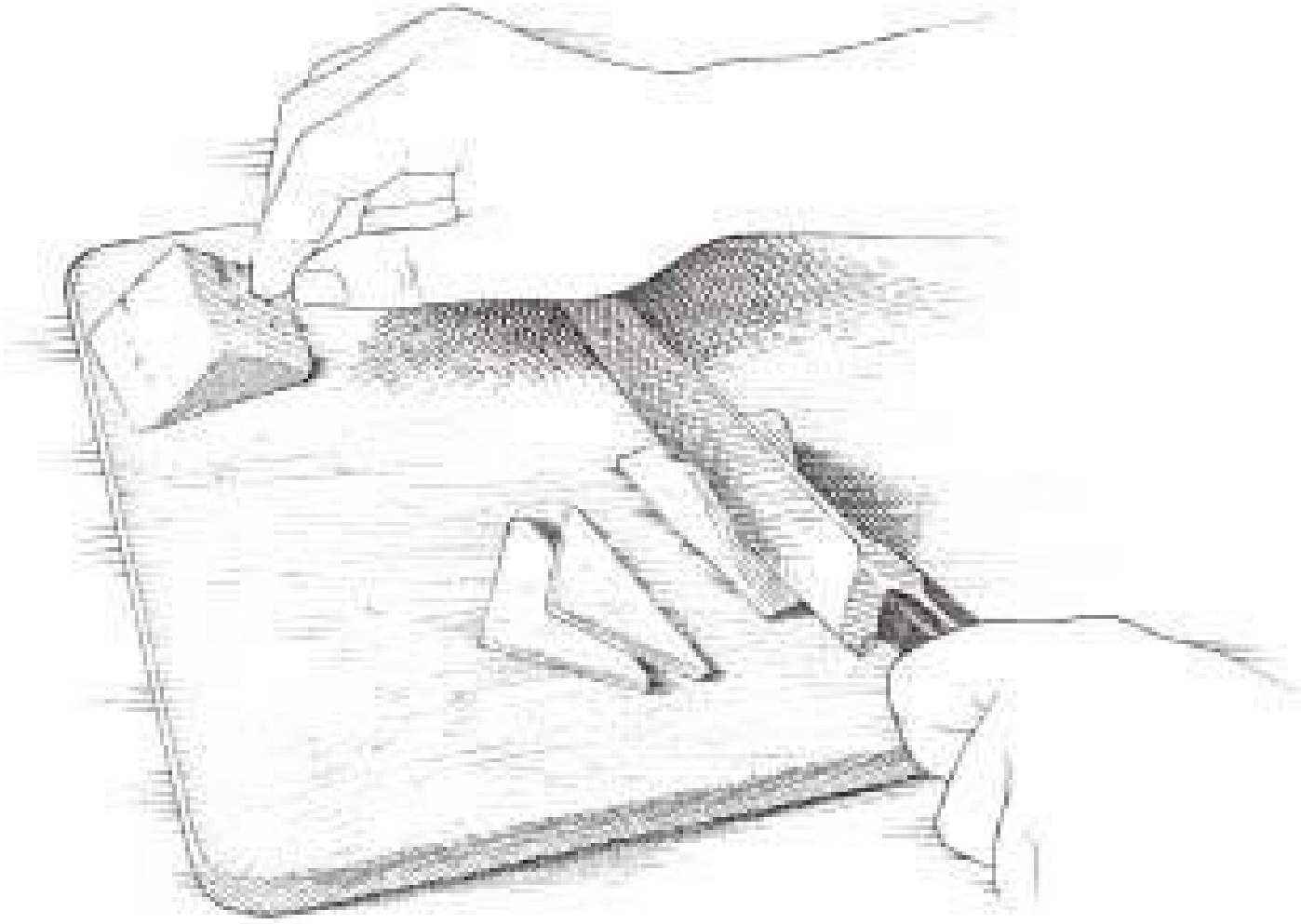

Figure 4.

Lay each half on its cut side and slice the cheese into thin triangles, about $^{1}/_{16}$-inch wide. These thin shards should be about the size of a date.

Warm Figs with Goat Cheese and Honey

makes 16 pieces

NOTE: *The figs should be baked very briefly, just long enough to soften the cheese and warm the figs.*

16 walnut halves (about $^1/_2$ cup)
1 tablespoon brown sugar
$^1/_8$ teaspoon salt
$^1/_8$ teaspoon ground cinnamon
$1^1/_2$ ounces goat cheese (about 3 tablespoons)

8 fresh figs, halved lengthwise
2 tablespoons honey

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Combine walnuts, brown sugar, salt, and cinnamon in small, heavy-bottomed skillet over medium-high heat until sugar melts and coats nuts evenly, about 3 minutes. Remove nuts from pan, separating them from each other. Cool.

2. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 500 degrees. Spoon heaping $^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon goat cheese onto each fig half and place on parchment-lined, rimmed baking sheet. Bake figs for 4 minutes. Transfer warm figs to

serving platter.

3. Place a candied walnut half on each fig half and drizzle honey over figs. Serve immediately.

Marinated Goat Cheese

serves 4

NOTE: *The garlic should be broken down into a fine puree for this recipe. After mincing, sprinkle the garlic with salt, mash the garlic-salt mixture with the side of a chef's knife, and then continue to mince until the garlic forms a smooth puree. Serve with bread or crackers.*

1 log (8 ounces) goat cheese

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

3/4 teaspoon chopped fresh thyme leaves

$^{3}/_{4}$ teaspoon minced fresh chives

$^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoon minced fresh rosemary leaves

1 small garlic clove, minced and then worked into a puree with $^{1}/_{8}$ teaspoon salt

Ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Following figure 5, use a piece of dental floss to cut cheese crosswise into slices $^{1}/_{3}$ inch thick.

2. Whisk together oil, thyme, chives, rosemary, garlic-salt puree, and pepper

to taste in small bowl.

3. Pour oil mixture over cheese. Serve immediately or cover and refrigerate for up to 1 day.

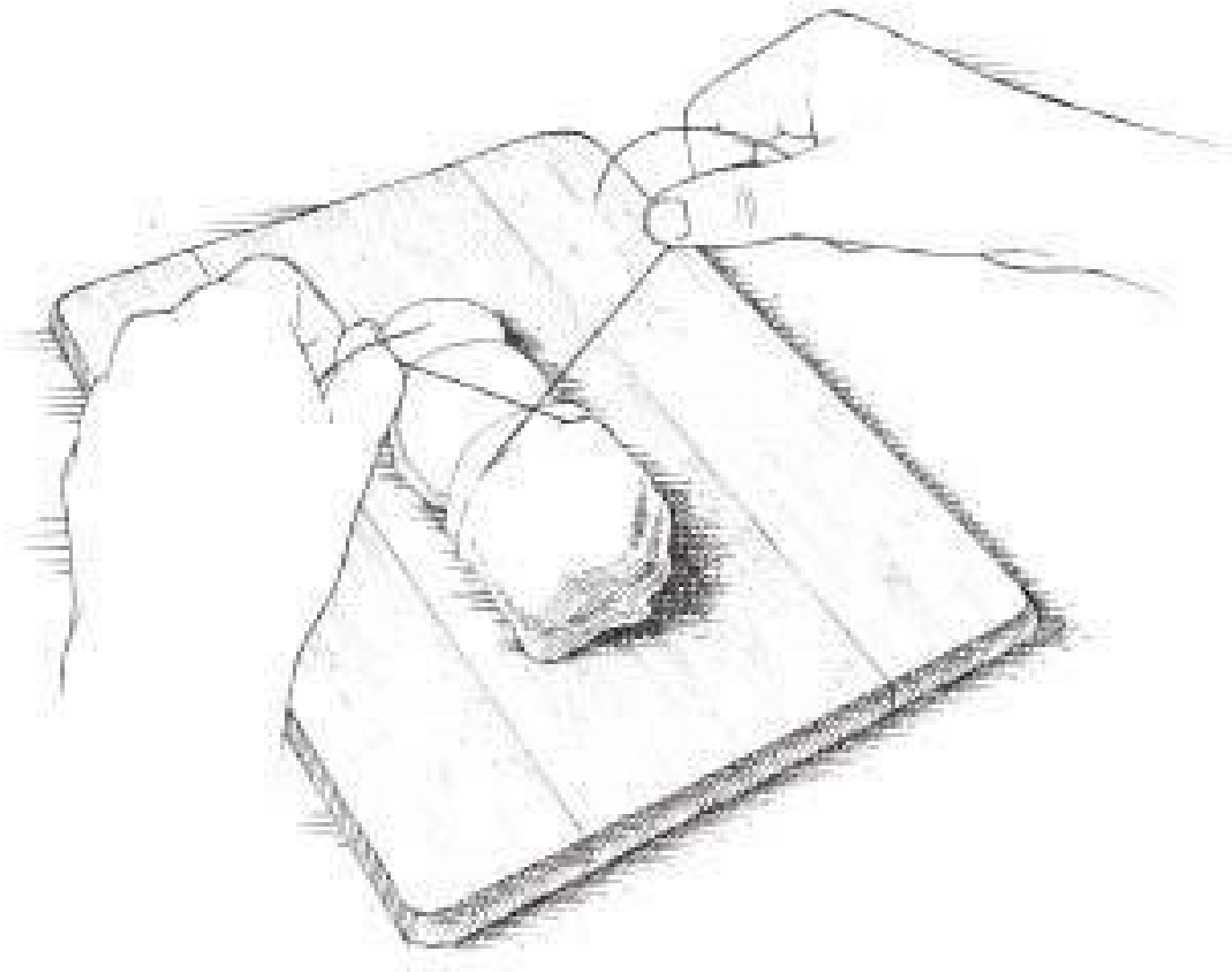

Figure 5.

A knife quickly becomes covered with goat cheese, making it difficult to cut clean, neat slices. A piece of dental floss is much easier to use. Slide an 18-inch piece of floss under the cheese. Cross the ends of

the floss above the cheese and then pull the floss through the cheese to make slices at $^{1}/_{3}$-*inch intervals*.

Grilled Mozzarella and Sun-Dried Tomato Skewers

makes 24 skewers

NOTE: *Use dried, loose tomatoes, not those packed in oil, for this recipe.*

48 large sun-dried tomatoes (about 3 ounces)
1 pound fresh mozzarella, cut into 1-inch cubes (you should have about 48 pieces)
3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
$1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons salt
Ground black pepper

48 small basil leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack so that it is about 6 inches from broiler and heat broiler.

2. Combine $^{3}/_{4}$ cup water and tomatoes in medium microwave-proof bowl. Microwave for 30 seconds. Cover and let stand until tomatoes soften, about 5 minutes. Drain and blot dry on paper towels.

3. Meanwhile, toss mozzarella with oil, salt, and pepper to taste in medium bowl. Using 24 short bamboo or wooden

skewers, thread a piece of mozzarella, basil leaf, and tomato (in that order) onto each skewer; repeat with second piece of mozzarella, basil leaf, and tomato. Brush skewers with any oil remaining in bowl.

4. Line bottom of broiler pan bottom with foil and coat broiler pan rack with cooking spray. Place 12 skewers on broiler pan rack. Broil skewers, turning once, until cheese begins to melt, about 2 minutes. Remove from oven and let rest for 30 seconds. Pick up each skewer, twirling any melted cheese around the skewer, and serve immediately. Repeat with remaining skewers.

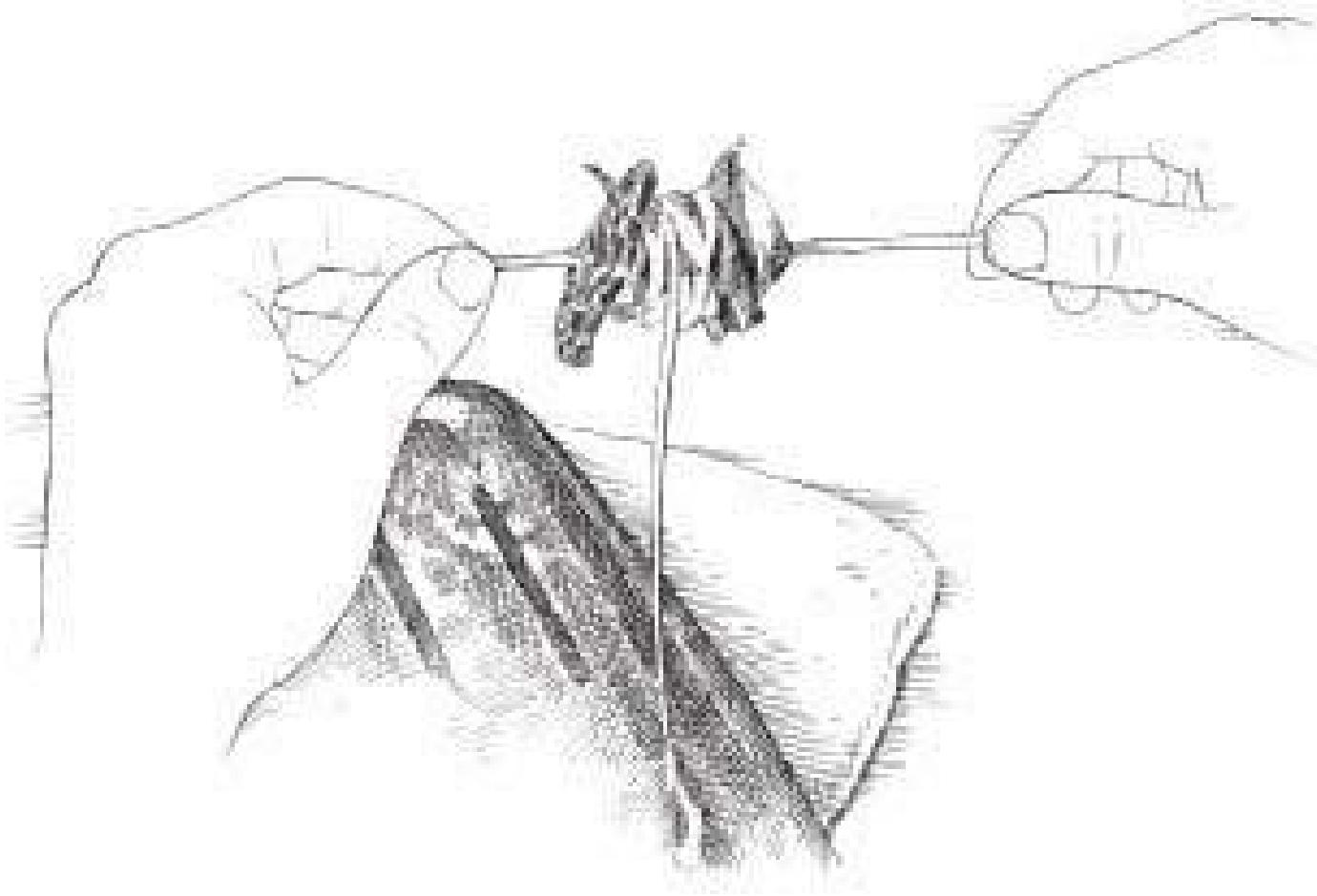

Figure 6.

The cheese melts slightly under the broiler. Once the skewers have cooled for about 30 seconds, pick up each skewer and spin it gently in your fingers to wrap any strings of melted cheese back around the skewers.

Honey-Baked Brie Wrapped in Phyllo

serves 8

NOTE: *A small wheel of brie can be wrapped in phyllo to form an extralarge beggar's purse. Serve the warm brie with a very sharp knife and spread it on crackers. The white, chalky mold that covers a wheel of brie can give off an ammonia-like odor when heated, especially if the cheese has been wrapped in packaging for some time and been unable to breathe. Remove the mold to prevent this problem. For this recipe, thaw a 1-*

pound box of phyllo (which has about 20 sheets) in the refrigerator overnight. Let the boxed phyllo come to room temperature on the counter for 2 hours.

10 sheets frozen phyllo dough (about 8 ounces), thawed and brought to room temperature

1 wheel of brie (about 2 pounds, 6 inches in diameter)

5 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

3 tablespoons honey

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oven to 425 degrees. Remove phyllo from box and place on kitchen

cloth that's just barely damp. Cover with another barely damp cloth and then a dry cloth to prevent phyllo from drying out.

2. Scrape white, chalky layer of mold off cheese rind, leaving remaining rind intact (see figure 7). Working with one phyllo sheet at a time, brush about $1^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoons melted butter lightly over sheet and arrange according to figures 8 and 9.

3. Place trimmed brie in center of phyllo layers. Use back of spoon to spread honey over top of brie. Following figure 10, lift edges of phyllo to enclose

cheese, gathering excess on top. Brush surface with remaining tablespoon of butter and place on parchment-lined, rimmed baking sheet.

4. Cover top of phyllo with piece of foil (see figure 11) and bake for 15 minutes. Remove foil and continue baking until phyllo is golden brown, about 5 minutes. Transfer brie to platter and serve immediately.

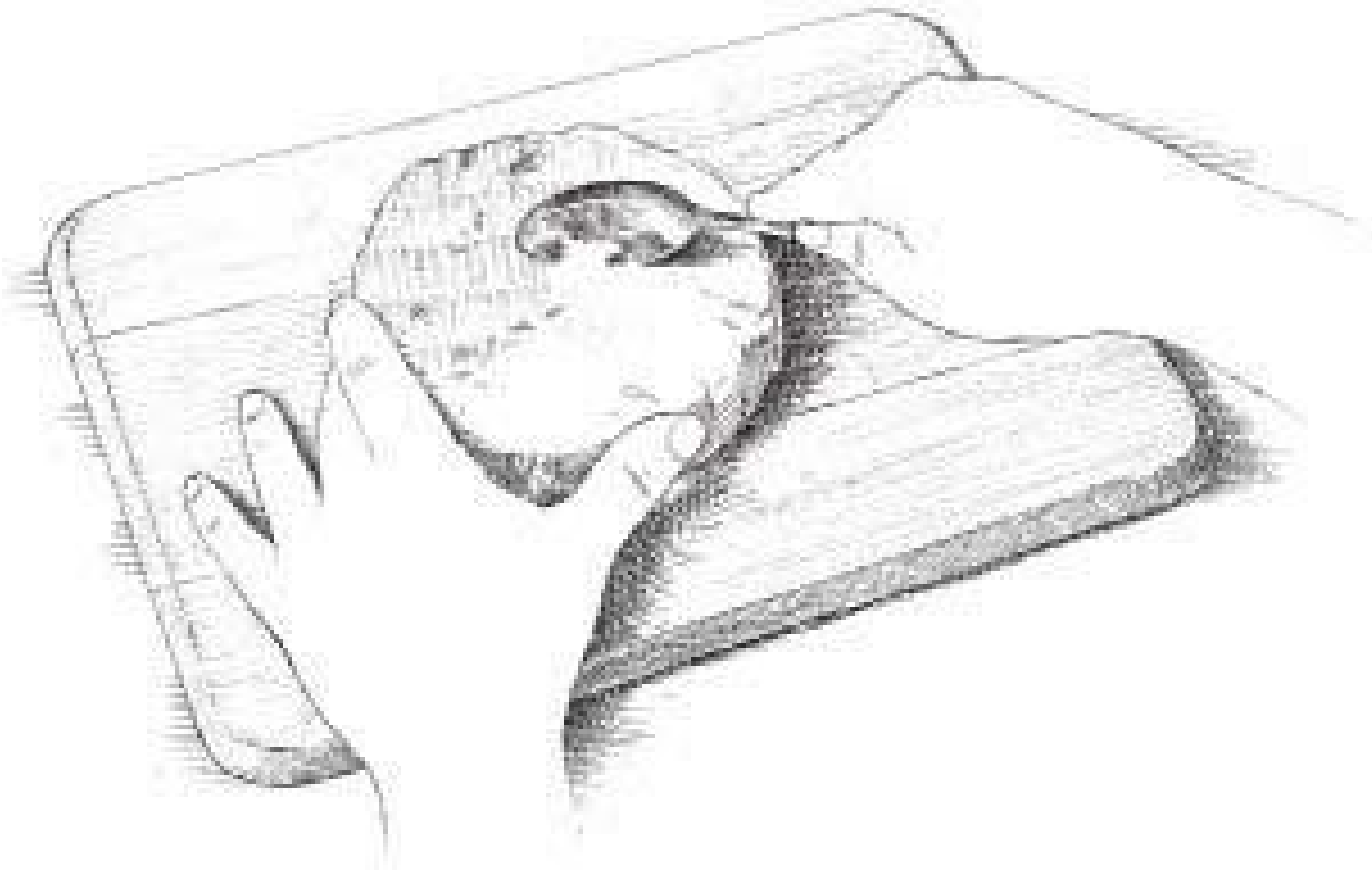

Figure 7.

Using a soup spoon, scrape the white, chalky layer of mold off the rind, leaving the remaining rind intact.

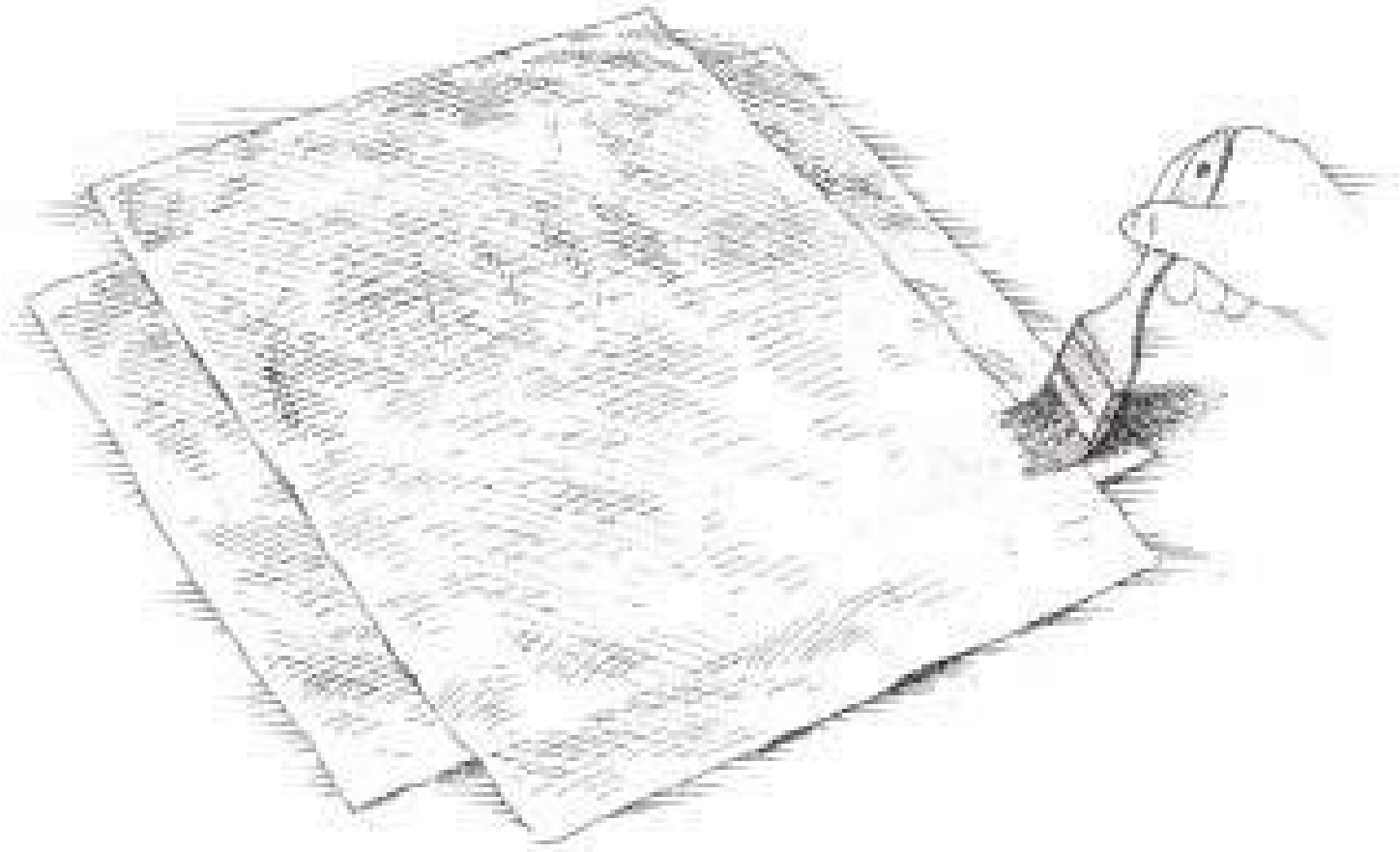

Figure 8.

Lay one sheet of phyllo on the counter and brush lightly with butter. Lay a second sheet perpendicular to the first sheet and brush with butter.

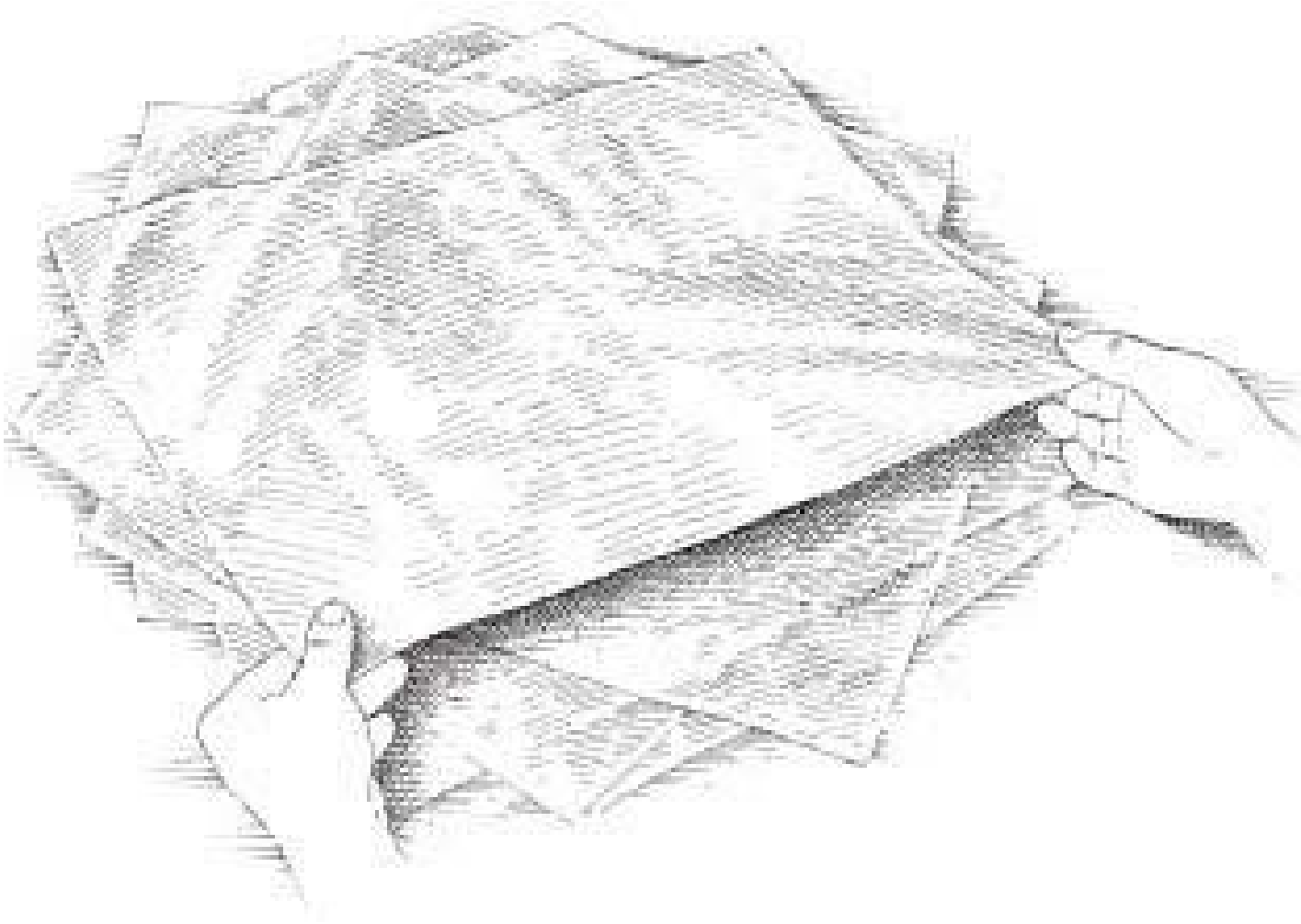

Figure 9.

Crisscross two more sheets of phyllo on top of the first two sheets, buttering each as directed. Repeat the process with another four sheets of phyllo, laying them perpendicular to each other. Lay the final two sheets at right angles

to each other on top of the pile.

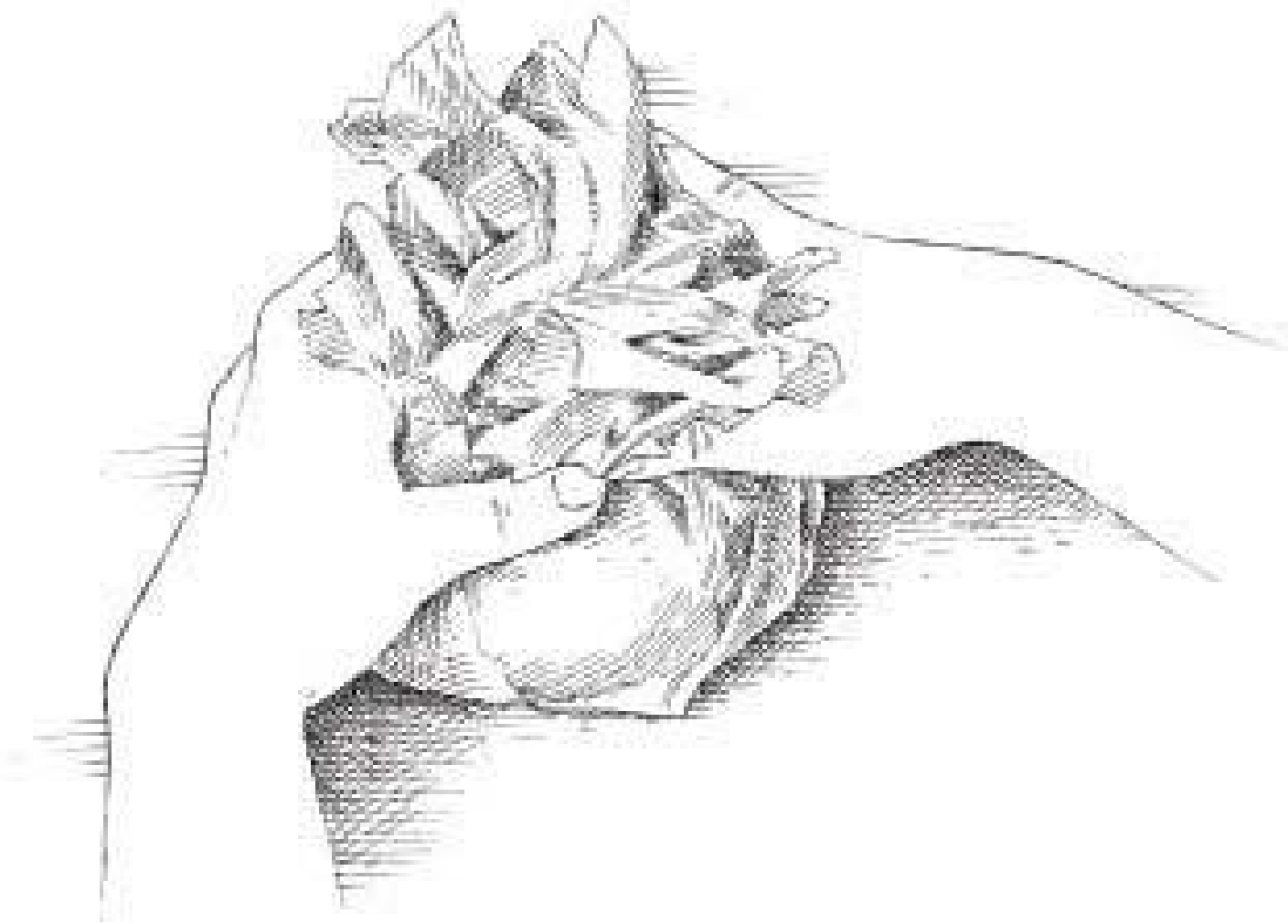

Figure 10.

Once the cheese has been placed in the center of the phyllo, lift the edges of the phyllo sheets up and over the cheese to enclose it. Gather the excess phyllo on top and pinch together to form a beggar's purse.

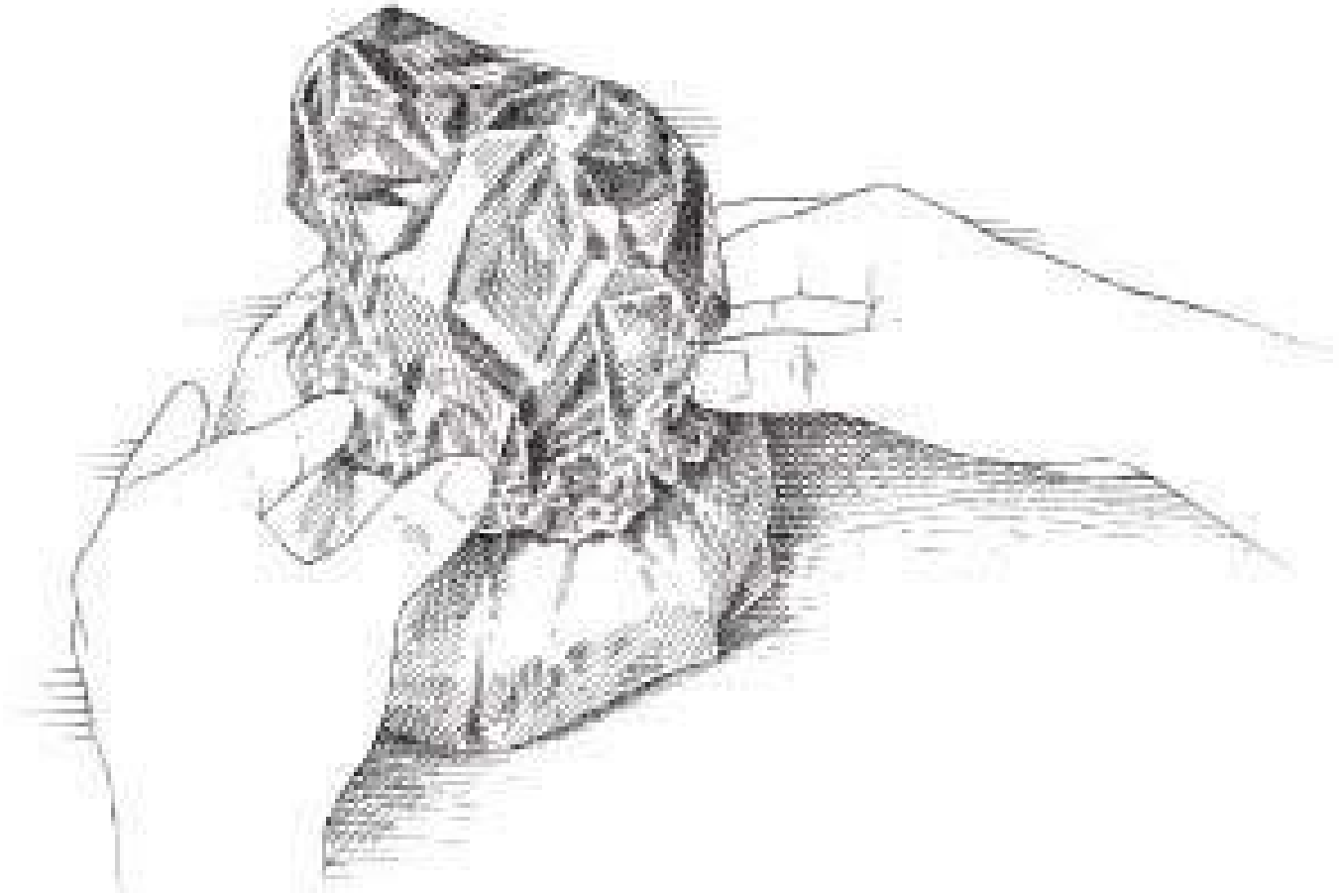

Figure 11.

Crimp the edges of a 5-inch square of foil. Carefully place the foil over the pinched top of the phyllo to keep it from burning in the oven.

VEGETABLE APPETIZERS

VEGETABLES MAKE EXCELLENT APPETIZERS because they are generally light and refreshing. They are appropriate before a heavy meal, especially one that contains a lot of meat and/or cheese.

Vegetable appetizers can also be used to set the tone for a seasonal meal. It makes good sense to start a spring meal with fresh grown asparagus and a summer supper with marinated zucchini. Starchier vegetables, such as potatoes,

are best for winter meals or cocktail parties where you want guests to feel more full.

Marinated Black and Green Olives

makes about 3 cups

NOTE: *These olives will keep in the refrigerator for at least a month and are perfect for impromptu entertaining. Ouzo is a sweet, licorice-flavored Greek spirit. You can substitute sambuca.*

8 ounces large, brine-cured green olives with pits

8 ounces large, brine-cured black olives with pits

5 large garlic cloves, crushed

3 large shallots, thinly sliced

1 teaspoon grated orange zest

1 teaspoon minced fresh thyme leaves

1 teaspoon hot red pepper flakes

1/2 cup ouzo

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

3/4 teaspoon salt

Pinch cayenne pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Drain olives into colander and rinse them well under cold running water. Drain olives well.

2. Combine remaining ingredients in glass or plastic bowl. Add olives and toss to combine. Cover and refrigerate for at least 12 hours. Remove from refrigerator at least 30 minutes before serving.

Prosciutto-Wrapped Roasted Asparagus

makes about 20 pieces

NOTE: *Make sure you have the same number of asparagus spears and pieces of prosciutto (count them once they have been cut into 3-inch lengths). The number should be around 20.*

1 pound thin asparagus spears, tough ends snapped off
1 teaspoon extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and ground black pepper

1 teaspoon balsamic vinegar

3 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese

3 ounces thinly sliced prosciutto, cut crosswise into 3-inch pieces

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to highest position and heat broiler. Toss asparagus with oil on rimmed baking sheet. Sprinkle with salt and pepper to taste. Broil, shaking pan halfway through to turn asparagus, until lightly browned, about 5 minutes.

2. Sprinkle asparagus with vinegar and cheese. Cool slightly. Wrap a piece of

prosciutto around bottom half of each asparagus spear, making sure to leave the tip of the asparagus exposed. Arrange asparagus on platter and serve immediately.

Small Potatoes Stuffed with Bacon and Cheese

makes 16 pieces

NOTE: *It's important to remove as much of the potato flesh as possible, leaving behind just a very thin layer attached to the skin.*

8 small red or white potatoes, about 2 ounces each

Salt

4 slices bacon (about 4 ounces), finely chopped

1 small onion, minced

1 medium garlic clove, minced

$2^1/_2$ ounces cream cheese, softened

2 tablespoons minced chives

Ground black pepper

$1^1/_4$ ounces sharp cheddar, very thinly sliced

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Bring 6 cups water to boil in medium saucepan. Add potatoes and 2 tablespoons salt and boil, partially covered, until potatoes are tender, 20 to 25 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, fry bacon in small, heavy-bottomed skillet over medium-

high heat until crisp, about 5 minutes. Use slotted spoon to transfer bacon to plate lined with paper towels and pour off all but 1 tablespoon bacon fat from skillet.

3. Add onion to remaining fat in skillet. Sauté over medium heat until golden, about $3^{1}/_{2}$ minutes. Add garlic and cook for 30 seconds. Remove pan from heat.

4. When potatoes are done, drain and cool slightly. (It is important that the potato flesh be hot when processed with the other ingredients, so don't cool to much.) Following figure 12, halve and

hollow out potatoes, placing potato flesh in medium bowl along with bacon, onion mixture, cream cheese, chives, and salt and pepper to taste. Using electric mixer, beat mixture on medium speed until just combined, about 10 seconds.

5. Adjust oven rack so that it is 6 inches from broiler, and heat broiler. Following figure 13, stuff potatoes and arrange in shallow 9-inch metal pie pan. Broil 10 minutes. Remove potatoes from broiler and top each half with slice of cheddar. Return potatoes to broiler and broil until cheese melts, about 5 seconds. Serve immediately.

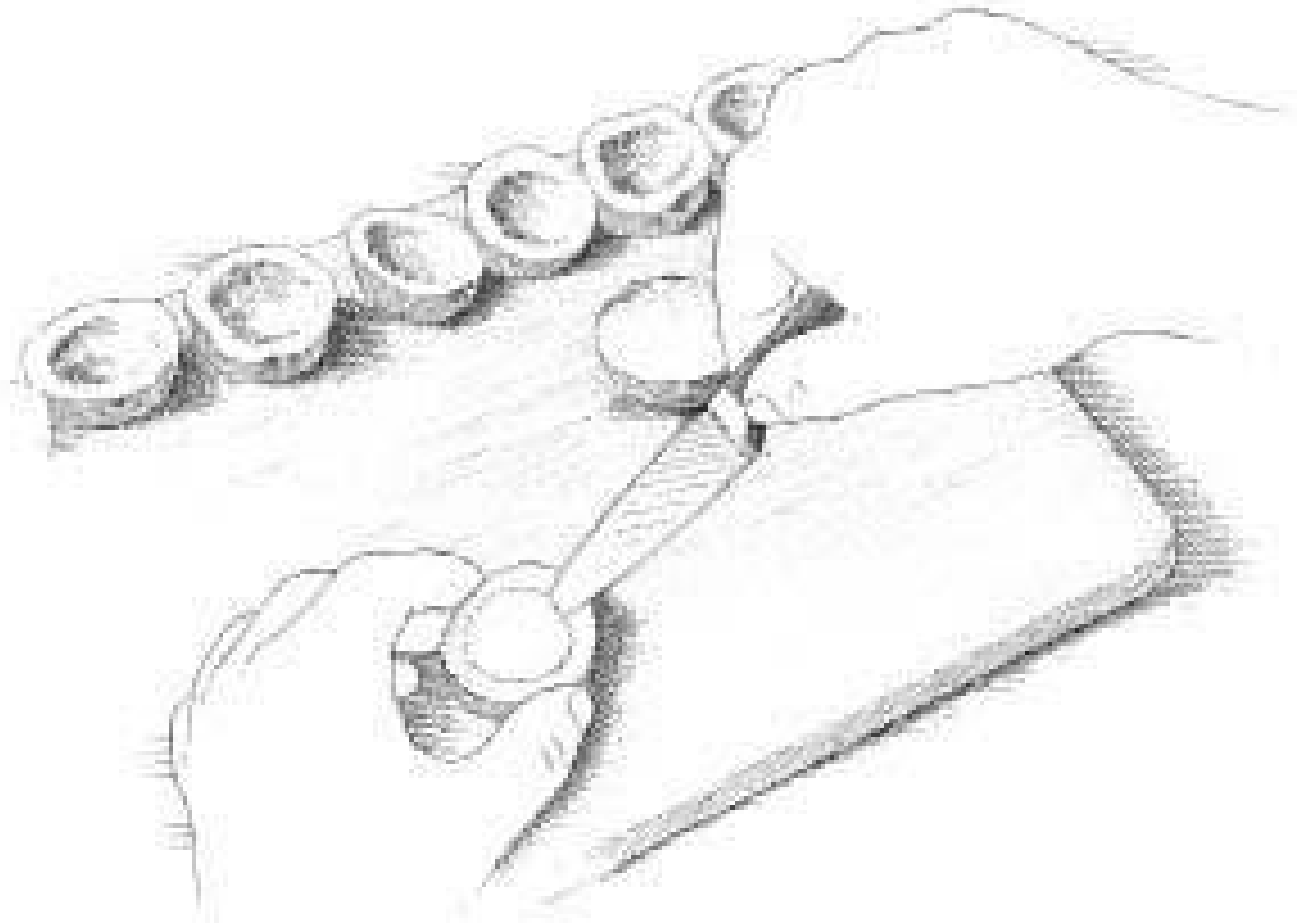

Figure 12.

Cut the potatoes in half around the equator. Trim a very thin slice from the end so each piece will sit flat on the counter. Use a paring knife to trace a neat outline just inside the skin of the potato. Use a small spoon to scrape out the flesh inside the circle, leaving a thin

band of flesh attached to the skin.

Figure 13.

Using a small spoon, stuff a small amount of cheese-flavored potato mixture back into each potato half, mounding the filling slightly over the top of the potato half.

Roasted Mushroom Caps Stuffed with Sausage

makes 24 pieces

NOTE: *Prepare stuffing while mushrooms caps are roasting.*

24 large mushrooms, stems discarded and caps wiped clean
2 tablespoons olive oil
Salt and ground black pepper
12 ounces bulk pork sausage
4 slices white bread, torn into large pieces
1 large shallot, coarsely

chopped

1 large garlic clove, coarsely chopped

1 tablespoon mustard

2 teaspoons balsamic vinegar

2 tablespoons port wine

3 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese

1 large egg, lightly beaten

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to lowest position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Toss mushroom caps, oil, and salt and pepper to taste in medium bowl. Arrange caps, gill-side down, in single layer on large baking sheet. Roast until mushrooms have released some juice and are brown

around edges, about 15 minutes. Remove pan from oven and turn caps over with metal spatula. Continue to roast until mushroom liquid has evaporated completely and mushroom caps are uniformly brown, 5 to 10 minutes longer.

2. Meanwhile, place sausage in medium skillet over medium-high heat and sauté until brown, about 5 minutes. Drain excess fat.

3. Place cooked sausage, bread, shallot, and garlic in food processor. Pulse until coarsely chopped, about 10 one-second pulses. Transfer filling to small mixing

bowl and stir in remaining ingredients, including 1 teaspoon ground black pepper.

4. When mushrooms caps are uniformly brown, remove pan from oven and fill each mushroom with a heaping tablespoon of filling (or more depending on mushroom's size). Continue baking until filling is golden brown and hot throughout, about 15 minutes. Transfer to platter and serve immediately.

Corn Fritters

makes 30 small cakes

NOTE: *These fritters are delicious on their own but are even better when topped with a dollop of sour cream and smoked salmon or chive-flavored sour cream and caviar.*

2 cups frozen corn kernels, partially thawed
1 large egg
3 tablespoons flour
3 tablespoons cornmeal
2 tablespoons heavy cream
1 large shallot, minced (about 3 tablespoons)

$1\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoons salt

Pinch cayenne pepper

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup vegetable oil for frying, or more as needed

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Combine all ingredients except oil in food processor and pulse until mixture forms thick batter, with some whole kernels and bits of corn still visible, about ten 1-second pulses. (The batter can be covered and refrigerated for several hours.)

2. Heat oil in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until it shimmers,

about 2 minutes. Using a measuring teaspoon, drop silver-dollar-sized rounds of batter into oil (half the batter, or 15 fritters, should fit into the skillet at once). Fry until golden on one side, about 40 seconds. Using a thin metal spatula, turn fritters and fry until other side is golden, about 40 seconds more. Drain fritters on triple thickness of paper towels. Maintaining heat in skillet, repeat with remaining batter, adding more oil if necessary. Serve immediately.

Cocktail Potato Pancakes

makes 30 small cakes

NOTE: *Serve these miniature potato cakes with a dollop of sour cream or apple sauce.*

2 pounds Yukon Gold or russet potatoes, peeled
1 medium yellow onion, peeled and cut into eighths
1 large egg
2 tablespoons minced fresh chives
3 tablespoons matzo meal
$1^1/_2$ teaspoons salt
Ground black pepper

1 cup vegetable oil for frying

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Grate potatoes in a food processor fitted with coarse shredding blade. Place half of potatoes in fine mesh sieve set over medium bowl and reserve. Fit processor with steel blade, add onion, and pulse with remaining potatoes until mixture looks coarsely chopped, about six 1-second pulses. Combine with potatoes in sieve and toss together, pressing to extract as much liquid as possible from potatoes into bowl beneath. Let potato liquid stand until starch settles to bottom, then pour off liquid, leaving starch in bowl. Beat egg, potatoes, chives, matzo meal, and salt

and pepper to taste into starch.

2. Heat half of oil in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering, about 3 minutes. Meanwhile, invert a rimmed baking sheet and cover with aluminum foil or parchment paper. Using a tablespoon measure, form half potato mixture into 15 cakes on back of baking sheet. Transfer cakes one by one to hot oil with thin metal spatula. Fry until golden brown on one side, about 3 minutes. (Use this time to form remaining cakes on back of baking sheet.) Turn with spatula and continue frying until golden brown on second side, about 3 minutes more. Drain

pancakes on triple thickness of paper towels.

3. Pour oil from pan and wipe clean with paper towels. Add remaining $^{1}/_{2}$ cup oil to pan and heat over medium-high heat until shimmering. Fry remaining pancakes as directed above. Serve immediately.

MEAT AND CHICKEN APPETIZERS

MEAT APPETIZERS STRIKE US AS COCKTAIL party food. Most are substantial, so that if dinner is soon to follow, you should offer something light, like Prosciutto-Wrapped Melon, or small portions of sliced meats, such as prosciutto and salami, served with bread, olives, and cheese.

Most meat appetizers must be served hot. We suggest ways to prepare as much as possible in advance (sauces can generally be made and other ingredients

can be prepared and often skewered), but meat appetizers usually involve some last-minute cooking.

Prosciutto-Wrapped Melon

makes 32 pieces

NOTE: *To use a honeydew melon, cut one half into 16 crescents, then cut crescents in half crosswise. Reserve remaining melon for another use.*

1 medium cantaloupe

1/4 pound thinly sliced prosciutto, cut into 2 by 5-inch pieces

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Trim rind from melon, cut melon in half, and scoop out seeds with spoon.

Cut each half into eight $^{1}/_{2}$-inch-wide crescents. Cut each crescent in half crosswise.

2. Following figure 14, wrap one piece of prosciutto around each melon slice. Serve immediately or cover and refrigerate for up to 2 hours.

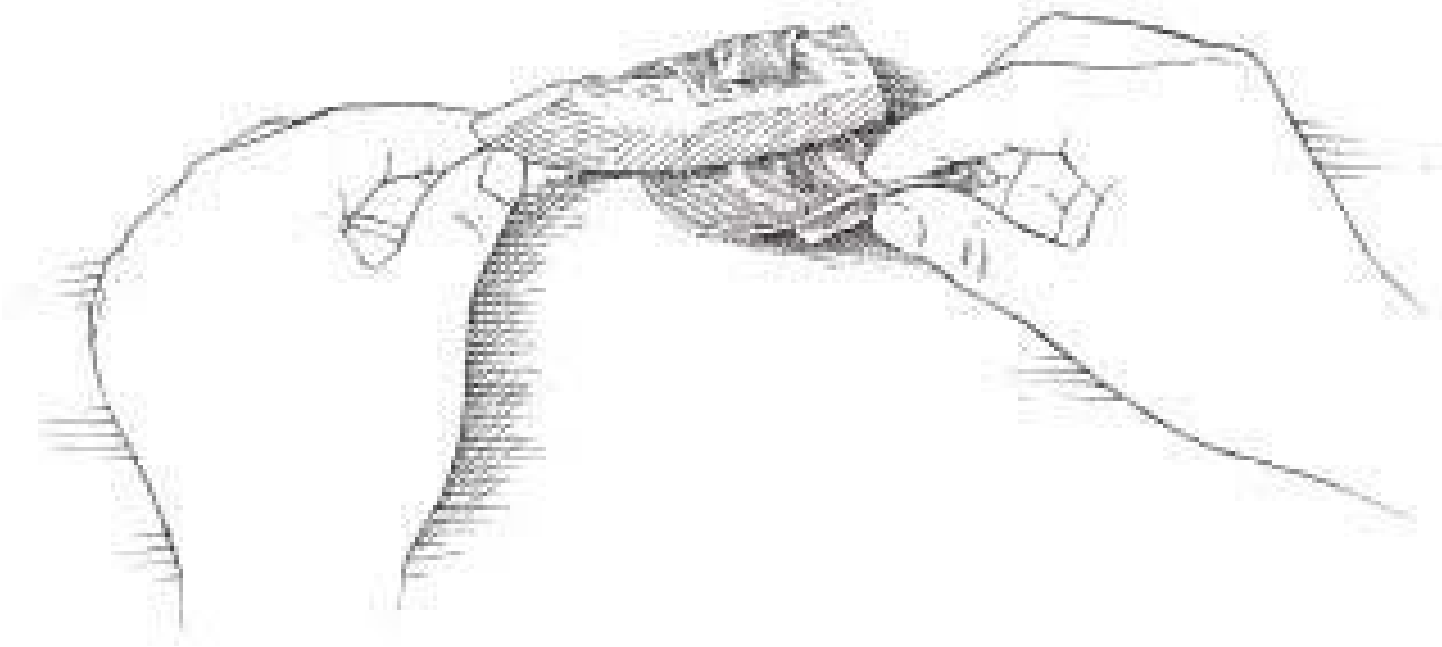

Figure 14.

Take a piece of prosciutto and carefully wrap it around the thicker end of each melon slice.

Kielbasa Wrapped in Puff Pastry

makes 14 to 16 pieces

NOTE: *The key to success with this recipe is rendering some of the sausage fat, which keeps the puff pastry from becoming soggy. Pastries can be made ahead and frozen for up to two weeks or made ahead and refrigerated for several hours before baking.*

1 pound kielbasa

1 sheet (10 by $9^1/_2$ inches) commercial puff pastry, still partially frozen, cut in half

2 large eggs, lightly beaten

$^1/_4$ cup grainy mustard

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oven to 425 degrees. Cut kielbasa in half crosswise and pierce several times with fork. Roll it in 2 layers of paper towel and microwave on high for 1 minute to release some of the fat; set aside to cool.

2. Meanwhile, place one half of puff pastry between two layers of parchment paper and use a rolling pin to stretch pastry into rectangle that measures about 10 by 7 inches. Brush pastry edges with beaten egg. Following figure 15, roll

pastry around sausage. Brush exterior with egg. Place seam-side down on parchment-lined, rimmed baking sheet. Repeat with second piece of puff pastry and kielbasa and place on same baking sheet. Put baking sheet in freezer for 10 minutes.

3. Bake until deep golden brown, 20 to 25 minutes. Remove from oven and allow to rest for 5 minutes. Slice diagonally into $^{1}/_{2}$-inch slices. Arrange slices on platter and serve immediately with a small bowl of mustard.

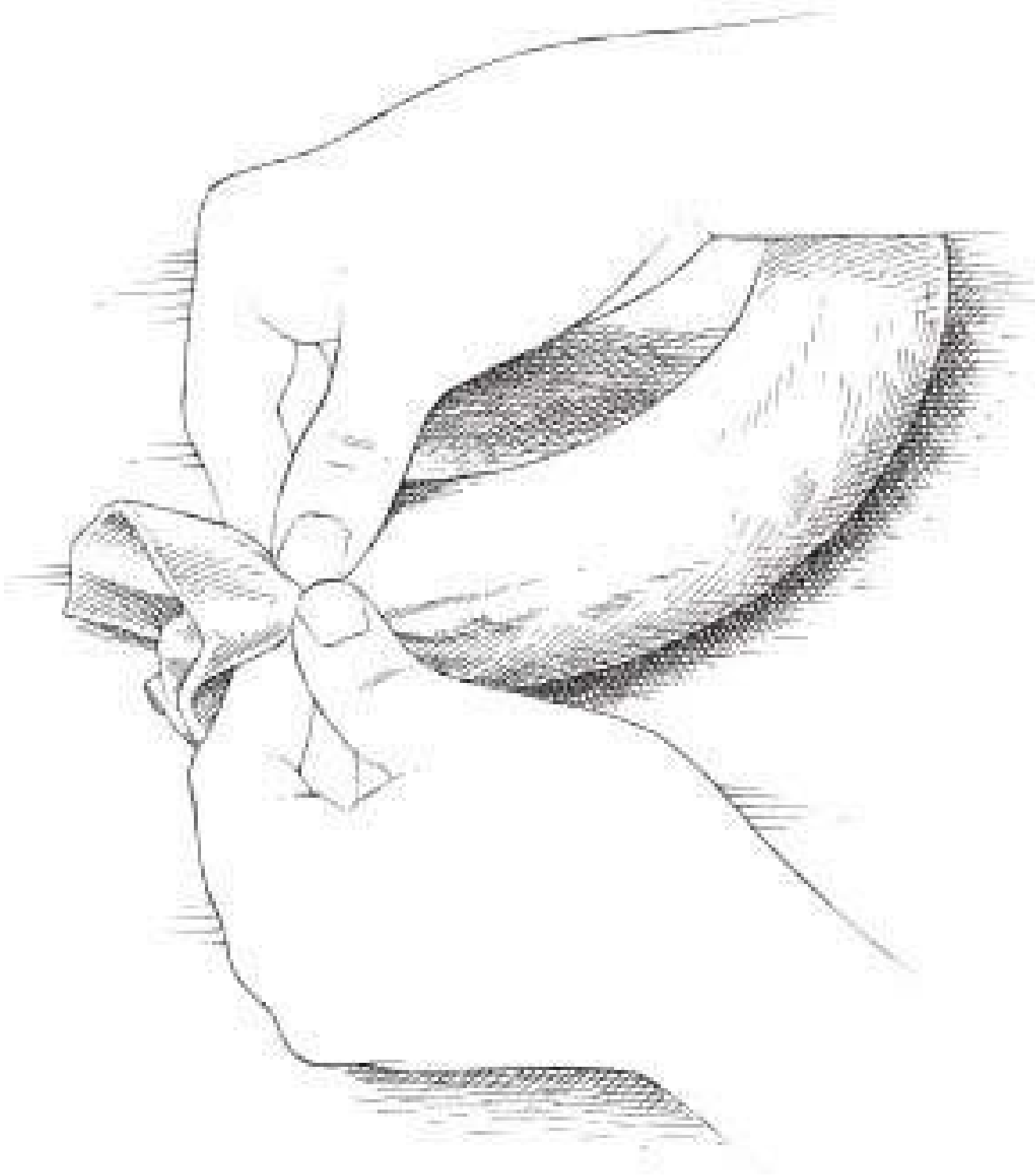

Figure 15.

Place a piece of kielbasa on the longer edge of the puff pastry.

Roll the kielbasa in the pastry and then pinch in the ends to seal.

Indian-Style Meatballs with Apricot Sauce

makes 36 meatballs

NOTE: *We found that freezing the meatballs briefly before frying helps them hold their shape.*

Indian-Spiced Meatballs

1 pound ground lamb
$1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons salt
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon ground coriander
$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon garam masala
$\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon cayenne pepper

2 tablespoons minced fresh cilantro leaves

2 tablespoons yogurt

1 slice white bread, chopped (about 5 tablespoons)

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

Apricot Sauce

1 cup apricot preserves

1/4 cup port wine

1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar

1/8 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1/4 teaspoon hot red pepper flakes

1 tablespoon fresh minced mint leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

::INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Mix all ingredients for meatballs except oil in large bowl. Shape into 36 meatballs, each about 1 inch in diameter. Place on parchment-lined baking sheet and freeze for 5 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, combine apricot preserves, port, vinegar, cinnamon, and red pepper flakes in small saucepan over medium-high heat. Bring to a simmer and remove from heat. Stir in mint and salt and pepper to taste. Transfer sauce to serving bowl and

cover to keep warm.

3. Heat heavy-bottomed, 12-inch skillet over high heat until very hot, about 4 minutes. Add oil to pan and swirl to coat bottom. Lay half of meatballs in pan and cook, turning occasionally, until well browned, 5 to 6 minutes. Transfer to serving platter. Repeat with remaining meatballs. Place bowl with apricot sauce on platter and serve immediately, with toothpicks.

Asian-Style Beef and Scallion Rolls

makes 35 to 40 pieces

NOTE: *Freezing the meat makes it easier to slice. Rolls can be assembled up to four hours in advance and browned to order.*

$1^1/_3$ pounds flank steak, trimmed of excess fat and frozen for 20 minutes

10 scallions, green part only, cut into 2-inch lengths (see figure 16)

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

2 medium garlic cloves, minced

1 tablespoon minced fresh gingerroot

1 teaspoon hot red pepper flakes

$^1/_4$ cup tamari sauce

3 tablespoons mirin or sherry

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Cut flank steak in half lengthwise. Following figure 17, slice each half crosswise on the bias as thinly as possible. You should have about forty 2 by 3-inch pieces. Place meat slices between 2 sheets of parchment paper and pound to a uniform thickness, about $^1/_8$ inch. Pieces will measure 3 by 5

inches. Roll each piece of beef up tightly around two or three pieces of scallion (see figure 18).

2. Heat heavy-bottomed large skillet over medium-high heat until hot, about 4 minutes. Add oil and heat briefly until it shimmers. Lay 20 beef rolls in skillet, seam-side down, and sauté, without moving, until browned, about 1 minute. Using tongs, turn rolls to brown on all sides, about 2 minutes more. Remove rolls from pan and set aside on plate to rest. With pan still hot, repeat with remaining beef rolls, transferring them to same plate to rest when done.

3. Add garlic, ginger, and red pepper flakes to empty pan; sauté until fragrant, scraping up any browned bits from bottom of pan, about 10 seconds. Add tamari, mirin, cooked beef rolls, and any accumulated juices on plate. Simmer to finish cooking beef, about 1 minute. Transfer beef to a serving platter and pour sauce into small serving bowl. Skewer beef rolls and place bowl with sauce on platter. Serve immediately.

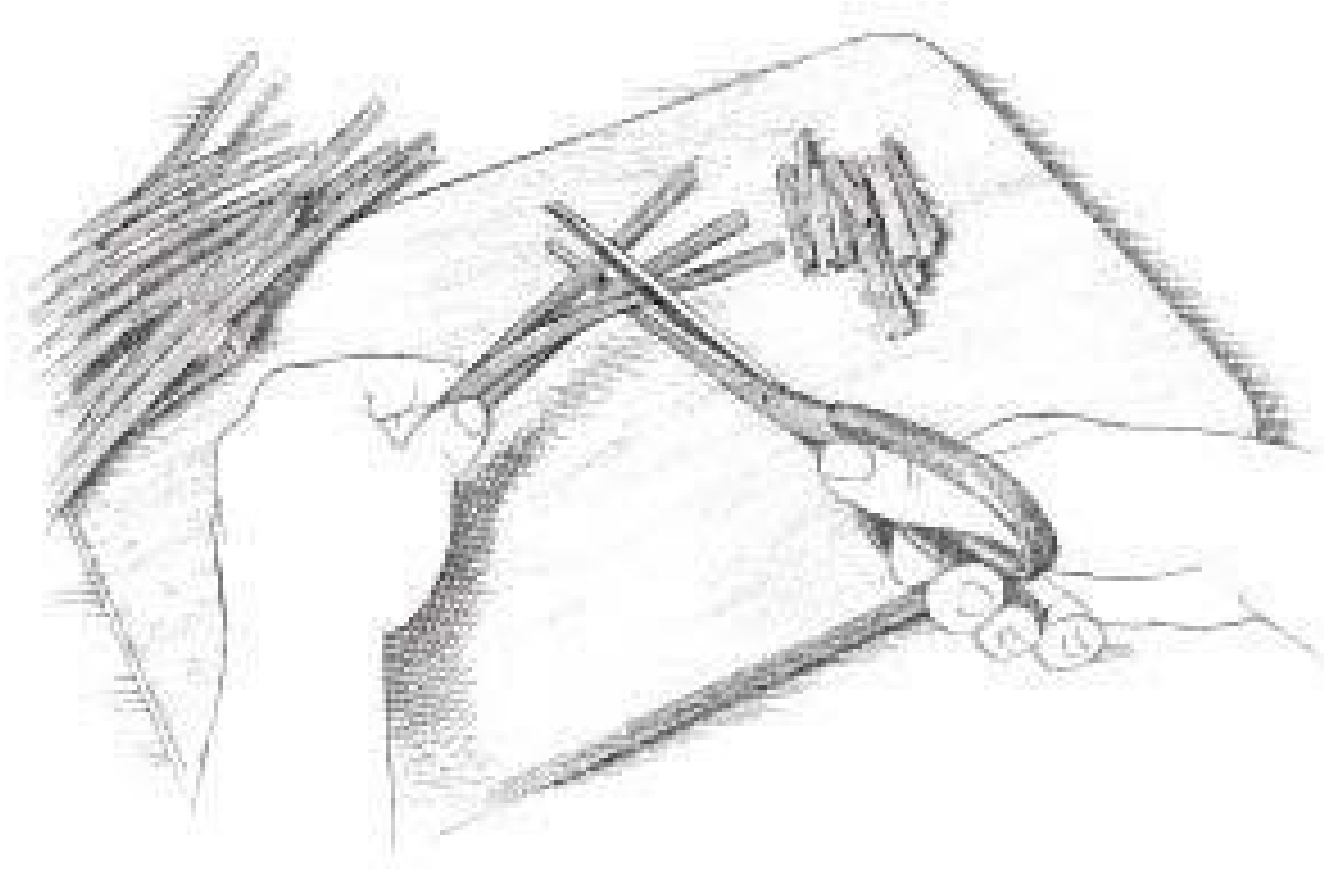

Figure 16.

Use a pair of scissors to snip the scallion greens into 2-inch lengths. Make sure to separate the several green portions at the top of most scallions and snip each one. A single scallion will yield as many as ten 2-inch lengths of greens.

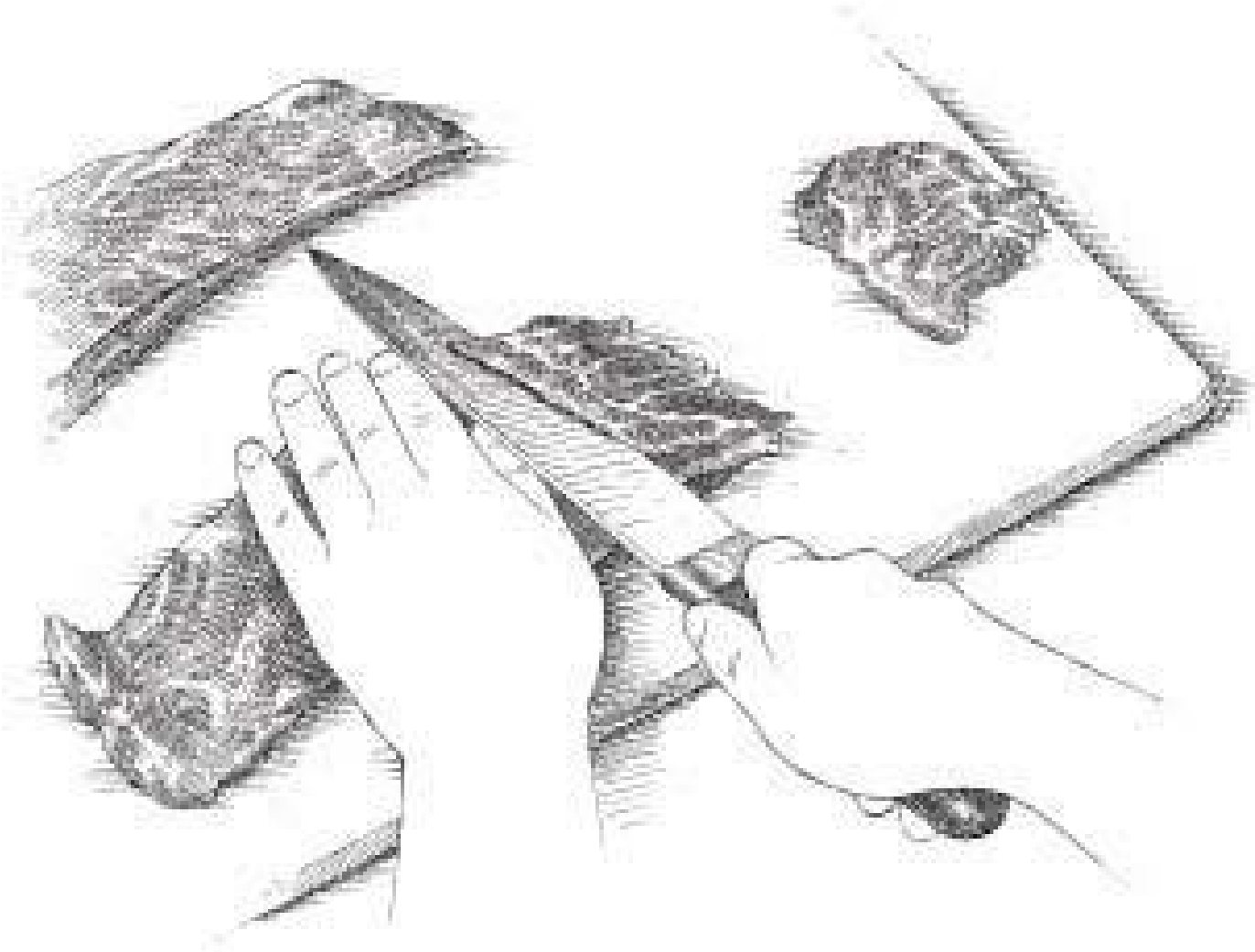

Figure 17.

Cut the flank steak in half lengthwise. Then slice each half crosswise as thinly as possible on the bias. You will be cutting against the grain of the meat.

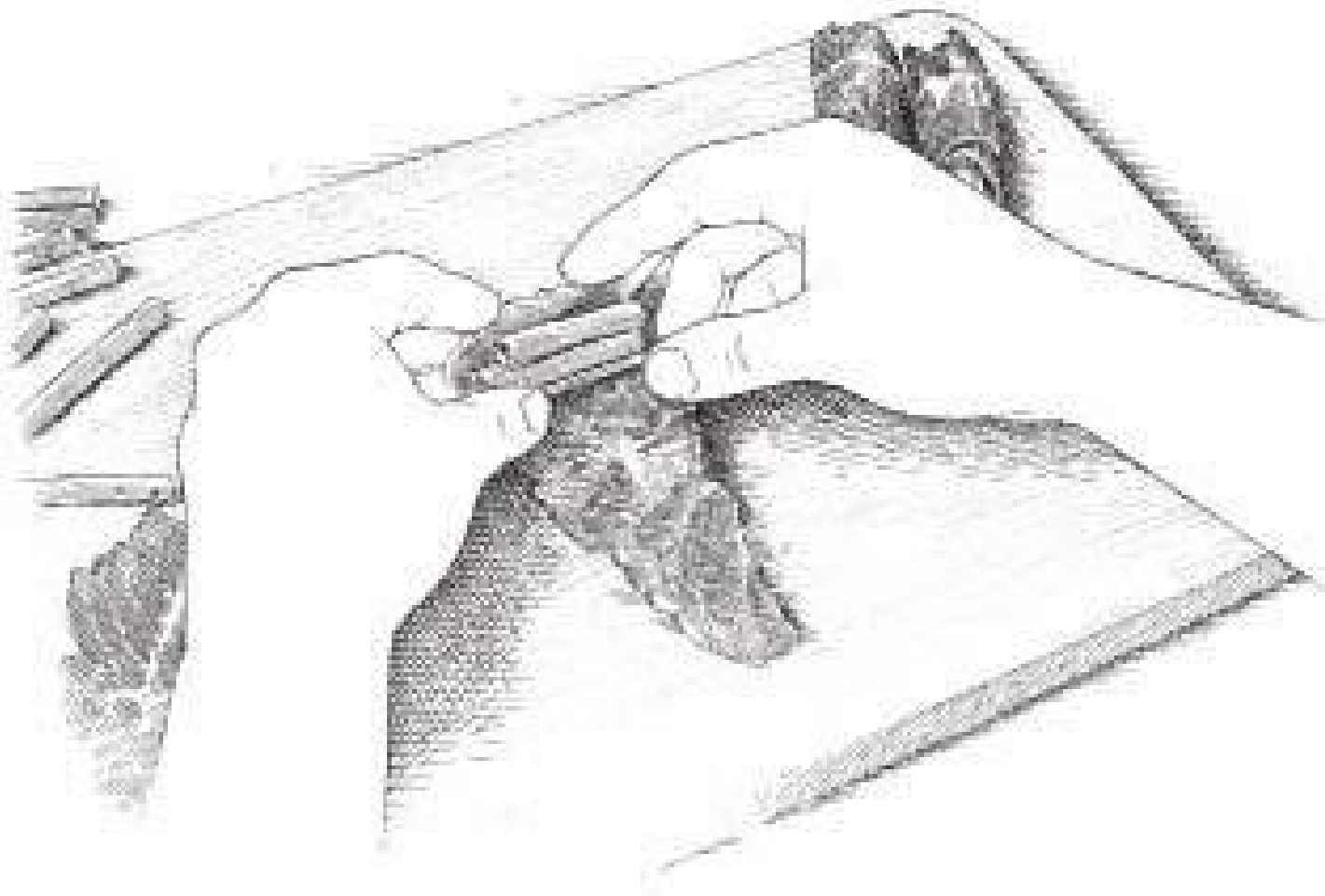

Figure 18.

Once the slices of meat have been pounded, place two or three pieces of scallion over the meat and roll tightly, starting at a short end, to seal. The meat is sticky enough to seal without skewers.

Seared Flank Steak with Horseradish Sauce

makes 40 pieces

NOTE: *We strongly recommend using crème fraîche in this recipe. It has a firmer texture than sour cream (which can be watery in sauces like this) and better flavor.*

Flank Steak

$1^1/_2$ pounds flank steak, trimmed of excess fat and patted dry with paper towels

Salt and ground black

pepper

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

Horseradish Sauce

1 cup crème fraîche or sour cream

3 tablespoons prepared horseradish

1 tablespoon lemon juice

1/4 teaspoon sugar

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat heavy-bottomed, 12-inch skillet over high heat until very hot, about 4 minutes. While skillet is heating, season

steak with salt and pepper to taste. Add oil to pan and swirl to coat bottom. Lay steak in pan and sauté, not moving it, until well browned, about $3^1/_2$ minutes. Turn meat with tongs; sauté until browned on second side, about $3^1/_2$ minutes more. Transfer steak to plate and let rest for 10 minutes.

2. While steak rests, mix all ingredients for horseradish sauce, including salt and pepper to taste, in small serving bowl.

3. Following figure 17, slice steak crosswise on the bias into slices $^1/_8$ inch

thick. Halve longer slices into 3-inch lengths. Roll up each slice tightly, skewer with toothpick, and transfer to serving platter. Place bowl with sauce on platter and serve immediately.

Chicken Satay with Spicy Peanut Sauce

makes 16 skewers

NOTE: *Thai red curry paste is sold in many supermarkets. Look for it near the fish sauce and rice noodles. It has a complex, spicy flavor. An equal amount of hot red pepper flakes will provide the peanut sauce with adequate heat, but the sauce will lack the complex flavor provided by the curry paste.*

1/4 cup low-sodium soy sauce

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

2 tablespoons Asian sesame oil

2 tablespoons honey

6 small garlic cloves, minced (about 2 tablespoons)

1/4 cup minced fresh cilantro leaves

1 tablespoon minced fresh gingerroot

2 medium scallions, white and green part, sliced thin

4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts (about 4 ounces each)

Spicy Peanut Sauce

5 tablespoons creamy peanut butter

2 tablespoons lime juice

1/3 cup unsweetened coconut milk

1 tablespoon minced fresh gingerroot

2 medium garlic cloves, minced

1 teaspoon Thai red curry paste or hot red pepper flakes

1 teaspoon sugar

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to highest position and heat broiler. Whisk together soy sauce, vegetable oil, sesame oil, honey, garlic, cilantro, ginger, and scallions in large bowl. Cut chicken breasts on diagonal into 16 strips, each about 3 inches long and 1 inch wide. Add

chicken to bowl and marinate, stirring occasionally, for 15 to 20 minutes.

2. While chicken marinates, place all ingredients for peanut sauce in blender or food processor and process until smooth. Scrape sauce into small serving bowl.

3. Thread each chicken piece lengthwise on its own short bamboo or wooden skewer. Place skewers on a broiler rack over foil-lined broiler pan bottom. Cover exposed ends of skewers with foil (see figure 19). Brush chicken with marinade remaining in bowl and broil

until golden brown, about $2^1/_2$ to 3 minutes, turning skewers half-way through. Place skewers on platter with bowl of peanut sauce. Serve immediately.

Figure 19.

To keep the exposed portions of the skewers from burning (the portion people will use as a handle to hold the skewers), cover the ends of the skewers (but not the chicken) with foil.

SEAFOOD APPETIZERS

SEAFOOD MAKES A LIGHT, REFRESHING APPETIZER. The recipes that follow either start with smoked fish (salmon or trout) or call for cooking the seafood in some fashion.

Raw seafood, however, is often so simple to serve that you don't really need a recipe. Clams on the half shell are delicious on their own or with a dollop o f cocktail sauce. Choose either littlenecks or cherrystones (the latter are larger) for shucking. Oysters, which can be served like clams, are a bit more

complicated to buy. There are five main species and hundreds of varieties, usually named for the places where the oysters are found. Buy oysters from a reputable source and taste several kinds to figure out whether you prefer crisp, briny Atlantic oysters from northern waters; softer, flabbier Atlantic oysters from the Gulf; fruity, sweet Pacific oysters; briny and metallic-tasting European or flat oysters; or briny but sweet Kumamotos.

Clams, oysters, and mussels can also be grilled just until they open (5 to 10 minutes depending on their size). Once the bivalves open, serve with lemon wedges, barbecue sauce, or a little hot sauce.

Smoked Salmon Mousse

makes about $1\frac{1}{4}$ cups

NOTE: *This tasty spread has multiple applications. It can be piped into hollowed-out cherry tomatoes (use a melon baller to remove the seeds), onto snow peas and endive leaves, or into little tart shells. Our favorite way to use this spread is as a canapé topping for squares of black bread.*

4 ounces sliced smoked salmon
1 large shallot, minced (about 3 tablespoons)
2 ounces cream cheese, softened

1 tablespoon lemon juice

$^1/_4$ cup crème fraîche or sour cream

Ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place salmon and shallot in food processor and process until mixture is finely chopped, scraping down bowl as necessary, about 10 seconds. Add cream cheese and lemon juice and process again until mixture forms a ball, again scraping down bowl as necessary. Add crème fraîche and pulse just to incorporate, 5 seconds.

2. Turn mousse into bowl and season

with pepper to taste. Use immediately or cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate up to 2 days.

VARIATION:

Smoked Trout Mousse

Replace salmon with $^{1}/_{2}$ pound smoked trout fillets (about 2 fillets), skinned and broken into pieces. Substitute lime juice for lemon juice. Increase crème fraîche t o $^{1}/_{3}$ cup. Add 2 tablespoons well-drained prepared horseradish with crème fraîche.

Broiled Shrimp Wrapped with Bacon

makes 24 pieces

NOTE: *We found that blanching makes the bacon a bit less salty and is worth the extra couple of minutes of work.*

4 slices bacon (about 4 ounces)
24 small shrimp (about 8 ounces), peeled
1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Stack bacon strips on top of each

other and halve lengthwise; cut strips diagonally into thirds. Bring 1 quart of water to a boil in medium saucepan. Add bacon and blanch for 50 seconds. Drain bacon and lay flat on triple thickness of paper towels.

2. Adjust oven rack to highest position and heat broiler. Wrap one piece bacon around each shrimp and place on broiler rack, tucking ends of bacon under shrimp. Sprinkle shrimp with balsamic vinegar and salt and pepper to taste.

3. Broil until shrimp are pink and edges of bacon are brown, about 2 minutes,

reversing direction of broiler pan after 1 minute. Transfer to a platter and serve immediately, with toothpicks.

Shrimp Cocktail

makes 16 to 20 pieces

NOTE: *Cooking the shrimp in a quick shrimp stock made with the shells gives them a real flavor boost. If using smaller shrimp, decrease cooking time for shrimp by one to two minutes.*

Herb-Poached Shrimp

1 pound very large (16 to 20 per pound) shrimp, peeled, deveined, and rinsed, shells reserved
1 teaspoon salt
1 cup dry white wine

4 peppercorns
5 coriander seeds
1/2 bay leaf
5 sprigs fresh parsley
1 sprig fresh tarragon
1 teaspoon lemon juice

Cocktail Sauce

1 cup ketchup
2 1/2 teaspoons prepared horseradish
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
1 teaspoon ancho or other mild chili powder

Pinch cayenne pepper

1 tablespoon lemon juice

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Bring reserved shells, 3 cups water, and salt to boil in medium saucepan over medium-high heat; reduce heat to low, cover, and simmer until fragrant, about 20 minutes. Strain stock through sieve, pressing on shells to extract all liquid.

2. While stock is simmering, combine all ingredients for cocktail sauce in small bowl. Adjust seasonings. Cover and refrigerate sauce to blend flavors, at least 1 hour and up to several days.

3. Bring stock, wine, spices, herbs, and lemon juice to a boil in 3- or 4-quart saucepan over high heat; boil 2 minutes. Turn off heat and stir in shrimp; cover and let stand until firm and pink, 8 to 10 minutes. Drain shrimp, reserving stock for another use.

4. Plunge shrimp into ice water to stop cooking, then drain again. Refrigerate shrimp until well chilled, at least 1 hour and up to several hours. Serve chilled shrimp with cocktail sauce.

Cocktail Crab Cakes

makes 24 small cakes

NOTE: *The amount of bread crumbs you add will depend on the juiciness of the crabmeat. Start with just 2 tablespoons. If the cakes won't hold together once you have added the egg, add more bread crumbs, one tablespoon at a time.*

Crab Cakes

1 pound jumbo lump crabmeat, picked over to remove cartilage and shell

4 scallions, green part only,

minced (about 1/2 cup)

1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley leaves

1 1/2 teaspoons Old Bay seasoning

2 to 4 tablespoons fine dry bread crumbs

1/4 cup mayonnaise

Salt and ground white pepper

1 large egg

1/2 cup flour

6 tablespoons vegetable oil

Creamy Dipping Sauce

1/4 cup mayonnaise

1/4 cup sour cream

2 teaspoons minced chipotle chiles

1 small garlic clove, minced

2 teaspoons minced fresh cilantro leaves

1 teaspoon lime juice

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Gently mix crabmeat, scallions, parsley, Old Bay, 2 tablespoons bread crumbs, and mayonnaise in medium bowl, being careful not to break up crab lumps. Season with salt and white pepper to taste. Carefully fold in egg with rubber spatula until mixture just clings together. Add more crumbs if

necessary.

2. Invert a rimmed baking sheet and cover with parchment paper. Using a generous tablespoon, form mixture into 24 cakes, each $1^{1}/_{2}$ inches in diameter and $^{1}/_{2}$ inch thick. Place each finished cake on baking sheet. Cover with plastic wrap and chill at least 30 minutes. (Can be refrigerated up to 24 hours.)

3. While cakes are chilling, combine all ingredients for sauce in small bowl. Cover and refrigerate to blend flavors, at least 30 minutes and up to 2 days.

4. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 200 degrees. Line a baking sheet with double thickness of paper towels. Put flour on plate or in a pie tin. Lightly dredge half the crab cakes, knocking off excess.

5. Meanwhile, heat heavy-bottomed 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat for 4 minutes. Add 3 tablespoons oil and lay floured cakes gently in skillet; pan-fry until outside is crisp and brown, $1^{1}/_{2}$ to 2 minutes. (Flour remaining cakes while first batch is browning.) Using a metal spatula, turn cakes. Sauté until second

side is crisp and brown, $1^{1}/_{2}$ to 2 minutes. Transfer finished cakes to baking sheet lined with paper towels and place sheet in oven.

6. Pour off fat from hot skillet and wipe clean with paper towels. Return skillet to heat, add remaining 3 tablespoons oil, and heat 1 minute. Add remaining cakes and pan-fry as above. Serve hot with dipping sauce.

Steamed Shrimp Wontons with Thai Dipping Sauce

makes 24 pieces

NOTE: *You can make the shrimp filling one day ahead but should assemble the wontons as close to serving time as possible or the filling will weep. Look for wonton wrappers in the refrigerator case of your supermarket. The dipping sauce becomes more flavorful if prepared a day in advance.*

Shrimp Wontons

1/2 pound raw medium shrimp, peeled and deveined

1 teaspoon grated or finely minced fresh gingerroot

1 medium garlic clove, chopped

1 medium scallion, thinly sliced

2 teaspoons Asian chili paste

1 large egg white

24 square wonton wrappers

Thai Dipping Sauce

1/4 cup rice wine vinegar

2 tablespoons fish sauce

1 tablespoon sugar

1 large garlic clove, thinly

sliced

1/2 small carrot, peeled and coarsely grated

1/4 teaspoon hot red pepper flakes

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place shrimp, ginger, garlic, scallion, chili paste, and egg white in food processor and process until well blended, about 1 minute. Transfer to small bowl and refrigerate until ready to use.

2. Mix all ingredients for sauce together in small bowl. Set aside for at least 10

minutes or up to 1 day for flavors to develop.

3. Follow figures 20, 21 and 22 to shape wontons. Spray a collapsible steamer basket with vegetable spray. Fill large Dutch oven or heavy-bottomed stockpot with enough water to reach bottom of basket. Bring to simmer over medium-low heat and lower basket into kettle. Arrange 12 wontons $^{1}/_{2}$ inch apart in basket. Increase heat to high, cover, and steam until dumplings are cooked through, about 5 minutes. Remove wontons from steamer basket and repeat with remaining wontons. Serve with dipping sauce.

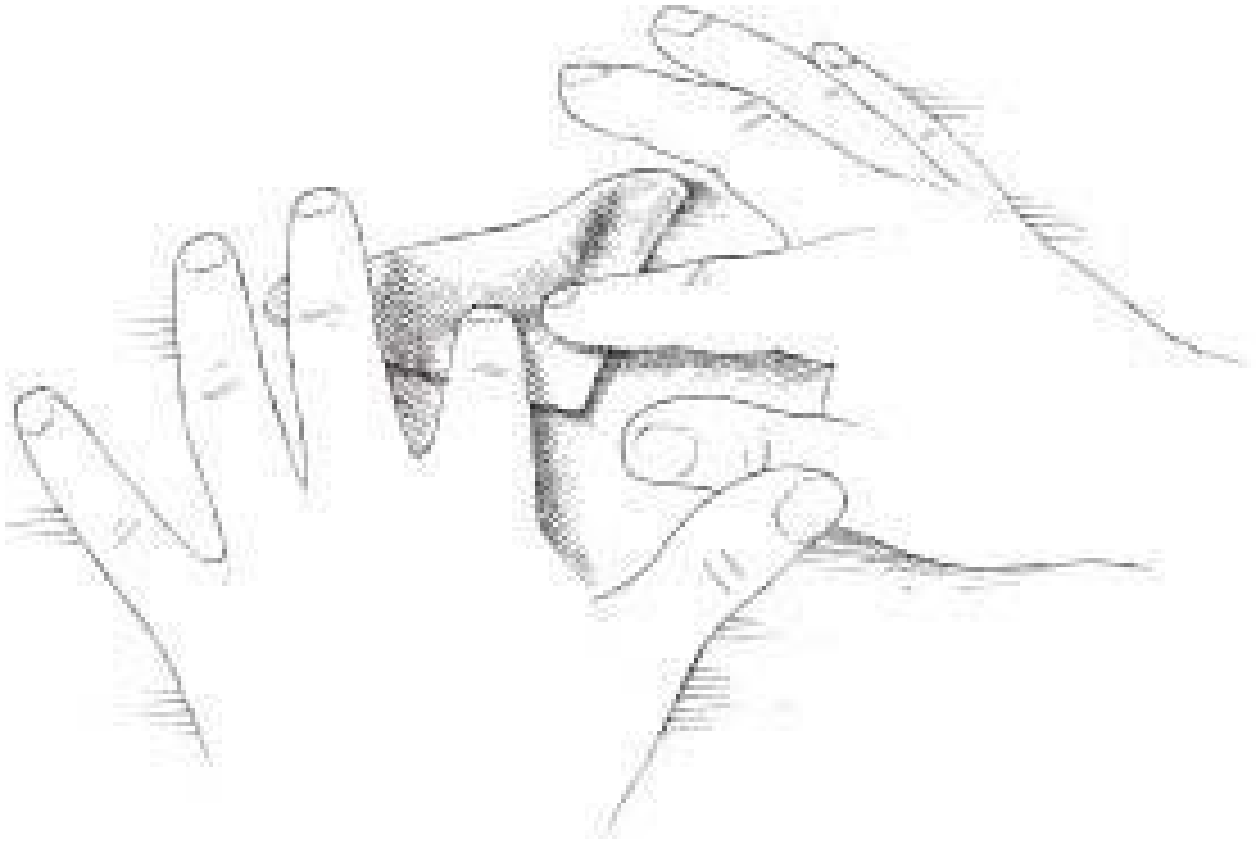

Figure 20.

Position a square wonton wrapper with one point facing you. Place 2 teaspoons of filling in the center. Fold the wrapper in half to form a triangle. Press to seal edges.

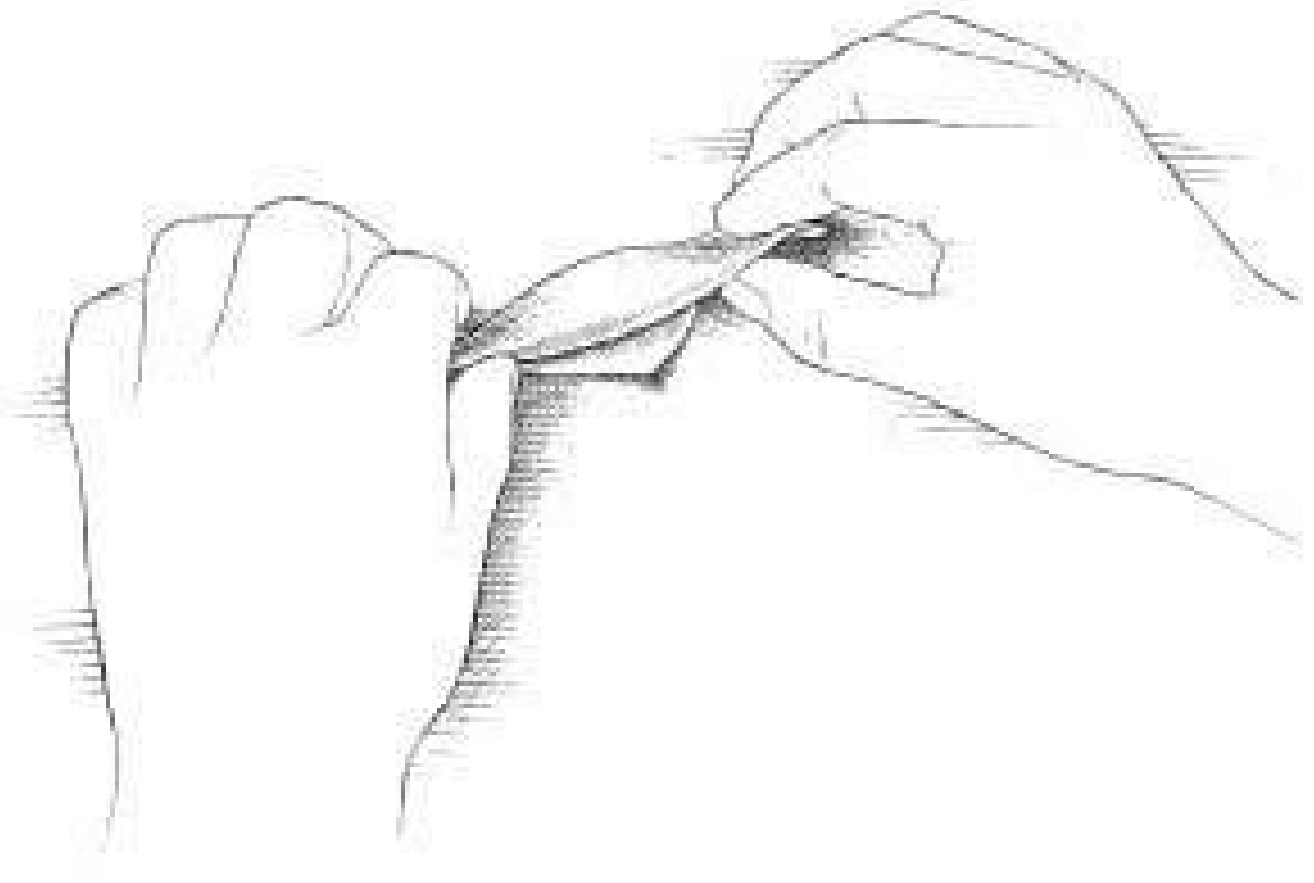

Figure 21.

Fold the long edge containing the filling over, leaving the top of the triangle exposed by about half an inch.

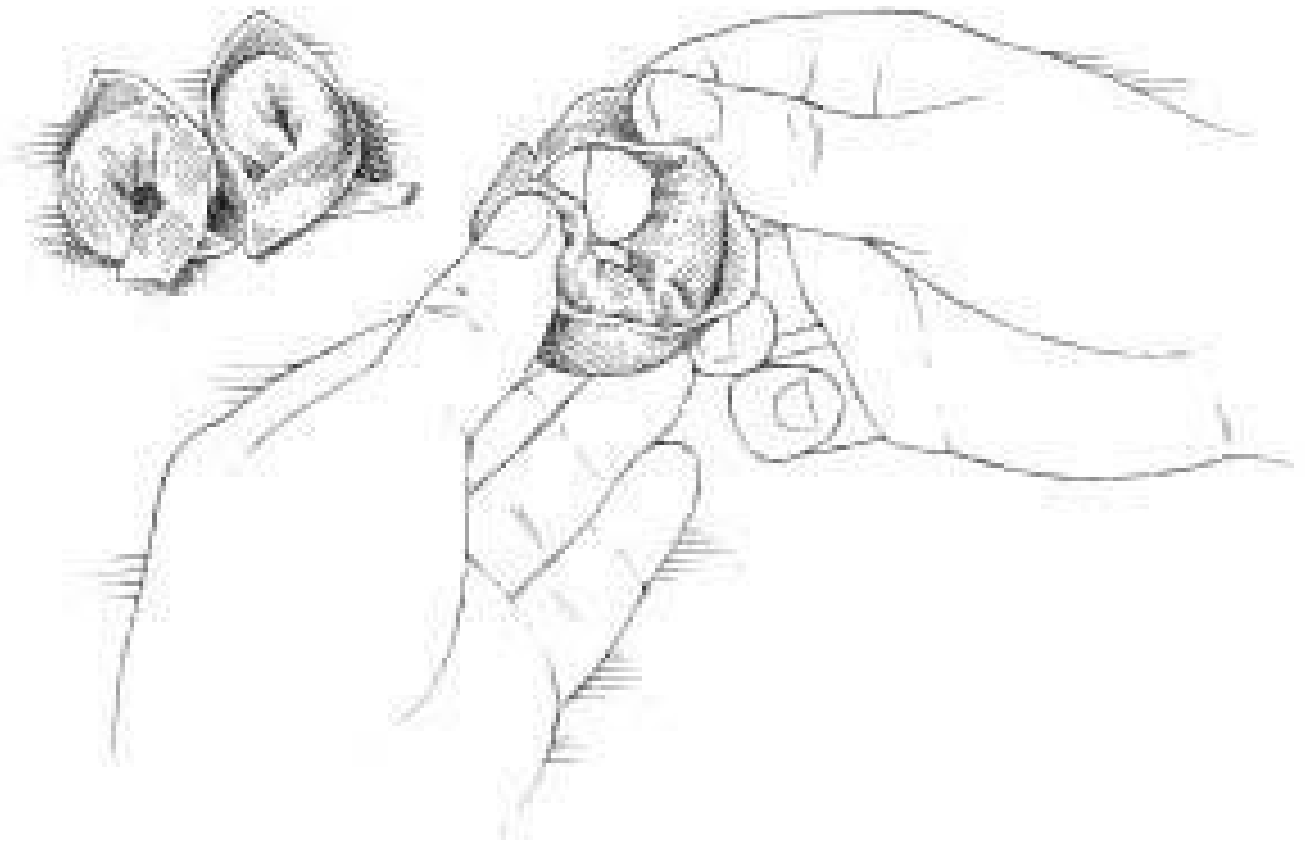

Figure 22.

Moisten the underside of the right point, then bring the two points together, right over left, to overlap, away from the tip of the triangle. Pinch the points together to seal the dumpling.

EGG APPETIZERS

TWO KINDS OF EGG DISHES MAKE SENSE AS appetizers. Deviled eggs start with hard-boiled eggs that have been halved. The yolks are removed, enriched and seasoned, and then piped back into the empty whites. The key to perfect hard-boiled eggs is removing the pan from the heat as soon as the water comes to a boil and then letting the eggs steep, covered, in the hot water for exactly 10 minutes.

The other main type of egg appetizer is a fully cooked, flat omelet, which is called a *tortilla* in Spain or a *frittata* in

Italy. These thick egg "cakes" can be sliced into wedges or cut into bite-sized squares. They can be served hot or at room temperature, making them ideal for entertaining.

Deviled Eggs

makes 8 pieces

NOTE: *In some eggs, the yolks set very close to the bottom of the whites and it is difficult to remove the yolks and still keep the whites in tact as a serving vessel. For this reason, we boil five eggs, using the yolks from all five but discarding the white from one egg, figuring that one egg is likely to have this problem.*

You may double or triple this recipe as long as you use a pot large enough to hold the eggs in a single layer, covered by an inch of water. The eggs

can be boiled one day in advance. After piping in the egg yolk mixture, however, they can be refrigerated for only up to two hours before serving.

5 large eggs
1 tablespoon mayonnaise
1 tablespoon unsalted butter, melted
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
1/2 teaspoon rice wine vinegar
1/8 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
1/8 teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon ground black pepper
Dash Tabasco sauce

2 teaspoons minced fresh chives

::INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place eggs in medium saucepan, cover with 1 inch water, and bring to a boil over high heat. Remove pan from heat, cover, and let stand for 10 minutes. Meanwhile, fill a medium bowl with 1 quart cold water and 1 tray of ice cubes (or equivalent).

2. Transfer eggs to ice water bath with slotted spoon; let sit 5 minutes. Following figures 23 and 24, peel eggs and then slice in half lengthwise. Remove yolks and place in small bowl.

Place whites on platter, discarding two halves that look the worst, and set aside.

3. Mash yolks with fork until no large lumps remain. Add mayonnaise, butter, mustard, vinegar, Worcestershire sauce, salt, pepper, and Tabasco, and blend with wooden spoon until well mixed.

4. Fit pastry bag with medium star tip. Fill pastry bag with egg yolk mixture. Pipe yolk mixture into reserved egg halves, mounding filling slightly above egg halves (see figure 25). Sprinkle $^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoon chives over each egg half. Serve.

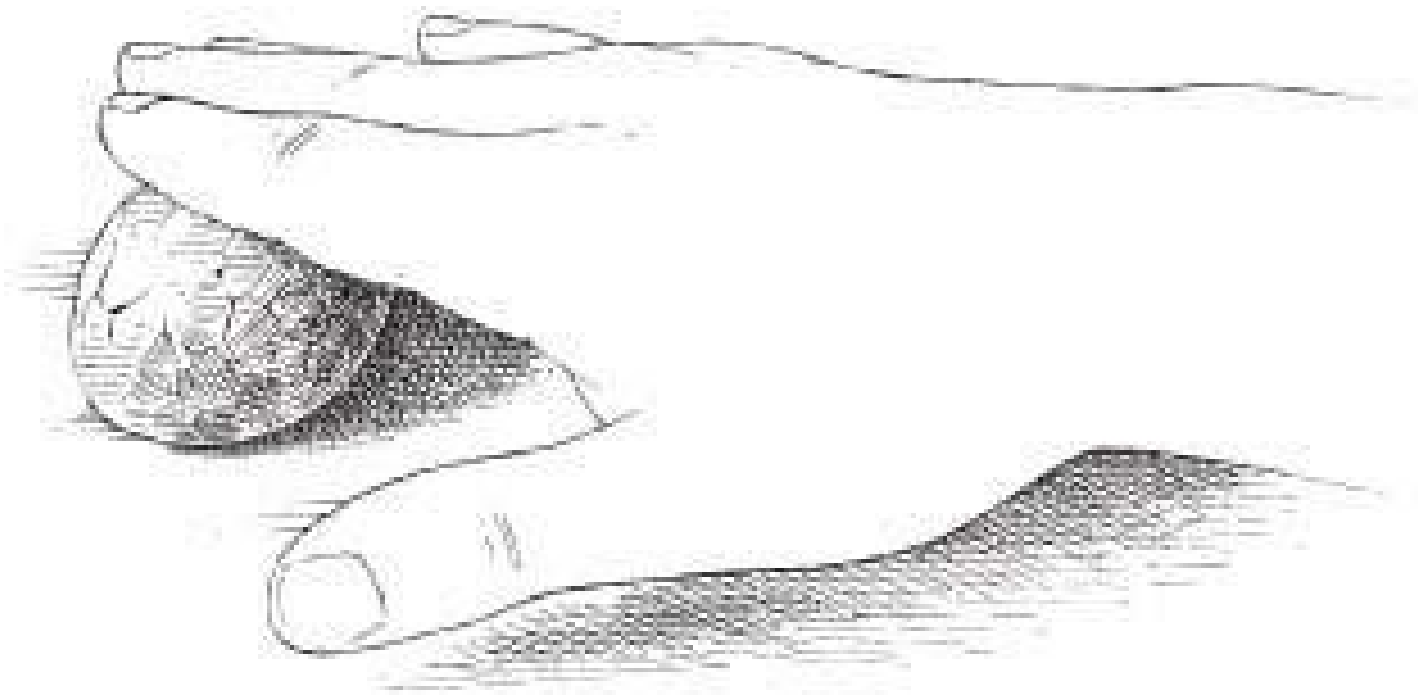

Figure 23.

Tap the egg all over against the counter surface, then roll it gently back and forth a few times on the counter to crack the shell all over.

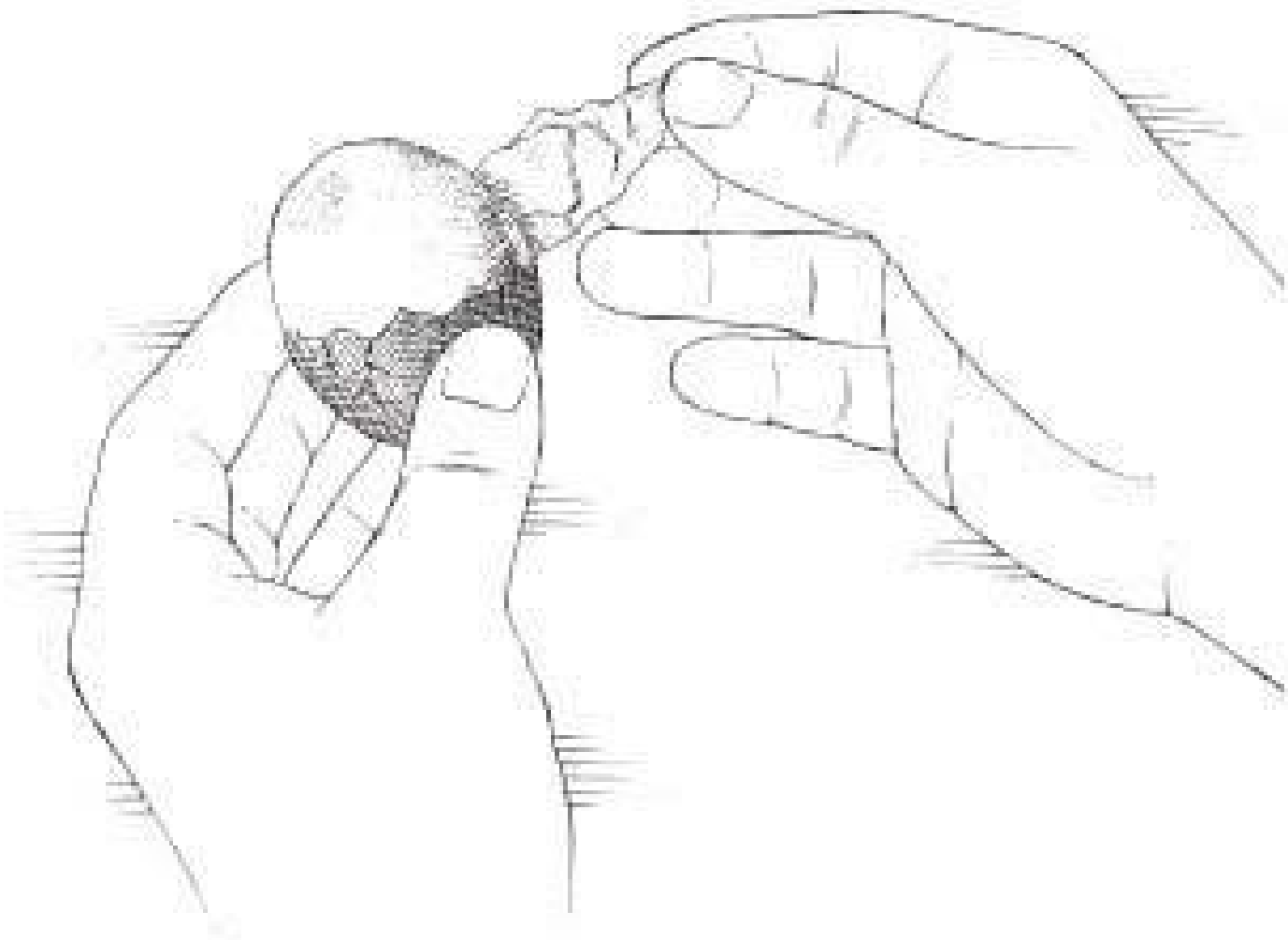

Figure 24.

Begin peeling from the air pocket end (the wider end) of the egg. The shell should come off in spiral strips attached to a thin membrane.

Figure 25.

A pastry bag fitted with a star tip makes the most attractive deviled eggs. If you don't own a pastry bag, spoon the yolk mixture into a

sealable plastic bag. Snip a small piece from one bottom corner of the bag and then gently squeeze the filling through the hole into the egg halves.

Spanish Omelet

makes 12 or more pieces

NOTE: *This dish, called* tortilla espanola, *is a thick, golden brown cake of eggs, potatoes, and onions. Serve with some sliced Spanish ham (called* serrano), *a hunk of manchego cheese, and a bowl of olives to make a traditional tapas.*

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

1 large onion, halved and thinly sliced

2 small garlic cloves, minced

12 ounces red potatoes, thinly

sliced

6 large eggs, lightly beaten

1 teaspoon minced fresh thyme leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat 2 tablespoons oil in 10-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat. Swirl skillet to distribute oil evenly over bottom and sides. Add onion; sauté until softened, 3 to 4 minutes. Add garlic, sauté until fragrant but not colored, about 1 minute. Transfer onion mixture to medium bowl and reserve.

2. Still over medium heat, add remaining tablespoon oil to skillet and swirl to distribute evenly. Add potatoes, toss to coat potatoes with oil, cover, and cook, stirring occasionally, until potatoes are tender, 13 to 15 minutes. Transfer potatoes to bowl with onions. Add eggs and thyme, stirring to coat well; season with salt and pepper to taste.

3. Add entire mixture back to skillet over medium heat. Stir lightly with fork until eggs start to set. Once bottom is firm, lift omelet edge so that uncooked egg runs underneath. Continue cooking about 40 seconds, then lift edge again,

repeating process until egg on top is no longer runny, about 8 minutes.

4. Cover skillet with a large buttered plate and carefully flip the omelet out. Gently slide omelet back into pan, cooked side up, and cook until completely set and golden brown, about 4 to 5 minutes longer. Run spatula around skillet edge to loosen omelet; slide onto serving plate. Cut into thin wedges or 1-inch squares, season with salt and pepper to taste, and serve immediately or at room temperature.

Figure 26.

Once the bottom of the omelet or frittata is firm, use a thin spatula to lift the edge closest to you. Tilt the skillet slightly toward you so that uncooked egg runs underneath. Return the skillet to level position and swirl gently to distribute the uncooked egg.

Asparagus Frittata with Mint and Parmesan

makes 12 or more pieces

NOTE: *An Italian frittata is similar to a Spanish omelet, but the texture is lighter and fluffier. Putting the frittata under the broiler (rather than flipping it) helps create this texture. Blanch the asparagus in salted water until crisp-tender, about $1^1/_2$ to 2 minutes.*

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil or unsalted butter
1 shallot, minced
1 tablespoon minced fresh

mint leaves

2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves

1/3 pound asparagus, tough ends snapped off and discarded; spears cut into 1-inch pieces and blanched until crisp-tender

5 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese

1/4 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper

6 large eggs, lightly beaten

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to upper-middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees.

2. Heat oil or butter in 10-inch nonstick, ovenproof skillet over medium heat. Swirl skillet to distribute evenly over pan bottom and sides. Add shallot and sauté until softened, 3 to 4 minutes. Stir in mint, parsley, and asparagus; toss asparagus to coat with oil. Spread in single layer.

3. Meanwhile, stir 3 tablespoons cheese, salt, and pepper into eggs. Pour mixture into skillet; stir lightly with fork until eggs start to set. Once bottom is firm, use thin spatula to lift frittata edge closest to you. Tilt skillet slightly

toward you so that uncooked egg runs underneath (see figure 26). Continue cooking about 40 seconds, then lift edge again, repeating process until egg on top is no longer runny.

4. Sprinkle remaining 2 tablespoons cheese over frittata. Transfer skillet to oven; bake until frittata top is set and dry to touch, 2 to 4 minutes, making sure to remove frittata as soon as top is just set. Run spatula around skillet edge to loosen frittata; slide onto serving plate. Cut into thin wedges or 1-inch squares and serve immediately or at room temperature.

BREAD AND PASTRY APPETIZERS

THIS CHAPTER CONTAINS RECIPES FOR BRUSCHETTA, quesadillas, biscuits, and phyllo triangles. *Bruschetta* is an Italian appetizer that starts with slices of broiled or grilled country bread that are rubbed with garlic, brushed with olive oil, and topped with everything from chopped tomatoes to olive paste. The *quesadilla* comes from Mexico and is a hot "sandwich" made with two tortillas. This tortilla sandwich is usually filled with cheese (and other ingredients) and

cut into narrow wedges for serving.

Biscuits are an all-American favorite. For use as an appetizer, they need to be cut quite small. In our recipe, we split and fill the biscuits with ham and cheese after they have been baked.

This chapter ends with a recipe for phyllo triangles. In our testing, we found that phyllo must be slowly brought to room temperature to prevent sticking or cracking. This means thawing phyllo (which is almost always purchased frozen) overnight in the refrigerator and then bringing it to room temperature in the box. To keep phyllo from cracking, keep sheets in a stack between two barely damp cloths until you need them.

Master Recipe

Bruschetta with Fresh Herbs

makes 16 small slices

NOTE: *This is the simplest bruschetta, but delicious. The variations are slightly more complicated.*

5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

$1^1/_2$ tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves

1 tablespoon minced fresh

thyme or oregano leaves

1 tablespoon minced fresh sage leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

1 loaf country bread (about 12 by 5 inches), cut lengthwise in half and sliced crosswise into 1-inch-thick pieces (ends saved for another use)

1 large garlic clove, peeled

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to highest position and heat broiler.

2. Mix oil, herbs, and salt and pepper to

taste in small bowl. Set aside.

3. Place bread on large baking sheet; broil bread until golden brown on both sides. Place toast slices on large platter, rub garlic over tops, brush with herb oil, and serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Bruschetta with Tomatoes and Basil

Combine 4 medium ripe tomatoes (about $1^{2}/_{3}$ pounds), cored and cut into $^{1}/_{2}$-inch dice, with $^{1}/_{3}$ cup shredded fresh basil leaves and salt and pepper to taste in

medium bowl and set aside.

Follow master recipe, reducing oil to 3 tablespoons and omitting parsley, thyme, and sage. Once toasts have been broiled, rubbed with garlic, and brushed with oil, use slotted spoon to divide tomato mixture among toast slices and serve immediately.

Bruschetta with Black Olive Paste

Process 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, $1^{1}/_{2}$ cups pitted kalamata olives, 2 teaspoons fresh rosemary leaves, 2 tablespoons shredded fresh basil leaves, 1 tablespoon rinsed capers, and 4 rinsed anchovy fillets in food processor,

scraping down sides with rubber spatula, until mixture is finely minced and forms a chunky paste, about 1 minute. Transfer to small bowl and set aside.

Follow master recipe, reducing oil to 3 tablespoons and omitting parsley, thyme, and sage. Once toasts have been broiled, rubbed with garlic, and brushed with oil, use a small spoon to spread olive paste lightly over toasts and serve immediately.

Avocado and Cheese Quesadilla

makes 8 pieces

NOTE: *We find that an electric knife is the best tool for cutting a quesadilla into wedges. Serve as is or with a little Classic Red Table Salsa.*

2 soft, 8-inch flour tortillas

1 medium ripe Haas avocado, halved, pitted, flesh removed and coarsely chopped

1/2 small garlic clove, minced

2 tablespoons minced fresh cilantro leaves

1 teaspoon lime juice

Salt and ground black pepper

3 thin slices red onion

2 ounces pepper Jack cheese, coarsely grated

Nonstick cooking spray

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 450 degrees. If tortillas are uneven in size, trim them with a scissors to match.

2. Combine avocado, garlic, cilantro, and lime juice in small bowl and mash coarsely with fork. Season with salt and

pepper to taste. Spread mixture evenly over one tortilla, leaving $^{1}/_{2}$-inch border around circumference free. Arrange onion slices over avocado and sprinkle with cheese, leaving $^{1}/_{2}$-inch border. Place second tortilla over cheese and press slightly to position.

3. Heat 10-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat for 2 minutes. Coat top tortilla with vegetable spray and place quesadilla, greased side down, into pan. Cook until golden brown and crisp, about 2 minutes. Coat top tortilla with vegetable spray. Using a wide metal spatula, flip quesadilla in pan. Cook

until second side is golden brown and crisp, about 2 minutes more.

4. Transfer quesadilla with metal spatula to small baking sheet and place in oven until hot throughout, about 3 minutes, flipping once halfway through. Cut into 8 wedges and serve immediately.

Cheddar Biscuits with Ham and Swiss

makes about 30 pieces

NOTE: *These biscuits are best served at once, though they may be wrapped and refrigerated for a day, then reheated for a few minutes in a 350-degree oven. Assemble just before serving.*

Cheddar Biscuits

2 cups all-purpose flour, plus extra for work surface

1 tablespoon baking powder

3/4 teaspoon salt

3 tablespoons chilled unsalted butter, cut into 1/4-inch cubes

3 tablespoons chilled vegetable shortening

1 cup shredded cheddar cheese (about 4 ounces)

3/4 cup cold milk

2 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

Ham and Cheese Filling

5 tablespoons honey mustard

1 pound thinly sliced ham, cut into 3-inch lengths

1/2 pound thinly sliced Swiss

cheese, cut into 1-inch pieces

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust rack to center position and heat oven to 450 degrees.

2. Pulse together flour, baking powder, and salt in food processor. Add chilled butter and shortening; process until mixture resembles dry oatmeal. Transfer to large bowl. Add cheese and toss lightly with rubber spatula or fork. Stir in milk until dry ingredients are just moistened. Let dough rest for 1 minute, then transfer to a well-floured work surface.

3. Pat dough into a rough 6 by 10-inch rectangle. Using a lightly floured $1^{1}/_{2}$-inch biscuit cutter, stamp out dough rounds, cutting them close together. Dip cutter into flour before each new cut. Push scraps of dough together so that their edges join, and firmly pinch edges with fingertips to seal. Pat dough into small rectangle and cut more biscuits. (You should have about 30 altogether.) Place dough rounds $1^{1}/_{2}$ inches apart on two ungreased baking sheets. (Baking sheets may be covered with plastic wrap and refrigerated up to 3 hours.)

4. Brush dough rounds with melted

butter. Bake until biscuits are lightly browned, 8 to 10 minutes. Let cool slightly on wire rack until just warm. Split each biscuit in half. Arrange bottom halves on platter. Spread $^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon mustard on each biscuit half. Loosely arrange a slice of ham over mustard, then place a piece of cheese on top of ham. Set tops of biscuits in place and serve.

Phyllo Triangles

makes 24 pieces

NOTE: *For this recipe, thaw a 1-pound box of phyllo (which has about 20 sheets) in the refrigerator overnight. Let the boxed phyllo come to room temperature on the counter for 2 hours. The triangles can be made several weeks in advance and frozen on a baking sheet. When ready to bake, take the triangles straight from the freezer and bake as directed, increasing the time by 10 or 15 minutes.*

Sausage and Cheese Filling

1/4 pound ground sweet Italian sausage
1/4 pound ground turkey or veal
1 large egg yolk
1 tablespoon bread crumbs
2 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese
2 tablespoons grated provolone cheese
2 tablespoons ricotta cheese
1 medium garlic clove, chopped

Goat Cheese and Olive

Filling

8 ounces goat cheese, at room temperature

8 black olives, pitted and chopped

2 tablespoons pine nuts, toasted and chopped

2 teaspoons grated lemon zest

1 teaspoon minced fresh thyme leaves

1 medium garlic clove, minced

Pinch salt

16 sheets frozen phyllo dough (about 13 ounces), thawed and brought to room temperature

1/2 pound (2 sticks) unsalted

butter, melted

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. If making sausage and cheese filling, process all ingredients in food processor until well blended, about 1 minute. Transfer to small bowl and refrigerate until needed. If making goat cheese and olive filling, use rubber spatula to combine all ingredients in small bowl and refrigerate until needed. (Both fillings can be refrigerated up to 1 day.)

2. Remove phyllo from box and place on barely damp kitchen cloth. Cover with barely damp cloth and then a dry cloth to prevent phyllo from drying out.

3. Adjust oven racks to upper-middle and lower-middle positions and heat oven to 425 degrees. Following figures 27, 28 and 29, assemble triangles. Place triangles seam-side down and about 1 inch apart on two parchment-lined baking sheets. Freeze for 10 minutes.

4. Brush each triangle top with 1 teaspoon of remaining butter. Bake until golden brown, for a total of 13 to 15 minutes, switching position of baking sheets halfway through cooking. Remove baking sheets from oven and cool triangles on sheets for 5 minutes. Serve

immediately.

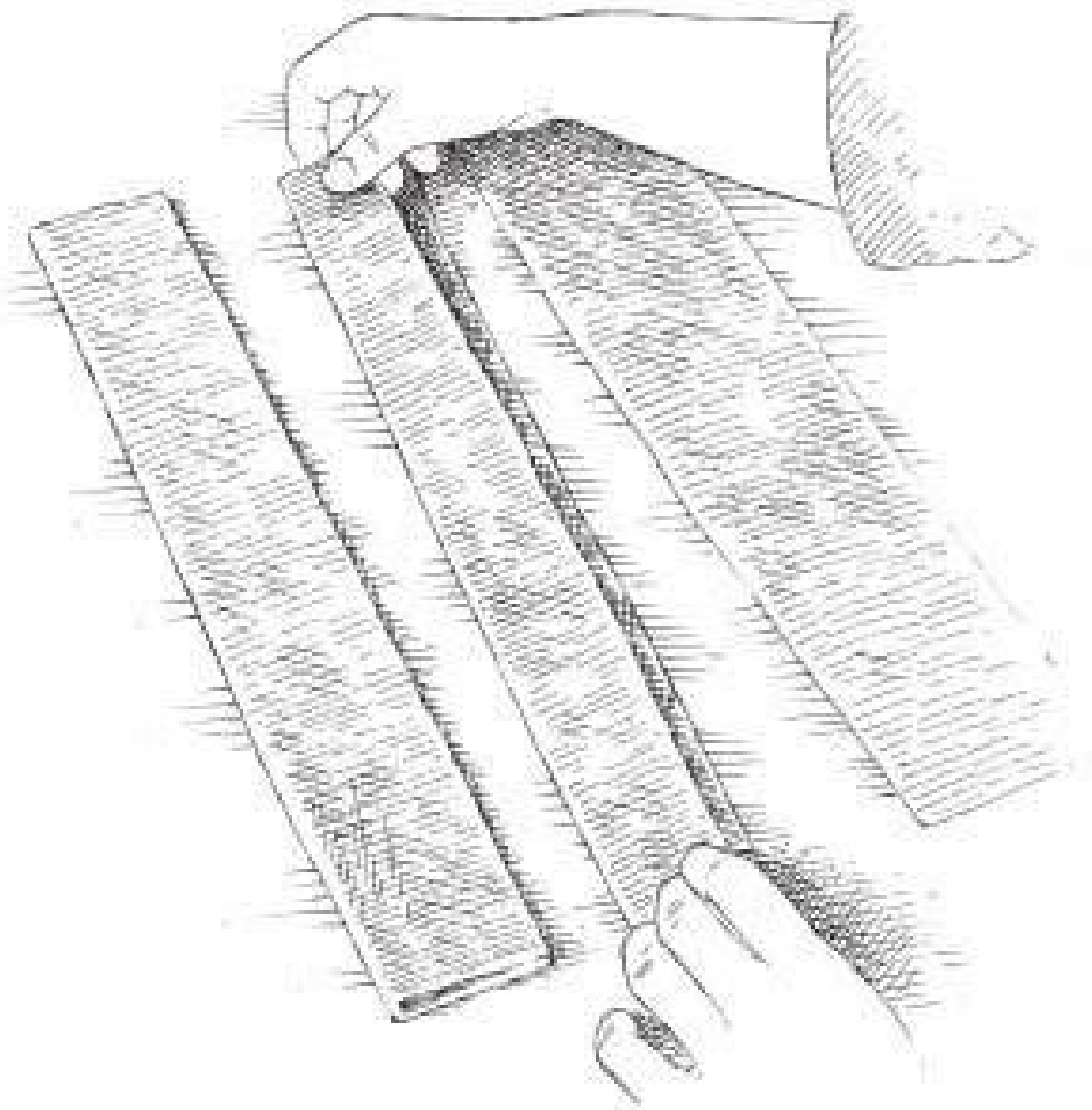

Figure 27.

Brush a phyllo sheet with $1^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoons melted butter. Place a second sheet of phyllo directly on

top of the first sheet and brush it with $1^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoons of butter. Cut sheets lengthwise to make three long doubled strips of phyllo, each about 4 inches wide. Fold each strip in half lengthwise.

Figure 28.

Place 2 level teaspoons of filling on the corner of one strip and fold up the phyllo to form a right-angled triangle.

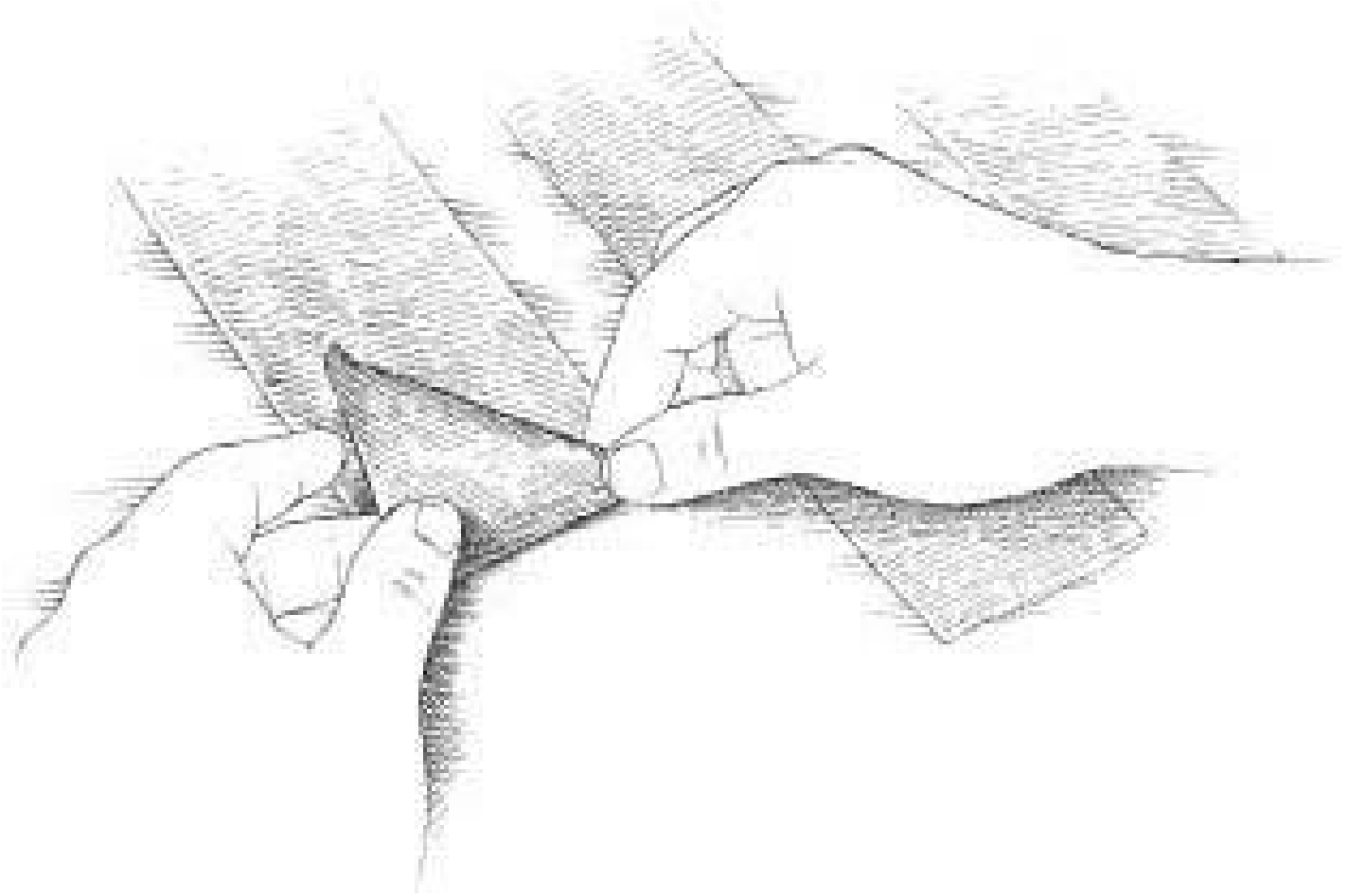

Figure 29.

Continue folding up and over, flag-folding style, until you reach the end of the strip. Repeat figures 28 and 29 with remaining two strips of phyllo. Once you have made three triangles, start over again with two new pieces of

phyllo and repeat figures 27, 28 and 29.

POPCORN AND NUTS

SPICED NUTS ARE A PARTY FAVORITE. MOST recipes calls for a heavy sugar syrup, which leaves the nuts very sticky. Another popular option is to sauté the nuts in butter, but we found that this method dulls the finish of the nuts and makes them taste oily. After testing some alternatives, we decided to coat the nuts in a light glaze made from very small amounts of liquid, sugar, and butter. This treatment leaves the nuts shiny and just tacky enough for a dry spice coating to stick perfectly, giving the nuts a beautiful

appearance and excellent flavor.

Making flavored popcorn is even easier. Simply cook seasonings in a little melted butter to bring out their flavor and then toss with hot, fresh popcorn.

Cajun Popcorn

makes 3 quarts

NOTE: *To pop the corn needed for this recipe, heat a wok over medium-high heat for 4 minutes, add 2 tablespoons vegetable oil, and $^{1}/_{2}$ cup popcorn kernels. Cover, then cook, shaking constantly, until kernels stop popping, $2^{1}/_{2}$ to 3 minutes.*

3 tablespoons unsalted butter

$^{3}/_{4}$ teaspoon Tabasco sauce

1 teaspoon hot red pepper flakes

$^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon garlic powder

1/4 teaspoon onion powder

1/4 teaspoon dried thyme

1/2 teaspoon paprika

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/8 teaspoon ground black pepper

3 quarts plain freshly popped popcorn

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Combine all ingredients except popcorn in small saucepan and cook over medium-low heat until butter has melted and mixture begins to foam, 2 to 3 minutes. Cover and set aside to keep warm.

2. Place hot popcorn in large bowl, drizzle with butter mixture, and toss until evenly coated. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Warm-Spiced Pecans with Rum Glaze

Makes about 2 cups

NOTE: *Store spiced nuts in an airtight container for up to 5 days.*

2 cups raw pecan halves (8 ounces)

Warm Spice Mix

2 tablespoons sugar

$^{3}/_{4}$ teaspoon kosher salt

$^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon ground cinnamon

$^{1}/_{8}$ teaspoon ground cloves

1/8 teaspoon ground allspice

Rum Glaze

1 tablespoon rum, preferably dark
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
1 teaspoon brown sugar
1 tablespoon unsalted butter

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Line rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper and spread nuts in even layer. Toast 4 minutes, rotate pan, and continue toasting until fragrant, about 4 minutes. Transfer baking sheet to wire rack.

2. Stir together ingredients for spice mix in medium bowl and set aside.

3. Bring rum, vanilla, sugar, and butter to a boil in medium saucepan, whisking constantly. Stir in toasted nuts and cook, stirring constantly with wooden spoon, until nuts are shiny and almost all liquid has evaporated, about $1^{1}/_{2}$ minutes. Transfer nuts to bowl with spice mix and toss to coat well. Return nuts to parchment-lined baking sheet to cool.

VARIATION:

Mexican-Spiced Almonds,

Peanuts, and Pumpkin Seeds

Following recipe for Warm-Spiced Pecans with Rum Glaze, replace pecans with $1\,^1/_4$ cups sliced almonds, $^2/_3$ cup roasted unsalted peanuts, and $^1/_4$ cup raw pumpkin seeds. Toast almonds for 4 minutes, then add peanuts and pumpkin seeds to baking sheet and toast 4 minutes longer.

Replace Warm Spice Mix with 1 tablespoon sugar, 1 teaspoon kosher salt, $^1/_4$ teaspoon ground cinnamon, $^1/_4$ teaspoon ground cumin, $^1/_4$ teaspoon ground coriander, $^1/_8$ teaspoon cayenne,

and $^{1}/_{8}$ teaspoon garlic powder. Replace rum and vanilla with 2 tablespoons water.

HOW TO MAKE SALAD

Salad Basics

Dressings

Leafy Salads

Vegetable Salads

Grain & Bean Salads

Main-Course Salads

SALAD BASICS

MAKING SALAD IS ONE OF THE MOST CREATIVE culinary pursuits. Baking requires that the cook follow directions precisely. Roasting a chicken or cooking pasta also demands a high level of attention to detail. But salad making allows for a fair amount of improvisation. Watercress can be substituted for arugula, which in turn can be substituted for dandelion greens or mizuna. If you like bell peppers, cucumbers, or tomatoes, they can be added to almost any salad.

Salad making is creative, but there are some broad guidelines that must be followed to achieve optimal results.

SHOP CAREFULLY. Most greens have a short shelf-life, so it's especially important to buy specimens that look healthy at the market. Greens with stems and roots will stay fresher longer and should be purchased when possible. Also, look for any rot among bunches as you shop. Decay can spread quickly and it's best to avoid greens on which this process has already begun. If you get greens home and notice a few slimy leaves, pick them out immediately rather than waiting until you make salad. If you

wait, the rot may well have spread throughout the bunch.

KEEP CRISP. Because they are mostly water, greens should be stored in the crisper drawer of the refrigerator, where the humidity is the highest. But while moist air will help prolong their freshness, excessive amounts of water won't. Therefore, don't wash lettuces until you are ready to use them and drain off any standing water in bags before refrigerating greens.

WASH AND DRY THOROUGHLY. Because they grow in such close proximity to the

ground, salad greens are often quite sandy. Thorough washing in a deep bowl or sink filled with cold water is a must. Swish the greens in the water to loosen any sand. Once the bottom of bowl is free of grit (you may need to drain the bowl and add clean water several times), dry greens in a salad spinner and then use paper or kitchen towels to blot off any remaining moisture. It's imperative to remove all visible moisture. Dressing will slide off damp greens and pool up at the bottom of the salad bowl. Washed and dried greens can be refrigerated in a dry zipper-lock bag for several hours.

DON'T TEAR UNTIL READY TO EAT. While whole leaves can be washed and dried in advance, do not tear lettuces until ready to dress the salad. Tearing the leaves leads to oxidation and browning in delicate greens. Whatever you do, don't take a knife to salad greens. The more violently they are cut, the quicker they will brown. Gentle tearing of large leaves by hand is best.

DRESS GREENS LIGHTLY. Nothing is worse than a limp, soggy salad with too much dressing. Dressed greens should glisten. We find that $^1/_4$ cup of vinaigrette is sufficient to dress 2 quarts

of salad greens, enough for four servings. We lightly pack a 4-cup plastic measure to portion out greens.

SERVE IMMEDIATELY. Once a salad is dressed, the clock is ticking. Waiting even 15 minutes to eat the salad may cause some loss in freshness and crispness. The longer salad greens sit under a coating of a dressing, the less appetizing they become as the salt in the dressing draws moisture out of the greens and causes them to become limp.

GLOSSARY OF SALAD GREENS

The following list starts with the four main varieties of lettuce and then covers the most commonly available specialty greens. When substituting one green for another, try to choose greens with a similar intensity. For example, peppery arugula could be used as a substitute for watercress or dandelion greens, but not for red leaf lettuce, at least not without significantly altering the flavor of the salad. Figures 1 through 4 offer some general guidelines on substitutions.

BUTTERHEAD LETTUCES: Boston and Bibb are the two most common varieties of these very mild-tasting lettuces. A head of butterhead lettuce has a nice

round shape and loose outer leaves. The color of the leaves is light to medium green (except, of course, in red-tinged varieties) and the leaves are extremely tender.

LOOSELEAF LETTUCES: Red leaf, green leaf, red oak, and lolla rossa are the most common varieties. These lettuces grow in a loose rosette shape, not a tight head. The ruffled leaves are green at the base and magenta toward the top in red varieties. These lettuces are the perhaps most versatile because their texture is soft yet still a bit crunchy and their flavor is mild but not bland.

ROMAINE LETTUCE: The leaves on this lettuce are long and broad at the top. The color shades from dark green in outer leaves (which are often tough and should be discarded) to pale green in the thick, crisp heart. Also called Cos lettuce, this variety has more crunch than either butterhead or looseleaf lettuces and a more pronounced earthy flavor. Romaine lettuce is essential in Caesar salad, when the greens must stand up to a thick, creamy dressing.

ICEBERG LETTUCE: Iceberg is the best known variety of crisphead lettuce. Its shape is perfectly round and the leaves are tightly packed. A high water content

makes iceberg especially crisp and crunchy, but also robs it of flavor.

ARUGULA: Also called rocket, this tender, dark green leaf can be faintly peppery or downright spicy. Larger, older leaves tend to be hotter than small, young leaves, but the flavor is variable, so taste arugula before adding it to a salad. Try to buy arugula in bunches with the stems and roots still attached—they help keep the leaves fresh. Arugula bruises and discolors quite easily. Try to keep stemmed leaves whole. Very large leaves can be torn just before they are needed.

WATERCRESS: With its small leaves and long, thick stalks, watercress is easy to spot. It requires some patience in the kitchen because the stalks are really quite tough and must be removed one at a time. The leaves are usually mildly spicy, like arugula.

DANDELION GREENS: Dandelion greens are tender and pleasantly bitter. The leaves are long and have ragged edges. The flavor is similar to that of arugula or watercress, both of which can be used interchangeably with dandelion. Note that tougher, older leaves that are more than several inches long should be cooked and not used raw in salads.

MIZUNA: This Japanese spider mustard has long, thin, dark green leaves with deeply cut jagged edges. Sturdier than arugula, watercress, or dandelion, it can nonetheless be used interchangeably with these slightly milder greens in salads when a strong peppery punch is desired. Note that larger, older leaves are better cooked, so choose small "baby" mizuna for salads.

TATSOI: This Asian green has thin white stalks and round, dark green leaves. A member of the crucifer family of vegetables that includes broccoli and cabbages, tatsoi tastes like a mild

Chinese cabbage, especially bok choy. However, the texture of these miniature leaves is always delicate.

RADICCHIO: This most familiar chicory was almost unknown in this country two decades ago. The tight heads of purple leaves streaked with prominent white ribs are now a supermarket staple. Radicchio has a decent punch but is not nearly as bitter as other chicories, especially Belgian endive.

BELGIAN ENDIVE: With its characteristic bitter chicory flavor, endive is generally used sparingly in salads. Unlike its

cousin radicchio, endive is crisp and crunchy, not tender and leafy. The yellow leaf tips are usually mild-flavored, while the white, thick leaf bases are more bitter. Endive is the one salad green we routinely cut rather than tear. Remove whole leaves from the head and then slice crosswise into bite-sized pieces.

CHICORY: Chicory, or curly endive, has curly, cut leaves that form a loose head that resembles a sunburst. The leaves are bright green and their flavor is usually fairly bitter. The outer leaves can be somewhat tough, especially at the base. Inner leaves are generally more tender.

ESCAROLE: Escarole has smooth, broad leaves bunched together in a loose head. With its long ribs and softly ruffled leaves, it looks a bit like leaf lettuce. As a member of the chicory family, the flavor can be intense, although not nearly as strong as that of endive or chicory.

FRISÉE: This spiky, miniature green has a nutty, almost buttery flavor as well as the characteristic bitterness of all chicories. Although the leaves are quite thin, they are not as soft as they seem and provide a fairly good crunch.

SPINACH: Of all the cooking greens, this one is the most versatile in salads because it can be used in its miniature or full-grown form. Flat-leaf spinach is better than curly-leaf spinach in salads because the stems are usually less fibrous and the spade-shaped leaves are thinner, more tender, and sweeter. Curly spinach is often dry and chewy, while flat-leaf spinach, sold in bundles rather than in cellophane bags, is usually tender and moist, more like lettuce than a cooking green.

BABY COOKING GREENS: Miniature versions of chard, beet greens, turnip greens, and kale are often sold

separately by the pound at supermarkets or used in salad mixes like mesclun. The white-or red-veined leaves are easy to spot. The flavor is much milder than that of full-sized cooking greens.

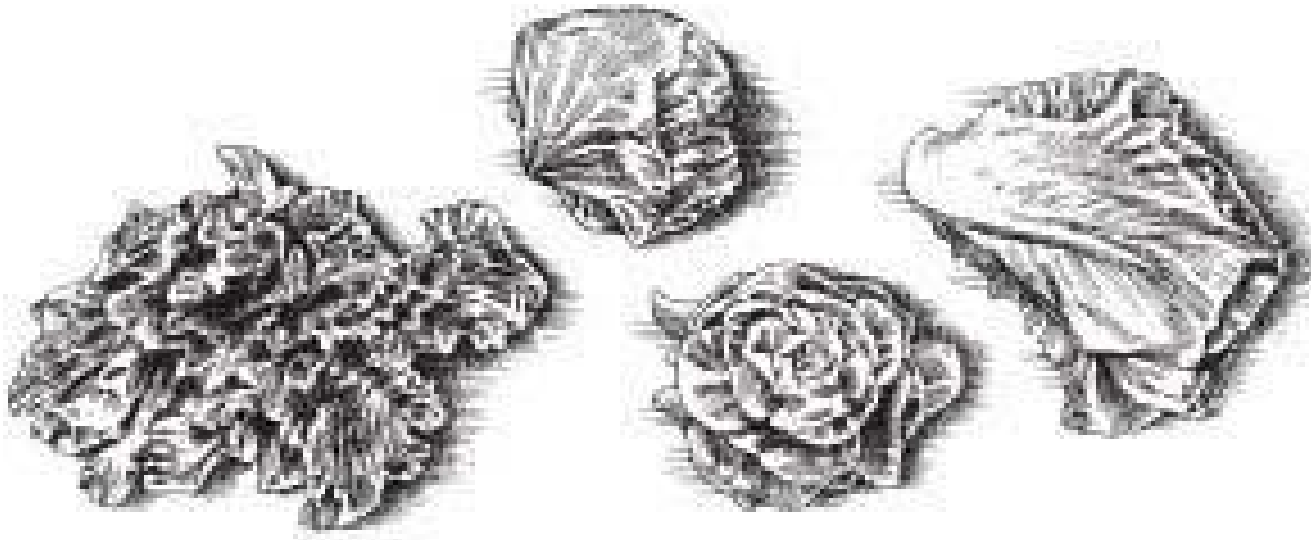

Figure 1.
Tender, mild leaf lettuces are the most commonly available salad greens. Although they can be used alone, they work well when mixed with stronger-tasting greens. Lettuces from left to right, red leaf, iceberg, Boston, and Romaine.

Figure 2.
Tender, peppery dark greens add punch to any salad. They are often mixed with milder greens, but can stand alone in refreshing palate-cleansing salads. From left to right, watercress, dandelion, arugula, tatsoi, and mizuna.

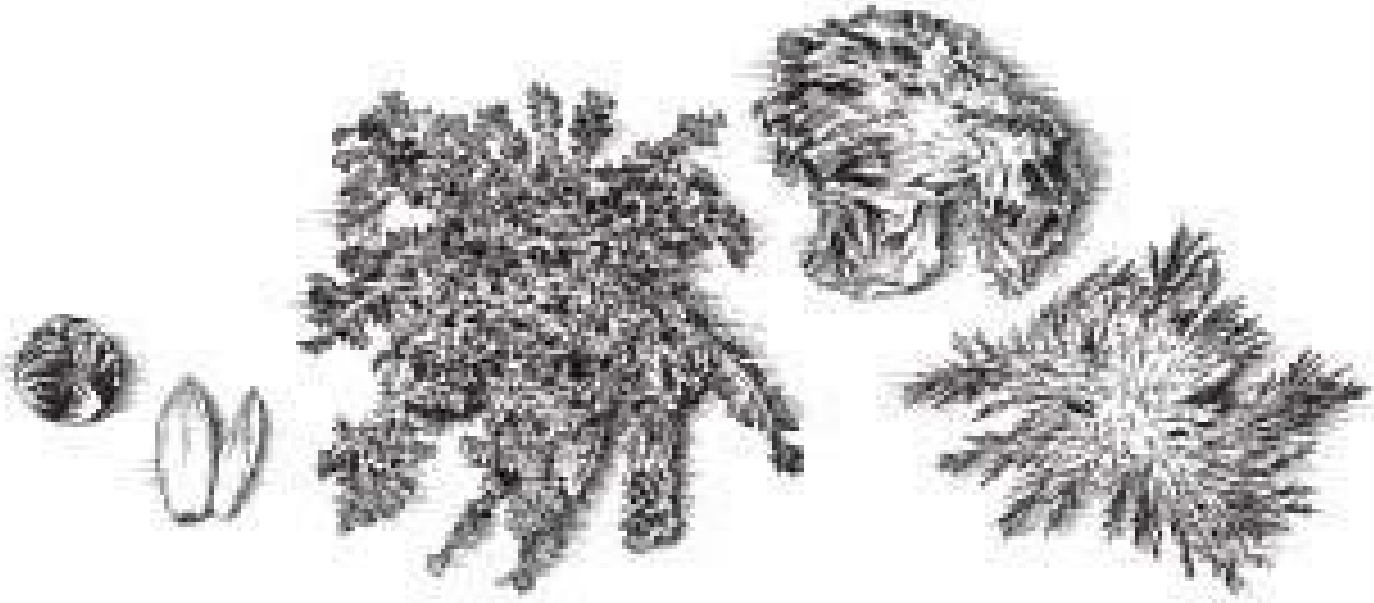

Figure 3.
The chicory family includes many different-looking salad greens. Most are somewhat bitter and crunchy. From left to right, radicchio, Belgian endive, chicory, escarole, and frisée.

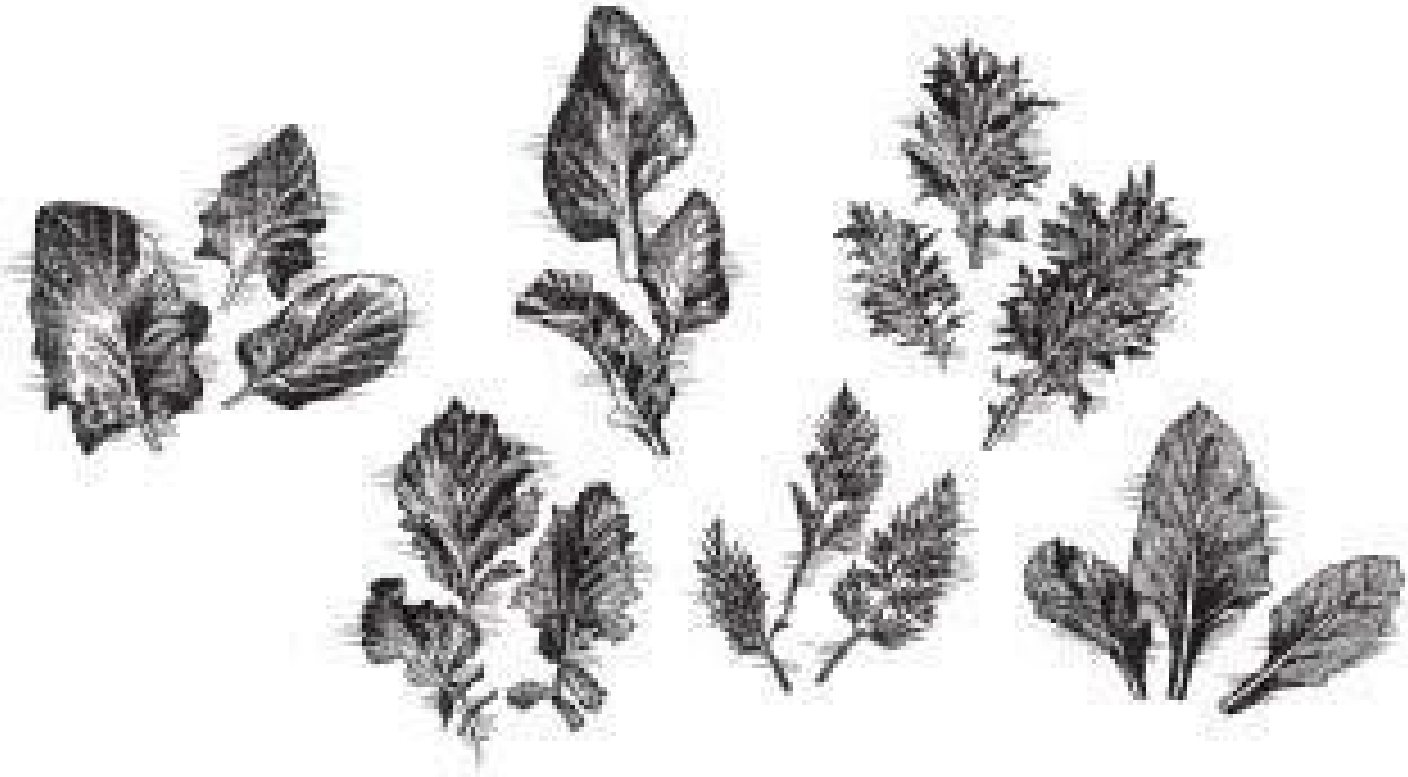

Figure 4.
Sturdier "cooking" greens are often used in salads. Full-sized leaves of spinach, the mildest and most tender of these greens, can be used in salads, as well as baby spinach. Otherwise, only very young leaves such as baby beet and chard greens are appropriate in salads. From left to right, baby

spinach, baby red Swiss chard, baby kale, baby broccoli rabe, baby carrot tops, and baby beet greens.

DRESSINGS

THERE ARE TWO TYPES OF COLD SAUCES typically used to dress salads. Vinaigrette is a relatively thin emulsion made of oil, vinegar, and seasonings. Mayonnaise is a thick, creamy emulsion of egg yolk and oil with a little acid and some seasonings.

An emulsion is a mixture of two things that don't ordinarily mix, such as oil and water, or oil and vinegar. The only way to mix them is to stir or whisk so strenuously that the two ingredients break down into tiny droplets. Many of

these droplets will continue to find each other and recoalesce into pure fluid. (This is what happens when the emulsion breaks.) Eventually one of the fluids (usually the less plentiful one) will break entirely into droplets so tiny that they remain separated by the opposite fluid, at least temporarily.

The liquid in the droplet form is called the dispersed phase because the droplets are dispersed throughout the emulsion. The liquid that surrounds the droplets is the continuous phase. Because the continuous phase forms the surface of the emulsion, that's what the mouth and tongue feel and taste first.

Vinaigrette is the most common dressing for salads, used with leafy

greens as well as vegetables, grains, and beans. While it is possible to dress a salad with oil and then vinegar, the results are quite different when these ingredients are combined before being poured over greens.

To demonstrate this difference, try this test. Dress a simple green salad first with oil, then a mixture of vinegar, salt, and pepper. The result will be harsh, with an extremely prominent vinegar bite. Next, take another batch of greens and the same dressing ingredients. Mix the salt and pepper into the vinegar and then whisk in the oil until the dressing is translucent. When this emulsified dressing is poured over greens, the

flavor will be smoother with a greater emphasis on the oil.

The science of emulsions explains why the same ingredients can taste so different. In the first oil-then-vinegar salad, the oil and vinegar don't mix, so both race up the tongue. The less viscous vinegar wins, hence this salad taste more acidic. In the emulsion, the oil is whipped into tiny molecules that surround dispersed droplets of vinegar. The oil is the continuous phase and is tasted first. Your tongue is coated with fat droplets that cushion the impact of the acid.

The correct ratio of oil to vinegar is open to much discussion and can depend on the acidity of the vinegar as well as

the flavor of the oil. In general, we prefer a ratio of four parts oil to one part acid, but this can vary, especially when using citrus juices and rice wine vinegar, which are much less acidic than common vinegars.

In terms of forming a vinaigrette, either a fork or small whisk will generate the whipping action necessary to break up the oil into small droplets. With either tool, the emulsion will break rather quickly so rewhisk the dressing just before pouring it over salad greens. We found that adding the salt and pepper to the vinegar is best because the vinegar mutes these flavors a bit and prevents them from becoming too overpowering.

On the other hand, we prefer to add herbs and some other seasonings to the finished dressing to maximize their impact.

Mayonnaise is used to dress vegetable salads—especially potato salad and coleslaw. It acts as a creamy binder and adds richness to any salad. The science of mayonnaise is fairly complex and unusual. Whisking transforms three thin liquids—vegetable oil, lemon juice, and egg yolk—into a thick, creamy sauce. In this sauce, the egg yolk and lemon juice are the continuous phase (that's why something that is 95 percent oil doesn't taste greasy) and the oil is the dispersed phase that must be broken into tiny droplets.

Mayonnaise works because an egg yolk is such a good emulsifier and stabilizer. But sometimes mayonnaise can "break," as the ingredients revert back to their original liquid form. To keep mayonnaise from breaking, it is first necessary to whisk the egg yolk and lemon juice thoroughly (the egg yolk itself contains liquid and fat materials that must be emulsified). It is equally important to add the oil slowly to the egg yolk. Remember, two tablespoons of yolk and lemon juice must be "stretched" around $^{3}/_{4}$ cup of oil.

In terms of oil, we like the flavor of corn oil in our basic mayonnaise. It produces a dressing that is rich and eggy

with good body. Canola oil makes a slightly lighter, more lemony mayo. We find that extra-virgin olive oil can be harsh and bitter, especially if used alone in mayonnaise. Pure olive oil produces a mellower mayonnaise but is more costly than corn or canola oil and does not deliver better results.

While homemade mayonnaise is a delicious addition to salads, many cooks prefer the convenience and safety of commercial brands made without raw eggs. In our tasting of major brands, Hellmann's came out on top. Among light or reduced-calorie brands, Hellmann's again beat out Kraft, which is its main competition in the marketplace.

GLOSSARY OF OILS AND VINEGARS

The following oils and vinegars are used in recipes throughout this book. To keep oils from becoming rancid, store bottles in a cool, dark pantry and buy small quantities that will be used up within a few months. Storing oils in the refrigerator will prolong their freshness.

EXTRA-VIRGIN OLIVE OIL: This is our standard choice for most salads. In blind tastings, we could not tell the difference between extra-virgin oil that cost $10 per liter and $80 per liter. However, cheaper pure and "light" oils are

characterless and decidedly inferior in salads, although they may be fine for some cooking. An inexpensive supermarket extra-virgin oil, such as Berio or Colavita, is our recommendation for salads.

WALNUT OIL: This oil has a warm, nutty flavor that works well in salads with fruits and/or toasted nuts. Like other nut oils, walnut oil tends to go rancid quickly and is best stored in the refrigerator.

ASIAN SESAME OIL: With its dark brown color and rich aroma, toasted sesame oil

adds a distinctive Asian flavor to salad dressings. Use it in moderation. More than a tablespoon or so will overwhelm other ingredients.

CANOLA OIL: This bland oil is best used to soften a particularly strong oil, especially sesame or walnut. Alone, its flavor is unremarkable. But in combination with a potent nut or seed oil, canola can be part of a good dressing.

RED WINE VINEGAR: Red wine vinegar is the most versatile choice in salads. Its flavor is sharp but clean. Domestic

brands tend to have an acidity around 5 percent, while imported red brands often contain as much as 7 percent. In our tasting of red wine vinegars, Heinz beat other domestic brands as well as imports, some of which cost ten times as much.

WHITE WINE VINEGAR: Similar to red wine vinegar but often not quite as complex. Our choice when a pink vinaigrette made with red wine vinegar might seem odd.

BALSAMIC VINEGAR: A rich, sweet, oaky vinegar that is best used in combination

with red wine vinegar in salads. Real balsamic vinegar is aged many years and costs at least $10 per bottle. Cheap supermarket versions are nothing more than caramel-colored red wine vinegar. They are usually harsh and unpleasant tasting. Given the small quantities of balsamic vinegar needed to transform a salad, it's worth investing in the real thing. In our tasting, we liked vinegars from Cavalli, Fiorucci, Fini, and Masserie di Sant'Eramo.

SHERRY VINEGAR: This Spanish vinegar is usually quite strong (often with 7 percent acidity) but has a rich, oaky, nutty flavor.

CITRUS JUICES: Orange, lime, and lemon juices can all be used in salad dressing. They add acidity as well as flavor. Lemon and lime juices are more acidic and can stand on their own. Orange juice is usually combined with vinegar. To add more citrus flavor without disturbing the ratio of acid to oil, stir in some grated zest.

RICE WINE VINEGAR: A natural choice in Asian dressings, this low-acidity (about 4.5 percent), clear vinegar is quite mild. Use it when you want to keep acidity in check but want to avoid the distinctive flavor of citrus juices.

Master Recipe

Classic Vinaigrette

NOTE: ***Salt and pepper are mixed first with the vinegar for subtlety. If you like, you can adjust the seasonings after the salad has been dressed by sprinkling additional salt and/or pepper directly onto the greens. The Master Recipe makes about $^{1}/_{2}$ cup, enough to dress 4 quarts (or eight servings) of leafy salad. Extra dressing can be refrigerated for up to a week. Variations that contain fresh***

herbs should be used within several hours for maximum freshness.

$1^1/_2$ tablespoons red wine vinegar
$^1/_4$ teaspoon salt
$^1/_8$ teaspoon ground black pepper
6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

INSTRUCTIONS:

Combine vinegar, salt, and pepper in bowl with fork. Add oil, then whisk or mix with fork until smooth, about 30 seconds. The

dressing will separate after 5 or 10 minutes, so use immediately or cover and refrigerate for several days and mix again before tossing with greens.

VARIATIONS:

Mediterranean Vinaigrette

Replace vinegar with $2^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoons lemon juice, increase pepper to $^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoon, and decrease oil to 4 tablespoons. Whisk 1 tablespoon drained and minced capers, 1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley leaves, 1 teaspoon minced fresh thyme leaves, and 1 medium garlic clove, minced fine, into

finished dressing.

Balsamic Vinaigrette

Reduce red wine vinegar to $1^1/_2$ teaspoons and combine with $1^1/_2$ tablespoons balsamic vinegar.

Walnut Vinaigrette

Replace vinegar with 2 tablespoons lemon juice and replace olive oil with 4 tablespoons canola oil mixed with 2 tablespoons walnut oil.

Mixed Herb Vinaigrette

Add 1 tablespoon minced fresh basil leaves, $1^1/_2$ teaspoons minced fresh

parsley leaves, and 1 teaspoon minced fresh oregano leaves to finished dressing. Use dressing within several hours for optimum freshness.

Shallot Vinaigrette

Add 1 tablespoon minced shallot to vinegar, salt, and pepper. Let stand 10 minutes. Whisk in oil and use dressing within several hours for optimum freshness.

Basil-Curry Vinaigrette

Replace red wine vinegar with $1^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons each lemon juice and white wine vinegar. Combine lemon juice, vinegar, salt, and pepper with $^{1}/_{2}$

teaspoon curry powder and $1^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoons honey. Reduce oil to 4 tablespoons. Whisk 3 tablespoons minced fresh basil leaves into finished dressing. Use dressing within several hours for optimum freshness.

Creamy Vinaigrette

Replace red wine vinegar with 1 tablespoon white wine vinegar. Combine vinegar, salt, and pepper with 1 tablespoon lemon juice and 2 teaspoons Dijon-style mustard. Reduce oil to 4 tablespoons. Whisk 2 tablespoons sour cream or plain yogurt into finished dressing. This recipe yields 2/3 cup dressing.

Orange-Sesame Vinaigrette

Replace red wine vinegar with 1 tablespoon rice wine vinegar. Combine vinegar, salt, and pepper with 1 teaspoon grated orange zest, 2 tablespoons orange juice, and 1 tablespoon minced fresh gingerroot. Replace olive oil with 4 tablespoons canola oil mixed with 1 tablespoon Asian sesame oil. This recipe yields 2/3 cup dressing.

Tarragon-Mustard Vinaigrette

Replace red wine vinegar with 2 tablespoons white wine vinegar.

Increase salt to $^1/_2$ teaspoon and pepper to $^1/_4$ teaspoon. Combine vinegar, salt, and pepper with 1 tablespoon Dijon-style mustard and 1 tablespoon minced fresh tarragon leaves. Whisk in oil and use dressing within several hours for optimum freshness. This recipe yields 2/3 cup dressing.

Orange Vinaigrette

Decrease red wine vinegar to 2 teaspoons. Combine vinegar, salt, and pepper with 1 teaspoon minced orange zest and 4 tablespoons orange juice. Increase olive oil to $^1/_2$ cup. This recipe yields $^3/_4$ cup dressing.

Hoisin Vinaigrette

Replace red wine vinegar with 1/3 cup rice wine vinegar and omit salt and pepper. Combine vinegar with $1\,^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons soy sauce, 3 tablespoons hoisin sauce, and 1 tablespoon minced fresh gingerroot. Replace olive oil with 3 tablespoons canola oil mixed with 1 tablespoon Asian sesame oil. This recipe yields $^{3}/_{4}$ cup dressing.

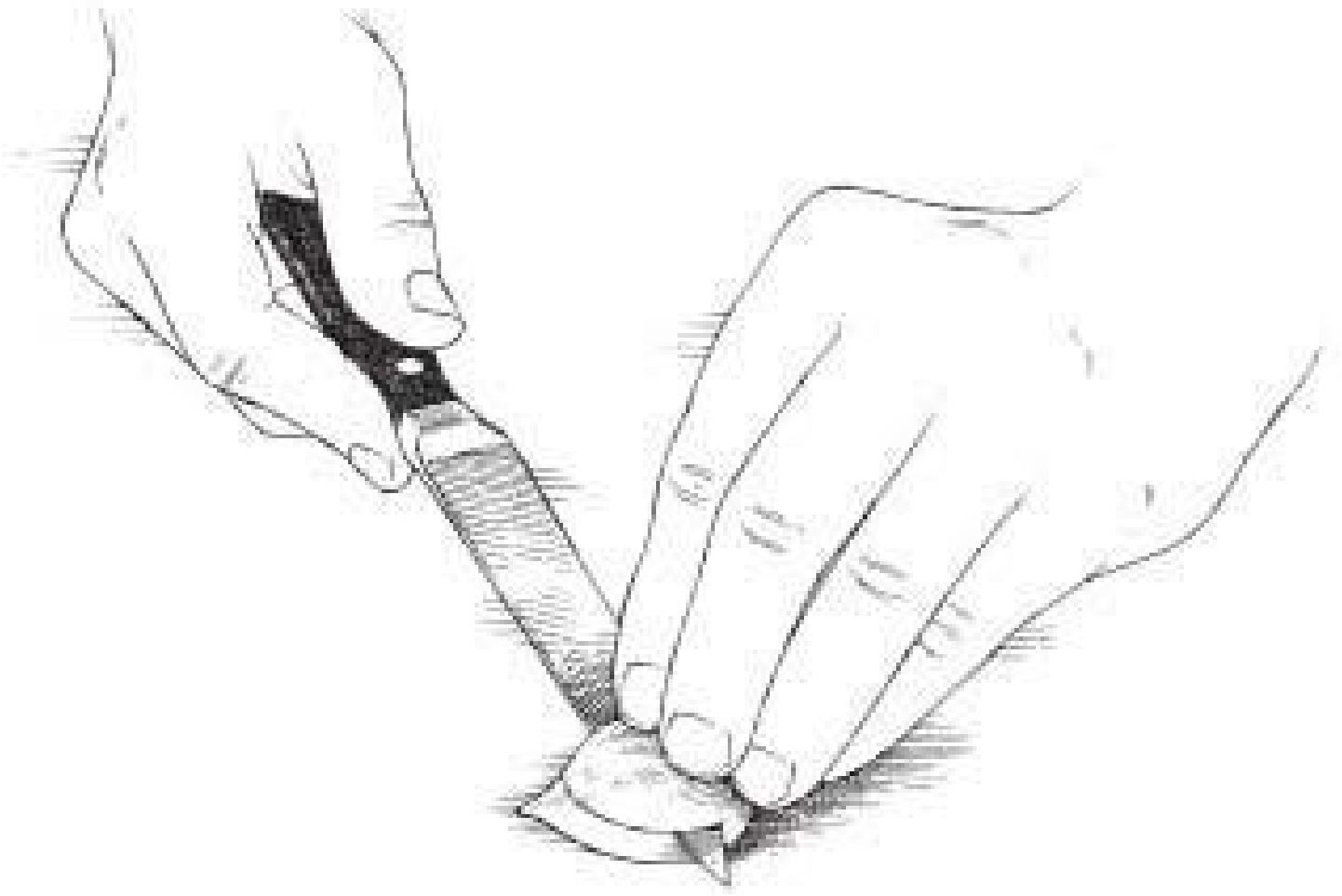

Figure 5.
Shallots add spark to many dressings. To keep them from overpowering other ingredients, they must be minced quite fine. Start by placing the peeled bulb flat side down on a work surface and slicing crosswise almost to

(but not through) the root end.

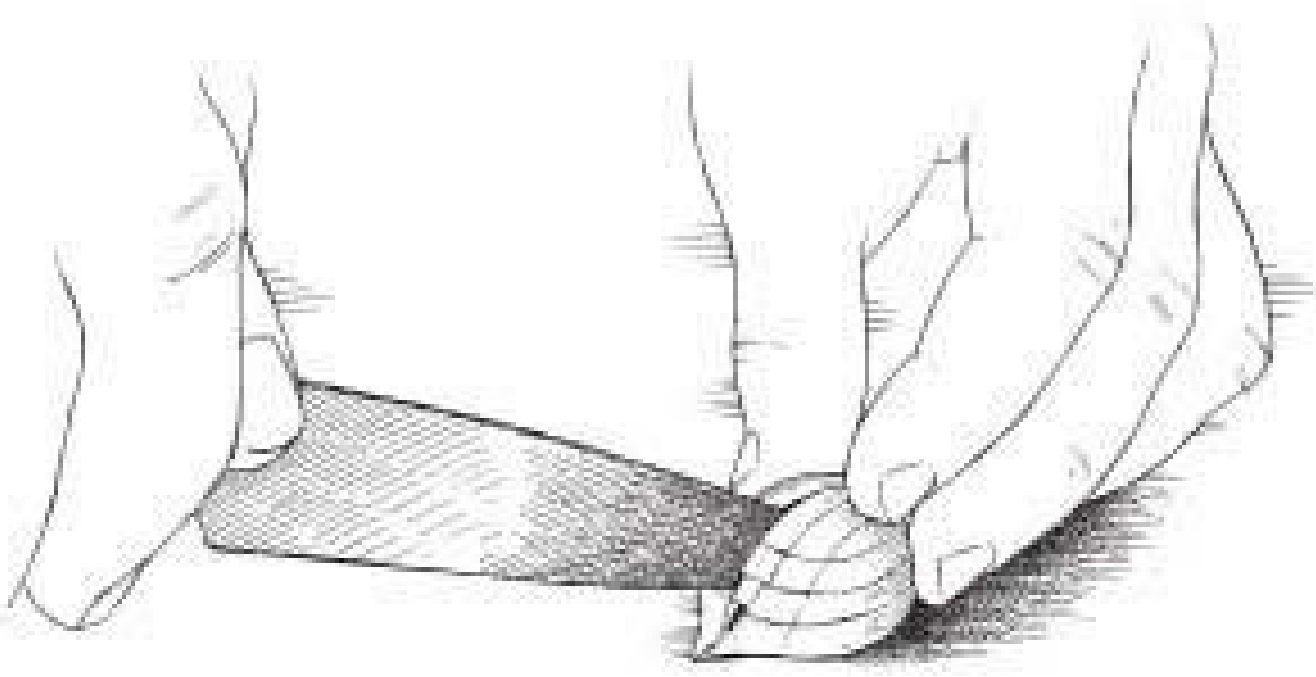

Figure 6.
Make a number of parallel cuts through the top of the shallot down to the work surface.

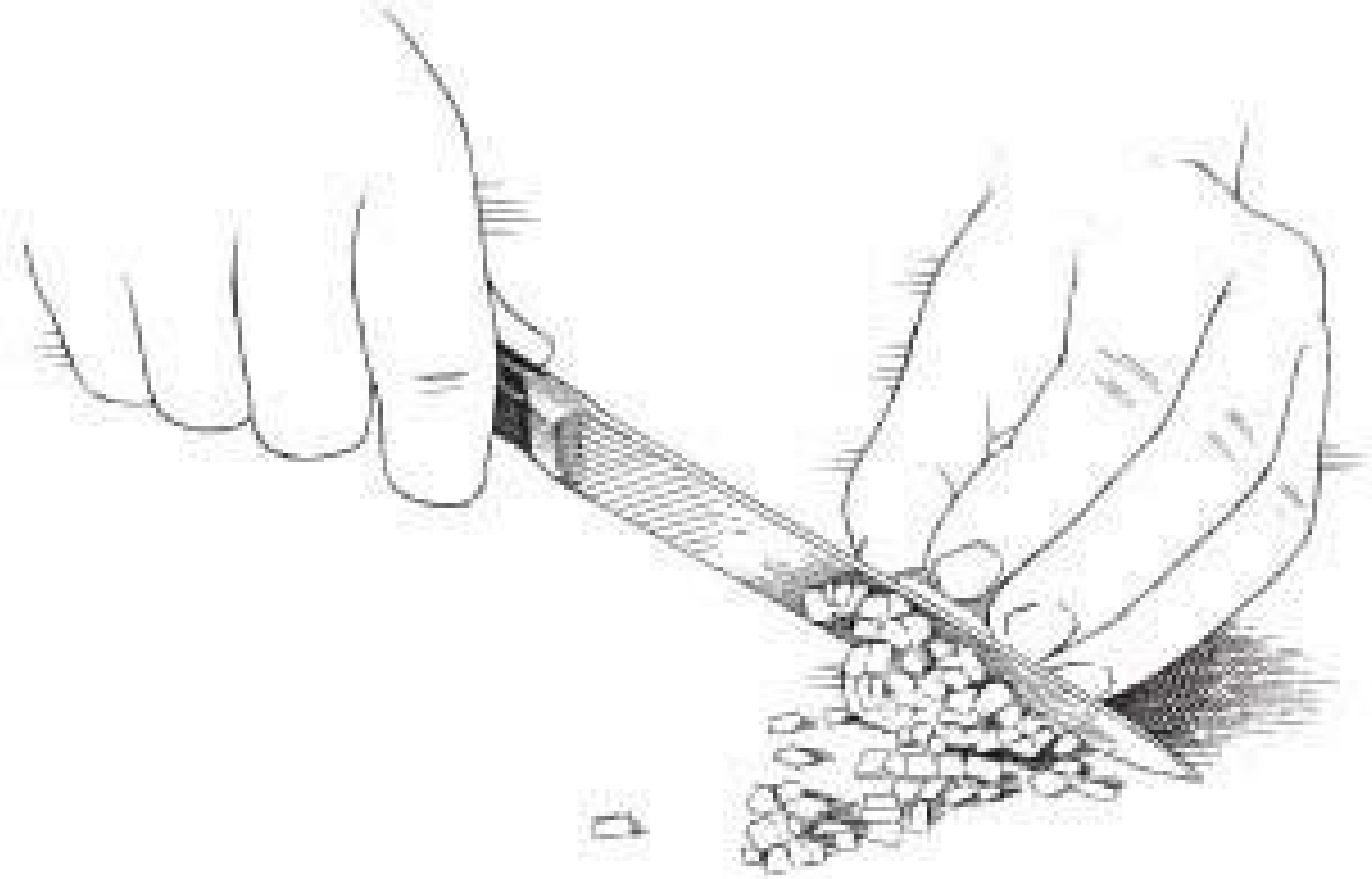

Figure 7.
Finally, make very thin slices perpendicular to the lengthwise cuts made in figure 6.

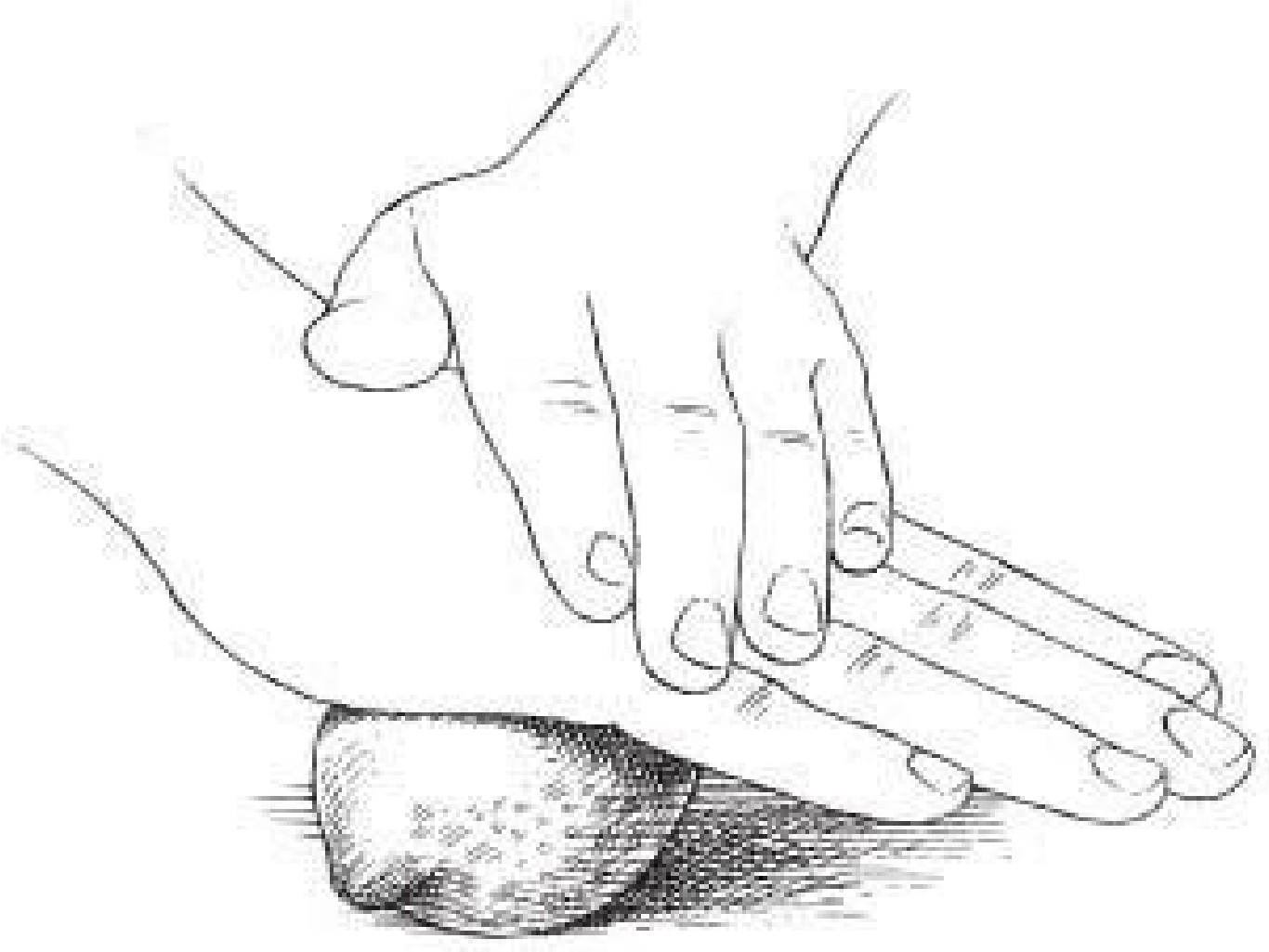

Figure 8.

We have tested numerous methods for extracting as much juice as possible from lemons (and limes) and have devised the following method. Start by rolling the lemon on a hard surface, pressing down firmly with the

palm of your hand.

Figure 9.
Cut the fruit in half and use a wooden reamer to extract the juice into a bowl. To catch the seeds, place a mesh strainer over the bowl.

Master Recipe

Homemade Mayonnaise

NOTE: ***Each time you add oil, make sure to whisk until it is thoroughly incorporated. It's fine to stop for a rest or to measure the next addition of oil. If the mayonnaise appears grainy or beaded after the last addition of oil, continue to whisk until smooth.*** **See *figures 10 and 11*, *for tips on making mayo. Makes about $^{3}/_{4}$ cup.***

1 large egg yolk

1/4 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon Dijon-style mustard

1 1/2 teaspoons lemon juice

1 teaspoon white wine vinegar

3/4 cup corn oil

Master Instructions

1. Whisk egg yolk vigorously in medium bowl for 15 seconds. Add all remaining ingredients except for oil and whisk until yolk thickens and color brightens, about 30 seconds.

2. Add $^{1}/_{4}$ cup oil in slow, steady stream, continuing to whisk vigorously until oil is incorporated completely and mixture thickens, about 1 minute. Add another $^{1}/_{4}$ cup oil in the same manner, whisking until incorporated completely,

about 30 seconds more. Add last $^1/_4$ cup oil all at once and whisk until incorporated completely, about 30 seconds more. Serve. (Can be refrigerated in airtight container for several days.)

VARIATIONS:

Lemon Mayonnaise

Add $1^1/_2$ teaspoons grated lemon zest along with lemon juice.

Dijon Mayonnaise

Whisk 2 tablespoons Dijon-style mustard into finished mayonnaise.

Tarragon Mayonnaise

Stir 1 tablespoon minced fresh tarragon leaves into finished mayonnaise.

Food Processor Mayonnaise

Use 1 whole large egg and double quantities of other ingredients in Master Recipe. Pulse all ingredients except oil in workbowl of food processor fitted with metal blade three or four times to combine. With machine running, add oil in thin steady stream through open feed tube until incorporated completely. (If food pusher has small hole in bottom, pour oil into pusher and allow to drizzle down into machine while motor is

running.) This recipe yields $1^{1}/_{2}$ cups mayonnaise.

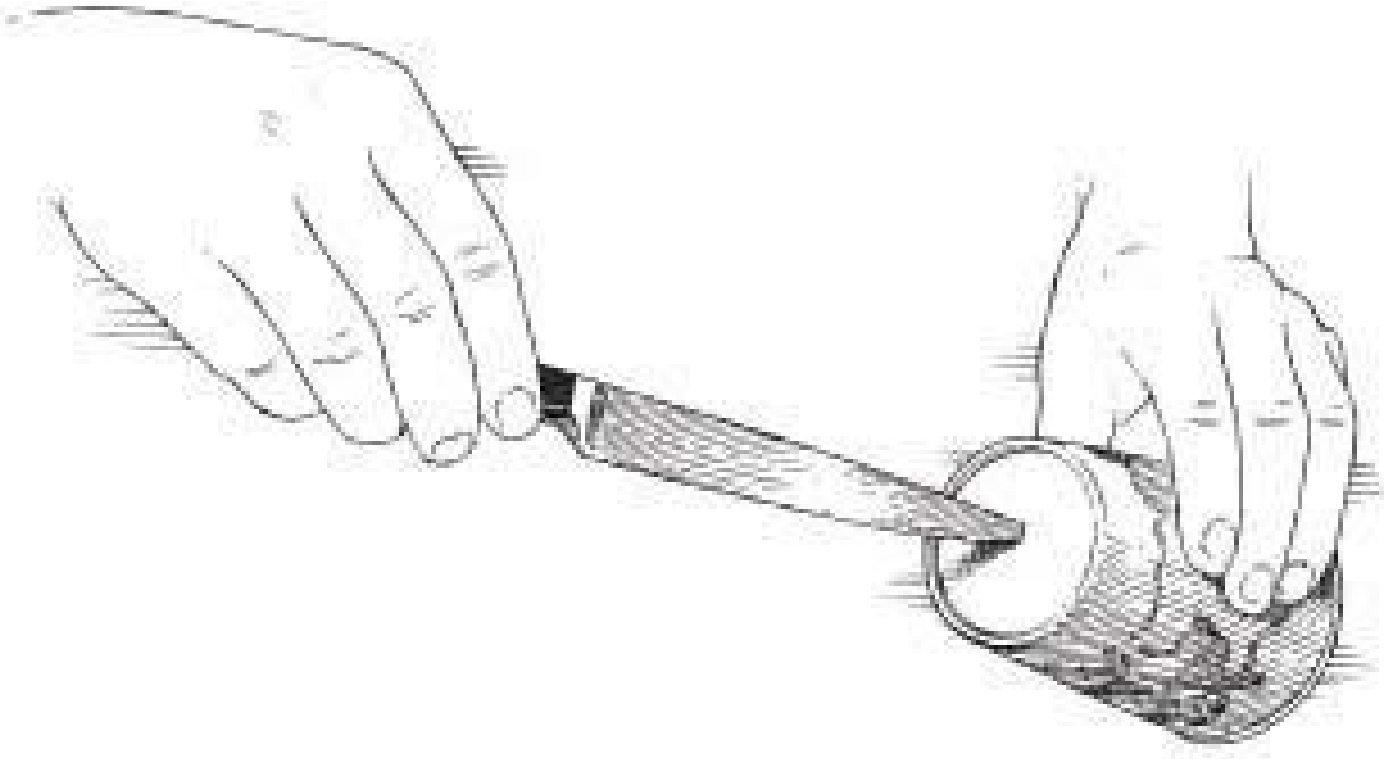

Figure 10.
An easy way to drizzle oil into mayonnaise slowly and evenly is to punch a small hole in the bottom of a paper cup and use it to add the oil to the egg yolk and lemon juice.

Figure 11.
Pour the oil into the cup while holding your finger over the hole, then hold the cup above the bowl

and remove your finger. To keep the bowl stable while whisking, set it on a wet dishcloth.

LEAFY SALADS

WHEN MAKING A LEAFY SALAD, CONSIDER how various greens will work together. There are times when you may want to use all tender lettuces and greens, such as Bibb and red oak. Other salads, especially those with chunky ingredients like sliced vegetables and fruits, cheese, or nuts, are better with a combination of tender and sturdier greens like arugula or radicchio.

In addition to texture, think about flavor. Balance peppery greens with mild greens, unless, of course, you are

trying to create a very spicy salad that will served as a palate cleaner after a rich main course. Color should also be considered.

Master Recipe

Mixed Green Salad

NOTE: ***We like a hint of garlic in our basic salad but find the flavor is too bitter when minced garlic is added directly to the dressing. For garlic aroma without any harshness, we rub the salad bowl with a halved clove.*** **See *figures 12 and 13*, *for tips on coring and washing heads of lettuce. This salad serves four.***

$^1/_2$ medium garlic clove, peeled

2 quarts washed and dried mild salad greens, such as romaine, Boston, Bibb, or other leaf lettuces

$^1/_4$ cup Classic Vinaigrette or any variation (*see* Classic Vinaigrette)

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Rub bottom and sides of large salad bowl (at least 4-quart) with garlic clove; discard garlic.

2. Place greens in large salad bowl. Drizzle dressing over greens and toss to coat. Serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Tri-Color Salad with Balsamic Vinaigrette

Dress 4 cups arugula, 1 small head radicchio, cored and leaves torn, and 2 small heads Belgian endives, stems trimmed and leaves cut crosswise into thirds, with $^1/_4$ cup Balsamic Vinaigrette.

Asian Baby Greens with Orange-Sesame Vinaigrette

Dress 2 quarts baby spinach, mizuna, tatsoi, and/or other spicy Asian greens with $^1/_4$ cup Orange-Sesame Vinaigrette.

Arugula Salad with Walnut Vinaigrette and Toasted Walnuts

Dress 2 quarts arugula and 3 tablespoons toasted and coarsely chopped walnuts with $^{1}/_{4}$ cup Walnut Vinaigrette.

Figure 12.
To core and wash head lettuce simultaneously, rap the bottom of the head of lettuce sharply on the counter to loosen the core. Turn the head of lettuce over and pull out the core in one piece.

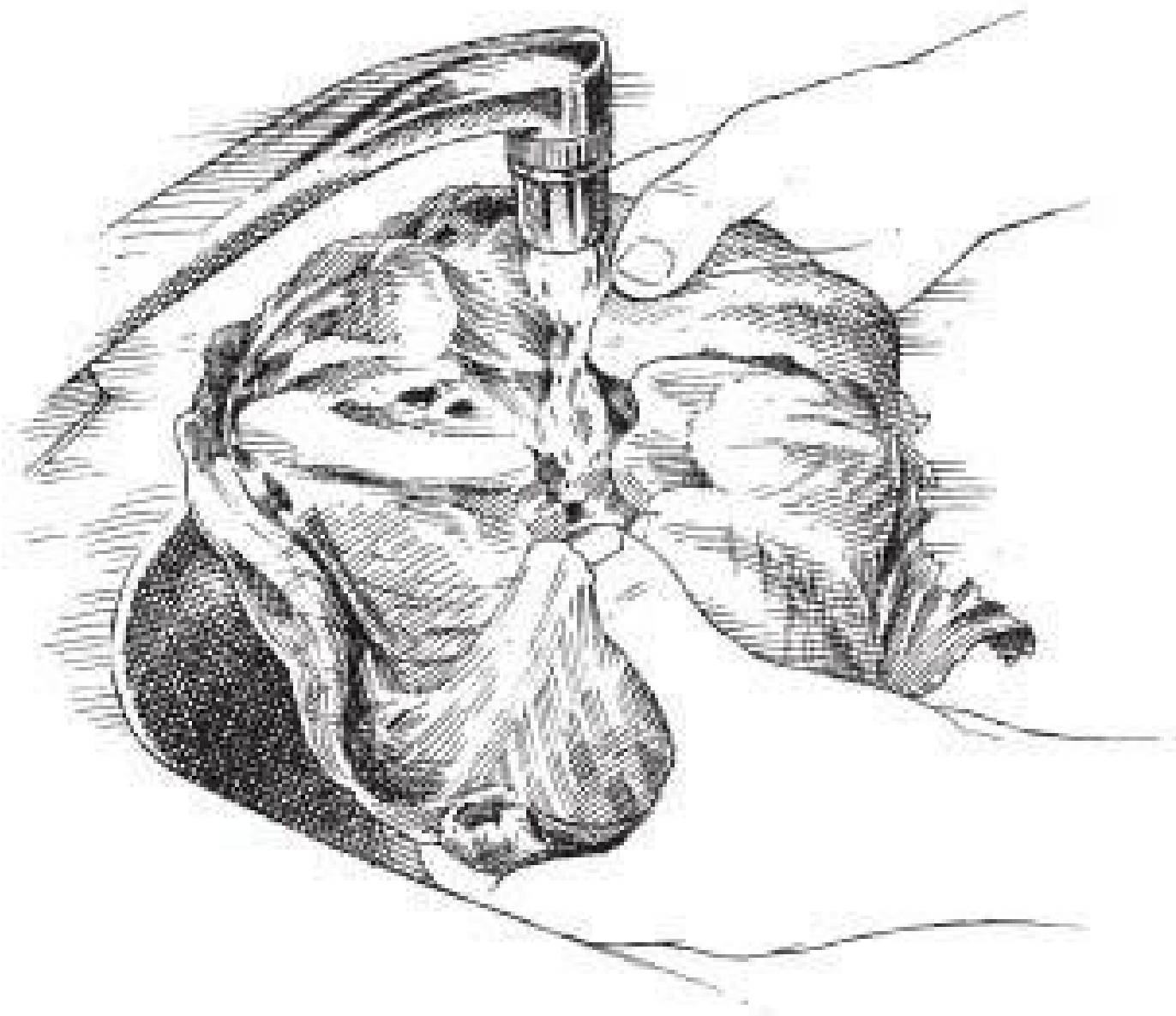

Figure 13.
Fill the hole left by the extracted core with water to rinse soil from the lettuce. Separate leaves, wash again if necessary, and dry.

Caesar Salad

NOTE: ***Caesar dressing must be thick and smooth. Most recipes call for a raw egg, but we found that the dressing was thin with just one egg, and tended to separate when two were added. In the end, we found that coddling an egg (cooking it in the shell in simmering water for 45 seconds) releases its thickening powers and makes the creamiest, thickest Caesar dressing. Coddling does not kill any bacteria that may be present in eggs.*** **See** ***the variation on Caesar Salad with Eggless Dressing if you are concerned about eating raw eggs.***

If you don't own a garlic press, chop the garlic for both the croutons and dressing by hand; sprinkle it with salt and then continue mincing until quite fine. The garlic and anchovies in the dressing are optional, but most modern cooks would find the salad a bit bland without them. This salad yields four first-course servings.

Garlic Croutons

2 large garlic cloves, peeled and put through a garlic press

$^1/_4$ teaspoon salt

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

2 cups $^1/_2$-inch white bread

cubes (from a baguette or country loaf)

Caesar Dressing

1 large egg
3 tablespoons lemon juice
1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
1/4 teaspoon salt
8 grindings black pepper
1 small garlic clove, pressed (1/4 teaspoon)
4 flat anchovy fillets, minced fine (scant 1 1/2 teaspoons)
1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil
2 medium heads romaine

lettuce (large outer leaves removed) or 2 large romaine hearts, washed, dried, and torn into $1^{1}/_{2}$-inch pieces (about 10 cups, lightly packed)

1/3 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. For croutons, preheat oven to 350 degrees. Mix garlic, salt, and oil in small bowl and set aside for 20 minutes. Spread bread cubes out over small baking sheet. Drizzle oil through fine-mesh strainer evenly onto bread and toss to coat. Bake until golden, about 12 minutes. Cool on baking sheet to room

temperature. (Croutons can be stored in airtight container for 1 day.)

2. For dressing, bring several cups of water to boil in small saucepan. Carefully lower whole egg into water and cook for 45 seconds. Remove egg with slotted spoon. When cool enough to handle, crack egg into medium bowl. Add all other dressing ingredients except oil and whisk until smooth. Add oil in slow, steady stream, whisking constantly until smooth. Adjust seasonings. (Dressing may refrigerated in airtight container for 1 day; shake before using.)

3. Place lettuce in large bowl. Drizzle with half of dressing and toss to lightly coat leaves. Sprinkle with cheese, remaining dressing, and croutons and toss to coat evenly. Serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Caesar Salad with Eggless Dressing

Because coddled eggs are not cooked long enough to kill any bacteria that might be present in the eggs, we tested a number of alternatives for people concerned about eating raw eggs. To our surprise, bland and smooth tofu is the

perfect substitute for a coddled egg because it does not have any of the grittiness or sulfurous smell of hard-boiled eggs, the solution suggested in most books.

Substitute 2 ounces soft tofu, drained and crumbled (about 1/3 cup), for egg. Process dressing ingredients except oil in food processor until smooth, about 1 minute. With motor running, add oil in slow, steady stream until smooth.

Grilled Chicken Caesar Salad

This salad serves four as a main course. Brush two boneless, skinless chicken breasts (about $^{3}/_{4}$ pound) with 1

tablespoon olive oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper to taste. Grill or broil, turning once, until cooked through, about 10 minutes. Cool chicken to room temperature and slice crosswise into $^{1}/_{2}$-inch-wide strips. Add chicken to salad along with cheese.

Bitter Green Salad with Citrus and Parmesan Shavings

NOTE: ***The combination of watercress and endive works well with the orange and grapefruit sections, although other greens, especially frisée, arugula, and dandelion, could also be used. Serve this refreshingly tart salad after a relatively high-fat meal like roast pork, duck, or goose. See figures 14–17 for information on sectioning oranges and grapefruits. This salad yields four servings.***

$^1/_2$ small red onion, diced fine

2 tablespoons red wine vinegar

1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil

Salt and ground black pepper

4 cups watercress, washed, stemmed, and dried

2 heads Belgian endive, cut into 2-inch pieces

1 large orange, peeled and sectioned, juice reserved

1 large grapefruit, peeled and sectioned, juice reserved

2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley leaves

12 shavings Parmesan cheese

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Mix onion and vinegar in small bowl

and let stand for 30 minutes. Whisk oil into onion mixture and season with salt and pepper to taste.

2. Mix watercress and endive in medium bowl. Add fruit and juices, onion mixture, and parsley; toss to coat. Divide among four salad plates. Garnish with cheese shavings and serve immediately.

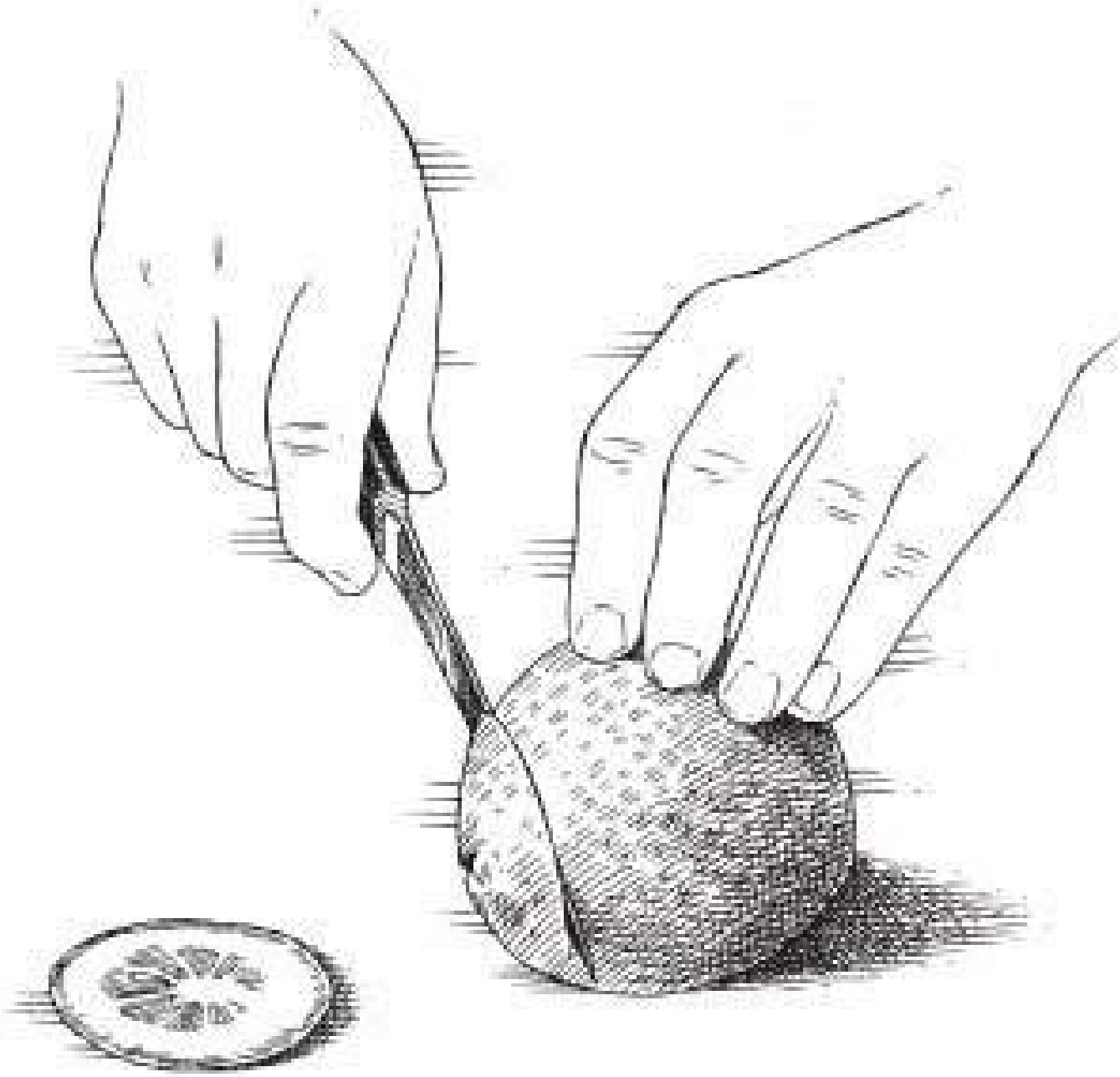

Figure 14.
To separate orange or grapefruit sections from the membranes that divide them, start by slicing a small section, about $^{1}/_{2}$-inch

thick, off the top and bottom ends of the fruit.

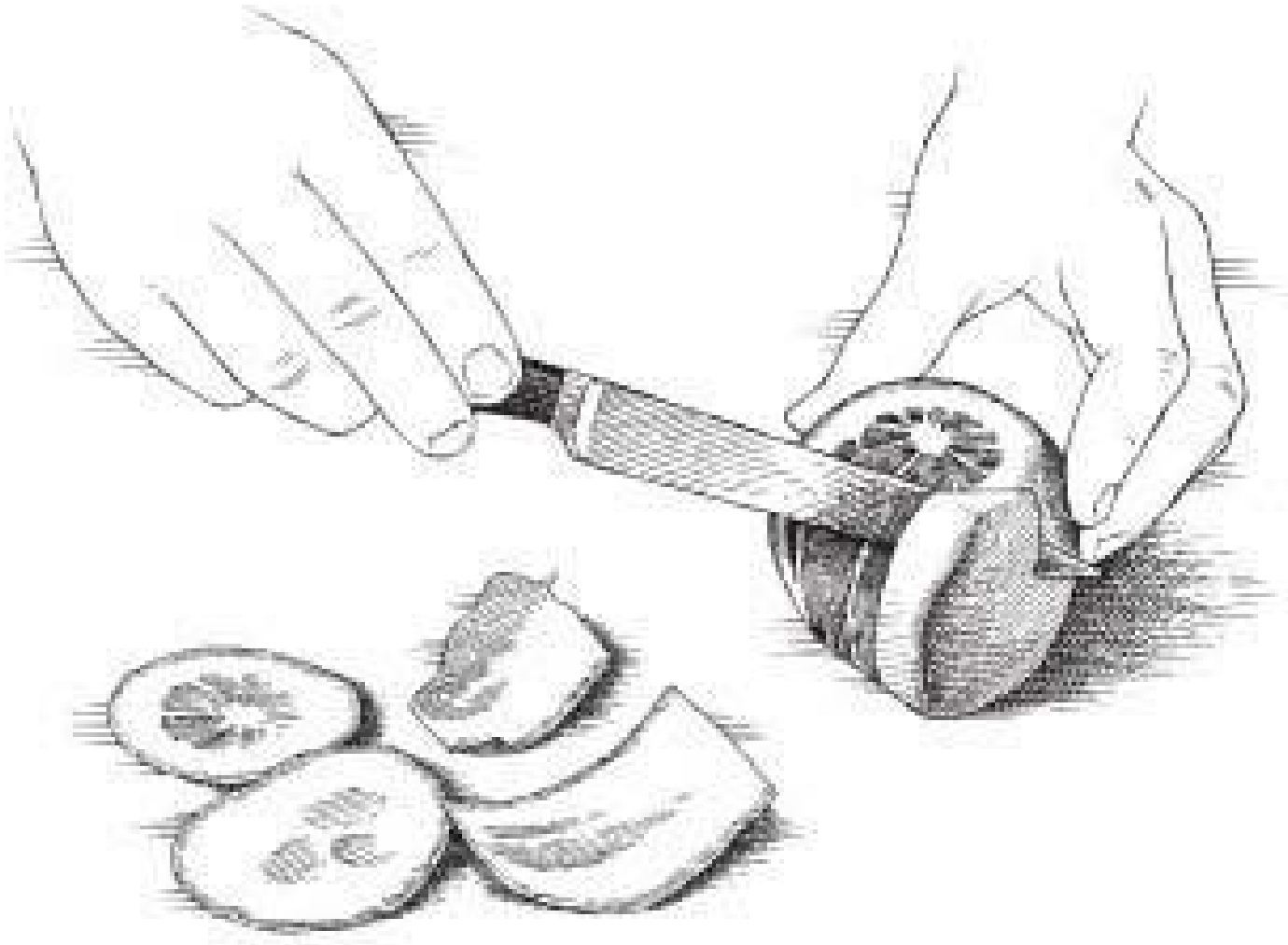

Figure 15.
With the fruit resting flat against a work surface, use a very sharp paring knife to slice off the rind, including all of the bitter white pith. Slide the knife edge from top to bottom of the fruit and try to follow the outline of the fruit

as closely as possible.

Figure 16.
Working over a bowl to catch the juice, slip the blade between a membrane and one section and slice to the center, separating one side of the section.

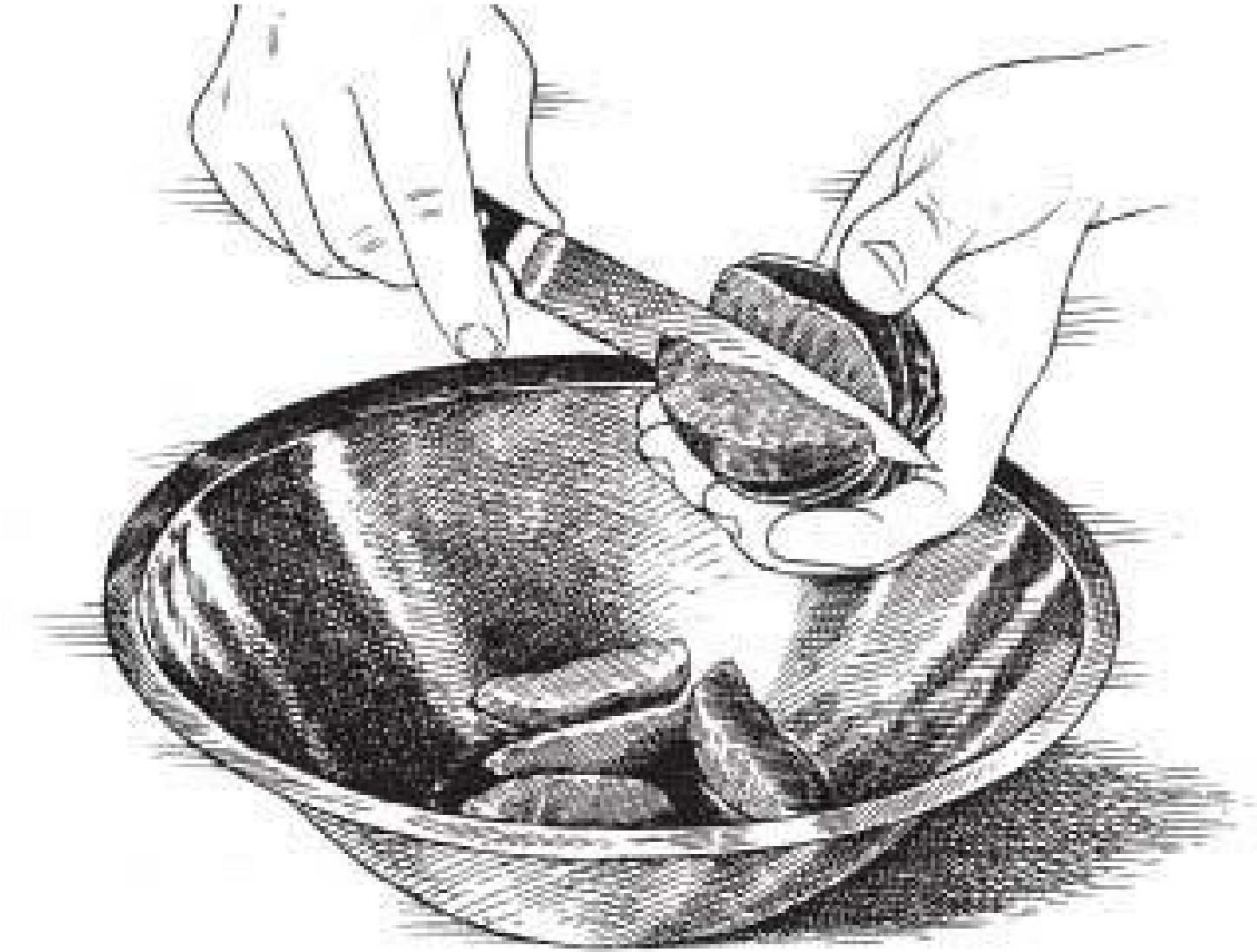

Figure 17.
Turn the blade of the knife so that it is facing out and is lined up along the membrane on the opposite side of the section. Slide the blade from the center out along the membrane to

completely free the section. Continue until all the sections are removed.

Spinach Salad with Mushrooms, Croutons, and Warm Lemon Dressing

NOTE: ***Use a hunk of leftover baguette or country white bread to make the croutons for this recipe. This salad serves four. If you like, add 4 cooked and crumbled strips of bacon along with the croutons.***

$1^1/_2$ pounds flat-leaf spinach, stemmed, washed, dried, and torn into large pieces (about 9 cups)

$^1/_2$ pound fresh cremini or white mushrooms, cleaned,

stems trimmed, and sliced thin

1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil

3 cups stale bread, cut into 3/4-inch cubes

2 medium garlic cloves, minced

1/4 cup lemon juice

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place spinach and mushrooms in large bowl and set aside.

2. Heat oil in large skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add bread and fry, turning several times with slotted spoon, until crisp and golden,

about 3 minutes. Transfer croutons to plate lined with paper towel. Off heat, allow remaining oil to cool for 1 minute. Add garlic and cook until colored, about 2 minutes. Whisk in lemon juice and salt and pepper to taste. Pour warm dressing over salad and toss to coat. Add croutons, toss and serve immediately.

Watercress Salad with Pears, Walnuts, and Gorgonzola

NOTE: ***Pears, walnuts, and blue cheese are a classic combination, especially over bitter greens like watercress. Arugula and Stilton can stand in for the watercress and Gorgonzola. Toast the walnuts in a dry skillet over medium heat, shaking the pan occasionally, until fragrant, about 5 minutes. This salad serves four as an appetizer or after the main course in place of or before dessert.***

2 large, ripe but firm red pears, each halved, cored, and

cut into 12 wedges

1 tablespoon lemon juice

6 cups arugula, stemmed, washed, and dried

1/2 cup Walnut Vinaigrette (*see* Mediterranean Vinaigrette)

3 ounces Gorgonzola cheese, crumbled

1/2 cup walnuts, toasted and chopped coarse

Ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Toss pear wedges with lemon juice in medium bowl; set aside.

2. Toss arugula with vinaigrette. Divide dressed greens among four salad plates. Arrange pears over greens, sprinkle with cheese, walnuts, and a generous grind of pepper. Serve immediately.

VEGETABLE SALADS

VEGETABLE SALADS CAN BE DIVIDED INTO TWO classes based on the dressing. Creamy salads dressed with mayonnaise, such as coleslaw and potato salad, are perfect accompaniments to warm-weather meals because they can be refrigerated. Cucumber salads with a creamy yogurt dressing are related.

A second type of vegetable salad is dressed with vinaigrette. These dishes are generally best served at room temperature, when flavors are brightest. Also, unlike creamy mayonnaise-based

salads, many vegetable salads that have been dressed with vinaigrette should be served immediately. This is especially true of green vegetables, which will lose their bright color and become soggy rather quickly.

Creamy Coleslaw

NOTE: ***Salting the cabbage and carrots draws off excess water that can otherwise cause the dressing to become watery. To keep the acidity in check, we prefer rice wine vinegar, which is less sour than other vinegars. If you like caraway or celery seed in your coleslaw, add $^1/_4$ teaspoon of either with the mayonnaise and vinegar. The cabbage can be prepared a day in advance, but dress it close to serving time. Serves four.***

1 pound (about $^1/_2$ medium head) red or green cabbage, shredded fine or chopped to

yield 6 cups (*see* figures 18–23)

1 large carrot, peeled and grated

2 teaspoons kosher salt or 1 teaspoon table salt

1/2 small onion, minced

1/2 cup Homemade Mayonnaise (*see* Homemade Mayonnaise) or store-bought

2 tablespoons rice wine vinegar

Ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Toss cabbage, carrots, and salt in colander set over medium bowl. Let stand until cabbage wilts, at least 1 hour

and up to 4 hours.

2. Dump wilted cabbage and carrots into bowl. Rinse thoroughly in cold water (ice water if serving slaw immediately). Pour vegetables back into colander, pressing, but not squeezing on them to drain. Pat dry with paper towels. (Vegetables can be refrigerated in zipper-lock plastic bag overnight.)

3. Pour vegetables into bowl. Add onion, mayonnaise, and vinegar and toss to coat. Season with pepper to taste. Cover and refrigerate until ready to serve.

VARIATIONS:

Sweet-and-Sour Coleslaw

Toss cabbage, carrot, and salt with $^1/_2$ cup sugar and let stand until wilted. Do not rinse vegetables. Replace onion and mayonnaise with $^1/_4$ teaspoon celery seeds and 6 tablespoons vegetable oil. Increase vinegar to $^1/_4$ cup. (Can be covered and refrigerated for 5 days.)

Curried Coleslaw with Apples and Raisins

Follow Sweet-and-Sour variation above, adding 1 teaspoon curry powder, 1 peeled and diced apple, and $^1/_4$ cup

raisins along with oil and vinegar.

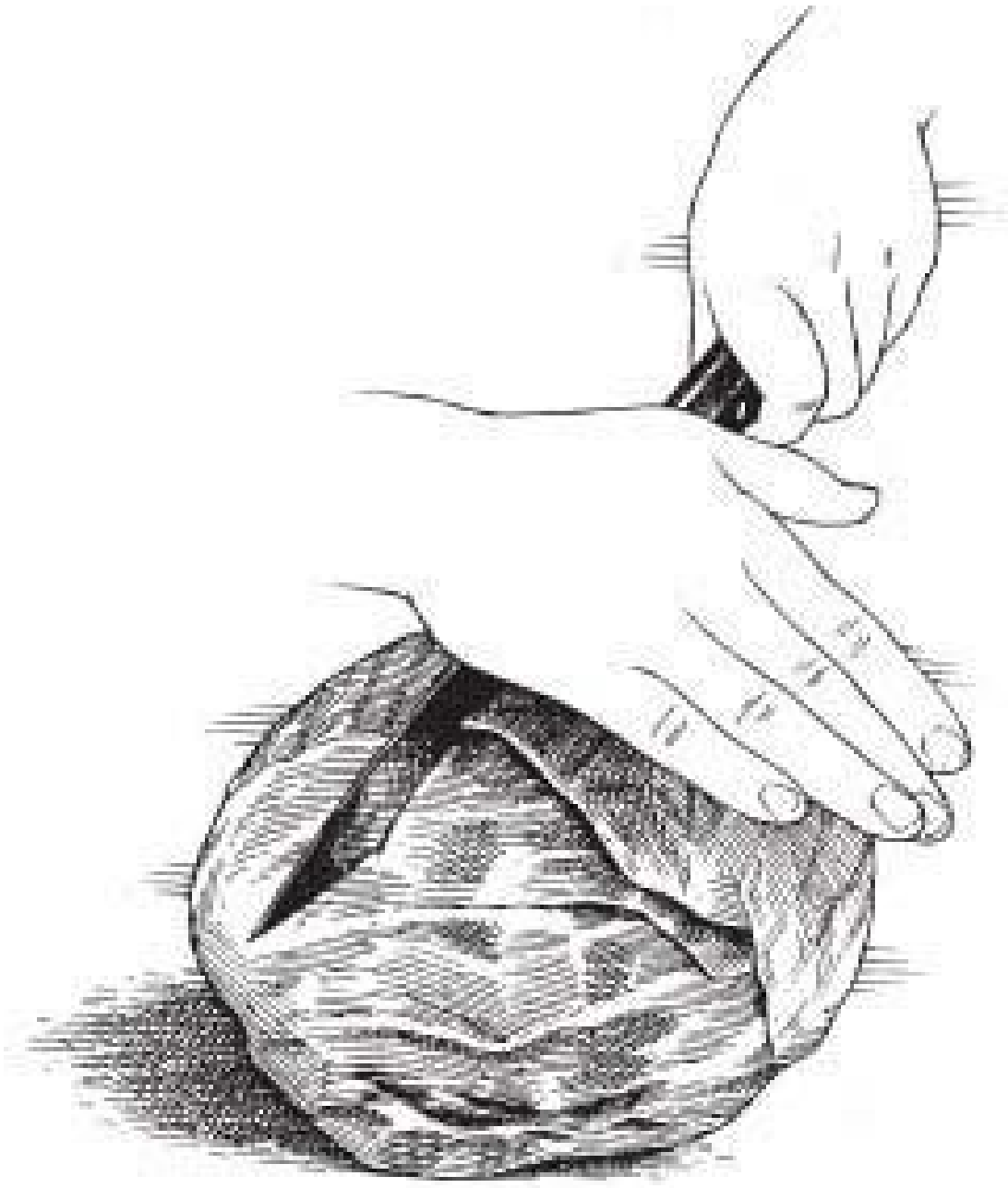

Figure 18.
It can be hard to figure out how to cut a large cabbage. We start by placing the heel of the palm on the back of the knife, a little in

front on the center, and applying pressure toward the tip of the knife as it goes into the cabbage.

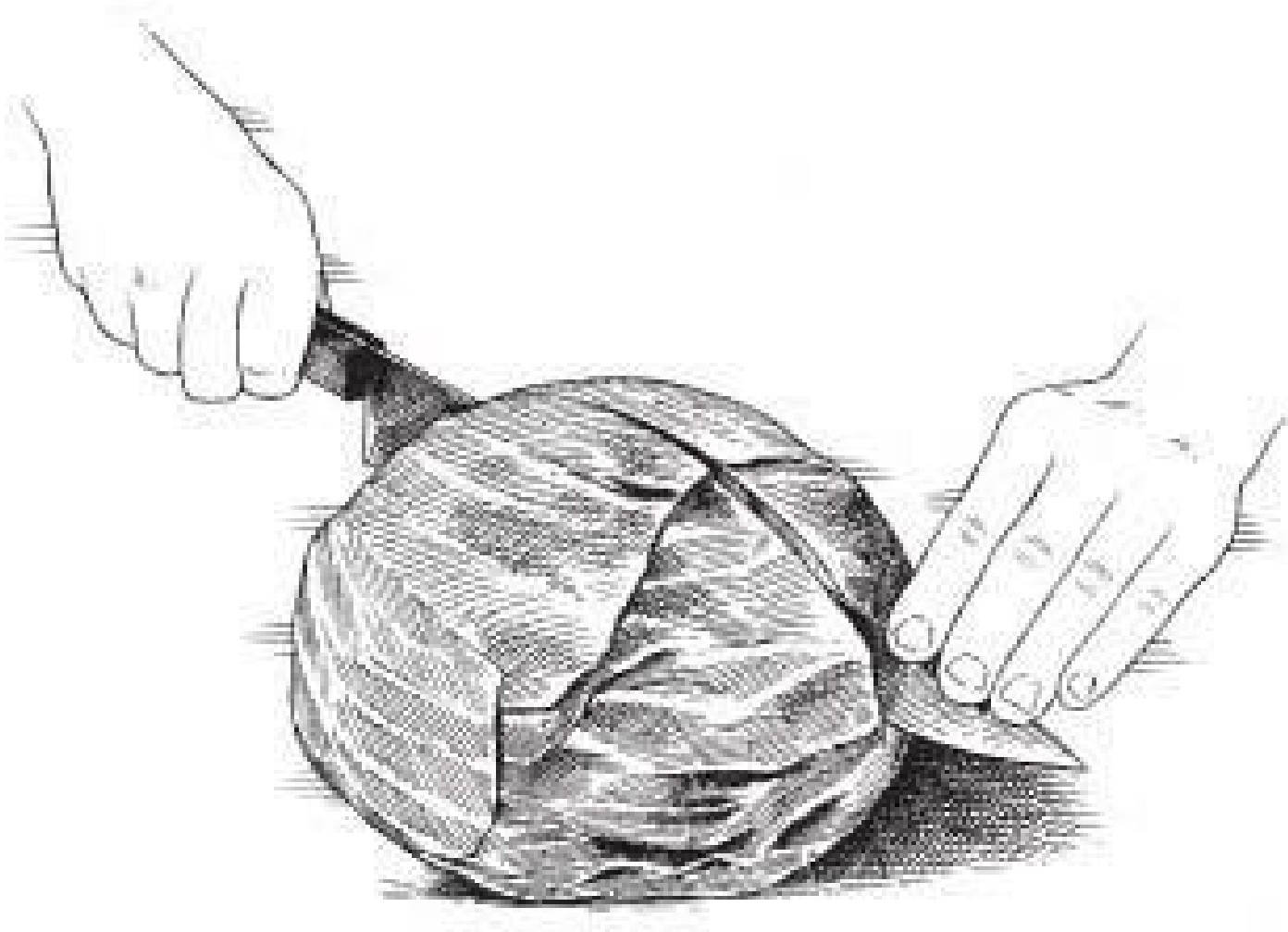

Figure 19.
Once the blade is completely below the top of the cabbage, move your fingers to the top of the front section of the knife and apply pressure to finish cutting.

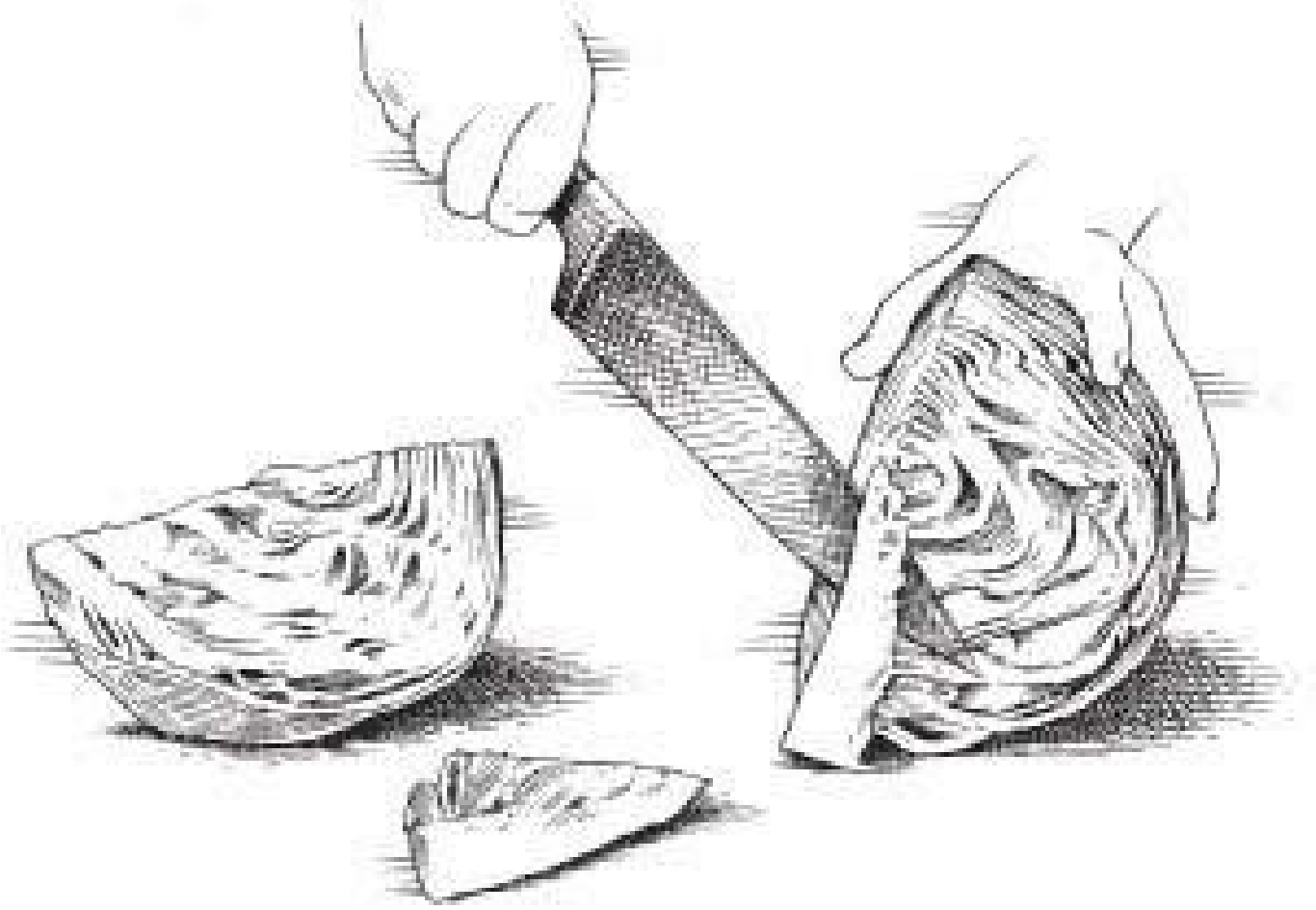

Figure 20.
For slicing cabbage by hand, use the following method to guarantee pieces that are the correct length. Cut the cabbage into quarters and remove the piece of the core attached to each quarter.

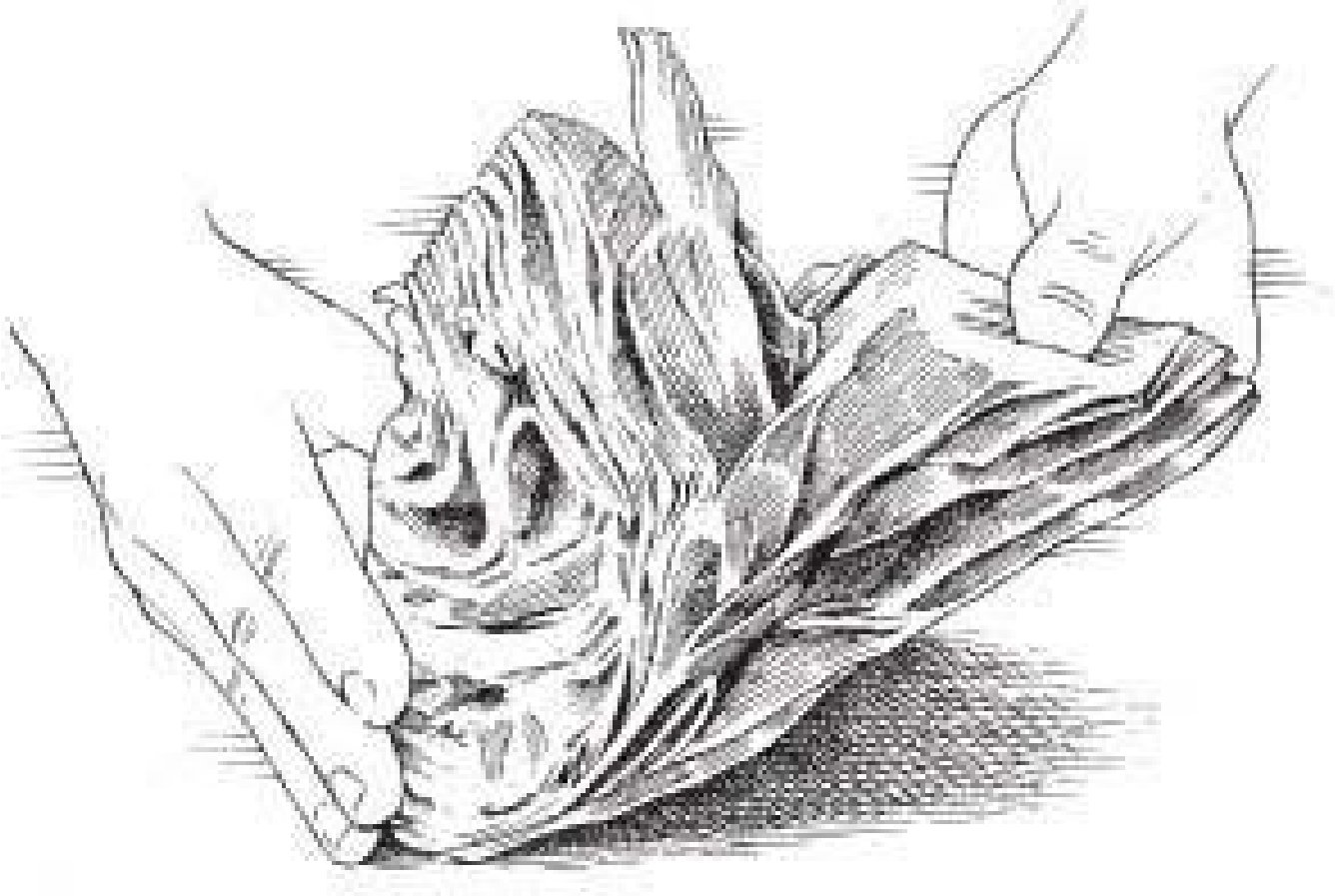

Figure 21.
Separate the cabbage quarters into stacks of leaves that flatten when pressed lightly.

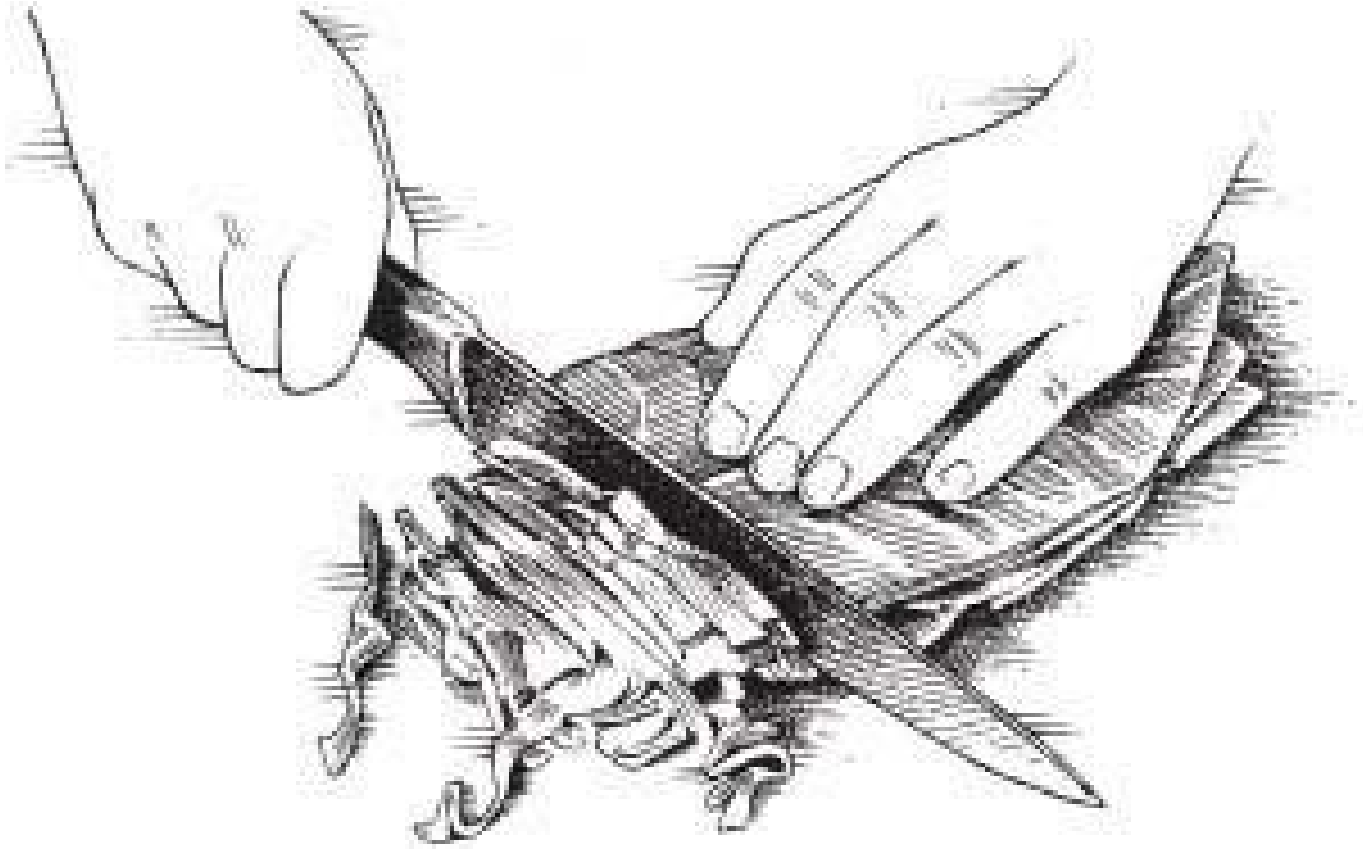

Figure 22.
Use a chef's knife to cut each stack of cabbage diagonally (this ensures long pieces) into thin shreds. To chop cabbage, turn the pile of shredded cabbage crosswise, then cut the shreds into fine dice.

Figure 23.
For larger jobs, a food processor fitted with the shredding disk makes quick work of cabbage.

Follow figures 18–21, rolling stacked leaves crosswise to fit them into the feed tube.

Boiled Potatoes for Salad

NOTE: ***Potato salad starts with boiled potatoes. In our testing, we found that low-starch potatoes such as Red Bliss provide the sturdy texture needed to stand up to dressing. Russet or baking potatoes will fall apart and produce a sloppy-looking salad. There's no need to salt the water for cooking the potatoes—in our tests we found that it does not penetrate. And make sure to cook the potatoes with their skins on to prevent them from becoming water-logged. Cool the potatoes slightly, peel if desired, and then dress.***

2 pounds Red Bliss or new

potatoes (about 6 medium or 18 new), rinsed and scrubbed

::INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place potatoes in 4-to 6-quart pot and cover with water. Bring to boil, cover, and simmer, stirring once or twice to ensure even cooking, until thin-bladed knife or metal cake tester inserted into a potato can be removed with no resistance, 25 to 30 minutes for medium potatoes and 15 to 20 minutes for new potatoes.

2. Drain and cool potatoes slightly. Peel if desired. Cut potatoes (use serrated knife if they have skins) as directed in

following recipes while still warm, rinsing knife occasionally in warm water to remove gumminess. Proceed as directed in one of the following recipes.

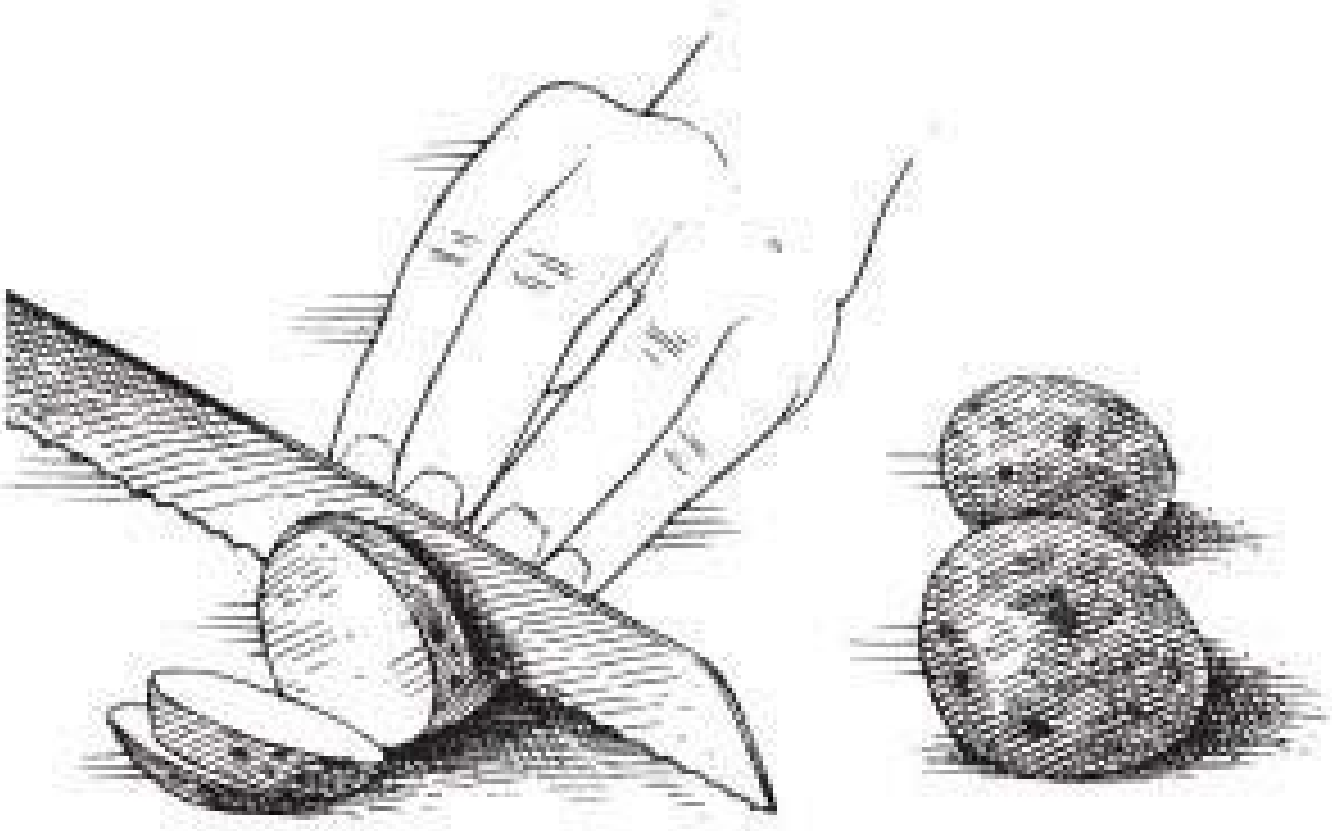

Figure 24.
If you would like to keep the peel on the potatoes, use a serrated knife to slice the potatoes. Other knives will cause the skin to rip and shred.

American-Style Potato Salad with Eggs and Sweet Pickles

NOTE: ***Warm potatoes absorb vinegar best so sprinkle vinegar over them when still warm. Use sweet pickle, not relish for the best results in this recipe. Serves six to eight.***

1 recipe Boiled Potatoes for Salad (*see* Boiled Potatoes for Salad), cut into $^{3}/_{4}$-inch cubes

2 tablespoons red wine vinegar

$^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon salt

$^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon ground black pepper

3 hard-boiled eggs, peeled and cut into small dice

2 large scallions, sliced thin

1 small celery stalk, cut into small dice

1/4 cup sweet pickle, cut into small dice

1/2 cup Homemade Mayonnaise (*see* Homemade Mayonnaise) or store-bought

2 tablespoons Dijon-style mustard

1/4 cup minced fresh parsley leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Layer warm potato cubes in medium

bowl, sprinkling with vinegar, salt, and pepper as you go. Refrigerate while preparing remaining ingredients.

2. Mix in remaining ingredients and refrigerate until ready to serve, up to 1 day.

French-Style Potato Salad with Tarragon Vinaigrette

NOTE: ***If fresh tarragon is not available, increase the parsley to three tablespoons and use tarragon vinegar in place of the white wine vinegar. Serves six.***

1 recipe Boiled Potatoes for Salad (*see* Boiled Potatoes for Salad), cut into $^1/_4$-inch-thick slices

2 tablespoons white wine vinegar

$^1/_4$ teaspoon salt

$^1/_4$ teaspoon ground black

pepper

$^2/_3$ cup Tarragon-Mustard Vinaigrette (*see* Tarragon-Mustard Vinaigrette)

1 medium shallot, minced

2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Layer warm potato slices in medium bowl, sprinkling with vinegar and salt and pepper as you go. Let stand at room temperature while preparing dressing.

2. Whisk dressing and shallot together in small bowl. Pour over potatoes and toss lightly to coat. Refrigerate salad until

ready to serve, up to 1 day. Bring to room temperature, stir in parsley, and serve.

German-Style Potato Salad with Bacon and Balsamic Vinegar

NOTE: ***Smaller new potatoes are more attractive in this recipe. The slices are smaller and tend not to break up as much as bigger potatoes do. Cider vinegar is more traditional, but we like the sweeter, fuller flavor of the balsamic vinegar. Serves six.***

1 recipe Boiled Potatoes for Salad (*see* Boiled Potatoes for Salad), cut into $^1/_4$-inch-thick slices

$^1/_4$ cup balsamic or cider

vinegar

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper

4–5 slices bacon (about 4 ounces), cut crosswise into 1/4-inch strips

1 medium onion, diced

2 tablespoons vegetable oil, if needed

1/2 cup beef broth

1/4 cup minced fresh parsley leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Layer warm potato slices in medium

bowl, sprinkling with 2 tablespoons vinegar and salt and pepper as you go. Let stand at room temperature while preparing dressing.

2. Fry bacon in medium skillet over medium heat until brown and crisp, 7 to 10 minutes. Transfer bacon with slotted spoon to bowl of potatoes. Add onion to bacon drippings and sauté until softened, 4 to 5 minutes. If necessary, add oil to yield 2 tablespoons unabsorbed fat.

3. Add beef broth and bring to boil. Stir in remaining 2 tablespoons vinegar. Remove from heat and pour mixture over

potatoes. Add parsley and toss gently to coat. Serve warm or tepid. (Salad may be covered and set aside at room temperature for several hours.)

Salted Cucumbers for Salad

NOTE: ***Cucumbers are so watery that they will dilute dressings unless salted. In our tests, we found that weighting the cucumbers maximizes the amount of the liquid they shed, as does time, at least up to a point. Cucumbers should be weighted for at least an hour, but after three hours they will not yield any additional liquid. Do not use more salt than directed below; even if rinsed off the cucumbers will still taste too salty.***

3 medium cucumbers (about $1^1/_2$ pounds), peeled, halved lengthwise, seeded, and cut on

the diagonal $^{1}/_{4}$-inch thick (*see* figures 25 and 26)

1 tablespoon salt

INSTRUCTIONS:

Toss cucumbers with salt in strainer or colander set over bowl. Weight with water-filled, gallon-sized zipper-lock freezer bag, sealed tight (*see* figure 27). Drain for at least 1 hour, and up to 3 hours. Transfer cucumber to medium bowl and reserve for future use.

Yogurt Mint Cucumber Salad

NOTE: ***Known as raita, this creamy cucumber salad is traditionally served with curry as a cooling contrast. Serves four.***

1 cup plain low-fat yogurt
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1/4 cup minced fresh mint leaves
2 small garlic cloves, minced
Salt and ground black pepper
1 recipe Salted Cucumbers for Salad (*see* Salted Cucumbers for Salad)

INSTRUCTIONS:

Whisk yogurt, oil, mint, garlic, and salt and pepper to taste in medium bowl. Add cucumbers and toss to coat. Serve chilled.

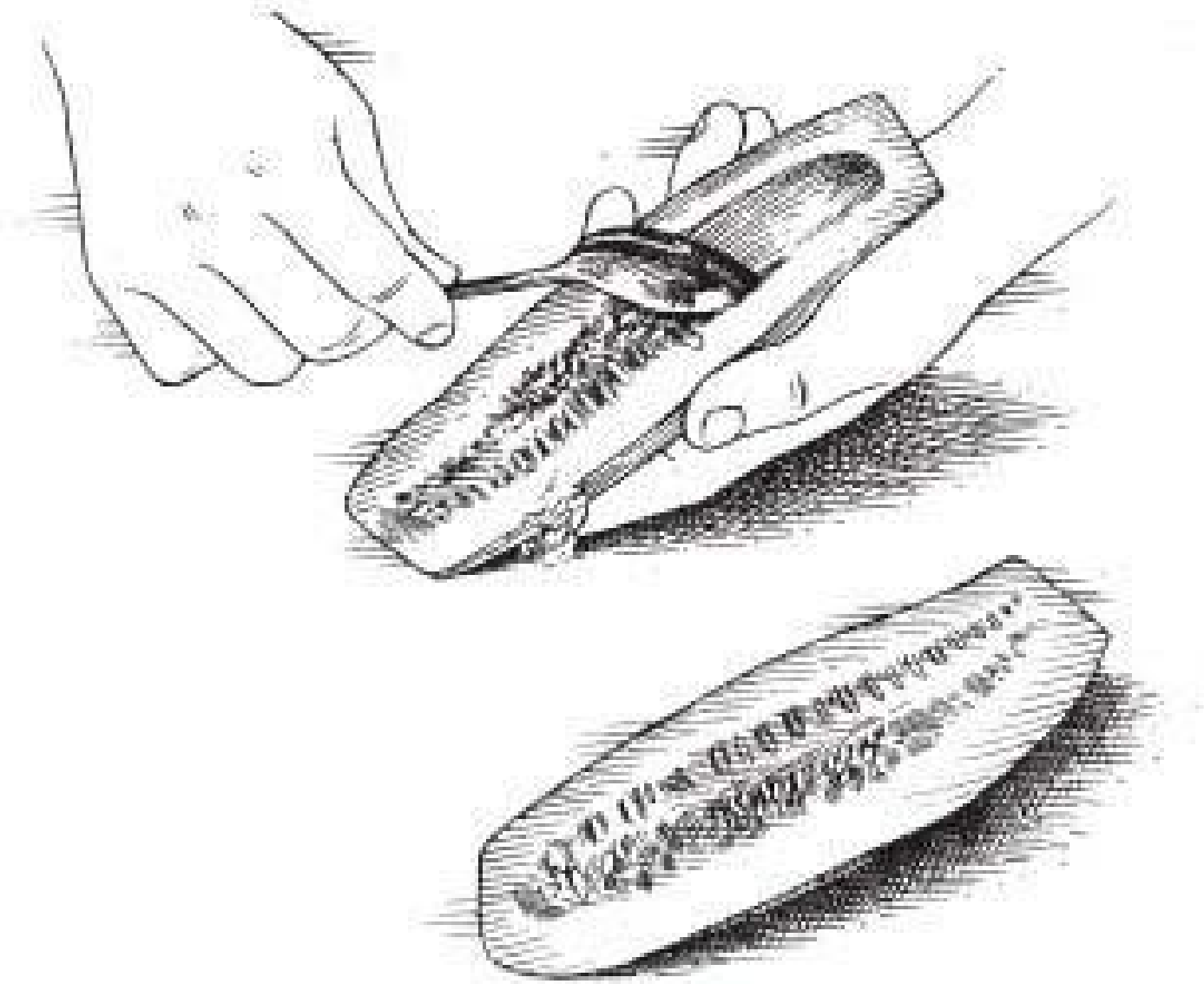

Figure 25.
Use a small spoon to remove the seeds and surrounding liquid from each cucumber half.

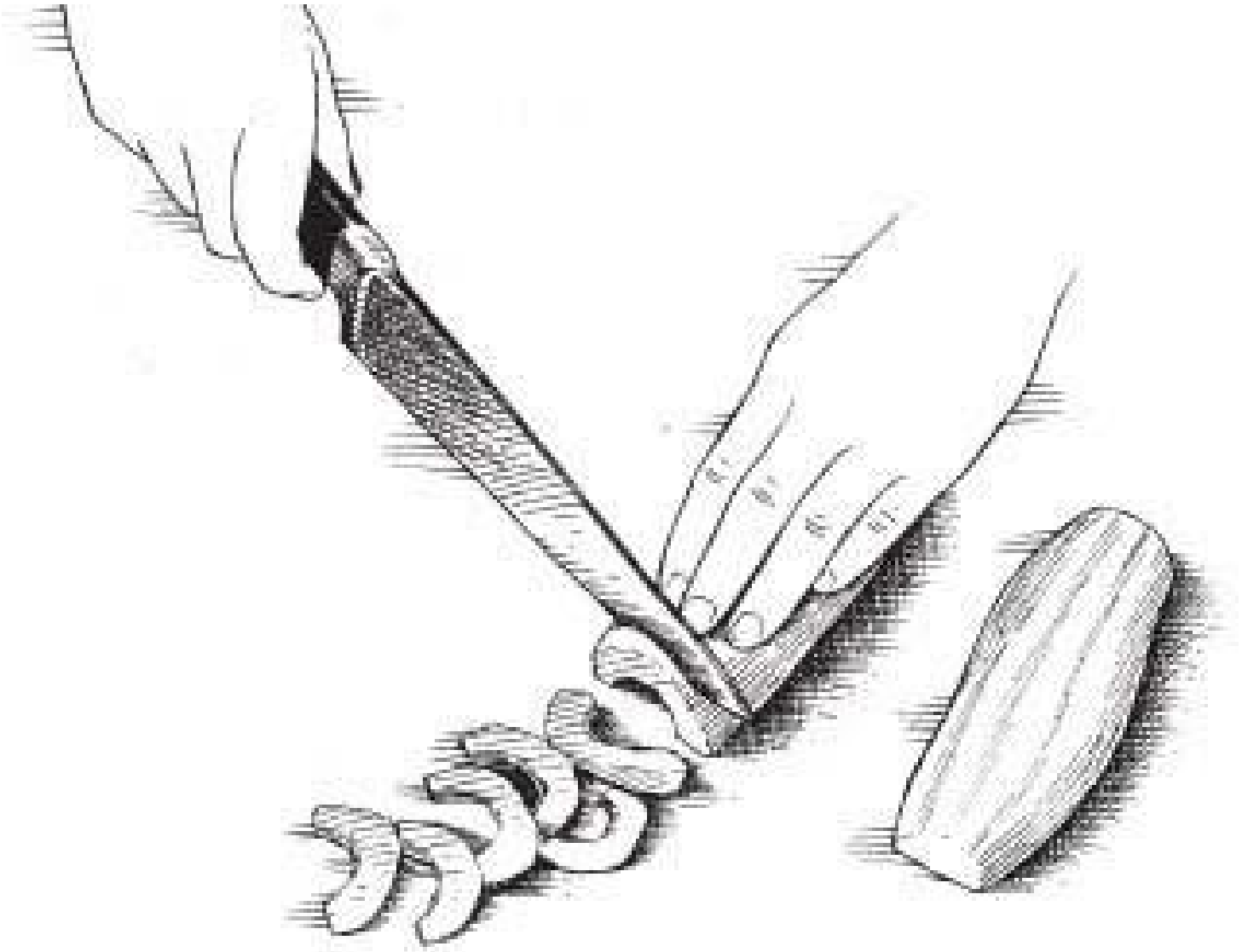

Figure 26.
Lay halves flat side down on a work surface and slice on the diagonal into $^{1}/_{4}$-inch-thick pieces.

Figure 27.
Weight the salted cucumber to help extract the liquid. To apply the weight evenly, fill a gallon-size plastic bag with water and seal tightly. Place the bag over

the cucumbers in the colander.

Sesame-Lemon Cucumber Salad

NOTE: ***Toast sesame seeds in dry skillet set over medium heat until fragrant and golden, 4 to 5 minutes. The Asian flavors in the dressing make this salad a natural accompaniment to stir-fries. Serves four.***

1/4 cup rice wine vinegar
1 tablespoon lemon juice
2 tablespoons Asian sesame oil
2 teaspoons sugar
1/8 teaspoon dried red pepper flakes, or to taste
1 tablespoon sesame seeds,

toasted

1 recipe Salted Cucumbers for Salad (*see* Salted Cucumbers for Salad)

INSTRUCTIONS:

Whisk all ingredients except cucumbers together in medium bowl. Add cucumbers and toss to coat. Serve chilled or at room temperature.

Asparagus Vinaigrette with Sieved Egg and Pickled Onions

NOTE: ***The pickled pink onions are an excellent contrast to the creamy hard-boiled eggs and vinaigrette. Only $^1/_4$ cup of pickled onions are needed for this salad. Use the remaining pickled onions in other salads or on sandwiches. For a simpler version of this salad, use asparagus, hard-boiled egg, and $^1/_2$ cup Tarragon-Mustard Vinaigrette*** **(see *Tarragon-Mustard Vinaigrette*). *Or try this salad with $1^1/_2$ pounds of trimmed and steamed***

leeks.

1/2 cup white wine vinegar, plus 1 tablespoon for vinaigrette

1/2 teaspoon sugar

Salt and ground black pepper

1 small red onion, sliced thin and separated into rings

1/3 cup minced fresh parsley leaves

2 teaspoons minced fresh tarragon leaves

1 tablespoon drained capers

1 strip zest and 1 tablespoon juice from 1 small orange; zest sliced thin and blanched 10

seconds, then minced

1/2 teaspoon Dijon-style mustard

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

1 1/2 pounds asparagus, tough ends snapped off

1 hard-boiled egg, peeled, white diced fine, yolk pushed through a sieve

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Mix 1/2 cup vinegar, sugar, 1/2 teaspoon salt, and 1/4 teaspoon pepper in nonreactive bowl. Place onion slices in colander in sink and pour boiling water over them. Add warm onions to vinegar

mixture, adding enough cold water to cover. Let stand until onions are pink, about 15 minutes. Set aside.

2. Put parsley, tarragon, capers, and orange zest in small bowl with pinch of salt; stir in juice and remaining 1 tablespoon vinegar. Whisk in mustard, then slowly whisk in oil. Adjust seasonings and set aside.

3. Bring 1 inch water to boil in soup kettle. Put asparagus in steamer basket, then carefully place basket in kettle. Cover and steam until asparagus spears bend slightly when picked up, 4 to 5

minutes. Transfer asparagus to clean towel to dry.

4. Arrange asparagus on platter. Spoon vinaigrette over spears. Lift $^{1}/_{4}$ cup or so of onion rings from liquid and scatter over asparagus. Sprinkle diced egg white and sieved yolk over asparagus and serve immediately.

GRAIN & BEAN SALADS

SALADS MADE FROM PASTA, BULGUR, RICE, BREAD, and legumes are increasingly popular, especially during the warm weather. These salads are fairly hearty and can be served as side dishes or as light meals or lunches.

We have never been fans of mayonnaise-based macaroni salads. Pasta is too delicate to be sauced with something so heavy and creamy, especially if the pasta is refrigerated and eaten cold. But there are other styles of pasta salad that can be refreshing and

delicious. Raw tomato sauces, vinaigrettes, and pesto are excellent dressings for pasta salads and all three types are discussed in this chapter.

Bread Salad with Tomatoes, Herbs, and Red Onions

NOTE: ***Sturdy Italian or coarse peasant bread is essential for this recipe, called panzanella in Italian. Serves four.***

1 pound day-old bread, crusts removed and torn into 1-inch cubes (about 6 cups)

1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil

3 tablespoons red wine vinegar

2 large tomatoes, cored, seeded, and chopped

1/2 red onion, sliced paper-thin

2 tablespoons torn fresh basil or mint leaves

2 teaspoons whole fresh oregano leaves

1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley leaves

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place bread cubes in shallow bowl. Mix oil, vinegar, tomatoes, onion, and half of herbs in medium bowl. Let stand for 10 minutes to develop flavors and then add to bread, along with remaining herbs, and mix well. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

2. If bread still seems dry, sprinkle with 1 to 2 tablespoons water. Serve. (If very sturdy bread is used, salad can be covered and set aside for up to 2 hours.)

Pasta Salad with Raw Tomato Sauce

NOTE: ***Raw tomatoes make an excellent base for pasta salads. The heat from the pasta slightly cooks diced tomatoes (as well as any raw garlic) but does not loosen the skins, which therefore do not need to be removed. The seeds, however, make pasta salad too watery and should be removed.***

If you like, prepare the tomatoes several hours in advance but wait to add the seasonings. The garlic will become too pungent and the salt will draw precious juices out of the

tomatoes if the sauce marinates for more than half an hour or so.

Choose a short, stubby pasta that can trap bits of the sauce. Fusilli is an especially good choice, as is farfalle and orecchiette. Serves six to eight as a side dish. Do not refrigerate this salad; the cold will damage the flavor and texture of the tomatoes.

2 pounds ripe tomatoes

$^1/_4$ cup extra-virgin olive oil

1 garlic clove, minced (about 1 teaspoon)

2 tablespoons minced fresh basil leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

1 pound pasta (*see* note above)

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Core and halve tomatoes crosswise. Use your fingers to push out seeds and surrounding gelatinous material. Cut seeded tomatoes into $^{1}/_{2}$-inch dice and place in bowl large enough to hold cooked pasta. (Tomatoes can be covered and set aside for several hours.)

2. Bring 4 quarts of water to boil for cooking pasta. Add oil, garlic, basil, $^{3}/_{4}$ teaspoon salt, and several grindings of pepper to tomatoes and mix well. Add pasta and 1 tablespoon salt to boiling water and cook pasta until al dente.

Drain well and immediately toss with tomato sauce. Cool to room temperature. Serve or cover with plastic and set aside for up to 4 hours.

VARIATIONS:

Pasta Salad with Raw Tomatoes, Olives, and Capers

Add 1/3 cup pitted, sliced Kalamata olives, 2 tablespoons drained capers, and $^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon hot red pepper flakes (optional) along with oil.

Pasta Salad with Raw

Tomatoes and Mozzarella

Toss 6 ounces shredded fresh mozzarella cheese (about $1^{1}/_{2}$ cups) with hot drained pasta and tomato sauce.

Pasta Salad with Broccoli and Olives

NOTE: ***This style of pasta salad, common in delis and gourmet stores, uses a vinaigrette to dress noodles. Often, finely diced or shredded vegetables are added. The problem with most of these pasta salads is the acid. Without any lemon or vinegar, the pasta salad tastes flat. But the acid often causes the pasta to soften and dulls the color and flavor of many vegetables, especially green ones. The solution is to use lemon juice, which is less acidic than vinegar, and to let the vegetables cool to room***

temperature to set their color before combining them with the hot pasta and dressing.

Choose a short, stubby pasta that can trap pieces of vegetable such as fusilli, farfalle, orecchiette, or shells. Serves six to eight as a side dish.

1 large bunch broccoli (about $1^1/_2$ pounds), stalks discarded and florets cut into small bite-sized pieces (about 5 cups)

Salt

2 tablespoons lemon juice

$^1/_2$ teaspoon hot red pepper flakes

6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

1 pound pasta

12 large black olives, pitted and chopped

12 large fresh basil leaves, shredded

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Bring several quarts of water to boil for cooking broccoli. Add broccoli and salt to taste and cook until crisp-tender, about 2 minutes. Drain and cool to room temperature.

2. Whisk lemon juice, $^{3}/_{4}$ teaspoon salt, and hot red pepper flakes together in bowl large enough to hold cooked pasta. Whisk in oil until dressing is emulsified.

3. Bring 4 quarts of water to boil for cooking pasta. Add pasta and 1 tablespoon salt to boiling water and cook pasta until al dente. Drain well. Rewhisk dressing to emulsify and immediately toss with hot pasta, broccoli, olives, and basil. Cool to room temperature and serve. (Pasta salad can be refrigerated for 1 day. Bring to room temperature before serving.)

VARIATION:

Pasta Salad with Grilled Fennel and Red Onions

Omit broccoli and replace hot red

pepper flakes with black pepper to taste and olives with 8 drained and slivered sun-dried tomatoes packed in oil. Trim 1 large fennel bulb and cut through base into $^1/_2$-inch-thick wedges. Peel and cut 2 medium red onions crosswise into $^1/_2$-inch-thick rounds. Brush vegetables with $1^1/_2$ tablespoons olive oil and sprinkle with salt to taste. Grill, turning once, until both sides are marked with dark grill marks, about 15 minutes. Cool vegetables and cut into thin strips. Add to hot pasta and vinaigrette along with sun-dried tomatoes and basil.

Pasta Salad with Pesto

NOTE: ***Pesto is a natural sauce for pasta salad because of its concentrated flavor. But hot pasta can turn pesto sauce an unappealing greenish brown, a problem that becomes even more noticeable if the salad is set aside for some time before serving. In our testing, we found that adding some parsley to pesto helps keep its color green without affecting the flavor.***

If you like, add cooked and cooled vegetables to this recipe. Broccoli florets are especially good, as are tomatoes. About three cups of cooked vegetables are enough for a pound of

pasta. This is one pasta salad that can tolerate the addition of meat. If you like, add two cups of shredded cooked chicken. Fusilli is our first choice when saucing with pesto. Serves six to eight as a side dish.

3 medium garlic cloves, threaded on a skewer

2 cups fresh packed basil leaves

1/4 cup fresh flat Italian parsley leaves

1/4 cup pine nuts, toasted

1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil

Salt

1/4 cup finely grated Parmesan

cheese

1 pound pasta

::INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Bring small saucepan of water to boil. Lower skewered garlic into water; boil until garlic is partially blanched, about 45 seconds. Immediately run cold water over garlic to stop the cooking. Remove from skewer; peel and mince.

2. Place basil and parsley in heavy-duty, quart-size, zipper-lock plastic bag; pound with flat side of meat pounder until all leaves are bruised.

3. Place garlic, herbs, nuts, oil, and pinch of salt in bowl of food processor fitted with steel blade; process until smooth, stopping as necessary to scrape down bowl with flexible spatula.

4. Transfer mixture to bowl large enough to hold cooked pasta, stir in cheese, and adjust salt. Cover and set aside.

5. Bring 4 quarts of water to boil for cooking pasta. Add pasta and 1 tablespoon salt to boiling water and cook pasta until al dente. Drain well. Toss with pesto. Cool to room temperature and serve. (Pasta salad can

be refrigerated for 1 day. Bring to room temperature before serving.)

Tabbooleh

NOTE: ***As is common in traditional Arab recipes, this grain salad contains more parsley than bulgur. We prefer a ratio of five parts parsley to three or four parts wheat, but you may adjust as you like. Soaking the bulgur in lemon juice (as opposed to water or vinaigrette) gives it a fresh, intense flavor without the added heaviness associated with the oil. Fine-grain bulgur is our first choice for this recipe but medium-grain is an acceptable substitute. Coarse bulgur must be cooked before it is eaten and cannot be used in this recipe. This salad serves four to six as a side dish.***

1/2 cup fine-grain bulgur wheat, rinsed and drained

1/3 cup lemon juice

1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil

Salt

1/8 teaspoon cayenne or Middle Eastern red pepper, optional

2 cups minced fresh parsley leaves

2 medium tomatoes, cored, halved, seeded, and cut into very small dice

4 medium scallions, green and white parts, minced

2 tablespoons minced fresh

mint leaves or 1 rounded teaspoon dried mint

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Mix bulgur with $^{1}/_{4}$ cup lemon juice in medium bowl. Set aside, stirring occasionally, until grains are tender and fluffy, 20 to 40 minutes.

2. Whisk remaining lemon juice, oil, salt to taste, and cayenne, if using, together in small bowl. Add parsley, tomatoes, scallions, and mint to bulgur. Add dressing and toss to combine. Cover and refrigerate to let flavors blend, at least 1 hour and no more than 4 hours. Warm slightly at room temperature before

serving.

French Lentil Salad with Caraway and Radish

NOTE: ***French green lentils take longer to cook than the standard brown variety but keep their shape better, making them the best choice for salads. Ignore warnings about not adding salt to legumes, especially lentils, as they cook. Although the salt may slightly slow down water absorption and add 5 or 10 minutes to the cooking time, it develops and strengthens the flavor of the lentils and should be added at the start along with the aromatics. Serve this hearty, piquant salad with grilled sausage,***

roast duck, or pâté. It works well as is or over a bed of salad greens. Serves four.

1 cup French Le Puy lentils, picked over and rinsed

1/2 onion, halved and studded with 2 whole cloves

1 carrot, peeled and halved

1 celery stalk, cut into thirds

1 bay leaf

Salt

2 tablespoons sherry vinegar

3 tablespoons whole-grain mustard

1 tablespoon caraway seeds, lightly crushed

2 garlic cloves, minced

Ground black pepper

1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil

4 radishes, minced

1/4 cup minced fresh parsley leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Bring lentils, clove-studded onion, carrot, celery, bay leaf, 1/2 teaspoon salt, and 4 cups water to boil in medium saucepan. Boil for 5 minutes, reduce heat, and simmer until lentils are tender but still hold their shape, 25 to 30 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, mix vinegar, mustard,

caraway seeds, garlic, and salt and pepper to taste in large bowl. Slowly whisk in oil to make vinaigrette; set aside.

3. Drain lentils, discarding vegetables and bay leaf. Add warm lentils to vinaigrette and toss to coat. Cool to room temperature. (Lentil salad can be covered and set aside for several hours). Stir in radishes and parsley and serve immediately.

MAIN-COURSE SALADS

SALAD CAN BE BECOME DINNER WHEN PROTEIN IS added to the mix. For these salads, there are several points to remember. You want to use enough protein to make the salad seem substantial without overwhelming the greens. Somewhere between three and six ounces of protein per person is best.

Second, these salads are not the time to use tender Boston lettuce or tiny tatsoi. The greens must have enough crunch and flavor to stand up to the cooked protein, the vegetables, and

tangy dressings used in these salads. Flat-leaf spinach is an excellent choice, as is watercress, arugula, mizuna, or escarole.

Spinach Salad with Shrimp, Mango, and Red Onion

NOTE: ***To save time, buy shrimp that has been peeled and cooked. If you want to boil the shrimp yourself, buy slightly more than one pound with the shells on. This salad serves four.***

$1^1/_2$ pounds flat-leaf spinach, stemmed, washed, dried, and torn into large pieces (about 9 cups)

1 pound cooked medium shrimp

1 large ripe mango, peeled, pitted, and cut into thin strips

$^1/_2$ small red onion, peeled and

sliced thin

1 tablespoon rice wine vinegar

$^{2}/_{3}$ cup Orange-Sesame Vinaigrette (*see* Orange-Sesame Vinaigrette)

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place spinach, shrimp, and mango in large bowl and set aside.

2. Place onion and vinegar in small bowl. Macerate until onions are bright pink, about 5 minutes. Drain onions and add to salad bowl. Pour dressing over salad and toss gently. Serve immediately.

Spinach and Avocado Salad with Chili-Flavored Chicken

NOTE: ***A creamy yogurt dressing spiked with lemon and garlic is a good match for the strong flavors in this salad. This salad serves four.***

2 teaspoons chili powder
1 teaspoon ground cumin
Salt
2 teaspoons vegetable oil
1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breasts, trimmed of excess fat
$1^1/_2$ pounds flat-leaf spinach,

stemmed, washed, dried, and torn into large pieces (about 9 cups)

4 ripe plum tomatoes (about $^3/_4$ pound), cored and cut into wedges

1 Hass avocado, halved, pitted, peeled, and cut into thin strips (*see* figures 28–33)

3 tablespoons lemon juice

$^3/_4$ cup plain yogurt

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

1 large garlic clove, minced

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat broiler or light grill. Combine

chili powder, cumin, and $^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon salt in small bowl. Rub vegetable oil then spice mixture into both sides of each chicken breast. Broil or grill chicken, turning once, until cooked through, about 10 minutes. Set aside.

2. Place spinach and tomatoes in large bowl. Sprinkle avocado with 1 tablespoon lemon juice and add to salad bowl.

3. Whisk yogurt, olive oil, garlic, remaining 2 tablespoons lemon juice, and salt to taste in small bowl.

4. Slice chicken crosswise into $^{3}/_{4}$-inch-wide strips and add to salad bowl. Pour dressing over salad and toss gently. Serve immediately.

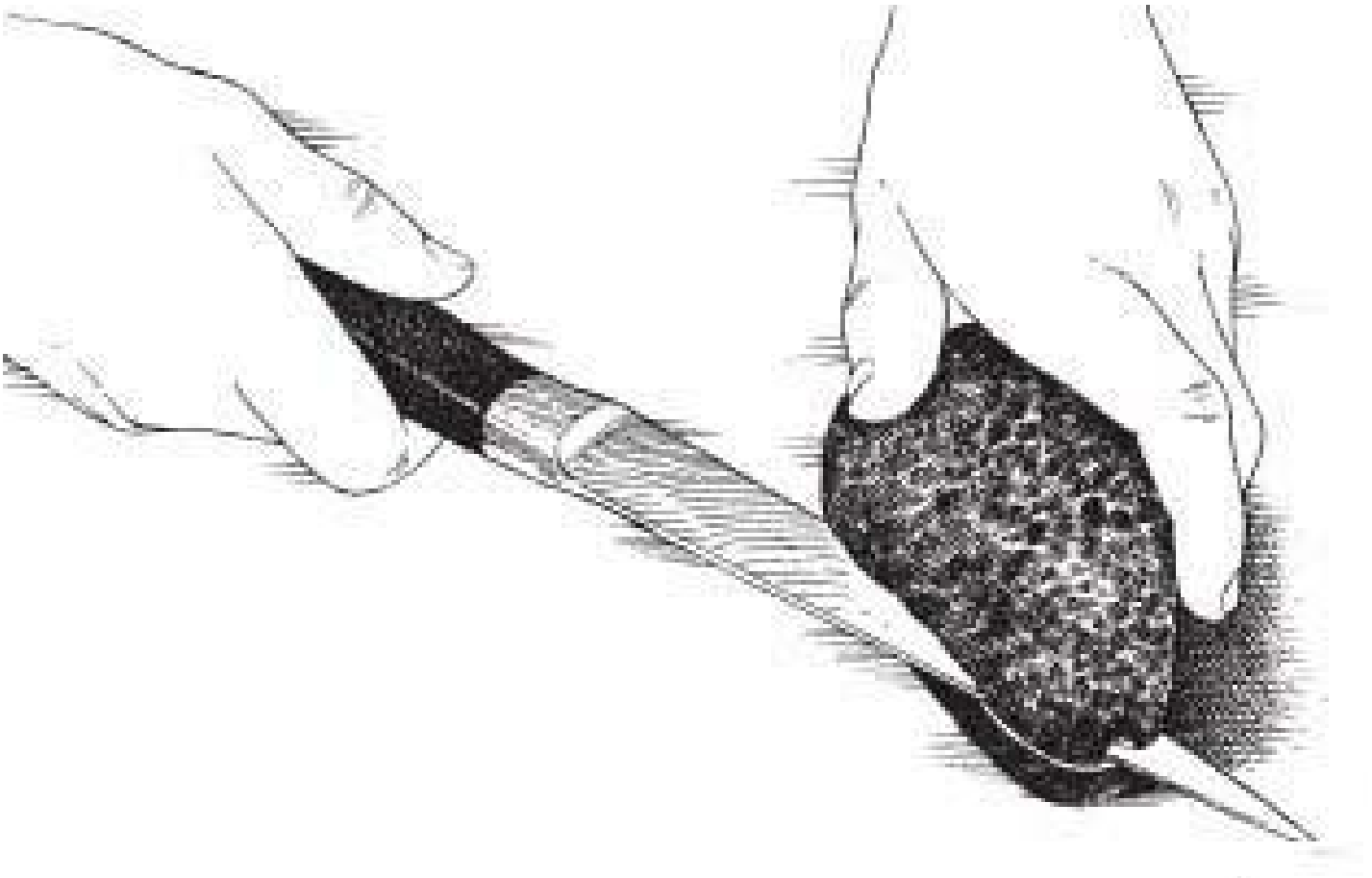

Figure 28.
With their dark, pebbly skin, Hass avocados are generally creamier and better in salads than larger, smooth-skinned varieties. To remove the flesh in neat slices, start by slicing around the pit and cutting through both ends.

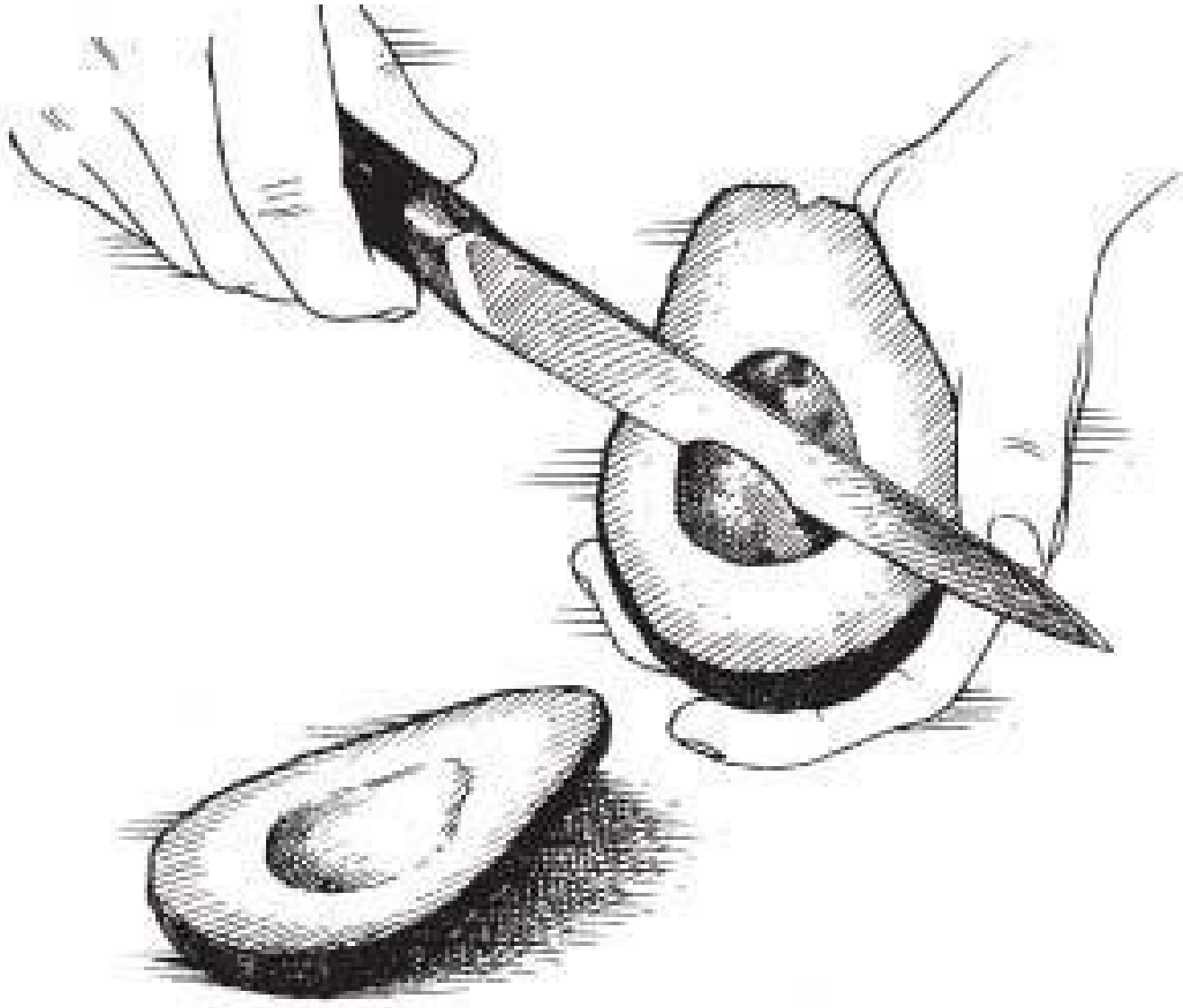

Figure 29.
Twist to separate the halves and then stick the blade of a large knife sharply into the pit.

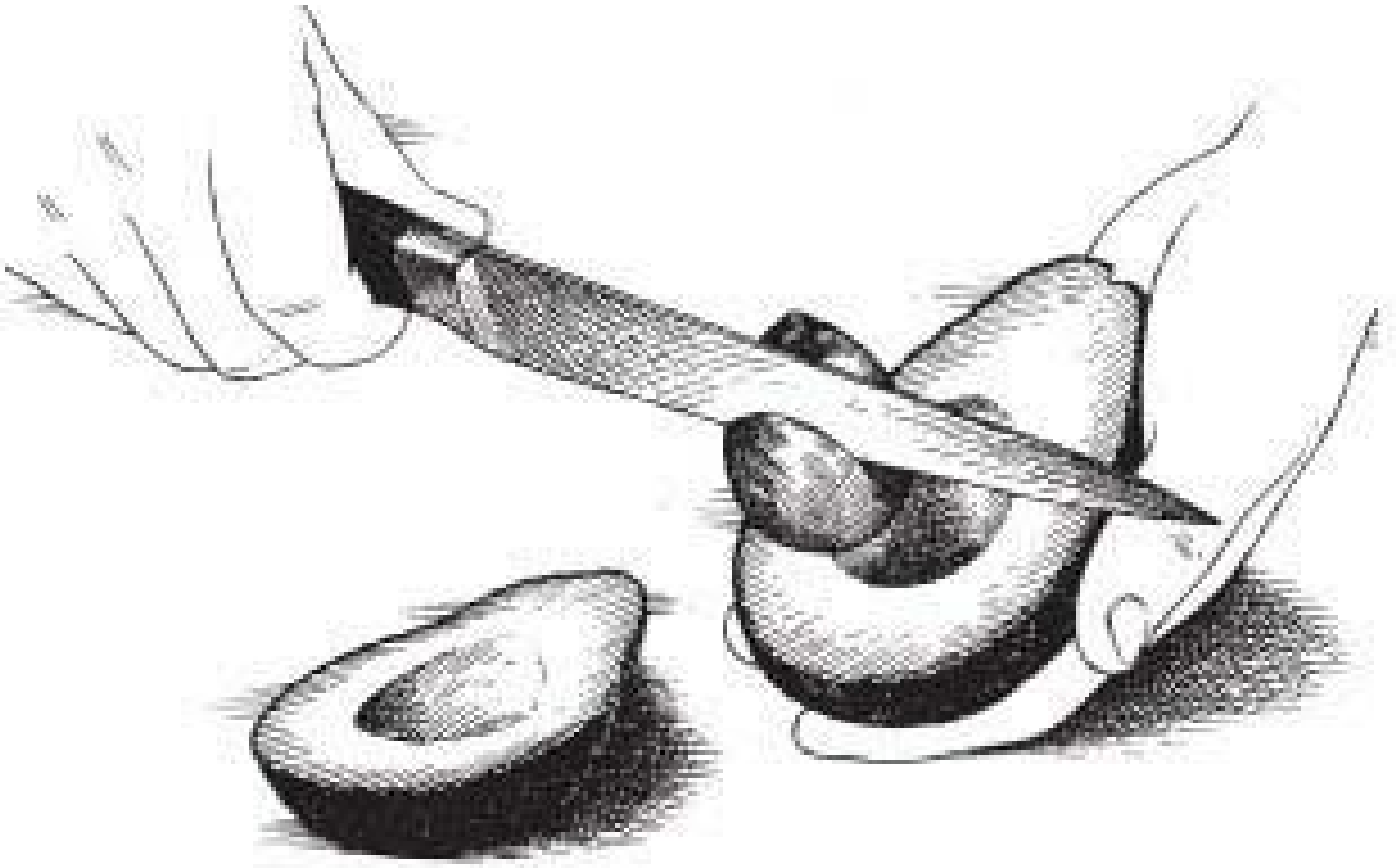

Figure 30.
Lift the blade, twisting if necessary to loosen and remove the pit.

Figure 31.
To protect your hands from the blade, use a large wooden spoon to pry the pit off the blade.

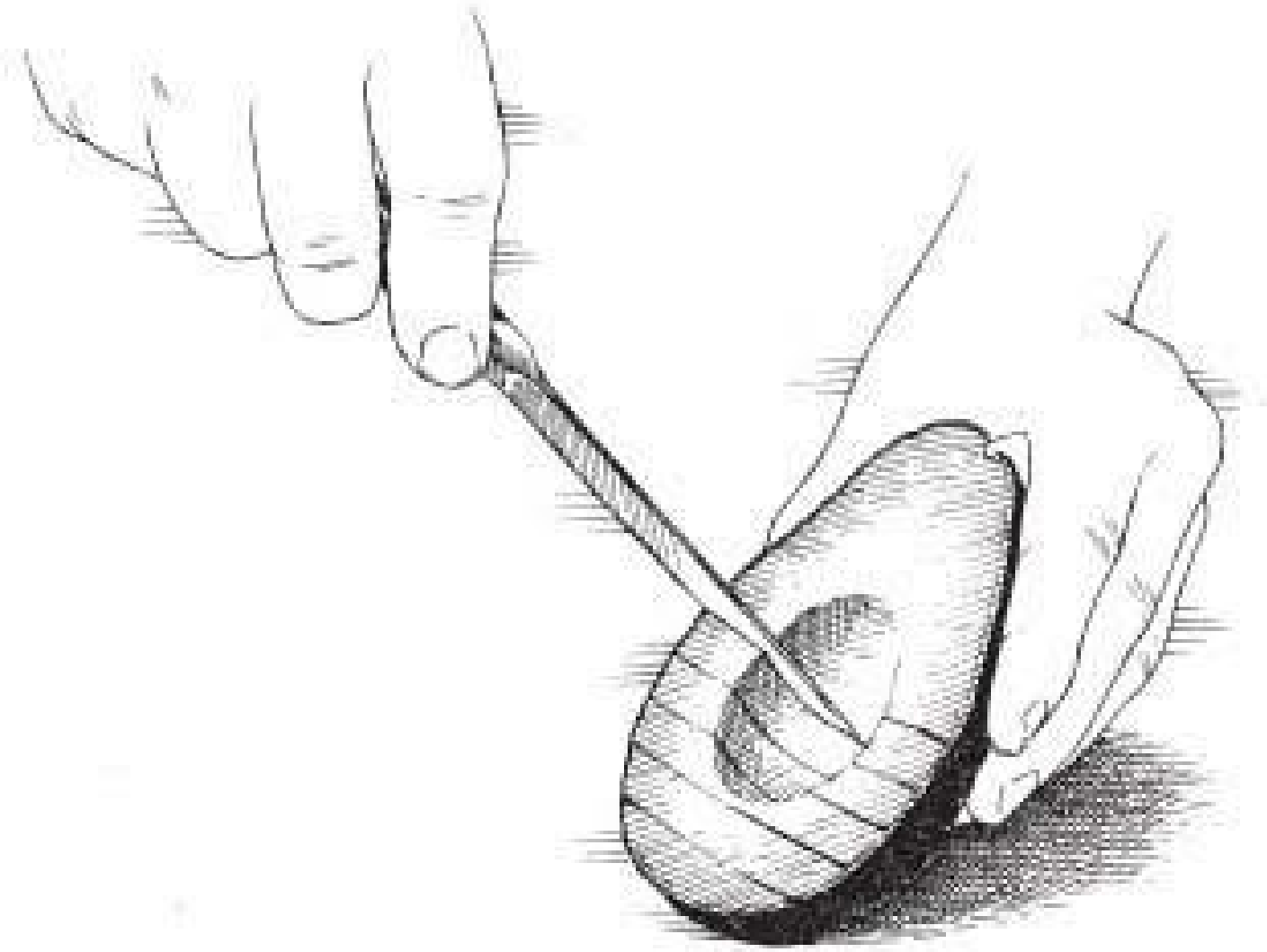

Figure 32.
Use a small paring knife to slice through the meat, but not the skin.

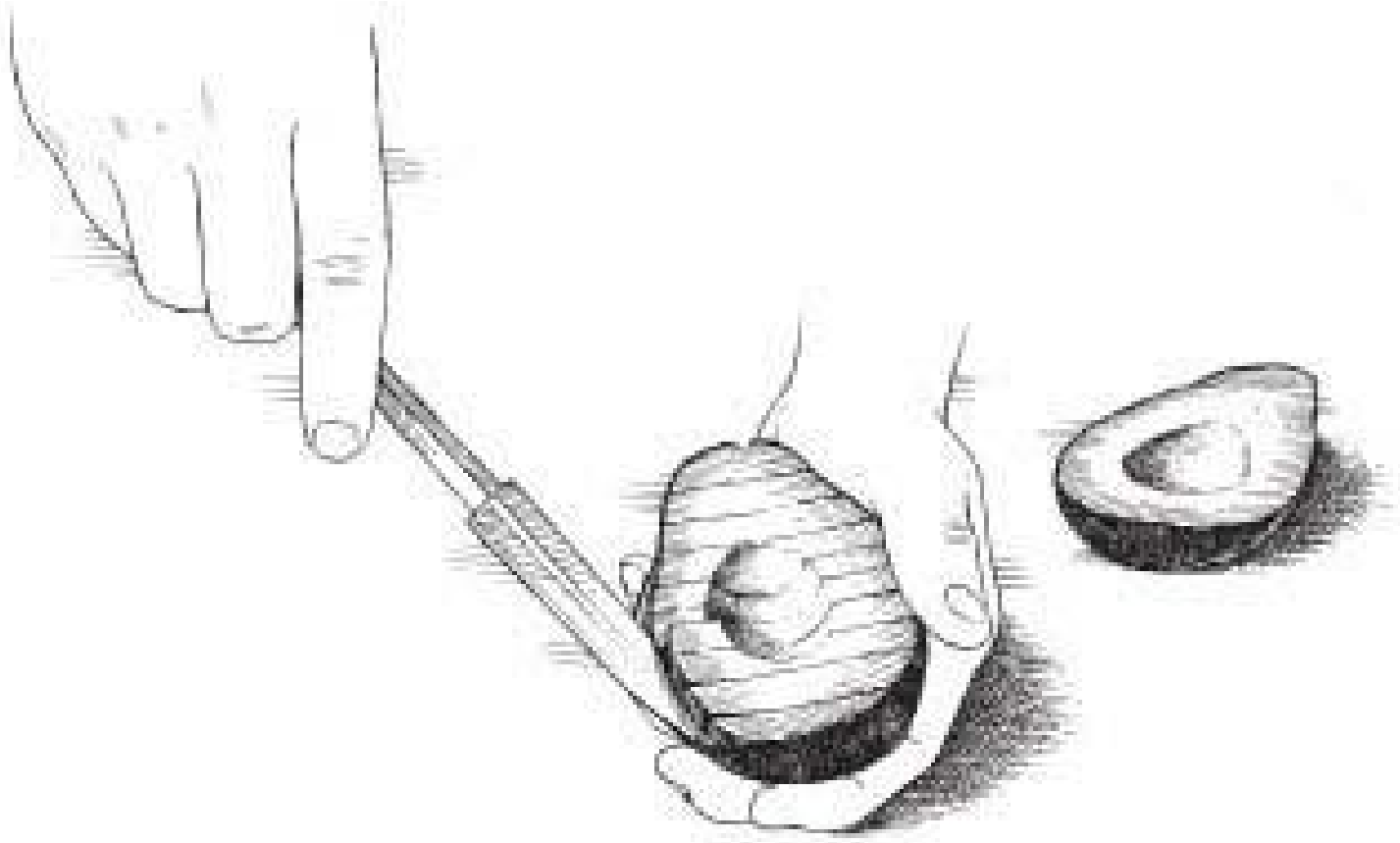

Figure 33.
Run a rubber spatula around the circumference, just inside the skin, to loosen the meat, then twist the spatula to pop out the meat.

Escarole Salad with Bacon and Poached Eggs

NOTE: ***Poaching eggs can be a messy business, with simmering water causing the eggs to loose their shape and the whites to feather. We found that adding eggs to boiling water, then turning off the heat and covering the pan allows them to cook by residual heat without the problem of churning bubbles. For best results, use a deep skillet rather than a saucepan (the eggs will hit the bottom of the pan more quickly and set properly) and heavily salt the water for best flavor. This salad is a one-dish brunch and***

will serve four. For information on poaching eggs in advance, see figure 35.

1 head escarole, washed, dried, and torn into pieces (about 8 cups)
1 teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons distilled white vinegar
4 large eggs, each cracked into a small handled cup
$^2/_3$ cup Creamy Vinaigrette (*see* Creamy Vinaigrette)
4 strips bacon, cooked, drained, and crumbled
12 cherry tomatoes, halved
2 ounces Roquefort cheese,

crumbled

2 tablespoons minced fresh chervil or parsley leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place escarole in large bowl and set aside.

2. Fill 8-to 10-inch nonstick skillet nearly to rim with water, adding salt and vinegar. Bring to boil over high heat. Lower lips of each cup just into water at once; tip eggs into boiling water (*see* figure 34), cover, and remove pan from heat. Poach until yolks are medium-firm, exactly 4 minutes. For firmer yolks (or for extra-large or jumbo eggs), poach for

$4^1/_2$ minutes; for looser yolks (or for medium eggs), poach for 3 minutes.

3. While eggs are poaching, toss greens with vinaigrette. Divide greens among four plates.

4. With slotted spoon, carefully lift and drain each egg over skillet. Slide one egg onto each plate along with portion of bacon, tomato, cheese, and herb. Serve immediately.

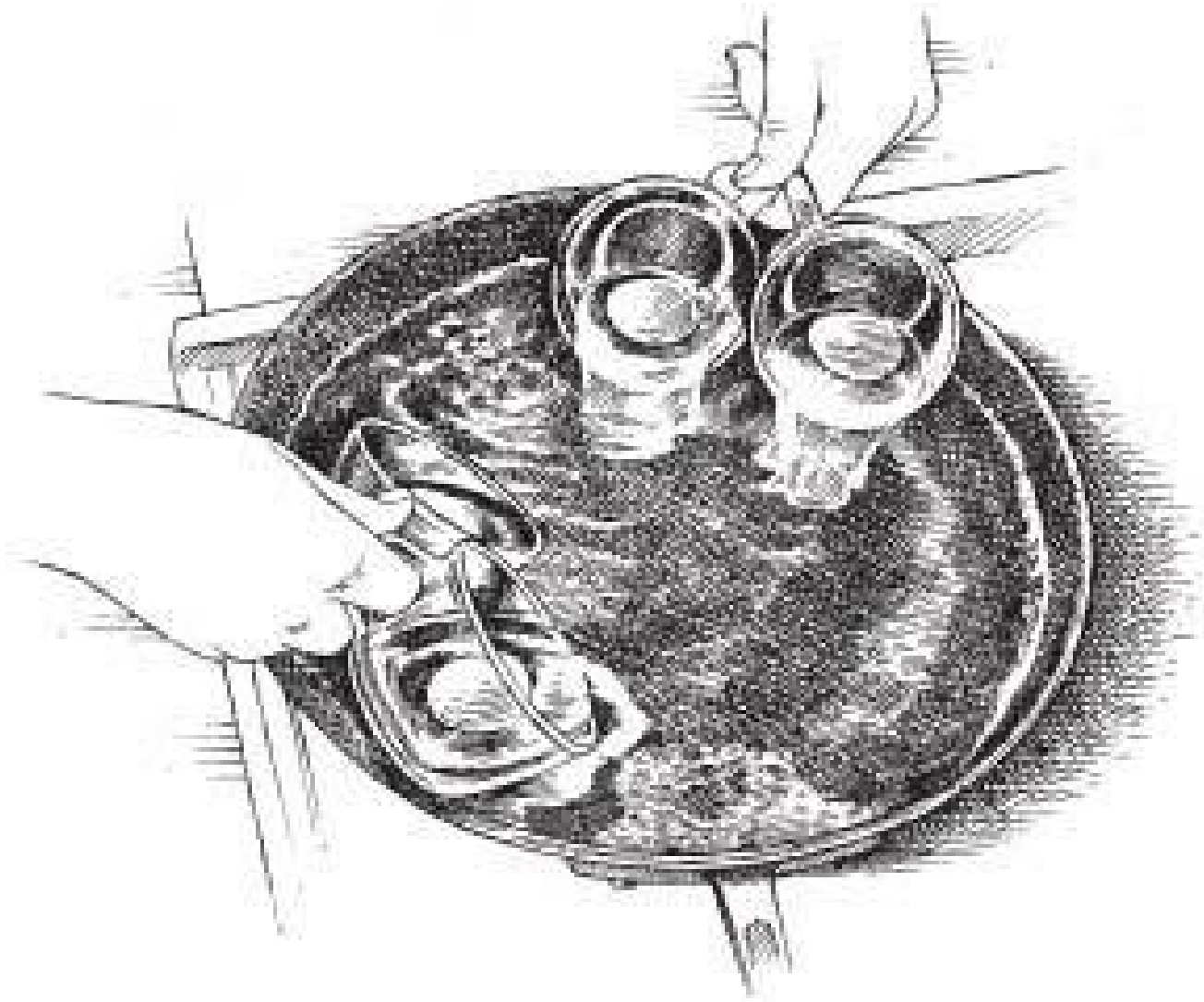

Figure 34.
To get four eggs into simmering water at the same time, crack each into a small cup with a handle. Lower lips of each cup just into the water at same time and then tips eggs into the pan.

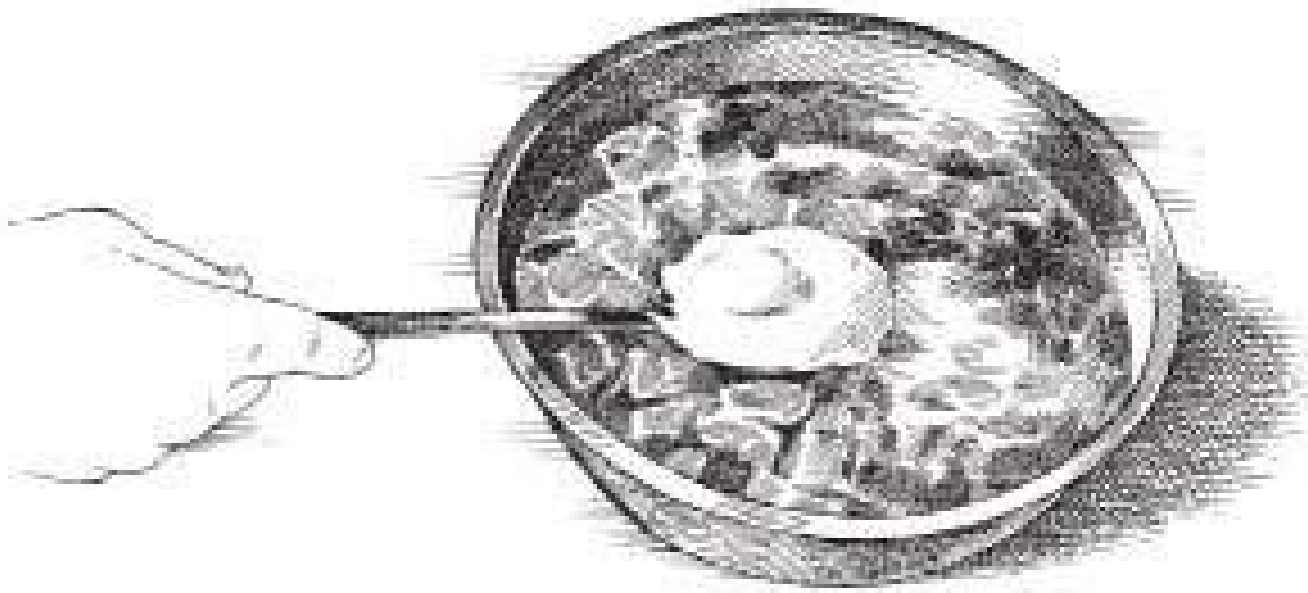

Figure 35.
Poaching eggs does not have to require last-minute work. If you prefer, place cooked eggs in bowl with enough ice water to submerge them, then refrigerate for up to 3 days. When ready to serve, use a slotted spoon to transfer each egg to a skillet filled with boiling water. Turn off the heat, cover, and wait 20 to 30

seconds. Use a slotted spoon to remove eggs and proceed with recipe.

Thai-Style Charred Beef Salad

NOTE: ***Tender, inexpensive flank steak is grilled then sliced thin and tossed with a hot-and-sweet Thai-style dressing, cucumber, red onion, leafy greens, and fresh aromatic herbs. Cut the flank steak in half lengthwise before grilling it to keep sliced pieces to a reasonable length. A whole steak usually weighs just under two pounds, which is too much for a salad for four. Reserve the smaller piece for stir-fries or other salads. The fiery dressing can be made with any fresh chile or crushed red pepper flakes, or a***

combination, as we have done.

$1\frac{1}{4}$ pounds flank steak, cut in half lengthwise

2 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil

Salt and ground black pepper

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup rice wine vinegar

$2\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons sugar

$\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes

1 medium cucumber, peeled, halved lengthwise, seeded, and cut on the diagonal $\frac{1}{4}$-inch thick (*see* figures 25 and 26)

$\frac{1}{2}$ small red onion, sliced very thin

1 small jalapeno or other fresh chile, stemmed, seeded, and cut into paper-thin rounds

4 cups Boston or Bibb lettuce, washed, thoroughly dried, and torn into large pieces

1 tablespoon fresh cilantro leaves, torn

1 tablespoon fresh mint leaves, torn

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Light charcoal or gas grill. Brush flank steak with olive oil and season generously with salt and pepper to taste. Grill steak over very hot fire until medium-rare, about 5 minutes per side. Remove steak from grill, let rest for 5

minutes, and slice thinly across the grain into $^{1}/_{4}$-inch-thick strips. Set steak aside.

2. Meanwhile, bring 2/3 cup water and vinegar to boil in small nonreactive saucepan over medium heat. Stir in sugar to dissolve. Reduce heat, add crushed red pepper flakes, and simmer until slightly syrupy, about 15 minutes. Cool to room temperature.

3. Combine steak, cucumber, onion, and chile in medium bowl. Pour cooled dressing over steak and vegetables and toss to coat.

4. Arrange salad greens over large platter. Spoon steak and vegetables over greens and drizzle with any dressing left in bowl. Sprinkle with torn herbs and serve immediately.

Roast Chicken Breasts for Salad

NOTE: ***In our testing, we found that chicken cooked for salad by wet methods (steaming, poaching, roasting in foil, or microwaving), produces bland meat with an unpleasant boiled chicken flavor. The dry heat of roasting results in more flavorful, firmer meat. Shredding the cooked and cooled chicken by hand gives the meat an uneven texture and helps the dressing cling to each piece.***

2 large whole bone-in, skin-on chicken breasts (at least $1^1/_2$ pounds each)

1 tablespoon vegetable oil
Salt

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 400 degrees. Set breasts on small, foil-lined jelly roll pan. Brush with oil and sprinkle generously with salt.

2. Roast until thermometer inserted into thickest part of breast registers 160 degrees, 35 to 40 minutes. Cool to room temperature, remove skin, and shred according to figures 36–39.

Figure 36.
Once chicken breasts have cooled, remove the skin and then slice along the center bone to separate the two pieces of the breast meat.

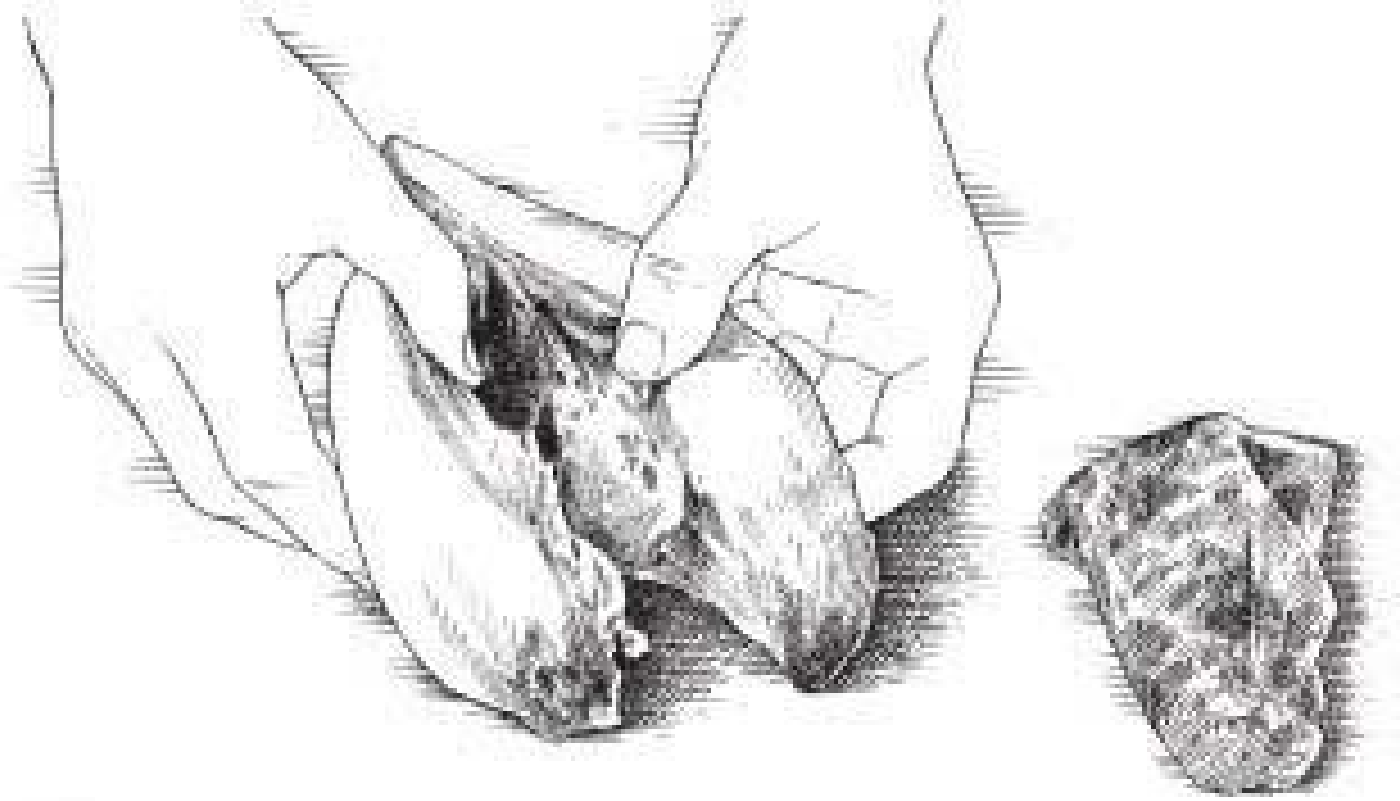

Figure 37.
Insert your fingers into the cut made by the knife and gently pry the breast meat off the bone in two pieces.

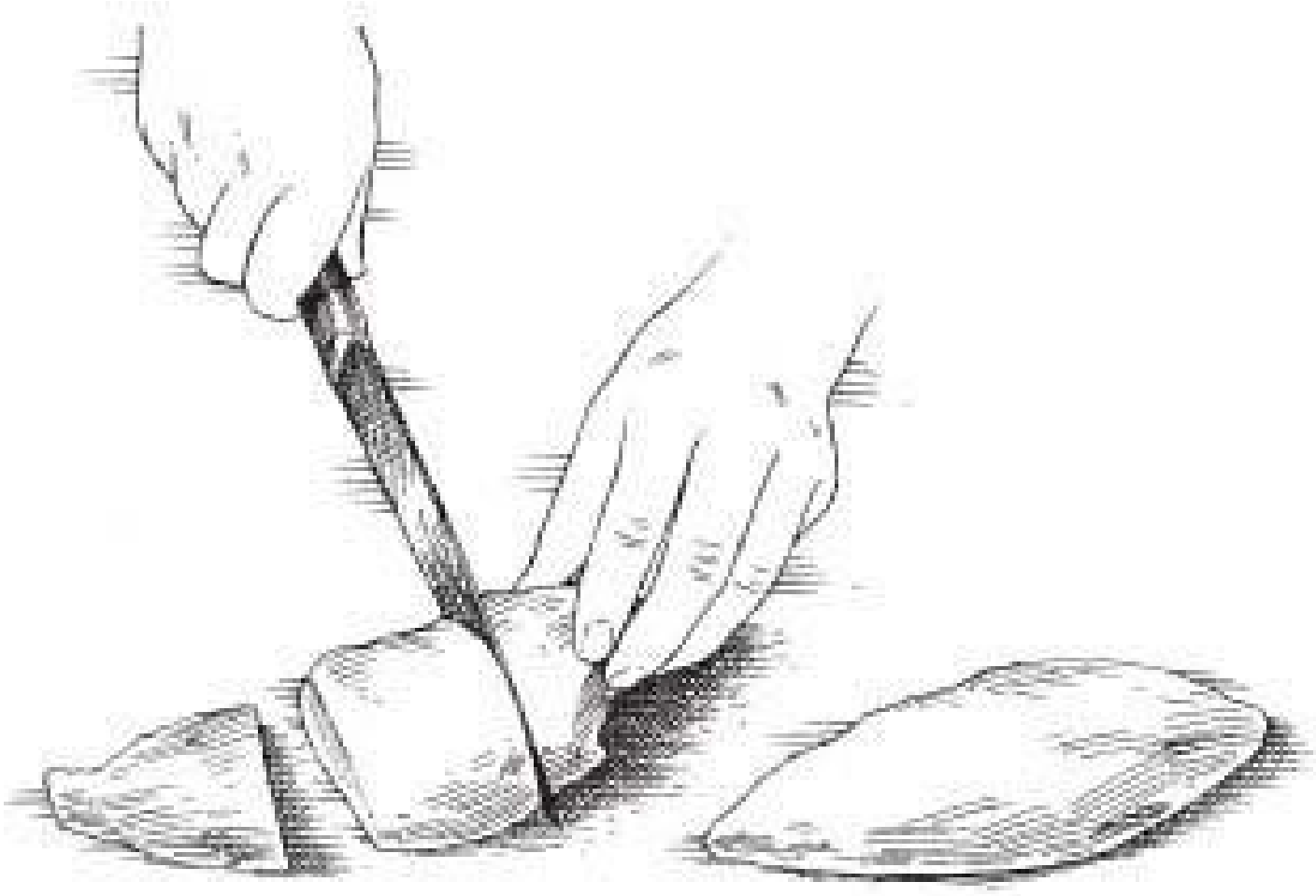

Figure 38.
Cut each breast into thirds with a sharp knife.

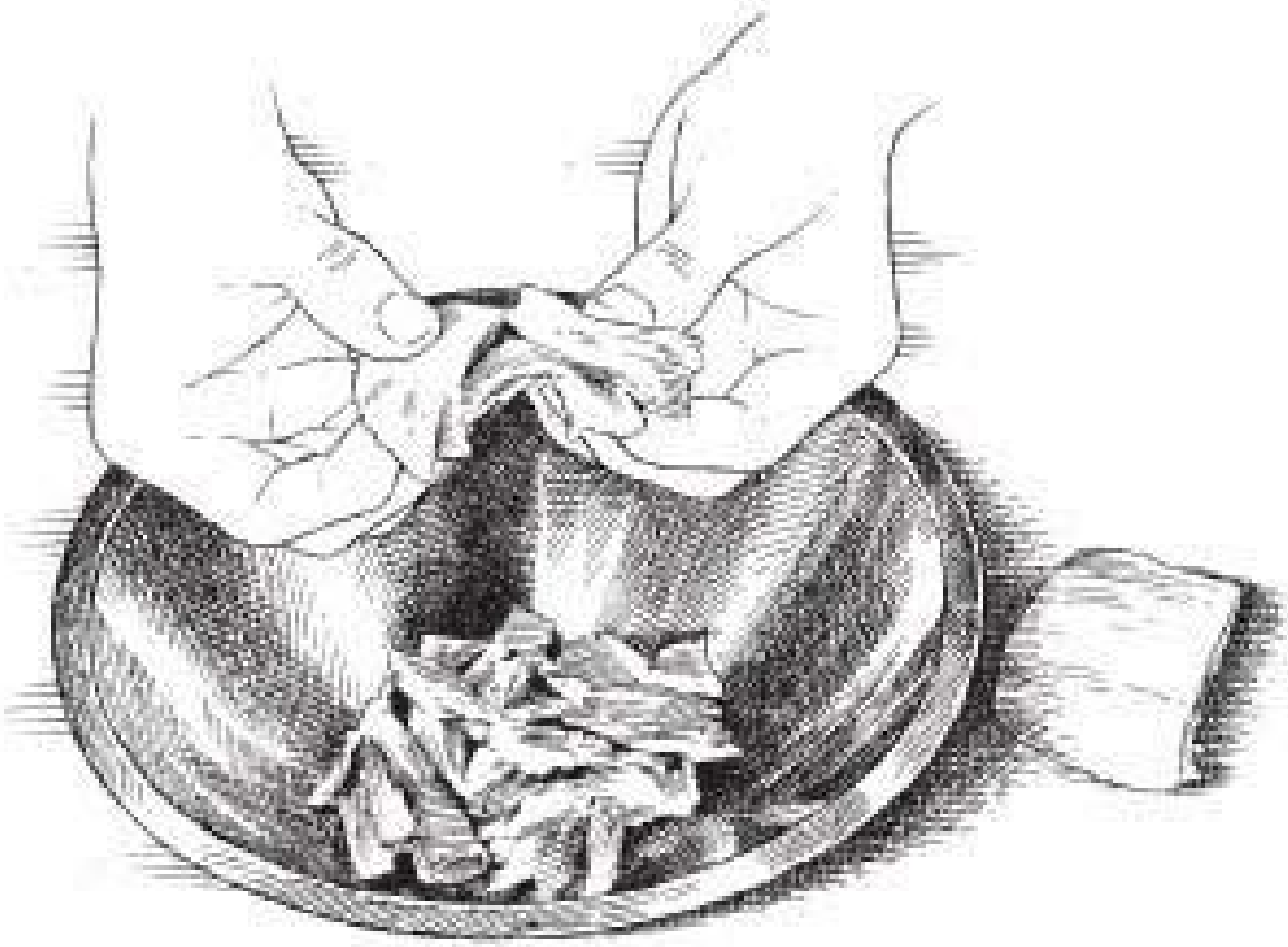

Figure 39.
Use your hands to pull apart breast pieces and shred into small pieces.

Classic Creamy Chicken Salad

NOTE: ***In addition to the parsley, add 2 tablespoons minced fresh tarragon or basil leaves if you like. This recipe begins with about 5 cups of shredded chicken, enough for 6 servings. Use this salad to make sandwiches or serve over a bed of leafy greens.***

1 recipe Roast Chicken Breasts for Salad (*see* Roast Chicken Breasts for Salad)

2 medium celery stalks, diced small

2 medium scallions, white and green parts, minced

$^{3}/_{4}$ cup Homemade Mayonnaise (*see* Homemade Mayonnaise) or store-bought

2 tablespoons lemon juice

2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

Mix all ingredients, including salt and pepper to taste, in large bowl. Serve immediately or refrigerate for up to 1 day.

VARIATIONS:

Waldorf Chicken Salad

Add 1 large crisp apple, cored and cut

into medium dice, and 6 tablespoons chopped, toasted walnuts.

Curried Chicken Salad with Raisins and Honey

Add 6 tablespoons golden raisins, 2 teaspoons curry powder, and 1 tablespoon honey. Use cilantro in place of parsley.

Chicken Salad with Hoisin Dressing

NOTE: ***Try serving this Asian-style salad on a bed of spinach leaves with sliced cucumber and radishes, or rolled in a flour tortilla with shredded iceberg lettuce or watercress. Serves six.***

1 recipe Roast Chicken Breasts for Salad (*see* Roast Chicken Breasts for Salad)

2 medium celery stalks, diced small

2 medium scallions, white and green parts, minced

2 tablespoons minced fresh

cilantro or parsley leaves

$^{3}/_{4}$ cup Hoisin Vinaigrette (*see* Hoisin Vinaigrette)

INSTRUCTIONS:

Mix chicken, celery, scallions, and cilantro in large bowl. Add dressing and toss to coat. Serve immediately or refrigerate for up to 1 day.

HOW TO MAKE SOUP

Soup Basics

Chicken Soup

Beef Soup

French Onion Soup

Pureed Vegetable Soups

Corn Chowder

Cream of Tomato Soup

Potato-Leek Soup

Minestrone

Lentil Soup

Ham and Split Pea Soup

New England Clam Chowder

SOUP BASICS

Making soup is one of the easiest and most rewarding kitchen tasks. The basic ingredients—stock, onions, carrots, potatoes, and herbs—are almost always on hand. The technique is simple. Most recipes begin with the sautéing of aromatic vegetables to build flavor. Liquid is then added along with the distinguishing ingredients—tomatoes for cream of tomato soup or lentils for a lentil soup—and everything is simmered until tender.

Although this process sounds simple

(and it is), there are a number of issues that require some special attention.

STOCK

Perhaps the most important issue that faces the cook when making soup is the choice of liquid. Without a doubt, homemade stock (usually chicken stock) is the best option. It has a rich flavor that complements not only chicken but also vegetables, grains, and beans. Certain recipes are best made with something other than chicken stock (as you will see in this book), but if you keep just one homemade stock on hand, make it chicken stock.

We find that beef stock has it uses,

especially in a beef soup. It is also delicious (but not essential) in French onion soup. We understand the appeal of vegetable stock for vegetarians, but, given a choice, we always opt for chicken stock, even in a vegetable soup. Of course, if you don't eat meat, you can use vegetable stock, either homemade or store-bought, in any vegetable or bean soup recipe in this book and achieve fine results. In many cases, you could even use water. Soups made with water or vegetable stock will, however, taste less complex.

Our chicken stock takes just an hour to make and is worth the minimal effort. Unfortunately, even the most diligent cook may not always have the time to

make homemade stock. Canned broths make good soups, especially if you follow some simple guidelines.

Avoid canned beef broths at all cost. We tested 11 leading brands of canned beef broth and beef bouillon cubes and could not find one that we liked. None really tasted like beef, and most had strong off flavors. Government regulations require makers of beef broth to use only 1 part protein to 135 parts moisture in their product. That translates into less than 1 ounce of meat to flavor 1 gallon of water. (In contrast, our homemade beef stock uses 6 pounds of meat and bones to flavor 2 quarts of water.) Most manufacturers use salt,

monosodium glutamate (MSG), and yeast-based hydrolyzed soy protein to give their watery concoctions some flavor and mouthfeel. None of these cheap tricks works.

By comparison, canned chicken broth is far superior. In our tasting of 10 leading brands, we found several that actually tasted like chicken. However, many brands are overly salty, which may explain why low-sodium broths made by Campbell's and Swanson (both brands are owned by the same company) topped our ratings.

Most commercial brands of stock come in cans that measure just under two cups. (Aseptic paper containers generally hold a liter, or just more than

four cups.) If using the smaller cans, just add a little water to stretch the broth as needed in recipes. For instance, if a recipe calls for four cups of broth, use two cans of broth plus a few extra ounces of water to make four cups.

STORING AND REHEATING SOUP

One of the beauties of soup is the fact that it holds so well. Make a pot on Sunday and you can enjoy soup several times during the week. Unless otherwise specified, all the soups in this book can be refrigerated for several days or frozen for several months. Store soup in an airtight container. When ready to

serve, reheat only as much soup as you need at that time. You can reheat soup in the microwave or in a covered saucepan set over medium-low heat. Because the microwave heats unevenly, this method is best for single servings. Just heat the soup right in the serving bowl or mug. Larger quantities of soup are best reheated on the stovetop.

You may find that a soup has thickened in the refrigerator or freezer. (As soup cools, liquid evaporates in the form of steam.) Simply thin out the soup with a little water to achieve the proper texture.

While most soups can be cooled, then reheated without harm, some will suffer, especially in terms of texture. Soups with rice and pasta are best eaten

immediately. When refrigerated, rice and pasta become mushy and bloated as they absorb the liquid in the soup. If you plan on having leftovers, cool the soup before adding the rice or pasta, which is often the last step in most recipes. Add a portion of the rice or pasta to the soup you plan on eating immediately, then add the rest when you reheat the remaining soup.

Soups with seafood also fail to hold up well. For instance, clams will become tough if overcooked by reheating. These soups are best served as soon as they are done.

Finally, pureed soups made from green vegetables will look their best if served

immediately upon completion of the recipe. Reheating breaks down the chlorophyll in some green vegetables (asparagus is especially prone to this problem). A soup that is bright green can turn drab army green if stored for several hours and then reheated. Of course, these soups will still taste delicious, but their visual appeal will be greatly diminished.

EQUIPMENT

Soupmaking requires just a few pieces of equipment. At the most basic level, all you need is a pot and spoon. Here are our recommendations for all the equipment used in this book.

SOUP KETTLE/DUTCH OVEN

Most soups can be prepared in a small stockpot (also called a soup kettle) or Dutch oven. These pots work best because they are generally quite large (at least seven quarts) and have two handles, which makes lifting much easier. Dutch ovens are twice as wide as they are high. For stockpots, the opposite is true—they are generally twice as high as they are wide.

Because of their different shapes, we find it slightly easier to sauté in a Dutch oven. There's more surface area, and the vegetables are easier to stir in a shallower pot. This greater surface area also causes soups simmered uncovered

to reduce and condense more than they would in a stockpot.

Another consideration when choosing a pot for soupmaking is cost. Most Dutch ovens are designed for making stews and braises and have thick, heavy bottoms that will ensure good results when browning meat. Consequently, most good Dutch ovens cost about $150. We found that cheaper Dutch ovens cause pan drippings to burn. For soupmaking, though, you can get away with a cheaper stockpot because it is used mostly for simmering liquids. In most soup recipes, a cheap aluminum stock pot will deliver fine results. As an added advantage, these pots are lightweight and easy to carry from the stovetop to the counter or

sink.

BLENDER

The texture of a pureed soup should be smooth and creamy. With this in mind, we tried pureeing these soups in a food mill, a food processor, and a regular countertop blender, as well as with a handheld immersion blender.

Forget using the food mill for this purpose. We tried all three blades (coarse, medium, and fine), and, in each case, the liquid ran right through the blade as we churned and churned only to produce baby food of varying textures. Once separated, the liquid and pureed solids could not be combined with a whisk.

The food processor does a decent job of pureeing, but some small bits of vegetables can be trapped under the blade and remain unchopped. Even more troubling is the tendency of a food processor to leak hot liquid. Fill the workbowl more than halfway and you are likely to see liquid running down the side of the food processor base. Even small quantities of soup must be pureed in batches, and that's a hassle.

The immersion blender has more appeal since this tool can be brought directly to the pot and there is no ladling of hot ingredients. However, we found that this kind of blender also leaves some chunks behind. If you don't mind a

few lumps, use an immersion blender.

For perfectly smooth pureed soups, use a regular blender. As long as a little headroom is left at the top of the blender, there is never any leaking. Also, the blender blade does an excellent job with soups because it pulls ingredients down from the top of the container. No stray bits go untouched by the blade.

Depending on the amount of soup you have made, you may need to puree in two batches. A standard blender has a capacity of seven cups, but it is best not to puree more than five cups of soup at a time.

STRAINER

Even after pureeing, many soups will still contain stray bits of vegetable solids. You can leave the soup as it is, but for a more refined texture it is best to remove these tiny pieces.

We tested a variety of strainers to see which is best for this job. With its three layers of fine mesh, a chinois (a conical French strainer used in many restaurants) proved too fine. We found that the fine mesh holds back almost all of the solids and the resulting soup is too brothy. A regular mesh strainer holds back too little. In our opinion, it does no good to pass a pureed soup through a typical mesh strainer. We had the best results when we turned to a fine, round mesh

strainer (see figure 1). It removed large bits of vegetables but allowed the pureed solids to pass through with the liquid.

LADLE

You will want a large ladle for serving soup. We find a ladle with a capacity of one cup to be the most useful.

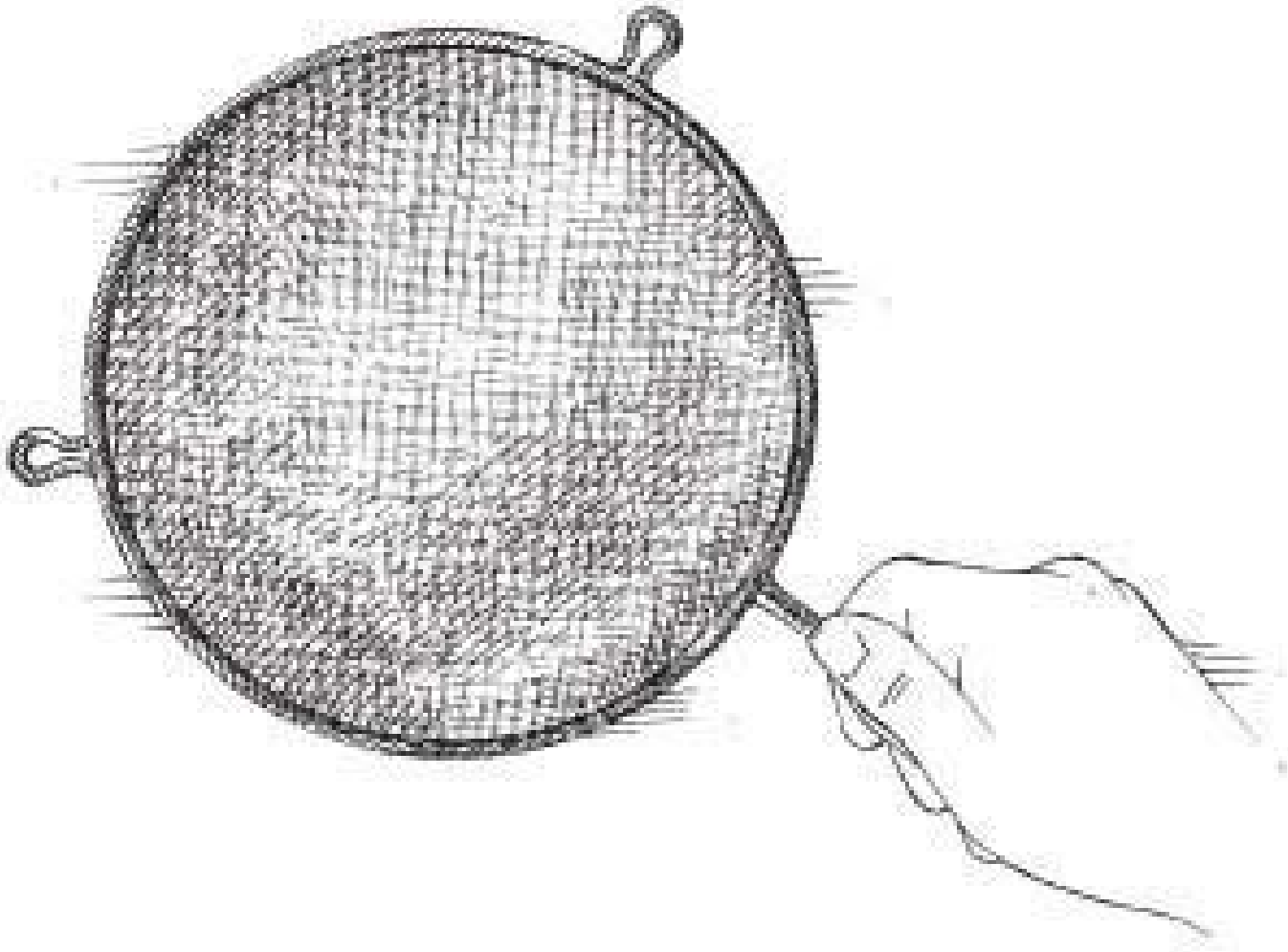

Figure 1.

The mesh on this strainer is fine enough to trap large solids but not so fine that it will hold back the pureed solids that should remain in a soup.

CHICKEN SOUP

MOST STANDARD CHICKEN STOCKS ARE not flavorful enough for a robust chicken soup. They are fine if ladled into risotto, but we wanted a broth that really tastes like chicken. We knew that the time-consuming conventional method—simmering chicken parts and aromatics such as onions, carrots, and celery in water for at least three hours—was part of the problem. This method takes so long to extract flavor from the chicken that many cooks shortcut the process and end up with weak stock. We wanted to

see if we could do better in less time.

We tried blanching a whole chicken (cooking in boiling water for several minutes) on the theory that blanching keeps the chicken from releasing foam during cooking and makes a clearer-tasting stock. The blanched chicken was then partially covered with water and placed in a heatproof bowl over a pan of simmering water. Cooked this way, the chicken itself was never simmered, and the resulting broth was remarkably clear, refined, and full-flavored. The only problem: it took four hours for the broth to take on sufficient flavor. We also noted that our four-pound chicken was good for nothing but the garbage bin after being cooked for so long.

A number of recipes favor roasting chicken bones or parts and then using them to make stock. The theory at work here is that roasted parts will flavor stock in minutes, not hours. We gave it a try several times, roasting chicken backs, necks, and bones, with and without vegetables. We preferred the roasted stock with vegetables but nonetheless found the actual chicken flavor to be too tame.

At last we tried a method described by Edna Lewis in her book *In Pursuit of Flavor* (Knopf, 1988). She sautés a chicken that's been hacked into small pieces along with an onion until the chicken loses its raw color. The pot is

then covered, and the chicken and onion cook, or "sweat," over low heat until they release their rich, flavorful juices, which takes about 20 minutes. Only at that point is the water added, and the broth is simmered for just 20 minutes longer.

We knew we were onto something as we smelled the chicken and onions sautéing. The finished broth confirmed what our noses had detected, tasting pleasantly sautéed, not boiled. But we still had some refining to do: for once, we had made too strong a broth.

We substituted chicken backs and wing tips for the whole chicken and used more water. The resulting broth was less intense, just the right strength to make a

base for some of the best chicken soup we've ever tasted. We made the stock twice more—once without the onion and once with onion, celery, and carrot. The onion added a flavor dimension we liked; the extra vegetables neither added nor detracted from the final soup, so we left them out.

After much trial and error, we had a master recipe that delivered liquid gold in just 40 minutes. While this recipe requires more hands-on work (hacking up parts, browning an onion, then chicken parts), it is ready in a fraction of the time required to make stock by traditional methods.

Where can you find these otherwise

mostly useless chicken parts? The Buffalo chicken wing fad has made wings more expensive than legs and thighs. For those who can find chicken backs, this is clearly an inexpensive way to make stock for soup. Our local grocery store usually sells them for almost nothing, but in many locations they may be hard to get.

Luckily, we found that relatively inexpensive whole legs make incredibly full-flavored broths for soup. In a side-by-side comparison of two stocks, one made from backs and the other from whole legs, we found the whole leg broth to be even more full-flavored than the all-bone stock. Just don't try to salvage the meat from the legs. After 5

minutes of sautéing, 20 minutes of sweating, and another 20 minutes of simmering, the meat is void of flavor.

If you are making a soup that needs some chicken meat, use a whole chicken, as directed in the recipe for Chicken Stock with Sautéed Breast Meat. The breast is removed, split into two pieces, sautéed briefly, and then added with the water to finish cooking. The rest of the bird—the legs, back, wings, and giblets—is sweated with the onions and discarded when the stock is done. The breast meat comes out of the pot perfectly cooked, ready to be skinned and shredded when cool. We particularly liked the tidiness of this

method: one chicken yields one pot of soup.

One note about this method. We found it necessary to cut the chicken into pieces small enough to release their flavorful juices in a short period of time. A meat cleaver, a heavy-duty chef's knife, or a pair of heavy-duty kitchen shears makes the task fairly simple. Precision is not required. The point is to get the pieces small enough to release their flavorful juices in a short period of time.

To cut up a whole chicken, start by removing the whole legs and wings from the body; set them aside. Separate the back from the breast, then split the breast and set the halves aside. Hack the back

crosswise into three or four pieces, then halve each of these pieces. Cut the wing at each joint to yield three pieces. Leave the wing tip whole, then halve each of the remaining joints. Because of their larger bones, the legs and thighs are the most difficult to cut. Start by splitting the leg and thigh at the joint, then hack each to yield three to four pieces.

Chicken Stock

makes about 2 quarts

NOTE: *A cleaver will quickly cut up the chicken parts. A chef's knife will also work, albeit more slowly.*

1 tablespoon vegetable oil
1 medium onion, cut into medium dice
4 pounds chicken backs and wing tips or whole legs, hacked with cleaver into 2-inch pieces
2 quarts boiling water
2 teaspoons salt
2 bay leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oil in large stockpot over medium heat. Add onion; sauté until colored and softened slightly, 2 to 3 minutes. Transfer onion to large bowl.

2. Add half of chicken pieces to pot; sauté until no longer pink, 4 to 5 minutes. Transfer cooked chicken to bowl with onion. Sauté remaining chicken pieces. Return onion and chicken pieces to pot. Reduce heat to low, cover, and cook until chicken releases its juices, about 20 minutes.

3. Increase heat to high; add boiling

water, salt, and bay leaves. Return to simmer, then cover and barely simmer until broth is rich and flavorful, about 20 minutes.

4. Strain broth and discard solids. Skim fat (see figure 2, below, and figure 3) and reserve for later use in soups or other recipes, if desired. (Broth can be covered and refrigerated up to 2 days or frozen for several months.)

Figure 2.

Stock should be defatted before being used. The easiest way to do this is to refrigerate the stock

until the fat rises to the surface and congeals. Use a spoon to scrape the fat off the surface. If you like, reserve the fat in an airtight container and use it in place of oil when sautéing.

Figure 3.

You won't always have time to refrigerate stock and wait for the fat to solidify. If this is the case, use a gravy skimmer. Pour some stock into the skimmer, then pour the stock out through the spout attached to the bottom of the

skimmer into a clean container. The fat will float to the top of the gravy skimmer as you pour. When there's nothing but a little fat left in the skimmer, remove the fat and start again with more stock. Repeat this process until the entire batch of stock has been defatted.

Chicken Stock with Sautéed Breast Meat

makes about 2 quarts

NOTE: *Choose this broth when you want to add breast meat to soup. This recipe starts with a whole chicken rather than just backs or legs.*

1 tablespoon vegetable oil

1 whole chicken (about 3 $^{1}/_{2}$ pounds), breast removed, split, and reserved; remaining chicken hacked with cleaver into 2-inch pieces

1 medium onion, cut into

medium dice

2 quarts boiling water

2 teaspoons salt

2 bay leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oil in large stockpot over medium heat. When oil shimmers and starts to smoke, add chicken breast halves; sauté until brown on both sides, about 5 minutes. Remove chicken breast pieces and set aside. Add onion to pot; sauté until colored and softened slightly, 2 to 3 minutes. Transfer onion to large bowl.

2. Add half of hacked chicken pieces to

pot; sauté until no longer pink, 4 to 5 minutes. Transfer cooked chicken to bowl with onion. Sauté remaining hacked chicken pieces. Return onion and chicken pieces (excluding the breasts) to pot. Reduce heat to low, cover, and cook until chicken releases its juices, about 20 minutes.

3. Increase heat to high; add boiling water, chicken breasts, salt, and bay leaves. Return to simmer, then cover and barely simmer until chicken breasts are cooked through and broth is rich and flavorful, about 20 minutes.

4. Remove chicken breasts from pot; when cool enough to handle, remove skin from breasts, then remove meat from bones and shred into bite-sized pieces; discard skin and bone. Strain broth into separate container and discard solids. Skim fat (see figures 2 and 3), and reserve for later use in soups or other recipes. (The shredded chicken and broth can be covered and refrigerated separately up to 2 days.)

Egg Drop Soup

serves six to eight

NOTE: *Real egg drop soup starts with the finest homemade chicken stock. With stock made, the soup can be ready in just five minutes.*

1 recipe Chicken Stock
1 tablespoon soy sauce
Salt
2 tablespoons cornstarch
4 medium scallions, sliced thin
2 tablespoons minced fresh cilantro leaves
4 large eggs, beaten in a small bowl

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Bring stock to simmer in large saucepan over medium-high heat. Add soy sauce and salt to taste.

2. Combine cornstarch and 2 tablespoons water in small bowl and stir until smooth. Whisk cornstarch mixture into broth until it thickens slightly. Stir in scallions and cilantro.

3. Whisk broth so that it is moving in circular direction in pan. Pour eggs into broth in slow, steady stream so that ribbons of coagulated egg form (see

figure 4). Remove whisk and let eggs stand in broth without mixing until set, about 1 minute. Once set, break eggs up with a fork and serve soup immediately.

VARIATION:

Stracciatella

This Italian version of egg drop soup has grated Parmesan added to the broth.

Follow recipe for Egg Drop Soup, omitting soy sauce in step 1. Omit step 2 (that is, do not use cornstarch, scallions, or cilantro). Instead, beat $^1/_4$ cup grated Parmesan cheese and $^1/_4$ cup minced fresh basil leaves with eggs in measuring cup. Stir egg mixture into

broth as directed in step 3. Season soup with ground black pepper before serving.

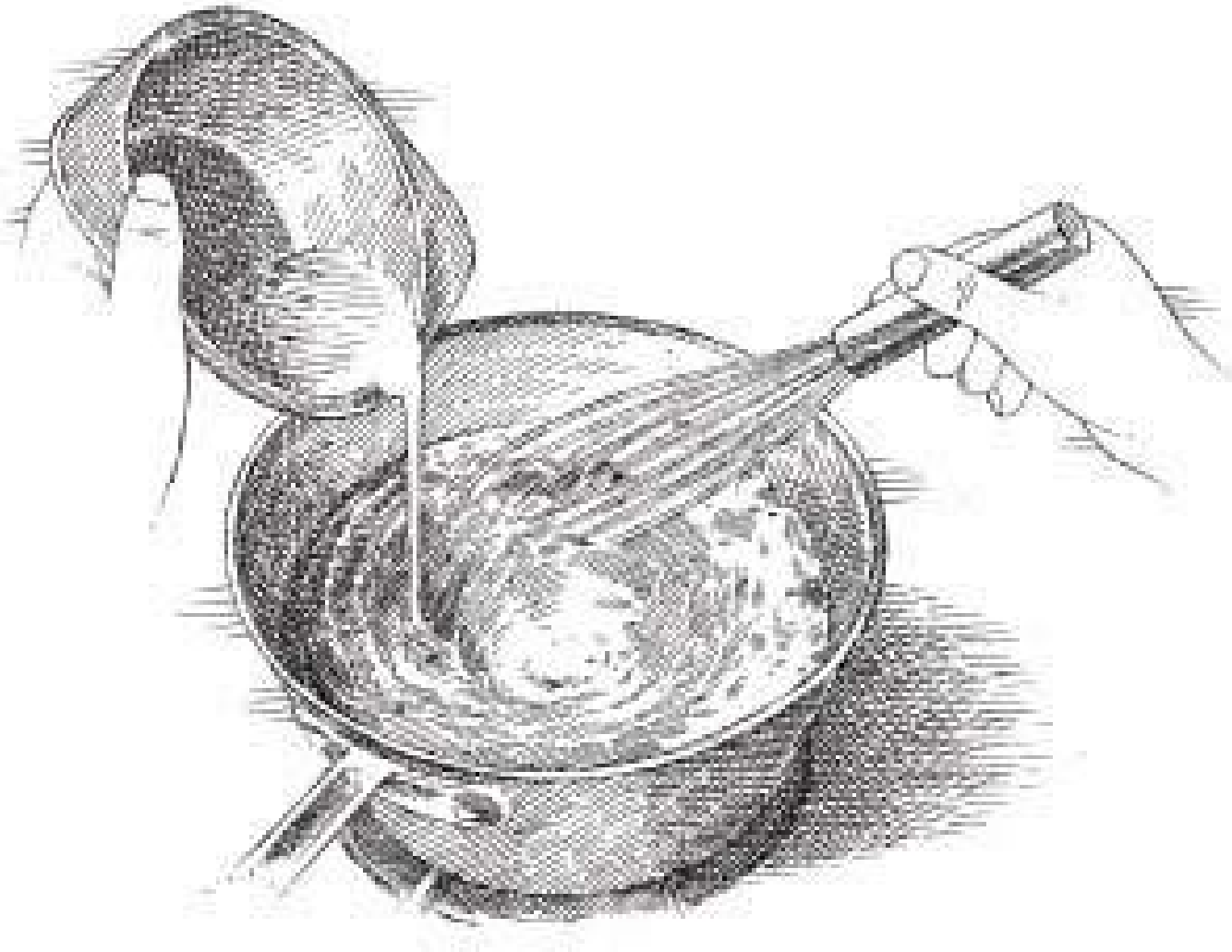

Figure 4.

Whisk the chicken broth so that it moves in a circular motion in the saucepan. Pour the beaten eggs into the broth in a slow, steady stream, whisking all the time, so that ribbons of coagulated egg form.

Chicken Noodle Soup

serves six to eight

NOTE: *This recipe relies on stock made with breasts to provide some meat for the soup. To reinforce the poultry flavor, sauté the vegetables in chicken fat skimmed from cooled stock. Vegetable oil may used if you prefer.*

2 tablespoons chicken fat or vegetable oil

1 medium onion, cut into medium dice

1 large carrot, peeled and sliced $^{1}/_{4}$-inch thick

1 celery stalk, sliced 1/4-inch thick

1/2 teaspoon dried thyme leaves

1 recipe Chicken Stock with Sautéed Breast Meat

2 cups (3 ounces) wide egg noodles

1/4 cup minced fresh parsley leaves

Ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat chicken fat in stockpot or Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add onion, carrot, and celery; sauté until softened, about 5 minutes. Add thyme along with

stock and shredded chicken meat; simmer until vegetables are tender and flavors meld, 10 to 15 minutes.

2. Add noodles and cook until just tender, about 5 minutes. Stir in parsley and pepper to taste, adjust seasonings, and serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Chicken Soup with Orzo and Spring Vegetables

Follow recipe for Chicken Noodle Soup, replacing onion with 1 medium leek, rinsed thoroughly, quartered lengthwise, then sliced thin crosswise.

Substitute $^1/_2$ cup orzo for egg noodles. Along with orzo, add $^1/_4$ pound trimmed asparagus, cut into 1-inch lengths, and $^1/_4$ cup fresh or frozen peas. Substitute 2 tablespoons minced fresh tarragon leaves for parsley.

Chicken Soup with Shells, Tomatoes, and Zucchini

Follow recipe for Chicken Noodle Soup, adding 1 medium zucchini, cut into medium dice, along with onion, carrot, and celery, and increase sautéing time to 7 minutes. Add $^1/_2$ cup chopped tomatoes (fresh or canned) along with stock. Substitute 1 cup small shells or

macaroni for egg noodles and simmer until noodles are cooked, about 10 minutes. Substitute an equal portion of fresh basil for parsley. Serve with grated Parmesan, if you like.

BEEF SOUP

BEEF STOCK SHOULD TASTE LIKE BEEF—**ALMOST** as intense as pot roast jus or beef stew broth—and be flavorful enough to need only a few vegetables and a handful of noodles or barley to make a good soup.

We began our testing by making a traditional stock using four pounds of beef bones fortified with a generous two pounds of beef, as well as celery, carrot, onion, tomato, and fresh thyme, all covered with four quarts of water. Our plan was to taste the stock after 4, 6, 8,

12, and 16 hours of simmering.

At hours 4, 6, and even 8, our stock was weak and tasted mostly of vegetables. And while the texture of the 12-and 16-hour stocks was richly gelatinous, the flavors of vegetables and bones (not beef) predominated.

Knowing now that it was going to take more meat than bones to get great flavor, we started our next set of tests by making broths with different cuts of meat, including chuck, shank, round, arm blade, oxtail, and short ribs. We browned two pounds of meat and one pound of small marrowbones, and we browned three pounds each of different bone-in cuts, such as shank, short ribs, and oxtails. We browned an onion along

with each batch. After browning we covered the ingredients and let them "sweat" for 20 minutes. We added only a quart of water to each pot and simmered until the meat in each pot was done.

After a simmer of $1^{1}/_{2}$ hours, our broths were done, most tasting unmistakably beefy. Upon a blind tasting of each, we agreed that the shank broth was our favorite, followed by the marrowbone-enhanced brisket and chuck. Not only was the broth rich, beefy, and full of body, the shank meat was soft and gelatinous, perfect for shredding and adding to a pot of soup (see figure 5). Because it appeared that our broth was going to require a

generous amount of meat, the brisket's high price ($3.99 per pound compared with $1.99 for both the shanks and the chuck) knocked it out of the running.

Though not yet perfect, this broth was on its way to fulfilling our requirements. It could be made from common supermarket cuts like shank, chuck, and marrowbones. Second, it didn't take all day. This broth was done in about $2^1/_2$ hours and was full-flavored as soon as the meat was tender. Unlike traditional stocks, which require a roasting pan, stockpot, oven, and burner, this was a one-pot, stovetop-only affair. Finally, this broth didn't require a cornucopia of vegetables to make it taste good. To us,

the more vegetables, the weaker the beef flavor. At this point, our recipe called for one lone onion.

What we sacrificed in vegetables, however, we were going to have to compensate for in meat. It took two pounds of meat and one pound of bones to make a quart of broth.

At this point our richly flavored broth needed enlivening. Some broth recipes accomplish this with a splash of vinegar, others with tomato. Although we liked tomatoes in many of the soups we developed, they didn't do much for our broth. And although vinegar was an improvement, red wine made the broth taste even better. We ultimately fortified our broth with a modest half-cup of red

wine, adding it to the kettle after browning the meat.

What we had done in developing our recipe for beef broth was to follow our method for making chicken broth—browning and then sweating a generous portion of meat and bones, adding water just to cover, and simmering for a relatively short time—without giving it much thought. We knew the ratio of meat to water was right, but we wondered if it was really necessary to sweat the meat for 20 minutes before adding water. Side-by-side tests proved that sweating the meat did result in a richer-flavored broth. Moreover, the sweated meat and bones did not release foamy scum, thus

eliminating the need to skim.

After much testing, we came to this inescapable conclusion: if you want to make beef soup right, you can't skimp on the meat.

Rich Beef Stock

makes scant 2 quarts

NOTE: *Because meat makes such an important contribution to the flavor of this broth, a generous amount is required. For the recipes that follow, you will need only half the amount of meat used to make the broth. Refrigerate the leftover meat in an airtight container and use it for sandwiches or cold salads. If you prefer, replace the shank with 4 pounds of chuck cut into* $1^{1}/_{2}$*-inch chunks and 2 pounds of small marrowbones.*

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

6 pounds shank, meat cut from bone in large chunks (see figure 5)

1 large onion, halved

1/2 cup dry red wine

1/2 teaspoon salt

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in large stockpot or Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Brown meat, bones, and onion halves on all sides in batches, making sure not to overcrowd pot and adding more oil to pot as necessary. Remove meat, bones, and onion and set aside. Add red wine to empty pot and cook until reduced to a syrup, 1 to 2 minutes.

Return browned bones, meat, and onion to pot. Reduce heat to low, then cover and sweat meat and onion until they have released about $^{3}/_{4}$ cup dark, very intensely flavored liquid, about 20 minutes. Increase heat to medium-high, add 2 quarts water and salt, and bring to a simmer. Reduce heat to very low, partially cover, and barely simmer until meat is tender, $1^{1}/_{2}$ to 2 hours.

2. Strain broth, discard bones and onion, and set meat aside. Skim fat from stock (see figures 2 and 3) and discard. (Stock and meat to be used in soup can be refrigerated up to 5 days.)

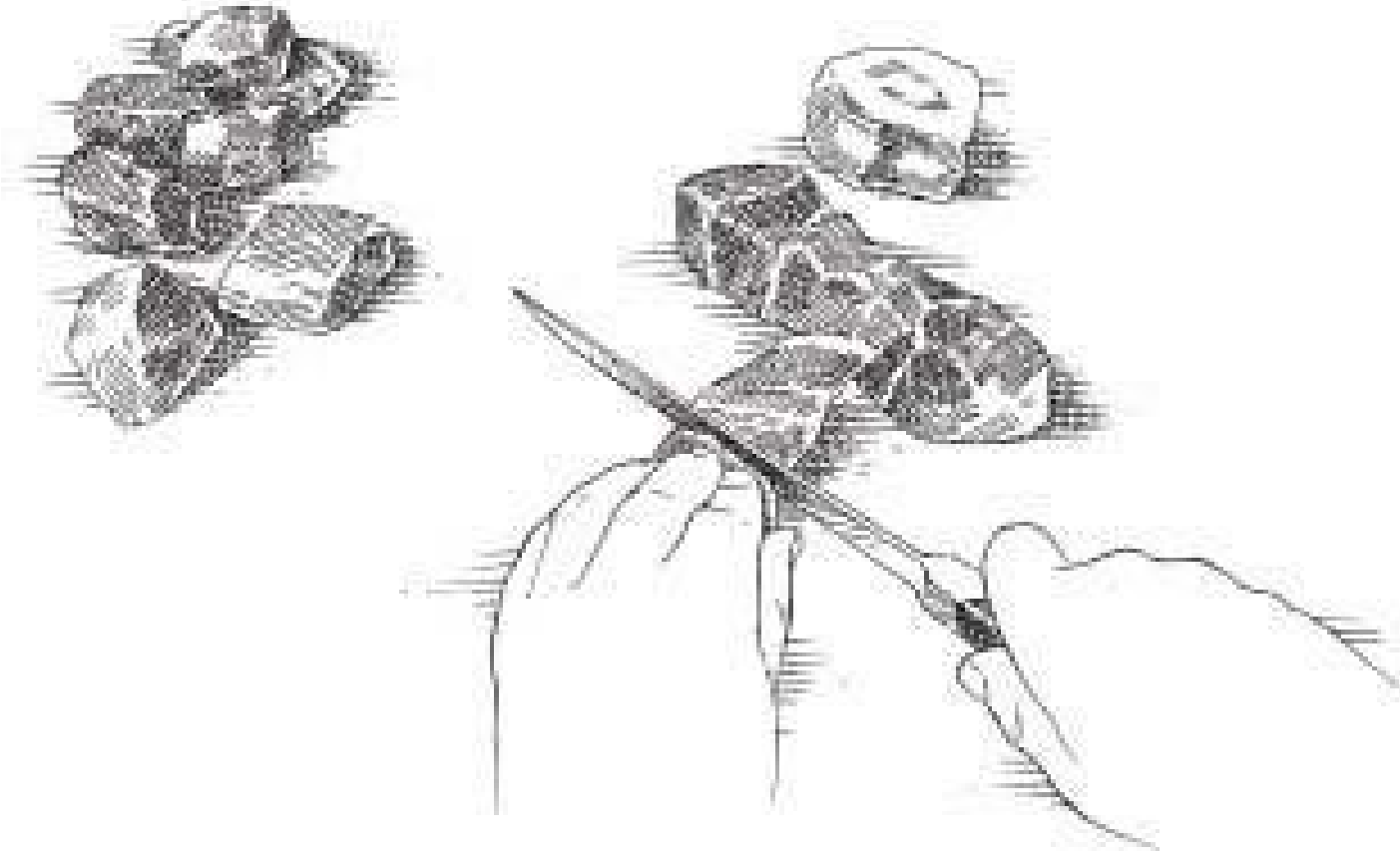

Figure 5.

Cut the meat away from the shank bone in the largest possible pieces.

Beef Noodle Soup

serves six

NOTE: *Our beef stock is the basis of a quick noodle soup.*

1 tablespoon vegetable oil

1 medium onion, cut into medium dice

2 medium carrots, cut into medium dice

1 celery stalk, cut into medium dice

1/2 teaspoon dried thyme or 1 1/2 teaspoons minced fresh thyme leaves

1/2 cup canned diced tomatoes

1 recipe Rich Beef Stock, with 2 cups meat shredded into bite-sized pieces

2 cups (3 ounces) wide egg noodles

1/4 cup minced fresh parsley leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oil in stockpot or Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add onion, carrots, and celery; sauté until softened, about 5 minutes. Add thyme and tomatoes, then beef broth and meat; bring

to a simmer. Reduce heat to low and simmer until vegetables are no longer crunchy, about 15 minutes.

2. Add noodles and simmer until fully cooked, about 5 minutes longer. Stir in parsley, add salt and pepper to taste, and serve immediately.

Beef Barley Soup with Mushrooms

serves six

NOTE: *Use any wild or domestic mushroom in this soup.*

2 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 medium onion, cut into medium dice
2 medium carrots, cut into medium dice
12 ounces mushrooms, sliced thin
1/2 teaspoon dried thyme or 1 1/2 teaspoons minced fresh

thyme leaves

1/2 cup canned diced tomatoes

1 recipe Rich Beef Stock, with 2 cups meat shredded into bite-sized pieces

1/2 cup pearl barley

1/4 cup minced fresh parsley leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oil in stockpot or Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add onion and carrots; sauté until almost soft, 3 to 4 minutes. Add mushrooms and sauté until softened and liquid is almost completely

evaporated, 4 to 5 minutes longer.

2. Add thyme and tomatoes, then beef broth, meat, and barley; bring to a simmer. Reduce heat to low and simmer until barley is just tender, 45 to 50 minutes. Stir in parsley, add salt and pepper to taste, and serve immediately.

FRENCH ONION SOUP

FRENCH ONION SOUP SHOULD HAVE A DARK, rich broth, intensely flavored by a plethora of seriously cooked onions, covered by an oversized crouton that is broth-soaked beneath and cheesy and crusty on top. The first obstacle to success is the broth. This soup is most commonly made with homemade beef stock. But making beef stock takes at least three hours. We wondered if there was a way to get around this step.

We tested soups made with chicken stock, both homemade (which takes

considerably less time to prepare than beef stock) and canned. Both were, well, too chicken-y and just not right. Soups made with canned beef broth were terrible. Canned beef broth does not have enough flavor to carry the day alone. After experimentation, we devised a formula for what we call cheater broth. By combining canned beef and chicken broths with red wine (the secret ingredient here), we came up with a broth that has enough good, rich flavor to make an excellent soup base.

The next obvious step was to examine the onion factor. After a crying game of slicing many onions of several varieties and then sautéing away, we found Vidalias to be disappointingly bland and

boring, white onions to be candy sweet and one-dimensional, and yellows to be only mildly flavorful, with just a slight sweetness. Red onions ranked supreme. Their flavor was intensely onion-y, sweet yet not cloying, and subtly complex.

What was exasperating about the onions is that they took nearly an hour to caramelize. On top of that, they required frequent stirring to keep them from sticking to the bottom of the pot and burning. We found that adding salt to the onions as they began to cook helped draw out some of the water and shaved about 10 minutes off the cooking time. But we began to wonder if it was

necessary for the onions to be so caramelized.

We tried, as one recipe suggested, sautéing them until just softened and colored, but they didn't brown enough to contribute much flavor to the soup. Maybe, we thought, a vigorous sauté, over high heat to achieve deep browning, would do the trick. Not so. Onions cooked that way did not lose enough liquid and made the soup watery and bland. (Besides, there is something wrong with an onion soup in which the onions have even a hint of crunch.) We also tried roasting the onions, thinking that the even, constant heat of the oven might be the answer. Wrong again. Taking the pan in and out of the oven to

stir the onions was an incredible hassle.

It was inattentiveness that caused us to let the drippings in the pot of a batch of onions go a little too far. The onions themselves, though soft, were not thoroughly caramelized, but all the goo stuck on the pot was. We were sure that the finished soup would taste burned, but we were surprised to find that it was, in fact, as sweet, rich, and flavorful as the soups we had been making with fully caramelized onions. To refine the technique we had stumbled on, we decided that medium-high heat was the way to go and that the drippings should be very, very deeply browned. There's no way around frequent stirring, but this

method cut about another 10 minutes off the onion-cooking time, bringing it down to just over 30 minutes.

With all those wonderful, tasty drippings stuck to the bottom of the pot, the deglazing process—adding liquid and scraping up all the browned bits—is crucial. Once the broth is added to the onions, we found that a simmering time of 20 minutes is needed to allow the onion flavor to permeate the broth and the flavors to meld.

Some recipes call for placing the crouton in the bottom of the bowl and ladling the soup over it. We disagree. We opt to set the crouton on top, so that only its bottom side is moistened with broth while its top side is crusted with

cheese. The crouton can then physically support the cheese and prevent it from sinking into the soup. To keep as much cheese as possible on the surface, we found it best to use two croutons, instead of only one, to completely fill the mouth of the bowl. A baguette can be cut on the bias as necessary to secure the closest fit.

Traditionally, French onion soup is topped with Swiss, Gruyère, or Emmentaler. Plain Swiss cheese was neither outstanding nor offensive. It was gooey, bubbly, and mild. Both Gruyère and Emmentaler melted to perfection and were sweet, nutty, and faintly tangy, but they were also very strong and pungent,

overwhelming many tasters' palettes.

We found that the flavor of Swiss cheese could be improved with the addition of some grated Asiago cheese. Like Gruyère and Emmentaler, Asiago has a sweet and nutty flavor, but without the pungent quality. Parmesan was a good complement for the Swiss cheese, too, with a pleasant sweetness and saltiness, but without the nuttiness of Asiago.

French Onion Soup

serves 6

NOTE: *For a soup that is resplendent with deep, rich flavors, use 8 cups of Rich Beef Stock in place of the canned chicken and beef broths and red wine. Tie the parsley and thyme sprigs together with kitchen twine so they will be easy to retrieve from the soup pot.*

2 tablespoons unsalted butter

5 medium red onions (about 3 pounds), sliced thin

Salt

6 cups low-sodium canned chicken broth

$1\frac{3}{4}$ cups low-sodium canned beef broth

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup dry red wine

2 sprigs fresh parsley

1 sprig fresh thyme

1 bay leaf

1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar

Ground black pepper

1 baguette, cut on the bias into $\frac{3}{4}$-inch slices (2 slices per serving)

$4\frac{1}{2}$ ounces Swiss cheese, sliced $\frac{1}{16}$inch thick

3 ounces Asiago cheese, grated (about $\frac{3}{4}$cup)

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Melt butter in stockpot or Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add onions and $^1/_2$ teaspoon salt and stir to coat onions thoroughly with butter. Cook, stirring frequently, until onions are reduced and syrupy and inside of pot is coated with very deep brown crust, 30 to 35 minutes. Stir in chicken and beef broths, red wine, parsley, thyme, and bay leaf, scraping pot bottom with wooden spoon to loosen browned bits, and bring to a simmer. Simmer to blend flavors, about 20 minutes, and discard herbs. Stir in balsamic vinegar and adjust seasoning with salt and pepper to taste. (Soup can

be refrigerated in airtight container up to 2 days; return to simmer before finishing with croutons and cheese).

2. To serve, adjust oven rack to upper-middle position and heat broiler. Set heatproof serving bowls or crocks on baking sheet and fill each with about $1^{1}/_{2}$ cups soup. Top each bowl with two baguette slices and distribute Swiss cheese slices, placing them in a single layer, if possible, on bread. Sprinkle with about 2 tablespoons grated Asiago cheese and broil until well-browned and bubbly, about 10 minutes. Cool 5 minutes and serve.

PUREED VEGETABLE SOUPS

Initially, we set out to develop a single master recipe for pureed vegetable soup, hoping that the same technique could be used with all vegetables. We quickly discovered that green vegetables, such as peas and asparagus, must be handled differently from the heartier, more starchy vegetables, such as carrots and butternut squash.

Dense winter vegetables are bulky enough to act as their own thickener.

There is no need to add flour or cream to thicken soups made from these vegetables. Green vegetables, however, are not starchy enough to use on their own. They require flour and cream. Loss of color is another issue when making soups made from green vegetables. The two types of pureed soup are considered separately in this chapter.

SOUPS WITH HEARTY VEGETABLES

We enjoy the smooth, silky texture of creamed vegetable soups, but we often find the flavor to be lacking. The dairy elements (usually lots of butter and cream) mask the taste of the vegetables.

Instead of an intense carrot flavor in a creamy base, for example, we usually taste cream with carrots in the background.

We wanted to see if there was a way to make a pureed soup that tasted more like vegetables. We wanted a creamy carrot soup reminiscent of the sweetest carrots, a butternut squash soup that really had the flavor of squash. And we were not willing to sacrifice anything in terms of consistency. Puréed vegetable soups must be silky. Otherwise, there is no point in pureeing them.

Most creamy vegetable soups contain flour. While we find flour to be essential when working with more watery green vegetables, starchy vegetables don't

seem to need flour. In fact, when flour is added to soups made with dense, starchy vegetables, the texture becomes overly thick and starchy.

To find our way, we decided to use carrots as a model and then test other vegetables after developing a basic recipe. We started out by experimenting with other starches (cornstarch and potato starch) but found the results to be similar to soups made with flour. The texture was still too thick and gummy, and the vegetables were not the primary flavor. We had also seen recipes using potatoes or rice as thickeners, usually cooked right along with the vegetables in broth. When we tried this, though, the

potatoes and rice detracted from the carrot flavor and caused the color of the soup to fade.

We found that the elimination of the starch improved the texture of the soup, but the recipe we were working with had a dairy component, and its flavor still dominated. It seemed to us that the best idea might be to use a larger quantity of vegetables and puree them for texture.

Most recipes for pureed vegetable soup use equal amounts of vegetables and liquid, or in some cases slightly more liquid than vegetables. We decided to alter this ratio in a big way and cook four cups of carrots in two cups of stock. We figured we would get more

vegetable flavor and could use the vegetables themselves as a thickener.

This change resulted in an immediate improvement. By the time the vegetables were cooked, the mixture was thick enough to create a puree with good body. In fact, the pureed carrots and broth were actually a little too thick. Instead of adding cream to the vegetables as they cooked, we now needed to add cream to the blender to thin out the pureed carrots.

We used about one cup of cream to get the right consistency, but this was too much dairy fat for our taste. Next, we tried substituting half-and-half as well as whole and low-fat milk. We found that

whole milk provided just the right amount of dairy fat to improve the texture, providing smoothness and a creamy mouthfeel without overwhelming the carrot flavor. Adding skim milk or 2 percent milk was like adding more broth —not at all satisfying. Half-and-half was good, but a tad too rich.

Now that we had successfully developed a bright orange carrot soup that tasted of good, sweet carrots, we wondered what other vegetables might take to this technique. Watery vegetables refused to work. Mushrooms, for instance, don't have enough fiber and bulk to work as their own thickening agent. Peas and asparagus are also poor candidates for this technique, which

works best with tubers, roots, and hearty winter vegetables.

We have included recipes using carrots, butternut squash, and cauliflower, but the same technique can be applied to parsnips, turnips, beets, or sweet potatoes. These soups also taste delicious cold. To serve them cold, start off with oil instead of butter; unlike butter, the oil won't congeal when chilled.

Pureed Carrot Soup

serves four to six

NOTE: *Use oil instead of butter when serving this soup cold.*

2 tablespoons unsalted butter or extra-virgin olive oil

1 medium onion, 3 medium shallots, or 1 medium leek (white and light green parts only), chopped

$^1/_4$ cup dry sherry or white wine

$1^1/_2$ pounds (about 8 medium) carrots, peeled, halved

lengthwise, and sliced thin (about 4 cups)

2 cups Chicken Stock or low-sodium canned broth

1 teaspoon salt

$^1/_8$ teaspoon ground white pepper, or more to taste

Pinch freshly grated nutmeg

$1^1/_4$-$1^1/_2$ cups whole milk

2 teaspoons minced fresh tarragon, chives, or parsley leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat butter or oil in large saucepan over medium heat. Add onion; sauté until

golden, about 5 minutes. Stir in sherry and carrots; cook until sherry evaporates, about 30 seconds.

2. Add stock, salt, pepper, and nutmeg to saucepan; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to simmer, cover, and cook until carrots are tender, 20 to 25 minutes.

3. Ladle carrot mixture into blender. Add 1 cup milk; blend until very smooth. Return soup to saucepan; cook over low heat until warmed through. If soup is too thick, stir in up to $^{1}/_{2}$ cup more milk to thin consistency. Adjust seasonings. Serve hot, garnishing bowls with minced

herb.

VARIATIONS:

Pureed Butternut Squash Soup with Ginger

Follow recipe for Puréed Carrot Soup, adding 1 tablespoon finely minced fresh gingerroot to onions after onions have sautéed for 4 minutes. Continue cooking for 1 minute. Replace carrots with 1 medium butternut squash (about $2^1/_2$ pounds), which has been halved, seeded, peeled, and cut into $^1/_2$-inch cubes to yield 5 cups. Omit nutmeg and cook squash until tender, 15 to 20 minutes. Thin with 1 to $1^1/_4$ cups milk and garnish

with minced chives or parsley.

Pureed Cauliflower Soup with Curry

Follow recipe for Puréed Carrot Soup, adding $1^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoons curry powder to onions after onions have sautéed for 4 minutes. Continue cooking for 1 minute. Replace carrots with 1 medium head cauliflower (about 2 pounds), stems discarded and florets cut into bite-sized pieces to yield 5 cups. Omit nutmeg and cook cauliflower until tender, about 15 minutes. Thin with $^{3}/_{4}$ to 1 cup milk and garnish with minced chives or parsley.

SOUPS WITH GREEN

VEGETABLES

Soups made with green vegetables behave quite differently from other pureed vegetable soups. Some green vegetables, such asparagus, are not starchy enough to create a thick texture when pureed. They need help from flour and/or cream. Loss of color is another key issue that affects all soups made with green vegetables.

Our goal was to develop pureed green vegetable soups with bright color and strong flavor. The color issue was fairly easy to solve. Green vegetables should not be simmered too long in soup. This means cutting the vegetables into small pieces so they cook quickly. Also, it is

best to serve creamy green vegetable soups as soon as they are ready. Reheating is not kind to these soups, which are prone to turning a drab olive green.

The more problematic issue is flavor. As we found in earlier tests with carrots, flour and cream have a dulling effect on vegetable flavor. However, while carrots are sturdy enough to create a thick soup without either flour or cream, green vegetables are too watery. We tried to get around using flour and cream but were disappointed with the results. While soups made with starchy vegetables can become dull when thickened with these ingredients, pureed green vegetable soups are thin unless

flour and cream are used. Our mission was clear: improve and enhance the vegetable flavor despite the need to add flour and cream.

We found that keeping simmering times to a minimum helped to preserve the flavor of green vegetables. Puréeing or finely chopping them in the food processor improved the texture of the soup and cut cooking time to a matter of minutes. For instance, we discovered that processing partly frozen peas in the food processor and simmering them briefly in the soup released their starch and flavor quickly. Boston lettuce, a common component in many pea soup recipes, gave our soup a marvelous,

almost frothy texture.

For broccoli, the key was to pulse the trimmed stems and florets in the food processor. When cut so finely, broccoli will become completely tender in just seven or eight minutes of cooking, before its strong-smelling compounds have had a chance to form.

Asparagus proved more troublesome. No matter what we tried, the flavor in soups simmered for only a short time was too mild. When we allowed the asparagus to cook for a longer time (more than 15 minutes), the flavor was better, but the color was army green. We tried broiling the asparagus, hoping that this method would boost its flavor and help to break down its stringy texture.

Broiled asparagus remained bright green and contributed much more flavor to the soup, but the texture was still too stringy.

We tried pureeing chopped raw asparagus before adding it to the soup, and this greatly improved the texture. Unfortunately, the flavor of this soup paled in comparison with the soup made with broiled asparagus. The solution was simple: puree half of the asparagus for smooth texture and broil the other half for strong flavor. We found the results to be admirable; although the finished texture is not perfectly smooth —even after straining—the flavor and color are lovely.

Creamy Pea Soup

serves four to six

NOTE: *Shallots work best with delicate green vegetables, but you can use an equal amount of onions or leeks.*

4 tablespoons unsalted butter

1 cup minced shallots (7 to 8 shallots)

2 tablespoons flour

4 cups Chicken Stock or low-sodium canned broth

$1^1/_2$ pounds frozen peas, partially thawed at room temperature for 10 minutes

12 small Boston lettuce leaves

(about 3 ounces), washed, dried, and chopped

1/2 cup heavy cream

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat butter in large saucepan over medium-low heat. Add shallots and sauté, covered, until completely soft, 7 to 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Stir in flour with wooden spoon. Cook for 30 seconds, stirring constantly. Add stock gradually, whisking constantly to thin out flour-butter mixture. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, reduce heat to low, and simmer for 5 minutes.

2. While soup base is cooking, place partially frozen peas in workbowl of food processor and process until peas are texture of coarse, chopped pistachios, about 20 seconds. Stir peas and lettuce into soup base, cover, and bring to a simmer over medium-high heat. Uncover, reduce heat to medium, and simmer for 2 minutes.

3. Purée soup in a blender in two batches until smooth. Pour soup through fine strainer (see figure 1) and into clean saucepan, then stir in cream. Bring soup to a simmer, but do not boil. Season with

salt and pepper to taste. Serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Creamy Broccoli Soup

Follow step 1 of Creamy Pea Soup recipe, using 2 cups stock and 2 cups water. Trim tough bottom portion of stalks from 1 large bunch broccoli (about $1^{1}/_{2}$ pounds). Peel tough outer skin from remaining portion of stalks. Coarsely chop peeled stalks and florets. Pulse broccoli in food processor until cut very small but not pureed. (The largest pieces should be pea-sized). Stir broccoli into soup base in place of peas and lettuce and simmer until tender, 7 to

8 minutes. Proceed with step 3 of Creamy Pea Soup recipe, but do not strain. Add $1^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoons lemon juice with salt and pepper to taste.

Creamy Asparagus Soup

Preheat broiler and position rack on highest setting. Place $1^{1}/_{2}$ pounds trimmed (tough ends discarded) asparagus on rimmed baking sheet. Drizzle 1 tablespoon melted butter over asparagus and roll asparagus back and forth to coat. Broil asparagus until tender and just beginning to color, about 5 minutes. Cool and roughly chop. Reserve. Chop another $1^{1}/_{2}$ pounds raw, trimmed asparagus into 1-inch pieces

and transfer to workbowl of food processor. Pulse until asparagus is finely chopped. Reserve separately.

Follow step 1 of Creamy Pea Soup recipe. Replace peas and lettuce in step 2 with broiled and raw chopped asparagus and simmer until tender, about 5 minutes. Proceed with step 3 of Creamy Pea Soup recipe. Add 1 tablespoon lemon juice with salt and pepper to taste. If soup seems too thick, add up to 1 cup hot water.

CORN CHOWDER

THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE IN MAKING CORN chowder is getting corn flavor. The sweet, delicate flavor of corn can be easily overwhelmed by the cream, potatoes, leeks, bacon, and other seasonings. At the outset, we decided to use frozen corn because it is available year-round and is so easy to work with. (We also developed a variation for fresh corn that can be used during the summer.)

Since broiling worked so well to bring out the flavor of asparagus in our

Creamy Asparugus Soup, we decided to try this method with frozen corn kernels. As we hoped, the flavor of the chowder made with broiled corn was richer and deeper. We had worried that the application of dry heat might toughen the kernels as well as enhance their flavor, but they softened nicely when stirred into the soup. As an added bonus, we found that broiled corn kernels were less likely to fall apart after being simmered.

Having achieved the corn flavor we were after, we turned our attention to texture. Many corn chowders are too thick, even gluey. We tried eliminating flour and the step of pureeing the finished soup, but did not like the results. The soup was a bit thin, and the

corn and the liquid did not meld. Next, we tried pureeing the finished chowder, but we didn't like these results either. The soup was too dense, and we missed the chunks of corn and potato.

We decided to thicken the soup without pureeing. Sprinkling two tablespoons of flour over the sautéed aromatic vegetables worked well, but the soup was still a bit thin. When we added more flour, the soup tasted floury. We had better results when we pureed some of the corn kernels before adding them to the soup kettle. The starchy pureed corn made the soup silkier and heartier without making it dull or gluey. At last, we had a corn chowder with

excellent corn flavor and a silky, substantial texture.

Corn Chowder

serves four to six

NOTE: *Chowder made with frozen corn is delicious and easy to assemble. To use fresh corn, remove the kernels from five to six medium ears to yield the necessary five scant cups for this recipe.*

2 10-ounce packages frozen corn kernels (5 scant cups)

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

Salt and ground black pepper

2 ounces (2 strips) bacon, cut crosswise into $^{1}/_{4}$-inch strips

3 tablespoons unsalted butter

2 medium leeks, white and light green parts, finely chopped

1 large celery stalk, cut into $^1/_4$-inch pieces

2 medium garlic cloves, minced

Pinch cayenne pepper

2 tablespoons flour

4 cups Chicken Stock or low-sodium canned broth

1 bay leaf

2 medium red potatoes, cut into $^1/_2$-inch dice

1 teaspoon chopped fresh thyme leaves

1 cup heavy cream

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to top position and heat broiler. Toss 4 scant cups corn with 1 tablespoon oil and salt and pepper to taste in large bowl. Spread corn out evenly over large baking sheet. Broil, stirring occasionally, until corn begins to brown, 7 to 10 minutes. Remove from oven and set aside. Allow remaining 1 scant cup corn to partially thaw, about 10 minutes. Process in food processor until very fine, about 15 seconds. Reserve.

2. Cook bacon in large saucepan or Dutch oven over medium heat until crisp, about 8 minutes. Remove bacon

with slotted spoon and set aside. Pour off all bacon fat.

3. Melt butter in empty Dutch oven, still over medium heat. Add leeks and sauté until very soft, about 7 minutes. Add celery and cook for another 5 minutes, or until soft. Add garlic and cayenne; sauté until fragrant, about 1 minute. Stir in flour with wooden spoon. Cook for 2 minutes.

4. Add stock slowly, whisking constantly to thin flour-butter mixture. Add bay leaf and potatoes and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer until

potatoes are tender, 10 to 12 minutes. Add roasted corn, processed corn, and thyme; let soup simmer over medium-high heat for 5 minutes.

5. Stir in cream and return to a simmer. Add bacon and salt and pepper to taste. Remove bay leaf. Serve hot.

CREAM OF TOMATO SOUP

CREAMY TOMATO SOUP SHOULD TASTE LIKE sweet, ripe tomatoes and have a rich red color. The cream should tame the acidity but not obliterate it. The soup should also be extremely smooth.

We knew that ripe August tomatoes would make excellent soup, but this recipe is really too heavy for summertime. It's best served at the holidays or for lunch on a cold winter's day, when only out-of-season tomatoes are available. We made five different

tomato soup recipes using out-of-season fresh tomatoes, and the results were ghastly. All the soups were watery and tasted like cream and vegetables (onions, leeks, whatever was added to the base). The tomato flavor was so faint that the color was the only clue that the soups contained tomatoes.

Our next step was to test canned tomatoes. From past results, we knew that canned whole tomatoes packed in juice (not puree) have the freshest tomato flavor. That's because puree is a concentrate requiring higher and longer cooking times than simple canned tomatoes, whole or diced. We tried our favorite canned whole tomatoes (Muir Glen has been a consistent winner in our

blind taste tests), and the results were better but not great. The soup needed more tomato flavor.

We wondered how we could get more flavor from canned tomatoes. We decided to trying broiling, which had worked well in soups made with corn and asparagus. The difference was enormous. The soup tasted as if it had been made with the finest, ripest summer tomatoes.

Admittedly, broiling canned tomatoes can be tricky. We had trouble with burning in some spots on the tray. We figured that roasting in a hot oven would deliver similar results without the risk of scorching. After several tests, we

concluded that roasting at 450 degrees gave us excellent flavor without any scorching. Roasting both intensified the flavor of the canned tomatoes and mellowed their acidity.

With the all-important tomato element in place, we wondered if we could intensify the flavor even further with tomato paste or sun-dried tomatoes. Sun-dried tomatoes added a bit more tomato flavor, but we felt the difference was not worth the bother of rehydrating the dried tomatoes in boiling water. The paste brought another level of tomato intensity to the soup and fortified the color. Paste is easy to add to the soup, so we have included some in our recipe.

Cream of Tomato Soup

serves four

NOTE: *Roasting the canned tomatoes improves their flavor and gives the soup a rich red color.*

2 cans (28 ounces) whole tomatoes packed in juice, preferably Muir Glen

$1^1/_2$ tablespoons dark brown sugar

4 tablespoons unsalted butter

4 large shallots, minced (about $^3/_4$cup)

1 tablespoon tomato paste

Pinch ground allspice

2 tablespoons flour

2 cups Chicken Stock or low-sodium canned broth, hot

1/2 cup heavy cream

2 tablespoons dry sherry or brandy

Salt and cayenne pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Line a rimmed baking sheet with aluminum foil. Drain tomatoes in small strainer set over medium bowl. With your fingers, open whole tomatoes and remove seeds, allowing juices to fall through strainer

and into bowl (see figure 6). Reserve 2 cups juice. Leaving seeds behind, transfer whole tomatoes to lined baking sheet and arrange in single layer (see figure 7). Sprinkle tomatoes with brown sugar and bake until completely dry and starting to color, about 30 minutes. Let cool slightly, then peel tomatoes off foil. Reserve.

2. While tomatoes are roasting, melt butter in medium saucepan over medium heat until foaming. Add shallots, tomato paste, and allspice. Reduce heat to low, cover, and sauté, stirring occasionally, until shallots are completely soft, 7 to 10 minutes. Stir in flour and cook for 30

seconds, stirring constantly. Gradually add stock, whisking to incorporate the flour/butter mixture.

3. Add tomatoes and their juice. Cover and simmer gently for 10 minutes. Pour hot soup through strainer into clean saucepan. Purée solids left in strainer in blender with enough tomato broth in saucepan (about 1 cup) to achieve a perfectly smooth consistency. Stir puree into tomato broth and set pan over low heat. Add cream and sherry and season with salt and cayenne to taste. Bring to a simmer. Serve hot.

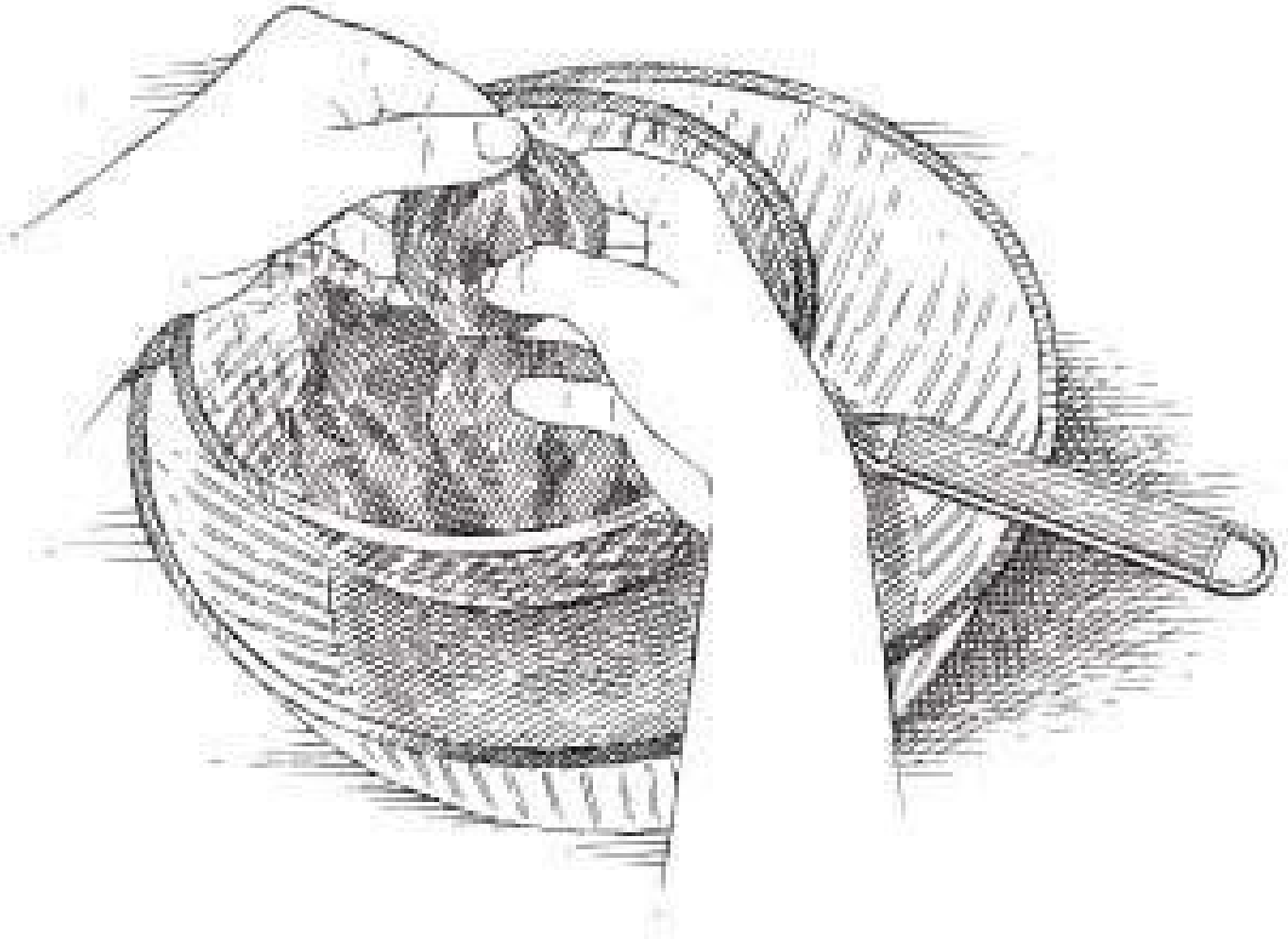

Figure 6.

With your fingers, carefully open the whole tomatoes over a strainer set in a bowl and push out the seeds, allowing the juices to fall through strainer and into the bowl. The seeded tomatoes can go directly onto the baking sheet, as

directed in figure 7.

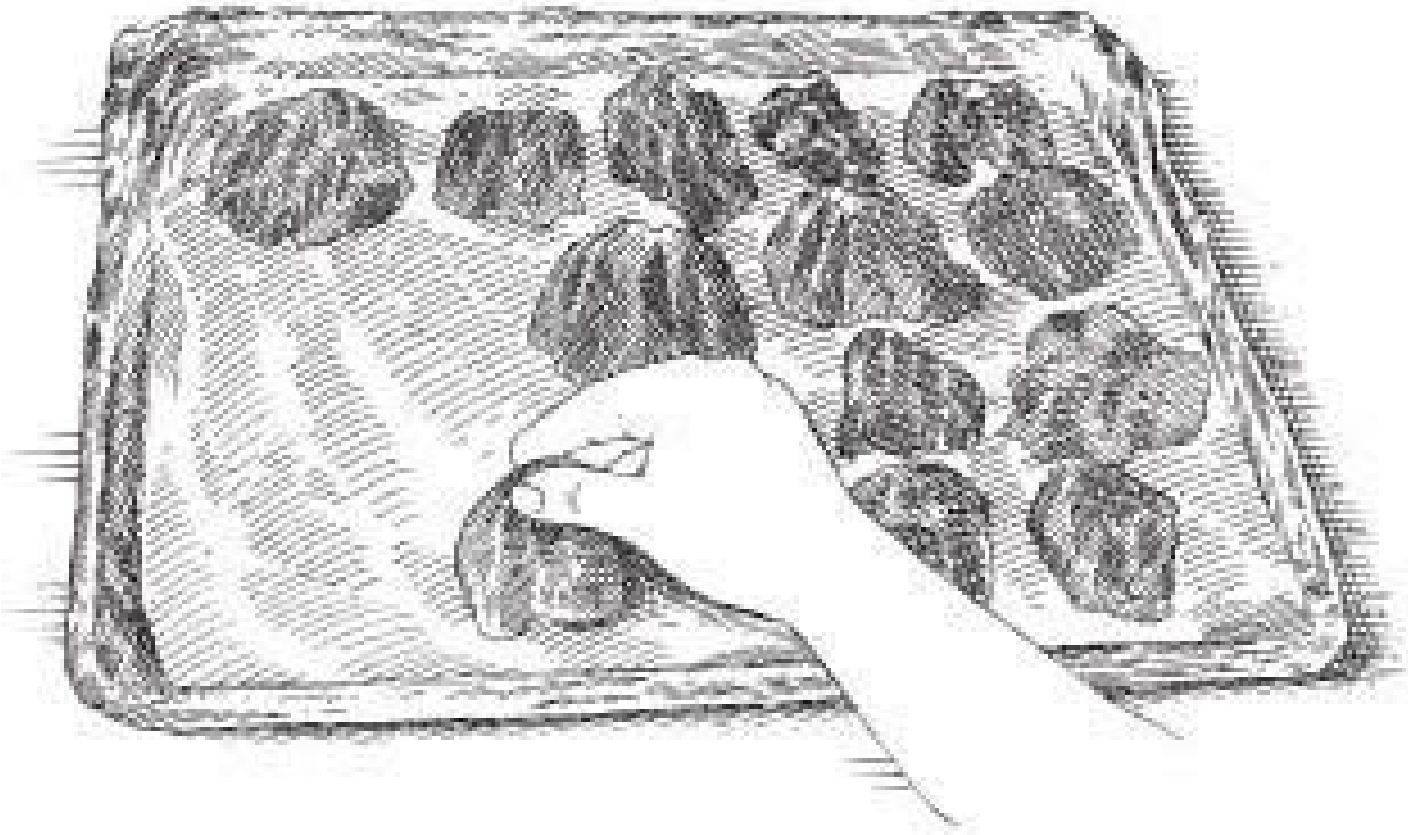

Figure 7.

To promote even cooking, arrange the seeded tomatoes in a single layer on a foil-lined, rimmed baking sheet. The foil is essential; it keeps the tomatoes from scorching and sticking to the baking sheet.

POTATO-LEEK SOUP

POTATO-LEEK SOUP IS A STAPLE OF EUROPEAN peasant cooking. It is at once hearty and creamy because of the potatoes and lean because cream is rarely added. We had a number of questions. What kind of potatoes are best, and how should they should be cooked to keep them from disintegrating? How many leeks are necessary for good flavor? Should other alliums (onions and garlic) be added to the base?

We started by testing various kinds of

potatoes. In our opinion, the potatoes in this soup should be tender but not mushy or waterlogged. In many of the recipes we tested, the potatoes fell apart into a starchy mess. Low-starch red potatoes are a must here. We discovered that they hold their shape better than russet potatoes or Yukon golds.

Precise timing for cooking the potatoes was hard to pinpoint. One minute the potatoes tasted a bit underdone, the next minute they were too soft. We hit upon the following solution: simmer the potatoes until the chunks are almost tender (there should be just a tiny bit of hardness in the center when tested), then turn off the heat, cover the pot, and let gentle residual heat finish cooking the

potatoes.

With the potato issue settled, we moved on to the leeks. We started out with two leeks. Although this a common amount in many recipes, we found that soups with so few leeks tasted anemic. We concluded that while potatoes may add the texture and heft to this soup, the leeks are the real source of flavor. We eventually decided on five or six medium leeks, including some of the green section, which makes for a more robust flavor. We tried slicing the leeks quite fine as well as leaving the pieces fairly large. Larger pieces are a substantial and appealing addition to this soup.

We like the simplicity of using just leeks and potatoes but wondered if other vegetables (especially onions and garlic) might add flavor. We found the presence of garlic, even in small amounts or when roasted, to be overpowering. However, onions added another level of flavor that complemented that of the leeks.

Potato-Leek Soup

serves six to eight

NOTE: *Red-skinned potatoes hold their shape better than other potatoes and are the best choice in this recipe.*

6 tablespoons unsalted butter

2 medium-large onions, chopped fine

5–6 medium leeks, whites and 3 inches of green section, halved lengthwise, washed, and cut crosswise into $^{3}/_{4}$-inch pieces (about 11 cups)

1 tablespoon flour

6 cups Chicken Stock or low-

sodium canned broth

1 bay leaf

$1^{3}/_{4}$ pounds red potatoes, peeled and cut into $^{3}/_{4}$-inch dice (about 4 cups)

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Melt butter in large Dutch oven over medium-low heat. When butter foams, add onions, cover, and cook, stirring occasionally, until very soft, about 10 minutes. Add leeks, increase heat to medium, cover, and cook, stirring occasionally, until tender but not mushy, 15 to 20 minutes. Do not allow leeks to

color.

2. Sprinkle flour over vegetables and stir to coat evenly. Cook for 2 minutes. Gradually whisk in stock. Add bay leaf and potatoes, cover, and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer, covered, until potatoes are almost tender, about 5 minutes. Remove pan from heat and keep covered until flavors meld and potatoes are completely tender, about 10 minutes. Remove bay leaf and season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve hot.

VARIATIONS:

Potato-Leek Soup with

Kielbasa or Ham

Follow recipe for Potato-Leek Soup until potatoes are almost tender. Add 8 ounces kielbasa, cut into $^1/_4$-inch slices, or 8 ounces diced cooked ham, then cover pan and let flavors meld for 10 minutes. Proceed as directed.

Potato-Leek Soup with White Beans

Follow recipe for Potato-Leek Soup, reducing amount of potatoes to 1 pound. When potatoes are almost tender, add 1 cup cooked white beans and 1 cup hot water, cover pan, and let flavors meld for 10 minutes. Proceed as directed.

MINESTRONE

MINESTRONE IS NOT A LIGHT UNDERTAKING. Any way you cut it, there is a lot of dicing and chopping. Given the amount of preparation, we thought it was important to discover which steps and ingredients were essential and which we could do without. Could everything be added to the pot at once, or is it necessary to precook some of the vegetables? Was stock essential, or could we use water, as do many traditional Italian recipes? How many vegetables were enough? And which

ones?

While we wanted to pack the soup with vegetables, we were also determined to create a harmonious balance of flavors. Minestrone should be a team effort, with each element pulling equal weight. From the start, we decided to jettison vegetables that were too bold (such as broccoli) as well as those that were too bland and would contribute little flavor to the soup (such as button mushrooms).

We wanted to devise a basic technique for preparing the soup, and our research turned up two possible paths. The majority of recipes dump the vegetables into a pot with liquid and simmer them until everything is tender. A few recipes

call for sautéing some or most of the vegetables before adding the liquid (along with any vegetables that would not benefit from cooking in fat, such as spinach).

Although we expected the soup with sautéed vegetables to be more flavorful, it wasn't. We then prepared three more pots without sautéing any of the vegetables. We added homemade vegetable stock to one pot, homemade chicken stock to a second, and water and the rind from a wedge of Parmesan cheese to the third.

The results were unexpected. The soup made with vegetable stock tasted one-dimensional and overwhelmingly sweet;

because the vegetables were already sweet, using vegetable stock, which is also fairly sweet, did not help to balance the flavors. We realized we wanted the liquid portion of the soup to add a layer of complexity that would play off the vegetables. The soup made with chicken stock seemed to fit the bill. It was rich, complex, and delicious. However, the chicken flavor overwhelmed the vegetables. Diluting the stock with water wasn't the answer; this resulted in a rather bland soup. Ultimately, we preferred the soup made with water and the cheese rind. The Parmesan gave the broth a buttery, nutty flavor that contrasted nicely with the vegetables without overshadowing them.

We wanted the vegetables to soften completely but not lose their shape, and an hour of gentle simmering accomplished this. Much longer and the vegetables began to break down; any less time over the flame and the vegetables were too crunchy. We liked the concentrating effect of simmering without the lid on.

We also looked at several recipes that added some fresh vegetables at the end of the cooking time. This sounded like a nice idea, but the fresh peas and green beans added 10 minutes before the soup was done tasted uncooked and bland compared with the vegetables that had simmered in the flavorful soup for an

hour. For maximum flavor, all the vegetables, even ones that usually require brief cooking times, should be added at the outset.

The addition of the cheese rind was an interesting find. During our research, we also turned up two other flavor boosters that could replace the cheese rind and be added to the soup from the start: rehydrated porcini mushrooms and their soaking liquid, and pancetta (unsmoked Italian bacon). The pancetta proved to be a better team player.

Pancetta must be sautéed to render its fat and release its flavor. We cooked a little pancetta until crisp in some olive oil, then added the water and vegetables. Like the cheese rind, the pancetta

contributed depth. But while cheese rind gave the soup a buttery, nutty flavor, the pancetta added a very subtle flavor of pork and spice. We tried regular American bacon as well. It was a bit stronger and lent a smoky element to the soup. In the recipe variation below, we prefer the subtler flavor of the pancetta, but either pancetta or smoked bacon make for a much more flavorful soup than one made with water alone.

Up until this point, we had focused on ingredients that went into the soup pot at the start. But many traditional Mediterranean recipes stir in fresh herbs or herb pastes just before the soup is served. Pesto is the most common

choice, and we were hooked from the first time we added it to the soup. The heat of the soup releases the perfume of the basil and garlic and creates another delicious layer of flavor. A simple mixture of minced fresh rosemary, garlic, and extra-virgin olive oil was also delicious. As with the pesto, the oil adds some fat to a soup that is otherwise very lean. The rosemary and garlic combo is very strong and must be used in smaller quantities than the pesto.

Minestrone

serves six to eight

NOTE: *The rind from a wedge of Parmesan cheese, preferably Parmigiano-Reggiano, brings complexity and depth to a soup made with water instead of stock. Remove the rind from a wedge of fresh Parmesan, or save the rinds from pieces that have been completely grated in a zipper-lock bag, stored in the freezer to use as needed.*

2 small leeks (or 1 large), washed thoroughly, white and light green parts sliced thin,

crosswise

2 medium carrots, chopped small

2 small onions, chopped small

2 medium celery stalks, chopped small

1 medium baking potato, peeled and cut into medium dice

1 medium zucchini, cut into medium dice

3 cups stemmed spinach leaves, cut into thin strips

1 can (28 ounces) whole tomatoes packed in juice, drained, and chopped

1 Parmesan cheese rind, about 5 x 2 inches Salt

1 can (15 ounces) cannellini beans, drained and rinsed

$^1/_4$ cup pesto or 1 tablespoon minced fresh rosemary mixed with 1 teaspoon minced garlic and 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil

Ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Bring vegetables, tomatoes, 8 cups water, cheese rind, and 1 teaspoon salt to boil in a stockpot. Reduce heat to medium-low; simmer uncovered, stirring occasionally until vegetables are tender but still hold their shape, about 1 hour. (At this point, soup can be refrigerated

in airtight container for 3 days or frozen for 1 month.)

2. Add beans and cook just until heated through, about 5 minutes. Remove pot from heat. Remove and discard cheese rind. Stir in pesto or rosemary-garlic mixture. Adjust seasonings, adding pepper and more salt, if necessary. Serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Minestrone with Pancetta

Mince 2 ounces thinly sliced pancetta or bacon and sauté in 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil in soup kettle until crisp,

3 to 4 minutes. Proceed with recipe for Minestrone, adding vegetables, tomatoes, and water but omitting cheese rind.

Minestrone with Rice or Pasta

Follow recipe for Minestrone or Minestrone with Pancetta until vegetables are tender. Add $^{1}/_{2}$ cup Arborio rice or small pasta shape, such as elbows or orzo, and continue cooking until rice is tender, about 20 minutes, or until pasta is al dente, 8 to 12 minutes. Add beans and proceed as directed.

VARYING MINESTRONE

Minestrone contains seven kinds of vegetables as well as tomatoes and cannellini beans. The aromatics—leeks, carrots, onions, and celery—are essential, as are the tomatoes. We like to add starchy potatoes, sweet zucchini, and leafy spinach, but these choices can be altered according to personal preference.

What follows are some notes on other vegetables that were tested in this soup. Bell peppers and broccoli were too distinctive, while eggplant and white mushrooms added little flavor, so none of these four vegetables is recommended.

When making substitutions, keep in

mind that the Minestrone recipe has $2^{1}/_{2}$ cups of solid vegetables (potatoes and zucchini) and three cups of leafy spinach. Use similar proportions when working with the vegetables below.

As for the beans, white kidney beans, called cannellini beans in Italy, are the classic choice. But other white beans can be used, as well as red kidney, cranberry, or borlotti beans, all of which appear in various Italian recipes for minestrone.

CAULIFLOWER: While broccoli is too intense for minestrone, milder cauliflower can blend in. Cut into tiny florets and use in place of potatoes or

zucchini.

ESCAROLE: This slightly bitter green works well with white beans and pasta. Chop and use in place of spinach.

GREEN BEANS: Beans are a standard ingredient in French versions of this soup. Cut into $^{1}/_{2}$-inch pieces and use in place of zucchini.

KALE: This assertive green can be overwhelming on its own, but it gives the soup a pleasant edge when combined with spinach. Remove ribs and chop.

Use up to $1^1/_2$ cups in place of $1^1/_2$ cups of spinach.

PEAS: The delicate flavor of fresh peas is wasted in this soup, so use frozen. Add up to $^1/_2$ cup in place of $^1/_2$ cup zucchini or white beans.

SAVOY CABBAGE: This crinkly leaf cabbage adds an earthy note. Shred finely and use up to $1^1/_2$ cups in place of $1^1/_2$ cups spinach.

SWISS CHARD: This green is similar to

spinach, with a slightly more earthy flavor. Remove ribs and chop. Use in place of spinach.

TURNIPS: The modest bitter edge of the turnip helps balance out the flavors of the sweet vegetables. Peel and use in place of potatoes.

WINTER SQUASH: Butternut squash is sweet, but in small quantities it is especially colorful and delicious. Peel and dice. Use in place of potatoes or zucchini.

LENTIL SOUP

OUR IDEAL LENTIL SOUP IS THICK AND hearty, with lentils that are still intact. Many of the recipes we tested made delicious soups, but their texture was unappealing because the lentils had disintegrated into a thick mush.

We started our testing by focusing on the type of lentil. Red lentils fall apart when simmered and are best used in purees. We had better luck with the common brown lentils (sometimes tinged with green) that are sold in supermarkets. Although not perfect, our

initial tests revealed that they make a better soup than red lentils. We had the best results with French green lentils, called lentils du Puy. They stay particularly firm when cooked, making them ideal for soups.

Since most supermarkets don't carry French green lentils, we decided to see if we could devise a method for handling common brown lentils that would make them less likely to fall apart when cooked. Our first area of research was salt.

Many sources recommend adding salt only after the lentils have been cooked, warning that they will toughen otherwise. We wondered if adding salt at the outset might make them less likely

to disintegrate. We added salt at the outset, at the halfway point, and at the end of the cooking time and found no difference in texture. However, lentils cooked in liquid that was salted at the outset tasted better, having a more developed flavor.

Several sources suggested sautéing the lentils in oil before adding liquid to strengthen the outer skins. This technique works with rice—it is used to make pilaf and risotto—and it seemed worth a try. We found that lentils cooked for a while without liquid did in fact hold up better to the simmering process. When the soup was done, sautéed lentils were firmer than lentils added directly to the

liquid without prior cooking. It seems that sautéing does indeed harden the lentil's outside layer of starch, producing a soup with tender lentils that do not fall apart.

Lentil Soup

serves four to six

NOTE: *Common brown lentils work well in this recipe, although French green lentils are even better.*

2 tablespoons vegetable oil
4 slices (about 4 ounces) bacon, diced
2 medium-large onions, chopped fine
2 medium carrots, peeled and chopped medium
3 medium garlic cloves, minced
1 bay leaf
1 teaspoon minced fresh

thyme leaves

1 can (14.5 ounces) diced tomatoes, drained and liquid reserved

1 cup lentils, rinsed and picked through to remove any stones

1 teaspoon salt

Ground black pepper

$^3/_4$ cup white wine

4 cups Chicken Stock or low-sodium canned broth

1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oil in large, heavy-bottomed saucepan over medium-high heat. When

oil is shimmering, add bacon and stir, cooking until fat is fully rendered and bacon is crisp, 3 to 4 minutes. Add onions, carrots, garlic, bay leaf, thyme, and drained tomatoes, and cook until vegetables begin to soften, about 2 minutes.

2. Stir in lentils, salt, and pepper to taste. Cover, reduce heat to medium-low, and sweat vegetables until softened, 8 to 10 minutes; lentils will become darker in color.

3. Uncover, increase heat to high, add wine, and simmer for 1 minute. Add

stock, juice from canned tomatoes, and $1^1/_2$ cups water. Bring to a boil, partially cover, and reduce heat to low, simmering until lentils are cooked but still hold their shape, 30 to 35 minutes. Remove and discard bay leaf.

4. Place 3 cups soup in blender and puree until smooth. Add pureed soup back to saucepan, and stir in vinegar, if using. Serve hot.

HAM AND SPLIT PEA SOUP

We love split pea soup made with ham broth; the problem is that nowadays, except for the occasional holiday, most cooks rarely buy a bone-in ham. We wondered if we could duplicate this wonderful soup without buying a huge ham.

To confirm or disprove our belief that ham broth is crucial to split pea soup, we made several pork broths and pork-enhanced canned chicken broths. In addition to making broth the old-

fashioned way, from a meaty ham bone, we made broths from smoked pork necks, pork hocks (fresh and smoked), and smoked ham shanks. We also made cheater broths: kielbasa simmered in canned chicken broth, kielbasa simmered in water, bacon simmered in chicken broth, and bacon simmered in water.

Broths made with hocks—fresh as well as smoked—were more greasy than flavorful. In addition, the hocks gave up very little meat, making it necessary to purchase an additional portion of ham to fortify the soup. Ham shanks, which include the hock, made a pleasant but lightweight broth that was a tad greasy and salty—both fixable problems had

we liked the broth more. Pork necks, which are not widely available, made a fairly flavorful but salty broth. All four cheater broths failed. Both the kielbasa- and bacon-enhanced chicken broths tasted strongly of overly processed meat, while the water-based versions tasted weak.

Not surprisingly, the broth made from the bone of a big ham was the winner. It was meaty and full-flavored, rich but not greasy, nicely seasoned without being overly salty, and smoky without tasting artificial. Unlike any of the other broths, this one sported bits of meat. And not just good meat—great meat. The tender pieces of ham that fell away from the

bone during cooking were not just a nice byproduct of the broth. They were the glory of our split pea soup. But was there a way around buying half a ham (with an average weight of about 8 pounds) just to make a pot of soup?

After checking out the ham and smoked pork cases at several different stores, we discovered the picnic ham from the pork shoulder. Unlike the cut we generally refer to as ham, which comes from the back legs of the animal, the picnic comes from the shoulder and front legs. Smaller than a ham, the half-picnic weighs only $4^{1}/_{2}$ pounds. After making a couple more pots of soup, we found that the picnic pork shoulder—with its

bones, fat, rind, and meat—made outstanding stock, and after two hours of simmering, the meat was meltingly tender yet still potently flavorful.

Since we did not need the full picnic half for our pot of soup, we pulled off and roasted two of its meatier muscles and used the remaining meat, bone, fat, and rind to make the soup. At around 99 cents a pound, a picnic shoulder is usually cheaper than a ham, and often cheaper than pork hocks, shanks, and neck bones as well. Here, we thought, was the modern solution. Rather than buy a ham for eating (and eating and eating) with a leftover bone for soup, buy a picnic for making soup, then roast the remaining couple of pounds for

eating.

There are several ways to make ham and split pea soup. You can throw all the ingredients—ham bone, peas, and diced vegetables—into a pot and simmer until everything is tender. Or you can sauté the vegetables, then add the remaining ingredients, and cook the soup until the ham and peas are tender. Alternatively, you can cook the ham bone and peas (or give the ham bone a little bit of a head start) until ham and peas are tender and then add raw, sautéed, or caramelized vegetables to the pot, continuing to cook until the vegetables are tender and the flavors have blended.

Although we had hoped to make this

soup a straight forward one-pot operation, we found that dumping everything in at the same time resulted in gloppy, overcooked peas and tired mushy vegetables by the time the ham was tender. For textural contrast in this smooth, creamy soup, we ultimately preferred fully—not overly—cooked vegetables.

Our best soups were those in which the vegetables spent enough time in the pot for their flavors to blend but not so long that they had lost all of their individuality. Of the soups with vegetables added toward the end of cooking, we preferred the one with the caramelized vegetables. The sweeter vegetables gave this otherwise

straightforward meat and starch soup a richness and depth of flavor that made the extra step and pan worth the trouble.

Many pea soup recipes call for an acidic ingredient—vinegar, lemon juice, fortified wines such as sherry or Madeira, Worcestershire sauce, or sour cream—to bring balance to an otherwise rich, heavy soup. After tasting all of the above, we found ourselves drawn to balsamic vinegar. Unlike any of the other ingredients, balsamic vinegar's mildly sweet, mildly acidic flavor perfectly complemented the soup.

Ham and Split Pea Soup

serves six

NOTE: *Use a small 2 1/2-pound smoked picnic portion ham if you can find one. Otherwise, buy a half-picnic ham and remove some meat (see figures 8 and 9), which you can save for use in sandwiches, salads, or omelets.*

1 piece (about 2 1/2 pounds) smoked, bone-in picnic ham

4 bay leaves

1 pound (2 1/2 cups) split peas, rinsed and picked through to remove any stones

1 teaspoon dried thyme

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

2 medium onions, chopped medium

2 medium carrots, chopped medium

2 medium celery stalks, chopped medium

1 tablespoon butter

2 medium garlic cloves, minced

Pinch sugar

3 small new potatoes, scrubbed and cut into medium dice

Ground black pepper

Minced red onion

(optional)
Balsamic vinegar

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Bring 3 quarts water, ham, and bay leaves to boil, covered, over medium-high heat in large soup kettle. Reduce heat to low and simmer until meat is tender and pulls away from bone, 2 to $2^{1}/_{2}$ hours. Remove ham meat and bone from broth; add split peas and thyme and simmer until peas are tender but not dissolved, about 45 minutes. Meanwhile, when ham is cool enough to handle, shred meat into bite-sized pieces and set aside. Discard rind and bone.

2. While ham is simmering, heat oil in large skillet over high heat until shimmering. Add onions, carrots, and celery; sauté, stirring frequently, until most of the liquid evaporates and vegetables begin to brown, 5 to 6 minutes. Reduce heat to medium-low; add butter, garlic, and sugar. Cook vegetables, stirring frequently, until deeply browned, 30 to 35 minutes; set aside.

3. Add sautéed vegetables, potatoes, and shredded ham to soup; simmer until potatoes are tender and peas dissolve and thicken soup to the consistency of

light cream, about 20 minutes more. Remove and discard bay leaves. Season with pepper to taste. Serve hot, sprinkling red onion over bowls, if desired, and passing vinegar separately at table.

VARIATION:

Ham and Split Pea Soup with Caraway

Toast $1\,^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoons caraway seeds in a small skillet over medium-high heat, stirring frequently, until fragrant and browned, about 4 minutes. Follow recipe for Ham and Split Pea Soup, substituting toasted caraway seeds for

the dried thyme.

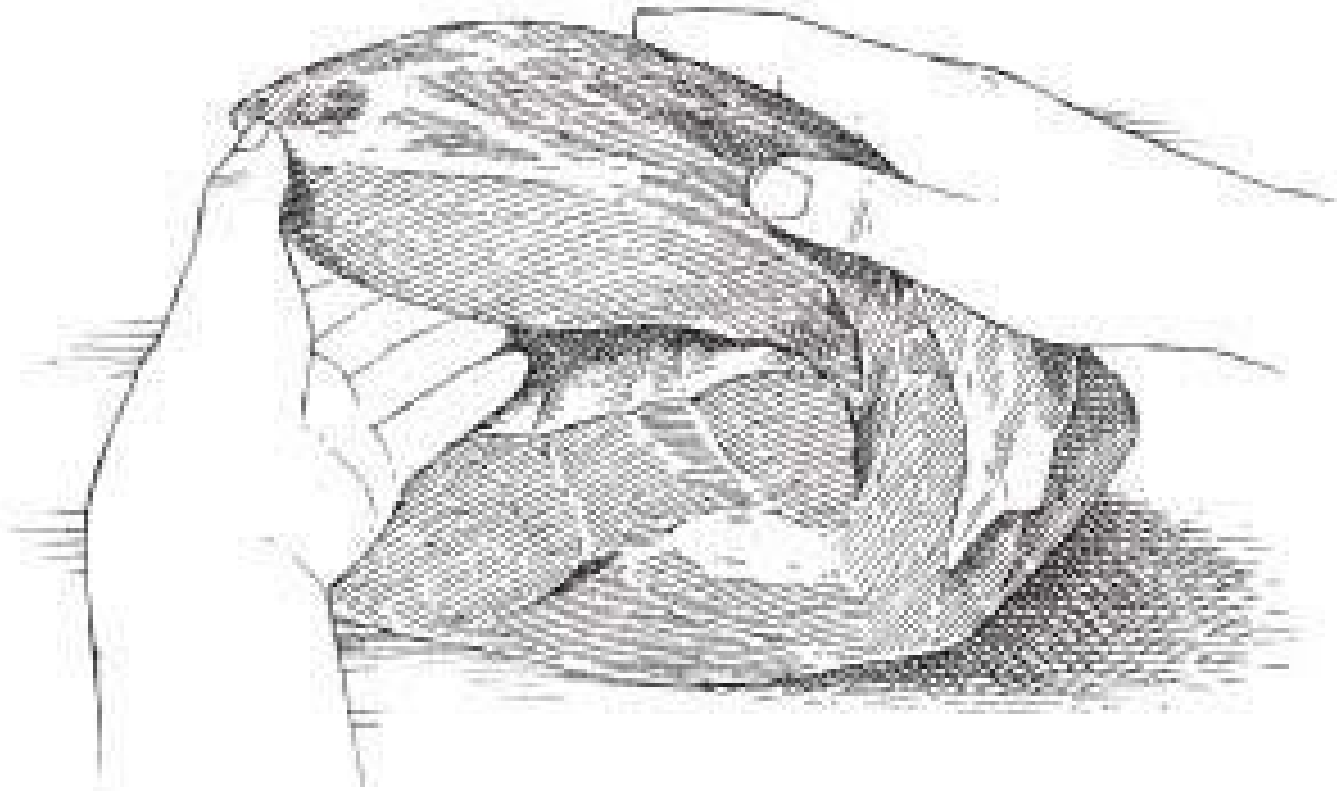

Figure 8.

A half-picnic ham is readily available in supermarkets but contains too much meat for a pot of soup. Our solution is to pull off several meaty sections of the ham and save the meat for sandwiches, salads, or egg dishes. With your fingers, loosen the large comma-shaped muscles on top of the

picnic half.

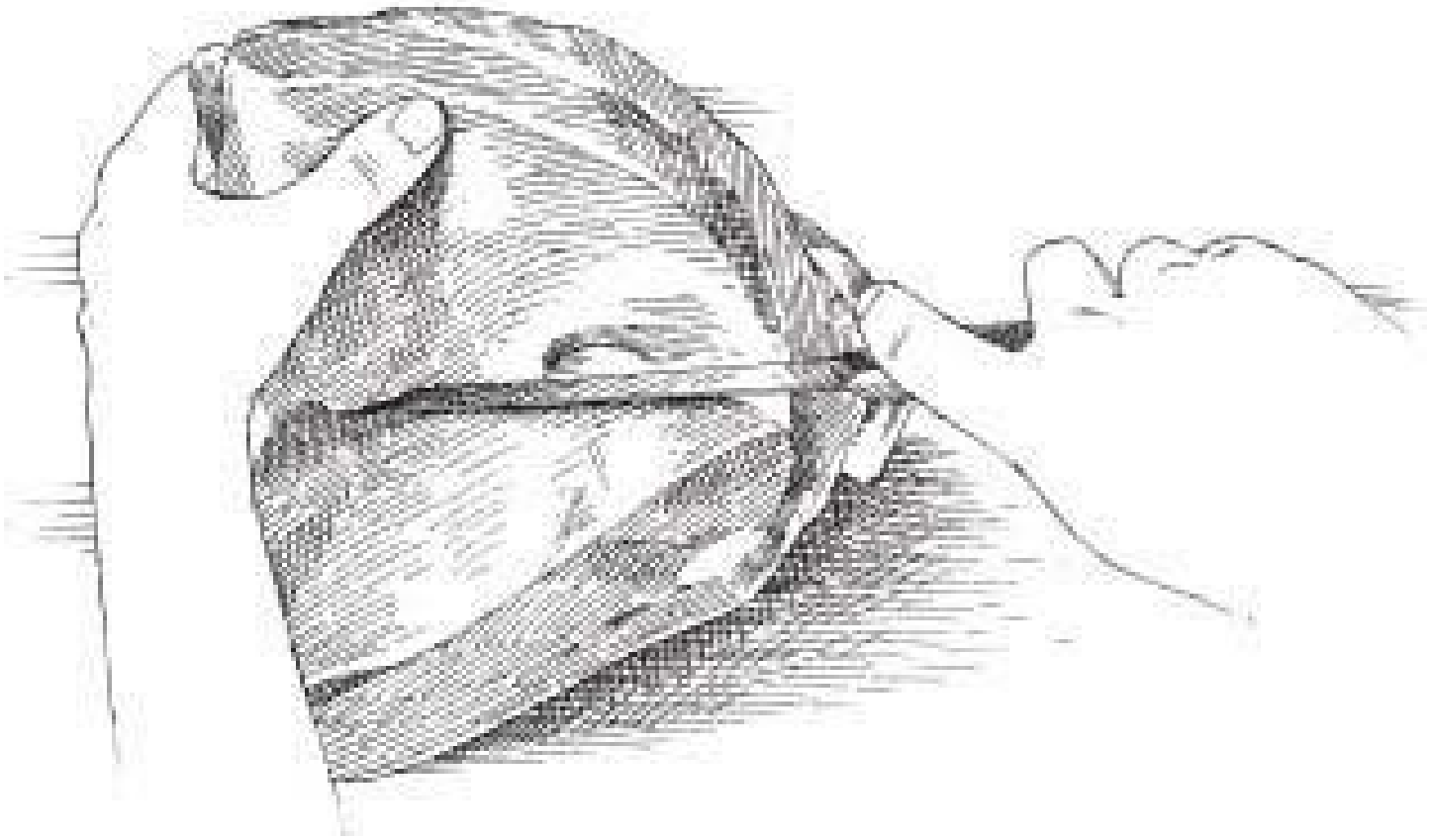

Figure 9.

Use a knife to cut the membrane separating the comma-shaped muscles from the rest of the roast. The remaining meat and bone can be used to make soup.

NEW ENGLAND CLAM CHOWDER

We wanted to develop a delicious, traditional chowder that was economical, would not curdle, and could be prepared quickly. Before testing recipes, we explored our clam options. Because chowders are typically made with hard-shell clams, we purchased a variety (from smallest to largest): cockles, littlenecks, cherrystones, and chowder clams, often called quahogs.

Although littlenecks and cockles made delicious chowders, we eliminated

them; both were just too expensive to toss into a chowder pot. Chowders made with the cheapest clams, however, weren't really satisfactory, either. The quahogs we purchased for testing were large (four to five inches in diameter), tough, and strong-flavored. Their oversized bellies (and the contents therein) gave the chowder an overbearing mineral taste that frustrated our efforts to develop a smooth, rich flavor.

Though only a little more expensive, cherrystones offer good value and flavor. The chowder made from these slightly smaller clams was distinctly clam-flavored, without an inky aftertaste. Because there are no industry

sizing standards for each clam variety, you may find some small quahogs labeled as cherrystones or large cherrystones labeled as quahogs. No matter what their designation, clams much over three inches in diameter will deliver a distinctly metallic chowder.

Steaming clams open is far easier than shucking them. Five minutes over simmering water, and the clams open as naturally as a budding flower. Ours did not toughen up as long as we pulled them from the pot as soon as they opened and didn't let them cook too long in the finished chowder.

The extra step of purging, or filtering, hard-shell clams is unnecessary. All of

the hard-shells we tested were relatively clean, and what little sediment there was sank to the bottom of the steaming liquid. Getting rid of the grit was as simple as leaving the last few tablespoons of broth in the pan when pouring it from the pot. If you find that your clam broth is gritty, strain it through a coffee filter.

Older recipes call for thickening clam chowder with crumbled biscuits; bread crumbs and crackers are modern stand-ins. Standard chowders thickened with bread crumbs or crackers failed to impress. We wanted a smooth, creamy soup base for the potatoes, onions, and clams, but no matter how long the chowder was simmered, neither the bread crumbs nor the crackers ever

completely dissolved into the cooking liquid. Heavy cream alone, by contrast, did not give the chowder enough body. We discovered fairly quickly that flour would be necessary, not only as a thickener but as a stabilizer; unthickened chowders separate and curdle.

Because chowders call for potatoes, some cooks suggest that starchy baking potatoes, which tend to break down when boiled, can double as a thickener. We found that the potatoes did not break down sufficiently but instead simply became mushy. Red boiling potatoes are best for chowders.

Should the chowder be enriched with milk or cream? We found that so much

milk was required to make it look and taste creamy that the chowder started to lose its clam flavor, becoming more like mild bisque or the clam equivalent of oyster stew. Making the chowder with almost all clam broth (five cups of the cooking liquid from the steaming clams) and then finishing it with a cup of cream gave us what we were looking for—a rich, creamy chowder that tasted distinctly of clams.

New England Clam Chowder

serves six

NOTE: *You can replace the bacon with 4 ounces of salt pork.*

7 pounds medium-sized hard-shell clams, such as cherrystones, washed and scrubbed clean

4 slices thick-cut bacon (about 4 ounces), cut into $^1/_4$-inch pieces

1 large Spanish onion, diced medium

2 tablespoons flour

3 medium red potatoes (about 1 $^{1}/_{2}$ pounds), scrubbed and diced medium

1 large bay leaf

1 teaspoon fresh thyme leaves or $^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoon dried thyme

1 cup heavy cream

2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves

Salt and ground black or white pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Bring clams and 3 cups water to boil in large, covered stockpot. Steam until clams just start to open (see figure 10), 3

to 5 minutes. Transfer clams to large bowl; cool slightly. Open clams with a paring knife, holding clams over bowl to catch any juices. With knife, sever muscle that attaches clam to shell (see figure 11); transfer meat to cutting board. Mince clams; set aside. Pour clam broth into 2-quart Pyrex measuring cup, holding back last few tablespoons broth in case of sediment; set clam broth aside. (You should have about 5 cups.) Rinse and dry pot; return to burner.

2. Fry bacon in pot over medium-low heat until fat renders and bacon crisps, 5 to 7 minutes. Add onion to bacon; sauté until softened, about 5 minutes. Add

flour; stir until lightly colored, about 1 minute. Gradually whisk in reserved clam juice. Add potatoes, bay leaf, and thyme; simmer until potatoes are tender, about 10 minutes. Add clams, cream, parsley, and salt (if necessary) and pepper to taste; bring to simmer. Remove from heat and serve immediately.

VARIATION:

Quick Pantry Clam Chowder

If you're short on time or find clams to be scarce and expensive, we've found that the right canned clams and bottled clam juice can deliver a chowder that's

at least three notches above canned soup in quality. We tested seven brands of minced and small whole canned clams. We preferred Doxsee Minced Clams teamed with Doxsee brand clam juice. Doxsee clams were neither too tough nor too tender, and they had a decent, natural, clam flavor.

Follow recipe for New England Clam Chowder, substituting for fresh clams 4 cans (6.5 ounces each) minced clams, juice drained and reserved, plus 1 cup water and 2 bottles (8 ounces each) clam juice. Add clam juice and meat at points when fresh clam juice and meat would be added.

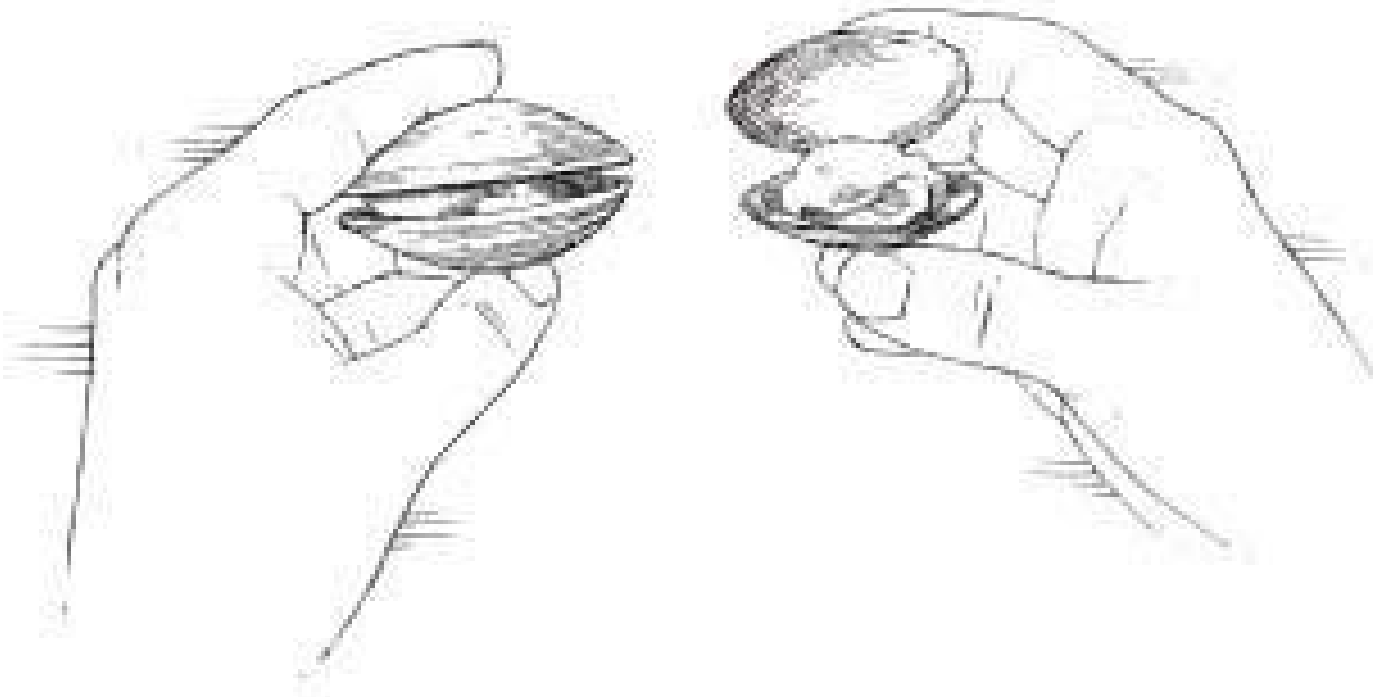

Figure 10.

Steam clams until just open, at left, rather than completely open, as shown at right.

Figure 11.

Carefully use a paring knife to open clams, holding each over a bowl to catch the juices. When open, discard the top shell and use the knife to sever the muscle that connects the clams to the bottom shell.

HOW TO MAKE STEW

Stew Basics

Meat Stews

Chicken Stews

Seafood Stews

Vegetable Stews

STEW BASICS

GOOD STEW IS HARD TO BEAT. WHEN successful, stew is one of those dishes that is more than the sum of its parts. Slow, long cooking transforms proteins, vegetables, and liquids into a hearty, rugged dish that is satisfying and intensely flavored.

So what exactly is stew and how does it differ from soup or a braise? There is some disagreement in the food world, but for our purposes a stew is small chunks of meat, chicken, seafood, and/or vegetables cooked in liquid, which is

usually thickened and served as a sauce. A stew is a one-dish meal that can be eaten with a fork and without a knife.

Soup may contain the same ingredients (small bits of protein and vegetables in a liquid base), but it contains much more liquid than a stew and the liquid is generally not thickened. Soup is eaten with a spoon.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is a braise, which usually contains less liquid than a stew and the protein and vegetables are cut into much larger pieces or even left whole, as in a pot roast. The meat in a braise often contains bones (stews are usually boneless) and the vegetables are more for flavoring the meat and juices than for eating. Finally,

a braise is eaten with a fork but usually requires a knife as well.

Stews and braises do have a number of elements in common—the aromatic vegetables (as well as the meat and chicken) are usually browned and the cooking temperature must be low. Browning is important because it develops flavor. The sugars in the vegetables (and the meat and chicken) caramelize in a process known as the Maillard reaction. Deglazing the pan with wine or stock loosens flavorful browned bits from the bottom of the pan, which in turn dissolve and flavor the stew liquid.

Contrary to popular belief, browning

does not seal in juices in stew meat. As the internal temperature of the meat rises, more and more juices are expelled. By the time the meat is fork-tender, it has shed most of its juices. As odd it sounds, this is the beauty of a stew or braise because the surrounding liquid, which will be served as a sauce, is enriched by these juices.

Stew meat remains edible because slow-cooking turns the collagen and connective tissue found in tough cuts of meat, such as the beef shoulder or chicken thighs, into gelatin. This gelatin makes meat tender; it also helps thicken the stew liquid. The same thing happens when these tough cuts are barbecued or slow-roasted. Prolonged low-

temperature cooking allows the connective tissue to break down and makes the meat tender.

The main difference between slow-roasting and stewing is that in stewing the exterior of the meat is less likely to dry out and overcook in the liquid. That's because the temperature of the stewing or braising liquid cannot exceed 212 degrees, or the boiling point. This ceiling limits the rate at which the meat can cook.

In our testing, we found that the temperature of the stewing liquid is crucial when certain ingredients are stewed. We found it is essential to keep the temperature of the liquid below 212

degrees when stewing meat or chicken. If either is boiled, it stays tough and the outside becomes especially dry. Keeping the liquid at a simmer (rather than a boil) allows the internal temperature of the meat to rise slowly. By the time it is actually fork-tender, much of the collagen will have turned to gelatin.

We have found that putting a covered Dutch oven in a 250-degree oven ensures that the temperature of the stewing liquid will remain below the boiling point, at about 200 degrees. (Ovens are not totally effective at transferring heat; a temperature of 250 degrees recognizes that some heat will be lost as it penetrates through the pot

and into the stew.)

The temperature of the liquid is crucial when making fish stew, but for a different reason. Since fish is so delicate and cooks so quickly, it is added to stews just before serving. (The deep seafood flavor comes from the stock, not the fish itself used in the stew.) We find it best to cook the fish for a few minutes in the liquid, then turn off the burner and cover the pot. The fish finishes cooking in the residual heat and is less likely to become dry or fall apart.

When making vegetable stews, temperature is not nearly as important since the main goal is to soften the vegetables to an appealing texture. You

don't want to boil a vegetable stew so furiously that the vegetables fall apart. A brisk simmer is fine for all-vegetable stews.

INGREDIENTS FOR MAKING STEW

The meat, chicken, seafood, and/or vegetables are the most important ingredients in any stew. Buying the right cuts and preparing them for stewing are discussed in the appropriate chapters.

In addition to the "main ingredients," there are a number of supporting ingredients that appear again and again in recipes throughout this book. These ingredients are the basis for the sauce

that surrounds the main stew ingredients. In particular, we find the choice of canned broth, canned tomatoes, and wine to be important when making a stew.

BROTH Homemade stock makes delicious stews. However, with the exception of fish stews, we find that canned products will work quite well and they greatly simplify the process. (Fish stew can be made with doctored-up bottled clam juice, with some sacrifice in flavor.) There is no reason not to use homemade stock if you have some on hand, but beef, chicken, lamb, pork, and vegetable stews will taste just fine if made with a carefully selected

canned broth.

You might think that meat stews, especially those with beef, would taste better when made with canned beef broth. However, canned beef broths simply do not deliver full-bodied, beefy flavor. We tested 11 commercial beef broths and bouillon cubes. Some had a subtle suggestion of beef, but most begged the question, "Where's the beef?"

Current government regulations require that beef broth need only contain 1 part protein to 135 parts moisture. That translates to less than one ounce of meat to flavor a gallon of water. Most manufacturers use salt, monosodium glutamate (MSG), and yeast-based hydrolyzed soy protein to give this

watery concoction some flavor and mouthfeel. Does any canned beef broth or powdered beef bouillon cube taste like the real thing? Our panel shouted a resounding no.

By comparison, canned chicken broths are far superior. While they rarely taste like homemade stock, several of the 11 brands that we tested had some decent chicken flavor. In stews, even those made with beef, we found that canned chicken broth is superior to canned beef broth. So which canned broths do we recommend? In our tasting, reduced-sodium and low-sodium broths made by Campbell's and Swanson (both brands are owned by the same company) topped

the list.

TOMATOES Chopped tomatoes are used in many stews in place of wine to add an acidic element, color, and flavor. We find that canned tomatoes are easier to work with than fresh (which would have to be peeled before chopping) and their flavor is usually better. If you have some very good ripe tomatoes on hand and don't mind peeling them, go ahead and use them. However, canned tomatoes are fine for every recipe in this book.

Our favorite canned tomato product is Muir Glen Diced Tomatoes. These tomatoes are convenient to use, since they have already been chopped, and the

flavor is especially fresh and bright with a good balance of sweet and acid flavors. Whole canned tomatoes can be used as well. Simply remove the tomatoes from their liquid, chop, and measure. When buying canned whole tomatoes, we recommend choosing brands packed in tomato juice, not tomato puree. The puree gives the tomato a cooked flavor that we don't generally like. In our testing of leading brands, Muir Glen and Progresso whole tomatoes came out on top.

WINE We found in our testing that the quality of the wine used in a stew matters. "Cooking wine"—the dreadful,

usually oxidized stuff sold in supermarkets—does not cut it when it comes to a stew that relies on wine for much of its flavor. However, there is no reason to overcompensate. Pouring a $30 bottle of good burgundy or Cabernet Sauvignon into the pot is not advisable either. We found that as long as the wine tastes good enough to drink, it will make delicious stew. Therefore, we recommend inexpensive, young wines in the $7 to $9 range when making stew. In general, fruity reds such as Chianti, zinfandel, young cabernets from California, and many of the hearty wines from southern France are best in stew. As for white wines, avoid those which are very dry or heavily oaked. A crisp,

fruity Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Blanc, or a young Chardonnay is ideal.

EQUIPMENT FOR MAKING STEW

Other than some spoons and ladles, stew making doesn't require much in the way of equipment. Of course, you need a cutting board and some knives to chop ingredients, but otherwise the focus is on the pot.

We found that a Dutch oven (also called a lidded casserole) is almost essential for making a stew. You can try to use a large pasta pot or soup kettle, but these pots are probably too narrow and tall. Also, many are quite light, thin,

and cheap—designed to heat up water quickly but not meant for browning. Since most stew recipes begin by browning to develop flavor, it's imperative to use a pot with a heavy bottom.

A Dutch oven (*see* figure 1) is nothing more than a wide, deep pot with a cover. It was originally manufactured with "ears" on the side (small, round tabs used to pick up the pot) and a top that had a lip around the edge. The latter design element was important because a Dutch oven was heated through coals placed both underneath and on top of the pot. The lip kept the coals on the lid from falling off. One could bake biscuits, cobblers, beans, and stews in

this pot. It was, in the full sense of the word, an oven. This oven was a key feature of chuck wagons and essential in many American homes where all cooking occurred in the fireplace. As for the word "Dutch," it seems that the best cast iron came from Holland and the pots were therefore referred to as Dutch ovens.

Now that everyone in America has an oven, the Dutch oven is no longer used to bake biscuits or cobblers. However, it is essential for dishes that start on top of the stove and finish in the oven, like stew. In order to make some recommendations about buying a modern Dutch oven, we tested 12 models made

by leading cookware companies.

In our testing, we found that a Dutch oven should have a capacity of at least six quarts to be useful. (Eight quarts is even better.) As we cooked in the pots, we came to prefer wider and shallower Dutch ovens because they make it easier to check the progress of the cooking. They also offer more bottom surface to accommodate larger batches of meat for browning. This reduces the number of batches required to brown a given quantity of meat, and with it, the chances of burning the flavorful pan drippings. Ideally, a Dutch oven should have a diameter twice as wide as its height.

We also preferred pots with a light-colored interior finish, such as stainless

steel or enameled cast iron. It is easier to judge the caramelization of the drippings at a glance in these pots. Dark finishes can mask the color of the drippings, which may burn before you realize it. Our favorite pot is the eight-quart All-Clad Stainless Stockpot (despite the name, this pot is a Dutch oven). The seven-quart Le Creuset Round French Oven, which is made of enameled cast-iron, also tested well. These pots are quite expensive, costing at least $150, even when on sale. The seven-quart Lodge Dutch Oven is made from cast-iron. It is extremely heavy (making it a bit hard to maneuver) and it must be seasoned regularly. The dark

interior finish is also not ideal. But is browns ingredients quite well and costs just $45.

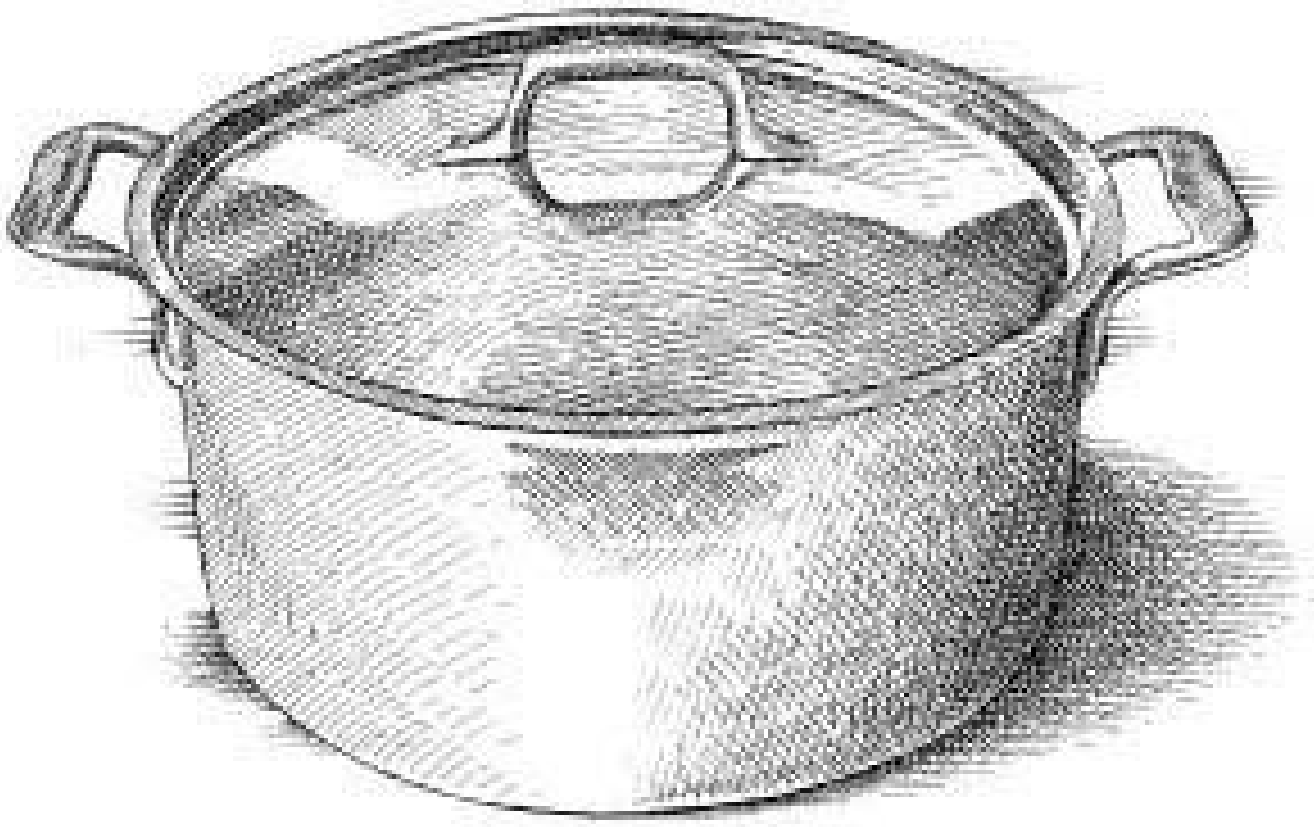

Figure 1.

The ideal Dutch oven is twice as wide as it is high. It also should have handles on both sides (to make it easy to lift the pot in and out of the oven) as well as a lid with a handle. Since this pot often goes into the oven, make sure that the handles are ovenproof.

MEAT STEWS

Meat stews, made with beef, lamb, or pork, should be rich and satisfying. Our goal in developing a master recipe for meat stew was to keep the cooking process simple without compromising the stew's deep, complex flavor.

At the outset, we made several decisions. We tried several recipes with homemade meat stock. They were delicious but require much more effort than stews made with canned broth or other liquids. At the other extreme, we rejected recipes that call for dumping

meat, vegetables, and liquid into a pot to simmer for a couple of hours. Browning the meat and some of the vegetables, especially onions, adds flavor, and this step is too important to skip.

We focused on the following issues: What cut or cuts of meat respond best to stewing? Is it the same cut from different animals? How much and what kind of liquid should you use? When and with what do you thicken the stew? And where should the stew be cooked, in the oven or on top of the stove, or does it matter?

We decided to start our tests with beef and then see if our findings held true for lamb and pork. We sampled 12 different cuts of beef (*see* figure 2). We browned

each, marked them for identification, and stewed them in the same pot. Chuck proved to be the most flavorful, tender, and juicy. Most other cuts were either too stringy, too chewy, too dry, or just plain bland. The exception was rib eye steak, which made good stew meat but is too expensive a cut to use for this purpose.

Our advice is to buy a steak or roast from the chuck and cube it yourself instead of buying precut stewing beef. The reason is simple: Prepackaged stewing beef is often made up of irregularly shaped end pieces from different muscles that cannot be sold retail as steaks or roasts because of their

uneven appearance. Because of the differences in origin, precut stewing cubes in the same package may have inconsistent cooking, flavor, and tenderness qualities. If you cut your own cubes from a piece of chuck, you are assured that all the cubes will cook in the same way and have the flavor and richness of chuck.

The names given to different cuts of chuck vary, but the most commonly used names for retail chuck cuts include boneless chuck-eye roasts, cross-rib roasts, blade steaks and roasts, shoulder steaks and roasts, and arm steaks and roasts. We particularly liked chuck-eye roast in our testing, but all chuck cuts were delicious when cubed and stewed.

So why does chuck make the best stew? The intramuscular fat and connective tissue in chuck is well suited to long, slow, moist cooking. When cooked in liquid, the connective tissue melts down into gelatin, making the meat juicy and tender. The fat helps, too, in two important ways. Fat carries the chemical compounds that our taste buds receive as beef flavor, and it also melts when cooked, lubricating the meat fibers as it slips between the cells, increasing tenderness.

With our cut of beef settled, we started to explore how and when to thicken the stew. We tried several thickening methods and found most acceptable,

with the exception of quick-cooking tapioca, which produced a slimy and gelatinous stew. Dredging meat cubes in flour is another roundabout way of thickening stew. The floured beef is browned, then stewed. During the stewing process, some of the flour from the beef dissolves into the liquid, causing it to thicken. Although the stew we cooked this way thickened up nicely, the beef cubes had a "smothered steak" look: The flour coating had browned, not the meat. This coating often fell off during cooking to expose pale and therefore less flavorful meat.

We also tried two thickening methods at the end of cooking—a beurre manié (softened butter mixed with flour) and

cornstarch mixed with water. Either method is acceptable, but the beurre manié lightened the stew's color, making it look more like pale gravy than rich stew juices. Also, the extra fat did not improve the stew's flavor enough to justify it. For those who prefer thickening at the end of cooking, we found cornstarch dissolved in water did the job without compromising the stew's dark, rich color.

Pureeing the cooking vegetables is another thickening method. Once the stew is fully cooked, the meat is pulled from the pot and the juices and vegetables are pureed to create a thick sauce. We felt this thickening method

made the vegetable flavor too prominent.

Ultimately, we opted for thickening the stew with flour at the beginning—stirring it into the sautéing onions and garlic, right before adding the liquid. Stew thickened this way did not taste any better, but it was easier to make. There's no last-minute work; once the liquid starts to simmer, the cook is free to do something else.

We next focused on stewing liquids. We tried water, wine, low-sodium canned beef broth, low-sodium chicken broth, as well as combinations of these liquids. Stews made with water were bland and greasy. Stews made with all wine were too strong. All stock was good, but we missed the acidity and

flavor provided by the wine. In the end, we preferred a combination of chicken stock and red wine. (In general, we think canned chicken stock tastes better than canned beef stock; *see* Broth for more information.)

We tested various amounts of liquid and found that we preferred stews with a minimum of liquid, as this preserves a strong meat flavor. With too little liquid, however, the stew may not cook evenly and there may not be enough stew "sauce" to spoon over starchy accompaniments. A cup of liquid per pound of meat gave us sufficient sauce to moisten a mound of mashed potatoes or polenta without drowning them.

We tested various kinds of wine and found that fairly inexpensive fruity, full-bodied young wines, such as Chianti, zinfandel, or cabernets were best. (*See* Wine for more information on wine.)

In order to determine when to add the vegetables, we made three different stews, adding carrots, potatoes, and onions to one stew at the beginning of cooking and to another stew halfway through the cooking process. For our final stew, we cooked the onions with the meat but added steamed carrots and potatoes when the stew was fully cooked.

The stew with vegetables added at the beginning was thin and watery. The

vegetables had fallen apart and given up their flavor and liquid to the stew. The beef stew with the cooked vegetables added at the last minute was delicious and the vegetables were the freshest and most intensely flavored. However, it is more work to steam the vegetables separately. Also, vegetables cooked separately from the stew don't really meld all that well with the other flavors and ingredients. We prefer to add the vegetables partway through the cooking process. They don't fall apart this way and they still have enough time to meld with the other stew ingredients. There is one exception to this rule. Peas should be added just before serving the stew to preserve their fresh color and texture.

Our recipe was now complete and we only had to fiddle with the cooking times and temperatures. We focused on low-temperature cooking methods, since we already knew that high heat toughens and dries out meat. We cooked stews on the stovetop over low heat (with and without a flame-taming device) and in a 250-degree oven. (You want to maintain a simmer in the pot, with temperatures staying below the boiling point, 212 degrees, so that the meat does not become tough and dry.)

The flame-tamer device worked too well and the stew juices tasted raw and boozy. Putting the pot right on the burner worked better, but we had the most

consistent results in the oven. We found ourselves constantly adjusting the burner to maintain a gentle simmer and this method is prone to error. Cooking in a 250-degree oven ensures a constant level of heat.

Regardless of whether you cook the stew on the stovetop or in the oven, the meat passes from the tough to tender stage fairly quickly. Often at the $2^1/_2$-hour mark the meat would still be chewy. Fifteen minutes later it would be tender. Let the stew go another 15 minutes and the meat starts to dry out.

With a recipe using beef chuck developed, we wondered if the same technique and ingredients would work

with other meats. We tested various cuts of pork and lamb and found that shoulder cuts respond best to stewing. Like chuck, these cuts have enough fat to keep the meat tender and juicy during the long cooking process.

Pork shoulder is often called Boston butt or Boston shoulder in markets. We generally bought a boneless Boston butt or pork shoulder roast (*see* figure 3) and cut it into cubes ourselves. A lamb shoulder roast can be hard to find. We often bought inexpensive bone-in lamb shoulder chops (*see* figure 4) and cut the meat off the bone and into chunks.

For the most part, the beef recipe worked fine with these cuts of pork and lamb. However, lamb tends to cook a bit

more quickly. Beef and pork require a total cooking time of $2^{1}/_{2}$ to 3 hours. Lamb needs just 2 to $2^{1}/_{2}$ hours to soften up. All times will vary depending on the addition of slow-cooking vegetables, such as potatoes and carrots, as the meat cooks.

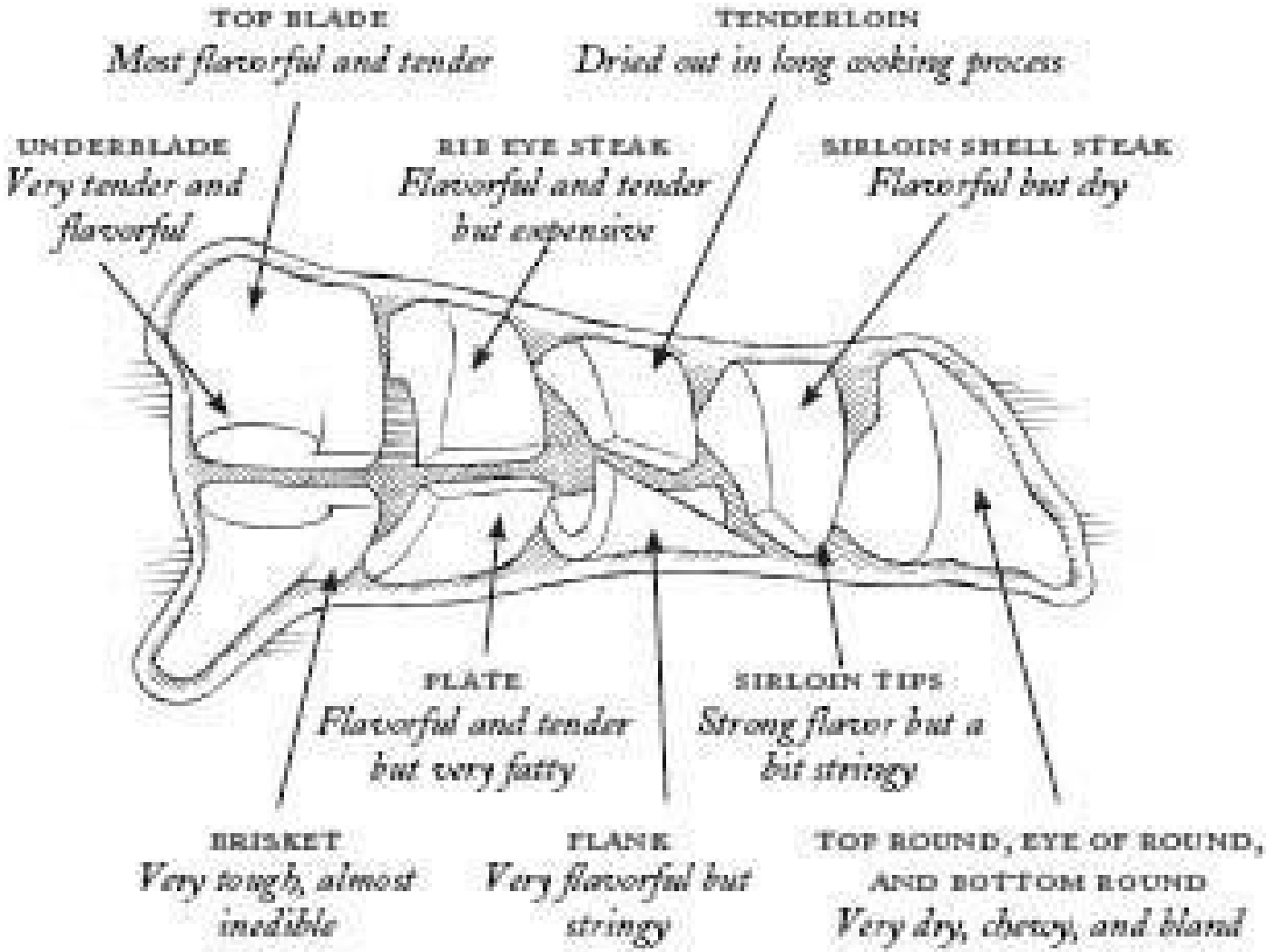

Figure 2.

We stewed 12 different cuts of beef from every part of the cow. Chuck, which consists of the underblade and top blade, was the most flavorful and cooked up quite tender. Since chuck is far less

expensive, it is our first choice for stewing.

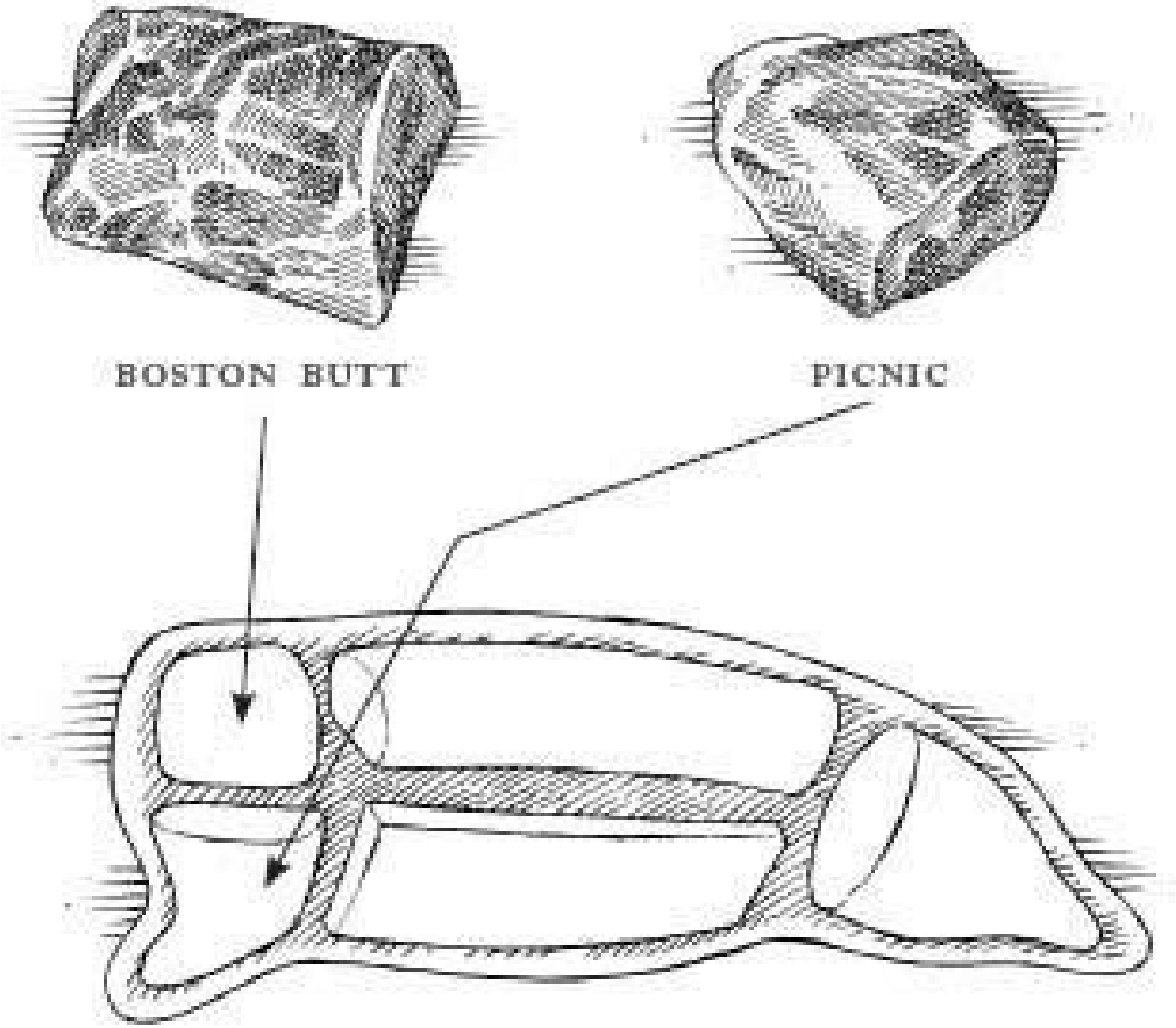

Figure 3.

We found that pork cuts from the shoulder of the pig are best for stewing. These cuts have enough fat (the loin, for instance, is much

too lean for stewing) to keep the meat moist as it cooks. We recommend buying a boneless Boston butt (also called a pork shoulder blade Boston roast) or a picnic roast (also called a pork shoulder arm picnic roast) and cutting the roast into 1 $^{1}/_{2}$-inch cubes yourself (see figure 5). A bone-in roast can be used but will require more effort to prepare. You may also buy pork stew meat, but the pieces are likely to be irregularly sized and can come from various parts of the animal.

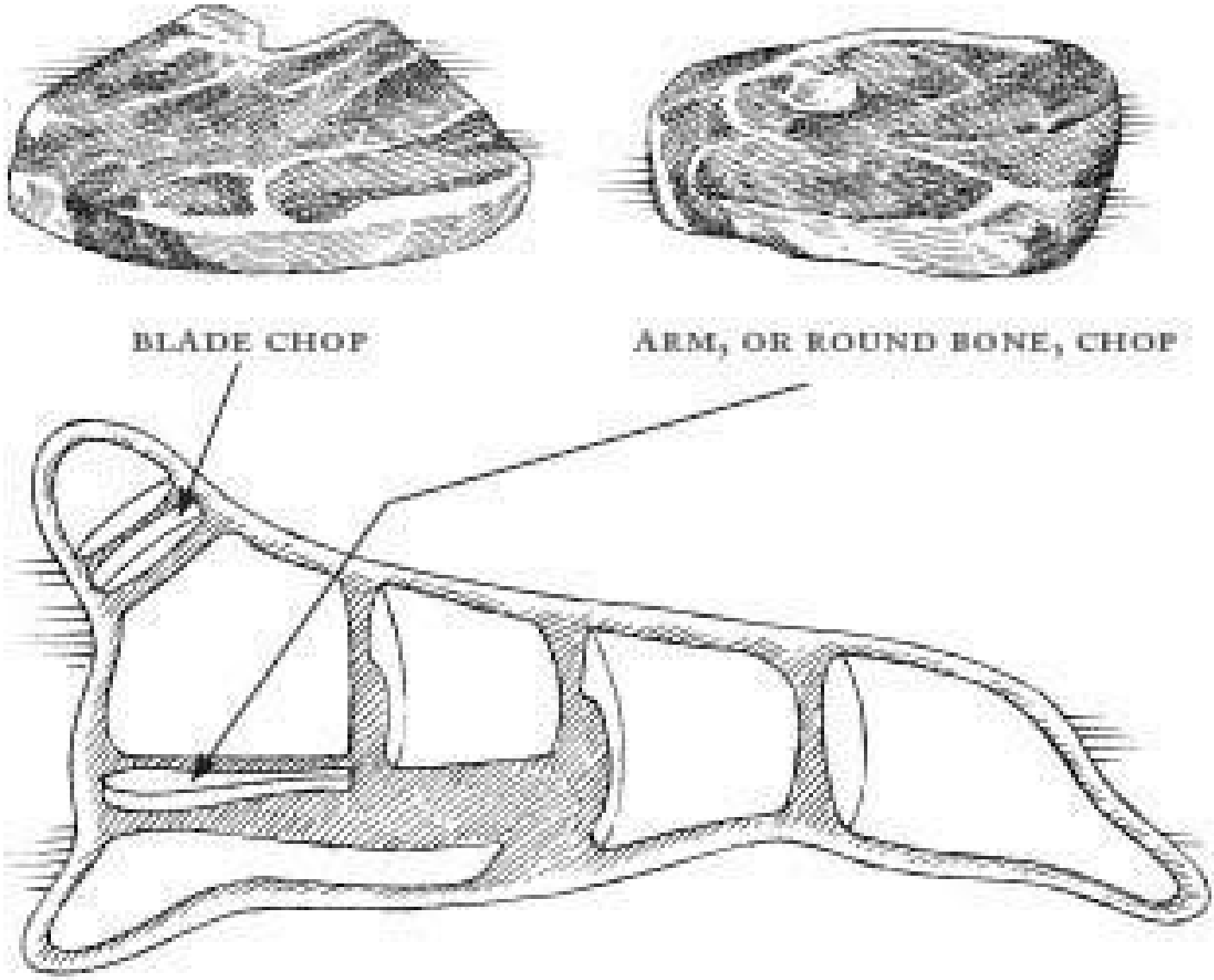

Figure 4.

It's very hard to find boneless lamb shoulder in markets. You might see the whole shoulder, but this cut is difficult to bone out. You can buy lamb meat for stew

or, better yet, buy thick shoulder chops, remove the meat from the bone, and cut it into large cubes. There are two kinds of shoulder chops. The blade chop is roughly rectangular in shape and contains a piece of the chine bone and a thin piece of the blade bone. The arm, or round bone, chop is leaner and contains a cross-section of the arm bone. Arm chops are easier to work with, and we suggest buying about 5 $^{1}/_{2}$pounds of chop to yield 3 pounds of stew meat.

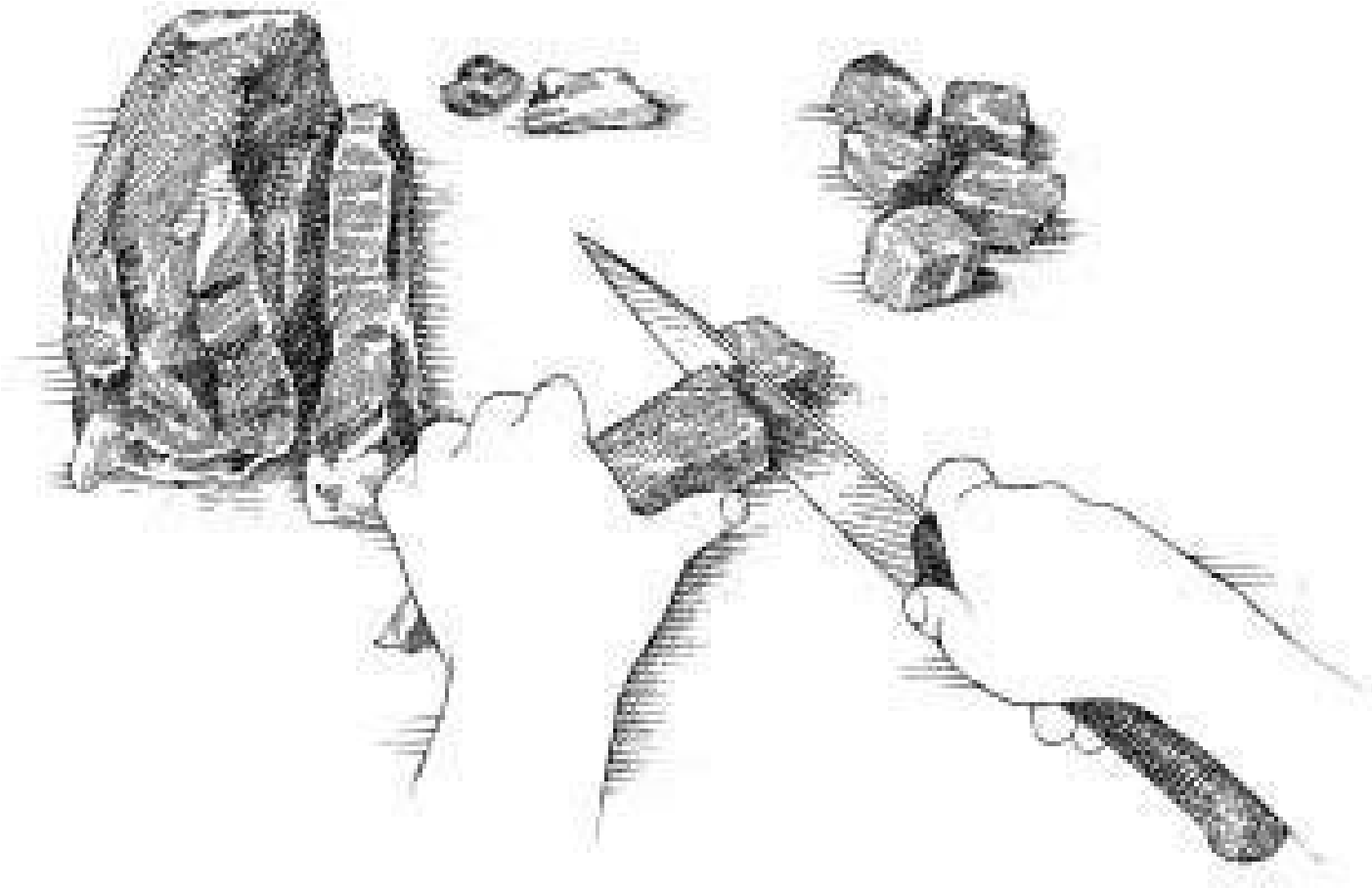

Figure 5.

To get stew meat pieces that are cut from the right part of the animal and regularly shaped, we suggest buying a boneless roast and cutting the meat into cubes yourself. Here, we are cutting a boneless chuck roast into 1 $^{1}/_{2}$-

inch cubes, making sure to remove excess bits of fat or gristle from each piece of meat.

Master Recipe

Meat Stew

NOTE: *Make this stew in a large, ovenproof Dutch oven, preferably a pot with a capacity of 8 quarts but nothing less then 6 quarts. In either case, choose a Dutch oven with a wide bottom since it will allow you to brown the meat in two batches. Serves six to eight.*

**3 pounds beef chuck, lamb shoulder, or pork shoulder, trimmed and cut into $1^1/_2$-inch cubes (*see*

figure 5)

$1^1/_2$ teaspoons salt

1 teaspoon ground black pepper

3 tablespoons vegetable oil

2 medium-large onions, chopped coarse (about 2 cups)

3 medium garlic cloves, minced

3 tablespoons flour

1 cup full-bodied red wine

2 cups chicken stock or low-sodium canned broth

2 bay leaves

1 teaspoon dried thyme

4 medium boiling potatoes, peeled and cut into 1-inch cubes

4 large carrots, peeled and sliced $^1/_4$-inch thick

1 cup frozen peas (about 6 ounces), thawed

$^1/_4$ cup minced fresh parsley leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oven to 250 degrees. Place beef cubes in large bowl. Sprinkle with salt and pepper; toss to coat. Heat 2 tablespoons oil over medium-high heat in large ovenproof Dutch oven. Add half of

meat and brown on all sides, about 5 minutes. Remove meat and set aside on plate. Repeat process with remaining oil and meat.

2. Add onions to empty Dutch oven and sauté until softened, 4 to 5 minutes. Add garlic and continue to cook for 30 seconds. Stir in flour and cook until lightly colored, 1 to 2 minutes. Add wine, scraping up any browned bits that may have stuck to pot. Add stock, bay leaves, and thyme, and bring to a simmer. Add meat and return to a simmer. Cover and place pot in oven. Cook for 1 hour.

3. Remove pot from oven and add potatoes and carrots. Cover and return to oven. Cook just until meat is tender, 1 to $1^{1}/_{2}$ hours for lamb and $1^{1}/_{2}$ to 2 hours for beef and pork. Remove pot from oven. (Can be cooled, covered, and refrigerated up to 3 days. Reheat on top of the stove.)

4. Add peas, cover, and allow to stand for 5 minutes. Stir in parsley, discard bay leaves, adjust seasonings, and serve.

Beef Stew with Bacon, Mushrooms, and Pearl Onions

NOTE: *This hearty stew is our version of boeuf bourguignon. It calls for equal amounts of red wine and chicken stock. Instead of frozen pearl onions, you can use fresh pearl onions (prepared accoording to the instructions in figures 6, 7 and 8). This stew is delicious over mashed potatoes. Serves six to eight.*

3 pounds beef chuck, trimmed and cut into $1^1/_2$-inch cubes

$1^1/_2$ teaspoons salt

1 teaspoon ground black pepper

4 ounces sliced bacon, cut into $^1/_2$-inch pieces

1 tablespoon vegetable oil

2 medium-large onions, chopped coarse (about 2 cups)

3 medium garlic cloves, minced

3 tablespoons flour

$1^1/_2$ cups full-bodied red wine

$1^1/_2$ cups chicken stock or low-sodium canned broth

2 bay leaves

1 teaspoon dried thyme

1 pound white button mushrooms, quartered

1 cup (8 ounces) frozen pearl

onions, cooked according to package directions

$^1/_4$ cup minced fresh parsley leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oven to 250 degrees. Place beef cubes in large bowl. Sprinkle with salt and pepper; toss to coat. Fry bacon in large ovenproof Dutch oven over medium heat until golden brown, about 7 minutes. Drain bacon, reserving bits and drippings separately. Increase heat to medium-high and heat 2 tablespoons bacon drippings in Dutch oven. Add half of meat and brown on all sides, about 5 minutes. Remove meat and set aside on

plate. Repeat process with another tablespoon of bacon drippings and remaining meat.

2. Add onions to empty Dutch oven and sauté until softened, 4 to 5 minutes. Add garlic and continue to cook for 30 seconds. Stir in flour and cook until lightly colored, 1 to 2 minutes. Add wine, scraping up any browned bits that may have stuck to pot. Add stock, bay leaves, and thyme, and bring to a simmer. Add meat and bacon bits return to a simmer. Cover and place pot in oven. Cook until meat is almost tender, 2 to $2^{1}/_{2}$ hours.

3. Meanwhile, heat 2 tablespoons bacon drippings in large skillet. Add mushrooms and sauté over high heat until browned, 5 to 7 minutes. Transfer mushrooms to large bowl. Add cooked pearl onions and sauté until lightly browned, 2 to 3 minutes. Add onions to bowl with mushrooms.

4. Add mushrooms and onions to stew when meat is almost tender. Cover and return pot to oven. Cook until meat is completely tender, 20 to 30 minutes. (Can be cooled, covered, and refrigerated up to 3 days. Reheat on top

of the stove.)

5. Stir in parsley, discard bay leaves, adjust seasonings, and serve.

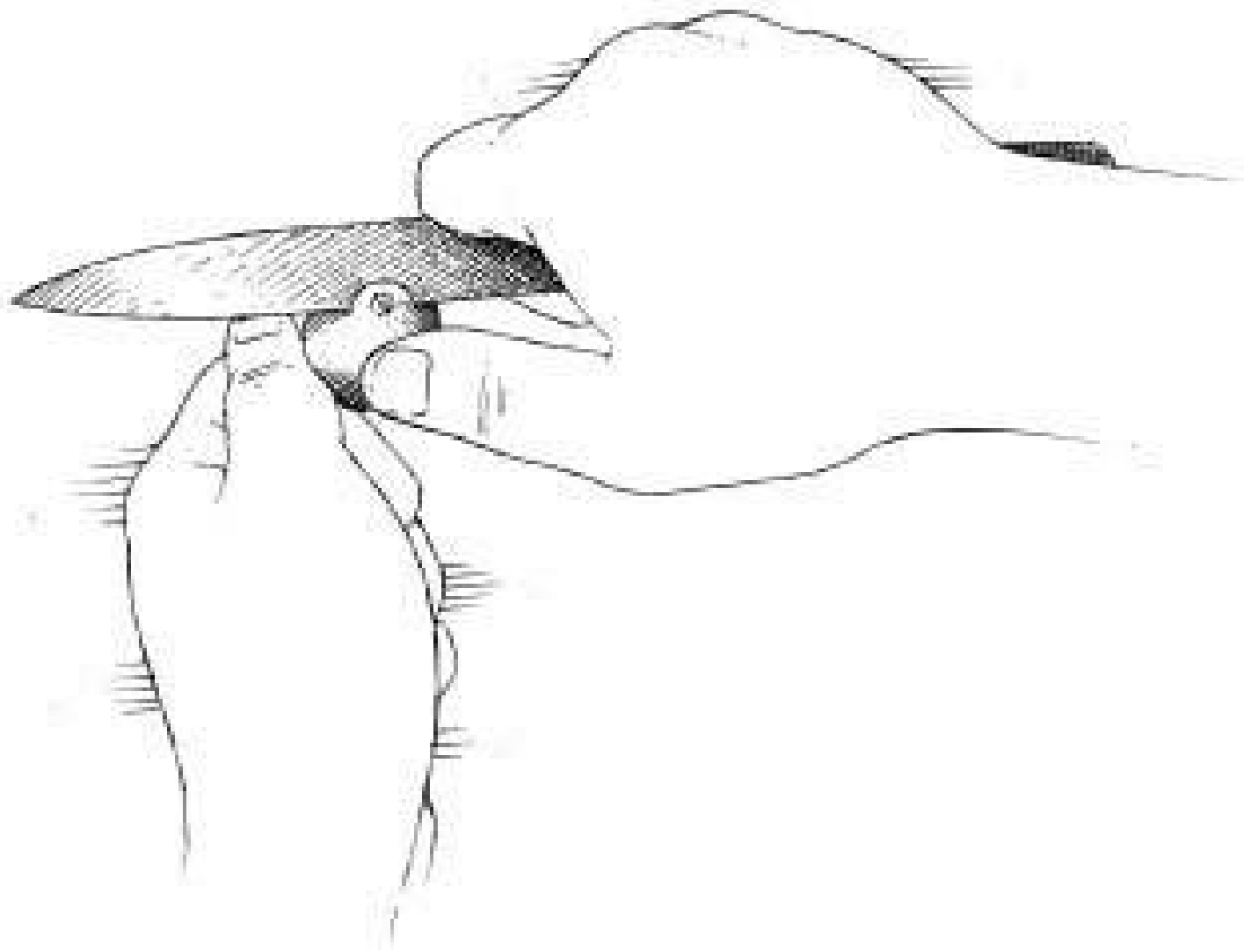

Figure 6.

To prepare fresh pearl onions, start by cutting off a tiny bit of the root end with a small paring knife.

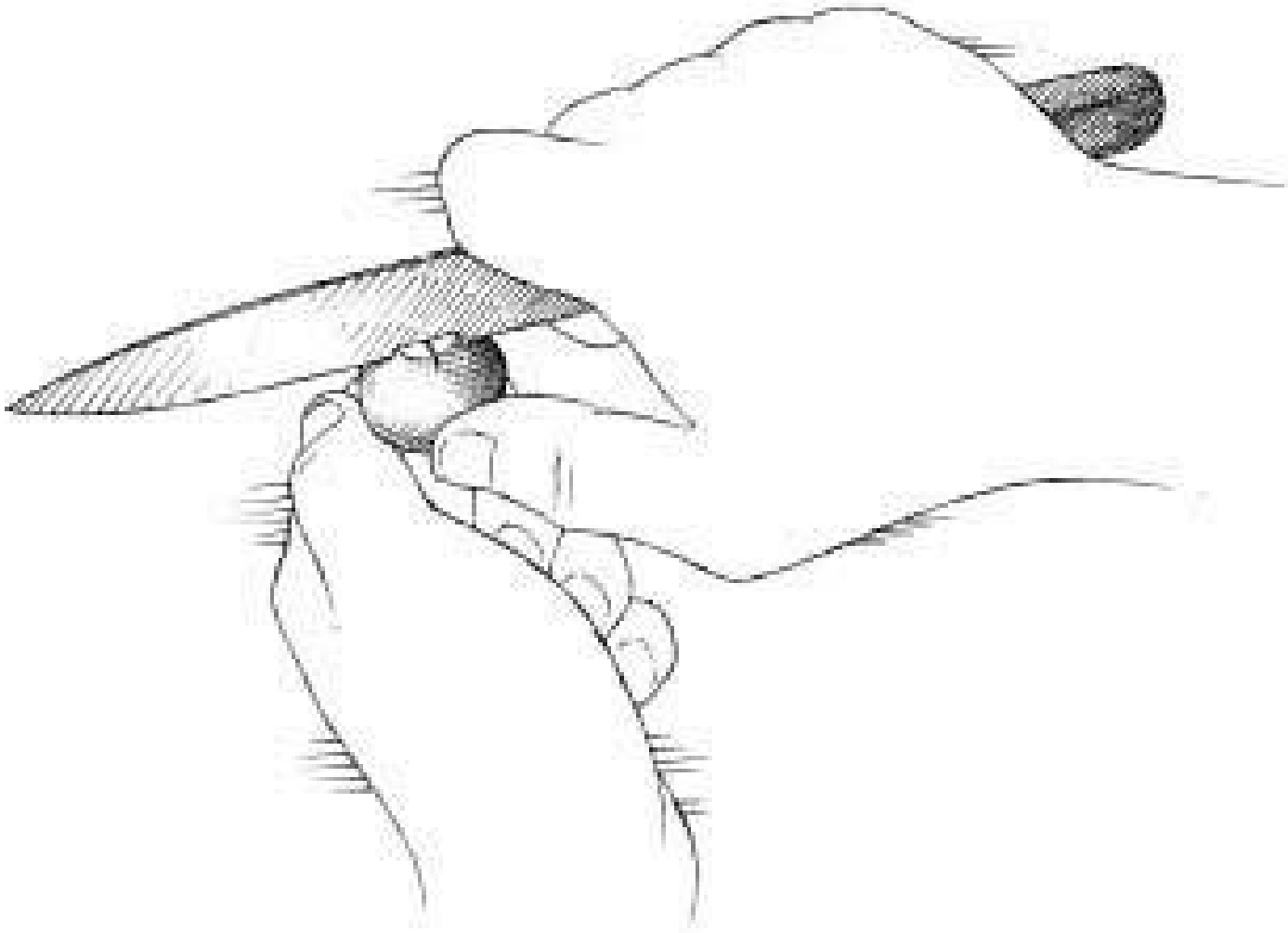

Figure 7.

To keep the onions from falling apart, cut an X in the exposed root end of each onion. This will allow the layers to expand but still hold together when sautéed.

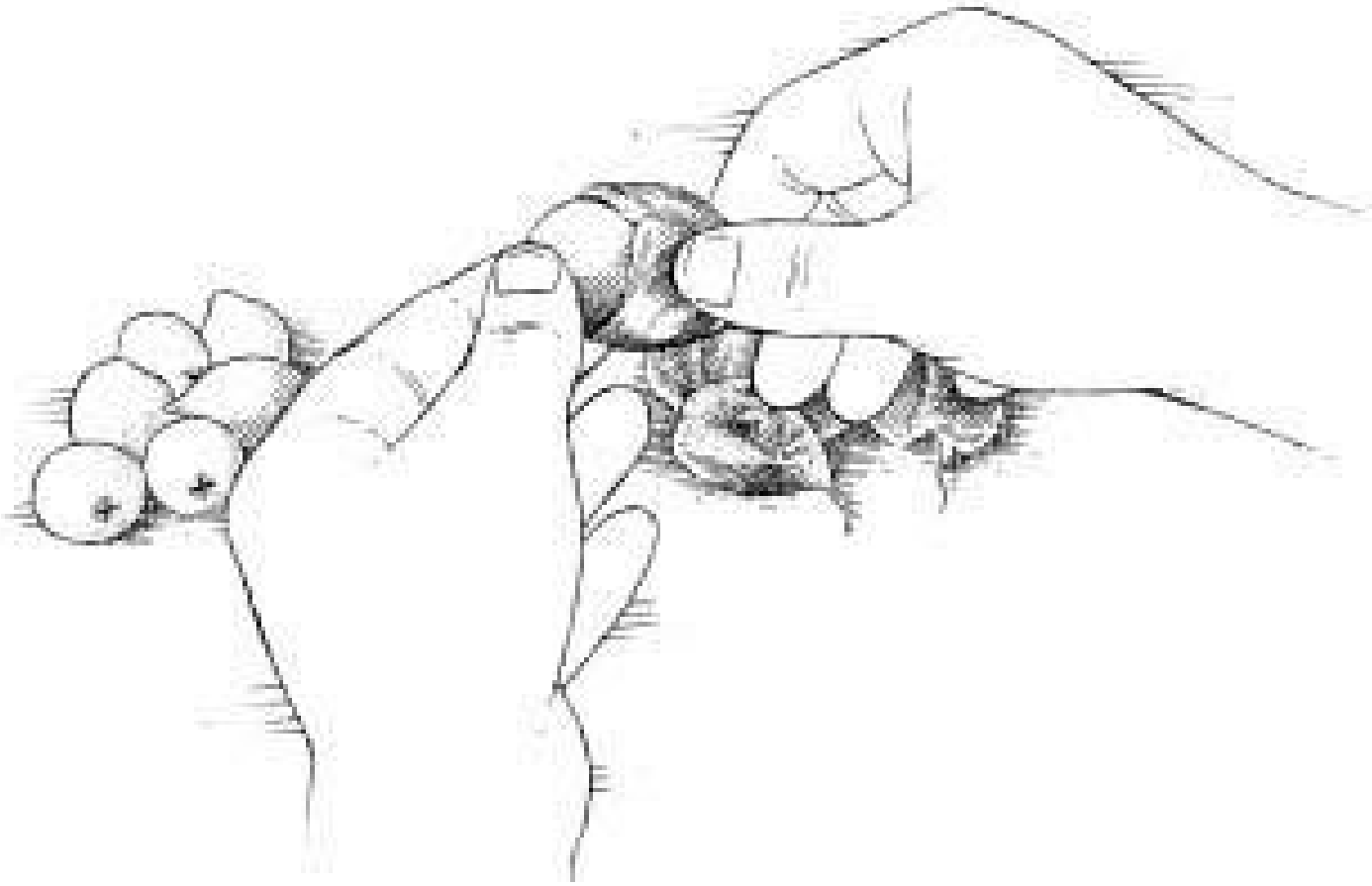

Figure 8.

We find it easier to peel fresh pearl onions after they have been blanched in boiling water for 30 seconds. Drain the onions and, when they are cool enough to handle, simply slip off the skins.

Beef Goulash

NOTE: *The sour cream is optional but adds a nice color and richness. Serve over egg noodles. Serves six to eight.*

3 pounds beef chuck, trimmed and cut into $1^1/_2$-inch cubes

$1^1/_2$ teaspoons salt

1 teaspoon ground black pepper

4 ounces sliced bacon, cut into $^1/_2$-inch pieces

2 medium-large onions, chopped coarse (about 2 cups)

1 medium red bell pepper, stemmed, seeded, and chopped

6 medium garlic cloves, minced

2 tablespoons sweet paprika

3 tablespoons flour

1 cup white wine

2 cups chicken stock or low-sodium canned broth

2 bay leaves

1 teaspoon dried thyme

4 large carrots, peeled and sliced $^1/_4$-inch thick

$^1/_4$ cup minced fresh parsley leaves

$^1/_2$ cup sour cream

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oven to 250 degrees. Place beef cubes in large bowl. Sprinkle with salt and pepper; toss to coat. Fry bacon in

large ovenproof Dutch oven over medium heat until golden brown, about 7 minutes. Drain bacon, reserving bits and drippings separately. Increase heat to medium-high and heat 2 tablespoons bacon drippings in Dutch oven. Add half of meat and brown on all sides, about 5 minutes. Remove meat and set aside on plate. Repeat process with another tablespoon of bacon drippings and remaining meat.

2. Add onions and red bell pepper to empty Dutch oven and sauté until softened, 4 to 5 minutes. Add garlic and continue to cook for 30 seconds. Stir in paprika and flour; cook 1 to 2 minutes.

Add wine, scraping up any browned bits that may have stuck to pot. Add stock, bay leaves, and thyme, and bring to a simmer. Add meat and return to a simmer. Cover and place pot in oven. Cook for 1 hour.

3. Remove pot from oven and add carrots. Cover and return to oven. Cook just until meat is tender, $1\,^{1}/_{2}$ to 2 hours. Remove pot from oven. (Can be cooled, covered, and refrigerated up to 3 days. Reheat on top of the stove.)

4. Stir in parsley and sour cream, discard bay leaves, adjust seasonings,

and serve. Once sour cream has been added, do not let stew simmer or boil or sour cream will curdle.

Belgian Beef Stew with Beer

NOTE: *This famed Belgian stew, called carbonnade, uses beer for the cooking liquid. We found that an amber-colored ale, such as Pete's Wicked Ale or Anchor Steam Ale, gave the stew the richest flavor without any harshness. Traditionally, carbonnade contains just beef, onions, and beer for an intensely flavored stew. We found that brown sugar mellows the flavor of the beer, vinegar sharpens the other flavors, and mustard gives the broth some spice. The stew is delicious served over egg noodles. Since this stew does not contain any root vegetables, it can also be served over*

mashed potatoes or any root vegetable puree. Serves six to eight.

3 pounds beef chuck, trimmed and cut into 1 1/2-inch cubes

1 1/2 teaspoons salt

1 teaspoon ground black pepper

3 tablespoons vegetable oil

2 pounds onions, thinly sliced

2 medium garlic cloves, minced

3 tablespoons flour

1 1/2 cups amber-colored ale

1 1/2 cups chicken stock or low-sodium canned broth

2 bay leaves

1 teaspoon dried thyme

1 tablespoon brown sugar
1 tablespoon cider vinegar
1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
$^1/_4$ cup minced fresh parsley leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oven to 250 degrees. Place beef cubes in large bowl. Sprinkle with salt and pepper; toss to coat. Heat 2 tablespoons oil over medium-high heat in large ovenproof Dutch oven. Add half of beef and brown on all sides, about 5 minutes. Remove meat and set aside on plate. Repeat process with remaining oil and beef.

2. Add onions to empty Dutch oven and sauté, stirring frequently until onions release their liquid and in essence deglaze the pan, 10 to 12 minutes. Reduce heat to medium; cook until liquid evaporates, drippings begin to brown, and onions become quite dark, about 15 to 20 minutes. Add garlic and continue to cook for 30 seconds. Stir in flour and cook until lightly colored, 1 to 2 minutes. Add ale, scraping up any browned bits that may have stuck to pot. Add stock, bay leaves, thyme, brown sugar, and vinegar, and bring to a simmer. Add meat and return to a simmer. Cover and place pot in oven. Cook just until meat is tender, 2 to $2^{1}/_{2}$

hours. Remove pot from oven. (Can be cooled, covered, and refrigerated up to 3 days. Reheat on top of the stove.)

3. Stir in mustard and parsley, discard bay leaves, adjust seasonings, and serve.

Irish Stew

NOTE: *Lamb stew is a favorite dish in Ireland. The broth is made with all stock (no wine), and potatoes and carrots are the most typical vegetables. Without the wine, the stew liquid is particularly meaty. Adding a little Worcestershire sauce intensifies the meatiness of the stew. Serves six to eight.*

3 pounds lamb shoulder, trimmed and cut into $1^1/_2$-inch cubes

$1^1/_2$ teaspoons salt

1 teaspoon ground black pepper

3 tablespoons vegetable oil

3 medium-large onions, chopped coarse (about 3 cups)

3 tablespoons flour

3 cups chicken stock or low-sodium canned broth

1/2 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce

2 bay leaves

1 teaspoon dried thyme

6 medium boiling potatoes, peeled and cut into 1-inch dice

4 large carrots, peeled and sliced 1/4-inch thick

1/4 cup minced fresh parsley leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oven to 250 degrees. Place lamb cubes in large bowl. Sprinkle with salt and pepper; toss to coat. Heat 2 tablespoons oil over medium-high heat in large ovenproof Dutch oven. Add half of lamb and brown on all sides, about 5 minutes. Remove meat and set aside on plate. Repeat process with remaining oil and lamb.

2. Add onions to empty Dutch oven and sauté until softened, 4 to 5 minutes. Stir in flour and cook until lightly colored, 1 to 2 minutes. Add 1 cup stock, scraping up any browned bits that may have stuck to pot. Add remaining stock,

Worcestershire sauce, bay leaves, and thyme, and bring to a simmer. Add meat and return to a simmer. Cover and place pot in oven. Cook for 1 hour.

3. Remove pot from oven and add potatoes and carrots. Cover and return to oven. Cook just until meat is tender, 1 to $1^1/_2$ hours. Remove pot from oven. (Can be cooled, covered, and refrigerated up to 3 days. Reheat on top of the stove.)

4. Stir in parsley, discard bay leaves, adjust seasonings, and serve.

Lamb Stew with Tomatoes, Chickpeas, and Spices

NOTE: *In this North African stew, canned tomatoes take the place of the wine. Because no vegetables are added partway through the cooking process, the total stewing time for the lamb is reduced to about 2 hours. Serve this stew over couscous. Serves six to eight.*

3 pounds lamb shoulder, trimmed and cut into $1^1/_2$-inch cubes

$1^1/_2$ teaspoons salt

1 teaspoon ground black pepper

3 tablespoons vegetable oil

2 medium-large onions, chopped coarse (about 2 cups)

4 medium garlic cloves, minced

3 tablespoons flour

$1^1/_2$ cups chicken stock or low-sodium canned broth

$1^1/_2$ cups chopped canned tomatoes with their juice

2 bay leaves

$1^1/_2$ teaspoons ground coriander

1 teaspoon ground cumin

$^3/_4$ teaspoon ground cinnamon

$^1/_2$ teaspoon ground ginger

1 15-ounce can chickpeas, drained and rinsed

1/4 cup minced fresh parsley or cilantro leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oven to 250 degrees. Place lamb cubes in large bowl. Sprinkle with salt and pepper; toss to coat. Heat 2 tablespoons oil over medium-high heat in large ovenproof Dutch oven. Add half of lamb and brown on all sides, about 5 minutes. Remove meat and set aside on plate. Repeat process with remaining oil and lamb.

2. Add onions to empty Dutch oven and sauté until softened, 4 to 5 minutes. Add garlic and continue to cook for 30

seconds. Stir in flour and cook until lightly colored, 1 to 2 minutes. Add stock, scraping up any browned bits that may have stuck to pot. Add tomatoes, coriander, cumin, cinnamon, ginger, and bay leaves, and bring to a simmer. Add meat and return to a simmer. Cover and place pot in oven. Cook just until meat is almost tender, $1^{3}/_{4}$ to $2^{1}/_{4}$ hours.

3. Remove pot from oven and add chickpeas. Cover and return pot to oven and cook until meat is tender and chickpeas are heated through, about 15 minutes. (Can be cooled, covered, and refrigerated up to 3 days. Reheat on top of the stove.)

4. Stir in parsley, discard bay leaves, adjust seasonings, and serve.

Lamb Stew with Rosemary and White Beans

NOTE: *In this Italian stew, cannellini or other white beans take the place of the potatoes. Rosemary is used in place of the thyme. Since this dish contains beans, it can be served as is, or perhaps with some bread, but it does not require any other starch. Serves six to eight.*

3 pounds lamb shoulder, trimmed and cut into $1^1/_2$-inch cubes

$1^1/_2$ teaspoons salt

1 teaspoon ground black pepper

3 tablespoons vegetable oil

2 medium-large onions, chopped coarse (about 2 cups)

3 medium garlic cloves, minced

3 tablespoons flour

1 cup white wine

2 cups chicken stock or low-sodium canned broth

2 bay leaves

1 tablespoon minced fresh rosemary

3 large carrots, peeled and cut into $^{3}/_{8}$-inch dice

1 15-ounce can white beans, drained and rinsed

$^{1}/_{4}$ cup minced fresh parsley leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oven to 250 degrees. Place lamb cubes in large bowl. Sprinkle with salt and pepper; toss to coat. Heat 2 tablespoons oil over medium-high heat in large ovenproof Dutch oven. Add half of lamb and brown on all sides, about 5 minutes. Remove meat and set aside on plate. Repeat process with remaining oil and lamb.

2. Add onions to empty Dutch oven and sauté until softened, 4 to 5 minutes. Add garlic and continue to cook for 30 seconds. Stir in flour and cook until lightly colored, 1 to 2 minutes. Add

wine, scraping up any browned bits that may have stuck to pot. Add stock, bay leaves, and rosemary, and bring to a simmer. Add meat and return to a simmer. Cover and place pot in oven. Cook for 1 hour.

3. Remove pot from oven and add carrots. Cover and return to oven. Cook just until meat is almost tender, 1 to $1^{1}/_{4}$ hours. Remove pot from oven and add white beans. Cover and return pot to oven and cook until meat is tender and beans are heated through, about 15 minutes. Remove pot from oven. (Can be cooled, covered, and refrigerated up to 3 days. Reheat on top of the stove.)

4. Stir in parsley, discard bay leaves, adjust seasonings, and serve.

Pork Stew with Prunes, Mustard, and Cream

NOTE: *This French stew features prunes soaked in brandy. The liquid is enriched with cream. If you like, use Armagnac in place of the brandy. Ladle this stew over buttered noodles. Serves six to eight.*

6 ounces prunes, halved and soaked in $^1/_3$ cup brandy, until softened, about 20 minutes

3 pounds pork shoulder, trimmed and cut into $1^1/_2$-inch cubes

$1^1/_2$ teaspoons salt

1 teaspoon ground black pepper

3 tablespoons vegetable oil

2 medium-large onions, chopped coarse (about 2 cups)

3 medium garlic cloves, minced

3 tablespoons flour

1 cup white wine

2 cups chicken stock or low-sodium canned broth

2 bay leaves

1 teaspoon dried thyme

1/2 cup heavy cream

3 tablespoons Dijon mustard

1/4 cup minced fresh parsley leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oven to 250 degrees. Place pork cubes in large bowl. Sprinkle with salt and pepper; toss to coat. Heat 2 tablespoons oil over medium-high heat in large ovenproof Dutch oven. Add half of pork and brown on all sides, about 5 minutes. Remove meat and set aside on plate. Repeat process with remaining oil and pork.

2. Add onions to empty Dutch oven and sauté until softened, 4 to 5 minutes. Add garlic and continue to cook for 30 seconds. Stir in flour and cook until lightly colored, 1 to 2 minutes. Add wine, scraping up any browned bits that

may have stuck to pot. Add stock, bay leaves, and thyme, and bring to a simmer. Add meat and return to a simmer. Cover and place pot in oven. Cook for 2 hours.

3. Add prunes, brandy, and cream. Cover and return to oven. Cook just until meat is tender, 30 to 45 minutes. Remove pot from oven. (Can be cooled, covered, and refrigerated up to 3 days. Reheat on top of the stove.)

4. Stir in mustard and parsley, discard bay leaves, adjust seasonings, and serve.

Pork Vindaloo

NOTE: *This Indian dish of Portuguese ancestry relies on tomatoes instead of wine as part of the liquid base. Pair this stew with steamed rice, preferably basmati rice. Serves six to eight.*

3 pounds pork shoulder, trimmed and cut into $1^1/_2$-inch cubes

$1^1/_2$ teaspoons salt

1 teaspoon ground black pepper

3 tablespoons vegetable oil

3 medium-large onions, chopped coarse (about 3 cups)

8 medium garlic cloves, minced

3 tablespoons flour
1 tablespoon sweet paprika
3/4 teaspoon ground cumin
1/2 teaspoon ground cardamom
1/4 teaspoon cayenne
1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
1 1/2 cups chicken stock or low-sodium canned broth
1 1/2 cups chopped canned tomatoes with their juice
2 bay leaves
1 teaspoon sugar
2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
1 tablespoon mustard seeds
1/4 cup minced fresh cilantro leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oven to 250 degrees. Place pork cubes in large bowl. Sprinkle with salt and pepper; toss to coat. Heat 2 tablespoons oil over medium-high heat in large ovenproof Dutch oven. Add half of pork and brown on all sides, about 5 minutes. Remove meat and set aside on plate. Repeat process with remaining oil and pork.

2. Add onions to empty Dutch oven and sauté until softened, 4 to 5 minutes. Add garlic and continue to cook for 30 seconds. Stir in flour, paprika, cumin, cardamom, cayenne, and cloves, and

cook until lightly colored, 1 to 2 minutes. Add stock, scraping up any browned bits that may have stuck to pot. Add tomatoes, bay leaves, sugar, vinegar, and mustard seeds, and bring to a simmer. Add meat and return to a simmer. Cover and place pot in oven. Cook just until meat is tender, about $2^{1}/_{2}$ hours. Remove pot from oven. (Can be cooled, covered, and refrigerated up to 3 days. Reheat on top of the stove.)

3. Stir in cilantro, discard bay leaves, adjust seasonings, and serve.

CHICKEN STEWS

CHICKEN STEW IS A BIT HARD TO DEFINE. Say beef stew and most everyone can imagine large, boneless chunks of browned beef floating in a rich, dark sauce along with some vegetables. But what exactly is chicken stew? Is it a cut-up chicken that is browned and then braised? Is it a cut-up chicken that is stewed (to make homemade broth) and then cooled in order to tear the meat from the bones? Is it boneless breasts or thighs cut into chunks and browned and stewed like

beef?

We started with a whole chicken that was cut up, browned, and then simmered in water to make stock. The liquid was strained and the meat was removed from the breasts, legs, and thighs. Like meat stew, this preparation produced a stew without bones, and the homemade stock was a nice bonus. But the dish required a lot of effort (pulling the meat off each piece is very tedious) and the results were good but not great.

Our next thought was to follow our master recipe for meat stew but use a cut-up chicken instead of cubes of boneless beef, lamb, or pork. We browned the chicken parts, removed them from the pot, sautéed some

aromatic vegetables, deglazed the pot with some wine, added stock, slow-cooking vegetables, and the chicken, and simmered until everything was tender. We encountered several problems with this method. The skin is nice and crisp after browning but becomes flabby and not very appealing after stewing in liquid for the necessary half hour or so. In addition, the wings are very unappetizing—they contain mostly inedible skin and very little meat. Also, the breast pieces were way too large to fit into a bowl (each piece would have to be cut in half crosswise) and they had dried out during the stewing process.

We tried this recipe again using just

breasts and legs. We cut the split breasts in half, browned all the parts, pulled off the skin, and then added the legs to the stew followed by the breasts. Although the breasts were less dry and stringy, we felt that the dark meat pieces, with their extra fat and connective tissue, were better suited to stewing. They had much more flavor and their texture was more appealing. In addition, our tasters preferred the meatier thighs to the drumsticks, which tend to have more bone. The thighs are also easier to eat than the drumsticks, with the meat easily separating from the bones. We decided to abandon the breasts and drumsticks and concentrate on a stew made with thighs only.

This last test had revealed something interesting about the thighs. Removing the skin after the parts were browned was a must. The stew liquid was much less fatty, and since the skin was very soft and flabby and not really edible, there seemed little reason to serve it to people. We wondered if we should just start with boneless, skinless thighs—it certainly would be easier to eat a stew without bones. Unfortunately, when we browned boneless, skinless thighs, the outer layer of meat became tough and dry. Also, the skinless thighs tended to stick to the pan, even when we added quite a bit of oil. The skin acts as a cushion between the meat and pan.

We had decided on the style of chicken stew and for the most part liked the master recipe for meat stew adapted to chicken. But we found that we could not simply take the meat stew recipe wholesale and just add chicken instead of beef, lamb, or pork.

First of all, meat stews often taste best with red wine. Chicken generally matches up better with white wine. Also, because chicken requires less cooking time, we found that a stew made with one cup of wine and two cups of stock (as suggested in our meat stew recipes) was too alcoholic. Cutting the wine back to half a cup and increasing the stock by a half a cup keeps the stew from being

too boozy. We also found that chicken's milder flavor calls for less aggressive seasoning. Therefore, we used one less bay leaf and half as much thyme as in our meat stew recipe.

Like meat stew, chicken stew responds best to subboiling temperatures, which are easier to maintain in a low oven. However, when we put the chicken in a 250-degree oven it took almost the entire cooking time for the liquid to come up to temperature. We raised the oven temperature to 300 degrees and found that the stew was ready 30 minutes after the chicken was added to the liquid. Although this higher temperature would eventually cause the stew temperature to rise to the boiling point, we found that

the temperature was just about 200 degrees when the chicken was done.

Because chicken requires so much less time to cook than meat, vegetables are added before the chicken, not after. For instance, the carrots and potatoes get a 10-minute head start on the chicken so that they will be tender by the time the chicken is cooked through.

Master Recipe

Chicken Stew

NOTE: *We recommend using regular chicken thighs in this recipe. As a second option, you may use boneless, skinless chicken thighs, although the outer layer of meat will toughen during the cooking process. Substitute boneless, skinless thighs and sauté them in batches, adding a few more tablespoons of vegetable oil during the process to keep them from sticking. You may need to use a metal spatula to loosen browned skinless thighs from the pan.*

Serves six to eight.

8 bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs (about 3 pounds)
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 large onion, chopped coarse
2 medium garlic cloves, minced
3 tablespoons flour
1/2 cup white wine
2 1/2 cups chicken stock or low-sodium canned broth

1 bay leaf

1/2 teaspoon dried thyme

4 large carrots, peeled and sliced 1/4-inch thick

4 medium boiling potatoes, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch cubes

1 cup frozen peas (about 6 ounces), thawed

1/4 cup minced fresh parsley leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oven to 300 degrees. Sprinkle chicken with salt and pepper. Heat oil over medium-high heat in large ovenproof Dutch oven.

Add half of chicken, skin side down, and brown, about 4 minutes. Turn chicken and brown on other side, about 4 minutes. Remove chicken and set aside on plate. Repeat process with remaining chicken. Drain and discard all but 1 tablespoon fat from pot. When chicken has cooled, remove and discard skin (*see* figure 9).

2. Add onion to empty Dutch oven and sauté until softened, 4 to 5 minutes. Add garlic and continue to cook for 30 seconds. Stir in flour and cook until lightly colored, 1 to 2 minutes. Add wine, scraping up

any browned bits that may have stuck to pot. Add stock, bay leaf, and thyme, and bring to a simmer. Add carrots and potatoes and simmer for 10 minutes. Add chicken, submerging it in liquid, and return to a simmer. Cover and place pot in oven. Cook for 30 minutes. Remove pot from oven. (Can be cooled, covered, and refrigerated up to 3 days. Reheat on top of the stove.)

3. Add peas, cover, and let to stand for 5 minutes. Stir in parsley, discard bay leaf, adjust seasonings, and serve.

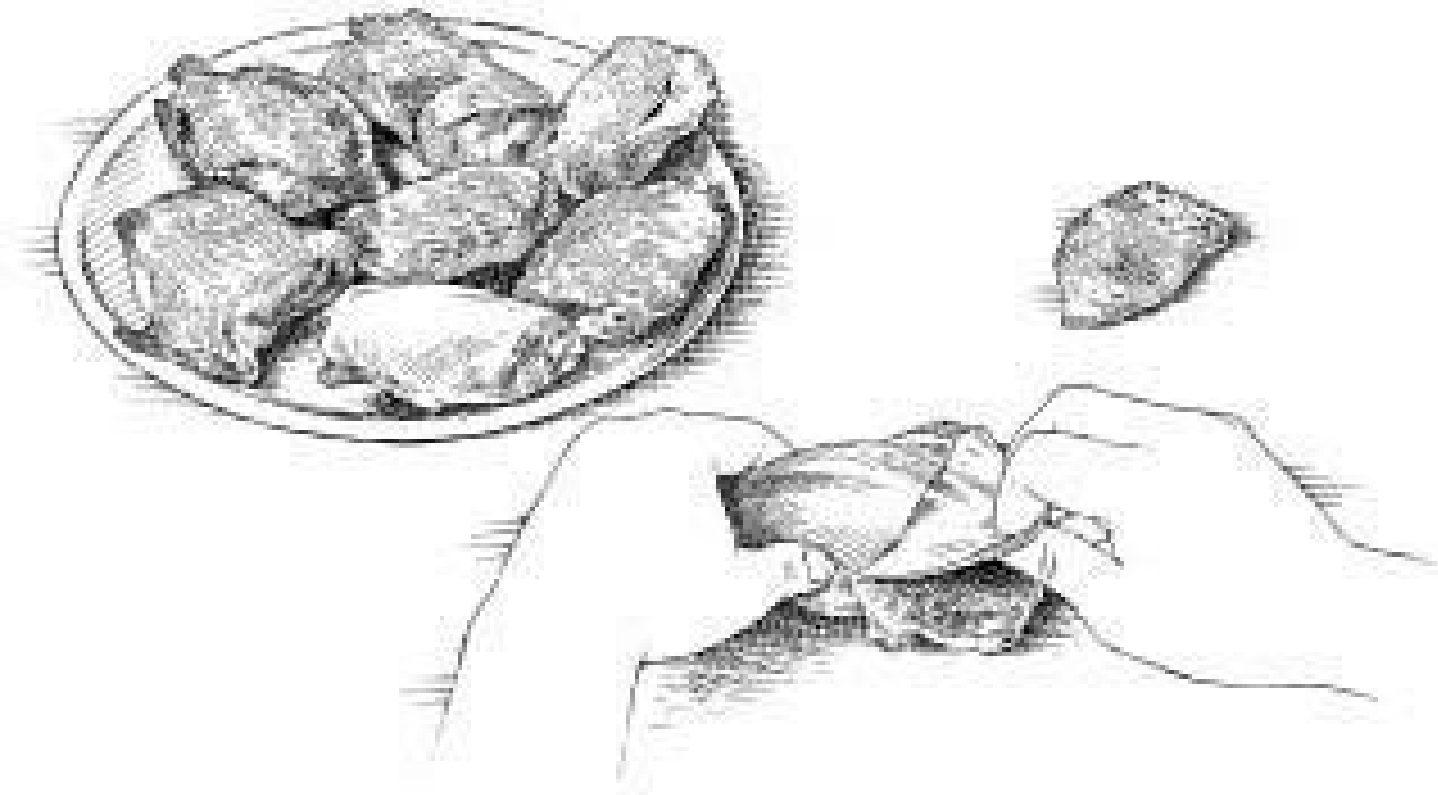

Figure 9

Once the chicken thighs have been browned and cooled, grasp the skin from one end and pull to separate the skin from the meat. Discard the skin.

Chicken Stew with Leeks, Potatoes, and Saffron

NOTE: *Saffron gives this stew a yellow-orange hue and a rich, earthy flavor. Buy saffron threads (not powder) and crumble them yourself for the best flavor. Serves six to eight.*

8 bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs (about 3 pounds)

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

4 large leeks, light green and white parts, sliced thin

2 medium garlic cloves, minced

3 tablespoons flour

1/2 cup white wine

2 1/2 cups chicken stock or low-sodium canned broth

1 bay leaf

1/2 teaspoon dried thyme

1/4 teaspoon saffron threads

4 large carrots, peeled and sliced 1/2-inch thick

4 medium boiling potatoes, cut into 1/2-inch cubes

1/4 cup minced fresh parsley leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oven to 300 degrees. Sprinkle

chicken with salt and pepper. Heat oil over medium-high heat in large ovenproof Dutch oven. Add half of chicken, skin side down, and brown, about 4 minutes. Turn chicken and brown on other side, about 4 minutes. Remove chicken and set aside on plate. Repeat process with remaining chicken. Drain and discard all but 1 tablespoon fat from pot. When chicken has cooled, remove and discard skin.

2. Add leeks to empty Dutch oven and sauté until softened, 4 to 5 minutes. Add garlic and continue to cook for 30 seconds. Stir in flour and cook until lightly colored, 1 to 2 minutes. Add

wine, scraping up any browned bits that may have stuck to pot. Add stock, bay leaf, and thyme, and bring to a simmer. Crumble saffron threads between fingers right over pot to release flavor (*see* figure 10). Add carrots and potatoes and simmer for 10 minutes. Add chicken, submerging it in liquid, and return to a simmer. Cover and place pot in oven. Cook for 30 minutes. Remove pot from oven. (Can be cooled, covered, and refrigerated up to 3 days. Reheat on top of the stove.)

3. Stir in parsley, discard bay leaf, adjust seasonings, and serve.

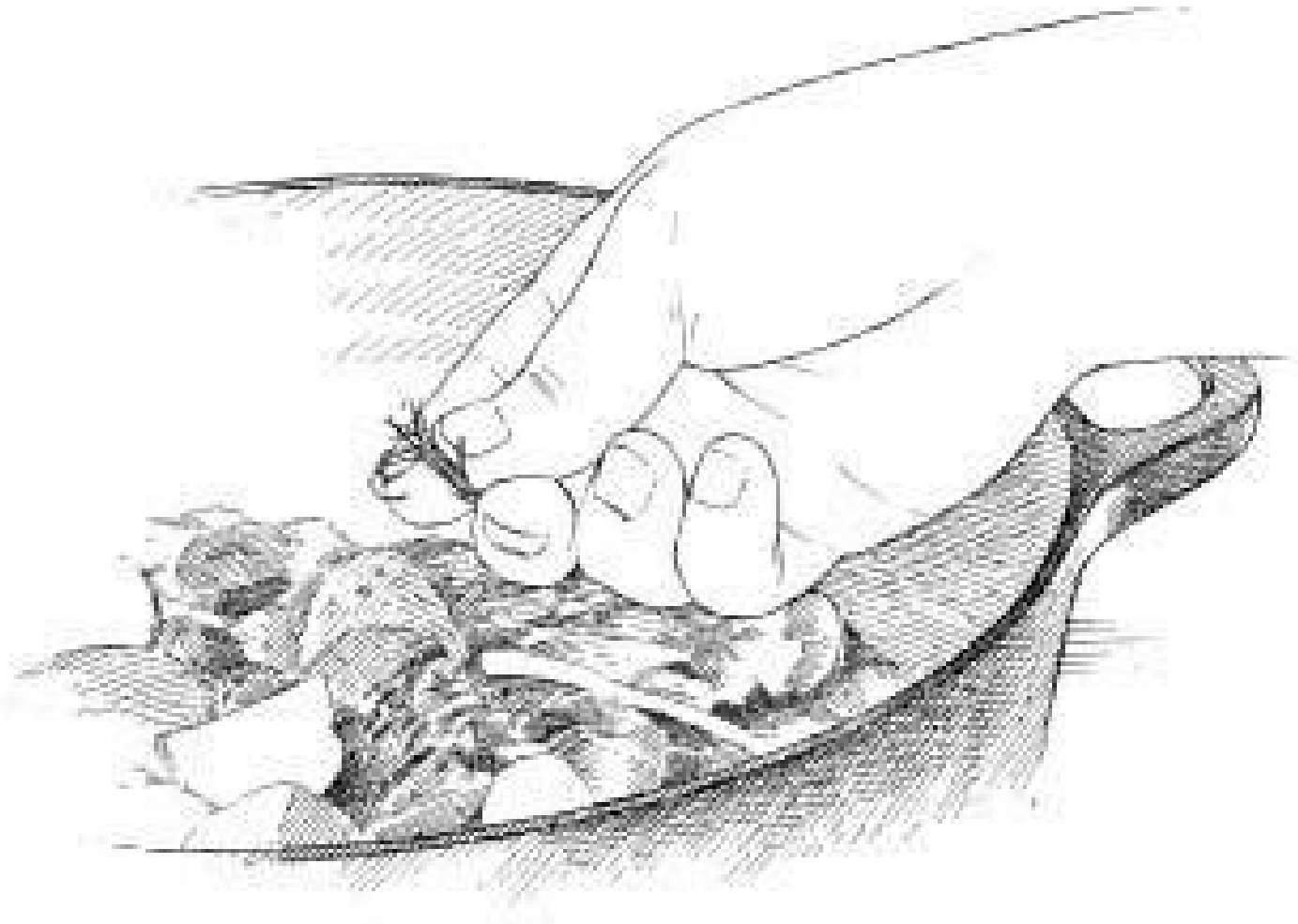

Figure 10.

To release their flavor, crumble saffron threads between your fingers right over the pot.

Country Captain Chicken Stew

NOTE: *A Southern favorite. We like this curried chicken stew with fresh mangoes rather than the usual mango chutney. Rice is a good accompaniment to this stew. Serves six to eight.*

8 bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs (about 3 pounds)

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

2 large onions, chopped coarse

1 green bell pepper, stemmed, seeded, and chopped

2 medium garlic cloves, minced

1 1/2 tablespoons sweet paprika

1 tablespoon curry powder

1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper

3 tablespoons flour

1 1/2 cups chicken stock or low-sodium canned broth

1 1/2 cups chopped canned tomatoes with their juice

1 bay leaf

1/2 teaspoon dried thyme

1/2 cup raisins

1 ripe mango, peeled, pitted, and cut into 1/4-inch dice

1/4 cup minced fresh parsley

leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oven to 300 degrees. Sprinkle chicken with salt and pepper. Heat oil over medium-high heat in large ovenproof Dutch oven. Add half of chicken, skin side down, and brown, about 4 minutes. Turn chicken and brown on other side, about 4 minutes. Remove chicken and set aside on plate. Repeat process with remaining chicken. Drain and discard all but 1 tablespoon fat from pot. When chicken has cooled, remove and discard skin.

2. Add onions and bell pepper to empty

Dutch oven and sauté until softened, 4 to 5 minutes. Add garlic and continue to cook for 30 seconds. Stir in paprika, curry powder, and cayenne and cook until spices are fragrant, about 30 seconds. Stir in flour and cook 1 to 2 minutes. Add stock, scraping up any browned bits that may have stuck to pot. Add tomatoes, bay leaf, thyme, raisins, and mango, and bring to a simmer. Simmer for 10 minutes to blend flavors. Add chicken, submerging it in liquid, and return to a simmer. Cover and place pot in oven. Cook for 30 minutes. Remove pot from oven. (Can be cooled, covered, and refrigerated up to 3 days. Reheat on top of the stove.)

3. Stir in parsley, discard bay leaf, adjust seasonings, and serve.

SEAFOOD STEWS

FIND A COUNTRY THAT HAS A COASTLINE, AND you will find a fish stew in the culinary repertoire. Whatever their geographic origin, fish stews are surprisingly easy for home cooks to prepare. Most recipes begin by making stock. The next step is to make a flavor base. The stock is added and then the fish.

Although the process is straightforward, we had a number of questions. Is fish stock essential? If so, what kinds of fish make the best stock?

What ingredients are essential in the flavor base and which are optional? What kinds of fish respond best to stewing? What size should the pieces of fish be? How long should they cook?

We started our testing by making a favorite fish stew with homemade fish stock, water, chicken stock, and a "cheater's" stock that started with bottled clam juice. The stew made with homemade fish stock was far superior. Unlike meat or chicken stews, where the protein simmers for some time in the stew, fish can cook for only a few minutes or it will dry out and fall apart. Since the fish does not have time to flavor the stew liquid, the liquid must start out tasting good. Water made a

horrible fish stew. Chicken stock tasted too much like chicken. Bottled clam juice, doctored up with some fresh ingredients, is our second choice if making fish stock is impossible.

We tested various fish for making stock and preferred those with heads and bones that will produce a gelatinous stock. (*See* Choosing Fish for Stock for more details.) Trimmings can come from any number of fish, although oily, strong-tasting fish, such as bluefish or salmon, should be avoided.

Many recipes suggest sweating fish bones and vegetables before adding water to make stock. In our tests, we found that this step was not only

unnecessary but also yielded an inferior stock. We found that simply adding all the ingredients to the pot, including the water, at the same time, produces a cleaner, brighter tasting stock.

Unlike meat or chicken stock, fish stock is rarely simmered for hours. Some sources warn against simmering for longer than 15 or 30 minutes, suggesting that the trimmings will make the stock bitter if cooked too long. We tested various times and found that fish stock tastes best when simmered for a full hour. When we continued to simmer the stock for another hour there was no improvement in flavor, but the stock did not become bitter, either.

There was a time when fishmongers

would gladly give away bones, heads, and tails. But no longer, unless perhaps you are an especially good customer. And don't expect to automatically have bones available when you show up. Call ahead and reserve what you need.

In addition to fish trimmings, water, and aromatic vegetables, many recipes call for white wine. We made fish stock both with and without wine and found that the wine adds a pleasant acidity. (Adding a little lemon adds some acidity, but not enough. We found that adding more than a quarter of a lemon will make the stock taste overly lemony.)

The prime flavoring element for many

fish stews is a seasoned tomato sauce, or base. Like stock, aromatic vegetables (onions, carrots, and celery) add flavor. However, for the base these vegetables should be sautéed to bring out their full flavor. Again, white wine brings a much-needed acidic edge to the stew. Other ingredients, such as fresh fennel and Pernod for bouillabaisse or almonds and red bell pepper for zarzuela, are added to give specific stews their character. Whatever the ingredients, the base should be well seasoned; it will be diluted with fish stock, which is cooked without salt.

We tested bases made with fresh and canned tomatoes. We found little difference, so don't hesitate to use

canned tomatoes. Unlike the stock, the base for the stew doesn't improve with longer cooking. After twenty minutes, the tomatoes begin to lose their freshness. After thirty minutes, the tomato base tastes too acidic and all the fresh tomato flavor is gone. Once the tomatoes are added, we recommend simmering the stew base just long enough to thicken the consistency and blend flavors, 15 to 20 minutes.

Once the base is cooked, it's time to add the stock and bring the mixture to a boil. The fish is then added and cooked briefly. In our testing, we found that overcooking the fish is the biggest problem with most fish stews. We found

that 3-to 4-ounce pieces are best for serving (they are neither too large to eat gracefully nor so small that they fall apart in the stew). Pieces of fish this small, however, cook very quickly. We tried various simmering and boiling regimens. In the end, what worked best was cooking the fish in simmering broth for 5 minutes, followed by 5 minutes of indirect cooking with the heat turned off and the lid on the pot.

Any white-fleshed fillet can be used in fish stew. In general, we like firmer fillets, such as red snapper or monkfish. Tender fillets, such as flounder or sole, can be used, but you might want to reduce the simmering time by a minute or two to keep these thinner fillets from

overcooking.

CHOOSING FISH FOR STOCK

Several kinds of fish make an exceptionally good stock that is rich and gelatinous. These fish are listed in the first grouping and should be used when possible. Most other tender white fish are fine for stock as well, and these are listed in the second grouping. Avoid the oily fish in the third grouping when making stock.

BEST FISH FOR STOCK

Blackfish

Monkfish, especially the heads
Red snapper
Sea bass

COMMON FISH THAT MAKE GOOD STOCK

Cod
Flatfish (sole, flounder, etc.)
Haddock
Pacific pollack
Rockfish
Shells from lobster, shrimp, or crabs
Skate

FISH TO AVOID

Bluefish
Mackerel
Pompano

Salmon
Smelt

Fish Stock

NOTE: *Fish heads, tails, and bones can be used to make stock. An equal amount of lobster, shrimp, or crab shells may be used instead. Makes 2 to $2^{1}/_{2}$ quarts.*

3 pounds fish trimmings (*see* Choosing Fish for Stock), prepared according to figures 11, 12 and 13
1 medium onion, diced
2 medium carrots, diced
1 large celery stalk, diced
8 fresh parsley stems, chopped
1 cup dry white wine
1 lemon quarter

10 whole black peppercorns
2 bay leaves
1 dried chile pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Put all ingredients in 6-to 8-quart pot. Cover with $2^{3}/_{4}$ quarts cold water. Bring to boil over medium heat; simmer gently for 1 hour, periodically skimming away scum that rises to surface.

2. Strain stock through double thickness of cheesecloth, pressing out as much liquid as possible with back of spoon. (Stock can be cooled and refrigerated for up to 3 days or frozen for 3 months.)

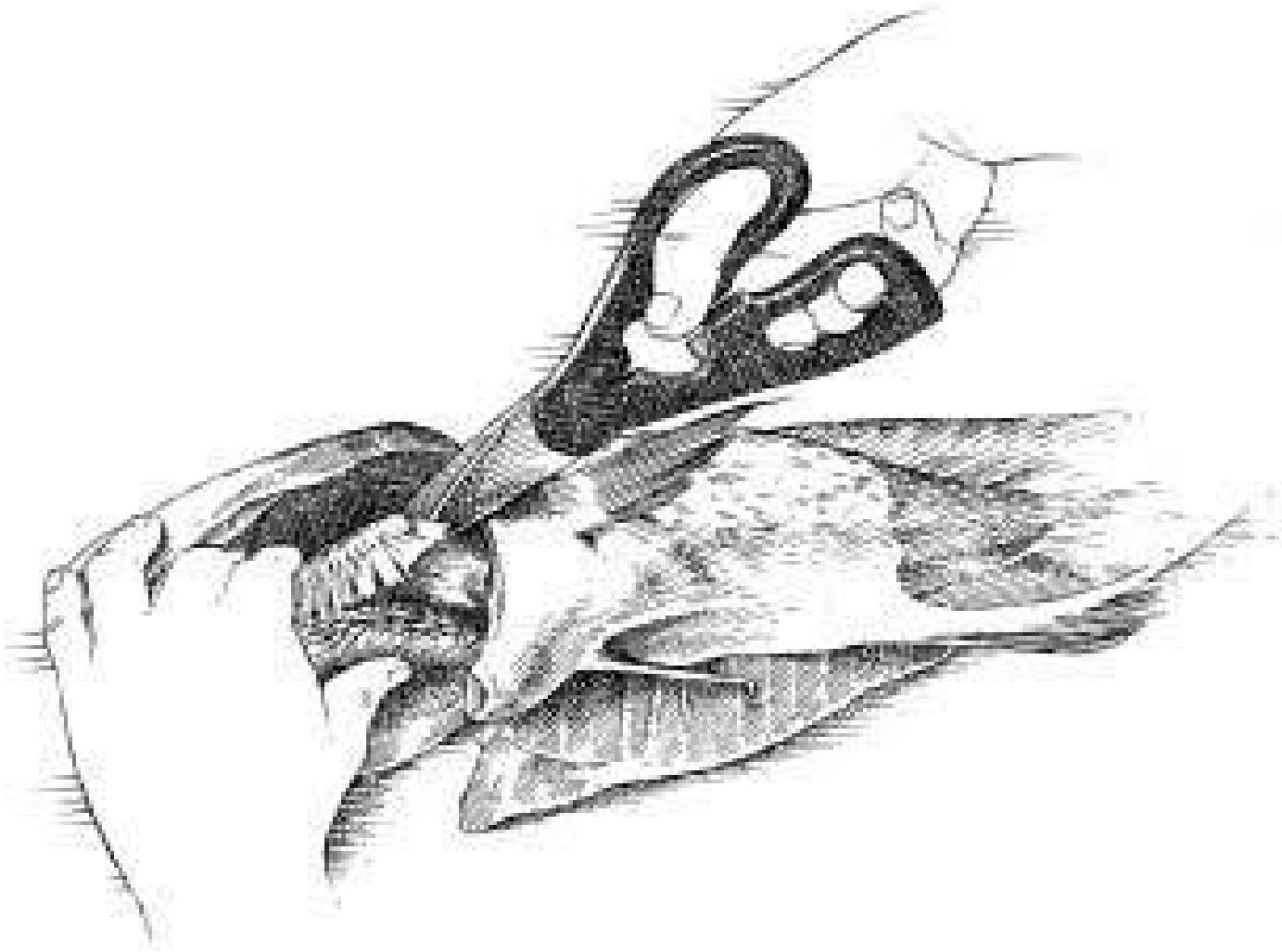

Figure 11.

Lift the gill cover and detach the gills with scissors.

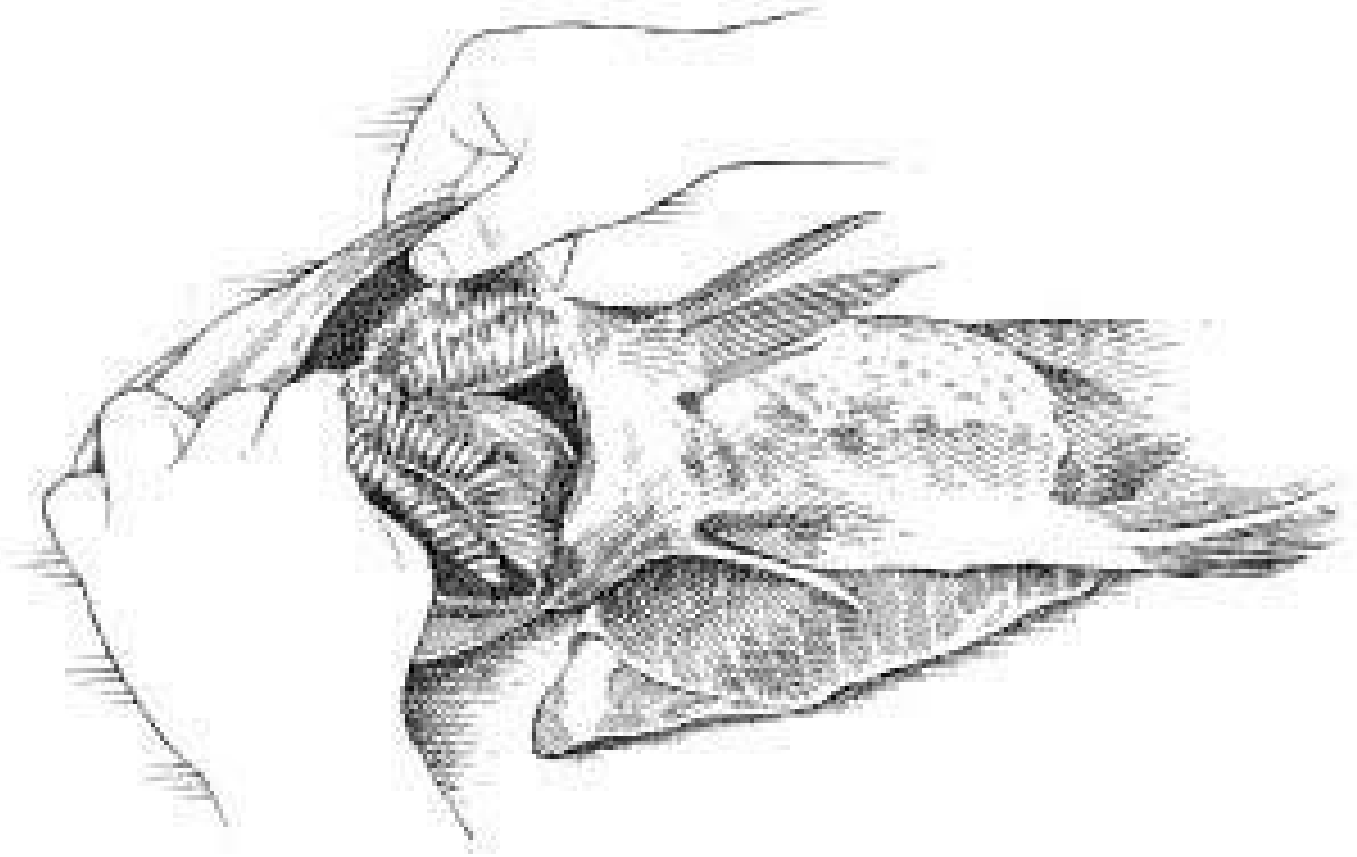

Figure 12.

Remove and discard the gills.

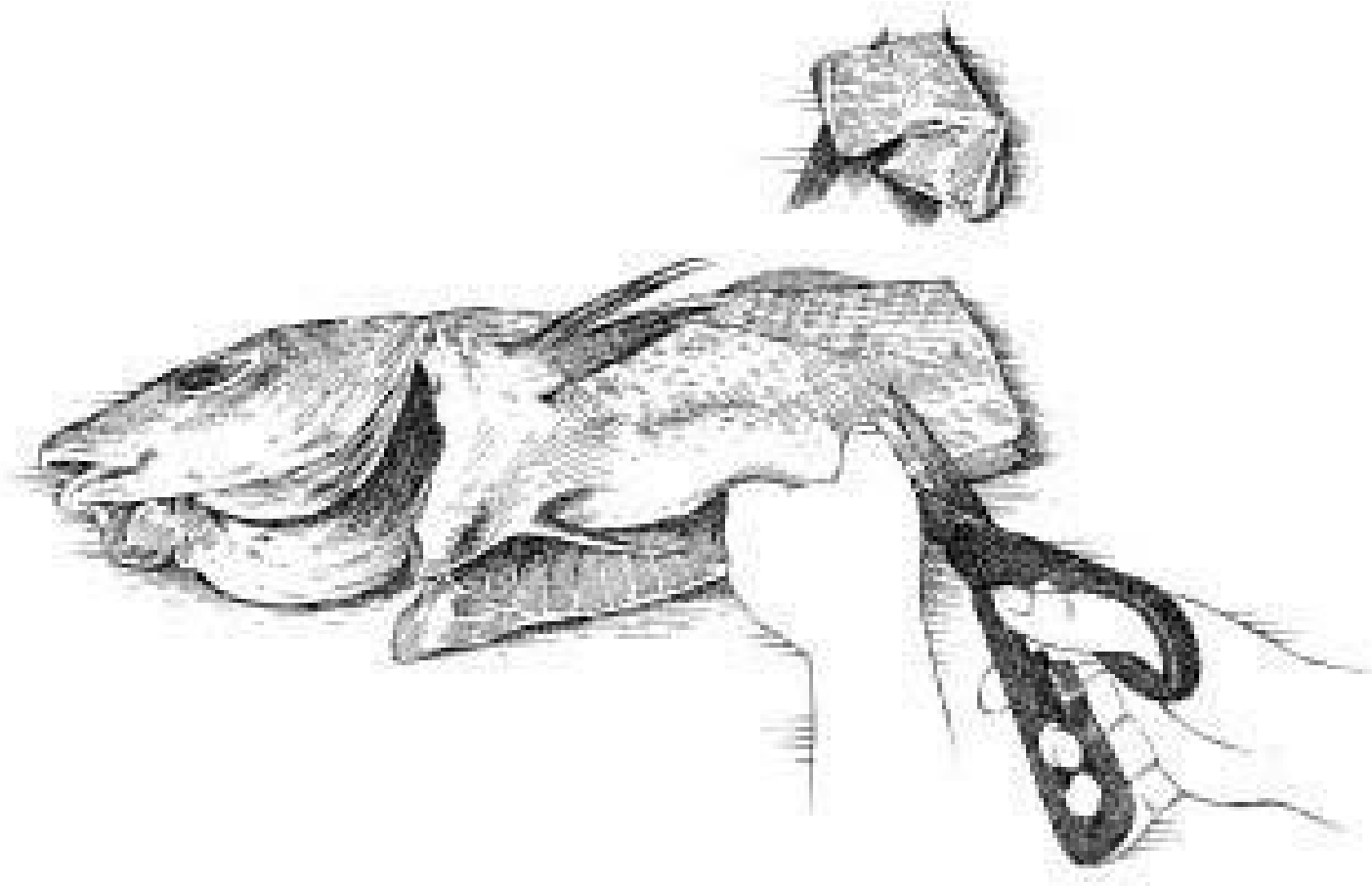

Figure 13.

Cut the trimmings into 3-inch pieces with heavy-duty kitchen shears or a meat cleaver.

Cheater's Stock

NOTE: *We found that doctored clam juice can be used in a pinch in place of fish stock. Clam juice is very salty, so don't add any salt to the stew until you have tasted it. Makes about $4^1/_2$ cups.*

1 small onion, minced
1 medium carrot, minced
2 medium celery stalks, minced
8 fresh parsley stems, chopped
1 cup dry white wine
3 8-ounce bottles clam juice
3 cups water
2 bay leaves
8 whole black peppercorns

1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
1 tablespoon lemon juice
1 dried chile pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

Bring all ingredients to boil in medium saucepan. Simmer to blend flavors (no skimming necessary), about 30 minutes. Strain through cheesecloth, pressing on solids with back of spoon to extract as much liquid as possible. (Can be refrigerated for 3 days.)

Master Recipe

Fish Stew

NOTE: *Red snapper, cod, grouper, monkfish, and sea bass are our favorite choices for stew. However, any white-fleshed fillet can be used either singly or in combination with another kind of fish. Because fish stew does not involve browning of meat and the stew does not go into the oven, it is not necessary to use a Dutch oven. A regular soup pot works just fine, although you may use a Dutch oven if you prefer. Serves six to eight.*

2 tablespoons olive oil
1 medium onion, diced
1 medium celery stalk, diced
1 medium carrot, diced
3 large garlic cloves, minced
1/2 cup dry white wine
2 cups chopped canned tomatoes with juice
2 large bay leaves
1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper, or to taste Salt and ground black pepper
4 1/2 cups Fish Stock or Cheater's Fish Stock

3 pounds white-flesh fish fillets, rinsed, patted dry, and cut into 3-to 4-ounce pieces

$^1/_4$ cup minced fresh parsley leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oil in large soup kettle. Add onion, celery, carrot, and garlic and cook over medium heat until softened, about 10 minutes. Add wine and simmer until reduced by half, 2 to 3 minutes. Add tomatoes, bay leaves, cayenne pepper, and salt and pepper to taste. Bring to boil, reduce heat, and simmer until mixture has thickened to tomato

sauce consistency, 15 to 20 minutes.

2. Add fish stock and bring to boil. Reduce heat to simmer and adjust seasonings with salt, pepper, and cayenne to taste.

3. Add fish pieces and simmer, stirring a few times to ensure even cooking, for 5 minutes. Remove kettle from heat, cover, and let stand until fish is just cooked through, about 5 minutes. Stir in parsley, discard bay leaves, and serve immediately.

Cod Stew with Potatoes and Bacon

NOTE: *This simple New England–style fish stew contains just cod, potatoes, onions, and bacon. Other firm, white-fleshed fish fillets may be used, but cod is the most authentic choice. The stew is delicious as is but can be enriched with a little heavy cream just before serving if you like. Serves six to eight.*

4 ounces sliced bacon, cut into 1/4-inch pieces

1 medium onion, diced

1/2 cup dry white wine

2 cups chopped canned tomatoes with their juice

2 large bay leaves

1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper, or to taste Salt and ground black pepper

4 1/2 cups Fish Stock or Cheater's Fish Stock

3 medium boiling potatoes, cut into 1/2-inch cubes

1/2 cup heavy cream (optional)

3 pounds cod fillets, rinsed, patted dry, and cut into 3-to 4-ounce pieces

1/4 cup minced fresh parsley leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Fry bacon in large soup kettle over medium heat until nicely browned, about 7 minutes. Remove bacon with slotted spoon and set aside. Add onion to bacon fat and cook over medium heat until softened, about 10 minutes. Add wine and simmer until reduced by half, 2 to 3 minutes. Add tomatoes, bay leaves, cayenne pepper, and salt and pepper to taste. Bring to boil, reduce heat, and simmer until mixture has thickened to tomato sauce consistency, 15 to 20 minutes.

2. Add fish stock and potatoes and bring to boil. Reduce heat and simmer until

potatoes are almost tender, 10 to 15 minutes. Add cream, if using. Adjust seasonings with salt, pepper, and cayenne to taste.

3. Add fish pieces and simmer, stirring a few times to ensure even cooking, for 5 minutes. Remove kettle from heat, cover, and let stand until fish is just cooked through, about 5 minutes. Stir in bacon and parsley, discard bay leaves, and serve immediately.

Bouillabaisse

NOTE: *This French fish stew is served in soup plates that have been lined with sliced cooked potatoes. Float two slices of toasted French bread dolloped with Roasted Red Pepper Mayonnaise (see recipe) in each bowl. Serves eight.*

2 tablespoons olive oil
2 medium onions, diced
1 small fennel bulb, diced, tough parts and stalks discarded
6 large garlic cloves, minced
1/2 cup dry white wine
3 cups chopped canned tomatoes with their juice
1/4 teaspoon saffron threads,

crumbled (*see* figure 10)

3 tablespoons anise-flavored liqueur such as Pernod

1 teaspoon grated orange zest

2 large bay leaves

1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper, or to taste Salt and ground black pepper

4 1/2 cups Fish Stock or Cheater's Fish Stock

1 pound new potatoes

3 pounds white-flesh fish fillets, rinsed, patted dry, and cut into 3-to 4-ounce pieces

1 recipe Roasted Red Pepper Mayonnaise

16 slices 1/2-inch-thick French

bread, toasted

1/4 cup minced fresh parsley leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oil in large soup kettle. Add onions, fennel, and garlic and cook over medium heat until softened, about 10 minutes. Add wine and simmer until reduced by half, 2 to 3 minutes. Add tomatoes, saffron, Pernod, orange zest, bay leaves, cayenne pepper, and salt and pepper to taste. Bring to boil, reduce heat, and simmer until mixture has thickened to tomato sauce consistency, 15 to 20 minutes.

2. Add fish stock and bring to boil. Reduce heat to simmer and adjust seasonings with salt, pepper, and cayenne to taste.

3. Meanwhile, place potatoes in medium saucepan and cover with water. Bring to boil and simmer until cooked through, 15 to 20 minutes. Drain, cool slightly, and cut into thick slices. Cover and keep potatoes warm.

4. Add fish to stew and simmer, stirring a few times, for 5 minutes. Remove kettle from heat, cover, and let stand until fish is just cooked through, about 5

minutes.

5. Spread a dollop of mayonnaise over each piece of toast. Divide potato slices among soup plates. Stir parsley into stew, discard bay leaves, and ladle stew into soup plates. Float 2 toasts in each soup plate and serve immediately.

Roasted Red Pepper Mayonnaise

NOTE: *Spread this French sauce, called rouille, on toasts that you float in bowls of seafood stew. If you like, mix the mayonnaise right into the stew for added flavor. If you prefer not to eat dishes with raw eggs, replace the egg yolk and olive oil with $^{3}/_{4}$ cup prepared mayonnaise, adding the mayonnaise with the pepper and saffron and processing until smooth. Makes about 1 cup.*

2 large garlic cloves, peeled

1 slice (about $^{1}/_{2}$-inch-thick) French bread

1 small red bell pepper, roasted, peeled, and seeded

1/8 teaspoon saffron threads, crumbled (*see* figure 10)

1 large egg yolk, at room temperature

1/2 cup olive oil

Salt

Pinch cayenne pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

With food processor motor running, drop garlic cloves, one at a time, through feed tube. Push garlic down sides of bowl with rubber spatula. Add bread and process to fine crumbs. Add bell pepper, saffron, then egg yolk and process until

pureed. With motor still running, slowly add oil until mixture thickens to mayonnaise consistency. Season to taste with salt and cayenne pepper.

Sicilian Fish Stew

NOTE: *Serve this heady stew with bruschetta—slices of country-style Italian bread that have been toasted, rubbed with a cut garlic clove, and brushed with olive oil. Serves six to eight.*

2 tablespoons olive oil
2 medium onions, diced
3 large garlic cloves, minced
1/2 cup dry white wine
2 cups chopped canned tomatoes with their juice
2 large bay leaves
1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper, or to taste Salt and ground

black pepper

$4^1/_2$ cups Fish Stock or Cheater's Fish Stock

3 tablespoons golden raisins

3 pounds white-flesh fish fillets, rinsed, patted dry, and cut into 3-to 4-ounce pieces

12 large green olives, pitted and quartered lengthwise

$^1/_4$ cup pine nuts, toasted

2 tablespoons minced fresh mint leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oil in large soup kettle. Add onions and garlic and cook over medium heat until softened, about 5 minutes. Add

wine and simmer until reduced by half, 2 to 3 minutes. Add tomatoes, bay leaves, cayenne pepper, and salt and pepper to taste. Bring to boil, reduce heat, and simmer until mixture has thickened to tomato sauce consistency, 15 to 20 minutes.

2. Add fish stock and raisins and bring to boil. Reduce heat to simmer and adjust seasonings with salt, pepper, and cayenne to taste.

3. Add fish pieces to stew and simmer, stirring a few times to ensure even cooking, for 5 minutes. Remove kettle

from heat, cover, and let stand until fish is just cooked through, about 5 minutes. Stir in olives, nuts, and mint. Discard bay leaves and serve immediately.

Zarzuela

NOTE: *Shellfish replaces fish in this Spanish stew. Lobster bodies and shrimp shells can be used in the fish stock if desired. Serves six to eight.*

2 tablespoons olive oil
2 medium onions, diced
2 medium red bell peppers, stemmed, seeded, and diced
3 large garlic cloves, minced
2 ounces prosciutto, minced
1/2 cup coarse-ground toasted almonds
1/8 teaspoon saffron threads, crumbled (*see* figure 10)
1/2 cup dry white wine

2 cups chopped canned tomatoes with their juice

2 large bay leaves

1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper, or to taste Salt and ground black pepper

4 1/2 cups Fish Stock or Cheater's Fish Stock

1 lobster (about 1 1/2 pounds), cut into pieces (*see* figures 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19)

12 littleneck clams, scrubbed

12 mussels, scrubbed and debearded

12 large shrimp, shelled but tails on

1/2 pound sea scallops (halved if very large)

1/4 cup minced fresh parsley leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oil in large soup kettle. Add onions, bell peppers, and garlic and cook over medium heat until softened, about 10 minutes. Add prosciutto, almonds, and saffron and sauté to coat with oil, about 1 minute. Add wine and simmer until reduced by half, 2 to 3 minutes. Add tomatoes, bay leaves, cayenne pepper, and salt and pepper to taste. Bring to boil, reduce heat, and simmer until mixture has thickened to

tomato sauce consistency, 15 to 20 minutes.

2. Add fish stock and bring to boil. Reduce heat to simmer and adjust seasonings with salt, pepper, and cayenne to taste.

3. Add lobster pieces and clams and simmer for 3 minutes. Add mussels and simmer for 2 minutes. Add shrimp and scallops and simmer for 3 minutes, removing clams and mussels as they open and transferring them to soup plates. Stir in parsley, discard bay leaves, and serve immediately.

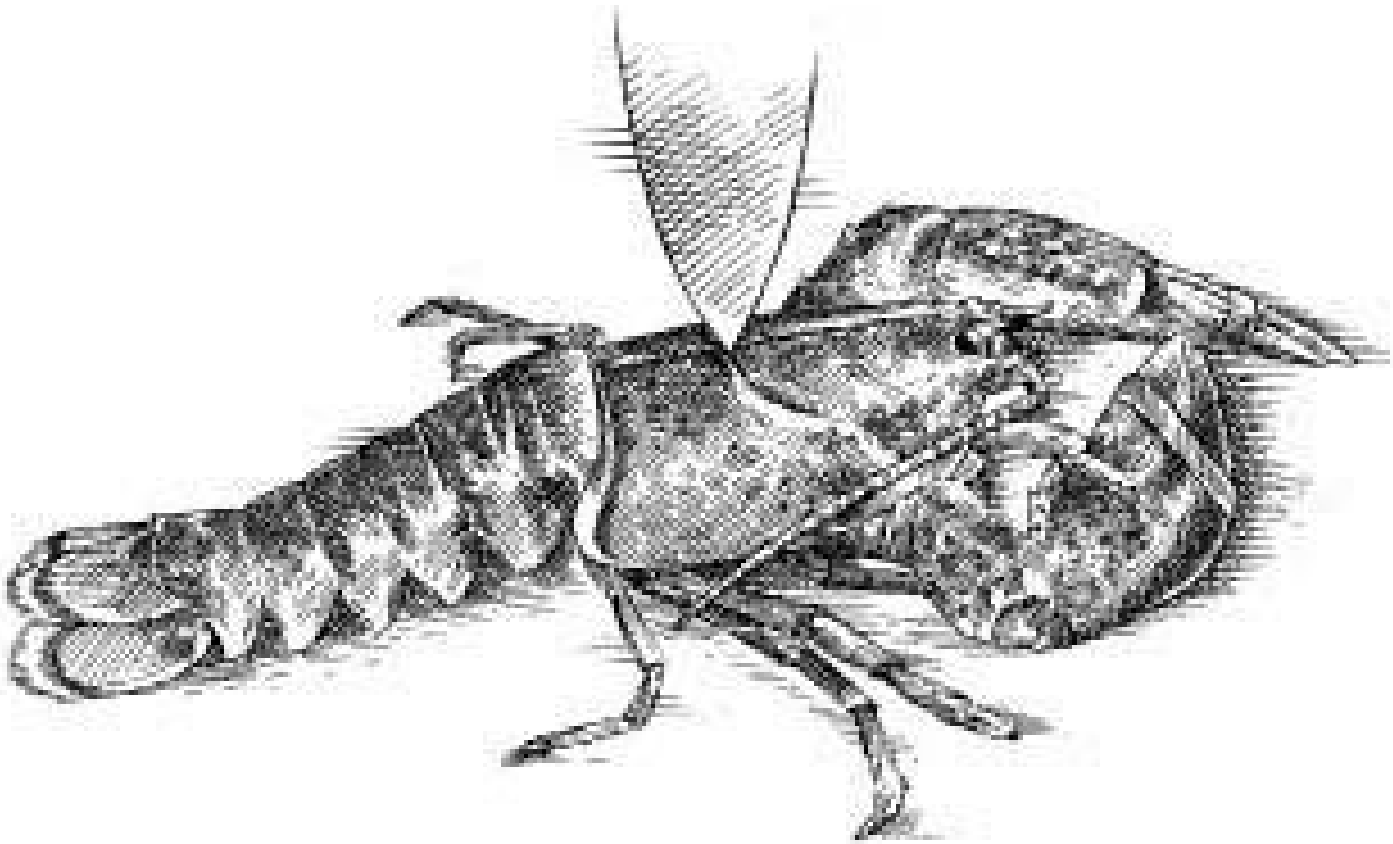

Figure 14.

Freeze the lobster for 5 to 10 minutes to make it easier to handle. Remove the lobster from the freezer and place the point of a chef's knife at the center of the cross on the lobster's head. Stab to kill.

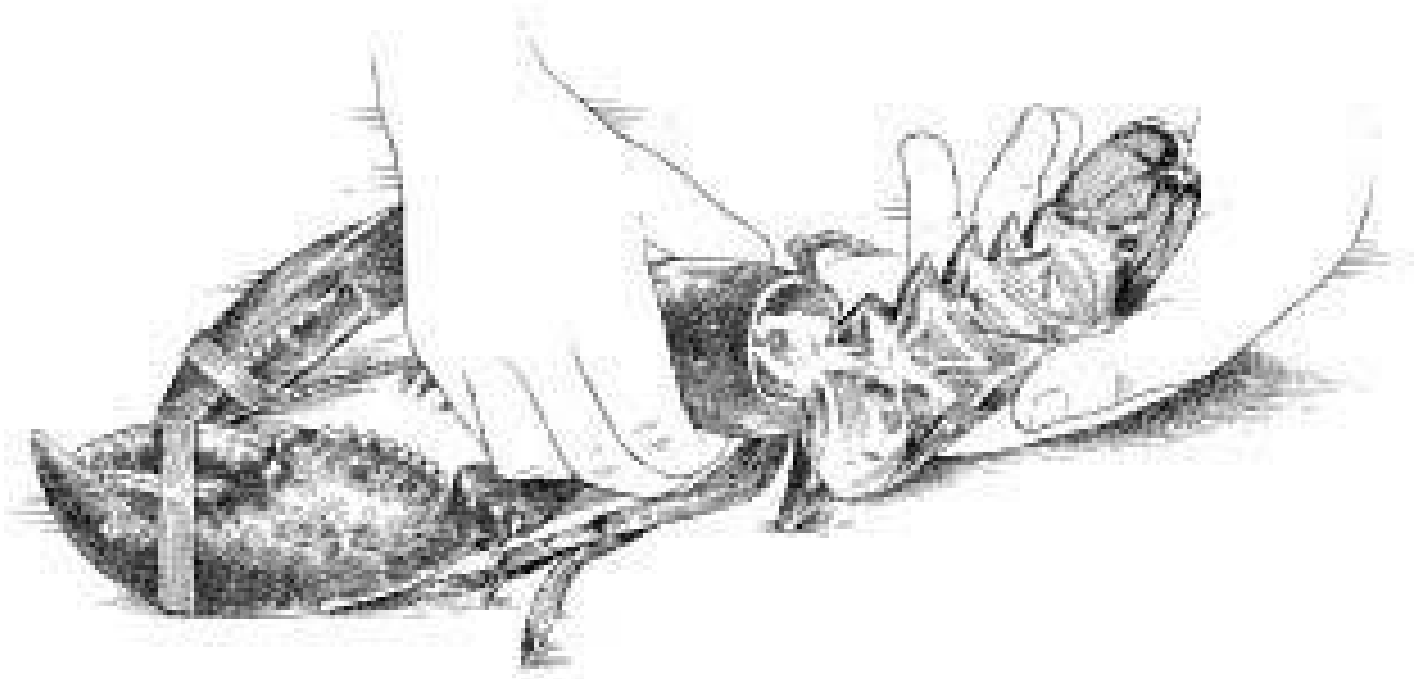

Figure 15.

Twist the tail from the body to separate them.

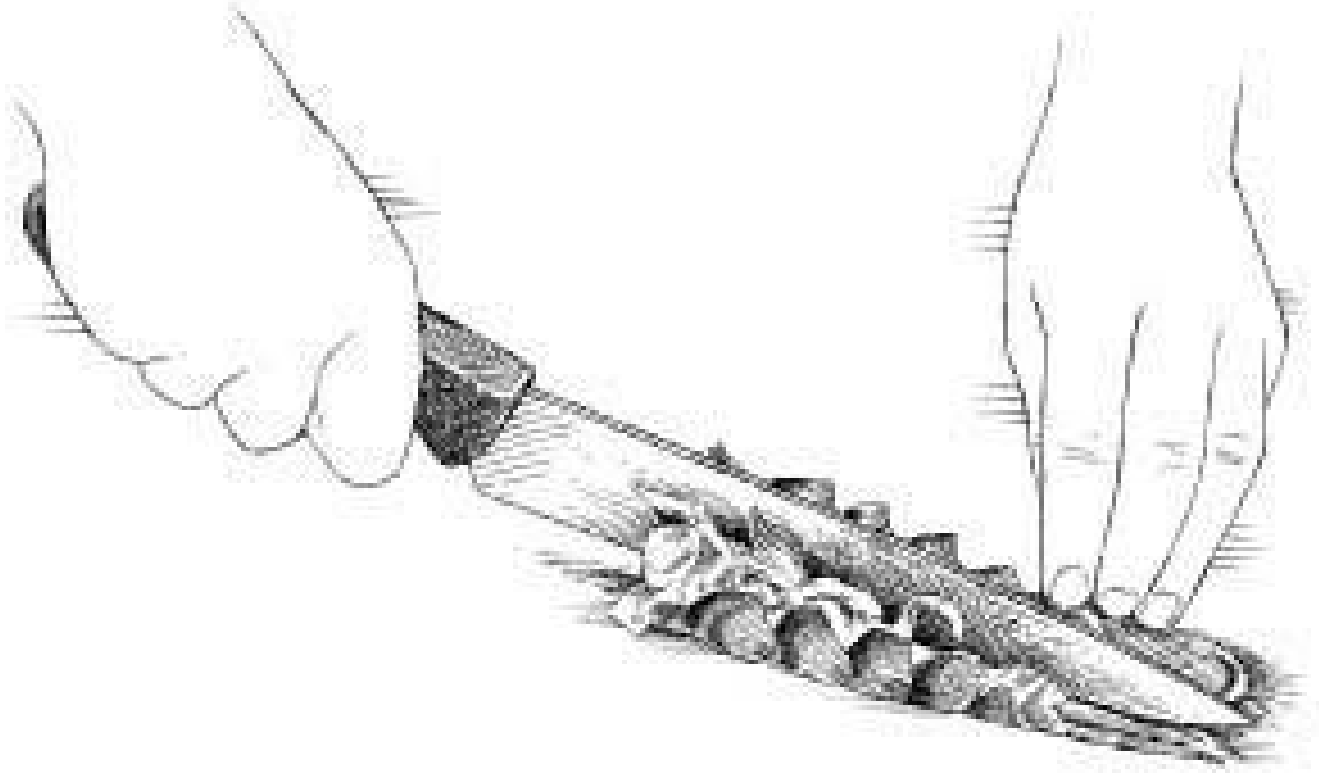

Figure 16.

Halve the tail lengthwise. Cut each piece in half crosswise to yield four pieces of lobster tail.

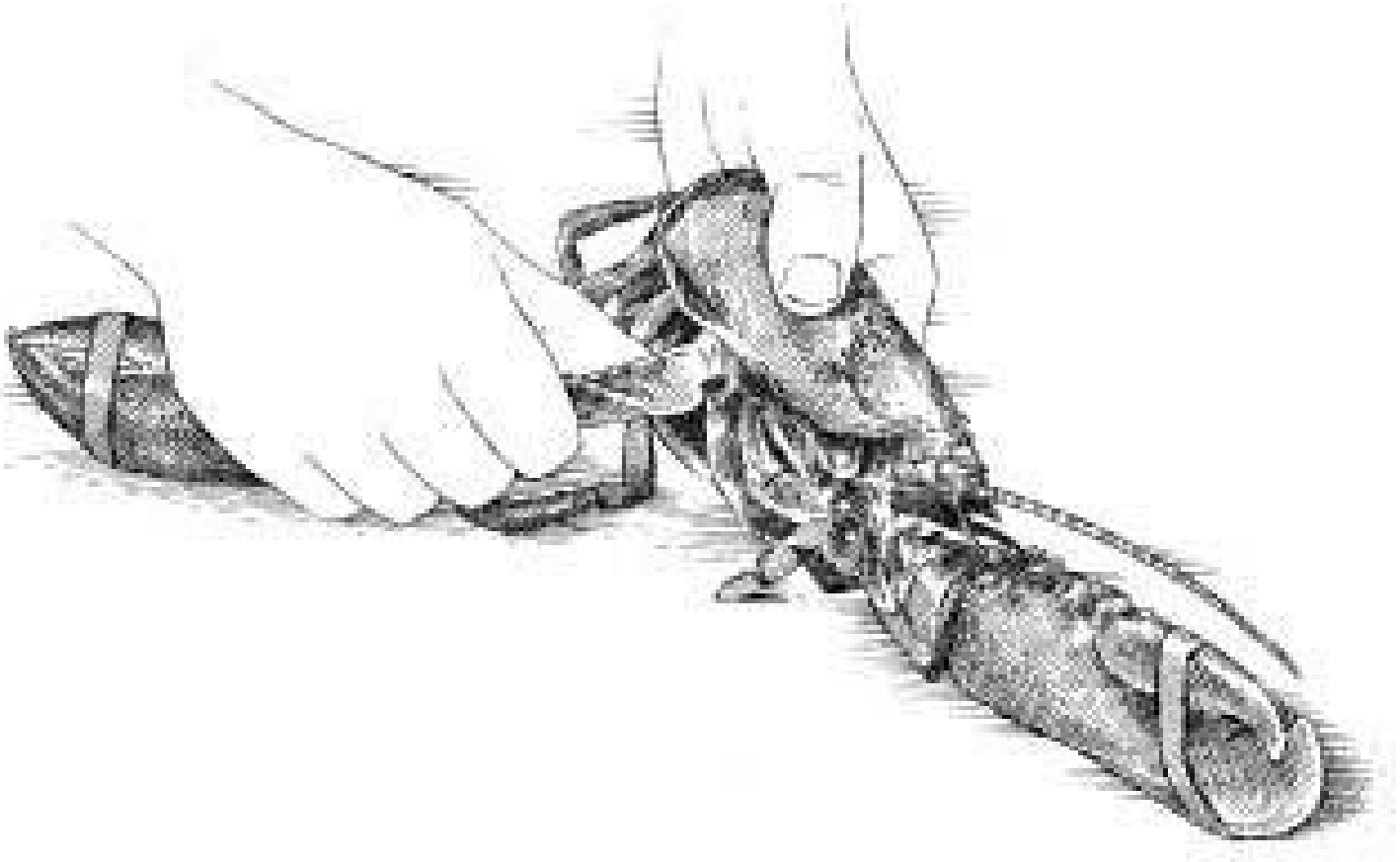

Figure 17.

Twist the claws to separate them from the body. (Save the body to make stock.)

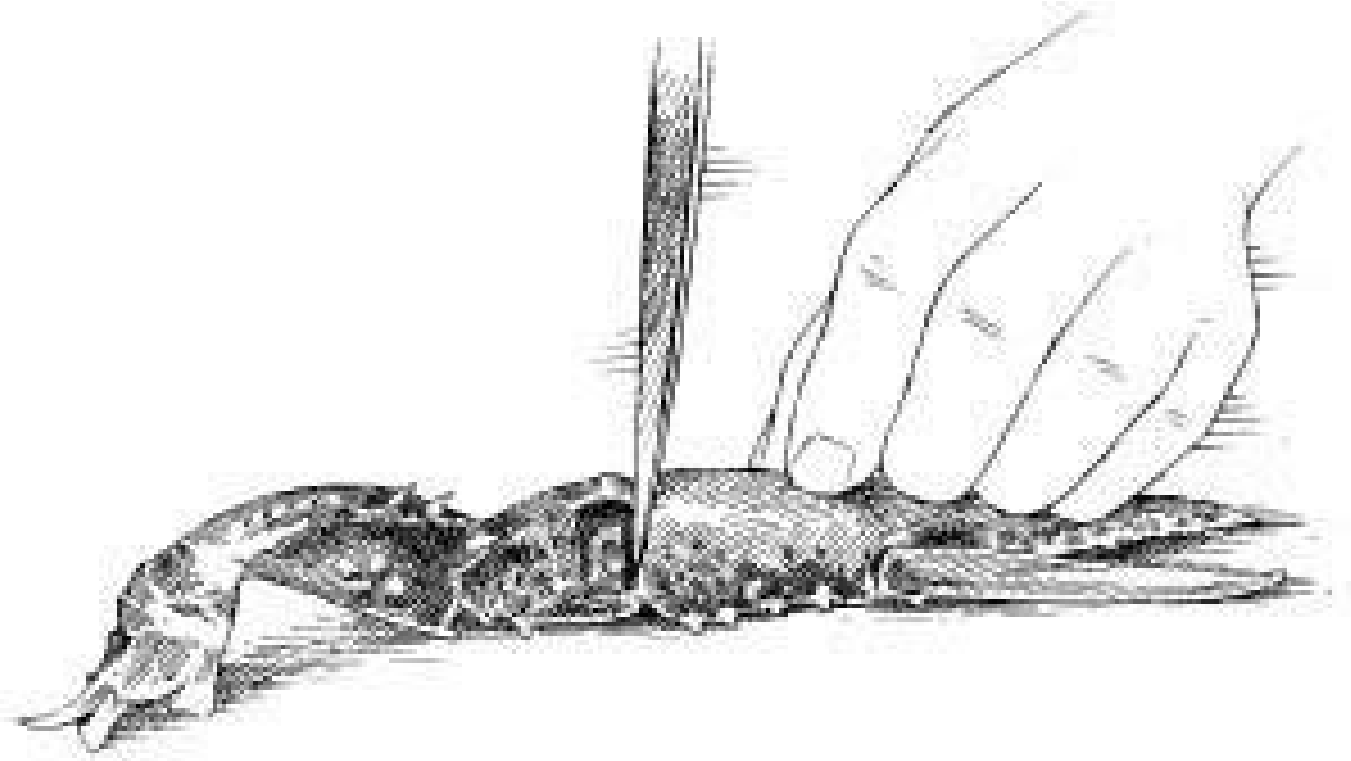

Figure 18.

Cut through each claw at the first joint to separate the meaty portion of the claw from the long, tubular portion of the claw.

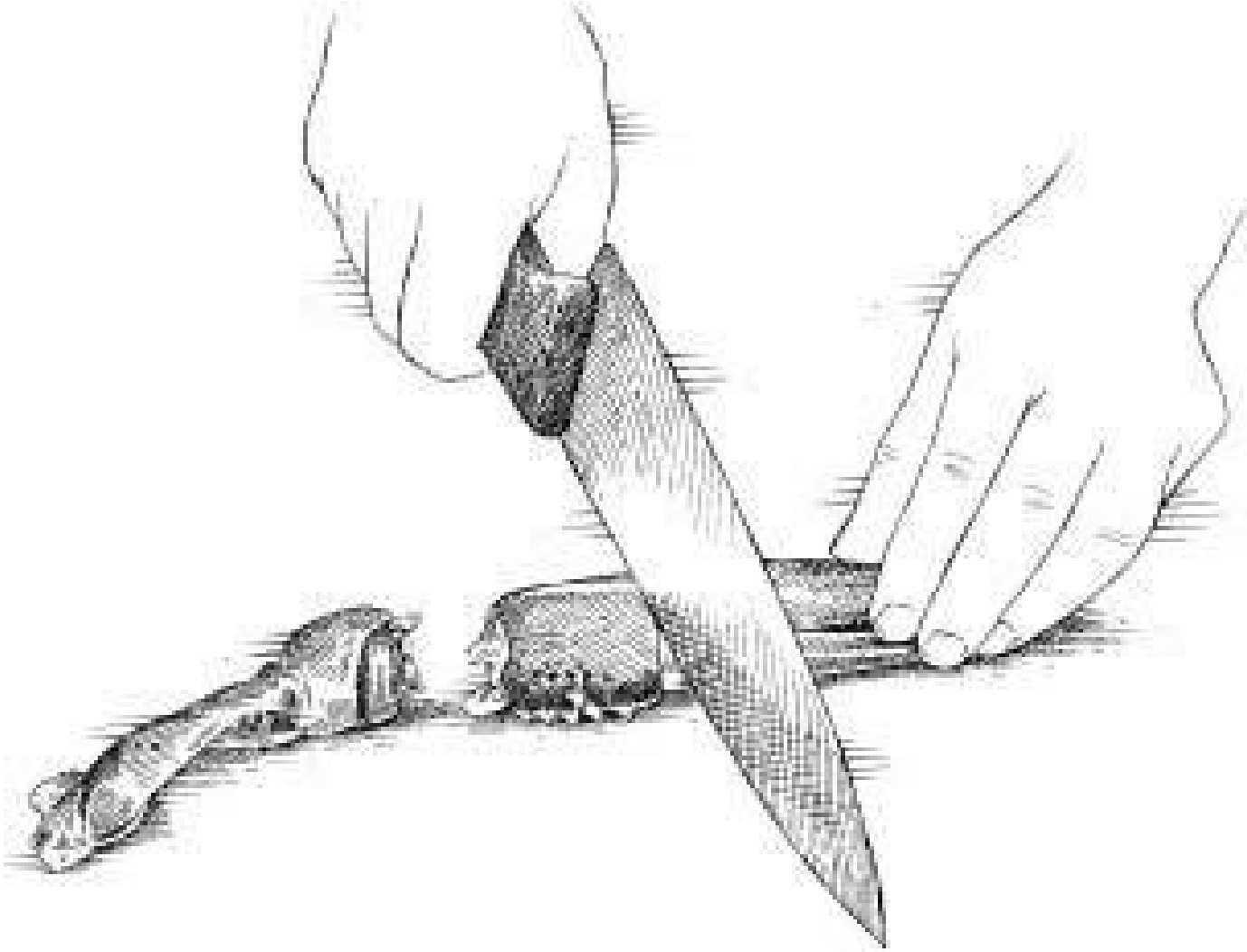

Figure 19.

With a couple of sharp blows with the back of a chef's knife, crack each piece of the claw.

VEGETABLE STEWS

MANY VEGETABLE STEWS CAN TASTE one-dimensional, much like a pan of sautéed vegetables with some broth. There is nothing wrong with these "stews," but they lack the intensity of a good meat, chicken, or fish stew. The biggest challenge when making vegetable stew is figuring out how to create a rich, deep flavor. This task is even harder if you want to make a vegetarian (that is, no chicken stock) vegetable stew. However, we have had some good vegetarian stews in the past

—dishes worth eating even if you like meat—and wanted to figure out what makes some vegetarian stews delicious and others bland and insipid.

We started our testing by preparing a number of basic vegetable stews and devising a composite recipe. From early tests, we preferred stews that started with onions, carrots, and celery sautéed in oil. (We tested butter but preferred the lighter flavor of olive oil with the vegetables.) For maximum flavor, we found it best to mince these vegetables and let them brown. We also found the addition of garlic and a strong herb, such as rosemary or thyme, added further depth to this base for the stew.

At this point, the larger vegetables,

those which would hold their shape during cooking and form the backbone of the stew, could be added. High-moisture vegetables that are usually sautéed, such as mushrooms, red onions, fennel, eggplant, bell peppers, and zucchini, should be added at this point. The pot can then be deglazed with a little wine. We found that red wine overpowered the vegetables and vastly preferred white wine. We also found that too much wine will make the stew boozy, no doubt because of the relatively short simmering time for vegetable stews. However, when we omitted white wine we felt the stew tasted flat. A half cup adds just the right amount of flavor and

acidity to a vegetable stew.

Once the wine has reduced, it is time to add the other liquids along with root vegetables. We experimented with various liquids and liked the combination of vegetable stock and tomatoes. Homemade vegetable stock makes a delicious stew, but canned products are fine as long as you shop carefully. Vegetable stews tend to be sweet, so avoid stocks that are more sweet than savory. You can almost tell by looking at the stock how it will taste. If the color is bright orange, the stock was made with a lot of carrots and will be achingly sweet. We found the shockingly orange canned vegetable stocks made by Swanson and College

Inn to be quite sweet. We had better luck when shopping at our local natural food store. We particularly liked an organic stock made by Pacific Foods of Oregon. It comes packaged in an aseptic carton and has a good, balanced vegetable flavor.

In addition to stock, we like to add tomatoes, both for flavor and color. The acidity helps balance some of the sweetness of the vegetables and the red color keeps vegetable stews from looking dull or brown.

We tested porcini soaking liquid and cream and found that both are too intense for an all-purpose vegetable stew. The one exception was a root vegetable stew

that was quite sweet and needed some additional savory elements. The smoky, meaty flavor of the porcini helps balance the sweetness of carrots and butternut squash. We also liked some cream in this rich winter stew. However, we found that the cream muted the flavor of more delicate spring and summer vegetables such as zucchini, eggplant, and asparagus.

Some sources suggest thickening vegetable stews with flour (like meat stews) or by stirring in a cornstarch slurry when the stew is almost done. However, both methods assume that the vegetables have been cooked in an abundant amount of liquid that needs thickening. We found that vegetable

stews taste watered down when the vegetables are cooked in too much liquid. We found it best to cook the vegetables in just as much liquid as is necessary. While other stews are cooked covered, we prefer to cook vegetable stews partially covered to allow some of this liquid to reduce and concentrate in flavor. Cooking the stew with the cover ajar also allows the liquid to thicken up to a nice consistency.

For this reason (and because different vegetables must go into the pot at different times), we prefer to cook vegetable stews on top of the stove. This eliminates the problem of toughening vegetables by cooking at a high

temperature, a constant worry when making meat, chicken, or fish stews. Vegetable stews can be simmered (not boiled, you don't want the veggies to fall apart) rather quickly, just until the vegetables are tender.

When the stew is almost done, delicate green vegetables such as asparagus and peas should be added. We found it best to add a little acid (either lemon juice or balsamic vinegar) just before serving the stew to balance the sweetness of the vegetables. A fresh herb finishes things off nicely.

Master Recipe

Vegetable Stew

NOTE: *Portobello mushrooms give this all-purpose vegetable stew a rich, deep flavor that complements the flavor of the other vegetables. Serves six to eight.*

2 tablespoons olive oil
1 medium onion, minced
1 medium carrot, minced
1 medium celery stalk, minced
1 medium red onion, cut

into 1/2-inch pieces

4 medium portobello mushrooms (about 1 1/4 pounds), stems discarded, caps halved and then sliced 1/2-inch-thick

10 ounces white button mushrooms, halved

2 medium garlic cloves, minced

1 teaspoon minced fresh rosemary

1/2 cup white wine

2 cups vegetable stock

1 cup chopped canned tomatoes with juice

1 bay leaf

4 large carrots, peeled and sliced $^1/_4$-inch thick

4 medium boiling potatoes, peeled and cut into $^1/_2$-inch cubes

1 cup frozen peas (about 6 ounces), thawed

$^1/_4$ cup minced fresh parsley leaves

1 tablespoon lemon juice

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oil over medium-high heat in large ovenproof Dutch oven. Add minced onion, carrot, and celery and sauté until vegetables

begin to brown, about 10 minutes.

2. Add red onion to Dutch oven and sauté until softened, about 5 minutes. Add portobello and button mushrooms and sauté until liquid they release has evaporated, about 10 minutes. Add garlic and rosemary; cook for 30 seconds. Add wine, scraping up any browned bits that may have stuck to pot. Add stock, tomatoes, bay leaf, carrots, and potatoes, and bring to a simmer. Simmer, partially covered, until carrots and potatoes are tender, about 30 minutes.

3. Turn off heat, stir in peas, cover, and allow to stand for 5 minutes. Stir in parsley and lemon juice, discard bay leaf, adjust seasonings, and serve.

Spring Vegetable Stew with Fennel and Asparagus

NOTE: *An equal amount of shelled and skinned fava beans would make a nice substitution for the peas. Serves six to eight.*

2 tablespoons olive oil
1 medium onion, minced
1 medium carrot, minced
1 medium celery stalk, minced
1 medium red onion, cut into $^1/_2$-inch pieces
1 small fennel bulb cut into $^1/_2$-inch pieces, tough parts and stalks discarded
2 medium garlic cloves, minced

1 teaspoon minced fresh thyme leaves

1/2 cup white wine

2 cups vegetable stock

1 cup chopped canned tomatoes with their juice

1 bay leaf

2 large carrots, peeled and sliced 1/4-inch thick

2 medium boiling potatoes, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch cubes

8 medium asparagus spears, tough ends discarded and cut on the bias into 1-inch pieces

1 cup frozen peas (about 6 ounces), thawed

1/4 cup minced fresh basil leaves

1 tablespoon lemon juice

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oil over medium-high heat in large ovenproof Dutch oven. Add minced onion, carrot, and celery and sauté until vegetables begin to brown, about 10 minutes.

2. Add red onion and fennel to Dutch oven and sauté until they begin to brown, about 10 minutes. Add garlic and thyme and continue to cook for 30 seconds. Add wine, scraping up any browned bits that may have stuck to pot. Add stock,

tomatoes, bay leaf, carrots, and potatoes, and bring to a simmer. Simmer, partially covered, for 25 minutes. Add asparagus and continue to simmer until vegetables are tender, about 3 minutes.

3. Turn off heat, stir in peas, cover, and allow to stand for 5 minutes. Stir in basil and lemon juice, discard bay leaf, adjust seasonings, and serve.

Vegetable Stew with Eggplant, Red Pepper, Zucchini, and Chickpeas

NOTE: *This summer stew, which highlights the flavors of a traditional ratatouille, is delicious on its own or served over couscous. Serves six to eight.*

$3^1/_2$ tablespoons olive oil
1 medium onion, minced
1 medium carrot, minced
1 medium celery stalk, minced
1 large red bell pepper, stemmed, seeded, and cut into $^1/_2$-inch dice

2 medium garlic cloves, minced

1 teaspoon minced fresh rosemary

2 medium zucchini (about $^{3}/_{4}$ pound), quartered lengthwise and cut into $^{1}/_{2}$-inch chunks

1 large eggplant (about 1 pound), cut into $^{1}/_{2}$-inch dice

$^{1}/_{2}$ cup white wine

2 cups vegetable stock

1 cup chopped canned tomatoes with their juice

1 bay leaf

1 15-ounce can cooked chickpeas, drained and rinsed (about $1^{3}/_{4}$ cups)

1/4 cup minced fresh mint leaves

2 teaspoons balsamic vinegar

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat 2 tablespoons oil over medium-high heat in large ovenproof Dutch oven. Add minced onion, carrot, and celery and sauté until vegetables begin to brown, about 10 minutes.

2. Add red pepper, garlic, and rosemary to Dutch oven and cook for 30 seconds. Scrape vegetables into bowl. Add 1/2 tablespoon oil and zucchini and sauté until softened, about 7 minutes. Scrape

zucchini into bowl with other vegetables. Add remaining tablespoon oil and eggplant and sauté until softened, about 5 minutes. Add vegetables in bowl back to pot. Add wine, scraping up any browned bits that may have stuck to pot. Add stock, tomatoes, and bay leaf, and bring to a simmer. Simmer, partially covered, until vegetables are tender, about 15 minutes.

3. Turn off heat, stir in chickpeas, cover, and allow to stand for 5 minutes. Stir in mint and balsamic vinegar, discard bay leaf, adjust seasonings, and serve.

Root Vegetable Stew with Porcini and Cream

NOTE: *Turnips, potatoes, carrots, and butternut squash make this stew hearty and satisfying. The porcini give the stew a smoky, meaty flavor that balances the sweetness of the vegetables. Serves six to eight.*

$^1/_2$ ounce dried porcini mushrooms
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 medium onion, minced
1 medium carrot, minced
1 medium celery stalk, minced
2 medium garlic cloves, minced
1 teaspoon minced fresh

rosemary

1/2 cup white wine

1 1/2 cups vegetable stock

1 cup chopped canned tomatoes with their juice

1/2 cup heavy cream

1 bay leaf

2 medium turnips, peeled and cut into 3/4-inch cubes

2 large carrots, peeled and sliced 1/4-inch thick

2 medium boiling potatoes, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch cubes

1/2 small butternut squash (about 1 pound), peeled, seeded,

and cut into 1/2-inch cubes

1/4 cup minced fresh parsley leaves or snipped chives

1 tablespoon lemon juice

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place porcini in small bowl and cover with 3/4 cup hot tap water. Soak until softened, about 20 minutes. Carefully lift mushrooms from liquid with fork and pick through to remove any foreign debris. Wash mushrooms under cold water if they feel gritty, then chop. Strain soaking liquid through sieve lined with paper towel or coffee filter. Reserve mushrooms and strained soaking liquid separately.

2. Heat oil over medium-high heat in large ovenproof Dutch oven. Add minced onion, carrot, and celery and sauté until vegetables begin to brown, about 10 minutes.

3. Add chopped porcini, garlic, and rosemary to Dutch oven and continue to cook for 30 seconds. Add wine, scraping up any browned bits that may have stuck to pot. Add strained porcini liquid, stock, tomatoes, cream, bay leaf, turnips, carrots, and potatoes, and bring to a simmer. Simmer, partially covered, for 25 minutes. Add squash and continue

simmering until vegetables are tender, 10 to 15 minutes.

4. Stir in parsley and lemon juice, discard bay leaf, adjust seasonings, and serve.

HOW TO COOK GARDEN VEGETABLES

Vegetable Basics

Asparagus

Broccoli

Cabbage and Brussels Sprouts

Cauliflower

Eggplant

Green Beans

Greens

Peas

Peppers

Tomatoes

Zucchini and Summer Squash

VEGETABLE BASICS

VEGETABLE COOKERY IS GENERALLY QUICK AND easy. Even so, cooks are perplexed by vegetables. They wonder what is the best way to cook a particular vegetable and are often in desperate need of inspiration when it comes to choosing simple flavorings. This book addresses both issues.

In the pages that follow, we examine the 13 most popular garden vegetables. We started by testing all the relevant cooking methods and making some conclusions about which methods are

best for that particular vegetable. From there, we offer master recipes that explain our preferred techniques along with plenty of variations so that you can produce vegetable side dishes that are interesting and varied.

As you will see, a number of cooking techniques are used repeatedly in this book. Here is an explanation of each method and its general pros and cons.

BOILING

"Boiling" means cooking in an abundant amount of boiling water, at least enough to cover the vegetables by several inches. When referring to vegetables, the term "blanching" (which means cooking in boiling water until partially but not

fully done) is often used. If the water is salted (use at least $^1/_2$ teaspoon of salt per quart of water) during boiling or blanching, the vegetables will be nicely seasoned. Blanched vegetables are often sautéed to finish the cooking process; this is also when more seasonings can be added. Porous vegetables, such as cauliflower and broccoli, can become waterlogged and mushy when boiled.

STEAMING

"Steaming" means cooking in a basket set over boiling water. It has similar effects as boiling, except that there is no possibility of seasoning vegetables with salt as they cook. Also, since the vegetables are above water as they

steam, they absorb less liquid and don't become soggy.

BRAISING

"Braising" refers to cooking in a covered pan with a small amount of liquid. Often a braise starts with sautéing the vegetables in some fat before adding the liquid. Steam from this liquid cooks the vegetable through and eventually becomes a sauce that seasons the vegetable.

GRILLING

The intense heat of the grill caramelizes the exterior of vegetables and concentrates their flavors by driving off water. Vegetables should be brushed

lightly with oil before grilling, and the grill surface should be meticulously scraped to prevent delicate vegetables from picking up off flavors. Vegetables should be grilled over a medium-hot fire —you should be able to hold your hand five inches above the cooking surface for four seconds.

BROILING

"Broiling" is similar to grilling. The intense heat of the broiler browns the exterior of vegetables and causes water to be expelled and evaporated. Lightly oiled vegetables should be placed in a single layer on a rimmed baking sheet for broiling. Position the vegetables about four inches from the broiling

element for the best results.

SAUTÉING AND STIR-FRYING

Most vegetables can be cooked in a hot pan with a little oil or butter. Sautéing and stir-frying are similar, especially since we find that a skillet works well when stir-frying on an American stove. (A wok is designed to sit in a cylindrical fire pit and is ill-suited to a flat stove.) In general, stir-frying relies on oil, not butter, and uses very high temperatures. We find it best to stir-fry in a very large (12-inch) nonstick skillet so that the vegetables can be placed in a single layer and will cook as quickly as possible. Sautéing generally occurs at more moderate temperatures. You may

use a regular or nonstick skillet here. Sautéing is appropriate for eggplant, tender greens, peppers, cherry tomatoes, and zucchini.

There are several other cooking methods that can be applied to vegetables that we have not considered in this book. We tested many vegetables in the microwave. Although this controversial kitchen tool did a decent job in some cases, it was never our favorite method. Often vegetables cooked unevenly and dried out in spots.

We understand the value of roasting many vegetables. However, for garden vegetables we find that we want to cook

them faster. Grilling and broiling yield comparable results—the exterior caramelizes and flavors are concentrated—and these methods seem more appropriate to warm-weather cooking.

Finally, we recognize how delicious fried vegetables can be. However, most cooks are looking for simpler, lower-fat preparations that they can use on a daily basis. For this reason, we have not considered frying in this book.

ASPARAGUS

ASPARAGUS PRESENTS ONLY ONE PREPARATION issue—should the spears be peeled, or is it better to discard the tough, fibrous ends entirely? While peeled asparagus have a silkier texture, we preferred the contrast between the peel and inner flesh. Peeling is also a lot of work. We prefer to simply snap off the tough ends and proceed with cooking (*see* figure 1).

We investigated moist-heat cooking methods and found that boiling and steaming yielded similar results. The

delicate tips remained a bit crisper when the asparagus was steamed, so that's our preferred method.

A second option for asparagus is stir-frying. The spears must be cut into smaller pieces—about one-and-a-half inches is right. We found that there is no reason to precook asparagus before stir-frying. As long as you use a skillet large enough to hold the asparagus in a single layer, they will soften after about four minutes of stir-frying. Adding a fairly liquidy sauce (which will reduce quickly to a syrup) helps finish the cooking process.

A third option, and one that most cooks don't consider, is grilling or broiling. The intense dry heat

concentrates the flavor of the asparagus, and the exterior caramelization makes the spears especially sweet. The result is asparagus with a heightened and—we think—delicious flavor.

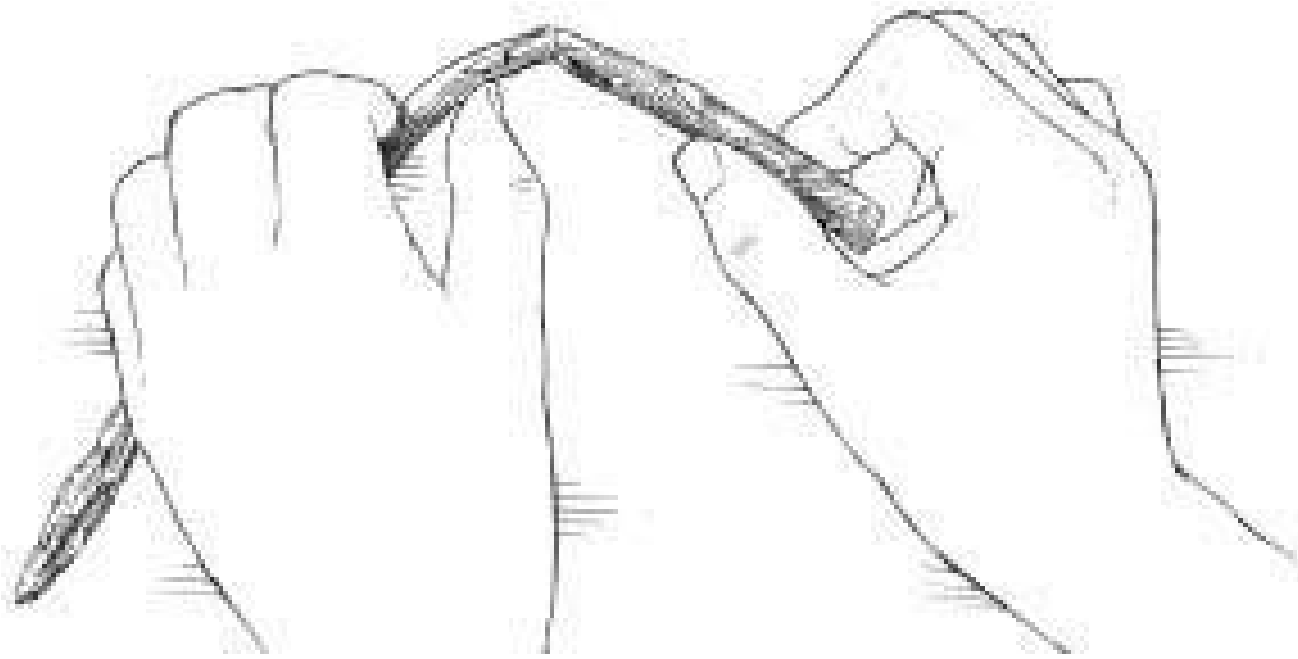

Figure 1.
In our tests, we found that the tough, woody part of the stem will break off in just the right place if you hold the spear the right way. Hold the asparagus about halfway down the stalk; with the other hand, hold the cut end between the thumb and index finger about an inch or so up from the bottom; bend the stalk

until it snaps.

Master Recipe

Steamed Asparagus

serves four

NOTE: ***A large sauté pan or Dutch oven is the best pot for steaming asparagus. Steamed asparagus is rather bland, so we prefer to toss it with a flavorful vinaigrette.***

$1^1/_2$ pounds asparagus, tough ends snapped off (*see* figure 1)

INSTRUCTIONS:

Fit wide saucepan with steamer basket. Add water, keeping water level below

basket. Bring water to boil over high heat. Add asparagus to basket. Cover and steam until asparagus spears bend slightly when picked up and flesh at cut end yields when squeezed, 3 to 4 minutes for asparagus under $^1/_2$ inch in diameter, 4 to 5 minutes for jumbo asparagus. Remove asparagus from basket and season as directed in variations.

VARIATIONS:

Steamed Asparagus with Lemon Vinaigrette

Combine $1^1/_2$ tablespoons lemon juice, $^1/_2$ teaspoon Dijon mustard, and $^1/_4$

teaspoon Tabasco sauce in small bowl. Whisk in 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil and season with salt and pepper to taste. Follow Master Recipe, tossing steamed asparagus with dressing. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Steamed Asparagus with Ginger-Hoisin Vinaigrette

Combine $2^1/_2$ tablespoons rice wine vinegar, $1^1/_2$ tablespoons hoisin sauce, $2^1/_2$ teaspoons soy sauce, and $1^1/_2$ teaspoons minced fresh gingerroot in small bowl. Whisk in $1^1/_2$ tablespoons canola oil and $1^1/_2$ teaspoons Asian sesame oil. Follow Master Recipe,

tossing steamed asparagus with dressing. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Master Recipe

Stir-Fried Asparagus

serves four

NOTE: ***Thick spears should be halved lengthwise and then cut into 1 1/2-inch pieces to ensure that the center cooks through.***

1/2 cup chicken stock or low-sodium canned broth

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper

$1^1/_2$ tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon peanut oil

$1^1/_2$ pounds asparagus, tough ends snapped off (*see* figure 1) and cut on the bias into $1^1/_2$-inch pieces

3 medium garlic cloves, minced

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Combine stock, salt, and pepper in small bowl and set aside.

2. Heat 12-inch nonstick skillet over high heat until quite hot, 2 to 3 minutes. Add $1^1/_2$ tablespoons oil and swirl to coat pan evenly (oil should shimmer in

pan immediately.) Add asparagus in single layer and stir-fry, tossing every 45 seconds, until well browned, about 4 minutes.

3. Clear center of pan, add garlic, and drizzle with remaining 1 teaspoon oil. Mash garlic with back of spatula. Cook 10 seconds and mix garlic with asparagus. Add chicken broth mixture and cook until sauce is syrupy, about 30 seconds. Serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Thai-Style Stir-Fried Asparagus with Chiles,

Garlic, and Basil

Follow Master Recipe, replacing stock, salt, and pepper with 2 tablespoons soy sauce, 1 tablespoon water, and 1 tablespoon sugar. Add 1 tablespoon minced jalapeno or serrano chile with garlic. Off heat, stir in $^1/_4$ cup chopped fresh basil leaves. Serve immediately.

Stir-Fried Asparagus with Black Bean Sauce

Follow Master Recipe, reducing chicken stock to 2 tablespoons, omitting salt, and adding 3 tablespoons dry sherry, 1 tablespoon soy sauce, 1 tablespoon Asian sesame oil, 1 tablespoon

fermented black beans, and 1 teaspoon sugar to bowl in step 1. Add $1^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoons minced fresh gingerroot with garlic. Off heat, stir in 2 thinly sliced scallions. Serve immediately.

Master Recipe

Grilled or Broiled Asparagus

serves four

NOTE: ***Thick spears will burn on the surface before they cook through. Use spears no thicker than 5/8 inch.***

$1\frac{1}{2}$ pounds asparagus, tough ends snapped off (*see* figure 1)
1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Light grill or preheat broiler. Toss asparagus with oil in medium bowl or, if broiling, on rimmed baking sheet.

2. Grill asparagus over medium heat, turning once, until tender and streaked with light grill marks, 5 to 7 minutes, or line up spears in single layer on baking sheet and broil, placing pan about 4 inches from broiler and shaking it once halfway through cooking to rotate spears, until tender and browned in some spots, 5 to 7 minutes. Season asparagus with salt and pepper to taste and serve hot, warm, or at room temperature.

VARIATIONS:

Grilled or Broiled Asparagus with Peanut Sauce

Whisk 1 minced garlic clove, $1^1/_2$ teaspoons minced fresh gingerroot, $1^1/_2$ teaspoons rice wine vinegar, $1^1/_2$ teaspoons soy sauce, 1 tablespoon Asian sesame oil, 1 tablespoon smooth peanut butter, 1 tablespoon water, and salt and pepper to taste together in small bowl. Follow Master Recipe, tossing asparagus with half of this mixture instead of olive oil. Cook as directed. Whisk 1 tablespoon minced fresh

cilantro leaves into remaining dressing. Toss cooked asparagus with dressing and adjust seasonings.

Grilled or Broiled Asparagus with Rosemary and Goat Cheese

Whisk 1/2 teaspoon minced fresh rosemary, 1 minced garlic clove, 1 tablespoon lemon juice, 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, and salt and pepper to taste together in small bowl. Follow Master Recipe, tossing asparagus with 1 tablespoon of this mixture instead of olive oil. Cook as directed. Toss cooked asparagus with remaining dressing, adjust seasonings,

and sprinkle with 1 ounce crumbled goat cheese.

BROCCOLI

BROCCOLI REQUIRES A MOIST-HEAT COOKING method to keep the florets tender and to cook through the stalks. We tested boiling, blanching then sautéing, and steaming. Boiled broccoli is soggy tasting and mushy, even when cooked for just two minutes. The florets absorb too much water. We found the same thing happened when we blanched the broccoli for a minute and then finished cooking it in a hot skillet.

Delicate florets are best cooked above water in a steamer basket. The stalk may

be cooked along with the florets as long as it has been peeled and cut into small chunks. (*See* figures 2 and 3 for preparation.) Broccoli will be fully cooked after about five minutes of steaming. At this point, it may be tossed with a flavorful dressing. A warning: Cook broccoli just two or three minutes too long and chemical changes cause loss of color and texture.

We tried stir-frying broccoli without precooking and found that the florets started to fall apart long before the stems were tender. While blanching and then stir-frying helped the broccoli to cook more evenly, the florets were soggy. We found that partially cooking the broccoli in the steamer basket and then adding it

to the stir-fry pan works best. Try this technique when you want to sauce broccoli rather than dress it with vinaigrette.

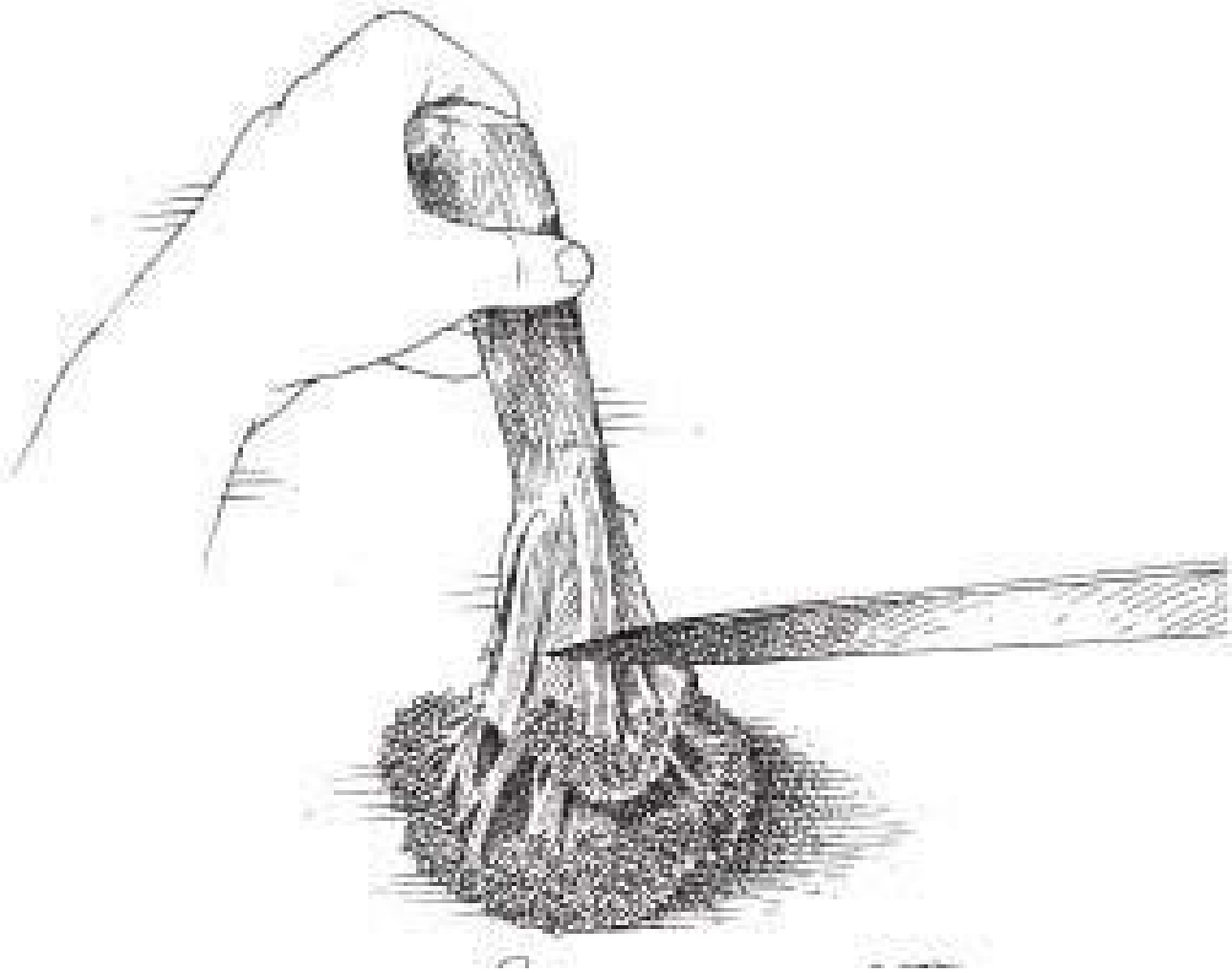

Figure 2.
Place head of broccoli upside down on a cutting board and trim off the florets very close to their heads with a large knife.

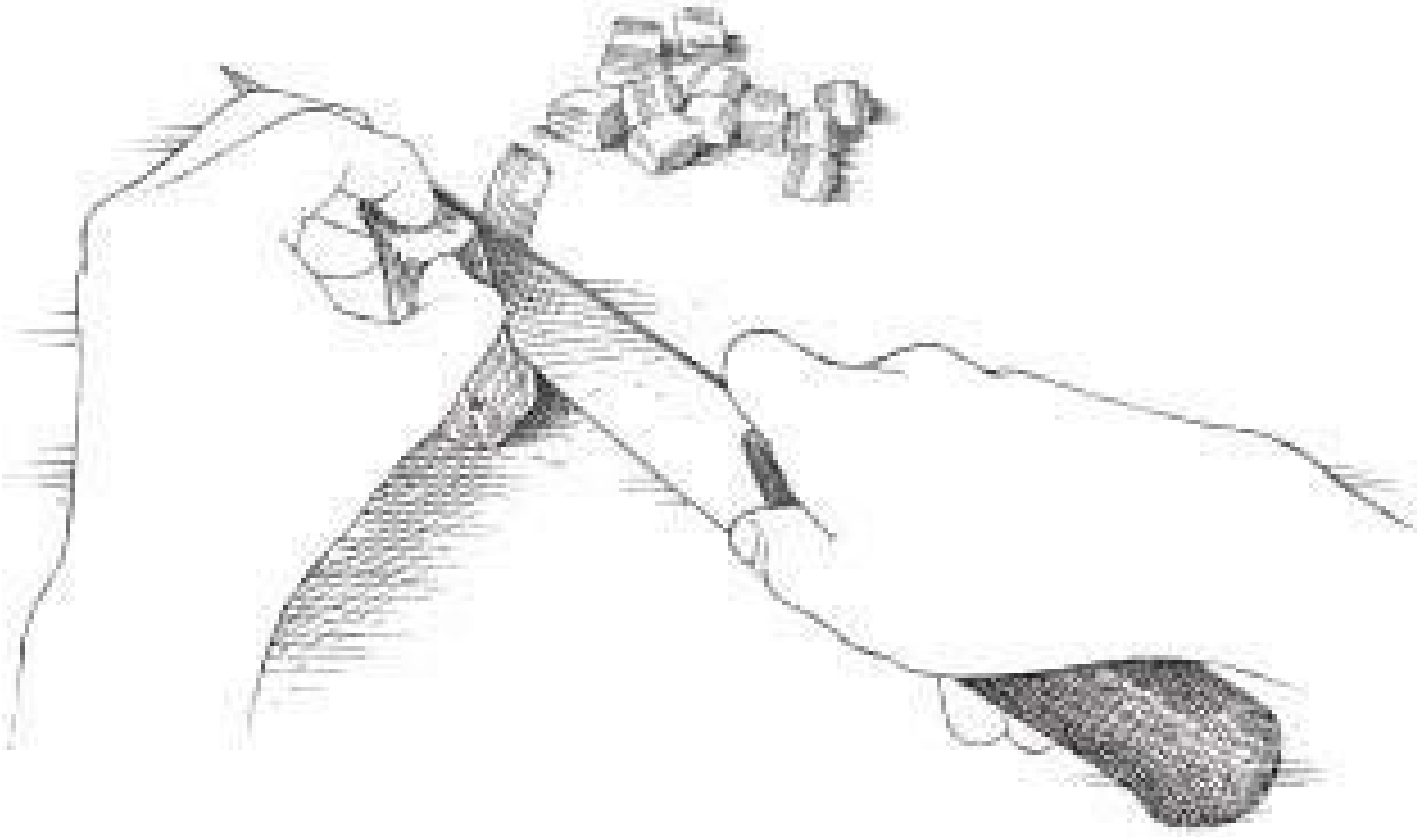

Figure 3.
The stalks may also be cooked. Stand each stalk up on the cutting board and remove the outer 1/8-inch from each side. Now cut the stalk in half lengthwise and into bite-sized pieces.

Master Recipe

Steamed Broccoli

serves four

NOTE: ***For maximum absorption, toss steamed broccoli with the dressings listed in the variations when hot. The broccoli may be served immediately or cooled to room temperature.***

$1\frac{1}{2}$ pounds broccoli (about 1 medium bunch), prepared according to figures 2 and 3

INSTRUCTIONS:

Fit wide saucepan with steamer basket. Add water, keeping water level below basket. Bring water to boil over high heat. Add broccoli to basket. Cover and steam until broccoli is just tender, $4^1/_2$ to 5 minutes. Remove broccoli from basket and season as directed in variations.

VARIATIONS:

Steamed Broccoli with Spicy Balsamic Dressing and Black Olives

Whisk 2 teaspoons balsamic vinegar, 2 teaspoons red wine vinegar, 1 minced garlic clove, $^1/_2$ teaspoon hot red pepper

flakes, and $^1/_4$ teaspoon salt in small bowl. Whisk in $^1/_4$ cup extra-virgin olive oil. Follow Master Recipe, tossing steamed broccoli with dressing and 12 large pitted and quartered black olives. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Steamed Broccoli with Orange-Ginger Dressing and Walnuts

In food processor combine 1 tablespoon peanut oil, 1 tablespoon soy sauce, 1 tablespoon honey, 1 tablespoon grated orange zest, 3 tablespoons orange juice, 1 peeled garlic clove, 1-inch piece peeled fresh gingerroot, and $^1/_2$ teaspoon

salt and process until smooth. Follow Master Recipe, tossing steamed broccoli with dressing, 2 thinly sliced scallions, and 2/3 cup toasted and chopped walnuts.

Steamed Broccoli with Lime-Cumin Dressing

Whisk 1 teaspoon grated lime zest, 1 tablespoon lime juice, $^1/_2$ teaspoon ground cumin, $^1/_2$ teaspoon salt, and hot red pepper sauce to taste in bowl. Whisk in 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, and then add $^1/_4$ cup minced red onion. Follow Master Recipe, tossing steamed broccoli with dressing.

Steamed Broccoli with Spanish Green Herb Sauce

In food processor, combine 2 peeled garlic cloves, $^1/_2$ cup each tightly packed fresh cilantro and parsley leaves, 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, 1 tablespoon lemon juice, and $^1/_2$ teaspoon salt and process until smooth. Follow Master Recipe, tossing steamed broccoli with dressing.

Master Recipe

Stir-Fried Broccoli

serves four

NOTE: ***Instead of steaming broccoli until tender and tossing it with a dressing, it may be partially steamed and then stir-fried with seasonings.***

1/2 cup chicken stock or canned low-sodium broth

1/2 teaspoon salt

Ground black pepper

1 1/2 tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon peanut oil

1 recipe Steamed Broccoli (), cooked just $2^1/_2$ minutes and removed from steamer

1 tablespoon minced garlic

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Mix together chicken stock, salt, and pepper to taste in small bowl.

2. Heat 12-inch nonstick skillet over high heat until quite hot, 2 to 3 minutes. Add $1^1/_2$ tablespoons oil and swirl to coat bottom of pan (oil should shimmer immediately). Add steamed broccoli and cook, stirring every 30 seconds, until fully cooked and heated through, about

$2^1/_2$ minutes.

3. Clear center of pan, add garlic, and drizzle with remaining 1 teaspoon oil. Mash garlic with back of spatula. Cook 10 seconds and then mix garlic with broccoli. Add chicken stock mixture and cook until sauce is syrupy, about 30 seconds. Serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Stir-Fried Broccoli with Orange Sauce

Follow Master Recipe, reducing chicken stock to $1^1/_2$ tablespoons and combining

with 3 tablespoons orange juice, $1^1/_2$ teaspoons grated orange zest, $^1/_4$ teaspoon sugar, and 2 teaspoons soy sauce; omit salt. Reduce garlic to 1 clove and add 1 medium scallion, thinly sliced, and 1 teaspoon minced fresh gingerroot along with garlic.

Stir-Fried Broccoli with Hot-and-Sour Sauce

Follow Master Recipe, reducing chicken stock to 1 tablespoon and combining with 3 tablespoons cider vinegar, 1 tablespoon soy sauce, and 2 teaspoons sugar; omit salt. Substitute ginger for garlic and add 1 tablespoon minced jalapeno or other fresh chile along with

ginger in step 3.

CABBAGE & BRUSSELS SPROUTS

LARGE GREEN CABBAGE AND SMALL BRUSSELS sprouts have similar cooking properties. Both become waterlogged when boiled. Steaming leaves cabbage and Brussels sprouts less soggy, but the flavor is wan and listless. Cabbage and Brussels sprouts need a cooking method that will add some flavor as well as counter their strong mustardy smell.

We found that shredding cabbage (*see* figures 4, 5, 6) and braising it in a mixture of butter and chicken stock adds

flavor. As long as the amount of liquid is quite small (a tablespoon was enough to cook a pound of cabbage), the texture will still be a bit crunchy and delicious. Cabbage can also be braised in other fats (bacon drippings) and liquids (apple juice, wine). Cream combines fat and liquid and may be used alone.

Brussels sprouts can easily be cooked by simmering them in water, draining, and then sautéing in seasonings. This method is awkward with shredded cabbage but works well with the small, round sprouts. We tested steaming the sprouts as well as braising them in a little salted water. The sprouts benefited greatly from cooking with some salt. As with cabbage, Brussels sprouts may also

be braised in cream and served as is.

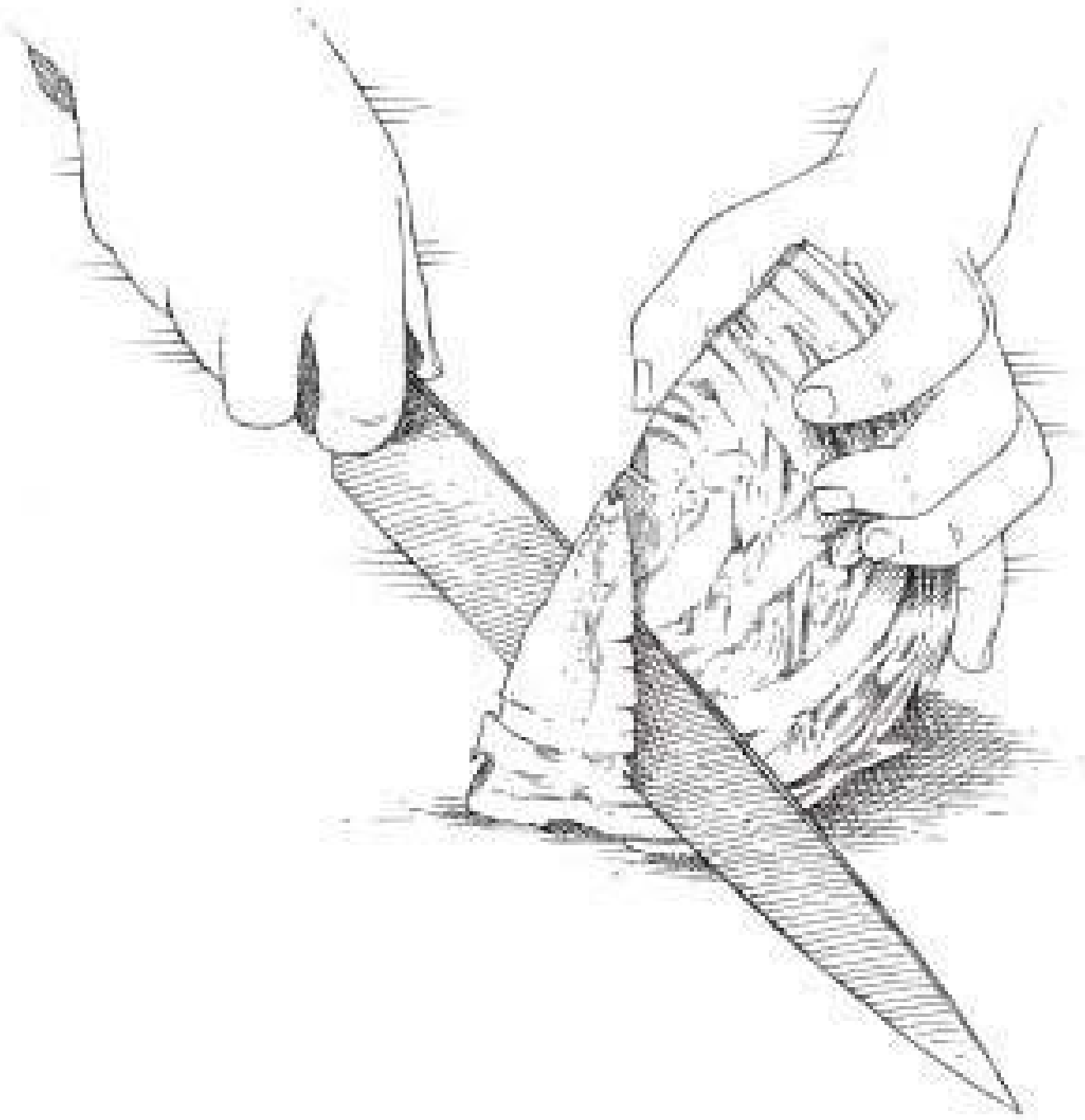

Figure 4.
Cut cabbage into quarters and use a chef's knife to remove the tough core section from each

piece.

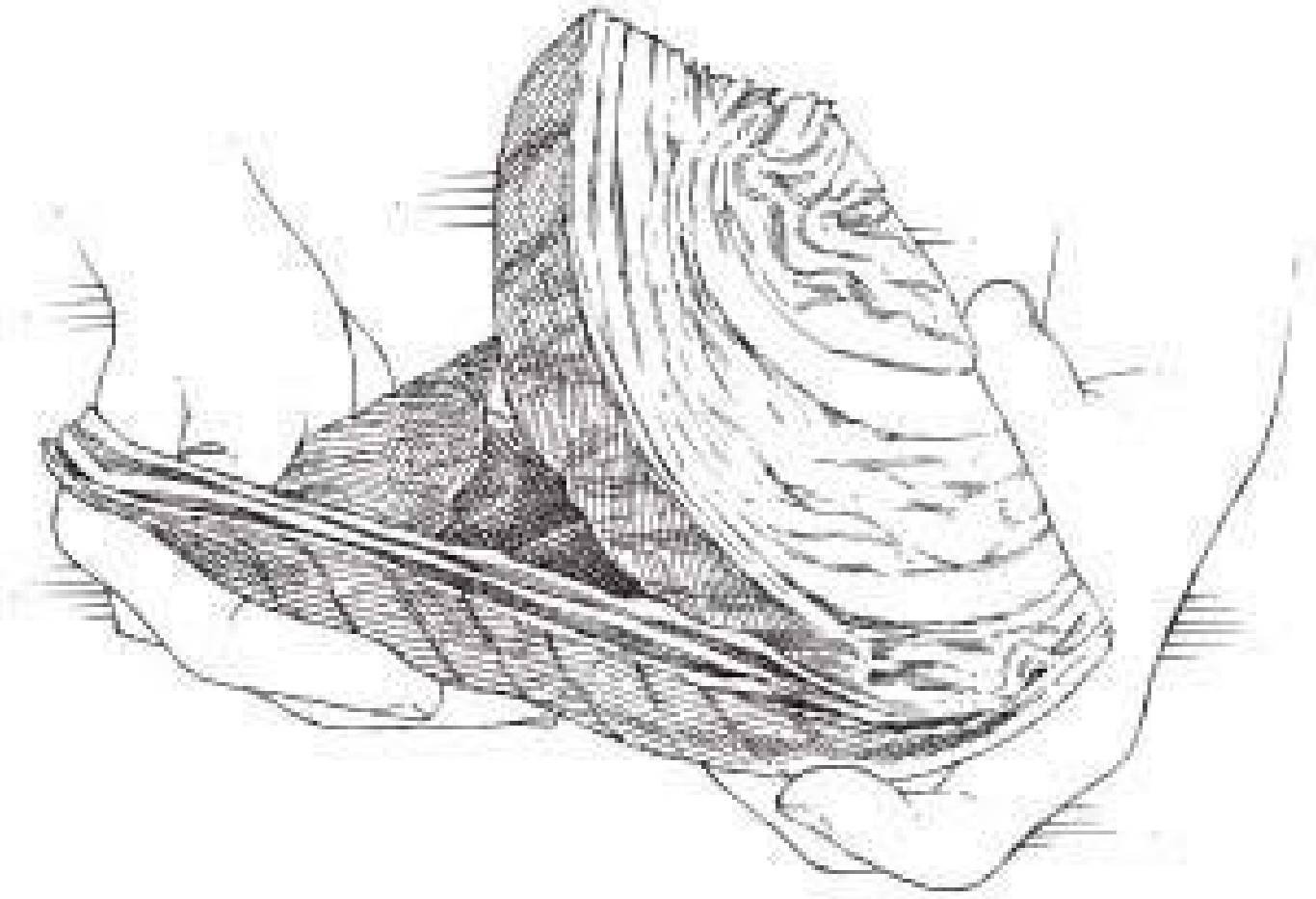

Figure 5.
Pull off several cabbage leaves at a time and press them flat against a cutting board.

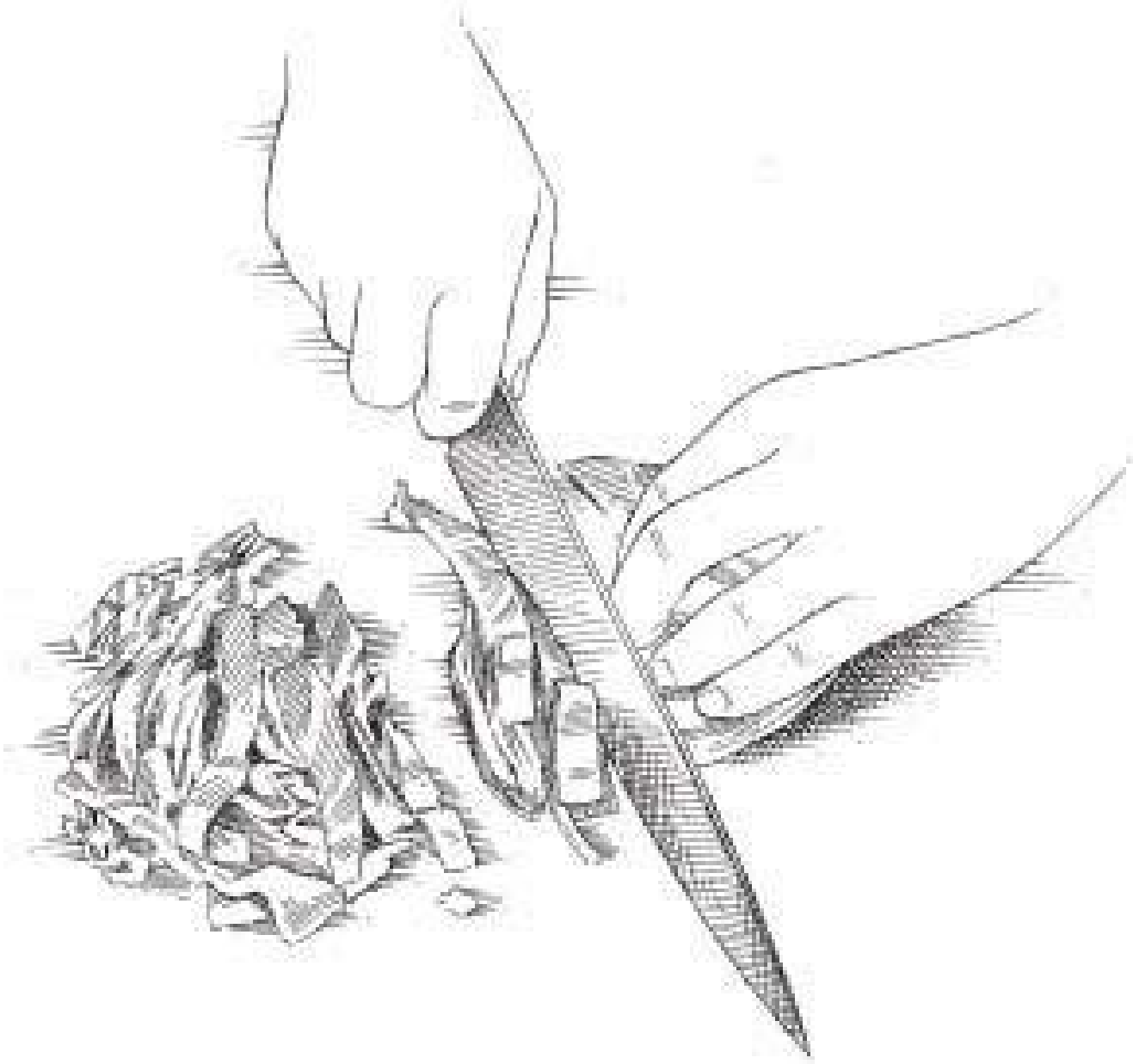

Figure 6.
Use a chef's knife to cut each stack of cabbage diagonally into $^{1}/_{4}$-inch-wide shreds.

Master Recipe

Braised Cabbage

serves four

NOTE: ***This recipe uses about six cups of shredded cabbage.***

1 tablespoon unsalted butter

1 tablespoon chicken stock or low-sodium canned broth

$^1/_2$ large head green cabbage (about $1^1/_2$ pounds), cored and cut into $^1/_4$-inch shreds (*see* figures 4, 5, 6)

$^1/_4$ teaspoon dried thyme

1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

Heat butter in large skillet over medium heat. Add stock, then cabbage and thyme. Bring to simmer; cover and continue to simmer, stirring occasionally, until cabbage is wilted but still bright green, 7 to 9 minutes. Sprinkle with parsley and season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Cream-Braised Cabbage with Lemon and Shallots

Follow Master Recipe, replacing butter and chicken stock with $^{1}/_{4}$ cup heavy cream, 1 teaspoon lemon juice, and 1 small minced shallot. Omit thyme and parsley.

Braised Cabbage with Bacon and Onion

Fry 4 strips bacon in large skillet over medium heat until crisp, about 5 minutes. Remove bacon from pan with slotted spoon and drain on paper towels. Pour off all but 1 tablespoon bacon drippings. A d d $^{1}/_{2}$ small onion, minced, to drippings, and sauté until slightly colored, $1^{1}/_{2}$ minutes. Proceed with

Master Recipe, omitting butter. Crumble bacon over cooked cabbage and serve.

Braised Cabbage with Caraway and Mustard

Follow Master Recipe, replacing stock with 1 tablespoon apple juice and $^1/_2$ teaspoon Dijon mustard and substituting 1 tablespoon caraway seeds for parsley.

Master Recipe

Braised Brussels Sprouts

serves three to four

NOTE: ***After cooking you may toss Brussels sprouts with a little butter and season them with ground black pepper. Or try one of the variations that follow. In our testing, we found no benefit to cutting an X into the bottom of each sprout. (Some sources say this promotes even cooking.) Simply trim the bottom of the stem and remove any discolored leaves before cooking.***

1 pound small Brussels sprouts, stems trimmed and any discolored outer leaves removed

$^1/_2$ teaspoon salt

INSTRUCTIONS:

Bring sprouts, $^1/_2$ cup water, and salt to boil in large skillet over heat. Lower heat to medium, cover, and simmer (shaking pan once or twice to redistribute sprouts) until knife tip inserted into center of sprout meets little resistance, 8 to 10 minutes. Drain well and season as directed in variations or note above.

VARIATIONS:

Brussels Sprouts Braised in Cream

Follow Master Recipe, substituting 1 cup heavy cream for water. Increase cooking time to 10 to 12 minutes. Season with pinch grated nutmeg and ground black pepper and serve without draining.

Glazed Brussels Sprouts with Chestnuts

If chestnuts are unavailable, substitute 1/3 cup toasted, chopped hazelnuts.

Prepare Master Recipe and set drained Brussels sprouts aside. Heat 2 tablespoons unsalted butter and 1

tablespoon sugar in large skillet over medium-high heat until butter melts and sugar dissolves. Stir in 16-ounce can peeled chestnuts in water, drained. Turn heat to low and cook, stirring occasionally, until chestnuts are glazed, about 3 minutes. Add 1 tablespoon unsalted butter and cooked Brussels sprouts. Cook, stirring occasionally, until heated through, 3 to 4 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste and serve immediately.

Brussels Sprouts with Garlic and Pine Nuts

Prepare Master Recipe and set drained Brussels sprouts aside. Heat 2

tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil in large skillet over medium heat. Add $^1/_4$ cup pine nuts and cook, stirring occasionally, until nuts begin to brown, about 2 minutes. Add 2 minced garlic cloves and cook until softened, about 1 minute. Stir in cooked Brussels sprouts. Cook, stirring occasionally, until heated through, 3 to 4 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste and serve immediately.

Brussels Sprouts with Tarragon-Mustard Butter

The mustard sauce may separate and appear curdled after the sprouts are added. If so, continue cooking and it

should come back together.

Prepare Master Recipe and set drained Brussels sprouts aside. Melt 4 tablespoon unsalted butter in large skillet over medium heat. Whisk in 2 tablespoons Dijon mustard until smooth. Add 1 teaspoon dried tarragon leaves. Cook, stirring constantly, until bubbly, about 30 seconds. Stir in sprouts, coating well with sauce. Cook, stirring frequently, until heated through, 3 to 4 minutes. Season to taste with salt and pepper and serve immediately.

CAULIFLOWER

CAULIFLOWER IS VERY POROUS, WHICH CAN BE an advantage or a disadvantage depending on the cooking technique used. We found that boiled cauliflower, even when underdone, always tastes watery. Steaming is much better, producing a clean, bright, sweet flavor and a crisp-tender, not soggy, texture.

To confirm our sensory observations, we weighed cauliflower before and after cooking and noticed a 10 percent increase in weight when the cauliflower was boiled (the extra weight was all

water) and no change in weight when the cauliflower was steamed. After steaming, cauliflower may be dressed with a vinaigrette or sautéed briefly in a flavorful fat.

A second option is braising, which takes advantage of cauliflower's ability to absorb liquid. We found that it is best to sauté the cauliflower first—browning intensifies the naturally mild flavor of cauliflower and adds a layer of sweetness—then add a flavorful liquid. Browned cauliflower takes well to aggressive seasonings, such as soy sauce, Indian spices, or even chiles.

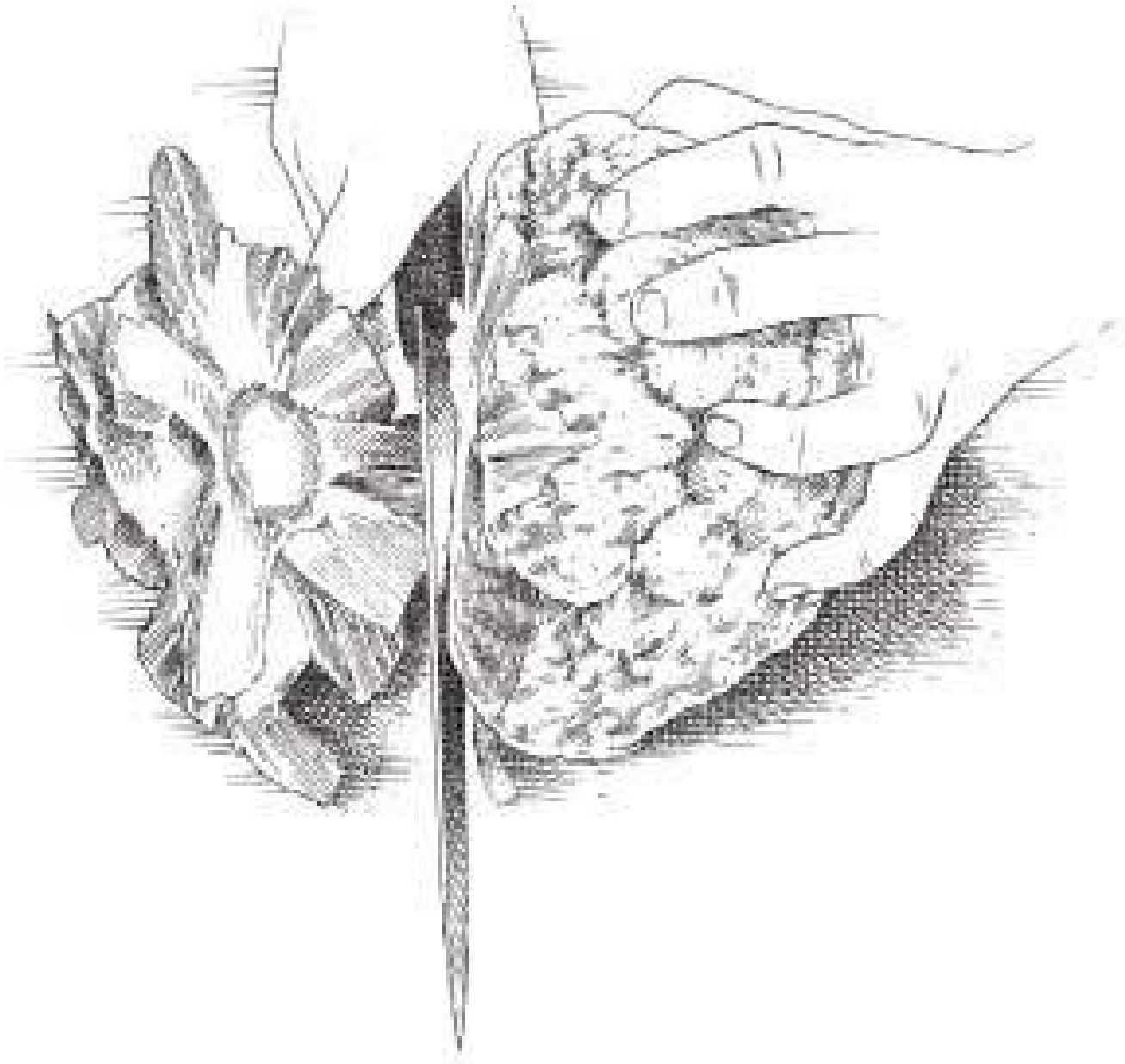

Figure 7.
To prepare cauliflower, start by pulling off the outer leaves and trimming off the stem near the base of the head.

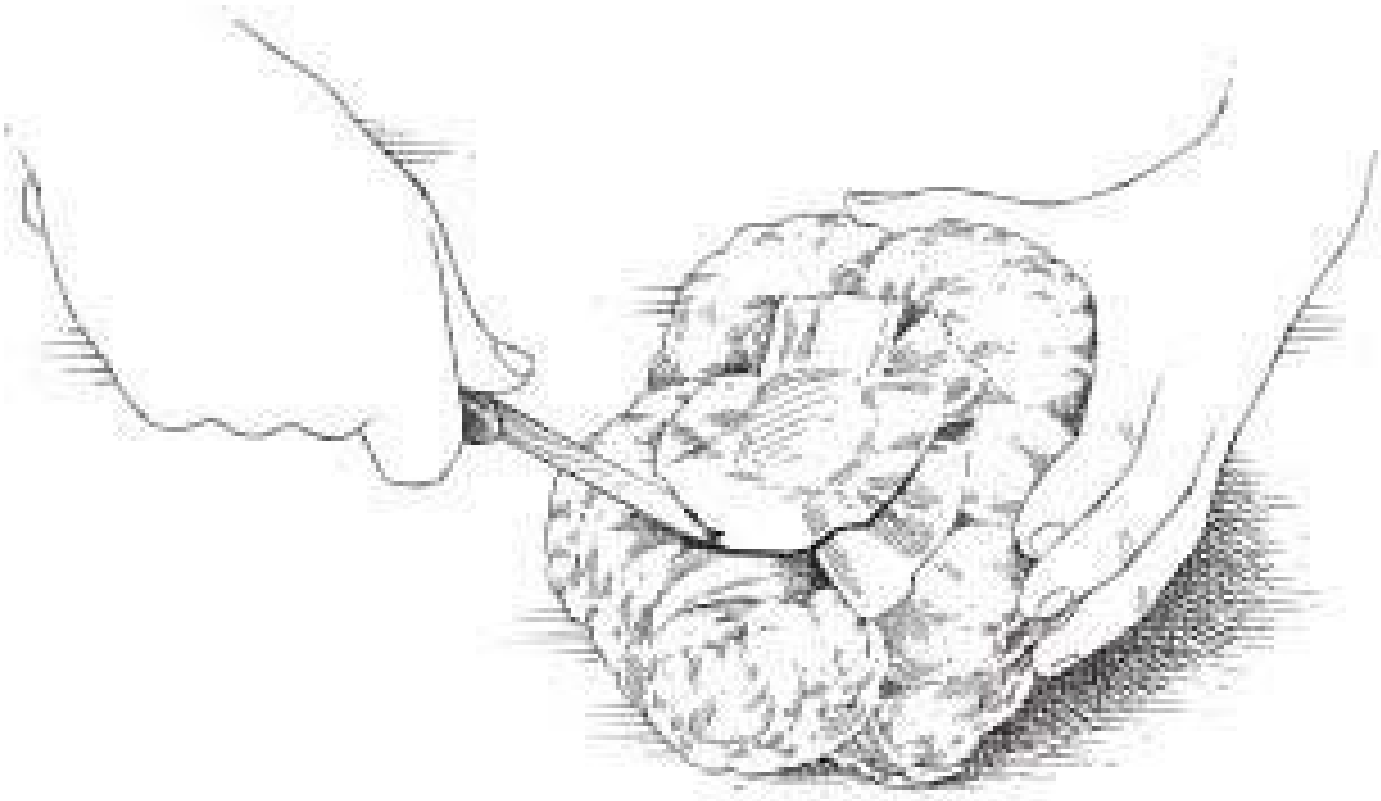

Figure 8.
Turn the cauliflower upside down so the stem is facing up. Using a sharp knife, cut around the core to remove it.

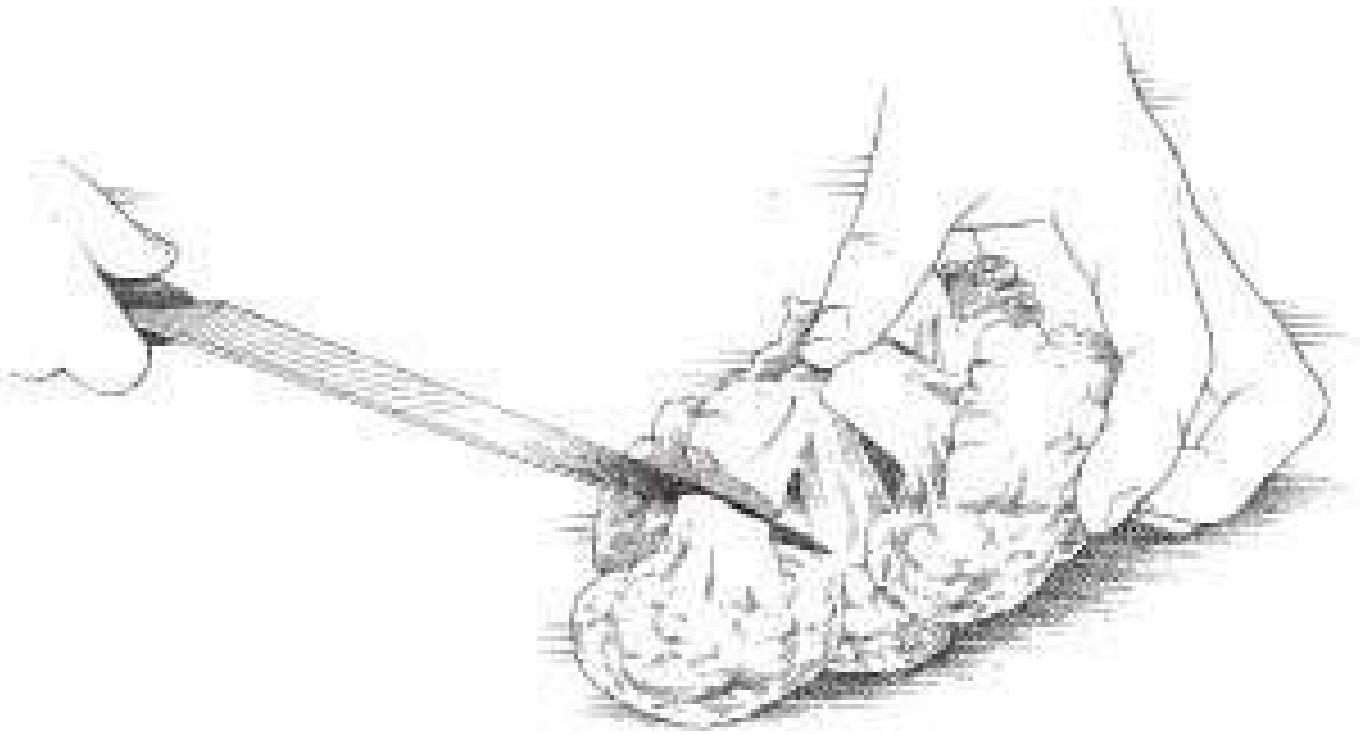

Figure 9.
Separate the individual florets from the inner stem using the tip of a chef's knife.

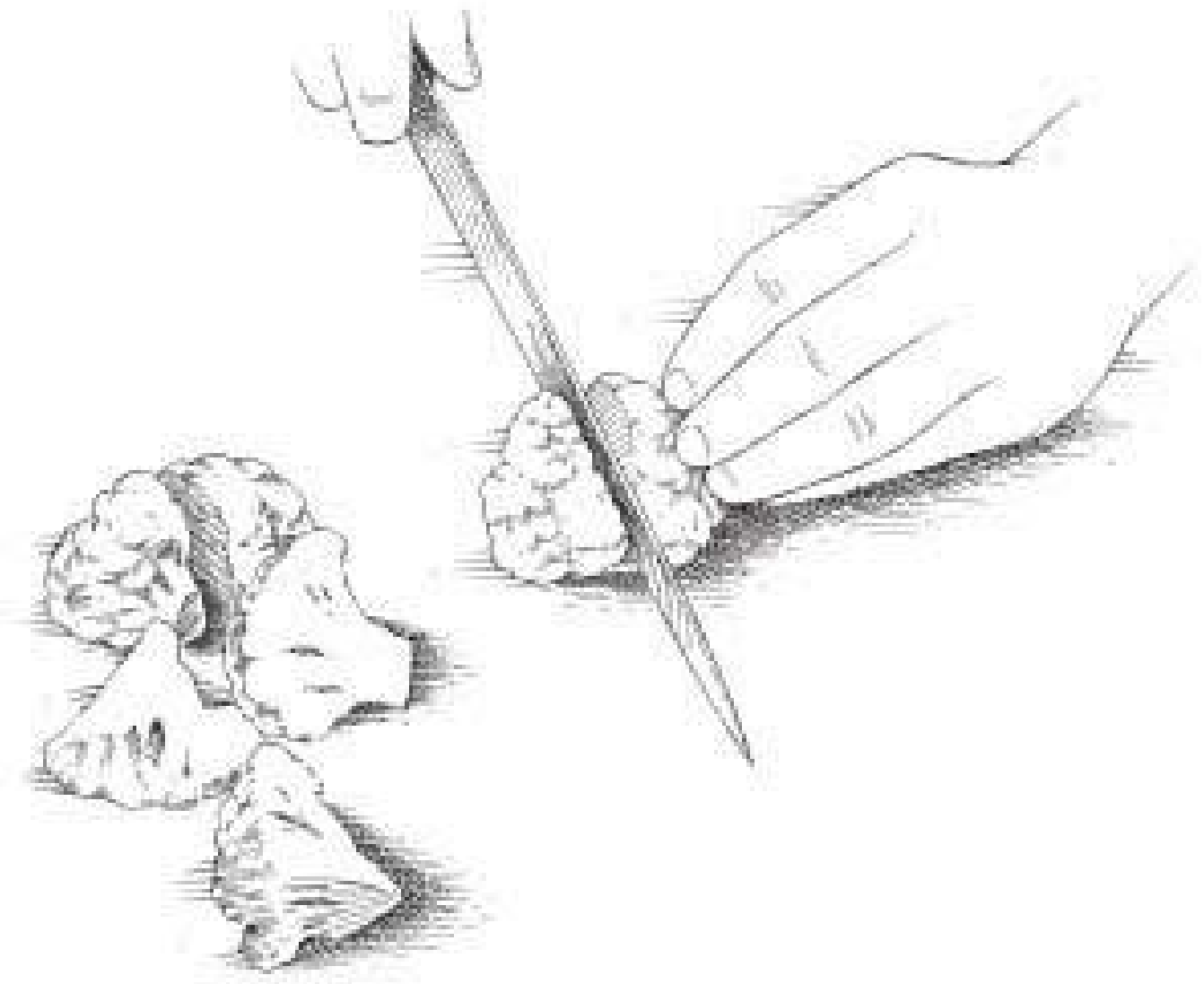

Figure 10.
Cut the florets in half, or in quarters if necessary, so that individual pieces are about 1 inch square.

Master Recipe

Steamed Cauliflower

serves four

NOTE: ***Mild seasonings, such as dill, basil, nuts, and citrus, are the best complement to the fresh, delicate flavor of steamed cauliflower. You may toss steamed cauliflower with extra-virgin olive oil or butter and salt and serve as is, or follow any of the simple variations.***

**1 medium head cauliflower (about 2 pounds), trimmed, cored, and cut into florets (*see*

figures 7, 8, 9, 10)

INSTRUCTIONS:

Fit wide saucepan with steamer basket. Fill with enough water to reach just below bottom of basket. Bring water to boil over high heat. Add cauliflower to basket. Cover and steam until cauliflower is tender but still offers some resistance to the tooth when sampled, 7 to 8 minutes. Remove cauliflower from basket and season as directed in variations or note above.

VARIATIONS:

Steamed Cauliflower with Dill-Walnut Vinaigrette

Whisk 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard, 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar, 1 tablespoon lemon juice, $^1/_2$ minced shallot or scallion, 2 tablespoons minced fresh dill, 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, and salt and pepper to taste in small bowl. Follow Master Recipe, tossing steamed cauliflower with dressing and $^1/_2$ cup toasted, chopped walnuts. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Steamed Cauliflower with Curry-Basil Vinaigrette

Whisk 1 tablespoon lemon juice, 1 tablespoon white wine vinegar, 1

teaspoon curry powder, $1\,^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoons honey, $^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoon salt, and 1/8 teaspoon pepper together in small bowl. Whisk in 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil and then add 2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil leaves. Follow Master Recipe, tossing steamed cauliflower with dressing. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Steamed Cauliflower with Bread Crumbs, Capers, and Chopped Egg

Follow Master Recipe, setting steamed cauliflower aside. Heat 2 tablespoons butter in large skillet over medium heat

until foamy. Add 3 tablespoons dried plain bread crumbs and cook, stirring occasionally, until lightly browned, about 5 minutes. Add cauliflower and heat through, about 1 minute. Add $1^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons lemon juice, 2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves, 2 tablespoons drained capers, and 1 hard-boiled egg, pressed through a sieve to crumble very fine. Toss lightly, season with salt and pepper to taste, and serve immediately.

Browned and Braised Cauliflower with Asian Flavors

serves four

NOTE: ***The stronger flavor of browned cauliflower stands up well to bolder, more complex flavor combinations, such as the garlic, ginger, sesame oil, and soy sauce used in this recipe.***

2 tablespoons soy sauce

2 tablespoons rice wine vinegar

1 tablespoon dry sherry

$1^1/_2$ tablespoons canola oil

1 medium head cauliflower, trimmed, cored, and cut into florets (*see* figures 7, 8, 9, 10

2 medium garlic cloves, minced

2 tablespoons minced fresh gingerroot

1 teaspoon Asian sesame oil

2 medium scallions, white and green parts, minced

Ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Combine soy sauce, vinegar, sherry, and $^1/_4$ cup water in small bowl and set aside.

2. Heat large skillet over medium-high

heat until pan is very hot, 3 to 4 minutes. Add canola oil, swirling pan to coat evenly. Add florets and sauté, stirring occasionally, until they begin to brown, 6 to 7 minutes.

3. Clear center of pan, add garlic and ginger, and drizzle with sesame oil. Mash garlic-ginger mixture with back of spatula and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute. Stir to combine garlic-ginger mixture with cauliflower. Sauté for 30 seconds.

4. Reduce heat to low and add soy sauce mixture. Cover and cook until florets are

fully tender but still offer some resistance to the tooth when sampled, 4 to 5 minutes. Add scallions and toss lightly to distribute. Season with pepper to taste and serve immediately.

Browned and Braised Cauliflower with Indian Flavors

serves four

NOTE: ***Yogurt creates a rich and satisfying sauce that tames and blends the flavors of the spices. If you like, add $^{1}/_{2}$ cup thawed frozen green peas along with the cilantro.***

$^{1}/_{4}$ cup plain yogurt
1 tablespoon lime juice
1$^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons canola oil
1 medium head cauliflower, trimmed, cored, and cut into

florets (*see* figures 7, 8, 9, 10

1/2 medium onion, sliced thin

1 teaspoon ground cumin

1 teaspoon ground coriander

1 teaspoon ground turmeric

1/4 teaspoon hot red pepper flakes

1/4 cup chopped fresh cilantro leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Combine yogurt, lime juice, and 1/4 cup water in small bowl and set aside.

2. Heat large skillet over medium-high

heat until pan is very hot, 3 to 4 minutes. Add oil, swirling pan to coat evenly. Add florets and sauté, stirring occasionally, until they begin to soften, 2 to 3 minutes. Add onions; continue sautéing until florets begin to brown and onions soften, about 4 minutes.

3. Stir in cumin, coriander, turmeric, and pepper flakes; sauté until spices begin to toast and are fragrant, 1 to 2 minutes. Reduce heat to low and add yogurt mixture. Cover and cook until flavors meld, about 4 minutes. Add cilantro, toss to distribute, cover, and cook until florets are fully tender but still offer some resistance to the tooth when

sampled, about 2 minutes more. Season with salt and pepper to taste and serve immediately.

EGGPLANT

THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE THAT CONFRONTS the cook when preparing eggplant is excess moisture. While the grill will evaporate this liquid and allow the eggplant to brown nicely, this won't happen under the broiler or in a hot pan. The eggplant will steam in its own juices. The result is an insipid flavor and mushy texture.

Salting is the classic technique for drawing some moisture out of the eggplant before cooking. We experimented with both regular table salt

and kosher salt and prefer kosher salt because the crystals are large enough to wipe away after the salt has done its job. Finer table salt crystals dissolve into the eggplant flesh and must be flushed out with water. The eggplant must then be thoroughly dried, which adds more prep time, especially if the eggplant has been diced for sautéing. (We prefer to dice eggplant that will be sautéed to increase the surface area that can brown and absorb flavorings.)

Eggplant destined for the broiler should be sliced very thin (about $^1/_4$ inch thick) so that the salt can work quickly. The salt will take more time to penetrate thicker slices and will in the end be less

effective. However, when grilling, you want thicker slices that won't fall apart on the cooking grate. We found that $^{3}/_{4}$-inch rounds are perfect for grilling.

Master Recipe

Sautéed Eggplant

serves four

NOTE: ***Very small eggplants (under 6 ounces each) may be cooked without salting. However, we found that large eggplants generally have a lot of moisture, which is best removed before cooking.***

1 large eggplant (about $1^1/_2$ pounds), ends trimmed and cut into $^3/_4$-inch cubes

1 tablespoon kosher salt

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

Ground black pepper

1 medium garlic clove, minced

2–4 tablespoons minced fresh parsley or finely shredded basil leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place eggplant in large colander and sprinkle with salt, tossing to coat evenly. Let stand 30 minutes. Using paper towels or large kitchen towel, wipe salt off and pat excess moisture from eggplant.

2. Heat oil in heavy-bottomed 12-inch

skillet until it shimmers and becomes fragrant over medium-high heat. Add eggplant cubes and sauté until they begin to brown, about 4 minutes. Reduce heat to medium-low and cook, stirring occasionally, until eggplant is fully tender and lightly browned, 10 to 15 minutes. Stir in pepper to taste, and add garlic. Cook to blend flavors, about 2 minutes. Off heat, stir in herb, adjust seasonings, and serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Sautéed Eggplant with Crisped Bread Crumbs

Melt 2 tablespoons unsalted butter in

small skillet. Add $^{1}/_{2}$ cup plain dried bread crumbs and toast over medium-high heat until deep golden and crisp, stirring frequently, about 5 to 6 minutes. Follow Master Recipe, adding toasted bread crumbs with herb.

Sautéed Eggplant with Asian Garlic Sauce

Follow Master Recipe, substituting 2 tablespoons peanut or vegetable oil for olive oil and adding 2 teaspoons minced fresh gingerroot with garlic. Once garlic and ginger are in pan, cook to blend flavors, about 1 minute. Add mixture of 2 tablespoons soy sauce, 2 tablespoons rice wine vinegar, and 1 teaspoon sugar.

Simmer until eggplant absorbs liquid, about 1 minute. Substitute 2 tablespoons minced fresh cilantro leaves and 2 tablespoons thinly sliced scallions for parsley or basil.

Master Recipe

Broiled Eggplant

serves four

NOTE: ***For broiling, it's best to slice the eggplant very thin.***

1 large eggplant (about 1 1/2 pounds), ends trimmed and sliced crosswise into 1/4-inch-thick rounds

1 tablespoon kosher salt

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

2–3 tablespoons minced fresh

parsley or finely shredded basil leaves

Ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place eggplant in large colander and sprinkle with salt, tossing to coat evenly. Let stand 30 minutes. Using paper towels or large kitchen towel, wipe salt off and pat excess moisture from eggplant.

2. Preheat broiler. Arrange eggplant slices on foil-lined baking sheet. Brush both sides with oil. Broil eggplant slices 4 inches from heat source until tops are mahogany brown, 3 to 4 minutes. Turn

slices over and broil until other side browns, another 3 to 4 minutes.

3. Remove eggplant from oven and sprinkle with herb. Season with pepper to taste and serve hot, warm, or at room temperature.

VARIATION:

Broiled Eggplant with Parmesan Cheese

This variation is delicious on its own or perfect as vegetarian main course for two when served with a basic tomato sauce.

Follow Master Recipe through step 2.

Sprinkle cooked eggplant with $^{1}/_{2}$ cup grated Parmesan cheese. Return eggplant to broiler until cheese melts and becomes bubbly and browned, 2 to 3 minutes. Sprinkle with parsley or basil and serve immediately.

Master Recipe

Grilled Eggplant

serves four

NOTE: ***There's no need to salt eggplant destined for the grill. The intense grill heat will vaporize excess moisture. You may use oregano in place of thyme if desired.***

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

2 medium garlic cloves, minced

2 teaspoons minced fresh thyme or oregano leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

1 large eggplant (about $1^1/_2$ pounds), ends trimmed and cut crosswise into $^3/_4$-inch rounds

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Light grill. Combine oil, garlic, herbs, and salt and pepper to taste in small bowl. Place eggplant on platter and brush both sides with oil mixture.

2. Grill eggplant, turning once, until both sides are marked with dark stripes, 8 to 10 minutes. Serve hot, warm, or at room temperature.

VARIATION:

Grilled Eggplant with Ginger and Soy

Combine 2 tablespoons soy sauce, $1^1/_2$ tablespoons honey, 1 tablespoon rice wine vinegar, and 1 tablespoon water in small skillet. Bring to boil over medium-high heat and simmer until slightly thickened, about 2 minutes. Remove from heat and add 1 teaspoon Asian sesame oil. Follow Master Recipe, substituting peanut oil for olive oil, using ginger in place of garlic, and omitting herb, salt and pepper. Drizzle thickened soy mixture over grilled eggplant, sprinkle with 2 thinly sliced scallions, and serve.

GREEN BEANS

WE'VE FOUND THAT GREEN BEANS respond better to boiling than steaming. A pound of beans in a standard steamer basket will not cook evenly—the beans close to the steaming water cook more quickly than the beans at the top of the pile. Stirring the beans once or twice as they cook solves this problem, but it is somewhat dangerous to stick your hand into the hot pot. Boiling is simpler—just add the beans and cook until tender—and it permits the addition of salt during cooking.

Unlike other vegetables that can become soggy when boiled, the thick skin on green beans keeps the texture crisp and firm. Leave beans whole when boiling; cut beans will become waterlogged. Boiled beans can be flavored with some butter or oil, dressed with a vinaigrette, or sautéed briefly in a flavorful fat.

A second cooking option is braising. We found that the thick skin on most beans means that they are fairly slow to absorb flavorful liquids like tomatoes, cream, or stock. For this reason, we had the best success when we braised the beans for a full 20 minutes.

Braised beans lose their bright green

color. Older, tougher beans benefit from long cooking, but really fresh green beans are best boiled and then seasoned, so as to retain as much of their flavor and texture as possible.

Master Recipe

Boiled Green Beans

serves four

NOTE: ***The freshness and thickness of the beans can greatly affect cooking time. Thin, farm-fresh beans—not much thicker than a strand of cooked linguine—may be done in just 2 minutes. Most supermarket beans are considerably thicker and have traveled some distance, hence the 5-minute cooking time recommended below. Dress the beans with a drizzle of extra-virgin olive oil or a pat of butter***

as well as a generous sprinkling of salt and pepper. Or make one of the variations.

1 pound green beans, ends snapped off
1 teaspoon salt

INSTRUCTIONS:

Bring $2^1/_2$ quarts of water to boil in large saucepan. Add beans and salt and cook until tender, about 5 minutes. Drain and season as directed in variations or note above.

VARIATIONS:

Green Beans with Toasted Walnuts and Tarragon

Other nuts, especially pine nuts and hazelnuts, and other herbs, especially parsley and basil, may be used in a similar fashion.

Follow Master Recipe, placing drained beans in large serving bowl. A d d $^{1}/_{4}$ cup chopped and toasted walnuts and $1^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons minced fresh tarragon leaves. Drizzle with $1^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons walnut or extra-virgin olive oil and toss gently to coat. Sprinkle with salt and pepper to taste and serve warm or at room temperature.

Green Beans with Fresh Tomato, Basil, and Goat

Cheese

Follow Master Recipe, placing drained beans in large serving bowl. Add $^{1}/_{2}$ cup chopped fresh tomato, 2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil leaves, and 1 ounce crumbled goat cheese. Drizzle with 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil and 1 teaspoon balsamic vinegar and toss gently to coat. Season with salt and pepper to taste and serve warm or at room temperature.

Green Beans with Bacon and Onion

Fry 4 strips bacon, cut into $^{1}/_{2}$-inch pieces, in large skillet over medium heat

until crisp, about 5 minutes. Remove bacon from pan with slotted spoon and drain on paper towels. Pour off all but 2 tablespoons bacon drippings. Add 1 medium onion, minced, to drippings and sauté until softened, about 5 minutes. Follow Master Recipe, adding drained beans to skillet. Toss to heat through, 1 to 2 minutes. Add bacon and season with salt (sparingly) and pepper to taste. Serve immediately.

Braised Green Beans, Italian Style

serves four

NOTE: ***The beans lose their bright green color but gain flavor from cooking in a tomato sauce.***

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 small onion, diced
2 medium garlic cloves, minced
1 cup chopped canned tomatoes
1 pound green beans, ends snapped off
Salt and ground black pepper

2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oil in large sauté pan over medium heat. Add onion and cook until softened, about 5 minutes. Add garlic and cook for 1 minute. Add tomatoes and simmer until juices thicken slightly, about 5 minutes.

2. Add green beans, $^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoon salt, and a few grindings of pepper to pan. Stir well, cover, and cook, stirring occasionally, until beans are tender but still have some bite, about 20 minutes. Stir in parsley and adjust seasonings.

Serve immediately.

Braised Green Beans, Asian Style

serves four

NOTE: ***The braising liquid—chicken stock, soy sauce, and rice wine vinegar—cooks down to a concentrated, very flavorful sauce, which is especially delicious over rice.***

2 tablespoons peanut oil
4 medium scallions, sliced thin
2 medium garlic cloves, minced
$^{3}/_{4}$ cup chicken stock or low-sodium canned broth
3 tablespoons soy sauce
1 tablespoon rice wine vinegar

2 teaspoons sugar

1 pound green beans, ends snapped off

Ground black pepper

2 tablespoons minced fresh basil leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oil in large sauté pan over medium heat. Add scallions and cook until softened, 2 to 3 minutes. Add garlic and cook for 1 minute. Add stock, soy sauce, vinegar, and sugar, and simmer until liquid thickens slightly, about 5 minutes.

2. Add green beans and a few grindings

of pepper to pan. Stir well, cover, and cook, stirring occasionally, until beans are tender but still have some bite, about 20 minutes. Stir in basil and adjust seasonings. Serve immediately.

GREENS

MANY COOKS THINK THEY CAN TREAT ALL leafy greens the same way, even though some are delicate enough for salads while others seem as tough as shoe leather. After cleaning, stemming, and cooking more than a hundred pounds of leafy greens, we found that they fell into two categories, each of which is handled quite differently.

Spinach, beet greens, and Swiss chard are tender and rich in moisture. They require no additional liquid during cooking. They taste of the earth and

minerals but are rather delicate. Kale as well as mustard, turnip, and collard greens are tougher and require the addition of some liquid as they cook. Their flavor is very assertive, even peppery in cases, and can be overwhelming.

We tested boiling, steaming, and sautéing tender greens. Boiling produced the most brilliantly colored greens, but they were also very mushy and bland. The water cooked out all their flavor and texture. Steamed greens were less mushy, but clearly these tender greens did not need any liquid. Damp greens that were tossed in a hot oil (which could be flavored with aromatics and spices) wilted in just two or three

minutes in a covered pan. Once wilted, we found it best to remove the lid so the liquid in pan would evaporate. This method has the advantage of flavoring the greens as they cook.

Tougher greens don't have enough moisture to be wilted in a hot pan; they scorch before they wilt. Steaming these greens produces a better texture but does nothing to tame their bitter flavor. Tough greens benefit from cooking in some water, which will wash away some of their harsh notes.

We tested boiling two pounds of greens in an abundant quantity of salted water and what might be called shallow-blanching in just two quarts of salted

water. We found that cooking the greens in lots of water diluted their flavor too much. Shallow blanching removes enough bitterness to make these assertive greens palatable, but not so much as to rob them of their character. Blanched greens should be drained and then briefly cooked with seasonings.

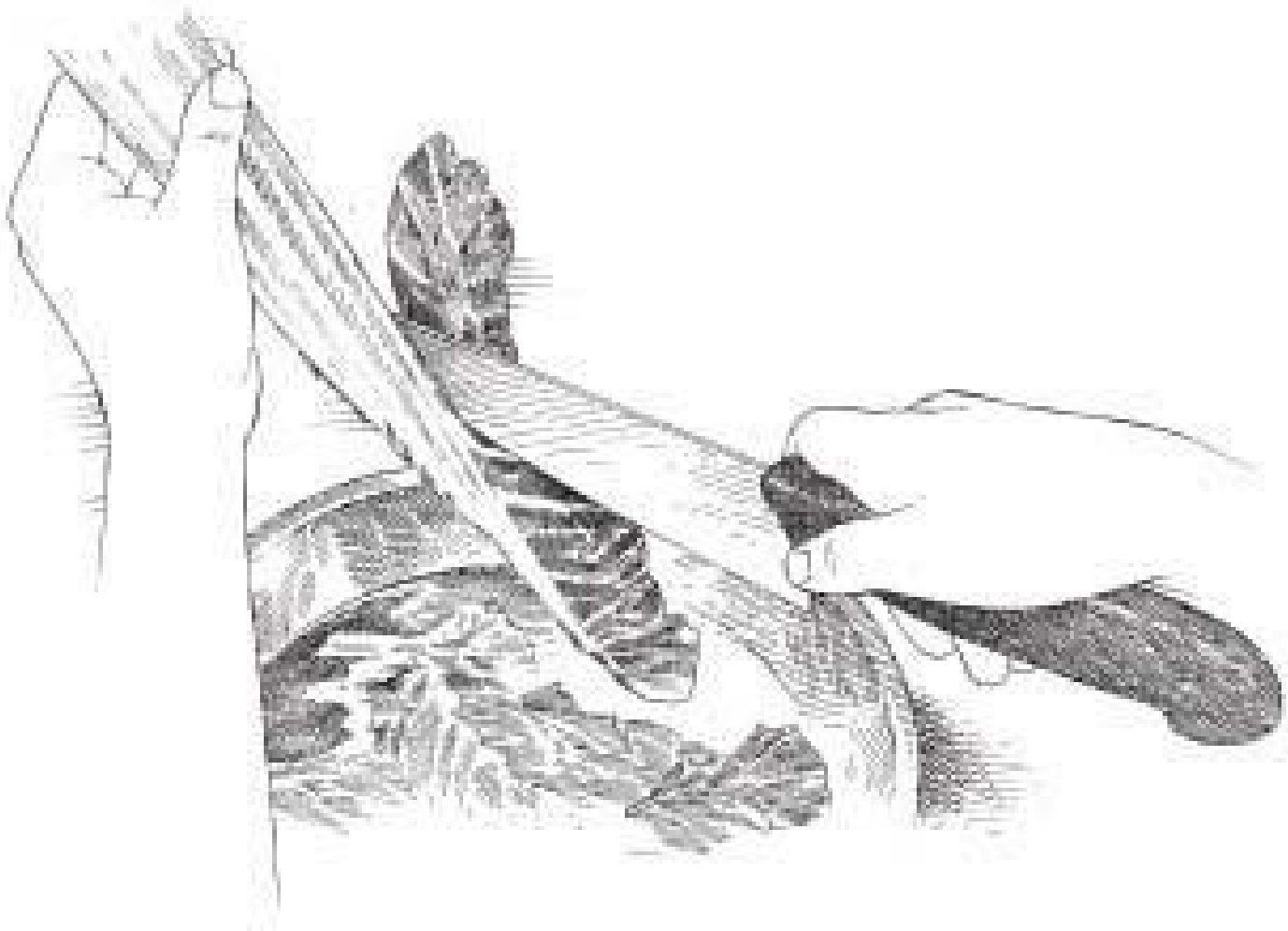

Figure 11.
To prepare Swiss chard, kale, collards, and mustard greens, hold each leaf at the base of the stem over a bowl filled with water and use a sharp knife to slash the leafy portion from either side of the thick stem. Discard the stem.

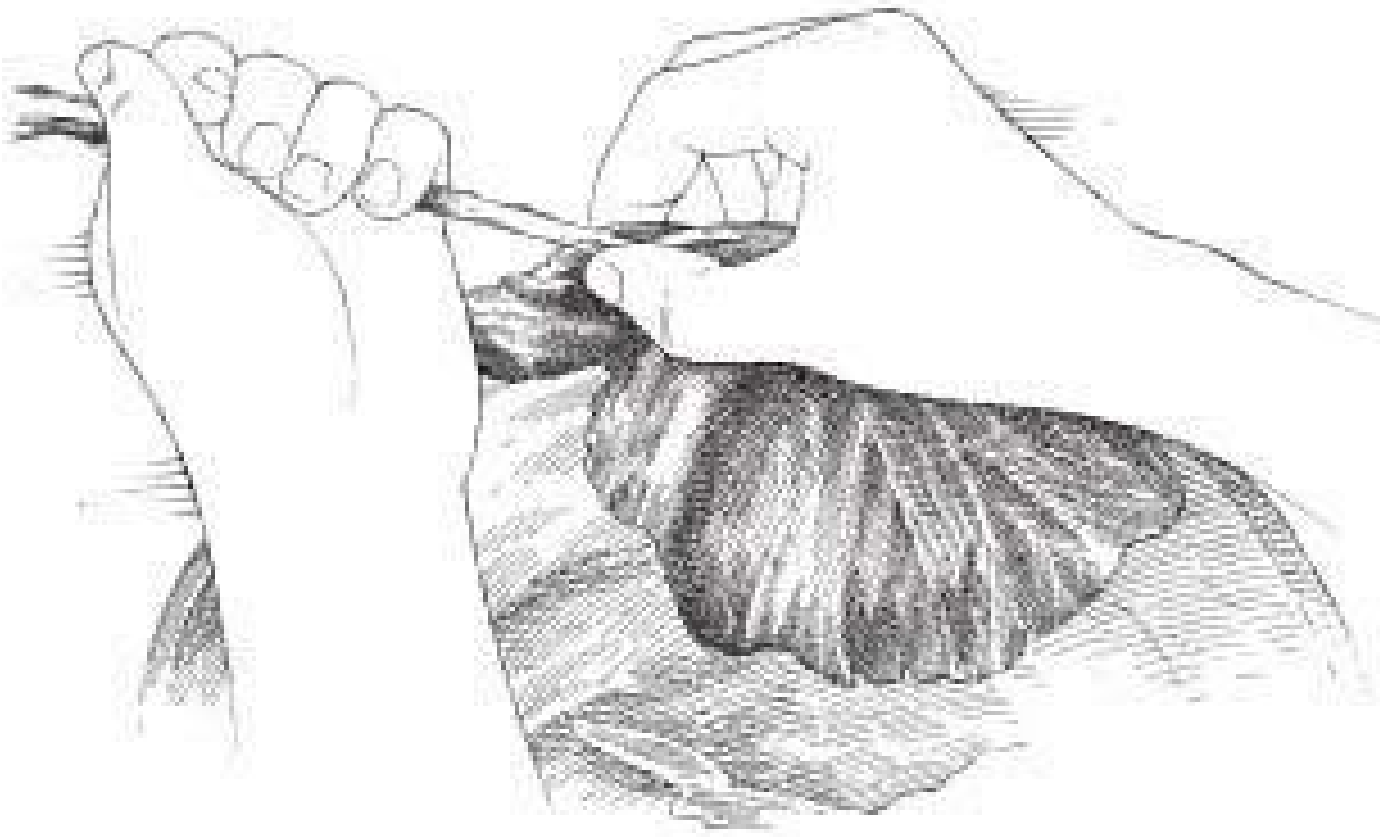

Figure 12.
Turnip greens are most easily stemmed by grasping the leaf between your thumb and index finger at the base of the stem and stripping it off by hand.

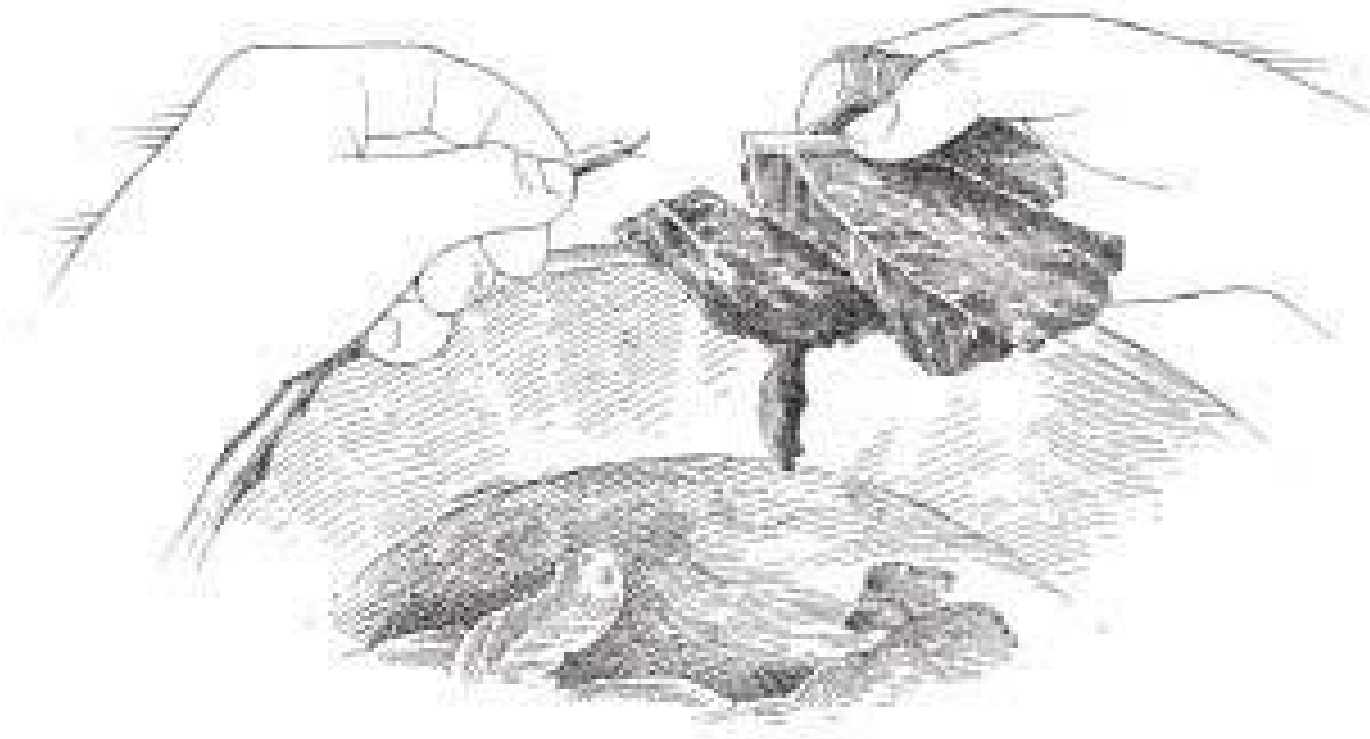

Figure 13.
When using the above method with turnip greens, the very tip of the stem will break off along with the leaves. It is tender enough to cook along with the leaves.

Master Recipe

Sautéed Tender Greens

serves four

NOTE: ***To stem spinach and beet greens, simply pinch off the leaves where they meet the stems. A thick stalks runs through each Swiss chard leaf, so it must be handled differently; see figure 11 for information on this technique. A large, deep Dutch oven or even a soup kettle is best for this recipe.***

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

2 medium garlic cloves, minced

2 pounds damp tender greens, such as spinach, beet greens, or Swiss chard, stemmed, washed in several changes of cold water, and coarsely chopped

Salt and ground black pepper

Lemon wedges (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS:

Heat oil and garlic in Dutch oven or other deep pot and cook until garlic sizzles and turns golden, about 1 minute. Add wet greens, cover, and cook over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally, until greens completely wilt, about 2 to 3 minutes. Uncover and season with salt and pepper to taste. Cook over high heat

until liquid evaporates, 2 to 3 minutes. Serve immediately, with lemon wedges if desired.

VARIATIONS:

Sautéed Tender Greens with Indian Spices

Follow Master Recipe, making these changes: Replace olive oil with 2 tablespoons vegetable oil. Cook 1 minced onion with garlic and oil. When onion and garlic are golden, add 1 teaspoon minced fresh gingerroot, $^1/_2$ minced jalapeno chile, 2 teaspoons curry powder, and $^1/_2$ teaspoon ground cumin. Cook until fragrant, about 2 minutes.

Add wet greens and proceed with recipe. When liquid evaporates in pan, add $^1/_4$ cup heavy cream and 2 teaspoons brown sugar. Cook, uncovered, until cream thickens, about 2 minutes. Serve immediately.

Sautéed Tender Greens with Cumin, Tomato, and Cilantro

Follow Master Recipe, making these changes: Cook 1 minced onion with garlic and oil. When onion and garlic are golden, add $^1/_2$ minced jalapeno chile and $1^1/_2$ teaspoons ground cumin. Cook until fragrant, about 2 minutes.

Add 2 large plum tomatoes, seeded and chopped, and cook until their juices release, about 1 minute. Add wet greens and proceed with recipe. When greens are done, add 2 tablespoons minced fresh cilantro leaves. Serve immediately, with lime wedges if desired.

Sautéed Tender Greens with Asian Flavors

Follow Master Recipe, making these changes: Replace olive oil with 2 tablespoons vegetable or peanut oil. Cook $^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon hot red pepper flakes with garlic. Add wet greens and proceed with recipe. When liquid in pan

evaporates, add mixture of $1^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons soy sauce, 1 tablespoon Asian sesame oil, 2 teaspoons rice wine vinegar, and 2 teaspoons sugar. Cook until liquid almost evaporates, about 1 minute. Serve immediately, garnishing with 2 teaspoons toasted sesame seeds.

Sautéed Tender Greens with Raisins and Almonds

Follow Master Recipe, making these changes: Increase garlic to 3 cloves. Cook $^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoon hot red pepper flakes with garlic. Add 1/3 cup golden raisins with wet greens and proceed with recipe. When greens have wilted, add $^{1}/_{2}$

teaspoon minced lemon zest. When greens are done, stir in 3 tablespoons toasted slivered almonds. Serve immediately.

Master Recipe

Quick-Cooked Tough Greens

serves four

NOTE: ***With the exception of turnip greens, all tough greens can be stemmed using the method outlined in figure 11. See figures 12 and 13, when working with turnip greens. Shallow-blanched greens should be shocked in cold water to stop the cooking process, drained, and then braised.***

Salt

2 pounds assertive greens, such as kale, collards, mustard, or turnip greens, stemmed, washed in several changes of cold water, and coarsely chopped

2 large garlic cloves, sliced thin

1/4 teaspoon hot red pepper flakes

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

1/3-1/2 cup chicken stock or low-sodium canned broth

Lemon wedges (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Bring 2 quarts water to boil in soup kettle or other large pot. Add $1^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoons salt and greens and stir until wilted. Cover and cook until greens are just tender, about 7 minutes. Drain in colander. Rinse kettle with cold water to cool, then refill with cold water. Place greens in cold water to stop cooking process. Gather handful of greens, lift out of water, and squeeze until only droplets fall from them. Repeat with remaining greens.

2. Heat garlic, red pepper flakes, and oil in large sauté pan over medium heat until garlic starts to sizzle. Add greens and

stir to coat with oil. Add 1/3 cup stock, cover, and cook over medium-high heat, adding more stock if necessary, until greens are tender and juicy and most of stock has been absorbed, about 5 minutes. Adjust seasonings, adding salt and red pepper flakes to taste. Serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Quick-Cooked Tough Greens with Prosciutto

Follow Master Recipe and after garlic starts to sizzle, add 1 ounce thin-sliced prosciutto that has been cut into thin strips. Add greens and proceed as

directed, stirring in 1/4 teaspoon grated lemon zest just before serving.

Quick-Cooked Tough Greens with Red Bell Pepper

Follow Master Recipe, sautéing 1/2 thinly sliced red bell pepper in oil until softened, about 4 minutes, before adding garlic and red pepper flakes. Proceed as directed.

Quick-Cooked Tough Greens with Black Olives and Lemon Zest

Follow Master Recipe, adding 1/3 cup

pitted and chopped black olives, such as kalamatas, after garlic starts to sizzle. Add greens and proceed as directed, stirring in $^1/_4$ teaspoon grated lemon zest just before serving.

Quick-Cooked Tough Greens with Bacon and Onion

Fry 2 bacon slices, cut crosswise into thin strips, in large sauté pan over medium heat until crisp, about 5 minutes. Remove bacon with slotted spoon and drain on paper towels. If necessary, add canola oil to bacon drippings to bring up to 2 tablespoons. Follow step 1 of Master Recipe, blanching and draining

greens as directed. Cook 1 small onion, minced, and 2 minced garlic cloves (in place of sliced garlic cloves and hot red pepper flakes) in bacon fat/oil mixture until softened, about 4 minutes. Add greens and proceed as directed, sprinkling with bacon bits and 2 teaspoons cider vinegar just before serving.

PEAS

THERE ARE THREE VARIETIES OF PEAS SOLD in most markets—shell peas, sugar snap peas, and snow peas. Shell peas are generally mealy and bland. Frozen peas are usually sweeter and better-tasting, but since fresh sugar snap and snow peas are almost always available, we prefer not to use frozen peas for side dishes.

The flat, light-green snow pea has a long history, especially in the Chinese kitchen. The peas are tiny and the pod is tender enough to eat. Sugar snap peas

are a relatively recent development dating back just 20 years. They are a cross between shell peas and snow peas. The sweet, crisp pod is edible and holds small, juicy peas.

Sugar snap and snow peas should be cooked quickly so that they retain some crunch and color. Stir-frying works well with snow peas, which have a fairly sturdy pod. However, sugar snap peas are too delicate for such intense heat. We found the pods will become mushy by the time the peas inside are actually heated through.

Both kinds of peas can be steamed, but we found that they respond better to blanching in salted water. The salt balances some of their sweetness and

brings out their flavor. Blanched peas tend to shrivel or pucker as they cool. To solve this problem, we plunge the cooked peas into ice water as soon as they are drained. This also helps to set their bright color. Once cooled, the peas can be drained, patted dry, and briefly sautéed in butter or oil to heat them through and add flavor.

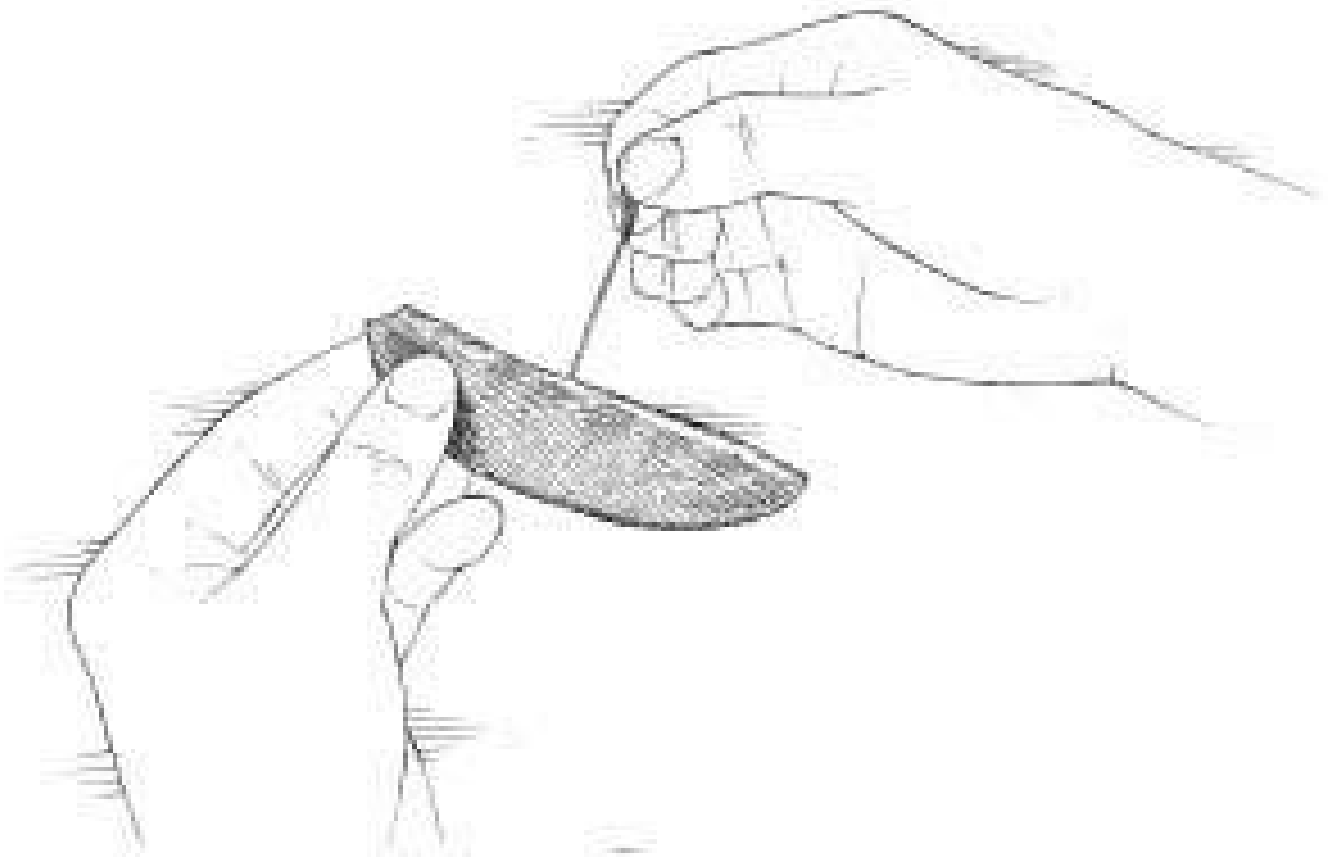

Figure 14.
To prepare snow peas, remove the string that runs along the flat side of the pod before cooking. Rip off the tip of the snow pea and pull along the pod to remove the string at the same time.

Master Recipe

Blanched Sugar Snap Peas or Snow Peas

serves four

NOTE: ***Sugar snap and snow peas may be cooked and seasoned the same way. The only difference is the cooking time. Have a bowl of ice water ready to shock the drained peas and prevent further softening and shriveling. The peas should be seasoned and reheated as directed in variations.***

1 teaspoon salt

4 cups loosely packed sugar snap peas or snow peas (about 1 pound), tips pulled off and strings removed from snow peas (*see* figure 14

INSTRUCTIONS:

Bring 6 cups water to boil in large saucepan. Add salt and peas and cook until crisp-tender, $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 minutes for sugar snap peas or about $2\frac{1}{2}$ minutes for snow peas. Drain peas, shock in ice water, drain again, and pat dry. (Peas can be set aside for 1 hour before seasoning.)

VARIATIONS:

Peas with Hazelnut Butter and Sage

Cook peas as directed in Master Recipe and set aside. Toast 2 tablespoons chopped hazelnuts in small skillet, shaking pan often to promote even cooking, just until fragrant, 3 to 4 minutes. Heat 2 tablespoons unsalted butter in medium sauté pan over medium heat until it browns to color of brown sugar and smells nutty, about 5 minutes. (Take care not to burn.) Add peas, 2 tablespoons chopped fresh sage leaves, and nuts. Toss to combine and cook until peas are heated through, 1 to $1^{1}/_{2}$ minutes. Season with salt and pepper to

taste and serve immediately.

Peas with Ham and Mint

Cook peas as directed in Master Recipe and set aside. Melt 1 tablespoon unsalted butter in medium sauté pan over medium heat. Add $^1/_2$ cup country or smoked ham, cut into $^1/_4$-inch dice, and sauté for 1 minute. Add peas and 2 tablespoons chopped fresh mint. Toss to combine and cook until peas are heated through, 1 to $1^1/_2$ minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste and serve immediately.

Peas with Lemon, Garlic, and Basil

Cook peas as directed in Master Recipe and set aside. Heat 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil in medium sauté pan over medium heat. Add zest of 1 lemon, sliced very fine, and 1 minced garlic clove, and sauté until garlic is golden, about 2 minutes. Add peas, 1 tablespoon lemon juice, and 8 chopped fresh basil leaves. Toss to combine and cook until peas are heated through, 1 to $1^{1}/_{2}$ minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste and serve immediately.

Master Recipe

Stir-Fried Snow Peas

serves four

NOTE: ***Snow peas are sturdier than sugar snap peas and hold up well when stir-fried.***

1/4 cup chicken stock or canned low-sodium broth

1/4 teaspoon salt

Ground black pepper

1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon peanut oil

4 cups loosely packed snow

peas (about 1 pound), tips pulled off and strings removed (*see* figure 14

$1^1/_2$ teaspoons minced garlic

$1^1/_2$ teaspoons minced fresh gingerroot

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Mix chicken stock, salt, and pepper to taste in small bowl.

2. Heat 12-inch nonstick skillet over high heat until quite hot, 2 to 3 minutes. Add 1 tablespoon oil and swirl to coat bottom of pan (oil should shimmer immediately). Add snow peas and cook

for 2 minutes, tossing peas every 30 seconds.

3. Clear center of pan, add garlic and ginger, and drizzle with remaining 1 teaspoon oil. Mash garlic and ginger with back of spatula. Cook for 10 seconds and then mix with snow peas. Off heat, add chicken stock mixture (it should immediately reduce down to a glaze). Serve at once.

VARIATIONS:

Stir-Fried Snow Peas with Oyster Sauce

Follow Master Recipe, substituting

mixture of 3 tablespoons dry sherry, 2 tablespoons oyster sauce, 1 tablespoon Asian sesame oil, 1 tablespoon soy sauce, and $^1/_4$ teaspoon ground black pepper for chicken stock mixture in step 1.

Stir-Fried Snow Peas with Spicy Orange Sauce

Follow Master Recipe, substituting mixture of 3 tablespoons dry sherry, 1 tablespoon soy sauce, 1 tablespoon Asian sesame oil, 2 teaspoons red wine vinegar, $^1/_2$ teaspoon sugar, $^1/_2$ teaspoon ground black pepper, and $^1/_4$ teaspoon salt for chicken stock mixture in step 1.

Add 1 tablespoon grated orange zest and $^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoon hot red pepper flakes along with garlic and ginger.

PEPPERS

MOST COOKS ARE FAMILIAR WITH ROASTING bell peppers for salads or dips. However, peppers may be sliced and cooked as a vegetable side dish as well. Green peppers are unripe and generally quite bitter. Red, yellow, and orange peppers are all fully ripe and much sweeter. Avoid purple peppers, which turn a drab green color when cooked and cost much more than green peppers.

We tested sautéing and stir-frying first and found that both methods yield lightly

seared peppers that are still fairly crisp. They were good, but lacked the silky smoothness of roasted peppers. We tried longer cooking times, but the exterior charred by the time the pepper was fully cooked.

We decided to see what would happen if we put the cover on the skillet after searing them. As we hoped, the peppers steamed in their own juices and became especially tender. We found that the moisture from the peppers is enough to keep them from scorching in the covered pan. We also realized that we now had an opportunity to add another liquid for juicier, seasoned peppers. A little vinegar balances the intense sweetness of the peppers and works especially

well.

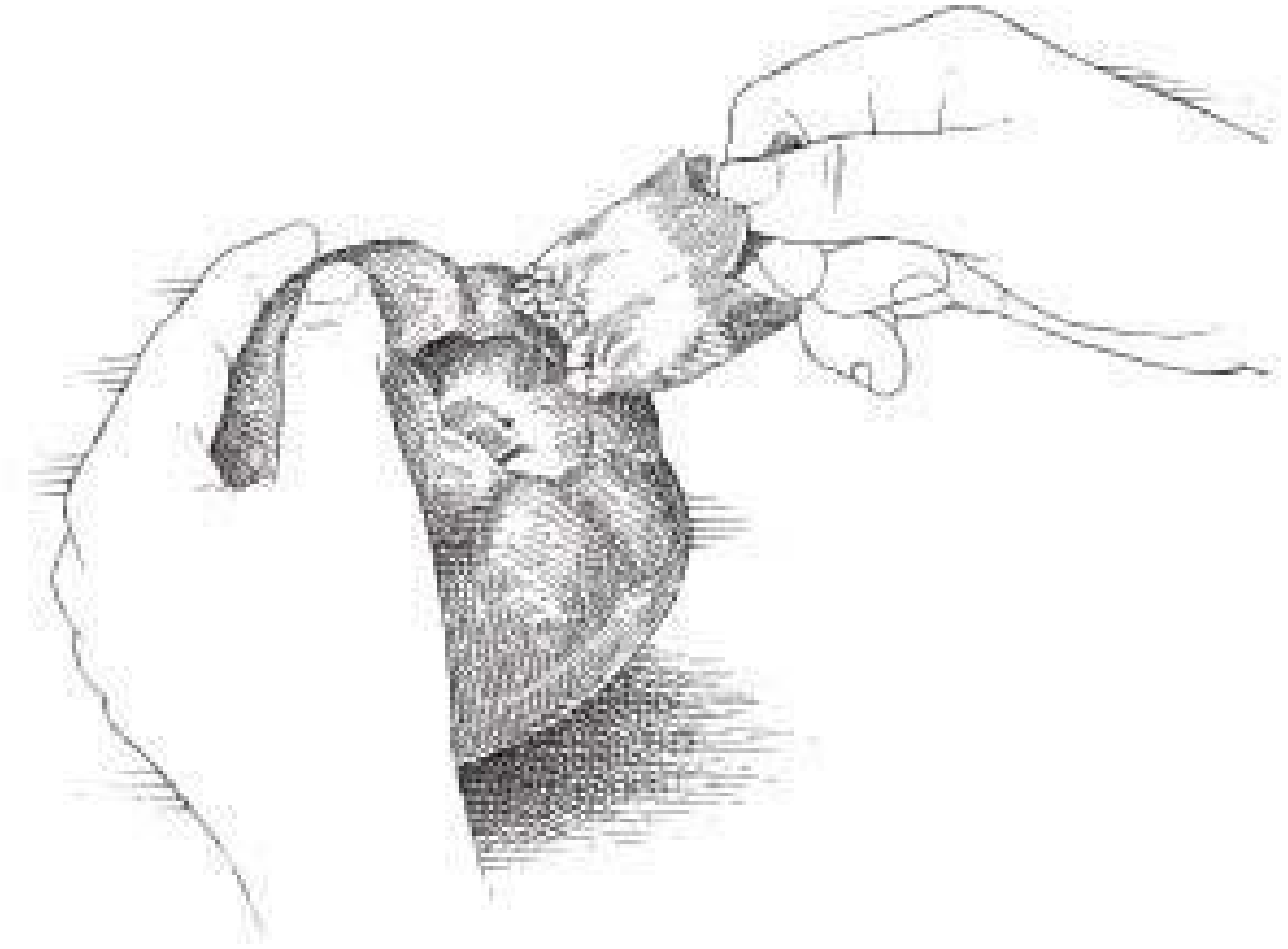

Figure 15.
To prepare peppers, cut around the stem with a small, sharp knife. Pull out the stem and the attached core, which should be filled with seeds.

Figure 16.
To easily remove the white ribs and make the pepper flatter for slicing, cut the pepper lengthwise into quarters. Slide a knife under

the white ribs to remove them as well as remaining seeds. Slice the cleaned pepper lengthwise into $^{1}/_{4}$-inch-wide strips.

Master Recipe

Sautéed Bell Peppers

serves four

NOTE: ***A mixture of yellow, orange, and red peppers delivers the sweetest and best results. You may use one green pepper, but these unripe peppers are much less sweet and should not be used in greater amounts.***

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

4 medium bell peppers (about $1\frac{3}{4}$ pounds), cored, seeded, and

cut into $^{1}/_{4}$-inch-wide strips (*see* figures 15 and 16

1 medium garlic clove, minced

1 tablespoon chopped fresh oregano, basil, or parsley leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

::INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oil in large skillet over medium-high heat. Add peppers and sauté, tossing occasionally, until peppers begin to brown on edges, about 5 minutes.

2. Add garlic and cook for 1 minute. Reduce heat to low, cover pan, and cook until peppers are tender, 4 to 5 minutes. Remove cover and stir in herb. Season

with salt and pepper to taste. Serve hot, warm, or at room temperature.

VARIATIONS:

Sautéed Bell Peppers with Red Onion and Balsamic Vinegar

Follow Master Recipe, cooking 1 small red onion, thinly sliced, with bell peppers. Just before covering pan, add 3 tablespoons balsamic vinegar. Use parsley as herb.

Sautéed Bell Peppers with Black Olives and Feta Cheese

Follow Master Recipe, adding 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar to pan just before covering. Use oregano as herb and add 8 pitted and chopped black olives at the same time. Just before serving, crumble 2 ounces feta cheese over peppers.

Sautéed Bell Peppers with Bacon and Caraway

Fry 4 bacon slices, cut crosswise into $^1/_4$-inch-wide strips, in large skillet over medium heat until crisp, about 5 minutes. Remove bacon from pan with slotted spoon and drain on paper towels. Proceed with Master Recipe, using

bacon drippings instead of olive oil and adding 1 medium chopped onion to drippings with peppers. Omit garlic. Just before covering pan, add 2 tablespoons cider vinegar and 1 teaspoon caraway seeds. Replace herb with bacon. Serve hot.

TOMATOES

TOMATOES ARE A STAPLE IN SUMMER SALADS. The mildly acidic juices from the tomatoes themselves provide a proper base for a dressing with little or no additional vinegar or other acid. To make this work, you need to extract a little of the juice from the tomatoes before you make salads. Simply cut the tomatoes into wedges, sprinkle them with salt, and wait about 15 minutes for the juices to exude.

To serve round (or beefsteak) tomatoes as a side dish, it's best to

combine them with bread crumbs and bake them. There are two choices—the tomatoes may be cored and stuffed, or they may be halved and sprinkled with the crumbs. We tested both methods and found that all the liquid material in the tomatoes must be removed to get the crumbs to brown and crisp in the oven. This is easier to do when the tomatoes are halved and sprinkled with crumbs. It's hard to remove all the seeds from a whole cored tomato. It's also tricky to get much stuffing into a whole cored tomato, while a halved tomato has plenty of moist surface area to which crumbs can adhere.

We found it best to bake the tomatoes as quickly as possible—you want the

crumbs to brown but don't want the tomatoes to soften too much. An oven temperature of 400 degrees delivered the best results in our testing, quickly crisping the crumbs and allowing the tomatoes to warm through and soften slightly but still hold their shape.

For a quicker side dish, try sautéing cherry tomatoes. The idea is to get them in and out of the pan quickly, so they don't become mushy and fall apart. We found that medium-high heat does the best job. In our testing, we found that many cherry tomatoes are slightly bitter. We liked the results when we sprinkled a little sugar over the tomatoes before they went into the pan. If your cherry

tomatoes are especially sweet, you may omit the sugar, but in most cases we find that it helps balances the acidity in the tomatoes.

Master Recipe

Tomato Salad with Olives and Capers

serves four

NOTE: ***Salting the tomato wedges creates the juices that form the base of the dressing for the salad.***

4-5 large vine-ripened tomatoes (about $1^1/_2$ pounds)

$^1/_2$ teaspoon salt

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

1 tablespoon lemon juice

3 tablespoons capers, chopped

12 large black olives, such as kalamatas, pitted and chopped

1/4 cup finely chopped red onion

2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley leaves

Ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Core and halve tomatoes through stem end, then cut each half into 4 or 5 wedges. Toss wedges and salt in large bowl; let rest until small pool of liquid accumulates, 15 to 20 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, whisk oil, lemon juice,

capers, olives, onion, parsley, and pepper to taste in small bowl. Pour mixture over tomatoes and accumulated juices and toss to coat. Set aside to blend flavors, about 5 minutes. Serve.

VARIATIONS:

Tomato and Bread Salad with Garlic-Anchovy Dressing

Follow step 1 of Master Recipe. Whisk together 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, $1^1/_2$ tablespoons red wine vinegar, 2 minced garlic cloves, 1/3 cup chopped fresh basil leaves, 3 minced anchovy fillets, and ground black pepper to taste

in small bowl. Toss dressing with tomatoes and set aside for 5 minutes. Add 4 slices of chewy country-style bread, cut $^{3}/_{4}$ inch thick, that have been toasted or grilled until lightly browned and then cut into $^{3}/_{4}$-inch cubes. Serve immediately.

Tomato and Cucumber Salad

Peel, quarter, seed, and cut 2 cucumbers into $^{1}/_{4}$-inch dice. Toss with 2 teaspoons salt in strainer set over bowl, and set aside for 1 hour; discard liquid. Follow Step 1 of Master Recipe. Whisk together 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, 2

tablespoons lemon juice, $^1/_4$ cup finely chopped red onion, $^1/_4$ cup chopped fresh mint leaves, and ground black pepper to taste. Toss tomatoes in dressing and set aside for 5 minutes. Add drained cucumbers and serve immediately.

Master Recipe

Baked Tomatoes

serves four

NOTE: ***The key to this recipe is removing the seeds and surrounding gelatinous material. Otherwise, the tomatoes will become soupy and the bread crumb topping will not brown.***

1/2 cup dried plain bread crumbs
1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
2 tablespoons chopped fresh

basil leaves

2 tablespoons chopped fresh oregano leaves

2 medium garlic cloves, minced

$^1/_4$ teaspoon hot red pepper flakes

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

4 medium ripe tomatoes (about $1^1/_4$ pounds), halved and seeded (*see* figure 17)

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Mix crumbs, cheese, basil, oregano, garlic, hot red pepper flakes, and 1 tablespoon

oil together in small bowl. Set aside.

2. Place tomato halves, cut side up, in single layer in 13 by 9-inch baking dish. Season tomatoes with salt and pepper to taste. Spoon bread crumb mixture evenly over tomato halves. Drizzle remaining 2 tablespoons oil over bread crumbs.

3. Bake until tomatoes are cooked through and bread crumbs are crisp and golden brown, 25 to 30 minutes. Remove dish from oven and let cool for 5 to 10 minutes. Serve warm.

VARIATION:

Baked Tomatoes with Olives and Balsamic Vinegar

Follow Master Recipe, adding 8 pitted and chopped black olives to bread crumb mixture. Just before serving, drizzle tomatoes with $1^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons balsamic vinegar.

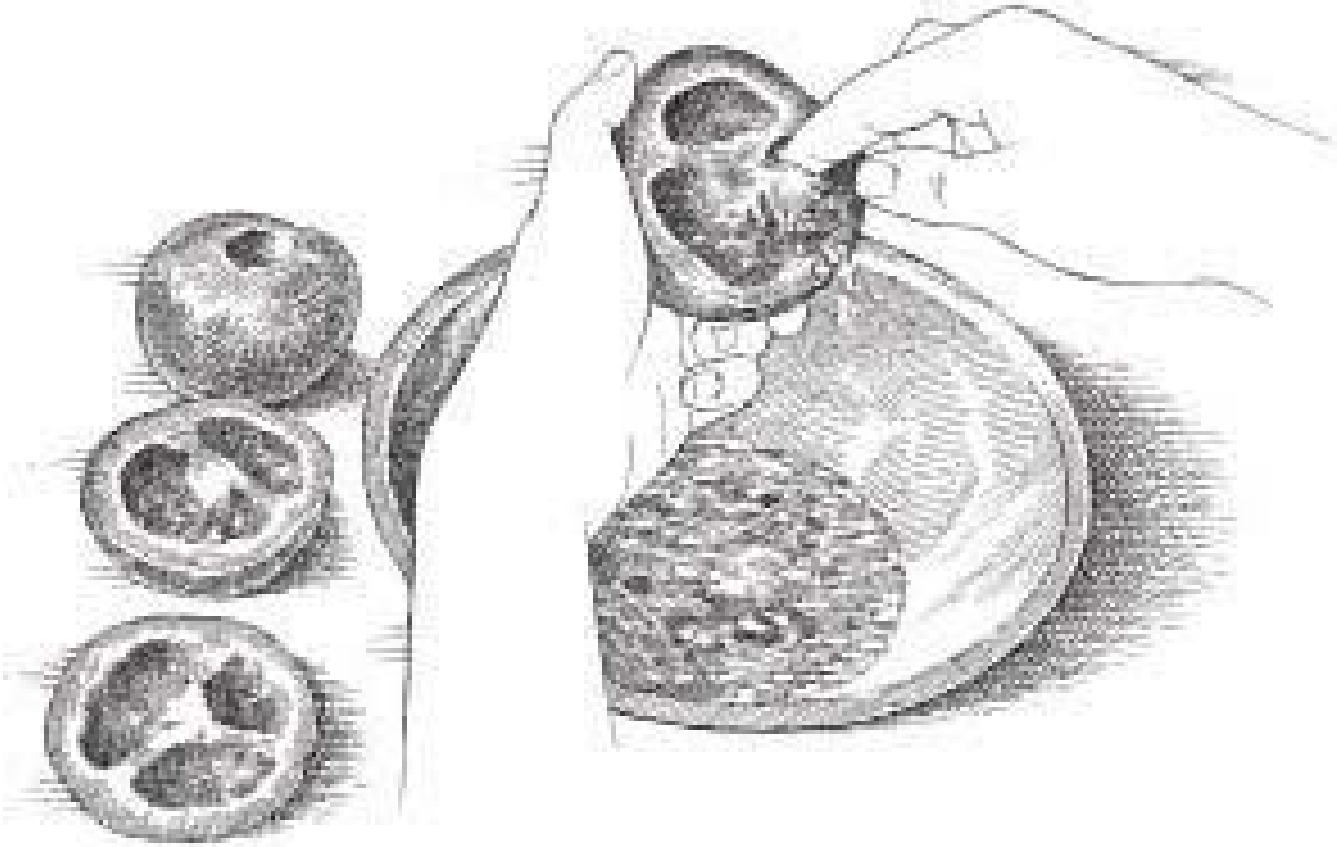

Figure 17.
To prepare round tomatoes for baking, remove the core and then cut the tomatoes in half around the equator. Use your finger to pull out the seeds and surrounding gelatinous material from each tomato half.

Master Recipe

Sautéed Cherry Tomatoes

serves four

NOTE: ***To speed up the caramelization process and balance the acidity of the tomatoes, we tossed the cherry tomatoes with a little sugar just before cooking. If your cherry tomatoes are very sweet, you may want to reduce or omit the sugar.***

1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil

4 cups (2 pints) red cherry tomatoes, halved unless very

small

2 teaspoons sugar

1 medium garlic clove, minced

2 tablespoons thinly sliced fresh basil leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

::INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oil in large skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering.

2. Mix tomatoes and sugar in medium bowl and add to hot oil. (Do not mix tomatoes ahead of time or you will draw off some juices.) Cook 1 minute, tossing frequently. Add garlic and mix, cooking another 30 seconds. Remove pan from

heat, add basil, and season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Sautéed Cherry Tomatoes with Curry and Mint

Follow Master Recipe, adding $1^1/_2$ teaspoons curry powder with garlic. Substitute thinly sliced mint leaves for basil. If you like, mix in 2 tablespoons plain yogurt just before serving.

Sautéed Cherry Tomatoes with Brown Butter and Herbs

Follow Master Recipe, replacing oil

with equal amount of unsalted butter. When butter starts to brown and foam subsides, add tomatoes and sugar and cook as directed. Substitute equal amount of snipped chives or minced fresh dill or tarragon for basil.

ZUCCHINI & SUMMER SQUASH

THE BIGGEST PROBLEM THAT CONFRONTS the cook when preparing zucchini and yellow summer squash is their wateriness. Both are about 95 percent water and will become soupy if just thrown into a hot pan. If they cook in their own juices, they won't brown. Since both are fairly bland, they really benefit from some browning. Clearly, some of the water must be removed before sautéing.

We tested salting to draw off some

water and found that sliced and salted zucchini will shed about 20 percent of its weight after sitting for 30 minutes. (Summer squash performed the same in all of our tests.) One pound of sliced zucchini threw off almost three tablespoons of liquid, further confirmation that salting works. We tested longer periods and found that little moisture is extracted after 30 minutes.

Given that you don't always have 30 minutes, we wanted to develop quicker methods for cooking zucchini. We tried shredding the zucchini on the large holes of a box grater and then squeezing out excess water by hand. We were able to reduce the weight of shredded zucchini by 25 percent by wrapping it in paper

towels and squeezing until dry. Shredded and squeezed zucchini cooked up nicely, although it did not brown as well as sliced and salted zucchini.

After our success with shredding and squeezing, we wondered if a similar technique might work with sliced zucchini. Since sliced zucchini has so much less surface area than shredded zucchini, we found our manual method of extracting water to be ineffective; we recommend salting in this case.

Another quick-prep option is the grill. The intense heat quickly expels excess moisture in zucchini, and that moisture harmlessly drops down on the coals rather than sitting in the pan. We found

that so much evaporation occurs during grilling that salting or shredding is not necessary.

Master Recipe

Shredded Zucchini or Summer Squash Sauté

serves four

NOTE: ***Try this recipe when you're pressed for time and want to cook indoors.***

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

5 medium zucchini or summer squash (about 2 pounds), trimmed, shredded, and squeezed dry (*see* figures 18

and 19)

3 medium garlic cloves, minced

2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley, basil, mint, tarragon, or chives

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

Heat oil in large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add zucchini or squash and garlic and cook, stirring occasionally, until tender, about 7 minutes. Stir in herb and salt and pepper to taste. Serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Shredded Zucchini or

Summer Squash and Carrot Sauté

Follow Master Recipe, substituting 2 medium peeled and shredded carrots for 1 zucchini or squash.

Creamed Zucchini or Summer Squash

Follow Master Recipe, substituting an equal amount of butter for oil. Omit garlic and add 1/3 cup heavy cream with herb; simmer briefly until cream is absorbed.

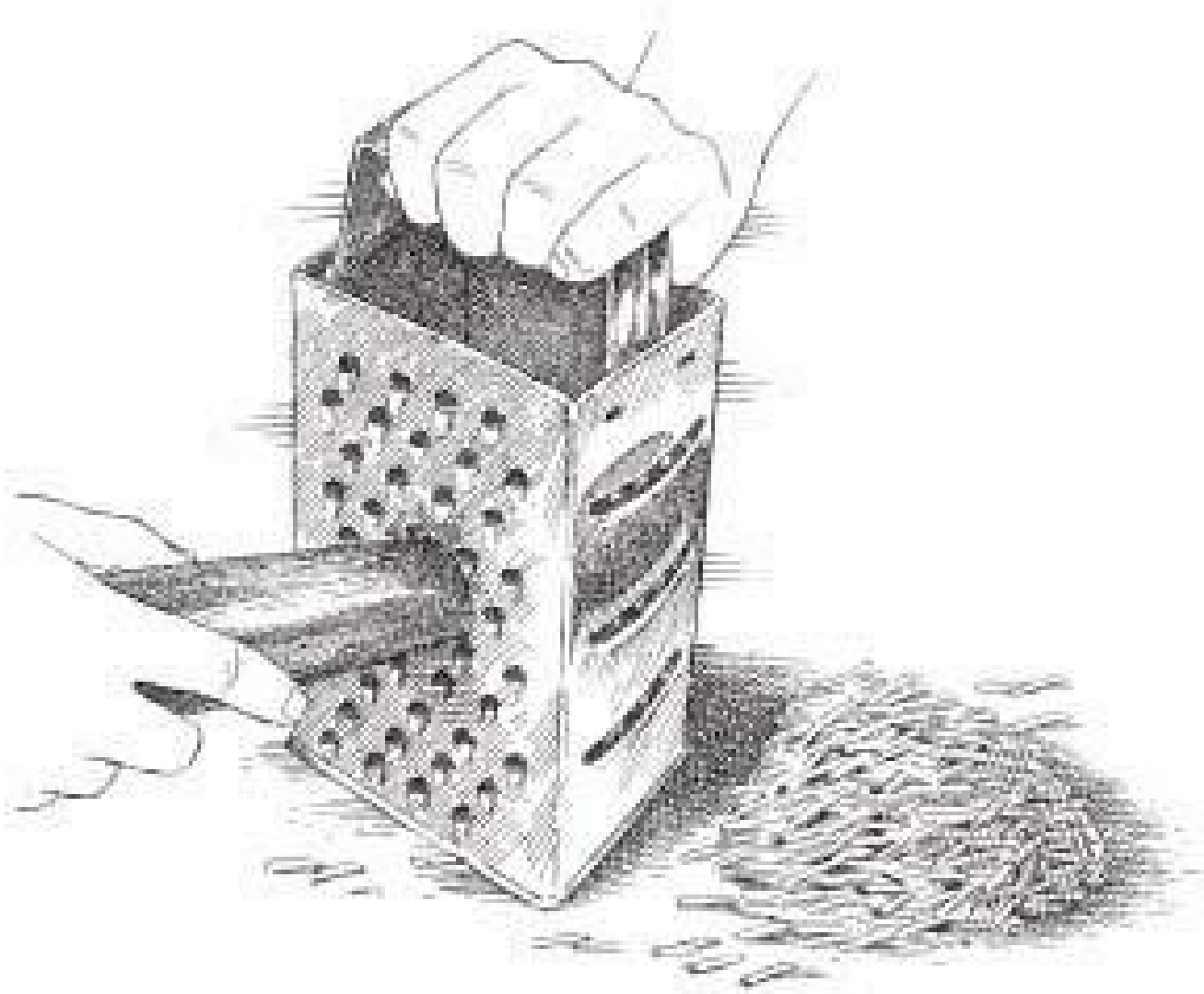

Figure 18.
For quick indoor cooking, shred trimmed zucchini or squash on the large holes of a box grater or in a food processor fitted with the shredding disk.

Figure 19.
Wrap the shredded zucchini or squash in paper towels and squeeze out excess liquid.

Proceed immediately with sautéing.

Master Recipe

Grilled Zucchini or Summer Squash

serves four

NOTE: ***Excess water evaporates over hot coals so no salting of zucchini or squash is necessary before cooking.***

4 medium zucchini or summer squash (about $1^1/_2$ pounds), trimmed and sliced lengthwise into $^1/_2$-inch-thick strips

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Light grill. Lay zucchini or squash on large baking sheet and brush both sides with oil. Sprinkle generously with salt and pepper.

2. Place zucchini or squash on grill. Cook, turning once, until marked with dark strips, 8 to 10 minutes. Remove from grill and serve hot, warm, or at room temperature.

VARIATIONS:

Grilled Zucchini or Summer Squash with Tomatoes and

Basil

Whisk 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil with 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar and salt and pepper to taste in large serving bowl. Add 2 tablespoons minced fresh basil leaves and 1 large tomato, cored and cut into thin wedges, and toss. Follow Master Recipe, cutting grilled zucchini or squash into 1-inch pieces when cooled slightly. Toss zucchini or squash with tomatoes and serve warm or at room temperature.

Grilled Zucchini or Summer Squash with Capers and Oregano

Whisk 1 tablespoon chopped capers, 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar, and 1 medium minced garlic clove in small bowl. Whisk in 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil and season with salt and pepper to taste. Follow Master Recipe, cutting grilled zucchini or squash into 1-inch pieces when cooled slightly. Toss zucchini or squash with dressing and 1 tablespoon chopped fresh oregano in large bowl. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Master Recipe

Sautéed Zucchini or Summer Squash

serves four

NOTE: ***If you like browned zucchini or squash, you must salt it before cooking. Salting drives off excess water and helps the zucchini or squash sauté rather than stew in its own juices. Coarse kosher salt does the best job of driving off liquid and can be wiped away without rinsing. Do not add more salt when cooking or the dish will be too salty.***

4 medium zucchini or summer squash (about $1^1/_2$ pounds), trimmed and sliced crosswise into $^1/_4$-inch rounds

1 tablespoon kosher salt

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

1 small onion or 2 large shallots, minced

1 teaspoon grated lemon zest

1 tablespoon lemon juice

1-2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley, basil, mint, tarragon, or chives

Ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place zucchini or squash slices in colander and sprinkle with salt. Set colander over bowl until about 1/3 cup water drains from zucchini or squash, about 30 minutes. Remove vegetable from colander and pat dry with clean kitchen towel or several paper towels, wiping off any remaining crystals of salt.

2. Heat oil in large skillet over medium heat. Add onion or shallots and sauté until almost softened, about 2 minutes. Increase heat to medium-high and add zucchini or squash and lemon zest. Sauté until zucchini or squash is golden brown, about 10 minutes. Stir in lemon juice and

herb and season with pepper to taste. Serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Sautéed Zucchini or Summer Squash with Walnuts and Herbs

Follow Master Recipe, omitting lemon zest and juice and adding 2 tablespoons toasted chopped walnuts with herb.

Sautéed Zucchini or Summer Squash with Olives and Lemon

Follow Master Recipe, adding $^{1}/_{4}$ cup

pitted and chopped black olives along with lemon juice and using 2 teaspoons minced fresh thyme or oregano as herb.

Sautéed Zucchini or Summer Squash with Pancetta and Parsley

Follow Master Recipe, omitting oil. After salting zucchini or squash, cook 2 ounces diced pancetta or bacon in skillet. When fat renders, add onion and continue with recipe. Omit lemon zest and juice and use parsley as herb.

HOW TO COOK POTATOES

Potato Basics

Baked Potatoes

Roasted Potatoes

Mashed Potatoes

Fried Potatoes

Potato Salad

Boiled Potatoes

Sautéed Potatoes

Hash Browns

Latkes

Potato Gratin

Sweet Potatoes

POTATO BASICS

THE COOK HAS TWO CHALLENGES WHEN preparing any recipe with potatoes. The first is to determine the best cooking method. How should potatoes be baked? What's the best way to make mashed potatoes? A second question is nearly as important. What kind of potato works best in a specific recipe? While other vegetables in most markets vary by size and freshness, in most cases, shoppers will find only one variety of that vegetable. Broccoli is broccoli, carrots are carrots. Even when there are several

varieties (as with heirloom tomatoes), most can be used interchangeably. Yes, one tomato might look a bit different or be a bit sweeter than another, but they are closely related.

With potatoes, this is not the case. Make french fries with Red Bliss potatoes and the fries will be heavy and greasy. Use russet potatoes in salad and they will fall apart into potato mush.

The fact that dozens of potato varieties are grown in this country makes the question of which potato is best for a specific recipe even more confusing. At any time you may see as many as five or six kinds of potatoes in your supermarket. Go to a farmers' market and you may see a dozen varieties. Some

potatoes are sold by varietal name (such as Red Bliss or Yukon Gold), but others are sold by generic name (baking, all-purpose, etc.)

STARCH CONTENT

To make sense of this confusion, it is helpful to group potatoes into three major categories based on their ratio of solids (mostly starch) to water. The categories are high-starch/ low-moisture potatoes, medium-starch potatoes, and low-starch/high-moisture potatoes.

Each of the recipes in this book has been tested with all three major types of potatoes. In each recipe, we have listed the commonly available variety that

works best.

You can safely make substitutions within each category (for example, other varieties of red potato can be used in place of Red Bliss potatoes in salad). Substitutions between categories are more problematic. In a few recipes, such as potato gratin, different potatoes give different results, but all are acceptable. In most cases, however, one type of potato is clearly preferred.

HIGH-STARCH/LOW-MOISTURE POTATOES

Often referred to as baking potatoes, high-starch/low-moisture potatoes can also be used for frying and mashing. The flesh in these potatoes turns dry and

fluffy when cooked. Russet potatoes (also called Idaho potatoes) are the most common baking potatoes. Other lesser-known varieties include the All Blue and White Creamer. In all of our recipes, we refer to baking potatoes as russets.

MEDIUM-STARCH POTATOES

These potatoes are considered all-purpose and include Yukon Gold, Yellow Finn, Purple Viking, Caribe, Irish Cobbler, Butterfinger, Ozette, and Purple Peruvian. All-purpose potatoes can be mashed or baked but are generally not as fluffy as the high-starch potatoes. Likewise, they can be boiled for salad, but they won't hold their shape as well as red potatoes. We generally

recommend medium-starch potatoes in recipes for dishes such as home fries, where a combination of these traits is desirable.

LOW-STARCH/HIGH-MOISTURE POTATOES

This category covers all red-skinned potatoes, including Red Bliss, Red Pontiac, All Red, Dark Red Norland, Ruby Crescent, and Red Creamer. It also includes most new potatoes as well as the Rose Finn Apple, the Russian Banana, and the White Rose potato. All of these potatoes, often called waxy potatoes, hold their shape better than other potatoes when sliced or diced and cooked. They are best roasted, sautéed,

or boiled and used in salad.

STORAGE POTATOES VERSUS NEW POTATOES

In addition to categorizing potatoes by starch content, it is useful to divide them into two groups based on how they have been handled after harvesting.

STORAGE POTATOES

Most potatoes are cured after harvesting to toughen their skins and protect their flesh. They are then held in cold storage, often for months. These potatoes are called storage potatoes. Almost all of the potatoes in supermarkets are storage potatoes.

NEW POTATOES

Occasionally potatoes are harvested before they have developed their full complement of starch. New potatoes are always waxy (low in starch, high in moisture), even if they are actually a high-starch variety. Although all new potatoes are small, not all small potatoes are new. You can pick out a new potato by examining the skin. If the skin feels thin and you can rub it off with your fingers, you are holding a new potato. New potatoes have a lot of moisture and their flesh is almost juicy when cut.

SWEET POTATOES

Finally, there is the sweet potato. This

tuber is in fact not a potato at all. It is part of the morning glory family. The kind of sweet potato found in most markets is orange-fleshed (they are labeled yams but are not related to the tropical plant of that name), but yellow-fleshed varieties are available in some markets. For more information on buying and cooking sweet potatoes, see.

KEEPING POTATOES AT HOME

Since potatoes seem almost indestructible compared with other vegetables, little thought is generally given to their storage. But because various problems can result from

inadequate storage conditions, we decided to find out how much difference storage really makes. We stored all-purpose potatoes in five environments: in a cool (50–60 degrees Fahrenheit), dark place; in the refrigerator; in a basket near a sunlit window; in a warm (70–80 degrees), dark place; and in a drawer with some onions at room temperature. We checked all the potatoes after four weeks.

As expected, the potatoes stored in the cool, dark place were firm, had not sprouted, and were crisp and moist when cut. There were no negative marks on the potatoes stored in the refrigerator, either. Although some experts say that the sugar level dramatically increases in

some potato varieties under these conditions, we could not see or taste any difference between these potatoes and the ones stored in the cool, dark but unrefrigerated environment.

Our last three storage tests produced unfavorable results. The potatoes stored in sunlight, in warm storage, and with onions at room temperature developed a greenish tinge. When potatoes are stressed by improper storage, the level of naturally occurring toxins increases, causing the greenish tinge known as *solanine*. Because solanine is not destroyed during cooking, any part of the potato with this greenish coloring should be completely cut away before cooking.

The skin of the potatoes stored in sunlight became gray and mottled, while the potatoes stored in a warm place and those stored with onions sprouted and became soft and wrinkled. Sprouts also contain increased levels of solanine and should be cut away before cooking.

BAKED POTATOES

To confirm the general wisdom on what constitutes the best baking potato, we baked an all-purpose potato, Yukon Gold, and the standard baking potato, russet, and found that russets do produce the fluffiest and—to our mind—the best baked potato. We baked russets at temperatures ranging from 350 to 500 degrees and discovered that traditional slow baking is best, mainly because of the effect it has on the skin. The skin of a potato baked at 350 degrees for an hour and 15 minutes simply has no peer. Just

under the skin, a well-baked potato will develop a substantial brown layer. This is because the dark skin absorbs heat during cooking, and the starch just inside the skin is broken down into sugar and starts to brown. If you love baked potato skin, this is definitely the best method.

If slow baking is essential to good skin, the consistency of the flesh also requires some attention. Letting the potato sit awhile after baking without opening it up will steam the potato and cause the flesh to become more dense. For fluffy potatoes, create a wide opening to let steam escape as soon as the potatoes come out of the oven.

Twice-baked potatoes are essentially baked potatoes from which the flesh has

been removed, mashed with dairy ingredients and seasonings, mounded back in the shells, and baked again. This dish offers a good range of both texture and flavor in a single morsel. Done well, the skin is chewy and substantial without being tough, with just a hint of crispness to play off the smooth, creamy filling. In terms of flavor, cheese and other dairy ingredients make the filling rich and tangy, a contrast with the potato's mild, slightly sweet shell.

Because twice-baked potatoes are put in the oven twice, we found it best to limit the initial baking to an hour, rather than the usual 75 minutes. Oiling the skins before baking and using a higher

oven temperature promote crispness—not something you necessarily want in plain baked potatoes but a trait we came to admire in creamy twice-baked potatoes. Another difference in the treatment of baked and twice-baked potatoes occurs when they come out of the oven. Unlike baked potatoes, which should be cut open immediately to release steam, twice-baked potatoes should be allowed to sit and cool down a bit, which makes them easier to handle. Because the flesh is mixed with wet ingredients, any compromise to the texture from unreleased moisture is negligible.

Once the potato halves had been emptied of their flesh, they got a little

flabby sitting on the counter waiting to be stuffed. Because the oven was still on and waiting for the return of the stuffed halves, we decided to put the skins back in while we prepared the filling. That worked beautifully, giving the shells an extra dimension of crispness.

Pleased with our chewy, slightly crunchy skins, we now had to develop a smooth, lush, flavorful filling. Dozens of further tests helped us refine our filling to a rich, but not killer, combination of sharp cheddar, sour cream, buttermilk, and butter. We learned to season the filling aggressively with salt and pepper; for herbs, the slightly sharp flavor of scallions or chives was best.

With the filling mixed and mounded back into the shells, our last tests centered on the final baking. We wanted to do more than just heat the filling through; we intended to form an attractive brown crust on it as well. We found that using the broiler was the was easiest and most effective method. After 10 or 15 minutes, the potatoes emerged browned, crusted, and ready for the table.

Master Recipe

Baked Potatoes

serves 4

NOTE: *We found that no benefit or harm was done to the potatoes by poking them with the tines of a fork before putting them in the oven. Do use a fork to open the skin as soon as the potatoes come out of the oven (see figures 1 and 2). Season with salt to taste and a pat of butter. If you like, embellish with a dollop of sour cream, crumbled bacon, grated or shredded*

cheese, or minced chives or scallions.

4 medium russet potatoes (7 to 8 ounces each), scrubbed

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Place potatoes on middle rack and bake until skewer glides easily through flesh, about 75 minutes.

2. Remove potatoes from oven and pierce with a fork to create a dotted X (see figure 1). Press in at ends of potato to push flesh up and out (see figure 2). Season as desired and serve immediately.

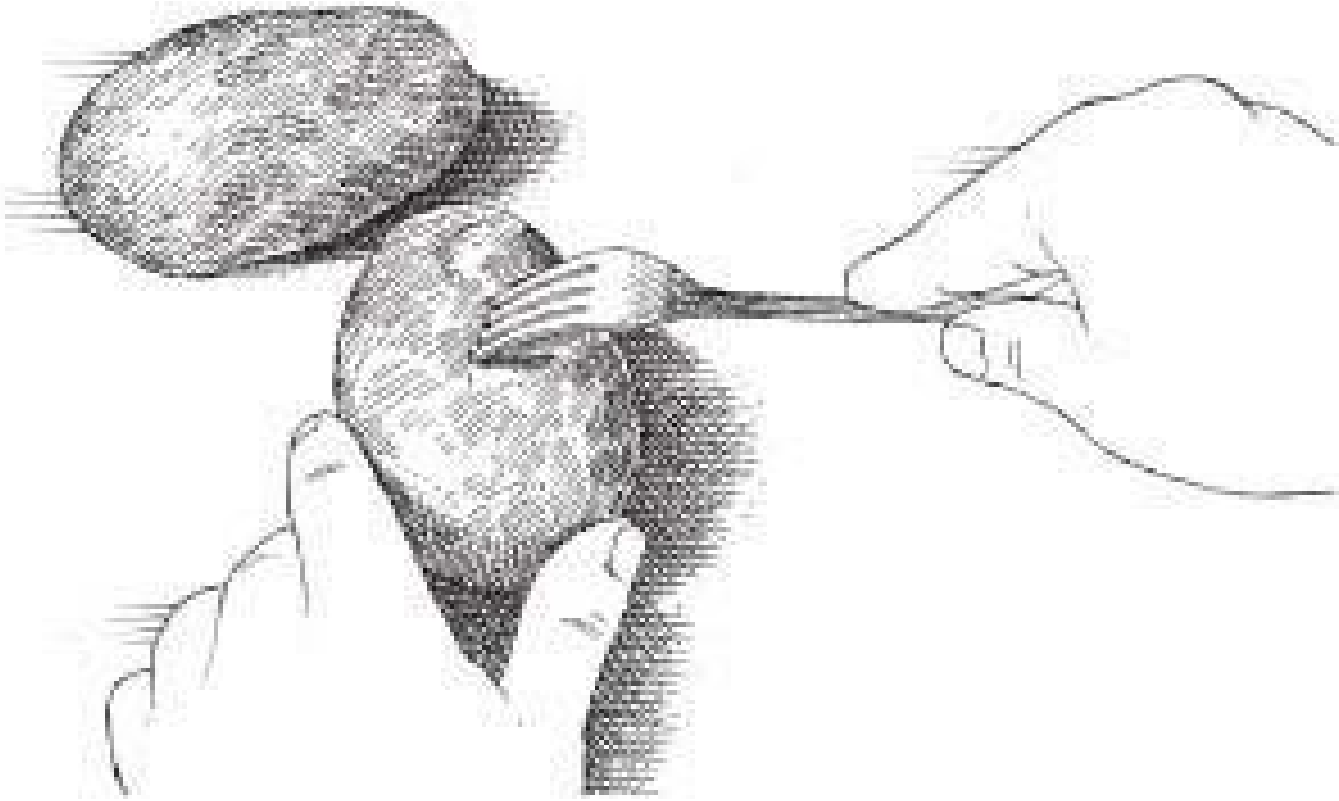

Figure 1.

Use the tines of a fork to make a dotted X on top of each baked potato.

Figure 2.

Press in at the ends of the potato to push the flesh up and out. This method maximizes the amount of steam released and creates the fluffiest texture. In addition, we

find that butter tends to slide right out of potatoes that are slit lengthwise. With the flesh pushed up this way, the potato does a better job of holding onto the butter. The butter thus ends up in the potato and not on your plate.

Quicker Baked Potatoes

serves 4

NOTE: *This half-and-half method produces far superior results than straight microwaving. By the time you have scrubbed the potatoes and microwaved them, the oven will be preheated. To cook fewer potatoes by this method, plan on 2 minutes total cooking time in the microwave for each potato. Don't try to microwave more than four potatoes at one time.*

4 medium russet potatoes (7 to 8 ounces each), scrubbed

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Place 4 scrubbed potatoes in microwave and cook at high power for 4 minutes. Turn potatoes over and cook at high power for another 4 minutes.

2. Transfer potatoes to hot oven and cook until skewer glides easily through flesh, about 20 minutes. Open as directed in figures 1 and 2, and serve immediately.

Master Recipe

Twice-Baked Potatoes

serves 6 to 8

NOTE: *To vary the flavor a bit, try substituting other types of cheese, such as Gruyère, fontina, or feta, for the cheddar. Yukon Gold potatoes, though slightly more moist than our ideal, gave our twice-baked potatoes a buttery flavor and mouthfeel that everyone liked, so we recommend them as a substitution for the russets.*

4 medium russet potatoes (7 to

8 ounces each), scrubbed, dried, and rubbed lightly with vegetable oil

4 ounces sharp cheddar cheese, shredded (about 1 cup)

1/2 cup sour cream

1/2 cup buttermilk

2 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

3 medium scallions, sliced thin

1/2 teaspoon salt

Ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to upper-middle position and heat oven to 400 degrees. Bake potatoes on foil-lined baking sheet

until skin is crisp and deep brown and skewer easily pierces flesh, about 1 hour. Setting baking sheet aside, transfer potatoes to wire rack and let sit until cool enough to handle, about 10 minutes.

2. Using an oven mitt or folded kitchen towel to handle hot potatoes, cut each potato in half so that long, blunt side rests on work surface (see figure 3). Using a small dinner spoon, scoop flesh from each half into medium bowl, leaving a $^{1}/_{8}$-inch to $^{1}/_{4}$-inch thickness of flesh in each shell. Arrange shells on lined sheet and return to oven until dry and slightly crisped, about 10 minutes. Meanwhile, mash potato flesh with fork

until smooth. Stir in remaining ingredients, including pepper to taste, until well combined.

3. Remove shells from oven and increase oven setting to broil. Holding shells steady on pan with oven mitt or towel-protected hand, spoon mixture into crisped shells, mounding slightly at the center, and return to oven. Broil until spotty brown and crisp on top, 10 to 15 minutes. Allow to cool for 10 minutes. Serve warm.

VARIATIONS:

Twice-Baked Potatoes with

Pepperjack Cheese and Bacon

Fry 8 strips (about 8 ounces) bacon, cut crosswise into $^1/_4$-inch pieces, in medium skillet over medium heat until crisp, 5 to 7 minutes. Remove bacon to drain on plate lined with paper towel; set aside. Follow recipe for Twice-Baked Potatoes, substituting pepperjack cheese for cheddar and stirring reserved bacon into filling mixture.

Twice-Baked Potatoes with Chipotle Pepper and Onion

Heat 2 tablespoons butter in medium skillet over medium heat; sauté 1

medium onion, chopped fine, until soft, 3 to 4 minutes, and set aside. Follow recipe for Twice-Baked Potatoes, omitting butter and adding 1 to $1^1/_2$ tablespoons minced canned chipotle peppers in adobo sauce, reserved sautéed onion, and 2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro leaves to filling mixture.

Twice-Baked Potatoes with Smoked Salmon and Chives

This variation makes a fine brunch dish.

Follow recipe for Twice-Baked Potatoes, omitting cheese and scallions and stirring 4 ounces smoked salmon, cut into $^1/_2$-inch pieces, and 3 tablespoons

minced fresh chives into filling mixture. Sprinkle finished potatoes with additional chopped chives as garnish just before serving.

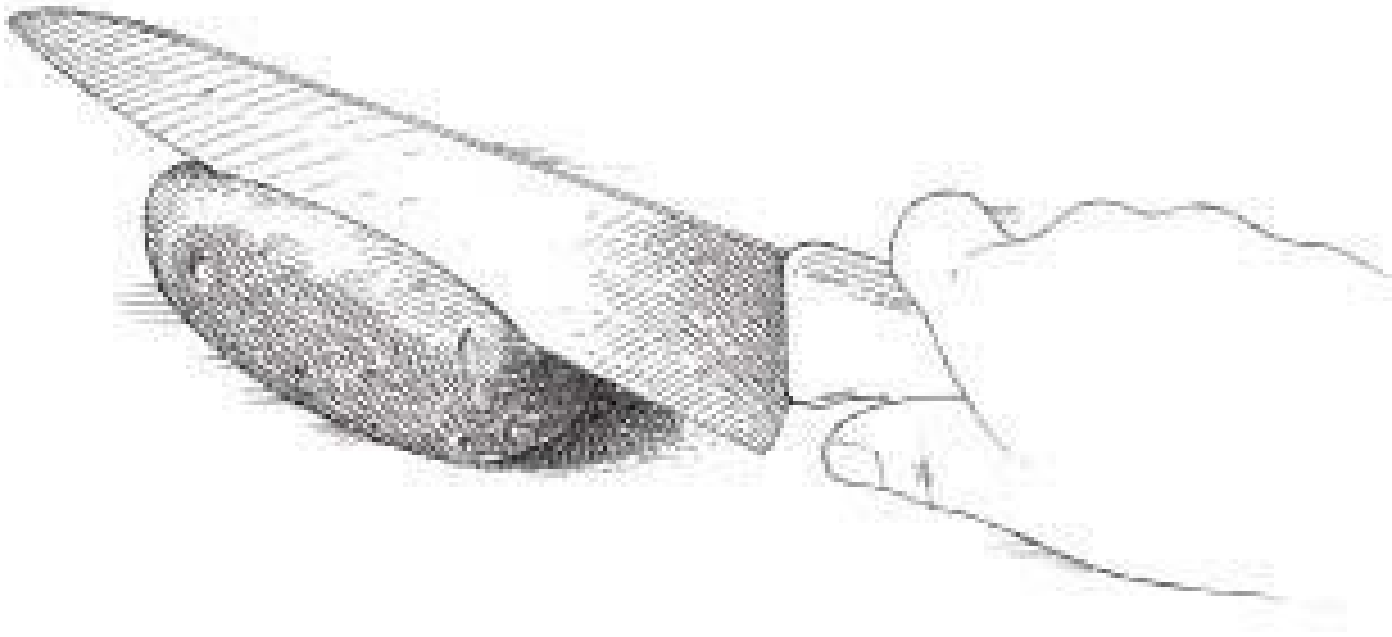

Figure 3.

Most russet potatoes have two relatively flat, blunt sides and two curved sides. Halve the baked potatoes lengthwise so the blunt sides are down once the shells are stuffed, making them much more stable on the pan during the final baking.

ROASTED POTATOES

THE PERFECT ROASTED POTATO IS CRISP and deep golden brown on the outside, with moist, velvety, dense interior flesh. The potato's slightly bitter skin is intact, providing a contrast with the sweet, caramelized flavor that the flesh develops during the roasting process. It is rich but never greasy, and it is often accompanied by the heady taste of garlic and herbs.

To start, we roasted several kinds of potatoes. We liked high-starch/low-moisture potatoes (we used russets) the

least. They did not brown well, their dry, fluffy texture was more like baked than roasted potatoes, and their flavor reminded us of raw potatoes. Medium-starch all-purpose potatoes (we used Yukon Golds) produced a beautiful golden crust, but the interior flesh was still rather dry. The best roasted potatoes came from the low-starch/high-moisture category (we used Red Bliss). These potatoes emerged from the oven with a light, delicate crust and a moist, dense interior that had a more complex, nutty flavor than the others, with hints of bitterness and tang.

After choosing the Red Bliss potatoes, we began to test oven temperatures. At 425 degrees, the result was an even-

colored, golden-brown potato with a thin, crisp crust and an interior that was soft and dense, although still slightly dry.

While researching, we came across some recipes that called for parboiling the potatoes before roasting them. Hoping that this approach would produce a texturally superior potato that retained more of its moisture after cooking, we tried boiling the potatoes for seven minutes prior to roasting. This produced a potato closer to our ideal.

We then tried covering the potatoes for a portion of their roasting time. We were especially drawn to this technique because it allowed the potatoes to steam in their own moisture with little extra

effort required on the part of the cook. The results were perfect. The crisp, deep golden-brown crust was perfectly balanced by a creamy, moist interior. These potatoes had a sweet and nutty caramelized flavor, with just a hint of tang from the skin. A very simple method had produced the very best potatoes.

The next step in the process was to figure out how to add garlic flavor, which makes a good variation on standard roasted potatoes. If we added minced garlic during the last five minutes of cooking, it burned almost instantly; coating the potatoes with garlic-infused oil failed to produce the strong garlic flavor we were after; and roasting whole, unpeeled garlic cloves

alongside the potatoes and squeezing the pulp out afterward to add to the potatoes was tedious. The best method turned out to be both simple and flavorful: mash raw garlic into a paste, place it in a large stainless steel bowl, put the hot roast potatoes into the bowl, and toss. This method yields potatoes with a strong garlic flavor yet without the raw spiciness of uncooked garlic.

Master Recipe

Roasted Potatoes

serves 4

NOTE: *To roast more than 2 pounds of potatoes at once, use a second pan rather than crowding the first. If your potatoes are as small as new potatoes, cut them in halves instead of wedges and turn them cut-side up during the final 10 minutes of roasting.*

2 pounds Red Bliss or other low-starch potatoes, scrubbed, dried, halved, and cut into $^{3}/_{4}$-

inch wedges

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 425 degrees. Toss potatoes and oil in medium bowl to coat; season generously with salt and pepper to taste and toss again to blend.

2. Place potatoes flesh-side down in a single layer on shallow roasting pan; cover tightly with aluminum foil and cook for 20 minutes. Remove foil; roast

until side of potato touching pan is crusty golden brown, about 15 minutes more.

3. Remove pan from oven and carefully turn potatoes over using metal spatula (see figure 4). Return pan to oven and roast until side of potato now touching pan is crusty golden brown and skins have raisinlike wrinkles, 5 to 10 minutes more. Remove from oven, transfer potatoes to serving dish (again, using metal spatula and extra care not to rip crusts), and serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Roasted Potatoes with

Garlic and Rosemary

While potatoes are roasting, mince 2 medium garlic cloves; sprinkle with $^{1}/_{8}$ teaspoon salt and mash with flat side of chef's knife blade until paste forms. Transfer garlic paste to large bowl; set aside. In last 3 minutes of roasting time, sprinkle 2 tablespoons chopped fresh rosemary evenly over potatoes. Immediately transfer potatoes to bowl with garlic, toss, and serve.

Roasted Potatoes with Garlic, Feta, Olives, and Oregano

While potatoes are roasting, mince 2

medium garlic cloves; sprinkle with $^1/_8$ teaspoon salt and mash with flat side of chef's knife blade until paste forms. Transfer garlic paste to large bowl; add $^1/_2$ cup crumbled feta cheese, 12 pitted and chopped kalamata olives, and 1 tablespoon lemon juice; set aside. In last 3 minutes of roasting time, sprinkle 2 tablespoons chopped fresh oregano evenly over potatoes. Immediately transfer potatoes to bowl with garlic mixture, toss, and serve.

Roasted Potatoes with Spicy Caramelized Onions

While potatoes are roasting, heat medium skillet over medium-high heat.

Add 2 tablespoons olive oil and 1 medium onion, halved and sliced thin, and salt and ground black pepper to taste. Reduce heat to medium and cook, stirring occasionally, until onions are caramelized and deep golden brown, about 15 minutes. Stir in $^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoon cayenne pepper and 1 teaspoon ground cumin; cook until fragrant, about 1 minute longer. Transfer to large bowl; add $1^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoons lime juice, 2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley, and roasted potatoes. Toss and serve.

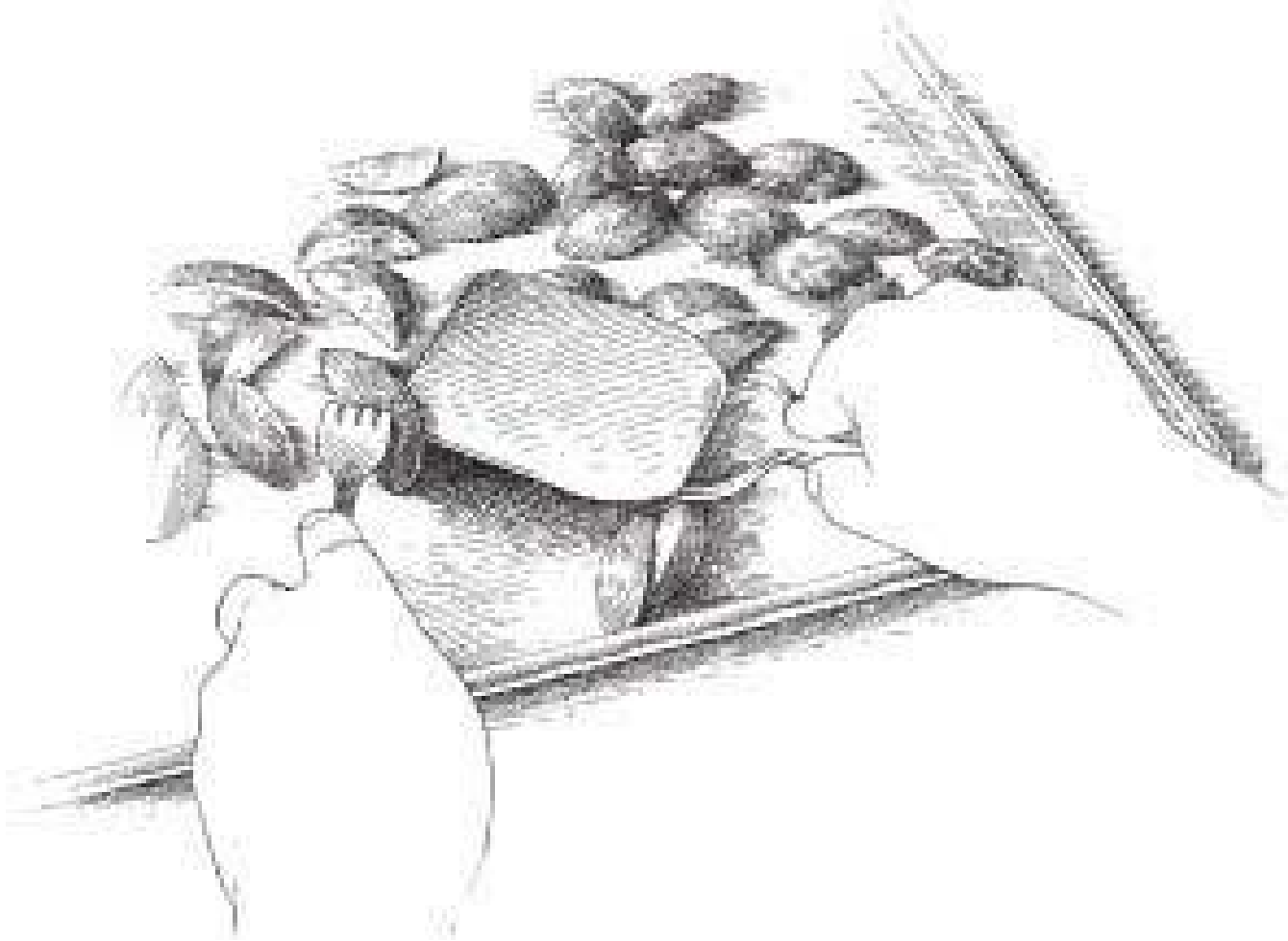

Figure 4.

Press metal spatula against roasting pan as you slide it under the potatoes to protect the crisp crust. Flip the potatoes so that the other cut sides come into contact with the hot pan.

MASHED POTATOES

POTATOES ARE COMPOSED MOSTLY OF STARCH and water. The starch is in the form of granules, which in turn are contained in starch cells. The higher the starch content of the potato, the fuller the cells. In high-starch potatoes, the cells are completely full—they look like plump little beach balls. In medium-and low-starch potatoes, the cells are more like underinflated beach balls. The space between these less-than-full cells is taken up mostly by water.

In our tests, we found that the full

starch cells of high-starch potatoes are most likely to maintain their integrity and stay separate when mashed, giving the potatoes a delightfully fluffy texture. In addition, the low water content of these potatoes allows them to absorb milk, cream, and/or butter without becoming wet or gummy. Starch cells in lower-starch potatoes, on the other hand, tend to clump when cooked and break more easily, allowing the starch to dissolve into whatever liquid is present. The broken cells and dissolved starch make for gummy mashed potatoes.

Conventional recipes call for boiling large chunks of peeled potatoes. Knowing that the skin can keep potatoes from becoming water-logged when

boiled, we wondered what would happen if we peeled the potatoes after boiling.

When we boiled whole russet potatoes with their skins on, then peeled and mashed them, the results were fantastic. The mashed potatoes had a stronger potato flavor and the texture was smoother. By comparison, potatoes cooked the conventional way (peeled and cut into chunks) were watery tasting and a bit grainy.

Potatoes boiled with their skins on were also much drier after ricing or mashing. As a result, they could absorb much more dairy and butter than conventionally cooked potatoes. The

result is the richest, most delicious mashed potatoes ever. While it is a bit of a pain to peel hot boiled potatoes, we think the results justify this minor inconvenience.

We prefer to force cooked potatoes through a food mill, which turns the potatoes into fine, thin shreds. With the potatoes already mashed, you can blend in milk and butter with a rubber spatula, which is gentle on those starch cells and therefore helps ensure consistently fluffy mashed potatoes. While a ricer works just as well as a food mill, it is less convenient; the container that holds the potatoes is fairly small, so you need to cut the hot potatoes in half.

The more traditional mashers are

usually of two types: a disk with large holes in it or a curvy wire loop. We found the disk to be more efficient for reducing both mashing time and the number of lumps in the finished product. (Potatoes mashed in this way, however, will never be silky, as are those put through a food mill or ricer.) If you choose a masher, don't use a spatula to blend in the other ingredients, as recommended with the food mill and ricer, but blend and mash at the same time to minimize stickiness.

Many recipes call for heating milk before adding it, justifying this by saying that cold milk makes mashed potatoes sticky. Our repeated experiments have

demonstrated that this is not true. Cold milk does cool the potatoes, which you really don't want. Our choice is to use warm milk, but only because it keeps the potatoes up to temperature. While you can certainly use milk to make mashed potatoes, our tasters preferred versions made with half-and-half, which gives mashed potatoes a richer mouthfeel and flavor. If you insist on using milk, whole milk is superior to low-fat milk.

Master Recipe

Mashed Potatoes

serves 4

NOTE: *Russet potatoes make slightly fluffier mashed potatoes, but Yukon Golds have an appealing buttery flavor and can be used if you prefer. Mashed potatoes stiffen and become gluey as they cool, so they are best served piping hot. If you must hold mashed potatoes before serving, place them in a heatproof bowl, cover the bowl tightly with plastic wrap, and set the*

bowl over a pot of simmering water. The potatoes will remain hot and soft-textured for one hour.

2 pounds russet potatoes, scrubbed
1 cup half-and-half, warmed
4 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened and cut into 4 equal pieces
Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place potatoes in large saucepan with cold water to cover (about 2 quarts). Bring to a boil over high heat, reduce heat, and simmer, covered, until potatoes

are just tender when pricked with a thin-bladed knife, about 20 minutes.

2. Peel potatoes by holding in a clean kitchen towel folded twice and using a paring knife to peel skin. Drop them one at a time, cut in half if necessary, into a food mill or ricer and process them back into warm, dry saucepan. (If you don't mind some lumps, drop peeled potatoes back into warm, dry saucepan and mash with potato masher.) Using a rubber spatula, add half-and-half and salt to taste. Add butter, continue to mix until melted. Season generously with pepper and serve hot.

VARIATIONS:

Mashed Potatoes with Parmesan and Lemon

Stir in 1 cup grated Parmesan cheese, after adding half-and-half but before adding butter. Add butter, then stir in minced or grated zest from 2 lemons.

Mashed Potatoes with Pesto

We find it best to use pesto made with half parsley so that the heat of the potatoes doesn't turn the pesto army green.

Place $^1/_4$ cup toasted pine nuts, walnuts, or almonds, 1 peeled garlic clove, 1 cup fresh basil leaves, 1 cup fresh parsley leaves, and 7 tablespoons

extra-virgin olive oil in workbowl of food processor; process until smooth, stopping as necessary to scrape down sides of bowl. Transfer mixture to small bowl, stir in $^1/_4$ cup grated Parmesan cheese, and add salt to taste. Add pesto to the mashed potatoes in place of butter.

Mashed Potatoes with Root Vegetables

Most root vegetables are more watery than potatoes, so you will need less than the full cup of half-and-half.

Replace 1 pound of potatoes with 1 pound of parsnips, rutabagas, celery root, carrots, or turnips that have been peeled and cut into $1^1/_2$-to 2-inch

chunks. Add half-and-half $^1/_4$ cup at a time until the desired consistency is obtained.

Mashed Potatoes with Garlic and Olive Oil

Add 6 to 8 peeled garlic cloves to saucepan with potatoes in step 1. Replace butter with $^1/_4$ cup extra-virgin olive oil.

Buttermilk Mashed Potatoes

Buttermilk gives mashed potatoes a pleasing tang and rich texture, even when less butter is used. If you are

interested in mashed potatoes with less fat, this is your best option.

Replace half-and-half with 1 cup warmed buttermilk. Reduce butter to 1 tablespoon.

FRIED POTATOES

THE IDEAL FRENCH FRY IS LONG AND CRISP, with sides cut at right angles, a nice crunch on the outside, and an earthy potato taste. Its bass flavor note should be rustic, like a mushroom's, and its high note should hint of the oil in which it was cooked. It should definitely not droop, and its coloring should be two-toned, blond with hints of brown.

Obviously, a good french fry requires the right potato. Would it be starchy or waxy? We tested two of the most popular waxy potatoes, and neither was

even close to ideal. During frying, their abundance of water evaporated, leaving hollows inside the potato that filled with oil. The finished fries were greasy. Next we tested the starchy potato most readily available nationwide, the russet. This potato turned out to be ideal, frying up with all the qualities we were looking for.

Because russets are starchy, it is important to rinse the starch off the surface after cutting the potato into fries. To do this, simply put the cut fries in a bowl, place the bowl in the sink, and run cold water into it, swirling with your fingers until the water runs clear. This might seem like an unimportant step, but it makes a real difference. When we

skipped the starch rinse, the fries weren't quite right, and the oil clouded.

At this point, you take the second crucial step: Fill the bowl with clear water, add ice, and refrigerate the potatoes for at least 30 minutes. That way, when the potatoes first enter the hot oil, they are nearly frozen; this allows a slow, thorough cooking of the inner potato pulp. When we tried making fries without chilling them first, the outsides started to brown well before the insides were fully cooked.

Our preference is to peel potatoes for french fries. A skin-on fry does not form those little airy blisters, which we like. Peeling the potato also allows the cook

to see—and remove—any imperfections or greenish coloring.

What is the right fat for making perfect french fries? To find out, we experimented with lard, vegetable shortening, canola oil, corn oil, and peanut oil. Lard and shortening make great fries, but we figured that for health reasons many cooks won't want to use these products. We moved on to canola oil, but we were unhappy with the results: bland, almost watery fries.

Corn oil was the most forgiving oil in the test kitchen. It rebounded well from temperature fluctuations, and it held up very well when the same oil was used for several batches of fries. What's more, the fries tasted marvelous. Peanut

oil also produced good results. A potato fried in peanut oil is light, and the flavor is rich but not dense. The earthy flavor of the potato is there, as with corn oil, but is not overbearing. At this point, we were very close, but something was still missing. The high flavor note, which is supplied by the animal fat in lard, was lacking.

We tried a dollop of strained bacon grease in peanut oil, about two generous tablespoons per quart of oil. The meaty flavor came through, but without its nasty baggage.

So bacon grease appeared to be the animal fat of choice. To be certain of this, we added bacon grease to each of

the oils, with these results: canola oil, extra body, but still short on flavor; corn oil, more body, more flavor, nearly perfect; peanut oil, flavor, bite, body, bass notes, high notes galore. At last, an equivalent to lard.

So now it was time to get down to the frying, which actually means double-frying. First, we fried the potatoes at a relatively low temperature to release their rich and earthy flavor. Then we quick-fried them at a higher temperature until they were nicely browned and served them immediately.

For the sake of convenience, we also attempted a single, longer frying. Like many cooks before us, we found that with standard french fries (as opposed to

the much thinner shoestring fries), we could not both sear the outside and properly cook the inside in a single visit to the hot fat. When we left them in long enough to sear the outside, we wound up with wooden, overcooked fries.

We found it easy to adapt our recipe for steak fries. In this case, we like to leave the skin on for a more rustic appearance (although it can be removed) and cut the fries into lengths $^1/_2$ inch thick. Frying was exactly the same except that steak fries need a couple of extra minutes on the first frying to color.

Oven fries are a completely different animal. Many cooks don't want to deep-fry because of health concerns. They

also don't like the mess associated with deep frying. Recipes for oven-fried potatoes have been popular in recent years, but we had found most oven fries to be a pale imitation of the real thing. We wanted fries that were crisp and golden brown. In addition, the inside had to be fluffy and potatoey tasting.

We first experimented with different ways of cutting the potatoes. We assumed that wedges of some sort would work best. However, because the thickness varies (the ends are thinner, the middle quite thick), we found that wedges cook and color unevenly. We had far better luck when we cut the fries into uniform $^{1}/_{2}$-inch-thick lengths, just

as we did for steak fries.

As with fries cooked in oil, many sources suggest refrigerating or chilling the raw, cut potatoes in ice water to get oven fries to brown nicely. We found that chilled fries emerged from the oven with a mushy interior and that they were less crisp than potatoes simply cut and oven-fried.

At this point, we wondered if the double-cooking method used with french fries could be adapted to oven fries. We tried steaming the potatoes first, hoping this would set the starches in the fries and help the exterior to crisp up. The potatoes emerged from the steamer quite sticky because of the starches that had been released. We carefully dried the

potatoes with a tea towel (they stuck to paper towels) and spread them out in a single layer over a preheated pan.

The fries emerged from the oven crisp and delicious. By getting the potatoes to release some of their starch during steaming, they release less starch in the oven, which allows the exterior to become especially crisp and golden brown.

Master Recipe

French Fries

serves 4

NOTE: *For those who like it, flavoring the oil with a few tablespoons of bacon grease adds a subtle, meaty flavor to the fries. Their texture, however, is not affected if the bacon grease is omitted.*

2 pounds russet potatoes, peeled and cut into lengths $^1/_4$ by $^1/_4$ inch thick (see figure 5)

2 quarts peanut oil

4 tablespoons strained bacon grease (optional)

3 large brown paper bags

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Rinse cut fries in large bowl under cold running water until water turns from milky colored to clear. Cover with at least 1 inch of water, then cover with ice. Refrigerate at least 30 minutes. (Can be refrigerated up to 3 days ahead.)

2. In 5-quart pot or Dutch oven fitted with clip-on-the-pot candy thermometer, or in large electric fryer, heat oil over

medium-low heat to 325 degrees. As oil heats, add bacon grease. Oil will bubble up when you add fries, so be sure you have at least 3 inches of room at top of cooking pot.

3. Pour off ice and water, quickly wrap potatoes in a clean tea towel, and thoroughly pat dry. Increase heat to medium-high and add half of fries, a handful at a time, to hot oil. Fry, stirring with Chinese skimmer or slotted spoon with large holes, until potatoes are limp and soft and start to turn from white to blond, 6 to 8 minutes. (Oil temperature will drop 50 to 60 degrees during this frying.) Use skimmer or slotted spoon to

transfer fries to brown paper bag; spread out on bag to drain. Fry remaining potatoes and drain on second bag. Let fries rest at least 10 minutes. (Can stand at room temperature up to 2 hours.)

4. When ready to serve fries, reheat oil to 375 degrees. Using paper bag as a funnel, pour potatoes from one bag into hot oil. Discard bag and open a clean bag on counter. Fry potatoes, stirring fairly constantly, until golden brown and puffed, 2 to 3 minutes. Transfer to open paper bag. Fry remaining potatoes and add to new bag with other fries. Season to taste with salt and pepper or other seasoned salt, close bag, and shake well

so bag absorbs excess oil and fries are coated evenly with seasonings. Remove fries from bag and serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Spicy Fries

Combine 1 teaspoon chili powder, 1 teaspoon sweet paprika, $^1/_2$ teaspoon ground cumin, and $^1/_8$ to $^1/_4$ teaspoon cayenne pepper in small bowl. Use this mixture in place of black pepper (and with salt) in step 4.

Steak Fries

Peel potatoes or scrub well and leave peels on. Cut into lengths $^1/_2$ by $^1/_2$-inch

thick. Proceed as directed in recipe for french fries, increasing frying time in step 3 to 10 minutes.

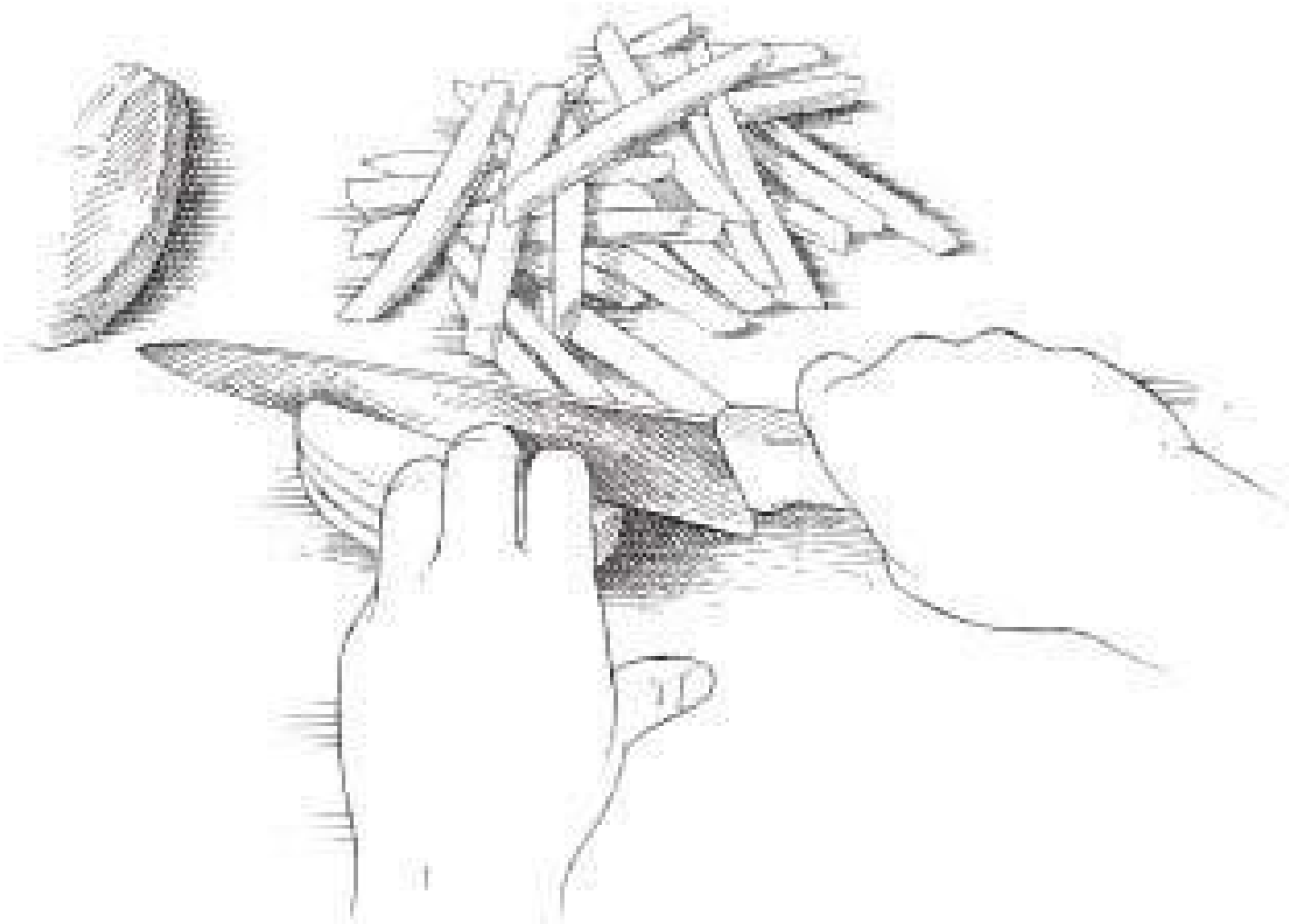

Figure 5.

For standard fries, slice peeled potatoes lengthwise into ovals about $^{1}/_{4}$-inch thick. Stack several ovals on top of each other and slice them into $^{1}/_{4}$-inch thick

lengths.

Master Recipe

Oven Fries

serves 4

NOTE: *Like french fries, oven fries are twice-cooked for the best texture. First, they are steamed to cook the interior partially and set the starch. Next, they are baked in a hot oven until the exterior is crisp. Make sure to preheat the greased baking sheets as directed. Adding the steamed potatoes to a hot pan makes a difference. There's no need to turn fries. The bottom becomes*

especially crisp, while the other sides turn golden brown.

4 teaspoons peanut oil

2 pounds russet potatoes, scrubbed and cut into lengths $^1/_2$ by $^1/_2$ inch thick

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Put $^1/_2$ teaspoon oil on each of two rimmed baking sheets. Use paper towel to spread oil evenly over entire surface, and place both sheets in oven. Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Rinse cut fries in large bowl under cold running water until water turns from milky colored to

clear.

2. Fit large pot or Dutch oven with steamer basket; fill with enough water to reach just below bottom of basket. Bring water to boil over high heat; add potatoes to basket. Cover and steam for 5 minutes, until potatoes are glistening but still very firm. Remove potatoes and spread out in single layer on two clean tea towels. Pat dry using a third tea towel.

3. Toss potatoes and remaining tablespoon of oil in medium bowl to coat; season generously with salt and

pepper to taste and toss again to blend. Carefully remove one baking sheet from oven and place half of potatoes on baking sheet so they are spread out and not touching each other. Place baking sheet back in oven and repeat process using second baking sheet and remaining potatoes.

4. Bake until potatoes are deep golden brown and have begun to puff, 25 to 30 minutes. Serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Oven Fries with Indian Spices

Combine 1 teaspoon ground turmeric, 1 teaspoon ground coriander, $^1/_2$ teaspoon ground cumin, and $1^1/_2$ teaspoons curry powder in small bowl. Add spice mixture to steamed potatoes along with salt and pepper in step 3.

Oven Fries with Cheese

Replace pepper in step 3 with 1 teaspoon sweet paprika. When potatoes are done, pull all fries close together on one baking sheet, sprinkle evenly with $^1/_4$ cup grated Parmesan cheese, and return to oven until cheese melts, about 1 minute. Serve immediately.

POTATO SALAD

POTATO SALADS COME IN NUMEROUS STYLES. Though recipes may seem dramatically different, most have four things in common—potatoes, of course; fat (usually bacon, olive oil, or mayonnaise); an acidic ingredient, usually vinegar, to perk things up; and flavorings for distinction. Though these salads may be very different in character, the issues affecting all of them, it turns out, are much the same.

We first wanted to know what type of potato should be used and how should it

be cooked. Recipe writers seemed split down the middle between starchy and waxy potatoes, with starchy praised for being more absorbent and waxy admired for their sturdiness. We have always just boiled potatoes with the skin on, but steaming, microwaving, roasting, and baking are all options.

Next, when should the potato be peeled? On the assumption that hot potatoes are more absorbent, some thought it worth scorching fingertips to get the cooked potatoes peeled and cut immediately. Other recipe writers were more casual—"peel when cool enough to handle." Still others instructed us to refrigerate the cooled potatoes, then peel and cut the next day. And, of course, you

may wonder whether you really need to peel them at all.

Finally, should potatoes be seasoned when still warm, assuming that they do absorb flavorings better in this state? Is it worth the two-step process of seasoning the potatoes with vinegar (or vinaigrette), salt, and pepper first? Or should you toss everything together at the same time?

After boiling, steaming, baking/roasting, and microwaving four different varieties of potatoes—Red Bliss, russets, potatoes labeled "all-purpose" in the market, and Yukon Golds—we found Red Bliss to be the potato of choice and boiling the cooking

method of choice. Higher-starch potatoes—russets, all-purpose, and Yukon Golds—are not sturdy enough for salads. They fell apart when cut and looked sloppy in salad form.

Before giving up on high-starch potatoes, though, we wanted to test their absorption power, a selling point for many cooks. A number of potato salad recipes suggested an initial drizzling of vinegar over warm or hot salad potatoes to make them taste seasoned from within as well as dressed from without.

We found that high-starch potatoes are indeed more absorbent than the lower-starch varieties—to a fault. When tossed with vinegar, the high-starch potato salads tasted dry, sucking up all the

vinegar and asking for more. These mealy, high-starch potatoes, we determined, were great for mashing or baking, but not for salad. The low-starch boiling potatoes successfully absorbed the vinegar but still remained firm and creamy.

Next we wanted to see if we could boost flavor at the cooking stage by boiling the potatoes in chicken broth and in water heavily seasoned with bay leaves and garlic cloves. The chicken stock may as well have been water—there wasn't even a hint of evidence that the potatoes had been cooked in stock. The bay leaves and garlic smelled wonderful as the potatoes cooked, but

the potatoes were still bland-tasting (although the skins smelled faintly of garlic).

We tried boiling potatoes without the skin, but they were waterlogged compared with their skin-on counterparts. In salad form all the potatoes had a sloppy, broken look, and they tasted watery.

Although we might not want to eat the skin of a boiled Idaho in a salad, we found the paper-thin skin of the boiled red potato not unpleasant to taste and certainly pleasant to look at in what is often a monochromatic salad. Although this saved the peeling step, we found the skin tended to rip when cutting the potato. Because this was especially true

when the potatoes were very hot, we solved the problem in two ways. First, we cut the potatoes with a very sharp knife, which minimized ripping, and second, we found it wasn't necessary to cut them when they were hot, since warm ones are just as absorbent.

By this time we had learned that warm potatoes do absorb vinegar better than cold potatoes, but we weren't necessarily sure where we wanted the acidity: Should it be in the potato, in the dressing, or in both? After much testing, we concluded that warm potatoes can be sprinkled with two tablespoons of vinegar; add more vinegar, though, and the potatoes will taste pickled. If the

salad needs more vinegar, just add it to the dressing.

Master Recipe

Boiled Potatoes for Salad

NOTE: *Potato salad starts with boiled potatoes. In our testing, we found that low-starch potatoes such as Red Bliss provide the sturdy texture needed to stand up to dressing. Baking potatoes tend to fall apart and produce a sloppy-looking salad. Make sure to cook the potatoes with their skins on to prevent them from becoming waterlogged. Cool the potatoes slightly, peel if desired, and then dress.*

2 pounds Red Bliss potatoes

(about 6 medium), scrubbed

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place potatoes in 6-quart pot and cover with water. Bring to boil, cover, and simmer, stirring once or twice to ensure even cooking, until thin-bladed paring knife or metal cake tester inserted into a potato can be removed with no resistance, 25 to 30 minutes.

2. Drain and cool potatoes slightly. Peel if desired. Cut potatoes as directed in following recipes while still warm, rinsing knife occasionally in warm water to remove gumminess. Proceed as directed in one of the following recipes.

American-Style Potato Salad with Eggs and Sweet Pickles

serves 6 to 8

NOTE: *Use sweet pickles, not relish, for the best results in this recipe.*

1 recipe Boiled Potatoes for Salad, cut into $^{3}/_{4}$-inch cubes

2 tablespoons red wine vinegar

$^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon salt

$^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon ground black pepper

3 hard-boiled eggs, peeled and

cut into small dice

2 large scallions, sliced thin

1 small celery stalk, cut into small dice

1/4 cup sweet pickles, cut into small dice

1/2 cup mayonnaise

2 tablespoons Dijon mustard

1/4 cup minced fresh parsley leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Layer warm potato cubes in medium bowl, sprinkling with vinegar, salt, and pepper as you go. Refrigerate while preparing remaining ingredients.

2. Mix in remaining ingredients, adjust seasonings, and refrigerate until ready to serve, up to 1 day.

French-Style Potato Salad with Tarragon Vinaigrette

serves 6

NOTE: *If fresh tarragon is not available, increase the parsley to three tablespoons and use tarragon vinegar in place of the white wine vinegar.*

1 recipe Boiled Potatoes for Salad, cut into slices $^1/_4$-inch thick

4 tablespoons white wine vinegar

$^1/_2$ teaspoon salt

$^1/_2$ teaspoon ground black

pepper

1 tablespoon Dijon mustard

1 medium shallot, minced

6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves

1 tablespoon minced fresh tarragon leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Layer warm potato slices in medium bowl, sprinkling with 2 tablespoons vinegar and salt and pepper as you go. Let stand at room temperature while preparing dressing.

2. Whisk remaining 2 tablespoons vinegar, mustard, and shallot together in small bowl. Whisk in oil so that mixture is somewhat emulsified. Pour over potatoes and toss lightly to coat. Refrigerate salad until ready to serve, up to 1 day.

3. Bring salad to room temperature, stir in parsley and tarragon, adjust seasonings, and serve.

German-Style Potato Salad with Bacon and Balsamic Vinegar

serves 6

NOTE: *Smaller new potatoes are more attractive in this recipe. The slices are smaller and tend not to break up as much as those from bigger potatoes. Cider vinegar is more traditional, but we like the sweeter, fuller flavor of the balsamic vinegar.*

1 recipe Boiled Potatoes for Salad, cut into slices $^{1}/_{4}$-inch thick

1/4 cup balsamic or cider vinegar

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper

4–5 slices bacon (about 4 ounces), cut crosswise into 1/4-inch strips

1 medium onion, diced

2 tablespoons vegetable oil, if needed

1/2 cup beef broth

1/4 cup minced fresh parsley leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Layer warm potato slices in medium bowl, sprinkling with 2 tablespoons vinegar and salt and pepper as you go. Let stand at room temperature while preparing dressing.

2. Fry bacon in medium skillet over medium heat until brown and crisp, 7 to 10 minutes. Transfer bacon with slotted spoon to bowl of potatoes. Add onion to bacon drippings and sauté until softened, 4 to 5 minutes. If necessary, add oil to yield 2 tablespoons unabsorbed fat.

3. Add beef broth and bring to boil. Stir in remaining 2 tablespoons vinegar.

Remove from heat and pour mixture over potatoes. Add parsley and toss gently to coat. Serve warm or tepid. (Salad may be covered and set aside at room temperature for several hours.)

Southwestern-Style Potato Salad with Chiles and Cilantro

serves 6

NOTE: *This colorful salad is moderately spicy; adjust the amounts of jalapeno and cayenne to increase or decrease the heat.*

1 recipe Boiled Potatoes for Salad, cut into 3/4-inch cubes

5 tablespoons lime juice

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon ground black

pepper

1 teaspoon minced or grated lime zest

$^1/_8$–$^1/_4$ teaspoon cayenne pepper

2 teaspoons ground cumin

1 teaspoon minced jalapeno chile

6 tablespoons canola oil

1 medium red bell pepper, cut into $^1/_4$-inch dice

2 tablespoons minced red onion

$^1/_4$ cup minced fresh cilantro leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Layer warm potato cubes in medium bowl, sprinkling with 2 tablespoons lime juice and salt and pepper as you go. Let stand at room temperature while preparing dressing.

2. Combine remaining 3 tablespoons lime juice, zest, cayenne, cumin, and jalapeno in small mixing bowl. Gradually whisk in oil so that mixture is somewhat emulsified. Pour over potatoes; toss lightly to coat. Mix in bell pepper and onion. Adjust seasonings, adding cayenne and more salt, if desired. Refrigerate until ready to serve, up to 1 day.

3. Bring salad to room temperature, stir in cilantro, adjust seasonings, and serve.

Potato-Beet Salad with Horseradish and Sour Cream Dressing

serves 6

NOTE: *To simplify preparation, we wanted to cook the potatoes and beets together. We found that large potatoes and small beets will cook at the same rate and can be boiled together. Surprisingly, the beets do not stain the potatoes as long as the beets are cooked unskinned. If you must use smaller potatoes or larger beets, cook them separately.*

1 recipe Boiled Potatoes for Salad, made with 1 pound Red Bliss potatoes (3 medium) and 1 pound beets (5 small) with 1 inch of stem and root attached to prevent bleeding

2 tablespoons white vinegar

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper

1/2 cup sour cream

2 tablespoons or more prepared horseradish

2 medium celery stalks, cut into 1/4-inch dice

2 tablespoons minced red

onion

$^1/_4$ cup minced fresh dill leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Drain and cool potatoes and beets slightly. Peel potatoes if desired. Rub skins off beets with paper towel or your fingers and discard stems and roots. Cut potatoes and beets into quarters and then into slices $^1/_4$-inch thick while still warm, rinsing knife occasionally in warm water to remove gumminess.

2. Layer warm potato and beet slices in medium bowl, sprinkling with vinegar and salt and pepper as you go. Let stand

at room temperature while preparing remaining ingredients.

3. Combine sour cream and horseradish in small bowl. Taste and add more horseradish, if desired. Mix dressing with potatoes and beets; toss lightly to coat. Mix in celery and onion. Adjust seasonings, adding more salt or a touch of vinegar if desired. Refrigerate until ready to serve, up to 1 day.

4. Bring salad to room temperature, stir in dill, adjust seasonings, and serve.

BOILED POTATOES

Most often we boil potatoes for salad. However, freshly dug baby or new potatoes can be boiled, buttered, and served hot as a side dish.

From our initial tests we knew that having a range of sizes in the pot was problematic. The small potatoes overcooked and their skins split when cooked with larger potatoes. Use potatoes that are all the same size.

While large potatoes are fine for salad, we think that the best potatoes for boiling and buttering are small—less

than $2^1/_2$ inches in diameter and preferably smaller. These potatoes cooked more evenly—larger ones tended to get a bit mushy right under skin by the time the center was cooked through.

From previous tests, we knew that you must boil potatoes with their skins on to prevent them from becoming watery. However, we found that the flesh on a boiled potato must be exposed at some point so that it can soak up the butter and seasonings. When we tossed drained, whole, skin-on potatoes in a bowl with butter, the butter just stayed in the bowl—it could not penetrate the skin.

We tried peeling a thin band around

the center of each potato before boiling to eliminate the need to cut them after cooking. This test failed. Once the potatoes were cooked, the skin that had been left on started to break away from the flesh, and the flesh, too, was breaking apart.

For the best flavor, we found it necessary to cut the potatoes in half after boiling. Although a bit tedious, we found that holding the hot potatoes one at a time with a pair tongs and then slicing them with a knife worked well. Once all of the potatoes were cut in half, we immediately added them to the bowl with the butter. As soon as the potatoes are coated with fat, the seasonings can be added.

Not only are cut boiled potatoes more flavorful, but they have a nicely moist mouthfeel. Comparatively, the potatoes left whole were dry and bland.

Master Recipe

Boiled Potatoes with Butter

serves 4

NOTE: *Refer to the chart Estimated Boiling Time For Potatoes for precise cooking times for potatoes of various size. If using potatoes more than 2 inches in diameter, consider cutting them into quarters in step 3 for maximum absorption of the seasonings and ease of eating.*

3 tablespoons unsalted butter

2 pounds small Red Bliss or

new potatoes, scrubbed

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place butter in medium serving bowl and set it aside to soften while preparing and cooking potatoes.

2. Place potatoes in 6-quart pot; cover with water and add 1 tablespoon salt. Bring to a boil, cover, and simmer, stirring once or twice to ensure even cooking, until a thin-bladed paring knife or metal cake tester inserted into a potato can be removed with no resistance. Drain potatoes.

3. Cut potatoes in half, using a pair of tongs to steady hot potatoes and a sharp knife to cut them (see figure 6). Place halved potatoes in bowl with butter and toss to coat. Season with salt and pepper to taste and toss again to blend. Serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Boiled Potatoes with Butter and Chives

Add 3 tablespoons thinly sliced fresh chives to potatoes with salt and pepper in step 3.

Boiled Potatoes with

Lemon, Parsley, and Olive Oil

Replace butter with 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil. Add the minced zest of 1 lemon and 3 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley leaves to potatoes with salt and pepper in step 3.

Boiled Potatoes with Mustard, Shallots, and Tarragon

Fresh dill can be used in place of the tarragon if you prefer.

Blend 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard into butter with fork or rubber spatula once butter has softened. Add 1 tablespoon

minced shallots and 2 tablespoons chopped fresh tarragon leaves to potatoes with salt and pepper in step 3.

ESTIMATED BOILING TIME FOR POTATOES

Depending on their size, small potatoes can take from 8 to 18 minutes to cook through. Use the following chart and, of course, test the potatoes with a paring knife as directed. To ensure even cooking, choose potatoes that are all the same size. The cooking time starts once the potatoes are covered and begin to simmer.

DIAMETER	NUMBER OF POTATOES IN 2 POUNDS	COOKING TIME
Less than 1 inch	32 or more	8 to 10 minutes
1 to 1½ inches	25 to 31	10 to 12 minutes
1½ to 2 inches	18 to 24	12 to 15 minutes
2 to 2½ inches	12 to 17	15 to 18 minutes

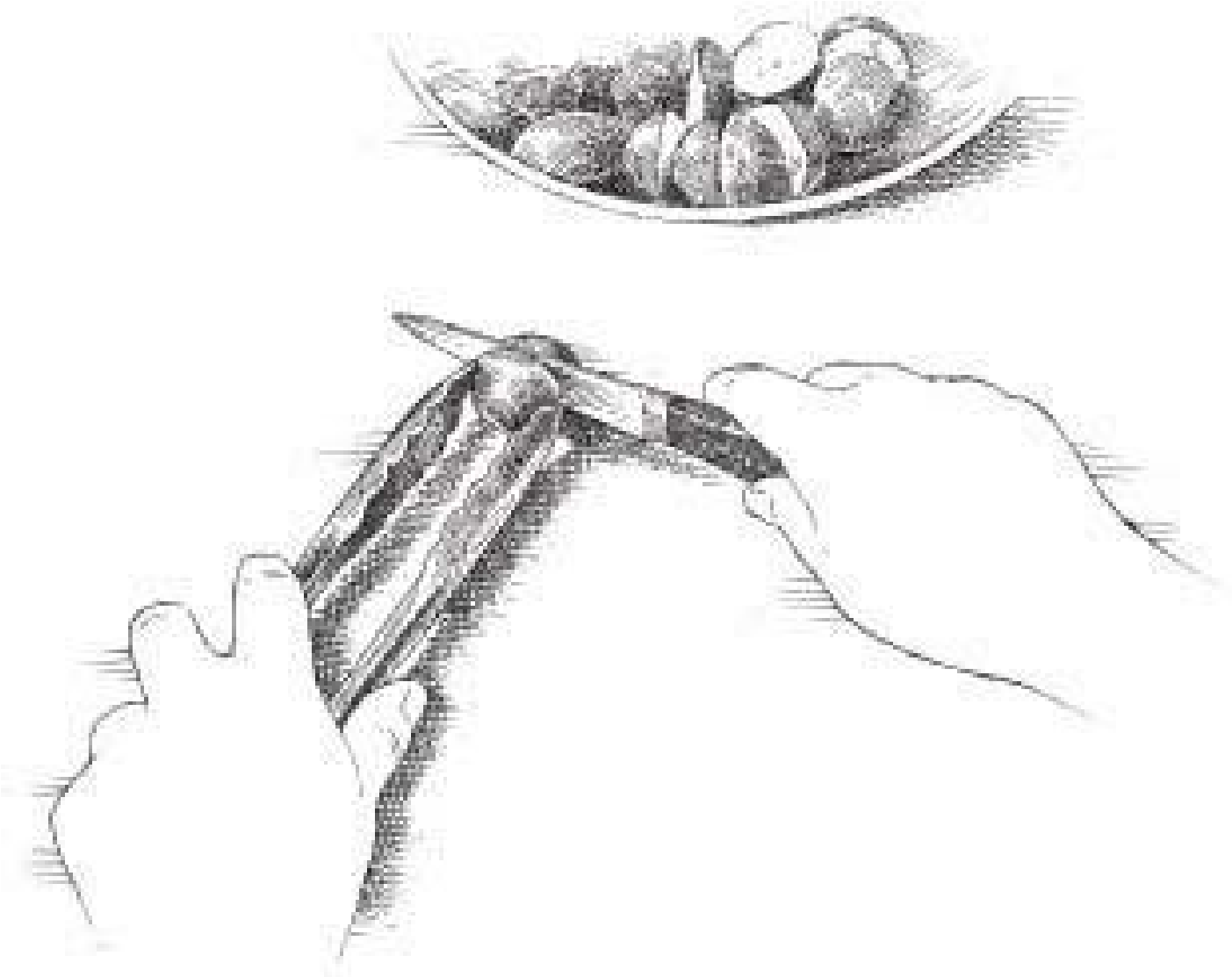

Figure 6.

Potatoes should be boiled whole and unpeeled so that they don't become soggy. After boiling, however, the potatoes should be cut in half, because the fleshy portion of the potato absorbs

butter and seasonings far better than the skin. Steady the hot potato with a pair of tongs while cutting it with a sharp knife.

SAUTÉED POTATOES

CRISP SLICES OR CHUNKS OF SAUTÉED POTATOES (often called home fries) are a breakfast favorite. They also make an excellent side dish for dinner. Some recipes suggest that potatoes can be sautéed without precooking. Most sources, however, start by boiling or baking potatoes and then sautéing to get them crisp. We started with questions about the potatoes (the type, whether or not they should be peeled, whether to slice or dice) and then moved on to test various cooking methods.

Yukon Golds were the clear favorites in our testing. They produced home fries with a rich golden color and crisp exterior. Starchier russet potatoes fell apart in our tests and are not recommended. Red potatoes are fine but could not match the Yukon Golds in terms of appearance or flavor.

All of our testers preferred the texture and flavor that the skin added, so we decided not to peel potatoes for home fries. We found that sliced potatoes were much harder to cook than diced potatoes. A pound of sliced potatoes stacks up three or four layers deep in a large skillet, and the result is uneven cooking, with some potatoes burned and

others undercooked. Potatoes cut into $^1/_2$-inch dice brown much more evenly. We found that a 12-inch skillet can hold $1^1/_4$ pounds of diced potatoes in a single layer.

In our tests, raw potatoes, no matter how small they were cut, burned before the interior had cooked sufficiently. We decided to precook the potatoes before sautéing.

We started by dicing baked potatoes and found the texture gummy and the exterior not terribly crisp. Potatoes that were boiled until tender and then diced broke down in the pan, and the inside was overcooked by the time the exterior was crisp. We tried braising diced

potatoes, figuring we could cook them through in a covered pan with some water and fat, remove the cover, let the water evaporate, and then crisp up the potatoes in the remaining fat. Although this sounds like a good idea, each time the potatoes stuck horribly to the pan.

The best results occurred when we boiled diced potatoes briefly, drained them, and then sautéed them. Since the potatoes were drained once the water came to a boil, they didn't absorb much water and held their shape nicely.

We think potatoes taste best when sautéed in butter, but a combination of oil and butter is much easier to work with and far less likely to burn. We particularly liked the combination of

corn oil and butter, but peanut oil, canola oil, or olive oil can be used in place of corn oil.

Master Recipe

Sautéed Potatoes

serves 3 to 4

NOTE: *The potatoes must be cooked in a pan large enough to hold them in a single layer. A 12-inch skillet will do the job. Use a spatula to turn the potatoes as they cook. Work gently so that you don't break the crisp crust that forms on the side cooking against the pan bottom.*

$1^1/_4$ pounds Yukon Gold potatoes, scrubbed and cut into

1/2-inch cubes

1 1/4 teaspoons salt

1 1/2 tablespoons corn oil

1 1/2 tablespoons unsalted butter

1/8 teaspoon ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place potatoes in 6-quart pot; cover with water and add 1 teaspoon salt. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat. As soon as water begins to boil, drain potatoes well.

2. Heat oil and butter in heavy-bottomed

large skillet over medium-high heat until butter foams. Add potatoes and shake pan so that potatoes form a single layer. When potatoes are golden brown on bottom (after about 4 minutes), carefully use a wooden spatula to turn them. Continue cooking potatoes, turning them three or four more times, until nicely browned on all sides, about 15 to 20 minutes in total. Season with remaining $^1/_4$ teaspoon salt and pepper to taste and stir. Serve immediately or keep warm in preheated 300-degree oven for up to 20 minutes.

VARIATIONS:

Sautéed Potatoes with

Rosemary and Garlic

Replace corn oil and butter with 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil. When potatoes are browned on all sides, add 2 teaspoons chopped fresh rosemary and 1 teaspoon minced garlic. Cook for another 2 to 3 minutes over low heat, shaking pan frequently to coat potatoes with rosemary and garlic and to cook garlic. Season with salt and pepper and serve.

Home Fries

While potatoes are being blanched, heat 1 tablespoon corn oil in large, heavy-bottomed skillet. Add 1 medium onion, chopped fine, and sauté over medium-

high heat until lightly browned, 8 to 10 minutes. Scrape onions into bowl. Add $1^1/_2$ tablespoons oil and $1^1/_2$ tablespoons butter to empty pan as directed in step 2. Cook potatoes as directed. When potatoes are browned all over, return onions to pan along with 1 teaspoon paprika and stir to coat. Season with salt and pepper as directed and serve.

Spicy Home Fries

Follow Home Fries variation, adding a pinch or two of cayenne pepper to potatoes along with paprika.

Home Fries with Bell Pepper and Cumin

Follow Home Fries variation, cooking 1 finely chopped red or green bell pepper with onion. Remove pepper with onion and add back to pan along with paprika and 1 teaspoon ground cumin. Season with salt and pepper as directed and serve.

HASH BROWNS

HASH BROWNS ARE BEST DEFINED AS THIN, crisp sautéed potato cakes made with grated or chopped potatoes, raw or precooked. We tested various kinds of potatoes and found high-starch russets to yield the best results overall. They adhered well, browned beautifully, and had the most pronounced potato flavor.

Our next challenge was to decide between raw and precooked potatoes. Precooked potatoes tasted good, but when chopped they did not stay together in a cohesive cake, and when grated they

needed to be pressed very hard to form a cake. Unfortunately, this meant they ended up having the mouthfeel of fried mashed potato. Although this is an acceptable alternative if you have leftover cooked potatoes, we preferred using raw, grated potatoes. We also liked the more textured interior, the pronounced potato taste, and the way the raw shreds of potatoes formed an attractive, deeply browned crust.

Choosing the best method for cutting the potatoes was easy. In our tests, chopped potatoes never stayed together in the pan. No matter how finely diced, they were simply chopped, sautéed potatoes, not hash browns. Grating the potatoes on the large-hole side of a box

grater or with the shredding disk on a food processor yielded hash browns that formed a coherent cake when cooked.

After cooking countless batches of hash browns, we found that the pan itself was an important factor. A skillet with sloping sides makes it considerably easier to press the potatoes into a flattened shape, invert them, and slide them from the pan. All of these tasks were difficult in a straight-sided frying pan. Uncoated stainless steel pans produced the best crust, but nonstick pans provided adequate browning and are far easier to clean.

Hash browns can be made into one or more individual servings or one large

portion that can be cut into wedges. If making a single cake, fold it over just before serving so that each wedge of hash brown has four (not just two) crisp edges. No matter how you choose to present the hash browns, make sure you serve them steaming hot.

Master Recipe

Hash Browns

serves 3 to 4

NOTE: *To prevent potatoes from turning brown, grate them just before cooking. For individual servings, simply divide the grated potatoes into four equal portions and reduce cooking time to 5 minutes per side. To vary flavor, add 2 tablespoons grated onion, 1 to 2 tablespoons herb of choice, or roasted garlic to taste to the raw grated potatoes. You can also garnish*

the cooked hash browns with snipped chives or scallion tops just before serving.

1 pound russet potatoes, peeled, washed, and dried

1/4 teaspoon salt

Ground black pepper

1 tablespoon unsalted butter

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Using shredding disk of food processor or large holes on box grater, coarsely grate potatoes. Wrap grated potatoes in clean kitchen towel and squeeze dry (see figure 7). Toss fully dried grated potatoes (you should have about 1 1/2 cups) with salt and pepper to

taste in medium bowl.

2. Meanwhile, heat half the butter in a 10-inch skillet over medium-high heat until it just starts to brown, then scatter potatoes evenly over entire pan bottom. Using wide spatula, firmly press potatoes to flatten; reduce heat to medium and continue cooking until dark golden brown and crisp, 7 to 8 minutes.

3. Invert hash browns, browned-side up, onto large plate; add remaining butter to pan. Once butter has melted, slide hash browns back into pan. Continue to cook over medium heat until second side is

dark golden brown and crisp, 5 to 6 minutes longer.

4. Fold potato round in half (see figure 8) and cook 1 minute longer. Slide hash browns onto plate or cutting board, cut into wedges, and serve immediately.

VARIATION:

Hash Browns with Smoked Cheddar and Herbs

Add $1^1/_2$ teaspoons each minced fresh parsley, dill, and chives to grated potatoes in step 1. Cook as directed. After second side has turned dark brown and crisp in step 3, cover half of cake

with $^{1}/_{4}$ cup shredded smoked cheddar. Continue with step 4, folding uncovered half of cake over cheese-covered half. Cook until cheese melts, about 2 minutes. Serve immediately.

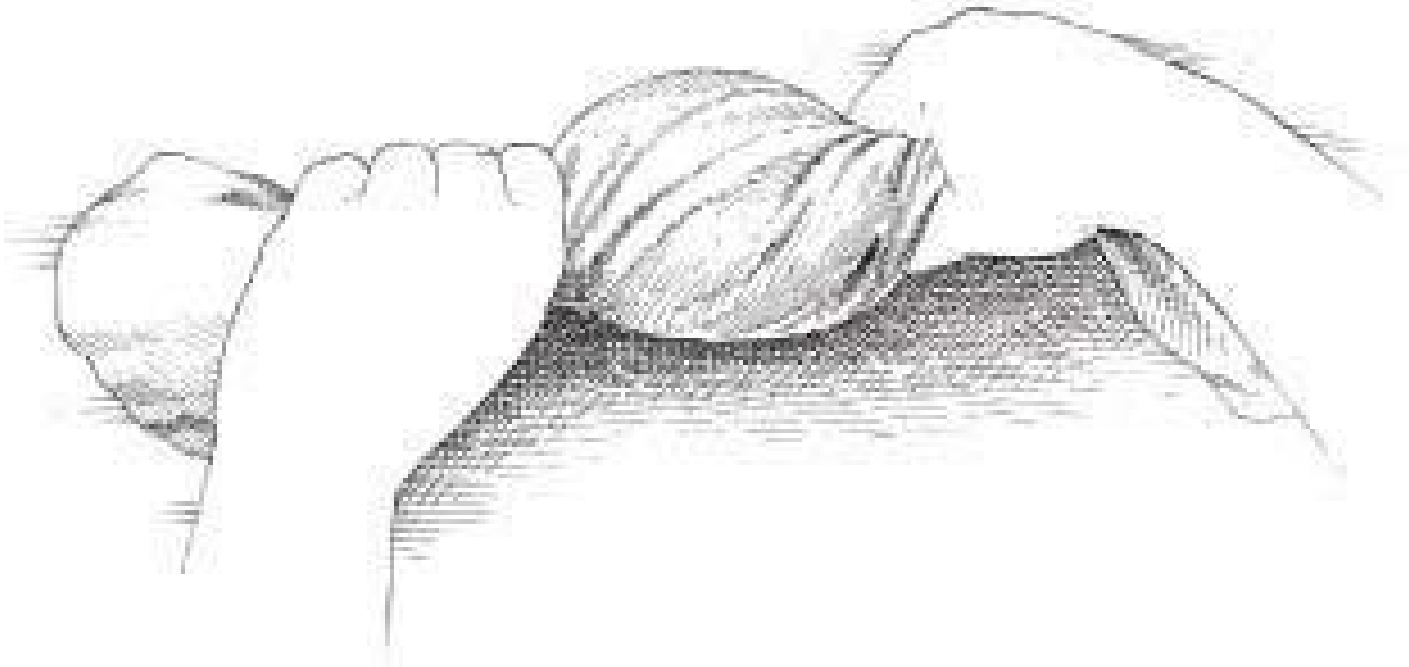

Figure 7.

To release water from the grated potatoes, place them in a towel, and, using two hands, twist the towel tightly to squeeze out as much moisture as possible.

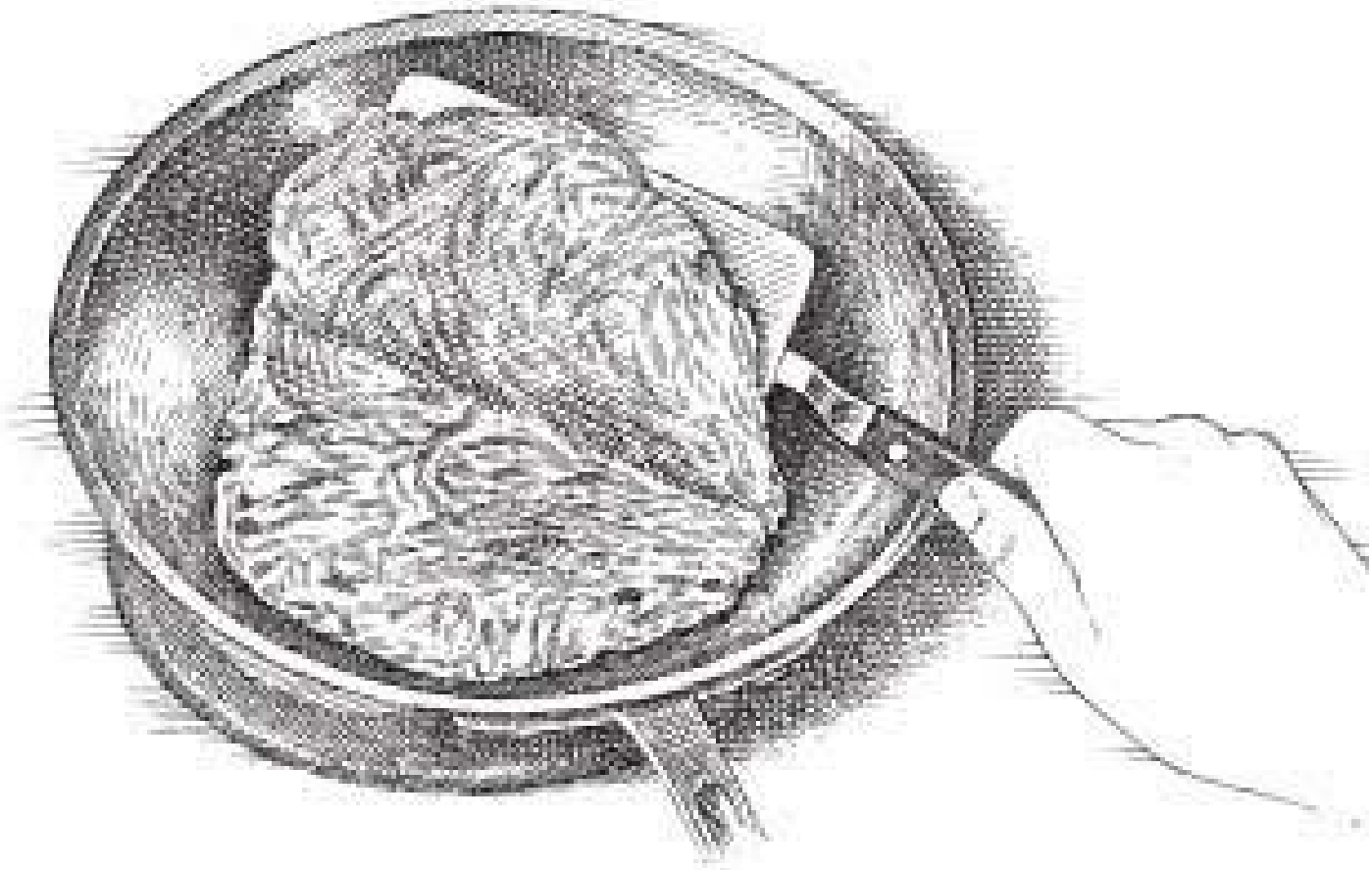

Figure 8.

Just before serving, fold the large flat hash brown cake over, omelet style. When cut into wedges, each piece will then have four crisp edges.

LATKES

LATKES ARE THICK, GRATED POTATO PANCAKES that are pan-fried in vegetable oil. They should be golden and very crisp on the exterior, creamy and moist on the interior.

We tested russets, red potatoes, and Yukon Golds. The russet potato pancakes had a pleasantly pronounced potato flavor and dry texture. The red potato pancakes were at the other end of the spectrum; very creamy, almost gluey on the side. The Yukon Gold pancakes were an attractive yellow-gold color,

tasted somewhat sweet and mild, and were creamy in texture but not gluey at all. The pancakes made with Yukon Gold potatoes were deemed the best, followed closely by the pancakes made with the russets.

In our tests, we found that most latke recipes produce pancakes that are either thick and creamy or thin and crisp. We wanted a thick pancake with a creamy center, but the exterior had to be lacy and crisp

Shredded potatoes make latkes that are very crisp and lacy on the exterior. For a creamier interior, we found it best to grind the potatoes to a coarse puree. We decided to use both shredded and more finely grated potatoes. We simply took

some of the shredded potatoes out of the food processor and pulsed those remaining (with the onion added) until pretty fine. This two-step procedure gave us the best of both worlds: latkes with an exterior that cooked up crisp because of the larger shred and an interior that was thick and chewy, like a traditional pancake.

Many recipes use a lot of flour or matzo meal as a binder. These starches help soak up some of the moisture the cut potatoes exude. Unfortunately, starches can make latkes heavy. We decide to press out some of the moisture by hand and then lightly bind the potatoes with the starch that settles to the bottom of the

bowl filled with the potato water.

We found the temperature of the oil to be crucial to frying the perfect latkes. Unfortunately, there's not enough oil in the pan to use a thermometer. Instead, you must look for visual clues. When the oil is hot enough for frying, it will shimmer on the surface and look kind of wavy.

Latkes

makes fourteen 3-inch pancakes

NOTE: *Matzo meal is a traditional binder, though we found that the pancake was neither improved nor harmed by the addition of this ingredient in small amounts. Applesauce and sour cream are the classic accompaniments for latkes. This recipe will serve four to six people.*

2 pounds Yukon Gold or russet potatoes, peeled

1 medium onion, peeled and cut into eighths

1 large egg

4 medium scallions, white and green parts, minced

3 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves

2 tablespoons matzo meal (optional)

$1^1/_2$ teaspoons salt

Ground black pepper

1 cup vegetable oil for frying

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Grate potatoes in food processor fitted with shredding blade. Place half the potatoes in fine mesh sieve set over medium bowl and reserve. Fit food processor with metal blade, add onion, and pulse with remaining potatoes until

all pieces measure roughly 1/8 inch and look coarsely chopped, 5 to 6 one-second pulses. Mix with reserved potato shreds in sieve and press against sieve to drain as much liquid as possible into bowl below. Let potato liquid in bowl stand until starch settles to bottom, about 1 minute. Pour off liquid, leaving starch in bowl. Beat egg, the potato mixture, and remaining ingredients except oil into starch.

2. Heat 1/4-inch depth of oil in large skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering but not smoking. Working one at a time, place 1/4 cup potato

mixture, squeezed of excess liquid and pressed into a disc $^{1}/_{2}$ inch thick, in oil. Press gently with nonstick spatula; repeat until 5 latkes are in pan.

3. Maintaining heat so fat bubbles around edges of latkes, fry until golden brown on bottom and edges, about 3 minutes. Turn with spatula and continue frying until golden brown all over, about 3 minutes more. Drain on triple thickness of paper towels set on wire rack over jelly roll pan. Repeat with remaining potato mixture, returning oil to temperature between each batch and replacing oil after second batch. (Cooled latkes can be covered loosely

with plastic wrap, held at room temperature for 4 hours, transferred to a heated cookie sheet, and baked in a 375-degree oven until crisp and hot, about 5 minutes). Season with salt and pepper to taste and serve immediately.

POTATO GRATIN

A **POTATO GRATIN—ALSO KNOWN AS SCALLOPED** potatoes—consists of thinly sliced potatoes covered by a liquid and baked in a wide, shallow baking pan until the potatoes are tender and the top gets a burnished crust. Most recipes follow the same procedure: Rub an ovenproof dish with garlic, brush it with butter, layer it with sliced potatoes, add seasonings and just enough liquid to cover the potatoes, and bake.

We tried all the major potato varieties, including all-purpose whites, boilers,

yellow-fleshed, and new potatoes. All made tasty gratins, but we did find subtle variations in flavor and texture—waxy potatoes ended up firmer, for example, while floury baking potatoes were more tender. However, the differences were relatively slight, and we began to suspect that the way the potato is sliced is more significant than which type is used.

We found that potatoes cut into $^{1}/_{16}$-inch slices soaked up the cooking liquid and melted into a cakelike texture. When sliced $^{1}/_{8}$-inch thick, however, they kept their shape nicely throughout baking but still melded together. When sliced too thick ($^{1}/_{4}$ inch or more), however, the

potato slices did not properly meld together in the oven. Don't slice potatoes in advance and hold them in water. We found that this caused their starch to leech out, resulting in a bland gratin with layers that do not hold together properly.

The pan in which you make a gratin is an important consideration. A standard gratin dish is oval, 10 to 12 inches long, and 6 to 8 inches wide. As it turns out, the dimensions of the pan are more important than the material it's made of. We cooked successful gratins in a variety of dishes, from classic enamel to earthenware to ovenproof glass—the key is that they were all shallow. Two to three layers of potatoes should come about three quarters of the way up the

sides of the pan so they cook evenly and have a broad surface area to brown.

We found 350 degrees to be the best oven temperature. At higher temperatures, the slices on the top of the gratin tended to dry out and become tough. We also discovered that it helps to baste the top slices once or twice during the cooking so they stay moist and brown evenly.

We made gratins using a variety of liquids, including whole milk, low-fat milk, half-and-half, heavy cream, meat broths, and water. The heavy cream had a tendency to break up and become greasy, particularly at higher temperatures. The low-fat milk, on the

other hand, was insipid, while the whole milk was almost completely soaked up by the potatoes, leaving only a light curd between the layers. Our favorite all-purpose dairy cooking medium turned out to be half-and-half. The gratins we made with it had just the right balance of saturated potato and saucy liquid, without overwhelming the taste of the potato. They were also easy to prepare.

Until this point, we had tried pouring cold liquids over the layered potatoes and baking them. We wondered if we could cut the cooking time by heating the potatoes and liquid beforehand. We placed a pound of sliced potatoes, enough liquid to barely cover them, salt, and pepper into a saucepan and brought

the liquid to a boil, stirring occasionally so the potatoes didn't scorch or stick. We next lowered the heat and simmered the mixture until the liquid thickened. Finally, we poured the potatoes into a baking dish and finished them in a 350-degree oven.

This method proved to possess many benefits. The cooking time was reduced, the assembly of the gratin took less time, and, because the seasoning was added to the liquid, the final product was evenly seasoned.

There are several ways to enhance the crust from which these dishes get their name (the French word gratin means "crust"). Dotting the top with butter

makes for a golden crust, as does cheese. A nice finish can also be achieved by pouring a thin layer of cream over the top of the gratin for the final 20 or 30 minutes of baking. This cap of cream browns evenly without greasy edges.

Potato Gratin

serves 4 to 6

NOTE: *Russet potatoes will produce a more tender gratin; slices of waxy new potatoes will be firmer. Use either, depending on your personal preference. For a more pronounced crust, sprinkle three tablespoons of heavy cream or grated Gruyère cheese on top of the potatoes after 45 minutes of baking. A mandolin or V-slicer will make quick work of the potatoes, but a sharp chef's knife can be used if you prefer.*

1 large garlic clove, peeled

and smashed

1 tablespoon unsalted butter, softened

$2^1/_4$ cups half-and-half

$1^1/_4$ teaspoons salt

$^1/_8$ teaspoon ground black pepper

Pinch grated nutmeg

Pinch cayenne pepper (optional)

2 pounds potatoes, peeled and sliced $^1/_8$-inch thick

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to center position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Rub bottom and sides of 5-to 6-cup gratin

dish or shallow baking dish with garlic. Mince remaining garlic and set aside. Once garlic in dish has dried, about 2 minutes, spread dish with half the butter.

2. Bring half-and-half, salt, pepper, nutmeg, cayenne (if desired), potatoes, and reserved garlic to boil in medium saucepan over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally with wooden spoon (liquid will just barely cover potatoes). Reduce heat and simmer until liquid thickens, about 2 minutes.

3. Pour potato mixture into prepared dish; shake dish or use fork to distribute

potatoes evenly. Gently press down on potatoes until submerged in liquid; dot with remaining butter.

4. Bake until top is golden brown (basting once or twice during first 45 minutes), about 75 minutes. Let rest 10 minutes and serve.

SWEET POTATOES

Sweet potatoes, often mislabeled as yams in markets (a yam is actually a huge tropical tuber covered with thick, brown skin), come in two distinct types—dry and moist. Dry sweet potatoes have white-to-yellow flesh, while moist ones have orange flesh. The second variety appears more often in markets.

Dry sweet potatoes are slightly sweet and mealy, almost like a russet potato. Moist sweet potatoes have a higher sugar content and are dense, watery, and more easily caramelized. Neither variety

should be washed until just before cooking, as sweet potatoes have thin skins that can go soft very easily. Refrigeration is a no-no; it causes the flesh to soften and promotes the growth of mold. Store sweet potatoes in a cool, dark, well-ventilated spot.

Master Recipe

Sweet Potato Casserole

serves 8 to 12

NOTE: *Most holiday sweet potato casseroles are too sweet and swimming in butter. This casserole is sweet but not cloying, rich but not fatty. In our tests, we found that parboiling the sweet potatoes is essential. It sets their bright orange color and releases their sugars. Casseroles made with potatoes that were not precooked were dry and less flavorful.*

3 pounds sweet potatoes (about 6 medium), peeled, halved lengthwise, and halves cut crosswise into $^{1}/_{4}$-inch slices

6 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted, plus softened butter for baking dish

2 tablespoons honey

3 tablespoons molasses

1 tablespoon grated fresh gingerroot or 1 teaspoon ground ginger

$^{3}/_{4}$ teaspoon salt

$^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoon cayenne pepper

$1^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons cornstarch

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 375 degrees. Bring several quarts of water to boil in large pot, add sweet potato slices, and boil over high heat until sweet potatoes are bright orange and the point of a paring knife easily pierces but does not break apart a few slices, 4 to 5 minutes. Drain potatoes well and turn into buttered 13 by 9-inch dish.

2. Whisk melted butter, honey, molasses, ginger, salt, and cayenne in small bowl; set aside. Mix cornstarch with 2 tablespoons cold water in small bowl until totally smooth, then whisk into

butter mixture. Pour butter mixture over sweet potatoes and toss to coat well.

3. Cover dish tightly with foil and bake until liquid is bubbly, about 50 minutes. Remove foil, stir potatoes gently, and bake until liquid thickens to glaze potatoes, about 20 minutes. Cool slightly and serve hot or at room temperature.

VARIATIONS:

Sweet Potato Casserole with Maple

Follow recipe for Sweet Potato Casserole, substituting 5 tablespoons maple syrup for honey and molasses.

Sweet Potato Casserole with Orange

Follow recipe for Sweet Potato Casserole, adding 4 teaspoons finely grated orange zest to butter mixture.

Sweet Potato Casserole with Lemon and Bourbon

Follow recipe for Sweet Potato Casserole, adding 3 tablespoons lemon juice to butter mixture and substituting $^1/_4$ cup bourbon for water in cornstarch mixture.

Sweet Potato Casserole with Pecan Topping

Much sweeter than the original recipe, but delicious.

Stir together 6 tablespoons light brown sugar and $^1/_4$ cup flour in small bowl. Add 4 tablespoons cold butter, cut into $^1/_4$-inch pieces, and toss to coat. Pinch between fingertips until mixture is crumbly and resembles coarse cornmeal. Stir in $^1/_2$ cup chopped pecans; cover and refrigerate until needed. Follow recipe for Sweet Potato Casserole, sprinkling cold nut mixture over potatoes after removing foil. Proceed as directed, baking until topping is crisp and dark golden brown, about 20 minutes.

Master Recipe

Baked Sweet Potatoes

serves 4

NOTE: *The skin on baked sweet potatoes can be tough and unappealing, We found that lightly coating the skin with oil softens it slightly and promotes caramelization. This recipe is designed for the orange-flesh varieties of sweet potato that generally show up in supermarkets. If you have white-fleshed sweet potatoes, increase the baking time by about 10*

minutes and use plenty of butter to moisten their drier flesh.

4 medium sweet potatoes (about 2 pounds), scrubbed, dried, and lightly pricked with a fork

2 tablespoons vegetable or olive oil

Salt and ground black pepper

Unsalted butter

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to center position and heat oven to 400 degrees. Rub potatoes with oil, then arrange on foil-lined baking sheet as far apart as

possible.

2. Bake until knife tip slips easily into potato center, 40 to 50 minutes. Remove sweet potatoes from oven and pierce with a fork to create a dotted X (see figure 1). Press in at ends of sweet potato to push flesh up and out (see figure 2). Season with salt and pepper to taste. Dot with butter to taste and serve.

VARIATION:

Mashed Sweet Potatoes

Bake sweet potatoes as directed. As soon as they come out of the oven, remove peels and put sweet potatoes

through a ricer or food mill, pressing the tiny bits into a medium bowl. (You can use a potato masher to mash the peeled potatoes in a bowl, but the texture will be coarse and not nearly as silky.) Stir in 5 tablespoons softened butter and salt and pepper to taste. Beat with a spoon until silky and smooth.

Master Recipe

Oven-Fried Sweet Potatoes

serves 4

NOTE: *Make sure to handle sweet potatoes with a thin metal spatula in the oven. You need to loosen them carefully from the baking sheet so that the crusty exterior does not rip or stick to the pan.*

4 teaspoons peanut oil

2 pound sweet potatoes (3 large), scrubbed

Salt and ground black

pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place $^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon oil on each of two rimmed baking sheets. Use paper towel to spread oil evenly over entire surface and place both sheets in oven. Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

2. Cut each sweet potato from end to end into eight thick wedges. Toss sweet potatoes and remaining tablespoon of oil in medium bowl to coat; season generously with salt and pepper to taste and toss again to blend. Carefully remove one baking sheet from oven and place half of sweet potatoes on baking

sheet cut-side down; spread them out so they do not touch each other. Place baking sheet back in oven and repeat process using second baking sheet and remaining sweet potatoes.

3. Bake until cut side of sweet potato touching baking sheet is crusty and golden brown, 15 to 20 minutes. Remove from oven and carefully turn sweet potatoes, using a metal spatula to loosen them from baking sheet. Bake until second cut side of sweet potato now touching pan is crusty and golden brown, 10 to 15 minutes. Use metal spatula to transfer sweet potatoes to platter and serve immediately.

VARIATION:

Sweet Potato Oven Fries with Indian Spices

Combine 1 teaspoon ground turmeric, 1 teaspoon ground coriander, $^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon ground cumin, and $1^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoons curry powder in small bowl. Add spice mixture to potatoes along with salt and pepper in step 2.

HOW TO MAKE PASTA SAUCES

Pasta Basics

Tomato Sauces

Pesto and Other Oil-Based Sauces

Vegetable Sauces

Meat Sauces

Seafood Sauces

Dairy Sauces

PASTA BASICS

COOKING PASTA SEEMS SIMPLE—AFTER ALL, who can't boil water—but there are a number of fine points that can make the difference between decent pasta dishes and great ones. Over the course of several years of writing and cooking about pasta, we have developed the following list of tips.

BUY AMERICAN, IF YOU LIKE. While many sources tout the superiority of Italian pasta, our taste tests have shown this to be a myth. American brands of

spaghetti scored just as well as Italian brands, and Ronzoni, which is made by Hershey Foods, topped the rankings. While Italian brands offer a greater variety of shapes—such as ear-like orecchiette or bow tie—shaped farfalle—the quality differences that once existed between domestic and Italian pasta have disappeared.

FLAVORED PASTA LOOKS BETTER THAN IT TASTES. Saffron, beet, and tomato pasta may look great, but the flavor is quite subtle. Even spinach pasta has only the mildest spinach flavor, and it's hard to detect once the noodles have been sauced. Buy flavored pastas if you like,

but don't spend extra money thinking they will taste better than plain wheat pasta.

USE DRIED PASTA FOR MOST RECIPES. Fresh pasta, either made at home or at a local pasta shop, is our first choice for lasagne or ravioli. It's also wonderful when cut into fettuccine and then tossed with a cream sauce (the eggs in fresh pasta work well with dairy sauces in general). However, for most uses, dried pasta, which contains just flour and water, is the best choice. Dried pasta has a sturdier texture better suited to many sauces, especially those with vegetables or other large chunks. Dried pasta is also much more convenient than

fresh because it has an almost unlimited shelf-life. If you do use fresh pasta, don't buy packages from the refrigerator case in the supermarket. These brands are soft and mushy and have none of the delicacy and subtle egg flavor of fresh pasta made at home or in a pasta shop.

USE ENOUGH WATER. While the brand of pasta may not make much difference, how you cook the pasta does. First and foremost, start with enough water (at least four quarts for a pound of pasta). Cooking pasta in enough water is the single most important factor in preventing sticking. Pasta swells as it rehydrates and if there is not enough

room, the result is a sticky mess.

FORGET THE OIL. Some cookbooks suggest adding oil to the cooking water to keep the pasta from sticking together. We have found that abundant water will do this job. Oil will make the pasta slick and therefore less receptive to the sauce and should not be added to the cooking water. However, we do recommend using olive oil in pasta sauces. for a discussion of buying olive oil.

USE PLENTY OF SALT. Pasta cooked without salt is bland, no matter how salty the sauce is. Add at least 1

tablespoon once the water comes to a boil, remembering that most of the salt goes down the drain with the cooking water.

TASTE TO COOK PASTA RIGHT. There are no tricks to tell when pasta is al dente, or cooked "to the tooth." (We tried throwing strands against the ceiling or refrigerator and couldn't tell when that pasta was done, but did we end up with a messy kitchen.) When properly cooked, pasta should be resilient but not chewy. Cooking times on packages or in other cookbooks are often inaccurate because each stove works differently, so tasting pasta is a must. Keep in mind that

the pasta will soften a bit further once drained.

DRAIN, DON'T SHAKE. Nothing is worse than a soggy, watery bowl of pasta. However, there is no need to shake the pasta bone-dry either. A little pasta water dripping from the noodles helps thin and spread the sauce. In fact, in many recipes we suggest reserving a little of the cooking water and using it as needed with oil-based sauces that may not moisten the pasta quite enough.

ADD DRAINED PASTA TO SAUCE. For the best flavor and coverage, we like to add

the drained pasta right to the pan with the sauce and then toss over low heat for a minute or so. This method promotes the most even coverage and also allows the pasta to actually absorb some of the sauce. Because the pasta will continue to cook in the sauce, undercook it slightly so the strands are not soft by the time they get to the table.

RESERVE SOME OIL. For an added flavor boost, we found it helpful in our testing to save a little of the olive oil for tossing with the drained pasta and sauce. This tip is especially useful when making a simple tomato sauce. The flavor of the oil is released on contact

with the hot pasta and the oil helps spread the sauce over the noodles.

DON'T GO OVERBOARD WITH SAUCE. Italians are usually quite restrained in their use of sauces, especially because they generally eat pasta as a first course. We prefer to use slightly more sauce, but not the excessive amount common in many American restaurants. If your pasta is dry, you are not using enough sauce. If you finish the pasta and there is still sauce in the bowl, you are using too much.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT SHAPE. In Italy

there is a fine art to matching pasta shapes and sauces. However, we find that there is only one important consideration—the texture of the sauce. A very chunky sauce is better with shells or rigatoni than spaghetti because the former shapes can trap and hold pieces of the sauce, while large chunks of vegetables, for instance, would just sit on top of long, thin strands. The idea is to eat the sauce and pasta in the same mouthful. The headnote to each recipe makes some suggestions about the appropriate pasta shape. *See* also figures 1 and 2.

SERVING SIZES. Every sauce recipe in

this book is designed to coat one pound of pasta. For the most part, one pound of pasta will serve four as a main course. Of course, if the sauce is particularly rich, if there are kids at the table, or if there are a lot of other foods being served, you may be able to get five or six servings. As a first course in the Italian style, a pound of pasta will yield six to eight servings.

USE CHEESE AS YOU LIKE. While grated cheese is a ubiquitous accompaniment to pasta in this country, not so in Italy. Italians would never serve cheese with seafood and often omit it with oil-based vegetable sauces. Of course, you can do

as you like. We find that grated cheese works best when the sauce is fairly liquid, made with either cream or tomatoes. Otherwise, the cheese may stick to the pasta and make it seem dry.

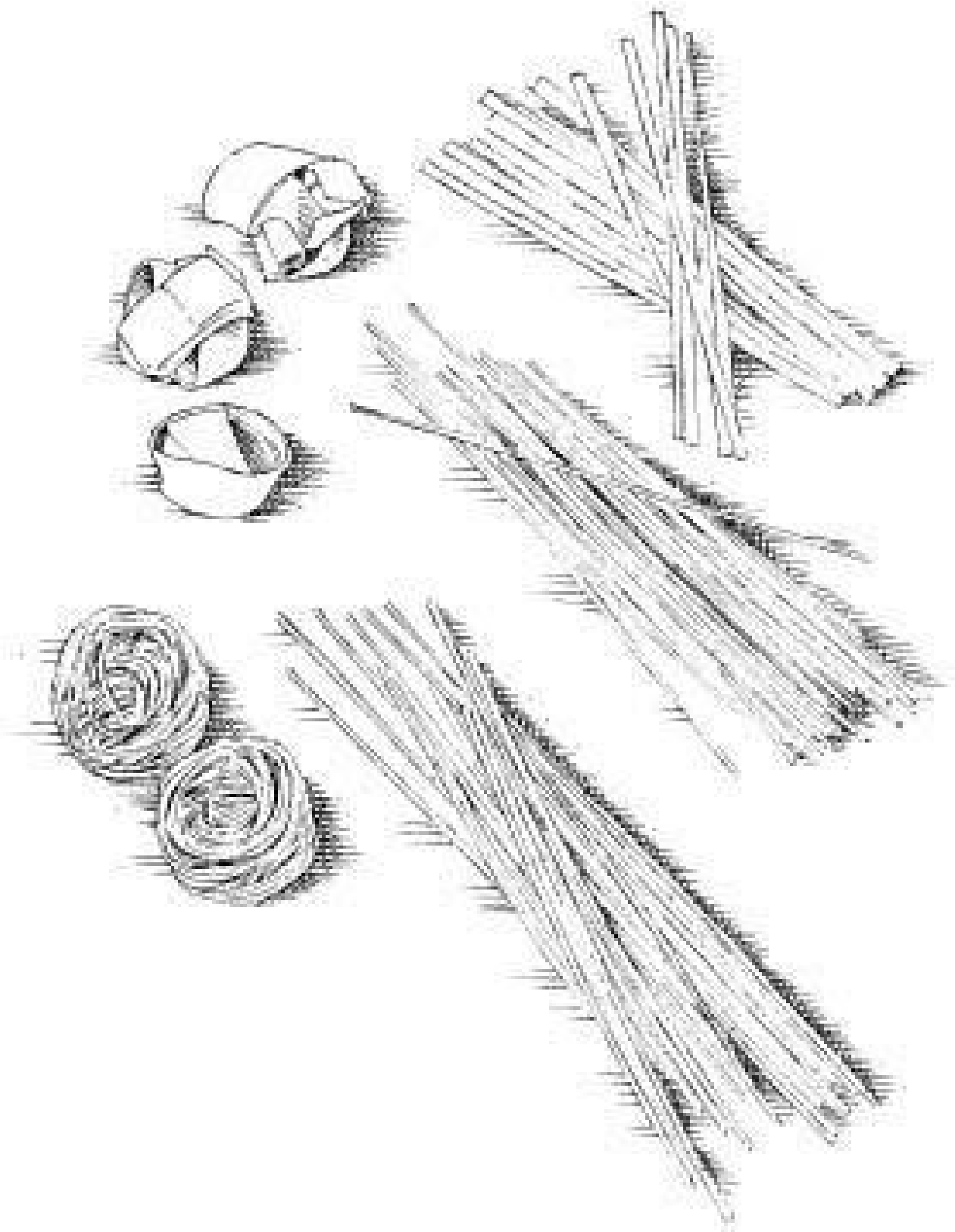

Figure 1.
Long strands are best with

smooth sauces or sauces with very small chunks. In general, wider long noodles, such as pappardelle and fettuccine, can support slightly chunkier sauces than the very thin noodles. Clockwise from the top right, the shapes shown are fettuccine, linguine, spaghetti, capellini, and pappardelle.

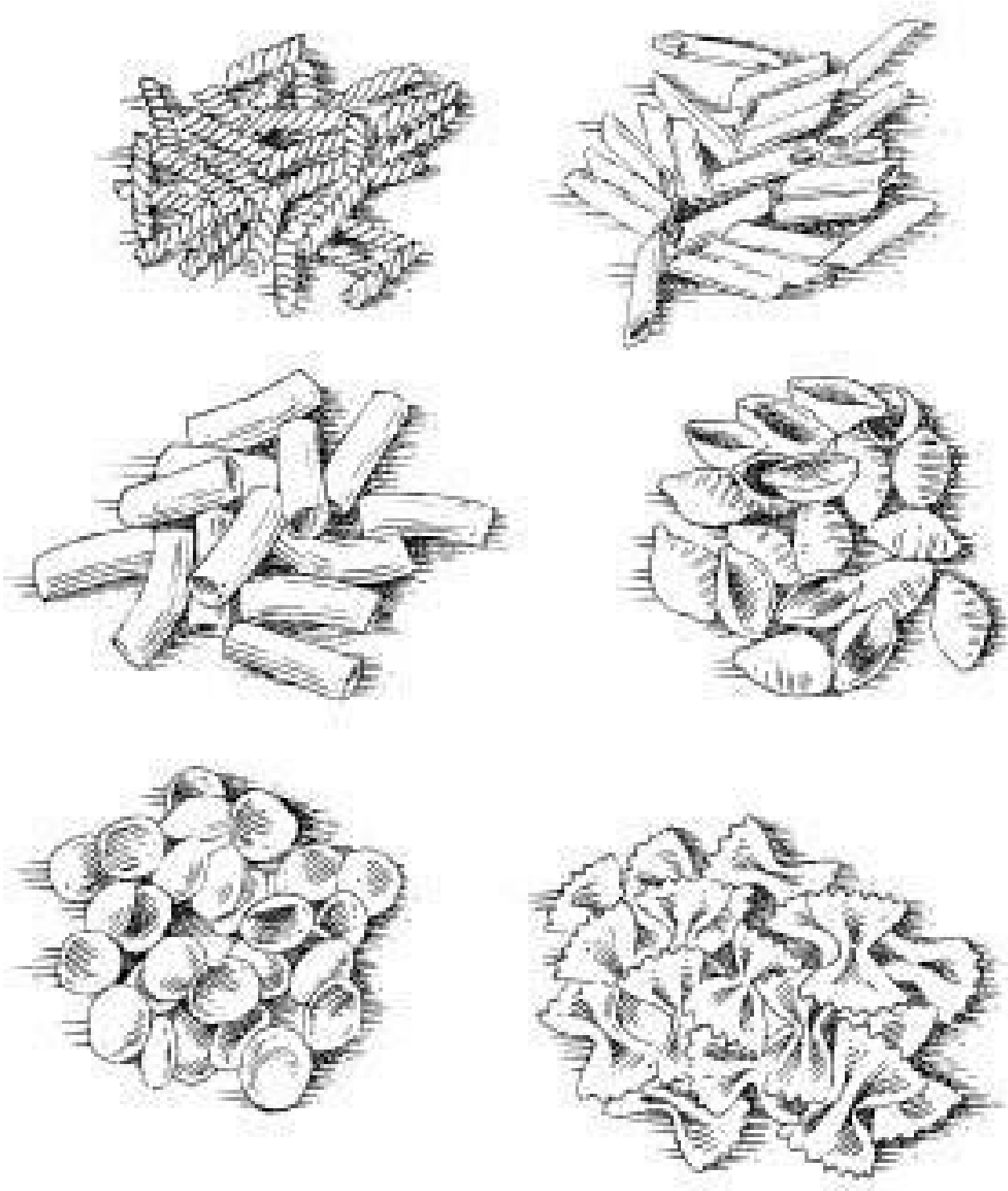

Figure 2.
Short tubular or molded pasta shapes do an excellent job of trapping chunkier sauces. Sauces

with very large chunks are best with rigatoni or other large tubes. Sauces with small chunks make more sense with fusilli or penne. Clockwise from the top right, the shapes shown are penne, shells, farfalle, orecchiette, rigatoni, and fusilli.

TOMATO SAUCES

THERE ARE THREE BASIC KINDS OF TOMATO sauce—a cooked sauce based on canned tomatoes, a cooked sauce based on fresh tomatoes, and a raw sauce using super-ripe summer tomatoes.

The first sauce is certainly the most useful (it can be made year-round) and also the most confusing. This basic tomato sauce should be quick to prepare and have as much fresh tomato flavor as possible. We tested dozens of variables, including the type and brand of tomatoes as well as additional ingredients, and

came to these conclusions.

For the freshest tomato flavor, stick with canned diced tomatoes, especially those made by Muir Glen, or whole tomatoes packed in juice. (We like whole tomatoes from Muir Glen as well as Progresso.) Other canned tomato products, including whole tomatoes packed in puree and crushed tomatoes, have less fresh tomato flavor because they contain cooked products such as paste and/or puree.

While diced tomatoes are our first choice, you can use whole tomatoes as long as you dice them either by hand or in a food processor. One 28-ounce can of whole tomatoes will yield about $2^{1}/_{2}$

cups of diced tomatoes. Add some of the packing juice in recipes where slightly more is required.

In addition to the tomato tests, we experimented with seasonings. We found that butter mutes the flavor of the tomatoes and, for most uses, we prefer olive oil. Garlic is essential but can be overpowering. To keep garlic from burning, we puree it with a little water. A little sugar rounds out the flavors and helps balance the sweet and tart elements.

For the other two kinds of tomato sauce using fresh tomatoes, we have a number of recommendations. For cooked sauces, use plum tomatoes unless local round tomatoes are in season. With

either variety, peel and seed the tomatoes before cooking them for a meaty-textured sauce. For raw tomato sauces, only local round tomatoes will do. There is no need to peel tomatoes for raw sauces, but do halve and seed the tomatoes to remove excess moisture.

Master Recipe

Simple Tomato Sauce

NOTE: ***If using whole tomatoes, avoid those packed in sauce or puree—which produces a dull, relatively flavorless sauce without the interplay of sweetness and acidity—and choose a brand packed in juice. You will need to drain the contents of a 28-ounce can and then start dicing and measuring. Depending on the brand, you may need several tablespoons of juice to yield the amount specified below. If you choose Muir Glen Diced***

Tomatoes, use almost the entire contents of a single 28-ounce can, without discarding any liquid. If you do not have a garlic press, mince the garlic very fine with a little salt (see figure 4) and sauté it for one minute rather than two. Serve with any pasta shape.

$2^{2}/_{3}$ cups diced canned tomatoes

2 medium garlic cloves, peeled (*see* figure 3)

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

2 tablespoons coarsely

chopped fresh basil leaves (about 8 leaves)

1/4 teaspoon sugar

1/2 teaspoon salt

Master Instructions

1. If using diced tomatoes, go to step 2. If using whole tomatoes, drain and reserve liquid. Dice tomatoes by hand or into workbowl of food processor (use three or four $^{1}/_{2}$-second pulses). Tomatoes should be coarse, with $^{1}/_{4}$-inch pieces visible. If necessary, add enough reserved liquid to tomatoes to total $2^{2}/_{3}$ cups.

2. Process garlic through garlic press into small bowl; stir in 1 teaspoon water (*see* figure 4; if you

don't own a garlic press, *see* figure 5). Heat 2 tablespoons oil and garlic in medium sauté pan over medium heat until fragrant but not brown, about 2 minutes. Stir in tomatoes; simmer until thickened slightly, about 10 minutes. Stir in basil, sugar, and salt. Adjust seasonings and serve, tossing pasta with remaining tablespoon of oil. Reserve $^{1}/_{4}$ cup pasta cooking water and use as needed to moisten sauce.

VARIATIONS:

Spicy Tomato Sauce

(Arrabbiata)

Increase garlic to 4 cloves and add $^{3}/_{4}$ teaspoon dried red pepper flakes with garlic puree. Substitute $^{1}/_{4}$ cup minced fresh parsley leaves for basil.

Tomato Sauce with Anchovies and Olives

Increase garlic to 3 cloves and add $^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon dried red pepper flakes and 3 minced anchovy fillets along with garlic puree. Substitute $^{1}/_{4}$ cup minced fresh parsley leaves for basil. Add $^{1}/_{4}$ cup pitted (see figure 13), sliced Kalamata olives and 2 tablespoons drained capers

with parsley.

Tomato Sauce with Vodka and Cream

A d d $^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoon dried red pepper flakes along with garlic. Halfway through 10-minute simmering time, add $^{1}/_{2}$ cup vodka. Continue with recipe, adding 1 cup heavy cream and ground black pepper to taste along with remaining seasonings. Transfer sauce to workbowl of food processor; pulse to coarse puree. Return sauce to pan; simmer over medium heat to thicken, 2 to 3 minutes.

Tomato Sauce with Bacon

and Parsley

Fry 4 ounces (6 slices) bacon, cut into $^1/_2$-inch pieces, in medium skillet over medium-high heat until crisp and brown, about 5 minutes. Transfer with slotted spoon to paper towel—lined plate; pour all but 2 tablespoons fat from pan. Omit 2 tablespoons olive oil from sauce and cook garlic and $^1/_2$ teaspoon dried red pepper flakes in bacon fat. Substitute 2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley leaves for basil; add reserved bacon, crumbled, along with parsley, and reduce salt to $^1/_4$ teaspoon.

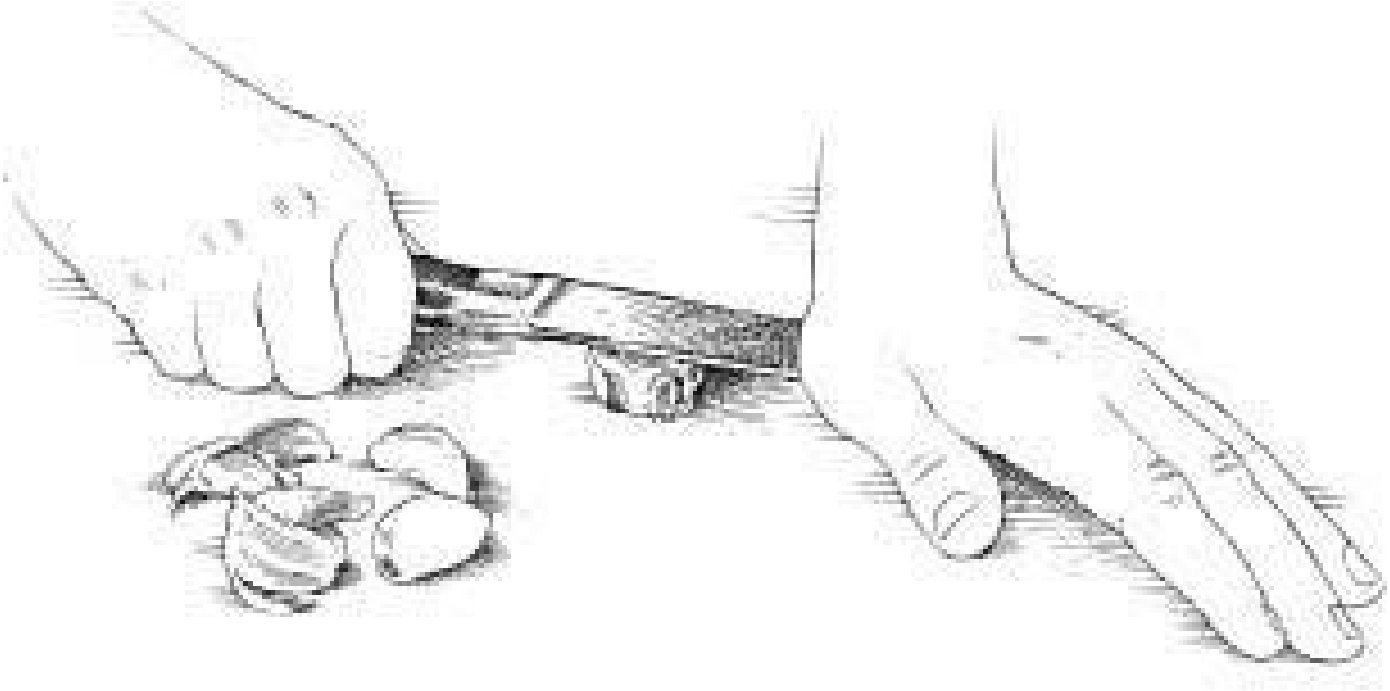

Figure 3.
There are many ways to peel garlic. Unless whole cloves are needed, we crush the cloves with the side of a large chef's knife or a cleaver to loosen their skins and then peel them by hand.

Figure 4.
In a subtle tomato sauce, it's especially important to keep the garlic from burning while still giving it time to become fragrant. Our solution is to cut the garlic as small and evenly as possible. A heavy-duty garlic press with

sturdy handles (don't buy a cheap, flimsy one) does this best. Mix the pressed garlic into a bowl and stir in 1 teaspoon water to form a wet puree.

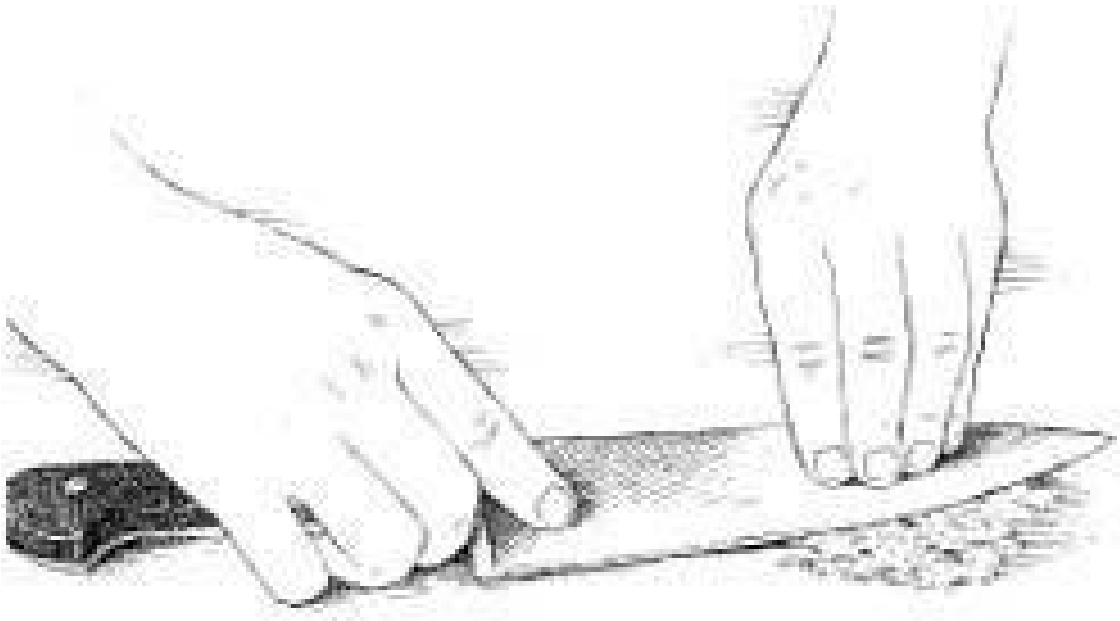

Figure 5.
If you don't own a garlic press, mince it on a cutting board, sprinkling the garlic with a little salt and using the side of a chef's knife to work it into a fine puree. You can prepare garlic for all pasta sauces in this manner, if you like; it is essential when the sauce contains just tomatoes, oil, garlic, herbs, and salt.

Master Recipe

Fresh Tomato Sauce with Basil

NOTE: ***When round tomatoes are in season, use them in this recipe. Otherwise, stick with oblong plum tomatoes. The first variation is a classic in northern Italy; it has a sweet, delicate flavor well-suited to filled pastas or gnocchi, as well as any dried pasta. The second variation is a heartier sauce with strong vegetable flavor; use it with any dried pasta. We prefer to peel the***

tomatoes (the sauce is silkier without the skins), but you may leave them on if you like.

2 pounds ripe fresh tomatoes
2 medium garlic cloves, peeled
3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
2 tablespoons coarsely chopped fresh basil leaves (about 8 leaves)
1/2 teaspoon salt

Master Instructions

1. Peel, core, seed, and chop tomatoes into $^{1}/_{2}$-inch pieces (*see* figures 6 through 9).

2. Process garlic through garlic press into small bowl; stir in 1 teaspoon water (*see* figure 4; if you don't own a garlic press, *see* figure 5). Heat 2 tablespoons oil and garlic in medium sauté pan over medium heat until fragrant but not brown, about 2 minutes. Stir in tomatoes; simmer until thickened somewhat, about 20 minutes. Stir in

basil and salt. Adjust seasonings and serve, tossing pasta with remaining tablespoon of oil. Reserve $^{1}/_{4}$ cup pasta cooking water and use as needed to moisten sauce.

VARIATIONS:

Fresh Tomato Sauce with Butter and Onions

Replace oil with equal amount of unsalted butter and replace garlic with 1 small onion, minced. Sauté onion in butter until translucent, about 5 minutes, before adding tomatoes and proceeding with recipe. Omit basil.

Fresh Tomato Sauce with Aromatic Vegetables

Replace garlic with $^{1}/_{2}$ cup each finely chopped onion, carrot, and celery. Sauté vegetables in oil until softened, 8 to 10 minutes, before adding tomatoes and proceeding with recipe.

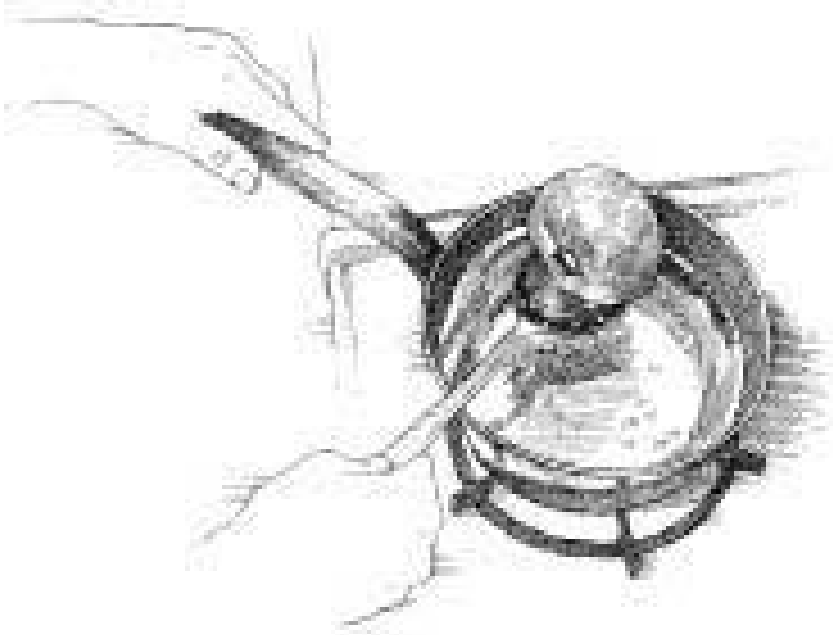

Figure 6.
To remove the skins from fresh tomatoes, drop the tomatoes into a pan of simmering water. Use a slotted spoon to turn the tomatoes (you want all sides to touch the water). After 30 seconds, use the spoon to remove the tomatoes from the water.

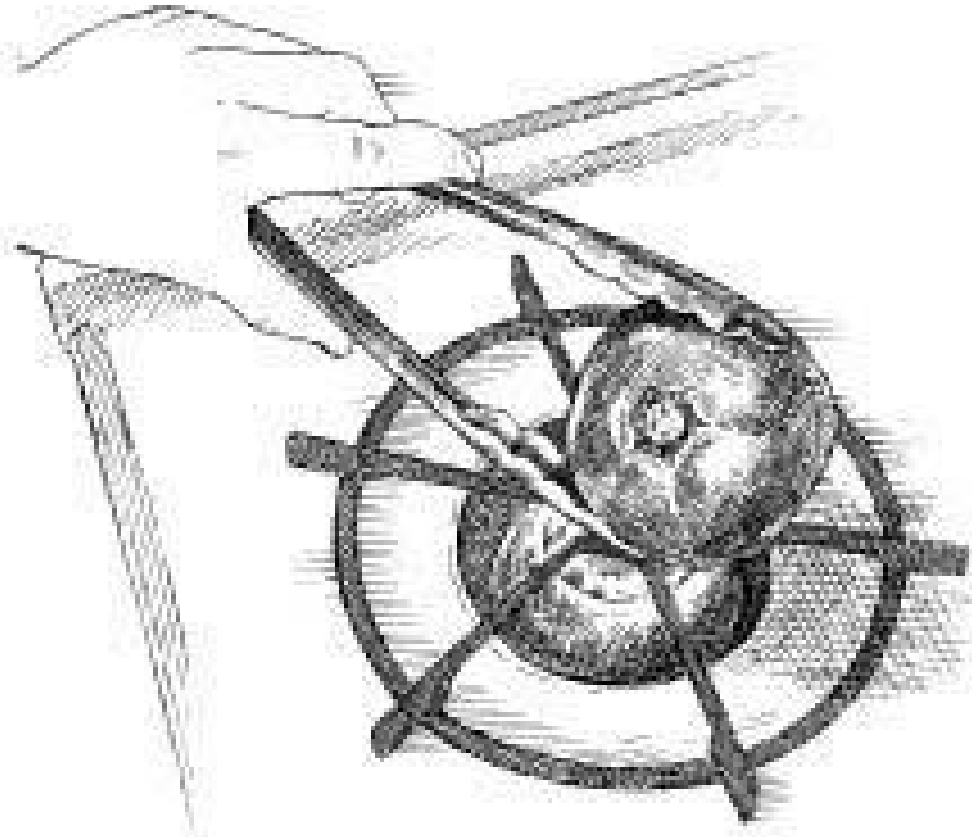

Figure 7.
If you prefer, hold a tomato with long-handled tongs over a burner set to high. Turn the tomato often until the skin blisters and starts to separate, about 30 seconds. This method makes sense when peeling just one or two tomatoes, but for a whole batch you may

save time by simmering them in water.

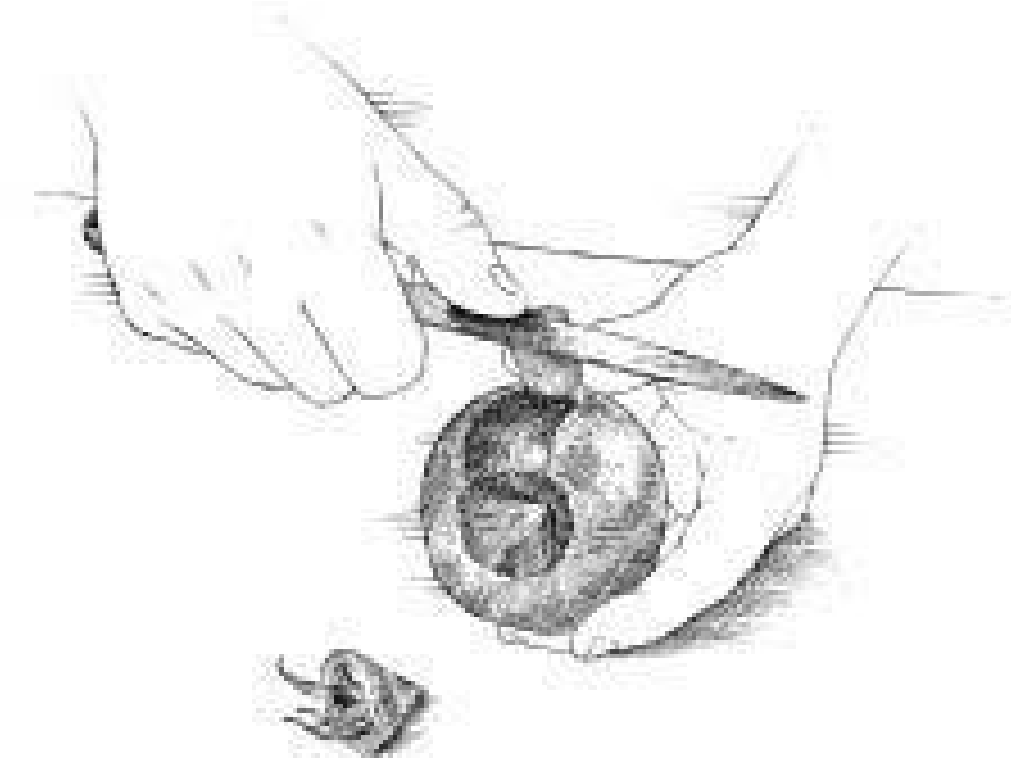

Figure 8.
With either method, wait until the tomatoes are cool enough to handle and then cut out the core. Removing the core makes it easy to grab hold of the skin and peel it off with your fingers.

Figure 9.
Halve each cored and peeled tomato crosswise and then squeeze the seeds out over a bowl or into the sink. Use your finger to push out any remaining seeds. Cut seeded tomatoes into $^{1}/_{2}$-inch dice and reserve for sauce.

Master Recipe

Raw Tomato Sauce with Basil and Garlic

NOTE: ***Called salsa cruda in Italy, this raw sauce depends on absolutely ripe summer tomatoes. The tomatoes are seeded (but not peeled), tossed with the finest olive oil and seasonings, and then used as a sauce for pasta. If you prefer, omit the garlic. Use this sauce with penne or fusilli and serve immediately or allow the pasta to cool to room temperature (do not refrigerate) and enjoy as***

an Italian-style pasta salad.

$1^1/_2$ pounds ripe tomatoes

$^1/_4$ cup extra-virgin olive oil

1 garlic clove, minced

2 tablespoons minced fresh basil leaves Salt and ground black pepper

Master Instructions

1. Core and halve tomatoes crosswise. Squeeze seeds out over bowl or into sink. Use your fingers to push out any remaining seeds. Cut seeded tomatoes into $^{1}/_{4}$-inch dice and place in bowl large enough to hold cooked pasta.

2. Add remaining ingredients, including salt and pepper to taste, and mix well. (Sauce can be covered and set aside at room temperature for several hours before using.)

VARIATIONS:

Spicy Raw Tomato Sauce

Add $^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon dried red pepper flakes, or to taste.

Raw Tomato Sauce with Mixed Herbs

Increase basil to 3 tablespoons and add 3 tablespoons minced parsley and 1 tablespoon each minced mint and thyme.

Raw Tomato Sauce with Olives and Capers

Add $^{1}/_{3}$ cup pitted, sliced Kalamata

olives and 2 tablespoons drained capers.

Raw Tomato Sauce with Pesto

Replace garlic and herbs with $^{1}/_{2}$ cup Classic Pesto.

Raw Tomato Sauce with Mozzarella

Toss 6 ounces fresh mozzarella packed in water, drained and shredded (*see* figure 10), with hot drained pasta and tomato sauce made with $^{1}/_{3}$ cup extra-virgin olive oil. Smoked mozzarella may also be used in this recipe, but avoid shrink-wrapped mozzarella, which will

be too dry and rubbery.

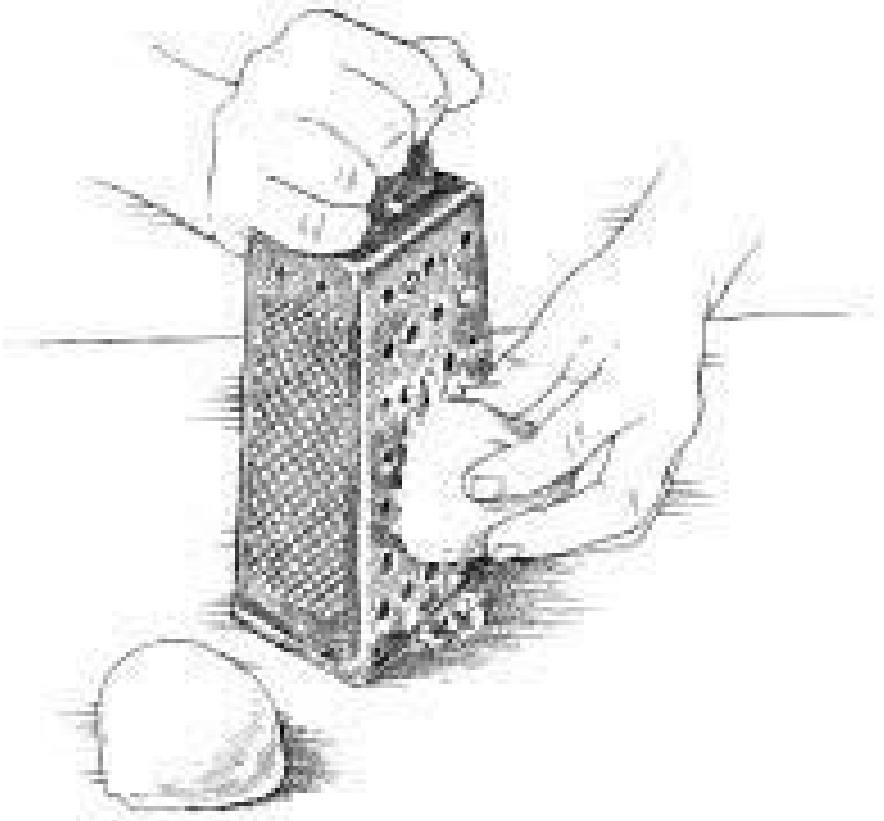

Figure 10.
Mozzarella can be shredded in a food processor fitted with a shredding disk or by hand, using the large holes on a standard box grater.

Figure 11.
Parsley and other fresh herbs with long stems can be kept fresh for at least a week, if not longer, by washing and drying the herbs, and then trimming the stem ends.

Figure 12.
Place the herbs in a tall, airtight container with a tight-fitting lid. Add water up to the top of the stems, but don't cover the leaves. Seal the container tightly and refrigerate. The combination of water and relatively little air

keeps the herbs much fresher than other storage methods.

PESTO AND OTHER OIL-BASED SAUCES

OLIVE OIL-BASED SAUCES ARE QUICK TO prepare and generally ready in less time than it takes to bring water to a boil and cook pasta. Their flavor is very potent, whether it's the strong punch of basil in pesto sauce or the sautéed garlic in aglio e olio.

There are a few points to remember when making pesto, the most famous of all oil-based sauces. Traditionally, this pureed sauce is made in a mortar and pestle, which yields an especially silky

texture and intense basil flavor. The slow pounding of the basil leaves (it takes fifteen minutes to make pesto this way) releases their full flavor.

By comparison, blender and food processor pestos can seem dull or bland. We prefer a food processor over the blender for several reasons. Ingredients tend to bunch up near the blender blade and do not become evenly chopped. Also, to keep solids moving in a blender, it is necessary to add more oil than is really needed to make pesto.

We tested various methods for releasing more of the basil and anise notes in leaves destined for the food processor, including chopping, tearing, and bruising them. In the end, we settled

on packing basil leaves in a plastic bag and bruising them with a meat pounder or rolling pin.

The other main issue with pesto is taming the acrid, overpowering garlic flavor. We tested roasting, sautéing, and infusing oil with garlic flavor, but found all these methods lacking. However, blanching tames the harsh garlic notes and loosens its skin for easy peeling.

To bring out the full flavor of the nuts, toast them in a dry skillet before processing. Almonds are relatively sweet but are fairly hard, so they give pesto a coarse, granular texture. Walnuts are softer but still fairly meaty in texture and flavor. Pine nuts yield the smoothest,

creamiest pesto.

Once basic basil pesto is mastered, other variations are possible. All of these sauces should be thinned with some pasta cooking water to facilitate good distribution throughout the pasta, soften flavors, and highlight creaminess.

Classic Pesto

NOTE: ***Basil usually darkens in homemade pesto, but you can boost the green color by adding the optional parsley. For sharper flavor, substitute 1 tablespoon finely grated Pecorino Romano cheese for 1 tablespoon of the Parmesan. Serve with long, thin pasta or a shape, like fusilli, that can trap bits of the pesto. Pasta with pesto can be served immediately or allowed to cool and eaten at room temperature.***

$^1/_4$ cup pine nuts, walnuts, or almonds

3 medium garlic cloves, threaded on a skewer

2 cups packed fresh basil leaves

2 tablespoons fresh parsley leaves (optional)

7 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

Pinch salt

$^1/_4$ cup finely grated Parmesan cheese

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Toast nuts in small, heavy skillet over medium heat, stirring frequently, until just golden and fragrant, 4 to 5 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, bring small saucepan of water to boil (or use boiling water for

cooking pasta). Lower skewered garlic into water (*see* figure 13); boil for 45 seconds. Immediately run garlic under cold water. Remove from skewer; peel and mince.

3. Place basil and parsley in heavy-duty, quart-size, zipper-lock bag; pound with flat side of meat pounder until all leaves are bruised (*see* figure 14).

4. Place all ingredients except cheese in workbowl of food processor; process until smooth, stopping as necessary to scrape down sides of bowl. Transfer mixture to small bowl, stir in cheese,

and adjust salt. (Cover surface of pesto with sheet of plastic wrap or thin film of oil and refrigerate for up to 5 days.) Thin with $^1/_4$ cup pasta cooking water before tossing with pasta. Reserve additional $^1/_4$ cup pasta cooking water and use as needed to moisten sauce.

VARIATIONS:

Mint Pesto

Replace basil with equal amount of mint leaves and omit parsley.

Arugula Pesto

Replace basil with 1 cup packed fresh arugula leaves and increase parsley to 1

cup packed. Reduce Parmesan to 2 tablespoons; add $^{1}/_{3}$ cup ricotta cheese at same time as Parmesan.

Figure 13.
Briefly blanching whole unpeeled cloves of garlic tames their flavor and prevents the garlic from overpowering the other ingredients in pesto. Skewer whole unpeeled cloves and then lower them into a small pot of boiling water (you can also use

the boiling water for cooking pasta) for 45 seconds. Immediately run garlic under cold water to stop the cooking process.

Figure 14.
Bruising herb leaves in a zipper-lock plastic bag with a meat pounder (or rolling pin) is a quick but effective substitute for hand-pounding with a mortar and pestle and helps to release their flavor.

Sun-Dried Tomato and Black Olive Pesto

NOTE: ***Serve with fusilli or other shape that can trap bits of the sauce.***

15 sun-dried tomatoes packed in oil, drained (about $^{2}/_{3}$ cup)
8 large Kalamata olives, pitted
1 medium garlic clove, peeled
2 tablespoons fresh parsley leaves
1 teaspoon fresh thyme leaves
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
Salt

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place sun-dried tomatoes, olives, garlic, parsley, and thyme in workbowl of food processor. Pulse, scraping down sides of bowl as needed, until ingredients are coarsely chopped. Pulse in oil, one tablespoon at a time, to form smooth but still slightly coarse paste.

2. Scrape pesto into small bowl. Add salt to taste. If the olives are salty, you may need very little salt. (Cover surface of pesto with sheet of plastic wrap or thin film of oil and refrigerate for up to 5 days.) Thin with $^{1}/_{4}$ cup pasta cooking water before tossing with pasta. Reserve additional $^{1}/_{4}$ cup pasta cooking water

and use as needed to moisten sauce.

Olive Oil and Garlic Sauce

NOTE: ***The key to aglio e olio (garlic and oil) is to cook the garlic slowly to tame its bite but without causing it to burn and become bitter. It's hard to make this sauce with much less oil (the pasta will be bland and dry), but the variation with lemon juice does use fewer tablespoons. Put the pasta (use either linguine or spaghetti) in the water just before starting the sauce.***

1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil

6 large garlic cloves, peeled

Salt and ground black pepper

1/4 cup minced fresh parsley

leaves

1. Place oil, garlic, and $1^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoons salt in small skillet. Turn heat to medium-low and cook, stirring often, until garlic becomes a rich, golden color, about 5 minutes. Do not let garlic brown.

2. Remove skillet from heat. Stir in parsley, and pepper to taste. Reserve $^{1}/_{4}$ cup pasta cooking water and use as needed to moisten sauce.

VARIATIONS:

Spicy Olive Oil and Garlic

Sauce

Add $^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon dried red pepper flakes to oil with garlic.

Olive Oil and Garlic Sauce with Lemon

Reduce oil to $^{1}/_{3}$ cup and add 2 tablespoons lemon juice along with parsley.

VEGETABLE SAUCES

THERE ARE TWO MAIN CONSIDERATIONS when preparing vegetable sauces for pasta. First, the vegetables must be cut into small enough pieces that will not overwhelm the pasta. Broccoli must be trimmed into very small florets or mushrooms sliced. The other major issue is moisture.

Some vegetables, such as mushrooms, are fairly watery and will help create their own sauce. Other vegetables, like broccoli, need some help. Possible choices include tomatoes, cream, and

oil. Tomatoes are low in fat but can obscure delicate vegetable flavors. Cream has the same problem, with additional concern about fat. Olive oil is probably the best all-purpose solution because its flavor complements that of most vegetables, but care must be taken to keep the pasta from becoming too greasy.

While it is certainly possible to use more than $^1/_2$ cup of oil in a vegetable sauce meant for tossing with one pound of pasta (many traditional Italian recipes do so), we think it's better to keep the oil under $^1/_2$ cup. One reason many cooks, including us, choose vegetable pasta sauces is because they make lighter,

healthier meals. If you agree and want to keep oil use to a minimum, rely on a little of the pasta cooking water to moisten and stretch the sauce.

In our taste tests, we have found that pure olive oils do not have much flavor and are not recommended in pasta sauces. Extra-virgin olive oils (which contain more flavor than other olive oils and by law must have a very low acidity) are a must. In our testing, we found it quite difficult to tell differences among various extra-virgin oils when tasted on food. This held true even when comparing oils priced at $10 per quart to those retailing for $50 or more a quart.

All extra-virgin oils go through an

independent tasting process that eliminates flawed samples. Our advice is to find a reasonably priced brand you like—the supermarket has many decent choices. An oil marked "extra-virgin" will deliver a certain level of quality, so you can focus on important considerations, like finding fresh, flavorful vegetables.

Master Recipe

Broccoli-Anchovy Sauce

NOTE: ***This recipe can be made with cauliflower, broccoli rabe, kale, turnip greens, or collards. Simply adjust blanching time to insure that vegetable is cooked only until crisp-tender or slightly wilted. The hot red pepper flakes can be omitted from the master recipe or any of the variations for a milder sauce. Serve with orecchiette or shells if using broccoli or cauliflower. When made with leafy greens, this sauce works well fusilli or penne.***

If making the master recipe, feel free to use the anchovy-packing oil to help make up the 1/3 cup olive oil needed.

1 medium head broccoli (about 1 1/2 pounds)
Salt
1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil
4 medium garlic cloves, minced
1 2-ounce can anchovy fillets, drained and minced
1/2 teaspoon dried red pepper flakes

Master Instructions

1. Bring several quarts of water to boil in large saucepan. Separate broccoli florets from central stalk; discard stalk and break florets into bite-sized pieces (*see* figures 15 through 17). There should be about 6 cups of florets. Add salt (to taste) and broccoli to boiling water. Cook until crisp-tender, 2 to 3 minutes. Drain and set broccoli aside.

2. Heat oil, garlic, and anchovies in medium sauté pan over medium heat until garlic is fragrant but not brown, about 2 minutes. Stir in hot

red pepper flakes and then broccoli. Cook, stirring often, until broccoli is heated through, about 2 minutes. Adjust seasonings. Reserve $^1/_4$ cup pasta cooking water and use as needed to moisten sauce.

VARIATIONS:

Broccoli Rabe, Garlic, Raisin, and Pine Nut Sauce

Replace broccoli with 6 cups broccoli rabe cut into 1-inch pieces and cook until tender, 1 to 2 minutes. Omit anchovies. Add $^1/_4$ cup yellow or dark raisins and 2 tablespoons pine nuts along

with hot red pepper flakes and cook for 30 seconds before adding blanched broccoli rabe.

Cauliflower, Onion, and Bacon Sauce

Replace broccoli with 6 cups cauliflower florets and cook until crisp-tender, 3 to 4 minutes. Omit anchovies and hot red pepper flakes. Instead, cook 4 ounces pancetta or bacon cut into $^1/_2$-inch dice in sauté pan over medium heat until crisp, about 7 minutes. Remove pancetta or bacon with slotted spoon, add enough oil to equal $^1/_3$ cup total fat. Sauté 1 medium onion, minced, in fat until golden, about 6 minutes, adding

garlic during last minute. Add blanched cauliflower and pancetta or bacon and cook until heated through. Add $^{1}/_{4}$ cup minced fresh parsley and season sparingly with salt.

Figure 15.
Some heads of broccoli have closely bunched branches that all meet the central stalk at roughly the same point. If this is the case, lay the broccoli on its side and use a large chef's knife to cut the florets off about $^{1}/_{2}$ inch below their heads.

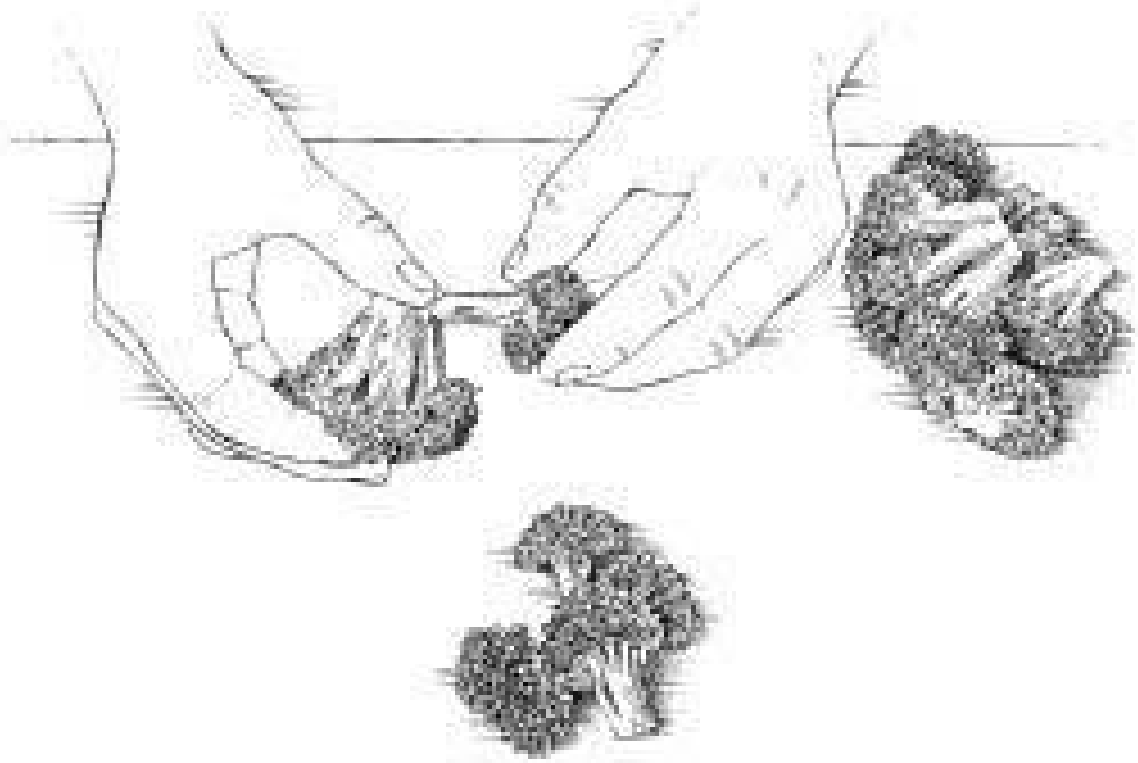

Figure 16.
Break apart florets in bite-sized pieces, snapping them apart where individual clusters meet.

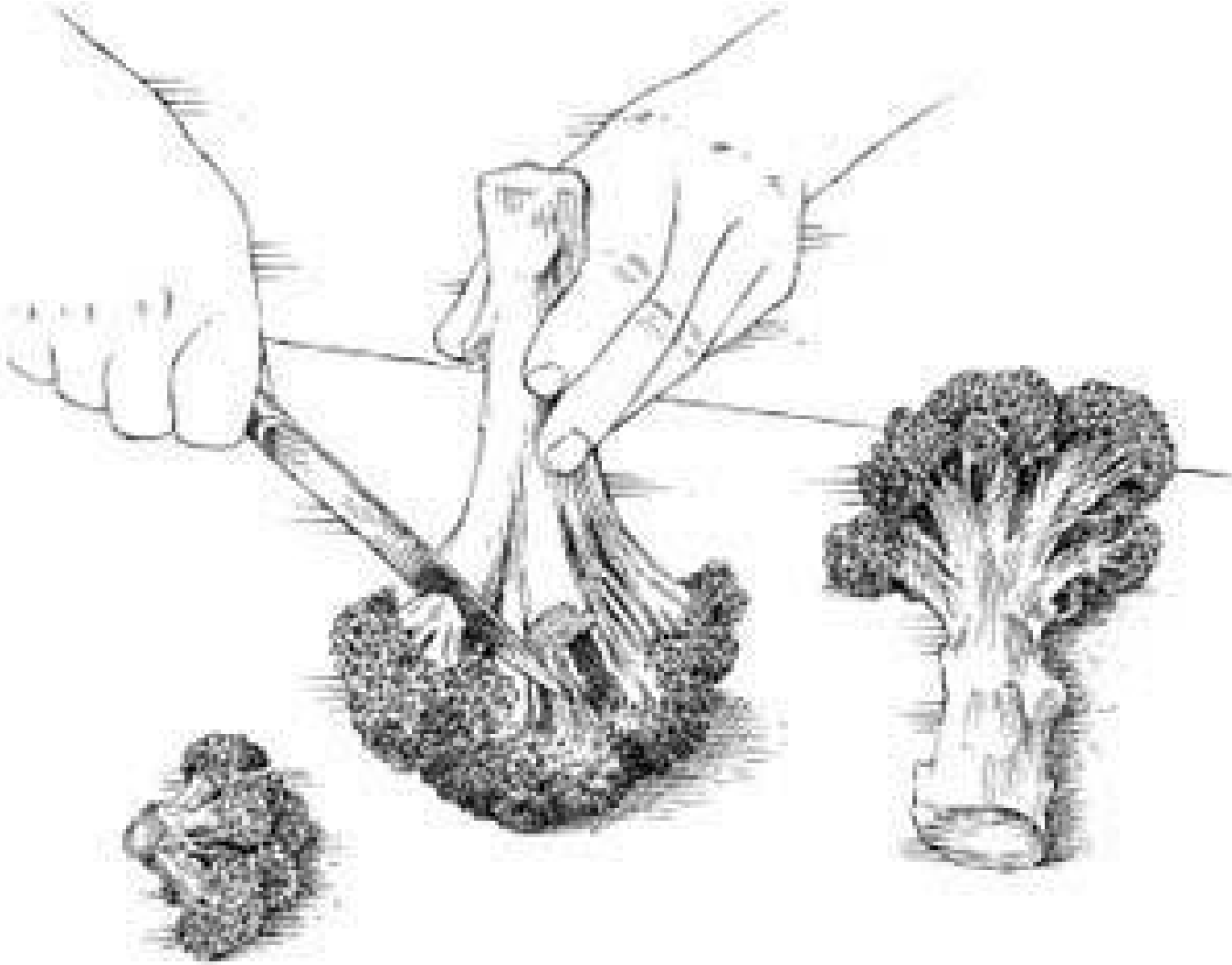

Figure 17.
If working with a head of broccoli with widely spaced branches, place the head of broccoli upside down and use a large, sharp knife to quickly trim off the florets close to their

heads.

Escarole and White Bean Sauce

NOTE: ***Our panel of tasters preferred Green Giant and Goya brands of canned beans. Serve with orecchiette or small shells.***

1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil

4 medium garlic cloves, minced

1 large head escarole (about 1 pound), trim and discard end and wilted outer leaves; cut remaining leaves into 1/2-inch strips and rinse thoroughly

2 teaspoons minced fresh oregano leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

1 16-ounce can white cannellini beans, drained and rinsed

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oil and garlic in large sauté pan over medium heat until fragrant but not brown, about 2 minutes. Add greens, increase heat to medium-high, and cook, stirring often, until greens are slightly wilted, about 3 minutes.

2. Add $^{3}/_{4}$ cup water, oregano, and salt and pepper to taste. Cover and simmer until escarole is tender, about 3 minutes. Add beans, cover, and simmer until flavors are blended, about 3 minutes.

Reserve $^{1}/_{4}$ cup pasta cooking water and use as needed to moisten sauce.

Roasted Red and Yellow Pepper Sauce

NOTE: ***This room-temperature sauce works well with fusilli, penne, farfalle, or other small shapes that can trap bits of the sauce.***

2 medium red bell peppers, roasted, peeled, cored, seeded, and chopped (*see* figures 18–24)

2 medium yellow bell peppers, roasted, peeled, cored, seeded, and chopped (*see* figures 18–24)

6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

1 large garlic clove, minced

2 tablespoons minced fresh

mint leaves

1 tablespoon drained capers

2 teaspoons lemon juice

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

Combine all ingredients, including salt and pepper to taste, in large bowl. Cover and set aside for flavors to meld, at least 30 minutes or up to 2 hours. Adjust seasonings. Reserve $^{1}/_{4}$ cup pasta cooking water and use as needed to moisten sauce.

Figure 18.
To prepare a bell pepper for roasting, slice $^{1}/_{4}$ inch from the top and bottom of the pepper.

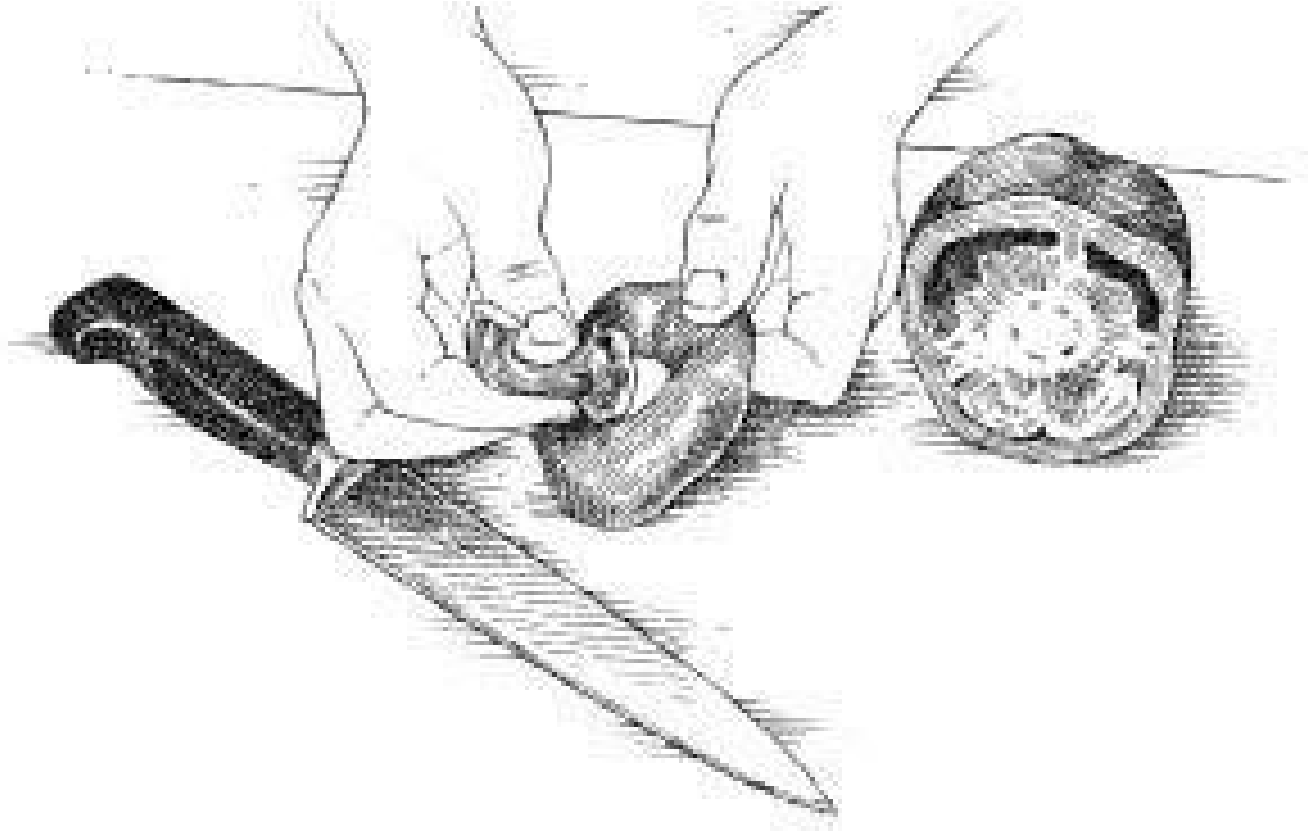

Figure 19.
Gently remove the stem from the top lobe.

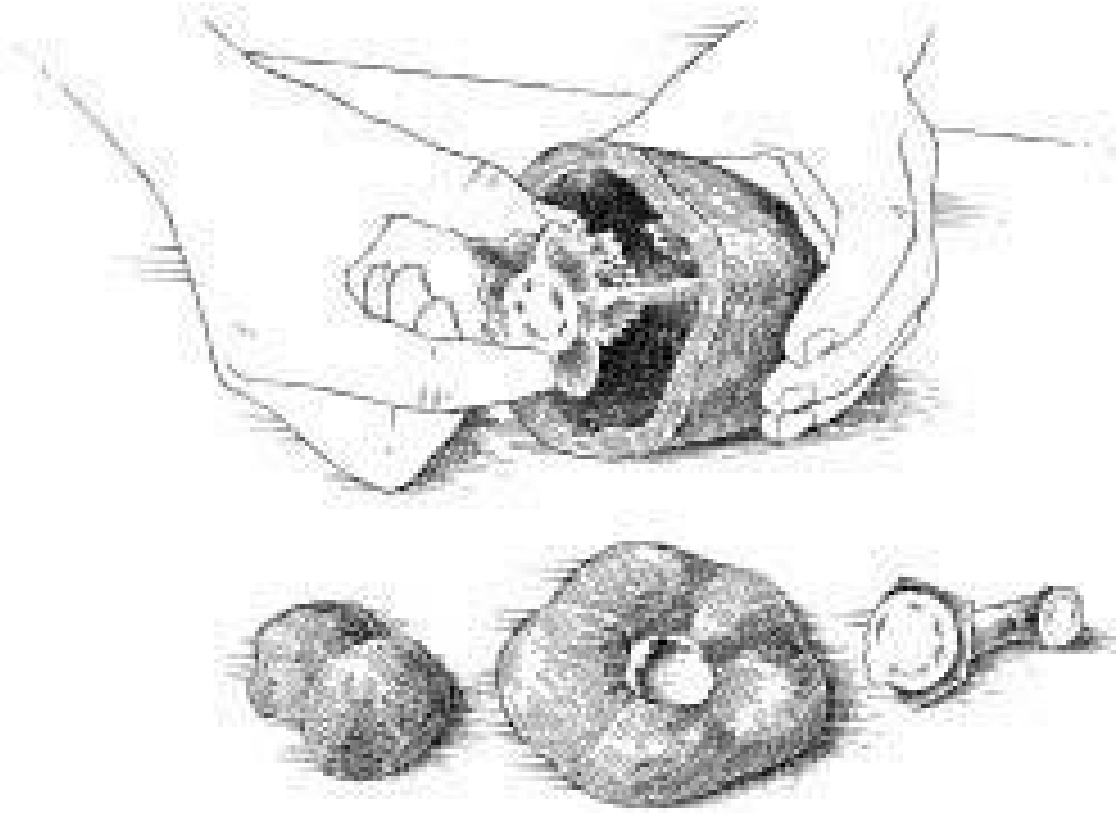

Figure 20.
Pull the core out of the pepper.

Figure 21.
Slit down one side of the pepper, then lay it flat, skin side down, in long strips. Use a sharp knife to slide along the inside of the pepper removing all white ribs and seeds.

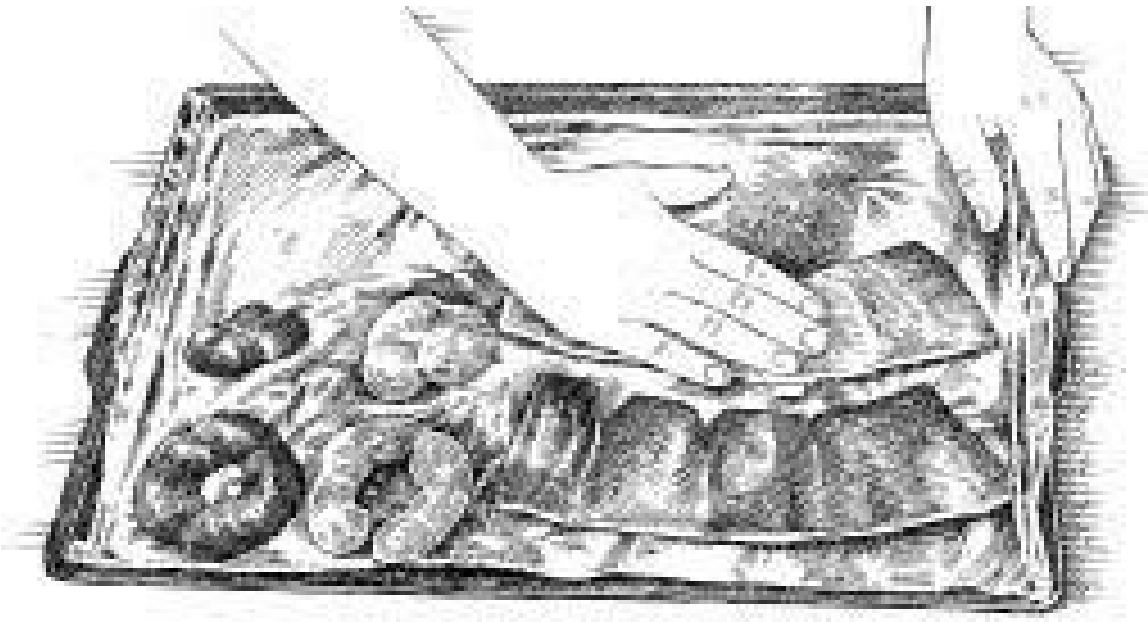

Figure 22.
Arrange strips of peppers and the top and bottom lobes, all pieces skin side up, on a baking sheet lined with a piece of aluminum foil. Flatten the strips with the palm of your hand.

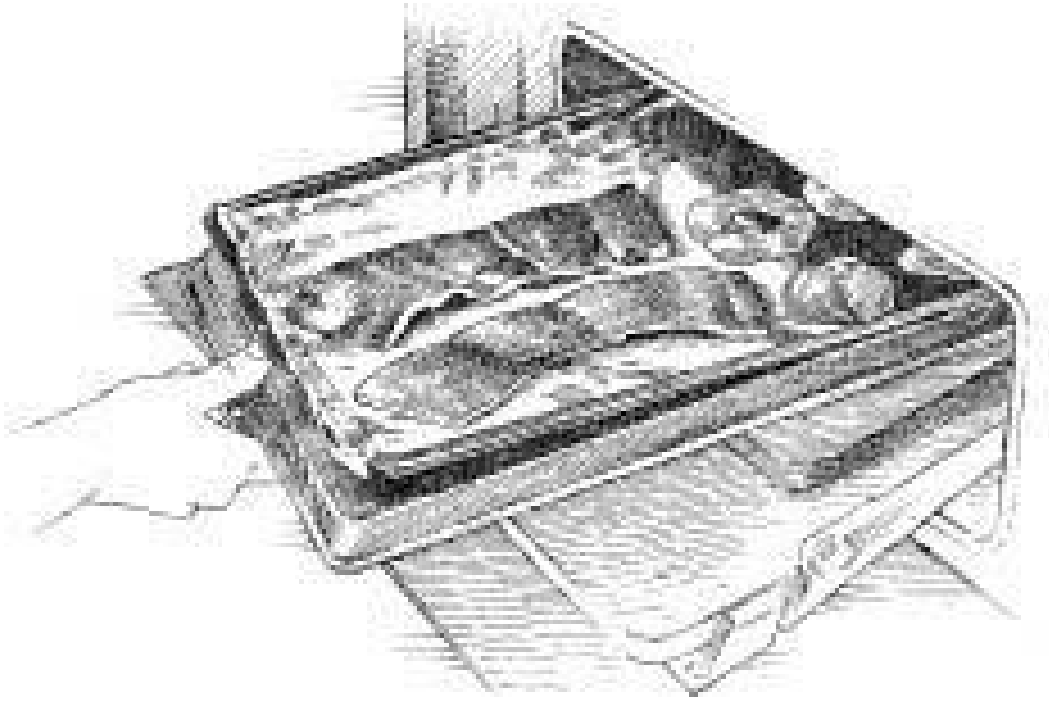

Figure 23.

Adjust oven rack to top position and preheat broiler. If the rack is more than $3^{1}/_{2}$ inches from heating element, set a jelly-roll pan, bottom side up, on a rack and then slide the baking sheet with the peppers on top of the upside down jelly-roll pan.

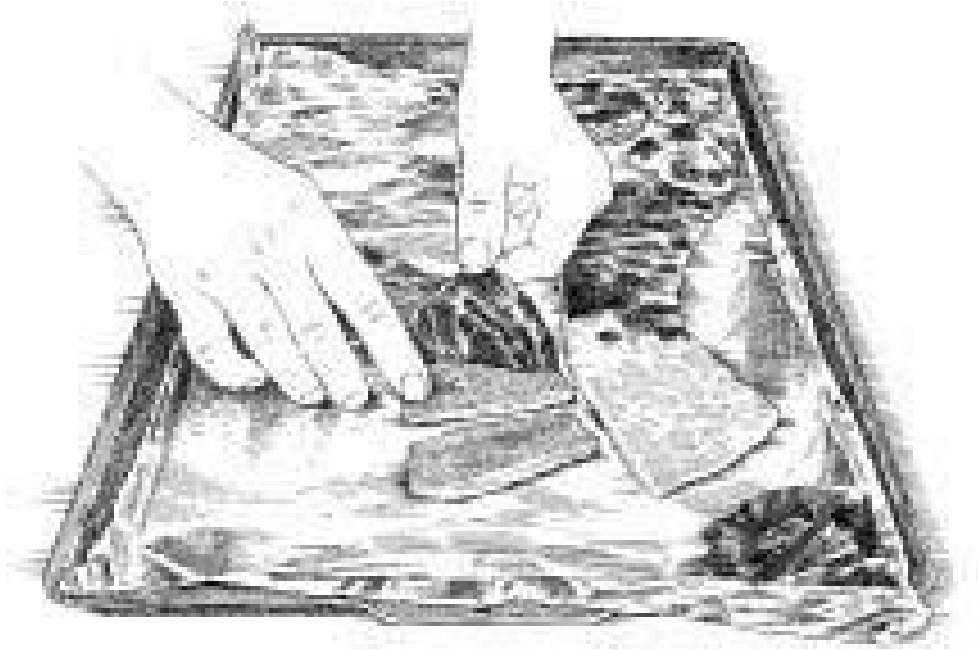

Figure 24.

Roast until the skin of the peppers is charred and puffed up like a balloon but the flesh is still firm. Wrap pan tightly with foil and steam peppers for 15 minutes to help loosen skins. When peppers are cool enough to handle, start peeling the skin where it has charred and bubbled the most. The skin should come

off in large strips.

Braised Fennel and Kale Sauce with Balsamic Vinegar

NOTE: ***The natural sweetness of fennel makes it a good partner for bitter greens like kale, mustard, turnip, or beet. Flowering purple kale adds color as well as earthy flavor and should be used if possible. Serve with spaghetti or linguine.***

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
1 medium onion, minced
1 medium fennel bulb (about 1 pound), fronds removed, minced, and reserved (1

tablespoon); stems discarded; and bulb trimmed, halved, cored, and sliced thin

Salt and ground black pepper

$^3/_4$ pound kale or other bitter greens, stemmed (*see* figure 25), washed, and chopped coarse

2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar

$^1/_4$ cup grated Parmesan cheese, plus more for table

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oil in large sauté pan or skillet with cover. Add onion; sauté over medium heat until softened, about 5 minutes. Stir in fennel and cook until

golden, about 10 minutes.

2. Add $^{1}/_{2}$ cup water and salt and pepper to taste. Stir in kale and cover. Simmer over medium-low heat until fennel is tender and greens are fully cooked, about 10 minutes.

3. Stir in vinegar and simmer to blend flavors, about 1 minute. Adjust seasonings. Toss sauce with pasta and cheese. Garnish servings with reserved minced fronds.

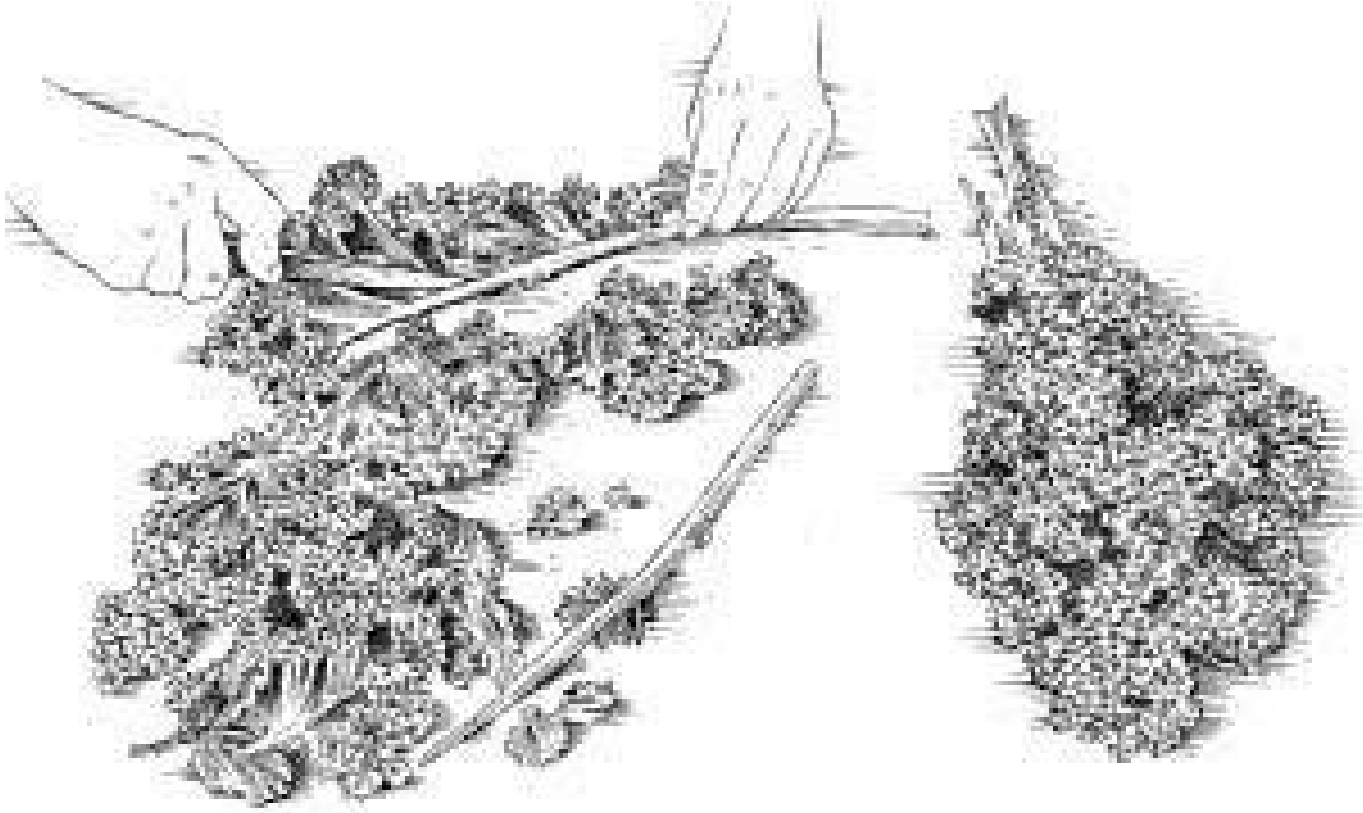

Figure 25.
Kale leaves have a tough central rib that must be removed and discarded before cooking. Lay the leaves curly side down, and slice along either side of the rib to remove the leafy portion.

Portobello Mushroom Ragù

NOTE: ***A ragù is a thick tomato sauce usually made with meat. Here, hearty portobello mushrooms take the place of the meat and add an earthy, woodsy flavor. Serve with penne and grated Parmesan cheese passed at the table.***

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

1 medium onion, minced

2 medium portobello mushrooms (about $^1/_2$ pound), stems discarded; caps halved and cut crosswise into $^1/_4$-inch strips (*see* figures 26 and 27)

1 teaspoon minced fresh

rosemary leaves

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

$^1/_2$ cup dry red wine

$1^1/_2$ cups drained canned whole tomatoes, chopped

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oil in large skillet. Add onion and sauté over medium heat until translucent, about 5 minutes. Add mushrooms and cook, stirring occasionally, until quite tender and starting to shed their liquid, about 5 minutes. Stir in rosemary and salt and pepper to taste, and cook for 30 seconds.

2. Add wine and simmer until it reduces by half, about 3 minutes. Add tomatoes and simmer until sauce thickens considerably, 10 to 15 minutes. Adjust seasonings.

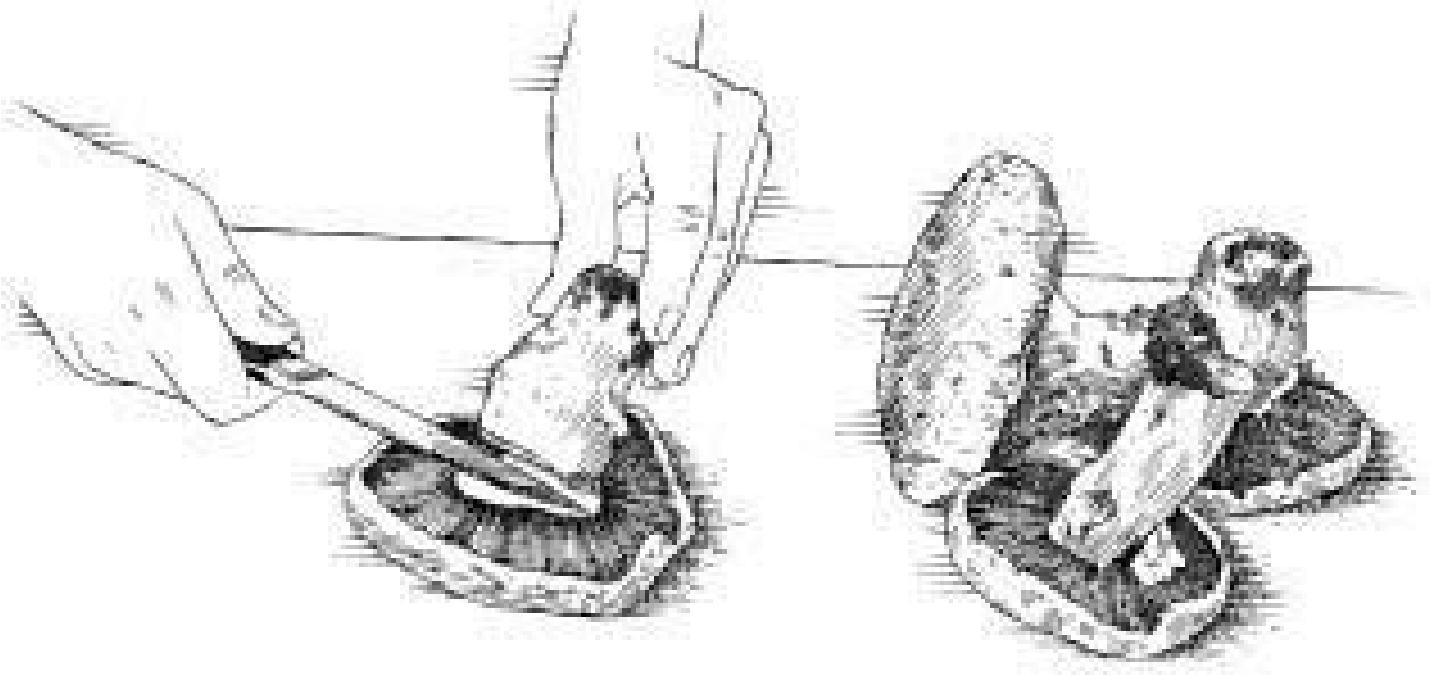

Figure 26.
The stems on portobello mushrooms are tough and woody. They can be used in stock but will remain hard if used in a pasta sauce. Simply slice them off just under the cap and reserve for another use or discard.

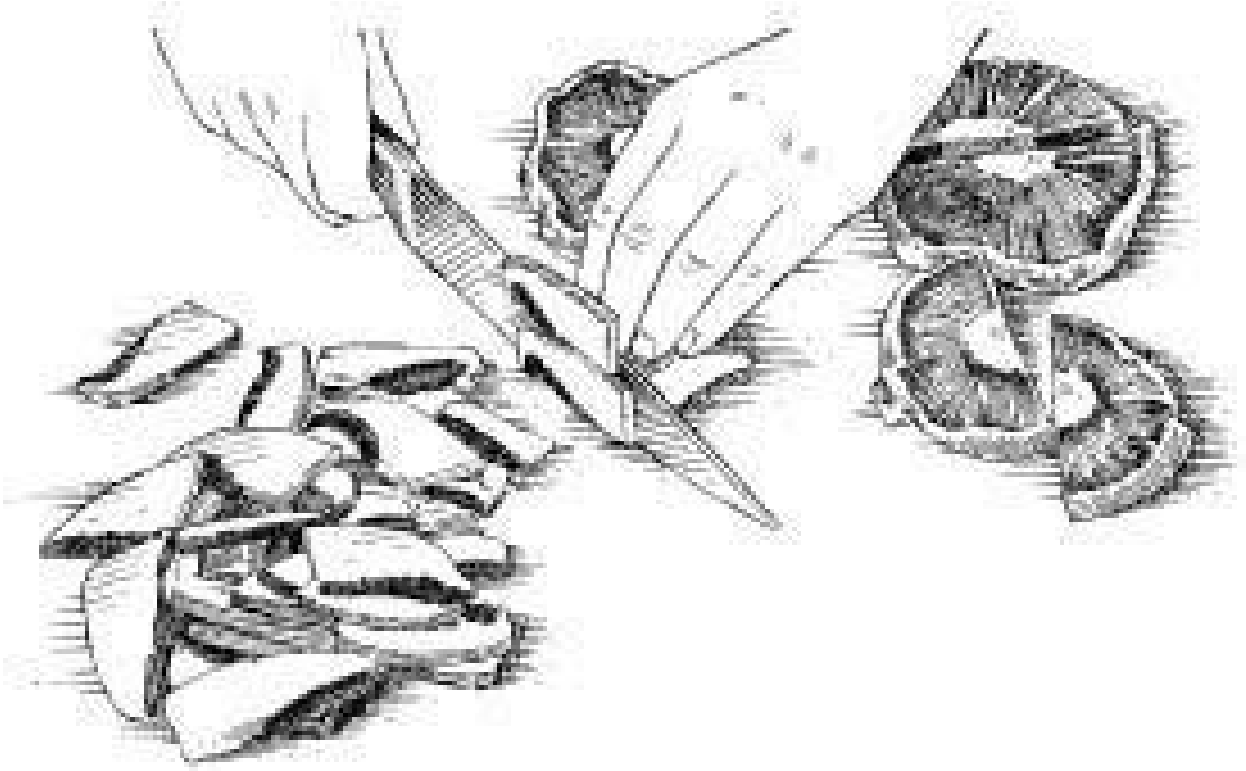

Figure 27.
Slice each cap in half and then cut each half crosswise into $^{1}/_{4}$-inch-thick strips.

MEAT SAUCES

BY DEFINITION, MEAT SAUCES ARE RICH IN FLAVOR and offer an excellent way to "stretch" a small amount of beef or pork to feed four or more people. Because the meat must marry with the pasta, it needs to be quite small. Ground meats, bulk sausage (or sausage meat removed from its casings and crumbled), and chopped bacon are all possible choices.

When making sauces with ground beef, we opt for chuck, which has more fat than ground round and sirloin. In our testing, we have found that leaner ground

meats become dry and tough when cooked through, as is necessary when making a pasta sauce. Even chuck can lose too much moisture if it is overcooked. For this reason, sauté ground meat (as well as sausage) just until it loses its raw color. This way the meat will still retain some of its moisture when the liquid ingredients (wine, tomatoes, etc.) are added to the pan. The meat will continue to cook, so there's no need to worry about undercooking at this point.

In addition to not overcooking the meat, try to break apart pieces with a fork as the meat cooks. Ground meat, especially, has a tendency to clump together as it cooks. Pieces of meat

crumbled into small bits will coat pasta better than large pieces, so don't omit this step.

Sauces in this chapter require several different kinds of canned tomatoes. For ragù, we like to use whole tomatoes in juice. We drain and chop the tomatoes and then use the juices to keep the sauce from scorching. The three-hour simmering time for this sauce accentuates differences in pans and stoves. The tomato juice, which can be added as needed, helps compensate for those differences.

For the absolutely quickest meat sauce, we use canned crushed tomatoes, which need very little time to thicken

into a saucy consistency. While some chunkiness is desired in a basic tomato sauce, for meatballs the sauce should be thick (so the meatballs don't become soggy) and smooth. Canned crushed tomatoes are essential here.

Bolognese Sauce

NOTE: ***Italy's most famous meat sauce hails from Bologna and is called a ragù. While many recipes use a variety of ground meats, pancetta, prosciutto, and/or mushrooms, we prefer the simple, intense flavors of beef and tomatoes, fortified with wine, milk, and aromatic vegetables. Ground beef is first sautéed with onions, carrots, and celery until no longer pink. Wine is added to give the sauce depth. Once the wine cooks off, the beef is simmered in a little milk, which adds sweetness and keeps the meat soft during the final long simmering in tomatoes. Serve with***

fresh pasta, especially fettuccine or cheese ravioli, and pass grated Parmesan cheese at the table.

2 tablespoons unsalted butter
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 small onion, minced
1 small carrot, peeled and minced
1/2 celery stalk, minced
3/4 pound ground beef, preferably chuck
Salt
1 cup dry white wine
1 cup milk
Pinch freshly grated nutmeg
1 28-ounce can whole tomatoes packed in juice,

chopped fine, with juice reserved

::INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat butter and oil in casserole or large, deep sauté pan with thick, heavy bottom. Add onion, carrot, and celery and sauté over medium heat until softened, about 7 minutes.

2. Add beef and crumble with fork to break apart (*see* figure 28). Sprinkle with 1 teaspoon salt and cook, stirring often, until meat just loses raw color, about 3 minutes. Add wine and simmer until alcohol cooks off, about 4 minutes. Add milk and nutmeg. Simmer until milk

thickens a bit, about 4 minutes.

3. Add tomatoes and $^{1}/_{2}$ cup of their juice. When sauce starts to boil, reduce heat so that it cooks at barest simmer, with just an occasional bubble or two. Cook, uncovered, for 3 hours, turning down heat if sauce starts to simmer or scorch. If sauce dries out before it is done, add some reserved tomato juice. Adjust seasonings and serve. (Sauce can be stored in airtight container and refrigerated for several days or frozen for several months. Warm over low heat before using.)

Quick Meat Sauce

NOTE: ***A traditional meat sauce must simmer for three hours to acquire its characteristic depth of flavor. In this 20-minute recipe, mushrooms lend some bulk and flavor to a quickly simmered sauce. Serve with fettuccine, filled pastas (tortellini or ravioli), or even fusilli, and pass grated Parmesan or Pecorino Romano cheese at the table.***

1 tablespoon olive oil

$^{3}/_{4}$ pound ground beef, preferably chuck

Salt and ground black pepper

$^{1}/_{2}$ pound button or cremini

mushrooms, ends trimmed and sliced thin

2 medium garlic cloves, minced

1 teaspoon minced fresh oregano leaves or $^1/_2$ teaspoon dried

$^1/_2$ cup dry red wine

$2^1/_2$ cups crushed tomatoes

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oil in large skillet. Add beef and crumble with fork to break meat apart. Cook, stirring often, over medium heat until meat just loses raw color, about 3 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste. If there is a lot of fat in pan, carefully drain some off.

2. Add mushrooms and cook until tender, about 3 minutes. Add garlic and oregano and cook for 1 minute. Add wine; simmer until alcohol cooks off, about 2 minutes.

3. Add tomatoes and simmer until sauce thickens, about 10 minutes. Adjust seasonings and serve.

VARIATION:

Sausage-Mushroom Sauce with Tomatoes

Replace beef with equal amount of Italian link sweet (or hot) removed from

casings. Cook, crumbling sausage with fork, until pink color is gone, about 4 minutes. Add salt sparingly and proceed with recipe.

Figure 28.
Ragù must have a very fine, almost smooth texture. For this reason, it's imperative that you crumble the ground beef with a fork as it cooks. Otherwise, it may clump together into large pieces that might overwhelm delicate pasta shapes.

Meatballs in Smooth Tomato Sauce

NOTE: ***We found that a combination of beef and pork delivers the best flavor. The pork adds an extra dimension to the meatballs but all chuck may be used if you prefer. As for binders, we found that fresh sliced bread, with the crusts trimmed, creates moister, richer, creamier meatballs than dried bread crumbs. Buttermilk adds a subtle tang and is our preferred liquid to soften the torn bread.***

To dress spaghetti or other long, thin shape, ladle several large

spoonfuls of tomato sauce (without meatballs) over spaghetti and toss until noodles are well coated. Divide pasta among individual bowls and top each with a little more tomato sauce and several meatballs. Serve immediately with grated cheese passed separately.

Meatballs

2 slices white sandwich bread (crusts discarded), torn into small pieces

$^1/_2$ cup buttermilk or 6 tablespoons plain yogurt thinned with 2 tablespoons sweet milk

1 pound ground meat (preferably 3/4 pound ground chuck and 1/4 pound ground pork)

1/4 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese

2 tablespoons finely minced fresh parsley leaves

1 large egg yolk

1 teaspoon finely minced garlic

3/4 teaspoon salt

Ground black pepper

About 1 1/4 cups vegetable oil for pan-frying

Smooth Tomato Sauce

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

1 teaspoon minced garlic

1 28-ounce can crushed tomatoes

1 tablespoon minced fresh basil leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Combine bread and buttermilk in small bowl, mashing occasionally with fork, until smooth paste forms, about 10 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, place ground meat,

cheese, parsley, egg yolk, garlic, salt, and pepper to taste in medium bowl. Add bread-milk mixture and combine until evenly mixed (*see* figure 29). Shape 3 tablespoons of mixture into $1^{1}/_{2}$-inch round meatball. (When forming meatballs use a fairly light touch. If you compact the meatballs too much, they can become dense and hard.) You should be able to form about 14 meatballs. (Meatballs may be placed on large plate, covered loosely with plastic wrap, and refrigerated for several hours.)

3. Pour vegetable oil into 10- or 11-inch sauté pan to depth of $^{1}/_{4}$ inch. Turn flame

to medium-high heat. After several minutes, test oil with edge of meatball. When oil sizzles, add meatballs in single layer. Fry, turning several times, until nicely browned on all sides, about 10 minutes (*see* figure 30). Regulate heat as needed to keep oil sizzling but not smoking. Transfer browned meatballs to plate lined with paper towels and set aside.

4. Discard oil in pan but leave behind any browned bits. Add olive oil for tomato sauce along with garlic and sauté, scraping up any browned bits, just until garlic is golden, about 30 seconds. Add tomatoes, bring to boil, and simmer

gently until sauce thickens, about 10 minutes. Stir in basil and salt and pepper to taste. Add meatballs and simmer, turning them occasionally, until heated through, about 5 minutes. Adjust seasonings and serve.

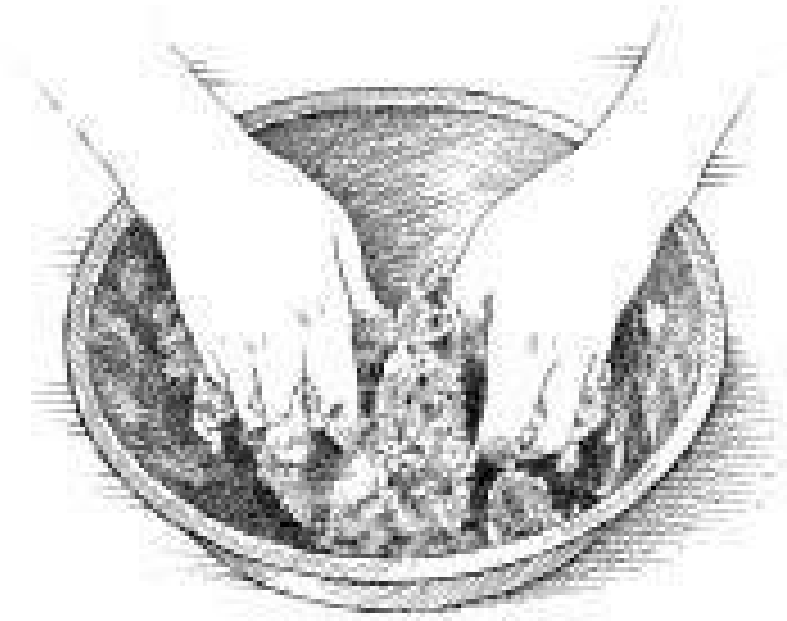

Figure 29.
Once all the ingredients for the meatballs are in the bowl, mix with a fork to roughly combine. At this point, use your hands to make sure that the flavorings are evenly distributed throughout the mixture.

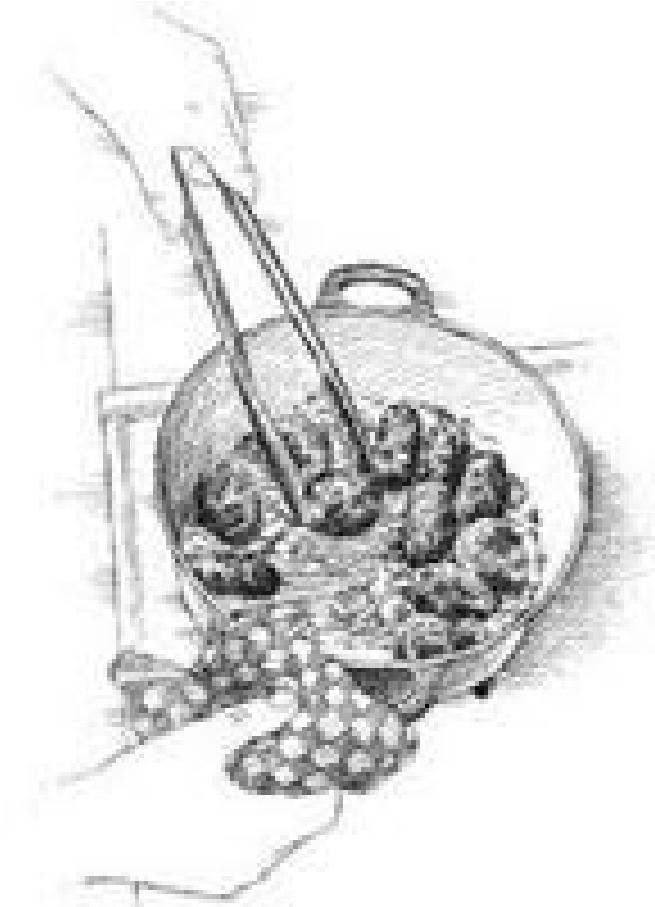

Figure 30.
Meatballs must be browned well on all sides. This may involve standing meatballs on their sides near the end of the cooking process. If necessary, lean them up against each other to get the final sides browned.

Carbonara Sauce

NOTE: ***With bacon, eggs, and cheese, this sauce, which should be served with spaghetti, is an indulgence. Pancetta, Italian bacon that is cured but not smoked, is more authentic, but regular smoked American bacon is fine as well. For a sharper cheese flavor, replace $^{1}/_{4}$ cup of the Parmesan with an equal amount of grated Pecorino Romano. We found that white wine, which is common to some carbonara recipes, helps cut the richness of the sauce. Note that although the heat from the pasta will slightly cook the eggs, it will not raise***

the temperature sufficiently to kill bacteria and this dish should be avoided by anyone who does not want to eat raw eggs.

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

3 large garlic cloves, lightly crushed

$^1/_3$ pound pancetta or bacon, cut into $^1/_4$-inch dice (*see* figure 31)

$^1/_4$ cup dry white wine

4 large eggs

$^1/_2$ cup grated Parmesan cheese, plus more for table

2 tablespoons minced fresh

parsley leaves
Ground black pepper to taste

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oil in large skillet. Add garlic and cook over medium heat, turning several times, until rich golden color, about 5 minutes. Remove and discard garlic.

2. Add pancetta to skillet and cook, stirring occasionally, until crisp, about 7 minutes. Drain off all but 2 tablespoons of fat. Add wine and simmer for 2 minutes. Turn off heat and set pan aside. Reheat bacon mixture just before tossing with pasta.

3. Meanwhile, in bowl large enough to hold cooked pasta, beat eggs, cheese, parsley, and generous amount of black pepper. Toss cooked and drained pasta in bowl with eggs. Mix well and then stir in hot bacon mixture. Serve immediately.

Figure 31.
Cutting pancetta or bacon can be difficult because the pieces often stick to a knife. Try using kitchen scissors instead.

SEAFOOD SAUCES

THERE ARE SEVERAL IMPORTANT POINTS to consider when making pasta sauces from seafood. First, most seafood will overcook quickly, so timing is essential. While a meat sauce can often simmer on the back burner for quite some time, a clam sauce can go from delicious to inedible in a matter of minutes. For the most part, this means starting seafood sauces at the same time the pasta goes into the boiling water. If the sauce is ready before the pasta, turn off the heat and cover the pan. Do not simmer

seafood sauces over low heat. The heat from the drained pasta will warm seafood sauces if necessary.

The second important issue is moisture. Shrimp, scallops, mussels, and clams are unappetizing if too dry and will not coat pasta properly. In the case of clams and mussels, the natural juices make the ideal medium for a sauce. Shrimp and scallops will need a fair amount of olive oil, wine, cream, or tomatoes to keep them saucy. Reserving some of the pasta cooking water is also a good idea.

When serving seafood pasta sauces, Italians do not pass grated cheese at the table. The Italians feel that the rich, buttery flavor of cheese clashes with the

bright, briny flavor of seafood.

For the most part, we agree with the Italian sentiment. If you would like to add something to seafood pastas at the table, try toasted bread crumbs. They add a pleasing crunch and nutty flavor. Any time you have some stale bread on hand, turn it into crumbs (either by hand or in a food processor) and then freeze the crumbs in an airtight container. When needed, simply toast the crumbs in a dry skillet for an instant flavor boost for seafood pasta.

Some cleaning tips for seafood. Clams and mussels need to be scrubbed with a stiff brush to remove any caked-on mud or sand. Also, pull out any weedy

"beards" protruding from the mussels. Scallops have a small, rough-texture, crescent-shaped muscle that attaches the scallop to the shell. This tendon on the side of the scallop can toughen when cooked and should be peeled off when preparing scallops.

Fresh Clam Sauce

NOTE: ***Large quahog clams, though they do not make great eating, provide plenty of liquid for a briny, brothy pasta sauce. And because quahogs, also called chowder clams, are so cheap, discard them without guilt and dine on the sweet, tender littlenecks with the pasta. To keep the littlenecks from becoming tough, cook them just until they begin to open in a little wine and then add them back to the sauce just before it is tossed with either spaghetti or linguine. The diced plum tomato in this recipe provides some acidity as well as color. Start the pasta at the same time you start cooking the***

garlic and undercook the pasta slightly, because it will be cooked again with the sauce. **See *figure 32* for information on cleaning clams.**

24 small littleneck clams, scrubbed thoroughly

6 large quahog or chowder clams, scrubbed thoroughly

1/2 cup dry white wine

Pinch cayenne

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

2 medium garlic cloves, minced (about 1 tablespoon)

1 large or 2 small plum tomatoes, peeled, cored, seeded, and minced (*see* figures 6–9)

$^{3}/_{4}$ cup chopped fresh parsley leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Bring clams, wine, and cayenne to boil in deep, 10- to 12-inch covered skillet over high heat. Boil, shaking pan occasionally, until littlenecks begin to open, 3 to 5 minutes. Transfer littlenecks with slotted spoon to bowl; set aside. Recover pan and continue cooking quahogs until their liquid is released, about 5 minutes more. Discard quahogs and strain liquid in pan through paper towel—lined sieve into large measuring cup (*see* figure 33). Add enough water to make 1 cup; set aside.

2. Wipe out skillet with paper towel and heat oil and garlic in empty skillet over medium heat until garlic starts to sizzle, about 1 minute. Adjust heat to low; cook, stirring occasionally, until garlic turns pale gold, about 5 minutes more. Add tomatoes, raise heat to high, and sauté until incorporated, about 2 minutes. Add littlenecks and cover; cook until all clams are open, 1 to 2 minutes more.

3. Add cooked, drained pasta, reserved clam liquid, and parsley and cook, stirring often, until pasta is melded with sauce, about 30 seconds. Serve

immediately.

Figure 32.
Scrub clams with soft brush under running water to remove any sand from their shells.

Figure 33.
To remove any grit from the clam cooking liquid, strain it through a sieve lined with a single layer of paper towel and set over a measuring cup. If desired, moisten the towel first so that it

does not absorb any precious clam juices.

Steamed Mussel Sauce with Lemon and White Wine

NOTE: ***Mussels can sometimes be gritty. To remove any sand, the mussels are steamed in white wine and the broth is strained through paper towels. The mussels and their strained liquid are added to the finished sauce just before it is tossed with the pasta. Use linguine or spaghetti and start cooking it once mussels have been steamed and the broth has been strained. This sauce is fairly soupy, so serve with bread.***

3 dozen black mussels, rinsed thoroughly and weedy beards

removed (*see* figure 34)

1/2 cup dry white wine

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

2 medium garlic cloves, minced

1/2 teaspoon dried red pepper flakes

1/2 teaspoon grated zest and 2 tablespoons juice from 1 medium lemon

2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves

Salt

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Bring mussels and wine to boil in large soup kettle over medium-high heat. Lower heat to steam mussels until most

have opened, 4 to 5 minutes. Discard any that have not opened. Remove mussels from shells if desired; set aside. Strain liquid through papertowel-lined sieve and reserve. Wipe out soup kettle with another paper towel.

2. Heat oil over medium heat in now-empty soup kettle. Add garlic and pepper flakes; sauté until garlic is golden, about 1 minute. Add strained mussel broth, and lemon zest and juice; simmer to blend flavors, 3 to 4 minutes. Return mussels to kettle; heat to warm through. Stir in parsley and salt to taste. Use immediately.

Figure 34.
Some mussels contain a weedy beard protruding from the crack between the two shells. Trap the beard between the side of a small knife and your thumb and pull to remove it.

Shrimp Sauce with Basil

NOTE: ***This sauce is really nothing more than sautéed shrimp tossed with pesto minus the cheese. The linguine or other long, thin pasta should be in the water when you start cooking the shrimp.***

3/4 cup packed fresh basil leaves
1 small garlic clove, minced
1 tablespoon pine nuts
6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and ground black pepper
1 pound small shrimp, peeled and deveined if desired

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place basil, garlic, nuts, and 4 tablespoons oil in workbowl of food processor; process until smooth, stopping as necessary to scrape down sides of bowl. Transfer mixture to bowl large enough to hold cooked pasta. Stir in $^1/_2$ teaspoon salt and $^1/_4$ teaspoon pepper.

2. Heat remaining 2 tablespoons oil in large skillet. Add shrimp; sauté over medium-high heat until pink, 3 to 4 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Transfer shrimp to bowl with

pesto. Thin with $^{1}/_{4}$ cup pasta cooking water before tossing with pasta. Reserve additional $^{1}/_{4}$ cup pasta cooking water and use as needed to moisten sauce.

Seared Scallop Sauce with Wine and Cream

NOTE: ***The only tricky part of this recipe is ensuring that the pasta and sauce are done at the same time. Start spaghetti or other long, thin pasta after adding the ginger and shallot to the sauté pan and you'll be fine.***

$1^1/_2$ pounds sea scallops, tendons discarded
Salt and ground black pepper
$1^1/_2$ tablespoons unsalted butter
1 medium shallot, minced
1 tablespoon minced fresh gingerroot

$^{2}/_{3}$ cup dry white wine

2 tablespoons white wine vinegar

1 cup heavy cream

$^{1}/_{4}$ cup snipped fresh chives or $^{1}/_{2}$ cup chopped scallion greens

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 200 degrees. Sprinkle scallops on both sides with salt and pepper. Heat large sauté pan over medium-high heat. Add half butter; swirl to coat pan bottom. Continue to heat until butter turns golden brown. Add half of scallops, one at a time, flat side down; cook, adjusting heat as necessary to prevent fat from burning, until scallops

are well browned, $1^1/_2$ to 2 minutes. Using tongs (*see* figure 35), turn scallops one at a time; cook until sides are firmed up and all but middle third of scallop is opaque, 30 seconds to $1^1/_2$ minutes longer, depending on size. Transfer scallops to platter and place in warm oven. Repeat cooking process with remaining butter and scallops.

2. Add shallot and ginger to empty pan; cook until shallot softens, 1 to 2 minutes. Increase heat to high; add wine and vinegar and boil, scraping pan bottom with wooden spoon to loosen caramelized bits, until liquid reduces to

glaze, 4 to 5 minutes. Add cream, $^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon salt, $^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoon pepper; bring to boil. Reduce heat; simmer until cream reduces slightly, about 1 minute. Stir in chives. Toss with pasta, divide among bowls, and arrange some scallops over each portion.

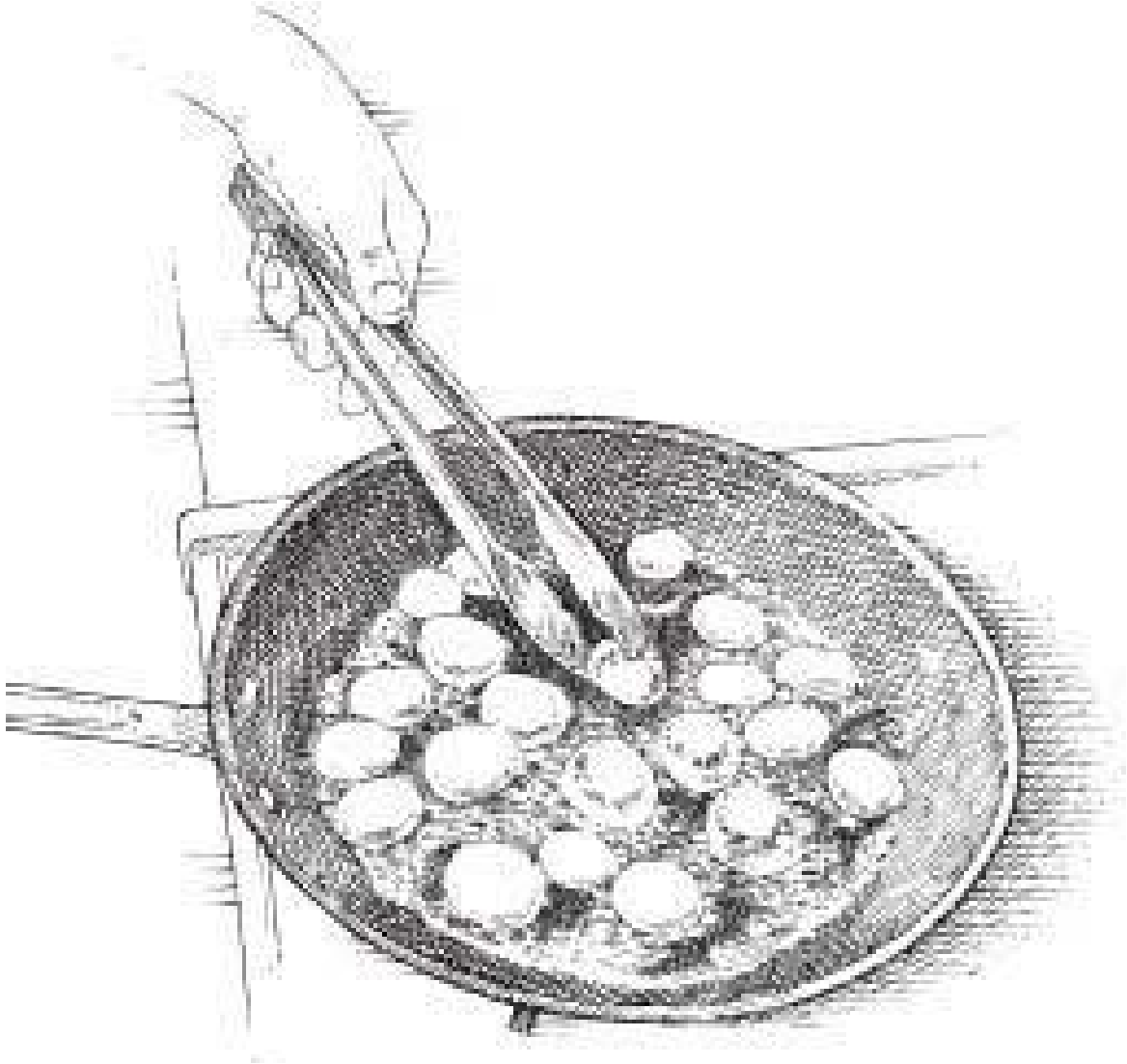

Figure 35.
When sautéing scallops, make sure not to overcrowd the pan or they will not brown properly. Use tongs to turn the scallops in the pan.

Scallop Sauce with Toasted Bread Crumbs

NOTE: ***In this sauce, toasted bread crumbs take the place of grated cheese (which is not served with seafood sauces in Italy) and are tossed with the pasta and scallop sauce just before serving. Use linguine or spaghetti here and do not shake the pasta dry when draining. If the pasta is still coated with a little cooking water (but not dripping) it will marry better with the oil-based sauce. Start cooking the pasta just before heating the oil in step 2.***

$^1/_2$ cup fresh bread crumbs

(*see* figures 36–38)

1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil

Salt

2 medium cloves garlic, minced

1/2 teaspoon hot red pepper flakes or to taste

1 pound scallops, tendons discarded and cut into 1/2-inch pieces

1/4 cup minced fresh parsley leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to center-low position and preheat oven to 325 degrees. Mix crumbs with 1 tablespoon oil and pinch salt to coat evenly. Spread

in single layer on small baking sheet. Bake crumbs, stirring once after 5 minutes, until golden brown, about 12 minutes. Set crumbs aside.

2. Heat remaining oil in very large skillet. Add garlic and sauté over medium heat until golden, about 1 minute. Add hot red pepper flakes and salt to taste and continue cooking for another 30 seconds.

3. Increase heat to high. Add scallops and sauté, stirring occasionally, until opaque, about 3 minutes. Stir in parsley and adjust seasonings. Immediately toss

sauce with pasta and toasted bread crumbs and serve.

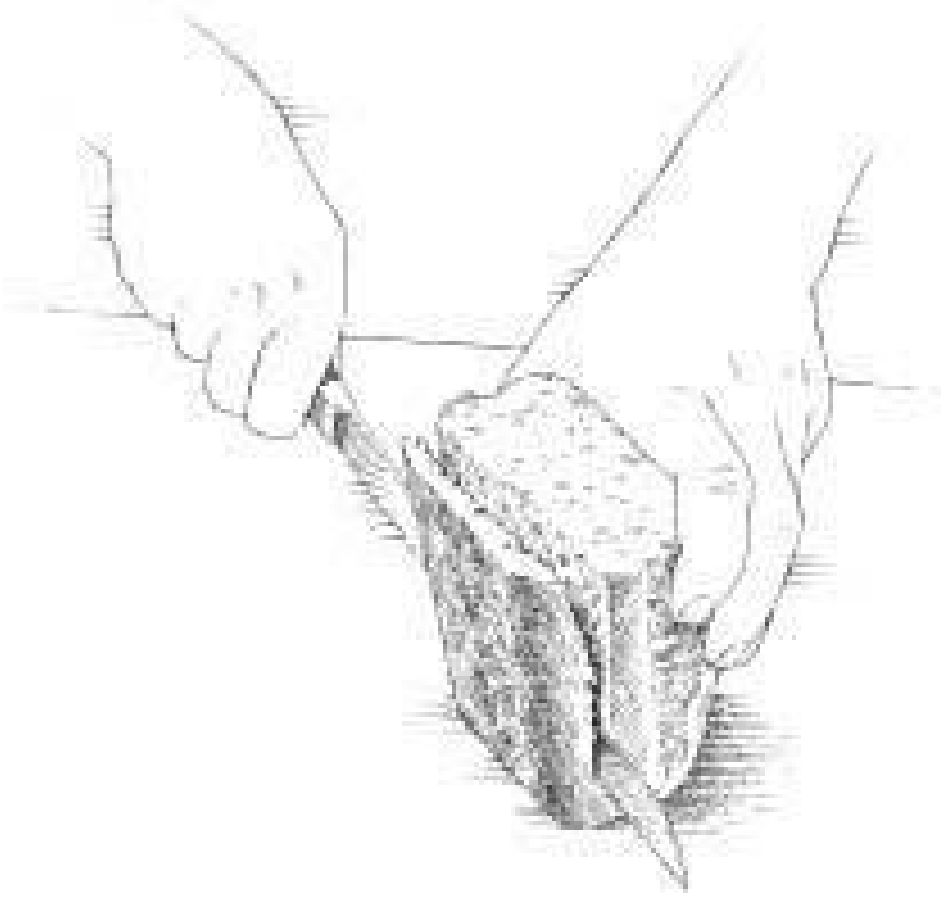

Figure 36.
To make bread crumbs, start with a piece of 2- or 3-day old country white bread or baguette. To make crumbs by hand, slice off and discard the tough and often overbaked bottom crust.

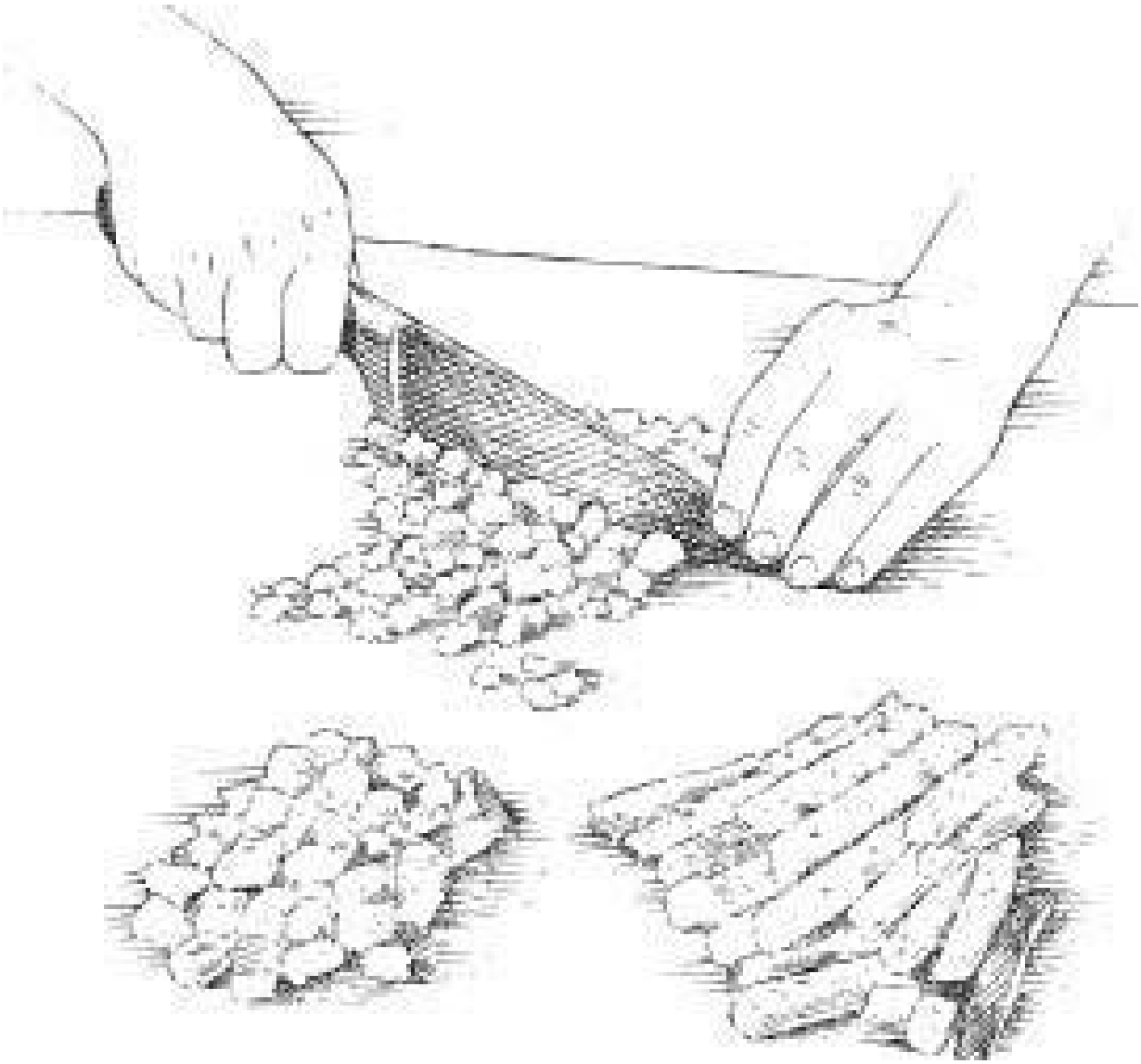

Figure 37.

Slice the bread into $^{3}/_{8}$-inch-thick pieces. Cut these slices into $^{3}/_{8}$-inch strips, and then cut these into cubes and chop until you have small pieces about the size

of a lemon seed.

Figure 38.
To make the crumbs in a food processor, cut the trimmed loaf into $1^{1}/_{2}$-inch cubes and then pulse the cubes in a food

processor to the desired crumb size.

DAIRY SAUCES

SAUCES BASED ON BUTTER, CREAM, AND CHEESE deliver tremendous flavor, usually with a minimum of work. It's hard to imagine a simpler sauce than butter cooked until golden brown and infused with fresh sage leaves.

There are a few rules to remember. Use unsalted butter. Many manufacturers add salt to butter to prolong its freshness. Lost in the process is the sweet, creamy dairy flavor of farm-fresh butter. Sweet (or unsalted) butter tastes better.

When buying heavy cream, try to select a brand that has not been ultrapasteurized. This process exposes the cream to very high temperatures in order to prolong shelf-life. In the process, the cream loses some freshness and takes on a cooked flavor. Regular pasteurized cream, which may be available in supermarkets and is almost always sold in natural foods stores, has a sweeter, fresher flavor.

Finally, high-quality cheeses will always make a difference in pasta sauces, even when it's just a little grated Parmesan sprinkled on at the table. When shopping for ricotta, this means avoiding supermarket varieties, which

tend to be watery and bland, and going to an Italian market, a cheese shop, or gourmet store and getting fresh homestyle ricotta that is firmer, creamier, and drier (it should have a texture like goat cheese) and much more flavorful.

Some tips for buying and grating Parmesan cheese: The real thing, Parmigiano-Reggiano, will deliver the best results. Look for these words stenciled on the rind. In our tests, we found that cheese grated directly over pasta has the fullest flavor. However, you can grate cheese before dinner and place some in a bowl on the table. If you have extra, it can be stored in the refrigerator. In our tests, grated cheese

lost some flavor after a week, but the quality did not become significantly worse than freshly grated cheese until a month in the refrigerator. At this point, the grated cheese was quite dry and a bit bitter. Our advice: Grate cheese as needed but feel free to refrigerate extra in an airtight container and use it within a week or so.

Butter and Sage Sauce

NOTE: ***This is the simplest of all sauces. It is especially good with filled fresh pasta like ravioli and tortellini. It also works with fresh fettuccine or any dried pasta. Serve with grated Parmesan cheese at the table.***

8 tablespoons unsalted butter
2 tablespoons minced fresh sage leaves
Salt

INSTRUCTIONS:

Place butter, sage, and $^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon salt in medium skillet set over medium heat. Cook, swirling pan occasionally, until

butter is golden brown, about 5 minutes. Use immediately.

VARIATION:

Butter and Pine Nut Sauce

Toast 2 tablespoons chopped pine nuts in medium skillet over medium heat until golden and fragrant, about 5 minutes. Set nuts aside, then proceed with recipe, omitting sage and adding toasted nuts and 2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves when butter has turned golden brown.

Alfredo Sauce

NOTE: ***With butter, cream, and cheese, this sauce is certainly a luxury. However, when paired with fresh fettuccine, the results are incomparable. Start cooking dried pasta before starting the sauce; fresh pasta can be added to the boiling water at the same time the cream and butter are heating. Undercook the pasta slightly; it finishes cooking in the cream sauce.***

1 cup heavy cream

3 tablespoons unsalted butter

$^{2}/_{3}$ cup grated Parmesan cheese, plus more for table

Salt and ground black pepper
Grated fresh nutmeg

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place $^{2}/_{3}$ cup cream and butter over medium heat in sauté pan large enough to hold cooked pasta. Bring to boil; simmer until thickened, about 30 seconds.

2. Add cooked, drained pasta to cream sauce, tossing to coat noodles. Add remaining cream, cheese, salt and pepper to taste, and nutmeg. Continue tossing until cream thickens a bit and pasta is nicely coated, about 30 seconds. Adjust seasonings and serve immediately with more grated cheese.

Gorgonzola Sauce

NOTE: ***Classically, this sauce is served with fresh fettuccine. Use a mild, creamy Gorgonzola (called dolcelatte) or a sharper, crumbly bleu cheese, depending on the flavor desired.***

4 ounces Gorgonzola cheese, crumbled

1/2 cup milk

2 tablespoons unsalted butter

1/4 cup heavy cream

Salt

1/3 cup grated Parmesan cheese, plus more for table

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place Gorgonzola, milk, and butter over medium-low heat in sauté pan large enough to hold cooked pasta. Cook, stirring often, until cheese has melted and sauce is smooth, about 4 minutes.

2. Add cream and raise heat to medium. Simmer until sauce thickens a bit, about 2 minutes. Add salt to taste.

3. Add cooked, drained pasta to cream sauce, tossing to coat noodles. Add grated cheese and continue tossing until pasta is nicely coated, about 30 seconds. Adjust seasonings and serve

immediately with more grated cheese.

Porcini Mushroom Sauce with Cream

NOTE: ***If you like, toss this intense sauce with fettuccine, preferably fresh, and $^{1}/_{2}$ cup grated Parmesan cheese. Pass extra cheese at the table.***

2 ounces dried porcini mushrooms
3 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 medium onion, minced
Salt and ground black pepper
6 tablespoons heavy cream
3 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place mushrooms in small bowl. Add 2 cups hot tap water and soak until tender, about 20 minutes. Carefully lift mushrooms from liquid (*see* figure 39) and pick through to remove any foreign debris. Wash mushrooms under cold water if gritty, then chop. Strain soaking liquid through sieve lined with paper towel (*see* figure 40). Reserve mushrooms and soaking liquid separately.

2. Heat butter in large sauté pan over medium heat. Add onion and sauté until edges begin to brown, about 7 minutes. Add porcini and salt and pepper to taste

and sauté to release flavors, 1 to 2 minutes.

3. Increase heat to medium-high. Add mushroom soaking liquid and simmer briskly until liquid has reduced by half, about 10 minutes. Stir in cream and simmer until sauce just starts to thicken, about 2 minutes. Stir in parsley and adjust seasonings.

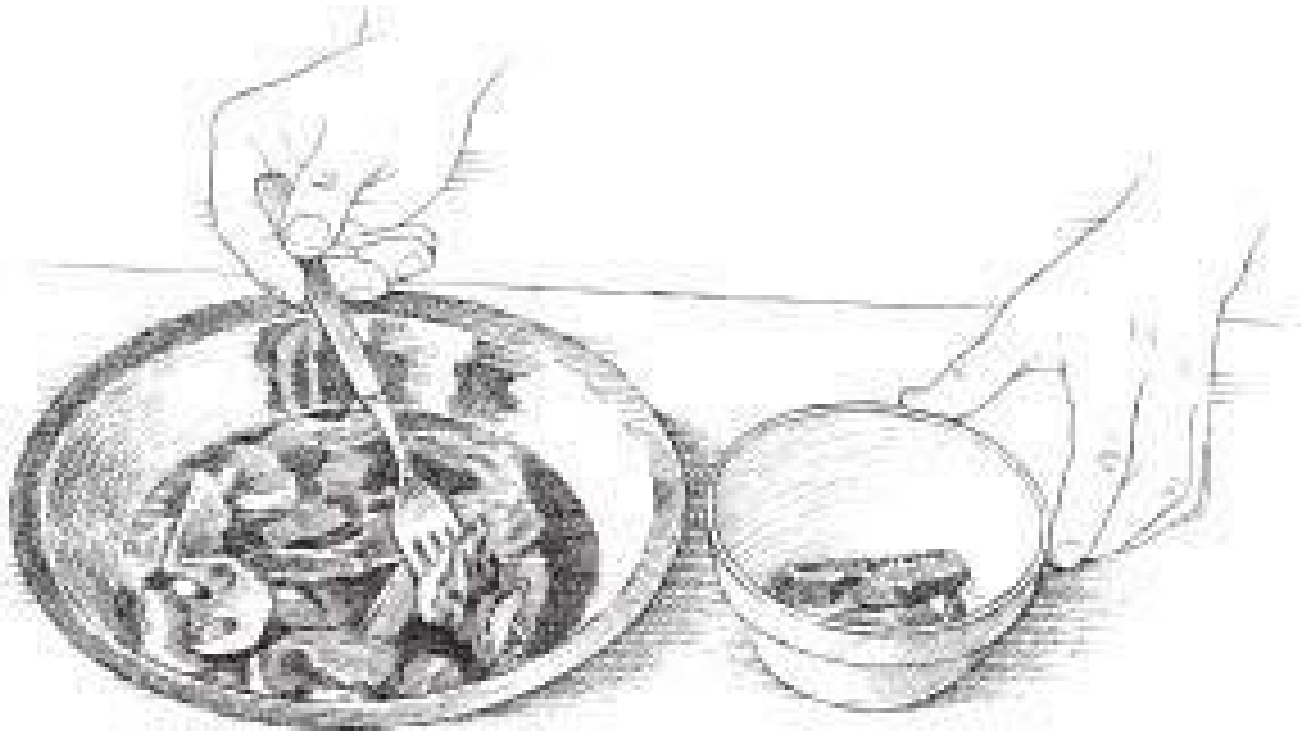

Figure 39.
When soaking porcini, most of the sand and dirt will fall to the bottom of the bowl. Use a fork to lift the rehydrated mushrooms from the liquid without stirring up the sand.

Figure 40.
The soaking liquid is quite flavorful and should be reserved. To remove grit, pour the liquid through a small sieve lined with a single sheet of paper towel and

placed over a measuring cup.

Ricotta and Parmesan Sauce with Peas

NOTE: ***Ricotta creates a rich, creamy sauce with much less fat than other dairy products. Serve with orecchiette or farfalle, which will trap the peas.***

1 10-ounce package frozen peas
Salt
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 medium onion, minced
1 cup ricotta cheese
1/3 cup grated Parmesan cheese
2 tablespoons unsalted butter, diced

Ground black pepper

2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Bring water to boil in small saucepan. Add peas and salt to taste. Simmer just until almost tender, about 1 minute. Drain and reserve.

2. Heat oil in medium skillet over medium heat. Add onion and sauté until golden, about 7 minutes. Stir in peas and cook just until well-coated with oil and onions, about 1 minute. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Stir in parsley if using.

3. Stir cheeses and butter together in bowl large enough to hold cooked pasta. Stir in pea-onion mixture; adjust seasonings. Reserve $^{1}/_{4}$ cup pasta cooking water and use as needed to moisten sauce.

VARIATION:

Ricotta and Parmesan Sauce with Peas and Bacon

Omit oil and cook 4 ounces (6 slices) bacon in medium skillet over medium heat until crisp, about 7 minutes. Transfer bacon to paper towel-lined plate and pour off all but 2 tablespoons

fat from pan. Cook onion in bacon fat. Omit butter. Proceed with recipe, adding crumbled bacon to cheeses along with pea-onion mixture.

HOW TO COOK SHRIMP & OTHER SHELLFISH

Shrimp

Scallops

Clams and Mussels

Oysters on the Half Shell

Lobster

Crabs

SHRIMP

COOKING SHRIMP IS A RELATIVELY STRAIGHT forward process. As soon as the meat turns pink (which can happen in just two or three minutes over intense heat), the shrimp are done. How the shrimp are handled before cooking actually generates more confusion. Should they be peeled? Should the vein that runs down the back of each shrimp be removed?

There are two basic ways of cooking shrimp, either with dry heat (for example, grilling or pan-searing) or

moist heat (for example, poaching or steaming). After some initial tests, we concluded that shrimp must be prepared differently when cooked by dry and moist heat. We found that when shrimp are grilled or pan-seared, the shell shields the meat from the intense heat and helps to keep the shrimp moist and tender. Try as we might, we found it impossible to grill or pan-sear peeled shrimp without overcooking them and making the meat dry and tough, especially the exterior layers. The only method that worked was to intentionally undercook the shrimp; but that left the inside a little gooey, something that almost no one enjoyed.

When shrimp are cooked in liquid the

tables turn, and it is best to peel them first. The exterior of shrimp cooked in liquid are not as prone to drying out, and the shells can be simmered in the liquid to increase its flavor. Also, it is nearly impossible to peel shrimp cooked in hot liquid. While the peel separates easily from grilled or pan-seared shrimp, the shells become firmly attached to the meat when the shrimp are cooked in liquid.

In addition to peeling, the issue of deveining generates much controversy among experts. Although some people won't eat shrimp that has not been deveined, others believe that the "vein"—actually the animal's intestinal

tract—contributes flavor and insist on leaving it in. In our tests, we could not detect an effect (either positive or negative) on flavor when we left the vein in. The vein is generally so tiny in most medium-sized shrimp that it virtually disappears after cooking. Out of laziness, we leave it alone. In larger shrimp, the vein is usually larger as well. Very large veins can detract from the overall texture of the shrimp and are best removed before cooking.

One more step worth taking when preparing shrimp for dry cooking is to brine them in a salt solution. Brining causes shrimp to become especially plump (they may gain as much 10 percent in water weight) and firm. The

science is fairly simple. Salt causes protein strands in the shrimp to unwind, allowing them to trap and hold onto more moisture when cooked. At its most successful, brining turns mushy shrimp into shrimp with the chewy texture of a lobster tail. Even top-quality shrimp are improved by this process. We tested various concentrations of salt and brining times, and in the end settled on soaking shrimp in a strong salt solution (three cups kosher salt dissolved in five and one-half cups water) for 20 to 25 minutes.

Once the shrimp has been brined, it can be dumped into a hot skillet or threaded onto skewers and grilled.

Unpeeled shrimp is easy to cook either way. As soon as the meat turns pink, the shrimp are done. We found that shrimp should be cooked quickly to prevent them from toughening. This means using a very hot skillet or a hot grill fire.

When pan-searing, it's easy enough to make a quick pan sauce once the shrimp have been cooked and transferred to a bowl. Just add some oil and seasonings (garlic, shallots, lemon juice, herbs, spices) to the empty pan and cook briefly. The sauce can then be tossed with the shrimp in the shell to coat them. When grilling, we like to coat the shrimp with a paste or marinade before cooking. With both pan-searing and grilling, the flavorings adhere to the shell beautifully.

When you peel the shrimp at the table, the seasonings stick to your fingers and they are in turn transferred directly to the meat as you eat it. Licking your fingers also helps.

When poaching shrimp for cocktail or salad, brining is not necessary—the shrimp remain nice and plump when cooked in liquid. The issue here is how to flavor the shrimp as it cooks. If you start with good shrimp and simmer them in salted water until pink, the shrimp will have a decent but rarely intense flavor. Cooking them in their shells (which actually contain a lot of the "briny" flavor we associate with good seafood) helps improve the flavor of the

shrimp, but the cooked shrimp are very hard to peel. When steamed, the shells attach to the meat, and it becomes hard to remove them without tearing the meat below. In addition, we found that it takes a good 20 minutes for the shells to give up their flavor. Clearly, the shrimp meat will be long overcooked by this time.

Our solution is to peel the shrimp and simmer the shells alone with the salted water to make a quick stock. To give the stock even more flavor, we tried adding other ingredients to the strained stock. After trying a dozen different combinations, involving wine, vinegar, lemon juice, and various herbs and spices, we found that a mixture of three parts quick shrimp stock to one part

white wine, with a dash of lemon juice and some traditional herbs (bay leaf, parsley, and tarragon) does the best job of flavoring the shrimp as it cooks. At higher concentrations, the wine and lemon juice are too overpowering.

At this point in our testing, we liked the flavor of our poached shrimp but wondered if prolonging the cooking time (and hence the time the shrimp was in contact with the flavorful broth) would improve its flavor. We tried lowering the heat but found that it was too easy to overcook the shrimp and make it tough. What worked best was to bring the broth to a boil, turn off the heat, add the shrimp, and cover the pot. The shrimp

can stay in the liquid for 10 minutes or so (as opposed to just 2 or 3 minutes if the liquid is boiling), enough time to really pick up the flavor of the liquid.

In addition to dry-heat cooking or poaching, there are two other cooking methods for shrimp worth considering. True shrimp scampi contains peeled pink shrimp floating in plenty of garlicky sauce that can be used to moisten bread or rice. The challenge is cooking the shrimp in a skillet in such a way that will produce these wonderful juices.

We added every liquid we could think of—white wine, lemon juice, fish and chicken stock, even water—but were disappointed. Olive oil didn't work either. The wine and lemon juice added

too much acidity, extra oil made the dish greasy, and the stocks and water diluted the flavor of the shrimp. During these tests, we also noticed that an overly high heat makes the garlic too brown and also toughens the shrimp.

When we lowered the heat the liquid given up by the shrimp lingered in the pan. We set out to cook the shrimp more slowly, in effect braising it in olive oil and its own natural juices. Because our goal was to preserve the liquid and tenderness of the shrimp rather than create crispness, the technique is closer to braising than sautéing.

Once we started to move in this direction, everything fell into place.

With lower heat, the garlic becomes tender and mellow, the olive oil retains its freshness, and the shrimp remains moist and tender.

Our last experiments involved deep-frying shrimp. We tested a variety of coatings and preferred a simple one made with bread crumbs. It was crisp and crunchy (we found that a crunchy coating offers a nice contrast with tender shrimp and other shellfish), and it browns nicely. When we tried dredging the shrimp in flour then dipping it in egg and rolling it in bread crumbs, the coating separated from the shrimp. We preferred just egg and then bread crumbs since the coating rests right on the shrimp and offers the best contrast in

textures. Cornmeal lacked the same crunch and color. A beer batter was too puffy and light, and the beer flavor detracted from the seafood flavor. Also, the beer batter is not at all crunchy but soft. A mixture of flour and milk made a pasty coating with no crunch, and adding some egg to the batter didn't do much to improve it.

As for the frying medium, we found that peanut and corn oil were the most flavorful. Canola and vegetable oil were fine, if less flavorful.

A final note about buying shrimp. There are more than 300 species of shrimp grown around the world. (There is such a thing as "wild" shrimp, but

most shrimp is farm-raised.) Black tiger shrimp from Asia is the most common variety sold in U.S. markets. It can be firm and tasty, but the quality is inconsistent. In our taste tests, we preferred Mexican whites from the Pacific Coast and Gulf whites. They were the firmest and had the strongest fresh-from-the-sea flavor. However, we didn't like all the white shrimp we tasted. Chinese white shrimp were decidedly inferior to both the Mexican and Gulf white shrimp and to most of the tiger shrimp.

In general, the flavor and texture differences in various species are most noticeable when shrimp is poached and used in shrimp cocktail. Our advice is

simple: If you have a choice, look for white shrimp from Mexico or the Gulf, especially when making shrimp cocktail.

Master Recipe

Brined Shrimp

NOTE: ***When pan-searing or grilling, we recommend that you brine the shrimp first to make them especially plump and juicy.***

3 cups kosher salt or 2 cups table salt

2 pounds large shrimp (21 to 25 count per pound)

INSTRUCTIONS:

Pour 2 cups boiling water into large bowl. Add salt, stirring to dissolve, and cool to room

temperature. Add $3^1/_2$ cups ice water and shrimp and let stand 20 to 25 minutes. Drain and rinse thoroughly under cold running water. Open shells with manicure scissors (*see* figure 1) and devein if desired (*see* figure 2).

VARIATION:

Brined Frozen Shrimp

In many ways, uncooked frozen shrimp offer consumers the best quality since the shrimp are frozen at sea and then thawed at home, not at the market, as is the case with almost all the "fresh" shrimp sold at the retail level. However, because frozen shrimp are generally sold

in five-pound blocks, these shrimp can be difficult to handle. Rather than trying to saw through a block of ice, we recommend putting the frozen block of shrimp under cold running water and pulling off individual shrimp as they become free. When you have the desired amount of shrimp (in this recipe, two pounds), place the remaining portion of the block back in the freezer and proceed with brining the partially thawed shrimp.

Follow Master Recipe, using $3^{1}/_{2}$ cups cold (not ice) water since the shrimp themselves are still partially frozen. Proceed as directed with brining.

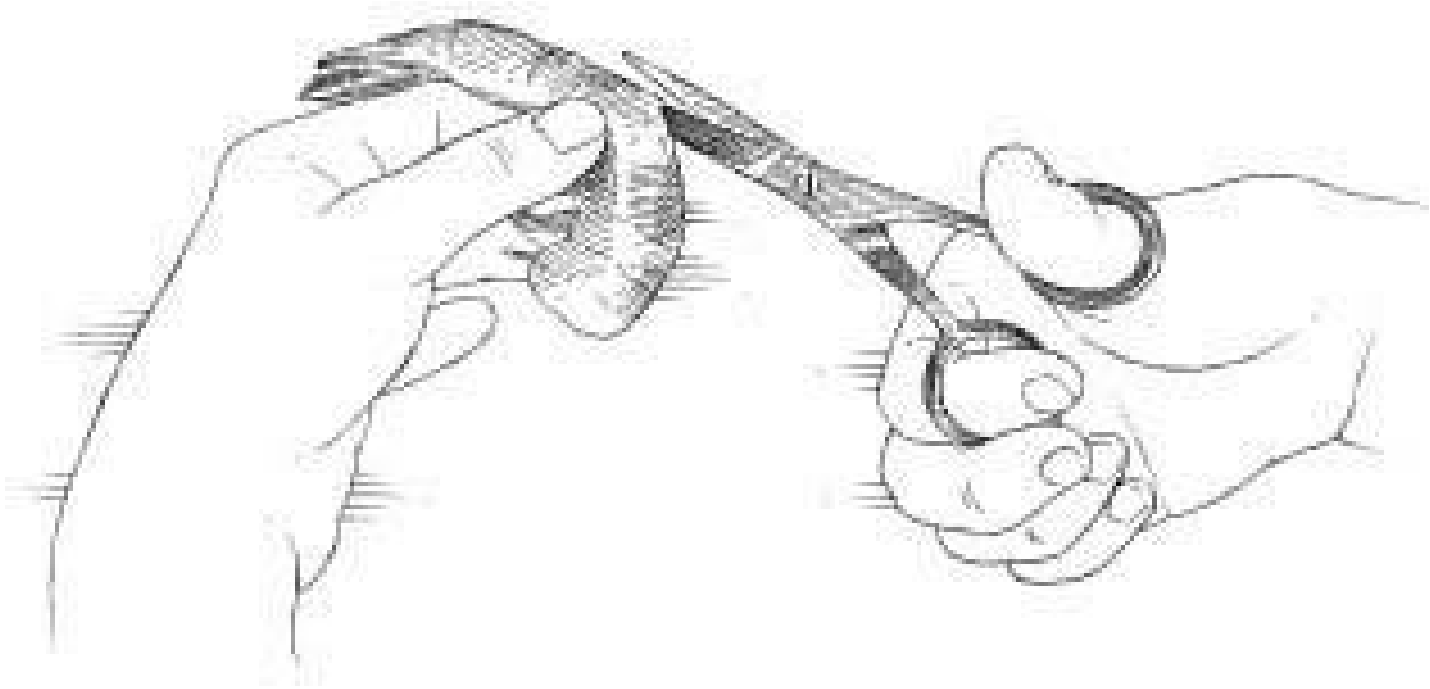

Figure 1.
When cooked with dry heat (pan-searing or grilling), shrimp are best cooked in their shells. The shells hold in moisture and also flavor the shrimp as they cook. However, eating shrimp cooked in its shell can be a challenge. As a compromise, we found it helpful to slit the back of the shell with a manicure or other

small scissors with a fine point. After cooking, each person can quickly and easily peel away the shell.

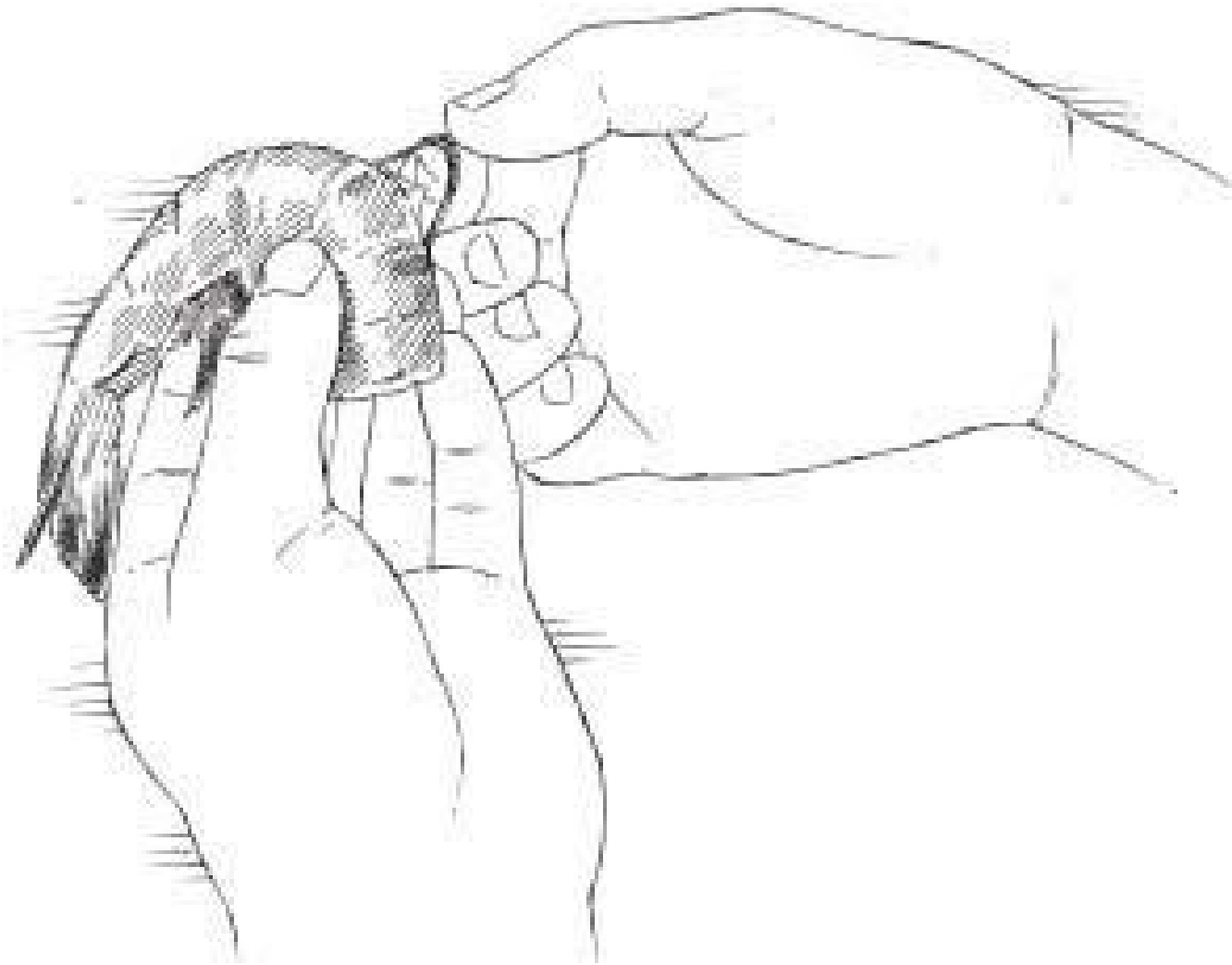

Figure 2.
Slitting the back of the shell makes it easy to devein the shrimp as well. Except when the vein is especially dark and thick, we found no benefit to deveining in our testing. If you choose to

devein shrimp, slit open the back of the shell (figure 1). Invariably you will cut a little into the meat and expose the vein as you do this. Use the tip of the scissors to lift up the vein, and then grab it with your fingers and discard.

Master Recipe

Pan-Seared Shrimp

NOTE: ***This recipe delivers shrimp in its simplest and purest form. The variations add some other flavors but are also remarkably simple. To keep burnt bits from ending up in the sauce, rinse and wipe clean the pan after the shrimp has been cooked. Serves four to six.***

1 recipe Brined Shrimp

$^1/_2$ lemon

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat large nonstick or cast-iron skillet over high heat until very hot. Place single layer of shrimp in pan. Cook until shrimp shells turn spotty brown, 1 to 2 minutes. Turn shrimp as they brown; cook until remaining side turns spotty brown, 1 to 2 minutes longer. As shrimp are done, transfer them to medium bowl. Repeat process with remaining shrimp.

2. Squeeze lemon juice over shrimp and serve warm or at room temperature.

VARIATIONS:

Pan-Seared Shrimp with Shallots and Tarragon

Follow Master Recipe through step 1. Omit lemon. Rinse and wipe out pan with paper towel. Heat 1 tablespoon olive oil in skillet over medium heat. Add 1 large minced shallot and sauté until softened and just beginning to brown, 1 to $1^1/_2$ minutes; add to bowl with shrimp. Add $1^1/_2$ tablespoons sherry vinegar, $1^1/_2$ tablespoons minced fresh tarragon leaves, and salt and ground black pepper to taste to bowl. Toss to combine.

Pan-Seared Shrimp with

Southwestern Flavors

Follow Master Recipe through step 1. Omit lemon. Rinse and wipe out pan with paper towel. Heat 1 tablespoon olive oil in skillet over medium heat. Add 1 large minced garlic clove, 2 teaspoons chili powder, and $^{3}/_{4}$ teaspoon ground cumin and sauté until garlic is fragrant and lightens in color, 30 to 45 seconds; add to bowl with shrimp. Add $2^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons lime juice, 2 tablespoons minced fresh cilantro leaves, and salt and ground black pepper to taste to bowl. Toss to combine.

Master Recipe

Grilled Shrimp with Spicy Garlic Paste

NOTE: ***To keep the shrimp from dropping through the grill rack onto the hot coals, thread them onto skewers. You can cook shrimp loose on a perforated grill grid that rests right on the cooking grate. The problem with this method is that each shrimp must be turned individually with tongs rather than in groups, as with skewered shrimp. The shrimp are more likely to cook***

unevenly on a grid because it takes so long to turn them all. Serves four to six.

1 large garlic clove, peeled
1 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper
1 teaspoon paprika
2 tablespoons olive oil
2 teaspoons lemon juice
1 recipe Brined Shrimp
Lemon wedges

Master Instructions

1. Light grill. Mince garlic with salt into smooth paste. Mix garlic and salt with cayenne and paprika in small bowl. Add oil and lemon juice to form thin paste. Toss shrimp with paste until evenly coated. (Can be covered and refrigerated for up to 1 hour). Thread shrimp onto skewers (*see* figure 3).

2. Grill shrimp over medium-hot fire, turning once (*see* figure 4), until shells are bright pink, 2 to 3 minutes per side. Serve hot or at

room temperature with lemon wedges.

VARIATIONS:

Broiled Shrimp.

Follow Master Recipe, adjusting oven rack to top position. Place skewered shrimp in jelly roll or other shallow pan and broil, turning once, until shells are bright pink, 2 to 3 minutes per side.

Grilled or Broiled Shrimp with Asian Flavors

Unlike the garlic paste (which adheres beautifully to the shrimp as they cook), this seasoning mixture is fairly liquid

and falls off. We found that letting the shrimp sit in this mixture for at least half an hour (but no more than an hour) flavors them nicely.

Follow Master Recipe, omitting all ingredients except brined shrimp. Combine $1^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons soy sauce, 2 teaspoons rice wine vinegar, $^{3}/_{4}$ teaspoon Asian sesame oil, $1^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoons sugar, $^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon grated fresh gingerroot, 1 large minced garlic clove, and 2 minced scallions in medium bowl. Toss shrimp with mixture and let marinate 30 to 60 minutes. Skewer and grill, or broil as directed.

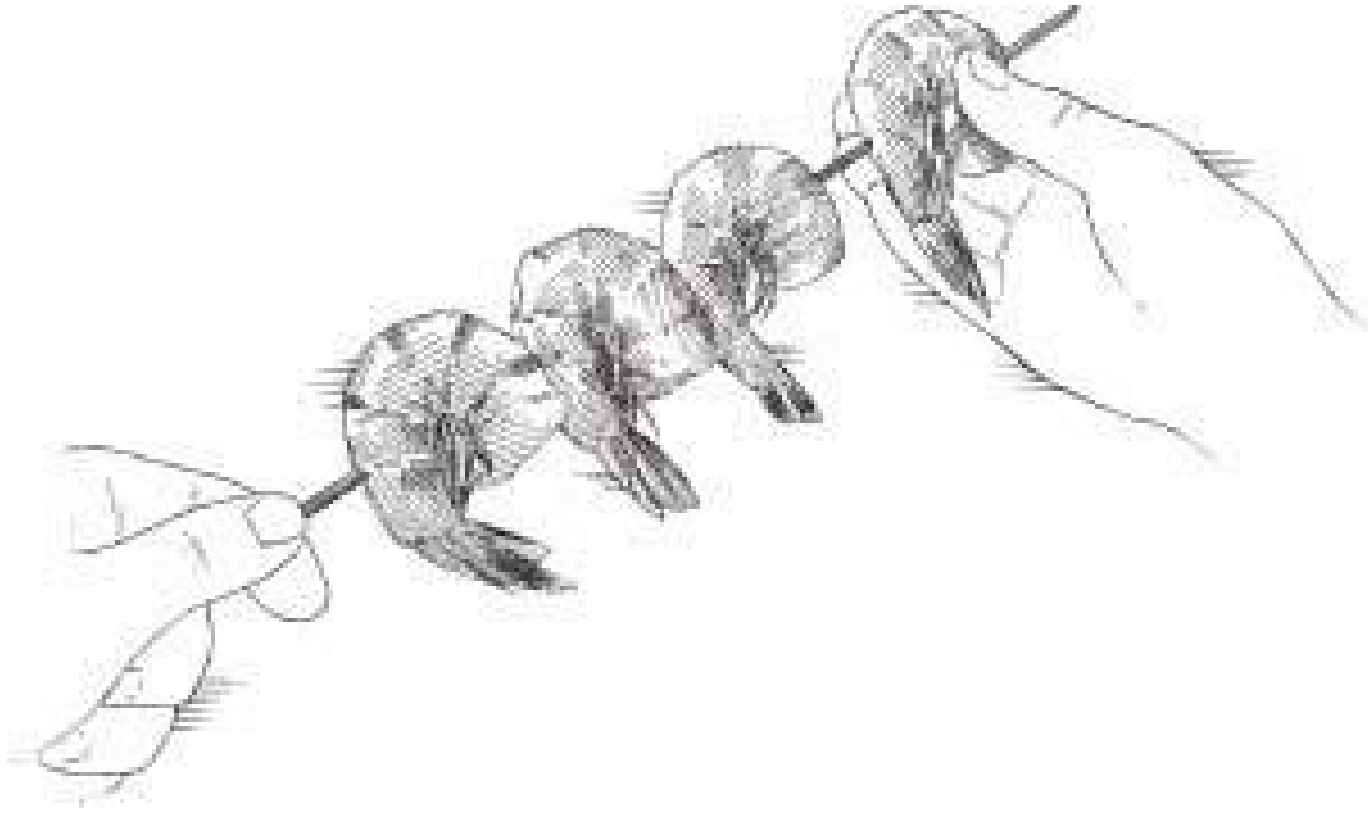

Figure 3.
Thread shrimp on skewers by passing the skewer through the body near the tail, folding the shrimp over, and passing the skewer through the shrimp again near the head. Threading each shrimp twice keeps it in place (it won't spin around) and makes it easy to cook the shrimp on both

sides by turning the skewer just once.

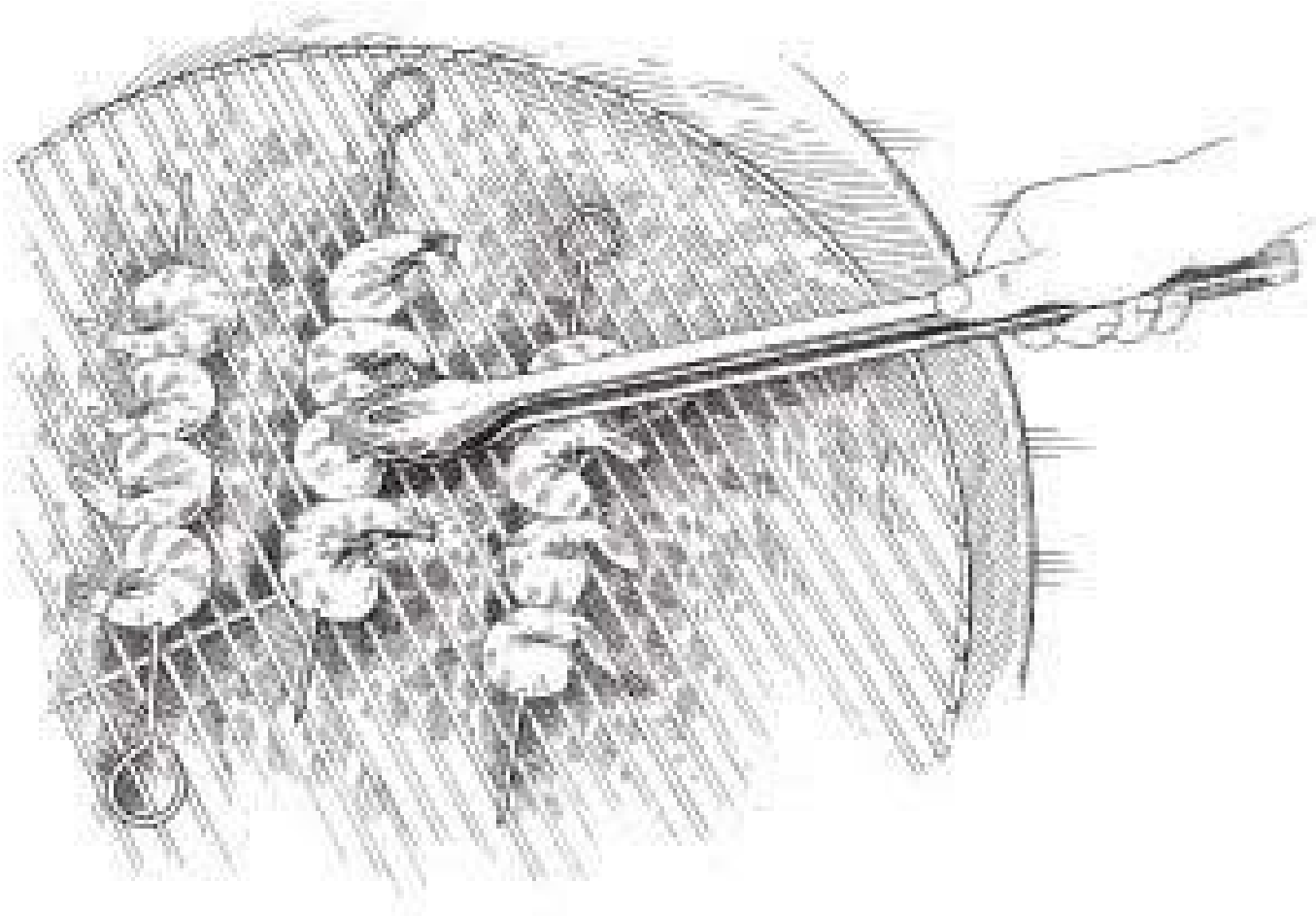

Figure 4.
Long-handled tongs make it easy to turn hot skewers on the grill. Lightly grab onto a single shrimp to turn the entire skewer.

Master Recipe

Herb-Poached Shrimp

NOTE: ***If using larger or smaller shrimp, increase or decrease cooking times for shrimp by a minute or two. There is no need to use manicure scissors to open the shells since they should be completely removed before cooking in liquid. Simply open the shells with your fingers under running water and slip them off the meat. If you want to remove the vein, slit the back of each shrimp with a paring knife and rinse under cold water to wash***

away the vein. If possible, use Mexican or Gulf white shrimp in this recipe.

1 pound large shrimp (21 to 25 count per pound), peeled, deveined if desired, and rinsed, shells reserved
1 teaspoon salt
1 cup dry white wine
4 peppercorns
5 coriander seeds
1/2 bay leaf
5 sprigs fresh parsley
1 sprig fresh tarragon
1 teaspoon lemon juice

Master Instructions

1. Bring reserved shells, 3 cups water, and salt to boil in medium saucepan over medium-high heat. Reduce heat to low, cover, and simmer until fragrant, about 20 minutes. Strain stock through sieve, pressing on shells to extract all liquid.

2. Bring stock and remaining ingredients except shrimp to boil in 3- to 4-quart saucepan over high heat. Boil for 2 minutes. Turn off heat and stir in shrimp. Cover and let stand until firm and pink, 8 to 10

minutes. Drain shrimp, reserving stock for another use, such as in pasta sauce or fish stew or soup. Plunge shrimp into ice water to stop cooking, then drain again. Refrigerate shrimp and proceed with cocktail or salad recipe.

Shrimp Cocktail

NOTE: ***We prefer cocktail sauce that starts with ketchup rather than bottled chili sauce, which is generally too vinegary. The cocktail sauce benefits from a variety of heat sources, none of which overpowers the others. For best flavor, use horseradish from a fresh bottle and mild chili powder. Serves four as an appetizer.***

1 cup ketchup

$2\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons prepared horseradish

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground black pepper

1 teaspoon ancho or other mild chili powder

Pinch cayenne

1 tablespoon lemon juice

Crushed ice

1 recipe Herb-Poached Shrimp, chilled

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Stir all ingredients except ice and shrimp together in small bowl. Adjust seasonings.

2. Fill four goblets with crushed ice. Arrange shrimp over ice, with tails hanging over sides of goblets. Serve immediately with cocktail sauce.

Master Recipe

Shrimp Salad

NOTE: ***This salad makes an excellent filling for soft rolls. If serving this salad over greens, slice the shrimp in half lengthwise rather than chopping them coarse. Serves four.***

1 recipe Herb-Poached Shrimp, chopped very coarse

1 medium celery rib, cut into small dice

1 medium scallion, white and green parts, minced

1/3 cup mayonnaise

1 tablespoon lemon juice

1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

Mix all ingredients together in medium bowl, including salt and pepper to taste. Serve. (Can be covered and refrigerated overnight.)

VARIATIONS:

Shrimp Salad with Chipotle

Chile

Follow Master Recipe, adding 1 small chipotle chile in adobo, minced, with all ingredients, and substituting lime juice for lemon and fresh minced cilantro leaves for parsley.

Curried Shrimp Salad

Follow Master Recipe, adding 1 teaspoon curry powder with all ingredients.

Master Recipe

Shrimp Scampi

NOTE: ***Use the cayenne pepper sparingly to give the faintest hint of spiciness. Serves four.***

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

4 medium garlic cloves, minced

2 pounds large shrimp (21 to 25 count per pound), peeled, deveined if desired, and rinsed

1/4 cup minced fresh

parsley leaves

2 tablespoons lemon juice

Salt

Cayenne pepper to taste

INSTRUCTIONS:

Heat oil and garlic in 10-inch skillet over medium heat until garlic begins to sizzle. Reduce heat to medium-low and cook until fragrant and pale gold, about 2 minutes. Add shrimp, increase heat to medium, and cook, stirring occasionally, until shrimp turn pink, about 7 minutes. Be careful not to overcook shrimp or they will become tough. Off heat, stir in parsley, lemon juice, and salt and

cayenne pepper to taste. Serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Shrimp Scampi with Cumin, Paprika, and Sherry Vinegar

Follow Master Recipe, sautéing 1 teaspoon ground cumin and 2 teaspoons paprika with garlic, substituting an equal amount of sherry vinegar for lemon juice, and omitting cayenne.

Shrimp Scampi with Orange Zest and Cilantro

Follow Master Recipe, sautéing 1

teaspoon finely grated orange zest and $^1/_4$ teaspoon hot red pepper flakes with garlic, substituting 2 tablespoons minced fresh cilantro leaves for parsley, and omitting cayenne.

Fried Shrimp

NOTE: ***We hate to waste oil when frying. For that reason, we like to fry shrimp and other shellfish in batches in a four-quart saucepan filled with just 5 cups of oil. Serves four as an appetizer, two as a main course.***

1 large egg

1/2 teaspoon salt

Ground black pepper

3/4 cup plain dry bread crumbs

1 pound shrimp, peeled, deveined if desired, and rinsed

About 5 cups peanut or corn oil for frying

Lemon wedges or Tartar

Sauce

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Beat egg with salt and pepper to taste in small bowl. Place bread crumbs in wide, shallow dish. Working several at a time, dip shrimp in egg mixture, shake off excess, then coat with bread crumbs, pressing to make crumbs adhere. Set shrimp on cookie sheet; repeat with remaining shrimp.

2. Heat $1^{1}/_{2}$ inches of oil in heavy 4-quart saucepan to 360 degrees. Add half of shrimp and fry until deep golden brown, about 60 seconds. Remove with slotted spoon and drain on double layer

of paper towels on cooling rack. Repeat with remaining shrimp, letting oil come back up to temperature if necessary. Serve with lemon wedges or tartar sauce.

SCALLOPS

SCALLOPS OFFER SEVERAL POSSIBLE CHOICES FOR the cook, both when shopping and cooking. There are three main varieties of scallops—sea, bay, and calico. Sea scallops are available year-round throughout the country and are the best choice in most instances. Like all scallops, the product sold at the market is the dense, disk-shaped muscle that propels the live scallop in its shell through the water. The guts and roe are usually jettisoned at sea because they are so perishable. Ivory-colored sea

scallops are usually at least an inch in diameter (and often much bigger) and look like squat marshmallows. Sometimes they are sold cut-up, but we found that they can lose moisture when handled this way and are best purchased whole.

Small, cork-shaped bay scallops (about half an inch in diameter) are harvested in a small area from Cape Cod to Long Island. Bay scallops are seasonal—available from late fall through midwinter—and are very expensive, up to $20 a pound. They are delicious but nearly impossible to find outside of top restaurants.

Calico scallops are a small species (less than half an inch across and taller

than they are wide) harvested in the southern United States and around the world. They are inexpensive (often priced at just a few dollars a pound) but generally not terribly good. Unlike sea and bay scallops, which are harvested by hand, calicos are shucked by machine steaming. This steaming partially cooks them and give them an opaque look. Calicos are often sold as "bays," but they are not the same thing. In our kitchen test, we found that calicos are easy to overcook and often end up with a rubbery, eraser-like texture. Our recommendation is to stick with sea scallops, unless you have access to real bay scallops.

In addition to choosing the right species, you should inquire about processing when purchasing scallops. Most scallops (by some estimates up to 90 percent of the retail supply) are dipped in a phosphate-and-water mixture that may also contain citric and sorbic acids. Processing extends shelf life but harms the flavor and texture of the scallop. Its naturally delicate, sweet flavor can be masked by the bitter-tasting chemicals. Even worse, scallops absorb water during processing, which is thrown off when they are cooked. You can't brown processed scallops in a skillet—they shed so much liquid that they steam.

By law, processed scallops must be identified at the wholesale level, so ask your fishmonger. Also, look at the scallops. Scallops are naturally ivory or pinkish tan; processing turns them bright white. Processed scallops are slippery and swollen and usually sitting in milky white liquid at the store. Unprocessed scallops (also called dry scallops) are sticky and flabby. If they are surrounded by any liquid (and often they are not), the juices are clear, not white.

Besides the obvious objections (why pay for water weight or processing that detracts from their natural flavor?), processed scallops are more difficult to cook. We found that sautéing to

carmelize the exterior to a concentrated, nutty flavored, brown and tan crust is the best way to cook scallops. The caramelized exterior greatly enhances the natural sweetness of the scallop and provides a nice crisp contrast with the tender interior.

The most common problem a cook runs into with scallops is getting a nice crust before the scallop overcooks and toughens. We started our tests by focusing on the fat in the pan. Since scallops cook quickly, we knew it would be important to choose a fat that browns efficiently. We tried butter, olive oil, canola oil, a combination of butter and oil, plus cooking in oil with a finish of butter at the end for flavor.

To preserve the creamy texture of the flesh, we cooked the scallops to medium-rare, which means the scallop is hot all the way through but the center still retains some translucence. As a scallop cooks, the soft flesh firms and you can see an opaqueness that starts at the bottom of the scallop, where it sits in the pan, and slowly creeps up toward the center. The scallop is medium-rare when the sides have firmed up and all but about the middle third of the scallop has turned opaque.

The scallops browned well in all the fats we tested, but butter produced the thickest crust and best flavor. The nutty taste of butter complements the

sweetness of the scallop without compromising its delicate flavor. We tested various pans, and while the technique worked in both nonstick and regular skillets, we recommend a light-colored regular skillet so you can judge how quickly the butter is browning and regulate the heat if necessary.

Despite the origin of the word *sauté*, which means "to jump" in French, it's critical for the formation of a good crust to leave the scallop alone once it hits the pan. We found the best method for cooking was to place the scallops carefully in the pan one at a time, with one flat side down for maximum contact with the hot pan. We turned the scallops once and browned the second flat side.

The best tool for turning scallops is a pair of tongs, although a spatula can be used in a pinch.

We recommend pan-searing in butter as the best all-purpose method for cooking scallops. Like shrimp, scallops can also be breaded and deep-fried. While the preparation is simple (just remove the small muscle on each side of the scallop), frying the scallops presented more of a problem than we thought they would in our testing.

We tried simply breading and frying sea scallops, but differing sizes caused trouble. The big ones didn't cook through before they became too dark. We tried using calicos instead. They were a pain

to dredge because they are so small, and they became tough when cooked. We went back to frying sea scallops, slicing them in half at the equator, and although this improved their cooking, they lost some appeal as flat discs. So we opted to leave the small ones (about 1 inch in diameter and $^{3}/_{4}$ inch high) whole. If you can only buy larger scallops, cut them in half vertically, or in quarters if the scallops are really quite large (more than $1^{1}/_{2}$ inches in diameter).

Master Recipe

Pan-Seared Scallops

NOTE: ***This recipe was developed for standard sea scallops, about the size of a short, squat marshmallow. If using smaller scallops, turn off the heat as soon as you turn them; they will finish cooking from the residual heat, 15 to 30 seconds longer. For very large scallops, turn the heat to low once they have browned and continue cooking for 1 minute. Then turn the scallops, raise the heat to medium, and cook them at least 2 minutes on the second***

side. Serves four.

$1^1/_2$ pounds sea scallops (about 30 to a pound), small muscles removed (*see* figure 5)

Salt and ground black pepper

$1^1/_2$ tablespoons unsalted butter

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Sprinkle scallops on both sides with salt and pepper to taste. Heat an 11-inch sauté pan over medium-high heat until hot, about 1 minute. Add half the butter; swirl to coat pan bottom. Continue to heat pan

until butter begins to turn golden brown.

2. Add half the scallops, one at a time, flat side down. Cook, adjusting heat as necessary to prevent fat from burning, until scallops are well browned, $1^{1}/_{2}$ to 2 minutes. Using tongs (*see* figure 6), turn scallops, one at a time. Cook until medium-rare (sides have firmed up and all but middle third of scallop is opaque), 30 to 90 seconds longer, depending on size. Transfer scallops to warm platter; cover with foil. Repeat cooking process using remaining butter and

scallops. Serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Pan-Seared Scallops with Lemon, Shallots, and Capers

Follow Master Recipe. After searing scallops and transferring to platter, pour off all but 1 tablespoon butter and sauté 1 medium minced shallot in fat until softened, 1 to 2 minutes. Add 1 cup dry white wine and 1 teaspoon grated lemon zest, and simmer until reduced to about $^1/_3$ cup, 6 to 7 minutes. Off heat, stir in 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, 2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley

leaves, 1 tablespoon lemon juice, 1 tablespoon minced capers, and salt and pepper to taste. Spoon sauce over scallops and serve.

Pan-Seared Scallops with Sherry, Red Onion, Orange, and Thyme

Follow Master Recipe. After searing scallops, and transferring to warm platter, pour off all but 1 tablespoon butter and sauté $^{1}/_{3}$ cup minced red onion in fat until softened, 1 to 2 minutes. Add $^{3}/_{4}$ cup dry sherry, $^{1}/_{4}$ cup orange juice, 1 teaspoon grated orange zest, and 1 teaspoon minced fresh thyme, and

simmer until reduced to about $^{1}/_{3}$ cup, 6 to 7 minutes. Off heat, stir in 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, 1 tablespoon lemon juice, and salt and pepper to taste. Spoon sauce over scallops and serve.

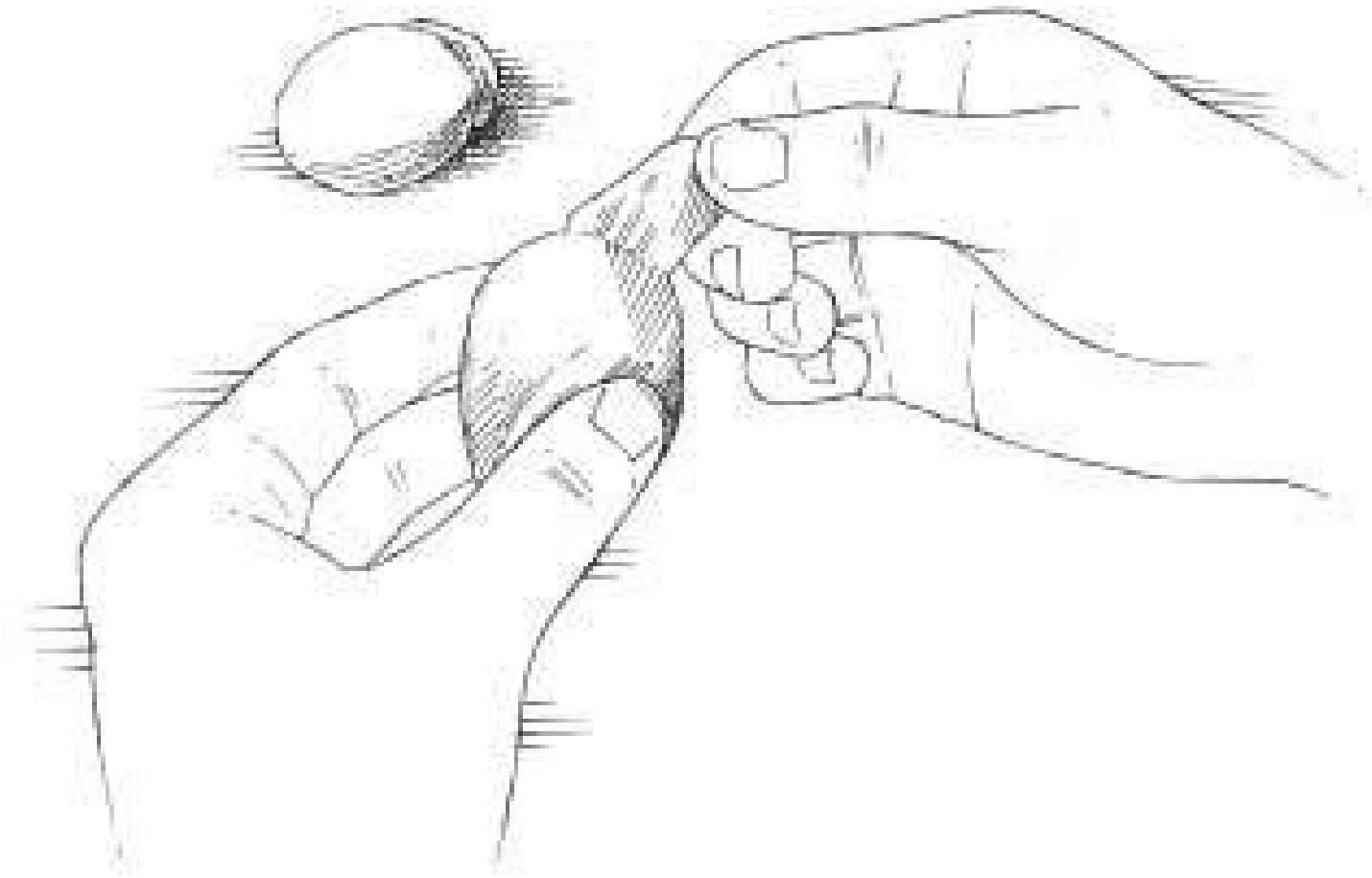

Figure 5.
The small, rough-textured, crescent-shaped muscle that attaches the scallop to the shell is often not removed during processing. You can readily remove any muscles that are still attached. If you don't, they will

toughen slightly during cooking.

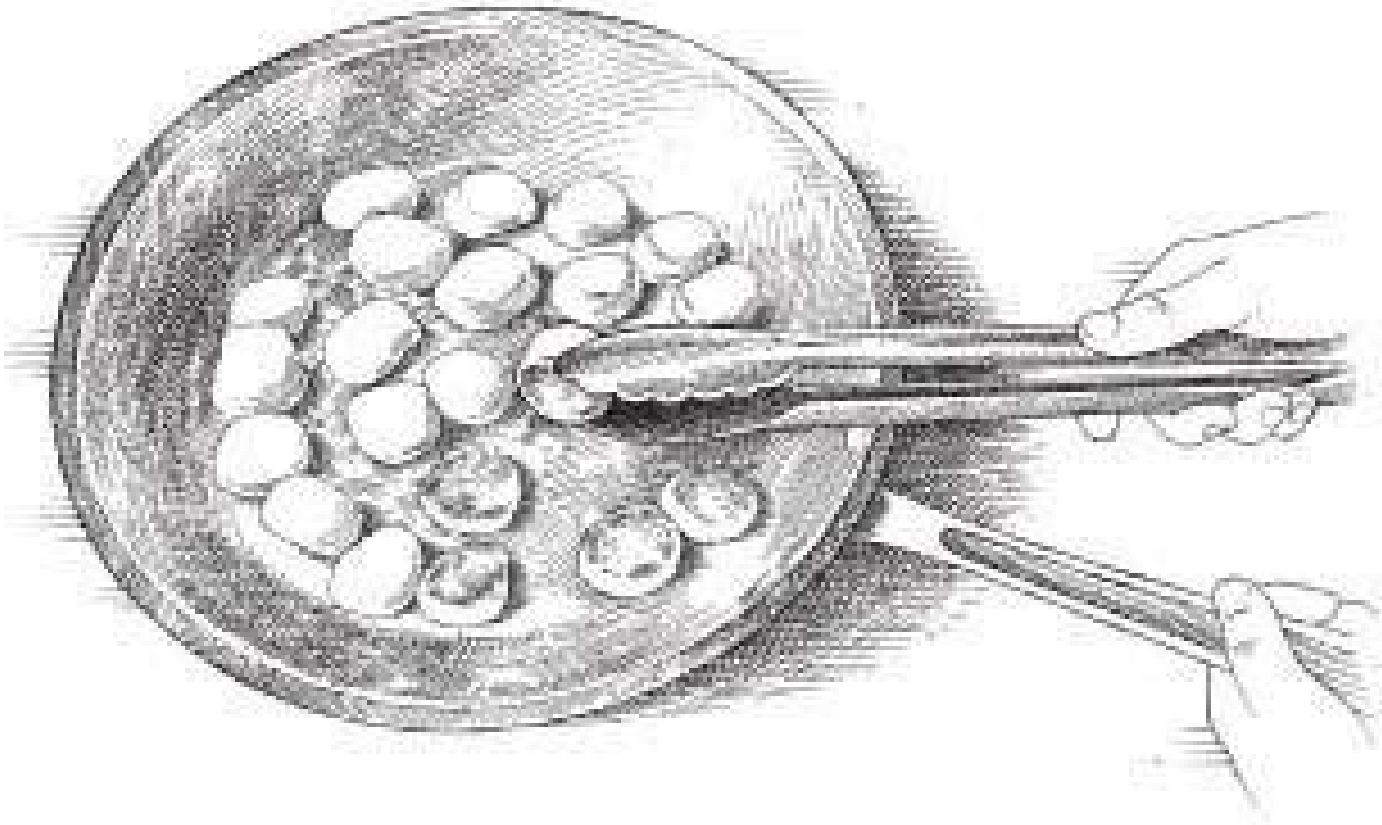

Figure 6.
When sautéing scallops, make sure not to overcrowd the skillet or they will not brown properly. Use tongs to turn the scallops in the pan.

Fried Scallops

NOTE: ***Small sea scallops are best because they will cook through before the coating burns. If scallops are larger than 1 inch in diameter and $^{3}/_{4}$ inch high, they should be cut vertically in half before breading. Jumbo scallops (more than $1^{1}/_{2}$ inches in diameter) should be quartered vertically. Serves four as an appetizer, two as a main course.***

1 large egg

Salt and ground black pepper

$^{1}/_{2}$ cup plain dry bread crumbs

**1 pound sea scallops, halved or quartered if necessary (*see*

note)

About 5 cups peanut or corn oil for frying

Lemon wedges or Tartar Sauce

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Beat egg with salt and pepper to taste in small bowl. Place bread crumbs in wide, shallow dish. Working several at a time, dip scallops in egg mixture, shake off excess, then coat with bread crumbs, pressing to make crumbs adhere. Set scallops on cookie sheet; repeat with remaining scallops.

2. Heat $1^{1}/_{2}$ inches of oil in heavy 4-

quart saucepan to 360 degrees. Add half of scallops and fry until deep golden brown, about 60 seconds. Remove with slotted spoon and drain on double layer of paper towels on cooling rack. Repeat with remaining scallops, letting oil come back up to temperature if necessary. Serve with lemon wedges or tartar sauce.

CLAMS AND MUSSELS

THE REAL CHALLENGE WHEN PREPARING clams and mussels is getting rid of the grit. These two-shelled creatures are easy to cook: When they open, they are done. However, perfectly cooked clams and mussels can be made inedible by lingering sand. Straining their juices through cheesecloth after cooking will remove the grit, but it's a pain. Besides being messy, solids such as shallots and garlic are removed. Worse still, careful straining may not remove every trace of grit, especially bits that are still clinging

to the clam or mussel meat.

After much trial and error in the test kitchen, we concluded that it is also impossible to remove all the sand from dirty clams or mussels before cooking. We tried various soaking regimens—such as soaking in cold water for two hours, soaking in water with flour, soaking in water with cornmeal, and scrubbing and rinsing in five changes of water. None of these techniques worked. Dirty clams and mussels must be rinsed and scrubbed before cooking, and any cooking liquid must be strained after cooking. Rinsing the cooked clams and mussels is a final guarantee that the grit will be removed, but flavor is washed away as well.

During the course of this testing, we noticed that some varieties of clams and mussels were extremely clean and free of grit. A quick scrub of the shell exterior and these bivalves were ready for the pot. Best of all, the cooking liquid could be served without straining. After talking to seafood experts around the country we came to this conclusion: If you want to minimize your kitchen work and ensure that your clams and mussels are free of grit, you must shop carefully.

Clams can be divided into two categories—hard-shell varieties (such as littlenecks and cherrystones) and soft-shell varieties (such as steamers and

razor clams). Hard-shells grow along sandy beaches and bays; soft-shells in muddy tidal flats. A modest shift in location makes all the difference in the kitchen.

When harvested, hard-shells remain tightly closed. In our tests, we found the meat inside to be sand-free. The exterior should be scrubbed under cold running water to remove any caked-on mud, but otherwise these clams can be cooked without further worry about gritty broths.

Soft-shell clams gape when they are alive. We found that they almost always contain a lot of sand. While it's worthwhile to soak them in several batches of cold water to remove some of the sand, you can never get rid of it all.

In the end, you must strain the cooking liquid. People often rinse clams once more at the table in individual bowls of broth.

We ultimately concluded that hard-shell clams (that is, littlenecks or cherrystones) are worth the extra money at the market. Gritty clams, no matter how cheap, are inedible. Buying either littlenecks or cherrystones ensures that the clams will be clean.

A similar distinction can be made with mussels based on how and where they are grown. Most mussels are now farmed either on ropes or along seabeds. (You may also see "wild" mussels at the market. These mussels are harvested the

old-fashioned way—by dredging along the sea floor. In our tests, we found them to be extremely muddy and basically inedible.) Rope-cultured mussels can cost twice as much as wild or bottom-cultured mussels, but we found them to be free of grit in our testing. Since mussels are generally inexpensive (no more than a few dollars a pound), we think clean mussels are worth the extra money. Look for tags, usually attached to bags of mussels, that indicate how and where the mussels have been grown.

When shopping, look for tightly closed clams and mussels (avoid any that are gaping; these may be dying or dead). Clams need only be scrubbed. Mussels may need scrubbing as well as

debearding. Simply grab onto the weedy protrusion and pull it out from between the shells and discard. Don't debeard mussels until you are ready to cook them, as debearding can cause the mussel to die. Mussels or clams kept in sealed plastic bags or under water will also die. Keep them in a bowl in the refrigerator and use them within a day or two for best results.

We tested the four most common cooking methods for clams and mussels: steaming in an aromatic broth (usually with some wine in it), steaming in a basket set over an aromatic broth, roasting in the oven, and sautéing in some oil on the stove. In our tests, we

found that clams or mussels that were sautéed, roasted, or steamed over a broth tasted of pure shellfish, but they also tasted flat and one-dimensional. They cooked in their juices. In contrast, clams and mussels that were steamed in a flavorful broth picked up flavors from the liquid. They became more complex tasting and, in our opinion, better.

With steaming in broth as our preferred all-purpose cooking method, we started to test various amounts and types of liquids, including fish stock, water, wine, and beer. We found white wine to be the best choice, although beer worked nicely with the mussels and is given as an option on Mussels Steamed in Beer. The bright acidity of white wine

balances the briny flavor of clams and mussels. Fish stock and water (even when seasoned with garlic, herbs, and spices) were dull by comparison. While it is possible to steam four pounds of bivalves in just half a cup of liquid (naturally, the pot must be tightly sealed), we like to have extra broth for soaking into bread or rice. We settled on using two cups of white wine to cook four pounds of clams or mussels.

We also made some refinements to the cooking broth. Garlic, shallots, and a bay leaf enrich the flavor of the shellfish. Simmering the broth for three minutes before adding the shellfish is sufficient time for these seasonings to

flavor the wine broth. The all-purpose broth can be flavored in numerous ways, as the recipe variations in this chapter demonstrate.

As an aside, we also tested grilling clams and mussels, a method that has become popular in recent years. We also tested frying clams. Neither method can be considered all-purpose, but each has its advantages. Although delicious, fried clams are too much work for the average home cook. Using preshucked clams delivers mediocre results, and shucking clams yourself is an arduous task. Leave fried clams to restaurants.

Grilling is an interesting idea, especially for summer entertaining. Steaming is clearly the easiest and best

way to cook clams and mussels, but because grilling is such a novelty and the results can be quite good, we decided to include a recipe in this chapter. If you are cooking outside and want to throw a few clams or mussels over the coals to serve as an appetizer, we think you will be pleased with the results. We found it is important not to move the shellfish around on the grill and to handle them carefully once they open. You want to preserve as much of the natural juice as possible, so when the clams or mussels open, transfer them with tongs to a platter, holding them steady so as not to tip out any of the liquid.

Master Recipe

Steamed Clams or Mussels

NOTE: ***The basic flavorings in this recipe work with all kinds of mussels and with either littlenecks or cherrystone clams. (Really large cherrystones may require 9 or 10 minutes of steaming to open.) Variations below may be better suited to the particular flavor of mussels or clams as indicated. Serves four as a main course with woarm bread or rice, eight as an appetizer.***

2 cups white wine

2 large shallots ($^1/_2$ cup minced)

4 medium garlic cloves, minced

1 bay leaf

4 pounds clams or mussels, scrubbed and debearded if cooking mussels

4 tablespoons unsalted butter

$^1/_2$ cup chopped fresh parsley leaves

Master Instructions

1. Bring wine, shallots, garlic, and bay leaf to simmer in large pot. Continue to simmer to blend flavors for about 3 minutes. Increase heat to high and add clams or mussels. Cover and cook, stirring twice, until clams or mussels open, 4 to 8 minutes, depending on size of shellfish and pot.

2. Use slotted spoon to transfer clams or mussels to large serving bowl. Swirl butter into pan liquid to make emulsified sauce. Stir in parsley. Pour broth over clams or

mussels and serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Steamed Clams or Mussels with White Wine, Curry, and Herbs

Follow Master Recipe, adding 1 teaspoon curry powder to simmering liquid in step 1. Right after swirling in butter, stir in 2 tablespoons each chopped fresh cilantro and basil leaves and reduce parsley to 2 tablespoons.

Steamed Clams or Mussels with White Wine, Tomato, and Basil

This may be served over one pound of cooked linguine if desired.

Follow Master Recipe, decreasing wine to 1 cup. Once clams or mussels have been removed from broth, add 2 cups crushed canned tomatoes along with $^{1}/_{4}$ cup olive oil in place of butter. Simmer until reduced to sauce consistency, about 10 minutes. Substitute basil for parsley. Season with salt and pepper. Return clams or mussels to pot, heat briefly, and serve immediately.

Steamed Clams or Mussels with Asian Flavors

Follow Master Recipe, omitting

ingredient list except for clams or mussels. Instead, steam shellfish in 1 cup chicken stock, 2 tablespoons soy or fish sauce, 2 teaspoons vinegar (preferably rice), $^{1}/_{8}$ teaspoon cayenne pepper, 2 tablespoons minced fresh gingerroot, 4 minced scallions (green and white parts), and 1 tablespoon grated lime zest. Garnish with 2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro leaves, 2 tablespoons minced chives or scallions, and lime quarters.

Mussels Steamed in Beer

Follow Master Recipe, using mussels and substituting light-colored beer for wine and one small onion for shallots.

Add 3 sprigs fresh thyme to beer along with onion, garlic, and bay leaf.

Steamed Mussels with Cream Sauce and Tarragon

Follow Master Recipe using mussels. After removing mussels from pot, simmer cooking liquid until reduced to $^1/_2$ cup, about 8 minutes. Add $^3/_4$ cup heavy cream and reduce until thickened, about 2 minutes. Omit butter. Stir in parsley, 2 teaspoons minced fresh tarragon leaves, and 1 tablespoon lemon juice.

Grilled Clams or Mussels

NOTE: ***When the grill is on, we often like to throw clams or mussels over the coals and grill them just until they open. Don't move the shellfish around too much or you risk spilling the liquor out of the shells. This cooking method delivers pure clam or mussel flavor. If you like, serve with lemon wedges, a bottle of Tabasco or other hot sauce, and some fresh tomato salsa. Serves four as an appetizer.***

2 pounds clams or mussels, scrubbed and debearded if cooking mussels Lemon wedges, hot sauce, and/or salsa

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Light grill. When hot, place clams or mussels directly on cooking grate. Grill, without turning, until shellfish opens, 3 to 5 minutes for mussels and 6 to 10 minutes for clams.

2. With tongs, carefully transfer opened clams or mussels to flat serving platter, trying to preserve as much juice as possible. Discard top shells and loosen meat in bottom shell before serving if desired (*see* figure 7). Serve with lemon wedges, hot sauce, and/or salsa passed separately.

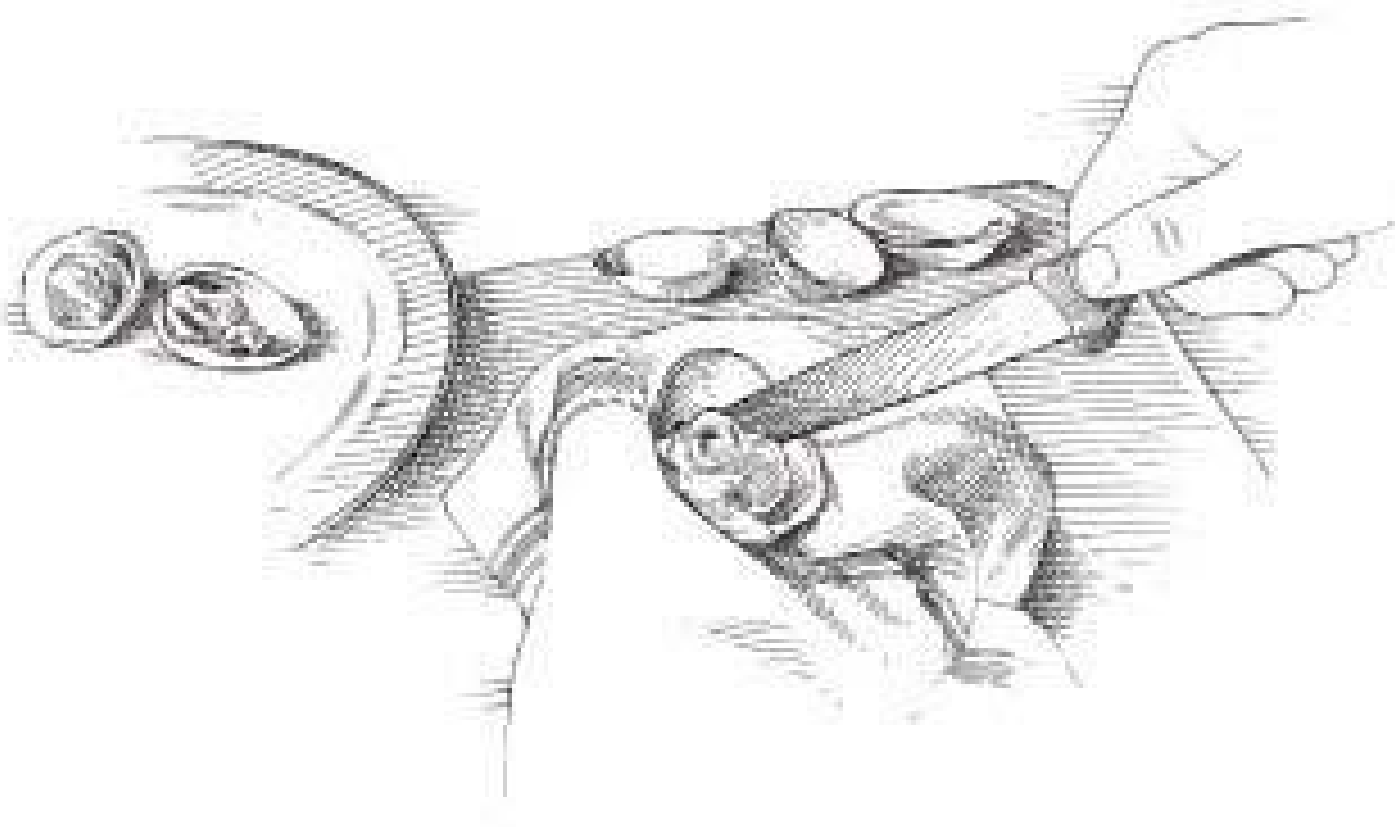

Figure 7.
The easiest way to serve grilled clams or mussels is to divide them among small plates and give each person a small fork. However, if you want guests to eat the clams or mussels right off the shell, hold each one in a kitchen towel as you take it off the grill, pull off and discard the

top shell, then slide a paring knife under the meat to detach it from the bottom shell. By the time you have done this to each clam or mussel, the shells should have cooled enough to permit everyone to pick them up and slurp the meat directly from the shells.

OYSTERS ON THE HALF SHELL

OFAVORITE WAY TO SERVE OYSTERS IS ON THE half shell. This is the best way to showcase their intense and exotic flavors. Oysters may be cooked in a stew or stuffed and baked, but we find that these preparations diminish the traits we like best about oysters. Serving oysters on the half shell also allows you to appreciate the stunning differences in oyster varieties.

It's easy to become overwhelmed by oysters. As if they weren't challenging

enough to open, there are so many kinds it's hard to figure out what to buy. Walk into a good seafood shop and you may find Gliddens from Maine, Wellfleets from Massachusetts, Chincoteagues from Virginia, and Kumamotos from the West Coast. What's the difference and which should you buy?

The first thing to know is that there are only five species of oysters seen in the United States (*see* figure 8). The three most important are the familiar Atlantic, grown all along the East and Gulf coasts; the European, grown in the Northwest and a few spots in the far Northeast; and the Pacific, grown all along the West Coast. In addition, there are Olympias, oysters the size of a half-dollar that are

indigenous to the Northwest and rarely seen elsewhere, and the trendy Kumamotos, once considered a variety of Pacific oyster but recently declared a distinct species.

The problem for shoppers is that within each of the three most popular species there are myriad nicknames and place names: The Atlantic is not only called the Eastern but is casually referred to by many place names (such as Wellfleet and Chincoteague); the European is known as the "flat" and also —incorrectly—as the belon, a name that belongs to oysters from a small region in France; and the Pacific, which is also grown in Europe, not only has place

names attached to it but is sometimes called a Portuguese ("Portugaise"), after a now-extinct species that once made up the majority of oysters grown in Europe.

All this nomenclature business would be fodder only for linguists if oysters did not taste so different from one and another. An oyster from the mainland-facing side of Martha's Vineyard and one from the Atlantic side, for example, taste as different as two good but distinct bottles of Napa Valley Merlot. In fact, oysters are quite a bit like wine: You have the species, which corresponds to the grape variety, and the specific oysters from each location, which correspond to individual wines. Climate, water quality, and the age and

condition of the growing beds are among the factors that affect the taste of an individual oyster.

Nevertheless, just as all Merlots have some things in common, so do all oysters from a particular species. To describe the major attributes of each species, we had more than a dozen people taste 13 kinds of oysters from all over the country. Here are the general conclusions from our panel's tasting notes.

ATLANTIC OYSTERS Crisp and briny, with a fresh, cold flavor of salt, and lightly fishy. Easy to like and not complex. Range in size from 2 inches to

nearly 6 when grown in warm southern waters. We preferred crisp, brinier oysters (Wellfleets, Blue Points, etc.) from cold northern waters. Southern oysters (Chincoteagues, Apalachicholas, etc.) were softer, flabbier, and not nearly as briny.

PACIFIC OYSTERS Rarely salty but very complex tasting and often fruity. (Many tasters compared the flavor with cucumber or watermelon.) Sometimes sweet or even muddy. Our tasters preferred them sweet rather than muddy tasting. Usually 3 to 4 inches long.

EUROPEAN OR FLAT OYSTERS Very challenging and off-putting to oyster novices. When good, they start out tasting crisp and briny (like an Atlantic), but the finish is strong and metallic—something many oyster connoisseurs love. These oysters are round and measure about 5 inches in diameter.

KUMAMOTOS Very appealing because they combine the complexity of the Pacific oyster with more sweetness and less muddiness. Can be briny in the same way as good Atlantics. Because they're fairly small, they can be eaten in one bite.

OLYMPIAS Very hard to find outside of the Northwest. If you do find them, they are usually briny and metallic, much like flats. Very small.

In addition to considering species, pay close attention to freshness and season when shopping. The best oyster is the freshest. Older oysters are drier, flabbier, and less flavorful. Merchants are required by law to keep the tags that come with each container of oysters. The tag shows the place of origin and date of harvest. A reputable fishmonger can tell you exactly where and when an oyster was harvested. Any oysters more than a

few days old should not be purchased.

Season is also key. The old adage about not eating oysters during months that don't contain the letter *R* is not as important as it used to be, when people spurned oysters in the summer because they died more quickly out of the water. But many oysters do spawn in the months without an *R*—May, June, July, and August—and spawning makes the meat mushy and less appetizing.

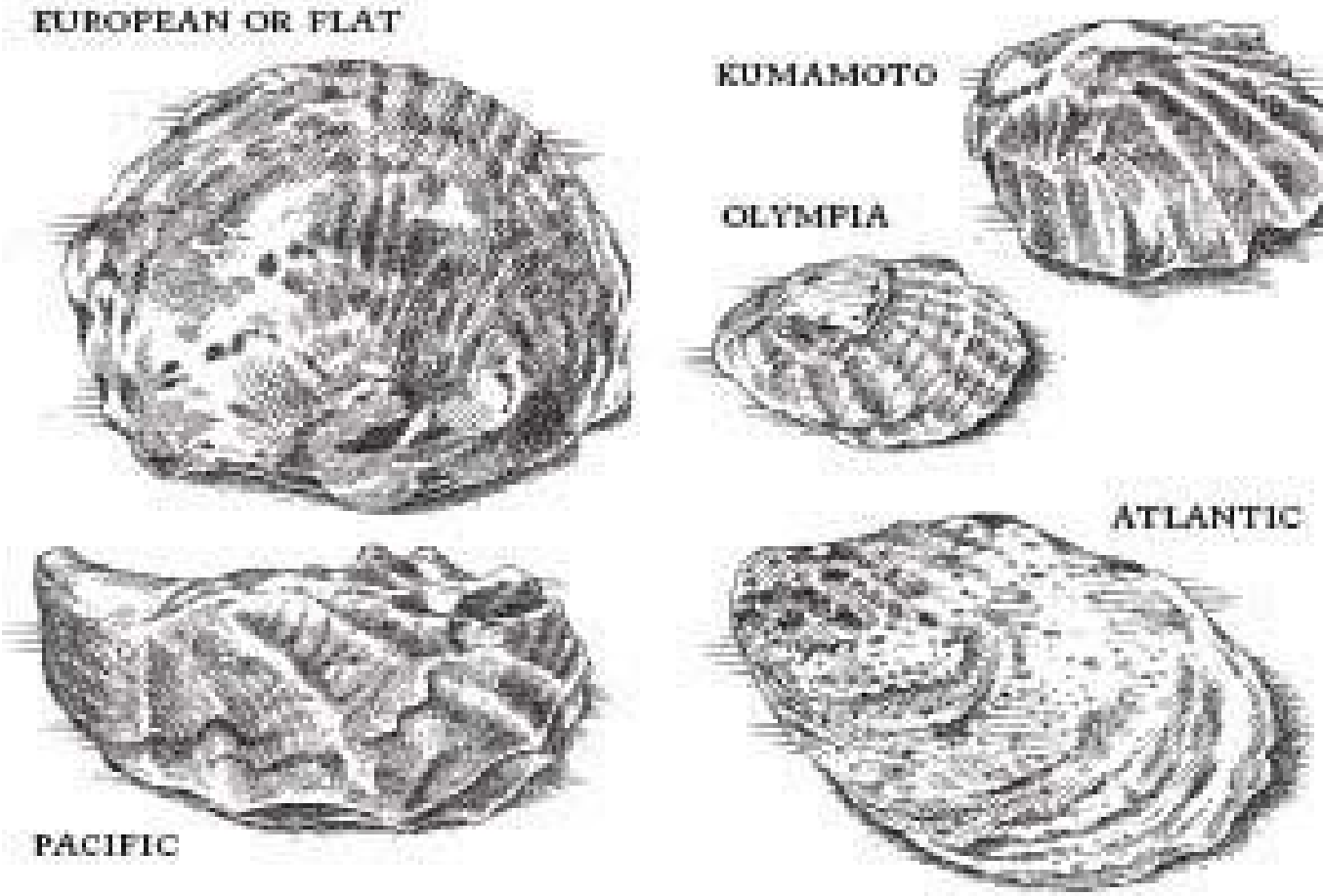

Figure 8.
The five types of oysters.

Shucked Oysters with Champagne Dressing

NOTE: ***Purists serve shucked oysters as is or with a squirt of lemon juice and a sprinkling of pepper. We also like oysters with a simple champagne dressing. Avoid dressings that contain oil (it makes the oysters greasy) or that are overly acidic or harsh. We liked champagne vinegar best but also recommend white wine or rice vinegar. In any case, use a high-quality vinegar. The right oyster knife is essential for opening oysters quickly and safely. (For more information,*** **see** ***Buying an Oyster Knife.) Serves***

four to six.

1/2 cup good quality champagne vinegar
1 teaspoon coarsely ground black pepper
1 tablespoon minced shallot
Crushed ice
2 dozen fresh oysters

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Combine vinegar, pepper, and shallot in small bowl and let sit a few minutes to let flavors mingle.

2. Meanwhile, arrange crushed ice on large platter. Shuck oysters (*see* figures

10 through 13), being careful to keep oyster liquor in shells. Discard top shells. Carefully Nestlé oysters into ice. Serve with champagne dressing on the side.

BUYING AN OYSTER KNIFE

If you want to open more than one oyster every 10 minutes and end up with the shell, your temper, and your hands intact, it's important to have the right oyster knife. To find the best oyster knife, we had experienced and novice shuckers test several knives as well as a simple church-key can opener, which some experts claim is the best tool for the job.

Our two favorites were the Oxo (*see* figure 9) and the Dexter Russell S121. Both knives have blades with a slightly angled, pointed tip that makes it surprisingly easy to make that first penetration into the hinge between the top and bottom shells (*see* figure 10). The handles on these knives are also nicely contoured and textured for a secure, comfortable grip. Lastly, both knives have a long blade that makes it easy to detach the oyster meat once the shell has been pried open.

When an oyster knife is nowhere to be found, the pointed end of a church-key can opener will eventually open some oysters, but not without some heartache.

(Church keys are common openers about the size of a stick of gum, often with a bottle opener on one end and a V-shaped can opener on the other.) We opened some oysters this way (it took two or three times as long), but others never yielded to this crude substitute for a real oyster knife.

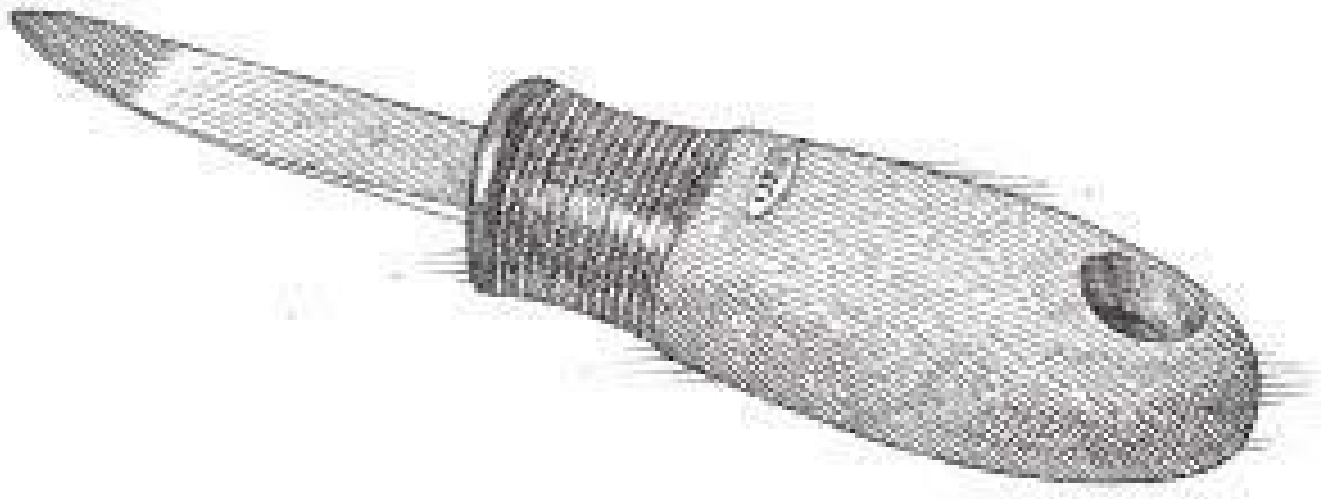

Figure 9.
This oyster knife (made by Oxo) has a slightly angled, pointed tip that makes it easy to open the hinge between the top and bottom shells. The blade is long enough to detach the oyster meat from the shell, and the handle is contoured for a secure, comfortable grip.

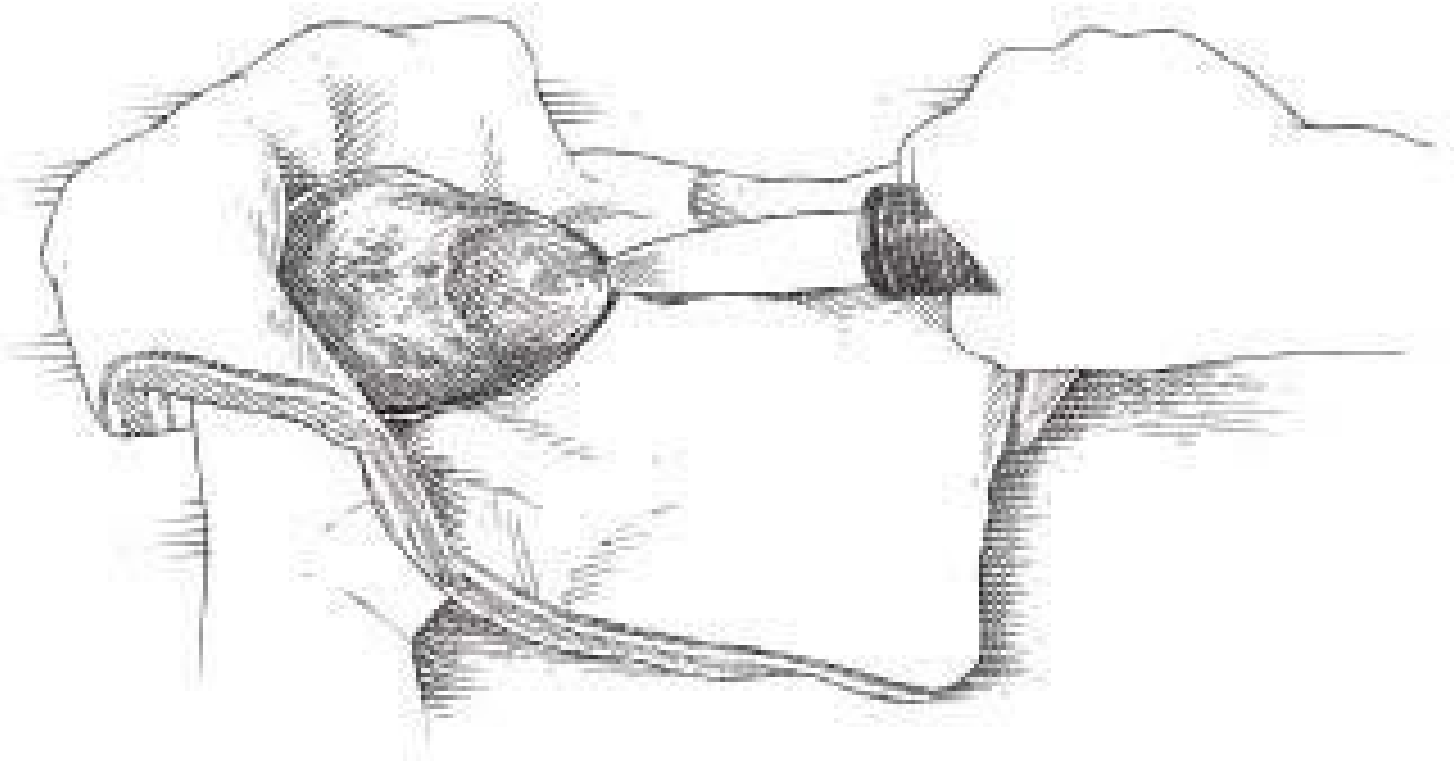

Figure 10.

Shucking an oyster is easy if you have the right tool* (see *Figure 9*) *and technique. Remember to keep the oyster flat as you work to keep the flavorful juices from spilling out of the shell. Start by holding the oyster cupped side down in a kitchen towel. Locate the hinge

with the tip of the knife.

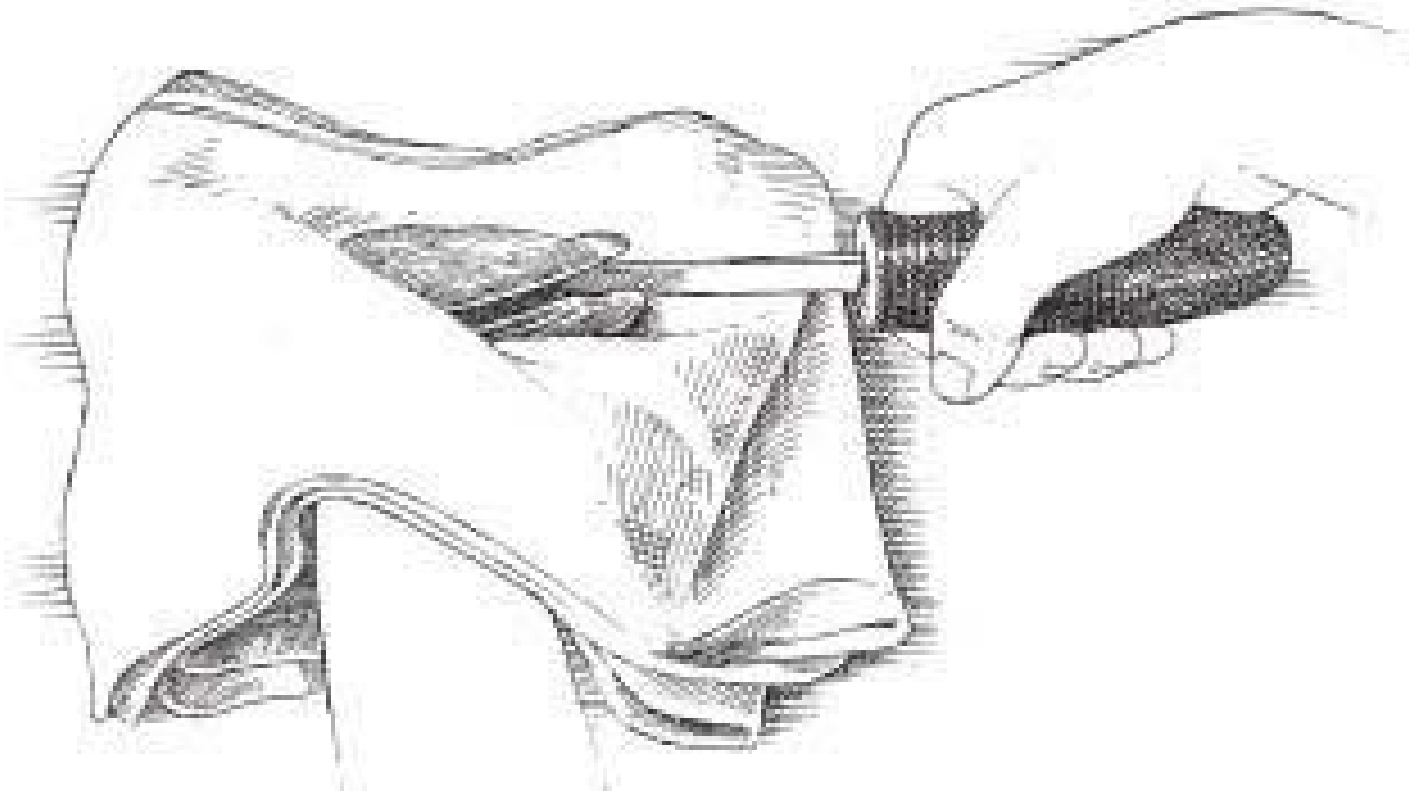

Figure 11.
Push between the edges of shells, wiggling back and forth to pry them open.

Figure 12.
Detach the meat from the top shell and discard the shell.

Figure 13.
To make eating easier, sever the muscle that holds the meat of the oyster to the bottom shell.

LOBSTER

AS WITH CLAMS AND MUSSELS, WE FOUND that shopping for lobster is just as important as cooking. Lobsters must be purchased alive. Choose lobsters that are active in the tank, avoiding listless specimens that may have been in the tank too long. Maine lobsters (which are actually found on the northeast coast from Canada to New Jersey), with their large claws, are meatier and sweeter than clawless rock or spiny lobsters. They are our first choice. Size is really a matter of preference and budget. We

found it possible to cook large as well as small lobsters to perfection as long as we adjusted the cooking time (*see* Approximate Steaming Times and Meat Yields).

During our initial phase of testing, we confirmed our preference for steamed lobster rather than boiled. Steamed lobster did not taste better than boiled, but the process was simpler and neater, and the finished product was less watery when cracked open on the plate. Steaming the lobster on a rack or steamer basket kept it from becoming waterlogged. (If you happen to live near the ocean, seaweed makes a natural rack.) We found that additions to the pot —beer, wine, herbs, spices, or other

seasonings—failed to improve the lobster's flavor. It seems that nothing can penetrate the hard lobster shell.

As for dry-heat cooking methods, we found the steady, even heat of the oven preferable to broiling, where charring of the meat is a real danger. We found that a high oven temperature of 450 degrees works the best. You want to cook the lobster quickly. When we roasted lobsters at lower temperatures, the outer layer of meat had dried out by the time the inside was cooked through. To keep the tail from curling during roasting, we found it helpful to run a skewer through it (*see* figure 22).

Although we had little trouble

perfecting these two cooking methods, we were bothered by the toughness of some of the lobsters tails we were eating. No matter how we cooked them, most of the tails were at least slightly rubbery and chewy.

We spent six months talking to research scientists, chefs, seafood experts, lobstermen, and home cooks to see how they tackled the problem of the tough tail. The suggestions ranged from the bizarre (petting the lobster to "hypnotize" it and thus prevent an adrenaline rush at death that causes the tail to toughen, or using a chopstick to kill the lobster before cooking) to the sensible (avoiding really old, large lobsters). But after testing every one of

these suggestions, we still didn't have a cooking method that consistently delivered a tender tail.

Occasionally, we would get a nice tender tail, but there did not seem to a pattern. We then spoke with several scientists who said we were barking up the wrong tree. The secret to tender lobster was not so much in the preparation and cooking as in the selection.

Before working on this topic in the test kitchen, the terms *hard-shell* and *soft-shell* lobster meant nothing to us. Unlike crabs, there's certainly no distinction between the two at the retail level. Of course, we knew from past experience

that some lobster claws rip open as easily an aluminum flip-top can, while others require shop tools to crack. We also noticed the wimpy, limp claw meat of some lobsters and the full, packed meat of others. We attributed these differences to the length of time the lobsters had been stored in tanks. It seems we were wrong. These variations are caused by the particular stage of molting that the lobster is in at the time it is caught.

As it turns out, most of the lobsters we eat during the summer and fall are in some phase of molting. During the late spring, as waters begin to warm, lobsters start to form the new shell tissue underneath their old shells. As early as

June off the shores of New Jersey and in July or August in colder Maine and Canadian waters, the lobsters shed their hard exterior shell. Because the most difficult task in molting is pulling the claw muscle through the old shell, the lobster dehydrates its claw (hence the smaller, wimpier claw meat).

Once the lobster molts, it emerges with nothing but a wrinkled, soft covering, much like that on a soft-shell crab. Within 15 minutes, the lobster inflates itself with water, increasing its length by 15 percent and its weight by 50 percent. This extra water expands the wrinkled, soft covering, allowing the lobster room to grow long after the shell

starts to harden. The newly molted lobster immediately eats its old shell, digesting the crucial shell-hardening calcium.

Understanding the molt phase clarifies the deficiencies of soft-shell summer lobster. It explains why it so waterlogged, why its claw meat is so shriveled and scrawny, and why its tail meat is so underdeveloped and chewy. A one-pound soft-shell lobster also has far less meat than a one-pound hard-shell lobster. (*See* Approximate Steaming Times and Meat Yields for more details.)

During the fall, the lobster shell continues to harden and the meat expands to fill the new shell. By spring,

lobsters are at their peak, packed with meat and relatively inexpensive since it is easier for fishermen to check their traps than it is during the winter. As the tail grows, it becomes firmer and meatier and will cook up tender, not tough. Better texture and more meat are two excellent reasons to give lobsters a squeeze at the market (*see* figure 14) and buy only those with hard shells. As a rule thumb, hard-shell lobsters are reasonably priced from Mother's Day through the Fourth of July.

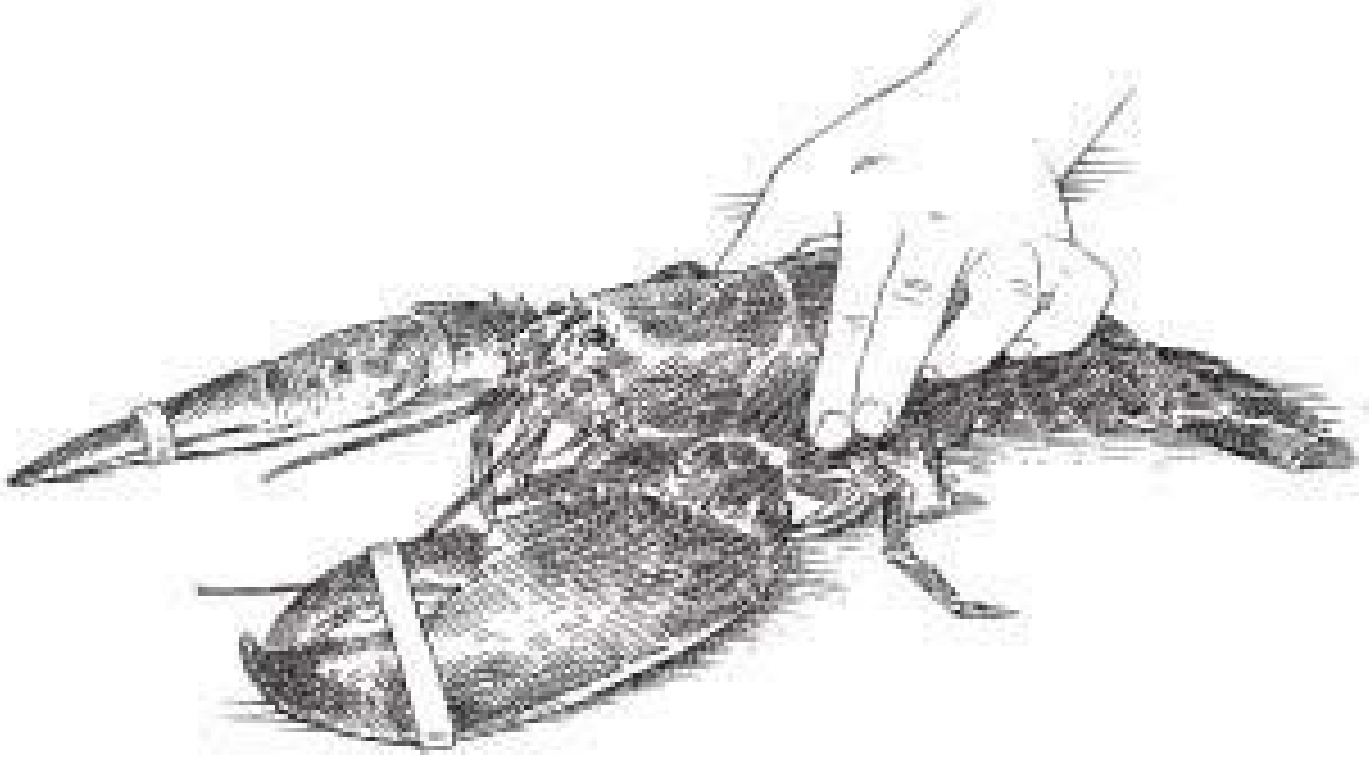

Figure 14.
Hard-shell lobsters are much meatier than soft-shell lobsters, which have recently molted. To determine whether a lobster has a hard or soft shell, squeeze the side of the lobster's body. A soft-shell lobster will yield to pressure, while a hard-shell lobster will feel hard, brittle, and

tightly packed.

Steamed Lobsters

NOTE: ***Because hard-shell lobsters are packed with more meat than soft-shell lobsters, you may want to buy slightly larger lobsters if the shells appear to be soft. Serves four.***

4 whole lobsters
8 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted until hot (optional)
Lemon wedges

INSTRUCTIONS:

Bring about 1 inch of water to boil over high heat in a large soup kettle set up with wire rack, pasta insert, or seaweed bed. Add lobsters, cover, and return

water to boil. Reduce heat to medium-high and steam until lobsters are done (*see* chart on Approximate Steaming Times and Meat Yields). Serve immediately with warm butter and lemon wedges.

Approximate Steaming Times and Meat Yields

LOBSTER SIZE	COOKING TIME *(in minutes)*	MEAT YIELD *(in ounces)*
1 lb		
soft-shell	8 to 9	about 3
hard-shell	10 to 11	4 to 4½
1¼ lbs		
soft-shell	11 to 12	3½ to 4
hard-shell	13 to 14	5½ to 6
1½ lbs		
soft-shell	13 to 14	5½ to 6
hard-shell	15 to 16	7½ to 8
1¾ -2 lbs		
soft-shell	17 to 18	6¼ to 6½
hard-shell	about 19	8½ to 9

Oven-Roasted Lobsters with Herbed Bread Crumbs

NOTE: ***Freezing the lobster for 10 minutes numbs the creature and makes it easier to handle when cutting in half for roasting. Freezing for this short amount of time does not affect the texture or quality of the meat. Serves four.***

4 tablespoons unsalted butter

$^1/_2$ cup plain dry bread crumbs

2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves or 1 tablespoon minced fresh tarragon leaves or snipped chives

4 whole lobsters, prepared

according to figures 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22

Salt and ground black pepper

Lemon wedges

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to middle-high position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Heat 1 tablespoon butter in small skillet over medium heat. When foaming subsides, add bread crumbs and cook, stirring occasionally, until toasted and golden brown, 3 to 4 minutes. Stir in herbs and set aside.

2. Arrange lobsters crosswise on two 17-by-11-inch foil-lined jelly roll pans,

alternating tail and claw ends. Melt remaining butter and brush over body and tail of each lobster; season with salt and pepper to taste. Sprinkle portion of bread crumb mixture evenly over body and tail meat.

3. Roast lobsters until tail meat is opaque and bread crumbs are crisp, 12 to 15 minutes. Serve immediately with lemon wedges.

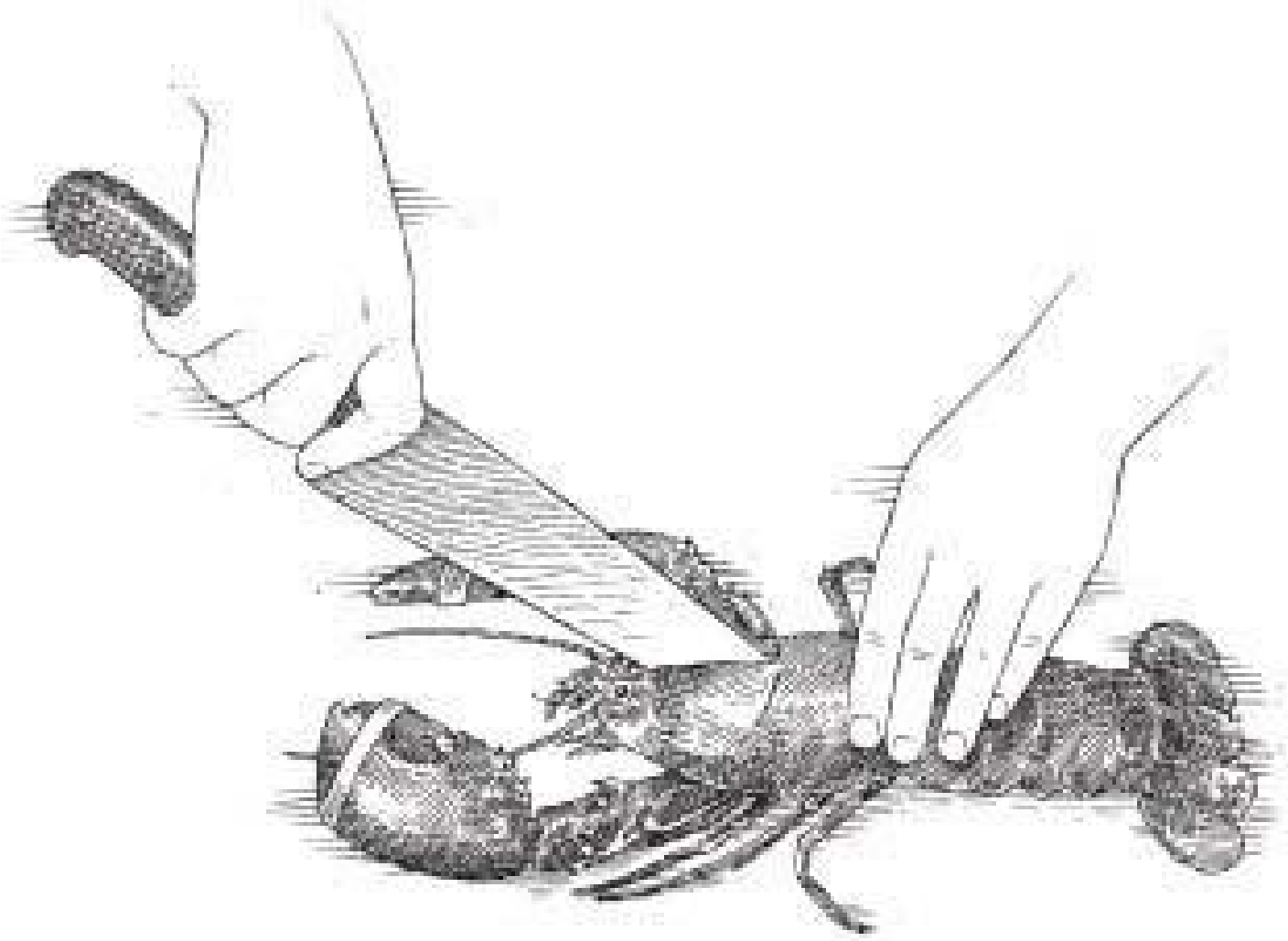

Figure 15.
Place the lobster in the freezer for 10 minutes to numb it. With the blade of a chef's knife facing the head, kill the lobster by plunging the knife into the body at the point where the shell forms

a "T." Move the blade down until it touches the head.

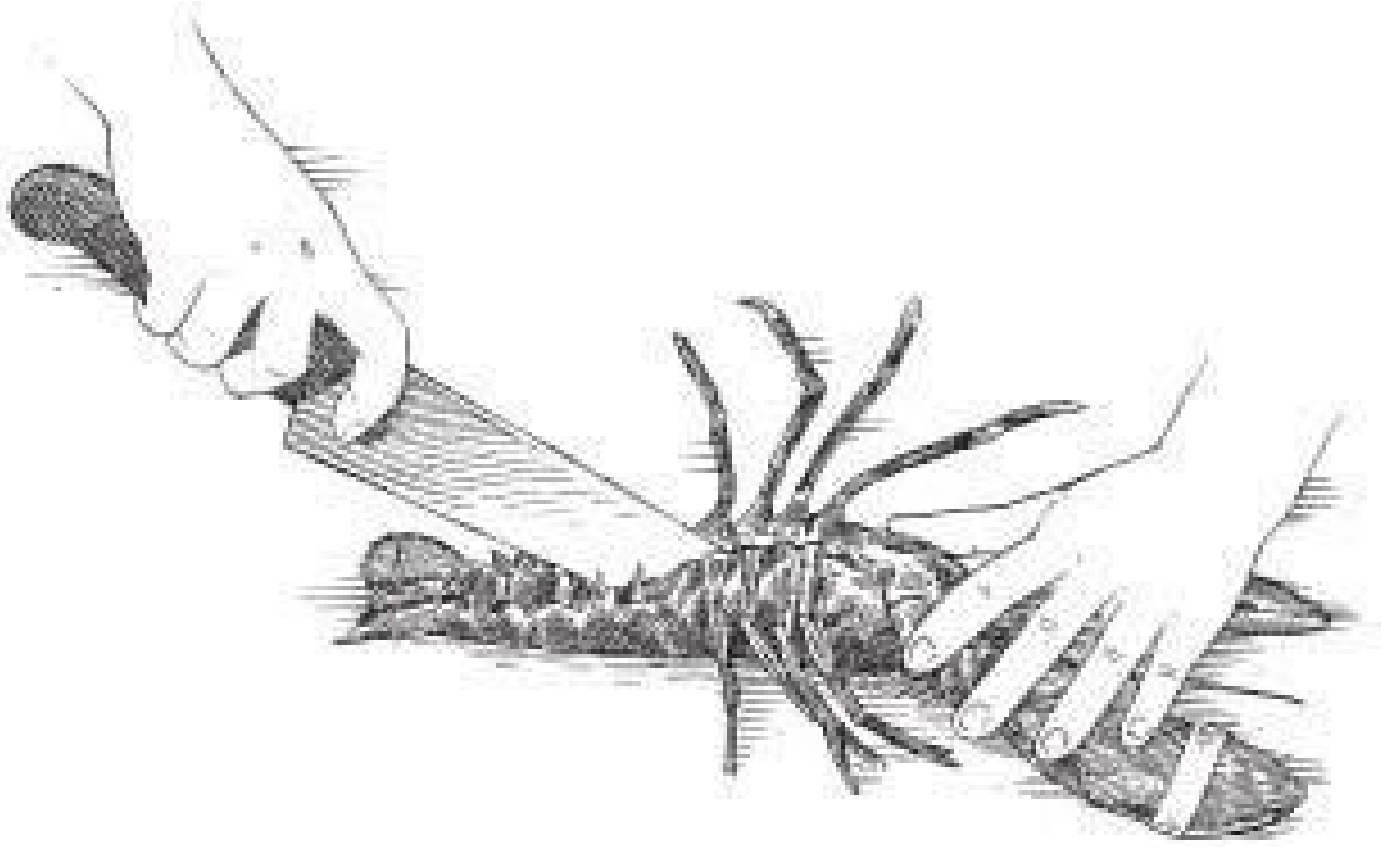

Figure 16.
Turn the lobster over, then, holding the upper body with one hand and positioning the knife blade so that it faces the tail end, cut through the body toward the tail, making sure not to cut all the way through the shell.

Figure 17.
Move your hand down to the lower body and continue cutting through the tail.

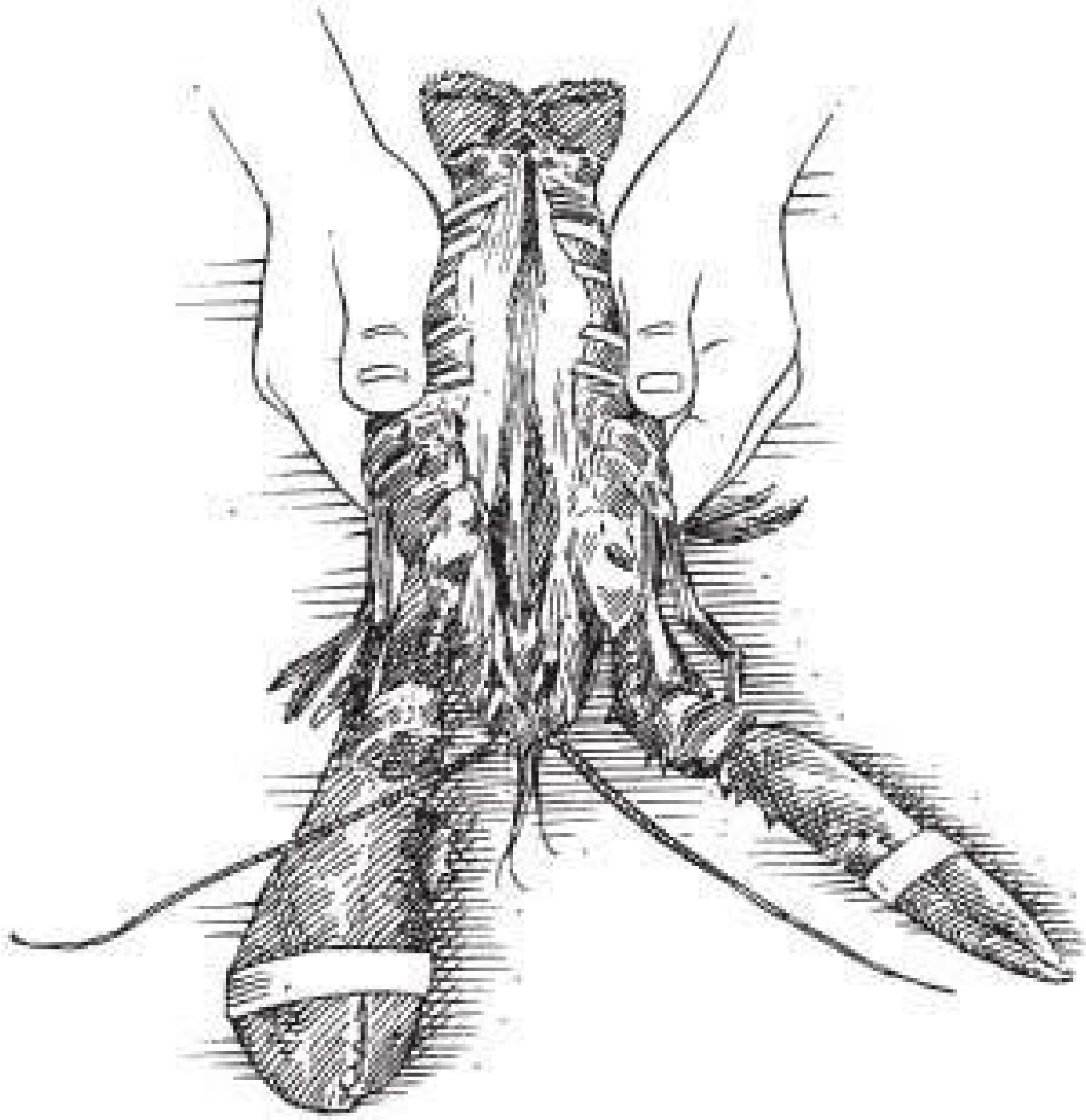

Figure 18.
Holding half of the tail in each hand, crack, but do not break, the back shell to butterfly the lobster.

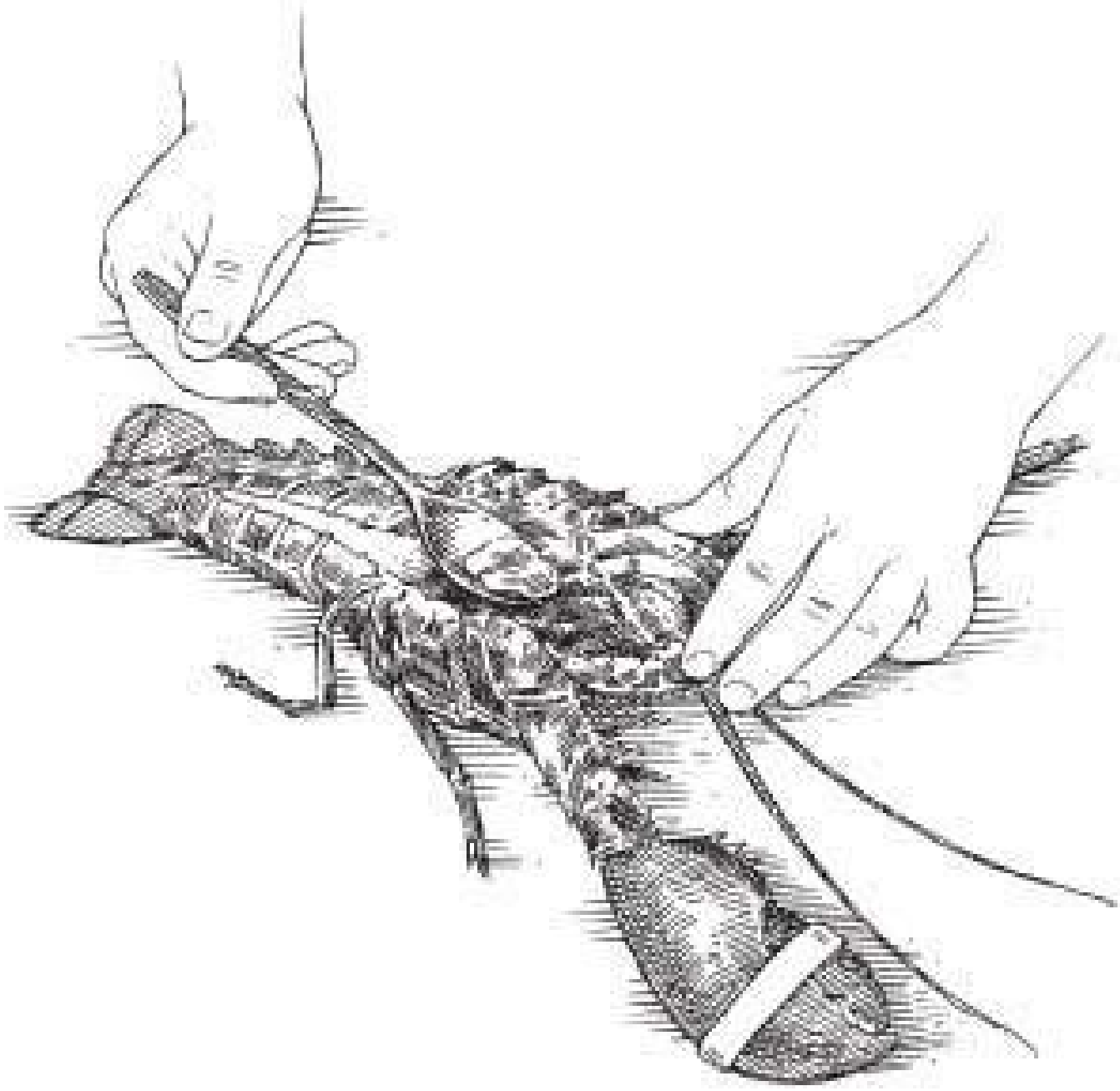

Figure 19.
Use a spoon to remove and discard the stomach sac.

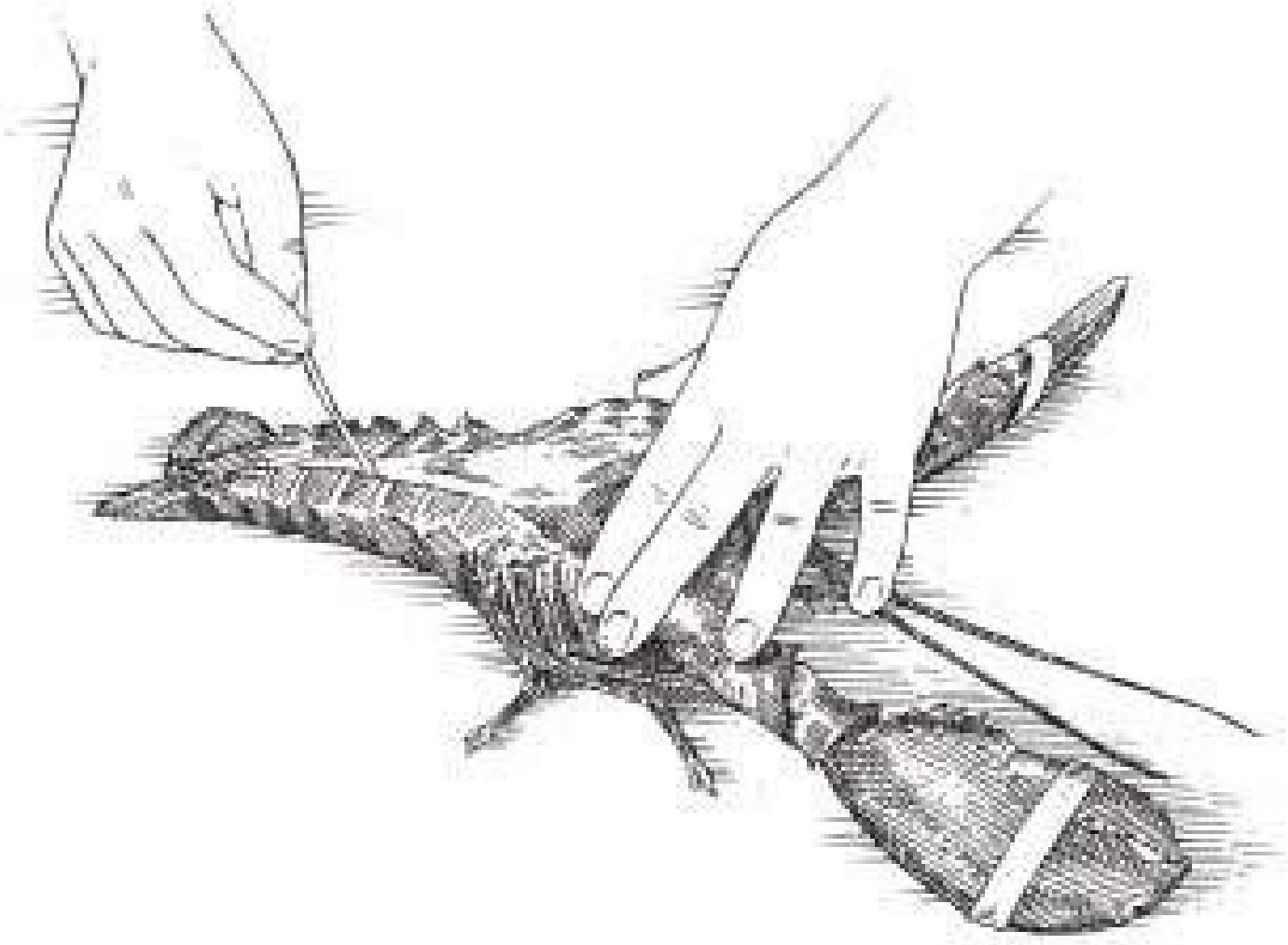

Figure 20.
Remove and discard the intestinal tract.

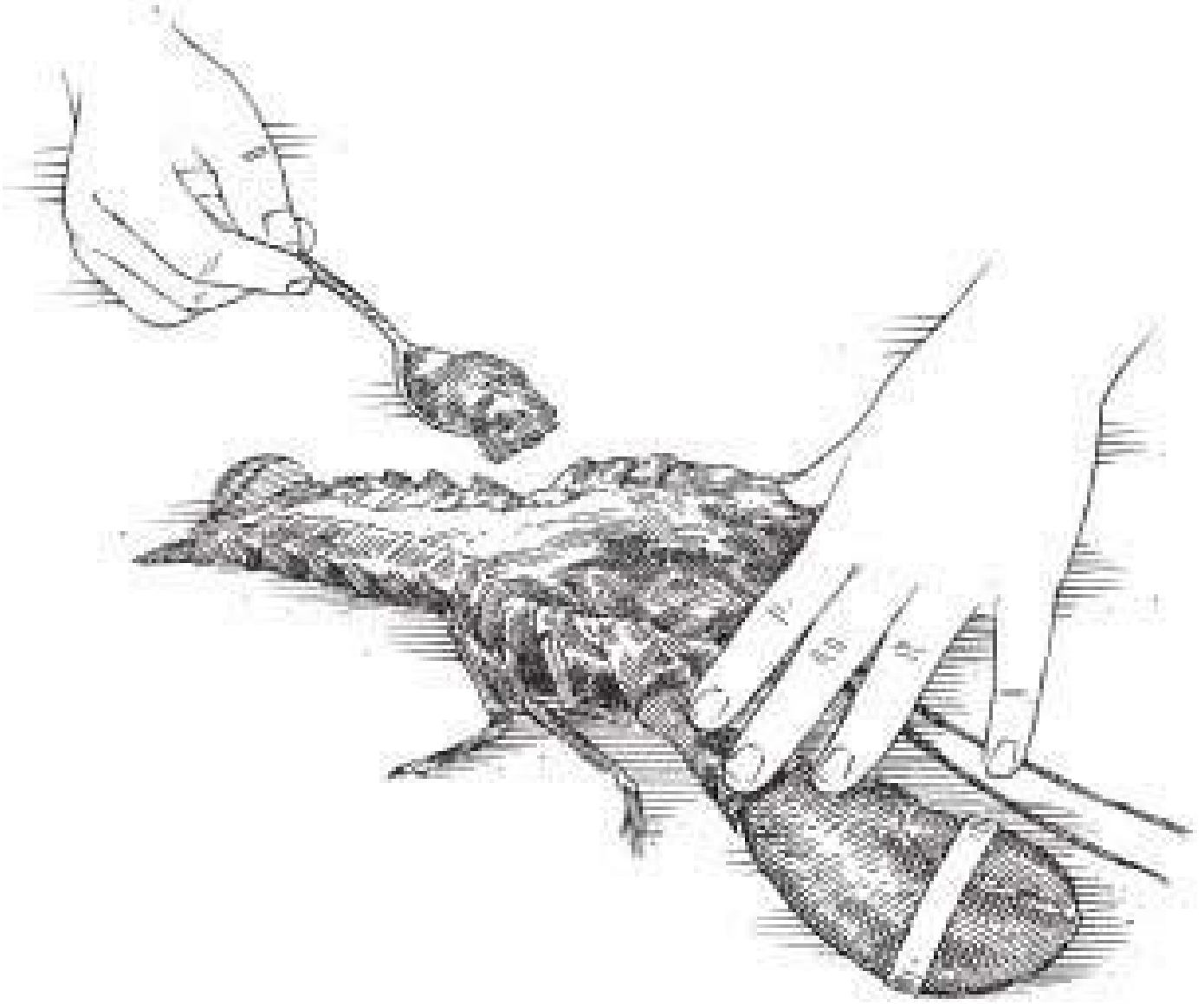

Figure 21.
Remove and discard the green tomalley if you wish.

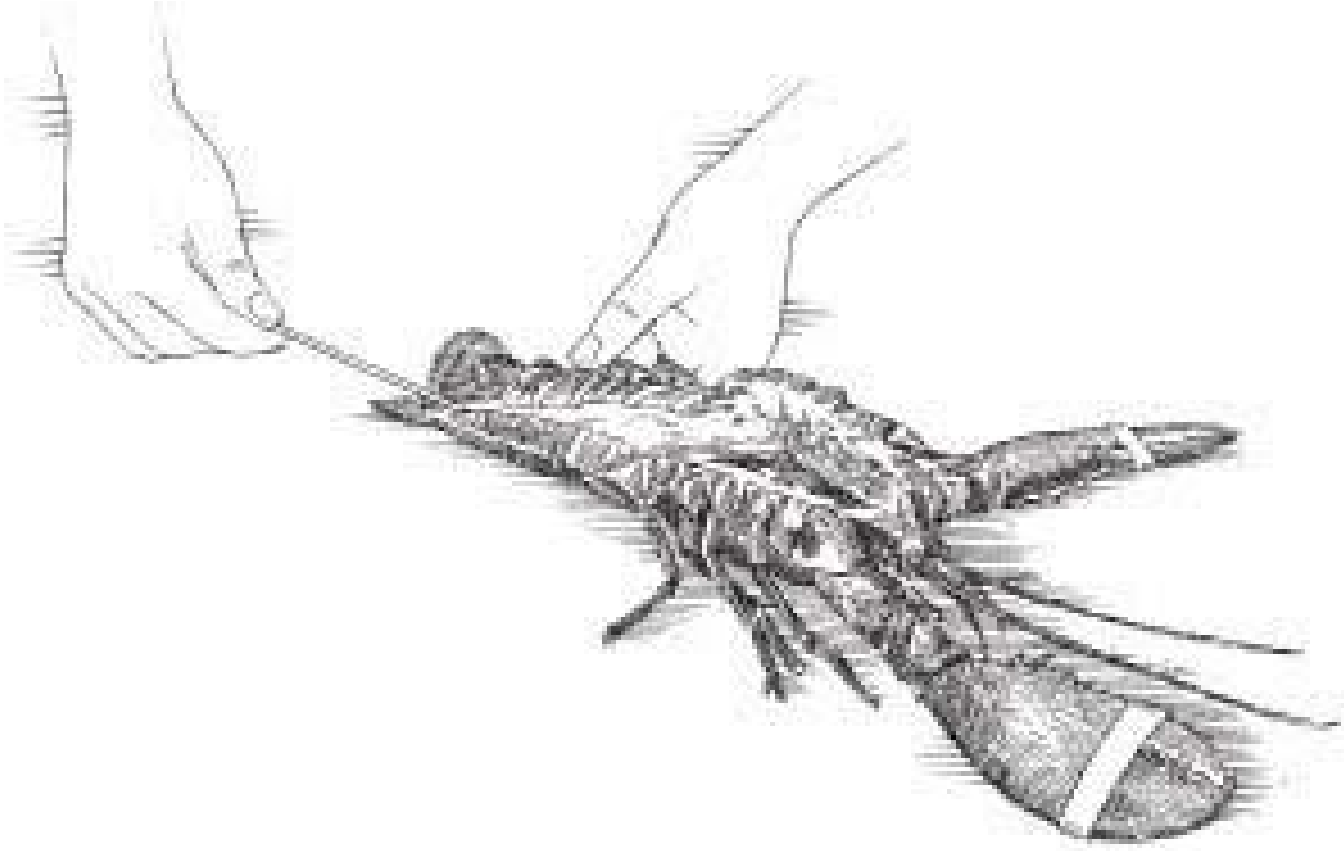

Figure 22.
Run a skewer up one side of the lobster tail to keep it from curling during cooking.

CRABS

THERE ARE DOZENS OF SPECIES OF CRABS, including stone crabs from Florida, king crabs from Alaska, and Dungeness crabs from the West Coast. The most widely available crab is the blue crab, which is found along the East Coast. Live blue crabs may be boiled and served as is. There's not much meat on a crab, and getting to it is a messy proposition. A crab boil is easy to prepare, but it's not the most efficient way to enjoy crabmeat. We think that a crab boil makes the most sense as an appetizer or part of a larger

seafood spread, not as a main course. Thankfully, the meat is picked from the shell by processors and sold as fresh crabmeat when you need crabmeat in quantity for use in salads and crab cakes.

One of our favorite ways to consume blue crabs is when they are soft-shell crabs. Soft-shell crabs are blue crabs that have been taken out of the water just after they have shed their shells in the spring or summer. At this brief stage of its life, the whole crab, with its new, soft, gray skin, is almost completely edible and especially delicious. They should be purchased alive and cleaned at home for optimum flavor. Once cleaned, the crab should be cooked immediately.

To our way of thinking, the whole point of cooking soft-shells is to make them crisp. The legs should crunch delicately, while the body should provide a contrast between its thin, crisp outer skin and the soft, rich interior that explodes juicily in the mouth. Deep-frying delivers these results, but this method is better suited to restaurants. Air pockets and water in the crab cause a lot of dangerous splattering. For optimum safety, soft-shell crabs should be fried in a very large quantity of oil in a very deep pot, which is not practical at home.

We wanted to develop an alternative method for home cooks. We tried

roasting, but the crabs didn't get crisp enough. Pan-frying lightly floured crabs produces a satisfyingly crisp crust. Crabs still splatter hot fat when cooked this way, but far less than when deep-fried. To avoid the mess and danger of the splattering hot fat, we recommend sliding a splatter screen (a round wire net with a handle) over the pan. We tried various coatings, including cornmeal, bread crumbs, and even Cream of Wheat. These coatings all detracted from the flavor of the crab. Flour produces a nice crisp crust with minimal effect on flavor.

We tried soaking the crabs in milk for two hours before applying the flour coating, a trick advocated by several

sources to "sweeten" the meat. Again, we found that this method detracted from the fresh-out-of-the-water flavor of the crabs.

We also tried various fats for pan-frying, including whole butter, clarified butter, vegetable and peanut oils, and a combination of whole butter and olive oil. We found that whole butter gives the crabs a nutty flavor and browns them well. It is our recommended all-purpose cooking fat. Peanut oil produces especially crisp crabs. It does not add the rich flavor of butter, but works well when Asian flavorings are used to sauce the crabs.

We found that you need a tablespoon

of fat for each crab and that a large skillet will accommodate only four crabs. Since two soft-shells make a typical serving, you will need two pans when cooking for four people. Although any heavy-bottomed skillet will work, cast iron holds heat especially well and is recommended.

Once the soft-shells have been cooked, they should be sauced and served immediately. Because the crabs are pan-fried, they don't need much of a sauce. A drizzle of something acidic, such as a squirt of lemon juice, is sufficient.

When shopping for soft-shells, look for fresh rather than frozen crabs. Most stores will offer to clean the crabs for you. Refuse their offer if you can. When

you clean a live crab, it begins to lose its juices. In our tests, we found that crab cooked immediately after cleaning is plumper and juicier than a crab cleaned several hours before cooking.

While soft-shells are certainly the easiest way to enjoy the flavor of crabs, there is something appealing about crab boil. In our tests, we found that less is more here. The crabs have so much flavor that they can be boiled in plain water. You can add seasonings such as Old Bay if you like, but they are far from essential.

For those who don't like a mess or to work for their dinner, fresh crabmeat is a good, if expensive, alternative. Other

forms of crabmeat just don't compare. Canned crabmeat is—well—horrible; like canned tuna, it bears little resemblance to the fresh product. Fresh pasteurized crabmeat is watery and bland. Frozen crabmeat is stringy and wet. There is no substitute for fresh blue crabmeat, preferably "jumbo lump," which indicates the largest pieces and highest grade.

For crab cakes and salads, fresh unpasteurized jumbo lump crabmeat is the only choice. For best flavor, don't rinse the crabmeat. Just pick over the meat to make sure all the cartilage and shell pieces have been removed.

Master Recipe

Pan-Fried Soft-Shell Crabs

NOTE: ***A splatter screen (see figure 26) is essential if you want to minimize the mess and the danger to your arms and face. For maximum crispness, you should cook the crabs in two pans, each covered with a splatter screen, so you can serve the crabs as soon as they are cooked. If you are working with just one splatter screen and pan, cook four crabs in four tablespoons of butter,***

transfer them to a platter in a 300-degree oven, wipe out the pan, add 4 more tablespoons of butter, and cook the remaining crabs. Serves four as a main course, eight as an appetizer.

8 medium-to-large soft-shell crabs, cleaned (*see* figures 23 through 25) and patted dry with paper towels

All-purpose flour for dredging

10 tablespoons unsalted butter

1/4 cup lemon juice

2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves

Ground black pepper

Master Instructions

1. Dredge crabs in flour; pat off excess. Heat two 11-or 12-inch heavy-bottomed frying pans over medium-high heat until pans are quite hot, about 3 minutes. Add 4 tablespoons butter to each pan, swirling pans to keep butter from burning as it melts. When foam subsides, add four crabs, skins down, to each pan. Cover each pan with splatter screen and cook, adjusting heat as necessary to keep butter from burning, until crabs turn reddish brown, about 3 minutes. Turn crabs with spatula or tongs

and cook until second side is browned, about 3 minutes more. Drain crabs on plate lined with paper towel.

2. Set one pan aside. Discard the butter in the other pan and remove from heat. Add lemon juice to that pan to deglaze it. Cut remaining 2 tablespoons butter into pieces and add to skillet. Swirl pan to melt butter. Add parsley and salt and pepper to taste. Arrange two crabs on each of four plates. Spoon some sauce over each plate and serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Pan-Fried Soft-Shell Crabs with Lemon, Capers, and Herbs

The pan sauce is tart and powerfully flavorful; you need only about one tablespoon per serving.

Follow Master Recipe through step 1. Set one pan aside and discard the butter in the other pan. Off heat, add 3 tablespoons lemon juice, 2 teaspoons sherry vinegar, $1\,^1/_2$ teaspoons drained and chopped capers, and 1 minced scallion. Swirl in butter as directed in Master Recipe. Add 2 teaspoons minced fresh tarragon along with parsley, salt,

and pepper. Spoon sauce over crabs and serve.

Pan-Fried Soft-Shelled Crabs with Orange and Soy

This Asian recipe uses peanut oil rather than butter to cook the crabs.

Follow Master Recipe, using 1/4 cup peanut oil in each pan in step 1. When crabs are done, remove and drain as directed. Set one pan aside and discard the oil in the other pan. Add 2 tablespoons fresh peanut oil to pan and return to medium heat. Add 3 medium minced garlic cloves, 3/4 teaspoon minced fresh gingerroot, and 1/4

teaspoon hot red pepper flakes, and sauté until garlic is fragrant and lightened in color, 30 to 45 seconds. Off heat, stir in 2 tablespoons orange juice, 2 tablespoons rice vinegar, 1 teaspoon soy sauce, and 2 thinly sliced scallions. Spoon sauce over crabs and serve.

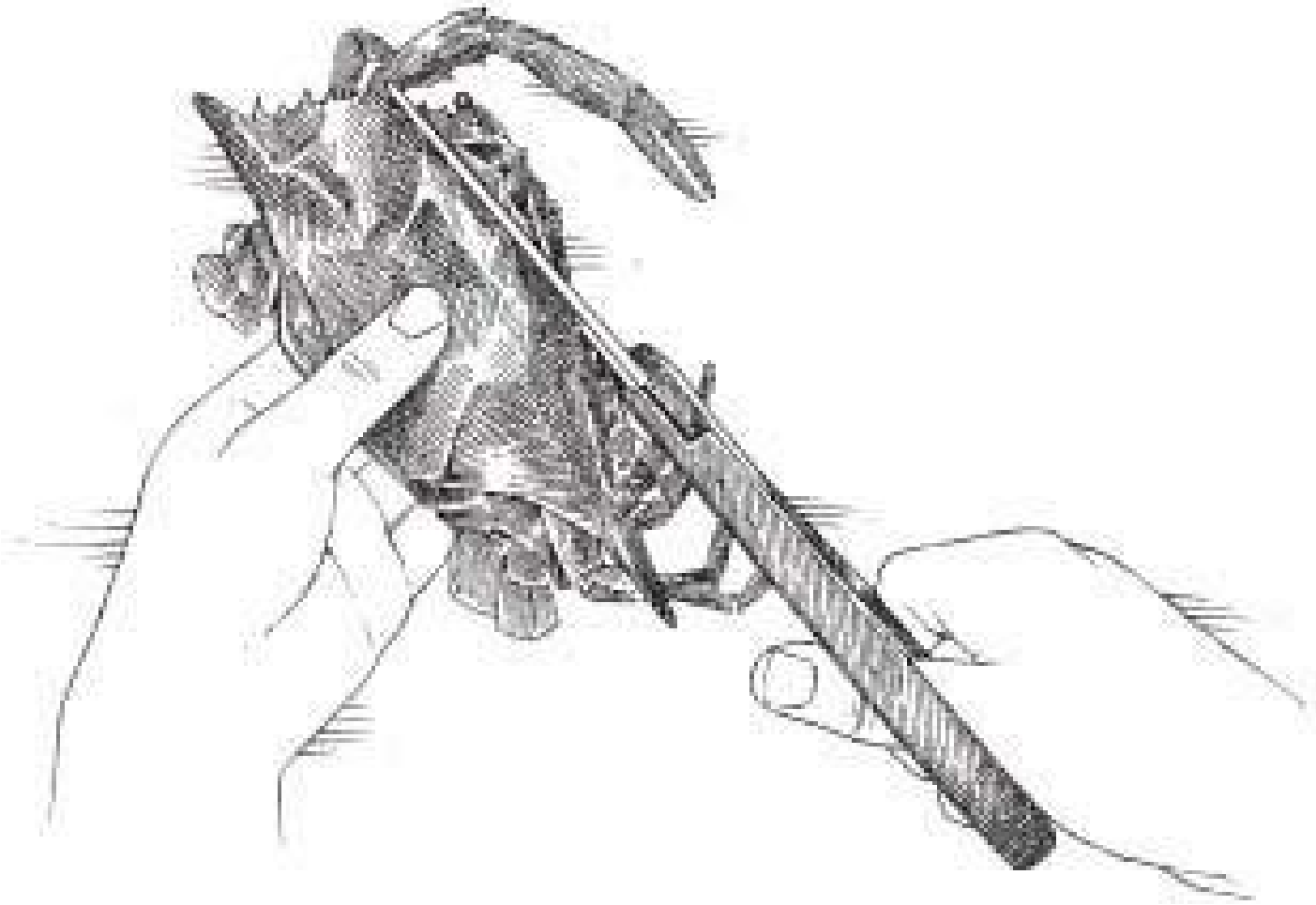

Figure 23.
To clean a soft-shell crab, first cut off its mouth with kitchen scissors; the mouth is the first part of the shell to harden. You can also cut off the eyes at the same time, but this is purely for aesthetic reasons since the eyes

are edible.

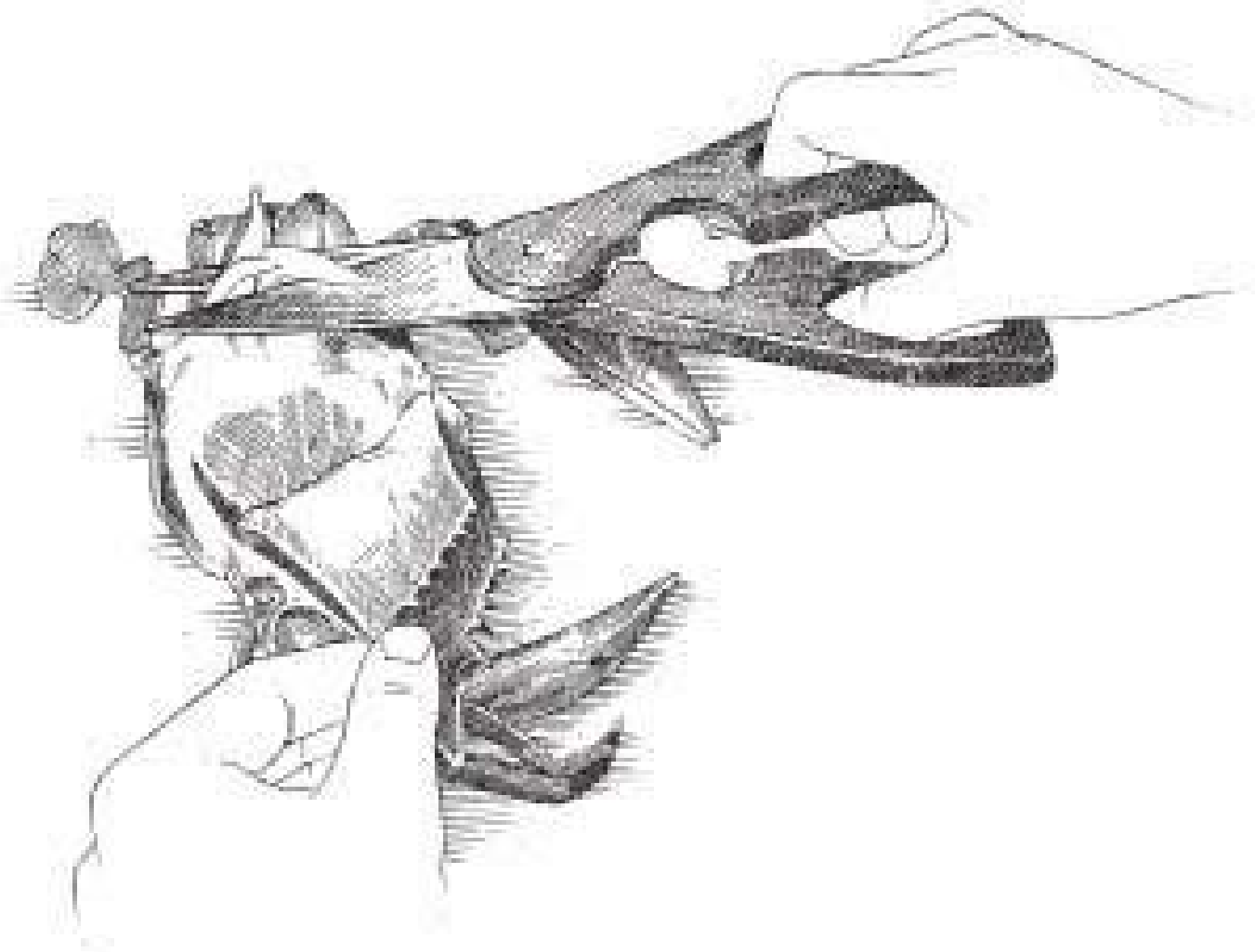

Figure 24.
Next, lift the pointed side of the crab and cut out the spongy off-white gills underneath; the gills are fibrous and watery and unpleasant to eat.

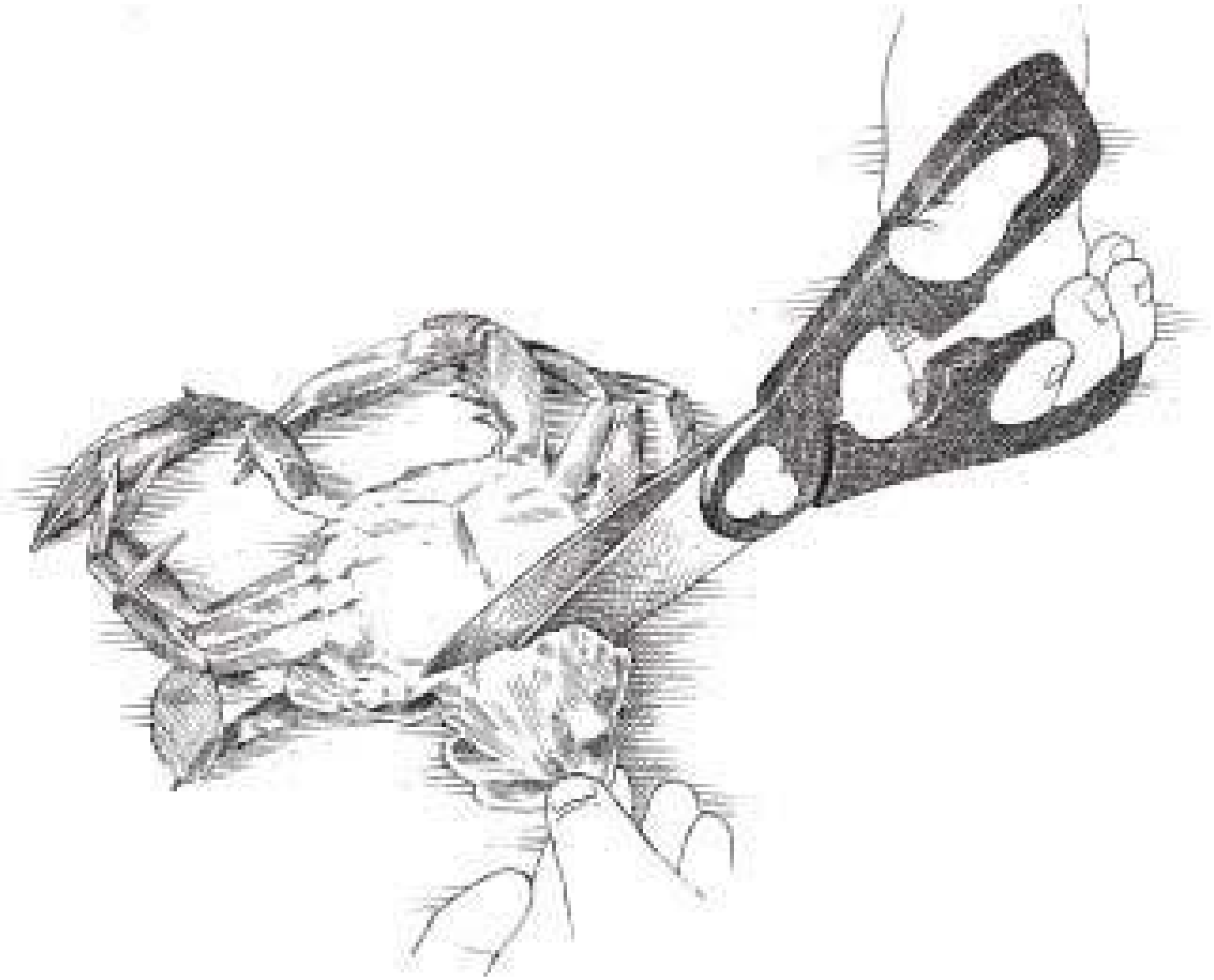

Figure 25.
Finally, turn the crab on its back and cut off the triangular, or T-shaped, "apron flap."

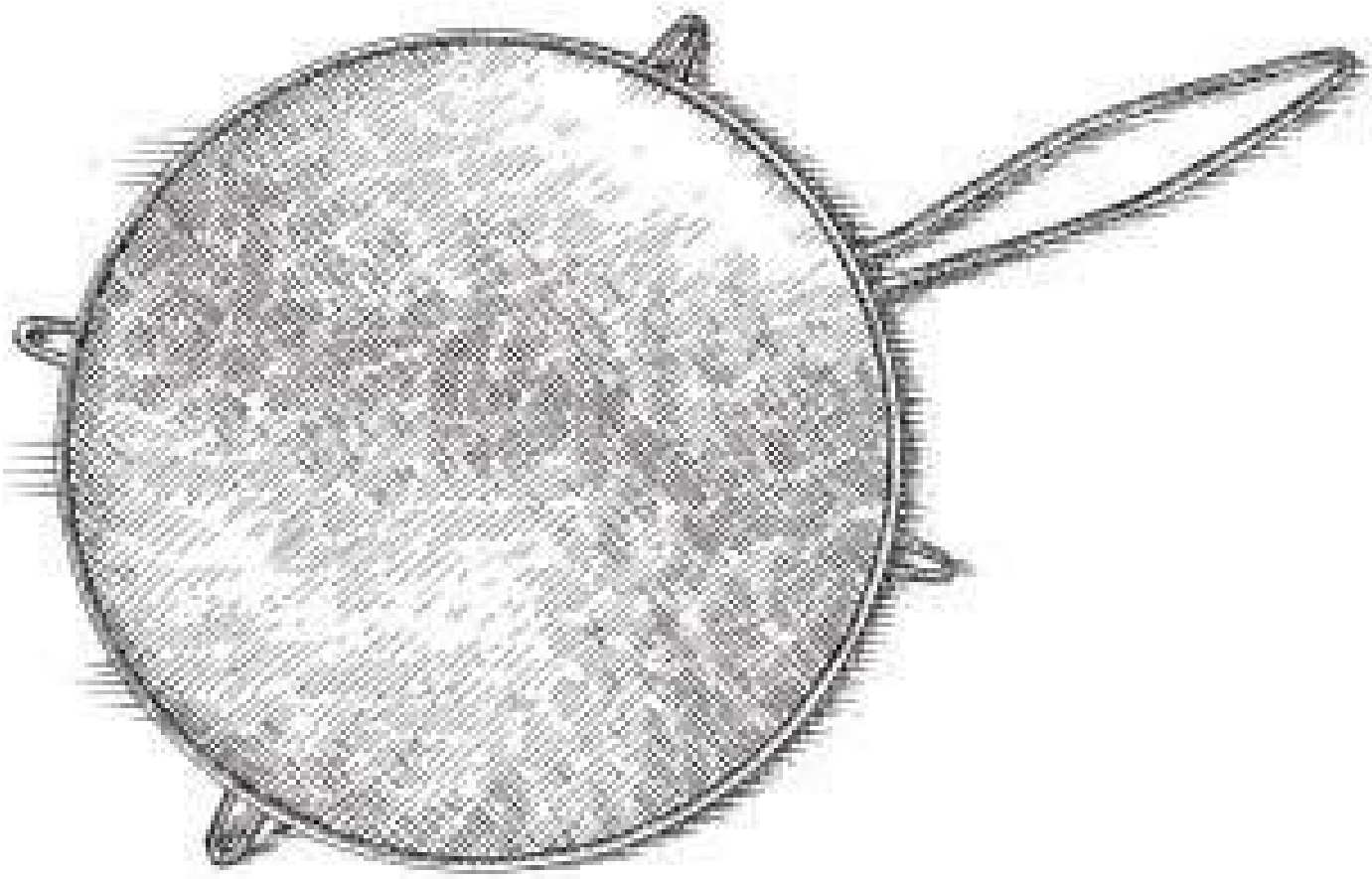

Figure 26.
Because they are full of water, soft-shells spit hot fat like crazy when fried. To protect your hands and face (and to keep your stove top from becoming covered with grease), slide a splatter screen—a round wire net with a handle—over the pan with the crabs as

they cook. Steam can escape through the netting so the crabs stay crisp, and the fat stays in the pan.

Master Recipe

Boiled Blue Crabs

NOTE: ***We find that crabs have so much flavor they are best boiled in plain water. You can add seasonings (see the variations), but they are far from essential. An 8-quart stock pot will hold only 8 crabs at a time. If you want to cook more crabs, keep reusing the liquid as needed. Or, if you like, use a larger pot and more water, following the proportions outlined in this recipe. Eating boiled crabs (see***

figures 27 through 30) is a lot of work, and we think they make more sense as an appetizer than a main course. Serves four as an appetizer.

8 blue crabs (6 to 8 ounces each), rinsed
Lemon wedges

INSTRUCTIONS:

Bring $4^1/_2$ quarts water to boil in 8-quart stock pot. Using tongs, add crabs and boil until bright orange-red, about 5 minutes. Remove crabs with tongs and serve with lemon wedges.

VARIATIONS:

Crab Boil with Vinegar and Old Bay

Bring 4 quarts water, 2 cups white vinegar, and 1 tablespoon Old Bay to boil in pot. Cook crabs as directed and serve with lemon wedges.

Spicy Crab Boil with Vinegar and Old Bay

Bring 4 quarts water, 2 cups white vinegar, 1 tablespoon Old Bay, 1 teaspoon cayenne, and 1 tablespoon paprika to boil in pot. Cook crabs as directed and serve with lemon wedges.

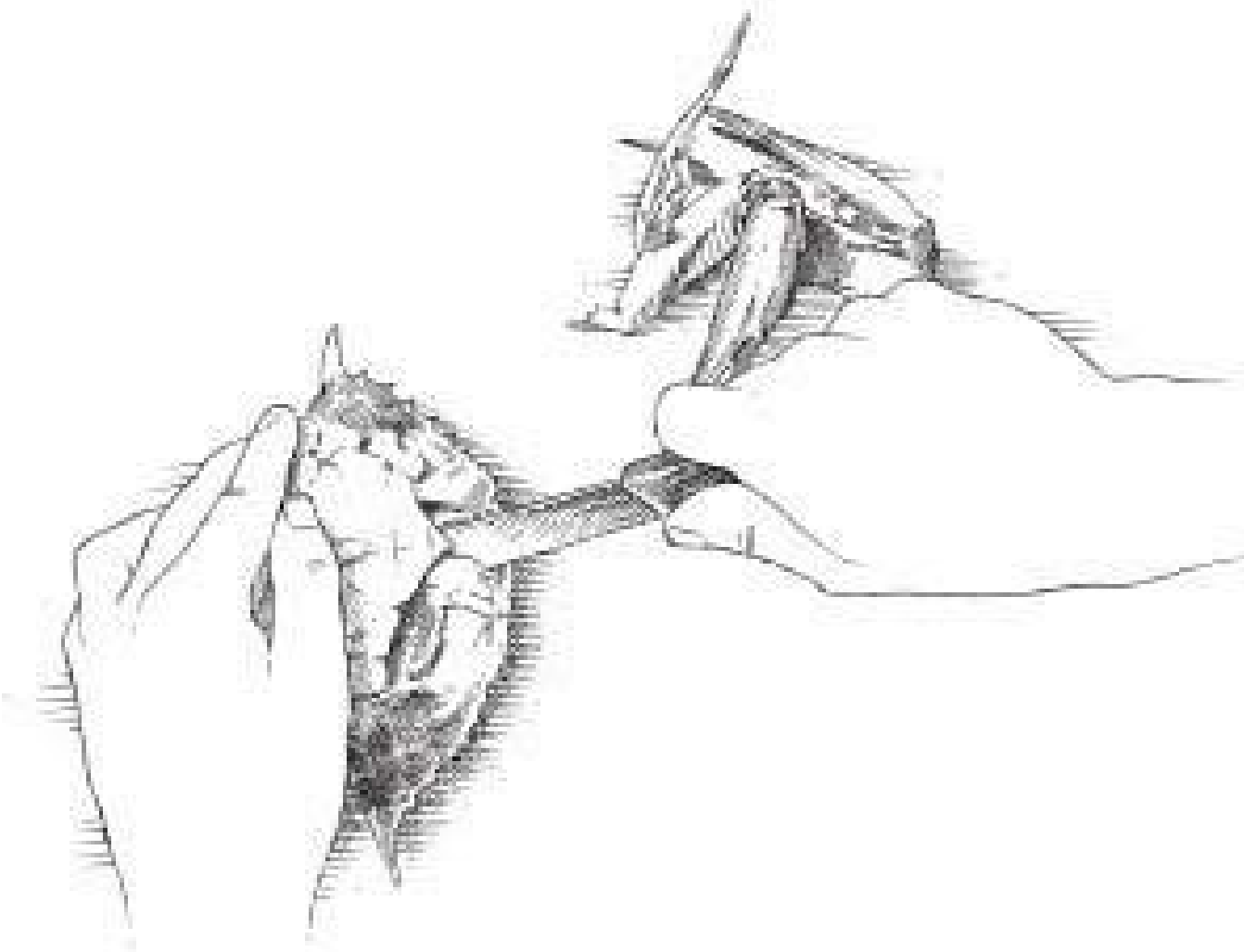

Figure 27.
Eating whole blue crabs can be a challenge. Start by twisting off the claws and legs and breaking them open with a mallet or crackers to expose the meat. Once all the claws and legs have been detached, turn the crab upside-

down and insert a paring knife into the front of the crab. Twist the knife to loosen the bottom shell from the rest of the crab.

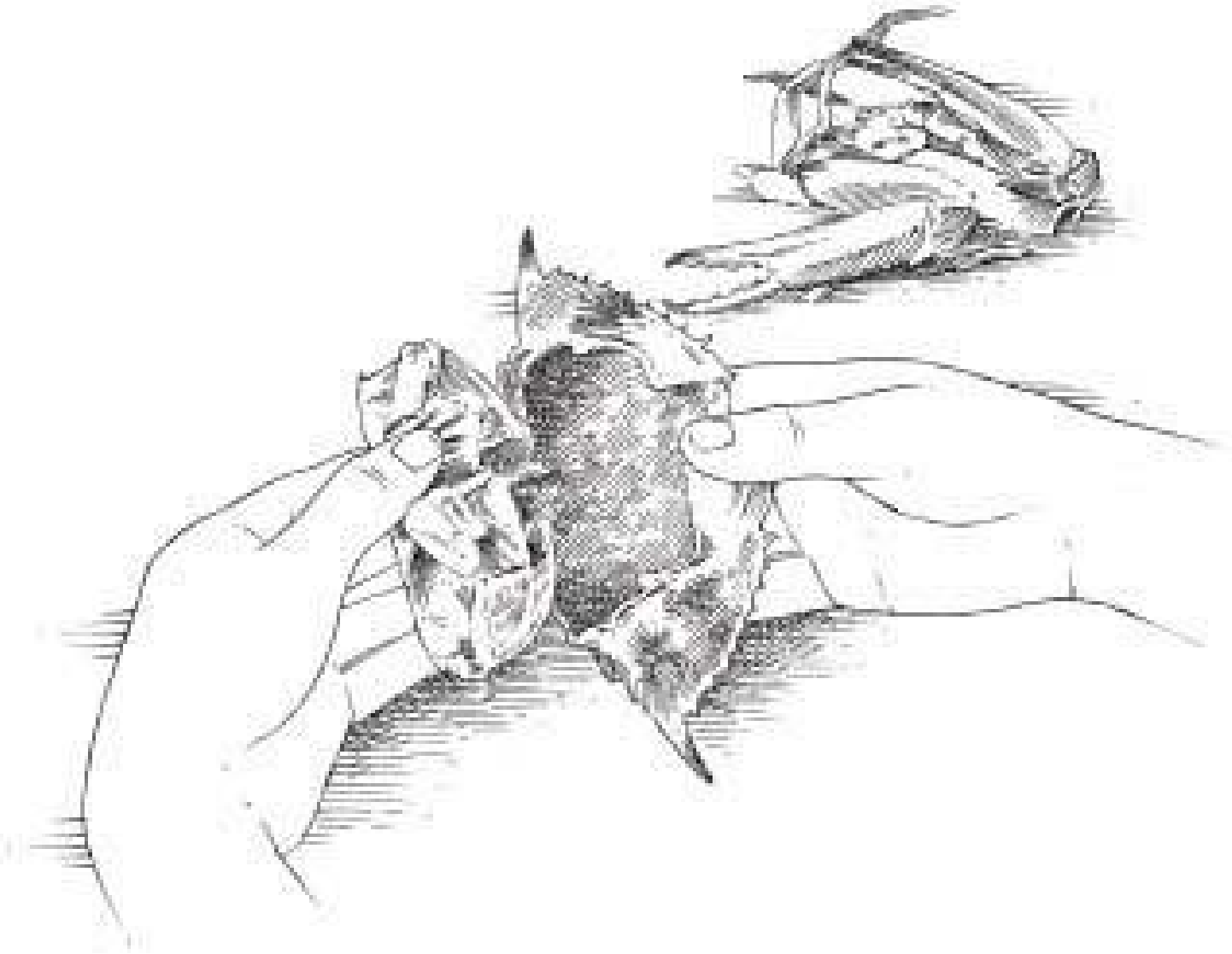

Figure 28.
Remove the knife and pry the bottom shell (at left above) off the body of the crab. Discard the top shell.

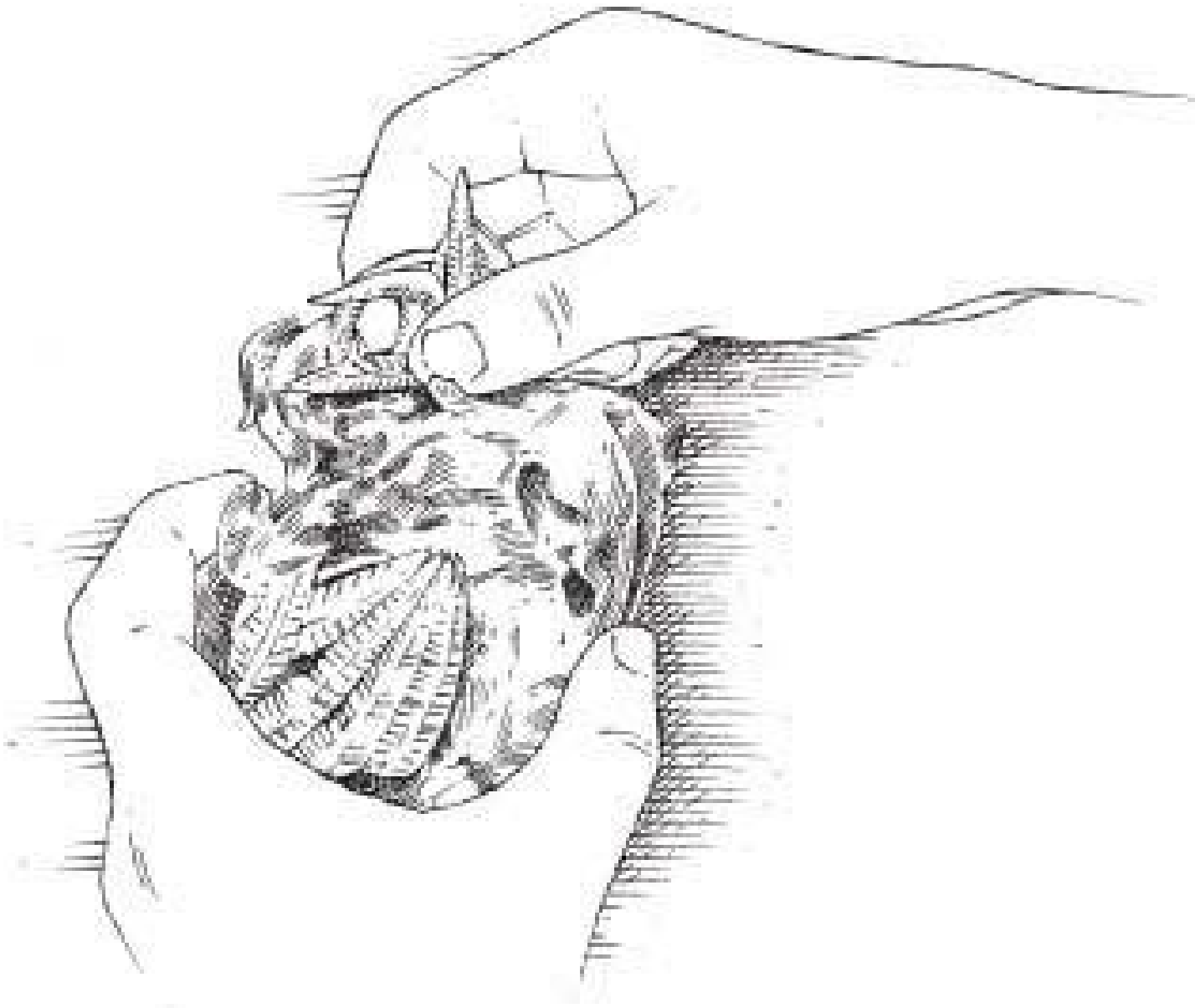

Figure 29.
Use your fingers to remove the feathery, white gills on either side of the crab.

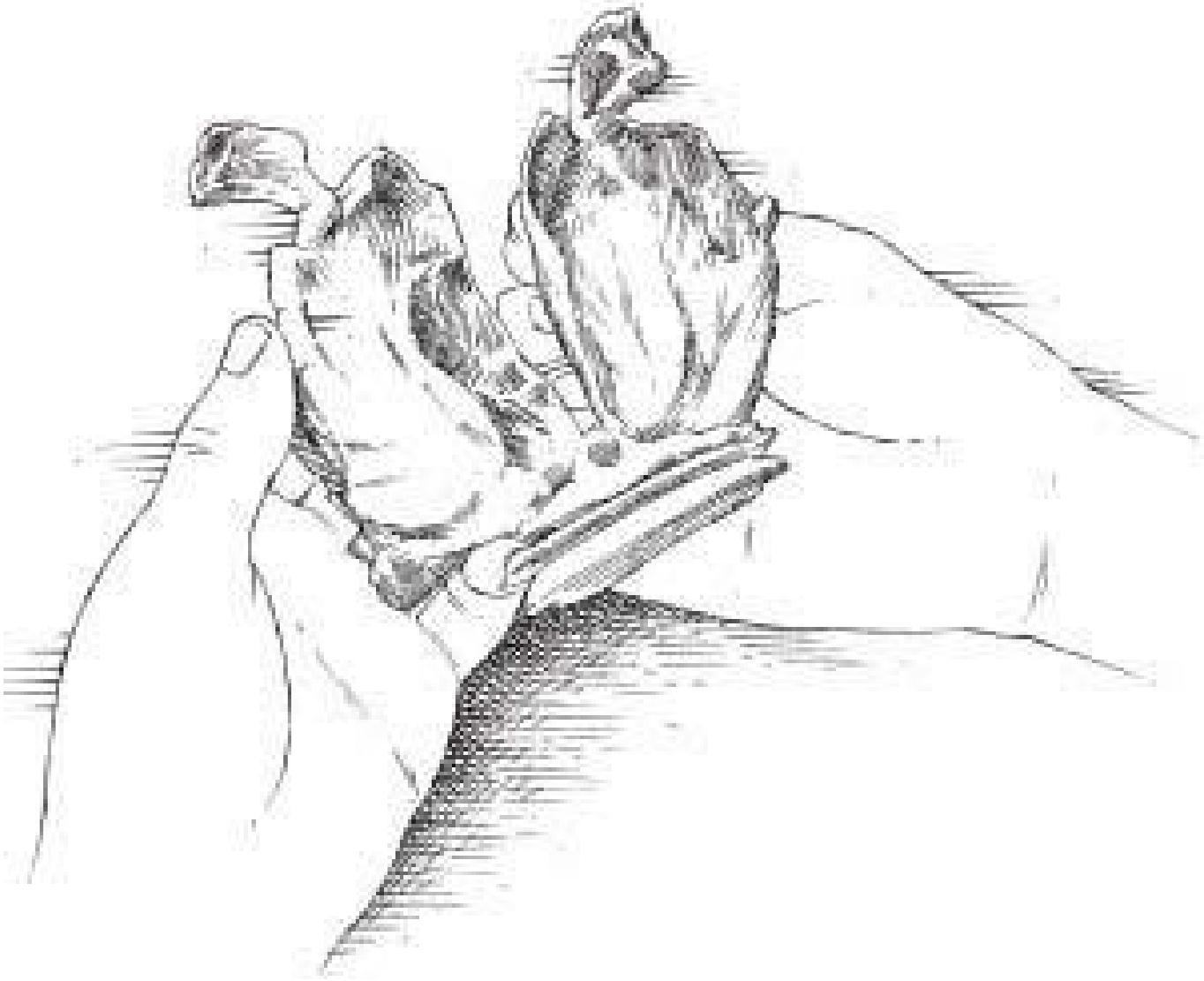

Figure 30.
Use your hands to break the crab in half front to back. Break each piece in half again to expose the meat of the crab.

Pan-Fried Crab Cakes

NOTE: ***The amount of bread crumbs you add will depend on the crabmeat's juiciness. Start with the smallest amount, adjust the seasonings, and then add the egg. If the cakes won't bind at this point, then add more bread crumbs, one tablespoon at a time. You want to avoid adding too much filling, which will mask the flavor of the crabs. Chilling the shaped cakes is essential; it helps them keep their shape when cooked and reduces the amount of binder necessary. Serves four.***

1 pound jumbo lump crabmeat,

picked over to remove cartilage and shell

4 scallions, green part only, minced (about 1/2 cup)

1 tablespoon chopped fresh herb, such as cilantro, dill, basil, or parsley

1 1/2 teaspoons Old Bay seasoning

2 to 4 tablespoons plain dry bread crumbs

1/4 cup mayonnaise

Salt and ground white pepper

1 large egg

1/4 cup all-purpose flour

1/4 cup vegetable oil

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Gently mix crabmeat, scallions, herb, Old Bay, 2 tablespoons bread crumbs, and mayonnaise in medium bowl, being careful not to break up crab lumps. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Carefully fold in egg with rubber spatula just until mixture clings together. Add more crumbs if necessary.

2. Divide crab mixture into four portions and shape each into a fat, round cake about 3 inches across and $1^{1}/_{2}$ inches high. Arrange on baking sheet lined with waxed paper; cover with plastic wrap and chill for at least 30 minutes. (Can be

refrigerated up to 24 hours.)

3. Put flour on plate or in pie tin. Lightly dredge crab cakes. Heat oil in large, preferably nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until hot but not smoking. Gently lay chilled crab cakes in skillet. Pan-fry, turning once, until outsides are crisp and browned, 4 to 5 minutes per side. Serve hot, with Tartar Sauce or Creamy Dipping Sauce if desired.

Tartar Sauce

NOTE: ***This is the classic sauce for crab cakes and fried seafood. It is delicious with either prepared or homemade mayo. Makes generous $^{3}/_{4}$ cup.***

$^{3}/_{4}$ cup mayonnaise

$1^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons minced cornichons (about 3 large), plus 1 teaspoon cornichon juice

1 tablespoon minced scallion

1 tablespoon minced red onion

1 tablespoon drained capers, minced

INSTRUCTIONS:

Mix all ingredients in small bowl. Cover and refrigerate until flavors blend, at least 30 minutes. (Can be refrigerated for several days.)

Creamy Dipping Sauce

NOTE: ***The chipotle gives this sauce some mild chile heat. This sauce can be used with crab cakes or any fried seafood. Makes about $^1/_2$ cup.***

$^1/_4$ cup mayonnaise

$^1/_4$ cup sour cream

2 teaspoons minced chipotle chiles

1 small garlic clove, minced

2 teaspoons minced fresh cilantro leaves

1 teaspoon lime juice

INSTRUCTIONS:

Mix all ingredients in small bowl. Cover

and refrigerate until flavors blend, at least 30 minutes. (Can be refrigerated for several days.)

Master Recipe

Crabmeat Salad

NOTE: ***This recipe is similar to the Shrimp Salad, but the celery is cut smaller because of the crabmeat's finer texture. Use this salad as a sandwich filling or serve it over leafy greens. Serves four to six.***

1 pound jumbo lump crabmeat, picked over to remove cartilage or shell

1 medium celery rib, chopped fine

1 medium scallion, white

and green parts, minced

1/3 cup mayonnaise

1 tablespoon lemon juice

1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

Mix all ingredients in medium bowl. Season with salt and pepper to taste. (Can be covered and refrigerated overnight.)

VARIATIONS:

Crabmeat Salad with Lemon and Tarragon

Substitute 1 tablespoon minced fresh tarragon leaves for parsley and add 1 teaspoon grated lemon zest to mixture.

Crabmeat Salad with Chives and Horseradish

Substitute 2 tablespoon snipped chives for parsley and add $^{3}/_{4}$ teaspoon prepared horseradish. Omit scallion.

HOW TO COOK CHICKEN BREASTS

Chicken Basics

Grilled Breasts & Cutlets

Broiled Breasts

Roasted Breasts & Chicken Salad

Sautéed Cutlets

Sautéed Stuffed Cutlets

Baked Cutlets

Stir-Fried Cutlets

CHICKEN BASICS

THIS CHAPTER COVERS A NUMBERS OF BASIC issues concerning the purchase and preparation of chicken, including the differences between cutlets and breasts, the purpose of brining, and the importance of proper, safe handling.

BREASTS OR CUTLETS?

If you like white meat, you have two basic choices: breasts with the bone in and skin on, or cutlets, breasts from which the bones and skin have been removed. If you buy breasts, you can

purchase them whole or split. The former is the entire breast taken from a single chicken. Split breasts are basically whole breasts that have been halved along the breastbone.

Cutlets are split breasts that are taken off the bone and skinned. Most cutlets contain the main portion of the breast plus a long, skinny piece of meat that runs along the side of the bird. This flap of meat, which is attached to the underside of the cutlet, is called the tenderloin. If you see packages of cutlets marked "thinly sliced" or "trimmed," the tenderloins may have been removed. Except in the case of grilling, when the added thickness of the tenderloin slows down the cooking process too much, we

prefer to buy regular cutlets, with the tenderloins still attached. These cutlets are thicker, so it's easier to retain their juices during cooking.

When purchasing a package of breasts, you will find a wide variation in size. In shopping to develop the recipes for this book, we found bone-in split breasts that weighed from 7 to 14 ounces. If you try to roast or grill small and large breasts at the same time, you will need to make some adjustments in the cooking time, removing smaller pieces from the heat first. We find it easier to buy breasts that are all the same size, preferably 10 to 12 ounces.

Cutlets can range in size from 4 to 10

ounces. Again, you will make your work much easier if you try to buy mediumsized cutlets, each weighing about 6 ounces. Excess fat should be removed, as should the tough, white tendon that runs through the tenderloin (see figures 1 and 2 for details).

THE PURPOSE OF BRINING

Because breasts and cutlets are so lean, we find that they can often dry out. This can be especially problematic when cooking cutlets by dry heat methods such as grilling, broiling, or roasting. (Cutlets cooked in plenty of fat or liquid are less likely to dry out.) In these cases, we like to brine chicken breasts and cutlets.

We find that soaking chicken parts in a

saltwater solution before cooking keeps the meat juicier. Brining also gives delicate (and sometimes mushy) chicken a meatier, firmer consistency and seasons the meat right to the center of the cut.

How does brining work? Brining actually promotes a change in the structure of the proteins that make up a muscle. The salt causes protein strands to unwind, in a process called *denaturing*, just as they do when exposed to heat, acid, or alcohol. When protein strands unwind, they get tangled in one another and trap water in the matrix that forms. Salt is commonly used to give processed meats a better texture. For example, hot dogs made without salt

would be limp.

Brining time is varied depending on the size of the chicken parts. For instance, we found that bone-in, skin-on breasts should be brined for $1^{1}/_{2}$ hours but that boneless, skinless cutlets become nicely plumped and seasoned after just 45 minutes.

We often add sugar to the brine. The sugar does not affect the texture of the meat, but it does add flavor. For instance, we find that brining chicken breasts in a sugar-salt solution enhances the caramelization (or browning) that occurs when the parts are grilled, thereby also enhancing flavor. Because brined chicken browns more quickly

than nonbrined chicken, it is important to watch it carefully as it cooks.

Note that we have listed kosher or regular table salt in recipes that call for brining. Because of the difference in the size of the crystals, cup for cup, table salt is about twice as strong as kosher salt.

SAFE HANDLING

Given the prevalence of bacteria in the poultry supply in this country, it's probably best to assume that the chicken you buy is contaminated. That means you need to follow some simple rules to minimize the danger to you and your family.

Keep chicken refrigerated until just before cooking. Bacteria thrive at temperatures between 40 and 140 degrees. This means leftovers should also be promptly refrigerated.

When handling poultry, make sure to wash hands, knives, cutting boards, and counters (or anything else that has come into contact with the raw chicken, its juices, or your hands) with hot, soapy water. Be especially careful not to let the chicken, its juices, or your hands touch foods (like salad ingredients) that will be eaten raw.

Finally, cook chicken breasts and cutlets to an internal temperature of 160 degrees to ensure that any bacteria have

been killed. Use an instant-read thermometer to gauge when chicken is done. Note that cooking white meat chicken to temperatures much above 160 degrees will cause juices to be lost and will result in drier, less appealing meat.

Figure 1.
Lay each cutlet tenderloin-side down and smooth the top with your fingers. Any fat will slide to the periphery, where it can be trimmed with a knife.

Figure 2.
To remove the tough, white tendon, turn the cutlet tenderloin-side up and peel back the thick half of the tenderloin so it lies top down on the work surface. Use the point of a paring knife to cut around the top of the tendon to expose it, then scrape the tendon free with the knife.

GRILLED BREASTS & CUTLETS

BONE-IN, SKIN-ON BREASTS AND BONELESS, skinless cutlets can both be grilled, but each requires its own methods for flavoring and cooking.

GRILLED BREASTS

Grilled chicken breasts should have richly caramelized, golden brown (not burnt) skin and moist, juicy meat. With very little fat, breasts have a tendency to dry out. The fact that many bone-in breasts can be more than an inch thick

doesn't help. The skin can char and the exterior layers of meat can dry out by the time the meat near the bone is cooked through.

We divided our tests on grilled chicken breasts into three sets. The first involved partial cooking off the grill; the second involved particular ways of moving the chicken around on the grill surface, as well as use of the grill cover for part of the cooking time; and the third involved various ways of treating the chicken before cooking it, both to add flavor and to improve texture.

We had thought that some of the methods of partially cooking the chicken off the grill would work pretty well, but we were wrong. Poaching the chicken

before grilling resulted in dry chicken with a cottony texture. Microwaving prior to grilling was even worse: The chicken ended up not only dry but rubbery, and the skin failed to crisp despite its postmicrowave time on the grill.

Our next approach was to sear the breasts on the grill first, then finish the cooking off the grill. Using the microwave to finish cooking after a five-minute sear on the grill wasn't bad, and it is acceptable for those times when you're in a hurry to get food on the table. Unlike the chicken that was microwaved before being grilled, these pieces had crispy skin, and the meat was evenly

cooked throughout. But the meat was also slightly less juicy than that cooked entirely on the grill.

Our final attempt at combined cooking methods came even closer to the goal. Again we seared the breasts on the grill but this time finished cooking them in a 350-degree oven. The meat was evenly cooked and remained juicy, with none of the toughness experienced with other combined cooking methods; the skin, which had crisped up nicely during its time on the grill, remained quite crisp after its sojourn in the oven.

The differences between this method and our final favorite were differences of degree. The meat was just slightly less tender, the skin a bit less crispy.

More important, this oven method used two different appliances and required you to do part of the cooking outside on the grill and the rest in the kitchen. Not only was this needlessly cumbersome, it was also less fun, given that part of the appeal of grilling is standing around the fire while sipping your favorite beverage and passing the time of day as you cook. So we consigned this method to the reject pile along with the other, less successful combination cooking techniques.

We next moved on to test methods that involved cooking on the grill alone. Each involved some variation on a two-level fire, that is, a fire in which one

area of the grill is hotter than the other. The idea in every case was to get the sear from the hotter fire and cook the chicken evenly all the way through over the cooler part of the grill.

The first of these methods seemed particularly contrary, but a friend had insisted that it worked, so we gave it a test run. In this method, the chicken was cooked on a low fire first, then finished up on a hot fire. Like microwaving, however, this backward approach resulted in dry meat—a lame result for a method that saved no time or energy.

Next we tried the method that intuitively seemed most likely to succeed: searing the chicken breasts over the coals and then moving them to a

cool part of the grill to finish cooking. The breasts refused to cook through to the bone in less than half an hour. By this time the skin was burning and the outer layers of meat were dry. We tried using the grill cover but detected some off flavors from the burned-on ashes that had built up on the inside of the cover. (This ash buildup is a common problem with charcoal grilling but not gas grilling, in which the fire burns much more cleanly.)

We did notice, however, that cooking with the cover cut the grilling time back to 20 minutes. Less time over the flames meant the skin was not black and the meat was still juicy. We decided to

improvise a cover by using a disposable aluminum roasting pan (an old restaurant trick) to build up heat around the breasts and help speed along the cooking. After searing for five minutes, we moved the breasts to a cooler part of the fire, covered them with a disposable pan, and continued grilling for another 15 minutes or so. This allowed the breasts to cook through without burning.

It was now time to consider ways of adding flavor to the chicken. Options included marinades, spice rubs and pastes, barbecue sauces, salsas, and brining.

Marinating the chicken was disappointing. Even several hours in a classic oil-and-acid marinade added

only a small amount of flavor to the finished chicken, and oil dripping off the marinated chicken caused constant flare-ups during the initial searing period.

Rubbing the chicken with a spice rub prior to grilling proved far more satisfactory. Because rubs and pastes are composed almost entirely of spices, they have enough flavor intensity to stand up to the smoky grilled flavor of the meat. Barbecue sauces often contain some sweetener and can burn if brushed on the chicken before cooking. We found it best to brush them on when cooking was almost done, serving extra sauce at the table, if desired. You can also skip flavoring the chicken with a rub or sauce

and instead serve it with a salsa or chutney.

As a final test, we tried brining the chicken before grilling it. We tried brining for various amounts of time and found that by using a brine with a high concentration of salt and sugar, we could achieve the result we wanted in only $1^{1}/_{2}$ hours. The brine penetrated the chicken to the bone, seasoning it and helping to firm up its texture before grilling.

Master Recipe

Charcoal-Grilled Bone-In Chicken Breasts

serves four

NOTE: ***If the fire flares because of dripping fat or a gust of wind, move the chicken to the area of the grill without coals until the flames die down. Brining improves the chicken's flavor, but if you're short on time, skip step 1 and season the chicken generously with salt as well as pepper before cooking. Add flavorings before or during cooking: Rub the chicken***

parts with a spice rub or paste before they go on the grill, or brush them with barbecue sauce during the final 2 minutes of cooking.

$^3/_4$ cup kosher salt or 6 tablespoons table salt

$^3/_4$ cup sugar

4 split chicken breasts (bone in, skin on), 10 to 12 ounces each, excess fat and skin trimmed (see figure 3)

Ground black pepper

Disposable aluminum roasting pan

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Dissolve salt and sugar in 1 quart

cold water in gallon-sized, zipper-lock plastic bag. Add chicken; press out as much air as possible from bag and seal; refrigerate until fully seasoned, about $1^{1}/_{2}$ hours.

2. Light large chimney starter filled with charcoal and allow to burn until charcoal is covered with layer of fine gray ash. Build a two-level fire by stacking all coals on one side of grill (see figure 4). Set cooking rack in place, cover grill with lid, and let rack heat up, about 5 minutes. Use wire brush to scrape clean cooking rack.

3. Meanwhile, remove chicken from brine, rinse well, dry thoroughly with paper towels, and season with pepper to taste or with one of the spice rubs or pastes.

4. Cook chicken, uncovered, over hotter part of grill until well browned, 2 to 3 minutes per side. Move chicken to cooler part of grill and cover with disposable aluminum roasting pan; continue to cook, skin-side up, for 10 minutes. Turn and cook for 5 minutes more or until done. To test for doneness, either peek into thickest part of chicken with tip of small knife (you should see

no redness near the bone) or check internal temperature at thickest part with instant-read thermometer, which should register 160 degrees. Transfer to serving platter. Serve hot or at room temperature.

VARIATIONS:

Gas-Grilled Bone-In Chicken Breasts

With the lid down on a gas grill, there's no need to cook the chicken under a disposable roasting pan.

Follow master recipe, preheating grill with all burners set to high and lid down until grill is very hot, about 15 minutes. Use wire brush to scrape clean cooking

grate. Leave one burner on high and turn other burner(s) down to medium-low. Cook chicken, covered, over hotter part of grill until well browned, 2 to 3 minutes per side. Move chicken to cooler part of the grill; continue to cook, covered, as directed in master recipe.

Grilled Chicken Breasts with Barbecue Sauce

Any homemade or store-bought tomato-based barbecue sauce will taste great on grilled chicken. Coat the chicken with the barbecue sauce once it is nearly done to prevent the sugars in the sauce from burning. Plan on using about $^{1}/_{2}$ cup of barbecue sauce to coat four split breasts,

more if you serve barbecue sauce at the table.

Follow master recipe, making the following changes: About 2 minutes before breasts will be done, brush some barbecue sauce on breasts, turn, and cook for 1 minute. Brush with more sauce, turn, and cook another minute or so. Transfer chicken to serving platter, brush with additional sauce to taste, and serve, with more sauce passed at table if desired.

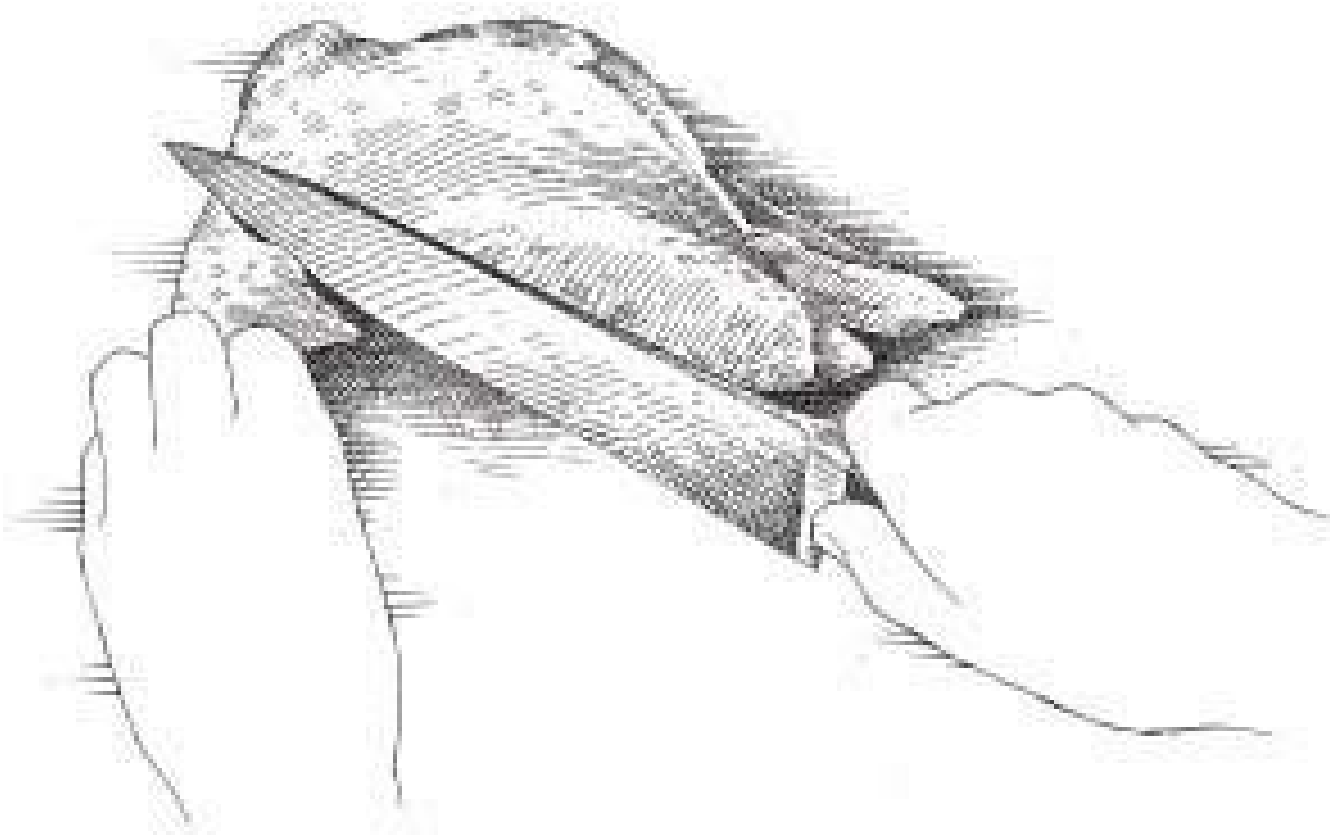

Figure 3.
Trim excess fat or any skin that hangs over the edge of the breast.

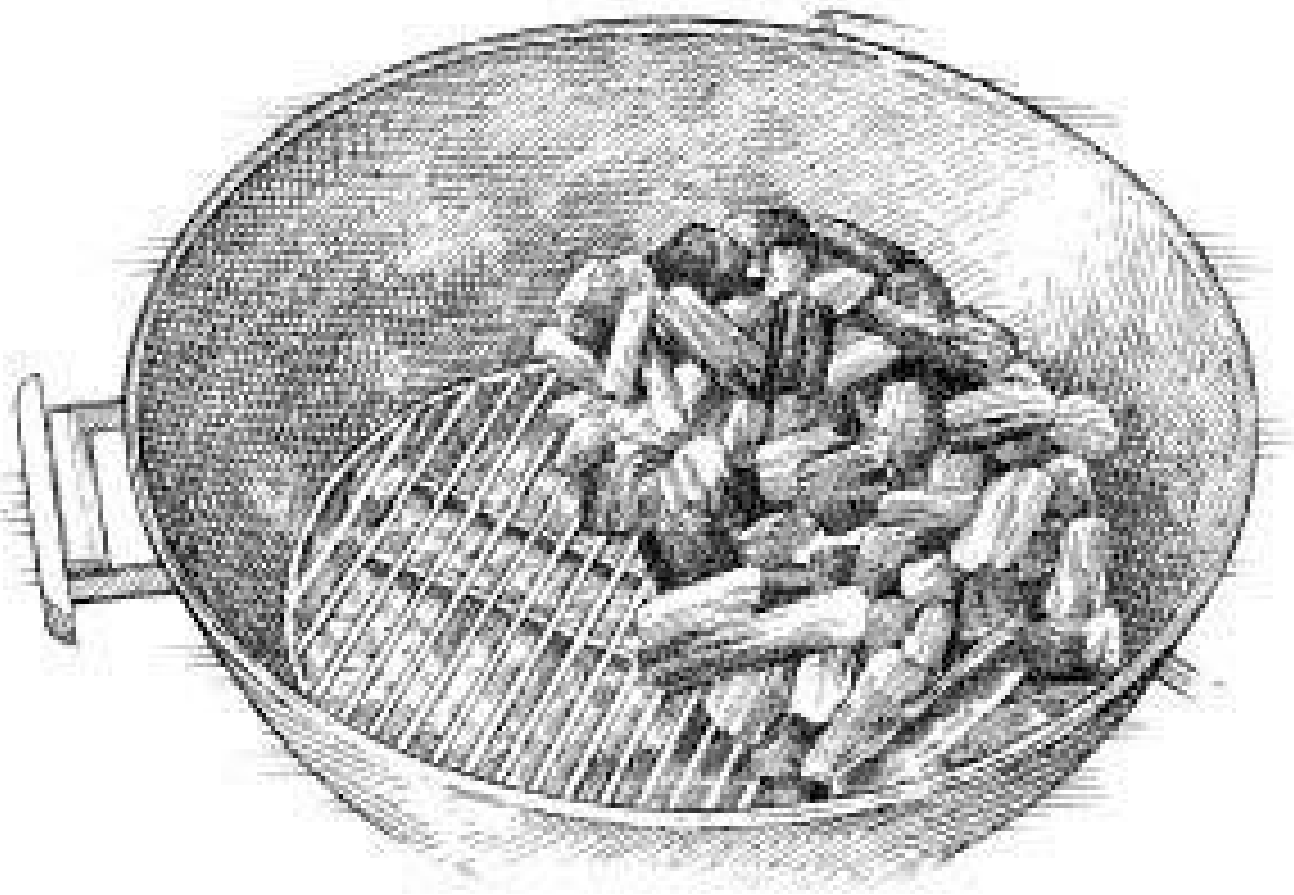

Figure 4.
Thick bone-in breasts are so susceptible to burning on the grill that we pile all the coals onto one side (for searing) and then leave the remaining part of the grill empty (for cooking the breasts through). The intense heat put

out by the hot side of the grill is also ideal for quickly cooking boneless cutlets.

Simple Spice Pastes

each makes about 1/3 cup,
enough to coat 4 bone-in, split breasts

NOTE: *Wet and dry ingredients are blended to form two thick pastes.*

Citrus and Cilantro Spice Paste

1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon chili powder
1 teaspoon sweet paprika
1 teaspoon ground coriander
2 tablespoons orange juice
1 tablespoon lime juice
1 tablespoon olive oil

1 garlic clove, peeled

2 tablespoons fresh cilantro leaves

Asian Spice Paste

2 tablespoons soy sauce

2 tablespoons peanut oil

1 tablespoon minced jalapeno or other fresh chile, stemmed and seeded

1 tablespoon chopped fresh ginger

1 garlic clove, peeled

2 tablespoons fresh cilantro leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

Puree all ingredients for either paste in food processor or blender until smooth. Rub paste over brined and dried chicken breasts before grilling.

Pantry Spice Rub

makes about $^{1}/_{2}$ cup,
enough to coat 4 bone-in, split breasts

NOTE: ***Other dried spices can be used in a similar fashion. For heat, add some cayenne pepper.***

2 tablespoons ground cumin
2 tablespoons curry powder
2 tablespoons chili powder
1 tablespoon ground allspice
1 tablespoon ground black pepper
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

INSTRUCTIONS:

Combine all ingredients in small bowl. Rub mixture over brined and dried chicken breasts before grilling.

GRILLED CUTLETS

Without skin, boneless breasts (cutlets) are especially prone to burning and drying out on the grill. They are more difficult to cook than chicken parts with skin (which keeps in moisture) and bones (which add flavor).

However, many people don't eat chicken skin and would rather not bother with bones. If that's the case, it seems pointless to rub spices into bone-in,

skin-on parts and then throw out the skin after cooking. If you don't eat skin, we think you might as well start with boneless, skinless breasts and apply the seasonings where they can be enjoyed.

Our goal was clear: develop a technique for cooking cutlets that would keep these delicate parts as moist as possible. Cutlets have almost no fat and can dry out easily with any cooking method. From our initial tests, it was clear that we needed to get them on and off the grill as quickly as possible. Cooking them over high heat and turning them just once was the best method we tested.

To make the fire quite intense, we spread a full chimney of lit charcoal out

over just two-thirds of the grill. The concentrated fire shortened the cooking time by a minute or two. On gas, we just kept the burners on high the whole time and lifted the lid as infrequently as possible.

Although this fast cooking method was delivering good results, we still had some tweaking to do. The area between the tenderloin (the flap of meat at the thick part of the breast) and breast wasn't cooking through. The meat is so thick here that cooking takes a few minutes longer than for the rest of the breast. You have two options: remove the tenderloin, or leave it on and overcook most of the breast just to get

the meat underneath the tenderloin cooked through. We opted to remove the tenderloins. Save them for a stir-fry or grill them with the breasts, reducing their cooking time by more than half.

We found it imperative to brush the cutlets with a bit of oil to keep them from sticking to the grill. The oil also helped keep the outer layer of meat from becoming dry and tough.

We had one last test to run: brining. In our initial tests, we used the same brine we had developed for bone-in, skin-on parts. After brining for $1\,^{1}/_{2}$ hours, the time that works with skin-on breasts, we found that the boneless cutlets were much too salty. After much tinkering, we

found that our brine worked in just 45 minutes.

While brined cutlets were juicy and well seasoned, they clearly needed a flavor boost. As with skin-on, bone-in breasts, we found that sticky glazes (such as barbecue sauce) are best applied when the meat is almost cooked through. If applied earlier, the glaze will burn.

Master Recipe

Charcoal-Grilled Chicken Cutlets

serves four

NOTE: ***Be wary of overcooking, especially if your grill runs hot. To check for doneness with an instant-read thermometer, slide it on an angle into the thickest part of the meat; make sure it does not go entirely through and out the bottom of the meat or the reading will be off.***

$^{3}/_{4}$ cup kosher salt or 6

tablespoons table salt

$^{3}/_{4}$ cup sugar

4 boneless, skinless chicken cutlets (about $1^{1}/_{2}$ pounds), tenderloins removed and reserved for another use; fat trimmed (see figure 1); rinsed and thoroughly dried

1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil

Ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Dissolve salt and sugar in 1 quart cold water in gallon-sized, zipper-lock plastic bag. Add chicken breasts; press out as much air as possible from bag and

seal. Refrigerate until fully seasoned, about 45 minutes.

2. Light large chimney starter filled with charcoal and allow to burn until charcoal is covered with layer of fine gray ash. Build two-level fire by spreading all coals over two-thirds of grill. Set cooking rack in place, cover grill with lid, and let rack heat up, about 5 minutes. Use wire brush to scrape clean cooking grate.

3. Meanwhile, remove chicken from brine, rinse well under cold, running water, and dry thoroughly with paper

towels. Toss chicken in medium bowl with oil to coat. Season with pepper to taste.

4. Cook chicken, uncovered, smooth-side down first, directly over hot coals until the chicken is opaque about two-thirds up sides and rich brown grill marks appear, 4 to 5 minutes. Turn and continue grilling until chicken is fully cooked, about 4 minutes. (If using barbecue sauce or one of glazes, cook for 3 minutes after turning chicken, brush glaze on both sides, and cook another minute or so, turning once.) To test for doneness, peek into thickest part of chicken with tip of small knife (it should

be opaque at the center), or check internal temperature with instant-read thermometer, which should register 160 degrees. Transfer chicken to serving platter. Serve hot or at room temperature.

VARIATION:

Gas-Grilled Chicken Cutlets

On a gas grill, cook cutlets over high heat as quickly as possible to keep them moist and juicy.

Follow master recipe, preheating grill with all burners set to high and lid down until grill is very hot, about 15 minutes. Use wire brush to scrape clean cooking

grate. Leave all burners on high. Cook chicken, covered, smooth-side down first, until dark brown grill marks appear, about 5 minutes. Turn and continue grilling, covered, until chicken is fully cooked, 4 to 5 minutes. (If using barbecue sauce or one of glazes, cook for 3 minutes after turning chicken, brush glaze on both sides, and cook another minute or two, turning once.)

GLAZES FOR CHICKEN CUTLETS

Thick glazes are applied while the chicken cutlets are still on the grill. About two minutes before chicken is cooked through, brush the glaze on both

sides of chicken and allow to cook another minute or so on each side.

Homemade or prepared barbecue sauce can be used in the same manner. Use $^{1}/_{2}$ cup barbecue sauce to coat 4 cutlets.

Maple Mustard Glaze

makes about $^{1}/_{2}$ cup,
enough for 4 chicken cutlets

NOTE: ***Sharp and sweet, the combination of real maple syrup and whole-grain mustard makes a delicious sweet and sour glaze that can be quickly made while the chicken is cooking on the grill. Because of the high level of sugar in this glaze, make sure to watch the chicken very carefully once the glaze has been applied.***

$^{1}/_{4}$ cup maple syrup

$^{1}/_{3}$ cup whole grain mustard

1 teaspoon balsamic vinegar

INSTRUCTIONS:

Mix all ingredients together in small bowl. Apply glaze as directed in recipes for charcoal-or gas-grilled cutlets.

Smoky Orange Chile Glaze

makes $^1/_2$ cup,
enough for 4 chicken cutlets

NOTE: ***Chipotle chiles add a smoky, hot flavor to plain chicken breasts. Orange zest and juice, cilantro, molasses, and a touch of lime add sweet and sour notes that balance the heat and smoke of the peppers.***

4 chipotle chiles in adobo sauce, roughly chopped (about $2^1/_2$ tablespoons), with 2 tablespoons adobo sauce
1 teaspoon grated orange zest
2 tablespoons orange juice

1/4 cup lightly packed cilantro leaves

2 teaspoons molasses

3 tablespoons vegetable oil

1 lime, cut into 8 wedges

INSTRUCTIONS:

Puree chipotle chiles, adobo sauce, zest, juice, cilantro, and molasses in food processor or blender until smooth. Slowly add oil in thin stream until incorporated. Apply glaze as directed in recipes for charcoal-or gas-grilled cutlets. Serve grilled chicken with lime wedges.

BROILED BREASTS

ALTHOUGH THEY DON'T SOUND GLAMOROUS, broiled chicken breasts can be great when properly prepared: moist, well-seasoned, with a good caramelized flavor and crisp skin. They can be every bit as good as grilled chicken breasts.

The difficulties with broiling chicken stem from the intense heat put out by the broiler. If the food is placed too close to the heating element, it can char on the outside long before it is cooked through at the center. Getting thin, crisp skin can also be a problem if the skin is not given

time to render its fat slowly. To avoid these common problems, we knew we would have to figure out the optimal distance between the oven rack and the heat source as well as the best way to season the meat in order to make it flavorful and moist.

As noted, we found a wide variation in the size of bone-in chicken breasts at the supermarket, with weights ranging from 7 to 14 ounces per breast half. We found that buying breasts of similar size is important to ensure even cooking. We had the best luck with breasts that weighed 10 to 12 ounces; smaller breasts were deemed kind of skimpy (the bones weigh several ounces), and larger breasts were hard to cook through. If

broiling breasts of varying size, the best approach is to remove each piece from the oven as soon as it is done.

These early tests showed that broiling, like grilling, is tough on lean breast meat. Clearly, brining would be in order. As expected, the brined breasts were more moist, better seasoned, and, owing to the addition of sugar to the brine, better caramelized. When not brined, the meat is dry and bland by comparison. The rubs and sauces noted in the variations can camouflage some of these problems, but the basic master recipe won't.

We now turned our attention to the actual broiling method. Many recipes

suggested broiling chicken parts just 4 to 8 inches away from the heating element. In all cases, the skin burned before the meat was cooked through near the bone. We found that the chicken broiled best when placed on the bottom rack of the oven, some 13 inches from the heating element. At this distance, the meat has time to cook through and the skin won't burn. To caramelize the chicken even more, we moved the broiler pan to the second shelf from the top (about 5 inches from the broiler) for the final minute or two of cooking.

With this information in hand, we realized that broiling bone-in chicken parts is not possible in an old-fashioned stove with the broiler underneath the

oven chamber. To get the chicken parts the necessary distance from the heating element, you need a modern oven with the broiler at the top of the main cooking chamber.

Although well browned, the skin was a touch too thick and a bit soggy. Remembering a technique used to cook ducks, we tried slashing the skin a few times before placing it in the oven to broil. This trick worked quite well. The skin rendered a little extra fat and crisped up a bit more. We also discovered that starting the parts skin-side down was key to getting thin, crisp skin. If cooked skin-side up first, the skin tended to become soggy during the

final minutes of cooking.

Our broiled chicken was now delicious. In fact, this broiled chicken is as appealing as any grilled chicken, with the benefit of being a year-round recipe.

Master Recipe

Broiled Bone-In Chicken Breasts

serves four

NOTE: ***Though we recommend brining, you can bypass this step if pressed for time; skip step 1 and season the chicken generously with salt and pepper before broiling. This recipe will work only in ovens that have the broiler element in the main chamber. In ovens with a separate broiler underneath the main cooking chamber, it isn't possible to get the***

chicken breasts far enough away from the heating element. If you are making one of the variations, the ingredients can be prepped while the chicken is brining.

$^{3}/_{4}$ cup kosher salt or 6 tablespoons table salt

$^{3}/_{4}$ cup sugar

4 split chicken breasts (bone in, skin on), 10 to 12 ounces each, excess fat and skin trimmed (see figure 3)

Ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. In gallon-sized, zipper-lock plastic bag, dissolve salt and sugar in 1 quart

cold water. Add chicken and seal bag, pressing out as much air as possible; refrigerate until fully seasoned, about $1^{1}/_{2}$ hours. Remove from brine, rinse well, and dry thoroughly with paper towels.

2. Meanwhile, adjust one oven rack to lowest position and other rack to upper-middle position (top rack should be about 5 inches from heating element; bottom rack should be 13 inches away); heat broiler. Line bottom of broiler pan with foil and fit with slotted broiler-pan top. Following figure 5, make three diagonal slashes in skin of each chicken piece with sharp knife (do not cut into

meat). Season both sides of chicken pieces with pepper and place skin-side down on broiler pan.

3. Broil chicken on bottom rack until just beginning to brown, 12 to 16 minutes. Using tongs, turn chicken skin-side up, and continue to broil on bottom rack until skin is slightly crisp and thickest part of meat registers 160 degrees on an instant-read thermometer, about 10 minutes.

4. Move broiler pan to upper rack. Broil until chicken is dark spotty brown and skin is thin and crisp, about 1 minute.

Serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Broiled Chicken Breasts with Garlic, Lemon, and Rosemary

Combine 4 minced garlic cloves, 2 teaspoons grated lemon zest, 1 tablespoon minced fresh rosemary leaves, and pepper to taste in small bowl. Combine 3 tablespoons lemon juice and 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil in second small bowl. Follow master recipe, spreading a portion of garlic rub under skin before slashing skin. Brush chicken with lemon juice and

oil just before moving chicken to upper rack to crisp skin.

Broiled Chicken Breasts with Jamaican Jerk Dipping Sauce

Stir together $^1/_4$ cup lime juice and $^1/_4$ cup lightly packed brown sugar until dissolved in small bowl; set aside. Toast 1 unpeeled garlic clove and 1 medium habanero chile in small dry skillet over medium heat, shaking pan frequently, until blistered, about 8 minutes. Peel and mince garlic; seed and mince habanero. Combine garlic, habanero, 2 minced scallions, $^1/_2$ cup

minced onion, $1^1/_2$ tablespoons minced fresh ginger, $^1/_2$ teaspoon dried thyme, and pinch ground allspice in second small bowl. Stir in 2 tablespoons lime/brown sugar mixture; set aside as dipping sauce. Follow master recipe, brushing chicken pieces with remaining lime/brown sugar mixture just before moving to upper oven rack to crisp skin. Serve chicken, passing dipping sauce separately.

Deviled Chicken Breasts

The breadcrumb coating can burn if the chicken is moved to the top rack, so the chicken is broiled completely on the lower rack.

Combine 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard, 1 tablespoon white wine vinegar, and $^1/_4$ teaspoon cayenne pepper in small bowl; set aside. With fork, mash together 2 tablespoons softened butter and salt and pepper to taste (use salt sparingly if the chicken was brined) in small bowl. Follow master recipe, spreading a portion of the butter under skin before slashing skin. Rub mustard mixture all over chicken breasts. Sprinkle 1/3 cup plain breadcrumbs over skin side of chicken pieces and press to adhere. Carefully place chicken skin-side down on broiler pan and continue with master recipe, omitting step 4.

Five-Spice Broiled Chicken

Breasts with Ginger Butter

With fork, mash together 2 tablespoons softened butter, 1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger, and salt and pepper to taste (use salt sparingly if the chicken was brined) in small bowl. Follow master recipe, spreading a portion of the ginger butter under skin before slashing skin. Brush chicken pieces with 1 teaspoon vegetable oil and sprinkle with 2 teaspoons five-spice powder. Carefully place chicken skin-side down on broiler pan and continue with master recipe.

Figure 5.
Make three diagonal slashes in the skin of each breast to help render fat and promote crispness. Lift the skin up a bit and hold it taut while cutting. This will keep you from cutting into the meat and causing juices to be lost during cooking.

ROASTED BREASTS & CHICKEN SALAD

SOMETIMES YOU WANT THE FLAVOR OF ROASTED chicken but don't have the hour or more needed to cook a whole chicken. Or maybe your family likes roasted chicken, but no one will eat the wings and legs. Roasting bone-in breasts offers a good solution to either problem.

The main challenge when roasting chicken breasts is getting the skin crisp. We like to roast a whole chicken on a basket or V-rack to circulate the heat evenly around the bird and prevent any

part of the skin from sitting in fat or cooking juices. We assumed the same thing would hold true for parts, and our tests backed up our hunch. When we roasted parts directly in the pan, the skin was flabbier than when we lifted the parts off the bottom of the pan with a flat rack. You will need a roasting pan large enough to accommodate a flat rack. A 13 by 9-inch roasting pan with fairly shallow sides (about 2 inches high) and a rack that is slightly smaller work especially well.

We next turned our attention to oven heat. We started out using the same temperature we found best for roasting a whole chicken—375 degrees. Given the shorter oven time, we found that the skin

did not crisp when parts were cooked at this temperature. Next, we tried 450 degrees. After setting off several smoke alarms, we realized that this superhigh oven heat was going to cause pan drippings to burn. We eventually settled on 425 degrees. At this temperature, the skin was nice and crisp by the time the meat had cooked through. As an added protection against smoking, we found it useful to add one-half cup water to the roasting pan about 15 minutes into the cooking time.

Given the configuration of chicken breasts (the skin is generally on one side, bones on the other), we found no advantage in turning the chicken during

the cooking process. Cooking them skin-side up results in the most crispy and best-browned skin. While we found that basting actually makes skin less crisp (coating the skin with liquid and/or fat makes it soggy and slows down the crisping process), we clearly detected a benefit from slipping a little butter under the skin of each piece before cooking. The melting butter helps lift the skin off the meat and causes it to puff up nicely. The butter is also a good medium for herbs, spices, chiles, and other seasonings that can flavor the meat.

Finally, as with grilled or broiled chicken breasts, we like the effect of brining on parts destined for roasting. Although not essential, brining seasons

the meat through to the bone and firms up the texture, giving the chicken breasts a meatier taste.

The timing in this recipe will vary depending on the size of the breasts. We found that 7-ounce breasts cooked in 30 minutes, but that 14-ounce breasts took 45 minutes. The best serving size was 10 to 12 ounces. If you have any doubt as to whether the chicken is cooked through, use an instant-read thermometer and pull breasts from the oven once the temperature hits 160 degrees.

Master Recipe

Roasted Bone-In Chicken Breasts

serves four

NOTE: ***If you're short on time, you can skip brining (step 1) and season the chicken generously with salt. We've found that high heat works best, as it cooks the chicken quickly without drying it out and produces a crisp crust. The only problem comes from the smoking fat at the bottom of the roasting pan. To avoid this nuisance, we pour $^{1}/_{2}$ cup water into***

the pan 15 minutes into the cooking time.

$^3/_4$ cup kosher salt or 6 tablespoons table salt

$^3/_4$ cup sugar

4 split chicken breasts (bone in, skin on), 10 to 12 ounces each, excess fat and skin trimmed (see figure 3

2 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

Salt and ground black pepper

1 teaspoon vegetable oil

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. In gallon-sized, zipper-lock plastic bag, dissolve salt and sugar in 1 quart

cold water. Add chicken and seal bag, pressing out as much air as possible; refrigerate until fully seasoned, about $1^{1}/_{2}$ hours. Remove from brine, rinse well, and dry thoroughly with paper towels.

2. Preheat oven to 425 degrees. With fork, mash together butter and salt and pepper to taste (use salt sparingly if chicken was brined) in small bowl. Rub butter mixture under skin of each chicken breast. Place rack in large roasting pan and transfer chicken, skin-side up, to rack. Brush chicken with oil and lightly season with salt and pepper to taste (use salt sparingly if chicken was brined).

3. Roast for 15 minutes. Add $^1/_2$ cup water to pan to prevent excessive smoking. Cook until juices run clear or internal temperature registers 160 degrees when an instant-read thermometer is inserted into thickest part of breast, another 20 to 30 minutes. Serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Roasted Chicken Breasts with Honey Mustard Glaze

Combine $^1/_4$ cup Dijon mustard, 2 tablespoons honey, and 1 teaspoon brown sugar in small bowl and set

aside. Follow master recipe, brushing chicken with honey mustard glaze when water is added to pan.

Roasted Chicken Breasts with Lemon and Herbs

Follow master recipe, adding 1 tablespoon minced lemon zest and 1 tablespoon minced fresh thyme or rosemary leaves to butter mixture in step 2. Proceed as directed, rubbing lemon-herb butter under skin of each breast.

Roasted Chicken Breasts with Porcini Mushroom Paste

Place 1 ounce dried porcini mushrooms in small bowl and cover with hot tap water. Let stand until mushrooms are soft, about 20 minutes. Carefully lift mushrooms from liquid, pat dry, and chop finely. (Strain and reserve soaking liquid for another use.) Follow master recipe, adding mushrooms, 2 minced garlic cloves, and 2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves to butter mixture in step 2. Proceed as directed, rubbing mushroom paste under skin of each breast.

Roasted Chicken Breasts with Herb Crust

Beaten egg yolks are brushed onto the

skin of the chicken pieces to help make the herbs adhere to the skin and to create a nice thick crust. We like the combination of tarragon, parsley, and dill, but mint, cilantro, or even savory can be used in this recipe.

Place 2 cups each loosely packed fresh tarragon leaves, parsley leaves, and dill leaves in work bowl of food processor. Process until finely chopped. Follow master recipe, rubbing butter under skin as directed. Do not brush chicken with oil, but do season with salt and pepper to taste. Brush chicken with 2 lightly beaten egg yolks, sprinkle herb mixture over pieces, and lightly pat herbs so that chicken is evenly coated. Transfer chicken, skin-side up, to oiled

rack in roasting pan. Roast as directed in master recipe.

CHICKEN SALAD

Classic chicken salad consists of tender breast meat, pulled apart by hand and bound loosely with mayonnaise. There's a little celery for texture, some parsley or tarragon for flavor, and a squeeze of lemon juice for freshness. We often make this salad from leftover roasted or poached chicken.

So what didn't we know about chicken salad? After a little thought, we had only one question. When making the classic version from scratch, and not from leftover meat, how should we cook the

chicken?

Although there were many choices, they basically fell into two camps, wet cooking and dry cooking. The wet cooking methods included poaching, steaming, and roasting in foil (oven-steaming). Chicken cooked by each of these methods had a bland, unmistakably boiled flavor. Roast chicken, which is cooked with dry heat, was a very different matter. The meat tasted roasted and the resulting chicken salad was superb.

Since the skin is to be discarded when roasting breasts for salad, there's no need to elevate the chicken on a rack. It can be cooked directly on the bottom of the roasting pan. You can also get away

with a slightly lower oven temperature and thus eliminate the potential for smoking. We found that a little vegetable oil brushed on the chicken helps to keep it moist as it roasts but that butter under the skin makes the meat too rich tasting and not suitable for salad.

Roasted Chicken Breasts for Salad

makes about 5 cups when shredded,
enough for 1 salad recipe

NOTE: ***Once the chicken breasts have cooled to room temperature, remove and discard the skin. At this point, you may wrap and refrigerate the breasts or make salad.***

2 large whole chicken breasts (bone in, skin on), at least $1^1/_2$ pounds each
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
Salt

INSTRUCTIONS:

Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 400 degrees. Set breasts on small, foil-lined jelly roll pan. Brush with oil and sprinkle generously with salt. Roast until meat thermometer inserted into thickest part of breast registers 160 degrees, 35 to 40 minutes. Cool to room temperature, remove skin, and continue with one of the following salad recipes. (Cooked chicken can be wrapped in plastic and refrigerated for 2 days.)

Master Recipe

Creamy Chicken Salad

serves six

NOTE: ***In addition to the parsley leaves, you can flavor the salad with 2 tablespoons of minced fresh tarragon or basil leaves. You can use leftover meat from a roast chicken, if desired.***

1 recipe Roasted Chicken Breasts for Salad, skinned and boned, meat shredded into bite-sized pieces

2 medium celery ribs, cut into small dice

2 medium scallions, white and green parts, minced

$^{3}/_{4}$ cup mayonnaise

2 tablespoons juice from 1 small lemon

2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

Mix all ingredients together in large bowl, including salt and pepper to taste. Serve. (Can be covered and refrigerated overnight.)

VARIATIONS:

Waldorf Chicken Salad

Follow master recipe, adding 1 large crisp apple, cored and cut into medium dice, and 6 tablespoons chopped toasted walnuts.

Curried Chicken Salad with Raisins and Honey

Follow master recipe, adding 6 tablespoons golden raisins, 2 teaspoons curry powder, and 1 tablespoon honey. Replace parsley with equal amount of cilantro.

Chicken Salad with Hoisin Dressing

Try serving this Asian-style salad on a

bed of young spinach leaves with sliced cucumber and radishes or rolled in a flour tortilla with shredded iceberg lettuce or watercress.

Whisk 1/3 cup rice vinegar, 3 tablespoons hoisin sauce, $1^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons soy sauce, and 1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger in small bowl. Whisk in 3 tablespoons vegetable oil and 1 tablespoon Asian sesame oil. Follow master recipe, replacing mayonnaise, lemon juice, salt, and pepper with hoisin dressing. If you like, replace parsley with equal amount of cilantro.

SAUTÉED CUTLETS

SAUTÉING A BONELESS, SKINLESS CHICKEN BREAST sounds easy. But too often the chicken comes out only lightly colored and dry. Ideally, a sautéed chicken breast should have a nicely browned exterior and a tender, juicy interior.

Although there are several keys to sautéing boneless chicken breasts successfully, we found that one is paramount: There must be enough heat. Home cooks often shy away from the smoke and splatters that can accompany strong heat. But a thin, delicate food like

boneless chicken must be cooked through quickly. Cooking over low or even moderate heat pushes the meat's moisture to the surface before any browning occurs, and, once the juices hit the exterior of the meat, it will not brown at all, unless it is cooked for a long, long time. Furthermore—and this is especially true for a lean piece of meat such as a chicken breast—these same juices provide the lion's share of moisture; expel them, and the result is a tough, leathery piece of meat rather than a tender, moist one.

There are other points to bear in mind. After you have trimmed excess fat from the cutlets and removed the tendons, rinse them quickly under cool water,

then dry the meat thoroughly with paper towels; if the cutlets are wet, they will not brown. For the best flavor, we sprinkle salt and pepper generously on both sides of each cutlet.

We sautéed both floured and unfloured chicken cutlets to see if there would be any differences in taste, texture, or juiciness. We immediately noticed a more dramatic sizzle when the unfloured cutlet hit the pan. While both cutlets sizzled during cooking, the unfloured cutlet "spit" a bit more. The flour seems to provide a barrier between the fat in the pan and the moisture in the cutlet. The floured cutlet was also easier to turn and move in the pan; while neither

version stuck to the skillet, the floured cutlet skated easily when we swirled it about.

When cooked, the floured cutlet displayed a consistently brown crust, almost resembling a skin. The uncoated breast was a spotty brown. Both breasts were equally moist, but the floured cutlet had a better mouthfeel with its contrasting crispy exterior and juicy, tender meat. The floured cutlet, reminiscent of fried chicken, was also more flavorful than its uncoated counterpart. Our advice: Flour those cutlets.

In our tests, we found that a 12-inch skillet can comfortably hold four chicken cutlets of about six ounces each

(crowded meat will not brown well). Unless the bottom of the pan is reasonably heavy, the chicken will scorch. We tested nonstick and enamel-coated pans and found them perfectly acceptable, but we prefer bare metal—stainless steel or an alloy—as it seems to yield more intense color.

The best cooking medium for chicken cutlets is vegetable oil, which provides excellent browning and won't burn. In a concession to the reigning wisdom about health, we tried sautéing a batch of cutlets in just the sheerest film of oil. The results were disastrous. The oil burned, the outside of the chicken became dry and stringy, and the crust

was very disappointing, nearly blackened in some spots and a strange yellowish color in others. For sautéed food to become crisp and uniformly brown, the entire surface must stay in contact with the fat. Meat has an irregular surface, so those parts not in contact with the cooking medium—in this case, the oil—are steamed by the moisture generated by the cooking meat and, therefore, will not brown. For this reason, you will need about two tablespoons of fat in the pan at the start.

Place the oil in the skillet and set the pan over high heat. (While everyone's stove is different, most home burners are quite weak. To get enough heat under the pan to brown the cutlets, you really need

to set the burner on *high*.) Once the oil shimmers, quickly add the cutlets, with the tenderloin-side down, holding onto the tapered end as you lay each cutlet down flat.

Maintain the heat at the point where the fat remains at a fast sizzle but does not quite smoke. If you see more than just a wisp or two of smoke, immediately slide the pan off the burner, turn down the heat a bit, and wait a few seconds before returning the pan to the flame. Be advised that there will be some spattering.

Master Recipe

Sautéed Chicken Cutlets

serves four

NOTE: ***Serve these chicken cutlets with either of the sauces.***

4 boneless, skinless chicken cutlets (about $1^1/_2$ pounds), fat trimmed and tendons removed (see figures 1 and 2); rinsed and thoroughly dried

Salt and ground black pepper

$^1/_4$ cup all-purpose flour

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 200 degrees. Place a plate in oven for keeping cooked cutlets warm while making sauce.

2. Sprinkle both sides of cutlets with salt and pepper to taste. Measure flour onto a plate or pie tin. Working with one cutlet at a time, dredge in flour. Make sure tenderloin is tucked beneath and fused to main portion of breast. Pick up cutlet from tapered end; shake to remove excess flour.

3. Heat heavy-bottomed 12-inch skillet

over high heat until hot, about 4 minutes. Add oil and heat briefly until it shimmers. Lay cutlets in skillet, tenderloin side-down and tapered ends pointing out (see figure 6).

4. Adjust heat to medium-high (fat should sizzle but not smoke) and sauté cutlets, not moving them until browned on one side, about 4 minutes. Turn cutlets with tongs (a fork will pierce meat); cook on other side until meat feels firm when pressed and clotted juices begin to emerge around tenderloin, 3 to 4 minutes. Remove pan from heat and transfer cutlets to warm oven. Continue with one of the sauces

that follow.

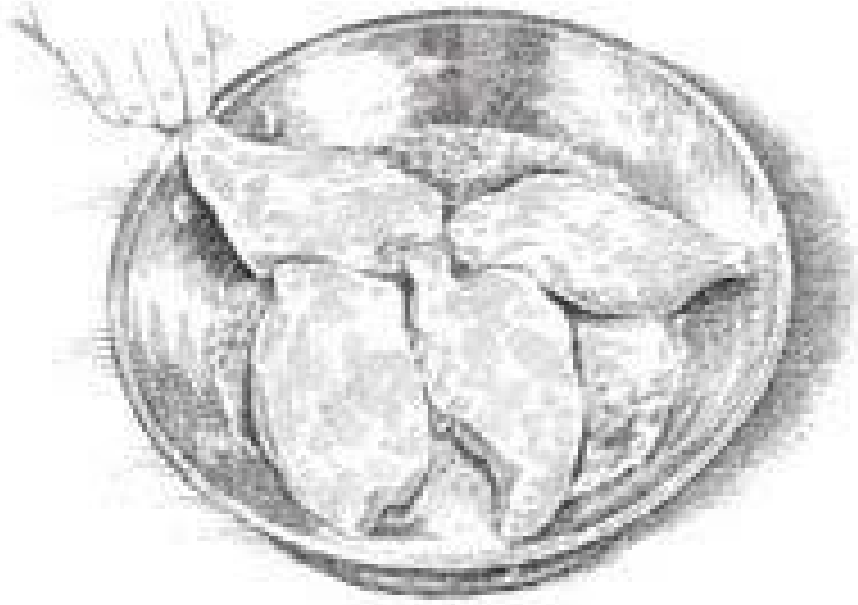

Figure 6.
To avoid being splashed with hot fat, lay the cutlets into the pan thick-side first and hang onto the tapered end until the whole cutlet is in the pan. The tapered ends of the cutlets should be at the edges of the pan, where the heat is less intense.

PAN SAUCES FOR CHICKEN

The concept of a pan sauce is simple. The juices that escape from the meat (in this case, chicken) during cooking reduce, caramelize, and sometimes harden. The resulting bits, which are basically caramelized proteins that chefs refer to as *fond*, provide a concentrated flavor on which to build a sauce.

To release this flavor into a sauce, a liquid is used to wash and dissolve these bits off the bottom of the pan. This process, known as *deglazing*, can be done with many different liquids, including wine, water, juice, brandy,

stock, vinegar, or a combination thereof. The liquid is then boiled and reduced to thicken the sauce. After reducing the liquid, take the pan off the heat and swirl in one or more tablespoons of softened butter to give the sauce added richness and deeper flavor.

If you wish to use butter to thicken a deglazing sauce as well as to enrich its flavor, be sure to observe the following guidelines. The sauce must be slightly syrupy and already well reduced. It takes about 3 tablespoons of butter to thicken 1/3 cup of sauce. Add the butter off the heat and do not return the pan to the heat once the butter has been added; the heat will cause the sauce to separate and thin out. Finally, swirl the pan by the

handle, or stir very gently, until the butter is incorporated and the sauce thickened. Note that acidic deglazing sauces—those made with a high proportion of lemon juice, vinegar, or wine—are more stable and thicker than others.

Lemon-Caper Sauce (Piccata)

enough for 4 chicken cutlets

NOTE: ***Lemon slices and lemon juice give this sauce a strong lemon flavor.***

2 large lemons

2 tablespoons minced shallot or 1 teaspoon minced garlic

1 cup chicken stock or canned low-sodium broth

2 tablespoons drained small capers

2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves

3 tablespoons unsalted butter,

cut into 3 pieces, softened

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Cut one lemon in half from pole to pole. Trim fleshy ends from one half of lemon and then cut crosswise into very thin slices; set slices aside. Juice remaining lemon half along with whole lemon to obtain $^{1}/_{4}$ cup; reserve separately.

2. Follow Master Recipe for Sautéed Chicken Cutlets. Without discarding fat, set skillet over medium heat. Add shallot or garlic to empty pan and sauté until fragrant, about 30 seconds for shallots, 10 seconds for garlic. Add stock and

lemon slices, increase heat to high, and scrape skillet bottom with wooden spoon or spatula to loosen browned bits. Simmer until liquid reduces to about 1/3 cup, about 4 minutes. Add any accumulated juices from chicken, lemon juice, and capers and simmer until sauce reduces again to 1/3 cup, about 1 minute. Remove pan from heat and swirl in parsley and butter until butter melts and thickens sauce. Spoon sauce over chicken and serve immediately.

Marsala Sauce

enough for 4 chicken cutlets

NOTE: ***In our testing, we preferred a sweet Marsala to a dry one for the body, soft edges, and smooth finish it gave the sauce.***

$2^1/_2$ ounces pancetta (about 3 slices), cut into pieces
1 inch long and 1/8 inch wide
8 ounces white mushrooms, sliced (about 2 cups)
1 medium garlic clove, minced
1 teaspoon tomato paste
$1^1/_2$ cups sweet Marsala
$1^1/_2$ tablespoons lemon juice

2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves

4 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 4 pieces, softened

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Follow Master Recipe for Sautéed Chicken Cutlets. Without discarding fat, set skillet over low heat. Add pancetta and sauté, stirring occasionally and scraping pan bottom to loosen browned bits, until pancetta is brown and crisp, about 4 minutes. With slotted spoon, transfer pancetta to paper towel-lined plate.

2. Add mushrooms to fat in empty skillet

and increase heat to medium-high; sauté, stirring occasionally and scraping pan bottom, until liquid released by mushrooms evaporates and mushrooms begin to brown, about 8 minutes. Add garlic, tomato paste, and cooked pancetta; sauté while stirring until tomato paste begins to brown, about 1 minute.

3. Off heat, add Marsala; return pan to high heat and simmer vigorously, scraping browned bits from pan bottom, until sauce is slightly syrupy and reduced to about $1^{1}/_{4}$ cups, about 5 minutes. Off heat, add lemon juice and any accumulated juices from chicken.

Swirl in parsley and butter until butter melts and thickens sauce. Spoon sauce over chicken and serve immediately.

SAUTÉED STUFFED CUTLETS

CUTLETS THAT ARE STUFFED AND BREADED ARE special-occasion food. The filling coats the chicken from the inside with a creamy sauce, while the crust makes a crunchy counterpoint. They can be very good, but these little bundles pose a number of problems for the cook. The filling must be creamy without being runny; flavorful but not so strong that it overpowers the chicken. The crust must be crisp all over, without burnt spots, and it must completely seal

in the filling so that none leaks out.

We first focused on the cooking method. We needed to develop a technique that would crisp the exterior without overbrowning it before the center was fully cooked. Deep frying was the obvious answer, but this option is really better suited to restaurants than home kitchens. We tested roasting, broiling, sautéing, and combinations of these methods. We found that two approaches warranted further exploration: (1) complete cooking in a skillet on the stovetop and (2) stovetop browning followed by roasting.

We ran our next test on the stove, sautéing the breasts in just enough vegetable oil to generously coat the

bottom of a sauté pan. This test revealed a number of problems. First, it was difficult to arrive at a heat level that would cook the chicken through without burning it. Also, the cutlets often stuck to the pan. Furthermore, even though the breasts in the pan at any one time were of only slightly different weights, their rates of cooking were different enough to be a problem.

It seemed logical that the two-step method—a preliminary pan-frying on top of the stove, followed by roasting in the even heat of the oven—would solve the twin problems of overbrowning and undercooking. We sautéed the next batch in oil that came one-third to halfway up

the sides of the chicken, cooking until the chicken was well-browned all over. Then, to combat the sogginess we had observed in roasted breasts during the initial round of testing, we baked the chicken on a rack in a jelly roll pan so that hot air could circulate underneath the breasts.

The results were much improved: the breasts didn't stick to the pan; they came out of the oven evenly browned, with an excellent, crunchy coating; and the meat inside was not soggy but instead almost uniformly moist, with only the skinny tips of the breasts slightly dry. Because the time in the oven didn't significantly darken the crust, we could rely on this method for a perfect crust every time as

long as we carefully supervised the stovetop browning.

Next we had to figure out what ingredients to use in the crust. We found that a classic a l'anglaise breading (dipping the cutlets in flour, then in eggs beaten with a little oil and water, and finally in bread crumbs) worked best.

Satisfied with the coating and cooking methods, we turned our attention to the stuffing. During our first round of testing, we had found "pocket-stuffed" breasts to be particularly troublesome. This method calls for slicing horizontally into the thickest part of the cutlet and sandwiching the filling into the middle. Because the filling is placed in the

thickest part of the breast, its shape becomes even more uneven. In the oven, this unevenness causes the small tapered end to dry out long before the thicker portion is cooked. And, of course, when you cut into it, the tapered end is disappointingly devoid of filling. Pounding the breasts thin and rolling them up around the filling produced the most even distribution of filling and the most even cooking of the meat. It was also the only method that kept the filling from leaking out during cooking. Once cooked, the breasts could be sliced crosswise into medallions that looked lovely on the plate.

As for the content of the filling, we wanted something creamy but thick.

Cheese was the obvious choice. After several tests, we concluded that beaten cream cheese provided the creamy consistency we wanted; it was thick and smooth. For flavor, we turned to more potent cheeses, such as cheddar and Gorgonzola, along with seasonings such as browned onions, garlic, and herbs.

But there was still a problem. These breasts had to be secured with toothpicks—sometimes multiple toothpicks in a single breast—all of which then had to be removed before the breast was sliced into medallions.

Getting over this hurdle turned out to be easier than we anticipated. We reasoned that chilling the stuffed breasts

before cooking would inhibit the filling from melting so quickly and that the chilled cheese filling would hold the rolls together. We were right on both counts. Wrapping the breasts in plastic and refrigerating them for one hour before breading and cooking cooled the cheese enough to hold the roll together. It also kept the cheese from seeping out of the crust during baking. Another advantage of this technique is that it allows the cook to prepare the breasts up to this point and refrigerate them overnight.

Master Recipe

Sautéed Stuffed Chicken Cutlets

serves four

NOTE: ***The chicken breasts can be filled and rolled in advance, then refrigerated for up to 24 hours.***

4 boneless, skinless chicken cutlets (5 to 6 ounces each), tenderloins removed and reserved for another use; fat trimmed (see figure 1); rinsed and thoroughly dried

Salt and ground black pepper

1 recipe filling

1/2 cup all-purpose flour

2 large eggs

1 1/2 teaspoons plus 3/4 cup vegetable oil

1 1/2 teaspoons water

1 cup plain bread crumbs

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place each chicken cutlet on large sheet of plastic wrap, cover with second sheet, and pound with meat pounder or rolling pin until 1/4 inch thick throughout (see figure 7). Each pounded breast should measure roughly 6 inches wide

and $8^{1}/_{2}$ inches long. Cover and refrigerate while preparing filling.

2. Place breasts smooth-side down on work surface; season with salt and pepper. Fill, roll, and wrap each breast (see figures 8 and 9). Refrigerate until filling is firm, at least 1 hour.

3. Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position; heat oven to 400 degrees. Spread flour in pie plate or shallow baking dish. Beat eggs with $1^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoons vegetable oil and $1^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoons water in second pie plate or

shallow baking dish. Spread bread crumbs in third pie plate or shallow baking dish. Unwrap chicken breasts and roll in flour; shake off excess. Using tongs, roll breasts in egg mixture; let excess drip off. Transfer to bread crumbs; shake pan to roll breasts in crumbs, then press with fingers to help crumbs adhere. Place breaded chicken breasts on large wire rack set over jelly roll pan.

4. Heat remaining $^{3}/_{4}$ cup oil in medium skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering, but not smoking, about 4 minutes; add chicken, seam-side down, and cook until medium golden brown,

about 2 minutes. Turn each roll and cook until medium golden brown on all sides, 2 to 3 minutes longer. Transfer chicken rolls, seam-side down, to wire rack set over jelly roll pan; bake until deep golden brown and instant-read thermometer inserted into center of each roll registers 155 degrees, about 15 minutes. Let stand 5 minutes before slicing each roll crosswise into 5 medallions; arrange on individual dinner plates and serve.

Figure 7.
Place each trimmed cutlet between two sheets of plastic wrap. Starting in the center of each breast, pound evenly out toward the edges, taking care not to tear the flesh.

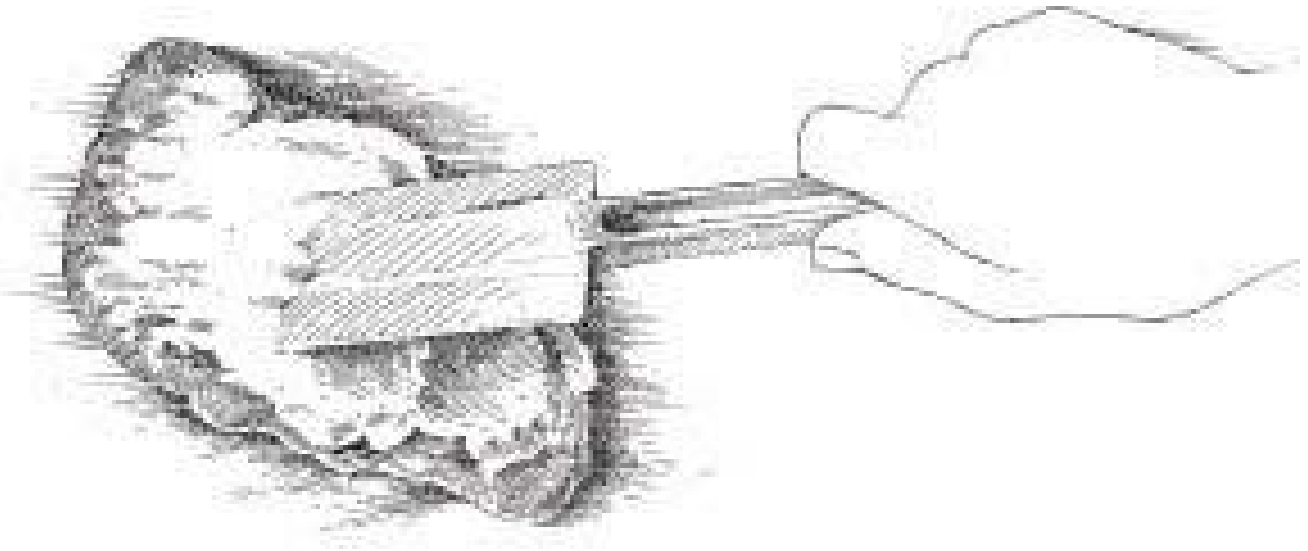

Figure 8.
Place each cutlet, smooth-side down, on work surface, season, and spread with one-quarter of cheese mixture.

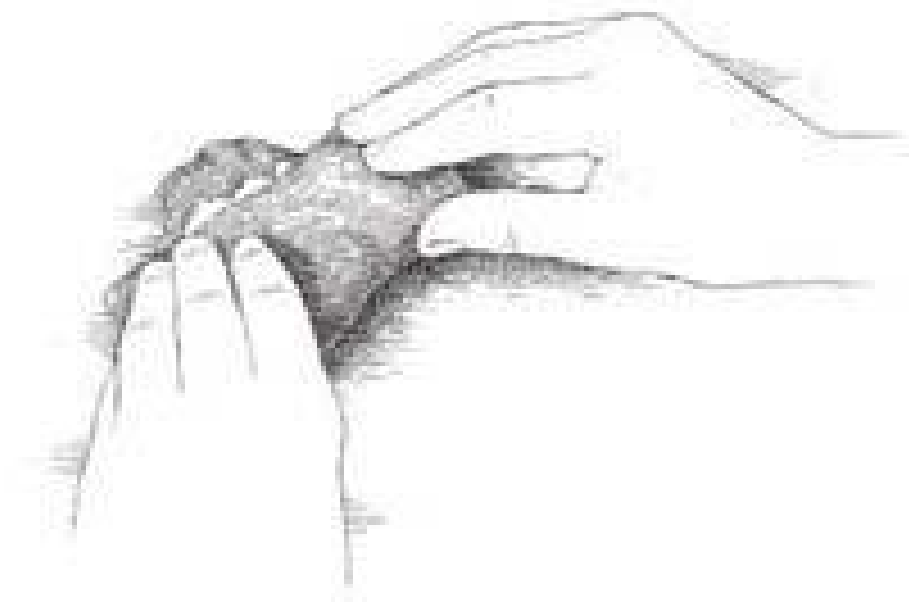

Figure 9.
Roll up each cutlet from the tapered end, folding in the edges to form a neat cylinder. To help seal the seams, wrap the stuffed cutlets in plastic and twist the ends of the wrap in opposite directions.

Ham and Cheddar Cheese Filling

enough to stuff 4 breasts

NOTE: ***If desired, substitute Gruyère or Swiss for the cheddar.***

1 tablespoon unsalted butter
1 small onion, minced
1 small garlic clove, minced
4 ounces cream cheese, softened
1 teaspoon chopped fresh thyme leaves
2 ounces cheddar cheese, shredded (about $^1/_2$ cup)
Salt and ground black pepper

4 thin slices cooked deli ham

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat butter in medium skillet over low heat until melted; add onion and sauté, stirring occasionally, until deep golden brown, 15 to 20 minutes. Stir in garlic and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds longer; set aside.

2. In medium bowl, using hand mixer, beat cream cheese on medium speed until light and fluffy, about 1 minute. Stir in onion mixture, thyme, and cheddar; season with salt and pepper and set aside. To stuff breasts, place one slice ham on top of cheese on each breast,

folding ham as necessary to fit onto surface of breast.

VARIATIONS:

Gorgonzola Cheese Filling with Walnuts and Figs

Two tablespoons of dried cherries or cranberries can be substituted for the figs.

Follow recipe for Ham and Cheddar Cheese Filling, replacing cheddar cheese with 2 ounces crumbled Gorgonzola cheese (about $^1/_2$ cup). Stir in $^1/_4$ cup chopped toasted walnuts, 3 medium dried figs, stemmed and chopped (about 2 tablespoons), and 1

tablespoon dry sherry along with Gorgonzola. Omit ham.

Broiled Asparagus and Smoked Mozzarella Filling

To cook asparagus for this filling, toss trimmed spears with 2 teaspoons olive oil and salt and pepper to taste on a jelly roll pan, then broil until tender and browned, 6 to 8 minutes, shaking pan to rotate spears halfway through cooking time.

Follow recipe for Ham and Cheddar Cheese Filling, replacing cheddar cheese with 2 ounces shredded smoked mozzarella cheese (about $^{1}/_{2}$ cup). Replace ham with 16 medium asparagus,

trimmed to 5-inch lengths and broiled. Place 4 asparagus spears horizontally on top of cheese on each breast, spacing them about 1 inch apart and trimming off ends if necessary.

BAKED CUTLETS

HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS ASIDE, SAUTÉING is our preferred method for cooking a chicken cutlet. The thick, brown crust and tender, juicy interior cannot be duplicated by any other cooking method. Grilling is a good low-fat alternative to sautéing but there are no pan juices with which to make a sauce. In many cases, it is the pan sauce that makes bland cutlets worth eating. Also, grilling is not always an option.

We identified two lower-fat options for cooking boneless chicken cutlets:

baking in an open pan and enclosing the cutlets and seasonings in parchment paper or foil packets and then baking, or "steaming," the chicken in the oven.

BAKED CHICKEN CUTLETS

We decided to focus first on baking the cutlets in an open pan. (For information on oven-steaming). We wanted to develop a technique that could be used year-round and that would also give us some precious pan juices. From the start, we knew this would be a tough assignment. Roasting a piece of meat that contains almost no fat presents an obvious challenge: how to keep it moist

and juicy.

Many traditional recipes for baked chicken cutlets call for lots of butter and cream to keep the meat moist. While this undoubtedly works, the results are generally not as good as they are when similar dishes are made on the stove; the chicken does not brown when it sits in a bath of heavy cream. We think the oven makes sense only when there is a desire to keep the fat content to a minimum.

With that goal in mind, we started testing a number of variables—especially the temperature of the oven and the use of ingredients (other than cream) that might keep the chicken moist as it bakes. It was soon apparent that getting the chicken in and out of the oven

as quickly as possible is key. The longer it stays in the oven, the drier it gets. High temperatures (we settled on a constant 450 degrees) cook the cutlets quickly and prevent dryness. Baking cutlets in a hot oven also causes some browning, which boosts flavor in what is otherwise a fairly bland piece of meat.

Roasting chicken cutlets at a high temperature is only part of the answer. The meat still tends to dry out, especially in spots where the cutlets are thin and toward the exterior. We needed to give the cutlets enough time to cook through in the center while protecting the outside layer of meat from becoming tough. It was clear that we needed to add

moisture and, yes, a little fat. Adding a bit of oil (one-half tablespoon per cutlet) helps create the impression of moistness in the outer layer of meat and also promotes browning. Since cutlets are so bland, we use olive oil to add flavor as well.

We also found that liquids from moist vegetables, such as tomatoes and mushrooms, are essential in keeping the chicken from becoming tough and dry. Our testing showed that placing the vegetables both underneath and on top of the chicken was the best guarantee of moistness in the end. While the vegetables don't affect the interior of the cutlet, their juices do flavor and moisten the exterior layer, which is so prone to

drying out in the oven.

We found that tomatoes could be treated differently from other vegetables, such as onions, mushrooms, fennel, and peppers. Tomatoes are so juicy and soften so quickly that they can go into the oven at the same time as the chicken. When using the other vegetables, we found it best to roast them first to bring their juices to the surface, then add the cutlets to the pan and continue baking until everything was tender. This two-stage cooking process (without and then with the chicken) lets harder vegetables soften up properly. When we put onions or peppers into the oven right along with the chicken, they would still be crunchy

when the chicken was done. Therefore, we created two master recipes: one that covers the chicken with raw tomatoes and another that roasts vegetables first, then adds the chicken.

Bold flavorings also turned out to be key to our oven-baked dishes. Even if the meat is juicy, without seasonings, it's really not worth eating. Spices, garlic, and herbs all help. We also found brining of the breasts to be worth the minimal effort required. In fact, brining has a more pronounced effect on cutlets than it does on skin-on, bone-in breasts because in the latter the skin and bones contribute flavor and moisture. Even with the protective effects of juicy vegetables, unbrined cutlets will be a

tad dry in spots when baked.

If you don't have time to brine, use smaller cutlets, which will cook through fairly quickly and spend minimal time in the oven. When we neglected to brine larger cutlets, we found them dry, especially in the outer layers.

We realized that our efforts had produced an unintended side effect. By baking chicken with vegetables as a protective measure, we had also created a nearly complete meal. With the addition of a leafy salad or a starch, dinner was done.

Master Recipe

Baked Chicken Cutlets with Tomatoes and Herbs

serves four

NOTE: ***Brining does improve the flavor and texture of the cutlets, but if you are short on time, skip step 1 and add salt to the parsley mixture.***

$^3/_4$ cup kosher salt or 6 tablespoons table salt

$^3/_4$ cup sugar

4 boneless, skinless chicken cutlets (about 6 ounces each),

fat trimmed and tendons removed (see figures 1 and 2); rinsed and thoroughly dried

1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley leaves

1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper (optional)

2 medium garlic cloves, minced very fine

Salt and ground black pepper

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

1/2 teaspoon dried oregano

2 cups cored and chopped fresh plum tomatoes (about 6 tomatoes) or drained and chopped canned tomatoes

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. In gallon-sized, zipper-lock plastic bag, dissolve salt and sugar in 1 quart of water. Add chicken and seal bag, pressing out as much air as possible; refrigerate until fully seasoned, about 45 minutes. Remove from brine, rinse well, and dry thoroughly with paper towels.

2. Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Combine parsley, cayenne, garlic, pepper, and salt (omit if chicken was brined) in small bowl. Rub chicken all over with herb mixture.

3. Combine oil, oregano, tomatoes, and salt and pepper to taste in medium bowl. Spoon half of tomato mixture into 13 by 9-inch roasting pan. Place chicken on top and cover with remaining tomato mixture.

4. Roast until chicken is cooked through, 15 to 20 minutes, basting once or twice with pan juices. To check for doneness, cut into thickest part of one breast with small knife. If there is any hint of pink, return chicken to oven till done. Serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Asian-Style Baked Chicken

Cutlets with Tomatoes and Herbs

Follow master recipe, making the following changes: Substitute $^1/_4$ cup chopped fresh cilantro for parsley. Add 1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger to cilantro mixture. Replace oregano with 4 thinly sliced scallions.

Baked Chicken Cutlets with Tomatoes and Porcini Mushrooms

Dried Italian porcini mushrooms lend richness but not fat to baked chicken breasts. A little of their soaking liquid is

added to the pan for moisture. Any other dried mushrooms, especially morels or shiitakes, may be substituted.

Place 1 ounce dried porcini mushrooms in medium bowl and cover with hot tap water. Let mushrooms soak until softened, about 20 minutes. Carefully lift mushrooms from liquid, pat dry, and finely chop. Strain soaking liquid through sieve lined with paper towel. Reserve $^1/_4$ cup strained soaking liquid for this recipe, saving the rest for another use. Follow master recipe, making the following changes: Substitute $^1/_4$ cup chopped fresh basil leaves for parsley. Omit cayenne and oregano. Add mushrooms and reserved soaking liquid

to tomato mixture.

Master Recipe

Baked Chicken Cutlets with Roasted Onions and Mushrooms

serves four

NOTE: ***Roasted vegetables provide the moisture that keeps cutlets moist as they bake. Roast the vegetables partway, add the chicken, and continue baking until both the vegetables and chicken are done. Brining does improve the flavor and texture of the chicken, but if you are short on time, skip step 1 and add salt***

to the thyme mixture.

$^{3}/_{4}$ cup kosher salt or 6 tablespoons table salt

$^{3}/_{4}$ cup sugar

4 boneless, skinless chicken cutlets (about 6 ounces each), fat trimmed and tendons removed (see figures 1 and 2); rinsed and thoroughly dried

2 medium onions, halved and sliced thin

10 ounces white button or cremini mushrooms, ends trimmed and sliced thin

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

Salt and ground black pepper

2 tablespoons chopped fresh thyme leaves

2 medium garlic cloves, minced very fine

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. In gallon-sized, zipper-lock plastic bag, dissolve salt and sugar in 1 quart of water. Add chicken and seal bag, pressing out as much air as possible; refrigerate until fully seasoned, about 45 minutes. Remove from brine, rinse well, and dry thoroughly with paper towels.

2. Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Combine onions, mushrooms, oil, and salt and pepper to taste in 13 by 9-inch

roasting pan. Roast, stirring once or twice, until onions begin to brown and mushrooms give off their juices, 15 to 20 minutes.

3. Meanwhile, combine thyme, garlic, pepper, and salt (omit if chicken was brined) in small bowl. Rub chicken all over with herb mixture.

4. Transfer half of onions and mushrooms from roasting pan to bowl; spread remaining vegetables evenly over bottom of pan. Place chicken on top of onions and mushrooms and then cover with onions and mushrooms in bowl.

5. Roast until chicken is cooked through, 15 to 20 minutes, basting once or twice with pan juices. To check for doneness, cut into thickest part of one breast with small knife. If there is any hint of pink, return chicken to oven till done. Serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Baked Chicken Cutlets with Roasted Peppers and Onions

Follow master recipe, replacing mushrooms with 2 medium red, yellow, and/or orange bell peppers, cored, seeded, and cut into $^{1}/_{2}$-inch-thick strips.

Baked Chicken Cutlets with Roasted Fennel and Tomatoes

Follow master recipe, replacing onions and mushrooms with 2 cups thinly sliced fennel (about 1 medium bulb) and 2 cups cored and chopped plum tomatoes (about 6 medium), and reducing roasting time in step 2 to 15 minutes. Proceed as directed, replacing thyme with 1 tablespoon chopped fresh oregano leaves.

OVEN-STEAMED CHICKEN CUTLETS

Cooking *en papillote* is a classic French technique that involves oven-steaming fish, chicken, or vegetables in parchment paper packets. The food cooks in its own juices and stays especially moist. We tested parchment paper and heavy-duty aluminum foil packets and found no difference in the end results. Although parchment packets do look intriguing and are pretty enough to slice open at the table, foil is easier to find and work with and is our first choice.

Like baked cutlets, oven-steamed cutlets need a little liquid to keep them juicy. The liquid also becomes an instant sauce when the chicken is cooked. In our testing, we found that these recipes

require no oil at all as long as liquid is added to the packets in the form of juicy vegetables and wine. In addition, heavy seasonings (don't stint on the salt and pepper) and the use of flavorful ingredients (especially garlic and herbs) are necessary to keep oven-steamed chicken from being too bland. No browning or caramelization can occur when chicken is cooked in foil packets, so bold seasonings are a must.

Brining makes a big difference in the quality of oven-steamed cutlets; they were much juicier and more flavorful than those which had not been brined. If not brining, we recommend using smaller cutlets to minimize cooking time, which will help keep the meat from

drying out.

Since the chicken is actually cooking in its own juices (plus a little wine and vegetable juices), the packages must not be opened until the cooking is done. If opened too soon, the built-up steam is released and the chicken is not as moist when done. For this reason, bake the packets by weight—at least 20 minutes for cutlets that are six ounces or fewer and 25 minutes for cutlets that are particularly thick or weigh much more than six ounces each. When you bring the packets to the table, you can rest assured that they will be cooked through but still juicy.

This chicken is best eaten immediately

after cooking. The meat emerges from the oven moist and tender, but as soon as it cools the texture begins to become drier and tougher. When preparing this recipe, it is critical to put a stop to cooking the moment the chicken is removed from the oven. To do so, open all packages immediately.

Master Recipe

Oven-Steamed Chicken Cutlets with Tomatoes and Herbs

serves four

NOTE: ***This technique for oven-steaming cutlets is similar to that used for baking them. There are just a few changes. White wine replaces the olive oil and everything—the chicken, vegetables, and seasonings—is enclosed in foil packets before baking.***

$^{3}/_{4}$ cup kosher salt or 6

tablespoons table salt

3/4 cup sugar

4 boneless, skinless chicken cutlets (about 6 ounces each), trimmed and tendons removed (see figures 1 and 2); rinsed and thoroughly dried

1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley leaves

1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper (optional)

2 medium garlic cloves, minced very fine

Salt and ground black pepper

2 cups cored and chopped fresh plum tomatoes or drained and chopped canned tomatoes

$^{1}/_{4}$ cup white wine

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. In gallon-sized, zipper-lock plastic bag, dissolve salt and sugar in 1 quart of water. Add chicken and seal bag, pressing out as much air as possible; refrigerate until fully seasoned, about 45 minutes. Remove from brine, rinse well, and dry thoroughly with paper towels.

2. Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Combine parsley, cayenne, garlic, pepper, and salt (omit if chicken was brined) in small bowl. Rub chicken all over with herb mixture.

3. Cut 4 pieces of heavy-duty aluminum foil about 12 inches square. Arrange portion of tomatoes in center of each piece of foil. Top with one chicken breast. Drizzle 1 tablespoon wine over each breast and fold foil to make packets (see figures 10 through 12).

4. Put foil packets on rimmed baking sheet and bake 20 to 25 minutes. Open packets, taking care to keep steam away from your hands and face. Transfer contents of packets to individual plates and serve immediately.

VARIATION:

You can adapt any of the baked cutlet recipes for oven steaming as follows: Rub chicken with seasonings. Place all vegetables on foil, but omit oil. Top with chicken and drizzle with 1 tablespoon wine. Wrap all ingredients in foil packets and bake as directed in step 4, above. (There's no need to roast vegetables separately.)

Figure 10.
Arrange vegetables and seasoned cutlet in center of 12-inch sheet of heavy-duty aluminum foil. Drizzle wine over chicken, then bring the sides of the foil up to meet over the chicken.

Figure 11.

Crimp the edges together in a $^{1}/_{4}$-inch fold, and then fold over three more times.

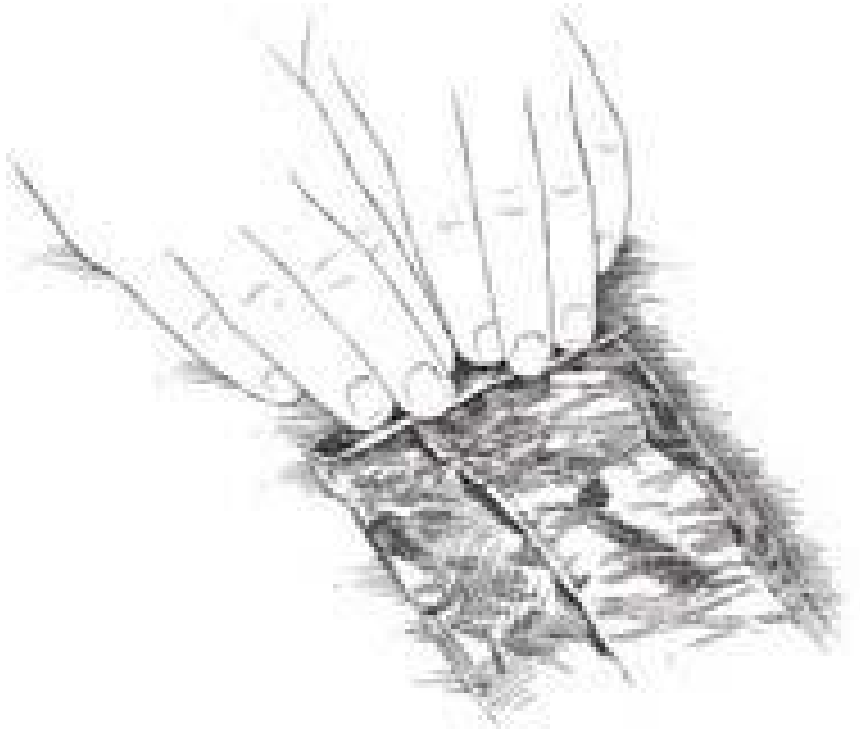

Figure 12.
Fold the open edges at either end of the packets together in a $^{1}/_{4}$-inch fold, and then fold over twice again to seal. When opening the packets after baking, take care to keep steam away from your hands and face.

STIR-FRIED CUTLETS

TO STIR-FRY PROPERLY YOU NEED PLENTY of intense heat. The pan must be hot enough to caramelize the sugars and proteins in the meat, deepen flavors, and evaporate unnecessary juices. All this must happen in minutes. The problem for most American cooks is that the Chinese wok and the American stovetop are a lousy match that generates moderate heat at best.

Woks are conical because in China they traditionally rest in cylindrical pits containing the fire. Food is cut into small

pieces to shorten cooking time, thus conserving fuel. Only one vessel is required for many different cooking methods, including sautéing (stir-frying), steaming, boiling, and deep frying.

Unfortunately, what is practical in China makes no sense in America. Stovetop cooking, in which heat comes at the pan only from the bottom instead of from all sides, doesn't work with a wok. On an American stove, the bottom of the wok gets hot but the sides become only warm. A horizontal heat source requires a horizontal pan. Therefore, for stir-frying at home, we recommend a large skillet, 12 to 14 inches in diameter, with a nonstick coating. If you insist on using a wok for stir-frying, choose a flat-

bottomed model. It won't have as much flat surface area as a skillet, but it will work better on an American stove than a conventional round-bottomed wok.

American stoves necessitate other adjustments. In Chinese cooking, intense flames lick the bottom and sides of the wok, heating the whole surface to extremely high temperatures. Conventional stoves simply don't generate enough British Thermal Units (BTUs) to heat any pan (whether a wok or flat skillet) sufficiently for a proper stir-fry. American cooks must accommodate the lower horsepower on their stoves. Throw everything into the pan at one time and the ingredients will

steam and stew, not stir-fry.

One solution is to boil the vegetables first so that they are merely heated through in the pan with the other stir-fry ingredients. We find this precooking to be burdensome. After testing, we found that we could avoid precooking by following two strategies. First, cut the vegetables quite small; second, add them to the pan in batches. By adding a small volume of food at a time, the heat in the pan does not dissipate. Slow-cooking vegetables such as carrots and onions go into the pan first, followed by quicker-cooking items such as zucchini and bell peppers. Leafy greens and herbs go in last.

The other option, which works best

with green vegetables, is to steam them in the pan. Just stir-fry them in a little oil, add some water, and cover the skillet. Once the broccoli, green beans, or asparagus have cooked, they should be removed from the skillet to prevent color loss or overcooking. Return these vegetables to the pan just before adding the cooked chicken and sauce.

We find it best to freeze chicken for an hour or so to making slicing easier. We tried several kinds of marinades and found that a simple mixture of soy sauce and dry sherry is best. Just make sure to drain the protein before stir-frying. If you add the marinating liquid, the chicken will stew rather than sear.

Many stir-fry recipes add the aromatics (scallions, garlic, and ginger) too early, causing them to burn. In our testing, we found it best to add the aromatics after cooking the vegetables. When the vegetables are done, we push them to the sides of the pan, add a little oil and the aromatics to the center of the pan, and cook briefly until fragrant but not colored, about 10 seconds. To keep the aromatics from burning and becoming harsh-tasting, we then remove the pan from the heat and stir them into the vegetables for 20 seconds. Then the seared chicken is added back to the pan along with the sauce.

A good stir-fry for four people needs

only $^{3}/_{4}$ pound of chicken to $1^{1}/_{2}$ pounds of prepared vegetables. This ratio keeps the stir-fry from becoming too heavy and is also more authentic, since protein is a luxury used sparingly in China.

As for the sauces, we have kept the ingredient lists quite simple. We find that a few strongly flavored and carefully chosen ingredients can do the job. We tried thickening sauces with cornstarch but found that it made the sauces gloppy and thick. Without any thickener, they were cleaner tasting and brighter. Just make sure the pan is very hot when you add the sauce so that excess moisture can evaporate, causing the sauce to thicken slightly.

Master Recipe

Stir-Fried Chicken and Broccoli with Hoisin Sauce

serves four

NOTE: ***The secret to this classic stir-fry dish is lots of heat, so preheating the pan is crucial. After cooking the chicken, steam the broccoli in the same skillet over medium heat. When the broccoli is tender but still crisp, remove it to a plate to prevent further cooking. Turn the heat back to high and finish this dish in a sizzling hot skillet. If you like your stir-fries hot***

and spicy, add 1/4 teaspoon of hot pepper flakes to the pan with the garlic, ginger, and scallions.

3/4 pound boneless, skinless chicken cutlets, fat trimmed and tendons removed (see figures 1 and 2); rinsed and thoroughly dried; cut into uniform pieces (see figures 13 through 15)

1 1/2 tablespoons light soy sauce

1 tablespoon dry sherry

3 tablespoons hoisin sauce

2 tablespoons chicken stock or low-sodium canned broth

1 teaspoon Asian sesame oil

4 tablespoons peanut oil

$1^1/_4$ pounds broccoli, florets broken into bite-sized pieces; stems trimmed, peeled, and cut on diagonal into 1/8-inch-thick ovals

$^1/_3$ cup water

2 cups sliced shiitake mushrooms (about 4 ounces)

1 tablespoon minced garlic

1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger

2 tablespoons minced scallions, white parts only

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Toss chicken with 1 tablespoon soy

sauce and sherry in medium bowl; set aside, tossing once or twice.

2. Mix remaining $^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoon soy sauce with hoisin sauce, chicken stock, and sesame oil in small bowl; set aside.

3. Heat a 12-or 14-inch nonstick skillet over high heat for 3 to 4 minutes. Drain chicken. Add 1 tablespoon peanut oil to pan and swirl so that it evenly coats pan bottom. Heat oil until it just starts to shimmer and smoke. Add chicken and stir-fry until seared and three-quarters cooked, about $2^{1}/_{2}$ to 3 minutes. Scrape cooked chicken and all liquid into clean

bowl. Cover and keep warm.

4. Let pan come up to temperature, about 1 minute. When hot, add 1 tablespoon peanut oil and swirl so that it evenly coats bottom of pan. When oil just starts to smoke, add broccoli and stir-fry for 30 seconds. Add water, cover pan, and lower to medium heat. Steam broccoli until crisptender, about 2 minutes. Transfer broccoli to plate lined with clean kitchen towel.

5. Let pan come up to temperature, about 1 minute. When hot, add another tablespoon peanut oil and swirl so that it

evenly coats bottom of pan. When oil just starts to smoke, add shiitake mushrooms and stir-fry until golden, about 2 minutes. Clear center of pan and add garlic, ginger, and scallions, drizzle with remaining tablespoon of peanut oil, and stir-fry until fragrant but not colored, 10 to 15 seconds. Add broccoli back to pan, remove pan from heat, and stir scallions, garlic, and ginger into vegetables for 20 seconds.

6. Return pan to heat and add cooked chicken along with its liquid, stir in sauce, and stir-fry until ingredients are well coated with sauce and sizzling hot, about 1 minute. Serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Stir-Fried Chicken and Green Beans with Garlic Sauce

Follow master recipe, making the following changes: In step 2, omit hoisin sauce, increase soy sauce to 2 tablespoons, and add 1 tablespoon sherry and $^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon sugar to soy sauce, chicken stock, and sesame oil. Substitute $1^{1}/_{4}$ pounds string beans for broccoli and increase steaming time in step 4 to about 4 minutes. Replace mushrooms with 1 five-ounce can sliced

water chestnuts and decrease cooking time in step 5 to 30 seconds. Increase garlic to 2 tablespoons.

Stir-Fried Chicken and Bok Choy with Ginger Sauce

Bok choy does not need to be steamed—simply stir-fry it.

Follow master recipe, making the following changes: In step 2, omit hoisin sauce, increase soy sauce to 2 tablespoons, and add 1 tablespoon sherry and $^1/_2$ teaspoon sugar to soy sauce, chicken stock, and sesame oil. Replace broccoli with 1 pound bok choy, stalks and greens separated and cut into thin strips. In step 4, stir-fry bok

choy stalks in 1 tablespoon oil for 1 to 2 minutes. Add 1 red bell pepper, stemmed, seeded, and cut into 3 by $^1/_2$-inch strips and cook 1 minute. Add bok choy greens and cook 15 to 30 seconds. Omit mushrooms and the tablespoon of oil used to stir-fry them in step 5. Continue with step 5 of the master recipe by clearing the center of the pan and adding the garlic, 2 tablespoons ginger, and scallions.

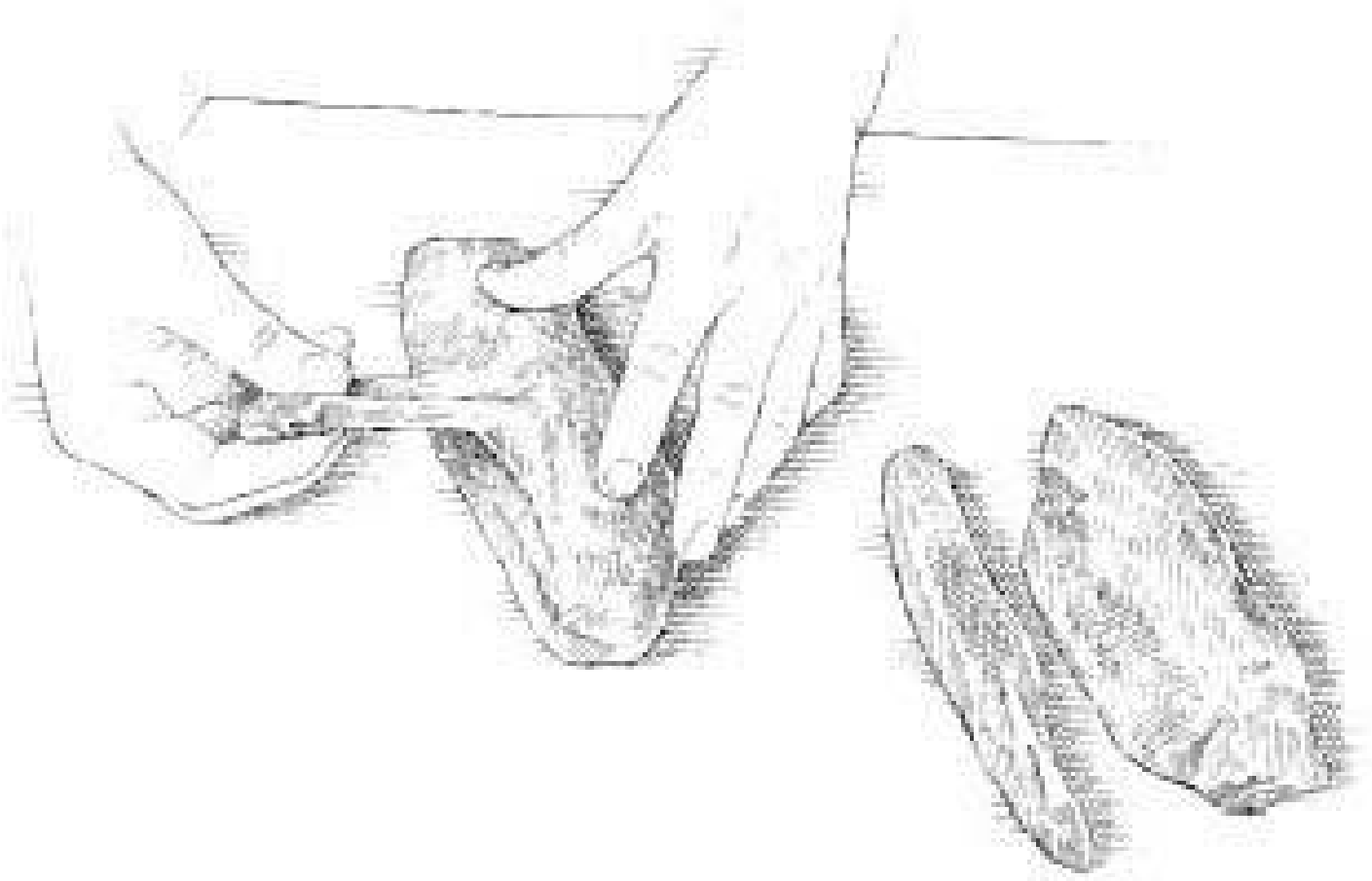

Figure 13.
Slightly frozen meat is easier to slice thinly than meat at room temperature. Place the chicken in the freezer for one hour to firm up its texture, or slice frozen chicken that has been partially defrosted. To prepare chicken cutlets for a stir-fry, start by

removing the tenderloins. Set them aside.

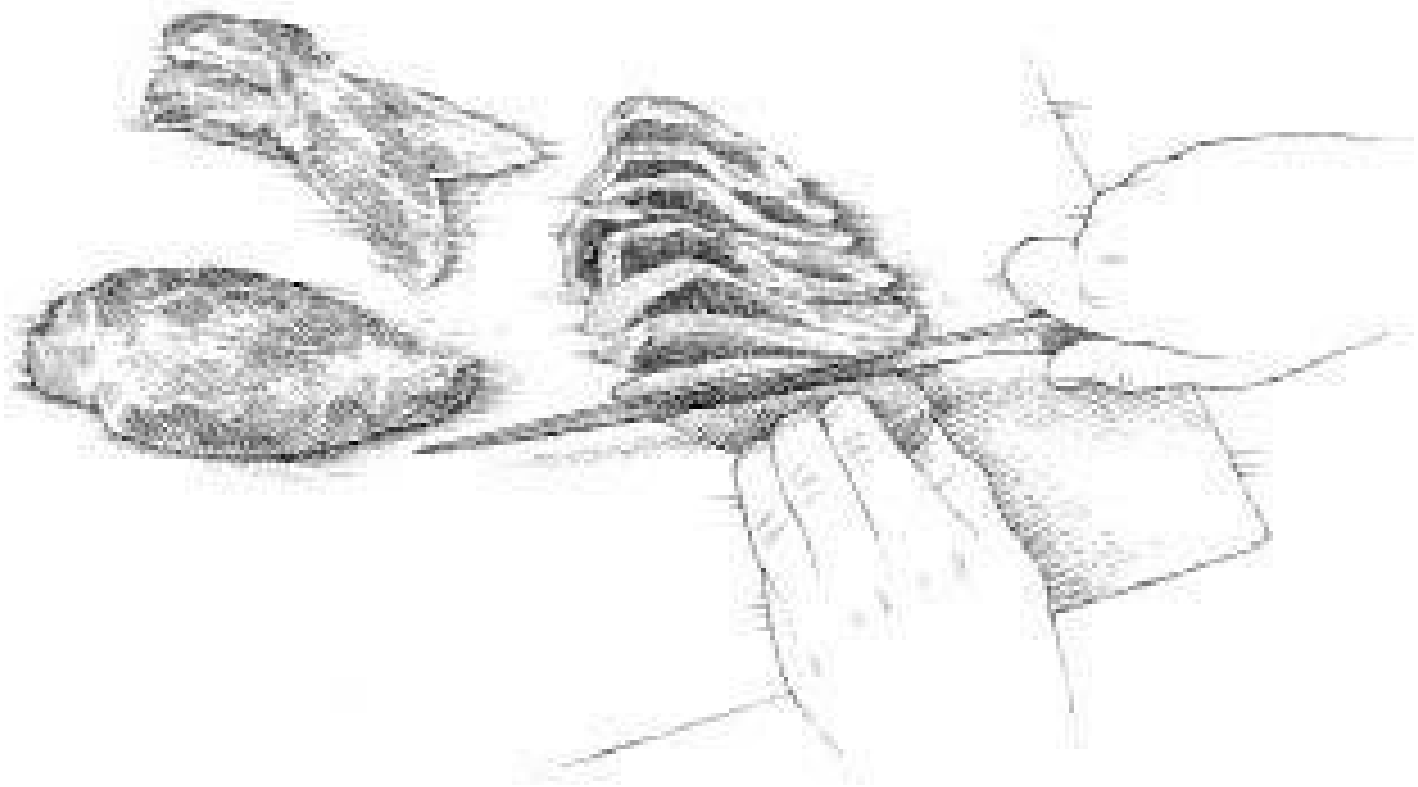

Figure 14.
Slice the main part of the cutlet across the grain into $^{1}/_{2}$-inch-wide strips that are $1^{1}/_{2}$ to 2 inches long. The center pieces will need to be cut in half so that they are approximately the same length as end pieces.

Figure 15.
Cut the tenderloins on the diagonal to produce pieces about the same size as the strips of breast meat.

HOW TO SAUTÉ

Sauté Basics

Chicken Cutlets

Turkey and Veal Cutlets

Pork Medallions

Steak

Fish Fillets and Steaks

Shrimp and Scallops

SAUTÉ BASICS

TO SAUTÉ IS TO COOK FOOD QUICKLY IN A hot skillet. In general, you need just enough fat to coat the bottom of the pan. If you add enough fat to reach any measurable depth, then you are pan-frying, not sautéing.

Sautéing causes the exterior of meat, poultry, and seafood to brown. Browning adds flavor to foods and promotes the development of a crisp crust, which offers a pleasing textural contrast with the interior of foods. Sautéing is usually reserved for tender,

quick-cooking, boneless cuts, such as chicken cutlets or fish fillets.

Besides browning the food, sautéing produces flavorful browned bits in the pan, which can be used to make a quick sauce once the cooked meat, poultry, or seafood has been set aside.

In some cases, the meat, poultry, or seafood can be coated with bread crumbs and then sautéed. This produces an especially crisp crust. In order to preserve the crunch of the breading, we don't serve breaded cutlets and fillets with a pan sauce.

This book focuses on sautéed main courses suitable for a quick weeknight dinner. Individual chapters explore chicken cutlets; turkey and veal cutlets;

pork medallions; steak; fish fillets and steaks; and shrimp and scallops. All of these foods are boneless and require almost no preparation on the part of the cook.

Although it is quick, sautéing is not always simple. Too often, foods don't brown as well you might like. Sometimes the kitchen fills with smoke. At other times, foods stick to the pan.

This chapter covers the basics—from how to handle food before it goes into the skillet to how to make pan sauces. For details on sautéing specific foods, see the appropriate chapter.

MAKE SURE THE FOOD IS DRY

Moisture is the enemy of sautéing. Not

only does moisture cause hot fat to splatter, but it also prevents browning. Foods should always be thoroughly dried with paper towels just before they are sautéed. For the same reason, you shouldn't season foods too far in advance. Over time, salt draws moisture to the surface. Try sprinkling foods with seasonings while you wait for the pan to preheat.

FLOUR DELICATE FOODS

We find that some foods with a delicate texture, such as chicken cutlets and flounder fillets, benefit from flouring before cooking. The flour coating promotes browning and ensures that the exterior crust will be crisp. In our

testing, we found that sturdier meats, such as steak, should not be floured; they brown well without any coating. Also, shellfish can absorb flour and become gluey, so we don't recommend flouring shrimp or scallops.

::CHOOSE THE RIGHT PAN

When sautéing you will need a large pan that can accommodate as much food as possible in one batch. Food that is crowded into a small skillet won't brown as well, especially if all the food is not in direct contact with the pan bottom. Also, crowding food into a small pan causes the temperature to drop precipitously, which negatively affects browning. It is also important to choose

a pan with a heavy bottom.

In theory, cast iron would seem to be a good choice for sautéing; in fact, however, it is not recommended because it can react with some acidic pan sauces. Heavy stainless steel pans with an aluminum or copper core, such as those manufactured by All-Clad, or heavy anodized aluminum pans, such as those made by Calphalon, are our favorite choices in the test kitchen. We like these pans because they are heavy and conduct heat evenly across the entire bottom of the pan.

Avoid thin, inexpensive stainless steel or aluminum pans. Food and pan drippings are far more likely to burn, especially at the high temperatures we

recommend throughout this book.

We tested nonstick and enamel-coated pans and found them acceptable but not quite up to par. Fat tends to bead up on these slick surfaces and so may not coat foods evenly once they are added to the pan. As a result, foods don't brown as well in nonstick and enamel-coated pans. A bare metal surface yields more intense color and thus more flavor.

PREHEAT UNTIL BLAZING HOT

Too often, home cooks are timid about using high heat on their stove. Yes, you may make a bit of mess on the stovetop, but high heat is the only way to brown four steaks at once. In addition, foods can stick in cool pans, something that

never happens in a hot pan.

In each recipe, we recommend heating an empty skillet over high heat for a specific amount of time. Do not skip this step.

USE VEGETABLE OIL

We find that neutral-tasting oils, such as vegetable, peanut, or canola, make the best medium for sautéing. Olive oil can clash with flavorings in the sauce. It is also more likely to burn. Butter adds a delicious flavor to sautéed foods, but the danger of burning is great. Even when blended with some vegetable oil, butter usually burns. Save butter for swirling into the finished pan sauce.

We prefer to add the oil to a hot pan,

not a cold one. Add the oil all at once and swirl it over the pan bottom. The oil will shimmer immediately, indicating that the pan is ready for food.

PLEASE DO NOT DISTURB

Despite the origin of the word *sauté*, which means "to jump" in French, it's critical to let the food sit after it hits the pan if it is to form a good crust. Resist the temptation to check it constantly. All that activity cools the food down, getting in the way of browning and making the food more likely to stick to the pan. Lifting the food from the pan too early can also cause the crust to tear.

If you like, set a splatter screen—a round mesh screen with a handle—over

the skillet to minimize the mess on your stovetop. The screen keeps fat in the pan without causing foods to steam, as they would if covered with a lid.

DEGLAZE THE EMPTY PAN

Once sautéed foods are browned and cooked through, they should be placed on a plate in a warm oven while you use the pan drippings to make a quick sauce. Start by sautéing aromatics (garlic, shallots, onions) in the drippings. Next, deglaze the pan with some liquid (anything from stock to vinegar to bottled clam juice) and scrape with a wooden spoon to loosen the flavorful browned bits. You then simmer the liquid until it reduces to a nice, thick

consistency. Other ingredients, such as mustard and herbs, can be added to the sauce.

We like to finish most sauces by swirling in some softened butter. The butter enriches the sauce and gives it more body. Swirl in the butter off heat with a wooden spoon so that the butter does not separate.

In restaurants, pan sauces start with veal, chicken, beef, or fish stock. In a nod to convenience, we call for canned low-sodium chicken broth for the recipes in this book. If you have homemade stock on hand, use it. Stock has more body than canned broth (the former usually contains gelatin from bones) and will improve the texture as

well as the flavor of pan sauces.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT SAUCE

Although the technique we use to make pan sauces is pretty much the same throughout the book, the texture and flavor of the sauces vary so as to complement specific sautéed foods. For instance, shrimp requires a thick glaze that can really cling to each piece. Citrus works with seafood but might seem odd with beef, which tastes better with heartier flavors such as red wine, mushrooms, brandy, peppercorns, and cream.

Once you master the basics of sautéing and making a pan sauce, you will be able to create your own recipes almost

without effort. Pick up some cutlets, fillets, or steaks on the way home from work and then use pantry staples and whatever else you have on hand to create a pan sauce. The 48 recipes in this book are a starting point; once you've mastered the basic techniques, hundreds of variations will be within your grasp.

USE HOMEMADE CRUMBS

In some recipes, we coat foods with bread crumbs before sautéing. A crisp, breaded cutlet or fillet does not require a pan sauce. A squirt of lemon juice will suffice.

We tested a number of different coatings and found that homemade bread

crumbs are superior to store-bought. Homemade crumbs are larger and more irregular in shape and therefore promote a crisper crust. We liked cornmeal but felt that it could not serve as an all-purpose coating, as do bread crumbs. (Fish fillets are an exception; they really benefit from the extra crunch that cornmeal adds.)

To make homemade crumbs, simply grind small cubes of stale bread in a food processor until fine. Choose a bread without seeds or sugar when making homemade crumbs. Of course, you can substitute an equal amount of store-bought crumbs if you like.

As for liquids to dip the food in before coating it with crumbs, we tested egg,

milk, and a combination of milk and egg. Lightly beaten egg (thinned with a little water) makes the lightest, crispiest coating. We also found that flouring the cutlets and fillets before dipping them in egg and then bread crumbs helps the food to retain moisture and produces the crispiest coatings.

CHICKEN CUTLETS

SAUTÉING A BONELESS, SKINLESS CHICKEN BREAST sounds easy. But too often the chicken comes out of the pan only lightly colored and dry. Ideally, a sautéed chicken breast should have a nicely browned exterior and a tender, juicy interior.

We sautéed both floured and unfloured chicken cutlets to determine any differences in taste, texture, and juiciness. We immediately noticed a more dramatic sizzle when the unfloured cutlet hit the pan. While both cutlets

sizzled during cooking, the unfloured cutlet "spit" a bit more. The flour seems to provide a barrier between the fat in the pan and the moisture in the cutlet. The floured cutlet also moved about more freely; while neither version stuck to the skillet, the floured cutlet skated easily as we swirled it about.

When cooked, the floured cutlet displayed a consistently brown crust, almost resembling a skin. The uncoated breast was a spotty brown. Both breasts were equally moist, but the floured cutlet had a better mouthfeel, with its contrasting crispy exterior and juicy, tender meat. The floured cutlet, reminiscent of fried chicken, was also more flavorful than its uncoated

counterpart. Our advice: Flour those cutlets.

The best cooking medium for chicken cutlets is vegetable oil, which provides excellent browning and won't burn. In a concession to the reigning wisdom about health, we tried sautéing a batch of cutlets in just the sheerest film of fat. The results were disastrous. The fat burned, the outside of the chicken became dry and stringy, and the crust was very disappointing, nearly blackened in some spots and a strange yellowish color in others. For sautéed food to become crisp and uniformly brown, the entire surface must stay in contact with the fat. Chicken has an

irregular surface, and any part that is not in contact with the cooking medium—in this case, the oil—will not brown because it is being steamed by the moisture released from the cooking meat. In a 12-inch skillet, two tablespoons of oil is about right. If your skillet is wider, you may need closer to three tablespoons.

Everyone's stove is different, of course, but most home burners are quite weak, so when we say "high," we mean "high." Once the oil shimmers, quickly lay in the chicken cutlets, with the tenderloin-side down, holding onto the tapered end as you lay the cutlet flat.

Maintain the heat to the point at which the fat remains at a fast sizzle but does

not quite smoke. If you see more than just a wisp or two of smoke, slide the pan off the burner immediately, turn down the heat, and wait a few seconds before returning the pan to the flame. Be advised that there will be some spattering.

We also tested coating the cutlets with bread crumbs to make an especially crisp exterior and found that breaded cutlets tended to burn faster than regular floured cutlets. We made several modifications to our basic sautéed chicken cutlet recipe to eliminate this problem. First, the cutlets must be pounded to a thickness of a half-inch or less so that the interior won't still be raw

when the exterior has browned. Second, the pan doesn't require as much preheating. Last, breaded cutlets should be cooked at a slightly lower temperature than plain floured cutlets.

Master Recipe

Sautéed Chicken Breast Cutlets

serves four

NOTE: *Serve the chicken breast cutlets plain or with any of the sauces: Lemon-Caper Sauce, Sherry-Cream Sauce with Mushrooms, Tomato-Basil Sauce with Capers, Asian-Style Sweet and Sour Sauce, Mustard and Cream Sauce with Endive and Caraway and Peach Salsa.*

4 chicken breast cutlets ($1^1/_2$ pounds), trimmed (see figure 1), tendons removed (see figure 2), rinsed, and thoroughly dried

Salt and ground black pepper

$^1/_4$ cup all-purpose flour

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 200 degrees. Place a plate in oven for keeping cooked cutlets warm while making sauce.

2. Sprinkle both sides of cutlets with salt and pepper to taste. Measure flour onto a

plate or pie tin. Working with one cutlet at a time, dredge in flour. Make sure tenderloin is tucked beneath and fused to main portion of breast (see figure 3). Pick up cutlet from tapered end; shake to remove excess flour.

3. Heat heavy-bottomed 12-inch skillet over high heat until hot, about 4 minutes. Add oil and heat briefly until it shimmers. Lay cutlets in skillet, tenderloin-side down and tapered ends pointing out (see figure 4).

4. Adjust heat to medium-high (fat should sizzle but not smoke) and sauté

cutlets, not moving them, until browned on one side, about 4 minutes. Turn cutlets with tongs (a fork will pierce meat); cook on other side until meat feels firm when pressed and clotted juices begin to emerge around tenderloin, 3 to 4 minutes. Remove pan from heat and transfer cutlets to warm oven. Continue with one of the sauces that follows.

PAN SAUCES:

Lemon-Caper Sauce

enough for 4 servings

1 medium shallot, minced

1 cup canned low-sodium chicken broth

1/4 cup lemon juice

2 tablespoons small capers, drained

3 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

Follow Master Recipe for Sautéed Chicken Breast Cutlets. Without discarding fat, set skillet over medium heat. Add shallots; sauté until softened,

about 30 seconds. Increase heat to high, add broth, and scrape skillet bottom with wooden spatula or spoon to loosen browned bits. Add lemon juice and capers; boil until liquid reduces to about $^1/_3$ cup, 3 to 4 minutes. Add any accumulated chicken juices; reduce sauce again to $^1/_3$ cup. Off heat, swirl in softened butter until it melts and thickens sauce. Spoon sauce over chicken and serve immediately.

Sherry-Cream Sauce with Mushrooms

enough for 4 servings

NOTE: *White wine, champagne, port, or Madeira can be substituted for the sherry in this classic chicken sauté; in that case, the mace should be omitted or replaced by a speck of nutmeg.*

2 medium shallots, minced

8 ounces thinly sliced mushrooms

1/8 cup sherry, preferably cream or amontillado

1/2 cup canned low-sodium

chicken broth

1 cup heavy cream

2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves

Pinch of ground mace

Salt and ground black or white pepper

1 small lemon wedge

Follow Master Recipe for Sautéed Chicken Breast Cutlets . Without discarding fat, set skillet over medium heat. Add shallots; sauté until softened, about 30 seconds. Increase heat to high, add mushrooms, sauté until soft and brown, 2 to 3 minutes. Add sherry; boil until sherry completely evaporates, about 1 minute. Add broth and cream;

boil, stirring frequently, until sauce reduces to $^1/_3$ cup and is thick enough to lightly coat a spoon, about 5 to 6 minutes. Add any accumulated chicken juices; reduce sauce to previous consistency. Stir in parsley and mace and season to taste with salt, pepper, and drops of lemon juice. Spoon sauce over chicken and serve immediately.

Tomato-Basil Sauce with Capers

enough for 4 servings

2–3 shallots, minced (about $^1/_3$ cup)

3 medium garlic cloves, minced

2 medium-large tomatoes, peeled, cored, seeded, and chopped (about 2 cups)

$^1/_4$ cup dry white wine or 3 tablespoons dry vermouth

2 tablespoons small capers, drained

2 tablespoons shredded basil leaves or minced parsley leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

Follow Master Recipe for Sautéed Chicken Breast Cutlets. Without discarding fat, set skillet over medium heat. Add shallots and sauté until softened, about 30 seconds. Stir in garlic, then tomatoes. Increase heat to high and cook, stirring frequently, until tomatoes have given up most of their juice, forming a lumpy puree, about 2 minutes. Add wine, capers, and any accumulated chicken juices; boil sauce until thick enough to mound slightly in a spoon, about 2 minutes. Stir in herb and season with salt and pepper. Spoon sauce over chicken and serve

immediately.

Asian-Style Sweet and Sour Sauce

enough for 4 servings

3 medium garlic cloves, minced

2 teaspoons minced fresh gingerroot

1/4 teaspoon hot red pepper flakes

1/4 cup dark brown sugar, packed firm

1/4 cup distilled white vinegar

2 tablespoons soy sauce

1/2 teaspoon anchovy paste or Asian fish sauce

4 medium scallions, including

the tender green parts, thinly sliced

Place garlic, ginger, and pepper flakes on a cutting board; mince further to pulverize the pepper. Follow Master Recipe for Sautéed Chicken Breast Cutlets. Without draining fat, return skillet to medium heat; add garlic mixture and sauté until softened, about 30 seconds. Increase heat to high; add brown sugar, vinegar, soy sauce, anchovy paste, and accumulated chicken juices; boil, stirring to loosen browned bits from pan bottom until mixture thickens to a light syrup, less than 1 minute. Pour sauce over chicken, scatter scallions on top, and serve immediately.

Mustard and Cream Sauce with Endive and Caraway

enough for 4 servings

1 medium head endive, cut diagonally into 1/4-inch slices
2 medium shallots, minced
2 tablespoons cider vinegar
1 teaspoon caraway seeds
1/2 cup canned low-sodium chicken broth
1/2 cup heavy cream
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
Salt and ground black pepper

Follow Master Recipe for Sautéed

Chicken Breast Cutlets. Without draining fat, return skillet to medium heat; add endive and shallots; sauté until softened and lightly browned, 3 to 4 minutes. Add vinegar and bring to boil, scraping up browned bits from bottom of skillet with wooden spoon. Add caraway seeds, broth, and cream; increase heat to medium-high and boil, stirring occasionally, until slightly thickened and reduced to generous $^{1}/_{2}$ cup, about 5 minutes. Stir in mustard and season to taste with salt and pepper. Pour sauce over chicken and serve immediately.

Peach Salsa

enough for 4 servings

2 small peaches or nectarines, cut into small dice

$^1/_2$ large cucumber, peeled, seeded, and cut into small dice (about $^2/_3$ cup)

1 plum tomato, seeded and cut into small dice

2 tablespoons chopped red onion

1 jalapeno chile, stemmed, seeded, and minced

4 teaspoons lime juice

Salt

1 cup canned low-sodium

chicken broth

2 teaspoons lemon juice (or additional lime juice)

1. Mix peaches, cucumber, tomato, onion, chile, and lime juice in medium bowl. (Can cover and refrigerate up to 24 hours.) Before serving, season salsa with $^1/_4$ teaspoon salt or to taste; set aside at room temperature and follow Master Recipe for Sautéed Chicken Breast Cutlets.

2. Pour off any remaining chicken fat, set skillet over high heat; add broth and boil until it reduces to $^1/_3$ cup, scraping up browned bits from pan bottom. Add any

accumulated chicken juices and reduce sauce to previous consistency; stir in lemon juice. Pour sauce over chicken. Spoon salsa alongside chicken and serve immediately.

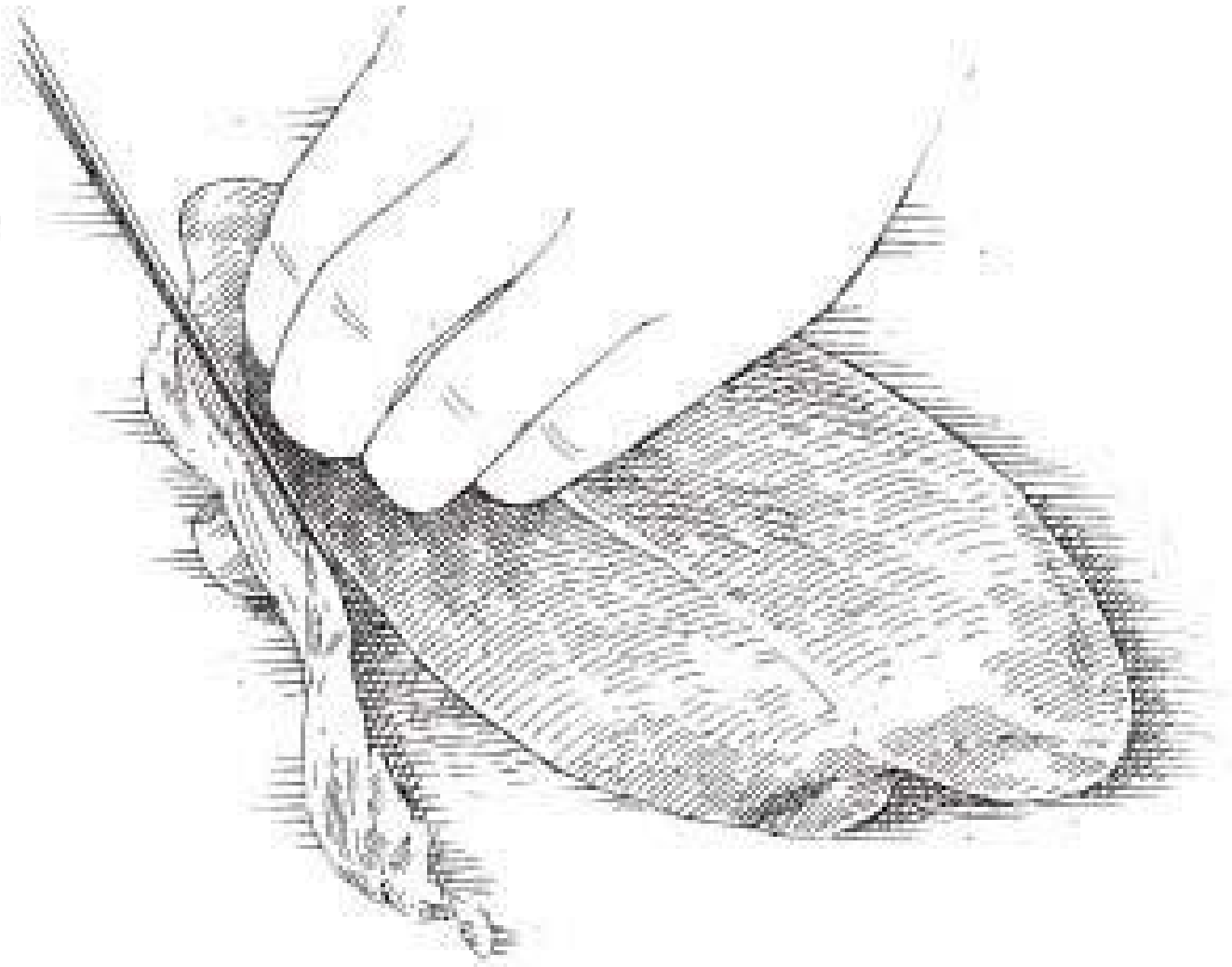

Figure 1.

Lay each cutlet tenderloin-side down and smooth the top with your fingers. Any fat will slide to the periphery, where it can be trimmed with a knife.

Figure 2.

To remove the tough, white tendon, turn the cutlet tenderloin-side up and peel back the thick half of the tenderloin so it lies top down on the work surface. Use the point of a paring knife to cut around the tip of the tendon to expose it, then scrape the tendon

free with the knife.

Figure 3.

When flouring, make sure that the tenderloin is tucked beneath and fused to the main portion of the breast.

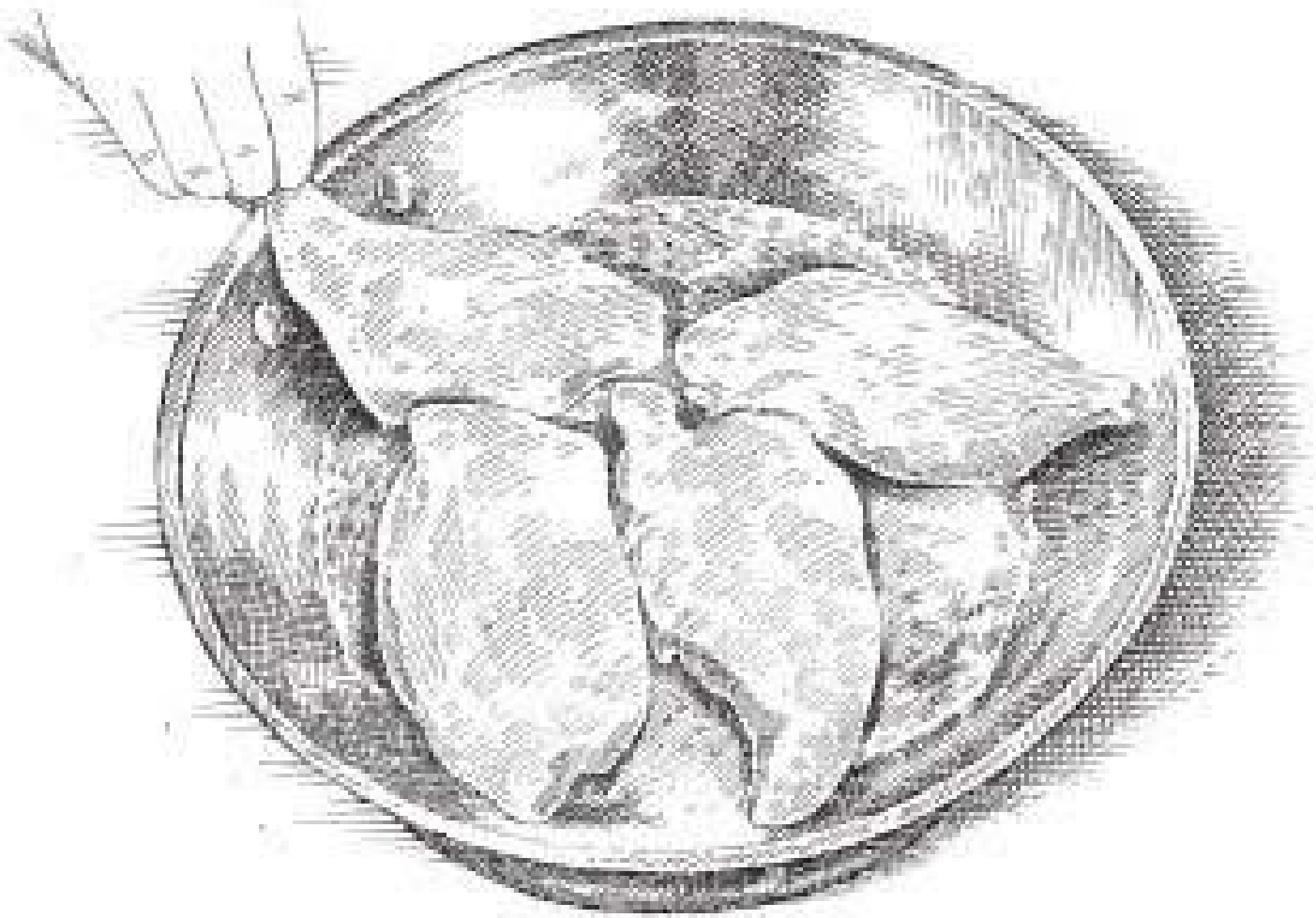

Figure 4.

To avoid being splashed with hot fat, lay the cutlets into the pan thick side first and hang onto the tapered end until the whole cutlet is in the pan. The tapered ends of the cutlets should be at the edges of the pan, where the heat is less

intense.

Master Recipe

Sautéed Breaded Chicken Cutlets

serves four

NOTE: *If you can buy thin cutlets (no thicker than $^{1}/_{2}$ inch), skip the pounding step. These thin cutlets can be sliced and served over a bed of greens or served in a sandwich roll. Unlike regular sautéed cutlets, breaded cutlets are delicious at room temperature and can be packed for picnics.*

1 large egg

1 tablespoon water

1 cup bread crumbs, preferably homemade (see Use Homemade Crumbs)

1/4 cup all-purpose flour

4 chicken breast cutlets (1 1/2 pounds), trimmed (see figure 1), tendons removed (see figure 2), rinsed, and thoroughly dried

Salt and ground black pepper

3 tablespoons vegetable oil

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Whisk egg with water in small, flat bowl. Measure bread crumbs and flour

onto separate plates or pie tins.

2. Pound cutlets to thickness of $^1/_2$ inch (see figure 5). Season cutlets with salt and pepper to taste, then dredge them one at time in flour, knocking off excess. Using tongs, dip each cutlet in egg wash, letting excess drip off (see figure 6), then place in pan with crumbs. Press crumbs lightly onto cutlets with fingertips to ensure that they adhere to surface of cutlet (see figure 7). Transfer breaded cutlets to baking rack to dry for 5 minutes (see figure 8).

3. Heat heavy-bottomed 12-inch skillet

over medium-high heat until hot, about 2 minutes. Add oil and heat briefly, just until it shimmers. Lay cutlets in skillet, tenderloin side down and tapered ends pointing out (see figure 4).

4. Maintain medium-high heat, so fat sizzles but does not smoke, and sauté cutlets until golden brown and crisp on one side, about 3 minutes. Check underside of cutlets once or twice to make sure they're not coloring too quickly. If they look very brown, lower heat slightly. Turn cutlets with tongs (a fork will pierce meat); lower heat to medium and cook on other side until meat feels firm when pressed, about 3

minutes. Serve immediately or transfer cutlets to plate in 200-degree oven to keep warm. Serve warm or at room temperature. (Cutlets may be refrigerated for 1 day. Bring to room temperature before serving.)

VARIATIONS:

Sautéed Breaded Chicken Cutlets with Lemon and Herbs

Follow Master Recipe (Sautéed Breaded Chicken Cutlets), replacing water in egg mixture with equal amount of lemon juice and adding 1 tablespoon chopped fresh dill, tarragon, oregano, or

thyme to bread crumbs.

Sautéed Breaded Chicken Cutlets with Parmesan (Chicken Milanese)

Follow Master Recipe (Sautéed Breaded Chicken Cutlets), reducing bread crumbs to $^{3}/_{4}$ cup and combining crumbs with $^{1}/_{4}$ cup grated Parmesan cheese. Serve with lemon wedges.

Sautéed Breaded Chicken Cutlets with Cornmeal Crust

Follow Master Recipe (Sautéed Breaded Chicken Cutlets), reducing

bread crumbs to $^{1}/_{4}$ cup and combining crumbs with $^{1}/_{4}$ cup yellow cornmeal. For a spicy coating, add cayenne pepper to taste to cornmeal-bread crumb mixture.

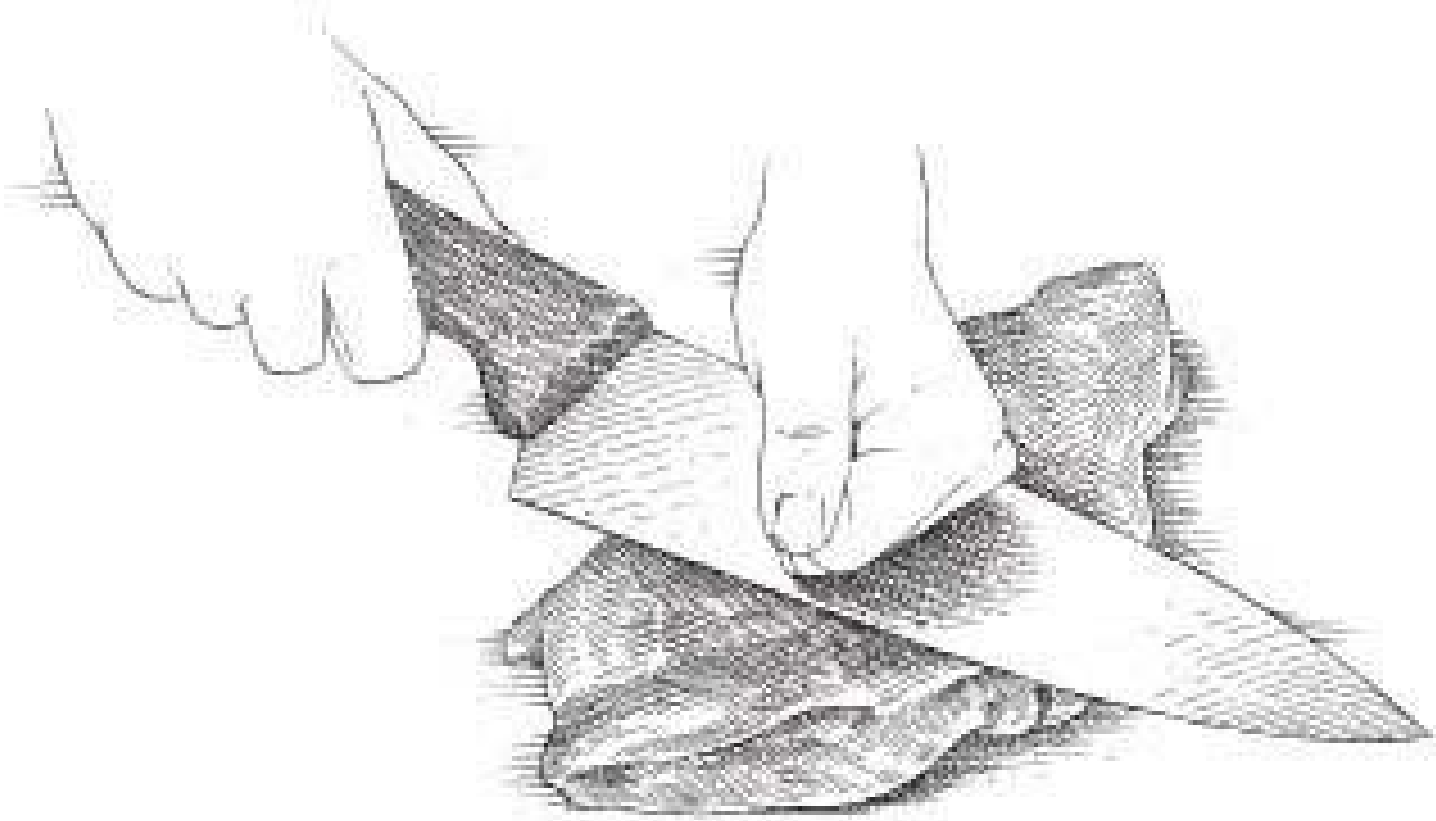

Figure 5.

Chicken cutlets that are to be breaded should be $^{1}/_{2}$ inch thick or less. The coating on thicker cutlets will burn before the cutlet cooks through. If you have one, use a heavy-duty meat pounder or smooth-sided mallet. If not, use an empty wine bottle or the flat side

of a chef's knife to flatten the chicken. Start by removing excess fat and the tendon. Place the cutlets, tenderloin-side down, on a cutting board. Lay the side of a large chef's knife on the breast and pound with your fist to flatten the cutlet to the desired thickness.

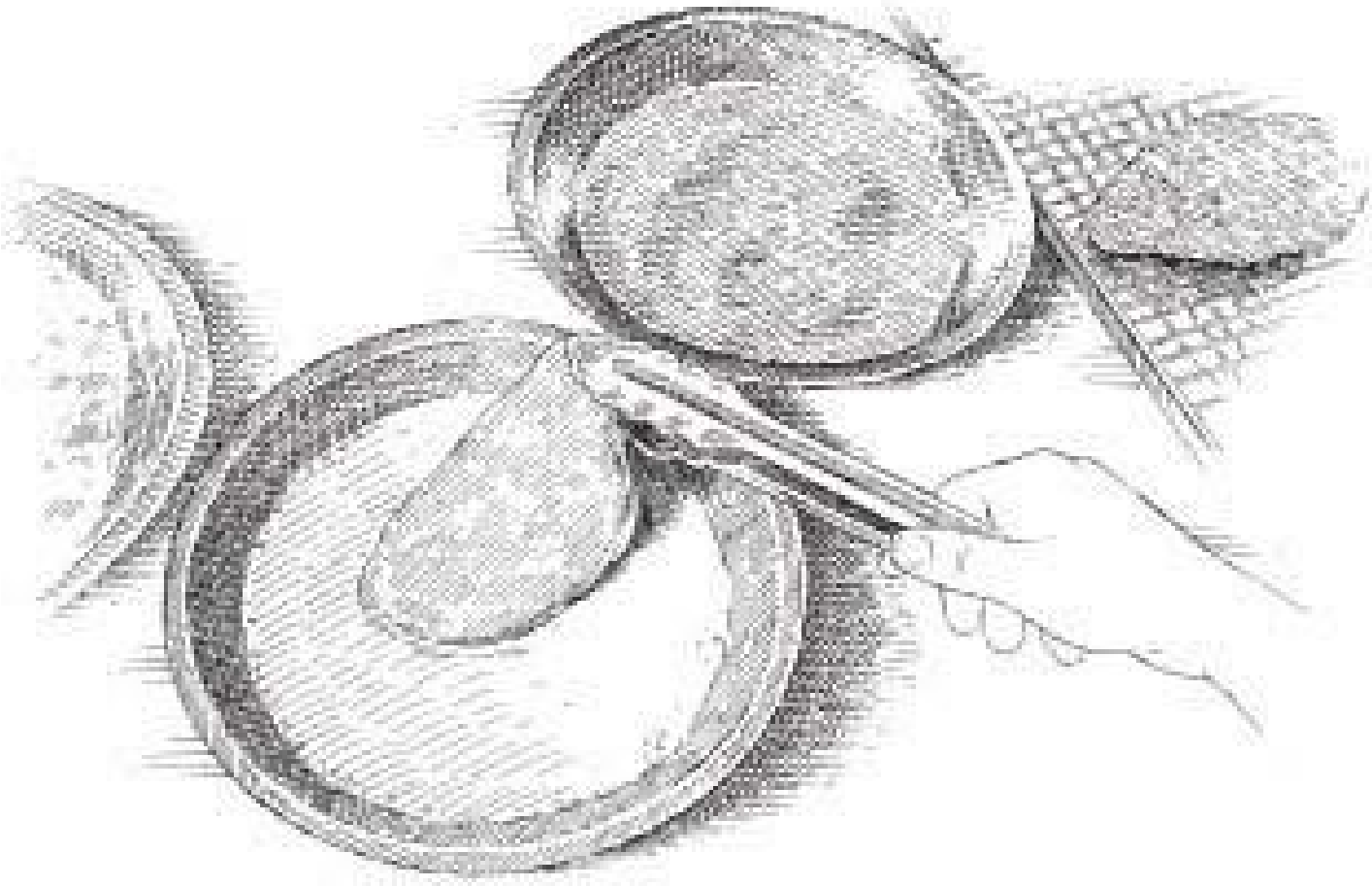

Figure 6.

We bread all chicken, veal, and turkey cutlets as well as fish fillets according to this process. To avoid breading your fingers, use a pair of tongs to dip each cutlet in the egg wash.

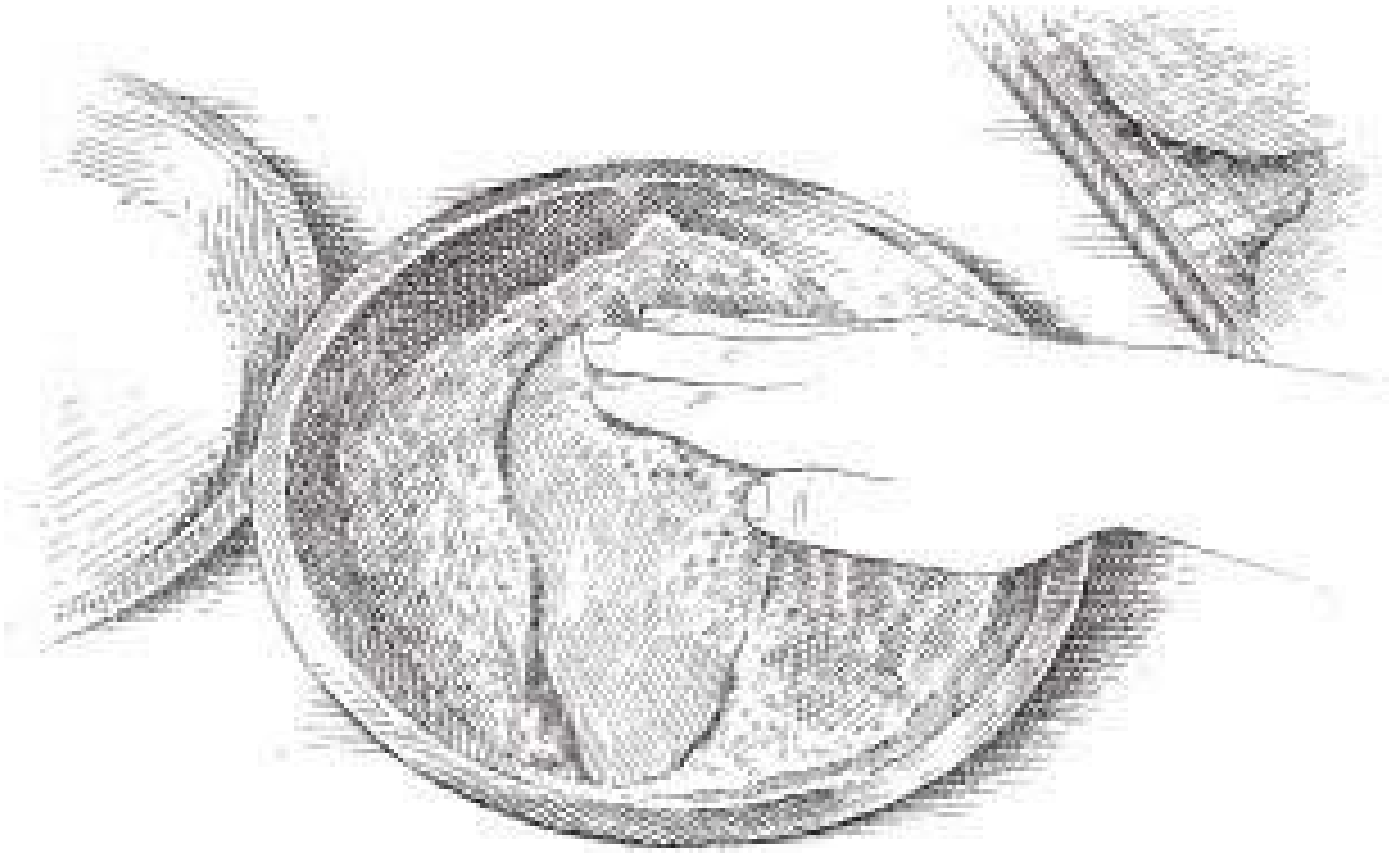

Figure 7.

Transfer the cutlets or fillets to a pie plate with the bread crumbs or cornmeal. Press crumbs or cornmeal lightly onto cutlets or fillets with fingertips to ensure that the crumbs adhere to the surface of the food.

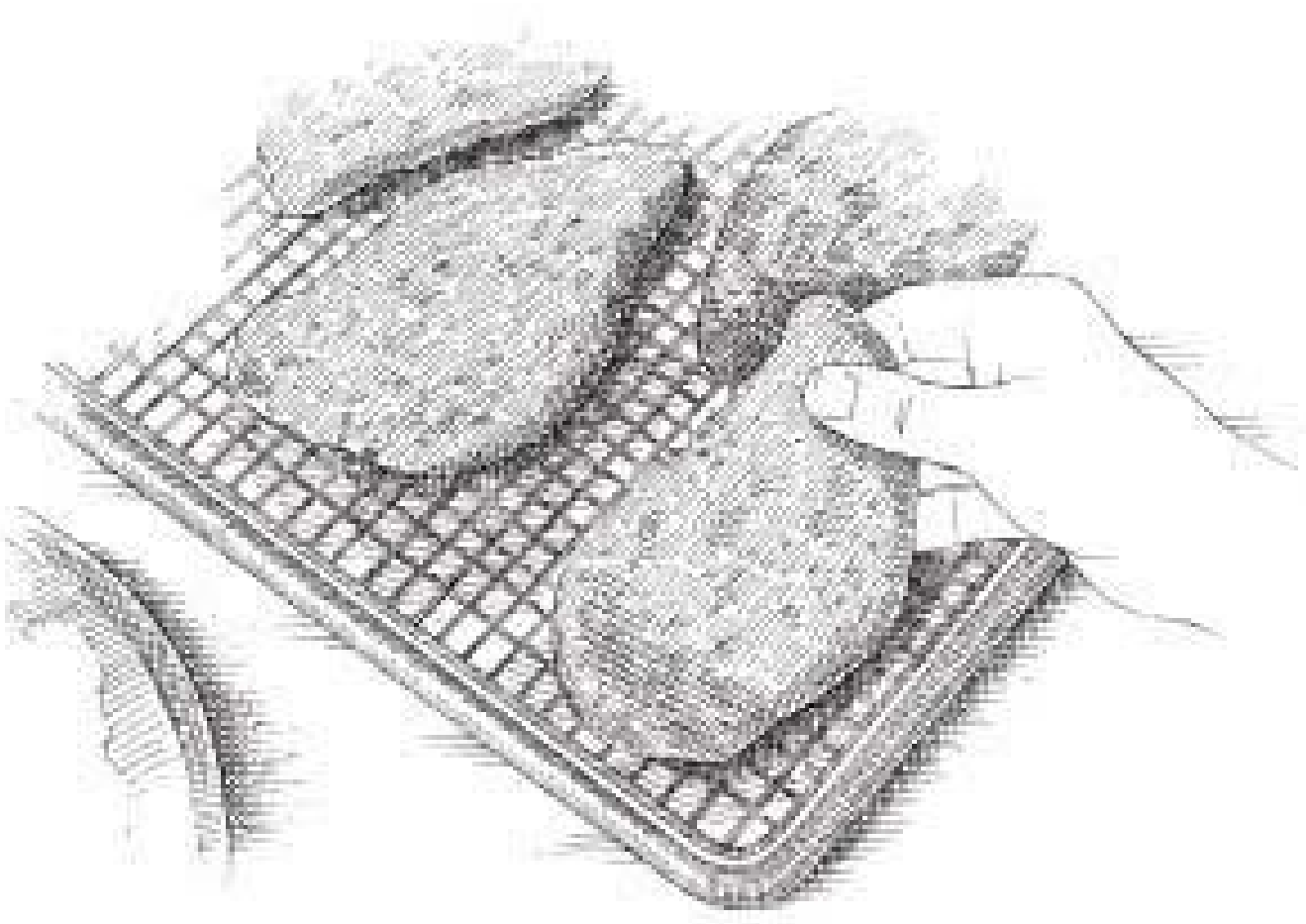

Figure 8.

Transfer the breaded cutlets to a baking rack and allow them to dry for 5 minutes. This drying time stabilizes the breading just enough so that it can be sautéed without sticking to the pan or falling off. Breaded chicken,

turkey, and veal cutlets should be handled this way; breaded fish fillets should be cooked as soon as they are breaded.

TURKEY AND VEAL CUTLETS

ALTHOUGH YOU MAY BE TEMPTED TO COOK turkey cutlets the same way you cook chicken cutlets—don't. Turkey cutlets are much leaner and, more important, much thinner. In our tests, we found that they present the same challenges as veal cutlets.

The biggest risk when preparing ultralean, superthin turkey or veal cutlets is overcooking. Misjudge the timing by a minute or two and this delicate meat can resemble shoe leather. The other major

issue is browning. We wondered if turkey and veal cutlets could be cooked in such a way as to promote the development of a crust, one of our favorite things about sautéed chicken cutlets. Could we get these thin cutlets to brown before they overcooked?

On the plus side, there are some factors that make turkey and veal cutlets remarkably easy to prepare. Unlike chicken breasts, these cutlets come in an even thickness, usually about one-quarter inch. There are no tendons or floppy tenderloins to contend with (turkey cutlets are breast slices, not the entire breast half, as is the case with chicken cutlets), and there's no chance that part of the cutlet will overcook

while part remains bloody. Also, because the cutlets are so thin, they are a lot less messy to prepare. The fat does not have time to smoke and splatter.

We decided to start our testing with turkey and then see how the final results would work with veal. We began by testing the role of flour. We sautéed two batches of cutlets—one seasoned with just salt and pepper, the other seasoned and then lightly coated on both sides with flour. Although the internal texture of both batches was similar, the exterior was quite different. The floured cutlets developed a light brown crust in places, making a pleasing contrast with the tender, white interior meat. The

unfloured cutlets were less flavorful (browning adds flavor), and we missed the crunch added by a nicely browned exterior.

The timing proved remarkably simple—two minutes on the first side and another minute or two on the second. Once the meat feels firm, take the turkey out of the pan. Use tongs to turn the meat and remove it from the pan. Pricking the meat with a fork can cause juices to escape.

Although most poultry companies put four 4-ounce cutlets in a package and claim that this amount serves four, we find it a bit skimpy. Six cutlets is a more realistic amount for four people. (Serve each person a whole cutlet and cut the

remaining two cutlets in half after cooking to yield four more smaller pieces.)

We discovered that veal cutlets can be cooked exactly the same way as turkey cutlets. However, we did encounter some bumps along the road. Most supermarket veal cutlets are improperly butchered, and, as a result, they buckle in the pan and will not brown.

Veal cutlets should be cut from the top round (a cut from the upper portion of the leg). A veal cutlet is a single piece of meat without any muscle separations. When butchered properly, it is cut against the grain so that the surface is perfectly smooth. Butchering the meat

against the grain makes the veal especially tender, and its smooth surface permits even browning.

We found that many markets sell cutlets from the shoulder or other parts of the leg. These cutlets are cut with the grain (the surface appears bumpy, indicating the cutlet contains a cross-section of several muscles). This irregular surface buckles when the cutlet is placed in a hot skillet and thus the cutlet will not brown or cook evenly. If you are going to spend the money on veal, we suggest going to a butcher and getting the right cutlets (see figure 9) or slicing the cutlets from the top round yourself (see figures 10 and 11).

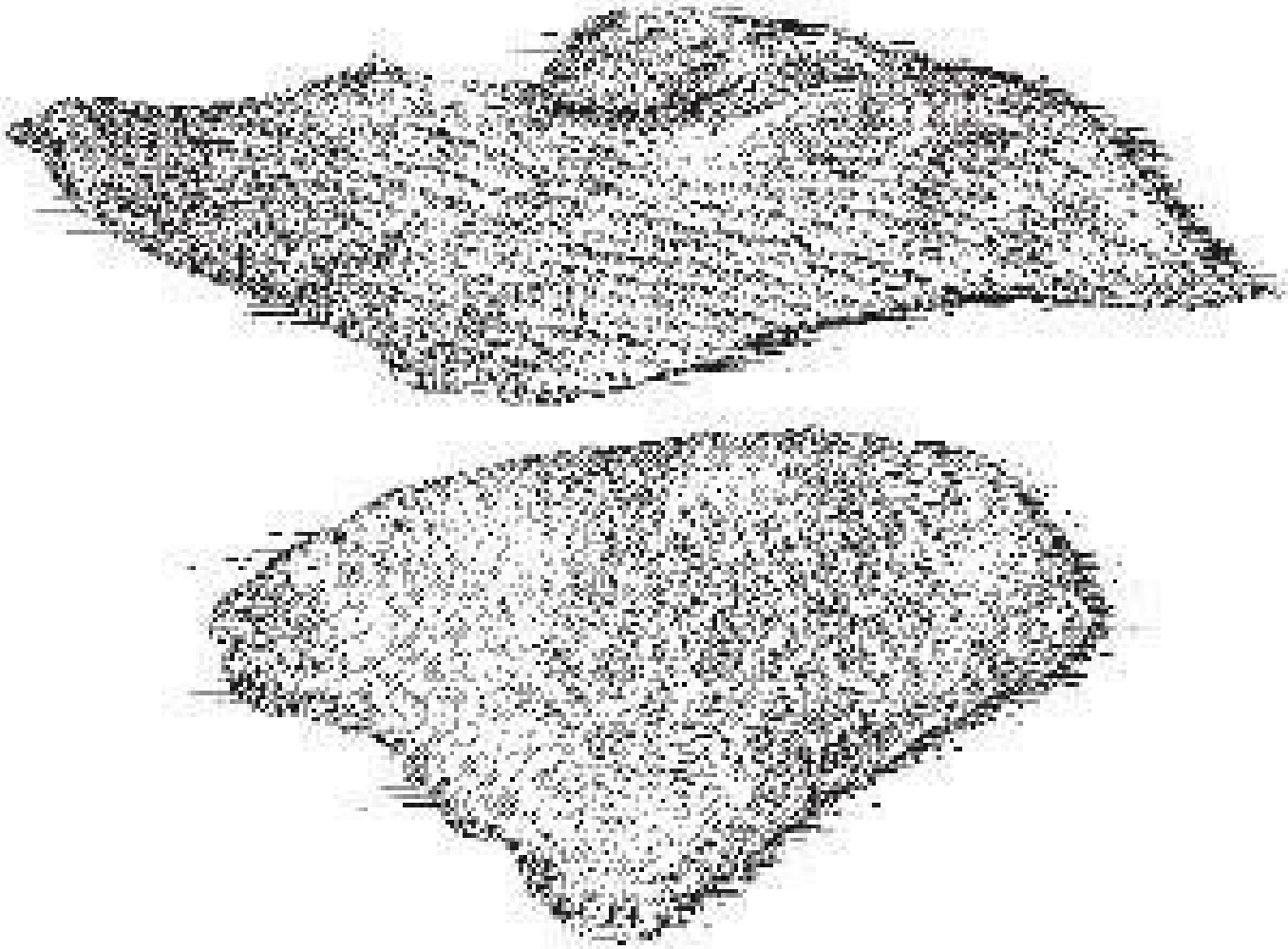

Figure 9.

Veal cutlets should be cut from the top round. Most supermarkets use the leg or sirloin and do not butcher the meat properly—it is cut with the grain, not against the grain, as is best. When shopping, look for cutlets in which no linear

striation is evident. The linear striation (in cutlet on top) is an indication that the veal has been cut with the grain and will be tough. Instead, the cutlets should have a smooth surface (like cutlet on bottom) in which no lines are evident.

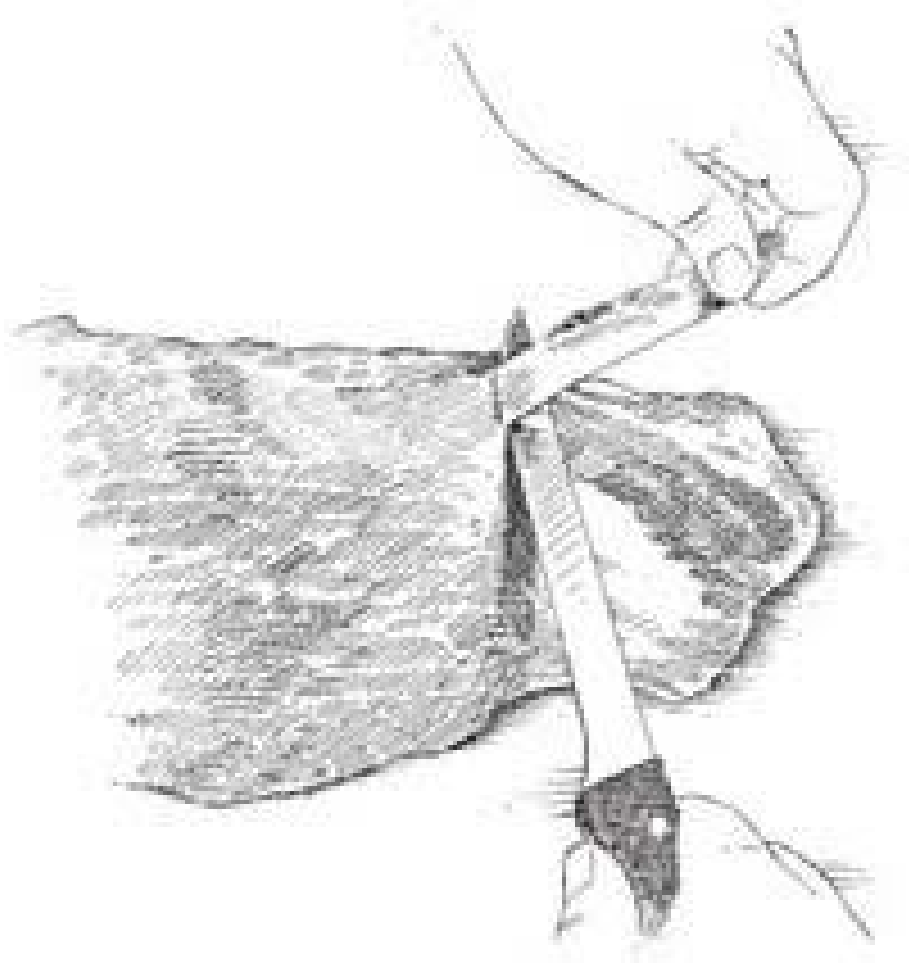

Figure 10.

To make your own cutlets from a piece of top round, start by removing the silver skin (the thin white membrane that covers the meat in places) with a boning knife.

Figure 11.

Once the silver skin has been trimmed, use a long nonflexible slicing knife to cut slices—on the bias against the grain—that are between one-quarter and one-half inch thick.

Master Recipe

Sautéed Turkey or Veal Cutlets

serves four

NOTE: *The timing for turkey and veal cutlets is the same. Turkey and veal are fairly bland, so they both match well with aggressively flavored sauces.*

6 turkey or veal cutlets (about $1^1/_2$ pounds), rinsed and thoroughly dried

Salt and ground black

pepper

1/2 cup all-purpose flour

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 200 degrees. Place a plate in oven for keeping cooked cutlets warm while you make one of the pan sauces.

2. Season both sides of cutlets with salt and pepper to taste. Measure flour onto a plate or pie tin. Working with one cutlet at a time, dredge in flour and shake to remove excess.

3. Heat heavy-bottomed 12-inch skillet over high heat until hot, about 4 minutes. Add oil and heat briefly until it shimmers. Lay cutlets in pan. Adjust heat to medium-high (fat should sizzle but not smoke) and sauté cutlets, not moving them until well browned, about 2 minutes. Turn cutlets with tongs and sauté until meat feels firm when pressed, about $1^{1}/_{2}$ minutes. Remove pan from heat and transfer cutlets to warm oven. Continue with one of the variations that follows.

PAN SAUCES:

Marsala Sauce

enough for 4 servings

1 large shallot, minced
12 ounces sliced button mushrooms
1 cup dry Marsala
3 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
2 teaspoons chopped fresh parsley leaves
Salt and ground black pepper

Follow Master Recipe for Sautéed Turkey or Veal Cutlets. Without discarding fat, set skillet over low heat.

Add shallot; sauté until softened, about 30 seconds. Increase heat to medium-high, add mushrooms, and sauté until slightly softened, about 30 seconds. Increase heat to high, add Marsala, and scrape skillet bottom with wooden spoon to loosen browned bits. Boil until liquid reduces to about $^{1}/_{3}$ cup, 4 to 5 minutes. Add any accumulated meat juices; reduce sauce again to $^{1}/_{3}$ cup. Off heat, and swirl in softened butter until it melts and thickens sauce. Add parsley and season with salt and pepper to taste. Spoon sauce over cutlets and serve immediately.

Balsamic and Rosemary Sauce

enough for 4 servings

2 medium garlic cloves, minced

1/2 cup balsamic vinegar

1/2 cup dry red wine

1 teaspoon sugar

3 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

1 teaspoon chopped fresh rosemary

Salt and ground black pepper

Follow Master Recipe for Sautéed Turkey or Veal Cutlets. Without

discarding fat, set skillet over low heat. Add garlic; sauté until fragrant, about 15 seconds. Increase heat to high, add vinegar, wine, and sugar and scrape skillet bottom with wooden spoon to loosen browned bits. Boil until liquid reduces to about $^{1}/_{3}$ cup. Add any accumulated meat juices; reduce sauce again to $^{1}/_{3}$ cup. Off heat, and swirl in softened butter until it melts and thickens sauce. Add rosemary and season with salt and pepper to taste. Spoon sauce over cutlets and serve immediately.

Tomato, Pancetta, and Caper Sauce

enough for 4 servings

NOTE: *Place diced pancetta (unsmoked Italian bacon) in an empty skillet set over medium-low heat and cook slowly until fat has rendered and pancetta is crisp, about 10 minutes. Transfer pancetta to plate lined with paper towels and reserve until needed.*

1 medium garlic clove, minced
1 cup white wine
$^1/_2$ cup canned diced tomatoes, drained

2 strips lemon peel, about 1 inch long

1 tablespoon capers, rinsed

3 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

2 teaspoons chopped fresh oregano leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

2 ounces finely diced pancetta, sautéed until crisp

Follow Master Recipe for Sautéed Turkey or Veal Cutlets. Without discarding fat, set skillet over low heat. Add garlic; sauté until fragrant, about 15 seconds. Increase heat to high and add wine, tomatoes, lemon peel, and capers

and boil until liquid reduces to about $^{1}/_{3}$ cup, 4 to 5 minutes, scraping pan bottom with wooden spoon to dislodge browned bits. Add any accumulated meat juices; reduce sauce again to $^{1}/_{3}$ cup. Remove lemon peel. Off heat, and swirl in softened butter until it melts and thickens sauce. Add oregano and season with salt and pepper to taste. Spoon sauce over cutlets, sprinkle with pancetta, and serve immediately.

Olive, Anchovy, and Orange Sauce

enough for 4 servings

2 anchovy fillets, minced
1 medium garlic clove, minced
1 teaspoon grated orange zest
1/2 cup sweet vermouth
1/2 cup canned low-sodium chicken broth
1/8 cup pitted and halved oil-cured black olives
3 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
2 teaspoons fresh chopped basil leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

Follow Master Recipe for Sautéed Turkey or Veal Cutlets. Without discarding fat, set skillet over low heat. Add anchovies, garlic, and orange zest; sauté until fragrant, about 15 seconds. Increase heat to high, add vermouth and broth, and boil to reduce to about $^{1}/_{3}$ cup, 4 to 5 minutes, scraping pan bottom with wooden spoon to loosen browned bits. Add any accumulated meat juices and reduce sauce again to $^{1}/_{3}$ cup. Off heat, and swirl in softened butter until it melts and thickens sauce. Add basil and season with salt and pepper to taste. Spoon sauce over cutlets and serve

immediately.

Master Recipe

Sautéed Breaded Turkey or Veal Cutlets

serves four

NOTE: *Breaded cutlets need more oil than plain cutlets to brown properly (in this case, $^{1}/_{4}$ cup) to brown properly. To prevent the coating from burning, keep heat at medium-high. See figures 6, 7 and 8, for more information on breading cutlets. Serve with lemon wedges if you like.*

2 large eggs

1 tablespoon water

2 cups bread crumbs, preferably homemade (see Use Homemade Crumbs)

1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley leaves

3/4 cup all-purpose flour

Salt and ground black pepper

6 turkey or veal cutlets (about 1 1/2 pounds), rinsed and thoroughly dried

1/4 cup vegetable oil

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Whisk egg with water in a small, flat

bowl. Mix bread crumbs and parsley together in pie tin. Measure flour onto a plate or separate pie tin.

2. Season both sides of cutlets with salt and pepper to taste. Working with one cutlet at a time, dredge in flour and shake to remove excess. Using tongs, dip each cutlet into egg wash, letting excess drip off, then place each on bed of crumbs. Press crumbs lightly onto each cutlet with fingertips to ensure that crumbs adhere to surface of meat. Place breaded cutlets on baking rack to dry for 5 minutes.

3. Heat oil in heavy-bottomed 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering, about 2 minutes. Lay cutlets in pan and sauté, not moving them until golden brown, about $2^1/_2$ minutes. Turn cutlets with tongs and sauté until golden brown, about $2^1/_2$ minutes more. Serve immediately.

VARIATION:

Sautéed Breaded Turkey or Veal Cutlets with Parmesan

Follow Master Recipe for Breaded Turkey or Veal Cutlets, reducing bread crumbs to $1^1/_2$ cups and adding $^1/_2$ cup grated Parmesan cheese to bread crumb

mixture.

PORK MEDALLIONS

We started our testing with this basic question: Which part of the pig makes the most sense for a quick weeknight sauté? The two obvious candidates were boneless pork chops and the tenderloin, which we would have to cut into medallions.

We tried a variety of chops, from the loin, rib, and sirloin. While boneless center rib and center loin chops were deemed adequate, we felt that the chops tasted better when cooked with the bone in. In addition, single chops from the

loin are cut very thin, and we found that they often dried out when sautéed. Double-thick chops remained moist in our tests, but only when seared and then placed in the oven to cook through. We moved on to the tenderloin.

The tenderloin is a boneless, torpedo-shaped muscle Nestléd against the rib bones in the loin section, which is roughly equivalent to a position deep inside the midback in a human being. The cut is notable for its remarkable lack of marbling—those ribbons of intramuscular fat that run through meat. While this is a virtue in terms of fat intake, it also presents an obstacle in terms of cooking—that is, the tenderloin is particularly vulnerable to

overcooking, which can lead to dry meat. To protect the tenderloin's characteristic tenderness, we prefer to cook it medium-well, so it is slightly rosy inside. This translates into an internal temperature of 145 to 150 degrees. If you prefer your pork well-done and gray-white throughout, this may not be the cut for you.

We proceeded to cut the tenderloin into one-inch slices and pounded them down to three-quarters of an inch with the flat side of a chef's knife (to increase the surface area for searing). We then sautéed them in a bit of sizzling oil for about one minute per side. At the end, every single slice was seared beautifully

on both sides, and the pan drippings were perfectly caramelized and ready to deglaze for a flavorful, simple sauce. The whole operation, from refrigerator to table, took only 15 minutes. Beneath the seared crust on each slice was juicy, succulent meat that met all our expectations for this supertender cut.

While testing and retesting our chosen method, we came up with a few pointers to help ensure successful sautéing. First, before cutting the medallions, trim the pearlescent membrane, called the silver skin, from the tenderloin. If left on, the silver skin shrinks in the heat of the pan, pulling the meat up and out of the hot fat, thereby inhibiting browning. Second, do not overcook the meat. There should be

just a tinge of pink when you peek into a piece with the tip of a paring knife. The meat will finish cooking as it rests on a plate and you make a pan sauce.

There is one drawback to sautéing a pork tenderloin. Sautéing two batches of medallions, one after the other, in the same pan caused the pan drippings to burn. We found it best to sauté just one large batch of medallions (the pan will be crowded and so must be kept extremely hot).

One tenderloin yields enough medallions for three servings. We have squeezed enough medallions for six servings (from two tenderloins) into one large skillet. If you prefer, cook enough

medallions for four people and make a full batch of sauce. The extra few tablespoons of sauce can be used to moisten potatoes or rice.

Master Recipe

Sautéed Pork Tenderloin Medallions

serves six

NOTE: *Blot dry the pork medallions with several sheets of paper towel to remove every drop of moisture before cooking, use a 12-inch skillet, and heat the pan until it is blazing hot. Turn the medallions in roughly the same order that they were added to the pan. The side of the medallion that was seared first will develop the best crust and*

should be presented facing up at the table.

2 boneless pork tenderloins (about 2 pounds total), trimmed of silver skin (see figure 12), cut into 1-inch slices, flattened to $^{3}/_{4}$-inch slices (see figure 13), and blotted dry with paper towels

Salt and ground black pepper

2 teaspoons vegetable oil

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat heavy-bottomed 12-inch skillet over high heat until very hot, about 4 minutes. While skillet is heating, season

medallions with salt and pepper to taste.

2. Add oil to pan and swirl to coat bottom. Lay medallions in pan and sauté, not moving them until browned, about 2 minutes. Turn meat with tongs; sauté until firm to the touch, about $1^{1}/_{2}$ minutes. Remove pan from heat, transfer cutlets to a plate, let rest for 5 minutes, then serve immediately.

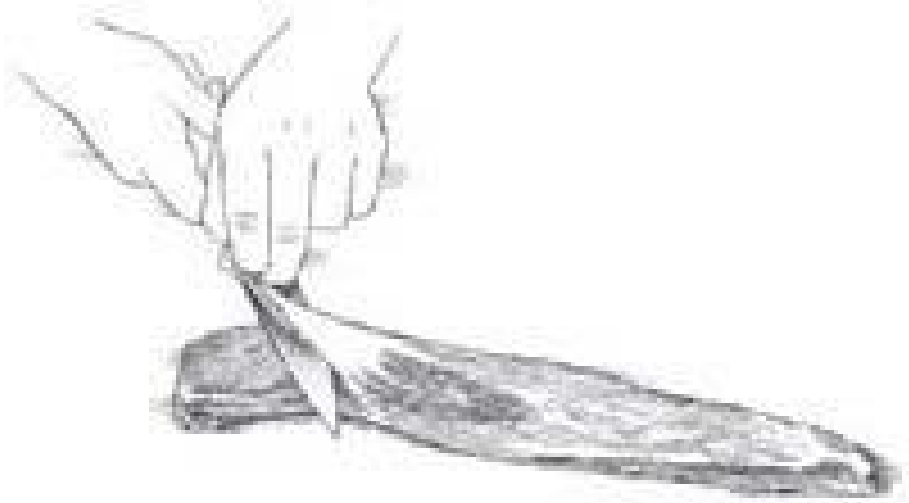

Figure 12.

To remove the silver skin from a pork tenderloin, slip a paring knife between the silver skin and the muscle fibers. Angle the knife upward slightly and use a gentle back-and-forth sawing action.

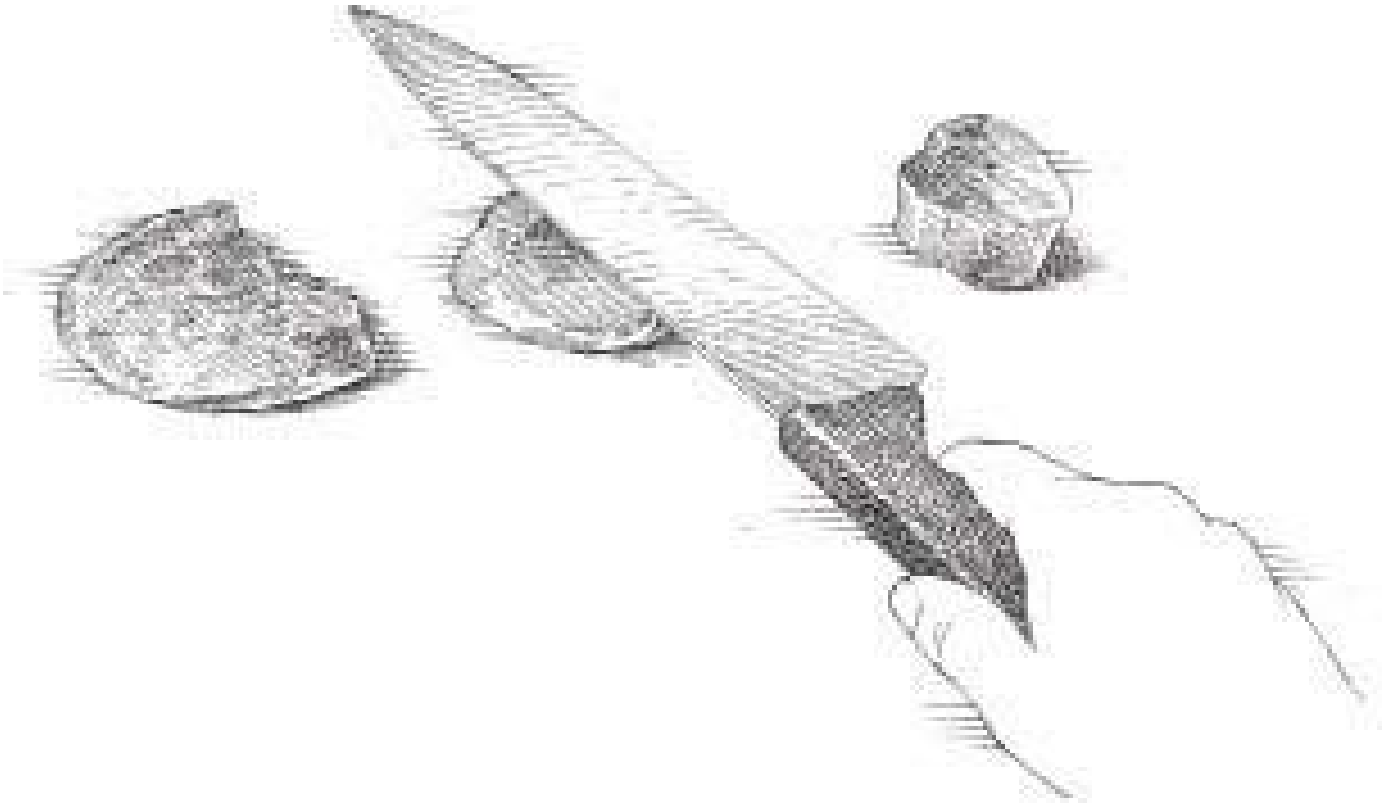

Figure 13.

A few smacks with the flat side of a chef's knife should flatten the 1-inch slices to a $^{3}/_{4}$-inch thickness.

PAN SAUCES:

Mustard and Tarragon Sauce

enough for 6 servings

1 medium shallot, minced (about 2 tablespoons)
1/8 cup white wine
1/2 cup canned low-sodium chicken broth
2 tablespoons heavy cream
1 tablespoon Dijon or country mustard
2 teaspoons lemon juice
3 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

2 teaspoons chopped fresh tarragon leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

Follow Master Recipe for Sautéed Pork Tenderloin Medallions. Without discarding fat, set skillet over low heat. Add shallot and sauté until softened slightly, about 30 seconds. Increase heat to high and add wine, broth, and cream, scraping pan bottom with wooden spoon to dislodge browned bits. Boil until liquid reduces to about $^{1}/_{3}$ cup, 4 to 5 minutes. Add any accumulated meat juices; reduce again to $^{1}/_{3}$ cup. Off heat, swirl in mustard and lemon juice; swirl in softened butter until it melts and

thickens sauce. Add tarragon and season with salt and pepper to taste. Spoon sauce over pork and serve immediately.

Asian-Flavored Sauce with Chile and Star Anise

enough for 6 servings

1/8 cup dry sherry

2 1/2 tablespoons rice wine vinegar

2 1/2 tablespoons soy sauce

3 tablespoons honey

1 tablespoon oyster sauce

2 teaspoons cornstarch

1 teaspoon hot red pepper flakes

2 pods star anise

1 teaspoon Asian sesame oil

1 tablespoon minced fresh

gingerroot
1 medium garlic clove, minced

Whisk together sherry, vinegar, soy sauce, honey, oyster sauce, and cornstarch in small bowl; stir in pepper flakes and star anise. Set aside. Follow Master Recipe for Sautéed Pork Tenderloin Medallions. Without discarding fat, set skillet over low heat. Add sesame oil, ginger, and garlic. Cook until fragrant, about 15 seconds. Increase heat to medium and add sherry mixture, scraping pan bottom with wooden spoon to loosen browned bits; simmer until slightly thickened, about 1 minute. Discard star anise pods before serving. Spoon sauce over pork and serve

immediately.

Port Sauce with Dried Cherries and Rosemary

enough for 6 servings

1/8 cup port

1/2 cup dried cherries

1/8 cup canned low-sodium chicken broth

3 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

2 teaspoons minced fresh rosemary leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

Follow Master Recipe for Sautéed Pork Tenderloin Medallions. Without

discarding fat, set skillet over high heat. Add port, cherries, and broth. Boil, scraping pan bottom with wooden spatula to loosen browned bits, until liquid reduces to about $^{1}/_{3}$ cup, 4 to 5 minutes. Add any accumulated pork juices; reduce again to $^{1}/_{3}$ cup. Off heat, swirl in butter until it melts and thickens sauce. Add rosemary and season with salt and pepper to taste. Spoon sauce over pork and serve immediately.

STEAK

Our ideal steak is one cooked in such a way that the entire surface caramelizes and forms a rich, thick crust —in other words, it is grilled. The intense heat of the grill makes it easy to obtain such a crust. But what about when the weather makes grilling impractical? We wanted to get the same result from sautéing.

This task turned out to be harder than we imagined. Sometimes we did get the great crust we were looking for, but sometimes we didn't. We needed to

figure out which cuts of steak and what cooking technique were best suited to sautéing.

It quickly became clear that boneless steaks are a must when sautéing. The bone in a T-bone or porterhouse steak protrudes slightly above the meat. When grilling, this slightly thicker bone makes no difference in cooking because the meat can sag slightly between the open wrungs on the rack. When sautéing, this does not happen. The bone remains in contact with the pan but the meat remains slightly elevated above the solid pan surface. The result is poor browning.

A boneless steak comes into direct contact with the pan and browns much more easily. We found that our favorite

steaks on the grill—the strip and the rib (see figure 14)—worked equally well in a hot skillet as long as we chose boneless versions. We wondered, though, if any cheaper cuts would work. On the grill, we like to cook shoulder steak cut for London broil and flank steak. However, these long pieces of meat are not suited to sautéing—they don't fit in a round skillet. We needed smaller, individual steaks that looked like the strip or rib steak.

We tested top and bottom round, the cuts many sources suggest for cooks on a budget. The top round was tough and bland. The bottom round had a better flavor, but the texture was equally tough.

Our butcher recommended top sirloin as well as boneless top butt, or rump, steaks. Although these steaks cost about as much as the round, we found them to be more flavorful and less chewy. At half the price of rib-eye and strip steak, the top sirloin offers an excellent value (see figure 15).

With our cuts of meat chosen, we started to refine our technique. It was obvious to us from the beginning that the key to browning the steaks was going to be preheating the pan, so that when the steaks hit, the surface it would be hot enough to sear the meat before it had a chance to overcook. (We also found out the hard way that the steak may stick if the pan isn't well heated, leaving the

delicious seared flavor in the pan, not the steak.)

We sautéed steaks in two tablespoons, one tablespoon, two teaspoons, and one teaspoon of oil. Since all of our preferred cuts of steaks give off some fat as they cook, we found that one teaspoon was adequate and kept the splattering to a minimum.

We wondered if a combination of high and medium heat would deliver the best results—browning the exterior and then allowing the interior to cook through. We found that constant high heat delivers the best-looking and best-tasting crust. Although the interior is a bit underdone when the steak comes out of the pan, a

five-minute rest lets the interior finish cooking and allows the juices to be redistributed evenly throughout the meat.

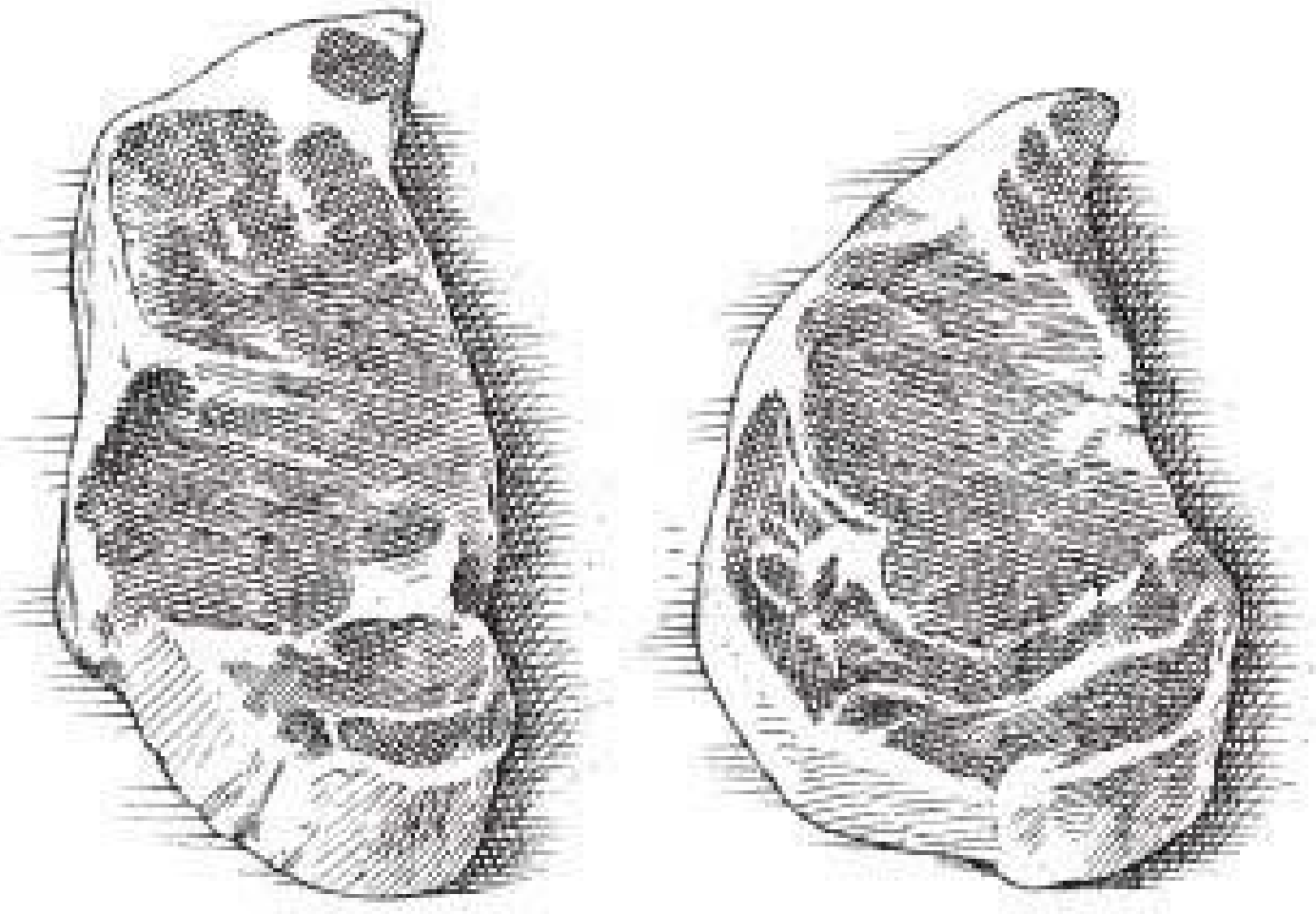

Figure 14.

The finest steaks for sautéing—though costly—are unquestionably the boneless strip steak and boneless rib-eye steak (right). The strip, also called the shell, top loin, or New York strip, is moderately chewy and has a

noticeable grain. The flavor is excellent. The rib eye (also called a rib steak) is very tender and smooth-textured, with a distinctive beefy taste that is robust and rich. There are also pockets of fat in this cut, while the strip steak is a bit leaner.

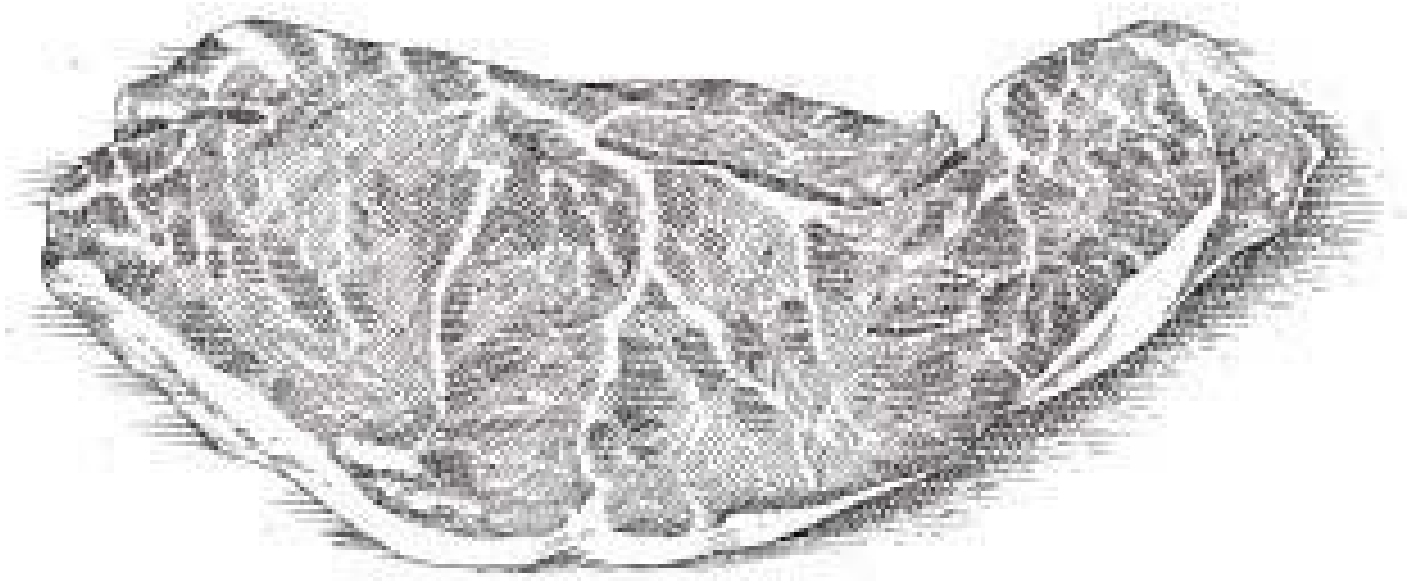

Figure 15.

Our first pick for a delicious, less expensive steak for sautéing is the top sirloin steak, also called sirloin butt, or rump, steak. At about $5.50 per pound, this steak offers excellent flavor and value and is very tender.

Master Recipe

Sautéed Steak

serves four

NOTE: *Our favorite steaks for this recipe are the strip and the rib. If you don't want to pay top dollar, try top sirloin. It will be a bit chewier and not quite as buttery, but still quite good.*

4 boneless 8-ounce beef steaks, 1 to $1^1/_4$ inches thick, thoroughly dried with paper towels

Salt and ground black

pepper

1 teaspoon vegetable oil

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat heavy-bottomed, 12-inch skillet over high heat until very hot, about 4 minutes. While skillet is heating, season steaks with salt and pepper to taste.

2. Add oil to pan; swirl to coat bottom. Lay steaks in pan and sauté, not moving them until well browned, about 4 minutes. Turn meat with tongs; sauté 3 minutes more for rare, 4 minutes for medium-rare, and 5 minutes for medium. Remove pan from heat and transfer steaks to a plate and let rest 5 minutes,

or while making sauce, then serve immediately. If using compound butter, place a pat of butter on top of each steak and let rest for about 2 minutes, then serve immediately.

PAN SAUCES:

Red Wine Sauce

enough for 4 servings

2 medium shallots, minced
2 teaspoons brown sugar
1/2 cup dry red wine
1/2 cup canned low-sodium chicken broth
1/2 bay leaf
1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
3 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
1 teaspoons chopped fresh thyme leaves
Salt and ground black

pepper

Follow Master Recipe for Sautéed Steak. Without discarding fat, set skillet over low heat. Add shallots and brown sugar and sauté until shallots are softened slightly, about 30 seconds. Increase heat to high and add wine, broth, and bay leaf, scraping pan bottom with wooden spoon to dislodge browned bits. Boil until liquid reduces to about $^1/_3$ cup, 4 to 5 minutes. Add vinegar and any accumulated meat juices; reduce again to $^1/_3$ cup. Off heat, swirl in softened butter until it melts and thickens sauce. Add thyme and season with salt and pepper to taste. Spoon sauce over steaks and serve immediately.

Brandy Peppercorn Sauce

enough for 4 servings

3 tablespoons black peppercorns, very coarsely ground

Salt

2 medium shallots, minced

1/2 cup brandy or cognac

1/2 cup canned low-sodium chicken broth

1/4 cup heavy cream

Pinch ground cloves

3 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

2 teaspoons chopped fresh parsley leaves or chives

1 teaspoon lemon juice

While pan is heating, dry steaks well, press peppercorns into both sides of meat, and sprinkle with salt. Follow Master Recipe for Sautéed Steak. Without discarding fat, set skillet over low heat. Add shallots and sauté until slightly softened, about 30 seconds. Increase heat to high, add brandy, broth, cream, and cloves and boil until liquid reduces to about $^1/_3$ cup, scraping pan bottom with wooden spoon to loosen browned bits. Add any accumulated juices; reduce sauce again to $^1/_3$ cup. Off heat, swirl in softened butter until it melts and thickens sauce. Add parsley or chives and lemon juice and season with

salt to taste. Spoon sauce over steaks and serve immediately.

Steak Diane

enough for 4 servings

2 large shallots, minced

1/2 cup brandy or cognac

1/2 cup canned low-sodium chicken broth

1 tablespoon Dijon mustard

1 tablespoon lemon juice

1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce

3 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

2 teaspoons minced fresh chives

Salt and ground black pepper

Follow Master Recipe for Sautéed Steak. Without discarding fat, set skillet over low heat. Add shallots and sauté until softened slightly, about 30 seconds. Increase heat to high, add brandy and broth and boil until liquid reduces to about $^{1}/_{3}$ cup, scraping pan bottom with wooden spoon to loosen browned bits. Add mustard, lemon juice, and Worcestershire sauce and any accumulated juices; reduce sauce again to $^{1}/_{3}$ cup. Off heat, swirl in softened butter until it melts and thickens sauce. Add chives and season with salt and pepper to taste. Spoon sauce over steaks and serve immediately.

Dried Porcini and Rosemary Sauce

enough for 4 servings

1/2 ounce dried porcini mushrooms
1/2 cup hot water
2 medium garlic cloves, minced
1/8 cup dry vermouth
1/8 cup canned low-sodium chicken broth
3 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
2 teaspoons chopped fresh rosemary
Salt and ground black

pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Soak dried mushrooms in hot water for 30 minutes. Remove mushrooms and cut into 1-inch lengths. Pour remaining liquid through strainer lined with coffee filter or several layers of cheesecloth; reserve liquid.

2. Follow Master Recipe for Sautéed Steak. Without discarding fat, set skillet over low heat. Add garlic and sauté until fragrant, about 15 seconds. Increase heat to high, add porcini and their liquid, vermouth, and broth and boil to reduce to about $^{1}/_{3}$ cup, scraping pan with spoon

to loosen brown bits. Add accumulated juices and reduce again to $^{1}/_{3}$ cup. Off heat, swirl in softened butter until it melts and thickens sauce. Add rosemary and season with salt and pepper to taste. Spoon sauce over steaks and serve immediately.

Compound Butters for Sautéed Steak

enough for 4 steaks

NOTE: *You can double or triple any of these recipes and store extra butter in the freezer. If making a large batch of compound butter, use a standing mixer to combine the ingredients evenly.*

Rosemary-Parmesan Butter

4 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

3 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese

2 teaspoons chopped fresh rosemary

1 small garlic clove, minced

1/8 teaspoon hot red pepper flakes

1/8 teaspoon salt

Roquefort Butter

4 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

3 tablespoons crumbled Roquefort cheese

2 teaspoons minced fresh sage leaves

1 teaspoon minced fresh parsley leaves

1 medium shallot, minced

2 teaspoons port

Pinch ground black pepper

1/8 teaspoon salt

Tapenade Butter

4 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

1 teaspoon minced fresh thyme leaves

1 small garlic clove, minced (about 1 teaspoon)

1/8 teaspoon finely grated orange zest

1/2 anchovy fillet, minced

10 pitted and finely chopped

oil-cured black olives (about 2 tablespoons)

$1^1/_2$ teaspoons brandy

Pinch ground black pepper

$^1/_8$ teaspoon salt

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Beat butter with large fork until light and fluffy. Add remaining ingredients and mix to combine.

2. As shown in figure 16, roll butter into a log about 3 inches long and $1^1/_2$ inches in diameter. Refrigerate until firm, at least 2 hours and up to 3 days. (Butter can be frozen for 2 months. When ready

to use, let soften just until butter can be cut, about 15 minutes.)

3. To use, remove compound butter from refrigerator and slice into 4 pieces just before sautéing steaks. Place one piece on each steak just as it comes out of the pan (see figure 17). Let rest for 2 minutes and serve immediately.

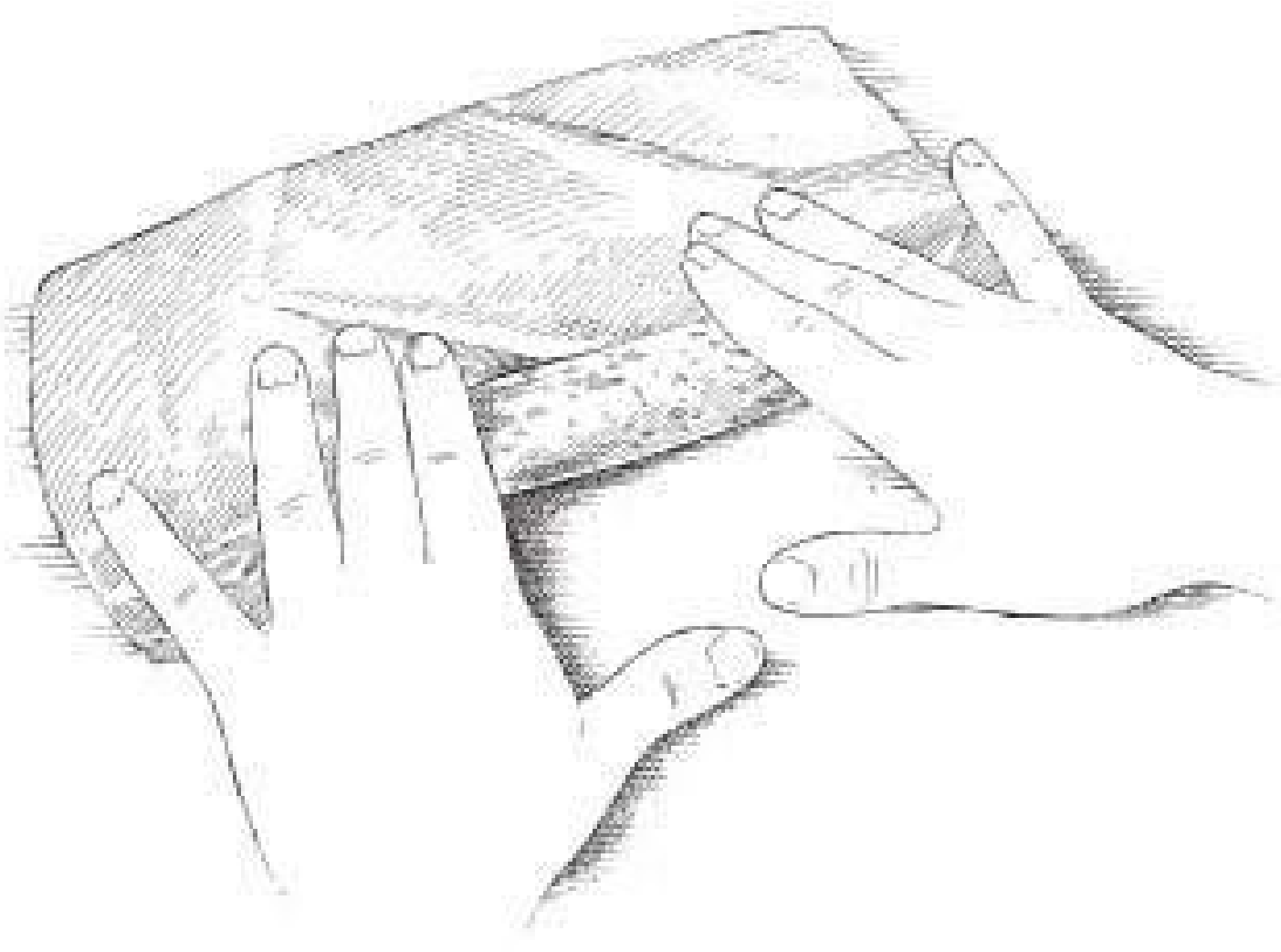

Figure 16.

Compound butters are a great way to add flavor to a cooked steak. Once the ingredients have been combined, place the butter mixture in the center of a piece of plastic wrap. Fold one edge of the plastic

wrap over the butter. Glide your hands back and forth over the butter to shape it into a 3-inch cylinder. Twist the ends of the plastic wrap shut and refrigerate until firm.

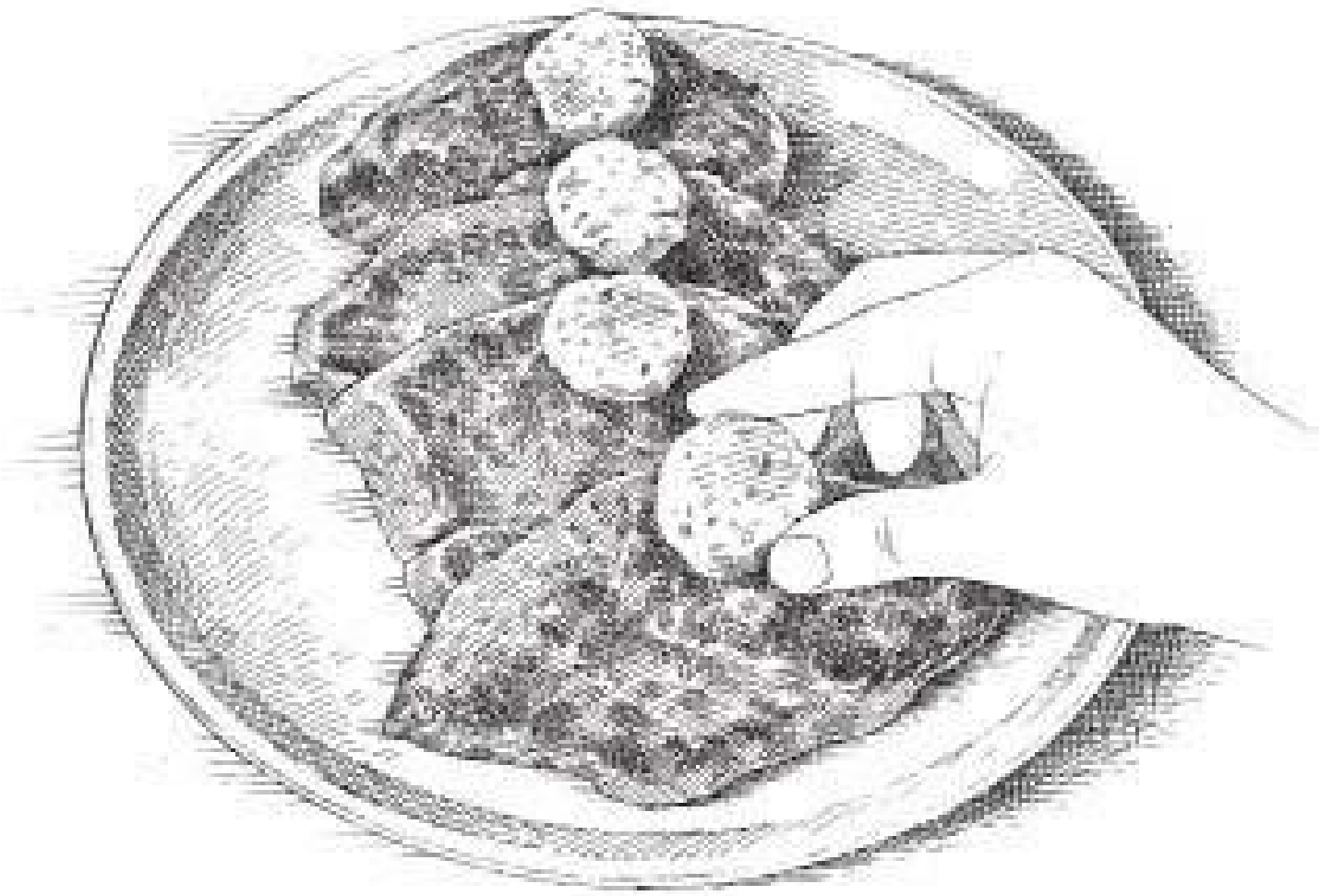

Figure 17.

When ready to use, unwrap the butter and cut it into 4 equal pieces. Place each piece on top of a just-cooked steak.

FISH FILLETS AND STEAKS

We wanted to establish a consis tent method for cooking fish. While most fish must be cooked in a blazing hot pan to promote browning, we quickly realized that a thick salmon fillet with skin on could not be treated like a thin, skinless piece of flounder.

After much testing, we eventually divided boneless fish into three categories: white-fleshed fillets (everything from sole and flounder to cod and snapper), steaks (tuna and

swordfish), and salmon fillets (which have their own unique cooking challenges). We developed a number of sauces that work well with all three classes of fish. The cooking issues, however, are distinct. Here are our findings.

When sautéing very thin fillets, first make sure that your pan can properly accommodate the fish. The fillets should lie flat and uncrowded in the pan. In our testing, if a piece of fish snuck up the cooler, ungreased side of the pan, it stuck and fell apart when flipped over. Because some flat fish fillets can be quite large, it is better to cut them before cooking so they lie flat. Another trick you can use to fit fillets that taper down

to a thin tail and to avoid overcooking the thinner portion is to fold the tail over the main portion of the fillet so the piece is all of the same thickness.

To keep the fillets from sticking, shake the pan occasionally before flipping them. If a fillet does stick, don't scrape it off the bottom of the pan; instead, let it cook a bit longer. We found that most often the fish sticks because it hasn't had a chance to form its protective crust. Once the crust is formed, it will shake loose.

Once you turn the fillets, really thin pieces (less than $^1/_2$ inch thick) will finish cooking by absorbing the residual heat in the pan, so turn off the heat

source. Thicker fillets need more time, but we found it best to turn the heat to medium-high to lessen splattering and prevent scorching.

To see if the fish is done, poke it with your finger. It should feel firm but not flake. If the fish falls into dry flakes, it has been overcooked.

Sautéing thick fish steaks raises different issues. Tuna and swordfish steaks are usually sold in large, 16-ounce pieces that can be hard to cook evenly. By the time the heat reaches the center, the edges have overcooked. Cutting the steaks in half minimizes this problem. Even with steaks that were one inch thick, we found that the heat distributed more evenly through

narrower pieces. An 8-ounce steak also makes an ideal single serving.

While we found that white fish fillets benefited from a dusting of flour, which helped them brown and produced a nice thick crust, we found that steaks were better left unfloured. The sturdy nature of the flesh and the longer cooking time encourage plenty of browning.

With its skin on, salmon raises other issues. We wondered if it needed as much fat. We started with two tablespoons—the amount we used to sauté white fish fillets. The results were greasy. We then cut back to one tablespoon—the amount we used to sauté tuna and salmon steaks. We thought

there was too much splattering. Eventually, we found that one teaspoon of fat is sufficient to cook four salmon fillets.

As with other pieces of fish, we preheated the pan until it was very hot and tried cooking over high heat. Billows of smoke soon filled the kitchen. We found that preheating on high was fine but that the heat had to be turned down to medium-high once the fish was added to the pan.

Master Recipe

Sautéed Thin Fish Fillets

serves four

NOTE: *Thin fish fillets measure between $^1/_4$ inch and $^1/_2$ inch thick and include flounder, sole, and catfish. Longer fillets can cook unevenly. Folding over the thin end of the fillet not only facilitates even cooking but also enables you to fit all the fillets in the pan at one time.*

$1^1/_2$ pounds thin fish fillets,

skinned (see figure 18), rinsed, and dried with paper towels (about 5 to 7 fillets, depending on thickness)

Salt and ground black pepper

$^3/_4$ cup all-purpose flour

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oven to 200 degrees. Place plate in oven for keeping cooked fillets warm while you make sauce.

2. Sprinkle fillets with salt and pepper to taste. Measure flour onto a plate or pie tin. Working with one fillet at a time,

dredge with flour and shake to remove excess. Fold thin tail over meaty portion of fillet (see figure 19).

3. Heat heavy-bottomed, 12-inch skillet over high heat until very hot, about 4 minutes. Add oil, lay fillets in pan, and sauté, shaking pan occasionally to keep fillets from sticking (see figure 20), until golden brown, 2 to 3 minutes. Turn fish with spatula. If fillets are very thin (about $^1/_4$ inch), turn heat off immediately, allowing residual heat from pan to finish cooking fish. If fish is a little thicker (about $^1/_2$ inch), continue to cook over medium-high heat for 1

more minute. Remove pan from heat and transfer fillets to warm oven while making sauce.

VARIATION:

Sautéed Thick Fish Fillets

Thick fish fillets measure between $^{3}/_{4}$ inch and 1 inch thick and include fish like striped bass, red snapper, grouper, and haddock. There's no need to fold over the ends of the fillets here; they are not very thin.

Follow Master Recipe for Sautéed Thin Fish Fillets, cooking $1^{1}/_{2}$ pounds thick fillets (4 to 6 pieces, depending on thickness) on first side until golden

brown, 3 to 4 minutes. Cook on second side for 2 to 3 minutes more.

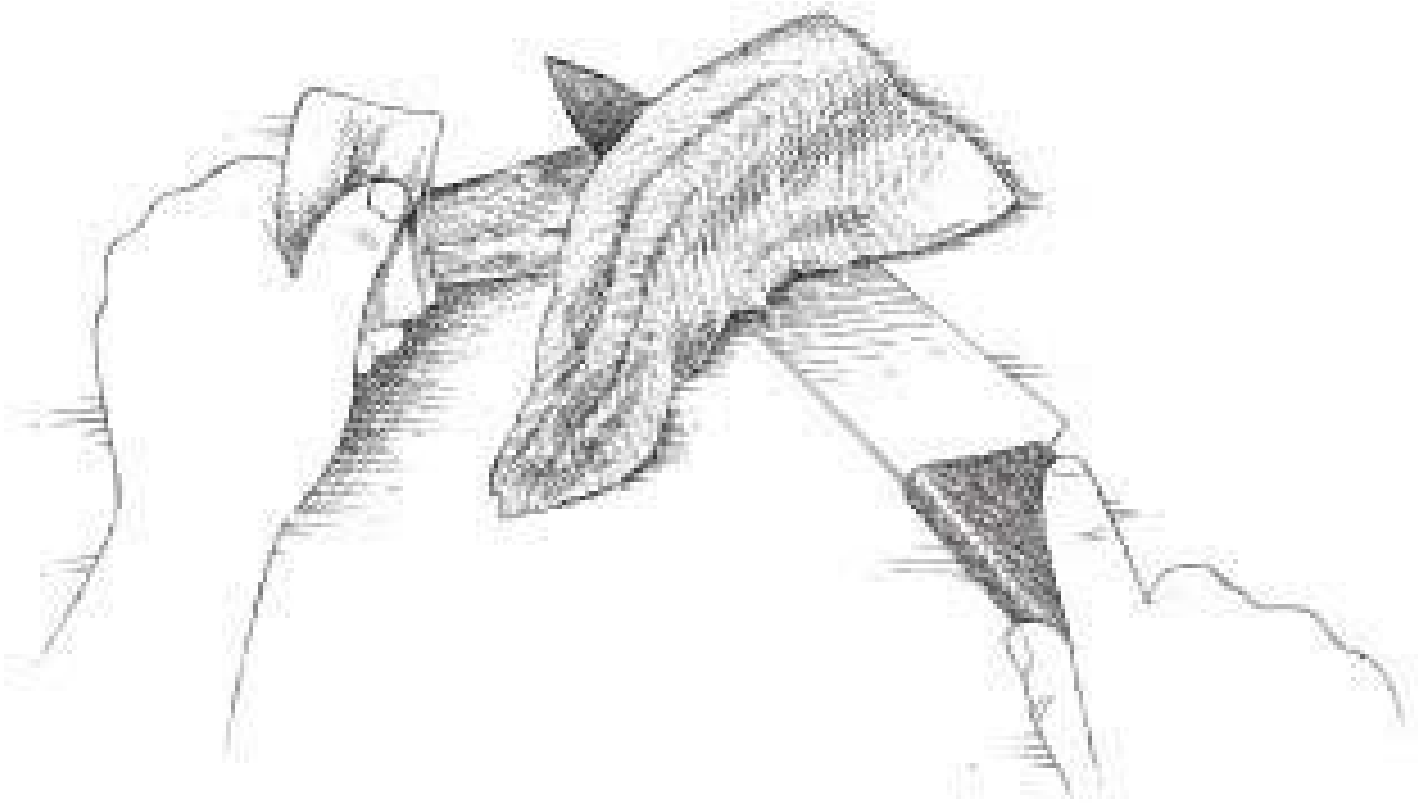

Figure 18.

To more easily remove the skin from a fish fillet, start at the end of the tail, then slide your knife along between the skin and flesh of the tail until you can grab hold of the skin with a paper towel. Use this "handle" to help separate the skin from the flesh.

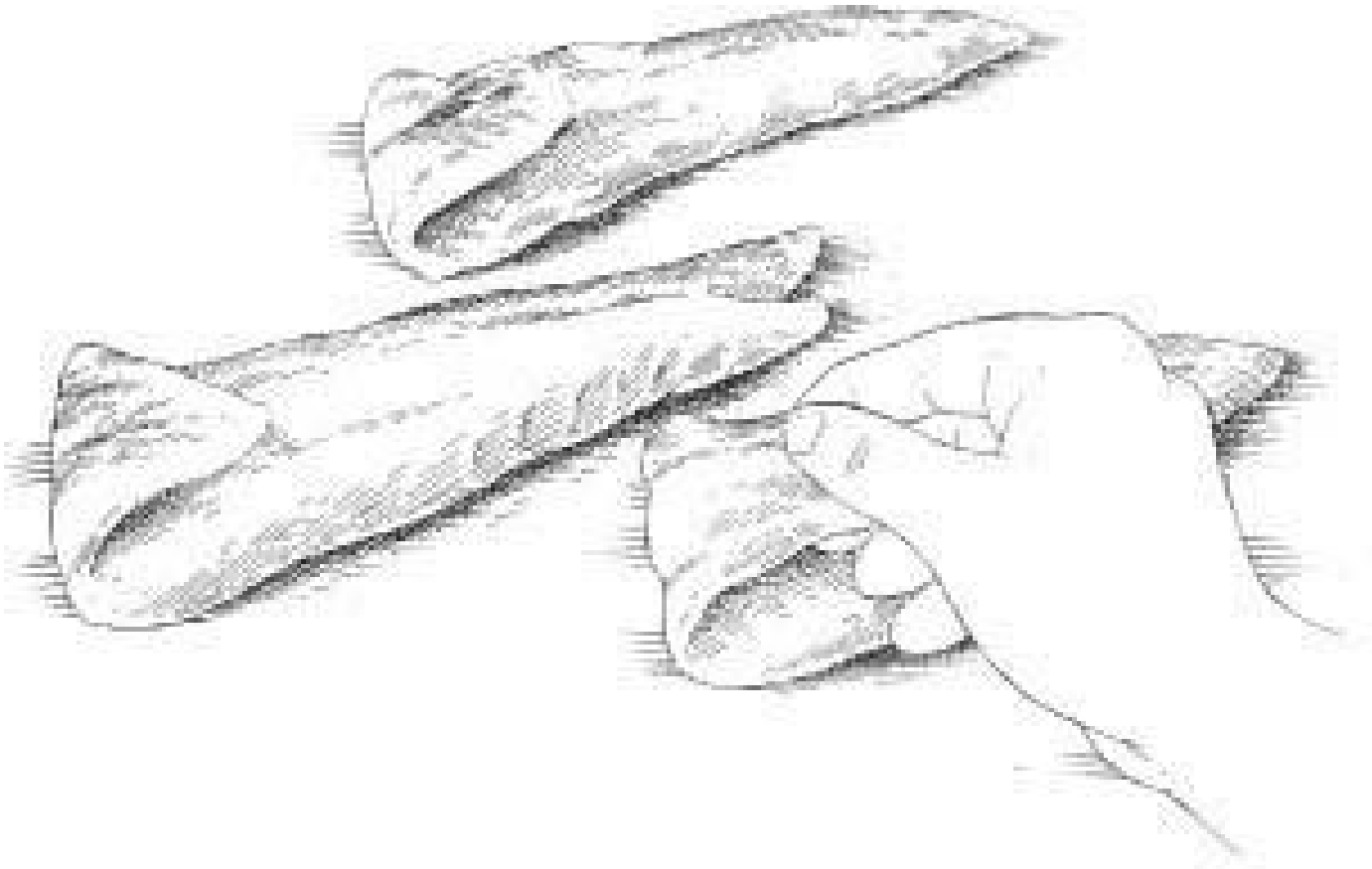

Figure 19.

When sautéing fish fillets that taper down to a thin tail, fold the tail over the fillet to ensure even cooking. Because the pan will be quite hot, it's best to do this on the cutting board. Be sure that the sauté pan you use is large enough to comfortably hold the fillets in a

single layer without overcrowding.

Master Recipe

Sautéed Fish Steaks

serves four

NOTE: *This method works well for steak-type fish such as swordfish and tuna. If you like your fish rare in the middle, make sure to cook it according to the lowest time given. It is imperative that the skillet be extremely hot to prevent sticking. Most markets sell 1-inch steaks that weigh about 1 pound. At home, cut these pieces in half before cooking to yield individual*

portions.

4 fish steaks (each about 8 ounces and $^{3}/_{4}$inch to 1 inch thick), rinsed and dried with paper towels

Salt and ground black pepper

1 tablespoon vegetable oil

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Turn oven to 200 degrees. Place plate in oven for keeping cooked steaks warm while you make sauce.

2. Heat heavy-bottomed, 12-inch skillet over high heat until very hot, about 4

minutes. While pan is heating, sprinkle fish with salt and pepper to taste.

3. Add oil and swirl to coat pan bottom. Lay steaks in pan and sauté, shaking pan occasionally to keep steaks from sticking, until golden, 1 to $1^{1}/_{2}$ minutes. Turn steaks with spatula and continue sautéing on second side until just cooked to preference, 1 to $1^{1}/_{2}$ minutes more. Remove pan from heat and transfer steaks to warm oven while making sauce.

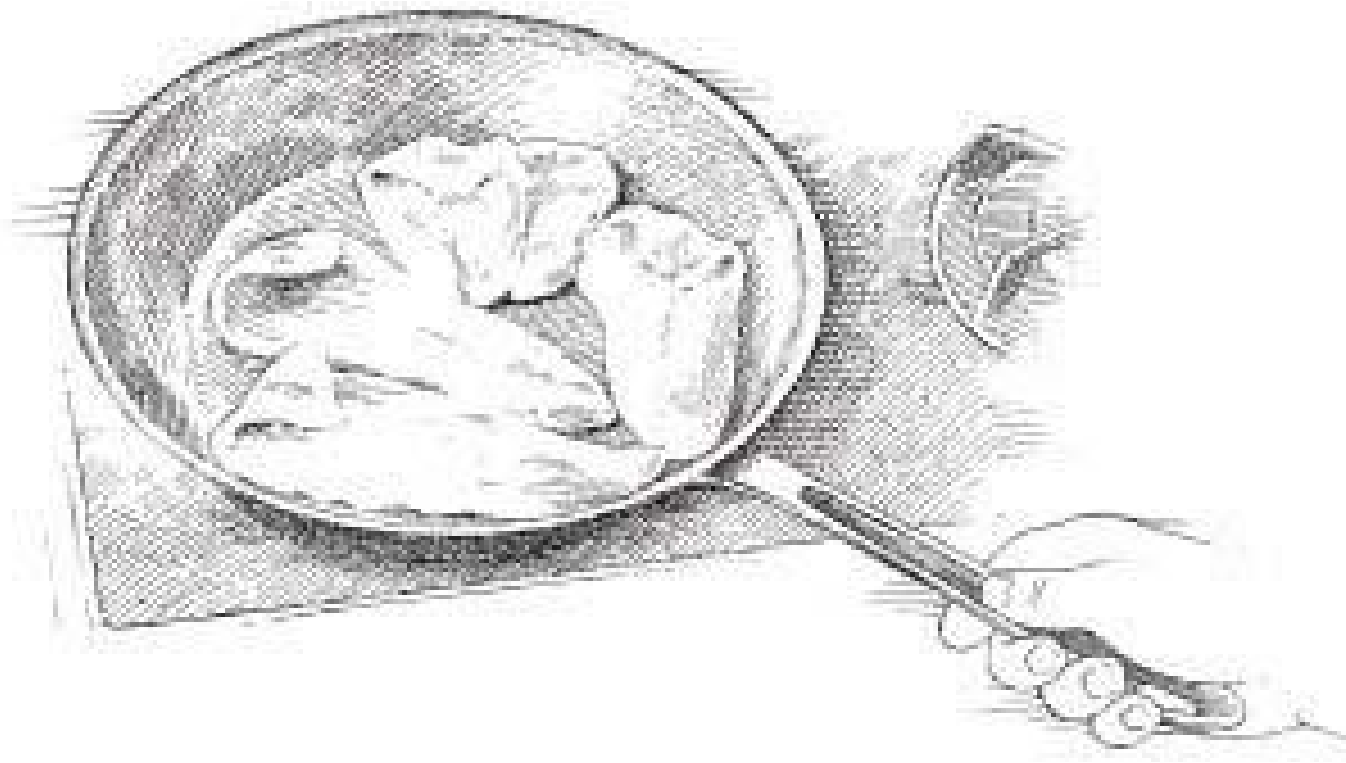

Figure 20.

Fish fillets and steaks are prone to sticking. As they cook, slide the skillet across the burner by quickly moving your wrist back and forth. Don't shake the pan so violently that the fish moves up the sides of the skillet.

Master Recipe

Sautéed Salmon Fillets

serves four

NOTE: *Because salmon fillets are thicker than other fillets, they must be cooked on medium-high heat (not high heat) so that the exterior doesn't burn before the interior cooks through. With the addition of the fish, the pan temperature drops; compensate for the heat loss by keeping the heat on high for 30 seconds after adding them, then turn down the heat.*

4 skin-on salmon fillets (each about 6 ounces and 1 to $1^{1}/_{4}$ inches thick), rinsed and dried with paper towels

Salt and ground black pepper

1 teaspoon vegetable oil

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oven to 200 degrees. Place plate in oven for keeping cooked fillets warm while you make sauce.

2. Heat heavy-bottomed, 12-inch skillet over high heat until very hot, about 4 minutes. Sprinkle salmon with salt and pepper to taste.

3. Add oil to pan; swirl to coat. Add fillets skin-side down and cook, without moving fish, until pan regains lost heat, about 30 seconds. Reduce heat to medium-high; continue to cook until skin side is well browned, about $4^1/_2$ minutes. Turn fillets and cook, without moving them, until they are no longer translucent on the exterior and are firm, but not hard, when gently squeezed, 3 minutes for medium-rare, $3^1/_2$ minutes for medium. Remove pan from heat and transfer fillets to warm oven while making sauce.

PAN SAUCES:

The following sauces can be used with thin or thick fillets as well as fish steaks and salmon fillets.

Balsamic Basil Sauce

enough for 4 servings

1 tablespoon sugar
1 large shallot, minced
1/8 cup balsamic vinegar
1/2 cup bottled clam juice
1 small tomato, peeled, cored, seeded, and cut into 1/2-inch dice (about 1/2 cup)
3 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
2 teaspoons chopped fresh basil leaves
Salt and ground black pepper

Follow a Master Recipe to cook fish (Sautéed Thin Fish Fillets, Sautéed Fish Steaks and Sautéed Salmon Fillets). Without discarding fat, set skillet over low heat. Sprinkle sugar into skillet; cook, without stirring, until sugar is golden brown, about 1 minute. Add shallot; sauté until softened slightly, about 30 seconds. Increase heat to high, add vinegar, clam juice, and tomato, scraping pan bottom with wooden spoon to loosen brown bits. Boil until reduced t o $^{1}/_{3}$ cup, 4 to 5 minutes. Add any accumulated juices and reduce sauce again to $^{1}/_{3}$ cup. Remove from heat, swirl in butter until it melts and thickens sauce. Add basil and season with salt

and pepper to taste. Spoon sauce over fish and serve immediately.

Chipotle Orange Sauce

enough for 4 servings

1 tablespoon sugar
2 medium garlic cloves, minced
2 small chipotle chiles en adobo, minced (about 2 teaspoons)
1/8 cup balsamic vinegar
1/2 cup orange juice
3 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
2 teaspoons chopped fresh cilantro leaves
Salt and ground black pepper

Follow a Master Recipe to cook fish

(Sautéed Thin Fish Fillets, Sautéed Fish Steaks and Sautéed Salmon Fillets). Without discarding fat, set skillet over low heat. Sprinkle sugar into skillet; cook, without stirring, until sugar is golden brown, about 1 minute. Add garlic and chipotles, and sauté until fragrant, about 10 seconds. Increase heat to high, add vinegar and orange juice, and boil until sauce is reduced to $^1/_3$ cup, 4 to 5 minutes, scraping pan bottom with wooden spoon to loosen brown bits. Add any accumulated fish juices and reduce sauce again to $^1/_3$ cup. Remove pan from heat, swirl in softened butter until it melts and thickens sauce. Add cilantro and season with salt and

pepper to taste. Spoon sauce over fish and serve immediately.

Fresh Tomato and Rosemary Sauce

enough for 4 servings

1 large shallot, minced

1/2 cup dry white wine

1/8 cup bottled clam juice

1 small tomato, peeled, cored, seeded, and cut into 1/2-inch dice (about 1/2cup)

3 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

1 teaspoon chopped fresh rosemary

Salt and ground black pepper

Follow a Master Recipe to cook fish (Sautéed Thin Fish Fillets, Sautéed Fish Steaks and Sautéed Salmon Fillets). Without discarding fat, set skillet over low heat. Add shallot; sauté until softened slightly, about 30 seconds. Increase heat to high, add wine and clam juice, and boil until sauce is reduced to $^1/_3$ cup, 4 to 5 minutes, scraping skillet bottom with wooden spoon to loosen browned bits. Add tomato and any accumulated fish juices and reduce sauce again to $^1/_3$ cup. Remove pan from heat and swirl in butter until melted and sauce is thickened. Add rosemary and season with salt and pepper to taste. Spoon sauce over fish and serve

immediately.

Lemon-Parsley Sauce with Capers

enough for 4 servings

1 large shallot, minced

1/8 cup dry white wine

1/2 cup bottled clam juice

2 tablespoons lemon juice

1 tablespoon capers, rinsed

2 pieces lemon peel, each 1 inch square

3 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

2 teaspoons chopped fresh parsley leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

Follow a Master Recipe to cook fish (Sautéed Thin Fish Fillets, Sautéed Fish Steaks and Sautéed Salmon Fillets). Without discarding fat, set skillet over low heat. Add shallot; sauté until softened slightly, about 30 seconds. Increase heat to high, add wine, clam juice, lemon juice, capers, and lemon peel, scraping pan bottom with wooden spoon to loosen browned bits. Boil until sauce is reduced to $^1/_3$ cup, 4 to 5 minutes. Add any accumulated fish juices and reduce sauce again to $^1/_3$ cup. Remove pan from heat and swirl in softened butter until it melts and thickens sauce. Remove lemon peel, add parsley, and season with salt and pepper to taste.

Spoon over fish and serve immediately.

Mustard Dill Sauce

enough for 4 servings

1 large shallot, minced

1/2 cup dry white wine

1/2 cup bottled clam juice

1 tablespoon Dijon mustard

3 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

2 teaspoons chopped fresh dill

Salt and ground black pepper

Follow a Master Recipe to cook fish (Sautéed Thin Fish Fillets, Sautéed Fish Steaks and Sautéed Salmon Fillets). Without discarding fat, set skillet over low heat. Add shallot; sauté until

softened slightly, about 30 seconds. Increase heat to high, add wine and clam juice, and boil until sauce is reduced to $^1/_3$ cup, 4 to 5 minutes, scraping pan bottom with wooden spoon to loosen brown bits. Add any accumulated fish juices and reduce sauce again to $^1/_3$ cup. Remove pan from heat and stir in mustard. Swirl in softened butter until it melts and thickens sauce. Add dill and season with salt and pepper to taste. Spoon sauce over fish and serve immediately.

Master Recipe

Sautéed Breaded Fish Fillets

serves four

NOTE: *Bread crumbs can turn soggy on moist fish fillets. We found that cornmeal makes a crisper coating. You can't tuck the ends of breaded fillets under because they won't brown. Therefore, you will need to sauté the breaded fillets in two batches or use two 12-inch skillets. Refer to figures 6, 7 and 8 for hints on breading fillets.*

Don't sauce breaded fillets or they will become soggy. Instead, serve with lemon wedges, garlic or herb mayonnaise, or tartar sauce.

2 large eggs, lightly beaten
1 tablespoon water
$^3/_4$ cup all-purpose flour
1 cup cornmeal
$1^1/_2$ pounds thin fish fillets, skinned (see figure 18), rinsed, and dried with paper towels (about 5 to 7 fillets, depending on thickness)
Salt and ground black pepper
$^1/_2$ cup vegetable oil

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Turn oven to 200 degrees. Place plate in oven for keeping cooked fillets warm while you prepare second batch.

2. Whisk egg with water in small, flat bowl. Measure flour and cornmeal onto separate pie tins.

3. Season fillets with salt and pepper to taste, then dredge them one at a time in flour, knocking off excess. Using tongs, dip each fillet into egg wash, letting excess drip off, then place each on bed of cornmeal. Press cornmeal lightly onto

fillets with fingertips to ensure that it adheres to surface of fish.

4. Heat heavy-bottomed, 12-inch skillet over high heat until very hot, about 4 minutes. Add $^1/_4$ cup oil, lay half the fillets in pan, and sauté, shaking pan occasionally to keep fillets from sticking, until golden brown, $1^1/_2$ to 2 minutes. Turn fish with spatula and continue sautéing on second side until golden, 1 to 2 minutes more. Transfer to plate in oven. Repeat process with remaining oil and fillets. Serve immediately.

SHRIMP AND SCALLOPS

SAUTÉING SHRIMP POSES A NUMBER OF PROBLEMS. Overcooking will produce shrimp reminiscent of rubber, but shrimp cooked too little will have a mushy texture. Shrimp retains a lot of water, and it often steams while cooking instead of maintaining a steady sauté.

Given our general success of starting with a hot pan when sautéing, we cooked several batches of shrimp this way. High heat helped somewhat in our quest to keep the shrimp from steaming, but not enough. We ended up sautéing the

shrimp in two batches, allowing the pan to hold its heat at a more consistent level. Cooking in batches also reduced the chances of overcooking the shrimp. Initially, we had too many shrimp to turn in too short a time; those placed in the pan at the beginning were rock-solid by the time the last shrimp was flipped.

We found that precise timing is the key to perfectly cooked shrimp. A few seconds made the difference between shrimp that was succulent or just barely edible. Jumbo shrimp allowed for a slightly larger margin of error in terms of cooking time than medium or large shrimp. There are no industry standards for sizing shrimp. Since all the terms are relative, buy shrimp according to the

number it takes to make a pound. Shrimp labeled "16/20," for example, require 16 to 20 individual pieces to make a pound.

Once shrimp are purchased, they must be prepared for cooking. When sautéing, we found it best to peel the shrimp before cooking. (In contrast, shells protect shrimp when grilling.) Sautéed shrimp are always sauced, and it's much too hard to eat sauced shrimp that have their shells on. In addition, the shells prevent the sauce from flavoring the shrimp meat.

Shrimp preparation also raises the issue of deveining, which generates much controversy, even among experts. Although some people won't eat shrimp

that has not been deveined, others believe that the "vein"—actually, the animal's intestinal tract—contributes flavor and insist on leaving it in. In our tests, we could not detect an effect (either positive or negative) on flavor when we left the vein in. The vein is generally so tiny in most medium-sized shrimp that it virtually disappears after cooking. Out of laziness, we leave it alone. In very large shrimp, the vein is usually larger as well. Very large veins can detract from the overall texture of the shrimp and are best removed before cooking.

Instead of using the more bountiful sauces that we developed for the other chapters in this book, we found that

shrimp are best sauced with a concentrated glaze—something that can adhere to the shrimp. Scallops also work best with a glaze. Because the shrimp and scallop sauces are interchangeable, we are covering both kinds of shellfish here, in one chapter.

Without a doubt, sautéing is the best way to cook scallops. The high heat caramelizes the exterior to form a concentrated, nutty flavored crust. The caramelized exterior enhances the natural sweetness of the scallop and provides a nice, crisp contrast with the tender interior.

Unfortunately, many scallops are watery and steam rather than sauté when

cooked in a hot pan. That's because most scallops (by some estimates up to 90 percent of the retail supply) are dipped in a phosphate and water mixture to extend their shelf life. During processing, scallops absorb water, which is then thrown off when they are cooked. You can't brown processed scallops in a skillet.

By law, processed scallops must be identified at the wholesale level, so ask your fishmonger. Also, look at the scallops. Scallops are naturally ivory or pinkish tan; processing turns them bright white. Processed scallops are slippery and swollen, and they usually sit in milky white liquid at the store. Unprocessed scallops (also called dry

scallops) are sticky and flabby. If they are surrounded by any liquid (and often they are not), the juices are clear, not white.

As for the type of scallop, we found large sea scallops to be the best choice when sautéing. Because they can be left in the pan longer than small bay or calico scallops, they are better able to brown without overcooking.

To preserve the creamy texture of the flesh, we cooked the scallops to medium-rare, which means the scallop is hot all the way through but that the center still retains some translucence. As a scallop cooks, the soft flesh firms and you can see an opaqueness develop,

starting at the bottom of the scallop, where it sits in the pan, and then slowly creeping up toward the center. The scallop is medium-rare when the sides have firmed up and all but about the middle third of the scallop has turned opaque.

Scallops will continue to cook via residual heat as they wait to be sauced, so don't hesitate to pull scallops from the pan when they look a bit underdone.

Master Recipe

Sautéed Shrimp

serves four

NOTE: *This recipe requires quick work. The shrimp can be dumped into the pan and spread in a single layer by shaking the skillet. For even cooking, you must turn each shrimp individually. To make this as easy as possible, we recommend buying large shrimp and using a pair of tongs.*

1 tablespoon vegetable oil

2 pounds large shrimp (16 to

20 per pound), peeled, deveined if desired, rinsed, and thoroughly dried

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Turn oven to 200 degrees. Place plate in oven to keep shrimp warm while making second batch and sauce.

2. Heat heavy-bottomed, 12-inch skillet over high heat until very hot, about 4 minutes. Add $1\,^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoons oil to pan; swirl to coat bottom. Add half the shrimp and sauté until bottoms are just pink, about 45 seconds to 1 minute. Turn

shrimp with tongs (see figure 21). Sauté until shrimp are just cooked and pink all over, 1 to $1^1/_2$ minutes. Remove pan from heat and transfer shrimp to warm oven while cooking remaining shrimp.

3. Let pan return to temperature over high heat for 10 to 15 seconds. Add remaining $1^1/_2$ teaspoons oil, swirl to coat bottom of pan, then add remaining shrimp and cook as directed in step 2. Transfer shrimp to warm oven while making sauce.

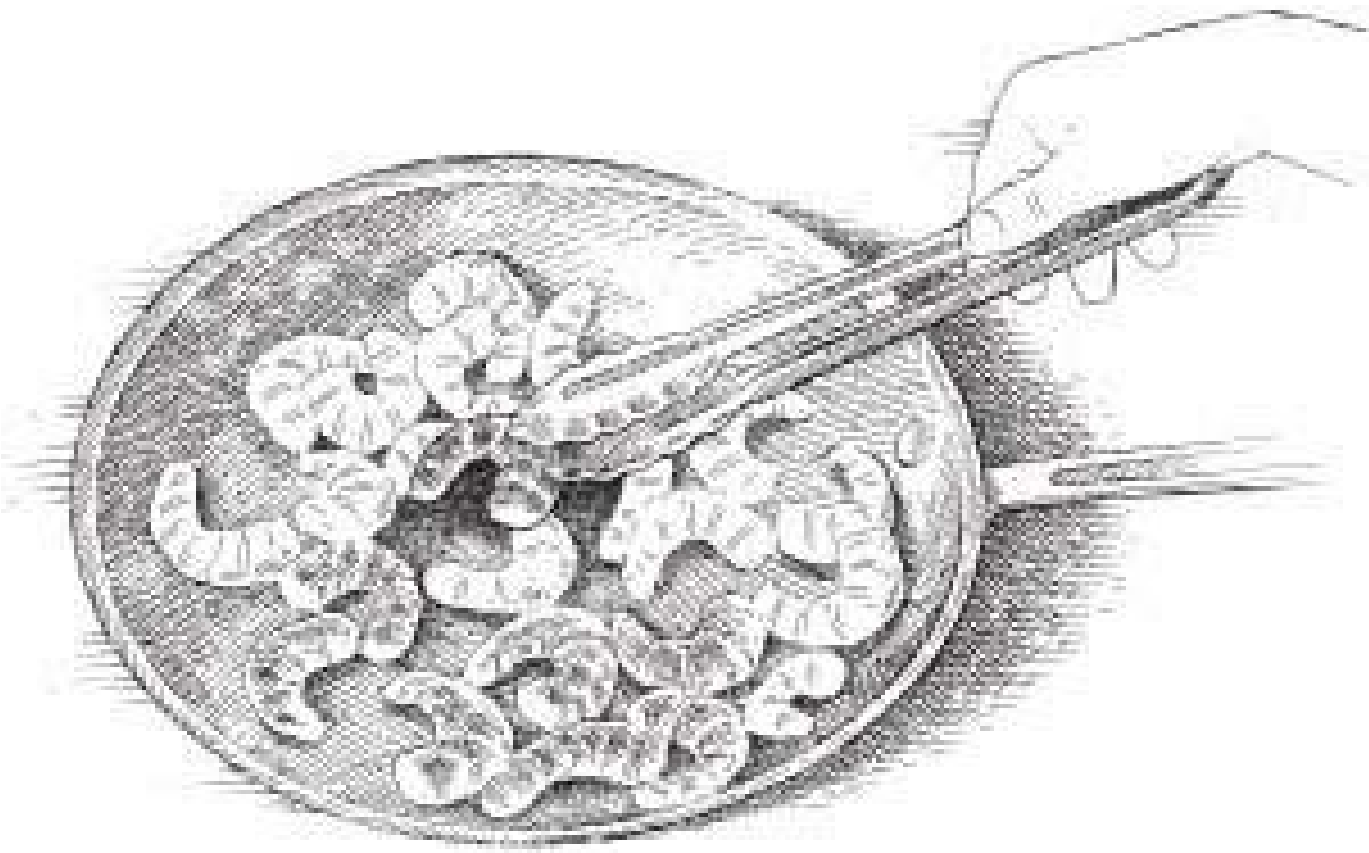

Figure 21.

To cook evenly, shrimp must be turned once as they become pink. We found that a using a pair of tongs—although tedious—is the only way to ensure that all the shrimp are actually turned. Work as quickly as possible to make sure that all of the shrimp are

cooking at the same rate.

Master Recipe

Sautéed Scallops

serves four

NOTE: *This recipe was developed for standard sea scallops, which are about the size of a short, squat marshmallow. If using smaller scallops, turn off the heat as soon as you turn them; they will finish cooking from the residual heat, 15 to 30 seconds longer.*

1 tablespoon vegetable oil

$1^1/_2$ pounds sea scallops (about 30 to a pound), small muscles

removed (see figure 22)

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Turn oven to 200 degrees. Place plate in oven to keep scallops warm while making second batch and sauce.

2. Heat heavy-bottomed, 12-inch skillet over high heat until very hot, about 4 minutes. Add $1^1/_2$ teaspoons oil; swirl to coat bottom. Add half the scallops, one at a time, flat side down. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Cook until scallops are well browned, $1^1/_2$ to 2

minutes. Using tongs, turn scallops, one at a time. Cook until medium-rare (sides have firmed up and all but middle third of scallop is opaque), 30 to 90 seconds longer, depending on size. Remove pan from heat and transfer scallops to warm oven while cooking remaining scallops.

3. Let pan return to temperature over high heat for 10 to 15 seconds. Add remaining $1^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoons oil, swirl to coat bottom of pan, then add remaining scallops and cook as directed in step 2. Transfer scallops to warm oven while making sauce.

Figure 22.

The small, rough-textured, crescent-shaped muscle that attaches the scallop to the shell is often not removed during processing. You can readily remove any muscles that are still

attached. If you don't, they will toughen slightly during cooking.

PAN SAUCES:

These sauces—really more like glazes because they are so concentrated—can be used with shrimp or scallops.

Garlic, White Wine, and Lemon Sauce

enough for 4 servings

4 medium garlic cloves, minced

1/2 cup dry white wine

2 tablespoons lemon juice

3 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

2 teaspoons chopped fresh parsley leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

Follow Master Recipe for Sautéed Shrimp or Scallops. Without discarding fat, set skillet over low heat. Add garlic

to pan; sauté until fragrant, about 15 seconds. Increase heat to high, add wine and lemon juice, scraping pan bottom with wooden spoon to loosen brown bits. Boil until sauce liquid is reduced to 3 tablespoons, 3 to 4 minutes. Add any accumulated seafood juices and reduce sauce again to 3 tablespoons, cooking about 1 minute more. Remove pan from heat and swirl in butter until it melts and thickens sauce. Add parsley and season with salt and pepper to taste. Add shrimp or scallops to sauce, toss, and serve immediately.

Cuban Citrus Glaze

enough for 4 servings

2 medium garlic cloves, minced

3/4 teaspoon ground cumin

1/4 cup orange juice

1/4 cup lime juice

3 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

2 teaspoons chopped fresh oregano leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

Follow Master Recipe for Sautéed Shrimp or Scallops. Without discarding fat, set skillet over low heat. Add garlic

and cumin, sauté until fragrant, about 15 seconds. Increase heat to high, add orange juice and lime juice. Boil until sauce liquid is reduced to 3 tablespoons, 3 to 4 minutes. Add any accumulated seafood juices and reduce sauce again to 3 tablespoons, cooking about 1 minute more. Remove pan from heat and swirl in butter until it melts and thickens sauce. Add oregano and season with salt and pepper to taste. Add shrimp or scallops to sauce, toss, and serve immediately.

Curried Tomato Sauce with Basil

enough for 4 servings

2 medium garlic cloves, minced

$1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons curry powder

1 teaspoon sugar

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup dark beer

1 cup halved cherry tomatoes

3 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

2 teaspoons thinly sliced fresh basil leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

Follow Master Recipe for Sautéed

Shrimp or Scallops. Without discarding fat, set skillet over low heat. Add garlic, curry, and sugar; sauté until fragrant, about 15 seconds. Increase heat to high and add beer, scraping bottom of pan with wooden spoon to loosen brown bits. Boil until sauce liquid is reduced to 3 tablespoons, 3 to 4 minutes. Add any accumulated seafood juices and reduce sauce again to 3 tablespoons, about 1 minute more. Remove pan from heat, add tomatoes, and swirl in butter until it melts and thickens sauce. Add basil and season with salt and pepper to taste. Add shrimp or scallops to sauce, toss, and serve immediately.

Lemon-Vodka Glaze

enough for 4 servings

1 medium shallot, minced
2 teaspoons fennel seeds
1/2 cup vodka
2 strips lemon peel, about 2 inches long
1 tablespoon lemon juice
3 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
2 teaspoons chopped fresh parsley leaves
Salt and ground black pepper

Follow Master Recipe for Sautéed Shrimp or Scallops. Without discarding

fat, set skillet over low heat. Add shallot and fennel seeds, sauté until shallots are softened slightly, about 30 seconds. Increase heat to high, remove pan from heat, add vodka, lemon peel, and lemon juice. Return pan to heat, scraping pan bottom with wooden spoon to loosen brown bits. Boil until sauce liquid is reduced to 3 tablespoons, 3 to 4 minutes. Add any accumulated seafood juices and reduce sauce again to 3 tablespoons, about 1 minute more. Remove pan from heat and swirl in butter until it melts and thickens sauce. Remove lemon peel, add parsley, and season with salt and pepper to taste. Add shrimp or scallops to sauce, toss, and serve immediately.

Thai Curry Glaze

enough for 4 servings

NOTE: *Look for Thai red curry paste near the rice noodles, coconut milk, and fish sauce in well-stocked grocery stores. Asian food stores will stock this item as well. Smash the lemon grass with the back of a chef's knife to release its flavor oils.*

1 teaspoon Thai red curry paste

1/2 cup coconut milk

2 medium garlic cloves, minced

2 teaspoons minced fresh gingerroot

1 piece lemon grass, 6-inches long, cut in half crosswise and bruised

2 teaspoons Asian fish sauce

2 teaspoons thinly sliced fresh basil leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

In a small bowl, whisk curry paste into coconut milk; set aside. Follow Master Recipe for Sautéed Shrimp or Scallops. Without discarding fat, set skillet over low heat. Add garlic, ginger, and lemon grass and sauté until fragrant, about 15 seconds. Increase heat to high and add curry-coconut milk mixture and fish sauce. Boil until liquid is reduced to 3

tablespoons, 3 to 4 minutes. Add any accumulated seafood juices and reduce sauce again to 3 tablespoons, cooking about 1 minute more. Remove lemon grass. Add basil and season with salt and pepper to taste. Add shrimp or scallops to sauce, toss, and serve immediately.

Spicy Nectarine Salsa

enough for 4 servings

2 medium nectarines, ripe but not mushy, cut into 1/4-inch dice

1/4 small red onion, minced (about 1 tablespoon)

1/2 medium jalapeno chile, stemmed, seeded, and minced (about 1 tablespoon)

2 teaspoons minced crystallized ginger

1 tablespoon golden raisins

1 tablespoon lime juice

2 tablespoons pineapple juice

Salt

In a small bowl, combine all salsa ingredients, including salt to taste, until well blended. Allow to stand for 5 minutes to let flavors develop. Follow Master Recipe for Sautéed Shrimp or Scallops. Spoon salsa over shrimp or scallops and serve immediately.

HOW TO MAKE POT PIES AND CASSEROLES

Casserole Basics

Pot Pies

Pasta Casseroles

Rice & Grain Casseroles

Bean Casseroles

Potato Casseroles

CASSEROLE BASICS

THE CHALLENGE WHEN MAKING A GOOD casserole is keeping the ingredients as fresh tasting as possible. Too many casseroles are overcooked and dull, reminiscent of the worst cafeteria cuisine. That's because the ingredients are generally double-cooked. For example, pasta is boiled then baked and pot pie filling is stewed then baked. Our solution to all this cooking is to keep oven time to a minimum.

We found the best casseroles are made in a fairly shallow baking dish and

cooked at a high oven temperature. This reduces cooking time to just a fraction of the time suggested in many cookbooks. Some casseroles can be in and out of the oven in just 15 minutes. Tasted against longer baking and slower ovens, this quick method wins hands down every time. Vegetables are fresher tasting (and looking), and pasta, grains and beans have a better texture and are far less likely to be mushy.

The casserole comes in hundreds of different shapes and sizes. For the purpose of this book, we have limited ourselves to main-course casseroles.

We have divided the book into chapters based on the starch that holds the casserole together–pastry and

biscuits (for pot pies), pasta, rice and grains, beans, and potatoes. Throughout, we have stayed true to the American spirit of these dishes, while using fresh ingredients of the highest quality. Yes, you can make a casserole with canned soup, but it won't taste as good as a casserole made with homemade sauce and vegetables you cook yourself. We think good results always justify an extra 10 minutes of work.

Our preference for fresh ingredients has, however, been coupled with an attempt to keep prep times as short as possible. Casseroles are meant to be convenience foods–a complete supper in a covered dish. There's no sense taking

simple food and making it so complicated you would never make the recipe. We have consistently searched for shortcuts (like no-boil lasagne noodles and chicken pot pies that start with boneless, skinless breasts and canned broth) that deliver the best combination of flavor and convenience.

POT PIES

We wanted to figure out a way to streamline the process of making a pot pie. While it will never be a 20-minute meal, pot pie should not take all day to prepare. We started our testing with chicken pot pie and then decided to see if our experiences in the kitchen could e adapted to turkey and vegetable pot pies.

We began by determining the best way to cook the chicken. We steamed and roasted whole chickens, and we braised chicken parts. Steaming the chicken was time-consuming, requiring about one

hour, and after that time the steaming liquid still didn't have enough flavor to make a sauce for the pie. Roast chicken also required an hour in the oven, and by the time we took off the skin and mixed the meat in with the sauce and vegetables, the roasted flavor was lost. We had similar results with braised chicken: it lost its delicious flavor once the browned skin was removed.

Next we tried poaching, the most traditional cooking method. We tested this method with bone-in parts and boneless, skinless breasts. Though both the parts and the breasts were poached in canned broth, we thought the long-simmered poaching liquid of the parts would be significantly better. But in our

comparison of the pies, we found no difference in quality, and we were able to shave one-half hour off the cooking time (10 minutes to cook the breasts compared with 40 minutes to cook the parts). For those who like either dark or a mix of dark and white meat in the pie, boneless, skinless chicken thighs can be used as well.

We decided to tackle the vegetables next, so we made pies with raw vegetables, sautéed, vegetables, and parboiled vegetables. We found that the vegetables sautéed before baking held their color and flavor best, the parboiled ones less so. The raw vegetables were not fully cooked at the end of baking

time and gave off too much liquid, watering down the flavor and thickness of the sauce.

Our final task was to develop a sauce that was flavorful, creamy, and of the proper consistency. Chicken pot pie sauce is traditionally based in a roux (a mixture of butter and flour sautéed together briefly), which is thinned with chicken broth and often enriched with cream.

Because of the dish's inherent richness, we wanted to see how little cream we could get away with using. We tried three different pot pie fillings, with one-quarter cup of cream, one-quarter cup of half-and-half, and one cup of milk, respectively. Going into the

oven, all the fillings seemed to have the right consistency and creaminess; when they came out, however, it was a different story. Vegetable and meat juices diluted the consistency and creaminess of the cream and half-and-half sauces. To achieve a creamy-looking sauce, we would have needed to increase the cream dramatically. Fortunately, we didn't have to try it, because we actually liked the milk-enriched sauce. The larger quantity of milk kept the sauce creamy in both color and flavor.

To keep the sauce from becoming too liquid, we simply added more flour. A sauce that looks a little thick before

baking will become the perfect consistency after taking on the chicken and vegetable juices that release during baking.

As we expected, turkey pot pie followed the same rules as chicken pot pie. We found it most convenient to use leftover turkey meat, although if you can find turkey breast tenderloins in your supermarket, they may be prepared in the same way as boneless chicken breasts. As for vegetable pot pie, we found that a chicken pot pie minus the chicken tasted too light–it was more like a side dish than supper. To remedy this problem, we increased the amount of vegetables, especially hearty vegetables such as potatoes. Adding other root vegetables

and dried mushrooms also helped to give vegetable pot pie enough heft.

Up until this point, we had been topping our pot pies with pastry dough. Although these crusts were delicious, we wondered if there were quicker, simpler options. Biscuits worked beautifully, although they were not much easier to prepare.

We tested phyllo pastry, which we thought would result in a light, flaxy crust. To the contrary, we were surprised to find that the phyllo topping resulted in a tough, almost membrane-like cover. We then tried the frozen puff pastry found at most supermarkets. We were quite surprised at the lovely,

puffed, light crust that appeared. After testing this pastry with a butter glaze, an egg wash glaze, and no glaze, we were happy to find that our tasters were unanimous in their preference for the plain pastry. The other advantage to using the puff pastry is the almost-perfect size of the sheets. They fit in a standard casserole dish without trimming.

Master Recipe

Chicken Pot Pie

serves 6 to 8

NOTE: *You can make the filling ahead of time, but remember to heat it on top of the stove before topping it. As for the topping, it can be made up to 2 hours in advance and refrigerated on a floured baking sheet. The pot pie can be baked in one large pan (a standard 13 x 9-inch pan is ideal but feel free to use any baking dish with a similar surface area) or six individual ceramic baking dishes.*

1 1/2 pounds boneless, skinless chicken breasts and/or thighs

2 cups chicken stock of canned low-sodium brother

1 1/2 tablespoons vegetable oil

1 medium-large onion, finely chopped

3 medium carrots, peeled and cut crosswise 1/4-inch thick

2 small celery stalks, cut crosswise 1/4-inch thick

Salt and ground black pepper

4 tablespoons unsalted butter

1/2 cup all-purpose flour

1 1/2 cups milk

1/2 teaspoon dried thyme

3 tablespoons dry sherry

$^3/_4$ cup frozen green peas, thawed

3 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves

1 recipe Rich, Flaky Pie Dough, 1 recipe Fluffy Buttermilk Biscuits or variations, or 1 sheet (about 9 ounces) frozen puff pastry

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to low-center position; heat oven to 400 degrees. Put chicken and stock in small Dutch oven or soup kittle over medium heat. Cover, bring to a simmer; simmer until chicken

is just done, 8 to 10 minutes. Transfer meat to large bowl, reserving broth in measuring cup for easy pouring later.

2. Increase heat to medium-high; heat oil in now-empty pan. Add onion, carrots, and celery; sauté until just tender, about 5 minutes. Season to taste with salt and pepper. While vegetable are sautéing, shred meat into bite-sized pieces. Transfer cooked vegetables to bowl with chicken.

3. Heat butter over medium heat in same pan. When foaming subsides, add flour; cook about 1 minute, stirring. Whisk in

chicken broth, milk, and accumulated chicken juices, and thyme. Bring to a simmer, then continue to simmer until sauce fully thickens, about 1 minute. Season to taste with salt and pepper; stir in sherry.

4. Pour sauce over chicken mixture; stir to combine. Stir in peas and parsley. Adjust seasonings. (The filling can be covered and refrigerated overnight; reheat before topping with pie dough, biscuits, or puff pastry.) Pour mixture into 13 x 9-inch pan or six 12-ounce ovenproof dishes. Top with pie dough (*see* figures 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5), biscuits (*see* figure 6), or puff pastry (*see* figures

7 and 8); bake until topping is golden brown and filling is bubbly, 30 minutes for a large pie and 20 to 25 minutes for individual pies. Serve hot.

VARIATIONS:

Chicken Pot Pie with Spring Vegetables

Herb Biscuits are particularly good here.

Follow Master Recipe, replacing celery with 18 thin asparagus stalks that have been trimmed and cut into 1-inch pieces. Increase peas to 1 cup.

Chicken Pot Pie with Wild Mushrooms

The soaking liquid used to rehydrate dried porcini mushrooms replaces some of the chicken stock used to poach the chicken and then to enrich the sauce. This filling works well with Parmesan Biscuits.

Follow Master Recipe, soaking 1 ounce dried porcini mushrooms in 2 cups warm tap water until softened, about 20 minutes. Lift mushrooms from liquid, strain liquid, and reserve 1 cup. Use soaking liquid in place of 1 cup of chicken stock. Proceed with recipe, cooking rehydrated porcini and 12 ounces sliced button mushrooms with vegetables. Finish as directed.

Chicken Pot Pie with Corn and Bacon

This southern variation with corn and bacon works especially well with Cornmeal Biscuits.

Follow Master Recipe, replacing oil with $^1/_4$ pound bacon, cut crosswise into $^1/_2$-inch-wide strips. Cook over medium heat until fat is rendered and bacon is crisp, about 6 minutes. Remove bacon from pan with slotted spoon and drain on paper towels. Cook vegetables in bacon fat. Add drained bacon to bowl with chicken and cooked vegetables. Proceed with recipe, replacing peas with 2 cups fresh or frozen corn.

Turkey Pot Pie

Leftover turkey makes an excellent pot pie. If you want to use fresh turkey, replace chicken in Master Recipe with 1 $^{1}/_{2}$ pounds turkey breast tenderloins. In step 1, increase simmering time to 9-11 minutes.

For leftover turkey, follow Master Recipe, replacing chicken with 3 cups cooked turkey meat, shredded into bite-sized pieces. Eliminate step 1 and use 2 cups chicken stock in step 3.

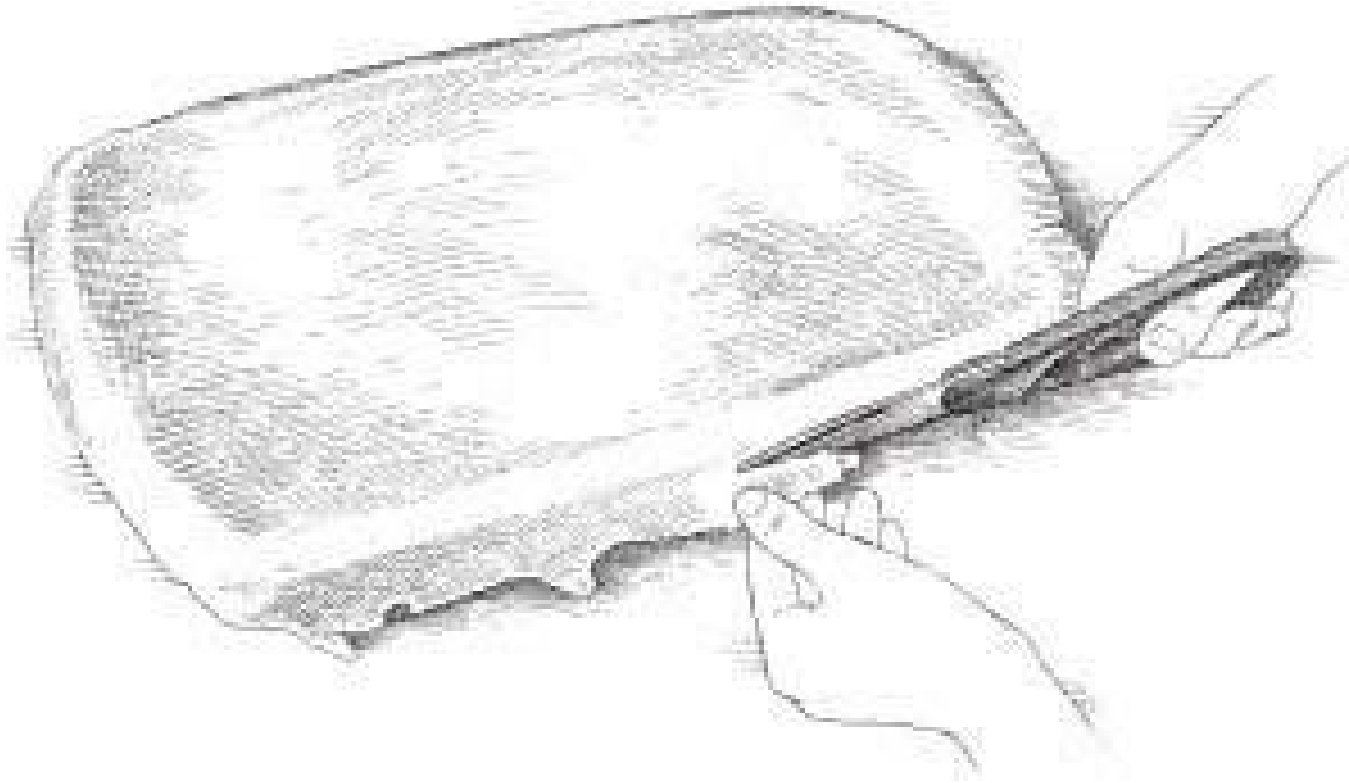

Figure 1.

If using pie dough, lay the rectangle of dough for the large pie or the dough rounds for the individual pies over the pot pie filling, trimming the dough to within $^{3}/_{4}$ inch of the pan lip.

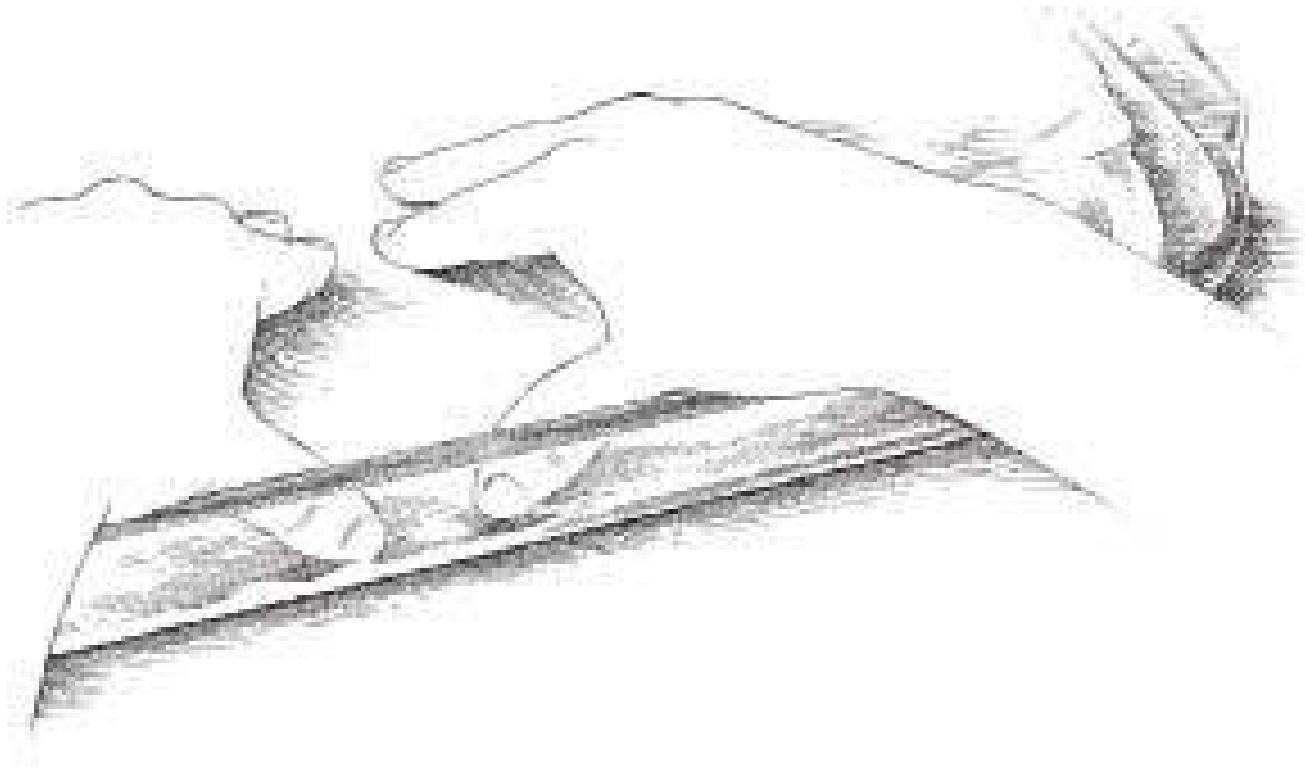

Figure 2.

For a double-crust effect, simply tuck the overhanging dough down into the pan side. The tucked crust will become soft in the oven, like the bottom crust of a pie. Proceed to figure 5 if using this method.

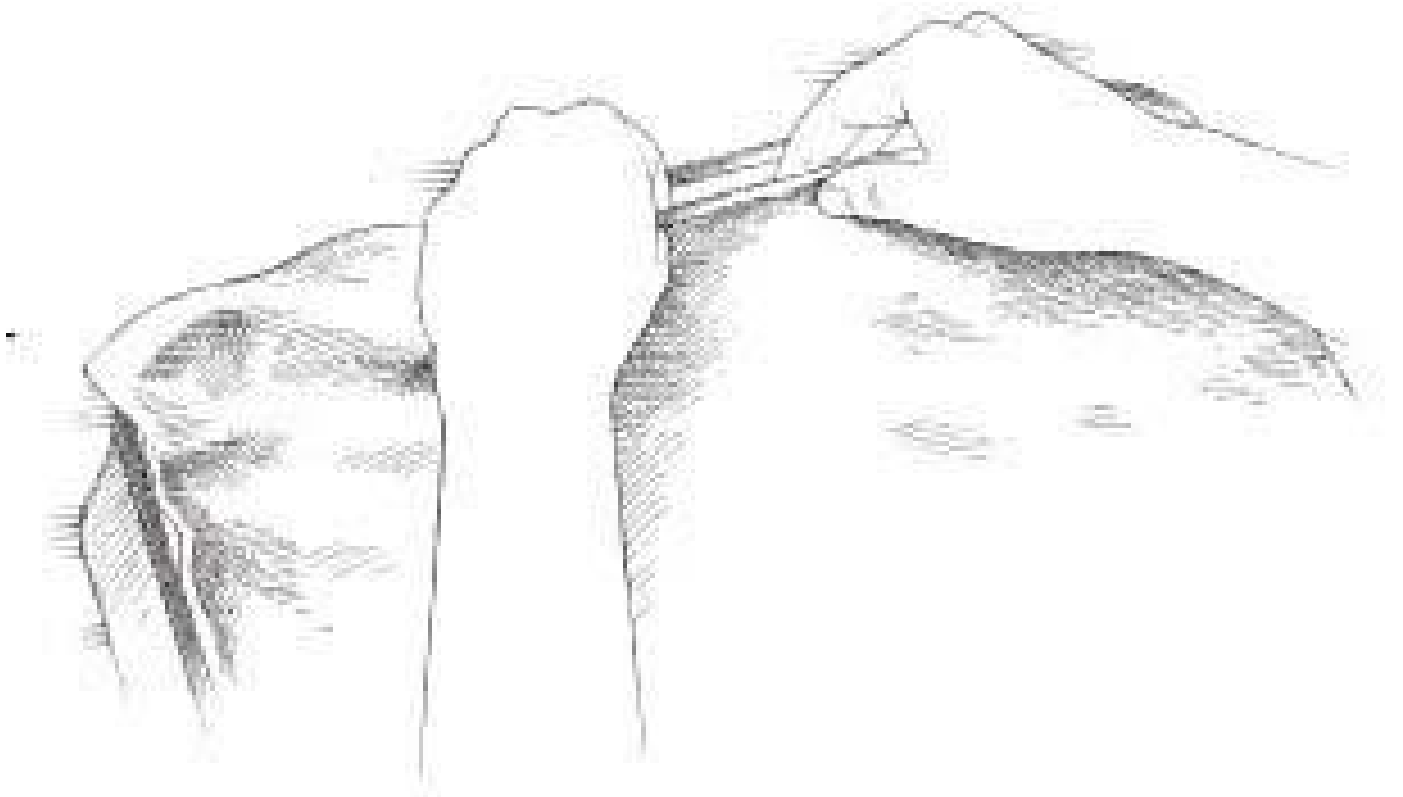

Figure 3.

For a more finished look, tuck the overhanging dough back under itself so the folded edge is flush with the lip of the pan.

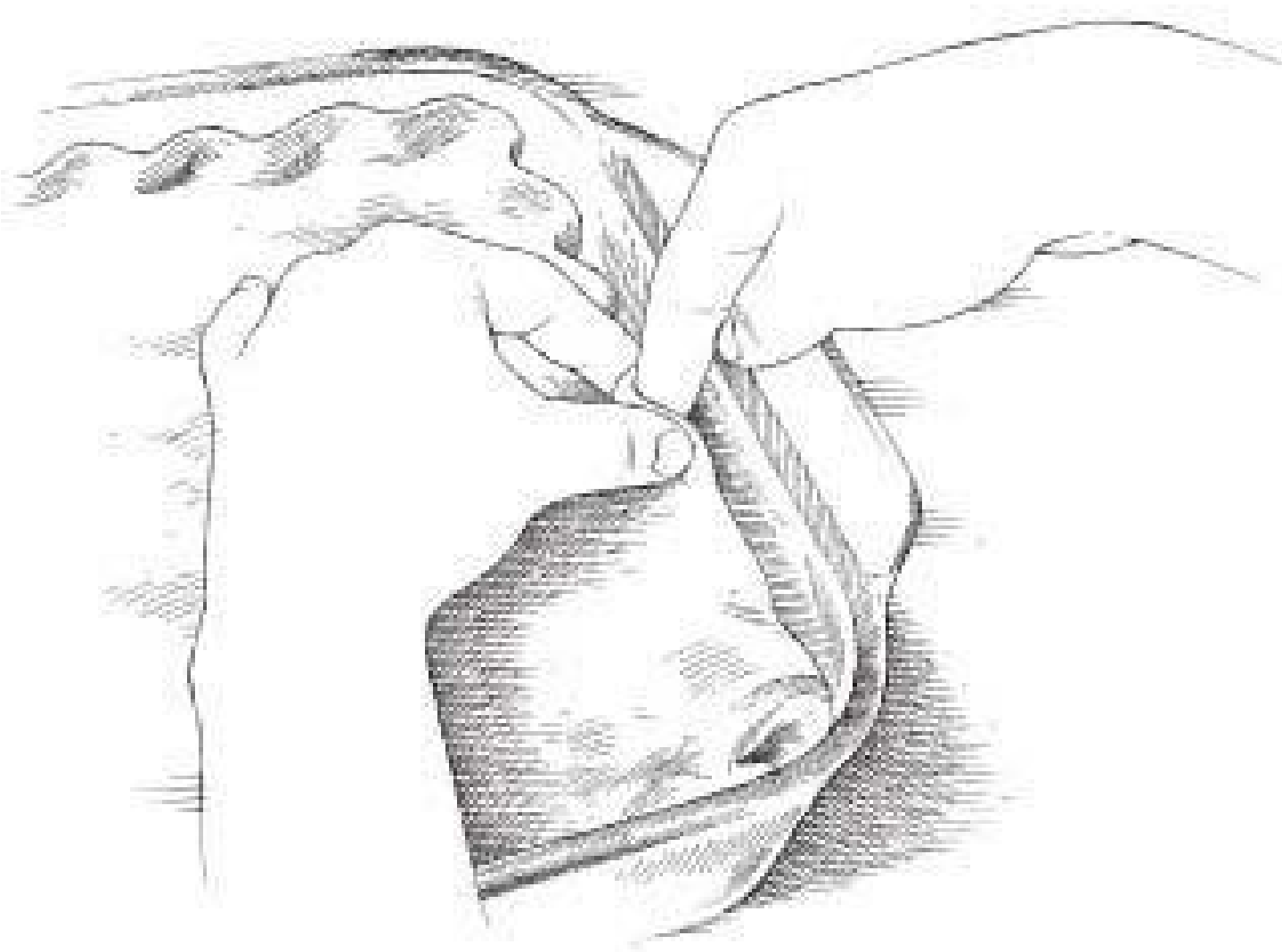

Figure 4.

Holding dough with thumb and index finger of one hand, push the dough with the index finger of the other hand to form a pleated edge. Repeat all around the edge to flute

the dough.

Figure 5.

Cut at least four 1-inch vent holes in a large pot pie or one 1-inch vent hole in each individual pie.

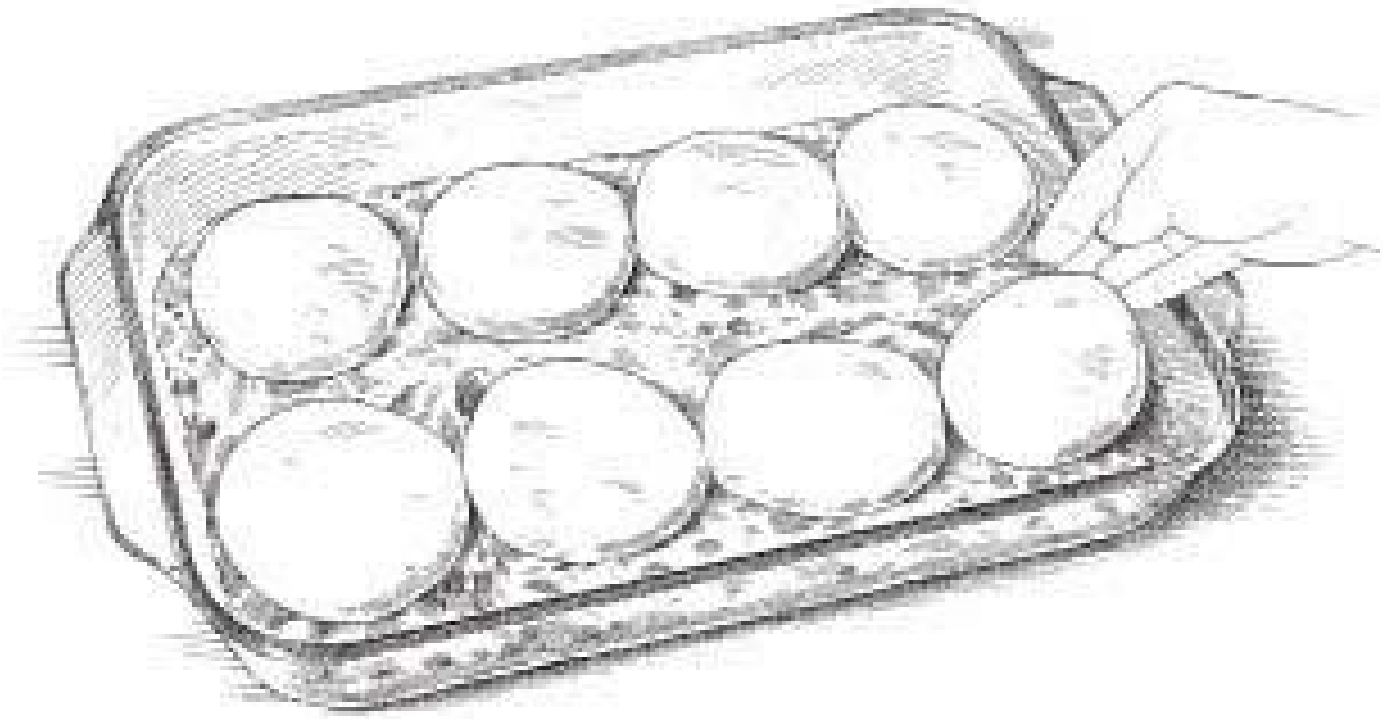

Figure 6.

If using biscuits to top a pot pie, simply arrange the dough rounds over the warm filling before baking.

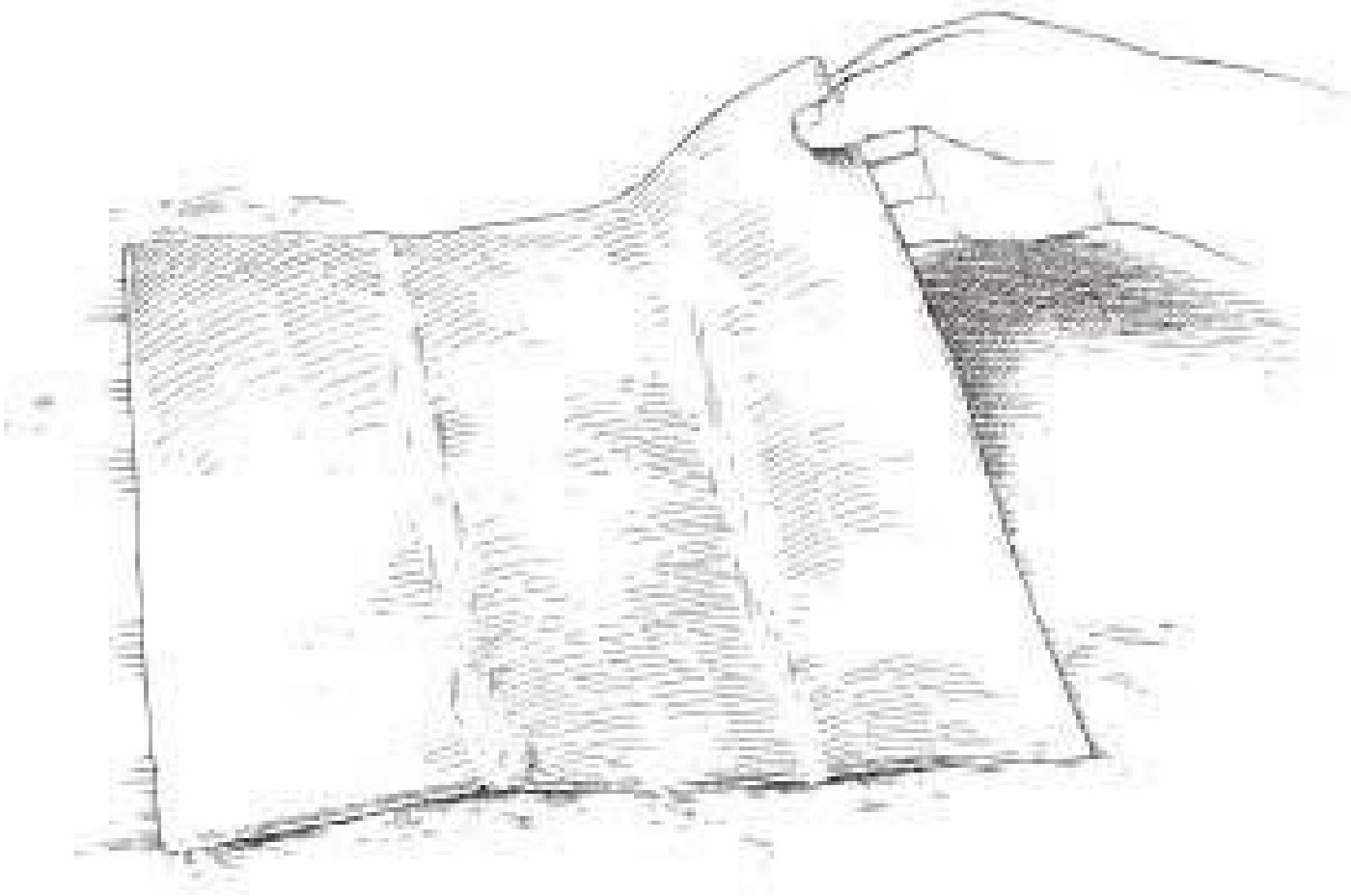

Figure 7.

If using store-bought puff pastry, defrost the dough until pliable but still-chilled, 20 to 30 minutes. Unfold and place with creases opening out onto a floured surface like a book set face down.

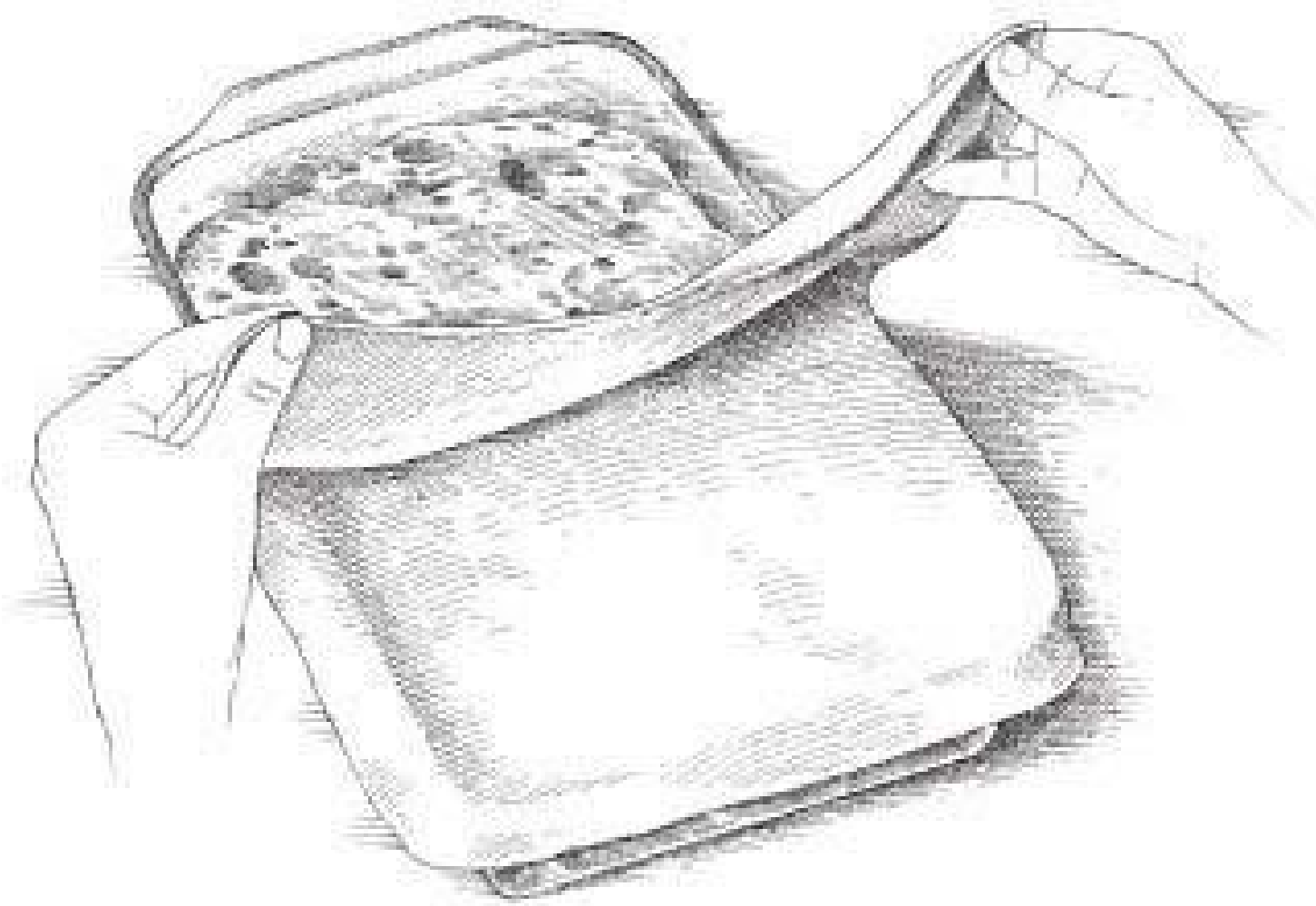

Figure 8.

*Roll the defrosted puff pastry out so that it is about two inches larger than the baking dish(es). Lay the puff pastry over the filling. Tuck the edges of the pastry into the pan (*see *figure 2*) *or flute the edges (*see *figures 3*

and 4). Cut vent holds as in figure 5.

Master Recipe

Vegetable Pot Pie

serves 6 to 8

NOTE: *The abundant use of vegetables makes this pie hearty enough to serve as a main course. If you like, use chicken broth in place of the vegetable broth.*

3 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 medium-large onion, finely chopped
4 medium carrots, peeled and cut crosswise $^{1}/_{4}$-inch thick

2 small celery stalks, cut crosswise 1/4-inch thick

2 medium garlic cloves, finely minced

5 medium red-skinned potatoes, cut into 1/2-inch dice

24 asparagus spears, trimmed and cut into 1-inch pieces

Salt and ground black pepper

4 tablespoons unsalted butter

1/2 cup all-purpose flour

2 cups vegetable stock

1 1/2 cups milk

1/2 teaspoon dried thyme

3 tablespoons dry sherry

3/4 cup frozen green peas,

thawed

3 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves

1 recipe Rich, Flaky Pie Dough, 1 recipe Fluffy Buttermilk Biscuits or variations, or 1 sheet (about 9 ounces) frozen puff pastry

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oil in medium Dutch oven or soup kettle over medium-high heat. Add onion, carrots, and celery; sauté 3 minutes. Add garlic and potatoes, cover, and cook for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add asparagus, cover again, and cook for 4 minutes, stirring occasionally. Season to taste with salt

and pepper. Transfer cooked vegetables to bowl.

2. Heat butter over medium heat in empty pan. When foaming subsides, add flour; cook about 1 minute, stirring. Whisk in vegetable stock, milk, and thyme. Bring to a simmer, then continue to simmer until sauce fully thickens, about 1 minute. Season to taste with salt and pepper; stir in sherry.

3. Pour sauce over vegetable mixture; stir to combine. Stir in peas and parsley. Adjust seasonings. (The filling can be covered and refrigerated overnight;

reheat before topping with pie dough, biscuits, or puff pastry.) Pour mixture into 13 x 9-inch pan or six 12-ounce ovenproof dishes. Top with pie dough (*see* figures 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5), biscuits (*see* figure 6), or puff pastry (*see* figures 7 and 8); bake until topping is golden brown and filling is bubbly, 30 minutes for a large pie and 20 to 25 minutes for individual pies. Serve hot.

VARIATIONS:

Vegetable Pot Pie with Winter Root Vegetables

Follow Master Recipe, decreasing potatoes to 4 medium and adding 3 medium parsnips, peeled and cut

crosswise, 1/4-inch thick, and 1 medium turnip, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch dice, with garlic and potatoes in step 1. Increase cooking time to 9 minutes. Omit asparagus. Season with salt and pepper to taste and proceed as directed.

Vegetable Pot Pie with Wild Mushrooms

The soaking liquid used to rehydrate dried porcini mushrooms replaces some of the vegetable stock used to enrich the sauce. Parmesan Biscuits are particularly good in this recipe.

Follow Master Recipe, soaking 1 ounce dried porcini mushrooms in 2 cups warm tap water until softened,

about 20 minutes. Lift mushrooms from liquid, chop mushrooms, strain liquid, and reserve, adding enough vegetable stock to make up 2 cups of liquid. Proceed with recipe, adding reserved porcini mushrooms along with 10 ounces sliced white button mushrooms, 4 ounces sliced shiitake mushrooms, and 8 ounces sliced crimini mushrooms along with garlic; cover the pot and cook for 6 minutes. Add potatoes, cover, and cook 5 minutes more. Omit asparagus. Season with salt and pepper to taste and proceed as directed.

Rich, Flaky Pie Dough

Makes enough dough to cover one 13 x 9 inch baking dish or six 12-ounce ovenproof baking dishes.

NOTE: *We find that a combination of butter and shortening delivers the best texture and flavor for pie pastry. Use a food processor to cut the fat into the flour. Once the mixture resembles coarse cornmeal, turn it into a bowl and add just enough ice water to bring the dough together. If you like a bottom crust in your pot pie, you can duplicate that soft crust texture by tucking any overhanging pie dough down into the*

pan side rather than fluting it.

$1^1/_2$ cups all-purpose flour

$^1/_2$ teaspoon salt

8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter, chilled, cut into $^1/_4$-inch pieces

4 tablespoons chilled all-vegetable shortening

3 to 4 tablespoons ice-cold water

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Mix flour and water in workbowl of food processor fitted with steel blade. Scatter butter pieces over flour mixture, tossing to coat butter with flour. Cut butter into flour with five 1-second

pulses. Add shortening; continue pulsing until flour is pale yellow and resembles coarse cornmeal, keeping some butter bits size of small peas, about four more 1-second pulses. Turn mixture into medium bowl.

2. Sprinkle 3 tablespoons of ice-cold water over mixture. Using rubber spatula, fold water into flour mixture. Then press down on dough mixture with broad side of spatula until dough sticks together, adding up to 1 tablespoon more cold water if dough will not come together. Shape dough into ball, then flatten into 4-inch disk. Wrap dough in plastic and refrigerate for 30 minutes

while preparing pie filling.

3. On floured surface, roll dough into 15 x 11-inch rectangle, about 1/8-inch thick. If making individual pies, roll dough about 1/8-inch thick and cut 6 dough rounds about 1 inch larger than pan circumference.

4. Lay dough over the warm pot pie filling, trimming dough to within $^{3}/_{4}$ inch of pan flap. Tuck overhanging dough back under itself so folded edge is flush with lip of pan and flute edges all around. Or, simply tuck overhanging dough down into pan side. Cut at least

four 1-inch vent holes in large pot pie or one 1-inch vent hole in smaller pies (*See* figures 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 for illustrations on preparing crust for baking.) Proceed with pot pie recipe.

Fluffy Buttermilk Biscuits

Makes enough to cover one 13 x 9 inch baking dish or six 12-ounce ovenproof baking dishes.

NOTE: *When making fluffy buttermilk biscuits, we use the food processor to cut the butter into the dry ingredients. We then scrape this mixture into a bowl and stir in the buttermilk. If you like, substitute an 8-ounce container of low-fat or whole-milk plain yogurt for the buttermilk. If the dough does not quite come together, add 1 or 2 tablespoons regular milk. Do not overwork the biscuits. Unlike pie pastry, biscuits*

take to a number of different flavorings.

1 cup all-purpose flour

1 cup cake flour (not self-rising)

2 teaspoons baking powder

1/4 teaspoon baking soda

1 teaspoon sugar

1/2 teaspoon salt

8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter, chilled and quartered lengthwise and cut crosswise into 1/4 inch pieces

3/4 cup cold buttermilk, plus 1 to 2 tablespoons extra, if needed

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Pulse first six ingredients in workbowl of food processor fitted with steel blade. Add butter; pulse until mixture resembles coarse meal with a few slightly larger butter lumps.

2. Transfer mixture into medium bowl; add $^{3}/_{4}$ cup buttermilk; stir with fork until dough gathers into moist clumps. Add remaining 1 or 2 tablespoons buttermilk if dough is too dry. Transfer dough to floured work surface and form into rough ball, then roll dough $^{1}/_{2}$-inch thick. Using 2 $^{1}/_{2}$ to 3-inch pastry cutter,

stamp out 8 rounds of dough. If making individual pies, cut dough slightly smaller than circumference of each dish.

3. Arrange dough rounds over warm filling (*see* figure 6) and proceed with pot pie recipe.

VARIATIONS:

Parmesan Biscuits

Follow recipe for Fluffy Buttermilk Biscuits, decreasing the butter to 5 tablespoons. After fat has been processed into flour and transferred to medium bowl, add $1\ ^{1}/_{2}$ cups grated Parmesan cheese (4 ounces); toss lightly,

then stir in liquid.

Herb Biscuits

Follow recipe for Fluffy Buttermilk Biscuits, adding 3 tablespoons minced parsley or 2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves and 1 tablespoon minced fresh tarragon or dill leaves after fat has been processed into flour.

Cornmeal Biscuits

Follow recipe for Fluffy Buttermilk Biscuits, replacing cake flour with 1 cup yellow cornmeal.

PASTA CASSEROLES

THIS CHAPTER EXPLORES SEVERAL AMERICAN and Italian casseroles that start with pasta: turkey tetrazzini, macaroni and cheese, baked ziti, and lasagne.

Turkey tetrazzini can be very good, an interesting blend of toasted bread crumbs, silky sauce, and turkey meat, bound together by one of our favorite foods, spaghetti. Or, it can taste like cafeteria food. The downside of casseroles-that individual tastes and textures are fused and thus diminished-is

acute with this dish. We found that baking the casserole in a shallow dish in a hot oven to prevent over-cooking makes a big difference in this recipe.

Next we adjusted the sauce. The traditional choice is Béchamel, a sauce in which milk is added to a roux, a whisked mixture of melted butter and flour. We decided to use a Velouté, a sauce based on chicken stock. This brightened up both the texture and the flavor, since dairy tends to dampen other flavors. We also played around a bit with the amount of sauce, trying larger and smaller quantities, and found that more sauce overran the taste of the other ingredients. In this case, less was more. The dish still needed a burst of favor,

however, so we spruced it up with a shot of sherry and a little lemon juice and nutmeg, a bit of Parmesan cheese to provide tang and bite, and a full two teaspoons of fresh thyme.

Most recipes do not toast the bread combs before baking. This step does complicate the dish by adding an extra step (in a pinch, you can skip the toasting), but it is well worth it. Tossing the toasted bread crumbs with a bit of grated Parmesan also helps to boost their flavor.

Macaroni and cheese is another classic American pasta casserole. There are two distinct styles of macaroni and cheese. The more common variety is

Béchamel-based. Here macaroni is blanketed with a cheese-flavored white sauce, usually topped with crumbs, and baked. The other variety is custard-based. In this style, a mixture of egg and milk is poured over layers of grated cheese and noodles. As the dish bakes, the eggs, milk, and cheese set into a custard. This macaroni and cheese is also topped with bread crumbs.

We tried both styles and were unimpressed. The Béchamel-based version was grainy and tasted like macaroni with cheese sauce. We preferred the cheesier-flavored custard version, but this dish still had problems-the dry custard had set around the noodles. Neither recipe had done the job

of melding the cheese sauce and macaroni.

We then ran across a recipe in John Thorne's *Simple Cooking* (Penguin, 1989). His recipe starts with macaroni cooked just shy of al dente. The hot, drained macaroni is then tossed with butter in a heat-proof pan or bowl. Evaporated milk, hot red pepper sauce, dry mustard, eggs, and a large quantity of cheese are stirred into the noodles.

The combination is baked for 20 minutes, with cheese and milk additions and a thorough stir every 5 minutes. Frequent stirrings allow the eggs to thicken without setting, which results in an incredibly silky sauce. During

cooking, the sauce settles into the tubular openings of the macaroni, offering a burst of cheese with each new bite. The results were fantastic.

Though the recipe was virtually perfect, we did consider a few refinements. First, we found that at the end of baking, the dish was hot but hardly piping. We also missed the contrasting textures of crunchy bread crumbs and soft noodles and sauce offered by the baked versions. Finally, we wondered if evaporated milk was really necessary.

After testing the recipe with whole and low-fat milks and half-and-half, we realized that evaporated milk was not an ingredient thoughtlessly added. All the

macaroni and cheese dishes made with fresh milk curdled a bit, resulting in a chalky grainy texture. The one made with evaporated milk remained silky smooth. The evaporation and sterilization process stabilizes the milk, which in turn stabilizes the macaroni and cheese.

We found that you could not remedy the dish's lukewarm temperature problem by leaving it in the oven much longer than the suggested 20 minutes. If you do, you run the risk of curdling the eggs, and the dish starts to develop a subtle grainy texture. We wondered if we could cook the macaroni and cheese on top of the stove instead of in the oven. We found that by using a heavy-

bottomed pot and cooking over low heat, it was possible to make the macaroni and cheese on top of the stove in less than five minutes. Not only was this method quicker, but it kept the macaroni and cheese piping hot. To add the standard bread crumb topping, we altered the macaroni and cheese in a casserole dish, sprinkled on the bread crumbs, and ran the dish under the broiler for several minutes.

With our classic American pasta casseroles perfected, we turned to baked ziti. This dish, with tomato sauce and mozzarella cheese, can be a delicious Italian casserole, or it can be dry and unappetizing, with hard, overcooked noodles. The key to avoiding these

problems is to keep the pasta in the oven as briefly as possible and to use enough tomato sauce. When we just coated the noodles lightly with sauce, they tended to become dry and hard in the oven. Adding a little cooking water to the drained pasta also helped keep the casserole moist.

Aside from the pasta and tomato sauce, cheese is the other major component of this dish. If you can, use fresh mozzarella packed in water, which makes the texture of the finished dish especially moist and creamy. Mozzarella is a bit bland. We found that adding a quarter cup of Parmesan perks up the flavor. To ensure that the cheese is

evenly distributed throughout the casserole, layer half of the pasta in the baking dish, sprinkle with half of the cheeses, then add the remaining pasta and cheeses and, finally, the sauce.

Lasagne made with no-boil noodles is another good example of a quick, satisfying casserole. These precooked, dried noodles eliminate the time-consuming step of boiling and draining the sheets of pasta, the noodles may simply be layered straight from the box into a baking dish with tomato sauce and cheese.

The challenge in creating this recipe was to figure out how to use the no-boil noodles. We tried them in a standard lasagne and found that they sucked all

the moisture out of the sauce, leaving tiny bits of dried-out tomato pulp. The noodles were stiff, even crunchy in places. Clearly, the noodles needed more moisture to rehydrate.

The label on one brand of noodles suggested adding stock to the assembled lasagne. The result was a watery mess. We tried another manufacturer's suggestion to soak the noodles in hot water before layering them into the pan. This, too, caused the noodles to cook up soft and mushy.

We made some headway when we covered the pan with foil before it went into the oven. The steam trapped by the foil helped the noodles to soften without

causing the sauce to dry out. Using more tomato sauce than you might in a standard lasagne with boiled noodles also helped rehydrate the noodles. We found that leaving the tomato sauce fairly watery (we simmered it for just five minutes) and then adding some water provided enough moisture, helping to make the pasta tender without becoming too soft.

Covering the lasagne with foil as it bakes does present one problem–the top layer of cheese won't brown. This was easily solved by removing the foil during the last 15 minutes of baking.

Turkey Tetrazzini

serves 6

NOTE: *Using a shallow baking dish, no cover, and a very hot oven benefit both texture and flavor. Don't be stingy with the salt and pepper. Tetrazzini is great with leftover chicken as well.*

Topping

1 cup fresh bread crumbs (*see* figures 9, 10 and 11)

Pinch salt

$1^1/_2$ tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

$^1/_4$ cup grated Parmesan

cheese

Filling

Salt

3/4 pound spaghetti or other long-strand pasta

6 tablespoons butter, plus extra for greasing baking dish

8 ounces white button mushrooms, wiped clean, stems trimmed, and sliced thin

2 medium onions, minced

Ground black pepper

1/4 cup all-purpose flour

2 cups chicken stock or canned low-sodium chicken broth

3 tablespoons dry sherry

$^3/_4$ cup grated Parmesan cheese

$^1/_4$ teaspoon grated nutmeg

2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice

2 teaspoons minced fresh thyme leaves

4 cups leftover cooked boneless turkey or chicken meat, cut into $^1/_4$ inch dice

2 cups frozen peas, thawed

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. *For the topping*: Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Mix bread crumbs, salt, and butter in small baking dish; bake until golden brown and crisp, 15 to 20

minutes. Cool to room temperature, transfer to bowl, and mix with $^{3}/_{4}$ cup grated Parmesan.

2. *For the filling:* Increase oven temperature to 450 degrees. Butter shallow casserole or baking dish that measures about 13 x 9 inches. Bring 4 quarts water to boil in large pot. Add 1 tablespoon salt, snap spaghetti in half, and add to pot. Cook until al dente. Reserve $^{1}/_{4}$ cup of cooking water, drain spaghetti, and return to pot with reserved liquid.

3. Meanwhile, heat 2 tablespoons butter

in large skillet over medium heat until foaming subsides; add mushrooms and onions and sauté, stirring frequently, until onions soften and mushroom liquid evaporates, 7 to 10 minutes. Season to taste with salt and pepper; transfer to medium bowl and set side.

4. Melt remaining 4 tablespoons butter in cleaned skillet over medium heat. When foam subsides, whisk in flour and cook, whisking constantly until flour turns golden, 1 to 2 minutes. While continuing to whisk, gradually add chicken stock. Adjust heat to medium-high and simmer until mixture thickens, 3 to 4 minutes. Off heat and whisk in

sherry, Parmesan, nutmeg, $^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon salt, lemon juice, and thyme. Add sauce, mushroom mixture, turkey and peas to spaghetti and mix well, adjusting seasonings to taste.

5. Turn mixture into buttered baking dish, sprinkle evenly with bread crumbs, and bake until bread crumbs brown and mixture is bubbly, 13 to 15 minutes. Serve immediately

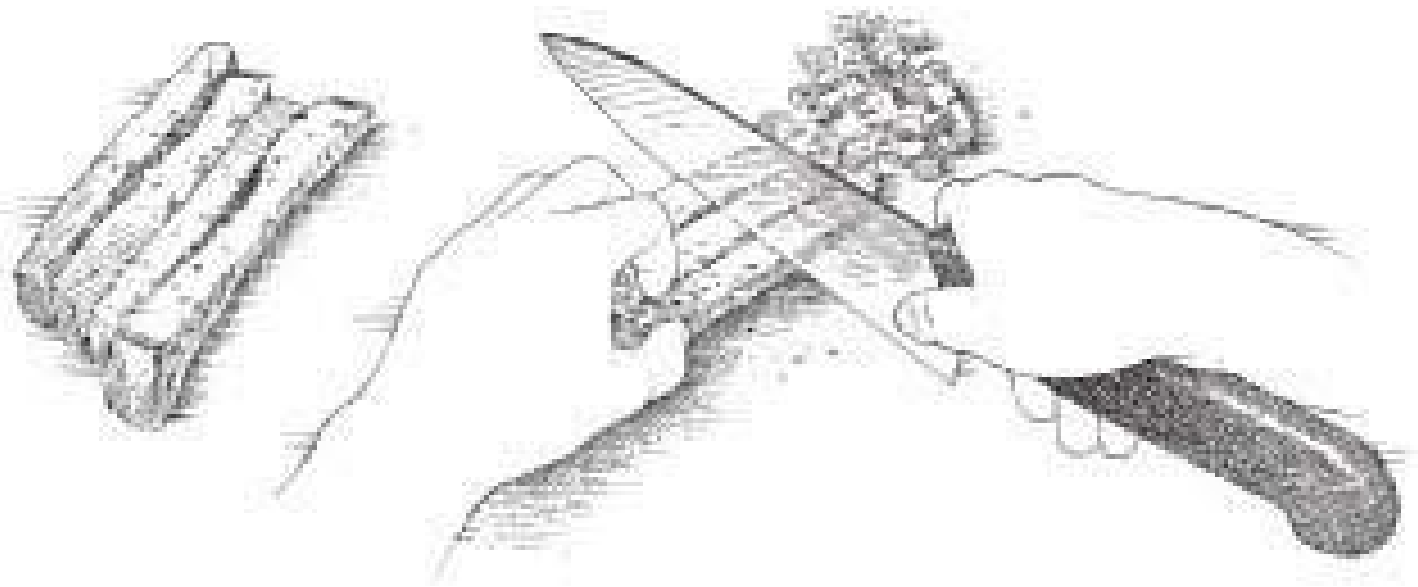

Figure 9.

Fresh crumbs are worth the minimal effort they require. We find that dry bread crumbs are powdery and tasteless. Fresh bread crumbs may be cut with a knife, grater or food processor. To make bread crumbs by hand use a sharp bread knife to cut slices 3/8-inch thick-Cut these slices into 3/8-inch strips, then cut these into

cubes and chop the crumbs until they are about the size of dried black beans.

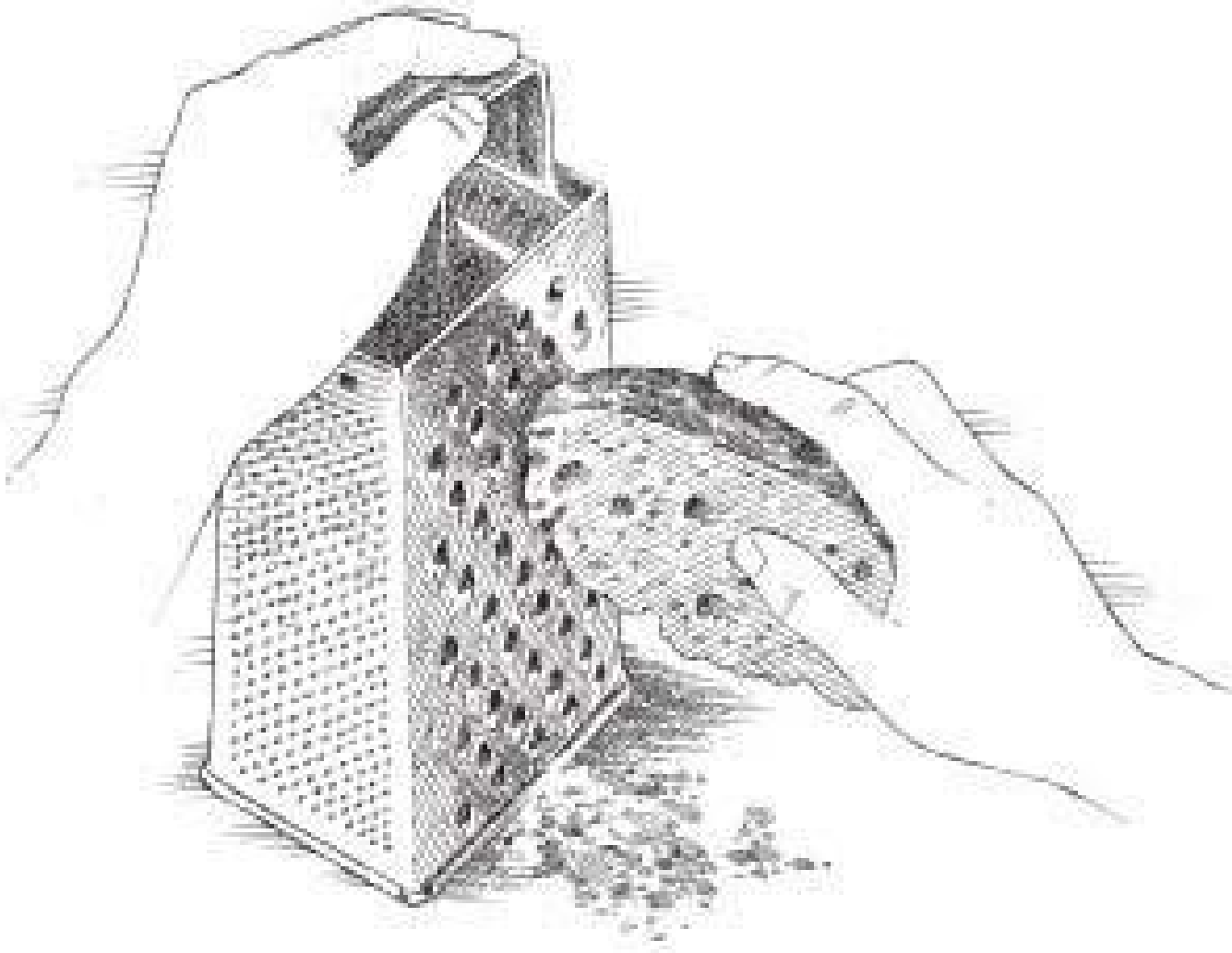

Figure 10.

To make bread crumbs with a box grater, rub tie trimmed bread against the largest holes. The crumbs will be finer-textured than those made by hand or in a food processor.

Figure 11.

To make bread crumbs in a food processor cut the trimmed loaf into 1 $^{1}/_{2}$-inch cubes, then pulse the cubes in a food processor to the desired crumb size.

"Baked" Macaroni and Cheese

serves 4 as a main course or 6 to 8 as a side dish

NOTE: Our preferred version of macaroni and cheese turned out to be a simple stove-top recipe that cooks in five minutes. To finish the dish, we sprinkle it with fresh bread crumbs and put it under the broiler for a minute or two, which gives it that baked casserole look with a golden-brown topping.

6 tablespoons unsalted butter

1 cup fresh bread crumbs (*see*

figures 9, 10 and 11)

Salt

12 ounces sharp Wisconsin cheddar, American, or Monterey-jack cheese, shredded (about 3 cups)

2 large eggs

1 can (12 ounces) evaporated milk

1/2 teaspoon hot red pepper sauce

1 teaspoon dry mustard, dissolved in 1 teaspoon water

12 ounces elbow macaroni

Ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat 2 tablespoons butter in large skillet over medium heat until foam subsides. Add bread crumbs and cook tossing to coat with butter, until crumbs just begin to color. Season to taste with salt. Cool completely, toss with $^{1}/_{4}$ cup cheese, and set aside.

2. Readjust oven rack 6 inches from heating element and heat broiler.

3. Mix eggs, 1 cup evaporated milk, pepper sauce, and mustard mixture in small bowl and set aside.

4. Meanwhile, bring 3 quarts water to boil in large pot. Add 2 teaspoons salt and macaroni and cook until almost tender but still a little firm to the bite. Drain and return pasta to pot over low heat. Add remaining 4 tablespoons butter and toss to melt.

5. Pour egg mixture over buttered noodles along with three-quarters of remaining cheese. Stir until thoroughly combined and cheese starts to melt. Gradually add remaining milk and cheese, stirring constantly, until mixture is hot and creamy, about 5 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

6. Pour cooked macaroni and cheese into 9-inch square baking dish. Spread crumbs evenly over top. Broil until crumbs turn deep brown, 1 to 2 minutes. Let stand to set a bit, about 5 minutes, and serve.

Master Recipe

Baked Ziti with Mozzarella and Tomatoes

serves 6

NOTE: *Use fresh mozzarella if possible–it will provide extra creaminess and moisture, which are important in this dish.*

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for oiling baking dish

2 medium garlic cloves, minced

1 can (28 ounces) crushed

tomatoes

2 tablespoons coarsely chopped fresh basil leaves

Salt

1 pound ziti or other short, tubular pasta

8 ounces mozzarella cheese, shredded

$^1/_2$ cup grated Parmesan cheese

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Heat 2 tablespoons oil and garlic in a medium skillet over medium heat until fragrant but not brown, about 2 minutes. Stir in tomatoes; simmer until thickened

slightly, about 10 minutes. Stir in basil and salt to taste.

2. Meanwhile, bring 4 quarts water to boil in large pot. Add 1 tablespoon salt and pasta. Cook until almost tender but still a little firm to the bite. Reserve $^{1}/_{4}$ cup of cooking water, drain pasta, and return it to pot with reserved liquid. Stir in tomato sauce.

3. Lightly brush 13 x 9-inch baking dish with oil. Pour half of pasta into dish. Sprinkle with half of mozzarella and half of Parmesan. Pour remaining pasta into dish and sprinkle with remaining

mozzarella and Parmesan.

4. Bake until cheese turns golden brown, about 20 minutes. Remove dish from oven and let rest for 5 minutes before serving.

VARIATIONS:

Baked Ziti with Eggplant

Cut 2 medium eggplants (about 2 pounds) cross-wise into $^{3}/_{4}$-inch-thick slices, then into $^{3}/_{4}$-inch-thick strips. Place eggplant in colander and sprinkle with 1 tablespoon kosher salt. Set over bowl for 1 $^{1}/_{2}$ hours. Brush off salt. Heat 3 tablespoons oil in large skillet. Add

eggplant and cook over medium-low heat until eggplant is tender, 15 to 20 minutes. Add garlic to pan (eliminate the 2 tablespoons oil) and proceed with recipe as directed.

Baked Ziti with Meatballs

Follow Master Recipe, adding 1 recipe cooked and drained Best Meatballs to cooked tomato sauce. Proceed as directed.

Best Meatballs

makes several dozen tiny meatballs

2 slices white sandwich bread torn into small cubes (crust discarded)

$^1/_2$ cup buttermilk or 6 tablespoons plain yogurt thinned with 2 tablespoons whole milk

$^3/_4$ pound ground chuck mixed with $^1/_4$ pound ground pork, or 1 pound ground chuck

$^1/_4$ cup grated Parmesan cheese

2 tablespoons minced fresh

parsley leaves
1 large egg yolk
1 small garlic clove, minced
$^{3}/_{4}$ teaspoon salt
Ground black pepper
Vegetable oil

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Combine bread and buttermilk in small bowl, mashing occasionally until smooth paste forms, about 10 minutes.

2. Combine bread mixture, meat, cheese, parsley, egg yolk, garlic, salt, and pepper to taste in a medium bowl until well blended.

3. Heat about $^{1}/_{4}$ inch of vegetable oil in large skillet. Take handful of meat mixture and, working directly over skillet, pinch off pieces no larger than a small grape, then flatten them slightly (*see* figure 12). Cooking in batches to avoid overcrowding, carefully drop them into hot oil. Fry, turning once, until evenly browned, 3 to 4 minutes. Use a slotted spoon to transfer meatballs to a paper towel on platter.

Figure 12.

Casseroles require small meatballs that won't overwhelm the other ingredients. Rather than shaping lots of round little meatballs, simply pinch off small pieces of the meatball mixture right over the skillet. Each piece

should he no larger than a small grape.

Master Recipe

Quick Lasagne with Meatballs

serves 6 to 8

NOTE: *Make sure to buy American no-boil noodles, which are long and thin. In our testing, we found that square Italian no-boil noodles taste great, but their odd shape makes them difficult to use in a standard casserole dish.*

2 tablespoons olive oil
2 medium garlic cloves, minced
1 can (28 ounces) crushed

tomatoes

2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil or parsley leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

15 dried 7 x 3 1/2 inch no-boil lasagne noodles

1 recipe Best Meatballs

1 pound mozzarella cheese, shredded (about 4 cups)

2/3 cup grated Parmesan cheese

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oil and garlic in medium skillet over medium heat until fragrant but not brown, about 2 minutes. Stir in tomatoes; simmer until thickened slightly, about 10

minutes. Stir in basil or parsley and salt and pepper to taste. Pour into large measuring cup. Add enough water to make 3 $^{1}/_{2}$ cups.

2. Spread $^{1}/_{2}$ cup sauce evenly over bottom of greased 13 x 9 baking dish. Lay three noodles crosswise over sauce, making sure they do not touch each other or sides of the pan. Spread $^{1}/_{4}$ of prepared meatballs evenly over noodles, $^{3}/_{4}$ cup sauce evenly over meatballs, and $^{3}/_{4}$ cup mozzarella and 2 tablespoons Parmesan evenly over sauce. Repeat layering of noodles, meatballs, sauce, and cheeses three more times. For fifth

and final layer, lay final three noodles crosswise over previous layer and top with remaining 1 cup tomato sauce, 1 cup mozzarella, and 2 generous table-moons Parmesan. (Can be wrapped with plastic and refrigerated overnight or wrapped in plastic and aluminum foil and frozen for up to 1 month. If frozen, defrost in refrigerator.)

3. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 375 degrees. Cover pan with large sheet foil greased with cooking spray. Bake 25 minutes (30 minutes if chilled); remove foil and continue baking until top turns golden brown in spots, about 15 minutes.

Remove pan from oven and let lasagne rest 5 minutes. Cut and serve immediately

VARIATION:

Quick Lasagne with Roasted Zucchini and Eggplant

Adjust oven racks to upper-and lower-middle positions and heat oven to 400 degrees. Toss 1 pound each zucchini (about 2 medium) and eggplant (about 2 small), cut into $^{1}/_{2}$-inch dice, with 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, 4 minced garlic doves, and salt and pepper to taste. Spread out vegetables on two greased baking sheets; roast,

turning occasionally until golden brown, about 35 minutes. Set vegetables aside. Proceed with Master Recipe, replacing meatballs with roasted zucchini and eggplant.

RICE & GRAIN CASSEROLES

GRAINS ARE EXCELLENT CANDIDATES FOR casseroles for several reasons. Hearty and filling yet also fairly bland, they work well as a background for many, many flavors.

Rice is the most obvious choice for a grain casserole because it is so familiar to American cooks. We wanted to develop a recipe for chicken and rice casserole and then see if we could adapt this recipe to make the Creole specialty known as jambalaya, with its rice,

sausage, and shrimp.

There are two recurring problems with most chicken and rice casseroles. The rice tends to cook unevenly, becoming hard and brittle in some spots and soggy and mushy in others. The other issue is the cooking of the chicken. The breast meat tends to dry out and overcook by the time the legs and thighs are done.

We decided to tackle the chicken issue first. The parts are first sautéed to build flavor and then placed in a baking dish with the rice and other seasonings. We solved the problem of overcooked breast meat by adding the browned legs and thighs to the baking dish at the outset. We reserved the browned breast pieces and added them to the casserole

halfway through its cooking time.

At this point in our testing we decided to jettison the chicken wings from our recipe. The wings are covered with a lot of thick skin that does not take well to casseroling. Chicken wings are best grilled, so excess fat can be rendered and the skin can turn crisp. What's more, when we served the wings from the casserole they looked pretty paltry on the plate; they just didn't make up a complete serving, as did the other parts of the chicken.

With the chicken issues resolved, we turned our attention to the rice. In our first attempts, the rice on top of the baking dish became brittle and dry and

the rice at the bottom of the dish was a bit soggy. We found that stirring the rice once solved this problem. To stir the rice easily we found it best to transfer the chicken thighs and legs to a plate and then stir up the rice. The chicken thighs and legs can be placed back on top of the rice along with the browned breast pieces.

We tested various liquids used to cook the rice in the casseroles. Chicken stock made a very heavy dish, while plain water was bland. Adding some wine and canned tomatoes to plain water proved to be the right balance. The acidity in the wine and tomatoes enriched the flavor of the chicken and rice without adding heaviness.

As for the choice of rice, we found that regular long-grain rice works well. Parboiled (or converted) rice was tasteless by comparison. Medium-grain rice made a creamier casserole, more like risotto, which some tasters liked and others didn't. Basmati rice cooked up fluffy and nutty and seemed to make the most sense with the Indian spice variation.

We found that jambalaya, the famed Creole rice casserole, can be made along the same lines as a chicken and rice casserole. Jambalaya contains sausage, which can be treated just like chicken-browned, removed from the pan, and then added to the baking dish

with the rice and liquid. Shrimp is a bit trickier since it cooks so quickly. We found it best not to precook the shrimp but to add raw shrimp when the casserole is almost done.

We found that pearl barley, just like rice, can be used to make casseroles. Barley becomes starchier and creamier when cooked this way. Sweet Italian sausage works well with the earthy flavors of the barley. Mushrooms are another obvious addition to a barley casserole.

The last recipe in this chapter is a polenta pie, a particularly rich Italian casserole. This dish relies on cooked cornmeal mush (called polenta) to bind together a filling, which is usually

tomato based. A polenta pie is akin to a lasagne (the polenta takes the place of pasta) or even a pot pie (the polenta acts like a crust). We tested various kinds of polenta pie and ended up liking those with a bottom and top crust best.

To prevent lumps from forming, we found it best to stir the cornmeal into room-temperature liquid and then add this liquid directly to simmering water. Polenta made with all water was a bit bland. Adding some chicken broth improved the flavor. We found that using all broth, however, was a mistake. It tended to make the polenta compete with, rather than complement, the filling. A ratio of four parts water to one part

stock proved to be ideal.

We also found that the polenta mixture quickly became stiff and hard to work with. Adding some butter as the polenta cooks helps keep it slightly loose and improves the flavor of the polenta layers. If it still solidifies (this might happen if you take a break when assembling the casserole), you can loosen the texture by stirring in some hot water.

Master Recipe

Chicken and Rice Casserole

serves 6

NOTE: *We prefer not to use chicken wings in casseroles. They are mostly flabby skin with very little meat and make a poor serving, especially when compared with the breast, leg, or thigh. If you are trying to stretch a casserole to feed more people, you may want to use them.*

1 chicken (3 to 4 pounds) rinsed, patted dry; and cut into

6 pieces, wings and back reserved for another use (*see* figures 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18)

Salt and ground black pepper

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

1 medium onion, chopped fine

3 medium garlic cloves, minced very fine

1 1/2 cups long-grain white rice

1 can (14 1/2 ounces) whole tomatoes, drained (about 1/2 cup liquid reserved) and chopped

1/2 cup white wine

$^1/_3$ cup chopped fresh parsley leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

l. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Sprinkle chicken pieces liberally on both sides with salt and pepper. Heat oil until shimmering in heavy, 12-inch skillet over high heat. Add chicken pieces skin side down; cook without moving them, until well-browned about 6 minutes. Turn chicken pieces over with tongs and cook again without moving them, until well-browned on second side, about 6 minutes longer. Remove from pan and set aside.

2. Pour all but 2 tablespoons fat from pan; return to burner. Reduce heat to medium; add onion and sauté, stirring frequently until softened, about 3 to 4 minutes. Add garlic and sauté until fragrant, approximately 1 minute longer. Stir in rice and cook stirring frequently until coated and glistening, about 1 minute longer.

3. Transfer rice mixture to 13 x 9-inch baking dish; add tomatoes. To skillet add reserved tomato liquid, wine, 1 teaspoon salt, and $2\,{}^{1}/_{4}$ cups water; increase heat to medium-high, scraping browned bits off pan bottom with

wooden spoon. Bring to a boil and pour over rice mixture, stirring to combine.

4. Place chicken thighs and legs on top of the rice, cover tightly with foil, and bake for 20 minutes. Remove dish from oven, transfer chicken thighs and legs to plate, and stir rice (if rice appears too dry add $^{1}/_{4}$ cup more water and stir well). Add back chicken thighs and legs as well as breast pieces, re-cover, and cook until both rice and chicken pieces are tender, about 20 to 25 more minutes. Remove dish from oven. Stir in parsleys re-cover dish, and allow to rest for 5 minutes; serve immediately

VARIATIONS:

Chicken and Rice Casserole with Saffron, Peas, and Paprika

Brown chicken as directed in Master Recipe. In step 2, along with onion, sauté 1 medium green bell pepper, cored, seeded, and cut into medium dice. Along with garlic, add 4 teaspoons paprika and $^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoon saffron and sauté until fragrant, about 1 minute. Proceed as directed, adding 1 cup thawed frozen peas along with parsley.

Chicken and Rice Casserole with Indian Spices

Brown chicken as directed in Master Recipe. At beginning of step 2, sauté one 3-inch piece cinnamon stick stirring with wooden spoon until it unfurls, about 15 seconds. Add onion and 2 medium green bell peppers, stemmed, seeded, and cut into medium dice; sauté until onion and peppers are just soft, 5 to 6 minutes. Along with garlic, add 1 teaspoon each ground turmeric, coriander, and cumin. Proceed as directed, omitting parsley.

Chicken and Rice Casserole with Chiles, Cilantro, and Lime

Brown chicken as directed in Master

Recipe. In step 2, along with onion, sauté 2 jalapeno chilies, cored, seeded, and minced. Along with garlic, add 2 teaspoons each ground cumin and coriander and 1 teaspoon chili powder and sauté until fragrant, about 1 minute. Proceed as directed, substituting $^{1}/_{4}$ cup chopped fresh cilantro leaves and 3 tablespoons lime juice for parsley

Chicken and Rice casserole with Anchovies, Olives, and Lemon

Brown chicken as directed in Master Recipe. In step 2, along with onions, sauté 5 minced anchovy fillets. Proceed as directed, adding 1 teaspoon minced

lemon zest and 1 tablespoon juice from one small lemon and $^{1}/_{2}$ cup imported black olives, pitted and halved, along with parsley.

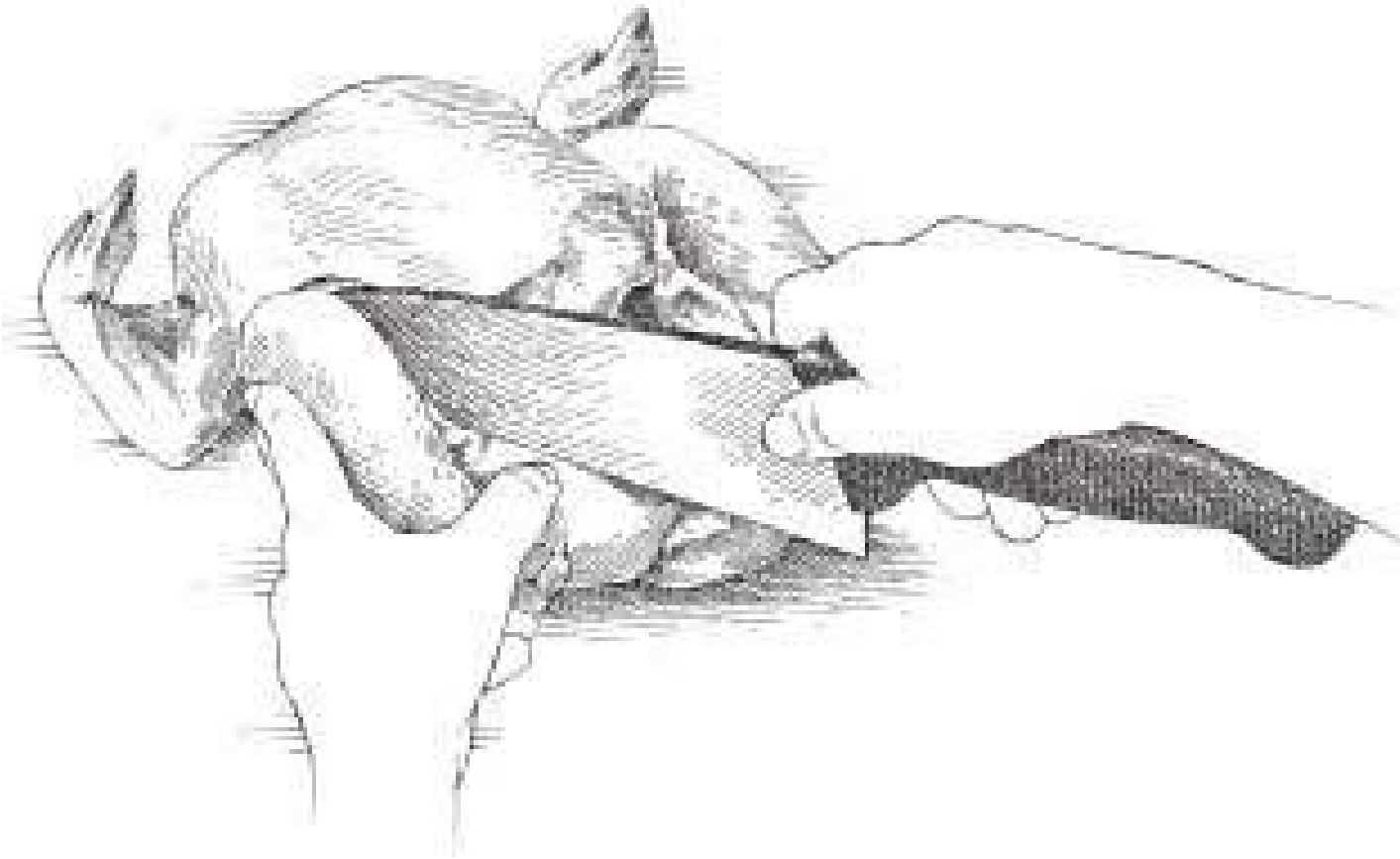

Figure 13.

We find that only breasts, thighs, and legs are worth using in a casserole. We reserve the wings (along with tie back) for making stock. To butcher a chicken for a casserole follow these steps. With a sharp chef's knife, cut through the skin around the leg where it

attaches to the breast.

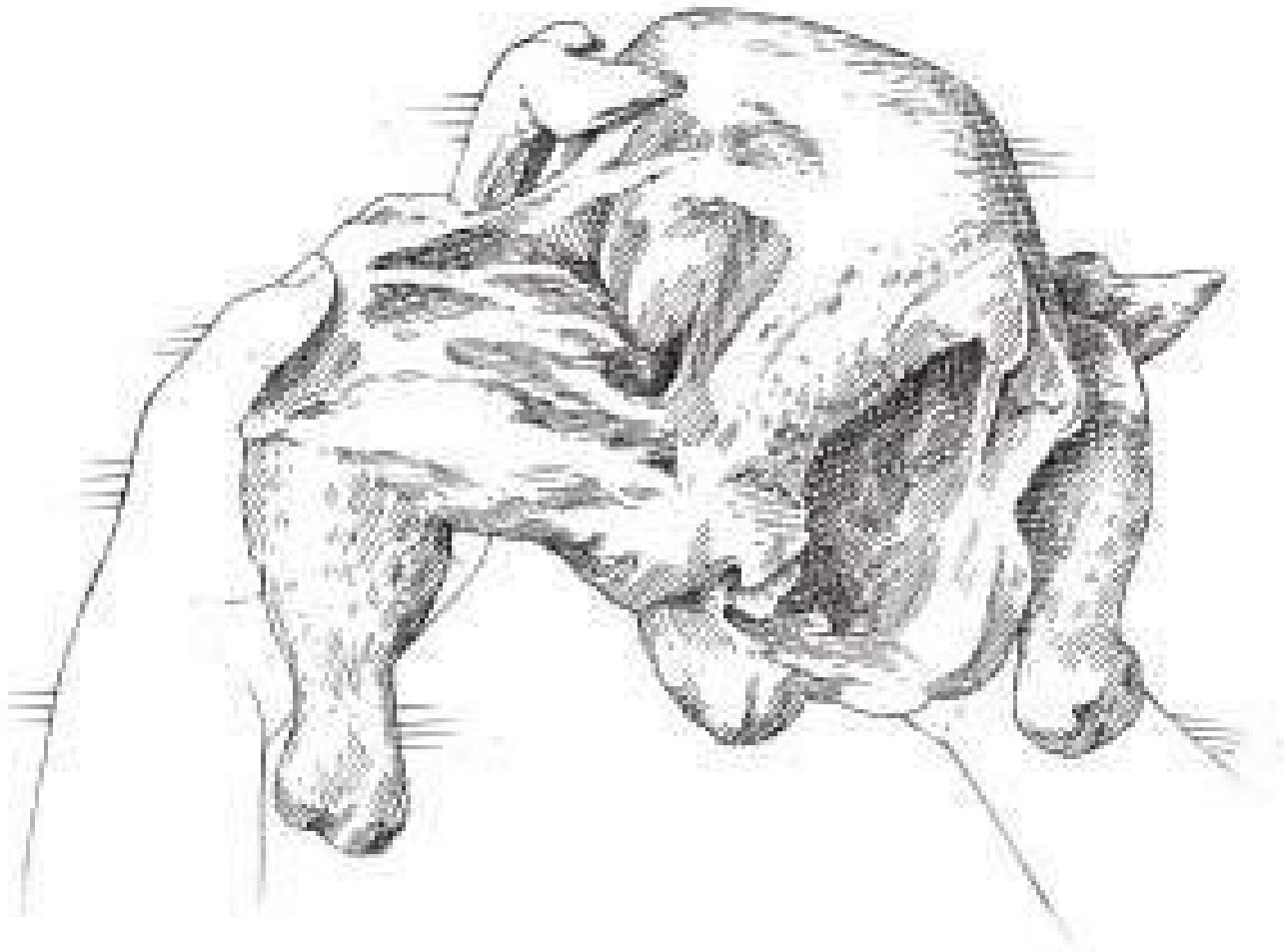

Figure 14.

Using your hand, pop each leg out of its socket.

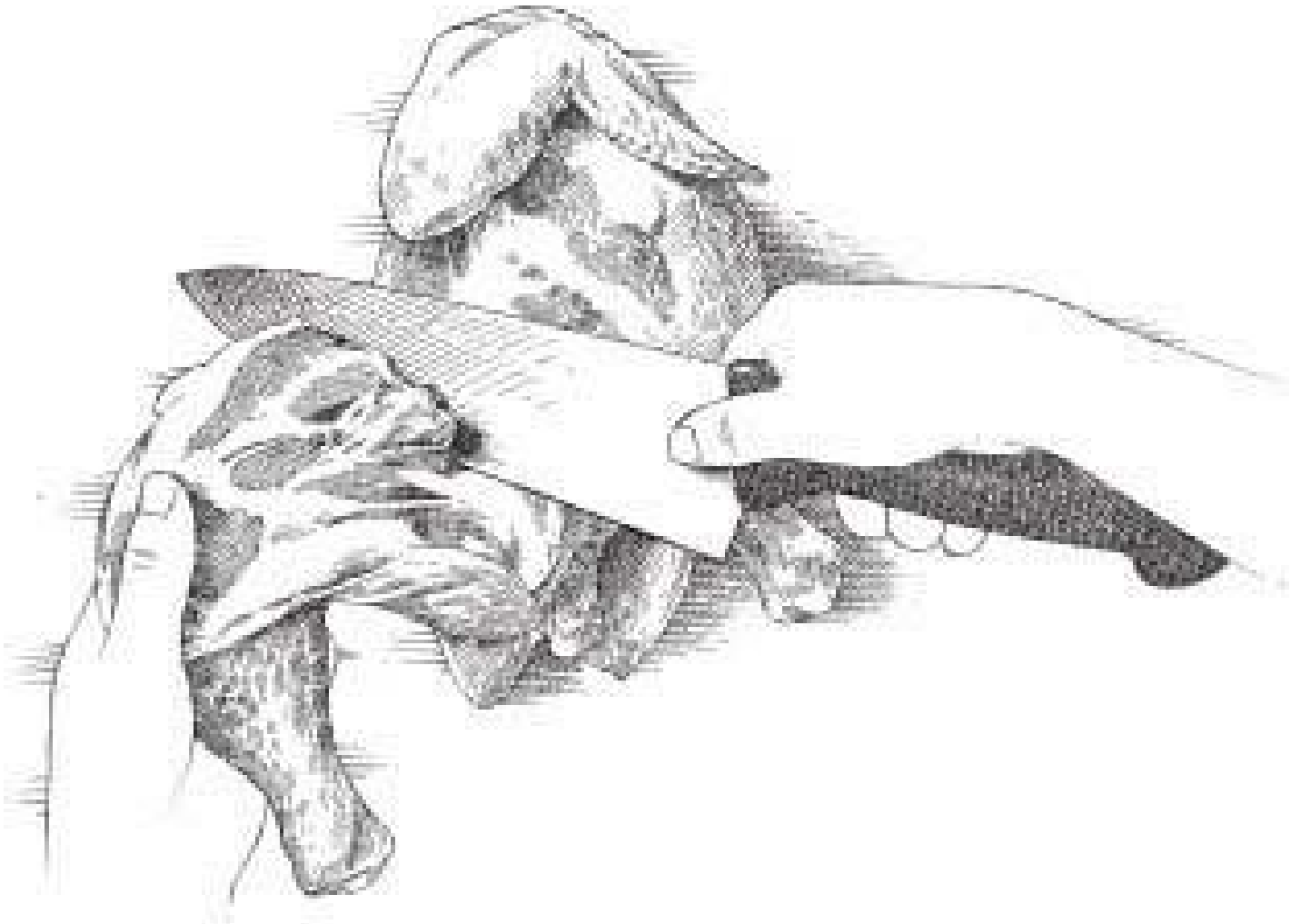

Figure 15.

Use your chef's knife to cut through the flesh and skin to detach each leg from the body.

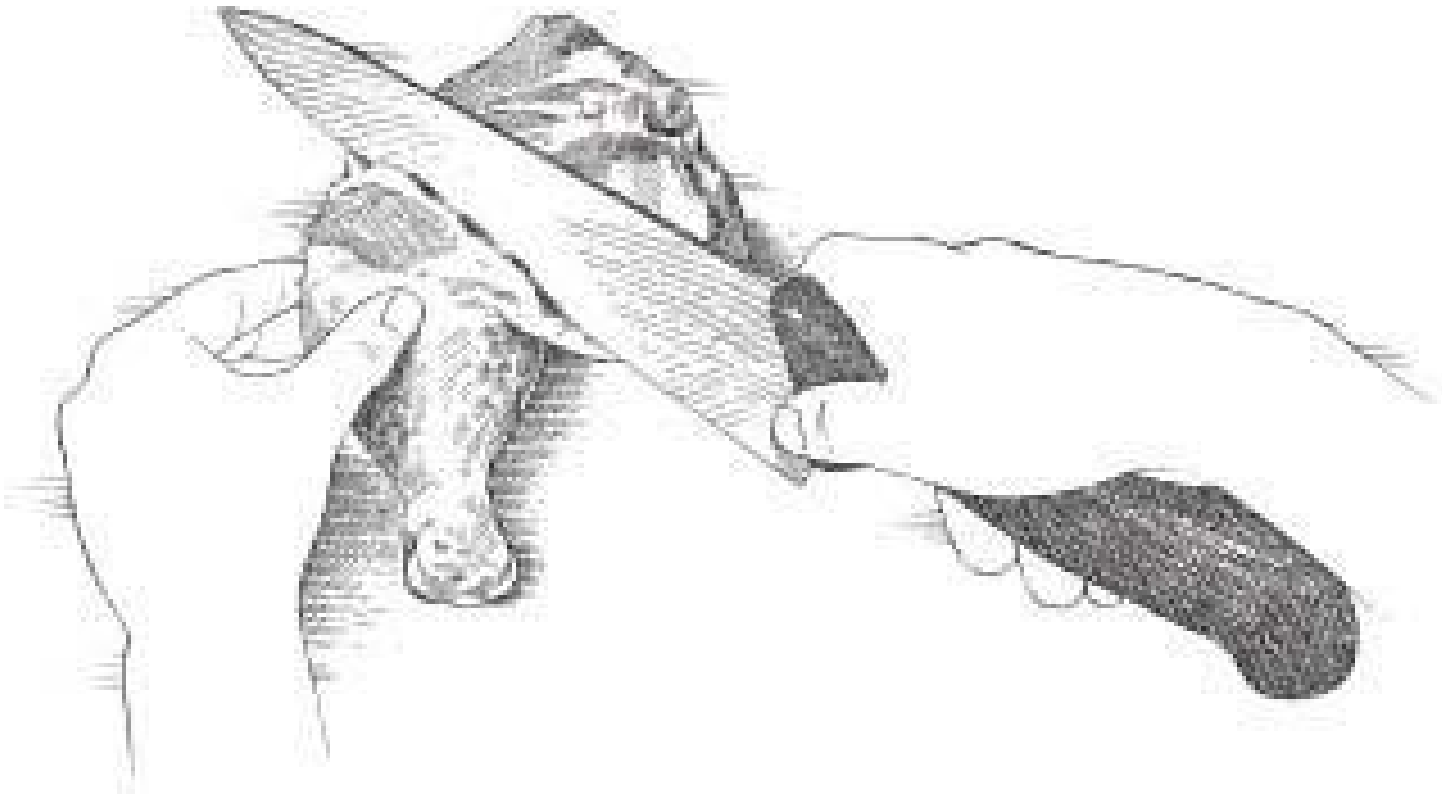

Figure 16.

A line of fat separates the thigh and drumstick. Cut through the-joint at this point.

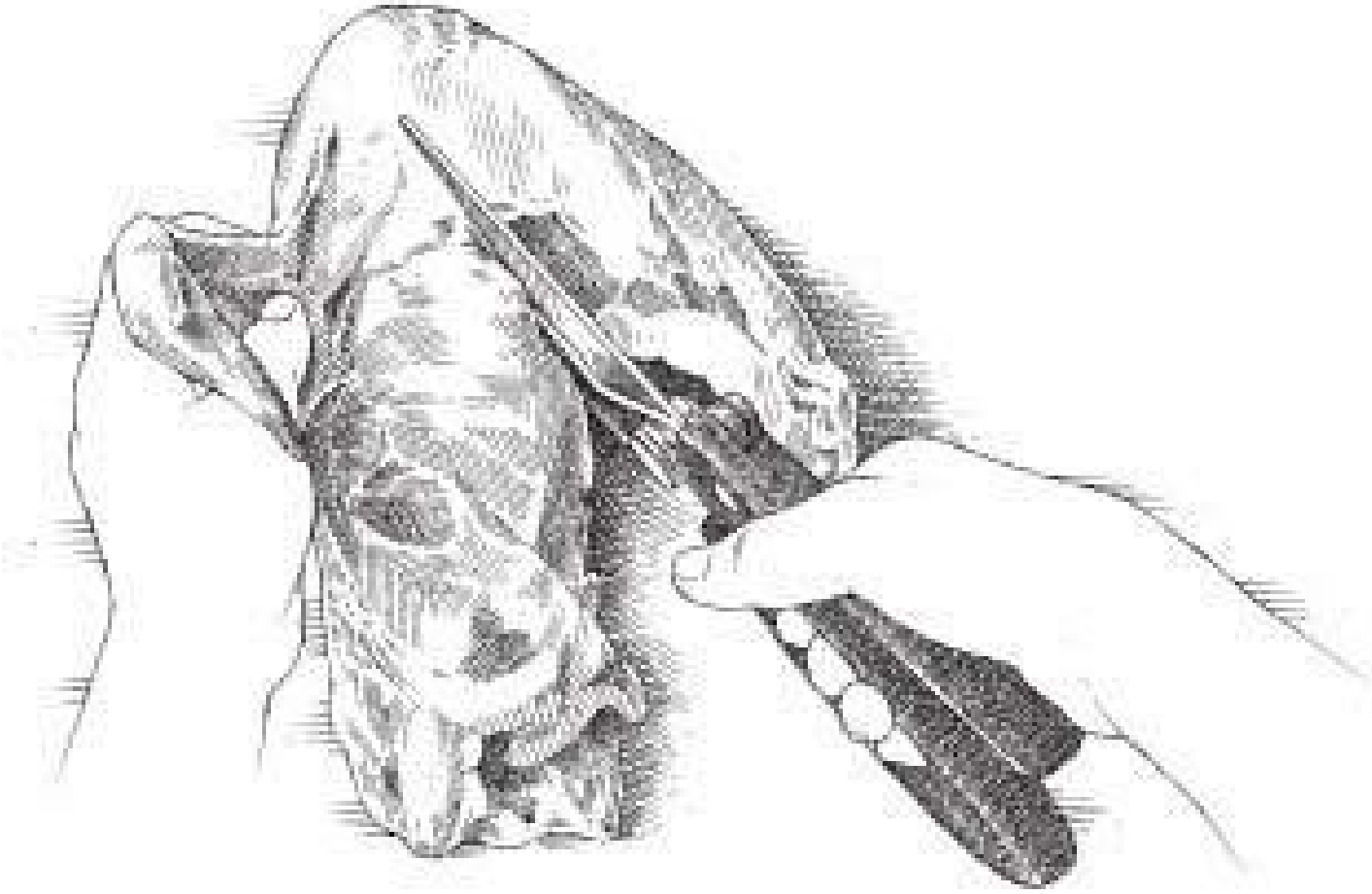

Figure 17.

Using poultry shears, cut down the ribs between tie sack and the breast to totally separate the back and wings from the breast. (Place back and 'wings in zipper-lock plastic bag and freeze to make stock 'when you have accumulated a few backs.)

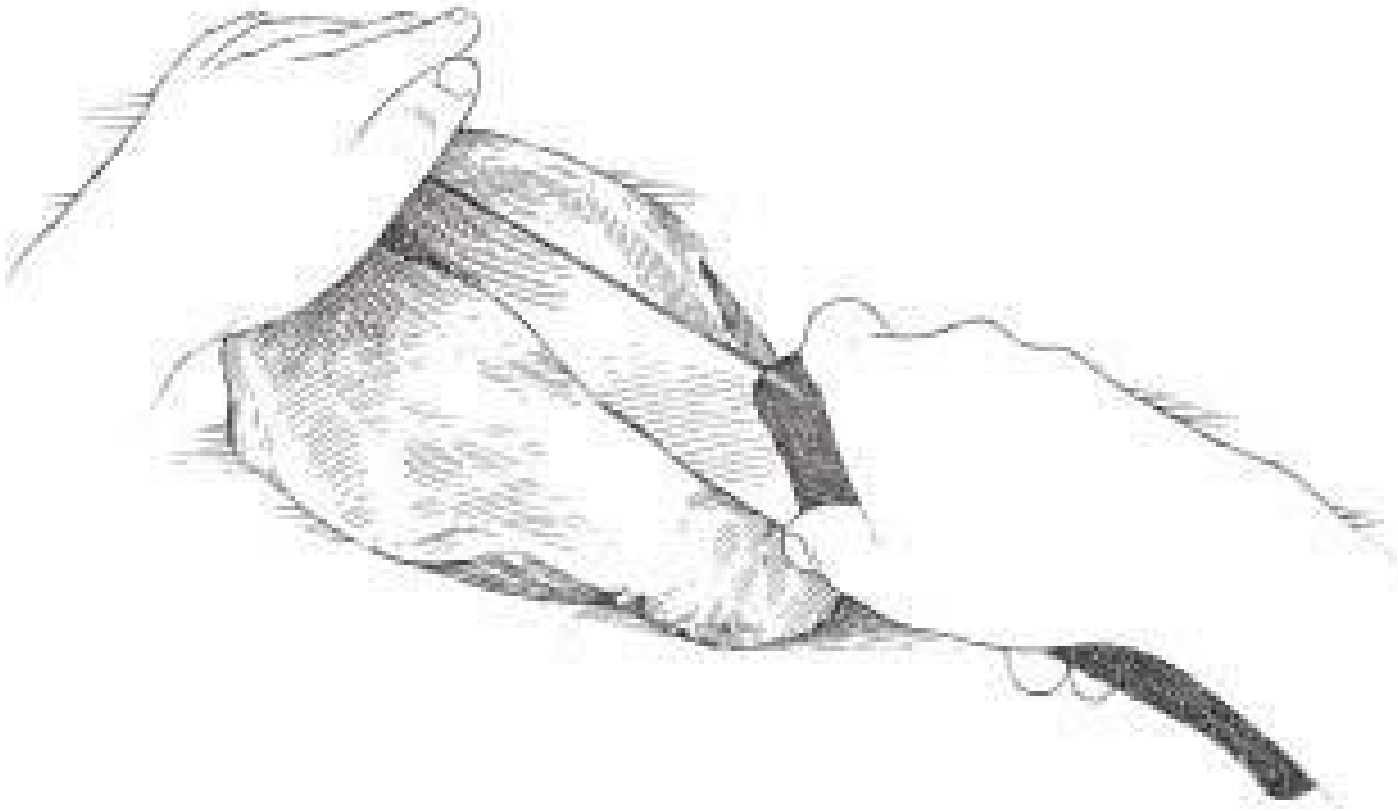

Figure 18.

Place a chef's knife directly on the breast bone, then apply pressure to cut through the bone and separate the breasts.

Jambalaya with Chorizo and Shrimp

serves 6

NOTE: *This dish is delicious made with chorizo sausage, but andouille also works well. If you like hot foods, this recipe may not be spicy enough for you, so increase the cayenne as desired.*

1 tablespoon vegetable oil
8 ounces chorizo
1 large onion, finely diced
1 celery stalk, finely diced
1 medium red bell pepper,

cored, seeded, and finely diced
3 medium garlic cloves, finely minced
1 1/2 cups long-grain white rice
1 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon minced fresh thyme leaves
1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper
1 can (14 1/2 ounces) whole tomatoes, drained and chopped
1 cup clam juice
1 3/4 cups chicken stock or low-sodium canned broth
1 large bay leaf
1/2 pound medium shrimp, shelled and (if desired)

deveined

2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Heat oil in heavy 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat. Add chorizo; cook until sausage is fully rendered and nicely browned, approximately 7 to 8 minutes. Remove chorizo from pan and set aside to drain on a paper towel-lined plate.

2. Reduce heat to medium, add onion, celery and red pepper, and cook until softened, 3 to 4 minutes. Add garlic and sauté until fragrant, about 1 minute

longer. Stir in rice, salt, thyme, and cayenne, and cook, stirring frequently until coated and glistening, about 1 minute longer. Transfer rice mixture to 13 x 9g-inch baking dish; add tomatoes.

3. Add clam juice, chicken stock, bay leaf, and $^{1}/_{2}$ cup water to skillet, increase heat to medium-high, scraping browned bits off pan bottom with wooden spoon. Bring to a boil and pour over rice mixture, adding chorizo and stirring to combine.

4. Cover tightly with foil and bake for 25 minutes. Remove dish from oven, stir

the rice (if rice appears too dry add $^{1}/_{4}$ cup water and stir well), place shrimp on top of rice mixture, re-cover, and cook until rice is fully tender and shrimp is cooked, about 15 minutes more. Stir in parsley, re-cover dish, and allow to rest for 5 minutes. Remove bay leaf and serve immediately

Barley and Mushroom Casserole with Sausage

serves 6

NOTE: *This casserole is particularly starchy and filling.*

1 ounce dried porcini mushrooms
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 pound sweet Italian sausage, removed from casings
1 medium onion, chopped fine
3 medium garlic cloves, minced very fine

1 cup pearl barley

12 ounces white button mushrooms, sliced thin

1/2 cup white wine

1 1/2 cups chicken stock or low-sodium canned broth

1 teaspoon salt

1/3 cup chopped fresh parsley leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Soak porcini mushrooms in 2 cups warm tap water in small bowl until softened, about 20 minutes. Lift mushrooms from liquid, chop mushrooms, and strain liquid, reserving 1 cup.

2. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Heat oil until shimmering in heavy 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat. Add sausage and cook, breaking it into $^{1}/_{2}$-inch pieces, until well-browned all over, about 7 minutes. Remove from pan and set aside.

3. Lower heat to medium; add onion and sauté, stirring frequently, until softened, about 3 to 4 minutes. Add garlic and sauté until fragrant, approximately 1 minute longer. Stir in barley and cook, stirring frequently, until coated and glistening, about 1 minute longer.

4. Transfer barley mixture to 13 x 9-inch baking dish. Place empty skillet over medium-high heat, add button mushrooms, and cook, scraping browned bits bottom of pan, until liquid evaporates, about 7 minutes. Add reserved porcini and their soaking liquid, wine, stock, and salt, bring to a boil, and pour over barley mixture.

5. Stir in sausage, cover tightly with foil, and bake for 20 minutes. Remove dish from oven, stir barley (if barley appears too dry, add $^{1}/_{4}$ cup water and mix well), re-cover, and bake until the barley is tender, about 20 to 25 minutes. Remove

dish from oven. Stir in parsley, re-cover dish, and allow to rest for 5 minutes; serve immediately.

VARIATION:

Barley and Mushroom Casserole with Chicken

Replace sausage with 1 chicken (3 to 4 pounds), rinsed, patted dry; and cut into 6 pieces, wings and backs reserved for another use (*see* figures 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18). Sprinkle chicken pieces liberally with salt and ground black pepper. Heat oil until shimmering in large, heavy skillet over high heat. Add chicken pieces skin side down; cook without moving them, until well-

browned, about 6 minutes. Turn chicken pieces over with tongs and cook again without moving them, until well-browned on second side, about 6 minutes longer. Remove from pan and set aside. Pour all but 2 tablespoons fat from pan; return to burner and proceed with recipe, adding chicken thighs and legs to top of barley mixture for the last 20 minutes of cooking, then adding the chicken breast pieces for the next 20 to 25 minutes. Finish master recipe as directed.

Sausage and Polenta Casserole

serves 6 to 8

NOTE: *This casserole is very rich. It produces a "soft" polenta pie that does not slice well but should be spooned onto a plate. The polenta for the "crust" does not need to be fully cooked-it should remain soft enough to spread into a baking dish. Once the polenta is removed from the heat it will start to stiffen, so work quickly. If the polenta for the top "crust" stiffens too much as you make the bottom layer and spoon in the filling, stir in a small*

amount of hot water to achieve a more fluid consistency.

Filling

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

1 medium garlic clove, minced

1/2 pound sweet Italian sausage, removed from casings

1/4 cup minced fresh parsley leaves

Salt

1 can (28 ounces) whole tomatoes packed in juice, drained (reserve juice) and chopped

Crust

2 tablespoons butter, plus extra for greasing baking dish

1 teaspoon salt

1 cup chicken stock or low-sodium canned broth

1 1/2 cups yellow cornmeal

2 cups grated mozzarella cheese

1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. *For the filling:* Heat oil in a heavy 12-inch skillet over medium heat; add the garlic and sauté until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add sausage, parsley and 1/2 teaspoon salt; crumble sausage with

edge of wooden spoon to break it apart into tiny pieces. Cook, continuing to crumble sausage, just until it loses its raw color but has not browned, about 3 minutes.

2. Add tomatoes and their juice and bring to a simmer; simmer until sauce begins to thicken, about 20 minutes. Adjust seasonings with extra salt to taste.

3. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Butter 13 x 9-inch baking dish.

4. *For the crust:* Melt butter in large saucepan. Add 3 cups water and salt and bring to a boil. Mix chicken stock with 1 cup cold water in large measuring cup. Place cornmeal in medium bowl and slowly stir chicken stock mixture into cornmeal. Mix moistened cornmeal mixture into boiling water, stirring frequently over low heat until thickened, 15 to 18 minutes.

5. Assemble casserole according to figures 19, 20 and 21. Bake until topping becomes golden brown and filling is bubbling, 30-40 minutes. Let casserole cool and solidify for 10 minutes before serving.

VARIATION:

Beef and Polenta Casserole

Follow Master Recipe, replacing sausage with $^{1}/_{2}$ pound ground beef chuck.

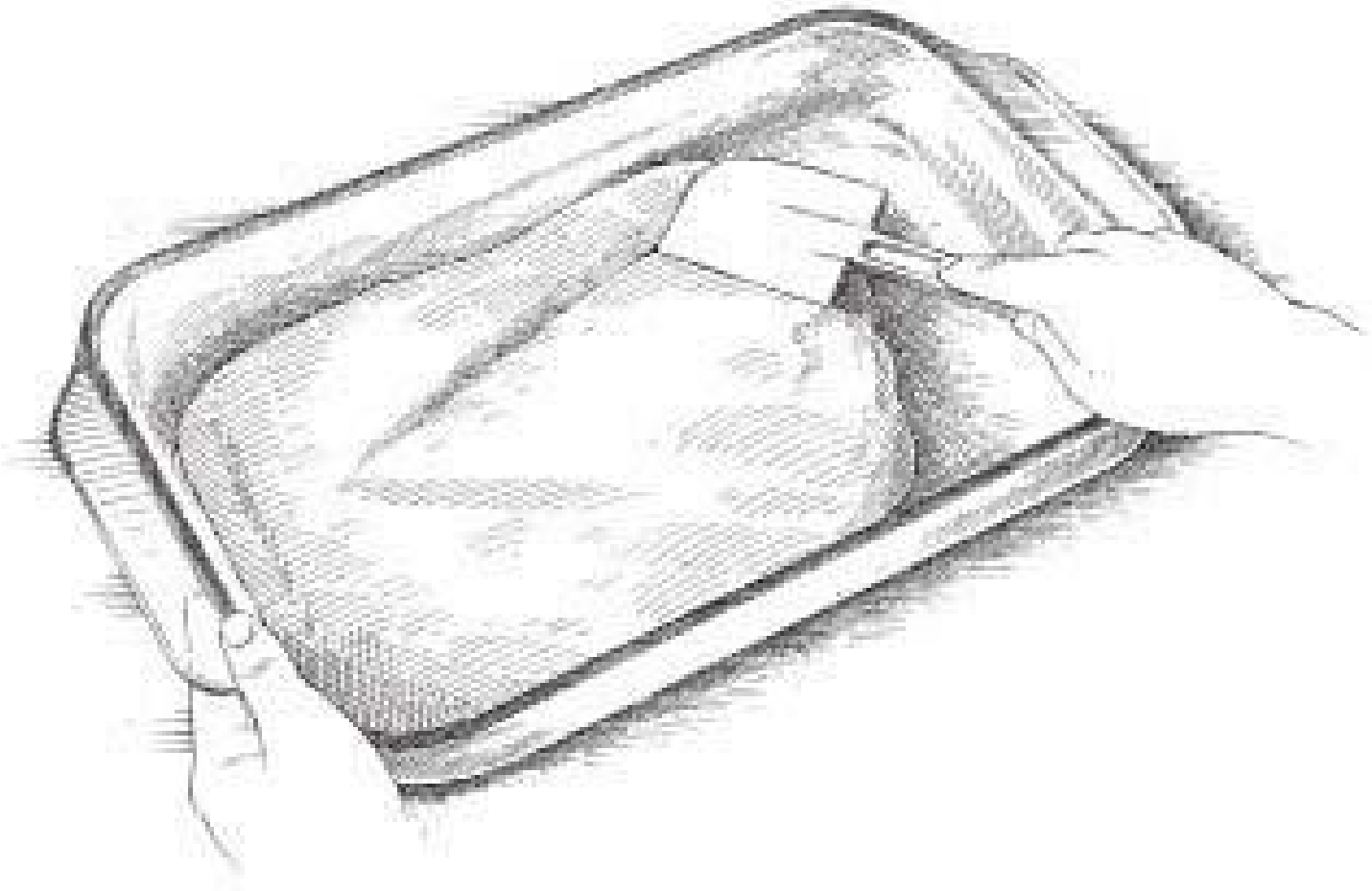

Figure 19.

Use a rubber spatula to spread half the polenta mixture onto the bottom of a buttered making disc. The polenta crust should be about $^{1}/_{2}$ inch thick.

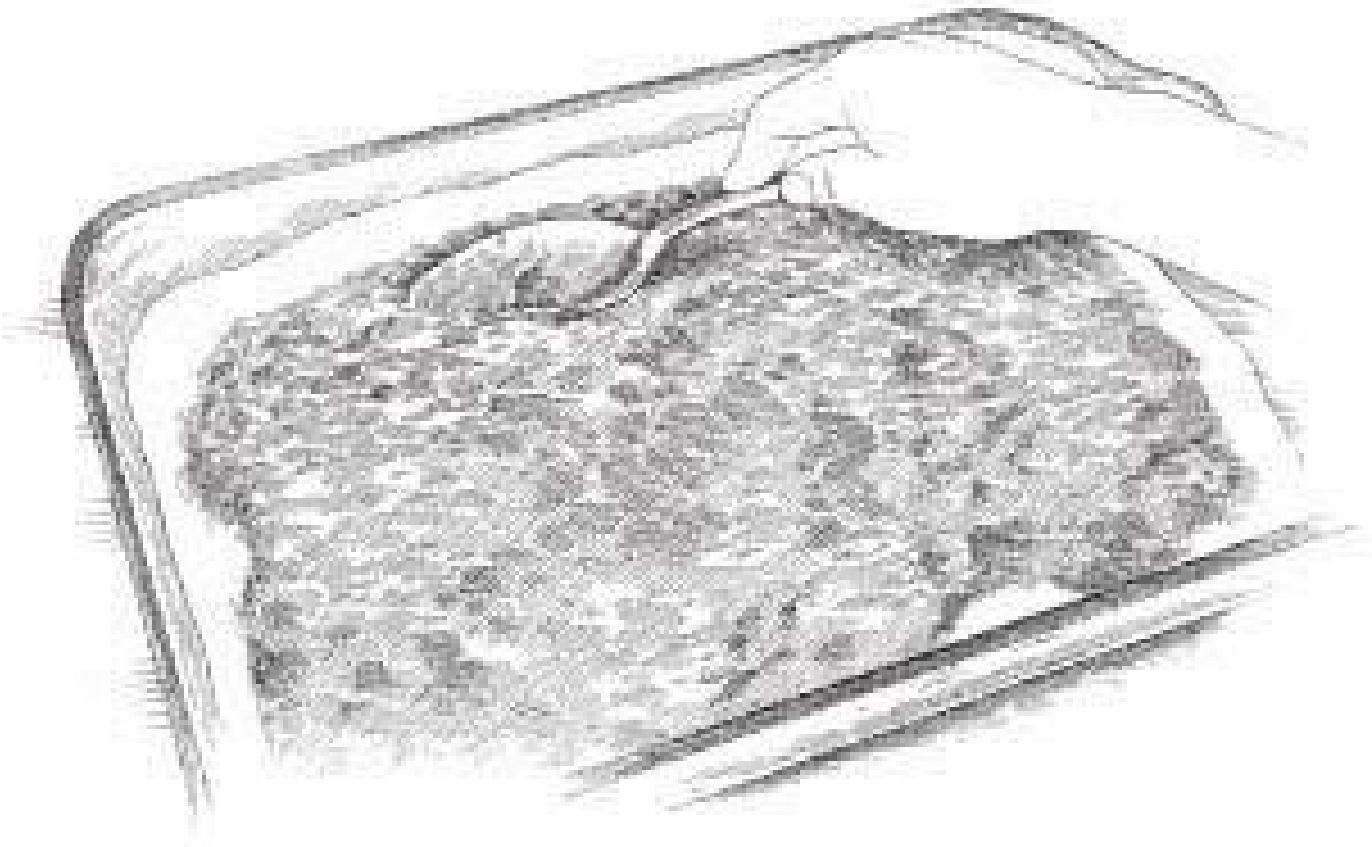

Figure 20.

Carefully spoon the sausage filling over the polenta crust, leaving a $^{1}/_{2}$-inch border around the edges. Gently press down on the filling with the back of a spoon to push the polenta about $^{1}/_{4}$ inch up the sides of the baking dish.

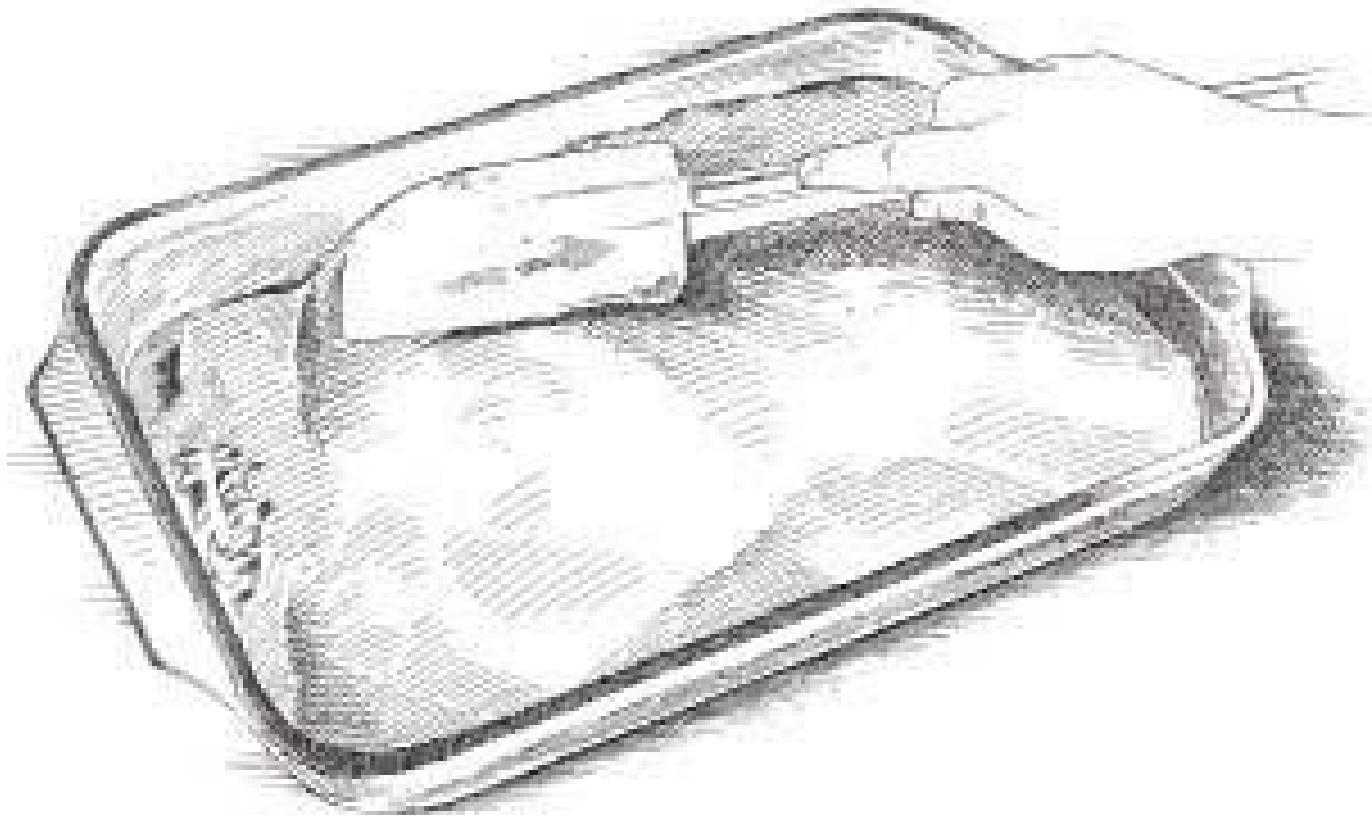

Figure 21.

Sprinkle half of the cheese over the filling. Spoon the remaining polenta into the dish. Use a rubber spatula to spread the polenta evenly over the filling to form a thin top crust. Make sure to push the polenta to the edges of the dish so that it attaches to the raised

portion of the bottom crust. Sprinkle the remaining cheese over the polenta.

BEAN CASSEROLES

BEANS MAKE A HEARTY BASE FOR CASSEROLES. Since casseroles are meant to be prepared relatively quickly, we wanted to figure out how to use canned or frozen beans in these recipes. We found that canned white and black beans are surprisingly good in casseroles. (Kidney beans also work well.) A11 of these beans remain fairly firm, even when baked. We tested several leading brands and found that Green Giant and Goya rated highest.

We had thought that organic beans

made with far less sodium (many canned beans seem quite salty) would do well in this tasting. However, we found these beans to be bland and chalky. For the best favor, salt should be added during the cooking process, whether beans are cooked at home or by a food manufacturer.

The other alternative to cooking dried beans is using frozen. We find that frozen lima beans and black-eyed peas are firmer and more flavorful than canned versions. Unlike white, black, and kidney beans, which are much sturdier, these two legumes don't seem to take well to canning.

Bean casseroles go hand in hand with pork. We used cooked ham for most of

the recipes in this chapter, but we also tried smoked ham. While the smoked ham intensified the flavor of the casserole, it also added a saltiness that some tasters found objectionable. We prefer to stick with cooked ham.

This chapter includes recipes for three different kinds of bean casseroles. We find that beans alone are not satisfying as a casserole. They need help from another starch. We developed recipes that pair beans with toasted bread crumbs, rice, and cornbread to create one-dish meals.

The white bean casserole is the easiest to prepare. A quick bean stew (sautéed aromatics, drained canned beans,

tomatoes, and stock) is spooned into a baking dish, sprinkled with bread crumbs, and baked.

Hoppin' John, a bean and rice casserole from South Carolina, is a bit more complex. The rice is handled as is in the rice casserole recipes in the previous chapter. The black-eyed peas are stirred into the rice along with the liquid ingredients, and the mixture is baked in a casserole dish. This dish is appropriate year-round but is traditionally served on New Year's Day. The peas are supposed to bring good luck for the coming year.

The third type of casserole in this chapter combines a lima bean stew with a thick cornmeal batter that bakes into a

cornbread topping. We tried cooking the lima beans in a roux base (flour and butter), but the flavor of the roux overwhelmed the lima beans. We found that the beans were better matched with chicken stock and a little cream.

The topping is a simple cornbread batter that should not be allowed to cover the filling completely. This is because the cream in the filling can cause it to become a bit watery. It's best if the batter is dropped by the spoonful over the filling (as if making a cobbler) so that some liquid from the sauce can evaporate in the oven. The result is a nicely thickened sauce that surrounds the beans and vegetables.

White Bean Casserole with Ham

serves 6

NOTE: *Coarse homemade breadcrumbs make the best topping for this casserole; store-bought breadcrumbs are too fine and easily soak into the-filling. Smoked ham lends nice flavor but it is often very salty; if you use it, season the filling with care.*

Topping

2 cups coarse fresh bread crumbs (*see* figures 9, 10 and 11)

2 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese

Filling

1 tablespoon butter, plus extra for greasing baking dish

1 tablespoon vegetable oil

2 medium onions, finely chopped

3 medium garlic cloves, minced very fine

12 ounces cooked ham, cut into 1/2-inch dice (about 2 1/2 cups)

1 cup chicken stock or canned

low-sodium broth

1 can (14.5 ounces) diced tomatoes, drained

3 cans (1.5 ounces each) white beans, drained and rinsed

$1^1/_2$ teaspoons minced fresh thyme

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. *For the topping:* Adjust oven rack to upper-middle position and heat oven to 400 degrees. Mix bread crumbs and butter together in baking dish; bake until light golden brown and crisp, 5 to 8 minutes. Cool to room temperature, transfer to bowl, and mix with Parmesan

cheese; set aside.

2. *For the filling:* Butter 13 x 9-inch baking dish and set it aside. Heat butter and oil in heavy 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until foam subsides; add onion and sauté until softened, 3 to 4 minutes. Add garlic and ham; sauté until garlic is fragrant, about 1 minute. Stir in stock, tomatoes, beans, and thyme; season with salt and pepper to taste and bring to a simmer.

3. Transfer mixture to baking dish and bake uncovered until bubbling around edges, about 10 minutes. Sprinkle bread

crumb mixture on top and bake until bread crumbs are toasted and deep golden brown, about 8 minutes longer. Cool casserole 5 to 10 minutes before serving.

VARIATION:

White Bean Casserole with Ham and Kale

Wash, stem, and shred 1 bunch kale (about 10 ounces) into $^1/_4$- to $^1/_2$-inch strips. Follow Master Recipe, adding kale to skillet after onion has softened; sauté kale until wilted, 3 to 4 minutes. Add garlic and ham and proceed as directed.

Hoppin' John

serves 6

NOTE: *Frozen black-eyed peas are used were because canned peas do not maintain their texture or shape in the oven.*

Butter for greasing baking dish
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
6 ounces cooked ham, cut into $^1/_2$-inch dice (about 1 $^1/_4$ cups)
3-4 slices bacon, diced
1 medium onion, chopped fine
3 medium garlic cloves, minced very fine

1 1/2 cups long-grain white rice

1/2 teaspoon dried thyme

1/2 teaspoon hot red pepper flakes

2 bay leaves

2 cups chicken stock or low-sodium canned broth

1 teaspoon salt

Ground black pepper

1 package (10 ounces) frozen black-eyed peas, thawed and rinsed

2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Butter

13 x 9-inch baking dish and set it aside. Heat oil until shimmering in heavy 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat. Add ham and cook until crisp and fat has rendered, about 6 minutes. Add bacon and cook until slightly crisp, about 3 minutes. Use slotted spoon to remove ham and bacon from pan and set aside on paper towel-lined plate.

2. Spoon out all but 2 tablespoons fat from pan; return to burner. Reduce heat to medium; add onion and sauté, stirring frequently until softened, 3 to 4 minutes. Add garlic and sauté until fragrant, approximately 1 minute longer. Stir in rice, thyme, and red pepper flakes, and

cook, stirring frequently until coated and glistening, about 1 minute longer. Transfer rice mixture to baking dish; add bay leaves.

3. Return skillet to heat; add chicken stock, 1 $^{1}/_{2}$ cups water, salt, and pepper to taste. Increase heat to medium-high, scraping browned bits of bottom of pan with wooden spoon. Add black-eyed peas, ham, and bacon, bring to a boil, and pour over rice mixture, stirring to combine.

4. Cover tightly with foil and bake for 20 minutes. Remove from oven, stir the

rice (if rice appears too dry add $^{1}/_{4}$ cup more water), re-cover with foil, and cook until the rice is fully tender, about 20 to 25 minutes more. Remove dish from oven. Stir in parsley, re-cover dish, and allow to rest for 5 to 10 minutes; serve immediately.

Sausage, Corn, and Lima Bean Casserole with Cornbread Crust

serves 6 to 8

NOTE: *This casserole is quite rich and hearty. The filling is a creamy bean, corn, tomato, and sausage stew, while the topping is like moist cornbread*

Filling

1 tablespoon vegetable oil

1 pound kielbasa sausage, halved lengthwise and cut into $^1/_4$-inch half moons

2 medium onions, finely

chopped
4 medium garlic doves, minced
2 teaspoons minced fresh thyme leaves
2 teaspoons minced fresh rosemary
1 cup chicken stock or low-sodium canned l broth
1/2 cup heavy cream
1 can (14.5 ounces) whole tomatoes, drained and chopped
2 packages (10 ounces each) frozen lima beans, thawed and rinsed
1 package (10 ounces) frozen corn, thawed

Topping

1/2 cup yellow or white cornmeal

1/2 cup all-purpose flour

1 teaspoon baking powder

1/4 teaspoon baking soda

2 teaspoons sugar

1/4 teaspoon salt

1 large egg

1/3 cup buttermilk

1/3 cup milk

1 tablespoon unsalted butter, melted, plus extra for greasing baking dish

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Butter

13 x 9-inch baking dish and set it aside.

2. *For the filling*: Heat oil until simmering in heavy 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat. Add sausage and sauté, stir ring occasionally with wooden spoon until sausage is evenly browned and fully rendered, 5 to 7 minutes. Remove sausage from pan and drain on paper towel-lined plate. Set aside.

3. Pour all but 2 tablespoons fat from pan; return to burner. Reduce heat to medium; add onions and cook until softened, 3 to 4 minutes. Add garlic,

thyme, and rosemary and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add chicken stock and cream, then increase heat to medium-high, scraping browned bits off pan bottom with wooden spoon. Stir in tomatoes, lime beans, and corn. Bring to a boil, then pour mixture into baking dish. Add sausage and stir to combine well. Cover with foil while preparing topping.

4. *For the topping:* Mix dry ingredients in medium bowl. Make a well in cornmeal mixture and add egg. Stir lightly with wooden spoon, then add buttermilk and milk. Stir wet and dry ingredients quickly until almost

combined. Add melted butter; stir until ingredients are just combined.

5. Drop batter by large spoonfuls over lima bean filling, creating a cobblerlike topping (*see* figure 22). Bake until cornbread topping is golden brown, 20 to 25 minutes. Let rest for 5 to 10 minutes before serving.

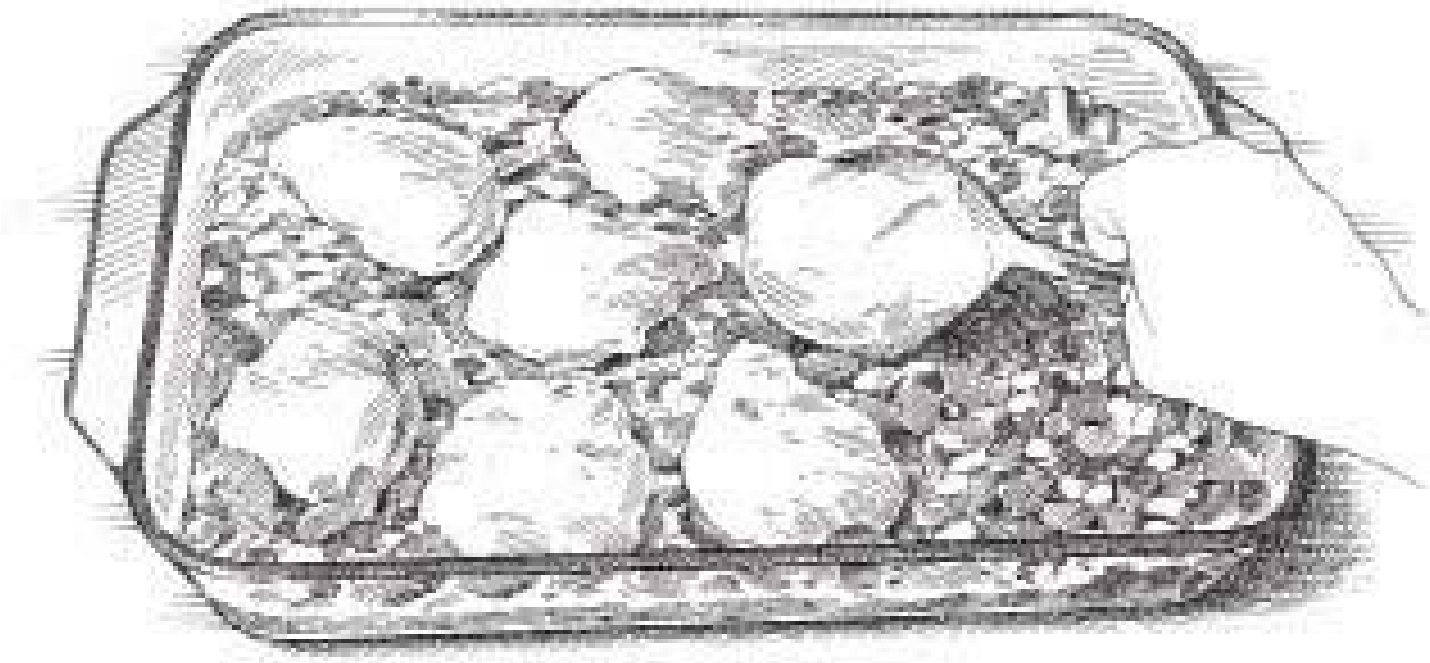

Figure 22.

Drop the cornmeal batter by large spoonfuls over the filling. Make sure to space the spoonfuls of batter evenly over the filling, as if making a cobbler. The topping will spread in the open, covering most but not all of the filling.

POTATO CASSEROLES

THIS CHAPTER INCLUDES CASSEROLES IN which potatoes are the star. We begin with a recipe for shepherd's pie-basically lamb stew topped with mashed potatoes. Traditional recipes for shepherd's pie start with leftover roast leg of lamb. We wanted to develop a recipe that did not start with leftovers that many cooks are unlikely to have. We tested ground lamb, and although this made a credible filling, it was not as richly flavored and toothsome as we wanted. We then tested meaty (and

relatively inexpensive) shoulder chops, which are our favorite for lamb stew. They worked beautifully, giving the falling a hearty lamb flavor and chewy (but not tough texture) that contrasts nicely with the smooth mashed potato topping.

We tried using regular mashed potatoes as the topping for this casserole, but they started to break down in the oven. Adding two egg yolks gives the mashed potatoes more body and helps them hold their shape.

Scalloped potatoes, thinly sliced rounds of potatoes baked with dairy and usually cheese, are a classic side dish. To bring this dish up to the level of a main course, we devised two different

strategies. Our first was to layer many more potatoes than is customary into the casserole dish. This worked just fine. Our second concerned the "sauce" for the potatoes, which is traditionally made from heavy cream. We found that this worked fine, although we felt the rich cream needed some contrasting flavors. Simmering a little garlic, cayenne, nutmeg, salt, and pepper in the cream added the extra level of flavor we thought was needed.

To make sure that all of the potatoes in this recipe (almost five pounds) fit into the baking dish, it is necessary to layer the slices with some care. We also found it helpful to compress the layers with a

spatula several times during baking. This gives the casserole a substantial texture, while also allowing the cream to circulate completely around the potatoes, helping to brown the top layer.

The New England Scalloped Fish and Potato Casserole is less fussy than the all-potato scallop because there is no layering of the potatoes in the pan. The potatoes need to be precooked on the stove top so that the fish does not overcook. At this point, the potatoes slices are simply poured into the baking dish, the fish is added, and the casserole is briefly baked. This dish is also looser than the potato scallop because the sauce does not cook down so much in the oven.

As for flavoring these scalloped

potato casseroles, we prefer bacon. Ham could be used, but we like the strong, salty flavor of bacon best. We found that the fish casserole also benefited from the addition of smoked trout, which added another level of seafood flavor to this dish.

Shepherd's Pie

serves 6 to 8

NOTE: *We found that diced lamb shoulder chops give telling a much richer flavor than ground lamb. If you prefer to use ground lamb, see the variation. Follow the assembly instructions below, or, for fancier presentation,* see *figures 24*, *25* *and* *26*.

Filling

3 pounds lamb shoulder chops (4 chops), boned and cut into 1-inch pieces (should yield about 1 $^{1}/_{2}$ pounds)

1 1/2 teaspoons salt

1 teaspoon ground black pepper

3 tablespoons vegetable oil

2 medium onions, chopped coarse

2 medium carrots, cut into 1/4-inch slices

1 garlic clove, finely minced

2 tablespoons all-purpose flour

1 tablespoon tomato paste

2 1/4 cups chicken stock or low-sodium canned broth

1/4 cup full-bodied red wine

1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce

1 teaspoon fresh chopped thyme

1 teaspoon fresh chopped rosemary

1 cup frozen peas, thawed

Topping

2 pounds large russet potatoes, peeled and cut into 2-inch cubes

1 teaspoon salt

6 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

3/4 cup whole milk, warmed

2 large egg yolks

Ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Season lamb with salt and pepper. Heat 2 tablespoons oil until shimmering in l2-inch skillet over medium-high heat. Add half of lamb and cook until well-browned on all sides, 5 to 6 minutes. Remove from pan and set aside. Put remaining tablespoon oil into pan and cook remaining lamb, again until well-browned on all sides, 5 to 6 minutes. Remove from pan and set aside with previously cooked lamb.

2. Reduce heat to medium and add onion and carrot to fat in now-empty pan. Cook until softened, about 4 minutes. Add garlic, flour, and tomato paste, and cook

until garlic is fragrant and flour is cooked, about 1 minute. Whisk in stock and wine, then Worcestershire sauce. Stir in thyme, rosemary and reserved lamb. Bring to a boil, cover tightly with lid, then reduce heat to low and simmer until lamb is just tender, 25 to 30 minutes.

3. Meanwhile, put potatoes in large saucepan; add cold water to cover and $^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon salt. Bring to a boil and continue to cook over medium heat until potatoes are tender when pierced with knife, 15 to 20 minutes. Drain potatoes well and return pan to low heat. Mash potatoes over low heat, adding butter as

you mash. Stir in warm milk and then egg yolks. Season with $^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoon salt and ground pepper to taste.

4. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Stir peas into lamb mixture and check seasonings. Pour evenly into 13 x 9-inch baking dish. With a large spoon, place mashed potatoes over entire filling. Starting at sides to make sure of a tight seal, use rubber spatula to smooth out potatoes (*see* figure 23). Bake until top turns golden brown, 20 to 25 minutes. Let pie rest 5 to 10 minutes before serving.

VARIATION:

Shepherd's Pie with Ground Lamb

Follow Master Recipe, substituting 1 $^{1}/_{2}$ pounds ground lamb for the lamb shoulder chops. Cook one half at a time, until well-browned, about 3 minutes for each batch of lamb. Continue with recipe as directed, reducing simmering time in step 2 to 15 minutes.

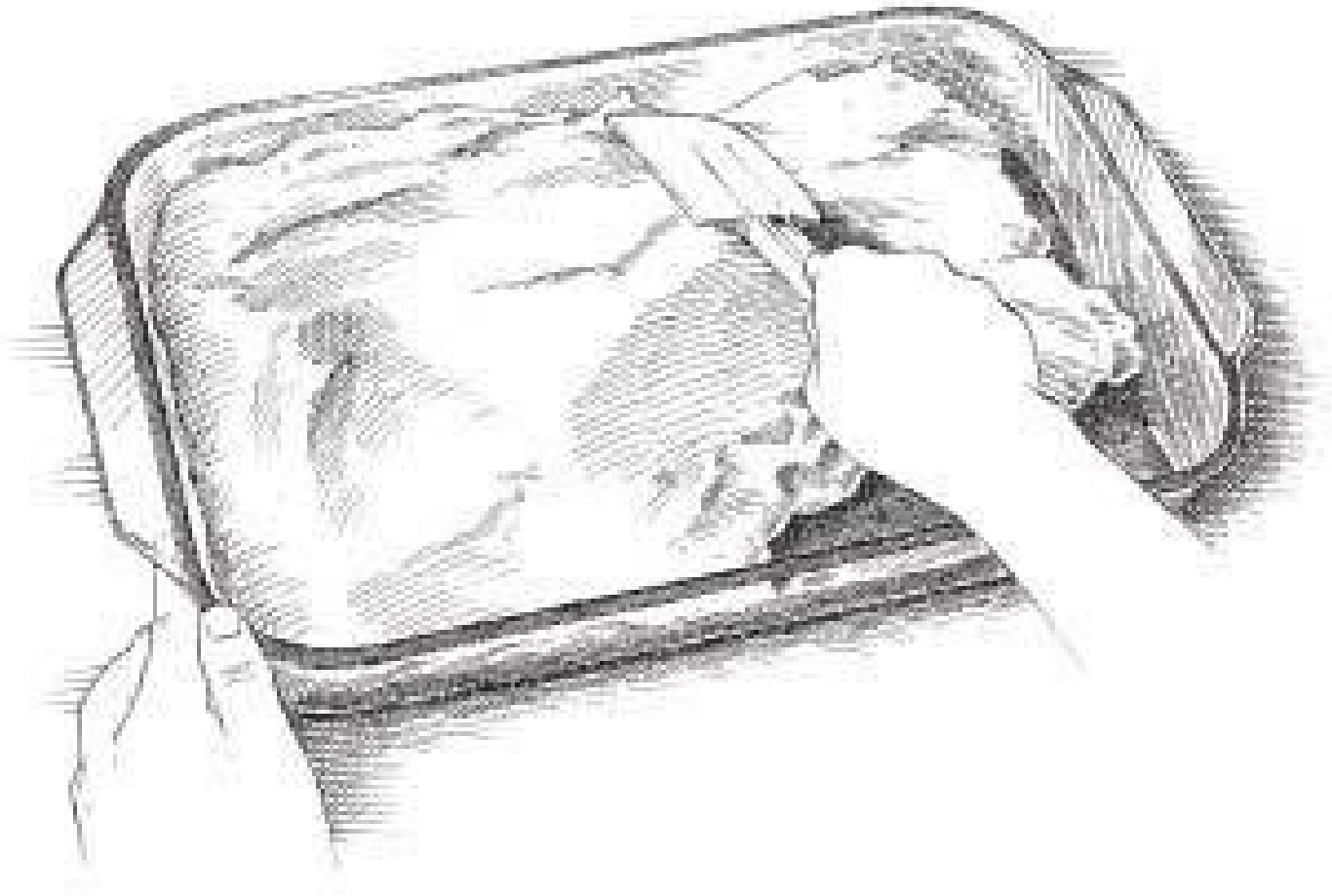

Figure 23.

Spoon the mashed potatoes over the entire filling. Starting at the sides of the baking disc, use a rubber spatula to spread the potatoes into an even layer. Make sure that the potatoes attach to the sides often dish and that you can see the filling.

Figure 24.

For a fancier presentation, we like to bake shepherd's pie in a 10-inch pie plate. The mashed potato topping rises high above the filling, much like a lemon meringue pie or baked Alaska. Place the-filling in the pie plate

and then drop spoonfuls of mashed potatoes around the perimeter of the pie plate.

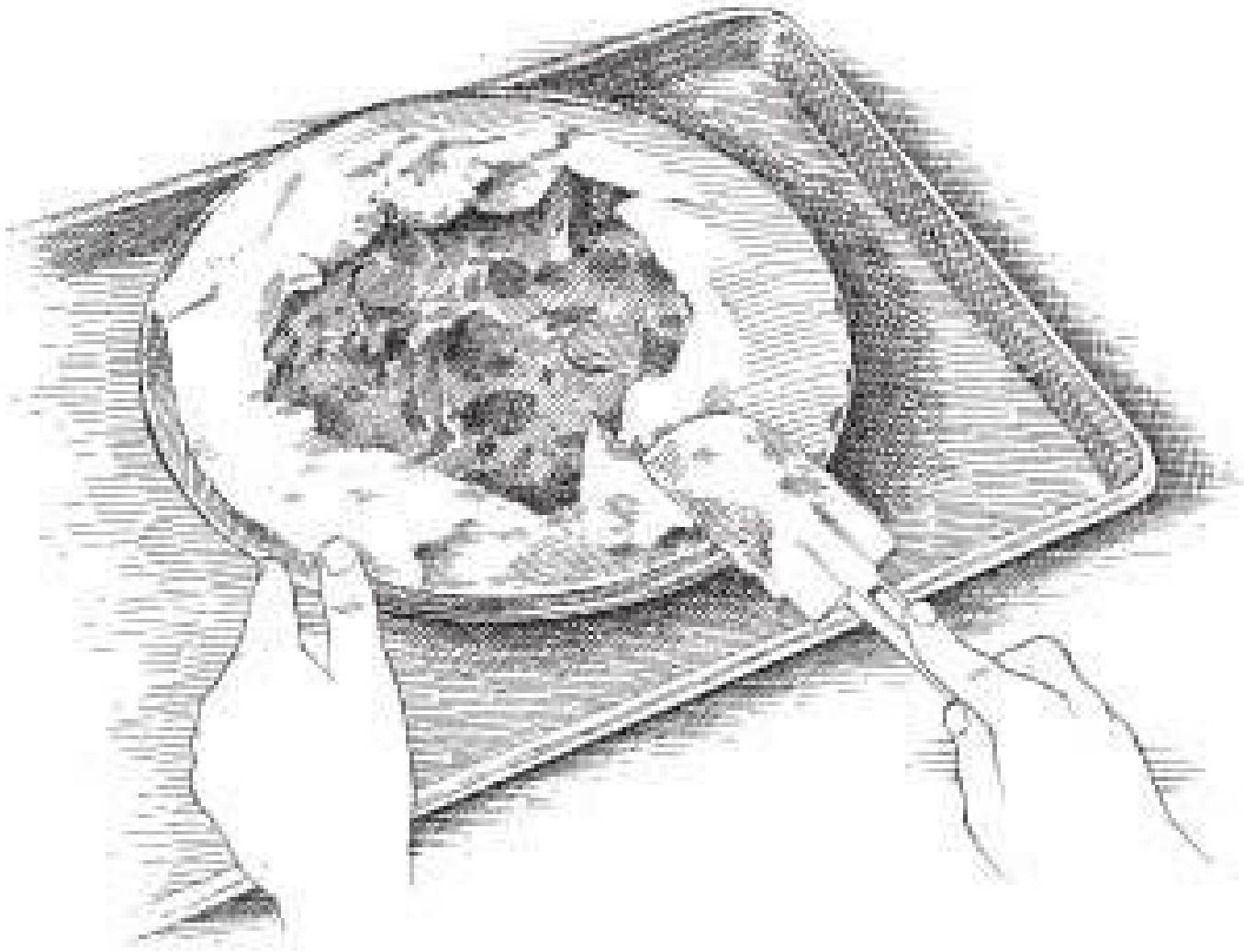

Figure 25.

Use a rubber spatula to attach the potatoes to the rim of the pie plate. It's important to seal the edges this may to prevent the filling from bubbling out of the pie plate in the oven.

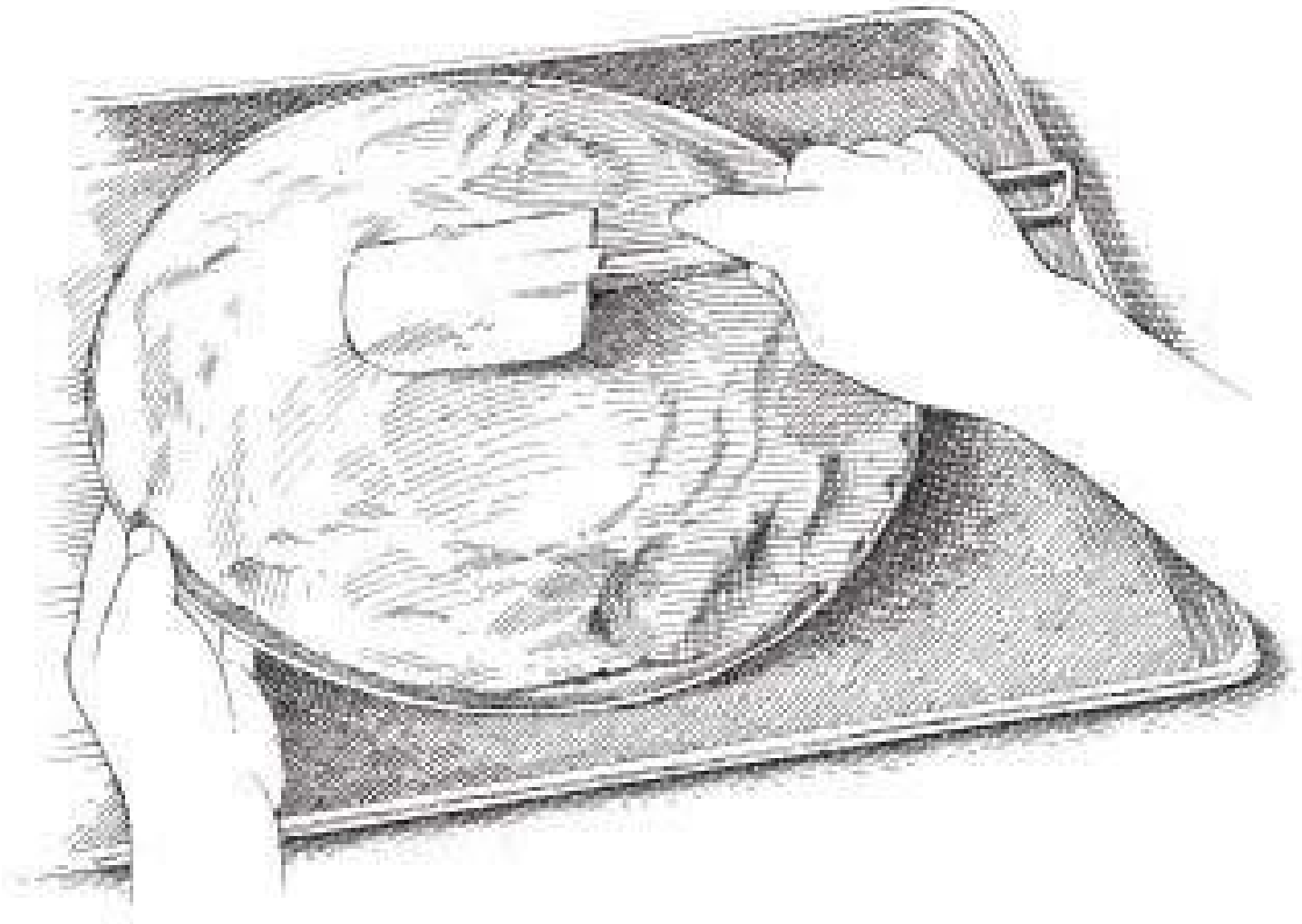

Figure 26.

Drop the remaining mashed potatoes I'm the center of the pie plate and then smooth the top with a spatula. Because the topping rises so high, we recommend making the pie on a baking sheet to catch any drips.

Hearty Scalloped Potatoes

serves 6 to 8

NOTE: *The larger chunks of bread (as opposed to bread crumbs) work well with the scalloped potatoes. We prefer smoky bacon in this dish, although you could use diced cooked ham instead to use ham, sauté the onions and garlic in a tablespoon of vegetable oil and then add 1 1/2 cups diced ham and heat it through*

Topping

3 slices white bread (3 ounces), crusts removed and cut

into 1/4-inch dice

3 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

1 cup grated Parmesan cheese

Filling

6 ounces bacon, diced

2 small onions, minced

2 medium garlic cloves, minced

3 cups heavy cream

1 1/2 teaspoons salt

1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper

Pinch cayenne pepper

1/4 teaspoon nutmeg

4 1/2-5 pounds medium-large

russet potatoes, peeled and cut into $^1/_4$-inch slices

$3^1/_2$ ounces Gruyère cheese, shredded

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. *For the topping*: Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Mix bread cubes and melted butter in small baking dish; bake until golden brown and crisp, about 20 minutes. Cool to room temperature, transfer to bowl, and mix with Parmesan. Keep oven on.

2. *For the filling:* Cook bacon in

medium skillet over medium heat until crisp and fat has fully rendered, 5 to 6 minutes. Transfer bacon to paper towel-lined plate. Pour off all but 1 tablespoon fat from pan. Add onions and sauté until golden brown, 3 to 4 minutes. Add half of garlic and sauté until fragrant, about 1 minute. Set aside.

3. In medium saucepan, heat cream, remaining garlic, 1 $^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoons salt, black pepper, cayenne pepper, and nutmeg until simmering. Remove from heat.

4. Arrange half of potatoes in bottom of

13 x 9-inch baking dish, forming 3 to 4 long rows of densely overlapping slices (*see* figure 27). Sprinkle slices with $^1/_4$ teaspoon salt and black pepper to taste. Sprinkle potato layer evenly with the sautéed onions, bacon, and Gruyère. With remaining potatoes, arrange a second layer over filling, creating a snug cover of overlapping rows reaching edges of baking dish (*see* figure 28). Pour hot cream mixture over potatoes.

5. Bake until cream thickens and top turns deep golden brown, about 1 hour and 15 minutes, pressing surface of casserole twice with spatula to make cream on bottom of dish rise to surface

(*see* figure 29). Sprinkle top with crouton mixture and bake for 5 minutes. Let rest for 5 to 10 minutes before serving.

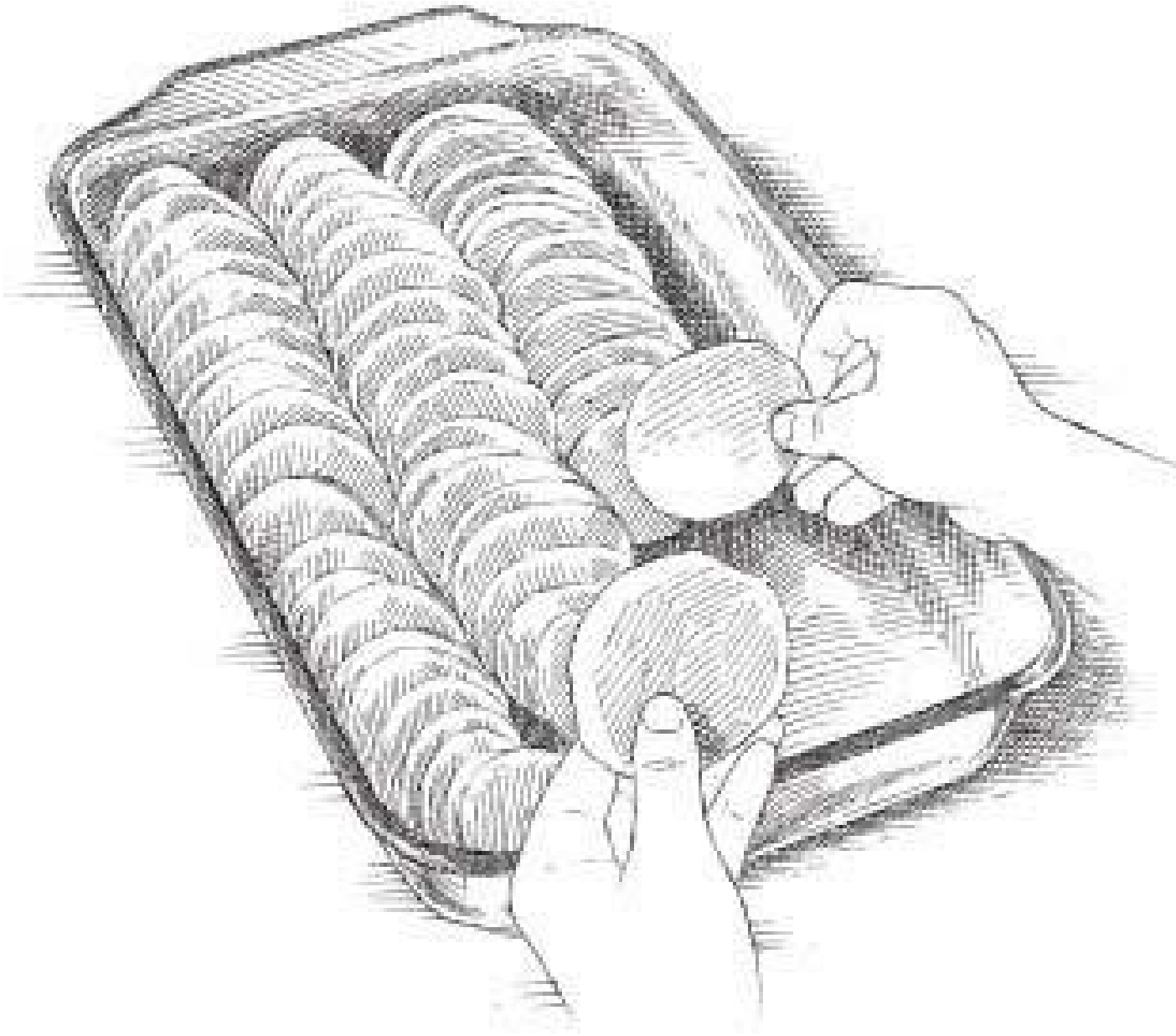

Figure 27.

Arrange half of potatoes in bottom of baking dish, forming 3 to 4 long routes of densely overlapping slices. Make sure that potato slices go right to the sides of the

dish to form a tight crust.

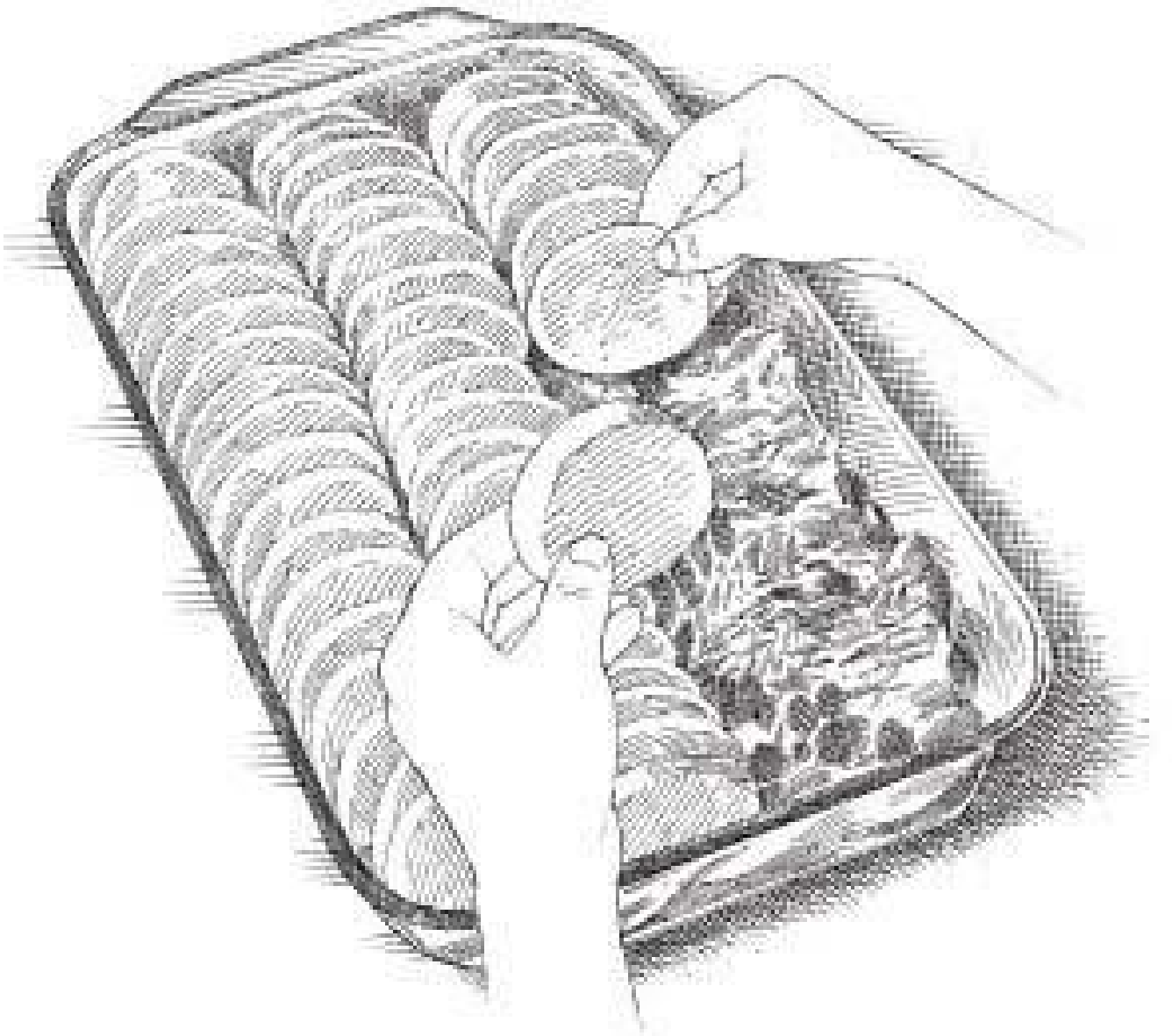

Figure 28.

Sprinkle filling over bottom layer of potatoes. Add a second layer of overlapping potato slices, making sure that crust extends right to the edges of the dish.

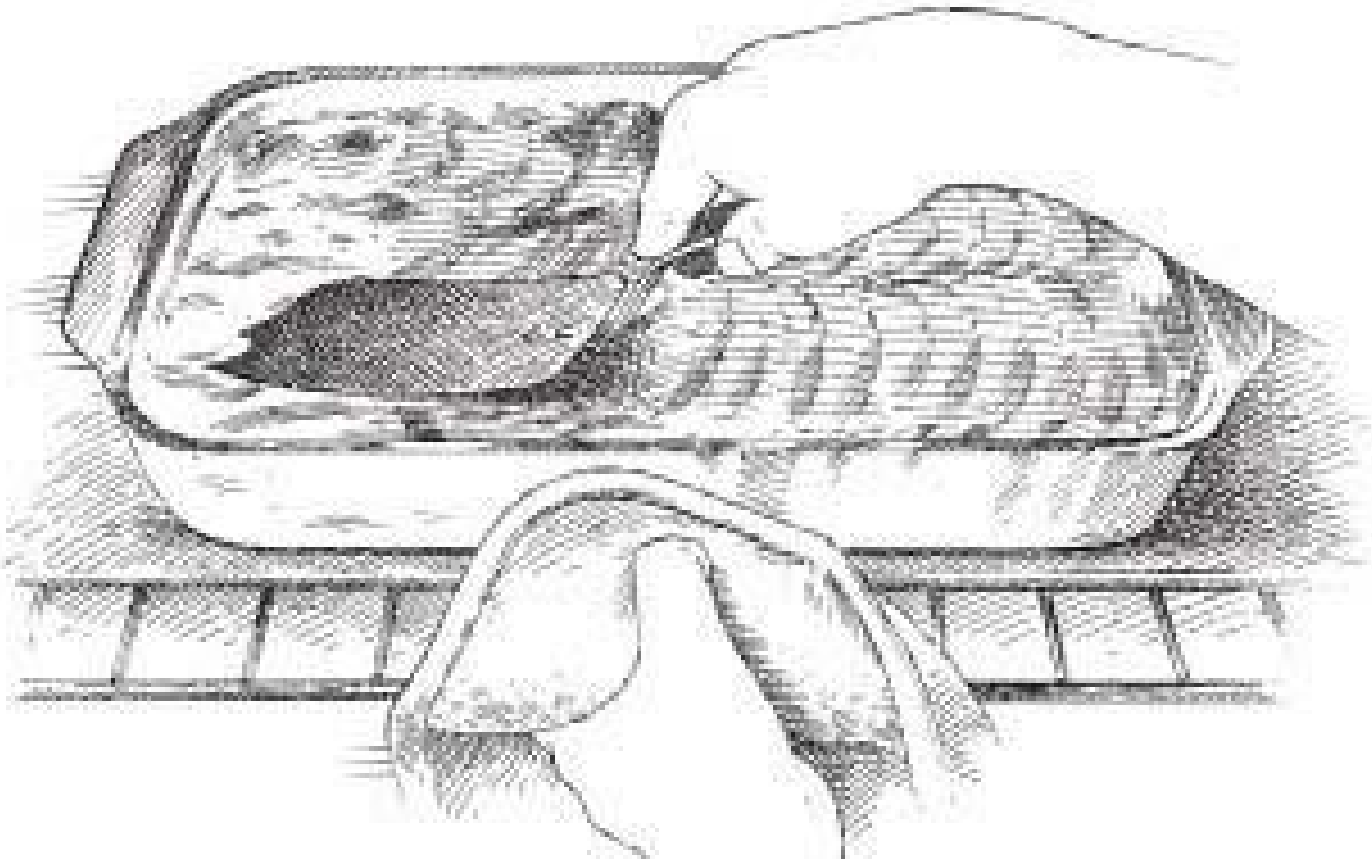

Figure 29.

As the potato casserole bakes, occasionally press doom on the top of the casserole 'with a spatula to force the cream on the bottom of the leaking dish up. This technique will keep the top layer of potatoes moist and will also find the layers together to form a

slightly compressed cake that holds together when sliced

New England Scalloped Fish and Potato Casserole

serves 6 to 8

NOTE: *Cod is traditional here, but haddock or any other firm, flaky white fish could be substituted The smoked trout in the recipe adds a cured, sweet flavor, almost like ham, that corks especially well with cod*

Topping

3 slices white bread (3 ounces), crusts removed and cut into $^1/_4$ inch dice

3 tablespoons unsalted butter,

melted

Filling

4 ounces bacon, diced
2 small onions, minced medium
2 celery stalks, minced
1 garlic clove, minced
3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
$1^1/_2$ cups chicken stock or low-sodium canned broth
1 cup heavy cream
1 cup white wine
1 bay leaf
$1^1/_2$ pounds medium-large russet potatoes, peeled and cut into $^1/_4$-inch slices
$1^1/_2$ pounds cod fillets, cut into

l-inch cubes

4 ounces smoked trout, flaked

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. *For the topping:* Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Mix bread cubes and melted butter in small baking dish; bake until golden brown and crisp, about 20 minutes. Cool to room temperature and set aside.

2. *For the filling:* Cook bacon in Dutch oven over medium heat until crisp and fat has fully rendered, 5 to 6 minutes. Use slotted spoon to transfer to paper

towel lined-plate. Still over medium heat, add onions and celery and cook until softened, 4 to 5 minutes. Add garlic and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute. Stir in flour and cook until golden, about 1 minute.

3. Whisk in stock, cream, and wine. Add bay leaf, reserved bacon, and potatoes. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to medium-low. Cover and cook until potatoes are just tender, about 15 minutes. Remove and discard bay leaf

4. Stir in cod, trout, and salt and pepper to taste. Pour into 13 x 9-inch baking

dish. Cover tightly with foil; bake until cream thickens and cod is fully cooked, 15 to 20 minutes. Uncover dish. Sprinkle top with croutons and bake, uncovered, for 5 minutes. Let rest 5 to 10 minutes before serving.

HOW TO COOK HOLIDAY ROASTS & BIRDS

Roasting Basics

Roast Turkey

Roast Goose

Stuffed Roast Cornish Hens

Baked Ham

Prime Rib

Roast Leg of Lamb

ROASTING BASICS

ALTHOUGH ROASTS COME FROM A VARIETY OF animals, they are all cooked in the oven, often in a similar fashion. Many of the issues are the same when roasting turkey or goose, prime rib or leg of lamb. What's the best oven temperature? Does the roast need to be turned? Is a rack necessary?

There are two basic styles of roasting. What might be termed "conventional roasting" starts with a moderate oven—350 or 375 degrees are standard temperatures. The roast is placed in the

oven and then cooked at that initial oven temperature until the internal temperature of the meat reaches the desired number. Although this method is easy, it does not take full advantage of the oven's capabilities.

Other roasting methods manipulate the temperature, sometimes using a combination of higher and/or lower temperatures. High-heat roasting (temperatures of 400 degrees and higher) promotes exterior browning, which builds flavor, crisps any skin, and makes a roast more attractive. But high-heat roasting can cause uneven cooking, with the temperature of the exterior layers of meat racing ahead of the temperature in the center of the roast.

In general, high heat is better for small roasts and birds (like Cornish hens) that need to brown thoroughly by the time the meat is cooked through. High heat can also be used at the beginning of the cooking time to brown a roast or at the end of the cooking time to crisp the skin on a bird.

Slow roasting, or low-heat roasting, relies on temperatures of 325 degrees or lower to cook gently and evenly. Lower oven temperatures allow sufficient time for the even conduction of heat from the outer layers of a roast to the center. The main problem with slow-roasting is that the exterior will remain quite pale, even after hours in the oven. Many slow-

roasting recipes either begin by searing the meat (prime rib) or end by raising the oven temperature (goose).

EQUIPMENT FOR ROASTING

Roasting requires a few pieces of equipment. In addition to the list below, you will need a carving board and some knives.

INSTANT-READ THERMOMETER We recommend an instant-read thermometer over traditional meat thermometers that are inserted into the roast before it goes into the oven. An instant-read

thermometer can be inserted into almost any food—everything from a roast to a custard for ice cream—and will display the internal temperature within seconds. Unlike traditional meat thermometers, instant-read thermometers are not designed to be left in the oven. Prolonged exposure of the whole unit to heat will destroy the measuring mechanism.

There are two types of instant-read thermometers on the market—dial face and digital. Though pocket-size dial face thermometers are less expensive than digitals, they are less precise, and most read temperatures in a narrower range. Our favorite thermometer registers temperatures from below zero to 500

degrees.

Another important difference between digital and dial thermometers is the location of the temperature sensor. On dial face thermometers, the sensors are roughly $1^1/_2$ inches from the tip of the stem. The sensors on digital thermometers are usually located at the very tip of the stem. The former position means that the stem must be stuck deep into the meat or other food. A digital thermometer will deliver a more accurate reading in thin cutlets or shallow liquids.

There is one last factor to consider when buying an instant-read thermometer. In our testing of nine

models, we found that some models responded in just 10 seconds, while others took as long as 30 seconds to record the correct temperature. There is no point keeping the oven door open longer than is necessary, so choose a fast-responding model such as the Owen Instruments Thermapen or Taylor Digital Pocket.

ROASTING PAN Roasting pans can cost $2 or $200, or even more once you start talking about copper. Most roasting pans are made of aluminum because it heats quickly. Some pans are lined with stainless steel, which is easier to clean than aluminum. We find that material is

less important than size, depth, and weight.

You want a roasting pan that is large enough to hold a leg of lamb or country ham. A 13-by 9-inch baking pan is fine for a chicken, but you will need something considerably larger for most roasts. A size of 15 by 12 inches will work fine for most recipes in this book. (You will need a roasting or jelly roll pan that measures 19-inches long and 13-inches across to cook six Cornish hens at one time.)

In addition to size, you want a roasting pan that is deep enough to keep fat from splattering onto the walls of the oven. Since many roasts are cooked on racks, a shallow pan may prove problematic.

On the other hand, a really deep pan will discourage browning. We find that a depth of $2^1/_2$ inches is ideal.

We also prefer roasting pans with handles, which make it easy to lift them in and out of the oven. Lastly, you should consider buying a roasting pan with a heavy bottom. Some recipes end by placing the empty pan on top of the stove for deglazing. A thin pan may buckle or scorch, but a heavy-duty roasting pan with a thick bottom won't.

We know that many cooks rely on disposable aluminum pans for holiday roasts and birds. They are large and cheap and there is no cleanup. The downside is that these pans are flimsy

and can fall apart. If you insist on using them, fit two pans together to support heavy roasts and birds. Also, try to buy disposable pans with handles and make sure to support the bottom of the filled pan when lifting it.

ROASTING RACK A rack keeps a roast above pan juices and grease, which helps prevent the exterior from cooking up soft or fatty. A rack also allows air to circulate underneath so the bottom of a roast can brown without burning or overcooking, which sometimes happens when a roast rests directly on a hot pan.

There are several types of roasting racks, each with a different use. A U-

shaped basket rack cradles a chicken perfectly. In our test, we found that the perforated nonstick finish conducts heat better than other racks so that skin browns especially well. Basket racks are solid and stable, but too small to accommodate turkeys or geese. For these larger birds, a nonadjustable V-rack is recommended. Unlike adjustable V-racks, the nonadjustable version is made from thick metal bars, not flimsy wires. We found that this kind of rack stays put in the pan and doesn't bend when holding heavy birds.

Basket and V-racks keep birds well elevated from the roasting pan so that the skin on the underside browns well. In our tests, we found that a vertical rack

doesn't lift the chicken far enough off the pan to brown the skin on the bottom end of the bird. A vertical rack also splatters fat all over the oven.

For other recipes, you simply need to keep the meat out of the rendered fat and juices. A flat rack is fine for prime rib, ham, or leg of lamb. Look for special roasting racks that are small enough to fit in most pans.

ROAST TURKEY

IS IT POSSIBLE TO ROAST A TURKEY PERFECTLY? Usually juicy breast meat comes with a price—shocking pink legs and thighs. You have some leeway with the dark meat, which is almost impossible to dry out during normal roasting times. The problem is that the breast, which is exposed to direct heat and finishes cooking at a lower temperature, becomes parched while the legs and thighs take their time creeping to doneness. Nearly every roasting method in existence tries to compensate

for this; few succeed.

We tested dozens of different methods for roasting a turkey, from traditional to idiosyncratic. Our goals were to end up with an attractive bird, to determine the ideal internal temperature, and to find a method that would finish both white and dark meat simultaneously.

Our first roasting experiments used the method most frequently promoted by the National Turkey Federation, the United States Department of Agriculture, and legions of cookbook authors and recipe writers. This method features a moderately low roasting temperature of 325 degrees, a breast-up bird, and an open pan. We tried this method twice, basting one turkey and leaving the other

alone. The basted turkey acquired a beautifully tanned skin, while the unbasted bird remained quite pale. Both were cooked to 170 degrees in the leg/thigh. Despite the fact that this was 10 degrees lower than recommended by the USDA and most producers, the breasts still registered a throat-catchingly dry 180 degrees.

We quickly determined that almost all turkeys roasted in the traditional breast-up manner produced breast meat that was 10 degrees ahead of the leg/thigh meat (tenting the breast with heavy-duty foil was the exception; read on). Because white meat is ideal at 160 degrees, and dark thigh meat just loses

its last shades of pink at about 170 degrees, you might conclude, as we did, that roasting turkeys with their breasts up is a losing proposition.

We also discovered that stuffing a bird makes overcooked meat more likely. Because it slows interior cooking (our tests showed a nearly 30-degree difference in internal temperature after an hour in the oven), stuffing means longer oven times, which can translate to bone-dry surface meat. We eventually developed a method for roasting a stuffed turkey but if the turkey is your priority, we recommend cooking the dressing separately.

Of all the breast-up methods, tenting the bird's breast and upper legs with

foil, as suggested by numerous authors, worked the best. The foil deflects some of the oven's heat, reducing the ultimate temperature differential between white and dark meat from 10 to 6 degrees. The bird is roasted at a consistent 325-degree temperature, and during the last 45 minutes of roasting the foil is removed, allowing enough time for lovely browning. If you're partial to open-pan roasting and don't care to follow the technique we developed, try the foil shield; it certainly ran second in our tests.

Amidst all these failures and near-successes, some real winners did emerge. Early on, we became fans of

brining turkey in a salt water bath before roasting. When we first removed the brined turkey from the refrigerator, we found a beautiful, milky-white bird. When roasted, the texture of the breast was different from that of the other birds we had cooked; the meat was firm and juicy at the same time. And the turkey tasted fully seasoned; others had required a bite of skin with the meat to achieve the same effect. We experimented with the brining time, and found that eight to 12 hours in the refrigerator produces a pleasantly seasoned turkey without overly salty pan juices. Brining was our first real breakthrough; we now believe it to be essential in achieving perfect taste and

texture. But we had yet to discover the way to roast.

Our most successful attempt at achieving equal temperatures in leg and breast came when we followed James Beard's technique of turning the turkey as it roasts. In this method, the bird begins breast side down on a V-rack, then spends equal time on each of its sides before being turned breast side up. The V-rack is important not just to hold the turkey in place, but also to elevate the turkey, affording it some protection from the heat of the roasting pan. This combination of rack and technique produced a turkey with a breast temperature that ran only a few degrees

behind the leg temperature.

Because we were using smaller turkeys than Beard had used, we had to fine-tune his method. Large turkeys spend enough time in the oven to brown at 350 degrees; our turkeys were in the 12-pound range and were cooking in as little as two hours, yielding quite pale skin. Clearly, we needed higher heat.

Reviewing our notes, we noticed that the basted birds were usually the evenly browned, beautiful ones. So we turned up the heat to 400 degrees, basted faithfully, and got what we wanted. In an effort to streamline, we tried to skip the leg-up turns, roasting only breast side down, then breast side up. But in order for the turkey to brown all over, these

two extra turns were necessary. Brining, turning, and basting are work, yes, but the combination produces the best turkey we've ever had.

During our first few tests, we discovered that filling the cavity with aromatic herbs and vegetables made for a subtle but perceptible difference in flavor. This was especially noticeable in the inner meat of the leg and thigh; turkeys with hollow cavities, by contrast, tasted bland. Roasted alongside the turkey, the same combination of carrot, celery, onion, and thyme also did wonders for the pan juices.

INTERNAL

TEMPERATURE: HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

Industry standards developed by the United States Department of Agriculture and the National Turkey Federation call for whole birds to be cooked to an internal thigh temperature of 180 to 185 degrees. The breast temperature, according to these standards, should be 170 degrees. However, our kitchen tests showed that no meat is at its best at a temperature of 180 or 185 degrees. And breast meat really tastes best closer to 160 to 165 degrees.

While the USDA might have us

believe that the only safe turkey is a dry turkey, this just isn't true. The two main bacterial problems in turkey are salmonella and Campylobacter jejuni. According to USDA standards, salmonella in meat is killed at 160 degrees. Turkey is no different. So why the higher safety standard of 180 degrees?

Part of the problem is that stuffing must reach an internal temperature of 165 degrees to be considered safe. (Carbohydrates such as bread provide a better medium for bacterial growth than do proteins such as meat; hence the extra safety margin of 5 degrees). The USDA also worries that most cooks don't own an accurate thermometer.

The final word on poultry safety is this: As long as the temperature on an accurate instant-read thermometer reaches 160 degrees when inserted in several places, all unstuffed meat (including turkey) should be bacteria-free. Dark meat is undercooked at this stage and tastes better at 170 or 175 degrees. With our turning method, the breast will reach about 165 degrees when the leg is done.

A temperature of 165 degrees also guarantees that stuffed turkeys are safe. But bacteria in meat cooked to 180 or 185 degrees is long gone—as is moistness and flavor.

Best Roast Turkey

NOTE: ***We prefer to roast small turkeys, no more than 14 pounds gross weight, because they cook more evenly than large birds. (If you must cook a large bird, see the variation.) If you prefer, double the amount of salt in the brine and brine for just four hours. This hurry-up brine works with large turkeys and turkeys destined to be stuffed as well. Serves 10 to 12.***

2 cups kosher salt or 1 cup table salt

1 turkey (12 to 14 pounds gross weight), rinsed thoroughly; giblets, neck, and

tailpiece removed and reserved to make gravy

3 medium onions, chopped coarse

$1^1/_2$ medium carrots, chopped coarse

$1^1/_2$ celery stalks, chopped coarse

6 thyme sprigs

3 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Dissolve salt in 2 gallons of cold water in large stockpot or clean bucket. Add turkey and refrigerate or set in very cool (40 degrees or less) spot for 12

hours.

2. Remove turkey from salt water and rinse both cavities and skin under cool running water for several minutes until all traces of salt are gone. Pat dry inside and out with paper towels. Adjust oven rack to lowest position and heat oven to 400 degrees. Toss one-third of onion, carrot, celery, and thyme with 1 tablespoon of melted butter and place this mixture in body cavity. Bring turkey legs together and perform a simple truss (*see* figures 1–3).

3. Scatter remaining vegetables and

thyme over a shallow roasting pan. Pour 1 cup water over vegetables. Set V-rack in pan. Brush entire breast side of turkey with half of remaining butter, then place turkey, breast side down, on V-rack. Brush entire backside of turkey with remaining butter.

4. Roast for 45 minutes. Remove pan from oven (close oven door); baste. With wad of paper toweling in each hand, turn turkey, leg/thigh side up. If liquid in pan has totally evaporated, add additional $^{1}/_{2}$ cup water. Return turkey to oven and roast for 15 minutes. Remove turkey from oven again, baste, and again use paper toweling to turn other leg/thigh

side up; roast for another 15 minutes. Remove turkey from oven for final time, baste, and turn it breast side up; roast until breast registers about 165 degrees and thigh registers 170 to 175 degrees on an instant-read thermometer, 30 to 45 minutes (*see* figures 4 and 5). Remove turkey from pan and let rest until ready to carve. Serve with gravy.

VARIATION:

Large Roast Turkey

Smaller turkeys cook faster and are generally more tender, but sometimes you need a bigger bird for a large holiday crowd. By tinkering with our original recipe, we were able to

produce a beautiful large turkey without sacrificing juiciness and flavor. When roasting a large turkey, it's not necessary to roast bird on each side. Serves 18 to 20.

Follow recipe for Best Roast Turkey, roasting 18-to 20-pound turkey breast side down in 250-degree oven for 3 hours, basting every hour. Then turn breast side up and roast another hour, basting once or twice. Increase oven temperature to 400 degrees and roast until done, about 1 hour longer.

Figure 1.
Using the center of a 5-foot length of cooking twine, tie the legs together at the ankles.

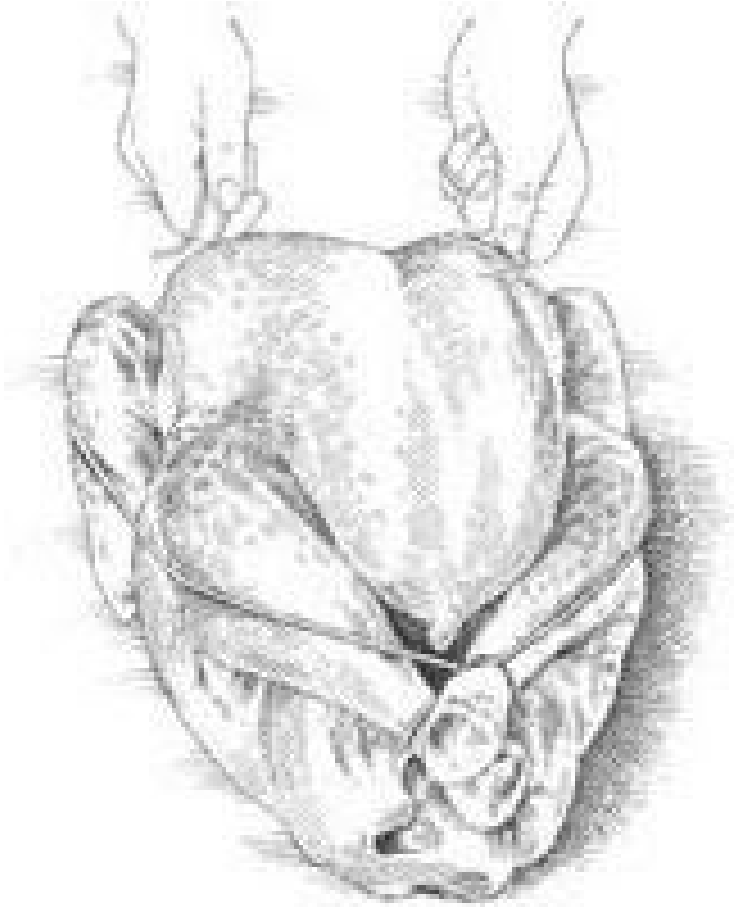

Figure 2.
Run the twine around the thighs and under the wings on both sides of the bird and pull it tight.

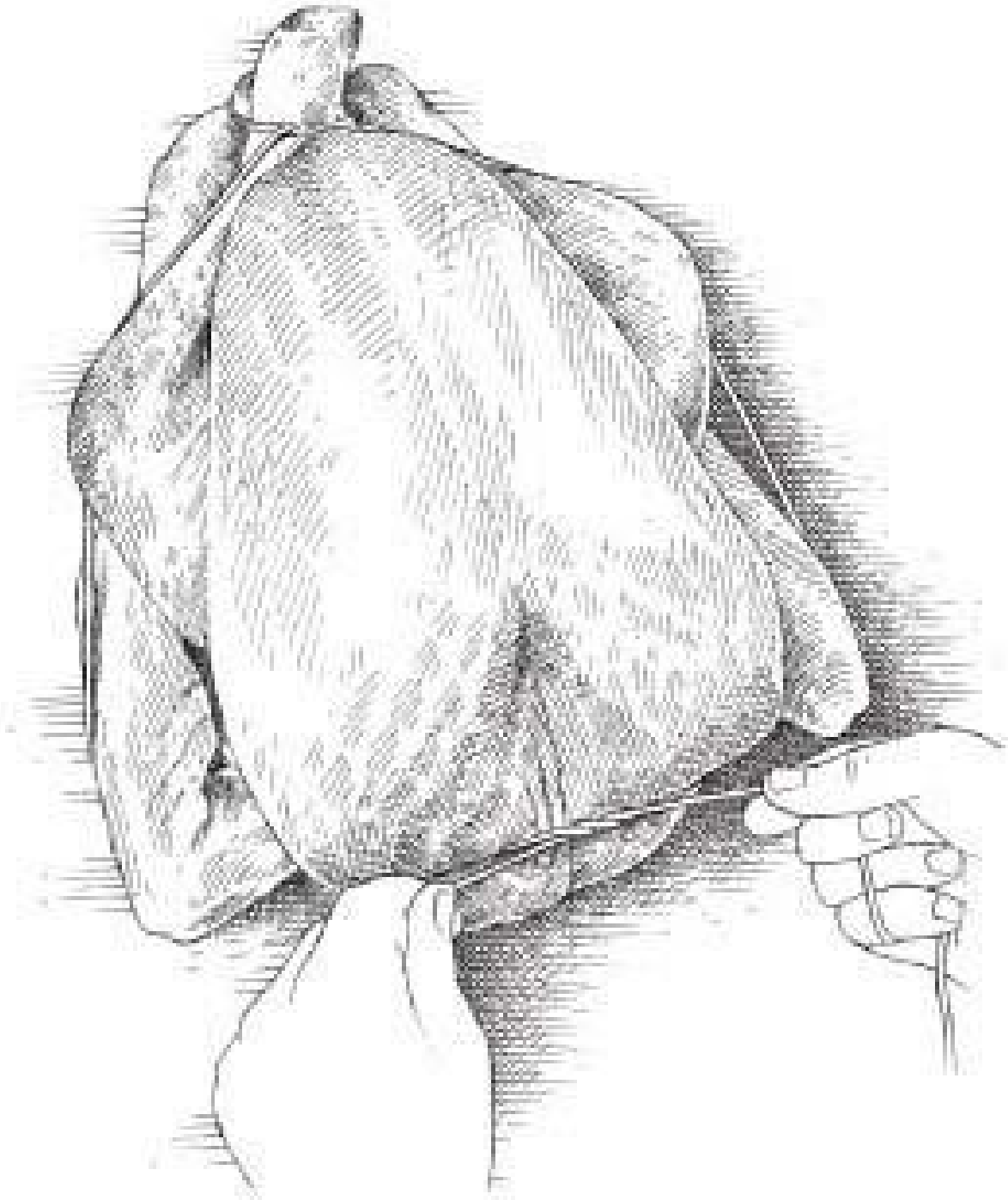

Figure 3.
Keeping the twine pulled snug, tie a firm knot around the excess flesh at the neck of the bird. Snip

off excess twine.

Figure 4.
When using an instant-read thermometer, make sure that you measure the temperature of the thickest part of the thigh.

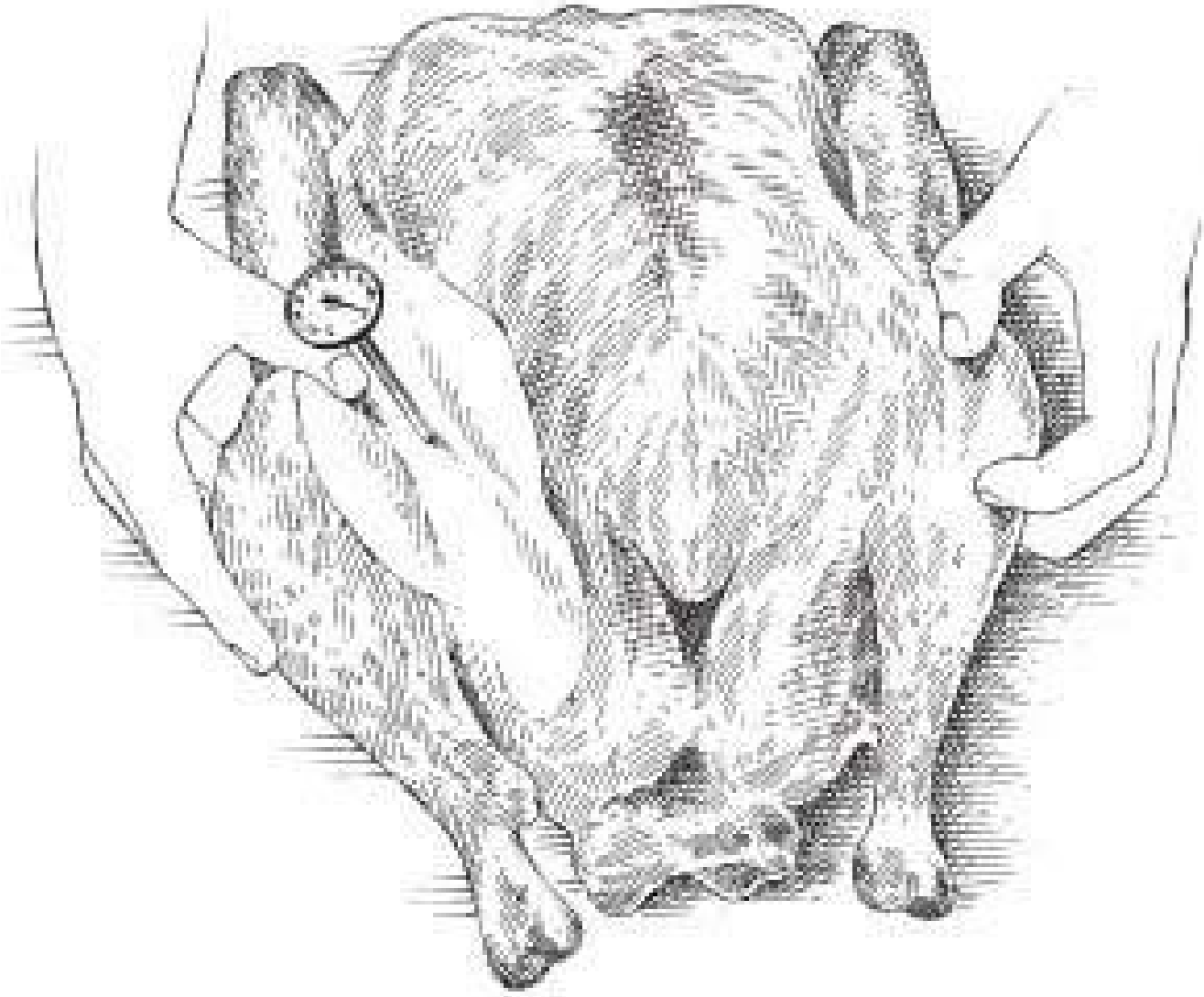

Figure 5.
This cutaway drawing shows the actual point to which the tip of the thermometer should penetrate.

Giblet Pan Gravy

NOTE: ***The gravy is best made over several hours. Complete step 1 while the turkey is brining. Continue with step 2 once the bird is in the oven. Start step 3 once the bird has been removed from the oven and is resting on a carving board.***

1 tablespoon vegetable oil

Reserved turkey giblets, neck, and tailpiece

1 onion, unpeeled and chopped

$1^1/_2$ quarts turkey or chicken stock or 1 quart low-sodium canned chicken broth plus

2 cups water

2 thyme branches

8 parsley stems

3 tablespoons unsalted butter

$^1/_4$ cup flour

1 cup dry white wine

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oil in soup kettle; add giblets, neck, and tail, then sauté until golden and fragrant, about 5 minutes. Add onion; continue to sauté until softened, 3 to 4 minutes longer. Reduce heat to low; cover and cook until turkey and onion release their juices, about 20 minutes. Add stock and herbs, bring to boil, then adjust heat to low. Simmer, skimming

any scum that may rise to surface, until broth is rich and flavorful, about 30 minutes longer. Strain broth (you should have about 5 cups) and reserve neck, heart, and gizzard. When cool enough to handle, shred neck meat, remove gristle from gizzard, then dice reserved heart and gizzard. Refrigerate giblets and broth until ready to use.

2. While turkey is roasting, return reserved turkey broth to simmer. Heat butter in large heavy-bottomed saucepan over medium-low heat. Vigorously whisk in flour. Cook slowly, stirring constantly, until nutty brown and fragrant, 10 to 15 minutes. Vigorously

whisk all but 1 cup of hot broth into roux. Bring to boil, then continue to simmer until gravy is lightly thickened and very flavorful, about 30 minutes longer. Set aside until turkey is done.

3. When turkey has been transferred to carving board to rest, spoon out and discard as much fat as possible from roasting pan, leaving caramelized herbs and vegetables. Place roasting pan over two burners at medium-high heat. Return gravy to simmer. Add wine to roasting pan of caramelized vegetables, scraping up any browned bits with wooden spoon and boiling until reduced by half, about 5 minutes. Add remaining 1 cup broth,

then strain pan juices into gravy, pressing as much juice as possible out of vegetables. Stir giblets into gravy; return to a boil. Adjust seasonings, adding salt and pepper to taste. Serve with turkey.

Roast Stuffed Turkey

NOTE: ***For some cooks, the stuffing is the best part of the holiday meal, and for best flavor they want to cook at least some of the stuffing in the bird. This causes all kinds of cooking problems since the stuffing can be slow to heat up. The stuffing enthusiasts in our test kitchen developed a method that gets the stuffing hot enough to kill any bacteria without causing the delicate breast meat to dry out.***

At the outset, we limited our turkey to a maximum of 15 pounds because it is just too difficult to stuff and roast larger birds safely. From initial tests,

we saw that the stuffing generally lagged at least 10 degrees behind the breast and leg. Since the stuffing must reach a temperature of 165 degrees according to USDA standards, our breast meat was at a bone-dry 175 degrees in these early experiments.

Clearly, we were going to have to heat the stuffing before putting it into the turkey. When we heated stuffing to 120 degrees in a microwave and then roasted the bird at a constant 325 degrees, we cut 45 minutes off the roasting time we'd needed with cold stuffing. The breast was still overcooked, but this method was promising. In the end, we settled on a

combination of high and low heat.

We also determined that, regardless of temperature, roasting the bird breast down for only one hour was not sufficient. The breast needed to be shielded for most of the cooking time. We also abandoned roasting leg side up because the turns were too awkward with a stuffed bird.

A 12-to 15-pound turkey will accommodate approximately half of the stuffing. Bake the remainder in a casserole dish while the bird rests before carving. Make the gravy recipe. Serves 10 to 12.

2 cups kosher or 1 cup table salt

1 turkey (12 to 15 pounds gross weight) rinsed thoroughly; giblets, neck, and tailpiece removed and reserved to make gravy

2 medium onions, chopped coarse

1 medium carrot, chopped coarse

1 celery stalk, chopped coarse

4 thyme sprigs

12 cups prepared stuffing

3 tablespoons unsalted butter, plus extra to grease casserole dish and foil

1/4 cup turkey or chicken stock or low-sodium canned

chicken broth

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Dissolve salt in 2 gallons of cold water in large stock pot or clean bucket. Add turkey and refrigerate or set in very cool (40 degrees or less) spot for 12 hours.

2. Remove turkey from salt water and rinse skin and both cavities under cool water for several minutes until all traces of salt are gone. Pat dry inside and out with paper towels; set aside. Adjust oven rack to the lowest position and heat the oven to 400 degrees. Scatter onions, carrot, celery, and thyme over shallow

roasting pan. Pour 1 cup water over vegetables. Set V-rack in pan.

3. Place half of stuffing in buttered medium casserole dish, dot surface with 1 tablespoon butter, cover with buttered foil, and refrigerate until ready to use. Microwave remaining stuffing on full power, stirring two or three times, until very hot (120 to 130 degrees), 6 to 8 minutes (if you can handle stuffing with hands, it is not hot enough). Spoon 4 to 5 cups of stuffing into the turkey cavity until very loosely packed (*see* figure 6). Secure skin flap over the cavity opening with turkey lacers or skewers (*see* figures 7 and 8). Melt remaining 2

tablespoons butter. Tuck wings behind back, brush entire breast side with half of melted butter, then place turkey breast side down on V-rack. Fill neck cavity with remaining heated stuffing and secure skin flap over opening as above (*see* figure 9). Brush back with remaining butter.

4. Roast 1 hour, then reduce temperature to 250 degrees and roast 2 hours longer, adding additional water if pan becomes dry. Remove pan from oven (close oven door) and with wad of paper toweling in each hand, turn breast side up and baste (temperature of breast should be 145 to 150 degrees). Increase oven temperature

to 400 degrees; continue roasting until breast registers about 165 degrees, thigh registers 170 to 175 degrees, and stuffing registers 165 degrees on instant-read thermometer, 1 to $1\,^{1}/_{2}$ hours longer. Remove turkey from oven and let rest until ready to carve.

5. Add $^{1}/_{4}$ cup stock to dish of reserved stuffing, replace foil, and bake until hot throughout, about 20 minutes. Remove foil; continue to bake until stuffing forms golden brown crust, about 15 minutes longer.

6. Carve turkey; serve with stuffing and

gravy.

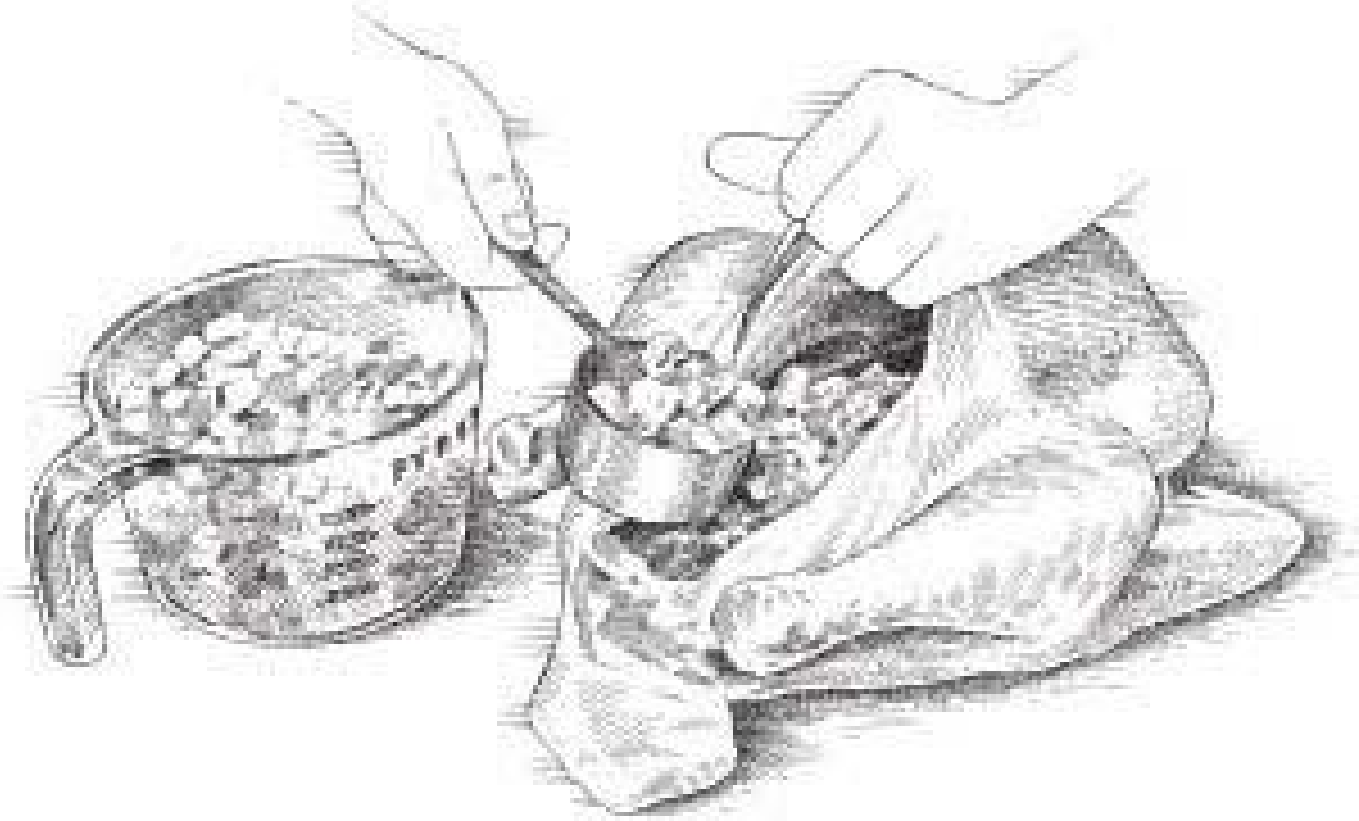

Figure 6.
Use a measuring cup to place the preheated stuffing into the cavity of the bird. Remember, it's imperative that the stuffing is heated before placing it in the bird.

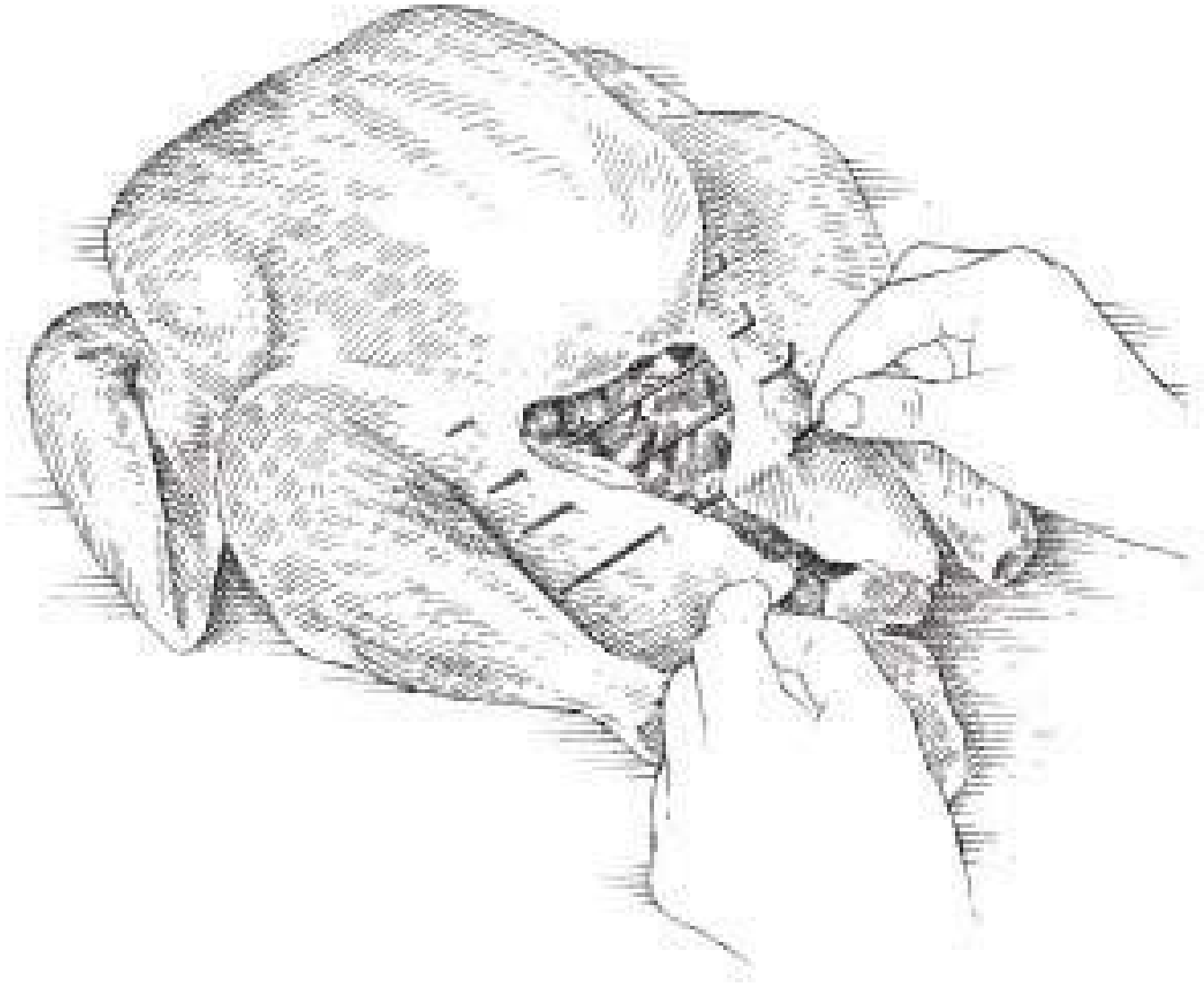

Figure 7.
To keep the stuffing in the cavity use metal skewers (or cut bamboo skewers) and thread them through the skin on both sides of the cavity.

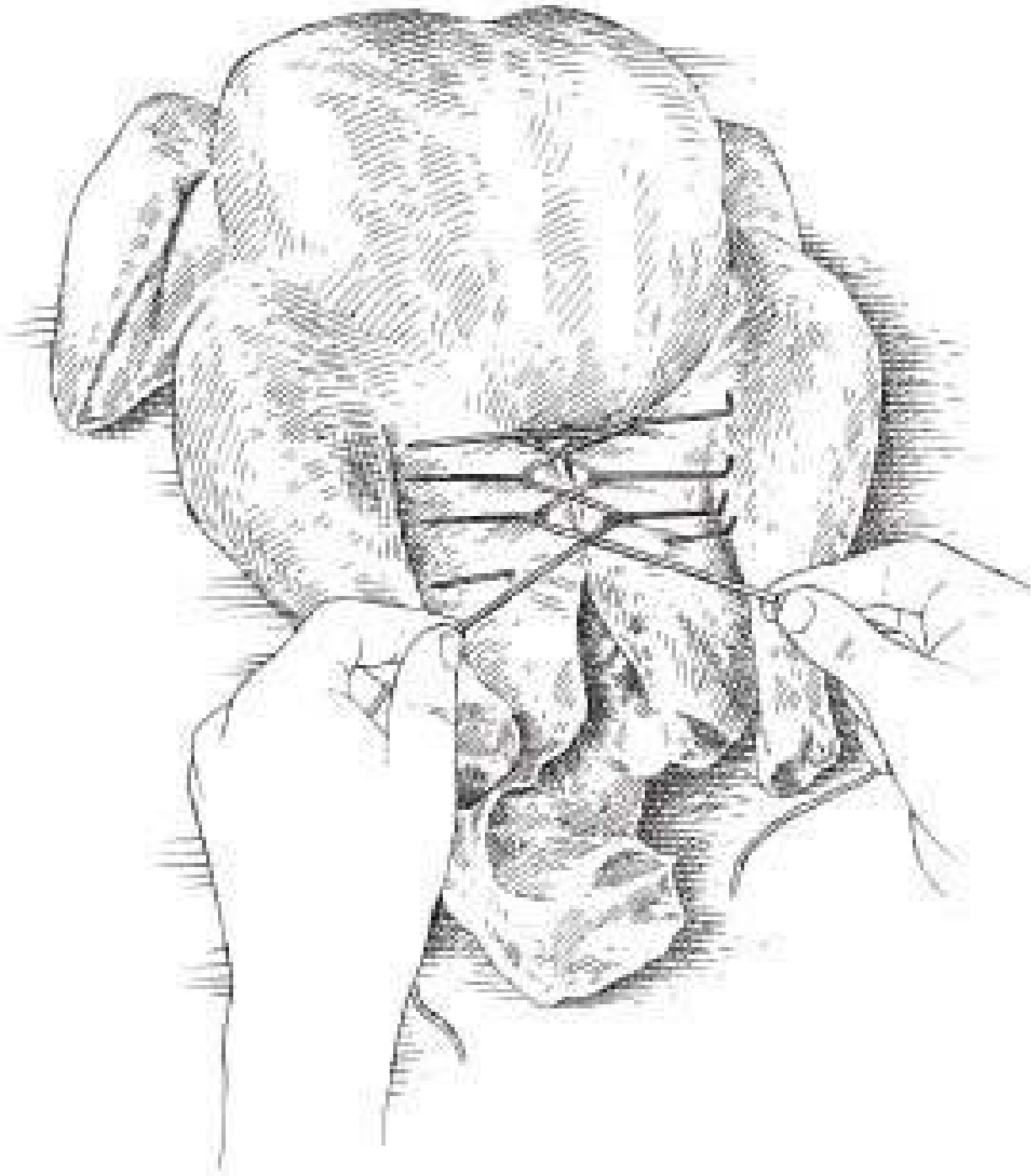

Figure 8.
Use a 2-foot piece of kitchen twine to close up the cavity, as if you were lacing up boots. Center

the twine on the top skewer and then simply cross the twine as you wrap each end of the string around and under the skewers. Loosely tie the legs together with another short piece of kitchen twine.

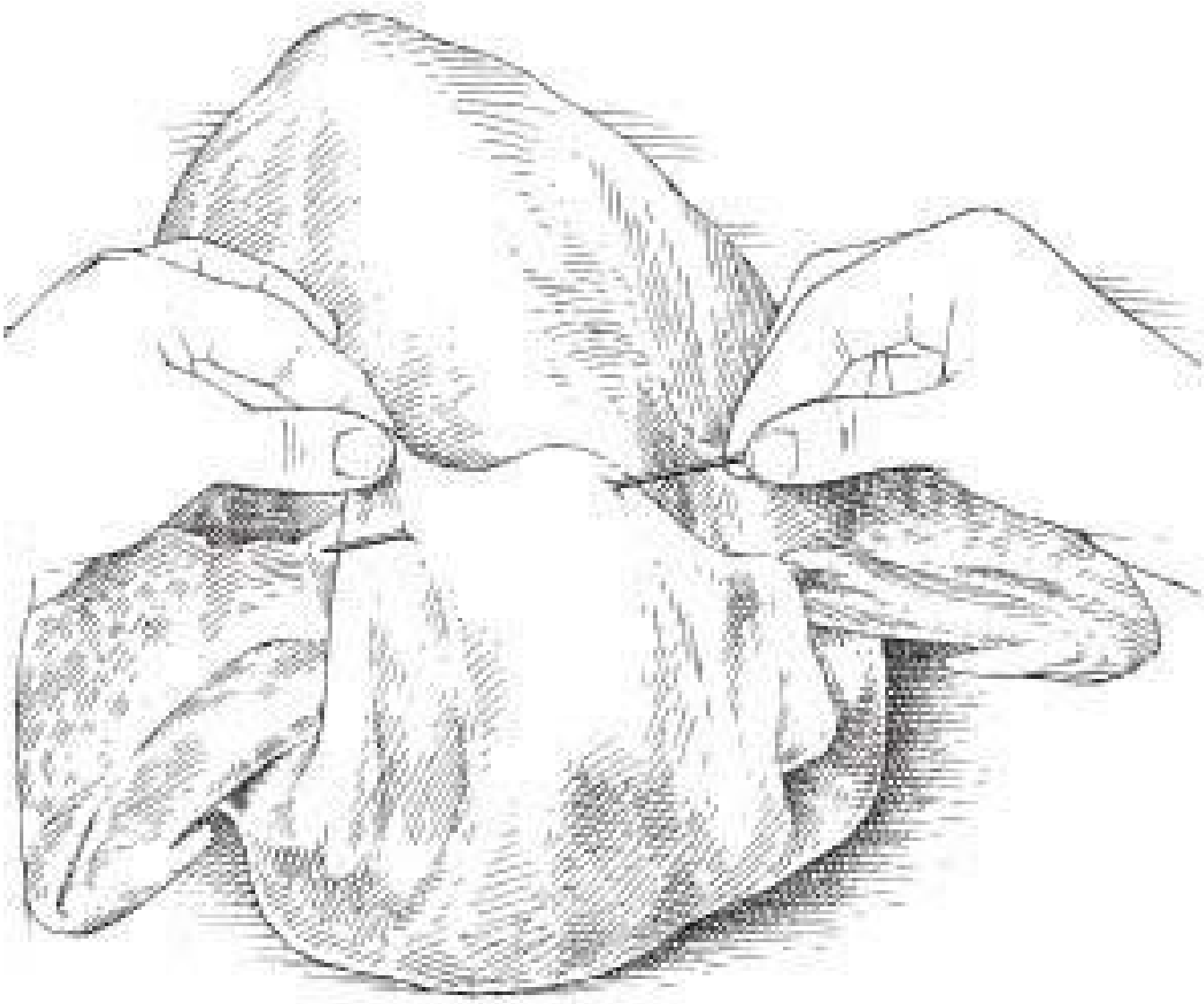

Figure 9.
Flip the bird over onto its breast. Stuff the neck cavity loosely with approximately one cup of stuffing. Pull the skin flap over and use a skewer to pin the flap to the turkey.

ALL ABOUT BREAD STUFFINGS

In our tests, we found that dry bread cubes are essential when making stuffing because they do a better job of absorbing seasonings and other flavors than fresh cubes. To dry bread, cut a fresh loaf of French or other white bread into $^1/_2$-inch slices, place the slices in a single layer on cookie sheets or cooling racks, and allow the slices to sit out overnight. The next day, cut the slices into $^1/_2$-inch cubes and allow them to dry in a single layer for an additional night.

If you are in a hurry, place $^1/_2$-inch slices of bread in a 225-degree oven for

30 to 40 minutes, or until dried but not browned. Remove the bread from the oven and cut into $^1/_2$-inch cubes. You will need a one-pound loaf of bread to obtain the 12 cups of bread cubes necessary for the following recipes.

All these stuffings can be covered and refrigerated for one day. Turn the mixture into a 13-by-9-inch or comparably-sized microwave-safe pan and reheat in a 325 degree-oven or microwave until the stuffing is warmed through before packing it into a bird.

Place any stuffing that won't fit in the bird in a greased 8-inch square baking dish. Drizzle a few tablespoons of melted butter over the stuffing and cover

the pan with foil. Bake in a 400-degree oven for about 25 minutes, remove the foil, and bake an additional 15 minutes. All of these bread stuffing recipes make about 12 cups.

Bread Stuffing with Sausage, Pecans, and Dried Apricots

NOTE: ***High-quality sausage is the key to this recipe. Toast the pecans in a 350-degree oven until fragrant, 6 to 8 minutes.***

1 pound sweet Italian sausage, removed from casings and crumbled

6 tablespoons unsalted butter

1 large onion, chopped (about $1^1/_2$ cups)

4 medium celery stalks, chopped (about $1^1/_2$ cups)

1/2 teaspoon each dried sage, dried thyme, dried marjoram

1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper

1/2 cup fresh parsley leaves, chopped fine

2 cups pecans, toasted and roughly chopped

1 cup dried apricots, sliced thin

1 teaspoon salt

12 cups dried French or other white bread cubes

1 cup chicken stock or low-sodium canned chicken broth

3 large eggs, lightly beaten

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Cook sausage in large skillet over medium heat until browned, about 10 minutes. Transfer sausage to large bowl with slotted spoon. Discard fat and in same pan melt butter.

2. Add onion and celery and cook, stirring occasionally, over medium heat until soft and translucent, 6 to 7 minutes. Add dried herbs and pepper and cook for another minute. Transfer contents of pan to bowl with sausage. Add parsley, pecans, apricots, and salt and mix to combine. Add bread cubes to bowl.

3. Whisk stock and eggs together in

small bowl. Pour mixture over bread cubes. Gently toss to evenly distribute ingredients.

Bread Stuffing with Bacon, Apples, Sage, and Caramelized Onions

NOTE: ***For the best flavor, make sure to cook the onions until they are a deep golden brown color.***

1 pound bacon, cut crosswise into $^1/_4$-inch strips

6 medium onions, sliced thin (about 7 cups)

1 teaspoon salt

2 Granny Smith apples, peeled, cored, and cut into $^1/_2$-inch cubes (about 2 cups)

$^1/_2$ teaspoon ground black

pepper

1/2 cup fresh parsley leaves, chopped fine

3 tablespoons fresh sage leaves, cut into thin strips

1/2 cups dried French or other white bread cubes

1 cup chicken stock or low-sodium canned chicken broth

3 large eggs, lightly beaten

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Cook bacon in large skillet or Dutch oven over medium heat until crisp and browned, about 12 minutes. Remove bacon from pan with slotted spoon and drain on paper towels. Discard all but 3

tablespoons of rendered bacon fat.

2. Increase heat to medium-high and add onions and $^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoon of salt. Cook onions until golden in color, making sure to stir occasionally and scrape sides and bottom of pan, about 20 minutes. Reduce heat to medium and continue to cook, stirring more often to prevent burning, until onions are deep golden brown, another 5 minutes. Add apples and continue to cook another 5 minutes. Transfer contents of pan to large bowl.

3. Add remaining $^{3}/_{4}$ teaspoon salt, pepper, parsley, and sage to bowl and

mix to combine. Add bread cubes.

4. Whisk stock and eggs together in small bowl. Pour mixture over bread cubes. Gently toss to evenly distribute ingredients.

ROAST GOOSE

GOOSE MEAT IS SURPRISINGLY FIRM, ALMOST chewy to the bite, yet it is also moist and not at all tough or stringy. Both the breast and legs are dark, in the manner of duck, but unlike duck, goose has no gamy or tallowy undertones. Actually, the first impression of many people is that goose tastes a lot like roast beef.

Goose, however, does have a problem. Although the meat itself is not fatty, a thick layer of fat lies just below the skin. As a consequence, the skin,

which looks so tempting, often turns out to be too soft and greasy to eat. To make a good roast goose, it is imperative to rid the bird of this fat.

Most cookbooks and chefs suggest periodic basting with chicken stock or wine to dissolve the fat and promote a handsome brown color. But this method does not work. A considerable amount of subcutaneous fat always remains, and worse, the basting seriously softens goose skin, which should be crackling crisp.

Among all the goose-cooking methods we had read about, we were most intrigued by the steam-roasting and closed-cover techniques recommended by various authorities. Since the best

way to render fat is to simmer it in water, steaming sounded like a promising procedure.

So we set a goose on a rack over an inch of water and steamed it on top of the stove in a covered roaster for about an hour. Then we poured the water out of the pan and put the goose into a 325-degree oven, covered. After one hour we checked on the goose, and seeing that the skin was very flabby and not in the least bit brown, we removed the cover of the pan and turned the heat up to 350 degrees. Alas, an hour later the skin was still soft and only a little browner. Even though the goose tested done at this point, we let it stay in the oven for

another 30 minutes, but the skin did not improve.

Tasting the goose, we realized that there was yet another problem; steaming had perhaps made the meat a tad juicier, but it had also made the texture a little rubbery and imparted a boiled, stewish flavor. The goose no longer tasted the way we thought goose should. So we abandoned steaming.

Since liquid basting and steaming had both proved unsuccessful, we thought it was time to try a simple dry roast. Some of the geese that we had bought came with instructions to roast at 500 degrees for 30 minutes and then to turn the oven down to 300 degrees and roast several hours longer. We stuffed the goose,

dried and pricked the skin, and popped it into the scorching oven. As we should have guessed, within 15 minutes the goose had begun to drip, and the kitchen had filled with smoke. We quickly turned the oven thermostat down to 300 degrees and let the bird roast until it tested done, about three hours. Then we increased the oven temperature to 400 degrees, transferred the goose to a large jelly-roll pan, and returned it to the oven for about 15 minutes to brown and crisp the skin. The results surprised us. This method, the simplest of all, yielded a beautifully brown, crisp-skinned bird, with moist meat and surprisingly little unmelted fat.

Dry, open roasting looked like the way to proceed, but we wondered if the technique could be further improved. We thought about adapting a classic technique often used with duck. The duck is immersed in boiling water for one minute and then allowed to dry, uncovered, in the refrigerator for 24 hours. The boiling and drying were supposed to tighten the skin, so that during roasting, the fat would be squeezed out. We tried this method with a goose and loved the results. The skin was papery-crisp and defatted to the point where it could be eaten with pleasure—and without guilt.

The breast and leg meat of a goose are

not as dissimilar as the breast and leg meat of a chicken, turkey, or duck. Thus, while most birds require special roasting procedures—such as trussing or basting—to keep the breast at a lower temperature than the legs and to prevent it from drying out, goose can be put in the oven and left alone except for turning it over at the halfway mark to ensure even crisping of the skin.

Unlike these other birds, the doneness of goose cannot be judged solely by the internal temperature of the meat. The length of the cooking time is also an important factor. Goose generally reaches an internal temperature of 170 degrees in the thigh cavity (the usual indicator of "well done") after less than

two hours of roasting. Yet the meat turns out to be tough, especially around the thighs, if the bird is removed from the oven at this point. At least 45 minutes of additional roasting are required to make the meat tender. Since goose has so much fat, there is little chance of the meat drying out. The most reliable indicator of doneness is the feel of the drumsticks. When the skin has puffed and the meat inside feels soft and almost shredded when pressed—like well-done stew meat—the rest of the bird should be just right.

Roast Goose

NOTE: ***We used both fresh and frozen geese in testing and found no difference in the final result. This is fortunate, as most geese come to the market frozen. Serves 8 to 10.***

1 whole goose (10 to 12 pounds gross weight), neck, giblets, wing tips, and excess fat removed, rinsed, patted dry, and reserved to make stuffing and stock; wishbone removed and skin pricked all over (*see* figures 10–13)

8 cups Stuffing with Bacon, Apples, Sage, and Caramelized

Onions warmed

Salt and ground black pepper

1 recipe Red Wine Gravy

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Fill large stock pot two-thirds of way with water and bring to rolling boil. Submerge goose in boiling water (*see* figure 14). Drain goose and dry thoroughly, inside and out, with paper towels. Set goose, breast side up, on flat rack in roasting pan and refrigerate, uncovered, for 24 to 48 hours.

2. Adjust oven rack to low-center position and heat to 325 degrees. Stuff and truss goose (*see* figures 15 and 16).

Season goose skin liberally with salt and pepper.

3. Place goose, breast down, on heavy-duty V-rack set over roasting pan; roast for $1^1/_2$ hours. Remove goose from oven and bail out most of fat from roasting pan, being careful not to disturb browned bits at bottom of pan. Turn goose breast up, and return to oven to roast until flesh of drumsticks feels soft and broken up (like well-done stew meat) and skin has puffed up around breast bone and tops of thighs, $1^1/_4$ to $1^1/_2$ hours longer. Increase oven temperature to 400 degrees; transfer

goose, still on its rack, to large jelly-roll pan. Return to oven to further brown and fully crisp skin, about 15 minutes longer. Let stand, uncovered, about 30 minutes before carving.

4. Remove trussing, and spoon stuffing into serving bowl. Carve goose; serve with stuffing and gravy.

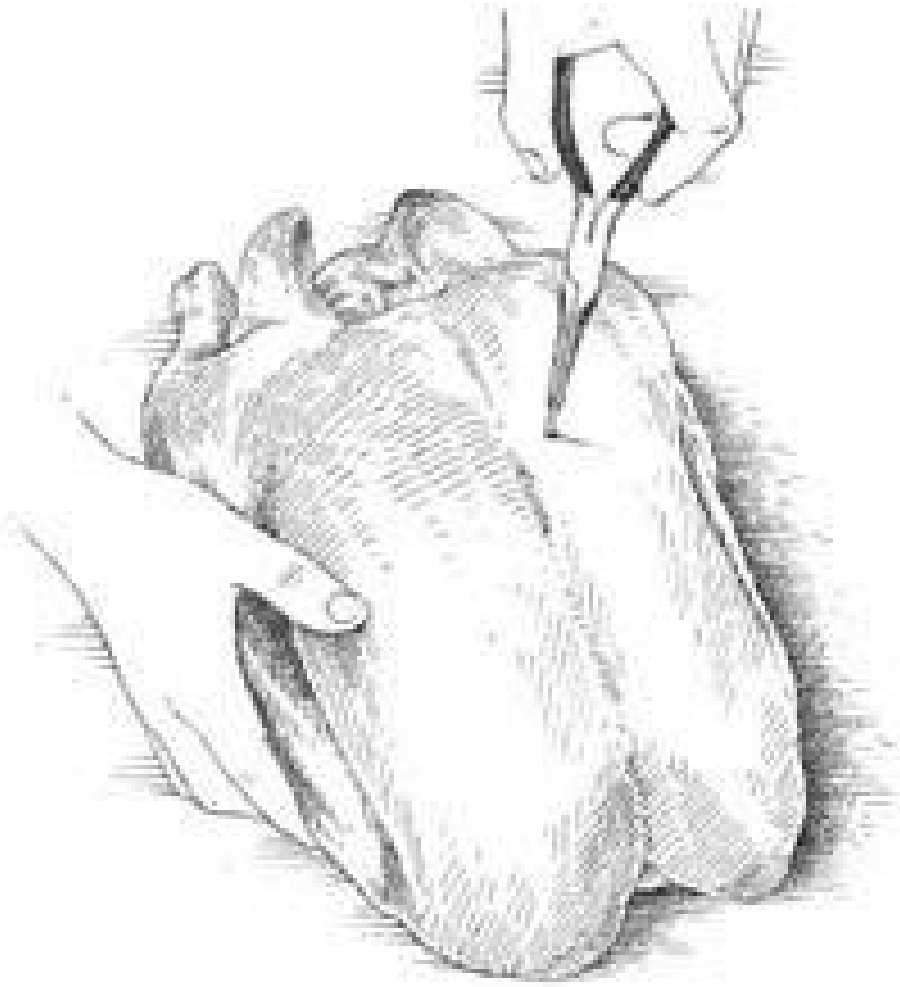

Figure 10.
Use tweezers or small pliers to remove any remaining quills from the goose skin.

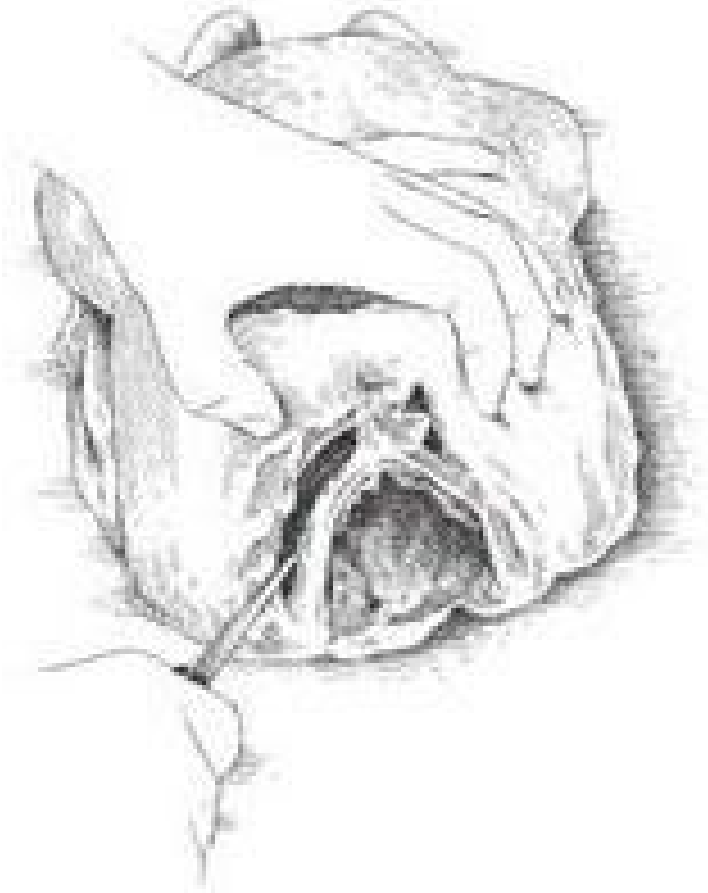

Figure 11.
Pull back the skin at the neck end and locate the wishbone. Scrape along the outside of the wishbone with a paring knife until the bone is exposed; then cut the bone free of the flesh.

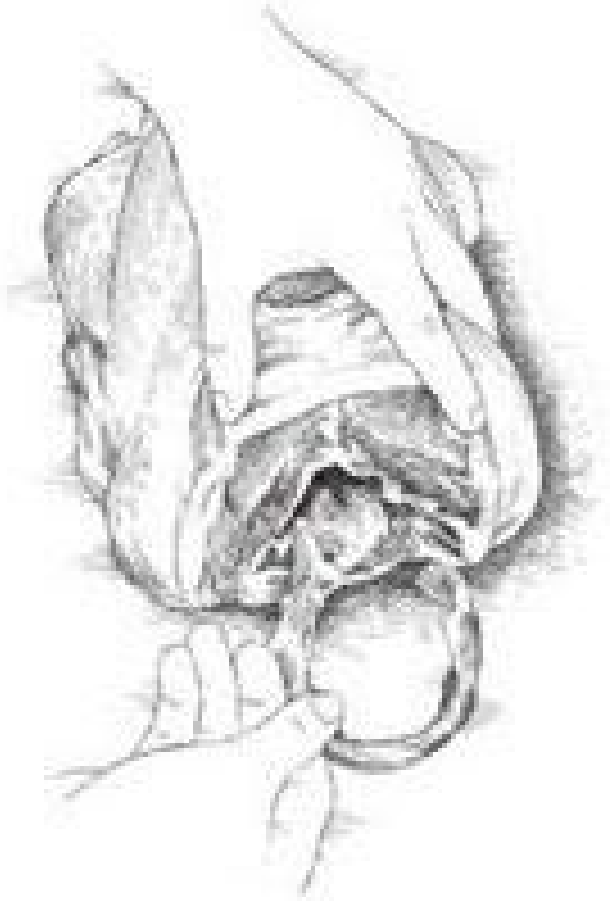

Figure 12.
Pull down on the wishbone, freeing it from the carcass; add the bone to the stock pot.

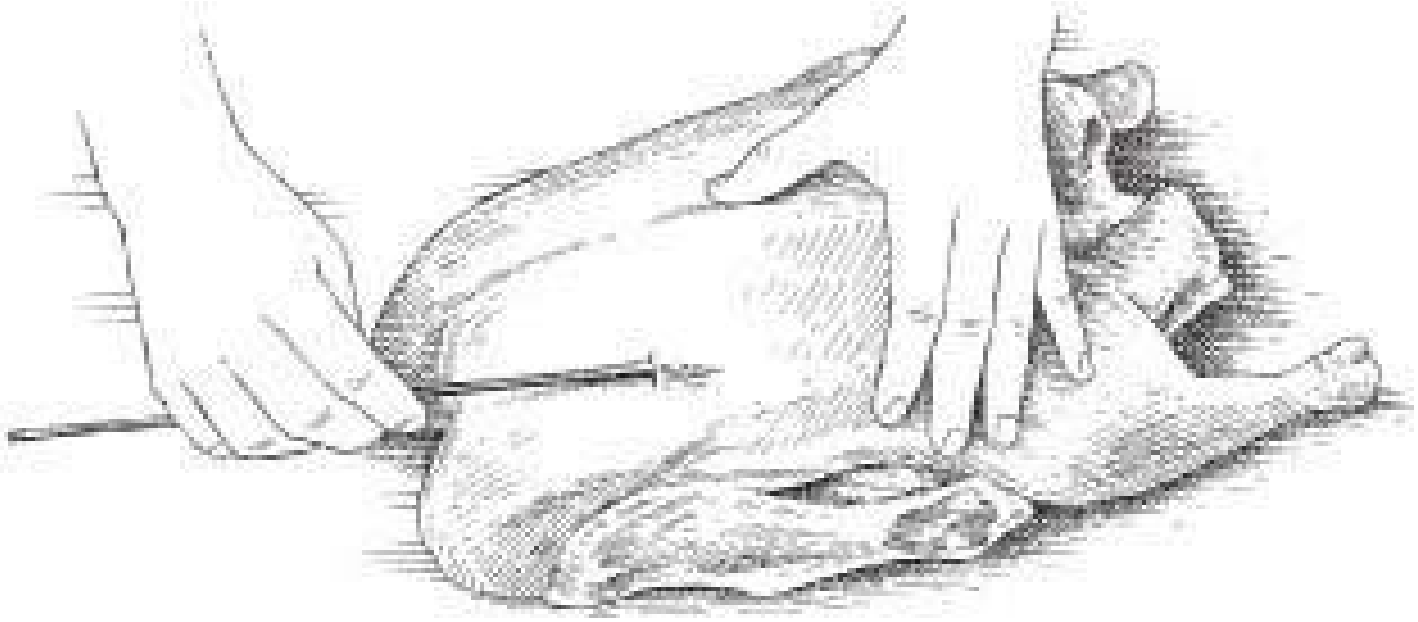

Figure 13.
With a trussing needle or thin skewer, prick the goose skin all over, especially around the breast and thighs, holding the needle nearly parallel to the bird to avoid pricking the meat. Pricking the skin helps render the fat during cooking.

Figure 14.
Using rubber gloves to protect your hands from possible splashes of boiling water, lower the goose, neck end down, into the water, submerging as much of the goose as possible until "goose bumps" appear, about 1 minute. Repeat this process,

submerging the goose tail end down.

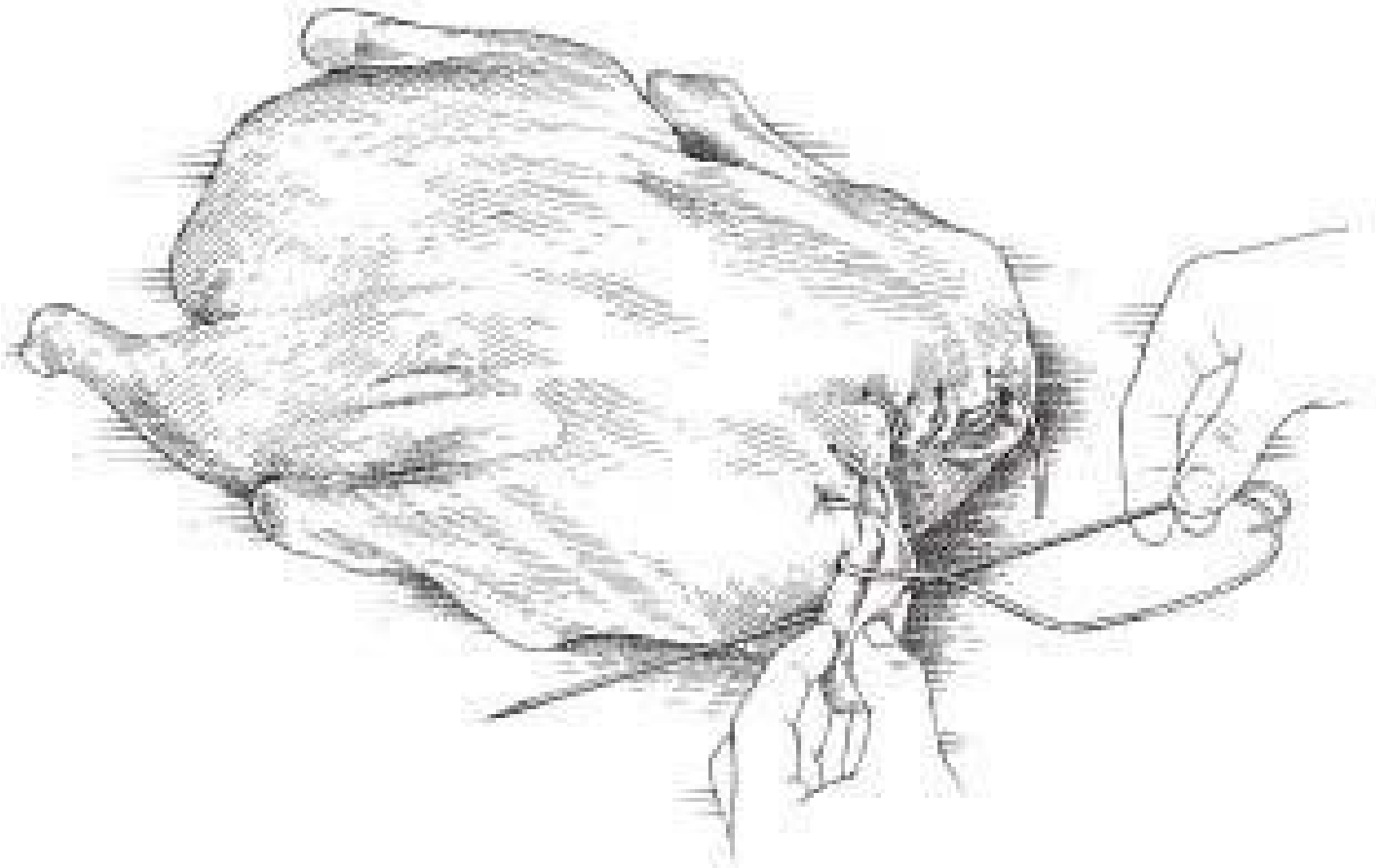

Figure 15.
Pack a small handful of stuffing into the neck cavity; sew the opening shut with a trussing needle and heavy white twine.

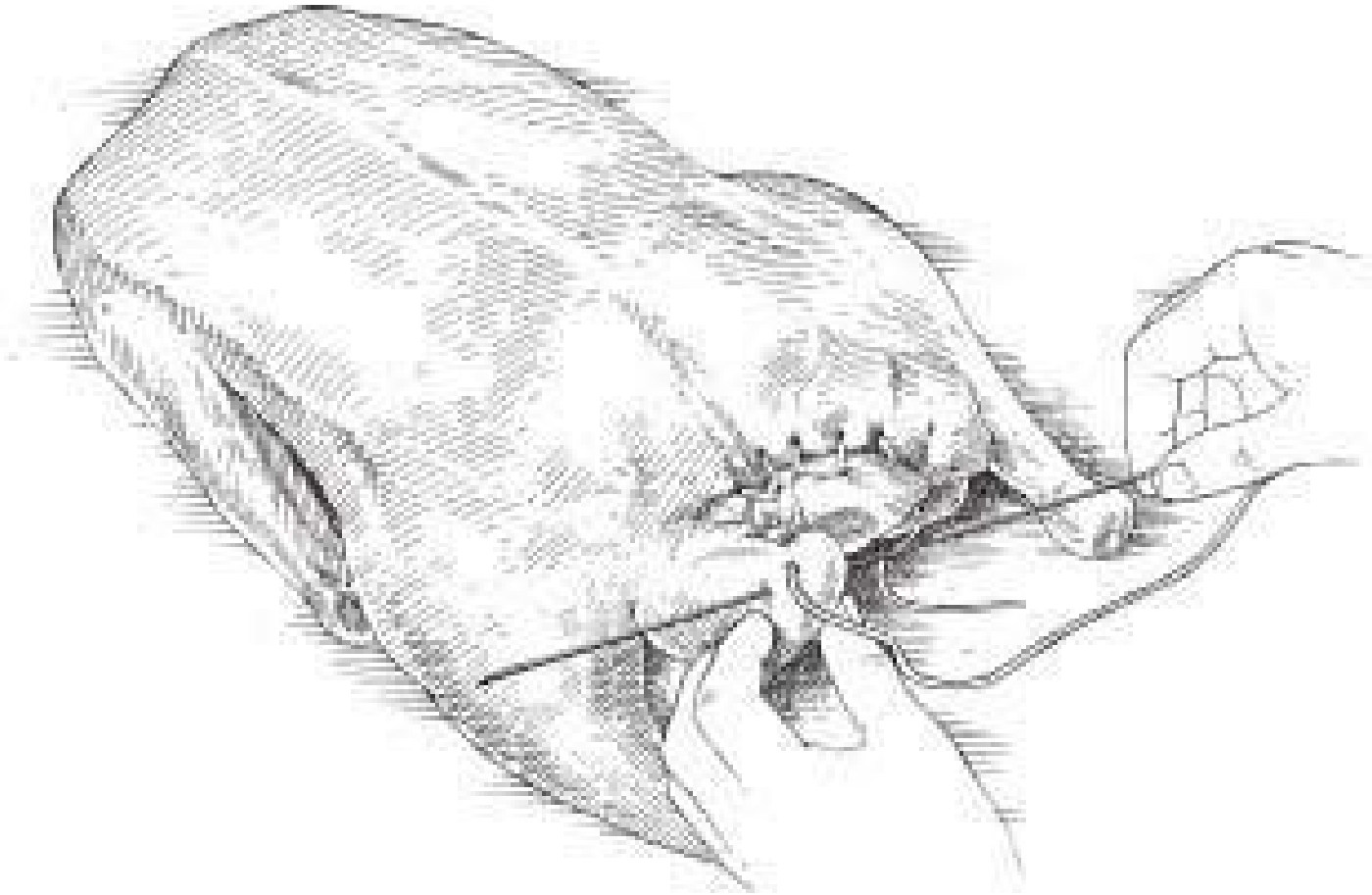

Figure 16.
Pack the remaining stuffing in the body cavity, pressing it in firmly with your hands or a large spoon; sew the body vent shut.

Brown Goose Stock

NOTE: ***The goose stock can be cooled to room temperature and refrigerated in the saucepan up to 3 days. Makes about $1^{1}/_{2}$ cups.***

3 tablespoons goose fat, patted dry and chopped

Reserved goose neck and wing tips, cut into 1-inch pieces; heart and gizzard left whole

1 medium onion, chopped

1 medium carrot, peeled and chopped

1 medium celery stalk, chopped

2 teaspoons sugar

2 cups full-bodied red wine

1/2 cup chicken stock or low-sodium canned chicken broth

6 large parsley stems

1 large bay leaf

1 teaspoon black peppercorns

1/2 teaspoon dried thyme

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat fat over medium heat in large saucepan until it melts, leaving small browned bits. Increase heat to medium-high; heat fat until it just begins to smoke. Add goose pieces; sauté, stirring until meat turns mahogany, about 10 minutes.

2. Add onion, carrot, and celery; sauté, stirring frequently, until vegetables brown around edges, about 10 minutes longer. Stir in sugar; continue to cook, stirring continuously, until it caramelizes and begins to smoke. Pour in wine, scraping pan bottom with wooden spoon to dissolve browned bits.

3. Add chicken stock, parsley, bay leaf, peppercorns, and thyme. Bring to simmer, lower heat so liquid barely bubbles. Simmer, partially covered, until stock is dark and rich, about 2 hours, adding water if solids become exposed.

Red Wine Giblet Gravy

NOTE: ***This simple gravy starts with the Brown Goose Stock and then uses sherry to deglaze the roasting pan with the browned bits from the goose. Make the stock while the goose is in the oven and then start this gravy once the goose has been transferred to a carving board to rest. Makes about 2 cups.***

1 recipe Brown Goose Stock

1/2 cup sweet sherry (cream or amontillado)

1/2 cup chicken stock or low-sodium canned broth, if needed

2 1/2 tablespoons melted goose

fat from the roasting pan

$2^1/_2$ tablespoons all-purpose flour

1 goose liver, cut into small dice

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Bring reserved goose stock to simmer. Spoon most of fat out of roasting pan, leaving behind all brown roasting particles. Set pan over two burners on low heat. Add sherry; scrape with wooden spoon until all brown glaze in pan is dissolved. Pour mixture into goose stock; simmer to blend flavors, about 5 minutes.

2. Strain mixture into 4-cup glass measure, pressing down on solids with back of spoon; let liquid stand until fat rises to top. Skim fat, and if necessary add enough chicken broth to make up to 2 cups. Rinse out goose stock pot and return strained stock to it. Take gizzard and heart from strainer, cut in tiny dice, and add to goose stock. Return stock to boil.

3. Heat goose fat and flour over medium-low heat in heavy-bottomed medium saucepan, stirring constantly with wooden spoon until roux just

begins to color, about 5 minutes; remove from heat. Beating constantly with whisk, pour boiling stock, all at once, into brown roux. Return saucepan to low heat; simmer 3 minutes. Add liver; simmer 1 minute longer. Taste, and adjust seasoning, adding salt and lots of fresh black pepper.

STUFFED ROAST CORNISH HENS

CORNISH GAME HENS PRESENT SEVERAL CHALLENGES to the cook. If roasted breast side up, the breast will surely overcook before the legs and thighs are done. Getting the birds to brown properly with such a short stay in the oven is difficult, especially if trying to fit six birds into one large pan. And a 500-degree oven is not the answer to any of these problems. Six little birds dripping fat onto an overheated roasting pan will set off smoke alarms all over

the neighborhood.

Stuffing also presents some challenges. Because the cavity is the last spot to heat up, getting the stuffing to reach a safe internal temperature of 165 degrees means overcooking the meat in many cases.

One final problem: After roasting a few batches, we thought the flavor of these birds was unremarkable. Most Cornish hens are mass-produced (companies that specialize in free-range or boutique chickens have not entered this market) and are lacking in flavor. Our mission then was clear—to stuff and roast six grocery-store quality Cornish hens in a way that they looked good (the skin had to brown) and tasted great (we

would have to up the flavor in the meat), without overcooking them or smoking up the kitchen.

You may as well steam Cornish hens as roast six of them in a high-sided roasting pan. The pan sides shield the birds from oven heat, and their snug fit in the pan further prevents browning. So our first move was to get the birds up out of the pan and onto a wire rack set over the pan. We also switched to a large roasting pan that measured 19 inches by 13 inches. Our second step was to space the birds as far apart as possible on the rack to insure even cooking and good browning.

From our initial tests, we determined

that rotating the birds was crucial for moist, juicy breast meat. Because Cornish hens are in the oven for such a short time, we opted for just one turn as opposed to the two turns we favor when roasting a regular chicken. We found that one turn, from breast side down to breast side up, kept the breast meat from becoming dry or coarse-textured and was not too much of a hassle.

After roasting Cornish hens at temperatures ranging from 350 to 500 degrees, as well as roasting high and finishing low and roasting low and finishing high, we found that all oven temperatures have their problems. We finally settled on 400 degrees, cranking up the oven to 450 degrees during the

last few minutes. This roasting temperature was high enough to encourage browning while low enough to prevent excessive smoking. Adding water to the roasting pan once the chicken fat starts to render and the juices flow guarantees a smokeless kitchen. Another perk: The pan is automatically deglazed in the oven. Once the birds are roasted, you can pour the pan juices into a saucepan without having to deglaze the roasting pan over two burners.

Even at these relatively high temperatures, the skin was not quite as brown as we might have liked. We realized that 45 minutes, no matter what the oven temperature, is not enough time

to get a dark mahogany skin on any bird. We decided to see if we could improve the appearance of the skin with a glaze of some sort. We tested balsamic vinegar, soy sauce, and jam thinned with a little soy sauce. All three glazes worked beautifully. The balsamic glaze was our favorite, giving the hens a pleasing spotty brown, barbecued look.

With the cooking and skin issues resolved, we turned our attention to boosting the flavor in the bland meat. We doubt that there's a piece of chicken (or turkey) that does not benefit from a few hours in a saltwater brine. Cornish hens are no exception. Two hours in a saltwater bath transformed mediocre-tasting birds into something special.

Our final challenge was to roast the birds, stuffed, without overcooking. Starting the hens breast side down was helping, since it slowed down the cooking in the heat-sensitive breast meat. Heating the stuffing in a microwave before spooning it into each hen also helped. By the time the stuffing reached 165 degrees (a temperature sufficient to kill any salmonella), the breast was 172 degrees and the thigh 176 degrees. As we expected, the thigh was nice and juicy at this temperature. Although we think that breast meat is ideally cooked to 165 to 170 degrees, it was still nice and juicy at this higher temperature and not at all dry, like birds

that had been filled with room-temperature stuffing.

Although we were aware that trussing would slow down the roasting of the hens' legs and thighs, we knew we had to do something. With their fragile, loose frame, Cornish hens are unsightly with their dangling legs. Stuffing the birds further increases the need to close the cavity. We discovered that simply tying the legs together improved the look of our hens and secured the stuffing without impeding roasting.

Stuffed Roast Cornish Hens

NOTE: ***Many game hens in the supermarket weigh more than $1^1/_2$ pounds, making them too large for a single serving. Try to buy small game hens or go to the butcher and order baby chickens, also called poussin, which generally weigh about one pound.***

Brining the birds breast side down ensures that the meatiest portions are fully submerged. Pouring a little water into the roasting pan at the 25-minute mark, once the birds have been turned, both prevents them from smoking during cooking and makes instant jus,

eliminating the need to deglaze the pan over two burners. Each of the stuffing recipes on yields three cups, enough for six Cornish hens. A quarter-recipe of any bread stuffing can also be used.

2 cups kosher or 1 cup table salt

6 Cornish hens (each 1 to 1 1/2 pounds), trimmed of extra fat, giblets removed, rinsed well

3 cups prepared stuffing heated until very hot (120 to 130 degrees) in microwave

6 tablespoons balsamic vinegar

3 tablespoons olive oil

1/4 cup dry vermouth or white

wine

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Dissolve salt in 5 quarts of cold water in small clean bucket or large bowl. Add hens breast side down; refrigerate 2 to 3 hours. Remove, rinse thoroughly, pat dry, and prick skin all over breast and legs with point of paring knife (*see* figure 17).

2. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 400 degrees. Spoon $^{1}/_{2}$ cup of hot stuffing into cavity of each hen; tie legs of each hen together with 10-inch piece of kitchen twine (*see* figure 18). Leaving as much space as

possible between each bird, arrange them breast side down and wings facing out, on large (at least 19 by 13 inches) wire rack, set over an equally large roasting or jelly-roll pan. Whisk balsamic vinegar and oil in small bowl; set aside.

3. Roast until backs are golden brown, about 25 minutes. Remove pan from oven, brush bird backs with vinegar and oil glaze (reblending before each bird), turn hens breast side up and wings facing out, and brush breast and leg area with additional glaze. Return pan to oven, add 1 cup of water, roast until meat thermometer inserted into stuffed cavity

registers about 150 degrees, about 15 to 20 minutes longer. Remove pan from oven again, brush birds with remaining glaze, return pan to oven, add another $^{1}/_{2}$ cup water to pan and increase oven temperature to 450 degrees. Roast until birds are spotty brown and stuffed cavity registers 165 degrees, 5 to 10 minutes longer. Remove birds from oven and let rest for 10 minutes.

4. Meanwhile, pour hen jus from roasting pan into small saucepan, spoon off excess fat, add vermouth or wine, and simmer over medium-high heat until flavors blend, 2 to 3 minutes. Drizzle

about $^{1}/_{4}$ cup sauce over each hen and serve, passing remaining sauce separately.

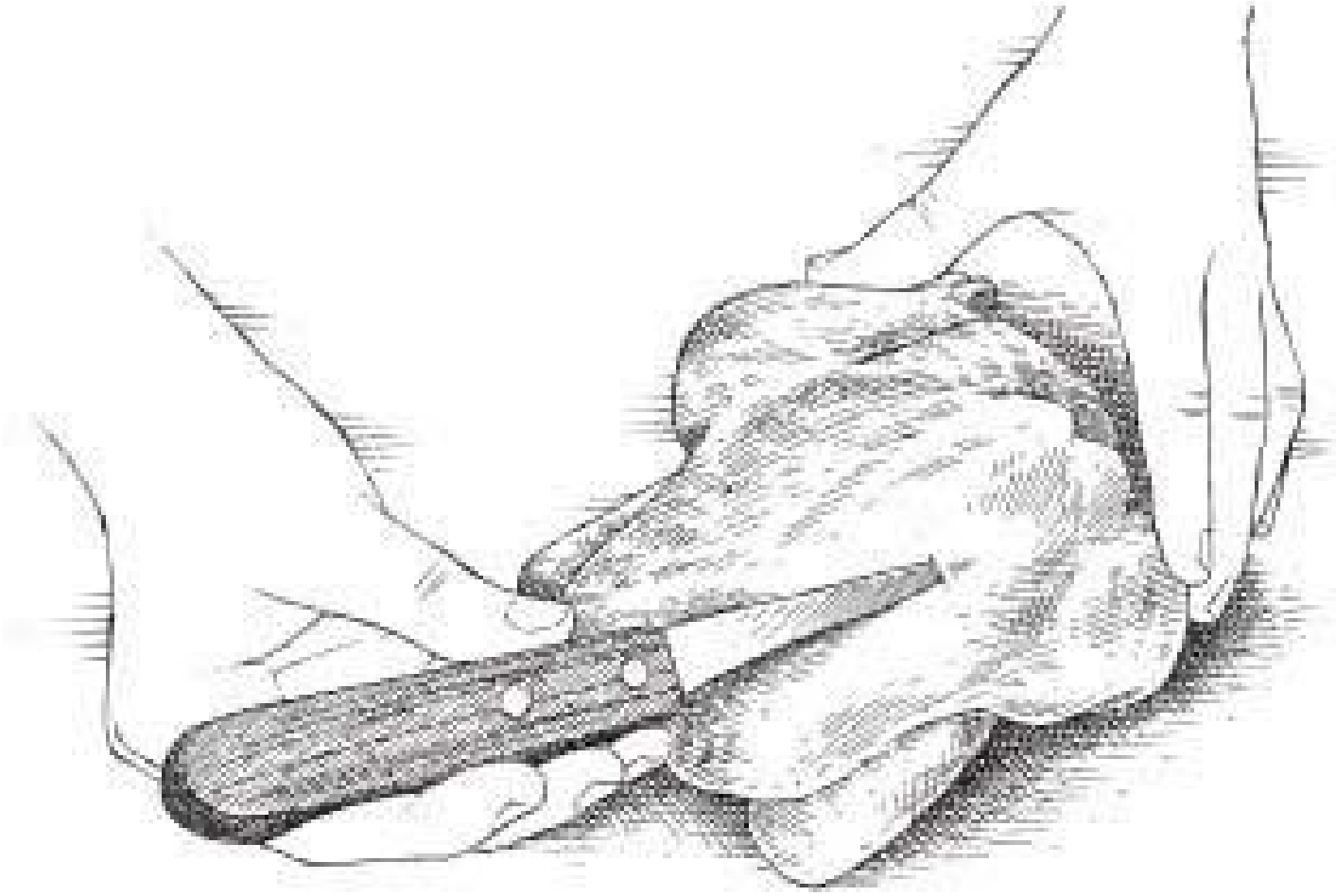

Figure 17.
To prevent skin from ballooning when juices build up, carefully prick the skin (but not the meat) on the breast and legs with the tip of a paring knife before roasting.

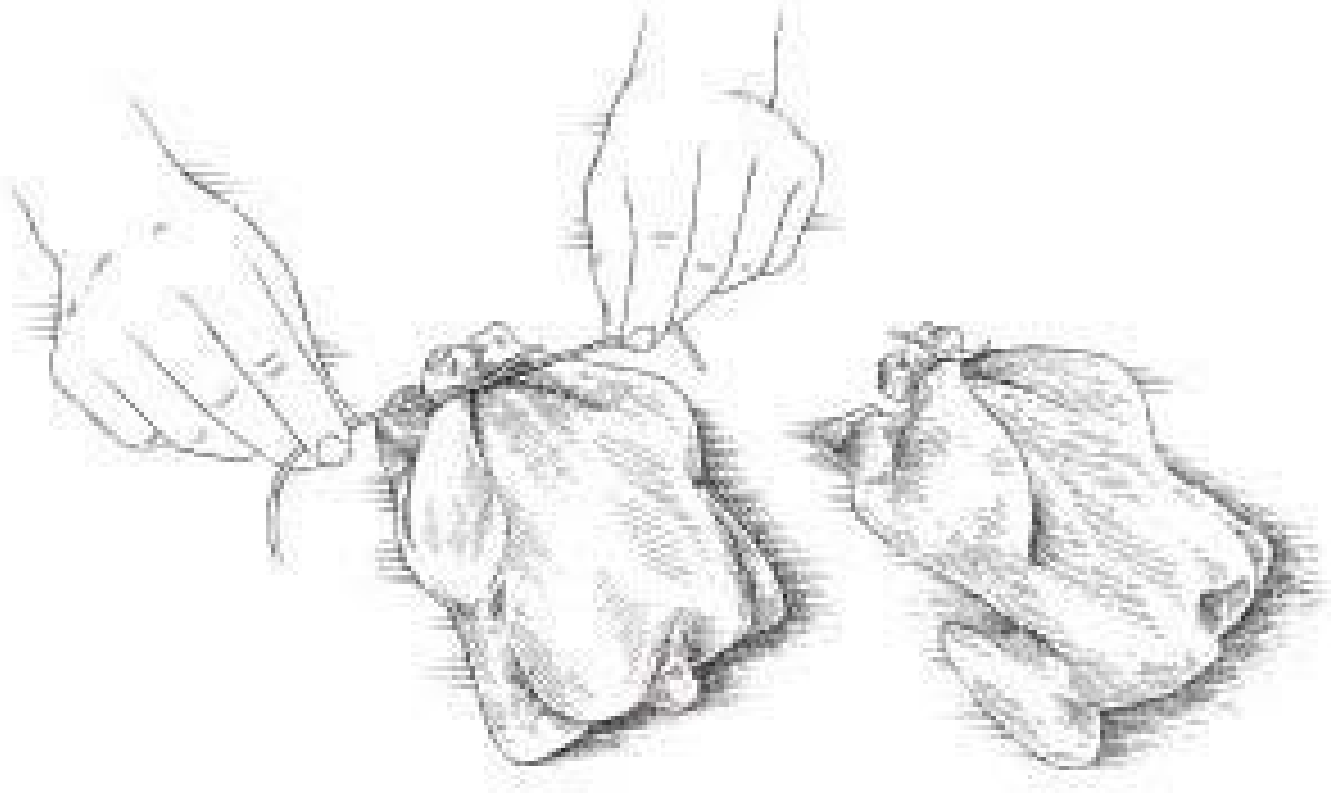

Figure 18.

Spoon $^{1}/_{2}$cup of hot stuffing into the cavity of each hen. Tie the legs of each hen together with a 10-inch piece of kitchen twine.

STUFFINGS FOR CORNISH HENS

While any stuffing, including those for turkey can be used to fill the cavity in a Cornish hen, the following recipes match beautifully with the delicate flavor of a hen. A Thanksgiving turkey might call for a traditional bread stuffing, but hens can be filled with a variety of grains, including rice, couscous, quinoa, and barley.

Any of these stuffings may be prepared a day in advance, placed in a microwave-safe bowl, wrapped tightly with plastic, and refrigerated. Microwave the stuffing until it is quite hot just before stuffing it into the hens. Each recipe makes enough stuffing for

six hens.

Couscous Stuffing with Currants, Apricots, and Pistachios

NOTE: ***Toasted slivered almonds can be substituted for the pistachio nuts. Makes 3 cups.***

2 tablespoons butter
1 small onion, minced
2 medium garlic cloves, minced
1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/8 teaspoon ground ginger
1/8 teaspoon ground turmeric
1 cup couscous
1 1/3 cups chicken stock or low-sodium canned chicken broth

1/4 cup dried apricots (8 to 9 whole), chopped fine

3 tablespoons currants

1/4 cup shelled, toasted pistachio nuts, chopped

2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves

1 teaspoon juice from 1 small lemon

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat butter over medium heat in medium saucepan. Add onion, garlic, cinnamon, ginger, and turmeric; sauté until onion softens, 3 to 4 minutes. Add couscous; stir until well coated, 1 to 2

minutes.

2. Add chicken stock, bring to simmer, remove from heat, cover, and let stand until couscous has fully rehydrated, about 5 minutes. Fluff couscous with fork; stir in dried fruit, nuts, parsley, and lemon juice. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Transfer mixture to microwave-safe bowl.

Wild Rice Stuffing with Cranberries and Toasted Pecans

NOTE: ***The wild rice blend (a mixture of regular long-grain and wild rice) in this stuffing holds together when pressed with a fork. Look for wild rice blend in the supermarket. You can use all wild rice, but the cooked grains will remain separate. Raisins, currants, or even dried blueberries may be substituted for the cranberries. Makes 3 cups.***

2 cups chicken stock or low-sodium canned chicken broth

1 cup wild rice blend

2 tablespoons butter

1 small onion, minced

1/2 small celery stalk, minced

1/4 cup toasted pecans, chopped coarse

1/4 cup dried cranberries

2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves

2 teaspoons minced fresh thyme leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Bring chicken stock to boil in medium saucepan. Add rice blend; return to boil. Reduce heat to low, cover, and simmer until rice is fully cooked, 40 to 45

minutes. Turn rice into microwave-safe bowl; fluff with fork.

2. Meanwhile, heat butter in medium skillet over medium heat. Add onion and celery; sauté until softened, 3 to 4 minutes. Add this mixture, as well as pecans, cranberries, parsley, and thyme, to rice; toss to coat. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Quinoa Stuffing with Lemon and Rosemary

NOTE: ***Quinoa, an ancient South American grain now widely available in supermarkets and natural food stores, grows with a bitter protective coating called saponin that is mostly removed during processing. However, it's still a good idea to rinse quinoa well before cooking. Rich in iron and protein, this grain has a light, crunchy texture and nutty flavor, making it perfect for stuffing small hens. Makes 3 cups.***

$1^1/_2$ cups quinoa, rinsed

3 cups chicken stock or low-

sodium canned chicken broth

2 tablespoons butter

1 small onion, chopped fine

1 garlic clove, chopped fine

4 sun-dried tomatoes packed in oil, drained, patted dry, and chopped coarse

1 teaspoon grated zest from 1 lemon

$^1/_2$ teaspoon chopped fresh rosemary leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Combine quinoa and stock in saucepan and bring to boil. Reduce heat to low and simmer until liquid is

absorbed, 10 to 15 minutes. Transfer to microwave-safe bowl.

2. Meanwhile melt butter in small skillet over medium heat. Add onion and garlic; sauté until softened, 3 to 4 minutes. Add this mixture, along with sun-dried tomatoes, zest, rosemary, and salt and pepper to taste, to quinoa; toss to coat.

BAKED HAM

HAM IS MADE FROM THE HIND QUARTER OF a hog. There are two general categories, which are referred to by butchers and people in the business as country and city hams. Country hams are salted and aged by a process known as dry-curing. City hams are brined in a salt solution (like pickles) by a process known as wet-curing. The former method results in salty, firm, dry meat, like prosciutto or the famed serrano ham of Spain. The latter process is used to make moister slicing hams, the kind sold

in supermarkets.

Most country hams are made in small batches by craftsmen on farms in Virginia, the Carolinas, Kentucky, and Tennessee. Unless you live in the South, you won't see country hams in markets, but they can be ordered by mail or through your local butcher.

Country hams are cured in salt or a mixture of salt and sugar for several weeks, usually about five. During this dry-curing period, the meat must lose at least 18 percent of its fresh weight. (Many country hams shed 25 percent of their weight, for an even saltier, more concentrated ham flavor.) By law, a country ham must also absorb at least 4 percent salt. At this level, the salt acts as

preservative and prevents any bacterial growth during the long aging process that follows.

Once a country ham has been cured, it's smoked (over hardwoods like hickory or apple) for two to six days, rubbed with black pepper, and then aged, at least 60 days and up to a year or more in some cases. You could eat country ham raw (it's fully preserved), but the custom in the United States is to cook ham. The most famous country hams come from the small Virginia town of Smithfield. By law, Smithfield hams must be dry-cured and then aged a minimum of six months.

The flavor of a country ham is always

intense, and often quite salty. Good country ham has a complex smoky flavor with hints of blue cheese, nuts, wood, and spice. In general, the longer a ham has been aged, the stronger the flavors will be. When buying country ham, decide how strong and intense a flavor you like and then buy according to age. Most novices will find a 15-month ham overpowering and are probably better off with a shorter-cure ham. Southerners who grew up on good country ham may find a three-month ham insipid.

Many people believe that soaking a country ham is essential to its final edibility. The theory is that soaking causes the meat to lose some of the salt with which it was cured, as the salt

naturally moves from places of greater concentration (in the ham) to places of lesser concentration (the soaking water). As salt migrates out of the ham, water replaces some of it, a process that helps soften the ham's texture and prevents excessive dryness.

Our testing supported this theory but also showed that the process doesn't happen as quickly as you might think. Only when we soaked a year-old ham for a full 36 hours could we detect any change in texture compared with a similar ham that was not soaked. The soaked ham was just a bit less dry and a bit less salty.

In our tests, we found that hams

subjected to cures of less than six months are rarely so salty that they need soaking. But a ham cured for more than a year needs at least three days in cold water before cooking to become edible. Hams cured for six to 12 months need to be soaked for 36 hours.

Many recipes suggest adding ingredients, especially sweeteners, to the soaking liquid. We found that sugar, Coke, and white vinegar (all recommended by various sources) have no effect on the ham.

The next step is to cook the ham. We tried baking the ham in a 325-degree oven and liked the results quite a lot. The ham is dry and salty. However, this method is for ham lovers only. Many

ham novices were put off by the strong flavor. Simmering tames some of the salt and is the best bet when preparing ham for a holiday crowd. Simmering also adds a little moisture to the ham, making it easier to carve in thin slices. (Country ham is too rich and salty to be sliced into thick slabs like a city ham.)

We tried all kinds of simmering regimens and found that cooking the ham at the barest simmer is better than boiling. Gentle heat ensures that the outside layers of meat don't cook too fast. As for the timing, we found that 10 minutes per pound is a decent barometer. Better still, use an instant-read thermometer and pull the ham out of the

pot when it reaches 120 degrees.

At this point, the rind and most of the fat need to be removed. The ham can then be scored, glazed, and put into the oven just to set the glaze, the best option when serving the ham as the centerpiece of a meal. A simmered country ham can also be cooled, boned, weighted, and then sliced into very thin pieces and served at a buffet party with biscuits.

Many cooks would rather skip the scrubbing, soaking, and simmering steps that a country ham often requires. They would also prefer a ham that could be carved into thick, moist slices. Wet-cured city hams are the answer. City hams are smoked like country hams but not aged. Unlike country hams, brined

hams are not actually preserved and must be refrigerated like fresh meat.

There are several types of city hams. Some hams are labeled "boneless," others "bone-in." Boneless hams are usually made by pressing together various pieces of meat. There is no muscle definition and the "skin" is often made by a machine that scores the exterior and then paints it with food coloring. We prefer bone-in city hams. The large hip bone that runs the length of the ham has been left intact. However, some or all of the small bones that can make carving a country ham so tricky have been removed.

The other issue is the water content.

Many large commercial outfits inject the meat with brine to increase its weight and cost (hams are usually sold by the pound), sometimes by as much as 25 percent. Hams that are actually brined instead of injected taste stronger and are more economical since you are not paying for water weight that the ham will lose when cooked. If you see the words "with natural juices" or "water added," the ham has been injected and will probably cook up moister, less smoky, and much lighter. If you want a really mild ham flavor, you might consider a water-added ham. However, our recommendation is to stick with a no-water-added ham. They are chewy rather than squishy and have some of the

character of a country ham without all the bother and the salt.

Some city hams are sold with a partial rind and some fat that must be trimmed, just like a country ham. However, most city hams have very little fat and cannot even be scored. If you have a choice, buy a ham with some fat on it. You can then remove as much fat as you like and score whatever remains.

To serve a city ham, simply glaze and bake. We recommend buying a city ham that is labeled "ready-to-eat" or "fully cooked." (Most city hams are sold this way.) If fully cooked at the plant, you need only warm the ham in the oven to an internal temperature of 140 degrees.

If you happen to buy a ham labeled "partially cooked" or "cook before eating," it must baked to an internal temperature of 160 degrees, and you will need to adjust the cooking times in our recipe.

Baked Country Ham

NOTE: ***We tested nine brands of mail-order country hams. All but one of the hams was deemed good or excellent. We particularly liked the Wigwam ham from S. Wallace Edwards & Sons (800–222–4267).***

Any size dry-cured ham can be adapted to this recipe; just adjust the cooking time as needed to reach the internal temperatures listed below. Country ham is best served in very thin slices over biscuits or in rolls. It's much too rich and salty to serve in thick slices. Leftover bits of ham can be used to flavor cooked greens, eggs, pasta, or rice. If removing the hock,

save it to flavor soup or beans. Serves about 30.

1 country ham, 14 to 15 pounds
1 cup glaze of choice

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Scrub mold off (*see* figure 19). Remove hock with hacksaw (*see* figure 20). If ham has been aged less than six months, proceed with step 2. If ham has been aged more than six months, place ham in large stock pot filled with cool water. Place pot in cool place and change water once a day. Hams aged 6 to 12 months should be soaked for 36 hours. Hams aged more than a year

should be soaked for 3 days. Drain ham and scrub again.

2. Place ham in large stock pot and cover with fresh water. Bring to boil, reduce heat, and simmer until instant-read thermometer inserted into thickest part of ham registers 120 degrees, 2 to 3 hours. Transfer ham from pot to large cutting board. (Liquid can be reserved and used to cook greens or rice, or added to soup.)

3. Preheat oven to 325 degrees. When ham has cooled just enough to handle, peel away rind and most of fat (*see*

figures 21 and 22). Score remaining fat (*see* figure 23).

4. Place ham on flat rack in large roasting pan lined with double layer of aluminum foil. Pour 2 cups water into pan. Smear glaze onto exterior of ham using rubber spatula (*see* figure 24). Bake until instant-read thermometer inserted in several places in ham registers 140 degrees, about 1 hour. Transfer ham to cutting board and let rest about 15 minutes. Carve into very thin slices and serve.

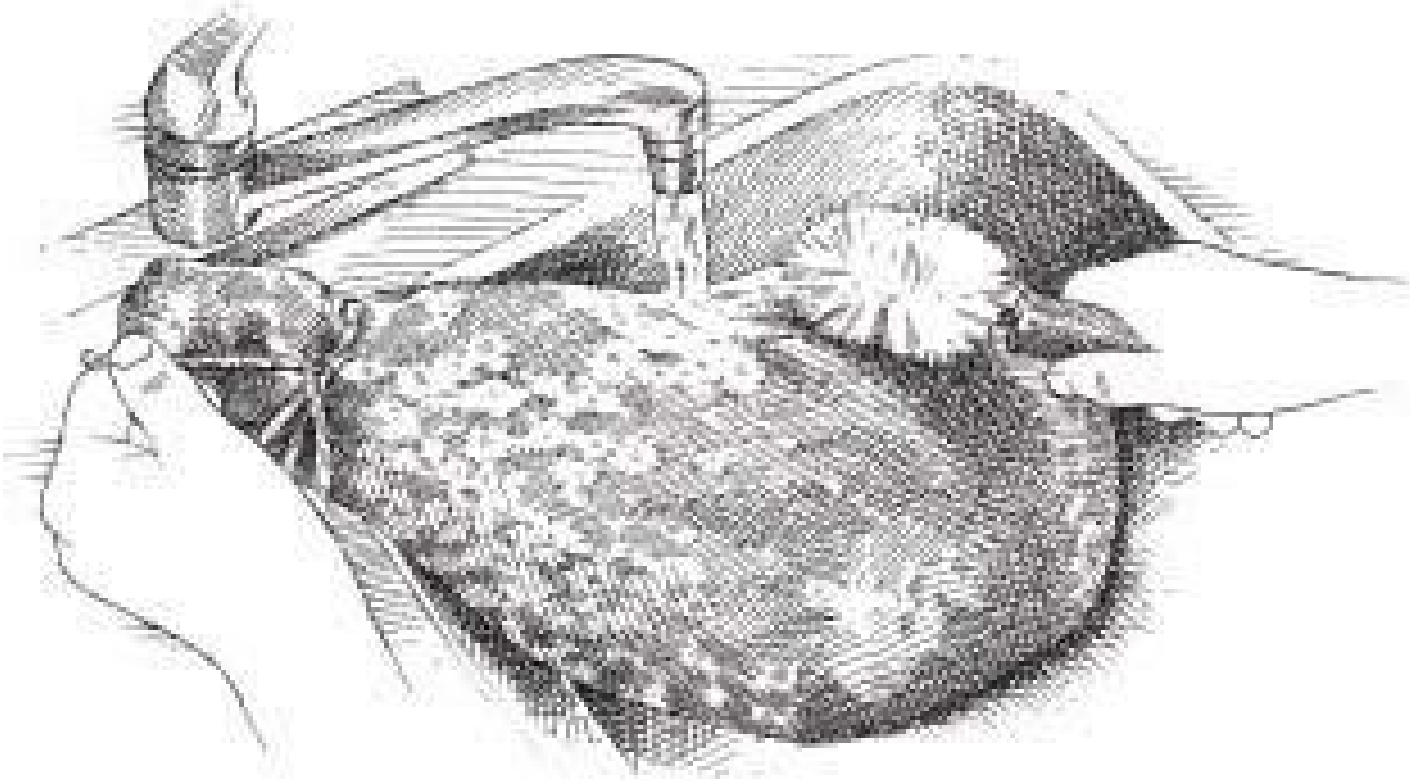

Figure 19.
Scrub mold off with a vegetable scrubbing brush under running water. Hams aged more than six months should be soaked. Scrub ham again after soaking.

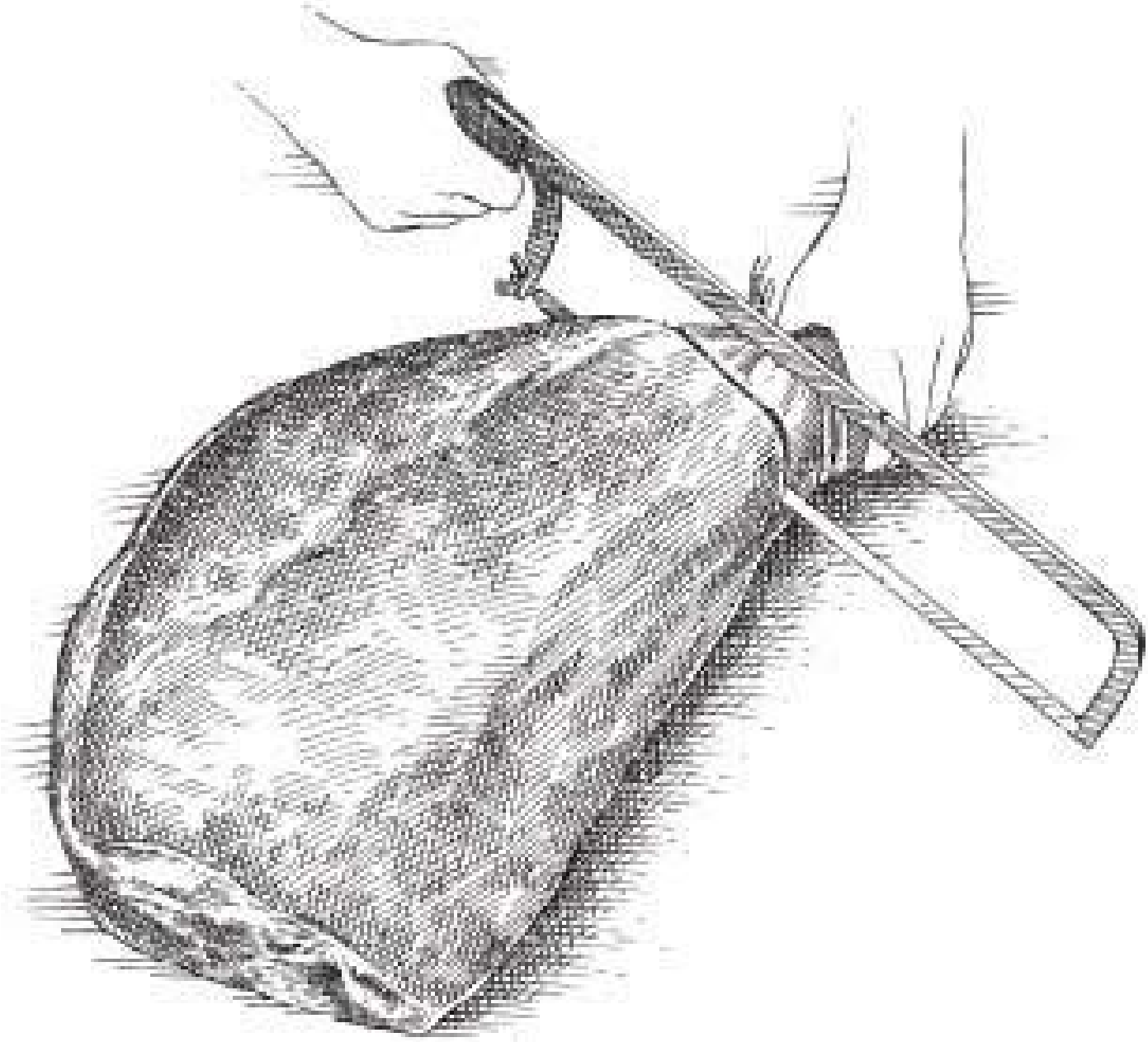

Figure 20.
Use a hacksaw to remove the hock so that the ham will fit into a large stock pot.

Figure 21.
As soon as the ham is removed from the simmering water, remove the skin and most, but not all, of the fat. Slice into the rind with a sharp knife.

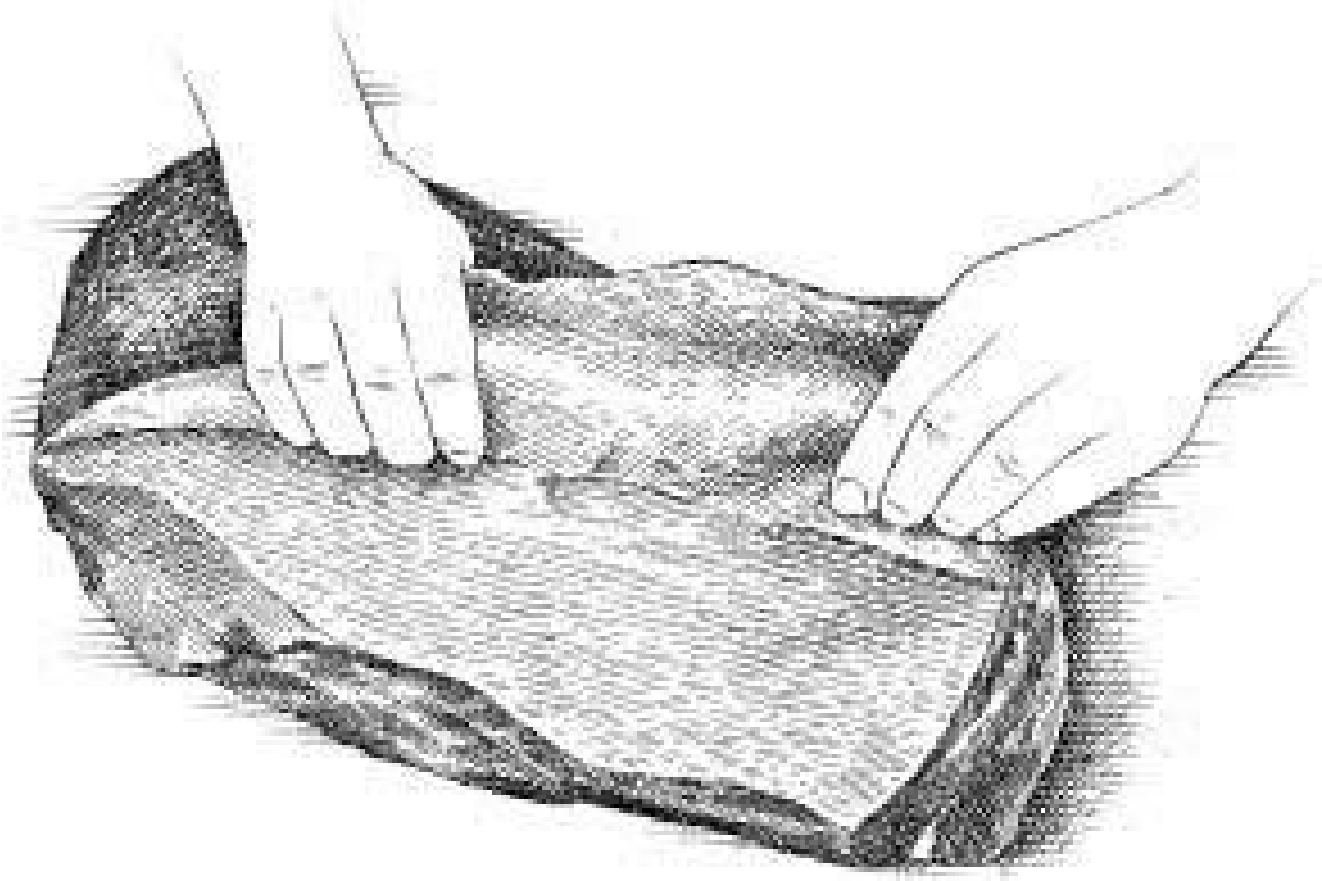

Figure 22.
Peel back the rind and discard. With knife, trim remaining fat to about $^{1}/_{4}$ inch thickness.

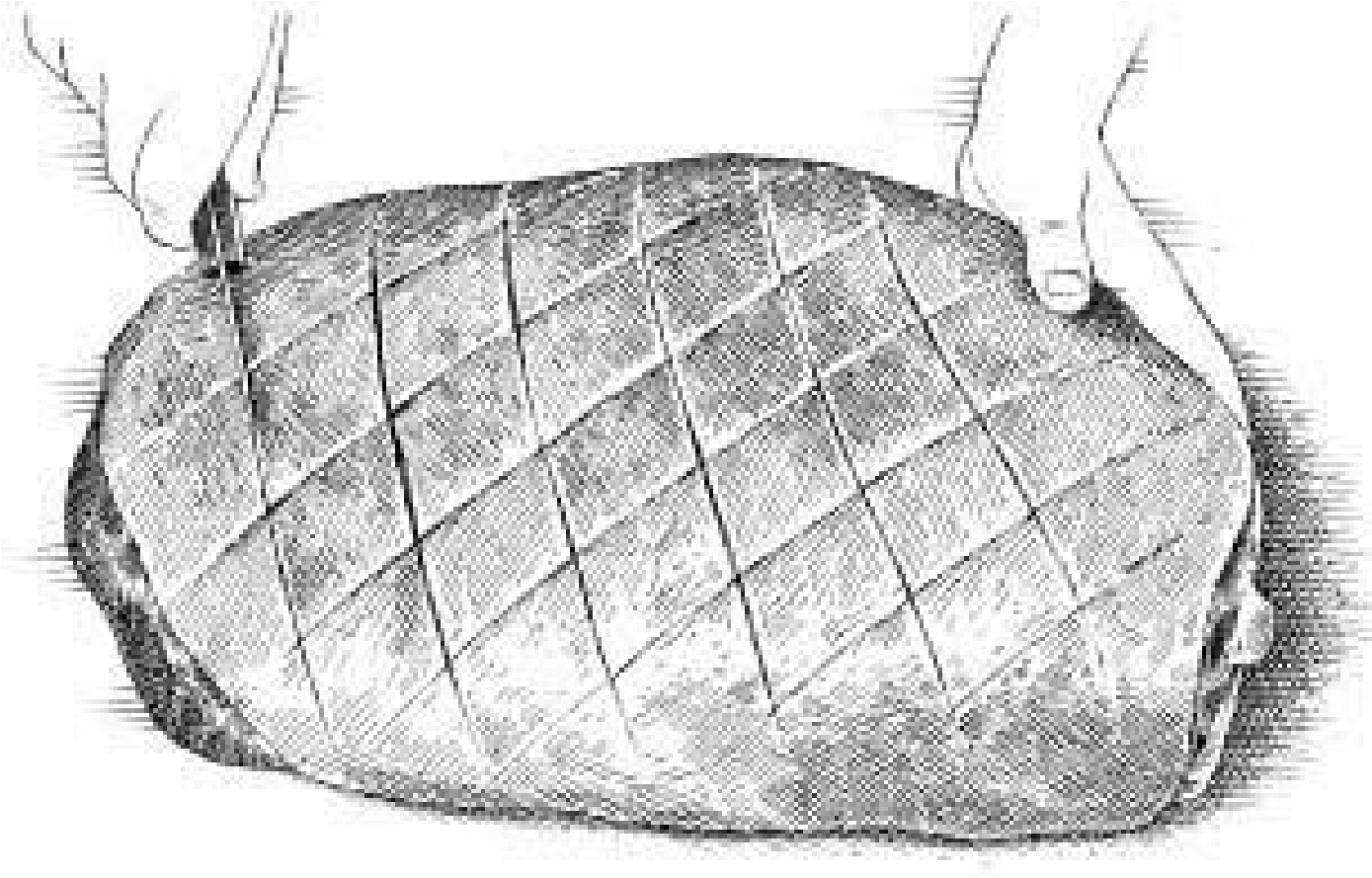

Figure 23.
Country hams as well as any city hams that have an even outer layer of fat should be scored before baking. Use a sharp paring knife to cut down into the fat, making sure not to cut into the meat. Cut parallel lines across

the ham, spacing them about 1 $^{1}/_{2}$ inches apart. Make a series of perpendicular lines to create a diamond pattern in the fat.

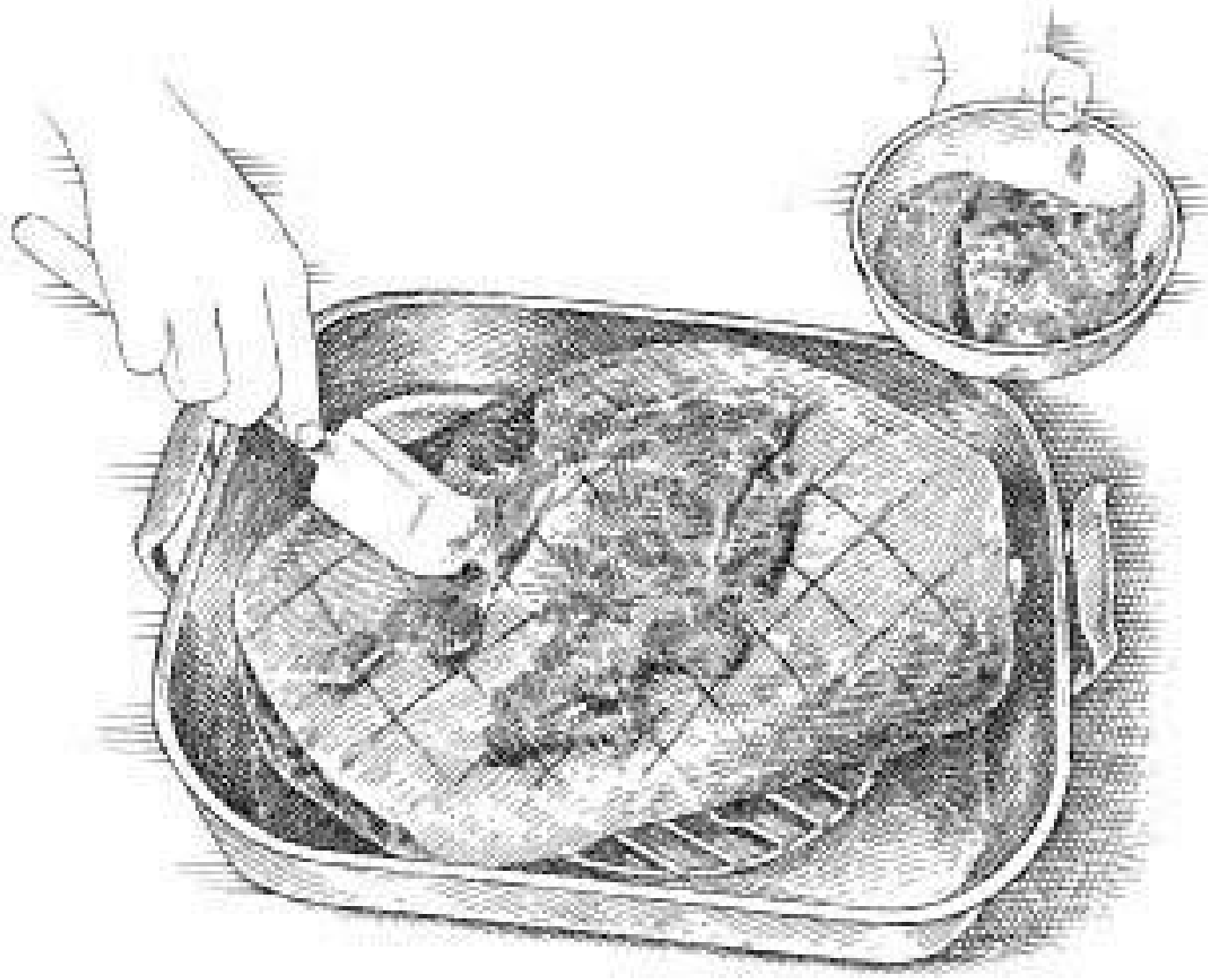

Figure 24.
Use a rubber spatula to apply the thick, paste-like glaze to the exterior of the partially cooked ham.

Baked City Ham

NOTE: ***A whole brined or wet-cured ham can weigh as much as 16 pounds. However, many companies sell portions of the leg, which can weigh as little as five pounds. Cook the ham according to internal temperature rather than time, and use more or less glaze depending on size of ham. Serves six to 20, depending on size of ham.***

1 wet-cured, fully cooked bone-in ham (5 to 16 pounds)

$^1/_2$1 cup glaze of choice

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Let ham sit at room temperature for at

least 3 hours. Adjust oven rack to lowest position. Heat oven to 325 degrees.

2. Remove wrapping. If ham is covered with jelly-like layer, rinse and pat dry. If necessary, remove rind and trim fat to $^1/_4$-inch thickness (*see* figure 22). If covered with even layer of fat, score ham (*see* figure 23).

3. Place ham on flat rack in large roasting pan lined with double layer of aluminum foil. Pour 2 cups water into pan. Bake ham until instant-read thermometer inserted in several places in ham registers 120 degrees, 1 to 3

hours, depending on size of ham. Smear glaze onto exterior of ham using rubber spatula (*see* figure 24). Continue baking until instant-read thermometer registers 140 degrees, about 1 hour longer. Let ham rest for about 15 minutes. Carve perpendicular to bone into $^{1}/_{2}$-inch-thick slices.

Orange Juice and Brown Sugar Glaze

NOTE: ***For a sweeter, glossier glaze, brush ham with a little honey about 30 minutes before it is ready to come out of the oven. We don't like to chew on whole cloves so we don't stud the ham; we prefer adding the flavor of cloves to the glaze. Don't baste the ham with any of the pan juices. They are too salty and intense. Makes about 1 cup.***

$1^1/_4$ cups packed light brown sugar
3 tablespoons fresh squeezed orange juice

$^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon ground cloves

INSTRUCTIONS:

Mix sugar, orange juice, and cloves together in medium bowl to form thick paste. Set mixture aside until ready to glaze ham.

Mustard and Brown Sugar Glaze

NOTE: ***For a sweeter, glossier glaze, brush ham with a little maple syrup about 30 minutes before it is ready to come out of the oven. Makes about 1 cup.***

$1\frac{1}{4}$ cups packed light brown sugar

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup Dijon mustard

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon ground cloves

INSTRUCTIONS:

Mix sugar, mustard, and cloves together in medium bowl to form thick paste. Set

mixture aside until ready to glaze ham.

PRIME RIB

WE STARTED OUR TESTING WITH OVEN temperatures. We tested eight heating regimens, everything from 500 degrees for 40 minutes with the oven turned off and the door closed for the next two hours to a constant 200 degrees. All the prime ribs roasted at 300 degrees or above were pretty much the same. Each slice of carved beef was well done around the exterior and medium towards the center, with a beautiful medium-rare pink center. We might have been tempted to report that roasting temperature

doesn't matter if we hadn't tried cooking prime rib at lower temperatures.

It's funny that we should end up preferring the prime rib roasted at 200 degrees because it certainly wasn't love at first sight. About halfway through this roast's cooking time, the meat looked virtually raw and the exterior was pale. But we changed our minds quickly as soon as we carved the first slice. This roast was as beautiful on the inside as it was anemic on the outside. Unlike the roasts cooked at higher temperatures, this one was rosy pink from the surface to the center. If was also the juiciest and most tender roast we had cooked. It was restaurant prime rib at its best.

Besides being evenly cooked, the

prime rib roasted in a 200-degree oven had another thing going for it: Its internal temperatures increased only a degree or two during its resting period. (Roasts are allowed to rest when they come out of the oven both to distribute the heat evenly and to allow the juices to reabsorb back into the outer layer of meat.) Cooked to 128 degrees, it moved only to 130 degrees after a 45-minute rest.

Not so the roasts cooked at higher temperatures. Their internal temperatures increased much more dramatically out of the oven. As a matter of fact, we noticed a direct correlation between oven temperature and a roast's

post-cooking temperature increase. Roasts cooked in a moderate oven (325 to 350 degrees) averaged a 14-degree jump in internal temperature while resting. Roasts cooked at 425 degrees jumped an unbelievable 24 degrees on the counter. These temperature rises make it difficult to know when a roast should be taken out of the oven.

In addition to its more stable internal temperature, the prime rib roasted at 200 degrees also lost less weight during cooking than those roasted at higher temperatures. Roasts weighing about seven pounds shed less than eight ounces when cooked at 200 degrees, but almost $1^1/_2$ pounds in a 350-degree oven and a

shocking two pounds at 425 degrees. Some of the weight loss may be extra fat, but some is surely juice. This test confirmed our sense that beef roasted at 200 degrees was indeed the juiciest.

The Beef Council and other official agencies won't endorse low-temperature roasting. But after conversations with several food scientists, we determined that low-temperature roasting is safe for this cut. The odds of finding bacteria inside a prime rib roast are virtually nonexistent. (Bacteria in beef is usually limited to the exterior or to ground beef.) Just as important, the only way to guarantee that all bacteria are killed is to cook the meat to an internal temperature of 160 degrees, something we would

never suggest. The only possible problem is bacteria on the exterior of the meat.

But we took care of this problem (as well as the pale exterior of the roast cooked at 200 degrees) when we decided to sear the meat on top of the stove before putting it in the oven. To make sure that the final color is attractive, sear the roast for at least eight minutes, turning it often.

Our last area of interest was aging. From past tests, we knew that dry-aging often improves the flavor and texture of steaks. However, most butchers don't dry-age beef because the hanging quarters take up too much refrigerator

space and the meat loses weight during the process, forcing the butcher to make less profit or raise the price of the beef. Most butchers prefer beef that comes packaged in vacuum-sealed bags. There is no work and no weight loss.

We were still curious about dry-aging, so we ordered two prime ribs, one dry-aged, one wet-aged, from a restaurant supplier in Manhattan. Like a good, young red wine, the wet-aged beef tasted pleasant and fresh on its own. But there was no comparison to the dry-aged beef, which had a stronger, richer, gamier flavor and buttery texture.

Since dry-aged beef is so hard to find, we set out to devise our own method. It's just a matter of making room in the

refrigerator and remembering to buy the roast ahead of time. Simply pat the roast dry and place it on a rack over a pan. We found that even a day or two helped concentrate the meat's flavor. For an especially tender texture and beefy flavor, let the meat age for the full week.

Perfect Prime Rib

NOTE: ***Even if you don't purchase the roast several days ahead of time as the instructions suggest, even a day or two of aging in the refrigerator will help. The roast is first browned on top of the stove and then placed in the oven. You can accomplish both steps in a heavy-duty roasting pan. Otherwise, brown the roast in a cast-iron skillet and then transfer it to a regular roasting pan. It is essential that the temperature inside your oven is actually 200 degrees. Some ovens can run a bit cool at such low settings. Use an oven thermometer and, if necessary, boost the thermostat as***

needed to maintain a constant temperature of 200 degrees inside the oven. Serves six to eight.

1 3-rib standing rib roast (about 7 pounds), preferably first cut (*see* figure 25)

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Set roast on rack above pan lined with paper towels. Refrigerate for 3 to 7 days. Shave off dehydrated exterior layer of roast with sharp knife. Let roast rest at room temperature for 3 hours; tie roast (*see* figure 26).

2. Adjust oven rack to low position and heat oven to 200 degrees. Heat large heavy-duty roasting pan over two burners set at medium heat. Place roast in hot pan and cook on all sides until nicely browned and at least $^{1}/_{4}$ cup fat has rendered, 8 to 10 minutes. Remove roast from pan. Drain off fat. (Reserve fat in measuring cup if making Yorkshire pudding.) Set wide rack in pan, then set roast on rack. Generously season with salt and pepper.

3. Place roast in oven and roast until meat registers 130 degrees (for medium-rare), about $3^{1}/_{2}$ hours (or about 30

minutes per pound). Transfer prime rib to cutting board. (If making Yorkshire pudding, *see* recipe. Let roast stand 20 minutes (a bit longer is fine) before serving.

4. Remove twine and position roast so that rib bones are perpendicular to cutting board. Using carving fork to hold roast in place, cut along rib bones to sever meat from bones. Set roast cut side down on board and carve meat across grain into thick slices.

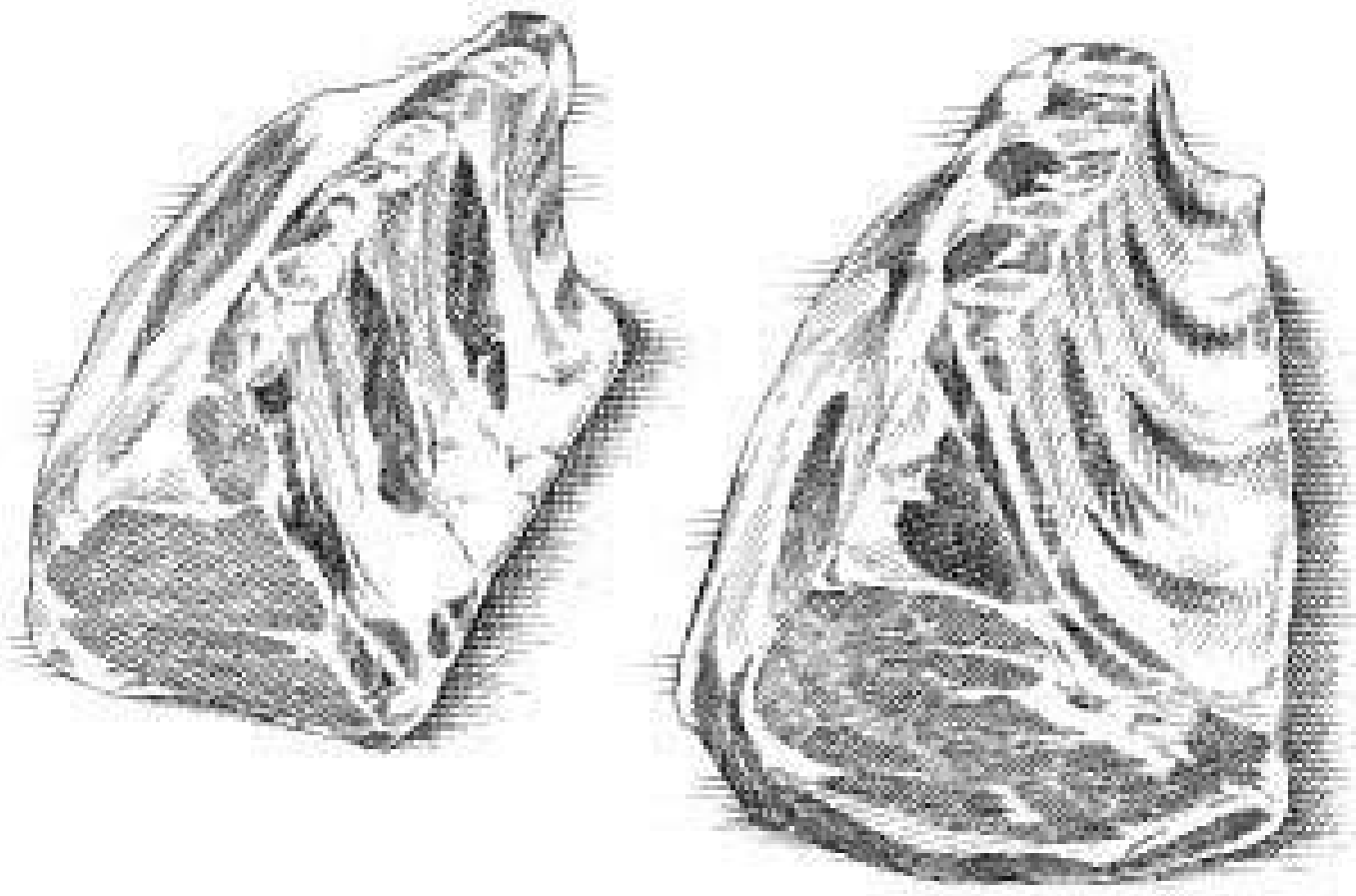

Figure 25.
Butchers tend to cut a rib roast, which consists of ribs six through 12, into two distinct cuts. We find that the loin end rib roast, also called the "first cut" or "small end" roast, is more tender and less fatty because it contains a

single rib-eye muscle. This roast, consisting of ribs ten through 12, is our favorite. The "second cut" rib roast (right) includes ribs six through nine. It is closer to the chuck end and consists of several muscles, each of which is surrounded by fat.

Figure 26.
It is imperative to tie prime rib before roasting. If left untied, the outer layer of meat will pull away from the rib-eye muscle and overcook. To prevent this problem, tie the roast at both ends, running string parallel to

the bone.

Yorkshire Pudding

NOTE: ***Many recipes insist that the batter for Yorkshire pudding must be cold to rise properly. We found that the batter will rise fine whether it goes into the oven at room temperature or well chilled. The temperature of the pan does matter, though. If the pan is not hot, the pudding will be flat and soggy. We suggest using the fat rendered during the searing process. Or, if you prefer, melt butter in the empty pan. Make sure to cook Yorkshire pudding fully or it might fall. It should be well puffed and nicely browned. Serves six to eight.***

2 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon salt
2 cups milk
5 large eggs
$^1/_4$ cup rendered beef fat or butter

::INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Whisk flour and salt together in large bowl. Beat milk and eggs together in medium bowl until well combined. Slowly whisk wet ingredients into dry ingredients until batter is smooth. There should be no lumps of flour.

2. When roast is removed from oven, raise temperature to 425 degrees. Pour

fat into 9-by 13-inch pan and heat in oven for about 10 minutes.

3. Whisk batter to recombine. Pour batter into hot pan. Bake until puffed and nicely browned, about 25 minutes. Cut into squares and serve immediately with prime rib.

ROAST LEG OF LAMB

THE MAIN PROBLEM WITH ROAST LEG OF lamb is that it cooks unevenly. In most cases, the outer meat becomes dry and gray, while the meat around the bone remains almost raw. Since the leg is reasonably priced and feeds a lot of people, it seemed worth solving this basic cooking problem.

The uneven thickness of the leg is the most formidable obstacle to even cooking. At the thicker sirloin end, the meat surrounding the flat, twisting hipbone is very thin. The center of the

leg, which comprises the top half of the thigh, is fleshy, but the thigh then tapers dramatically toward the knee joint, and the shank itself is a mere nub of meat.

The only way to deal with the problem is to remove the hipbone entirely and then tie the leg into as compact a shape as possible. However, boning and tying do not by themselves guarantee even cooking. Special procedures must be followed in roasting the leg to ensure that all parts are exposed to the same amount of heat and will thus reach similar internal temperatures at the same time.

We started by roasting a $7\,^{1}/_{2}$-pound leg at 400 degrees, with the meat resting

directly on the roasting pan. After about one hour, the meaty side of the leg, which had been facing up, registered 120 on a meat thermometer, or underdone. The meat around the thigh bone was practically raw, while the bottom of the leg, which had been resting on the hot pan, had reached 135 degrees, or slightly overdone.

Clearly we needed a rack to protect the downward-facing side of the leg from overcooking. We also felt the exterior could be browner and that a lower cooking temperature might even out the rate at which various parts of the leg cook. We roasted a leg on a rack at 450 degrees for 20 minutes and then lowered the temperature to 325 degrees

for the next hour. The top was evenly cooked, at 130 degrees throughout, but the underside was undercooked. Evidently, the rack had been too effective in keeping the bottom of the leg cool.

We decided to try the next leg with the oven rack at the lowest position, so that the rack side of the leg might cook more quickly. This helped, but we decided in the end that the leg would have to be turned for even cooking.

We had one final question: Was it worth trying to find Prime rather than the standard Choice lamb. Tasting them side-by-side, we preferred the Prime cut, which was more tender. The Choice

leg was a bit chewy, while the Prime leg was silky and buttery. The flavor of the Prime leg was also less gamy and richer, almost like roast beef. The differences, especially in texture, were most apparent in slices taken from the rarest portion of the roasts. So if you like rare lamb, it's definitely worth ordering a Prime leg. It only costs an extra 50 cents or so a pound, but you will have to find a butcher shop that carries this sometimes hard-to-find meat.

Roast Leg of Lamb

NOTE: *There are two choices when shopping for leg of lamb. A whole leg contains all the bones. Many markets sell "semiboneless" legs, which have the aitchbone, or hipbone, removed* (see *figure 27*). *The lamb cooks more evenly (and makes carving much simpler) when the aitchbone is removed, so ask your butcher to do this if necessary. If making the Piquant Caper Sauce, you will need the aitchbone to make stock. Ask the butcher to wrap it up separately. Many legs also come with a "hinged" shank bone. Unless you have a very large roasting pan, you will need to remove*

this part of the shank bone to fit the roast in the oven (see figure 27). This bone can also be used to make stock in the Piquant Caper Sauce.

Legs come in a variety of sizes. Our recipe starts with a semiboneless leg that weighs between six and eight pounds. (The weight of the whole, untrimmed leg is about $1^1/_2$ pounds more.) Smaller legs have a sweeter, milder flavor, so you may want to search for a petite leg if you don't like a strong "sheepy" flavor. If roasting a smaller leg, reduce the cooking time at 325 degrees by at least 10 minutes.

We find it best to cook lamb by internal temperature. We like our

lamb medium-rare, or about 135 degrees when carved. Since the internal temperature will rise while the lamb rests, pull the leg out of the oven when the temperature reaches 130 degrees. If you like lamb on the rarer side, pull it out of the oven at 120 degrees (the temperature will rise to 125 degrees by carving time). If you like lamb more well done, pull it out at 135 degrees (the temperature will rise above 140 degrees). Depending on the size of the leg you buy, this recipe serves eight to 12.

Roast Leg of Lamb

Salt and ground black pepper

1 teaspoon finely minced fresh rosemary leaves or $^1/_2$ teaspoon dried rosemary, finely crushed (omit if making Mint Sauce)

1 semiboneless leg of lamb (6 to 8 pounds), excess fat removed and discarded (*see* figures 28–31)

3 medium garlic cloves, slivered

2 tablespoons olive oil

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Mix 2 teaspoons salt, 2 teaspoons pepper, and rosemary in small bowl.

2. Sprinkle portion of rosemary mixture

over inner surface of cleaned and boned meat. Tie lamb according to figures 32 and 33. Cut slits into roast with tip of paring knife. Poke garlic slivers inside. Brush exterior with oil, then rub remaining seasoning onto all surfaces of meat. Place leg, meaty side up, on roasting pan fitted with flat rack; let stand 30 minutes. Adjust oven rack to lowest position and heat oven to 450 degrees.

3. Pour $^{1}/_{2}$ cup water into bottom of roasting pan. Roast lamb for 10 minutes. With wad of paper toweling in each hand, turn leg over. Roast 10 minutes longer. Lower oven temperature to 325

degrees. Turn leg meaty side up and continue roasting, turning leg every 20 minutes, until instant-read thermometer inserted in several locations registers 130 degrees, 60 to 80 minutes longer. Transfer roast to another pan; cover with foil and set aside in warm spot to complete cooking and to allow juices to reabsorb into meat, 15 to 20 minutes. Reserve roasting pan to make Piquant Caper Sauce.

4. When ready to serve, remove string from roast and carve by cutting slices parallel to bone, each about $^{1}/_{4}$-inch thick. When meat on top has been removed, flip leg over and carve bottom

in same fashion. To facilitate carving side of leg, grasp narrow end of leg and hold it perpendicular to work surface and slice as before. Serve sliced lamb with sauce.

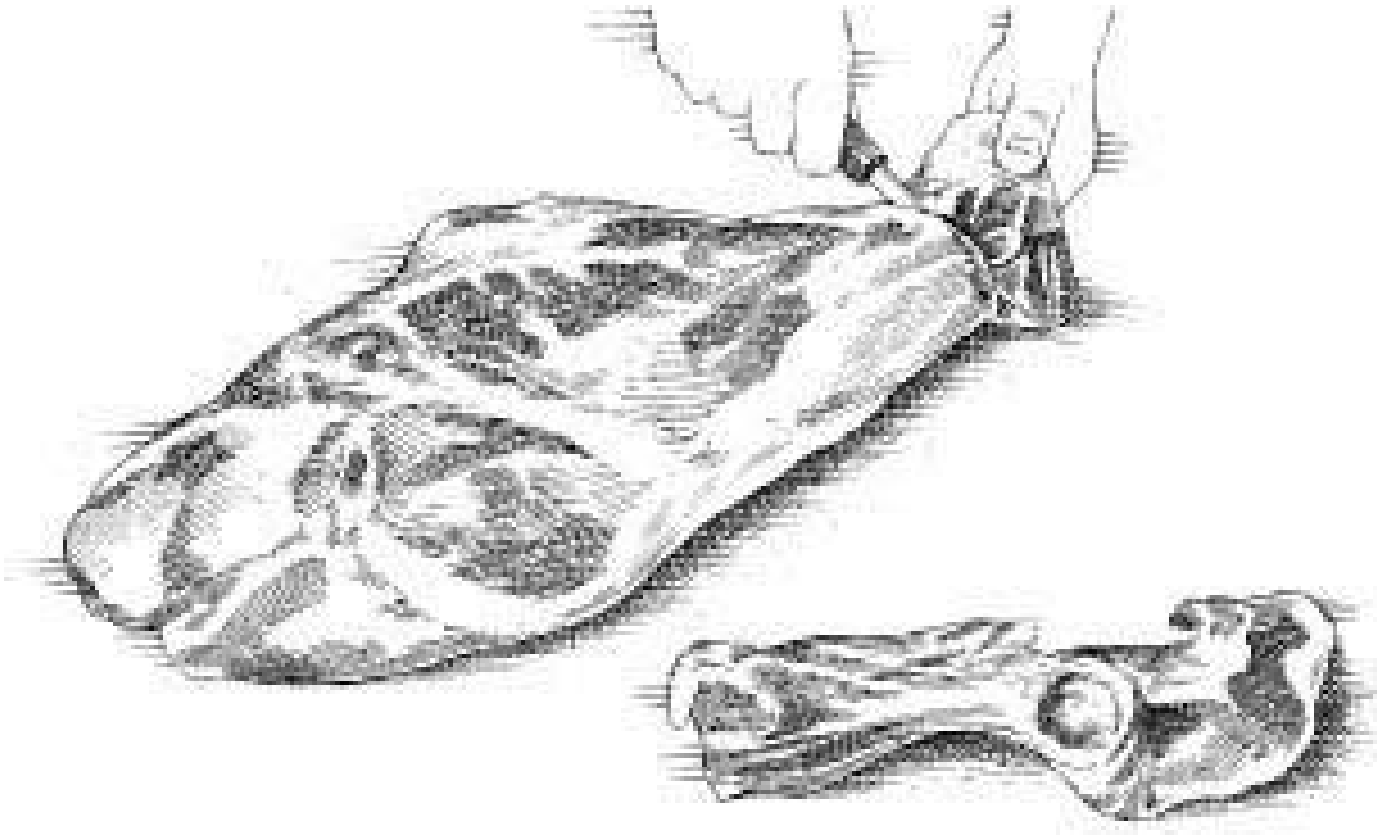

Figure 27.
The butcher should remove the aitchbone (right front) and save it so you can make stock. If the shank bone has been partially detached by the butcher, remove it with a knife and save it, too, for stock.

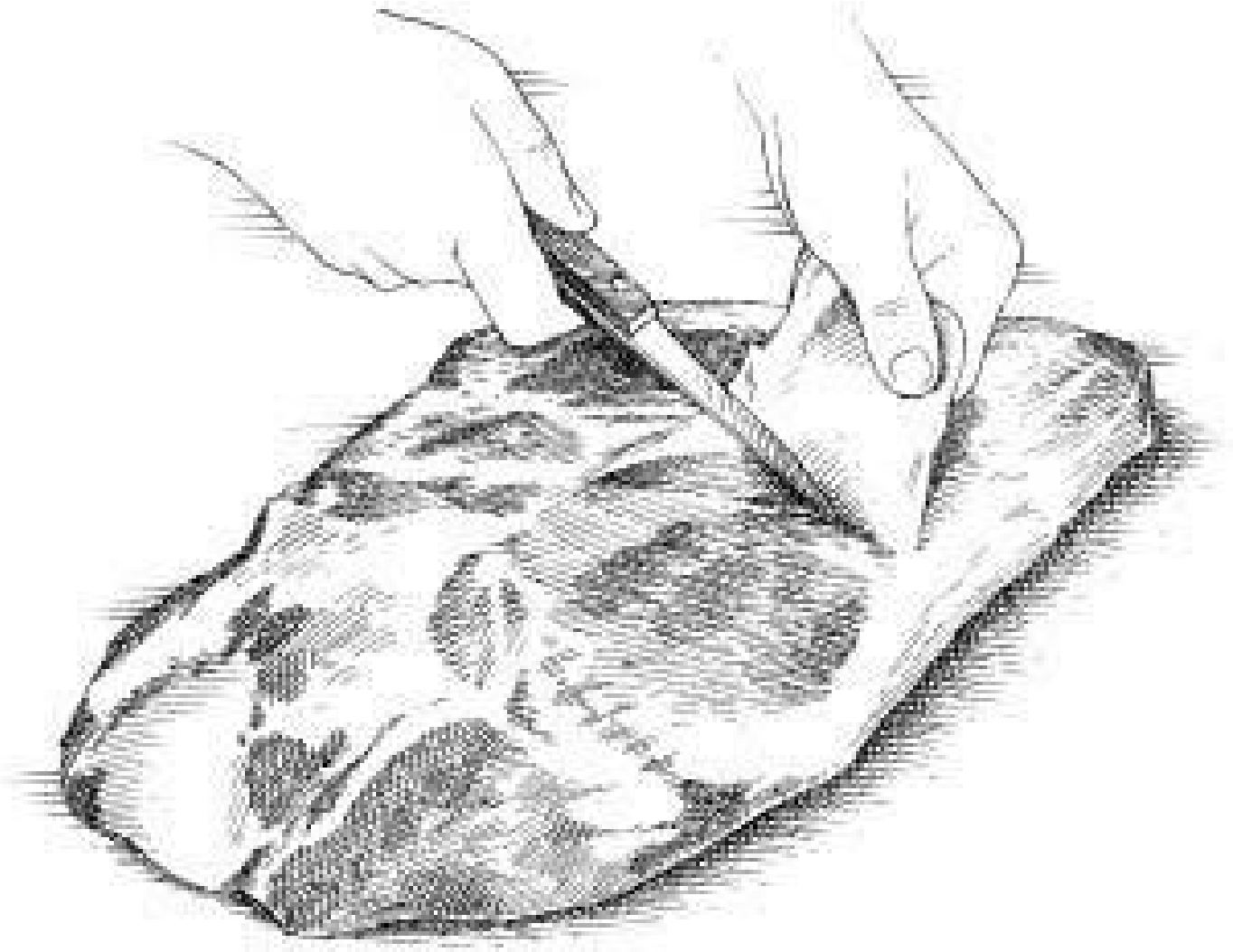

Figure 28.
Lamb fat is strong-flavored and unpleasant to chew. Remove large pieces of fat, using a knife and your hands to cut and then pull the fat off the leg. It's fine to leave a few streaks of fat to

moisten the roast.

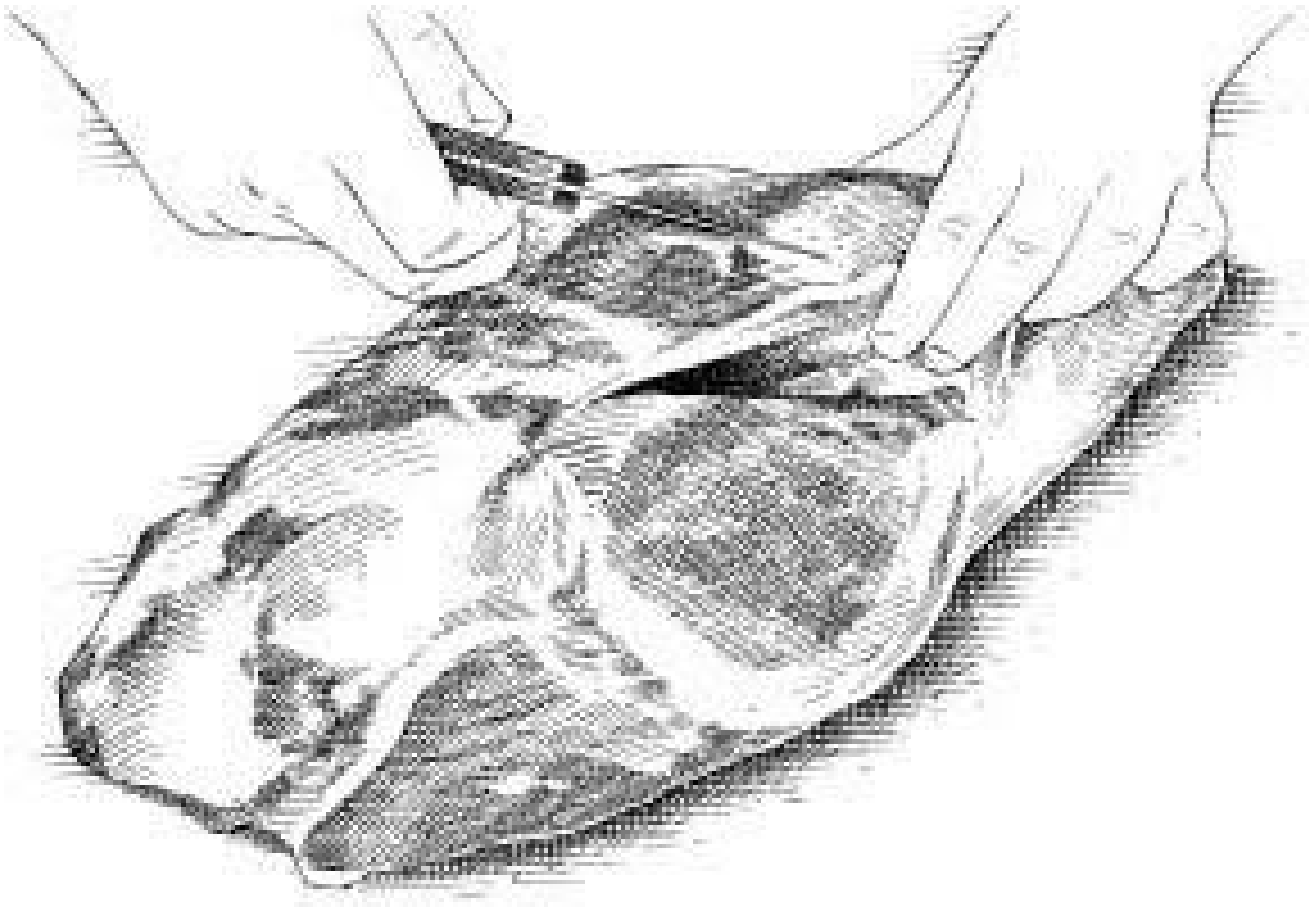

Figure 29.
The fat and other material surrounding the strong-tasting popliteal lymph node should be removed. Set the leg meaty side up and cut down into the area that separates the broad, thin flap of meat on one side of the leg with the thick, meaty lobe on the

other.

Figure 30.
Use both hands and the knife to widen the incision, exposing the lymph node and surrounding fat.

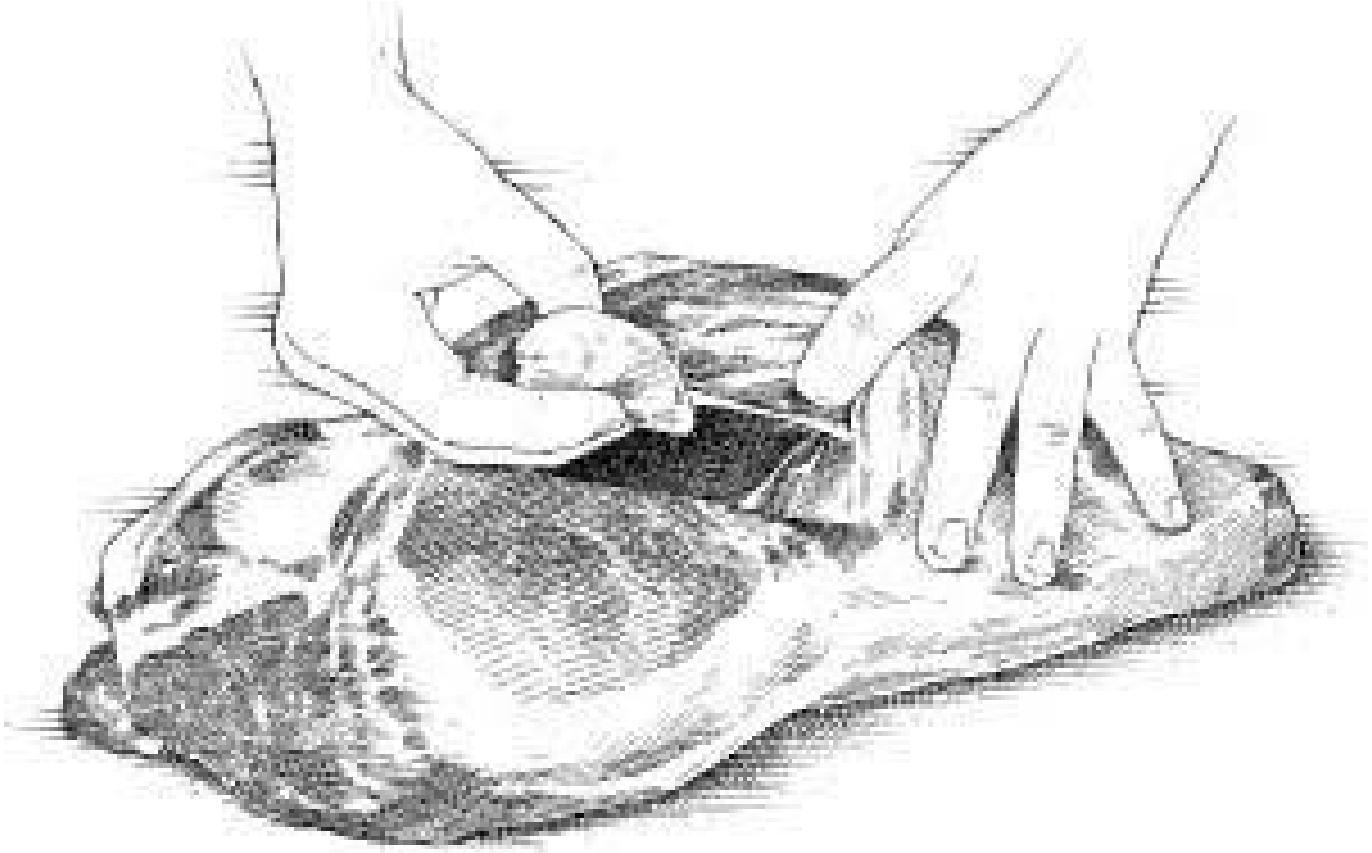

Figure 31.
Reach in and grasp the nugget of fat. Pull while cutting the connective tissue, being very careful not to cut into the gland itself. Pull the fat and other matter free.

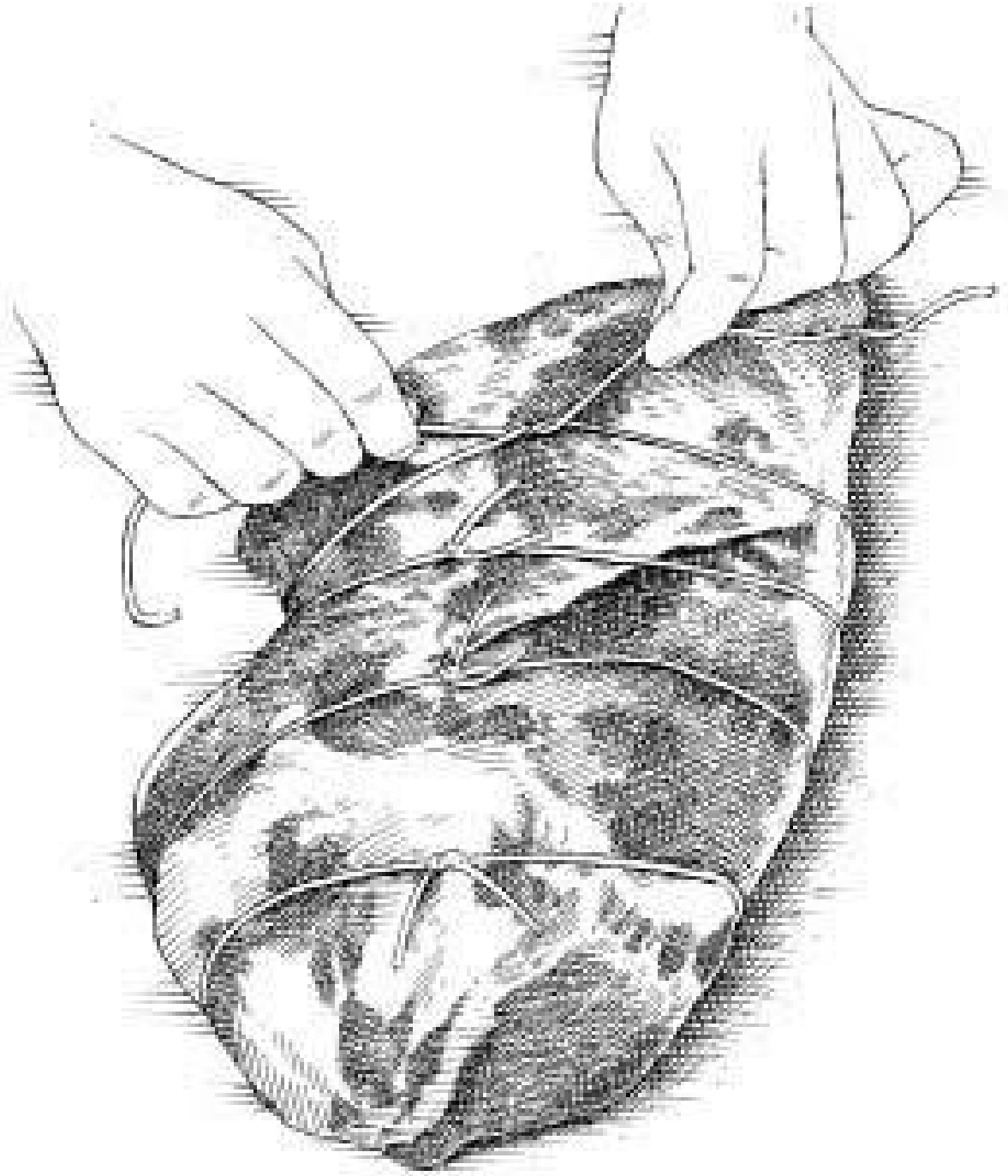

Figure 32.
Set the leg meaty side up and smooth the flap of meat at the sirloin end so that it folds over

and neatly covers the tip of the thigh bone. Tie several short lengths of twine around the leg, placing each piece of twine parallel to the next.

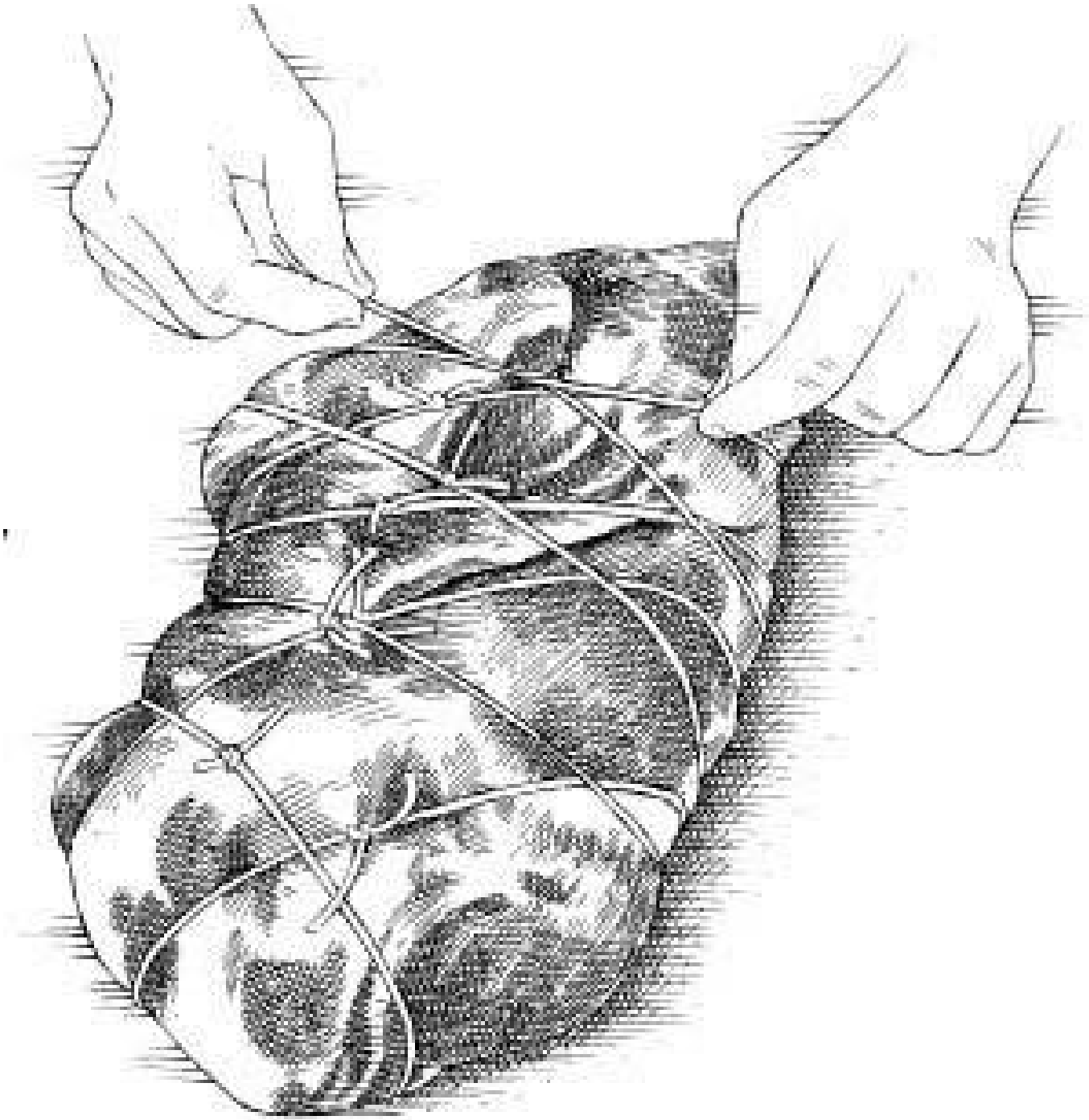

Figure 33.
Tie several more short lengths of twine around the leg, running pieces of twine perpendicular to

those in figure 32.

Piquant Caper Sauce

NOTE: ***If making this sauce, ask the butcher for the aitchbone (see figure 27) and reserve any meat scraps that have come off the lamb during the cleaning process. Make sure to remove the fat from these scraps. You can also use the hinged part of the shank bone (see figure 27). To accommodate the aitchbone, you will need a wide saucepan or deep sauté pan. Start the sauce as soon as the lamb goes into the oven.***

1 tablespoon olive oil
Lamb bones and meat scraps
1 medium onion, chopped

coarse

3 cups chicken stock or canned chicken broth, preferably low-sodium

1/3 cup dry white wine or dry vermouth

2 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

2 tablespoons all-purpose flour

1/3 cup (3 ounces) small capers, drained, bottling liquid reserved

1 teaspoon balsamic vinegar

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oil in large, heavy-bottomed saucepan set over medium heat. Add

reserved bones and meat scraps and onion. Sauté, turning bones several times, until well browned, about 10 minutes. Add broth, scraping pan bottom to loosen browned bits; bring to boil. Reduce heat to low; simmer, partially covered, until bones and meat have given up their flavor to broth, about 1 hour. Add a little water if bones are more than half exposed during cooking.

2. Set empty pan used to roast leg of lamb over medium heat. Add wine and scrape with wooden spoon until brown bits dissolve. Pour mixture into lamb stock, then strain everything into 2-cup glass measure. Let sit until fat rises, then

skim. Add water, if necessary, to make $1^{1}/_{2}$ cups of liquid. Pour liquid back into saucepan and bring to boil.

3. Mix butter and flour to smooth paste. Gradually whisk butter-flour mixture into stock. Stir in capers, vinegar, and any juices lamb throws off while resting. Simmer to blend flavors, about 3 minutes. Add more vinegar or caper bottling liquid to achieve piquant, subtly sharp-sweet sauce. Serve with lamb.

Mint Sauce

NOTE: ***This sauce has a refreshing mint flavor without the cloying sweetness of mint jelly. The texture is much thinner than jelly, similar to maple syrup. This sauce is remarkably easy to make and does not require any bones since no stock is necessary. If making this sauce, eliminate the rosemary from the lamb recipe and just rub the meat with olive oil and salt and pepper and stud with garlic. Chop the mint right before adding it to the sauce to preserve its fresh flavor.***

1 cup white wine vinegar
6 tablespoons sugar

$^1/_4$ cup minced fresh mint leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat vinegar and sugar in medium saucepan over medium heat. Bring to boil and simmer until slightly syrupy, 8 to 10 minutes. (Liquid should be reduced to about $^1/_2$ cup.)

2. Remove pan from heat, let cool for 5 minutes, and stir in mint. Pour sauce into bowl and cover with plastic wrap. Set aside for at least 1 hour. (Sauce can be set aside for one day.) Serve at room temperature with lamb.

HOW TO GRILL

Grilling Basics

Grilled Steaks & Burgers

Grilled Pork Tenderloin & Chops

Grilled Lamb Chops

Grilled Chicken

Grilled Seafood

Grilled Vegetables

GRILLING BASICS

GRILLING IS THE QUICK-COOKING (OR SEARING) of foods over an open fire. Grilled foods are fairly thin so that they can cook through over a hot fire without causing the exterior to char. Larger cuts, such as roasts or whole birds, can be cooked over an open fire, but they require lower cooking temperatures and longer cooking times, as well as the use of indirect heat and the cover. Although many cooks call this grilling, a turkey or brisket is technically barbecued or grill-roasted. True grilling, which is the

subject of this book, is hotter and faster.

Grilling is not a science. Fire is a living, changing entity that requires constant attention and rapid response to current conditions. Gas grills deliver consistent results but often sacrifice intensity in the process. (See information on using a gas grill.) Charcoal fires do a better job of searing and browning. We also find that charcoal-grilled foods taste better. Adding up all the pluses and minuses, we think that working with a live charcoal fire is worth the effort.

All the recipes in this book were tested on a kettle-style grill using hardwood lump charcoal (*see* figure 1). During the hundreds of hours we spent cooking outdoors to produce this book,

we developed the following guidelines for optimum results when grilling.

USE A KETTLE GRILL. We find that a round kettle-style grill is the best all-purpose choice for outdoor cooking. The large cooking grate (usually at least 16 inches across and often as much as 22 inches in diameter) allows you to prepare a good amount of food at one time. Also, the deep kettle holds a lot of charcoal so you can build a big, hot fire.

USE ENOUGH CHARCOAL. Many cooks stint on the fuel when grilling and never get the temperature high enough. There's no point spending $30 on steaks and then

steaming them over an inadequate fire. The size of your grill, the amount of food being cooked, and the desired intensity of the fire are all factors in deciding how much charcoal to use. In the end, you want a fire that is slightly larger than the space on the cooking grate occupied by food. Remember that you can always let the fire die down a bit if the heat is too intense. It's possible to add more charcoal if the fire is too weak, but this involves lifting up the hot cooking grate, which is awkward and inconvenient.

For most jobs, we light one chimney full of charcoal. When the coals are well lit and covered with gray ash, we dump them on the grill bottom and add the rest of the charcoal (*see* figure 2). Five

pounds of charcoal (or more when a blazing hot fire is needed for cooking steaks) is not an unreasonable amount.

BUILD THE RIGHT KIND OF FIRE. There are two basic types of charcoal fires you can build in a grill. When the coals are lit, they may be spread out evenly across the bottom of the grill (*see* figure 3). A single-level fire delivers even heat across the cooking grate, usually at a moderate temperature because the coals are fairly distant from the cooking grate. We cook vegetables and shrimp over this kind of fire.

A second option, one that we employ in most instances, is a two-level fire.

Once the coals are lit, some of the coals should be raked off the pile and spread out in a single layer across half the grill bottom. The remaining coals stay piled up on the other side of the grill so that they are closer to the cooking grate (*see figure 4*).

There are several advantages to a two-level fire. The heat above the pile of coals is quite hot, perfect for searing. The heat above the single layer of coals is less intense, perfect for cooking thicker foods once they are well browned. This cooler part of the fire also comes in handy if flames engulf food. Simply drag the food to the cooler part of the grill and the fire will usually subside.

TAKE THE FIRE'S TEMPERATURE. Different foods require different heat intensities. To gauge the temperature of the fire, hold your hand 5 inches above the cooking grate and use the timing in figure 5 to determine the heat level. If the fire is not hot enough, add more charcoal. If the fire is too hot, wait for the heat to dissipate a bit.

GET THE RIGHT TOOLS. Many grill manufacturers produce sets of long-handled tools for use with the grill. We prefer less expensive, sturdier tools such as a long-handled fork, a spring-loaded tongs, a dogleg metal spatula, a

paintbrush, and a wire brush for cleaning the grill (*see* figure 8). Some grill grids have hinged sections that make it much easier to add charcoal to the fire during cooking (*see* figure 6). If you have a choice, buy a grill with this feature.

DON'T USE THE COVER. Over time, soot and resinous compounds can build up on the inside of a kettle grill cover. For this reason, we don't use the cover when grilling since we find that the cover often imparts a slightly "off" taste, which we can best described as resembling the odor of stale smoke. We prefer to use a disposable aluminum roasting or pie pan to cover foods that require some buildup

of heat to cook them through.

THICKER IS OFTEN BETTER. In general, moderately thick steaks, fish fillets, and chops are easier to grill because they will be well seared by the time the inside is properly cooked. Very thin steaks, chops, and fish fillets are harder to keep moist, especially if you like a crisp exterior. When shopping, you may need to ask the butcher or fish-monger to cut meat or fish to fit your needs.

COOKING TIMES ARE ESTIMATES. Cooking over a live fire is not like cooking in a precisely calibrated oven. Be prepared to adjust timing, especially if grilling in cool or windy weather. An

instant-read thermometer or taking the meat off the grill and peeking with the tip of a knife are the best ways of telling when food is cooked to your liking.

WE LIKE IT RARE. We find that beef, pork, and fish are more flavorful and juicier when cooked short of well done, either rare, medium-rare, or medium, depending on the item in question. If you are worried about killing possible bacteria, you should cook all meat and seafood to an internal temperature of at least 160 degrees. Of course, chicken must be well done in all cases.

Figure 1.
Commonly available fuels include, charcoal briquettes, lump hardwood charcoal, wood chips, and hardwood logs. We recommend hardwood charcoal; it burns hotter and cleaner than standard briquettes. If you want

to add smokiness, consider adding some hardwood logs or wood chunks to the fire. If using wood chips, wrap them in aluminum foil, poke some holes in the foil, and put the packet directly on the coals.

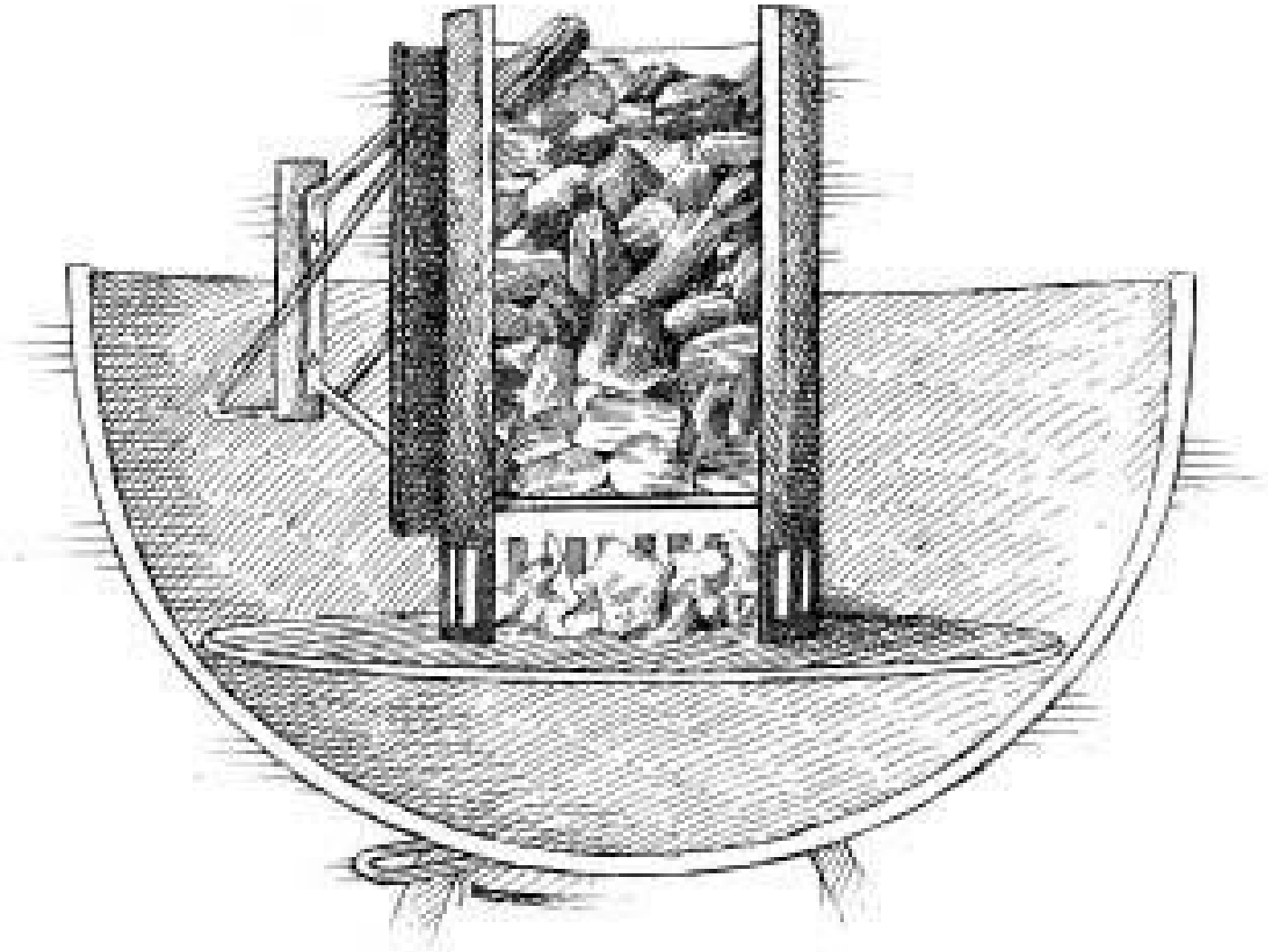

Figure 2.
Our favorite way to start a charcoal fire is with a flue starter, also known as a chimney starter. To use this simple device, fill the bottom section with crumpled newspaper, set the flue

on the grill grate, and fill the top with charcoal. When you light the newspaper, flames will shoot up through the charcoal, igniting it. When the coals are well lit and covered with a layer of gray ash, dump them onto the charcoal grate, and add the rest of the charcoal. Continue heating until all the coals are gray.

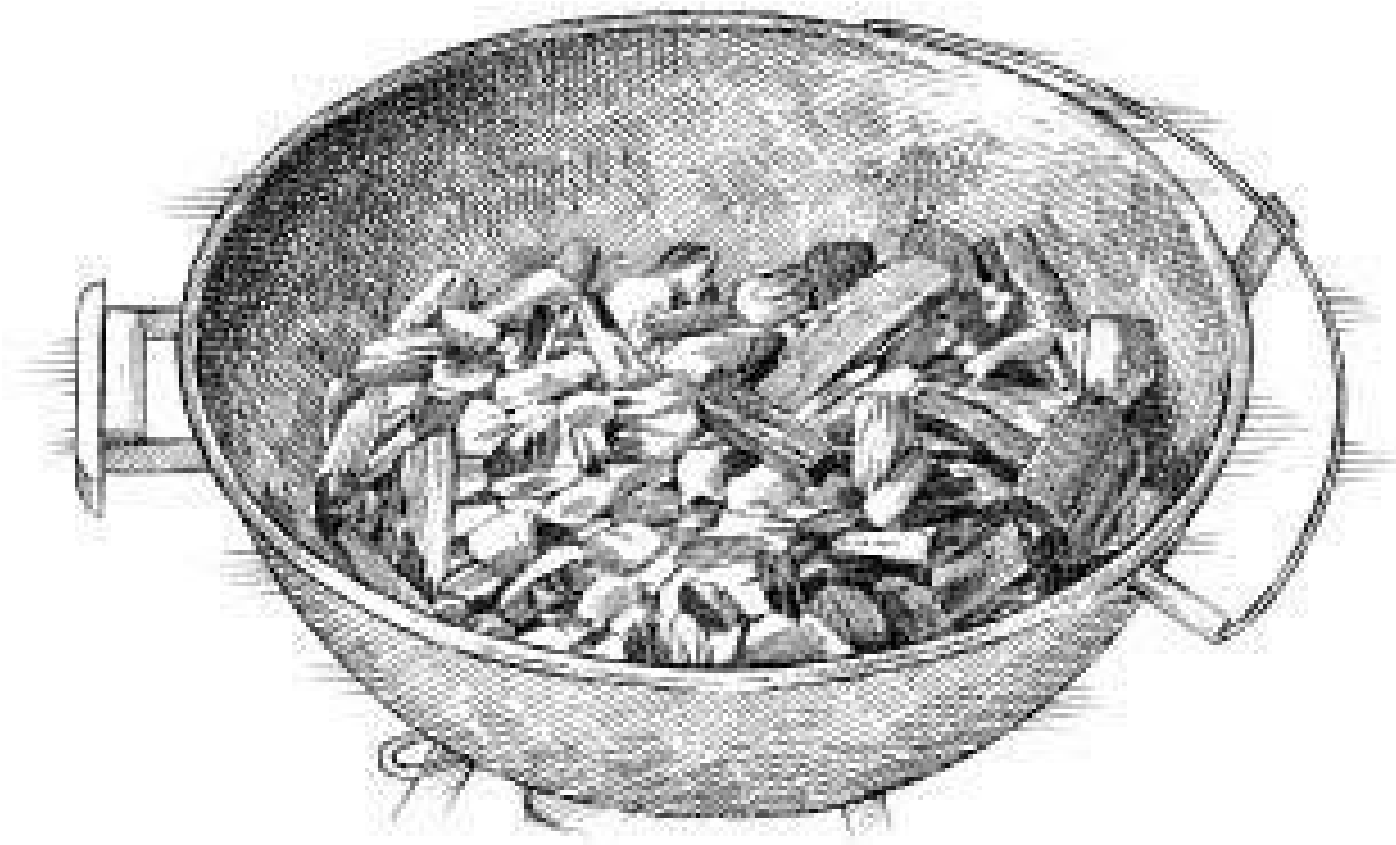

Figure 3.
At this point, the coals can be arranged in an even layer to create a single-level fire. This kind of fire delivers even heat and is best for quick searing at a moderate temperature.

Figure 4.
A two-level fire permits searing over very hot coals and slower cooking over medium coals to cook through thicker cuts. To build a two-level fire, spread some of the lit coals in a single layer over half the grill. Leave the

remaining coals in a pile that rises to within 2 or $2^{1}/_{2}$ inches of the cooking grate.

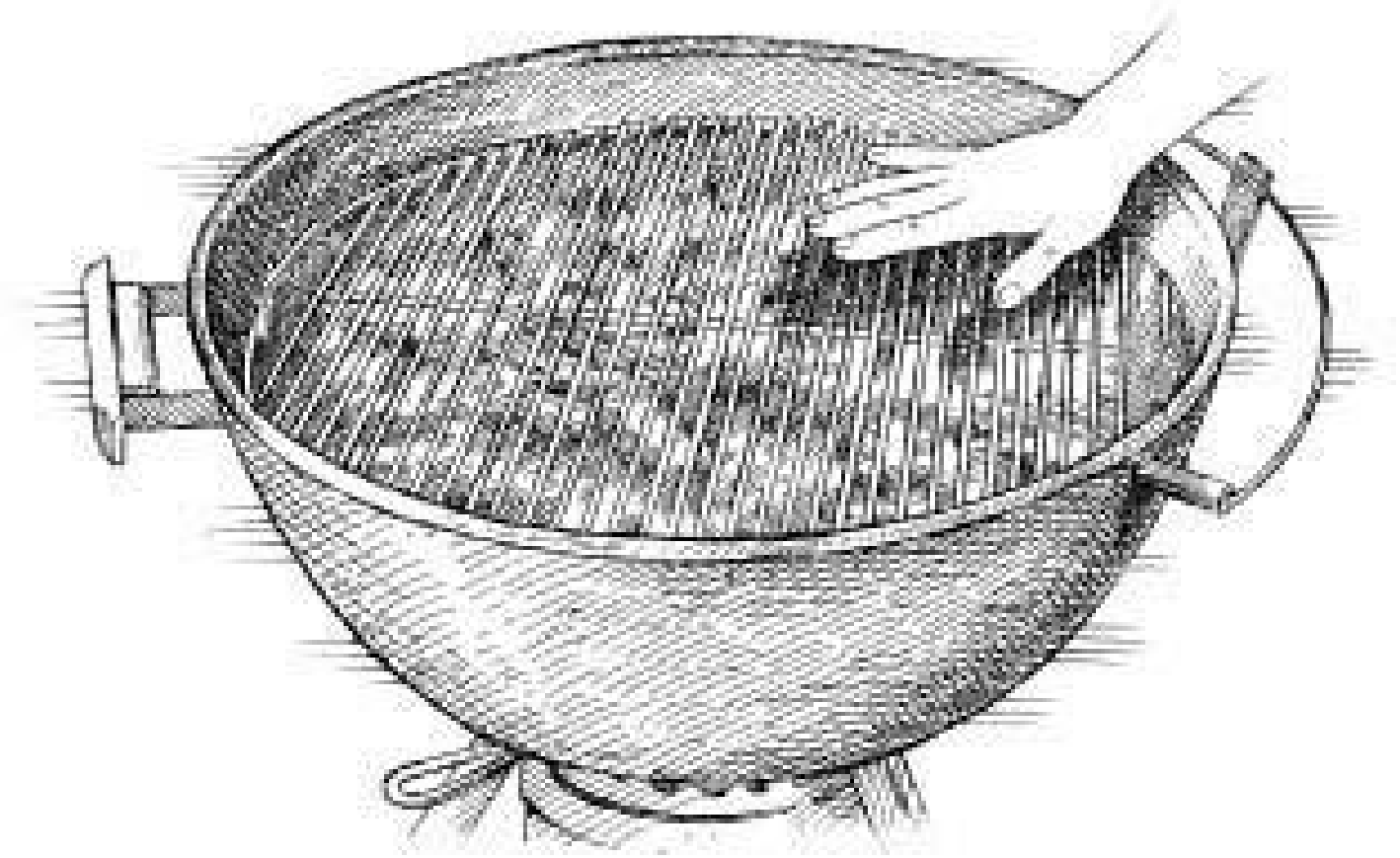

Figure 5.
Once the coals have been spread out in the bottom of the grill, put the cooking grate in place, and put the cover on for 5 minutes to heat up the grate. Before cooking, determine the intensity of the fire by holding your hand 5 inches above the cooking grate. When

the fire is hot, you should be able to keep your hand in place for no more than 2 seconds. For a medium-hot fire, the time extends to 3 or 4 seconds; for a medium fire, 5 or 6 seconds; and for a medium-low fire, 7 seconds.

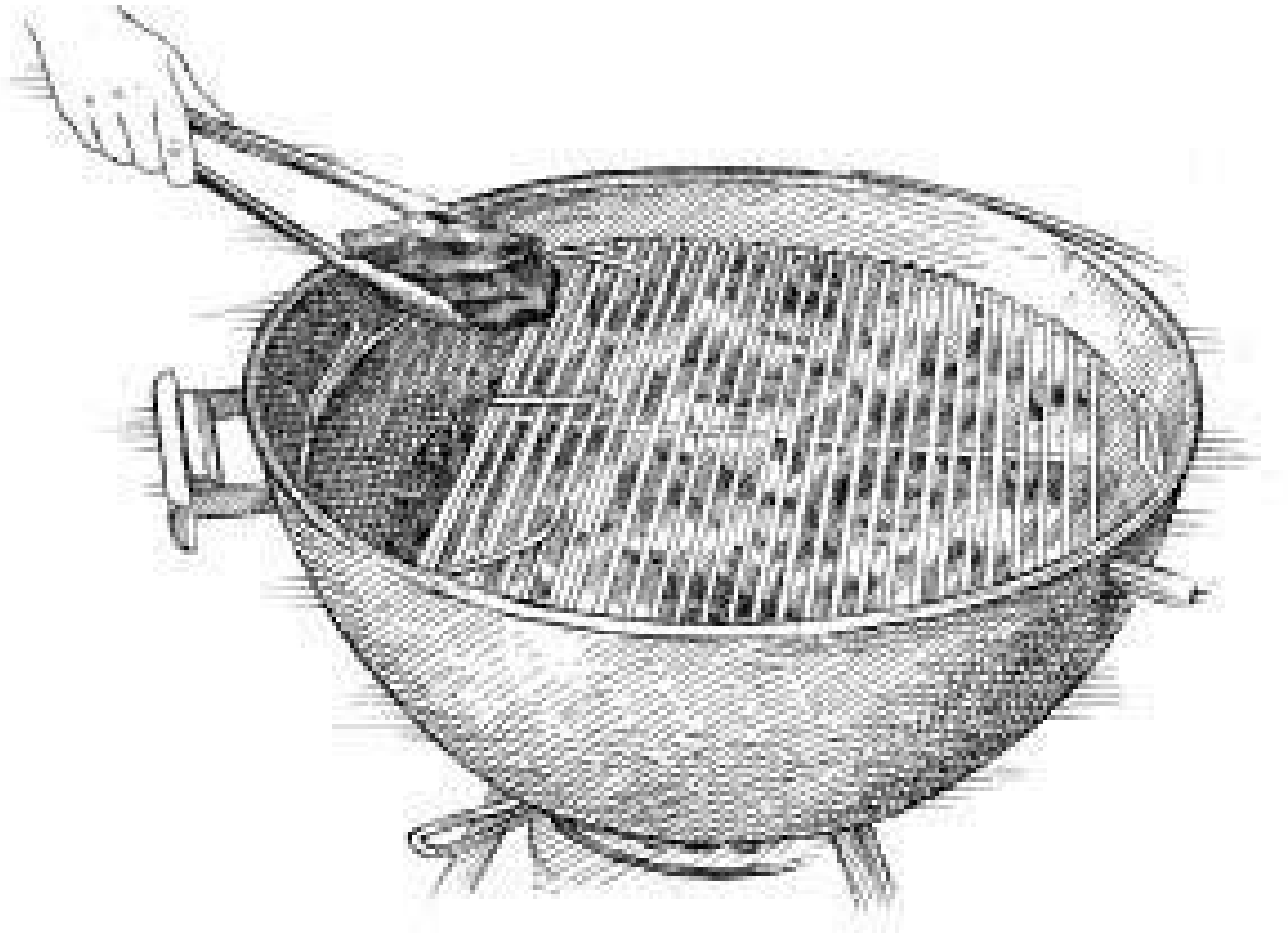

Figure 6.
If the fire is not hot enough, add more charcoal. Some grills come with a hinged cooking grate that makes it easier to add charcoal or move coals around when cooking.

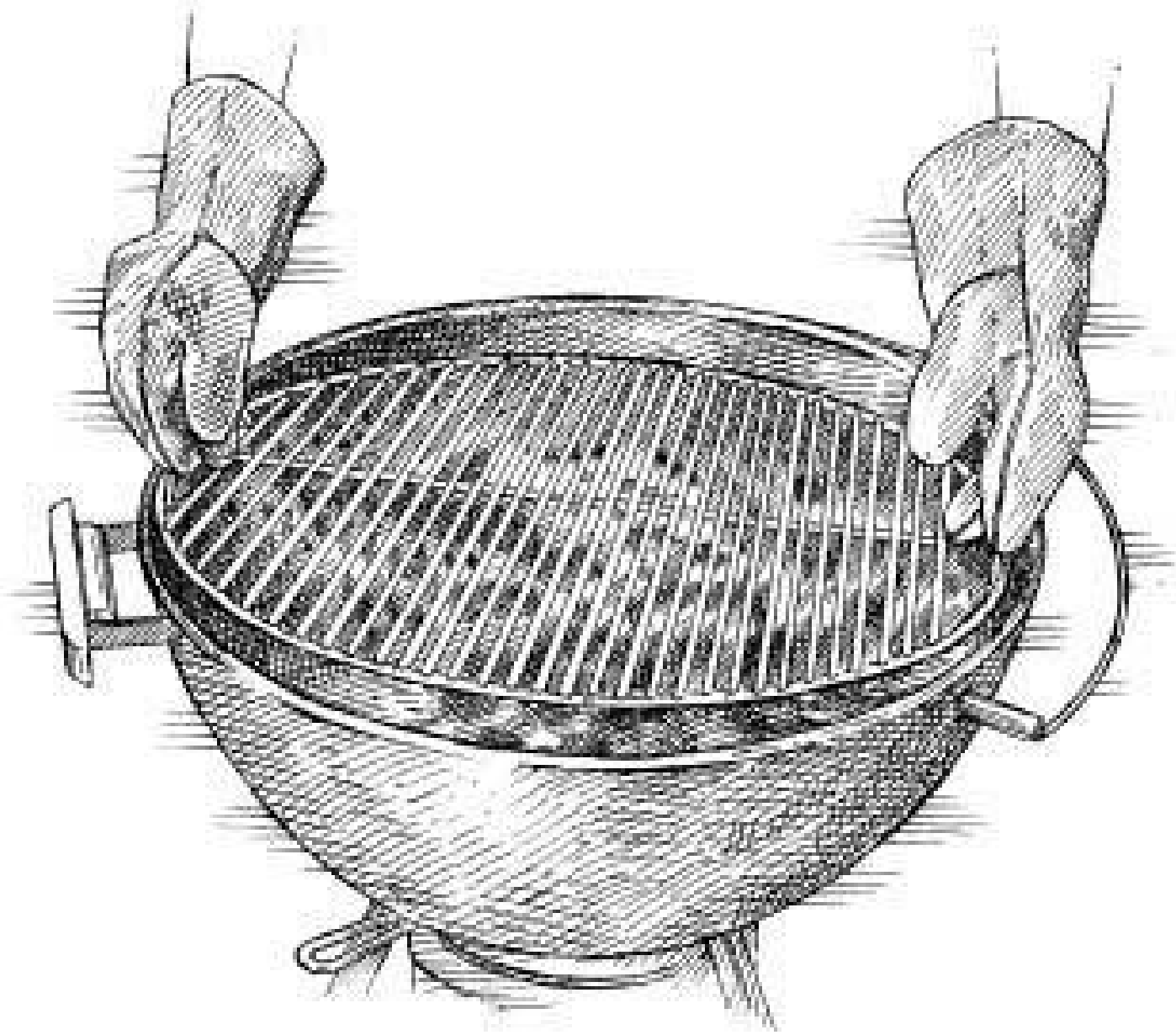

Figure 7.
If the cooking grate is not hinged, use a pair of fire-resistant gloves to lift it off the grill, and then add more charcoal.

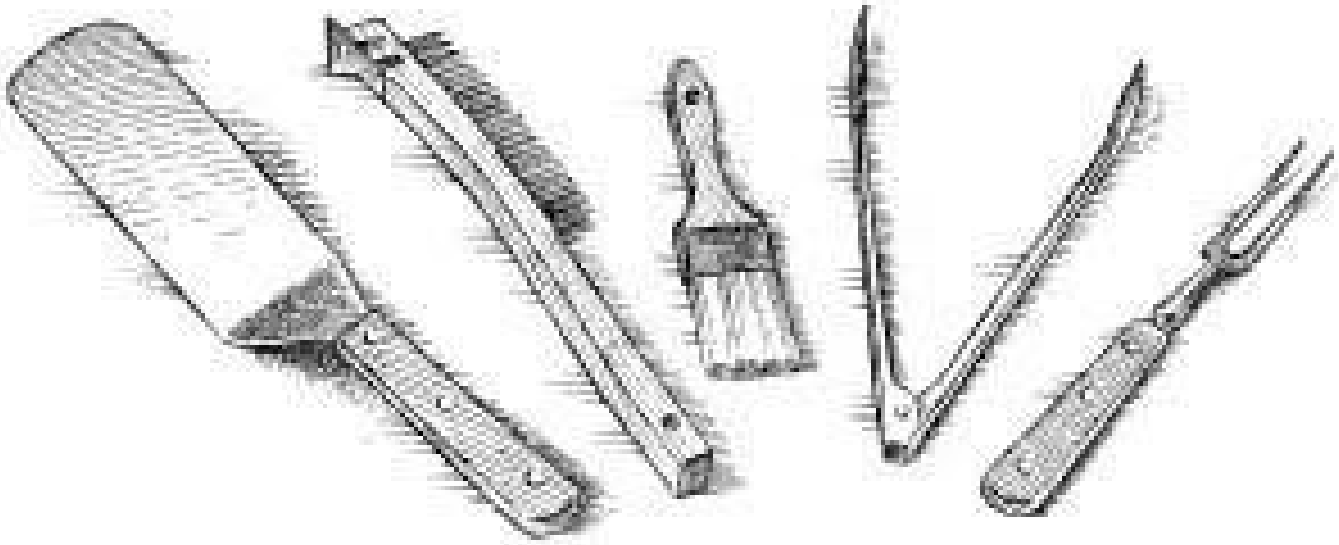

Figure 8.
We find the following tools useful when grilling. From left, a dogleg spatula for lifting foods off the grill, a wire brush for cleaning the grill grate, a paintbrush for brushing on sauces and marinades, spring-loaded tongs, and a long-handled fork for turning foods.

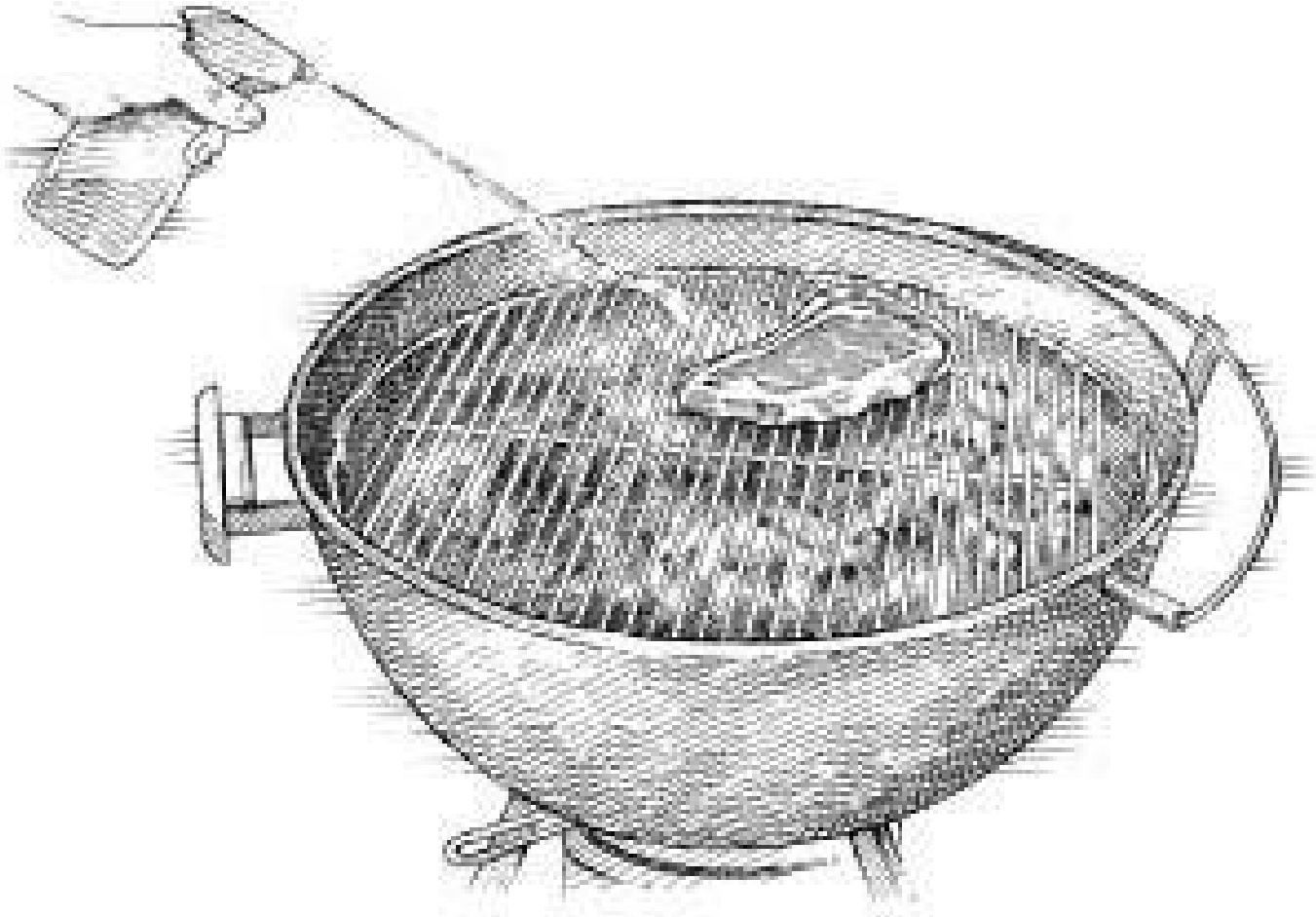

Figure 9.
If foods start to flame, pull them to the cooler part of the grill (an advantage of working with a two-level fire) or use a squirt bottle to douse the flames with water.

NOTES ON USING A GAS GRILL

Gas grills are increasing in popularity and the reasons are clear—the fire is easy to light and control. But while there are some $3,000 units that can produce a blazing hot fire, most gas grills cannot approach the heat level of a good hot charcoal fire. If you want a truly crisp crust on a steak, gas is not going to deliver the same results as charcoal. However, for foods that require cooler fires, such as vegetables or shrimp, the results on a gas grill will be fine.

The recipe instructions in this book give the proper heat level, which is

determined by holding your hand five inches off the cooking grate (*see* figure 5). If using a gas grill, adjust the dials to produce the correct temperature.

Most gas grills come with two temperature controls, each regulating a separate burner. You can use the dials to change the heat level on the entire grill, turning the heat from high to medium once food has been seared. The dials can also be manipulated to create two heat levels on the cooking surface at the same time. For instance, you may set one burner at high for searing and set the other at medium to cook foods through or to have a place to move foods if they ignite.

One final note about gas grills. Unlike

charcoal grills, the inside of the cover stays fairly clean. Since there is no buildup of resinous smoke, the grill cover (rather than a disposable aluminum pan) can be used.

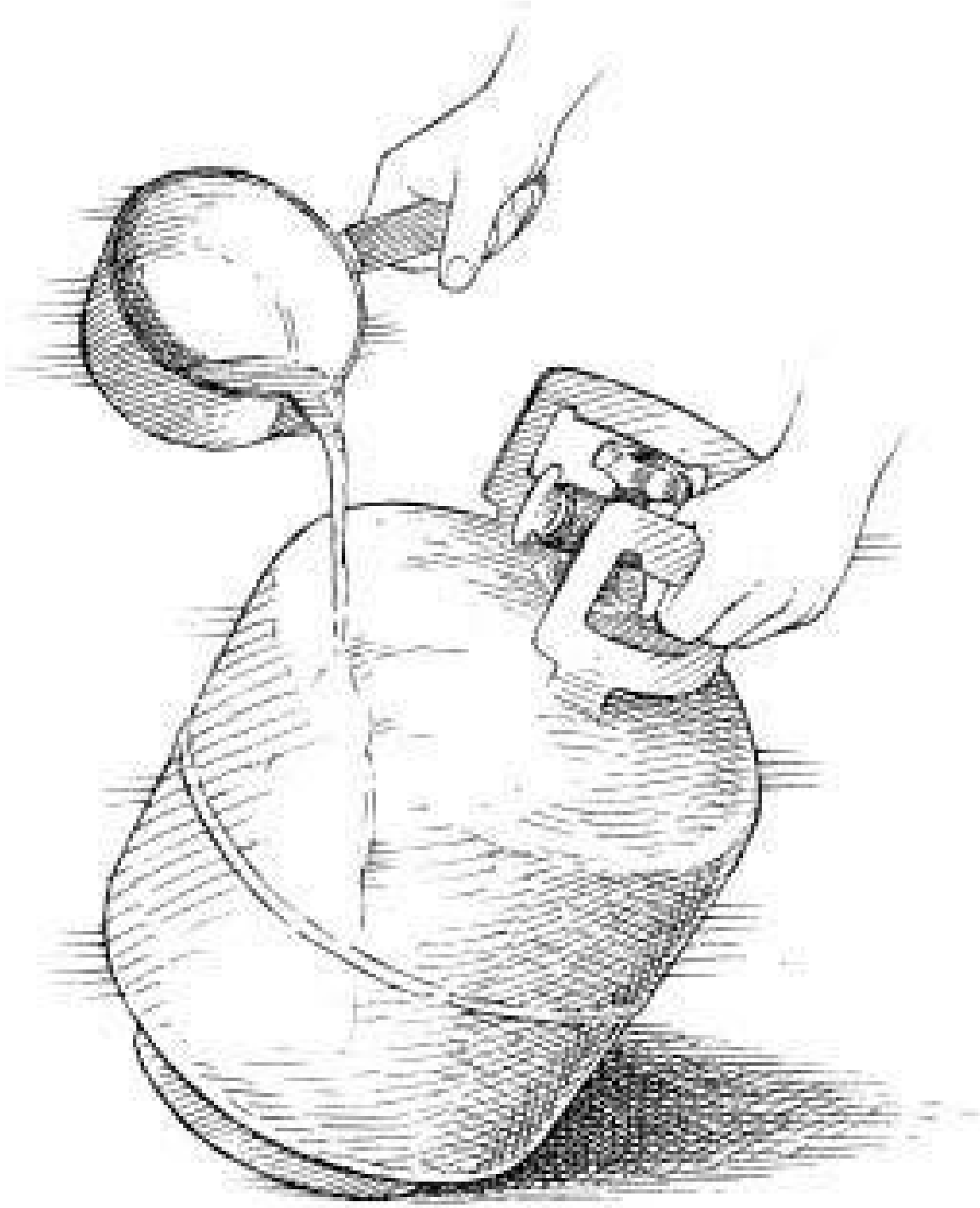

Figure 10.
We wish propane tanks had a gauge that would register the gas level. You can get an idea of how

much gas is left in the tank by using this trick. Pour a cup or so of boiling water over the tank.

Figure 11.
Feel the metal with your hand. Where the water has succeeded in warming the tank, it is empty;

where the tank remains cool to the touch, there is still propane inside.

GRILLED STEAKS & BURGERS

THE KEY TO COOKING STEAKS PROPERLY IS high heat. For an all-over seared crust, a very hot charcoal fire is a must. The coals must come within $2^1/_2$ inches of the cooking grate. While this intense heat is needed to produce the crisp crust we like, it will burn the exterior of the steak before it is cooked through. We found that making a two-level fire (with coals piled high on one side and spread out on the other side of the grill) is necessary. After a quick searing over the very hot

part of the fire, we move the steaks over the single layer of coals to cook through.

This system acts as insurance against bonfires; at the first sign of a flare-up, slide the steak to the cooler part of the grill. A two-level fire also solves the problem of cooking a porterhouse or T-bone steak that contains delicate tenderloin meat on one side of the bone and strip on the other side. Simply position these steaks so that the strip is over the hotter fire and the tenderloin is over the cooler fire.

For all cuts of steak, look for meat that has a bright, lively color. Beef normally ranges from pink to red, but dark meat probably indicates an older, tougher animal. The external fat as well as the

fat that runs through the meat (called intramuscular fat or marbling) should be as white as possible. The marbling should be smooth and fine, running through the meat, and not in clumps. Stay away from packaged steaks that show a lot of red juice (known as "purge"). The purge may indicate a bad freezing job, and the steaks will be dry and cottony.

Grilling hamburgers requires a different technique. Their high fat content makes burgers particularly susceptible to flare-ups, but you still need enough heat to generate a good crust. The solution is a fire made of a single layer of coals. The heat is even but not overly intense.

Chuck is the best choice of meat for burgers. It has a robust, beefy flavor that other cuts do not. If you like, ask your butcher to grind a chuck roast to order or do it yourself in a food processor.

NOTES ON CUTS OF BEEF FOR STEAK

There are nine primal cuts of beef sold at the wholesale level. A butcher will trim these primal cuts into retail cuts. Steaks generally come from the following parts of the cow.

SHOULDER/CHUCK: Often labled London broil, steaks from this region are boneless and consist of a single muscle.

Buy a shoulder steak that is $^{1}/_{2}$ to 2 pounds and slice it thin on the bias. We find that shoulder steaks offer the best value for cost-conscious shoppers.

RIB: Rib, rib eye, or Delmonico steaks can be cut with or without the bone. They are tender and have a beefy flavor.

SHORT LOIN: Our favorite steak, the strip or top loin, is cut from this region. The tenderloin and filet mignon also come from the short loin, but we find them overly tender. The T-bone and porterhouse contain a nice balance of chewy strip and buttery tenderloin.

SIRLOIN: Sometimes labled London broil, these steaks are tougher than short loin steaks and not as highly prized.

ROUND: Steaks cut from the round (most often called London broil steaks) are boneless and quite lean. We find them dry and chewy and generally avoid them.

FLANK: The tender, boneless, single-muscle steak from the flank is often sold as London broil. It is fairly thin (no more than an inch thick) and weighs $1^{1}/_{2}$ to 2 pounds. Like shoulder steaks, slice this cut on the bias for serving.

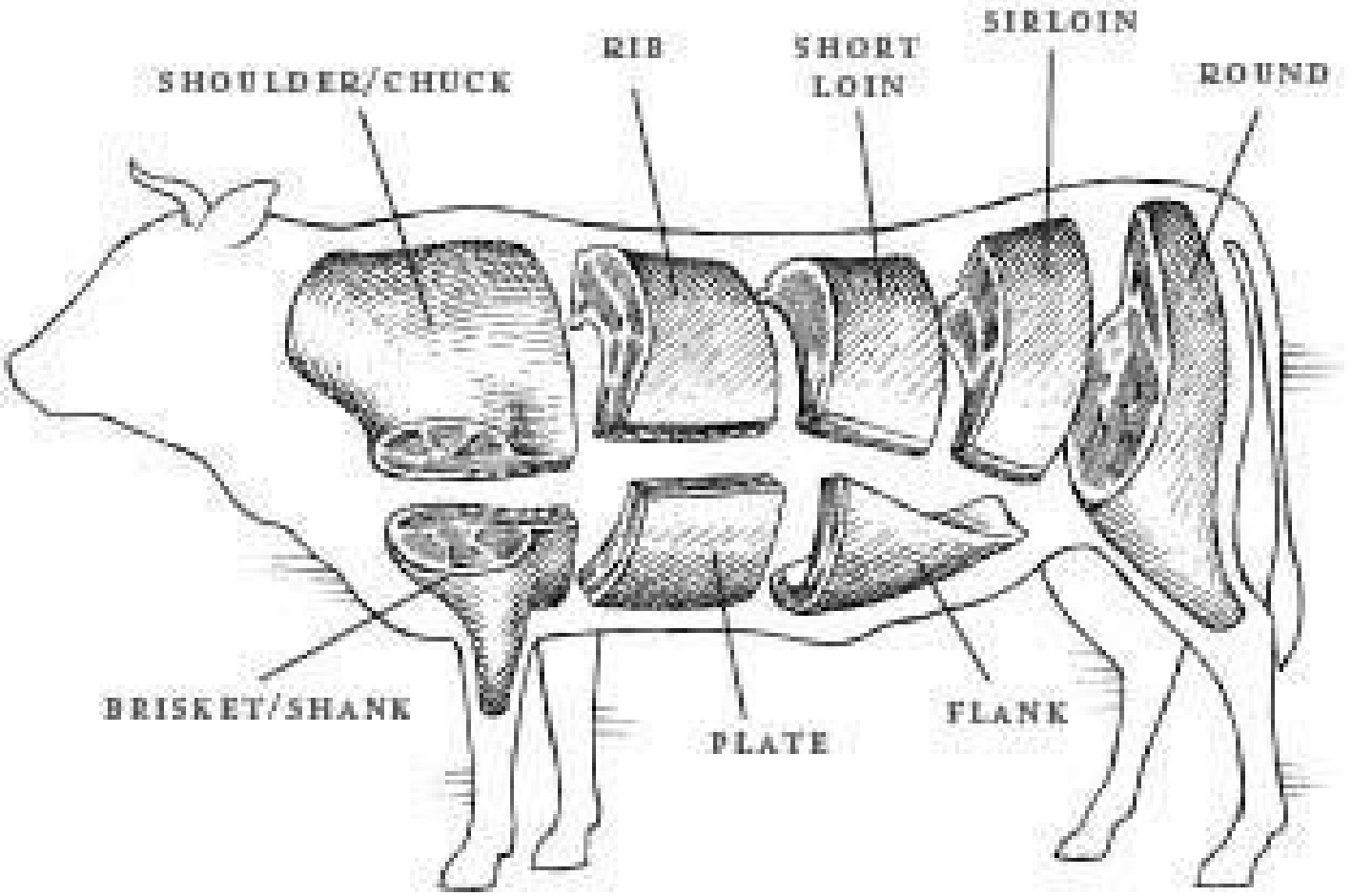
SHOULDER/CHUCK
RIB
SHORT LOIN
SIRLOIN
ROUND
BRISKET/SHANK
PLATE
FLANK

DIAGRAM NO. I

Grilled Strip Steak

NOTE: ***Strip steaks (also called top loin), either on or off the bone, are our first choice for grilling individual steaks. You may also use rib eye steaks. (See figures 12 and 13, for descriptions of each steak.) This recipe yields four large servings. If you would rather limit portions to 8 ounces, grill two 1-pound steaks, slice them, and then serve each person half a steak. Serve as is or with one of the compound butters.***

4 strip steaks with or without bone, $1^1/_4$ to $1^1/_2$ inches thick (12 to 16 ounces each) Salt and

ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Build a two-level fire (*see* figure 4). Set grill rack in place, cover grill with lid, and let rack heat up, about 5 minutes.

2. Sprinkle both sides of each steak with salt and pepper to taste. Grill, uncovered, over very hot fire until well browned on one side, 2 to 3 minutes. Turn each steak; grill until well browned on second side, 2 to 3 minutes. (If steaks start to flame, pull them to cooler part of grill or extinguish flames.)

3. Once steaks are well browned on both sides, slide each one to cooler part of grill. Continue grilling over medium fire

to desired doneness, 5 to 6 minutes more for rare (120 degrees on instant-read thermometer), 6 to 7 minutes for medium-rare on the rare side (125 degrees), 7 to 8 minutes for medium-rare on the medium side (130 degrees), or 8 to 9 minutes for medium (135 to 140 degrees). Let steaks rest 5 minutes, then serve immediately.

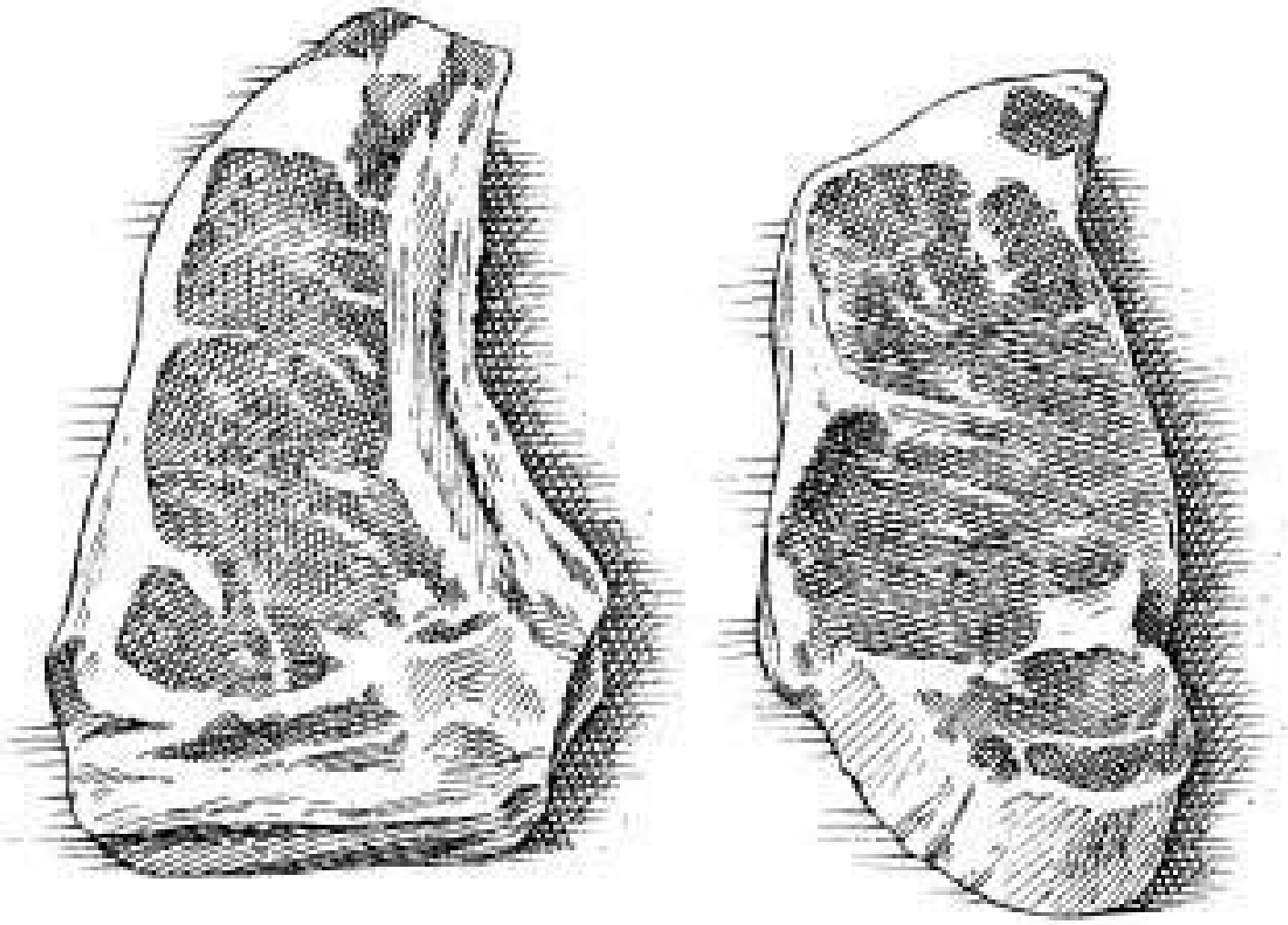

Figure 12.
Strip steak (also called shell, New York strip, or top loin) is our favorite cut for grilling. It is moderately chewy with a noticeable grain. The flavor is excellent, with slightly less fat

than rib. The strip steak on the left is on the bone; the strip steak on the right is off the bone.

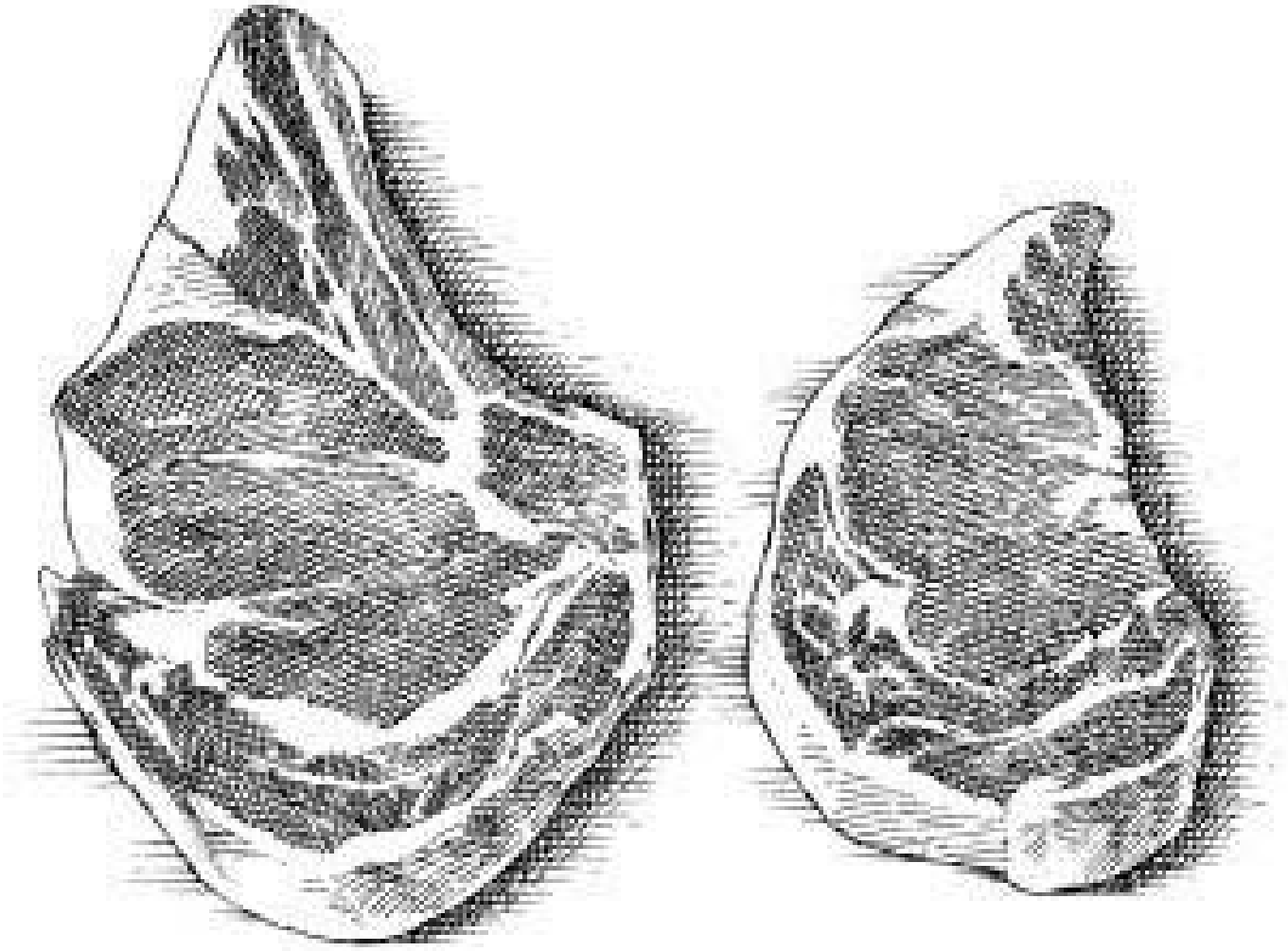

Figure 13.
We also like rib eye (also called rib) steaks on the grill. They are very tender and smooth textured. The distinctive beefy taste is robust and rich, with pockets of fat in the meat. The rib eye on the left is on the bone; the rib eye on

the right is off the bone.

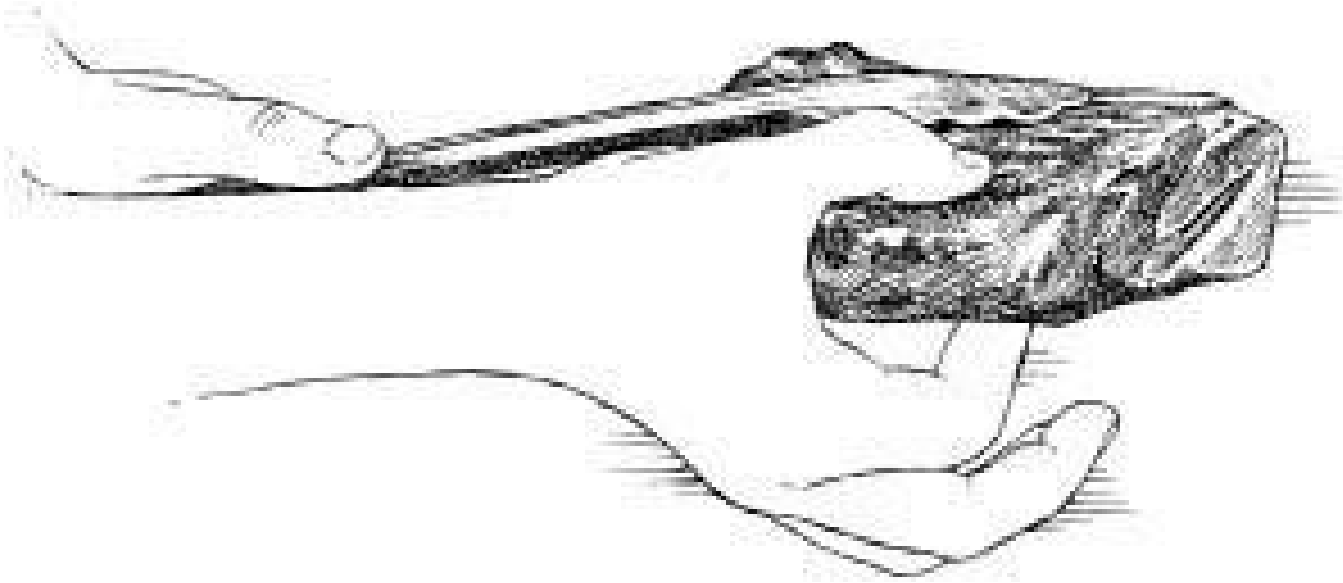

Figure 14.
There are two ways to tell when a steak is properly cooked. To judge doneness by texture, pick up the steak and compare the texture to that of your hand. A rare steak will approximate the soft, squishy feel of the skin between your thumb and forefinger. Make a fist and do the same to give the springy feel of medium, or touch

the tip of your nose for well done.

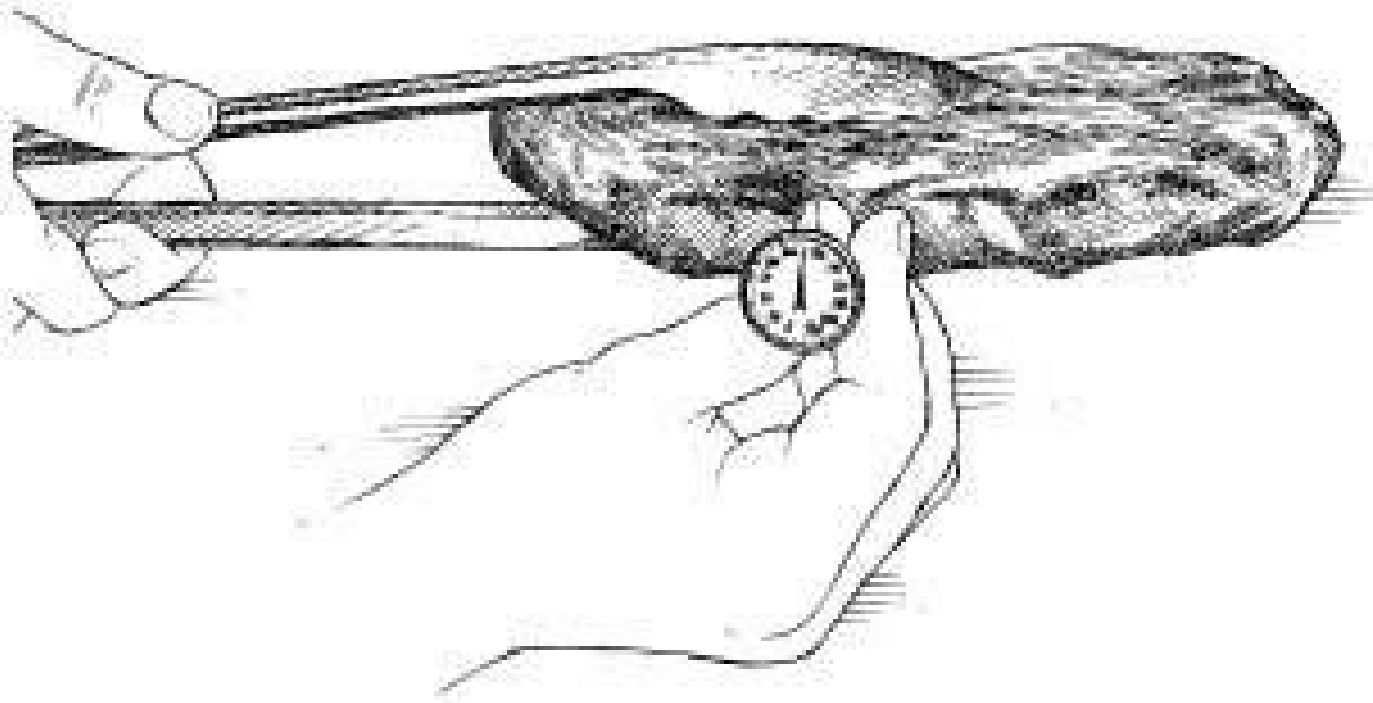

Figure 15.
An instant-read thermometer can be slid sideways into a steak to judge doneness. Push the tip of the thermometer through the edge of the steak and make sure that most of the shaft is embedded in the meat and not touching any bone. Pull the steak off the grill when it registers 120

degrees for rare; 125 to 130 degrees for medium-rare; 135 to 140 degrees for medium.

Grilled Porterhouse or T-Bone Steak

NOTE: ***Both the porterhouse and T-bone combine pieces of the strip and tenderloin. These steaks are so large it's best to have the butcher cut them thick (about $1^1/_2$ inches) and let each steak serve two people. Serve as is or top with a dollop of compound butter (see recipes) as soon as the steaks come off the grill.***

2 porterhouse or T-bone steaks, each $1^1/_2$ inches thick (about $3^1/_2$ pounds total) Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Build a two-level fire (*see* figure 4). Set grill rack in place, cover grill with lid, and let rack heat up, about 5 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, sprinkle both sides of each steak with salt and pepper to taste. Position steaks so that strip pieces are over hottest part of fire and tenderloin pieces are over cooler part of fire (*see* figure 17). Grill, uncovered, until well browned on one side, 2 to 3 minutes. Turn each steak; grill until well browned on second side, 2 to 3 minutes. (If steaks start to flame, pull them to cooler part of grill or extinguish flames.)

3. Once steaks are well browned on both

sides, slide each one to cooler part of grill. Continue grilling over medium fire to desired doneness, 5 to 6 minutes more for rare (120 degrees on instant-read thermometer), 6 to 7 minutes for medium-rare on the rare side (125 degrees), 7 to 8 minutes for medium-rare on the medium side (130 degrees), or 8 to 9 minutes for medium (135 to 140 degrees). Let steaks rest 5 minutes, cut off strip and tenderloin pieces and slice them each crosswise about 1/3 inch thick (*see* figures 18, 19, 20). Serve immediately.

VARIATION:

Tuscan Steak with Lemon and Olive Oil

Called *bistecca Fiorentina*, this dish is traditionally made with T-bone steak.

Rub each steak with 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper to taste. Grill as directed. Serve steaks with 2 lemons cut into wedges.

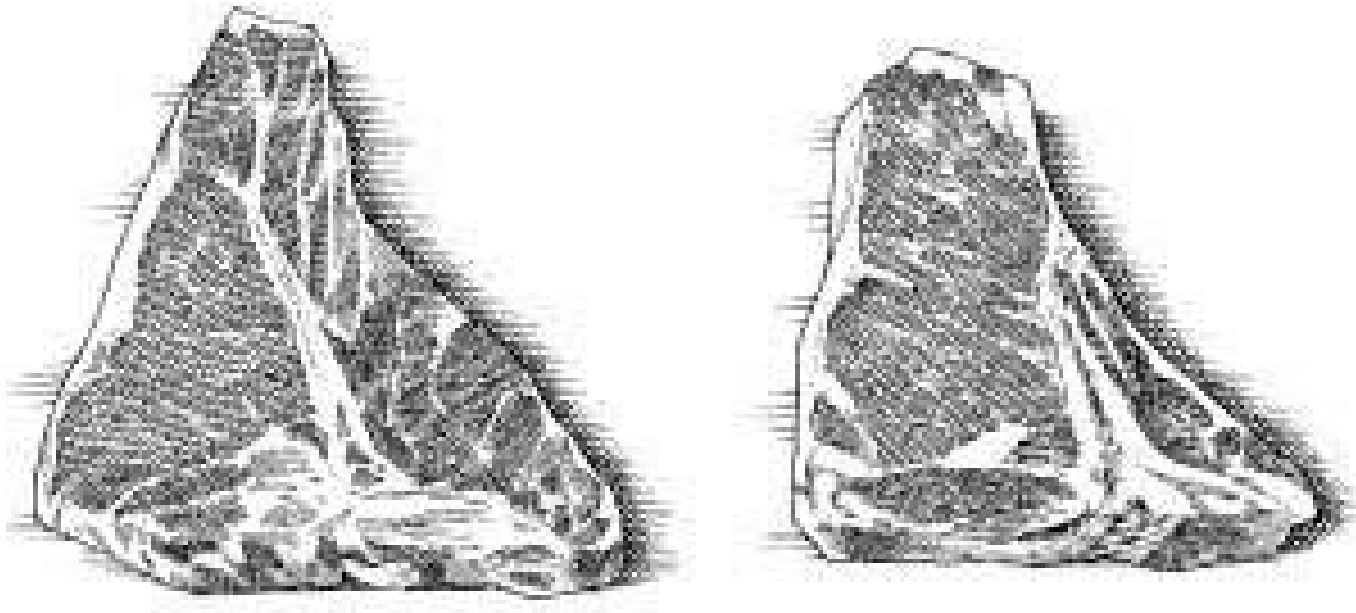

Figure 16.
The T-bone (right) combines an oblong piece of strip with a round of tenderloin that measures less than $1^{1}/_{4}$ inch in diameter. The grain of the strip piece is finer and more desirable than that of the porterhouse because it's closer to the rib (not the hip). The porterhouse combines both strip

and tenderloin, but the tenderloin section is larger.

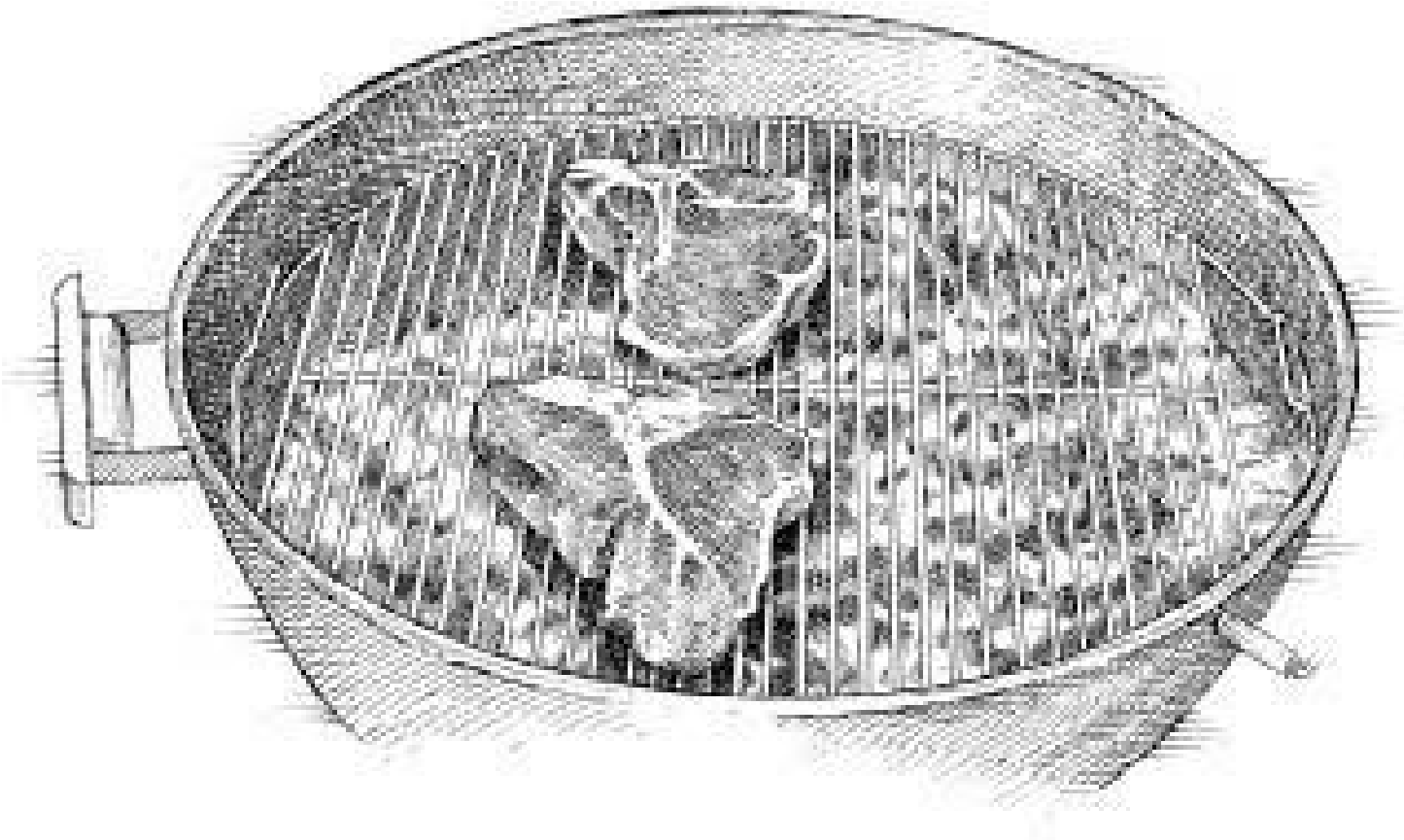

Figure 17.
Porterhouse and T-bone steaks contain portions of the delicate, buttery tenderloin as well as some of the chewier, more flavorful strip. When grilling these steaks, keep the tenderloin (the smaller portion on the left side of the bone on these steaks) over the

cooler part of the fire.

Figure 18.
Once grilled, let a porterhouse or T-bone steak rest for five minutes before slicing and dividing the meat into two serving portions. Start by slicing close to the bone to remove the strip section.

Figure 19.
Turn the steak around and cut the tenderloin section off the bone.

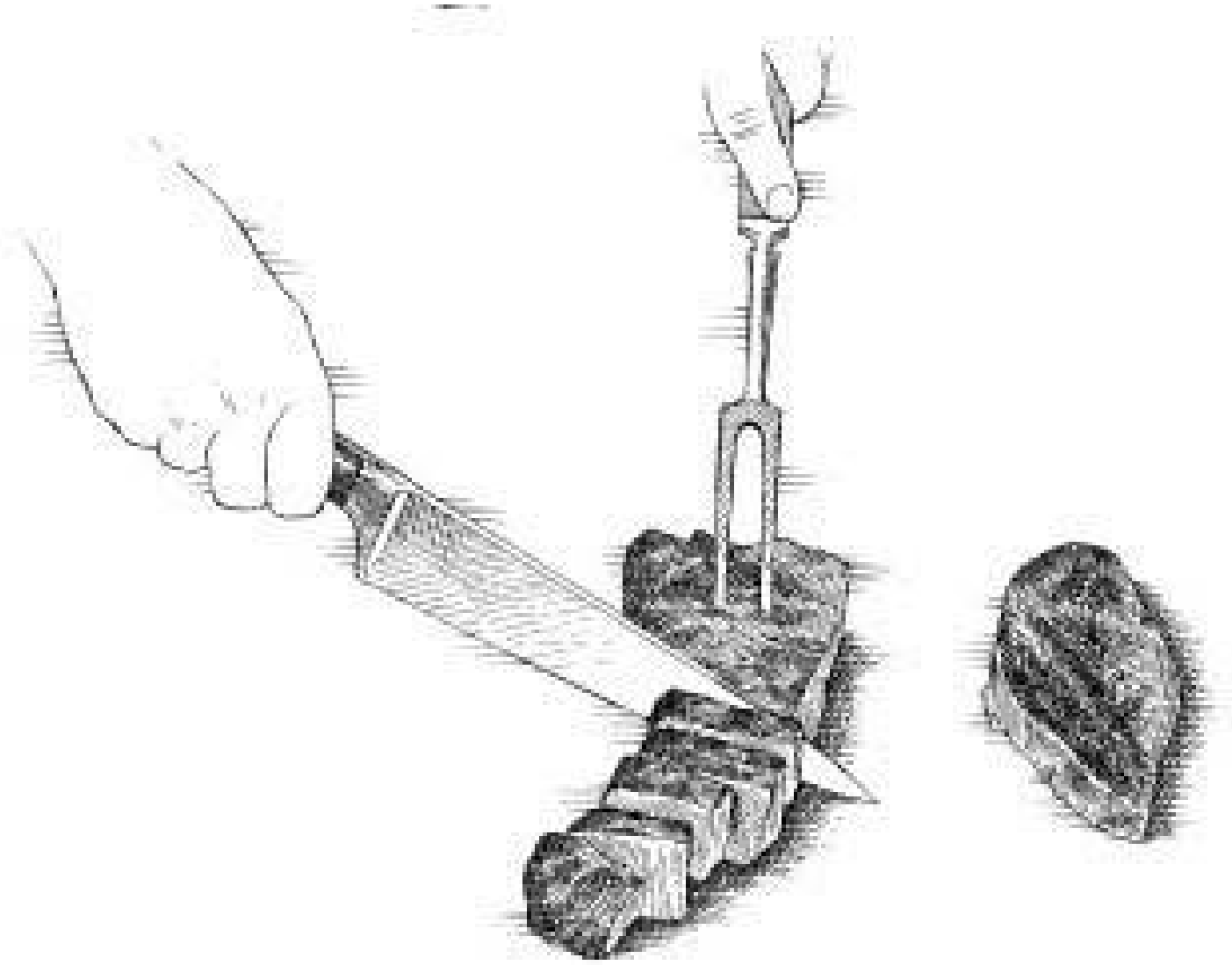

Figure 20.
Slice each piece crosswise into 1/3-inch thick portions and serve immediately.

Grilled London Broil

NOTE: ***London broil is a recipe, not a cut of meat. You take a thick steak, grill it, then slice it thinly, on a bias, across the grain. Traditionally, the cut for London broil was flank steak, which was once inexpensive but now costs upwards of $7 a pound. Thick steaks cut from the shoulder rather than the round (in our kitchen tests we found the latter to have a livery flavor and tougher texture) make a cheaper alternative, often selling for $2 or $3 a pound. This recipe can be adapted to thinner flanks. Simply grill over a single-level fire to desired doneness, 6 to 8 minutes total.***

Because the shoulder is thicker, it requires the two-level fire specified below. Do not cook past medium-rare or this lean cut will be unpalatably dry. London broil tastes best when served with a compound butter. Serves four.

$1^1/_2$–2 pounds boneless shoulder steak, about $1^1/_2$ inches thick Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Build a two-level fire (*see* figure 4). Set grill rack in place, cover grill with lid, and let rack heat up, about 5 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, sprinkle both sides of steak with salt and pepper to taste. Grill, uncovered, until well browned on one side, 2 to 3 minutes. Turn steak; grill until well browned on second side, 2 to 3 minutes.

3. Once steak is well browned on both sides, slide to cooler part of grill. Continue grilling over medium fire to desired doneness, 5 to 6 minutes more for rare (120 degrees on instant-read thermometer), 6 to 7 minutes for medium-rare on the rare side (125 degrees), or 7 to 8 minutes for medium-rare on the medium side (130 degrees). Let steak rest 5 minutes, slice thin on

bias, and serve immediately.

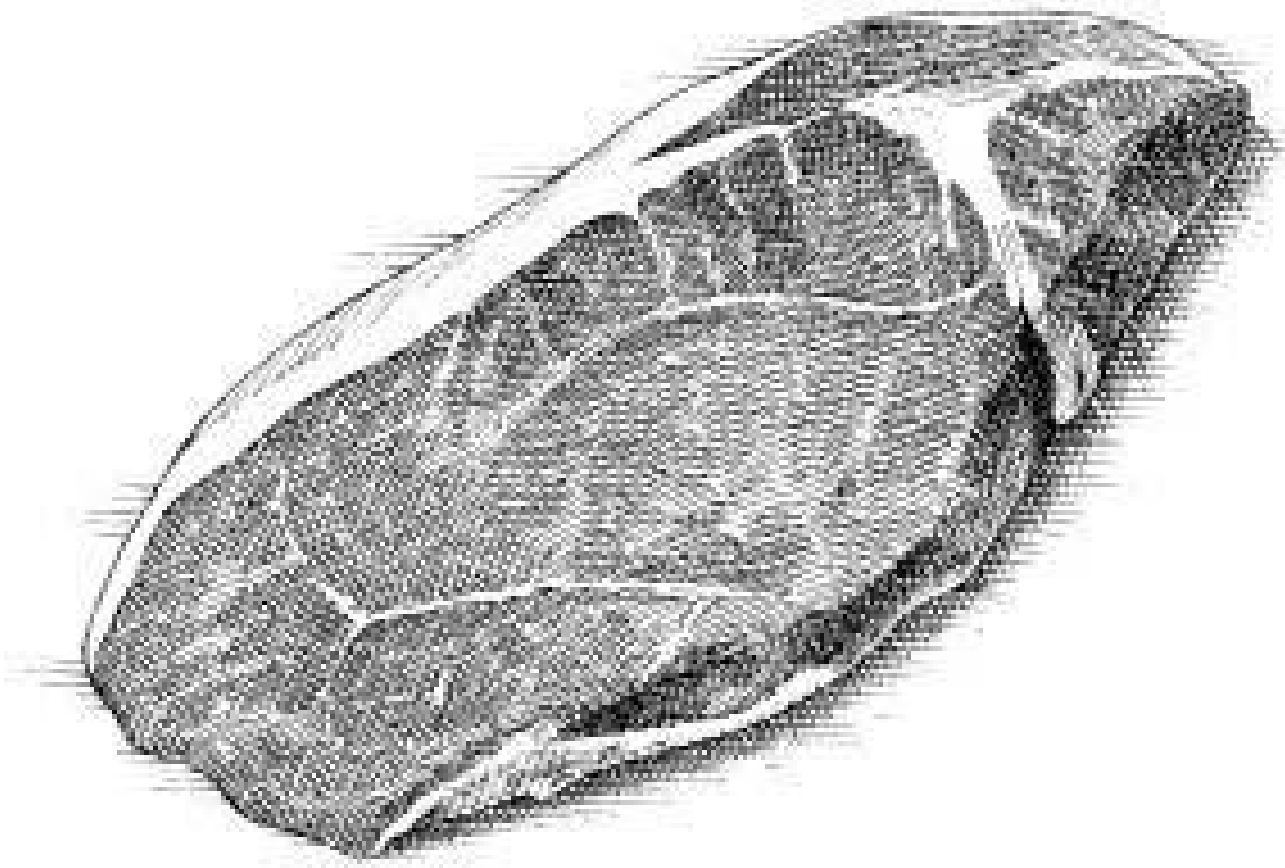

Figure 21.
A boneless shoulder steak about $1^{1}/_{2}$ inches thick makes the tenderest, most flavorful London broil when sliced thin on the bias.

Parsley Butter

NOTE: ***This recipe makes enough butter for four servings. If you like, double the recipe and freeze extra butter, wrapped tightly in plastic, for up to one month.***

2 tablespoons butter, softened
1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley leaves
1 tablespoon minced shallot, optional Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

Use fork to mash butter and parsley together in small bowl. Work in shallot

if using and salt and pepper to taste. Wrap in plastic and shape into small log. Refrigerate until needed, slicing off pieces and letting melt over hot steaks.

VARIATIONS:

Parsley-Caper Butter

Add 1 teaspoon minced capers with parsley.

Lemon-Parsley Butter

Add 1 teaspoon grated lemon zest with parsley.

Roquefort Butter

Replace 1 tablespoon butter with $^{1}/_{2}$ ounce crumbled Roquefort cheese. Omit

parsley and shallot and add $^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoon brandy along with salt and pepper.

Grilled Burgers

NOTE: ***Chuck that you grind yourself or buy ground is the key to juicy, flavorful burgers. The meat should be 80 percent lean. Serves four, with buns and toppings.***

$1\frac{1}{4}$ pounds ground chuck

$\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon salt

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Build a single-level fire (*see* figure 3). Set grill rack in place, cover grill with lid, and let rack heat up, about 5 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, break up chuck to increase surface area for seasonings. Sprinkle salt and pepper over meat; toss lightly with hands to distribute seasonings. Divide meat into four equal portions and shape into burgers (*see* figures 22 and 23).

3. Grill burgers, uncovered, over hot fire, turning once and cooking to desired doneness as follows: 3 minutes per side for rare, 4 minutes per side for medium-rare, 5 minutes on the first side and 4 minutes on second side for medium, and 5 minutes per side for well-done. Serve immediately.

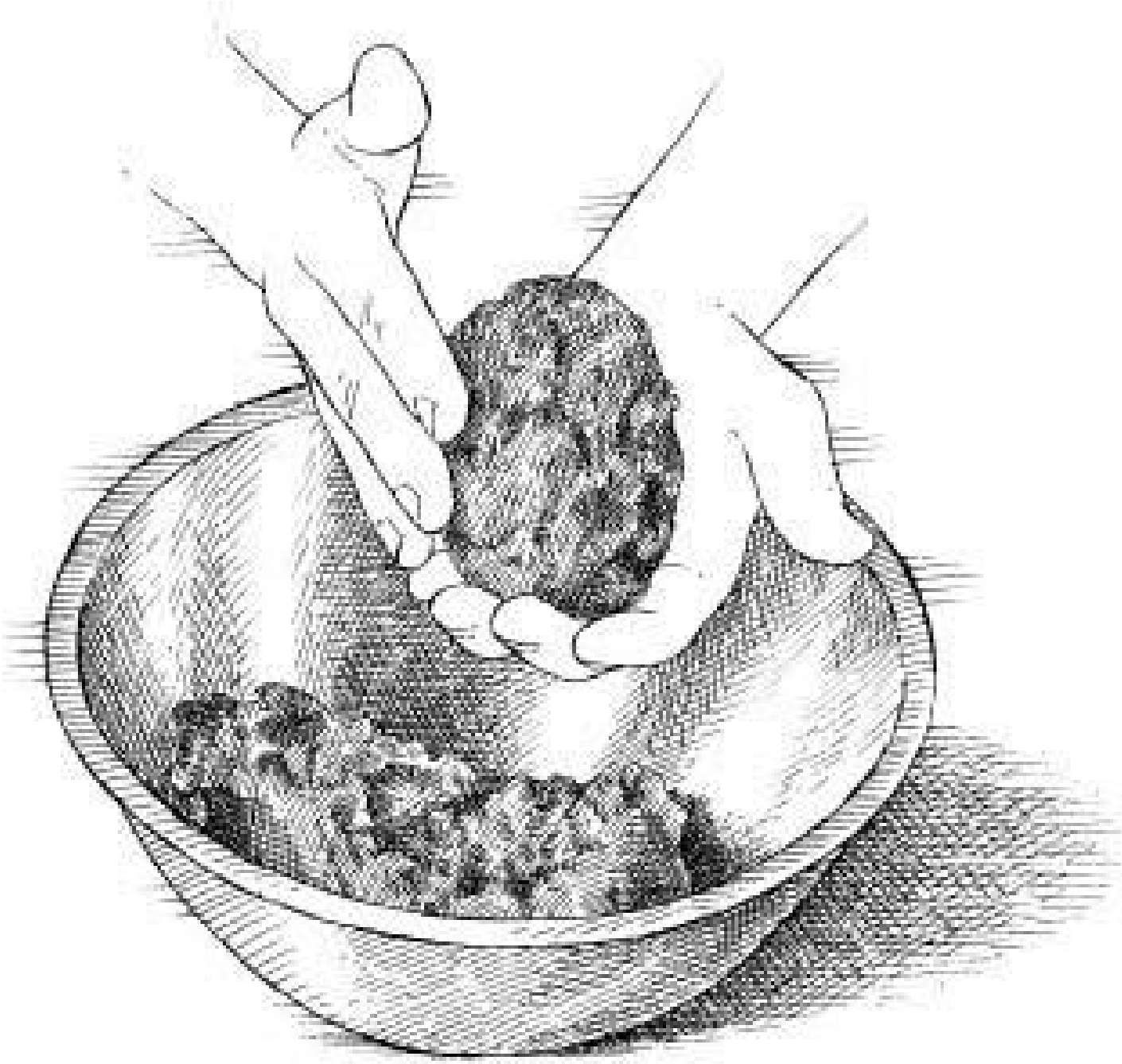

Figure 22.
With cupped hands, toss one portion of meat back and forth from hand to hand to shape into a loose ball.

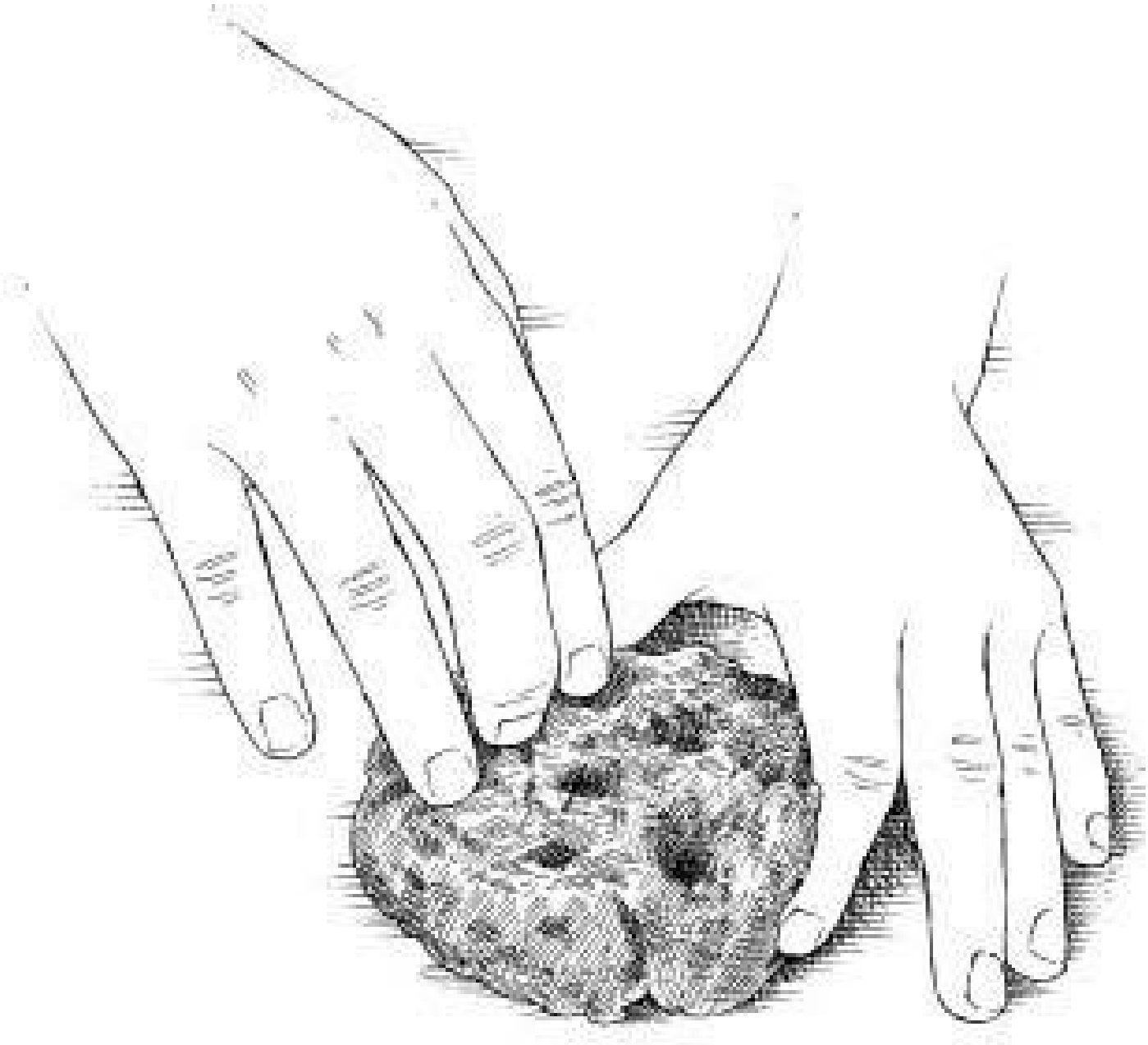

Figure 23.
Pat lightly to flatten into 1-inch-thick burger that measures $3^1/_2$ to 4 inches across. Use fingertips to create pocked, textured surface.

GRILLED PORK TENDERLOIN & CHOPS

TODAY'S LEANER PORK DOES WELL ON THE grill as long as you are careful not to overcook it. However, the tenderloin and chops can become tough and dry if cooked until thoroughly gray. This method worked for our mothers when even "lean" cuts of pork were laced with fat. But today we recommend grilling both the tenderloin and chops until the center is just tinged with a little pink (not bloody) in the center. The meat will register about 150 degrees on an instant-

read thermometer at this stage.

The tenderloin is a torpedo-shaped cut that runs along the rib bones in the loin section. It is extremely lean and notable for its lack of marbling. While tender, it can be bland and benefits greatly from assertive seasoning. We prefer to coat the tenderloin (as well as chops) with a spice or herb rub before grilling and then serve it with a salsa, which adds more flavor and moisture. While a little sweetness often accentuates the flavor of pork, a sweet rub can burn easily, so tend the grill carefully when adding sugar to the mix.

Pork chops were once much fattier and less prone to drying out. While the problem is not quite as acute as with the

tenderloin, care must be taken when cooking chops to keep them moist. When buying pork chops, look for chops that are solidly pink rather than streaked with white—the white is not fat but connective tissue, mostly elastin, which does not break down during cooking. Also, be sure to buy chops that are an inch thick. Thinner chops will dry out by the time the exterior is nicely seared.

The two "center-cut" chops (*see* figure 25) are taken from the center of the loin and are our first choice for grilling. The center rib chop looks like a miniature beef rib and the center loin chop looks like a miniature T-bone or porterhouse steak. Avoid cuts from the end of the

loin, which tend to be tough and sinewy. Like the tenderloin, chops can be a bit dry and bland when simply oiled and seasoned with salt and pepper. Serve them with salsa and rub with spices or herbs for extra flavor and moisture.

Grilled Pork Tenderloin

NOTE: ***Tenderloins come two to a package, each weighing a little less than a pound and serving four to six depending on the side dishes. Invariably one tenderloin is smaller than the other and will require 2 or 3 minutes less time on the grill. We like pork cooked medium, just until a tinge of pink remains in the center. You may cook pork until well done (about 160 degrees), but it will be a bit drier. Season with salt and pepper as directed below or coat with a spice or herb rub. Either way, serve with a salsa.***

2 pork tenderloins (about 2 pounds total), silver skin trimmed (*see* figure 24)

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Build a single-level fire (*see* figure 3). Set grill rack in place, cover grill with lid, and let rack heat up, about 5 minutes.

2. Rub tenderloins with oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper to taste. Grill over medium-hot fire, turning several times to make sure all four sides are browned, about 4 minutes per side. Cover

tenderloins with disposable aluminum roasting pan (*see* figure 29). Cook, turning once, until meat is tinged with pink in center or internal temperature registers 150 degrees, 5 to 7 minutes. Let tenderloins rest for 5 minutes, slice crosswise into 1-inch-thick pieces, and serve immediately with salsa or other sauce.

Figure 24.
To remove the silver skin, slip a paring knife between the silver skin and the muscle fibers. Angle the knife slightly upward and use a gentle back-and-forth sawing action.

Grilled Pork Chops

NOTE: ***We prefer center loin or center rib chops (see figure 25)*** **that are an inch thick for grilling. They can be seasoned with just salt and pepper, but we prefer them when coated with a spice or herb rub and served with salsa. Serves four.**

4 center loin or center rib pork chops, each 1-inch thick (about 2 pounds total)
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Build a two-level fire (*see* figure 4). Set grill rack in place, cover grill with lid, and let rack heat up, about 5 minutes.

2. Rub chops with oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper to taste. Grill over medium-hot fire, turning once, until both sides are browned, about 6 minutes.

3. Slide chops to cooler part of fire and cover with disposable aluminum roasting pan (*see* figure 29). Grill over medium-low fire, turning once, until meat is tinged with pink in center, 8 to 10 minutes. Serve immediately.

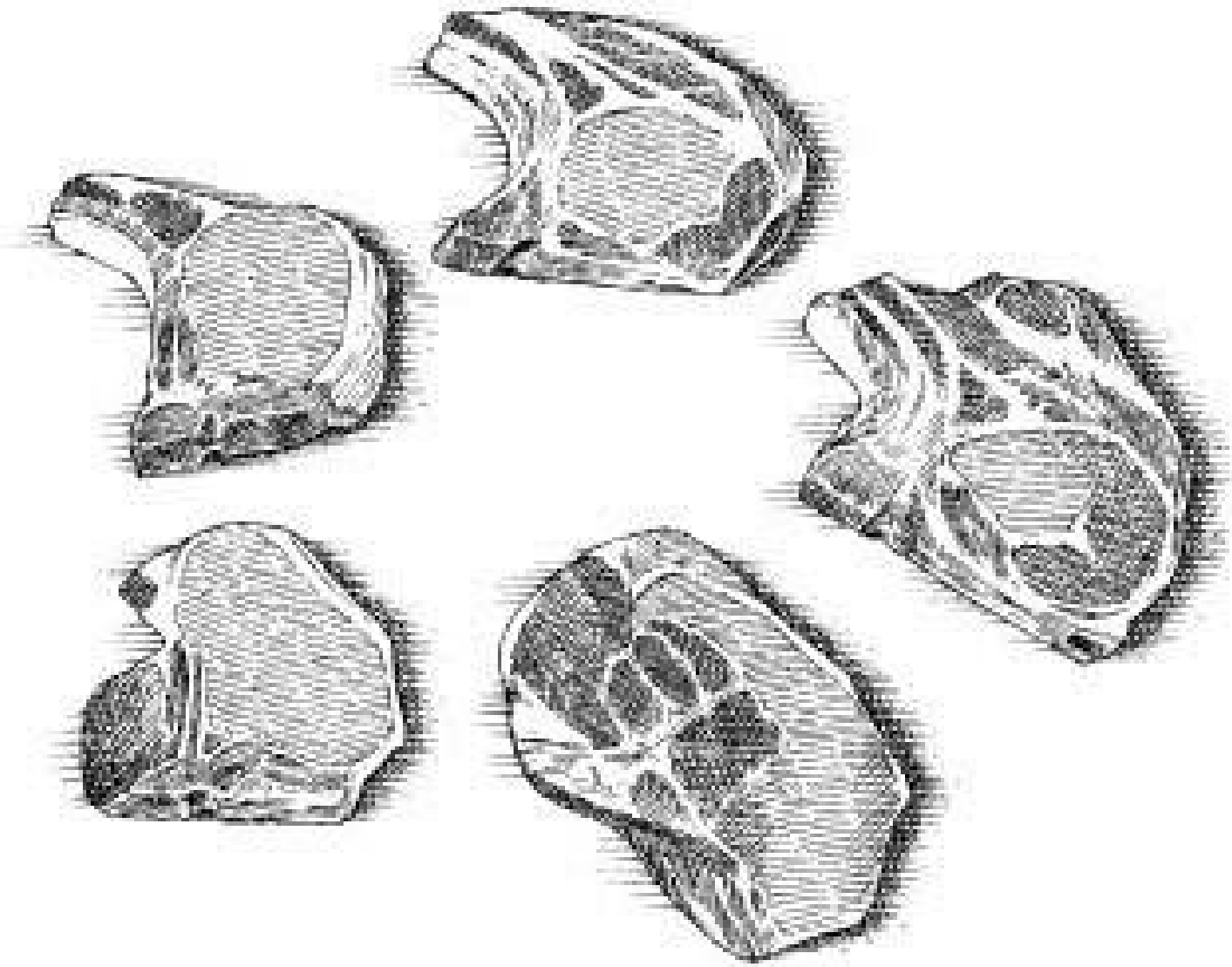

Figure 25.
There are five kinds of pork chops regularly available in supermarkets and butcher shops. Clockwise from the top, the rib end, the rib end blade, the sirloin

end, the center loin, and the center rib. We prefer the center loin and center rib chops, which are meatier and less chewy than the rest.

Spice Rub for Pork

NOTE: ***Because this rub contains sugar, make sure to mind the grill and turn the pork often to keep the sugar from burning.***

1 tablespoon fennel seeds
1 tablespoon cumin seeds
1 tablespoon coriander seeds
$^3/_4$ teaspoon ground cinnamon
$1^1/_2$ teaspoons dry mustard
$1^1/_2$ teaspoons brown sugar

INSTRUCTIONS:

Toast seeds in small skillet over medium heat, shaking pan occasionally to prevent burning, until first wisps of smoke

appear, 3 to 5 minutes. Cool to room temperature, mix with remaining ingredients, and grind to powder in spice grinder. Rub mixture over oiled and seasoned pork before grilling.

VARIATION:

Herb Rub for Pork

Grind following ingredients in spice grinder: $1^1/_2$ teaspoons each dried thyme, dried rosemary, and black peppercorns; 2 bay leaves, crumbled; 2 whole cloves or allspice berries; and 1 teaspoon salt. Do not sprinkle pork with salt or pepper.

Pineapple Salsa

NOTE: ***This sweet salsa complements grilled pork nicely. The moisture also keeps the pork from tasting dry.***

1/4 small pineapple, peeled, cored, and dice d

1 barely ripe banana, peeled and diced

1/2 cup seedless green grapes, halved or quartered

1/2 firm avocado, peeled and cut into 3/8-inch dice

4 teaspoons lime juice

1 jalapeno chile, stemmed, seeded, and minced

1 teaspoon minced fresh

oregano leaves Salt

INSTRUCTIONS:

Combine all ingredients including salt to taste in medium bowl. Let stand at room temperature for 30 minutes. Serve alongside grilled pork tenderloin or chops.

VARIATION:

Peach Salsa

Combine following ingredients and refrigerate for at least 1 hour or up to 4 days: 2 chopped peaches, 1 diced red bell pepper, 1 small diced red onion, $^1/_4$ cup chopped parsley, 1 minced garlic clove, $^1/_4$ cup pineapple juice, 6

tablespoons lime juice, 1 minced jalapeno, and salt to taste.

GRILLED LAMB CHOPS

GRILLED LAMB CHOPS DON'T HAVE TO BE A rare (and expensive) summer treat. True, loin and rib chops (together, the eight rib chops form the cut known as rack of lamb) can cost upwards of $12 a pound. But we love the meaty flavor and chewy (but not tough) texture of shoulder chops. We also like the fact that they cost just $4 per pound.

In a side-by-side taste test, we grilled loin, rib, and shoulder chops to medium-rare and let them stand about 5 minutes before tasting. The rib chop was the

most refined of the three, with a mild, almost sweet flavor and tender texture. The loin chop had a slightly stronger flavor; the texture was a bit firmer (but not chewier) than the rib chop. The shoulder chop had a distinctly gutsier flavor than the other two. While it was not at all tough, it was chewier. If you like the flavor of lamb (and we do) and are trying to keep within a budget, then try shoulder chops.

We also tried a second test in which we grilled the chops to medium, a stage at which many people prefer lamb. Both the rib and loin chops were dry and less flavorful and juicy than they were at medium-rare. The shoulder chop held its own, in both taste and texture, displaying

another advantage besides price.

Shoulder chops can range in thickness from $^1/_2$ to 1 inch. We prefer the thicker chops and you should ask your butcher to cut them for you if necessary. Loin and rib chops are usually thicker, often close to $1^1/_2$ inches. The added thickness means that these chops should be cooked over a two-level fire to bring the inside up to temperature without charring the exterior. A two-level fire also makes sense as lamb tends to flame and the cooler part of the grill is the perfect place to let flames die down. Even when making a single-level fire for thinner shoulder chops, we often leave part of the grill bottom uncovered with coals so

that we have a place to slide the chops if the flames become too intense.

Grilled Shoulder Lamb Chops

NOTE: ***Grill shoulder lamb chops over a very hot fire. Half-inch-thick chops, which many supermarkets sell, require about 30 seconds less cooking time per side. Serves four.***

4 shoulder lamb chops (blade or round bone), about $^{3}/_{4}$ inch thick

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Build a single-level fire (*see* figure

3). Set grill rack in place, cover grill with lid, and let rack heat up, about 5 minutes.

2. Rub chops with oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper to taste. Grill over hot fire until bottom of each chop is well browned, about 2 minutes. (If chops start to flame, pull off heat for a moment or extinguish flames with squirt bottle.) Turn each chop and cook about 2 minutes more for medium-rare or $2^1/_2$ minutes for medium. Serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Grilled Lamb Chops with Garlic-Rosemary Marinade

Stir 2 large garlic cloves, put through a

press or pureed, 1 tablespoon minced fresh rosemary leaves, and pinch cayenne into oil. Rub chops with paste; let stand at least 30 minutes. (Chops can be refrigerated overnight.) Grill as directed.

Grilled Lamb Chops with Soy-Shallot Marinade

Stir $^{1}/_{4}$ cup minced shallot or scallion, 2 tablespoons each minced fresh thyme and parsley leaves, 3 tablespoons lemon juice, and 2 tablespoons soy sauce into oil. Marinate chops in mixture for at least 20 minutes, or up to 1 hour. Grill as directed.

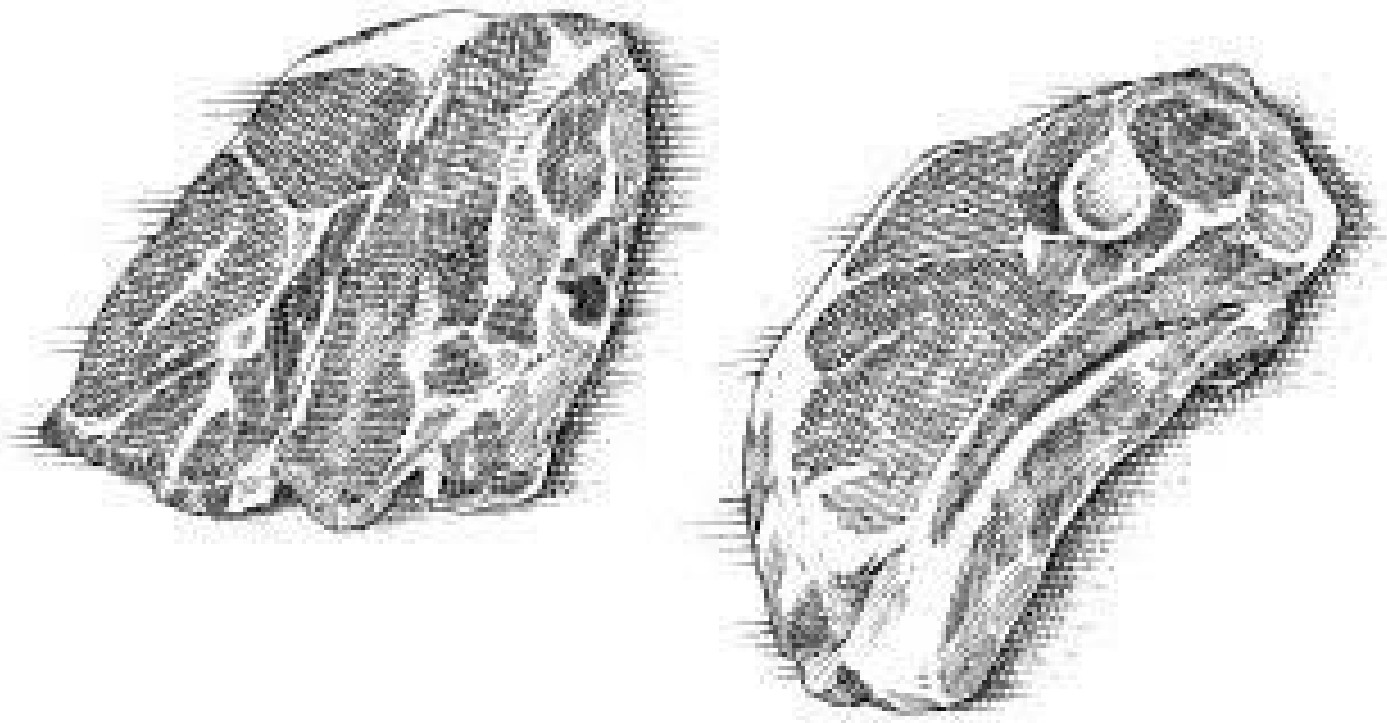

Figure 26.
There are two kinds of shoulder chops. The blade chop is roughly rectangular in shape and contains a piece of the chine bone and a thin piece of the blade bone. The arm or round bone chop (right) is leaner and contains a round cross-section of the arm bone so that the chop

looks a bit like a mini ham steak. The extra fat in the blade chop melts on the grill, flavoring and moistening the meat. The arm bone chop has a tiny line of riblets on the side of each chop, which are delicious. Either chop takes well to grilling.

Grilled Loin or Rib Lamb Chops

NOTE: ***Because loin and rib chops are thicker than shoulder chops, they must first be seared over a hot fire and then cooked through on a cooler part of the grill. These chops are smaller than shoulder chops and you will need two for each serving. Use either of the marinades with these chops.***

8 loin or frenched rib lamb chops, each about $1^1/_4$ inches thick

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Build a two-level fire (*see* figure 4). Set grill rack in place, cover grill with lid, and let rack heat up, about 5 minutes.

2. Rub chops with oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper to taste. Grill over hot fire, turning once, for 4 minutes. (If chops start to flame, pull off heat for a moment or extinguish flames with squirt bottle.) Move chops to cooler part of grill and continue grilling over medium fire, turning once, until desired doneness, about 6 minutes for rare and 8 minutes for medium. Serve immediately.

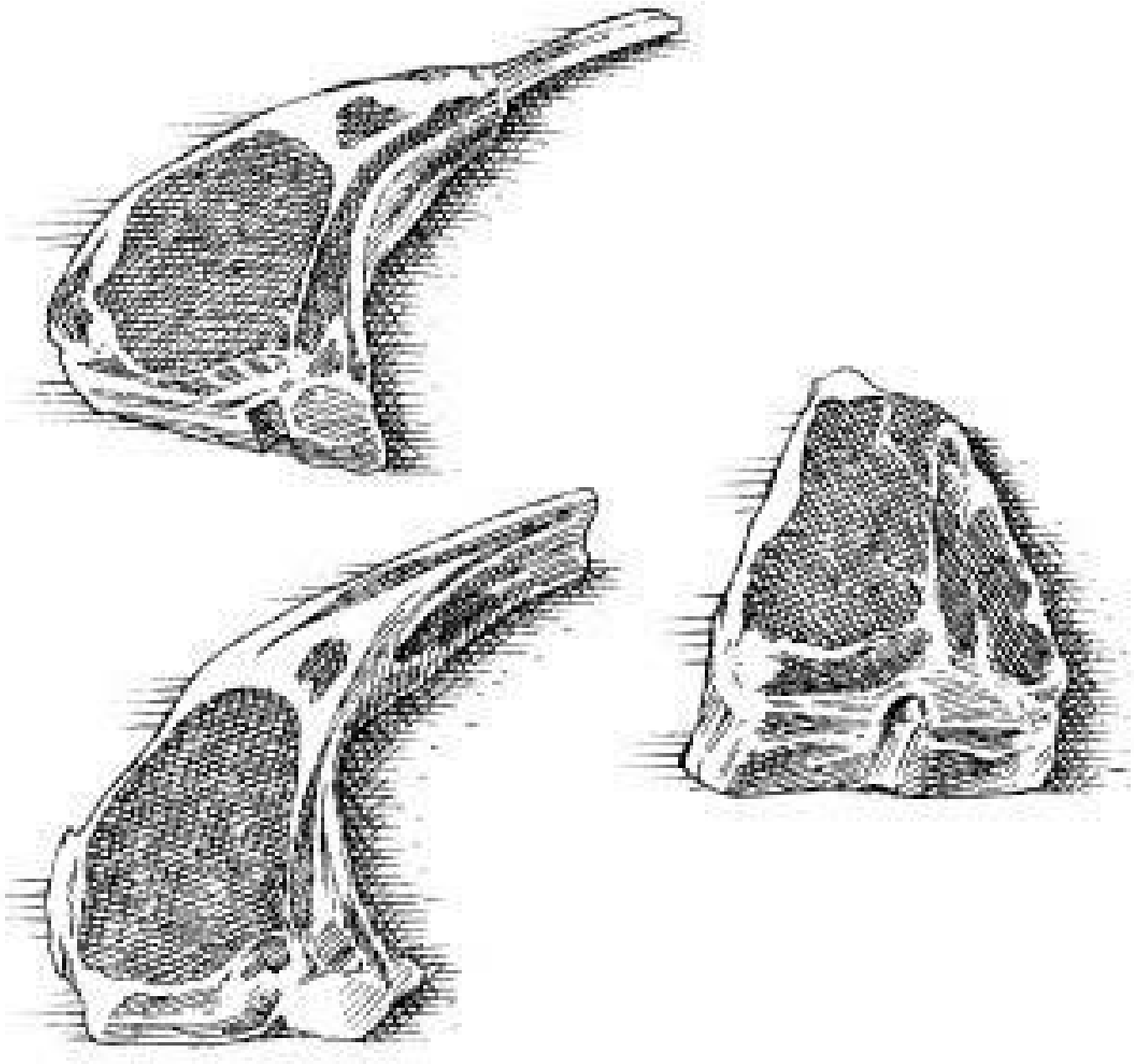

Figure 27.
Rib chops often contain a lot of fat on the bone. Have your butcher "french" the chop by scraping away this fat. Like a T-

bone steak, a loin chop (right) has meat on either side of the bone. The small piece on the right side of the bone is very tender and fine-grained. The larger piece on the left side is chewier.

GRILLED CHICKEN

AS SOON AS OUR TESTING STARTED, WE REALIZED we needed to develop separate methods for dark and white meat parts. The higher fat content in thighs and legs makes flare-ups a greater problem, while the breasts have a tendency to dry out and need special handling.

We quickly dismissed partially cooking before or after grilling, since poaching or microwaving yielded dry, cottony meat. Finishing grilled parts in a hot oven is cumbersome and the grill flavor is not strong enough.

We tried the method recommended by the manufacturers of many covered grills: searing chicken over a hot fire, then moving it to a medium fire, putting the cover on, and cooking until done. This method works well, but the residue on the inside of the cover imparts an undesirable flavor.

Next, we tried searing the chicken over a medium-hot fire and then moving it to a medium fire to finish cooking. This approach was fine for thinner thighs and legs. However, we found that breasts need to be moved to an area with no coals and covered with a disposable pan (no off flavors here) to cook through.

Marinating the chicken does not add much flavor and causes constant flare-ups during the initial searing period. Rubbing the chicken with a spice rub prior to grilling proved far more satisfactory. Barbecue sauces often contain some sweetener and can burn if brushed on the chicken before cooking. We found it best to brush them on when cooking was almost done As a final test, we tried brining the chicken before grilling it. The brine penetrated the chicken, seasoning it and slightly firming up its texture before grilling.

You can grill dark and white meat parts together, if you like. Set up a three-level fire with most of the coals on one

side of the grill, some coals in the middle, and no coals on the opposite side. Sear all the chicken parts over the hottest part of the fire, finish cooking the legs and thighs over the medium fire in the middle, and move the seared breasts to the coolest part of the grill and cover with a disposable pan.

Grilled Chicken Thighs or Legs

NOTE: ***Brining improves the chicken's flavor, but if you're short on time, skip step 1 and season the chicken generously with salt and pepper before cooking. Add flavorings or during cooking: Rub the chicken parts with a spice rub or paste before they go on the grill or brush them with barbecue sauce*** **during the final 2 minutes of cooking. Serves four.**

8 chicken thighs or 4 whole legs

$^{3}/_{4}$ cup kosher salt or 6 tablespoons table salt

$^{3}/_{4}$ cup sugar

Ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Trim overhanging fat and skin from chicken pieces; this will prevent burning. In gallon-size zipper-lock plastic bag, dissolve salt and sugar in 1 quart of water. Add chicken, seal bag, and refrigerate until fully seasoned, about $1^{1}/_{2}$ hours.

2. Build a two-level fire (*see* figure 4). Set grill rack in place, cover grill with lid, and let rack heat up, about 5 minutes.

3. Meanwhile, remove chicken from brine, rinse well, dry thoroughly with paper towels, and season with pepper to

taste or one of the spice rubs or pastes.

4. Cook chicken, uncovered, over medium-hot fire until seared, about 1 to 2 minutes on each side. Move chicken to medium fire; continue to grill uncovered, turning occasionally, until dark and fully cooked, 12 to 16 minutes for thighs, 16 to 20 minutes for whole legs. To test for doneness, either peek into thickest part of chicken with tip of small knife (you should see no redness near the bone) or check internal temperature at thickest part with instant-read thermometer, which should register 165 degrees. Transfer to serving platter. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Grilled Bone-In Chicken Breasts

NOTE: ***If the fire flares because of dripping fat or a gust of wind, move the chicken to the area without coals until the flames die down. See note about flavoring chicken and omitting the brining step when pressed for time. Serves four.***

3/4 cup kosher salt or 6 tablespoons table salt

3/4 cup sugar

4 split chicken breasts (bone-in, skin-on), 10 to 12 ounces each

Ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. In gallon-size zipper-lock plastic bag, dissolve salt and sugar in 1 quart of water. Add chicken, seal bag, and refrigerate until fully seasoned, about $1^{1}/_{2}$ hours.

2. Build a two-level fire but do not spread coals out over half of grill (*see* figure 28). Set grill rack in place, cover grill with lid, and let rack heat up, about 5 minutes.

3. Meanwhile, remove chicken from brine, rinse well, dry thoroughly with paper towels, and season with pepper to taste or one of the spice rubs or pastes.

4. Cook chicken, uncovered, over

medium-hot fire until well browned, 2 to 3 minutes per side. Move chicken to area with no fire and cover with disposable aluminum roasting pan; continue to cook, skin side up, 10 minutes (*see* figure 29). Turn and cook 5 minutes more. To test for doneness, either peek into thickest part of chicken with tip of small knife (you should see no redness near the bone) or check internal temperature at thickest part with instant-read thermometer, which should register 160 degrees. Transfer to serving platter. Serve warm or at room temperature.

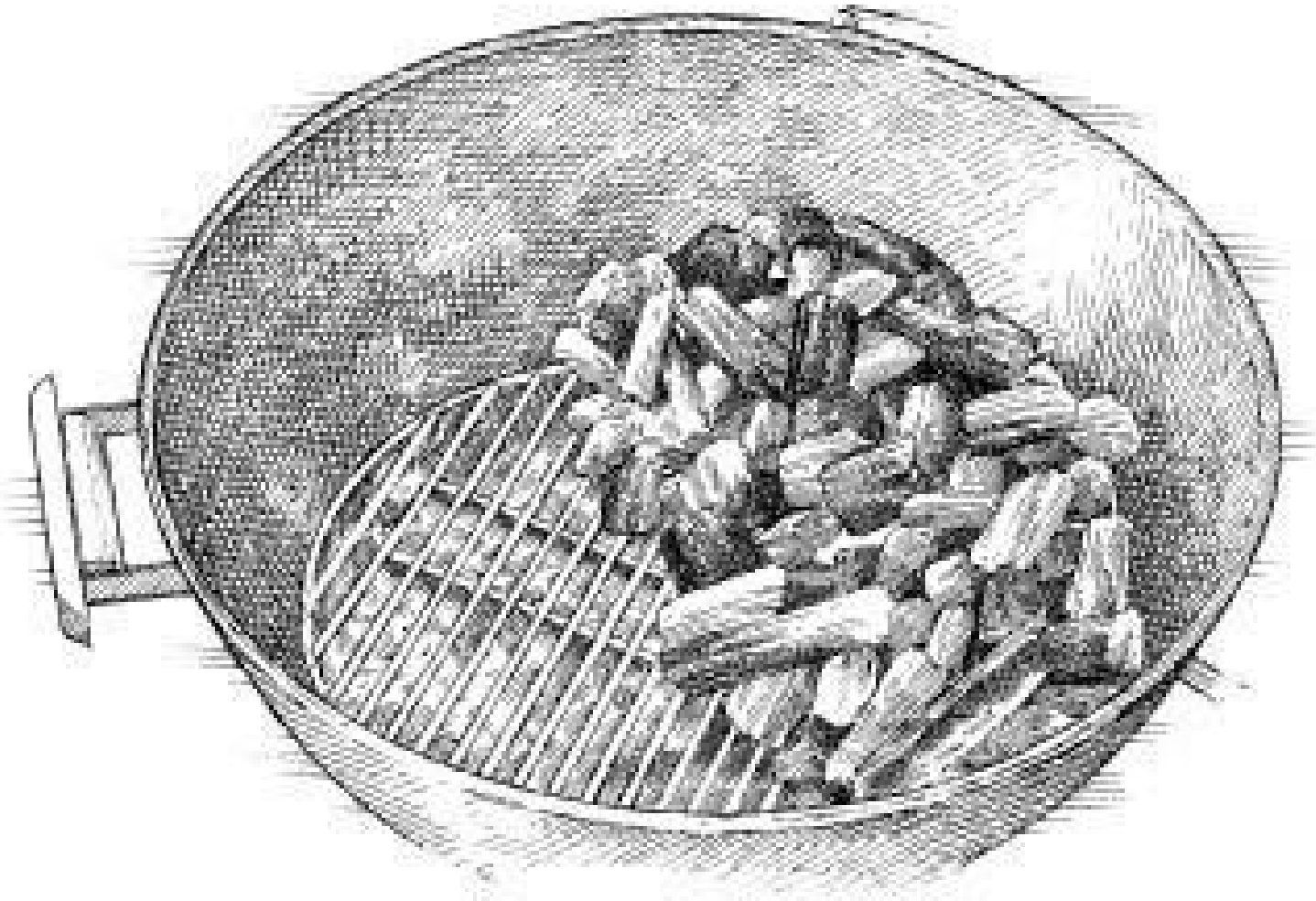

Figure 28.
Thick bone-in chicken breasts are so susceptible to burning on the grill that we build an unusual two-level fire with all the coals piled high on half the grill (for searing) and the remaining part

of the grill empty (for cooking through).

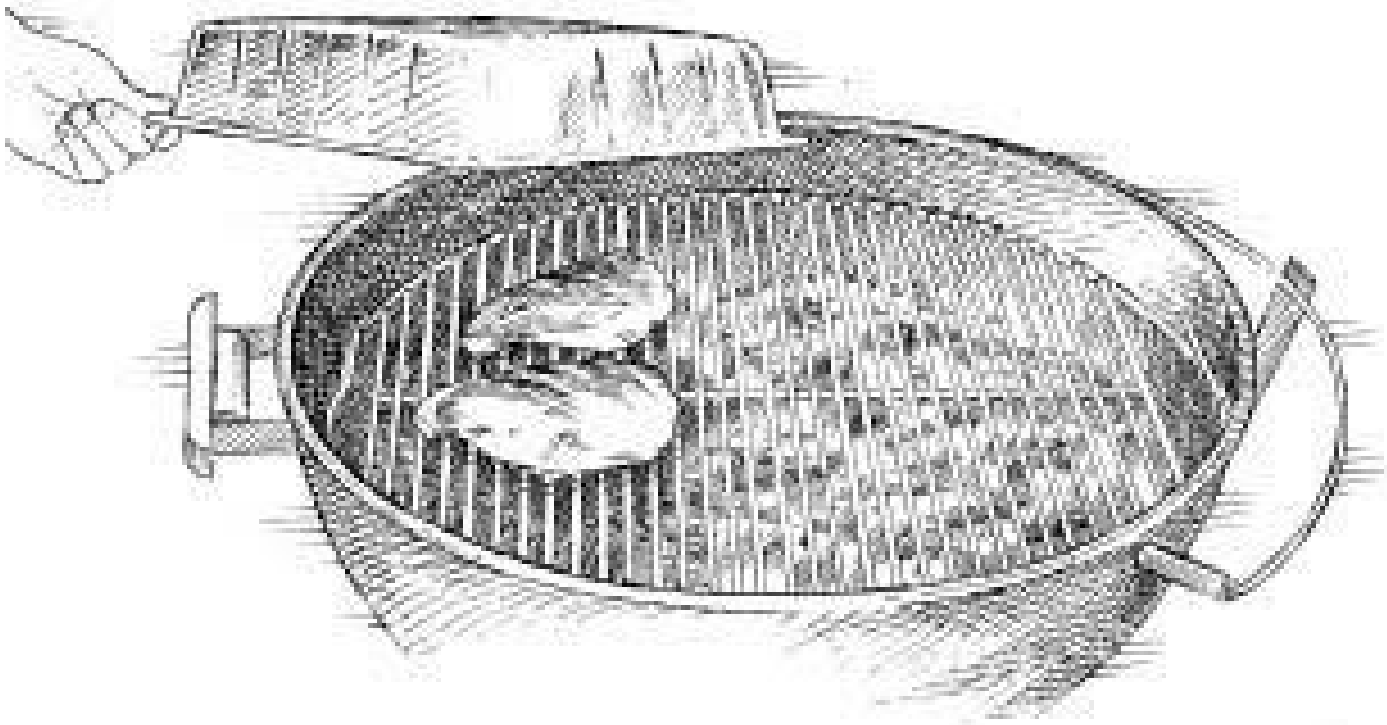

Figure 29.
To trap heat and speed up the cooking process over the cool part of the fire, cover the chicken breasts with a disposable roasting pan. The pan creates an oven-like effect and protects the skin from further coloring. We also use this technique with pork tenderloin and chops.

Basic Spice Rub for Chicken

NOTE: ***Use this rub (or the variation) prior to grilling. Makes about $^1/_2$ cup, enough to coat a single recipe of either dark or white meat parts.***

2 tablespoons ground cumin
2 tablespoons curry powder
2 tablespoons chili powder
1 tablespoon ground allspice
1 tablespoon ground black pepper
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

INSTRUCTIONS:

Combine all ingredients in small bowl.

Rub mixture over brined and dried chicken parts before grilling.

VARIATION:

Garam Masala Spice Rub

Toast following ingredients in dry skillet until fragrant, about 2 minutes, and then grind to powder in spice grinder: 2 tablespoons each fennel seeds, anise seeds, cardamom pods, and black peppercorns; 1 teaspoon whole cloves; and 1 cinnamon stick, broken into several pieces.

Basic Spice Paste for Chicken with Citrus and Cilantro

NOTE: ***Makes about 1/3 cup, enough to season a single recipe of either dark or white meat parts.***

1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon chili powder
1 teaspoon paprika
1 teaspoon ground coriander
2 tablespoons orange juice
1 tablespoon lime juice
1 tablespoon olive oil
1 garlic clove, peeled
2 tablespoons fresh cilantro leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

Puree all ingredients in food processor or blender until smooth. Rub paste over brined and dried chicken parts before grilling.

VARIATION:

Asian Spice Paste

Replace spices, juices, and olive oil with 1 tablespoon minced fresh chile, 1 tablespoon chopped fresh gingerroot, 2 tablespoons soy sauce, and 2 tablespoons peanut oil.

Basic Barbecue Sauce

NOTE: ***This recipe makes about 3 cups, enough for several batches of chicken.***

2 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 medium onion, minced
1 can (8 ounces) tomato sauce
1 can (28 ounces) whole tomatoes with juice
3/4 cup distilled white vinegar
1/4 cup packed dark brown sugar
2 tablespoons molasses
1 tablespoon paprika
1 tablespoon chili powder
2 teaspoons liquid smoke,

optional

1 teaspoon salt

2 teaspoons ground black pepper

$^1/_4$ cup orange juice

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oil in large, heavy-bottomed saucepan over medium heat. Add onion and sauté, stirring frequently, until golden brown, 7 to 10 minutes. Add remaining ingredients. Bring to boil, reduce heat to lowest possible setting, and simmer, uncovered, until thickened, 2 to $2^1/_2$ hours.

2. Purée sauce, in batches if necessary, in food processor or blender. Transfer to

airtight container. (Can be refrigerated for 2 weeks.)

3. Brush chicken parts with sauce about 2 minutes before they are done, turning and brushing again after 1 minute.

VARIATIONS:

Barbecue Sauce with Mexican Flavors

To completed and cooled sauce, add $1^1/_2$ teaspoons ground cumin, $1^1/_2$ teaspoons chili powder, 6 tablespoons lime juice, and 3 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro leaves.

Barbecue Sauce with Asian Flavors

To completed and cooled sauce, add 1 tablespoon minced fresh gingerroot, 6

tablespoons soy sauce, 6 tablespoons rice wine vinegar, 3 tablespoons sugar, and $1^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons Asian sesame oil.

GRILLED SEAFOOD

SALMON IS THE EASIEST FISH TO GRILL BECAUSE it is oily, and therefore harder to overcook. However, salmon often sticks to the grill and tears. Our testing revealed that a medium-hot fire browns without burning and, more importantly, creates the necessary crust so that the salmon can be flipped easily. Oiling the skin does not keep it from sticking and can cause flare-ups. We prefer to rub the grill grate with a wad of paper towels dipped in vegetable oil before cooking any fish.

Center-cut fillets are almost always $1^1/_2$ inches thick and ideal for grilling; thinner pieces cut from the tail tend to overcook, and thick pieces from the head can take too long to cook through. The grill cover can impart a smoky, fatty flavor to the fish, so leave it off.

Tuna and swordfish have much less fat than salmon, so drying out is a real threat on the grill. By the time these steaks are seared, the inside can be dry and unappetizingly fishy, especially if the steaks are thin. We found a hot fire will produce well-seared fish that is moist inside.

If you want these fish rare or medium-rare, they must be cut about $1^1/_2$ inches

thick. But you can't always get thick steaks. The standard supermarket cut is $^3/_4$ to 1 inch thick. By the time a piece of tuna or swordfish this thin is seared, the fish is overcooked. Something must be done to thin-cut tuna and swordfish before it hits the grill. After testing various marinades, we found that soaking the fish in olive oil does the best job of keeping the texture moist and luscious, even in thin steaks cooked to medium and beyond.

According to the food scientists we spoke with, the oil penetrates and coats the strands of protein in tuna and swordfish so that the fish feels moist in the mouth, even after most of the

moisture has been cooked out. Oils high in emulsifiers—such as mono- and di-glycerides—penetrate protein more quickly than oils containing less of these agents. Extra-virgin olive oil contains both these emulsifiers and also adds flavor to the fish.

Grilled Salmon

NOTE: ***If your fillets are less than $1^1/_2$ inches thick, decrease the grilling time by roughly 30 seconds per side. To test fillets for doneness, either peek into the salmon with the tip of a small knife, or remove the salmon from the grill and squeeze both sides of the fillet gently with your fingertips (raw salmon is squishy; medium-rare salmon is firm, but not hard). Serves four.***

Vegetable oil for grill grate

4 center-cut salmon fillets, each 6 to 7 ounces and $1^1/_2$ inches thick, pin bones removed

(*see* figures 30 and 31) Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Build a single-level fire (*see* figure 3). Set grill rack in place, cover grill with lid, and let rack heat up, about 5 minutes. Rub cooking grate with oil-dipped wad of paper towels (*see* figure 32).

2. Generously sprinkle each side of fillets with salt and pepper. Place fillets skin side down on grill. Grill over medium-hot fire until skin shrinks and separates from flesh and turns black, 2 to 3 minutes. Flip fillets gently with long-handled tongs or spatula. Grill until

fillets are opaque throughout, yet translucent at very center, 3 to 4 minutes. Serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Grilled Salmon with Mustard Glaze

Mix 2 tablespoons each dry mustard and sugar with 2 teaspoons water to make thick paste. Sprinkle fish with salt and pepper and spread paste over flesh side of fillets. Grill as directed, drizzling with extra-virgin olive oil before serving.

Grilled Salmon with Indian Flavors and Mango Chutney

For marinade, mix 2 tablespoons vegetable oil, 2 tablespoons grated fresh

gingerroot, $1^1/_2$ teaspoons each ground cumin, coriander, and salt, and $^1/_4$ teaspoon cayenne pepper in shallow bowl. Marinate salmon while coals are heating and do not sprinkle with salt and pepper. For chutney, mix 1 ripe mango cut into $^1/_2$-inch dice, 3 tablespoons lemon juice, and 1 tablespoon chopped fresh cilantro leaves in small bowl. Grill as directed and serve with chutney.

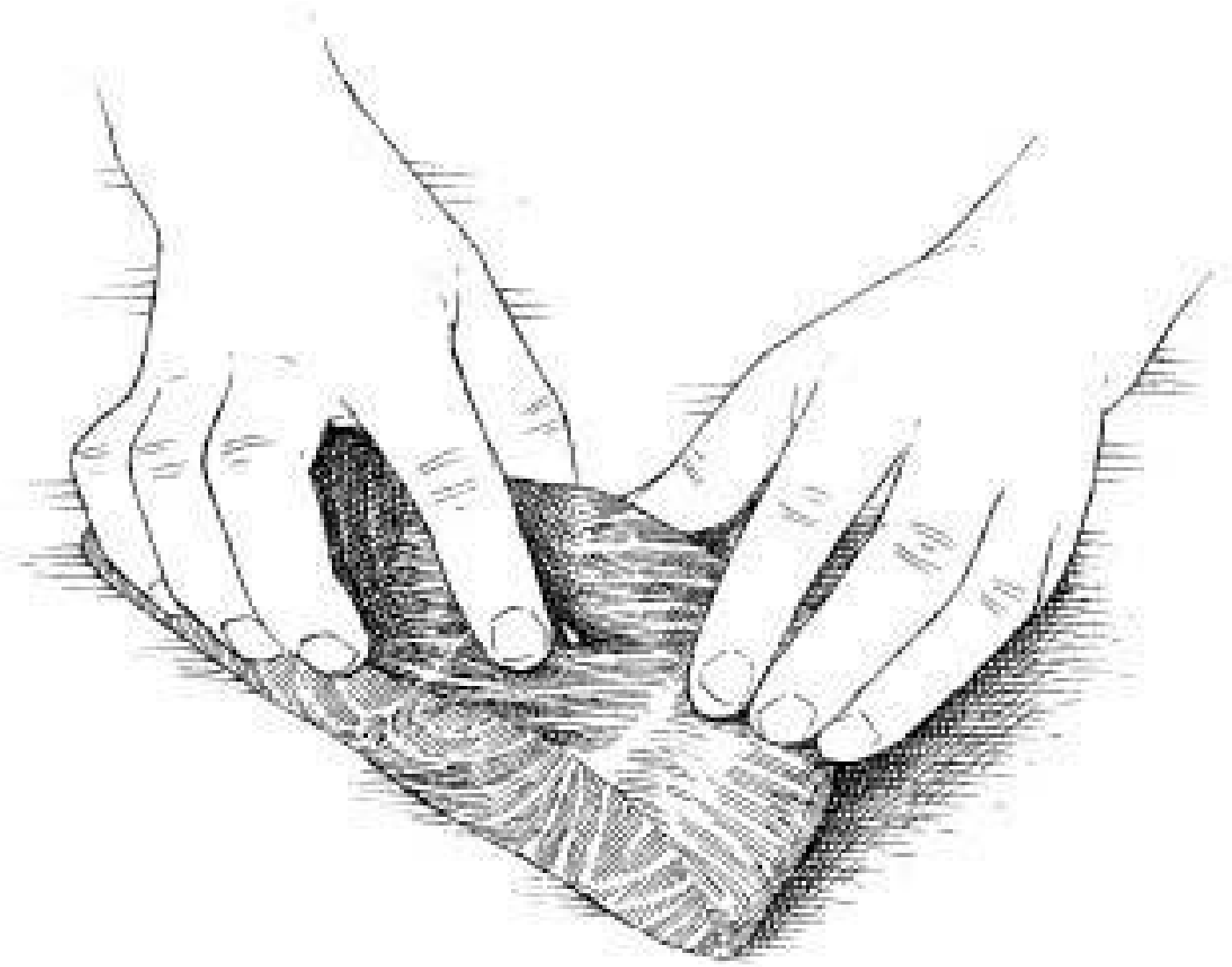

Figure 30.
Using the tips of your fingers, gently rub the surface of each salmon fillet to locate any pin bones.

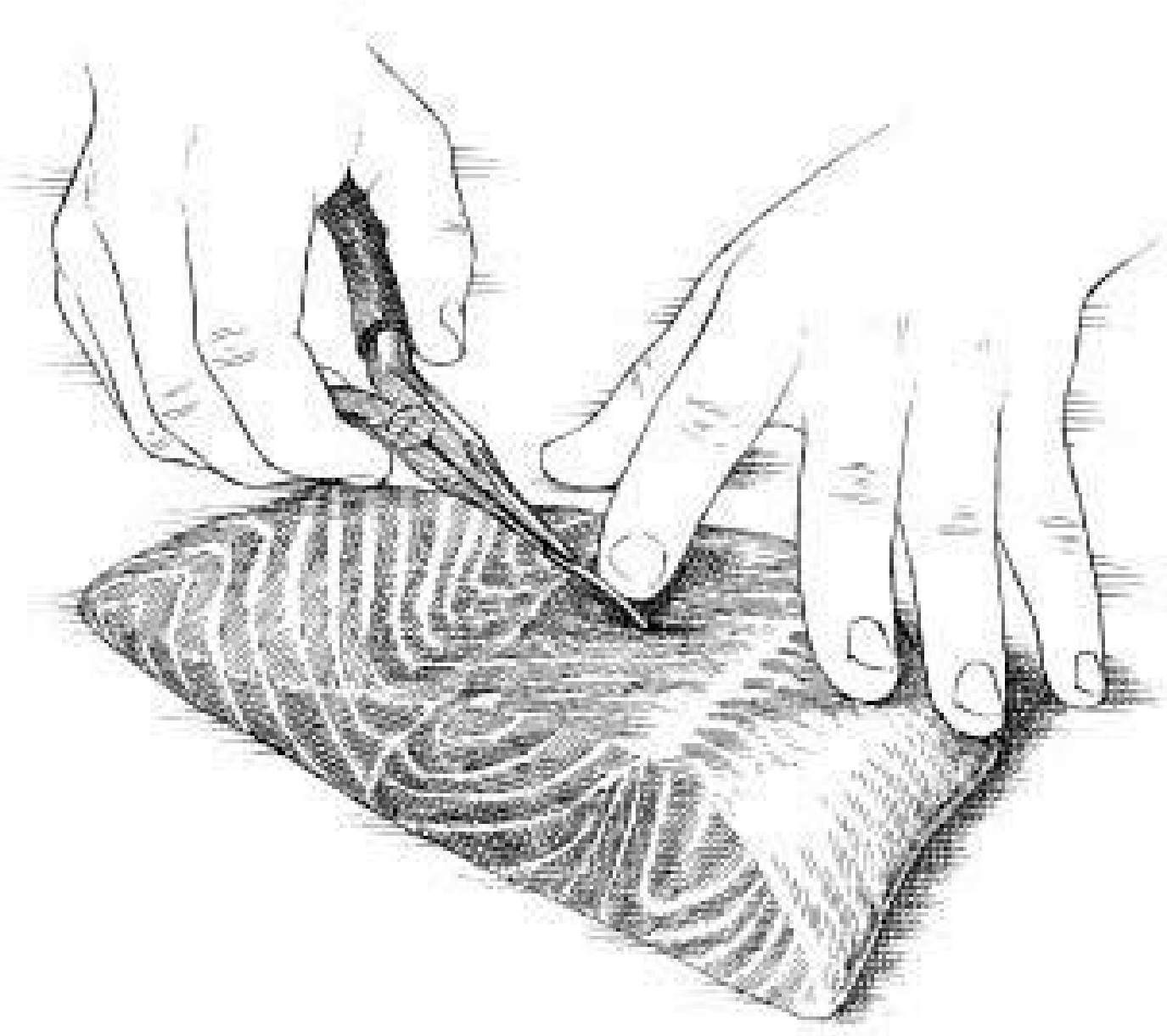

Figure 31.
If you find any bones, use a pair of needle-nose pliers to pull them out.

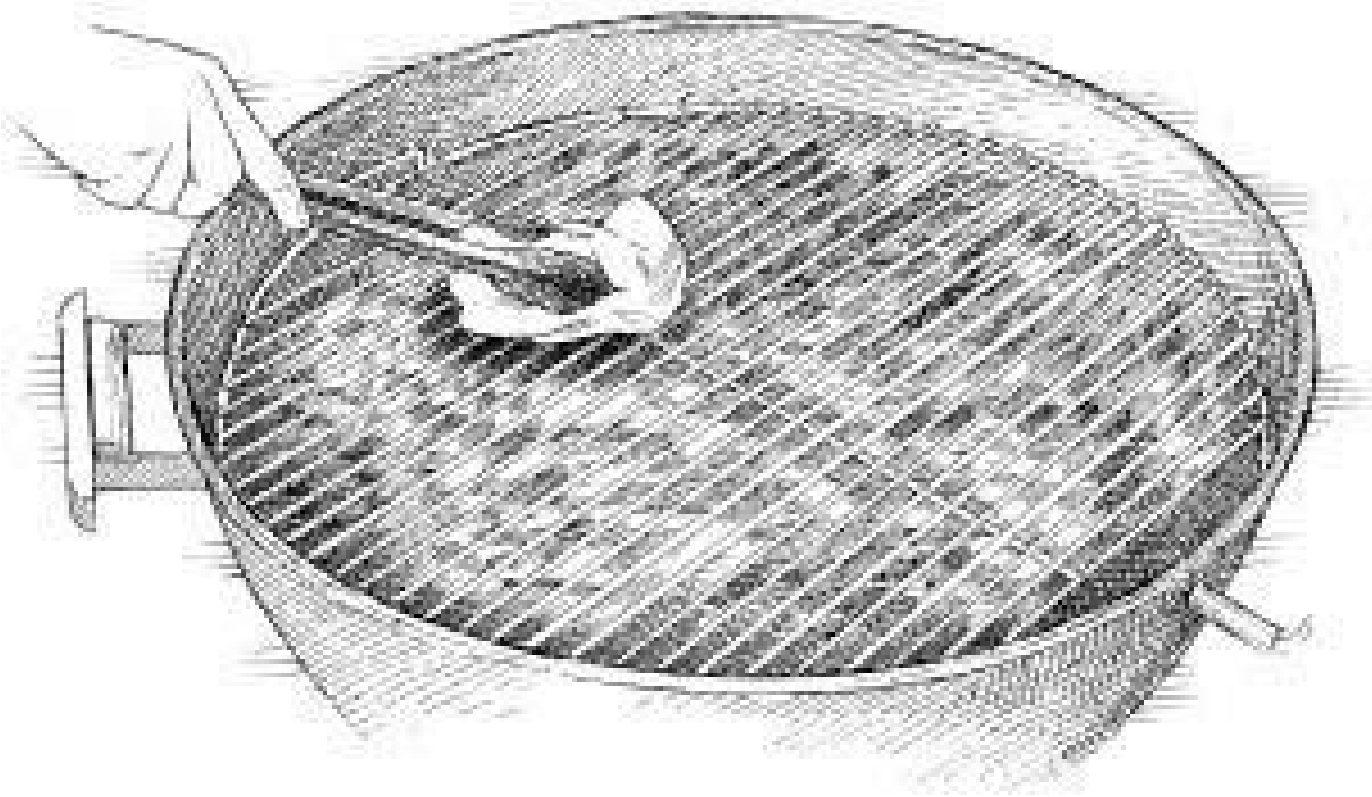

Figure 32.
Just before placing fish on the grill, dip a large wad of paper towels in vegetable oil, grab it with tongs, and wipe the grid thoroughly to lubricate and prevent sticking. This will also clean any remaining residue from the grill.

Figure 33.
Because they are thinner at the edges, salmon fillets do not cook through evenly. We like the gradation from well-done at the edges to rare in the center, but

not everyone does. Steaks, which have an even thickness throughout, cook more evenly, but are bony. However, it is possible to turn a fillet into a steak. Start by cutting through a 3-inch-wide fillet lengthwise down to, but not through, the skin.

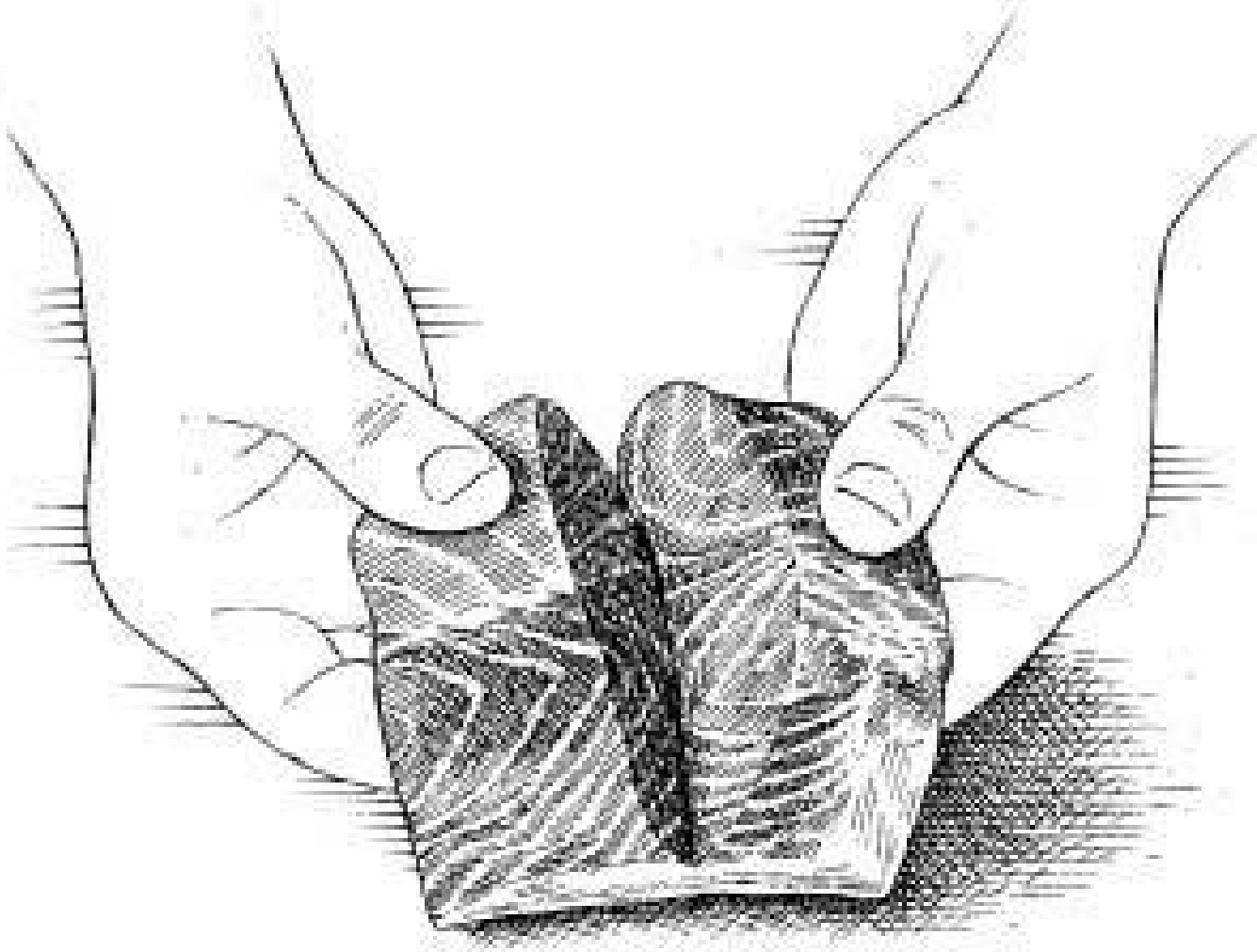

Figure 34.
Fold the two flesh pieces out with the skin acting as a hinge.

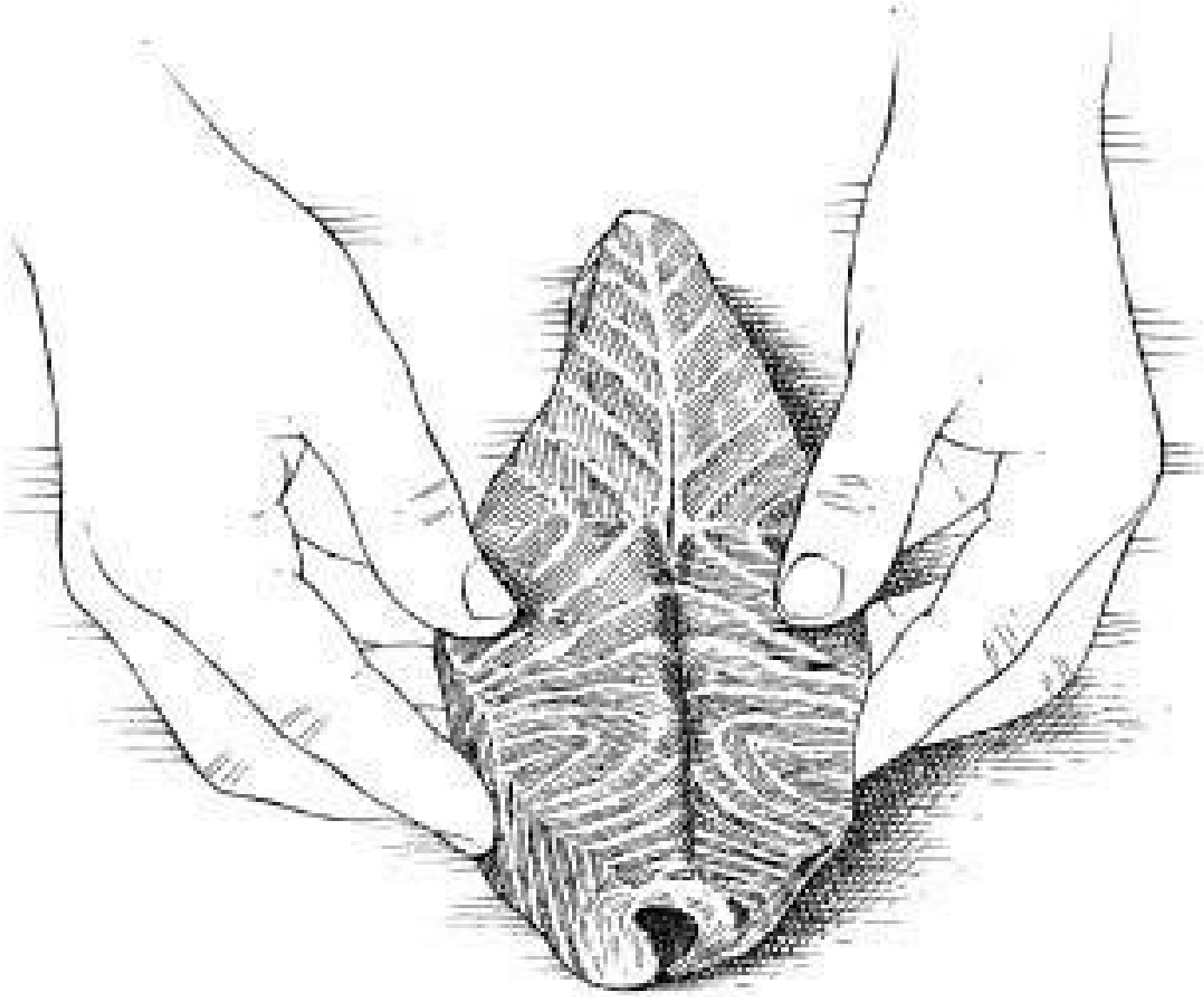

Figure 35.
A 3-inch-wide fillet will now look like a steak, but without any bones, and have an even thickness of $1^1/_2$ inches. The one drawback is that the skin won't crisp since

it is sandwiched in the middle of the steak. If you like to eat the skin, cook the fillets as is. The cooking time for mock steaks is the same as for regular fillets.

Thick-Cut Grilled Tuna

NOTE: ***If you like your tuna rare, you must buy steaks cut about $1^1/_2$ inches thick. This will allow you to sear them well without overcooking the inside. For four, you'll need two steaks (they run about 1 pound each). Cut each in half before grilling. If you prefer more well-done tuna, buy thinner steaks and marinate in olive oil to keep them moist.***

2 tuna steaks, cut $1^1/_2$ inches thick (about 1 pound each)
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Build a single-level fire (*see* figure 3). Set grill rack in place, cover grill with lid, and let rack heat up, about 5 minutes. Rub cooking grate with oil-dipped wad of paper towels (*see* figure 32).

2. Cut tuna steaks in half to make four equal pieces. Brush with oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper to taste.

3. Grill, turning once, over hot fire to desired doneness, about 5 to 6 minutes for rare or 7 to 8 minutes for medium-rare.

VARIATIONS:

Thin-Cut Grilled Tuna

Combine 4 tuna steaks cut $^{3}/_{4}$- to 1-inch thick with $^{1}/_{4}$ cup extra-virgin olive oil in plastic zipper-lock bag. Marinate in refrigerator, turning several times, for at least 2 hours or overnight. Remove fish from bag, sprinkle with salt and pepper, and grill over hot fire to desired doneness, about $2^{1}/_{2}$ minutes total for medium-rare, 3 minutes total for medium, and 4 minutes total for well-done.

Grilled Tuna with Herb-Infused Oil

Heat $^{1}/_{4}$ cup extra-virgin olive oil, $1^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoons grated lemon zest, $1^{1}/_{2}$

teaspoons chopped fresh thyme leaves, 1 minced garlic clove, and $^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoon hot red pepper flakes in small saucepan until hot. Cool oil and then brush some on thick-cut tuna before and after grilling. Use herb oil as marinade for thin-cut tuna.

Thick-Cut Grilled Swordfish

NOTE: ***Unlike salmon and tuna, we find that swordfish should be cooked until medium—no more or less. A two-level fire is necessary; the fish sears over the hot fire and then cooks through on the cooler part of the grill. If you can only find thin steaks, see variation below. Individual swordfish steaks are quite large. This recipe serves four, or more if you are willing to cut the steaks into smaller pieces.***

2 swordfish steaks, cut $1^1/_2$ inches thick (about $1^1/_4$ pounds each)

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil Salt and ground black pepper

Lemon wedges

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Build a two-level fire (*see* figure 4). Set grill rack in place, cover grill with lid, and let rack heat up, about 5 minutes. Rub cooking grate with oil-dipped wad of paper towels (*see* figure 32).

2. Cut swordfish steaks in half to make four equal pieces. Brush with oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper to taste.

3. Grill, turning once, over hot fire for 9 minutes. Move fish to cooler part of grill and cook over medium fire, turning once,

until center is no longer translucent, 4 to 6 minutes. Serve immediately with lemon wedges.

VARIATIONS:

Thin-Cut Grilled Swordfish Steaks

Combine 4 swordfish steaks cut $^{3}/_{4}$- to 1-inch thick with $^{1}/_{4}$ cup extra-virgin olive oil in plastic zipper-lock bag. Marinate in refrigerator, turning several times, for at least 2 hours or overnight. Remove fish from bag and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Build single-level fire and grill over hot fire, turning once, until center is no longer translucent, about 6 minutes total.

Grilled Swordfish with Lemon-Parsley Sauce

Add 1 teaspoon grated lemon zest to olive oil for brushing on thicker steaks or marinating thinner cuts. Combine another $^1/_4$ cup extra-virgin olive oil with $1^1/_2$ tablespoons lemon juice, 2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves, and salt and pepper to taste in small bowl. Grill fish and serve with lemon-parsley sauce.

Grilled Swordfish with Salsa Verde

Combine 2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves, 1 tablespoon minced fresh basil leaves, 1 tablespoon pitted and minced green olives, $1^1/_2$ teaspoons

drained and minced capers, 1 medium minced garlic clove, 1 minced flat anchovy fillet, 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, 1 tablespoon lemon juice, and pepper to taste in small bowl. Grill fish and serve with sauce.

Grilled Shrimp with Garlic Paste

Serves four

NOTE: ***Brining dramatically improves the taste and texture of shrimp. To keep shrimp moist, grill them with the shell on. Thread on skewers or grill over mesh screen to keep them from falling onto the coals.***

1 cup plus 1 teaspoon kosher salt

2 pounds medium shrimp in the shell

2 large garlic cloves, peeled

1 teaspoon cayenne pepper

2 teaspoons paprika

$^1/_4$ cup extra-virgin olive oil

4 teaspoons lemon juice

Lemon wedges

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Dissolve 1 cup salt in 1 quart warm water in large bowl. Add another quart of cold water along with shrimp, and let stand for 45 minutes. Drain and rinse thoroughly under cold running water.

2. Build a single-level fire (*see* figure 3). Set grill rack in place, cover grill with lid, and let rack heat up, about 5 minutes.

3. Meanwhile, mince garlic with remaining 1 teaspoon salt to form

smooth paste. Mix with cayenne and paprika in small bowl. Stir in oil and lemon juice. Toss shrimp with paste until evenly coated. Thread shrimp on skewers (*see* figures 36, 37, 38) if desired.

4. Grill shrimp over medium fire, turning once, until shells turn bright pink, 2 to 3 minutes per side. Serve hot or at room temperature with lemon wedges.

VARIATION:

Grilled Shrimp with Anchovy Butter

Omit garlic paste. Pour contents of 2-ounce can of flat anchovy fillets packed in olive oil into small saucepan. Turn heat to medium-low and cook, mashing

anchovies with wooden spoon, until fillets fall apart and form smooth sauce, about 3 minutes. Add 4 tablespoons unsalted butter and $1^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoons lemon juice. Cook just until butter melts; keep sauce warm. Toss shrimp with 1 tablespoon olive oil, grill, and then toss with anchovy butter and serve with lemon wedges.

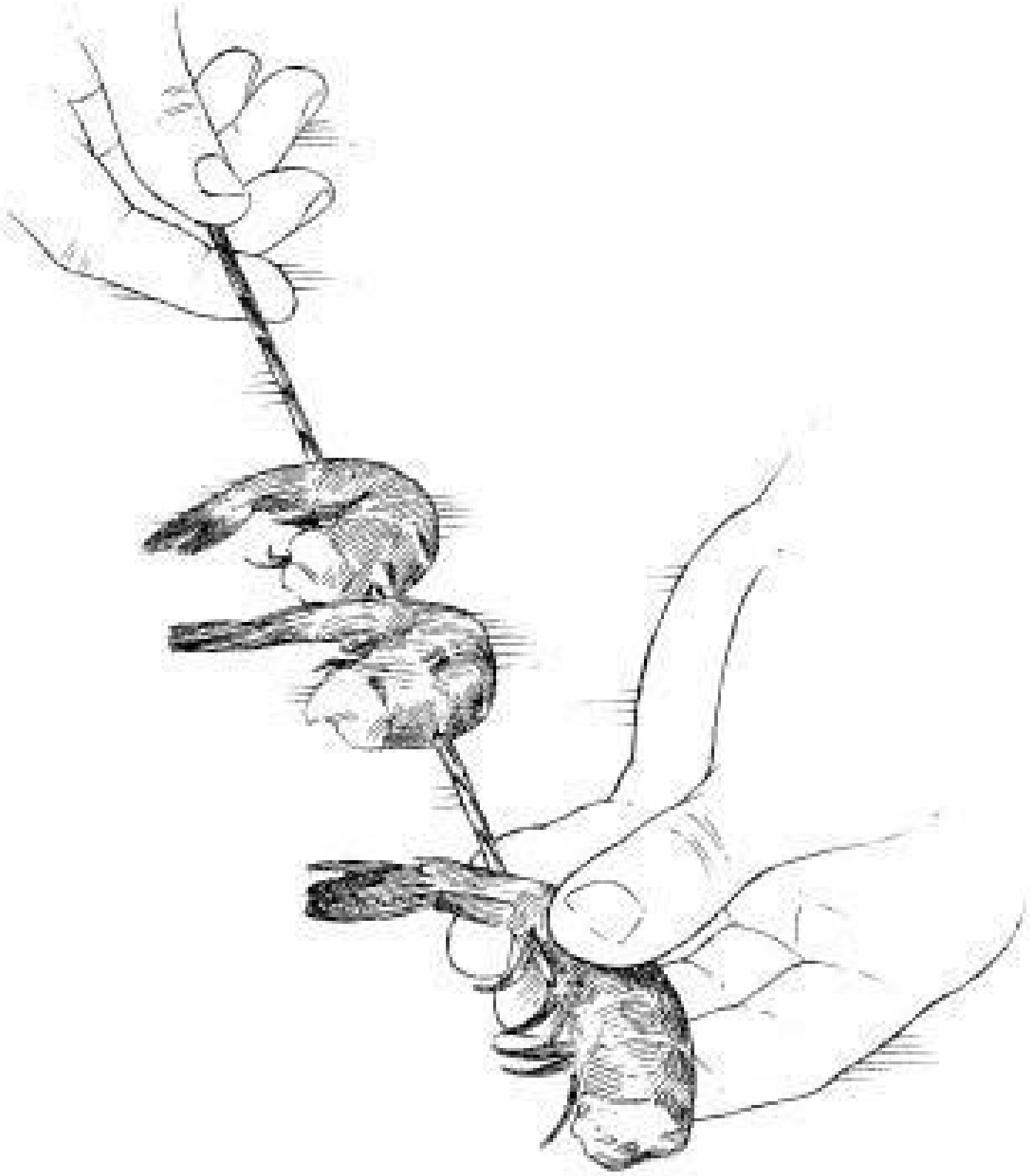

Figure 36.
Shrimp may be threaded by

passing a single skewer through the body near the tail, folding the shrimp over, and passing the skewer through the body again near the head.

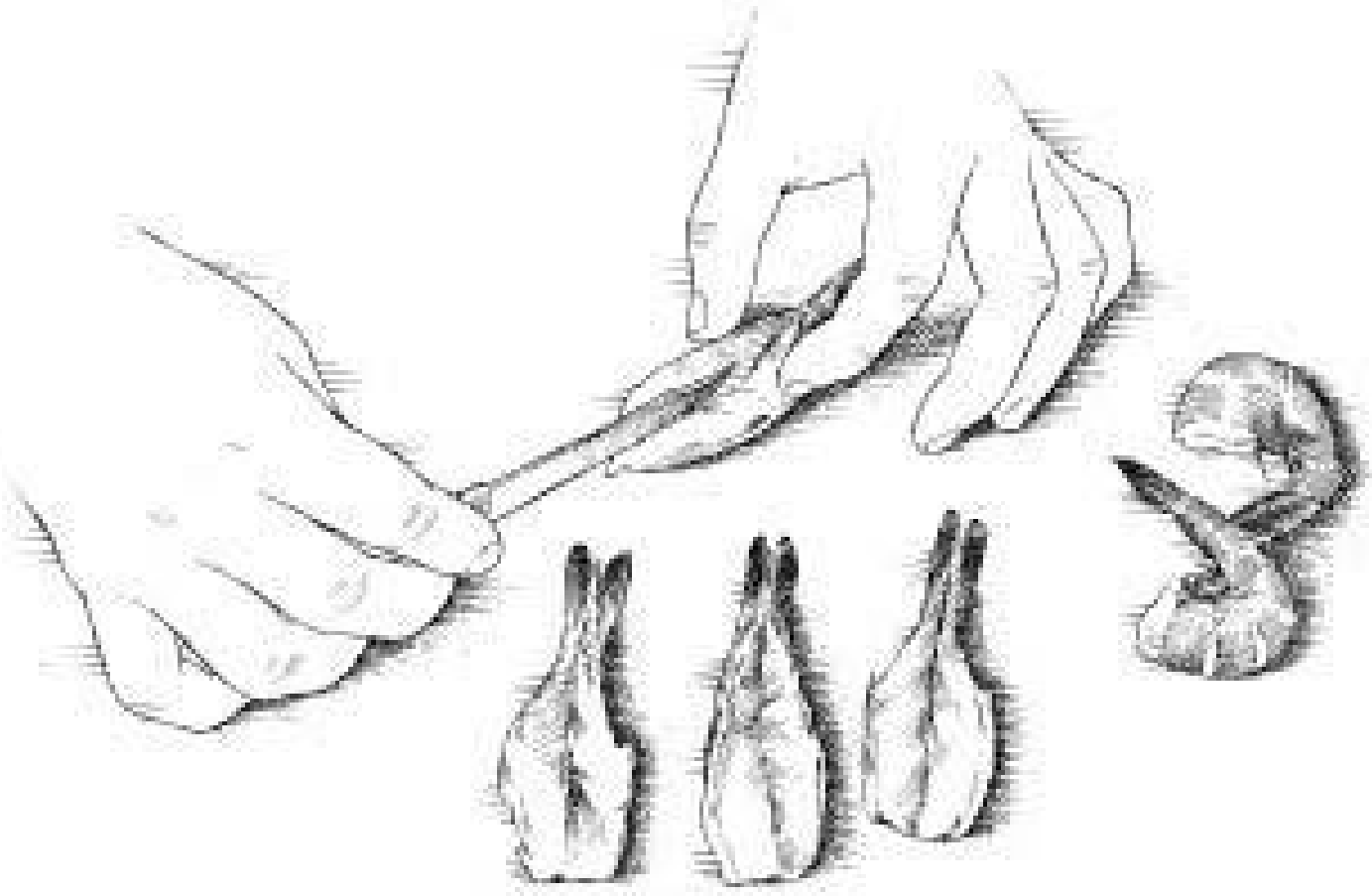

Figure 37.
Shrimp can also be butterflied and threaded on two skewers. Use a sharp paring knife to slice through the back and cut about two-thirds of the way through the shrimp.

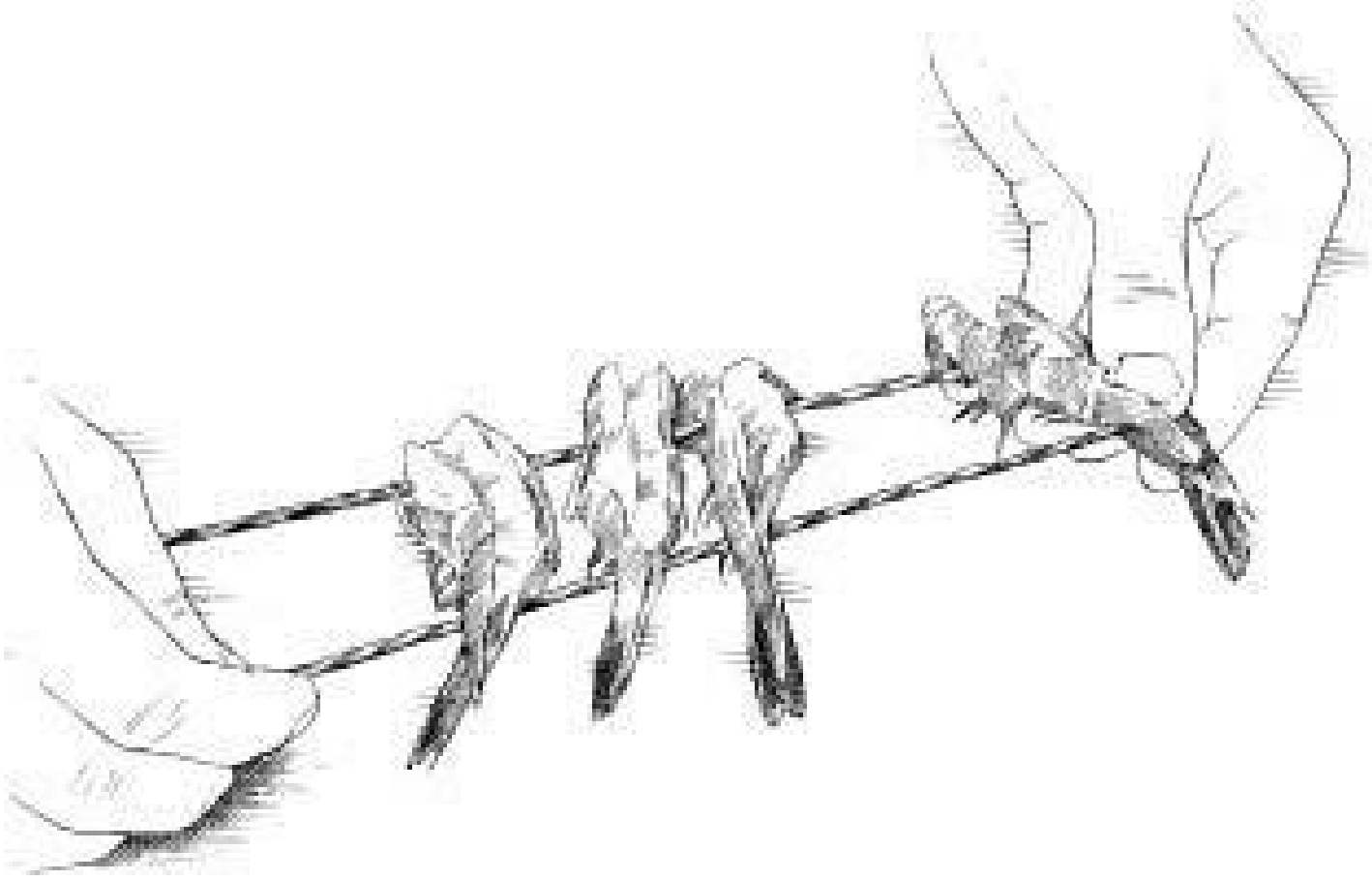

Figure 38.
Push one skewer through both sides of the butterflied shrimp near the head. Push a second skewer through the shrimp near the tail.

GRILLED VEGETABLES

VEGETABLES DON'T RESPOND WELL TO BLAZING fires—incineration is a real possibility. A medium-hot fire (you should be able to hold your hand five inches off the grate for four seconds) is ideal for most vegetables. A few, slower-cooking items, such as new potatoes, or particularly delicate vegetables, such as asparagus, are better cooked over a medium or medium-low fire.

Because even a cheap gas grill has enough BTUs to reach these heat levels,

the type of grill used to cook vegetables is not very important. Delicate vegetables can pick up some resinous flavor from the cover, so leave it off. It is also imperative that the grate be scraped clean. Tiny bits of charred-on food cause flare-ups (which must be avoided at all costs when grilling veggies) and can impart an off flavor.

We tested various grill equipment designed for vegetables and found it best to cook vegetables right on the grate. (Hinged metal baskets are not practical because some vegetables will cook faster than others, and in these baskets everything must be turned at the same time.) Smaller items like cherry tomatoes or mushrooms can be skewered

to keep them from falling through the grill grate. A vegetable grid (a tightly woven grid with handles) or piece of fine mesh can be set right on the cooking grate to keep small items and onions from falling onto the coals.

The following vegetables work best on the grill, all without any precooking. Toss or brush each vegetable with extra-virgin olive oil (other oils are too bland) before grilling and cook over a medium-hot fire unless otherwise specified. If you like, add salt and pepper, fresh herbs, garlic, and/or grated citrus zest to the oil before brushing it on vegetables, or try one of the flavored oils sold at supermarkets. Grilled vegetables can

also be seasoned with salt and pepper just before serving.

ASPARAGUS: Snap off tough ends. Grill over medium fire, turning several times, until tender and streaked with light grill marks, 6 to 8 minutes.

CORN: Remove husk and silk. Grill over medium fire, turning often, until kernels start to char, about 4 minutes.

EGGPLANT: Remove ends. Cut large eggplant crosswise into $^1/_2$-inch-thick rounds. Slice small eggplant lengthwise into $^1/_2$-inch-thick strips; if you like, remove the peel from outer slices so

they match other pieces (*see* figure 40). Grill, turning once, until flesh is darkly colored, 8 to 10 minutes.

ENDIVE: Cut in half lengthwise through stem end. Grill, flat side down, until streaked with dark grill marks, 6 to 8 minutes.

FENNEL: Remove stalks and fronds. Slice vertically through base into $^{1}/_{2}$-inch-thick pieces. Grill, turning once, until streaked with dark grill marks and quite soft, 10 to 15 minutes.

MUSHROOMS, PORTOBELLO: Clean with damp cloth and remove stems.

Grill, with gill-like underside facing up, until cap is streaked with grill marks, 8 to 10 minutes.

MUSHROOMS, WHITE BUTTON AND CREMINI: Clean with damp cloth and trim thin slice from stems. Grill on grid, turning several times, until golden brown, 6 to 7 minutes.

ONIONS: Peel and cut into $^1/_2$-inch-thick slices. Grill on grid, turning once, until lightly charred, about 6 minutes.

PEPPERS: Core, seed, and cut into large wedges. Grill, turning once, until streaked with dark grill marks, 9 to 10

minutes.

POTATOES, NEW: Choose very small potatoes (no larger than whole walnut) and cut them in half. Grill on grid over medium-low fire, turning several times, until richly colored and tender throughout, 25 to 30 minutes.

TOMATOES, CHERRY: Remove stems. Grill on grid, turning several times, until streaked with dark grill marks, about 3 minutes.

TOMATOES, PLUM: Cut in half lengthwise and seed. Grill, turning once, until streaked with dark grill marks,

about 8 minutes.

ZUCCHINI (AND SUMMER SQUASH): Remove ends. Slice lengthwise into $^{1}/_{2}$-inch-thick strips. If you like, remove the peel from outer slices so they match other pieces (*see* figure 40). Grill, turning once, until streaked with dark grill marks, 8 to 10 minutes.

Grilled Italian Vegetables with Thyme and Garlic

NOTE: ***A vegetable grid (see figure 39)*** **is essential for grilling onions. Drizzle vegetables with balsamic vinegar at the table if you like. Serves six.**

1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil

3 medium garlic cloves, minced

1 tablespoon minced fresh thyme leaves, plus several sprigs for garnish Salt and ground black pepper

3 medium zucchini (about 1 pound), ends trimmed and cut

lengthwise into $^1/_2$-inch-thick strips

3 small eggplant (about 1 pound), ends trimmed and cut lengthwise into $^1/_2$-inch-thick strips

2 large red onions (about 1 pound), peeled and cut into $^1/_2$-inch-thick slices

1 large red bell pepper, cored, seeded, and cut into large wedges

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Build a single-level fire (*see* figure 3). Set grill rack in place, cover grill with lid, and let rack heat up, about 5

minutes.

2. Meanwhile, combine oil, garlic, minced thyme, and salt and pepper to taste in small bowl. Lay vegetables on large baking sheet or platter and brush with flavored oil.

3. Place vegetable grid over medium-hot fire and heat for several minutes. Spread onions out over grid in single layer. Place remaining vegetables on open parts of grill. If necessary, vegetables can be grilled in batches.

4. Grill over medium-hot fire, turning vegetables once, until everything is marked with dark stripes, about 6 minutes for onions and 8 to 10 minutes for zucchini, eggplant, and pepper.

5. As each vegetable looks done, transfer it to large platter. Garnish platter with thyme sprigs and serve grilled vegetables hot, warm, or at room temperature. (Vegetables can be covered and kept at room temperature for several hours.)

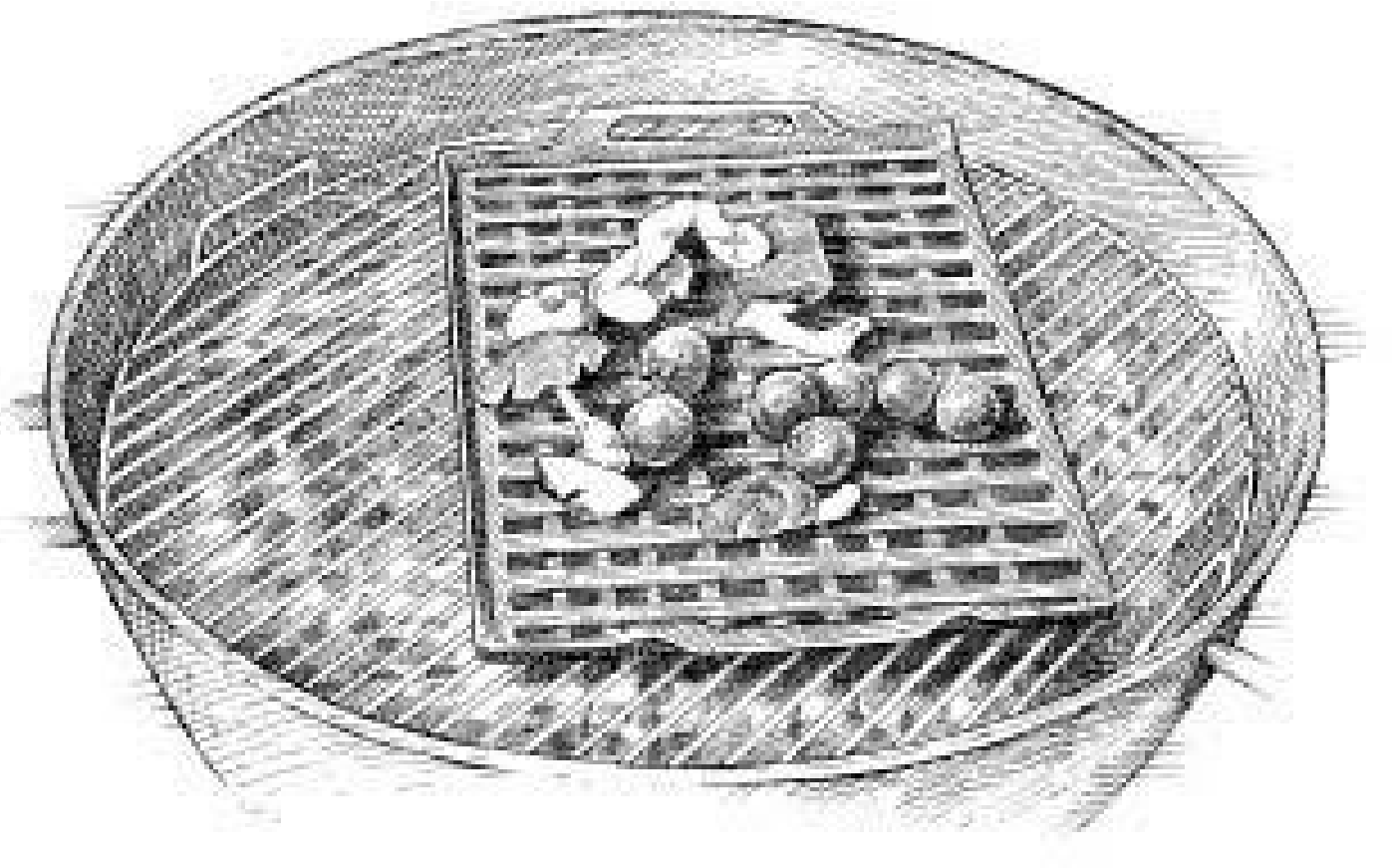

Figure 39.
A vegetable grid has tightly woven bars of metal that keep small items such as onions from falling through the cooking grate. Set the vegetable grid directly onto the grate and then cook onions, small mushrooms, or cherry tomatoes on the grid.

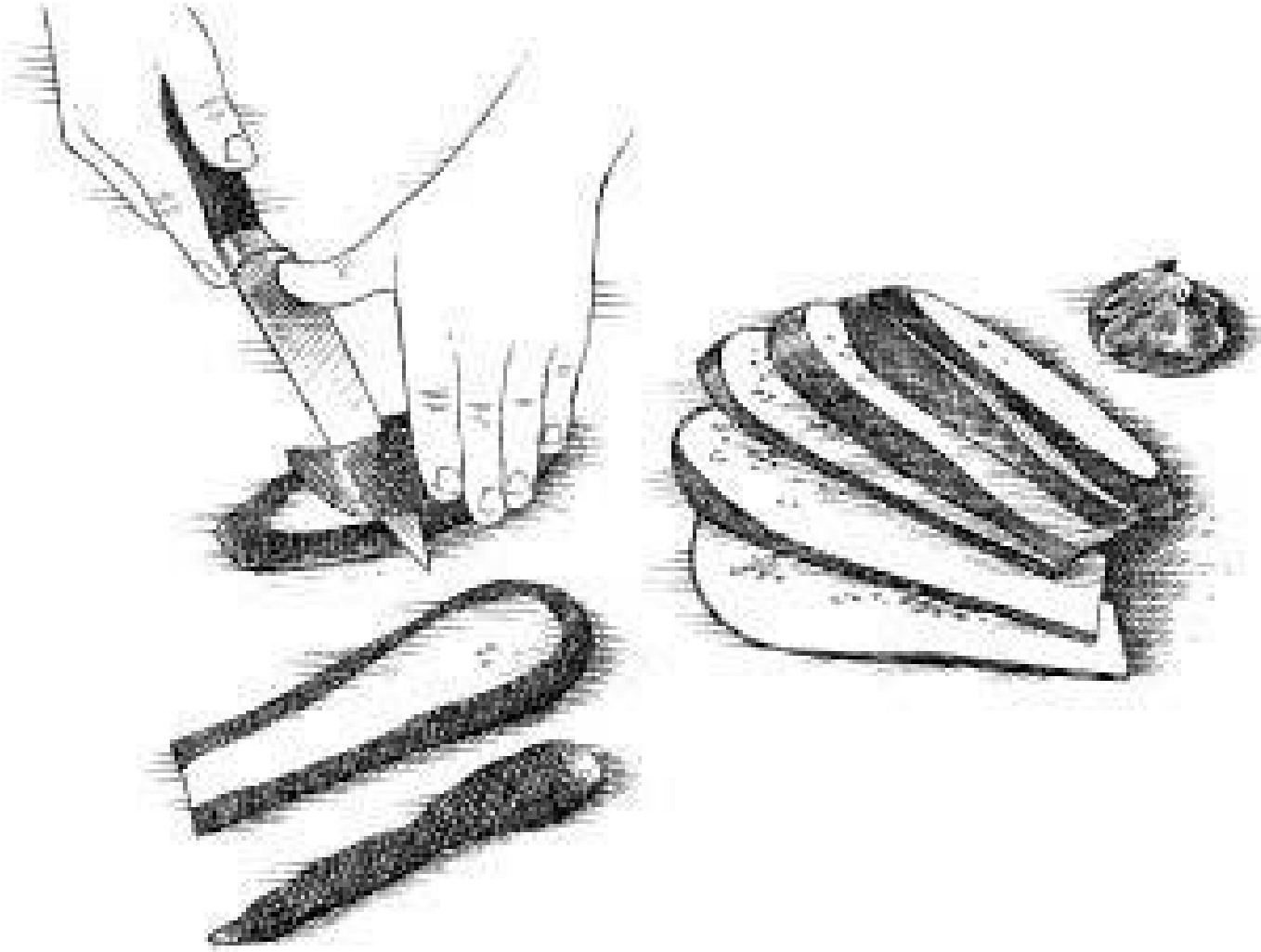

Figure 40.
For aesthetic reasons, you may want to trim the peel from the outer eggplant slices so they match the others. You can do the same thing with outer zucchini slices. Besides creating more

attractive grill marks, the flesh cooks better when directly exposed to the heat.

Grilled Corn with Herb Butter

NOTE: ***Freshly picked sweet corn can be husked and then grilled directly over hot coals. Brush lightly with vegetable oil before grilling and then brush with herb butter just before serving. Serves four.***

3 tablespoons unsalted butter

2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley, thyme, cilantro, basil and/or other fresh herbs Salt and ground black pepper

4 ears of corn, husked

1 tablespoon vegetable oil

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Build a single-level fire (*see* figure 3). Set grill rack in place, cover grill with lid, and let rack heat up, about 5 minutes.

2. Melt butter in small saucepan. Stir in herbs and salt and pepper to taste; keep butter warm.

3. Brush corn with vegetable oil. Grill corn, turning often, over medium fire, until kernels are lightly charred, about 4 minutes. Remove corn from grill, brush with herb butter and serve immediately.

Grilled Portobello Mushrooms, Red Pepper, and Garlic Croutons

NOTE: ***This grilled bread salad can be served as a side dish or even better as a first course for an outdoor grilled meal for four. The grilled croutons will become soggy fairly quickly. If you prepare this dish in advance, do not add them until just before serving.***

5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

2 medium garlic cloves, minced

1 teaspoon grated zest and 1 tablespoon juice from medium lemon Salt and ground black

pepper

2 large portobello mushrooms, cleaned with damp cloth and stems removed

1 large red bell pepper, cored, seeded, and cut into large wedges

4 1-inch-thick slices Italian bread

3 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Build a single-level fire (*see* figure 3). Set grill rack in place, cover grill with lid, and let rack heat up, about 5 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, combine 4 tablespoons oil, garlic, lemon zest, and salt and pepper to taste in small bowl. Place mushrooms, red pepper, and bread slices on large platter; brush both sides of vegetables and bread with flavored oil.

3. Place vegetables and bread over medium-hot fire, making sure that gill-like undersides of mushrooms are facing up. Grill over medium-hot fire, turning pepper and bread once but leaving mushrooms as is, until vegetables and bread are streaked with dark grill marks, about 2 minutes for bread and 8 to 10 minutes for mushrooms and pepper.

4. Transfer grilled vegetables and bread

to cutting board. Halve mushrooms, then cut into $^1/_2$-inch-wide strips. Cut pepper into $^1/_4$-inch-wide strips. Cut bread into 1-inch croutons.

5. Toss vegetables in large serving bowl with remaining 1 tablespoon oil, lemon juice, and parsley. Adjust seasonings. (Vegetables can be covered and kept at room temperature for 1 hour.) Stir in croutons and serve immediately.

Grilled Asparagus with Almonds, Green Olives, and Sherry Vinaigrette

NOTE: ***Asparagus should be cooked on a cooler part of the grill to keep the tips from blackening. Serves four as a side dish.***

1 medium garlic clove, minced

1/2 teaspoon ground cumin

2 tablespoons chopped red onion

1 tablespoon sherry vinegar

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil Salt and ground black pepper

$1\frac{1}{2}$ pounds asparagus, tough ends snapped off

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup sliced almonds, toasted

2 tablespoons pitted and chopped green olives

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Build a single-level fire (*see* figure 3). Set grill rack in place, cover grill with lid, and let rack heat up, about 5 minutes.

2. Combine garlic, cumin, onion, vinegar, oil, and salt and pepper to taste in small bowl. Place asparagus on platter and brush with 2 tablespoons dressing.

3. Lay asparagus spears perpendicular to

the cooking grate so they won't fall onto the coals. Grill over medium fire, turning once, until streaked with light grill marks, 6 to 8 minutes. Transfer to serving dish and pour remaining dressing over grilled vegetables. Toss to coat, adjust seasonings, and scatter almonds and green olives on top. Serve hot or at room temperature.

VARIATION:

Grilled Asparagus with Peanut Sauce

Combine following to make dressing: 1 minced garlic clove, 1 tablespoon Asian sesame oil, $1^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoons each finely grated fresh gingerroot, rice wine vinegar, and soy sauce, and salt and

pepper to taste. Brush 2 tablespoons dressing over asparagus before grilling. Stir 1 tablespoon each peanut butter, minced fresh cilantro leaves, and water into remaining dressing and pour over grilled asparagus. Garnish with 2 tablespoons chopped scallions.

HOW TO BARBECUE & ROAST ON THE GRILL

Barbecue and Grill-Roasting Basics

Barbecued Ribs

Barbecued Beef Brisket

Barbecued Pulled Pork

Barbecued Salmon

Grill-Roasted Poultry

Grill-Roasted Beef Tenderloin

Grill-Roasted Pork Loin

Rubs and Sauces

BARBECUE & GRILL-ROASTING BASICS

MOST COOKS INTUITIVELY UNDERSTAND How to barbecue. You build the biggest fire possible and place the food—meat, fish, chicken, or vegetables—right over the coals. Once the food is nicely seared on both sides, it's done. Steaks, chops, and other relatively thin foods can be grilled this way because the interior will be cooked by the time the exterior is nicely browned.

But what about a thick pork roast or brisket? If grilled this way, the exterior

will be charred and ashen well before the interior of such a large piece of meat has a chance to cook through. Same thing for a whole chicken or turkey. The solution is indirect cooking, with the lid down (not up, as in grilling) to trap heat and create a regulated cooking environment much like that of an oven.

While grilling calls for filling the grill with charcoal or lighting all the gas burners, indirect cooking on the grill relies on a smaller fire. The lit coals are banked on one side of the grill, or one of the gas burners is turned off. Foods cooked by indirect heat are placed over the "cool" part of the grill. Since there is no direct heat, the exterior of the food cooks slowly without flare-ups. With the

lid on, the heat of the fire is trapped, and it cooks the food slowly and evenly.

Why bother with indirect cooking on the grill when you can roast in the oven? The smoky flavor we associate with ribs or pulled pork comes only from the grill. Even foods that we don't normally consider grilling—a whole turkey or side of salmon—taste better when wood flavor is added to the equation.

There are actually two kinds of indirect cooking that are possible on a covered grill. Barbecuing is the traditional low-and slow-cooking method used with ribs, pulled pork (shredded Boston butt), and brisket. Because the goal is to impart as much

smoke flavor as possible, a long cooking time over a relatively low fire is required. Barbecuing also provides ample time for fatty, tough cuts to become more lean and tender.

Although there is much debate among barbecue experts as to the proper cooking temperature, we found in our testing that barbecuing should take place between 250 and 300 degrees. While some chefs and pit masters might argue that ribs are best barbecued at 180 degrees, we found it very difficult to maintain such a low fire. Also, such low temperatures allow bacteria to multiply and increase the risk of food-borne illnesses.

Once the sustained (or average)

temperature during the cooking period exceeds 300 degrees, we believe (and most experts concur) that the process becomes grill-roasting, the other method of indirect cooking. The grill setup is the same, there's just more heat.

Grill-roasting is best for foods that are already tender and that don't require low and slow cooking. Birds are especially well suited to grill-roasting (at lower temperatures the skin remains soft and flabby), as are tender cuts of meat (like beef tenderloin) that need to develop a crisp crust during their relatively short cooking time. Grill-roasting occurs between 300 and 400 degrees. (It's hard to sustain much higher temperatures by

indirect cooking; for comparison, true grilling occurs at temperatures in excess of 500 degrees.)

Salmon might seem to be an ideal candidate for grill-roasting. Clearly, this fish does not need the long cooking time provided by barbecuing to render fat and become tender. But we found that grill-roasted salmon cooks so quickly that the fish doesn't pick up enough smoke flavor. Thus, we prefer the lower cooking temperature of barbecuing to lengthen the cooking time.

SMOKE

One of the best reasons to barbecue or grill-roast is to flavor foods with smoke.

Charcoal itself has some flavor (gas adds none), but the real smoky flavor of good ribs or brisket comes from wood chunks or chips. Chips will work on either a charcoal or gas grill (see the following pages for details), but chunks are suited to charcoal fires only, since they must rest in a pile of lit coals to work. (If placed on the bottom of a gas grill they will not get hot enough to smoke.)

Hickory is the most traditional wood used for outdoor cooking, but there are other choices. In our tests, we found that any hardwood chunks or chips can be used. Frankly, the differences in flavor are minimal, especially if the food has been coated with spices. The difference

between hickory and mesquite, for instance, is hard to taste on spice-rubbed ribs but will be more perceptible on a chicken that has been rubbed with butter, salt, and pepper and nothing else. We have noted traditional pairings (such as ribs and hickory or salmon and alder) throughout the book, but feel free to use whatever wood is available.

CHARCOAL VERSUS GAS GRILLS

Our preference when grilling is to use charcoal. We like the way it heats up and the flavor that food absorbs from hardwood charcoal (our favorite fuel for most recipes). However, when doing

indirect cooking—barbecuing or grill-roasting—many of the advantages that charcoal grills have over gas grills disappear.

Hardwood charcoal, also called natural or lump charcoal, tends to burn too quickly. It's too hot to be practical when cooking by indirect heat. We like the intense fire this charcoal makes when searing steaks, but when using it to barbecue brisket, you have to open the grill and add charcoal much more often than you'd like. Also, because the fire can run hotter at the outset, there is a greater risk of burning the edges of large foods (such as turkeys and ribs) that may be close to the coals. For indirect cooking, we prefer to use regular

charcoal briquettes, which burn cooler and more slowly.

Briquettes don't have as much flavor as hardwood charcoal, but they do give foods a more smoky flavor than a gas grill. Whether grilling over briquettes or gas, wood chunks or chips must do the real flavoring work. In our testing, we consistently found that foods cooked over charcoal had a smokier flavor than those cooked over gas. That's because a charcoal fire does a better job of getting the wood (which is sitting right in the fire) to smolder and smoke.

Although we eventually devised a method for maximizing the smoke from chips used in a gas grill the smoke flavor

is not as strong as it is in foods cooked over charcoal. If you like really smoky foods and are using a gas grill, you might consider using more chips at the outset when grill-roasting or adding more chips to the foil tray partway through the cooking time when barbecuing.

Intense smoky flavor aside, gas grills do have some advantages over charcoal when cooking by indirect heat. It's easier to regulate the heat on a gas grill. Just turn the dial and the temperature immediately responds. Also, there is no need to add charcoal during the long cooking process, so there is less hassle and mess. Gas grills are also more convenient to use during rainy weather.

Finally, our tasters felt that foods

cooked over gas were juicier than foods cooked over charcoal. The reason for this is simple. Smoke makes foods taste great but causes them to dehydrate. Since gas grilling generates less smoke, foods retain more moisture. That's why we found that brining birds and other foods that tend to dry out is especially important when cooking over charcoal. Brining adds flavor to foods that will be cooked over gas, but it has a less noticeable effect on texture.

In the end, we found that cooking with charcoal or gas produces excellent, if somewhat different, results. For your convenience, each recipe in this book has been adapted for both types of

grilling.

USING A CHARCOAL GRILL FOR INDIRECT COOKING

We find that a kettle-style grill rather than a rectangular hibachi is the best choice when using charcoal. The deep bowl shape allows air to circulate, and the high lid accommodates even tall foods like a turkey. Choose the largest grill possible, preferably one with a grate that measures 22 inches across. On smaller grills, the "cool" part of the grill will be too cramped to accommodate a turkey or two slabs of ribs.

Before starting, empty the grill of any

old ashes, which may block air circulation and prolong cooking times when barbecuing or grill-roasting. We find that a flue starter, or chimney starter, is the most efficient way to light charcoal. (*See* figures 1 through 4 for instructions on lighting the charcoal and setting up the grill for indirect cooking.) A chimney starter is foolproof, and it eliminates the need for lighter fluid, which can impart off flavors to delicate foods such as fish and vegetables.

Some experts recommend banking the coals on either side of the grill and leaving the center open for indirect cooking. They believe that having the coals on both sides of the grill promotes even heating. When we tried this

method, we found that the edges of large pieces of food, such ribs, brisket, and turkey, can burn. We prefer to bank all the coals on one side of the grill, leaving half of the grill free of coals and providing a large space for foods to cook without danger of burning. Since the lid is down, the heat from the coals is distributed just as well as with two piles of charcoal.

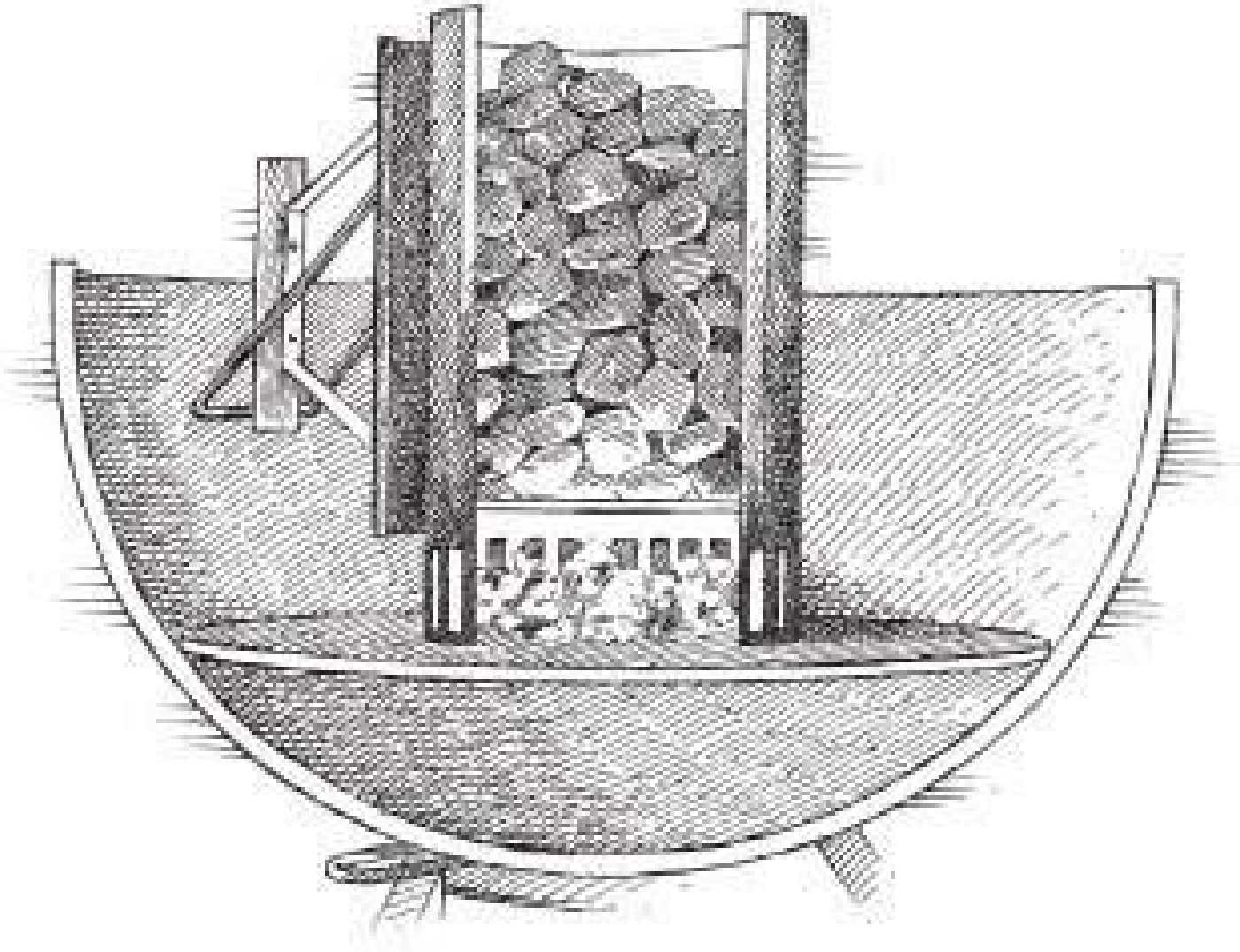

Figure 1.
Fill the bottom section of a chimney starter with crumpled newspaper, set the starter on the bottom grate in a kettle grill, and fill the main compartment with as much charcoal as directed in

individual recipes. When you light the newspaper, flames will shoot up through the charcoal, igniting it.

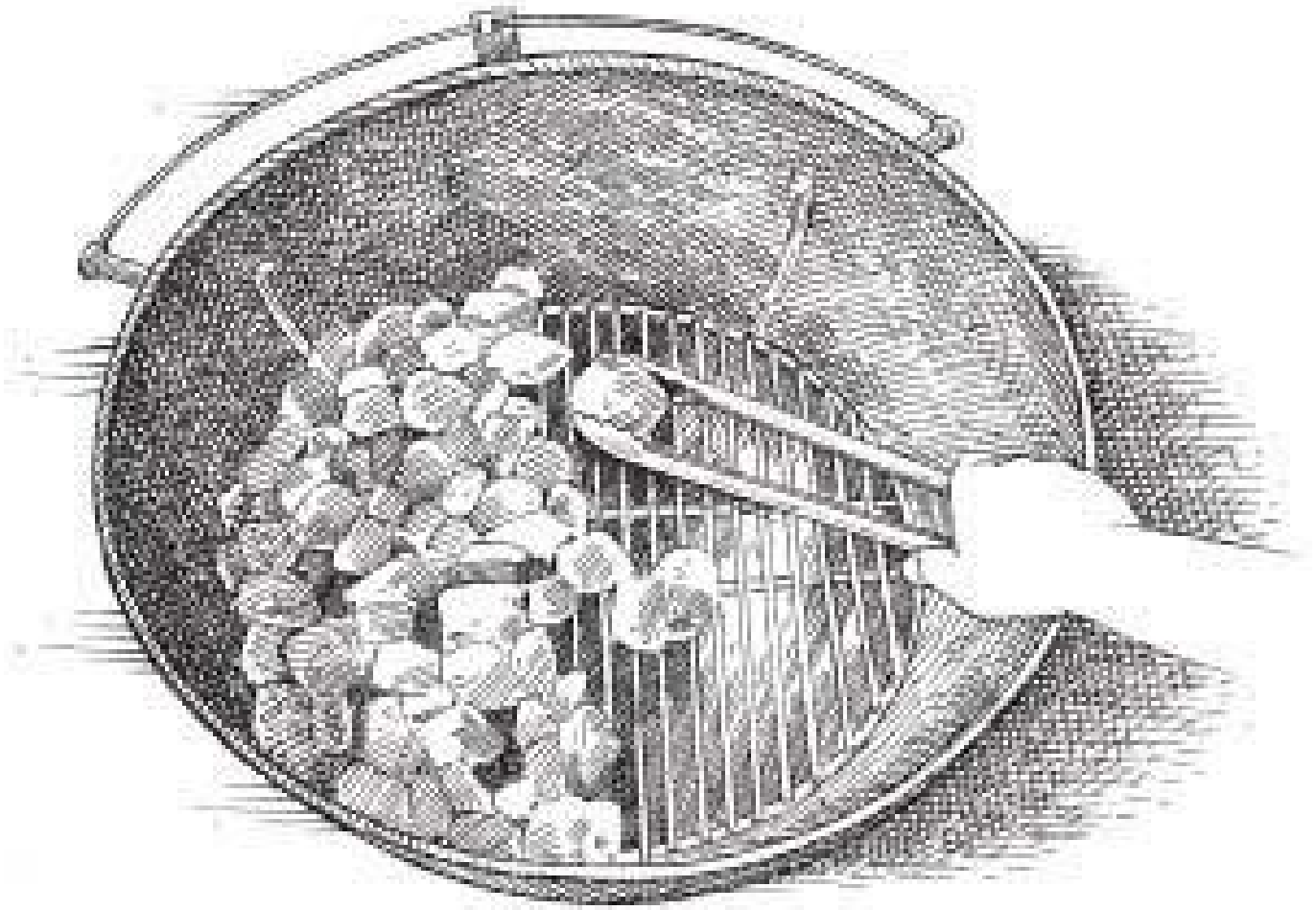

Figure 2.
When the coals are well lit and covered with a layer of gray ash, dump them onto the charcoal grate, piling the coals up on one half of the grill and leaving the other half free of coals. If necessary, use long-handled

tongs to move the briquettes into place.

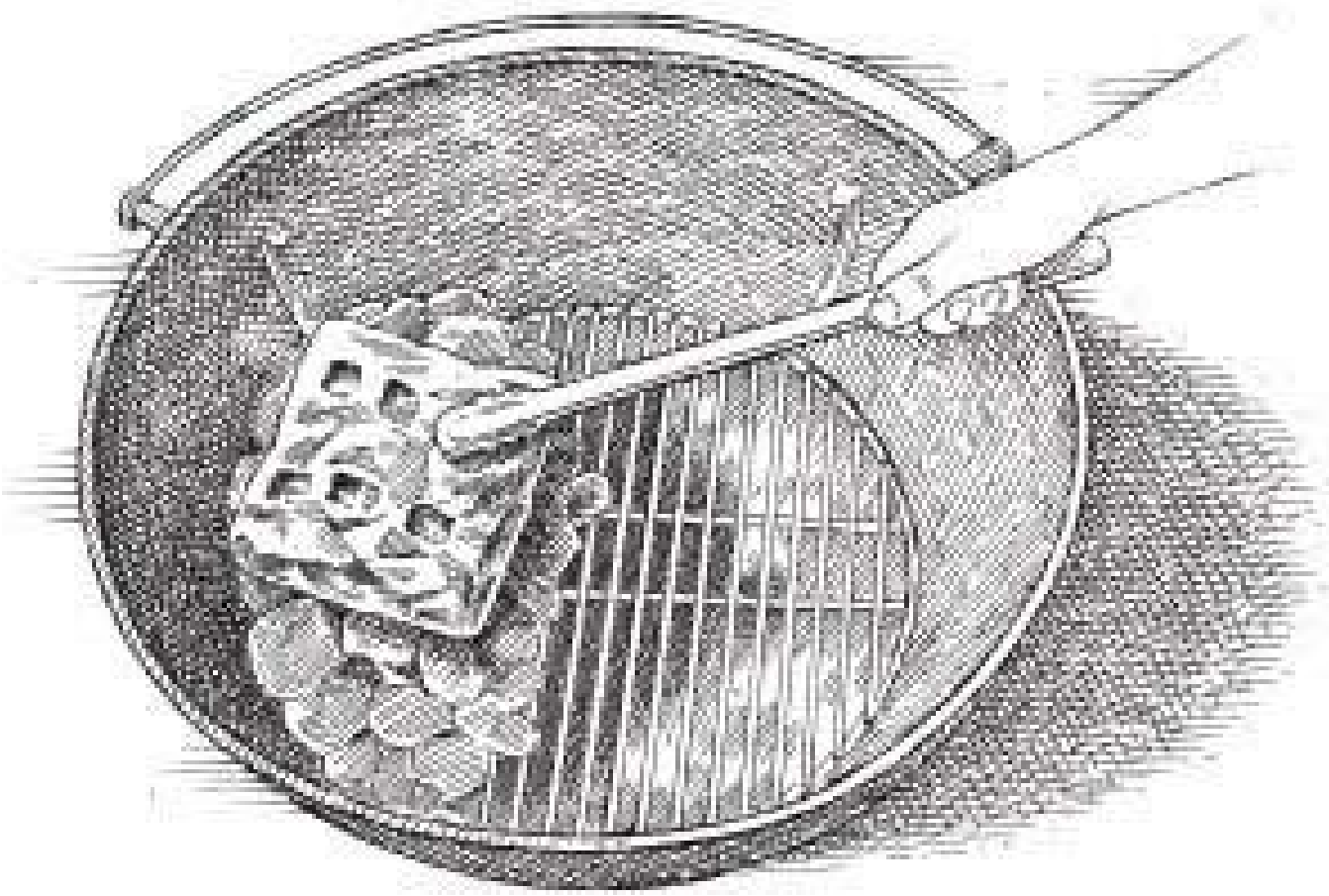

Figure 3.

Place soaked and drained wood chunks or a foil packet filled with wood chips on top of the coals. Set the top grate in position, heat briefly, and then scrape the grate clean with a wire brush. You are now ready to cook over the cool

part of the fire.

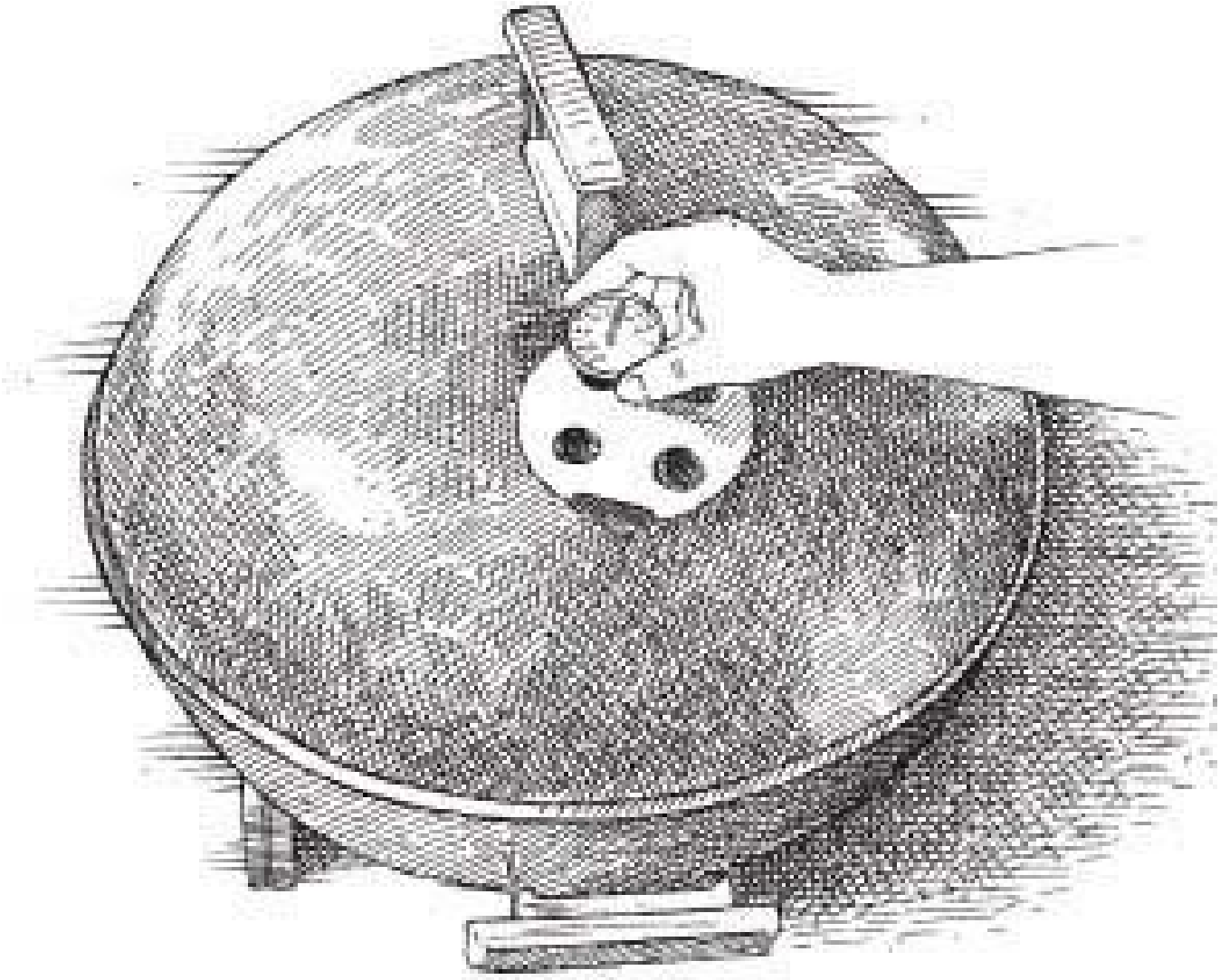

Figure 4.
We like to have some idea of what the temperature is inside a kettle grill as foods cook. A grill thermometer inserted through the vents on the lid can tell you if the

fire is too hot or if the fire is getting too cool and it's time to add more charcoal. You can control the heat level to some extent by adjusting the vents on the lid and base of the grill. Opening the vents gives the fire more oxygen and will cause the coals to burn hotter at first, but then the fire will cool down more quickly as the coals peter out. Closing the vents partially (don't close the vents all the way or the fire will die) lowers the heat but keeps the coals from burning up too fast and helps the grill retain heat.

WOOD ON A CHARCOAL GRILL

Wood chunks are the easiest way to add smoke flavor when cooking over charcoal. You don't want the wood to catch fire and give up all its smoke at once. Ideally, the chunks should smolder slowly, releasing smoke for as long as possible. We found that soaking chunks adds enough moisture to the wood to prevent it from catching fire as soon as it is placed on the charcoal.

If using wood chunks, soak as many three-inch chunks (each the size of a tennis ball) as directed in each recipe in cold water to cover for one hour. Drain

the chunks and place them directly on the lit pile of charcoal.

If you can't find wood chunks, small wood chips may be used. To keep the chips from burning up too quickly, we found it best to wrap them in a foil packet. (There's no need to soak these chips; the foil protects them from catching fire too quickly.) We tried soaking the chips and throwing them directly onto the coals, but they caught fire immediately. The same thing happened when we placed the chips in an open foil tray on top of the coals—an open tray does not provide enough protection for the chips and can tip over if placed on an uneven pile of charcoal.

If using wood chips, follow figures 5

and 6 to wrap chips in heavy-duty aluminum foil. Note that regular foil does not offer enough protection and the chips can catch fire.

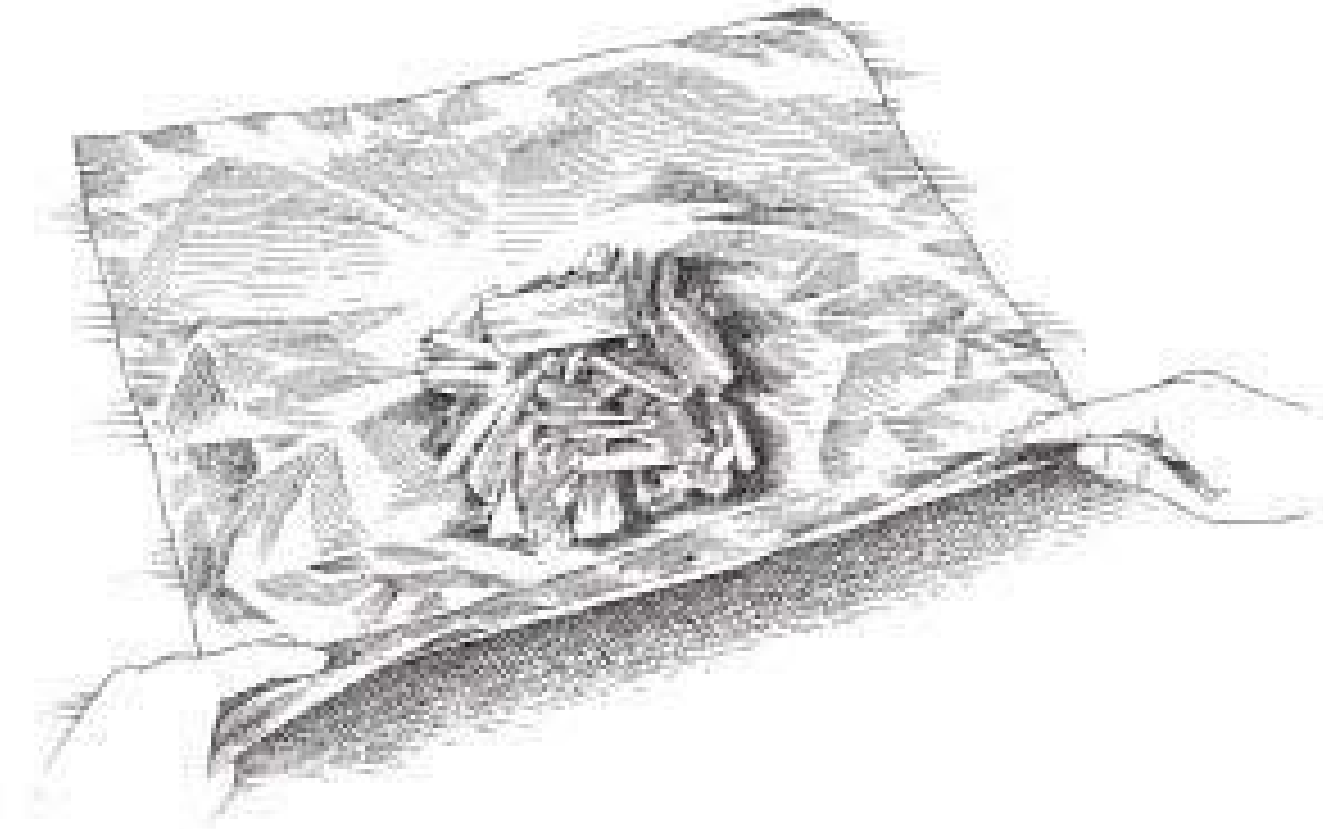

Figure 5.
Place the amount of wood chips called for in the recipe in the center of an 18-inch square of heavy-duty aluminum foil. Fold in all four sides of foil to encase the chips.

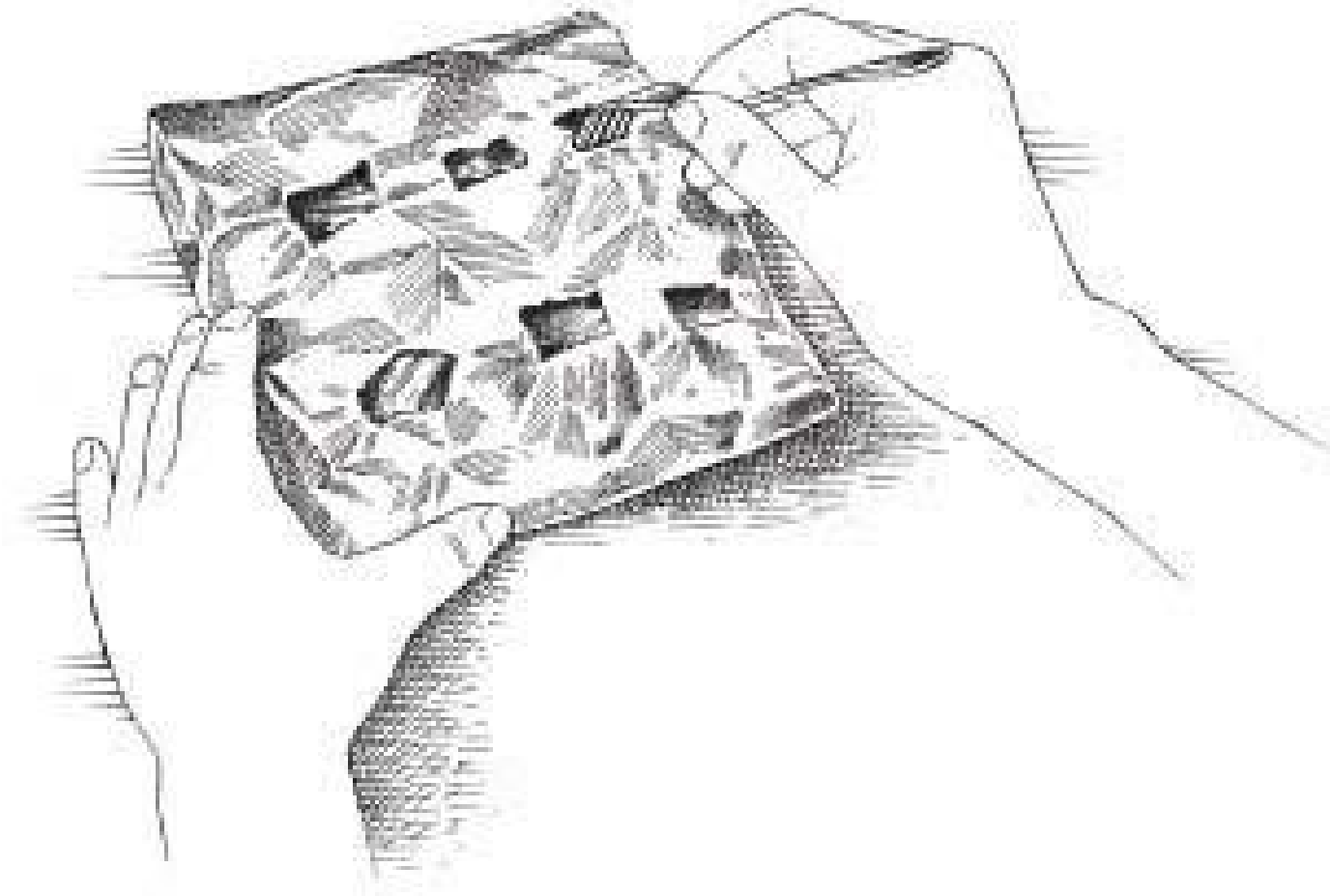

Figure 6.
Turn the foil packet over. Tear about six large holes (each the size of a quarter) through the top of the foil packet with a fork to allow smoke to escape. Place the packet, with holes facing up, directly on a pile of lit charcoal.

USING A GAS GRILL FOR INDIRECT COOKING

As with a charcoal grill, size matters when trying to cook certain foods on a gas grill. For instance, the lid must be tall enough to accommodate a turkey resting in a V-rack. (A lid that is less than eight or nine inches tall will be a problem.) Likewise, the size of the cooking grate is important when trying to prepare ribs. Unless the cooking surface has an area of at least 400 square inches, you will need to cook one slab at a time. (If the grill comes with a warming rack, you may cook a second slab there.)

In addition to size, the number of

burners is critical. It's not possible to cook indirectly on a grill with only one burner, because the burner is usually positioned in the center of the grill and the "cool" parts of the grill are too small to fit most foods. You must use a grill with at least two burners. With one burner on and one burner off, at least half of the grill will be cool enough for slow cooking.

Just as important, buy a gas grill with a thermometer. You can stick an oven thermometer on the cooking grate, but then you have to open the lid to find out the temperature. Opening the lid causes heat to be lost and prolongs total cooking time. Also try to buy a grill with a gas gauge. Many of the recipes in this

book require several hours of cooking, and there's nothing worse than running out of gas unexpectedly.

In our tests, we found it slightly easier to cook on grills with left and right burners rather than front and back. The cooking grate on most gas grills is rectangular. When the grill is divided into front and back cooking zones, the cool part of the grill will be a long, relatively narrow band. Although this shape is well suited to ribs and tenderloin, it can be a challenge when cooking a turkey. When the grill is divided into left and right cooking zones, each side is roughly a square, which we find to be a better shape for cooking

birds. Foods that are long and thin, like tenderloin, can be easily curled in a C-shape over the cool side of the grill.

To set up a gas grill for indirect cooking, remove all warming shelves attached to the hood or the back of the grill. (Leave the racks in place when making ribs on a small grill.) Place a foil tray with wood chips (*see* figures 7 through 10) on top of the primary burner (*see* figure 11). With some gas grills, one burner must be turned on first. This is the primary burner. With other grills, you may designate a primary burner yourself. Light all burners and cover the grill. When you see a lot of smoke (this will take about 20 minutes), turn off the burner(s) without the chips and place the

food over these off burners. If the chips start to flame, douse the fire with water from a squirt bottle.

WOOD ON A GAS GRILL

Chips are the only choice for gas grills since chunks are hard to position right over a lit burner and may not get hot enough to smoke. We tried various methods for adding chips before we hit upon the best solution.

When we tossed either unsoaked or soaked chips directly into the bottom of a gas grill, they burned much too quickly and gave up all their smoke or did not smoke at all because they fell below the burners. We tried the foil packet method

that worked well with charcoal, but found that in this case the packet actually was too effective a shield and not enough smoke was being released.

We prefer to place the chips in an open foil tray. The tray (which can be made from heavy-duty aluminum foil; *see* figures 7 through 10) shields the chips from direct contact with the burner but is open on top to allow the smoke to flow freely. The tray also allows you to spread out the chips so that they are not piled on top of each other, as they are inside a smaller foil packet. More chips can also be added to the tray throughout the cooking process. When we placed unsoaked chips in the tray they caught fire immediately. Soaking the chips for

15 minutes prevents them from igniting and allows them to smolder slowly and produce a lot of smoke.

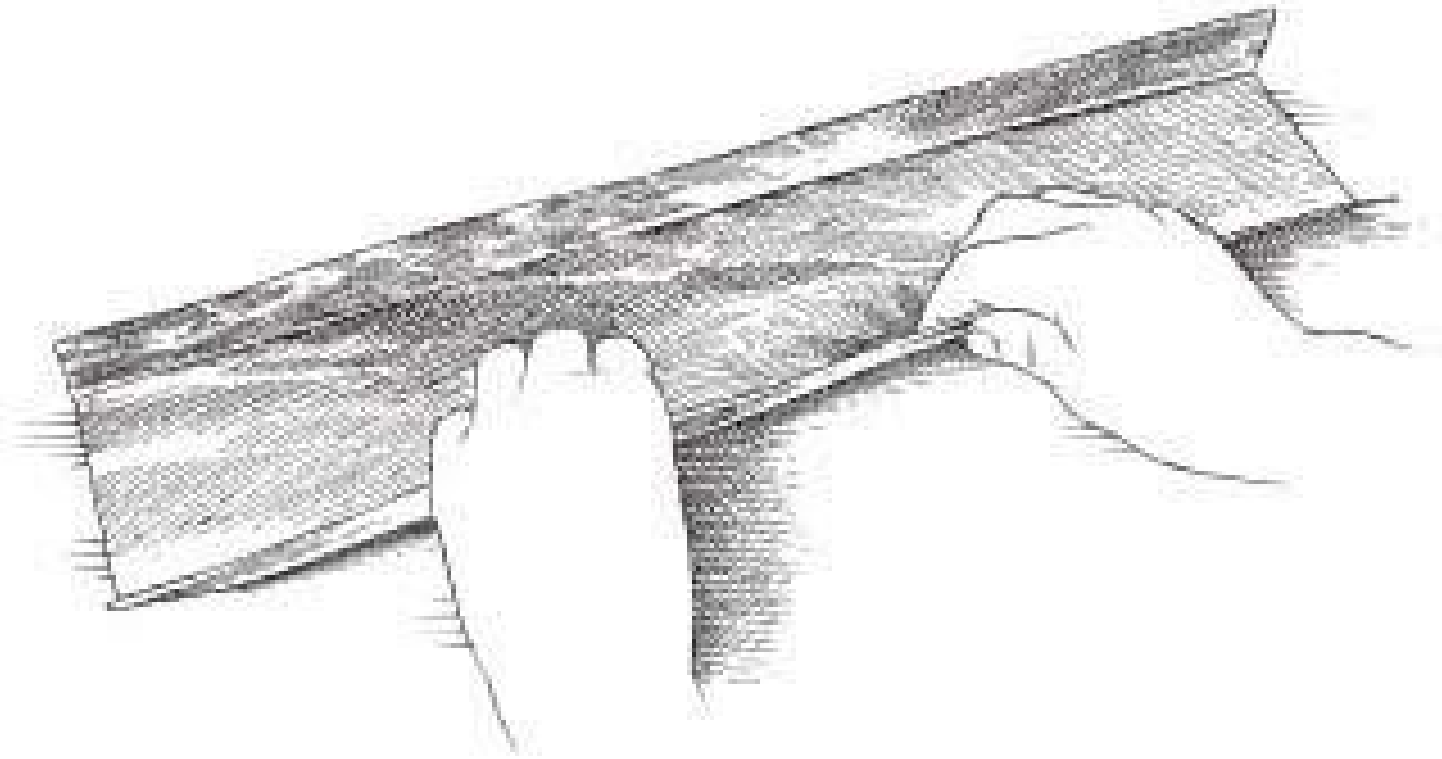

Figure 7.
Start with a 12-by 18-inch piece of heavy-duty foil. Make a 1-inch fold on one long side. Repeat three more times and turn the fold up to create a sturdy side that measures about 1 inch high. Repeat the process on the other long side.

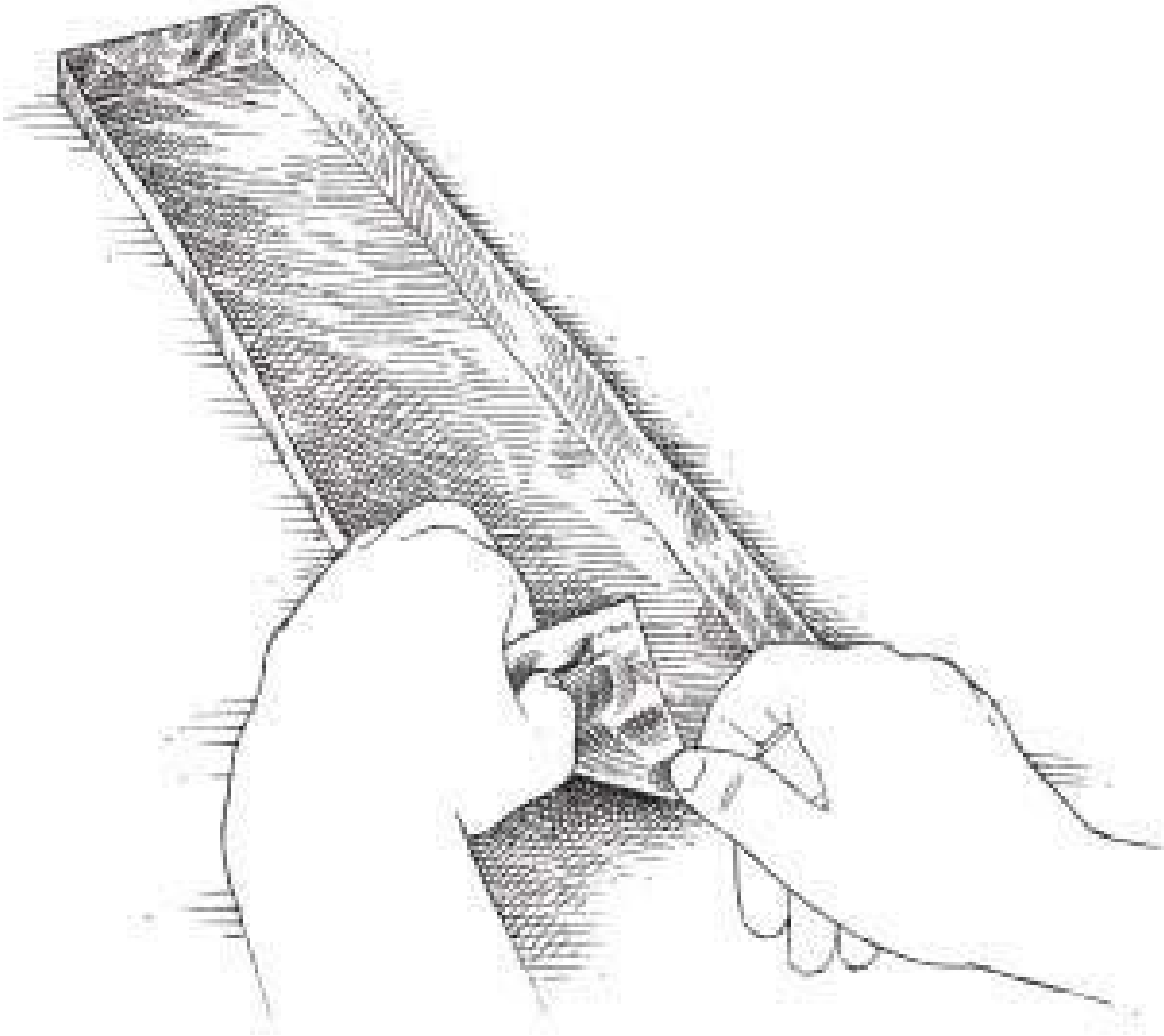

Figure 8.
With a short side facing you, fold in both corners as if wrapping a gift.

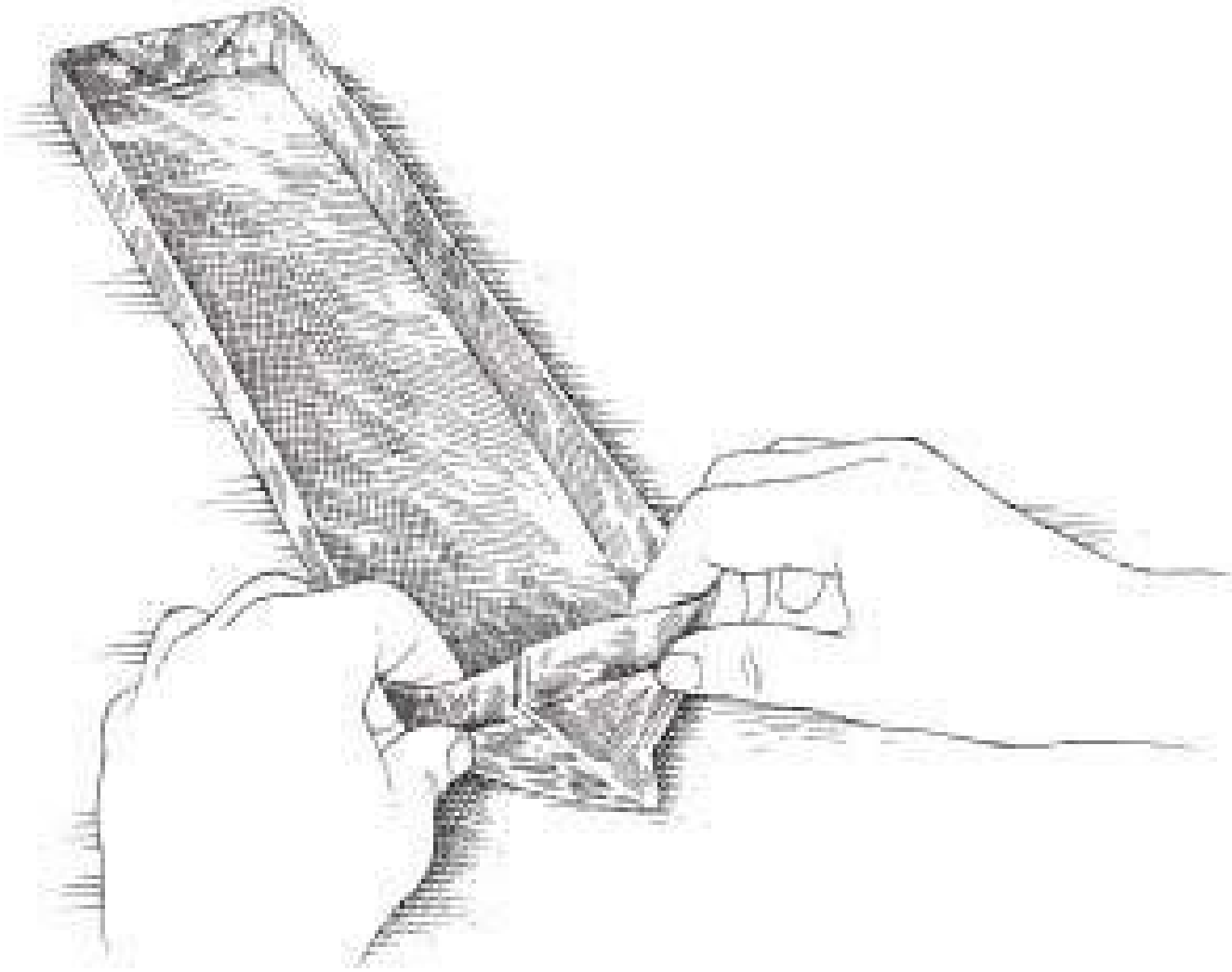

Figure 9.
Turn up the inside inch or so of each triangular fold to match the rim on the long sides of the foil tray.

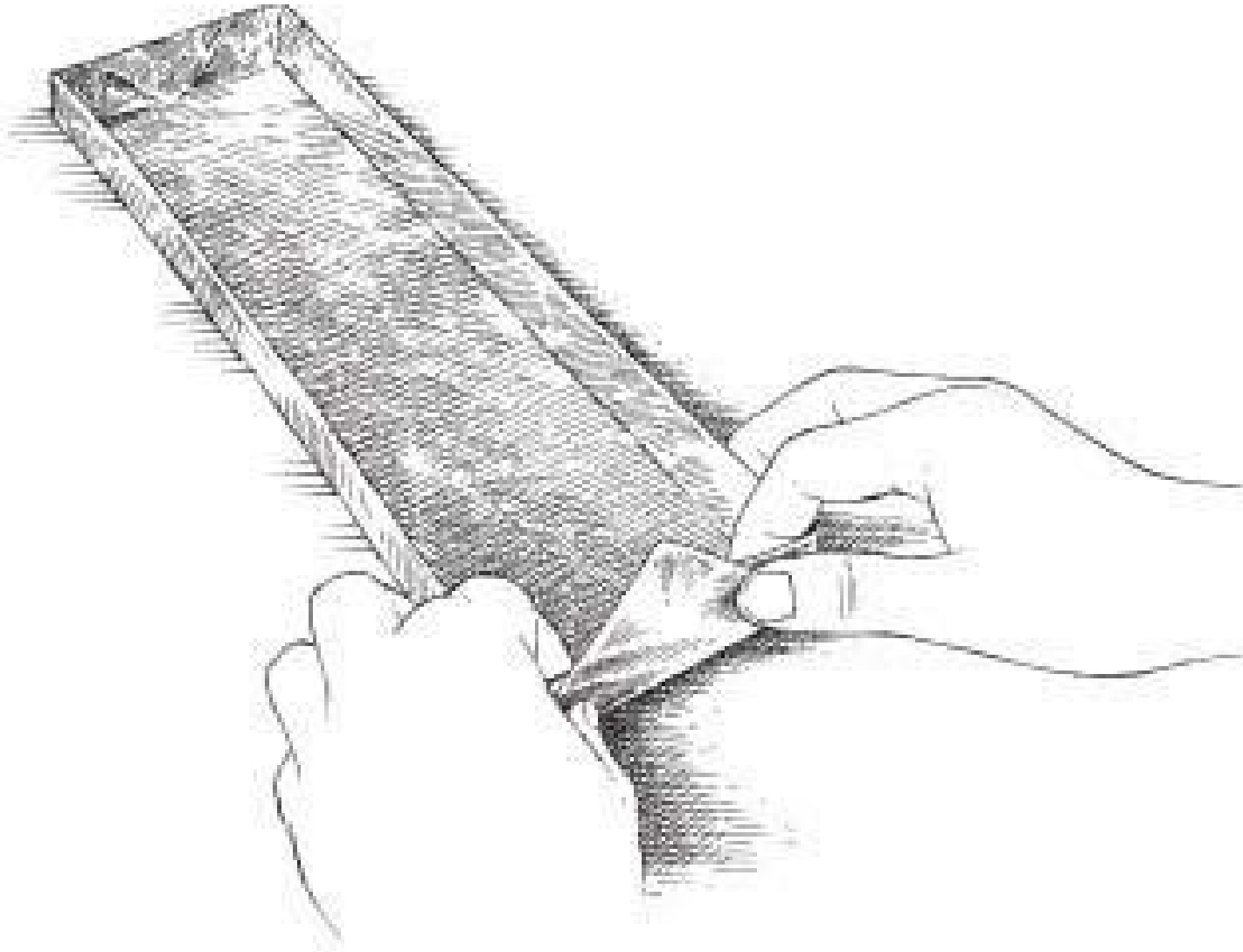

Figure 10.
Lift the pointed end of the triangle over the rim of foil and fold down to seal. Repeat the process on the other short side.

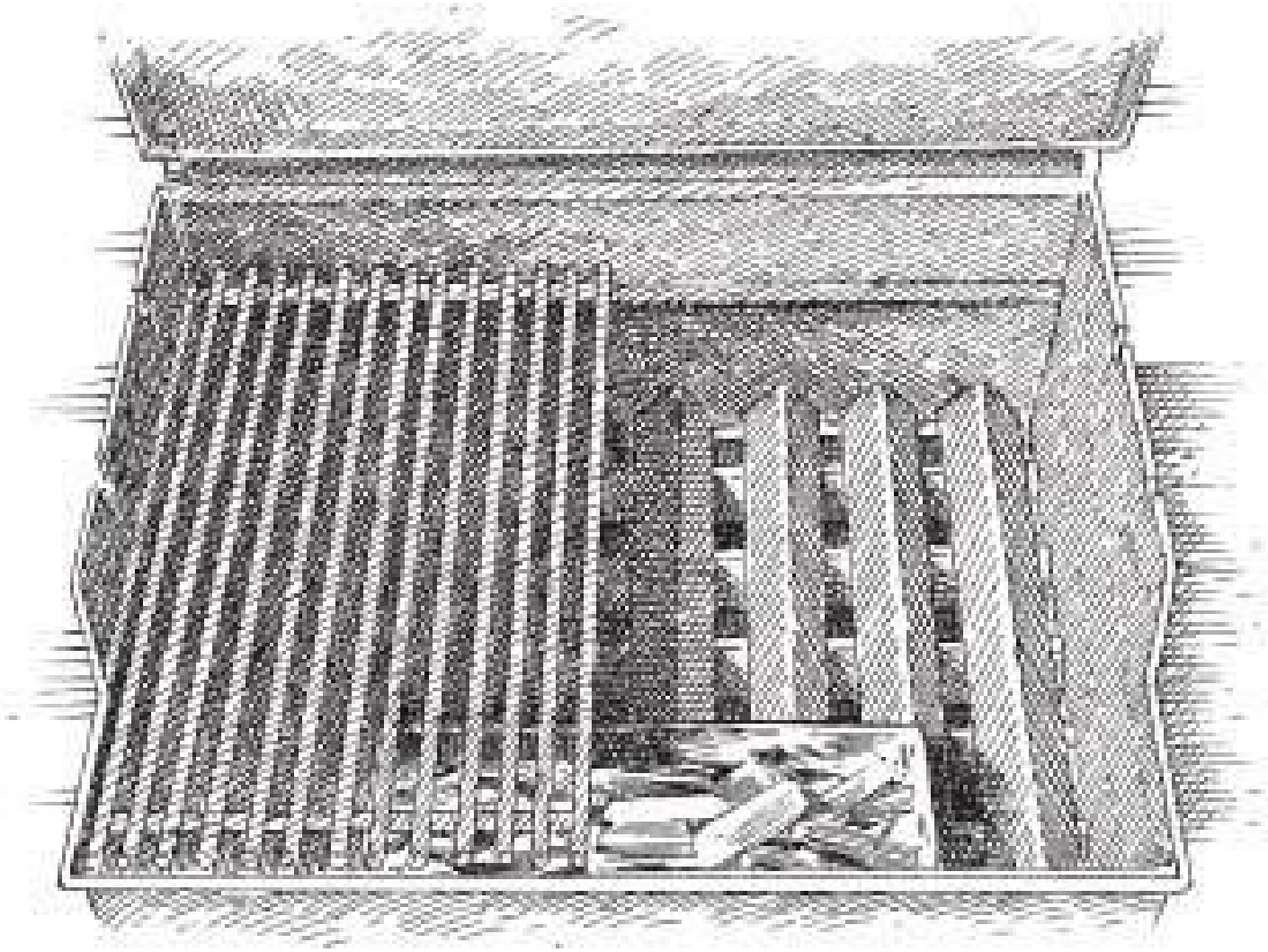

Figure 11.
When using a gas grill, place the soaked chips in the foil tray and set it over the burner you plan to leave on during the cooking process (in this case the front one —we call this the primary

burner). Make sure the tray is resting securely over the burner and will not tip. Replace the grill rack and preheat the grill as directed.

BARBECUED RIBS

WE WANTED TO KNOW WHETHER IT IS possible to produce "authentic" ribs (the kind you get at a barbecue joint) at home. We started by cooking ribs—for us, this means pork spareribs—three different ways. One slab was cooked over indirect heat, one parboiled and then grilled over direct heat, and the third cooked on a rotisserie attachment to our grill—we were reluctant to use this unusual bit of equipment but, in the name of science, thought we should give it a shot. All three tests were conducted

over charcoal with hickory chips in a covered grill.

The ribs cooked over indirect heat were the hands-down favorite. Those cooked on the rotisserie were not nearly as tender, and the parboiled ribs retained the unappealing flavor of boiled meat. While the indirect method needed some refinement, we were convinced it is the best way to cook ribs at home. It also came closest to replicating the method used by barbecue pit masters.

We prefer regular spareribs to either baby back ribs or country-style ribs (*see* figure 12). The latter ribs are leaner, and therefore prone to drying out, but the extra fat on spareribs helps keep the meat tender and moist during the long

cooking process.

We tested a number of popular techniques for barbecuing ribs. Some experts swear by placing some source of moisture in the grill, most often an aluminum pan filled with water or beer. We filled a pan with water and put it next to the coals to create some steam. We couldn't taste the difference between ribs cooked with or without the water.

Next, we tested turning and basting. We found that for the even melting of the fat, it is best to turn the ribs every half hour. Turning also ensures even cooking. When turning, work as quickly as possible to conserve heat in the grill; don't leave the lid off and wander away

to find a pair of tongs. Basting proved to be a bust. Tomato-based sauces burn over the long cooking time, and we didn't find the meat any moister after basting.

Under normal weather conditions, we found the ribs to be done in two to three hours. Signs of doneness include the meat starting to pull away from the ribs (if you grab one end of an individual rib bone and twist it, the bone will actually turn a bit and separate from the meat) and a distinct rosy glow on the exterior. Since the ribs require a relatively short cooking time, there is no need to replenish the coals. A fire that starts out at 350 degrees will drop back to around 250 degrees by the end of two hours.

At this point in our testing, we had produced good ribs, but they were not quite as moist and tender as some restaurant ribs. We spoke with several pit masters, and they suggested wrapping the ribs when they come off the grill. We wrapped the ribs in foil and then placed them in a brown paper bag to trap any escaping steam. After an hour, we unwrapped the ribs and couldn't believe the difference. The flavor, which was great straight off the grill, was the same, but the texture was markedly improved. The wrapped ribs literally fell off the bone.

We spoke with several food scientists who explained that as the ribs rest, the

juices are evenly distributed back through the meat and the resulting ribs are more moist and more tender. In fact, our ribs are so flavorful and tender that we consider sauce optional.

Master Recipe

Barbecued Ribs

NOTE: *We prefer regular spareribs (see figure 12) to baby back or country-style ribs, both of which are less fatty and can dry out as they barbecue. Hickory is the traditional wood choice with ribs, but some of our tasters liked mesquite as well. Serves four.*

2 full slabs pork spareribs (about 6 pounds total)

$^3/_4$ cup Dry Rub for Barbecue

2 3-inch wood chunks or 2 cups wood chips

Heavy-duty aluminum foil
Brown paper grocery bag
2 cups Barbecue Sauce
optional

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Rub both sides of ribs with dry rub and let stand at room temperature for 1 hour. (For stronger flavor, wrap rubbed ribs in double layer of plastic and refrigerate for up to one day.)

2. Soak wood chunks in cold water to cover for 1 hour and drain, or place wood chips on 18-inch square of aluminum foil, seal to make packet, and use fork tines to create about six holes to

allow smoke to escape (*see* figures 5 and 6).

3. Meanwhile, light about 40 charcoal briquettes in chimney. Transfer hot coals from chimney to one side of kettle grill, piling them up in a mound two or three briquettes high. Keep bottom vents completely open. When coals are covered with light gray ash, lay wood chunks or packet with chips on top of charcoal. Put cooking grate in place, open grill lid vents completely, and place lid on grill, turning lid so that vents are opposite wood chunks or chips to draw smoke through grill. Let grate heat for 5 minutes, clean with wire

brush, and position ribs over cool part of grill. (Initial temperature will be about 350 degrees and will drop to 250 degrees after 2 hours.)

4. Barbecue, turning ribs every 30 minutes, until meat starts to pull away from ribs and has rosy glow on exterior, 2 to 3 hours. Remove ribs from grill and completely wrap each slab in foil. Put foil-wrapped slabs in brown paper bag, and crimp top of bag to seal tightly. Allow to rest at room temperature for 1 hour.

5. Unwrap ribs and brush with barbecue

sauce if desired or serve with sauce on side.

VARIATION:

Barbecued Ribs on a Gas Grill

If working with a smaller grill, place the second slab of ribs on the warming rack.

Follow Barbecued Ribs Master Recipe, making the following changes: Place foil tray with soaked wood chips (*see* figures 7 through 10) on top of primary burner (*see* figure 11). Turn all burners to high and preheat with lid down until chips are smoking heavily, about 20 minutes. Turn primary burner down to medium, turn off burner(s)

without chips, and clean grill with wire brush. Position ribs over cool part of grill. Barbecue, turning ribs every 30 minutes, until done, 2 to 3 hours. (Temperature inside grill should be constant 275 degrees; adjust lit burner as necessary.) Wrap, rest, and brush ribs with barbecue sauce.

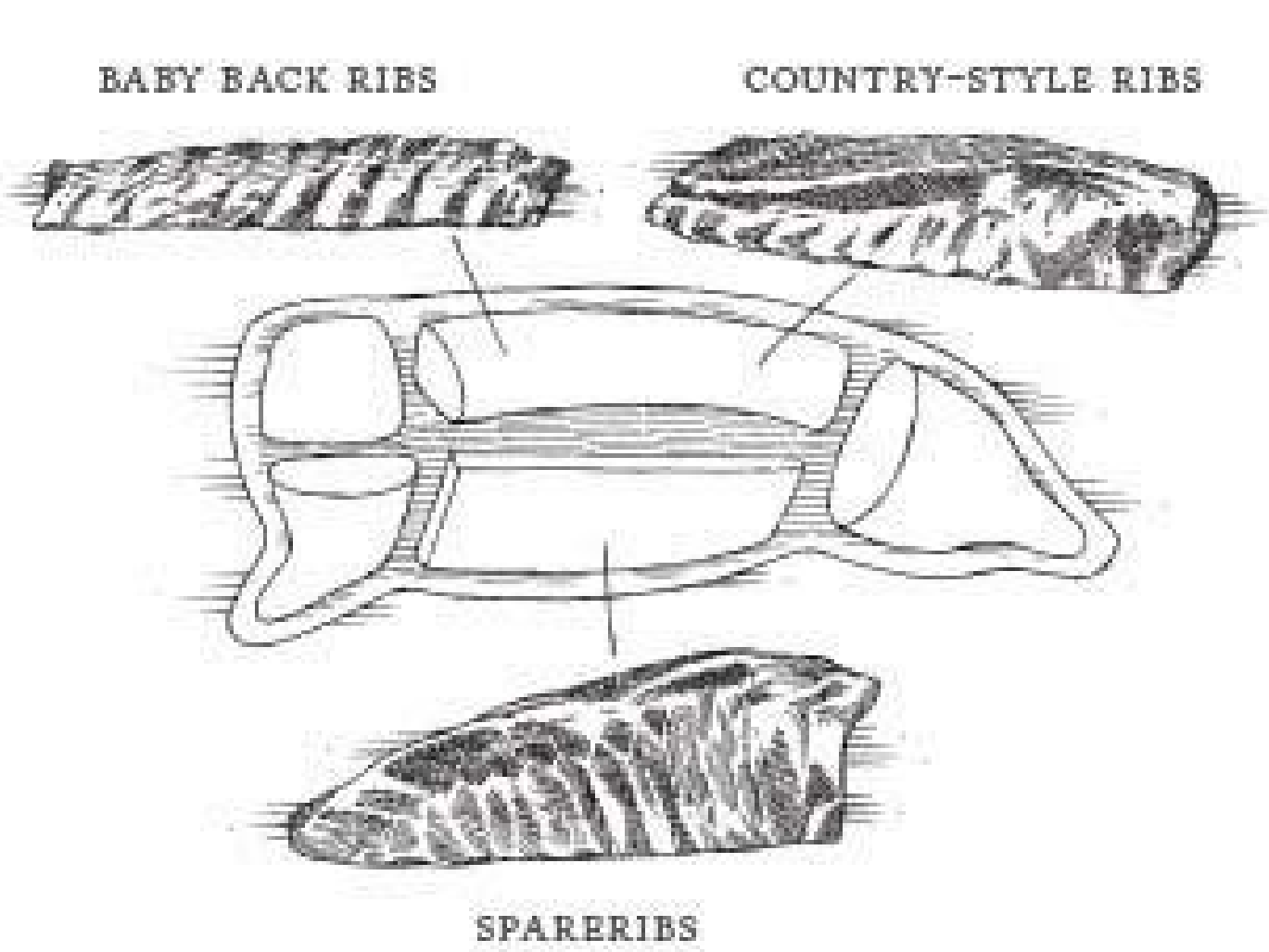

Figure 12.

Spareribs come from the side or underbelly of the pig and have the most fat, making them the best choice for barbecuing. Baby back ribs (sometimes called back ribs or loin back ribs) come from the loin (or back) of the pig where

the bones are shorter. Country-style ribs are cut from further along the back (closer to the legs). These ribs are quite large and meaty.

BARBECUED BEEF BRISKET

THE MAIN REASON IT'S SO HARD TO COOK brisket right is that it starts out as a very tough cut of meat. Unless brisket is fully cooked, the meat is very chewy and practically inedible. Because a brisket is so large, cooking the meat fully can take many hours. Our goal was to make the meat as tender as possible as quickly as possible.

So what does "fully cooked" mean when talking about brisket? To find out, we roasted four small pieces to various

internal temperatures. The pieces cooked to 160 and 180 degrees were dry and quite tough. A piece cooked to 200 degrees was slightly less tough, although quite dry. A final piece cooked to 210 degrees had the most appealing texture and the most pleasant chew, despite the fact that is was the driest.

So what's going on here? Heat causes muscle proteins to uncoil and then bond together, which drives out juices in the same way that wringing removes moisture from a wet cloth. This process starts in earnest at around 140 degrees, and by the time meat reaches 180 degrees most juices have been expelled. This explains why a medium-rare steak (cooked to 130 degrees) is much juicier

than a well-done steak (cooked to 160 degrees).

With tender cuts, like steak, the lower the internal temperature of the meat, the juicier and less tough the meat will be. However, with cuts that start out tough, like brisket, another process is also at work. Brisket is loaded with waxy-looking connective tissue called collagen, which makes the meat chewy and tough unless fully cooked. Only when the collagen has been transformed into gelatin will the meat be tender. Collagen begins to convert to gelatin at 150 degrees, but the conversion process occurs most rapidly at temperatures above 180 degrees.

When cooking brisket, the gelatinization of collagen must be the priority. Thus, the meat should be cooked as fully as possible, or to an internal temperature of 210 degrees. The muscle juices will be long gone (that's why the sliced meat is served with barbecue sauce), but the meat will be extremely tender because all the collagen will have been converted to gelatin.

It is important to point out that moist-heat cooking methods (such as braising) are appropriate for cooking meats to such high internal temperatures because water is a more efficient conductor of heat than air. Meats cooked in a moist

environment heat up faster and can be held at high internal temperatures without burning or drying out.

Given the fact that brisket must be fully cooked and that the meat is so big (a full brisket can weigh 13 pounds), the meat needs 10 or 12 hours of barbecuing to reach the fork-tender stage. Even when butchers separate the brisket into smaller pieces, as is often the case (*see* figure 13), the cooking time is astronomical. Most cooks are not prepared to keep a fire going that long.

To get around this all-day-long-tending-the-fire problem, we found it necessary to commit barbecue heresy. After much testing, we decided to start the meat on the grill but then finish in the

oven, where it could be left to cook unattended. We wondered how long the meat would have to stay on the grill to pick up enough smoke flavor. In our testing, we found that two hours allowed the meat to absorb plenty of smoke flavor and created a dark brown, crusty exterior.

At this point, the meat is ready for the oven. We found it best to wrap the meat in foil to create a moist environment. (Unwrapped briskets cooked up drier, and the exterior was prone to burning.) After barbecuing, a whole brisket requires three hours or so in a 300-degree oven to become fork-tender. Barbecue purists might object to the use

of the oven, but this method works and doesn't require a tremendous commitment of hands-on cooking time.

Some further notes about our testing. Although many experts recommend basting a brisket regularly as it cooks on the grill to ensure moistness, we disagree. Taking the lid off wreaked havoc with our charcoal fire, and the meat didn't taste any different despite frequent basting with sauce. Likewise, we don't recommend placing a pan filled with water (we also tried beer) on the grill. Some barbecue masters believe that the liquid adds moisture and flavor to the meat, but we couldn't tell any difference between brisket cooked with and without the pan of liquid.

Brisket comes with a thick layer of fat on one side. We tried turning the brisket at it cooks, thinking this might promote even cooking. However, we had better results when we barbecued the brisket fat side up the entire time. When positioned this way, the fat slowly melts and lubricates the meat below.

Master Recipe

Barbecued Beef Brisket

NOTE: *Cooking a whole brisket, which weighs at least 10 pounds, may seem like overkill. However, the process is easy, and the leftovers keep well in the refrigerator for up to four days. (Leave leftover brisket unsliced, and reheat the foil-wrapped meat in a 300-degree oven until warm.) Don't worry if your brisket is a little larger or smaller; split-second cooking times are not critical since the meat is eaten very well-done. Still, if you don't want to bother with a big piece of meat,*

barbecuing brisket for less than a crowd is easy to do. Simply ask your butcher for either the point or flat portion of the brisket, which weigh about half as much as the whole brisket. Then follow this recipe, reducing the spice rub by half and barbecuing for just $1^1/_2$ hours. Wrap the meat tightly in foil and reduce the time in the oven to 2 hours. No matter how large or small a piece you cook, save the juices the meat gives off while in the oven to enrich the barbecue sauce (see figure 16). Hickory and mesquite are both traditional wood choices with brisket. Serves 18 to 24.

$^3/_4$ cup Dry Rub for Barbecue

1 whole beef brisket (*see* figure 13), 9 to 11 pounds, fat trimmed to $^1/_4$-inch thickness

2 3-inch wood chunks or 2 cups wood chips

Heavy-duty aluminum foil

2 cups Barbecue Sauce

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Apply rub liberally to all sides of meat, pressing down to make sure spices adhere and completely obscure meat. Wrap tightly in plastic wrap and refrigerate for 2 hours. (For stronger flavor, refrigerate brisket for up to 2 days.)

2. One hour prior to cooking, remove brisket from refrigerator, unwrap, and let come to room temperature. Soak wood chunks in cold water to cover for 1 hour and drain, or place wood chips on 18-inch square of aluminum foil, seal to make packet, and use fork to create about six holes to allow smoke to escape (*see* figures 5 and 6).

3. Meanwhile, light about 40 charcoal briquettes in chimney. Transfer hot coals from chimney to one side of kettle grill, piling them up in a mound two or three briquettes high. Keep bottom vents completely open. When coals are

covered with light gray ash, lay wood chunks or packet with chips on top of charcoal. Put cooking grate in place, open grill lid vents completely and place lid on grill, turning lid so that vents are opposite wood chunks or chips to draw smoke through grill. Let grate heat for 5 minutes, clean with wire brush, and position brisket, fat side up, on grate opposite fire. Barbecue without removing lid for 2 hours. (Initial temperature will be about 350 degrees and will drop to 250 degrees after 2 hours.)

4. Adjust oven rack to middle position and preheat oven to 300 degrees. Attach

two 48-inch long pieces of heavy-duty foil by folding long edges together two or three times, crimping tightly to seal well, to form an approximate 48-by 36-inch rectangle. Position brisket lengthwise in center of foil. Bring short edges over brisket and fold down, crimping tightly to seal (*see* figure 14). Repeat with long sides of foil to seal brisket completely (*see* figure 15). Place brisket on jelly roll pan; bake until meat is fork-tender, 3 to $3^{1}/_{2}$ hours.

5. Remove brisket from oven, loosen foil at one end to release steam, and let rest for 30 minutes. If you like, drain juices into large bowl (*see* figure 16)

and defat juices in gravy skimmer.

6. Unwrap brisket and place on cutting board. Separate into two sections and carve (*see* figures 17 and 18). Serve with plain barbecue sauce or with barbecue sauce that has been flavored with up to 1 cup of defatted brisket juices.

VARIATION:

Barbecued Beef Brisket on a Gas Grill

Follow Barbecued Beef Brisket Master Recipe, making the following changes: Place foil tray with soaked wood chips

(*see* figures 7 through 10) on top of primary burner (*see* figure 11). Turn all burners to high and preheat with lid down until chips are smoking heavily, about 20 minutes. Turn primary burner down to medium, turn off burner(s) without chips, and clean grill with wire brush. Position brisket, fat side up, over cool part of grill. Barbecue for 2 hours. (Temperature inside grill should be constant 275 degrees; adjust lit burner as necessary.) Proceed with Master Recipe as directed.

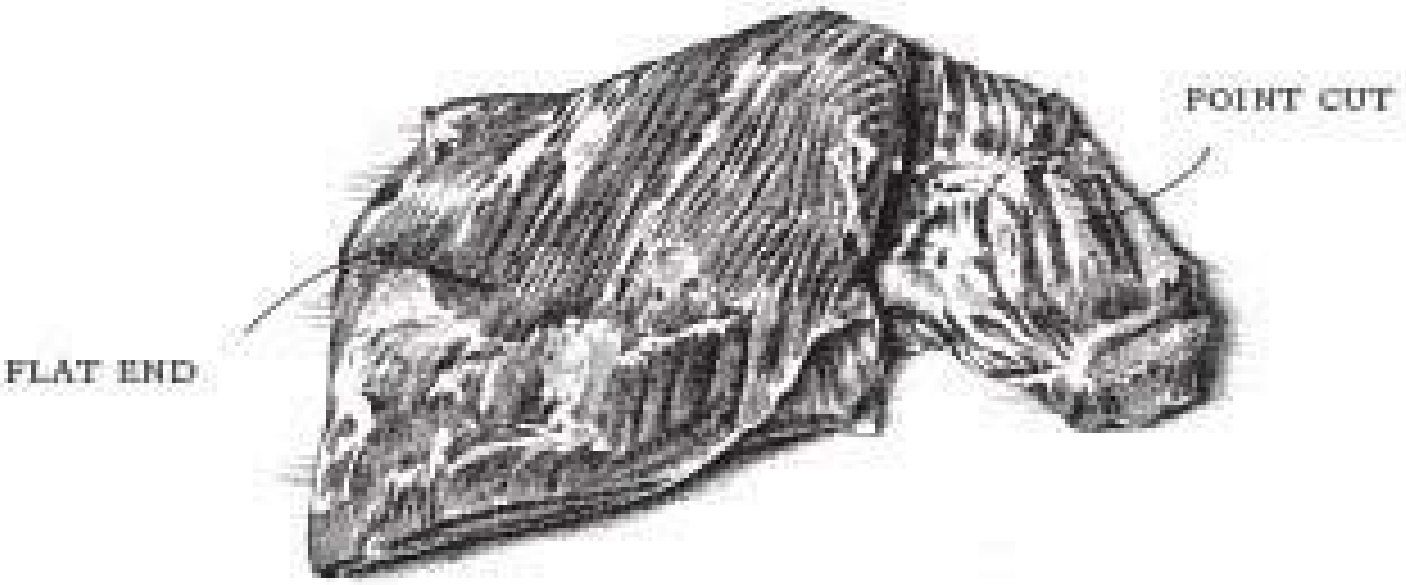

Figure 13.
Butchers sometimes separate the whole brisket into two parts, the flat end (left portion) and the point cut (right portion). The point cut is a bit thicker and contains more fat. It is more tender than the flat end when barbecued.

Figure 14.
After barbecuing, place the brisket on two 4-foot sections of heavy-duty foil that have been sealed together to make a 4-by 3-foot rectangle. Bring short ends of foil up over the brisket and crimp tightly to seal.

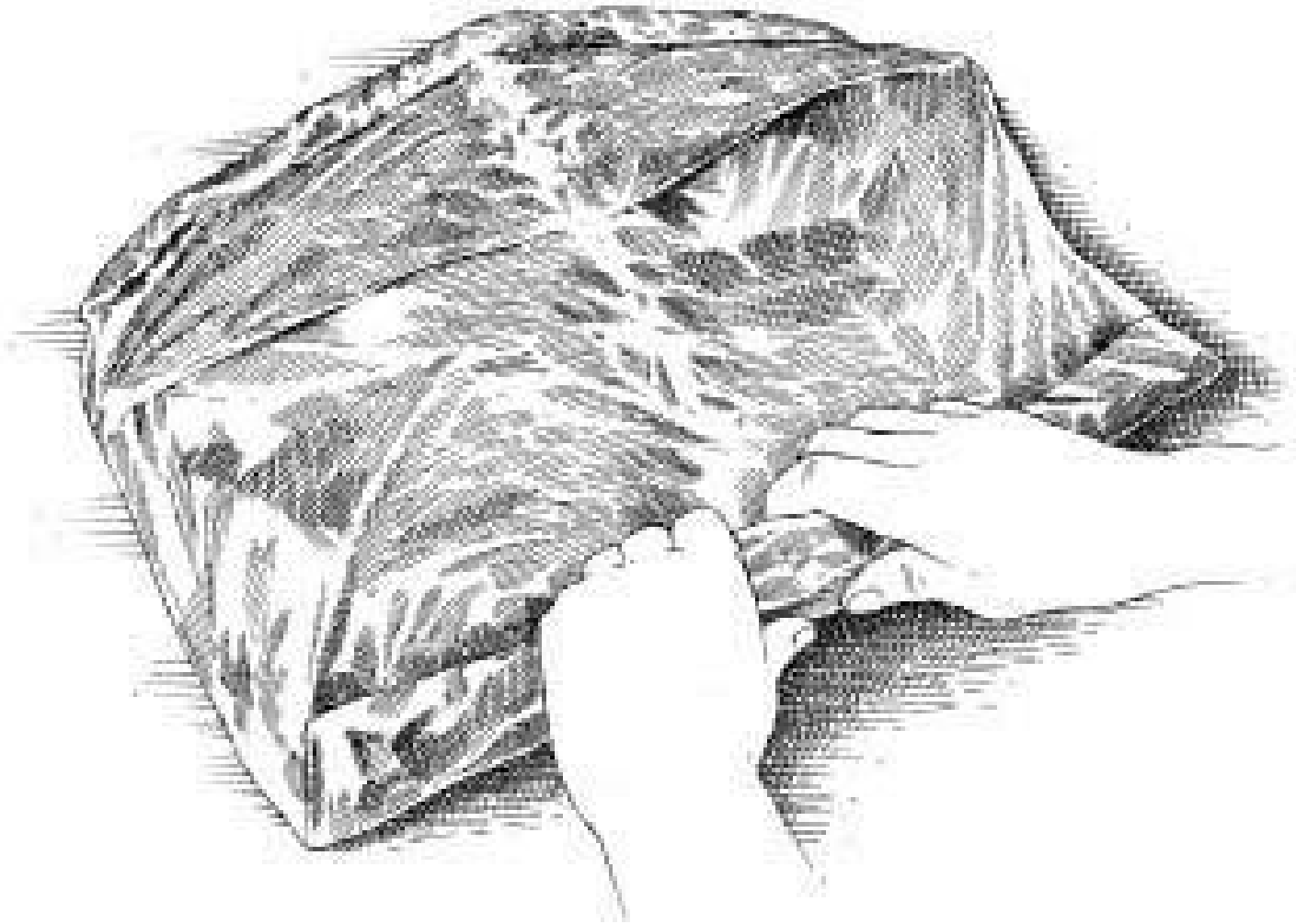

Figure 15.
Seal the long sides of the foil packet tightly up against the sides of the meat.

Figure 16.
After the brisket comes out of the oven, use pot holders or oven mitts to lift the jelly roll pan and carefully pour the juices into a bowl. Reserve the juices and defat

if you like. They make a delicious addition to the barbecue sauce.

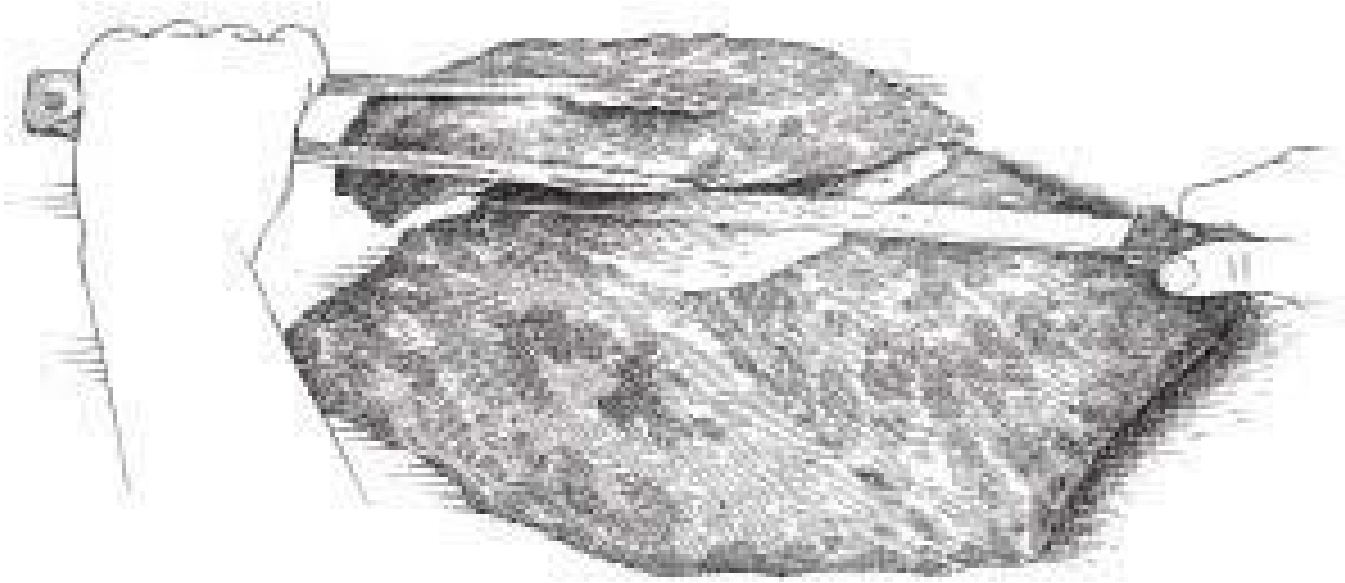

Figure 17.
Since the grain on the two sections of the brisket goes in opposite directions, separate the two cuts before slicing.

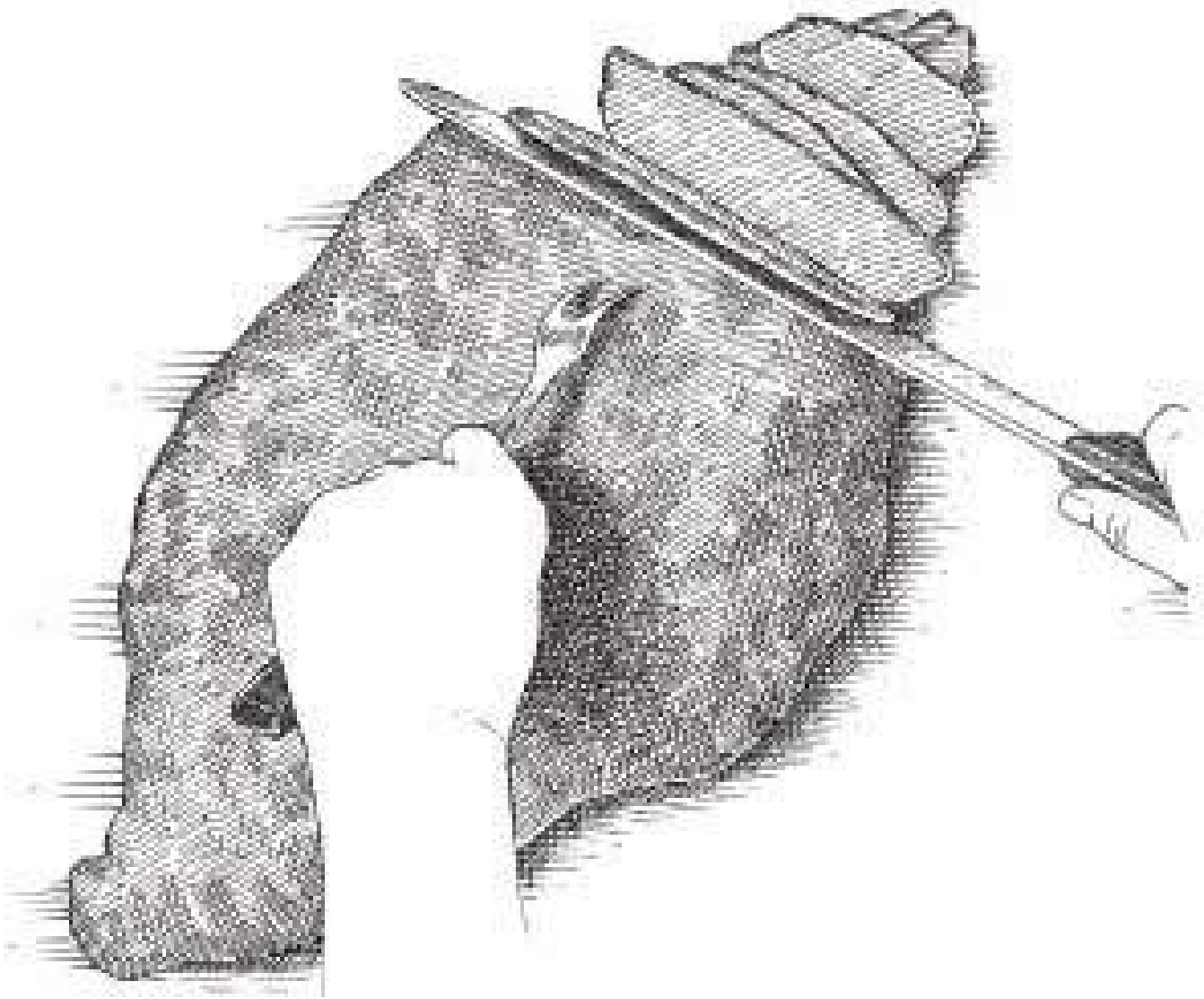

Figure 18.
Carve the brisket into long, thin slices, cutting against the grain on the diagonal.

BARBECUED PULLED PORK

PULLED PORK, ALSO CALLED PULLED PIG OR sometimes just plain barbecue, is slow-cooked pork roast, shredded and seasoned, and then served on a hamburger bun (or sliced white bread) with just enough of your favorite barbecue sauce, a couple of dill pickle chips, and a topping of coleslaw.

Our goal was to devise a procedure for cooking this classic southern dish that was at once both doable and delicious. The meat should be tender,

not tough, and moist but not too fatty. Most barbecue restaurants use a special smoker. We wanted to adapt the technique for the grill. We also set out to reduce the hands-on cooking time, which can stretch to eight hours of constant fire tending in some recipes.

There are two pork roasts commonly associated with pulled pork sandwiches: the shoulder roast and the fresh ham (*see* figure 19). In their whole state, both are massive roasts, anywhere from 14 to 20 pounds. Because they are so large, most butchers and supermarket meat departments cut both the front and back leg roasts into more manageable sizes: The part of the front leg containing the shoulder blade is usually sold as either a

pork shoulder roast or a Boston butt and runs from six to eight pounds. The meat from the upper portion of the front leg is marketed as a picnic roast and runs about the same size. The meat from the rear leg is often segmented into three or four separate boneless roasts called a fresh ham or boneless fresh ham roast.

For barbecue, we find it best to choose a cut of meat with a fair amount of fat, which helps keep the meat moist and succulent during long cooking and adds considerably to the flavor. For this reason, we think the pork shoulder roast, or Boston butt, is the best choice. We found that picnic roasts and fresh hams will also produce excellent results, but

they are our second choice.

To set our benchmark for quality, we first cooked a Boston butt using the traditional low-and-slow barbecue method. Using a standard 22-inch kettle grill, we lit about 30 coals and cooked the roast with indirect heat, adding about eight coals every half-hour or so. It took seven hours to cook a seven-pound roast. While the meat was delicious, tending a grill fire for seven hours is not very practical.

In our next test we tried a much bigger initial fire, with about five pounds of charcoal. After the coals were lit, we placed the pork in a small pan and set it on the grate. The trick to this more intense method is not to remove the lid

for any reason until the fire is out three hours later. Because you start with so many coals, it is not necessary to add charcoal during the cooking time. Unfortunately, the high initial heat charred the exterior of the roast and the interior was still tough and not nearly "fork-tender" when we took it off the grill.

Next, we tried a combination approach: a moderate amount of charcoal (more than the low-and-slow method but less than the no-peek procedure), cooking the pork roast for three hours on the grill and adding additional coals four times. We then finished the roast in a 325-degree oven

for two hours. This method produced almost the same results as the traditional barbecue but in considerably less time and with nine fewer additions of charcoal.

As with ribs (and all barbecue), we find it helpful to let the finished roast rest in a sealed paper bag for an hour. The meat reabsorbs the flavorful juices. In addition, the sealed bag produces a steaming effect that helps break down any remaining tough collagen. The result is a much more savory and succulent roast. Don't omit this step; it's the difference between good pulled pork and great pulled pork.

As with all barbecue, pork roast benefits from being rubbed with a

ground spice mixture. However, because the roast is so thick, we find it best to let the rubbed roast "marinate" in the refrigerator for at least three hours and preferably overnight. The salt in the rub is slowly absorbed by the meat and carries some of the spices with it. The result is a more evenly flavored piece of meat.

Master Recipe

Barbecued Pulled Pork

NOTE: *Preparing pulled pork requires little effort but lots of time. Plan on nine hours from start to finish: three hours covered with the spice rub, three hours on the grill, two hours in the oven, and one hour to rest. Hickory is the traditional choice with pork, although mesquite may be used if desired. Serve the pulled pork on plain white bread or warmed buns with the classic accompaniments of dill pickle chips and cole slaw. Serves eight.*

3/4 cup Dry Rub for Barbecue

1 bone-in pork roast, preferably Boston butt (*see figure 19*), 6 to 8 pounds

4 3-inch wood chunks or 4 cups wood chips

Heavy-duty aluminum foil

Disposable aluminum roasting pan (about 8prime; × 10prime;)

Brown paper grocery bag

2 cups Barbecue Sauce

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. If using fresh ham or picnic roast, remove skin (*see figure 20*). Massage dry rub into meat. Wrap tightly in double layer of plastic wrap and refrigerate for

at least 3 hours. (For stronger flavor, roast can be refrigerated for up to 3 days.)

2. About 1 hour prior to cooking, remove roast from refrigerator, and let come to room temperature. Soak wood chunks in cold water to cover for 1 hour and drain, or place wood chips on 18-inch square of aluminum foil, seal to make packet, and use fork to create about six holes to allow smoke to escape (*see* figures 5 and 6).

3. Meanwhile, light about 40 charcoal briquettes in chimney. Transfer hot coals

from chimney to one side of kettle grill, piling them up in a mound two or three briquettes high. Keep bottom vents completely open. When coals are covered with light gray ash, lay wood chunks or packet with chips on top of charcoal. Put cooking grate in place. Set unwrapped roast in disposable pan and place on grate opposite fire (*see* figure 21). Open grill lid vents three-quarters of the way and place lid on grill, turning lid so that vents are opposite wood chunks or chips to draw smoke through grill. Cook, adding about 8 briquettes every hour or so to maintain average temperature of 275 degrees, for 3 hours. Remove from grill and wrap pan holding roast with heavy-duty foil to cover

completely.

4. Adjust oven rack to middle position and preheat oven to 325 degrees. Place pan in oven and bake until meat is fork-tender, about 2 hours.

5. Slide foil-wrapped pan with roast into brown bag. Crimp top shut; let roast rest for 1 hour. Transfer roast to cutting board and unwrap. When cool enough to handle, "pull" pork by separating roast into muscle sections (*see* figure 22), removing fat if desired, and tearing meat into thin shreds with fingers (*see* figure 23). Place shredded meat in large bowl;

toss with 1 cup barbecue sauce, adding more to taste. Serve with remaining sauce passed separately.

VARIATION:

Pulled Pork on a Gas Grill

Follow Pulled Pork Master Recipe, making the following changes: Place foil tray with soaked wood chips (*see* figures 7 through 10) on top of primary burner (*see* figure 11). Turn all burners to high and preheat with lid down-until chips are smoking heavily, about 20 minutes. Turn primary burner down to medium and turn off burner(s) without chips. Position pan with roast over cool part of grill. Barbecue for 3 hours.

(Temperature inside grill should be constant 275 degrees; adjust lit burner as necessary.) Proceed with Master Recipe as directed.

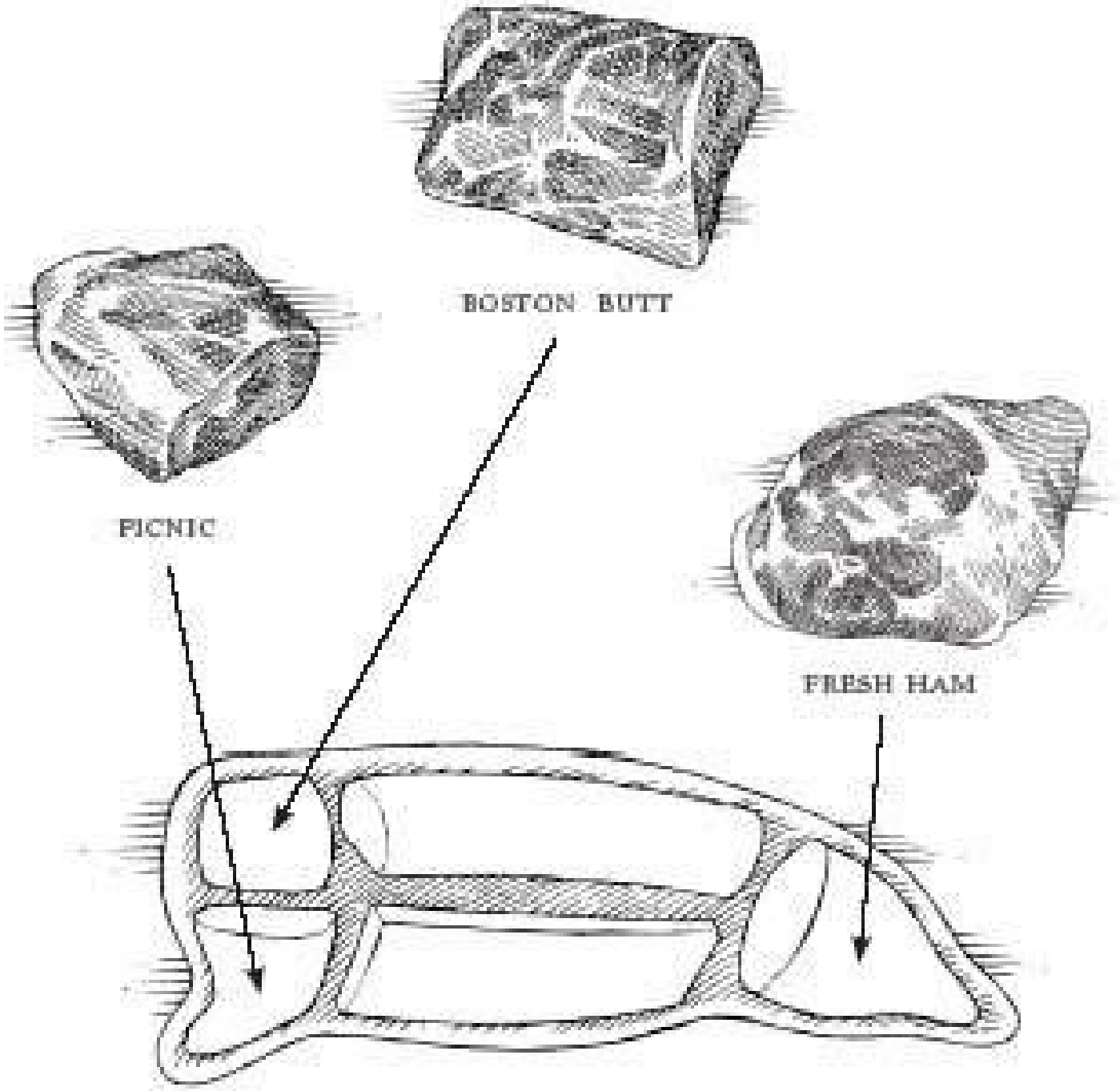

Figure 19.

Although all three cuts make good barbecue, Boston butt is our first choice because it has enough

fat to stay moist and succulent during the long cooking process.

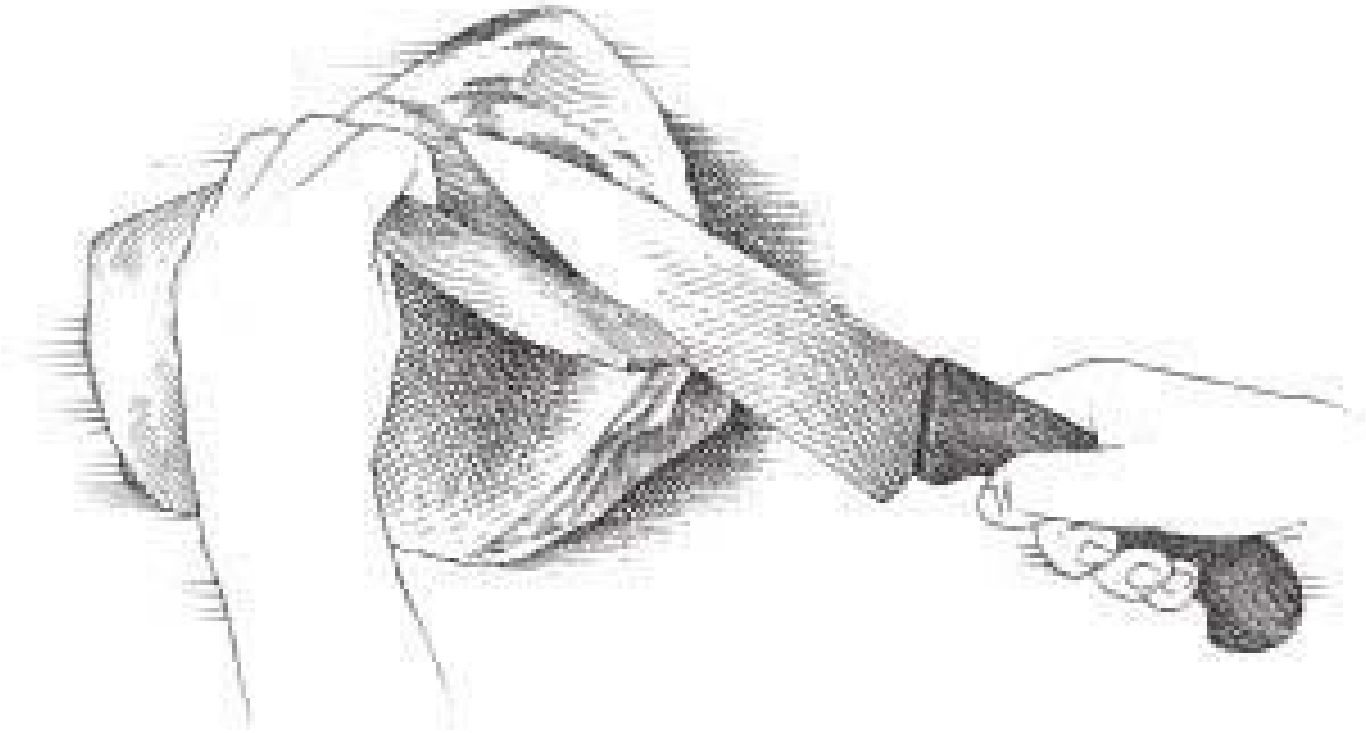

Figure 20.
If using fresh ham or picnic roast (seen here), cut through the skin with the tip of a chef's knife. Slide the knife blade just under the skin and work around to loosen the skin while pulling if off with your other hand. Boston butt does not need to be trimmed.

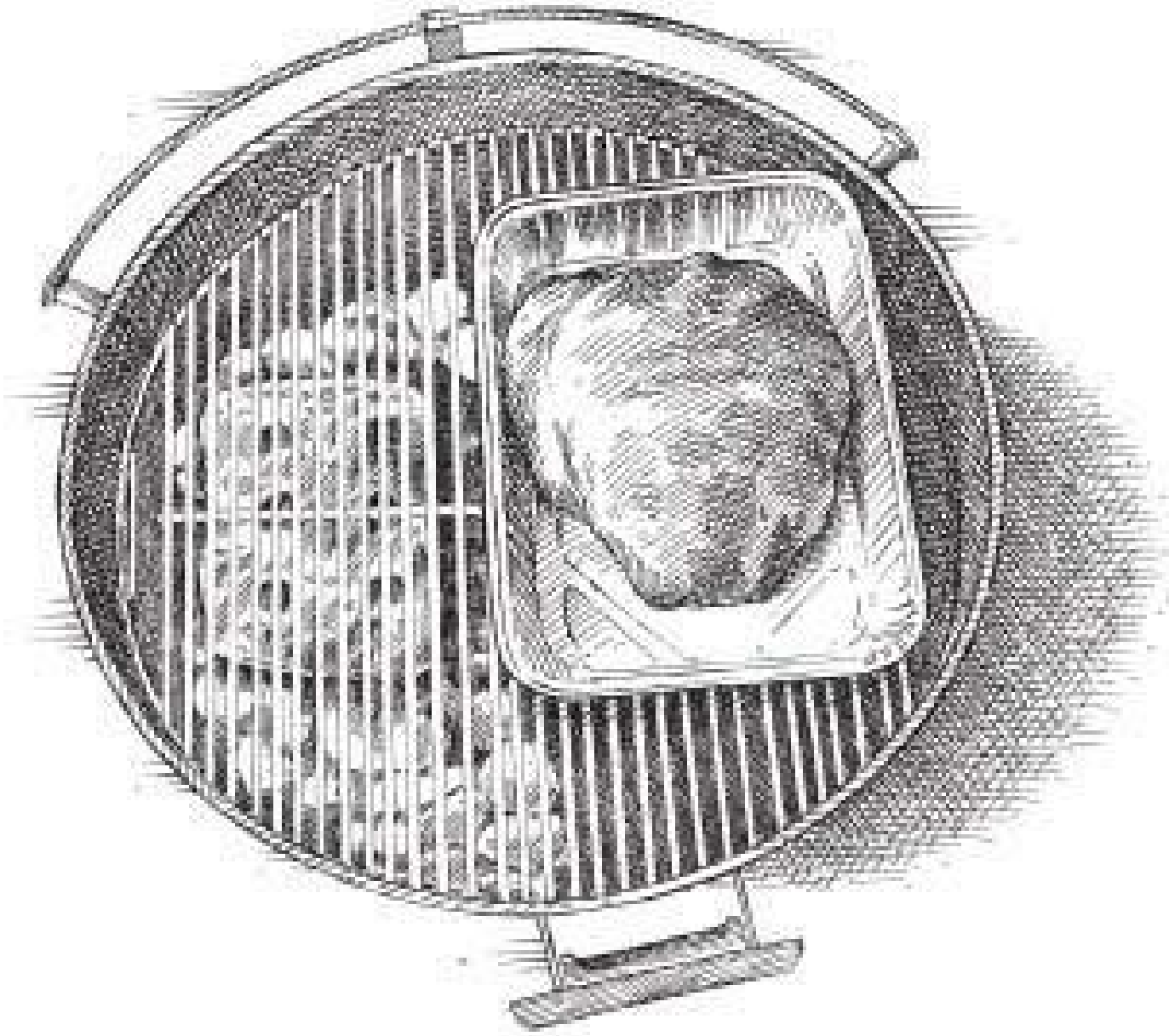

Figure 21.
Set the unwrapped roast, which has been placed in a disposable pan barely larger than the meat itself, on the grill rack opposite

the coals and the wood.

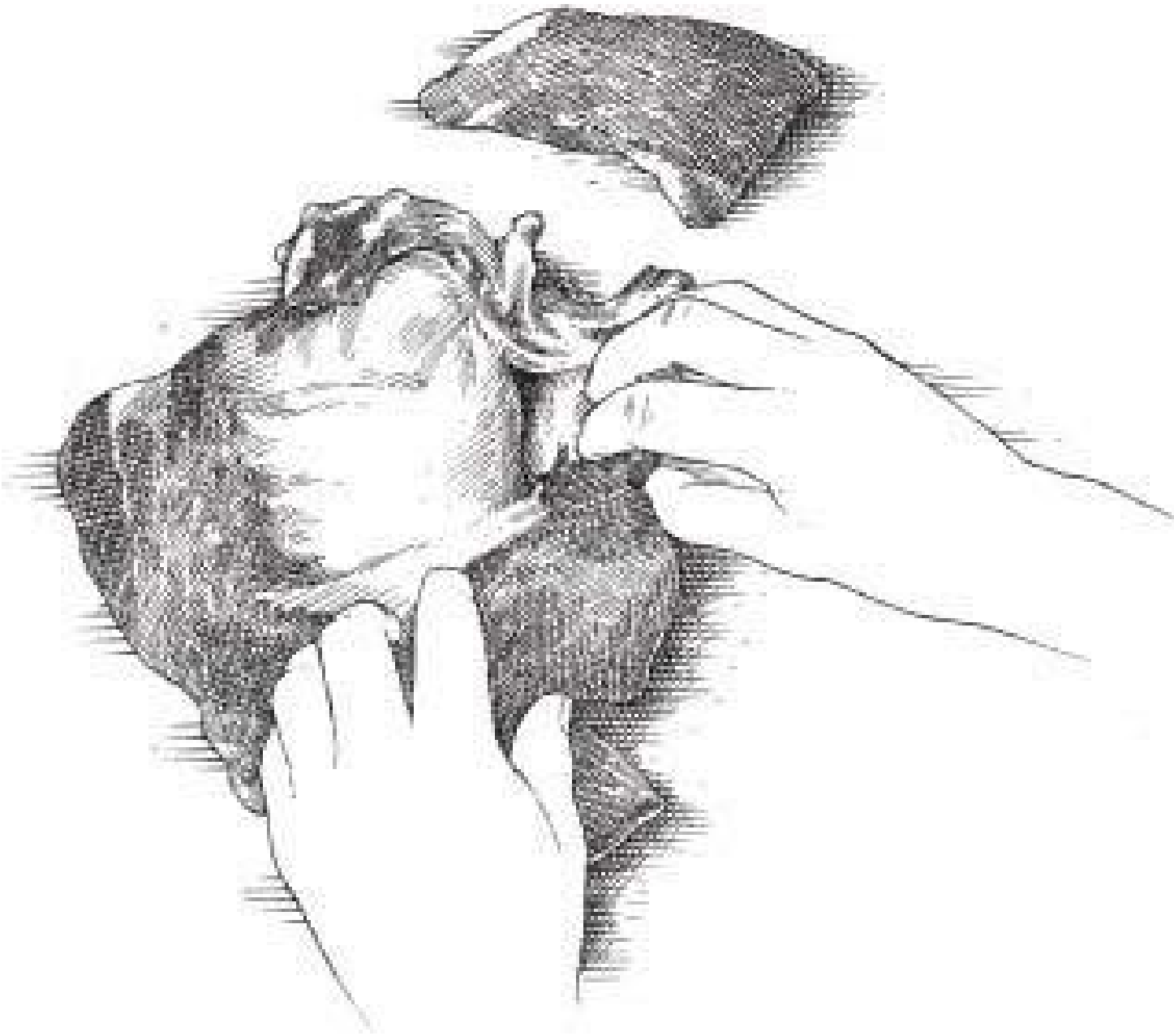

Figure 22.
As soon as the meat is cool enough to handle, remove the meat from the bones and separate the major muscle sections with

your hands.

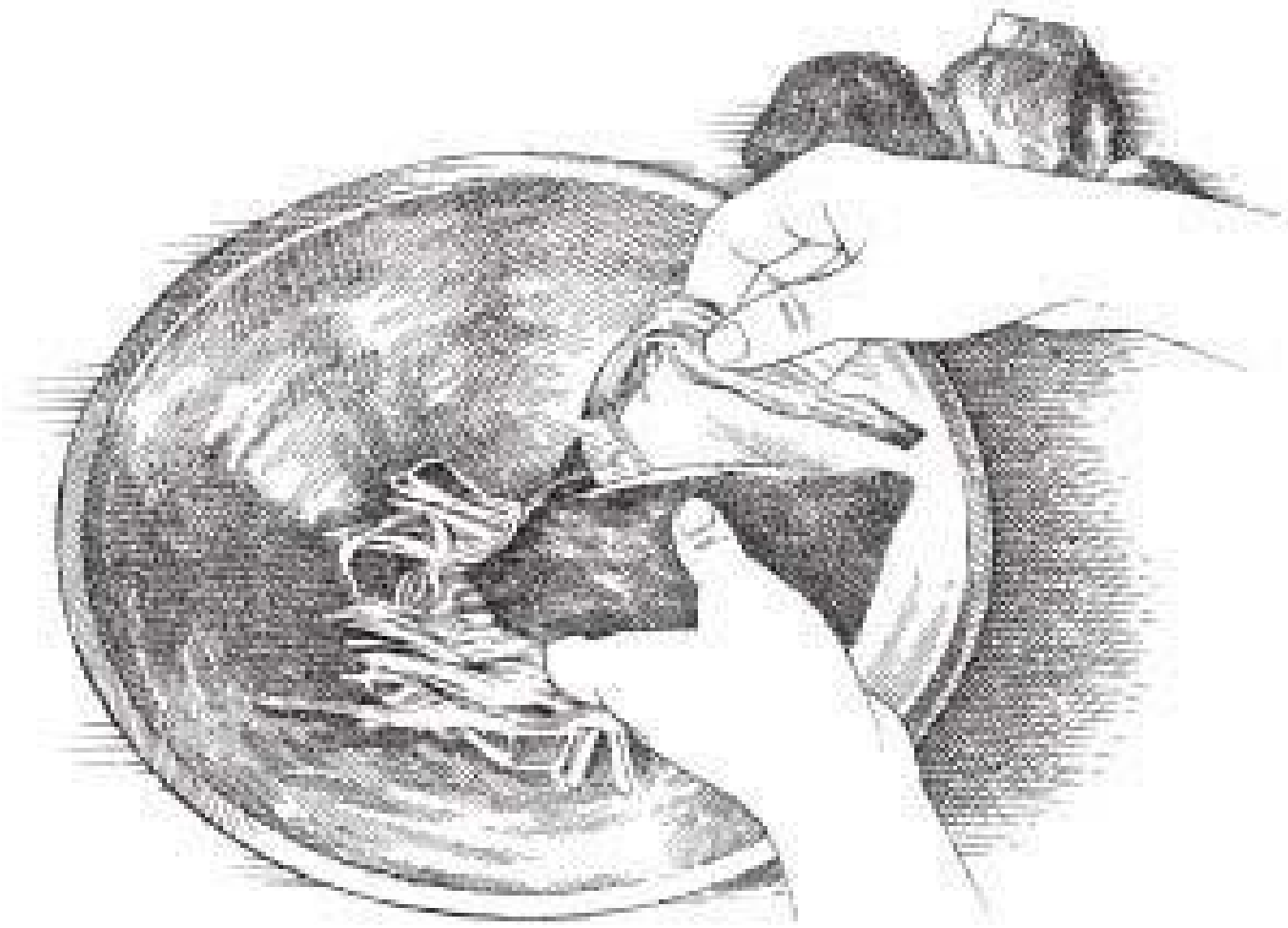

Figure 23.
Remove as much fat as desired and tear the meat into thin strips.

BARBECUED SALMON

WE WONDERED IF IT WAS POSSIBLE TO cook a whole side of salmon over low barbecue heat. Our goal was to produce a fish perfumed with smoke flavor (like smoked salmon). However, we wanted to cook the fish (not just smoke it), making it possible to serve the fish in large pieces as a main course.

When we first tried cooking a whole side of salmon over indirect heat, we liked the smoke flavor but felt that the salmon became too dry during the hour and a half cooking time. We tried

brushing the salmon with oil and then with a moist sauce, but neither improved the texture of the fish much below the surface.

At this point, we decided to try brining the salmon. Gravlax (which is cured but not smoked) is brined. Of course, we know from previous experience that brining helps poultry hold onto moisture as it cooks.

We tested a simple salt water brine and felt that it helped the fish retain more moisture as it barbecued. We also tried a brine with salt and sugar and found that the sweetness worked well with the flavor of the fish. As for the timing, we found that the fish benefits most from three hours of brining.

The actual cooking process is ridiculously simple. The fish is placed over indirect heat and cooked just until the thickest part of the fillet will flake. We built a modest charcoal fire with 40 briquettes and found that the salmon was done after an hour and a half. There was no need to add any charcoal as the salmon cooked, making this a quick and easy way to enjoy barbecue flavor.

As with poultry we found that salmon cooked over charcoal was significantly drier than salmon cooked over gas. Charcoal-barbecued salmon is still delicious and plenty moist (thanks to brining), but the difference is readily apparent.

Master Recipe

Barbecued Salmon

NOTE: *Alder wood is our first choice for this recipe, although hickory or mesquite are fine. Make sure the grill grate is hot and thoroughly cleaned before placing the salmon on it; otherwise the fish might stick. This salmon is delicious as is but tastes even better when served with either of the sauces on. Serve the salmon hot, at room temperature, or wrap the cooled fillet in plastic and chill overnight. Serves four to six.*

1 cup kosher salt or 2/3 cup table salt

1 cup sugar

1 skin-on salmon fillet (about $2^1/_2$ pounds), any pin bones removed with tweezers or needle-nose pliers

2 3-inch wood chunks or 2 cups wood chips

Heavy-duty aluminum foil

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

$1^1/_2$ teaspoons sweet paprika

1 teaspoon ground white pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place salt and sugar in gallon-size

zipper-lock plastic bag. Add 2 cups hot water and let stand 20 minutes to let salt and sugar dissolve. Add 5 cups cold water. Place salmon in brine, seal bag, and refrigerate for 3 hours.

2. Soak wood chunks in cold water to cover for 1 hour and drain, or place wood chips on 18-inch square of aluminum foil, seal to make packet, and use fork to create about six holes to allow smoke to escape (*see* figures 5 and 6).

3. Remove salmon from brine and blot dry completely with paper towels. Place

fillet, skin side down, on double layer of foil and rub both sides, especially skin side, with oil. Dust top of fillet with paprika and pepper.

4. Meanwhile, light about 40 charcoal briquettes in chimney. Transfer hot coals from chimney to one side of kettle grill, piling them up in a mound two or three briquettes high. Keep bottom vents completely open. When coals are covered with light gray ash, lay wood chunks or packet with chips on top of charcoal. Put cooking grate in place, open grill lid vents completely and place lid on grill, turning lid so that vents are opposite wood chunks or pouch to draw

smoke through grill. Let grate heat for 5 minutes, clean with wire brush, and slide salmon off foil and onto grate opposite fire so that long side of fillet is perpendicular to grill rods (*see* figure 24). (Initial temperature will be about 350 degrees but will drop to about 250 degrees before salmon is done.) Barbecue for $1^{1}/_{2}$ hours.

5. Using two spatulas (*see* figure 25), remove salmon from grill. To serve, cut through pink flesh but not skin to divide into individual portions (*see* figure 26). Slide spatula between fillet and skin to remove individual pieces, leaving skin behind (*see* figure 27).

VARIATION:

Barbecued Salmon on a Gas Grill

Follow Barbecued Salmon Master Recipe, making the following changes: Place foil tray with soaked wood chips (*see* figures 7 through 10) of primary burner (*see* figure 11). Turn all burners to high and preheat with lid down until chips are smoking heavily, about 20 minutes. Turn primary burner down to medium, turn off burner(s) without chips, and clean grill with wire brush. Position salmon over cool part of grill with long side of fillet perpendicular to grill rods. Barbecue for $1^{1}/_{2}$ hours. (Temperature

inside grill should be a constant 275 degrees; adjust lit burner as necessary.) Serve as directed in Master Recipe.

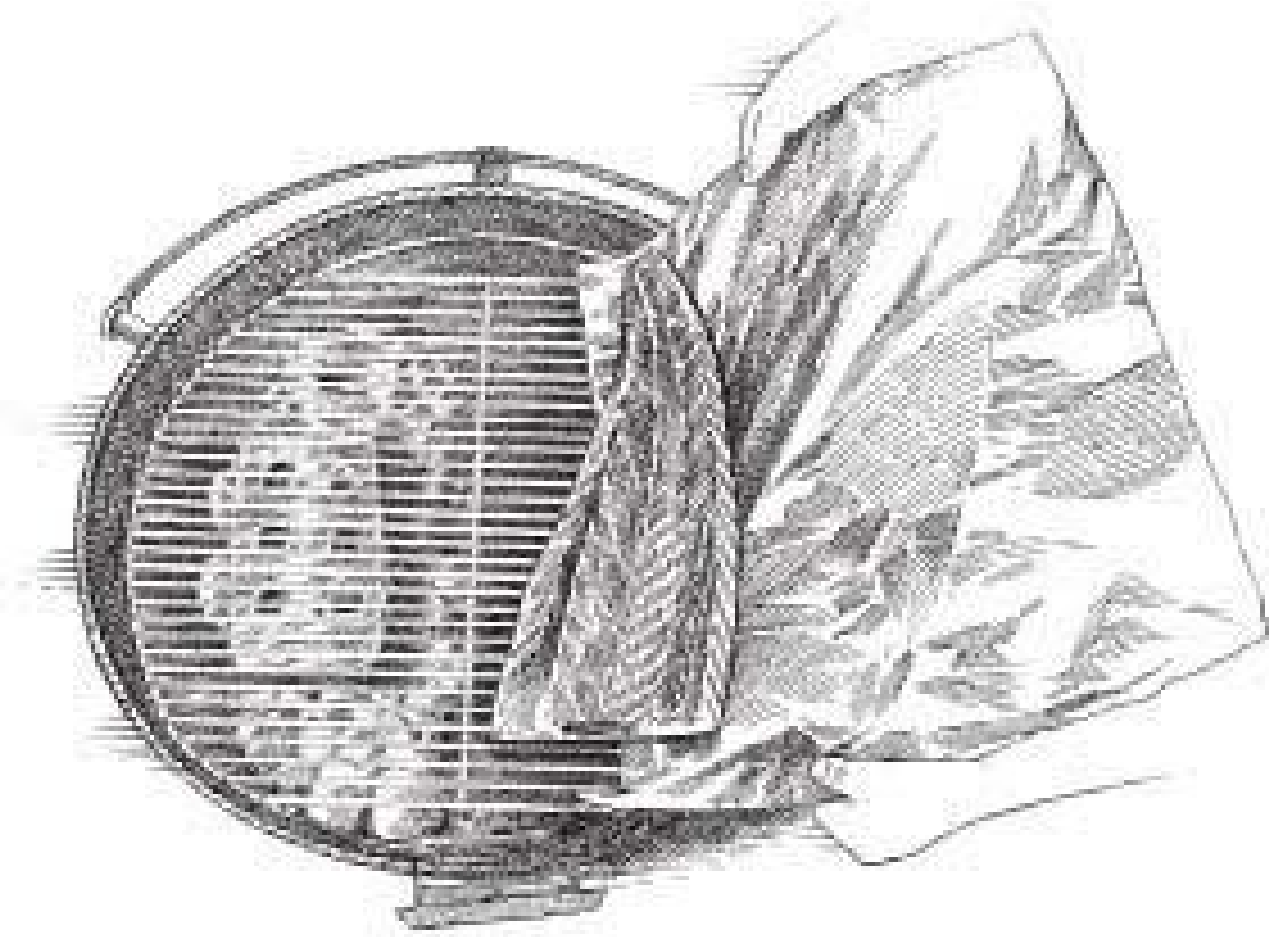

Figure 24.
Slide the salmon off the foil and onto the grill. To make it easier to remove the salmon from the grill once it is done, position the fillet so that the long side is perpendicular to the grill rods.

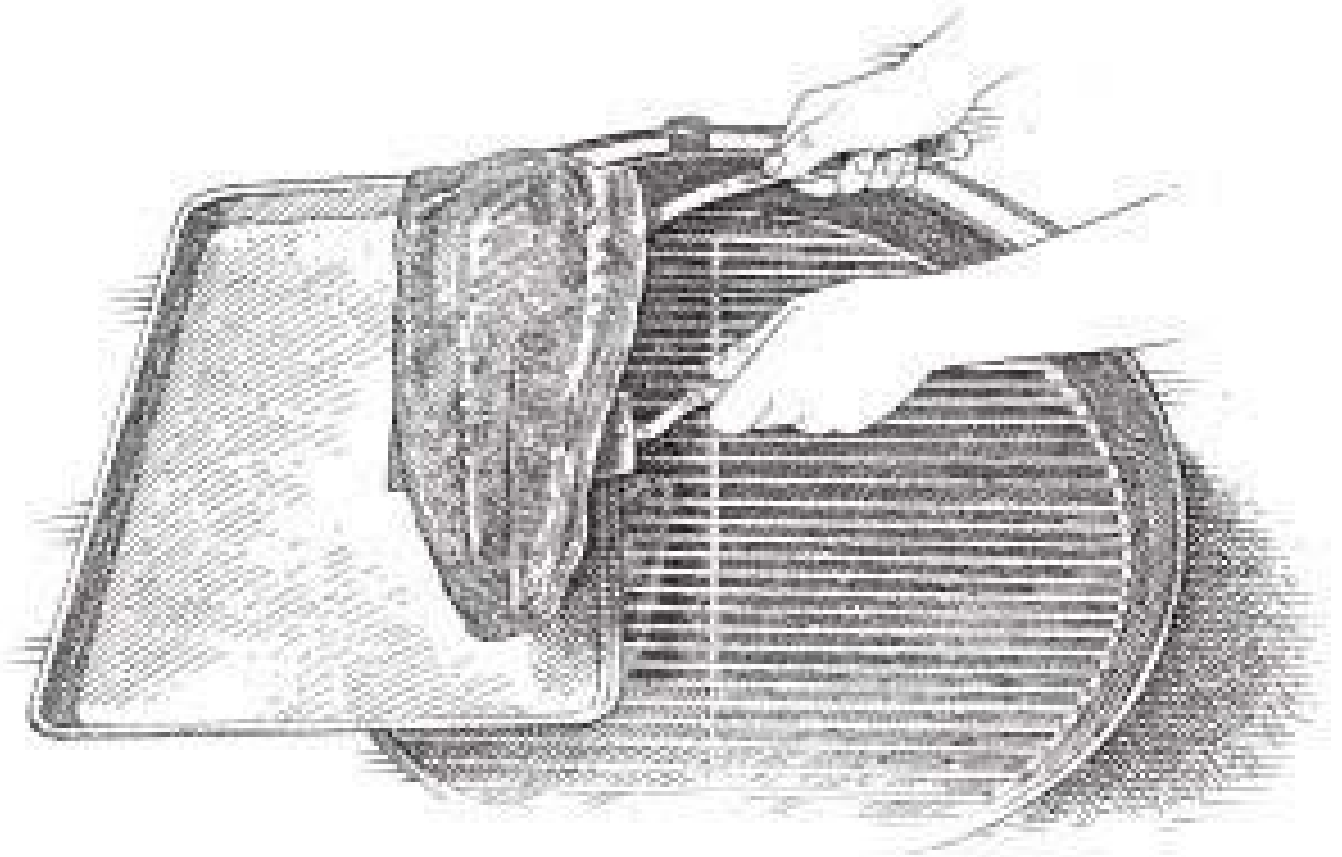

Figure 25.
Use two spatulas to transfer the cooked fish from the grill to a cookie sheet or cutting board.

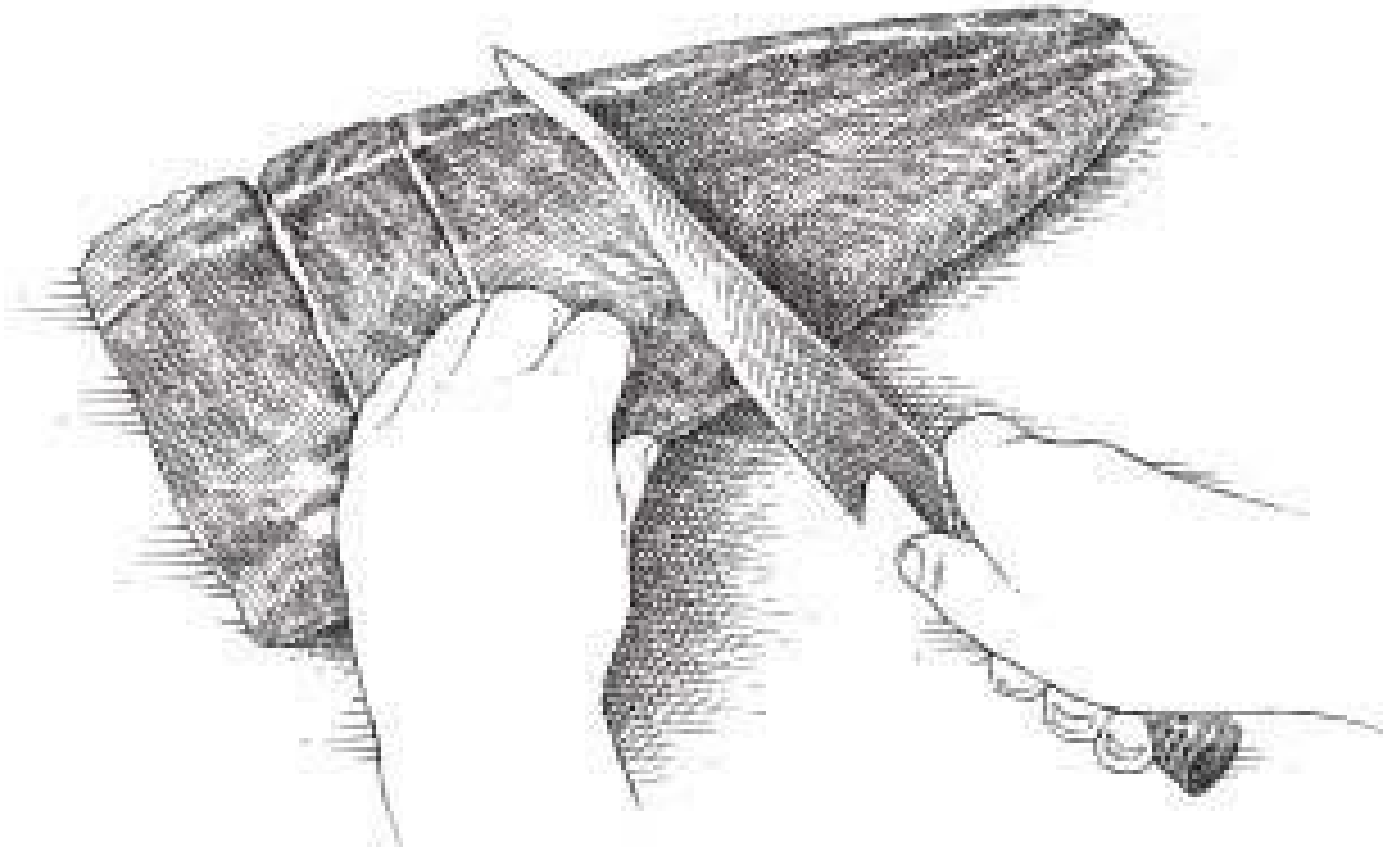

Figure 26.
To serve, cut through the pink flesh, but not the skin, to divide into individual portions.

Figure 27.
Slide a spatula between the fillet and skin to remove individual pieces, leaving the skin behind.

Sauces for Barbecued Salmon

NOTE: *Either of these sauces makes a good accompaniment to salmon, adding flavor and moisture to the fish. The horseradish sauce will be a little looser and creamier if made with crème fraîche but is also delicious with sour cream. Dijon, honey, or grainy mustard can be used in the second sauce. Each recipe makes about 1 cup.*

Horseradish Cream Sauce

1 cup crème fraîche or sour cream

2 tablespoons prepared

horseradish, or more to taste
Pinch salt

Mustard Dill Sauce

1 cup mustard (*see* note above)
$^1/_4$ cup minced fresh dill

INSTRUCTIONS:

Combine ingredients in small bowl. (Can be covered and refrigerated overnight.)

GRILL-ROASTED POULTRY

GRILL-ROASTING POULTRY—COOKING IT IN a covered grill over indirect heat at a temperature between 350 and 400 degrees—is an impressive feat. As with a conventionally roasted chicken, we wanted the meat to remain moist and tender while the skin became bronzed and crisp. We also wanted the bird to pick up a good amount of smoke flavor.

We intended to develop recipes for turkey, chicken, and game hens and found that the issues to be decided were

pretty much the same for all the birds, with a few important differences.

First of all, we found it imperative to choose a small turkey (12 to 14 pounds gross weight, 11 to 13 pounds once the giblets have been removed and the turkey drained). Mammoth 18-pound birds won't fit in most grills and are difficult to cook through without burning the skin.

Second, we found it helpful to lift the turkey off the grill rack by placing it in a V-rack. The slight elevation of the V-rack promotes even circulation of heat within the grill. Conversely, we found no benefit to using the V-rack with chickens and hens, which are so small they can sit right on the grill and still get

good air circulation. In fact, placing these smaller birds on the grill crisps their skin better during their relatively short cooking time.

Even with Cornish hens, a charcoal fire will die down before the meat is cooked through and the skin crisps. For this reason, we found it necessary to build a relatively large fire and then add more coals halfway through the cooking time. Of course, using a gas grill guarantees a constant source of heat and eliminates this issue.

We conducted several tests to see if turning and basting were necessary. We found that starting the birds breast side down and then turning them halfway

through the cooking time kept the breast juicy and was worth the effort. Rotating the birds 180 degrees, so that the opposite side faces the fire, promotes even cooking. With the turkey, we tested two more turns—putting the turkey on either side—but too much heat was lost from the grill and we had to add even more charcoal. More important, the turkey did not taste any juicier for the extra effort.

As for basting, we found that basting with butter before grilling can speed the browning of the skin on chickens and hens. However, we found that turkeys (which require much longer cooking times) can actually overbrown when basted at the start. Since the grill must be

opened to turn the bird, we used that opportunity to baste with butter and had excellent results.

We found that all birds benefit greatly from brining. With the turkey, which is especially prone to drying out, we consider brining mandatory. If you have the time, it's worthwhile to brine chickens and hens before grill-roasting as well.

One final note: We found that birds cooked over charcoal absorb more smoke flavor but were also noticeably drier. (Brining birds destined for charcoal grills mitigates this problem.) Birds cooked over gas were significantly moister but also don't

absorb as much smoke. In either case, grill-roasted poultry should be served with some sort of salsa or chutney for added moisture and flavor. Cranberry sauce or relish is also appropriate.

Master Recipe

Grill-Roasted Turkey

NOTE: *Make sure your grill lid is tall enough to accommodate both your turkey and a V-rack. Brining before grill-roasting improves the flavor and texture of the turkey. If you decide not brine, rub the turkey generously with salt before grilling. Grill-roasted turkey is a great choice for summer entertaining. The usual summer poultry accompaniments—salsa or chutney to moisten the bird, plus potato salad or cole slaw—can replace Thanksgiving standbys like cranberry sauce, stuffing,*

and mashed potatoes. Serves 10 to 12.

1 turkey (12 to 14 pounds), rinsed thoroughly, giblets removed, and wing tips tucked behind back (*see* figure 31)

2 cups kosher salt or $1^{1}/_{3}$ cups table salt

3 3-inch wood chunks or 3 cups wood chips and heavy-duty aluminum foil

1 medium onion, coarsely chopped

1 small carrot, coarsely chopped

1 celery stalk, coarsely chopped

3 thyme sprigs

3 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. To brine turkey: Dissolve salt in 2 gallons of cold water in large stock pot or clean bucket. Add turkey, breast side down, and refrigerate or set in very cool (40 degrees or less) spot for 12 hours.

2. When almost ready to cook, soak wood chunks in cold water to cover for 1 hour and drain, or place wood chips on 18-inch square of aluminum foil, seal to make packet, and use fork to create about six holes to allow smoke to escape (*see* figures 5 and 6).

3. Remove turkey from salt water and rinse inside and out under cool running water for several minutes until all traces of salt are gone. Pat turkey dry, inside and out, with paper towels. Toss onion, carrot, celery, and thyme with 1 tablespoon melted butter and place mixture in cavity of turkey.

4. Meanwhile, light chimney filled with charcoal briquettes. Transfer hot coals from chimney to one side of kettle grill, piling them up in a mound three briquettes high. Keep bottom vents halfway open. When coals are covered

with light gray ash, lay wood chunks or packet with chips on top of charcoal. Put cooking grate in place, position turkey, breast side down, in V-rack, and set V-rack securely on grate opposite fire (*see* figure 28). Open grill lid vents halfway and place lid on grill, turning lid so that vents are opposite wood chunks or chips to draw smoke through grill. (Initial temperature will be about 375 degrees and will drop to about 325 degrees after an hour.) Grill-roast turkey, covered, for about 1 hour.

5. Using thick pot holders, remove V-rack with turkey from grill and place it in large roasting pan. Working as

quickly as possible, remove grill rack, move foil packet aside, if using, add 12 more briquettes, stir them into pile, return foil packet, if using, and place grill rack back in position. Baste back side of turkey with melted butter. With wad of paper towels in each hand, turn turkey breast side up in V-rack. Baste breast side of turkey. Return V-rack with turkey to grill so that the side of the turkey that was facing away from the fire now faces the coals. Quickly replace lid and continue grill-roasting until instant-read thermometer inserted into thigh registers between 165 and 170 degrees, 1 to $1^{1}/_{4}$ hours longer, depending on grill temperature. Remove turkey from the

grill, let rest for 20 to 30 minutes, carve, and serve.

VARIATIONS:

Grill-Roasted Turkey on a Gas Grill

Follow Grill-Roasted Turkey Master Recipe, making the following changes: Place foil tray with soaked wood chips (*see* figures 7 through 10) of primary burner (*see* figure 11). Turn all burners to high and preheat with lid down until chips are smoking heavily, about 20 minutes. Leave primary burner on high and turn off other burner(s). Position turkey in V-rack over cool part of grill. Grill-roast for an hour, turning and

basting as directed, and continue to grill-roast until cooked through, 1 to 1 1/4 hours longer. (Temperature inside grill should average between 350 and 375 degrees; adjust lit burner as necessary.)

Grill-Roasted Turkey with Spice Rub

Follow Grill-Roasted Turkey Master Recipe or gas grill variation, making the following changes: Omit onion, carrot, celery, thyme, and butter. Coat skin with 1/2 cup of either spice rub. Grill-roast as directed.

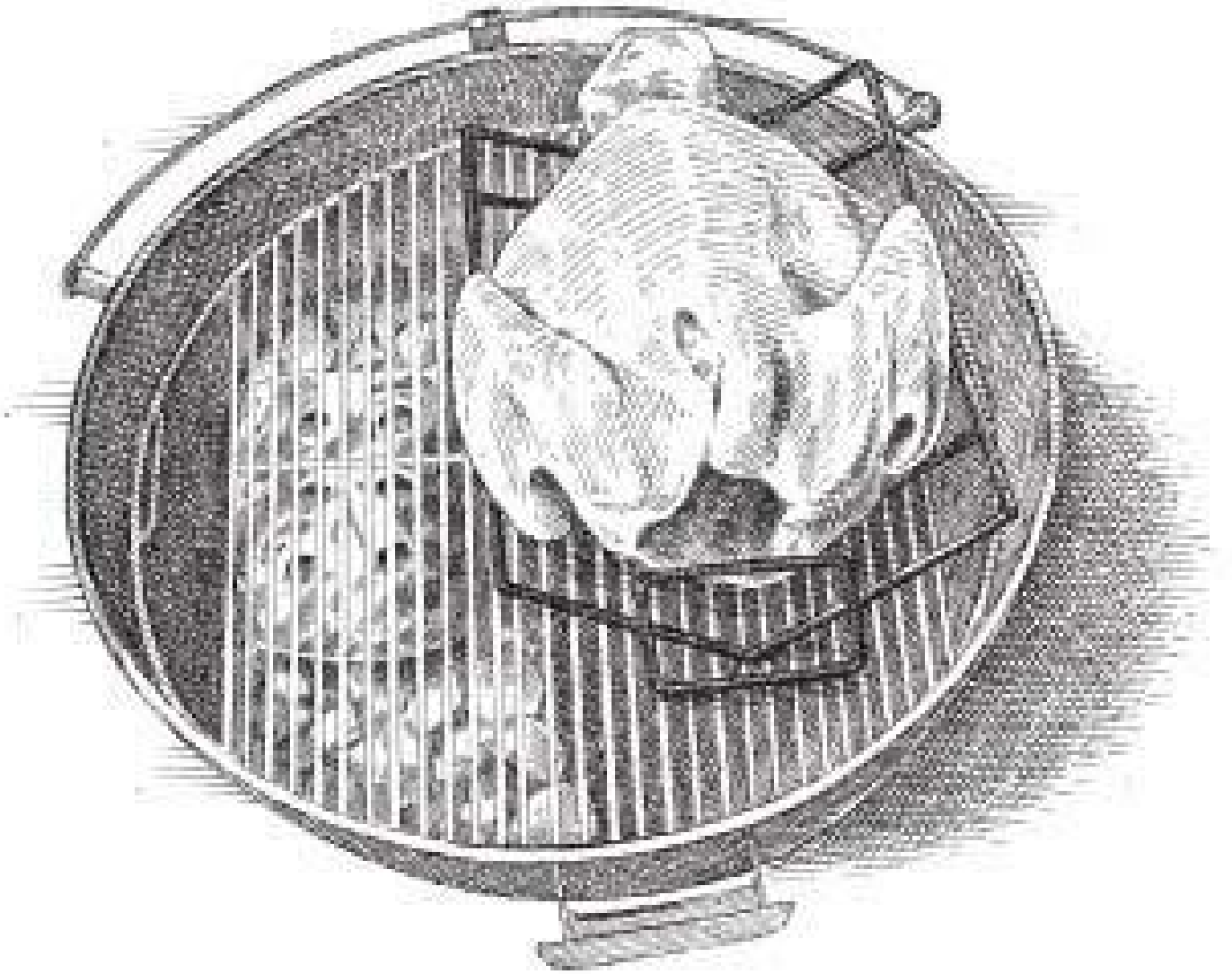

Figure 28.
Place turkey breast side down in a V-rack and set the rack over the cool part of fire.

Master Recipe

Grill-Roasted Chicken

NOTE: *Although brining is not essential, it is recommended, especially when cooking over charcoal. Mix 4 quarts water with 1 cup kosher salt or 2/3 cup table salt and refrigerate the bird, breast side down, in this mixture for 6 to 8 hours. Drain and rinse (see turkey recipe for details), and omit the salt in step 2 below. Serves four.*

2 3-inch wood chunks or 2 cups wood chips and heavy-duty aluminum foil

1 whole chicken (about $3^1/_2$ pounds), giblets discarded, chicken rinsed and patted dry with paper towels, and wing tips tucked behind back (*see* figure 31)

2 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Soak wood chunks in cold water to cover for 1 hour and drain, or place wood chips on 18-inch square of aluminum foil, seal to make packet, and use fork to create about six holes to allow smoke to escape (*see* figures 5

and 6).

2. Brush chicken, including cavity, with butter, and sprinkle with salt and pepper to taste.

3. Meanwhile, fill chimney with charcoal briquettes and light. Transfer hot coals from chimney to one side of kettle grill, piling them up in a mound three briquettes high. Keep bottom vents halfway open. When coals are covered with light gray ash, lay wood chunks or packet with chips on top of charcoal. Put cooking grate in place, open grill lid vents halfway and place lid on grill,

turning lid so that vents are opposite wood chunks or chips to draw smoke through grill. Let grate heat for 5 minutes, clean with wire brush, and position chicken, breast side down, on grate opposite fire. (Initial temperature will be about 375 degrees.) Grill-roast chicken, covered, for about 30 minutes.

4. Using heavy-duty tongs, remove chicken from grill and place it in large roasting pan. Working as quickly as possible, remove grill rack, push foil packet aside, if using, add 12 more briquettes, stir them into pile, return foil packet, if using, and place grill rack back in position. Return chicken, breast

side up, to grill so that side of chicken that was facing away from fire is now facing coals. Quickly replace lid and continue grill-roasting until instant-read thermometer inserted into thigh and breast registers between 165 and 170 degrees, 30 to 40 minutes longer, depending on grill temperature. Remove chicken from grill, let rest for 10 minutes, carve, and serve.

VARIATIONS:

Grill-Roasted Chicken on a Gas Grill

Follow Grill-Roasted Chicken Master Recipe, making the following changes: Place foil tray with soaked wood chips

(*see* figures 7 through 10) of primary burner (*see* figure 11). Turn all burners to high and preheat with lid down until chips are smoking heavily, about 20 minutes. Leave primary burner on high and turn off other burner. (If using grill with three burners, turn off middle burner and turn others to medium.) Position chicken, breast side down, over cool part of grill. Grill-roast, turning as directed, for 50 to 60 minutes. (Temperature inside grill should be 350 to 375 degrees; adjust lit burner as necessary.)

Grill-Roasted Chicken with Barbecue Sauce

Follow Grill-Roasted Chicken Master Recipe or gas grill variation, brushing chicken with 1/4 cup Barbecue Sauce during last 10 minutes of cooking. Continue as directed, checking frequently to make sure sauce does not burn.

Grill-Roasted Chicken with Spice Rub

Follow Grill-Roasted Chicken Master Recipe or gas grill variation, omitting butter and coating skin with 1/4 cup of either spice rub. Sprinkle with salt to taste and grill-roast as directed.

Master Recipe

Grill-Roasted Cornish Hens (Master Recipe)

NOTE: *Most supermarket game hens have very little flavor and really benefit from brining. Mix 4 quarts water with $^{3}/_{4}$ cup kosher salt or $^{1}/_{2}$ cup table salt and refrigerate the birds in this mixture for 6 to 8 hours. Drain and rinse turkey recipe for details and omit the salt in step 2 below. Either of the chicken flavor variations may be adapted to the hens as long as you divide the flavoring mixture evenly*

between the two birds. Serves four.

2 3-inch wood chunks or 2 cups wood chips and heavy-duty aluminum foil

2 Cornish game hens (about 3 pounds total), giblets discarded, hens rinsed and patted dry with paper towels, skin pricked (*see* figure 29), legs tied (*see* figure 30), and wings tucked (*see* figure 31)

2 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Soak wood chunks in cold water to

cover for 1 hour and drain, or place wood chips on 18-inch square of aluminum foil, seal to make packet, and use fork to create about six holes to allow smoke to escape (*see* figures 5 and 6).

2. Brush hens, including cavity, with butter, and sprinkle with salt and pepper to taste.

3. Meanwhile, fill chimney with charcoal briquettes and light. Transfer hot coals from chimney to one side of kettle grill, piling them up in a mound three briquettes high. Keep bottom vents

halfway open. When coals are covered with light gray ash, lay wood chunks or packet with chips on top of charcoal. Put cooking grate in place, open grill lid vents halfway and place lid on grill, turning lid so that vents are opposite wood chunks or chips to draw smoke through grill. Let grate heat for 5 minutes, clean with wire brush, and position hens, breast side down, on grate opposite fire. (Initial temperature will be about 375 degrees.) Grill-roast hens, covered, for about 30 minutes.

4. Using heavy-duty tongs, remove hens from grill and place them in large roasting pan. Working as quickly as

possible, remove grill rack, push foil packet aside, if using, add 12 more briquettes, stir them into pile, return foil packet, if using, and place grill rack back in position. Return hens, breast side up, to grill so that sides of hens that were facing away from fire are now facing coals. Quickly replace lid and continue grill-roasting until instant-read thermometer inserted into thigh registers between 165 and 170 degrees, about 30 minutes longer. Remove hens from grill, let rest for 10 minutes, carve, and serve.

VARIATION:

Grill-Roasted Cornish Hens on a Gas Grill

Follow Grill-Roasted Cornish Hens Master Recipe, making the following changes: Place foil tray with soaked wood chips (*see* figures 7 through 10) of primary burner (*see* figure 11). Turn all burners to high and preheat with lid down until chips are smoking heavily, about 20 minutes. Leave primary burner on high and turn off other burner. (If using grill with three burners, turn off middle burner and turn others to medium.) Grill-roast, turning as directed, for 40 to 50 minutes. (Temperature inside grill should be 350 to 375 degrees; adjust lit burner as necessary.)

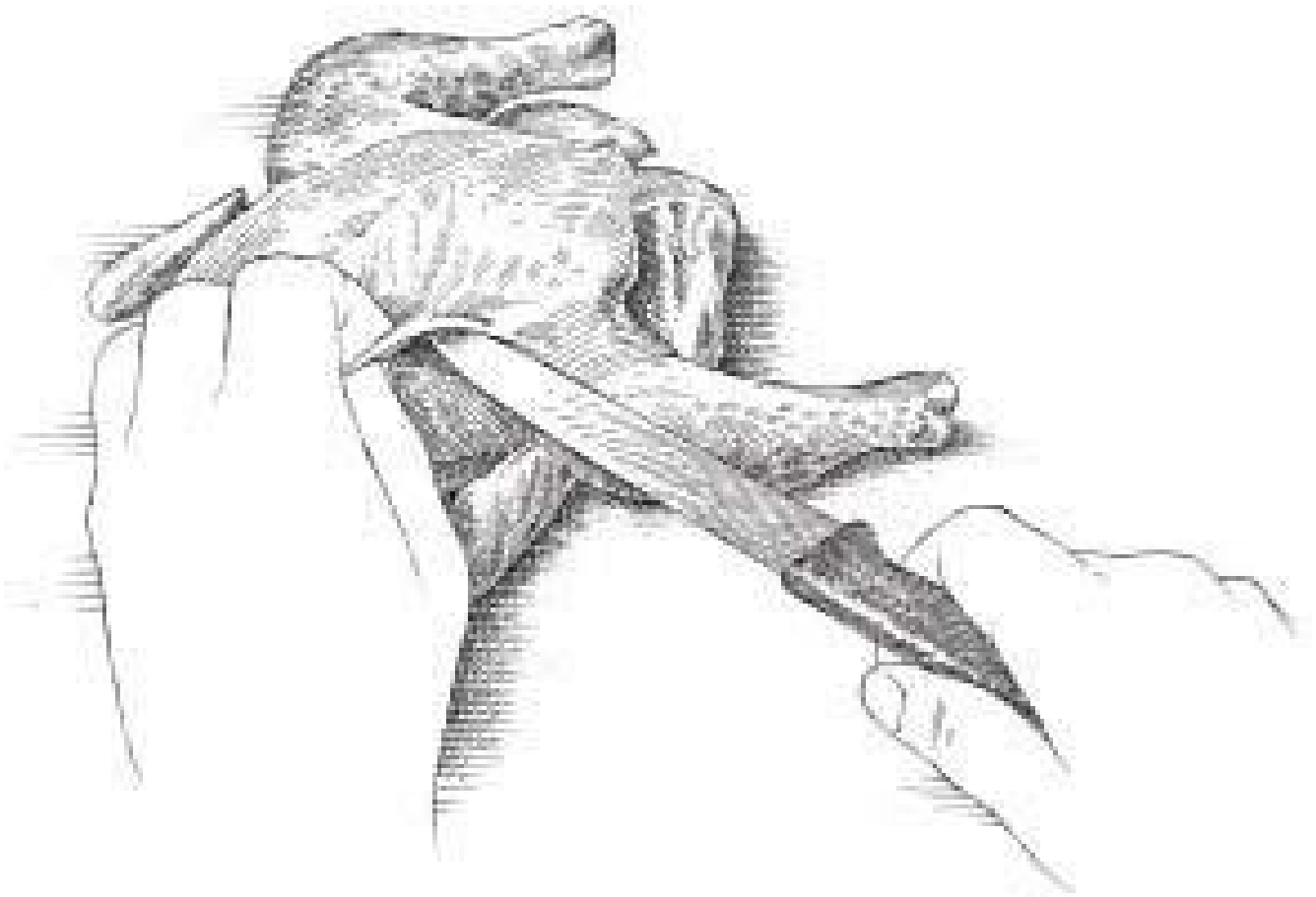

Figure 29.
To prevent the skin from ballooning when juices build up, carefully prick the skin (but not the meat) on the breast and leg of each Cornish hen with the tip of a knife.

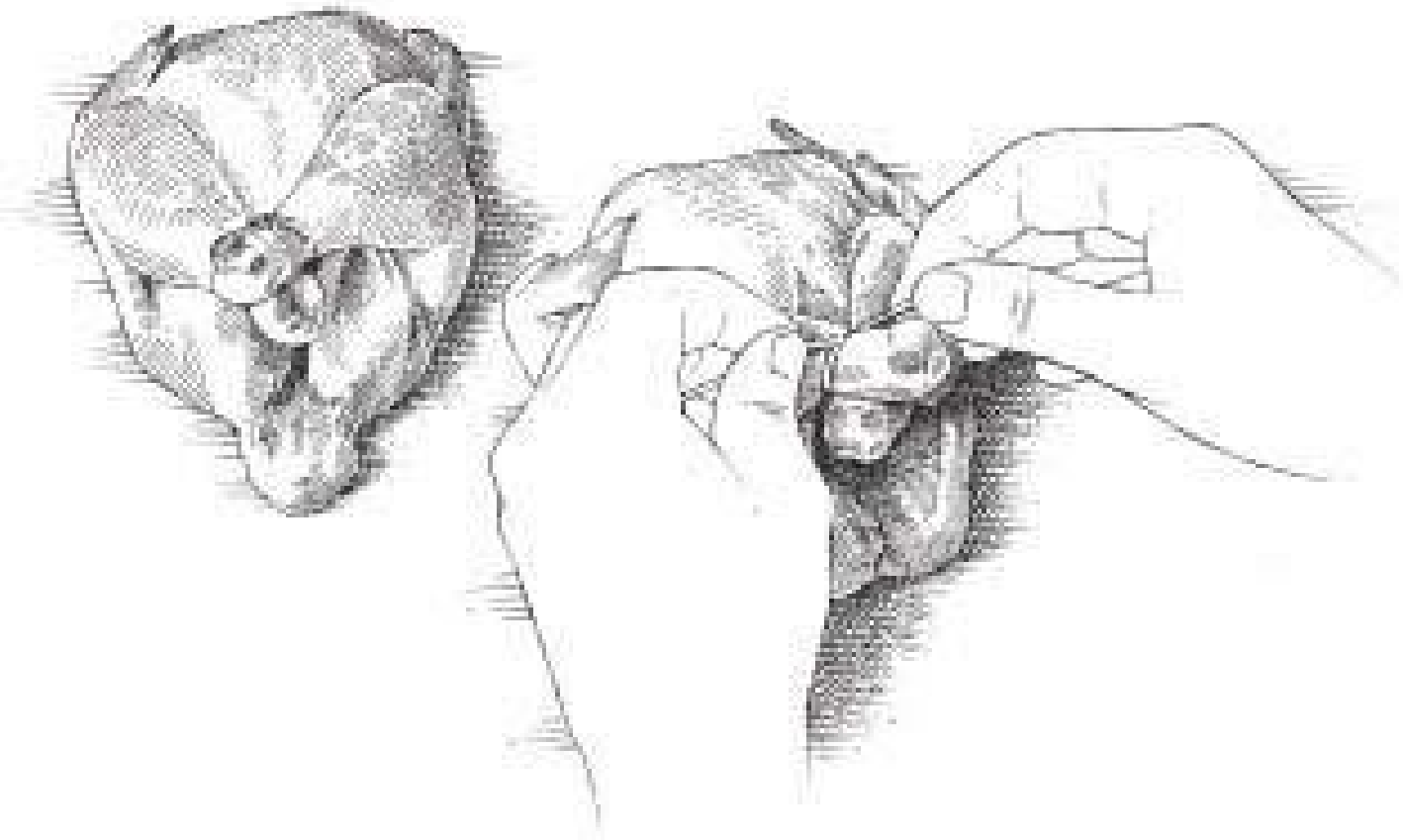

Figure 30.
To keep the legs close to the body and prevent them from burning, tie the legs of each hen together with a short piece of twine.

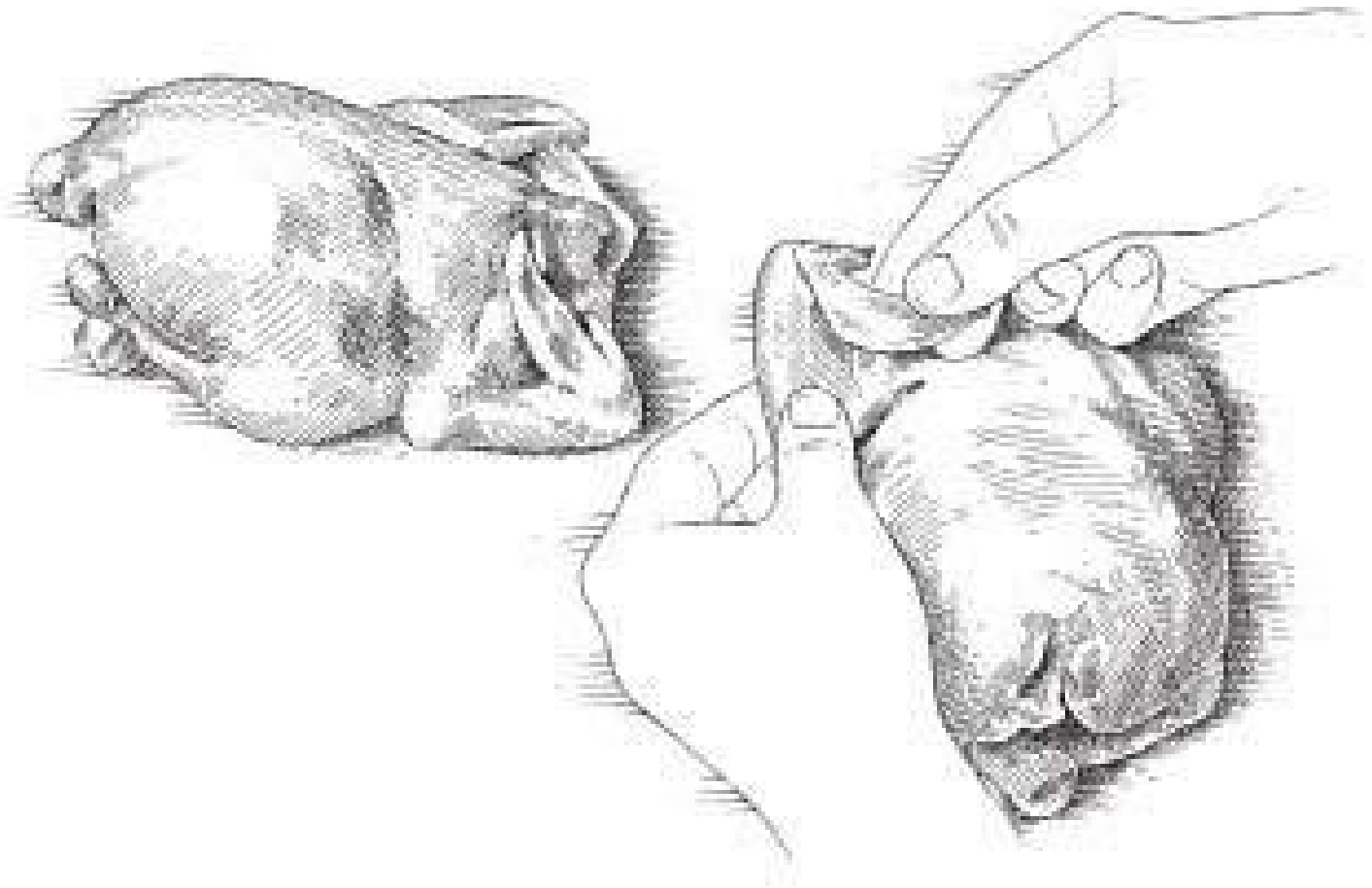

Figure 31.
To keep the wings close to the body and prevent them from burning or falling off, tuck the wing tips behind the back.

GRILL-ROASTED BEEF TENDERLOIN

BECAUSE THE TENDERLOIN SITS UP JUST UNDER the spine of the cow, it gets no exercise at all and is therefore the most tender piece of meat on the animal. It is one of the two muscles on either side of the bone in the ultra-premium steak known as the porterhouse, so when it is removed from the cow as a whole muscle, it sells for an ultra-premium price.

A whole beef tenderloin can be purchased "unpeeled," with an

incredibly thick layer of exterior fat left attached, but it's usually sold "peeled," or stripped of its fat. Because of our many bad experiences with overly lean meat, we purchased several unpeeled roasts. However, it quickly became clear that there was too much fat to leave on the roast. We found that the fat prevented the formation of a thick brown crust, one of the hallmarks of a perfectly cooked tenderloin.

We then tried peeling the roasts in the test kitchen. In the end we removed three pounds of waste from an eight-pound unpeeled roast, which had cost us $56. Since we could buy a five-pound peeled roast for just $40, the unpeeled roast was actually more expensive per pound

of edible meat and required a lot more effort. In fact, we found it best to leave the peeled roast alone, letting the scattered patches of fat on the exterior flavor the meat as it cooked.

Grill-roasting a whole tenderloin poses a challenge because of its shape (*see* figure 32). This cut is thick at one end and tapered at the other, which makes for uneven cooking. The solution to this problem was to fold under the tip end of the roast. We found that tying the roast bulks up the tenderloin center so it is almost as thick as the more substantial butt tender. Tying the roast also ensures even cooking.

As for the actual cooking process, we

found that a beef tenderloin cooks perfectly over indirect heat in 35 to 40 minutes. To build a nice thick crust on the meat, the initial charcoal fire should be fairly hot—about 375 degrees is ideal. We tried turning the roast but found that opening the lid caused the fire to lose heat and that the roast was browning evenly anyway.

Once the roast is cooked to 125 degrees (the optimum temperature if you like your meat cooked medium-rare), it should be pulled off the grill and allowed to rest; the internal temperature will rise by at least 5 degrees. Most roasts can be carved after 15 minutes, but we found that beef tenderloin improves dramatically if left uncarved

even longer. If cut too soon, the slices are soft and flabby. A slightly longer rest, however, allows the meat to firm up into a more appealing texture.

Master Recipe

Grill-Roasted Beef Tenderloin (Master Recipe)

NOTE: *There's no advantage to buying an unpeeled tenderloin. It seems cheaper, but we found that once the fat is trimmed away you don't save any money. If you can't find a whole tenderloin with the tip end (see figure 32) attached, use a smaller tenderloin and omit the tucking step. The cooking time will be about the same for the smaller roast because it is just as thick. The tenderloin can be served as is or*

with a double recipe of Horseradish Cream Sauce. A whole tenderloin serves 10 to 12.

1 whole peeled beef tenderloin (about 5 pounds), thoroughly patted dry, silver skin cut (*see* figure 33), tip end tucked under (*see* figure 34), and tied (*see* figure 35)

2 3-inch wood chunks or 2 cups wood chips and heavy-duty aluminum foil

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 tablespoon kosher salt or 2 teaspoons table salt

2 tablespoons coarse-ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. An hour before cooking, remove roast from refrigerator to bring it to room temperature.

2. Soak wood chunks in cold water to cover for 1 hour and drain, or place wood chips on 18-inch square of aluminum foil, seal to make packet, and use fork to create about six holes to allow smoke to escape (*see* figures 5 and 6).

3. Set roast on sheet of plastic wrap and rub all over with oil. Sprinkle with salt

and pepper and then lift wrap to press on excess (*see* figure 36.

4. Meanwhile, light chimney filled with charcoal briquettes. Transfer hot coals from chimney to one side of kettle grill, piling them up in a mound three briquettes high. Keep bottom vents completely open. When coals are covered with light gray ash, lay wood chunks or packet with chips on top of charcoal. Put cooking grate in place, open grill lid vents completely and place lid on grill, turning lid so that vents are opposite wood chunks or chips to draw smoke through grill. Let grate heat for 5 minutes, clean with wire brush, and roll

tenderloin off plastic and onto grate opposite fire so that long side of fillet is perpendicular to grill rods. (Meat should be positioned like the salmon in figure 24.) Initial temperature will be about 375 degrees. Grill-roast tenderloin, covered, until instant-read thermometer inserted into thickest part of roast registers about 125 degrees, 35 to 40 minutes.

5. Let stand about 30 minutes before carving. Cut roast into slices $^{1}/_{2}$-inch thick and serve. (Whole roast can be wrapped in plastic, refrigerated up to 2 days, sliced, and served chilled.)

VARIATIONS:

Grill-Roasted Beef Tenderloin on a Gas Grill

Follow Grill-Roasted Beef Tenderloin Master Recipe, making the following changes: Place foil tray with soaked wood chips (*see* figures 7 through 10) of primary burner (*see* figure 11). Turn all burners to high and preheat with lid down until chips are smoking heavily, about 20 minutes. Leave primary burner on high and turn off other burner. (If using grill with three burners, turn off middle burner and leave others on high.) Position tenderloin over cool part of grill. Grill-roast for 30 to 35 minutes.

(Temperature inside grill should average between 375 to 400 degrees; adjust lit burner as necessary.)

Grill-Roasted Beef Tenderloin with Pepper Crust

Follow Grill-Roasted Beef Tenderloin Master Recipe or gas grill variation, increase pepper to 6 tablespoons, and use mixture of strong white and black as well as mild pink and green peppercorns. Coarsely crush peppercorns with mortar and pestle or with heavy saucepan or skillet.

Grill-Roasted Beef

Tenderloin with Garlic and Rosemary

Studding the tenderloin with slivered garlic and fresh rosemary gives it an Italian flavor.

Follow Grill-Roasted Beef Tenderloin Master Recipe or gas grill variation, making following changes: After tying roast, use paring knife to make several dozen shallow incisions around surface of roast. Stuff a few fresh rosemary needles and 1 thin sliver of garlic into each incision. (A total of 1 tablespoon rosemary and 3 large garlic cloves, slivered.) Oil as directed. Sprinkle with salt, pepper, and additional 2

tablespoons minced rosemary. Proceed as directed.

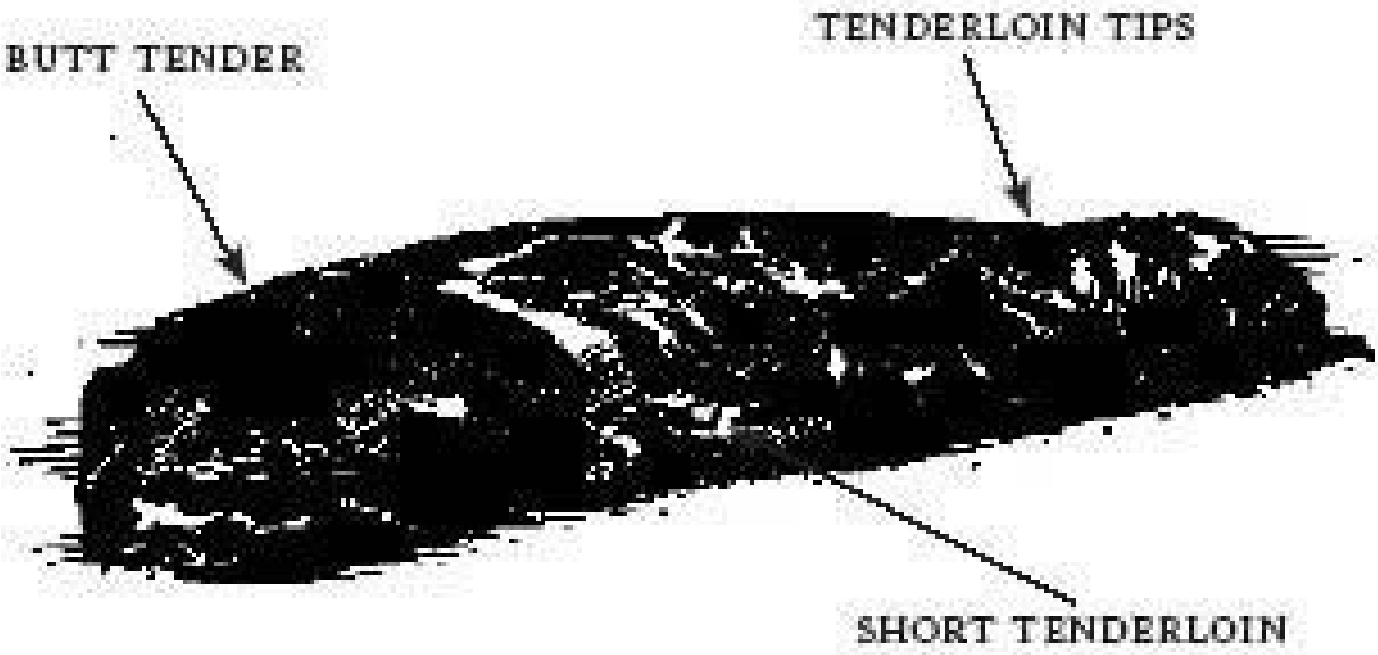

Figure 32.
A whole beef tenderloin comprises three sections: The thicker end of the roast is called the butt tender, and the middle portion—virtually an even thickness—is called the short tenderloin; the tapering tip end is sold as part of the whole tenderloin or removed and sold as

tenderloin tips.

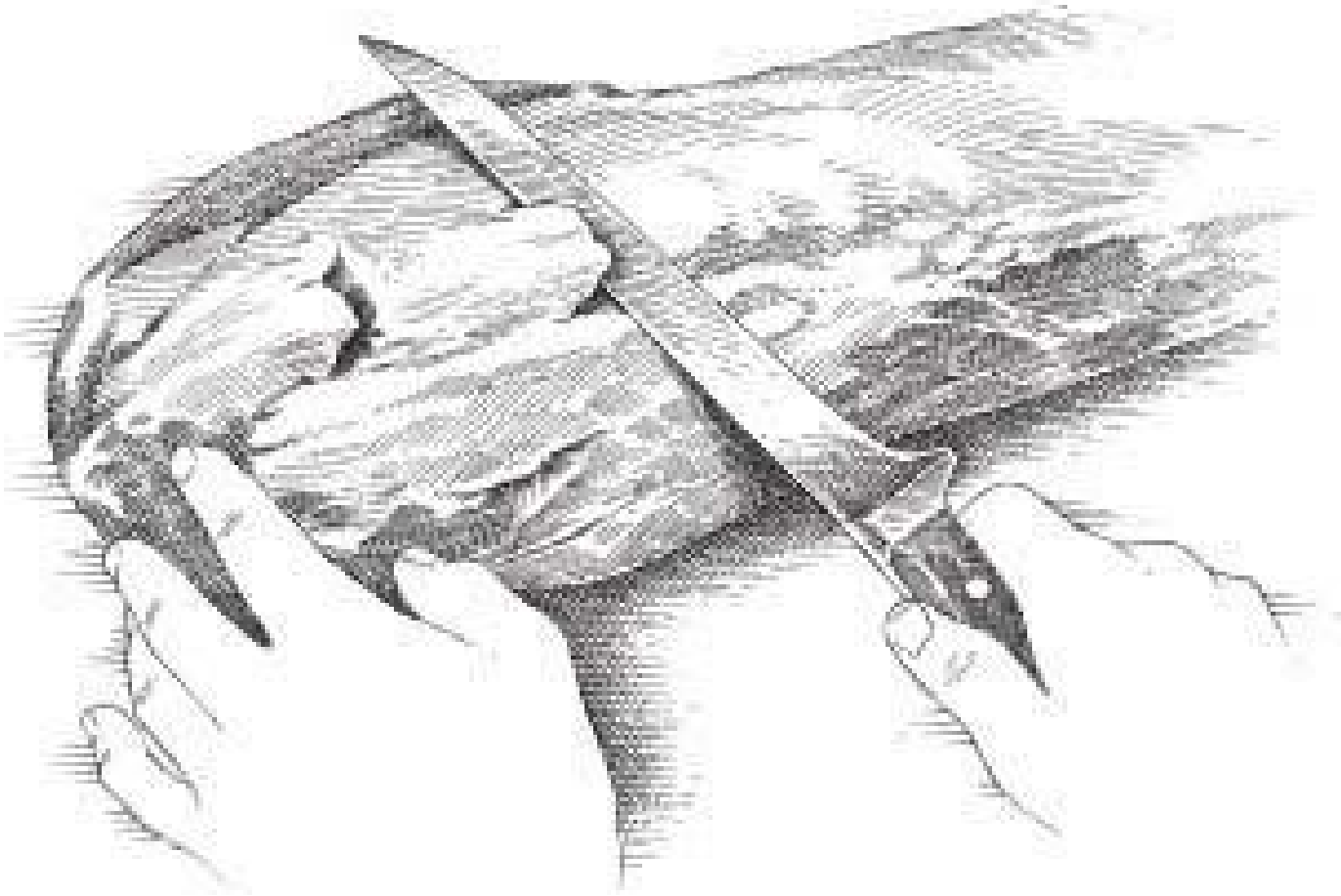

Figure 33.
To keep the meat from bowing as it cooks, slide a knife under the silver skin and flick the blade upward to cut through the silver skin at five or six spots along the length of the roast.

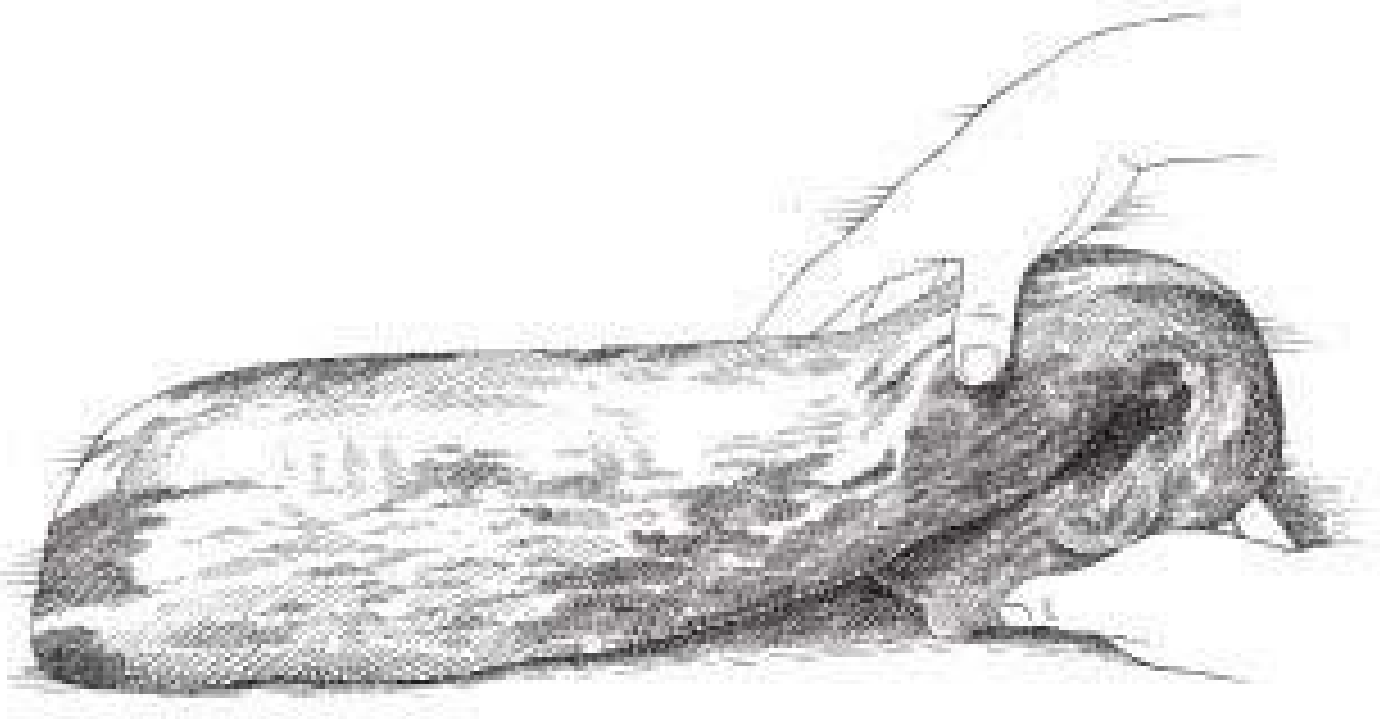

Figure 34.
To ensure that the tenderloin roasts more evenly, fold the thin tip end of the roast under about 6 inches.

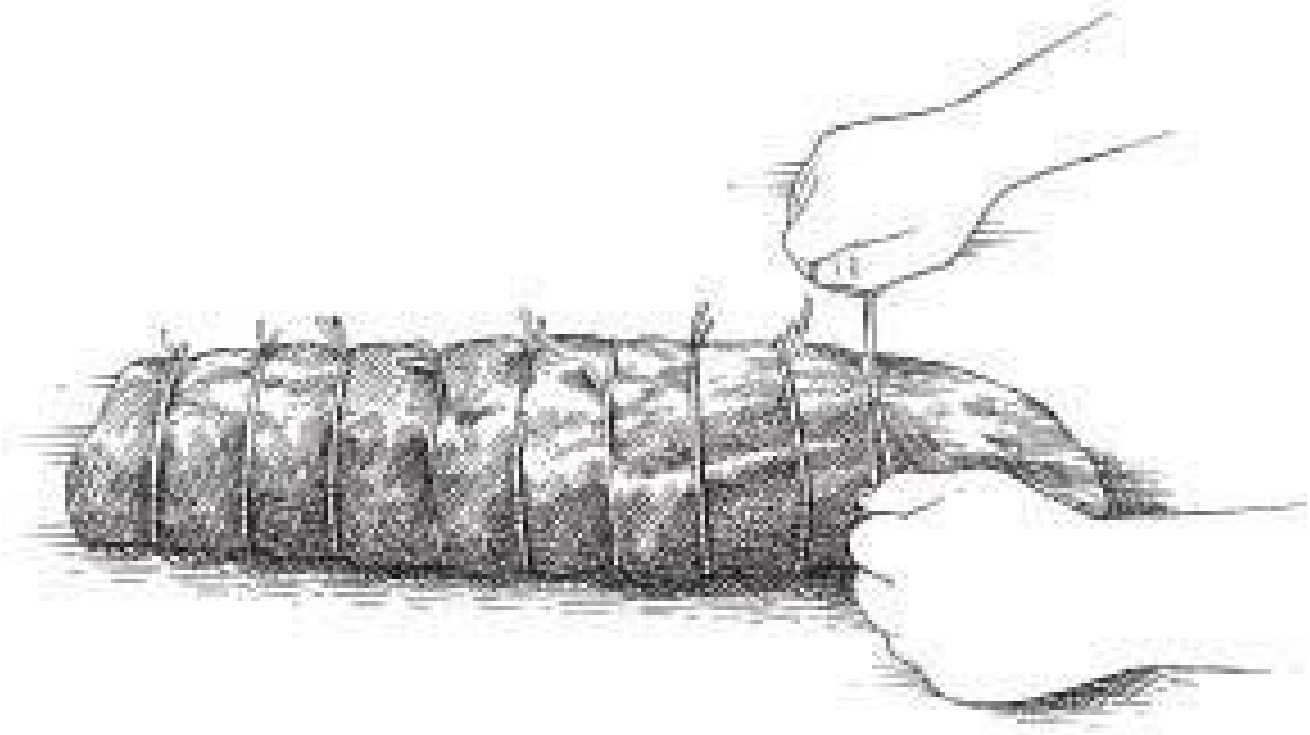

Figure 35.
For more even cooking and evenly sized slices, use 12-inch lengths of kitchen twine to tie the roast every $1^{1}/_{2}$ inches.

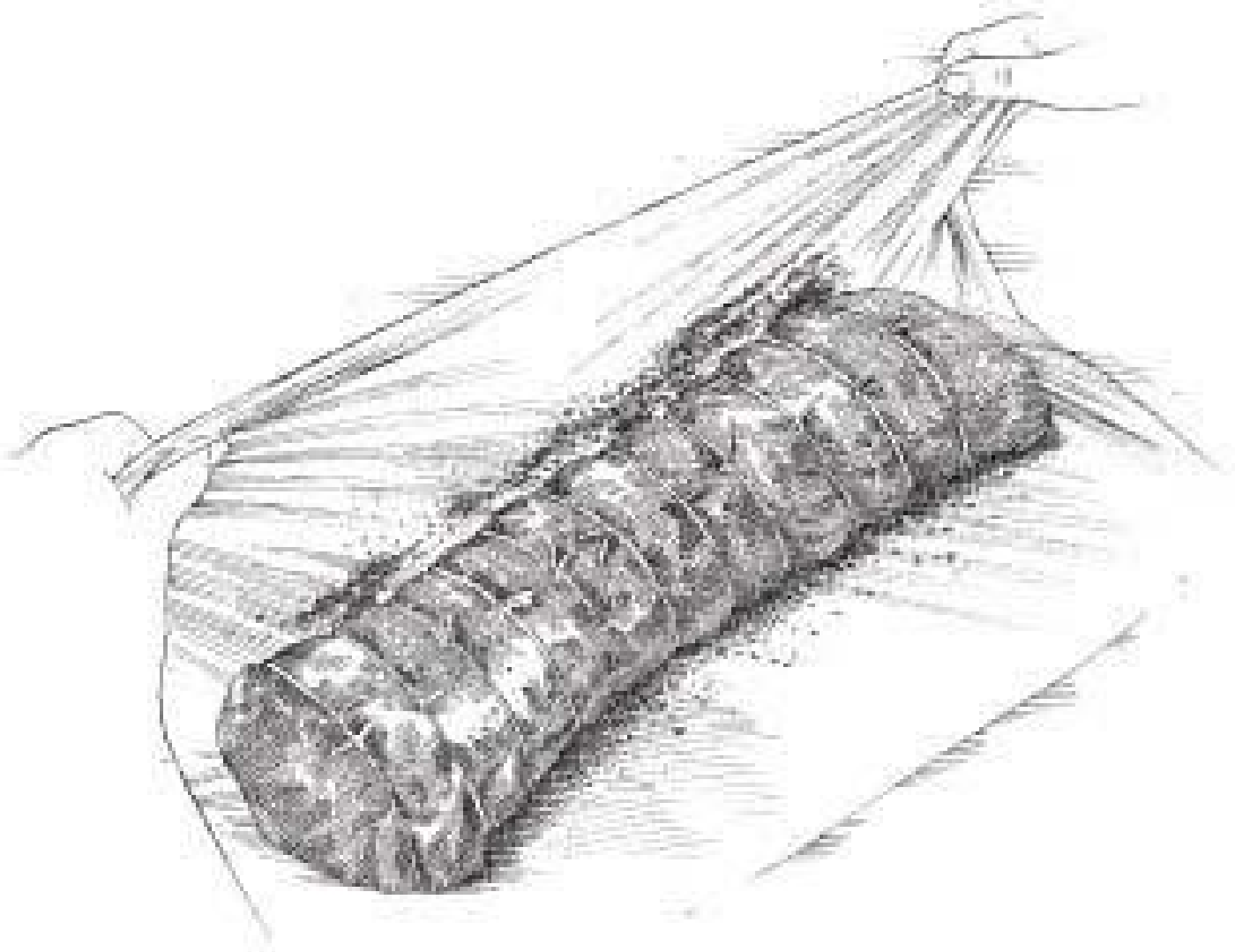

Figure 36.
Set the roast on a sheet of plastic wrap and rub it all over with oil. Sprinkle with salt and pepper, then lift the plastic wrap up and around the meat to press on the excess. This method guarantees

even coverage of the roast and can be used with the pepper crust or a spice rub.

GRILL-ROASTED PORK LOIN

ABONELESS PORK ROAST IS AN IDEAL CANDIDATE for grill-roasting. As opposed to barbecued pulled pork, which starts out with a very fatty cut from the shoulder or leg, lean loin roasts are the best choice for relatively quick grill-roasting since they are already tender. However, unlike the thin tenderloin, the loin is too thick to cook over direct heat. The exterior chars long before the interior comes up to temperature.

The pork loin runs along one side of the backbone of the pig, starting at the shoulder, or blade bone, and ending at the hip bone. For roasting (whether on the grill or in the oven), we found that the meat from the center of the loin, called the center loin roast or center-cut loin roast, is best. This piece of meat contains a single muscle, so the grain is tender and easy to carve. The center loin roast is a fairly pale piece of meat and has a relatively mild flavor.

We cooked the two other boneless roasts from the loin before deciding to go with the center loin roast. The blade roast, also called the blade loin roast or loin roast, contains small parts of

various shoulder muscles that are redder and more fibrous than the center loin. The meat at the other end of the loin, which is called rib end, hip end, or sirloin roast, is also more fibrous and tougher than the center loin.

Unlike a beef tenderloin, a pork center loin has a fairly even thickness from end to end so there is no need to tuck up one side or the other. To make the meat perfectly even and ensure proper cooking, we found it helpful to tie the roast at regular intervals.

A pork loin can be grill-roasted much like a beef tenderloin. The biggest challenge is keeping the meat moist. A beef tenderloin can be pulled from the grill when the internal temperature

reaches 125 degrees and eaten medium-rare. Pork must be cooked to a higher internal temperature to make the meat palatable (rare pork has an unappealing texture) and to kill any possible parasites.

After testing various temperatures, we found that the center loin roast should be pulled from the grill when the internal temperature registers 145 degrees on an instant-read thermometer. After the meat rests for 20 minutes, the temperature will rise to about 155 degrees. The meat will have a slight tinge of pink, but it will be far juicier than roasts cooked to an internal temperature that is just 10 degrees higher. (A temperature of 155

degrees is high enough to kill the parasite that causes trichinosis. However, the USDA recommends cooking all meat to an internal temperature of 160 degrees to kill bacteria such as salmonella. If safety is your primary concern, follow the USDA's guidelines.)

While we had little trouble getting the meat properly cooked on the grill (as with the beef tenderloin, there is no need to turn the meat as it cooks), we found the roast to be a bit bland and not as moist as we might have liked. Both problems stem from the fact that most of the internal fat has been bred out of the pig in recent years. We hit upon two strategies for making the meat taste

better and juicier when cooked.

If you have the time, pork (like lean poultry) responds well to brining. A brined pork roasts up juicier, and the saltwater bath also flavors the meat nicely. Our second solution for boosting the flavor in pork loin is to season it aggressively. A potent spice rub or a heady mixture of garlic and rosemary will dramatically improve the flavor of the meat.

Master Recipe

Grill-Roasted Pork Loin

NOTE: *Make sure to buy the center loin roast. Do not buy rib end, blade end, or loin end roasts, which have many muscle separations and can be quite tough. The entire center loin weighs 6 to 9 pounds when boned. It is commonly sold in smaller pieces, which usually weigh 3 or 4 pounds. If possible, we strongly recommend that you brine the meat in a mixture of 4 quarts cold water and 1 cup kosher salt or 2/3 cup table salt for 8 hours. Brining makes the meat considerably*

more moist and flavorful. If brining, omit the salt in step 3. Moisten the roast with salsa, chutney, or even applesauce. Serves 8 to 10.

1 boneless center loin roast (about 4 pounds), tied (*see* figure 35

2 3-inch wood chunks or 2 cups wood chips and heavy-duty aluminum foil

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 tablespoon kosher salt or 2 teaspoons table salt

2 tablespoons coarse-ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. An hour before cooking, remove roast from refrigerator to bring it to room temperature.

2. Soak wood chunks in cold water to cover for 1 hour and drain, or place wood chips on 18-inch square of aluminum foil, seal to make packet, and use fork to create about six holes to allow smoke to escape (*see* figures 5 and 6).

3. Set roast on sheet of plastic wrap and rub all over with oil. Sprinkle with salt and pepper and then lift wrap to press on excess (*see* figure 36).

4. Meanwhile, light chimney filled with charcoal briquettes. Transfer hot coals from chimney to one side of kettle grill, piling them up in a mound three briquettes high. Keep bottom vents completely open. When coals are covered with light gray ash, lay wood chunks or packet with chips on top of charcoal. Put cooking grate in place, open grill lid vents completely and place lid on grill, turning lid so that vents are opposite wood chunks or chips to draw smoke through grill. Let grate heat for 5 minutes, clean with wire brush, and roll pork loin off plastic and onto grate opposite fire so that long side of fillet is

perpendicular to grill rods. (Meat should be positioned the same way as the salmon in figure 24.) Initial temperature will be about 375 degrees. Grill-roast pork loin, covered, until instant-read thermometer inserted into thickest part of roast registers about 145 degrees, 40 to 50 minutes.

5. Let stand about 20 minutes before carving. Internal temperature should register between 150 and 155 degrees. (Can be wrapped in plastic and refrigerated up to 2 days.) Cut roast into slices $^{1}/_{2}$-inch thick and serve.

VARIATIONS:

Grill-Roasted Pork Loin on a Gas Grill

Follow Grill-Roasted Pork Loin Master Recipe, making the following changes: Place foil tray with soaked wood chips (*see* figures 7 through 10) of primary burner (*see* figure 11). Turn all burners to high and preheat with lid down until chips are smoking heavily, about 20 minutes. Leave primary burner on high and turn off other burner. (If using grill with three burners, turn off middle burner and leave others on high.) Position loin over cool part of grill. Grill-roast for 35 to 45 minutes. (Temperature inside grill should average

between 375 to 400 degrees; adjust lit burner as necessary.)

Grill-Roasted Pork Loin with Garlic and Rosemary

Follow Grill-Roasted Pork Loin Master Recipe or gas grill variation, making following changes: After tying roast, use paring knife to make several dozen shallow incisions around surface of roast. Stuff a few fresh rosemary needles and 1 thin sliver of garlic into each incision. (You will need a total of 1 tablespoon rosemary and 3 large garlic cloves, slivered.) Oil as directed. Sprinkle with salt, pepper, and additional 2 tablespoons rosemary.

Proceed as directed.

RUBS & SAUCES

RUBBED ONTO THE OUTSIDE OF FOODS, SPICE blends encourage the formation of a deeply browned crust filled with complex, concentrated flavors. Like marinades, spice rubs add flavor to foods, but they have several advantages over their wet counterparts.

Since they are composed almost solely of spices, they provide stronger flavors than marinades, which typically contain oil, an acidic liquid, and spices. Rubs also stick better to the surface of foods than marinades, which, again, gives them

an edge when it comes to intensifying flavor. Finally, marinades almost always contain oil and cause flare-ups on the grill. Spice rubs are ideal for foods that will be barbecued or grill-roasted since they can be left on foods for many hours without causing fires.

We find that bare hands—not brushes—are the best tools for applying spice rubs. Use a bit of pressure to make sure the spices actually adhere to the food. Although rubs can be applied right before cooking, we found that the flavor of the spices penetrates deeper into the food if given some time. In general, we like to refrigerate rubbed meats for a few hours to allow the flavors to develop.

In our tests, we found that the spices continue to penetrate and flavor the meat up until a certain point, beyond which we detect no increase in flavor. We found that the point at which the spice flavor stopped increasing was related to the thickness of the meat. For instance, ribs don't gain any more flavor after spending a day covered with a spice rub. However, a thicker pork roast can be rubbed three days before cooking for maximum spice penetration.

Barbecue sauce is best added to grilled foods at the table. When we added the sauce earlier, we found that the sugars and fat in most sauces caused foods to burn. You may brush barbecue

sauce on some foods during the final minutes of grill-roasting, if you like. For instance, you may want to glaze a chicken with sauce, applying it during the last 10 minutes of grill time to set the sauce as a light crust.

Dry Rub for Barbecue

NOTE: *You may adjust the proportions of spices in this all-purpose rub or add or subtract a spice, as you wish. For instance, if you don't like spicy foods, reduce or eliminate the cayenne. Also, if you are using hot chili powder, you may want to eliminate the cayenne. Makes about 1 cup, enough to coat two full slabs of ribs, one whole brisket, or one Boston butt roast.*

4 tablespoons sweet paprika
2 tablespoons chili powder
2 tablespoons ground cumin
2 tablespoons dark brown sugar

2 tablespoons salt
1 tablespoon dried oregano
1 tablespoon granulated sugar
1 tablespoon ground black pepper
1 tablespoon ground white pepper
1-2 teaspoons cayenne pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

Mix all ingredients in small bowl. (Can be stored in airtight container for several weeks.)

Spice Rubs for Poultry

NOTE: *These rubs are not as potent or peppery as the dry rub for barbecue, making them well suited to mild poultry. Each recipe makes about* $^{1}/_{2}$ *cup, enough for one turkey. Recipes should be halved for use on one chicken or two Cornish hens.*

Aromatic Rub

$1^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons ground cardamom

$1^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons ground ginger

$1^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons ground black pepper

1 tablespoon ground turmeric
1 tablespoon ground cumin
1 tablespoon ground coriander
$1^1/_2$ teaspoons ground allspice
$^1/_2$ teaspoon ground cloves

Indian Spice Rub

3 tablespoons curry powder
3 tablespoons chili powder
$1^1/_2$ tablespoons ground allspice
$1^1/_2$ teaspoons ground cinnamon

INSTRUCTIONS:

Mix ingredients in small bowl. (Can be

stored in airtight container for several weeks.)

Master Recipe

Basic Barbecue Sauce (Master Recipe)

NOTE: *Because barbecue sauce contains so many ingredients that can cause flare-ups on the grill (oil, tomatoes, liquid sweeteners), it should be brushed on foods at the very end of the grilling time or used as dipping sauce at the table. Makes about 3 cups.*

2 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 medium onion, minced
1 cup tomato sauce
1 28-ounce can whole

tomatoes with their juice

3/4 cup distilled white vinegar

1/4 cup packed dark brown sugar

2 tablespoons molasses

1 tablespoon sweet paprika

1 tablespoon chili powder

2 teaspoons liquid smoke (optional)

1 teaspoon salt

2 teaspoons ground black pepper

1/4 cup orange juice

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oil in large, heavy-bottomed saucepan over medium heat. Add onion

and sauté until golden brown, 7 to 10 minutes. Add remaining ingredients. Bring to boil, reduce heat to lowest possible setting, and simmer, uncovered, until thickened, 2 to $2^1/_2$ hours. Cool slightly.

2. Purée sauce, in batches if necessary, in blender or work-bowl of food processor. (Sauce can be refrigerated in airtight container for up to 2 weeks.)

VARIATIONS:

Barbecue Sauce with Mexican Flavors

This sauce is good with beef or chicken.

To completed and cooled sauce, add $1^1/_2$ teaspoons ground cumin, $1^1/_2$ teaspoons chili powder, 6 tablespoons lime juice, and 3 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro leaves.

Barbecue Sauce with Asian Flavors

This variation is especially good with chicken or pork.

To completed and cooled sauce, add 1 tablespoon minced fresh gingerroot, 6 tablespoons soy sauce, 6 tablespoons rice wine vinegar, 3 tablespoons sugar, and $1^1/_2$ tablespoons Asian sesame oil.

HOW TO STIR-FRY

Anatomy of a Stir-Fry

Equipment and Ingredients

Meat and Poultry Stir-Fries

Seafood Stir-Fries

Vegetarian Stir-Fries

Sauces and Rice

ANATOMY OF A STIR-FRY

TO STIR-FRY PROPERLY YOU NEED plenty of intense heat. The pan must be hot enough to caramelize sugars, deepen flavors, and evaporate unnecessary juices. All this must happen in minutes. The problem for most American cooks is that the Chinese wok and American stovetop are a lousy match that generates moderate heat at best.

Woks are conical because in China they traditionally rest in cylindrical pits containing the fire. Food is cut into small

pieces to shorten cooking time, thus conserving fuel. Only one vessel is required for many different cooking methods, including sautéing (stir-frying), steaming, boiling, and deep frying.

Unfortunately, what is practical in China makes no sense in America. A wok was not designed for stovetop cooking, where heat comes only from the bottom. On an American stove, the bottom of the wok gets hot but the sides are only warm. A horizontal heat source requires a horizontal pan. Therefore, for stir-frying at home, we recommend a large skillet, twelve to fourteen inches in diameter, with a nonstick coating.

American stoves necessitate other adjustments. In Chinese cooking, intense

flames lick the bottom and sides of a wok, heating the whole surface to extremely high temperatures. Conventional stoves simply don't generate enough British Thermal Units (BTUs) to heat any pan (whether a wok or flat skillet) sufficiently. American cooks must accommodate the lower horsepower on their stoves. Throw everything into the pan at one time and the ingredients will steam and stew, not stir-fry.

One solution is to boil the vegetables first so that they are merely heated through in the pan with the other stir-fry ingredients. We find this precooking to be burdensome and reserve it only for

vegetables such as broccoli and cauliflower that require it. We prefer to cut the vegetables quite small and add them to the pan in batches. By adding a small volume of food at a time, the heat in the pan does not dissipate. Slow-cooking vegetables such as carrots and onions go into the pan first, followed by quicker-cooking items such as zucchini and bell peppers. Leafy greens and herbs go in last.

When the vegetables are done, the aromatics (scallions, ginger, and garlic) are briefly cooked and then the seared meat, chicken, seafood, or tofu is added back to the pan along with the sauce. The result is a complete meal, perfect for weeknight dinners, that takes into

account the realities of cooking in an American kitchen.

POINTERS FOR SUCCESS

We uncovered a number of helpful tips and discoveries in our stir-fry testing. Keep these points in mind as you work through the recipes in this book.

FREEZE, SLICE, AND MARINATE PROTEIN

Most stir-fries start with some sort of protein, either beef, chicken, pork, shrimp, scallops, squid, fish, or tofu. All protein must be cut into bite-size pieces. We find it best to freeze beef, chicken, and pork for an hour or so to make slicing easier. We marinate all protein,

once sliced, in a mixture of soy sauce and dry sherry while preparing the vegetables and sauce. Just make sure to drain the protein before stir-frying. If you add the marinating liquid, the protein will stew rather than sear.

PROPER RATIO OF PROTEIN TO VEGETABLES

A good stir-fry for four people needs only a three-quarter pound of protein to one and one-half pounds of prepared vegetables. This ratio keeps the stir-fry from becoming too heavy and is more authentic since meat is a luxury used sparingly in China. Serve with plenty of rice (see recipes in chapter six) or over boiled noodles, especially Chinese egg

noodles (which resemble linguine) or thin cellophane rice noodles (which look like transparent angel hair pasta).

COOK IN BATCHES

Most proteins can be cooked in a single batch. The exceptions are flank steak, pork tenderloin, scallops, and squid, which shed a lot of liquid and will stew if cooked all at once. Vegetables, with a few exceptions such as snow peas, must be batched so that no more than one-half pound is added to the pan at one time.

In any case, sear the protein first and then remove it from the pan before cooking the vegetables. Start longer-cooking vegetables, such as onions and carrots, first. With the first batch still in

the pan, add medium-cooking vegetables, such as bell peppers and mushrooms, and then finally add fast-cooking leafy greens and fresh herbs. Note that vegetable cooking times will be affected by how they are prepared. For instance, sliced mushrooms will cook more quickly than whole mushrooms. Keep this in mind when deciding in what order to add vegetables to your own stir-fries.

In some cases, you may need to remove cooked vegetables from the pan before adding the next batch. This is especially important if you are cooking large amounts of leafy vegetables that throw off a lot of liquid, such as spinach. Follow the suggestions in individual

recipes.

VARY AMOUNT OF OIL BASED ON INGREDIENTS

Some foods, such as shrimp and chicken, will not stick much and can be stir-fried in a minimum of oil, no more than one tablespoon. Other foods, such as fish, eggplant, and mushrooms, tend to soak up oil and may require more. See specific recipes for suggestions.

PRECOOK VEGETABLES ONLY AS NEEDED

We prefer not to precook vegetables, which often adds an unnecessary step. We would rather cut vegetables quite small (no larger than a quarter). However, some vegetables, such as

broccoli and cauliflower florets, are difficult to cut this small; they tend to fall apart. Other vegetables, such as asparagus and green beans, may burn on the exterior before cooking through if added raw to a stir-fry. Therefore, we find it is necessary to blanch broccoli and cauliflower florets as well as asparagus and green beans.

ADD AROMATICS AT END

Many stir-fry recipes add the aromatics (scallions, garlic, and ginger) too early, causing them to burn. After cooking the vegetables, we push them to the sides of the pan, add a little oil and the aromatics to the center of the pan, and cook briefly until fragrant but not colored, about ten

seconds. To keep the aromatics from burning and becoming harsh-tasting, we then remove the pan from the heat and stir them into the vegetables for twenty seconds.

VARY AROMATICS AS NEEDED

We find that two tablespoons of chopped scallion whites, one tablespoon of minced garlic, and one tablespoon of minced ginger works well in a basic stir-fry for four. But feel free to adjust these amounts based on personal tastes and other ingredients in the stir-fry. For instance, beef works well with more garlic, and many seafood dishes taste fine with more ginger. To add heat to any stir-fry, add hot red pepper flakes or

minced fresh chiles with the aromatics.

DON'T USE CORNSTARCH IN SAUCES

Once the aromatics have been cooked, it's time to add the cooked protein and the sauce. We find that cornstarch-thickened sauces are often gloppy and thick. Omitting this ingredient produces cleaner-tasting and brighter sauces. Without cornstarch, it is necessary to keep the amount of sauce to a reasonable amount (about one-half cup) that will thicken slightly on its own with a minute or so of cooking.

USE SUGAR SPARINGLY

Even sweet sauces, such as sweet-and-sour, should contain a minimum of sugar.

Too much Chinese food prepared in this country is overly sweet. A little sugar is authentic (and delicious) in many recipes; a lot of sugar is not.

READ MASTER RECIPES

The following Master Recipe for Basic Stir-Fry is the key to understanding the recipes in this book. Read it carefully. The individual stir-fry recipes in Chapters Three, Four, and Five use the master recipe, with specific proteins, vegetables, and sauces plugged in to create delicious meals. Chapter Six contains recipes for a variety of simple sauces as well as several rice preparations. For detailed information on equipment and ingredients, turn to

Chapter Two.

Master Recipe

Basic Stir-Fry

NOTE: ***Figures 1–9****, illustrate the essential steps in this recipe. You may use a regular 12- or 14-inch skillet or a 12-inch Dutch oven in place of the recommended nonstick skillet, but you will need to use slightly more oil. This recipe serves four people.*

$^{3}/_{4}$ pound meat, seafood, or tofu, cut into small, even pieces

1 tablespoon soy sauce

1 tablespoon dry sherry

1 recipe any sauce

2-4 tablespoons peanut or vegetable oil

$1^1/_2$ pounds prepared vegetables, cut into small pieces (none bigger than a quarter) and divided into several batches based on cooking times

2 tablespoons minced scallions, white parts only

1 tablespoon minced garlic

1 tablespoon minced fresh gingerroot

Master Instructions

Basic Stir-Fry

1. Toss meat, seafood, or tofu with soy sauce and sherry in medium bowl; set aside and toss once or twice as you work on rest of recipe. Prepare sauce and vegetables; set aside.

2. Heat 12- or 14-inch nonstick skillet over high heat for 3 to 4 minutes. (Pan should be so hot you can hold outstretched hand one inch over pan for only three seconds.) Add 1 tablespoon oil (2

tablespoons for fish) and swirl oil so that it evenly coats bottom of pan. Heat oil until it just starts to shimmer and smoke. Check heat with hand as before.

3. Drain meat, seafood, or tofu and add to pan. (Add beef, pork, scallops, and squid in two batches.) Stir-fry until seared and about three-quarters cooked, 40 to 60 seconds for fish and scallops; 1 minute for beef, shrimp, and squid; 2 minutes for pork; $2^1/_2$ minutes for tofu; and $2^1/_2$ to 3 minutes for chicken. Scrape cooked meat,

seafood, or tofu and all liquid into bowl. Cover and keep warm.

4. Let pan come back up to temperature, 1 to 2 minutes. When hot, drizzle in 2 teaspoons oil. When oil just starts to smoke, add first batch of long-cooking vegetables. Stir-fry until vegetables are just tender-crisp, 1 to 2 minutes. Leaving first batch in pan, repeat with remaining vegetables, adding 1 teaspoon oil for each batch and cooking each set until crisp-tender, or wilted for leafy greens.

5. Clear center of pan and add scallions, garlic, and ginger. Drizzle with $^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon oil. Mash into pan with back of a spatula. Cook until fragrant but not colored, about 10 seconds. Remove pan from heat and stir scallions, garlic, and ginger into vegetables for 20 seconds.

6. Return pan to heat and add cooked meat, seafood, or tofu. Stir in sauce and stir-fry until ingredients are well coated with sauce and sizzling hot, about 1 minute. Serve immediately with

rice.

Figure 1.
Toss protein (meat, seafood, or tofu) with soy sauce and dry sherry in a small bowl. Allow to marinate while preparing sauce and vegetables.

Figure 2.
When ingredients are ready, heat 12- or 14-inch nonstick skillet over high heat for 3 to 4 minutes. Hold hand one inch over pan. When pan is so hot you can keep your hand there for only three seconds, add oil and heat until it just starts to shimmer and smoke.

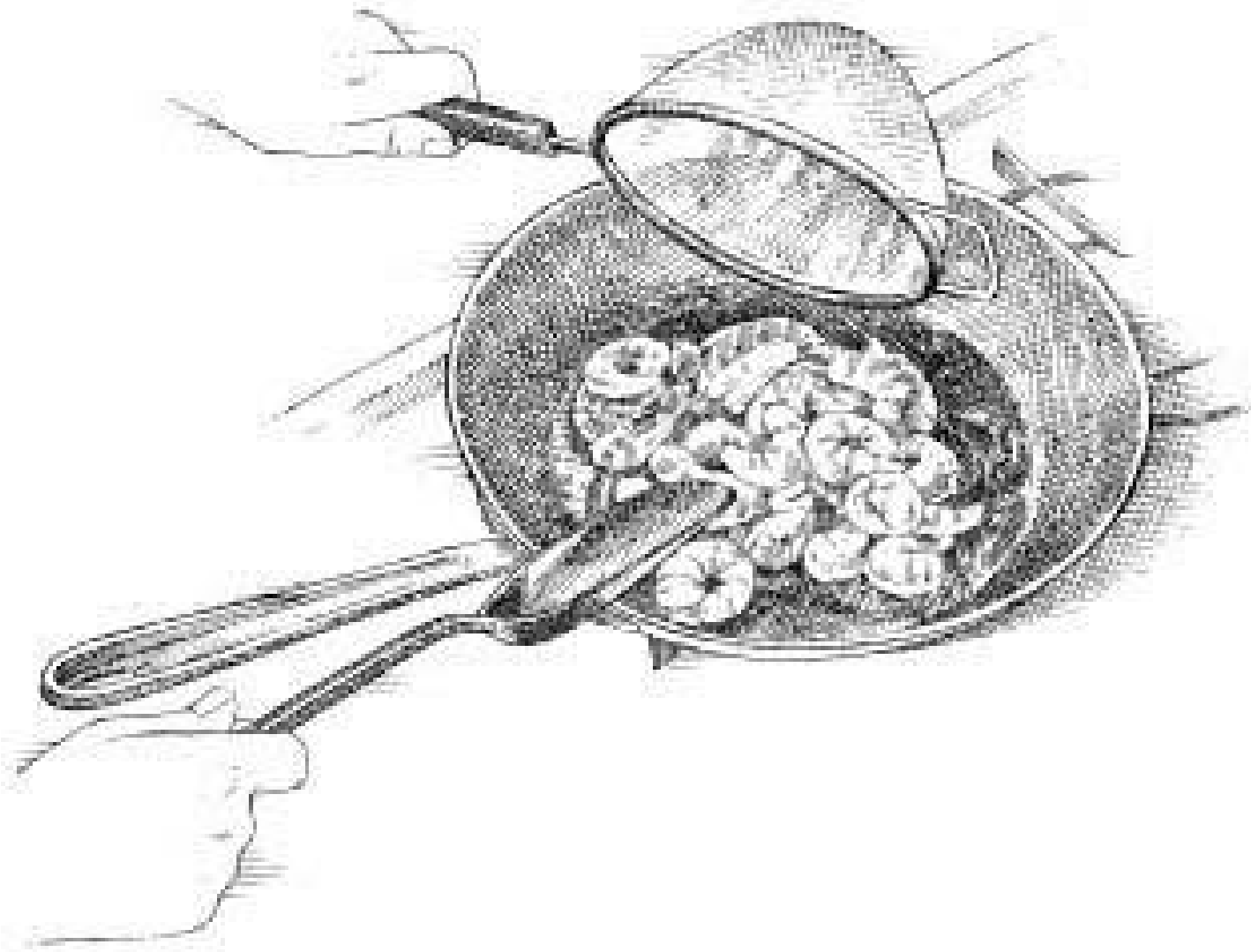

Figure 3.
Drain meat, seafood, or tofu and add to hot pan. Cook until seared and three-quarters done and then transfer to bowl. Cover and keep warm.

Figure 4.
When pan comes back to heat, 1 to 2 minutes, add 2 teaspoons oil. Heat briefly, then add first batch of longer-cooking vegetables.

Figure 5.
Leaving first batch of vegetables in pan, add additional oil and remaining vegetables in two more batches.

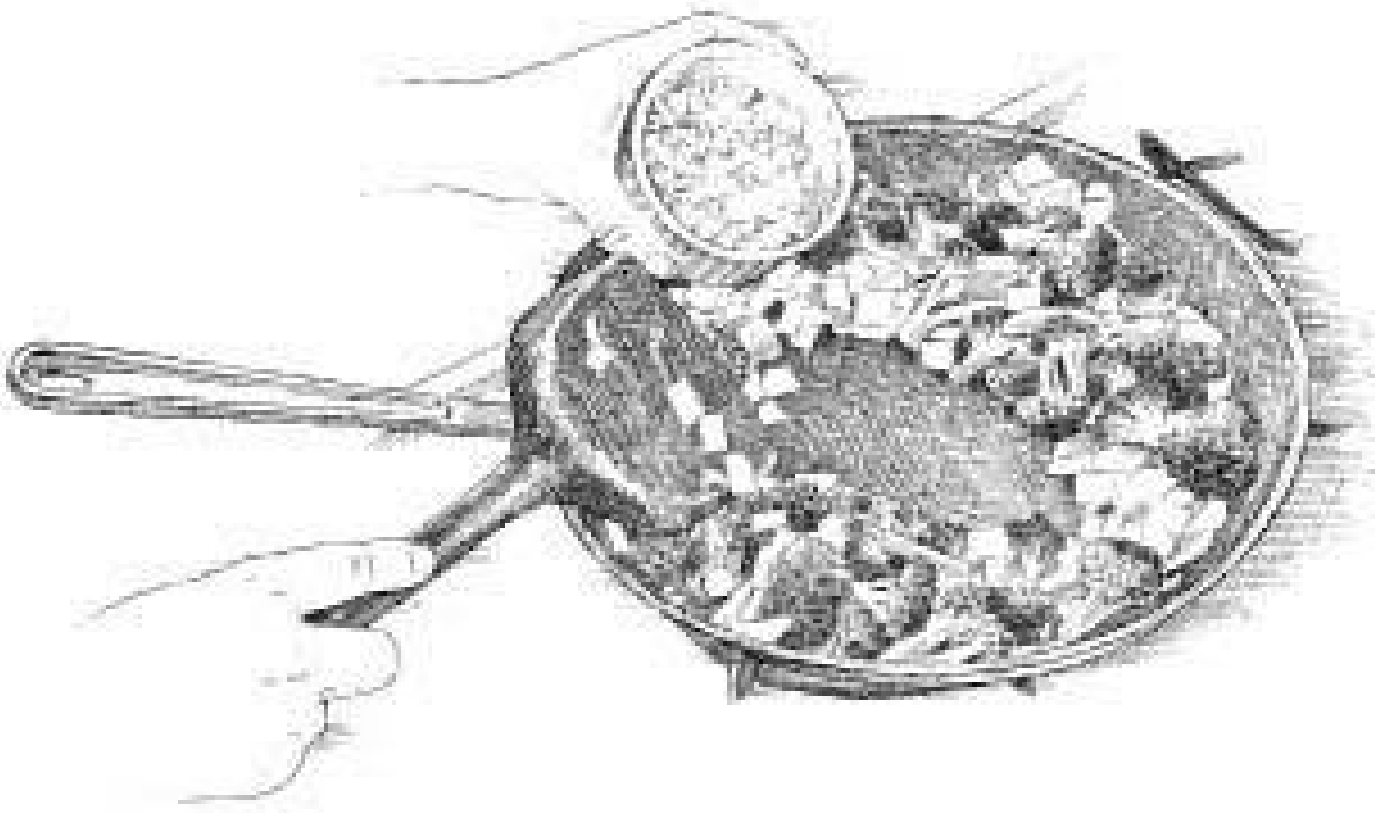

Figure 6.
When all vegetables are crisp-tender, clear center of pan, add scallions, garlic, and ginger, and drizzle with $^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon oil.

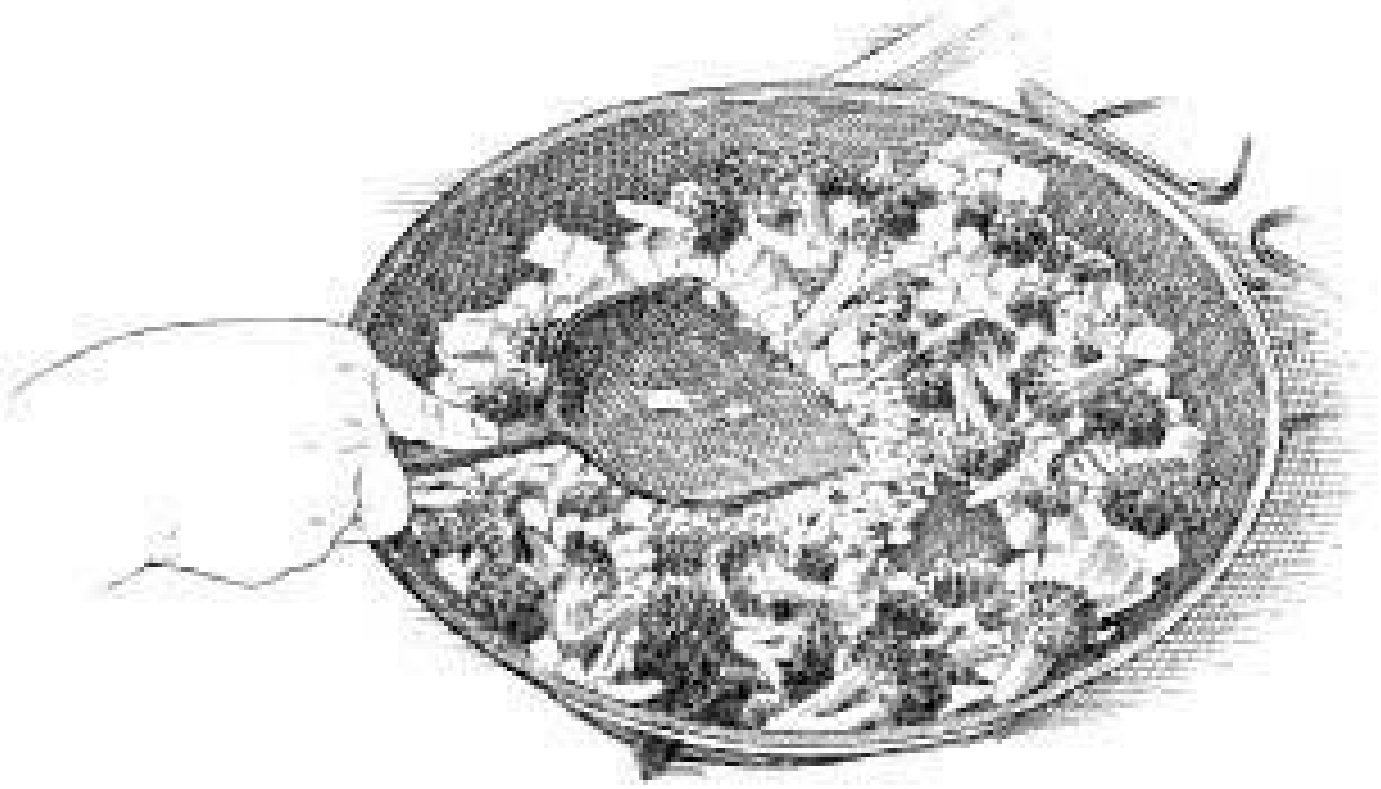

Figure 7.
Mash scallions, garlic, and ginger into pan with back of spatula. Cook 10 seconds; remove pan from heat and stir scallion mixture into vegetables.

Figure 8.
Return pan to heat and add cooked meat, seafood, or tofu along with juices in bowl.

Figure 9.
Stir in sauce and stir-fry for a minute or so to coat all ingredients and make sure everything is sizzling hot.

EQUIPMENT AND INGREDIENTS

STIR-FRYING REQUIRES FEW PIECES OF specialized equipment (you may already own them), but there are a number of ingredients that may seem unfamiliar. Here's a brief guide to buying and using the right tools and ingredients.

TOOLS FOR SUCCESS

PLASTIC SPATULA

Chinese cooks use long-handled metal food pushers or shovel spatulas to move food around woks. The same tool works

well in a nonstick skillet, although to protect the pan's surface, you should use only plastic or wooden implements. We prefer large shovels with a wide, thin blade and long, heat-resistant handle.

NONSTICK SKILLET

We prefer a 12- or 14-inch nonstick skillet for stir-frying. This pan requires a minimum of oil and prevents foods from burning onto the surface as they stir-fry. We tested the major brands of nonstick skillets and particularly liked pans from All-Clad and Calphalon. Both pans are sturdy but not overly heavy. For instance, many enameled cast-iron pans weigh close to five pounds and are hard to maneuver. A pan that weighs about

three pounds is much easier to control and still heavy enough to heat evenly. When shopping, make sure the handle is comfortable and preferably heat-resistant. A hollowed-out metal handle or a handle with a removable plastic sheath is ideal.

Our second choice for stir-frying is a regular 12- or 14-inch skillet. Without the nonstick coating, you will need to use slightly more oil. However, this pan will deliver excellent results. Look for the same features (a sturdy but not overly heavy pan with a heat-resistant handle is best) as with a nonstick skillet.

If you do not own a large skillet of any kind, do not substitute a smaller size. A 10-inch skillet is not large enough to

accommodate all the ingredients in a stir-fry recipe for four. The ingredients will steam and stew rather than stir-fry.

A large Dutch oven with a 12-inch base can be used for stir-frying if you do not own a large skillet. It's a bit harder to maneuver this pan (swirling oil and scraping out the cooked protein are easier in a shallow skillet with a handle), but as long as the pan bottom is large enough, a Dutch oven will work fine. As with a regular skillet, you may need to use more oil to keep ingredients from sticking.

RICE COOKER

A heavy-duty saucepan with a tight-fitting lid is fine for preparing rice.

However, if you make rice often, an electric rice cooker may be a wise investment. First of all, rice cookers are foolproof. Just add the right amount of water and rice and walk away. No need to adjust the temperature or check for doneness. An automatic sensor heats the water and then shuts off the cooker when all the water has been absorbed. Best of all, there is no need to time rice perfectly. All electric cookers automatically keep rice steaming hot for hours. Many models also come with nonstick pots that eliminate tedious cleanup.

STIR-FRY PANTRY

ASIAN SESAME OIL

Also known as dark or toasted sesame oil, this aromatic brown oil is used as a seasoning in sauces. Because of its low smoke point, it is not used for cooking. Do not substitute regular sesame oil, which is pressed from untoasted seeds and meant for salad dressings and cooking. Japanese brands of sesame oil are commonly sold in American supermarkets and are generally quite good. Sesame oil tends to go rancid quickly, so store it in a cool cabinet or refrigerate an opened bottle if you will not use it up within a couple of months.

CHILI PASTE

Sometimes labeled chili sauce, chili paste is a spicy seasoning made with

crushed chile peppers, vinegar, and usually garlic. The texture is thick and smooth and the color is bright red. Brands vary from mild to incendiary, so taste before using chili sauce, and adjust as needed. Opened bottles can be refrigerated for many months.

DRIED HOT RED PEPPER FLAKES

Also called crushed hot red pepper flakes, this pantry staple is a convenient way to add heat to most any stir-fry recipe. We find that adding hot red pepper flakes along with the aromatics (scallions, garlic, and ginger) maximizes their flavor. Note that hot red pepper flakes will lose their punch over time and should be replaced at least twice a

year

DRY SHERRY

We tested various combinations of ingredients for marinating the protein in our stir-fry recipes, including soy sauce, dry sherry, rice wine, chicken stock, sesame oil, cornstarch, and egg whites. We found that a simple mixture of soy sauce and dry sherry provides the best flavor. Rice wine also works well, but since most American cooks are not likely to have this ingredient on hand, our recipes call for dry sherry. Of course, if you have rice wine in the pantry, use an equal amount in place of the sherry.

SOY SAUCE

Soy sauce is the most important condiment in Asian cooking. Made from equal parts soybeans and roasted grains (usually wheat), plus water and salt, this fermented sauce is an all-purpose condiment that works with many other flavors. Many Americans confuse soy sauce with tamari. Soy sauce is made with wheat, while tamari contains just soybeans, water, and salt. Tamari is generally saltier and darker and better-suited as a dipping sauce (with sushi, for instance) than as a seasoning in cooking.

There are several kinds of soy sauce commonly sold in supermarkets in this country. For the most part, we prefer regular Chinese soy sauce. It's our

choice for marinating meat, seafood, or tofu, or for adding a salty, fermented flavor to sauces. However, when using a larger amount of soy sauce, we prefer to use a light or reduced-sodium brand. For instance, a ginger sauce that contains three tablespoons of soy sauce would be too salty if made with a regular, full-sodium sauce. Unless otherwise noted, recipes were tested with regular soy sauce.

SZECHWAN PEPPERCORNS

Szechwan peppercorns have a mildly peppery, herbal flavor and aroma. If possible, smell peppercorns before buying them to gauge freshness and intensity. Twigs and tiny leaves will be

mixed in with the peppercorns (just pick them out as you use the peppercorns), but there should be a minimum of black seeds. To bring out their flavor, toast peppercorns in a dry skillet until fragrant and then grind them in a coffee mill set aside for spices.

MEAT AND POULTRY STIR-FRIES

BEEF STIR-FRIES ARE BEST MADE WITH flank steak. It slices thin and stays tender when cooked over high heat. We tried other cuts, such as top round, and found that they become tough when stir-fried. Slightly frozen flank steak is easier to slice thin than meat at room temperature. The same holds true for chicken and pork. An hour in the freezer firms up the texture nicely. Another option is to defrost meat in the refrigerator and slice it while still partially frozen.

Flank steak sheds a fair amount of liquid. To keep the meat from stewing in its own juices, we prefer to sear flank steak in two batches. When the first batch is nicely browned, scrape out the meat and all juices and transfer them to a small bowl. Add a little more oil and then the second batch of meat to the pan. When that batch is done, add the meat and juices to the bowl, then cover the bowl. Bring the empty skillet back up to temperature and proceed with cooking the vegetables. Each batch of beef will require about one minute of cooking time.

The chicken recipes in this chapter call for boneless, skinless breasts that

are cut into $^1/_2$-inch-wide strips. If you can find boneless, skinless thighs (or want to bone and skin the thighs yourself), go ahead and use this tasty dark meat. Thighs should be cut into 1-inch pieces. Both breast and thigh meat require a fairly long time, at least two and one-half to three minutes, to cook through and brown slightly.

Many traditional stir-fry recipes use ground pork. We prefer lean tenderloin and cut it into long, thin strips that cook in about two minutes. Like flank steak, pork tenderloin can shed a lot of liquid and should be stir-fried in two batches.

Stir-Fried Beef and Eggplant in Oyster Sauce

NOTE: ***If you like, add 1 teaspoon minced fresh chile along with the garlic and ginger. The eggplant must be cooked in two batches to keep the pan from losing heat.***

$^3/_4$ pound flank steak, sliced thin (*see* figures 10 and 11)
1 tablespoon soy sauce
1 tablespoon dry sherry
1 recipe Oyster Sauce
4–5 tablespoons peanut or vegetable oil
1 medium eggplant (about 1

pound), cut into 3/4-inch cubes

1 red bell pepper, cleaned and cut into 3- by 1/2-inch strips

3 medium scallions, green parts cut into 1/4-inch lengths and white parts minced

2 tablespoons minced garlic

1 tablespoon minced fresh gingerroot

INSTRUCTIONS: Follow Master Recipe instructions for Basic Stir-Fry, cooking beef in two batches, each in 1 tablespoon oil until seared, about 1 minute. Cook eggplant in two batches, each in 1 tablespoon oil for 1 to 2 minutes. When second batch of eggplant

is done, add first batch of eggplant back to pan along with pepper and cook 1 minute. Add scallion greens and cook 15 to 30 seconds.

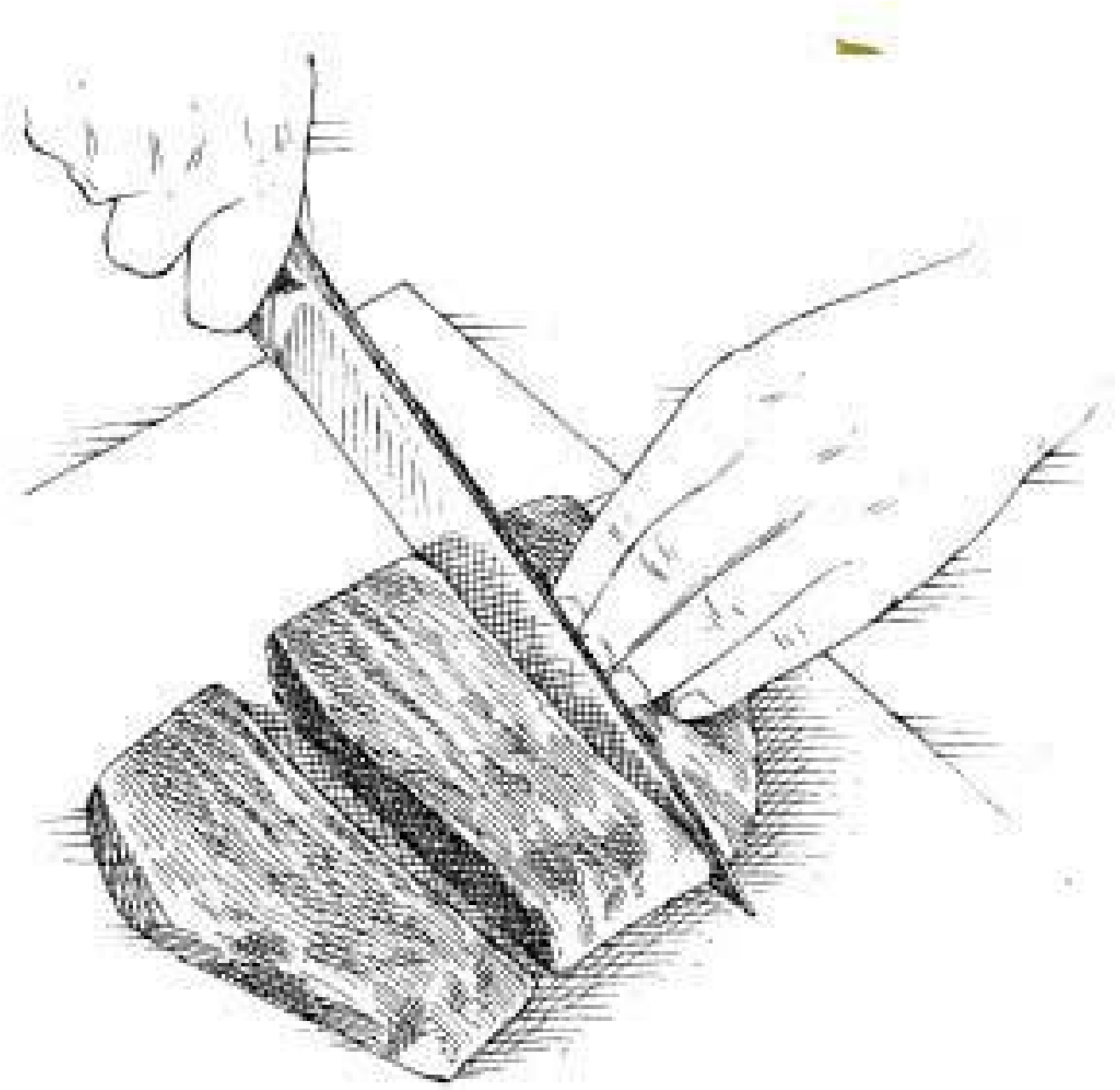

Figure 10.
Slice partially frozen flank steak into 2-inch-wide pieces.

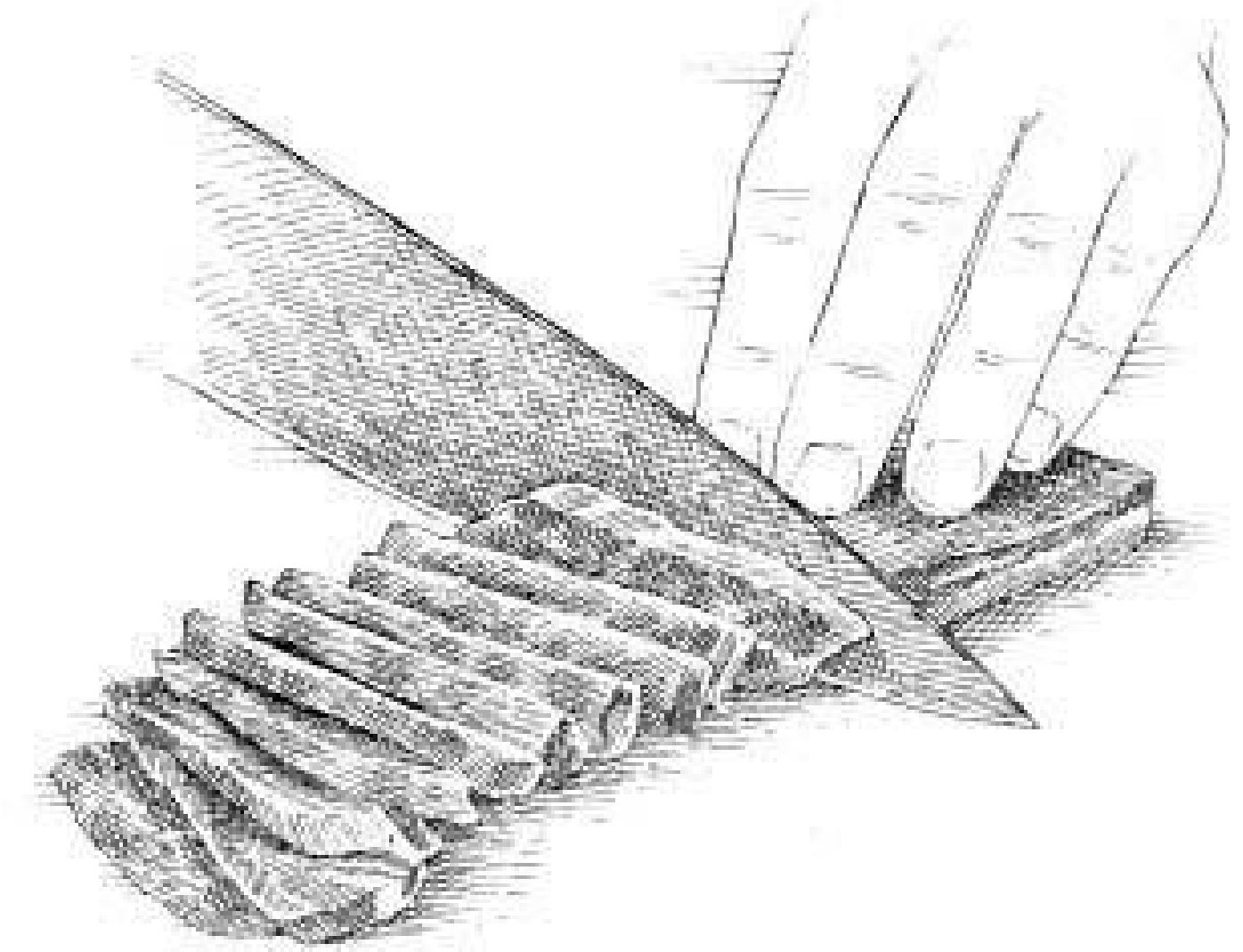

Figure 11.
Cut each piece of flank steak against the grain into very thin slices.

Stir-Fried Beef and Vegetables in Szechwan Chile Sauce

NOTE: ***Precook broccoli and cauliflower before stir-frying. Blanch broccoli for 1 to 2 minutes; cauliflower, for 1 minute.***

$^3/_4$ pound flank steak, sliced thin (*see* figures 10 and 11)

1 tablespoon soy sauce

1 tablespoon dry sherry

1 recipe Szechwan Chile Sauce

3-4 tablespoons peanut or vegetable oil

4 cups broccoli florets, blanched until crisp-tender

3 cups cauliflower florets, blanched until crisp-tender

1 red bell pepper, cleaned and cut into 3- by $^1/_2$-inch strips

2 tablespoons minced scallions, white parts only

2 tablespoons minced garlic

1 tablespoon minced fresh gingerroot

INSTRUCTIONS: Follow Master Recipe instructions for Basic Stir-Fry, cooking beef in two batches, each in 1 tablespoon oil, until seared, about 1 minute. Add broccoli and cook 1 to 2

minutes. Add cauliflower and cook 1 minute. Add pepper and cook 1 minute.

Stir-Fried Beef and Snow Peas in Ginger Sauce

NOTE: ***This classic stir-fry has a clean, bright ginger flavor. Snow peas require so little cooking that one pound may be cooked in a single batch.***

$^3/_4$ pound flank steak, sliced thin (*see* figures 10 and 11)
1 tablespoon soy sauce
1 tablespoon dry sherry
1 recipe Ginger Sauce
3 tablespoons peanut or vegetable oil
$1^1/_4$ pounds snow peas,

stringed

1 8-ounce can sliced bamboo shoots in water, drained

2 tablespoons minced scallions, white parts only

1 tablespoon minced garlic

1 tablespoon minced fresh gingerroot

INSTRUCTIONS: Follow Master Recipe instructions for Basic Stir-Fry, cooking beef in two batches, each in 1 tablespoon oil until seared, about 1 minute. Add snow peas and cook 1 minute. Add bamboo shoots and cook 30 seconds.

Stir-Fried Chicken, Pineapple, and Red Onion in Sweet-and-Sour Sauce

NOTE: ***Cut fresh or canned pineapple rings into $^{1}/_{2}$-inch-thick triangles that measure about 1 inch long per side.***

$^{3}/_{4}$ pound boneless, skinless chicken breast, cut into uniform pieces (*see* figures 12–14)

1 tablespoon soy sauce

1 tablespoon dry sherry

1 recipe Sweet-and-Sour Sauce

2–3 tablespoons peanut or vegetable oil

2 small red onions, peeled and cut into thin wedges

1 20-ounce can pineapple rings in juice, drained, or 2 cups fresh pineapple cut into wedges

3 medium scallions, green parts cut into $^1/_4$-inch lengths and white parts minced

1 tablespoon minced garlic

1 tablespoon minced fresh gingerroot

INSTRUCTIONS: Follow Master Recipe instructions for Basic Stir-Fry, cooking chicken in 1 tablespoon oil until slightly browned, $2^1/_2$ to 3 minutes. Add onion and cook 1 to 2 minutes. Add pineapple

and cook 1 minute. Add scallion greens and cook 15 to 30 seconds.

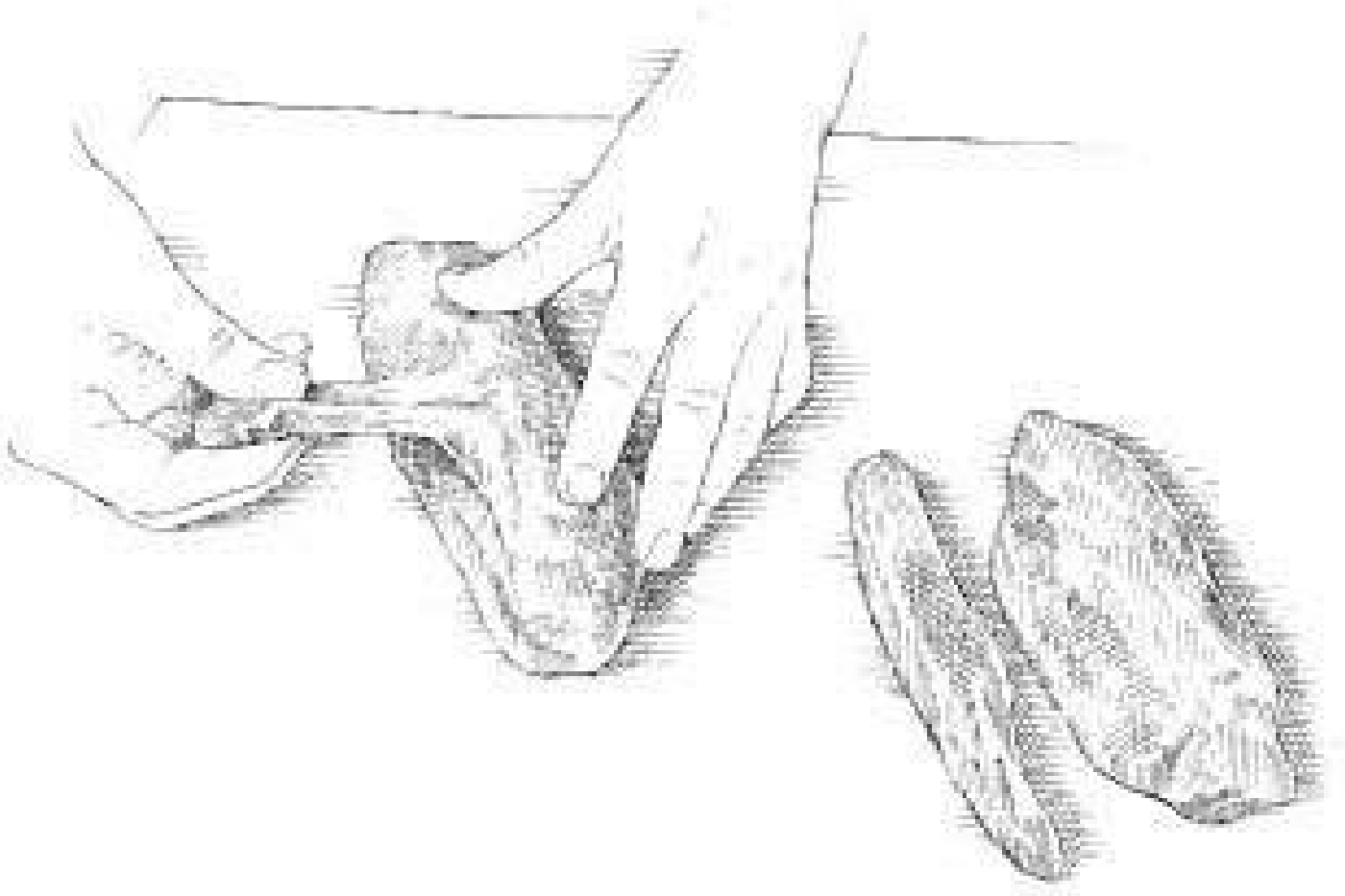

Figure 12.
To produce uniform pieces of chicken, separate tenderloins from partially frozen skinless, boneless breasts.

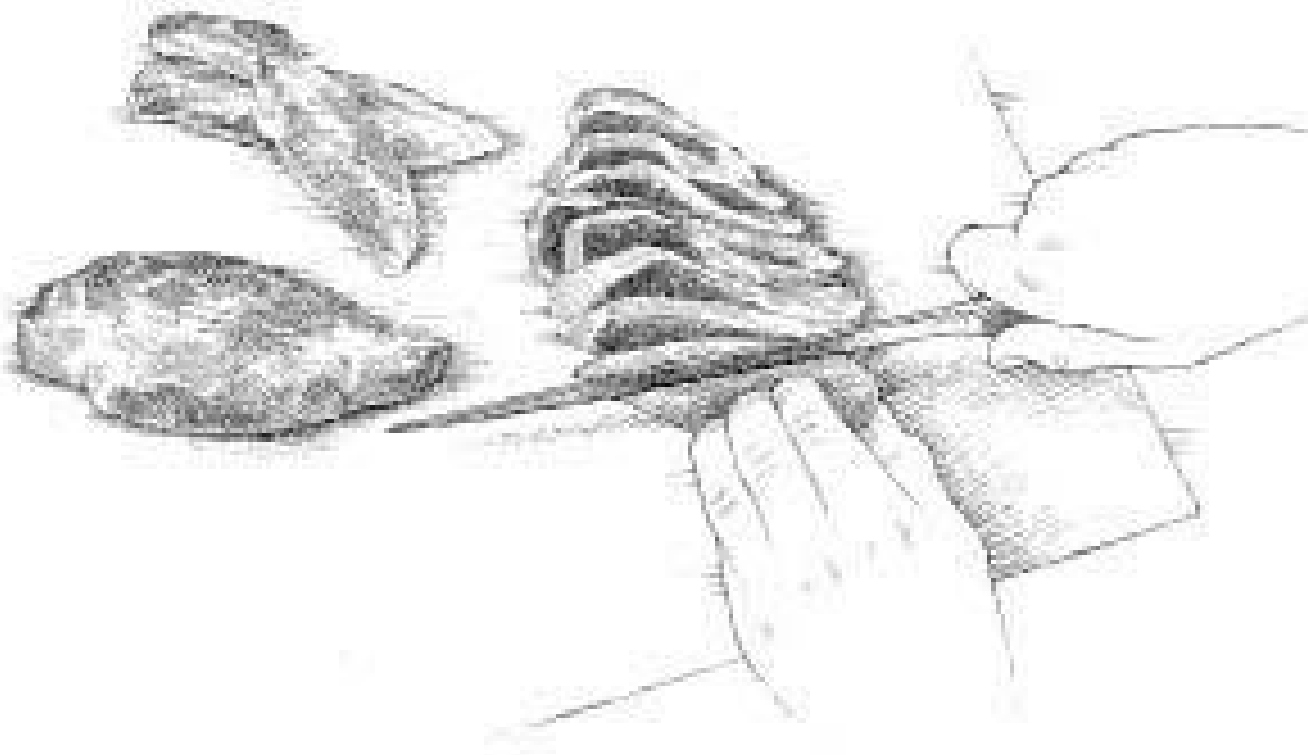

Figure 13.
Slice breasts across the grain into $^{1}/_{2}$-inch-wide strips that are $1^{1}/_{2}$ to 2 inches long. Center pieces need to be cut in half so that they are approximately the same length as end pieces.

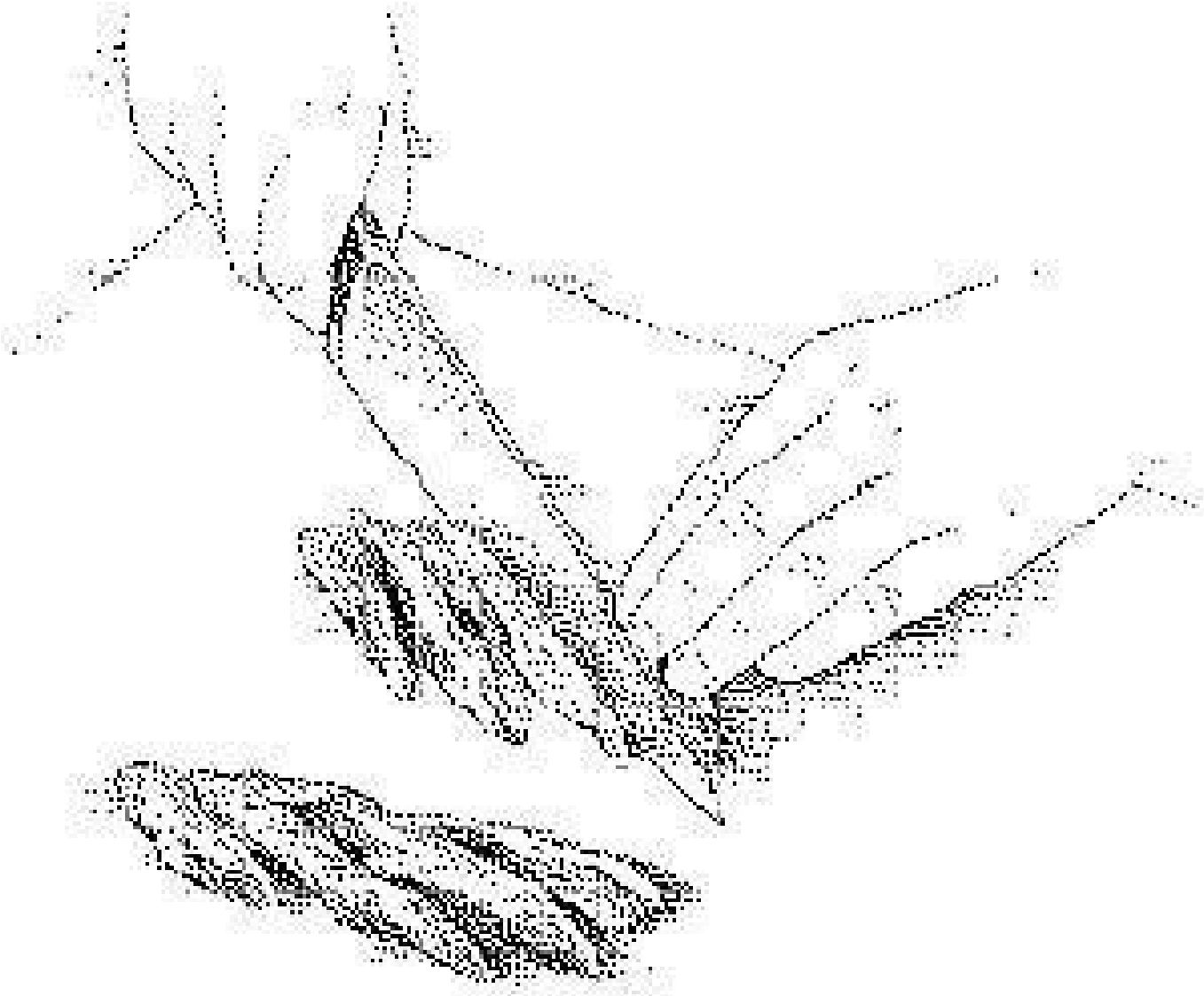

Figure 14.
Cut tenderloins on the diagonal to produce pieces about the same size as the strips of breast meat.

Stir-Fried Chicken, Celery, and Peanuts in Szechwan Chile Sauce

NOTE: ***Salted or natural peanuts may be used in this recipe.***

$^3/_4$ pound boneless, skinless chicken breast, cut into uniform pieces (*see* figures 12–14)

1 tablespoon soy sauce

1 tablespoon dry sherry

1 recipe Szechwan Chile Sauce

2-3 tablespoons peanut or vegetable oil

8 celery stalks, sliced thin on

the bias (*see* figure 15)

2 tablespoons minced scallions, white parts only

1 tablespoon minced garlic

1 tablespoon minced fresh gingerroot

$^1/_2$ cup peanuts

INSTRUCTIONS: Follow Master Recipe instructions for Basic Stir-Fry, cooking chicken in 1 tablespoon oil until slightly browned, $2^1/_2$ to 3 minutes. Cook celery in two batches, each for $1^1/_2$ to 2 minutes. Add first batch of celery back to pan before adding scallions, garlic, and ginger. Add peanuts with cooked chicken and sauce.

Figure 15.
To cut long, thin vegetables such as celery on the bias, hold knife at a 45-degree to vegetable as you slice.

Stir-Fried Chicken and Bok Choy in Ginger Sauce

NOTE: ***The white bok choy stalks require more cooking time than the greens, so separate the stalks and leaves before slicing them.***

$^{3}/_{4}$ pound boneless, skinless chicken breast, cut into uniform pieces (*see* figures 12–14)

1 tablespoon soy sauce

1 tablespoon dry sherry

1 recipe Ginger Sauce

3 tablespoons peanut or vegetable oil

1 pound bok choy, stalks and greens separated and sliced thin

(*see* figures 16–18)

1 red bell pepper, cleaned and cut into 3- by $^1/_2$-inch strips

2 tablespoons minced scallions, white parts only

1 tablespoon minced garlic

1 tablespoon minced fresh gingerroot

INSTRUCTIONS: Follow Master Recipe instructions for Basic Stir-Fry, cooking chicken in 1 tablespoon oil until slightly browned, $2^1/_2$ to 3 minutes. Add bok choy stalks and cook 1 to 2 minutes. Add pepper and cook 30 to 60 seconds. Add bok choy greens and cook 15 to 30 seconds.

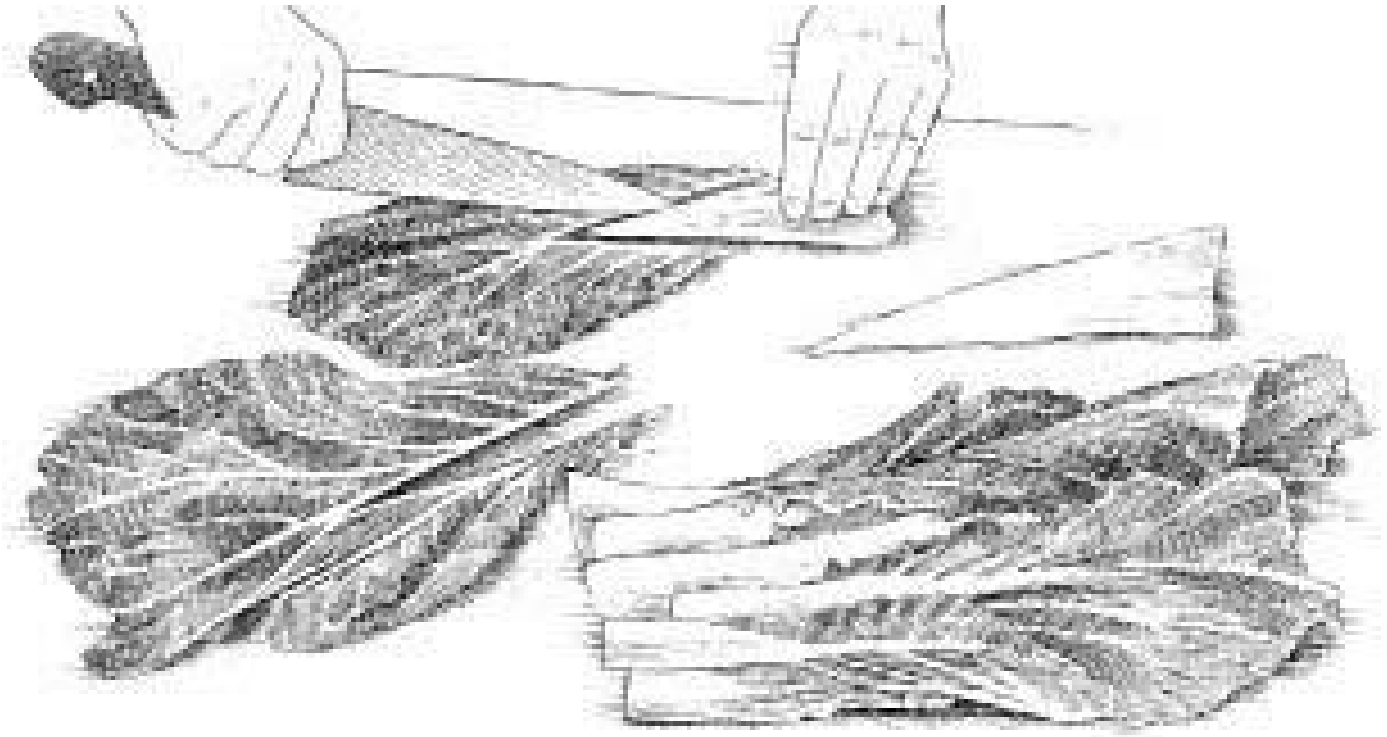

Figure 16.
Cut the leafy green portions of the bok choy away from the white stalks.

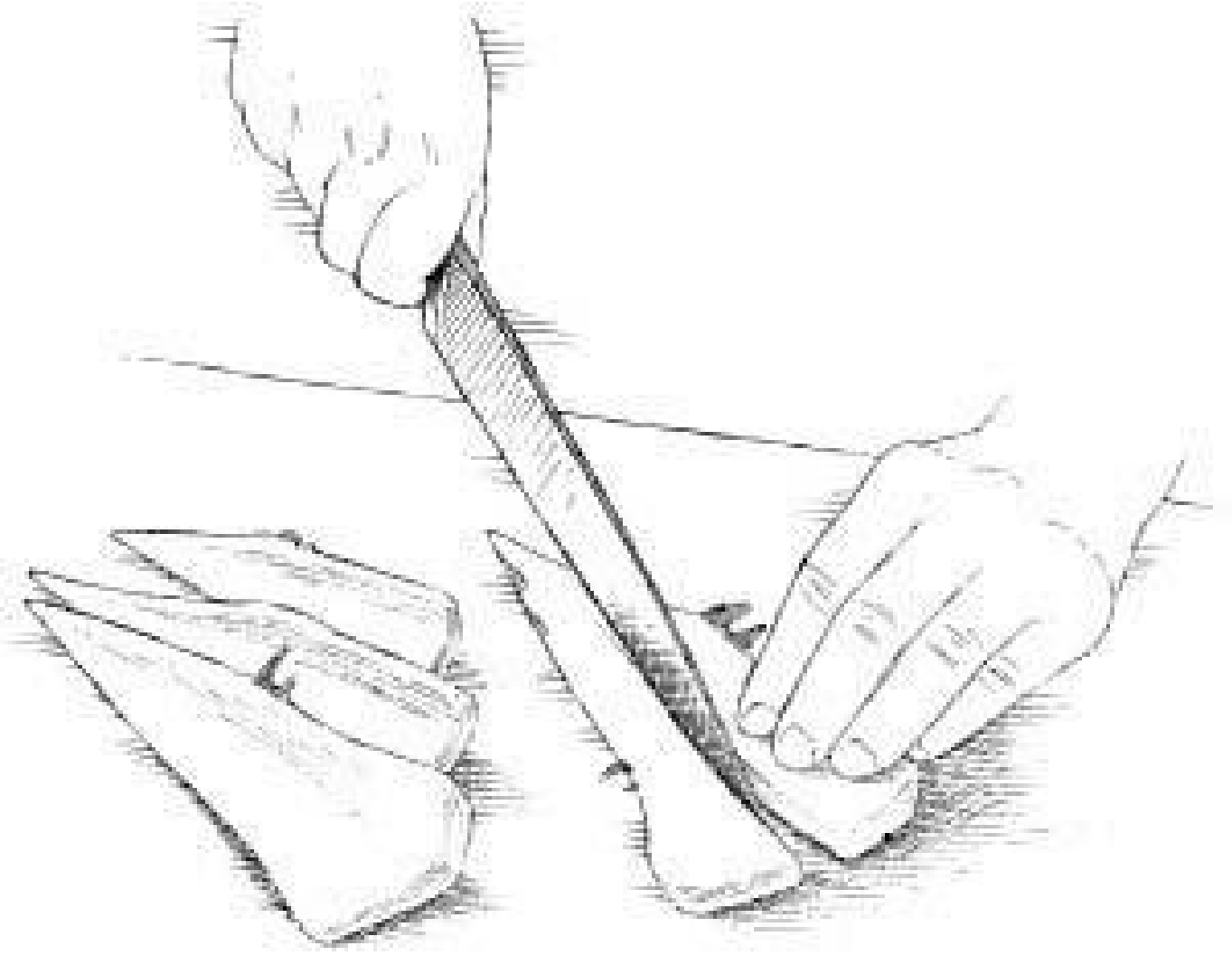

Figure 17.
Cut each white stalk in half lengthwise and then crosswise into thin strips.

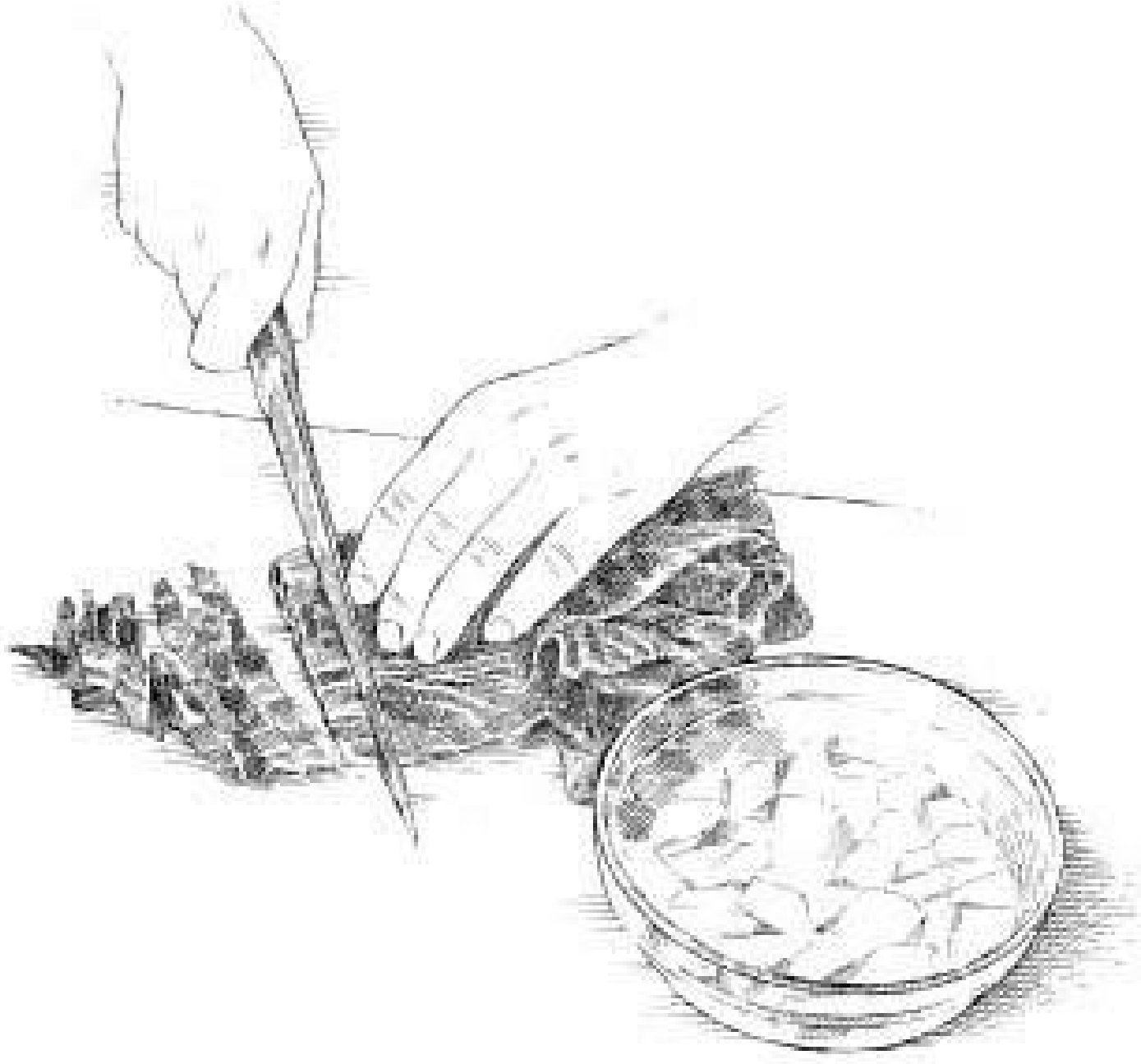

Figure 18.
Stack the leafy greens and then slice them crosswise into thin strips. Keep the sliced stalks and leaves separate.

Stir-Fried Chicken and Broccoli in Coconut Curry Sauce

NOTE: ***Blanch broccoli until crisp-tender (about two minutes) before proceeding with stir-fry recipe.***

$^3/_4$ pound boneless, skinless chicken breast, cut into uniform pieces (*see* figures 12–14)

1 tablespoon soy sauce

1 tablespoon dry sherry

1 recipe Coconut Curry Sauce

2–3 tablespoons peanut or vegetable oil

1 small onion, cut into 1-inch

cubes

$1^1/_2$ pounds broccoli, florets broken into bite-size pieces; stems trimmed, peeled, and cut into $^1/_4$-inch dice

1 yellow bell pepper, cleaned and cut into 3- by $^1/_2$-inch strips

2 tablespoons minced scallions, white parts only

$^1/_2$ tablespoon minced garlic

1 tablespoon minced fresh gingerroot

INSTRUCTIONS: Follow Master Recipe instructions for Basic Stir-Fry, cooking chicken in 1 tablespoon oil until

browned, $2^{1}/_{2}$ to 3 minutes. Add onion and cook 2 minutes. Add broccoli and cook 1 minute. Add pepper and cook 1 minute.

Stir-Fried Pork and Red Cabbage in Hot-and-Sour Sauce

NOTE: ***To finely shred cabbage, cut cored quarters crosswise into $^{1}/_{4}$-inch-wide strips.***

$^{3}/_{4}$ pound pork tenderloin, trimmed of fat and shredded (*see* figures 19 and 20)
1 tablespoon soy sauce
1 tablespoon dry sherry
1 recipe Hot-and-Sour Sauce
3–4 tablespoons peanut or vegetable oil
$^{3}/_{4}$ medium red cabbage, cored

and shredded (about 9 cups)

1 medium carrot, peeled and julienned

2 tablespoons minced scallions, white parts only

1 tablespoon minced garlic

1 tablespoon minced fresh gingerroot

INSTRUCTIONS: Follow Master Recipe instructions for Basic Stir-Fry, cooking pork in two batches, each in 1 tablespoon oil until seared, about 2 minutes. Cook cabbage in two batches, each for $1^{1}/_{2}$ minutes. When second batch is done, add first batch of cabbage back to pan along with carrot and cook 2

minutes.

Figure 19.
To shred the pork, freeze the tenderloin until firm. Cut the tenderloin crosswise into $^{1}/_{3}$-inch-thick medallions.

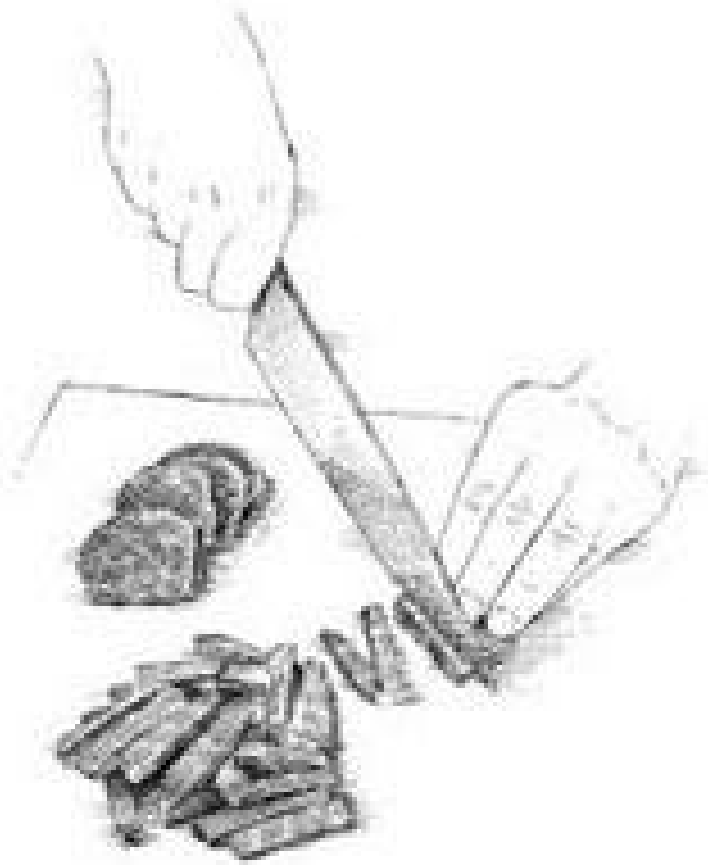

Figure 20.
Slice each medallion into $^{1}/_{3}$-inch-wide strips.

SEAFOOD STIR-FRIES

FRESH SEAFOOD WORKS WELL WITH A variety of flavors and is well-suited to stir-fries. Shrimp, scallops, and squid are all good choices because they cook quickly. Buy medium-sized shrimp, which can be left whole in stir-fries. Choose either fresh (which has almost always been frozen and then defrosted at the store) or frozen shrimp. Shrimp may be stir-fried in the shell, but they are easier to eat when shelled (and deveined if necessary) before cooking. Shrimp should be stir-fried until bright pink,

about one minute.

Scallops and squid shed a lot of water when stir-fried and should be cooked in batches to keep them from stewing in their own juices. If you can find good-quality bay scallops, use them whole in stir-fries. Otherwise, select sea scallops and cut them into 1-inch pieces. With either variety, remove the tendon that is attached to the side of each scallop. It becomes unpleasantly tough when cooked. Scallops will cook in just forty to sixty seconds. For optimum browning on the outside, turn scallops only once when stir-frying them.

Whole squid, either fresh or frozen, may be purchased cleaned at many fish markets. The tentacles may be stir-fried

as is, while the bodies should be cut crosswise into $^{1}/_{2}$-inch rings. Uncleaned squid is sold in many markets, and is considerably cheaper. *See* figures 32 through 36, for instructions on cleaning squid. Do not cook squid for more than one minute, or you risk toughening it.

When choosing fish for a stir-fry, we prefer a mild-tasting but firm white fish such as sea bass. Thin fillets, such as sole or flounder, will fall apart. We find that oily fish, such as tuna or salmon, taste too distinctive to blend well with many sauces. Our preferred choice is skinned sea bass fillets that are cut into cubes. They will not disintegrate when stir-fried and are mild enough to work

with powerful flavors such as ginger, garlic, and chiles. Cod also can be prepared in this fashion. Cubed fish will brown extremely quickly, in no more than forty to sixty seconds.

Stir-Fried Shrimp and Water Chestnuts in Hot-and-Sour Sauce

NOTE: ***Celery and water chestnuts add crunch to this classic stir-fry. You may use either salted or natural cashews.***

1 pound medium shrimp, peeled and deveined (*see* figures 21–24)

1 tablespoon soy sauce

1 tablespoon dry sherry

1 recipe Hot-and-Sour Sauce

2–3 tablespoons peanut or vegetable oil

3 celery stalks, sliced thin on

the bias (*see* figure 15)

2 8-ounce cans whole water chestnuts, drained and halved crosswise

2 tablespoons minced scallions, white parts only

1 tablespoon minced garlic

1 tablespoon minced fresh gingerroot

$^1/_2$ cup cashews

INSTRUCTIONS: Follow Master Recipe instructions for Basic Stir-Fry, cooking shrimp in 1 tablespoon oil until bright pink, about 1 minute. Add celery and cook 1 minute. Add water chestnuts and cook 1 minute. Add cashews with

cooked shrimp and sauce.

Figure 21.
To peel and devein shrimp, start with shrimp in one hand with legs facing up. Grab as many of the legs as you can with your other hand and peel downward. Moving your thumb toward the

tail, continue to peel. With most shrimp you will be able to loosen much of the shell in one piece.

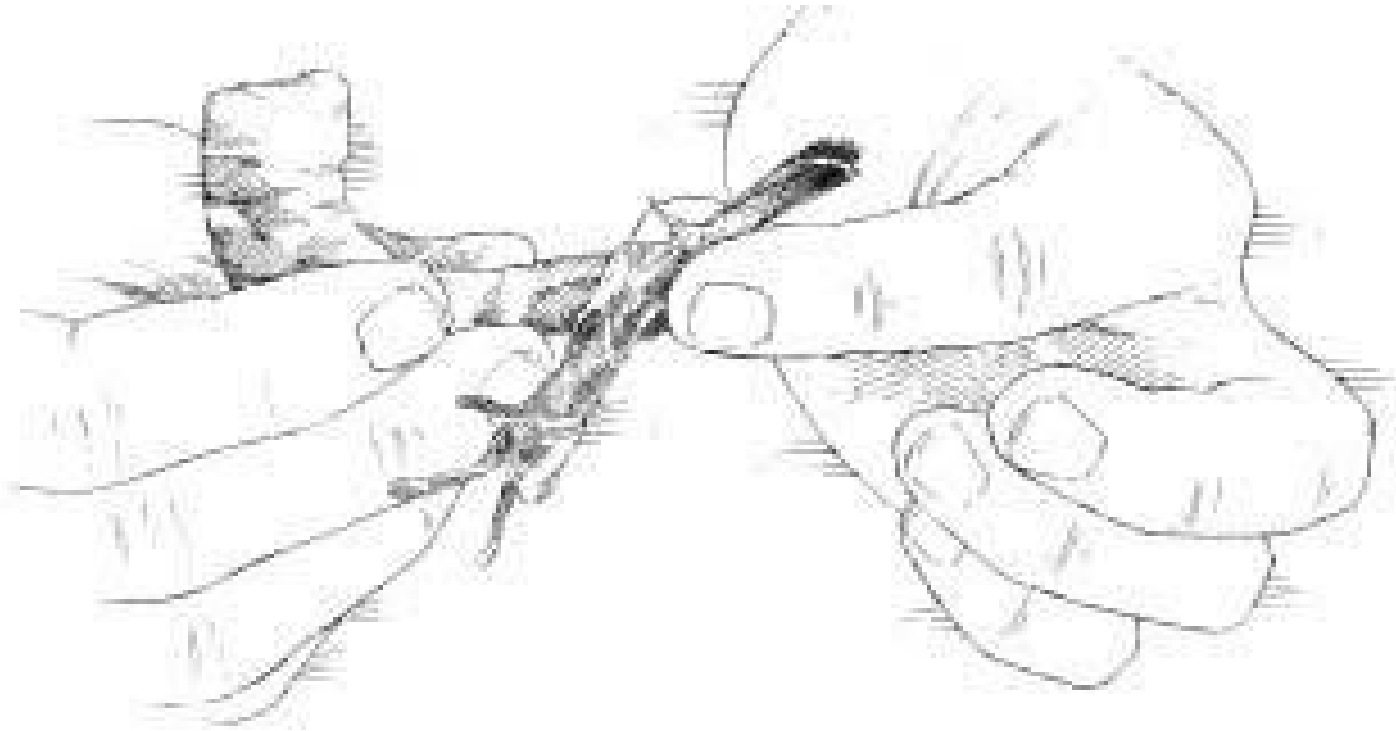

Figure 22.
Pinch the tail with one hand and gently pull the body away from the tail. The tail meat will come out easily.

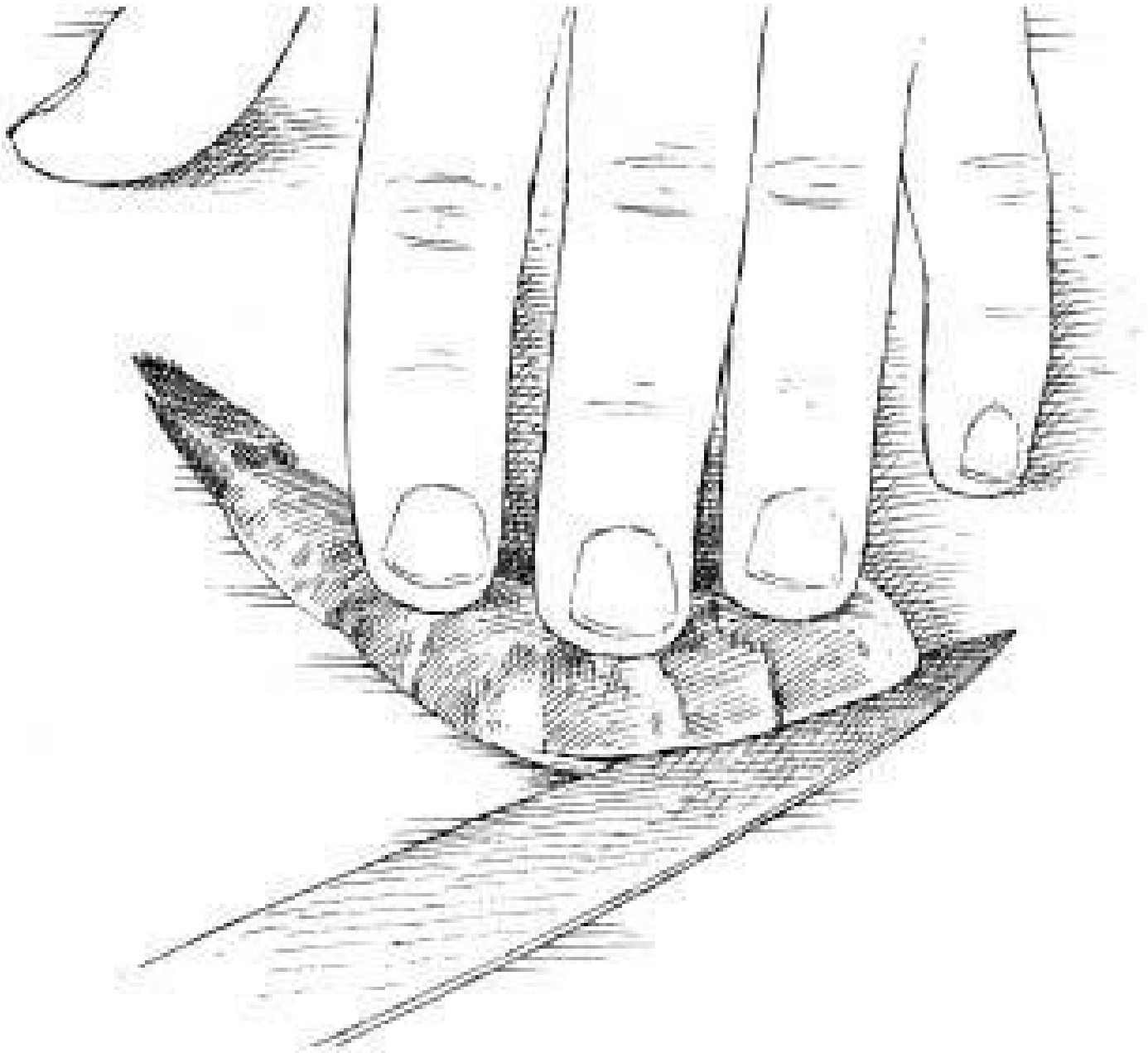

Figure 23.
If the vein that runs along the back of each shrimp is thick and black, we prefer to remove it. If

the vein is thin and opaque, we leave it in. To devein shrimp, use a sharp knife to make a slit about $^{1}/_{8}$ inch deep along length of back.

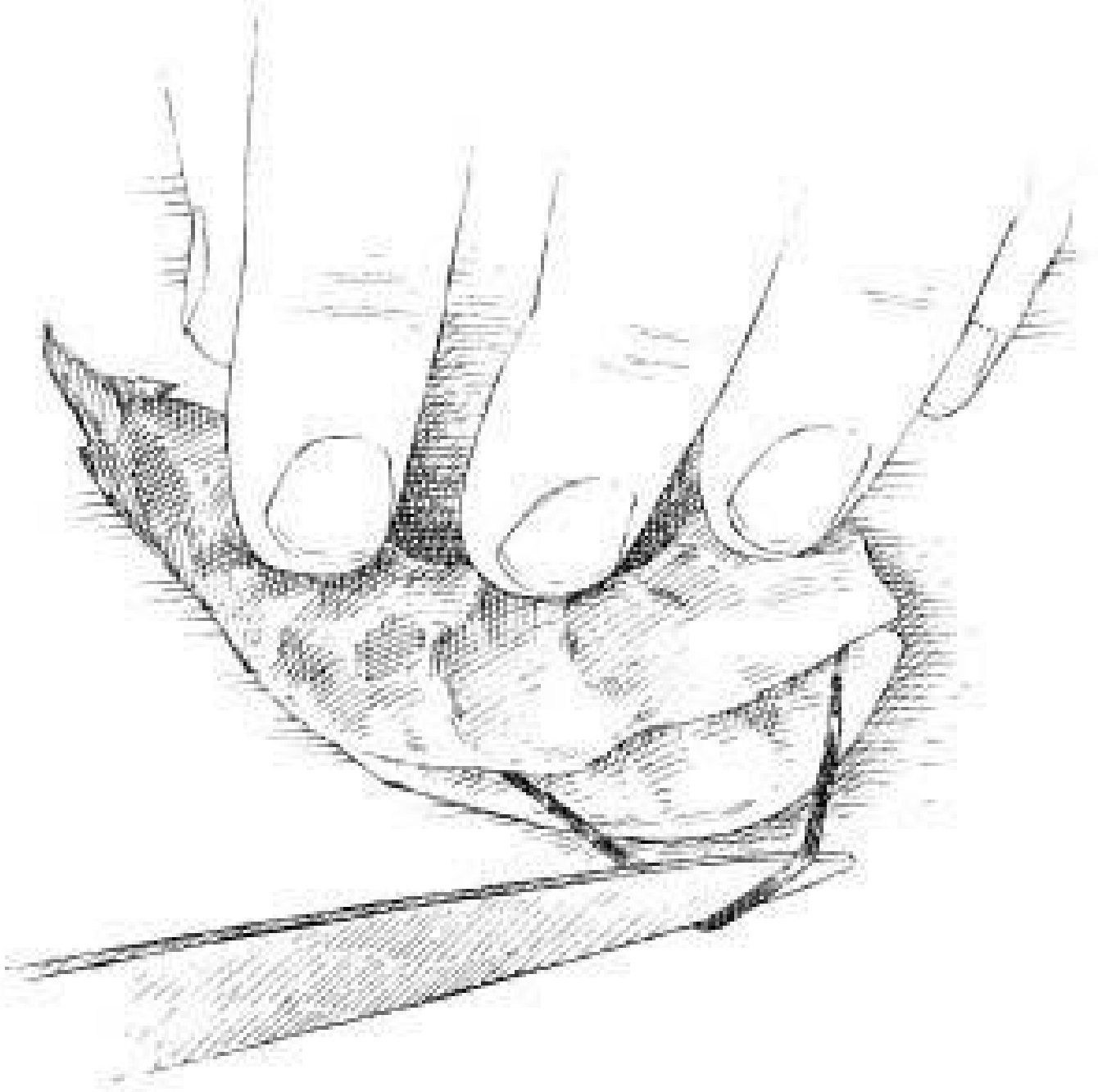

Figure 24.
Lift out the vein with the tip of a knife and discard.

Stir-Fried Shrimp, Scallions, and Peppers in Garlic Sauce

NOTE: ***Scallions are used as a vegetable in this recipe. You will need four or five bunches, about $^{3}/_{4}$ pound.***

1 pound medium shrimp, peeled and deveined (*see* figures 21–24)
1 tablespoon soy sauce
1 tablespoon dry sherry
1 recipe Garlic Sauce
2–3 tablespoons peanut or vegetable oil
1 cup scallion whites, sliced

into 1-inch pieces

2 medium red bell peppers, cleaned and cut into 1-inch cubes

$1^1/_2$ cups scallion greens, sliced into $^1/_2$-inch pieces

2 tablespoons minced scallions, white parts only

1 tablespoon minced garlic

1 tablespoon minced fresh gingerroot

INSTRUCTIONS: Follow Master Recipe instructions for Basic Stir-Fry, cooking shrimp in 1 tablespoon oil until bright pink, about 1 minute. Add sliced scallion whites and cook 1 to 2 minutes.

Add peppers and cook 1 minute. Add scallion greens and cook 30 seconds.

Stir-Fried Shrimp and Fennel in Spicy Tangerine Sauce

NOTE: ***Fennel is not traditional in Chinese stir-fries but softens nicely and complements the sweetness in the shrimp.***

1 pound medium shrimp, peeled and deveined (*see* figures 21–24)

1 tablespoon soy sauce

1 tablespoon dry sherry

1 recipe Spicy Tangerine Sauce

2-3 tablespoons peanut or vegetable oil

2 medium fennel bulbs, sliced thin (*see* figures 25–28)

1 red bell pepper, cleaned and cut into $^1/_2$-inch cubes

3 medium scallions, green parts cut into $^1/_4$-inch lengths and white parts minced

$^3/_4$ cup tightly packed stemmed fresh basil leaves

1 tablespoon minced garlic

1 tablespoon minced fresh gingerroot

INSTRUCTIONS: Follow Master Recipe instructions for Basic Stir-Fry, cooking shrimp in 1 tablespoon oil until bright pink, about 1 minute. Add fennel and

cook $1^{1}/_{2}$ minutes. Add pepper and cook 30 seconds. Add scallion greens and basil and cook 15 seconds.

Figure 25.
To prepare fennel, trim fronds and stems. Trim a very thin slice from the base and remove any tough or blemished outer layers from the bulb.

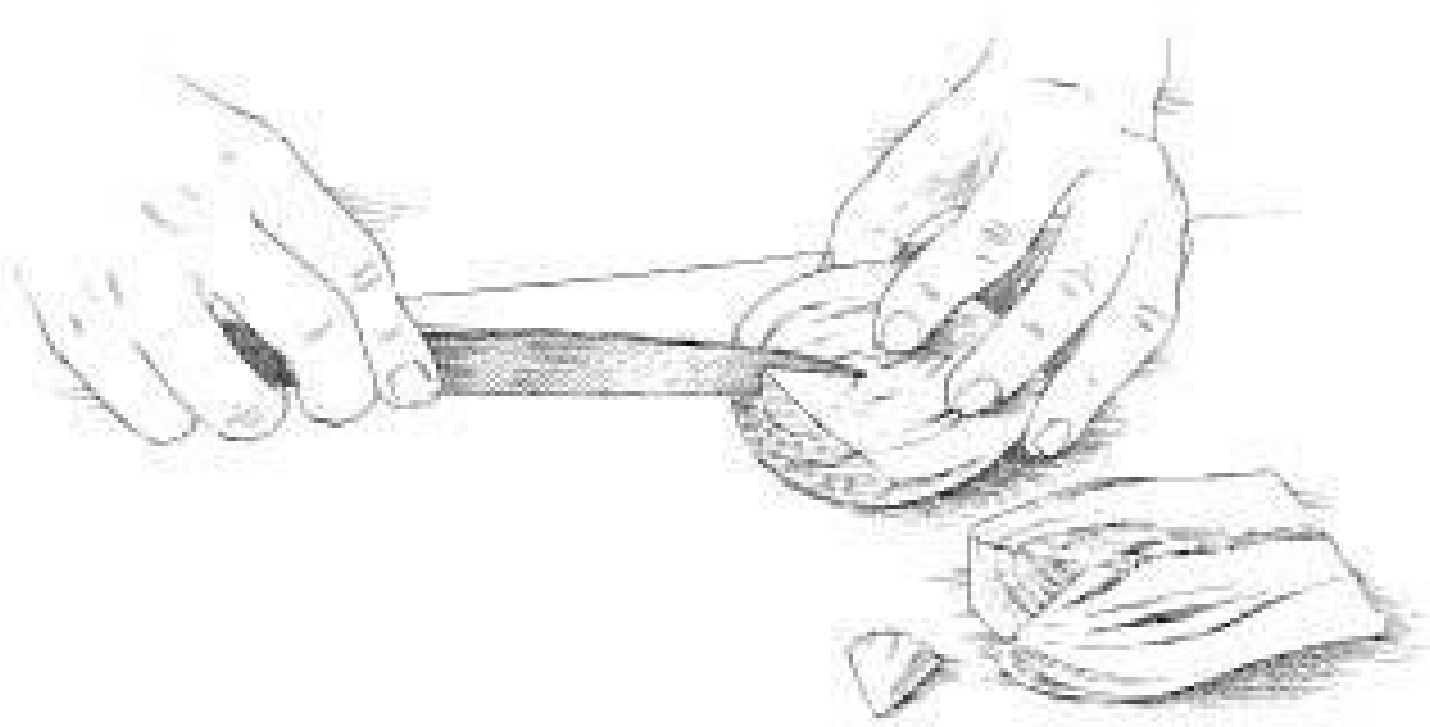

Figure 26.
Cut the bulb in half through the base. Use a small, sharp knife to remove the pyramid-shaped piece of the core in each half.

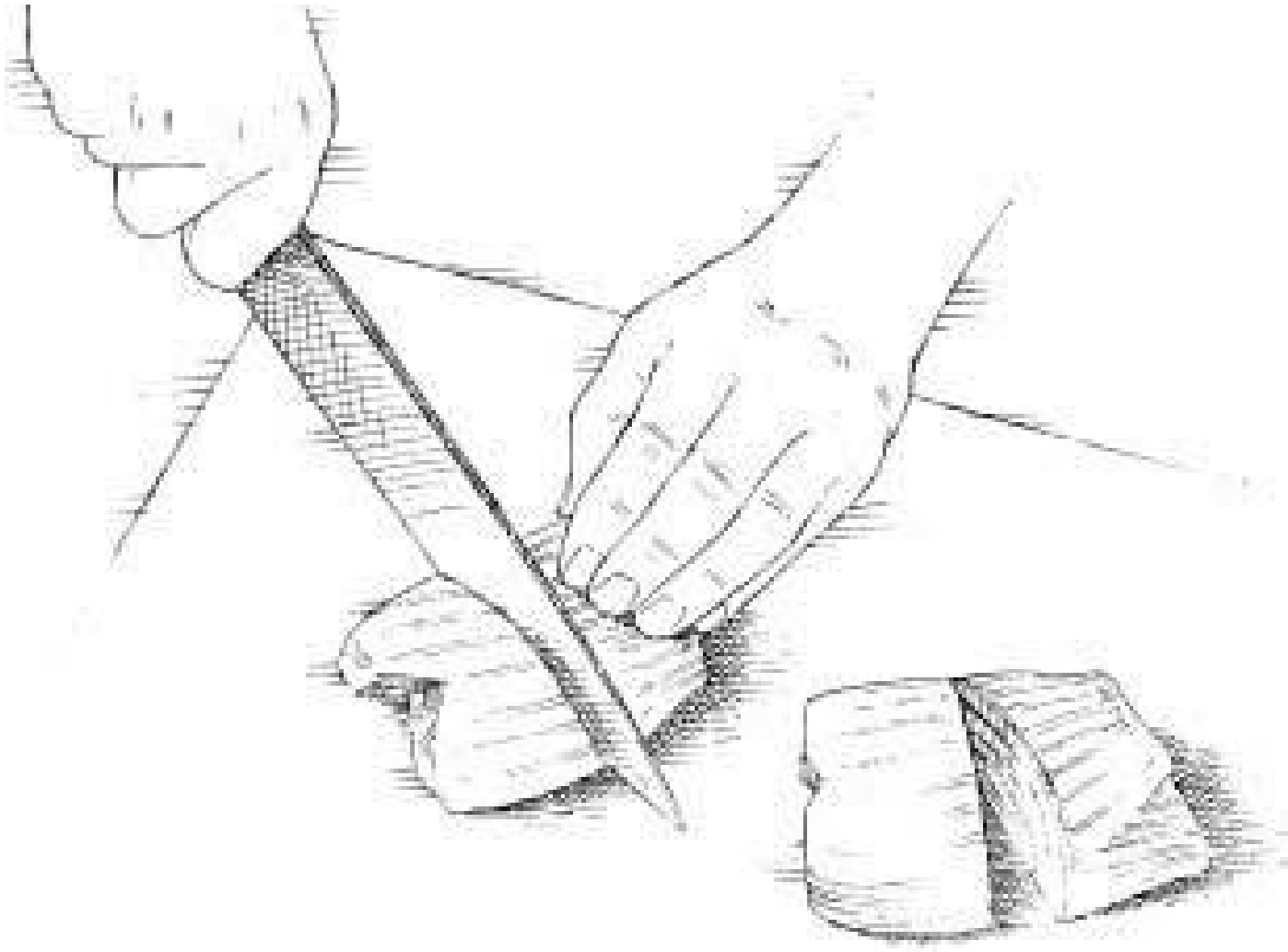

Figure 27.
Lay cored fennel half on a work surface and cut in half crosswise.

Figure 28.
Cut fennel pieces into $^{1}/_{4}$-inch-thick strips.

Stir-Fried Sea Bass and Vegetables in Spicy Tomato Sauce

NOTE: ***For this recipe, cut vegetables into very thin strips that resemble match-sticks or confetti (see figures 29 and 30).***

$^3/_4$ pound skinned sea bass fillet, cut into 1-inch cubes
1 tablespoon soy sauce
1 tablespoon dry sherry
1 recipe Spicy Tomato Sauce
3–4 tablespoons peanut or vegetable oil
2 medium carrots, peeled and

julienned

1 medium zucchini, julienned

1 medium yellow summer squash, julienned

$^1/_2$ medium Napa cabbage (about $^1/_2$ pound), shredded

2 tablespoons minced scallions, white parts only

1 tablespoon minced garlic

2 tablespoons minced fresh gingerroot

INSTRUCTIONS: Follow Master Recipe instructions for Basic Stir-Fry, cooking fish in 2 tablespoons oil until lightly browned, 40 to 60 seconds. Add carrots and cook 1 minute. Add zucchini and

squash and cook 15 seconds. Add cabbage and cook 15 seconds.

Figure 29.
Long vegetables such as carrots, zucchini, and summer squash can be cut into thin julienned strips (also called matchsticks) that cook quickly. Start by slicing the vegetables on the bias into rounds.

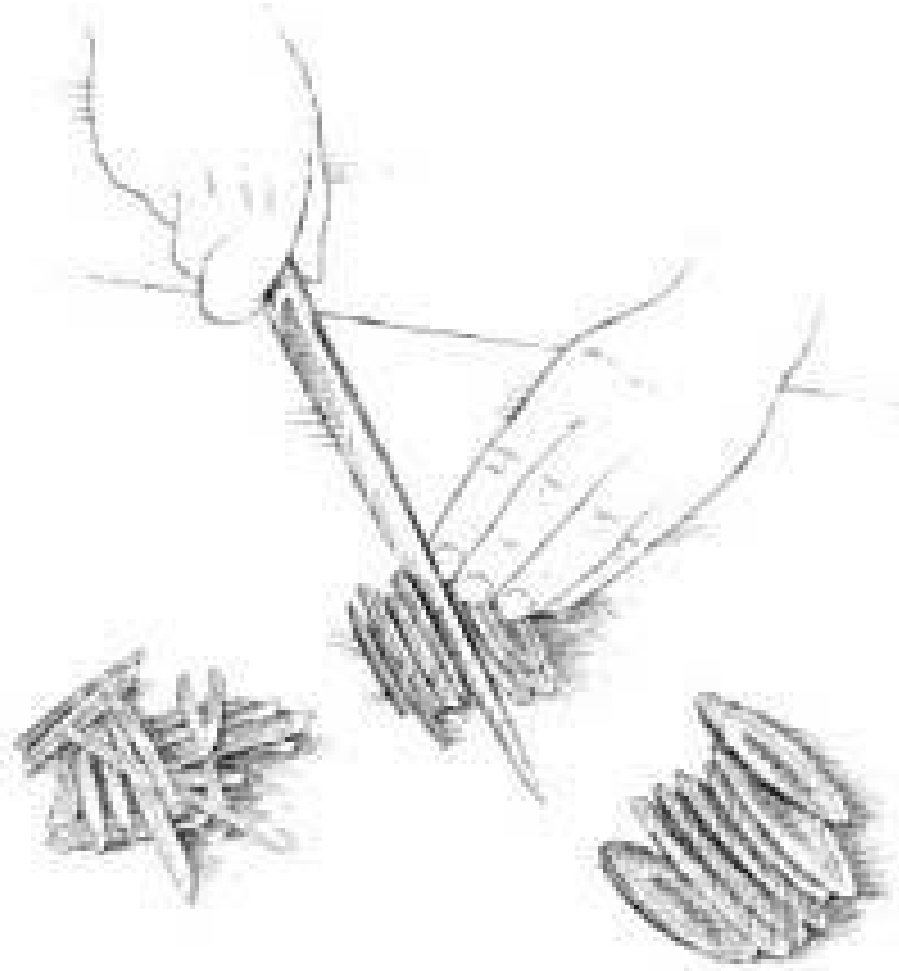

Figure 30.
Fan out the vegetable rounds and cut them into strips that measure about 2 inches long and $^{1}/_{4}$ inch thick.

Stir-Fried Scallops and Asparagus in Lemon Sauce

NOTE: ***Use whole bay scallops or sea scallops cut into 1-inch pieces for this dish, which is fairly subtle and benefits from the addition of salt and pepper just before serving. Asparagus blanched for four minutes will cook evenly in a single batch in this dish.***

$^3/_4$ pound scallops, tendons removed (*see* figure 31) and cut if necessary
1 tablespoon soy sauce
1 tablespoon dry sherry
1 recipe Lemon Sauce
2 pounds asparagus, ends

snapped off, sliced on the bias into 2-inch pieces, and blanched until crisp-tender

3-4 tablespoons peanut or vegetable oil

2 tablespoons minced scallions, white parts only

1 tablespoon minced garlic

1 tablespoon minced fresh gingerroot

$^1/_4$ cup chopped fresh parsley leaves

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS: Follow Master Recipe instructions for Basic Stir-Fry, cooking

scallops in two batches, each in 1 tablespoon oil, until opaque, 40 to 60 seconds. To achieve a nicely browned exterior, turn scallops only once while stir-frying. Add asparagus and cook $1\,^{1}/_{2}$ minutes. Add parsley with cooked scallops and sauce. Season with salt and pepper to taste just before serving.

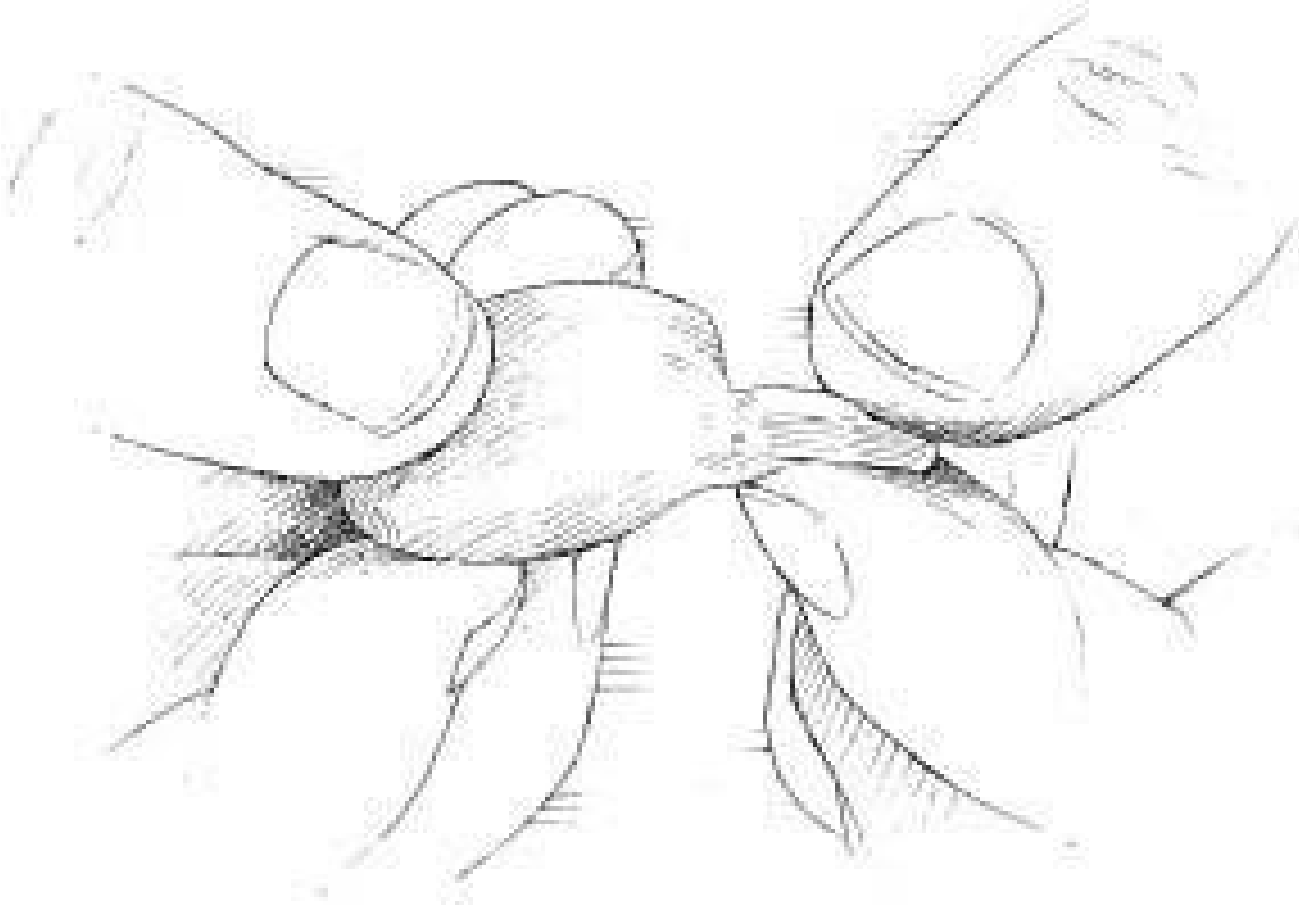

Figure 31.
The small, rough-textured, crescent-shaped muscle that attaches the scallop to the shell will toughen during cooking and should be removed when preparing scallops.

Stir-Fried Squid in Black Bean Sauce

NOTE: *If you can, buy cleaned squid and simply cut it into $^1/_2$-inch rings. Otherwise, buy $1^1/_2$ pounds uncleaned squid and use the instructions in figures 32–36, to clean it yourself.*

$^3/_4$ pound cleaned squid, cut into $^1/_2$-inch rings (*see* figure 37)
1 tablespoon soy sauce
1 tablespoon dry sherry
1 recipe Black Bean Sauce
3–4 tablespoons peanut or vegetable oil

2 celery stalks, halved lengthwise and sliced thin on the bias (*see* figure 15)

1/4 pound small shiitake mushrooms, stemmed and left whole (about 2 cups)

1 medium summer squash, quartered lengthwise and cut crosswise into 1/2-inch-thick triangles

1/2 pound sugar snap peas, stringed (about 3 cups)

2 tablespoons minced scallions, white parts only

1 tablespoon minced garlic

1 tablespoon minced fresh gingerroot

INSTRUCTIONS: Follow Master Recipe instructions for Basic Stir-Fry, cooking squid in two batches, each in 1 tablespoon oil, until opaque, about 1 minute. Add celery and cook 1 1/2 minutes. Add mushrooms and cook 1 minute. Add squash and cook 1 minute. Add peas and cook 30 to 60 seconds.

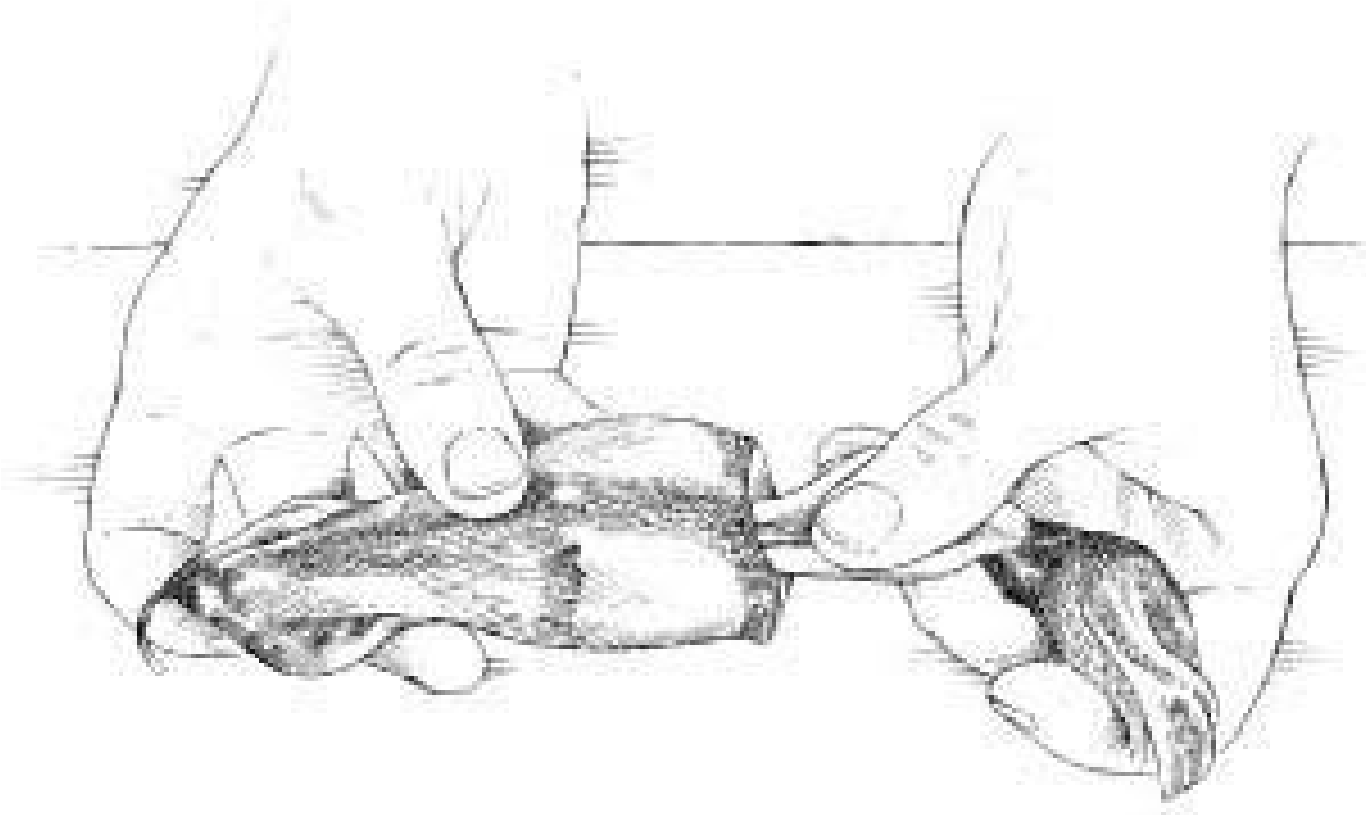

Figure 32.
To clean whole squid, reach into the body with your fingers and grasp as much of the innards as you can. Gently pull out the head and innards.

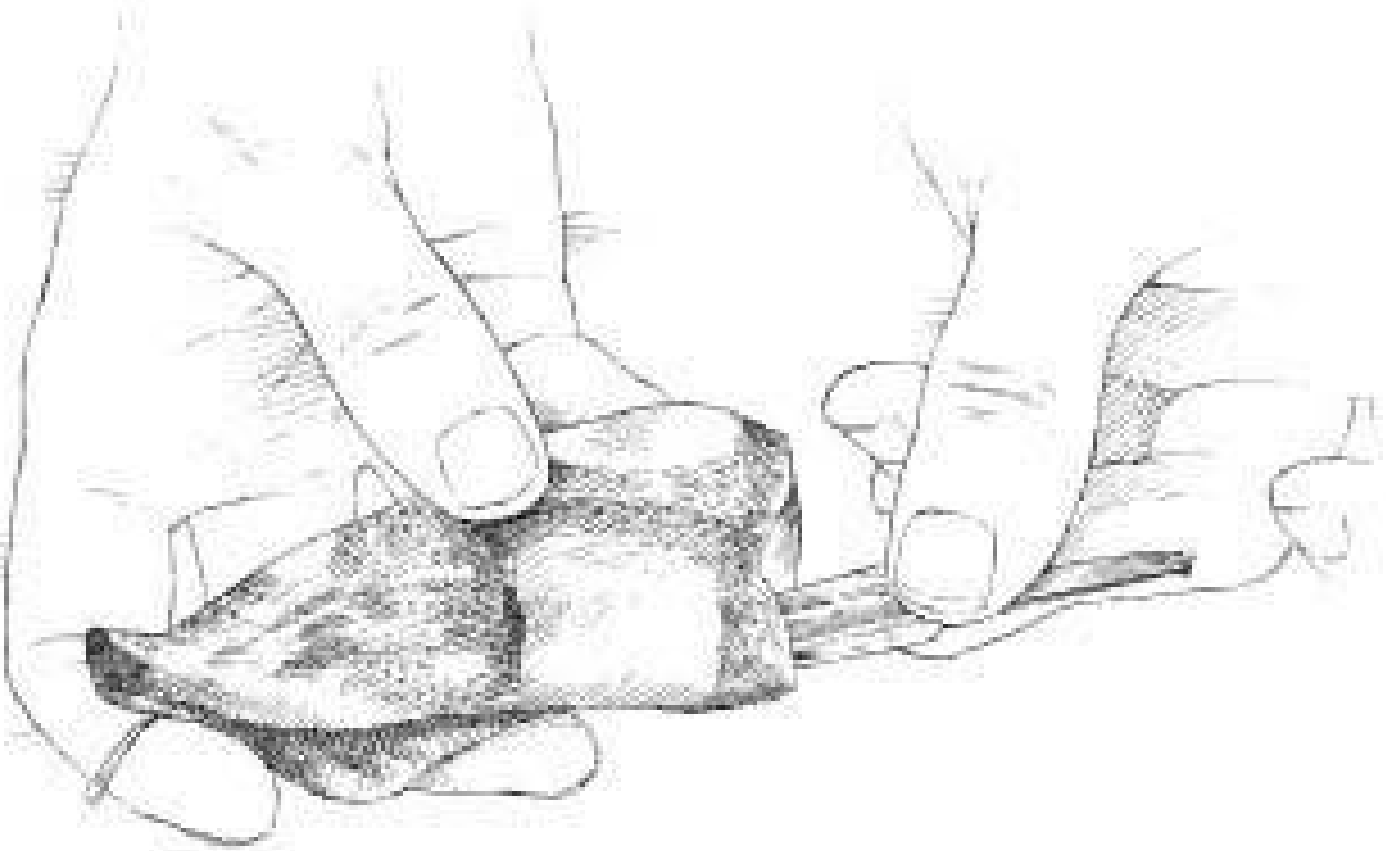

Figure 33.
You may have to make a second attempt to remove the hard, plastic-like quill; it will come out easily once you find it.

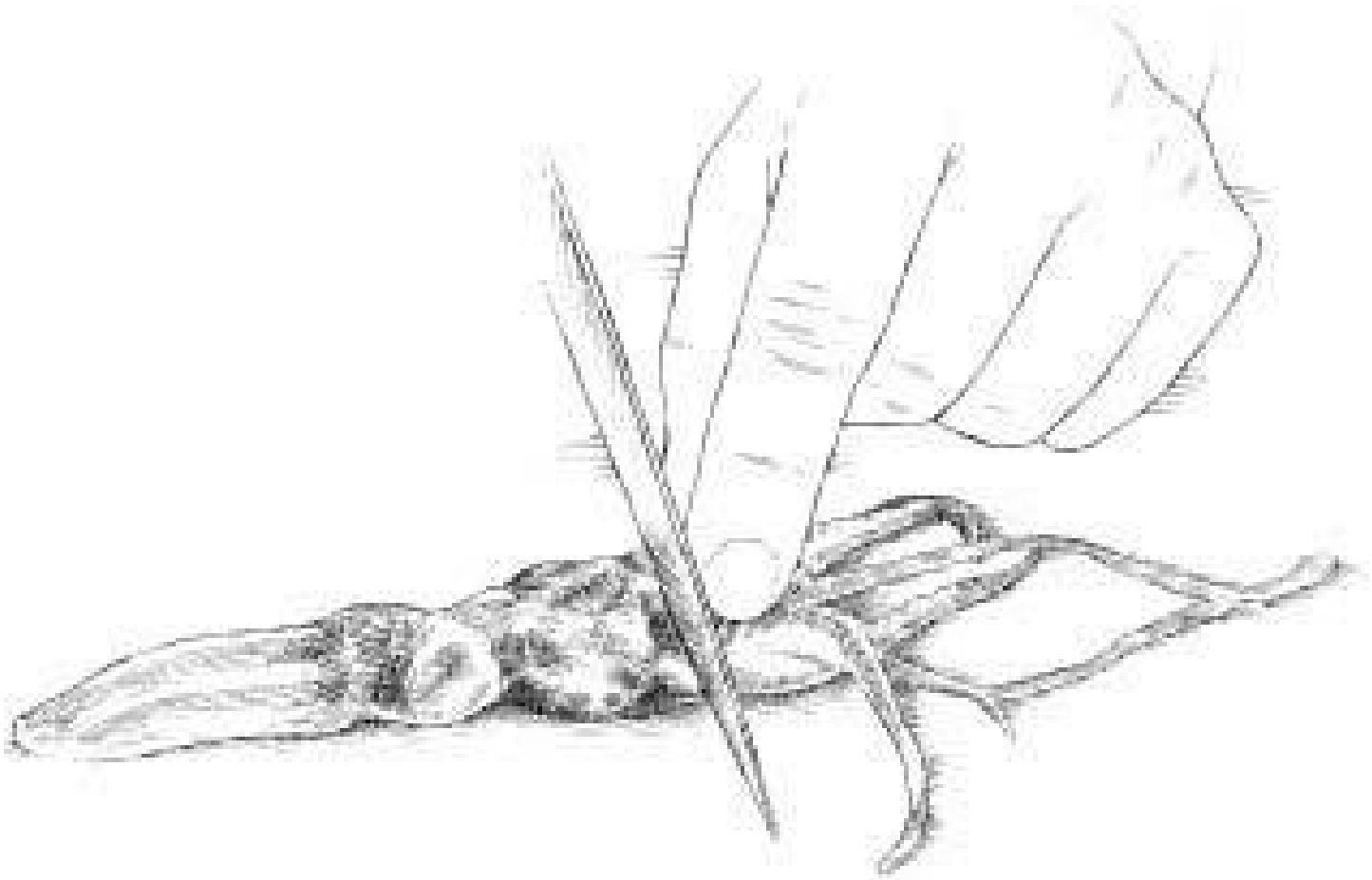

Figure 34.
Cut the tentacles just above the squid's eyes. Be careful of the black ink, which does stain. Discard innards.

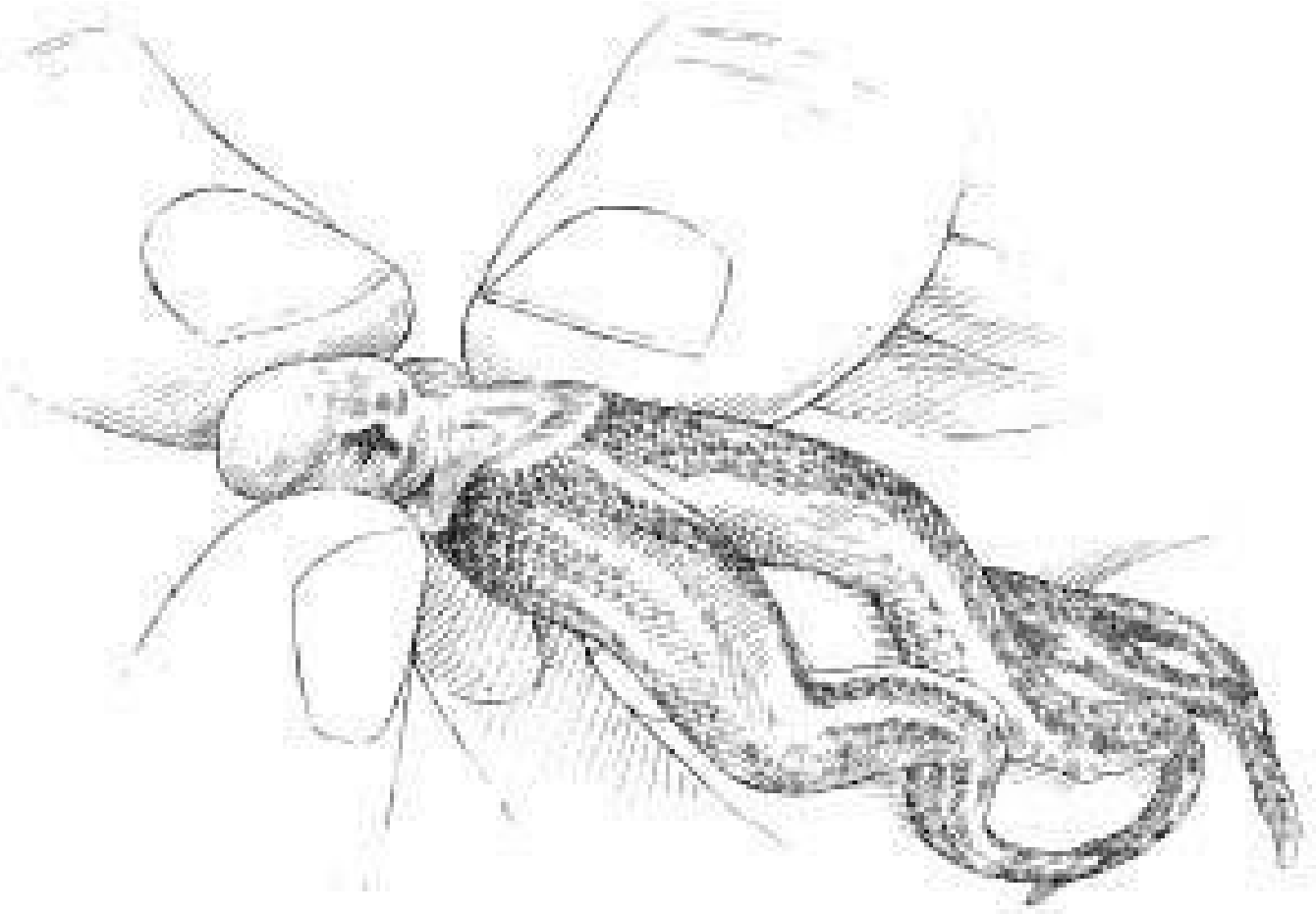

Figure 35.
Check tentacles for an inedible beak. Squeeze out and discard beak if necessary. Reserve tentacles.

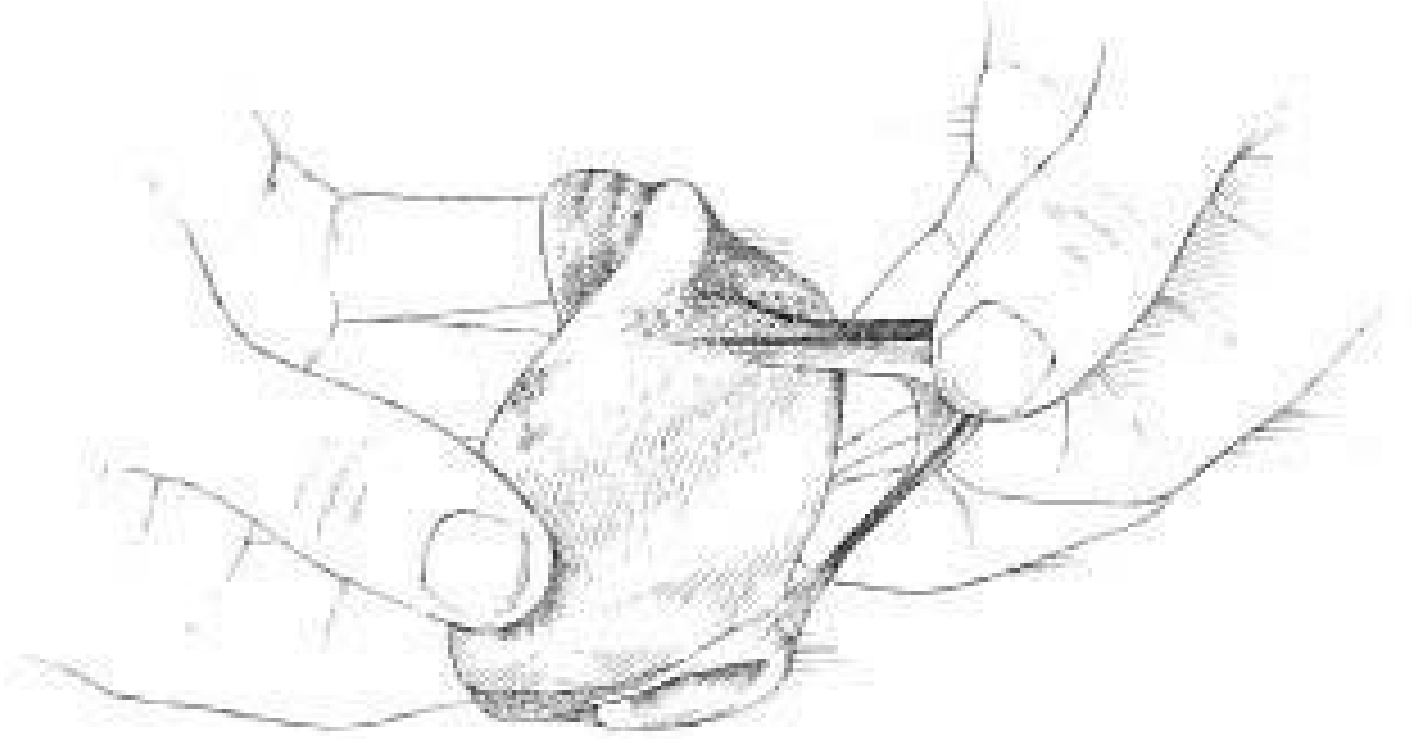

Figure 36.
The thin, membrane-like skin on the squid body is edible but can be easily peeled off for a white appearance.

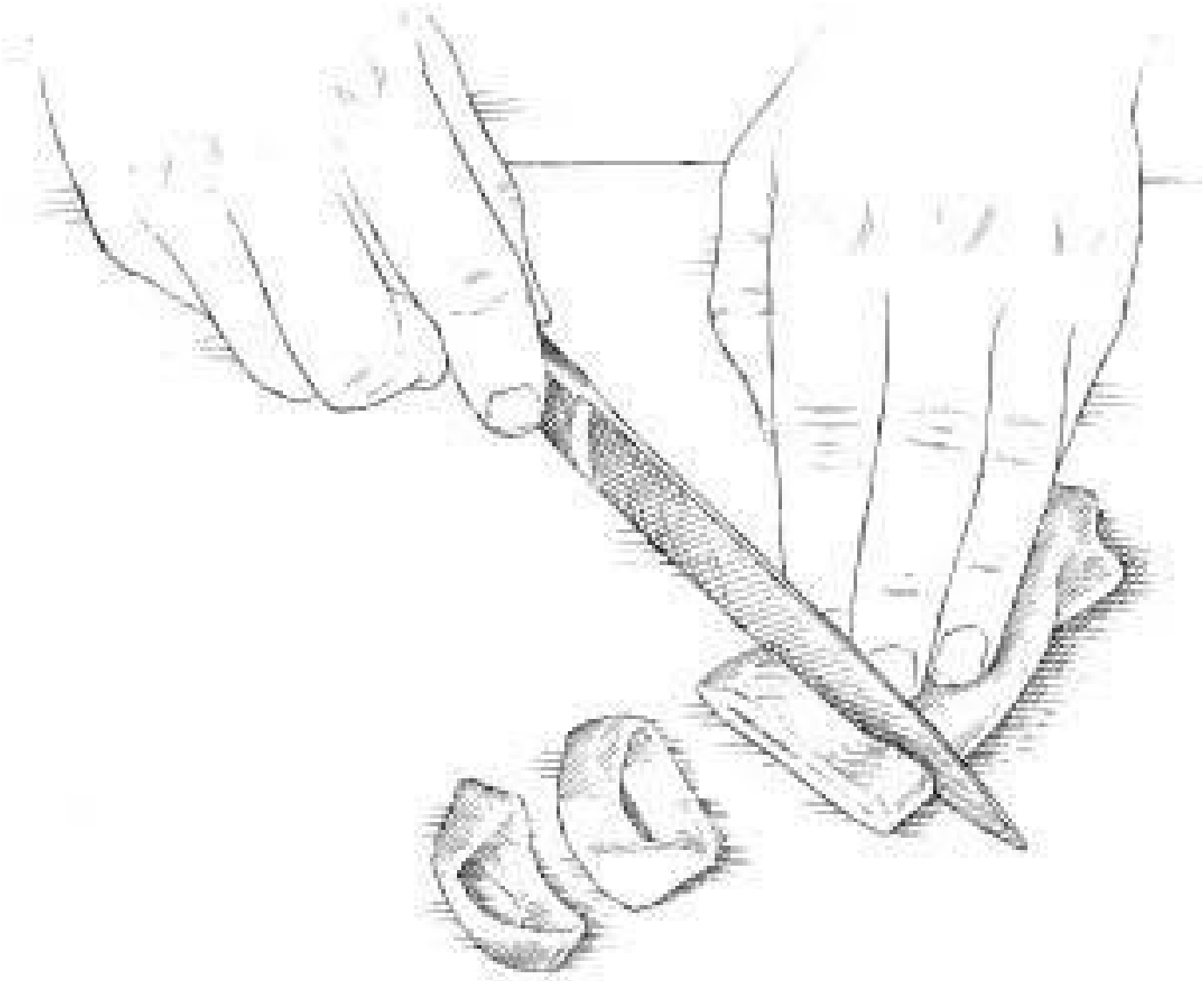

Figure 37.
Rinse interior of squid body and then slice it crosswise into $^{1}/_{2}$-inch rings.

VEGETARIAN STIR-FRIES

TOFU AND/OR VEGETABLES CAN BE used to make meatless stir-fries. Tofu adds a protein element and absorbs the flavors of the sauce well. Stir-frying is a good match for tofu because it browns the tofu cubes and gives them a pleasantly crisp exterior.

We find that firm tofu (rather than soft or silken varieties) holds up best when stir-fried. Like dairy products, tofu is perishable and should be kept well chilled to maximize its shelf-life. We prefer to use tofu within a day or two of

its purchase. If you want to keep the tofu for several days, open the package when you get it home from the market and refrigerate the tofu in fresh water. Change the water daily to keep the tofu fresh. Any hints of sourness and the tofu is past its prime.

When ready to stir-fry, drain the tofu and pat it dry with paper towels. We cut tofu into 1-inch cubes to speed cooking. To promote caramelization on the exterior, we turn the tofu as little as possible, no more than two or three times, as it sears. Tofu is hard to overcook, so let it brown for a total of two and one-half minutes.

Tofu is quite bland and we prefer it when paired with very flavorful sauces

like those made with fermented black beans or chiles and cider vinegar.

In addition to two tofu recipes, this chapter contains four simple vegetable preparations that can be served as side dishes with a Western meal or as part of a multicourse Chinese meal. These dishes are especially quick to prepare and require a minimum of ingredients. There is also no need to marinate any ingredients in these recipes. We find that two of these dishes benefit from a little seasoning with salt just before serving.

Stir-Fried Tofu and Two Peppers in Black Bean Sauce

NOTE: ***Use any combination of red, orange, and yellow bell peppers. Avoid green peppers, which will taste bitter in this dish.***

$^{3}/_{4}$ pound firm tofu, drained and cut into 1-inch cubes

1 tablespoon soy sauce

1 tablespoon dry sherry

1 recipe Black Bean Sauce

2–3 tablespoons peanut or vegetable oil

4 bell peppers, cleaned and cut

into 3- by $^1/_2$-inch strips

3 medium scallions, green parts cut into $^1/_4$-inch lengths and whites parts minced

1 tablespoon minced garlic

1 tablespoon minced fresh gingerroot

INSTRUCTIONS: Follow Master Recipe instructions for Basic Stir-Fry, cooking tofu in 1 tablespoon oil until browned on all sides, about $2^1/_2$ minutes. Cook peppers in two batches, each for about $1^1/_2$ minutes. When second batch of peppers is done, add first batch of peppers back to pan along with scallion greens and cook 15 to 30 seconds.

Stir-Fried Tofu and Vegetables in Hot-and-Sour Sauce

NOTE: ***Crunchy sugar snap peas are a good foil for tender tofu. Caramelized red onions add a sweet element.***

$^3/_4$ pound firm tofu, drained and cut into 1-inch cubes
1 tablespoon soy sauce
1 tablespoon dry sherry
1 recipe Hot-and-Sour Sauce
2–3 tablespoons peanut or vegetable oil
1 medium red onion, peeled, quartered, and cut crosswise

into 1/4-inch slices

1 pound sugar snap peas, stringed

2 tablespoons minced scallions, white parts only

1 tablespoon minced garlic

1 tablespoon minced fresh gingerroot

INSTRUCTIONS: Follow Master Recipe instructions for Basic Stir-Fry, cooking tofu in 1 tablespoon oil until browned on all sides, about 2 1/2 minutes. Add onion and cook 2 minutes. Add peas and cook 2 minutes.

Stir-Fried Spinach in Ginger Sauce

NOTE: ***Serve this stir-fry as a side dish with a roast or as part of a traditional Chinese meal.***

1 recipe Ginger Sauce

2–3 tablespoons peanut or vegetable oil

2 pounds stemmed spinach leaves, washed and thoroughly dried

2 tablespoons minced scallions, white parts only

1 tablespoon minced garlic

1 tablespoon minced fresh gingerroot

INSTRUCTIONS: Follow Master Recipe instructions for Basic Stir-Fry, cooking spinach in four or five batches, turning leaves often with tongs and adding more oil as needed, until just wilted, 45 to 60 seconds. Transfer each batch to colander-lined bowl before adding the next. Cook aromatics, then add drained spinach back to pan with sauce and heat through.

Stir-Fried Green Beans in Spicy Tomato Sauce

NOTE: ***The green beans should be blanched for about five minutes before being stir-fried.***

1 recipe Spicy Tomato Sauce
1 tablespoon peanut or vegetable oil
2 pounds green beans, stringed, and blanched until crisp-tender
2 tablespoons minced scallions, white parts only
1 tablespoon minced garlic
1 tablespoon minced fresh gingerroot

Salt

INSTRUCTIONS: Follow Master Recipe instructions for Basic Stir-Fry, cooking beans in 2 teaspoons oil, turning them often with tongs, until heated through, about 2 minutes. Season beans with salt to taste just before serving.

Stir-Fried Asparagus and Basil in Spicy Tangerine Sauce

NOTE: ***Three pounds of asparagus should yield about two pounds when the ends are removed. Blanch trimmed spears for about four minutes.***

1 recipe Spicy Tangerine Sauce

1–2 tablespoons peanut or vegetable oil

3 pounds medium asparagus, ends snapped off, halved crosswise, and blanched until crisp-tender

1/2 cup tightly packed fresh basil leaves, chopped

2 tablespoons minced scallions, white parts only

1 tablespoon minced garlic

1 tablespoon minced fresh gingerroot

Salt

INSTRUCTIONS: Follow Master Recipe instructions for Basic Stir-Fry, cooking asparagus in 1 tablespoon oil, turning spears often with tongs, until heated through, about 2 minutes. Add basil and cook 15 seconds. Season with salt to taste just before serving.

Stir-Fried Snow Peas and Shiitake Mushrooms in Garlic Sauce

NOTE: ***We like shiitake mushrooms in this recipe, although other flavorful mushrooms will work just fine. Light brown cremini mushrooms are a good substitute. Unlike the tough, woody stems on shiitakes, the stems on creminis need only be trimmed.***

1 recipe Garlic Sauce

2 tablespoons peanut or vegetable oil

1 pound shiitake mushrooms, stemmed and sliced

1 pound snow peas, stringed

2 tablespoons minced scallions, white parts only
1 tablespoon minced garlic
1 tablespoon minced fresh gingerroot

INSTRUCTIONS: Follow Master Recipe instructions for Basic Stir-Fry, cooking mushrooms in two batches, each in 1 tablespoon oil until golden, about 2 minutes. When second batch is done, add first batch of much-rooms to pan along with snow peas and cook 1 minute.

SAUCES AND RICE

STRONGLY FLAVORED SAUCES ARE THE KEY to vibrant stir-fries. In our testing, we found that cornstarch makes sauces thick and gloppy. We prefer the cleaner flavor and texture of sauces made without any thickener. A half cup of sauce (all of the following recipes yield this amount) will nicely coat the ingredients in our standard stir-fry without being too liquid. We have made a specific sauce suggestion for each stir-fry, but feel free to create your own combinations of sauce, vegetables, and

protein.

The chapter ends with three rice recipes—traditional sticky Chinese white rice, fluffy American-style white rice, and brown rice. The white rice recipes start with the same basic ingredients (rice, water, and salt) but rely on different cooking techniques to produce different results.

For sticky rice, bring the rice, water, and salt to a boil in a saucepan and simmer until the water level drops below the top of the rice. Then lower the heat and cover the pan. After about fifteen minutes, the rice emerges tender and sticky in nice clumps, perfect for picking up with chopsticks.

American-style fluffy white rice is

better suited to eating with a fork. Sauté the rice in a little oil to bring out its flavor and then simmer it in a covered saucepan until all the water is absorbed. Then remove the rice from the heat and let it stand to finish cooking. Just before serving, fluff the rice with a fork to separate the grains. This rice tastes nutty from the toasting, while sticky rice has a cleaner flavor.

If you prefer brown rice, we recommend a rice cooker or a two-step cooking method that involves boiling the rice in abundant water until it is almost tender, then steaming it to finish the cooking process and dry out the grains. Because brown rice requires so much

time to cook (40 to 45 minutes), we find that it cannot be reliably made in a covered saucepan without running a high risk of scorching.

Each of the following rice recipes yields six cups, a generous amount for four people that follows the Chinese custom of "stretching" a stir-fry by serving it with plenty of rice.

Hot-and-Sour Sauce

NOTE: ***For a spicier sauce, increase the chile to 2 tablespoons or more, if desired.***

3 tablespoons cider vinegar
1 tablespoon chicken stock
1 tablespoon soy sauce
2 teaspoons sugar
$1^1/_2$ tablespoons minced jalapeno or other fresh chile

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Combine all ingredients except jalapeno in small bowl and set aside.

2. Add jalapeno to stir-fry along with scallions, garlic, and ginger.

Garlic Sauce

NOTE: ***This sauce adds a rich garlic aroma to beef or seafood but does not overpower other ingredients. Adjust the heat as desired.***

3 tablespoons light soy sauce
4 teaspoons dry sherry
1 tablespoon chicken stock
2 teaspoons soy sauce
1/2 teaspoon Asian sesame oil
1 tablespoon very finely minced garlic
1/2 teaspoon sugar
1/4 teaspoon dried hot red pepper flakes

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Combine all ingredients except pepper flakes in small bowl and set aside.

2. Add pepper flakes to stir-fry along with scallions, garlic, and ginger.

Spicy Tomato Sauce

NOTE: ***This sauce is fairly fiery. Adjust the amount of chili paste for a milder or more incendiary sauce.***

3 tablespoons tomato paste
2 tablespoons soy sauce
2 tablespoons chicken stock
2 tablespoons dry sherry
2 teaspoons chili paste
1/2 teaspoon Asian sesame oil
1/2 teaspoon toasted and ground Szechwan peppercorns
1/2 teaspoon sugar
1/2 teaspoon dried hot red pepper flakes

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Combine all ingredients except pepper flakes in small bowl and set aside.

2. Add pepper flakes to stir-fry along with scallions, garlic, and ginger.

Sweet-and-Sour Sauce

NOTE: ***Pineapple juice can be used in this recipe instead of orange juice if desired. It's especially appropriate when using pineapple in the stir-fry. The flavors in this sauce are good with chicken, pork, and seafood.***

3 tablespoons red wine vinegar
3 tablespoons sugar
$1\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons tomato sauce
$1\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons orange juice
$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt

INSTRUCTIONS: Combine ingredients in small bowl and set aside.

Black Bean Sauce

NOTE: ***Chinese fermented black beans are available in Asian food shops. They should be moist and soft to the touch. Don't buy beans that are dried-out or shriveled. High-quality fermented beans should not be overly salty.***

3 tablespoons dry sherry
2 tablespoons chicken stock
1 tablespoon soy sauce
1 tablespoon Asian sesame oil
1/2 teaspoon sugar
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1 tablespoon Chinese

fermented black beans, chopped

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Combine all ingredients except beans in small bowl and set aside.

2. Add beans to stir-fry along with scallions, garlic, and ginger.

Ginger Sauce

NOTE: ***For hints on peeling and mincing ginger, see figures 38–40.***

3 tablespoons light soy sauce
2 tablespoons chicken stock
1 tablespoon soy sauce
1 tablespoon dry sherry
3 tablespoons very finely minced fresh gingerroot
$^1/_2$ teaspoon sugar

INSTRUCTIONS: Combine ingredients in small bowl and set aside.

Figure 38.
Use the bowl of a teaspoon to scrape off the knotty skin from a knob of ginger.

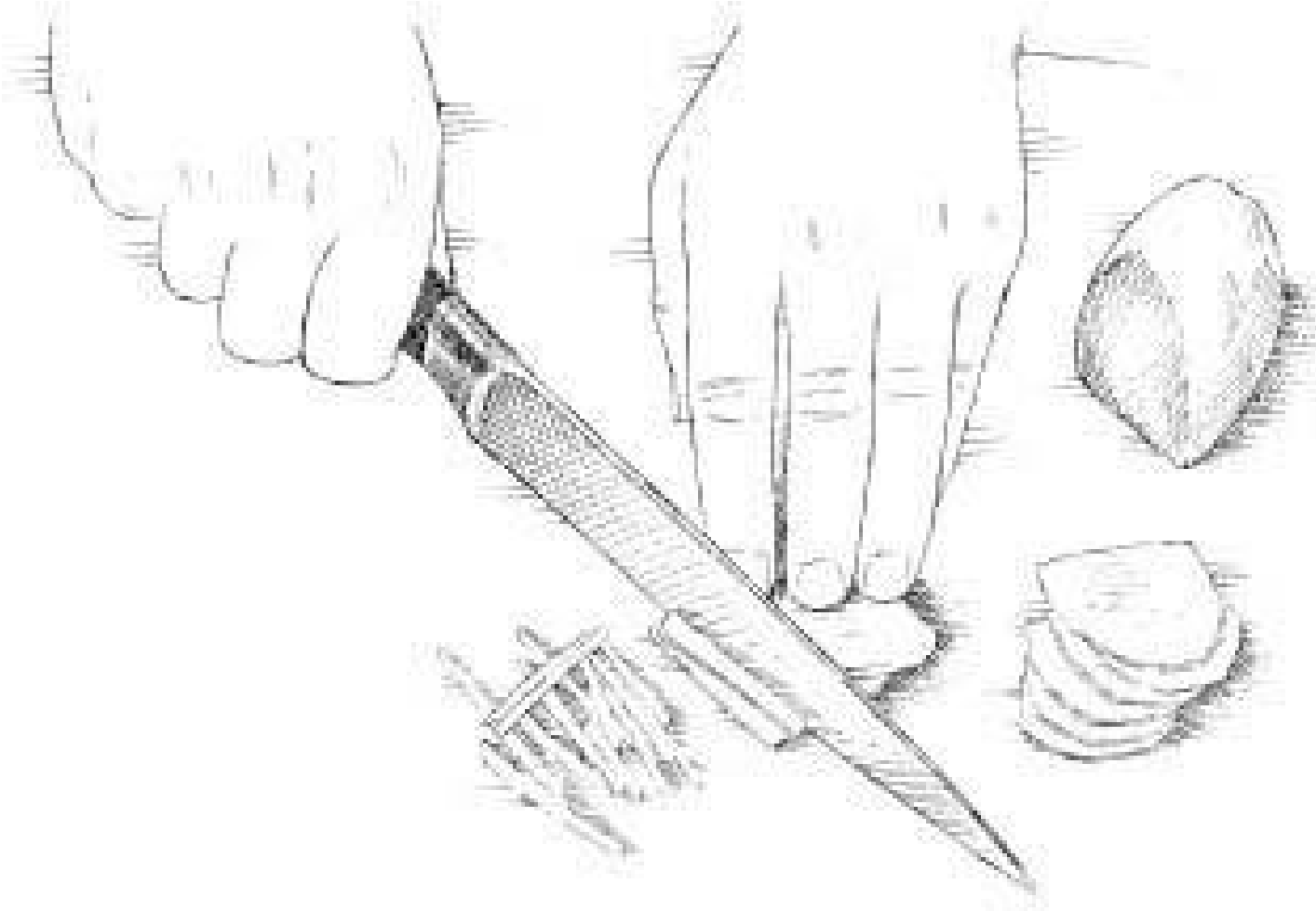

Figure 39.
To mince ginger by hand, slice peeled ginger into thin rounds, then fan rounds out and cut them into thin matchsticks.

Figure 40.
Chop matchsticks crosswise into fine mince. Peeled ginger may also be cut into small cubes and then crushed in a standard garlic

press.

Oyster Sauce

NOTE: ***As the name suggests, oyster sauce is made from fermented oysters, along with salt and spices. The flavor is not overly fishy but is quite salty, so a little goes a long way. This sauce works well with beef and seafood.***

3 tablespoons dry sherry
2 tablespoons oyster sauce
1 tablespoon Asian sesame oil
1 tablespoon soy sauce
1/2 teaspoon sugar
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS: Combine ingredients in

small bowl and set aside.

Coconut Curry Sauce

NOTE: ***Use canned unsweetened coconut milk in this recipe, not sweetened coconut cream. This velvety sauce coats food especially well.***

1/4 cup unsweetened coconut milk
1 tablespoon dry sherry
1 tablespoon chicken stock
1 1/2 teaspoons soy sauce
1 1/2 teaspoons curry powder
1/4 teaspoon sugar
1/4 teaspoon salt

INSTRUCTIONS: Combine ingredients in

small bowl and set aside.

Szechwan Chile Sauce

NOTE: ***This sauce gets its heat from chili paste. Szechwan peppercorns add an aromatic, herbaceous flavor.***

3 tablespoons dry sherry
1 tablespoon soy sauce
1 tablespoon Asian sesame oil
2 tablespoons chili paste
1/4 teaspoon toasted and ground Szechwan peppercorns
1/4 teaspoon sugar

INSTRUCTIONS: Combine ingredients in small bowl and set aside.

Spicy Tangerine Sauce

NOTE: ***Three tangerines will provide enough zest for this recipe. An orange may be used instead if desired. Wear rubber gloves when mincing the fresh chile and use the seeds to maximize the heat. For a citrus-flavored sauce without the heat, omit the chile.***

3 tablespoons dry sherry
1 tablespoon soy sauce
1 tablespoon Asian sesame oil
2 teaspoons red wine vinegar
1/2 teaspoon toasted and ground Szechwan peppercorns
1/4 teaspoon sugar
1/4 teaspoon salt

1 tablespoon minced jalapeno or other fresh chile

1 tablespoon grated tangerine zest

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Combine all ingredients except jalapeno and tangerine zest in small bowl and set aside.

2. Add jalapeno and tangerine zest to stir-fry along with scallions, garlic, and ginger.

Lemon Sauce

NOTE: ***One medium lemon will yield enough juice and zest for this recipe.***

3 tablespoons lemon juice

$^1/_2$ teaspoon minced lemon zest

2 tablespoons chicken stock

1 tablespoon soy sauce

2 teaspoons sugar

INSTRUCTIONS: Combine ingredients in small bowl and set aside.

Sticky White Rice

NOTE: ***This traditional Chinese cooking method yields sticky rice that works well as an accompaniment to a stir-fry, especially if eating with chopsticks.***

2 cups long-grain white rice
3 cups water
$^1/_2$ teaspoon salt

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place rice, water, and salt in medium saucepan set over medium-high heat. Bring water to boil. Cook, uncovered, until water level drops below top surface of rice and small holes form in

rice, about 10 minutes.

2. Reduce heat to very low, cover, and cook until rice is tender, about 15 minutes longer.

Fluffy White Rice

NOTE: ***We like to toast our rice before adding water. It gives the rice a subtle nutty flavor. Adjust the toasting time to suit your personal tastes. Do not use converted rice in this recipe. If you own a rice cooker, simply add the ingredients to the pot (without toasting the rice) and cook according to the manufacturer's instructions.***

4 teaspoons vegetable oil
2 cups long-grain white rice
$2\frac{3}{4}$ cups water
$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oil in medium saucepan set over medium heat. Add rice; cook, stirring constantly, for 1 to 3 minutes, depending on desired amount of nutty flavor. Add water and salt; bring to boil, swirling pot to blend ingredients.

2. Reduce heat to low, cover with tight lid lined with towel, and cook until liquid is absorbed, about 15 minutes.

3. Turn off heat; let rice stand on burner, still covered, to finish cooking, about 15 minutes. Fluff with fork and serve.

Basic Brown Rice

NOTE: ***Boiling and then steaming brown rice ensures perfectly cooked grains that do not stick or burn. Use long, medium, or short grain rice in this recipe. If you own a rice cooker, simply add the rice to the pot along with $4^1/_2$ cups water, 2 teaspoons oil, a n d $^1/_2$ teaspoon salt, and cook according to the manufacturer's instructions.***

2 cups brown rice
4 teaspoons vegetable oil
2 teaspoons salt

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Bring 3 quarts water to boil in large pot. Stir in rice, oil, and salt. Simmer briskly, uncovered, until rice is almost tender, about 30 minutes.

2. Drain rice into steamer basket that fits inside pot. Fill pot with about 1 inch water and return to heat. Place basket of rice in pot, making sure it rests above water level. Cover and steam until tender, 5 to 10 minutes. Scoop rice into bowl, fluff gently with fork, and serve.

HOW TO COOK CHINESE FAVORITES

Basics of Chinese Cooking

Soups

Dumplings

Steamed Fish

Kung Pao Chicken

Beef and Broccoli in Garlic

Sauce

Rice

Noodles

BASICS OF CHINESE COOKING

BEFORE YOU COOK, IT'S IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND the role of several important pieces of equipment, a handful of basic ingredients, and some classic Chinese cooking techniques.

EQUIPMENT

WORKS VERSUS SKILLETS

Many Chinese dishes, especially stir-fries, depend on plenty of heat to caramelize sugars, deepen flavors through intense browning, and drive off

excess liquid. The problem is that the Chinese wok and the typical American stovetop are a lousy match, capable of generating only moderate heat. Woks are conical because in China they traditionally rest in cylindrical pits containing the fire. Flames lick the bottom and sides of the pan so that food cooks remarkably quickly. A wok is not designed for stovetop cooking, where heat comes only from the bottom.

We think a horizontal heat source requires a horizontal pan. For stir-frying at home, we recommend a large skillet, 12 to 14 inches in diameter, with a nonstick coating. Size is important because you want foods to cook in a single layer, which causes them to

brown rather than steam. The nonstick coating allows you to use less oil.

In our testing of major brands of nonstick skillets, All-Clad and Calphalon came out on top. Both brands are sturdy but not overly heavy, so you can easily move these pans around the stovetop. They conduct heat well, allowing the surface of the skillet to become very hot, but their handles, which are made from hollowed-out metal, stay cooler than solid metal handles. A handle with a removable plastic sheath is ideal when stir-frying.

SHOVELS

Chinese cooks use shovel-shaped spatulas to move food around in a wok.

The same tool works well in a skillet. To protect nonstick surfaces, use plastic or wooden implements, not metal. We prefer large shovels with a wide, thin blade and long, heat-resistant handle.

STEAMERS

Chinese cooks often prepare foods in bamboo steamers. We have provided instructions for using a bamboo steamer in recipes throughout this book, but all recipes have also been tested on a collapsible metal steamer basket, an item American home cooks are more likely to own. Make sure to buy a large steamer basket, at least 11 inches in diameter. Smaller steamers won't be able to hold four pieces of fish or a full

batch of dumplings.

INGREDIENTS

ASIAN SESAME OIL

Also known as dark or toasted sesame oil, this aromatic, medium-brown oil is used as a seasoning in Chinese cooking. Because its smoke point is quite low (the oil burns at fairly low temperatures), it is not advisable to cook with sesame oil. Use some in a sauce, or toss noodles with a little sesame oil for a flavor boost. Don't confuse this product with regular sesame oil, which is pressed from untoasted seeds and has a medium yellow color. Store an open bottle in the refrigerator to prolong freshness.

CANNED CHICKEN BROTH

For most soups, we recommend homemade stock. For Chinese sauces, where just a few tablespoons of chicken broth are needed, store-bought versions are fine. Because canned broth is reduced in so many sauces, we recommend the use of low-sodium products to prevent sauces from becoming overly salty. Canned broths from Swanson's and Campbell's (which are owned by the same company) have consistently received top ratings in our taste tests. We find broths sold in aseptic cartons to be more flavorful than canned broths, which undergo a longer sterilization process.

CHILI PASTE

This thick, bright red seasoning looks like ketchup but is made from crushed chile peppers, vinegar, and, usually, garlic. Brands vary from mild to incendiary, so taste before using. Store opened bottles in the refrigerator.

FERMENTED BLACK BEANS

Chinese fermented black beans have a salty, beany flavor that adds an intriguing savory note to many dishes, especially those made with seafood. Nothing more than salted black beans, this product is sold in bags in Asian food stores and keeps indefinitely in the freezer. Make sure to buy beans that are soft to the touch, not hard or shriveled.

Some sources suggest rinsing fermented black beans before using them, but we find this unnecessary as long as you have purchased quality beans that are not overly salty.

OYSTER SAUCE

This thick, dark brown sauce is made from fermented oysters, salt, and spices. It lends a meaty, savory note to foods as well as a rich, dark color. We find that it is an essential ingredient when making lo mein and some stir-fry sauces. Some supermarkets may stock this item. Otherwise, an Asian grocery is your best bet. We have used Lee Kum Kee Premium Oyster-Flavored Sauce with excellent results. Don't let the words

"oyster-flavored" throw you. Read labels and make sure the sauce contains oysters rather than MSG (monosodium glutamate). Refrigerate bottles once opened.

RICE VINEGAR

Several kinds of vinegar are made from rice in various parts of Asia. The most common type is clear and very mild—even a bit sweet. Rice vinegar has far less acidity than most Western vinegars (4 percent versus 6 to 7 percent in most wine vinegars), so it is hard to use other vinegars in its place. Luckily, most supermarkets carry this staple.

RICE WINE

Rice wine is an Asian equivalent for dry sherry. It is used in sauces and marinades to add complexity to the flavor of a dish. Dry sherry can be substituted for rice wine, although it tends to taste more harsh and less complex.

SOY SAUCE

Few condiments are as misunderstood as soy sauce, the pungent, fragrant, fermented flavoring that's a mainstay in Asian cooking. Its simple, straightforward composition—equal parts soybeans and a roasted grain, usually wheat, plus water and salt—belies the subtle, sophisticated contribution it makes as an all-purpose

seasoning, flavor enhancer, tabletop condiment, and dipping sauce. The three products consumers are likely to encounter are regular soy sauce, light soy sauce (made with a higher percentage of water and hence lower in sodium), and tamari (made with fermented soybeans, water, and salt—no wheat). Tamari generally has a stronger flavor and thicker consistency than soy sauce. It is traditionally used in Japanese cooking, not Chinese.

In a tasting of leading soy sauces, we found that products aged according to ancient customs are superior to synthetic sauces, such as La Choy's, which are made in a day and almost always contain hydrolyzed vegetable protein. Our

favorite soy sauce, Eden Selected Shoyu Soy Sauce (*shoyu* is the Japanese word for soy sauce), is aged for three years.

TECHNIQUES

STIR-FRYING

In developing recipes for our book *How to Stir-Fry*, we tested all the important variables in this unique cooking process. For this book, we decided to develop two classic stir-fries—kung pao chicken and beef and broccoli in garlic sauce. Because the recipes for these stir-fries are based on techniques we developed for *How to Stir-Fry*, it is useful to repeat some of the key findings here.

The most important thing to remember

when stir-frying is to use enough heat. Stir-frying must happen quickly. Foods need to brown, not steam, and a superhot pan is essential. As noted on Chapter 14, we think a nonstick skillet is the best vessel for stir-frying on a conventional stovetop.

A stir-fry consists of four major components: protein, vegetables, aromatics (garlic, ginger, and scallions), and sauce.

We found that a simple marinade of soy sauce and sherry (or rice wine) really boosts the flavor of the protein. The protein should be stir-fried first, then removed from the pan so other ingredients can be cooked.

Vegetables should be cut fairly small.

We found it best to add them to the pan in batches to keep the pan from cooling down too much. We think a good stir-fry is two parts vegetables and one part protein. For four people, this means $1^{1}/_{2}$ pounds vegetables to $^{3}/_{4}$ pound of meat, poultry, or seafood.

Stir-fries must contain the three basic Chinese seasonings of garlic, ginger, and scallions. We found that these aromatics tend to burn if added to the pan too early. To keep this from happening, we clear a space in the center of the pan once the vegetables have been cooked, add the aromatics and a little oil, and then stir-fry them just until fragrant. At this point, the cooked protein is returned

to the pan, along with the sauce, which prevents the aromatics from scorching.

Stir-fry sauces must be bold. We found that cornstarch-thickened sauces are often thick and gloppy. In our tests, sauces made without cornstarch were cleaner-tasting and are preferred.

SLICING MEAT

Thinly sliced meat is a hallmark of Chinese cooking, whether it's thin strips of pork in lo mein or pieces of flank steak in a stir-fry. Thick slabs of meat will be flabby and may not marry well with other ingredients, so make sure to use a sharp knife when slicing chicken, pork, and beef. We find that partially freezing meat (an hour is more than

enough time) firms up its texture and makes slicing easier.

READYING *MISE EN PLACE*

Mise en place is a French term, but it applies to Chinese cooking as well. Simply stated, it means having all ingredients prepared and close at hand before you start cooking.

SOUPS

THE CHAPTER COVERS THREE CLASSIC Chinese soups: wonton, egg drop, and hot and sour. Each begins with chicken stock. Given the relative importance of the stock in wonton and egg drop soups, homemade stock is preferable in these recipes. It is less important in hot-and-sour soup, which contains many strongly flavored ingredients.

WONTON SOUP

In many respects, wonton soup is the simplest Chinese soup to prepare—that

is, if you have dumplings and stock on hand. In our testing we focused on the dumplings and other ingredients that are sometimes added to the broth.

The traditional wonton shape is a triangle with the two corners brought together. Some sources favor the traditional shape, while others recommend a tortellini-shaped wonton because leakage of the filling is supposedly less likely. In tortellini, the top corner (the one not bound to the others) is folded down.

We prepared both shapes and had no trouble with leaking in either case, as long as we were careful to brush the edges of the wrappers with water to create a tight seal. The triangular shape

was the unanimous favorite for two reasons—tradition and texture. It met people's visual expectations (the tortellini evoked comments about Chinese-Italian food), and, when properly cooked, it allows for a large part of the wrapper to turn silky smooth, just as great noodles do in broth. The tortellini shape was too chewy and condensed in comparison.

The next question was the filling. We tested all of the dumpling fillings created for chapter 3 of this book. All were delicious, but the rich pork filling was deemed the most authentic. For a lighter soup, we suggest using chicken in place of pork (as directed in the filling recipe)

or turning to the shrimp filling.

With shape and filling decided, our next concern was cooking the wontons. Boiling the wontons directly in the soup turned them mushy and slimy and had the effect of clouding the stock. Of the other two options, boiling and steaming them separately, we found boiling to produce the best results. The wrappers retained some body and yet remained tender and supple in the mouth. The steamed wontons were chewy.

The final issue to be tested was what ingredients (if any) to add to the broth. This area is fairly subjective, and we decided to stay close to tradition. Greens and scallions were deemed a must. (Napa cabbage, iceberg lettuce, or

spinach are all good choices for the greens.) Carrots, while not absolutely necessary, are a common ingredient and add color to the soup.

Wonton Soup

serves 6 to 8

NOTE: ***The wontons are cooked separately in boiling water and then added to the broth. Try to time things so that the broth is already simmering when you cook the wontons.***

Wontons

32 wonton wrappers

1/2 recipe Pork Filling for dumplings

Salt

Soup Base

2 quarts chicken stock

1/2 cup shredded greens (napa cabbage, spinach, or iceberg lettuce)

3 medium scallions, finely chopped

2 tablespoons grated carrot from half of small carrot (optional)

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Fill and seal wontons (see figures 1 through 3). Place wontons on large baking sheet covered with parchment or wax paper and refrigerate to firm up, at least 20 minutes or up to several hours. (Or place baking sheet in freezer until wontons are frozen, about 3 hours. Transfer to airtight container and freeze up to 1 month.)

2. Bring 4 quarts of water to a boil in large pot. Salt water to taste and add wontons. Cook until wontons are tender, 3 to 4 minutes (add 2 minutes if frozen). Lift wontons from water with slotted spoon and set aside on large plate.

3. Meanwhile, bring stock to a simmer in large soup kettle. Add greens, scallions, and carrots (if using) and simmer to blend flavors, 3 to 4 minutes. Add cooked wontons and simmer until wontons are heated through, 1 to 2 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste and serve immediately.

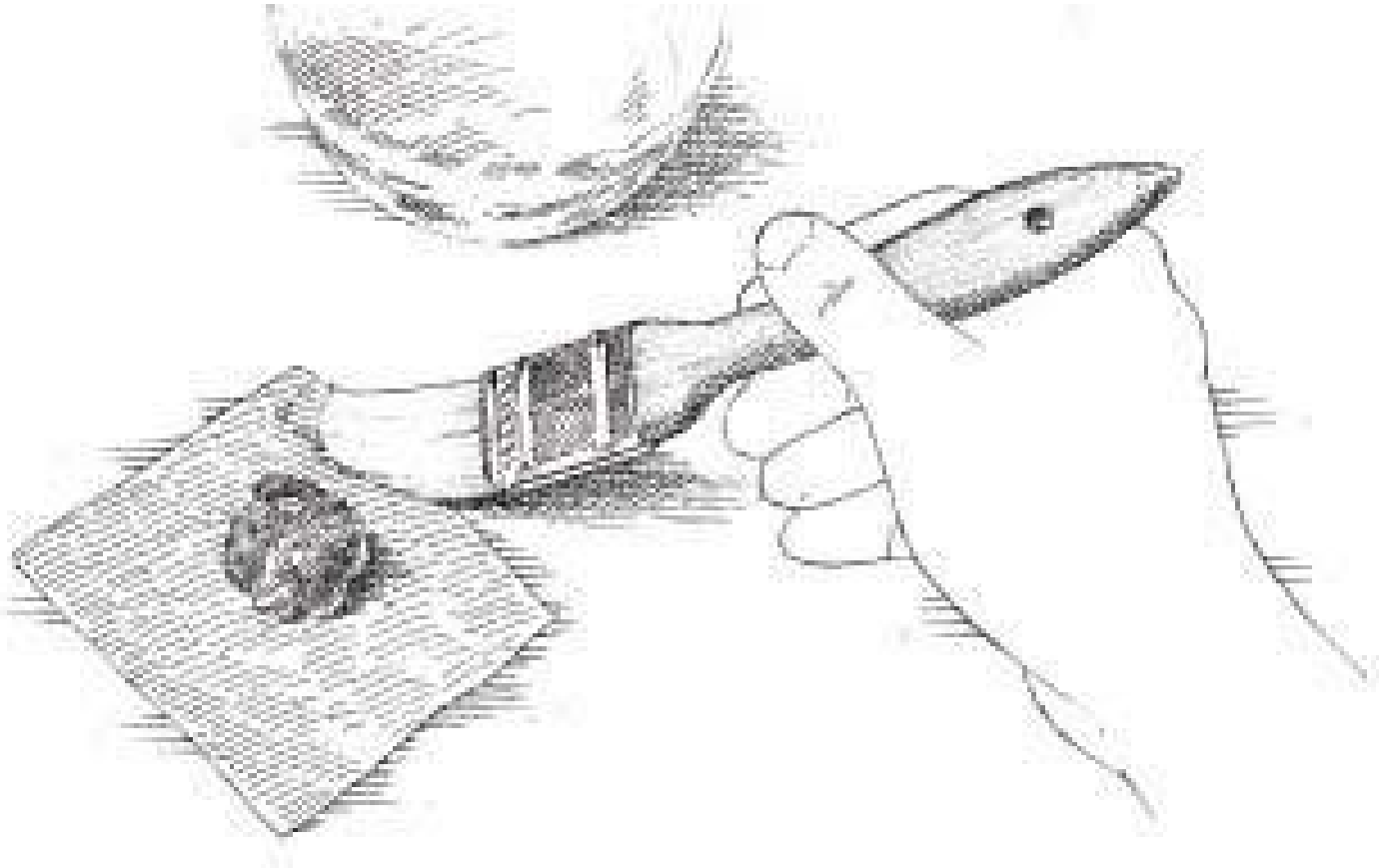

Figure 1.
Place a wonton skin on a flat, dry work surface with a corner pointing toward you. Place 1 teaspoon of filling in the center of the wrapper. Brush the edges lightly with water.

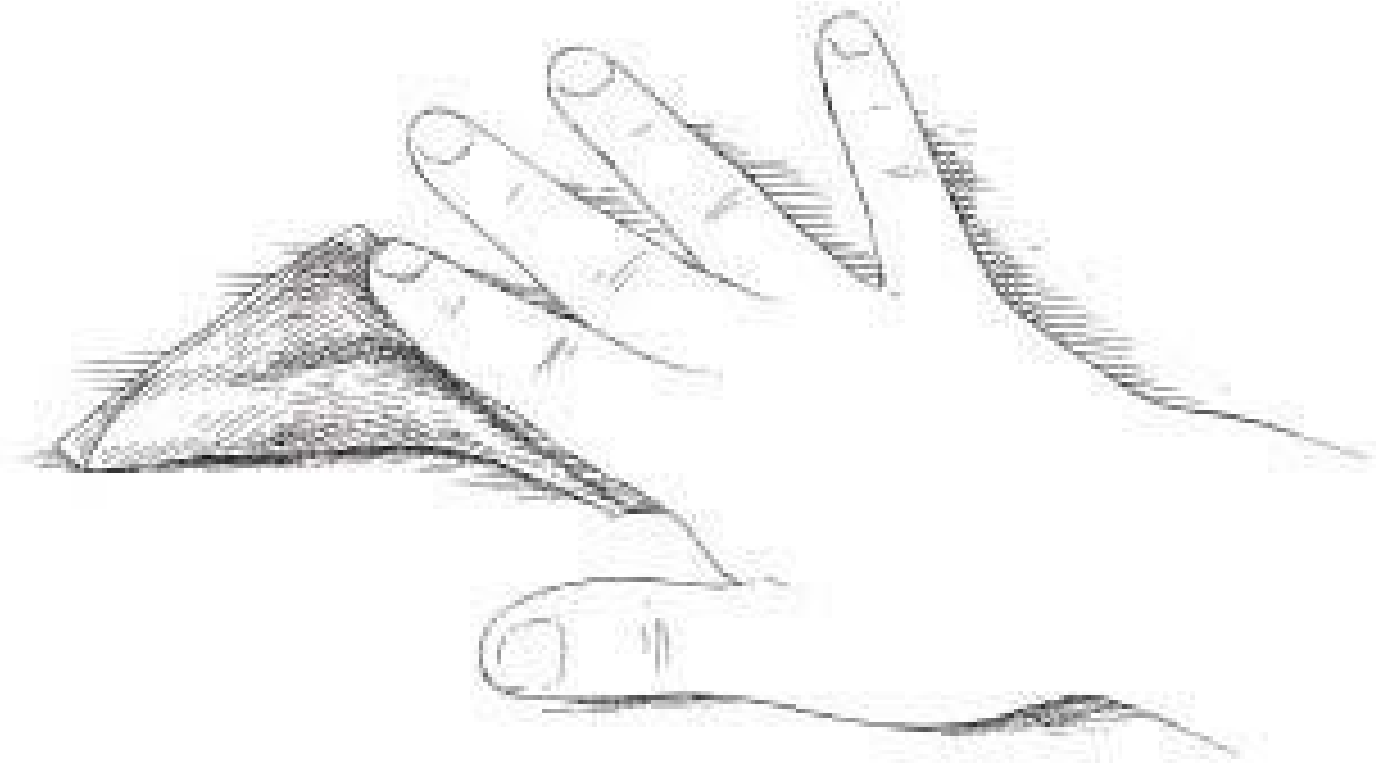

Figure 2.
Fold the wonton in half, away from you, making a triangle. Press edges firmly to seal.

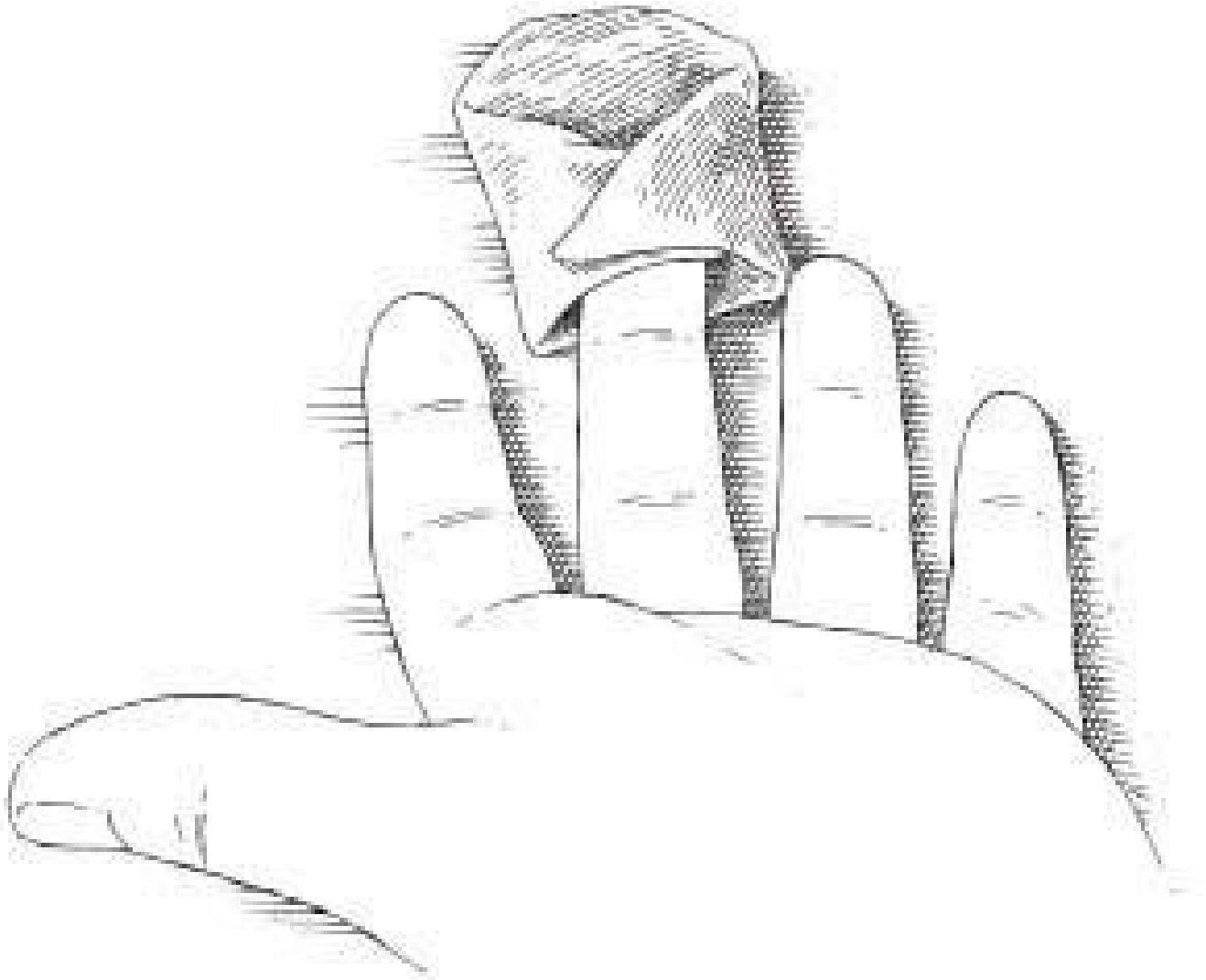

Figure 3.
Lightly brush the 2 corners nearest you with water, fold them over your finger, and press together to seal.

EGG DROP SOUP

Egg drop soup is basically thickened chicken stock with ribbons of coagulated egg. Ideally, the egg is fully cooked but still tender. There are two schools of thought as to how to accomplish this. In one, the eggs are poured onto the surface of the simmering broth and allowed to set without stirring. The eggs are then broken up with a fork. The other method calls for whisking the eggs into the broth and then allowing them to set without further stirring.

When we laid the eggs on the surface of the soup and allowed them to set up without stirring, the egg remained in large blobs. Once the eggs were set,

even vigorous stirring with a fork failed to break them up into small enough pieces.

Whisking in the eggs breaks them into small bits that set up into thinner ribbons. We found it best to add the eggs slowly and then let them cook for another 30 to 60 seconds, undisturbed, to ensure that they are fully set.

Although some sources suggest that the eggs alone will give egg drop soup its characteristic thick texture, we did not find this to be the case. Most recipes added cornstarch to give the soup some viscosity. The texture is important because the ribbons of egg will fall to the bottom of a bowl of thin, brothy soup. We found that two tablespoons of

cornstarch (dissolved in two tablespoons of water) thickened two quarts of stock sufficiently to suspend the ribbons of egg.

Egg Drop Soup

serves 6 to 8

NOTE: ***Timing is essential in this recipe. Because the cornstarch will lose its thickening power if simmered too long, the remaining ingredients must be added quickly once the cornstarch goes into the pot. Egg drop soup will not hold and should be served immediately.***

2 quarts chicken stock
1 tablespoon soy sauce
Salt
2 tablespoons cornstarch
2 medium scallions, chopped fine

2 tablespoons minced fresh cilantro leaves

4 large eggs, beaten in a measuring cup

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Bring stock to a simmer in large saucepan over medium-high heat. Add soy sauce and salt to taste.

2. Combine cornstarch and 2 tablespoons water in small bowl and stir until smooth. Whisk cornstarch mixture into broth until it thickens slightly, about 1 minute. Stir in scallions and cilantro.

3. Slowly add eggs to broth (see figure 4). Let eggs stand in broth without mixing until they are set, less than 1 minute. Once they have set, break up egg ribbons with a fork. Serve immediately.

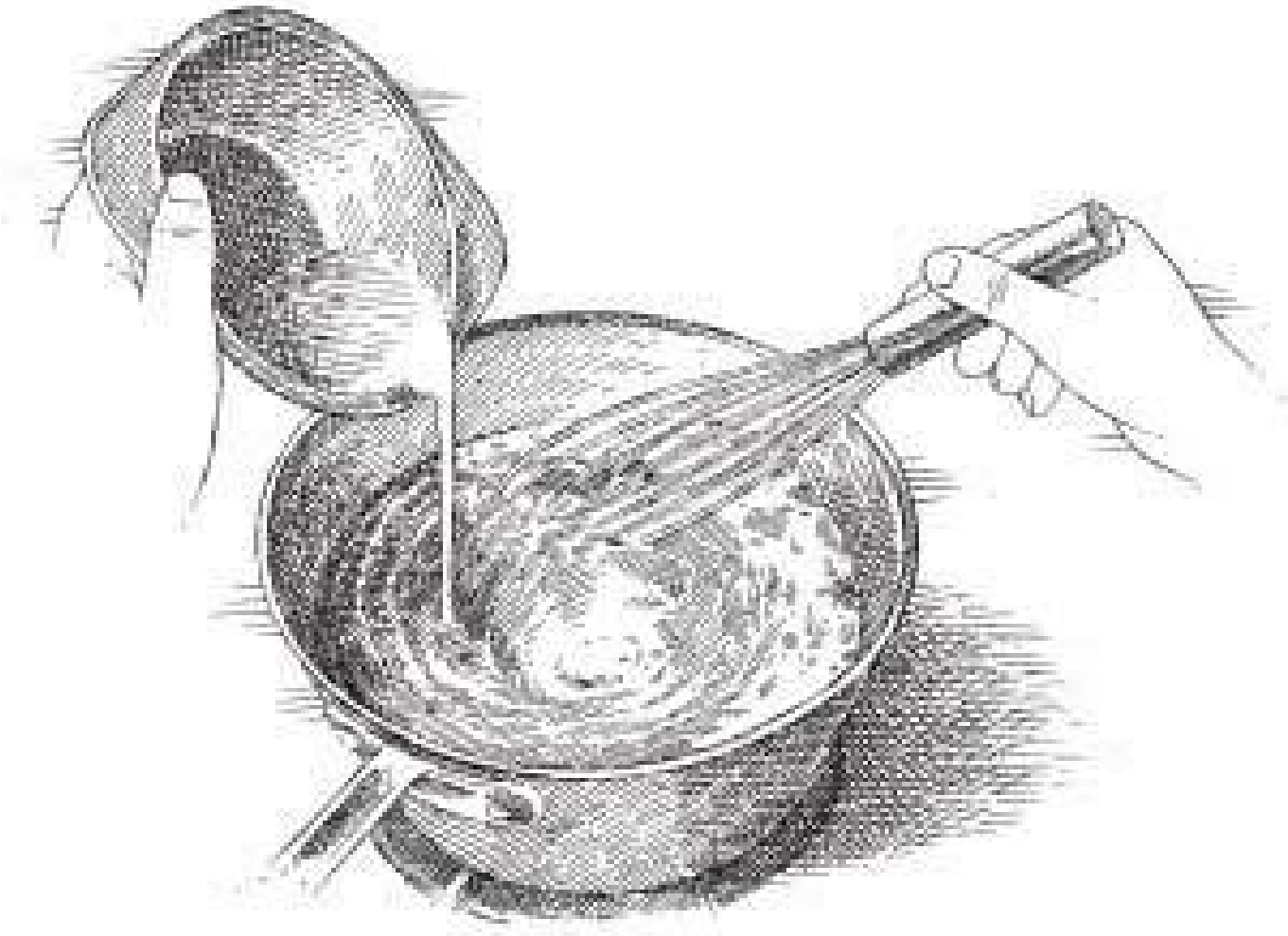

Figure 4.
Whisk the broth so that it is moving in a circle. Pour the eggs into the broth in a slow, steady stream so that ribbons of coagulated egg form, about one minute.

HOT-AND-SOUR SOUP

At the outset, we knew we could expect three challenges when trying to make this soup in an American kitchen. First, we would need to find substitutes for a few hard-to-find ingredients. Second, we had to arrive at the correct balance of flavors. Hot-and-sour soup should be complex, with hot, spicy, and sour flavors most prominent. Third, we had to perfect the texture, which should be silky and thick.

We focused first on the hard-to-find ingredients, in particular wood ear fungus (a kind of mushroom) and lily buds (which come from tiger lilies), both of which have a chewy texture and

earthy flavor. We found that dried shiitake mushrooms were the best substitute.

While dried shiitakes are a good visual replacement for wood ear fungus, the soup looked odd without the thinshredded bits of lily bud. As suggested in some sources, we tested both shredded leeks and bamboo shoots. Bamboo shoots seemed more authentic and were easier to prepare.

Almost every recipe we researched included chicken stock, soy sauce, vinegar, sesame oil, pepper, tofu, and egg. The type of vinegar and pepper used varied.

We tested distilled white, rice, white wine, and apple cider vinegars and

found that mild rice vinegar provided the necessary sour notes without adding any distracting flavors. Chinese black vinegar (an ingredient available mostly in Asian markets) is also often added for flavor and color. Some sources we consulted suggested using Worcestershire sauce as a substitute, and it worked beautifully, adding the dark color and complex, pungent flavor the soup needed.

We tested cayenne, white, and black pepper, alone and in combination. Cayenne was the testers' least favorite. It created a reddish color and an overpoweringly hot flavor. Black and white pepper were equally enjoyed.

Since black pepper is a more common item, we chose it for our recipe.

The final issue that remained to be tested was thickening the soup. At this point, we knew that a liberal amount of cornstarch would be needed to create a thick broth. When we used just two or three tablespoons, the heavy ingredients in the soup (tofu, pork, and vegetables) fell to the bottom of the pot. In the end, we found that one-third cup of cornstarch is needed to thicken eight cups of broth.

The point at which the cornstarch is added is also important. When added after the acid (the rice vinegar), the cornstarch often failed to thicken the soup. Several food scientists we spoke

to explained that because acid can prevent starch granules from bonding, it is preferable to add the acid after the cornstarch has dissolved and its granules bonded together to form the dense network that thickens the broth. Once the acid is added, the soup must not cook too long, or you again run the risk of causing the soup to thin out.

Hot-and-Sour Soup

serves 6 to 8

NOTE: ***If using canned broth, reduce the amount of soy sauce added to the vinegar mixture by 1 tablespoon.***

10 dried shiitake mushrooms
1 1/2 cups hot water
1 1/2 teaspoons dry sherry
1 tablespoon Asian sesame oil
3 tablespoons soy sauce
1/3 cup plus 1 teaspoon cornstarch
1/3 cup cool water
1 boneless center-cut pork

chop (about 4 ounces and 1/2 inch thick), trimmed of fat

3 tablespoons rice vinegar

2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce

1 1/2 teaspoons ground black pepper

6 cups chicken stock

1/2 cup bamboo shoots, cut into 1/8-inch strips

1/2 pound firm tofu, drained and cut into strips 2 by 1/4 inches

1 large egg, lightly beaten

2 tablespoons thinly sliced scallions

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place shiitakes in small bowl, cover with hot water, and soak until softened, about 20 minutes. Carefully lift shiitake from water, letting grit stay on bottom of bowl. Trim and discard stems and slice caps into 1/8-inch strips. Strain soaking liquid through sieve lined with paper towel into large soup kettle. Set aside.

2. Mix sherry, 2 teaspoons sesame oil, 1 tablespoon soy sauce, and 1 teaspoon cornstarch together in small bowl. Slice meat crosswise against grain into thin strips about $1^{1}/_{2}$ inches long. Toss pork with sherry marinade and set aside for at

least 10 minutes.

3. Blend remaining 1/3 cup cornstarch with cool water in small bowl. Set aside, leaving a spoon in bowl. Combine remaining 2 tablespoons soy sauce with vinegar, Worcestershire, and pepper in another bowl and set aside.

4. Add stock to soup kettle with mushroom soaking liquid. Bring to a boil over medium heat. Reduce heat to a simmer and add mushrooms and bamboo shoots. Bring back to a simmer and cook for 4 minutes. Gently stir in tofu and pork, including marinade. Bring back to

a simmer and cook 2 minutes.

5. Recombine cornstarch mixture and stir into simmering soup until it thickens, about 1 minute. Stir in vinegar mixture, then turn off heat. Without stirring soup, slowly drizzle egg in circular motion into pot. Gently stir once so egg forms into thin streamers and cooks completely, about 1 minute. Stir in remaining 1 teaspoon sesame oil. Ladle into bowls and garnish with scallions. Serve immediately.

DUMPLINGS

THIN SHEETS OF PASTA CAN BE USED TO wrap any number of fillings for quick Asian dumplings. Our first question about dumplings concerned the wrapper. Is homemade better than store-bought? We made our own and found the process unbearably tedious. We also found that store-bought wrappers deliver better results. They are moisture-free and much easier to work with than homemade wrappers, which stuck to pots and cooked up gummy in our tests. Buying wrappers allows you to concentrate on

making a filling and dipping sauce.

Wrappers, more specifically referred to as wonton wrappers or wonton skins, are delicate and paper-thin, usually about 1/32 of an inch. They are typically packed in 3-inch squares and made from flour, eggs, and salt. Wonton wrappers are sold fresh in the refrigerator case and can be frozen for several months if not used in a week or so. If you decide to freeze them, do so in small batches, since they cannot be separated from each other until completely thawed and, once thawed, do not take well to refreezing. We found that wrappers will thaw to room temperature in an hour or two.

The quality of wrappers varies from brand to brand, and we found thickness

to be the most important variable. Look for at least 50 wrappers per pound to make sure the skins you are buying are not too thick. Brands with fewer wrappers per pound will cook up thick and doughy.

Dumplings can be boiled, steamed, pan-fried, or deep-fried. Boiling allows the wrappers to absorb plenty of moisture and expand as they cook. It also keeps the exterior especially moist and tender and is the best choice if the dumplings are to be floated in a bowl of soup.

Steaming yields moist but resilient dumplings with chewy skins. Unlike boiling, we found that steaming does not

dilute the flavors in the filling and is a better choice for protecting delicate ingredients. If making dumplings to serve as an appetizer, we prefer steaming to boiling.

We tested deep-frying and found that this method yields crisp, tasty dumplings with an appealing golden color. And, because fried dumplings brown, they develop a natural sweetness from the caramelization, something that does not happen when dumplings are boiled or steamed. Of course, deep-frying dumplings is messy.

Somewhere between deep-frying and steaming is pan-frying, which combines two cooking methods and retains the advantages of both. The dumplings are

first browned in hot oil in a skillet and then steamed to tenderness. We found it best to sauté them a second time, after they are steamed, to make sure the bottoms are nice and crisp. Pan-fried dumplings, also called potstickers, must have at least one flat side for browning.

With our cooking methods chosen, we focused on the shapes best suited to each. We also wanted to find shapes that were easy to assemble. Pyramids are ideal for pan-frying because they have a flat bottom that becomes crisp. Among similar shapes, we find they are the easiest to assemble.

Pyramids work well for steaming, but they take up a lot of room in the steamer

basket. We wondered if a smaller shape would work as well. While the wonton shape seemed best for soup, it looked a little odd on an appetizer plate. The tortellini shape was appealing on two counts: its compact size makes it possible to fit many in a steamer basket at one time, and its shape stands up well to cooking and serving.

We tested three ways to seal dumplings—brushing the edges with beaten egg, brushing the edges with water, and leaving the edges alone and hoping the dough would be tacky enough to seal on its own. We quickly discovered that dumplings need a moist sealant to keep them from opening up when cooked. Water was less messy

than egg and worked beautifully; you can moisten the edges with your fingertip or a small brush.

Should you want to hold dumplings before serving, we found that they can sit refrigerated on a baking sheet for several hours. Line the baking sheet with parchment or wax paper, but don't try to flour the sheet; when we tried this, the flour made the dumplings gummy when cooked. And don't cover the baking sheet. When we covered it with plastic wrap, the wrappers got moist on the bottom and stuck to the tray. Although the uncovered dumplings dried out a bit, overall the results were better.

If you want to hold the dumplings for

longer than a few hours, they must be frozen or will become soggy. Freeze the dumplings on a paper-lined baking sheet and then transfer them to an airtight container to prevent freezer burn. We found it best to cook frozen dumplings straight from the freezer. Add two to three minutes to the cooking time (pyramids will need the full three minutes).

Pan-Fried Dumplings

makes 32 dumplings, enough for 6 to 8 servings

NOTE: ***Pan-fried dumplings must lie flat on at least one side if they are to brown.***

1 cup canned low-sodium chicken broth or water
3 tablespoons vegetable oil
32 pyramid dumplings stuffed with any filling (see figures 5 and 6)
1 recipe Soy-Ginger Dipping Sauce or any variation

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Bring broth or water to a simmer in small saucepan.

2. Meanwhile, heat 2 tablespoons oil in large skillet over medium-high heat. When oil is hot and hazy, add half the dumplings, flat sides down. Fry until bottoms are brown, about 2 minutes. Add $^{1}/_{2}$ cup simmering broth to skillet, pouring it around dumplings. Cover and cook until liquid is absorbed, about 3 minutes longer (add another 3 minutes if frozen). Uncover and let dumplings fry until bottoms are crisp again, about 1 minute. Serve immediately with dipping sauce on the side.

3. Heat remaining tablespoon of oil in empty skillet. Add remaining dumplings and repeat process, using remaining broth as directed. Serve immediately.

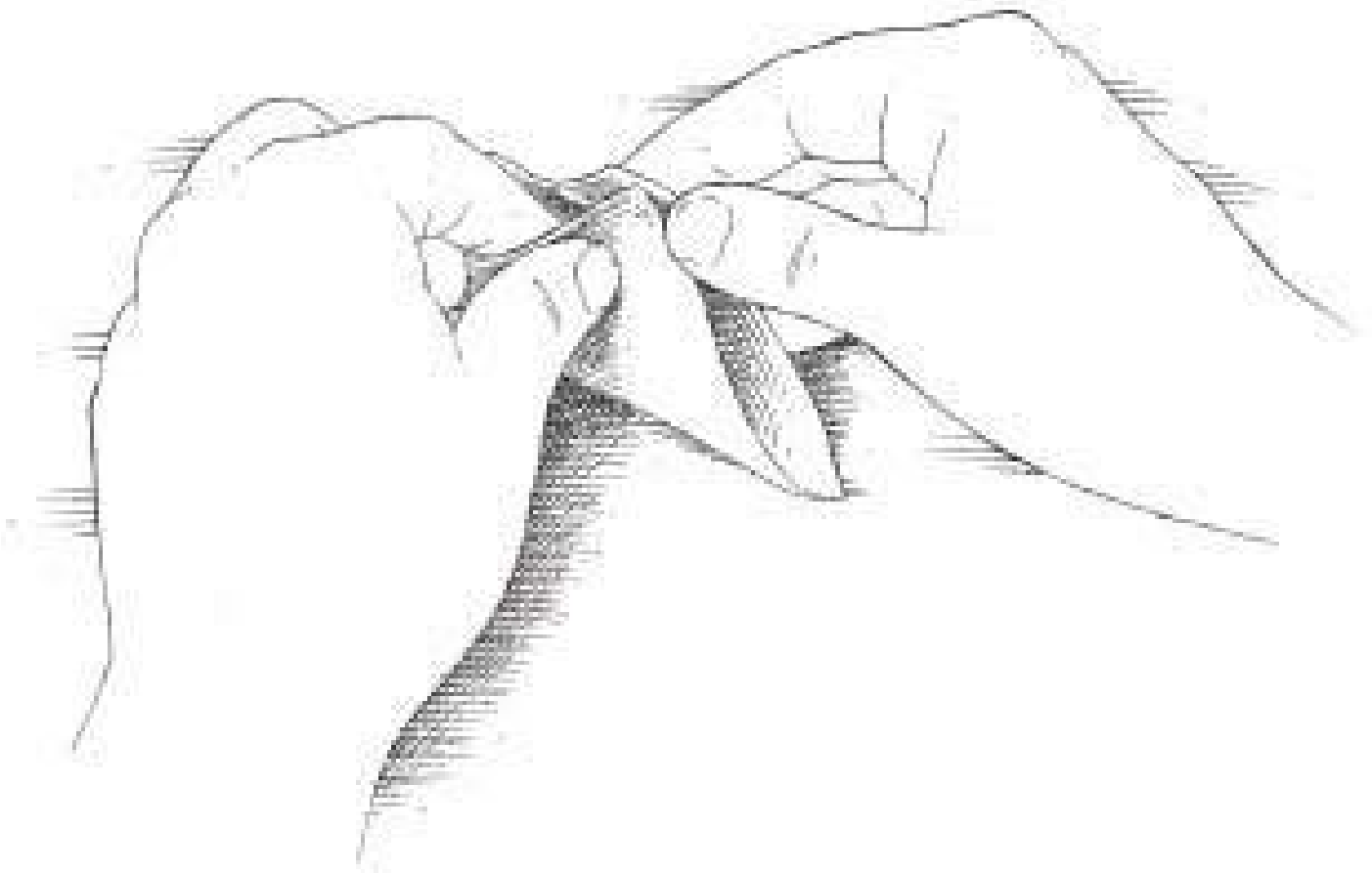

Figure 5.
To make pyramid-shaped dumplings, place two level teaspoons of filling in the center of a square wonton wrapper. Moisten the edges lightly with water. Bring up two opposite corners of the wrapper, and join them over the filling.

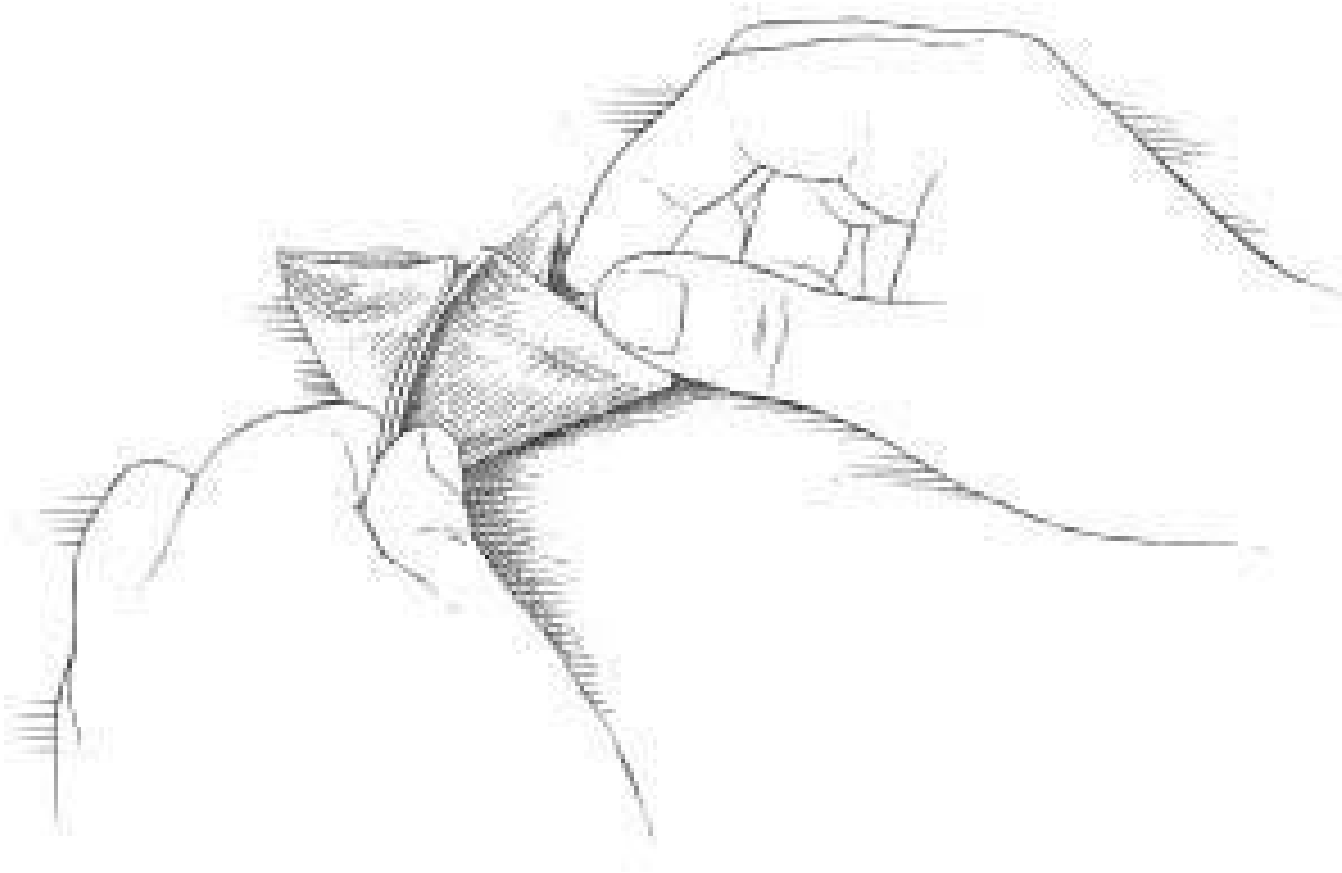

Figure 6.
Holding the pinched corners together over the filling, bring up the other two sides of the wrapper, one at a time, and pinch all four sides together over the filling to make a point. Pinch the seams firmly together to seal. Repeat with remaining filling

and wrappers. A single filling recipe is enough to make about 32 pyramids.

Steamed Dumplings

makes 32 dumplings, enough for 6 to 8 servings

NOTE: ***If you own a bamboo steamer basket, it can be used for this recipe. Simply grease the basket and arrange the dumplings inside. Bring water (it should be $^{3}/_{4}$ inch below the bottom of the basket) to a boil in a skillet large enough to hold the basket. Reduce to a simmer and set the covered basket in the skillet. Steam as directed. When the dumplings are done, place the basket on a plate, remove the cover, and serve.***

32 tortellini dumplings (see figures 7–9) or pyramid dumplings (see figures 5–6) stuffed with any filling

1 recipe Soy-Ginger Dipping Sauce or any variation

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Grease a large collapsible steamer basket. Fill a large soup kettle with enough water to come $^{3}/_{4}$ inch below bottom of basket. Bring to a simmer over medium-low heat.

2. Arrange half of dumplings in basket, making sure they don't touch. Lower basket into kettle. Increase heat to high;

cover and steam until dumplings are cooked through, about 5 minutes (add 2 to 3 minutes if frozen). Remove basket from kettle and serve dumplings immediately with dipping sauce.

3. Check water level in pot, adding more as necessary. Grease basket again and arrange remaining dumplings in basket, without letting them touch. Lower basket into kettle and cook as directed.

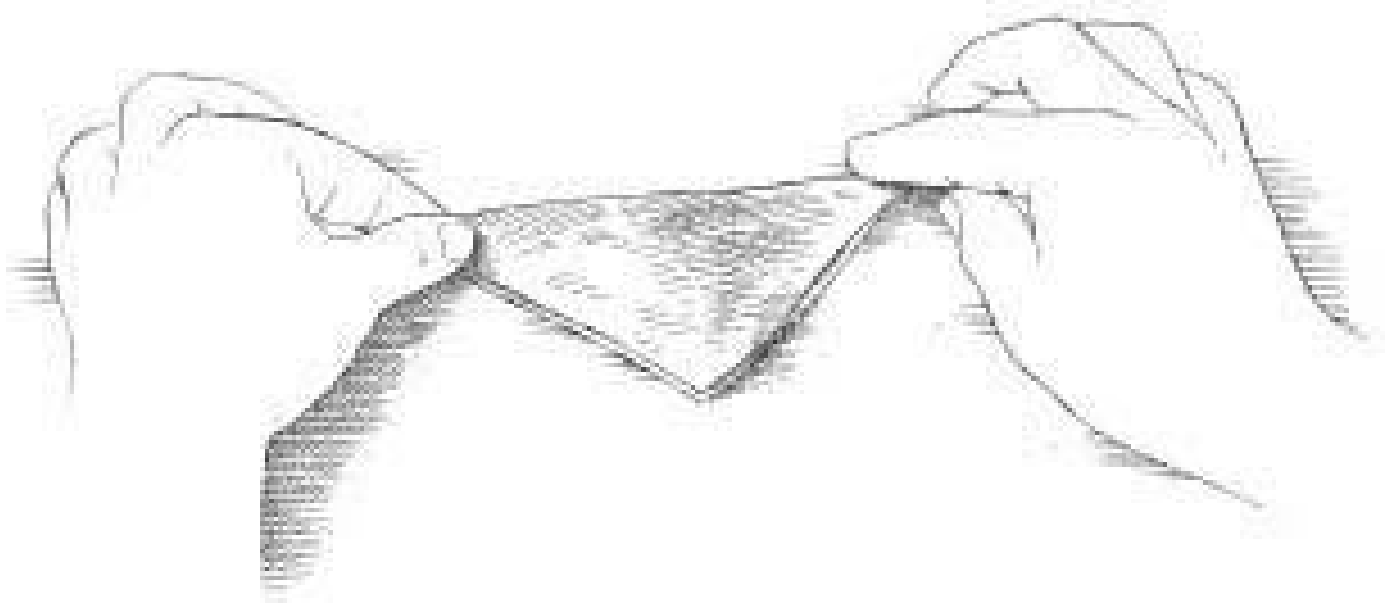

Figure 7.
To make tortellini-shaped dumplings, position a square wonton wrapper with one point facing you. Place one level teaspoon of filling in the center. Moisten edges lightly with water. Fold the wrapper in half to form a triangle. Press to seal the edges.

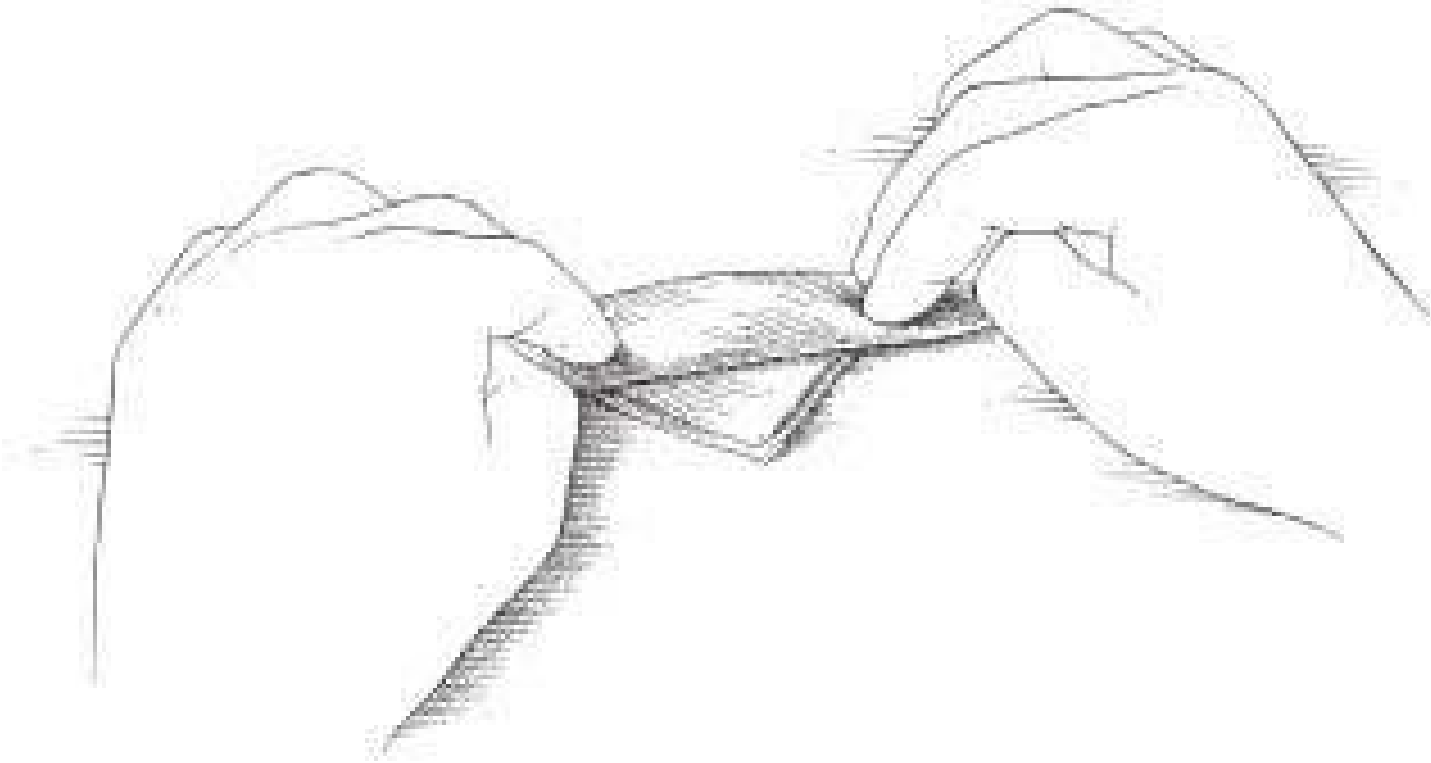

Figure 8.
Fold the long edge containing the filling over, leaving the top of the triangle exposed by about half an inch.

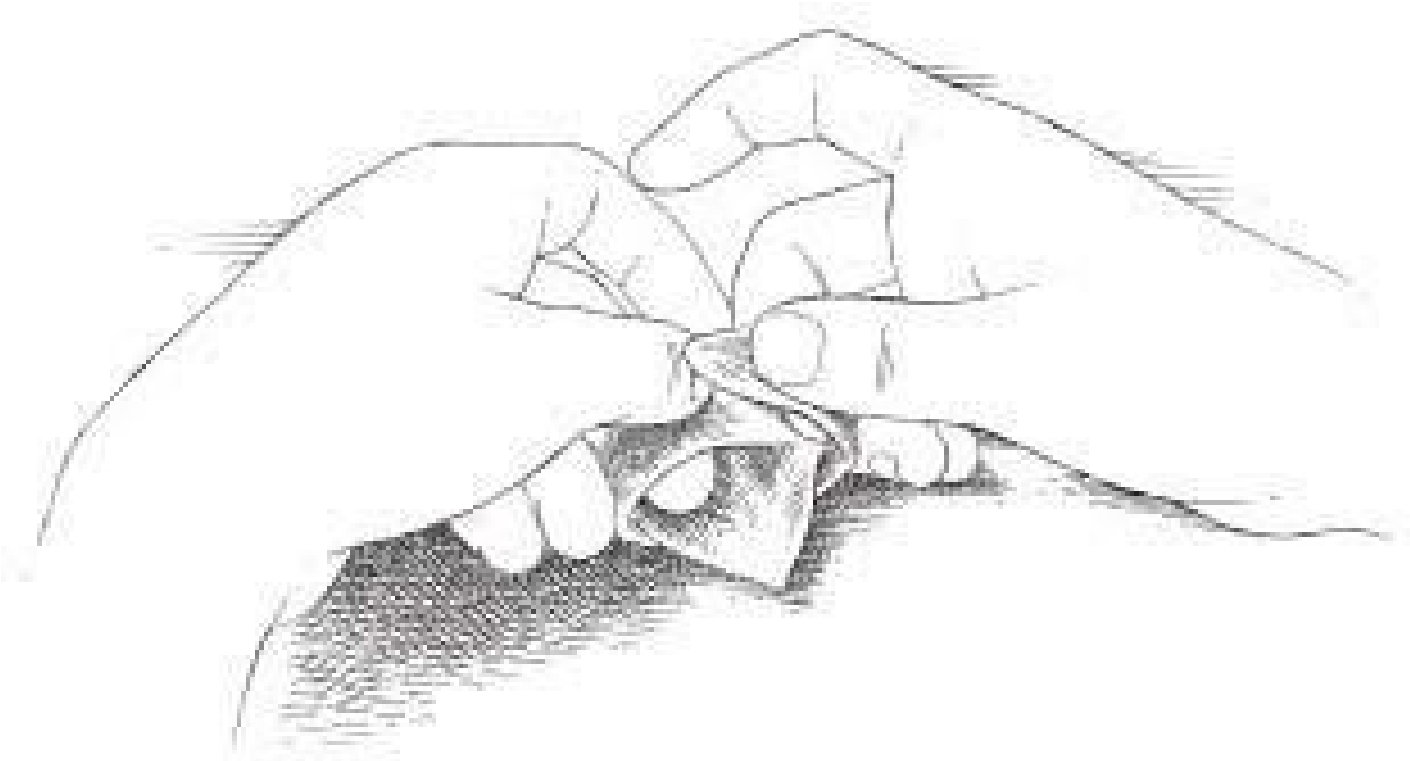

Figure 9.
Moisten the top side of the left point of the triangle, then bring the two points together, right over left, to overlap, away from the tip of the triangle. Pinch the points together to seal the dumpling. Repeat with remaining filling and wrappers. A single filling

recipe will yield 60 to 65 tortellini-shaped dumplings. Unless you are making dumplings for a party, freeze half and then steam them at a later date.

FILLINGS AND DIPPING SAUCE

No matter how they are cooked, dumplings, with their rather bland dough wrappers, benefit from tangy and savory dipping sauces. A well-seasoned filling is also essential.

After testing dozens of filling recipes, we looked through our notes and realized that tasters consistently preferred the same seasonings, even when the main ingredients in the filling changed. We eventually developed a basic flavoring recipe that could be used with meat, vegetables, or seafood.

The seasonings are fairly traditional—

ginger, garlic, rice wine or dry sherry, soy sauce, sesame oil, sugar, salt, and scallions. Two ingredients merit discussion: egg white and cornstarch.

Dumpling fillings must be smooth, creamy, and firm. The smooth part is fairly simple to achieve—just make sure to chop ingredients fairly small. We found that adding the egg white helps the filling set up properly in a firm but creamy mass.

The cornstarch is added to control moisture. If there's too much liquid in the filling, dumplings will become soggy and may break apart even before they are cooked. (That's why we ended up salting vegetables such as cabbage before adding them to fillings.) The

cornstarch absorbs any excess moisture and prevents wrappers from becoming mushy.

Flavoring Mixture for Dumplings

makes enough for one recipe of dumpling filling

$1^1/_2$ teaspoons minced fresh ginger
1 medium garlic clove, minced
$1^1/_2$ teaspoons dry sherry or rice wine
1 tablespoon soy sauce
1 teaspoon Asian sesame oil
$^1/_2$ teaspoon sugar
$^1/_4$ teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons minced scallion greens

1/2 large egg white

1 1/2 teaspoons cornstarch

INSTRUCTIONS:

Mix all ingredients in medium bowl.

Shrimp Filling

makes about $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups, enough for 32 pyramid dumplings or 65 tortellini or wonton dumplings

NOTE: ***A little ground pork holds together a filling of chopped shrimp and water chestnuts in this classic dumpling filling.***

6 ounces shelled raw shrimp, coarsely chopped
2 ounces ground pork
6 peeled water chestnuts (fresh or canned), minced
1 recipe Flavoring Mixture for Dumplings

INSTRUCTIONS:

Mix all ingredients in a medium bowl. Refrigerate until ready to make dumplings.

Pork Filling

makes about $1^1/_2$ cups, enough for 32 pyramid dumplings or 65 tortellini or wonton dumplings

NOTE: ***A classic for wonton soup dumplings. Although pork is traditional, ground chicken works quite well in its place.***

8 ounces ground pork
6 peeled water chestnuts (fresh or canned), minced
1 recipe Flavoring Mixture for Dumplings

INSTRUCTIONS:

Mix all ingredients in medium bowl.

Refrigerate until ready to make dumplings.

Mixed Vegetable Filling

makes about 1 1/2 cups, enough for 32 pyramid dumplings or 65 tortellini or wonton dumplings

NOTE: ***Cabbage, carrots, and mushrooms make a colorful and almost fatfree dumpling filling. Because of its high water content, cabbage must be salted and pressed before being used in a dumpling filling.***

1/2 medium napa cabbage, finely shredded (about 6 cups)

1 tablespoon salt

3/4 cup grated carrot (about 1

large carrot)

8 dried shiitake mushrooms, rehydrated in 1 cup hot water until softened, strained (liquid reserved for another use), and chopped fine

1 recipe Flavoring Mixture for Dumplings,

INSTRUCTIONS:

Toss cabbage and salt together in colander; let stand until cabbage wilts, 15 to 20 minutes. Rinse cabbage; squeeze dry. Mix cabbage with remaining ingredients. Refrigerate until ready to make dumplings.

Soy-Ginger Dipping Sauce

makes about 1 cup

NOTE: ***This relatively mild sauce goes well with almost every dumpling filling imaginable.***

1/4 cup soy sauce

1/4 cup rice vinegar

2 1/2 teaspoons sugar

1/4 cup water

1/2 medium scallion, minced

2 teaspoons minced fresh ginger

1/2 teaspoon Asian sesame oil

INSTRUCTIONS:

Bring soy sauce, vinegar, sugar, and water to a boil in small saucepan over medium heat, stirring briefly, until sugar dissolves. Pour into a bowl; stir in the scallion, ginger, and sesame oil. Cool sauce to room temperature. (Can be covered and refrigerated for several days.)

VARIATIONS:

Mustard Soy-Ginger Dipping Sauce

Stir in 1 to 2 tablespoons prepared hot Chinese mustard along with scallion, ginger, and sesame oil.

Spicy Soy-Ginger Dipping Sauce

Stir in 1 to 2 tablespoons chili paste or 1 teaspoon chili oil along with scallions, ginger, and sesame oil.

STEAMED FISH

A STEAMED WHOLE FISH IS A CHINESE DELICACY. In the United States, though, whole fish can be hard to find, and most cooks lack the proper pot in which to steam one. We wanted to adapt this technique for fillets, making sure to retain the most prized qualities of a steamed whole fish: moist, perfectly cooked flesh that is lightly seasoned to enhance, but not overwhelm, the flavor of the fish.

We started our testing with salmon fillets and focused on the issue of

equipment. In our research, we identified a number of possible steaming containers: a bamboo steamer, a collapsible metal steamer basket, a pasta pot with perforated insert, a glass pie plate, and a ceramic dinner plate.

We started our tests with a pie plate and heatproof dinner plate with a lip, assuming most everyone would have one or the other at home. Typically, the marinated or seasoned fish is placed on a plate and the plate then set on a rack in a wok or wide pot. Moving the plates in and out of the rather cramped Dutch oven we were using was a challenge. Perhaps more important, we found that fish did not cook evenly on a pie plate, which does not allow the steam to

penetrate evenly through the fillet.

We next tested a pasta pot with a perforated insert. Removing the cooked fillets from this pot was challenging as well because there is not enough room to maneuver a spatula under the fish.

We moved on to a collapsible metal steamer basket, which many cooks have in their kitchen, and it worked beautifully. We found that a large basket, preferably 11 inches or more across, is needed to hold four fish fillets. You might get away with a slightly smaller basket when steaming compact salmon fillets, but longer, thinner pieces will hang off the edge of the basket.

Sticking is the other major issue.

Fillets placed directly on the metal are hard to remove when done. Coating the basket with nonstick cooking spray works, but many traditional Chinese recipes place the fish on leafy greens instead. We tested napa cabbage, spinach, green cabbage, iceberg lettuce, bok choy, and chard. Owing to their sturdiness, the napa and green cabbage leaves worked best. The other greens tended to collapse during steaming, making it harder to remove both the fish and the greens from the steamer.

If each fillet is placed on a separate leaf, it is very easy to simultaneously remove both cabbage and fillet from the basket. The cabbage adds a subtle flavor to the fish, provides a bed to hold the

juices of a marinade or cooking sauce, and looks appealing when served under the fillet.

We next tested bamboo steamers. Typically, a set includes two steamers and a cover. We determined that using one steamer at a time ensures even cooking; foods cook at different rates in the top and bottom steamers when they are stacked. We tried placing the steamer in the bottom of a large stockpot, in the bottom of a wide, straight-sided skillet, and on top of a narrower stockpot. All three setups worked, but we preferred the narrow stockpot; you can put a lot of water in a narrow stockpot pot without worrying

about the water touching the fish, and, because you can put a lot of water in the pot, you don't have to worry about the pot running dry.

Up until this point, we had been steaming salmon fillets. With our steaming equipment chosen, we moved on to other fish. We found the cabbage leaf to be even more helpful when steaming thin fillets and flaky fish. In the end, you can use this method to steam almost any fish you like. Our tasters especially liked the results when steaming cod and halibut, although thinner white-fleshed fish, such as flounder and snapper, can be used if you fold the thin tails under to prevent overcooking.

Our final set of tests involved flavorings. Many traditional recipes call for marinating the fish before steaming, and we found this to be beneficial. Fish marinated briefly before cooking (10 minutes was enough) tasted better than fish steamed plain and then seasoned.

We like the subtle sweetness of rice wine (it was preferred over sherry, which tasters found too strong for white-fleshed fish) balanced with some soy sauce. A little minced garlic and ginger were welcome. Scallions and fermented black beans are traditional flavorings for Chinese steamed fish, and we like to add them to the fish just before turning on the heat to preserve their texture and color.

Some final notes on safety. Steam is very hot and can burn. The safest way to put a collapsible basket in the pot is to bring the water to a boil, then briefly shut off the flame while lowering it in (the flame should also be off when you remove the basket). Use oven mitts or a folded dry kitchen towel to hold the basket as you put it in and take it out of the pot. When it's time to test the fish, lift the lid at an angle away from you to release steam, and don't stick your face in the pot.

Master Recipe

Steamed Fish with Black Beans and Scallions

serves 4

NOTE: ***We found fillets to be easy to steam in a large collapsible steamer basket placed in a Dutch oven. If you use a traditional bamboo basket, place it on top of a narrow stockpot filled with simmering water and add about 2 minutes to the cooking time. Because it's easy to overcook the fish, check for doneness early. Although this recipe calls for thick salmon, cod, or halibut***

fillets, it can be modified to work with thin white fish such as flounder and snapper. Fold each fillet so that the tail is tucked under the wide end and steam for 4 to 5 minutes.

2 tablespoons rice wine or dry sherry
1 tablespoon soy sauce
1 teaspoon Asian sesame oil
1 medium garlic clove, minced
1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger
4 salmon fillets or thick white fish fillets, such as halibut or cod (each 6 to 8 ounces and $1^1/_2$ inches thick)
$^1/_2$ teaspoon salt

4 large napa or green cabbage leaves

1 tablespoon fermented black beans, chopped

2 tablespoons thinly sliced scallions

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Mix together rice wine, soy sauce, oil, garlic, and ginger in small bowl. Place fish in shallow glass or ceramic pan, sprinkle with salt, and then drizzle with rice wine mixture. Marinate for 10 to 15 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, fill Dutch oven with 1 inch of water. Place large collapsible

steamer basket in pot and check to make sure there's about $^{3}/_{4}$ inch of space between water level and bottom of basket. Remove basket from pot and line with napa leaves (see figure 10).

3. Cover pot with tight-fitting lid and bring water to a boil over high heat. Place one fish fillet on each cabbage leaf. Drizzle marinade over fish, then sprinkle with black beans and scallions (see figure 11).

4. Briefly turn off burner and carefully lower steamer basket into pot, holding it with an oven mitt or folded kitchen

towel. Cover tightly and turn heat back to high. Steam 6 to 7 minutes for medium-rare (good for salmon) or 7 to 8 minutes for medium. To check for doneness, lower heat and lift lid away from you to protect your face from the steam. Working quickly and using a long, thin knife, check to see if fillets are opaque throughout and flake easily. Cover again and steam longer if necessary.

5. When fish is done, turn off heat and carefully remove basket from pot using oven mitt or folded kitchen towel. To remove fish from basket, just slide cabbage leaves and fish together onto

individual plates. Serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Steamed Fish with Garlic and Cilantro

If you can't buy fermented black beans, try this variation.

Follow master recipe, increasing garlic to 2 large cloves and omitting black beans and scallions. Proceed as directed. Just before serving, garnish each fillet with scant 1 teaspoon minced fresh cilantro leaves.

Steamed Fish with Sizzling Ginger and Scallions

Follow master recipe, marinating fish in rice wine, soy sauce, and $1^1/_2$ tablespoons minced ginger (omit sesame oil and garlic). Omit black beans. Cut 2 scallions into $1^1/_2$-inch lengths and then slice lengthwise into very thin strips. When fish is almost done steaming, heat 4 teaspoons Asian sesame oil and 2 teaspoons peanut oil in small skillet until almost smoking. Transfer steamed fish to individual plates and sprinkle with prepared scallions. Immediately pour a little hot oil over each fillet, standing back in case oil splatters. Serve immediately.

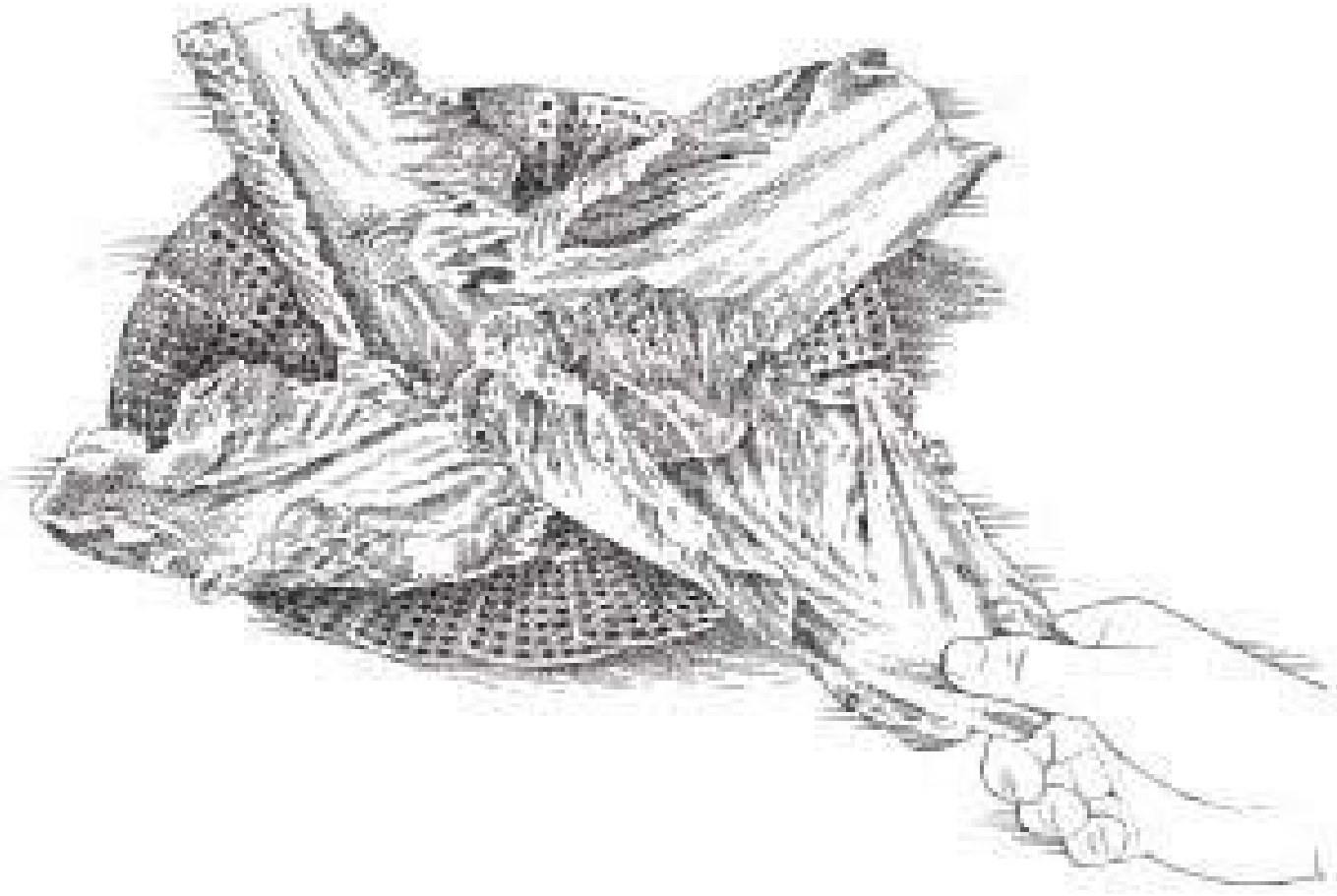

Figure 10.
Line a large collapsible steamer basket with four napa cabbage leaves, each slightly larger than a single piece of fish. Place leaves so that the stalks face the edge of the basket and the leaves create four distinct beds for the fish.

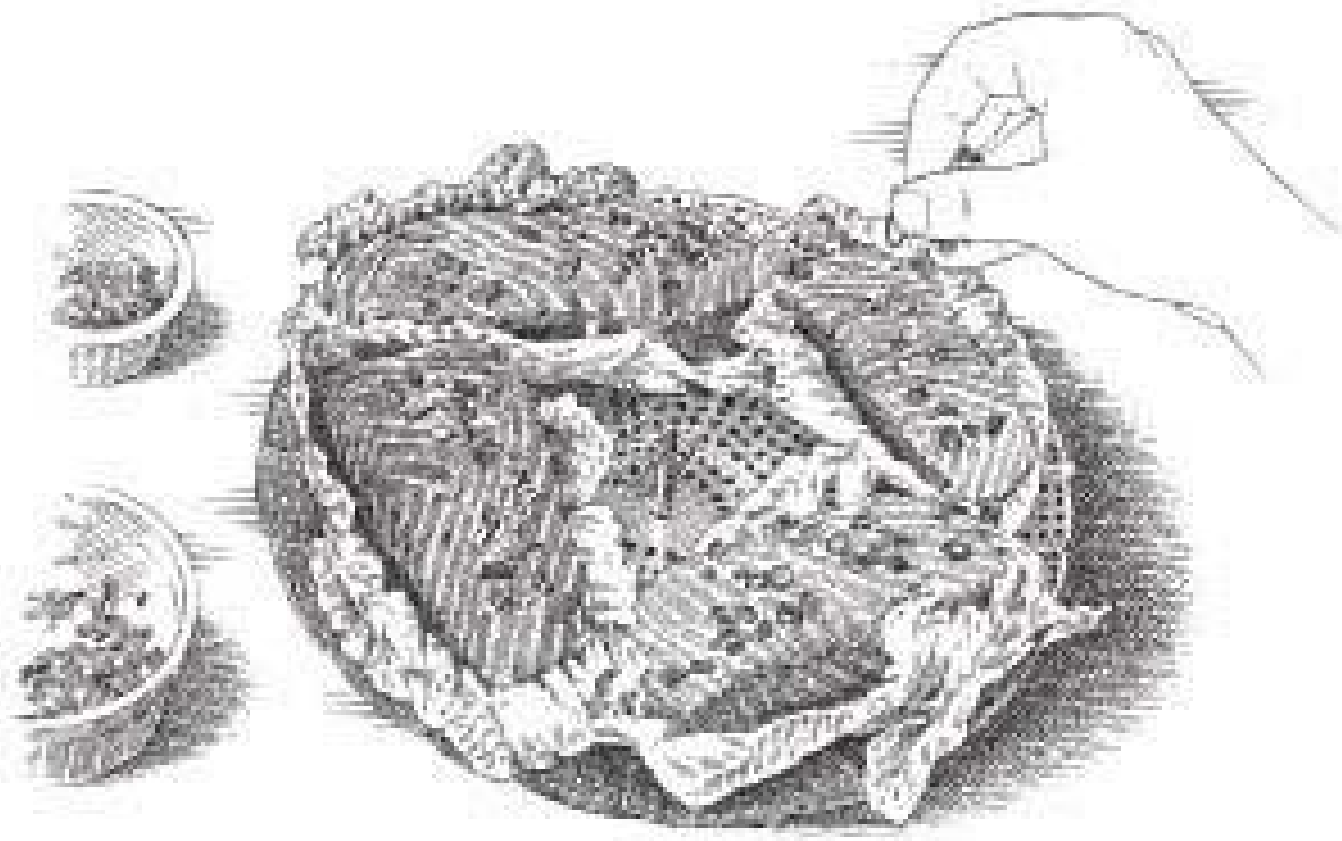

Figure 11.
Place one fish fillet on each cabbage leaf. Drizzle marinade over fish and then sprinkle with black beans and scallions.

KUNG PAO CHICKEN

KUNG PAO CHICKEN IS A RESTAURANT FAVORITE. Bits of silky chicken swim in a spicy, dark brown sauce along with peanuts and dried red chiles. Kung pao is not only spicy, it is rich. It typically contains few vegetables or none, making it uncharacteristic of most Chinese dishes. It should be served with plenty of rice to cut the heat and at least one vegetable dish to round out the meal. The biggest challenges when preparing kung pao are getting the texture of the chicken right and infusing the dish with

enough—but not too much—heat.

The texture of the chicken in this dish is different from that in a stir-fry. The exterior is an unusual combination of silky and crisp. In most restaurant kitchens, cooks obtain this crispiness by deep-frying (submerging the chicken in hot oil) and then draining the chicken. Chiles and aromatics are then stir-fried (cooked in a thin film of oil), and the sauce and chicken are added back at the end. We tested deep-frying as well as pan-frying (cooking the chicken in a shallow depth of oil) and got great results with pan-frying the chicken in just three tablespoons of oil. The oil is drained off after the chicken is cooked.

Pan-frying (or deep-frying in

restaurants) is what gives the chicken its crisp crust, but the desired silkiness comes from the marinade. Some sources suggest "velveting" the chicken in egg white; others add some cornstarch and/or oil to the marinade.

We tested velveting first, adding egg whites and cornstarch to a simple rice wine and soy sauce marinade. We prepared a second batch with cornstarch alone added to the rice wine and soy sauce. For the third batch, we included neither cornstarch nor egg white.

Tasters agreed that adding cornstarch to the marinade was a good idea. It gave the chicken the silky, tender texture we wanted. Egg white and cornstarch

performed on a par with the cornstarch-only mixture, so we opted to omit the egg white. We had also seen recipes that called for a little oil. We tried this tip and found that oil helps to keep the chicken pieces separate when cooked, which in turn improves the texture of the meat.

Until this point in the testing, we had been cooking diced chicken breasts with good results. We wondered how chicken thighs would do. Tasters felt that the thighs were even better—meatier, juicier, and more flavorful.

Chicken is traditionally diced for kung pao; tasters preferred a small $^1/_2$-inch dice. We found that one pound of diced

chicken could be comfortably cooked in a 12-inch skillet. Add any more chicken and it has to be cooked in batches to ensure that it will brown well and not stew in its own juices. Given the waste associated with chicken thighs (they contain a fair amount of fat that should be trimmed), we decided to buy $1^1/_4$ pounds of chicken to yield the pound needed for the recipe.

With the chicken element under control, we turned our attention to the heat level. Traditionally, kung pao chicken comes to the table filled with toasted dried red chiles. To release the flavor and heat from the chiles, we found it is necessary to break them in half

before toasting them in the oil. Most of the heat in a chile pepper is found in the seeds and interior ribbing, not the outer shell.

Because dried red chiles are sometimes not easy to come by, we wondered if hot red pepper flakes could be used instead. While toasting dried chiles in oil releases their flavor, pepper flakes tasted burned when cooked this way. We found it better to add them with the aromatics (garlic, ginger, and scallions) toward the end of the cooking time.

Tasters felt that kung pao chicken made with hot red pepper flakes instead of dried chiles looked a bit odd. We found that adding some diced red bell

pepper helped solved this problem. The charred bits of bell pepper add some visual contrast that the chicken needs. Their sweetness is also a good foil for the rich, spicy flavors in this dish.

In the end, tasters preferred the heat given by the dried red chiles. They seemed to have a fuller flavor than the pepper flakes, which were merely spicy. Because of the way the dried chiles are cooked, the flavor permeates the dish and blends with its sweet, sour, and salty elements. Hot red pepper flakes stand out. You taste heat, then the sweet, sour, and salty flavors. It's not that the hot red pepper flakes are bad; they just aren't as good.

Our next challenge was to assemble the elements of the sauce. Kung pao has a complex, brown sauce with strong sweet and sour notes to balance the heat of the chiles. Chicken broth, soy sauce, rice wine, and vinegar were pretty much standard in the recipes we consulted. We found that too much vinegar made the sauce harsh. A good deal of sweetness was also essential. In recipes that called for little or no sugar, the heat was one-dimensional. We found that a full tablespoon of sugar is best.

Because cornstarch generally makes stir-fry sauces too thick, we tend to shy away from it. However, the ingredients in kung pao—diced chicken, diced red

bell pepper, and peanuts—are so smooth that the sauce was not adhering properly. We tried reducing the sauce before adding the cooked chicken back to the pan. This helped, but the sauce was still pooling. We found that just $^1/_2$ teaspoon of corn starch solved this problem. Any more cornstarch—even just an extra $^1/_2$ teaspoon—turns the sauce gummy, so measure carefully.

The aromatic elements (garlic, ginger, and scallions) were fairly easy to incorporate. Tasters liked more scallions in this dish for contrast with the chicken and peanut flavors. Cutting scallions into $^1/_2$-inch lengths rather than mincing made them seem more like a

vegetable and helped to maintain freshness, a quality otherwise missing from this dish.

We tried other vegetables—mushrooms, water chestnuts, and celery—but tasters consistently preferred a streamlined dish of just chicken, diced red bell pepper, and peanuts. One final note: Use a nonstick skillet. If you don't, plan on adding more oil to keep the chicken from sticking.

Master Recipe

Kung Pao Chicken

serves 4

NOTE: ***If you have small dried red chiles on hand, use them instead of the hot red pepper flakes. For a medium-hot flavor, cook 5 to 10 chiles with the bell pepper, adding an extra tablespoon of oil so the chiles don't scorch. Crack a couple of the chiles in half to release the seeds, or open all of the chiles for a superspicy dish. Make sure not to eat the chiles. If you prefer, substitute 1 pound of boneless,***

skinless chicken breasts for the thighs. Serve with plenty of Sticky White Rice to cut the heat.

3 tablespoons soy sauce

$2^1/_2$ tablespoons rice wine or dry sherry

1 tablespoon plus $^1/_2$ teaspoon cornstarch

$1^1/_4$ pounds skinless, boneless chicken thighs, trimmed of fat and cut into $^1/_2$-inch cubes

5 tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon peanut oil

3 tablespoons canned chicken broth

1 tablespoon sugar

1 teaspoon rice vinegar

1 teaspoon Asian sesame oil

1 small red bell pepper, cored, seeded, and cut into $^1/_2$-inch dice

2 large garlic cloves, minced

1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger

6 medium scallions, whites only, cut into $^1/_2$-inch lengths

1 teaspoon hot red pepper flakes, or to taste

$^1/_2$ cup dry roasted, unsalted peanuts

INSTRUCTION:

1. Mix $1^1/_2$ tablespoons soy sauce, $1^1/_2$

tablespoons rice wine, and 1 tablespoon cornstarch together in medium bowl. Add chicken and toss. Add 1 tablespoon peanut oil and toss again. Set aside for 20 minutes.

2. Mix remaining $1^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons soy sauce, 1 tablespoon rice wine, and $^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon cornstarch together in small bowl. Stir in broth, sugar, vinegar, and sesame oil; set sauce aside.

3. Heat a 12-or 14-inch nonstick skillet over high heat for 3 minutes. Add 3 tablespoons peanut oil and swirl oil so that it evenly coats bottom of pan. Heat

oil until it just starts to shimmer and smoke. Add chicken and stir-fry until seared and three-quarters cooked, about 2 minutes. Strain chicken into clean bowl and set aside. Carefully wipe out pan with paper towel.

4. Put pan back over high heat and let it come up to temperature, 1 minute. When hot, add 1 tablespoon peanut oil and swirl oil so that it evenly coats bottom of pan. When oil just starts to smoke, add bell pepper and stir-fry for 1 minute. Clear center of pan and add garlic, ginger, scallions, and pepper flakes, drizzle with remaining teaspoon peanut oil, and stir-fry until fragrant, 10 to 15

seconds.

5. Add sauce and cook, stirring constantly, until it boils, 5 to 10 seconds. Add chicken back to pan and stir-fry until ingredients are well coated with sauce and sizzling hot, about 1 minute. Stir in peanuts and serve immediately.

VARIATION:

Kung Pao Shrimp

Even if pan-fried, shrimp never develops the silky crust found on chicken, so it's best to stir-fry the shrimp in a film of oil.

Follow master recipe, replacing chicken with 1 pound small or medium

shrimp, peeled, and eliminating 1 tablespoon cornstarch and 1 tablespoon oil from marinade in step 1. Reduce amount of oil in step 3 to 1 tablespoon. Cook shrimp until bright pink, 1 to $1^{1}/_{2}$ minutes. Transfer shrimp to bowl and proceed as directed.

BEEF & BROCCOLI IN GARLIC SAUCE

OUR FOREMOST CONCERN WHEN DEVELOPING a recipe for beef and broccoli in garlic sauce was the beef. Too often gray, soggy, and/or tough, the beef in this popular dish should be well browned and tender.

Our second area of concern was the broccoli. The florets should be bright green and crisp-tender. Most recipes steam or blanch florets in a separate pot to avoid overcooking. This seemed like a cumbersome step to us; we wanted to

simplify the process without sacrificing quality.

Finally, the sauce can be problematic. Sometimes the garlic flavor is too harsh; other times it is too mild. We wanted to figure out how much garlic to add, when to add it, and what other ingredients would complement rather than overwhelm the sweet garlic flavor of the sauce.

Although some sources suggest cuts from the shoulder and round, flank steak is the most common choice for stir-frying. After some testing, we found flank steak to have the best combination of beefy flavor and tenderness. Round was dry and tough, and the shoulder was too chewy.

The biggest challenge when cooking flank steak is dealing with all the liquid that it sheds in the skillet. Our tests showed that $^{3}/_{4}$ pound of thin-sliced flank steak loses between $^{1}/_{4}$ cup and 1/3 cup of its juices. The danger is that the beef will stew in these juices rather than sear. We found that the combination of using a hot pan and cooking in batches got the beef in and out of the skillet quickly and kept the meat from developing a stewed flavor.

The juices continue to leach out of the meat even after it comes out of the pan. We noticed that meat that had been delicious fresh from the skillet turned soggy several minutes later. Putting the

beef in a strainer after stir-frying solved this problem, separating the juices from the meat. This juice can be added back to the pan along with the meat to give the dish a more beefy flavor.

The tried-and-true method of blanching the broccoli in a separate pot and then adding it to the stir-fry along with the sauce worked well for us, but we wanted to avoid the hassle of dirtying another pot. We tried stir-frying the broccoli, adding the sauce (but not the meat), and then covering the pan. This method was very imprecise. The broccoli tended to overcook and the sauce to overreduce.

We had better luck when we stir-fried the broccoli in the skillet after the beef

had been cooked. (The skillet was empty at this point.) After a quick stir-fry, we added a little water, covered the pan, and then steamed the broccoli. We found that two minutes of covered cooking delivered perfectly cooked broccoli. When we piled the broccoli into a bowl, the residual heat caused the florets to soften further. To keep our broccoli crisp-tender, we found it best to spread the broccoli out on a plate covered with a clean towel, which absorbed excess moisture.

It always seems such as waste to throw out the broccoli stems, especially for a stir-fry. We found that stems would cook in the same time as florets if peeled

and cut on the diagonal into 1-inch rounds about 1/8 inch thick.

Although beef and broccoli is an admirable combination, most tasters felt that the addition of another vegetable would make the dish more visually and texturally appealing. In the end, we liked red bell pepper for its crunch and color.

We now turned our attention to the sauce. Some recipes add the garlic directly to the sauce. Tasters felt that garlic added this way was too raw-tasting. We had better results stir-frying the garlic along with the scallions and ginger. Doubling the usual amount of garlic for a stir-fry (from 1 to 2 tablespoons) gave us the deep, rich garlic flavor we wanted.

Several other possible contributors to the sauce were rejected by our panel of tasters: sugar for making the stir-fry too sweet, vinegar and sherry for adding unwelcome harsh notes, and hot red pepper flakes for competing with the garlic flavor. One additional ingredient, however, proved to be key: oyster sauce, the flavor of which goes extremely well with beef and broccoli. Oyster sauce provides body and color, and the complexity of its flavor eliminates the need for most other sauce ingredients. Only chicken broth, soy sauce, and sesame oil were needed to turn oyster sauce into a complete stir-fry sauce.

Master Recipe

Beef and Broccoli in Garlic Sauce

serves 4

NOTE: ***After cooking the beef, steam the broccoli in the same skillet over medium heat. When the broccoli is tender but still crisp, remove it to a plate to prevent further cooking. Turn the heat back to high and finish this dish in a sizzling hot skillet.***

$^{3}/_{4}$ pound flank steak, boneless, trimmed of fat and

sliced thin (see figures 12 and 13)

1 1/2 tablespoons soy sauce

1 tablespoon dry sherry or rice wine

3 tablespoons oyster sauce

2 tablespoons canned chicken broth

1 teaspoon Asian sesame oil

5 tablespoons peanut oil

1 1/4 pounds broccoli, florets broken into bite-sized pieces; stems trimmed, peeled, and cut on diagonal into 1-inch rounds, about 1/8 inch thick

1/3 cup water

1 small red bell pepper, cored,

seeded, and diced

2 tablespoons minced garlic

1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger

2 tablespoons scallions, whites only, cut into $^1/_2$-inch lengths

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Toss beef with 1 tablespoon soy sauce and dry sherry in medium bowl; set aside, tossing once or twice.

2. Mix remaining $^1/_2$ tablespoon soy sauce with oyster sauce, chicken broth, and sesame oil in small bowl; set aside.

3. Heat a 12-or 14-inch nonstick skillet over high heat for 3 minutes. Drain beef. Add 1 tablespoon peanut oil to pan and swirl so oil coats bottom of pan evenly. Heat oil until it just starts to shimmer and smoke. Add half the beef and stir-fry until seared and three-quarters cooked, about 1 minute. Transfer beef to strainer set over clean bowl to keep cooked meat and juices separate. Repeat process with another tablespoon of oil and second batch of beef.

4. Let pan come back up to temperature, about 1 minute. When hot, add 1 tablespoon oil and swirl so oil coats

bottom of pan evenly. When oil just starts to smoke, add broccoli and stir-fry for 30 seconds. Add water, cover pan, and lower to medium heat. Steam broccoli until crisp-tender, about 2 minutes. Transfer broccoli to plate lined with clean kitchen towel.

5. Let the pan come up to temperature, about 1 minute. When hot, add 1 tablespoon oil and swirl oil so that it coats bottom of pan evenly. When oil just starts to smoke, add bell pepper and stir-fry for 1 minute. Clear center of pan and add garlic, ginger, and scallions, drizzle with remaining tablespoon of oil, and stir-fry until fragrant but not colored,

10 to 15 seconds. Add broccoli back to pan and stir scallions, garlic, and ginger into vegetables for 20 seconds off heat.

6. Add cooked beef and its liquid, stir in sauce, and stir-fry until ingredients are well coated with sauce and sizzling hot, about 1 minute. Serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Scallops and Broccoli in Garlic Sauce

To achieve a nicely browned exterior, turn scallops only once while stir-frying.

Follow master recipe, substituting $^{3}/_{4}$ pound large sea scallops, tendons

removed and cut in half through the equator, for flank steak. Reduce amount of soy sauce to 1 tablespoon and use it all in step 2. Omit step 1 (scallops do not need to be marinated) and sherry. Stir-fry scallops in two batches according to step 3 until opaque, 40 to 60 seconds. Proceed as directed.

Bok Choy in Garlic Sauce

Follow master recipe, omitting beef, broccoli, and bell pepper. Prepare bok choy as directed in figures 14 through 16. Reduce amount of soy sauce to 1 tablespoon and use it all in step 2. Omit step 1 (bok choy does not need to be marinated) and sherry. Stir-fry bok choy

whites in two batches according to step 3 until crisp-tender, 1 to 2 minutes, and remove from pan. Omit step 4. Substitute bok choy leaves for bell pepper in step 5, adding 1 tablespoon water with leaves and reducing cooking time to 30 seconds. Cook garlic, ginger, and scallions as directed. Add stalks back to pan; stir for 20 seconds off heat. Stir in sauce, stir-fry for 30 seconds, and serve immediately.

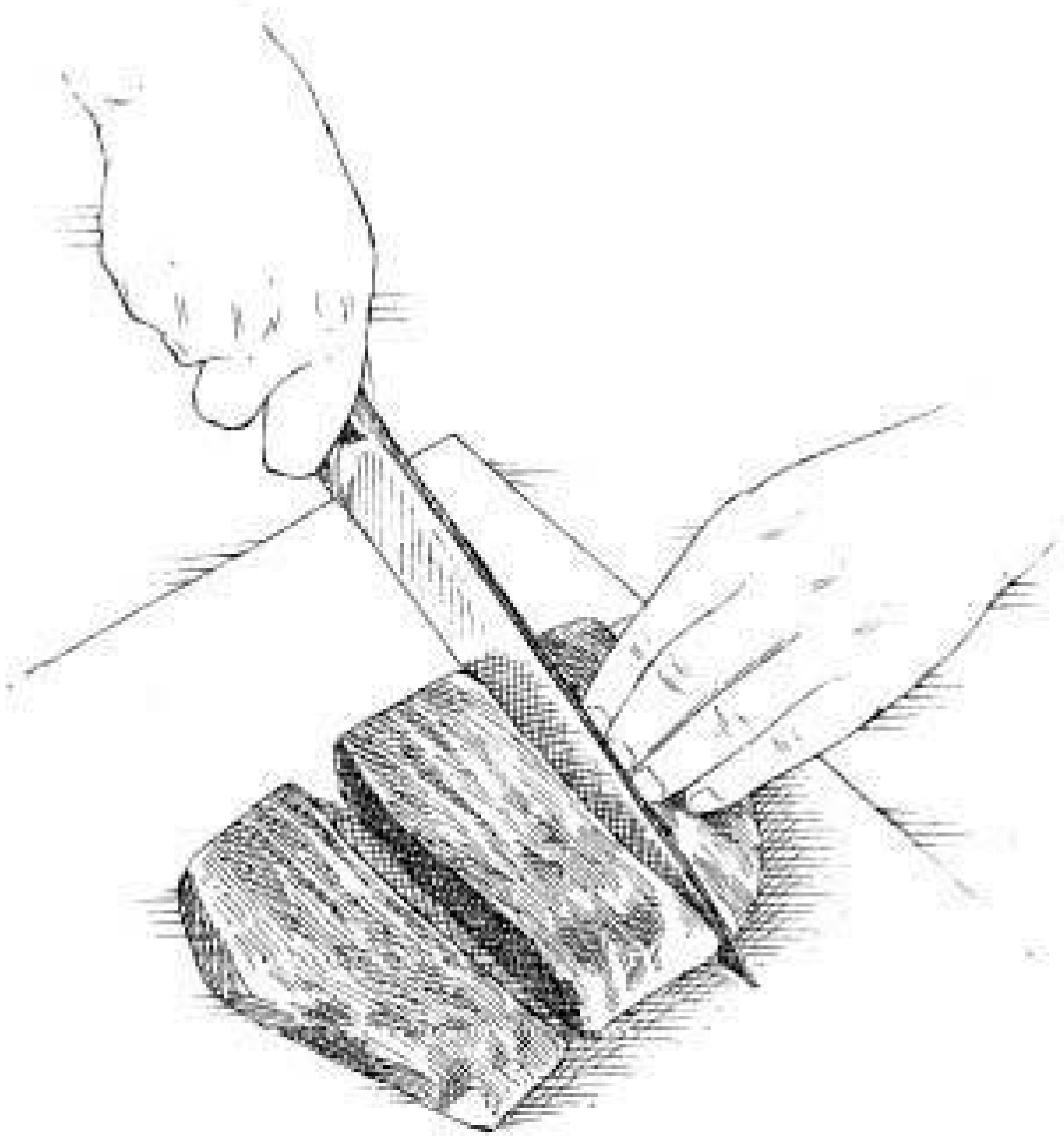

Figure 12.
Slice partially frozen flank steak into pieces 2 inches wide.

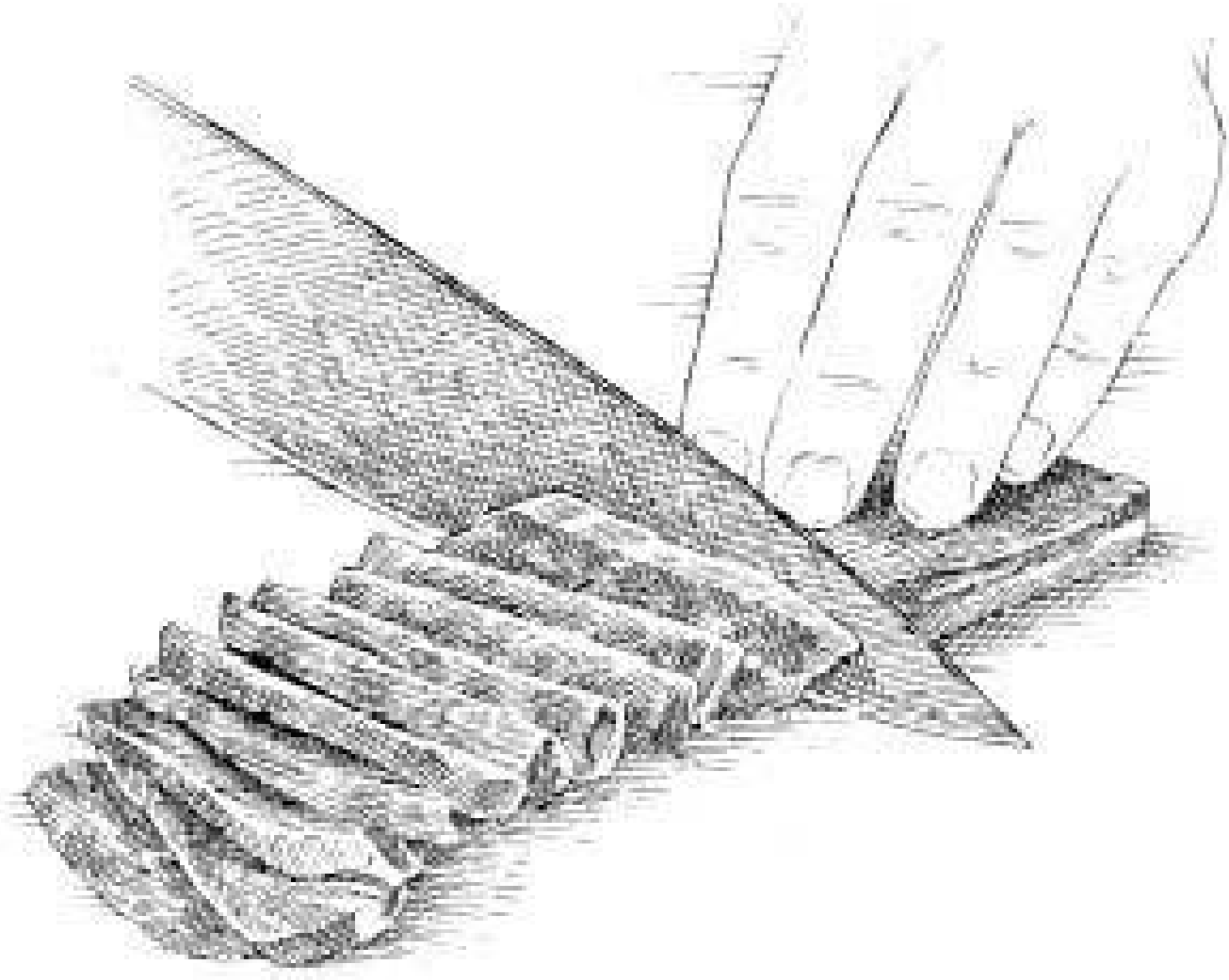

Figure 13.
Cut each piece of flank steak against the grain into very thin slices.

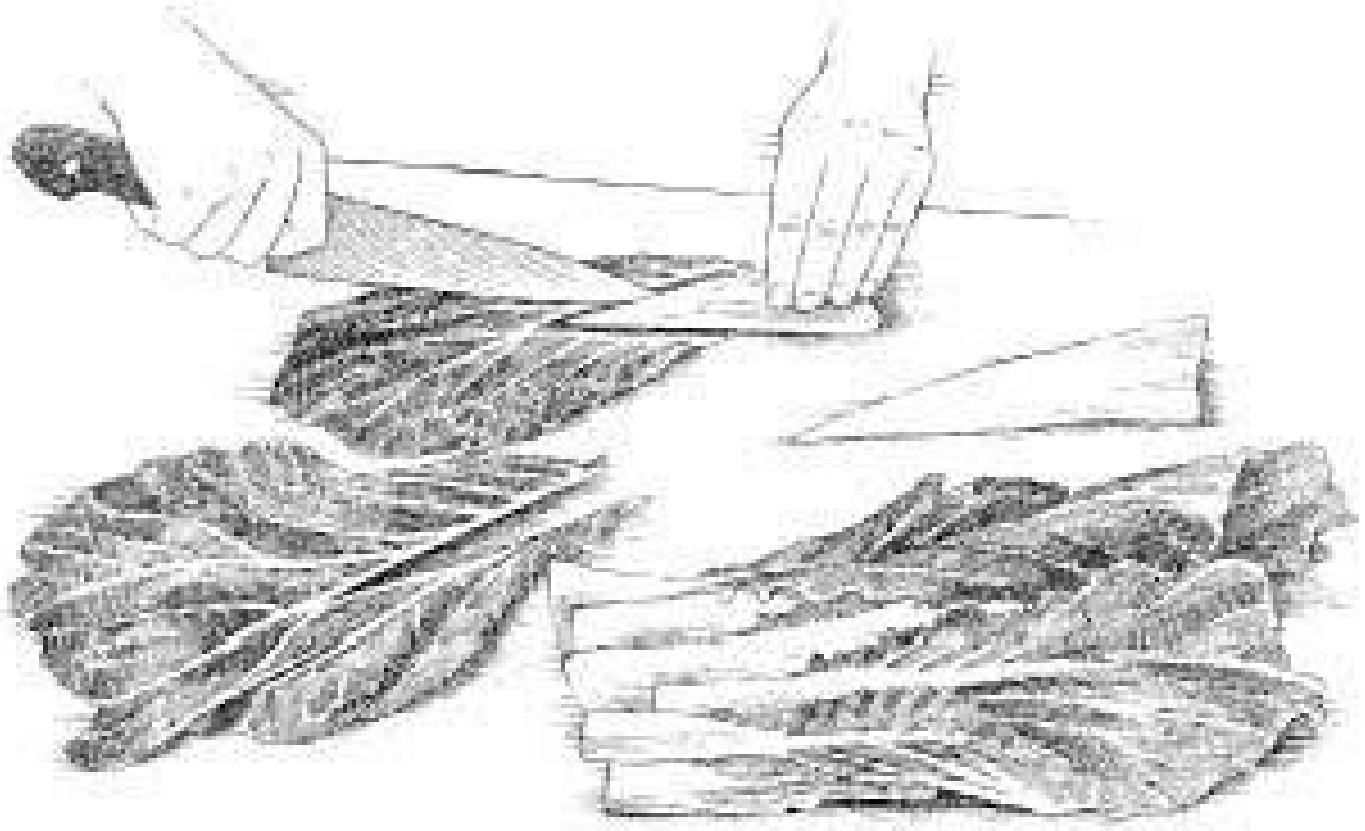

Figure 14.
Cut the leafy green portions of the bok choy away from the stalk.

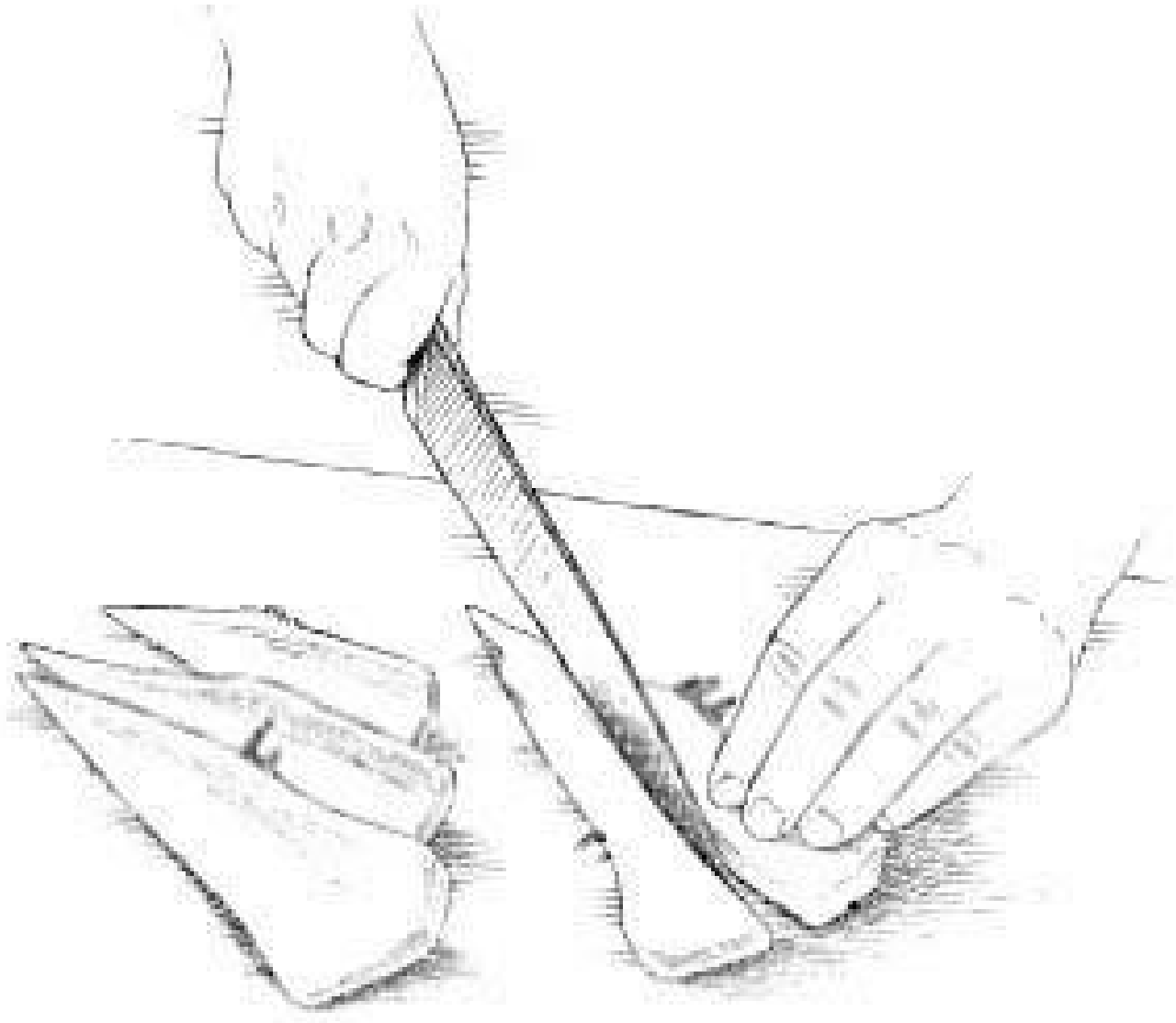

Figure 15.
Cut each stalk in half lengthwise and then crosswise into strips $^{1}/_{2}$ inch wide.

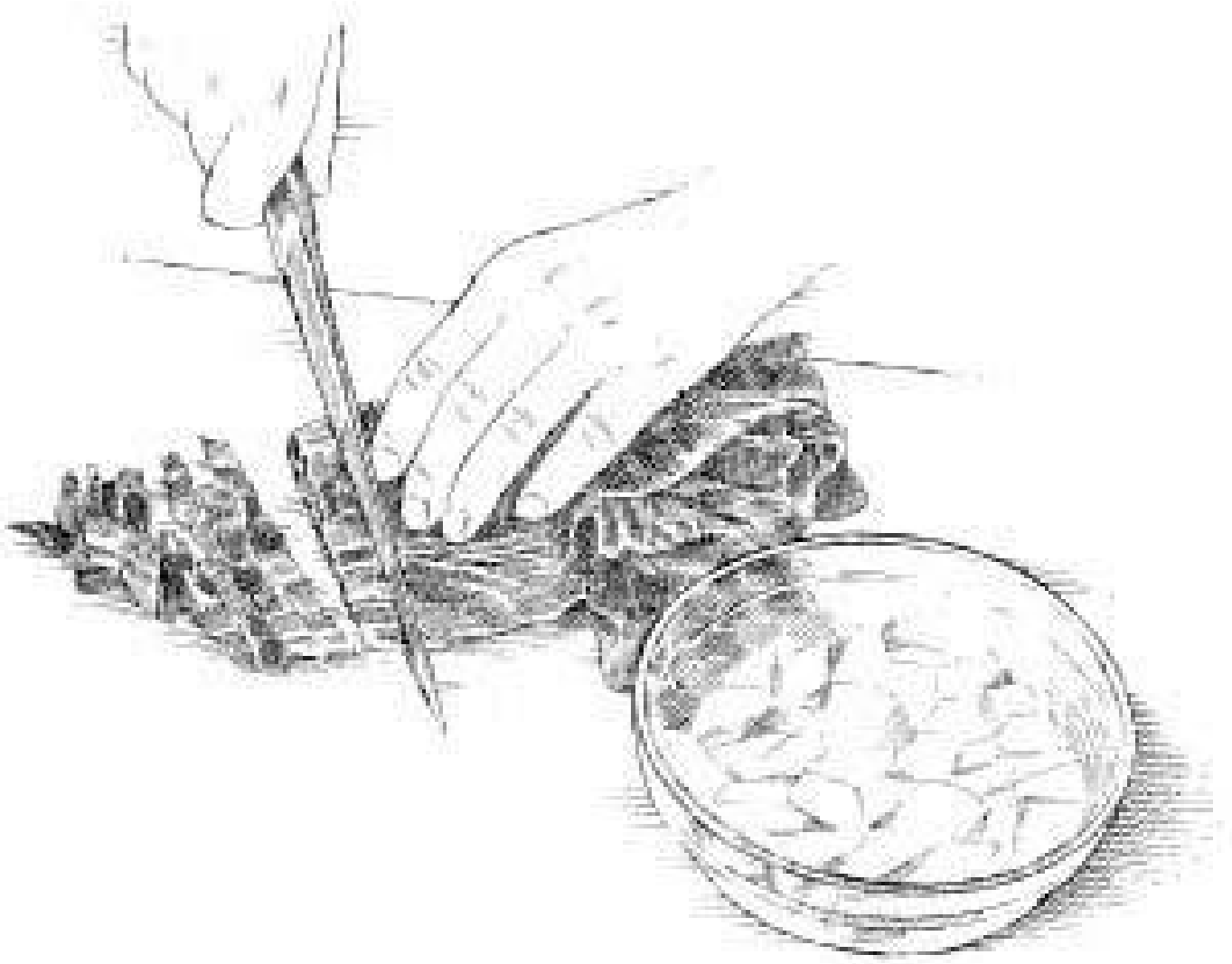

Figure 16.
Stack the leafy greens and then slice them crosswise into thin strips. Keep the sliced stalks and leaves separate.

RICE

AS A SIDE DISH, RICE HELPS STRETCH OUT small portions of highly seasoned stir-fries. Rice can also take center stage when served as a seasoned side dish or light entrée. This chapter examines how to cook plain white rice, Chinese style, as well as how to turn leftover rice into fried rice.

STICKY WHITE RICE

In China (and much of Asia), rice is cooked so that the texture is sticky and the grains clump together. This texture is

well suited to eating with chopsticks.

While many cooks assume that Chinese restaurants use a special kind of rice, they do not. Long-grain rice will cook up fluffy or sticky depending on how it is prepared. In Western recipes, once the rice and water come to a boil, the pan is covered and the rice is cooked over low heat. In most Chinese recipes, the rice and water are cooked uncovered until the water level drops below the surface of the rice and small holes form on the surface. At this point, the heat is reduced and the rice finishes cooking in much the same manner as in Western recipes.

The differences in technique have several consequences. It generally takes

about 10 minutes of active boiling for the water level to drop down below the surface of the rice. During this period, the rice is subjected to constant agitation and thus releases more starch. In addition, because the pot is uncovered, water is evaporating, so less water is left in the pot once it is covered.

Our research presented us with two variables for testing: whether or not to rinse the rice before cooking and what should be the ratio of rice to water. While rice is rinsed in many cultures for health reasons, the rice in the United States is quite clean. That said, we wondered if rinsing had some other benefit. The answer is no. We found that

rinsed rice cooked up a tad fluffier than un rinsed rice, which is fine for a pilaf but not recommended when making rice to accompany a Chinese meal. As for the ratio of water to rice, we found that a ratio of 1 cup rice to $1^{1}/_{2}$ cups water worked perfectly.

Sticky White Rice

makes about 6 cups, serving 4 to 6

NOTE: ***This traditional Chinese cooking method yields sticky rice that is easy to eat with chopsticks. This rice closely resembles the plain white rice served at most Chinese restaurants.***

2 cups long-grain rice
3 cups water
$^1/_2$ teaspoon salt

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place rice, water, and salt in medium saucepan set over medium-high heat. Bring water to a boil. Cook, uncovered, until water level drops below top

surface of rice and small holes form in rice, about 10 minutes.

2. Reduce heat to very low, cover, and cook until rice is tender, about 15 minutes longer. Rice is best served immediately, but pan can be taken off heat and set aside, covered, for up to 15 minutes.

FRIED RICE

Fried rice is a Chinese-American restaurant classic. It's also a dish frequently made at home in China. While both traditions start with leftover rice,

they depart in their perspective on soy sauce. Fried rice in China is rarely made with soy sauce, while American restaurant versions often contain so much soy sauce that the rice is dyed brown. In addition to cooking questions—such as the temperature of the rice before frying it, the amount of oil, and the type of pan—we wanted to resolve the flavor issues that we uncovered in our research.

Fried rice should contain separate grains of firm but tender rice. We wondered what would be the best initial temperature for the rice—freshly warm from the pot, room temperature, or cold?

Freshly made rice produced the least desirable results. The individual grains

did not separate, and they were overly tender and mushy. Room-temperature rice was only slightly better. Some grains separated, but overall the rice was still too soft and clumpy. Cold rice worked best in our tests.

Some sources suggest refrigerating the rice in a bowl. Others call for spreading it out on a tray for rapid cooling. The rice is then refrigerated.

We found that spreading the rice out on a baking sheet allows it to dry more quickly and better preserves its flavor and texture. Rice cooled in a bowl was stickier and less flavorful. The next day out of the refrigerator it did not feel as dry as rice that had been stored on a

baking sheet. We did notice that rice cooled on a metal baking sheet could be stained brown from rust on the pan. Lining the pan with a clean kitchen towel prevents any discoloration. We also found that the towel absorbs moisture, which also creates more desirable dry rice. Rice stored this way is best used between 24 and 48 hours after cooking. It's also important to cover rice left this long in the refrigerator to keep it from picking up off flavors from other foods.

As an aside, we tested rice stored in a quart container from a Chinese restaurant. We had excellent results when we used this rice the next day. Our theory is that the standard heavyweight paper Chinese food container allows

some air to penetrate into the rice, which facilitates its drying. At the same time, the container prevents the rice from picking up that hard-to-describe refrigerator taste.

With the preparation of the rice decided, it was time to start testing the frying process. The main issues were the type of pan (nonstick or conventional) and the type and quantity of oil.

A nonstick skillet consistently produced the best results. When using a regular skillet, more oil is needed, and even with more oil the egg (used in most fried rice recipes) may stick. If using a regular skillet, it's best to clean the pan after removing the egg and before

continuing with the recipe.

Tests showed that even when using a nonstick skillet a substantial amount of oil is required. Oil is needed to scramble the egg, to cook the protein (we include recipes that use pork, chicken, or shrimp), and to cook and coat the vegetables. We ended up using close to $^1/_4$ cup of oil, depending on the components of the dish. If you skimp on the oil, the texture of the dish suffers, sticking is likely, and the rice will be mushy.

We next turned to the issue of seasonings. Although soy sauce is the most obvious seasoning in the fried rice prepared at Chinese-American

restaurants, we found that salt enlivens fried rice without overpowering other ingredients. We decided to make salt part of the master recipe and leave soy for a variation. Sesame oil, ginger, and curry are examples of seasonings that, when used in moderation, create interesting and flavorful variations; none of these was listed as an ingredient in the basic fried rice recipes we reviewed.

The final issue concerned the other main ingredients in fried rice—namely, egg, vegetables, and proteins.

Eggs are a must. To make sure the egg is perfectly cooked, we found it best to cook it first and to remove it from the pan before cooking the other ingredients.

The technique of scrambling it over medium heat, using a wooden spatula to break it into small pieces, and cooking it until golden and aromatic yields pieces that will be flavorful and evenly distributed in the rice.

For a basic stir-fry, the choice of vegetables is simple. Tradition calls for scallions, peas, and sprouts, and we liked all of these ingredients. It took more time to figure out the order in which to add the rice and vegetables to the pan. When cooked first in oil by itself, the rice came out beautifully, each grain separate and the texture perfect. When the vegetables were added, though, the moisture they gave off caused

the rice to soften and clump. We were surprised to learn that it's best to cook the vegetables first in a good amount of oil, which in turn lubricates the rice and facilitates a pleasing texture of all ingredients.

Our basic recipe contains only egg for protein. Most Americans will prefer one of the heartier variations made with shrimp, chicken, or pork. We found that raw protein, such as shrimp or scallops, is best cooked before the egg and then removed from the pan. The protein can be added back to the rice later, along with the cooked egg.

Although you can cook protein for the purpose of using it in fried rice, the beauty of this dish is its capacity for

leftovers. For best results when using cooked protein, treat it like a vegetable. The protein and the rice will then be coated with oil and have the most pleasing texture.

Master Recipe

Fried Rice

serves 4

NOTE: ***In China, soy sauce is never used in fried rice. This master recipe is authentic in being delicately flavored with salt. The rice remains white, and the other ingredients are vibrant and fresh tasting. Try the pork variation for a more American rendition; it includes soy, which flavors and colors the rice. Although we recommend that you cool and store the rice as directed below, you can use***

leftover rice that has been stored in an airtight container. It will cook up mushier and with more clumps than rice cooled on a towel-lined baking sheet.

5 cups cooked white rice, cooled to room temperature on towel-lined baking sheet, covered, and refrigerated

$3^1/_2$ tablespoons peanut oil

2 large eggs, lightly beaten

4 medium scallions, thinly sliced

1 cup frozen peas, thawed

1 teaspoon salt

1 cup mung bean sprouts

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Separate rice with fingers to break up large clumps.

2. Heat a 12-or 14-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat for 2 minutes. Add $1^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons oil and swirl so that it coats bottom of pan evenly. Add eggs and cook until lightly set; then use a wooden or heatproof plastic spatula to scramble and break into small pieces. Cook until eggs are light golden brown and aromatic, about 3 minutes. Scrape eggs into bowl and set aside.

3. Raise heat to high and let pan come

back up to temperature, 1 to 2 minutes. When hot, add remaining 2 tablespoons oil and swirl to coat bottom of pan evenly. Add scallions and peas and stir-fry for 1 minute. Add rice and salt. Use spatula to break up any lumps and stir-fry until rice is hot, about 3 minutes. Add sprouts and eggs, mix well to blend, and heat through, about 1 minute. Serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Pork Fried Rice

Mix together $1\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons soy sauce, 1 tablespoon rice wine, and 1 teaspoon Asian sesame oil in small bowl and set aside. Follow master recipe through step

2. Heat pan as directed in step 3 and add 1 tablespoon peanut oil. Stir-fry 4 ounces finely diced cooked pork or ham for 1 minute. Add $1\,^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons more oil and continue with recipe. Omit salt and add soy mixture with eggs and sprouts.

Shrimp Fried Rice

Toss $^{1}/_{2}$ pound small, peeled shrimp with 1 tablespoon rice wine, 1 teaspoon Asian sesame oil, 1 teaspoon minced fresh ginger, and $^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon soy sauce in medium bowl. Set aside for 15 minutes, tossing once or twice. Before cooking eggs, heat 1 tablespoon peanut oil over medium-high heat in skillet.

Add shrimp and cook until bright pink, 1 to 2 minutes. Transfer cooked shrimp and all liquid to clean bowl and wipe out skillet with paper towel. Heat $1^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons more oil in empty skillet, cook egg, and proceed with master recipe as directed. Add shrimp back to pan with eggs in step 3.

Curried Chicken Fried Rice

Omit eggs and scallions in master recipe. Finely dice 1 medium onion, 1 small red bell pepper, and 4 ounces cooked chicken. Heat pan as directed. Add 2 tablespoons peanut oil and stir-fry onion over high heat until softened, about 2 minutes. Add peppers and cook

for 2 minutes more. Add 2 teaspoons curry powder; stir-fry for 10 seconds or until fragrant. Add 1 tablespoon more peanut oil along with chicken and stir-fry for 1 minute. Add peas and continue with master recipe.

NOODLES

FRESH CHINESE EGG NOODLES ARE SIMILAR TO fresh Italian pasta. Both are bright yellow and made with eggs and wheat. Chinese noodles are made with a different kind of wheat flour that yields firmer noodles when cooked. Chinese egg noodles are often round, not flat. They can be boiled and then either stir-fried to make lo mein or chilled and sauced to make cold sesame noodles.

LO MEIN

When lo mein is good, the noodles are

well seasoned and slippery but not greasy. The bits of vegetable and protein add interest but do not overwhelm the noodles. Just as often, though, lo mein is oily or the sauce is one-dimensional. Our goals were simple: figure out how to deal with the noodles (what kind, how to cook, how to drain and rinse, how to stir-fry) and then determine how to add flavor through the sauce.

Because lo mein noodles should be separate and soft, we thought it might be necessary to boil them past the al dente stage. But noodles boiled too long became mushy when stir-fried. In the end, we had better luck with noodles boiled just short of al dente. The noodles finish cooking while being stir-fried.

So how long should you cook noodles destined for use in lo mein? Because the time required to cook until not quite tender differs depending on the type of noodle, we found it best to taste the noodles and stop the cooking process 30 seconds to 1 minute before they reached al dente. The quickest and easiest way to stop cooking is to rinse the drained noodles under cold running water. This also washes off extra starch.

Next we wanted to find out if there is an advantage to tossing the rinsed noodles in oil. As it turned out, there are two. First, it helps to keep the noodles from sticking together before stir-frying —an issue that becomes more

problematic the longer the noodles are held. (Our tests showed that noodles could be held in the refrigerator for up to a day before stir-frying.) Second, the oil enhances the flavor and texture of the finished dish. We had seen recipes that called for peanut and sesame oil. In our tests, we preferred sesame oil for its more potent flavor.

Up until this point, we had been using fresh Chinese egg noodles. As expected, frozen Chinese egg noodles worked fine as long as we took the noodles straight from the freezer (defrosting caused them to stick together and become gummy) and added two minutes to the cooking time.

Since many home cooks don't have

access to fresh Chinese noodles, we wanted to find an alternative. The dried Chinese noodles sold in many supermarkets were terrible. Tasters found these noodles to be too thin for use in lo mein and their texture overly soft.

Dried Italian pasta was not much better. When cooked until al dente, the noodles were much too springy for use in lo mein. They were chewy rather than soft. Overcooking helped somewhat, but this was an imperfect solution.

Fresh Italian pasta, bought at the supermarket, produced much better results. In fact, lo mein made with Contadina fresh linguine was praised by tasters. It was much softer than dried

pasta, and its bright color was more authentic. We tried fresh spaghetti but found that the thicker, flatter linguine noodle worked (and looked) best.

With the noodle component of the dish under control, we moved on to the issue of the sauce. Our goal was to use minimal ingredients to get maximum flavor. Color was another important consideration, as tasters expressed a preference for lo mein with a rich, dark brown color.

Chicken broth and shiitake mushroom soaking liquid worked equally well as the primary liquid in the sauce and added subtle flavor. In terms of convenience, chicken broth is the logical choice for the master recipe and all

variations with animal protein. Shiitake soaking liquid is perfect for vegetarian lo mein, where the mushrooms add a much-needed chewy, meaty texture.

Soy sauce is a must for flavor, color, and authenticity. Many sources suggested using a thick, reduced, sweetened soy sauce product. While we liked thick soy sauce for its effect on color, the strong, salty but sweet flavor it contributed was not well liked.

Oyster sauce was another matter. As with the thick soy sauce, just two tablespoons colored the noodles beautifully. This time, though, tasters loved the flavor.

Pork is the most common protein used

in lo mein (although other proteins work well). We found slightly fattier meat to be preferable. Meat from a pork chop was better than tenderloin.

Master Recipe

Pork Lo Mein

serves 4

NOTE: ***Noodles tossed with some vegetables and protein make a delicious side dish for a more involved meal or a quick entrée for a weeknight supper. The key is to slightly undercook the noodles when they are first boiled and to cut the vegetables into thin strips. If fresh Chinese noodles are not available, substitute fresh Italian linguine and cook it for 1 to 2 minutes. Chopsticks or tongs (be***

careful not to scratch the pan bottom) help to combine the noodles with the other ingredients. Simply lift the noodles high off the pan, blending the components as you do so.

1 tablespoon salt

$^{3}/_{4}$ pound fresh Chinese egg noodles

$1^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons Asian sesame oil

1 tablespoon dry sherry

2 tablespoons soy sauce

2 center-cut boneless pork chops (about 4 ounces each and $^{1}/_{2}$ inch thick, fat trimmed)

$^{1}/_{4}$ cup canned chicken broth

2 tablespoons oyster sauce

3 tablespoons peanut oil

1 small carrot, grated (about $^1/_2$ cup)

$^1/_4$ small head napa cabbage, cored and shredded (about 2 cups)

4 scallions, greens only, cut into 1-inch pieces

1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger

1 medium garlic clove, minced

1 cup mung bean sprouts

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Bring 6 quarts water to a boil in large pot. Add salt and noodles, stir to

separate, and cook until noodles are slightly underdone, 2 to 3 minutes. Drain thoroughly, rinse in cold water, and drain again. Toss noodles with sesame oil in large bowl. (Noodles can be covered and refrigerated for up to 1 day.)

2. Mix sherry and 1 tablespoon soy sauce together in small bowl. Slice meat crosswise against the grain into thin strips about $1^1/_2$ inches long. Place in bowl and marinate for at least 10 minutes.

3. Mix chicken broth with oyster sauce

and remaining tablespoon soy sauce in small bowl; set aside.

4. Heat a 12-or 14-inch nonstick skillet over high heat for 3 minutes. Add 1 tablespoon peanut oil and swirl so that oil coats bottom of pan evenly. Add pork and stir-fry until seared and three-quarters cooked, about 2 minutes. Scrape pork and all liquid into clean bowl, cover, and set aside. Carefully wipe out skillet with paper towel.

5. Let pan come back up to temperature, 1 to 2 minutes. When hot, add 1 tablespoon oil and swirl to coat bottom

of pan evenly. Add carrot and cabbage and stir-fry until wilted, 1 to 2 minutes. Clear center of pan and add scallions, ginger, garlic, and remaining tablespoon of oil. Cook until fragrant, about 10 seconds, stir into the vegetables, and stir-fry 20 seconds off heat.

6. Add noodles, pork, sprouts, and chicken broth mixture to pan. Stir-fry and toss to combine all ingredients until noodles are heated through, 1 to 2 minutes. Serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Beef and Pepper Lo Mein

Follow master recipe, substituting 8 ounces flank steak, cut into thin strips (see figures 12 and 13), for pork. Reduce stir-frying time in step 4 to 1 minute and place cooked steak in strainer to drain off excess juice. Replace carrot with $^{1}/_{2}$ small red bell pepper cut into thin strips.

Shrimp and Snow Pea Lo Mein

Follow master recipe, substituting 8 ounces small, peeled shrimp for pork. Reduce stir-frying time in step 4 to 1 to 2 minutes. Replace carrot with 24 snow peas, ends and strings trimmed.

Vegetable Lo Mein

Place 8 dried shiitake mushrooms in small bowl, cover with hot water, and soak until softened, about 20 minutes. Carefully lift shiitake from water, leaving the grit in the bottom of the bowl. Pour off $^{1}/_{4}$ cup of soaking liquid and substitute for chicken broth in master recipe. Trim and discard mushroom stems and slice caps into 1/8-inch strips. Prepare master recipe, omitting pork and all of step 2, including sherry. Add an extra tablespoon of soy to mushroom liquid mixture in step 3. Substitute mushroom strips for pork in step 4, leaving them in pan when cooked.

Continue with master recipe, substituting 4 cups shredded bok choy (greens only—see figures 14 and 16) for napa cabbage.

COLD SESAME NOODLES

Cold sesame noodles, a popular item on Chinese restaurant menus, are easy to make at home. The noodles are simply boiled, oiled, chilled, and then tossed with a smooth dressing.

As we found with lo mein, traditional recipes call for fresh Chinese egg noodles, but we wanted to see if other noodles could be successfully substituted. Chinese sesame paste is a traditional component of the sauce.

Since it is available only in Asian food stores, we wondered how tahini (a Middle Eastern sesame paste sold in most supermarkets) or peanut butter would perform.

As we expected, fresh Chinese egg noodles performed best in this dish, cooking up tender but not mushy. In fact, we soon realized that this soft texture is a major difference between Chinese and Western pasta dishes, where a springier, chewier texture is prized. Frozen Chinese egg noodles, which require an extra two minutes of cooking time, worked well, too.

We wondered if fresh Italian pasta, which served as a good substitute for fresh Chinese noodles in lo mein, would

also do the job here. Our tests initially looked promising, but the noodles continued to absorb sauce as they sat, eventually became very mushy. In fact, noodles that were pretty good at the outset collapsed under the weight of the sauce after just 10 minutes.

This time dried Italian pasta—spaghetti—eventually proved to be the best substitute. When cooked until al dente, the pasta did not absorb the sauce as well as fresh egg noodles and its texture was too springy. Somewhat surprisingly, when we overcooked dried Italian spaghetti (it was cooked a full 15 minutes), we had much better results. Now the pasta was soft, just like fresh

Chinese egg noodles. Because dried spaghetti swells much more than fresh pasta, we found we needed a smaller amount of spaghetti than Chinese noodles to achieve the same volume of cooked noodles.

Our success with dried Chinese noodles varied by brand. When cooked till soft, the noodles in some brands became mushy or even fell apart when sauced. We eventually found some brands that held their shape better, but since all brands of dried spaghetti worked fine, we recommend that you stick with Italian pasta as a substitute for fresh Chinese egg noodles in this dish.

In our testing of the sauce, we substituted both tahini and peanut butter

for Chinese sesame paste and found that peanut butter contributed a nuttier flavor that comes closer to that of Chinese sesame paste. Surprisingly, tasters reported that the sauce made with peanut butter tasted "nutty" but did not detect a "peanuty" flavor. Tahini has a nice creamy texture, but the nut flavor is rather muted. Choose a smooth peanut butter made without sugar (look for a natural brand) for the best results.

A wide array of seasonings were called for in the sesame noodle recipes we looked at, including ginger, garlic, sake, coriander, hoisin sauce, soy sauce, honey, Szechuan pepper, and balsamic vinegar. Ginger and garlic were the most

common, but we found their flavors too harsh when raw. Other seasonings, such as hoisin sauce and Szechuan pepper, competed with the nut flavor. In the end, we chose very simple seasonings to round out the flavors: soy sauce to add a salty note, some rice vinegar for acidity, a little hot sauce for heat, and some sugar to keep everything in balance.

Water is used to thin the sauce, and hot is preferable to cold for its ability to release more flavor. We found it best to let the sauce rest at room temperature for 30 minutes to allow flavors to develop and to ensure that the sugar dissolves.

We found that mixing the pasta with the sauce and then refrigerating for any amount of time results in a rather dry and

sticky mixture, no matter how much oil and water the sauce contains. It is best to mix the sauce with the chilled and oiled pasta just before serving to ensure the creamiest result.

Master Recipe

Cold Sesame Noodles

serves 4 to 6

NOTE: ***Smooth peanut butter (use a natural brand without added sugar) is a better substitute for difficult-to-find Chinese sesame paste than the somewhat bland Middle Eastern—style tahini. But if you can find real Chinese sesame paste, by all means use it. We like some heat in the sauce (it helps to cut the richness), but you can omit the hot sauce if you prefer. Toasting the sesame seeds in a dry***

skillet until they achieve a rich golden color will boost their flavor.

1 tablespoon salt

1 pound fresh Chinese egg noodles (the width of spaghetti) or 3/4 pound dried Italian spaghetti

2 tablespoons Asian sesame oil

1/2 cup smooth natural peanut butter

3 tablespoons soy sauce

1 tablespoon sugar

1 tablespoon rice vinegar

1/2 teaspoon hot sauce, such as chili paste or Tabasco, or more to taste

1/2 cup hot water, or more

4 scallions, white and light green parts, finely chopped

2 tablespoons sesame seeds, toasted

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Bring 6 quarts water to a boil in large pot. Add salt and noodles and cook until noodles are just tender, 3 to 4 minutes. (If using dried Italian spaghetti, cook noodles until quite soft, about 15 minutes.) Drain thoroughly and toss with oil. Cool to room temperature. Cover and refrigerate until ready to use, at least 2 hours and up to 1 day.

2. Place peanut butter, soy sauce, sugar, vinegar, and hot sauce in blender or food processor. Process until smooth. With motor running, add water, 1 tablespoon at a time, until sauce is the consistency of heavy cream. Scrape sauce into large bowl and set aside for 30 minutes to allow flavors to blend. (Can be covered and set aside for several hours. Stir in hot water, a tablespoon at a time, if sauce thickens.)

3. When ready to serve, separate noodles with your fingers and then toss them with peanut sauce and scallions. Sprinkle with sesame seeds and serve

immediately.

Cold Sesame Noodles with Chicken and Vegetables

serves 4 as a main course

NOTE: ***The addition of chicken and fresh vegetables makes this a good main dish choice in warm weather. It is assembled in the fashion of a composed salad, with the vegetables and roasted chicken arranged on top of the noodles.***

Salt

1 pound fresh Chinese egg noodles (the width of spaghetti) or $^{3}/_{4}$ pound dried Italian spaghetti

2 tablespoons Asian sesame oil

1 whole chicken breast (bone in, skin on), about 3/4 pound

1 tablespoon vegetable oil

3/4 cup smooth natural peanut butter

4 1/2 tablespoons soy sauce

1 1/2 tablespoons sugar

1 1/2 tablespoons rice vinegar

3/4 teaspoon hot sauce, such as chili paste or Tabasco, or more to taste

3/4 cup hot water, or more

2 medium cucumbers

1/2 medium carrot, peeled

1/2 medium red bell pepper, cored, seeded, and cut into thin strips

4 scallions, white and light green parts, finely chopped

2 tablespoons sesame seeds, toasted

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Bring 6 quarts water to a boil in large pot. Add 1 tablespoon salt and noodles and cook until noodles are just tender, 3 to 4 minutes. (If using dried Italian spaghetti, cook noodles until quite soft, about 15 minutes.) Drain thoroughly and toss with sesame oil. Cool to room temperature. Cover and refrigerate until

ready to use, at least 2 hours and up to 1 day.

2. Meanwhile, preheat oven to 400 degrees. Rub chicken with vegetable oil and sprinkle generously with salt and place in roasting pan. Roast until meat thermometer inserted into thickest part of breast registers 160 degrees, 35 to 40 minutes. Cool to room temperature, remove skin, and shred meat into bite-sized pieces.

3. Place peanut butter, soy sauce, sugar, vinegar, and hot sauce in blender or food processor. Process until smooth. With

motor running, add water, 1 tablespoon at a time, until sauce is the consistency of heavy cream. Scrape sauce into large bowl and set aside for 30 minutes to allow flavors to blend. (Can be covered and set aside for several hours. Stir in hot water, a tablespoon at a time, if sauce thickens.)

4. Peel cucumbers and halve lengthwise. Use spoon to scoop out and discard seeds. Using large holes of a box grater, grate cucumbers and then squeeze dry in clean kitchen towel. Grate carrot, and prepare bell pepper.

5. When ready to serve, separate noodles with your fingers and then toss them with $1^{1}/_{4}$ cups peanut sauce and scallions. Arrange noodles on large platter or individual plates. Toss cucumber, carrot, and bell pepper together and arrange on top of noodles. Pile chicken in center. Drizzle remaining sauce over chicken and vegetables and sprinkle with sesame seeds. Serve immediately.

HOW TO MAKE PIZZA

Pizza Basics

Doughs and Sauces

Thin-Crust Pizza

Deep-Dish Pizza

Grilled Pizza

PIZZA BASICS

PIZZA MAY BE CALLED FAST FOOD, BUT YOU'VE got plenty to do before you can get it in the oven. There's dough to knead, let rise, and stretch; tomato sauce to make; cheese to grate; and toppings to prepare. Little wonder so many people have surrendered to shredded mozzarella and premade dough.

The problem, of course, is that these shortcuts come with a price: an extreme drop in quality. Homemade pizza is superb. Our goal was to find as many shortcuts as possible to streamline the

preparation of the various components.

We also wanted to develop a variety of recipes for different kinds of pizza. Although pizza has its origins in Italy, it has become a thoroughly American dish, with many regional differences. Chapter three focuses on thin-crust pizza, which is king in New York and other eastern pizza capitals; Chapter four covers deep-dish or Chicago-style pan pizza; and Chapter five is devoted to grilled pizza, first popularized in California, but now common throughout the country.

While these three kinds of pizza all rely on similar doughs and sauces, the techniques for shaping and baking each style of pizza are really quite different. Listed below are a number of pieces of

equipment you will use throughout this book.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

INSTANT READ THERMOMETER. Successful dough starts with water at the proper temperature. An instant-read thermometer, preferably a digital one with a quick response time and easy-to-read display, guarantees accurate readings.

FOOD PROCESSOR. Although doughs can be kneaded by hand or in a standing mixer, we find that a large-capacity food processor does the job quickly and efficiently. When choosing a food

processor, look for a model with an eleven-cup workbowl (smaller models cannot knead a dough with four cups of flour) and a heavy base (at least ten pounds) that will prevent the food processor from jumping across the counter as the blade spins through the thick dough.

BAKING SHEETS AND PEELS. For thin-crust pizza, we like to transfer stretched dough to a peel that has been dusted with semolina. The long handle on the peel makes it easy to slide the dough onto tiles or a stone in a hot oven. Although a rimless metal baking sheet can be used in this fashion, the lack of a handle puts

your hands that much closer to the oven heat.

When shopping for a pizza peel, note that there are two choices. Aluminum peels with heat-resistant wooden handles are probably the better bet because they can be washed and cleaned easily. Wooden peels can mildew when washed so it's best just to wipe them clean. Either way, make sure your peel measures at least sixteen inches across.

For grilled pizzas, we like to put stretched dough rounds on a rimless baking sheet or aluminum peel that has been dusted with flour. We do not feel comfortable placing a wooden peel so close to an open fire.

BAKING TILES OR STONE. If you like thin-crust pizza, we recommend you invest $15 or $20 to line the bottom rack of your oven with unglazed quarry tiles made of terra-cotta. These porous tiles come in six-inch squares and can be cut at a tile store to fit your oven rack perfectly. Look for one-half-inch-thick tiles.

A large rectangular pizza stone is also a good option. The chief drawback here is size. In most home ovens, you can fit two medium pizzas on a tile-lined rack. However, most pizza stones can only fit one pizza at a time. If using a stone, take care when sliding the pizza into the

oven. You don't want part of the pizza to hang off the stone, dumping toppings onto the oven floor.

DEEP-DISH PIZZA PAN. If you like deep-dish pizza, we recommend buying a fourteen-inch round metal pan that is two inches deep. We tested shiny and dark pans, and both browned the crust equally well.

LONG-HANDLED GRILL TOOLS. Grilling pizza over a hot fire can be tricky. Tongs with long, heat-resistant handles are essential. A fork (for pricking any bubbles that form in the crust) and brush

(for painting on oil) with long, heat-resistant handles are also worth owning.

PIZZA WHEEL. A pizza wheel will quickly turn a piping hot pizza into wedges or slices ready to eat. Although a pizza wheel looks like a pastry wheel, it should have a much stronger handle that is offset from a much stronger blade to provide the leverage necessary to cut through thick crusts. Make sure the cutting wheel is large enough (four inches is good) to get through a deep-dish pizza.

DOUGHS AND SAUCES

THE DOUGH IS PROBABLY THE TRICKIEST part of pizza making at home. While pizza dough is nothing more than bread dough with oil added for softness and suppleness, we found in our testing that minor changes in the ingredients list can yield dramatically different results.

Our goal in testing was threefold. We wanted to develop a recipe that was simple to put together; the dough had to be easy to shape and stretch; and the crust needed to bake up properly: crisp and chewy (but not tough and leathery)

for thin-crust and grilled pizzas; tender and chewy for deep-dish pizza, with a lighter, more open crumb.

After some initial tests, it was clear that bread flour delivers the best texture for thin-crust and grilled pizzas. Bread flour makes pizza crust that is chewy and crisp. Unbleached all-purpose flour could be used in a pinch, but the resulting crust is less crisp.

When it comes to deep-dish pizza, we prefer all-purpose flour. We found that unbleached all-purpose flour, with its lower protein content, makes the dough softer with a more breadlike chew than the same dough made with bread flour. To add softness and suppleness, we more than doubled the amount of oil in

this dough.

The second key to perfect crust is water. We found that using more water makes the dough softer and more elastic. It stretches more easily than a stiffer, harder dough with less water. We prefer to jump-start the yeast in a little warm water for five minutes. We then add more room-temperature water and oil.

When it comes to combining the dry ingredients (flour and salt) with the wet ingredients, the food processor is our first choice. The liquid gets evenly incorporated into the dry ingredients, and the blade kneads the dough in just thirty seconds. Of course, the dough can be kneaded by hand or with a standing

mixer. If making the dough by hand, resist the temptation to add a lot of flour as you knead.

It is possible to flavor pizza dough (we offer several variations) or to change the rising time by using less yeast and/or refrigerating the dough. This way, dough can be made the night before or in the morning and ready when you need it for dinner. We also have developed a quick dough for thin-crust pizza that is ready for the oven in one hour. Keep the following tips in mind when making pizza dough.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT FLOUR. Bread flour makes crisp crusts and is the perfect

choice for thin-crust pizza or grilled pizza, which is also fairly thin. All-purpose flour makes a soft, chewy, more breadlike crust, ideal for deep-dish pizza.

CHANGE THE FLAVOR. For a change of pace, it is easy to alter the flavor of the crust. Add a little semolina or cornmeal to the dough. The results are similar although the semolina makes a slightly lighter and crisper crust. Whole wheat flour gives pizza crust a hearty flavor but may slow down the rising time a bit. Garlic and herbs will add flavor to any dough but are especially welcome in a grilled pizza because the toppings are so

light.

KEEP IT COVERED. Use plastic wrap to cover the oiled bowl with the rising dough. The tight seal offered by plastic wrap keeps the dough moist and protects it from drafts. We reserve the traditional damp cloth for when the dough has been divided into balls and is waiting to be stretched out.

LET IT RISE AT YOUR OWN PACE. Decreasing the yeast slows down the rising time, making it possible to mix dough in the morning and then shape it at dinnertime. You may also chill the dough

to retard development of the yeast, allowing the dough to be refrigerated overnight and then to rise during the day and be shaped at dinnertime.

GIVE IT A REST. In order to stretch dough to its maximum diameter, let it rest one or two times during the shaping process. Once you feel some resistance from the dough, cover it with a damp cloth, and wait five minutes before going at it again. We find that fingertips and hands do a better job of stretching dough than a rolling pin, which presses out air from the risen dough and makes it tough. Our low-tech method is also superior to flipping dough into the air and other silly

directions that may work in a pizza parlor but can cause disaster at home.

FREEZE LEFTOVER DOUGH. Even if baking just one medium pizza, make a full dough recipe. After the dough has risen and been divided, place the extra dough in an airtight container and freeze it for up to several weeks. Defrost and stretch the dough when desired.

Master Recipe

Basic Pizza Dough

NOTE: ***We find that the food processor is the best tool for making pizza dough. However, you can knead this dough by hand or in a standing mixer. See figures 1–8, for more information on the dough-making process. Note that the flavor variations on chapter two can be used interchangeably with the time and kneading variations. For instance, you can make 8-Hour Cornmeal Pizza Dough and knead it by hand if you like.***

1/2 cup warm water, at about 105 degrees

1 envelope (2 1/4 teaspoons) active dry yeast

1 1/4 cups water, at room temperature

2 tablespoons olive oil

4 cups bread flour, plus extra for dusting hands and work surfaces

1 1/2 teaspoons salt

Vegetable oil or spray for oiling bowl

Master Instructions

1. Measure warm water into 2-cup measuring cup. Sprinkle in yeast; let stand until yeast dissolves and swells, about 5 minutes. Add room-temperature water and oil; stir to combine.

2. Pulse flour and salt in workbowl of large food processor fitted with steel blade to combine. Continue pulsing while pouring liquid ingredients (holding back a few tablespoons) through feed tube. If dough does not readily form into ball, add remaining liquid, and

continue to pulse until ball forms. Process until dough is smooth and elastic, about 30 seconds longer.

3. Dough will be a bit tacky, so use rubber spatula to turn out dough onto lightly floured work surface; knead by hand with a few strokes to form smooth, round ball. Put dough into deep oiled bowl and cover with plastic wrap. Let rise until doubled in size, about 2 hours. Punch dough down and turn out onto lightly floured work surface. Divide, if necessary, and shape as directed in master recipe for thin-crust, deep-dish, or grilled pizza.

VARIATIONS:

To Knead by Hand: Instead of step 2, combine salt and half of flour in deep bowl. Add liquid ingredients and use wooden spoon to combine. Add remaining flour, stirring until cohesive mass forms. Turn dough out onto lightly floured work surface and knead until smooth and elastic, 7 to 8 minutes. Use as little dusting flour as possible while kneading. Form dough into ball, put it into deep oiled bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and proceed with recipe.

To Knead in a Standing Mixer: Instead

of step 2, place flour and salt in deep bowl of standing mixer. With paddle attachment, briefly combine dry ingredients on low speed. Slowly add liquid ingredients and continue to mix on low speed until cohesive mass forms. Stop mixer and replace paddle with dough hook. Knead until dough is smooth and elastic, about 5 minutes. Form dough into ball, put it into deep oiled bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and proceed with recipe.

24-Hour Pizza Dough

Decrease yeast to $^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon. Let covered dough rise in refrigerator for up to 16 hours. Finish rising at room

temperature until doubled in size, 6 to 8 hours.

8-Hour Pizza Dough

Decrease yeast to $^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon. Let covered dough rise at cool room temperature (about 68 degrees) until doubled in size, about 8 hours.

Semolina Pizza Dough

Decrease room-temperature water to 1 cup and replace $^{3}/_{4}$ cup bread flour with equal amount of semolina.

Cornmeal Pizza Dough

Replace $^{3}/_{4}$ cup bread flour with equal amount of cornmeal.

Whole Wheat Pizza Dough

Replace 2 cups bread flour with equal amount of whole wheat flour. Dough may require an extra 30 minutes to double in size while rising.

Garlic-Herb Pizza Dough

Heat 2 tablespoons olive oil in small skillet. Add 4 medium minced garlic cloves and 1 teaspoon minced fresh thyme, oregano, or rosemary leaves. Sauté until garlic is golden, 2 to 3 minutes. Cool and use in place of oil in master recipe.

Deep-Dish Pizza Dough

Reduce yeast to $1^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoons, room-

temperature water to $^{3}/_{4}$ cup, and salt to $1^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoons; use 3 cups unbleached all-purpose flour in place of the 4 cups of bread flour; and increase oil to 3 tablespoons. Knead dough in food processor or by hand, not in standing mixer.

Figure 1.

Measure $^{1}/_{2}$ cup of warm water at about 105 degrees into a 2-cup measuring cup. Sprinkle the yeast over the water and let it stand until swelled, about 5 minutes. Add enough room-temperature

water to equal $1^{3}/_{4}$ cups and then add the oil.

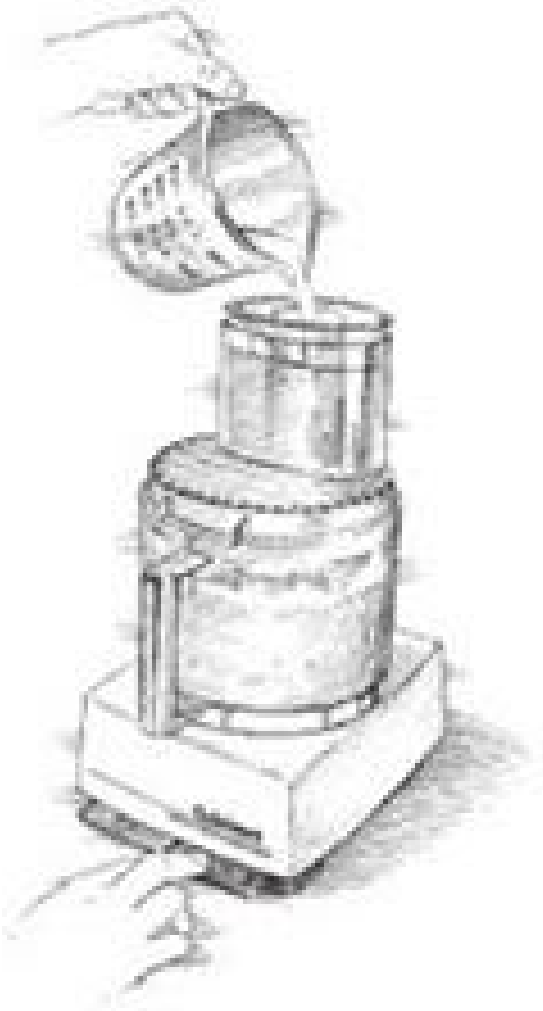

Figure 2.
The food processor is the easiest place to make pizza dough. Pulse the flour and salt to combine them. Then, pour the liquid ingredients through the feed tube while continuing to pulse.

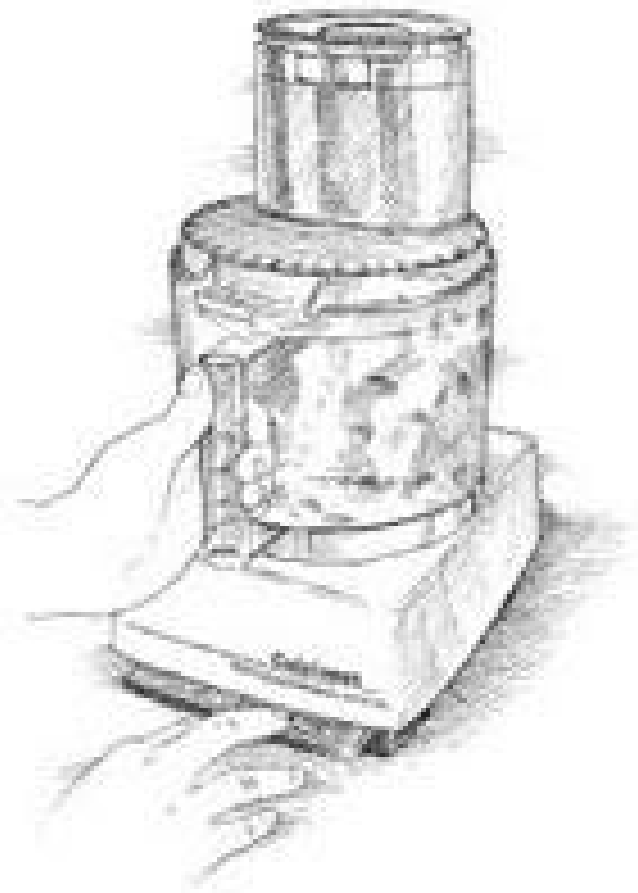

Figure 3.
Once the dough comes together, process it until it is smooth and elastic, about 30 seconds.

Figure 4.
Turn the dough onto a lightly floured work surface and shape it into a smooth, round ball.

Figure 5.
If kneading dough by hand, don't worry about overworking the dough. You can't be too rough. Use your palms for maximum leverage against the dough.

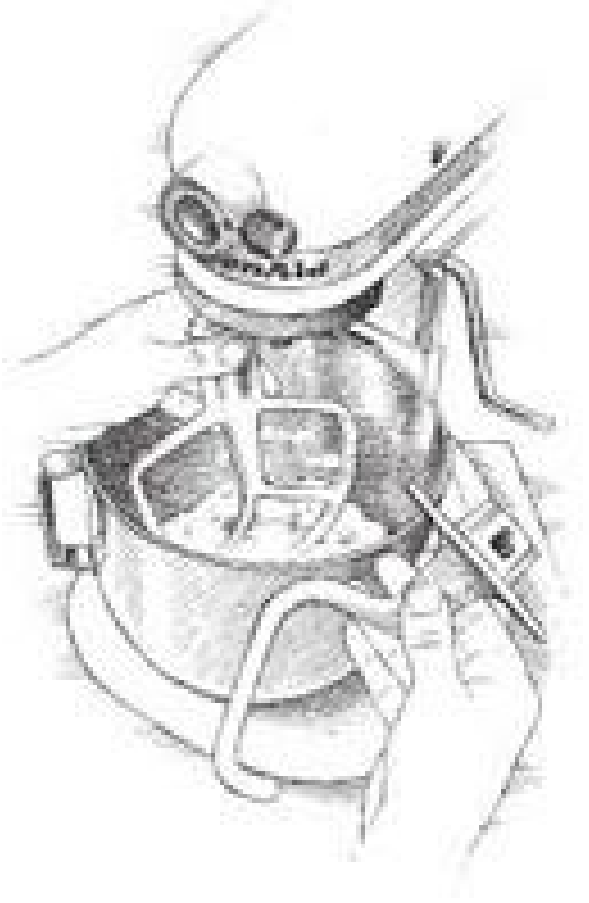

Figure 6.
If kneading dough in a standing mixer, use the paddle attachment to combine the dry and wet ingredients. When the dough forms a cohesive mass, stop the mixer and switch to the dough hook for kneading.

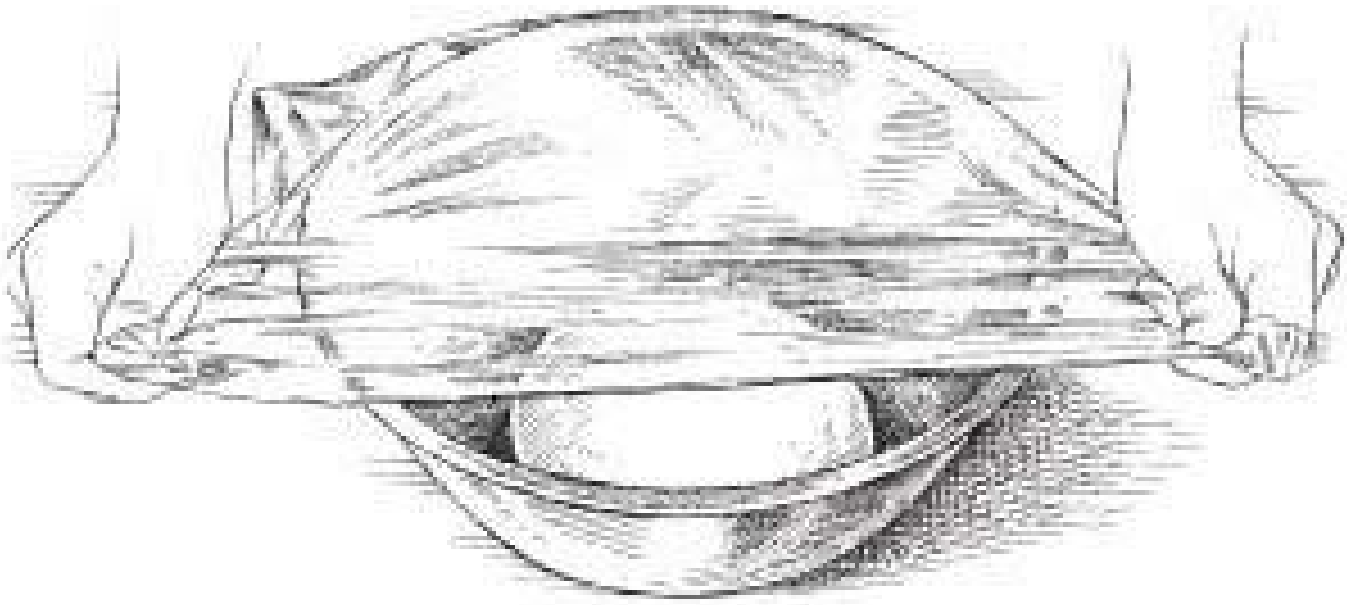

Figure 7.
Plastic wrap forms a tighter seal than a damp towel and keeps the dough moister. Place the kneaded dough into a deep oiled bowl and cover the bowl tightly with the wrap.

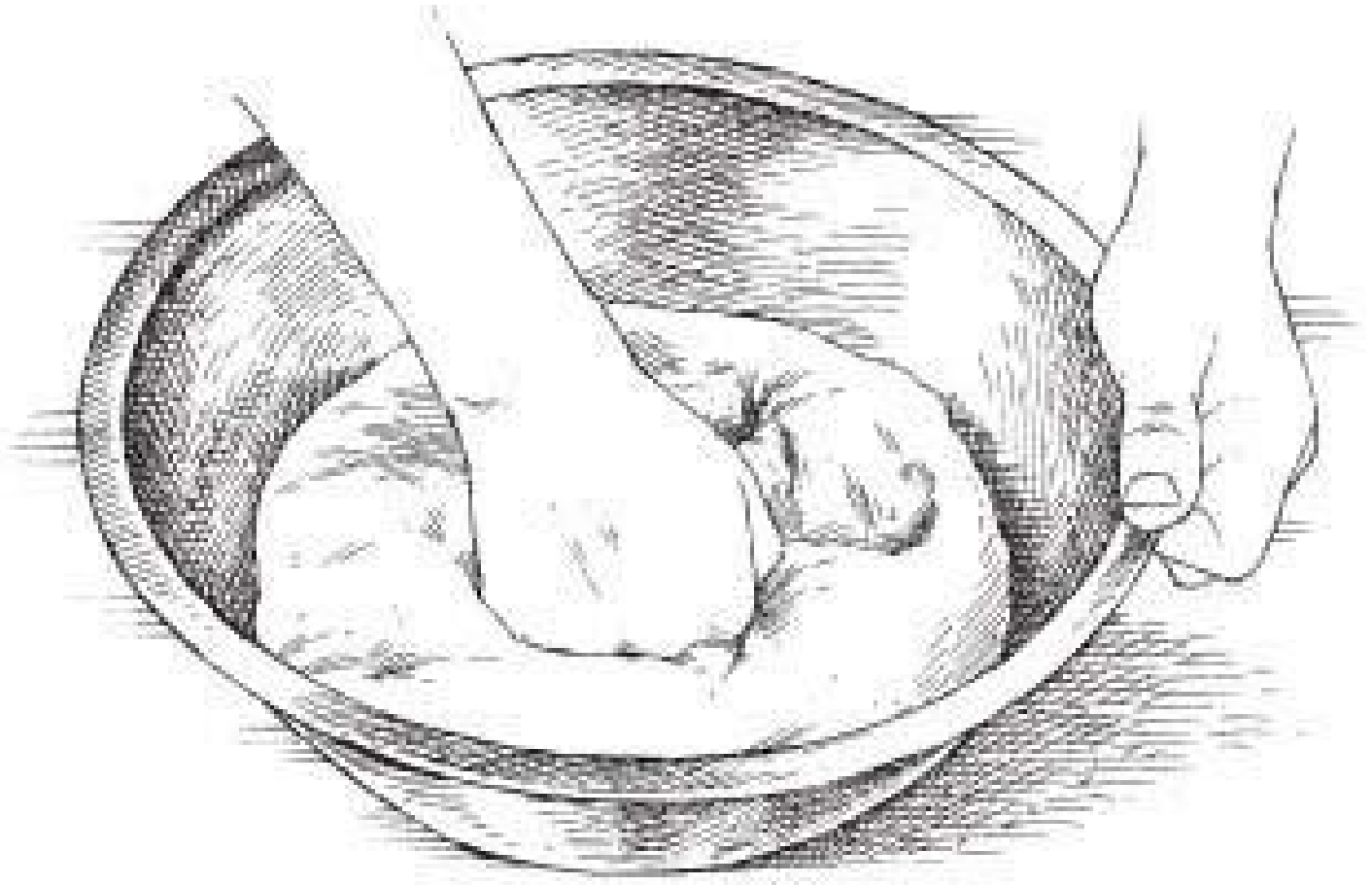

Figure 8.
After the dough has doubled in size (about 2 hours), deflate it by punching down on the dough with your fist. Divide, if necessary, and shape the punched-down dough as directed in the master recipes for thin-crust, deep-dish, or grilled pizza.

75-Minute Pizza Dough

NOTE: ***Although this quick dough does not quite have the same texture as our master recipe dough, it can be made after coming home from work to make thin-crust pizza. Rapid-rise yeast makes it possible to serve pizza in a little more than an hour after walking into the kitchen. The sugar also speeds up the rising process as does putting the dough into a warm oven. Although we prefer bread flour because it delivers a crisper crust, you may use all-purpose flour.***

$1^1/_2$ cups warm water, at about 105 degrees

1 envelope ($2^1/_4$ teaspoons) rapid-rise dry yeast

1 tablespoon sugar

2 tablespoons olive oil

4 cups bread or all-purpose flour, plus extra for dusting hands and work surfaces

$1^1/_2$ teaspoons salt Vegetable oil or spray for oiling bowl

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Set oven to 200 degrees for 10 minutes, then turn oven off.

2. Meanwhile, pour water into workbowl of large food processor.

Sprinkle yeast and sugar over water and pulse twice. Add oil, flour, and salt and process until mixture forms cohesive mass. Dough should be soft and just a bit tacky. (If it is very sticky, add 2 tablespoons flour and pulse briefly. If it is stiff and tight, add 1 tablespoon water and pulse briefly.) Process another 30 seconds.

3. Dough will be a bit tacky, so use rubber spatula to turn out dough onto lightly floured work surface; knead by hand with a few strokes to form smooth, round ball.

4. Put dough into deep lightly oiled bowl and cover with plastic wrap. Place in warm oven. Let rise for 40 minutes or until doubled. Remove from oven, punch dough down, and turn out onto lightly floured work surface. Divide and shape as directed in Master Recipe for Thin-Crust Pizza.

No-Cook Tomato Sauce

NOTE: ***We found that the oven heat "cooks" the tomato sauce when making thin-crust pizza. Simply combine canned crushed tomatoes, oil, garlic, salt, and pepper and then spread the mixture on the dough as needed. When shopping for crushed tomatoes, look for a brand that lists tomatoes, not tomato puree, as the first ingredient. In our testing, we have found that Muir Glen and Progresso are both excellent products. This recipe yields about 3 cups of sauce. Note that because of the lower oven temperature, no-cook tomato sauce will make deep-dish pizza***

soggy; follow the Thick Tomato Sauce variation at right when making deep-dish pizza.

1 28-ounce can crushed tomatoes
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
2 large garlic cloves, minced
Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

Combine tomatoes, oil, garlic, and salt and pepper to taste in medium bowl. Set aside at room temperature for up to several hours. (Sauce may be refrigerated in airtight container for 3 days.)

VARIATIONS:

Spicy No-Cook Tomato Sauce

Add 1 teaspoon hot red pepper flakes.

No-Cook Tomato Sauce with Basil

Add 2 tablespoons minced fresh basil leaves.

Thick Tomato Sauce

Place all ingredients in medium saucepan and simmer until thick and reduced to $2^{1}/_{2}$ cups, about 20 minutes.

THIN-CRUST PIZZA

UNLESS YOU BUILD A BRICK OVEN IN YOUR kitchen, it's not possible to duplicate thin pizzeria-style pies at home. Commercial pizza ovens can reach 800 degrees; home ovens just can't compete. That said, homemade thin-crust pizza is delicious, if different, from the pies you get when you eat out. The crust is chewier, crisper, and not nearly as greasy.

While American pizza parlors weigh down their crusts with pounds of toppings, we prefer to follow the Italian

method and use a restrained hand when topping a thin-crust pizza. This is partly out of necessity (without the extreme heat of a commercial oven, crusts with so much cheese and sauce will be soggy) and partly because we like pizzas this way. After all, you are making homemade bread, and pizza should be about the crust as well as the cheese and sauce.

In our testing, we found that baking thin-crust pizza on tiles or a pizza stone is a must. Thin crusts baked on a pizza screen (a perforated pan) or baking sheet will not be as crisp and chewy. (*See* Tools of the Trade, chapter one, for more information on buying these items.)

Our testing revealed that an oven

temperature of 450 degrees is your best bet. We could not detect any extra crispness in a pizza cooked in a 500-degree oven. What we did notice was a fair amount of smoke in our kitchen. If your oven works well at 500 degrees without smoking, feel free to bake pizzas at this temperature; you will shave a minute or two off the cooking time.

This chapter starts with some simple pizzas that are baked plain and then topped with herb oil, pesto, or cheeses. Pizzas with raw toppings such as fresh tomatoes, prosciutto, and arugula are next, followed by more complex pizzas with cooked meat, vegetable, and seafood toppings.

Keep the following tips in mind when making thin-crust pizza.

DUST PEEL WITH SEMOLINA. With its fine, sandy texture, semolina keeps pizza dough from sticking to peels. Cornmeal can be used, but we find that its coarser texture can make the bottom of the crust a bit gritty.

ADD MELTING CHEESES AT END OF BAKING. To keep soft cheeses like mozzarella moist and lush, we prefer to add them toward the end of the baking time. When added earlier, mozzarella tends to shrivel up and dry out. Adding it

later also gets more impact from less cheese, keeping the fat content to a minimum. Grating cheeses, like Parmesan, may be added at the start or near the end of baking as desired.

BAKING TIMES WILL VARY. Depending on your oven, the type of stone or tiles used, the size of the dough round, and the amount of topping, thin-crust pizzas may be done in as little as five or six minutes or may take as long as twelve minutes. Larger pies with heavier or juicier toppings may sometimes require closer to fifteen minutes. Don't pull a pizza out of the oven until the edge of the crust is golden brown and the toppings are

sizzling.

Master Recipe

Thin-Crust Pizza

NOTE: ***Any of the variations on basic pizza dough (except the deep-dish dough) may be used to make thin-crust pizza. See figures 9–19, for more information on stretching and baking thin-crust pizza. This recipe makes two large, four medium, or eight individual pies. Remember to preheat the oven (and stone, if using one) for at least thirty minutes.***

1 recipe Basic Pizza Dough or

75-Minute Pizza Dough

Flour for dusting hands and work surfaces

Semolina or cornmeal for dusting peel

Olive oil for brushing on dough

Toppings of choice (*see* following recipes)

Master Instructions

Thin Crust Pizza

1. Prepare dough as directed in dough recipe. Preheat oven at 450 degrees, placing pizza stone on rack in lower third of oven if not already lined with tiles, for 30 minutes. Turn punched-down dough out onto lightly floured work surface. Use chef's knife or dough scraper to halve, quarter, or cut dough into eighths, depending on number and size of pizzas desired. Form each piece into ball and cover with damp cloth. Let dough relax at least 5 minutes but not

more than 30 minutes.

2. Working with one piece of dough at a time and keeping others covered, flatten ball into disk using palms of hands. Starting at center and working outward, use fingertips to press dough to about $^{1}/_{2}$-inch thick. Use one hand to hold dough in place and other hand to stretch dough outward; rotate dough quarter turn and stretch again. Repeat turning and stretching until dough will not stretch any further. Let dough relax 5 minutes; continue stretching until it reaches correct diameter. Dough should be about

1/4 inch thick. (For large pizzas, let dough relax another 5 minutes and stretch again.) Use palm to flatten edge of dough. Transfer dough rounds to pizza peel that has been lightly dusted with semolina or cornmeal.

3. Brush dough rounds very lightly with oil and then add toppings. Cook topped pizzas in preheated oven until edges of crusts are golden brown, 5 to 12 minutes depending on size of pizzas. Add cheese if using and continue baking until melted, 2 to 3 minutes. Remove pizzas from oven, cut into

wedges, and serve immediately.

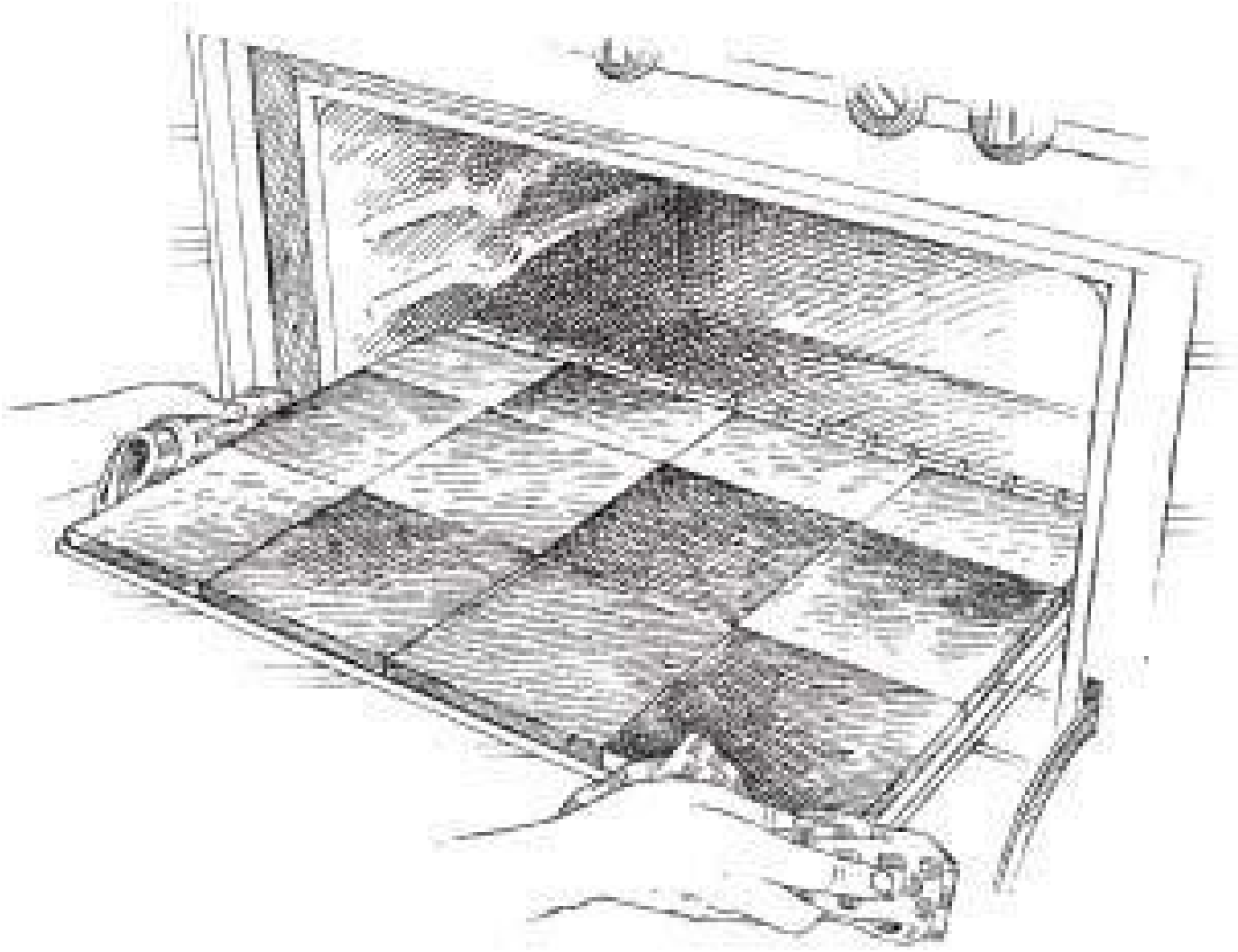

Figure 9.
Thin-crust pizza must be baked on tiles or a pizza stone. You may line a rack in the lower third of your oven with quarry tiles. If using a pizza stone, place it on the rack before turning the oven

on. Either way, preheat the oven for 30 minutes so that the tiles or stone becomes very hot.

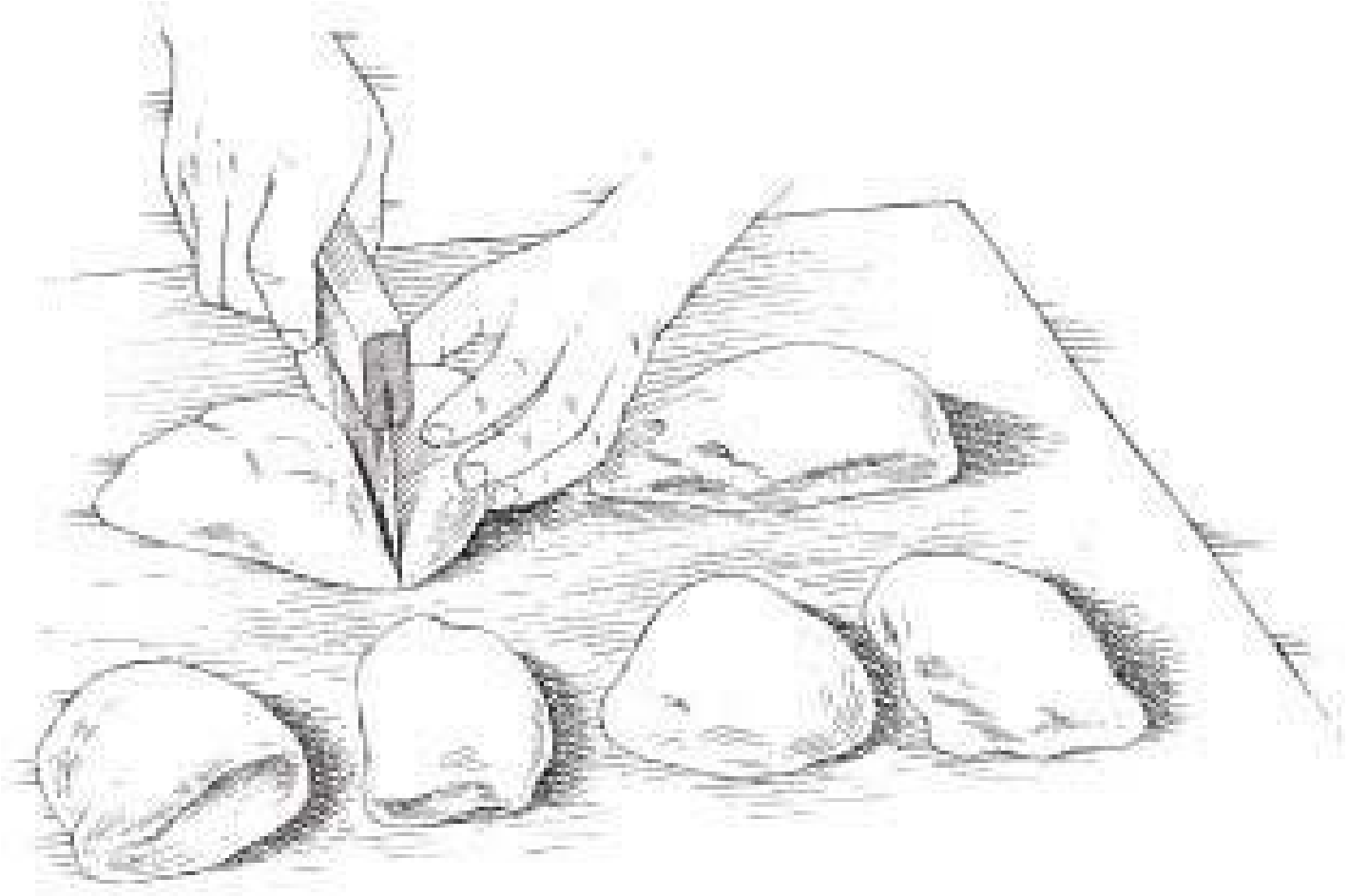

Figure 10.
Use a chef's knife or dough scraper to divide the risen and punched-down dough into two, four, or eight pieces. A single dough recipe will make two 14-inch pizzas, four 12-inch pizzas, or eight 8-inch pies.

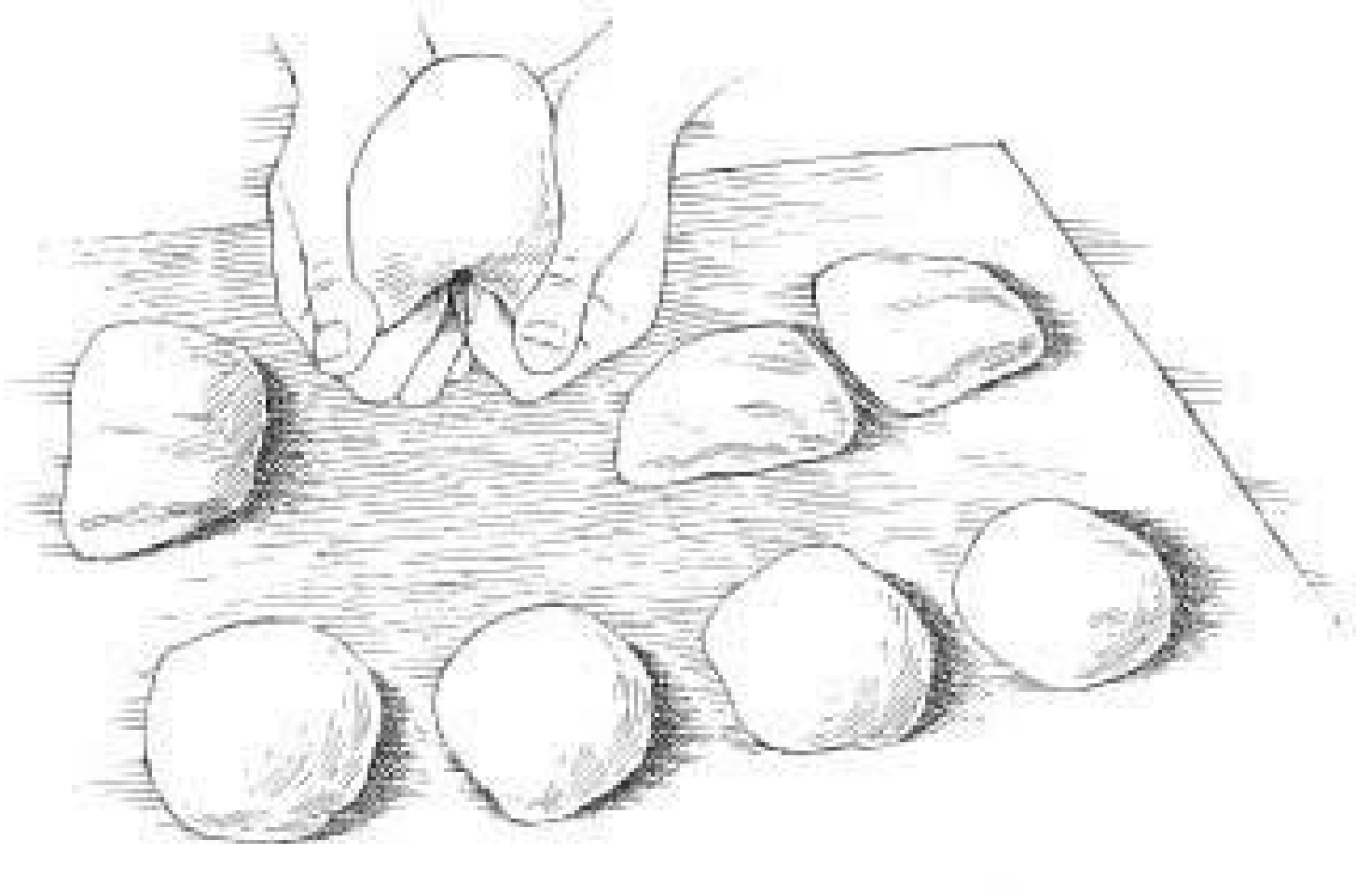

Figure 11.
Form each piece of dough into a smooth, round ball and cover it with a damp cloth. Let the dough relax for at least 5 minutes but no more than 30 minutes.

Figure 12.
Working with one ball of dough at a time and keeping the others covered, flatten the dough ball into a disk using the palms of your hands.

Figure 13.
Starting at the center of the disk and working outward, use your fingertips to press the dough to about $^{1}/_{2}$-inch thick.

Figure 14.
Use one hand to hold the dough in place and the other hand to stretch the dough outward. Rotate the dough a quarter turn and stretch it again. Repeat the turning and stretching until the dough will not stretch any further. Let the dough relax for 5 minutes, then continue stretching until it reaches the correct

diameter. For large pizzas, you may need to let the dough rest again before it will stretch to the desired size.

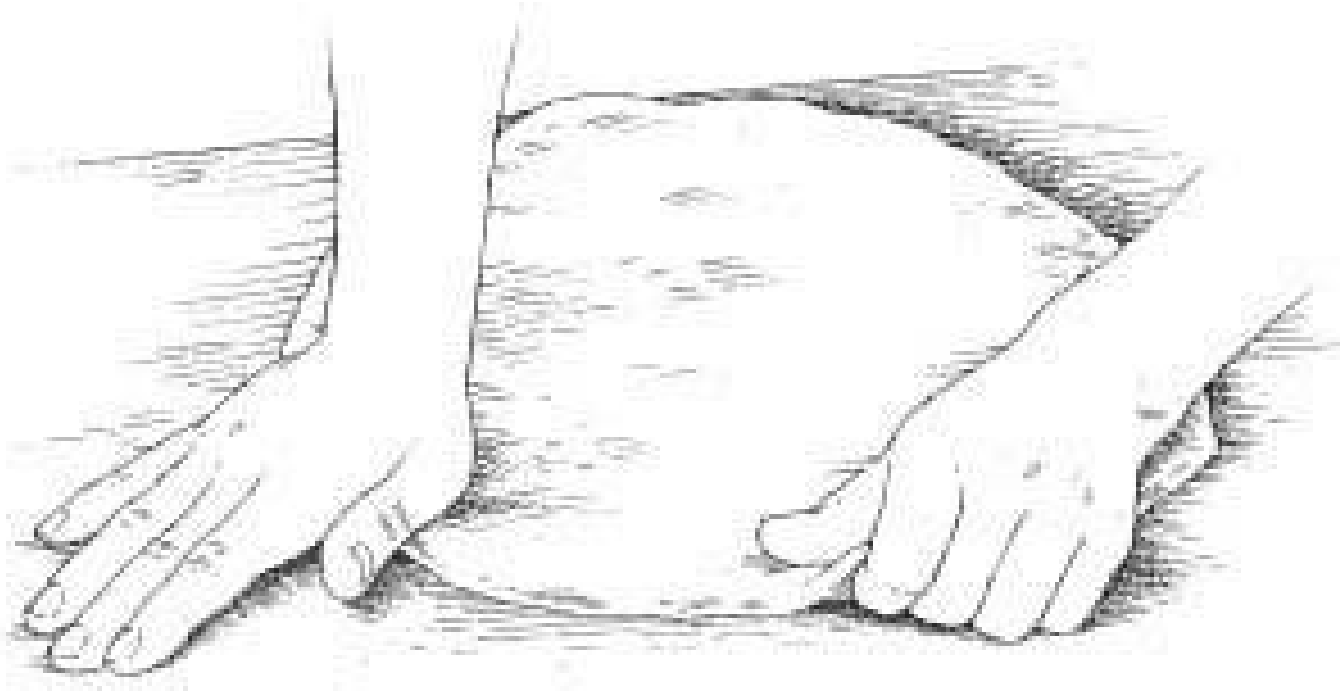

Figure 15.
Use your palm to press down and flatten the thick edge of the dough.

Figure 16.
Carefully lift the dough round and transfer it to a peel dusted with semolina or cornmeal.

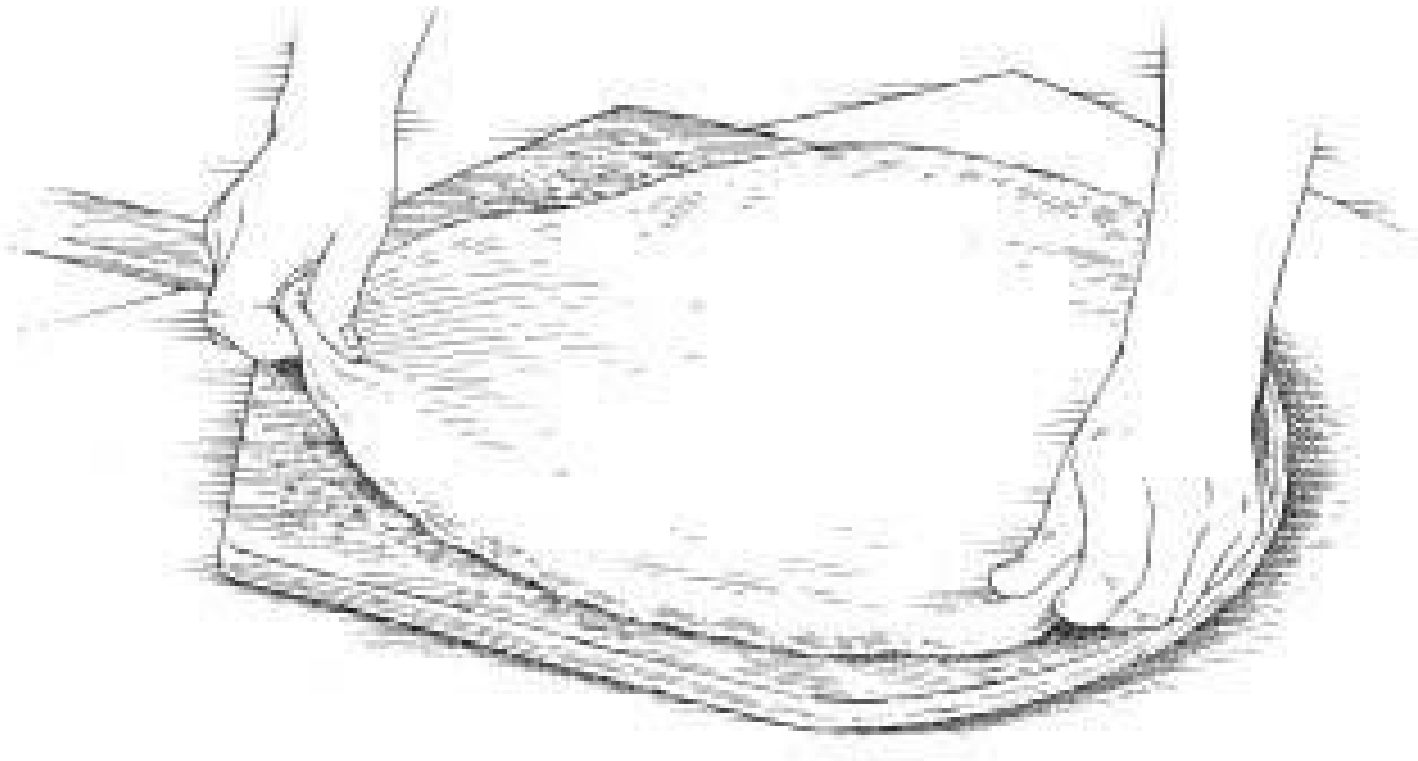

Figure 17.
If the dough loses its round shape, adjust it on the peel to return it to the original shape.

Figure 18.
Brush the entire dough round with a little olive oil. Add the toppings. To make it easier to hold pizza slices when eating, leave a $^{1}/_{2}$-inch border around the edges of the dough uncovered.

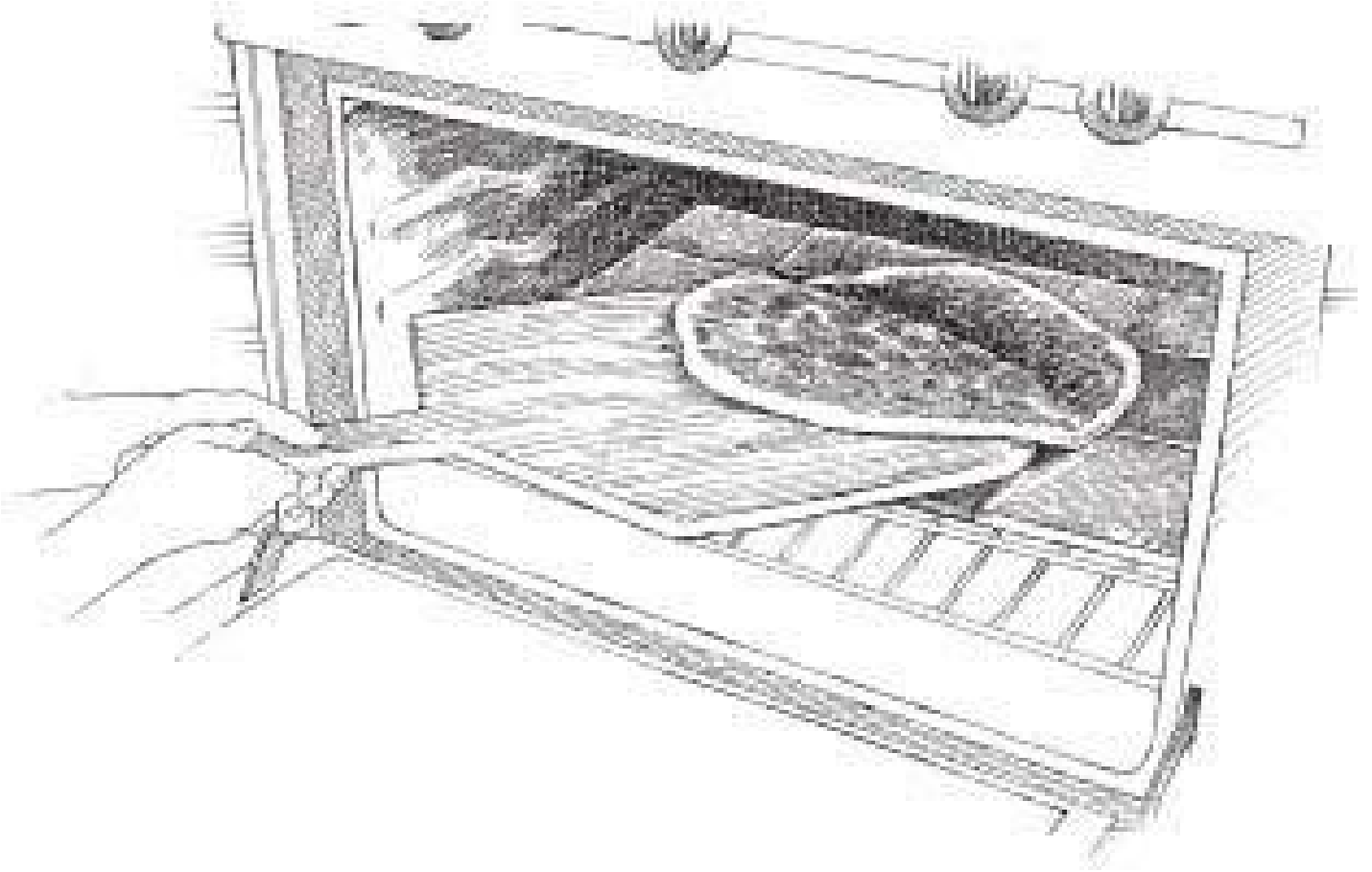

Figure 19.
Use a quick jerking action to slide the topped dough off the peel and onto the hot tiles or stone. Make sure that the pizza lands far enough back so that the front edge does not hang off the tiles or stone.

Pizza Bianca with Garlic and Rosemary

NOTE: ***This simple pizza is best as a snack or bread accompaniment to dinner. Pizza bianca translates as "white pizza" and refers to the fact that there are no tomatoes, just garlic, oil, rosemary, and salt, in this recipe.***

1 recipe Thin-Crust Pizza

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for brushing on stretched dough

6 medium garlic cloves, minced

4 teaspoons minced fresh rosemary leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Prepare dough rounds as directed in master recipe through step 2.

2. While preparing dough, combine $^{1}/_{4}$ cup oil, garlic, rosemary, and salt and pepper to taste in small bowl. Set herb oil aside.

3. Brush plain olive oil evenly over each stretched dough round. Prick each round all over with fork (*see* figure 20).

4. Bake until crusts begin to brown in

spots, 5 to 10 minutes. Remove crusts from oven and brush with herb oil. Continue baking 1 to 2 minutes. Remove pizzas from oven, cut into wedges, and serve immediately.

VARIATION:

Lemon Sea Salt Pizza

Brush each dough round with plain olive oil. Arrange 2 lemons sliced paper-thin over rounds, leaving $^1/_2$-inch border around edges uncovered, and sprinkle with coarse sea salt to taste. Bake until golden, 5 to 10 minutes. Brush herb oil over lemon slices and continue baking 1 to 2 minutes.

Figure 20.
When pizza dough is topped with just oil, it can bubble up as it bakes. To prevent this, prick the dough all over with a fork before it goes into the oven. If bubbles form during baking, prick them

before they become too large.

Pesto Pizza

NOTE: ***The crust is baked naked for this pizza and then spread with pesto just before serving. As with the pizza bianca, it is necessary to prick the dough with a fork before baking to prevent the formation of bubbles (see figure 20). You may substitute two-thirds cup of any favorite pesto sauce in this recipe.***

1 recipe Thin-Crust Pizza

2 cups tightly packed fresh basil leaves

2 medium garlic cloves, peeled

2 tablespoons pine nuts or walnuts

1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for brushing on stretched dough

1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Prepare dough rounds as directed in master recipe through step 2.

2. While preparing dough, place basil, garlic, and nuts in workbowl of food processor. Process, scraping down sides of bowl as needed, until ingredients are finely chopped. With motor running, add

1/2 cup oil in steady stream through feed tube and process until smooth. Scrape sauce into bowl. Stir in cheese and salt and pepper to taste. Cover and set sauce aside.

3. Brush oil evenly over each stretched dough round. Prick each dough round all over with fork (see figure 20). Bake until crusts begin to brown in spots, 5 to 10 minutes.

4. Remove crusts from oven and spread evenly with pesto, leaving 1/2-inch border around edges uncovered. Cut into wedges and serve immediately.

Classic Tomato Pizza with Mozzarella and Basil

NOTE: ***Ripe tomatoes will make all the difference here. It's imperative that excess moisture be removed from the tomatoes (see figure 23). If you don't mind the skins, don't bother peeling the tomatoes.***

1 recipe Thin-Crust Pizza

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for brushing on stretched dough

4 medium ripe tomatoes (about $1^1/_2$ pounds), peeled if desired (*see* figures 21 and 22), seeded (*see* figure 23), and

chopped Salt and ground black pepper

1/4 cup shredded fresh basil leaves

4 ounces mozzarella cheese, shredded (about 1 cup)

1/4 cup grated Parmesan or Pecorino Romano cheese

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Prepare dough rounds as directed in master recipe through step 2.

2. Brush oil evenly over each stretched dough round. Arrange portion of tomatoes over each dough round, leaving

1/2-inch border around edges uncovered. Season with salt and pepper to taste and scatter portion of basil over tomatoes. Drizzle with 2 tablespoons oil.

3. Bake until edges of crusts start to brown, 6 to 12 minutes. Sprinkle with cheeses and continue baking until cheeses melt, 2 to 3 minutes more. Remove pizzas from oven, cut into wedges, and serve immediately.

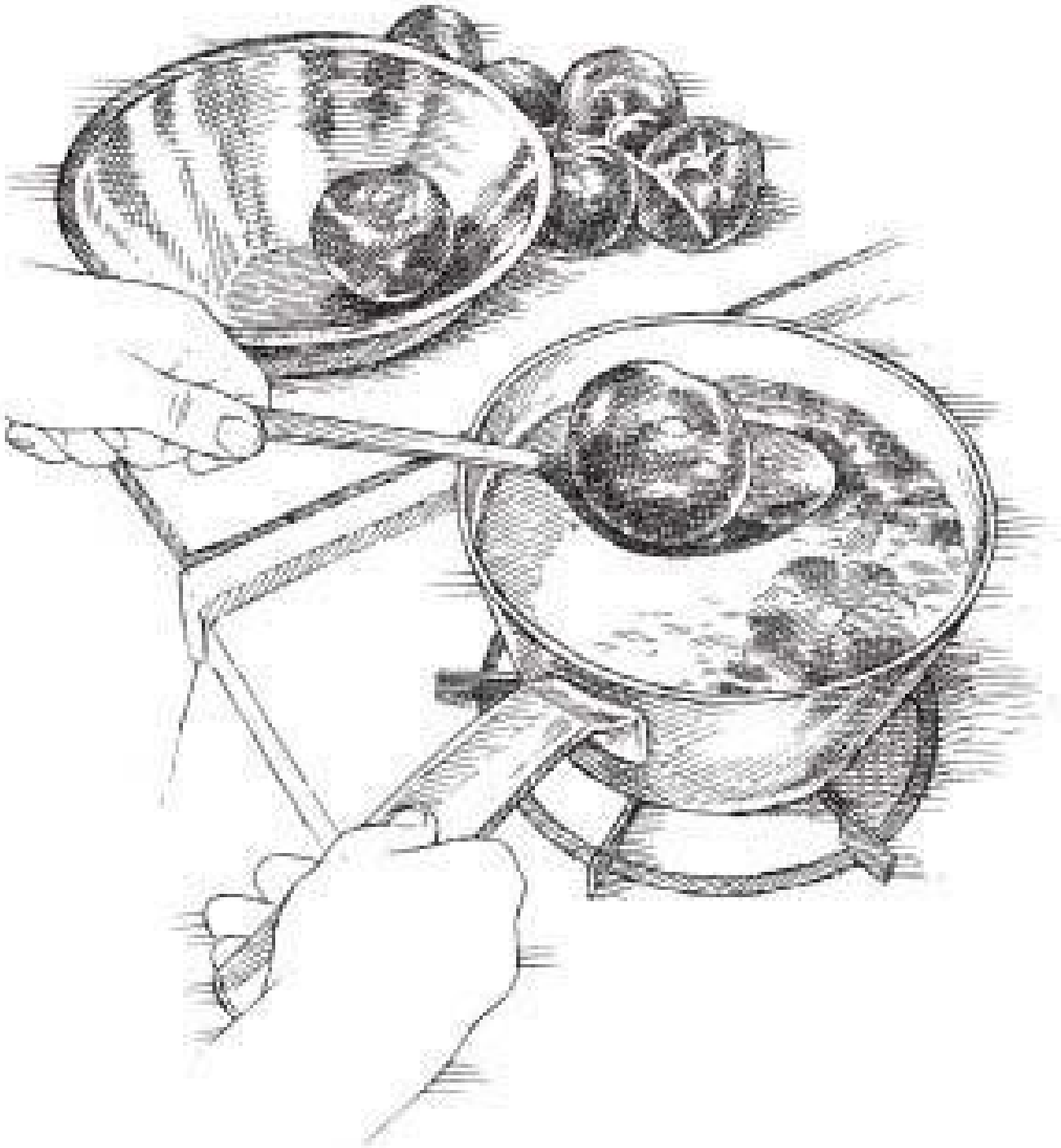

Figure 21.
To remove the skins from ripe tomatoes, drop the tomatoes into a saucepan filled with simmering

water. After 15 seconds, use a slotted spoon to retrieve the tomatoes.

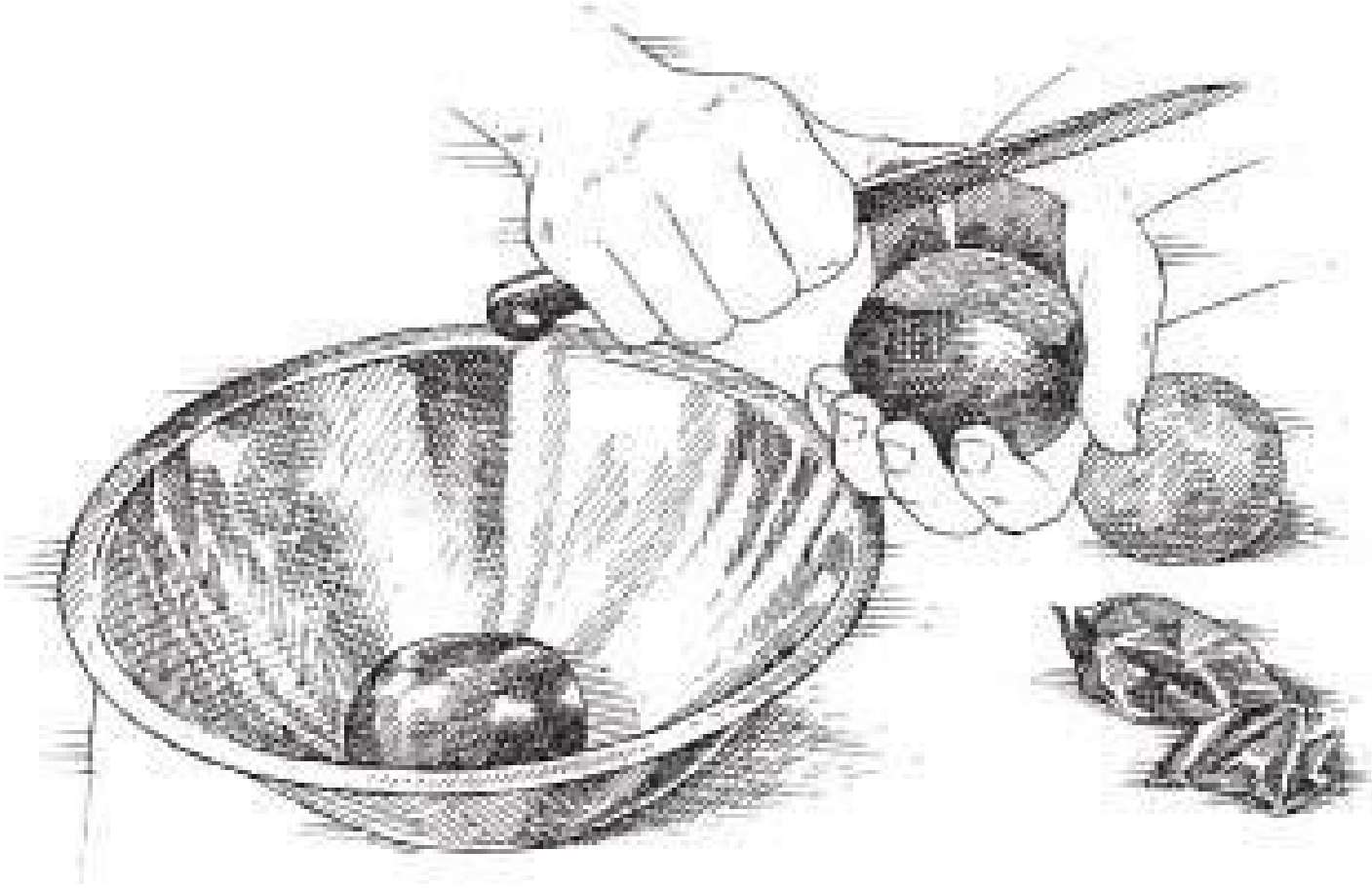

Figure 22.
When the tomatoes cool a bit, use a sharp paring knife to peel away the skins.

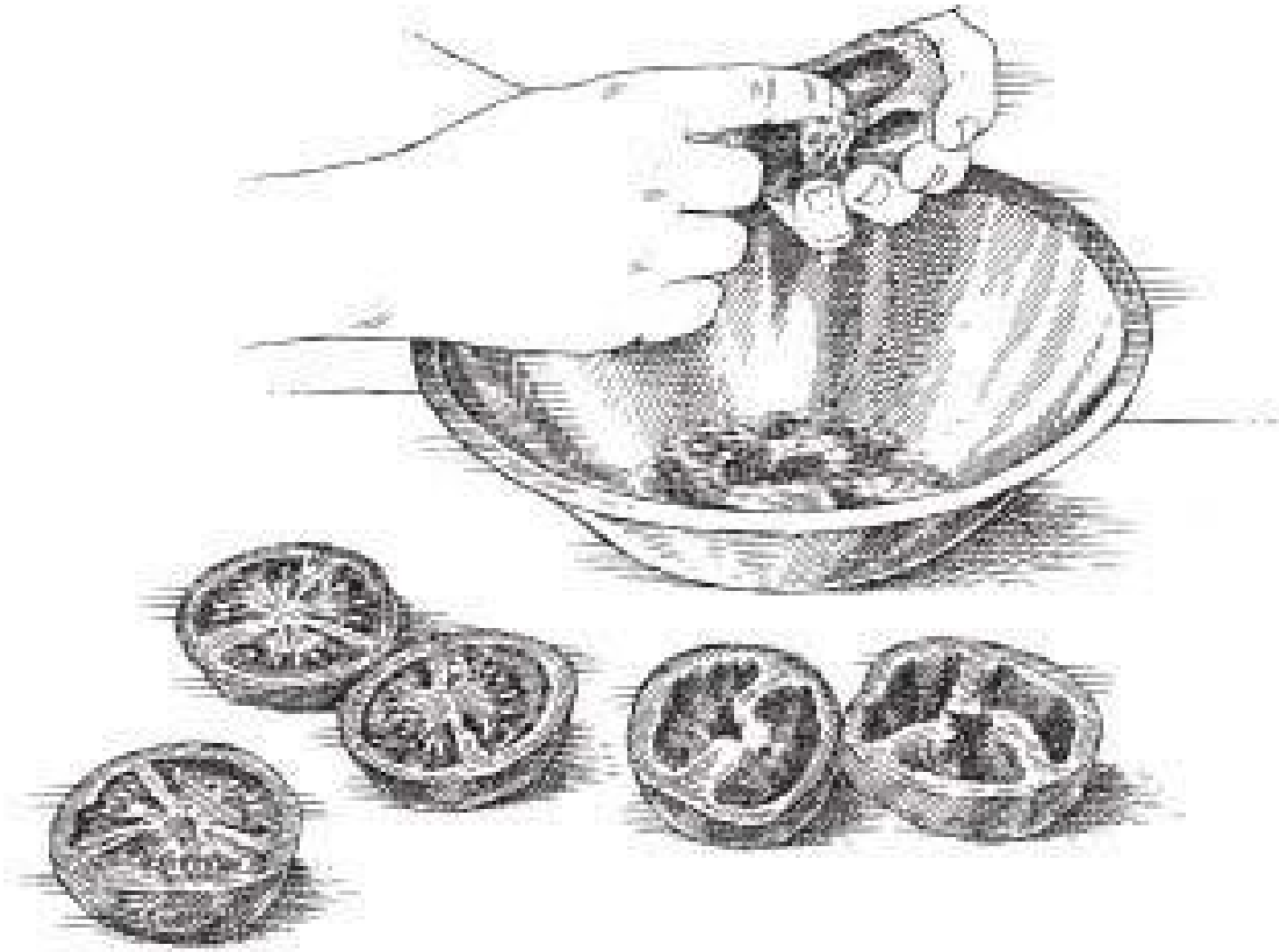

Figure 23.
Core and cut the tomatoes in half crosswise. Squeeze the seeds out into a bowl. Chop and reserve the tomatoes

Pepperoni Pizza

NOTE: *This classic pizzeria favorite is especially easy to prepare because the pepperoni cooks right in the oven with the pizza.*

1 recipe Thin-Crust Pizza

Olive oil for brushing on stretched dough

$1\frac{1}{2}$ cups No-Cook Tomato Sauce

8 ounces pepperoni, peeled and sliced thin

4 ounces mozzarella cheese, shredded (about 1 cup)

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup grated Parmesan cheese

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Prepare dough rounds as directed in master recipe through step 2.

2. Brush oil evenly over each stretched dough round. Spread portion of tomato sauce over each dough round, leaving $^{1}/_{2}$-inch border around edges uncovered. Scatter some pepperoni slices over sauce onto each dough round.

3. Bake until edges of crusts start to brown, 6 to 12 minutes. Sprinkle with cheeses and continue baking until cheeses melt, 2 to 3 minutes more.

Remove pizzas from oven, cut into wedges, and serve immediately.

Fresh Tomato Pizza with Arugula and Prosciutto

NOTE: ***The arugula for this pizza is tossed with a little oil to keep it moist, then sprinkled over the baked pizza as soon as it comes out of the oven. The heat from the pizza wilts the arugula without causing it to dry out. Because these topping ingredients are not precooked, this pizza is especially easy to prepare.***

1 recipe Thin-Crust Pizza

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for brushing on stretched dough

3 medium ripe tomatoes

(about 1 pound), cored and sliced crosswise into thin rounds
Salt and ground black pepper
4 ounces thin-sliced prosciutto (about 8 slices)
4 ounces mozzarella cheese, shredded (about 1 cup)
2 cups stemmed arugula leaves, washed and thoroughly dried

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Prepare dough rounds as directed in master recipe through step 2.

2. Brush oil evenly over each stretched dough round. Arrange portion of

tomatoes in concentric circles over each dough round, leaving $^{1}/_{2}$-inch border around edges uncovered. Season with salt and pepper to taste and drizzle with 4 teaspoons oil.

3. Bake until edges of crusts start to brown, 6 to 12 minutes. Lay prosciutto slices over tomatoes and sprinkle with cheese. Continue baking until cheese melts, 2 to 3 minutes more.

4. Toss arugula with remaining 2 teaspoons oil. Remove pizzas from oven and top each with portion of arugula. Cut pizzas into wedges and serve

immediately.

Caramelized Onion Pizza with Oil-Cured Olives and Parmesan

NOTE: ***Although these pizzas are substantial enough for dinner, they are particularly good as an hors d'oeuvre when cooked and then cut into small pieces.***

1 recipe Thin-Crust Pizza

2 tablespoons olive oil, plus extra for brushing on stretched dough

2 medium yellow onions, halved and sliced thin

1 teaspoon fresh thyme leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

$1\frac{1}{2}$ cups No-Cook Tomato Sauce

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup pitted and quartered oil-cured black olives

6 anchovies, chopped coarse (optional)

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup grated Parmesan cheese

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Prepare dough rounds as directed in master recipe through step 2.

2. While preparing dough, heat 2 tablespoons oil in large skillet set over medium-high heat. Add onions and sauté

until softened and somewhat caramelized, about 10 minutes. Stir in thyme; season with salt and pepper to taste. Set onions aside.

3. Brush oil evenly over each stretched dough round. Spread portion of tomato sauce over each dough round, leaving $^1/_2$-inch border around edges uncovered. Scatter portion of onions over sauce onto each dough round. Sprinkle with olives and optional anchovies.

4. Bake until edges of crusts start to brown, 6 to 12 minutes. Sprinkle with cheese and continue baking until cheese

melts, 2 to 3 minutes more. Remove pizzas from oven, cut into wedges, and serve immediately.

Sausage and Bell Pepper Pizza with Basil and Mozzarella

NOTE: ***If bulk sausage is not available, buy link sausage, remove the meat from the casings, and then break it into bite-size pieces. See figures 24 and 25, for more information.***

1 recipe Thin-Crust Pizza (*see* chapter three)

$^{3}/_{4}$ pound bulk sweet Italian sausage, broken into bite-size pieces

$1^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoons olive oil

(approximately), plus extra for brushing on stretched dough

1 red or yellow bell pepper, cored, halved, seeded, and cut into thin strips

Salt and ground black pepper

$1^1/_2$ cups No-Cook Tomato Sauce with Basil (*see* chapter two)

4 ounces mozzarella cheese, shredded (about 1 cup)

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Prepare dough rounds as directed in master recipe through step 2.

2. While preparing dough, put sausage

and $^{1}/_{4}$ cup water in large skillet. Cook over medium-high heat until water evaporates and sausage cooks through and browns, about 10 minutes. Remove sausage with slotted spoon and set aside. Add enough oil so that amount in skillet equals 1 tablespoon. Add bell pepper and sauté until softened slightly, about 5 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Set bell pepper aside.

3. Brush oil evenly over each stretched dough round. Spread portion of tomato sauce over each dough round, leaving $^{1}/_{2}$-inch border around edges uncovered. Scatter portion of sausage and bell

pepper over sauce onto each dough round.

4. Bake until edges of crusts start to brown, 6 to 12 minutes. Sprinkle with cheese and continue baking until cheese melts, 2 to 3 minutes more. Remove pizzas from oven, cut into wedges, and serve immediately.

VARIATION:

Andouille Sausage and Onion Pizza

Substitute andouille sausage removed from casings and broken into bite-size pieces for Italian sausage, replace bell pepper with 2 medium onions sliced thin, and use Spicy No-Cook Tomato

Sauce, *see* chapter two, in place of tomato sauce with basil.

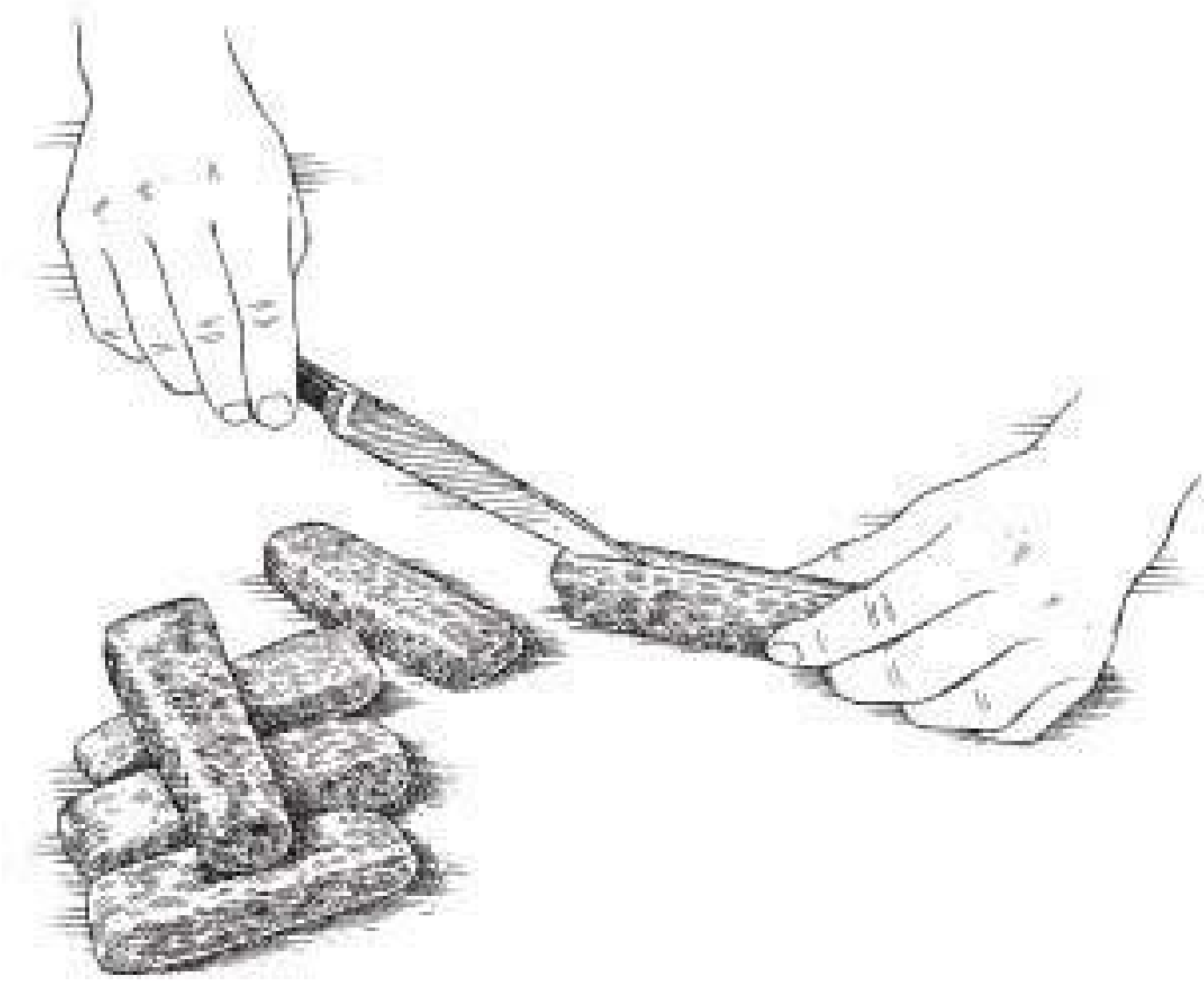

Figure 24.
Bulk sausage is easier to incorporate into a pizza topping. However, link sausage, including sweet or hot Italian sausage, andouille sausage, or chorizo,

will work if you follow these steps. First, run a sharp paring knife along the length of each link to slit open the casing.

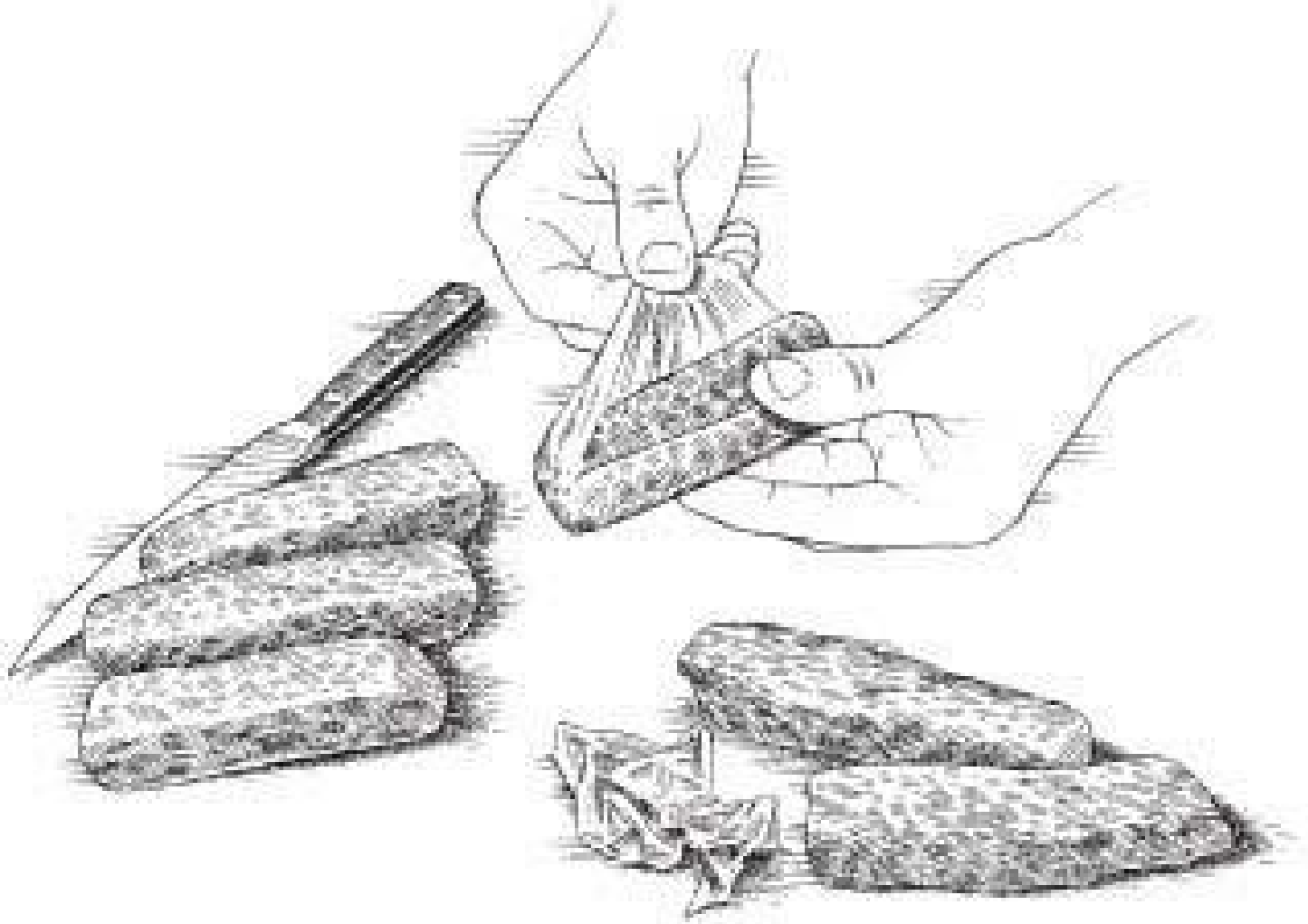

Figure 25.
Peel back the casing and remove the meat. Break the meat into bite-size pieces with your hands.

White Pizza with Spinach and Ricotta

NOTE: ***Ricotta cheese and garlicky sautéed spinach flavor this tomato-less pizza.***

1 recipe Thin-Crust Pizza (*see* chapter three)

2 tablespoons olive oil, plus extra for brushing on stretched dough

4 medium garlic cloves, slivered

$^1/_4$ teaspoon hot red pepper flakes

$1^1/_4$ pounds spinach, stemmed,

washed, partially dried, and chopped coarse

Salt and ground black pepper

1 cup ricotta cheese

1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Prepare dough rounds as directed in master recipe through step 2.

2. While preparing dough, heat 2 tablespoons oil in deep saucepan set over medium heat. Add garlic and pepper flakes and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add damp spinach, cover, and cook, stirring occasionally,

until just wilted, about 2 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Transfer to bowl with slotted spoon, leaving behind any liquid. Set spinach aside.

3. Brush oil evenly over each stretched dough round. Arrange portion of spinach over each dough round, leaving $^{1}/_{2}$-inch border around edges uncovered. Dot with ricotta and sprinkle with Parmesan.

4. Bake until edges of crusts brown, 6 to 12 minutes. Remove pizzas from oven, cut into wedges, and serve immediately.

White Clam Pizza

NOTE: ***This pizza is a specialty of New Haven, one of the great pizza capitals of America. Traditionally, freshly shucked clams are tossed with garlic, olive, and herbs. Canned clams work as well.***

1 recipe Thin-Crust Pizza (*see* chapter three)

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for brushing on stretched dough

6 medium garlic cloves, minced

1 medium onion, minced

$^1/_2$ teaspoon hot red pepper flakes

2 10-ounce cans baby clams, drained, or 24 little-neck clams, shucked

1 tablespoon fresh thyme or oregano leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

$^1/_2$ cup grated Parmesan cheese

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Prepare dough rounds as directed in master recipe through step 2.

2. While preparing dough, heat 2 tablespoons oil in large skillet set over medium heat. Add garlic, onion, and pepper flakes and cook until softened

and fragrant, $1^{1}/_{2}$ minutes. Stir in clams and thyme or oregano. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Set sauce aside.

3. Brush oil evenly over each stretched dough round. Spread portion of sauce over each dough round, leaving $^{1}/_{2}$-inch border around edges uncovered. Sprinkle with cheese.

4. Bake until edges of crusts brown, 5 to 10 minutes. Remove pizzas from oven, cut into wedges, and serve immediately.

VARIATION:

Red Clam Pizza

Brush oil over dough round. Cover each dough round with portion of Spicy No-Cook Tomato Sauce, leaving $^{1}/_{2}$-inch border around edges uncovered and using $1^{1}/_{2}$ cups sauce in total. Scatter clam sauce over tomato sauce and sprinkle with cheese. Increase baking time by several minutes.

DEEP-DISH PIZZA

DEEP-DISH PIZZA, PILED HIGH WITH TOMATO sauce, cheese, and toppings, presents several challenges for the home cook. With so much topping, there is a danger of the crust becoming soggy. In our testing, we uncovered several tricks for keeping the crust soft but not soggy.

The first issue, of course, is what kind of pan works best. We tried baking sheets, perforated pizza pans, and round metal pans made especially for deep-dish pizza. We prefer the latter. Dough can be pushed down into the holes in a

perforated pan, making the baked crust hard to remove. Baking sheets are not deep enough. We recommend a fourteen-inch round pizza pan that is two inches deep for the recipes in this chapter. We tested shiny and dark pans, and both browned the crust equally well.

When fitting the dough into the pan, build up a lip around the edge of the crust to keep the sauce and other toppings from oozing underneath the dough. We also found it helpful to bake the pizza crust without any toppings for several minutes. Baking the crust until it is set makes it less likely to absorb juices from the tomato sauce or vegetables. To keep the dough from bubbling as it bakes without toppings,

simply prick it with a fork.

While thin-crust and grilled pizzas respond to high heat, a thick pan pizza needs time to cook through. If the oven temperature is too high, the crust will burn before the toppings are really hot or the center of the dough is cooked. We found an oven temperature of 400 degrees is perfect. Baking the pizza in the lower third of the oven promotes even browning of the bottom crust. For an even darker crust, bake the pan pizza on preheated quarry tiles or a pizza stone.

The resulting pizza will be about one and one-quarter inches high around the edges and about three-quarters inch deep

in the center. Deep-dish pizza is breadier and saucier (use a fork and knife) than thin-crust pizza. A fourteen-inch pizza will feed four as a main course, six if feeding kids and adults.

Master Recipe

Deep-Dish Pizza

NOTE: ***Because the dough recipe for pan pizza uses less flour than other recipes, we suggest kneading the dough by hand or in a food processor. This smaller amount of dough can get lost in a big standing mixer. See figures 26–30, for information on shaping and baking deep-dish pizza.***

1 recipe Deep-Dish Pizza Dough (*see* chapter two)

Olive oil for brushing on pan and dough and coating hands

Toppings of choice (*see* following recipes)

Master Instructions

1. Prepare dough as directed in pizza recipe. Adjust rack to middle-low position and preheat oven to 400 degrees. Brush about $^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoon oil over bottom and sides of 14-inch pizza pan that measures 2 inches deep. Turn punched-down dough directly into greased pan.

2. Oil hands and press dough with fingertips to fit evenly into pan. While pressing dough, build up 2-inch-high lip around edges of pan.

Let dough rest 5 to 10 minutes, during which time lip will fall a bit. With oiled hands, build up lip once again. When pizza goes into oven, lip should be about 1 inch high. The rest of dough should have even thickness of about $^{1}/_{4}$ inch.

3. Prick dough all over with fork and bake without toppings in preheated oven until crust is set, about 4 minutes. Remove pan from oven. Brush crust with 1 tablespoon oil, prick any bubbles with fork, and add toppings as directed in specific recipes.

4. Return pizza to oven and bake until bottom of crust is lightly browned and toppings are sizzling, 30 to 40 minutes. Remove pizza from oven, and serve immediately.

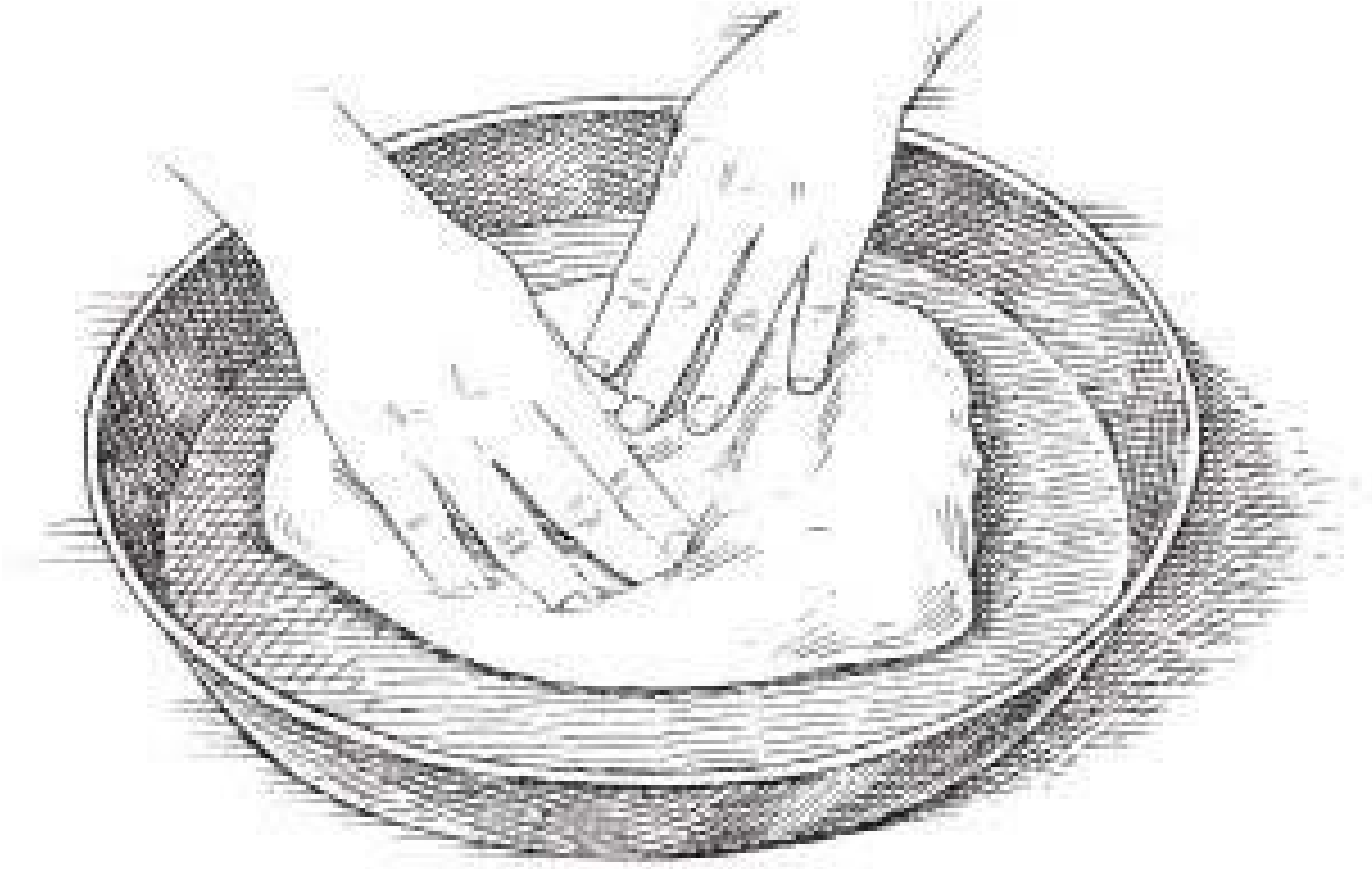

Figure 26.
Turn the punched-down dough directly into a greased 14-inch pizza pan. Oil your hands and press the dough with your fingertips to fit it evenly into the pan.

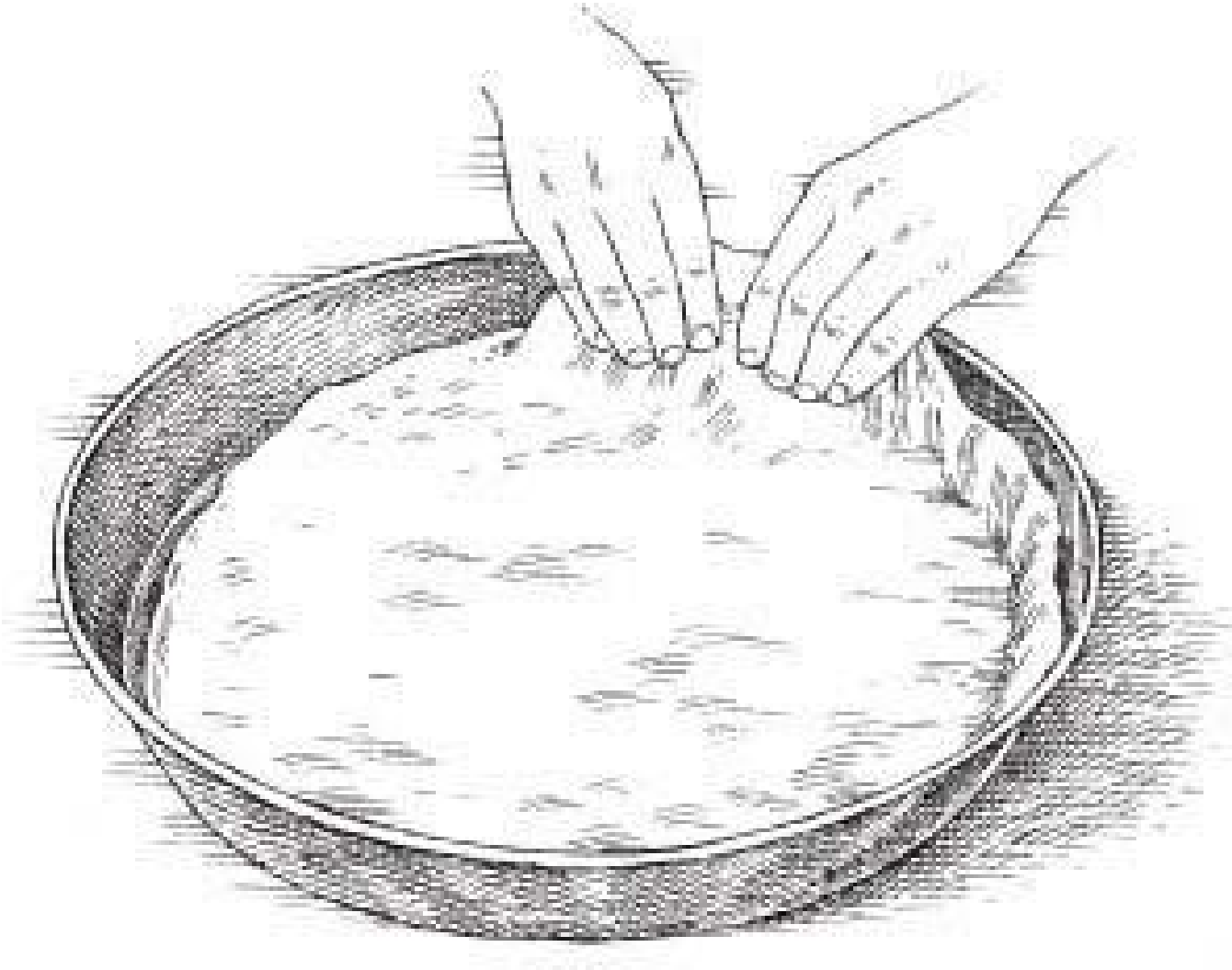

Figure 27.
While pressing the dough, it is important to build up a lip around the edge of the pan that will keep the sauce and other toppings from oozing under the dough. Build up a 2-inch-high lip, allow the dough to rest for 5

or 10 minutes (the lip will fall), then build up the lip again. When the pizza goes into the oven, the lip should be about 1 inch high.

Figure 28.
Prick the dough all over and then bake it without the toppings until the crust is set. Setting the crust before adding the toppings prevents sogginess that would otherwise be caused by moist ingredients like tomato sauce.

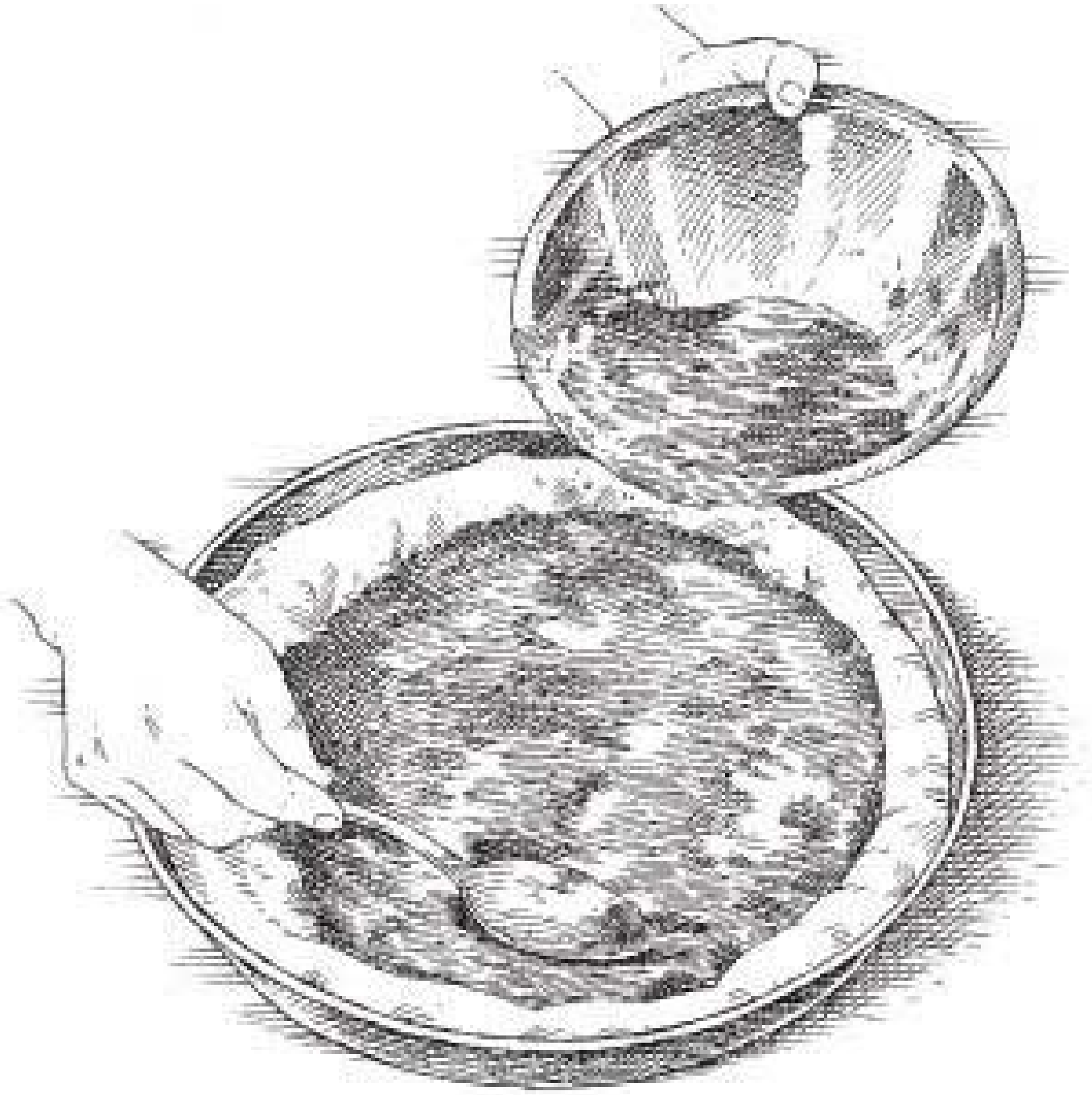

Figure 29.
When the dough is set, remove the pan from the oven and brush the crust with 1 tablespoon of oil. If the crust has bubbled, prick it

with a fork. Spread the tomato sauce and toppings up to the edge of the lip. Return the pizza to the oven to finish baking.

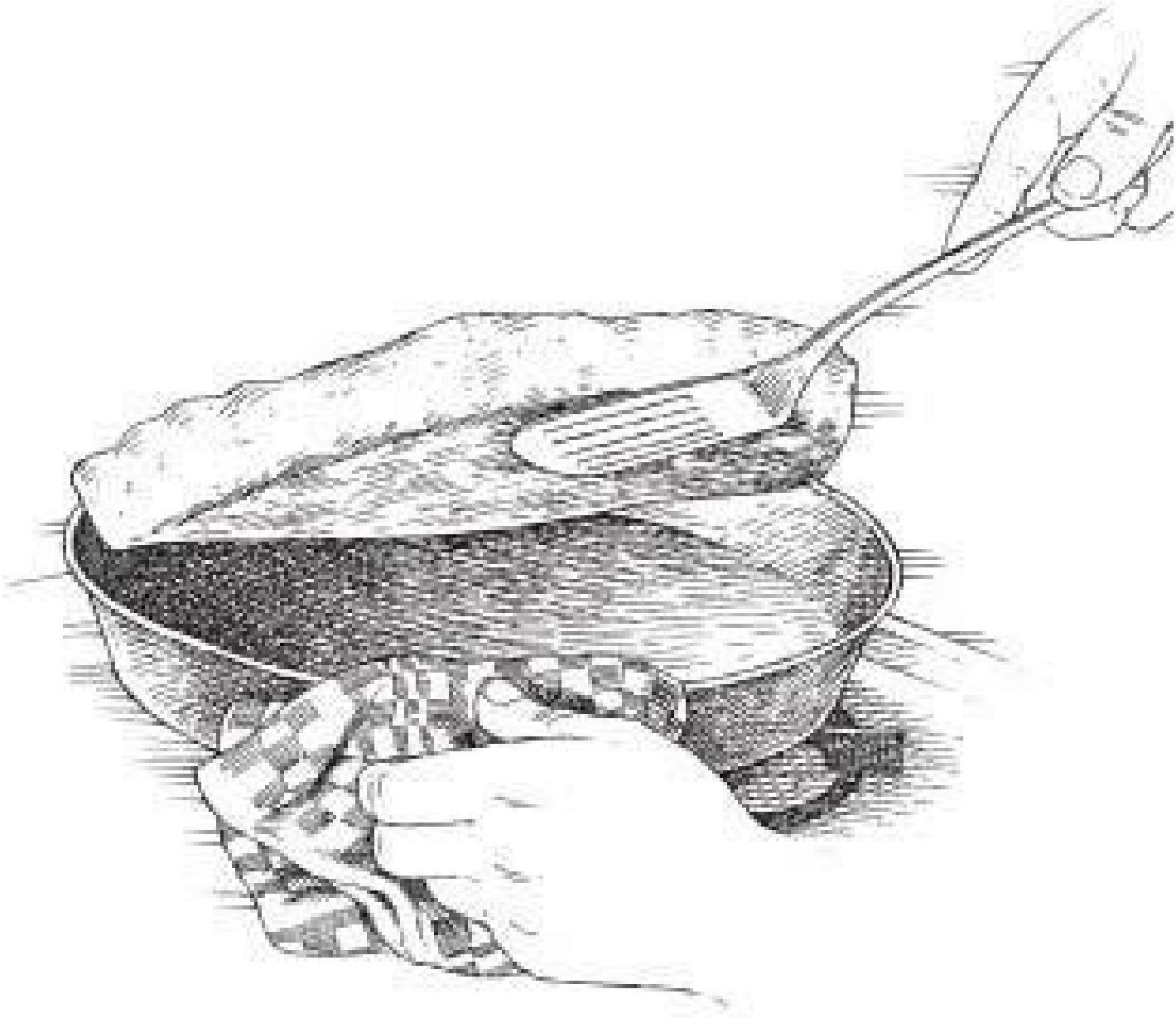

Figure 30.
To see if the pizza is cooked through, lift the crust up with a spatula and check to see if the bottom of the crust is lightly browned. The toppings should

also be sizzling before removing the pizza from the oven.

Classic Deep-Dish Pizza with Tomato Sauce and Mozzarella

1 recipe Deep-Dish Pizza (*see* chapter four)

Olive oil for brushing on pan and dough and coating hands

2 cups Thick Tomato Sauce (*see* chapter two)

6 ounces mozzarella cheese, shredded (about $1^1/_2$ cups)

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Fit dough into pan as directed in master recipe through step 2.

2. Prick dough all over with fork and bake without toppings in preheated oven until set, about 4 minutes. Remove pan from oven. Brush crust with 1 tablespoon oil. Spread tomato sauce evenly over crust up to edge of lip.

3. Return pizza to oven and bake until crust is lightly browned around edges, about 20 minutes.

4. Remove pan from oven and sprinkle cheese over tomato sauce. Return pizza to oven and bake until cheese is melted and bottom of crust is lightly browned,

10 to 15 minutes. Remove pizza from oven and serve immediately.

Deep-Dish Pizza with Sausage and Mushrooms

NOTE: ***If you want to use link sausage, see figures 24 and 25, for information about removing the meat from the casings.***

1 recipe Deep-Dish Pizza (*see* chapter four)

$^{3}/_{4}$ pound bulk sweet or hot Italian sausage, broken into bite-size pieces

$1^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons olive oil (approximately), plus extra for brushing on pan and dough and coating hands

1 pound white button mushrooms, trimmed and sliced thin

Salt and ground black pepper

2 cups Thick Tomato Sauce (*see* chapter two)

6 ounces mozzarella cheese, shredded (about $1^1/_2$ cups)

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Fit dough into pan as directed in master recipe through step 2.

2. While preparing dough, put sausage and $^1/_4$ cup water in large skillet. Cook over medium-high heat until water

evaporates and sausage cooks through and browns, about 10 minutes. Remove sausage with slotted spoon and set aside. Add enough oil so that amount in skillet equals 2 tablespoons. Add mushrooms and sauté until golden brown and juices they release have evaporated, about 7 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Set mushrooms aside.

3. Prick dough all over with fork and bake without toppings in preheated oven until set, about 4 minutes. Remove pan from oven. Brush crust with 1 tablespoon oil. Spread tomato sauce evenly over crust up to edge of lip. Arrange sausage and then mushrooms

over sauce.

4. Return pizza to oven and bake until crust is lightly browned around edges, about 30 minutes.

5. Remove pan from oven and sprinkle cheese over toppings. Return pizza to oven and bake until cheese is melted and bottom of crust is lightly browned, about 8 minutes. Remove pizza from oven, cut into wedges, and serve immediately.

Deep-Dish Pizza with Broccoli Ricotta, and Mozzarella

NOTE: ***The broccoli can dry out if added too early during the baking process. Therefore, bake the dough without toppings until it is well set (about ten minutes), then add the broccoli. The cheese is added with the broccoli to keep the florets from burning.***

1 recipe Deep-Dish Pizza (*see* chapter three)

2 pounds broccoli, stalks discarded and florets cut into bite-size pieces (about 8 cups)

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for brushing on pan and dough and coating hands

2 medium garlic cloves, slivered

1/2 teaspoon hot red pepper flakes, or to taste

Salt

1 1/2 cups ricotta cheese

4 ounces mozzarella cheese, shredded (about 1 cup)

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Fit dough into pan as directed in master recipe through step 2.

2. While preparing dough, steam broccoli until tender, about 5 minutes. Heat 3 tablespoons oil in large skillet set over medium heat. Add garlic and pepper flakes and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add broccoli and cook, stirring to coat with oil, for 1 minute. Season with salt to taste. Set broccoli aside.

3. Prick dough all over with fork and bake without toppings in preheated oven until well set and beginning to brown, about 10 minutes. Remove pan from oven. If dough has swollen, prick with fork. Brush crust with 1 tablespoon oil.

Spread ricotta evenly over crust up to edge of lip. Arrange broccoli over ricotta and sprinkle with mozzarella.

4. Return pizza to oven and bake until cheese is browned and bubbling and bottom of crust is lightly browned, about 30 minutes. Remove pizza from oven, cut into wedges, and serve immediately.

Deep-Dish Pizza with Roasted Vegetables

NOTE: ***Eggplant, zucchini, squash, and bell peppers are roasted with garlic and thyme and then layered into a deep-dish pie with tomato sauce and mozzarella.***

1 recipe Deep-Dish Pizza (*see* chapter four)

1 medium eggplant (about $^1/_2$ pound), cut crosswise into $^1/_4$-inch-thick rounds

2 small zucchini (about $^1/_2$ pound), halved and cut lengthwise into $^1/_4$-inch-thick

slices

2 small yellow squash (about $^1/_2$ pound), halved and cut lengthwise into $^1/_4$-inch-thick slices

2 red, yellow, or orange bell peppers (about 1 pound), cored, seeded, and cut into $^1/_2$-inch-wide strips

8 medium garlic cloves, halved lengthwise

2 tablespoons fresh thyme leaves

4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for brushing on pan and dough and coating hands

Salt and ground black pepper

$1^1/_2$ cups Thick Tomato Sauce (*see* chapter two)

4 ounces provolone cheese, grated (about 1 cup)

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Fit dough into pan as directed in master recipe through step 2.

2. While preparing dough, preheat oven to 450 degrees. Toss vegetables, garlic, and 1 tablespoon thyme with 4 tablespoons oil. Season vegetables with salt and pepper to taste. Spread vegetables out over large baking sheet. Roast until tender, about 20 minutes. Set

aside. Reduce oven temperature to 400 degrees.

3. Prick dough all over with fork and bake without toppings in preheated oven until set, about 4 minutes. Remove pan from oven. Brush crust with 1 tablespoon oil. Spread tomato sauce evenly over crust up to edge of lip. Arrange roasted vegetables over sauce.

4. Return pizza to oven and bake until crust is lightly browned around edges, 30 to 35 minutes.

5. Remove pan from oven and sprinkle cheese and remaining 1 tablespoon thyme over toppings. Return pizza to oven and bake until cheese is melted and bottom of crust is lightly browned, about 8 minutes. Remove pizza from oven, cut into wedges, and serve immediately.

GRILLED PIZZA

IF YOU THINK GRILLED PIZZA SOUNDS LIKE ONE OF those silly chef-inspired creations, think again. Grilling flatbreads over coals has a long history in Italy. As is our custom in this country, we have made this dish our own by adding distinctly American toppings.

There are a couple points to keep in mind when grilling pizza. Toppings have only a few minutes to heat through (any longer and the bottom crust will burn), so they must be kept fairly light. Therefore, we like to get as much flavor

from the crust as possible and recommend the Garlic-Herb Pizza Dough. This dough is so flavorful, we often just brush it with olive oil and serve it as an accompaniment to summer meals. Plain dough will also work fine on the grill.

In our testing, we found that larger crusts are hard to flip, so we recommend small pizzas only for the grill. This necessitates working in batches, so consider grilling pizzas for an informal meal when everyone is gathered in the backyard. As each pizza comes off the grill, serve it immediately. An extra pair of hands to top crusts while you tend the grill is helpful.

If you prefer not to be grilling pizzas

to order, the crusts can be grilled until nicely browned on both sides and then slid onto a baking sheet, cooled, covered, and kept at room temperature for several hours. When you are ready to serve the pizzas, brush the top of the grilled pizza rounds with a little oil, add the toppings, and slide the crusts under a preheated broiler for several minutes. While the smoky grill flavor is not quite as intense, this do-ahead method is much easier.

The recipes in this chapter will serve four as a light summer meal (two small pizzas per person) or eight as a first course. Keep the following tips in mind when making grilled pizza.

FLOUR ALL SURFACES. Because grilled pizzas are flipped (the bottom of the dough round eventually becomes the top of the pizza), we do not dust peels (use metal only; wooden peels should not go near the grill) or baking sheets with sandy semolina or cornmeal. Flour will keep the dough from sticking yet will not make the crust gritty.

KEEP TOPPINGS LIGHT AND DRY. Heavy toppings or liquidy sauces will make grilled pizza soggy and should thus be avoided. Raw ingredients that need only be heated through (fresh tomatoes,

cheese, sliced shrimp) or cooked ingredients that are fairly dry (sautéed onions, grilled mushrooms or eggplant) are best for grilled pizzas.

BRUSH DOUGH WITH OIL. Oil will help keep grilled pizza dough moist, prevent sticking to the grill, and promote even browning. Keep a brush and small bowl of olive oil nearby when grilling pizzas.

USE LONG-HANDLED TONGS TO FLIP DOUGH. Although we prefer to top grilled pizzas on a baking sheet and not on the grill, your hands will still spend a fair amount of time near the fire. To keep

them comfortable, use tongs with long, heat-resistant handles to maneuver the dough.

COVER PIZZA TO HEAT TOPPINGS THROUGH. Use either the grill cover or small disposable pie pans to concentrate heat and get the toppings hot by the time the bottom crust is nicely browned. If the toppings are not ready and the bottom crust is done, you can slide the pizzas onto a baking sheet and run them under the broiler.

Master Recipe

Grilled Pizza

NOTE: ***See figures 31–38, for more information on handling the dough on the grill. See figures 10–15, for more information on shaping the dough.***

To make pizza in advance, grill dough rounds until both sides are crisp and nicely browned, 2 to 3 minutes per side. Repeat with remaining dough rounds. (Grilled dough rounds can be covered and stored at room temperature for

up to 6 hours.) When ready to serve, preheat broiler. Brush tops of grilled dough with oil and add toppings, leaving 1/2-inch border around edges uncovered. Broil until toppings are hot and cheese melts, about 2 minutes. Serve immediately.

1 recipe Garlic-Herb Pizza Dough (*see* chapter two)

Flour for dusting hands, work surfaces, and baking sheets or metal peels

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil for brushing on dough

Salt

Master Instructions

Grilled Pizza

1. Prepare dough as directed in dough recipe. Light grill. Turn punched-down dough out onto lightly floured work surface. Use chef's knife or dough scraper to cut dough into eighths. Form each piece into ball and cover with damp cloth. Let dough relax at least 5 minutes but not more than 30 minutes.

2. Working with one piece of dough at a time and keeping others

covered, flatten ball into disk using palm of hand. Starting at center and working outward, use fingertips to press dough to about $^{1}/_{2}$-inch thick. Use one hand to hold dough in place and other hand to stretch dough outward; rotate dough quarter turn and stretch again. Repeat turning and stretching until dough will not stretch any further. Let dough relax 5 minutes, then continue stretching until it has reached diameter of 7 or 8 inches. Dough should be about $^{1}/_{4}$ inch thick. Use palm to flatten edge of dough. Transfer dough rounds to baking sheets or metal peels that

have been lightly dusted with flour.

3. Check to make sure grill is medium-hot. Brush oil evenly over each stretched dough round and sprinkle with salt to taste.

4. Grill dough, oiled side down, until dark brown grill marks appear, 1 to 2 minutes. Prick any bubbles that develop on top surface. Brush tops with more oil, then flip with long-handled tongs onto clean baking sheet or peel, grilled side up. (If grilling bread without toppings, simply brush tops

with oil and flip back onto grill.)

5. Brush grilled dough surfaces with oil and add toppings, leaving $^{1}/_{2}$-inch border around edges uncovered. Slide pizzas back onto grill. Cover and grill until pizza bottoms are crisp and browned, toppings are hot, and cheese melts, 2 to 3 minutes; serve immediately and repeat with remaining rounds.

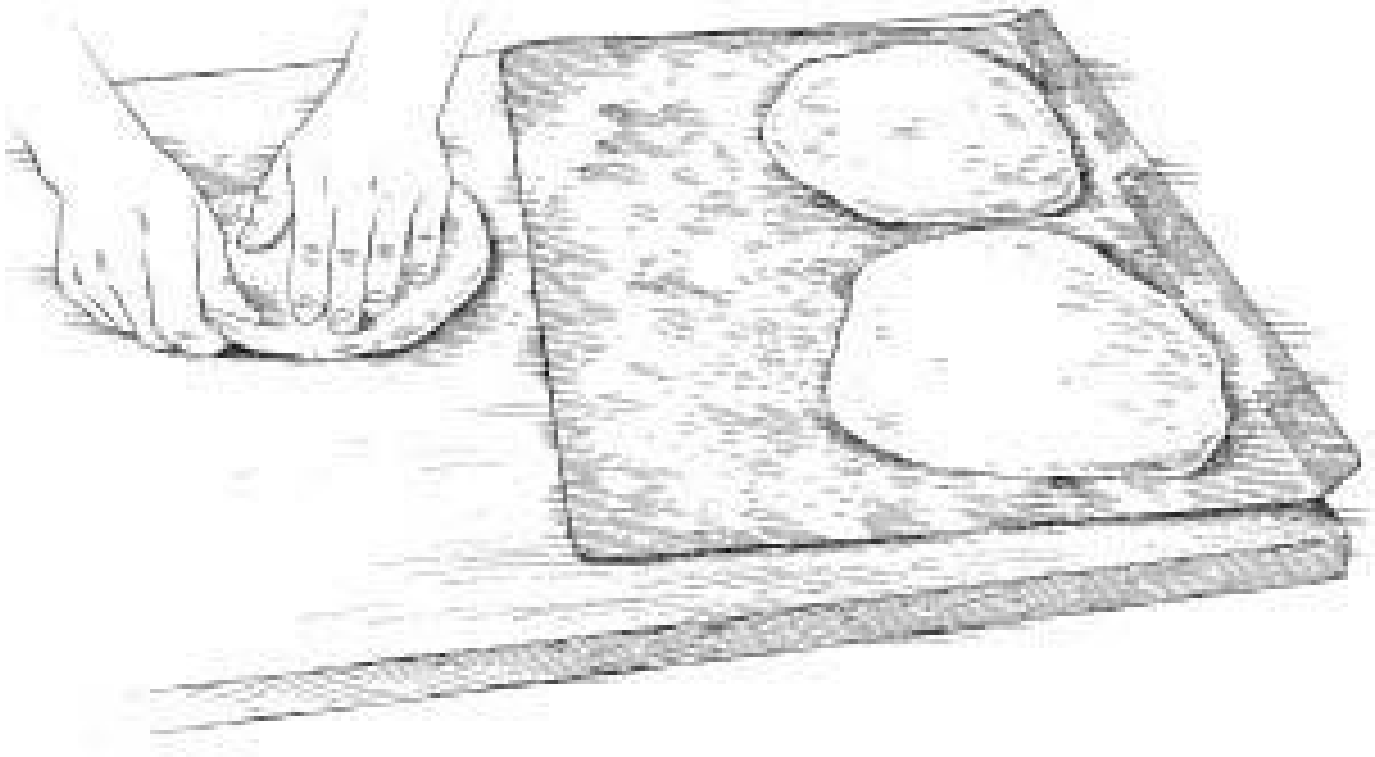

Figure 31.
Smaller dough rounds are easier to work with when grilling; stretch the dough on a floured work surface into 7-or 8-inch rounds. Transfer the stretched dough rounds to rimless baking sheets dusted with flour. Do not use semolina or cornmeal because the bottom of the dough

will eventually be flipped and covered with toppings.

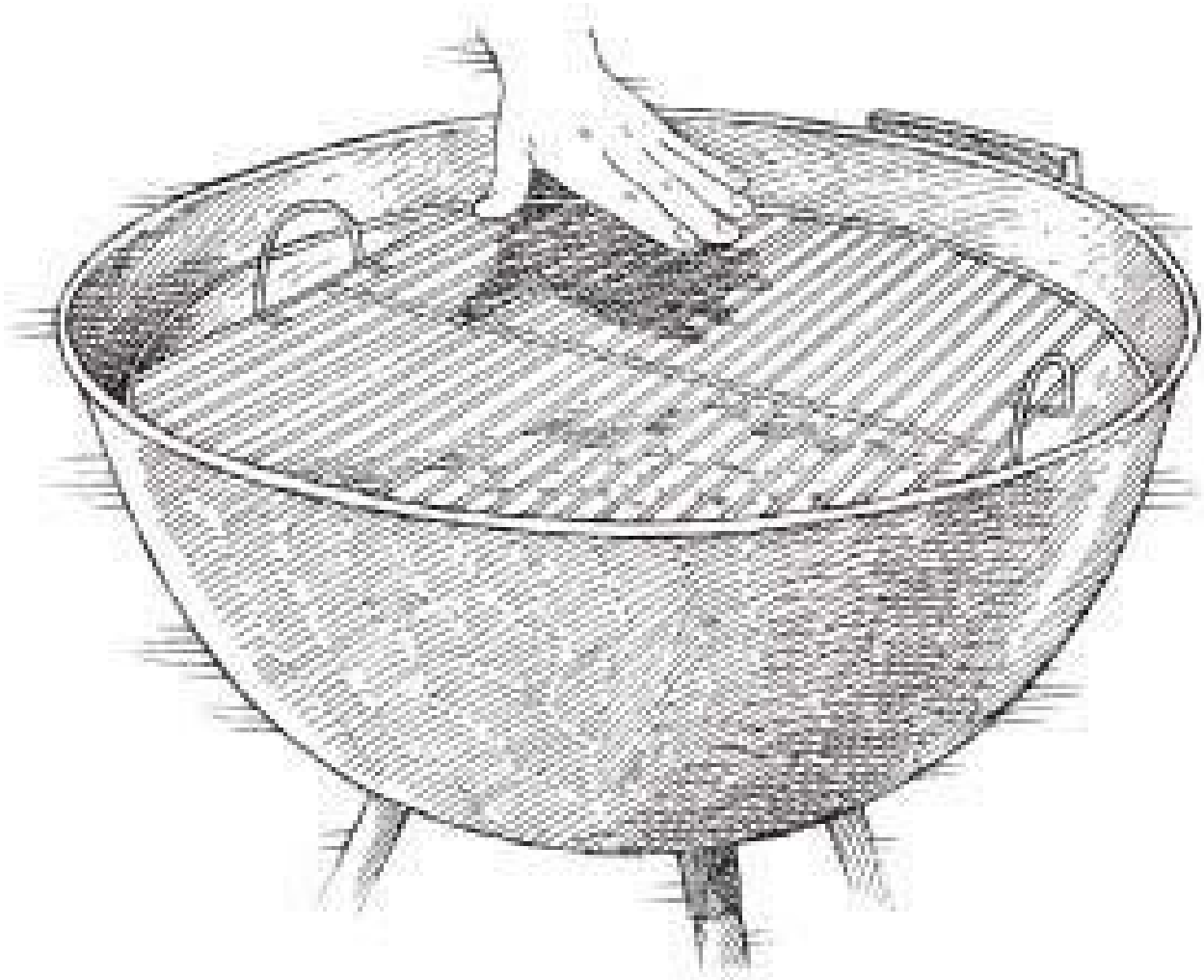

Figure 32.
Grilling pizza requires a medium-hot fire that will cook the crust quickly without burning it. To test the temperature, put your hand 5 inches above the grill surface. If you can hold it there for 3 or 4 seconds, your fire is the

right temperature.

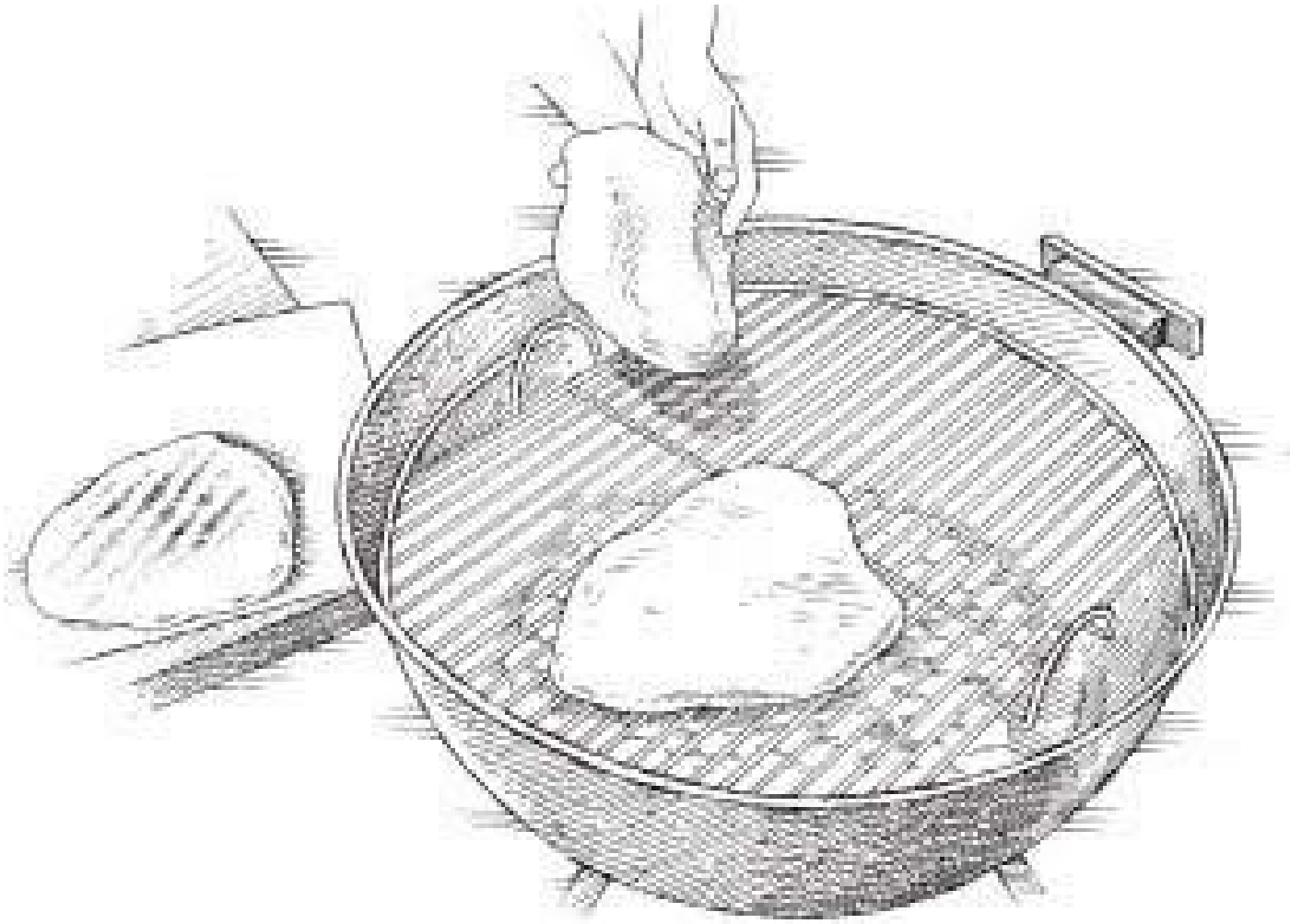

Figure 33.

When the fire is ready, brush the tops of the dough rounds with oil and sprinkle them with salt. Slide your hand under each dough round and gently flip the dough onto the grill, oiled side down. Cook them until dark grill marks

appear, 1 to 2 minutes.

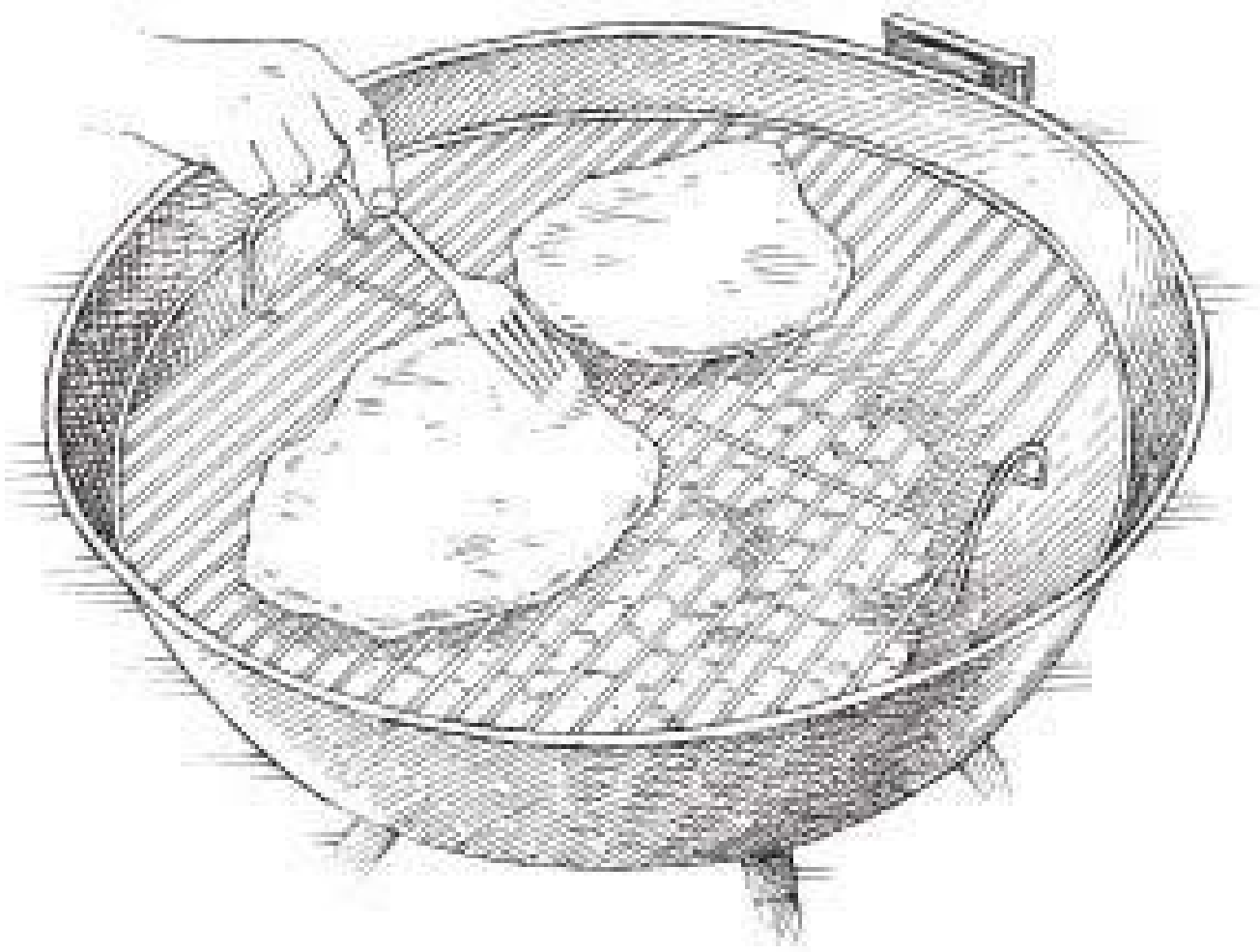

Figure 34.
Use a knife or fork to prick any bubbles that develop on the surface.

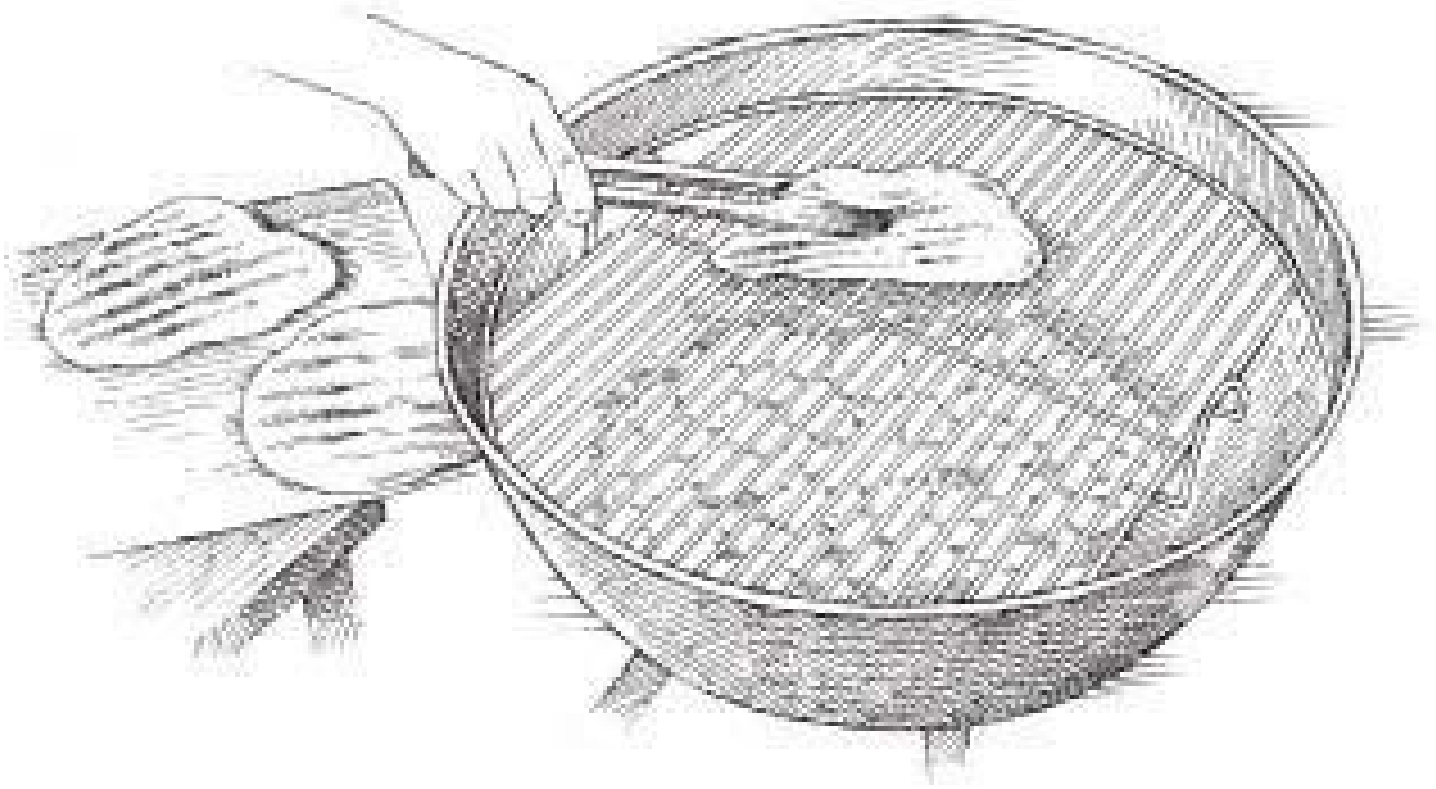

Figure 35.
Brush the tops with more oil, then flip the rounds with long-handled tongs onto a clean baking sheet, oiled side down. (We find that topping the pizzas right on the grill can be difficult given the intense heat and thus prefer this method.)

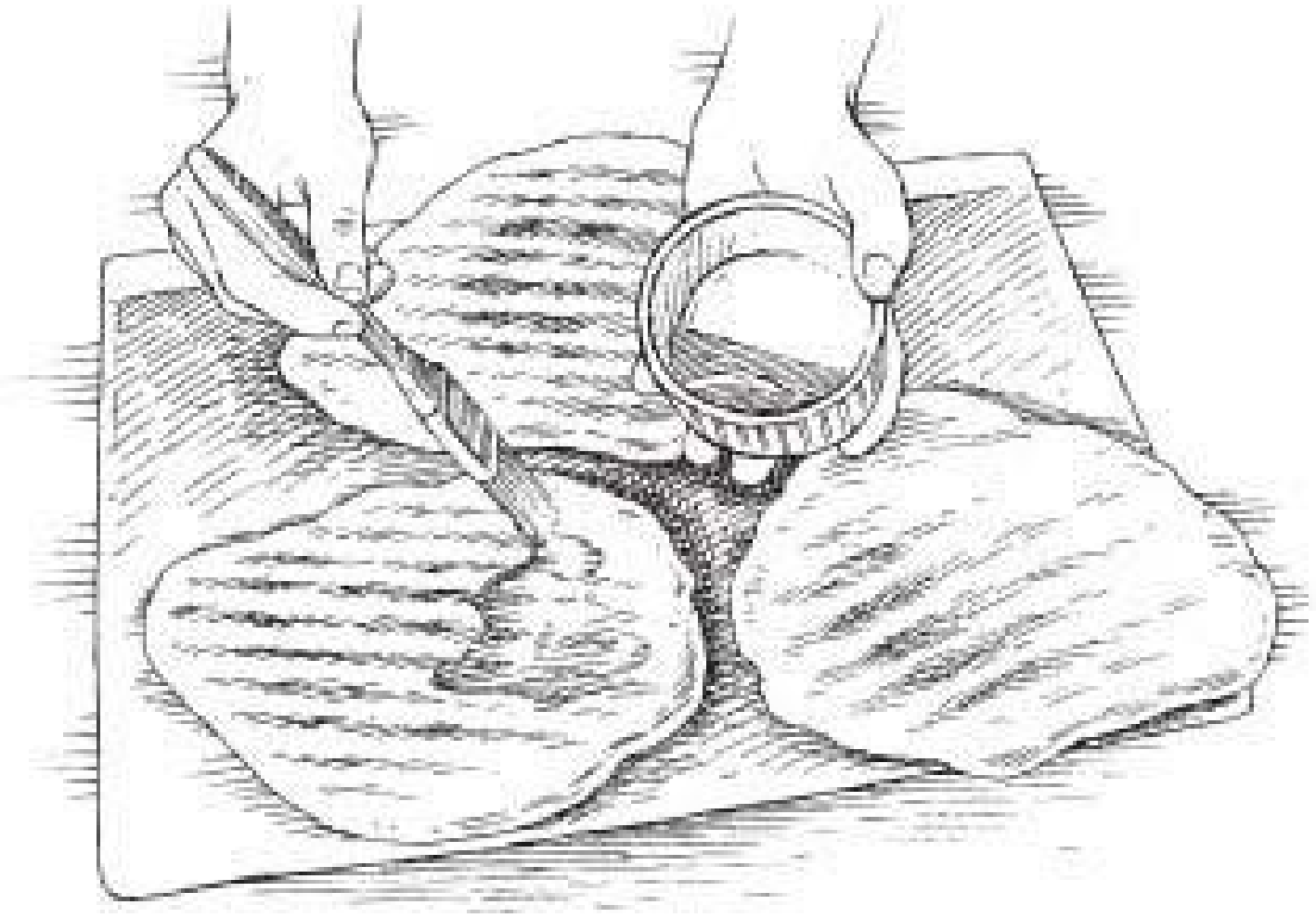

Figure 36.
Brush the grilled surface, which is now facing up, with more oil.

Figure 37.
Quickly arrange the toppings over the grilled surface, leaving a $^{1}/_{2}$-inch border around the edges uncovered.

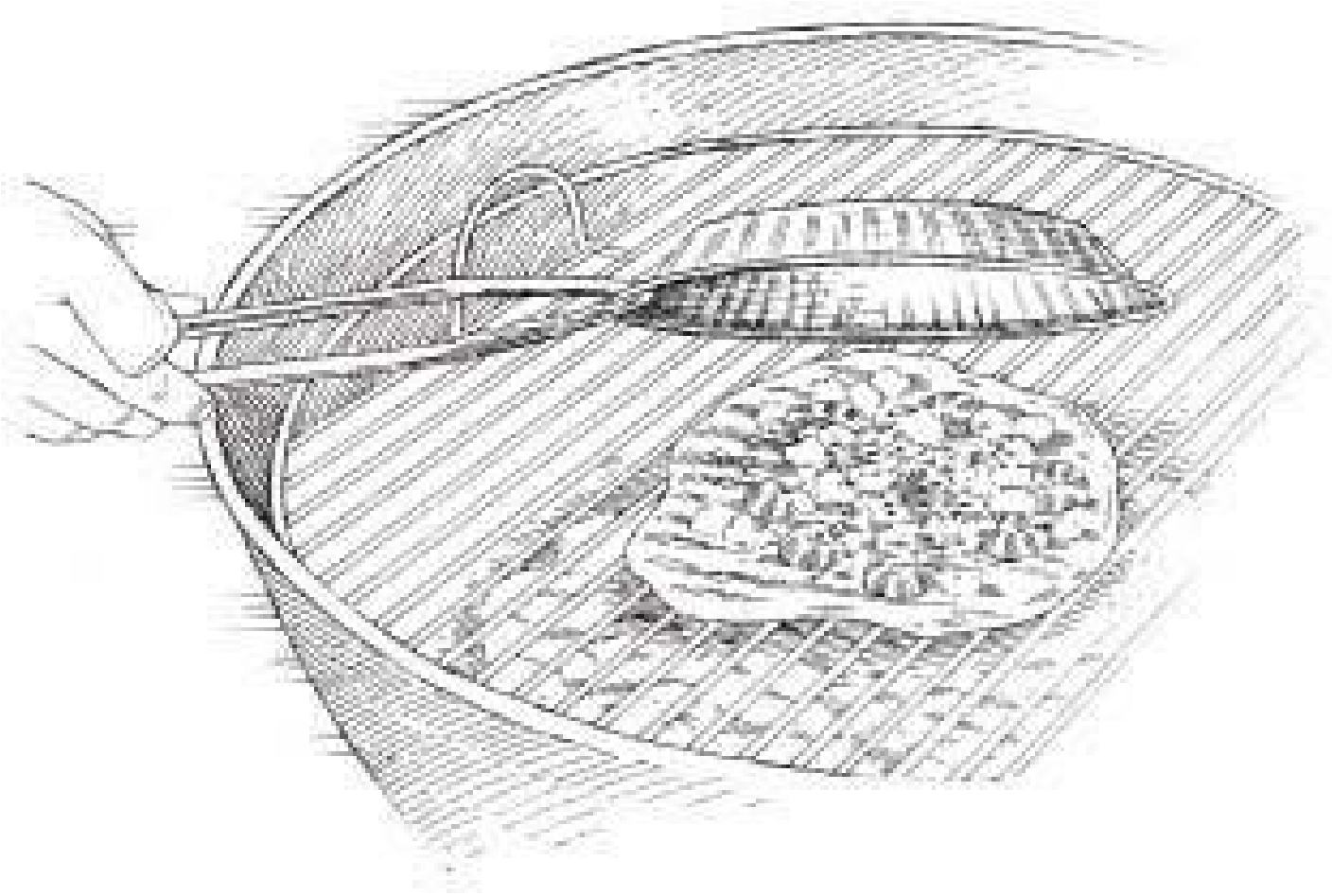

Figure 38.

Slide the pizzas back onto the grill. Cover and grill them until the pizza bottoms are crisp and browned, 2 to 3 minutes. If you are working with a lot of pizzas, it may be easier to top one, slide it back on the grill, and then cover

it with a disposable aluminum pie pan while brushing and topping the next pizza. This method also comes in handy when grilling over an open fire.

Grilled Pizza with Fresh Tomatoes and Basil

NOTE: ***When tomatoes are at their best and all your cooking is outside on the grill, think of this light pizza, which makes a good lunch for four or a first course for eight.***

1 recipe Grilled Pizza (*see* chapter five)

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

3 medium ripe tomatoes (about 1 pound), cored and sliced crosswise into thin rounds

1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese (optional)

1 cup lightly packed chopped fresh basil leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

$^1/_4$ cup pitted and quartered oil-cured black olives

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Grill dough rounds as directed in master recipe through step 4.

2. Brush grilled dough surfaces some oil. Arrange portion of tomatoes over each dough round, leaving $^1/_2$-inch border around edges uncovered. Sprinkle with optional Parmesan, basil, and salt and pepper to taste. Drizzle with

remaining oil and dot with olives if using.

3. Continue grilling pizzas, covered, until topping is hot and cheese melts, 2 to 3 minutes. Serve immediately.

Grilled Pizza with Shrimp and Feta Cheese

NOTE: ***This pizza is moister than some of the others and works well as a dinner for four when served with a salad.***

1 recipe Grilled Pizza

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for brushing on stretched dough

6 medium garlic cloves, minced

4 teaspoons minced fresh oregano leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

1 pound medium shrimp, peeled and halved lengthwise

(*see* figure 39)

8 ounces feta cheese, crumbled (2 cups)

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Prepare dough rounds as directed in master recipe through step 2.

2. While preparing dough, combine $^{1}/_{4}$ cup oil, garlic, 2 teaspoons oregano, and salt and pepper to taste in small bowl. Set herb oil aside.

3. Check grill heat and brush plain olive oil evenly over each stretched dough round. Grill, oiled side down, until dark

brown grill marks appear, 1 to 2 minutes. Brush tops with more plain olive oil, then flip onto clean baking sheet, grilled side up.

4. Arrange portion of shrimp over each dough round, leaving $^{1}/_{2}$-inch border around edges uncovered. Brush some herb oil over each pizza, making sure that shrimp are lightly brushed with oil as well. Sprinkle cheese and remaining 2 teaspoons oregano over shrimp.

5. Continue grilling pizzas, covered, until shrimp are pink and cheese melts, 2 to 3 minutes. Serve immediately.

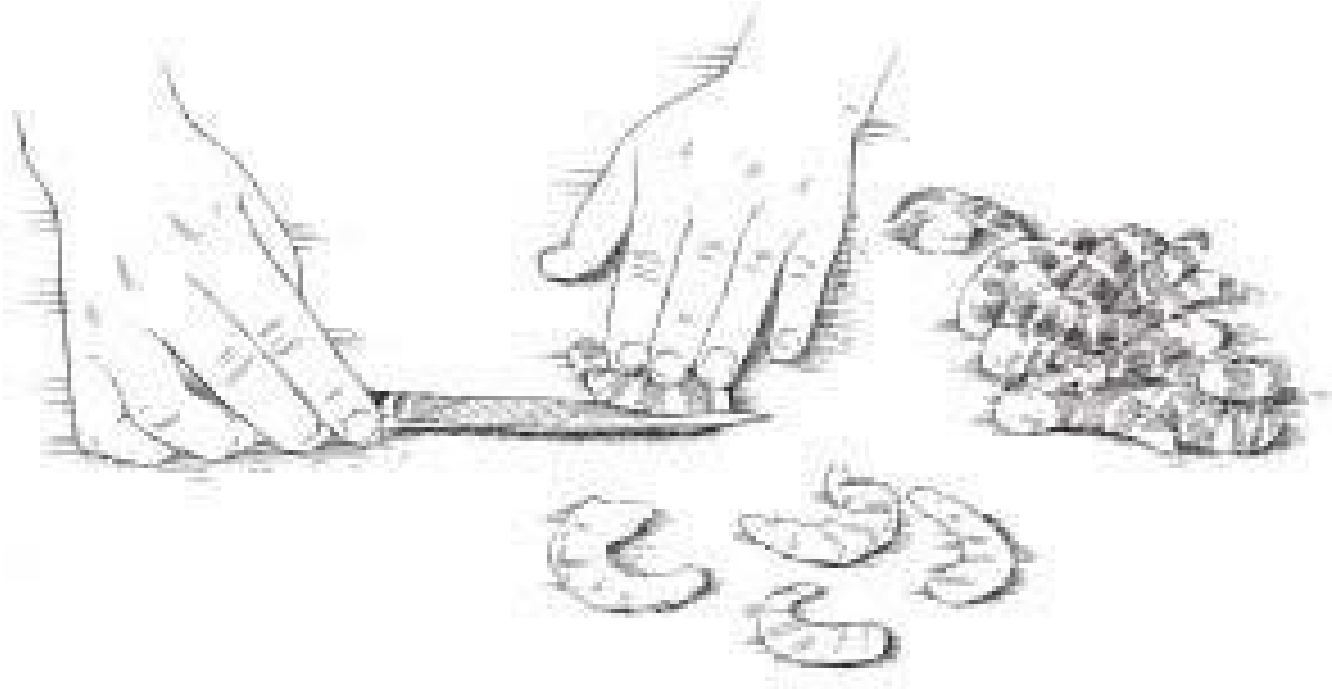

Figure 39.
Halving the shrimp lengthwise allows them to cook through on top of the pizza and eliminates the need to precook them. Peel the shrimp and use a sharp paring knife to cut along the back. Remove the vein if you like as you separate the halved shrimp.

Grilled Pizza with Portobello Mushrooms and Onions

NOTE: ***You can sauté the onions well in advance, but because you grill the mushrooms, it makes sense to cook them right before grilling the pizzas.***

1 recipe Grilled Pizza

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for brushing on stretched dough

2 medium onions, halved and sliced thin

2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar

1 teaspoon minced fresh

oregano or thyme leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

4 medium portobello mushrooms (about 1 pound), stems discarded

$^1/_2$ cup grated Parmesan cheese

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Prepare dough rounds as directed in master recipe through step 2.

2. While preparing dough, heat 2 tablespoons oil in large skillet. Add onions and sauté over medium heat until golden, about 8 minutes. Stir in vinegar and cook until liquid has evaporated,

about 1 minute. Stir in oregano or thyme and salt and pepper to taste. Set onions aside.

3. Brush mushrooms with 2 tablespoons oil. Season with salt and pepper to taste and grill, gill sides up, until caps are streaked with dark grill marks, 8 to 10 minutes. Remove mushrooms from grill and cut into $^{1}/_{4}$-inch strips. Set mushrooms aside.

4. Check grill heat and brush oil evenly over each stretched dough round. Grill, oiled side down, until dark brown grill marks appear, 1 to 2 minutes. Brush tops

with more oil, then flip onto clean baking sheet, grilled side up.

5. Brush grilled dough surfaces with oil. Arrange portion of onions and mushrooms over each dough round, leaving $^{1}/_{2}$-inch border around edges uncovered. Sprinkle cheese over vegetables.

6. Continue grilling pizzas, covered, until vegetables are hot and cheese melts, 2 to 3 minutes. Serve immediately.

Grilled Pizza with Grilled Eggplant and Goat Cheese

NOTE: ***Thin rounds of eggplant are brushed with a garlicky basil oil, grilled, and then layered over grilled crusts and sprinkled with goat cheese.***

1 recipe Grilled Pizza

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for brushing on stretched dough

6 medium garlic cloves, minced

4 tablespoons minced fresh basil leaves

Salt and ground black pepper

1 large eggplant (about 1 pound), cut crosswise into 1/4-

inch-thick rounds

8 ounces goat cheese, crumbled (about 2 cups)

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Prepare dough rounds as directed in master recipe through step 2.

2. While preparing dough, combine $^{1}/_{4}$ cup oil, garlic, 2 tablespoons basil, and salt and pepper to taste in small bowl. Set herb oil aside.

3. Brush eggplant slices with half of herb oil. Grill, turning once, until flesh is darkly colored, 8 to 10 minutes. Set

eggplant aside.

4. Check grill heat and brush plain olive oil evenly over each stretched dough round. Grill, oiled side down, until dark brown grill marks appear, 1 to 2 minutes. Brush tops with more plain olive oil, then flip onto clean baking sheet, grilled side up.

5. Brush grilled dough surfaces with remaining herb oil. Arrange portion of eggplant slices over each dough, leaving $^{1}/_{2}$-inch border around edges uncovered. Sprinkle cheese and remaining 2 tablespoons basil over eggplant.

6. Continue grilling pizzas, covered, until eggplant is hot and cheese melts, 2 to 3 minutes. Serve immediately.

Grilled Pizza with Fennel, Sun-Dried Tomato, and Asiago

NOTE: ***The sautéed fennel and onion topping can be prepared a day in advance of grilling the pizza. Bring to room temperature before using to top pizza.***

1 recipe Grilled Pizza

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for brushing on stretched dough

1 large Spanish onion (about 1 pound), halved and sliced thin

1 medium fennel bulb (about

3/4 pound), stems and fronds discarded; halved, cored, and bulb sliced very thin

4 large garlic cloves, minced

1 tablespoon fresh thyme leaves

1 teaspoon fennel seeds

1/4 teaspoon hot red pepper flakes

Salt

1/2 cup drained and slivered sun-dried tomatoes

1/2 cup grated Asiago cheese

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Prepare dough rounds as directed in master recipe through step 2.

2. While preparing dough, heat 3 tablespoons oil in large skillet over medium-high heat. Add onion and fennel and cook, stirring often, until vegetables soften, about 8 minutes. Add garlic and continue cooking 2 minutes. Stir in thyme, fennel seeds, and pepper flakes. Season with salt to taste. Set onion-fennel mixture aside.

3. Check grill heat and brush oil evenly over each stretched dough round. Grill, oiled side down, until dark brown grill marks appear, 1 to 2 minutes. Brush tops with more oil, then flip onto clean

baking sheet, grilled side up.

4. Brush grilled dough surfaces with more oil. Arrange portion of onion-fennel mixture over each dough round, leaving $^{1}/_{2}$-inch border around edges uncovered. Sprinkle tomatoes and cheese over vegetables.

5. Continue grilling pizzas, covered, until eggplant is hot and cheese melts, 2 to 3 minutes. Serve immediately.

HOW TO MAKE MUFFINS, BISCUITS, & SCONES

Quick Bread Basics

Classic Muffins

Bran Muffins

Buttermilk Biscuits

Cream Biscuits

Scones

Cornbread & Corn Muffins

Irish Soda Bread

Banana Bread

Cranberry Nut Bread

QUICK BREAD BASICS

MUFFINS, BISCUITS, SCONES, CORNBREAD, banana bread, and Irish soda bread have a number of elements in common. All of these baked goods can be quickly prepared (the batter or dough can usually be assembled in the time it takes to preheat the oven) and quickly baked. This sets them far apart from yeast breads, which must be allowed to rise for hours before baking. Chemical leaveners, such as baking powder and baking soda, are speedy and reliable.

There are a number of ingredients,

pieces of equipment, and techniques you will use repeatedly when making recipes in this book.

INGREDIENTS

BUTTER

For flavor, butter is the best fat to use in muffins, biscuits, and quick breads. We tested leading brands and found that freshness is the factor that most affects flavor. The best way to store butter is sealed in an airtight plastic bag in the freezer, pulling out sticks as you need them. Butter will keep in the freezer for several months but for no more than two or three weeks in the refrigerator.

We use unsalted butter in our test

kitchen. We like its sweet, delicate flavor and prefer to add our own salt to recipes. We find that the quality of salted butter is often inferior and that each manufacturer adds a different amount of salt, which makes recipe writing difficult.

DAIRY

Milk, buttermilk, yogurt, or cream is essential to all of the recipes in this book. They help bring doughs together and add flavor and richness.

Buttermilk and yogurt are acidic (both have been treated with bacteria) and will give baked goods a subtle tang. Recipes with these dairy items usually contain baking soda. Use either low-fat

or whole-milk plain yogurt, but avoid nonfat yogurt, which can make baked goods a bit dry and bland. Buttermilk is very low in fat—use either regular or skim versions. When measuring thick buttermilk or cream, make sure to use a spatula to scrape all of the liquid out of the measuring cup and into the batter.

FLOUR

Most of the recipes in this book call for all-purpose flour. All-purpose flour is typically made from a combination of hard red winter wheat and soft red winter wheat. Perhaps the primary difference between these types of wheat—and, consequently, in the flours made from them—is the variation in protein

content. Hard winter wheat is about 10 to 13 percent protein, and soft wheat about 8 to 10 percent. Mixtures of the two wheats are somewhere in between.

High-protein flours are generally recommended for yeasted products and other baked goods that require a lot of structural support. The reason is that the higher the protein level in a flour, the greater the potential for the formation of gluten. The sheets that gluten forms in dough are elastic enough to move with the gas released by yeast (which causes the bread to rise) but also sturdy enough to prevent that gas from escaping, so the dough doesn't deflate. Lower-protein flours, on the other hand, are recommended for chemically leavened

baked goods such as cakes and pastries. This is because baking powder and baking soda are quick leaveners. They lack the endurance of yeast, which can force the naturally resistant gluten sheets to expand. Gluten can overpower quick leaveners, causing the final baked product to fall flat. For this reason, bread flour (which is made from high-protein wheat) does not work in a muffin or biscuit recipe.

A second important difference in flours is whether they are bleached or not. Technically, all all-purpose flours are bleached. Carotenoid pigments in wheat lend a faint yellowish tint to freshly milled flour. But in a matter of

about 12 weeks, these pigments oxidize, undergoing the same chemical process that turns a sliced apple brown. In this case, yellowish flour changes to a whiter hue (though not stark white). Early in this century, as the natural bleaching process came to be understood, scientists identified methods to chemically expedite and intensify it. Typically, all-purpose flours are bleached with either benzoyl peroxide or chlorine gas. The latter not only bleaches the flour but also alters the flour proteins, making them less inclined to form strong gluten. Today many consumers prefer chemically bleached flour over unbleached because they associate the whiter color with higher

quality.

In extensive kitchen tests, we found that chemically bleached flour can give simple baked goods an "off" flavor, most often described as metallic. This characteristic is easiest to spot in a simple biscuit and less noticeable in a muffin with lots of sugar and other flavorful ingredients. We prefer unbleached, all-purpose flour for most uses.

In some cases, when we want an especially tender texture, we use cake flour along with the all-purpose. While all-purpose flour is made from hard wheat (at least in part) and contains between 10 and 12 percent protein, cake

flour is made from soft wheat and typically has just 8 to 10 percent protein. Less protein means less gluten formation and a more tender crumb.

Most supermarkets sell two kinds of cake flour: plain and self-rising. Self-rising cake flour contains salt and baking powder and is meant to be a convenience product. We would rather choose the amount and type of leavener that goes into our baking.

No matter the type or brand, we measure all flour by the dip-and-sweep method. Dip a metal or plastic dry measure into a bag of flour so that the cup is overflowing with flour. Then use a knife or icing spatula to level off the flour, sweeping the excess back into the

bag. Short of weighing flour (which is what professional bakers do), this measuring method is your best guarantee of using the right amount of flour. Spooning the flour into the measuring cup aerates it, and you might end up with as much as 25 percent less flour by weight.

LEAVENERS

Muffins, biscuits, and quick breads, as well as cookies, cakes, pancakes, and waffles, get their rise from chemical leaveners—baking soda and baking powder—rather than yeast. Chemical leavenings react with acids to produce carbon dioxide, the gas that causes these baked goods to rise.

To do its work, baking soda relies on an acidic ingredient in the recipe, such as buttermilk, sour cream, yogurt, or molasses. It's important to use the right amount of baking soda in recipes. Use more baking soda than can be neutralized by the acidic ingredient, and you'll end up with a metallic-tasting, coarse-crumbed quick bread or cake.

Baking powder is nothing more than baking soda (about one-quarter to one-third of the total makeup) mixed with a dry acid and double-dried cornstarch. The cornstarch absorbs moisture and keeps the baking soda and the dry acid apart during storage, preventing premature production of the gas. When

baking powder becomes wet, the acid comes into contact with the baking soda, producing carbon dioxide. Most commercial baking powders are "double-acting." In other words, they contain two kinds of acid—one that produces a carbon dioxide reaction at room temperature, the other responding only to heat.

In contrast, baking soda is only single-acting, as is homemade baking powder, which contains only one acid, cream of tartar. Baking soda reacts immediately on contact with an acid. In a muffin, for example, it is important to have an early release of carbon dioxide during the batter preparation so that small bubbles will be created to form the foundation of

the cell structure. These cells expand during baking because of additional carbon dioxide production caused by the action of the second leavening acid in baking powder, and the dough firms up into the final muffin structure.

EQUIPMENT

BAKING SHEETS

We tested 11 brands of baking sheets and found that sheets with shiny surfaces do a better job than darker pans, especially those with black nonstick surfaces. We found that scones and biscuits tend to burn on the bottom when baked on dark sheets. We prefer baking sheets that are rimless on at least one

side so that baked goods can be slid right onto a cooling rack.

FOOD PROCESSOR

The steel blade on a food processor is the best tool for cutting cold butter into dry ingredients to make biscuits and scones. Choose a large model (an 11-cup workbowl is best) that can handle a full batch of dough. You won't be able to make a dozen biscuits in a small food processor. Also, check out the weight of the base. A 10-pound food processor will stay put on the counter, no matter what kind of dough you are kneading. Lighter models may bounce around when trying to knead stiff yeast bread doughs.

ICE CREAM SCOOP

A spring-loaded ice cream scoop ensures uniform muffin size and clean dispensing when transferring the dough to the holes in a muffin tin. We use an ice cream scoop that holds one-half cup, so one full scoop will fill each hole in a regular muffin tin. If you use an ice cream scoop, don't attempt to smooth out the top of the batter in each muffin hole. The oven heat will do this.

LOAF PANS

In our testing, we found that dark-colored nonstick loaf pans brown banana breads and other quick breads evenly. Breads, especially sweet ones, can burn in glass loaf pans. Also, pans

with handles at either end are easier to work with and should prevent you from sticking your oven mitt into the edge of a baked loaf. Even with the nonstick coating, we recommend greasing and flouring your loaf pan to ensure easy release.

MIXERS

We find that standing mixers are easy to use (hands are free to add ingredients) and do the best job of beating air into cream, egg whites, and cake batter. For quick breads, though, all that's needed is a handheld mixer.

When shopping for a standing mixer, look for a heavy model with a single paddle-type attachment. Less expensive

models that use classic beaters are only a small step up in quality from handheld mixers. Paddle attachments are much better at incorporating ingredients and won't become clogged with batter or dough.

As for handheld mixers, avoid those models with old-fashioned beaters that have a thick post running down the center. Look for beaters with thin, curved wires and open centers. Handles that slope higher in the front and lower in back are easier on your arm.

MUFFIN PAPERS

We baked muffins with and without paper liners. Those baked in papers were shorter than those baked right in

the cup, but they also had a more rounded, filled-out look. When peeling off the papers, we lost a good portion of the muffin. Muffin papers also keep the muffin's sides from browning as well as those baked right in the cup. We prefer to grease muffin tins instead of using paper liners.

MUFFIN TINS

Muffin tins come in a variety of finishes and sizes. As with loaf pans, we found that tins with dark nonstick finishes promote deep browning and are preferred. Each hole in a standard muffin tin can hold about one-half cup of batter.

In our research, we ran across a few recipes with instructions to grease the

bottom, but not the sides, of the muffin holes. We tested two batches of muffins—one baked in greased holes, the other baked in holes in which only the bottoms were greased. We observed no difference between those baked in holes that had been greased completely and those baked in holes with greased bottoms only. Since it's difficult to grease the bottom but not the sides of a muffin hole, we just grease the entire hole.

TECHNIQUES

There are several methods commonly used to assemble quick breads. The most common, often referred to as the quick

bread method, calls for mixing wet and dry ingredients separately, pouring wet into dry, then mixing them together as quickly as possible. Batters for pancakes, popovers, and many quick breads rely on this approach.

A second technique, often called the creaming method and more common to cake batters, starts with creaming the butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Eggs and flavorings are beaten in, then the dry and liquid ingredients are alternately added. For the best results, we like to cream butter in a tall, narrow bowl.

A third possibility comes from the tradition of biscuit and pie-dough making, in which cold fat is cut into the

dry ingredients with fingertips, a fork, a pastry blender, or the blade of a food processor. Once the mixture has achieved a cornmeal-like texture with pea-sized flecks, liquid is added and quickly mixed in.

We have tested these three mixing methods on all of the recipes in this book. Often, we have found that the same ingredients will bake up quite differently depending on how they are combined.

DO-AHEAD TRICK

Muffins, biscuits, scones, and quick breads are morning food. However, many cooks balk at any early-morning baking project. To save time and energy,

we found it was possible to measure and mix dry ingredients ahead of time. Simply place the flour, sugar, leavener, and salt in a covered container at room temperature. In the morning, add the butter and dairy items, and the batter will be ready before your oven is preheated.

STORAGE METHODS

When testing recipes for this book, we found ourselves with lots of muffins and biscuits and quick breads on our hands. Invariably, we tried to store them. Here are the results of our tests.

Biscuits and cornbread are the least promising candidates for storage. These

baked goods taste best warm, although they are fine at room temperature. However, when stored for more than a few hours, biscuits become soggy and cornbread dries out and crumbles. The refrigerator or freezer is not kind to these items.

Quick breads (Irish soda bread, banana bread, and cranberry-nut bread) are the easiest to store. If wrapped tightly in plastic (once cooled), the breads will stay fresh for a couple of days. Slices are also delicious when toasted, even when not quite fresh.

Muffins and scones are best eaten the day they are made. Once cooled, they can be stored in an airtight container at room temperature. Day-old muffins can

be sliced in half and reheated in a toaster oven, with the cut sides facing up. Toast the muffins for four or five minutes, then slather them with butter and/or jam. Scones don't really reheat well and are best eaten at room temperature. Day-old scones will not be as good as fresh ones but are certainly acceptable.

For longer storage, muffins and scones should be frozen in an airtight container. We found that muffins freeze better than scones. That said, a different method should be used for thawing muffins and scones.

We tested thawing both kinds of baked goods on the counter, in a toaster oven,

in a warm oven, and in the microwave. Muffins thawed in the toaster oven were doughy and heated unevenly. Muffins thawed in the microwave were damp and, again, heated unevenly. Muffins thawed at room temperature were our least favorite. The outside was soft and mushy, the inside was doughy, and the flavor muted and old tasting.

We found that muffins are best thawed in a 350-degree oven. Place frozen muffins on a baking sheet and then immediately into a preheated oven. Corn muffins take 15 minutes to defrost, classic muffins 20 minutes, and bran 25 minutes. (These are good estimates. To test for doneness, cut a muffin in half from top to bottom and feel the inside. If

frozen or still cold, continue heating 3 to 5 minutes more.) Classic and bran muffins make for great eating when treated this way. The crust gets crispier than the exterior of a just-baked muffin and the inside is moist, tender, and full-flavored. The bran muffins are very aromatic. Corn muffins seem to dry out, but they are still acceptable.

Scones thawed in a regular or toaster oven dried out too much. This was particularly noticeable with oatmeal scones, which became very crumbly. The microwave made the scones soggy. We had the best luck thawing scones on the counter to room temperature. This takes two to three hours and works best

with scones that don't have any fresh fruit, which ends up tasting stale after freezing and makes the scones too moist.

CLASSIC MUFFINS

HAVE YOU EVER TRIED TO BAKE A BATCH OF those jumbo muffins you see in bakeries and specialty coffee shops? If you follow most cookbook recipes, you won't get what you're looking for. We tried scores of recipes, and we weren't satisfied with the results, either. Some muffins came out flat-topped or misshapen. Other batches were either rich and leaden or dense and dry. The best were pleasant, but not outstanding.

Our standards, admittedly, were high. We weren't looking for a "healthy"

muffin to incorporate in our daily diet. We wanted a really great weekend muffin, one that would make brunch guests covet the recipe. This muffin had to have it all. It needed rich, full flavor with a thin, crisp crust protecting its fragile, tender crumb. What's more, this muffin had to be a real looker. We would settle for nothing less than a perfectly round, mushroomlike cap with a pronounced, crisp overhang.

Working with a conservative six-muffin recipe, we decided to start our tests with mixing techniques. Our review of recipes pointed to the three possible methods introduced in (quick bread method, creaming method, biscuit/pie dough method; see Techniques).

Although the recipe we were working with at this point was way too lean (the muffins were small, dry, tough, and unappetizing), it did have one thing going for it—the creaming method. The creamed-batter muffins we had made thus far were more tender-crumbed than their competitors.

We were puzzled at this development. Practically every quick bread recipe cautions not to overmix the batter once wet and dry ingredients have been combined. Better, most authors reason, to leave streaks of flour in the batter than to overdevelop the flour's gluten, which results in smaller, denser, and tougher muffins.

In the creaming method, the batter was beaten by machine up to two minutes, depending on the recipe. If overbeating caused gluten development and tough muffins, why were these muffins tender? The explanation is fairly straightforward. In the creaming process butter is first aerated with sugar, then fat-and moisture-rich eggs are beaten into the mix. Dry ingredients are added alternately with the wet ingredients. In most creamed butter recipes, a good portion of the flour (in our recipe, it's half) is added to the creamed butter mixture before the wet ingredients. That way, the fat from the butter and egg coats most of the flour, preventing any gluten

formation. The remaining flour and wet ingredients are added alternately at this point, stimulating only a part of the flour's gluten. Certainly some of the flour's gluten must be activated; otherwise the muffin would have no structure at all.

In the quick-bread method, all wet ingredients and fats are added at once, denying the flour an opportunity to be coated with fat. We naturally questioned why the quick-bread method couldn't approximate the creaming method of coating the flour with fat first. So we made a batch of muffins, mixing the dry ingredients, then adding melted butter and eggs to disperse the fat. When the flour was sufficiently coated, we stirred

in the remaining wet ingredient (usually a dairy product, in this case, yogurt).

The muffins were just as tender as those made using the creamed method. But because the batter had not been aerated by the mixer, they lacked the height of the mixer muffins. So when you're short on time, you can achieve more tender muffins by simply mixing the melted butter and eggs into the dry ingredients. The muffins will not rise high enough to develop a lip, but their texture and flavor will be fine. When perfection counts, get out the mixer.

With the mixing method chosen, we moved on to testing individual ingredients. Because our original

formula was too dry and savory, we increased the butter and sugar, then moved on to testing the primary ingredient: flour. We made muffins with cake flour, all-purpose flour, and an equal mix of cake and all-purpose flours.

The batter made with cake flour was incredibly loose compared with the other batters, resulting in muffins that were squat, wet, and greasy. They also lacked a distinct, crisp outer crust. Muffins baked with half cake and half all-purpose were a step up from the cake flour muffins, but their texture was a tad wet and greasy and they lacked the beautiful shape of those made entirely with all-purpose flour. Although the all-

purpose flour formula still needed work, these muffins were shapely and fairly tender, with a nice contrast between crust and crumb. After our flour tests, we decided that the formula needed more sugar for added flavor.

By now our formula was beginning to take shape, and we were ready to test liquids. We made muffins using low-fat milk, whole milk, half-and-half, cream, powdered milk plus water (common in commercial baking), buttermilk, yogurt, and sour cream. Leavening adjustments were made (reducing the amount of baking powder and including baking soda) for all the buttermilk, yogurt, and sour cream muffins.

The thin liquids—low-fat milk, whole milk, powdered milk, and half-and-half—naturally produced thin batters that baked into smooth-topped muffins. They looked more like cupcakes. Low-fat milk muffins were soufflé-shaped, with straight sides and flat tops.

The thicker liquids—cream, buttermilk, low-fat yogurt, and sour cream—delivered thicker batters and muffins with rounded, textured tops. The higher-fat muffins, particularly those made with sour cream and cream, were squat, dense, heavy, and wet. The buttermilk muffins were good, but the yogurt-enriched were better, having a rough-textured rounded top, a sweet-

tangy flavor, and a light, tender crumb.

Now that we had a working base, we started adding fruits and flavorings. Three additional adjustments to the recipe came during this part of the testing. Although the sugar level seemed right in the plain muffin, the muffins made with tart fruit and other ingredients did not seem sweet enough. After increasing the sugar for the fruit variations, we found that we liked more sugar in the plain version of the recipe as well. We also found that one more tablespoon of butter gave us additional tenderness without weighing down the muffin. Increasing the batter by one-half —from a recipe that uses 2 cups of flour to one that uses 3 cups—pumped up the

volume to give us not only a beautifully rounded top but also a nice big lip. This base worked with all of the following variations, so you should feel free to plug in your own favorite ingredients.

As a final question, we wondered if the kind of fat used to grease the muffin tin would affect the final baked product. To find out, we baked muffins in an ungreased muffin tin and in four more tins, one each coated in butter, shortening, oil, and vegetable cooking spray. Only those baked in ungreased muffin tins were completely unacceptable, displaying tough, leathery crusts. Although differences were subtle, we preferred the flavor of the muffins

baked in buttered tins. For ease and speed, vegetable cooking spray took first place.

Master Recipe

Basic Muffins

makes 1 dozen large muffins

NOTE: ***To cinnamon-coat muffin tops, dip warm muffins in melted butter, then in mixture of $^{1}/_{2}$ cup granulated sugar and 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon.***

Vegetable cooking spray or unsalted butter for greasing muffin tin

3 cups all-purpose flour

1 tablespoon baking powder

1/2 teaspoon baking soda

1/2 teaspoon salt

10 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened but still firm (see figure 1)

1 cup minus 1 tablespoon granulated sugar

2 large eggs

1 1/2 cups plain low-fat yogurt

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 375 degrees. Spray 12-hole muffin tin with vegetable cooking spray or coat lightly with butter.

2. Whisk flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt together in medium bowl; set aside.

3. Cream butter and sugar with mixer on medium-high speed until light and fluffy, about 2 minutes. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Beat in one-half of dry ingredients. Beat in one-third of yogurt. Beat in remaining dry ingredients in two batches, alternating with yogurt, until incorporated. Divide batter evenly among holes in greased muffin tin (see figure 2).

4. Bake muffins until golden brown, 25

to 30 minutes. Set tin on wire rack to cool slightly, about 5 minutes. Remove muffins from tin and serve warm or at room temperature.

VARIATIONS:

Mocha Chip Muffins

Follow master recipe, dissolving 3 tablespoons instant espresso powder in yogurt and folding 1 cup chocolate chips into finished batter.

Apricot Almond Muffins

Follow master recipe, creaming 1 ounce (3 tablespoons) almond paste with butter and sugar and folding $1^{1}/_{2}$ cups finely diced dried apricots into finished batter.

Sprinkle each batter top with portion of $^1/_2$ cup sliced almonds.

Raspberry Almond Muffins

Follow master recipe, creaming 1 ounce (3 tablespoons) almond paste with butter and sugar. Spoon one-half portion of batter into each muffin cup. With small spoon, make well in center of each cup of dough. Spoon 1 to $1^1/_2$ teaspoons raspberry (or any flavored) jam into each well. Fill with remaining batter. Sprinkle each batter top with portion of $^1/_2$ cup sliced almonds.

Cranberry-Walnut-Orange Muffins

Follow Fixedmaster recipe, adding 2 teaspoons grated orange zest to butter and sugar mixture and folding $1^{1}/_{2}$ cups coarsely chopped fresh or frozen cranberries and $^{3}/_{4}$ cup coarsely chopped walnuts into finished batter.

Lemon Blueberry Muffins

Follow master recipe, adding 2 teaspoons grated lemon zest to butter and sugar mixture and folding $1^{1}/_{2}$ cups fresh or frozen (but not thawed) blueberries that have been tossed in 1 tablespoon flour into finished batter.

Lemon Poppy Seed Muffins

Follow master recipe, adding 3 tablespoons poppy seeds to dry ingredients and 1 tablespoon grated lemon zest to butter and sugar mixture. While muffins are baking, heat $^1/_4$ cup granulated sugar and $^1/_4$ cup lemon juice in small saucepan until sugar dissolves and mixture forms light syrup, 3 to 4 minutes. Brush warm syrup over muffins as soon as they come out of the oven. Cool and serve as directed.

Banana Walnut Muffins

Follow master recipe, adding $^1/_2$ teaspoon grated nutmeg to dry ingredients, substituting 1 cup packed

light brown sugar for granulated sugar, and folding $1^{1}/_{2}$ cups finely diced ripe bananas (about 3 small) and $^{3}/_{4}$ cup chopped walnuts into finished batter.

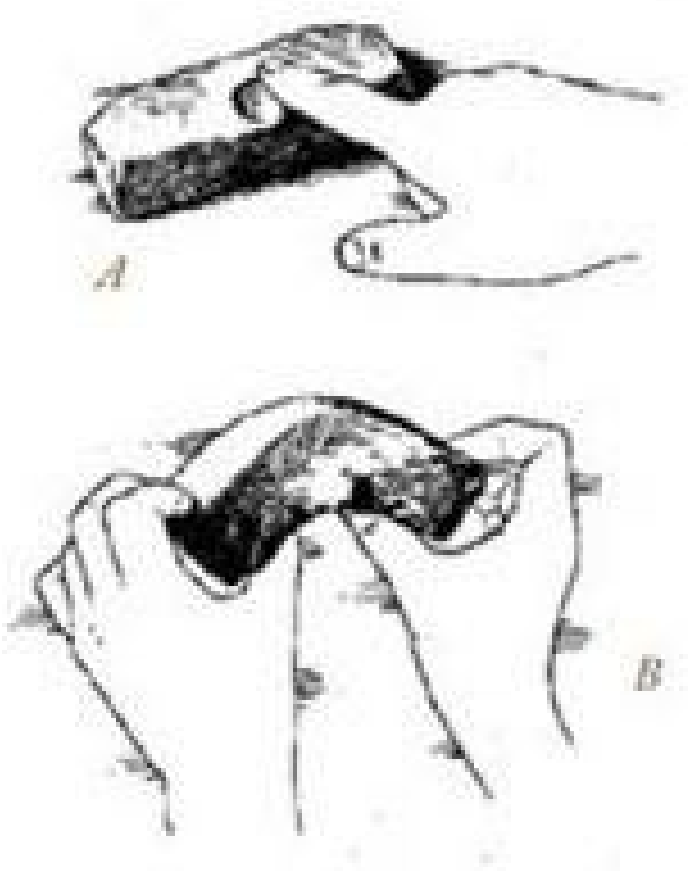

Figure 1.
Before creaming, butter must be brought to cool room temperature (about 67 degrees) so that it is malleable but not soft. Don't hurry this step. Cold butter can't hold as much air as properly softened butter, and the resulting muffins and quick breads may be

too dense. If you don't have an instant-read thermometer to take the temperature of the butter, use these visual clues: (A) The butter should give slightly when pressed but still hold its shape. (B) The butter should bend with little resistance and without cracking or breaking.

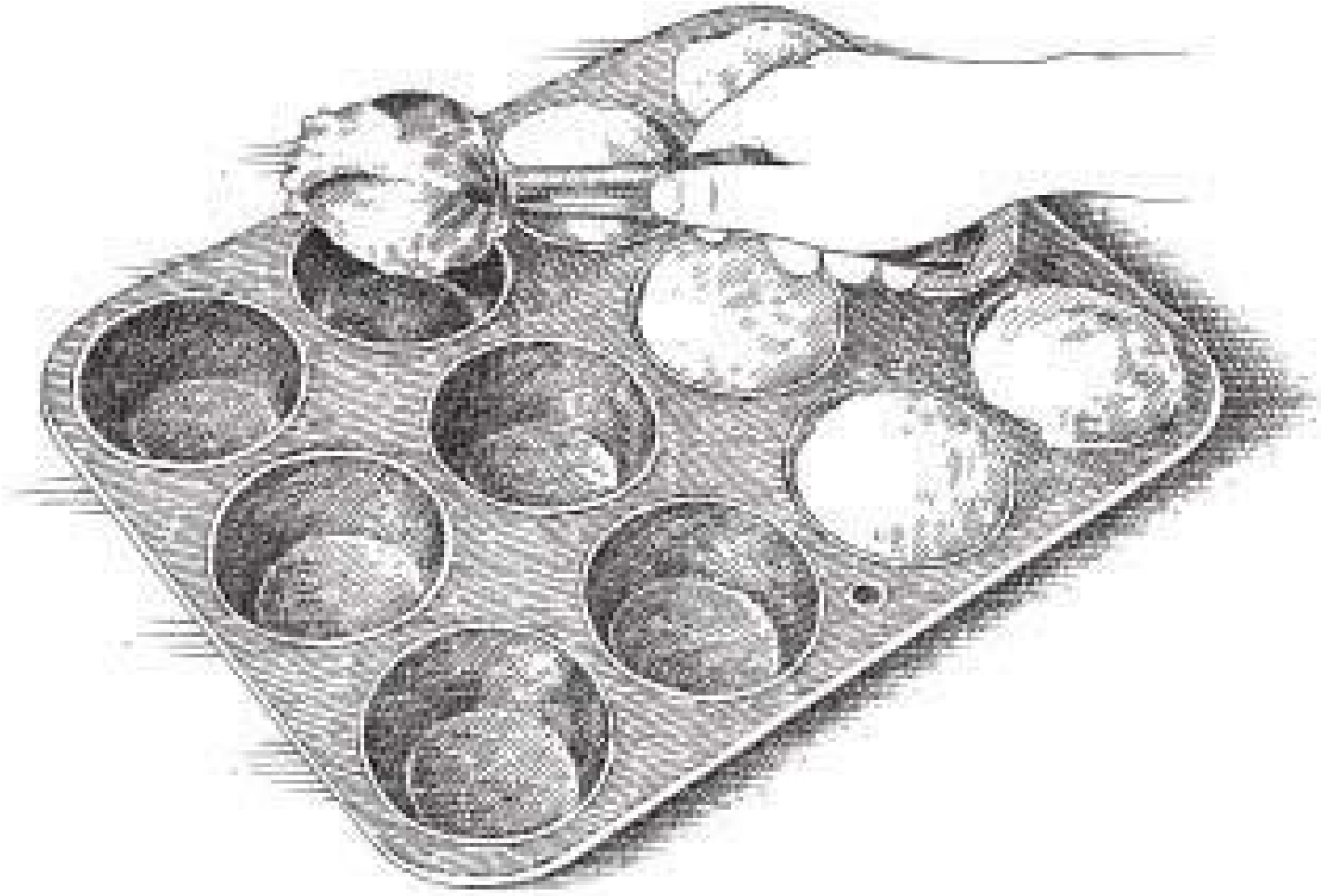

Figure 2.
Use an ice cream scoop to portion batter into a muffin tin.

BRAN MUFFINS

MOST ANY MUFFIN CAN BE MADE AS A variation on our recipe for basic muffins. Bran muffins, however, require a different formula. While most muffins have a buttery, delicate yellow crumb, bran muffins should be dark, rich, hearty, and moist.

There are two basic types of bran muffins—so-called refrigerator muffins and muffins based on a classic batter. The batter for refrigerator muffins, which contains bran cereal, is simply mixed and then stored in the refrigerator

until the cereal softens and becomes part of the batter. The "classic" batter muffins can be made by combining ingredients according to the creaming method or the quick bread method (both explained on Techniques). Wheat bran, rather than cereal, is the most common source of bran in classic bran muffin recipes.

We conducted a bake-off, and the inferiority of the cereal-based refrigerator muffins was immediately obvious. They had a muddy look, a somewhat rubbery texture, and an oddly chewy quality. The bran flavor was dull and muted, and they lacked the all-around depth we expected from a bran muffin. By contrast, the classic bran muffins tasted deeply of bran and had a

better (although still far from perfect) texture. Of the two approaches to making classic muffins, we preferred the creaming method (just as we did in our recipe for basic muffins) for its ability to create a fuller, more tender muffin.

With the mixing method decided, we moved on to the ingredients. A standard muffin batter is composed of flour, sugar, leavening, eggs, flavorings, milk, and fat. The batter's volume is built on a higher proportion of flour relative to fat and liquid. But when you reduce a portion of the flour to accommodate the bran, you disrupt the balance of liquid and dry ingredients, because wheat bran isn't actually absorbed into the batter the

way flour is. This means that you need to rework the proportion of liquid and dry ingredients.

To understand this dynamic, it is important to know a bit about bran. Bran, the exterior covering of wheat kernels, is milled into flakes. These flakes, known as wheat bran, are high in insoluble fiber. As a result, they are actually suspended in the batter, making a denser muffin. The bran flakes also tend to dry out and "break up" the batter, in much the same way that chocolate chips or nuts break up the batter in cookies.

When we started baking the muffins, we used a whopping two cups of bran. You can probably imagine the result:

dry, crumbly muffins that tasted (and acted) just like sawdust. After much fine-tuning, we found that we could achieve a fuller, more tempered flavor and a more pleasing texture by replacing a little of the all-purpose flour with whole wheat flour. This allowed us to cut the bran down to $1^{1}/_{2}$ cups without sacrificing the flavor we wanted.

Finally, we noticed that bran muffins tend to overbake in a flash. A tray of muffins are baked through when they retract ever so slightly from the sides of the cups and the tops spring back very gently on being touched. Don't look for an active spring. The muffins will be baked through even if a wooden pick

withdrawn from the centers has a few moist crumbs clinging to it.

Master Recipe

Bran Muffins

makes 1 dozen muffins

NOTE: ***Wheat bran is available at health foods stores. It is also available in supermarkets in boxes labeled Quaker Unprocessed Bran.***

Vegetable cooking spray or unsalted butter for greasing muffin tin

$1\frac{1}{4}$ cups all-purpose flour

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup whole wheat flour

2 teaspoons baking powder

1/2 teaspoon baking soda

3/4 teaspoon salt

1 1/4 teaspoons ground cinnamon

3/4 teaspoon ground allspice

1/2 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg

7 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened but still firm (see figure 1)

1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons packed dark brown sugar

2 large eggs

2 1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract

3 tablespoons unsulphured molasses

1/4 cup sour cream

1 cup plus 3 tablespoons buttermilk

1 1/2 cups wheat bran

1 cup raisins

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 375 degrees. Spray 12-hole muffin tin with vegetable cooking spray or coat lightly with butter.

2. Whisk flours, baking powder, baking soda, salt, and spices together in medium bowl; set aside.

3. Cream butter with mixer on medium speed until light and fluffy, 1 to 2 minutes. Add brown sugar, increase speed to medium-high, and beat until combined and fluffy, about 1 minute longer. Add eggs one at a time, beating well after each addition. Beat in vanilla, molasses, and sour cream until thoroughly combined and creamy, about 1 minute longer. Reduce speed to low; beat in buttermilk and half the flour mixture until combined, about 1 minute. Beat in remaining flour mixture until incorporated and slightly curdled looking, about 1 minute longer, scraping sides of bowl as necessary. Stir in bran and raisins. Divide batter evenly among

holes in greased muffin tin (see figure 2).

4. Bake until a toothpick inserted into muffin center withdraws cleanly or with a few moist particles adhering to it, about 25 minutes. Set tin on wire rack to cool slightly, about 5 minutes. Remove muffins from tin and serve warm or at room temperature.

BUTTERMILK BISCUITS

BISCUITS SHARE WITH MUFFINS THE DISTINCTION of being among the simplest of all breads. They are made from a mixture of flour, leavener (baking powder or soda), salt, fat (usually butter or vegetable shortening), and liquid (milk, buttermilk, sour milk, yogurt, or cream). To make them, one cuts fat into the dry ingredients, as when making pie dough; the liquid is then stirred in until a dough forms. Biscuits are usually rolled out and cut, although they can also be shaped by hand or dropped onto a

baking sheet by the spoonful.

We began our testing by focusing on the flour. We found that the kind of flour you choose has a great effect on the biscuit you end up with. The main factor here is the proportion of protein in the flour. Low-protein, or "soft," flour (such as cake flour or White Lily, a favored brand in the South) encourages a tender, cakelike texture as well as a more moist crumb. Higher-protein, or "strong," flour (such as all-purpose flour) promotes a crispier crust and a drier, denser crumb.

Tasters liked the crispier crust of the biscuits made with all-purpose flour and the tender, airy crumb of the biscuits made with cake flour. We found that a combination of half cake flour and half

all-purpose flour delivered the best results—a crisp crust and a tender crumb. If you don't have cake flour, all-purpose flour makes a fine biscuit as long as you add more liquid to the batter.

Fat makes biscuits (and other pastries) tender, moist, smooth, and tasty. Butter, of course, delivers the best flavor, while vegetable shortening makes a slightly flakier biscuit with better holding powers. However, we don't think this gain in shelf life is worth the loss in flavor. Stick with unsalted butter when making biscuits.

We discovered that a proportion of $^1/_2$ cup fat to 2 cups flour provides the best balance of tenderness and richness with

structure. If you use less fat, your biscuits will rise well, but they will be tough and dry. If you use more, your biscuits will have a lovely texture but they may end up a bit squat.

After mixing flour and leavening, you must "rub" the fat into the dry ingredients, making a dry, coarse mixture akin to large bread crumbs or rolled oats, with some slightly bigger lumps mixed in. This rubbing may seem unimportant, but in fact it is crucial to the proper rising of the biscuits. Gas released by the leavening during baking must have a space in which to collect; if the texture of the dough is homogeneous, the gas will simply dissipate. Melting fat particles create convenient spaces in

which the gas can collect, form a bubble, and produce a rise. Proper rubbing breaks the fat into tiny bits and disperses it throughout the dough. As the fat melts during baking, its place is taken up by gas and steam, which expand and push the dough up. The wider the dispersal of the fat, the more even the rising of the dough.

If, however, the fat softens and binds with the dry ingredients during rubbing, it forms a pasty goo, the spaces collapse, and the biscuits become leaden. To produce light, airy biscuits, the fat must remain cold and firm, which means rubbing must be deft and quick. Traditionally, biscuit makers pinch the

cut-up fat into the dry ingredients, using only their fingertips—never the whole hand, which is too warm—and they pinch hard and fast, practically flinging the little bits of flour and fat into the bowl after each pinch. Less experienced cooks sometimes cut in the fat by scraping two knives in opposite directions or by using a bow-shaped pastry blender. We found, however, that there is no reason not to use the food processor for this task: pulsing the dry ingredients and the fat is fast and almost foolproof.

After cutting in the fat, liquid is added and the dough is stirred, just until the ingredients are bound, using a light hand so the gluten will not become activated.

We found that buttermilk (or plain yogurt) gives biscuits the best flavor. It also creates a lighter, airier texture than regular milk. That's because the acid in the buttermilk reacts with the leaveners to increase the rise.

Biscuits are best formed by gently patting gobs of dough between your hands. If the work surface, the dough, and the cutter are generously floured, fluffy biscuits can be rolled and cut; but the softness of the dough makes this a tricky procedure, and the extra flour and handling will make the biscuits heavier and somewhat dense.

Because they need quick heat, biscuits are best baked in the middle of the oven.

Placed too close to the bottom, they burn on the underside and remain pale on top; set too near the oven roof, they do not rise well because the outside hardens into a shell before the inside has had a chance to rise properly. As soon as they are light brown, they are done. Be careful, as over-cooking will dry them out. Biscuits are always at their best when served as soon as they come out of the oven. The dough, however, may be made some hours in advance and baked when needed; the biscuits will still rise well.

Master Recipe

Buttermilk Biscuits

makes 12

NOTE: ***Mixing the butter and dry ingredients quickly so the butter remains cold and firm is crucial to producing light, tender biscuits. The easiest and most reliable approach is to use a food processor fitted with a steel blade. Expect a soft and slightly sticky dough. The wet dough creates steam when the biscuits bake and promotes the light airy texture. If the dough is too wet for you to shape the***

biscuits by hand, lightly flour your hands and then shape the biscuits.

1 cup all-purpose flour
1 cup plain cake flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
$^1/_2$ teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon sugar
$^1/_2$ teaspoon salt
8 tablespoons chilled unsalted butter, cut into $^1/_4$-inch cubes (see figures 3 through 5)
$^3/_4$ cup cold buttermilk, or $^3/_4$ cup plus
2 tablespoons plain yogurt

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 450 degrees.

2. Place flours, baking powder, baking soda, sugar, and salt in large bowl or workbowl of a food processor fitted with steel blade. Whisk together or pulse six times.

3. If making by hand, use two knives, a pastry blender, or your fingertips to quickly cut in butter until mixture resembles coarse meal with a few slightly larger butter lumps. If using food processor, remove cover and distribute butter evenly over dry ingredients.

Cover and pulse 12 times, each pulse lasting 1 second.

4. If making by hand, stir in buttermilk with a rubber spatula or fork until mixture forms soft, slightly sticky ball. If using food processor, remove cover and pour buttermilk evenly over dough. Pulse until dough gathers into moist clumps, about eight 1-second pulses.

5. Transfer dough to a lightly floured surface and quickly form into rough ball. Be careful not to overmix. Using a sharp knife or dough cutter, divide dough in quarters and then cut each quarter into

thirds. Quickly and gently shape each piece into a rough ball (see figure 6), and place on ungreased cookie sheet. (Baking sheet can be wrapped in plastic and refrigerated for up to 2 hours.)

6. Bake until biscuit tops are light brown, 10 to 12 minutes. Serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Buttermilk Biscuits with All-Purpose Flour

We find that a blend of cake flour and all-purpose flour creates a light, airy, and tender biscuit. If you don't have cake

flour on hand, you can use all-purpose flour alone, although the crumb will be coarser and the crust crispier because of the higher protein content in the flour.

Follow master recipe, replacing cake flour with an extra cup of all-purpose flour. Increase buttermilk or yogurt by 2 tablespoons.

Sweet Milk Biscuits

Buttermilk (or yogurt) adds richness and a distinctive tang to the biscuits while also helping the dough to rise. Biscuits made with whole milk are not as flavorful and need extra baking powder to rise properly.

Follow master recipe, replacing

buttermilk with $^{3}/_{4}$ cup whole milk and increasing baking powder to 1 tablespoon.

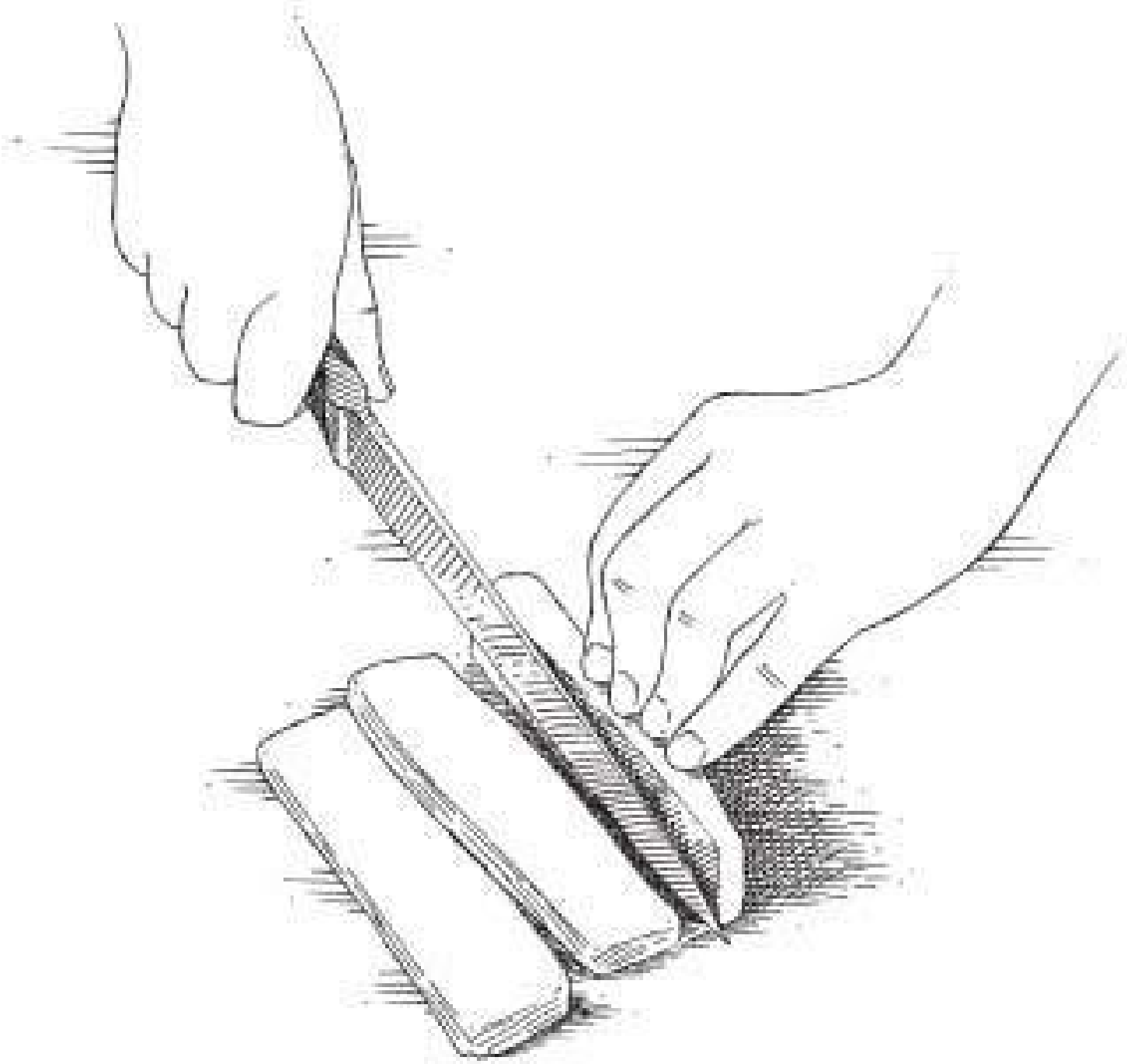

Figure 3.
Cut the butter lengthwise into three even strips.

Figure 4.
Separate the strips and then cut each lengthwise into thirds.

Figure 5.
Stack the strips on top of each other, then cut them crosswise into $^{1}/_{4}$-inch dice.

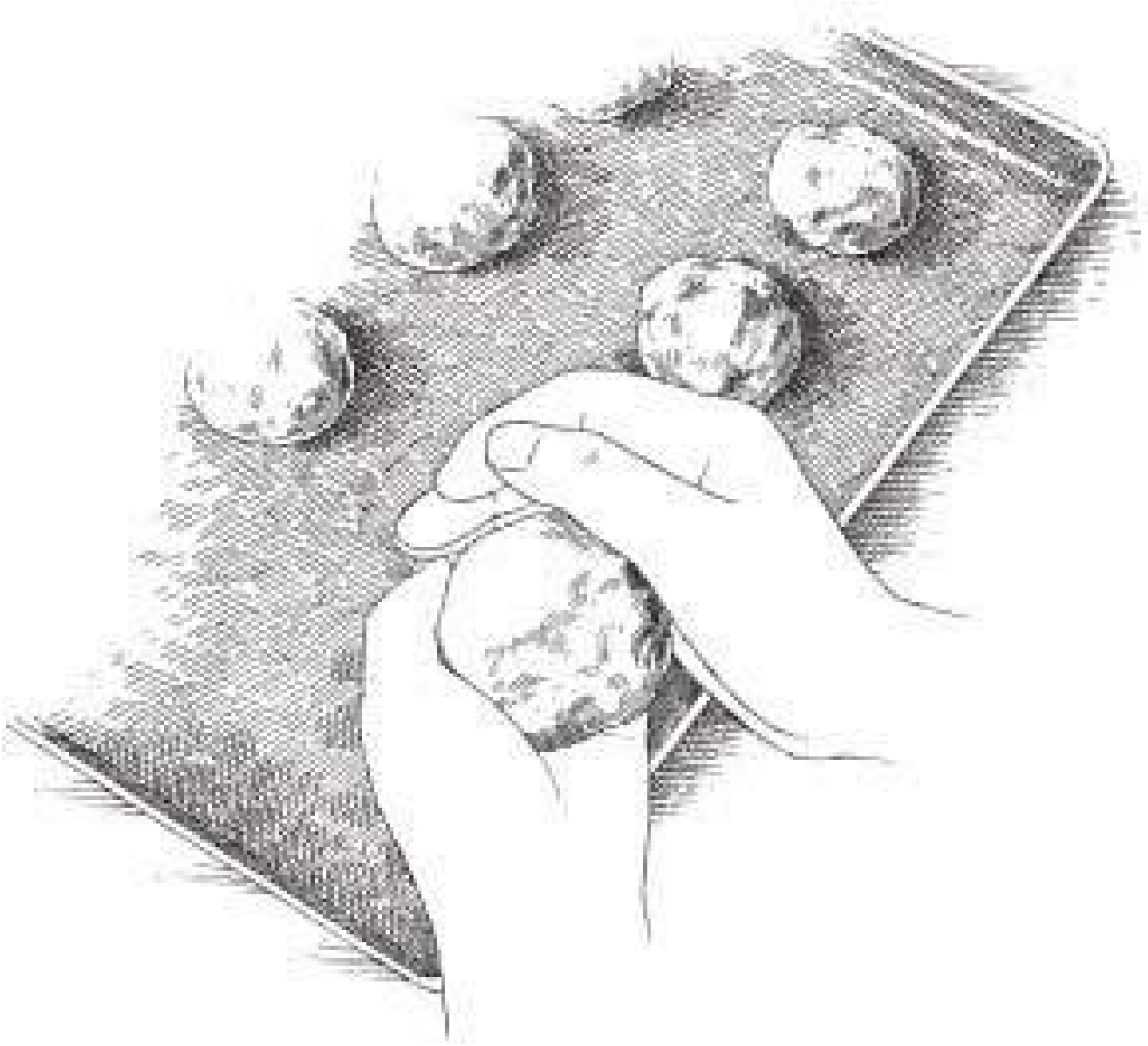

Figure 6.
Our buttermilk biscuit dough is too soft to roll and cut. Using a sharp knife or dough cutter, divide dough in quarters and then cut each quarter into thirds. With

lightly cupped hands, gently shape each piece into a ball.

CREAM BISCUITS

OUR BUTTERMILK BISCUITS are easy to prepare: You can have biscuits on the table in 20 minutes. But many cooks are intimidated by this kind of biscuit because they are not comfortable with the traditional process of cutting butter into flour.

We wondered if we could come up with a great recipe for homemade biscuits that can be made quickly and easily and that does not require cutting fat into flour. In short, was it possible to take the guesswork out of making

biscuits to create a foolproof recipe?

We began with a basic recipe calling for 2 cups flour, 2 teaspoons baking powder, 1 tablespoon sugar, and $^1/_2$ teaspoon salt. Now we had to figure out what to add to this mixture instead of butter or vegetable shortening to make a dough. We decided to try plain yogurt, sour cream, milk, milk combined with melted butter, and whipped heavy cream, an idea we borrowed from a scone recipe.

The biscuits made with yogurt and sour cream were a bit sodden in texture, those with the milk and milk/butter combination were tough and lifeless, and the whipped cream biscuit was too light,

more confection than biscuit. This last approach also required another step—whipping the cream—which seemed like too much trouble for a simple recipe. So we tried using plain heavy cream, without whipping, and this biscuit was the best of the lot. (Cream biscuits are not our invention. James Beard includes such a recipe in his seminal work *American Cookery* [Little, Brown, 1972].)

Next, we decided to do a blind tasting, pitting the cream biscuits against our conventional buttermilk biscuit recipe, which requires cutting butter into the flour. The result? Both biscuits had their partisans. The cream biscuits were lighter and more tender. They were also

richer tasting. The buttermilk biscuits were flakier and had the distinctive tang that many tasters associate with good biscuits. Although neither biscuit was sweet, the buttermilk version seemed more savory.

At this point, we decided that cream biscuits were a worthy (and easier) alternative to traditional buttermilk biscuits. Still, we were running into a problem with the shape of the biscuits, which spread far too much during baking. We have always followed the conventional advice about not overworking the dough. In our experience, the best biscuits are generally made from dough that is

handled lightly. This is certainly true of buttermilk biscuits.

But cream biscuits, being less sturdy than those made with butter, become soft and "melt" during baking. In this case, we thought, a little handling might not be such a bad thing.

So we baked up two batches: The first dough we patted out gingerly; the second dough we kneaded for 30 seconds until it was smooth and uniform in appearance. The results were remarkable. The more heavily worked dough produced much higher, fluffier biscuits than the lightly handled dough, which looked short and bedraggled.

We ran into a problem, however, when one batch of biscuits had to sit for

a few minutes while we waited for the oven to heat up. During baking, the dough spread, resulting in biscuits with bottoms that were too wide and tops that were too narrow. Clearly, the biscuits had to be popped into the oven immediately after cutting. As for dough thickness, $^{3}/_{4}$ inch provides a remarkably high rise, more appealing than biscuits that start out $^{1}/_{2}$ inch thick. We also discovered that it was best to add just enough cream to hold the dough together. A wet dough does not hold its shape as well during baking.

Although we find it easy enough to quickly roll out this dough and then cut it into rounds with a biscuit cutter, you can

simply shape the dough with your hands or push it into the bottom of an 8-inch cake pan. The dough can then be flipped onto the work surface and cut into wedges with a knife or dough scraper.

We also tested making drop biscuits, a method in which the dough is simply scooped up and dropped onto a baking sheet. These biscuits did not rise very well and their shape was inferior. It was also more time-consuming to drop the batter in individual spoonfuls than to simply shape the dough in one piece.

Our final ingredient tests involved sugar—the tasters felt that 1 tablespoon was a bit much, so we dropped it to 2 teaspoons—and baking powder, which we found we could reduce to 1 teaspoon

with no decrease in rise. For oven temperature, we tried 375, 400, and 425 degrees, and the latter was best for browning.

Now we had the simplest of biscuit recipes: Whisk together the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt in a medium bowl, add $1^{1}/_{2}$ cups of heavy cream, form the dough, knead it for 30 seconds, cut it, and bake for 15 minutes at 425 degrees. The results will surprise you.

Master Recipe

Cream Biscuits

makes 8

NOTE: ***This recipe provides the quickest and easiest way to make biscuits. Bake the biscuits immediately after cutting them; letting them stand for any length of time can decrease the leavening power and thereby prevent the biscuits from rising properly in the oven.***

2 cups all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons sugar
1 teaspoon baking powder

1/2 teaspoon salt

1 1/2 cups heavy cream

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to upper-middle position and heat oven to 425 degrees. Line baking sheet with parchment paper.

2. Whisk together flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt in medium bowl. Add 1 1/4 cups cream and stir with wooden spoon until dough forms, about 30 seconds. Transfer dough from bowl to countertop, leaving all dry, floury bits behind in bowl. In 1 tablespoon increments, add up to 1/4 cup cream to

dry bits in bowl, mixing with wooden spoon after each addition, until moistened. Add these moistened bits to rest of dough and knead by hand just until smooth, about 30 seconds.

3. Following figures 7 through 10, cut biscuits into rounds or wedges. Place rounds or wedges on parchment-lined baking sheet and bake until golden brown, about 15 minutes. Serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Cream Biscuits with Fresh Herbs

Use the herb of your choice in this variation.

Follow master recipe, whisking 2 tablespoons minced fresh herbs into flour along with sugar, baking powder, and salt.

Cream Biscuits with Cheddar Cheese

Follow master recipe, stirring $^{1}/_{2}$ cup (2 ounces) sharp cheddar cheese cut into $^{1}/_{4}$-inch pieces into flour along with sugar, baking powder, and salt. Increase baking time to 18 minutes.

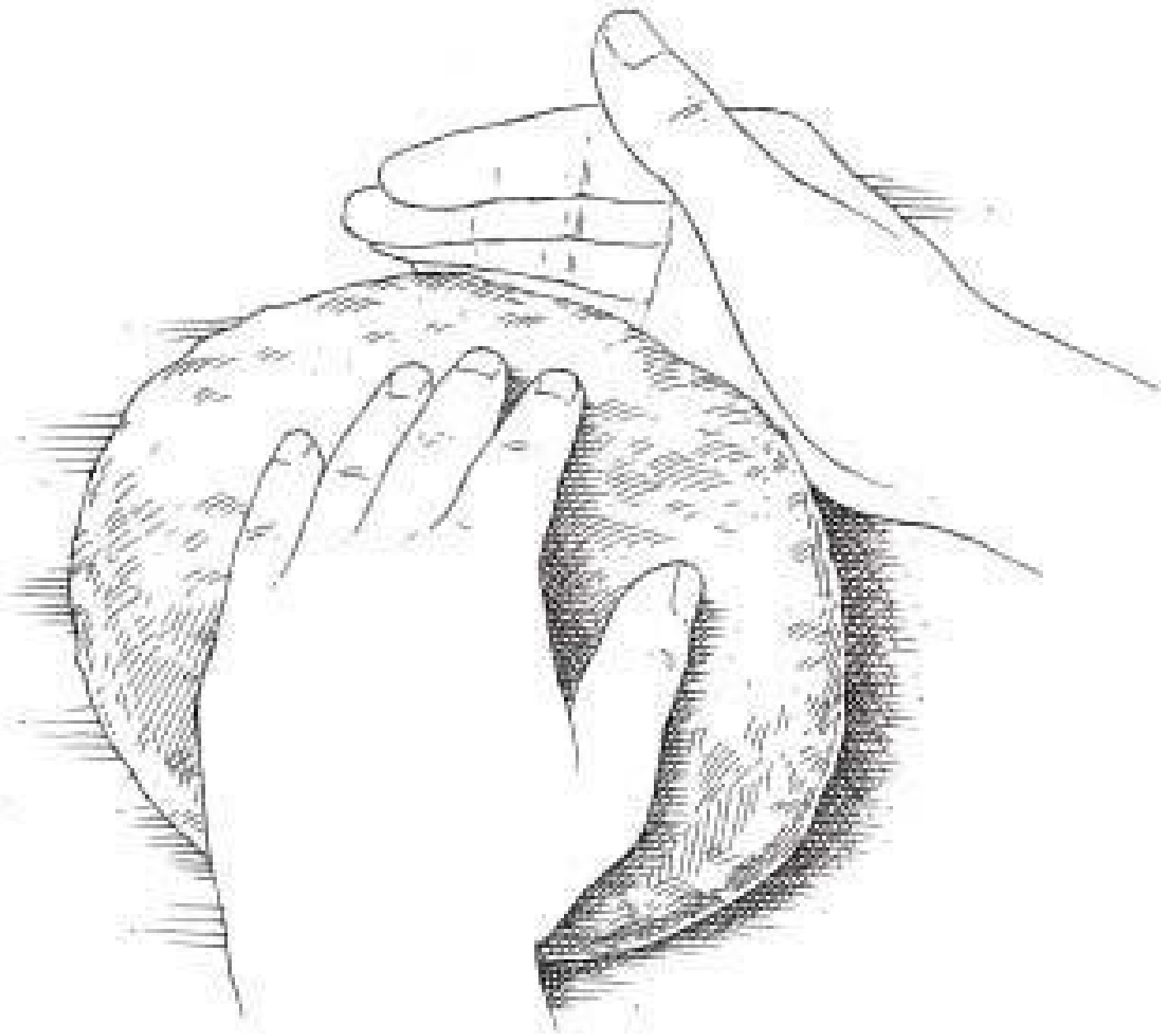

Figure 7.
For round biscuits, pat the dough on a lightly floured work surface into a $^{3}/_{4}$-inch-thick circle.

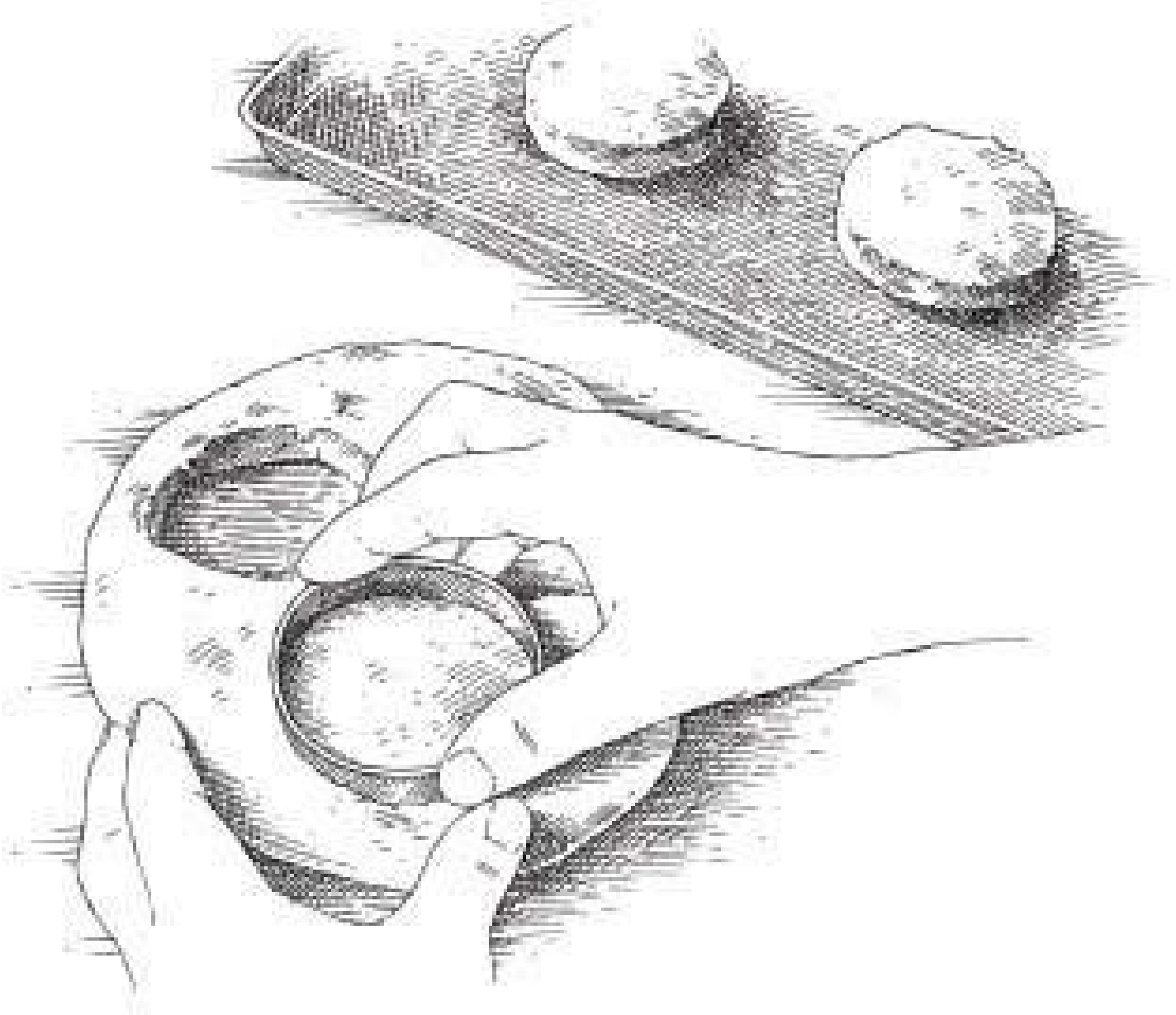

Figure 8.
Punch out the dough rounds with a biscuit cutter. Push together the remaining pieces of dough, pat into a $^{3}/_{4}$-inch-thick round, and

punch out several more biscuits. Discard the remaining scraps.

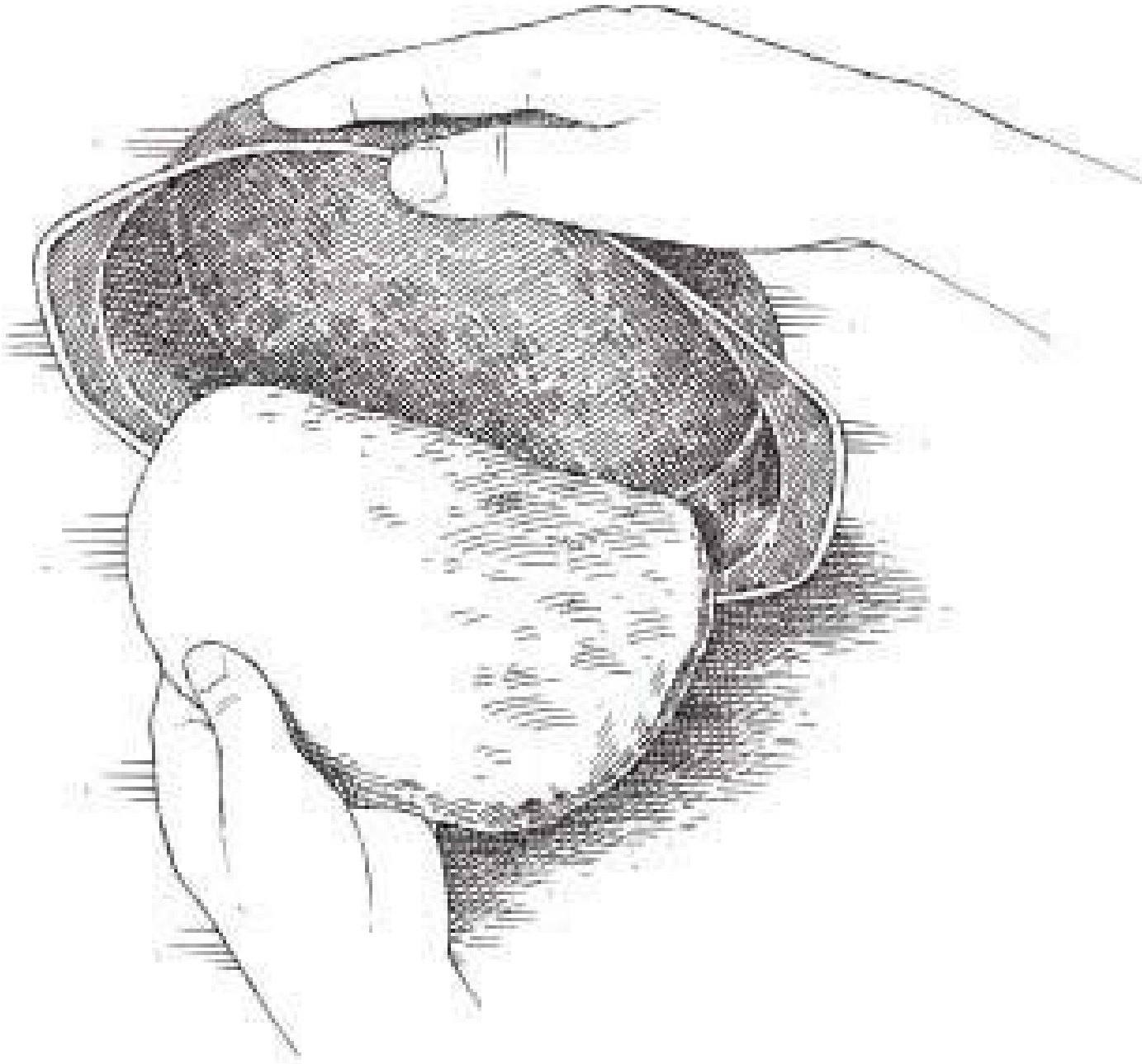

Figure 9.
To make wedges, press the dough into an 8-inch cake pan, then turn the dough out onto a lightly floured work surface.

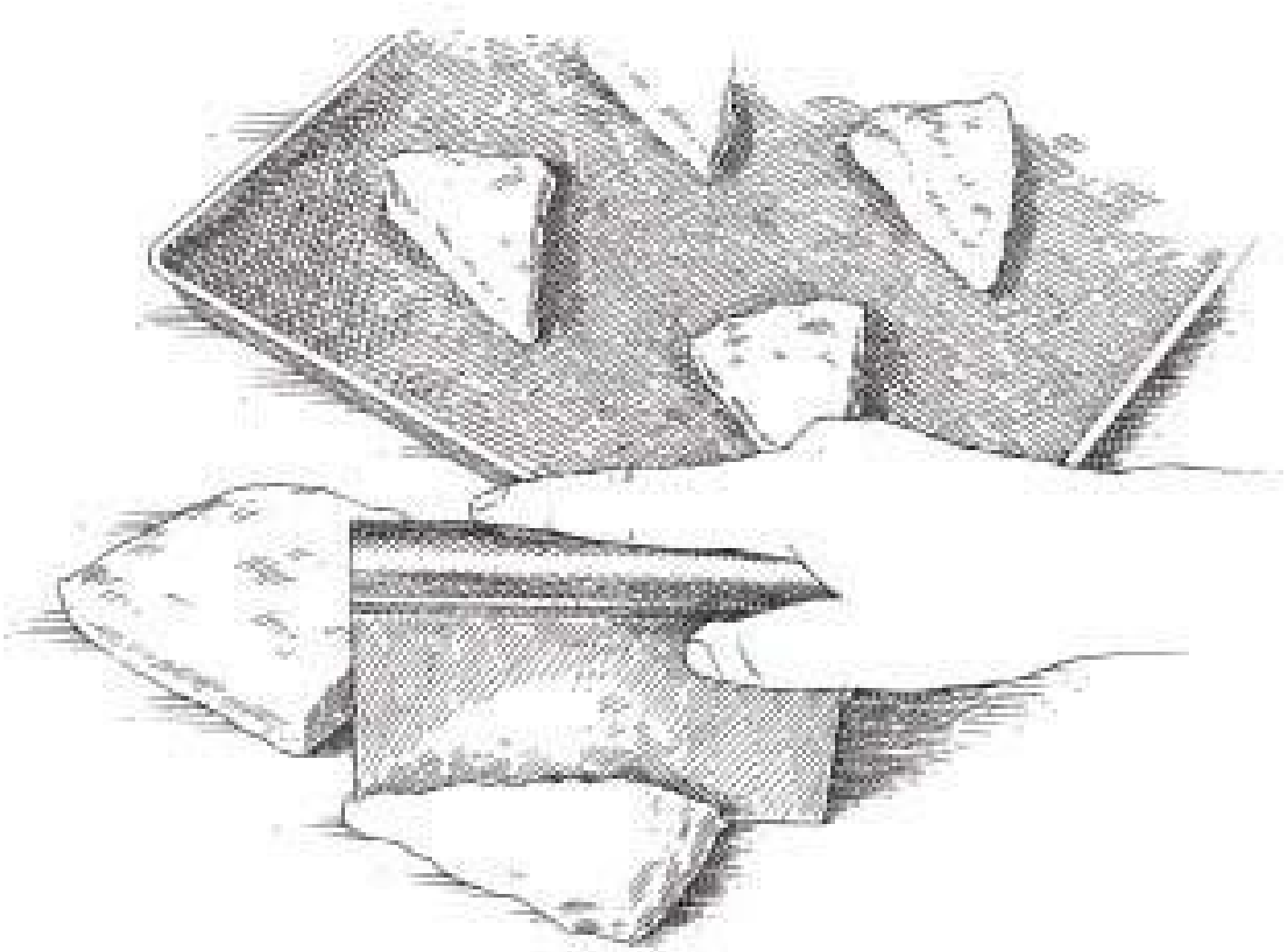

Figure 10.
With a knife or bench scraper, cut the dough into 8 wedges.

SCONES

SCONES, THE QUINTESSENTIAL TEA CAKE OF THE British Isles, were intended to be delicate, fluffy biscuits, which may come as a surprise to Americans. The clunky mounds of oven-baked sweetened dough that the British call rock cakes are often called scones in our restaurants and coffee shops. Unlike rock cakes, in which dough is dropped from a spoon onto a baking sheet, traditional scones are quickly rolled or patted out and cut into rounds or wedges.

We began our testing with the flour.

We constructed a composite recipe and then made one version with bread flour, one with all-purpose flour, and another with cake flour. The differences in outcome were astonishing. The scones made with bread flour were heavy and tough. Those made with all-purpose flour were lighter and much more flavorful. Cake flour produced scones that were doughy in the center, with a raw taste and poor texture.

With the question of flour type easily settled, we experimented with fat in the form of butter and then lard. We decided we preferred the rich flavor of butter. (Although lard is not used much in home baking anymore, we can understand why commercial bakers might prefer it. Day-

old scones made with lard hold up better than those made with butter. The preservative effects of different fats, along with lower cost, may be why store-bought scones are often made with margarine or other hydrogenated fats.) Although the amount of solid fat can be varied, we found 5 tablespoons butter to 2 cups flour to be just right. More butter and the scones almost melted in the oven, less butter and they turned out dry and tough.

The choice of liquid can also profoundly affect the flavor of a scone. We tested various liquids and found that cream made the best scones that were tender yet still light. Scones made with

milk were bland and dry. Buttermilk gave us scones with plenty of flavor, but they were also too flaky and biscuitlike. Scones made with cream were more moist and flavorful than the others.

We tried adding an egg to the dough and found that this made the scones very cakey, more American (or rocklike) in style than British. Many tasters liked the effect of the egg, however, and because it helps the scone hold onto moisture and remain fresh tasting longer, we decided to use the egg in a variation on our master recipe called Cakey Scones.

In traditional recipes, one to two tablespoons of sugar is enough to sweeten an entire batch of scones. American scones tend to be far sweeter

than the British versions, which are usually sweetened with toppings such as jam. Americans seem to eat their scones the way they eat their muffins, without anything more than a smear of butter, so the sweetness is baked in. We prefer the British approach, but to accommodate American tastes we decided to increase the sugar slightly to three tablespoons.

Finally, scones are often glazed to enhance their appearance and add sweetness. We tried brushing the dough with a beaten egg as well as with heavy cream just before baking. Scones brushed with egg became too dark in the oven. We preferred the more delicate look of scones brushed with cream and

then dusted with a little granulated sugar.

Scones can be mixed by hand or with a food processor. (The processor is used to cut fat into flour; minimal hand mixing is required afterward.) As with biscuits, we found the food processor to be more reliable than hand mixing, which can overheat the butter and cause it to soften. The same shaping technique used with wedge-shaped biscuits works perfectly with scones, even though this dough is a bit stickier. Just pat the dough into a cake pan, gently pop it out onto a floured surface, and then cut the dough into eight wedges.

Master Recipe

Cream Scones

makes 8

NOTE: ***The traditional British scone is somewhat sweet and biscuitlike in texture. If you prefer a more cakelike texture, or want the scones to stay fresh tasting longer, try the Cakey Scones variation. As with buttermilk biscuits, the easiest and most reliable approach to mixing the butter into the dry ingredients is to use a food processor fitted with a steel blade. Resist the urge to eat the scones hot***

out of the oven. Letting them cool for at least 10 minutes firms them up and improves their texture.

2 cups all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon baking powder
3 tablespoons sugar
$^1/_2$ teaspoon salt
5 tablespoons chilled unsalted butter, cut into $^1/_4$-inch cubes (see figures 3 through 5)
$^1/_2$ cup currants
1 cup heavy cream

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 425 degrees.

2. Place flour, baking powder, sugar, and salt in large bowl or workbowl of a food processor fitted with steel blade. Whisk together or pulse 6 times.

3. If making by hand, use two knives, a pastry blender, or your fingertips and quickly cut in butter until mixture resembles coarse meal with a few slightly larger butter lumps. If using food processor, remove cover and distribute butter evenly over dry ingredients. Cover and pulse 12 times, each pulse lasting 1 second. Add currants and quickly mix in or pulse one more time.

4. If making by hand, stir in heavy cream with rubber spatula or fork until dough begins to form, about 30 seconds. If using food processor, remove cover and pour cream evenly over dough. Pulse until dough just starts to gather into moist, pebblelike clumps, eight to ten 1-second pulses.

5. Transfer dough and all dry floury bits to countertop and knead dough by hand just until it comes together into a rough, slightly sticky ball, 5 to 10 seconds. Following figures 9 and 10, cut scones into 8 wedges. Place wedges on

ungreased cookie sheet. (Baking sheet can be wrapped in plastic and refrigerated for up to 2 hours.)

6. Bake until scone tops are light brown, 12 to 15 minutes. Cool on wire rack for at least 10 minutes. Serve warm or at room temperature.

VARIATIONS:

Ginger Scones

A light glaze of cream and sugar gives scones an attractive sheen and sweeter flavor. If baking scones immediately after making the dough, glaze dough just before cutting it into wedges. If scones

have been held in the refrigerator, apply the glaze to each wedge.

Follow master recipe, brushing tops of scones with 1 tablespoon heavy cream and then sprinkling with 1 tablespoon sugar just before baking them.

Cakey Scones

An egg changes the texture and color of the scones and helps to preserve freshness. You can keep them up to 2 days in an airtight container.

Follow master recipe, reducing butter to 4 tablespoons and cream to $^{3}/_{4}$ cup. Add 1 large egg, lightly beaten, to dough along with cream.

Oatmeal Raisin Scones

We found that old-fashioned rolled oats produced the best oatmeal scones, with a flakier texture and more noticeable oat flavor than quick-cooking oats. Mix this dough in the food processor; the pulsing action of the blade breaks down the coarse oats and incorporates them into the dough.

Follow master recipe, making dough in food processor and substituting 1 cup rolled oats for $^{1}/_{2}$ cup all-purpose flour. Replace currants with $^{3}/_{4}$ cup raisins. Increase sugar to 4 tablespoons and butter to 6 tablespoons.

Glazed Scones

Follow master recipe, substituting $^{1}/_{2}$ cup chopped crystallized ginger for currants.

Cranberry Orange Scones

Follow master recipe, adding 1 teaspoon grated orange zest with butter and substituting $^{3}/_{4}$ cup dried cranberries for currants.

Lemon Blueberry Scones

Mix the dough by hand after adding the blueberries to keep the blueberries plump and whole.

Follow master recipe, adding 1

teaspoon grated lemon zest with butter and substituting $^{1}/_{2}$ cup fresh or frozen (do not thaw) blueberries for currants.

CORNBREAD & CORN MUFFINS

WHILE ALL CORNBREADS ARE QUICK TO make and bake, there are two very distinct types: northern and southern. Southerners use 100 percent white cornmeal, and they like their cornbread crumbly, dry, and flat. Most northerners prefer sweeter, lighter, and higher golden cornbreads, which they achieve by adding sugar and combining white flour and yellow cornmeal. Both types of cornbread sport a brown crust, although southern cornbread crusts are also crisp

and crunchy.

After an initial round of testing, we realized that we preferred something in between, with elements of both styles incorporated into a single recipe. We liked the pure corn flavor of southern cornbread but wanted a crumb that was more moist and tender. Northern cornbread was more tender but was also fluffy, and the corn flavor was muted. We decided to start out with a southern-style recipe, since it had more of the elements that we liked.

The type of cornmeal was a natural place to begin our testing. We tested 11 different cornmeals in a simple southern cornbread recipe. Before these tests, we would have bet that color was a regional

idiosyncrasy that had little to do with flavor. But tasting proved otherwise. Cornbreads made with yellow cornmeal consistently had a more potent corn flavor than those made with white meal.

How the cornmeal was ground also affected flavor. Large commercial mills use huge steel rollers to grind dent corn (a hard, dry corn) into cornmeal. This is how Quaker, the leading supermarket brand, is produced. But some smaller mills scattered across the United States grind with millstones; this product is called stone-ground cornmeal. (If water is used as an energy source, the cornmeal may be labeled "water-ground.") Stone-ground cornmeal is

usually a bit coarser than cornmeal processed through steel rollers.

These smaller millers may also choose not to degerm, or remove all of the germ, cleanly from the kernel, as commercial mills do. This makes their product closer to a whole-grain cornmeal. If the color is uniform, the germ has been removed. A stone-ground cornmeal with some germ will have flecks that are both lighter and darker than the predominant color, whether that's yellow or white.

In our tests, we found the texture of cornbreads made with stone-ground meals to be more interesting, since the cornmeals were not of a uniform grind. More important, we found that cornbreads made with stone-ground

cornmeal tasted much better than those made with the standard Quaker cornmeal.

The higher moisture and oil content of stone-ground cornmeal causes it to go rancid within weeks. If you buy some, wrap it tightly in plastic, or put it into a moisture-proof container, then refrigerate or freeze it. Degerminated cornmeals, such as Quaker, keep for a year if stored in a dry, cool place.

We were set on the cornmeal—yellow, preferably stone-ground. The next issue was flour. For cornbread with a rich corn flavor, we found that flour is best omitted. (For corn muffins, some flour is necessary; see Corn Muffins.)

Although we didn't want cornbread to taste like dessert, we wondered whether a little sugar might enhance the corn flavor. So we made three batches—one with no sugar, one with two teaspoons, and one with a heaping tablespoon. The higher-sugar bread was really too sweet for our tastes, but two teaspoons of sugar seemed to enhance the natural sweetness of the corn without calling attention to itself.

So far all of our testing had been done with a composite recipe under which most southern cornbread recipes seemed to fall. We had, however, run across a recipe that didn't quite fit the mold, and now seemed like the right time to give it

a try.

In this simple version, boiling water is stirred into the cornmeal, then modest amounts of milk, egg, butter, salt, and baking powder are stirred into the resulting cornmeal mush and the whole thing is baked. So simple, so lean, so humble, so backwater, this recipe would have been easy to pass over. Just one bite completely changed the direction of our pursuit. Unlike anything we had tasted so far, the crumb of this cornbread was incredibly moist and fine and bursting with corn flavor, all with no flour and virtually no fat.

We were pleased, but since the foundation of this bread was cornmeal mush, the crumb was actually more

mushy than moist. In addition, the baking powder, the only dry ingredient left, got stirred into the wet batter at the end. This just didn't feel right.

After a few unsuccessful attempts to make this cornbread less mushy, we started thinking that this great idea was a bust. In a last attempt to salvage it, we decided to make mush out of only half the cornmeal and to mix the remaining cornmeal with the leavener. To our relief, the bread made this way was much improved. Decreasing the mush even further—from a half to a third of the cornmeal—gave us exactly what we were looking for. We made the new, improved cornbread with buttermilk and

mixed a bit of baking soda with the baking powder, and it tasted even better. Finally, our recipe was starting to feel right.

With this new recipe in hand, we performed a few more tests. We tried vegetable oil, peanut oil, shortening, butter, and bacon drippings. Butter and bacon drippings were pleasant flavor additions and improved the texture of the cornbread by making it less crumbly.

Before conducting these cornbread tests, we didn't think it was possible to bake cornbread in too hot an oven, but after tasting breads baked on the bottom rack of a 475-degree oven, we found that a dark brown crust makes bitter bread. We moved the rack up a notch, reduced

the oven temperature to 450 degrees, and were thus able to cook many loaves of cornbread to golden brown perfection.

One final question: Do you need to heat up the skillet before adding the batter? If you're not a southerner, the answer is no. Although the bread will not be as crisp in an unheated pan, it will ultimately brown up with a longer baking time. If you are a southerner, of course, the answer is yes. More than the color of the meal or the presence of sugar or flour, what makes cornbread southern is the batter hitting the hot fat in a cast-iron skillet.

Master Recipe

Cornbread

serves 8

NOTE: ***This cornbread is thin and crusty, making it the perfect accompaniment to soups, chili, or stews. Make sure that the water is at a rapid boil when it is added to the cornmeal. If you prefer a sweeter, more northern-style recipe, see the note to the corn muffin recipe on Corn Muffins.***

4 teaspoons bacon drippings or 1 teaspoon vegetable oil plus 1

tablespoon unsalted butter, melted

1 cup yellow cornmeal, preferably stone-ground

2 teaspoons sugar

1/2 teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon baking powder

1/4 teaspoon baking soda

1/2 cup rapidly boiling water

3/4 cup buttermilk

1 large egg, beaten lightly

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Set 8-inch cast-iron skillet with bacon fat (or vegetable oil) in heating oven.

2. Measure 1/3 cup cornmeal into medium bowl. Whisk remaining cornmeal, sugar, salt, baking powder, and baking soda together in small bowl; set aside.

3. Pour $^{1}/_{4}$ cup boiling water all at once into the 1/3 cup cornmeal; whisk quickly to combine. Continue adding water, a tablespoon at a time, until mixtures forms thick mush (see figure 11. Whisk in buttermilk gradually, breaking up lumps until smooth, then whisk in egg. When oven is preheated and skillet very hot, stir dry ingredients into mush

mixture until just moistened. Carefully remove skillet from oven. If using bacon fat, pour it from pan into batter and stir to incorporate. If pan has been greased with vegetable oil, stir melted butter into batter.

4. Quickly pour batter into heated skillet. Bake until golden brown, about 20 minutes. Remove from oven and instantly turn cornbread onto wire rack; cool for 5 minutes. Serve warm or at room temperature.

VARIATIONS:

Cornbread with Chiles

Follow master recipe, folding in 1 to 2 medium jalapeno chiles, seeded and minced, after bacon fat or melted butter has been incorporated.

Cornbread with Cheddar Cheese

Follow master recipe, folding in 2 ounces ($^1/_2$ cup) shredded cheddar cheese after bacon fat or melted butter has been incorporated.

Cornbread with Corn Kernels

Follow master recipe, folding in $^3/_4$ cup fresh or frozen corn kernels after bacon

fat or melted butter has been incorporated.

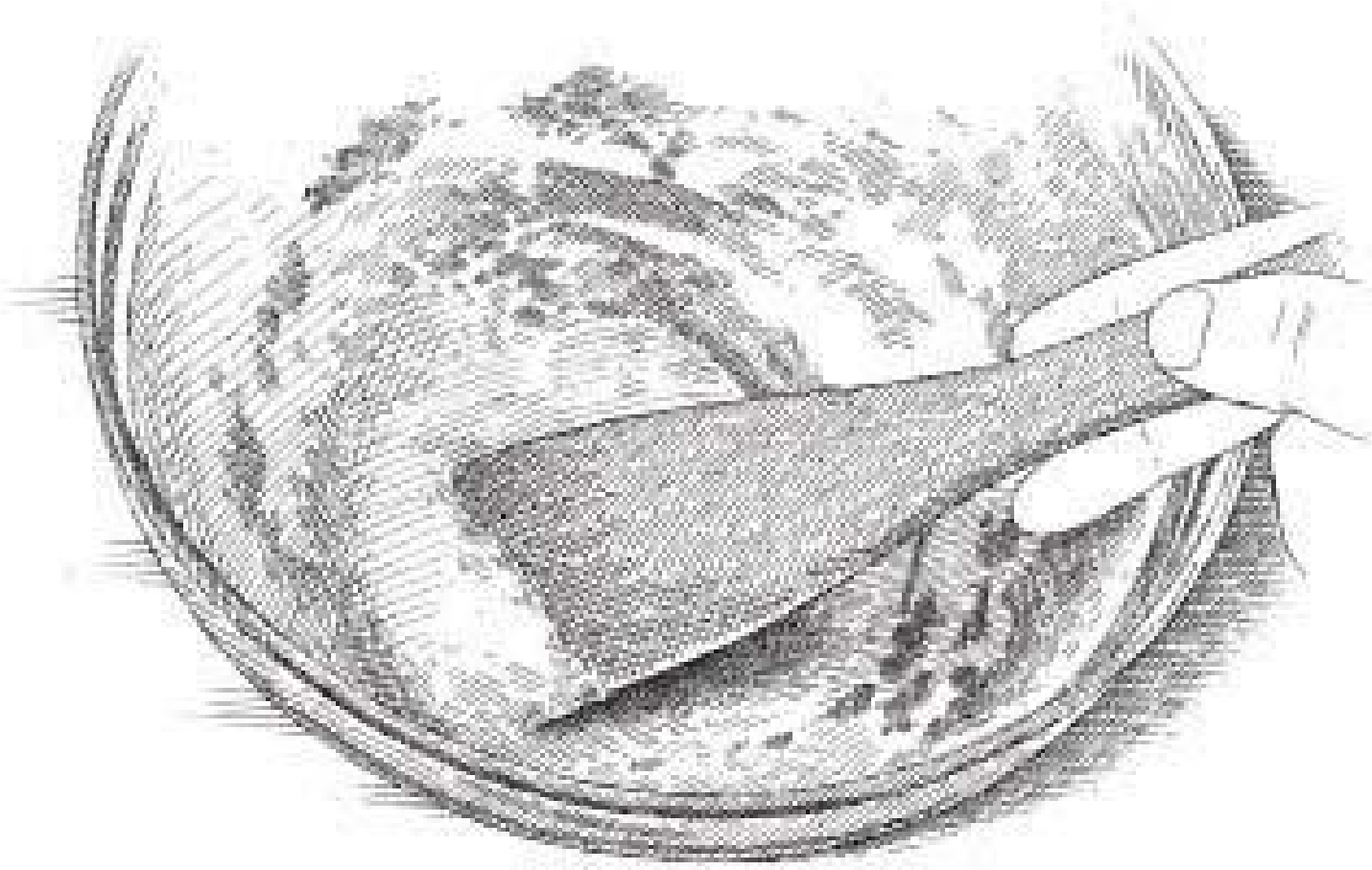

Figure 11.
The cornmeal mush must have just the right texture. The batter should neither clump together nor be too thin. Ideally, the mush will be soft, like polenta. The consistency will be thick enough to give the batter body but pliable

enough to accommodate wet ingredients easily.

Corn Muffins

makes 12

NOTE: ***Adding more sugar, another egg, and some cake flour turns cornbread into muffins. The flour and egg help create a cakier (less crumbly) texture, while the sugar makes the muffins seem less savory. This batter is fairly thin; if you like, transfer the batter to a 1-quart measuring cup and pour it into the greased muffin tin. If you like a cakier, sweet cornbread, like those made in the North, bake this batter in a greased 8-inch cast-iron skillet or square pan for 25 minutes.***

Vegetable cooking spray or

unsalted butter for greasing muffin tin

$1\frac{3}{4}$ cups yellow cornmeal, preferably stone-ground

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup cake flour

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup sugar

$\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon salt

2 teaspoons baking powder

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon baking soda

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup rapidly boiling water

$1\frac{1}{4}$ cups buttermilk

2 large eggs, beaten lightly

2 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 425 degrees. Spray 12-hole muffin tin with vegetable cooking spray or coat lightly with butter.

2. Measure $^{1}/_{2}$ cup cornmeal into medium bowl. Whisk remaining cornmeal, flour, sugar, salt, baking powder, and baking soda together in small bowl; set aside.

3. Pour 1/3 cup boiling water all at once into the $^{1}/_{2}$ cup cornmeal; whisk quickly to combine. Continue adding water, a tablespoon at a time, until mixtures

forms thick mush (see figure 11. Whisk in buttermilk gradually, breaking up lumps until smooth, then whisk in eggs. Stir dry ingredients into mush mixture until just moistened. Stir in melted butter just until incorporated. Ladle batter into greased muffin tin, filling holes almost to rim.

4. Bake until muffins are golden brown, 18 to 20 minutes. Set tin on wire rack to cool slightly, about 5 minutes. Remove muffins from tin and serve warm or at room temperature.

IRISH SODA BREAD

RICH, SWEET AMERICAN-STYLE IRISH SODA bread is filled with raisins and caraway seeds. It is delicious, but its uses are limited to breakfast or snacking. Authentic Irish soda bread has a tender, dense crumb and a rough-textured, crunchy crust. It is versatile enough to be served with butter and jam at breakfast, for sandwiches at lunch, or alongside the evening meal. We set out to devise a recipe for this leaner, more savory style of soda bread.

As we looked over a multitude of

recipes for soda bread, we found that they fell into two categories. The American versions contained eggs, butter, and sugar in varying amounts, along with caraway seeds, raisins, and a multitude of other flavorings. But most Irish cookbooks combined only four ingredients: flour (white and/or whole wheat), baking soda, salt, and buttermilk.

Flour, being the predominant ingredient, seemed like a good place to start our investigative baking. Because of Ireland's climate, the wheat grown there is a "soft," or low-protein, variety. While not suitable for strong European-style yeast breads, this flour is perfect for chemically leavened breads. This is

basically because flour with a lower protein content produces a finer crumb and more tender product, key for breads that don't have the light texture provided when yeast is used as the leavener.

After suffering through several tough, heavy loaves made with unbleached all-purpose flour, we started exploring different proportions of cake flour and all-purpose flour. And, in fact, the bread did become more tender and a little lighter with the addition of some cake flour. As the ratio of cake to all-purpose exceeded 1:1, however, the bread became much more compact and heavy, with an undesirable mouthfeel—1 cup of cake flour to 3 cups of all-purpose

proved best.

Because the liquid-to-dry ratio is important in determining texture and moistness, we decided to test buttermilk next. As it turned out, bread made with $1^{3}/_{4}$ or 12/3 cups of buttermilk produced bread that was doughy, almost gummy. With $1^{1}/_{2}$ cups, the dough was firmer yet still moist, and the resulting bread was no longer doughy. (If you don't have buttermilk on hand, plain yogurt can be substituted for an equally delicious bread with a slightly rougher crust and lighter texture.)

With the amount of buttermilk decided upon, we were now ready to explore the amount and type of leavening to use.

After trying various combinations of baking soda, baking powder, and cream of tartar, we found that $1\,^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoons of soda, combined with an equal amount of cream of tartar, provided just the right amount of lift for a bread that should be light but not airy. Relying on cream of tartar (rather than the acidity in the buttermilk) to react with the baking soda allows the tangy buttermilk flavor to come through.

Because baking soda begins reacting immediately with the cream of tartar and does not provide the big second rise you get with double-acting baking powder, it is important to mix the dough quickly and not too vigorously. If you mix too

slowly or too enthusiastically, too much carbon dioxide will be formed and will dissipate during the mixing process; not enough carbon dioxide will then be produced during baking to provide the proper rise. Extended kneading also overdevelops the gluten in the flour, toughening the bread.

Although we were making progress, the flavor of these basic loaves was mediocre at best, lacking depth and dimension, and they were also a bit tough. Traditionally, very small amounts of sugar and/or butter are sometimes added to soda bread, so, starting with sugar, we baked loaves with one and two tablespoons. Two tablespoons of sugar added just the flavor balance that

was needed without making the bread sweet. It was only with the introduction of butter, though, that the loaves began to lose their toughness and become outstanding. Still, we really wanted to maintain the integrity of this basic bread and avoid making it too rich. After trying tests with one to four tablespoons of unsalted butter, two tablespoons proved a clear winner. This bread was tender but not crumbly, compact but not heavy. More than two tablespoons of butter began to shift the flavor balance of the bread and add unnecessary richness.

We were getting very close to our goal, but the crust was still too hard, thick, and crumbly. We wanted crunch,

but crispness and tenderness as well.

In our research, we came upon various techniques for modifying the crust. Some dealt with the way the bread was baked, while others concentrated on how the bread was treated after baking. Trying to inhibit the formation of a thick crust by covering the bread with a bowl during the first 30 minutes of baking helped some, but the resulting bread took longer to bake and was paler and uneven in color. Using a large flowerpot and clay dish to simulate a cloche (a covered earthenware dish specifically designed for baking bread) again gave us a bread that didn't color well, even with both preheating the tray and buttering the dough.

But the next test, which, not coincidentally, closely simulated historical cooking methods for Irish soda bread, was a breakthrough. Baking the loaf in a well-buttered Dutch oven or cast-iron pot, covered only for the first 30 minutes, produced a well-risen loaf with an even, golden crust that was thin and crisp yet still had a bit of chew.

We realized, however, that not everyone has a cast-iron pot available, so we explored ways of softening the crust after baking. Wrapping the bread in a clean tea towel as soon as it emerged from the oven helped soften the crust, while a slightly damp tea towel softened it even more. The best technique, though,

was to brush the warm loaf with some melted butter. This gave it an attractive sheen as well as a delicious, buttery crust with just enough crunch.

Although we liked the crust of the bread baked in the Dutch oven a little better, the ease of baking it on a baking sheet made the loaf brushed with butter a more practical option.

Finally, make sure that you cool the bread for at least 45 minutes before serving. If cut when too hot, the bread will be dense and slightly doughy.

Master Recipe

Classic Irish Soda Bread

makes 1 loaf

NOTE: ***This bread is a great accompaniment to soups or stews, and leftovers make fine toast. With their flavorful grains and additions, the variations can stand alone.***

3 cups all-purpose flour
1 cup cake flour
2 tablespoons sugar
$1^1/_2$ teaspoons baking soda
$1^1/_2$ teaspoons cream of tartar

$1^1/_2$ teaspoons salt

2 tablespoons chilled unsalted butter, cut into $^1/_4$-inch cubes (see figures 3 through 5), plus 1 tablespoon melted butter for crust

$1^1/_2$ cups buttermilk or plain yogurt

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to upper-middle position and heat oven to 400 degrees. Whisk flours, sugar, baking soda, cream of tartar, and salt together in large bowl. Work diced butter into dry ingredients with fork or fingertips until texture resembles coarse crumbs.

2. Add buttermilk and stir with a fork just until dough begins to come together. Turn out onto lightly flour-coated work surface; knead until dough just becomes cohesive and bumpy, 12 to 14 turns. (Do not knead until dough is smooth, or bread will be tough.)

3. Pat dough into a round about 6 inches in diameter and $2^{1}/_{2}$ inches high; place on greased or parchment-lined baking sheet. Score dough by cutting cross shape on top of loaf (see figure 12).

4. Bake until golden brown and a skewer inserted into center of loaf comes out clean or internal temperature reaches 180 degrees, 40 to 45 minutes. Remove from oven and brush with melted butter; cool for 45 minutes. Serve warm or at room temperature. Once cooled, bread can be wrapped in plastic and stored at room temperature for a couple of days.

VARIATIONS:

Irish Brown Soda Bread

Unlike the Classic Irish Soda Bread dough, which is dry, this dough is extremely sticky.

Follow master recipe, making the following changes: Decrease all-

purpose flour to 1 3/4 cups and cake flour to 1/2 cup. Add 1 1/4 cups stone-ground whole wheat flour and 1/2 cup toasted wheat germ to flour mixture. Replace granulated sugar with 3 tablespoons brown sugar. Bake bread to internal temperature of 190 degrees, 45 to 55 minutes.

American-Style Soda Bread with Raisins and Caraway

This dough is wet and sticky.

Follow master recipe, making the following changes: Increase sugar to 1/4 cup and softened butter to 4 tablespoons. Add 1 lightly beaten egg, 1 cup raisins,

and 1 tablespoon caraway seeds (optional) along with buttermilk. Bake to internal temperature of 170 degrees, 40 to 45 minutes, covering bread with aluminum foil if it is browning too much.

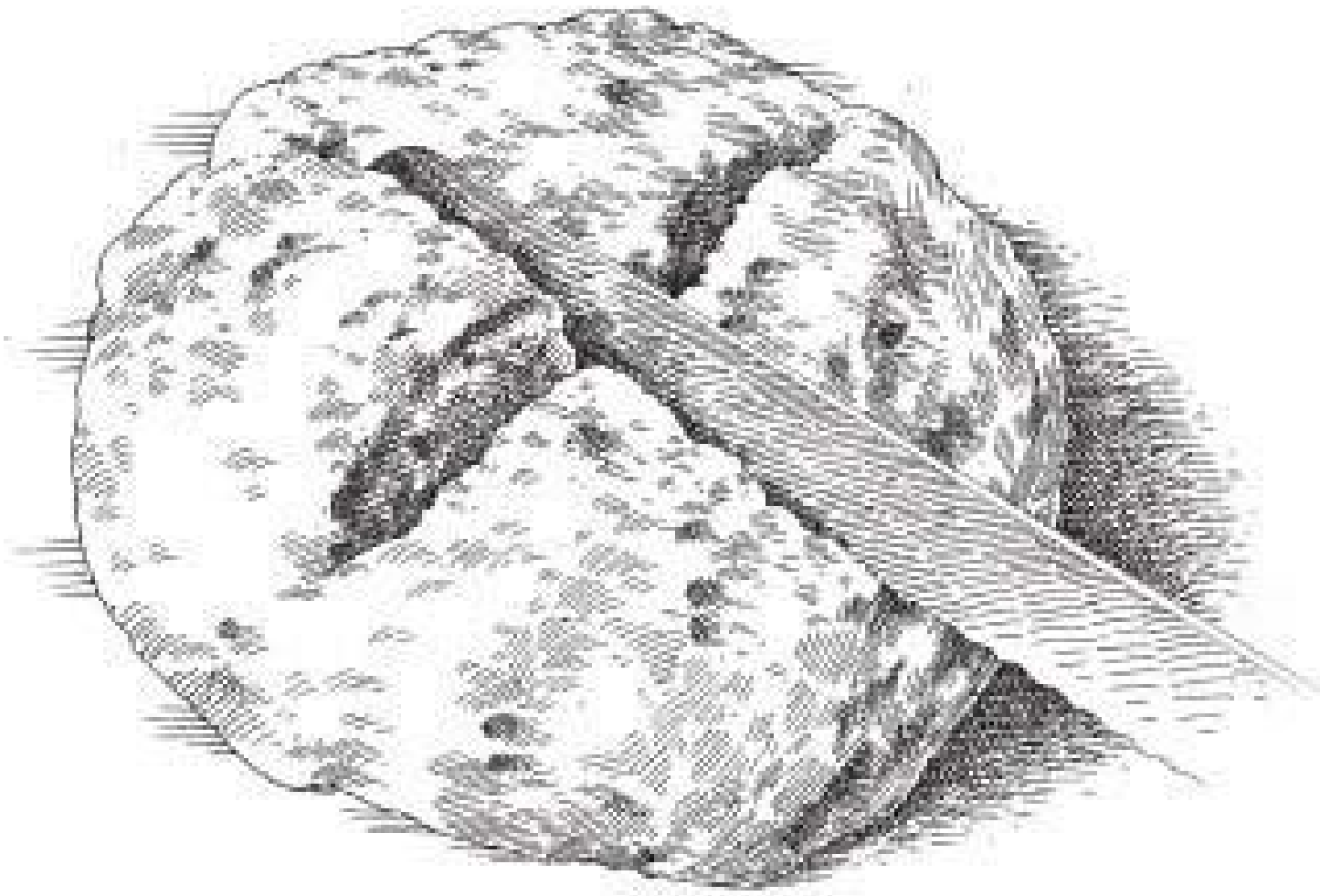

Figure 12.
Use a serrated knife to cut a cross shape in the top of the dough. Each score should be 5 inches long and $^{3}/_{4}$ inch deep.

BANANA BREAD

OVERRIPE BANANAS ON THE KITCHEN counter are an excellent excuse to make banana bread. However, many banana breads are flat, gritty, or heavy. Even worse, some loaves taste only remotely of bananas. Good banana bread is soft and tender with plenty of banana flavor and crunchy toasted walnuts. It should be moist and light, something so delicious that you look forward to the bananas on the counter turning soft and mushy.

In our testing, we found it very important to pay close attention to the

condition of the bananas. Sweet, older, darkly speckled bananas infused the bread with both moisture and flavor, which meant that the bread, whether still warm or day-old, succeeded with less butter than the amount used in most recipes.

We also experimented with the way we prepared the bananas for the batter: slightly mashed, mashed well, and pureed. Loaves with slightly mashed bananas left chunks of fruit. We preferred a smoother texture, but pureeing the bananas turned out to be a bad idea because the batter did not rise as well. Leavener probably escaped before the thin batter developed enough structure to trap gases. Bananas well-

mashed by hand kept the batter thick.

We still wanted more moisture in the bread, so we tried mixing in milk, buttermilk, sour cream, and plain yogurt. Sour cream added richness, but it also made for a heavy texture and an unattractive, pebbly crust. Milk added little flavor and created a slick crust. Buttermilk added a delightful tang, but yogurt let the banana flavor stand out. And because yogurt has more solids than buttermilk, it made for a slightly more solid loaf, which we preferred.

While the added yogurt softened the bread's crumb, we still sought a more delicate, open texture. So we decided to experiment with various mixing methods

to see how they affected the final texture. We considered the quick bread method and the creaming method (as defined on TECHNIQUES).

The creaming method created a soft texture (reminiscent of butter cake) and good volume from the whipped sugar and butter. However, its lighter color looked less appetizing next to the golden brown loaf achieved with the quick bread method. The quick bread method produced a delicate texture, too, and the less consistent crumb looked hearty and delicious. It also rosé more than the creamed loaf. All in all, it was a better choice.

Take caution when mixing, though. When we stirred the wet and the dry

ingredients into a smooth batter, the loaves turned out small and tough. Flour contains protein, and when protein mixes with water, gluten develops. The more you stir with a spoon, the more the gluten proteins arrange into long, orderly bundles. These bundles create an elastic batter that resists changing shape and cannot rise as well. To minimize gluten development, fold together the wet and dry ingredients gently, just until the dry ingredients are moistened. The batter should still be thick and chunky, but without any streaks of unincorporated flour.

Master Recipe

Banana Bread

makes one 9-inch loaf

NOTE: ***The success of this recipe depends on the use of very ripe bananas. Otherwise, the bread will be too dry. Toast the nuts on a baking sheet in a 350-degree oven until fragrant, about 6 minutes.***

Vegetable cooking spray or unsalted butter for greasing loaf pan

2 cups all-purpose flour

3/4 cup sugar

3/4 teaspoon baking soda

1/2 teaspoon salt

3 very ripe, soft, darkly speckled large bananas, mashed well (about 1 1/2 cups)

1/4 cup plain yogurt

2 large eggs, beaten lightly

6 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted and cooled

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1 1/4 cups toasted walnuts, chopped coarse (about 1 cup after chopping)

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Grease and flour a 9 by 5-inch loaf pan; set aside.

2. Whisk flour, sugar, baking soda, and salt together in large bowl; set aside.

3. Mix mashed bananas, yogurt, eggs, butter, and vanilla with wooden spoon in medium bowl. Lightly fold banana mixture into dry ingredients with rubber spatula until just combined and batter looks thick and chunky. Fold in walnuts. Scrape batter into prepared loaf pan.

4. Bake until loaf is golden brown and toothpick inserted in center comes out clean, about 55 minutes. Cool in pan for 5 minutes, then transfer to wire rack. Serve warm or at room temperature. Once cooled, bread can be wrapped in plastic and stored at room temperature for a couple of days.

VARIATIONS:

Banana Chocolate Bread

Follow master recipe, reducing sugar to 10 tablespoons and adding $2^{1}/_{2}$ ounces grated bittersweet chocolate (a heaping $^{1}/_{2}$ cup) along with walnuts.

Banana Coconut Bread with Macadamia Nuts

Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Toast $^{1}/_{2}$ cup flaked, sweetened coconut and 1 cup chopped macadamia nuts on small cookie sheet, stirring every 2 minutes, until golden brown, about 6 minutes. Follow master recipe, substituting toasted macadamias and coconut for walnuts.

Orange-Spice Banana Bread

Follow master recipe, adding 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon, $^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoon grated nutmeg, and 2 tablespoons grated orange

zest to dry ingredients.

CRANBERRY NUT BREAD

WE DON'T MAKE CRANBERRY NUT BREAD just for ourselves. We make it for the kindergarten teacher, the mail carrier, and anyone else who deserves something homemade rather than store-bought for the holidays.

The problem is that this simple bread is often sub-par, sunken in the middle, too dense, or so overly sweetened that the contrast between the tart berries and what should be a slightly sweet dough is lost. We wanted to avoid these

problems, and we had some other goals in mind as well. We were looking for a crust that was golden brown and evenly thin all the way around and a texture that was somewhere between a dense, breakfast bread and a light, airy cake. And, for convenience sake, we wanted a recipe that fit easily into a standard 9 by 5-inch loaf pan. After looking at almost 60 recipes, it seemed evident that the mixing method and the leavening were the most important factors in getting the quick bread we were after.

First we tackled mixing. Some recipes called for the creaming method, others the quick bread method (as defined on TECHNIQUES). We made several loaves using each of these methods.

While the creaming method did give us a marginally more tender bread, we quickly determined that it was too light and airy. We liked the denser, more compact texture produced by the quick bread method. An added advantage of the quick bread method is that—as its name implies—it can be put together very quickly.

Next we moved on to the question of leavening. When we looked back at our testing, we noted that 75 percent of the recipes combined baking powder with baking soda to leaven the bread. The rest used all baking powder or all baking soda. We tried every option we could think of using these two leaveners, both

alone and together. We found that baking powder seemed to enhance the flavor, while baking soda supported the structure; finding the right balance was tricky. Eventually, we came to the decision that $^1/_4$ teaspoon of baking soda combined with 1 teaspoon of baking powder gave us the bright flavor and rather dense texture we were looking for.

With our mixing and leavening methods settled, we focused on ingredients. We quickly determined that we liked the flavor that butter provided over that of oil, margarine, or vegetable shortening. More than one egg made the bread almost too rich and caused the

interior to turn somewhat yellow. After testing different amounts and types of sugar, we stuck with one cup of granulated sugar, which provided the right amount of sweetness. Orange zest added not only to the flavor but to the interior appearance as well.

We also tinkered with the liquid component. Many recipes called for water or even boiling water, but freshly squeezed orange juice was usually mentioned and offered the best flavor. We compared fresh, home-squeezed orange juice with commercially prepared juices made from both fresh oranges and from concentrate; home-squeezed juice was the winner, hands down.

Not every recipe called for dairy, but we tested everything from heavy cream to sour cream. Both buttermilk and yogurt provided the moistness and tang we were looking for, with buttermilk edging out yogurt by a hairbreadth.

Last but not least were the cranberries. The cranberry harvest begins just after Labor Day and continues through early fall, which means that by mid-to late January, no fresh berries are available. Cranberries freeze beautifully, so grab a few extra bags to have on hand and freeze them until ready to use. We found no discernible difference in the finished product whether using fresh or frozen cranberries.

Cranberry Nut Bread

makes one 9-inch loaf

NOTE: ***We prefer sweet, mild pecans in this bread, but walnuts can be substituted. Resist the urge to cut into the bread while it is hot out of the oven; the texture improves as it cools, making it easier to slice. To toast pecans, place skillet over medium heat, add chopped pecans, and toast, shaking pan frequently, until nuts are fragrant, 3 to 5 minutes.***

Vegetable cooking spray or unsalted butter for greasing loaf pan

1 tablespoon grated orange

zest

1/3 cup fresh orange juice

2/3 cup buttermilk

6 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted and cooled

1 large egg, beaten lightly

2 cups all-purpose flour

1 cup sugar

1 teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon baking powder

1/4 teaspoon baking soda

1 1/2 cups cranberries (about 6 ounces), chopped coarse

1/2 cup pecans, chopped coarse and toasted

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 375 degrees. Grease and flour a 9 by 5-inch loaf pan; set aside.

2. Stir together orange zest, orange juice, buttermilk, butter, and egg in small bowl. Whisk together flour, sugar, salt, baking powder, and baking soda in large bowl. Stir liquid ingredients into dry with rubber spatula until just moistened. Gently stir in cranberries and pecans. Do not overmix. Scrape batter into loaf pan and spread with rubber spatula into corners of pan.

3. Bake 20 minutes, then reduce heat to 350 degrees; continue to bake until golden brown and toothpick inserted in center of loaf comes out clean, about 45 minutes longer. Cool in pan 10 minutes, then transfer to wire rack and cool at least 1 hour before serving. Once cooled, bread can be wrapped in plastic and stored at room temperature for a couple of days.

HOW TO MAKE COOKIE JAR FAVORITES

Cookie Basics

Chocolate Chip Cookies

Chocolate Cookies

Sugar Cookies

Snickerdoodles

Peanut Butter Cookies

Oatmeal Cookies

Molasses-Spice Cookies

Almond Crescents

Coconut Macaroons

Icebox Cookies

Sandies

Sandwich Cookies

COOKIE BASICS

THERE ARE THOUSANDS OF COOKIE RECIPES in circulation. Over the years, we have made many of these recipes in our test kitchen and we have come to one startling conclusion. The simplest cookies are usually the best. Chocolate chip, oatmeal, and peanut butter cookies are popular for a reason. They may not be much to look at, but they usually taste better than a fancy cookie that requires a rolling pin, complicated shaping, and icing.

This book explains how to make these

classic American cookies, everything from snickerdoodles to molasses-spice cookies. We have tested every variable to come up with recipes that will work every time.

KEY INGREDIENTS

Keep the following items on hand and you will be prepared to make most of the recipes in this book.

BAKING POWDER AND BAKING SODA

Cookies are leavened with either baking powder or baking soda. Although cookies do not rise as much as cakes, the leavener does provide some lift and can affect the texture of the cookie.

Baking soda is only fully effective if there is an acid component, such as buttermilk, in the batter for it to react with and create carbon dioxide. In an alkaline (low acid) batter, a teaspoon of baking powder is a more effective leavening agent than an equal amount of soda. Many cookie doughs do not contain acidic ingredients, so baking powder is the most commonly used leavener. Some cookie doughs do contain acidic ingredients, such as brown sugar, molasses, or cocoa, and baking soda may be used in these recipes.

BUTTER We do not recommend using

margarine or shortening in most cookie recipes. These fats cannot give cookies the same rich flavor as butter.

We tested eight brands of butter in a variety of recipes to see if the brand or the fat content would make a difference. Higher-fat, European-style butters do make a creamier, richer buttercream frosting, but when making cookies (and most other dishes), we found that freshness is more important than the fat content or a specific brand.

Exposure to light and air will make butter rancid (that's why some sticks are wrapped in foil not paper), as can warm temperatures. The butter compartment on most refrigerator doors tends to be warmer than the rest of the refrigerator

and is not the best place to store butter. If you don't use much butter, store it in an airtight plastic bag in the freezer and pull out individual sticks as needed. Butter will maintain peak freshness for several months in the freezer, but no more than two or three weeks in the refrigerator.

One final note about butter. We use unsalted butter when making cookies. We like its sweet, delicate flavor. Peanut butter cookies are the exception to this rule. Salted butter helps bring out the flavor of the peanuts. Otherwise, we prefer the cleaner, fresher flavor of unsalted butter.

CHOCOLATE CHIPS Most cookie recipes rely on semisweet chips to supply the chocolate flavor. In our testing of major brands, we found that the chips that tasted best straight out of the bag tasted best in cookies. Nestlé, Guittard, Ghirardelli, and Tropical Source (a brand sold in natural food stores) all received high marks.

COCOA In its natural state, cocoa powder is mildly acidic. Many manufacturers, especially European ones, add an alkaline solution to neutralize the acidity. This processing, called dutching, mellows some of the

bitterness and harshness of natural cocoa.

We have found that the choice of natural or dutched cocoa powder often makes a difference in the flavor and appearance of a cookie. In our tests, cookies made with dutched cocoa had a rounder, richer chocolate flavor than those made with natural cocoa. Also, cookies with dutched cocoa were darker and judged more attractive. In a blind tasting of twelve brands of cocoa, we particularly liked dutched cocoas made by Van Leer, Pernigotti, Valrhona, Droste, and Merckens.

EGGS We used large eggs in all the

recipes in this book. Cold eggs can cause batters to separate and are harder to mix with other ingredients, so let the eggs sit out on the counter for an hour or two, or warm them in a bowl of hot tap water for five minutes.

FLOUR Cookies are generally made with all-purpose flour. Bread flour is too high in protein and will make cookies dry and tough. Cake flour is too low in protein and will make sandy, crumbly cookies. There are two kinds of all-purpose flour, bleached and unbleached. Bleached flour is treated with chlorine to whiten it and some sources suggest that this process gives

the flour a faint off flavor. We wanted to find out, so we tested bleached and unbleached flour in various cookie recipes.

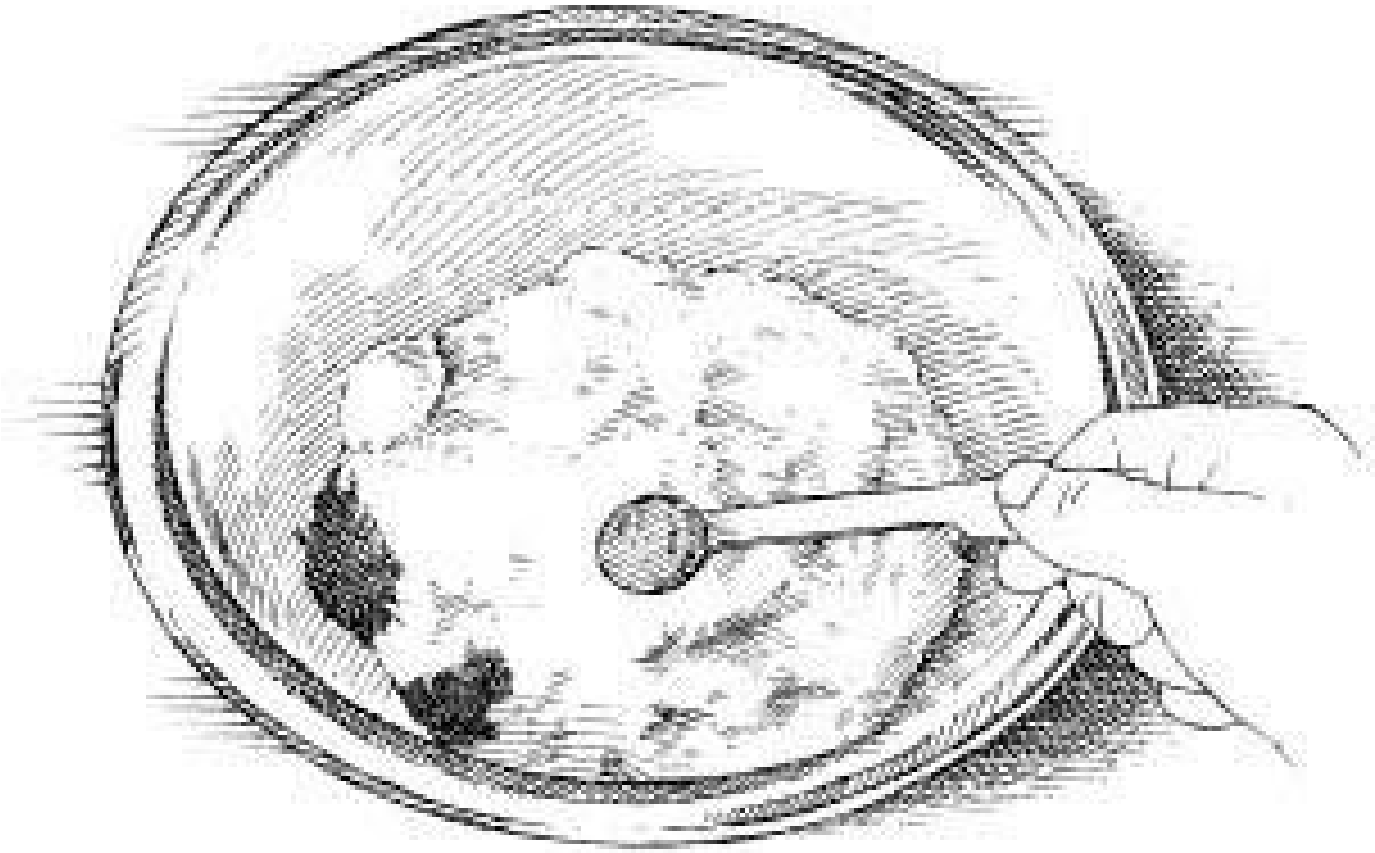

Figure 1.
Sometimes you forget if you have added the salt, leavening, and every spice. Once the flour is in the bowl, add each new dry ingredient in a different spot. If you are interrupted before you are done, simply count the number of ingredients already

added.

In a very simple vanilla icebox cookie that does not contain any leavener or other strongly flavored ingredient (such as chocolate, nuts, or peanut butter), we preferred the cleaner flavor of unbleached flour. However, once leavener is added to a recipe, even a simple one such as a sugar cookie, any chemical flavor that the bleached flour might impart to the dough becomes almost impossible to detect. So, with the exception of cookies that do not contain a chemical leavener, use either bleached or unbleached flour as you like.

We measure flour by the dip-and-sweep method. Dip a metal or plastic dry measure into a bag of flour so that

the cup is overflowing with flour. Then use a knife or icing spatula to level off the flour, sweeping the excess back into the bag.

NUTS Many cookies derive crunch and flavor from nuts. We always store nuts in the freezer to prevent them from becoming rancid.

SALT Although we generally prefer the clean flavor of kosher salt in our savory cooking, we use regular table salt when baking because the smaller crystals are more easily incorporated into a cookie batter.

SUGAR Granulated sugar is a key ingredient in most cookie recipes. Besides adding sweetness, sugar provides some structure and chew. In fact, very chewy cookies generally have quite a lot of sugar in them.

Many cookie recipes also call for brown sugar, which is granulated sugar with a small percentage of molasses added for flavor and color. (Light brown sugar contains 3.5 percent molasses; dark brown sugar has 6.5 percent molasses.) Brown sugar lends a caramel flavor that is welcome in many cookies. Dark brown sugar has a slightly stronger caramel flavor, but in most cookie

recipes the differences are slight. Unless noted, use either variety in the recipes in this book.

When measuring brown sugar, it is important to pack the sugar into the dry measure. We like to use the back of a smaller measure to press brown sugar into the cup (*see* figure 2).

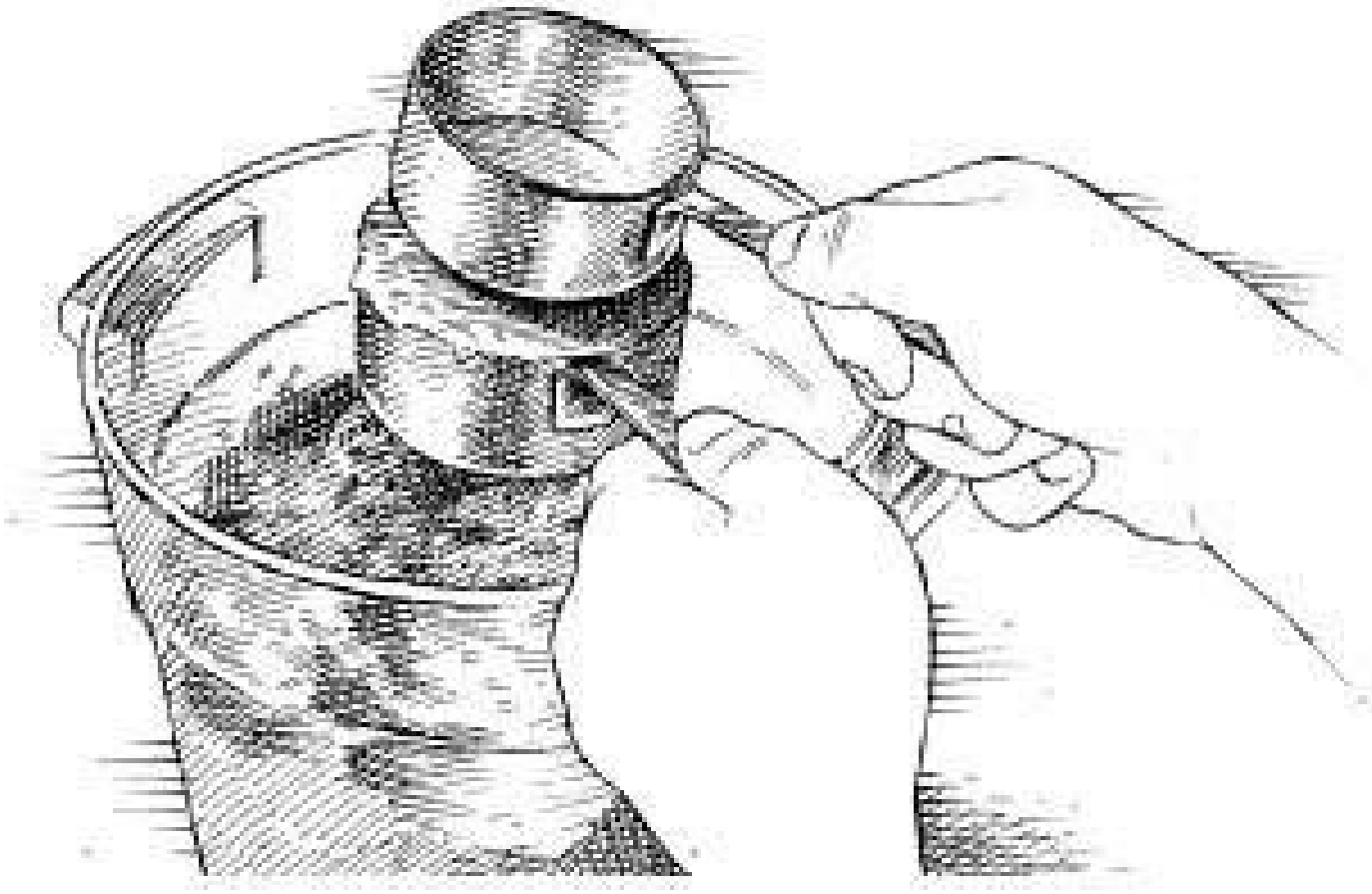

Figure 2.
When a recipe calls for some quantity of packed brown sugar, fill the correct dry measure with the sugar and use the next smallest cup to pack it.

Confectioners' sugar is used in cookies where tenderness and a fine crumb are important. Confectioners' sugar is made by pulverizing granulated sugar and combining it with a little cornstarch (about 3 percent of the total weight) to prevent it from clumping together. Because of its fine, powdery consistency, this sugar gives cookies a melt-in-your-mouth texture. Note that small lumps can still form in the box, so we recommend sifting confectioners' sugar before combining it with other ingredients.

VANILLA EXTRACT When we tested vanilla extracts several years ago, the

results were so shocking we repeated the test again and again. It turns out that most people, including pastry chefs, can't tell the difference between a cookie made with vanilla extract and a cookie made with the imitation stuff, which is derived from wood pulp. The differences are apparent in a custard, but in a cookie the quantities are so small and the other ingredients are so flavorful that these differences are hard to detect. But since we are generally loath to recommend ersatz products and since the price differential between the real and the fake is fairly small, we opt for the real thing in this case, too, even if it's hard to taste the difference.

KEY EQUIPMENT

Cookie-making requires very few pieces of equipment. You can even get away with using a wooden spoon instead of an electric mixer, although we do prefer a mixer. The rest of the equipment can be purchased for less than $15, total.

COOKIE SHEETS We tested eleven sheets in a variety of materials and came to some surprising conclusions. First of all, shiny, light-colored sheets do a better job of evenly browning the bottoms of cookies than dark sheets. Most of the dark sheets are nonstick and we found that these pans tend to

overbrown cookies. Shiny, silver sheets heat much more evenly, and if sticking is a concern we simply use parchment paper.

In our testing, we also came to prefer sheets with at least one rimless edge. This way we could slide a whole sheet of parchment paper onto a cooling rack without actually touching the hot paper. The open edge also makes it possible to slide cookies on a rack, rather than lifting them onto the rack and possibly dropping them. Our favorite cookie sheet is made by Kaiser out of tinned steel. At just $7, it was also the cheapest sheet we tested.

COOLING RACKS These often-neglected items are essential because they allow air to circulate under and around the cookies as they cool. Cookies cooled on a closed sheet might stick or become soggy. Choose a cooling rack that is large and sturdy. Some models have thin wires running in a single direction, but we prefer racks with crosswoven pieces of metal that form a fairly tight grid. These racks, sometimes called icing racks, are usually fairly sturdy. Also, the holes in the grid are very small, making it impossible for cookies to slide through onto the counter, something that often occurs on racks with wires that run in just one direction.

MIXER There are two basic types of mixers. Handheld mixers lack the power to knead bread (you need a standing mixer for that) but are fine for cookie doughs.

When shopping for a handheld mixer, look for models that have thin, curved wire beaters rather than the old-fashioned kind with thick posts down the center. This new design does a better job of driving food down into the bowl, improving the efficiency of the mixer while reducing splattering. Wire beaters are also much less likely to become clogged when mixing stiff cookie doughs.

In our testing, we also found that handles that slant up to the front fit the hand better and reduce arm stress more than handles that are parallel to the mixer. We tested nine mixers and found the KitchenAid to be the best choice.

Although standing mixers are not essential for making cookie doughs, they work well and free the cook to gather ingredients or grease a cookie sheet. When selecting a standing mixer, choose one with a single wide, flat beater rather than the two metal beaters commonly found on handheld mixers. The Rival Select and KitchenAid standing mixers have these flat beaters, which operate by planetary action. These beaters are

designed to reach the sides and bottom of the bowl to gather up and combine ingredients.

PARCHMENT PAPER When sticking is a potential problem, we recommend lining cookie sheets with parchment paper. The paper also keeps the bottom of the cookies from overbrowning. When the cookies are baked, we usually slide the whole sheet of parchment, with the cookies still attached, right onto the cooling rack. When cooled, the cookies can be peeled away from the paper.

Even when sticking is not an issue, we still use parchment paper. It makes cleanup a snap, and we can reuse cookie

sheets for subsequent batches without having to wash them first. When parchment is essential, the recipe directions call for it. Otherwise, use parchment at your discretion.

MIXING COOKIE DOUGH

Most cookie doughs are prepared in the same fashion. The butter is creamed with the sugar until light and creamy. The eggs and other liquids (vanilla or other extracts) are added. Finally, the flour and other dry ingredients, which have been sifted or stirred together, are added.

This process sounds easy (and it is), but there is some important science here.

The butter must be properly creamed in order to incorporate the right amount of air into the fat. In our tests, we've consistently found that cookies made with creamed butter are higher and have a lighter texture than those made with butter that is not creamed. We also found that creaming the butter with sugar adds more air than beating the butter alone. That's because the sharp edges of the sugar crystals physically aerate the butter by cutting small air pockets in the fat.

Cookies made with cold butter are often flat because the creaming process was not able to whip enough air into the butter. Ideally, an hour or two before you want to make cookies, remove the

butter from the refrigerator and let it warm to about 65 degrees. Butter starts to melt at 68 degrees, so the stick should still be a bit firm when pressed.

If you have forgotten to soften the butter, don't use the microwave to bring it up to room temperature. The microwave will melt the butter in places. Instead, cut the butter into very small bits so they will warm up quickly (*see* figure 3). By the time you have preheated the oven and assembled and measured the remaining ingredients, the butter should be close to 65 degrees.

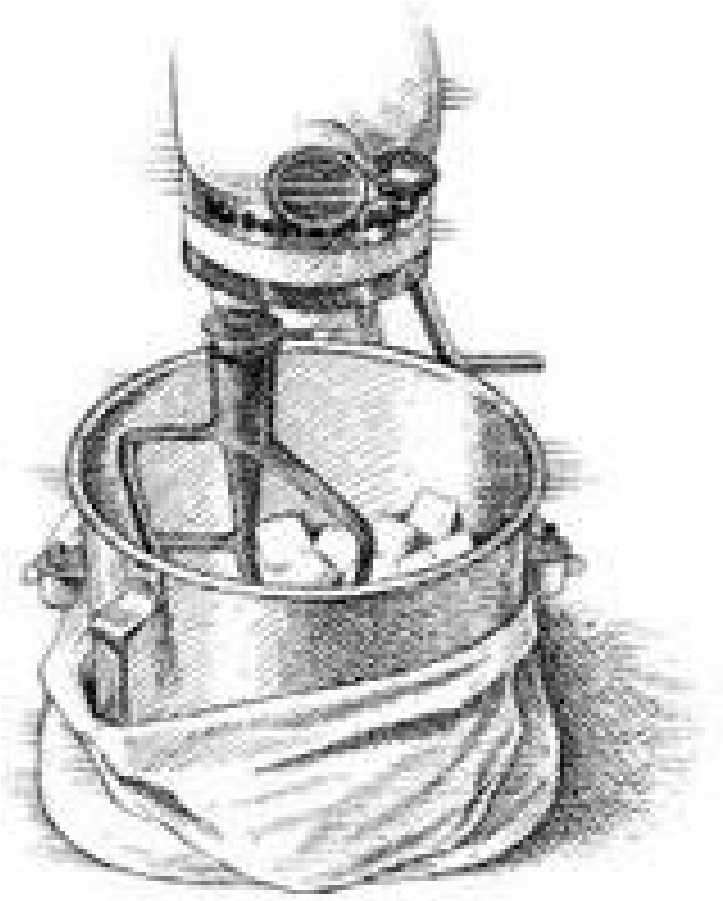

Figure 3.

If you have forgotten to take the butter out of the refrigerator in advance, try cutting the stick into small pieces and placing the pieces in a mixing bowl. You can speed up the warming process by wrapping a towel that has been run under hot tap water around

the bowl.

Butter and sugar can be creamed by hand, but an electric mixer (either handheld or standing) is quicker and more efficient. Most cooks don't cream the butter and sugar long enough and don't get as much volume as they should. The beating times for recipes in this book are for an electric mixer. If you beat the butter and sugar with a wooden spoon, the times will be several minutes longer, depending on your hand strength and speed. When the butter and sugar have lightened in color and become fluffy, you can stop.

Once the butter and sugar are creamed, most recipes call for the addition of eggs and vanilla or other liquids. Make sure

the eggs are at room temperature so they don't cause the batter to curdle. At this point, the dry ingredients can be stirred into the batter. You can use an electric mixer—just make sure the speed is set to low.

In many old-fashioned recipes, the flour, leavener, and salt are sifted together before being added to the batter. This was necessary when flour was often lumpy straight from the bag. However, modern flour is presifted and we find this step unnecessary for making cookies. We simply whisk the dry ingredients together in a bowl to make sure that the leavener and salt are evenly distributed in the batter.

The final step in the dough-making

process is to add solid ingredients, like chocolate chips and nuts. These should be stirred in by hand since a mixer might break them apart.

SHAPING COOKIES

There are several ways to manipulate a finished dough in order to change the appearance or texture of the baked cookies. In order to inhibit spreading in the oven (and thus prevent the cookies from becoming too thin), chill the dough in the refrigerator for at least one hour.

How the dough is shaped into small pieces will also affect the appearance of the cookies. The cookies in this book all rely on simple shaping methods.

(Cookies that require a rolling pin and cutter are not considered.) The doughs in this book are handled in one of three ways.

DROPPED This is the quickest way to get the dough into the oven. The dough is dropped from a spoon directly onto a cookie sheet. Because the pieces of dough are not round, they spread unevenly in the oven. The result is cookies with thin, crisp edges and thicker centers.

MOLDED For molded or shaped cookies, each piece of dough is rolled

into a ball or otherwise manipulated by hand before being placed on a cookie sheet. When rolled into a ball, the dough is often rolled in sugar before being baked. Shaping the dough into a ball promotes even spreading and thickness in the baked cookies.

ROLLED AND SLICED The dough is rolled into a log using a piece of plastic wrap, refrigerated until firm, and then sliced into thin rounds and placed on a cookie sheet. These cookies are called icebox, refrigerator, or slice-and-bake cookies. Sandwich cookies are made from thinly sliced cookies that are cooled and then filled with jam or

chocolate and sandwiched together.

BAKING TIPS

To make sure that all the cookies on the baking sheet are done at the same time, follow these general rules:

Always preheat the oven.

Measure the batter so that cookies will all be the same size.

Make sure to leave enough room between pieces of dough for cookies to spread in the oven. Two inches is

usually a safe distance.

::**Halfway through the baking time** reverse the top and bottom sheets and also rotate each sheet from back to front.

::**Watch the clock and check the cookies** a few minutes before the recipe indicates they will be done. Ovens vary (you should check yours with an oven thermometer) and cookies will go from underbaked to overbaked in a very few minutes.

::**Consider underbaking the cookies a**

bit, especially if you like them soft and chewy. Allow them to firm up on the sheets for several minutes before transferring them to a cooling rack.

When making second and third batches, do not place dough directly onto hot cookie sheets. This causes excess spreading and uneven baking because it will probably take you a few minutes to get all the dough on the sheet. You may arrange pieces of dough on parchment, slide the parchment onto a hot cookie sheet, and then place the cookie sheet immediately in the oven. The hot cookie sheet isn't a problem as long as all the pieces of dough get onto

the sheet at the same time and the sheet is immediately put in the oven.

STORING COOKIES

If you want to keep cookies for several days, we suggest storing them in a metal tin at room temperature. You can restore just-baked freshness to chewy cookies by wrapping a single cookie in a sheet of paper towel and microwaving it until soft, 15 to 25 seconds. Cool microwaved cookies before serving. This technique works best with oversized cookies like peanut butter and oatmeal that should be chewy and a bit soft. Do not try this with cookies that should be crisp.

If you know you can't finish off a batch of cookies in a few days, consider freezing part of the dough. Almost every dough can be frozen either in individual portions or as a block. If you have frozen the dough in balls, simply transfer them to a cookie sheet and bake as directed, extending the time in the oven by a few minutes. If the dough is a solid mass, let it thaw in the refrigerator before shaping and baking it.

CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES

CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES COME IN VARIOUS styles, with significant differences in texture, size, and flavor. The dough is a basic sugar cookie, in which some of the granulated sugar has been replaced by brown sugar, which gives them a caramel flavor. Of course, the dough is also studded with chocolate chips and, often, nuts.

Traditional recipes follow the Tollhouse cookie model, made famous on packages of Nestlé chocolate chips.

This recipe dates back to the 1930s when Ruth Wakefield, owner of the Toll House Inn in Whitman, Massachusetts, cut up a chocolate bar and added the pieces to a cookie dough. She eventually sold the recipe to Nestlé, which introduced the chocolate morsel in 1939.

These cookies are on the small side (about 2 inches in diameter). The edges are thin, crisp, and golden brown. The center of the cookie is thicker and will bend when the cookies are warm but hardens as the cookies cool and snaps after several hours. The center of this cookie is often cakey, but should not be dry.

The original recipe calls for equal parts of brown and granulated sugar. We

found that we like the caramel flavor that the brown sugar gives this cookie and have increased the ratio of brown to granulated sugar to two to one. Modern Tollhouse recipes often omit the water that was part of the original. We found that the water makes the cookies a bit moister and should be added.

An attractive variation on the traditional chocolate chip cookie is the oversized cookie that in recent years bake shops and cookie stores have made their reputation (and a lot of money) by selling. Unlike the traditional recipe made at home, these cookies are thick right from the edge to the center. They are also chewy, even a bit soft. Although

we knew at the outset that molding the dough rather than dropping it into uneven blobs would be essential to achieving an even thickness, we didn't realize how challenging making them really chewy would be.

We added more flour or ground oats (as some recipes suggest), which helped the cookies hold their shape and remain thick, but made the texture cakey and dry rather than chewy. When we tried liquid sweeteners, such as molasses and corn syrup, the dough spread too much in the oven and the cookies baked up thin.

At this point in our testing, we decided to experiment with the butter. Some chewy cookies start with melted rather than creamed butter. In its solid state,

butter is an emulsion of butter and water. When butter is melted, the fat and water molecules separate. When melted butter is added to a dough, the proteins in the flour immediately grab onto the freed water molecules to form elastic sheets of gluten. The gluten makes a cookie chewy.

Our first attempt with melted butter was disappointing. The dough was very soft from all the liquid, and the cookies baked up greasy. Because the dough was having a hard time absorbing the liquid fat, we reduced the amount of butter from sixteen to twelve tablespoons. We also reduced the number of eggs from two to one to make the dough stiffer.

The cookies were chewy at this point, but they became somewhat tough as they cooled, and after a few hours they were hard. Fat acts as a tenderizer and by reducing the amount of butter in the recipe we had limited its ability to keep the cookies soft. The only other source of fat is the egg. Since our dough was already soft enough and probably could not stand the addition of too much more liquid, we decided to add another yolk (which contains all the fat) and leave out the white. The dough was still stiff enough to shape. When baked, the cookies were thick and chewy and they remained that way when they cooled. Finally, we had the perfect recipe.

Traditional Chocolate Chip Cookies

NOTE: ***This is our take on the classic Tollhouse cookie, thin and crisp around the edges, thicker and a bit cakier in the middle. The dough can be baked on ungreased sheets, but lining the sheets with parchment will make cleanup easier. When the cookies come out of the oven, they are very soft. Let them cool on the sheets for a minute or two before transferring them to a rack. Makes about 60 cookies.***

$2^1/_4$ cups all-purpose flour

1 teaspoon baking soda

1 teaspoon salt

1/2 pound (2 sticks) unsalted butter, softened but still firm

1 cup packed light or dark brown sugar

1/2 cup granulated sugar

2 large eggs

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1/2 teaspoon water

2 cups semisweet chocolate chips

1 cup coarsely chopped walnuts or pecans

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven racks to upper-and lower-middle positions. Heat oven to

375 degrees. Whisk flour, baking soda, and salt together in medium bowl; set aside.

2. Either by hand or with electric mixer, cream together butter and sugars until light and fluffy, about 3 minutes with mixer set at medium speed. Scrape sides of bowl with rubber spatula. Add eggs, vanilla, and water. Beat until combined, about 40 seconds. Scrape sides of bowl.

3. Add dry ingredients and beat at low speed until just combined, 15 to 20 seconds. Add chocolate chips and nuts and stir until combined.

4. Drop batter by tablespoons onto ungreased cookie sheets, spacing pieces of dough about 1 inch apart. Bake, reversing position of cookie sheets halfway through baking, until cookies are light golden brown and outer edges begin to crisp, 8 to 10 minutes. Cool cookies on sheets for 1 to 2 minutes before transferring to cooling racks with wide spatula.

VARIATION:

Cocoa Chocolate Chip Cookies

We like these chocolaty cookies with

extra nuts. They won't spread as much in the oven so drop the batter by generous tablespoons onto the baking sheet. We tried both dutched and natural cocoa in this recipe. We thought the dutched cocoa gave the cookies a slightly stronger chocolate flavor, but both types of cocoa worked fine.

Decrease flour to 2 cups and sift $^1/_2$ cup cocoa powder with other dry ingredients. Increase nuts to $1^1/_2$ cups. Drop batter by generous tablespoons on cookie sheets and bake 10 to 12 minutes.

Thick and Chewy Chocolate Chip Cookies

NOTE: ***These oversized cookies are chewy and thick, like many of the chocolate chip cookies sold in gourmet shops and cookie stores. They rely on melted butter and an extra yolk to keep their texture soft. These cookies are best served warm from the oven but will retain their texture even when cooled. To ensure the proper texture, cool the cookies on the cookie sheet. Makes about 18 large cookies.***

2 cups plus 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour

$^1/_2$ teaspoon baking soda

1/2 teaspoon salt

12 tablespoons (1 1/2 sticks) unsalted butter, melted and cooled until warm

1 cup packed light or dark brown sugar

1/2 cup granulated sugar

1 large egg plus 1 egg yolk

2 teaspoons vanilla extract

1-1 1/2 cups semisweet chocolate chips

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven racks to upper-and lower-middle positions. Heat oven to 325 degrees. Line two large cookie sheets with parchment paper.

2. Whisk flour, baking soda, and salt together in medium bowl; set aside.

3. Either by hand or with electric mixer, mix butter and sugars until thoroughly blended. Beat in egg, yolk, and vanilla until combined. Add dry ingredients and beat at low speed just until combined. Stir in chips to taste.

4. Roll scant $^{1}/_{4}$ cup dough into ball (*see* figure 4). Holding dough ball in fingertips of both hands, pull into two equal halves (*see* figure 5). Rotate

halves ninety degrees (*see* figure 6) and, with jagged surfaces facing up, join halves together at their base, again forming a single ball, being careful not to smooth dough's uneven surface (*see* figure 7). Place formed dough onto cookie sheet, leaving $2^{1}/_{2}$ inches between each ball.

5. Bake, reversing position of cookie sheets halfway through baking, until cookies are light golden brown and outer edges start to harden yet centers are still soft and puffy, 15 to 18 minutes. Cool cookies on sheets. When cooled, peel cookies from parchment.

VARIATIONS:

Chocolate Chip Cookies with Coconut and Toasted Almonds

Add $1^{1}/_{2}$ cups sweetened dried coconut and 1 cup toasted sliced almonds along with chips.

Black and White Chocolate Chip Cookies

Substitute $^{1}/_{2}$ cup white chocolate chips for $^{1}/_{2}$ cup of semisweet chips. Add 1 cup chopped pecans with chips.

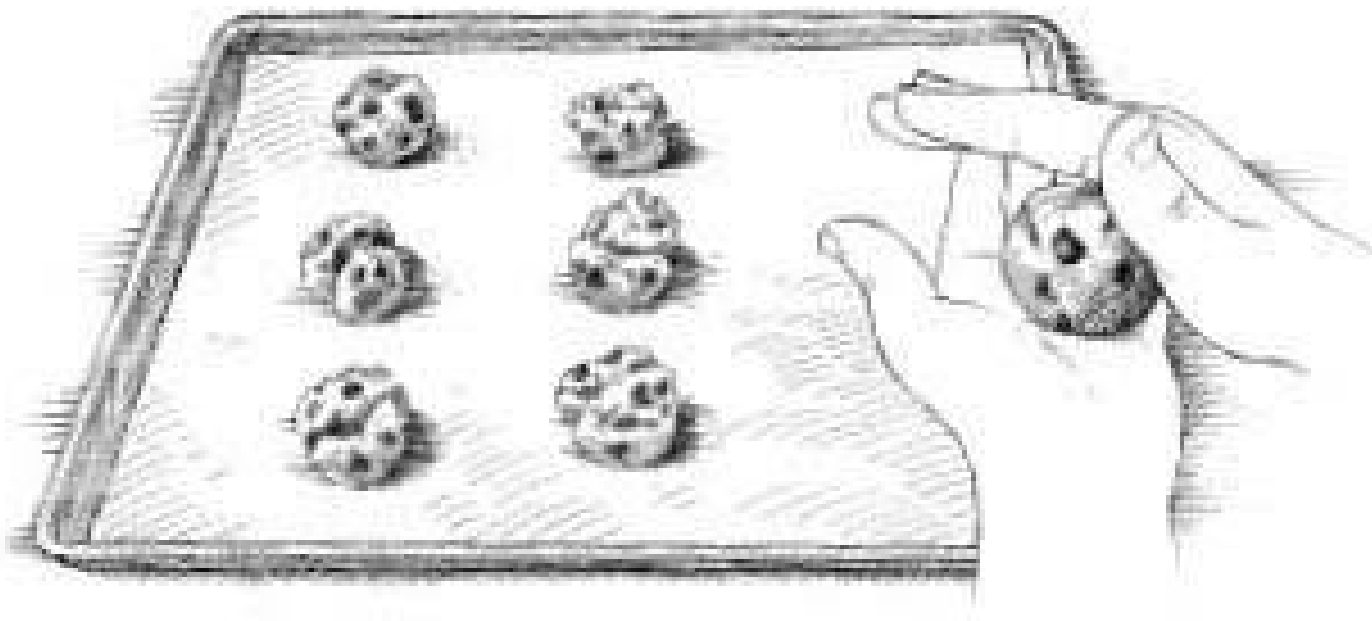

Figure 4.
Creating a jagged surface on the top of each dough ball will give the finished cookies an attractive and somewhat rough appearance. Start by rolling a scant $^{1}/_{4}$ cup of dough into a smooth ball.

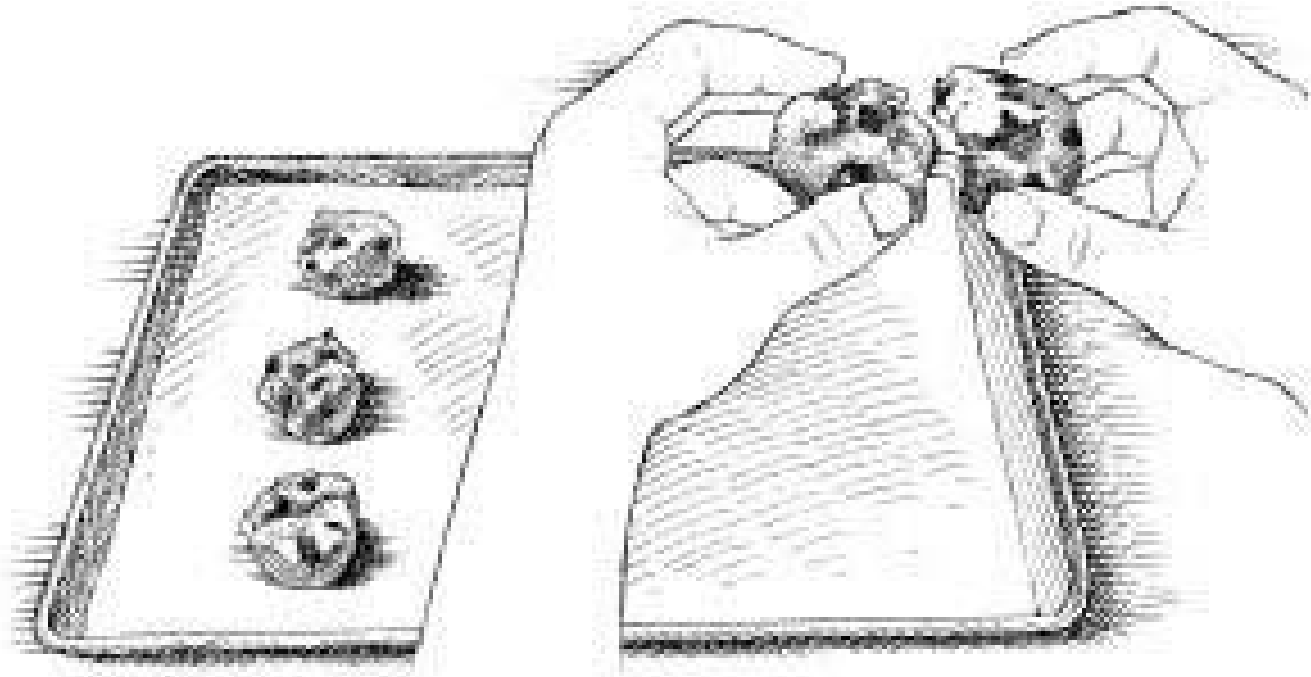

Figure 5.
Holding the dough ball in the fingertips of both hands, pull the dough apart into two equal halves.

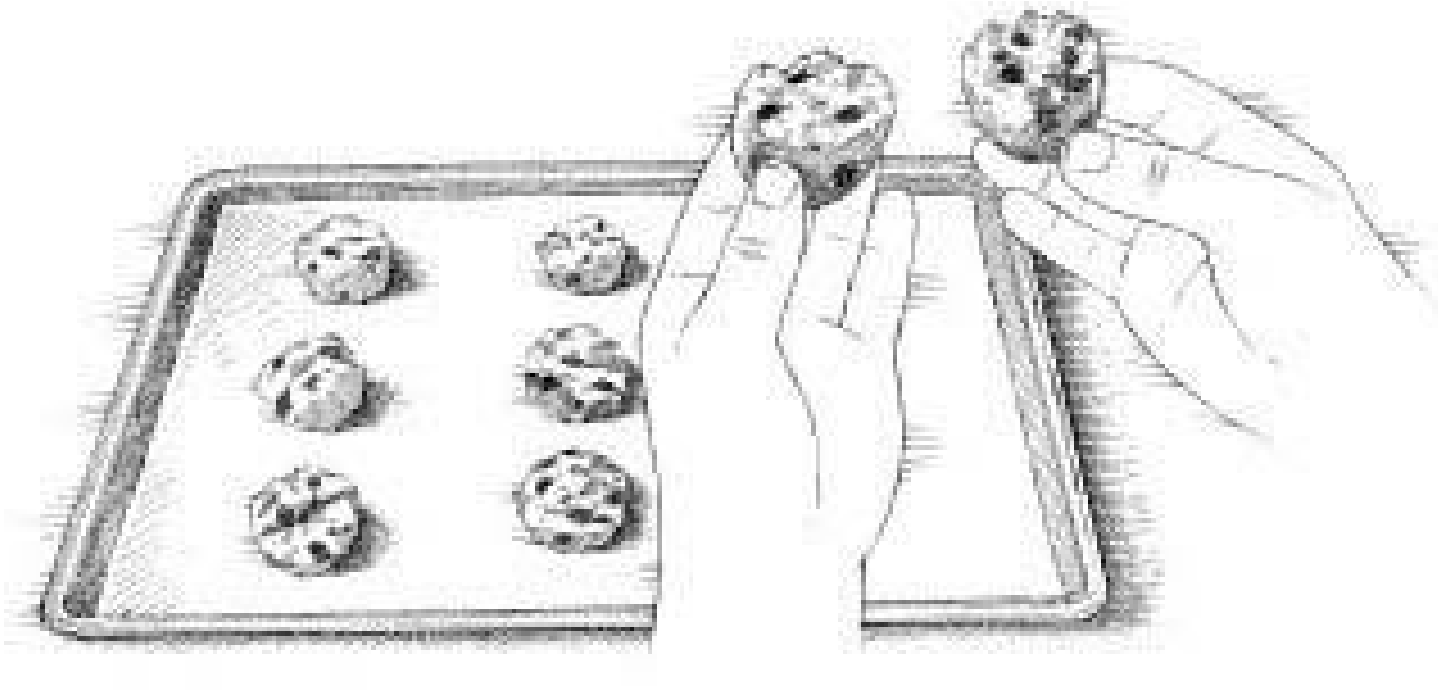

Figure 6.
Each half will have a jagged surface where it was ripped from the other. Rotate each piece 90 degrees so that the jagged surface faces up.

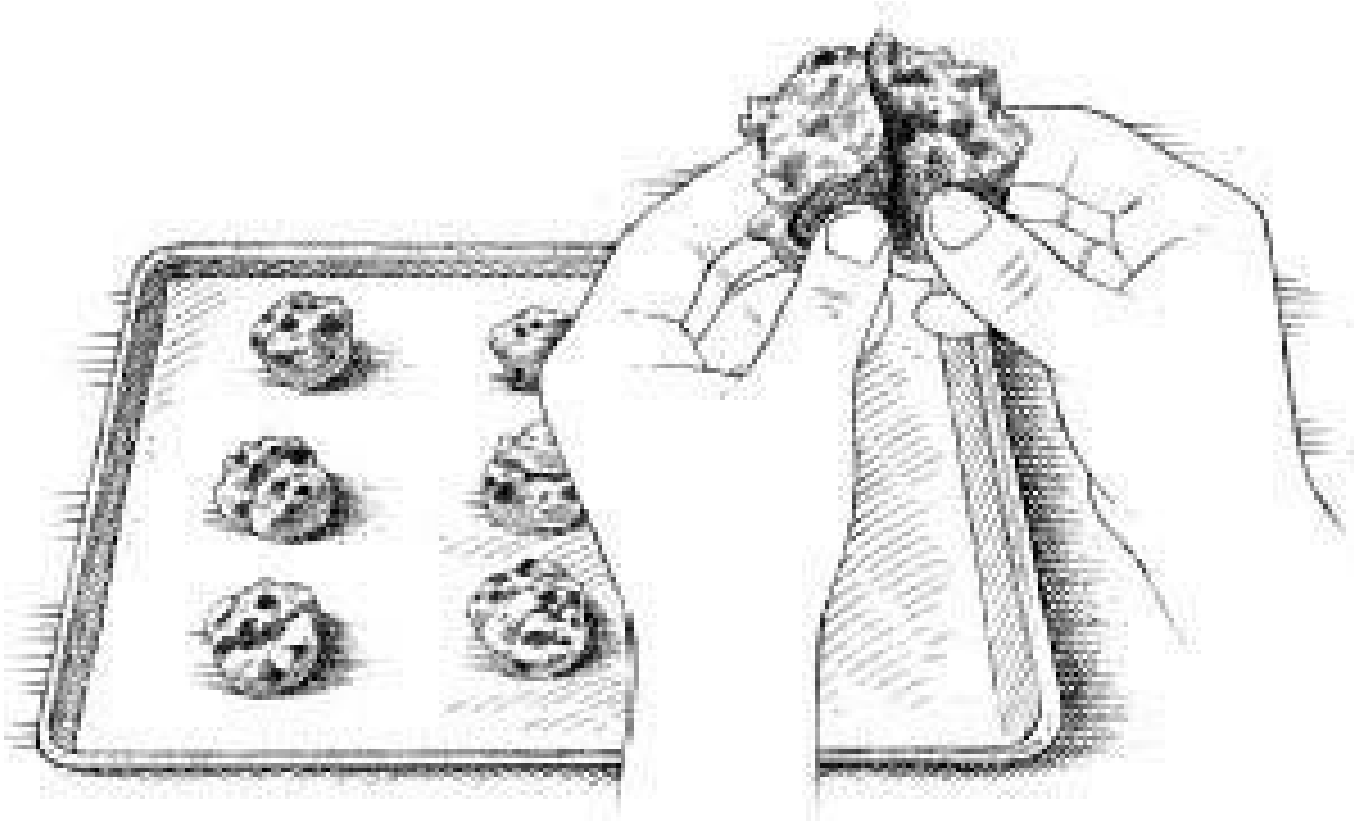

Figure 7.
Jam the halves back together into one ball so that the top surface remains jagged.

CHOCOLATE COOKIES

WE HAVE EATEN ALL KINDS OF CHOCOLATE cookies. Many recipes are similar to the dough used to make traditional Tollhouse cookies, except that some of the flour is replaced by cocoa powder. For our chocolate cookie recipe, we wanted something completely different. The cookie had to be packed with chocolate flavor, both from the dough and from chips. We also wanted the texture to be soft and creamy. We really wanted these cookies to taste like a chocolate bar or truffle baked into the

shape of a cookie.

Clearly, we would need to use melted chocolate for both flavor and smoothness. We experimented with semisweet and unsweetened chocolate. Semisweet chocolate was preferable, giving the cookies a better chocolate flavor and a smoother texture. Since we were adding chips to the dough, we tried melted chips instead of melted semisweet chocolate and liked the results just as well.

We encountered a recurring problem in our testing. We wanted to add a lot of chocolate, but the dough was very soft, making it hard to drop and causing the cookies to spread too much in the oven. We also discovered that this batter

needed a lot eggs (we settled on three) to give the cookies the smooth, truffle-like consistency we wanted. However, adding so many eggs made the dough even softer.

Many chocolate cookie recipes suggest chilling the dough in the refrigerator to firm up its texture. We found that our dough required two hours to achieve a firm texture. We also discovered that the dough will bake up fine if refrigerated overnight.

Our recipe was almost perfect but needed some final refinements. We added some cocoa powder and liked the results. The cocoa adds an intense, slightly bitter chocolate flavor that

balances the sweetness of the chocolate. We found that dutched cocoa tastes richer in this recipe than natural cocoa and makes the cookie darker. The vanilla extract enhances the chocolate flavor and we settled on using a full two teaspoons in our recipe. Although most recipes call for granulated sugar, we added some brown sugar and liked the rich, slightly caramel flavor it imparted.

Chocolate Cookies

NOTE: ***The batter is fairly thin and needs refrigeration to firm it up and prevent too much spreading in the oven. Even after chilling the batter, these cookies bake up rather flat, but they stay chewy and fudgy after they have cooled. Be careful not to overbake them as the color does not serve as an indicator. Makes about 40 cookies.***

16 ounces semisweet chocolate chips

8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter

$^1/_2$ cup all-purpose flour

1/4 cup Dutch-processed cocoa powder

1 teaspoon baking powder

1/4 teaspoon salt

3 large eggs

2/3 cup granulated sugar

1/3 cup packed light or dark brown sugar

2 teaspoons vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Melt 8 ounces chocolate chips with butter in double boiler until smooth. Set aside to cool.

2. Sift together flour, cocoa powder,

baking powder, and salt. Set aside.

3. Either by hand or with electric mixer, beat eggs with sugars until combined, about 1 minute. Stir in vanilla extract. Add melted chocolate and butter to egg mixture and mix until well combined, about 1 minute. Scrape bottom and sides of bowl. Add dry ingredients and stir until just combined, about 20 seconds. Stir in remaining 8 ounces chocolate chips. Cover bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate until batter firms, at least 2 hours. (Batter can be refrigerated for one day.)

4. Adjust oven racks to upper-and lower-middle positions. Heat oven to 350 degrees.

5. Drop batter by tablespoons onto parchment-lined cookie sheets, spacing pieces of dough $1^{1}/_{2}$ to 2 inches apart. Bake, reversing position of cookie sheets halfway through baking time, until edges of cookies are just beginning to set and centers are still soft and puffy, 11 to 12 minutes. Slide parchment paper with cookies onto cooling rack. When cooled, peel cookies from parchment.

VARIATIONS:

Chocolate Cookies with White Chocolate Chips and Macadamia Nuts

Substitute 8 ounces white chocolate chips for 8 ounces of semisweet chocolate chips. Stir into finished batter along with 1 cup chopped salted macadamia nuts.

Chocolate Cookies with Orange Zest

Add 1 tablespoon grated orange zest to finished batter along with chocolate chips.

SUGAR COOKIES

SUGAR COOKIES ARE THE SIMPLEST COOKIE YOU can make. Although the ingredient list is short (butter, flour, sugar, eggs, vanilla, leavener, and salt), this cookie can be especially delicious when made right. However, sugar cookies can also be bland and boring. There are no chips or nuts to offer distractions, so the dough itself must be delicious. Our ideal sugar cookie is sweet and buttery, with a soft, chewy texture.

We started testing by focusing on the

type and amount of sugar. Some recipes call for confectioners' sugar, but we found that these cookies were too crumbly and not chewy at all. We tried adding some brown sugar, but the caramel flavor felt like a variation to us. It did not deliver the clean, sweet, buttery flavor we wanted for a master recipe. Granulated sugar (and a lot of it) proved to be the best sweetener for flavor and texture.

We next focused on the flour. After several tests we settled on a ratio of one cup butter to two cups flour. This cookie has slightly less flour than many others to allow the buttery flavor to dominate. Cutting the flour made the dough a tad soft, but we reduced the eggs from two

in our working recipe down to one and that solved the problem. Reducing the egg also seemed to bring out the flavor of the butter.

We tried baking powder as well as cream of tartar and baking soda. (There are no acidic ingredients in this cookie, so plain baking soda would not work properly.) We felt that the baking powder gave this cookie the cleanest flavor. Several tasters noted a slightly sour flavor in the cookies made with cream of tartar and baking soda.

Our final tests concerned the vanilla. We tried leaving it out and really noticed the difference in this simple cookie. For the best flavor, we found it

necessary to use two teaspoons. With less vanilla, the cookies tasted flat or bland.

Sugar Cookies

NOTE: ***This is the simplest cookie imaginable, with the flavors of butter, sugar, and vanilla at the fore. The edges are firm but the center is soft and chewy. Makes about 30 cookies.***

2 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
$^1/_2$ teaspoon salt
$^1/_2$ pound (2 sticks) unsalted butter, softened but still firm
$1^1/_4$ cups granulated sugar
1 large egg
2 teaspoons vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven racks to upper-and lower-middle position. Heat oven to 375 degrees. Whisk together flour, baking powder, and salt in medium bowl; set aside.

2. Either by hand or with electric mixer, cream butter and 1 cup sugar until light and fluffy, about 3 minutes with mixer set at medium speed. Scrape sides of bowl with rubber spatula. Add egg and vanilla extract. Beat until combined, about 30 seconds. Add dry ingredients and beat at low speed until just combined, about 30 seconds.

3. Place remaining $^{1}/_{4}$ cup sugar in shallow bowl. Working with $1^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons of dough each time, roll dough into $1^{1}/_{2}$ inch balls (*see* figure 8). Roll balls in sugar and place on ungreased cookie sheets, spacing balls 2 to $2^{1}/_{2}$ inches apart.

4. Butter bottom of drinking glass with flat bottom that measures about 2 inches across. Dip bottom of glass in remaining sugar and flatten balls of dough with bottom of glass until 3/8 to $^{1}/_{2}$ inches thick and about $^{3}/_{4}$ inches in diameter (*see* figure 9). Dip bottom of glass into

sugar every two or three cookies.

5. Bake, reversing position of cookie sheets halfway through baking time, until edges of cookies are pale golden, 10 to 11 minutes. Let cookies cool on cookie sheet 2 to 3 minutes before transferring to cooling rack with wide spatula.

VARIATIONS:

Sugar Cookies with Ginger

Follow Master Recipe, whisking 1 teaspoon ground ginger with dry ingredients. Stir 1 tablespoon chopped crystallized ginger into finished dough.

Sugar Cookies with Lime

Zest

Follow Master Recipe, adding 1 teaspoon grated lime zest along with eggs. Place $^{1}/_{4}$ cup sugar for coating dough in step 3 in food processor. Add 1 teaspoon grated lime zest and process until sugar becomes green and zest is evenly distributed, about 10 seconds. Roll dough balls in lime sugar, gently shaking off excess.

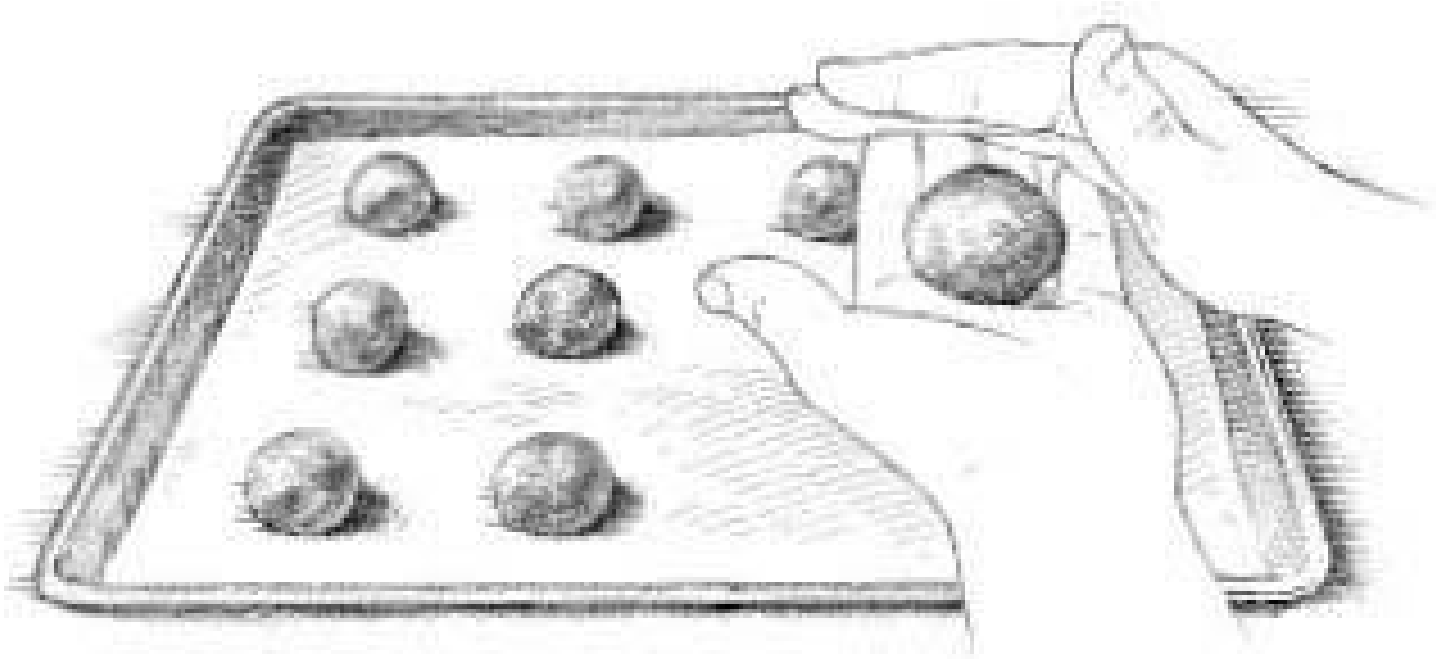

Figure 8.

Take $1^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons of dough and roll between palms into a ball that measures about $1^{1}/_{2}$ inches in diameter. Roll the ball of dough in sugar and then place the dough on an ungreased cookie sheet.

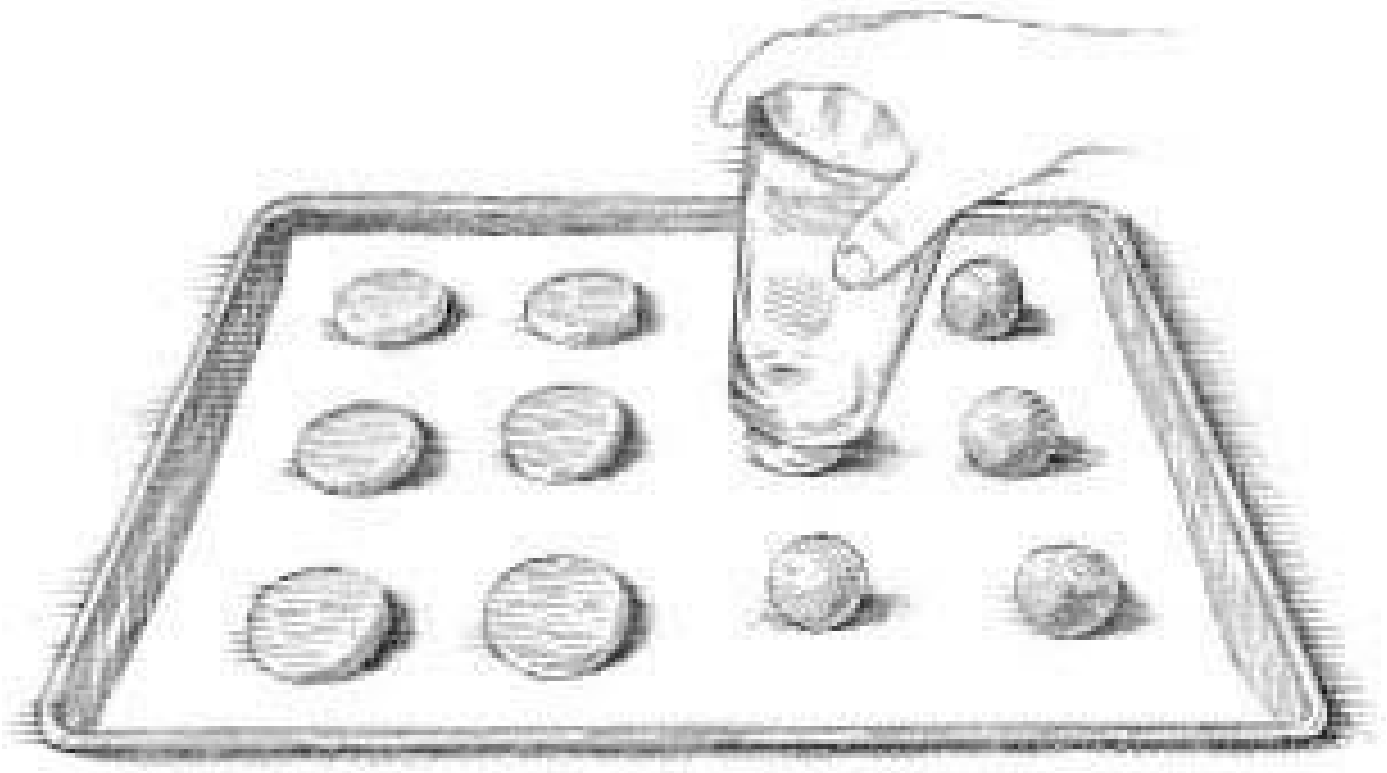

Figure 9.
Use a drinking glass with a flat bottom that measures about 2 inches across to flatten the balls of dough right on the cookie sheet. Butter the bottom of the glass before starting and dip it in sugar every two or three cookies.

SNICKERDOODLES

WITH THEIR CRINKLY TOPS AND LIBERAL dusting of cinnamon sugar, chewy snickerdoodles are a favorite in New England. The name is a corruption of a German word that translates as "crinkly noodles."

Traditionally, a snickerdoodle has a subtle tang or sour undertone that contrasts with the cinnamon sugar coating. Most recipes rely on baking soda and cream of tartar as the leavening agent for two reasons. First, the baking soda provides the characteristic tang.

Second, the baking soda and cream of tartar cause the cookie to rise very quickly and then to collapse somewhat. The result is the characteristic crinkly top.

We tested both baking powder and the baking soda-cream of tartar combination. As we expected, the latter combination is essential to this cookie. In order to make the cookies especially tangy, we found it helpful not to add vanilla. The vanilla can take away from the sourness, which is fairly subtle.

We noticed that most of the recipes we tested were not nearly chewy enough. We found that increasing the sugar helped, but we wondered why some traditional snickerdoodle recipes

contain vegetable shortening or Crisco. Although we generally don't recommend using shortening in cookies (it does not taste as good as butter), we thought it might be worth trying in this case. Unlike butter, which contains about 18 percent water, shortening is 100 percent fat. The water in butter evaporates in the oven and helps the cookies to spread. Since shortening does not contain water, in theory it should help reduce spread in the oven and keep cookies thick and chewy.

Our tests revealed that this bit of common culinary wisdom is in fact true. However, you don't need to use all or half shortening for the desired effect.

When we used one part shortening to one part butter, we felt the flavor of the cookie was lacking. After several attempts, we discovered that just one part shortening for every three parts butter is enough to keep the cookies chewy. At this level, the butter flavor still dominates.

Snickerdoodles

NOTE: ***These old-fashioned cookies are dusted with cinnamon sugar and have a good contrast between crisp exterior and soft, chewy interior. Makes about 30 cookies.***

$2^1/_4$ cups all-purpose flour

2 teaspoons cream of tartar

1 teaspoon baking soda

$^1/_2$ teaspoon salt

12 tablespoons ($1^1/_2$ sticks) unsalted butter, softened but still firm

$^1/_4$ cup vegetable shortening

$1^1/_2$ cups plus 3 tablespoons

granulated sugar

2 large eggs

1 tablespoon ground cinnamon

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven racks to upper-and lower-middle positions. Heat oven to 400 degrees. Grease or line cookie sheets with parchment paper.

2. Whisk flour, cream of tartar, baking soda, and salt together in medium bowl; set aside.

3. Either by hand or electric mixer, cream butter, shortening, and $1\,^{1}/_{2}$ cups

sugar until combined, 1 to $1^1/_2$ minutes with electric mixer set at medium speed. Scrape down sides of bowl with rubber spatula. Add eggs. Beat until combined, about 30 seconds.

4. Add dry ingredients and beat at low speed until just combined, about 20 seconds.

5. Mix remaining 3 tablespoons sugar with cinnamon in shallow bowl. Working with scant 2 tablespoons of dough each time, roll dough into $1^1/_2$-inch balls. Roll balls in cinnamon sugar and place on cookie sheet, spacing them

2 to $2^{1}/_{2}$ inches apart.

6. Bake, reversing position in oven halfway through baking time, until edges of cookies are beginning to set and centers are soft and puffy, 9 to 11 minutes. Let cookies cool on cookie sheet 2 to 3 minutes before transferring them to cooling rack with wide spatula.

PEANUT BUTTER COOKIES

FOR US, THE BEST PEANUT BUTTER COOKIE IS crisp around the edges, chewy in the center, and slightly puffed. The flavor is buttery and sweet with a strong hit of peanuts.

We started our tests by focusing on the fat. Butter accentuated the peanut flavor, while margarine and Crisco lessened it. The Crisco made the cookie chewier in the center, but we felt the loss in peanut flavor was not worth the added chewiness. We tried peanut oil (thinking

this might boost the overall peanut flavor), but the texture was dry and sandy.

From these early tests, we noticed that peanut butter types replicated the results we found with fats. Natural peanut butters with oil on top made the cookies sandy. Commercial brands, which contain partially hydrogenated vegetable oils that are similar to Crisco, made the cookies chewier. We tested both smooth and chunky peanut butter and felt chunky brands contributed more peanut flavor.

We tried using more peanut butter (we even used all peanut butter and no butter), but we still could not get a strong enough peanut flavor. Clearly, we would need peanuts as well as peanut

butter. We found that chopped peanuts tend to slip out of the dough. We then ground them in the food processor and worked them directly into the dough, which greatly improved the peanut flavor.

Salt brings out the flavor of peanuts (salted, roasted peanuts taste better than unsalted nuts), and we found that salt also helped bring out the flavor of the peanuts in the cookies. In fact, we found it best to use both salted nuts and salted butter for the strongest peanut flavor.

At this point, we focused our attention on the sweetener. We had been using granulated sugar but wondered if a liquid sweetener might make the cookies

chewier. We tried molasses and corn syrup but they could not beat granulated sugar. We tried brown sugar but found the resulting cookies to be too sweet and candyish. However, because the brown sugar did make the cookies taste nuttier, we decided to test half brown sugar and half granulated sugar. This turned out to be ideal, giving the cookies a mild praline flavor that highlighted the flavor of the peanuts.

Peanut Butter Cookies

NOTE: ***In our testing, we found that salted butter helps bring out the flavor of the nuts. If using unsalted butter, increase the salt to one teaspoon. Makes about 3 dozen cookies.***

$2\frac{1}{2}$ cups all-purpose flour

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon baking soda

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon baking powder

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt

$\frac{1}{2}$ pound (2 sticks) salted butter, softened but still firm

1 cup packed brown sugar

1 cup granulated sugar

1 cup extra-crunchy peanut

butter, at room temperature

2 large eggs

2 teaspoons vanilla extract

1 cup roasted salted peanuts, ground in food processor to resemble bread crumbs, about 14 pulses

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to low-center position. Heat oven to 350 degrees. Line large cookie sheet with parchment paper.

2. Whisk flour, baking soda, baking powder, and salt together in medium bowl; set aside.

3. Either by hand or with electric mixer, beat butter until creamy. Add sugars; beat until fluffy, about 3 minutes with electric mixer, stopping to scrape down bowl as necessary. Beat in peanut butter until fully incorporated, then eggs, one at a time, then vanilla. Gently stir dry ingredients into peanut butter mixture. Add ground peanuts; stir gently until just incorporated.

4. Working with generous 2 tablespoons each time, roll dough into 2-inch balls. Place balls on parchment-lined cookie sheet, leaving $2^{1}/_{2}$ inches between each

ball. Press each dough ball twice with dinner fork dipped in cold water to make crisscross design (*see* figure 10).

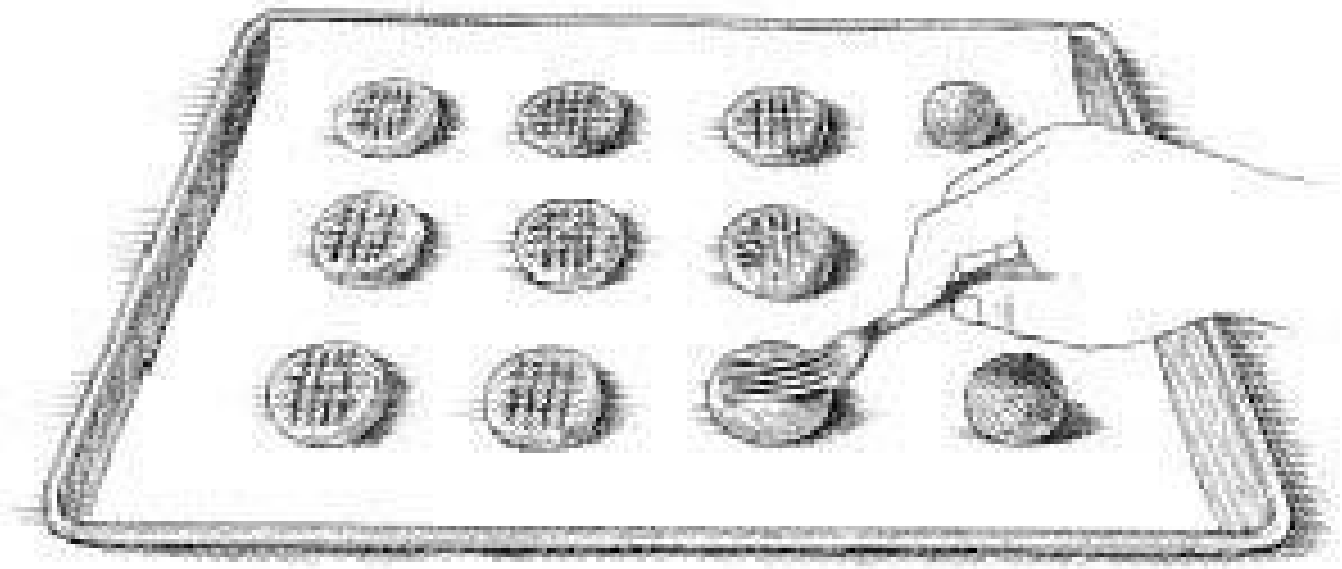

Figure 10.
To make crisscross design, dip a dinner fork in a small bowl of cold water and then press the fork into the dough ball. Rotate the fork 90 degrees and press it into the dough ball a second time.

OATMEAL COOKIES

WHEN DEVELOPING THIS RECIPE, WE wanted an oversized cookie that was chewy and moist. Most oatmeal cookies seem dry to us, and the flavor of the oats seems too weak. Many recipes don't call for enough oats, and spices often overwhelm the flavor of the oats that are there.

The flavor issues were easily solved. We tested various amounts of oats and found that in order to have a real oat flavor, we needed a ratio of two cups of oats for every cup of flour—far more

oats than most recipes use.

To keep the focus on the oats, we decided to eliminate the cinnamon, a common ingredient in most recipes, because it was overpowering the oats. We wanted some spice, however, and chose nutmeg, which has a cleaner, subtler flavor that we liked with oats.

Our cookies tasted good at this point, but we needed to work on the texture. In our tests, we found that a high proportion of butter to flour helped to keep the cookies moist. We settled on two parts butter to three parts flour.

We found that shaping the dough into two-inch balls (rather than dropping the meager rounded tablespoon called for in most recipes) helped keep the cookies

moister and chewier, especially in the center, which remains a bit underbaked in an oversized cookie.

Our final tests involved the sugar. We experimented with various amounts and found that adding a full cup each of both brown and granulated sugar delivered the best results, a cookie that was especially moist and rich. Sugar makes baked goods moister and more tender because it helps them hold onto water during the baking process. In addition, sugar encourages exterior browning, which promotes crispness.

Oatmeal Cookies

NOTE: ***If you prefer a less sweet cookie, you can reduce the white sugar by one-quarter cup, but you will lose some crispness. Do not overbake these cookies. The edges should be brown but the rest of the cookie should be very light in color. Parchment paper makes for easy cookie removal and cleanup, but it is not a necessity. If you don't use parchment, cool the cookies on the baking sheet for two minutes before transferring them to a cooling rack. Makes about 18 large cookies.`***

$^1/_2$ pound (2 sticks) unsalted

butter, softened but still firm

1 cup packed light brown sugar

1 cup granulated sugar

2 large eggs

$1^1/_2$ cups all-purpose flour

$^1/_2$ teaspoon salt

$^1/_2$ teaspoon baking powder

$^1/_4$ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg

3 cups rolled oats

$1^1/_2$ cups raisins (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven racks to low and middle positions. Heat oven to 350 degrees.

Line two large cookie sheets with parchment paper, if using.

2. Either by hand or with electric mixer, beat butter until creamy. Add sugars; beat until fluffy, about 3 minutes. Beat in eggs one at a time.

3. Whisk flour, salt, baking powder, and nutmeg together in medium bowl. Stir dry ingredients into butter-sugar mixture with wooden spoon or large rubber spatula. Stir in oats and optional raisins.

4. Working with generous 2 tablespoons

of dough each time, roll dough into 2-inch balls. Place balls on parchment-lined cookie sheet, leaving at least 2 inches between each ball.

5. Bake until cookie edges turn golden brown, 22 to 25 minutes. (Halfway during baking, turn cookie sheets from front to back and also switch them from top to bottom.) Slide cookies on parchment onto cooling rack. Let cool at least 30 minutes before peeling cookie from parchment.

VARIATIONS:

Date Oatmeal Cookies

Follow Master Recipe, substituting $1^{1}/_{2}$ cups chopped dates (*see* figure 11) for raisins.

Ginger Oatmeal Cookies

Follow Master Recipe, adding $^{3}/_{4}$ teaspoon ground ginger to flour and other dry ingredients and omitting raisins.

Chocolate Chip Oatmeal Cookies

Follow Master Recipe, omitting nutmeg and substituting $1^{1}/_{2}$ cups semisweet chocolate chips for raisins.

Nut Oatmeal Cookies

Follow Master Recipe, decreasing flour to 11/3 cups and adding $^{1}/_{4}$ cup ground almonds and 1 cup chopped walnut pieces along with oats. (Almonds can be ground in food processor or blender.) Omit raisins.

Orange and Almond Oatmeal Cookies

Follow Master Recipe, omitting raisins and adding 2 tablespoons minced orange zest and 1 cup toasted chopped almonds (toast nuts in 350-degree oven for 5 minutes) along with oats.

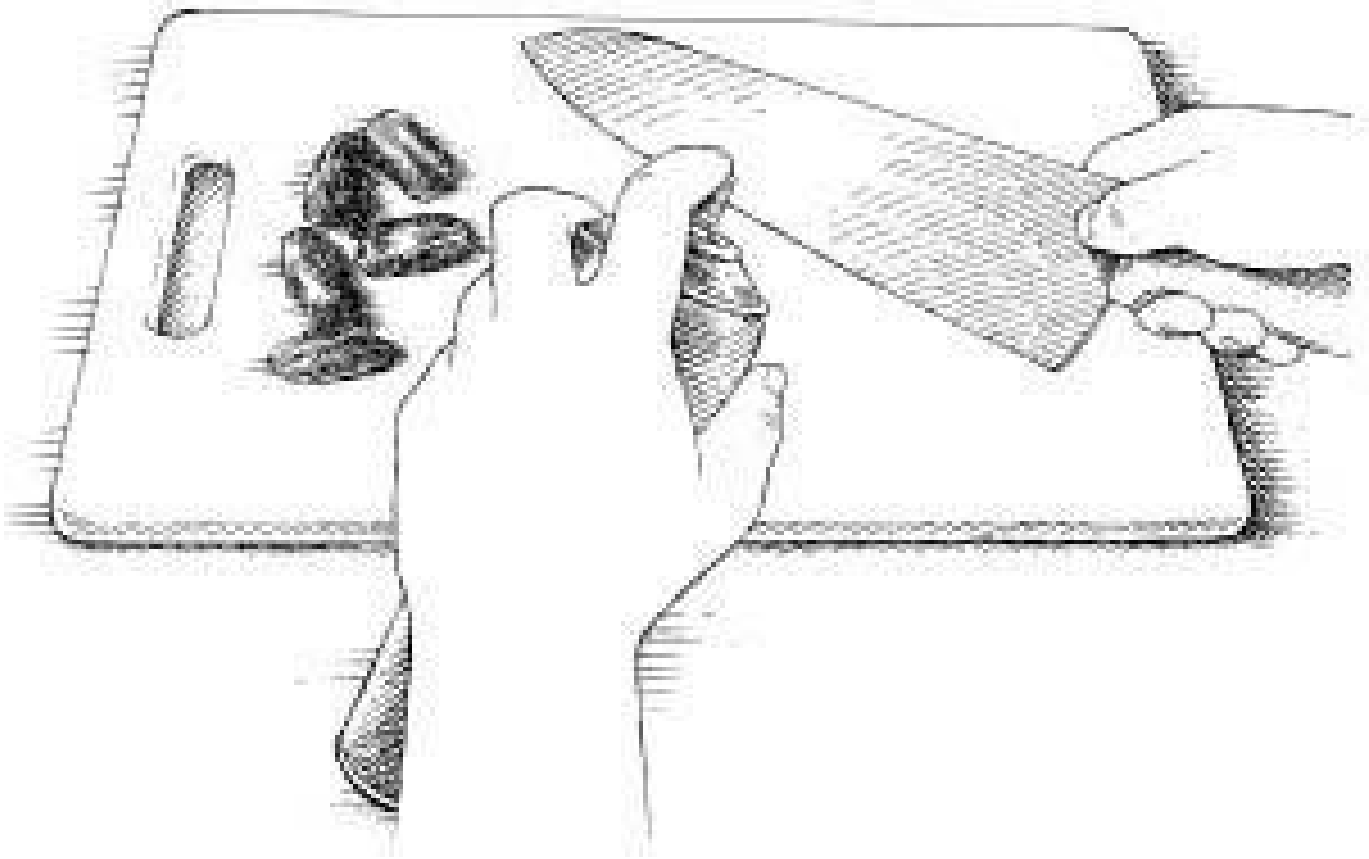

Figure 11.
Dried fruit, especially dates, very often sticks to the knife when you try to chop it. To avoid this problem, coat the blade with a thin film of vegetable oil spray just before you begin chopping any dried fruit. The chopped fruit doesn't cling to the blade and the

knife stays relatively clean.

MOLASSES-SPICE COOKIES

MANY MOLASSES-SPICE COOKIES ARE REALLY gingersnaps. They are hard and dry and not nearly sweet enough. We wanted to create an oversized cookie that was especially soft and chewy. We also wanted the cookie to have a strong molasses flavor with a good hit of sweetness. We started by testing the sweetener since we figured that the molasses would be the key to the puzzle.

We quickly found that too much molasses will impart a bitter quality to

the cookies. Cookies made with a lot of molasses may be soft and chewy, but they won't taste very good. We tried cutting back on the amount of molasses but the cookies were too bland. Brown sugar, which is made with a small amount of molasses, proved to be the answer. Unlike straight molasses, brown sugar has no harsh flavors. After several tests, we settled on the following formula as the ideal compromise between sweetness and good molasses flavor—one half cup each of dark brown sugar and granulated sugar along with one third cup of molasses.

We found that using a fair amount of sweetener helped make the cookies soft and chewy. The other trick was to

underbake the cookies a bit. Even with all this sweetener, these cookies can become hard if overbaked. Since the color of the cookies is so dark, err on the side of underbaking.

Molasses-spice cookies need to have a good spice flavor as well. Cinnamon, ginger, cloves, and allspice are the usual choices in most recipes. We especially like the flavor of the cinnamon and ginger in these cookies. The cloves are good, but they can dominate if used too freely. We settled on $^{3}/_{4}$ teaspoon as the right amount. Allspice is more problematic. In small amounts, this spice can sharpen the molasses flavor without seeming obtrusive, but we found that

adding more than $^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoon made the cookies harsh and even bitter.

Molasses-Spice Cookies

NOTE: ***These oversized cookies are especially attractive, with a rich, dark color, almost perfectly round edges, a surface marked with deep cracks, and an even thickness from the edge to the center. They stay incredibly soft and chewy, even days after they are baked. It is important to underbake the cookies (they won't look done when you take them out of the oven) and then let them firm up as they cool on the baking sheet. If you overbake these cookies, they will become dry and crisp. Makes about 20 large cookies.***

$2^1/_4$ cups all-purpose flour

2 teaspoons baking soda

1/2 teaspoon salt

1 1/2 teaspoons ground cinnamon

1 teaspoon ground ginger

3/4 teaspoon ground cloves

1/4 teaspoon ground allspice

12 tablespoons (1 1/2 sticks) unsalted butter, softened but still firm

1/2 cup packed dark brown sugar

1/2 cup plus 1/3 cup granulated sugar

1 large egg

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

$^1/_3$ cup unsulphured molasses

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust racks to upper-and lower-middle positions. Heat oven to 375 degrees. Whisk flour, baking soda, salt, and spices together in medium bowl; set aside.

2. Either by hand or with electric mixer, cream butter, brown sugar, and $^1/_2$ cup granulated sugar until light and fluffy, about 3 minutes with mixer set at medium speed. Scrape sides of bowl with rubber spatula. Add egg, vanilla extract, and molasses. Beat until

combined, about 30 seconds. Scrape sides of bowl.

3. Add dry ingredients and beat at low speed until just combined, about 30 seconds.

4. Place remaining 1/3 cup granulated sugar in shallow bowl. Working with 2 tablespoons of dough each time, roll dough into $1^{3}/_{4}$-inch balls. Roll balls in sugar and place on ungreased cookie sheets, spacing them $1^{1}/_{2}$ to 2 inches apart.

5. Bake, reversing position of cookie sheets halfway through baking, until outer edges begin to set and centers are soft and puffy, 11 to 13 minutes. Cool cookies on sheets for 2 to 3 minutes before transferring to cooling racks with wide spatula.

VARIATIONS:

Molasses-Spice Cookies with Orange Zest

These cookies have orange zest in the dough as well as in the sugar coating. The zest in the sugar coating prevents the sugar from melting completely and clumps up a bit. The result is a frosted

orange appearance that is quite attractive.

Follow Master Recipe, stirring 2 teaspoons grated orange zest into dough after dry ingredients have been incorporated. Place 1/3 cup sugar for coating dough in step 4 in food processor. Add 1 teaspoon grated orange zest and process until sugar becomes yellow and zest is evenly distributed, about 10 seconds. Roll dough balls in orange sugar, gently shaking off excess.

Glazed Molasses-Spice Cookies

Follow Master Recipe, preparing and

baking cookies as directed. When cookies have cooled, sift $1^{1}/_{2}$ cups confectioners' sugar and then whisk with 2 tablespoons milk until smooth. Dip spoon into glaze and drizzle over cookies (*see* figure 12).

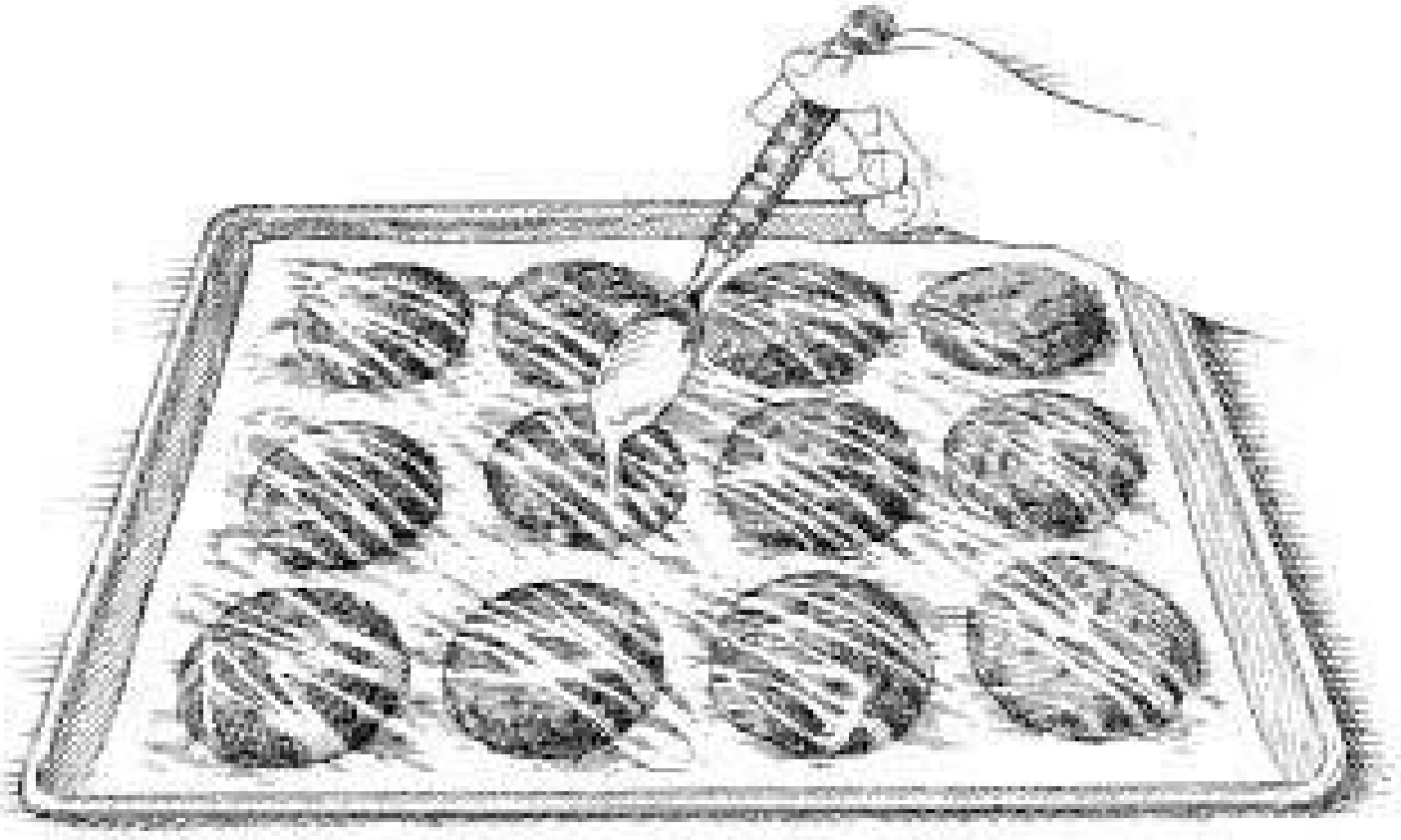

Figure 12.
Using a spoon to drizzle glaze over the cookies is fast and efficient. Place the cooled cookies back onto a cooled baking sheet. (Line the cookie sheet with parchment paper to speed clean up, if you like.) Dip the spoon into the glaze and move the spoon

over the cookies so that the glaze drizzles down onto them. Dip the spoon into the glaze as needed.

ALMOND CRESCENTS

GOOD ALMOND CRESCENTS HAVE A FINE , delicate crumb that is not dry or coarse. They melt in your mouth and seem light and buttery. Of course, they also must have a good nut flavor.

Confectioners' sugar is commonly used to give cookies an especially fine, melting texture. Because this sugar has been pulverized and then cut with cornstarch, it is supposed to make cookies that are tender and light. To test this theory, we made batches of crescents with both granulated and

confectioners' sugar. There was no comparison. The cookies with granulated sugar were coarse and crisp. The cookies made with confectioners' sugar were light and delicate with a particularly fine texture.

In order to make the cookies especially light, we found it helpful to use a slightly lower amount of flour than is commonly called for in most almond crescent recipes. In fact, we used only as much flour as was necessary to make a dough that could be easily rolled into short ropes and then shaped into crescents.

We next focused on the nuts. Chopped nuts are too coarse for this dough. We found it necessary to grind the nuts in a

food processor. Many recipes that we tried did not have nearly enough nuts. A full $1^{1}/_{2}$ cups is required for good nut flavor. We also found it helpful to add a little almond extract.

Although almonds are the most traditional flavor for crescent cookies, pecans and walnuts are equally appealing.

Almond Crescents

NOTE: ***These melt-in-your-mouth cookies get their light, buttery texture from confectioners' sugar, but it's imperative to sift this sugar to remove all lumps. Makes about 4 dozen cookies.***

$1\frac{3}{4}$ cups all-purpose flour

$\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon salt

$\frac{1}{2}$ pound (2 sticks) unsalted butter, softened but still firm

$1\frac{3}{4}$ cups confectioners' sugar, sifted

$1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons vanilla extract

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon almond extract

$1^1/_2$ cups blanched whole almonds, ground in food processor until quite fine

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven racks to upper-and lower-middle positions. Heat oven to 350 degrees. Whisk flour and salt together in medium bowl; set aside.

2. Either by hand or with electric mixer, cream butter and $^3/_4$ cup sugar until light and fluffy, about 2 minutes with mixer set at medium speed. Scrape sides of bowl with rubber spatula. Stir in vanilla and almond extracts.

3. Add ground almonds and flour mixture and mix at low speed until just combined, about 40 seconds.

4. Working with 1 tablespoon of dough each time, roll dough into $1^{1}/_{4}$-inch balls. Roll each ball between hands into rope that measures 3 inches long (*see* figure 13). Shape ropes into crescents on ungreased cookie sheet (*see* figure 14), spacing them 1 to $1^{1}/_{2}$ inches apart.

5. Bake, reversing position of cookie sheets halfway through baking, until

edges of cookies are golden brown, 15 to 17 minutes. Cool cookies on cookie sheet about 2 minutes before transferring them to cooling rack with wide spatula.

6. When cookies have completely cooled, roll them in remaining 1 cup confectioners' sugar until evenly coated (*see* figure 15).

VARIATION:

Pecan or Walnut Crescents

Follow Master Recipe, substituting $1^{3}/_{4}$ cups pecans or walnuts for almonds. Omit almond extract.

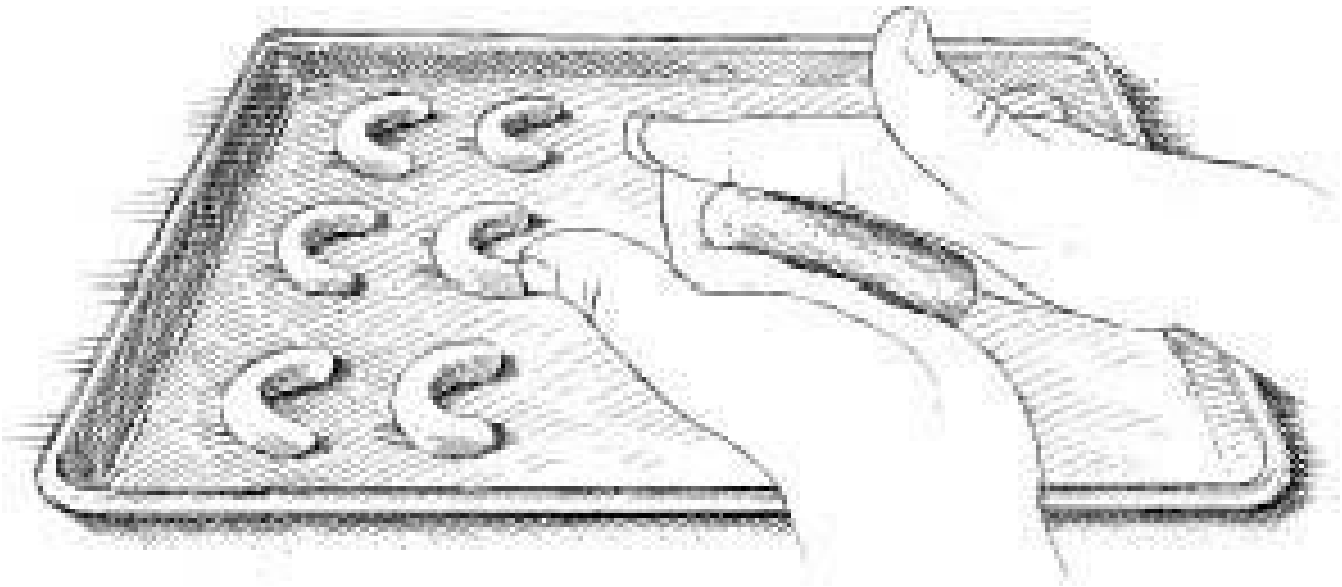

Figure 13.
Working with 1 tablespoon of dough each time, roll dough into $1^{1}/_{4}$-inch balls. Roll each ball between palms into a rope that measures 3 inches long.

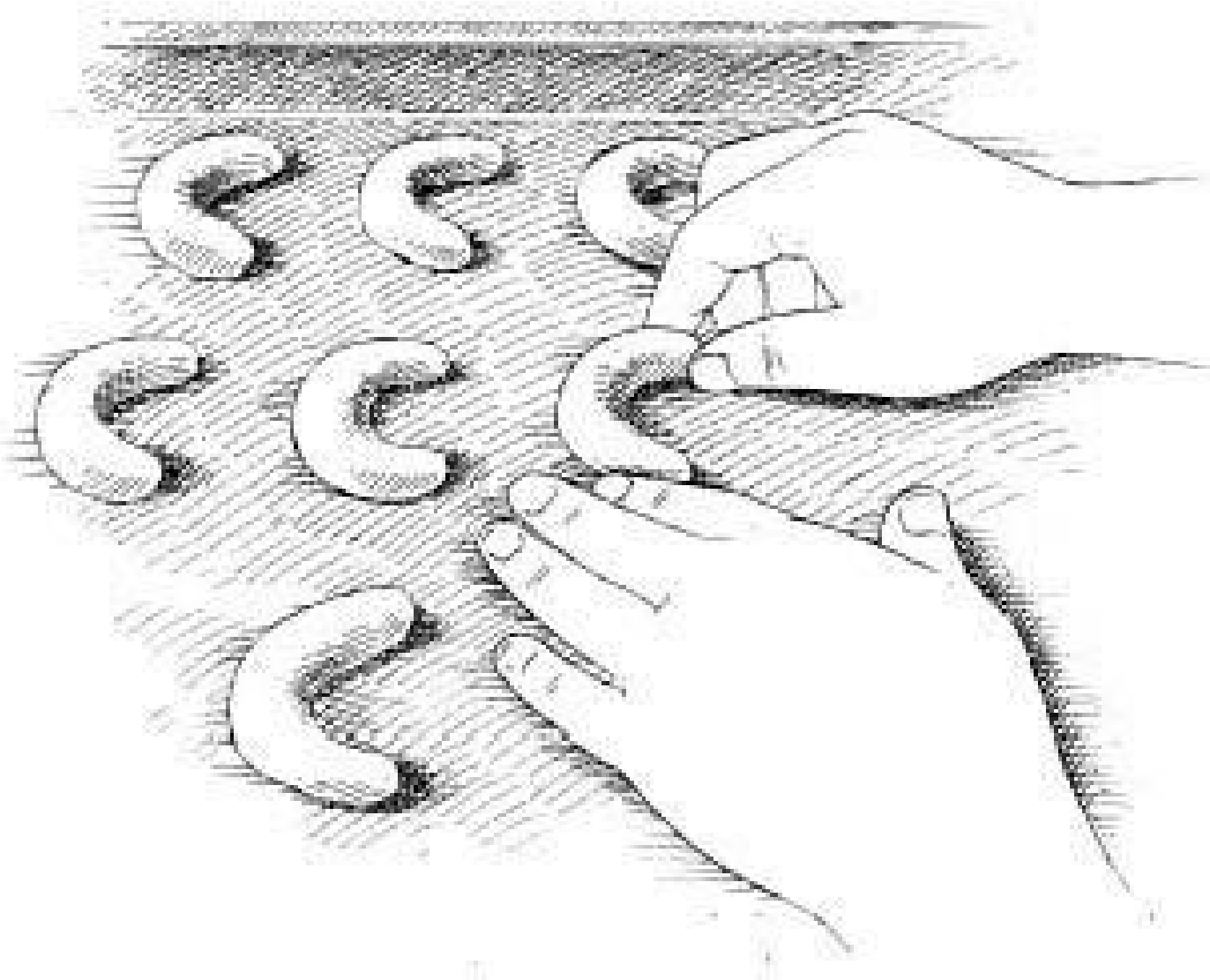

Figure 14.
Place the ropes on an ungreased cookie sheet and turn up the ends to form a crescent shape.

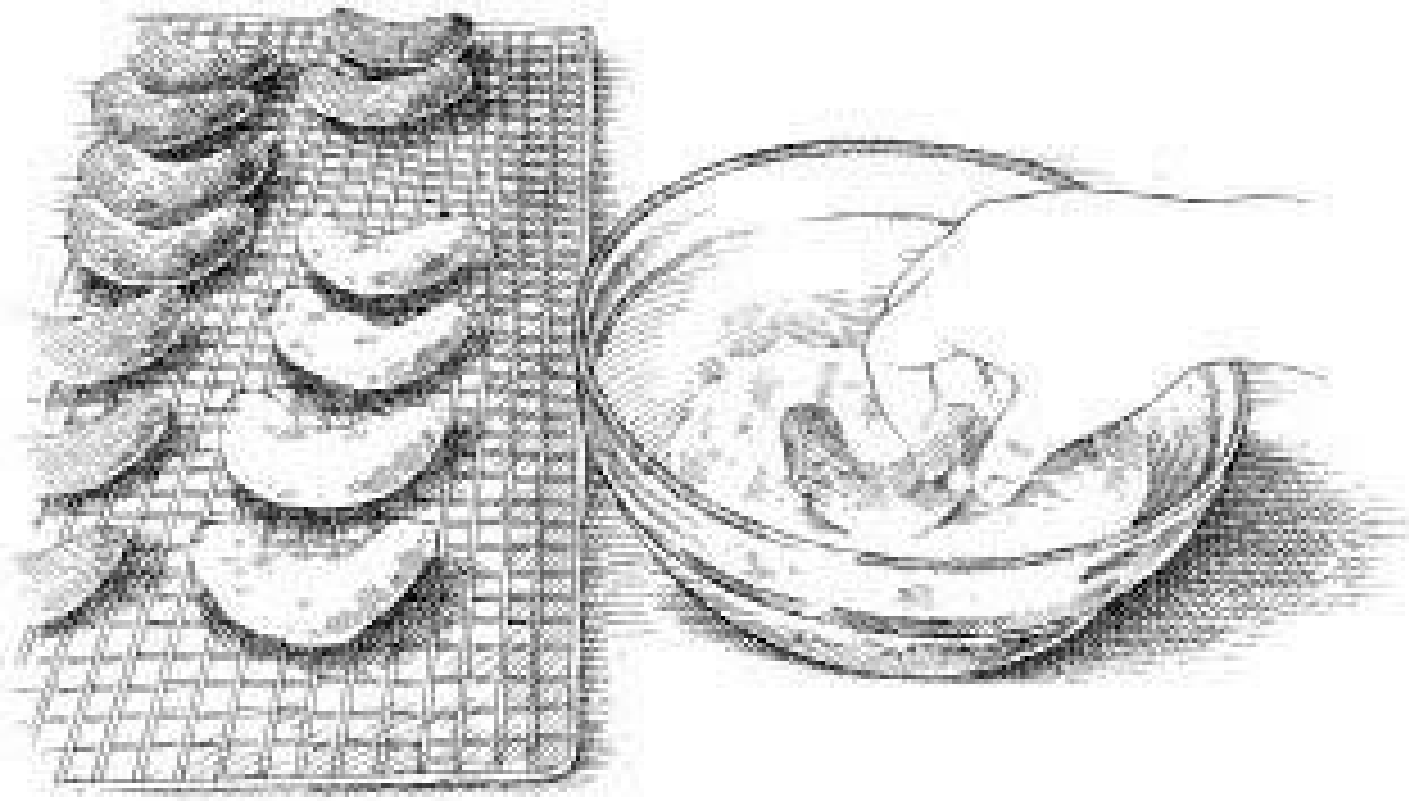

Figure 15.
Rolling the cooled crescents in a bowl of confectioners' sugar creates a thicker, more attractive coating than sifting the sugar over the cookies.

COCONUT MACAROONS

TOO MANY MACAROONS ARE SWEET WITH little real coconut flavor. They also can be dry. We wanted to create a coconut macaroon that was moist without being sticky. We also wanted the macaroon to have a strong coconut flavor with only enough sugar to complement the coconut, not overwhelm it.

There are three styles of coconut macaroons. The simplest recipes combine coconut, egg whites, and sugar. Another recipe style calls for the making of a meringue (the egg whites are beaten

with the sugar until stiff) and then the folding in of the coconut. A third style combines the coconut with sweetened condensed milk.

We made all three styles of coconut macaroon and concluded that simpler is better. The macaroons made with a meringue were too light and airy—like a meringue. The macaroons made with the sweetened condensed milk were sticky and much too sweet and dense. The cookies with just coconut, unbeaten egg whites, and sugar had the best texture and flavor, although they needed improvement.

We first focused on increasing the coconut flavor. We quickly discovered that sweetened flaked coconut, the kind

sold in supermarkets, is part of the problem. The cookies need a certain amount of sugar to hold together and using sweetened coconut makes it impossible to get the sugar to coconut ratio in balance.

When we switched to grated unsweetened coconut, which is sold in natural food stores and some gourmet shops, the flavor of the cookies improved dramatically. Because this product is grated rather than flaked, the texture of the cookies was also smoother and more appealing.

At this point, our macaroons were still a bit dry. However, we found that a small amount of corn syrup kept them

moist and even a bit gooey, but did not make them soggy. However, don't use more than one tablespoon of corn syrup or the cookies will be too wet and sticky.

Coconut Macaroons

NOTE: ***The great thing about these cookies is that they are not the cloyingly sweet confections that commonly pass as macaroons. In our testing, we found that grated unsweetened coconut (sold in natural food stores and some gourmet shops) is the key to a macaroon that tastes like coconut. Makes about 2 dozen cookies.***

2 large egg whites
1 tablespoon corn syrup
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
$^1/_2$ cup sugar
$2^1/_2$ cups grated unsweetened

coconut (*see* note above)

$^1/_4$ teaspoon salt

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven racks to upper-and lower-middle positions. Heat oven to 325 degrees. Line two cookie sheets with parchment paper.

2. By hand, lightly beat egg whites with corn syrup and vanilla extract in small bowl until thoroughly combined. Stir together sugar, coconut, and salt in another bowl. Add egg white mixture to coconut mixture and stir until evenly moistened.

3. Drop $1^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons of batter onto cookie sheet, spacing them about $1^{1}/_{2}$ inches apart (*see* figure 16). When cookie sheet is full, dampen fingers with cold water and loosely shape each mound of batter into haystack shape (*see* figure 17).

4. Bake, reversing position of cookie sheets halfway through baking, until macaroons are golden brown around edges, 8 to 10 minutes. Cool cookies on sheets about 5 minutes before transferring to cooling rack.

VARIATION:

Coconut Macaroons with Chocolate Chips

Follow Master Recipe, stirring $^{1}/_{2}$ cup semisweet chips into finished batter.

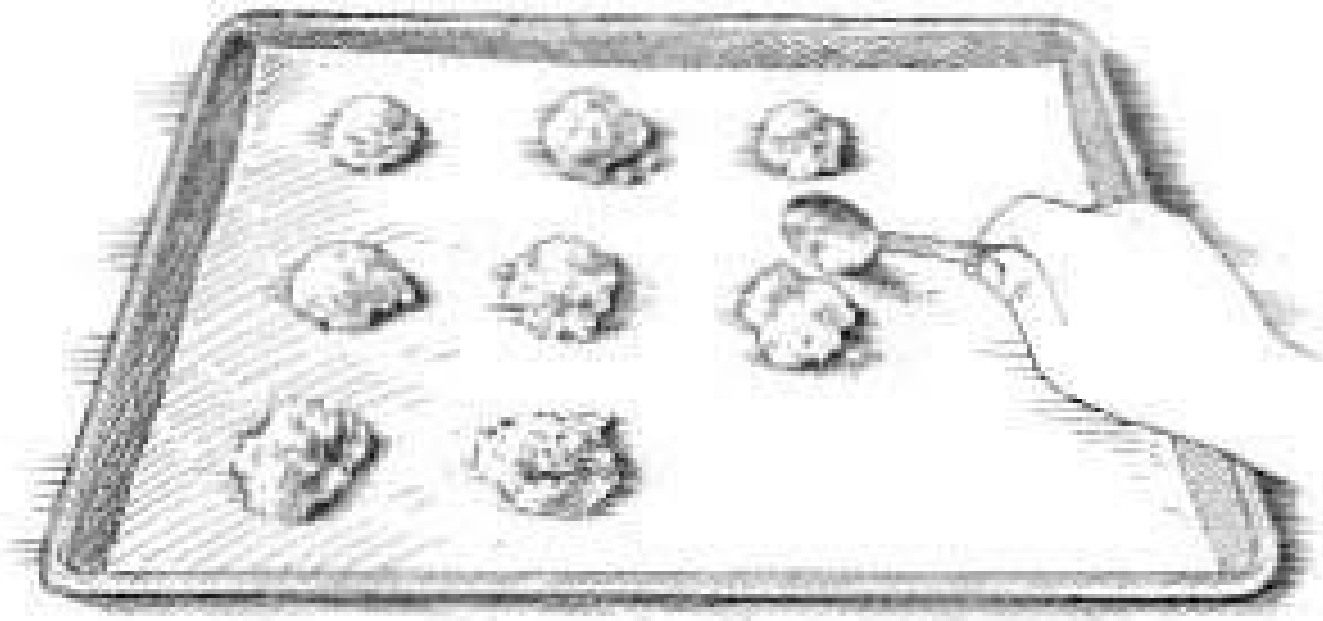

Figure 16.
Use a tablespoon measure to drop mounds of coconut that measure about $1^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons each onto a parchment-lined cookie sheet. Leave about $1^{1}/_{2}$ inches between each mound of coconut.

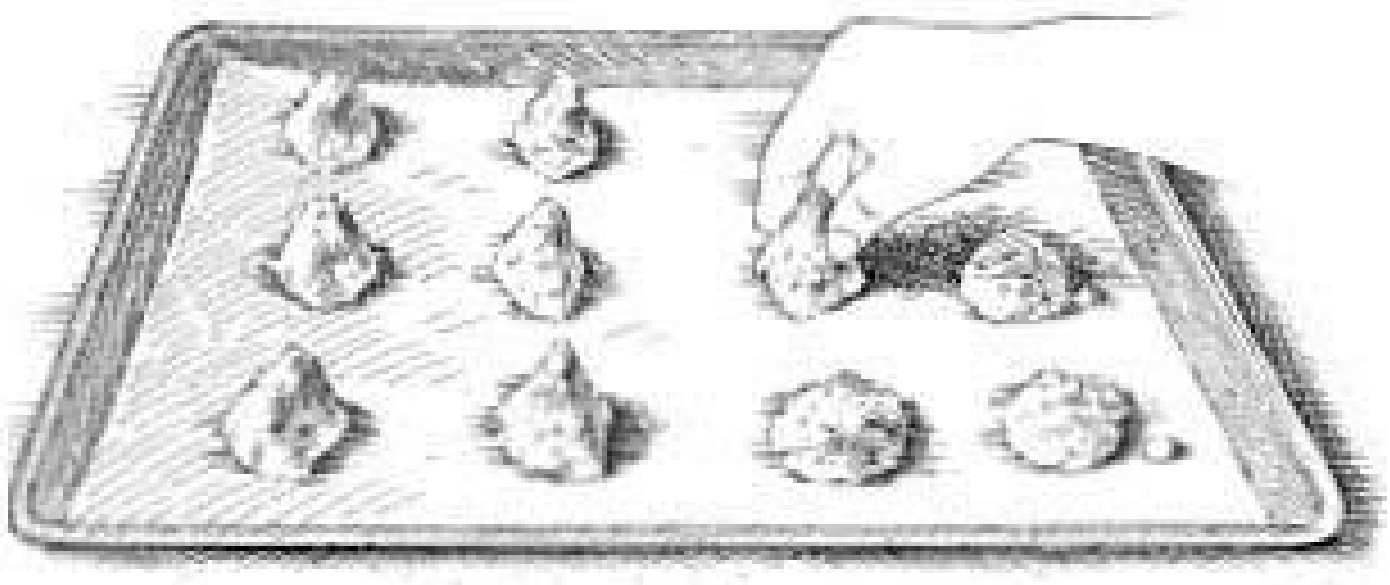

Figure 17.
Once the cookie sheet is covered with mounds of coconut, moisten your fingers with cold water and shape each mound into the characteristic loose haystack or pyramid shape.

ICEBOX COOKIES

ICEBOX COOKIES, ALSO CALLED REFRIGERATOR OR slice-and-bake cookies, are an American invention. A buttery cookie dough is rolled into a log, chilled until firm, then sliced and baked. The result is a thin, flat cookie. If you like moist, chewy cookies, look elsewhere.

When developing our master recipe for icebox cookies, we had several goals. We wanted these wafer-like cookies to have a crumbly, sandy texture that was tender, not crisp or hard. We

also wanted the flavor to be as rich and buttery as possible. Finally, we did not want the dough to be sticky or temperamental. Chilling will make almost any dough firm enough to slice. However, the dough for an icebox cookie must be manipulated right from the mixer. An overly soft or tacky dough would prove problematic.

Our first goal was to make the cookie thin and flat. Some recipes contain baking powder and others do not. We found that cookies made with baking powder were either too soft or too cakey. Since an icebox cookie is by definition thin, we did not want any lift from a leavener and eliminated it from our working recipe.

Although the cookies made without leavener were thin, we found that they often had bubbles in them. We wanted an even crumb that was dense and tender. Something was still causing the cookies to rise. We tried creaming the butter less and found that reducing the beating time from our standard three minutes to just one minute was the trick. Extensive creaming of the butter beats in too much air. The result is tiny air pockets that prevent the cookies from baking up perfectly flat.

We next focused on the sugar. Granulated sugar is used in recipes where sturdiness is a must, like in rolled sugar cookies. However, we wanted

cookies that were finer-textured and a bit crumbly. Confectioners' sugar is used in many cookie recipes to lend a melt-in-the-mouth texture, but we found that using all confectioners' sugar made icebox cookies with a texture that was too crumbly. After several tests, we settled on a ratio of three parts granulated sugar to two parts confectioners' sugar.

We also preferred the cleaner flavor of unbleached flour. Bleached flour gave these cookies a slight off flavor. The difference was slight, but noticeable. We wondered why we could not detect any difference in other cookies, even in our simple sugar cookie (*see* chapter 4). Then we realized that the other cookies

have more ingredients, including leavener, which obscured the differences in the flours.

Most icebox cookie recipes rely on whole eggs, and in our testing, we found that they were often quite pale and not very attractive. Using two yolks (rather than one whole egg) solved this problem and also added some more fat. The whites make the dough sticky and should be discarded or saved for another recipe.

Finally, we tested various oven temperatures. We found that a low oven temperature of 325 degrees helps the cookies hold their shape in the oven. At the lower temperature they also brown

more evenly (at higher temperatures the edges burn before the center cooks through) and the texture is more delicate and fragile.

Vanilla Icebox Cookies

NOTE: ***These wafer-like cookies bake up fairly thin with a crumbly, sandy texture. We found that the cleaner flavor of unbleached flour makes a difference in this simple cookie that does not contain any leavener. Makes about 45 cookies.***

$2\frac{1}{4}$ cups all-purpose flour, preferably unbleached

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt

$\frac{1}{2}$ pound (2 sticks) unsalted butter, softened but still firm

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup granulated sugar

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup confectioners' sugar,

sifted

2 large egg yolks

2 teaspoons vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Whisk together flour and salt in medium bowl; set aside.

2. Either by hand or electric mixer, cream butter and sugars until light and fluffy, 1 to $1\,^{1}/_{2}$ minutes with mixer set at medium speed. Scrape sides of bowl with rubber spatula. Add yolks and vanilla extract and beat until incorporated, 15 to 20 seconds. Scrape bowl with rubber spatula. Add flour mixture and mix at low speed until

dough forms and is thoroughly mixed, about 25 to 30 seconds.

3. Dough will be soft but should not be sticky. If sticky, chill for 10 to 15 minutes. Divide dough in half. Working with one half at a time, roll dough on work surface into log measuring about 6-inches long and 2-inches thick (*see* figure 18). Wrap each log in plastic and refrigerate at least 2 hours or up to 3 days. (Dough can be frozen up to one month. Wrap logs in plastic and then foil before freezing.)

4. Adjust oven racks to upper-and

lower-middle positions. Heat oven to 325 degrees. Grease or line cookie sheets with parchment paper.

5. Unwrap dough logs one at a time and with sharp knife, cut dough into $^1/_4$-inch-thick slices (*see* figures 19 and 20). Place slices on cookie sheets, spacing them $^1/_2$ to 1 inch apart.

6. Bake, reversing positions halfway through baking time, until edges begin to brown, about 14 minutes. Cool cookies on cookie sheets for 2 minutes, then transfer to cooling rack with wide spatula.

VARIATIONS:

Chocolate Icebox Cookies

Follow Master Recipe, reducing flour to 2 cups and whisking flour and salt with $^1/_4$ cup sifted dutched-process cocoa. Add 2 ounces melted and cooled semisweet chocolate to batter along with yolks and vanilla.

Marble Icebox Cookies

Follow Master Recipe, making half recipe of both Vanilla and Chocolate Icebox Cookies. Combine doughs as directed in figures 21 and 22. Chill, slice, and bake.

Cinnamon-Sugar Icebox Cookies

Save the egg whites when separating the yolks for the dough.

Follow Master Recipe, brushing chilled logs with beaten egg whites. Roll logs in mixture of 3 tablespoons sugar and 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon. Slice and bake as directed.

Ginger Icebox Cookies

Follow Master Recipe, whisking 2 teaspoons ground ginger with flour and salt.

Glazed Lemon Thins

Follow Master Recipe, adding 1 tablespoon grated lemon zest with yolks and vanilla. For glaze, sift 1 cup confectioners' sugar and then whisk with 1 tablespoon heavy cream and $4^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoons lemon juice until smooth. Drizzle glaze over cooled cookies with spoon (*see* figure 12).

Butterscotch Icebox Cookies

A maple glaze is especially good with these cookies. Sift 1 cup confectioners' sugar and then whisk with 3 tablespoons maple syrup and 1 tablespoon milk until smooth. See figure 12 for information on using a spoon to drizzle cooled cookies with glaze.

Follow Master Recipe, replacing granulated sugar with equal amount of brown sugar.

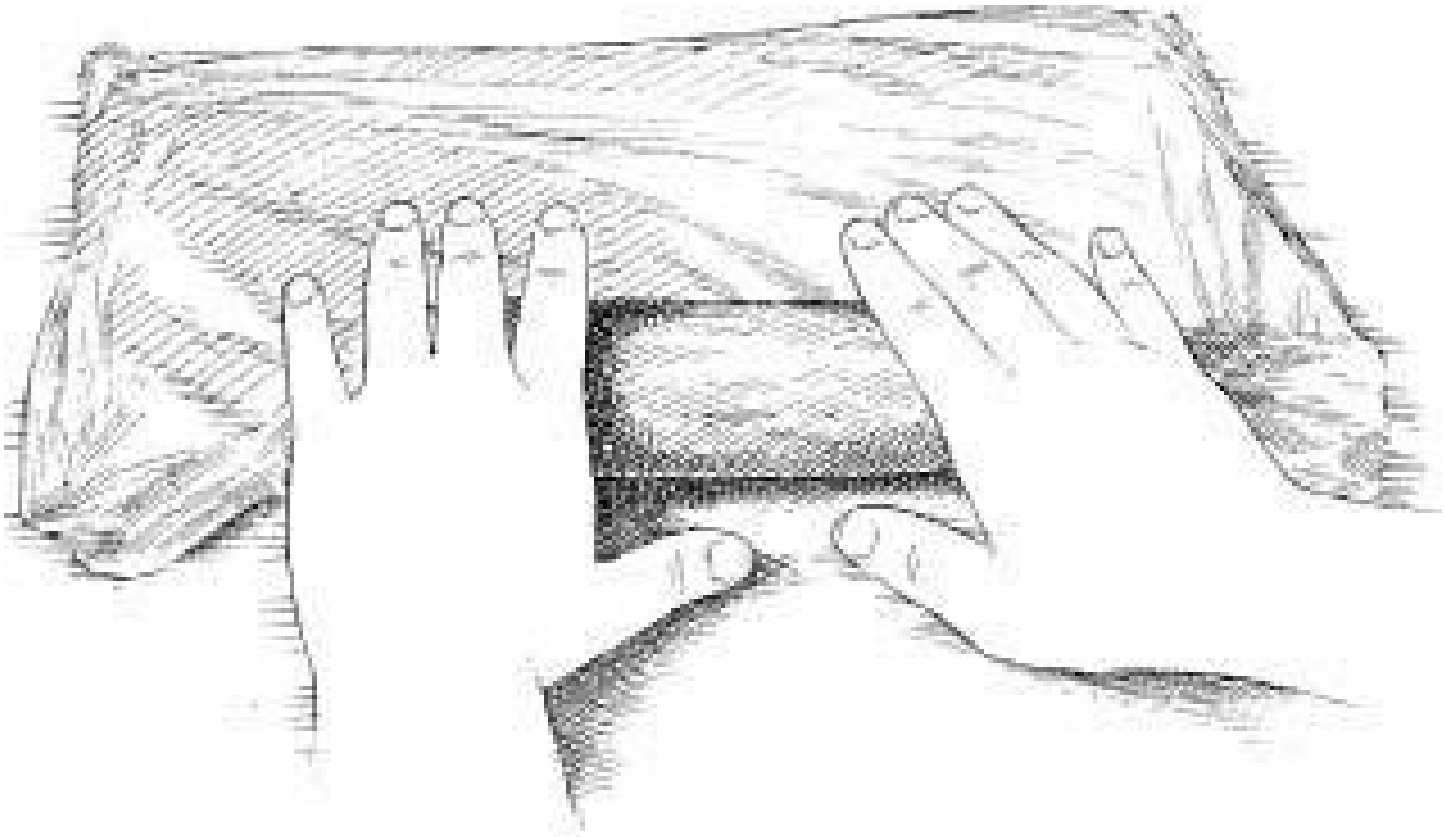

Figure 18.
Pat half of the dough into a rough log shape. Then roll with your hands to make a smooth log about 6-inches long and 2-inches thick. Lift the dough log onto a piece of plastic wrap and roll to seal. Chill dough before baking.

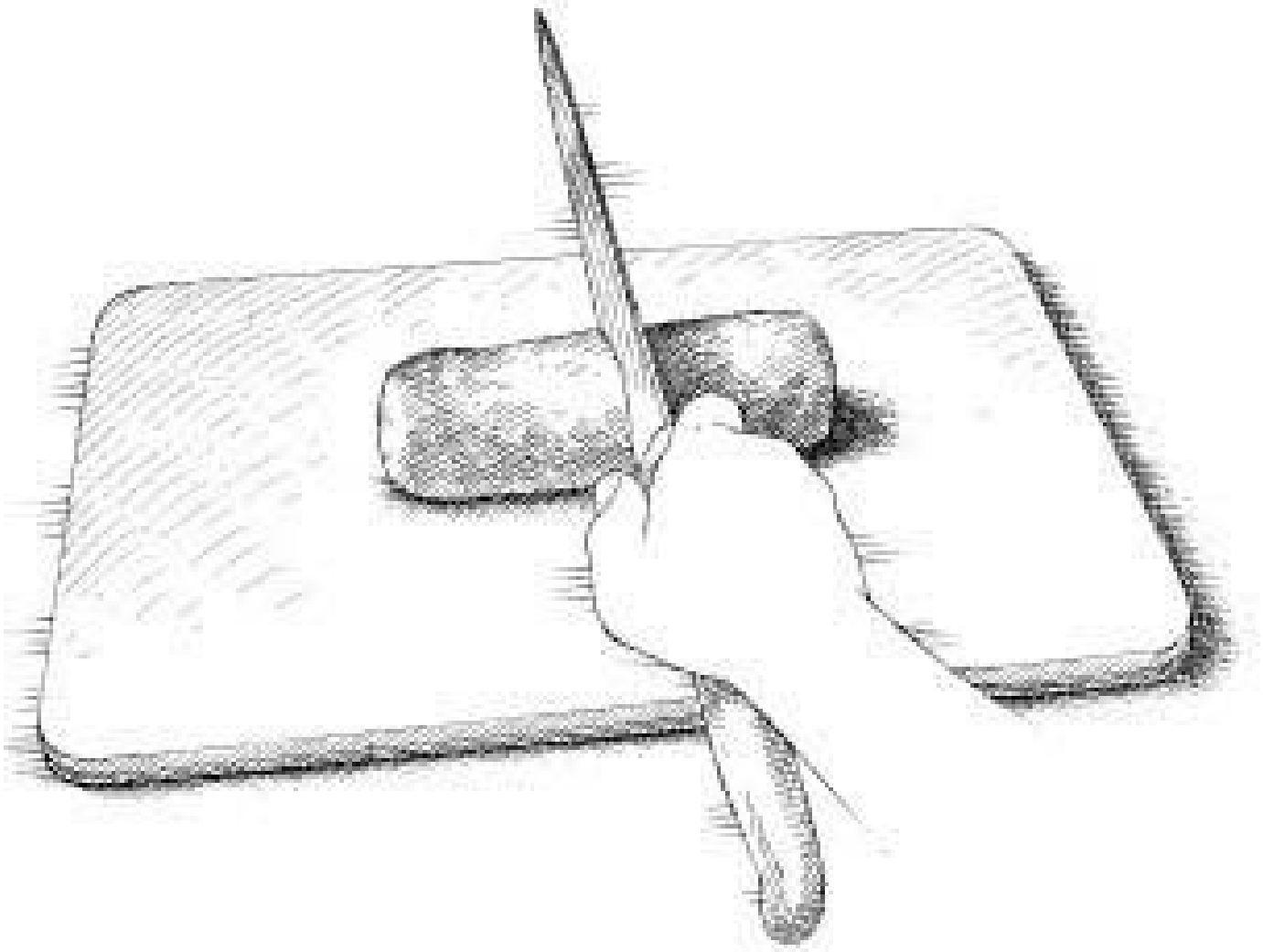

Figure 19.
We find that the chilled dough can soften by the time you cut an entire 6-inch log into slices. Therefore, we recommend slicing the unwrapped log in half and placing one half back in the refrigerator while you slice the

other half.

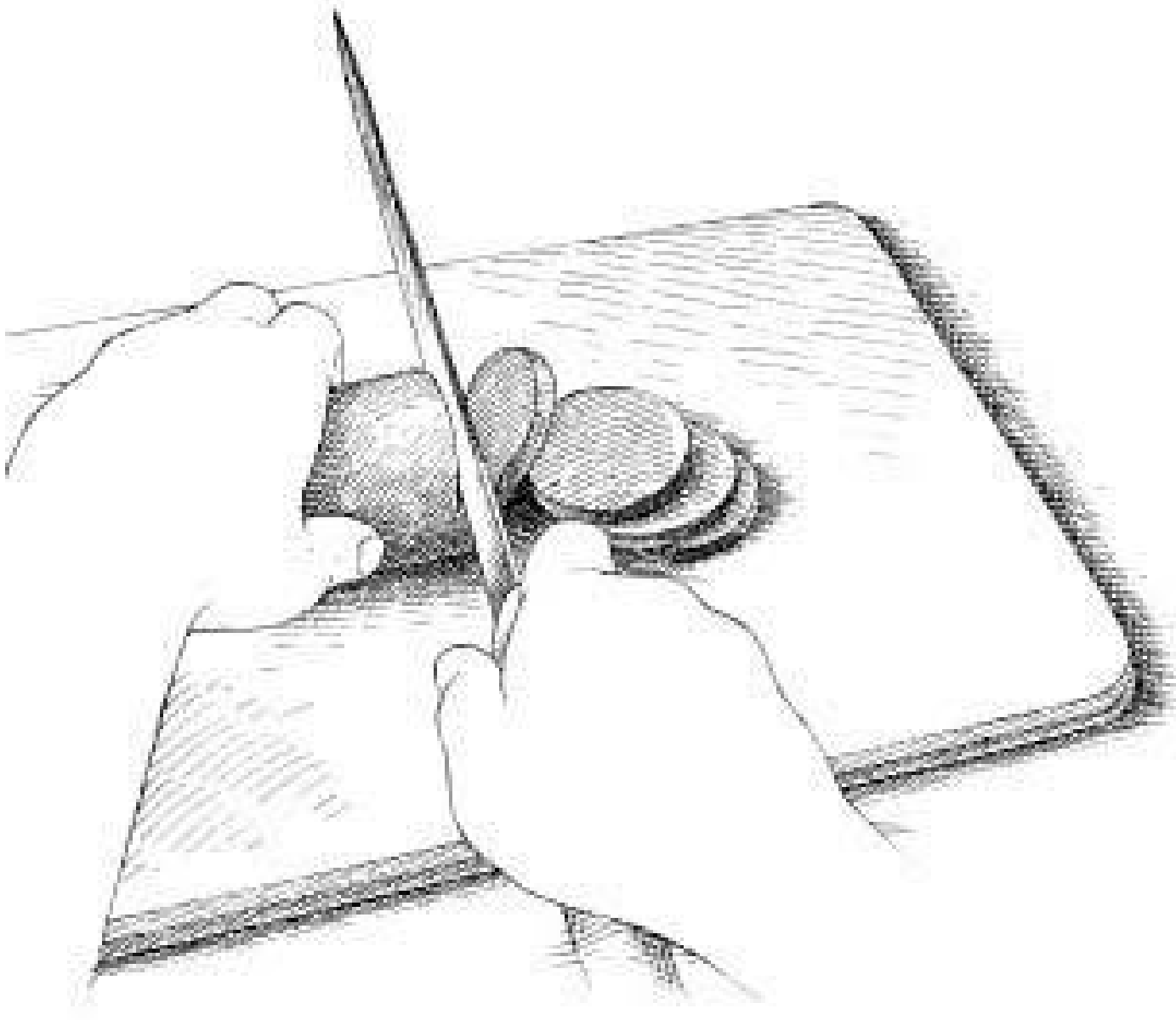

Figure 20.
Using a very sharp chef's knife, slice the log of dough into thin rounds. To prevent one side from flattening, roll the dough an eighth of a turn after every slice.

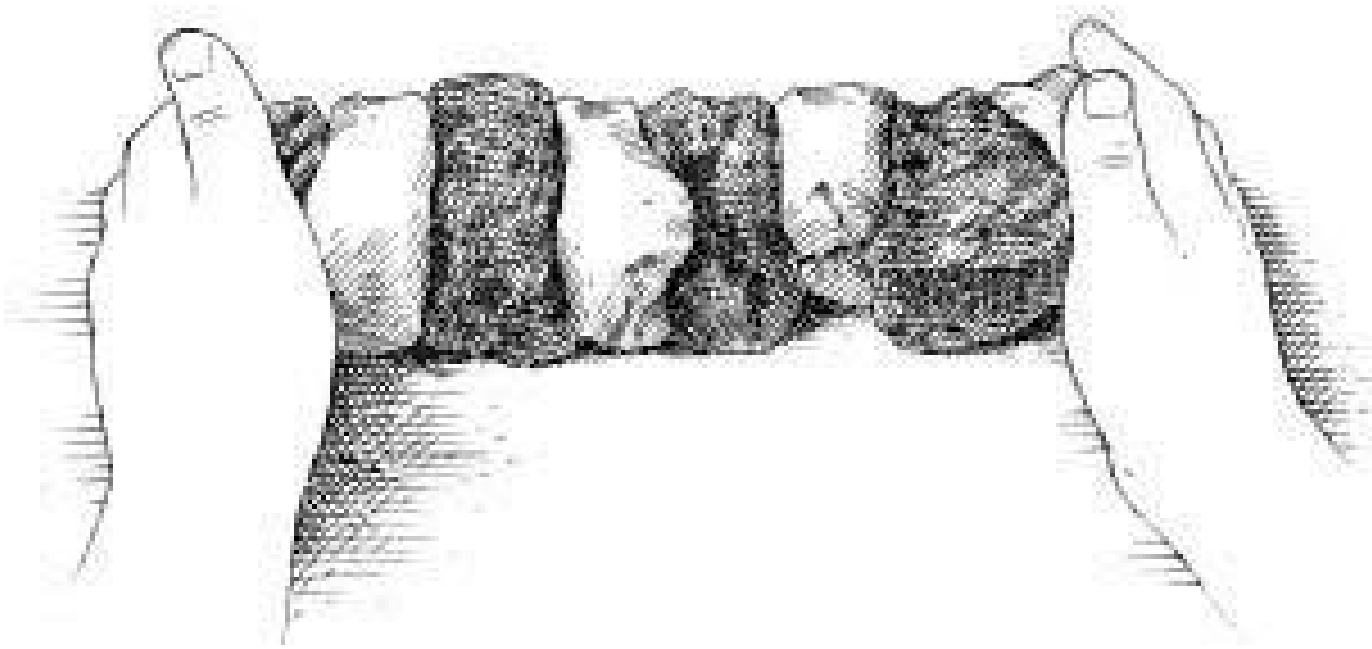

Figure 21.
To make marble cookies, break the vanilla and chocolate doughs each into four pieces. Lay the pieces next to each other on a clean counter, alternating pieces of vanilla and chocolate dough. Press the pieces together to form a single mass.

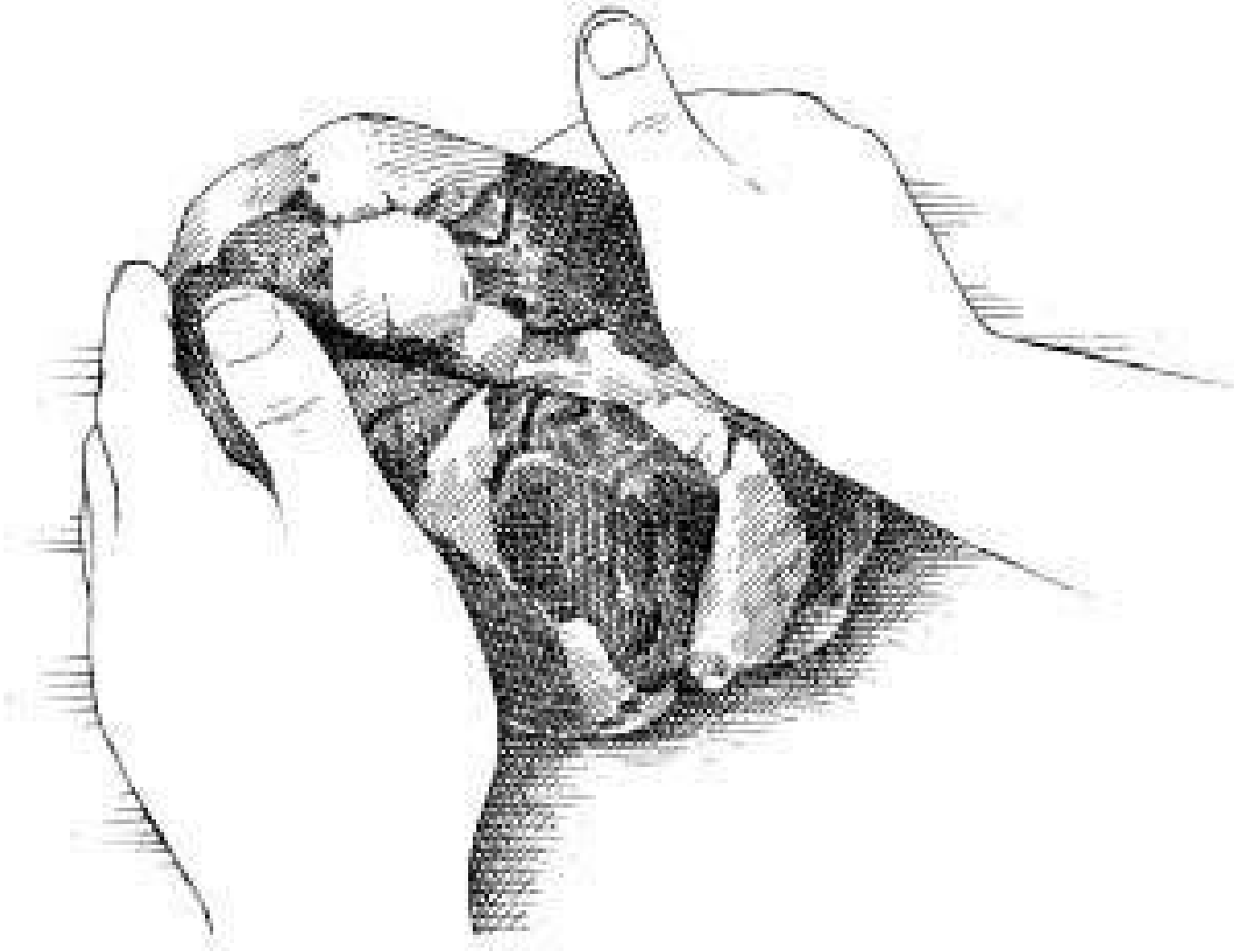

Figure 22.
Lightly knead the dough three or four times so that it becomes marbled. Do not overwork the dough or you will lose the marbling effect. Form the dough into logs as directed in figure 18. Chill, slice, and bake.

SANDIES

SANDIES ARE A TYPE OF ICEBOX OR SLICE-AND-bake cookie that relies on ground nuts to take the place of some flour. Their texture is fine and light, but these cookies are crisp rather than crumbly. In some ways, they are like shortbread cookies packed with nuts.

We found that ground nuts give the dough a rich flavor. However, we found it necessary to add some chopped nuts for texture (it's nice to have a bit of crunch) and appearance.

We experimented with various

sweeteners, trying to find one that would highlight the flavor of the nuts. Maple syrup gives the dough a great flavor, but liquid sweeteners (we also tried molasses) make the dough sticky and the cookies bake up heavy and leaden.

We tried using brown sugar and liked the caramel flavor, which works especially well with nuts. Either light or dark brown sugar is fine in this cookie, but dark brown gives better color and a stronger molasses flavor. Again, we liked the effect of a little confectioners' sugar in this dough. It helps give sandies their fine, delicate texture.

We tried adding baking powder (and later baking soda), but we found leaveners make these cookies too cakey.

We like sandies that are fairly thick and found that slicing them thick was the best way to get some height in the finished product.

Pecan Sandies

NOTE: ***Sandies are thicker than your average icebox cookie and have a melt-in-the-mouth texture that comes from ground nuts being added to the dough. Confectioners' sugar also gives these cookies an especially fine, smooth texture. Makes about 2 dozen cookies.***

$1\frac{1}{2}$ cups all-purpose flour

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground cinnamon

1 cup plus 2 tablespoons chopped pecans

12 tablespoons ($1\frac{1}{2}$ sticks)

unsalted butter, softened but still firm

1/4 cup confectioners' sugar, sifted

6 tablespoons packed light or dark brown sugar

1 large egg yolk

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Whisk together flour, salt, and cinnamon in medium bowl. Pulse 1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons pecans in food processor until fine. Nuts should be dry and fluffy. (Do not overprocess or nuts will become damp and oily.) Stir ground pecans and remaining 1/2 cup chopped nuts into flour mixture; set aside.

2. Either by hand or electric mixer, cream together butter and sugars until light and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Beat in yolk until incorporated, about 20 seconds. Add flour mixture and mix on low speed until dough just comes together, 25 to 30 seconds.

3. Roll dough on work surface into log measuring about 8-inches long and 2-inches thick. Wrap log in plastic and refrigerate at least 2 hours or up to 3 days. (Dough can be frozen up to 1 month. Wrap log in plastic and then foil before freezing.)

4. Adjust oven racks to upper-and lower-middle position. Heat oven to 325 degrees. Unwrap dough log and with sharp knife, cut dough into 3/8-inch-thick slices (*see* figures 19 and 20). Place slices on ungreased cookie sheets, spacing them $^{1}/_{2}$ to 1 inch apart.

5. Bake, reversing positions halfway through baking time, until edges begin to brown, 16 to 18 minutes. Cool cookies on cookie sheets for 2 minutes, then transfer to cooling rack with wide spatula.

VARIATIONS:

Walnut Sandies

Follow Master Recipe, replacing pecans with equal amount of chopped walnuts.

Almond Sandies

Follow Master Recipe, replacing pecans with equal amount of whole blanched almonds that have been toasted in 350-degree oven for 8 minutes, cooled, and then chopped. Add $^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoon almond extract with egg yolk.

SANDWICH COOKIES

SANDWICH COOKIES LOOK IMPRESSIVE BUT ARE actually very simple to make. Two thin, crisp cookies are sandwiched together with a little filling. Sandwich cookies are made from an icebox cookie dough that is sliced very thin. We found it necessary to reduce the baking time for these thinner cookies, but otherwise the cookie part of the recipe is the same.

We tested three chocolate fillings. Plain melted chocolate was too runny to use. A chocolate buttercream frosting, made with butter, milk, and

confectioners' sugar, was too creamy and soft. A ganache, which is made by stirring chopped chocolate into hot cream, is much simpler to prepare than buttercream and holds its shape better. It also has a very strong chocolate flavor. The ganache will firm up as it cools, so wait until it reaches room temperature before using it to make the sandwich cookies.

Jam is another common filling for sandwich cookies. We found it imperative to use jam that does not have any big chunks of fruit, which will keep the two cookies from coming together properly to form a sandwich. If necessary, you can strain the jam through a mesh sieve to remove pieces of fruit.

Be stingy with the filling. You don't want the filling to ooze out. Also, we found that it is not possible to fill the cookies very far in advance. The filling will make the cookies soggy rather quickly. At most, filled sandwich cookies can be stored for two hours. If you like, you can bake the cookies and keep them in an airtight container for two days before adding the filling.

Chocolate Sandwich Cookies

NOTE: ***The ganache filling has a good chocolate flavor and will hold its shape once cooled to room temperature. Makes about 30 sandwich cookies.***

1 recipe Chocolate Icebox Cookies

$^1/_2$ cup heavy cream

12 ounces bittersweet or semisweet chocolate, chopped

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Prepare dough for chocolate icebox cookies as directed. Cut cookies into

1/8-inch-thick rounds and reduce baking time by a minute or two. Cool cookies completely. (Cookies can be stored in an airtight container for up to 2 days.)

2. Place cream in small saucepan and bring to simmer. Turn off heat and add chocolate. Wait 3 minutes, then whisk until smooth. Let mixture cool to room temperature, at least 30 minutes.

3. Following figures 23 and 24, fill cookies with chocolate mixture. Serve within 2 hours.

VARIATIONS:

Mint Chocolate Sandwich Cookies

Follow recipe for Chocolate Sandwich Cookies, adding 1 teaspoon mint extract to cooled chocolate filling.

"Oreo" Cookies

The chocolate cookies and white filling may look like an Oreo, but the flavor is far superior. The filling relies on melted white chocolate mixed with sour cream to cut some of the cloying sweetness of the chocolate.

Follow recipe for Chocolate Sandwich Cookies, omitting cream and replacing bittersweet or semisweet

chocolate with an equal amount of white chocolate. Melt white chocolate in double boiler. Stir in $^{1}/_{2}$ cup sour cream and cool to room temperature, about 15 minutes. Use filling as directed.

Chocolate-Peanut Butter Sandwich Cookies

Follow recipe for Chocolate Sandwich Cookies, replacing chocolate filling with 1 cup smooth peanut butter beaten with 4 tablespoons softened butter and 1 cup confectioners' sugar, sifted, until fluffy.

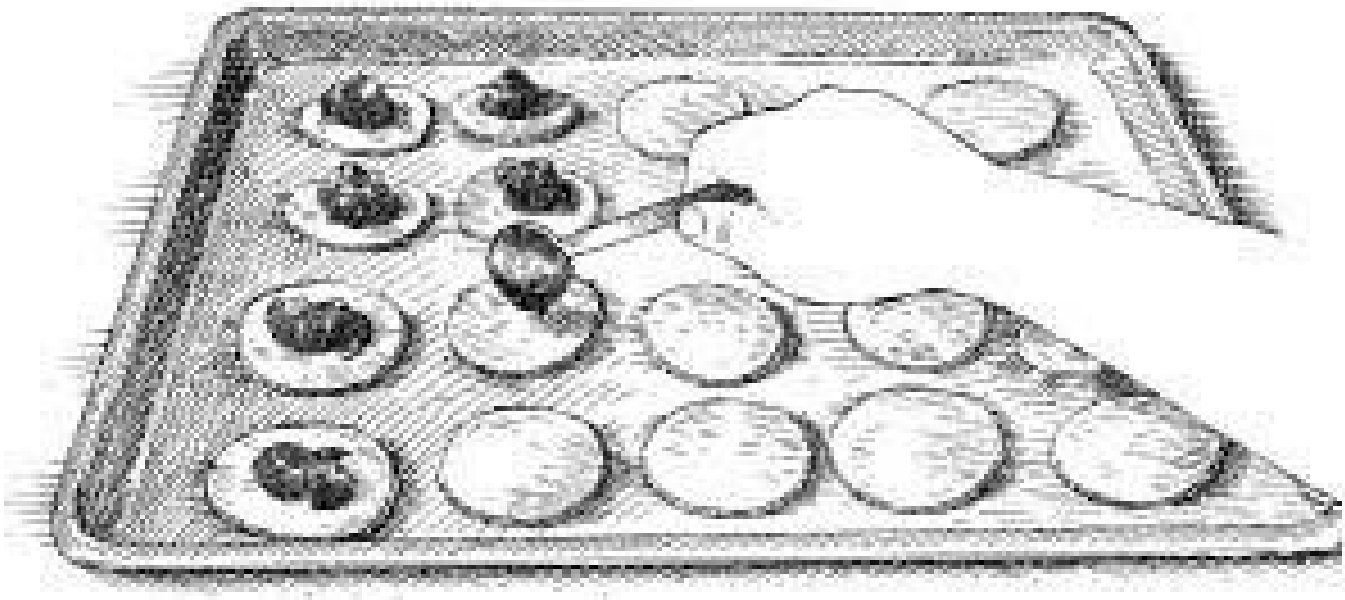

Figure 23.
Place half of the baked cookies on a cool cookie sheet, with the flat undersides facing up. Place a small mound of filling in the center of each cookie.

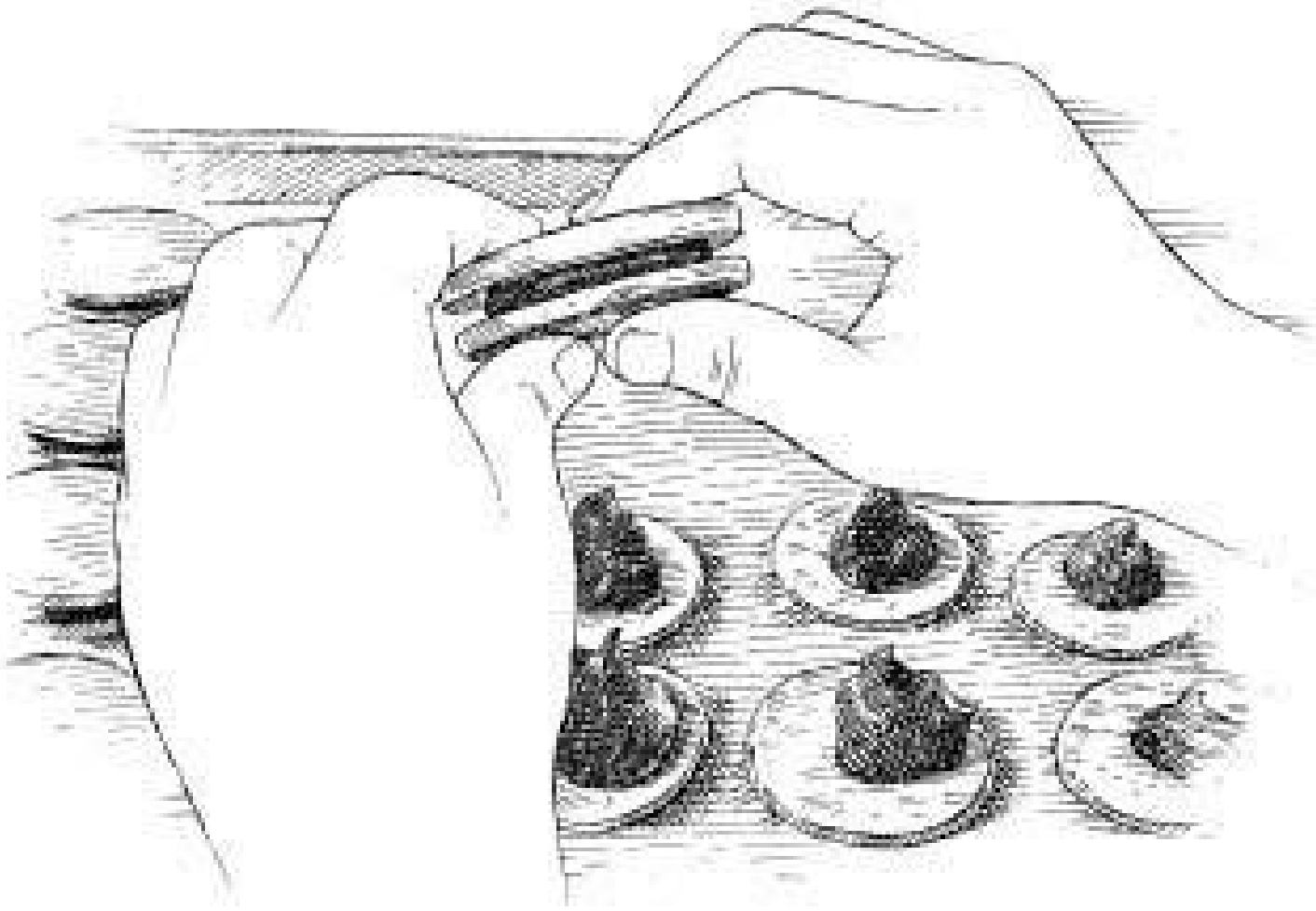

Figure 24.
Take a plain baked cookie and attach the flat underside to one of the cookies that has been dolloped with a mound of filling. Press gently to spread the filling between the two cookies.

Linzer Cookies

NOTE: ***Almond cookies filled with raspberry jam are a classic. However, feel free to create your own combinations using the pecan or walnut sandies and other kinds of jam. Makes about 20 sandwich cookies.***

1 recipe Almond Sandies

$^3/_4$ cup seedless raspberry jam

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Prepare dough for almond sandies as directed. Cut cookies into 1/8-inch-thick rounds and reduce baking time to 13 to 15 minutes. Cool cookies completely.

(Cookies can be stored in an airtight container for up to 2 days.)

2. Following figures 23 and 24, fill cookies with jam. Serve within 2 hours.

Jam Sandwich Cookies

NOTE: *We especially like raspberry jam because it is free of lumps. Other jams, including apricot, peach, or strawberry, can be used as well. If necessary, push the jam through a mesh strainer to remove any chunks. Chocolate makes an excellent filling for vanilla cookies as well. See the variation below. Makes about 30 sandwich cookies.*

1 recipe Vanilla Icebox Cookies

1 cup smooth jam or preserves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Prepare dough for vanilla icebox cookies as directed. Cut dough into 1/8-inch-thick rounds and reduce baking time by a minute or two. Cool cookies completely. (Cookies can be stored in an airtight container for up to 2 days.)

2. Following figures 23 and 24, fill cookies with jam. Serve within 2 hours.

VARIATION:

Vanilla Sandwich Cookies with Mocha Filling

A chocolate filling flavored with a little espresso powder is delicious when sandwiched between plain vanilla

cookies. If you prefer, omit the espresso powder and use a plain chocolate filling.

Follow recipe for Jam Sandwich Cookies, replacing jam with following filling: Bring $^{1}/_{2}$ cup heavy cream and $1^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoons instant espresso powder to simmer in small saucepan. Turn off heat and add 12 ounces chopped bittersweet or semisweet chocolate. Wait 3 minutes, then whisk until smooth. Let mixture cool to room temperature, at least 30 minutes.

HOW TO MAKE AN AMERICAN LAYER CAKE

Cake Basics

Yellow Layer Cakes

White Layer Cakes

Chocolate Layer Cakes

Frostings and Fillings

Decorating Ideas

CAKE BASICS

THE RECIPES IN THIS BOOK WILL teach you how to make a variety of classic American layer cakes. There are some rules to bear in mind as you work through the recipes. Follow this checklist for success every time.

CHECK YOUR OVEN TEMPERATURE WITH AN OVEN THERMOMETER. If your oven is too hot, the sides of the cake will set before the middle does, and the cake will hump or crack. If your oven is too cold, the air will escape from the batter

before the batter begins to set, and the cake will have a coarse texture and may even fall.

USE ROUND CAKE PANS THAT MEASURE EITHER EIGHT OR NINE INCHES ACROSS. Some recipes call for eight-inch cake pans, others for nine-inch pans. Use the correct size. If the pans are too large, they overheat the rim of the cake, causing the same sorts of problems as an overheated oven. If the pans are too small, batter may rise right out of them. Choose sturdy aluminum pans with absolutely vertical sides. Do not use disposable foil pans.

GENEROUSLY GREASE THE PANS WITH SHORTENING—NOT BUTTER—AND COAT THEM WELL WITH FLOUR. Butter contains water, which when it evaporates may leave greaseless gaps to which cake batter can stick. Solid vegetable shortening, such as Crisco, is 100 percent fat and won't leave gaps. The flour holds the shortening in place and keeps the batter from seeping through to the pan bottom. We find that shiny cake pans are almost nonstick, so there is no need for parchment paper liners. If you are using an older pan with a dull finish, as an extra precaution you may want to grease the pan, line the bottom with a piece of parchment or waxed paper, grease the paper, and then

flour the pan and paper.

HAVE ALL INGREDIENTS, ESPECIALLY BUTTER, EGGS, AND MILK, AT ROOM TEMPERATURE. Chilled ingredients do not emulsify well, which leads to a dense cake, and cold butter won't even mix into a batter. Very warm ingredients may cause air cells in creamed butter to dissolve. All ingredients should register between 65 and 70 degrees on an instant-read thermometer. Let butter soften on the counter for about an hour before creaming. The sticks should give when pressed, but still hold their shape with no signs of melting.

MEASURE FLOUR CAREFULLY BY THE DIP-AND-SWEEP METHOD. Dip the measuring cup into the container of flour, scoop out a heaping cupful, and then level the top with the straight edge on a butter knife or icing spatula. Do not shake, tap, or pack the cup. If the cup is not completely filled on the first try, dump the flour back into the container and dip again. For guaranteed accuracy, measure the flour by weight following the dip-and-sweep. For our recipes, measure the flour before sifting. This is essential because sifted flour weighs far less than unsifted. Use a cake sifter to remove any lumps from flour (or confectioners' sugar) and aerate dry

ingredients.

USE FRESH BAKING POWDER. As soon as a can of baking powder is opened, the acid and alkali components start to react. Within a few months, baking powder will lose some strength. When opening a can, write the date on the bottom and discard the baking powder after three months.

DIVIDE BATTER EVENLY BETWEEN PANS. Cake layers of different heights can pose a problem when it comes time to frost and decorate. Use a scale to make sure that equal amouints of batter go into each

pan (*see* figure 1).

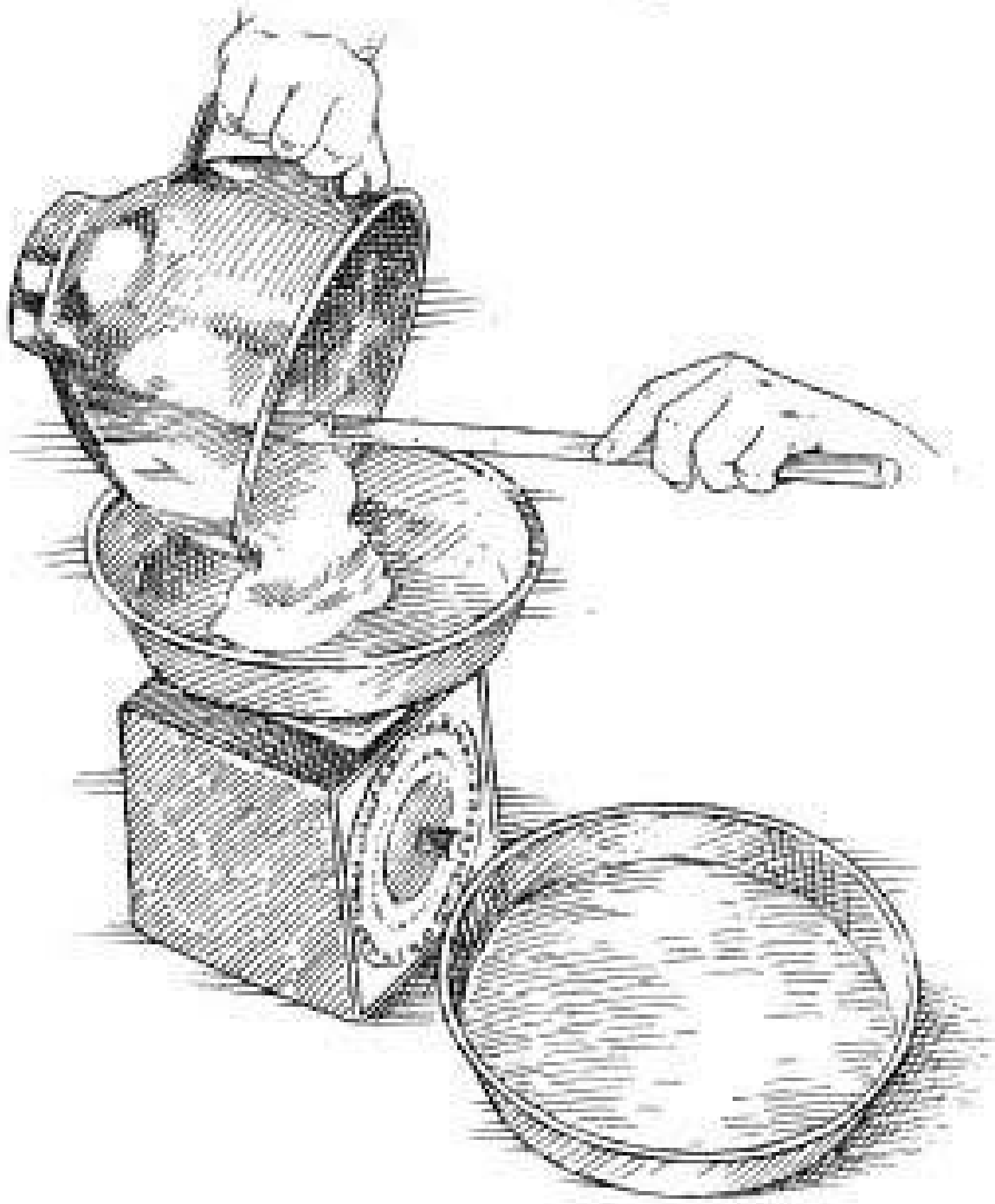

Figure 1.
To ensure that you end up with equal amounts of batter in each cake pan, use a kitchen scale to

measure the weight of each filled pan.

INSULATE THE PANS TO ENSURE EVEN COOKING. By providing a buffer between the sides of a cake pan and the oven heat, Magi-Cake Strips or damp newspaper prevent overcooking near the outside edges. The result is a level cake that does not shrink or crack and does not have a tough outer crust (*see* figures 2–4).

Figure 2.
Saturate each Magi-Cake Strip with cold water. Run your fingers along it to squeeze out excess

water.

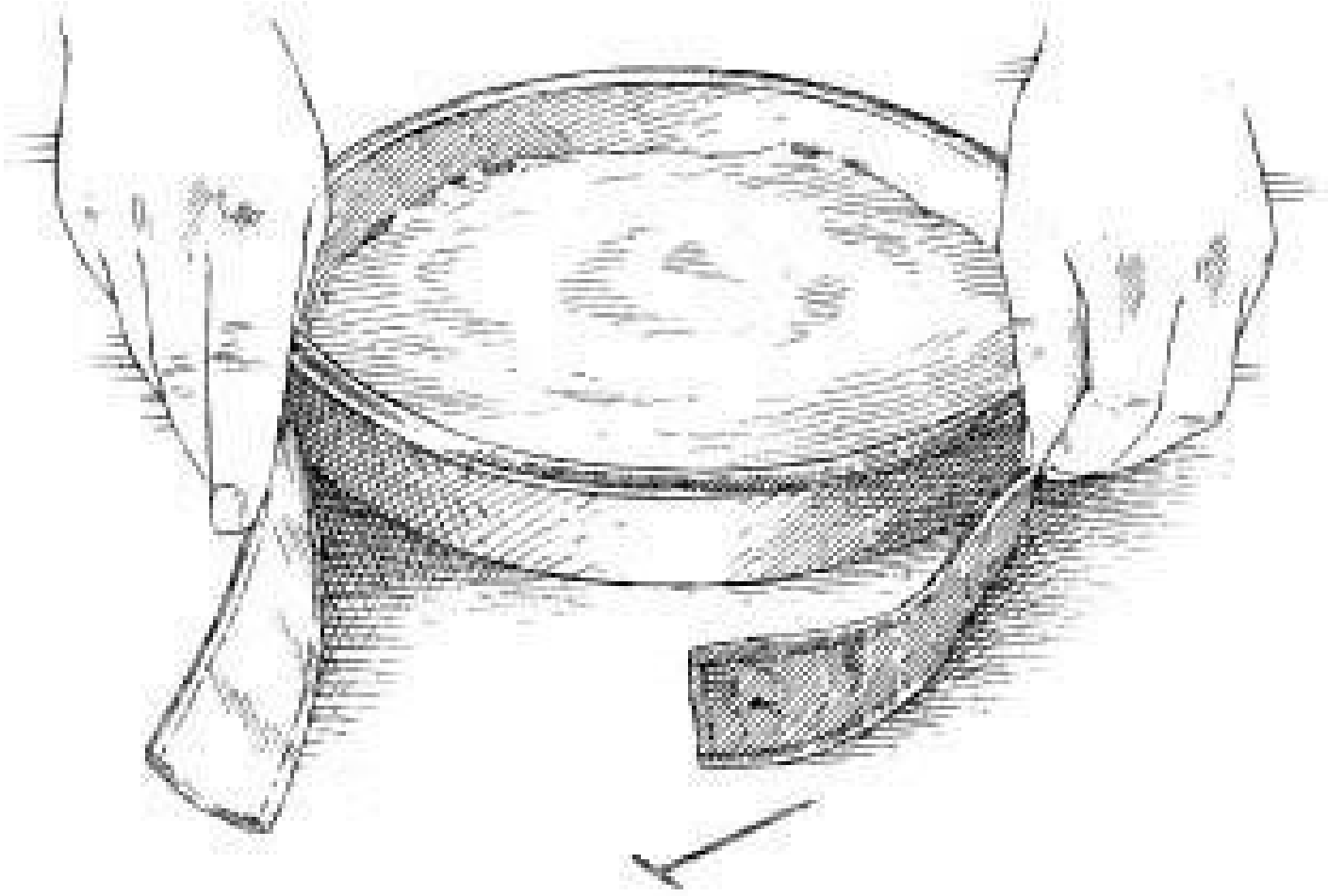

Figure 3.
With the aluminized side facing out, wrap the strip around the outside of the batter-filled pan. Secure the strip with the provided pin. Bake as directed, but note that cooking times may increase slightly.

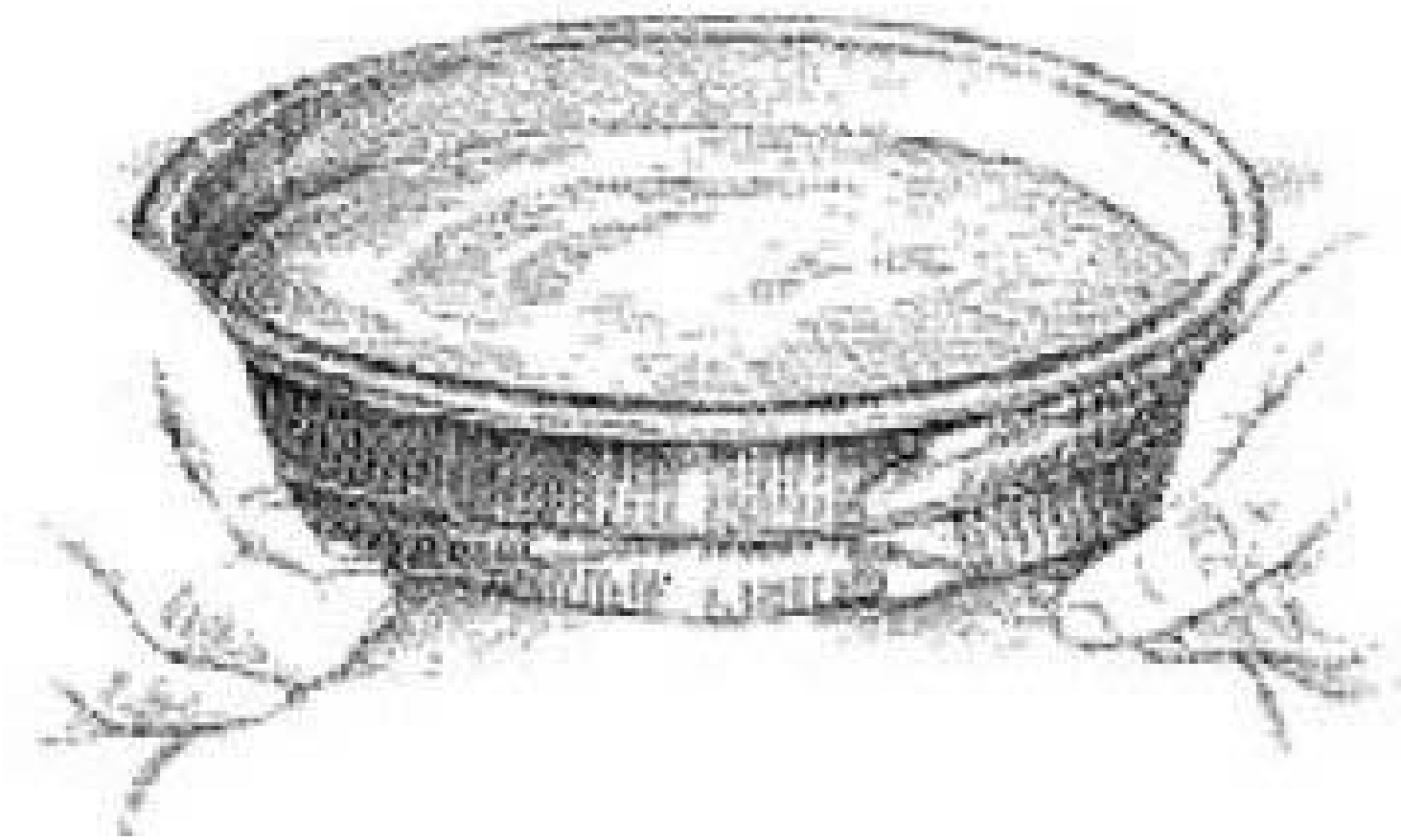

Figure 4.
Newspaper can be used to make your own Magi-Cake Strips. Fold a sheet of newspaper to make a strip the width of the pan height. Wet the strip and wrap it around the cake pan. Secure the strip with wet kitchen twine.

GIVE PANS ENOUGH SPACE IN THE OVEN. Cakes placed too close to one another will rise toward each other and end up lopsided. Cakes placed too close to the oven walls won't rise as high on the side nearest the wall. Keep pans at least three inches from each other and the oven walls and on the middle rack of the oven. If your oven is small, stagger the pans on racks set at the upper-middle and lower-middle positions to allow for proper air circulation.

USE YOUR FINGER AND A CAKE TESTER TO JUDGE WHEN LAYERS ARE DONE. Layer cakes should be baked until firm in the center when lightly pressed and a cake needle or toothpick inserted in the

center comes out clean or with just a crumb or two adhering.

COOL CAKE LAYERS IN THEIR PANS, THEN ON RACKS. Grease racks with nonstick vegetable spray to keep cake layers from sticking to them. Do not frost the layers until they are completely cooled. Cake layers are best frosted the day they are made. However, layers may be wrapped tightly in plastic and stored at room temperature for a day. For longer storage, freeze wrapped layers for up to one month. Defrost them on the counter and unwrap them just before frosting.

FROST THE CAKE TWICE. We prefer to apply a thin base coat of frosting to seal in the crumbs. We then refrigerate the cake until the frosting is set and add a thicker second coat of frosting (*see* figures 5–11).

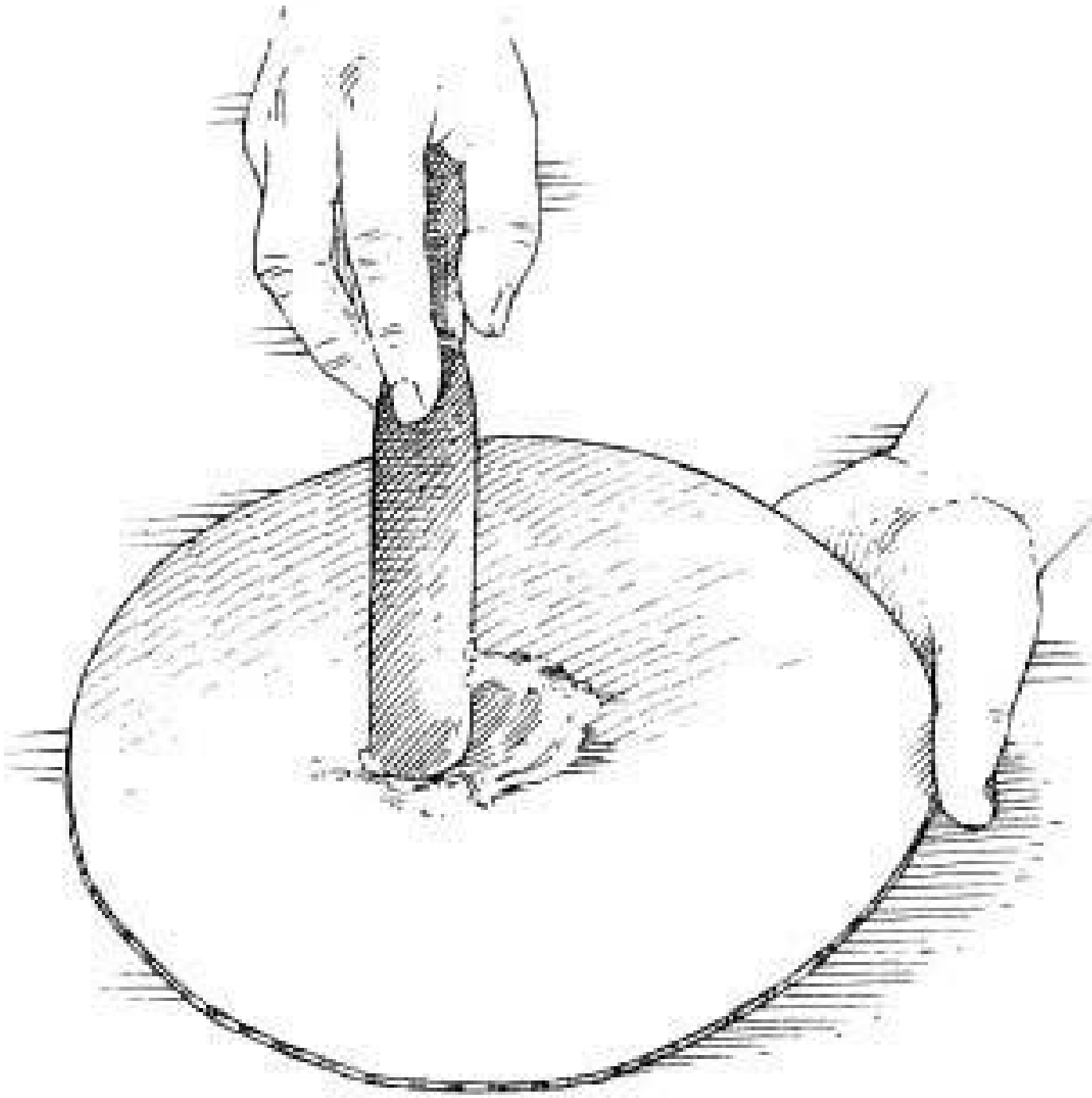

Figure 5.
To frost a standard two-layer cake, place on the cake stand a cardboard round cut to a slightly

smaller diameter than the layers. Dab a little frosting in the center of the round to anchor the cake in place. You may place the dab of frosting directly on the cake plate if desired.

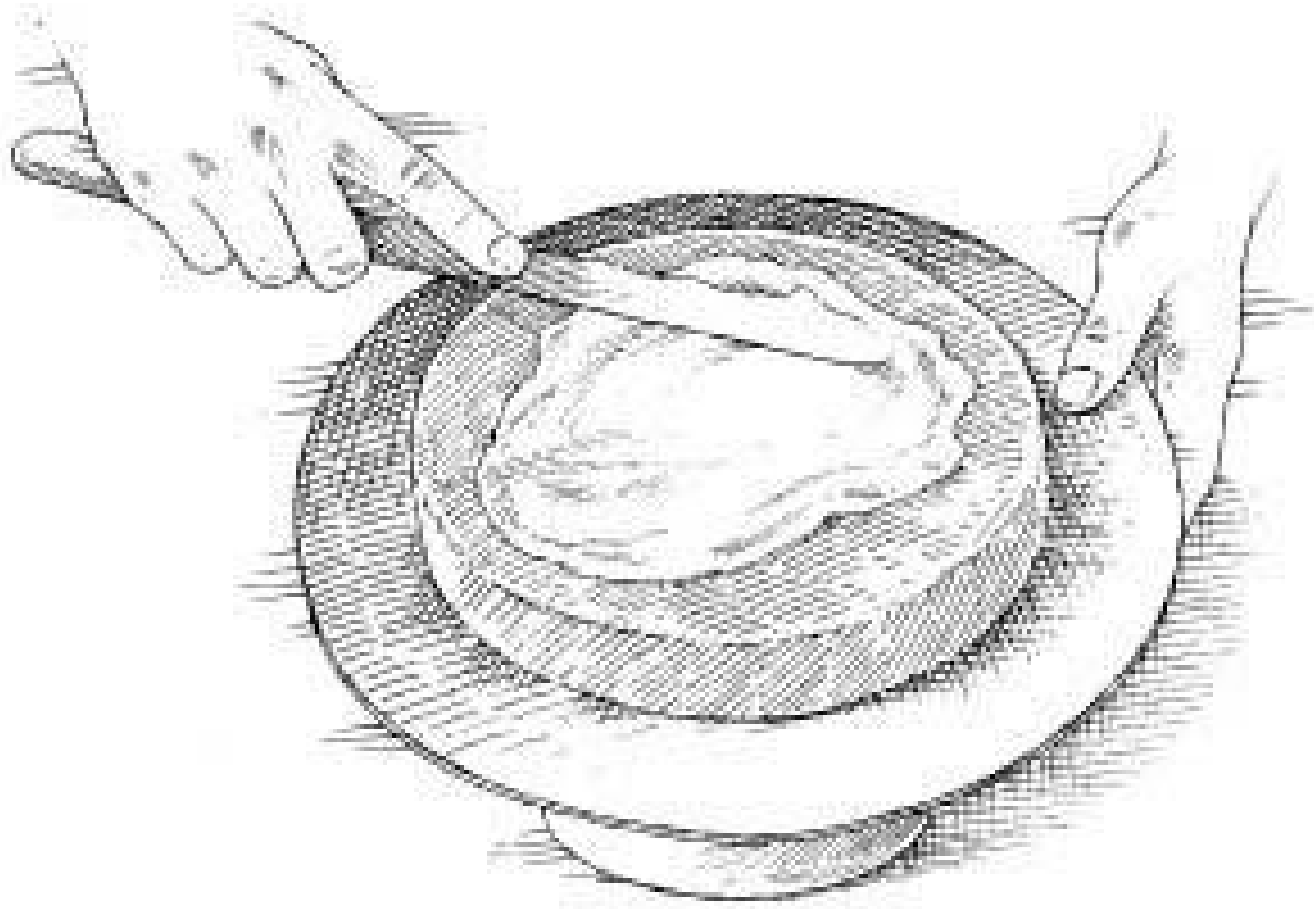

Figure 6.
Center one cake layer, bottom side up, on the cardboard round (or cake plate). Place a large blob of frosting in the center of the layer. Use a long frosting spatula to spread the icing without lifting up.

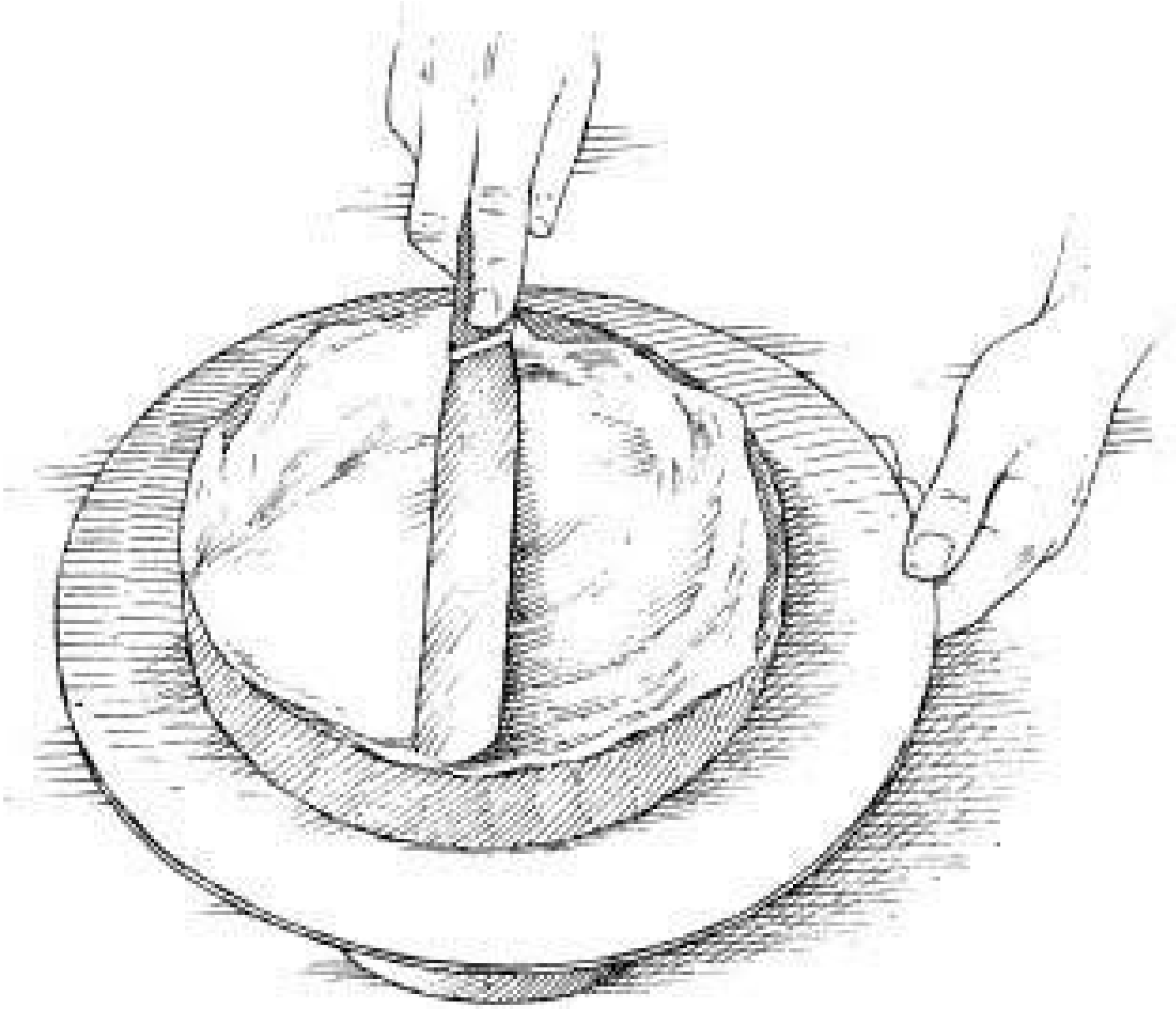

Figure 7.
Hold the edge of the spatula at a 45-degree angle against the top of the frosted layer. Gently turn the cake stand to remove the excess frosting and level it off.

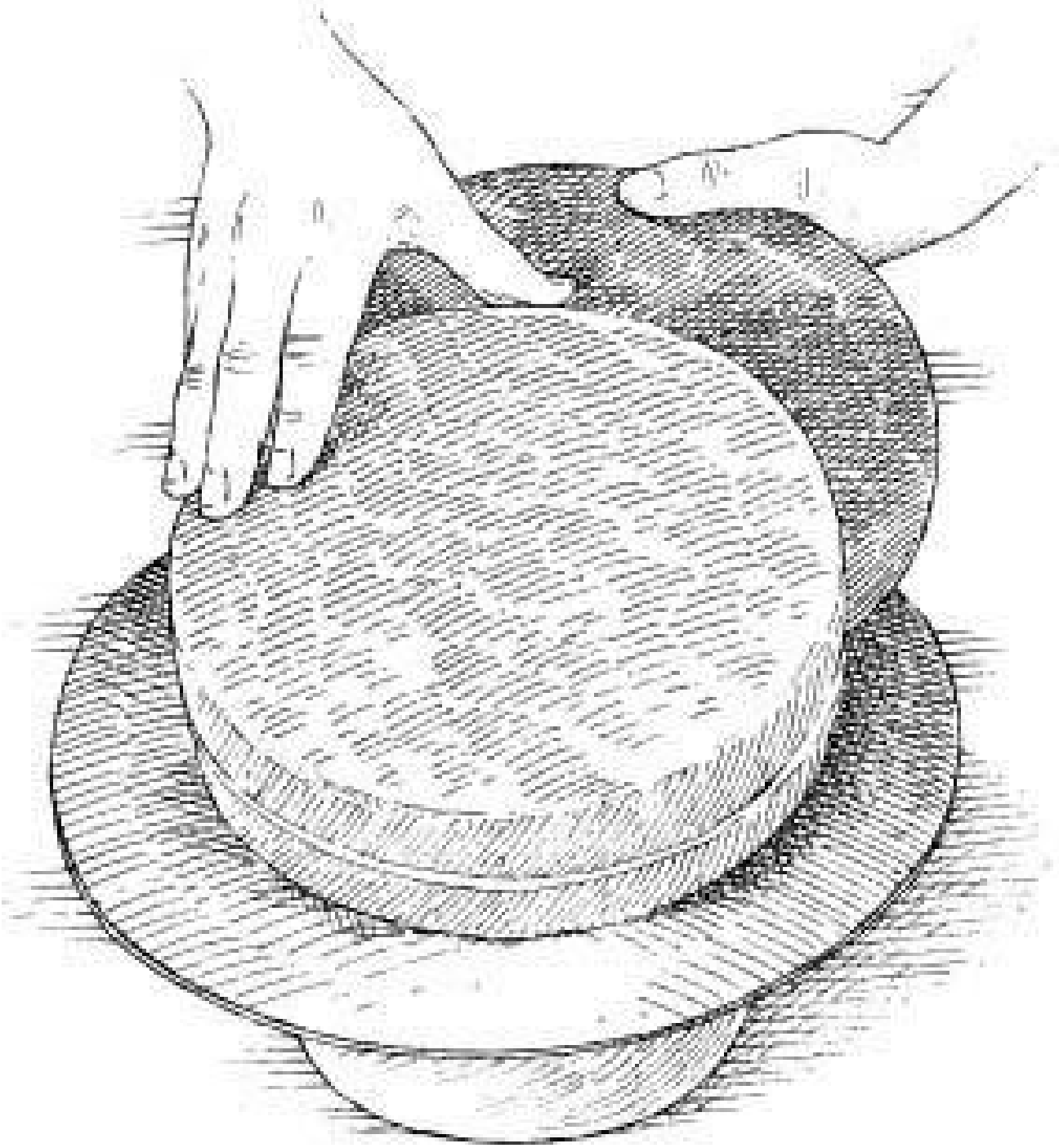

Figure 8.
Place the unfrosted layer, bottom side up, on a greased tart pan bottom and slide it onto the

frosted bottom layer, making sure that the layers are aligned.

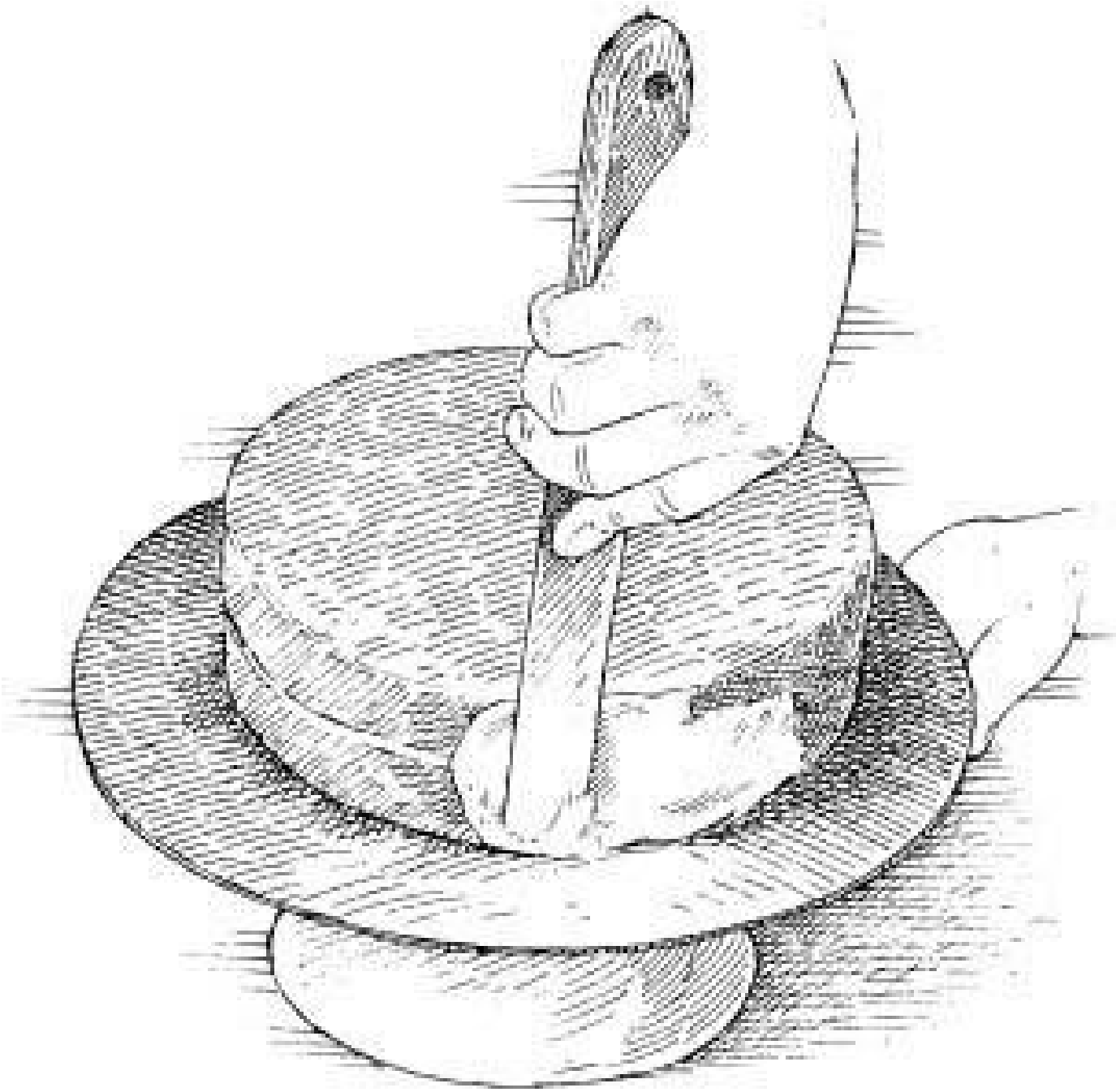

Figure 9.
Apply a thin basecoat of frosting to seal in the crumbs. Start by using the icing spatula to place a big dab of frosting on the side of

the cake. Move the spatula down against the side of the cake to spread out the frosting. Repeat the process until the side is covered.

Figure 10.
Lightly frost the top of the cake in the same manner as the first layer. Refrigerate the cake until the frosting is set, about 10 minutes.

Figure 11.
Apply a thick final layer of frosting to the top and sides of the cake.

YELLOW LAYER CAKES

THERE ARE TWO BASIC METHODS for making a yellow cake. The 1-2-3-4 cake dates back to the nineteenth century. The name refers to the ingredients (1 cup butter, 2 cups sugar, 3 cups flour, and 4 eggs). The recipe was easy to remember and helpful for cooks who did not have standardized measures because they could use the same cup to measure all the ingredients.

This cake is made by creaming the butter and sugar until light and fluffy. The eggs are beaten in, and then the dry

ingredients are added alternately with milk or another liquid (orange juice for an orange layer cake, for instance). A second kind of yellow cake is made by creaming the flour with the butter and sugar. The eggs and liquid ingredients are then added. Beating the flour with the butter coats it with fat and slows down the absorption of liquid. This method inhibits the formation of gluten, the elastic proteins that give bread and other baked goods their structure.

We made cakes with both methods and prefer the traditional creaming of butter and sugar without the flour, as in the 1-2-3-4 cake. A good butter cake should have enough chew and heft to stand up to almost any frosting. We found that

yellow cakes made by creaming the flour with the butter and sugar have an overly fine grain and fragile crumb.

Bleached all-purpose flour delivers the best balance of softness and structure in our version of the 1-2-3-4 cake, which contains less flour than the original. Cake flour does not have enough protein and makes an overly soft cake. Unbleached all-purpose has too much protein and makes a tougher cake.

Traditional recipes for the 1-2-3-4 cake often call for separated eggs. The yolks are beaten into the batter after the butter and sugar are creamed while the whites are whipped to stiff peaks and folded in after the flour and milk are

incorporated. Although the separated-egg method makes an especially light cake, our tests revealed it can lead to tunneling and air pockets. We had more reliable results (and no tunneling) when we added whole eggs to the batter.

Master Recipe

Basic Yellow Cake

NOTE: ***For best results, use a bleached all-purpose flour like Gold Medal or Pillsbury, which have less protein than unbleached all-purpose flours.***

1 tablespoon solid vegetable shortening

$2^1/_2$ cups ($12^1/_2$ ounces) bleached all-purpose flour, plus 2 tablespoons for flouring pans

1 tablespoon baking

powder

1/2 teaspoon salt

1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, softened but still firm

2 cups sugar

4 large eggs at room temperature

1 cup milk at room temperature

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Master Instructions

1. Set oven rack in middle position. (If oven is too small to hold both layers comfortably on a single rack, set racks in upper-middle and lower-middle positions.) Heat oven to 350 degrees. Coat bottom and sides of two 9-inch-by-$1^{1}/_{2}$-inch or -2-inch round cake pans with $^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoon shortening each. Sprinkle 1 tablespoon flour into each pan; roll pans in all directions to coat. Invert pans and rap sharply to remove excess flour.

2. Sift together remaining flour, baking powder, and salt. Set dry ingredients aside.

3. Beat butter in bowl of electric mixer at medium speed until smooth, about 30 seconds. Add sugar and beat, scraping down sides of bowl as needed, until light and fluffy, 2 to 3 minutes. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Stop mixer and scrape down sides of bowl as needed.

4. Combine milk and vanilla. With

mixer on low, add some of dry ingredients followed by a little of milk mixture. Continue alternating dry with liquid ingredients, ending with dry ingredients. Scrape down sides of bowl as needed throughout mixing process.

5. Divide batter evenly between two prepared cake pans; using rubber spatula, spread batter to pan walls and smooth tops. Arrange pans at least 3 inches from oven walls and 3 inches apart. (If oven is too small, place pans on separate racks in staggered fashion to allow for air circulation.) Bake until firm

in center when lightly pressed and cake needle or toothpick inserted in center comes out clean or with just a crumb or two adhering, 30 to 35 minutes.

6. Cool cakes in pans set on rack for 5 minutes. Loosen from sides of pans with knife, if necessary, and invert onto greased cake racks. Reinvert onto additional greased racks. Let cool completely, about 1 hour.

Classic Yellow Layer Cake with Chocolate Buttercream

NOTE: ***This is our version of America's favorite layer cake with buttery yellow cake layers and rich, creamy chocolate frosting. These yellow cake layers can be frosted with any of the buttercreams or decorating frostings in chapter 5. Coffee Buttercream is an especially good choice.***

1 recipe Basic Yellow Cake

1 recipe Chocolate Buttercream

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Prepare cake and frosting.

2. When layers are cool, frost cake.

Old-Fashioned Strawberry Layer Cake with Whipped Cream Frosting

NOTE: ***To enhance the flavor in out-of-season berries, sprinkle the fruit sliced for the in-between layer (step 2) with one teaspoon of sugar and let it stand for fifteen minutes.***

1 recipe Basic Yellow Cake

1 recipe Whipped Cream Frosting

1 quart (19 ounces) medium-sized strawberries, lightly rinsed, thoroughly dried, and hulled

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Prepare and cool cake layers. Prepare frosting.

2. Cut three-quarters of strawberries in half through stem ends.

3. Place first cake layer on cardboard round or cake plate. Frost top with $^{1}/_{4}$-inch-thick layer of whipped cream. Lay halved strawberries, cut side down, over whipped cream in single layer. Fill in spaces between berries with a little more whipped cream.

4. Add second cake layer. Press down lightly to secure. Frost top and sides of cake. Arrange remaining whole strawberries, stem side down, in decorative fashion on top of cake.

Orange Layer Cake

NOTE: ***Three medium oranges will yield enough zest and juice for the cake layers.***

1 recipe Basic Yellow Cake, with changes below

1 recipe Orange Buttercream or Orange Decorating Frosting

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Follow master recipe for Basic Yellow Cake, adding 1 tablespoon grated orange zest after last egg and replacing milk with 1 cup orange juice at room temperature.

2. When layers are cool, frost cake.

Almond Layer Cake

NOTE: ***Almond extract gives the cake layers a subtle almond flavor. Lightly toast the chopped almonds for the garnish in a 350-degree oven for eight minutes to bring out their flavor. See figure 12 for information on how to press the almonds or other nuts into the sides of a cake.***

1 recipe Basic Yellow Cake, with changes below

1 recipe Almond Buttercream or Almond Decorating Frosting

1 cup chopped almonds, lightly toasted

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Follow master recipe for Basic Yellow Cake, adding 1 teaspoon almond extract along with vanilla extract to milk.

2. When layers are cool, frost cake. Press almonds into sides of cake with bench scraper.

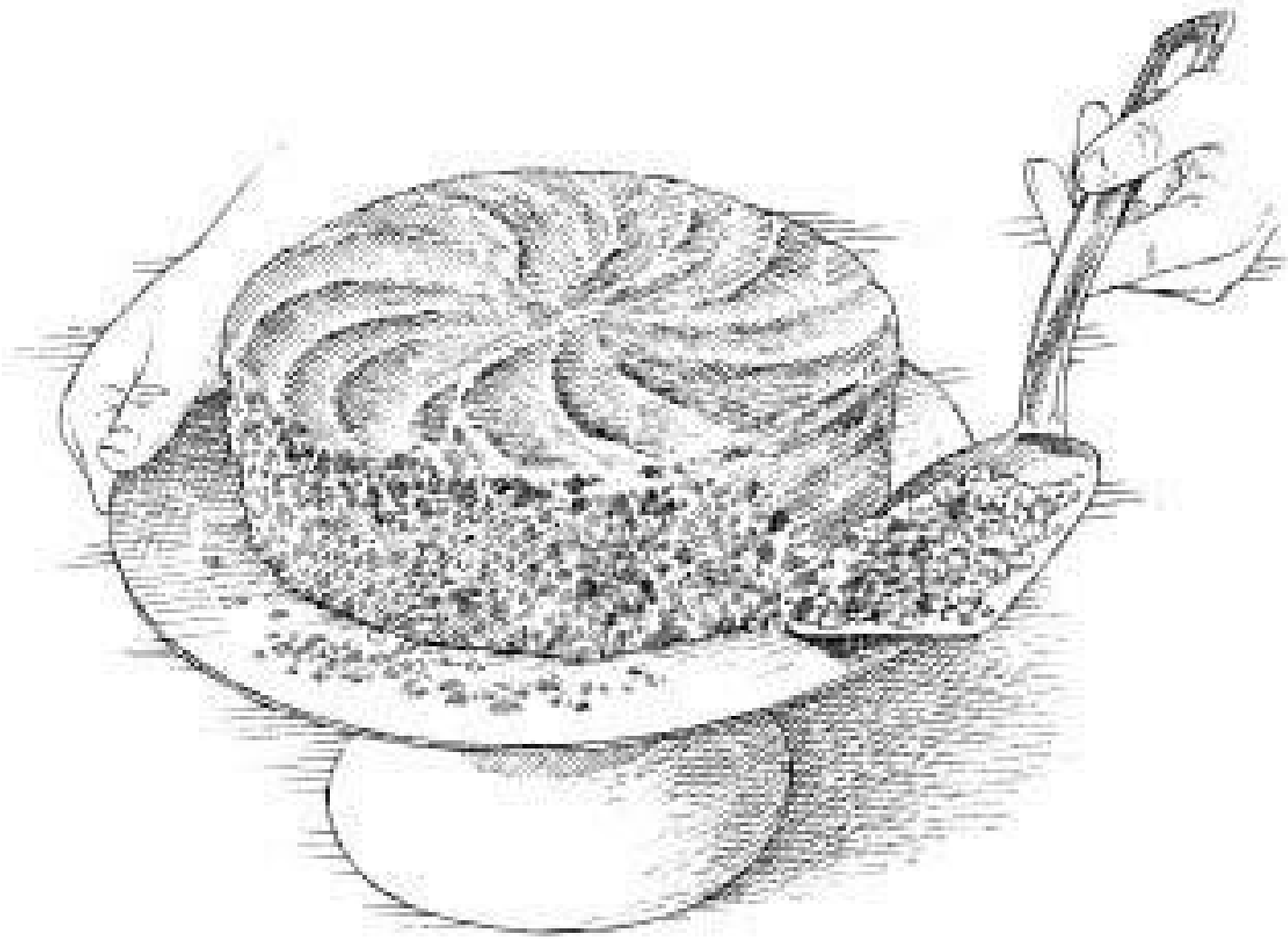

Figure 12
To coat the sides of the frosted cake with chopped or sliced nuts, use a bench scraper or a wide, flat spatula to lift some nuts onto the sides of the cake. Lightly toasting the nuts brings out their

flavor. Plan on using 1 cup to decorate the sides of a standard two-layer cake.

Lemon Layer Cake

NOTE: ***In order to get a strong lemon flavor, use lemon extract (made from the oils in the yellow peel) in the cake batter. Lemon juice is too weak and can curdle the milk.***

1 recipe Basic Yellow Cake, with changes below
1 recipe Lemon Buttercream or Lemon Decorating Frosting

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Follow master recipe for Basic Yellow Cake, adding 1 tablespoon grated lemon zest and $1^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoons lemon extract after last egg.

2. When layers are cool, frost cake.

VARIATION:

For Lemon Layer Cake with Lemon Curd Filling and Vanilla Frosting, cover bottom layer with Lemon Curd Filling and use Vanilla Buttercream or Vanilla Decorating Frosting to cover sides and top of cake.

Spice Layer Cake with Meringue Frosting

NOTE: ***The sweet meringue frosting complements the spices in the cake layers without overpowering them. The flavor of the spices intensifies after a day, so you may want to make the layers one day and frost them the next.***

1 recipe Basic Yellow Cake, with changes below

1 recipe Meringue Frosting

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Follow master recipe for Basic Yellow Cake, sifting $1\,^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoons

ground cinnamon and $^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon each ground ginger, freshly grated nutmeg, and ground cloves with flour and other dry ingredients.

2. When layers are cool, frost cake.

Country Buttermilk Layer Cake with Maple Meringue Frosting

NOTE: ***The lactic acid in the buttermilk makes a rich cake with a slightly coarser crumb. It also highlights the butter flavor. The maple frosting is reminiscent of old farm cakes from New England.***

1 recipe Basic Yellow Cake, with changes below

1 recipe Maple Meringue Frosting

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Follow master recipe for Basic

Yellow Cake, sifting $^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoon baking soda with other dry ingredients and replacing milk with 1 cup buttermilk at room temperature.

2. When layers are cool, frost cake.

Marble Layer Cake with Chocolate Frosting

NOTE: ***A little melted semisweet chocolate is beaten into half the batter. The two batters are then spooned into the cake pans and swirled with a butter knife. Melt the chocolate in a microwave (set at 50 percent power, stirring every minute or so until smooth) or a double boiler.***

1 recipe Basic Yellow Cake, with changes below

1 recipe Chocolate Buttercream or Chocolate Decorating Frosting

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Follow master recipe for Basic Yellow Cake, making the following changes: Equally divide batter between two bowls. Stir $1^{1}/_{2}$ ounces melted and cooled semisweet chocolate into one bowl and mix well. Drop several spoonfuls of yellow batter in various spots around one prepared cake pan. Drop several spoonfuls of chocolate batter in different places in same pan. Repeat until half of each batter has been used. Being careful not to touch bottom or sides of pan, gently draw butter knife through batters to create swirls. Smooth out batter. Repeat with remaining batter in second pan.

2. When layers are cool, frost cake.

WHITE LAYER CAKES

WHITE CAKES ARE THE CLASSIC choice for birthdays. A white cake is simply a yellow butter cake made with egg whites instead of whole eggs. The whites produce the characteristic color and also make the cake soft and fine-grained. Some white cakes can be a bit dry (the missing yolks provide richness to yellow cakes) and cottony. Many white cakes also are riddled with small holes.

These problems often result when white cakes are mixed by the same method as yellow cakes, that is, the

butter and sugar are creamed, and the dry ingredients are added alternately with milk. (Most white cake recipes call for stiffly beaten egg whites, which are folded in at the end.) This method exposes the flour directly to the liquid and leads to gluten formation. Although a little gluten formation is fine in a sturdier yellow cake, in a white cake (made without tenderizing yolks) the texture becomes tough. In addition, the gluten forms a stretchy net of ropelike fibers that press the air cells in the beaten whites into holes and tunnels.

To prevent overglutenization in white cake batter, we prefer to cream the flour with the butter and sugar. Because the flour is mixed with the butter at the start,

it is partially waterproofed and thus less prone to gluten development. This mixing method helps keep the crumb soft and delicate.

Our kitchen tests demonstrated that beaten egg whites are responsible for the formation of air pockets. Contrary to popular wisdom, beating the whites does not produce an ethereal texture. In fact, beating causes protein strands in the whites to uncoil and link up. These clumps of egg whites cannot be incorporated into the batter and cause unsightly holes when the cake is baked.

We found that unbeaten whites mix easily into the batter when added along with the milk. They set and stiffen in the

oven to provide the structure necessary to hold the fine air bubbles beaten into the butter when it is creamed. The result is a velvety cake with a delicate texture, high rise, and delicious flavor.

Master Recipe

Basic White Cake

NOTE: ***Low-protein cake flour makes these layers especially tender with a fine, delicate crumb. If you have forgotten to bring the milk and egg whites to room temperature, combine them as directed in step 2 and then set the bottom of the glass measuring cup in a sink of hot water and stir until the mixture feels cool rather than cold, about 70 degrees.***

2 tablespoons solid vegetable shortening

2 heaping tablespoons all-purpose flour for flouring pans

1 cup milk at room temperature

$^{3}/_{4}$ cup egg whites (about 6 large or 5 extra large) at room temperature

2 teaspoons vanilla extract

$2^{1}/_{4}$ cups ($10^{1}/_{8}$ ounces) plain cake flour

$1^{3}/_{4}$ cups sugar

4 teaspoons baking powder

1 teaspoon salt

$^{3}/_{4}$ cup ($1^{1}/_{2}$ sticks) unsalted butter, softened but still firm

Master Instructions

1. Set oven rack in middle position. (If oven is too small to hold both layers comfortably on a single rack, set racks in upper-middle and lower-middle positions.) Heat oven to 350 degrees. Coat bottom and sides of two 9-inch-by-$1^{1}/_{2}$-inch or -2-inch round cake pans with 1 tablespoon shortening each. Sprinkle 1 heaping tablespoon flour into each pan; roll pans in all directions to coat. Invert pans and rap sharply to remove excess flour.

2. Pour milk, egg whites, and vanilla into 2-cup measure and mix with fork until blended.

3. Mix cake flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt in bowl of electric mixer at low speed until combined. Add butter; continue beating at low speed until mixture resembles coarse crumbs, 2 to 3 minutes.

4. Add all but $^{1}/_{2}$ cup of milk mixture to crumbs and beat at medium speed (or high if using handheld mixer) for $1^{1}/_{2}$ minutes.

Add remaining $^{1}/_{2}$ cup of milk mixture and beat 30 seconds. Stop mixer and scrape down sides of bowl. Return mixer to medium (or high) speed and beat 20 seconds longer.

5. Divide batter evenly between two prepared cake pans; using rubber spatula, spread batter to pan walls and smooth tops. Arrange pans at least 3 inches from oven walls and 3 inches apart. (If oven is too small, place pans on separate racks in staggered fashion to allow for air circulation.) Bake until firm in center when lightly pressed and

cake needle or toothpick inserted in center comes out clean or with just a crumb or two adhering, 23 to 25 minutes.

6. Cool cakes in pans set on rack for 3 minutes. Loosen from sides of pans with knife, if necessary, and invert onto greased cake racks. Reinvert onto additional greased racks. Let cool completely, about 1 hour.

Classic White Layer Cake with Vanilla Frosting and Raspberry-Almond Filling

NOTE: *This all-purpose birthday cake is delicate and light. Chopped almonds, which have first been lightly toasted in a 350-degree oven for six minutes, are folded into the vanilla frosting that covers the bottom layer. A thin layer of raspberry jam is then spread over this frosting. If you decide not to decorate with a pastry bag, use Vanilla Buttercream instead of the firmer decorating frosting. In either case, see figures 13–15 for information on how to write a special*

message on top of the cake.

1 recipe Basic White Cake, with changes below

1/2 cup blanched slivered almonds, toasted and chopped coarse

1 recipe Vanilla Decorating Frosting

1/3 cup seedless raspberry jam

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Follow master recipe for Basic White Cake, adding 2 teaspoons almond extract along with 1 teaspoon vanilla.

2. When layers are cool, combine

almonds with $^{1}/_{2}$ cup frosting in small bowl. Use this mixture to cover top of bottom layer. Refrigerate several minutes to set frosting.

3. Carefully spread jam over frosting. Add second layer and frost top and sides of cake with remaining plain frosting.

VARIATION:

For **Classic White Layer Cake with Vanilla Frosting and Lemon Curd Filling**, make Basic White Cake without almond extract. Omit almonds but still coat top of bottom layer with a little plain frosting and refrigerate until set. Carefully spread $^{1}/_{2}$ cup Lemon Curd

Filling instead of raspberry jam over frosting. Add second layer and frost top and sides of cake.

Figure 13.
When writing "Happy Birthday" or something else on a cake, thin the icing with a few drops of water or extract to make it flow more smoothly. Write your message (in block or cursive

writing) with a pen or pencil on a piece of paper. Tape the paper to a flat surface and cover it with a sheet of clear acetate or plastic. Practice going over the message several times. Keep wiping the icing away and trying again until you are confident. When making printed letters, hold the bag vertically. When making cursive letters, tilt the bag a little as you write.

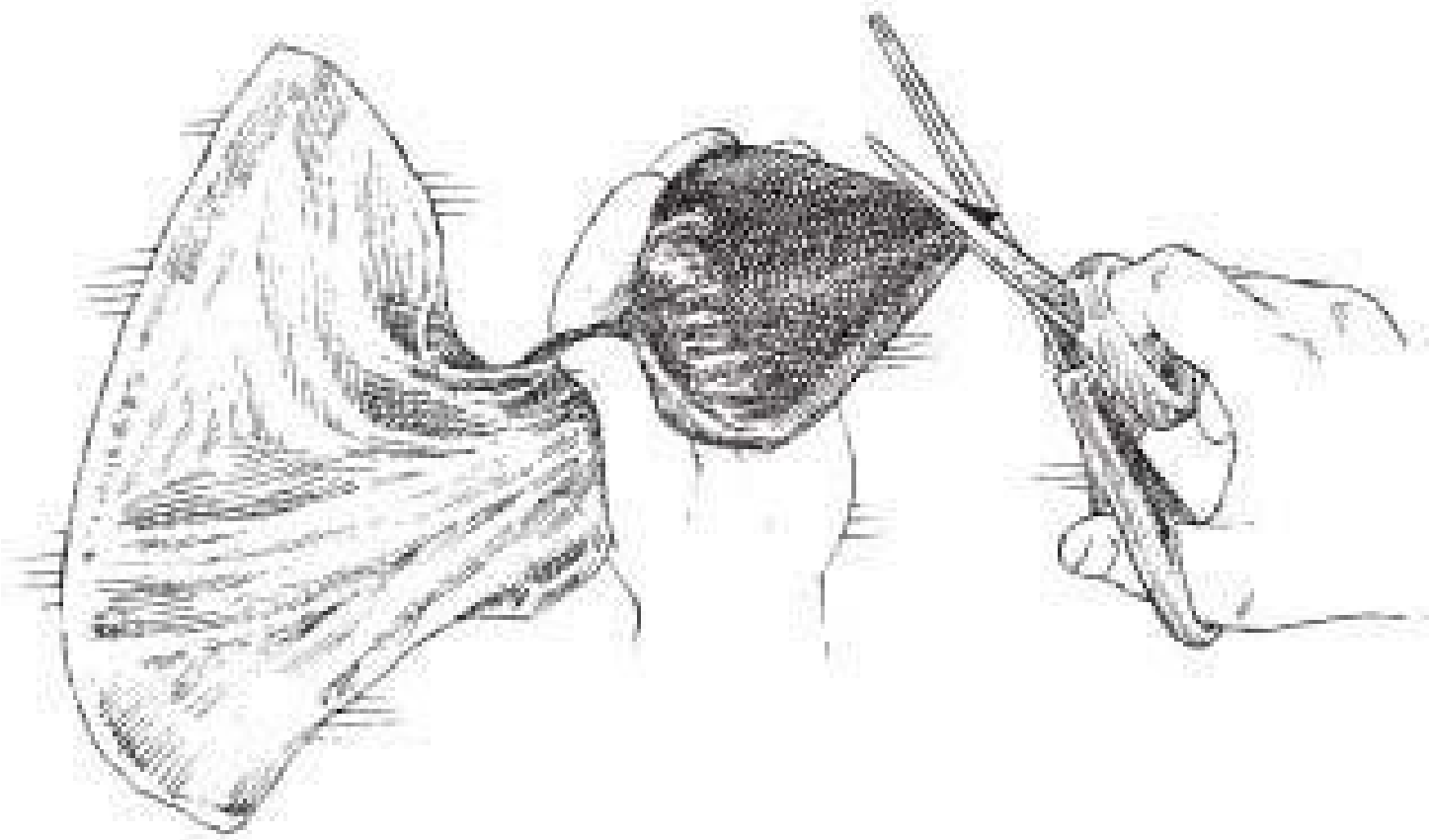

Figure 14.
Melted chocolate can also be used to decorate cakes or to write messages. Put the chocolate in a heat-safe zipper-lock plastic bag and immerse it in simmering water until the chocolate melts. Snip off the very tip of one corner of the bag.

Figure 15.
Holding the bag in one hand, gently squeeze the chocolate out of the bag. Discard the bag when

finished.

Southern Coconut Layer Cake

NOTE: ***For this southern classic, cover white cake layers with billowy, soft meringue and then sprinkle generously with sweetened flaked coconut.***

1 recipe Basic White Cake
1 recipe Meringue Frosting
2 cups lightly packed sweetened flaked coconut

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Prepare and cool cake layers. Prepare frosting.

2. Frost cake. Sprinkle top of cake with coconut and press remaining coconut into sides of cake.

Walnut Layer Cake with Maple Meringue Frosting

NOTE: ***Make sure the nuts are finely chopped by hand or in the food processor and then lightly toasted in a 350-degree oven for eight minutes. Cool the nuts before adding them to the batter.***

1 recipe Basic White Cake, with changes below

1 recipe Maple Meringue Frosting

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Follow master recipe for Basic White Cake, folding in $^{3}/_{4}$ cup finely chopped

and lightly toasted walnuts when finished beating batter.

2. When layers are cool, frost cake.

VARIATION:

For **Almond Layer Cake with Maple Meringue Frosting**, add 2 teaspoons almond extract to Basic White Cake along with 1 teaspoon vanilla. Fold in $^{3}/_{4}$ cup finely chopped and lightly toasted whole almonds instead of walnuts.

CHOCOLATE LAYER CAKES

CHOCOLATE CAKES CAN BE LIGHT AND tender, rich and fudgy, or anywhere in between. Minor ingredient changes may produce significant differences in texture and flavor. A master recipe with five variations follows. Each variation is quite distinct and is matched with a frosting that complements the cake layers.

There are a number of general principles that apply to all chocolate cakes. The most important issue is the

chocolate. We have found that dissolving cocoa in boiling water produces the best chocolate cake. The color is dark and the chocolate flavor intense. Mixing cocoa into the batter with the dry ingredients does not yield the same strong flavor or dark color.

Our kitchen tests show that cakes made with unsweetened or semisweet chocolate, as opposed to cocoa powder, are not as moist or flavorful. Cooking the chocolate over boiling water for several minutes ruptures some of the cocoa particles and helps release more flavor. But in the end, cocoa powder is more easily incorporated in cake batters and delivers more punch.

Nonalkalinized natural cocoas like

Hershey's make a cake that is slightly blacker and pleasantly bitter. Cakes made with dutched cocoa, which has been treated with an alkali to raise its pH, tend to have a fainter, mellower chocolate flavor. The distinctions are minor, but we prefer natural American cocoa in the following recipes.

The liquid ingredients in a chocolate cake are the other important variable. Milk (as opposed to water) mutes the chocolate flavor (dairy fat is a flavor blocker) but also makes the texture a little more substantial. Buttermilk and yogurt tenderize the crumb and add moistness while sour cream results in a dense yet melting texture.

Master Recipe

Basic Chocolate Cake

NOTE: ***Use a natural cocoa like Hershey's, rather than a dutched one. To measure the cocoa, dip the measure into the cocoa container and then sweep off the excess with a flat spatula or knife.***

1 tablespoon solid vegetable shortening

$1^1/_4$ cups ($6^1/_4$ ounces) bleached all-purpose flour, plus 2 tablespoons for flouring pans

1/2 cup nonalkalinized cocoa

2 teaspoons instant espresso or instant coffee

2 teaspoons vanilla extract

3/4 cup (1 1/2 sticks) unsalted butter, softened but still firm

1 1/4 cups sugar

2 large eggs at room temperature

1/2 teaspoon baking soda

1/2 teaspoon salt

Master Instructions

1. Set oven rack in middle position. Heat oven to 350 degrees. Coat bottom and sides of two 8-inch-by-$1^{1}/_{2}$-inch or -2-inch round cake pans with $^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoon shortening each. Sprinkle 1 tablespoon flour into each pan; roll pans in all directions to coat. Invert pans and rap sharply to remove excess flour.

2. Mix cocoa and espresso or coffee in small bowl; add 1 cup boiling water and mix until smooth. Cool to room temperature, then stir

in vanilla; set aside.

3. Beat butter in bowl of electric mixer at medium-high speed until smooth, about 30 seconds. Gradually sprinkle in sugar; beat until mixture is fluffy and almost white, 3 to 5 minutes. Add eggs, one at a time, beating 1 full minute after each addition. Stop mixer and scrape down sides of bowl as needed.

4. Whisk remaining flour, baking soda, and salt in medium bowl. With mixer on lowest speed, add

one-third of dry ingredients, followed immediately by one-third of cocoa mixture; mix until ingredients are almost incorporated into batter. Repeat process twice more. When batter appears blended, stop mixer and scrape down sides of bowl. Return mixer to low speed; beat until batter looks satiny, about 15 seconds.

5. Divide batter evenly between two prepared cake pans; using rubber spatula, spread batter to pan walls and smooth tops. Arrange pans at least 3 inches from oven walls and 3 inches apart. (If oven is

too small, place pans on separate racks in staggered fashion to allow for air circulation.) Bake until firm in center when lightly pressed and cake needle or toothpick inserted in center comes out clean or with just a crumb or two adhering, 23 to 30 minutes.

6. Cool cakes in pans set on rack for 10 minutes. Loosen from sides of pans with knife, if necessary, and invert onto greased cake racks. Reinvert onto additional greased racks. Let cool completely, about 1 hour.

Velvet Devil's Food Layer Cake with Coffee Buttercream

NOTE: ***The texture of this cake is both soft and dense, similar to a chocolate pound cake, only softer and lighter. The flavor intensely chocolate, yet pleasantly sweet. The rich coffee buttercream stands up to the dense texture of the cake and balances the rich chocolate flavor. If desired, coat the side of the frosted cake with finely shaved bittersweet chocolate, as in figures 16 and 17.***

1 recipe Basic Chocolate Cake
1 recipe Coffee Buttercream

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Prepare cake and frosting.

2. When layers are cool, frost cake.

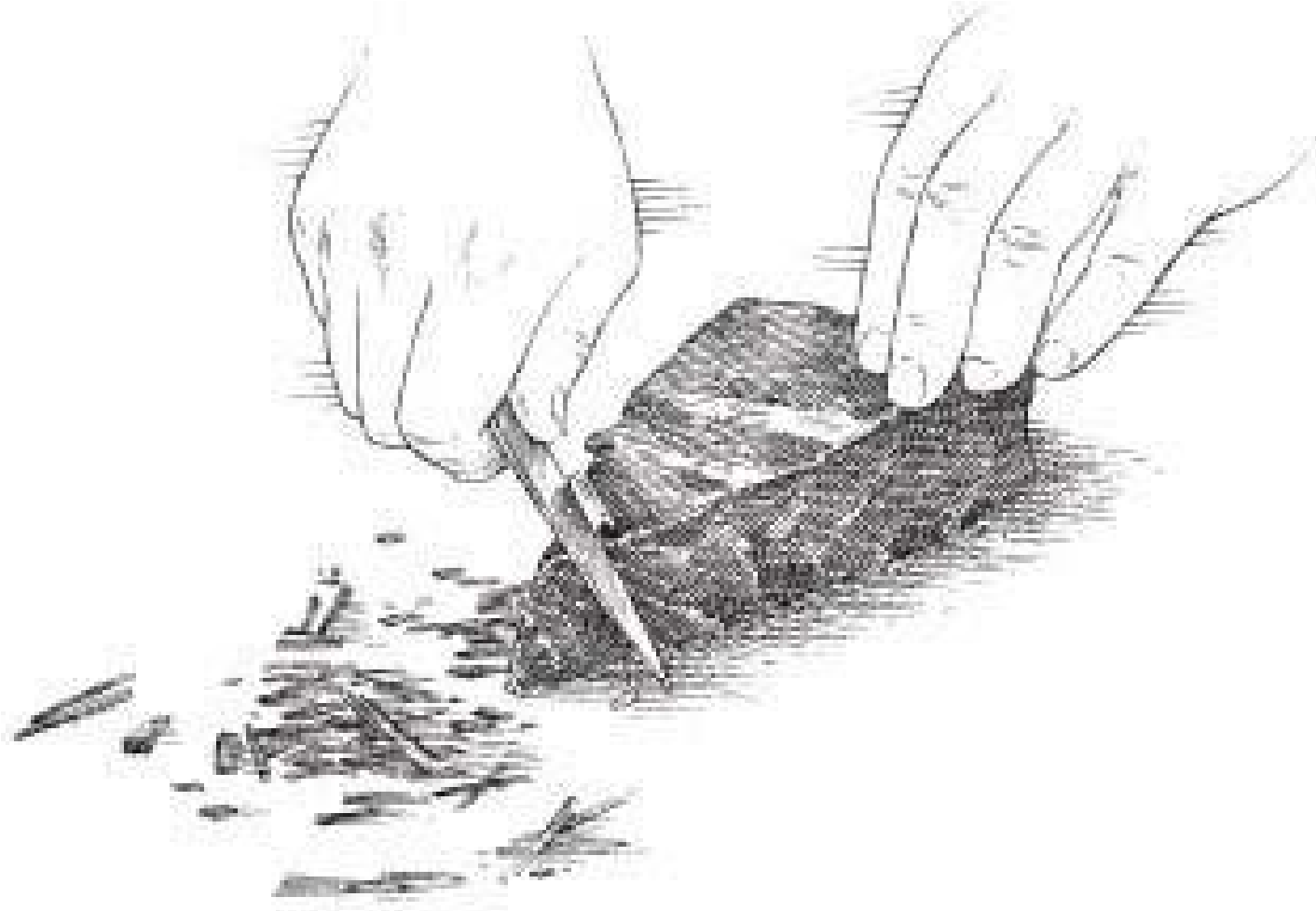

Figure 16.

Less than an ounce of chocolate can be turned into fine shavings to coat the side of a cake. Hold a sharp paring knife at a 45-degree angle against the flat side of a block of chocolate. Scrape toward you, anchoring the chocolate with

your other hand.

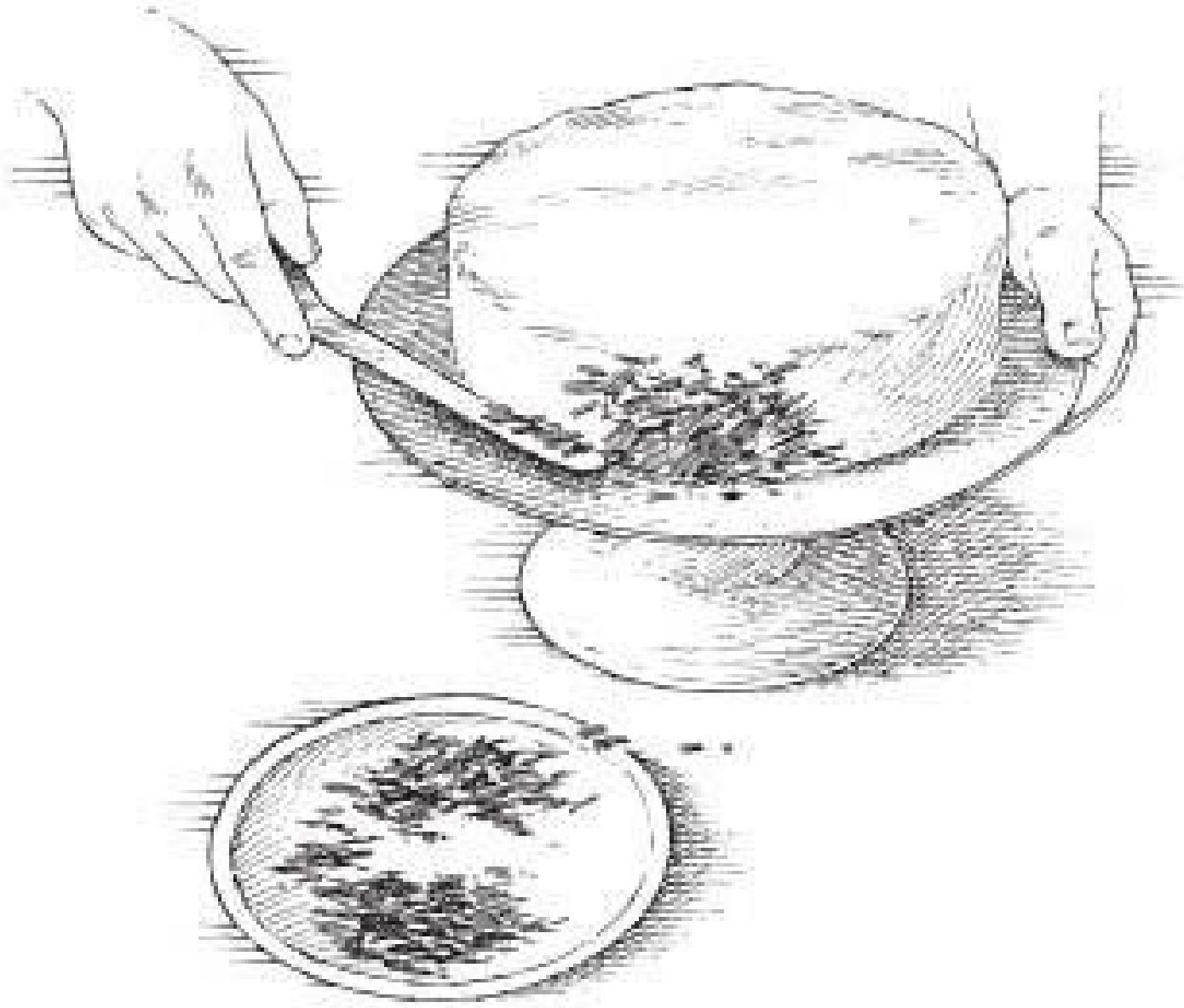

Figure 17.
Transfer the shavings to a plate by sliding a frosting spatula under them. Do not pick them up with your hands, or they will melt. To apply them, lift the

shavings with the spatula and gently touch them to the frosting. Continue until you have covered the side of the cake.

Classic Devil's Food Cake with Whipped Cream Frosting

NOTE: ***This cake has more sugar than the master recipe, resulting in an extremely tender texture. It almost falls apart at the touch of a fork but turns out to be resilient and a bit spongy when chewed. The lightly sweetened whipped cream matches well with the sweeter, lighter texture of this cake. If desired, garnish with chocolate shavings (see figures 18 and 19).***

1 recipe Basic Chocolate Cake, with changes below

1 recipe Whipped Cream Frosting

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Follow master recipe for Basic Chocolate Cake, making the following changes: Use two 9-by-$1^{1}/_{2}$-inch or -2-inch round cake pans. After dissolving cocoa and instant espresso or coffee in boiling water, stir in $^{3}/_{4}$ cup firmly packed brown sugar and $^{1}/_{2}$ cup low-fat plain yogurt or buttermilk; let cool and add vanilla. Reduce butter to $^{1}/_{2}$ cup (1 stick) and increase baking soda to $^{3}/_{4}$ teaspoon.

2. When layers are cool, frost cake.

Figure 18.
Thick chocolate shavings can be used to decorate the top of a cake. Start by warming a block of chocolate by sweeping a hair

dryer over it, taking care not to melt it. Hold the paring knife at a 45-degree angle against the chocolate and scrape toward you, anchoring the block with the other hand.

Figure 19.
Pick up the shavings with a toothpick and place them on the cake as desired.

Old-Fashioned Chocolate Layer Cake with Chocolate Cream Frosting

NOTE: ***The milk in this cake batter slightly mutes the chocolate flavor while giving the cake a sturdy, pleasantly crumbly texture. Cream enriches the frosting, making it compatible with this less assertive chocolate cake.***

1 recipe Basic Chocolate Cake, with changes below
1 recipe Chocolate Cream Frosting

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Follow master recipe for Basic Chocolate Cake, making the following changes: Omit step 2 as well as boiling water. Whisk cocoa and instant espresso or coffee with flour and other dry ingredients in step 4 until no lumps of cocoa remain. Combine 1 cup plus 2 tablespoons milk at room temperature and vanilla; add alternately with dry ingredients to butter-sugar-egg mixture.

2. When layers are cool, frost cake.

Sour Cream-Fudge Layer Cake with Chocolate Butter Icing

NOTE: ***Sour cream gives this cake its smooth, rich chocolate flavor and dense yet melting texture, almost like fudge. An equally intense chocolate icing stands up to the rich cake. It's best not to refrigerate this cake, but if you do, cut it while cold, then let the slices come to room temperature before serving.***

1 recipe Basic Chocolate Cake, with changes below

1 recipe Chocolate Butter Icing

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Follow master recipe for Basic Chocolate Cake, making the following changes: Use two 9-by-$1^{1}/_{2}$-inch or -2-inch round cake pans. Increase cocoa to 1 cup. Whisk $^{1}/_{2}$ cup sour cream into cocoa mixture along with vanilla. Increase butter to 1 cup (2 sticks), sugar to $1^{3}/_{4}$ cups, and baking soda to $^{3}/_{4}$ teaspoon.

2. When layers are cool, frost cake.

German Chocolate Layer Cake with Coconut-Pecan Filling

NOTE: ***Buttermilk gives this cake a pleasantly mild chocolate flavor and very light, soft texture. Be sure to divide the batter evenly between the pans (see figure 1) because these layers will rise quite high. The layers are split to create a four-tiered cake with filling covering all the layers, but with sides that are unfrosted.***

1 recipe Basic Chocolate Cake, with changes below

1 recipe Coconut-Pecan Filling

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Follow master recipe for Basic Chocolate Cake, making the following changes: Reduce cocoa to $^1/_4$ cup and boiling water to $^1/_3$ cup. Whisk $^1/_3$ cup nonfat plain yogurt or buttermilk into cocoa mixture along with vanilla. Increase eggs to 3.

2. When layers are cool, halve each crosswise (*see* figures 20–24). Place one cake bottom on serving plate. Spread 1 cup filling over cake half. Place another halved cake layer over filling. Repeat this stacking and spreading process with remaining filling

and cake, ending with a final layer of filling.

Figure 20.
For cakes with more than two layers, you will need to split each cake layer in half. Start by

making a $^{1}/_{8}$-inch-deep cut down the side of each cake layer with a serrated knife. This line can be used later to align the split layers.

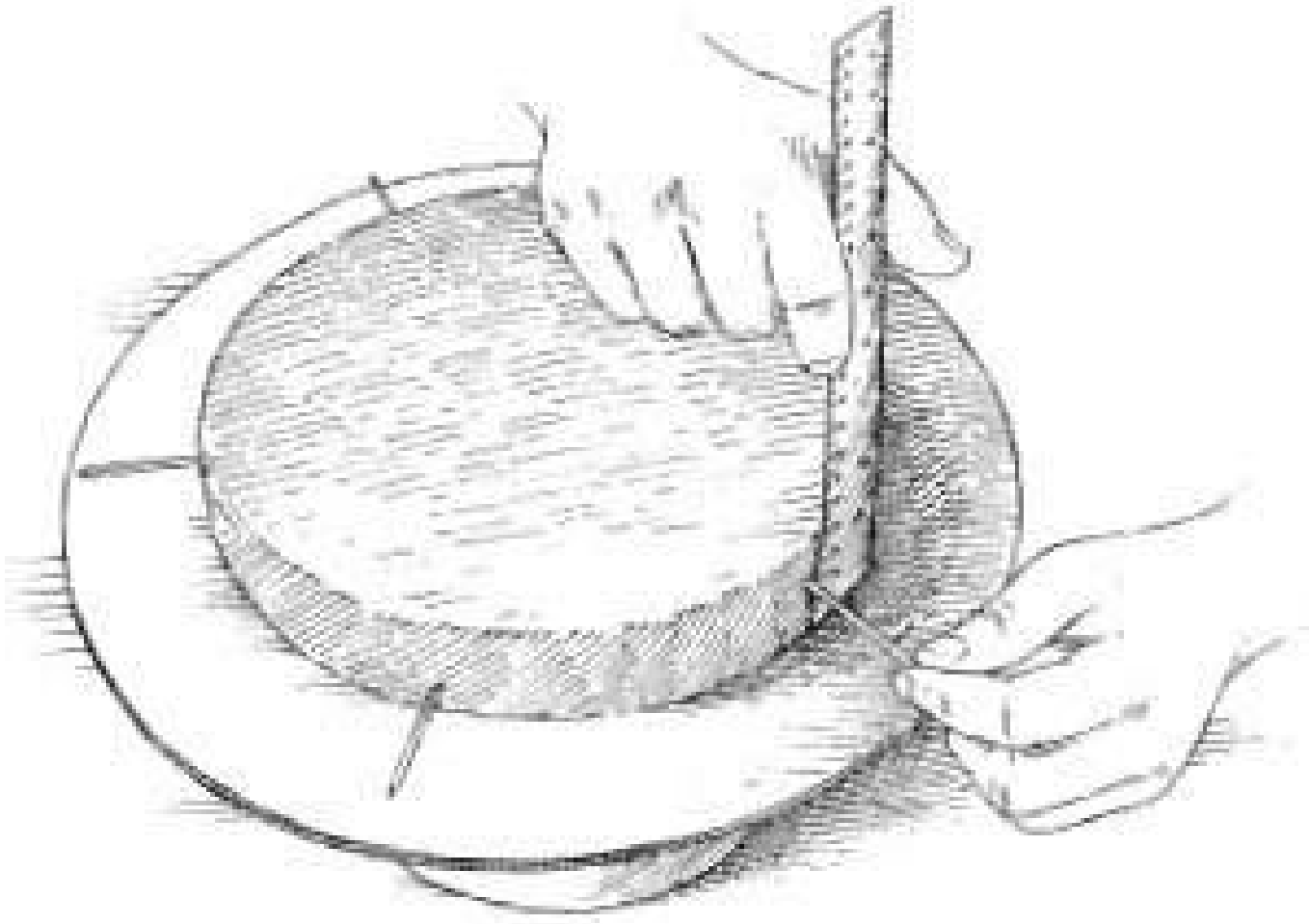

Figure 21.
To split the layers, place several toothpicks around the edge of the cake, halfway between the top and the bottom. Use a ruler to determine the midpoint.

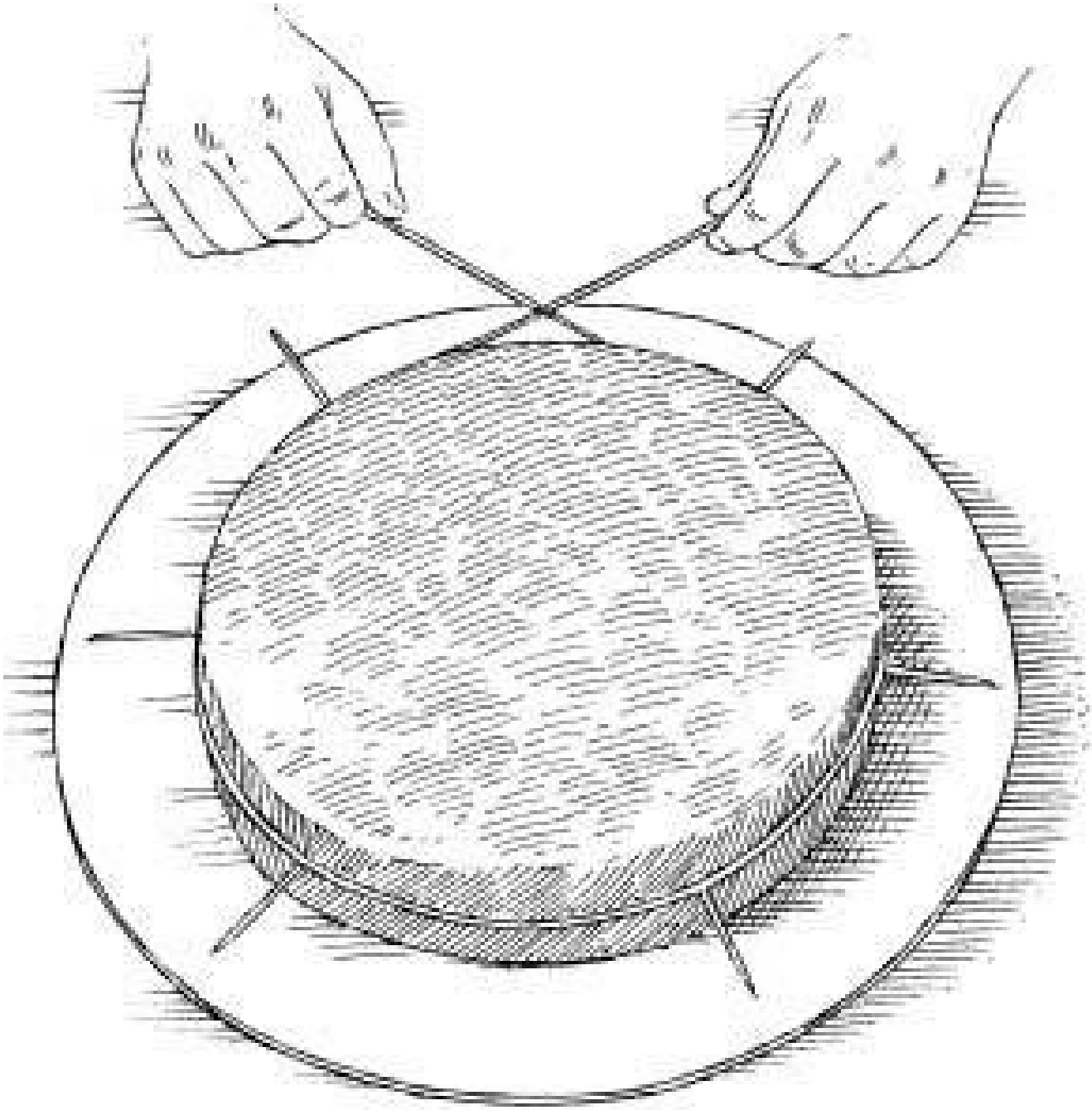

Figure 22.
Wrap a long piece of waxed dental floss around the circumference of the cake, making sure that the floss rests

directly on top of the toothpicks. Cross the ends of the floss and pull. As the floss tightens, it will cut through the cake.

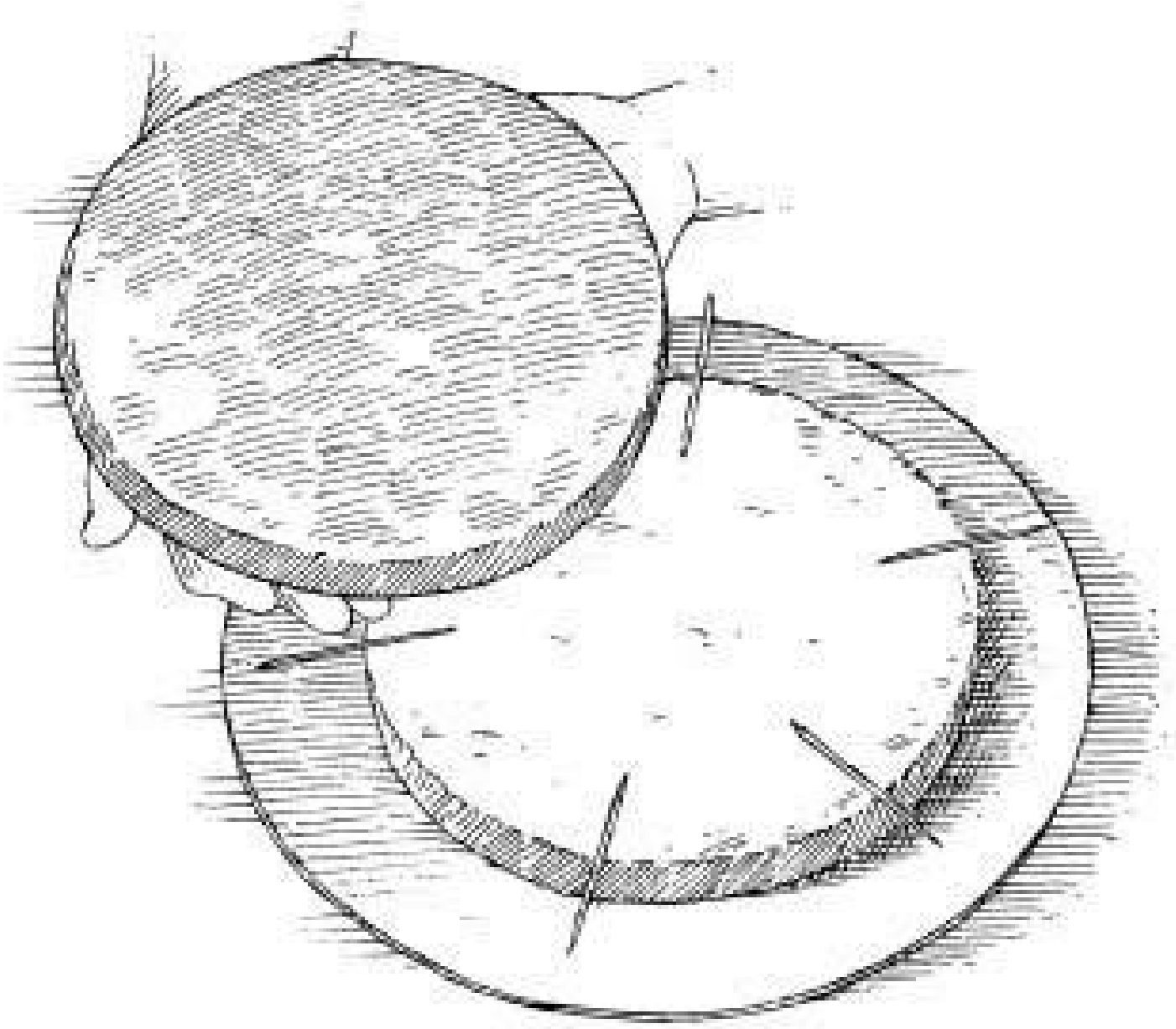

Figure 23.
Once the floss has cut through the cake, lift the top layer off and set it aside. Remove the toothpicks from the bottom layer.

Figure 24.
Fill the cake as desired and replace the layers, realigning the vertical cuts in the side of each layer. By putting the layers back

in their original orientation to each other, any unevenness in the way you cut them will be concealed.

Reduced-Guilt Chocolate Layer Cake with Meringue Frosting

NOTE: ***This cake is springier than the others in this chapter and not as rich. Egg whites keep the cake soft and moist, and with less fat the chocolate flavor and color are actually more intense.***

1 recipe Basic Chocolate Cake, with changes below
1 recipe Meringue Frosting

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Follow master recipe for Basic Chocolate Cake, making the following

changes: Whisk $^{1}/_{2}$ cup vegetable oil into cocoa mixture along with vanilla. Omitting step 3, whisk 1 cup sugar with flour and other dry ingredients in step 4. Rather than mixing wet and dry ingredients in three portions as in step 4, simply add cooled cocoa mixture to dry ingredients. Beat 4 large egg whites in bowl of electric mixer at low speed until foamy. Add $^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoon cream of tartar, raise speed to medium, and beat to soft peaks. Increase mixer speed to high and beat whites until stiff and glossy. Slowly sprinkle in remaining $^{1}/_{4}$ cup sugar and beat 15 seconds more. Fold egg whites gently but thoroughly into cocoa batter. Bake only 20 to 25 minutes.

2. When layers are cool, frost cake.

FROSTINGS AND FILLINGS

ANSWER TWO QUESTIONS BEFORE choosing a frosting. First, how will the frosting work with the cake layers? A rich, decadent chocolate ganache would overwhelm a delicate white cake. In addition to intensity, think about the flavors. An orange layer cake will work well with orange-flavored frosting, but complementary pairings such as walnut cake layers with maple meringue frosting also are possible.

The second basic question has to do

with decorations. In order to pipe rosettes or stars through a pastry bag, the frosting must be fairly stiff and dense. Meringue frostings and soft buttercreams are too loose. These frostings are better for swirling, combing, or stippling.

This chapter begins with two basic master recipes, each with five flavor variations. One frosting is designed for optimum flavor and silkiness; the other is sturdy enough for the most elaborate designs.

The buttercream frosting (our first master recipe) has a rich, smooth texture and strong buttery flavor. The consistency is soft and supple. European buttercreams often contain six egg yolks. We like an American-style buttercream

with just a few tablespoons of beaten whole egg. Made this way, the frosting tastes like butter and sugar and not eggs. However, we prefer not to omit the egg altogether. Even this small amount greatly improves the texture of the frosting and enhances the flavor of the other ingredients.

When you want to make more elaborate decorations, try our second master recipe for decorating frosting. This frosting contains more sugar, which gives it a denser, stiffer texture designed to hold its shape. We found it helpful to add a little lemon juice to cut the sweetness in this frosting.

These basic recipes are followed by a

series of frostings developed for specific cakes, such as whipped cream for a yellow layer cake with strawberries or maple meringue to coat an old-fashioned buttermilk cake. Refer to the individual cake recipes in the previous chapters for suggestions on which frosting will work best.

Master Recipe

Vanilla Buttercream

NOTE: ***Our favorite basic frosting has a smooth, creamy texture and rich, buttery flavor. The small amount of egg gives the frosting its silky texture and enhances the other flavors. This recipe yields three cups, enough to cover a standard two-layer cake. If you prefer for safety reasons not to use the raw egg, substitute an equal amount of milk. Keep in mind, however, that the texture will be less smooth. You can comb, swirl, or stipple***

this frosting (see figures 25–27) but cannot use a pastry bag. To vary the flavorings in the frosting, see suggestions.

$1^1/_2$ cups (3 sticks) unsalted butter, softened but still firm
3 cups confectioners' sugar, sifted
4 teaspoons vanilla extract
3 tablespoons beaten egg

Master Instructions

1. Beat butter in bowl of electric mixer at medium-high speed until fluffy, about 1 minute. Add sugar one spoonful at a time until incorporated. Beat, scraping down sides of bowl as needed, for 3 minutes.

2. Add vanilla and egg and beat until frosting is a fluffy mass, 3 to 5 minutes. (Buttercream may be covered and kept at room temperature for several hours or refrigerated in airtight container for 1 week. Bring to room temperature

before using.)

VARIATIONS:

Orange Buttercream

Follow master recipe, replacing vanilla with 3 tablespoons orange liqueur and $1^1/_2$ tablespoons grated orange zest.

Lemon Buttercream

Follow master recipe, replacing vanilla with $1^1/_2$ tablespoons lemon juice and $1^1/_2$ tablespoons grated lemon zest.

Almond Buttercream

Follow master recipe, reducing vanilla to 1 teaspoon and adding $^1/_2$ tablespoon

each almond extract and almond liqueur.

Coffee Buttercream

Follow master recipe, stirring $1^1/_2$ tablespoons instant espresso and $1^1/_2$ tablespoons coffee liqueur into 1 tablespoon vanilla until coffee dissolves.

Chocolate Buttercream

Follow master recipe, beating in half the sugar, then adding 4 ounces melted and cooled bittersweet chocolate. Beat in remaining sugar and reduce vanilla to 1 tablespoon and beaten egg to 2 tablespoons.

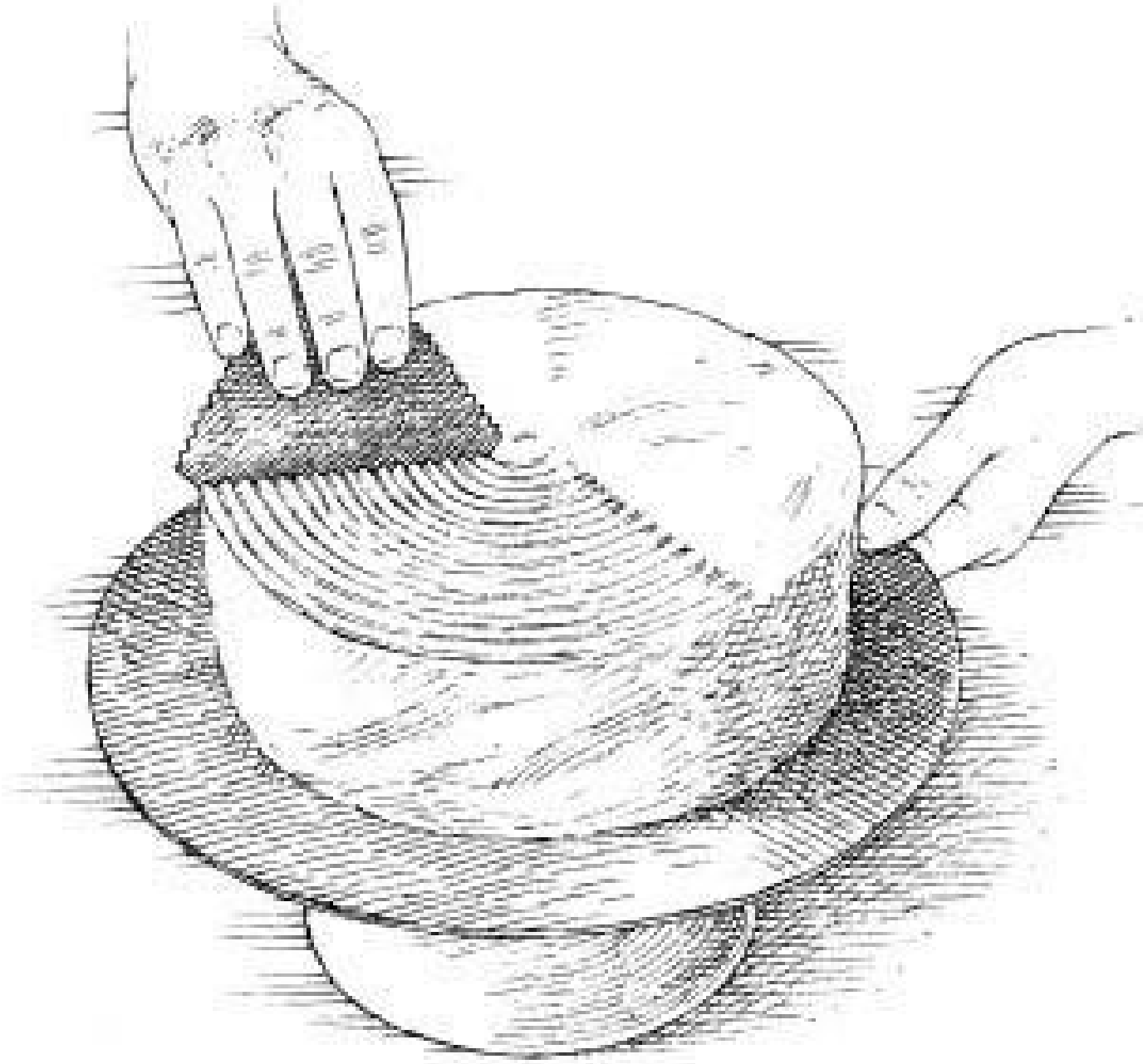

Figure 25.
Once the cake is completely frosted, you may use a cake comb to create concentric furrows on the cake top and/or sides.

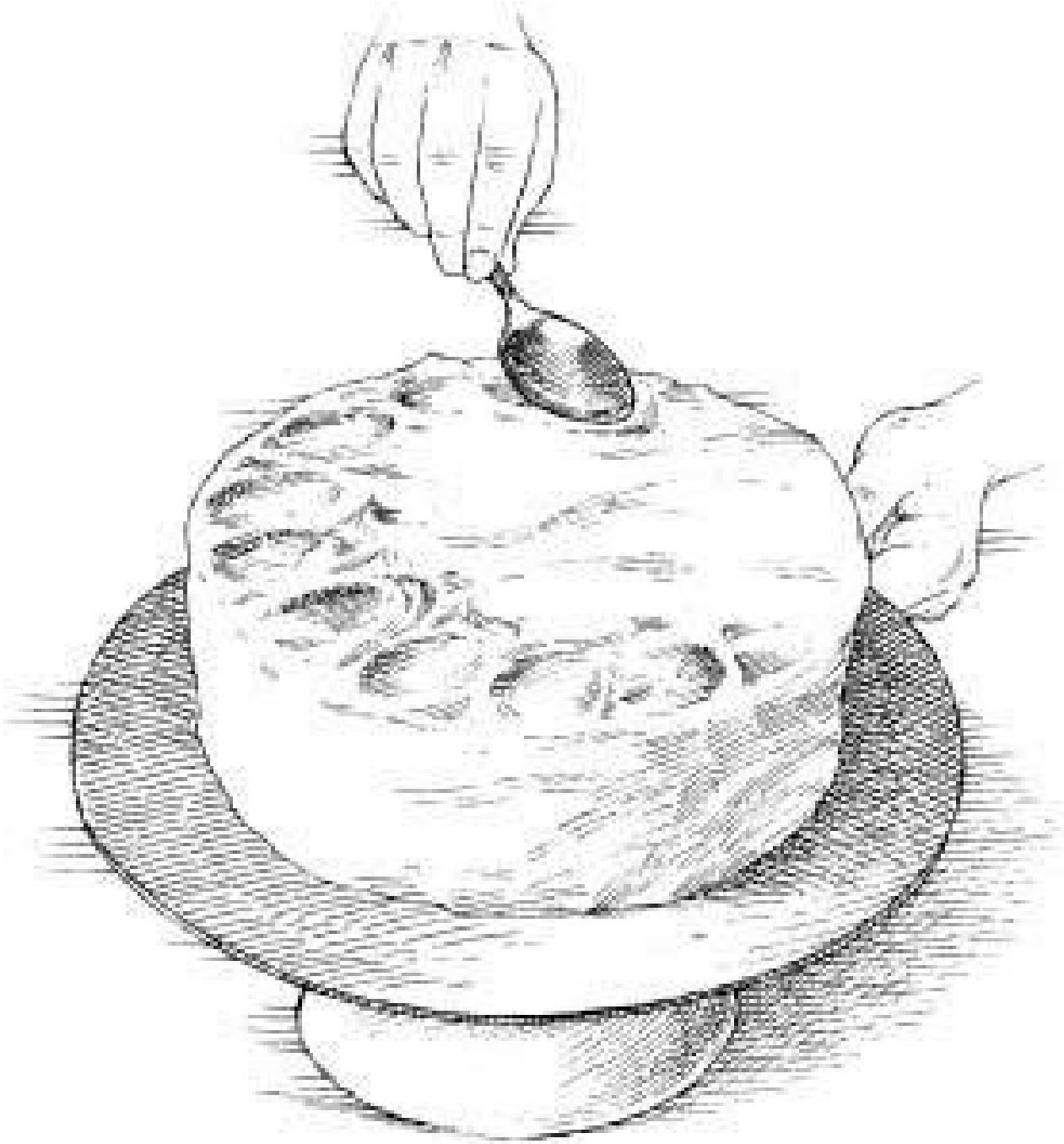

Figure 26.
Or, use the back of a tablespoon to make decorative swirls on the cake top and sides.

Figure 27.
The tip of a metal spatula may be used to stipple the top and sides of the cake.

Master Recipe

Vanilla Decorating Frosting

NOTE: ***This frosting contains more sugar than the Vanilla Buttercream, making it firmer and better suited to piping through a pastry bag. The lemon juice is added to help cut the sweetness. This recipe yields about four cups, enough for elaborate designs on a standard two-layer cake. See figures 28–33 for information on how to assemble and fill a pastry bag.***

See chapter 6 for decorating ideas. To vary the flavorings in the frosting, see suggestions.

$1^1/_2$ cups (3 sticks) unsalted butter, softened but still firm

6 cups confectioners' sugar, sifted

$2^1/_2$ tablespoons vanilla extract

$1^1/_2$ tablespoons milk

$^3/_4$ teaspoon lemon juice

Pinch salt

Master Instructions

1. Beat butter in bowl of electric mixer at medium-high speed until fluffy, about 1 minute. Add remaining ingredients and beat at low speed until sugar is moistened, about 45 seconds.

2. Increase speed to medium (or high if using handheld mixer); beat, scraping down sides of bowl as needed, until creamy and fluffy, about $1^{1}/_{2}$ minutes. Avoid overbeating, or frosting will become too soft. (Frosting may be

covered and kept at room temperature for several hours or refrigerated in airtight container for several days. Bring to room temperature before using.)

VARIATIONS:

Orange Decorating Frosting

Follow master recipe, replacing vanilla and lemon juice with 4 tablespoons orange liqueur and 2 tablespoons grated orange zest.

Lemon Decorating Frosting

Follow master recipe, replacing vanilla with 2 tablespoons grated lemon zest and increasing lemon juice to 2

tablespoons.

Almond Decorating Frosting

Follow master recipe, reducing vanilla to $1^1/_2$ teaspoons and adding 1 tablespoon each almond extract and almond liqueur. Omit lemon juice.

Coffee Decorating Frosting

Follow master recipe, stirring 2 tablespoons instant espresso and 2 tablespoons coffee liqueur into 1 tablespoon vanilla until coffee dissolves. Omit lemon juice.

Chocolate Decorating Frosting

Follow master recipe, reducing vanilla to $1^1/_2$ tablespoons and omitting lemon

juice. When frosting is fluffy, beat in 6 ounces melted and cooled bittersweet chocolate.

Figure 28.
A pastry bag allows for more elaborate decorations. With a new pastry bag, you may have to remove some of the pointed end

to accommodate the plastic coupler. First, unscrew the ring. Insert the coupler (the cone-shaped piece of plastic), pointed end first, up into the narrow end of the pastry bag, pushing it in tightly.

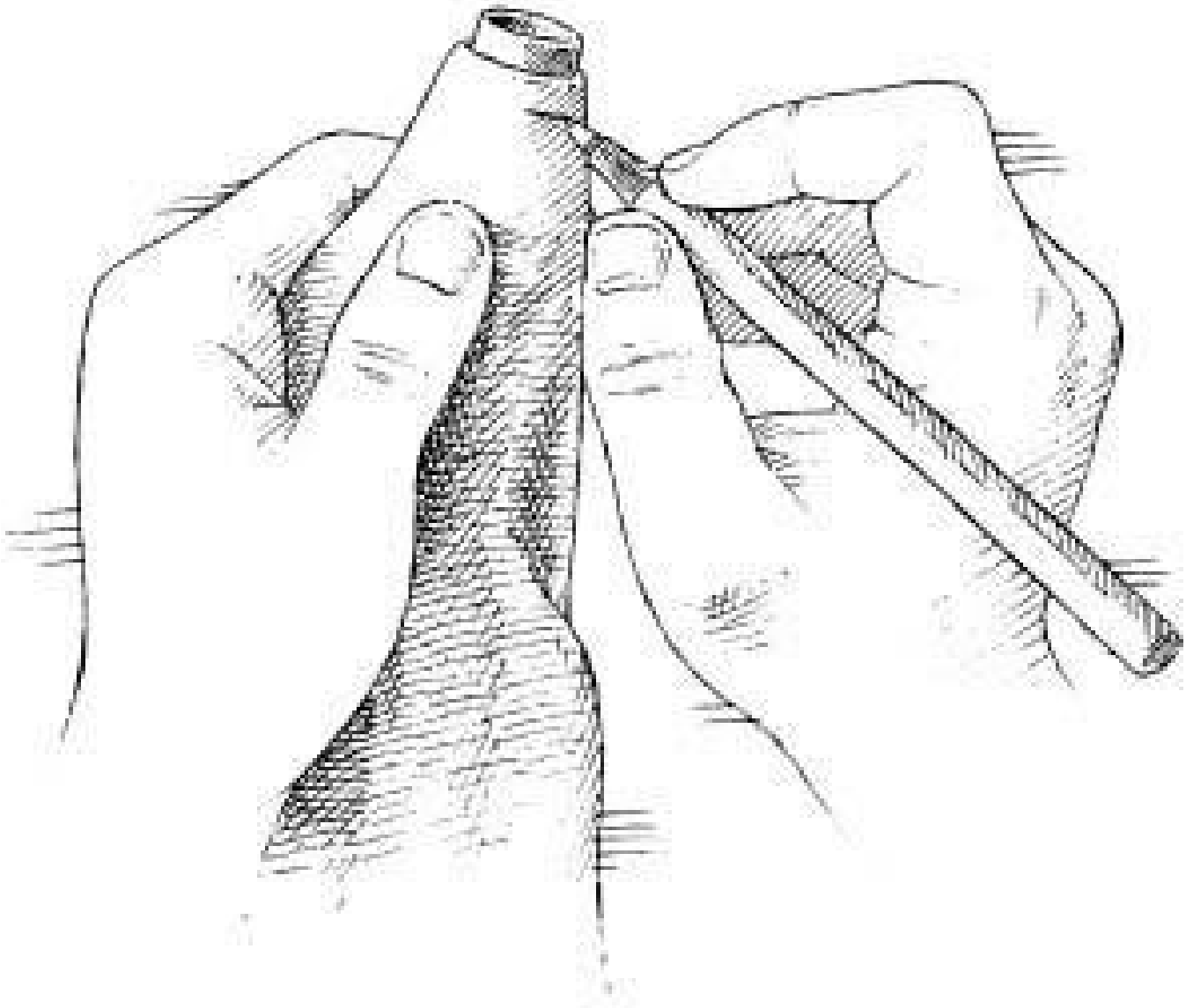

Figure 29.
With your fingernail or a pen, make a line between the first and second groove (thread) on the coupler.

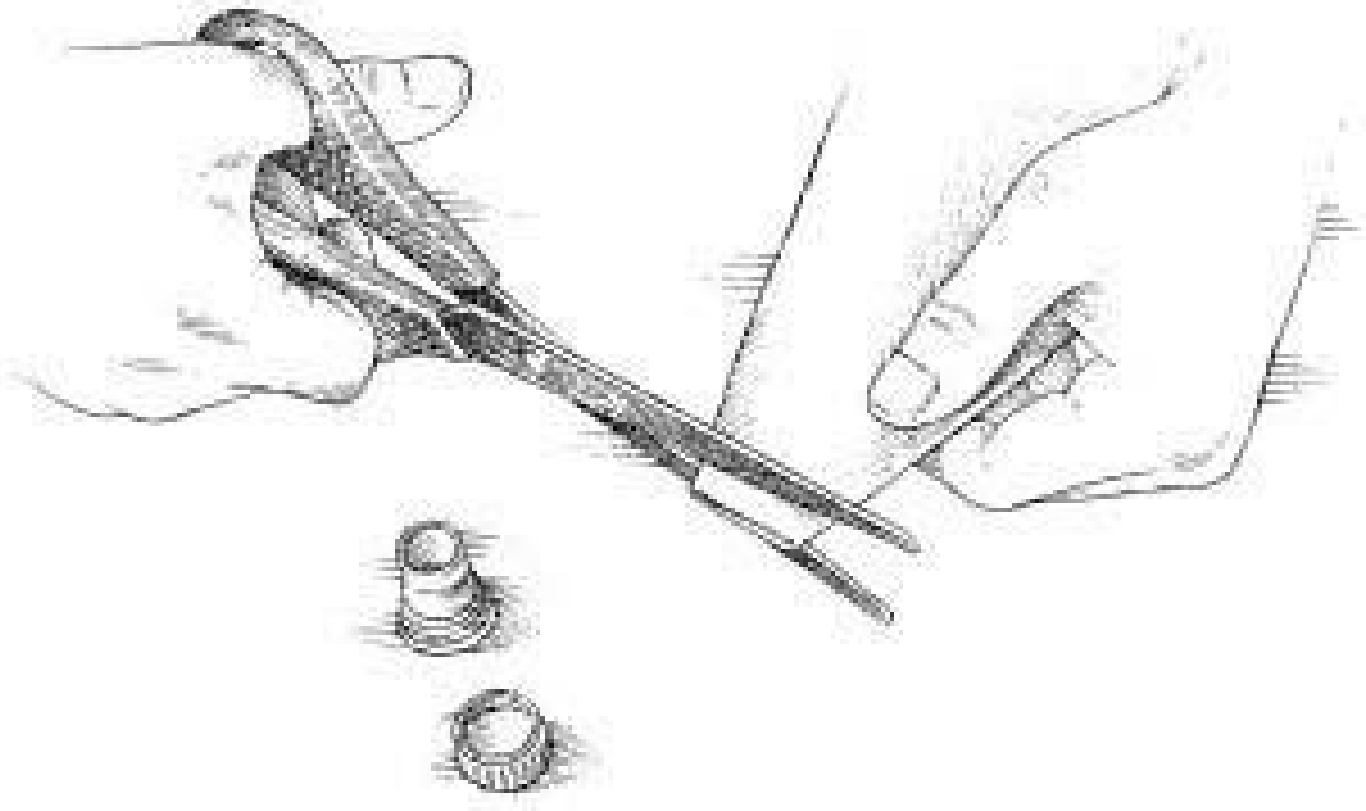

Figure 30.
Remove the coupler and cut away the bag at the mark. Do not cut away too much of the bag, or the coupler and icing will slip through the opening.

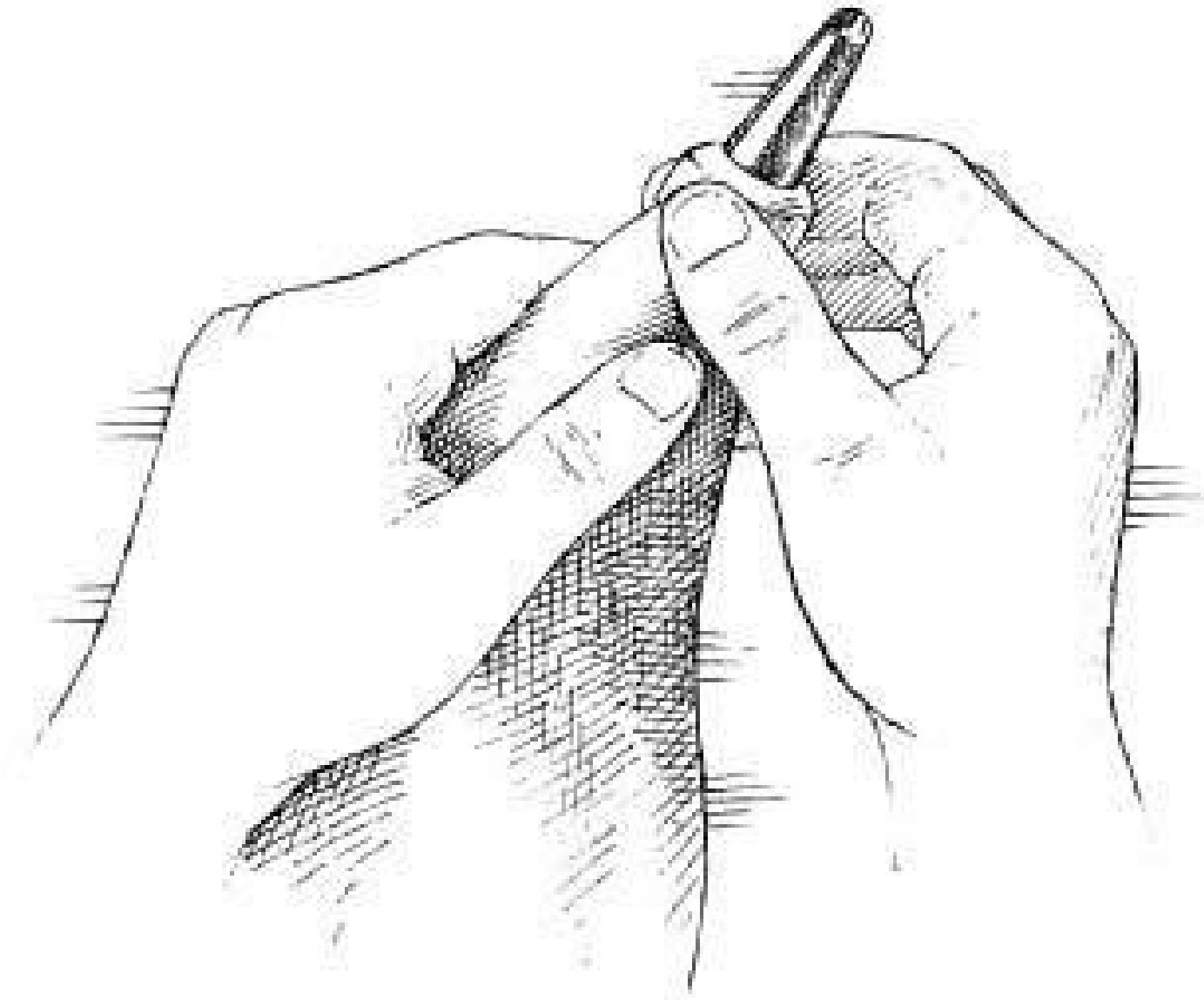

Figure 31.
Reinsert the coupler to expose the threads. Place a metal decorating tip over the coupler, and screw the ring tightly to secure the tip. With the coupler in place, you

can change tips without having to empty the pastry bag.

Figure 32.
To fill a pastry bag, make a 3-inch cuff at the top of the pastry bag. With one hand, hold the bag open under the cuff, and with the other hand, fill the bag half full using a rubber spatula. Pack the frosting into the bag to eliminate air spaces.

Figure 33.
Pull the cuff back to its original position. Twist the bag just above the icing and grip it slightly in

the curve of your hand between your thumb and forefinger. Consider this grip to be a "lock." Gentle pressure from the other fingers of that hand squeezes the icing out of the tip while you use your other hand to guide the bag.

Chocolate Cream Frosting

NOTE: ***Chocolate melted with hot cream makes a thick, rich frosting that takes well to swirling. This frosting has an intense chocolate flavor that is best suited to chocolate cakes.***

12 ounces bittersweet or semisweet chocolate, broken into pieces

$1\frac{2}{3}$ cups heavy cream

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup light corn syrup

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place chocolate in workbowl of food processor fitted with metal blade.

Process until chocolate has texture of coarse sand.

2. Bring cream to boil in small saucepan. With food processor running, pour hot cream through feed tube. Add corn syrup and process just until combined.

3. Scrape frosting into bowl set over larger bowl of ice water. Stir often until frosting thickens to spreadable consistency, about 15 minutes. (Frosting can be covered and kept at room temperature for several hours or refrigerated in airtight container for

several days. Bring to room temperature before using.)

Meringue Frosting

NOTE: ***A candy thermometer will guarantee the best results. Otherwise, test the syrup by dropping a small amount into a glass of ice water. When the syrup reaches 238 degrees, it should form a soft, gumlike ball in the ice water. This frosting contains no fat. The frosting does not hold up very well, however, so eat the frosted cake within a day.***

3 large egg whites
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
$^{1}/_{8}$ teaspoon cream of tartar
Pinch salt
$1^{1}/_{4}$ cups sugar

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Beat egg whites in bowl of electric mixer at slow speed until frothy, about 1 minute. Add vanilla, cream of tartar, and salt. Beat at medium speed to soft peaks, about 1 minute. Increase to high speed and beat whites to stiff, glossy peaks, 1 to 2 minutes more. Turn off mixer.

2. Meanwhile, combine sugar and $^{1}/_{3}$ cup water in small saucepan. Bring to boil over high heat, gently swirling pan by handle. Cover and boil 2 minutes, then carefully uncover and continue to boil until candy thermometer registers 238 degrees.

3. Return mixer to high speed and add syrup in thin, steady stream. Continue to beat, scraping down sides of bowl as needed, until frosting is cool, 7 to 10 minutes. Use immediately.

VARIATION:

For a **Maple Meringue Frosting**, replace sugar and water with $1^{1}/_{4}$ cups maple syrup. Place syrup in large, deep saucepan. When syrup comes to boil, reduce heat to medium, cover, and boil 2 minutes. Remove cover and boil until syrup reaches 238 degrees.

Chocolate Butter Icing

NOTE: ***This rich, glassy icing is designed to cover dense chocolate cakes such as Sour Cream—Fudge Layer Cake. Choose this icing when you want a shiny, smooth finish.***

9 ounces bittersweet or semisweet chocolate

$^1/_2$ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter

$^1/_3$ cup light corn syrup

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Melt chocolate and butter in medium bowl set over pan of almost-simmering water. Stir in corn syrup.

2. Set bowl over larger bowl of ice water, stirring occasionally, until frosting is just thick enough to spread, about 15 minutes. (Frosting can be covered and kept at room temperature for several hours.)

Whipped Cream Frosting

NOTE: ***In warm weather, chill the beaters and the bowl in the freezer for ten minutes before starting this recipe.***

$2^1/_2$ cups heavy cream, chilled
$^3/_4$ cup confectioners' sugar, sifted
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Beat cream in bowl of electric mixer at medium speed until thickened, about 3 minutes.

2. Add sugar and vanilla and beat,

scraping down sides of bowl as needed, until stiff, about 1 minute. (Frosting can be covered and refrigerated for several hours. Briefly rewhip if necessary.)

Coconut-Pecan Filling

NOTE: ***This filling yields about four cups, enough to cover all four layers of the German Chocolate Layer Cake. Toast pecans in 350-degree oven for 8 minutes before chopping.***

4 large egg yolks
1 cup sugar
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, softened
1 cup heavy cream
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 1/2 cups chopped pecans, toasted
2 cups lightly packed

sweetened flaked coconut

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Mix yolks, sugar, and salt in medium bowl. Beat in butter, then gradually add cream and vanilla.

2. Pour mixture into medium nonreactive saucepan. Cook over low heat, stirring constantly, until mixture is puffy and just begins to thicken, 15 to 20 minutes.

3. Pour mixture into medium bowl and cool to room temperature. Stir in pecans and coconut. (Frosting can be covered and kept at room temperature for several

hours.)

Lemon Curd Filling

NOTE: ***This thick filling is quite lemony and not terribly sweet. It will thicken as it cools.***

2 large egg yolks
$^1/_4$ cup sugar
2 tablespoons lemon juice
1 teaspoon grated lemon zest
2 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Beat yolks and sugar in medium nonreactive saucepan until smooth. Stir in juice, zest, and butter and set pan over medium-low heat. Cook, stirring

constantly, until curd thickens and becomes rich yellow color, about 3 minutes. Do not let mixture boil.

2. Pour curd through strainer. Place piece of plastic wrap directly on top of curd and refrigerate until chilled. (Lemon curd can be refrigerated in airtight container for several weeks.)

DECORATING IDEAS

CAKE DECORATING CAN BE SIMPLE OR elaborate, depending on the amount of time you have and the desired effect. Figures 5 through 11 outline our preferred method for frosting a standard two layer cake. If using a soft buttercream, see Figures 25 through 27 for tips on combing, swirling, or stippling the frosting.

When you want a more professional look, you will need to use a decorating frosting and pastry bag. Figures 28 through 33 demonstrate how to assemble

and fill a pastry bag. The illustrations in this chapter (*see* figures 34–41) offer some ideas for using a pastry bag.

A few points to remember. We find that a 14- or 16-inch nylon or polyester pastry bag is best for most uses. Advanced bakers may want a smaller bag suited to fine decorating as well.

To prolong the life of a pastry bag, wash it thoroughly in hot water after each use. If hot water is not up to the task, soak the bag in hot water splashed with a little vinegar. Air-dry the pastry bag before storing. Inverting the bag over a wine bottle can speed up this process.

Do not overfill the bag or it can be difficult to control the flow of frosting

out through the tip. A bag that is two-thirds full is easy to work with.

If you are writing "Happy Birthday" or some other message on top of the cake, do this first; then apply other designs. That way, if you make a mistake, you can remove the writing, refrost the top of the cake, and try again.

When working with a pastry bag, keep a damp cloth nearby to wipe clean the opening on the decorative tip.

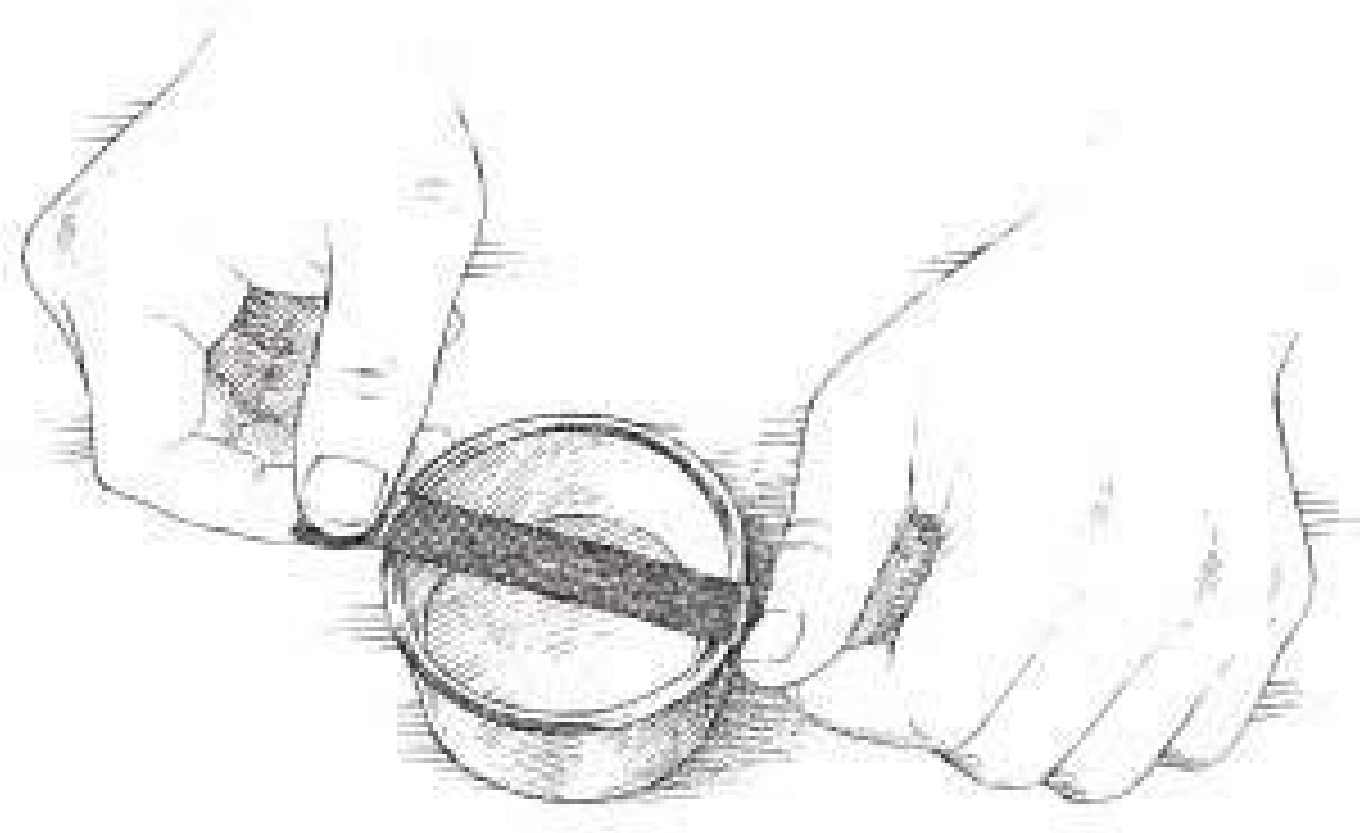

Figure 34.
Side swags are one of the simplest designs that can be applied before the top border is done. Put a piece of tape across a cookie cutter or jar lid, making sure that the edge of the tape falls directly across the middle to create a semicircle.

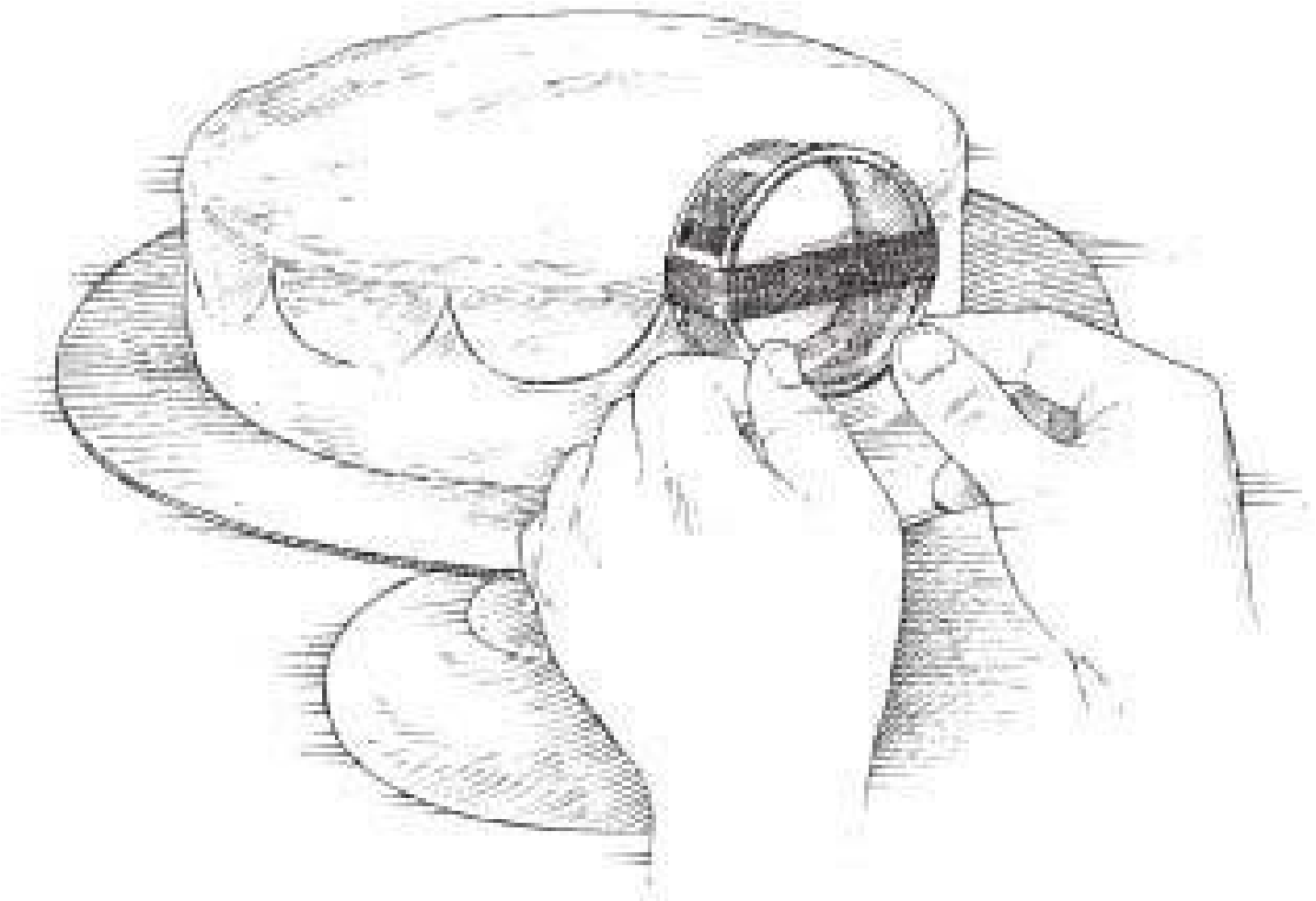

Figure 35.
Mark off sections around the cake by lining up the tape with the top edge of the cake and pressing the open semicircle into the icing.

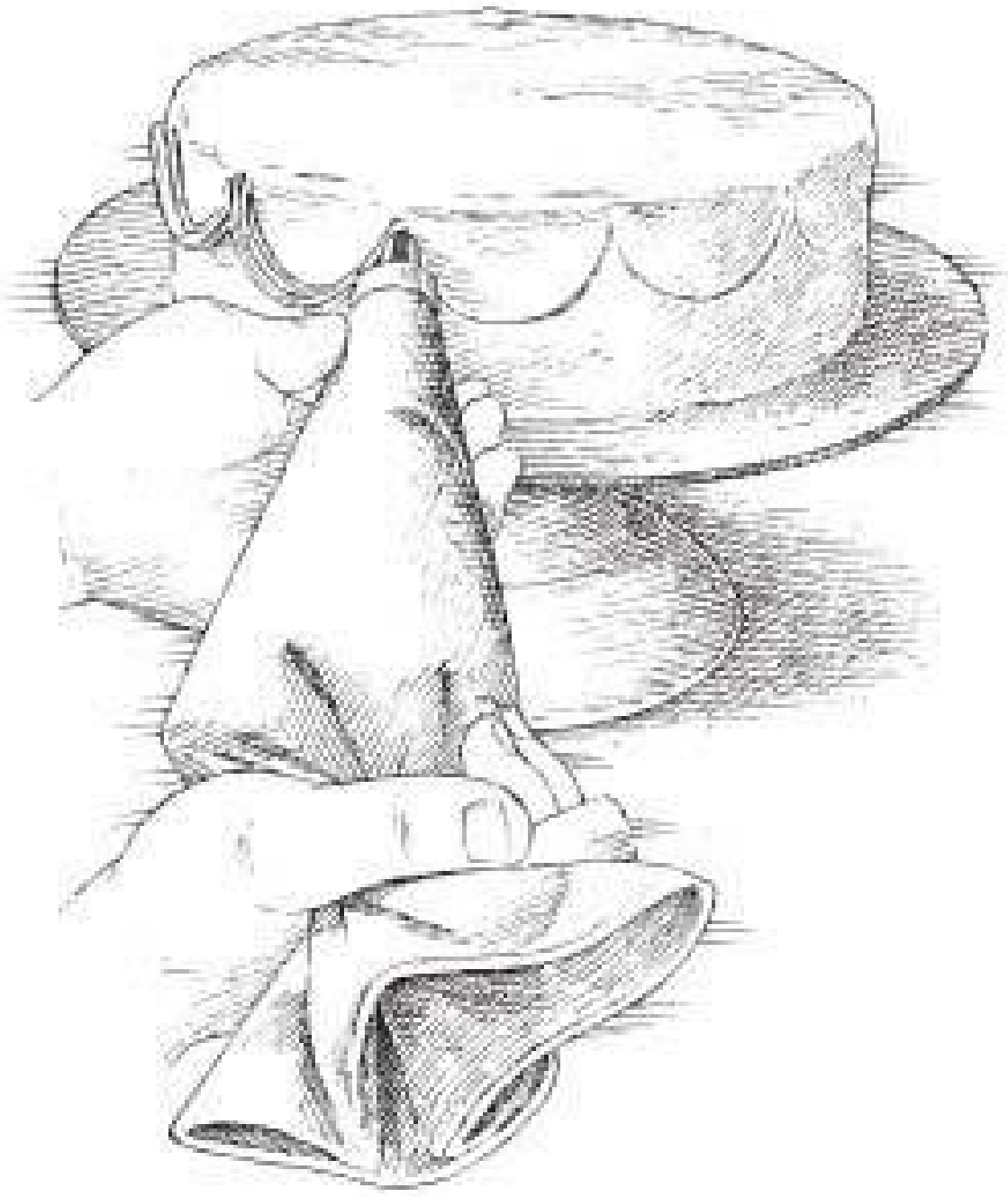

Figure 36.
Pipe stars or swirls over these semicircles to create a side swag design.

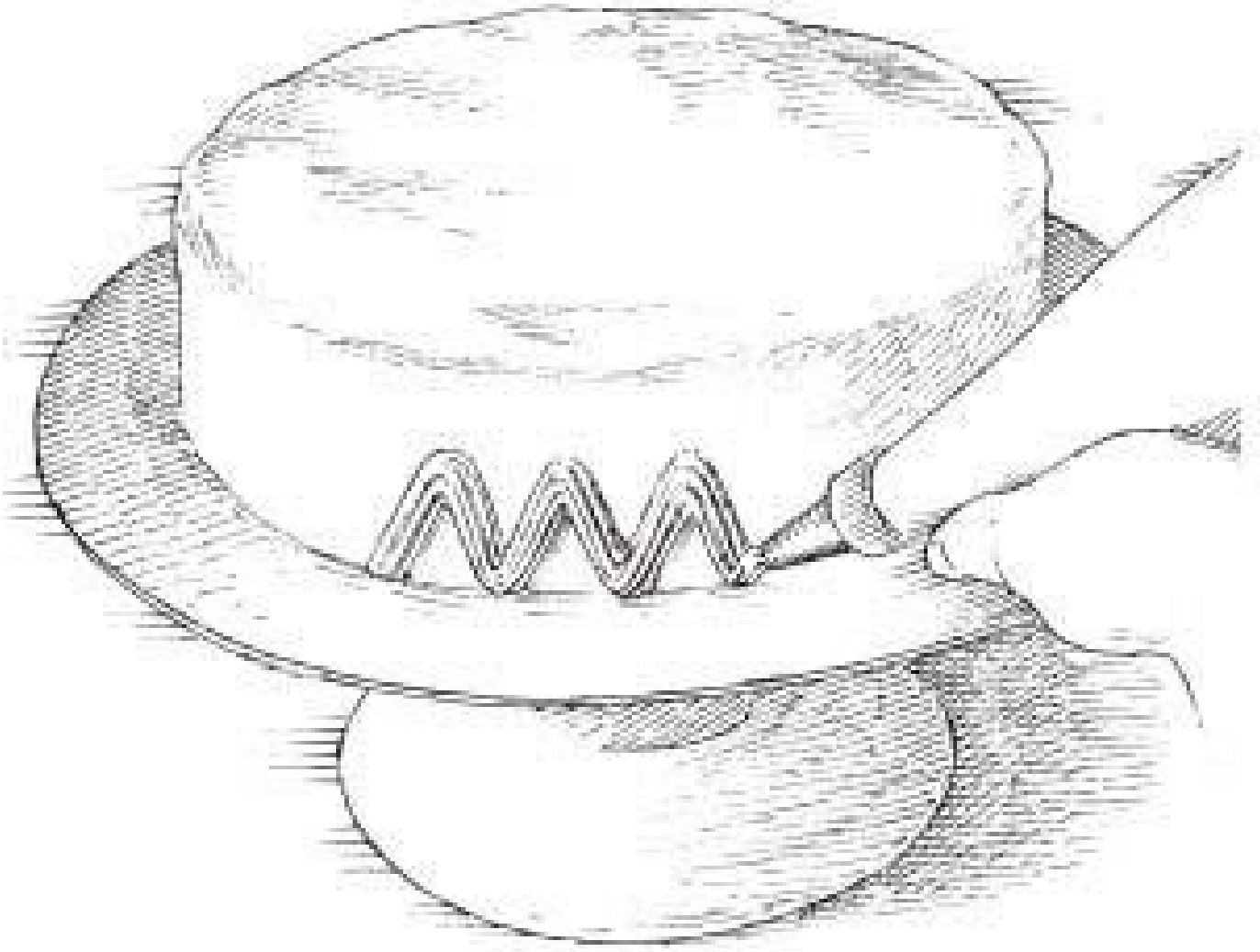

Figure 37.
To make a zigzag border, hold the pastry bag at a 45-degree angle with the tip touching the cake's bottom edge. Using steady pressure, move along the edge, squeezing the icing in an up-and-down movement, being careful

not to go too high. After you have gone 3 or 4 inches, stop squeezing at the point where the tip is near the platter and partially rotate the cake stand. Repeat this process until you have gone completely around the cake and joined the last stroke to the first.

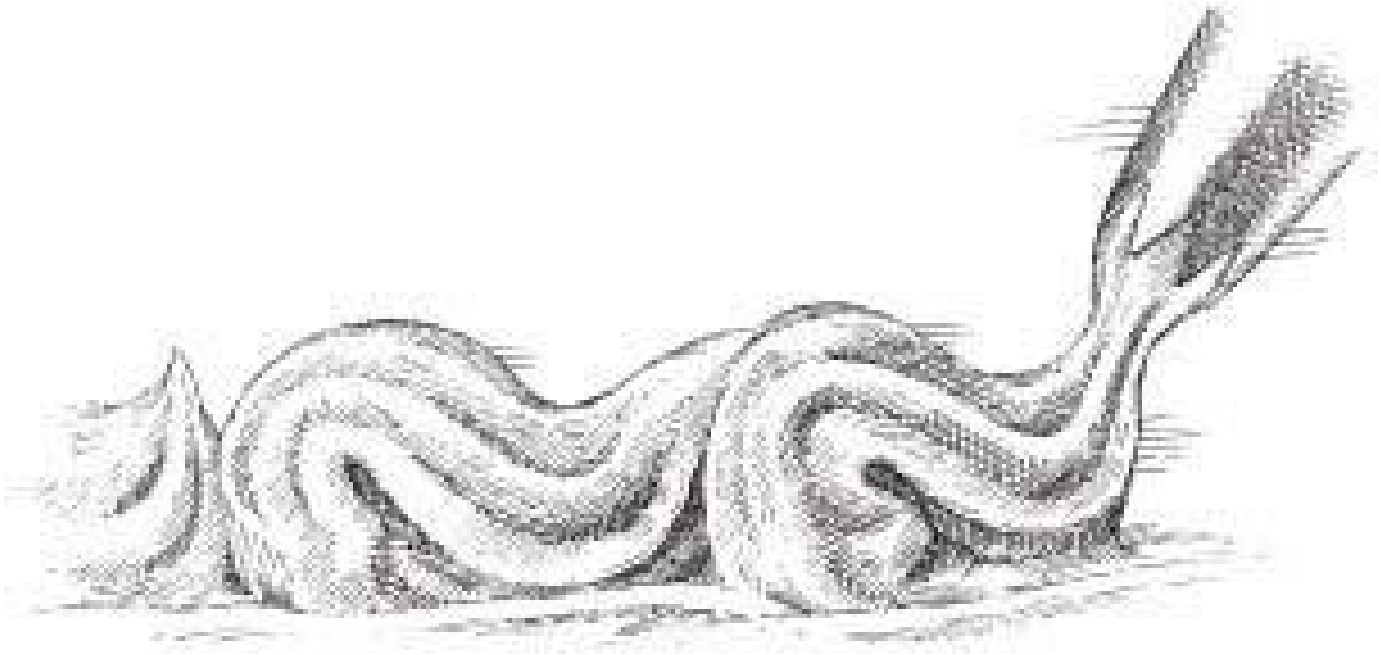

Figure 38.
To give a cake a finished look, add borders to the top and/or bottom edge. To make a shell border, hold the pastry bag at a 45-degree angle. Using medium pressure, squeeze out a puff of icing. As you move to the right, lessen your pressure on the bag to make a "tail." Stop the pressure and lift up the tip.

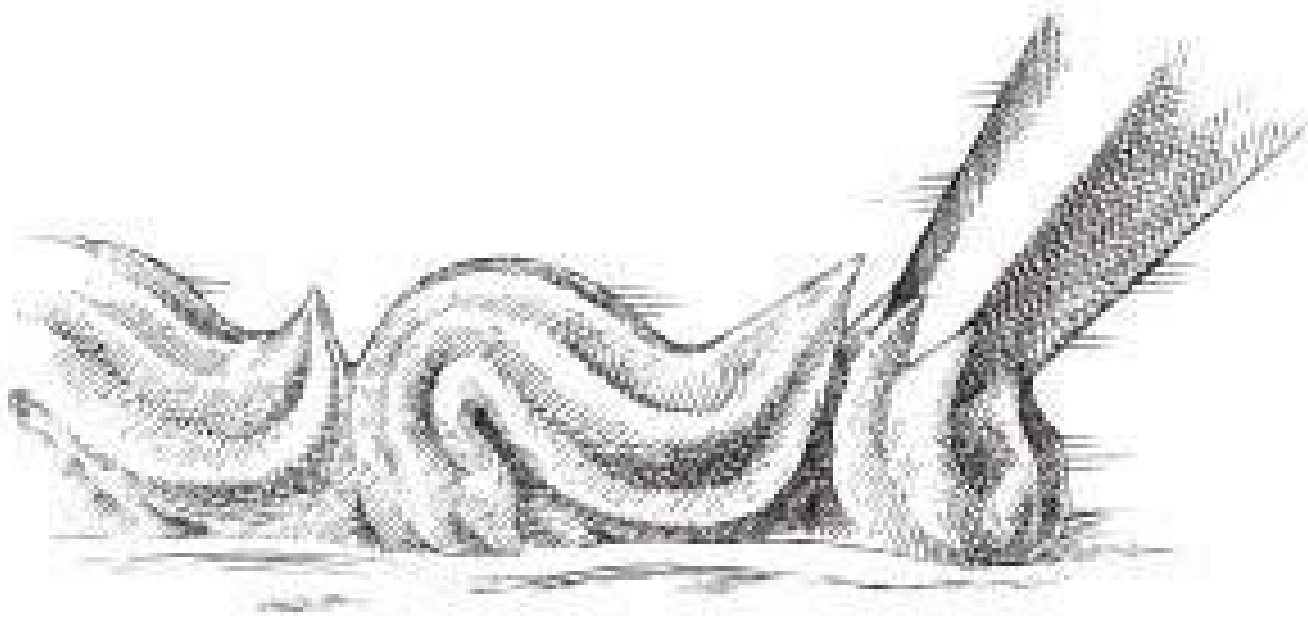

Figure 39.
Make another puff, overlapping it onto the end of the first tail, and again move to the right and release the pressure to create another tail. Repeat this process to create a shell border all the way around the cake.

Figure 40.
Rosettes and stars may be used to make a border or decorate the top of a cake. Both shapes are made with the pastry bag at a sharp angle. When repeating either shape, space each new one so that it touches the previous one. Rosettes are made by squeezing out a tiny circle of icing, never

changing the angle at which the bag is held.

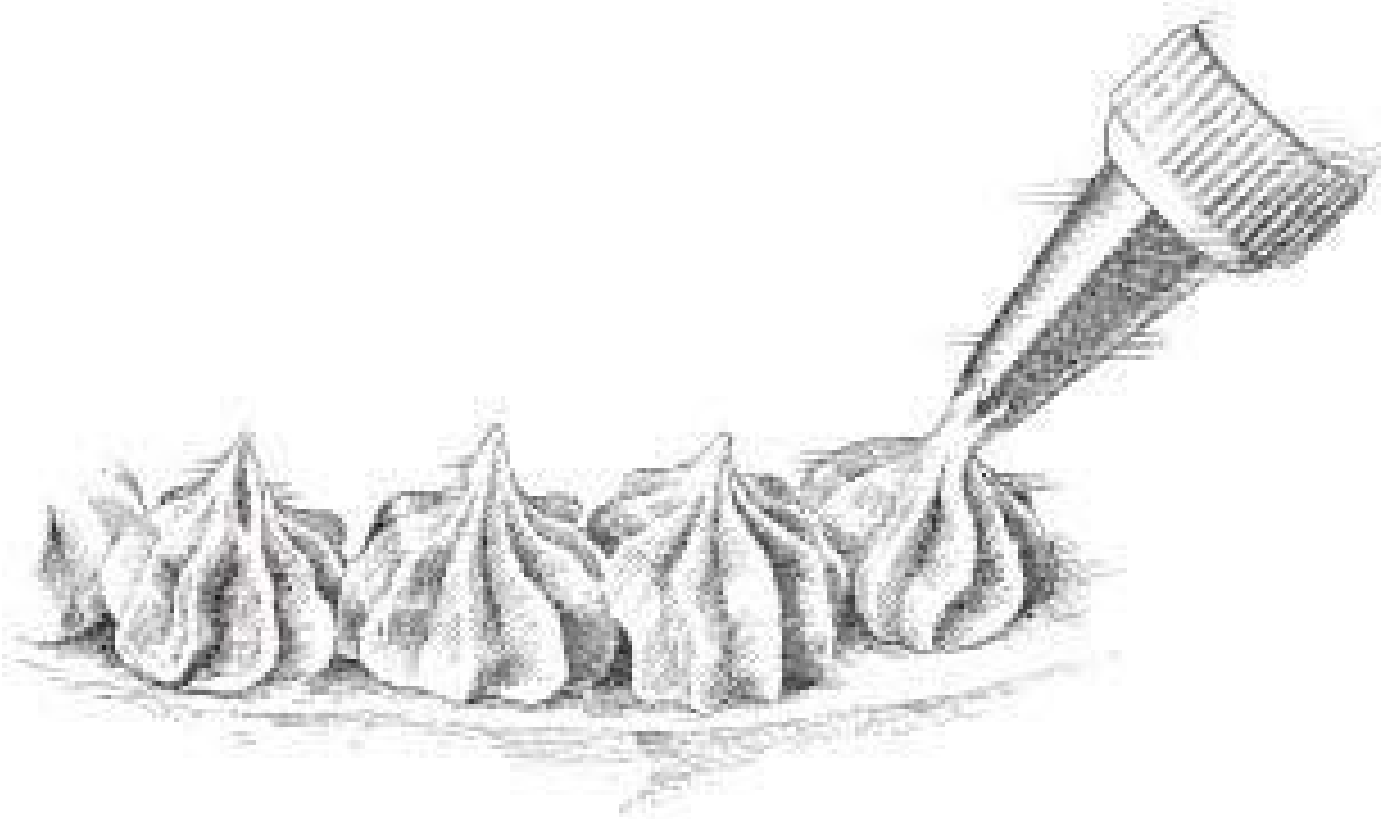

Figure 41.
Stars are made by squeezing out a bit of icing, letting up on the pressure, then immediately lifting the tip.

HOW TO MAKE A PIE

Pie Crusts

Apple Pie

Summer Fruit Pies

Custard Pie

Pumpkin Pie

Pecan Pie

Cream Pies

Lemon Meringue Pie

Key Lime Pie

PIE CRUSTS

Making good pie crust can be a simple procedure, but almost everyone who has tried can tell horror stories of crusts that turned out hard, soggy, flavorless, oversalted, underbaked, too crumbly, or unworkable. Advice is easy to come by: One expert says that butter is the secret to perfect crust; others swear by vegetable shortening, lard, or even canola oil. Some omit salt, some omit sugar, some insist that working the dough by hand is essential, some use cake flour in addition to all-purpose flour, some

freeze the dough, some do away with the rolling pin. . .and so on.

INGREDIENTS

Simple as it can be, pie crust—essentially a combination of fat, flour, and water—raises numerous questions: What are the ideal proportions of the main ingredients? What else should be added for character?

FAT

The most controversial ingredient in pastry is fat. We've found that while all-butter crusts taste good, they are not as flaky and fine-textured as those made with some shortening, which are our favorites. All-shortening crusts have

great texture but lack flavor, oil-based crusts are flat and entirely unappealing, and those made with lard are not only heavy and strongly flavored but out of favor due to health concerns. We've experimented with a variety of combinations and ultimately settled on a proportion of three parts butter to two parts shortening as optimal for both flavor and texture.

There's a reason shortening works: Vegetable shortenings such as Crisco are made from vegetable oil that has been hydrogenated to incorporate air and to raise its melting point above room temperature. (This is much the same process as "creaming" butter and sugar, in which the sharp sugar crystals cut into

the fat to create pockets of air.) The absence of hydrogenation is the reason that regular vegetable oil, which holds no more air than water, makes for poor pie doughs, whereas Crisco, which is about 10 percent gas, does a good job of lightening and tenderizing.

We also experimented with the relative proportions of fat and flour and finally settled on a ratio of two parts flour to one part fat. This ratio results in a relatively high-fat crust (you will find other recipes containing four parts of flour to one part of fat). But we found that the two-to-one proportion produces crusts that are easy to work and, when baked, are more tender and flavorful

than any other.

FLOUR

The protein content of flour is important in any sort of baking. Bread flour, which is high in protein, produces a strong, elastic dough. Low-protein pastry flour makes for a soft, tender crumb, the best for cakes. Pie crusts fall in between and thus are best made with all-purpose flour, a combination of bread and cake flours. No matter what we've tried—substituting cornstarch for part of the all-purpose flour (a cookie-baking trick that increases tenderness), adding a quarter teaspoon of baking powder to increase rise, or mixing cake flour with the all-purpose flour (again, to increase

tenderness)—we've always come back to plain old all-purpose flour.

WATER

We experimented with a variety of liquid ingredients, such as buttermilk, milk, and cider vinegar, a common ingredient in many pastry recipes. None of these improved on our basic recipe, so we recommend that you stick with ice water.

SALT AND SUGAR

After testing amounts ranging from a quarter teaspoon to as much as two tablespoons, we settled on one teaspoon of salt and two tablespoons of sugar for a double-crust pie, amounts that enhance

the flavor of the dough without shouting out their presence.

TECHNIQUE

You can make a pie dough by hand, but the food processor is faster and easier and does the best job of cutting the fat into the flour. First cut the butter in cubes. Then pulse the butter and flour together five times, add the shortening, and pulse four more times. Proper mixing is important: If you undermix, the crust will shrink when baked and become hard and crackly. If you overprocess, you'll get a crumbly, cookielike dough.

When you've combined the flour and

fat, dump the dough into a bowl and add the ice water. Use a rubber spatula and a folding motion to mix in the water; this exposes all of the dough to moisture without overworking it, something that can happen if the dough is left in the food processor and the water is pulsed in. Using a spatula to incorporate water allows you to minimize the amount of water used (less water means a more tender dough) and reduces the likelihood of overworking the dough.

Once you have a ball of dough, divide it in half (if making a double-crust pie), flatten each piece into a disk, wrap each one in plastic wrap, and rest the dough in the refrigerator for 30 minutes. You can give the dough a longer rest period

(an hour is best if the weather is warm), but then let it warm up slightly before attempting to roll it.

This dough is easy to roll if you follow a few basic guidelines. Flour the work surface very lightly; too much flour will be absorbed by the dough and cause it to toughen. If the dough seems too soft to roll, refrigerate it again rather than adding more flour.

EQUIPMENT

You need a tool to make the dough, something to roll it out with, and then a vessel for baking the pie. Here are our recommendations.

FOOD PROCESSOR

Our first choice for cutting fat into flour to make pie dough is a food processor. Look for a machine with an 11-cup capacity bowl; it should weigh at least 10 pounds, so it won't jump around on the counter. We recommend models made by Kitchen Aid and Cuisinart.

PASTRY BLENDER

Of course, bakers made pies long before the invention of the food processor. There are three low-tech options for cutting the fat into the flour: a pastry blender, a fork, and your fingertips.

If you don't have access to a food processor, we recommend the pastry blender, a D-shaped device consisting of a straight handle with a set of stiff wires

bowed from one end to the other. A pastry blender will not cut the fat into the flour quite as easily as a food processor, but it is more efficient than a fork.

As for your fingertips, this method works for some experienced bakers, but many cooks find that the heat from their fingers melts the butter. In our tests, handmade pie crusts turned out less flaky and more brittle than those made in a food processor or with a pastry blender.

ROLLING PIN

There are three main types of rolling pins: one basic American style and two French styles.

American-style pins have a metal

dowel running through the center, handles on either side, and are usually 10 to 15 inches long, not including handles. Their ball bearings and handles allow extra pressure to be exerted during rolling, which makes them best suited for heavy bread doughs.

French pins are usually 18 to 20 inches long and have no handles. This type of rolling pin is simply a round length of wood, like a dowel, which can be used on any type of dough. Some French pins are tapered, with the ends narrower than the middle. This is the type we recommend for pie making. The tapered ends make this kind of rolling pin lighter and more delicate, and therefore more precise. It's also easier to

make a perfectly round crust by anchoring one end of the pin in the center of the dough with one hand and pivoting the pin with the other hand.

PIE PLATE

We tested the three main types of pie plate—glass, ceramic, and metal—and found that a Pyrex glass pie plate did the best job of browning the crust, both when filled and "baked blind," as explained on Prebaked Pie Shells. Several metal pie plates also browned quite well, but the glass pie plate has a number of other advantages.

Because you can see through a Pyrex plate, it's easy to judge just how brown the bottom crust has become during

baking. With a metal pie plate, it's easy to pull the pie out of the oven too soon, when the bottom crust is still quite pale. A second feature we like about the traditional Pyrex plate is its wide rim, which makes the plate easier to take in and out of the oven and also provides more support for fluted edges than does a thin rim. Finally, because glass is nonreactive, you can store a pie filled with acidic fruit and not worry about metal giving the fruit an off flavor.

Pyrex pie plates do heat up more quickly than metal pie plates, so pies may finish baking a bit sooner than you expect, especially if you are following a recipe that was tested in a metal plate. All the times in our recipes are based on

baking in a glass pie plate; if baking in metal, you may need to add two to three minutes for empty crusts and five minutes for filled pies.

DOUBLE-CRUST PIES

Apple and summer fruit pies—such as blueberry, cherry, peach, and strawberry-rhubarb, apple and summer fruit pies—require a top and bottom crust. For these pies, one piece of dough is fitted into the pan, the filling is added, the second piece of dough is placed on top, and the pie is baked.

As an alternative to our standard dough recipe for a double-crust pie, we also provide a recipe for a firmer pie

dough. We accomplish this by reducing the total amount of fat in the recipe by about 30 percent. The reduction in fat results in some loss of flavor, but the dough's firmness makes it a better candidate for decorative edging such as crosshatching and scalloping since the dough is easier to shape. Since our firm dough has less fat, decorative edging holds up better in the oven.

Another decorative touch that can be used when making apple or summer fruit pies is the lattice-top crust. We recommend weaving the strips of dough together on a piece of parchment or waxed paper and then carefully sliding the lattice top over the filling.

PREBAKED PIE SHELLS

In apple and other fruit pies, which consist of two pieces of raw pie dough with filling sandwiched in between, the dough and filling are baked together. Many pies, however, such as pumpkin, lemon meringue, and cream, do not have a top crust. Rather, they start with a prebaked bottom crust, called a pie shell, which is filled and then sometimes baked again.

Baking unfilled pie pastry, commonly called blind baking, can turn out to be the ultimate culinary nightmare. Without the weight of a filling, a pastry shell set into a hot oven can shrink dramatically, fill with air pockets, and puff up like a

linoleum floor after a flood. The result? A shrunken, uneven shell that can hold only part of the filling intended for it.

We took our favorite pie dough recipe (halving the quantities since we needed a single crust, not a double) and started to investigate the effects of resting the dough (in the refrigerator or the freezer), docking it (pricking the dough before it bakes), and weighting the crust as it bakes to keep it anchored in place. All three tricks are used by professional bakers to prevent the common problems encountered when blind-baking a crust.

CHILLING AND RESTING

We found that refrigeration does the best

job of preventing shrinkage. Pastry shrinkage is caused by gluten. Simply put, when you add water to the proteins in flour, elastic strands of gluten are formed. The strands of gluten in the dough get stretched during the rolling process, and if they are not allowed to relax after rolling, the pastry will snap back like a rubber band when baked, resulting in a shrunken, misshapen shell. Resting allows the tension in the taut strands of dough to ease so that they remain stretched and do not shrink back when heated.

This process does not occur, however, when the dough is immediately placed in the freezer to rest after rolling. When frozen, the water in the crust solidifies,

freezing the gluten in place so it is not free to relax. As a result, when the dough is baked, the tense, stretched strands of gluten snap back, causing the crust to shrink.

We might have concluded that pie dough should be refrigerated and not frozen if we hadn't noticed that the frozen crusts, although shrunken, were much flakier than the refrigerated crusts. Pastry is made up of layers of dough (protein and starch from the flour combined with water) and fat. Dough and fat have different heat capacities. When you place the pastry in the oven after freezing it (rather than just refrigerating it), the dough heats up and

starts to set relatively quickly in comparison to the time it takes for the butter to melt and then vaporize; this is because butter has a much higher water content than the dough. As a result, by the time the water in the butter starts to turn to steam, the dough is well into its setting phase. The air spaces occupied by the frozen butter, which has now largely turned to steam, are held in place by the dough, which is far along in the baking process.

Dough that you have refrigerated, on the other hand, is not as well set by the time the butter vaporizes; hence the air pockets disappear, the soft dough simply sinking into the spaces left by the butter. We came to a simple conclusion: First

refrigerate the pie shell to relax the gluten, thus solving the problem of shrinkage during baking, then pop the dough in the freezer to improve flakiness.

This bit of science led to one other fascinating discovery. It is common knowledge that lard or vegetable shortening such as Crisco produces a very flaky crust. In fact, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, we use a combination of butter and shortening in our recipe because of the improvement in texture over an all-butter crust. The explanation for this phenomenon is simple. Lard and Crisco melt more slowly than butter. Therefore, they retain

their shape for even more time than butter does as the dough sets up, keeping the layers of pastry separated.

DOCKING AND WEIGHTING

While refrigerating the pie crust prevents shrinkage, it will not prevent ballooning, which can occur when air pockets form beneath the crust. Typically, bakers prevent the formation of air pockets by docking (or pricking) the dough with the tines of a fork before it goes into the oven. However, we found that docking was not necessary as long as the dough is weighted. Since weighting is a must—it not only prevents

ballooning but keeps the shell, especially the sides, in place as it bakes —we do not dock pastry dough.

Some professional bakers swear by "official" pie weights, while others make do with rice or dried beans. We found that metal or ceramic pie weights do a better job than rice or beans. They are heavier and therefore more effective in keeping the pastry from puffing. Pie weights are also better heat conductors and promote more thorough browning of the pastry.

BAKING

We got the most even browning by baking in the middle rack at a constant

temperature of 375 degrees. At higher temperatures, the pastry was prone to overbrowning and burned in spots, while lower temperatures caused the edges to brown well before the bottom. More important than temperature and placement, though, was cooking time.

There are two stages in prebaking. In the first stage, the dough is baked with a lining of aluminum foil and weights. This stage usually takes about 17 minutes; the objective is to cook the dough until it sets, at which point it can hold its shape without assistance. When the dough loses its wet look, turns from its original pale yellow to off-white, and begins to take on a very light brown color at the edges, the dough is set. If

you have any doubts, carefully (the dough is hot) touch the side of the shell to make sure that the crust is firm. If you remove the pie weights too soon, the dough sides will slip down, ruining the pie shell.

In the second stage, the foil and weights are removed, and the baking continues. At this point, if you are going to fill the pie shell and then bake it again, as you would with pumpkin or pecan pie, you should bake it until it is just lightly browned, about 9 minutes. Pie shells destined for fillings that require little or no further cooking, such as cream and lemon meringue pies, should be baked for about 15 minutes.

American Pie Dough for Fruit Pies

For one 9-inch pie with double crust

NOTE: *Apple and summer fruit pies require a top and bottom crust. Follow figures 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 to roll out the bottom crust and fit it into the pie plate. Refrigerate pie plate with bottom crust, prepare filling, place filling in pie plate, and then proceed as directed i n figures 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 to complete the top crust. To make a lattice top, see figures 12, 13, 14 and 15.*

$2^1/_2$ cups all-purpose flour, plus extra for dusting dough and work surface

1 teaspoon salt

2 tablespoons sugar

12 tablespoons unsalted butter, chilled, cut into $^1/_4$-inch pieces

8 tablespoons all-vegetable shortening, chilled

6–8 tablespoons ice water

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Pulse flour, salt, and sugar in food processor fitted with steel blade. Scatter butter pieces over flour mixture, tossing to coat butter with flour. Cut butter into

flour with five 1-second pulses. Add shortening and continue cutting in until flour is pale yellow and resembles coarse cornmeal, with butter bits no larger than small peas, about four more 1-second pulses. Turn mixture into medium bowl.

2. Sprinkle 6 tablespoons ice water over mixture. With blade of rubber spatula, use folding motion to mix. Press down on dough with broad side of spatula until dough sticks together, adding up to 2 tablespoon more ice water if it will not come together. Divide dough into two balls and flatten each into 4-inch-wide disk. Dust disks lightly with flour, wrap

each in plastic, and refrigerate at least 30 minutes, or up to 2 days, before rolling.

VARIATION:

Firm American Pie Dough for Decorative Edging

This crust has less flavor and a firmer texture than the master recipe, but decorative edging will hold up in the oven.

Follow recipe for American Pie Dough for Fruit Pies, using just 8 tablespoons butter and 6 tablespoons shortening. Reduce ice water to about 5 tablespoons.

American Pie Dough for Prebaked Pie Shell

For one 9-inch pie with single crust

NOTE: *Use this recipe for custard, pumpkin, pecan, cream, and lemon meringue pies. See figures 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 for more information on rolling out the dough and figures 16, 17, 18 and 19 for information on finishing the edge.*

$1\frac{1}{4}$ cups all-purpose flour, plus extra for dusting dough and work surface

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt

1 tablespoon sugar

4 tablespoons unsalted butter, chilled, cut into $^{1}/_{4}$-inch pieces

3 tablespoons all-vegetable shortening, chilled

4–5 tablespoons ice water

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Pulse flour, salt, and sugar in food processor fitted with steel blade. Scatter butter pieces over flour mixture, tossing to coat with flour. Cut butter into flour with five 1-second pulses. Add shortening and continue cutting in until flour is pale yellow and resembles coarse cornmeal, with butter bits no larger than small peas, about four more

1-second pulses. Turn mixture into medium bowl.

2. Sprinkle 4 tablespoons ice water over mixture. With blade of rubber spatula, use folding motion to mix. Press down on mixture with broad side of spatula until dough sticks together, adding up to 1 tablespoon more ice water if it will not come together. Shape dough into ball, squeezing two or three times with hands until cohesive, then flatten into 4-inch-wide disk. Dust lightly with flour, wrap in plastic, and refrigerate at least 30 minutes, or up to 2 days, before rolling.

3. Remove dough from refrigerator; let stand at room temperature to soften slightly, about 10 minutes if dough has chilled for 30 minutes, about 20 minutes if it has chilled overnight. (The dough should be pliable. Use your hands to squeeze the dough; if you can squeeze it without applying too much pressure, it is ready to roll.) Roll dough on lightly floured work surface to a 12-inch disk about $^1/_3$ inch thick. Fold dough in quarters, then place dough point in center of pie pan. Unfold dough.

4. Working around circumference of pan, press dough carefully into pan by gently

lifting dough edges with one hand while pressing around pan bottom with other hand. Trim edge to $^{1}/_{2}$ inch beyond pan lip. Tuck this rim of dough underneath itself so that folded edge is about $^{1}/_{4}$ inch beyond pan lip; flute dough in your own fashion. Refrigerate pie shell for 40 minutes and then freeze for 20 minutes.

5. Meanwhile, adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 375 degrees. Press doubled 12-inch square of aluminum foil inside dough shell; evenly distribute 1 cup or 12 ounces ceramic or metal pie weights over foil. Bake, leaving foil and weights in place

until dough dries out, about 17 minutes. Carefully remove foil and weights by gathering sides of foil and pulling up and out. For partially baked crust, continue baking until light golden brown, about 9 minutes more; for fully baked crust, continue baking until deep golden brown, about 15 minutes more. Transfer to wire rack to cool as directed in individual recipes.

VARIATION:

Prebaked Pie Dough Coated with Graham Cracker Crumbs

Custard fillings, such as that used in

lemon meringue pie and cream pies, are tough on crisp crusts. After much experimentation, we found that rolling out the pie dough in graham cracker crumbs promotes browning and crisps the crust. It also adds a wonderful graham flavor that complements the lemon and cream pie fillings without masking the character of the dough itself.

Follow recipe for American Pie Dough for Prebaked Pie Shell, sprinkling work surface with 2 tablespoons graham cracker crumbs when rolling out dough. Sprinkle more crumbs over dough itself. Continue sprinkling additional crumbs underneath and on top of dough as it is rolled, making sure to coat dough heavily with

crumbs. You will use a total of about $^{1}/_{2}$ cup crumbs. Fit graham cracker–coated dough into pie plate as directed and bake fully.

ROLLING OUT PIE DOUGH

No matter what kind of pie crust you are making (single, double, or lattice top), follow figures 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 before proceeding to specific directions on that type of crust.

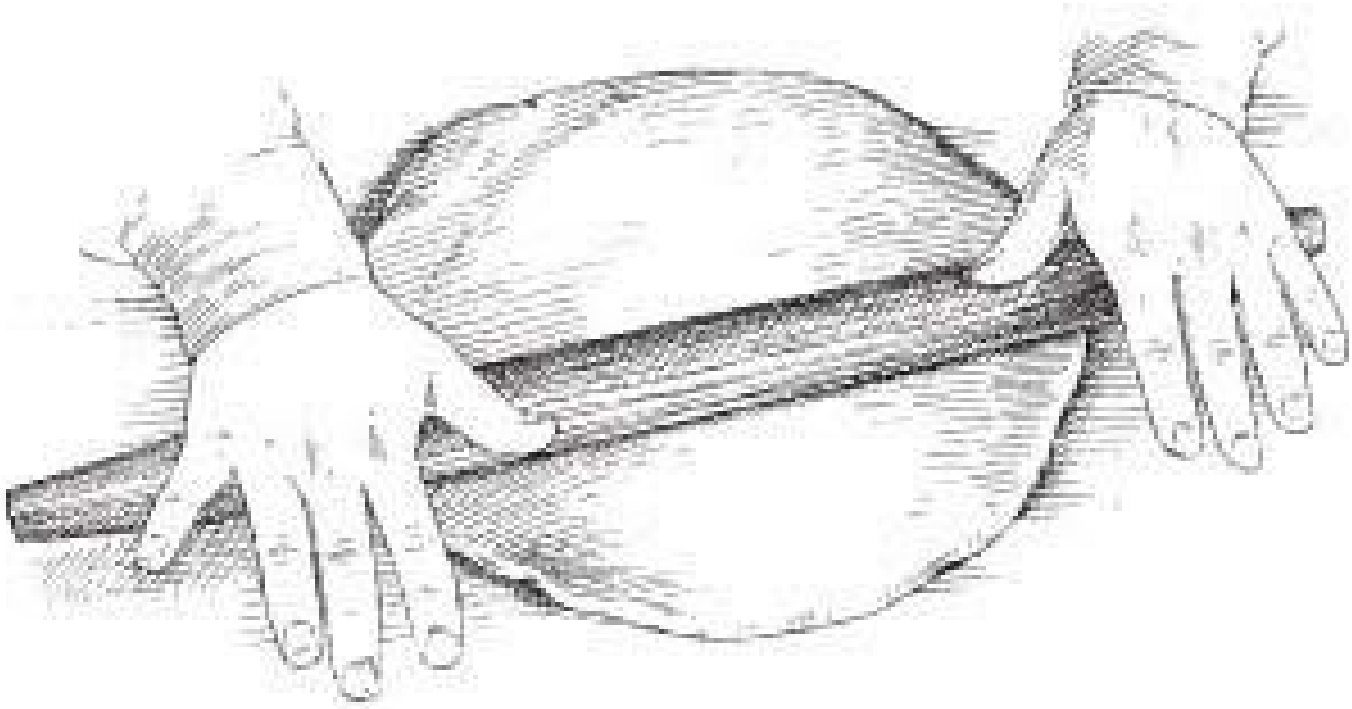

Figure 1.

Sprinkle a couple of tablespoons of flour over the work surface and the top of the dough. To roll, apply light pressure to the dough with a rolling pin and work from the center outward to avoid rolling over the same area more than necessary.

Figure 2.

Every 30 seconds or so, slide a bench scraper under the dough to make sure it is not sticking to the work surface. Rotate the dough a quarter turn and continue rolling out. Rotating the dough in this way ensures that it will be thinned

to a uniform thickness and form a perfect circle.

Figure 3.

To make sure that you've rolled the dough to the right size, place the pie plate upside down on top of it; the diameter of the dough should be 2 inches greater than that of the pie plate.

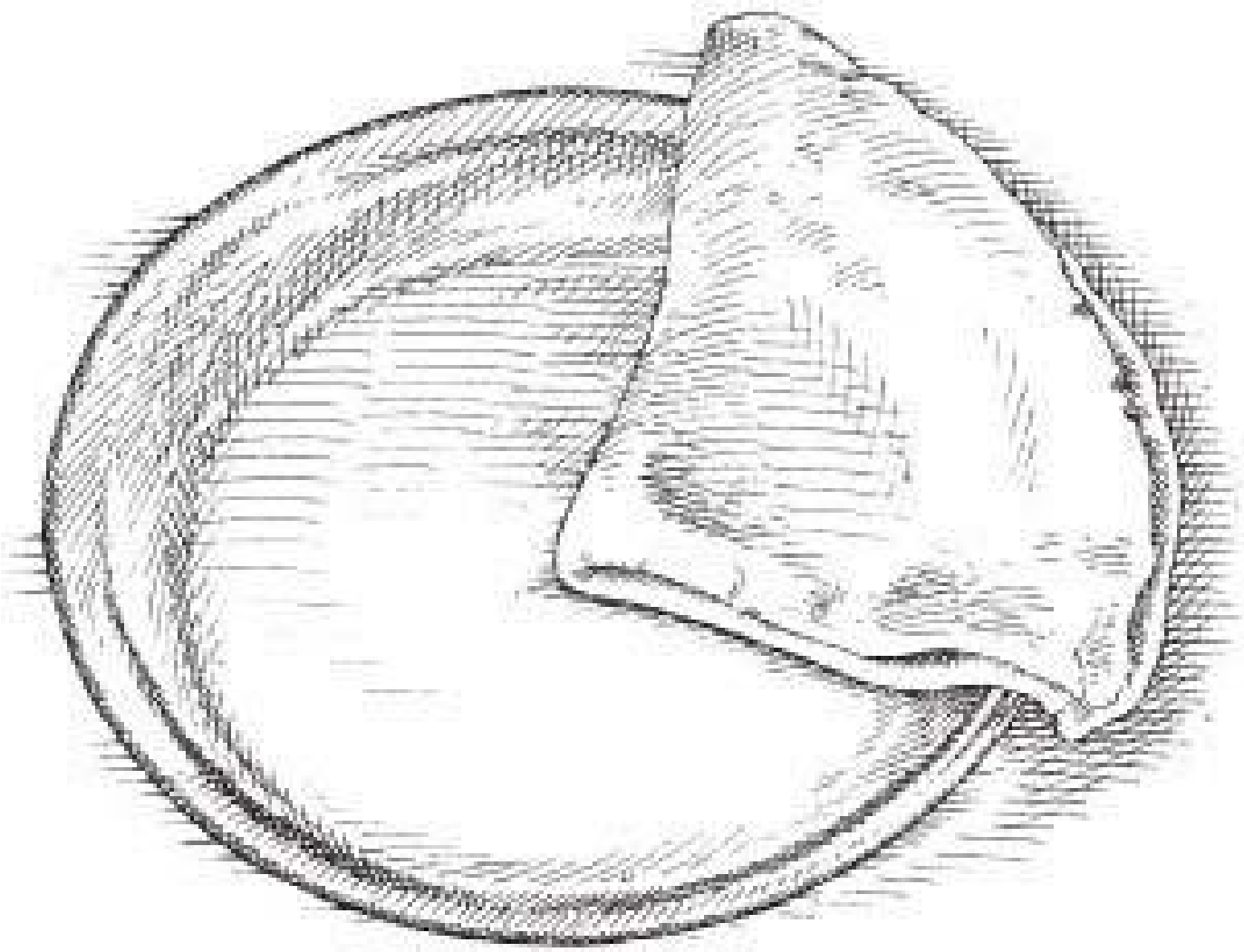

Figure 4.

Once the dough has reached the correct size, fold it into quarters. Place the folded dough in an empty pie plate, making sure the folded point of the dough is in the center of the plate. Unfold gently.

Figure 5.

Lift the edge of the dough with one hand and ease the pastry along the bottom and into the corners with the other hand; repeat around the circumference of the pan. Do not stretch the dough. Proceed with

appropriate steps, depending on whether you are making a single- or double-crust pie or a lattice top.

TO MAKE A DOUBLE-CRUST PIE

Follow figures 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 to roll out the bottom crust and fit it into the pie plate. Refrigerate pie plate with bottom crust, prepare filling, place filling in pie plate, and then proceed as directed here in figures 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11. Use this technique to prepare apple and summer fruit pies.

Figure 6.

Roll out the top crust and use a bench scraper to wrap the dough around the rolling pin.

Figure 7.

Unroll the dough over the filled pie, making sure to center the piece of dough on the pie plate.

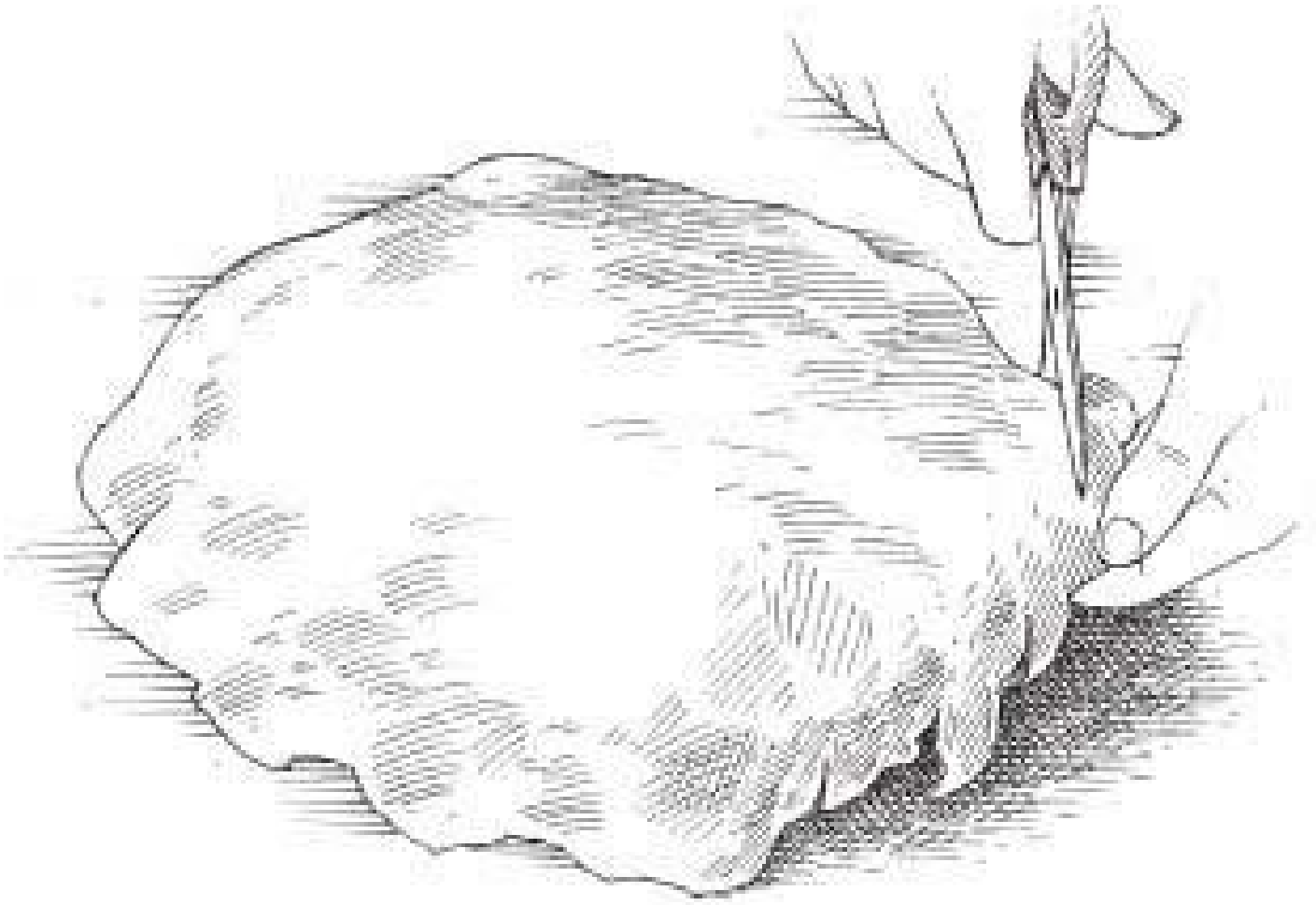

Figure 8.

Use kitchen scissors to trim the overhanging edges of the top and bottom crusts to about $^{1}/_{2}$ inch.

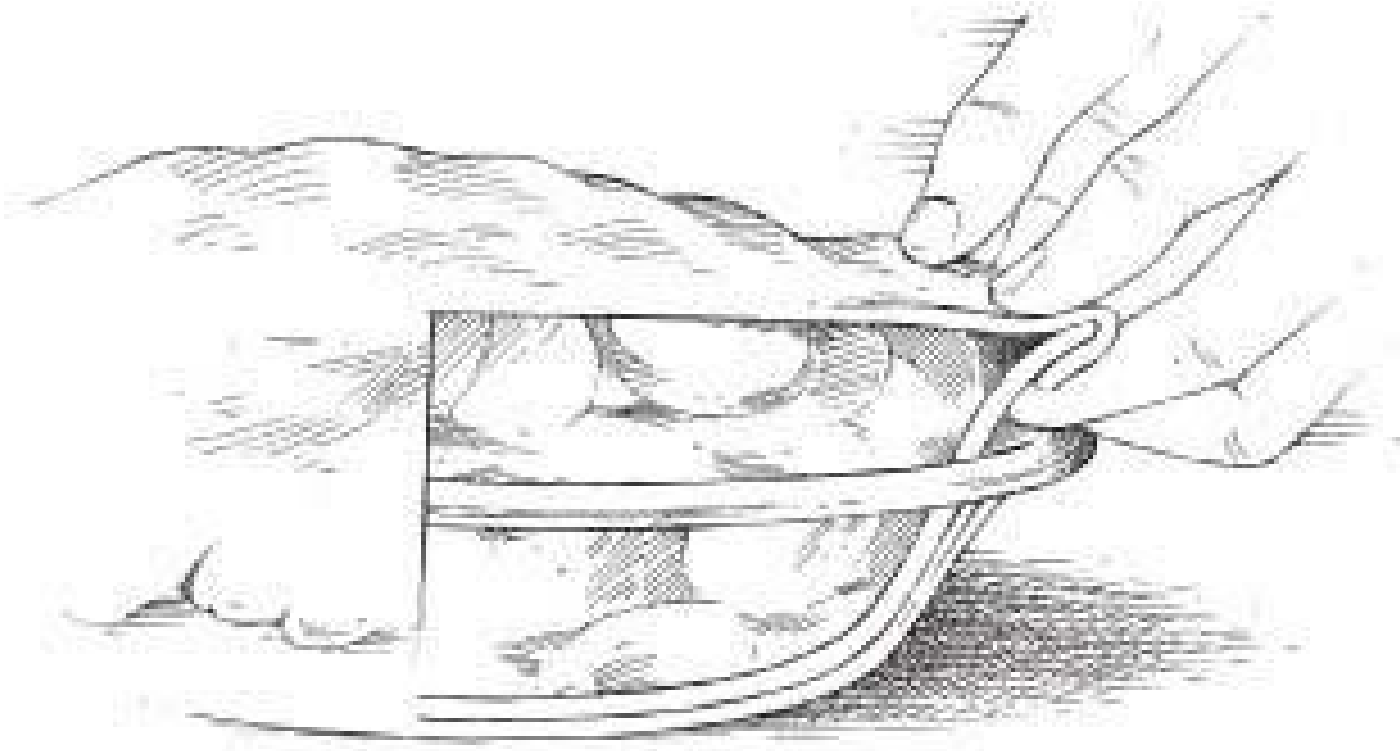

Figure 9.

For a neat edge that stays sealed, press the edges of the top and bottom crusts together and tuck this rim of dough underneath itself so that the folded edge is flush with the pan.

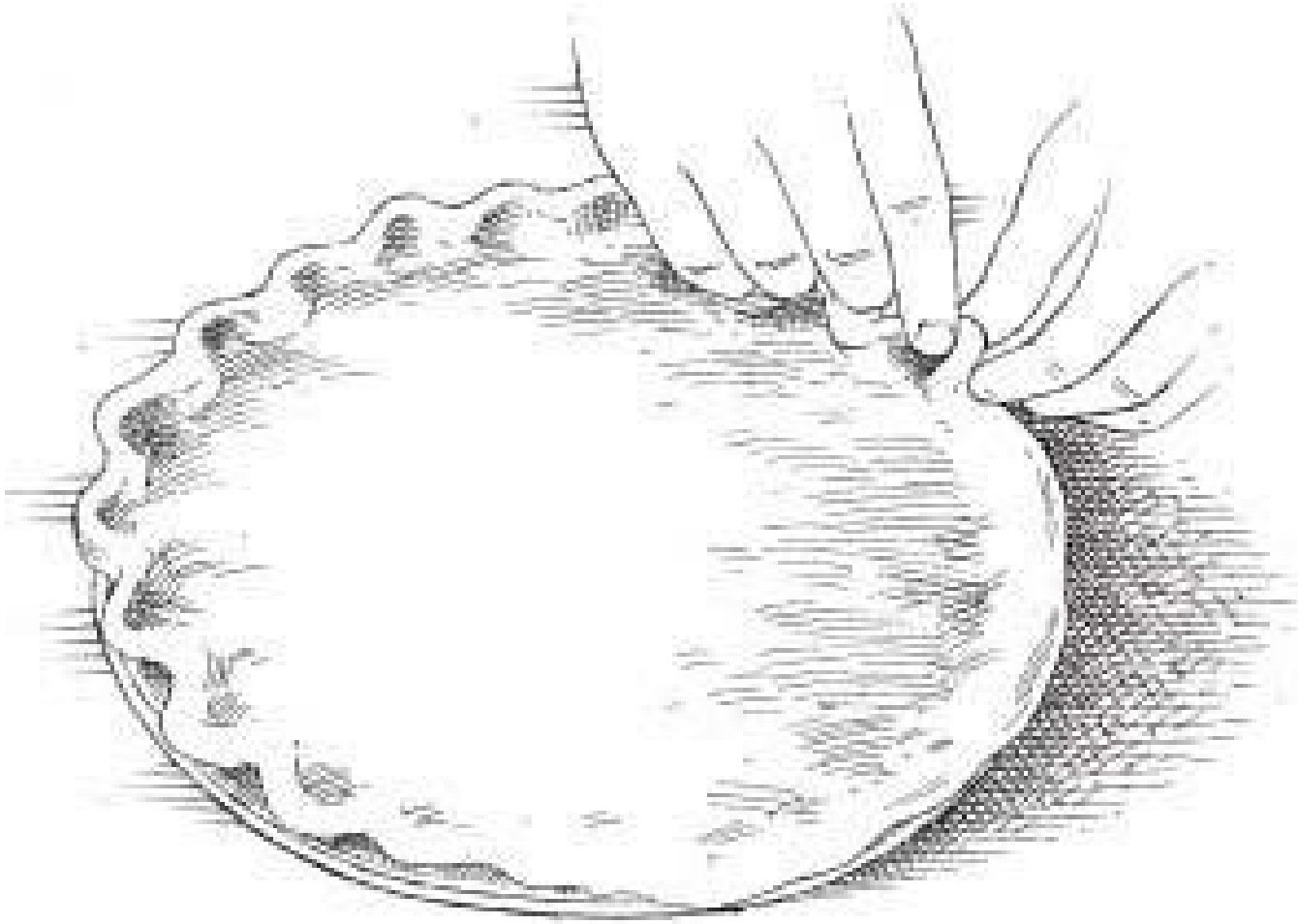

Figure 10.

Finish the formation of the double crust by pressing the edges with a fork (see figure 18) or fluting them (as shown here) to seal well.

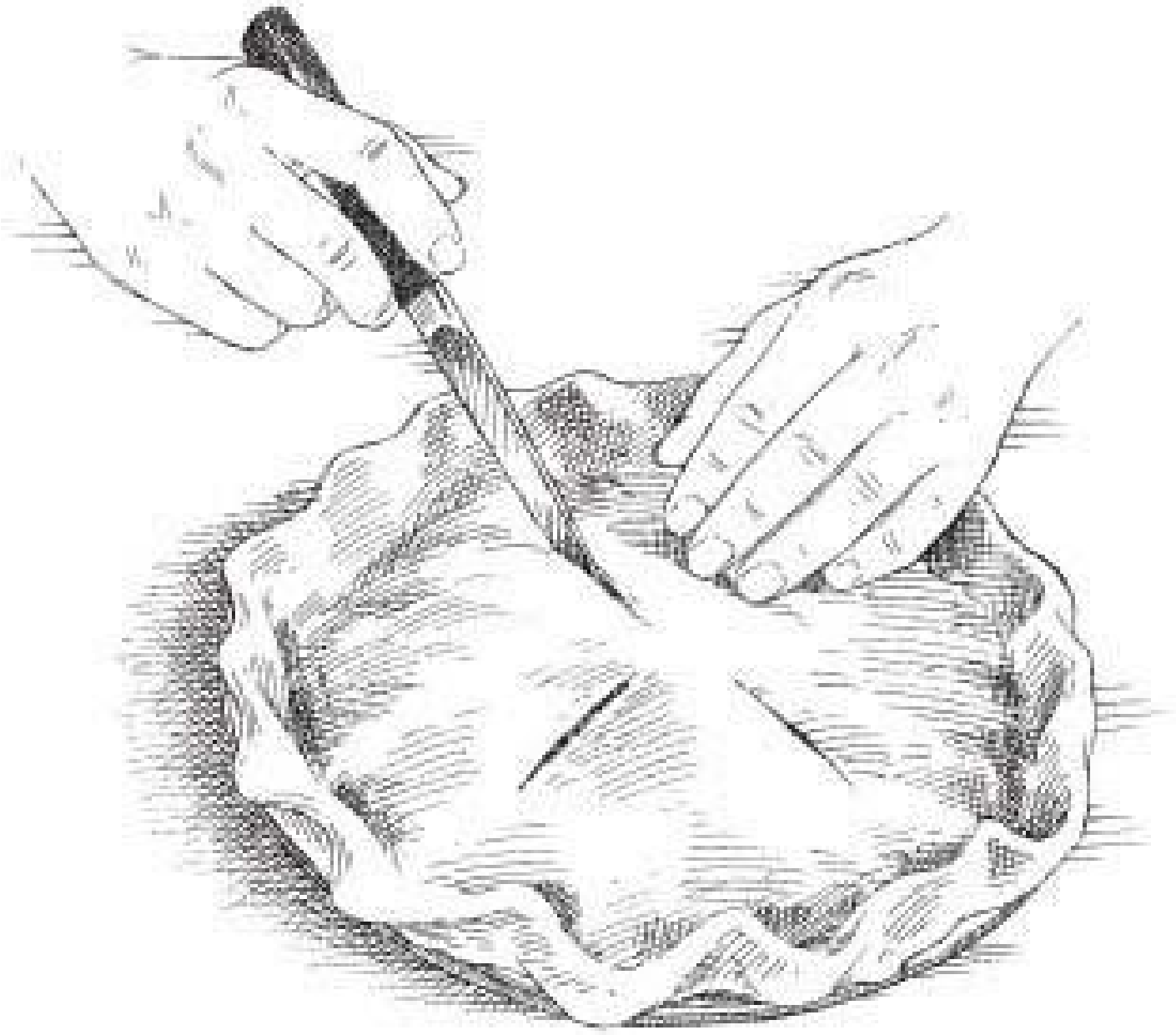

Figure 11.

Use a sharp knife to cut vents in the top crust.

TO MAKE A LATTICE-TOP PIE

Follow figures 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 to roll out the bottom crust and fit it into the pie plate. Refrigerate pie plate with bottom crust, prepare filling, place filling in pie plate, and then proceed as directed on figures 12, 13, 14 and 15. Use the lattice top as a dressier alternative to the standard top crust on a double-crust apple or summer fruit pie.

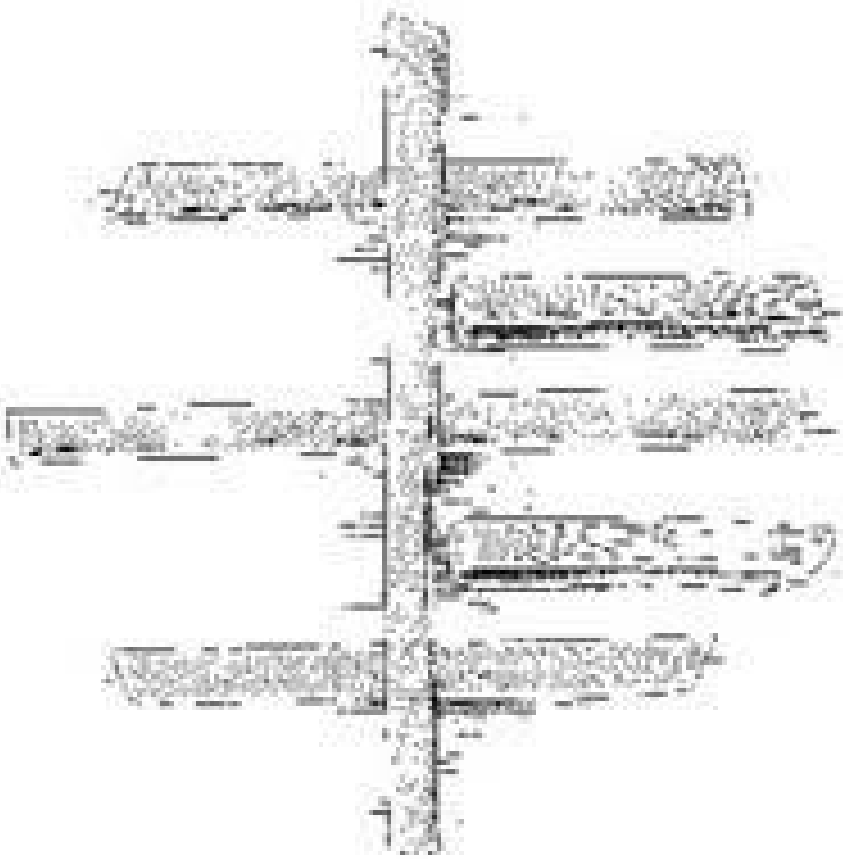

Figure 12.

Roll out the top crust and then cut it into 10 strips, each $^{1}/_{2}$ inch wide. Lay 5 strips of dough horizontally across a large piece of waxed or parchment paper. Fold the second and fourth strips in half and place a strip of dough in the center, at right angles to the

other strips.

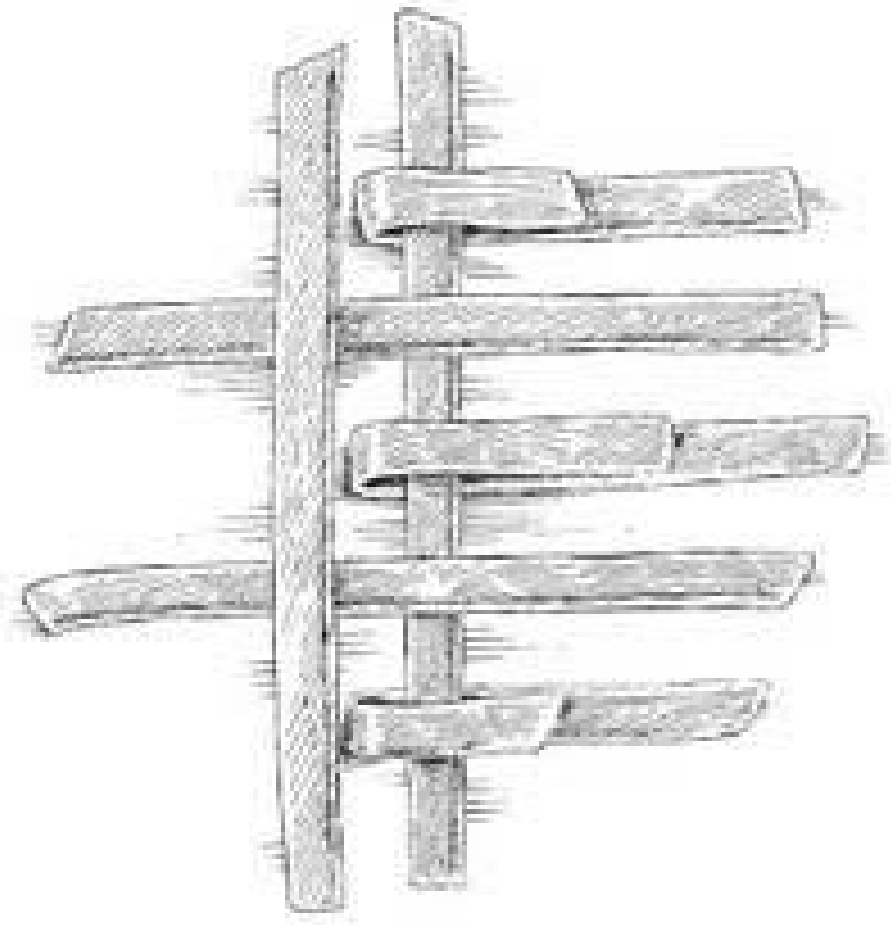

Figure 13.

Unfold the second and fourth strips so they lie on top of the vertical strip. Fold back the first, third, and fifth horizontal strips. Position a second strip of dough vertically, next to the first vertical strip.

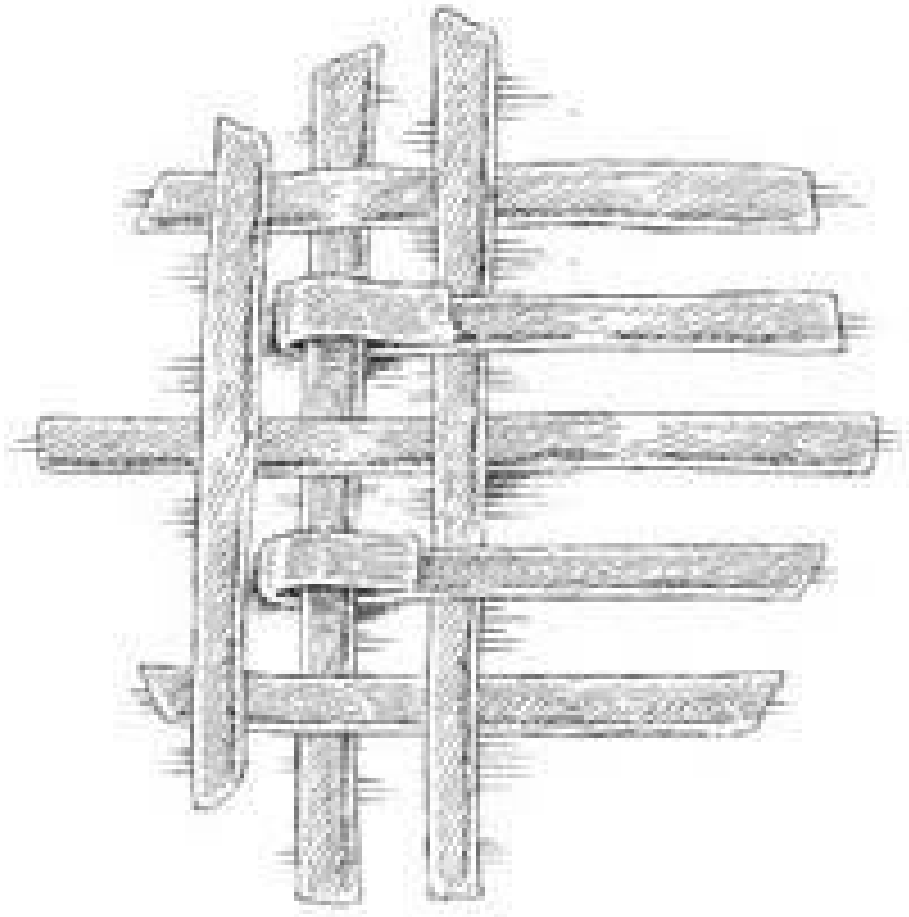

Figure 14.

Unfold the first, third, and fifth strips. Fold back the second and fourth strips and add a third vertical strip of dough. Unfold the strips.

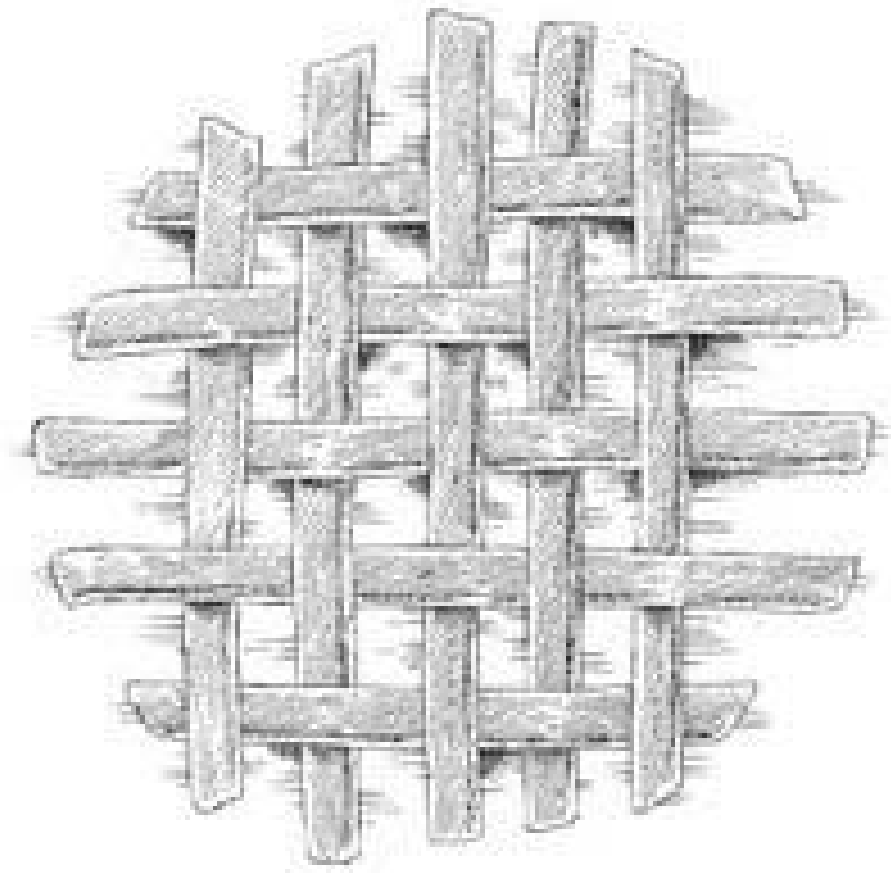

Figure 15.

Repeat this process on the other side, alternating folds and adding 2 more strips of dough (you will have a total of 10, 5 running each way). Carefully slide the lattice onto a filled pie shell. Trim off the excess lattice ends. Fold the rim of the bottom dough up and over the

lattice strips, and crimp to seal.

TO MAKE A SINGLE-CRUST PIE

Follow figures 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 to roll out the dough and fit it into the pie plate, then proceed as directed here in figures 16, 17, 18 and 19. Use this technique to prepare custard, pumpkin, pecan, cream, and lemon meringue pies.

Figure 16.

Use kitchen scissors to trim the dough to within $^{1}/_{2}$ inch of the lip of the pan all the way around.

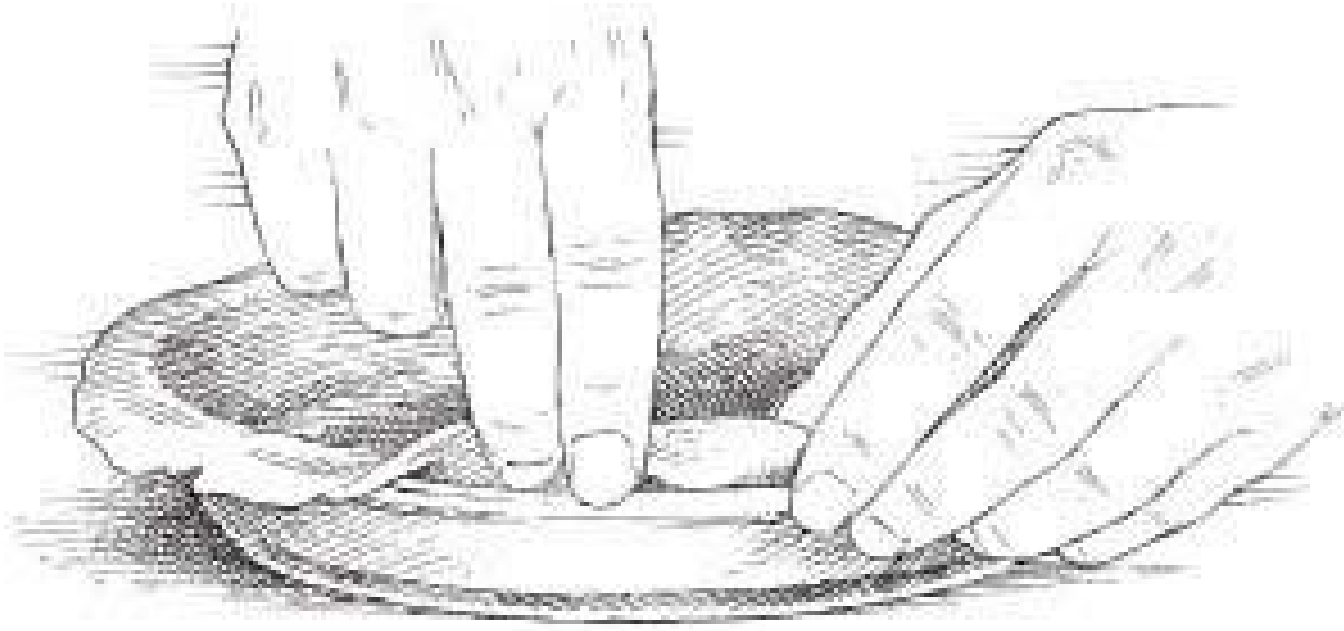

Figure 17.

Tuck the overhanging dough back under itself so the folded edge extends $^{1}/_{4}$ inch beyond the pan lip. Press it firmly to seal.

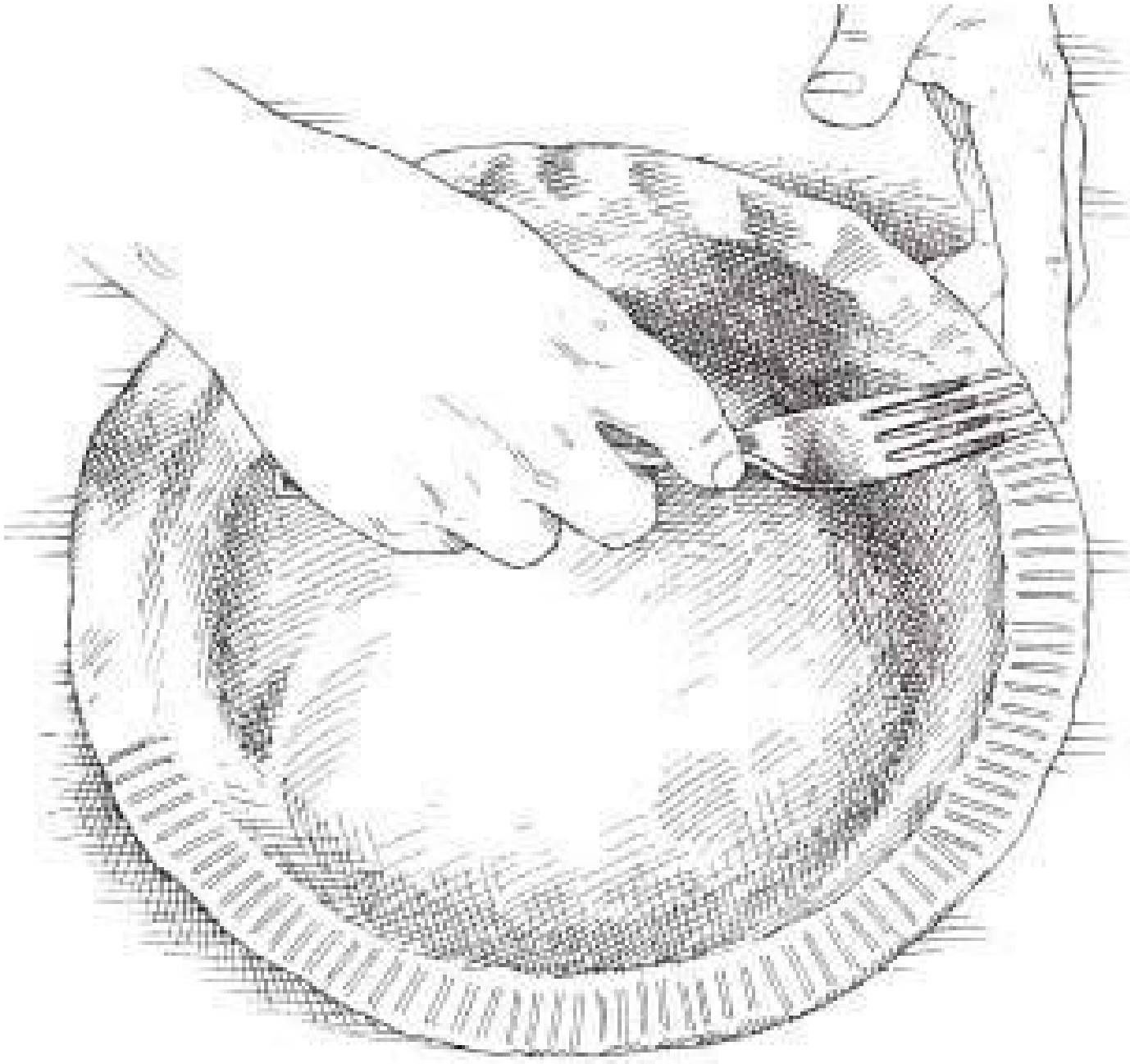

Figure 18.

The pie crust is ready for a decorative edge. The simplest thing to do is to press the tines of a fork against the dough to flatten

it against the rim of the pie plate.

Figure 19.

You may also flute the rim of the crust by pressing one side of the dough with your forefinger while holding the other side of the dough with the thumb and forefinger of your other hand.

APPLE PIE

Cooks who slather the apples destined for a pie with cinnamon, sugar, and a starchy thickener do themselves and the apples a disservice, so we set out to make a pie that lets the apples shine. We started by examining the variety of apple to use for the filling. We tested the nine best-selling varieties, figuring that we wanted a recipe that would work with apples commonly available in supermarkets throughout the year.

We determined that Granny Smith and

McIntosh both have excellent qualities; the former is tart with good texture and the latter has excellent flavor. But each of them also has drawbacks. A pie made with Grannies alone was too sour and a bit dull-tasting, while an all-McIntosh pie was too soft, more like applesauce than apple pie. A pie made with both varieties, however, was outstanding. The Grannies hold up well during cooking, the Macs add flavor, and the mushy texture of the Macs becomes a virtue in this setting, providing a nice base for the harder Grannies and soaking up some of the juice.

If you are making this pie during the fall apple season, when many local varieties may be available, follow the

recipe using all Macoun, Royal Gala, Empire, Winesap, Rhode Island Greening, or Cortland apples. Unlike the Granny Smith, these are well-balanced apples that work well on their own without thickeners or the addition of McIntosh.

We have always used butter in our pies. In fact, we once used up to six tablespoons in a deep dish pie, cutting this back to a more modest two tablespoons over the years. But when we taste-tested pies with and without butter this time, the leaner pies won hands down. Butter actually dulls the fresh taste of the apples. Lemon juice, however, is absolutely crucial to a good

apple pie. With a proper balance of sweet and tart, a good apple pie tastes like a crisp October morning rather than a muggy August afternoon. In the end, we settled on $1^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons of lemon juice and 1 teaspoon of zest.

Even a cursory review of apple pie recipes reveals a wide range of preferences for thickeners, with flour, tapioca, and cornstarch being the most common. We did try flour and tapioca and found that they overthickened the pie. A bit of tart, thin juice gives the pie a breath of the orchard, whereas a thick, syrupy texture is dull. In the end, we opted not to thicken the filling for our apple pie.

Many cookbook writers claim that letting apples sit in a bowl with the sugar, lemon juice, and spices, otherwise known as macerating, is key to developing flavor and juice. We found, however, that this simply caused the apples to dry out, making them rubbery and unpleasant. In addition, the apples themselves lost flavor, having exuded all of their fruitiness into the juice. So macerating, a common step in apple pie making, was clearly out.

In many apple pies, the top crust sets up quickly, leaving an air space between it and the apples, which reduce in volume as they cook. With our crust recipe, however, this is not an issue.

Sufficient shortening is cut into the flour so that the crust sinks down onto the apples as they cook. We did notice, however, that this high ratio of shortening produces a very flaky crust, one that is not easily cut into perfect slices. In addition, because there is still a fair amount of juice, which we find essential for good flavor, the filling may spread slightly once the pie is cut into individual slices.

Apple Pie

serves 8

NOTE: *For more detailed instructions on rolling out pie dough, see figures 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. See figures 6, 7, 8, 9 10 and 11 for information on assembling a double-crust pie. This pie is best eaten when cooled almost to room temperature, or even the next day.*

1 recipe American Pie Dough for Fruit Pies

2 pounds Granny Smith (4 medium) and 2 pounds McIntosh (4 medium) apples (about 8 cups when sliced)

$^{3}/_{4}$ cup plus 1 tablespoon sugar

$1^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons juice and 1 teaspoon grated zest from 1 medium lemon

$^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoon salt

$^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoon ground nutmeg

$^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoon ground cinnamon

$^{1}/_{8}$ teaspoon ground allspice

1 egg white, beaten lightly

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Prepare and shape dough into two disks as directed in recipe American Pie Dough for Fruit Pies. Refrigerate until needed.

2. Remove one piece of dough from refrigerator. If dough is stiff and very cold, let stand until cool but malleable. Adjust oven rack to center position, and heat oven to 425 degrees.

3. Roll one dough disk on a lightly floured surface into a 12-inch circle. Fold dough in quarters, then place dough point in center of 9-inch Pyrex regular or deep dish pie plate. Unfold dough.

4. Gently press dough into sides of pan, leaving portion that overhangs lip of pie plate in place. Refrigerate while preparing fruit.

5. Peel, core, and cut apples into slices $^{1}/_{2}$ inch to $^{3}/_{4}$ inch thick and toss with $^{3}/_{4}$ cup sugar, lemon juice and zest, salt, and spices. Turn fruit mixture, including juices, into chilled pie shell and mound slightly in center.

6. Roll out second dough disk and place over filling. Trim top and bottom edges to $^{1}/_{2}$ inch beyond pan lip. Tuck this rim of dough underneath itself so that folded edge is flush with pan lip. Flute edging or press with fork tines to seal. Cut four slits on dough top. If pie dough is very soft, place in freezer for 10 minutes.

Brush egg white onto top of crust and sprinkle evenly with remaining 1 tablespoon sugar.

7. Bake until top crust is golden, about 25 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 375 degrees; continue baking until juices bubble and crust is deep golden brown, 30 to 35 minutes longer.

8. Transfer pie to wire rack; cool to almost room temperature, letting pie sit at least 4 hours.

VARIATIONS:

Apple Pie with Crystallized

Ginger

Follow recipe for Apple Pie, adding 3 tablespoons chopped crystallized ginger to apple mixture.

Apple Pie with Dried Fruit

Macerate 1 cup raisins, dried sweet cherries, or dried cranberries in the lemon juice and 1 tablespoon Apple Jack, brandy, or cognac. Follow recipe for Apple Pie, adding macerated dried fruit and liquid to apple mixture.

Apple Pie with Fresh Cranberries

Follow recipe for Apple Pie, increasing

sugar to 1 cup and adding 1 cup fresh or frozen cranberries to apple mixture.

Do-Ahead Fresh-Baked Apple Pie

We have been asked many times about whether an unbaked pie could be frozen and then baked off days or weeks later. We tried this after two weeks and six weeks. The two-week pie was flatter than the freshly baked version, the flavor was a bit muted, and the apples were slightly on the spongy side. Nevertheless, we all felt that the results were good, a reasonable sacrifice in the name of convenience. However, the pie frozen for six weeks was a disaster, with

soft, foamy apples and a lackluster, greasy crust.

Follow recipe for Apple Pie through step 6, but do not brush with egg or sprinkle with sugar. Place pie on baking sheet and freeze for 2 to 3 hours, then cover it with a double layer of plastic wrap and return it to the freezer. Store for no more than 3 weeks. To bake, remove pie from freezer, brush it with egg wash, sprinkle with sugar, and place directly into a preheated oven. After baking it for the usual 55 minutes, reduce oven to 325 degrees, cover pie with foil so as not to overcook the crust, and bake for an additional 20 to 25 minutes.

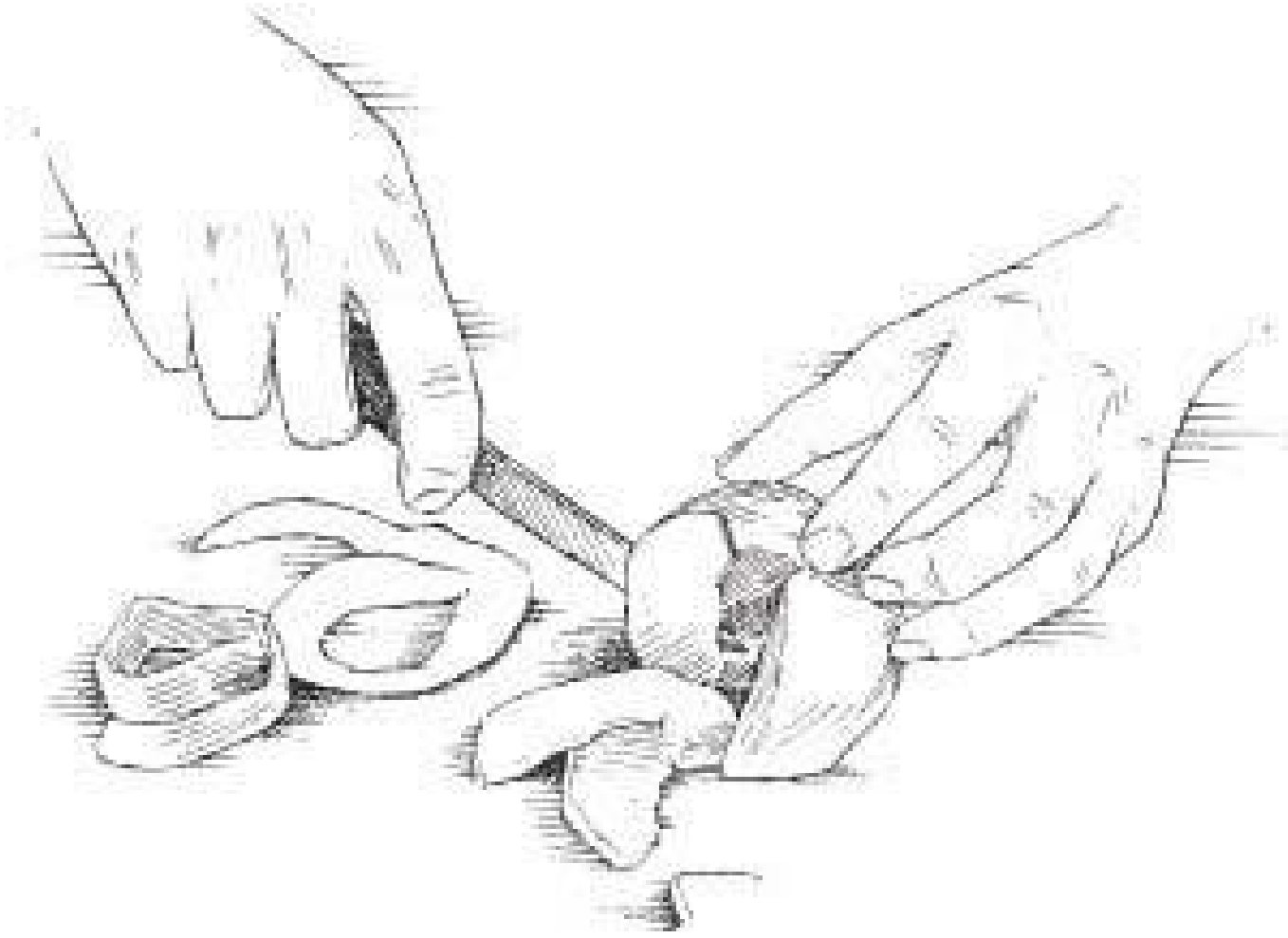

Figure 20.

Peel the apple and core it. Cut a thin slice from one end so that the apple sits squarely on your cutting surface. This makes it easy to cut thin, uniform slices. Now divide the apple in half vertically and cut off individual slices.

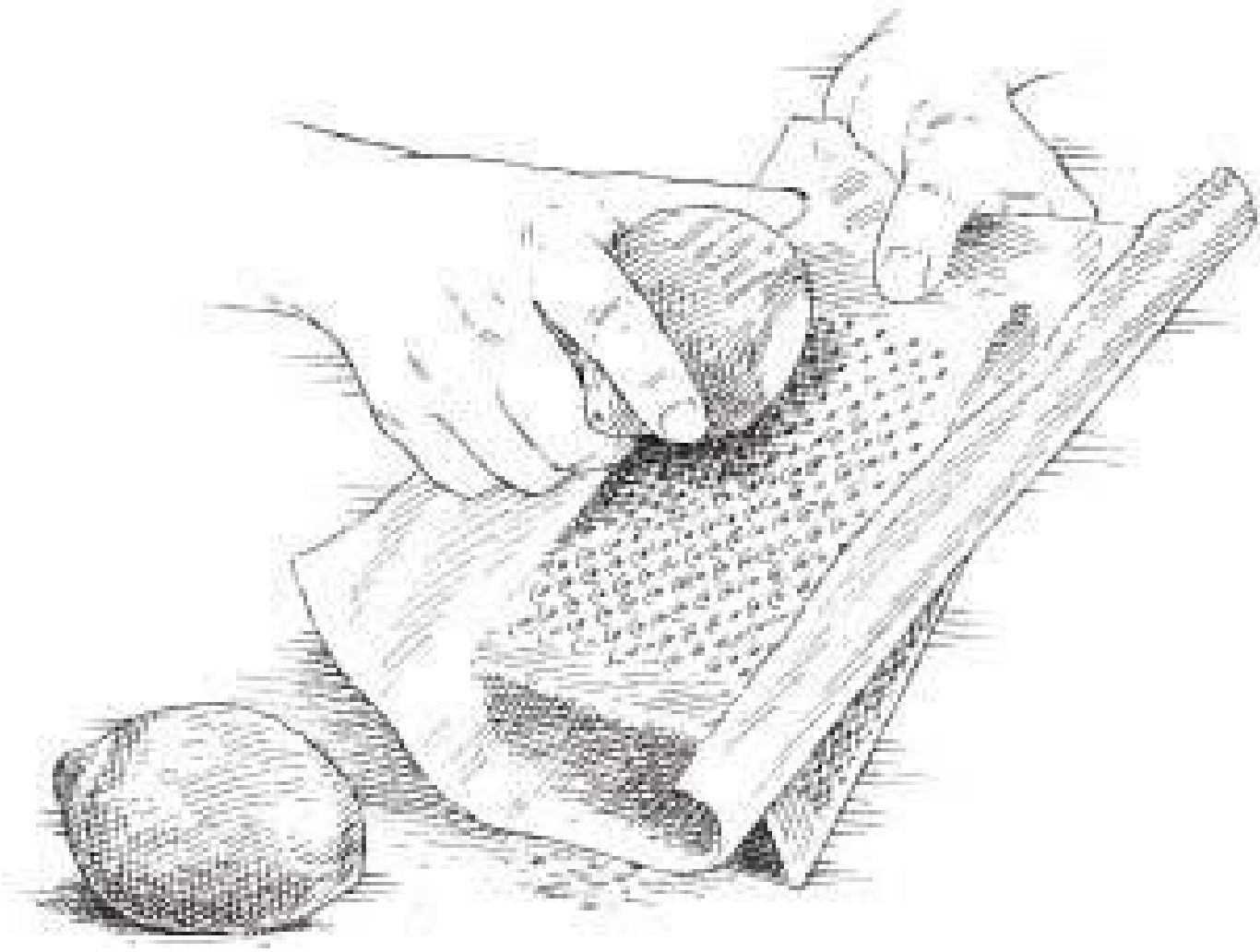

Figure 21.

If you cover your grater with waxed paper before grating lemon zest, the zest will remain on top of the waxed paper rather than clogging the grater's holes.

SUMMER FRUIT PIES

SUMMER FRUIT PIES TRADITIONALLY RELY ON flour or cornstarch to thicken the fresh blueberry, cherry, peach, or strawberry-rhubarb filling. However, we find these thickeners to be problematic.

Cornstarch thickens well, but at a price: in our tests, it yielded dull fruit, lacking in bright flavor and noticeably less acid. As a result, the mixture tasted sweeter and heavier. The flour resulted in fruit that was similarly unsatisfying in appearance and taste, and it also had

another failing: two tablespoons was not enough to firm up the fruit well. To give flour another chance, we ran a test using four tablespoons. This time, the fruit was gummy and almost inedible. As it turns out, this is because flour, unlike the other thickeners, contains proteins and other components as well as starch. As a result, it takes at least twice as much flour by volume to create the same degree of thickening as cornstarch. This amount of flour will adversely affect your pie—you can taste it.

By contrast, the samples of fruit that we thickened with the root starches arrowroot and tapioca were clear and bright in appearance, and the flavor of the fruit was fresh and clean. Of the two,

tapioca thickens a little better and is much cheaper, so it is our favorite.

Tapioca comes from the root of the cassava plant. Also called manioc, this plant is grown throughout most of the tropical world and is harvested when its roots are about 6 to 12 inches long. The starchy root can be boiled and eaten, and in many countries it takes the place of rice or potatoes in the diet.

To make what we know as tapioca, the starch is separated from the plant and cellulose material in the root. Pearl tapioca is made from tapioca starch that is heated to form pearls. To create quick-cooking tapioca, the starch is partially gelatinized and then pasted

together into pellets to improve its thickening powers. While we don't necessarily think of processing food as a good thing, in the case of tapioca, it results in a much more usable product.

During additional testing we found that the amount of tapioca should be varied depending on the juiciness of the berries. If you like a juicier pie, three tablespoons of tapioca is an adequate amount for six cups of fresh blueberries. If you like a really firm pie with no juices, five tablespoons is the correct amount.

Mixing the fruit and tapioca together works fine when a regular top crust is placed on the pie. However, when we made a lattice-top pie, we found that the

tapioca on top of the fruit baked into hard bits that once in our mouths felt like Tic-Tacs. For an open or lattice-top pie, we suggest mixing all of the tapioca with three-quarters of the fruit filling, filling the pie, and then adding the balance of the fruit on top.

Summer Fruit Pie

serves 8

NOTE: *For more detailed instructions on rolling out pie dough, see figures 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. See figures 6, 7, 8, 9 10 and 11 for information on assembling a double-crust pie.*

1 recipe American Pie Dough for Fruit Pies

1 recipe Fillings for Summer Fruit Pies

2 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into small pieces

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Prepare and shape dough into two disks as directed in recipe American Pie Dough for Fruit Pies. Refrigerate until needed.

2. Remove one piece of dough from refrigerator. If dough is stiff and very cold, let stand until cool but malleable. Adjust oven rack to center position and heat oven to 400 degrees.

3. Roll one dough disk on a lightly floured surface into a 12-inch circle. Fold dough in quarters, then place dough point in center of 9-inch Pyrex regular or deep dish pie plate. Unfold dough.

4. Gently press dough into sides of pan, leaving portion that overhangs lip of pie plate in place.

5. Prepare fruit filling and let stand for 15 minutes. Turn fruit mixture, including juices, into pie shell. Scatter butter pieces over fruit. Refrigerate until ready to top with remaining dough.

6. Roll out second dough disk and place over filling. Trim top and bottom edges to $^{1}/_{2}$ inch beyond pan lip. Tuck this rim of dough underneath itself so that folded

edge is flush with pan lip. Flute edging or press with fork tines to seal. Cut four slits on dough top. If pie dough is very soft, place in freezer for 10 minutes before baking.

7. Place pie on baking sheet to catch any drips; bake until top crust is golden, 20 to 25 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 350 degrees and continue to bake until juices bubble and crust is golden brown, 30 to 40 minutes longer.

8. Transfer pie to wire rack; let cool to almost room temperature so juices have time to thicken, from 1 to 2 hours. Serve

that day.

FILLINGS FOR SUMMER FRUIT PIES

Combine the ingredients for a specific filling in a large bowl for use in the Summer Fruit Pie recipe. Allow the fruit mixture to macerate for 15 minutes before scraping it into the pie plate. (If making a lattice-top pie, mix all of the tapioca with three-quarters of the fruit filling, fill the pie, and then add the balance of the fruit on top.)

Adjust the amount of sugar (within the range listed below) based on personal preference and the sweetness of fruit.

Also, use the full amount of tapioca for a firmer filling, the lower amount for a softer filling.

You can use frozen blueberries or cherries in this recipe (frozen peaches and strawberries are quite watery), measuring the fruit when frozen but letting it thaw before making the filling. If you don't follow this procedure, you run the risk of ending up with partially cooked fruit and undissolved tapioca.

Blueberry Filling

3 pints (6 cups) blueberries, rinsed and picked over, or 36 ounces frozen blueberries

$^3/_4$–1 cup sugar

3–4 tablespoons quick-cooking tapioca

2 teaspoons lemon juice

1 teaspoon grated lemon zest

1/4 teaspoon ground allspice

Pinch grated nutmeg

Strawberry-Rhubarb Filling

3 cups strawberries, hulled and sliced

3 cups rhubarb, trimmed and cut into 1-inch pieces

3/4–1 cup sugar

3–4 tablespoons quick-cooking tapioca

2 teaspoons lemon juice

1 tablespoon grated orange zest

1/4 teaspoon vanilla extract

Peach Filling

3 pounds peaches, peeled, pitted, and sliced (about 6 cups)

1/4–1/2 cup granulated sugar

1/2 cup packed brown sugar

3–4 tablespoons quick-cooking tapioca

2 teaspoons lemon juice

1 teaspoon grated lemon zest

1/4 teaspoon ground allspice

1/4 teaspoon grated nutmeg

1/4 teaspoon salt

1 tablespoon minced crystallized ginger

Cherry Filling

3 pounds sour or sweet cherries, stemmed and pitted (about 6 cups) or 36 ounces frozen cherries

3/4–1 cup sugar (use higher amount with sour cherries)

3–4 tablespoons quick-cooking tapioca (use higher amount with sour cherries)

2 teaspoons lemon juice

1 teaspoon grated lemon zest

1/8 teaspoon ground allspice

1/8 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1/8 teaspoon almond extract

1 tablespoon brandy

CUSTARD PIE

Milk, cream, sugar, and vanilla baked into a pie shell can produce an extraordinarily delicate, tender custard, which contrasts perfectly with a crisp crust. Unfortunately, most custard pies are flawed. Many have a tough, overbaked ring of custard (the perimeter overcooks by the time the center is set), a soggy, milk-soaked pie crust, and/or an overly eggy taste. Although custard pie is very simple to assemble, this pie is far from foolproof.

After some initial testing, we quickly

concluded that custard pie requires a fully prebaked pie crust and then a short oven time to cook the custard. When we tried partially baking the crust and then cooking the custard for some time in the oven, we inevitably turned out a pie with a soggy crust. When we used a fully baked crust and kept the oven time to a minimum (less than 15 minutes) the results were far better.

A short baking time has an added bonus: because there's not enough time for a heat differential to develop between the perimeter and the interior of the filling, the filling cooks much more evenly. Once the custard wobbles a bit when lightly shaken but feels set (not loose), the pie is done.

Of course, a short oven time for the filled pie means that the custard has to set up extremely fast. This means the custard must be thickened on top of the stove and then poured into the prebaked pie shell and baked until it achieves the texture of soft pudding. In our first round of testing, we discovered that fillings made with cornstarch as well as eggs set up much faster than those made with eggs alone. This is really not much of a surprise; the science here is pretty simple.

Cornstarch absorbs liquid when it is first added to a custard; you can see that the mixture looks thicker. Cornstarch also absorbs water as the custard bakes

in the oven and water is forced out of suspension as the egg proteins bond tightly together. Since the cornstarch soaks up the liquid that arises as a custard bakes, it also helps prevent the crust from becoming soggy.

Perhaps the trickiest part of this recipe is cooking the custard on the stovetop. If cooked too little, the custard will be runny and won't set up quickly enough in the oven. If cooked too long, the custard will curdle (the eggs will bond together into bits that resemble scrambled eggs) on the stovetop. We wondered how to tell when a custard is really ready for the pie shell. Many recipes say the custard should be cooked until it coats the back of a spoon—a direction we find

confusing.

An instant-read thermometer takes all the guesswork out of custard making. We found that custard cooked to 170 degrees on top of the stove won't curdle and will set up perfectly in the oven. If you don't own an instant-read thermometer, try scraping a wooden spoon along the bottom of the saucepan as the custard cooks. When the custard is thick enough to adhere to the edge of the spoon and form a ridge on the spoon, it is done.

The final issue was the type of dairy to use in the custard. We found that skim milk gave the custard a hollow taste and a thin texture. Whole milk provided good flavor but did not set well. Half-

and-half was better-tasting but still did not set up properly. Light cream set up fine but tasted a bit fatty. Heavy cream was too much of a good thing. After some tinkering, we settled on a ratio of two cups whole milk to one cup heavy cream—a mixture with more fat than straight half-and-half but less fat than light cream.

Custard Pie

serves 8

NOTE: *Timing is critical in this recipe. You must pour hot custard into a hot pie shell to keep oven time to a minimum. You have two options. A fully prebaked pie shell can be made several hours in advance, reheated in 375-degree oven for 5 minutes, and then filled with hot custard. Or, if you want to make the pie in one continuous process, follow the directions below and start making the custard (step 2) once the foil and pie weights have been removed from the crust during the*

prebaking process. By the time the crust is fully prebaked, the custard filling will be ready to be poured into the shell.

1 recipe American Pie Dough for Prebaked Pie Shell, prepared through step 4

3 large eggs

1/8 cup sugar

3 tablespoons cornstarch

2 teaspoons vanilla extract

1/4 teaspoon fresh grated nutmeg

1/2 teaspoon salt

2 cups whole milk

1 cup heavy cream

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 375 degrees. Fully bake pie shell on middle rack as directed in step 5 of recipe American Pie Dough for Prebaked Pie Shell.

2. Meanwhile, whisk together eggs, sugar, cornstarch, vanilla, nutmeg, and salt in medium bowl. Heat milk and cream in medium saucepan over medium-low heat until steaming, about 6 minutes. Whisk steaming milk and cream mixture into egg mixture in slow, steady stream. Return egg-milk mixture to saucepan and cook over medium-low

heat. Stir constantly with wooden spoon, scraping bottom of pan, until custard begins to thicken and forms a ridge on tip of spoon when bottom of pan is scraped and spoon is lifted, 6 to 8 minutes. (If using instant-read thermometer, stir occasionally until custard reaches 160 degrees, then constantly until the custard reaches 170 degrees.)

3. Leaving pie plate on oven rack, pour custard into hot pie shell. Bake until custard has set around edges but still jiggles slightly in the center when shaken, 12 to 15 minutes. Cool to room temperature on wire rack, about 2 hours.

VARIATIONS:

Lemon Custard Pie

Follow recipe for Custard Pie, decreasing vanilla to 1 teaspoon, substituting $1^1/_2$ tablespoons grated lemon zest for nutmeg, and whisking $1^1/_2$ tablespoons lemon juice into egg-cornstarch mixture.

Orange Custard Pie

Follow recipe for Custard Pie, decreasing vanilla to 1 teaspoon, substituting $1^1/_2$ tablespoons grated orange zest for nutmeg, and whisking $1^1/_2$ tablespoons orange juice into egg-

cornstarch mixture.

PUMPKIN PIE

A PUMPKIN PIE IS A VARIATION ON CUSTARD pie, and it presents the baker with identical challenges—making the crust crisp while developing a filling that is firm but still tender. After baking countless pumpkin pies, we found it necessary to take a threefold approach.

First, we began baking our crusts almost completely before filling them; that way we knew they started out crisp. Next, we made sure that both shell and filling were hot when we assembled the pie, so the custard could begin to firm up

almost immediately instead of soaking into the pastry. Finally, we baked the pie quickly, in the bottom of the oven, where the bottom of the crust is exposed to the most intense heat. (Baking in the top of the oven exposes the rim of the crust to the most intense heat, while baking in the middle fails to expose the crust to intense heat from any source.)

Because it sets the filling quickly, high oven heat works to the advantage of pumpkin pie; the quicker the pie gets out of the oven, the less likely the filling is to soak into the crust and make it soggy. But baking at high heat also has its perils —when overbaked, custard will curdle, becoming grainy and watery. No matter what the heat level, however, curdling

can be averted if the pie is taken out of the oven immediately once the center thickens to the point where it no longer sloshes but instead wiggles like gelatin when the pan is gently shaken. Residual heat will finish the cooking outside the oven. Because the presence of the pumpkin dilutes the egg proteins and therefore interferes with curdling, you have a window of about five minutes between "set" and "curdled," considerably longer than with most other custards.

Two other features of our recipe provide further insurance against curdling. First, because the filling is hot when it is put into the shell, the center

cooks quickly; this means that the edges, which receive the most direct heat, are less likely to become overcooked. Second, as with many older recipes, this recipe calls for heavy cream as well as milk and a good quantity of sugar. These ingredients not only improve the flavor, but they also protect the texture, since both fat and sugar serve to block the curdling reaction.

Fresh pumpkin is so difficult to use that few modern cooks go down this road. Canned pumpkin is surprisingly good, and, given a little special treatment, it can be as tasty as fresh. One problem with canned pumpkin is its fibrous nature, which is easily corrected by pureeing it in a food processor. You

can freshen the taste of canned pumpkin by cooking it with the sugar and spices before combining it with the custard ingredients. As the pumpkin simmers, you can actually smell the unwelcome canned odor give way to the sweet scent of fresh squash. This is a small but delightful culinary miracle.

Pumpkin Pie

serves 8

NOTE: *The key to this recipe is timing. Start preparing the filling when you put the pie shell in the oven. The filling will be ready at the same time as the pie shell. The pie may be served slightly warm, chilled, or at room temperature, which is our preference. The pie is fine by itself but much improved by a dollop of Brandied Whipped Cream (see recipe below).*

1 recipe American Pie Dough for Prebaked Pie Shell, prepared through step 4

2 cups (16 ounces) plain canned pumpkin puree

1 cup packed dark brown sugar

2 teaspoons ground ginger

2 teaspoons ground cinnamon

1 teaspoon fresh grated nutmeg

1/4 teaspoon ground cloves

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/8 cup heavy cream

1/8 cup milk

4 large eggs

Brandied Whipped Cream

1 1/3 cups heavy cream, chilled

2 tablespoons sugar
1 tablespoon brandy

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to lower and middle positions, and heat oven to 375 degrees. Partially bake pie shell on middle rack as directed in step 5 of recipe American Pie Dough for Prebaked Pie Shell.

2. Meanwhile, process pumpkin puree, brown sugar, spices, and salt in a food processor fitted with steel blade for 1 minute. Transfer pumpkin mixture to 3-quart heavy-bottomed saucepan; bring it to a sputtering simmer over medium-high heat. Cook pumpkin, stirring constantly,

until thick and shiny, about 5 minutes.

3. As soon as pie shell comes out of oven, increase oven temperature to 400 degrees. Whisk heavy cream and milk into pumpkin and bring to a bare simmer. Process eggs in food processor until whites and yolks are mixed, about 5 seconds. With motor running, slowly pour about half of hot pumpkin mixture through feed tube. Stop machine and scrape in remaining pumpkin. Process 30 seconds longer.

4. Immediately pour warm filling into hot pie shell. (Ladle any excess filling

into pie after it has baked for 5 minutes or so—by this time filling will have settled.) Bake pie on lower rack until filling is puffed, dry-looking, and lightly cracked around edges, and center wiggles like gelatin when pie is gently shaken, about 25 minutes. Cool on a wire rack for at least 1 hour.

5. *For the whipped cream:* When ready to serve the pie, beat cream and sugar in electric mixer at medium speed to soft peaks; add brandy. Beat to stiff peaks. Accompany each wedge of pie with a dollop of whipped cream.

PECAN PIE

PECAN PIE TYPICALLY PRESENTS A COUPLE OF problems. First, this pie is often too sweet, both in an absolute sense and in relation to its other flavors, which are overwhelmed by the sugariness. This problem is easily remedied by lowering the amount of sugar.

The other major complaint has to do with texture. Pecan pies too often turn out curdly and separated, and the weepy filling turns the bottom crust soggy and leathery. The fact that the undercrust

usually seems underbaked to begin with doesn't help matters.

Pecan pie should be wonderfully soft and smooth, almost like a cream pie. Taking the pie out of the oven before it is completely set helps achieve this texture. The pie continues to cook after being removed from the oven, as heat travels from the edges to the middle by conduction. And since pecan pies are composed largely of sugar and butter, cooling serves to make them still more solid.

A hot oven is a disaster with pecan pie —a fact that we confirmed in the test kitchen. At 375 degrees and above, the edges of the filling solidified before the center had even thickened. A moderate

oven (325 to 350 degrees) was better, but a slow oven (250 to 300 degrees) turned out to be best, producing a pie with a nicely thickened center and no hardened edges.

There was a problem, however. Pies baked at very low temperatures took so long to firm up that the crusts turned soggy, even when the shells had been thoroughly prebaked. Furthermore, the filling tended to separate into a jellylike layer on the bottom, with a frothy cap on top. At this point, we tried adding hot filling to the crust, which was also hot. When we tried this, we cut the baking time by close to half and fixed the problems of soggy crust and separated

filling.

We tested pies made with whole pecan halves, chopped pecans, and a combination of chopped and whole nuts. We had no problem deciding our preference. We found whole pecans too much of a mouthful, and we had difficulty cutting through them with a fork as we consumed a slice. Chopped nuts are easier to slice through and eat.

Toasting the nuts beforehand makes for a major improvement. We toasted the nuts in the oven while it was preheating in preparation for baking the crust. Toasting takes about seven minutes, but the nuts should be watched carefully and stirred from time to time to prevent burning. Be sure to let them cool to

lukewarm before chopping them, or they will crumble. Use a knife rather than a food processor, which tends to cut the nuts too fine.

Pecan Pie

serves 8

NOTE: *If you want warm pie, cool the pie thoroughly so that it sets completely, then warm it in a 250-degree oven for about 15 minutes and slice.*

1 recipe American Pie Dough for Prebaked Pie Shell, prepared through step 4

6 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 1-inch pieces

1 cup packed dark brown sugar

1/2 teaspoon salt

3 large eggs

$^{3}/_{4}$ cup light corn syrup

1 tablespoon vanilla extract

2 cups pecans (8 ounces), toasted and chopped into small pieces

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 375 degrees. Partially bake pie shell as directed in step 5 of recipe American Pie Dough for Prebaked Pie Shell.

2. Meanwhile, melt butter in medium heatproof bowl set in skillet of water maintained at just below simmer.

Remove bowl from skillet; mix in sugar and salt with wooden spoon until butter is absorbed. Beat in eggs, then corn syrup and vanilla. Return bowl to hot water; stir until mixture is shiny and warm to the touch, about 130 degrees. Remove from heat; stir in pecans.

3. As soon as pie shell comes out of oven, decrease oven temperature to 275 degrees. Pour pecan mixture into hot pie shell.

4. Bake until center feels set yet soft, like gelatin, when gently pressed, 50 to 60 minutes. Transfer pie to rack; let cool

completely, at least 4 hours. Serve pie at room temperature or warm, with lightly sweetened whipped cream or vanilla ice cream.

Triple Chocolate Chunk Pecan Pie

serves 8

1 recipe American Pie Dough for Prebaked Pie Shell, prepared through step 4

3 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 1-inch pieces

3/4 cup packed dark brown sugar

1/2 teaspoon salt

2 large eggs

1/2 cup light corn syrup

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1 cup pecans (4 ounces),

toasted and chopped into small pieces

2 ounces each semisweet, milk, and white chocolate, cut into $^{1}/_{4}$-inch pieces

INSTRUCTIONS:

Follow recipe for Pecan Pie, using ingredient amounts listed above. Scatter chocolate pieces over pecan mixture once it has been poured into crust. Gently press chocolate pieces into filling with back of spoon. Increase baking time to 55 to 65 minutes.

Maple Pecan Pie

serves 8

NOTE: *More liquid than corn syrup, maple syrup yields a softer, more custardlike pie. To preserve the maple flavor, this recipe uses granulated sugar instead of brown sugar. Toasted walnuts can be substituted for pecans.*

1 recipe American Pie Dough for Prebaked Pie Shell, prepared through step 4

4 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 1-inch pieces

1/2 cup sugar

1/2 teaspoon salt

3 large eggs

1 cup maple syrup

1 1/2 cups pecans (6 ounces), toasted and chopped into small pieces

INSTRUCTIONS:

Follow recipe for Pecan Pie, using ingredient amounts listed above and replacing corn syrup and vanilla with maple syrup.

Buttermilk Pecan Pie with Raisins

serves 8

NOTE: *Note that granulated sugar (not brown sugar) is used in this recipe. Serve at room temperature or lightly chillled.*

1 recipe American Pie Dough for Prebaked Pie Shell, prepared through step 4

6 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 1-inch pieces

$1\frac{1}{3}$ cups sugar

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt

3 large eggs

1/8 cup buttermilk

1/2 cup pecans (2 ounces), toasted and chopped into small pieces

1/2 cup raisins, chopped fine

INSTRUCTIONS:

Follow recipe for Pecan Pie, using ingredient amounts listed above and replacing corn syrup and vanilla with buttermilk.

CREAM PIES

CREAM PIE HAS ALMOST UNIVERSAL APPEAL, with enough flavoring options—vanilla, chocolate, banana, coconut, and butterscotch—to satisfy almost everyone. The key is to create a filling that is soft and creamy yet stiff enough to cut cleanly. It's not as easy as it sounds.

In our tests, the use of flour left us with a filling that was too soft. Gelatin made for a rubbery filling, and tapioca, which works well in fruit pies, produced a filling with the texture of stewed okra. Only cornstarch coupled with egg yolks

(whole eggs yielded a grainy texture) gave us the proper results.

The dairy component is also vital. Cream is simply too rich for a pie that already contains butter and eggs. Skim milk tasted thin and lacked the creamy texture we wanted. Both 2 percent and whole milk worked well but were even better when combined with a bit of evaporated milk, which adds a rich, round, caramel flavor. The basic vanilla cream filling also benefits greatly from the use of a vanilla bean in place of extract.

When making a cream filling for a pie, some cooks heat the sugar, cornstarch, and milk to a simmer, gradually add some of this mixture to the yolks to

stabilize them, and then return the stabilized yolks to the rest of the simmering milk. We found this process, called tempering the eggs, to be unnecessary in this recipe. You can dump everything except the flavorings and butter into a saucepan and cook, stirring often, until the mixture begins to bubble. This method is simpler, and because the cornstarch prevents the eggs from curdling, it isn't that risky.

Developing a filling with great body as well as flavor is important, as is preventing that filling from turning the prebaked crust soggy. Unlike most pies, this one does not call for the filling to be baked in the crust. The moist, fluid

filling is simply scraped into the crust and chilled. We found two procedures that help to keep the crust crisp.

Coating the dough with graham cracker crumbs as it is rolled out produces an especially crisp, browned pie shell. It also helps to pour the filling into the crust while the filling is warm but not quite hot. Hot filling keeps the crust crisp, but, because it is still quite liquid when poured into the crust, it settles compactly and falls apart when sliced. Warm filling, having had a chance to set a bit, mounds when poured into the crust and slices beautifully. Like hot filling, however, warm filling will not make the crust soggy.

Whatever you do, don't wait until the

filling has cooled to scrape it into the pie shell. When we tried it, cooled filling turned soupy and moistened our once-crisp crust. You can't disturb the filling once the starch bonds have completely set. If you break the starch bonds, you destroy the filling's structure. Those who have tried stirring liqueur into a chilled pastry cream may have been confronted with similar results. When we stirred the cold filling to put it into the crust, we broke the starch bonds so that the filling went from stiff to runny. We learned a major lesson. You can cool the filling to warm, but once it has set, don't stir it.

Vanilla Cream Pie

serves 8

NOTE: *For this pie, warm (but not hot) filling is poured into a fully baked, cooled crust. The filled pie is then refrigerated until thoroughly chilled and topped with whipped cream.*

1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons sugar
1/4 cup cornstarch
1/8 teaspoon salt
5 large egg yolks, lightly beaten
2 cups 2 percent or whole milk

1/2 cup evaporated milk

1/2 vanilla bean, about 3 inches long, split lengthwise

2 tablespoons unsalted butter

1–2 teaspoons brandy

1 recipe Prebaked Pie Shell Coated with Graham Cracker Crumbs, fully baked and cooled completely

Whipped Cream Topping

1 cup heavy cream, chilled

1 tablespoon sugar

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Whisk sugar, cornstarch, and salt in medium saucepan. Add yolks, then immediately but gradually whisk in milk and evaporated milk. Drop in vanilla bean. Cook over medium heat, stirring frequently at first, then constantly as mixture starts to thicken and begins to simmer, 8 to 10 minutes. Once mixture simmers, continue to cook, stirring constantly, for 1 minute longer. Remove pan from heat; whisk in butter and brandy. Remove vanilla bean, scrape out seeds, and whisk them back into filling.

2. Pour filling into shallow pan (another pie pan works well). Put plastic wrap directly on filling surface to prevent skin

from forming; cool until warm, 20 to 30 minutes. Pour warm filling into pie shell and, once again, place sheet of plastic wrap directly on filling surface. Refrigerate pie until completely chilled, at least 3 hours.

3. *For the whipped cream:* Beat cream and sugar in electric mixer at medium speed to soft peaks; add vanilla. Continue to beat to barely stiff peaks. Spread over chilled filling and refrigerate pie until ready to serve.

VARIATIONS:

Chocolate Cream Pie

Follow recipe for Vanilla Cream Pie, adding 2 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa to cornstarch mixture and omitting vanilla bean. Stir in 4 ounces chopped semisweet or bittersweet chocolate, and 1 teaspoon vanilla extract with butter and brandy.

Coconut Cream Pie

Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 300 degrees. Scatter $1^1/_4$ cups sweetened flaked coconut in 9-inch square pan. Bake, stirring occasionally, until evenly golden brown, 20 to 25 minutes. Cool to room temperature. Follow recipe for Vanilla Cream Pie, stirring 1 cup of the coconut

into filling once butter has melted. Continue with recipe, sprinkling remaining toasted coconut over whipped cream topping.

Banana Cream Pie

The safest and best place for the banana slices is sandwiched between two layers of filling. If sliced over the pie shell, the bananas tend to moisten the crust; if sliced over the filling top or mashed and folded into the filling, they turn brown faster.

Follow recipe for Vanilla Cream Pie, spooning half the warm filling into baked and cooled pie shell. Peel 2 medium bananas and slice them over

filling. Top with remaining filling. Continue with recipe.

Butterscotch Cream Pie

Butterscotch pie begins by cooking brown sugar and butter together to produce a rich caramel flavor. Milk is then slowly whisked into the bubbling brown sugar mixture. Don't worry if the sugar lumps—it will dissolve as the milk heats—but make sure not to add the egg-cornstarch mixture until the sugar completely dissolves.

1/4 cup cornstarch

1/4 teaspoon salt

1/2 cup evaporated milk

5 large egg yolks
6 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 cup packed light brown sugar
2 cups whole milk
$1^1/_2$ teaspoons vanilla extract
1 recipe Prebaked Pie Shell Coated with Graham Cracker Crumbs, fully baked and cooled completely

Whipped Cream Topping

1 cup heavy cream, chilled
1 tablespoon sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Dissolve cornstarch and salt in evaporated milk; whisk in egg yolks and set aside.

2. Meanwhile, heat butter and brown sugar in medium saucepan over medium heat until candy thermometer registers 220 degrees, about 5 minutes. Gradually whisk in whole milk. Once sugar dissolves, gradually whisk in cornstarch mixture. Continue cooking until mixture comes to boil; cook 1 minute longer. Turn off heat, then stir in vanilla. Pour filling into shallow pan (another pie pan works well). Put plastic wrap directly on filling surface to prevent skin from

forming; cool until warm, 20 to 30 minutes. Pour filling into pie shell and, once again, place sheet of plastic wrap on filling surface. Refrigerate until completely chilled, at least 3 hours.

3. *For the whipped cream:* Beat cream and sugar in electric mixer at medium speed to soft peaks; add vanilla. Continue to beat to barely stiff peaks. Spread whipped cream over chilled filling and refrigerate pie until ready to serve.

LEMON MERINGUE PIE

THE IDEAL LEMON MERINGUE PIE HAS A rich and lemony filling topped with an airy, nicely toasted meringue. The lemon filling should be soft but not runny, firm enough to cut but not stiff and gelatinous. And the meringue should not break down and puddle on the bottom or "weep" on top—not even on rainy days.

The ingredients in lemon meringue pie have remained constant for some time: sugar, water (or sometimes milk), cornstarch (sometimes mixed with flour), egg yolks, lemon juice (and

usually zest), and a little butter. To our taste, the straightforward lemon flavor of the water-based filling is pleasant, but it is also one-dimensional, lacking depth. Milk, however, subdues the lemon flavor. The solution is to rely primarily on water and a lot of egg yolks (we use six rather than the more conventional three), eliminating the milk altogether. This has another benefit: the additional egg yolks allow you to cut back on both sugar (which acts as a softener at a certain level) and cornstarch and still achieve a firm yet tender filling.

The meringue is much more tricky. On any given day it can shrink, bead, puddle, deflate, burn, sweat, break down, or turn rubbery. Most cookbooks

don't even attempt to deal with the problems of meringue. They supply the standard recipe—granulated sugar and cream of tartar beaten slowly into the egg whites—assuming, apparently, that some sort of flaw is unavoidable. After making 30-something lemon meringue pies, we're not sure we blame anyone for skirting the issue. For as easy as it was to figure out the perfect lemon filling, the meringue remained, finally, only a manageable mystery.

The puddling underneath the meringue is from under-cooking. Undercooked whites break down and return to their liquid state. The beading on top of the pie is from overcooking. This near-the-

surface overcooking of the meringue causes the proteins in the egg white to coagulate, squeezing out the moisture, which then surfaces as tears or beads. This double dilemma might seem insurmountable, but we hit upon a solution.

If the filling is piping hot when the meringue is applied, the underside of the meringue will not undercook; if the oven temperature is relatively low, the top of the meringue won't overcook. Baking the pie in a relatively cool oven also produces the best-looking, most evenly browned meringue. To further stabilize the meringue, we like to beat in a tiny bit of cornstarch; if you do this, the meringue will not weep, even on hot,

humid days.

Lemon Meringue Pie

serves 8

NOTE: *As soon as the filling is made, cover it with plastic wrap and then start working on the meringue. Add hot filling to the pie shell, apply the meringue and then quickly get the pie into the oven.*

Lemon Filling

1 cup sugar

$^1/_4$ cup cornstarch

$^1/_8$ teaspoon salt

$1^1/_2$ cups cold water

6 large egg yolks

1 tablespoon grated zest and

1/2 cup juice from 2 or 3 lemons

2 tablespoons unsalted butter

Meringue Topping

1 tablespoon cornstarch

1/8 cup water

1/4 teaspoon cream of tartar

1/2 cup sugar

4 large egg whites

1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract

1 recipe Prebaked Pie Dough Coated with Graham Cracker Crumbs, fully baked and cooled completely

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. *For the filling:* Mix sugar, cornstarch, salt, and water in large, nonreactive saucepan. Bring mixture to simmer over medium heat, whisking occasionally at beginning of process and more frequently as mixture begins to thicken. When mixture starts to simmer and turn translucent, whisk in egg yolks, two at a time. Whisk in zest, then lemon juice, and finally butter. Bring mixture to a good simmer, whisking constantly. Remove from heat, place plastic wrap directly on surface of filling to keep hot and prevent skin from forming.

2. *For the meringue:* Mix cornstarch with water in small saucepan; bring to simmer, whisking occasionally at beginning and more frequently as mixture thickens. When mixture starts to simmer and turn translucent, remove from heat. Let cool while beating egg whites.

3. Heat oven to 325 degrees. Mix cream of tartar and sugar together. Beat egg whites and vanilla until frothy. Beat in sugar mixture, 1 tablespoon at a time, until sugar is incorporated and mixture forms soft peaks. Add cornstarch mixture, 1 tablespoon at a time; continue

to beat meringue to stiff peaks. Remove plastic from lemon filling and return to very low heat during last minute or so of beating meringue (to ensure filling is hot).

4. Pour hot filling into pie shell. Using a rubber spatula, immediately distribute meringue evenly around edge and then center of pie to keep it from sinking into filling (see figure 22). Make sure meringue attaches to pie crust to prevent shrinking (see figure 23). Use back of spoon to create peaks all over meringue. Bake pie until meringue is golden brown, about 20 minutes. Transfer to wire rack and cool to room temperature.

Serve that day.

Figure 22.

Start by placing dabs of meringue evenly around the edge of the pie. Don't pile too much meringue in one place or it may start to sink into the filling. Once the edge of the pie is covered with meringue, fill in the center with the

remaining meringue.

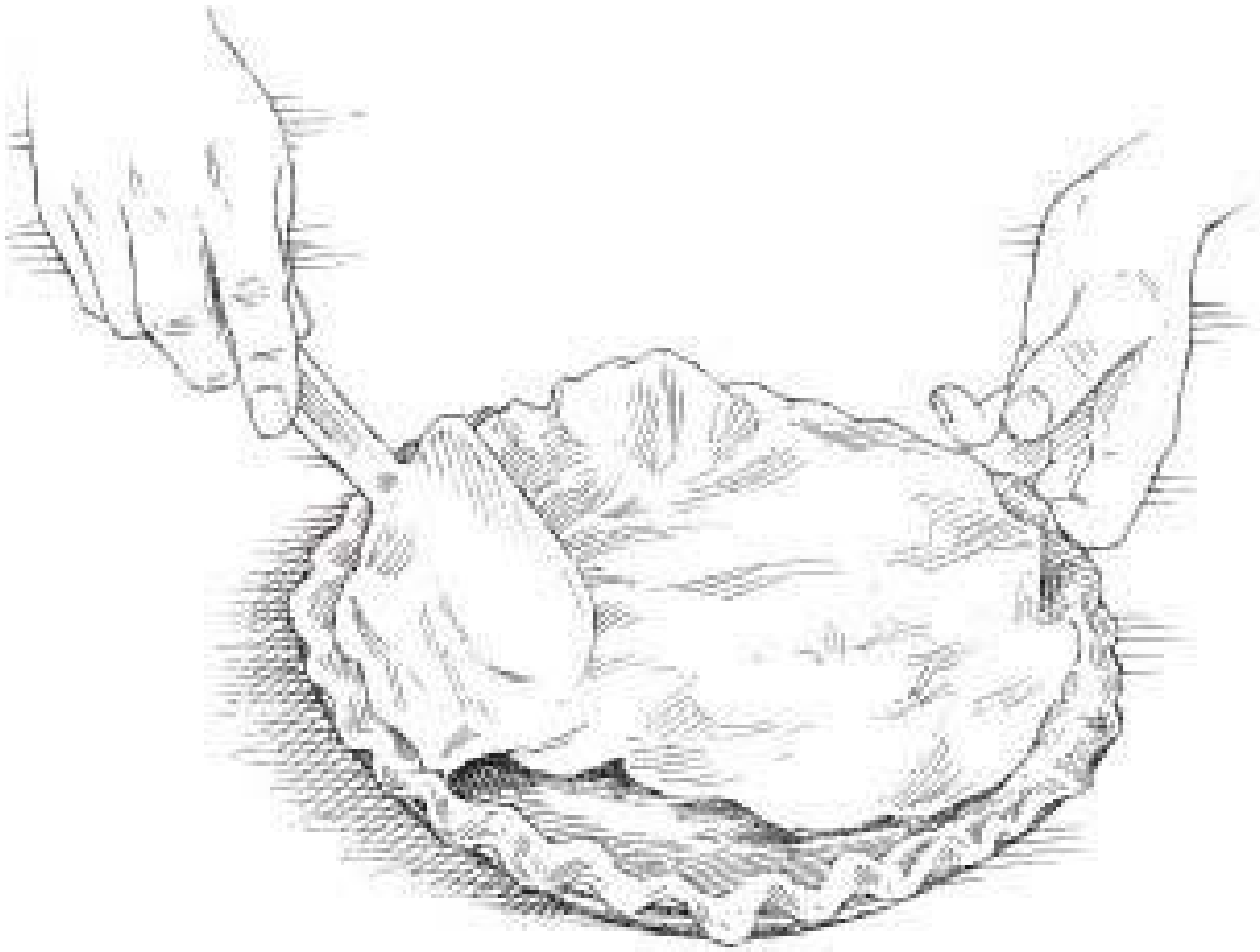

Figure 23.

Use a rubber spatula to anchor the meringue to the edge of the crust or it may pull away and shrink in the oven.

KEY LIME PIE

THE STANDARD RECIPE FOR KEY LIME PIE IS incredibly simple: beat four egg yolks, add a 14-ounce can of sweetened condensed milk, and then stir in one-half cup of lime juice and a tablespoon of grated lime zest. Pour it all into a graham cracker crust, chill until firm, and top the pie with sweetened whipped cream.

It would be lovely if this recipe worked, but we found that it doesn't, at least not to our complete satisfaction. Although the filling does set firm enough

to yield clean-cut slices, it has a loose, "slurpy" consistency. We tried to fix the consistency by beating the yolks until thick, as some recipes direct, but this did not help. Nor did it help to dribble in the lime juice rather than adding it all at once, as other recipes suggest. We also made the filling with only two yolks and with no yolks at all (such "eggless" versions of the recipe do exist), but this yielded even thinner fillings.

Still, the time spent mixing Key lime pie fillings in various ways was not a total loss. While in the heat of experimenting, we inadvertently threw the lime zest into a bowl in which we had already placed the egg yolks. When we whisked up the yolks, they turned

green, and the whole filling ended up tinted a lovely shade of pale lime. What a great way to dispense with food coloring.

Having found the mix-and-chill method wanting, we decided to try baking the pie. We used the same ingredients as before and simply baked the pie until the filling stiffened slightly, about 15 minutes in a moderate oven. The difference between the baked pie (which was really a custard) and the unbaked pie (which had merely been a clabber) was remarkable. The baked filling was thick, creamy, and unctuous, reminiscent of cream pie. It also tasted more pungent and complex than the raw

fillings, because the heat of the oven released the flavorful oils in the lime zest.

The filling is fairly tart and must be overset by whipped cream that has been generously sweetened. Since granulated sugar can cause graininess at high levels, we opt for confectioners' sugar in the topping for this pie.

Key Lime Pie

serves 8

NOTE: *If you prefer, you may use the Prebaked Pie Dough Coated with Graham Cracker Crumbs, but we like the simple graham cracker crust in this recipe. We tested this recipe with hard-to-find Key limes and regular supermarket limes (called Persian limes) and found that the pies tasted pretty much the same. Since Key limes are a nuisance to zest and squeeze (these tiny limes have thin skins and are full of seeds) and very hard to find, we recommend using regular Persian*

limes.

Lime Filling

4 teaspoons grated zest plus $^1/_2$ cup strained juice from 3 to 4 limes

4 large egg yolks

1 14-ounce can sweetened condensed milk

Graham Cracker Crust

11 full-size graham crackers, processed to fine crumbs ($1^1/_4$ cups)

3 tablespoons granulated sugar

5 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

Whipped Cream Topping

$^3/_4$ cup heavy cream, chilled

$^1/_4$ cup confectioners' sugar

$^1/_2$ lime, sliced paper thin and dipped in sugar (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. *For the filling:* Whisk zest and yolks in medium bowl until tinted light green, about 2 minutes. Beat in milk, then juice; set aside at room temperature to thicken.

2. *For the crust:* Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 325 degrees. Mix crumbs and sugar in medium bowl. Add butter; stir with fork until well blended. Scrape mixture into 9-inch pie pan; press crumbs over bottom and up sides of pan to form even crust. Bake until lightly browned and fragrant, about 15 minutes. Transfer pan to wire rack; cool to room temperature, about 20 minutes.

3. Pour lime filling into crust; bake until center is set, yet wiggly when jiggled, 15 to 17 minutes. Return pie to wire rack; cool to room temperature. Refrigerate until well chilled, at least 3 hours. (Can

be covered with lightly oiled or oil-sprayed plastic wrap laid directly on filling and refrigerated up to 1 day.)

4. *For the whipped cream:* Up to 2 hours before serving, whip cream in medium bowl to very soft peaks. Adding confectioners' sugar 1 tablespoon at a time, continue whipping to just-stiff peaks. Decoratively pipe whipped cream over filling or spread evenly with rubber spatula. Garnish with optional sugared lime slices and serve.

VARIATION:

Key Lime Pie with

Meringue Topping

We prefer to top Key lime pie with whipped cream, but meringue is another option.

Follow recipe for Key Lime Pie, replacing Whipped Cream Topping with Meringue Topping from recipe for Lemon Meringue Pie on chapter eight. Bake pie only 7 minutes, then apply meringue gently, first spreading a ring around the outer edge to attach the meringue to the crust, then filling in the center (see figures 22 and 23). Return pie to oven and bake 20 minutes more.

HOW TO MAKE SIMPLE FRUIT DESSERTS

Fruit Basics

Fruit Salads, Poached Fruit, Compotes, and Baked Apples

Crisps, Betties, Cobblers, and Buckles

Shortcakes

Fools, Summer Puddings, and Gratins

FRUIT BASICS

THIS BOOK FOCUSES ON SIMPLE FRUIT desserts, most of which are American in origin. We have not considered desserts where fruit is an accent or which require lengthy preparation, such as pies and tarts. The recipes in this book are quick to make and casual in nature. The emphasis is clearly on the fruit.

There are not too many secrets to buying good fruit. In-season, local fruit is always a better bet than out-of-season fruit that has been shipped thousands of miles, if only because local fruit can be

picked when ripe. Otherwise, use common sense when shopping.

At home, fruit stored at room temperature will continue to soften and ripen, while refrigeration will retard this process. To speed the ripening of pears or stone fruits, seal them in a paper bag with several green bananas. The bananas give off ethylene, a clear, odorless gas that promotes ripening.

This chapter outlines some common techniques we use in our kitchen to prepare fruits. Refer to them when making the desserts in the following chapters.

Figure 1.
When grating citrus peel, tiny bits of peel often stick to the grater between the holes. Rather than wasting this peel, you can quickly and easily brush it off onto waxed

paper, using a clean toothbrush kept especially for this purpose.

Figure 2.

We have read many tricks for coring an apple and tested numerous gadgets that core, peel, and/or slice apples. Our favorite method is actually quite simple. Remove the peel (we prefer a paring knife, but you may use a

vegetable peeler), then quarter the apple through the stem end. The core can now be removed from each quarter. However, the direction you cut is important. We find that when we start at the stem end, the quarters often break.

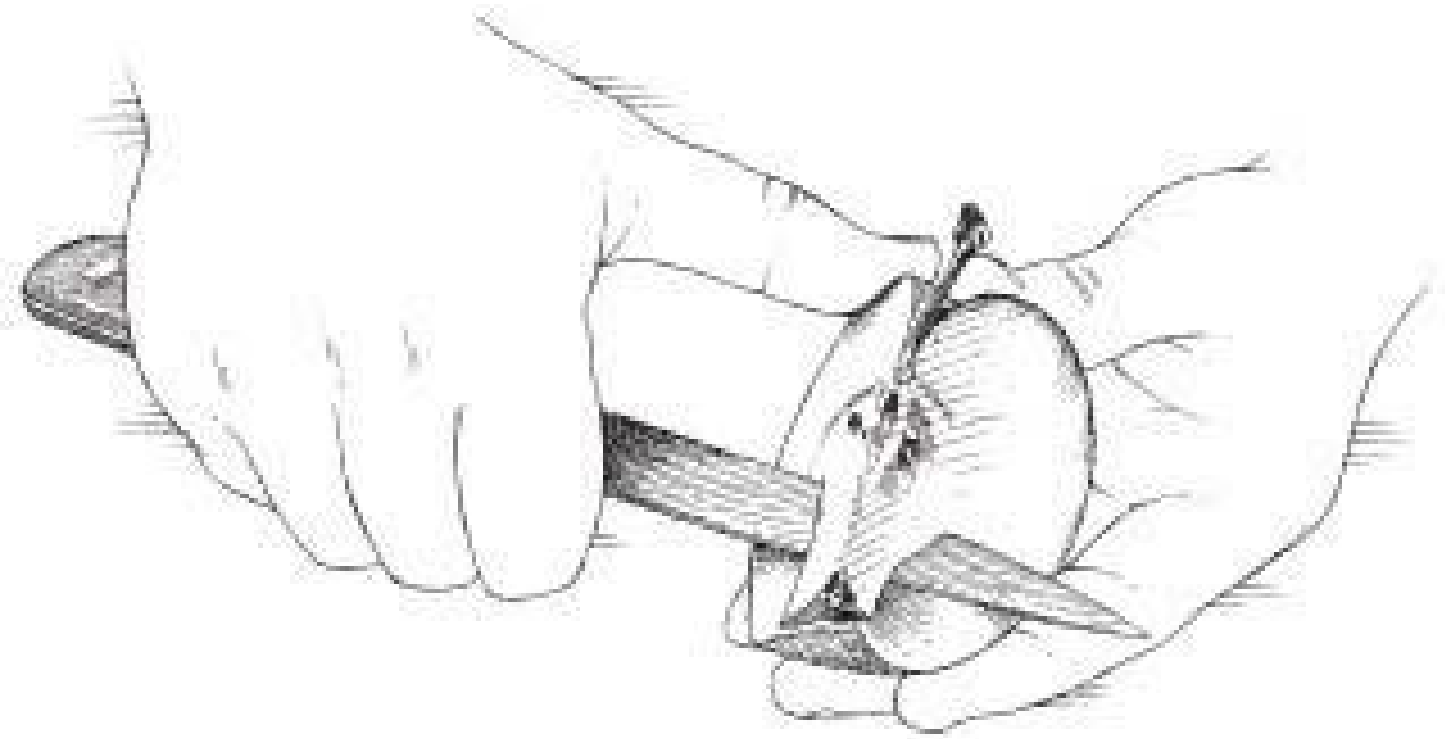

Figure 3.
Instead, start removing the core at the blossom end. The cored quarter can now be sliced as needed.

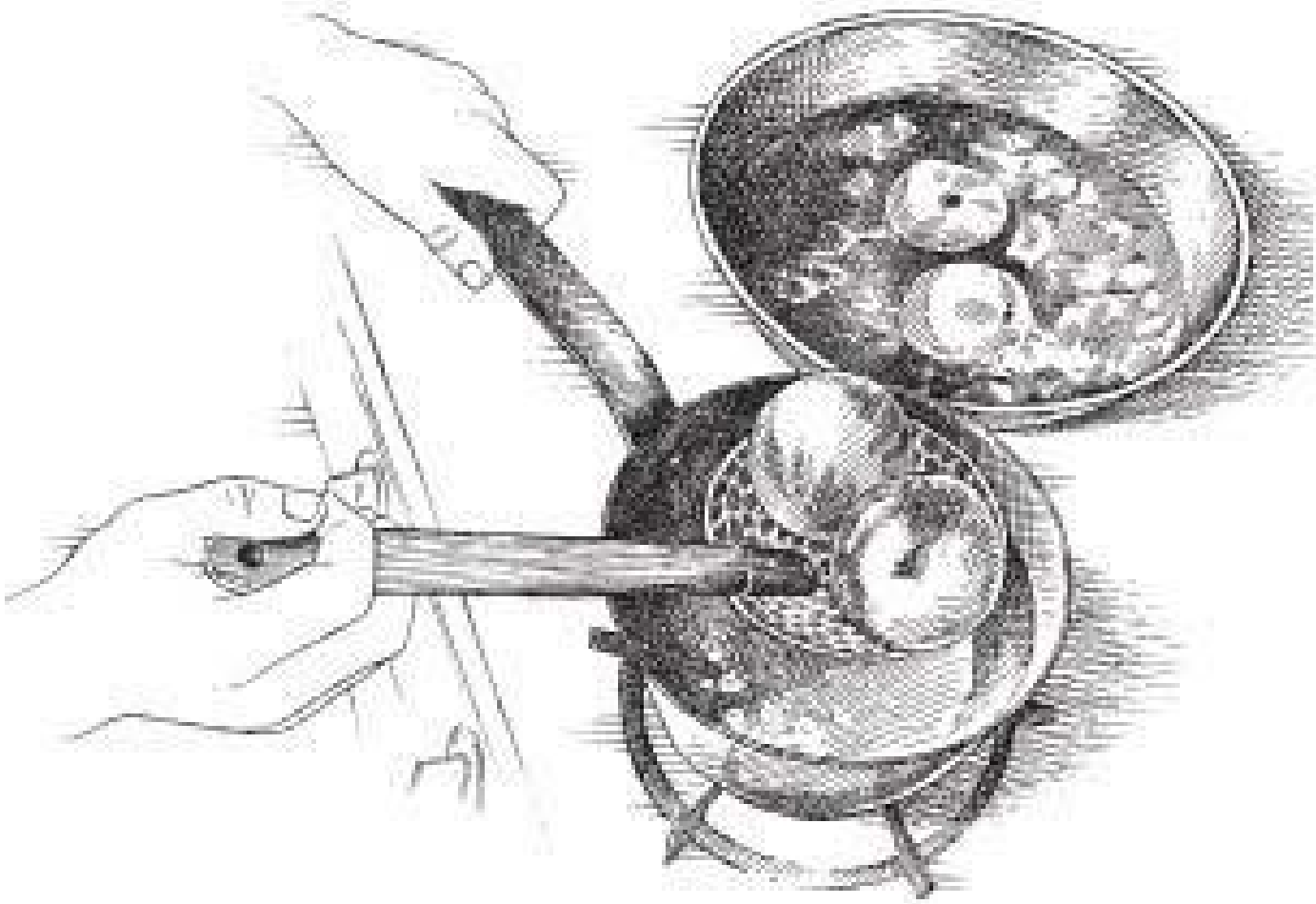

Figure 4.
To remove the skin from peaches and other stone fruits, bring a small saucepan of water to a boil. Add peaches and simmer, turning once or twice, for 30 seconds. Remove peaches with slotted spoon or Chinese skimmer and

transfer to bowl of ice water to stop the cooking process.

Figure 5.
When cool enough to handle, remove peaches from water and slip skins off with fingers.

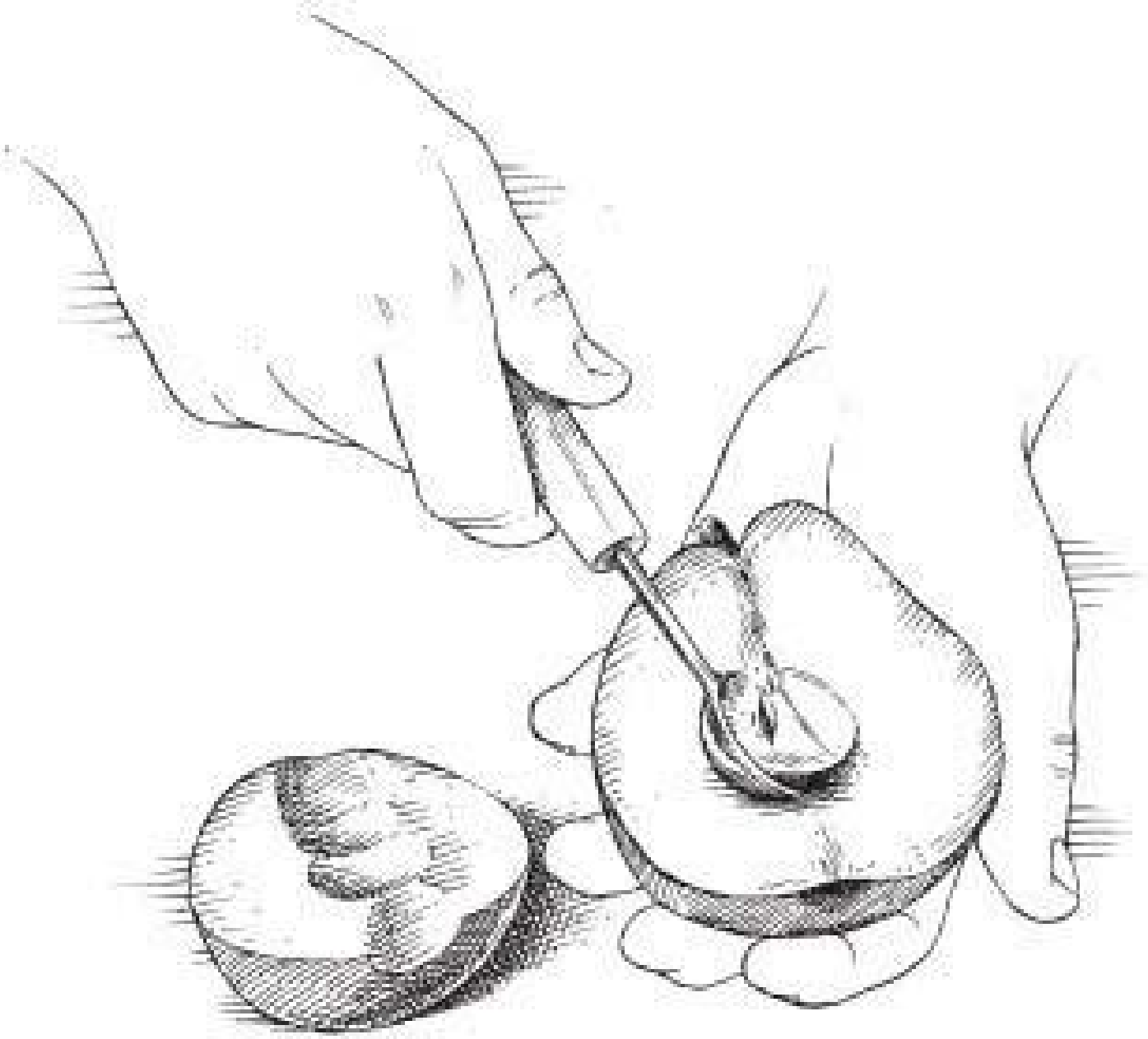

Figure 6.
To core a pear, cut the fruit in half from stem to blossom end. Use a melon baller to cut around the central core with a circular

motion.

Figure 7.
Draw the melon baller from the central core to the top of the pear, removing the interior portion of the stem as you go.

Figure 8.
Use the melon baller to remove the blossom end as well.

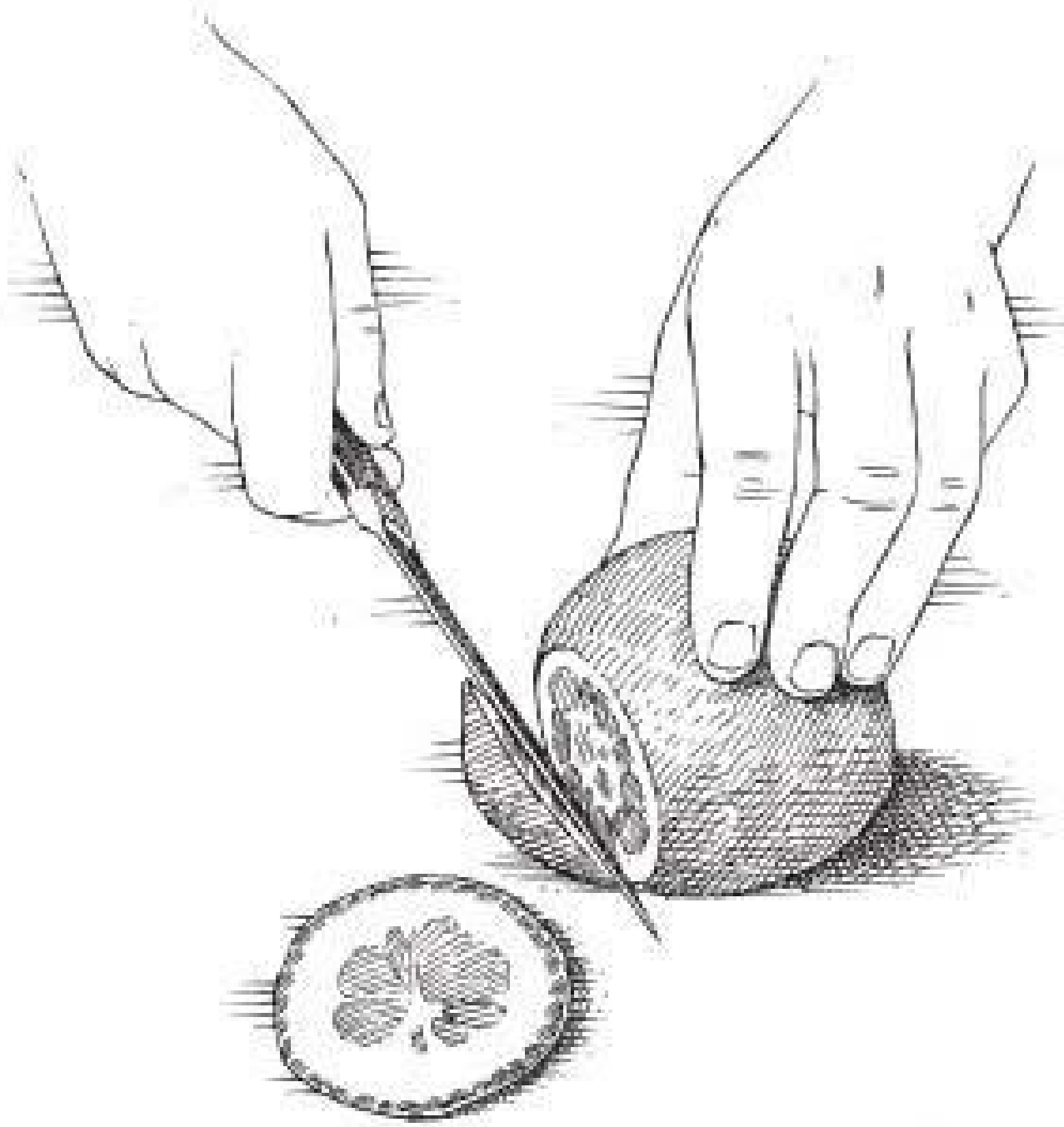

Figure 9.
In order to remove all of the skin and white pith from oranges and grapefruit, we prefer to slice off

the rind with a knife rather than peeling the fruit by hand. Start by trimming a thin slice from either end so that the fruit will sit flat on a counter.

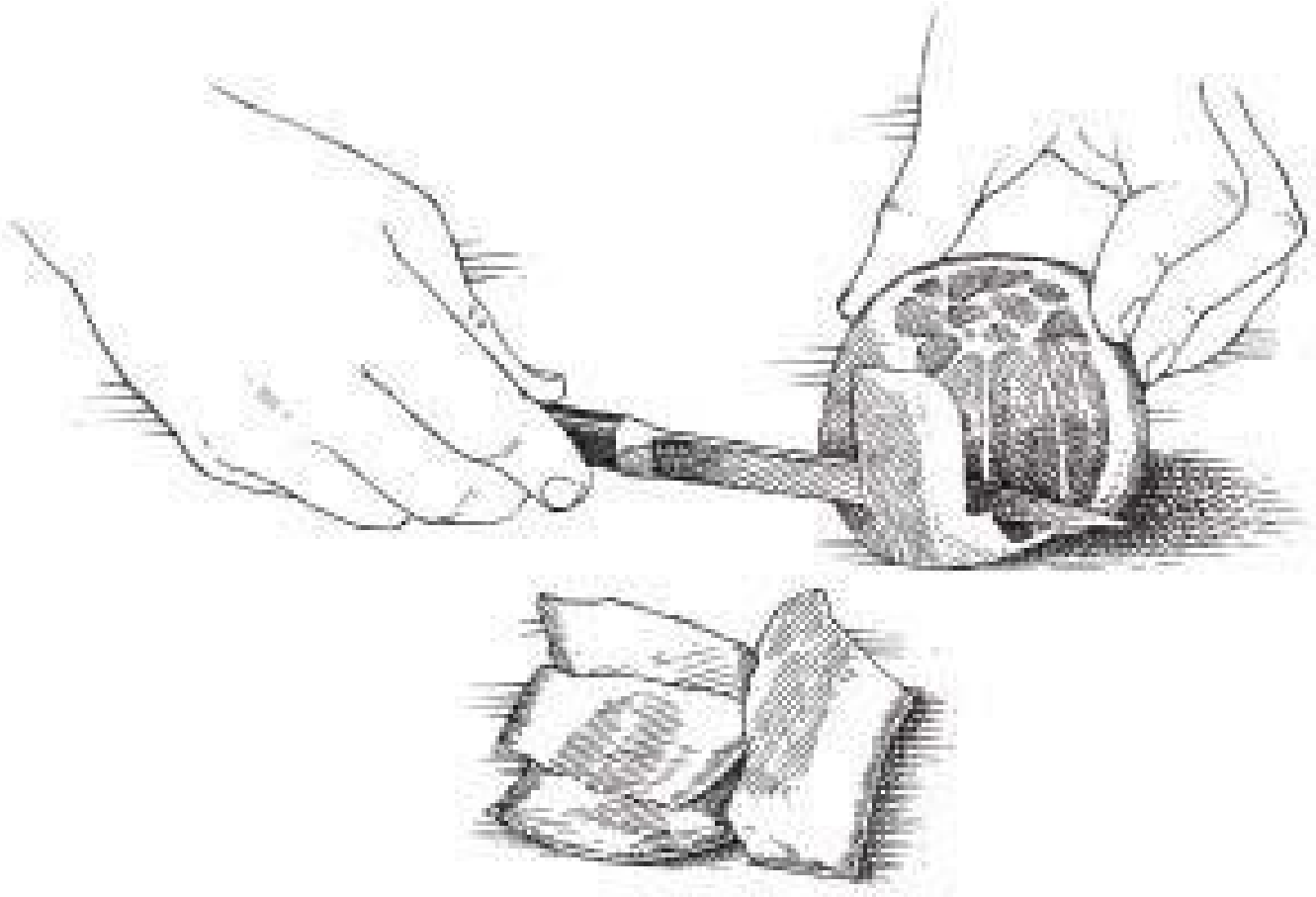

Figure 10.
Using a sharp paring knife, cut down around the orange to remove the peel and pith in long slices. Try to follow the outline of the fruit as closely as possible. The fruit can now be sliced into rounds for poaching or

segmented for use in salads.

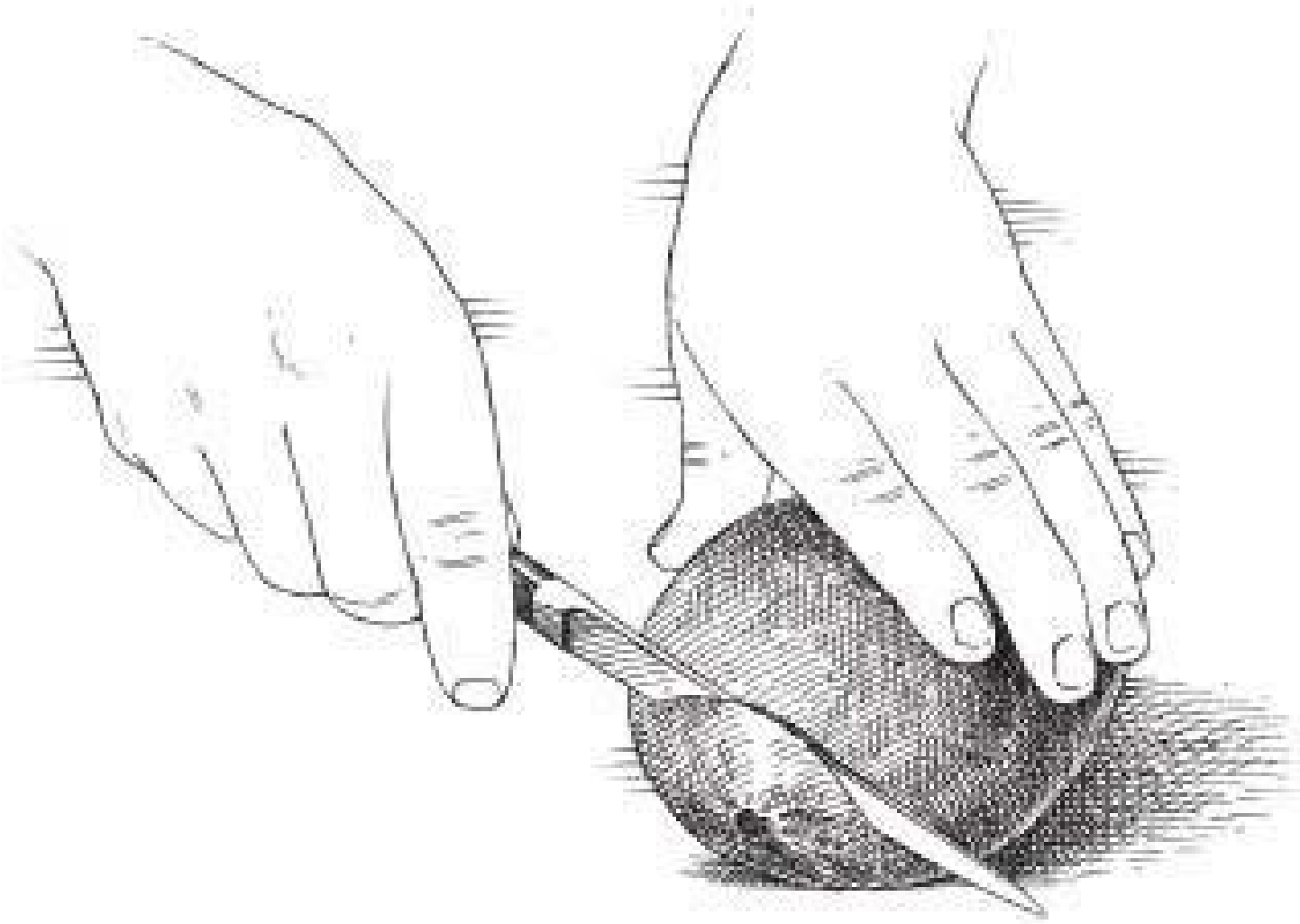

Figure 11.
A sharp paring knife makes it easy to peel a mango. This method also ensures long, thin, attractive strips of fruit, which are needed in many recipes. Start by removing a thin slice from one

end of the mango so that it sits flat on a work surface.

Figure 12.
Hold the mango cut side down, and remove the skin in thin strips with a paring knife, working from top to bottom.

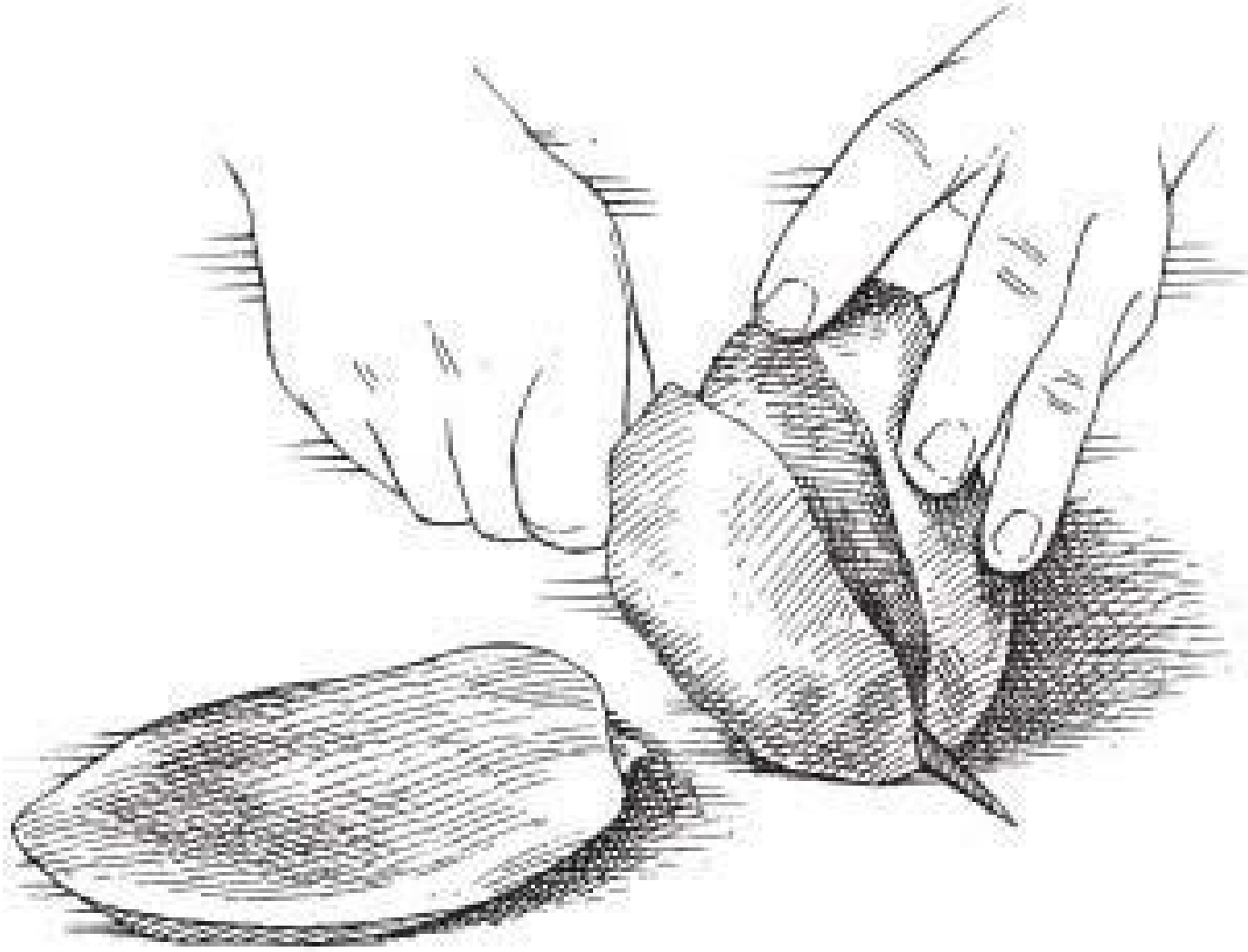

Figure 13.
Once the peel has been removed, cut down along the side of the flat pit to remove the flesh from one side of the mango. Do the same thing on the other side of the pit.

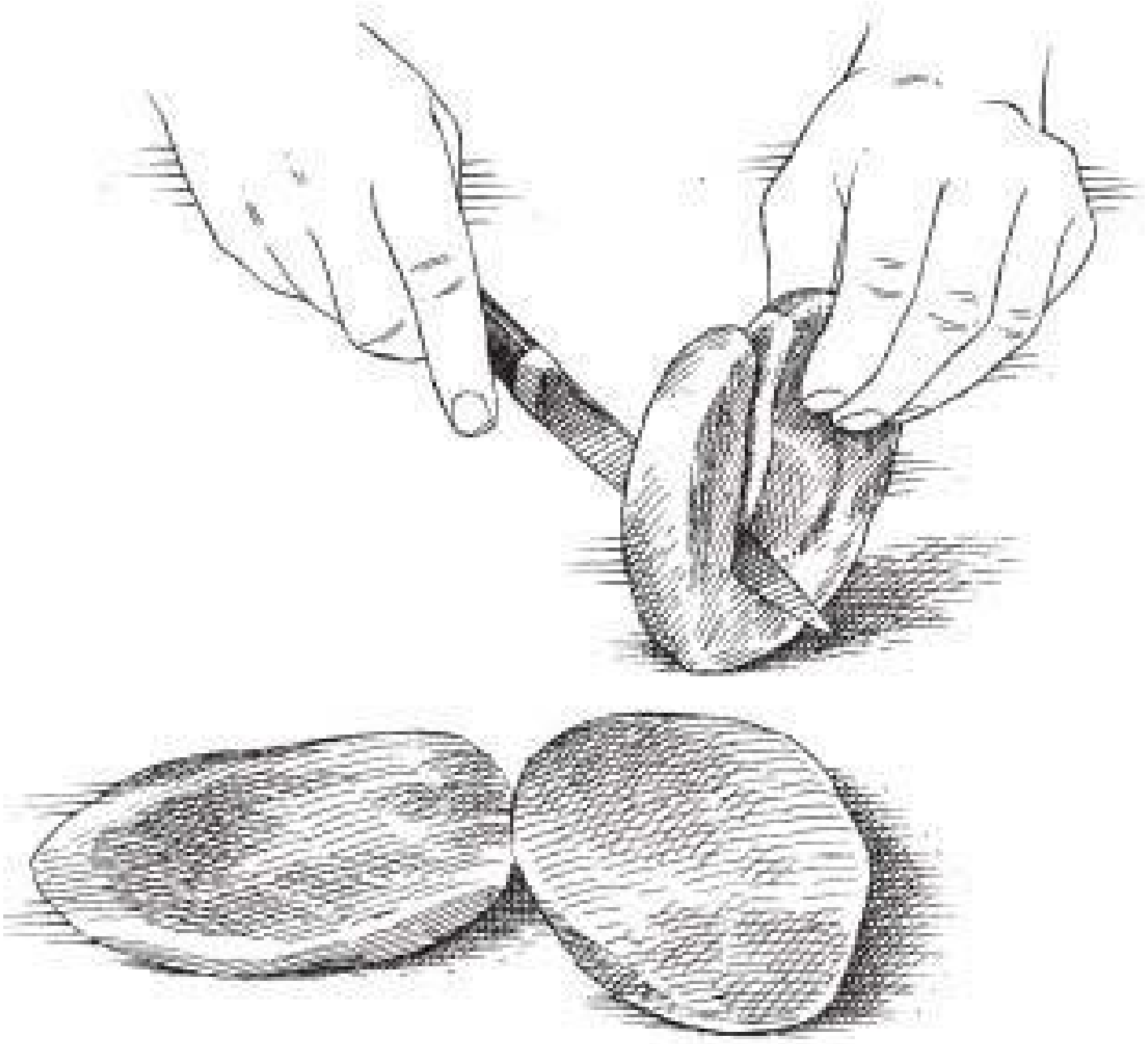

Figure 14.
Trim around the pit to remove any remaining flesh. The flesh can be sliced or chopped as needed for recipes.

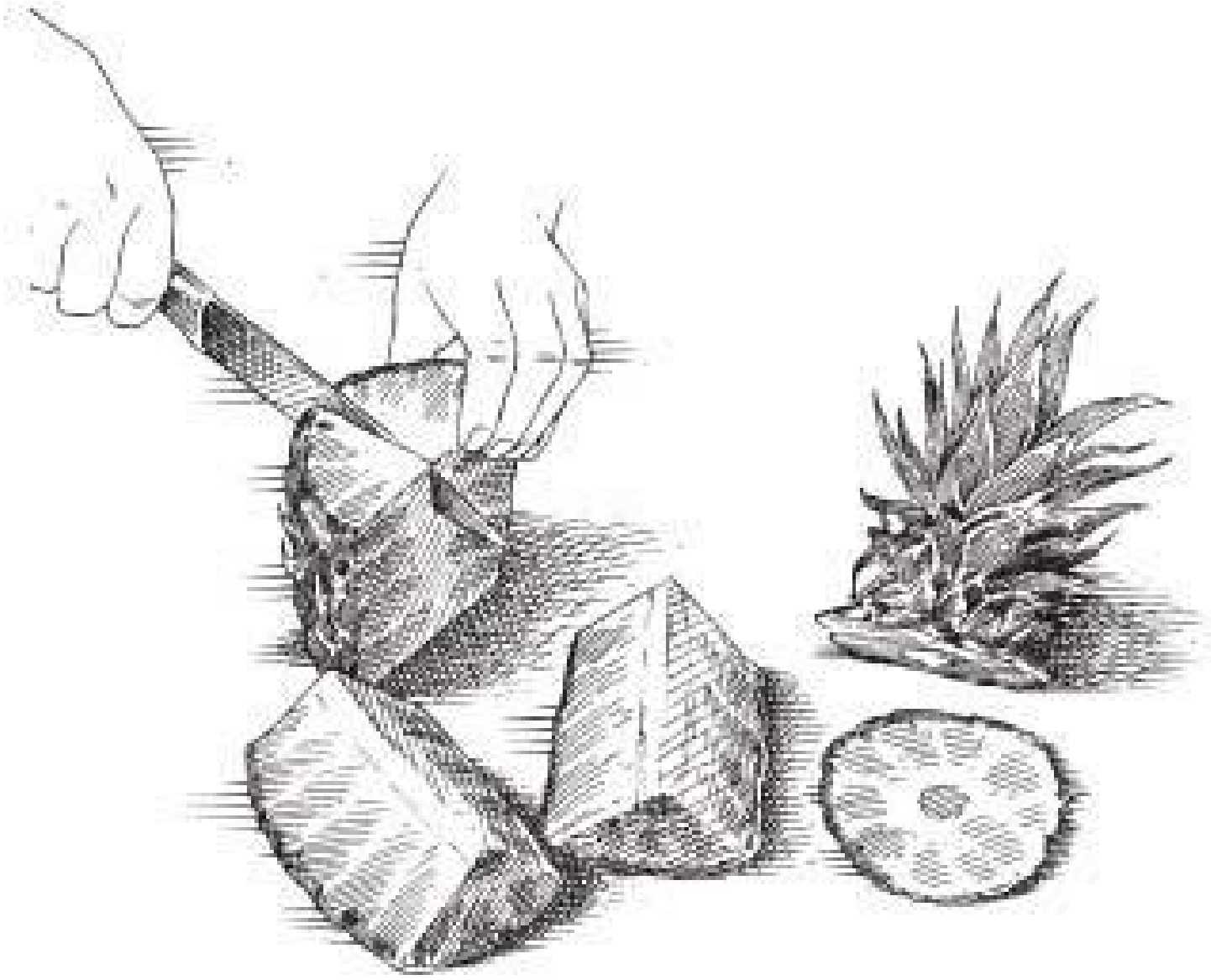

Figure 15.
A pineapple can seem daunting to peel and core. We find the following method is the easiest. Start by trimming the ends of the pineapple so that it will sit flat on

a counter. Cut the pineapple through the ends into four quarters.

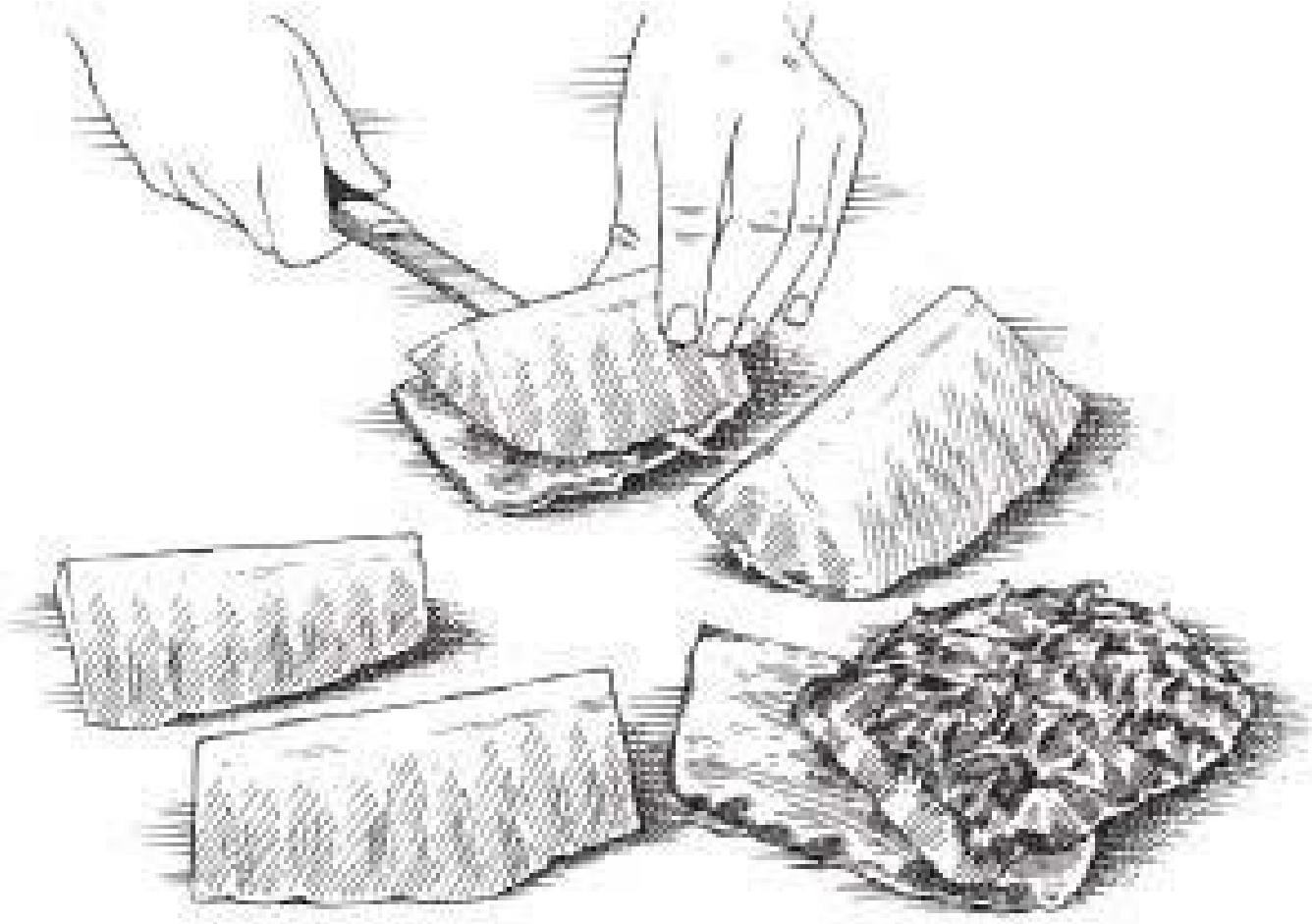

Figure 16.
Lay each quarter cut side up on a work surface and slide a knife between the skin and flesh to remove the skin.

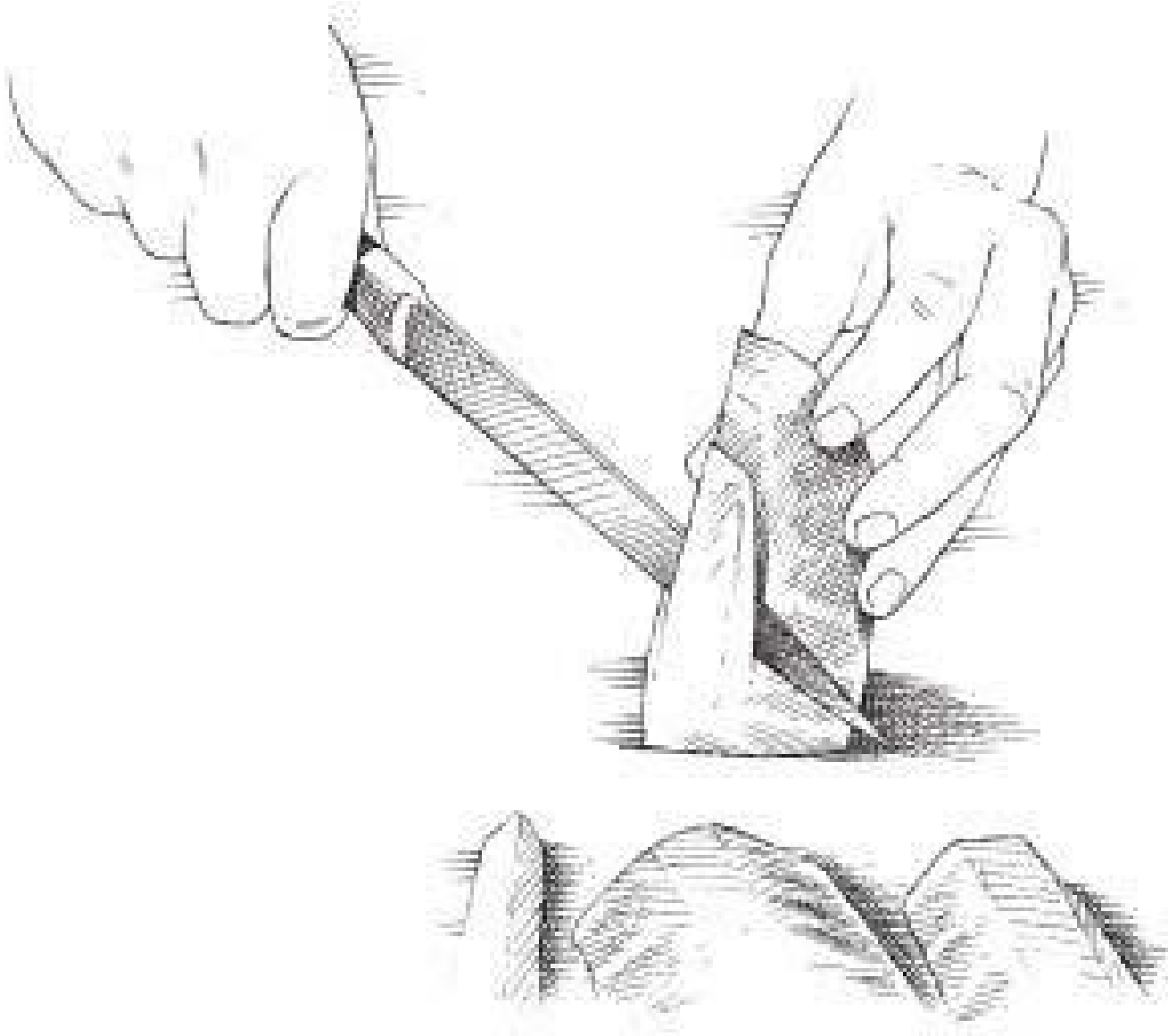

Figure 17.
Stand each peeled quarter on end and slice off the portion of tough, light-colored core. The peeled and cored pineapple quarter may be cut crosswise into $^{1}/_{2}$-inch-

thick pieces for salad or sliced lengthwise into long spears that can be grilled.

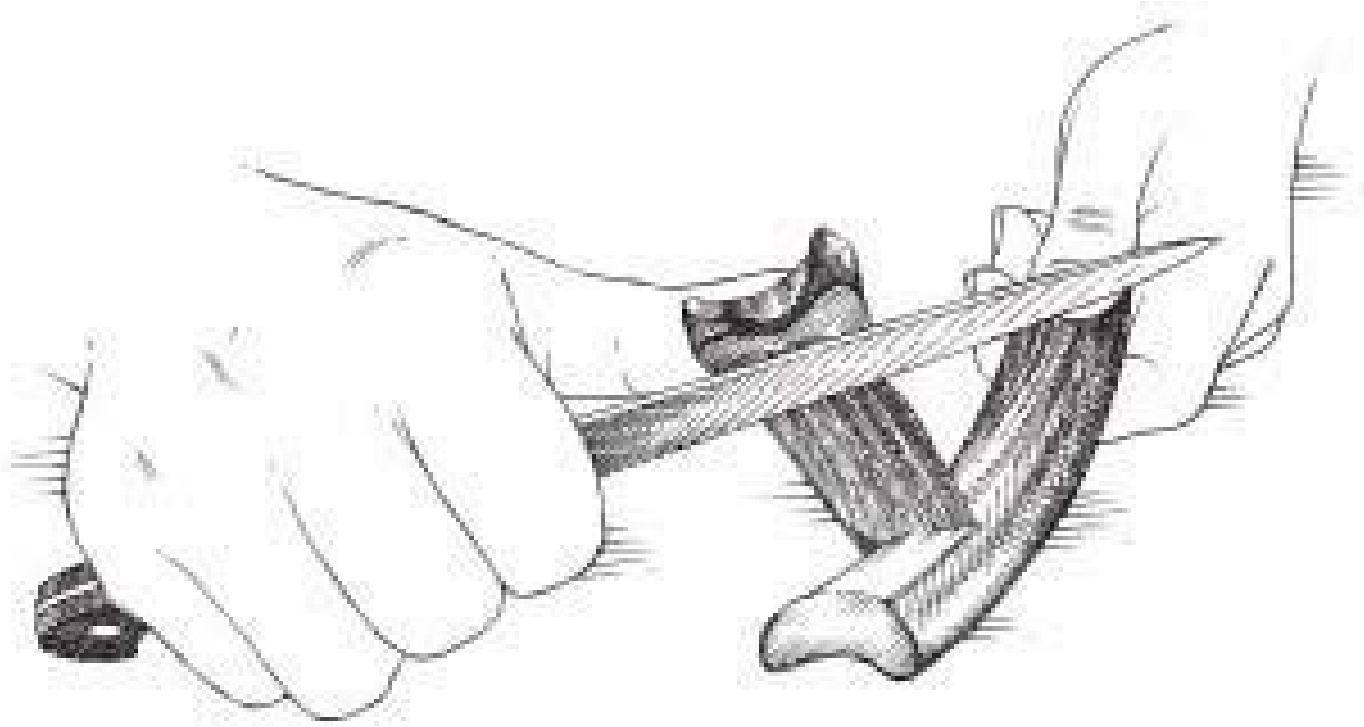

Figure 18.
Rhubarb stalks, especially thick ones, are covered with a stringy outside layer, which should be removed before cooking. Cut away and discard the leaves, which are inedible. Trim both ends of the stalk. Then partially slice a thin disk from the bottom of the trimmed rhubarb stalk, being careful not to cut all the

way through. Gently pull the partially attached disk away from the stalk, pull back the outer peel, and discard.

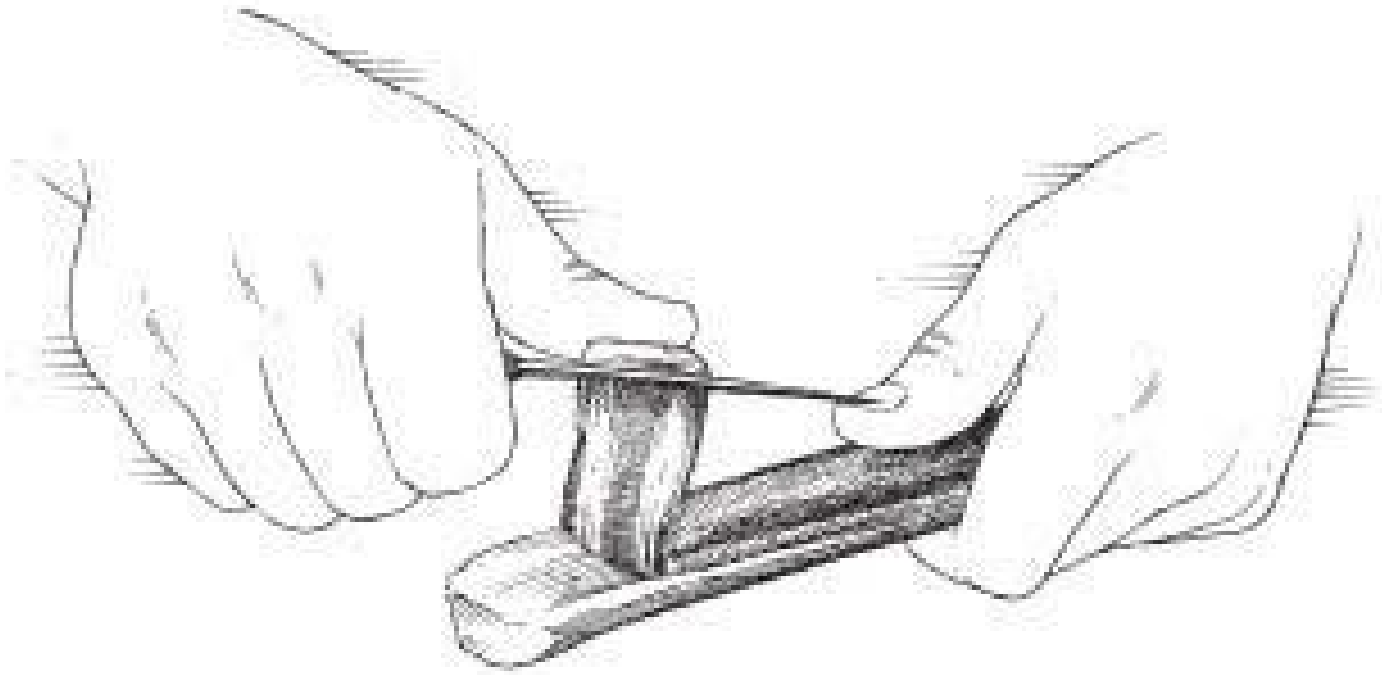

Figure 19.
Make a second cut partially through the bottom of the stalk in the reverse direction. Pull back the peel on the other side of the stalk and discard. The rhubarb is now ready to be sliced or chopped as needed in recipes.

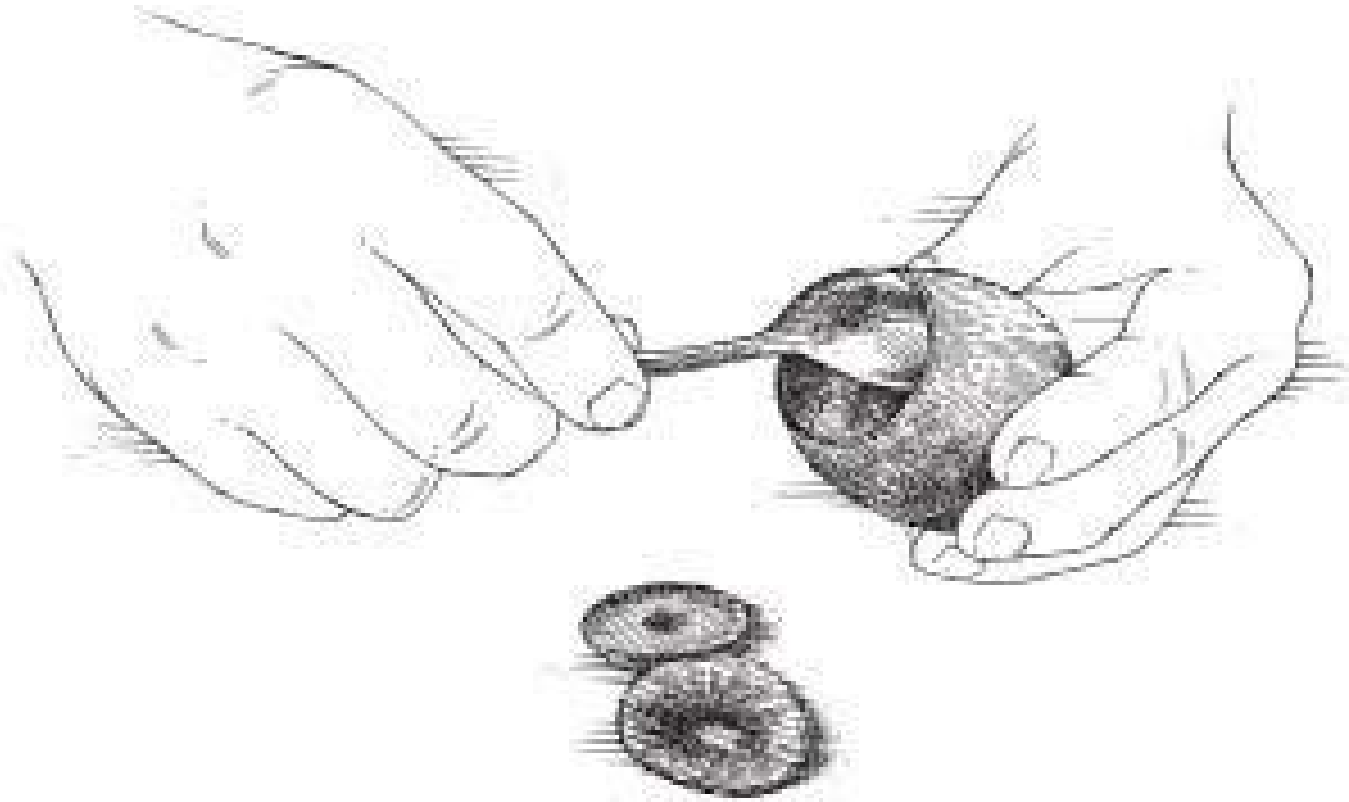

Figure 20.
A kiwi peel can be tough to remove with a vegetable peeler or knife. We like the following method. Start by trimming the ends of the fruit. Insert a small spoon between the skin and flesh, with the bowl of the spoon facing the flesh. Push the spoon down

and carefully move it around the fruit, separating the flesh from the skin.

Figure 21.
Gently remove the spoon and then pull the loosened skin away from the flesh.

FRUIT SALADS, POACHED FRUIT, COMPOTES, AND BAKED APPLES

THE SIMPLEST FRUIT DESSERT IS A RIPE PEAR or peach enjoyed as is without embellishment. When the fruit is not perfectly ripe or when something slightly more elaborate is desired, the fruit can be cooked and/or sugared.

This chapter focuses on desserts where fruit is on its own, usually with some sort of syrup or sauce, but without

pastry or other flour-based crusts or toppings. This includes everything from a simple fruit salad (where the fruit is not cooked, but sugared to form a light sauce) to baked fruit, grilled fruit, fruit compote (made by simmering dried fruits in syrup), and poached fruit.

Master Recipe

Fruit Salad

NOTE: ***There are two secrets to good fruit salad. First, make sure to stir the sweetener into some liquid to dissolve it completely. We found that honey is foolproof but that granulated sugar works well provided the mixture is stirred vigorously. Second, fruit salad must contain some citrus juice to prevent browning. We use the juice of an orange (lemon juice can be too tart) to keep everything looking fresh. After the orange juice and sweetener,***

everything else is optional, although you should use at least three or four fruits for a good contrast of flavors, colors, and textures. Serves six.

1/4 cup orange juice, preferably fresh-squeezed

2 tablespoons honey or sugar

6 cups fruit cut into bite-sized pieces, such as cored apples with peel on (*see* figures 2 and 3);

cored pears with peel on (*see* figures 6–8); hulled strawberries; peeled kiwis (*see* figures 20 and 21); stemmed

blueberries, whole raspberries, or blackberries;

peeled and seeded melon;

peeled and pitted mangoes (*see* figures 11–14);

pitted peaches, apricots, nectarines, or plums;

seedless grapes;

peeled (*see* figures 9 and 10) and sectioned oranges or grapefruits

Mint leaves for garnish, optional

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Combine juice and honey or sugar in large serving bowl. Add

fruit to bowl and toss to combine.

2. Chill fruit salad for 1 hour to blend flavors. (Salad can be refrigerated for 1 day in airtight container.) Serve fruit in individual bowls with a little liquid poured over each portion. Garnish with mint leaves, if desired.

VARIATIONS:

Fruit Salad with Liqueur

Add 1 tablespoon fruit-flavored liqueur to orange juice-honey mixture. Orange- or cherry-flavored liqueurs, such as Grand Marnier or kirsch, are especially

good.

Mixed Berry Salad

Add 1 tablespoon kirsch to orange juice-honey mixture. Use 3 cups strawberries and 1 cup each raspberries, blackberries, and blueberries.

Mixed Melon Salad

Use 2 cups each honeydew, cantaloupe, and watermelon.

Citrus Salad

Add 1 tablespoon Campari to orange juice-honey mixture. Use 2 cups each pink grapefruit, navel oranges, and blood oranges.

Peach-Berry Salad

Use 4 cups peaches or nectarines and 1 cup each blueberries and raspberries.

Master Recipe

Poached Fruit

NOTE: ***Unlike other cooking methods, poaching leaves intact the shape, texture, and basic flavor of fruit, while improving its tenderness and enhancing its flavor. The cooking medium is a simple syrup made with water and sugar. Other ingredients, such as spices, herbs, or wine, can be added to the syrup (*** **see** ***To Flavor Poaching Liquid).***

We found that most syrups are too sweet. After extensive testing, we chose a fairly light syrup

made with three parts liquid to one part sugar. This light syrup does not have the body of syrup made with more sugar, but it also is not cloyingly sweet.

In our testing, we also kept reducing the cooking time in order to keep the fruit from becoming mushy. Eventually we eliminated cooking altogether. As long as the fruit is ripe, we recommend the following method: Bring the syrup ingredients to a boil, add the fruit, turn off the heat, cover the pan, and set aside until the syrup has reached room temperature.

By this time the fruit will be tender and there is no chance that it will become mushy. If poaching underripe fruit, you should simmer the fruit in the syrup for several minutes, then turn off the heat and cover the pan. Either way, when the fruit is tender, chill and serve. Serves four to six.

Master Recipe

Poached Fruit

$1\frac{1}{2}$ cups water

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup sugar

2 pounds ripe fruit (*see* To Prepare Fruit for Poaching)

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Combine water and sugar in medium saucepan. Bring to boil and simmer, stirring occasionally, until sugar dissolves completely, about 5 minutes.

2. While syrup is cooking, prepare fruit. Add fruit to pan, turn off heat, cover, and set aside until mixture returns to room temperature, about 30 minutes. Transfer fruit and syrup to airtight container. Refrigerate until well chilled, at least 2 hours and up to 3 days.

3. To serve, spoon portion of fruit and syrup into individual bowls.

VARIATIONS:

Peaches Poached in Spiced Red Wine

Follow Master Recipe, replacing water

with $1^1/_2$ cups fruity red wine. Add 1 cinnamon stick, 2 cloves, and 1 long strip of lemon zest to wine along with sugar.

Poached Pears with Vanilla and Star Anise

Follow Master Recipe, adding 1 whole vanilla bean and 2 pieces star anise to syrup. When cooled, vanilla bean may be removed, washed, and reused.

TO PREPARE FRUIT FOR POACHING

The following quantities will yield the 2 pounds needed for a single recipe of Poached Fruit. Fruits may be combined if desired. For example, use 2 oranges

and 6 figs to yield the necessary 2 pounds.

5 medium apples: Peel, quarter, and core (*see* figures 2 and 3).

12 medium apricots: Halve and pit.

4 cups cherries: Stem and pit.

12 fresh figs: Stem and halve lengthwise.

5 medium nectarines: Halve and pit.

4 medium oranges: Remove rind with sharp knife (*see* figures 9 and 10) and cut crosswise into $^{1}/_{2}$-inch-thick rounds.

5 medium peaches: Peel (*see* figures 4 and 5), halve, and pit.

4 medium pears: Peel, halve, and core (*see* figures 6–8).

1 pineapple: Trim ends, quarter, peel, core, and cut into 2-inch-thick pieces (*see* figures 15–17).

9 medium plums: Halve and pit.

TO FLAVOR POACHING LIQUID

Use these ingredients singly or in combination as desired. Unless otherwise noted, add flavorings to poaching liquid along with sugar.

Liquors and liqueurs: A small amount of the eau-de-vie of the same fruit—such as Framboise with raspberries—enhances the flavor of most poached fruits. Add it after the fruit has cooled to room temperature and use sparingly. Start with no more than 1 tablespoon and add according to taste. Note that the bitterness of the alcohol will quickly

overwhelm the sweetness of the fruit.

In addition to eaux-de-vie, the following liquors may be used, especially with the fruits listed with them: bourbon (apples or pears); Framboise (figs, plums, raspberries, or strawberries); Grand Marnier (all fruit); kirsch (all fruit); and rum (white with delicate and/or acidic fruit; dark with apples and pears).

Citrus zest: Strip zest from one lemon or orange with vegetable peeler and add to poaching liquid.

Fruit juices: Replace half the water

with orange, white grape, raspberry, apple, or other juice.

Herbs: Add several sprigs fresh rosemary, thyme, lemon verbena, or mint.

Spices: Add any of the following, alone or in combination: 1 cinnamon stick, 2 cloves, 10 black peppercorns, 2 pieces star anise, several slices fresh gingerroot.

Vanilla bean: Add 1 whole bean. Don't split the bean unless you want the fruit to

be covered with tiny black specks. Whole beans can be removed from the syrup when cooled, then washed, dried, and reused.

Wines: Replace all or part of the water with red, white, or even rosé wine. Red and rosé wines are good with apricots, cherries, peaches, pears, plums, and strawberries. White wine is best with apples, oranges, pears, and pineapple. Fortified wines, such as port and Madeira, may be used in smaller amounts and are especially good with pears.

Master Recipe

Dried Fruit Compote

NOTE: ***The fruit in a dried fruit compote should be yielding but not mushy and the syrup thick but not cloying, especially since the fruit is already so sweet. We tested various liquids and found water too bland. Wine or liqueur, the latter diluted with a little water to keep it from overpowering the fruit, is preferable. As for the sugar,*** $^{1}/_{4}$ ***cup is sufficient for 2 cups of fruit. In our testing, we often***

found that the syrup reduced before the fruit was tender. When we added more liquid, the syrup was too thin. However, since compotes are often spooned over cake or ice cream, the syrup must be viscous. Our solution is a two-part cooking method. First, simmer the fruit in a covered pot until tender. Then remove the cover and simmer until the liquid is syrupy. This master recipe is fairly plain; add vanilla beans, whole spices, sliced gingerroot, and/or a strip of citrus zest to boost the flavor. Serves six.

2 cups dried fruit

1 cup flavorful liquid, such as white wine, port, or liqueur diluted with water

1/4 cup sugar

Master Instructions

Dried Fruit Compote

1. Combine ingredients in heavy-bottomed medium saucepan. Bring to boil, reduce heat to low, cover, and simmer for 20 minutes.

2. Remove cover and continue cooking over low heat, stirring occasionally, until liquid has reduced and become syrupy, about 15 minutes. Cool to room temperature. (Compote can be refrigerated in airtight container for 1 week.)

VARIATIONS:

Dried Apricot Compote with White Wine and Vanilla

If possible, use plump, medium-orange Mediterranean apricots. This compote is not as intense as the others and can be eaten as is or spooned over ice cream or cake.

Use dried apricots and 1 cup white wine. Add 3 star anise, 1 whole vanilla bean, and $^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoon whole black peppercorns.

Prune Compote with Armagnac and Lemon

This compote is syrupy and the flavor is quite intense. It's best served over ice cream (coffee is particularly good) or pound cake.

Use pitted prunes and $^{3}/_{4}$ cup Armagnac or brandy mixed with $^{1}/_{4}$ cup water. Add 1 long strip lemon zest.

Dried Fig Compote with Port

Like the prune compote, the figs are intensely flavored and best served over vanilla ice cream or pound cake.

Use dried figs, preferably Calmyrna, and 1 cup port. Add 1 cinnamon stick and $^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoon whole cloves.

Baked Apples

NOTE: ***Many apples split or become too mushy when baked. The ideal baked apple will hold its shape during baking, and will soften and remain moist without becoming mushy. We tested nine apple varieties to see how they would hold up and taste when baked. Among common varieties, only Golden Delicious apples rated well. McIntosh were mushy and Red Delicious and Granny Smiths were too dry. Several lesser known varieties also baked up nicely, including Baldwin, Cortland, Ida Red, and Northern Spy. Baked apples require a moderate oven heat of 350 degrees;***

higher temperatures can cause apples to split. To keep the apples moist, we found it necessary to baste them with the pan juices—apple cider is our preferred choice because it reinforces the apple flavor—every fifteen minutes. Serve warm with whipped cream or ice cream if desired. Serves four.

4 large apples, with strip of skin peeled from stem end, then rinsed, dried, and cored (*see* figures 22 and 23)

1/2 cup sugar

1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon

About 1 cup apple cider

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oven to 350 degrees. Place apples in 8-inch square or 9-inch round glass or ceramic baking dish or pie pan. Mix sugar and cinnamon in small bowl. Sprinkle mixture over apples and inside of cavities. Pour enough cider so that liquid comes $^{1}/_{2}$ inch up sides of pan.

2. Bake, basting every 15 minutes, until apples are tender when pierced with thin, sharp knife or cake tester, 45 to 55 minutes. Be careful not to overbake or skins will split, causing apples to lose their shape. Serve apples warm with pan juices. (Can be cooled to room

temperature, covered, and refrigerated for 2 days. Reheat before serving.)

VARIATIONS:

Brown Sugar Baked Apples

Replace white sugar with brown sugar and add 1 teaspoon vanilla extract to cider before pouring into pan.

Baked Apples with Walnut-Raisin Filling

Combine 4 teaspoons softened butter and $^1/_4$ cup each dark raisins and chopped walnuts. Fill each apple cavity with $^1/_4$ of mixture. Sprinkle with cinnamon-sugar and proceed with recipe.

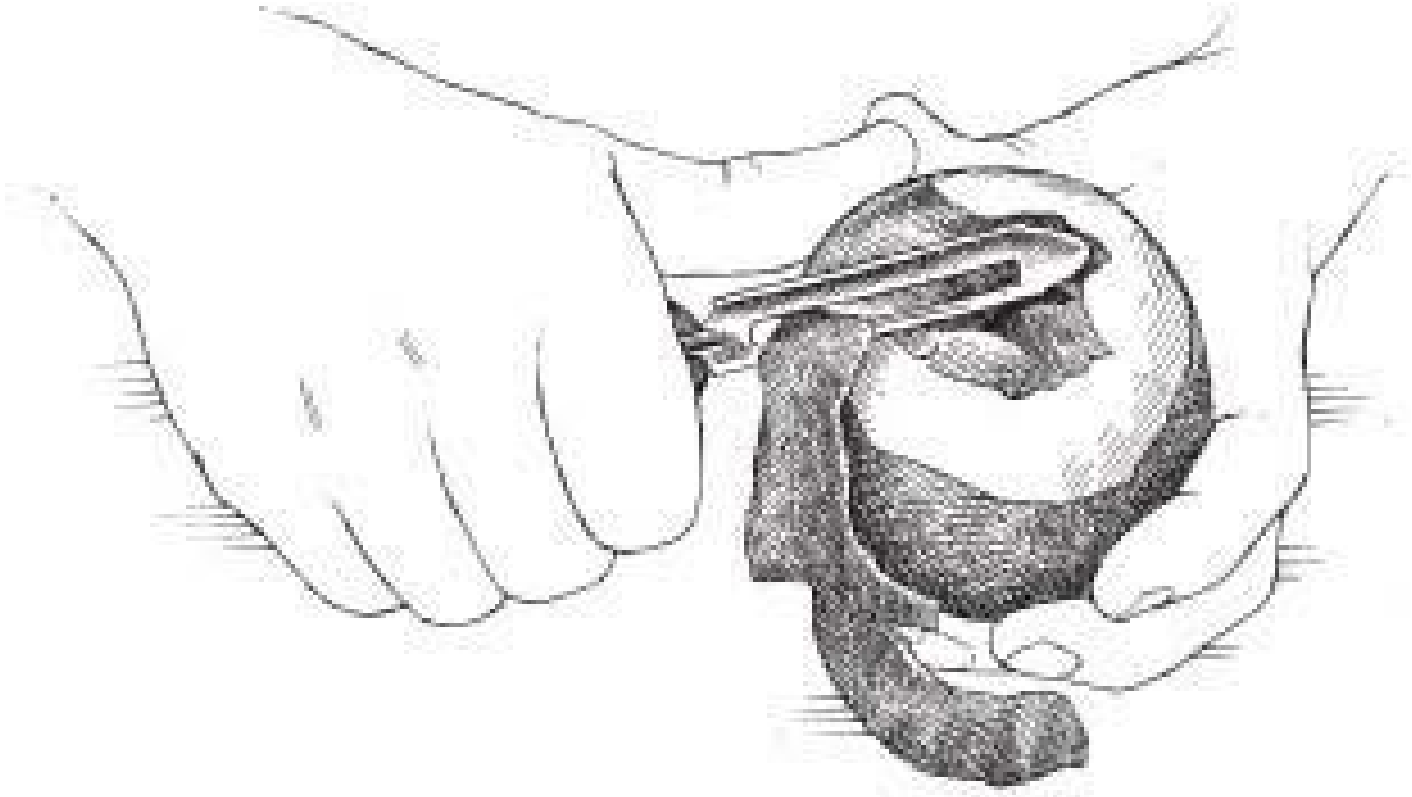

Figure 22.
To allow steam to escape and to keep the apples from bursting in the oven, remove a strip of skin around the apple's stem with a vegetable peeler.

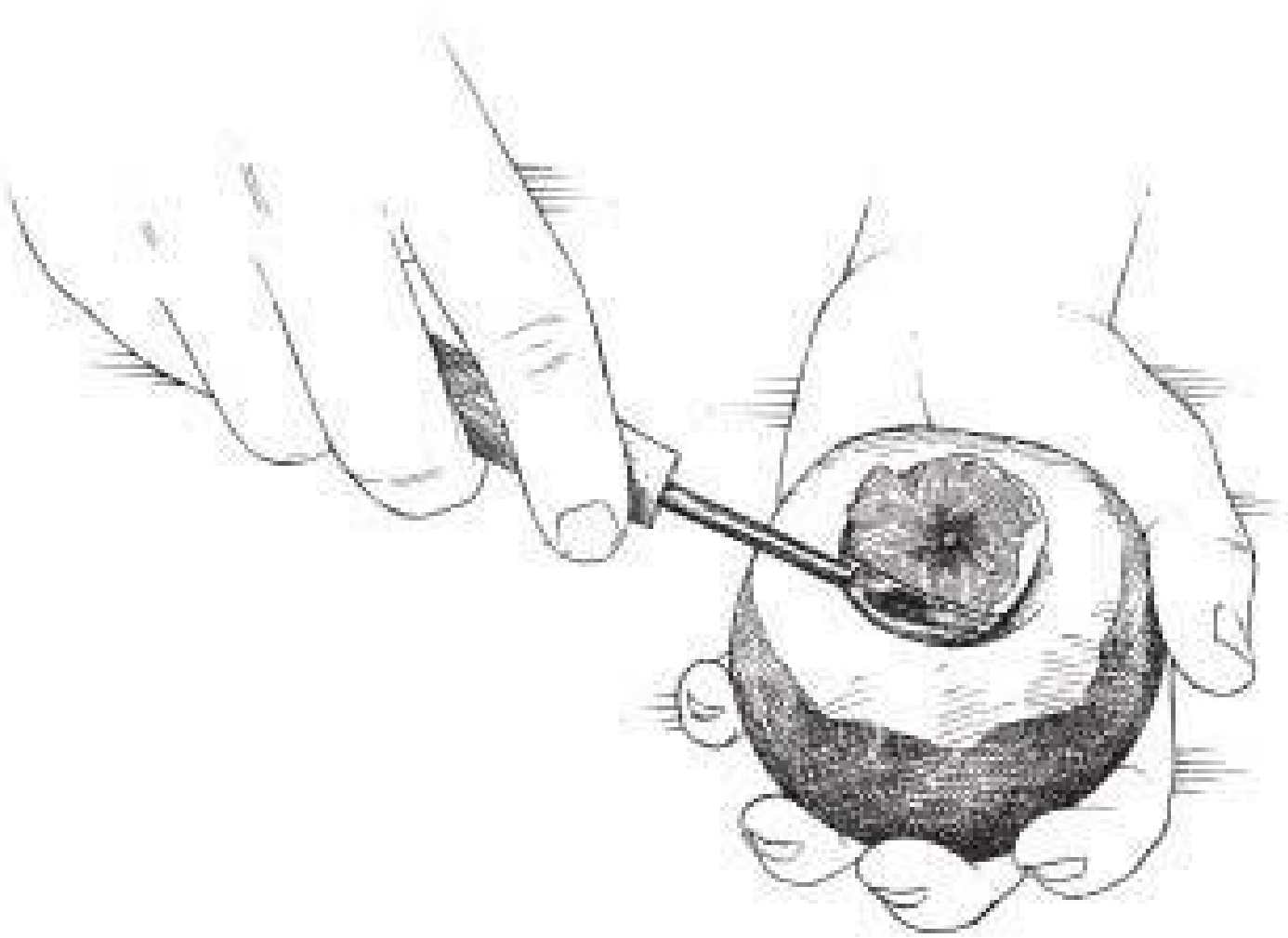

Figure 23.
The easiest way to core a whole apple thoroughly is with a melon baller. Just be careful not to puncture the blossom end.

Baked Peaches Filled with Cookie Crumbs

NOTE: ***Any kind of leftover plain cookies can be ground into a quick filling for halved peaches. Italian cooks use almond-flavored amaretti (almond macaroons), but we found that ground sugar cookies and oatmeal cookies also work well. A moderate oven temperature of 375 degrees is essential. Higher temperatures will cause the cookie filling to burn before the peaches are tender. At lower temperatures, the cookie filling will not brown adequately. Serves four. If desired, add***

ice cream or whipped cream.

4 medium peaches
$^3/_4$ cup cookie crumbs
3 tablespoons sugar
1 large egg yolk
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
2 tablespoons unsalted butter

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oven to 375 degrees. Working over bowl to catch juices, halve and pit peaches. Use small spoon to scoop out some pulp from each half to enlarge cavity left by pit (*see* figure 24). Add pulp to bowl with peach juices.

2. Add $^{1}/_{2}$ cup cookie crumbs, sugar, egg yolk, and vanilla to bowl with peach pulp. Mix well to form wet paste. Mound filling into cavities in peaches and compact with fingers until smooth.

3. Grease large, shallow baking dish with 1 tablespoon butter. Arrange peach halves in dish. Cut remaining butter into 8 small pieces and dot each peach with 1 piece. Sprinkle remaining $^{1}/_{4}$ cup cookie crumbs over fruit.

4. Bake until peaches are soft and filling begins to brown, about 40 minutes. Serve warm. (Peaches can be kept at

room temperature for several hours and reheated just before serving.)

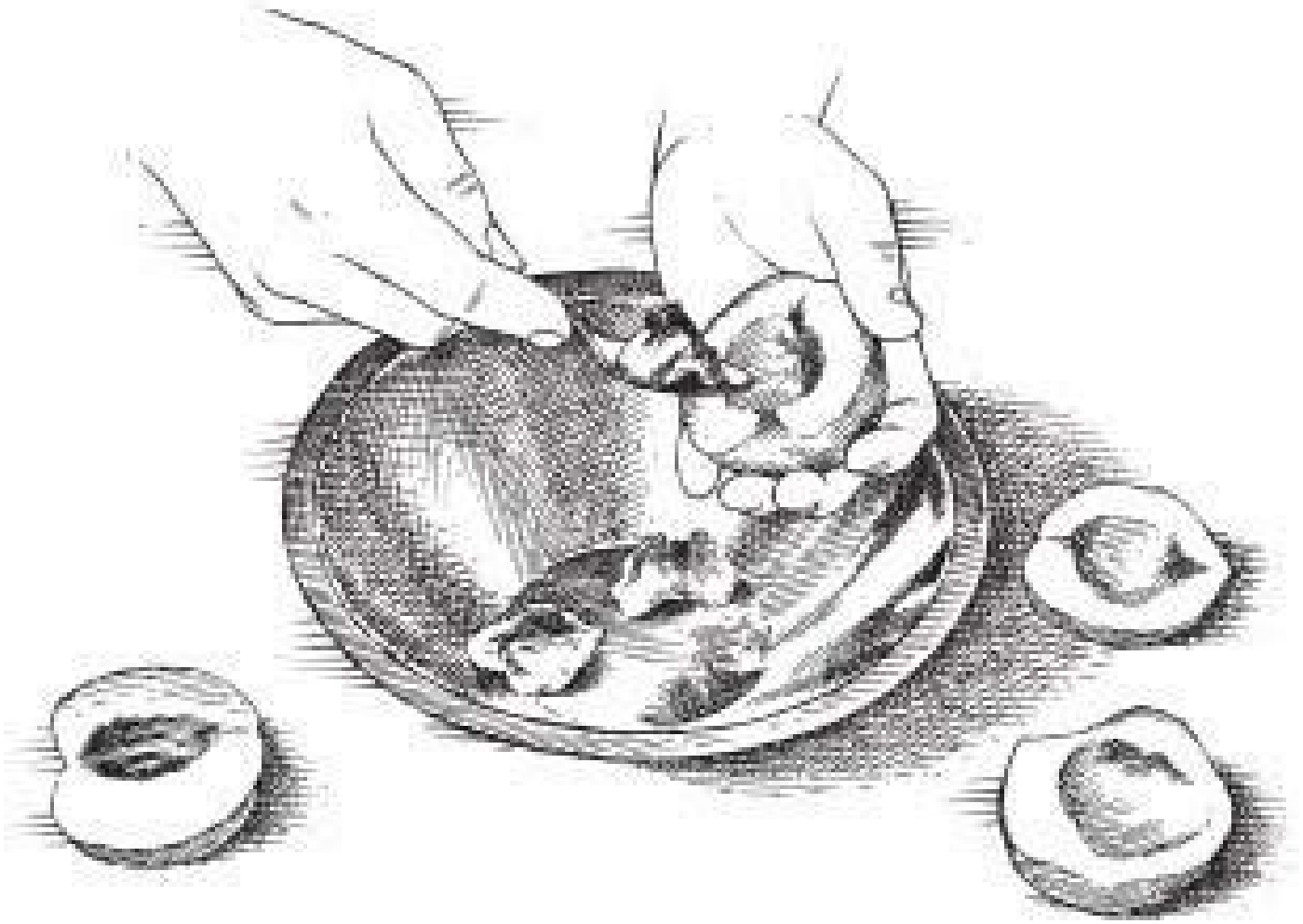

Figure 24.
Use small spoon to scoop out some pulp from each peach half to enlarge cavity left by pit. Work over a bowl to catch juices and add pulp to bowl.

Grilled Bananas with Caramel Sauce and Nuts

NOTE: ***Ripe but firm bananas take well to grilling as long as the fire is not blazing hot. A medium-hot fire (you should be able to hold your hand 5 inches above the cooking surface for no more than 3 or 4 seconds) is ideal. The intense heat concentrates the flavor of the fruit without causing the fruit to incinerate. Either a charcoal or gas grill should be able to produce the necessary heat. Fruit will pick up any flavors from the grate, so make sure to scrape it thoroughly.***

A sweet and creamy caramel sauce

and some chopped nuts complete the dessert, although a scoop of ice cream would not be amiss. Bananas should be warmed through on the grill; if cooked further they will become too soft. See variations for grilling pineapples, peaches, and pears. Serves four.

1/2 cup sugar

1/3 cup heavy cream

1 tablespoon rum or brandy

4 firm but ripe bananas, unpeeled but halved lengthwise (*see* figure 25)

1 tablespoon vegetable oil

1/2 cup chopped walnuts or

pecans, toasted

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Light charcoal or gas grill fire. While waiting for grill to heat up, place sugar and $2^1/_2$ tablespoons water in medium, heavy-bottomed saucepan. Turn heat to medium-low and stir often until sugar dissolves. Increase heat to high and cook, without stirring but swirling pan occasionally, until caramel is uniformly golden amber color, about 4 minutes.

2. Put on oven mitts to protect hands. Remove pan from heat and slowly whisk in cream a tablespoon at a time, making sure to keep bubbling caramel away

from arms. Stir until smooth. Stir in rum. Set caramel sauce aside to thicken and cool.

3. Brush cut side of bananas with oil. Grill bananas, cut side down, over medium-hot fire until light golden grill marks appear, about 2 minutes. Turn bananas and grill cut side up for 1 minute.

4. Remove bananas from grill and place two banana halves on each individual plate. Drizzle caramel sauce over bananas and sprinkle with nuts. Serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Grilled Pineapple with Caramel Sauce and Nuts

Replace bananas with 1 ripe pineapple that has been quartered, peeled, cored (*see* figures 15–17), and cut lengthwise into 1-inch-thick pieces. Brush both sides of fruit with oil and grill 2 minutes per side.

Grilled Peaches with Caramel Sauce and Nuts

Replace bananas with 4 firm but ripe peaches that have been halved and pitted. Brush cut side of fruit with oil and grill cut side down for 4 minutes and

cut side up for 3 minutes.

Grilled Pears with Caramel Sauce and Nuts

Replace bananas with 4 firm but ripe pears that have been halved lengthwise and cored (*see* figures 6–8). Brush cut side of fruit with oil and grill 5 minutes per side.

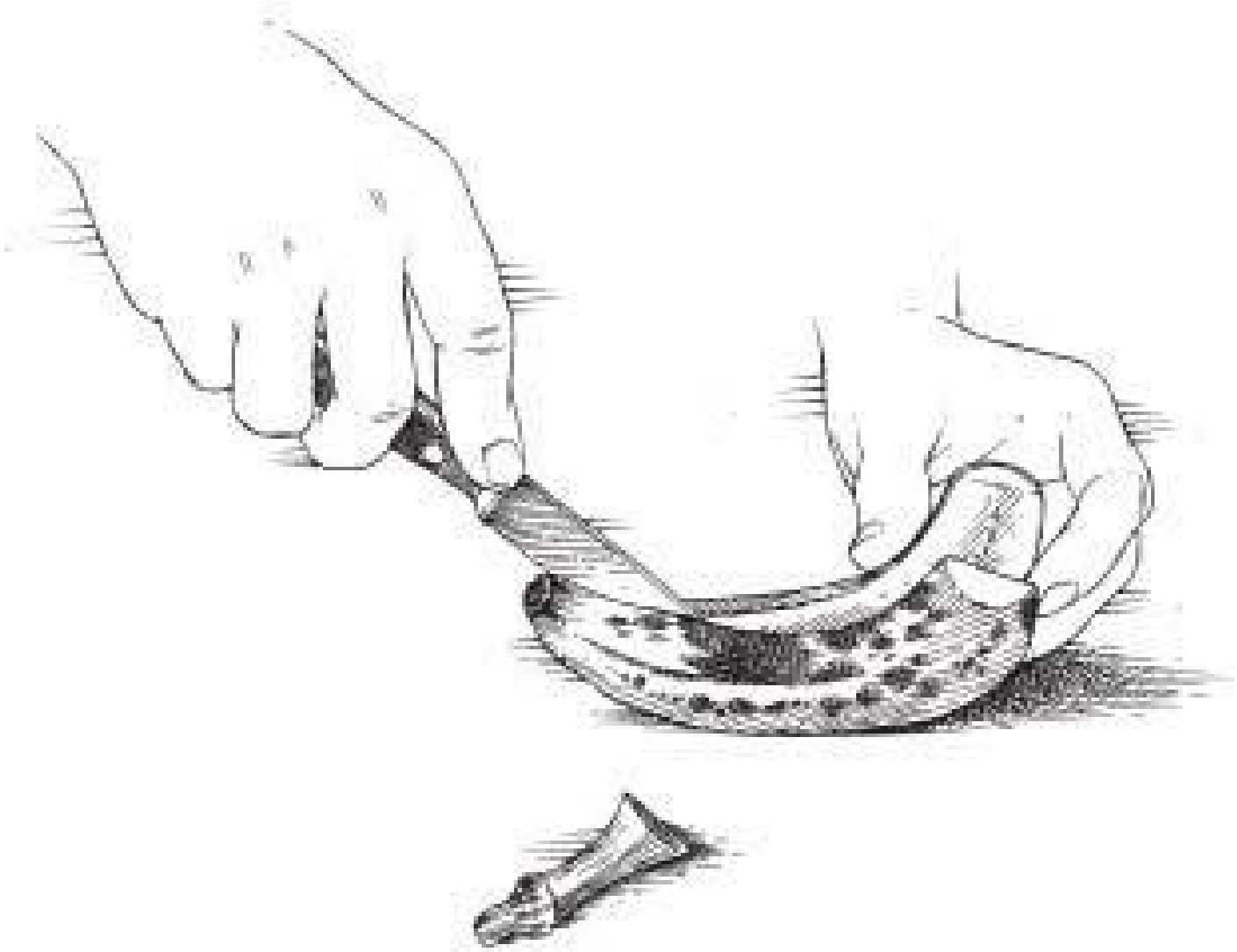

Figure 25.
Bananas should be grilled in their skins to keep them from falling apart. Halve the bananas lengthwise (with the skins still on) so that some of the flesh will caramelize over the fire.

CRISPS, BETTIES, COBBLERS, AND BUCKLES

THERE IS AN ASTONISHING ARRAY OF OLD-FASHIONED American desserts that consist of fruit baked with bread, cake crumbs, flour and butter, oats, crackers, and the like. In the days when home cooks were frugal, these desserts were an easy way to use up stale leftovers while providing a bit of variety in terms of texture and flavor.

Most of these simple desserts have funny names that are hard to keep

straight. While regional differences exist, most American cookbooks agree on the following formulations:

BETTY: Fruit is combined with buttered bread (or sometimes cake) crumbs and baked. Similar to a crisp, except that crumbs are usually layered with fruit instead of all on top. Also called a brown betty.

BUCKLE: Fruit is mixed with simple yellow cake batter and baked. Cake batter can be topped with streusel crumbs.

COBBLER: Fruit is topped with a crust,

which can be made from cookie dough, pie pastry, or biscuit topping, and baked. If made from biscuit or cookie dough, the topping can be dropped over the fruit for a cobbled appearance.

CRISP: Fruit is topped with a "rubbed" mixture of butter, sugar, and flour, then baked. Topping often includes nuts or oats.

CRUMBLE: An English term for crisp, usually made with oats.

GRUNT: Fruit is topped with biscuit dough and baked covered so that biscuits steam rather than bake. Texture is akin to

dumplings and is often gummy. Sometimes made on top of the stove. Also called a slump.

PANDOWDY: Fruit is covered with pastry dough and baked. Dough is cut, scored, and pressed into fruit. Sometimes crust is pressed into fruit during baking; other recipes "dowdy" the crust after baking.

PLATE CAKE: Fruit is topped with rolled biscuit dough and baked. When done, dessert is flipped and biscuit topping becomes bottom crust.

SHORTCAKE: Often grouped with

crisps, cobblers, and such, the fruit for this dessert is not baked but macerated and then layered between split biscuits with whipped cream. (*See* chapter 4.)

SLUMP: *See* grunt.

NOTES ON RECIPES

The baked fruit desserts in this chapter all taste best when served warm but not hot. If these desserts come out of the oven as you sit down for dinner, they should be at the right temperature when you are ready for dessert. A dollop of whipped cream (*see*) or ice cream adds a pleasing creamy, cool contrast.

Each recipe in this chapter is designed

to serve four to six, but all may be doubled and baked in a 13 by 9-inch pan. When doubling the recipe, you may need to increase the baking time by five minutes to ensure that the center cooks through completely.

Master Recipe

Fruit Crisp

NOTE: ***The most basic crisp topping contains just butter, flour, and sugar. We find that spices (we recommend cinnamon and nutmeg) and nuts (particularly whole almonds or pecans) are essential. The spices add flavor, while the nuts give the topping some texture and much-needed crunch. We tried oats and plain toppings without oats or nuts, and were unimpressed. Neither version merited the name crisp. The food processor does the***

best job of making the topping, although fingers or a fork may be used. A dollop of whipped cream or vanilla ice cream is always welcome. Serves four to six.

1/3 cup plus 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour

1/4 cup packed light brown sugar

1/4 cup granulated sugar

1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg

1/4 teaspoon salt

5 tablespoons cold unsalted butter, cut into 1/2-inch pieces

$^{3}/_{4}$ cup coarsely chopped nuts

1 recipe Fruit Fillings for Crisps & Betties (*see*)

Master Instructions

Fruit Crisp

1. Pulse flour, sugars, spices, and salt in work bowl of food processor. Add butter and pulse ten times, about 4 seconds each pulse. The mixture will first appear like dry sand, with large lumps of butter, then like coarse cornmeal. Add nuts, then pulse again, four to five times, about 1 second each pulse. Topping should look like slightly clumpy wet sand. Be sure not to overmix or mixture will become too wet and homogenous. Refrigerate topping while

preparing fruit, at least 15 minutes.

2. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Place fruit filling in 8-inch square or 9-inch round pan. Sprinkle chilled topping evenly over fruit.

3. Bake for 40 minutes. Increase oven temperature to 400 degrees and continue baking until fruit is bubbling and topping turns deep golden brown, about 5 minutes more. Serve warm. (Crisp may be set aside at room temperature for a few hours and then reheated in warm oven just before serving.)

FRUIT FILLINGS FOR CRISPS & BETTIES

Firm fruits, such as apples, pears, nectarines, peaches, and plums, work best in crisps and betties. Berries are quite watery and will make the topping soggy if used alone. However, they will work in combination with firmer fruits. If you like, replace up to one cup of the fruit in the fillings on Chapter 3 with an equal amount of berries. Raspberries are especially good with apples, and blueberries work nicely with peaches.

When using apples, our testing revealed that a combination of Granny Smith and McIntosh apples is best. The

McIntosh apples have a good flavor and will cook down to form a thick sauce. The Granny Smiths cut some of the sweetness and hold their shape.

We found it unnecessary to thicken the fruit in all but two cases. Plums are a bit watery and benefit from the addition of a little quick-cooking tapioca. Peaches will thicken up on their own but need some help when blueberries are added to the mix. Any juices thrown off by the other fruits will evaporate or thicken nicely without causing the topping to become soft.

As for flavoring the fruit, we find that $^1/_4$ cup of sugar is usually adequate, especially since the toppings are fairly

sweet. We also like to add some lemon juice and zest. One half teaspoon of grated gingerroot makes a nice addition to any of the following fillings. Each filling yields about 6 cups.

Apple Filling: Peel, quarter, core (*see* figures 2 and 3), and cut into 1-inch chunks $2^1/_2$ to 3 pounds apples (half Granny Smith and half McIntosh). Mix with $^1/_4$ cup sugar, $1^1/_2$ tablespoons lemon juice, and $^1/_2$ teaspoon grated lemon zest.

Apple-Raspberry Filling: Follow Apple Filling, reducing amount of cut apples to 5 cups and adding 1 cup

raspberries.

Nectarine Filling: Follow Peach Filling, substituting an equal amount of nectarines for peaches.

Peach Filling: Peel (*see* figures 4 and 5), pit, and cut into 1/3-inch wedges $2^{1}/_{2}$ to 3 pounds peaches. Mix with $^{1}/_{4}$ cup sugar, $1^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons lemon juice, and $^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon grated lemon zest.

Peach-Blueberry Filling: Follow Peach Filling, reducing amount of cut peaches

to 5 cups and adding 1 cup blueberries and 1 tablespoon quick-cooking tapioca.

Pear Filling: Peel, halve, core (*see* figures 6–8), and cut into 1-inch chunks $2^1/_2$ to 3 pounds pears. Mix with $^1/_4$ cup sugar, $1^1/_2$ tablespoons lemon juice, and $^1/_2$ teaspoon grated lemon zest.

Plum Filling: Pit and cut into 1/3-inch wedges $2^1/_2$ pounds plums. Mix with $^1/_4$ cup sugar, $1^1/_2$ tablespoons lemon juice, $^1/_2$ teaspoon grated lemon zest, and 1 tablespoon quick-cooking tapioca.

Master Recipe

Brown Betty

NOTE: ***Betties are similar to crisps with two exceptions. Traditionally, the streusel topping is made from buttered bread crumbs and layered in the middle of the fruit as well as on top. We like the idea of using buttered bread crumbs but find that the crumbs become soggy when layered in the middle of the fruit. Our solution is to sprinkle them on top of the fruit only. Serves four to six.***

4 slices firm white sandwich bread (about 4 ounces), torn into large pieces and pulsed in food processor to yield 2 cups coarse crumbs

1/4 cup packed light brown sugar

2 tablespoons granulated sugar

1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon

3 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

1 recipe Fruit Fillings for Crisps & Betties (*see*)

Master Instructions

Brown Betty

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Toss bread crumbs, sugars, and cinnamon with melted butter in medium bowl. Rub with fingers to combine.

2. Place fruit filling in 8-inch square or 9-inch round pan. Sprinkle topping evenly over fruit.

3. Bake until crumbs turn deep golden brown, juices bubble, and fruit is tender, 40 to 45 minutes.

Serve warm.

Master Recipe

Cobbler with Butter Cookie Dough Topping

NOTE: ***Although a bit unconventional, the sweet sugar cookie topping is our favorite. Spoonfuls of dough are dropped over the fruit filling and melted in the oven to form a golden brown crust with bits of fruit and juices bursting through in places. The topping is quite sweet, so go lightly on the sugar in the fruit filling. Serves four to six.***

1/2 cup all-purpose flour

1/4 teaspoon baking powder

Pinch salt

8 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

1/2 cup sugar

1 large egg yolk (use whole egg if doubling recipe)

1/4 teaspoon vanilla box

1 recipe Fruit Fillings for Cobblers (*see*)

Master Instructions

Cobbler with Butter Cookie Dough Topping

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Mix flour, baking powder, and salt together in small bowl and set aside.

2. Beat butter and sugar until light and fluffy, about 1 minute with electric mixer or 3 minutes by hand. Beat in egg yolk and vanilla until smooth. Stir in dry ingredients just until combined.

3. Place fruit filling in 8-inch square or 9-inch round baking pan. Drop cookie dough topping by heaping tablespoons evenly over fruit (*see* figure 26).

4. Bake until golden brown, 45 to 55 minutes. Serve warm. (Cobbler can be kept at room temperature for several hours and reheated just before serving.)

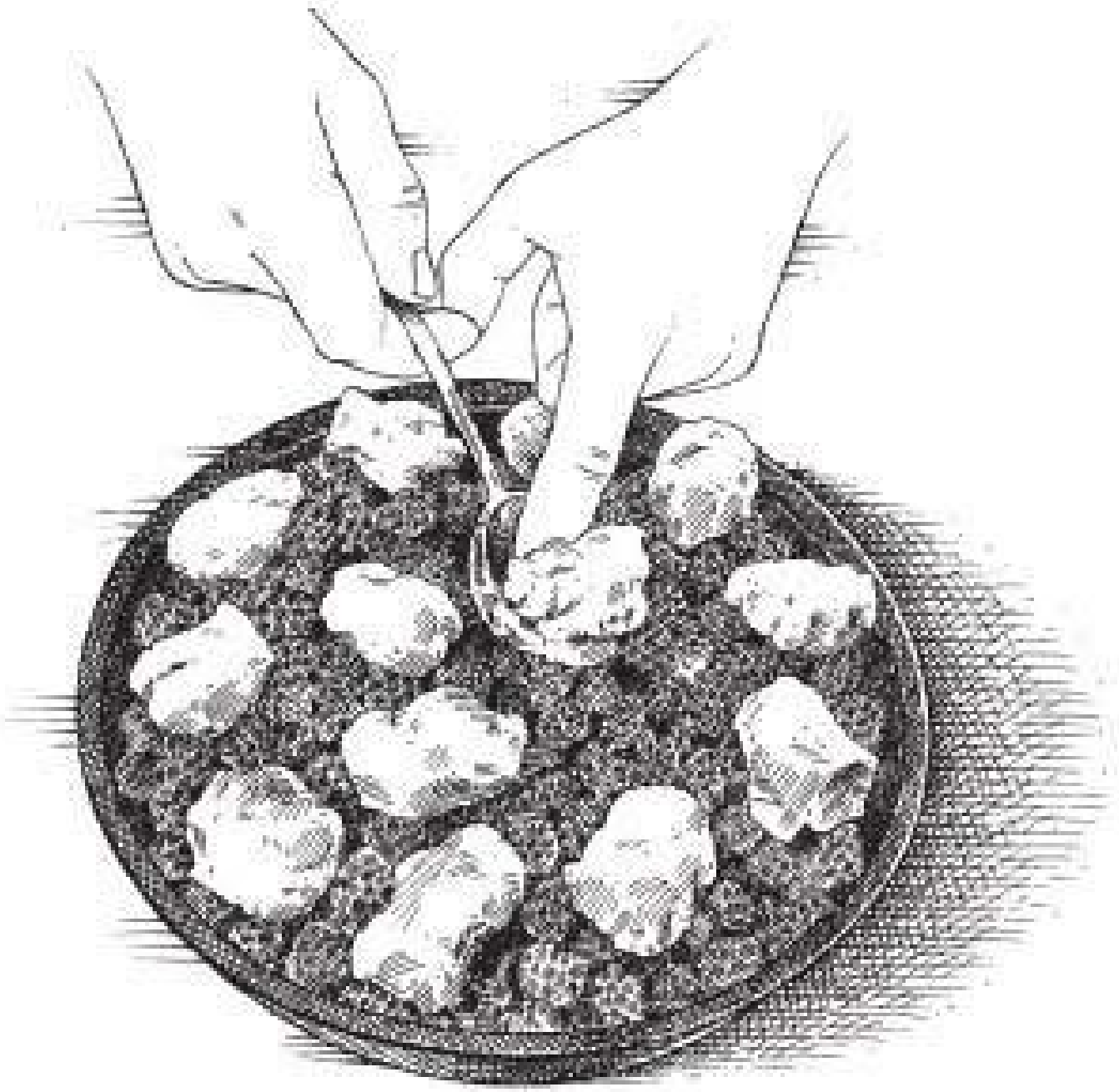

Figure 26.
Drop the cookie dough batter by heaping tablespoons evenly over the fruit. Make sure that pieces of

batter are not touching or clumped together in one spot.

FRUIT FILLINGS FOR COBBLERS

While there is little need to thicken the fruit for a crisp or a betty, we found that cobblers are a different matter. The fruit usually cooks under a thick blanket of dough or pastry, so excess fruit juices cannot evaporate. Also, many cobblers are traditionally made with berries, which are quite watery. To keep cobblers from becoming a soggy, soupy mess, it is necessary to thicken the fruit.

For a natural, thin, silky syrup, we prefer cornstarch, arrowroot, or potato starch. Used in small quantities, we found it difficult to tell much difference

among the three. Though they all worked equally well at unobtrusively thickening fruit juices, we recommend cornstarch because it is the most widely available. Flour turned the juices cloudy and tapioca can actually thicken the fruit too much and give it a jammy consistency. Neither is recommended in cobblers.

We found that each fruit requires a different amount of thickener based on its liquid content. At one extreme, apples and pears were so dry we ultimately added water to make them juicy enough. At the other end, sour cherries were too watery and demanded more thickener than other fruits. Soft berries (strawberries, blackberries, and raspberries, but not blueberries) need

more thickener than fleshier fruits like peaches or plums.

As for sweetening, most fruits benefit from the addition of sugar, since they are too tart when baked without. Sweet toppings and ice cream only make unsweetened fruit seem tarter. We found that sugar is also crucial in thickening the fruit juices into a light syrup.

After extensive testing, we devised the following methods for preparing, thickening, and sweetening thirteen fruits for cobblers. Each preparation yields 5 to 6 cups of fruit filling. Adjust the sweetness according to the ripeness of the fruit and individual tastes. Different cobbler toppings contain different

amounts of sugar. See individual recipes for suggestions on choosing the lower or higher amount of sugar listed in the fruit filling directions.

Fruits may be combined if desired. Adjust amounts of thickener and sweetener as needed. For example, to make blackberry-apricot filling, use $2^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoons cornstarch and about $^{1}/_{2}$ cup sugar to balance differences between the two separate formulas.

Apple Filling: Peel, quarter, core (*see* figures 2 and 3), and slice thick $1^{3}/_{4}$ pounds tart, firm apples such as Granny Smiths. Mix with 2 teaspoons cornstarch

dissolved in $^{1}/_{4}$ cup cold water and 1/3 to $^{1}/_{2}$ cup sugar.

Apricot Filling: Halve and pit $1^{3}/_{4}$ pounds apricots. Mix with 2 teaspoons cornstarch and $^{1}/_{2}$ to 2/3 cup sugar.

Blackberry Filling: Rinse 2 pints fresh blackberries (or use 24 ounces frozen). Mix with 1 tablespoon cornstarch and 1/3 to $^{1}/_{2}$ cup sugar.

Blueberry Filling: Rinse and pick over 2 pints fresh blueberries (or use 24

ounces frozen). Mix with 2 teaspoons cornstarch and $^{1}/_{2}$ to 2/3 cup sugar.

Cherry Filling: We prefer sour cherries, but you may substitute sweet cherries if sugar is reduced to about 1/3 cup. Stem and pit $1^{3}/_{4}$ pounds sour cherries (or use 24 ounces frozen). Mix with $1^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons cornstarch and 2/3 to $^{3}/_{4}$ cup sugar.

Mango Filling: Pit, peel, and slice thick (*see* figures 11–14) 3 pounds ripe mangoes. Mix with 2 teaspoons cornstarch and 1/3 cup sugar.

Nectarine Filling: Follow Peach Filling, substituting an equal amount of nectarines for peaches.

Peach Filling: Peel (*see* figures 4 and 5), pit, and slice thick $1^{3}/_{4}$ pounds peaches. Mix with 2 teaspoons cornstarch and 1/3 to $^{1}/_{2}$ cup sugar.

Pear Filling: Peel, halve, core (*see* figures 6–8), and slice thick 2 pounds pears. Mix with 2 teaspoons cornstarch dissolved in $^{1}/_{4}$ cup cold water and 1/3 to $^{1}/_{2}$ cup sugar.

Plum Filling: Pit and quarter $1^{3}/_{4}$ pounds plums. Mix with 2 teaspoons cornstarch and $^{1}/_{2}$ to 2/3 cup sugar.

Raspberry Filling: Rinse 2 pints fresh raspberries (or 24 ounces frozen). Mix with 1 tablespoon cornstarch and $^{1}/_{2}$ to 2/3 cup sugar.

Strawberry Filling: Hull and rinse 2 pints fresh strawberries (or 24 ounces frozen). Leave small or medium berries whole; halve larger ones. Mix with 1 tablespoon cornstarch and 1/3 to $^{1}/_{2}$ cup

sugar.

Strawberry-Rhubarb Filling: Follow Strawberry Filling, using 10 ounces each fresh strawberries and stringed rhubarb (*see* figures 18 and 19) cut into 1/3-inch chunks.

OPTIONAL FLAVORINGS FOR COBBLER FILLINGS

The cobbler fruit fillings are delicious as is. However, they can be flavored if desired. Here are some of our favorite flavorings and notes on their use.

Almond extract: Use no more than $^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon per filling recipe. Works especially well with cherries and apricots.

Brandy and liqueurs: Use no more than 1 tablespoon per recipe. Fruit-flavored liqueurs, such as kirsch or pear brandy, can boost fruit flavor and are especially good.

Ground spices: Ginger, cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves may be added in varying amounts. Use no more than $^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon ground ginger or cinnamon per

recipe; keep nutmeg and cloves to $^1/_4$ teaspoon or less.

Lemon juice and zest: Add 1 teaspoon juice and/or $^1/_2$ teaspoon grated zest.

Vanilla extract: All the fillings will benefit from the addition of 1 teaspoon vanilla extract. Nice but not essential.

Master Recipe

Cobbler with Rich Shortcake Topping

NOTE: ***Because the biscuit easily absorbs juices, this shortcake topping is best with berries. There's no sugar in the biscuit topping (just a dusting on top), so make sure to sweeten the fruit adequately by using the upper amount listed in the filling recipes. We find that the food processor does the best job of cutting cold fat into dry ingredients.*** ***(*** **S e e** ***figures 33–35,***

for an alternate technique using a box grater.) Serves four to six.

1 cup all-purpose flour
1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
1/4 teaspoon salt
4 tablespoons cold unsalted butter, cut into 1/4-inch pieces
2 tablespoons cold vegetable shortening
7 tablespoons milk
1 recipe Blackberry, Blueberry, Raspberry, or Strawberry Filling for Cobblers (*see* Chapter 3)
1 tablespoon sugar

Master Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Mix flour, baking powder, and salt in work bowl of food processor. Scatter butter pieces over mixture, tossing to coat butter with dry ingredients. Cut butter into dry ingredients with five 1-second pulses. Add shortening; continue cutting in until flour is pale yellow and resembles coarse cornmeal, with butter bits no larger than split peas, about four more 1-second pulses. Turn mixture into medium bowl.

2. Pour 6 tablespoons milk into flour mixture. Mix with rubber spatula until large clumps form. Turn mixture onto work surface; lightly knead until mixture just comes together. Place dough on sheet of plastic wrap and press into either square or circle, depending on whether using square or round pan. (Can be refrigerated for up to 2 hours.)

3. Place fruit filling in 8-inch square or 9-inch round pan. Roll dough on lightly floured work surface to 10-inch square or circle. Lay dough over prepared fruit; tuck

excess dough in between pan side and fruit (see figure 27). Brush dough with remaining tablespoon of milk; sprinkle biscuit topping with sugar. Cut four 2-inch air vents in dough top.

4. Bake until golden brown, 45 to 55 minutes. Serve warm.

VARIATIONS:

Plate Cake

This New England favorite is nothing more than a shortcake-topped cobbler turned upside down just before serving. The juices drip down over the biscuit,

which forms a plate of sorts to hold fruit.

Follow Master Recipe for Cobbler with Rich Shortcake Topping, cooling baked cobbler on rack for 10 minutes. Run knife around edges of pan to loosen dough. Place large serving plate on top of pan and quickly invert (*see* figure 28). Spoon any fruit remaining in pan over shortcake. Cool 10 minutes, cut into pieces, and serve immediately.

Cobbler with Dropped Biscuit Topping

A cobbler may be topped with individual biscuits rather than a seamless shortcake topping.

Follow Master Recipe for Cobbler

with Rich Shortcake Topping, increasing biscuit recipe by one half. Roll biscuit dough $^{3}/_{4}$-inch thick and use $2^{1}/_{2}$-inch biscuit cutter to punch out dough rounds. You should be able to cut nine rounds. Top fruit filling with individual biscuits (*see* figure 29), which will just fit into pan. Brush with milk, sprinkle with sugar, and bake as directed.

Cobbler with Individual Biscuit Topping

Instead of rolling out the biscuit dough, pieces may be pinched off and dropped over the fruit, as with the cookie dough topping (see figure 26). The result is a rustic cobbler with fruit peeking through

the biscuit topping.

Follow Master Recipe for Cobbler with Rich Shortcake Topping until dough comes together in step 2. Then pinch off walnut-sized pieces of dough and arrange them evenly over the fruit filling so that they do not touch each other. Do not brush with milk or sprinkle with sugar. Bake as directed.

Figure 27.
Lay rolled shortcake topping over fruit filling and tuck excess dough between side of pan and fruit. The tucked portion of the crust will be soft, in contrast to the golden brown top crust.

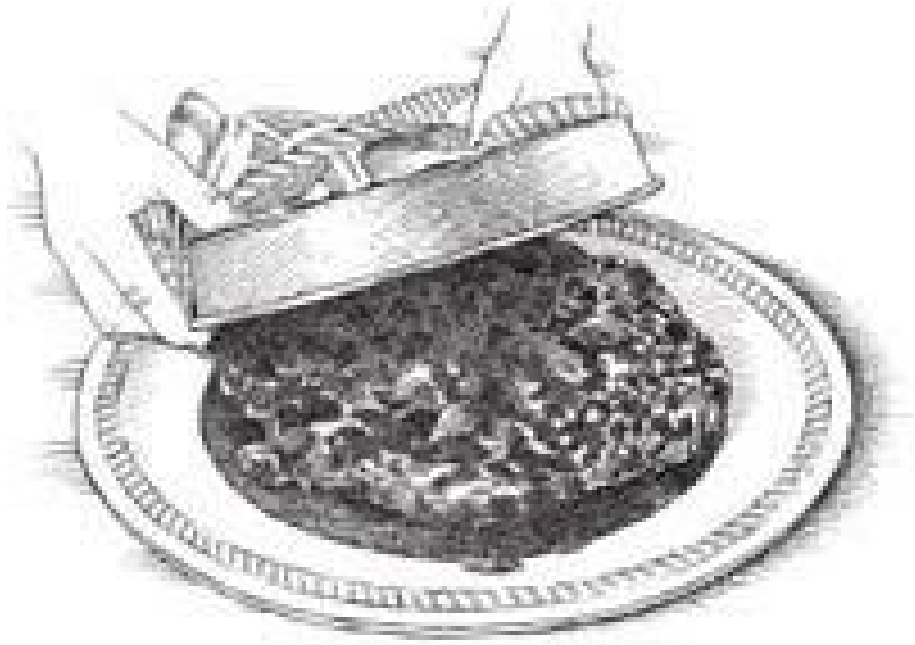

Figure 28.
A plate cake is nothing more than a cobbler with a rolled shortcake topping that has been turned upside down just before serving. Once the cobbler has cooled for ten minutes, place a large plate on top of the cobbler pan and invert quickly so that biscuit rests on the plate with the fruit and juices on top.

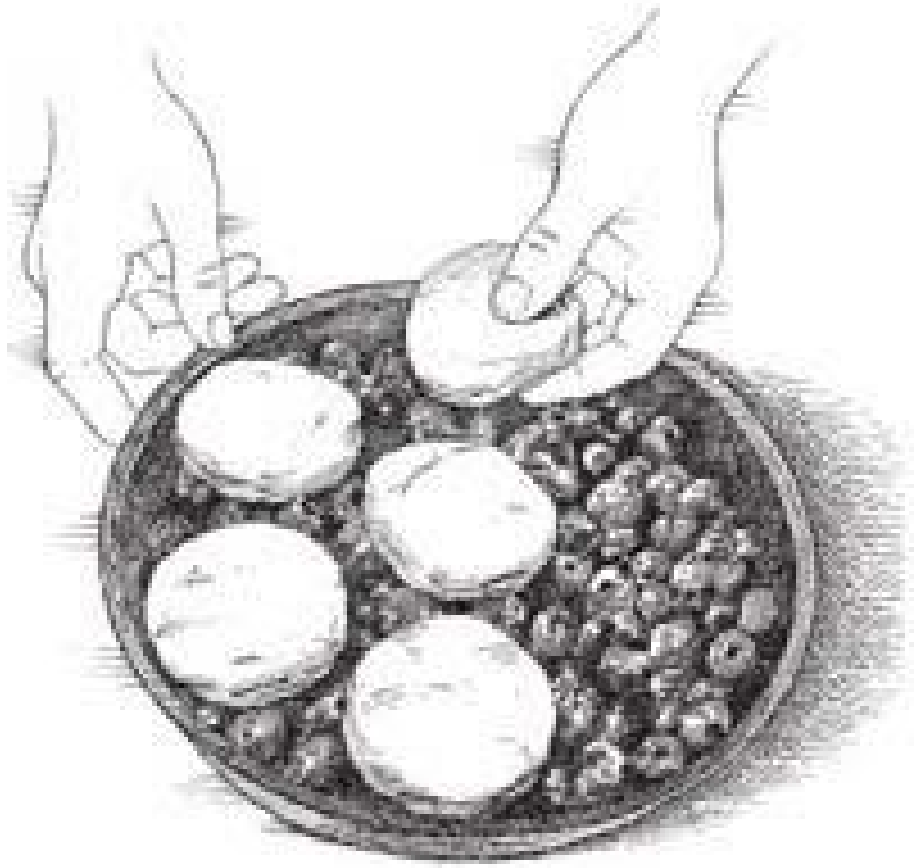

Figure 29.
The shortcake topping can be punched out into individual rounds, which are then set on top of the fruit filling. Make sure to space the biscuits evenly over the fruit filling.

Master Recipe

Cobbler with Flaky Pie Pastry Topping

NOTE: ***You can effortlessly achieve a nice contrast between soft-and crisp-textured crust by tucking the pastry between the fruit and the pan wall. The fruit juices keep the side crust tender while the dry oven heat crisps up the top. As with the biscuit topping, we prefer to use the food processor to work the fat into the dry ingredients, although a pastry blender or fork can be used in a***

pinch. Serves four to six.

1 cup all-purpose flour
1/4 teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons sugar
6 tablespoons cold unsalted butter, cut into 1/4-inch pieces
2 tablespoons cold vegetable shortening
2–3 tablespoons ice water
1 recipe Fruit Fillings for Cobblers (*see* Chapter 3)
1 tablespoon milk (or water)

Master Instructions

1. Mix flour, salt, and 1 tablespoon sugar in work bowl of food processor. Scatter butter pieces over mixture, tossing to coat butter with dry ingredients. Cut butter into dry ingredients with five 1-second pulses. Add shortening; continue cutting in until flour is pale yellow and resembles coarse cornmeal, with butter bits no larger than small peas, about four more 1-second pulses. Turn mixture into medium bowl.

2. Sprinkle 2 tablespoons ice water

over flour mixture. Using rubber spatula, fold water into mixture. Then press down on mixture with broad side of spatula until dough sticks together, adding up to 1 tablespoon more water if dough will not come together. Place dough on sheet of plastic wrap and press into either square or circle, depending on whether using square or round pan. Refrigerate while preparing fruit, at least 15 minutes. (Can be refrigerated for up to 2 days.)

3. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Place fruit filling in 8-inch square

or 9-inch round pan. Roll dough on lightly floured work surface to 10-inch square or circle. Lay dough over prepared fruit; tuck excess dough in between pan side and fruit. Brush dough with milk; sprinkle with remaining tablespoon sugar. Cut four 2-inch air vents in dough top.

4. Bake until golden brown, 45 to 55 minutes. Serve warm.

VARIATION:

Pandowdy

The crust in most pandowdy recipes is

quite soggy since it is usually pressed into the fruit halfway through baking. We prefer a contrast between crisp and tender crust. To achieve this balance, we dowdy the crust after it is fully baked. Follow Master Recipe for Cobbler with Flaky Pie Pastry Topping, baking until golden brown. Remove pan from oven and score crust lengthwise and crosswise to form 2-inch squares (*see* figure 30). Use the edge of large spoon or metal spatula to press edges of crust squares down into fruit (*see* figure 31). Serve warm.

Figure 30.
To make a pandowdy, score the crust on a pastry-topped cobbler with a sharp knife as soon as it emerges from the oven. Run knife lengthwise and crosswise to form 2-inch squares.

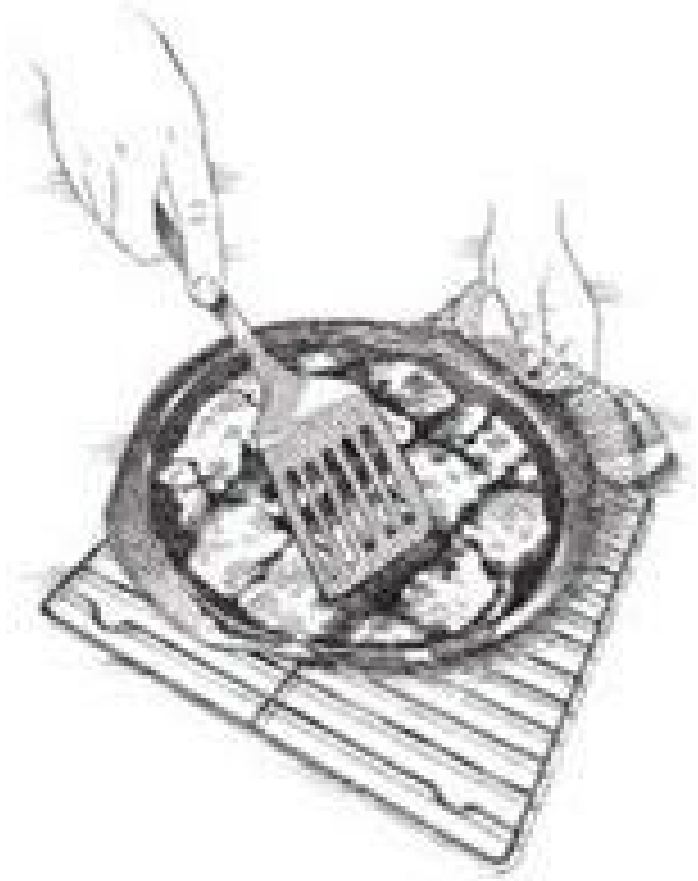

Figure 31.
Use the edge of a large spoon or metal spatula to press the edges of the crust squares down into the fruit. Don't completely submerge the pieces or they will become soggy. Because the crust will soften quickly, this dessert is best served when still warm.

Master Recipe

Buckle

NOTE: ***Traditional buckles are simply yellow cake batter with fruit folded in and streusel sprinkled on top. They are often not terribly fruity and taste more like coffee cake with fruit. In this version, we have used more fruit and less batter, and omitted the streusel topping. Also, the butter in this recipe is not part of the batter, but instead is melted in the pan while the oven preheats. The batter is added, then topped with fruit. Since the butter is not***

actually mixed into the batter, it surfaces to form a thin, crisp top. The cake batter is already quite sweet, so there is no need to sweeten or thicken the fruit. Softer fruits, such as berries and peaches, work best in a buckle; avoid pears and apples, which are too firm. Serves four to six.

6 tablespoons unsalted butter

$^{3}/_{4}$ cup all-purpose flour

$^{3}/_{4}$ cup plus 1 tablespoon sugar

1 teaspoon baking powder

$^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoon salt

$^{3}/_{4}$ cup milk

2 cups sliced stone fruits or berries (not sweetened or thickened)

Master Instructions

1. Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Put butter in 8-inch square or 9-inch round pan; set in oven to melt.

2. Whisk flour, $^{3}/_{4}$ cup sugar, baking powder, and salt in small bowl. Add milk; whisk until just incorporated into dry ingredients.

3. When butter has melted, remove pan from oven. Pour batter into pan without stirring it into butter.

Arrange fruit over batter. Sprinkle with remaining tablespoon sugar. Bake until batter browns, 40 to 50 minutes. Serve warm.

SHORTCAKES

SHORTCAKES MAY SEEM SIMILAR TO CRISPS AND cobblers, but there is one important difference—the fruit is not cooked. For a true shortcake, sweetened fruit is spread between a split biscuit. A dollop or two of whipped cream is also added. The contrast between cool fruit, warm and crisp biscuit halves, and chilled whipped cream places this dessert in a category by itself.

Since the fruit is not cooked, frozen fruit is not an option. The fruit must be ripe as well. Half-ripe berries will bake

up fine in a pandowdy, but will make a second-rate shortcake. Also, because the fruit is not baked, only softer fruits are appropriate. A pear or apple shortcake does not make sense. (For more information on choosing and preparing fruit for a shortcake, *see* .)

Our testing for this recipe revolved mostly around the biscuit. We tried four very different sweetened biscuits at the outset—a baking powder version with fat cut into flour, baking powder, salt, and sugar, and then moistened with milk; buttermilk biscuits with buttermilk in place of milk and baking soda substituted for part of the baking powder; cream biscuits with heavy cream standing in for the milk and some

of the fat; and egg-enriched cream biscuits with an egg and half-and-half replacing the milk.

After sampling each, we felt that the egg-enriched biscuits had the advantage. Even with the added sugar, the baking powder and buttermilk biscuits seemed more at home in a bread basket than on a dessert plate. The cream biscuits were good looking, but gummy inside. The egg and light cream biscuits were finer-textured and more cakelike.

With our general direction settled, we then tested individual ingredients. Because biscuits should be tender, we assumed that low-protein cake flour would deliver the best results. Defying

our predictions, the cake flour biscuit came in last, with a meltingly tender, yet powdery and dry texture that was too much like shortbread. There was not enough gluten in this flour to support all the fat.

Shortcakes made with bleached all-purpose flour were tender, moist, and cakelike. They were our clear favorites, besting a combination of cake and all-purpose flours, as well as plain cake flour.

We then experimented with liquids, figuring that the egg might be crucial but maybe not the light cream that won in our initial test. Buttermilk made the biscuits too savory, while heavy cream made them squat and dense. Milk was

fine but the richer flavor of half-and-half made it our first choice.

With the ingredient list settled, we focused on technique. The pastry cutter works well, but cutting the butter into small cubes beforehand can be a problem. If the butter is soft enough to cut easily, then it's too soft for the pastry and must be refrigerated or frozen (plus it tends to stick to the knife). If the butter is hard enough for the pastry, then it's difficult to cut.

Some cooks have cold fingertips, perfect for cutting butter into flour by hand, but many people don't and soften the butter too much in the process. The food processor is foolproof and is our

preferred method for mixing biscuits. For cooks without a food processor, we suggest using a box grater to cut frozen butter into the flour (*see* figures 33–35).

When testing dough shaping, we made an interesting discovery. Although hand-formed biscuits look attractive and rustic, we found they were fairly easy to overwork, since warm hands can cause the dough's surface butter to melt. Using a biscuit cutter requires less handling, and dough rounds cut this way develop a natural crack around the circumference during baking, making them easy to split by hand. We also realized we didn't need a rolling pin. Patting the dough to three-quarters inch thick on a floured work surface was fast and simple.

TO PREPARE FRUIT FOR SHORTCAKES

Two types of fruit are soft enough and have enough flavor to be used uncooked in a shortcake. Stone fruits, such as apricots, mangoes, nectarines, peaches, and plums, should be sliced thin and sugared to release some of their juices. The peels must be removed from mangoes but can be left on the others if desired.

Fresh berries are also suitable for use in shortcakes. We don't like quartered or sliced strawberries in shortcakes—they often slide off the split biscuit—but we don't like the look of a crushed fruit

shortcake either. So we found a happy compromise by quartering the strawberries, and then crushing a portion of the berry mixture to unify the quartered fruit. Set fruit aside while preparing biscuits to allow the juices to become syrupy.

Macerated Berries:

Measure out 8 cups hulled and quartered strawberries, stemmed whole blueberries, whole blackberries, and/or whole raspberries. Crush 3 cups fruit with potato masher (*see* figure 32). Mix with remaining 5 cups fruit and 6 tablespoons sugar. Set aside for at least 30 minutes and up to 2 hours.

Macerated Stone Fruits:

Measure out 8 cups pitted and sliced peaches, nectarines, mangoes, and/or plums. (Mangoes must also be peeled — *see* figures 11–14; other fruits can be peeled if desired.) Mix with 6 tablespoons sugar. Set aside for at least 30 minutes and up to 2 hours.

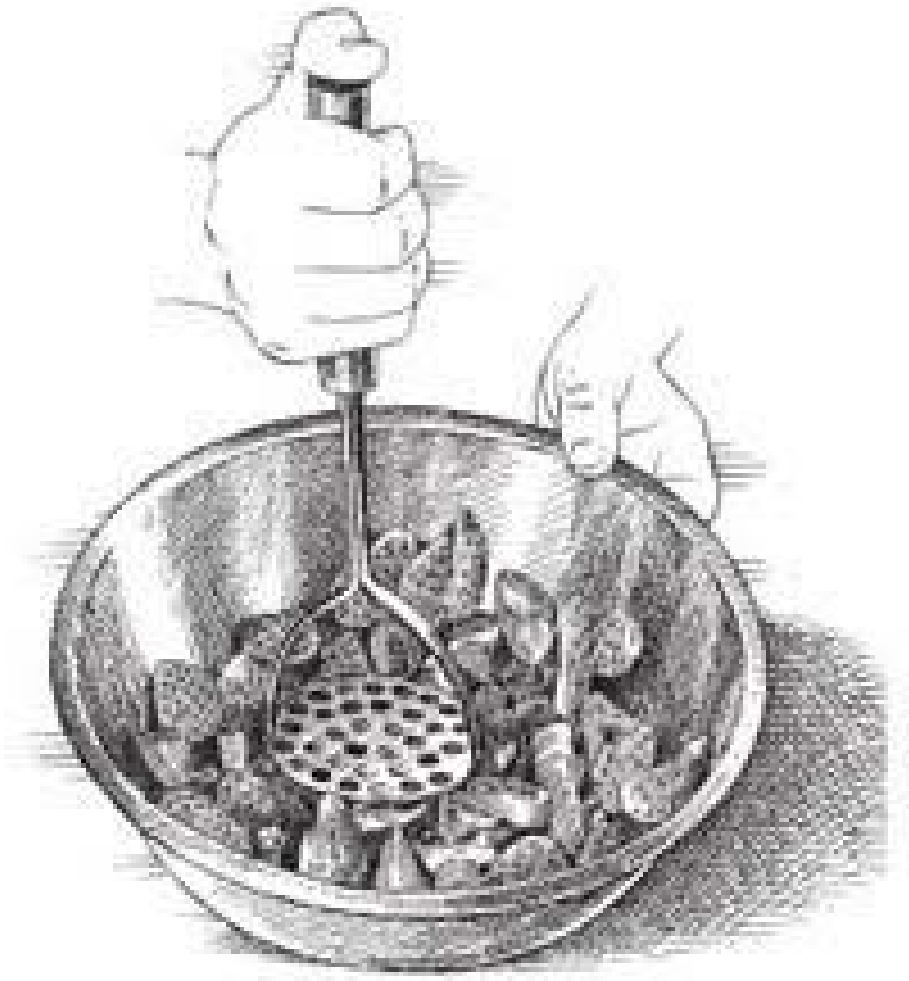

Figure 32.
For the best flavor and appearance, crush one-third of the berries for the filling with a potato masher. This thick puree will anchor the remaining whole or sliced berries so that they don't slip off the split biscuit.

Master Recipe

Shortcakes with Fruit and Whipped Cream

NOTE: ***After cutting six perfect rounds of dough, you can reknead the scraps and repeat the cutting process to get one or two more rounds. These shortcakes will be a little tougher and less attractive than those from the first cutting. Serves six.***

1 recipe Macerated Berries or Stone Fruits (*see*)

2 cups all-purpose bleached

flour, plus more for work surface and biscuit cutter

1 tablespoon baking powder

1/2 teaspoon salt

5 tablespoons sugar

8 tablespoons cold unsalted butter, cut into 1/2-inch pieces

1 large egg, lightly beaten

1/2 cup plus 1 tablespoon half-and-half or milk

1 large egg white, lightly beaten

2 cups Perfect Whipped Cream

Master Instructions

1. Prepare fruit and set aside to macerate.

2. Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 425 degrees. Mix flour, baking powder, salt, and 3 tablespoons sugar in work bowl of food processor. Scatter butter pieces over mixture, tossing to coat butter with dry ingredients. Cut butter into dry ingredients with five 1-second pulses. Continue cutting in butter until flour is pale yellow and resembles coarse cornmeal, with

butter bits no larger than small peas, about four more 1-second pulses. Turn mixture into medium bowl.

3. Mix beaten egg with half-and-half; pour into bowl with flour mixture. Combine with rubber spatula until large clumps form. Turn mixture onto floured work surface and lightly knead until it comes together.

4. Pat dough into 9 by 6-inch rectangle about $^{3}/_{4}$-inch thick (*see* figure 36). Flour $2^{3}/_{4}$-inch biscuit

cutter; cut out 6 dough rounds. Place rounds 1 inch apart on small baking sheet; brush tops with egg white and sprinkle with remaining 2 tablespoons sugar. (Can be covered and refrigerated for up to 2 hours before baking.)

5. Bake until biscuits are golden brown, 12 to 14 minutes. Place baking sheet on wire rack; cool cakes until warm, about 10 minutes.

6. Split each cake crosswise (*see* figure 37). Place each bottom on individual serving plate. Spoon

portion of fruit and then dollop of whipped cream over each cake bottom. Cap with cake top and serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Cornmeal Shortcakes

These pale yellow cakes work well with blueberries.

Follow Master Recipe, replacing $^{1}/_{2}$ cup of flour with $^{1}/_{2}$ cup yellow cornmeal.

Ginger Shortcakes

These spiced shortcakes taste best with peaches or mangoes.

Follow Master Recipe, adding $^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon ground ginger and 1 tablespoon minced crystallized ginger to dry ingredients.

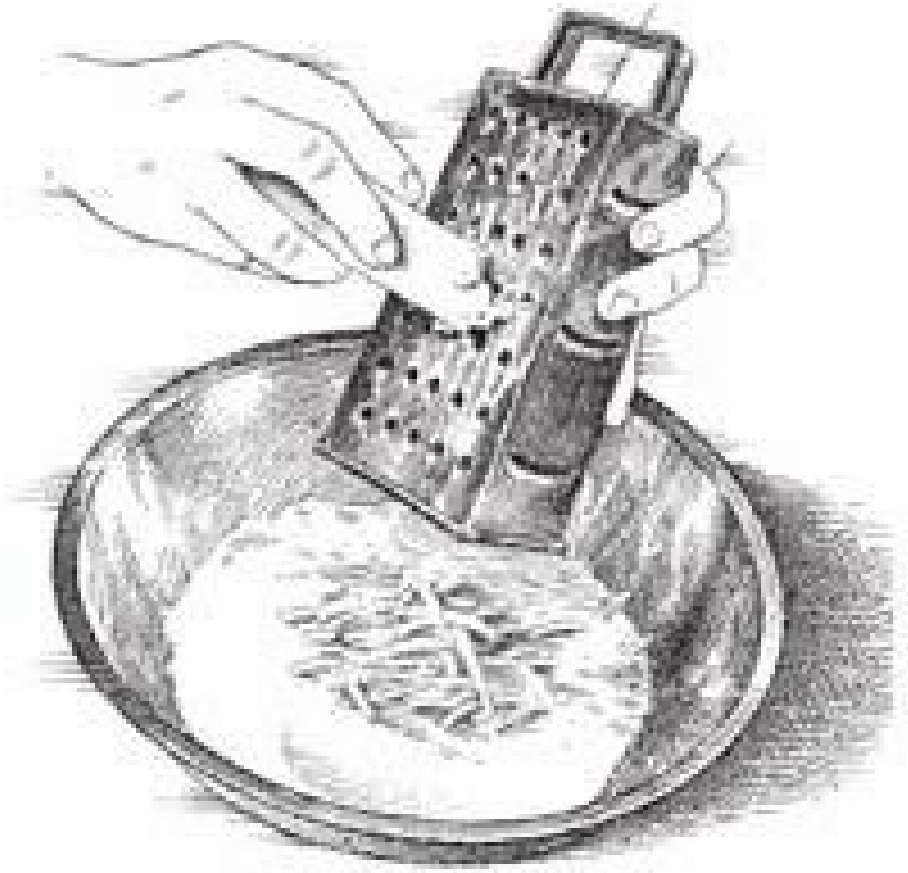

Figure 33.
If you don't have access to a food processor, try this method. Freeze butter and rub the hardened stick against the large holes of a regular box grater. Let the bits of butter fall directly into the dry ingredients.

Figure 34.
Once the butter has been grated, use a pastry blender to work the butter into the flour.

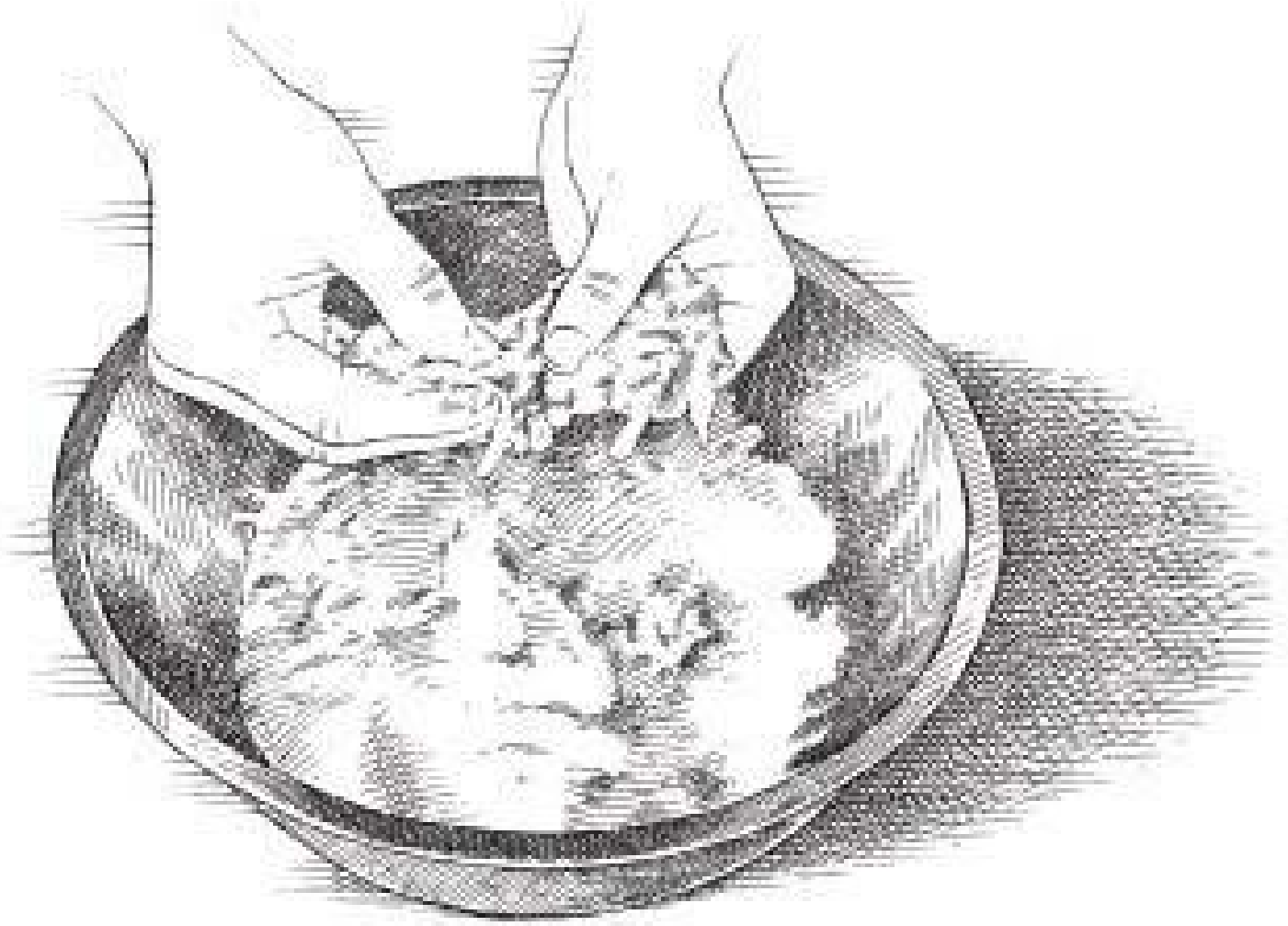

Figure 35.
Or scoop up the flour-coated bits of butter with both hands and quickly rub the butter into the dry ingredients with your fingertips. With either method, the butter pieces should be the size of split peas when done.

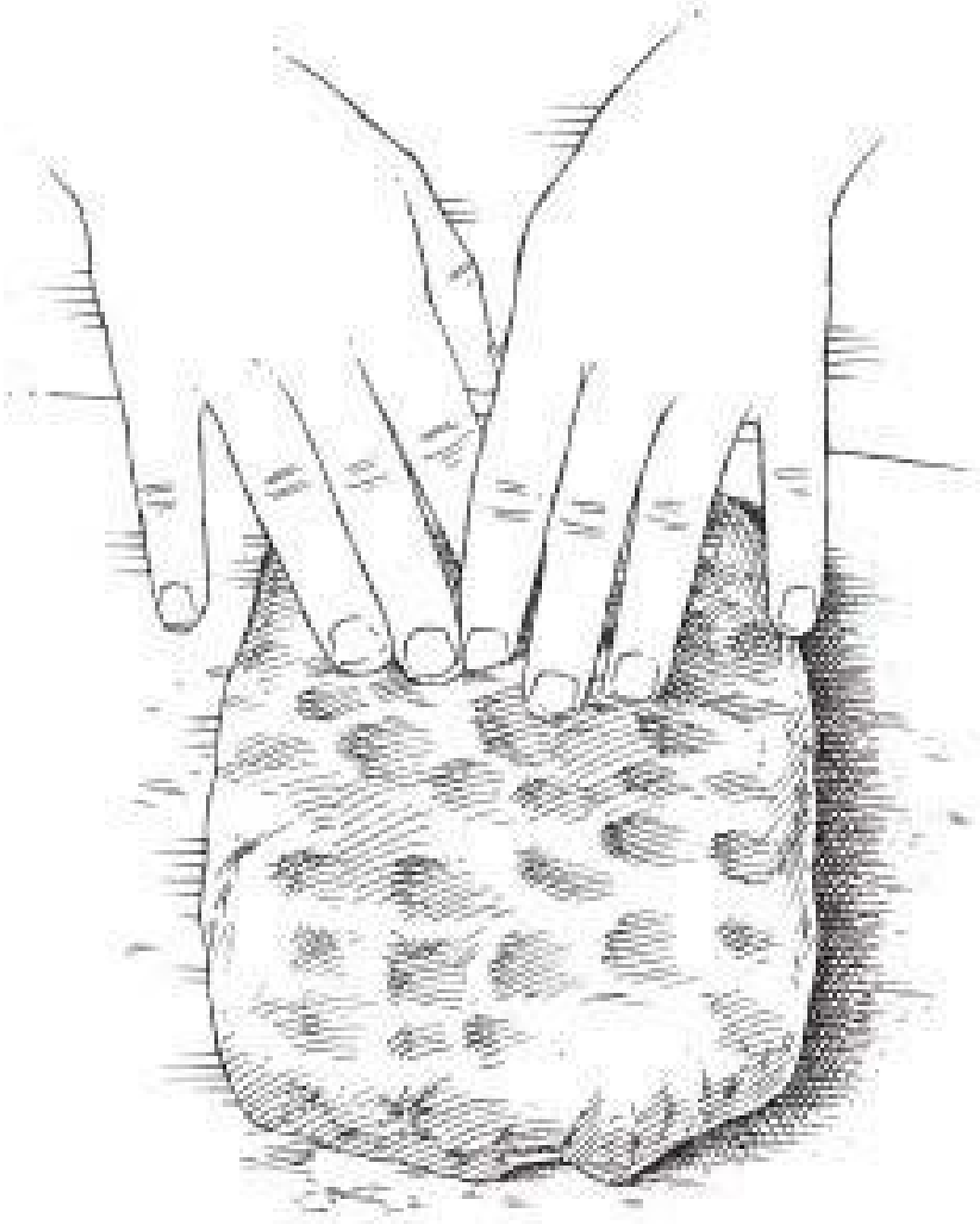

Figure 36.
Whether making the dough in a food processor or by hand, do not use a rolling pin or you might overwork it. Pat the dough with

your fingertips into a 9 by 6-inch rectangle that is about $^{3}/_{4}$-inch thick.

Figure 37.
When biscuits have cooled slightly, look for a natural crack around the circumference. Gently insert your fingers into the crack and split the biscuit in half.

Perfect Whipped Cream

NOTE: ***Supermarkets offer several creams for whipping. We tested them side by side and found that pasteurized organic heavy cream is our favorite. It delivers the sweetest cream flavor, and although it pours the thinnest, it whips up to double its volume. Regular pasteurized heavy cream is thicker and has a richer mouth-feel, no doubt due to additives intended to bulk up the texture. However, it is not as sweet and does not whip as well as organic cream. Finally, we tried ultrapasteurized heavy cream and were disappointed. While it is the thickest by far out of the container, its***

volume increases by just 50 percent when whipped, because the high temperatures required for ultrapasteurizing destroy some of the proteins and enzymes that promote whipping. The higher heat (which prolongs shelf life) also leaves the cream with a slightly cooked taste. Ultrapasteurized has become the "standard" in many markets, but pasteurized cream delivers better flavor and volume every time and is worth searching out. Note that whipping times will be slightly longer if using ultrapasteurized cream.

Many sources suggest sweetening cream with confectioners' sugar to

ensure that the sugar dissolves. We find that this sweetener, which contains about 3 percent cornstarch to prevent clumping, gives whipped cream a slightly chalky flavor. In our tests, regular granulated sugar dissolved just fine, as long as it was added before beating, not after. This recipe yields two cups.

1 cup ($^1/_2$ pint) chilled heavy cream, preferably pasteurized or pasteurized organic
1 tablespoon granulated sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Chill nonreactive, deep 1-to $1^1/_2$-

quart bowl and beaters for a hand-held mixer in freezer for at least 20 minutes.

2. Add cream, sugar, and vanilla to chilled bowl. Beat on low speed until small bubbles form, about 30 seconds. Increase speed to medium and continue beating until beaters leave a trail, about 30 seconds. Increase speed to high and continue beating until cream is smooth, thick, and nearly doubled in volume, about 20 seconds for soft peaks or about 30 seconds for stiff peaks. If necessary, finish beating by hand to adjust consistency. Serve immediately or spoon into fine sieve or strainer set over measuring cup and refrigerate for up to 8

hours.

FOOLS, SUMMER PUDDINGS, AND GRATINS

FOOLS, SUMMER PUDDINGS, AND GRATINS ARE combinations of fruit and creamy sauce that are eaten with a spoon. A fool is nothing more than cooked fruit puree that is chilled and then layered in bowls or goblets with whipped cream.

Summer pudding starts with cooked fruit, but layers the fruit between pieces of stale bread. The bread and fruit are weighted and refrigerated. The unmolded pudding is then garnished with

whipped cream.

For a gratin, berries are spread out in a baking dish and then covered with creamy sabayon and brown sugar. The whole mixture is run under the broiler to soften the fruit, caramelize the sugar, and heat the sauce.

Master Recipe

Fruit Fool

NOTE: ***Fools are made with fruit that has been cooked until quite tender and then mashed into a chunky puree. The stewed fruit mixture (which is sweetened and may contain flavorings) is chilled and then layered in bowls or goblets with fresh whipped cream. This recipe works well with berries, pitted cherries, or peeled and sliced stone fruits or rhubarb. Serves four to six.***

4 cups berries or other

prepared fruit (*see* note above)

$^{1}/_{4}$–$^{1}/_{2}$ cup sugar

2 cups Perfect Whipped Cream (*see*)

Master Instructions

Fruit Fool

1. Place fruit and $^{1}/_{4}$ cup sugar in medium saucepan set over medium heat. Crush fruit lightly with potato masher to release some juices. If pan is dry, add a few tablespoons of water. Cook, mashing fruit occasionally, until tender, 5 to 15 minutes, depending on variety and ripeness of fruit. Adjust sweetness, adding up to another $^{1}/_{4}$ cup sugar if desired. Cool to room temperature and transfer mixture to airtight container. Chill thoroughly.

(Mixture can be refrigerated overnight.)

2. Layer fruit mixture and whipped cream alternately in a glass serving bowl or individual goblets or bowls. Start with layer of fruit and end with layer of cream. Chill again, up to 1 day.

VARIATIONS:

Plum Fool

Peel, pit, and slice 6 plums (about $1\frac{1}{4}$ pounds). Cook with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar, 1 cinnamon stick, 1 long strip lemon zest,

and several tablespoons of water to keep fruit from burning until juices are released. Cook until tender, about 15 minutes. Discard lemon zest and cinnamon stick and proceed with recipe.

Rhubarb Fool

Cook 4 cups stringed (*see* figures 18 and 19) and sliced rhubarb with full $^{1}/_{2}$ cup sugar, 2 thin slices fresh gingerroot, and several tablespoons of water to keep fruit from burning until juices are released. Cook until tender, about 15 minutes. Discard ginger slices and proceed with recipe.

Mango Fool

Peel, pit, and slice 2 large mangoes (*see* figures 11–14). Cook with $^{1}/_{4}$ cup sugar, $^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon grated lime zest, and 1 tablespoon lime juice until tender, about 5 minutes. Proceed with recipe.

Summer Pudding

NOTE: ***Summer pudding starts with berries cooked into a thick puree. The berries are then layered with stale bread, weighted, and refrigerated until a cohesive pudding forms. We tested various kinds of bread and found that stale challah or brioche tastes best in this recipe. A firm-textured white bread, such as Pepperidge Farm, is our third choice. Preferably use a mixture of raspberries, strawberries, and blackberries. Red currants are traditional but not necessary. Use in place of half of the raspberries if you can find them. Individual ramekins are slightly more work to assemble but***

will unmold much more easily than a large summer pudding and look more attractive. Serves six.

2 pints strawberries, hulled and sliced

1 pint raspberries

1/2 pint blackberries

3/4 cup sugar

12 slices 1/4-inch-thick stale bread, crusts removed

Perfect Whipped Cream (*see*) for garnish

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Combine berries and sugar in medium saucepan set over medium heat. Cook,

stirring often, until fruit gives up some juice and sugar has dissolved, about 5 minutes. Do not cook fruit into puree; berries should not completely lose their shape. Remove pan from heat and cool to room temperature.

2. Cut bread slices into rounds to match diameter of individual $^{1}/_{2}$-cup ramekins.

3. Divide 1/3 of berry mixture among six $^{1}/_{2}$-cup ramekins. Dip 6 bread rounds into remaining berry mixture to saturate. Place one saturated bread round in each ramekin. Spoon half of remaining berry mixture over bread rounds. Repeat

saturating and layering with remaining bread rounds and berry mixture. Loosely cover each ramekin with piece of plastic wrap (*see* figure 38) and place on baking sheet. Lay second baking sheet on top of ramekins and weight with several cans (*see* figure 39).

4. Refrigerate puddings for at least 8 hours and up to 24 hours. Remove weights and top baking sheet. Unwrap ramekins. Run knife around inside edge of ramekins and invert onto individual serving plates (*see* figure 40). Dollop each pudding with whipped cream and serve immediately.

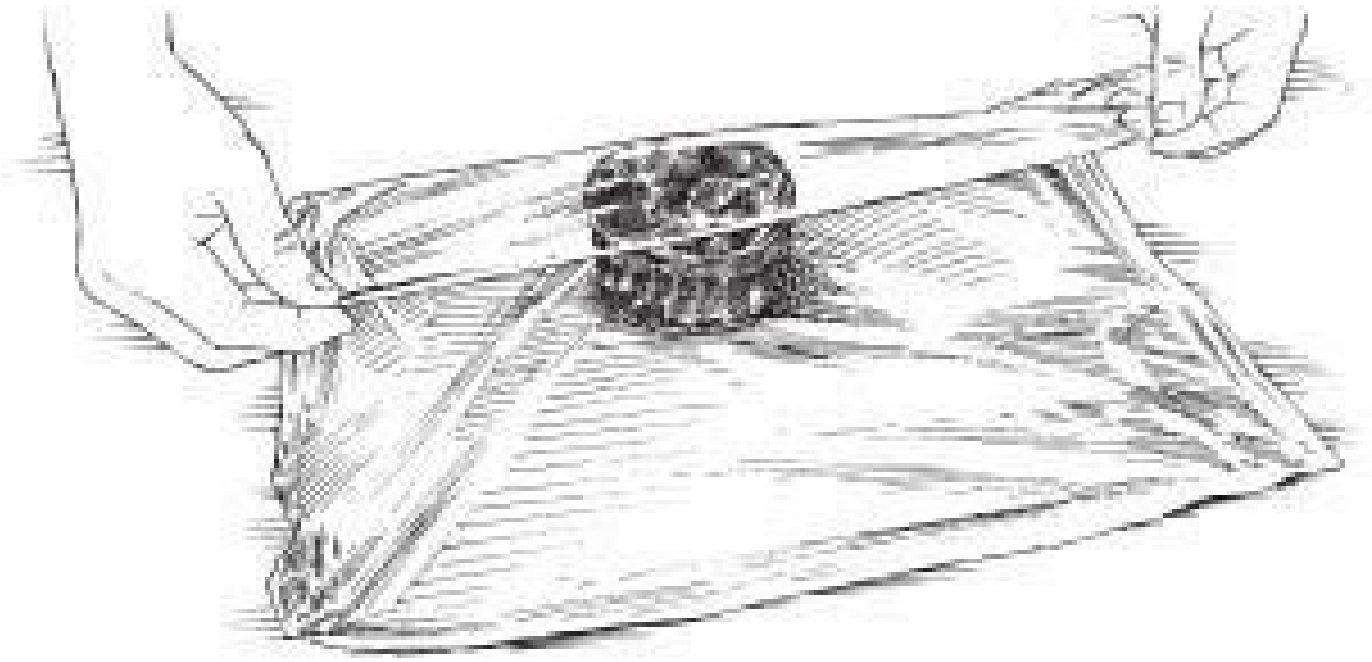

Figure 38.
Three layers of fruit and two bread rounds will fill the ramekins completely. To compress this mixture, set each ramekin over a piece of plastic wrap. Bring the edges of the plastic wrap up over the top of the ramekin to seal in the filling.

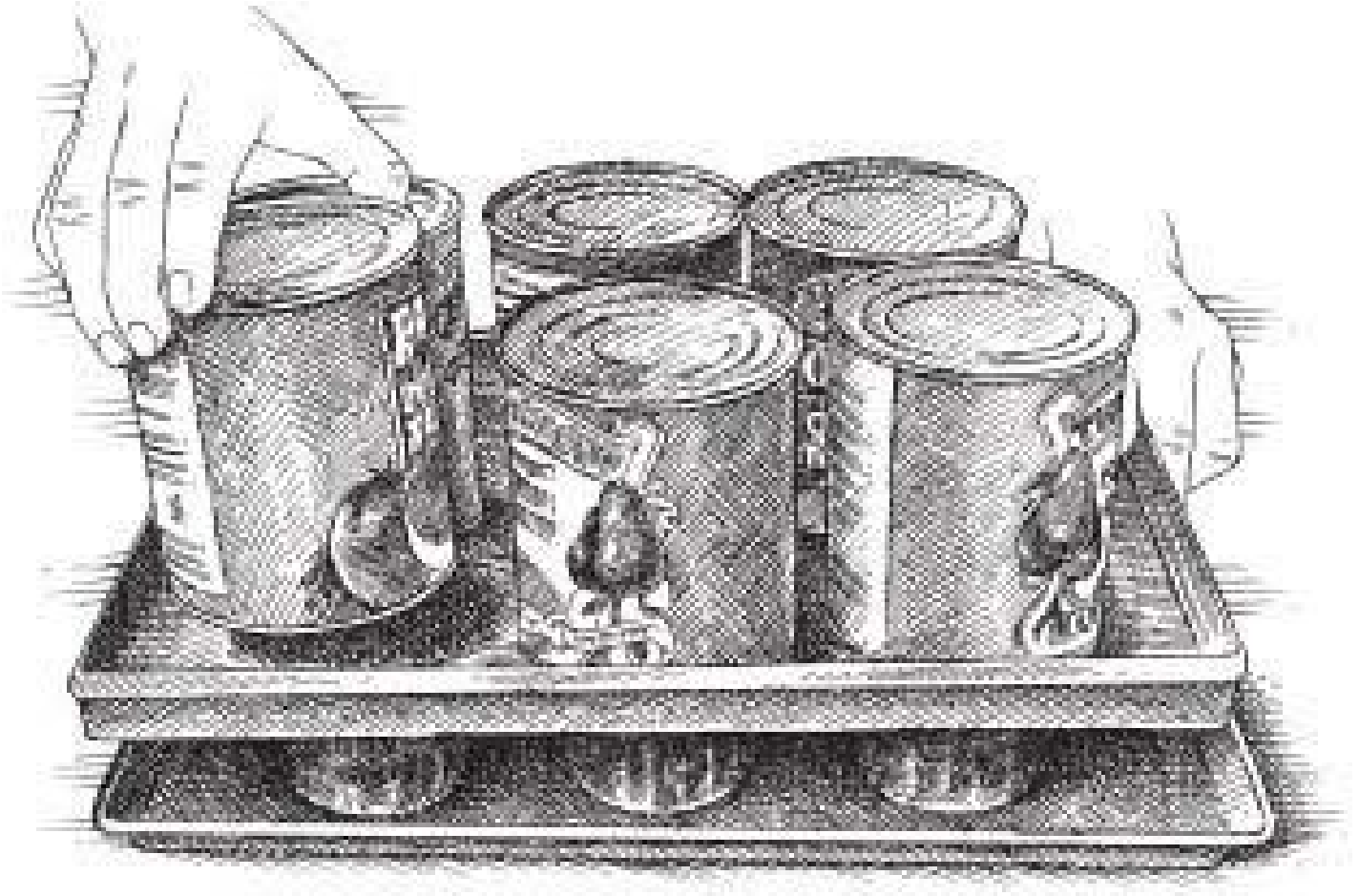

Figure 39.
Set all six ramekins on a baking sheet. Cover with a second baking sheet and then top with several heavy cans. The weighted ramekins should be refrigerated until the bread and fruit form a cohesive pudding, at least 8

hours.

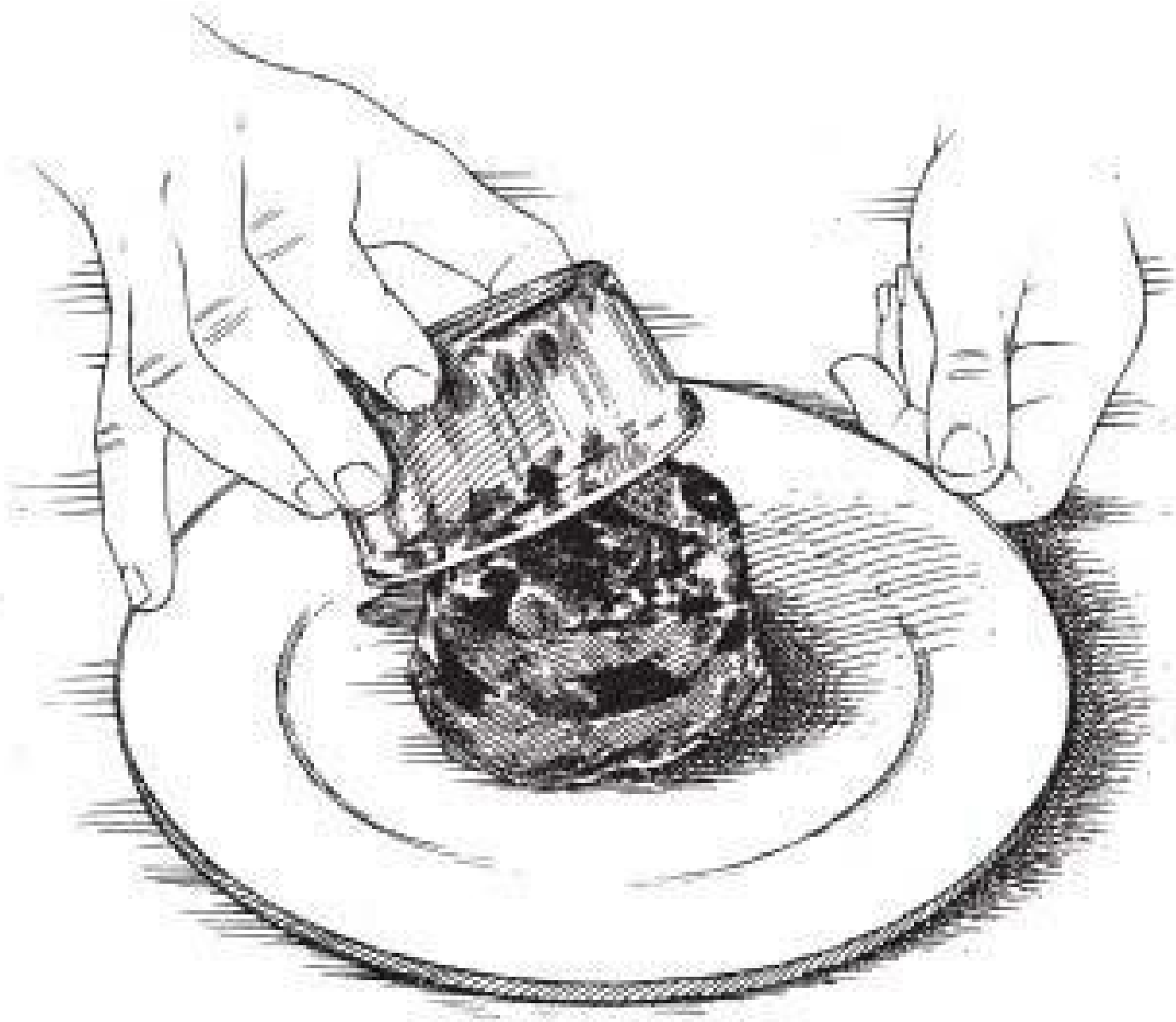

Figure 40.

To serve, unwrap the ramekins and run a knife around the inside edges. Place an individual serving plate on top of each ramekin and invert the pudding onto the plate.

Strawberry Gratin

NOTE: ***We generally think of the term gratin in conjunction with savory foods that are sprinkled with grated cheese and/or bread crumbs and run under the broiler until crisp. However, a shallow gratin dish can just as easily accommodate fruit that has been lightly sauced and sugared. In this version, the fruit is moistened with some lemon sabayon, a frothy egg sauce that contrasts nicely with the berries. A little brown sugar is sprinkled over the gratin, which is placed under the broiler to caramelize the top. We tested several sauces for the fruit, including heavy cream and***

sour cream thinned with milk. Both curdled in the oven, so stick with sabayon. This simple dessert can be assembled after dinner if the sabayon has been prepared in advance. Serves six.

2 pints strawberries, hulled and halved

$^3/_4$ cup Lemon Sabayon, chilled

3 tablespoons light brown sugar

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Divide berries among 6 individual shallow gratin dishes or ramekins set on a baking

sheet, or place berries in shallow 2-quart gratin dish.

2. Bake berries until fruit is warm and just beginning to cook, about 7 minutes. Remove from oven, adjust oven rack so that it is about 4 inches from broiler, and preheat broiler. Dollop gratin dish(es) with sabayon and sprinkle with brown sugar.

3. Slide the gratin dish(es) under broiler. Broil just until sugar melts and begins to caramelize, about 3 minutes. Serve immediately.

VARIATION:

Mixed Berry Gratin

Replace strawberries with $1^{1}/_{2}$ cups each whole raspberries and blackberries.

Lemon Sabayon

NOTE: ***Sabayon is a frothy egg-based sauce that can be spooned over fresh berries or served with poached fruit. The sauce is prepared in a double boiler and whisked continually to keep the eggs from curdling and to maximize the volume. A good sabayon will triple in volume by the time it has finished cooking. If using an instant-read thermometer, cook until the sauce reaches 160 degrees. This recipe makes*** $^{3}/_{4}$ ***cup, enough sauce for six servings of fruit.***

$^{1}/_{4}$ cup water

$^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon grated zest and 3

tablespoons juice from 1 lemon

3 large egg yolks

$^1/_3$ cup sugar

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Combine water, lemon zest, and juice in small bowl and set aside.

2. Whisk egg yolks and sugar in medium bowl until frothy, about 1 minute. Set bowl over pan of simmering water. Continue whisking until mixture begins to thicken, about 1 minute.

3. Gradually whisk in lemon mixture and continue cooking, whisking constantly,

until mixture is thick, light yellow, and triple in volume, 5 to 7 minutes. Use immediately or refrigerate in airtight container for up to 1 day and reheat in double boiler.

VARIATIONS:

Zabaglione

Marsala gives this sauce a distinctive Italian flavor and name. Replace lemon zest, juice, and water with $^1/_4$ cup each dry white wine and Marsala. Increase cooking time to about 9 minutes after alcohol has been added.

Cold Sabayon or Zabaglione

If you prefer, these sauces can be chilled

before being spooned over fruit. For a more luxurious, thicker sauce, fold 2 cups Perfect Whipped Cream into chilled sabayon or zabaglione. Use like whipped cream on top of summer pudding or any other simple fruit dessert.

Prepare Lemon Sabayon or Zabaglione. Remove bowl from pan of simmering water and place in ice bath. Continue whisking constantly until sauce has cooled to room temperature, about 5 minutes. Use as is or refrigerate in airtight container for up 1 day and use chilled.

HOW TO MAKE HOLIDAY DESSERTS

Baking Basics

Mincemeat Pie

Trifle

Chocolate Truffles

Plum Pudding

Chocolate soufflé

Crème Brûlée

Apple Pie

Yule Log Cake

BAKING BASICS

BAKING FOR THE HOLIDAYS CAN BE A CHANCE TO tackle a recipe that might seem too daunting or too seasonal to make at other times of the year. Of course, trying something you rarely, if ever bake, can lead to problems, and the holidays is not a time for recipes that don't come out right. That's why we have put together this collection of foolproof holiday desserts.

There are a couple of general baking rules that can help minimize your efforts and ensure good results.

WORK IN STAGES. Many recipes in this book can be put together over a day or more. Follow the wrapping and storage advice to prepare components before a holiday meal.

DON'T MAKE SUBSTITUTIONS. You can almost always substitute basil for parsley in a sauce for fish or chicken. But when it comes to baking, substitutions can be tricky and, in many cases, simply won't work. Follow the recipes as written, using the ingredients and equipment we recommend.

CHECK YOUR OVEN TEMPERATURE. If you don't do a lot of baking, you may not realize that your oven runs hot or cold. This is the perfect time to go out and buy an oven thermometer (sold at any store that sells kitchenware) and make sure that the thermostat on your oven is set correctly.

USE THE RIGHT OVEN SHELF. When making apple pie, you want the bottom crust to become brown and crisp and not soggy. Since the heat is more concentrated on the bottom of the oven, the pie is baked on the bottom rack. At other times, you want more even heating

and should use the center rack.

MEASURE CORRECTLY. Liquid ingredients should be measured in glass or plastic measures with a spout. Dry ingredients should be measured in metal or plastic cups. To measure flour accurately, dip the cup into the container with the flour, filling the cup so that it is overflowing. Use a small spatula or knife to sweep off excess flour.

MINCEMEAT PIE

MINCEMEAT WAS ONCE A COMMON ITEM put up every fall along with tomatoes and pickles. Rich, jamlike mincemeat takes on many forms but is commonly a mixture of apples, dried fruits, spices, alcohol, suet, and minced meat. Mincemeat originated in the Middle Ages, when the mixing of sweet and savory flavors was much more common. Meatless versions date back at least a century and make more sense to the modern cook not accustomed to the combination of sweet and savory.

Our first challenge was to replace the suet with butter. This was easy enough. The filling has a lighter flavor with butter, but is still rich and delicious. We also found that a combination of soft McIntosh apples and firmer Granny Smiths works best. The tart Granny Smiths hold their shape during the long cooking process, while the sweeter McIntosh apples fall apart and help thicken the filling.

As for the dried fruits, we like the combination of golden raisins, currants, and candied orange peel. The dark brown sugar gives the filling a rich molasses flavor and the modest amounts of spice add depth without

overpowering the fruits.

Long cooking is essential when making mincemeat. The ingredients need time to cook down and meld into a thick, rich mixture. However, we found that by the time we had cooked the fruit down into a soft mass with concentrated flavors, the pot was dry and there was not enough syrup to moisten the crust.

Many recipes add a lot of rum, brandy, or other spirits, but we felt that more than one-third cup was overpowering. After several missteps, we hit upon an easy solution. We added apple cider, which reinforces the apple flavor and keeps the mincemeat moist but does not stand out. Some of the cider goes into the pot at the start of the cooking time, the

rest when the fruit has cooked down (after about three hours) along with the alcohol. We then simmer the mincemeat for another ten minutes or so, just until this liquid reduces to a dense syrup.

Modern Mincemeat Pie

NOTE: ***This recipe uses fresh and dried fruit (but no meat) in the filling. The following dough recipe is firm enough to hold its shape and decorate but still delicious and flaky. This pie is fairly sweet and rich and should serve ten to twelve.***

Firm Pie Dough

$2^1/_2$ cups all-purpose flour, plus extra for dusting dough
1 teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons sugar
9 tablespoons chilled unsalted butter, cut into $^1/_4$-inch pieces

7 tablespoons chilled all-vegetable shortening
7-8 tablespoons ice water

Mincemeat Filling

3 Granny Smith apples, peeled, cored, and cut into $^1/_4$-inch dice
3 McIntosh apples, peeled, cored, and cut into $^1/_4$-inch dice
1 cup golden raisins
1 cup currants
Grated zest and juice from 1 orange
Grated zest and juice from 1 lemon

1/4 cup diced candied orange peel, optional

3/4 cup dark brown sugar

1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1/2 teaspoon ground allspice

1/2 teaspoon ground ginger

1/4 teaspoon ground cloves

1/4 teaspoon salt

8 tablespoons unsalted butter

1 1/2 cups apple cider

1/3 cup rum or brandy

1 beaten egg white for glazing pie dough

1 tablespoon sugar for sprinkling over pie dough

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. For dough, pulse flour, salt, and sugar in food processor fitted with steel blade. Scatter butter pieces over flour mixture, tossing to coat butter with a little flour. Pulse machine 5 times in 1-second bursts. Add shortening and continue pulsing until flour is pale yellow and resembles coarse cornmeal, with butter bits no larger than small peas, 4 to 6 more 1-second pulses. Turn mixture into medium bowl. If you do not have food processor, grate frozen butter and shortening into flour mixture and mix with your hands for 1 minute, rubbing flour and shortening between your fingers. Flour should turn very pale

yellow and become coarser in texture.

2. Sprinkle 6 tablespoons of ice water over mixture. With blade of rubber spatula, use folding motion to mix. Press down on dough with broad side of spatula until dough sticks together; gradually add up to 2 more tablespoons of ice water if dough will not stick together. Shape dough into ball with hands, divide into two balls, one slightly larger than the other. Dust lightly with flour, wrap separately in plastic, and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes. (Dough can be refrigerated overnight or wrapped again in plastic and frozen for up to 1 month.)

3. For filling, place all ingredients except $^{1}/_{2}$ cup of cider and brandy in large, heavy saucepan set over medium-low heat. Bring to boil and simmer gently, stirring occasionally to prevent scorching, until mixture thickens and darkens in color, about 3 hours. Continue cooking, stirring every minute or two, until mixture has jamlike consistency, about 20 minutes. Stir in remaining apple cider and brandy and cook until liquid in pan is thick and syrupy, about 10 minutes. Cool mixture. (Mincemeat can be refrigerated for several days.)

4. Remove dough from refrigerator. The dough is ready to be rolled when it is still cool to touch, but you can push your finger halfway down through center. (If dough has been chilled for more than 1 hour, it may have to sit on the counter for 10 to 20 minutes to soften.) Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 400 degrees.

5. On lightly floured surface, roll larger dough disk into 12-inch circle, about $^{1}/_{2}$ inch thick. Transfer and fit dough into 9-inch Pyrex pie pan, leaving in place dough that overhangs lip. Place cooled filling in pie shell.

6. On lightly floured surface, roll smaller disk into 11-inch circle. Lay pastry over filling. Trim top and bottom edges to $^1/_2$ inch beyond pan lip. Tuck this rim of dough underneath itself so that folded edge is flush with pan lip. Flute dough (*see* figures 1 through 4). Cut four slits at right angles on dough top to allow steam to escape. Brush egg white on top of crust and sprinkle 1 tablespoon sugar evenly over top.

7. Place pie on middle rack of oven. Bake until crust is lightly golden, 25 minutes. Reduce temperature to 350

degrees and continue to bake until juices bubble and crust is deep golden brown, about 35 minutes. The bottom crust should also be golden.

8. Transfer pie to wire rack and cool to room temperature. Serve with whipped cream or vanilla ice cream.

Figure 1.
There are many choices for decorating pie crust edges. For a double crust pie, we especially like fluted edges. For a small fluted edge, hold your thumb and index finger $^{1}/_{2}$ inch apart, press them against the outside edge of

the pastry rim, then use the index finger or knuckle of your other hand to press the dough through the opening thus created. Repeat this process at $^{1}/_{2}$-inch intervals around the pastry rim.

Figure 2.
For a larger fluted edge, hold your thumb and index finger about 1 inch apart, press them against the outside edge of the pastry rim, then use the index finger or knuckle of your other hand to press the dough through the opening thus created. Repeat

this process at 1-inch intervals around the pastry rim.

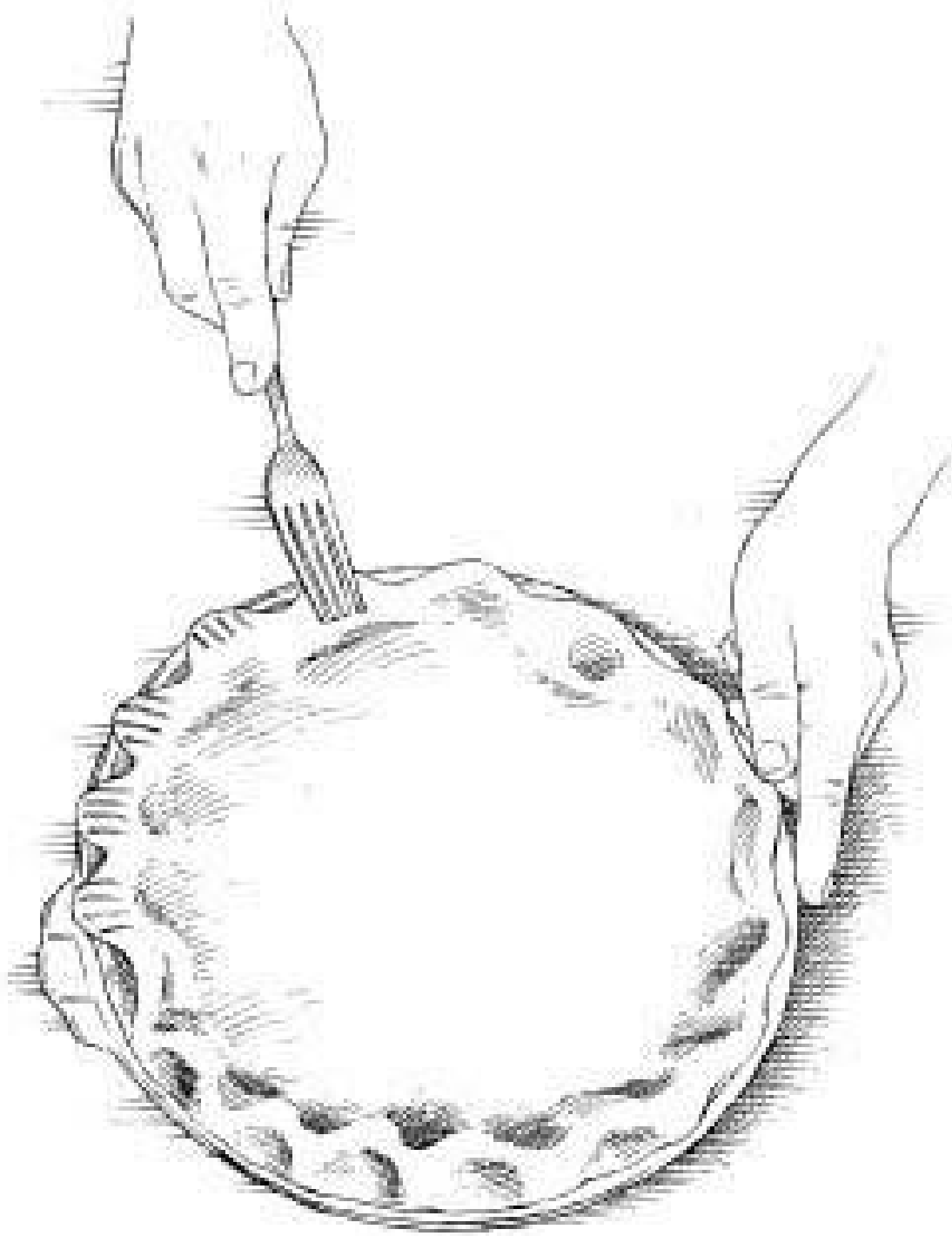

Figure 3.
For a decorative larger fluted edge, use the tines of a fork to mark each large flute.

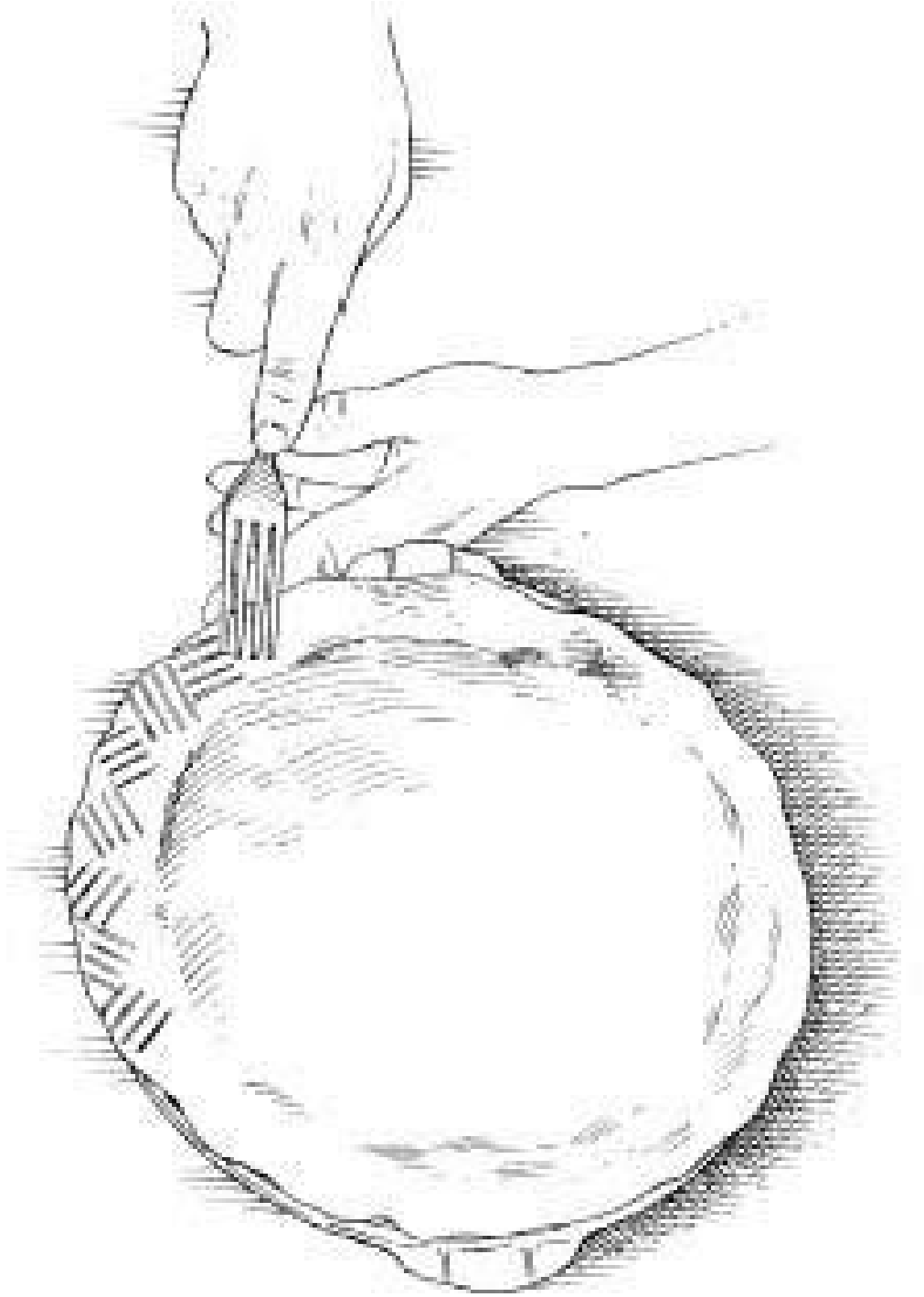

Figure 4.
If you prefer not to flute the edge, make a simple herringbone design. Hold a fork at a slight

diagonal to the crust and use the tines to mark the dough. Hold the fork at a slight diagonal in the opposite direction, mark the dough next to the original. Repeat this process around the pastry rim.

TRIFLE

VICTORIAN TRIFLE IS COMPOSED OF THREE OR more layers of sherry-moistened sponge cake, each dotted with tiny almond cookies and fresh raspberries and spread with a rich custard. The top is crowned with rosettes of lemon-scented whipped cream.

The texture of this celebratory dish is delicate and creamy, never heavy or wet, and the flavor is a subtle balance of tart fruit, slightly astringent wine, toasty almonds, and suave, eggy custard.

The custard is probably the trickiest

part of the entire recipe. It must be rich and creamy but should not be too runny (or it might obscure the carefully constructed layers) or too stiff (or it might separate into curdish bits when spread over the cake layers).

Most custard recipes that we tested were too thin. We tried using less milk and more cream, more egg yolks, thickening with cornstarch and gelatin, and failed every time. Because all of these custards were made in a pan on the stove, we figured it was time to try the oven and use a water bath, a method that works well for many puddings and custards, including crème brûlée (*see* Chapter 7).

We used a shallow baking dish so that

the custard was no firmer at the edges than the center when it set. On our first attempt, the oven produced a thick, glossy, completely smooth custard with the same texture as homemade mayonnaise—perfect for dropping over the cake layers in dollops.

The science here is quite simple. The proteins in the eggs need to coagulate when heated in order to produce a thick custard. However, if the eggs are overheated, the custard will scorch and curdle. Cooking on the stove requires constant stirring to prevent scorching. However, stirring makes it difficult for the egg proteins to bond together, and the custard is much softer when it finally

sets. When the custard is baked, there is no need for stirring (the water bath prevents scorching), so the custard sets up much firmer and thicker.

Classic Trifle

NOTE: ***Although trifle contains many components, most can be prepared in advance. The trifle (minus the whipped cream topping) needs at least 12 hours (but not more than 36 hours) to set in the refrigerator before serving. Once the whipped cream topping is added, the trifle should be served within four hours. This recipe serves sixteen.***

1 recipe Sponge Sheet Cake

3/4 cup cream sherry

3 cups raspberries, plus extra for garnish

36 marble-sized amaretti

cookies or almond macaroons

1/3 cup Amaretto or other almond-flavored liqueur

1 recipe Fresh Raspberry Purée

1 recipe Rich Baked Custard

1 recipe Lemon Whipped Cream

Candied violets, optional

INSTRUCTIONS:

Assemble according to figures 5 through 10. Serve immediately or refrigerate, uncovered, for up to 4 hours.

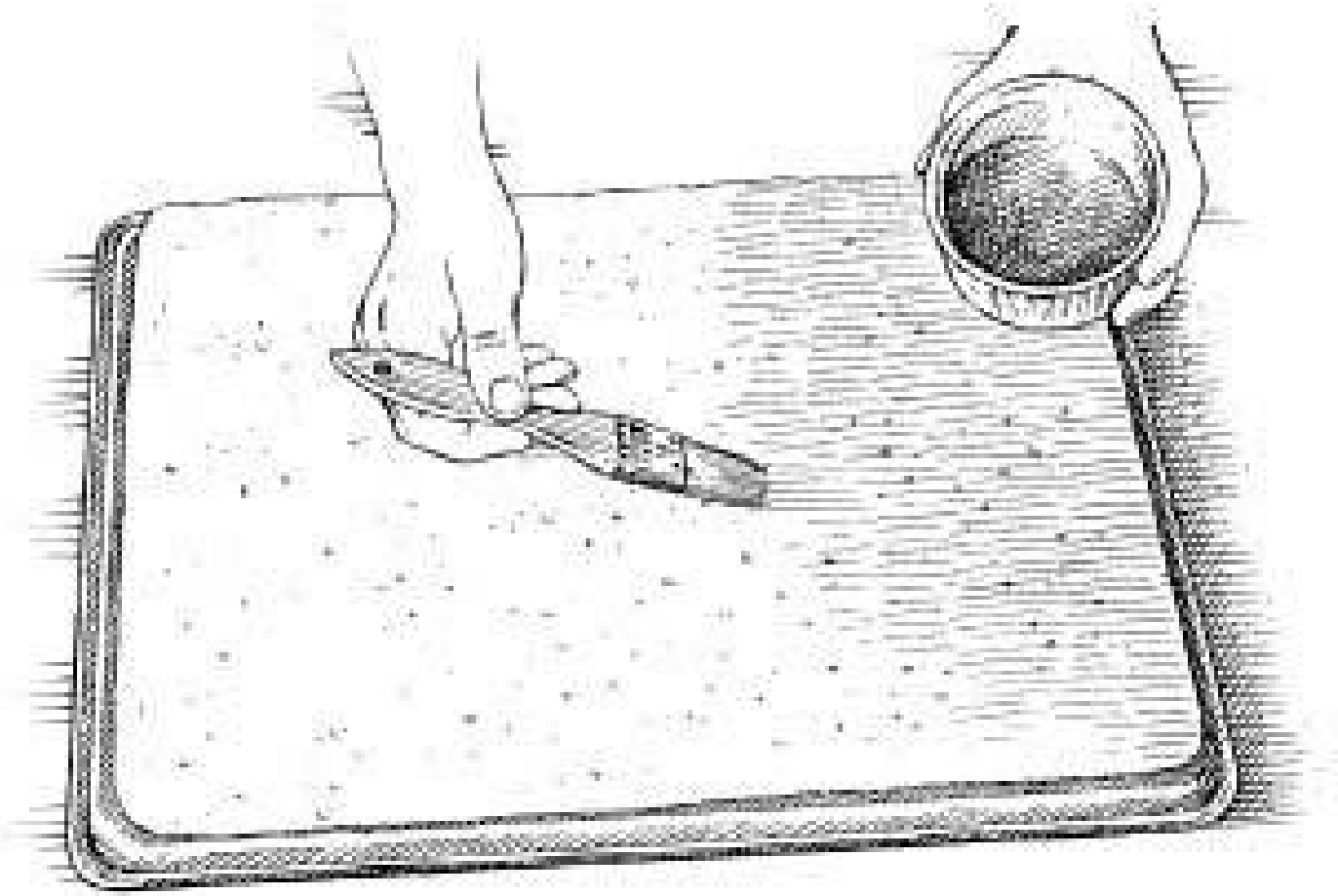

Figure 5.
Brush the cake evenly with sherry; let stand about 10 minutes.

Figure 6.
Using a serrated knife, cut the cake into six lengthwise and eight crosswise strips to yield 48 two-inch squares.

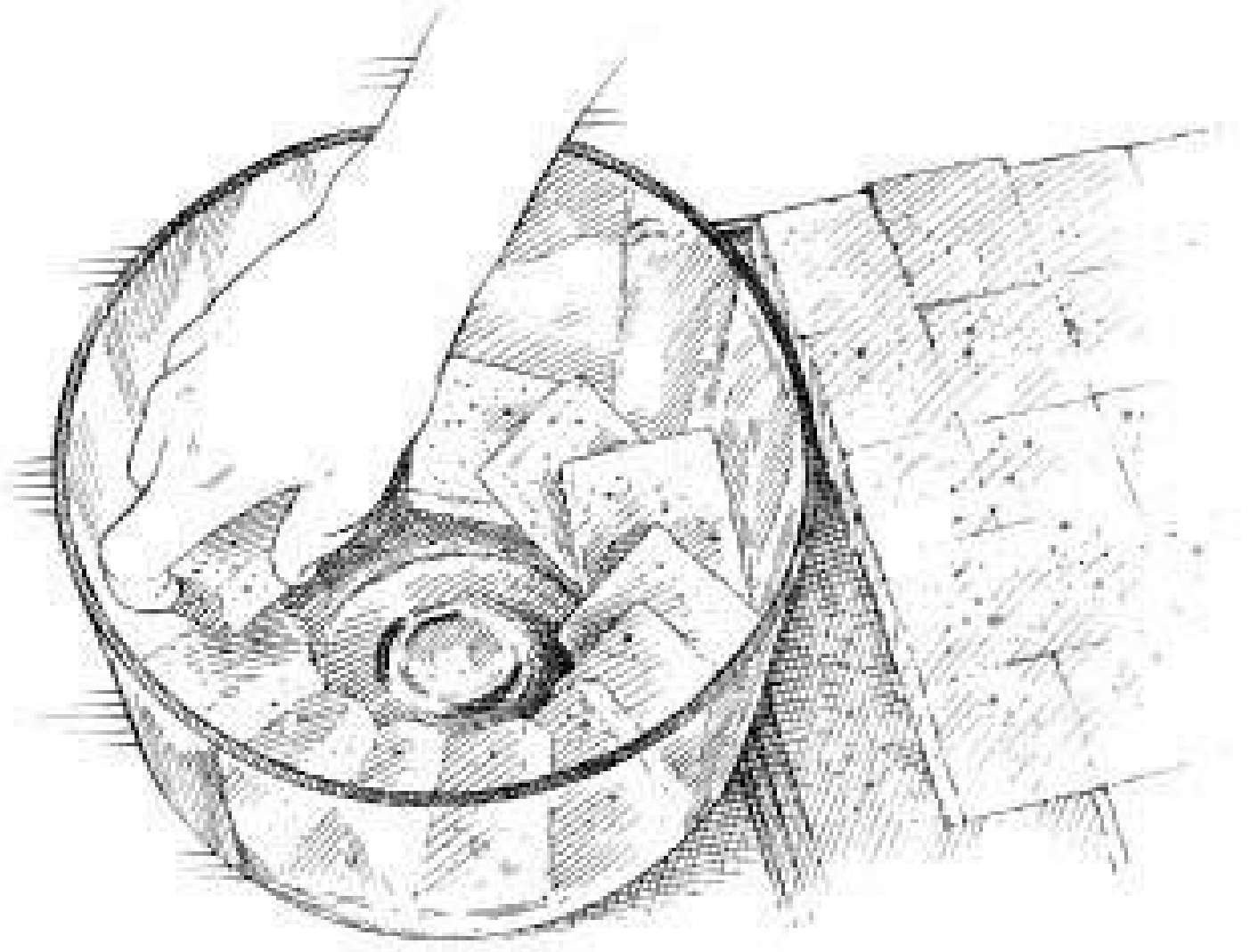

Figure 7.
Arrange 16 cake squares, fallen-domino-style, around the bottom of a 14-to 16-cup footed glass trifle dish, placing 12 or 13 squares in a ring against the wall of the dish and the remaining

squares in the center.

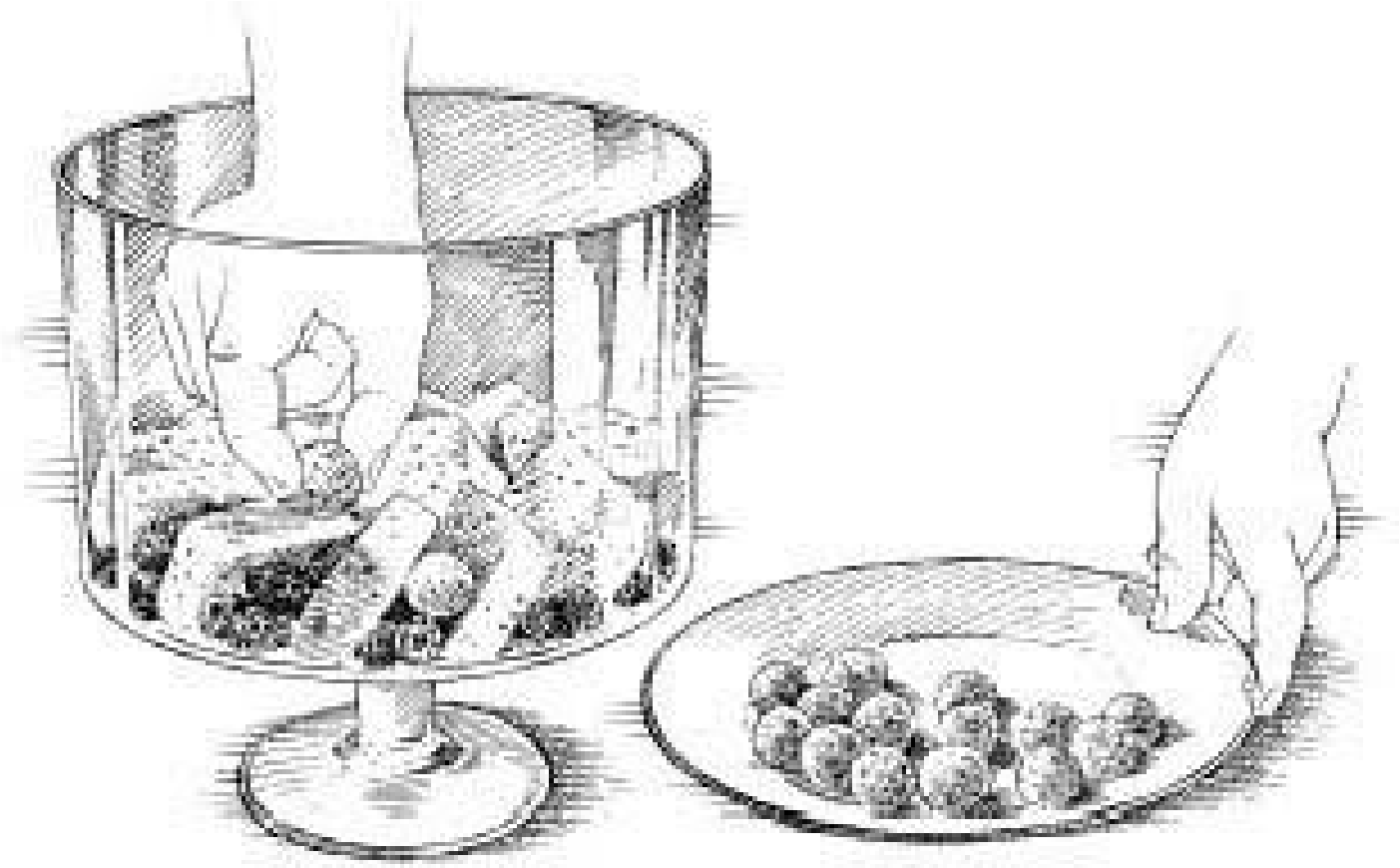

Figure 8.
Tuck two or three raspberries between each outer cake square, using 1/3 cup total. Scatter 2/3 cup berries over top of inner cake squares. Dip 12 almond cookies into Amaretto for 1 second, and then place on top of outer cake squares, near berries.

Figure 9.
Drizzle 1/3 cup raspberry puree over cake and cookies. Dollop one-third of custard over layer, coming to within $^{1}/_{2}$ inch of edge. Repeat steps 7, 8, and 9 twice

more to make a total of three layers of cake, berries, soaked cookies, raspberry puree, and custard. Cover bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 12 hours but not more than 36 hours.

Figure 10.
No more than 4 hours before serving, fill a large pastry bag fitted with $^{3}/_{4}$-inch fluted tip with Lemon Whipped Cream. Pipe

large, 2-to 3-inch rosettes over trifle top. Pipe any remaining cream into tiny rosettes to fill in between larger rosettes. Garnish the trifle with additional berries and candied violets, if using.

Sponge Sheet Cake

NOTE: ***Room temperature eggs will increase more in volume than cold eggs, so the whites and yolks are both warmed in a bowl set over a pan of hot water before being beaten.***

6 large eggs, separated
$^1/_2$ teaspoon cream of tartar
$^1/_2$ teaspoon salt
3 tablespoons plus $^1/_2$ cup sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
2 tablespoons hot water
1 cup plain cake flour

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to center position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly grease 18-by-11-inch jelly roll pan or 16-by-12-inch half sheet pan. Line bottom and sides of pan with wax paper, allowing 1-inch overhang on each end. Do not grease paper.

2. Place egg whites in large bowl and warm to room temperature over pan of hot water. Remove bowl with whites from hot water and whip with electric mixer at medium speed until foamy. Add cream of tartar and salt, increase mixer speed to medium-high, and beat whites to soft but definite peaks. Slowly

sprinkle in 3 tablespoons sugar; continue to beat until whites are shiny and very thick, 3 to 4 minutes. Scrape whites into wide 4-quart mixing bowl.

3. Without washing bowl or beaters, add yolks. Warm to room temperature over pan of hot water. Remove bowl with yolks from hot water. Add vanilla and hot water; beat at high speed for 1 minute. Slowly add remaining $^{1}/_{2}$ cup sugar; beat until mixture is pale, shiny, and almost as thick as marshmallow cream, 4 to 5 minutes longer.

4. Scrape yolk mixture over egg whites;

gently fold with rubber spatula until about two-thirds mixed. Sift flour over egg mixture; gently fold until flour is completely incorporated. Spread batter into prepared pan, smoothing top with spatula. Bake until cake top is lightly browned and center springs back when lightly pressed, 12 to 15 minutes.

5. Remove pan from oven and immediately free cake edges from pan sides with knife. Smooth sheet of wax paper over cake top. Place another sheet pan or cookie sheet on top of cake. Flip over both pans and lift off baking pan with cake. Cool cake, then gently peel off wax paper from cake bottom,

removing bottom crust. Flip cake, top side up, then peel off second sheet of wax paper, removing top crust. (Cake can be wrapped in plastic, then foil, and refrigerated for 1 day.)

Rich Baked Custard

NOTE: ***A glass baking dish such as Pyrex is essential for this recipe.***

12 large egg yolks
1 cup sugar
$^1/_2$ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
2 cups milk
1 cup heavy cream
$^1/_4$ cup brandy or Cognac

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to center position and heat oven to 300 degrees. Line bottom of large deep roasting pan with kitchen towel. Set 13-by-9-inch glass

baking dish in roasting pan. Bring a kettle of water to boil.

2. Whisk yolks, sugar, and nutmeg together in large bowl. Meanwhile, bring milk and cream to gentle simmer in large saucepan, stirring frequently to prevent boiling over. Slowly whisk milk mixture into yolks; stir in brandy. Set roasting pan in oven; pour custard into baking dish. Pour enough boiling water into roasting pan to reach custard's height. Cover roasting pan with heavy-duty aluminum foil.

3. Bake custard until spoonful taken from

center is texture of soft yogurt, 45 to 55 minutes. Remove roasting pan from oven, remove foil, and allow custard to cool until tepid in water bath. Remove glass baking dish from water bath, cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate until cold. (Custard can be refrigerated overnight.)

Fresh Raspberry Purée

NOTE: ***Thawed frozen raspberries can be used if fresh are not available. This recipe makes about 1 cup.***

2 cups raspberries
3 tablespoons sugar

INSTRUCTIONS:

Puree berries and sugar in blender or food processor fitted with metal blade. Strain through fine sieve, pressing on solids to release juice; discard seeds. (Puree can be covered and refrigerated for 1 day.)

Lemon Whipped Cream

NOTE: ***The lemon zest needs time to infuse the cream, so prepare at least 12 hours before using. Just before assembling trifle, strain cream and whip to stiff peaks. A food processor does the best job of grinding the zest and sugar very fine. However, you can do this by hand, mincing the zest with 1 tablespoon or so of sugar on a cutting board with a chef's knife. Mix the minced zest with the rest of the sugar, whisk in the lemon juice, and proceed as directed in the recipe.***

3 medium lemons, washed with warm water and dried

1/2 cup sugar
2 cups heavy cream
2 tablespoons cream sherry

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Remove lemon zest with vegetable peeler. Squeeze, then strain enough juice to make 1/2 cup.

2. Finely grind zest and sugar in food processor fitted with metal blade, about 2 minutes. With machine running, gradually dribble in lemon juice. Scrape mixture into airtight container. Whisk in cream and sherry, cover tightly, and refrigerate until mixture is thick and

lemon-flavored, at least 12 hours but not more than 36 hours.

3. Strain cream mixture through fine-mesh sieve and into large bowl, pressing on zest to release cream. Whip cream with electric mixer on medium-high speed to stiff peaks. Pipe immediately over trifle.

CHOCOLATE TRUFFLES

THE PERFECT TRUFFLE IS A BALANCED amalgam of texture and flavor that produces the ultimate chocolate experience. The predominant flavor should be chocolate, with other ingredients added only as enhancers. The texture should be sensuously creamy and light, despite its richness. The chocolate coating should be thin and delicate, just thick enough to keep the creamy center from losing its shape.

Truffle centers are made from a mixture of cream and chocolate called

ganache. Many ganache recipes call for pouring hot cream into a bowl with chopped chocolate, but some chocolate may not melt with this method, giving the filling a grainy texture. We find that melting the chocolate, either in the microwave or in a bowl set over a pan of gently simmering water, and then combining it with warm cream is more reliable.

In addition to chocolate and cream, we found that adding a little butter improved the texture of the ganache because its melting temperature is lower than that of chocolate and hence the mouth feel of the truffles is improved. However, too much butter will make the ganache dense and heavy tasting, so limit butter to 2 ounces

per pound of chocolate.

A little corn syrup boosts the sweetness of the truffles and makes the filling even more smooth. Again, too much corn syrup should be avoided because it can cause gumminess.

The other major challenge in preparing truffles is the chocolate shell. Tempering chocolate is very complicated and dipping, unless done by a professional, usually results in a thick coating. We prefer to dip our hands right into the melted chocolate and then roll the truffle centers in our hands to give them a light coating. The truffles are then rolled in cocoa powder, which hides any imperfections.

Easy Chocolate Truffles

NOTE: ***Although brandy or Cognac is traditional, use rum or any flavored liqueur, such as Amaretto, Frangelico, or Kirsch, in the chocolate centers. Melt the chocolate for centers in a bowl set over a pan of gently simmering water or in a microwave at 50 percent power, stirring every minute or so, until smooth. This recipe makes three or four dozen small truffles. See figures 11 through 17, for tips on shaping truffles.***

Chocolate Centers

$^1/_2$ cup heavy cream

2 tablespoons unsalted butter

1 tablespoon light corn syrup

9 ounces semisweet or bittersweet chocolate, chopped

2 tablespoons brandy, Cognac, rum, or liqueur

Chocolate Coating

12 ounces semisweet or bittersweet chocolate, chopped

2 cups Dutch-process cocoa powder, sifted into baking pan

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Combine cream, butter, and corn syrup in small saucepan and bring to simmer over low heat. Remove from

heat and cool for 5 minutes.

2. Melt 9 ounces chocolate in large bowl and whisk in cooled cream mixture until smooth. Whisk in alcohol. Cool mixture to room temperature, 1 to 2 hours.

3. Whip chocolate mixture with electric mixer until it thickens a bit, about 30 seconds. Do not overwhip or mixture will harden and become grainy. Scrape mixture into pastry bag fitted with $^{1}/_{2}$-inch plain tube. Pipe out 1-inch spheres onto baking sheet lined with parchment or wax paper. Refrigerate centers until firm, at least 1 hour.

4. To coat truffles, melt 12 ounces chocolate and allow to cool to 90 degrees. Coat centers with thin layer of chocolate by dipping hand in chocolate and rubbing centers across palm. Deposit truffles in pan filled with sifted cocoa. Use fork to roll truffle in cocoa; leave in pan until outsides are set, about 2 minutes. Transfer truffles to clean pan. When completely firm, place several truffles at a time in strainer and roll to remove excess cocoa. Place in airtight container and refrigerate for up to 1 week.

Figure 11.

Fill a pastry bag fitted with $^{1}/_{2}$-inch plain tube with whipped chocolate mixture. Holding bag perpendicular to and about 1 inch above a baking sheet lined with parchment or wax paper, squeeze

top of bag to push out a small sphere of chocolate. After the sphere forms, stop squeezing and pull tube away to the side to avoid leaving a long tail.

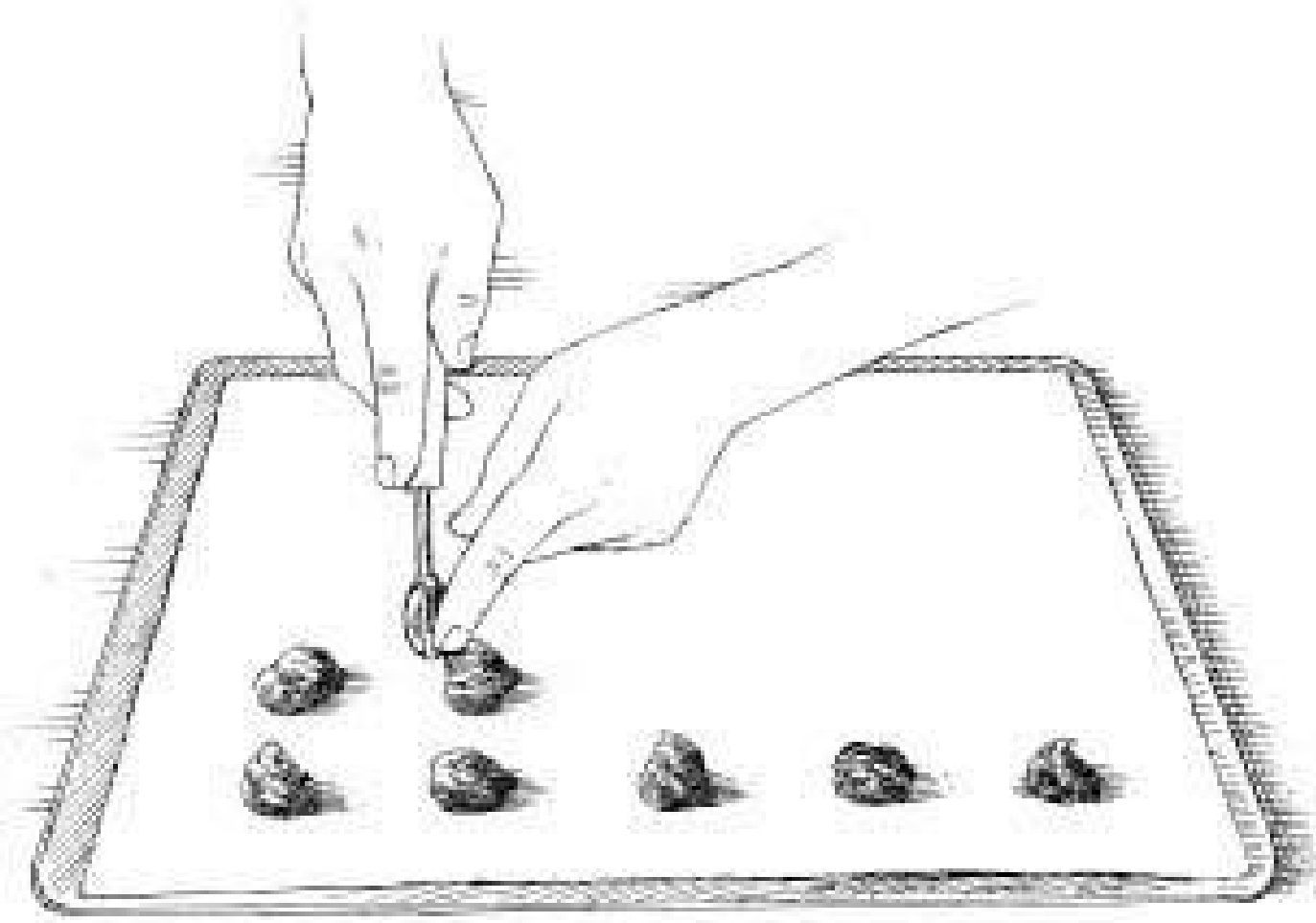

Figure 12.
If you don't have a pastry bag, use the bowl on a melon baller or a small scoop that measures just under a tablespoon to scoop out pieces of ganache and carefully set them on the paper-lined baking sheet. Scooped truffles

will be knobby, not round like piped truffles.

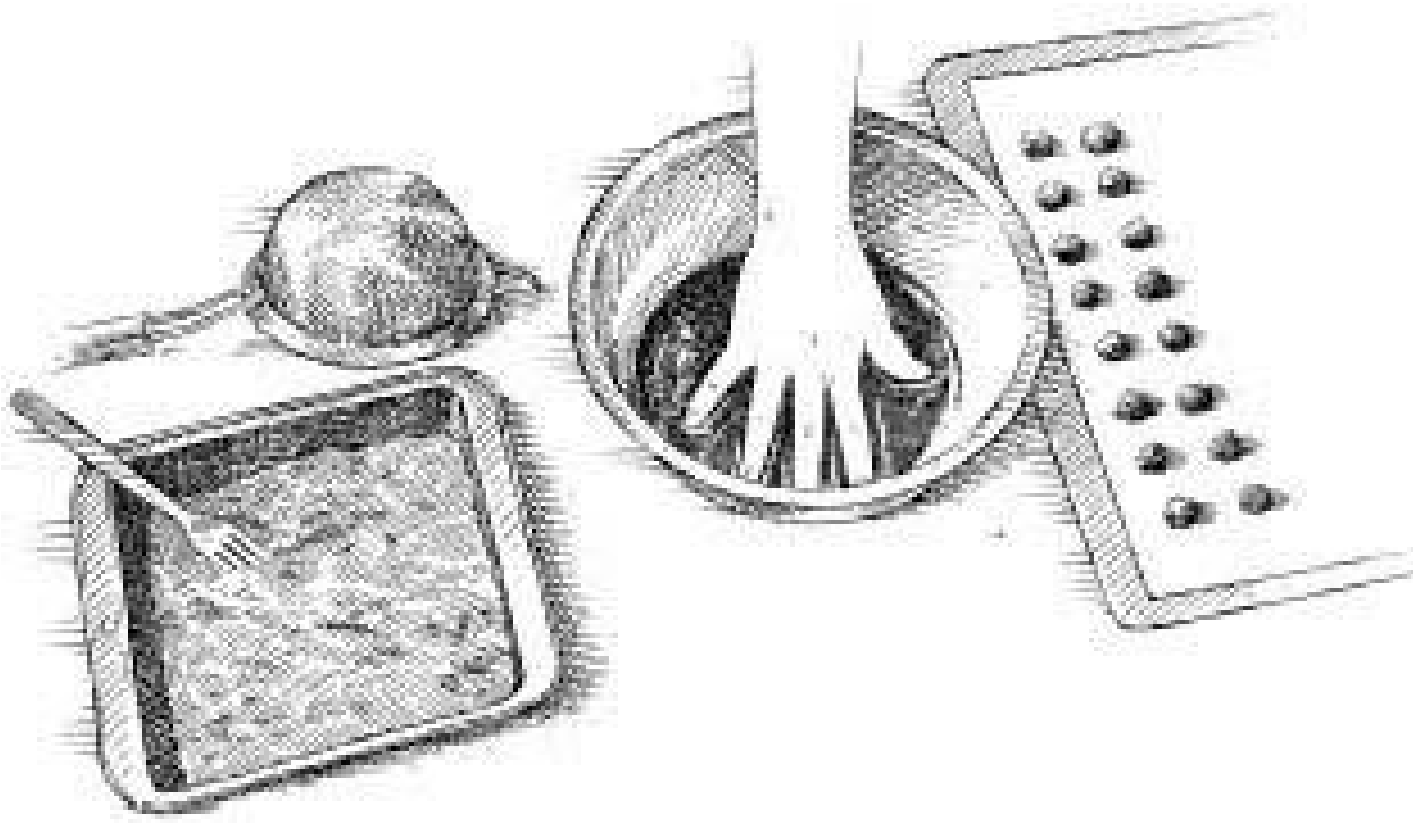

Figure 13.
Dipping truffle centers into melted chocolate often results in a thick coating of chocolate. The following method is a bit messy but guarantees a thin, delicate coating. Start by arranging a baking sheet with chilled centers, a bowl with melted chocolate,

and a baking pan filled with sifted cocoa on a work surface. Dip flat palm of one hand about $^{1}/_{4}$-inch deep into bowl of melted chocolate.

Figure 14.
Pick up truffle center with clean hand.

Figure 15.
Transfer truffle to chocolate-covered hand, and close hand around center to coat it with chocolate. Drop coated truffle into the cocoa. Do this with 2 or 3 more truffle centers before redipping hand in chocolate.

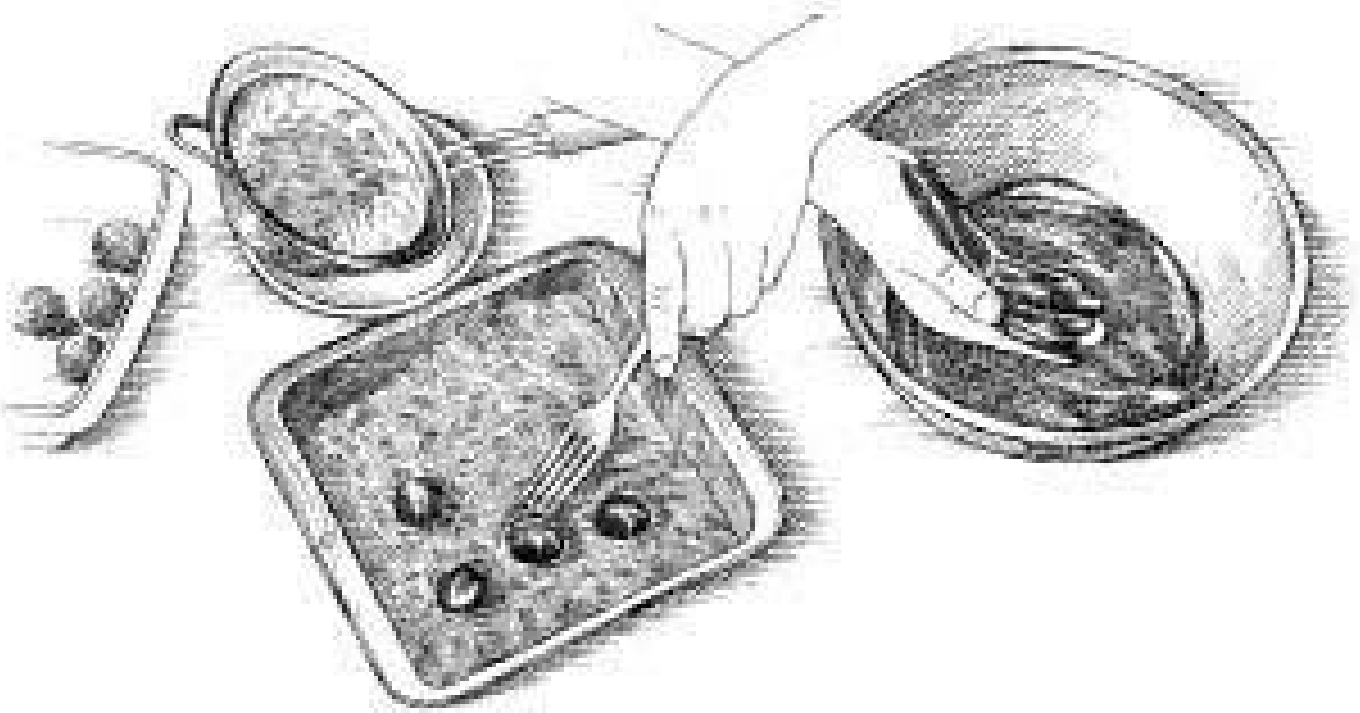

Figure 16.
As soon as truffles are in the pan with the cocoa, roll them around using a fork in your clean hand. Better yet, have a second person do this. Leave truffles in pan with cocoa until set and then transfer with fork or clean fingers to clean pan.

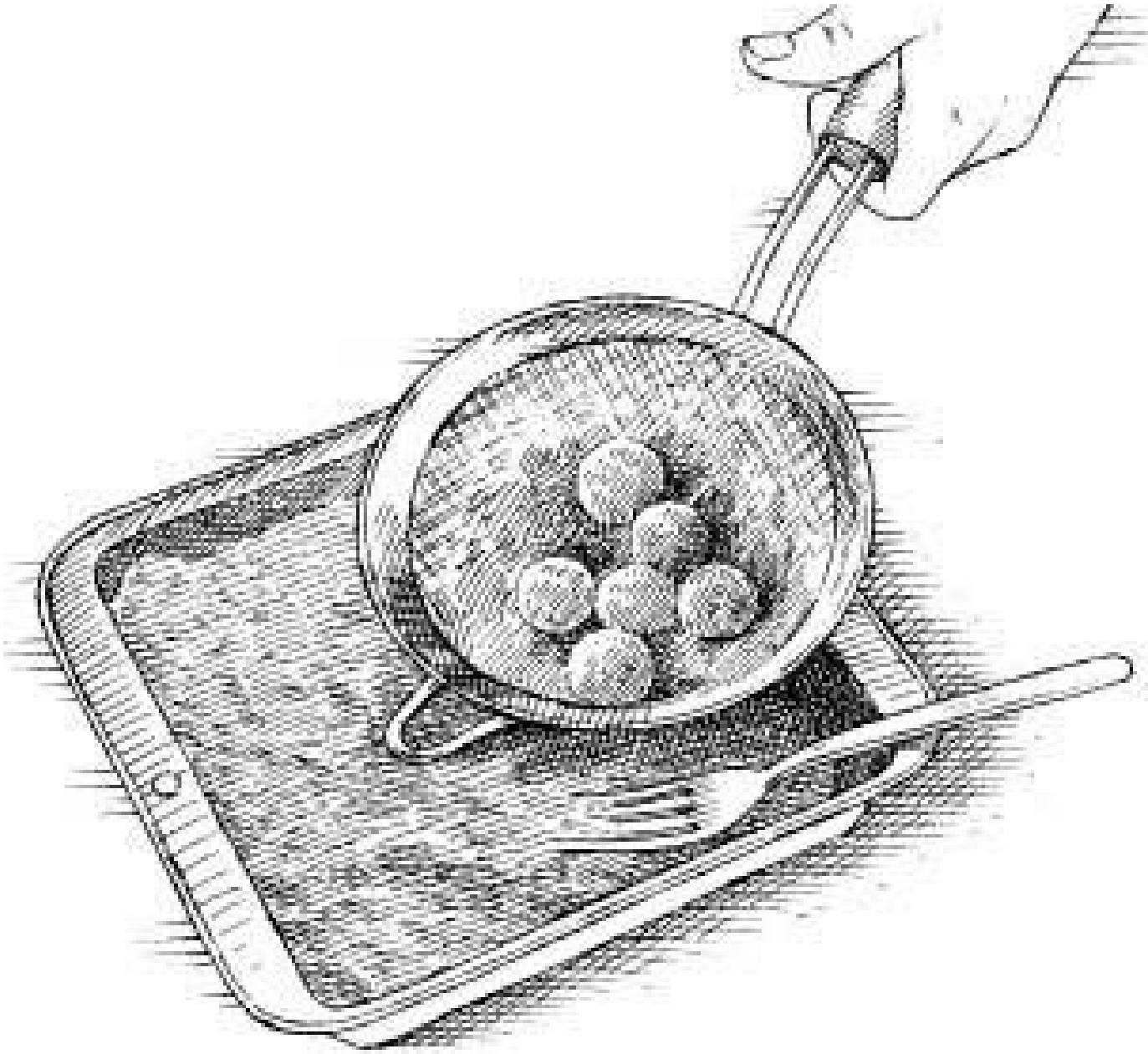

Figure 17.
When completely firm, place 5 or 6 truffles in a strainer and gently roll around to dislodge any excess cocoa. Place truffles in airtight

container and refrigerate until ready to serve.

PLUM PUDDING

PLUM PUDDING IS THE CLASSIC ENGLISH DESSERT for Christmas. Like other steamed puddings, this cake-like confection has a dense texture that is especially moist. The flavors are rich and concentrated, with spices and dried fruits predominating.

While traditional recipes call for suet, we wanted to use butter because suet can be difficult (if not impossible) to locate in many parts of the country. The color is not quite as dark when the pudding is made with butter, and the texture is a bit

more crumbly, but otherwise the results are the same.

In England, Christmas pudding and other steamed puddings are commonly prepared in ceramic pudding basins, which are essentially, deep, steep-sided bowls that often come with lids and handles. Fancy fluted tube (or "steeple") molds, which also usually come with snap-on lids, are available in a number of sizes and produce particularly attractive steamed puddings. Tube molds come in both metal and ceramic; metal ones tend to promote sticking, but are serviceable if you smooth a patch of foil flush against the greased bottom.

Although a mold with a cover and handle will make maneuvering the

pudding in the steamer easier, it is not essential. Any large heatproof glass or ceramic bowl can be used to make plum pudding.

Whether you use a bowl or a mold, plum pudding needs to be cooked on top of the stove in a tightly covered pot containing enough simmering water to reach halfway up the sides of the pudding mold. We say that the pudding is steamed, but because steaming, today, usually implies cooking something over, not in, boiling water, it might be more accurate to say that the pudding is boiled. Do not be intimated by this unfamiliar cooking procedure—it's easy, flexible, and quite forgiving of error.

Just remember to add more boiling water as needed to prevent the pot from running dry during the long steaming process.

Plum Pudding

NOTE: ***Choose any large pot for steaming the pudding. Just make sure that the pot is tall enough to be tightly covered once the pudding is inside, and remember that there will be a rack underneath the pudding as well as a cover or plate over the mold. Remember, too, that the steamer must be roomy enough to allow you to reach in and extract the cooked pudding, your hands protected by mitts or rubber gloves. Of course, a pudding mold with a handle makes the job easier. This recipe serves sixteen. See figures 18 through 21, for tips on making plum pudding.***

$2\frac{2}{3}$ cups (1 pound) dark raisins

2 cups (10 ounces) dried currants

2 cups water

1 cup plain bread crumbs

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup all-purpose flour

1 cup (8 ounces) firmly packed dark brown sugar

2 teaspoons ground cinnamon

2 teaspoons ground ginger

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon ground cloves

1 teaspoon salt

$\frac{1}{2}$ pound (2 sticks) chilled unsalted butter, cut into $\frac{1}{4}$-inch bits

4 large eggs

1/3 cup brandy or Cognac

1/2 cup sweet sherry (cream or Amontillado)

1/4 cup (2 ounces) finely chopped citron, optional

Vegetable shortening for greasing mold

1/4 cup additional brandy or Cognac for flaming the pudding, optional

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Chop half the raisins into pieces roughly the same size as currants. Combine chopped and whole raisins and currants in large, heavy-bottomed pot;

add water. Cover and bring to boil; uncover and simmer briskly, stirring frequently, until nearly all liquid has evaporated, 15 to 18 minutes. Remove pot from heat, recover, and let cool to room temperature, at least 2 hours.

2. Combine bread crumbs, flour, brown sugar, spices, and salt in workbowl of food processor fitted with metal blade. Process until brown sugar is completely pulverized. Add butter and pulse until mixture is consistency of coarse bread crumbs. Be careful not to allow mixture to clump. Whisk eggs in large bowl until foamy, then beat in brandy and sherry. Stir in crumb mixture. Add cooked fruits

and their juices and optional citron, and stir until well blended.

3. Very thickly grease $2\,^{1}/_{2}$-or 3-quart mold with shortening. Turn pudding batter into mold, leaving at least $^{3}/_{4}$ inch space between top of batter and rim of mold for expansion during steaming. If mold comes with cover, grease inside of cover and snap it in place. Otherwise, crimp sheet of heavy-duty aluminum foil over rim of mold with as little overhang as possible down sides. (Water tends to climb up overhanging foil.)

4. Arrange cake rack in bottom of large

pot and set mold on top. Pour enough boiling water into pot to come halfway up sides of mold. If mold does not have its own cover, place upside-down plate over foil and cover pot. Turn heat to high and return water to boil as quickly as possible to set outside of pudding and prevent sticking. Lower heat to maintain brisk simmer and steam for $3^1/_2$ hours, replenishing pot with additional boiling water as needed.

5. Remove mold from pot and let pudding cool until tepid. Shake mold back and forth to loosen pudding, then unmold onto large sheet of heavy-duty foil. Wrap pudding tightly, then wrap in

second sheet of foil or enclose in zipper-lock plastic bag. Let pudding stand at cool room temperature for 3 days, then refrigerate for at least 1 week and up to 2 months.

6. When ready to serve, return pudding to original mold that has been well greased and steam 2 to 3 hours, until center registers 160 degrees on instant read thermometer, or knife plunged in center comes out hot. (Once reheated, pudding can be left in pot, with heat shut off, for 1 to 2 hours before serving). Invert pudding onto platter and unmold. If you wish to flame pudding, warm brandy in small saucepan until barely

tepid. Drizzle brandy over pudding, and then, standing back, ignite with long wooden match. Cut into wedges and serve with hard sauce.

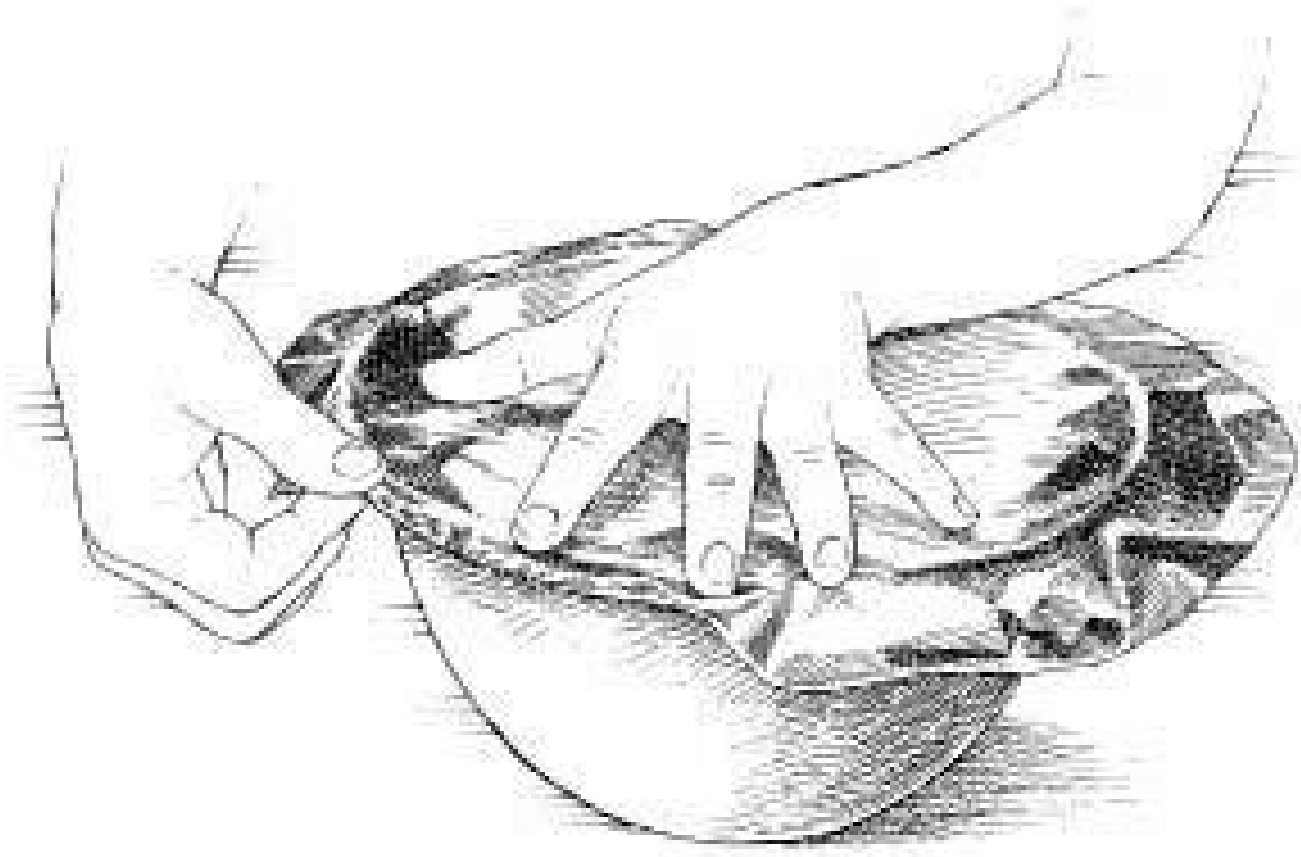

Figure 18.
Fill a well-greased mold with pudding batter, leaving at least $^{3}/_{4}$ inch of space between the batter and rim to allow for expansion. If the mold comes with a cover, grease the inside of cover and snap it in place. Otherwise, cut a piece of heavy-

duty foil 1 inch larger than mold. Crimp foil over the rim of the mold with as little overhang as possible down sides, because water tends to travel up overhanging foil.

Figure 19.
Arrange a cake rack on the bottom of the steamer to protect the pudding from direct contact

with the heat. Place the mold in the steamer and carefully add boiling water to come halfway up the sides of the mold.

Figure 20.
If the mold does not have its own cover, place an upside-down plate over foil. Steam for $3^{1}/_{2}$ hours.

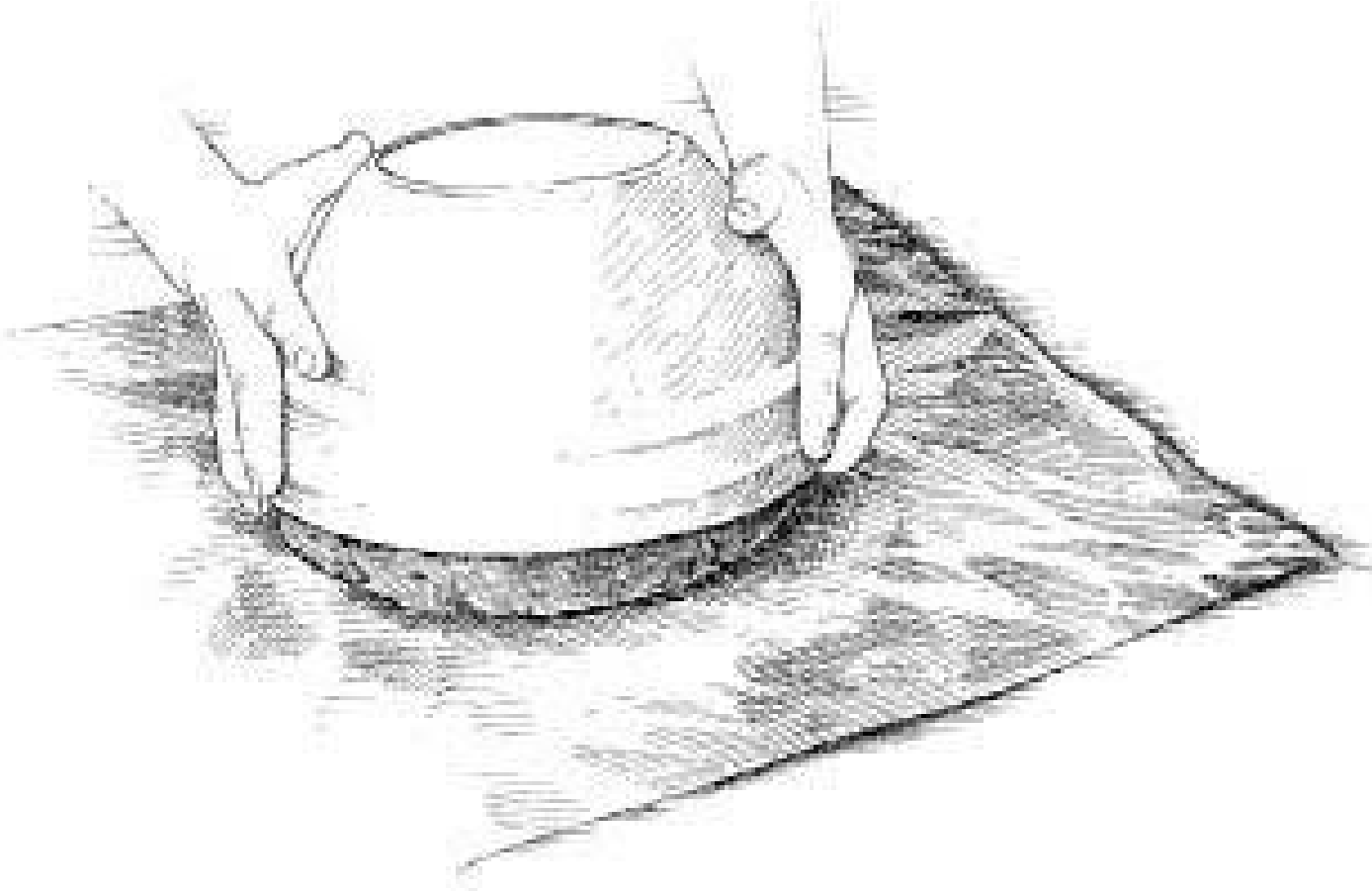

Figure 21.
Remove mold from pot and let pudding cool until tepid. Shake mold back and forth to loosen pudding, then unmold onto large sheet of foil. Wrap pudding tightly in foil, then wrap in second sheet of foil or enclose in zipper-lock plastic bag.

Fluffy Orange-Mace Hard Sauce

NOTE: ***The secret to this sauce is to add the spirits quite slowly; otherwise, the sauce may thin out. Use lemon zest in place of orange if desired.***

1/2 pound (2 sticks) unsalted butter, softened
3 cups confectioners' sugar
Grated zest of 1 large orange
1/2 teaspoon ground mace
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/3 cup brandy or Cognac
2 tablespoons sweet sherry (cream or Amontillado)

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Combine butter, sugar, zest, mace, and salt in large bowl with electric mixer set at low speed; gradually increase speed to medium-high and beat until mixture is fluffy and looks almost white, 7 to 10 minutes. Scrape down sides of bowl.

2. Combine brandy and sherry in measuring cup. With mixer running, very slowly dribble in spirits until well combined. Turn mixture into airtight container and refrigerate for up to 1 week. Bring refrigerated sauce to room temperature before transferring to serving dish or it will separate.

CHOCOLATE SOUFFLÉ

THE PERFECT SOUFFLÉ HAS A CRUSTY exterior, a dramatic rise above the rim, an airy but substantial outer layer, and a rich, loose center that is not completely set. A great chocolate soufflé must also convey strong, clear chocolate flavor.

A primary consideration when trying to create such a soufflé is the base, the mixture that gives substance and flavor to the soufflé as opposed to the lift and airiness provided by the beaten egg whites. In our testing, we found that egg yolks beaten with sugar are better than

the classic Béchamel (butter, flour, and milk) or pastry cream (egg yolks beaten with sugar and then heated with milk). Without any milk, which can block out other flavors, the chocolate notes come through loud and clear.

The other key is the egg whites. We found that adding two more whites than yolks prevents the outside layer from becoming too cakey (a problem with most chocolate soufflés) and also gives better lift.

One factor we found to be of surprising importance was the baking dish. We tried using a standard casserole dish and the soufflé rosé right out of the dish and onto the oven floor. Whether using a single large soufflé dish

or eight individual ramekins, the sides must be perfectly straight.

We also wanted to develop a soufflé base that could be prepared ahead of time and then baked as needed. Because beaten egg whites lose volume quickly, this is harder than it sounds. We tried refrigerating and freezing our basic soufflé batter and found that freezing portions in individual ramekins rather than a large dish worked best, although the rise was not as dramatic as we like. Adding confectioners' sugar to the beaten whites helped stabilize them and keep the rise high. We also added hot sugar syrup to the yolks to increase their volume, instead of plain sugar.

There are three ways to know when a chocolate soufflé is done—when you can smell the chocolate, when the soufflé stops rising, and when only the center jiggles when the dish is gently shaken.

Chocolate soufflé

NOTE: ***If you prefer, make one large soufflé in a buttered and sugared 2-quart soufflé dish and bake for about 25 minutes. If you like, melt the chocolate in a microwave set at 50 percent power for three minutes, stirring in the butter after two minutes. This recipe serves eight.***

5 tablespoons unsalted butter (1 tablespoon softened, remaining 4 tablespoons cut into $^1/_2$-inch chunks)

1 tablespoon plus 1/3 cup sugar

8 ounces bittersweet or

semisweet chocolate, chopped coarse

1/8 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract

1 tablespoon Grand Marnier

6 large egg yolks

8 large egg whites

1/4 teaspoon cream of tartar

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to lower middle position and heat oven to 375 degrees. Butter insides of eight 8-ounce ramekins with 1 tablespoon softened butter. Coat insides of dishes evenly with 1 tablespoon sugar; refrigerate ramekins until ready to use.

2. Melt chocolate and remaining 4 tablespoons butter in medium bowl set over pan of simmering water. Turn off heat, stir in salt, vanilla, and liqueur; set aside.

3. Beat yolks and remaining 1/3 cup sugar in medium bowl with electric mixer at medium speed until thick and pale yellow, about 3 minutes. Fold in chocolate mixture. Clean beaters.

4. Beat whites in medium bowl with electric mixer at medium speed until foamy. Add cream of tartar and continue

to beat at high speed to stiff, moist peaks.

5. Vigorously stir one-quarter of whipped whites into chocolate mixture. Gently fold in remaining whites (*see* figures 22 through 25). Spoon mixture into prepared dishes and clean each rim with wet paper towel; bake until exterior is set and interior is still a bit loose and creamy, 16 to 18 minutes. (soufflé is done when fragrant and fully risen; use two large spoons to pull open top of soufflé and peek inside if you have doubts; place back in oven if center is still soupy.) Serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Mocha soufflé

Add 1 tablespoon instant coffee powder dissolved in 1 tablespoon hot water to chocolate mixture, along with vanilla and liqueur.

Make-Ahead soufflé (either Chocolate or Mocha)

Make the following changes to recipe. Rather than beating sugar and yolks, bring 1/3 cup sugar and 2 tablespoons water to boil in small saucepan and simmer until sugar dissolves. With mixer running, slowly add this sugar syrup to egg yolks; beat until mixture triples in

volume, about 3 minutes. Beat egg whites until frothy; add cream of tartar and beat to soft peaks; add 2 tablespoons confectioners' sugar and continue to beat to stiff peaks. Cover filled ramekins and freeze until firm, at least 3 hours and up to 2 days. Increase oven temperature to 400 degrees; bake until exterior is set and interior is still a bit loose and creamy, 16 to 18 minutes. Do not overbake.

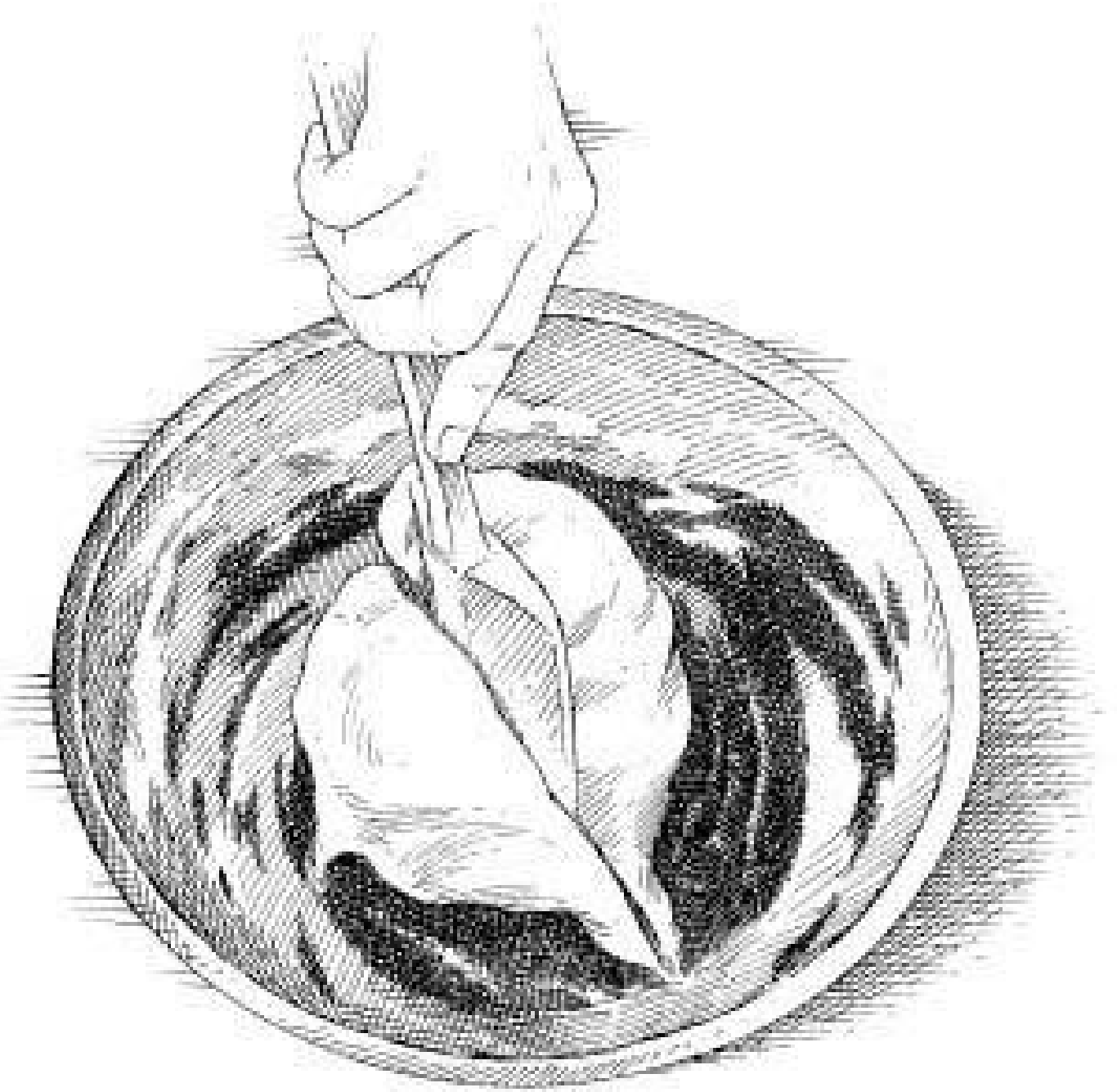

Figure 22.
Properly folding the beaten egg whites into the chocolate mixture is key to obtaining a fully risen soufflé. Start by vigorously

stirring in one-quarter of the whites. Then add rest of whites to bowl and starting at the top of the bowl, use a rubber spatula to cut through the middle of the mixture.

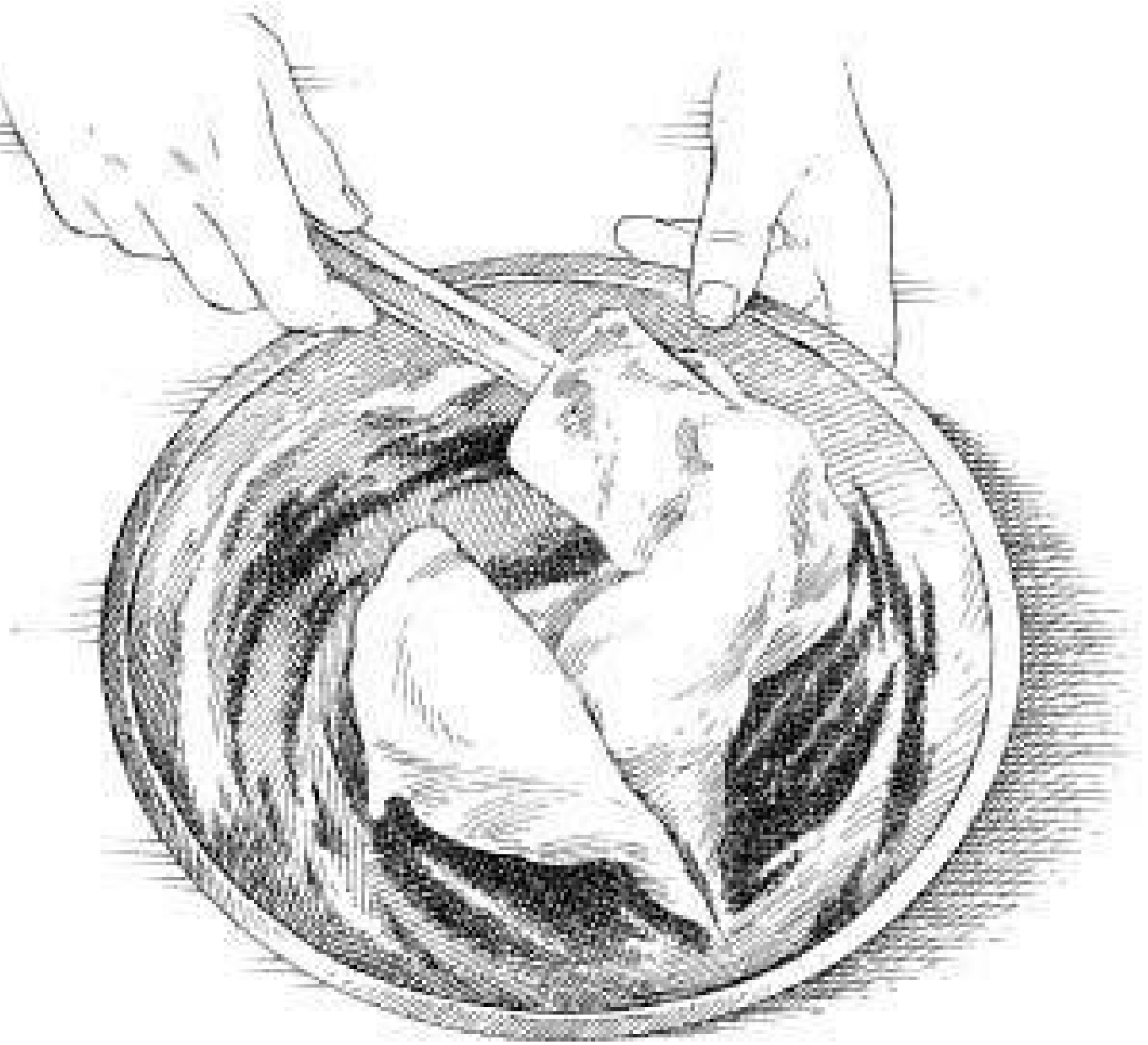

Figure 23.
Turn the edge of the spatula toward you so it moves up the sides of the bowl.

Figure 24.
Continue this motion, going full circle, until the spatula is back at the center of the bowl again.

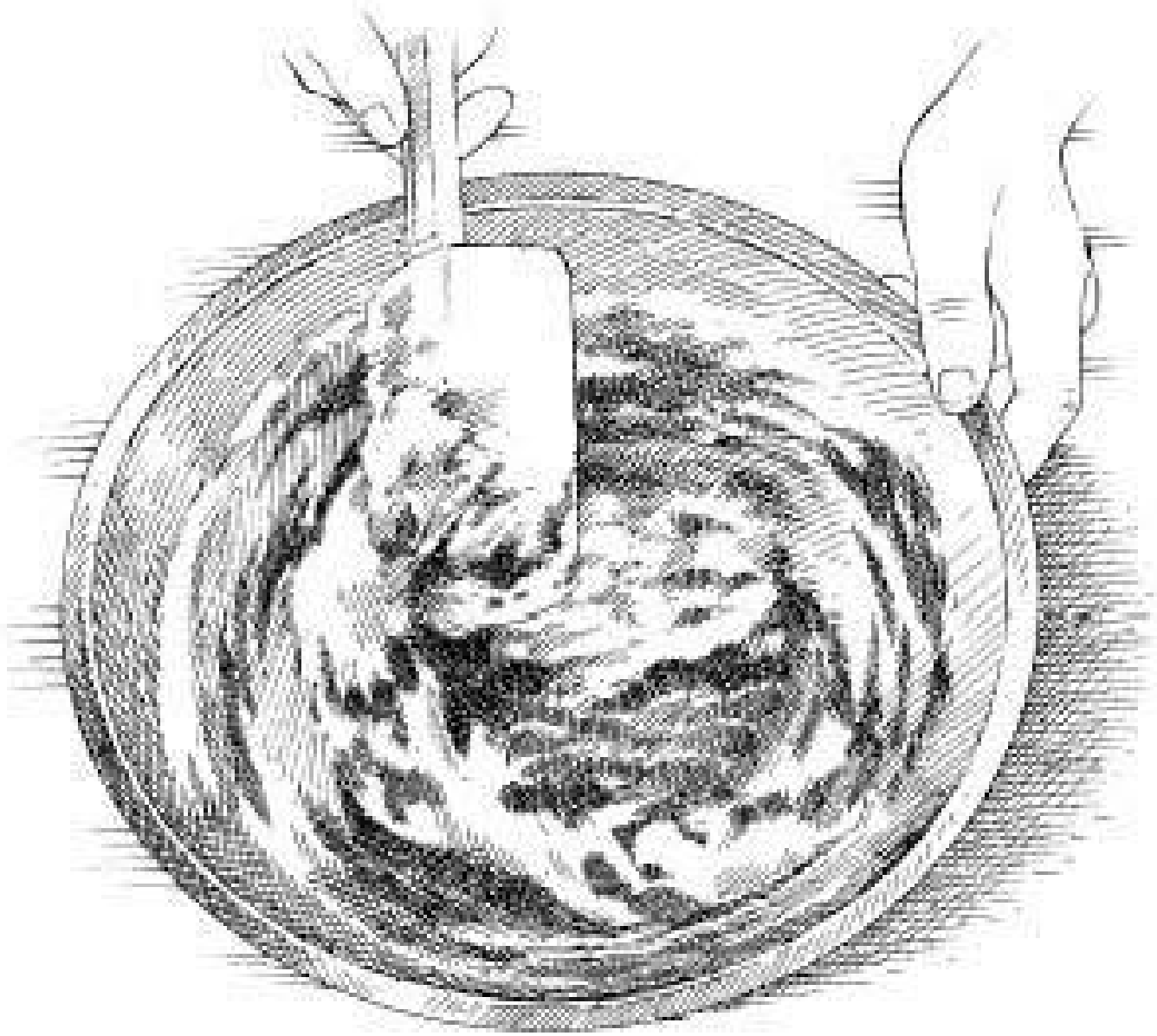

Figure 25.
Follow this procedure four more times, turning the bowl a quarter turn each time. Finally, use the spatula to scrape around the entire circumference of the bowl.

CRÈME BRÛLÉE

PERFECT CRÈME BRÛLÉE HAS A SMOOTH, creamy, slightly eggy custard and delicate, crisp brown sugar crust. While it is necessary to heat the eggs so that they thicken the custard, the risk of curdling is ever-present. Slow, gentle heat is the key to making the custard set properly without any loss of smoothness.

For this reason, the custard for crème brûlée should be prepared in a protective water bath in the oven, not on top of the stove, where the heat is much more direct and intense. In addition, we

found it preferable to add chilled cream (not scalded, as is common in most recipes) to the egg yolks. Hot cream quickly raises the temperature of the eggs, something we were trying to avoid.

We tried various combinations of ingredients and found that a simple custard of egg yolks, white sugar, and light whipping cream tastes best. Flavorings such as vanilla and spices detracted from the sweet cream and egg flavors and are not needed. We found that other types of dairy were too watery (half-and-half) or too rich (heavy cream). Light whipping cream, which has a fat content between 30 and 36 percent, is ideal. If you cannot find this cream, make your own by combining

equal parts of heavy cream (36 to 40 percent fat) and light cream (18 to 30 percent fat).

As for the crisp, caramelized sugar topping, it is easily prepared under the broiler and does not require the use of a blow torch, as is the custom in many restaurants. Drying the dark brown sugar (it has a richer flavor than either light brown sugar or white sugar) in a warm oven improves its taste, texture, and appearance by removing excess moisture and lumps that might otherwise cause problems when the topping is caramelized.

Crème Brûlée

NOTE: ***Use light whipping cream or equal parts light cream and heavy cream. This recipe serves six.***

1 tablespoon unsalted butter, softened

6 large egg yolks, chilled

6 tablespoons granulated white sugar

$1^1/_2$ cups light whipping cream, chilled

4 tablespoons dark brown sugar

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven rack to center position

and heat oven to 275 degrees. Butter six $^{1}/_{2}$-cup ramekins or custard cups and set them aside in glass baking dish large enough to accommodate them easily.

2. Whisk yolks in medium bowl until slightly thickened, about 1 minute. Add white sugar and whisk until dissolved, 1 to 2 minutes. Whisk in cream, then pour mixture into prepared ramekins.

3. Set baking dish on oven rack and pour warm water into baking dish to come halfway up sides of ramekins. Bake uncovered until custards are just barely set, about 45 minutes.

4. Remove baking pan from oven, leaving ramekins in hot water; cool to room temperature. Cover each ramekin with plastic wrap and refrigerate until chilled, at least 2 hours. (Custards can be refrigerated overnight.)

5. While custards are cooling, spread brown sugar in small baking pan; set in turned-off but still warm oven until sugar dries, about 20 minutes. Transfer sugar to small zipper-lock plastic bag; seal bag and crush sugar fine with rolling pin (*see* figure 26). Store brown sugar in bag until ready to top custards.

6. About 45 minutes before serving, adjust oven rack to next-to-highest position and preheat broiler. Remove chilled ramekins from refrigerator, uncover, and evenly spread each with 2 teaspoons dried brown sugar. Set ramekins in baking pan. Broil, watching constantly and rotating pan for even caramelization, until toppings are brittle, 2 to 3 minutes.

7. Refrigerate crème brûlées to re-chill custard, about 30 minutes. Brown sugar topping will start to deteriorate in about 1 hour.

VARIATIONS:

Pumpkin Crème Brûlée

Combine 5 tablespoons canned pumpkin puree, 3 tablespoons white sugar, $^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon vanilla extract, $^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoon each ground cinnamon and ground ginger, and a pinch of freshly grated nutmeg in small saucepan set over medium-low heat. Cook, stirring constantly, until mixture thickens slightly, about 5 minutes; cool to room temperature. Reduce white sugar in step 2 to 3 tablespoons. When sugar dissolves, whisk in cooled pumpkin

mixture, then cream. Strain through fine-mesh sieve into measuring cup, pour custard into ramekins, and proceed with recipe, baking for 60 to 75 minutes.

Ginger Crème Brûlée

Combine 2 teaspoons ground ginger with sugar in step 2 and then whisk into yolks.

Figure 26.
Drying the brown sugar for the topping in the oven removes some moisture and prevents burning when the sugar is caramelized. To make sprinkling the dried sugar easier, remove any lumps by placing the dried sugar in a sealed plastic bag and crushing it

with a rolling pin until quite fine.

APPLE PIE

BY THE TIME THE HOLIDAYS ROLL AROUND, many boutique apples, like Northern Spy and Winesap, are gone, and only the supermarket standards remain. We wanted to make an apple pie with varieties available year-round everywhere. After testing dozens of possibilities, we determined a combination of Granny Smith and McIntosh apples is best.

The Granny Smiths hold up well during cooking and the McIntosh add flavor and balance the sourness of the

Grannies. The mushy texture of the McIntosh apples is a problem when used on their own but provides a nice base for the harder Grannies and soaks up some of the juice in our pie; it also makes the use of flour or other flavor-dulling thickeners unnecessary.

When shopping for Granny Smith apples, we found it important to avoid truly acerbic fruit. Many Granny Smiths are picked too early, when they are bright green, a color that consumers and store managers prefer. The best Grannies are light green, indicating a riper, more mature apple. In general, more muted colors indicate riper specimens for other apple varieties as well.

With the apple component of the filling settled, we moved on to other possible ingredients. We found that butter competes with the flavor of the apples and is not needed. Lemon juice, however, is absolutely crucial to a good pie because it balances the sugar. In order to give the apples the upper hand, use only small amounts of spices.

In many apple pie recipes, there is a large gap between the top crust and filling, which cooks down substantially during baking. With our crust recipe, however, this is not an issue. There is sufficient shortening cut into the flour that the crust sinks down onto the apples as they cook. This high ratio of

shortening produces a very flaky crust, one that is not easily cut into perfect slices. In addition, there is still a fair amount of juice, which we find essential for good flavor, and the filling may spread slightly once cut into individual slices.

All-Season Apple Pie

NOTE: ***This dough has more fat than most recipes, giving the crust a crumbly texture that is delicious but not well suited to decorative edging or neat slicing. This pie serves eight.***

Flaky Pie Dough

$2^1/_2$ cups all-purpose flour, plus extra for dusting dough
1 teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons sugar
12 tablespoons chilled butter, cut into $^1/_4$-to 3/8-inch cubes
8 tablespoons chilled all-vegetable shortening

7-8 tablespoons ice water

Apple Filling

4 Granny Smith and 4 McIntosh apples, about $2^1/_2$ pounds total

$^3/_4$ cup sugar

1 teaspoon grated zest and $1^1/_2$ tablespoons juice from 1 lemon

$^1/_4$ teaspoon nutmeg, freshly ground preferred

$^1/_4$ teaspoon ground cinnamon

$^1/_8$ teaspoon ground allspice

$^1/_4$ teaspoon salt

1 beaten egg white for glazing

pie dough

1 tablespoon sugar for sprinkling over pie dough

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. For dough, pulse flour, salt, and sugar in food processor fitted with steel blade. Scatter butter pieces over flour mixture, tossing to coat butter with flour. Pulse machine 5 times in 1-second bursts. Add shortening and continue pulsing until flour is pale yellow and resembles coarse cornmeal, with butter bits no larger than small peas, 4 to 6 more 1-second pulses. Turn mixture into medium bowl. If you do not have food processor, grate frozen butter and shortening into flour mixture and mix with your hands

for 1 minute, rubbing flour and shortening between your fingers. Flour should turn very pale yellow and become coarser in texture.

2. Sprinkle 6 tablespoons of ice water over mixture. With blade of rubber spatula, use folding motion to mix. Press down on dough with broad side of spatula until dough sticks together, gradually adding up to 2 more tablespoons of ice water if it will not come together. Shape into ball with hands, divide the dough into two balls, one slightly larger than the other. Dust lightly with flour, wrap separately in plastic, and refrigerate for at least 30

minutes. (Dough can be refrigerated overnight or wrapped again in plastic and frozen for up to 1 month.)

3. Remove dough from refrigerator. The dough is ready to be rolled when it is still cool to touch but you can push your finger halfway down through center. (If the dough has been chilled for more than 1 hour, it may have to sit on the counter for 10 to 20 minutes to soften.) Adjust oven rack to bottom position and heat oven to 425 degrees.

4. Roll larger dough disk on lightly floured surface into 12-inch circle, about

1/8 inch thick. Transfer and fit dough into 9-inch Pyrex pie pan, leaving dough that overhangs lip in place. Refrigerate dough while rolling second disk and preparing fruit.

5. Roll smaller disk on lightly floured surface into 11-inch circle. Transfer to back of baking sheet and refrigerate until ready to use.

6. Peel, quarter, and core apples. Slice each quarter into thirds, about $^{1}/_{2}$-inch thick (*see* figure 27). Toss with sugar, lemon zest and juice, spices, and salt.

7. Turn fruit mixture, including any juices, into pie shell. Lay top pastry over filling. Trim top and bottom edges to $^{1}/_{2}$ inch beyond pan lip. Tuck this rim of dough underneath itself so that folded edge is flush with pan lip. Press dough with fork tines to seal. Cut four slits at right angles on dough top to allow steam to escape. Brush egg white on top of crust and sprinkle 1 tablespoon of sugar evenly over top.

8. Place pie on bottom rack. Bake until crust is lightly golden, 25 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 375 degrees and continue to bake until juices bubble

and crust is deep golden brown, 30 to 35 minutes. The bottom crust should be golden and juices from pie bubbling.

9. Transfer pie to wire rack and cool to room temperature. Pie is best eaten after it has completely cooled, even the next day.

VARIATIONS:

Crystallized Ginger Apple Pie

Add 3 tablespoons chopped crystallized ginger to apple filling.

Apple Pie with Dried Fruit

Soak 1 cup raisins, dried cherries, or dried cranberries (chopped coarse if fruit is large) in mixture of $1^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons lemon and 1 tablespoon Apple Jack, brandy, or Cognac for at least 30 minutes. Prepare apple filling, omitting lemon juice. Add fruit and soaking liquid to filling.

Cranberry Apple Pie

Add 1 cup fresh or frozen cranberries to apple filling and increase sugar to 1 cup.

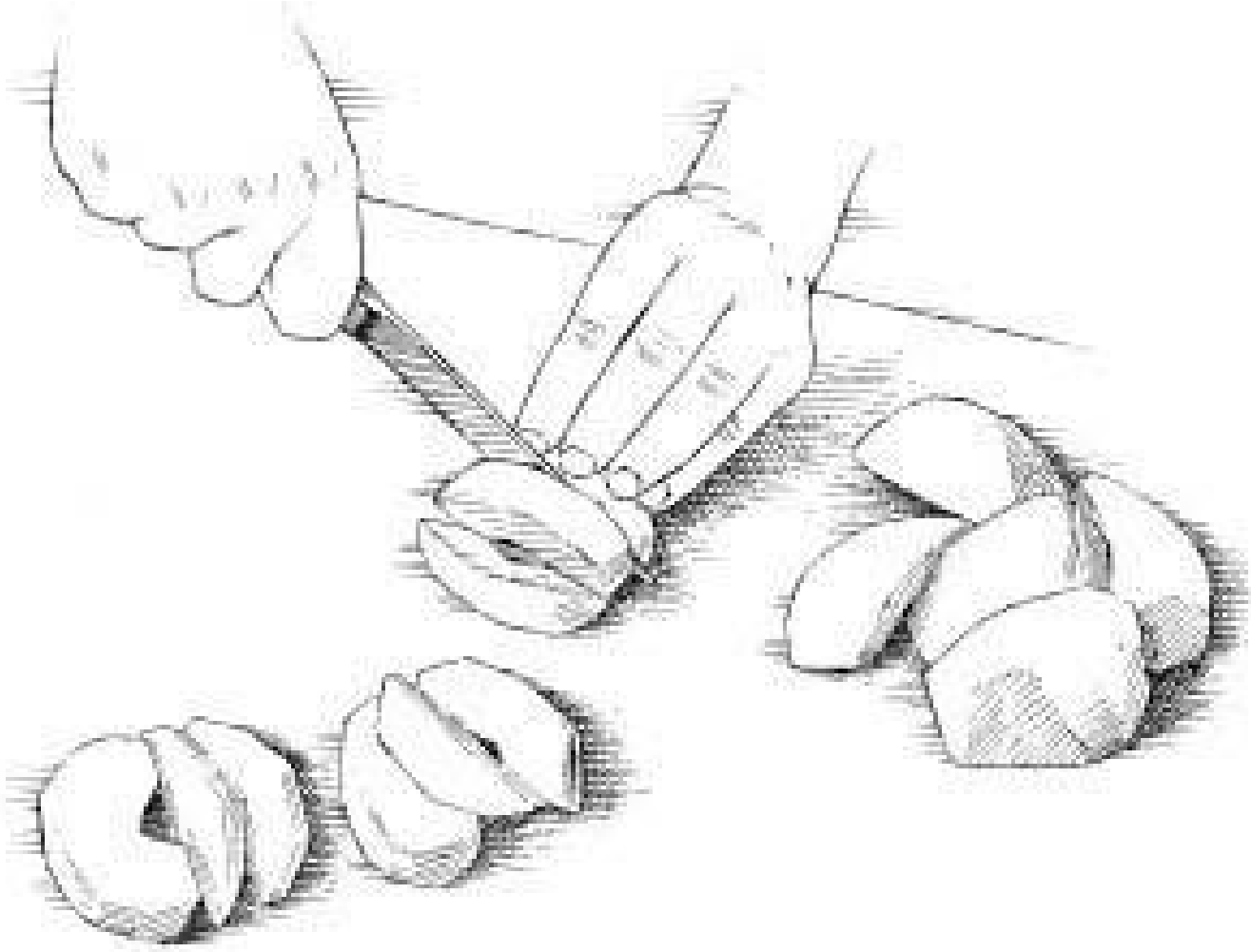

Figure 27.

Apple slices that are about $^{1}/_{2}$-inch thick work best in a pie. We found that peeling, quartering, and then removing the core from each piece was most convenient. At this point, cut each quarter into three wedges that should

measure about $^{1}/_{2}$-inch thick.

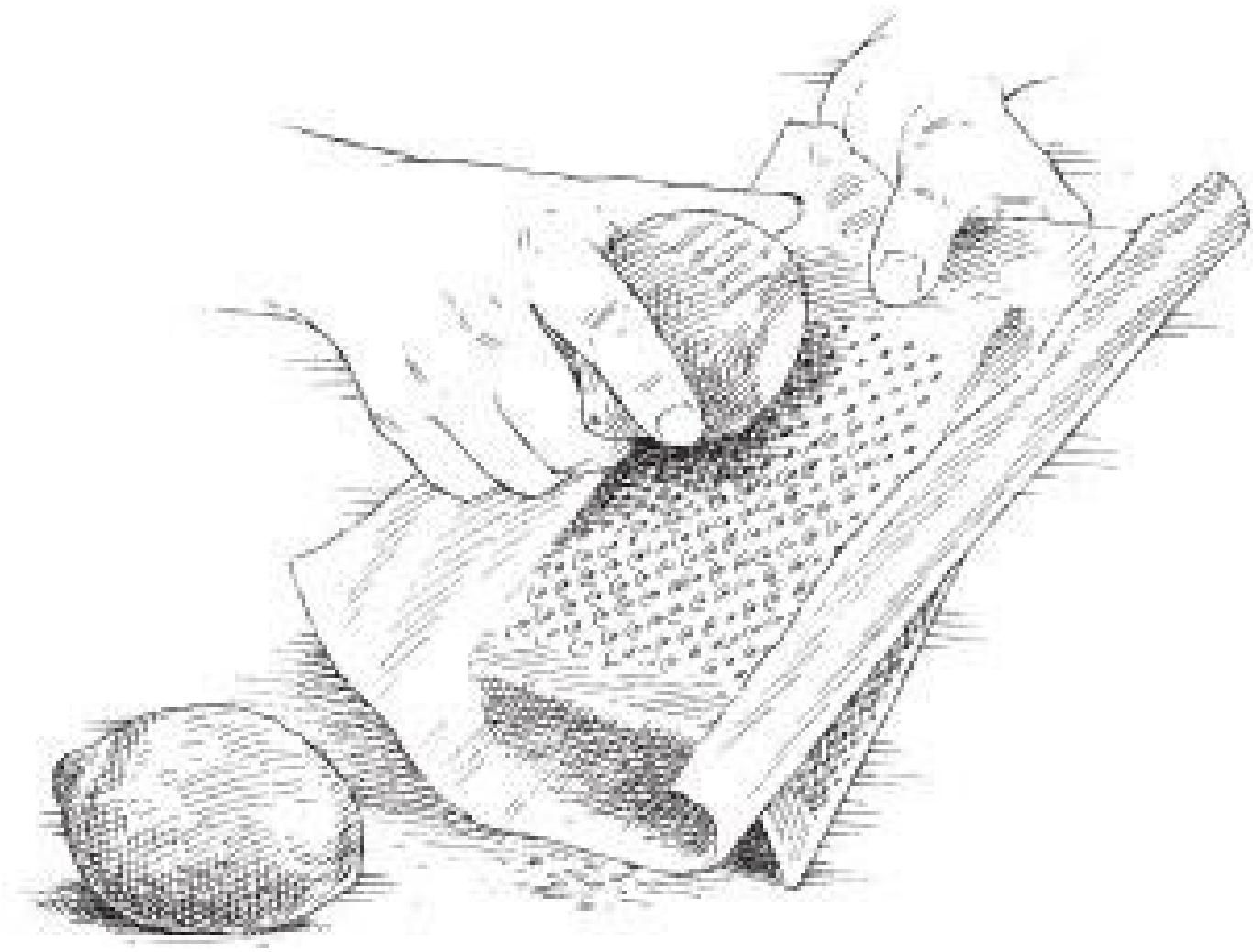

Figure 28.
If you cover your grater with waxed paper before grating lemon zest, the zest will remain on top of the waxed paper rather than clogging the grater's holes.

YULE LOG CAKE

CALLED BÛCHE DE NOËL IN FRANCE, A YULE log cake is a festive way to celebrate Christmas or other winter holidays. This impressive dessert is not nearly as difficult to prepare as it might seem. A yule log cake is nothing more than a fancy jelly roll cake with some meringue mushrooms for decoration. We tested every variable and developed a recipe that eliminates unnecessary steps and delivers foolproof results.

A yule log cake starts with a yellow sponge cake that's soft and moist but

sturdy enough to be rolled. Many classic sponge cakes roll beautifully but can be tough and dry. We wanted a more tender, cakey crumb. Adding butter makes the cake fragile and difficult to roll. We found that whipping whole eggs gives the cake the desired lightness and that brushing it with brandy when cooled keeps it moist.

The cooled sponge cake is then spread with a thick, rich, light-colored buttercream (we like coffee here) and rolled up into a spiral. The cake is then covered with chocolate buttercream and decorated with meringue mushrooms. While many buttercream recipes start with confectioners' sugar, egg yolks, and butter, we found that powdered sugar

results in a grainy texture, and dull color and flavor. A hot sugar syrup leaves behind no grittiness and because it does not contain any starch, it does not dull the flavor or color of the chocolate.

The same buttercream base can be used to make both the coffee and chocolate frostings for the inside and outside of the roll. Running the tines of a fork through the exterior buttercream imitates the rough texture of bark; slicing a piece off the roll and then attaching it to the top of the log creates a bump. Save extra buttercream for attaching the stems and caps of the meringue mushrooms, which are not essential but do make an attractive garnish.

Yule Log Cake

NOTE: ***The buttercream and meringue mushrooms require the making of a sugar syrup heated to 238 degrees, the soft ball stage. Use a candy or instant-read thermometer for the greatest accuracy. Or, drizzle some of the syrup into a bowl of cold water and try to shape it with your fingertips. If syrup forms a soft ball, it has reached correct temperature. This recipe serves twelve.***

Buttercream

$^{3}/_{4}$ cup sugar
8 egg yolks

$^{3}/_{4}$ pound (3 sticks) unsalted butter, at room temperature

$^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon vanilla extract

12 ounces bittersweet chocolate, melted

$1^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons instant espresso powder

2 teaspoons boiling water

Sponge Cake

1 tablespoon unsalted butter, at room temperature

1 cup plain cake flour

1 teaspoon baking powder

$^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoon salt

3 large eggs

1 cup sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 tablespoon brandy or Cognac
Meringue Mushrooms
Unsweetened cocoa powder
Confectioners' sugar

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. To make buttercream, combine $^{1}/_{2}$ cup water and sugar in small, heavy saucepan. Cover and bring to boil over medium-high heat. Boil, swirling pan once or twice, until sugar has dissolved, 1 to 2 minutes. If necessary, wash down any sugar crystals on side of pan with damp pastry brush. Cook, uncovered,

until temperature on thermometer registers 238 degrees, about 10 minutes.

2. While syrup is cooking, place egg yolks in large bowl of standing mixer fitted with wire whisk attachment. Beat at medium-high speed until pale yellow and very thick, about 5 minutes. With mixer at medium speed, slowly pour hot syrup into egg yolks, avoiding wire whisk. Continue to beat until mixture cools to room temperature, 5 to 10 minutes. Add butter 1 tablespoon at a time until all butter is thoroughly incorporated. Add vanilla.

3. Transfer one-third of buttercream to another bowl. Stir melted chocolate into first bowl of buttercream. Dissolve instant espresso in boiling water and stir into plain buttercream. Set both buttercreams aside at room temperature for up to 2 hours. (Buttercreams can be covered and refrigerated for 2 days or frozen for 1 week.)

4. Adjust oven rack to middle position and preheat oven to 375 degrees. Grease 16-by-11-inch jelly roll pan with 1 tablespoon butter. Line pan with parchment paper.

5. Sift flour with baking powder and salt; set aside. Place eggs in large bowl of standing mixer fitted with wire whisk attachment. Beat at medium-high speed until pale yellow and very thick, about 5 minutes. Slowly add sugar, then 1/3 cup water and vanilla. Add flour mixture and beat at medium speed until smooth, about 2 minutes. Pour batter into prepared pan, spread with spatula into corners, and rap pan once against counter to settle batter. Bake until cake layer is lightly browned and springs back when touched, 12 to 15 minutes.

6. Run knife along rim of pan to loosen cake. Cover top of cake with piece of

parchment paper, then cover completely with large, damp kitchen towel. Place flat side of baking sheet on top of towel. Flip over both pans and lift off baking pan with cake. Carefully peel off top piece of parchment paper.

7. Position cake so that long side faces you. Fold bottom edge of towel and parchment paper over bottom edge of cake (*see* figure 29). Tightly roll cake (*see* figure 30) and set aside, seam side down, to cool for 30 minutes. Steady cake on either side with small bowl.

8. If buttercream has been refrigerated,

bring to room temperature. Assemble and serve cake as directed in figures 31 through 37.

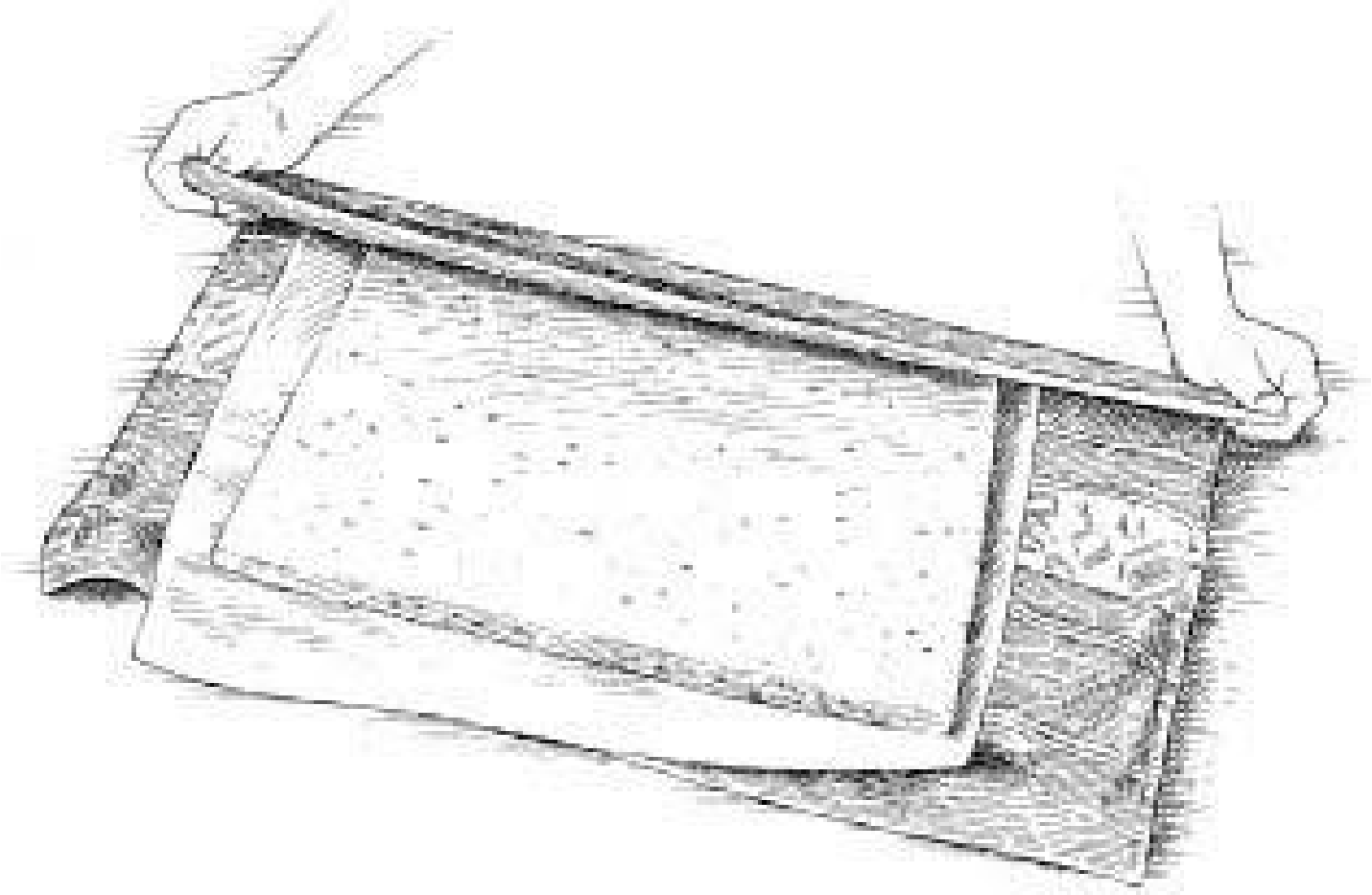

Figure 29.
With kitchen towel and piece of parchment paper underneath cake layer, fold bottom edge of the towel over the long edge of the cake.

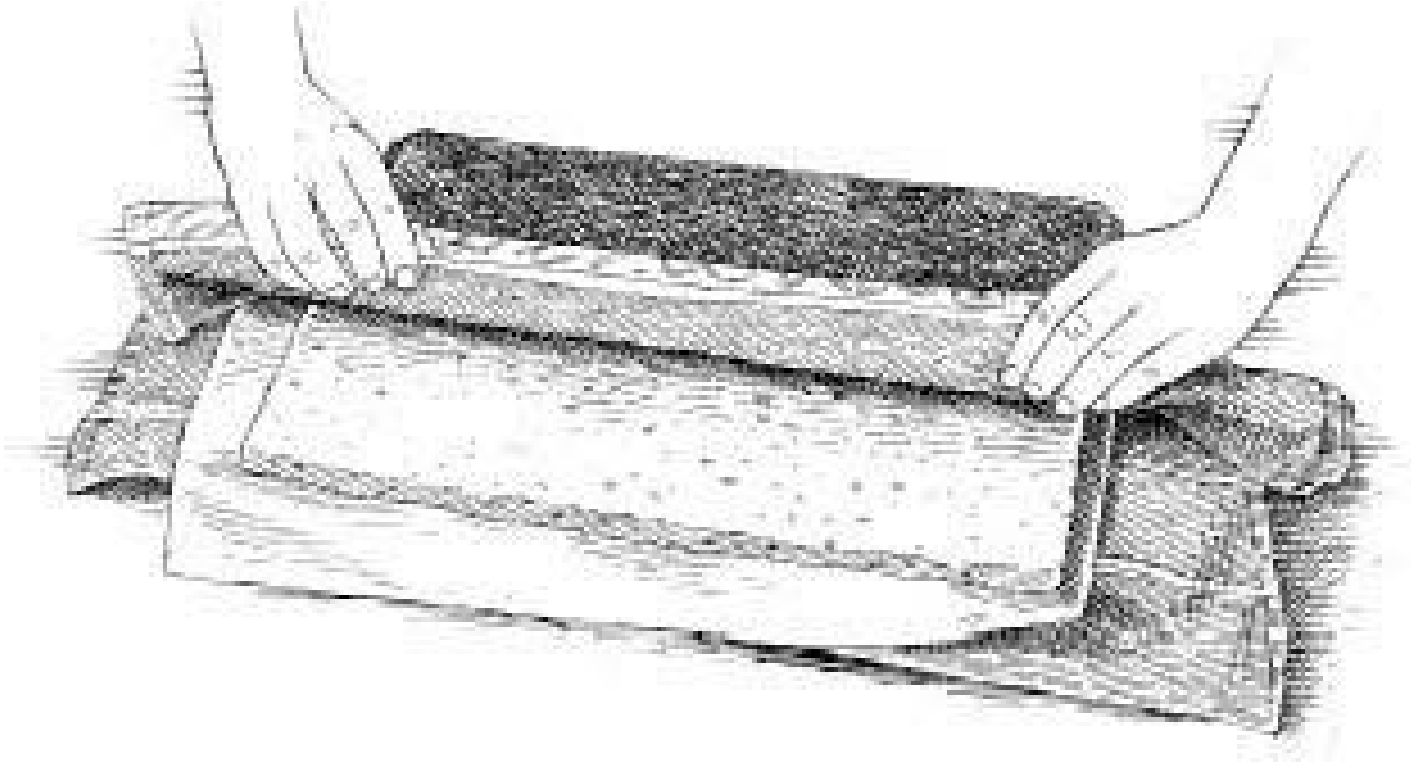

Figure 30.
Tightly roll the cake in the towel and set aside, seam side down, for 30 minutes. Steady cake on either side with small bowl. Rolling the cake while still warm will "train" it to roll without cracking when it cools.

Figure 31.
When the cake has cooled, unroll and peel off top piece of parchment paper. Sprinkle top of cake evenly with brandy. Spread evenly with coffee buttercream, leaving 1/8-inch border around edges uncovered.

Figure 32.
Roll cake in tight spiral, using towel to guide cake into proper shape. Separate parchment paper from bottom of cake as you roll.

Figure 33.
Place a serrated knife 2 inches in from one end of the roll and cut a diagonal slice. Set slice aside to make stump. Trim 1-inch slice from other end of roll and discard.

Figure 34.
Line serving platter with two 2-inch-wide strips of parchment paper. (Parchment strips should be spaced about 2 inches apart and will help keep platter clean as you apply the frosting.) Center cake, seam side down, over strips.

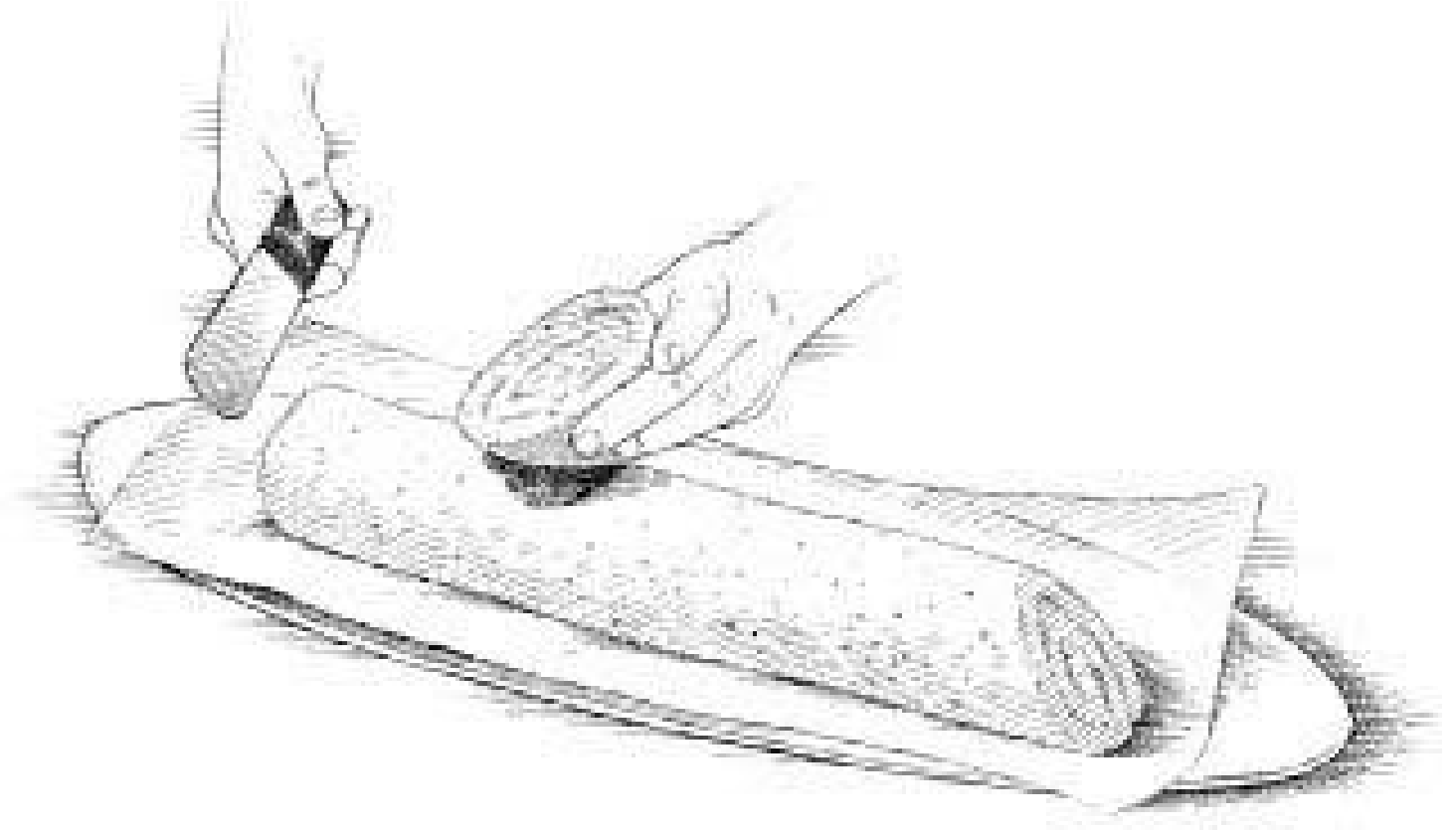

Figure 35.
Place dab of chocolate buttercream several inches in from one end of the roll. Place reserved slice of cake, flat side down, over buttercream and attach to top of log.

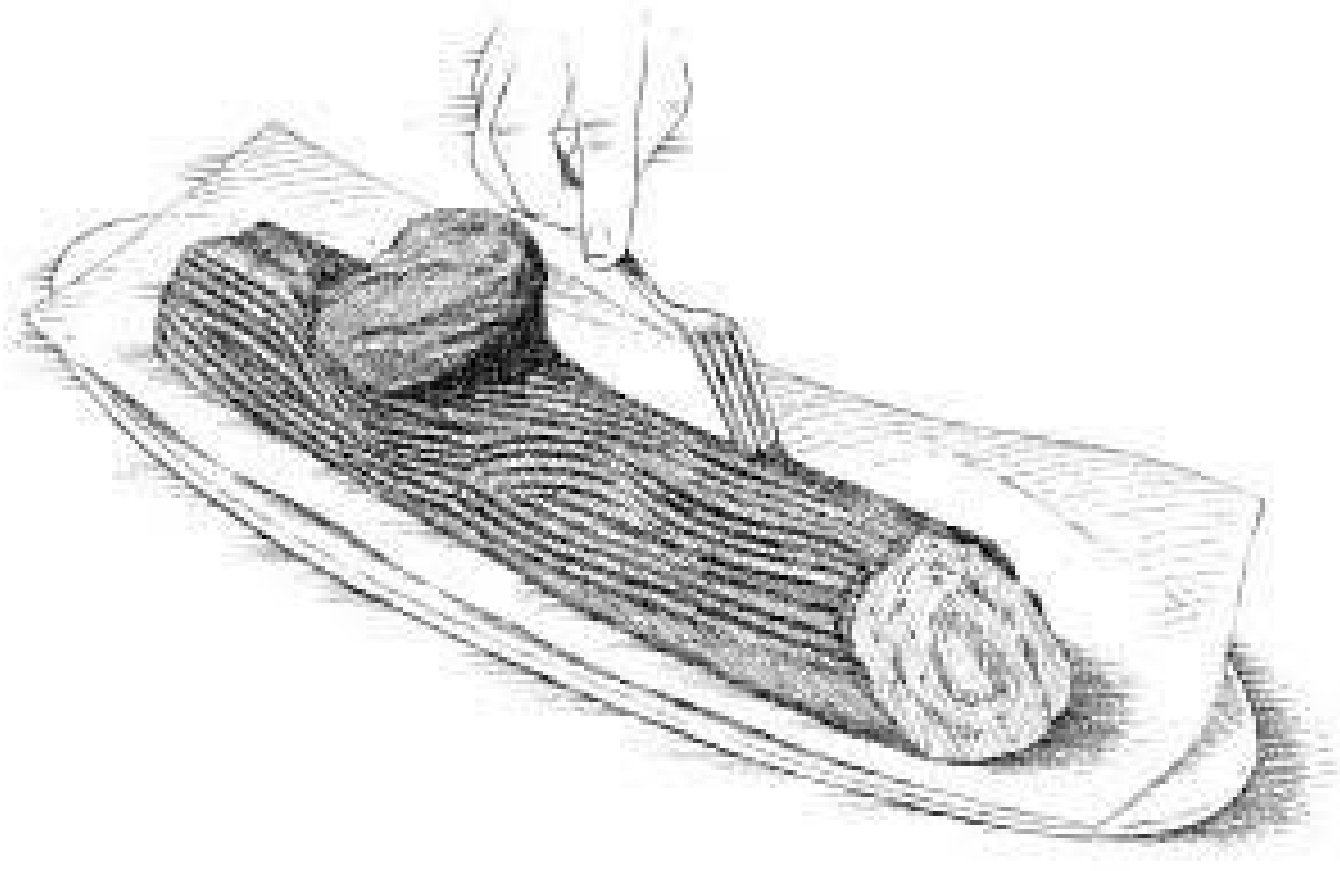

Figure 36.
Spread exterior of cake, including stump but keeping ends clean, with thin layer of chocolate buttercream. Refrigerate cake until buttercream is firm, about 15 minutes. Apply thicker final coat of buttercream. (Reserve extra

buttercream for assembling mushrooms.) Run tines of fork along the length of the cake to imitate bark. Carefully remove strips of parchment paper. At this point the cake can be refrigerated overnight or frozen for up to 1 month. Cover unfrosted ends with small piece of plastic wrap to protect them from drying out. If freezing, refrigerate until buttercream is firm and then wrap entire log in plastic.

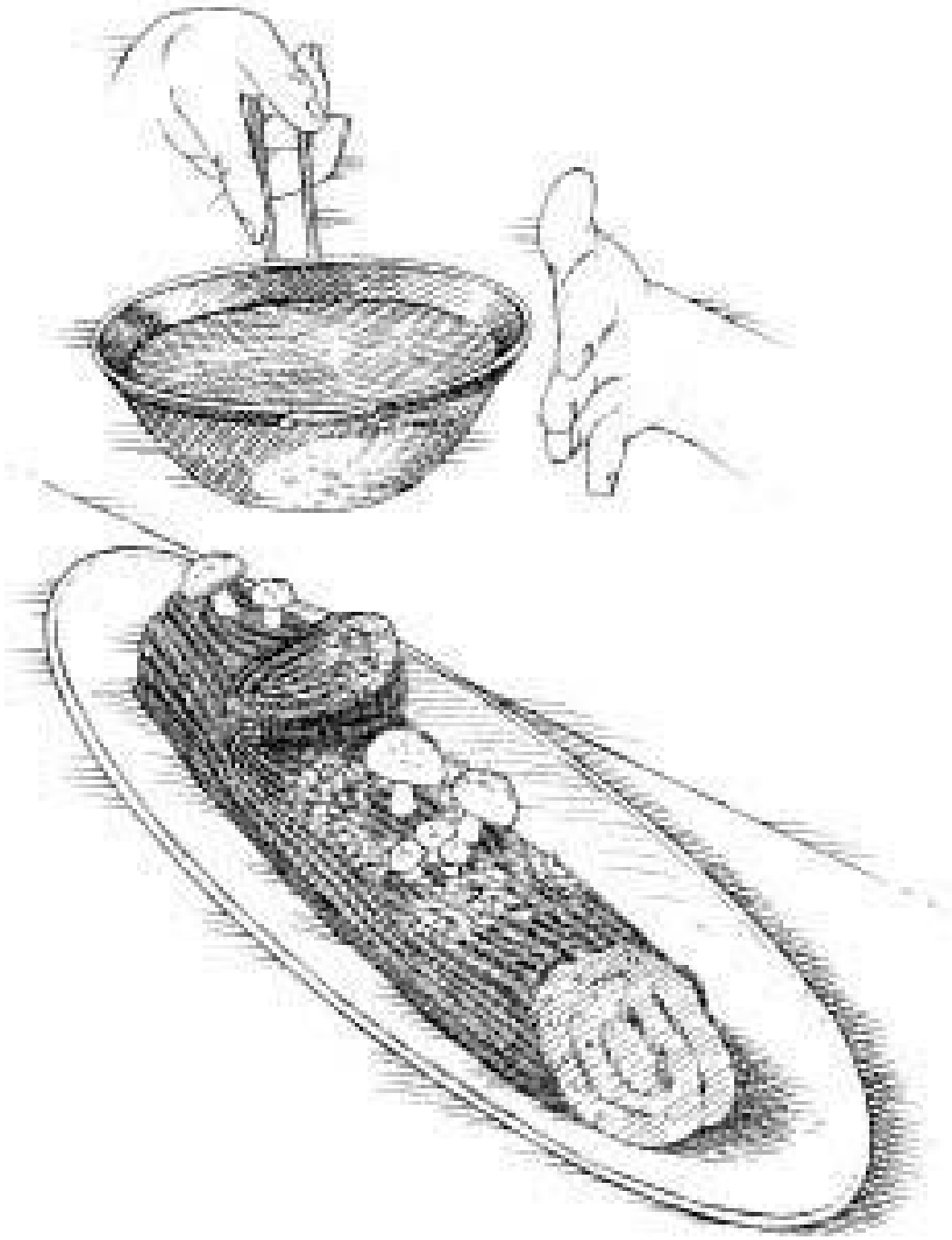

Figure 37.
When ready to serve, lightly sift cocoa powder over meringue mushrooms and arrange

mushrooms around cake on platter. Sift confectioners' sugar lightly over cake and serve immediately.

Meringue Mushrooms

NOTE: ***If the caps and stems become soggy during storage, crisp them in a 200-degree oven for 30 minutes before assembling the mushrooms. Make sure to save some extra chocolate buttercream for attaching caps and stems.***

1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons sugar
2 large egg whites
pinch salt
1/8 teaspoon cream of tartar
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Adjust oven racks to center and low positions and preheat oven to 200 degrees. Line two jelly roll pans with parchment paper.

2. Combine $^{1}/_{4}$ cup water and sugar in small, heavy saucepan. Cover and bring to boil over medium-high heat. Boil, swirling pan once or twice, until sugar has dissolved, 1 to 2 minutes. If necessary, wash down any sugar crystals on side of pan with damp pastry brush. Cook, uncovered, until temperature on thermometer registers 238 degrees, about 10 minutes.

3. While syrup is cooking, place egg whites in large bowl of standing mixer fitted with wire whisk attachment. Beat at medium-low speed until frothy, about 1 minute. Add salt and cream of tartar and beat, gradually increasing speed to high, to soft peaks, about 1 minute.

4. With mixer at medium speed, slowly pour hot syrup into egg whites, avoiding wire whisk. Increase speed to medium-high speed and continue to beat until meringue cools to room temperature and becomes very thick and shiny, 5 to 10 minutes. Add vanilla.

5. Fit pastry bag with $^{1}/_{4}$-inch pastry tip and fill with meringue. Pipe caps and stems onto paper-lined pans (*see* figures 38 and 39).

6. Bake meringue for 2 hours, turn off oven, and let rest in oven until very dry and crisp, about 30 minutes longer. Cool mushroom caps and stems on pans. (Store in airtight container for up to 1 week.) To assemble mushrooms, use buttercream to "glue" caps and stems together (*see* figures 40 and 41).

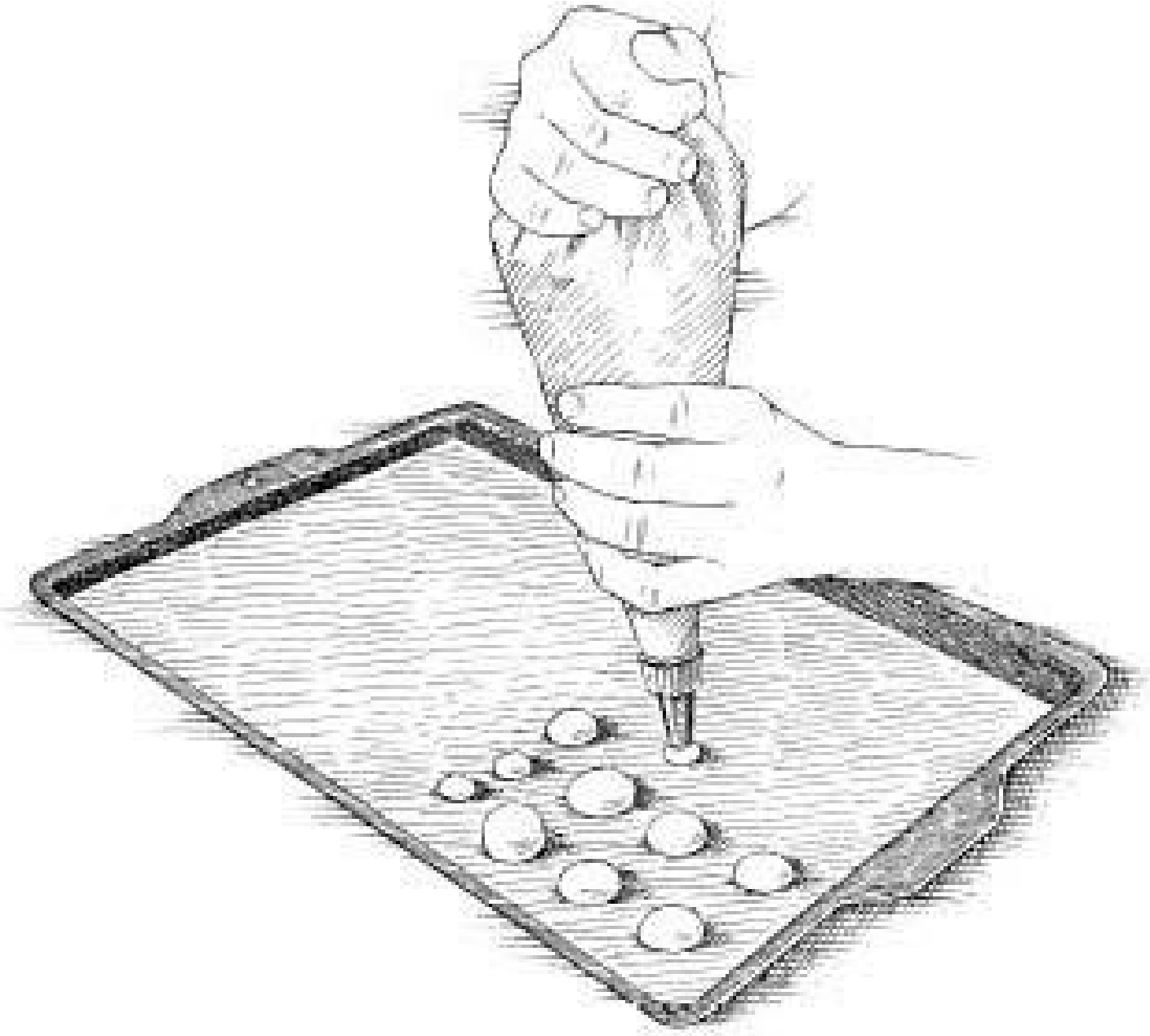

Figure 38.

Holding bag about $^{1}/_{4}$ inch above paper, pipe 30 rounds of varying sizes to form mushroom caps. Keep the tip steady as the

meringue flows into a round shape, stopping the pressure when the desired size is reached. To release the meringue without making a point, turn the tip clockwise and lift the bag straight up. If pointed tip forms, dip finger into a bowl of cold water and gently smooth the top of the cap to remove the tip.

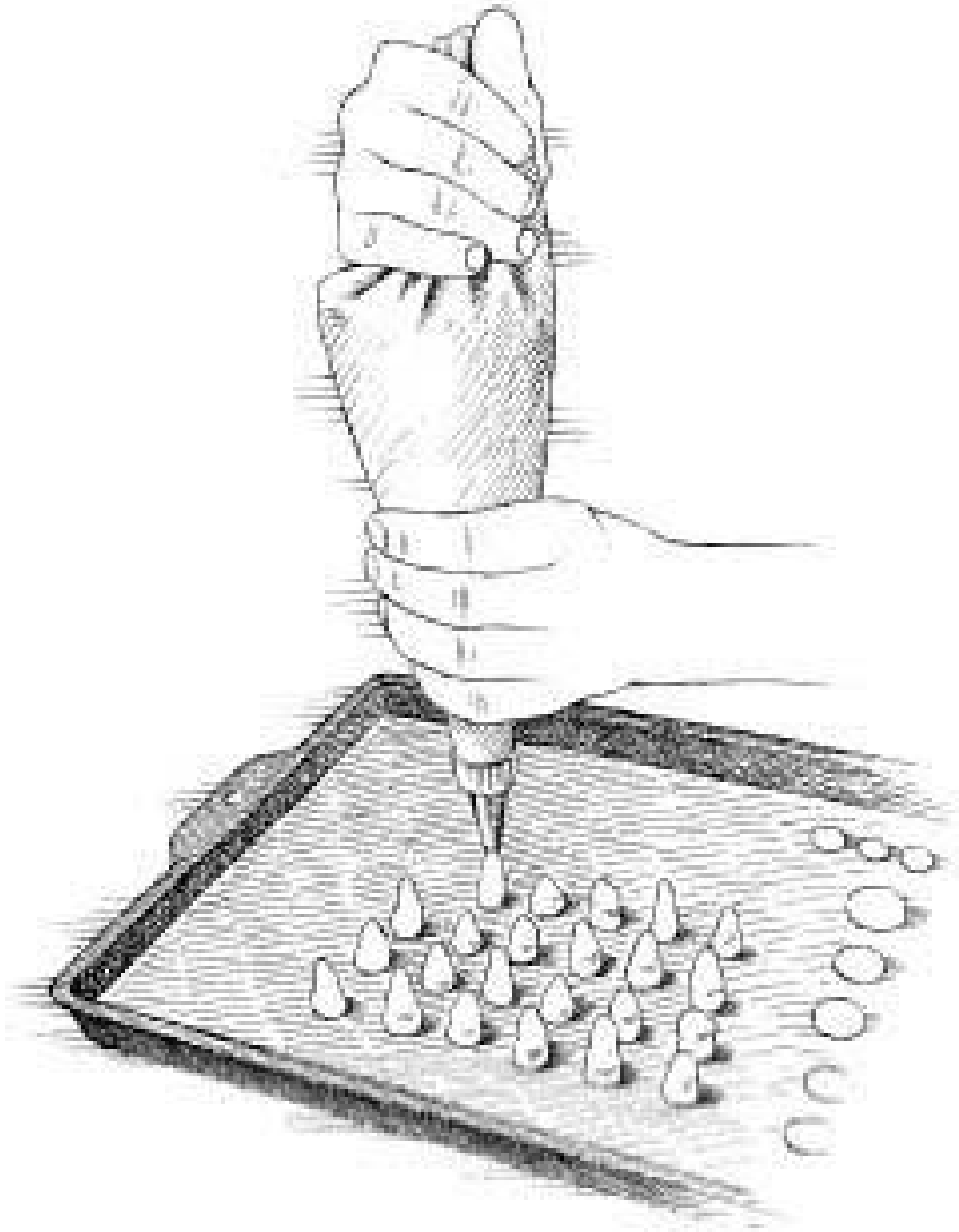

Figure 39.
To shape mushroom stems, hold pastry bag perpendicular to the pan, almost touching the paper.

Force meringue through tip as you pull up on the bag. The stems should be about 1-inch tall and stand up straight. Pointed ends are desired so just stop squeezing bag as you lift it straight up.

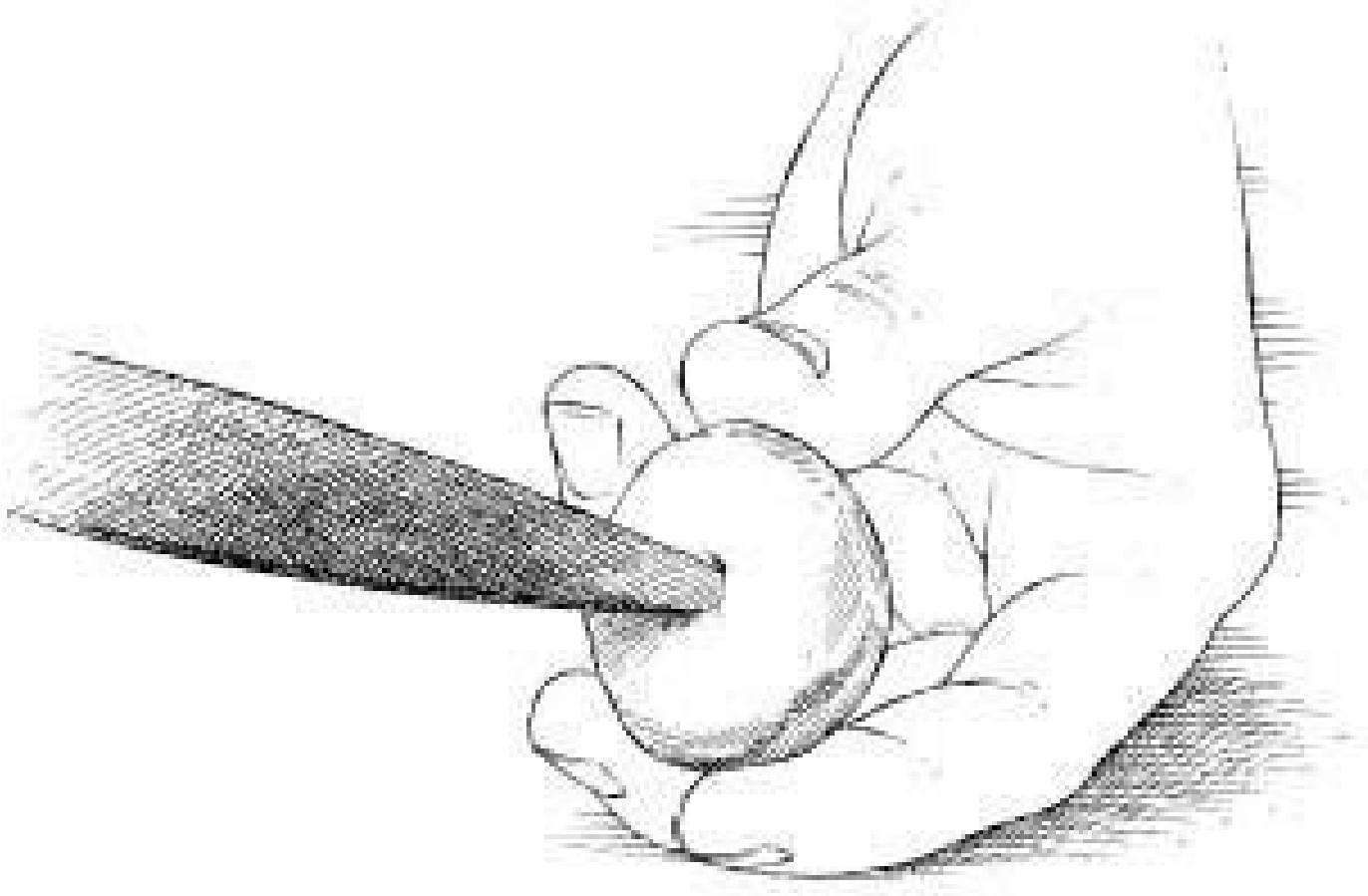

Figure 40.
Use a small paring knife or skewer to make an indentation in the underside of each mushroom cap.

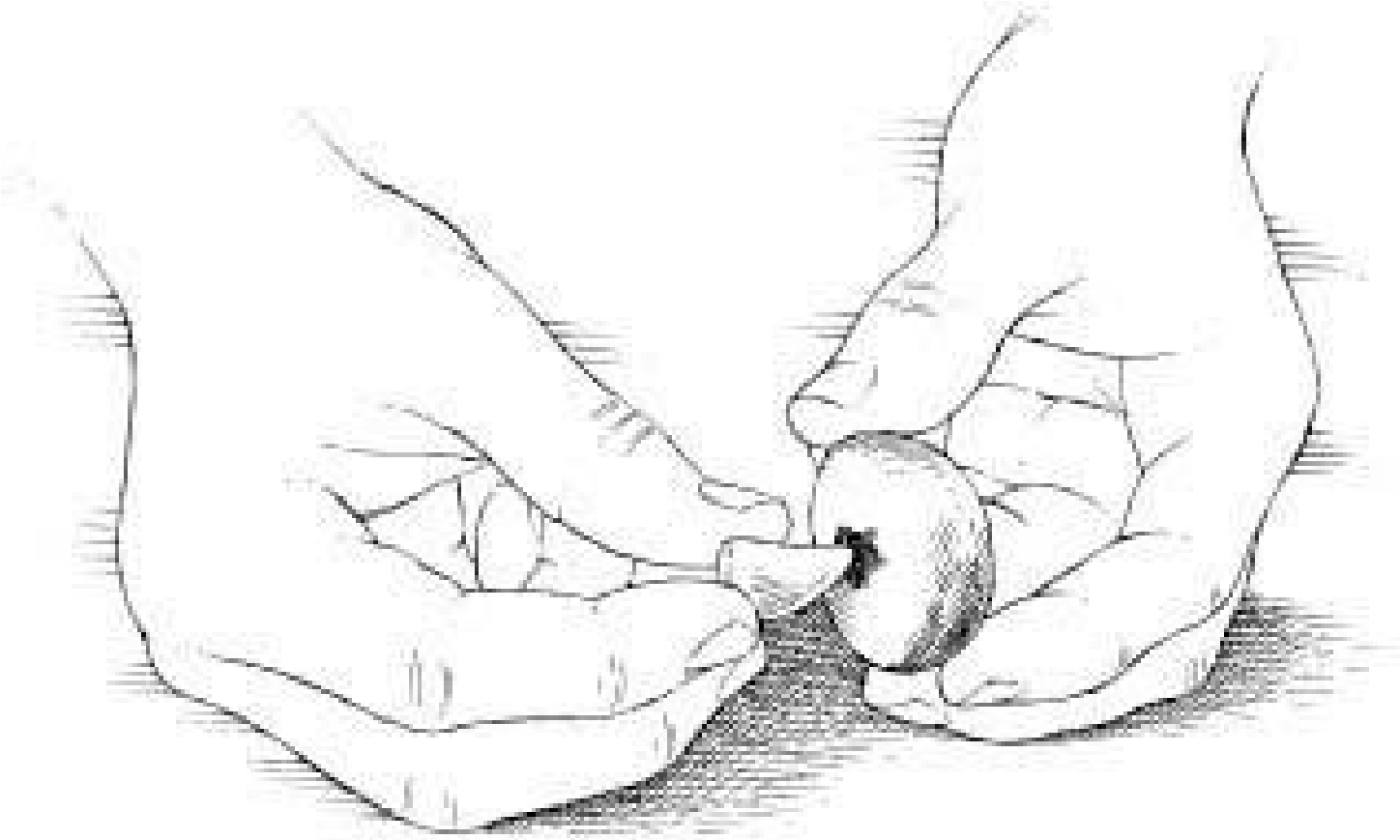

Figure 41.
Use tip of knife or toothpick to place a small dot of buttercream into the hole in each cap and onto the tip of each stem. Gently press the cap onto the end of the stem.

HOW TO MAKE ICE CREAM

Ice Cream Basics

Equipment

Classic Ice Creams

Fruit Ice Creams

Gelato

Sauces and Accompaniments

ICE CREAM BASICS

THE INGREDIENTS FOR ICE CREAM COULD not be simpler—cream, milk, sugar, flavorings, and sometimes eggs. The results, however, vary greatly, depending on the quantities of each ingredient and the techniques used.

There are two basic types of ice cream. Custard-style ice cream contains egg yolks and has a silky texture and rich flavor. Philadelphia-style ice cream is made without eggs, and often the ingredients are combined without any cooking. It's the difference between a

pale yellow French vanilla ice cream and a bright white plain vanilla.

While commercial versions of these two styles abound, we have found that home cooks are better off preparing a custard-type ice cream with egg yolks. These ice creams have the creamy texture we associate with high-quality ice cream. Egg yolks are about 10 percent lecithin, an emulsifier that helps maintain an even dispersal of fat droplets in ice cream and also helps keep ice crystals small. The overall effect is one of richness and smoothness.

Store-bought ice creams made without eggs often contain stabilizers and emulsifiers. Home cooks would not (and generally cannot) add these ingredients

to ice cream. Also, commercial ice cream machines are able to inject much more air into Philadelphia-style ice cream than home machines. With more air, these eggless ice creams have a lighter, less icy texture.

Once we decided that custard-style ice creams were the way to go, many other issues arose. How many egg yolks are needed for a one-quart batch of ice cream? What kind of dairy should be used? Cream, half-and-half, milk, or some combination? Also, what's the best way to prepare a custard without causing the eggs to curdle?

We tested as many as eight and as few as three egg yolks in our master recipe.

Although five or six eggs deliver an excellent texture, we find the egg flavor becomes too pronounced. Ice cream should taste of dairy, sugar, and flavorings, not like scrambled eggs. Four yolks give ice cream the appropriate silkiness without overpowering other flavors.

The question of which dairy products to use proved more complicated. Ice cream made with all cream is too buttery. The fat content is so high that churning causes tiny particles of butter to form. However, ice cream made with all milk or even half-and-half is too lean. These dairy products contain more water, and the result is an ice cream with tiny ice crystals.

After extensive testing, we came to prefer an equal amount of heavy cream and whole milk. The texture is rich, but there is no butteriness. Most important, there is enough fat to prevent the formation of large ice crystals that might otherwise occur when using a lower-fat dairy combination.

Besides adding sweetness, sugar also promotes a smoother, softer, more "scoopable" end product. This is because sugar reduces the number and size of ice crystals and lowers the freezing temperature of the custard. The latter effect allows you to churn the custard longer before it freezes firm, thus incorporating more air into the ice

cream.

In our testing, we found that the texture of a quart of ice cream made with one cup of sugar is excellent, but the sweetness overpowers delicate flavors like vanilla. We tried one-half cup of sugar per quart of ice cream and found that the ice cream was too firm to scoop right from the freezer. The texture was marred by iciness as well. Three-quarters cup sugar is enough to keep the ice cream soft and smooth without making it cloying. Note that bitter flavors like cocoa need to be offset with additional sugar.

With the ingredient issues settled, we turned our focus to questions of technique. We soon discovered that

subtle changes in the custard-making process can have a profound effect on texture. Our goal was absolute smoothness and creaminess. Of course, the danger of heating the eggs too high and causing the custard to curdle (the eggs literally clump together, as in making scrambled eggs, and cause the custard to break and become lumpy) also lurks in the background.

Our test kitchen came up with the following list of tips that will guarantee optimum texture and prevent curdling.

PREHEAT MILK AND CREAM WITH SOME SUGAR. We like to heat the milk, cream, and part of the sugar to 175

degrees. Do not heat this mixture any higher, or you may curdle the eggs when you add the mixture to them. Lower temperatures will not dissolve the sugar fully and thus are also not advised.

BEAT YOLKS AND SOME SUGAR. While the milk, cream, and part of the sugar are heating, beat the yolks with the remaining sugar. When making vanilla ice cream, we found that adding unbeaten or lightly beaten yolks to the custard results in an ice cream with a shocking yellow color. Even though color is not an issue in all ice creams (chocolate, for example), we found that prolonged beating—at least two minutes

with an electric mixer set to medium-high or four minutes with a whisk—helps dissolve the sugar and evenly disperses the emulsifying agent contained in the yolks. This maximizes the thickening and emulsifying power of the eggs once they are added to the custard.

TEMPER BEATEN YOLKS SLOWLY. Sudden exposure to high heat can curdle eggs and should be avoided. Thus, add a small portion of the hot milk-cream mixture to the beaten eggs in a slow stream, whisking constantly as you pour. Use a towel to hold the bowl containing the yolks in place. This process, called

tempering, also thins out the thick yolk-sugar mixture so that it can be more easily incorporated into the hot milk and cream.

HEAT CUSTARD SLOWLY. Whisk the thinned yolks back into the pan with the remaining hot milk and cream. Start heating the custard slowly, and never allow it to boil or it will become lumpy. We found that heating the custard slowly (as opposed to quickly) results in a smoother, thicker texture. Also, you are less likely to curdle a custard set over low heat. Depending on your stove and other variables, plan on at least three minutes, and ideally five to ten minutes,

to heat the custard to the proper temperature.

TEMPERATURE IS KEY FOR PERFECT CUSTARD. We found that various "tricks" for determining when a custard is fully cooked are only minimally helpful. Yes, a custard does thicken enough to coat the back of a spoon. Yes, a custard should hold its shape when a line is drawn through it on the back of the spoon. But these things may happen well before the custard has reached 180 degrees, the temperature we find ideal for ice cream making. Since egg yolks start to curdle between 185 and 190 degrees, our recommended final temperature of 180

degrees provides some margin of error but allows the eggs to provide a maximum amount of thickening. A custard cooked to only 160 or 170 degrees will make a slightly less rich, less silky ice cream. For this reason, we advocate the use of an instant-read thermometer when making custard for ice cream.

STRAIN CUSTARD FOR BETTER TEXTURE. No matter how careful you are, tiny bits of egg may overcook and form thin particles or strands, especially around the edges and bottom of the pan. Pouring the cooked custard through a fine-mesh strainer will eliminate any of

these solid egg pieces. However, a curdled custard with large clumps of eggs cannot be rescued and should be discarded.

CHILL, CHILL, CHILL. It's imperative that you chill the custard fully before placing it in an ice cream machine. We found that chilling the custard to 40 degrees or lower is ideal. We also found that if the custard is too warm when it is placed in the ice cream machine, it will need to be churned for much longer (up to an hour) until frozen to a semisolid state. Ice cream machines with canisters that require freezing before churning will loose their cooling ability before

this stage is reached. Ice cream machines with self-contained freezers can bring warm custards down to the correct temperature, but the extra churning causes the formation of butter flecks.

DO NOT CHURN TOO LONG. Ice cream will not emerge from any ice cream maker (including those that cost $500) with a firm texture. Once the ice cream is well chilled (about 25 degrees), fluffy, and frozen to the texture of soft-serve ice cream, remove it from the ice cream maker. It takes about thirty minutes of churning to reach this stage in most ice cream machines. If you churn

any longer, you may promote the development of butter flecks. In any case, further churning will not freeze ice cream any harder. Several hours in the freezer will complete the freezing process.

WAIT FOR ADD-INS. Nuts, chocolate, raisins, cookies, and other small items should be added to ice cream just before the churning is completed. We generally add them right to the ice cream maker and allow it to churn for another thirty seconds to distribute them. If you allow the ice cream maker to churn any longer, the blade will start to smash and eventually pulverize your add-in

ingredients.

STORE IN AIRTIGHT CONTAINER. Once the ice cream has been churned to the consistency of soft ice cream, turn off the ice cream machine and transfer the ice cream to a nonreactive container. We like plastic containers with airtight lids. Ideally, we prefer to put the ice cream in the freezer for two to four hours before serving. It will emerge soft and silky. Homemade ice cream can be frozen for up to two days. If kept longer, homemade ice cream becomes icy and loses much of its flavor.

WARM BEFORE SERVING. If you store ice cream for more than a few hours, the texture will become firm, like that of the ice cream sold in supermarket freezer cases. If you prefer a softer texture, transfer the container with the ice cream to the refrigerator thirty minutes to one hour before serving. We find that ice cream tastes best around 10 to 12 degrees.

EQUIPMENT

AN ICE CREAM MACHINE IS, OF COURSE, essential for making the recipes in this book. A few other kitchen tools will help ensure perfect results.

ICE CREAM MACHINE

There are four general types of ice cream machines, each with pros and cons for the home cook. Your choice will be affected by your budget and how frequently you prepare ice cream.

All ice cream machines are able to sustain temperatures below 32 degrees; however, each type does this differently.

Subfreezing temperatures are needed because sugar lowers the freezing temperature of ice cream to around 27 or 28 degrees. More sugar or the presence of alcohol lowers the freezing temperature even more.

Old-fashioned ice cream makers, which rely on ice and rock salt and come with either a manual or electric churning mechanism, were the standard until the late 1970s (*see* figure 1). The chilled custard is placed in a central container that is surrounded by ice and salt. Like sugar, salt lowers the freezing temperature of liquids. By adding a lot of rock salt (which melts more slowly than table salt), the temperature of the brine falls well below 32 degrees. This

in turn lowers the temperature of the custard and allows it to freeze into ice cream as it is churned.

We find that these traditional models in wooden buckets are messy to use. They are also less reliable than more modern ice cream machines because they can be affected by ambient conditions. Hot weather makes it more difficult to keep the brine below 32 degrees, so the ratio of salt to ice may need to be altered. In general, we find that using these ice cream makers requires practice and patience and that the results are not guaranteed.

However, many of these bucket-type machines have a two-quart capacity,

double that of all other ice cream machines designed for home use. Also, there are no parts to prefreeze, so this type of ice cream maker may be appropriate if your freezer is very crowded or runs well above 0 degrees. You may also make successive batches in this type of ice cream maker.

Expect to spend $100 for a traditional bucket-style ice cream machine with hand crank. Models with electric churning mechanisms generally cost about $150. These machines are increasingly hard to find. Old-fashioned hardware stores are the best bet.

Ice cream making at home changed with the invention of the Donvier in the late 1970s (*see* figure 2). Its French-

sounding pedigree notwithstanding, the name actually comes from the Japanese for "very cold." This ingenious invention was created by a Japanese engineer who thought of the idea after one of his children accidentally spilled milk on an aluminum cooling tray for sushi. He redesigned the tray, which housed a powerful coolant, into a canister shape more appropriate for ice cream making.

To use this type of ice cream machine, you must first place the aluminum canister filled with the patented supercoolant in the freezer overnight. The metal canister is about one inch thick and is hollow. The coolant, which is akin to antifreeze, is contained inside

the hollow walls of the canister and is capable of reaching very low temperatures.

To make ice cream, a chilled custard is poured into the very cold canister, which fits into a plastic shell, and a plastic hand crank is attached for churning. The home cook must turn the crank every few minutes to scrape away the portion of the custard that has frozen onto the inside of the canister. The crank should not be turned too often, or the custard will not get a chance to freeze. Eventually, all of the unfrozen custard rests against the supercold metal and freezes.

Although inexpensive (about $50), these ice cream machines do have some

drawbacks. They do not freeze ice cream as solid as some other machines do. You will definitely need to transfer ice cream to the freezer for several hours before serving. In addition, these machines require space in a very cold freezer to work. If your freezer is very crowded and/or too warm (temperatures significantly above 0 degrees will not work), the coolant will not get cold enough and the ice cream will not freeze properly. Last, because so little churning is involved, these machines do not beat much air into ice cream. The texture is not as smooth or fluffy as ice cream made in more expensive machines.

One last drawback is that this machine

can only make one quart of ice cream a day. To make a second batch, the canister must be frozen for at least twelve hours before the next use. If you buy or own this type of ice cream maker, we suggest that you leave it in the freezer at all times so that you can make ice cream without advance planning.

A relatively new variation on this type of ice cream machine adds an electric churning mechanism (*see* figure 3). An electric motor rests on top of the lid and powers the churning blade. The benefits are obvious. Constant churning beats in more air and results in a smoother texture and less iciness. These models generally cost around $75 (sometimes less) and are a good value. We prefer

them to the standard Donvier. We have had good success with the Krups La Glacière in our test kitchen. An additional canister can be purchased with this model so that two batches of ice cream can be prepared on the same day.

Without a doubt, ice cream machines with self-contained electric freezers are the best choice for home use. Modeled on commercial machines, these units are twice the size of a standard food processor and weigh thirty pounds or more. The custard is poured into a metal bowl that sits in the large countertop unit, which also houses a small freezer. Two switches activate the freezer and a

powerful churning blade.

We love our Simac machine from Italy (*see* figure 4), but the $500 price tag will be an impediment to all but the most dedicated ice cream maker. This Rolls-Royce of ice cream makers turns out frozen desserts with ultimate smoothness and no iciness. There is no down time between batches, and ice cream emerges at a significantly lower temperature and hence with a firmer texture than from other ice cream machines. Ice cream can be served right from this machine without further hardening in the freezer.

INSTANT-READ THERMOMETER

The precise measurement of temperature is essential in the preparation of ice

cream. Custards should be cooked to 180 degrees for optimum thickening, but no higher because curdling becomes a danger. Likewise, custards should be fully cooled below 40 degrees to promote quick churning and freezing without the formation of butter flecks.

For these reasons, we recommend the use of an instant-read thermometer when making ice cream. Since it is also helpful to measure the temperature of ice cream at serving time (we find ice cream tastes best around 10 to 12 degrees), choose an instant-read thermometer that goes down to 0 degrees.

You may also want to check the temperature of your freezer, especially if using an ice cream machine with a

canister that must be frozen overnight. A freezer/refrigerator thermometer that registers temperatures below zero can be purchased for several dollars at any housewares store. Cold freezer temperatures (below zero) are required for optimum performance of frozen canister-type ice cream machines. Note that removing frost and excess food can lower the freezer temperature by several degrees. However, if your freezer continues to run well above zero (say, 5 degrees or higher), you will be better off using an ice cream machine that does not require prefreezing of any parts.

SAUCEPAN

Custards are best cooked over low heat

in a tall, heavy saucepan that will prevent scorching. A two-and-one-half-quart saucepan is ideal. You may want to consider a pan with a nonstick surface. It certainly will be easier to clean.

Whether you choose a conventional or nonstick surface, look for a sturdy but not overly heavy saucepan that weighs between two and three pounds. Pans that weigh four or five pounds will be difficult to lift when filled. Lighter pans that weigh less than two pounds will be prone to scorching.

We prefer pans with heatproof handles. It's much easier to stir the custard constantly if you can hold the handle without a dish towel or pot

holder. We have had good experiences with All-Clad saucepans in our test kitchen and recommend them highly.

STRAINER

A fine-mesh strainer picks out tiny bits of egg that sometimes form in well-made custards. These bits of egg would otherwise mar the texture of the ice cream, so they must be removed. Fine-mesh strainers can also be used to strain out ground nuts from steeped liquids or to remove seeds from berries. We particularly like a conical-shaped French sieve called a chinois. The very fine mesh traps even the smallest particles. The shape makes it easy to press down on solids, like nuts and

berries, to extract as much liquid, and therefore flavor, from them as possible.

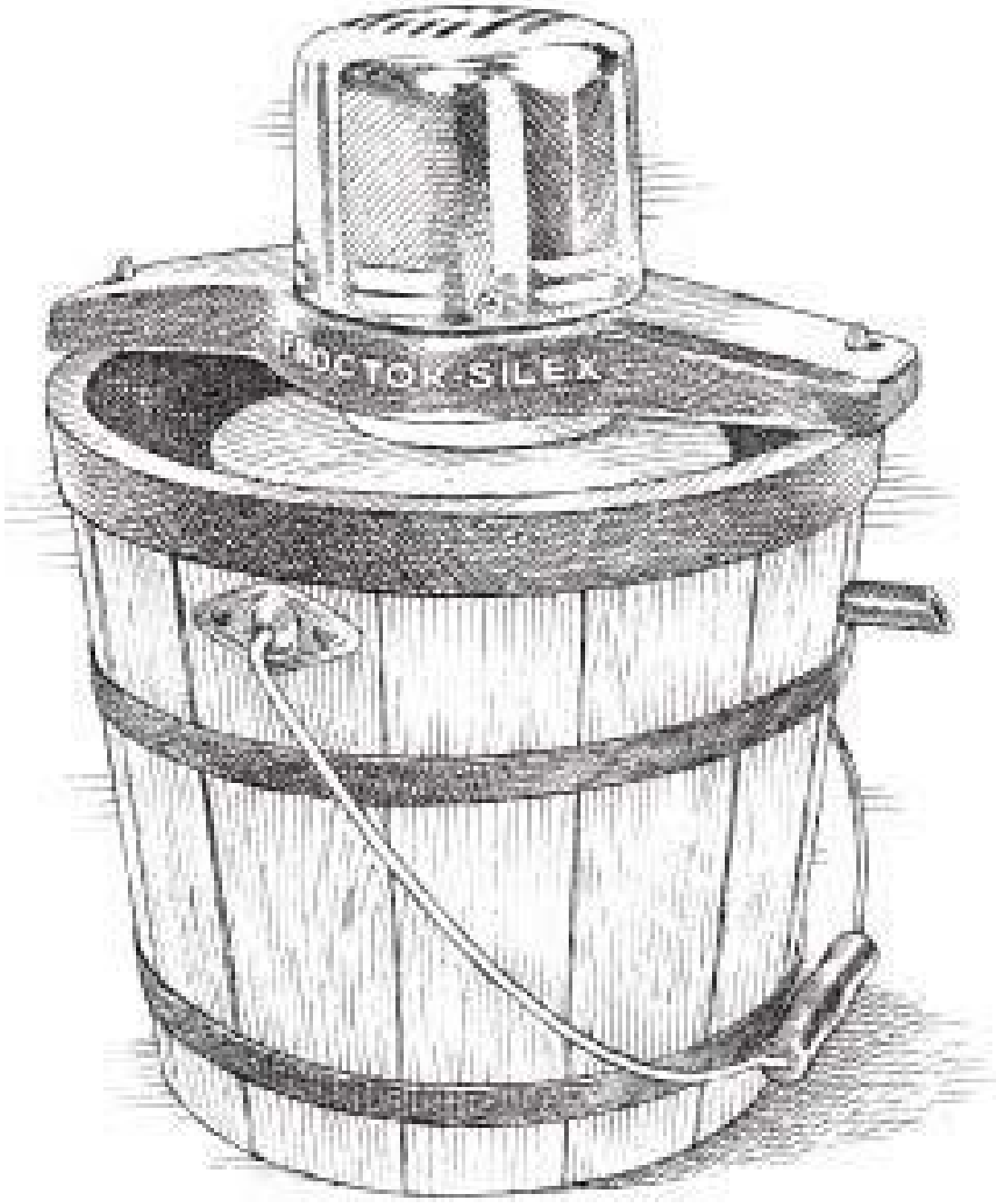

Figure 1.
Traditional ice cream makers in wooden buckets can be less reliable than more modern ice

cream machines because they can be affected by ambient conditions. Also, you will need to track down rock salt at a hardware store. However, many models have a large capacity, and this type of ice cream maker does not require prefreezing of any parts. As long as you have a steady supply of ice and rock salt, successive batches of ice cream may be made in this kind of machine. We prefer models, like this one, with electric churning mechanisms.

Figure 2.
The Donvier revolutionized ice cream making at home. A supercoolant inside the central

metal canister lowers the temperature of the custard as you churn with the plastic hand crank. This model is a good choice if your freezer maintains a temperature at or below zero. Note that the metal canister must be refrozen overnight before making a second batch of ice cream.

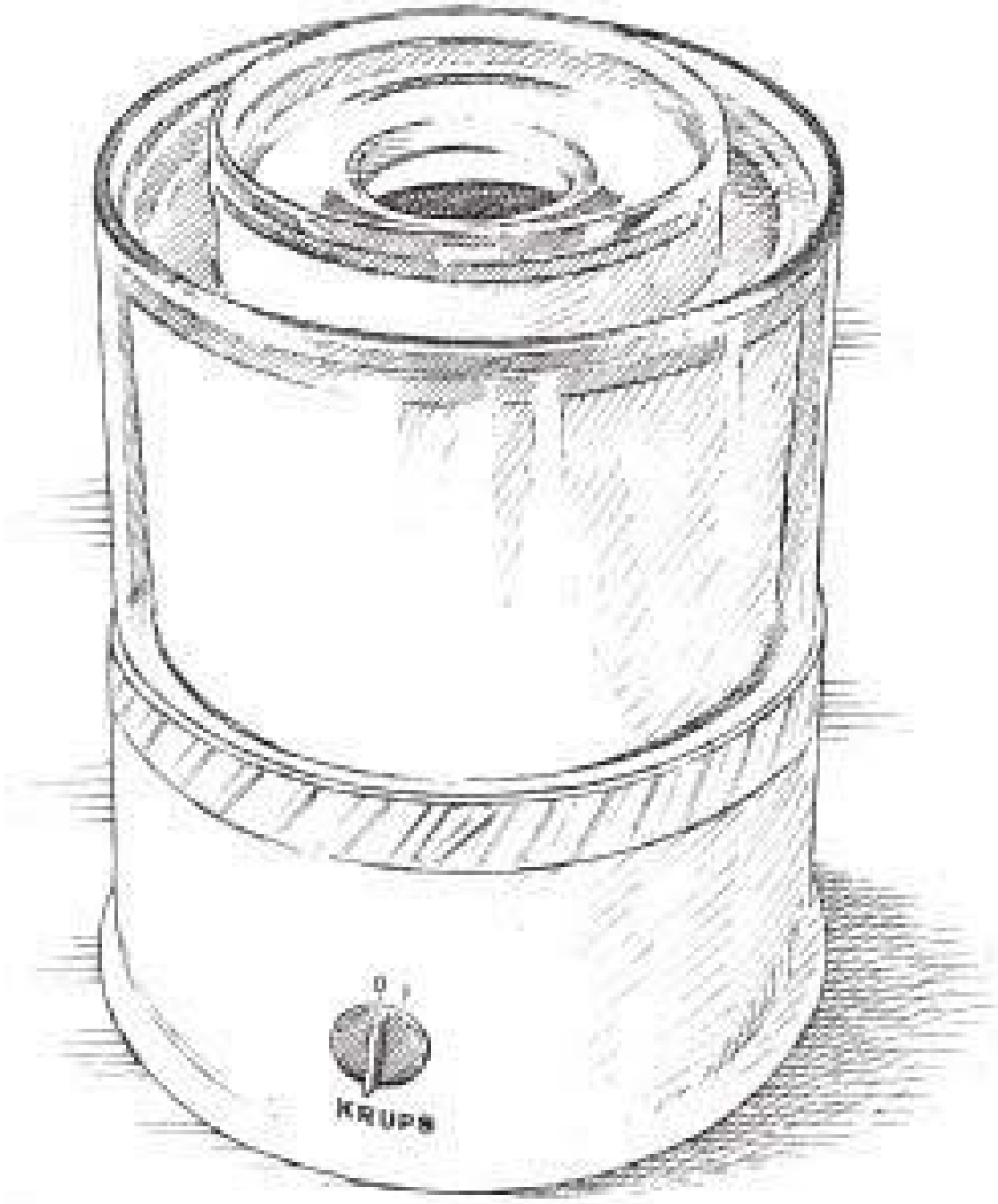

Figure 3.
Similar to the Donvier, this Krups ice cream machine has an electric motor in the base that

rotates the metal canister while a stationary blade churns. The constant motion beats more air into the ice cream and results in a better texture. For this reason, we prefer an electric churning mechanism.

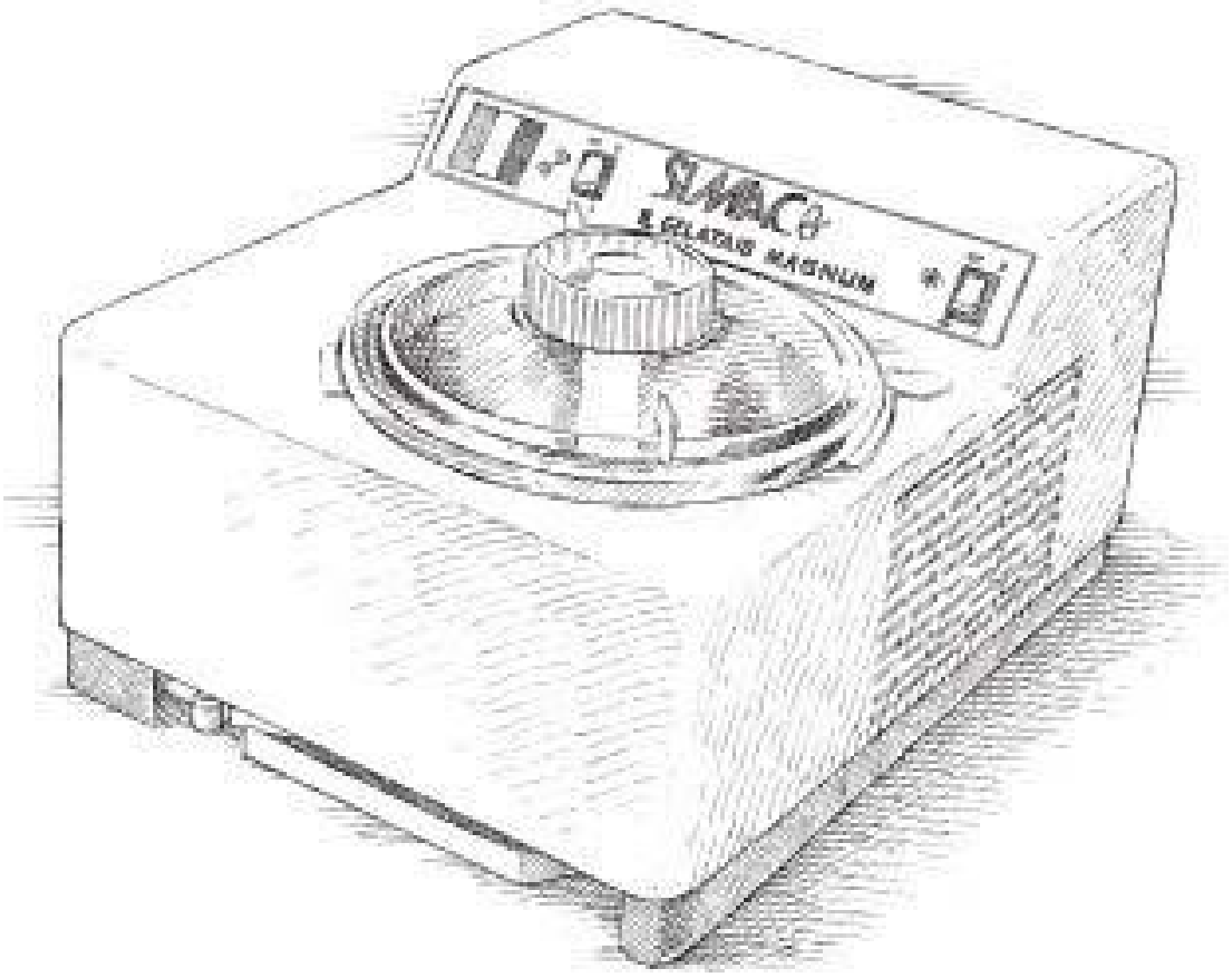

Figure 4.
The Rolls-Royce of ice cream machines, this Simac unit contains its own freezer. The texture of ice cream made in this machine is superb, and the ice

cream may be eaten right after churning without further hardening in the freezer. This machine can be used to make successive batches of ice cream on the same day. If money is no object, this kind of ice cream machine is the best choice.

CLASSIC ICE CREAMS

THIS CHAPTER CONTAINS RECIPES FOR ALL the classics—vanilla, chocolate, coffee—as well as nut ice creams and those flavored with exotic ingredients like ginger and coconut. Ice creams made with fresh fruits require special techniques because of the moisture content in the fruit. These ice creams are covered in the following chapter. This chapter focuses on ice creams made with "dry" flavorings that do not upset the proportions in the custard.

Vanilla ice cream is the basis for all

the ice cream and gelato recipes in this book. While the use of a vanilla bean makes a tremendous difference in this recipe, we have found that vanilla extract makes more sense for other flavors. The extract complements the flavors of chocolate, coffee, and nuts, while vanilla beans tend to overwhelm them.

When using a vanilla bean, pistachio nuts, or dried coconut, it is necessary to add an extra step to the basic custard-making process. These ingredients are steeped in almost-simmering milk and cream for about thirty minutes. They give up their flavor to the dairy ingredients, which are then used to temper the beaten egg yolks.

Other nuts, such as walnuts for Maple Walnut Ice Cream or pecans for Butter Pecan Ice Cream, are simply added at the end of the churning process. In these recipes, the nuts provide textural and flavor contrasts to the base. However, they are not used to flavor the custard itself.

Chocolate, coffee, and ginger flavors are best added in dry form, such as cocoa powder, instant espresso powder, or ground ginger. Using the liquid forms of these flavorings (like brewed coffee or a sugar syrup made with fresh ginger) adds extra water to the custard and can cause iciness. Melted chocolate can be used in small amounts to enrich a basic

chocolate ice cream. However, we found that the fat in melted chocolate can be quite heavy on the tongue if used in large amounts or as the sole provider of chocolate.

Master Recipe

Vanilla Ice Cream

NOTE: ***Two teaspoons of vanilla extract may be substituted for the vanilla bean, although the flavor will not be as true. To maximize the extract's potency, stir it into the chilled custard just before churning. Figures 5 and 12), illustrate the custard-making process. This recipe yields about one quart, as do all the ice cream and gelato recipes in this book.***

$1^1/_2$ cups whole milk

$1\frac{1}{2}$ cups heavy cream

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar

1 4-inch piece of vanilla bean, slit lengthwise and seeds removed (*see* figures 13 and 14)

4 large egg yolks

Master Instructions

1. Combine milk, cream, $^{1}/_{2}$ cup sugar, and vanilla seeds and pod in heavy $2^{1}/_{2}$-quart saucepan set over medium heat. Bring mixture to 175 degrees, stirring occasionally to dissolve sugar and break up vanilla seeds.

2. Meanwhile, beat remaining $^{1}/_{4}$ cup sugar and yolks in medium bowl, scraping down sides as needed, until mixture turns pale yellow and thickens so that it falls in ribbons, about 2 minutes with

electric mixer on medium-high or 4 minutes with whisk.

3. Remove about $^{1}/_{2}$ cup hot milk-cream mixture from pan and slowly whisk into beaten yolk mixture. Gradually whisk thinned yolk mixture back into saucepan. Reduce heat to low and bring mixture to 180 degrees, stirring constantly, about 5 minutes. Custard should be thick but not curdled or boiled.

4. Remove saucepan from heat; pour custard through fine-mesh strainer and into nonreactive bowl

or container. Retrieve vanilla pod from strainer and add to custard. Place bowl in larger bowl of ice water to bring custard to room temperature.

5. Cover bowl and refrigerate until custard registers 40 degrees or lower on thermometer, 4 to 8 hours. (Custard may be refrigerated overnight.) Remove vanilla pod from custard (or add extract, if using), stir well, and then pour custard into ice cream machine. Churn until frozen but still a bit soft. (Do not overprocess or ice cream may become icy with flecks

of butter.) Transfer ice cream to nonreactive container, seal, and freeze until firm. (Ice cream will keep up to 2 days.)

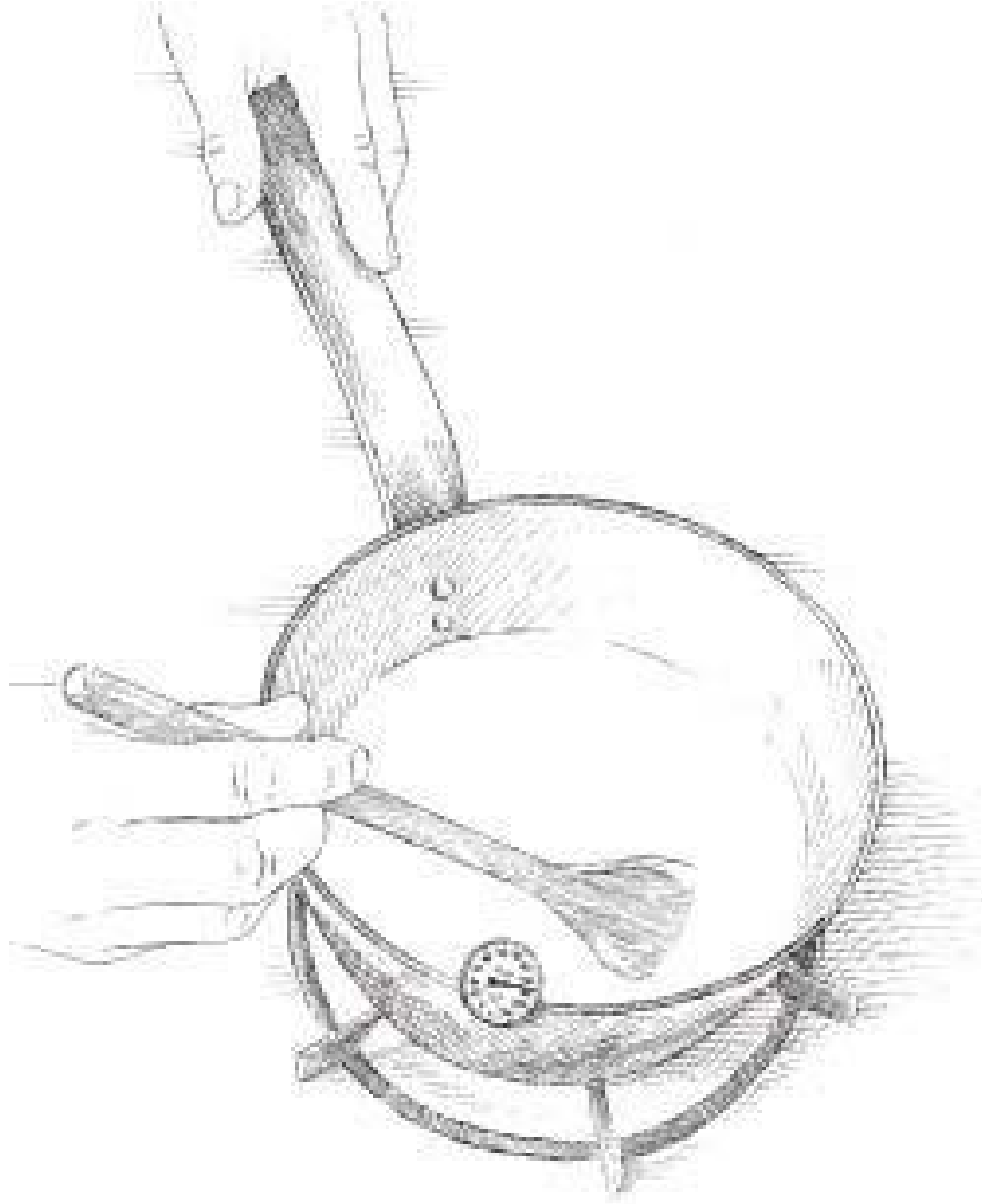

Figure 5.
Combine the milk, cream, part of the sugar, and the vanilla seeds and pod in a heavy $2^{1}/_{2}$-quart

saucepan. Heat to 175 degrees, stirring often to dissolve the sugar and break up the clumps of vanilla seeds.

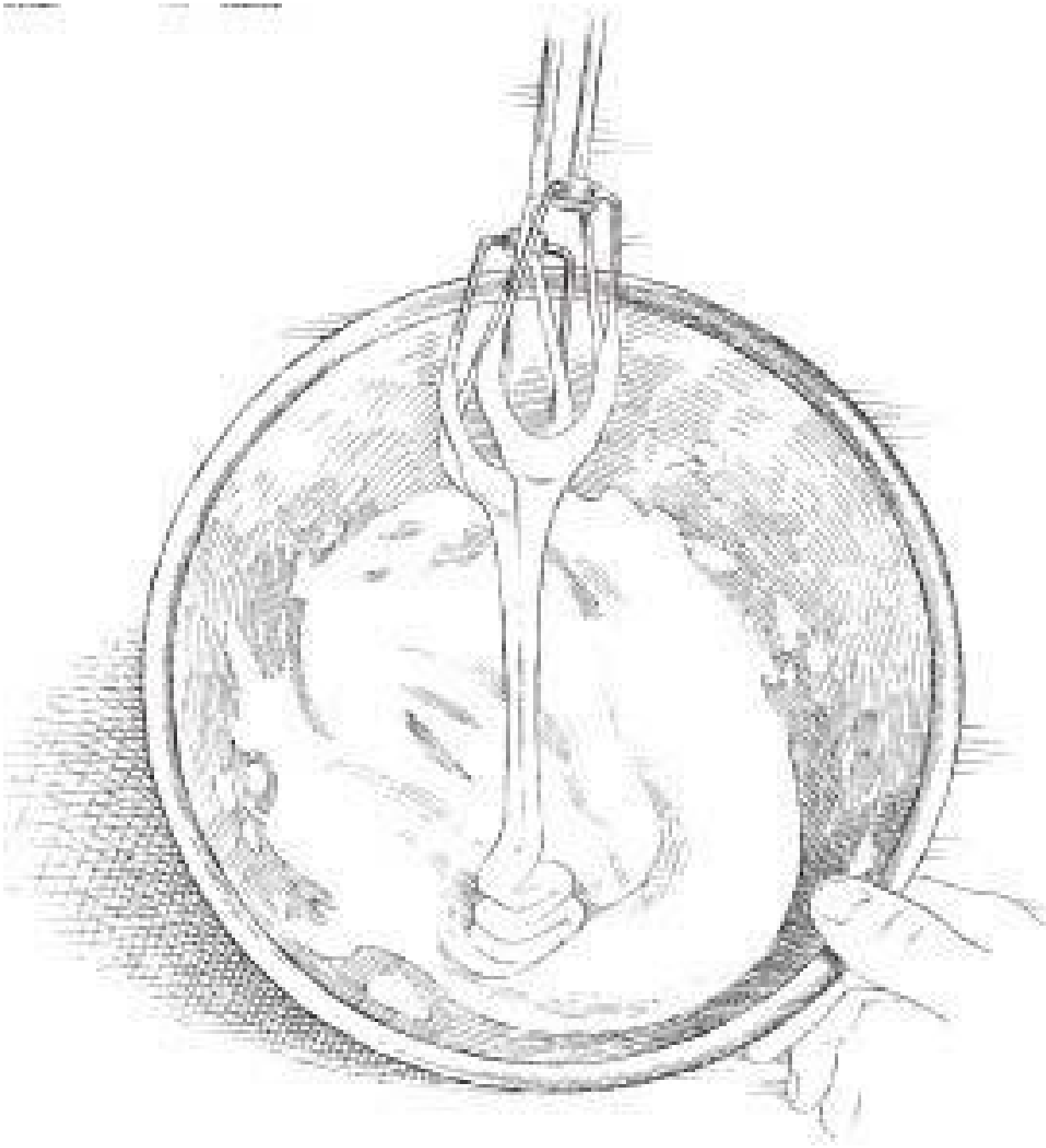

Figure 6.
While the milk mixture is heating, beat the remaining sugar and egg yolks until pale yellow in color and thick enough to fall in

ribbons from the beaters.

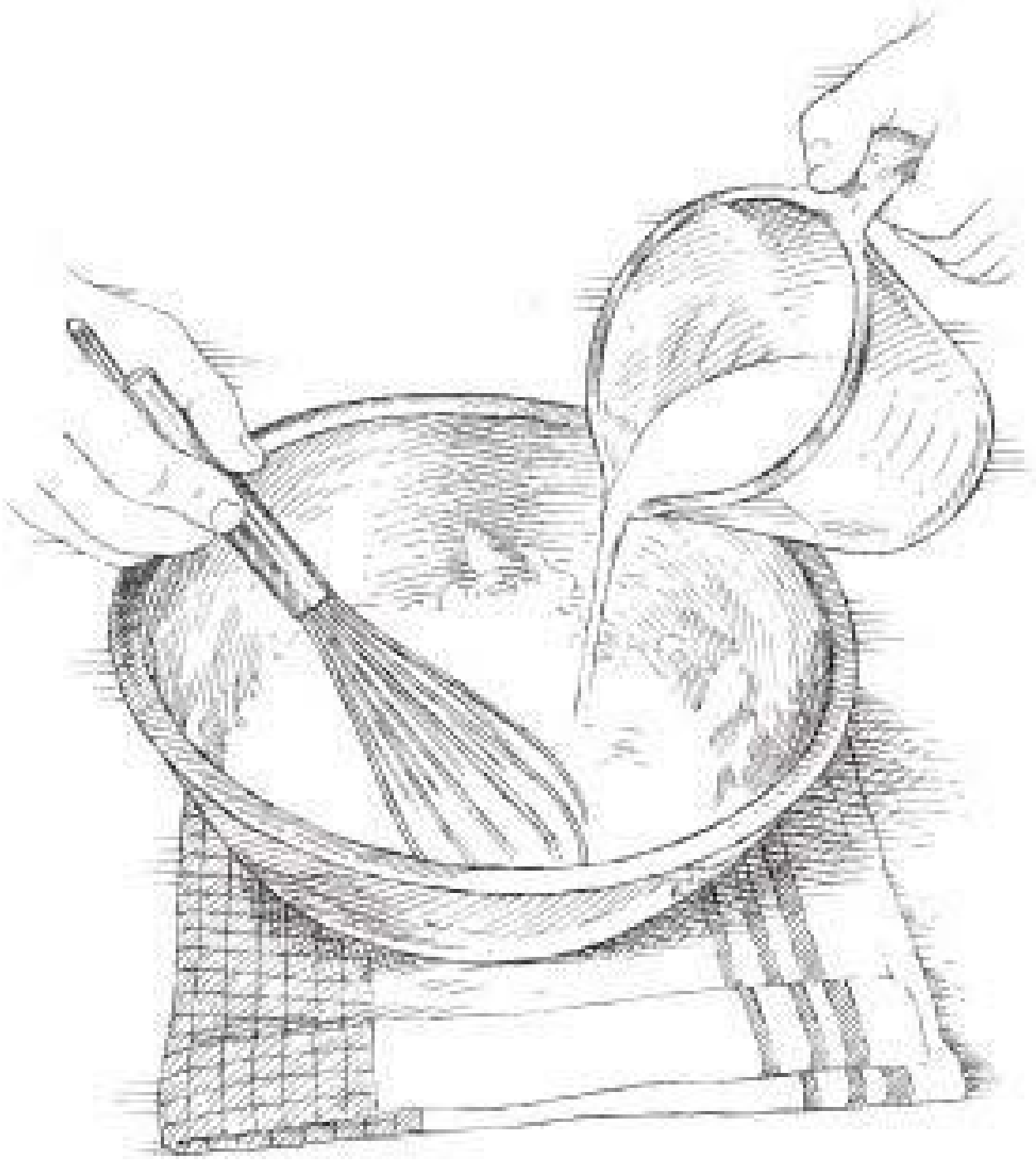

Figure 7.
Use a dish towel to steady the bowl containing the beaten yolks. Slowly whisk about $^{1}/_{2}$ cup of the

hot milk mixture into the yolks to thin them out. Then whisk the thinned yolks into the saucepan.

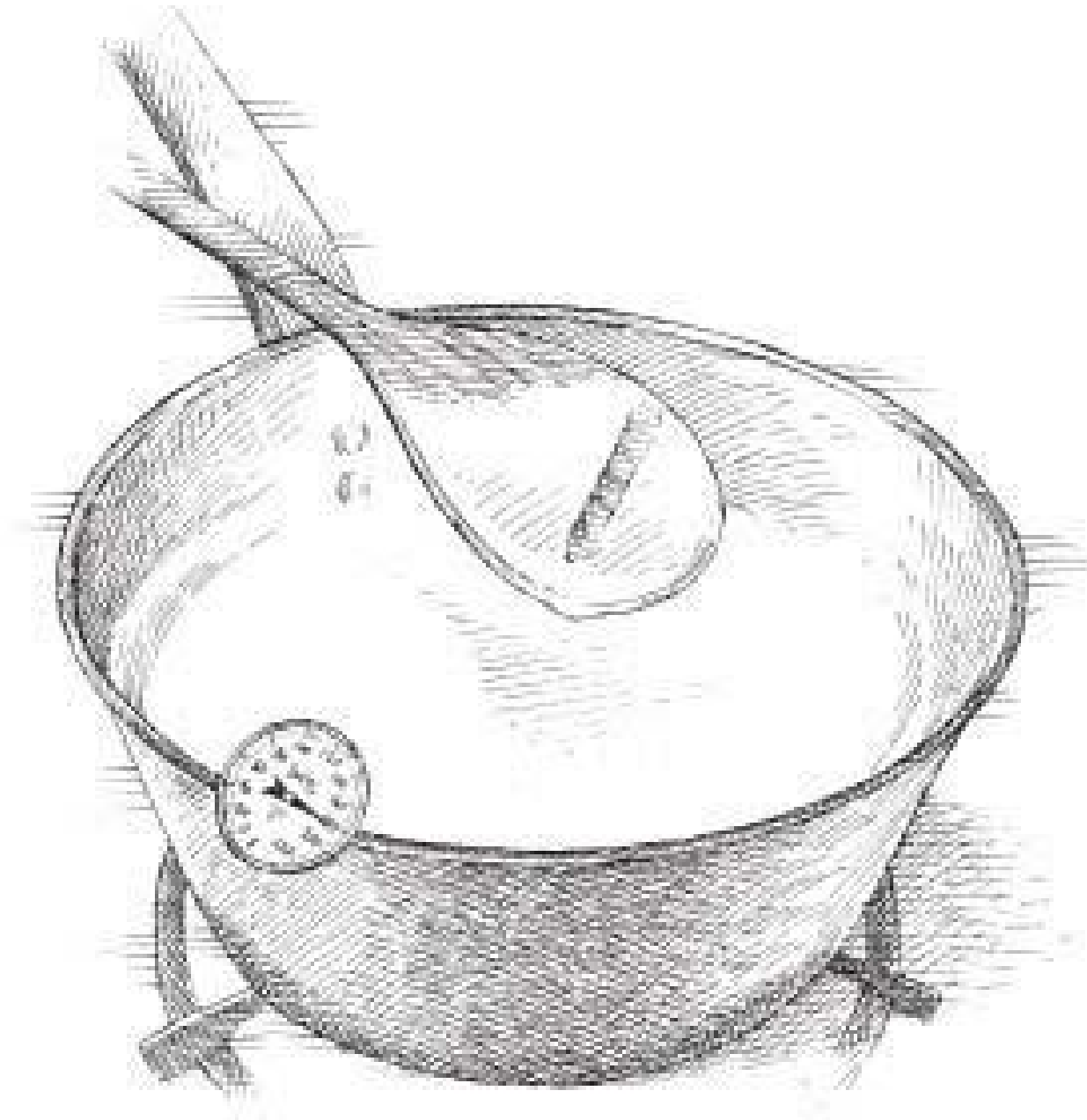

Figure 8.
Stirring constantly, heat the custard over low until thick and a temperature of 180 degrees has been reached. The custard should

be thick enough so that a line drawn through it on the back of a spoon holds for several seconds. For a more precise measurement, use an instant-read thermometer.

Figure 9.
Pour the custard through a fine-mesh strainer to remove any curdled bits and into a nonreactive bowl. Add the vanilla

pod back to the custard.

Figure 10.
Chill the custard to room temperature in a bowl of ice water. Cover the bowl and refrigerate until the custard reaches a temperature below 40 degrees.

Figure 11.
Remove and discard the vanilla pod. (If using vanilla extract instead of a vanilla bean, add it

now.) Pour the custard into an ice cream machine and churn.

Figure 12.
Depending on the ice cream machine, it will be necessary to churn the custard for about 30

minutes. At this point, the volume should be increased by about 25 percent, and the ice cream will be soft and fluffy. Scoop the ice cream into a nonreactive container and freeze it until firm before serving.

Figure 13.
A vanilla bean adds the truest flavor to vanilla ice cream. To flavor the custard, cut a 4-inch piece of vanilla bean in half lengthwise with a small, sharp knife.

Figure 14.
Place the knife at one end of the vanilla bean half and press down to flatten the bean as you move the knife away from you and remove the seeds. Add the seeds and pod to the saucepan with the milk and cream.

Chocolate Chip Ice Cream

NOTE: ***This simple variation adds small chunks of a high-quality chocolate bar to vanilla ice cream made with extract in place of the vanilla bean.*** ***See figure 15*** ***for information on chopping a chocolate bar for ice cream.***

$1^1/_2$ cups whole milk

$1^1/_2$ cups heavy cream

$^3/_4$ cup sugar

4 large egg yolks

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

2 ounces bittersweet or semisweet chocolate bar, chopped

INSTRUCTIONS:

Follow Master Recipe instructions for Vanilla Ice Cream, adding chocolate about 30 seconds before churning is completed.

VARIATIONS:

For **Mint Chocolate Chip Ice Cream**, replace vanilla extract with $^1/_4$ cup clear or green crème de menthe.

For **Oreo Ice Cream**, replace chocolate with 1 cup coarsely crumbled Oreo cookies (*see* figure 16) about 30 seconds before churning is completed.

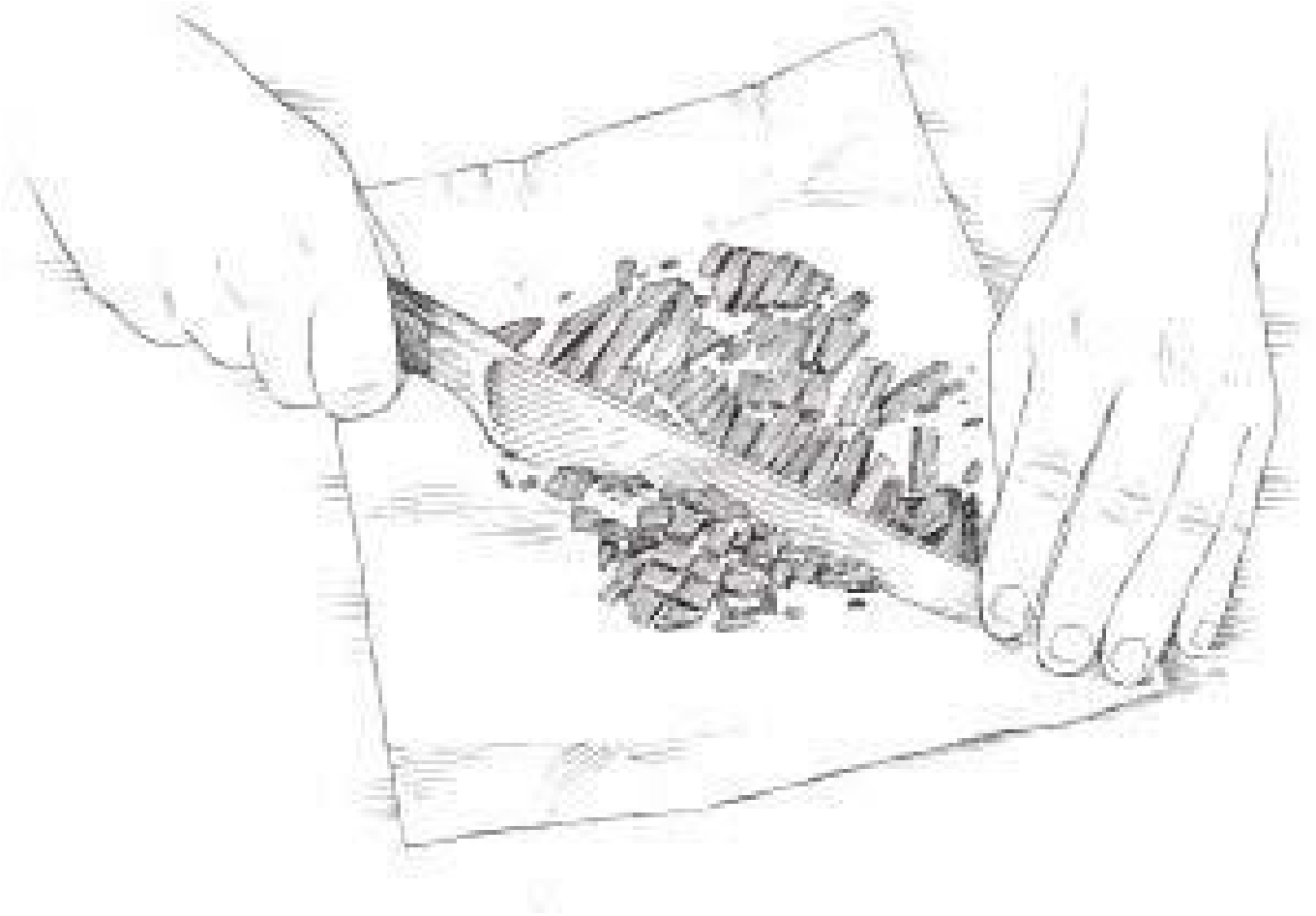

Figure 15.
Bittersweet or semisweet chocolate bars make an excellent addition to ice cream because they are already quite thin. Blocks of chocolate are harder to use because they yield irregular chunks that are often quite thick.

Chop a thin chocolate bar into $^{1}/_{4}$-inch pieces.

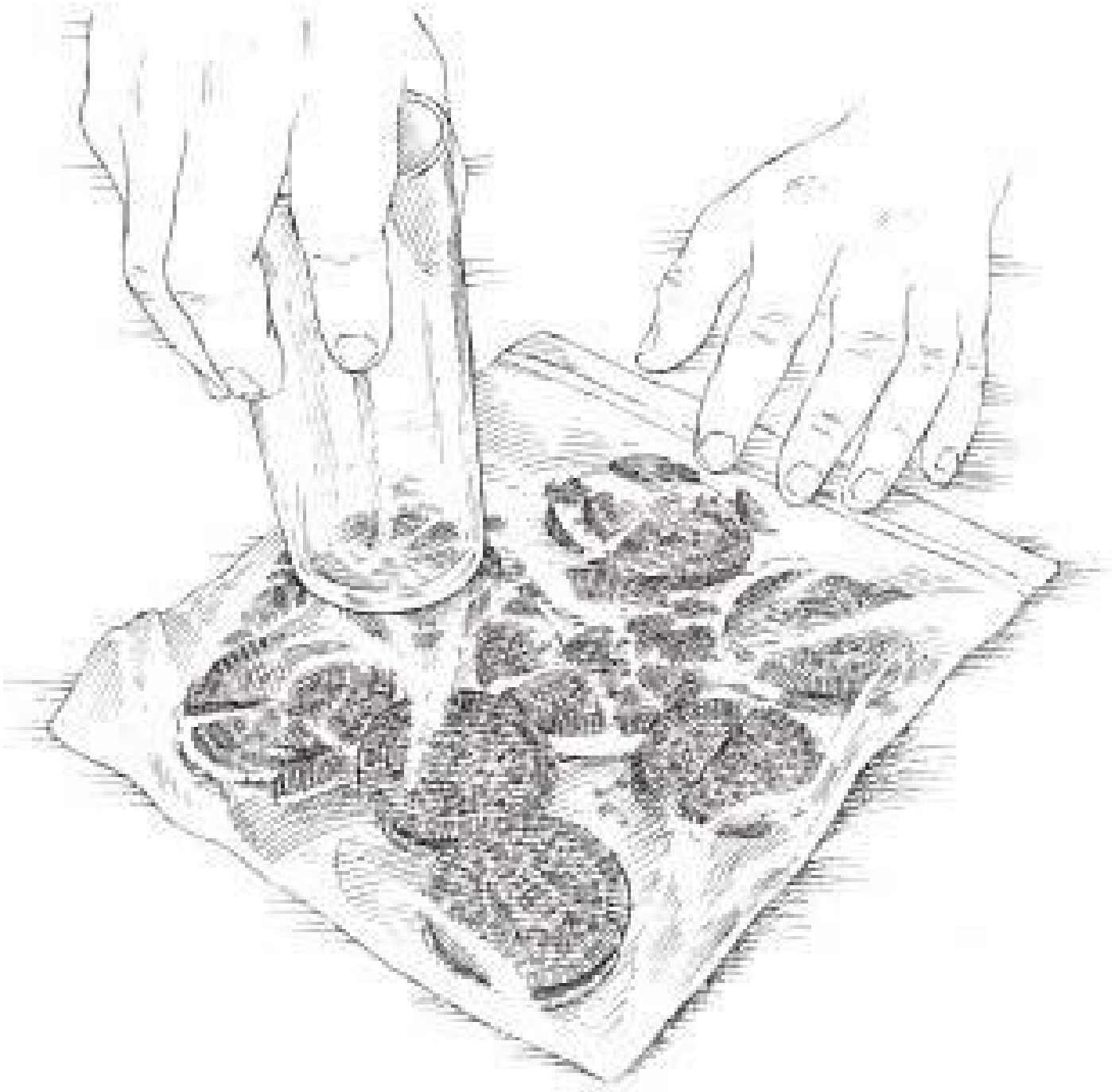

Figure 16.
Any favorite cookies, including Oreos, gingersnaps, almond biscotti, or even brownies, may be

added to ice cream. To crumble cookies, place them in a zipper-lock plastic bag and crush them with your fist or the bottom of a glass. Do not crush the cookies into fine crumbs.

Chocolate Ice Cream

NOTE: ***Cocoa powder gives ice cream a strong chocolate flavor without adding any more richness or fat. Dutch-process cocoa has a smoother flavor than that of natural cocoa and is preferred in this recipe. Two more tablespoons of sugar are needed to offset the bitterness of unsweetened cocoa. Note that cocoa powder makes the egg yolk mixture very thick, so whisk in the hot milk quite slowly to incorporate it evenly. The cocoa also increases the amount of time needed to thicken the custard by several minutes.***

1 1/2 cups whole milk

1 1/2 cups heavy cream

7/8 cup sugar

4 large egg yolks

1/3 cup unsweetened cocoa powder, preferably Dutch-process

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS:

Follow Master Recipe instructions for Vanilla Ice Cream, increasing sugar in step 1 to 5/8 cup. Stir cocoa into thickened egg yolk—sugar mixture with rubber spatula (*see* figure 17); beat until fully incorporated.

Figure 17.
Use a rubber spatula to stir the cocoa powder into the thickened egg yolk—sugar mixture. Once the cocoa has been moistened, use an electric mixer or a whisk

to incorporate the cocoa fully.

Chocolate Truffle Ice Cream

NOTE: ***The addition of melted bittersweet chocolate gives this ice cream an especially rich chocolate flavor. It also makes the beaten egg yolk mixture very thick and stiff. Slowly add the hot milk to thin out the egg yolk mixture gradually.***

$1^1/_2$ cups whole milk

$1^1/_2$ cups heavy cream

$^3/_4$ cup sugar

4 large egg yolks

$^1/_3$ cup unsweetened cocoa powder, preferably Dutch-

process

4 ounces bittersweet chocolate, melted and cooled

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS:

Follow Master Recipe instructions for Vanilla Ice Cream (*see* figure 17), stirring cocoa into thickened egg yolk—sugar mixture with rubber spatula (see figure 17). Stir in melted chocolate and beat with electric mixer until fully incorporated.

VARIATIONS:

Follow recipe for either Chocolate Ice Cream or Chocolate Truffle Ice Cream to make these variations.

For **Chocolate Chocolate Chip Ice Cream**, add 2 ounces chopped bittersweet or semisweet chocolate bar about 30 seconds before churning is completed. *See* figures 15, for information on chopping a chocolate bar for ice cream.

For **Chocolate Oreo Ice Cream**, fold in 1 cup coarsely crumbled Oreo cookies about 30 seconds before churning is completed. (*see* figure 16), for information on crumbling cookies for ice cream.

For **Rocky Road Ice Cream**, fold in $^{1}/_{2}$ cup slivered blanched almonds and 1 cup mini marshmallows about 30 seconds before churning is completed.

Coffee Ice Cream

NOTE: ***Instant espresso powder dissolves completely in the custard and does not leave any gritty residue like coffee grounds.***

$1^1/_2$ cups whole milk

$1^1/_2$ cups heavy cream

$^3/_4$ cup sugar

3 tablespoons instant espresso powder

4 large egg yolks

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS:

Follow Master Recipe instructions for Vanilla Ice Cream, stirring espresso

powder into milk-cream mixture in step 1.

VARIATIONS:

For **Mocha Chip Ice Cream**, add 2 ounces chopped bittersweet or semisweet chocolate bar about 30 seconds before churning is completed. See figure 15, for information on chopping a chocolate bar for ice cream.

For **Coffee Oreo Ice Cream**, fold in 1 cup coarsely crumbled Oreo cookies about 30 seconds before churning is completed. See figure 16, for information on crumbling cookies for ice cream.

Caramel Almond Swirl Ice Cream

NOTE: ***Caramel can be tricky to prepare. Begin by heating the sugar in a deep saucepan without stirring. At the very first wisp of smoke, start stirring until all the sugar is dissolved. Cook the sugar until it is light honey in color, which should take ten minutes or less. If the sugar becomes any darker, the caramel will be too stiff to swirl into the ice cream. Toasted and chopped walnuts, pecans, or macadamia nuts may be substituted for the almonds if desired.*** ***See* figure 18*****, for information on toasting nuts in***

a dry skillet.

$1^1/_2$ cups whole milk

$1^1/_2$ cups heavy cream

$^3/_4$ cup sugar

4 large egg yolks

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Caramel Almond Swirl

$^1/_2$ cup sugar

$^3/_8$ cup heavy cream

$^1/_2$ cup chopped almonds, toasted

INSTRUCTIONS:

Follow Master Recipe instructions for

Vanilla Ice Cream. While custard is chilling, prepare Caramel Almond Swirl. Heat sugar in deep saucepan set over low heat without stirring. At first wisp of smoke, stir constantly with long-handled spoon until sugar melts and caramel is light golden color, 8 to 10 minutes. Carefully add cream, making sure to keep hands and face away from bubbling sauce. Stir to incorporate cream and cook until sauce has softened again and is smooth, about 2 minutes. Remove pan from heat and pour sauce into glass measuring cup. Stir in almonds and set aside. About 1 minute before churning is completed, place measuring cup in bowl of hot water to heat caramel sauce. Drizzle sauce over frozen ice

cream, folding very gently to keep swirl distinct (*see* figure 19).

Figure 18.
To maximize their flavor, place the chopped nuts in a dry skillet set over medium heat and toast,

shaking the pan occasionally to turn the nuts, until fragrant, about 5 minutes.

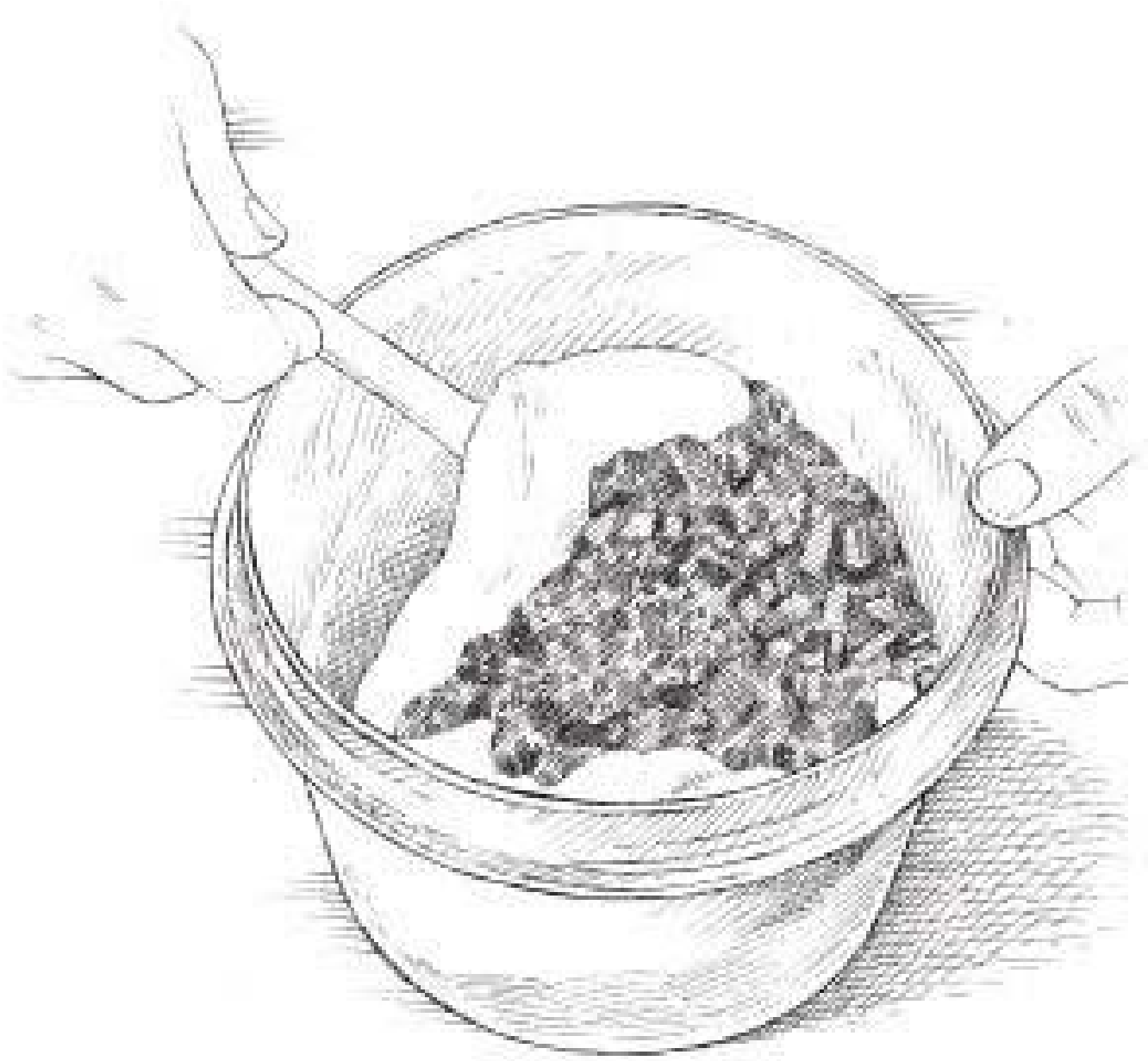

Figure 19.
To keep the caramel swirl distinct, pour the sauce over the frozen ice cream and then very gently fold to distribute the sauce

evenly throughout the ice cream.

Pistachio Ice Cream

NOTE: ***Unlike artificially flavored and colored bright green versions, this pistachio ice cream tastes like nuts. The color is tan and comes from shelled, unsalted nuts sold in health foods stores. The nuts are toasted to bring out their flavor, ground, infused into the milk, and then strained out. If you want, fold in an additional one-third cup toasted, chopped nuts when the churning is almost completed.***

$^{3}/_{4}$ cups whole milk

$1^{3}/_{4}$ cups heavy cream

**$1^{1}/_{4}$ cups shelled, unsalted pistachio nuts, toasted (*see*

figure 18) and ground fine in food processor

$^{3}/_{4}$ cup sugar

4 large egg yolks

$^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoon vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS:

Follow Master Recipe instructions for Vanilla Ice Cream, heating milk and cream almost to boiling point. Add nuts to hot milk and cream and steep 30 minutes. Pour milk-cream mixture through fine-mesh strainer and into clean saucepan, pressing down on nuts to extract as much liquid as possible (*see* figure 20). Discard nuts. Proceed with recipe step 1, heating flavored milk and

cream and $^{1}/_{2}$ cup sugar to 175 degrees.

Figure 20.
Finely ground nuts are steeped in almost-simmering milk and cream for 30 minutes to release

their flavor. Pour the nuts and milk-cream mixture through a fine-mesh strainer and then use the back of a large spoon or wooden spatula to press on the nuts to extract every bit of liquid and flavor from them. Discard the nuts and then use the flavored milk-cream mixture to make a custard.

Maple Walnut Ice Cream

NOTE: ***Maple syrup takes the place of the sugar in the Master Recipe. Pecans may be substituted for the walnuts if desired.***

1 cup plus 2 tablespoons whole milk
1 cup plus 2 tablespoons heavy cream
$^3/_4$ cup maple syrup
3 large egg yolks
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
$^3/_4$ cup chopped walnuts, toasted (*see* figure 18)

INSTRUCTIONS:

Follow Master Recipe instructions for Vanilla Ice Cream, omitting sugar and heating all of syrup with milk and cream. Beat egg yolks until smooth and lightened in color; thin with hot milk-cream-syrup mixture. About 30 seconds before churning is completed, add nuts.

Butter Pecan Ice Cream

NOTE: ***Light brown sugar gives this ice cream its characteristic caramel flavor. Because of the additional fat provided by the butter, the ratio of milk to cream has been changed in this recipe.***

2 cups whole milk
1 cup heavy cream
1/2 cup firmly packed light brown sugar
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
1/4 cup granulated sugar
4 large egg yolks
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
3/4 cup chopped pecans,

toasted (*see* figure 18)

INSTRUCTIONS:

Follow Master Recipe instructions for Vanilla Ice Cream, replacing $^1/_2$ cup sugar in step 1 with equal amount of light brown sugar and adding butter to milk-cream mixture. Beat granulated sugar with yolks as directed in Master Recipe. About 30 seconds before churning is completed, add nuts.

Ginger Ice Cream

NOTE: ***Ground ginger adds a potent punch to this Asian-inspired ice cream. If desired, fold in one-quarter cup minced crystallized ginger just before the churning is completed.***

$1\frac{1}{2}$ cups whole milk

$1\frac{1}{2}$ cups heavy cream

2 teaspoons ground ginger

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar

4 large egg yolks

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS:

Follow Master Recipe instructions for

Vanilla Ice Cream, stirring ginger into $^{1}/_{2}$ cup sugar (*see* figure 21) and then adding mixture to milk and cream in step 1.

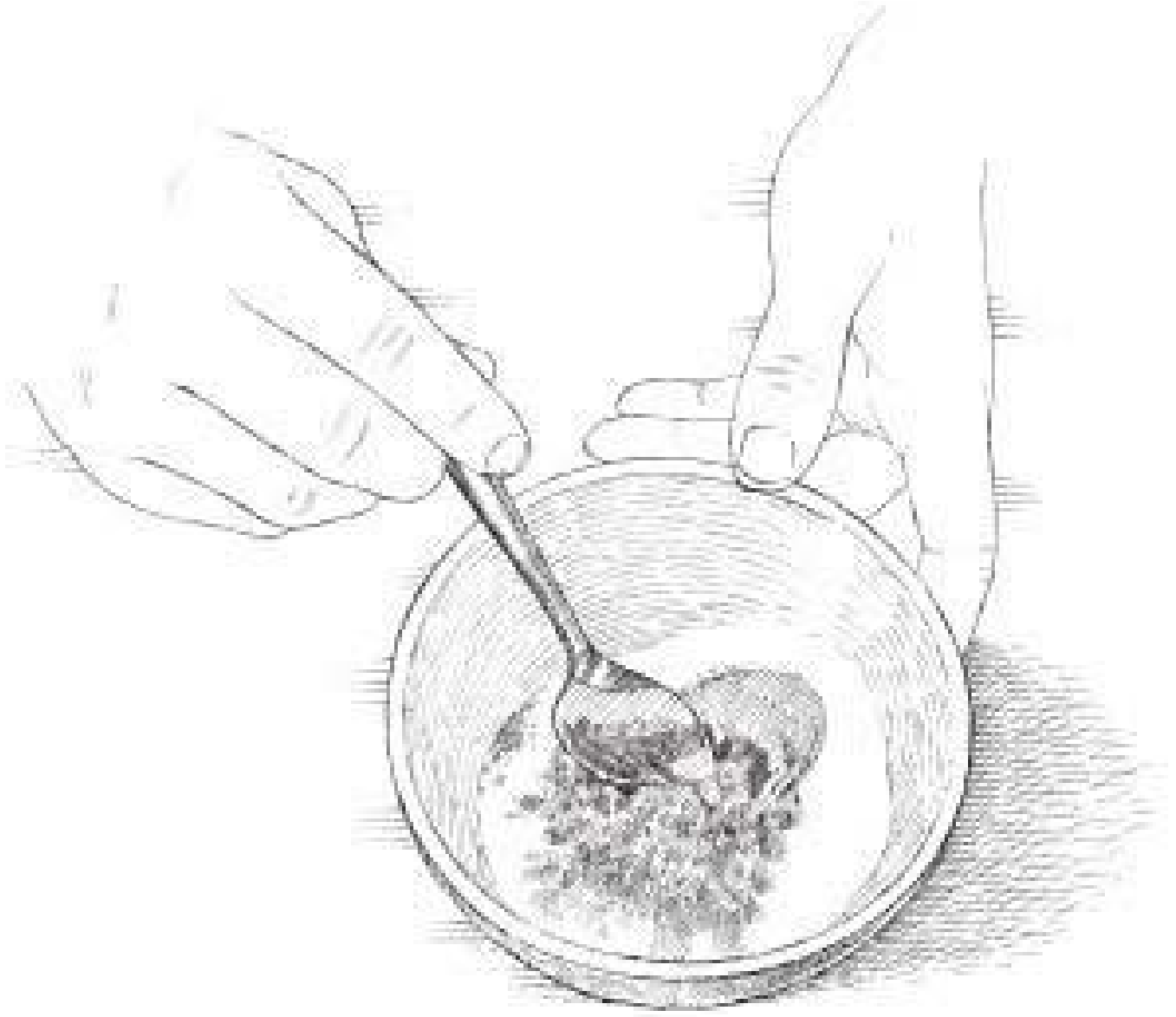

Figure 21.
Ground spices like ginger and cinnamon can give ice cream a rich, warm flavor. To prevent ground spices from clumping up, stir the spice and sugar together

in a small bowl and then heat this mixture along with the milk and cream until dissolved.

Toasted Coconut Ice Cream

NOTE: ***This ice cream has a strong tropical flavor. Grated unsweetened coconut delivers the best flavor. Look for this product in health foods stores. Sweetened flaked coconut is much less flavorful and should not be used in this recipe. Toasting the coconut brings out its flavor.***

$1\frac{3}{4}$ cups whole milk

$1\frac{3}{4}$ cups heavy cream

2 cups unsweetened grated coconut, toasted (*see* figure 22)

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar

4 large egg yolks

$^1/_2$ teaspoon vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS:

Follow Master Recipe instructions for Vanilla Ice Cream, heating milk and cream almost to boiling point. Add coconut to hot milk and cream and steep 30 minutes. Pour milk-cream mixture through fine-mesh strainer and into clean saucepan, pressing down on coconut to extract as much liquid as possible (*see figure 20*). Discard coconut. Proceed with recipe step 1, heating flavored milk and cream and $^1/_2$ cup sugar to 175 degrees.

Figure 22.
To toast unsweetened grated coconut, divide it between two pie pans. Place the pans in a 300-degree oven and bake, turning the coconut several times, until golden, about 15 minutes. Do not let the coconut burn, or it will impart a bitter flavor to the custard.

FRUIT ICE CREAMS

SUMMER IS THE BEST TIME FOR MAKING ICE cream, and with so many fruits in season, the combination is a natural. However, using fresh fruits to flavor ice cream presents challenges for the home cook.

Most fruits contain a high percentage of water, which can make ice creams icy. We found that fruit ice creams will never be as silky or creamy as ice creams flavored with vanilla beans or instant espresso powder. The addition of the fruit itself as well as the additional

liquid are antithetical to creaminess.

While we would never argue for the use of artificial fruit flavors (the solution employed by many commercial ice cream manufacturers), we do think some extra steps are necessary when working with fresh fruits.

For instance, we like to strain out the seeds and fibers in raspberries, blackberries, and bananas because they can detract from the texture of ice cream. Pushing these fruits through a fine-mesh strainer results in a smooth puree that captures their flavors but does not contain annoying seeds or strings.

Other fruits, such as peaches and cherries, are so juicy (i.e., watery) that we find it best to sauté them with a little

sugar to drive off some of their moisture. This process also caramelizes some of the natural sugars in the fruit and makes the fruit flavor more intense. We find that adding these fruit mixtures at the end of churning maximizes creaminess and keeps the fruit flavors fresh and intense.

Despite the additional sweetness provided by the fruit, we discovered that keeping the sugar at the same level as in the Master Recipe (three-quarters cup per quart of ice cream) helps promote smoothness and also intensifies the fruit flavors. In some recipes, we have increased the sugar slightly to offset tartness in the fruit (as with raspberries and blackberries) or excessive moisture

(as with cherries).

The ice cream recipes that follow capture the essence of each fruit while maintaining as much creaminess and silkiness as possible.

Strawberry Ice Cream

NOTE: ***Really ripe fruit that is red right through to the center is essential in this recipe. The fruit is sprinkled with sugar and allowed to soften in the refrigerator. The chunky fruit puree is added to the ice cream just before the churning is completed.***

1 cup plus 2 tablespoons whole milk

1 cup plus 2 tablespoons heavy cream

$^{3}/_{4}$ cup sugar

3 large egg yolks

$1^{1}/_{2}$ cups strawberries (about 6 ounces), hulled and sliced

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS:

Follow Master Recipe instructions for Vanilla Ice Cream, adding 5 tablespoons sugar to milk-cream mixture in step 1 and $^{1}/_{4}$ cup sugar to egg yolks in step 2. While custard is chilling, sprinkle sliced berries with remaining 3 tablespoons sugar and vanilla extract. Crush fruit lightly with potato masher (*see* figure 23) and refrigerate at least 1 hour to macerate. Add fruit mixture to ice cream about 1 minute before churning is completed.

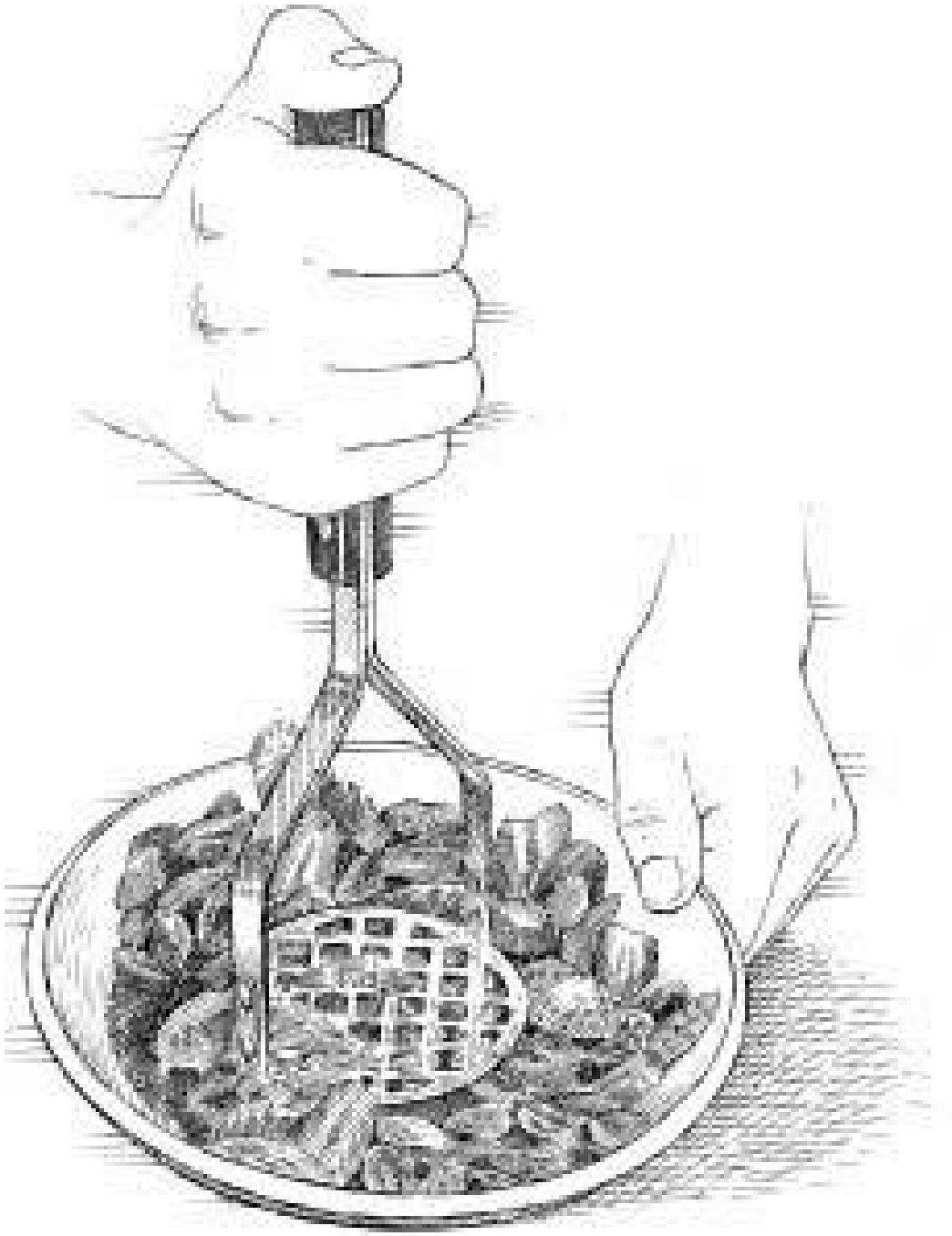

Figure 23.
Place the sliced strawberries in a wide, shallow bowl. Sprinkle them with sugar and vanilla and

use a potato masher to lightly crush the fruit. Allow the fruit to stand for about 1 hour or until softened into a chunky puree.

Raspberry Ice Cream

NOTE: ***Unlike strawberries, raspberries do not really add any bulk to ice cream. The macerated berries are pushed through a fine-mesh strainer to remove the seeds, and the berry liquid is then stirred into a basic custard for a brightly colored and flavored ice cream.***

$1\frac{1}{2}$ cups whole milk

$1\frac{1}{2}$ cups heavy cream

$\frac{7}{8}$ cup sugar

4 large egg yolks

2 cups raspberries

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS:

Follow Master Recipe instructions for Vanilla Ice Cream. While custard is chilling, sprinkle berries with remaining 2 tablespoons sugar and vanilla extract. Crush fruit lightly with potato masher (*see* figure 23) and refrigerate at least 1 hour to macerate. When fruit has softened, pour into fine-mesh strainer and press on solids to extract as much liquid as possible (*see* figure 24). Discard seeds and stir strained puree into chilled custard. Churn as directed.

VARIATION:

For **Blackberry Ice Cream**, replace raspberries with 2 cups blackberries.

Figure 24.
Raspberries and blackberries should be macerated like strawberries. However, the seeds

in these smaller berries should be strained out. Pour the softened berries into a fine-mesh strainer and use the back of a large spoon or spatula to push the puree through the strainer. Discard the seeds and use the strained liquid to flavor the custard.

Peach Ice Cream

NOTE: ***Depending on how firm the peaches are, see figure 25 or 26 for tips on removing the skins. Firm peaches may be used in this recipe, but they should be sweet and flavorful. Peach-flavored liqueur or brandy intensifies the fruit flavor in this lightly perfumed ice cream.***

1 cup whole milk
1 cup heavy cream
$^{3}/_{4}$ cup sugar
3 large egg yolks
3 medium peaches (about 1 pound), peeled, pitted (see figures 25 and 8), and cut into

1/2-inch dice

2 tablespoons peach-flavored liqueur

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS:

Follow Master Recipe instructions for Vanilla Ice Cream, adding 1/4 cup sugar to milk-cream mixture and beating another 1/4 cup sugar with egg yolks. While custard is chilling, place peaches and their juices along with remaining 1/4 cup sugar in large skillet. Cook over medium heat, stirring frequently, until juices thicken and caramelize, about 15 minutes. Stir in liqueur and cook another 2 minutes. Remove pan from heat and

chill peach mixture. Add vanilla to chilled custard and churn as directed. Add fruit mixture to ice cream about 1 minute before churning is completed.

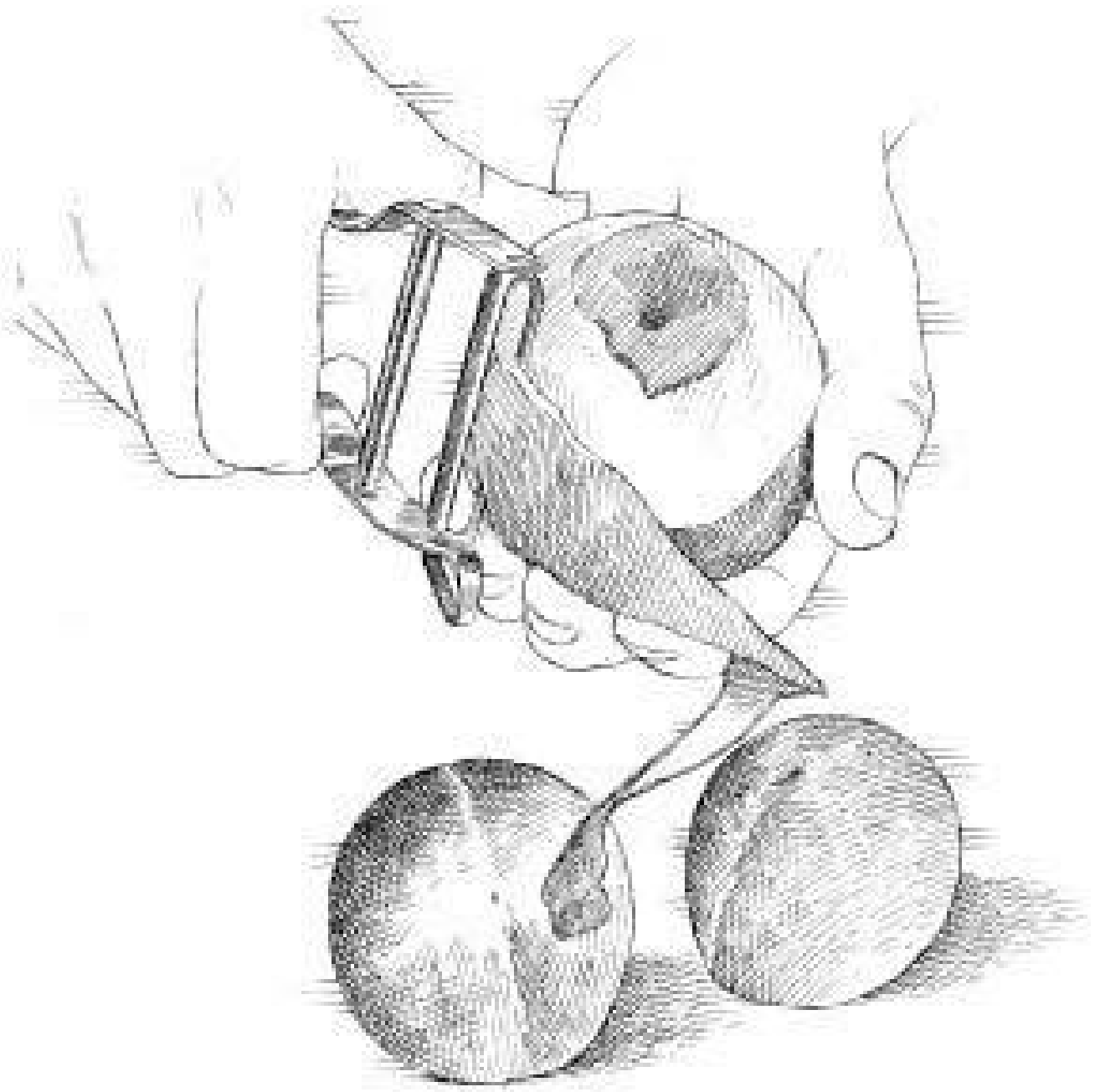

Figure 25.
If the peaches are firm but ripe, you may use a vegetable peeler to remove the skin from the fruit.

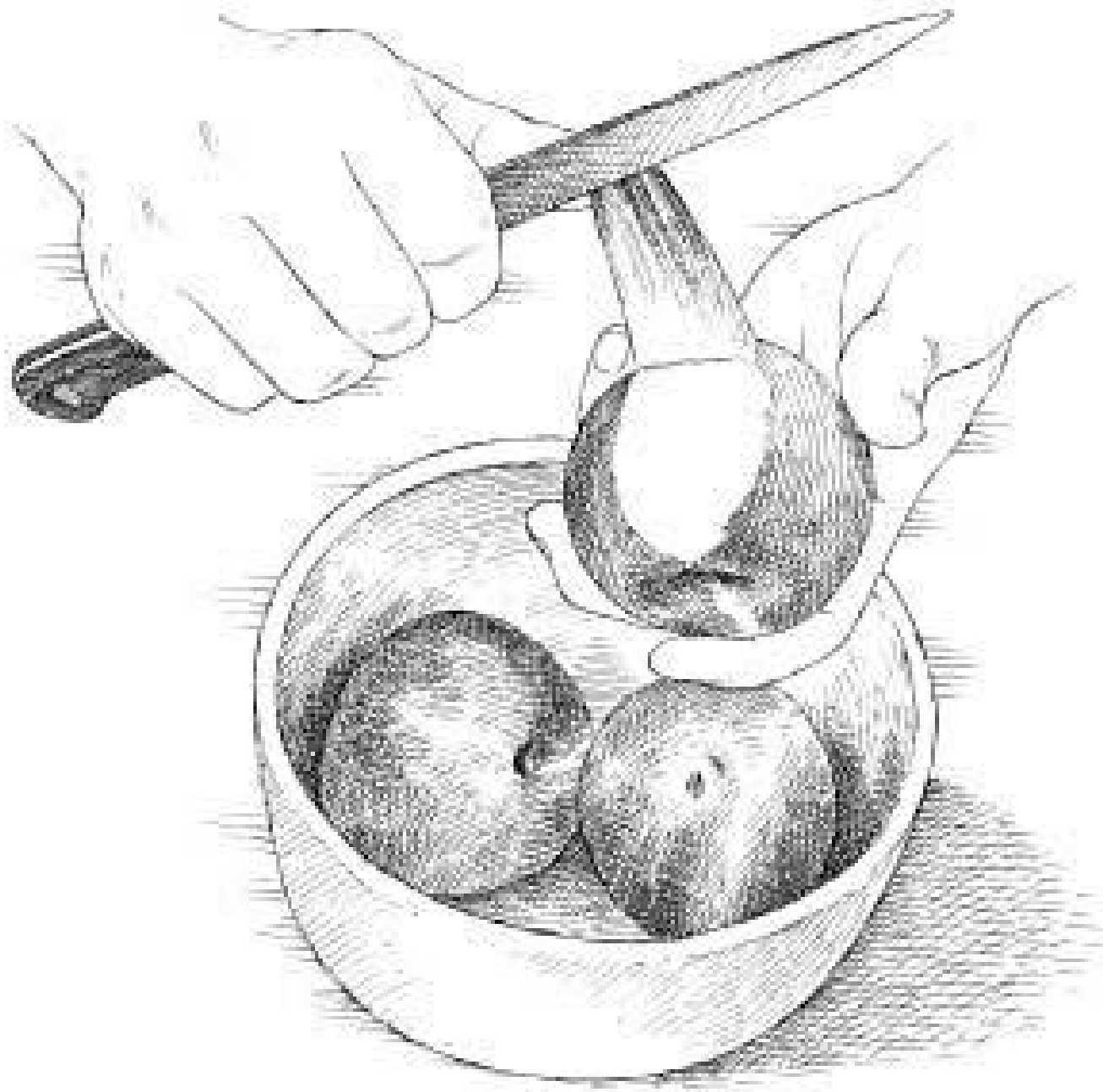

Figure 26.
If the peaches are soft, drop them into a pot of boiling water for 10 seconds to loosen their skins.

Retrieve the peaches with a slotted spoon, cool slighlty, and then use a paring knife to scrape away the skins.

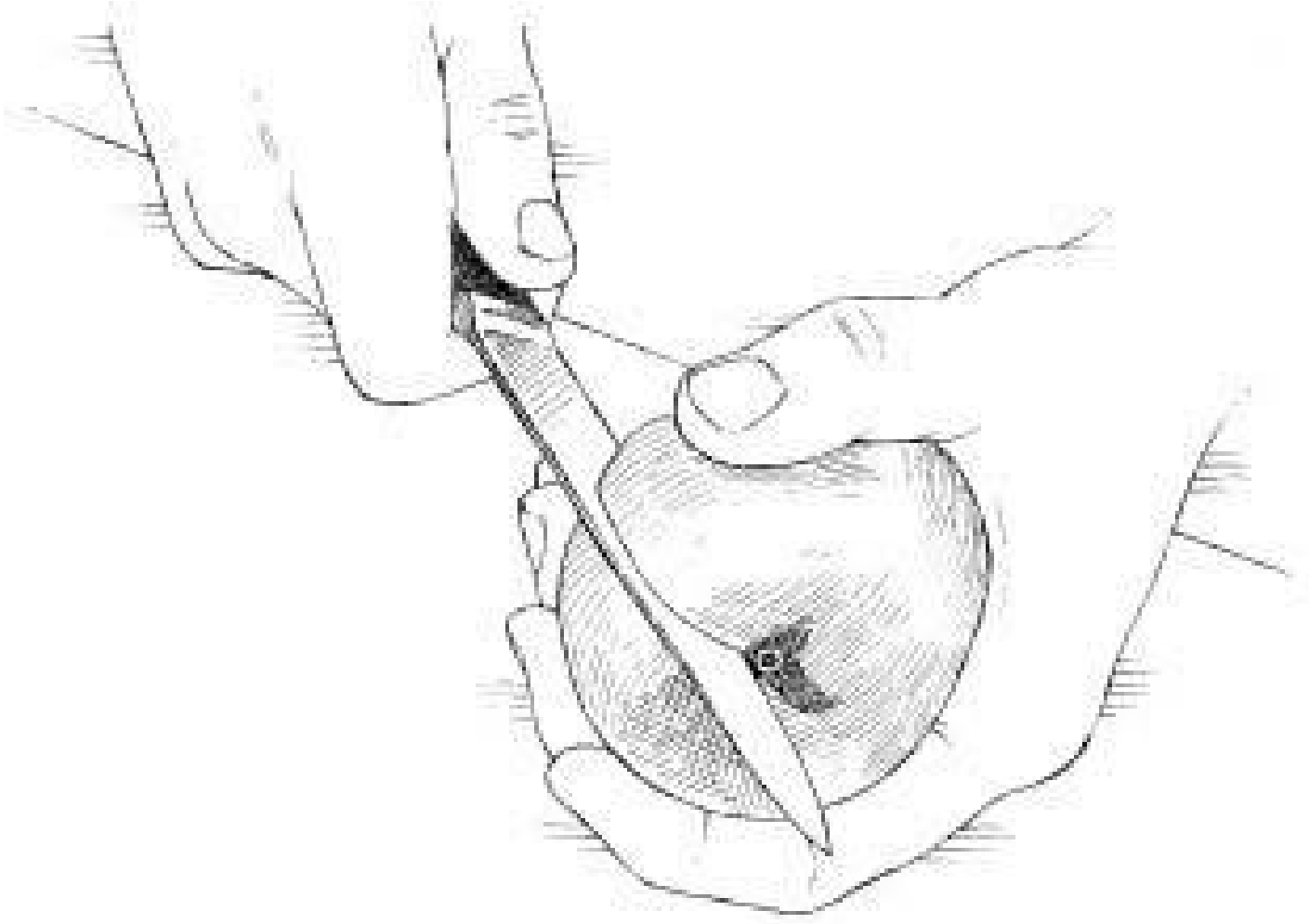

Figure 27.
To pit peaches, begin by running a small, sharp knife in a circle around each peeled peach, making sure to cut through the stem end.

Figure 28.
Twist the peach halves to separate them. Remove the pit and chop the peaches into $^{1}/_{2}$-inch pieces.

Cherry Ice Cream

NOTE: ***Use a cherry pitter to prepare the cherries or see figures 29 and 30 if you prefer to remove the pits by hand.***

$1\frac{1}{2}$ cups whole milk

$1\frac{1}{2}$ cups heavy cream

1 cup sugar

4 large egg yolks

$\frac{3}{4}$ pound ripe cherries, pitted

2 teaspoons vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS:

Follow Master Recipe instructions for Vanilla Ice Cream. While custard is chilling, place cherries and remaining $\frac{1}{4}$

cup sugar in medium skillet. Cook over medium-high heat, crushing cherries with back of spoon until thick and syrupy, 10 to 15 minutes. Chill cherry mixture. Add vanilla to chilled custard and churn as directed. Add cherry mixture to ice cream about 1 minute before churning is completed.

VARIATION:

For **Cherry Chocolate Chunk Ice Cream**, add 2 ounces chopped bittersweet or semisweet chocolate bar (*see* figure 15) about 30 seconds before churning is completed.

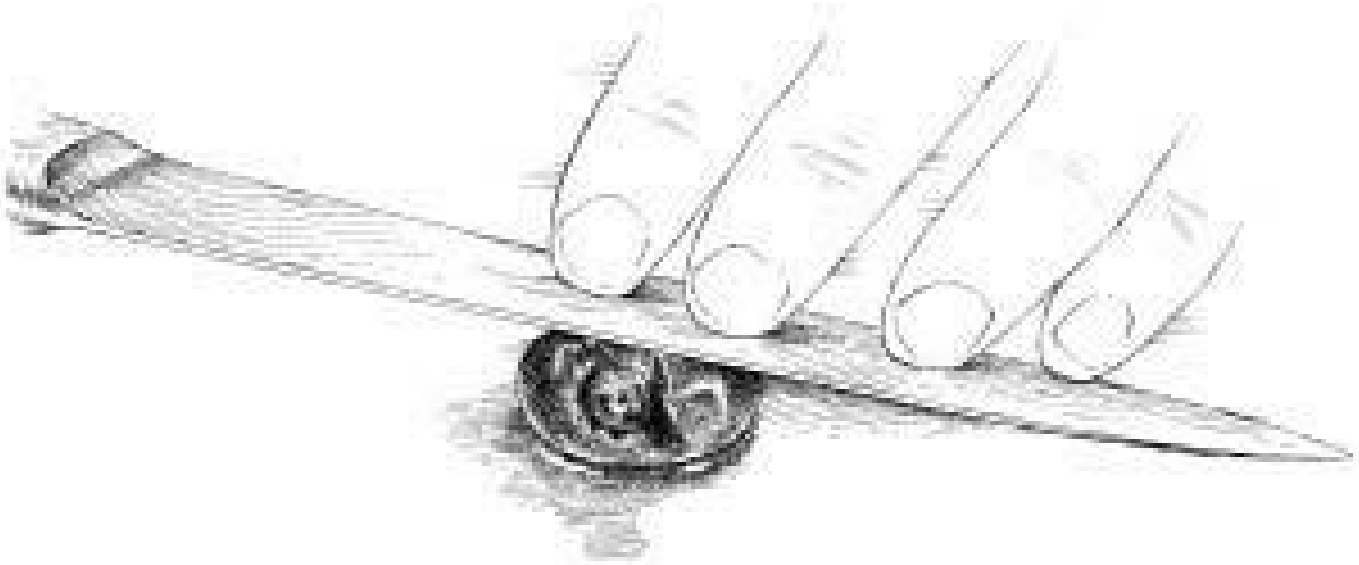

Figure 29.
If you don't own a cherry pitter, try this technique for removing the pits by hand. Use the side of a chef's knife to gently press down on the side of the cherry and loosen the pit.

Figure 30.
With your index finger and thumb on one hand and your thumb on the second hand, gently squeeze the cherry slightly below the bottom of the pit. The pit should come right out the top of the cherry with a minimal loss of juices or pulp.

Banana Ice Cream

NOTE: ***Straining the bananas (see figures 31 and 32) removes all the fibers and solids and gives this ice cream a smooth, silky texture. If desired, mash and strain two bananas and cut the third banana into $^{1}/_{4}$-inch cubes and add them to the ice cream about 30 seconds before churning is completed.***

$1^{1}/_{2}$ cups whole milk

$1^{1}/_{2}$ cups heavy cream

$^{3}/_{4}$ cup sugar

4 large egg yolks

3 very ripe medium bananas,

peeled, mashed with a fork, and strained (*see* figures 31 and 32)

2 teaspoons vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS:

Follow Master Recipe instructions for Vanilla Ice Cream, cooling custard until warm. Stir in strained bananas and chill to 40 degrees. Add vanilla extract and churn as directed.

VARIATIONS:

For **Banana Walnut Ice Cream**, add 2 ounces chopped, toasted walnuts about 30 seconds before churning is completed. *See* figure 18, for information on toasting nuts.

For **Banana Chocolate Chunk Ice Cream**, add 2 ounces chopped bittersweet or semisweet chocolate bar about 30 seconds before churning is completed. *See* figure 15, for information on chopping a chocolate bar for ice cream.

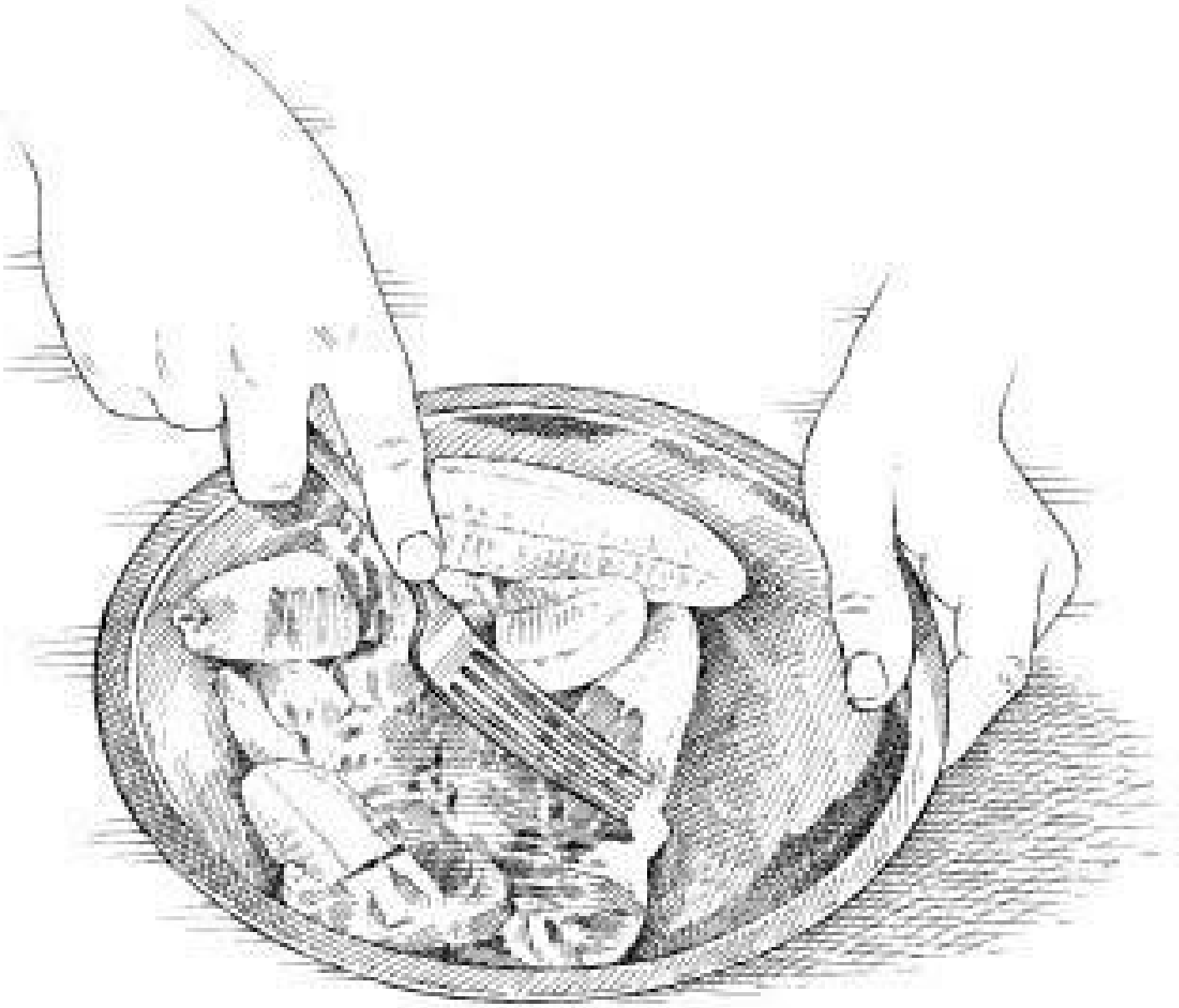

Figure 31.
Place the peeled ripe bananas in a medium bowl and mash them with a fork until smooth.

Figure 32.
Transfer the mashed bananas to a fine-mesh strainer and press the bananas with a rubber

spatula into a clean bowl. Discard the fibers in the strainer and use the smooth banana puree to flavor the custard.

Rum Raisin Ice Cream

NOTE: ***Dark rum will add more flavor to this ice cream and is recommended. The alcohol will prevent this ice cream from firming up completely as it churns. Plan on placing the ice cream in the freezer for several hours before serving.***

$^1/_2$ cup dark rum

$^3/_4$ cup raisins

$1^1/_2$ cups whole milk

$1^1/_2$ cups heavy cream

$^3/_4$ cup sugar

4 large egg yolks

INSTRUCTIONS:

Follow Master Recipe instructions for Vanilla Ice Cream, omitting vanilla from custard. Before making custard, warm rum and raisins in small saucepan. Remove pan from heat and steep 30 minutes. Drain and reserve rum and raisins separately. Stir rum into strained custard and chill. About 30 seconds before churning is completed, add reserved raisins.

GELATO

GELATO IS ITALIAN ICE CREAM. ALTHOUGH the ingredients are similar to American ice cream, the results are surprisingly different. First of all, gelato is often made with flavors we rarely see in America. Hazelnut and the combination of hazelnuts and chocolate, called gianduja, are as common in Italian ice cream shops as vanilla or strawberry.

Of course, Italians make coffee gelato, but since coffee ice cream is a common American flavor we have not included

this recipe. In addition to hazelnut and gianduja, you will find recipes for fig, amaretti, and cinnamon gelato in this chapter.

Besides unusual flavors, many American visitors to Italy are struck by the intensity of the flavors in gelato. Gelato should not contain a hint of hazelnuts or cinnamon, rather a strong jolt. Many gelato recipes use large amounts of flavoring ingredients, and some add liqueurs for a further boost. While American ice cream is often about the cream, gelato is about the flavorings.

There are several reasons for this difference. In general, American ice cream contains more butterfat. The additional fat coats our tongues and dulls

the perception of flavors. While we find that American ice cream is best made with equal parts heavy cream and whole milk, gelato requires a lighter hand, with almost two parts milk for each part cream. The texture will be less indulgent and rich, but the flavors are more intense.

Another important difference is temperature. Gelaterias in Italy generally serve their product at a higher temperature than do American ice cream shops. Because cold dulls flavors, a higher serving temperature heightens the intensity of gelato. It also makes gelato less icy and helps counteract the lower butterfat content.

We find that gelato tastes best when served at 15 degrees, about five degrees higher than American ice cream. At this temperature, gelato will not be as firm as ice cream, and it should be eaten with a spoon (as it is in Italy) and not licked from a cone.

Hazelnut Gelato

NOTE: ***Toasting the hazelnuts twice, once before skinning and once after, gives you an incredibly delicious and intense nut flavor.***

2 cups shelled hazelnuts, toasted, skinned, and toasted again (*see* figures 33 and 36)

$2^1/_4$ cups whole milk

$1^1/_4$ cups heavy cream

$^3/_4$ cup sugar

4 large egg yolks

1 tablespoon Frangelico or other hazelnut liqueur (optional)

1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS:

Follow Master Recipe instructions for Vanilla Ice Cream. Before making custard, grind nuts in food processor and then add them to almost-simmering milk and cream. Remove pan from heat and steep 30 minutes. Pour through fine-mesh strainer and into clean saucepan, pressing down on nuts to extract as much liquid as possible. Discard nuts. Add 1/2 cup sugar to saucepan and heat mixture to 175 degrees. Proceed with recipe as directed, stirring in optional Frangelico with vanilla.

Figure 33.
Toasting hazelnuts loosens their bitter skins and brings out their flavor. Start by toasting the nuts

in a 350-degree oven until they are fragrant and their skins are starting to blister and crack, about 15 minutes. Transfer the nuts to the center of a clean tea towel.

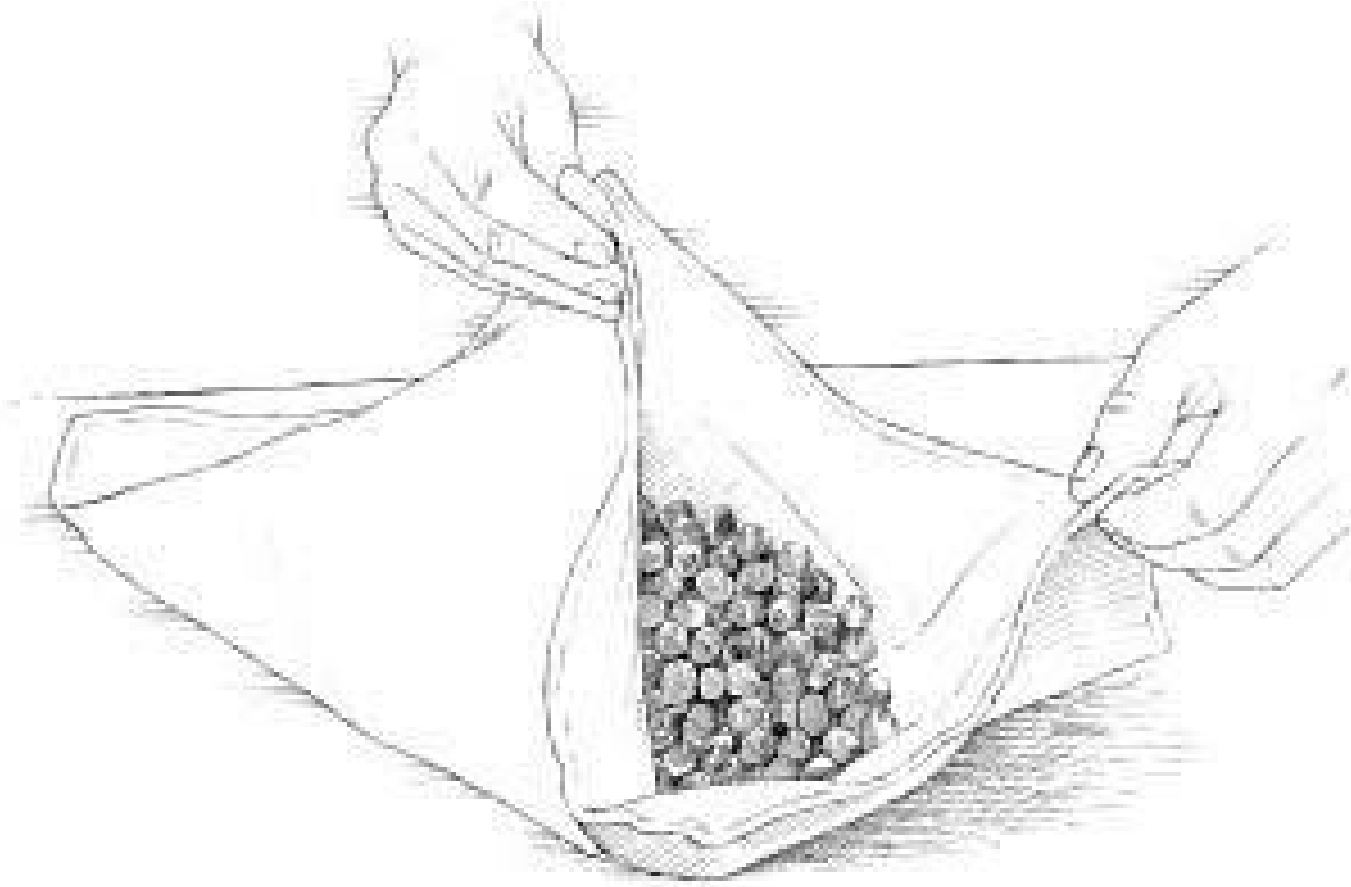

Figure 34.
Bring up the sides of the tea towel and twist it closed to seal in the nuts.

Figure 35.

Rub the nuts together through the towel to scrape off as much of the brown skin as possible. It's fine if patches of skin remain.

Figure 36.
Carefully open the towel on a flat work surface. Gently roll the nuts away from the skins. Return the nuts to the oven and toast them until they have a rich golden

color, about 15 minutes.

Gianduja Gelato

NOTE: ***The combination of chocolate and hazelnuts, called gianduja, is a classic in Italian cakes, candies, and ice creams.***

2 cups shelled hazelnuts, toasted, skinned, and toasted again (*see* figures 33 and 36)

$2^1/_4$ cups whole milk

$1^1/_4$ cups heavy cream

$^3/_4$ cup sugar

4 large egg yolks

$^1/_4$ cup unsweetened cocoa powder, preferably Dutch-process

1 tablespoon hazelnut liqueur (optional)

$^1/_2$ teaspoon vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS:

Follow Master Recipe instructions for Vanilla Ice Cream. Before making custard, grind nuts in food processor and then add to almost-simmering milk and cream. Remove pan from heat and steep 30 minutes. Pour through fine-mesh strainer and into clean saucepan, pressing down on nuts to extract as much liquid as possible. Discard nuts. Add $^1/_2$ cup sugar to saucepan and heat mixture to 175 degrees. Proceed with recipe as directed, adding cocoa to egg yolk-sugar

mixture (*see* figure 17). Stir in optional liqueur with vanilla.

Fig Gelato

NOTE: ***In season, many Italian gelaterias use fresh figs. Dried figs are more reliable and give gelato an even more intense flavor. Light brown calimyrna figs work especially well in this recipe.***

1 cup dried figs (about $^{1}/_{4}$ pound), minced
2 cups whole milk
1 cup heavy cream
$^{3}/_{4}$ cup sugar
4 large egg yolks
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS:

Follow Master Recipe instructions for Vanilla Ice Cream. Before making custard, place figs and $^{3}/_{4}$ cup water in $2^{1}/_{2}$-quart saucepan. Simmer until figs are tender and liquid is nearly evaporated, about 10 minutes. Stir in $^{1}/_{2}$ cup sugar and cook, stirring often, until dissolved. Add milk and cream and heat to 175 degrees. Proceed with recipe, beating remaining sugar and egg yolks as directed.

Amaretti Gelato

NOTE: ***Crisp almond macaroons, known in Italian as amaretti, are sold in better supermarkets and Italian foods shops. Since the cookies are crumbled, either large or small amaretti will work in this recipe.*** ***See figure 16******, for information on crumbling cookies for ice cream.***

2 cups whole milk
1 cup heavy cream
$^{3}/_{4}$ cup sugar
4 large egg yolks
3 tablespoons Amaretto or almond-flavored liqueur
1 cup crumbled amaretti

cookies

INSTRUCTIONS:

Follow Master Recipe instructions for Vanilla Ice Cream, replacing vanilla with Amaretto. About 30 seconds before churning is completed, add crumbled amaretti cookies.

Cinnamon Gelato

NOTE: ***Ground cinnamon gives this gelato a warm, rich flavor that is distinctively Italian. Make sure your cinnamon is fresh.***

2 cups whole milk
1 cup heavy cream
2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
$^3/_4$ cup sugar
4 large egg yolks
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS:

Follow Master Recipe instructions for Vanilla Ice Cream, stirring cinnamon into $^1/_2$ cup sugar (*see* figure 21) and

then adding mixture to milk and cream in step 1.

SAUCES AND ACCOMPANIMENTS

ICE CREAM CAN BE ENJOYED ON ITS OWN OR SERVED a la mode with a slice of pie. However, there are times when a spoonful of hot fudge sauce and a dollop of whipped cream are appropriate. This chapter contains a variety of classic American sauces for ice cream along with our foolproof technique for whipping cream.

The sauce recipes that follow may be used on their own with ice cream or as part of sundaes. One-quarter cup of

sauce makes a generous topping for two scoops of ice cream. Most sauces may be prepared well in advance and stored in the refrigerator for days, if not weeks. Sauces that are best eaten warm, such as hot fudge, should be heated in a double boiler or microwave as needed.

Sundaes are as all-American as apple pie, maybe even more so because they were actually invented in this country just before the turn of the century. The precise origins of the ice cream sundae are a bit murky. Several sources cite nineteenth-century prohibitions against the drinking of soda water on the Sabbath. With popular ice cream sodas out of bounds, ice cream parlors started serving sauces and other toppings with

ice cream on Sunday.

However the practice began, a sundae appeals to children as well as adults. Spoon one-quarter cup of any of the following sauce recipes over two scoops of ice cream and then top off with a one-half-cup or generous three-quarter-cup dollop of whipped cream. A sprinkling of chopped, toasted walnuts and a maraschino cherry finish off a classic sundae.

Hot Fudge Sauce

NOTE: ***This recipe produces a thick, chewy sauce that hardens when poured over cold ice cream. We love hot fudge sauce over most any ice cream. This recipe makes about two and one-quarter cups.***

10 ounces semisweet chocolate, chopped

3 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into pieces

$^{1}/_{4}$ cup sifted Dutch-process cocoa powder

$^{3}/_{4}$ cup sugar

$^{3}/_{4}$ cup heavy cream

3 tablespoons light corn syrup

Pinch salt

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Melt chocolate and butter together, stirring often, in small heatproof bowl set over pan of almost-simmering water. Off heat, whisk in cocoa powder until lumps dissolve. Set aside.

2. Combine sugar, cream, corn syrup, salt, and 2 tablespoons water in heavy-bottomed nonreactive saucepan. Cook over medium-low heat, stirring constantly and scraping pot sides occasionally until mixture comes to boil. Simmer, stirring constantly to keep sauce

from boiling over (*see* figure 37), until all sugar dissolves, about 2 minutes.

3. Remove pan from heat. Stir in vanilla and cool 2 minutes. Whisk in melted chocolate and butter. Mixture will thicken slightly as it cools. Serve sauce warm. Sauce may be refrigerated in airtight container for several weeks. Reheat sauce gently in double boiler.

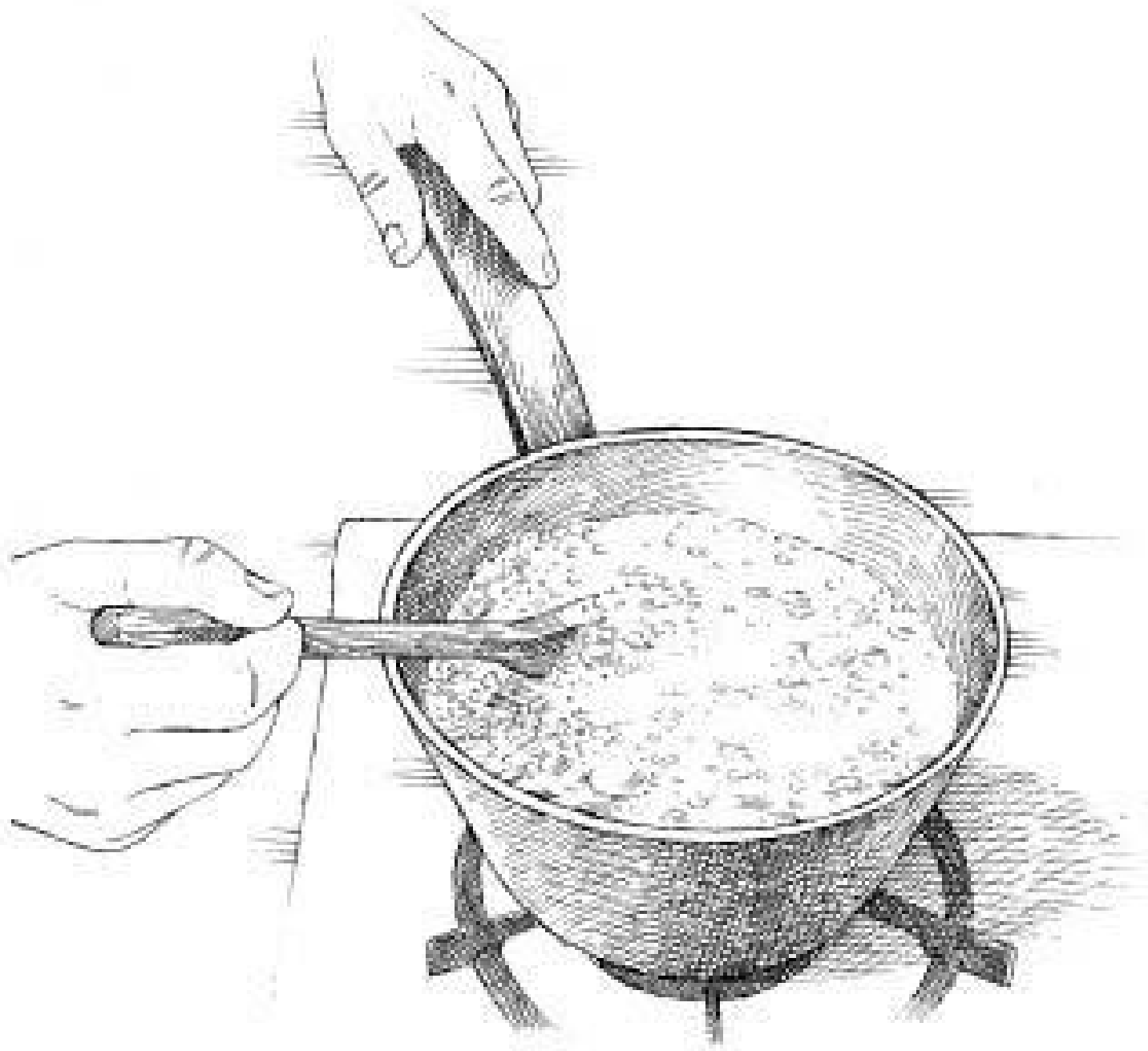

Figure 37.
When the sugar, cream, corn syrup, and water mixture comes to a boil it will quickly increase in volume. To keep the foaming

mixture from rising out of the pan, stir constantly with a wooden spoon. This mixture must be cooked until all the sugar dissolves, about 2 minutes.

Classic Caramel Sauce

NOTE: ***This smooth, silky sauce is a great match with maple walnut, butter pecan, vanilla, or any banana ice cream. This recipe makes about one and three-quarters cups.***

$1\frac{1}{2}$ cups sugar

1 cup heavy cream

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place sugar and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water in medium, heavy-bottomed saucepan. Turn heat to medium-low and stir often until sugar dissolves. Increase heat to high and cook, without stirring but swirling pan occasionally (*see* figure 38), until

caramel is uniformly golden amber color, 8 to 10 minutes.

2. Put on oven mitts to protect hands. Remove pan from heat and slowly whisk in cream a few tablespoons at a time, making sure to keep bubbling caramel away from arms. Stir until smooth. Sauce thickens as it cools. Serve warm or at room temperature. Sauce may be refrigerated in airtight container for several weeks. Reheat sauce in microwave or double boiler before using.

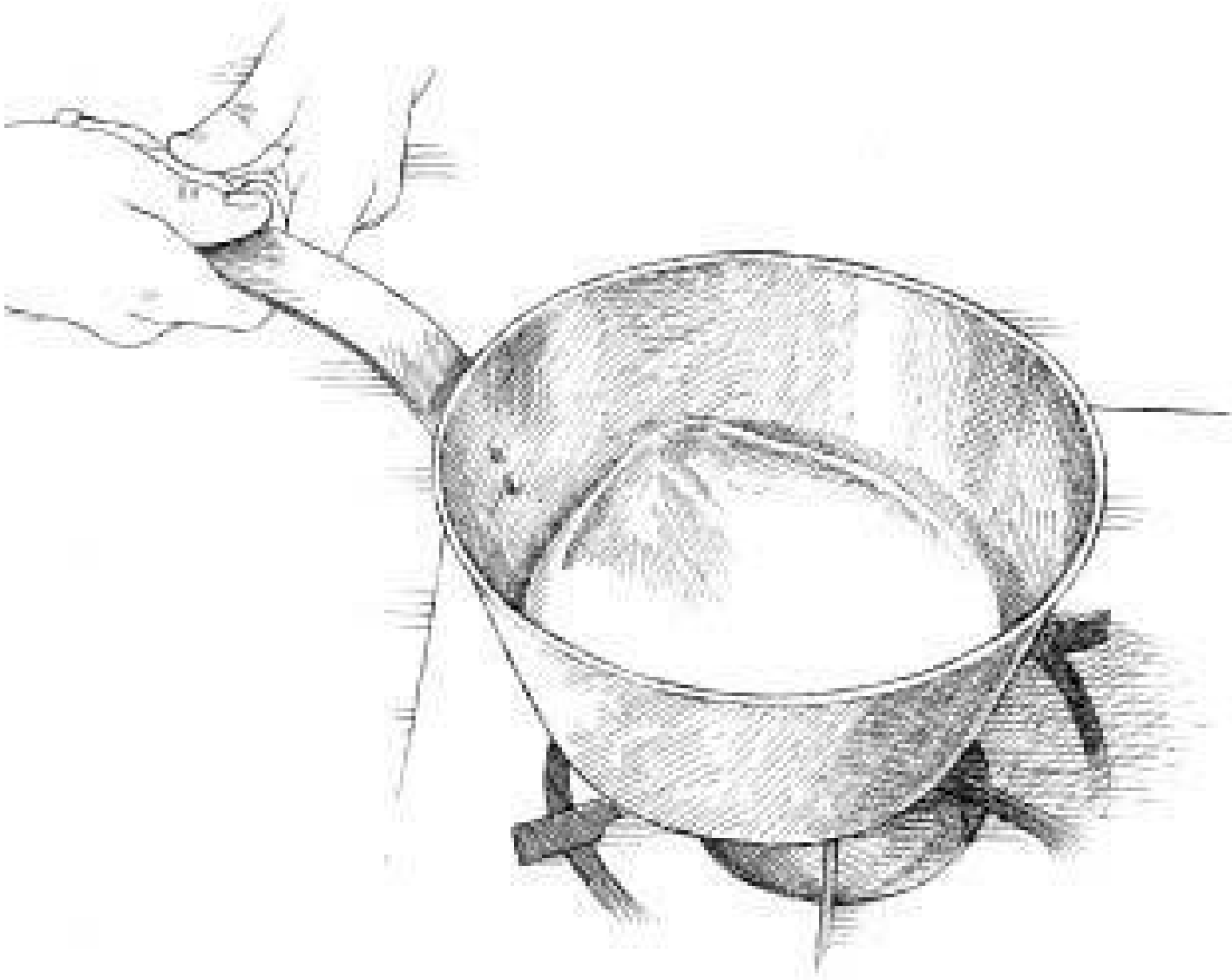

Figure 38.
When making caramel sauce, do not stir once the sugar has dissolved. However, do swirl the sauce occasionally by holding the handle and moving the pan back

and forth across the burner.

Best Butterscotch Sauce

NOTE: ***Light brown sugar gives this sauce a more intense caramelized flavor than that of plain caramel sauce. The butter gives it a richer mouth feel as well. This recipe yields about one and one-half cups.***

1 cup firmly packed light brown sugar

$^1/_4$ cup light corn syrup

3 tablespoons unsalted butter

Pinch salt

$^1/_2$ cup heavy cream

$1^1/_2$ teaspoons vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Combine sugar, corn syrup, butter, and salt in small, heavy-bottomed saucepan. Cook over medium heat, stirring often, until sugar melts.

2. Reduce heat to low and simmer without stirring until syrup reaches 280 degrees on candy thermometer, about 10 minutes.

3. Remove pan from heat and slowly stir in cream until sauce is smooth. Stir in vanilla. Sauce thickens as it cools. Serve warm or at room temperature. Sauce may be refrigerated in airtight container for several weeks. Reheat sauce in

microwave or double boiler before using.

Melba Sauce

NOTE: ***Melba sauce is a fancy name for raspberry sauce. It's wonderful over vanilla ice cream with sliced fruit, especially peaches. If you like, stir in one-half cup lightly crushed fresh raspberries just before serving. Without the fresh berries, this recipe yields about one cup.***

1 12-ounce package frozen raspberries, thawed

1/2 cup sugar

1 tablespoon lemon juice

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place berries and sugar in small

saucepan. Cook, stirring often, over medium heat until sugar dissolves and berries soften, 3 to 4 minutes.

2. Remove pan from heat and stir in lemon juice. Transfer sauce to fine-mesh strainer set over small bowl. Press on solids to extract as much liquid as possible. Discard seeds. Serve at room temperature. Sauce may be refrigerated in airtight container for several days.

Warm Bing Cherry Sauce

NOTE: ***This sauce is wonderful over vanilla ice cream. Use fresh fruit as directed below or a twelve-ounce bag of frozen pitted cherries, which will work just fine. Fresh cherries may be pitted by hand (see figures 33 and 36)*** **or with a cherry pitter. This recipe yields about one and one-half cups.**

1 pound cherries, pitted
1/2 cup sugar
1/4 cup light corn syrup
1/4 cup brandy
2 teaspoons cornstarch
1/2 teaspoon lemon juice

1/8 teaspoon almond extract

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place cherries, sugar, corn syrup, and brandy in medium saucepan. Bring to boil, lower heat, and simmer, stirring occasionally and using back of spoon to gently break apart cherries, until sauce thickens slightly, about 8 minutes.

2. Remove pan from heat. Stir cornstarch and 1 tablespoon cold water together in small bowl. Add cornstarch mixture to sauce and stir until incorporated.

3. Return pan to heat and bring sauce to

boil. Simmer, stirring constantly, until sauce thickens, about 1 minute.

4. Remove pan from heat and stir in lemon juice and almond extract. Sauce thickens as it cools. Serve warm. Sauce may be refrigerated in airtight container for several days. Reheat sauce in microwave or double boiler before using.

Perfect Whipped Cream

NOTE: ***Pasteurized cream has a superior flavor to ultrapasteurized cream and delivers more volume when whipped. Use either, but note that pasteurized cream overwhips more quickly, so you may prefer to slightly underwhip it, then remove the beaters and handwhip the cream a few strokes to the desired consistency. This recipe makes about four cups, a generous amount for six sundaes.***

2 cups chilled heavy cream
2 tablespoons granulated sugar
2 teaspoons vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Chill nonreactive, deep 2-quart bowl and beaters for handheld mixer in freezer at least 20 minutes.

2. Add cream, sugar, and vanilla to chilled bowl. Beat on low speed until small bubbles form, about 30 seconds. Increase speed to medium; continue beating until beaters leave a trail in thickening cream, about 30 seconds. Increase speed to high; continue beating until cream is smooth, thick, and nearly doubled in volume, about 30 seconds for soft peaks (class="italic">see figure 39) and about 40 seconds for stiff peaks (*see*

figure 40). If necessary, finish beating by hand to adjust consistency.

3. Use immediately or transfer to fine sieve or strainer set over bowl and refrigerate for up to 8 hours.

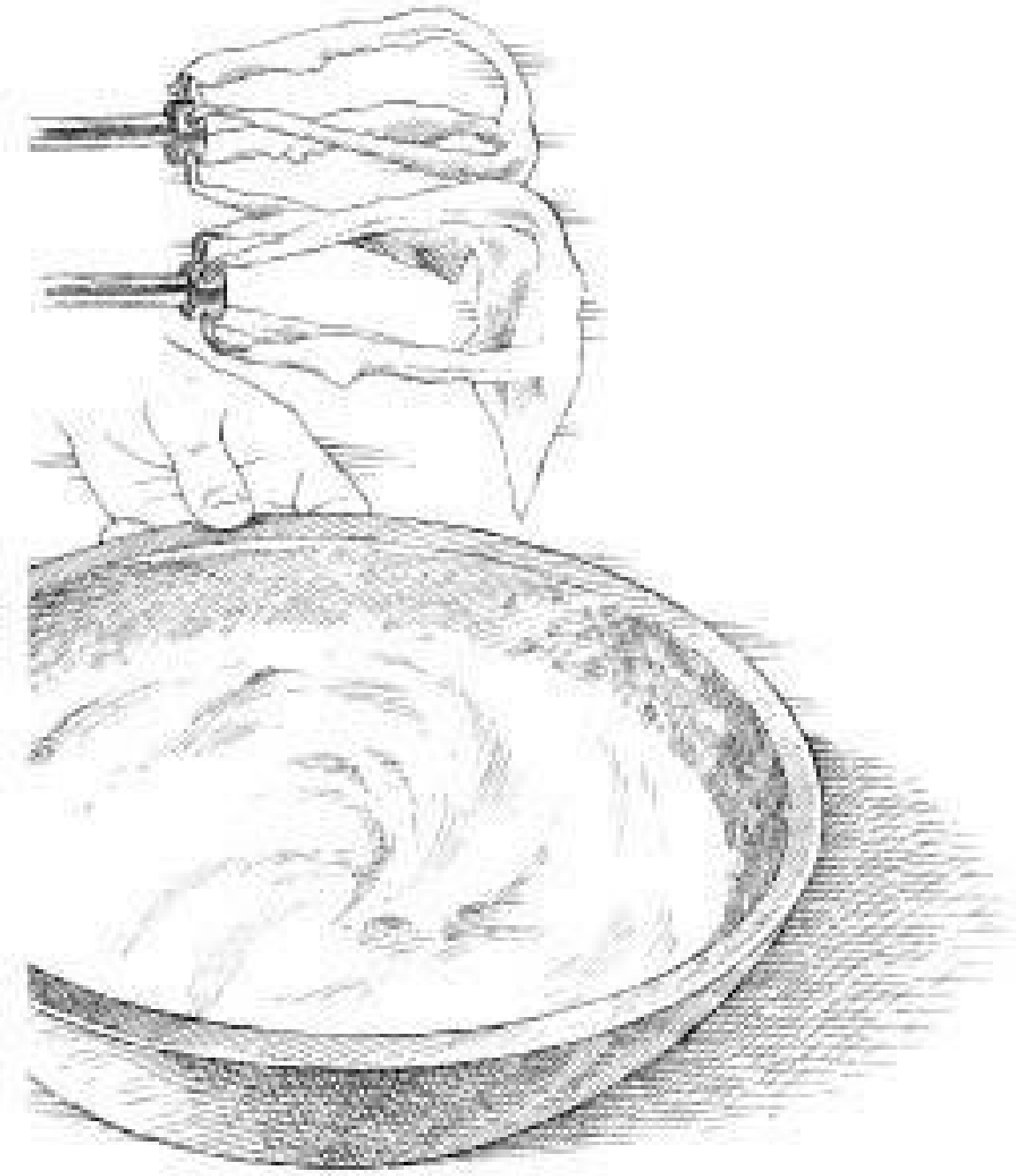

Figure 39.
Cream whipped to soft peaks will droop slightly from the ends of the beaters.

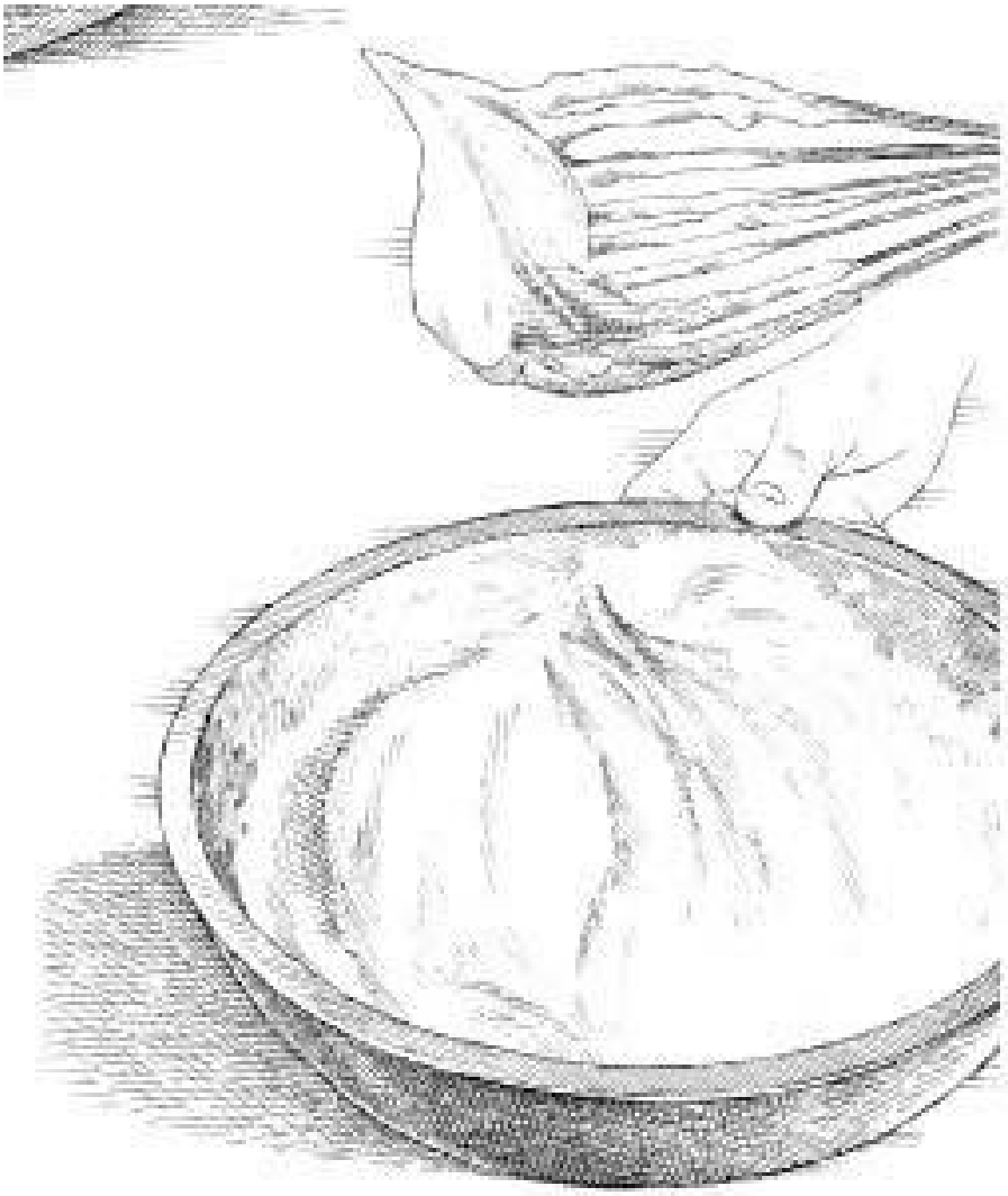

Figure 40.
Cream whipped to stiff peaks will cling tightly to the ends of the beaters. Cream is traditionally whipped to this stage for ice

cream sundaes.

HOW TO MAKE SAUCES & GRAVIES

Sauce Basics

Skillet Sauces

Chicken Jus

Turkey Gravy

Beef Gravy

Béchamel and Velouté

Mayonnaise

Hollandaise and Béarnaise

Butter Sauces

Barbecue Sauce

Asian Sauces

Vegetable Purées and Sauces

SAUCE BASICS

THE MYSTIQUE THAT SURROUNDS SAUCE making probably scares off many home cooks. However, if you follow some basic principles, good sauces are generally easy to prepare and will vastly improve your cooking. There are three general areas of concern: techniques, equipment, and ingredients.

TECHNIQUES

A number of techniques and terms are used (and explained) throughout this book. Here's a broad overview.

DEGLAZING When you have finished cooking a roast or cutlets, you will notice browned bits clinging to the pan. These bits of caramelized protein are highly flavorful and are the basis for a pan sauce or gravy. To loosen and dissolve these bits, you must add liquid to the empty (and hot) pan. (Keep a skillet over the flame, or put a roasting pan over two burners, as shown in figure 3.) Because the pan is so hot, the liquid immediately starts to boil. This process is called *deglazing* since the liquid in effect loosens the layer of browned bits and provides a medium into which they can dissolve.

REDUCING Many sauces, especially those made with stock, depend on the concentrated flavor and improved texture developed by means of the prolonged simmering of liquids. Most recipes suggest reducing sauces by a specific amount. This is meant to be a general guideline—you should eyeball the sauce rather than pouring it into a measuring cup. Thus, if a recipe calls for adding one cup of liquid and reducing it by two-thirds, you should simmer until there looks to be about one-third cup of liquid left in the pan.

THICKENING Thin sauces will run off foods, so sauces must generally be thick enough to cling and coat. Although reducing liquids will improve their texture, many sauces rely on thickeners to give them body.

Butter can be swirled into pan sauces just before serving to give them body and richness, while egg yolks can be used to turn liquid fat into thick, creamy sauces. For example, oil and egg yolks create mayonnaise; melted butter and egg yolks produce hollandaise.

Flour may be used as a thickener in two ways. It can be combined with melted fat in a hot pan to form a roux, which is then diluted with liquid. As the

sauces simmers, the starches in the flour will thicken the liquid. The other option is to blend flour with softened butter and stir this mixture, called a *beurre manié*, into sauces toward the end of the cooking time. We generally prefer the roux because there's more time for the raw, bitter taste of the flour to cook off.

Cornstarch is another popular thickener. It will form lumps if it's added directly to hot liquids. But if the cornstarch is whisked with a little room temperature liquid to form a slurry and is then added to the hot liquid, it will thicken quickly and tastelessly. Cornstarch breaks down if cooked too long, so use it once a sauce is nearly finished.

EMULSIFYING An emulsion is a mixture of two things that don't ordinarily mix, such as oil and water or oil and vinegar. The only way to mix them is to stir or whisk so strenuously that the two ingredients break down into tiny droplets. Eventually one of the fluids will break entirely into droplets so tiny that they remain separated by the opposite fluid, at least temporarily. Mayonnaise is an emulsion, as is hollandaise sauce, beurre blanc, and Béarnaise sauce.

EQUIPMENT

You will need the following items to

make the recipes in this book.

SAUCEPAN A saucepan is a straight-sided pan, generally ranging in size from one quart to four quarts. Since saucepans often spend quite a bit of time on the stovetop, their bottoms must be heavy enough to prevent scorching or burning. In general, we find that shiny pans are easier to work with—it's difficult to judge just how brown something is in a dark pan.

WHISK A wire whisk is the best tool for combining ingredients by hand and preventing lumps from forming. A whisk

creates a silky, smooth texture that is otherwise impossible. Make sure to buy a whisk with sturdy wires and that the handle is well-constructed and firmly anchored to the wires.

WOODEN SPOON A long-handled spoon can be used to loosen browned bits from a skillet that is being deglazed, or to stir roux from the edges of the pan back into a sauce. When the thin wires of a whisk are too delicate, we turn to a wooden spoon.

FINE-MESH SIEVE A strainer or sieve covered with fine mesh (like that on a

screen window) is essential for separating solids from liquids. Bits of vegetable will fall right through a colander or standard strainer, often marring the texture or appearance of a sauce.

BLENDER OR FOOD PROCESSOR When you want to turn liquids and solids into a smooth, airy sauce, a blender or food processor is called for. In general, a blender handles hot liquids better (a food processor can leak) and also whips more air into sauces, creating a lighter texture.

INGREDIENTS

The following ingredients are used over and over in this book.

BUTTER We use unsalted butter in our test kitchen. We like its sweet, delicate flavor and prefer to add our own salt to recipes. We find that the quality of salted butter is often inferior and that each manufacturer adds a different amount of salt, making it difficult to follow a recipe.

CHICKEN BROTH In restaurants, pan sauces start with veal, chicken, beef, or fish stock. In a nod to convenience, we call for canned chicken broth for the

recipes in this book. If you have homemade stock on hand, use it. Stock has more body than canned broth (the former usually contains gelatin from bones) and will improve the texture (as well as the flavor) of pan sauces.

Because canned broth is reduced in so many sauces, we recommend use of low-sodium products to prevent sauces from becoming overly salty. Canned broths from Swanson's and Campbell's (which are owned by the same company) have consistently received top ratings in our taste tests. Canned beef broth is horrid. None of the dozen brands we tried had any beef flavor; use canned chicken broth instead.

WINE Wine is another essential component in many sauces. We have found that it pays to use good wine, but there's no need to spend a fortune. The so-called cooking wine found on grocery store shelves is generally harsh and unpalatable, especially when the wine is reduced and unpleasant flavors are concentrated. In our tests, we have consistently preferred decent drinking wines (priced at about $10 a bottle). Save more expensive wines for the table, where their subtlety can be appreciated.

SKILLET SAUCES

SKILLET SAUCES ARE WHAT YOU MAKE IN A HOT pan once thin cuts of meat, poultry, or fish have been browned and transferred to a platter in a warm oven. All of these sauces start with the browned bits and thin film of fat that remains in the pan once the chicken cutlets, boneless steaks, or fish fillets have been removed.

In theory, cast iron would seem to be a good choice for sautéing; in fact, however, we do not recommended cast iron because it can react with some

acidic skillet sauces. Heavy stainless steel pans with an aluminum or copper core, such as those manufactured by All-Clad, or heavy anodized aluminum pans, such as those made by Calphalon, are our favorite choices in the test kitchen. We like these pans because they are heavy and conduct heat evenly across the entire bottom of the pan. Avoid thin, inexpensive pans because pan drippings are far more likely to burn, especially at the high temperatures needed for sautéing.

To make a skillet sauce, start by sautéing aromatics (garlic, shallots, onions) in the pan drippings. Next, deglaze the pan with some liquid—usually stock or wine, but sometimes

vinegar, fruit juice, or bottled clam juice—and scrape with a wooden spoon to loosen the flavorful browned bits. This step is crucial. Once loosened, the browned bits will dissolve into the simmering sauce and enrich it mightily. The liquid should be reduced to a nice, thick consistency—a process that takes about four minutes. To preserve their flavor, we found it best to add seasonings, such as mustard, vinegar, and herbs, once the sauce has been reduced.

We like to finish most sauces by swirling in some softened butter. The butter enriches the sauce and gives it more body. We found it best to swirl in

the butter off heat with a wooden spoon so that the butter does not separate.

Master Recipe

Herb Skillet Sauce

makes about $^{1}/_{3}$ cup, enough for 4 servings

NOTE: ***This simple formula is open to endless interpretation. The basic sauce is best on chicken, pork, veal, or turkey. For sauces to accompany fish or beef, see the variations. Vary the amount of herb based on its intensity, using more parsley, basil, dill, or cilantro and less tarragon, mint, rosemary, sage, thyme, or oregano. If using low-sodium canned chicken***

broth, no salt is needed to season the sauce. If using homemade stock, season with salt once the sauce has been reduced and thickened with butter.

1/2 small onion or 1 large shallot, minced

1 cup canned low-sodium chicken broth

1 teaspoon to 1 tablespoon minced fresh herb

3 tablespoons unsalted butter, broken into several pieces and softened

Ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Once sautéed meat, poultry, or fish has been removed from pan, reduce heat to medium, then add onion and sauté in remaining fat until softened, about 30 seconds.

2. Increase heat to high, add broth, and scrape skillet bottom to loosen browned bits. Boil until liquid appears darker and slightly thicker (it should reduce to one-third of its original volume), about 4 minutes. Add any accumulated juices from plate with cooked meat, poultry, or fish and reduce sauce again for 1 minute.

3. Off heat, stir in herb, and swirl in

butter with wooden spoon until it melts and thickens sauce. Season with pepper to taste. Arrange cooked meat, poultry, or fish on plates and spoon sauce over. Serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Lemon-Caper Skillet Sauce

Best on poultry, veal, or white-fleshed fish.

Follow master recipe, adding 2 tablespoons lemon juice and 2 tablespoons drained small capers with accumulated meat, poultry, or fish juices. Use parsley as herb.

Marsala Skillet Sauce

Ideal with poultry or veal.

Follow master recipe, cooking 12 ounces sliced button mushrooms in pan once onion has softened. Once mushrooms have softened (this will take 2 to 3 minutes), add 1 cup Marsala in place of broth. Proceed as directed, using parsley as herb. Season with salt to taste.

Balsamic Vinegar and Rosemary Skillet Sauce

Good with poultry, beef, or hearty fish, such as cod.

Follow master recipe, replacing onion with 2 minced garlic cloves and reducing sautéing time to 15 seconds.

Replace broth with 1/2 cup each balsamic vinegar and red wine and add 1 teaspoon sugar with vinegar and wine. Use rosemary as herb. Season with salt to taste.

White Wine, Mustard, and Tarragon Skillet Sauce

For pork, poultry, or fish.

Follow master recipe, decreasing amount of broth to 1/2 cup and adding 1/3 cup dry white wine and 2 tablespoons cream with broth. Use 2 teaspoons tarragon as herb. Swirl in 1 tablespoon Dijon or country mustard with butter. Season with salt to taste.

Port Skillet Sauce with Dried Cherries and Rosemary

Good with pork, beef, or game.

Follow master recipe, decreasing amount of broth to $^{2}/_{3}$ cup and adding $^{1}/_{3}$ cup port and $^{1}/_{2}$ cup dried cherries with broth. Use 2 teaspoons rosemary as herb.

Red Wine Skillet Sauce

For red meat or strong-flavored fish such as salmon or cod.

Follow master recipe, adding 2 teaspoons brown sugar with onion or

shallot. Decrease amount of broth to $^1/_2$ cup and add $^1/_2$ cup red wine and 1 bay leaf at same time. Add 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar with accumulated meat or fish juices. Use 1 teaspoon thyme as herb. Season with salt to taste.

Fresh Tomato and Basil Skillet Sauce

For poultry, veal, or fish.

Follow master recipe, deglazing pan with $^1/_2$ cup dry white wine and either $^1/_2$ cup chicken broth (if cooking poultry or veal) or $^1/_2$ cup bottled clam juice (if cooking fish). Add 1 small peeled, cored, seeded, and diced tomato with

accumulated poultry or fish juices. Use 1 tablespoon basil as herb.

CHICKEN JUS

THE FRENCH WORD *JUS* TRANSLATES AS "juice" and refers to a light sauce for meat that is made from pan drippings produced by roasting. Once the roast is removed from the pan, the pan is placed on top of the stove. An aromatic (usually onion) is cooked briefly in the drippings and the pan is then deglazed with a liquid, usually stock. This kind of sauce is generally not thickened with flour or another starch, but it may be enriched with a little butter. The idea is to capture the natural flavor of the meat in a quick,

light sauce.

Many cooks may associate the term *jus* with roast beef. At *Cook's* we prefer a thickened gravy with roast beef. Since roast beef creates very few pan drippings, beef jus (as prepared in many restaurants) derives most of its flavor from homemade veal stock or demi-glace, which is usually made from highly concentrated veal or beef stock and wine. Substitute canned broth (as most home cooks are likely to do), and the resulting jus is harsh and not terribly beefy.

A chicken jus is another matter. A roast chicken creates enough drippings, especially if you tilt the chicken as you remove it from the roasting pan and let

the juices from the body cavity run out. Our goal here was to turn these drippings into a sauce that really tastes like chicken. We had two main questions: Should the pan juices be defatted, and what liquid is best for deglazing?

For our first test, we roasted a chicken and did not defat the pan drippings. The jus was disappointing. Excess fat seemed to dilute the chicken flavor, and the excess fat had caused the drippings to burn in the pan. These burned drippings gave the sauce a harsh quality that was unwelcome. Some or all of the fat had to go.

For our next test, we pulled excess fat

from both the body and neck cavities of the bird before roasting. When the bird was done, there was far less fat in the pan drippings. We then ladled off all but the sheerest film of the remaining fat. The finished jus was thin (one taster commented that it "fell off the chicken meat") and not very flavorful.

Clearly, some sort of middle ground was needed. For our next test we still removed excess fat from the cavities before roasting, but this time we left a decent amount of fat in the drippings. (Although measurements here tend to be imprecise, we left three tablespoons of drippings in the pan, and fat accounted for about half of that volume.) We then sautéed an onion in the drippings and

deglazed the pan with canned broth. This jus was excellent. There was enough fat to give the sauce body. The balance of fat to pan juices was just right, and the chicken flavor was strong.

We then tested several methods for removing excess fat from the pan drippings. When we tried a gravy separator, we found that many of the browned bits ended up stuck inside of the separator and were lost. The jus made with drippings defatted this way was less flavorful.

In the end, we found it best to tilt the roasting pan so that the drippings flowed into one corner. With a small ladle (the kind you might use to pour pancake

batter) or a large dinner spoon, simply skim off the fat that rises to the surface. We found that a small chicken (weighing between $3^1/_2$ and 4 pounds) produces an average $^1/_2$ cup pan drippings, provided that excess fat has been pulled out of the cavities before cooking. This means that you should be able to spoon off 4 or 5 tablespoons of fat to yield the 3 tablespoons of partially defatted pan drippings needed for the jus.

Canned chicken broth worked well as the deglazing liquid, but we wondered if other liquids would be appropriate. After numerous tests, we found that chicken broth did the best job of emphasizing the natural chicken flavor in

the jus but that lemon juice, white wine, and orange juice can be used to add another flavor dimension. The choice of deglazing liquid is a matter of personal preference and may depend on what else is being served.

Many chef cookbooks suggest straining the finished jus before serving. While this step might make a more refined sauce, we found that the flavor suffers a bit and there's no need to dirty a strainer and bowl.

Master Recipe

Chicken Jus

makes $^{1}/_{2}$ cup

NOTE: ***To make sure that the pan drippings are not overly fatty, remove excess fat from around both cavities of the chicken before roasting it. To maximize the amount of pan drippings, choose a roasting pan just large enough to hold the bird. To promote caramelization of pan drippings, roast the chicken in a V-rack. For the best-flavored jus, rub the chicken with a little softened butter***

before roasting. Vary the amount of herb in the sauce based on its intensity, using more parsley, basil, dill, or cilantro and less tarragon, rosemary, sage, thyme, or oregano.

Pan drippings

1/2 small onion or 1 large shallot, minced

1 cup canned low-sodium chicken broth

1 teaspoon to 1 tablespoon minced fresh herb

1 tablespoon unsalted butter, softened

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Remove chicken from pan, tilting bird

so that juices in cavity flow into pan (see figure 1). Place chicken on platter to rest. Tip pan and use small ladle to skim off excess fat, leaving behind about 3 tablespoons partially defatted pan drippings, including all brown bits, dark liquid, and chicken juice (see figure 2).

2. Place pan over two burners at medium heat. Add onion and stir into pan drippings for 30 seconds. Add broth and increase heat to medium-high. Stir and scrape up any browned bits with wooden spoon (see figure 3), boiling until reduced by half and deep golden brown, 4 to 5 minutes. Add any accumulated juices from platter with

chicken and reduce again for 1 minute.

3. Turn off heat. Stir in herb and then swirl in butter until it melts and thickens sauce. Serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Lemon Chicken Jus

Follow master recipe, adding 1 tablespoon lemon juice with accumulated chicken juices.

Chicken Jus with Mustard and Dill

Follow master recipe, using dill as herb and stirring in 1 tablespoon Dijon

mustard after butter melts.

Chicken Jus with White Wine, Garlic, and Parsley

Follow master recipe, replacing onion with 2 minced garlic cloves and reducing sautéing time to 15 seconds. Add $^{1}/_{2}$ cup white wine to garlic and increase heat to medium-high. Boil, scraping up browned bits until wine is almost evaporated, about 2 minutes. Add broth and proceed as directed. Use parsley as herb.

Chicken Jus with Orange and Cumin

Follow master recipe, adding 2 teaspoons ground cumin with onion. Reduce amount of broth to $^{1}/_{2}$ cup and add $^{1}/_{2}$ cup of orange juice at same time. Proceed as directed, omitting the herb. Season to taste with salt.

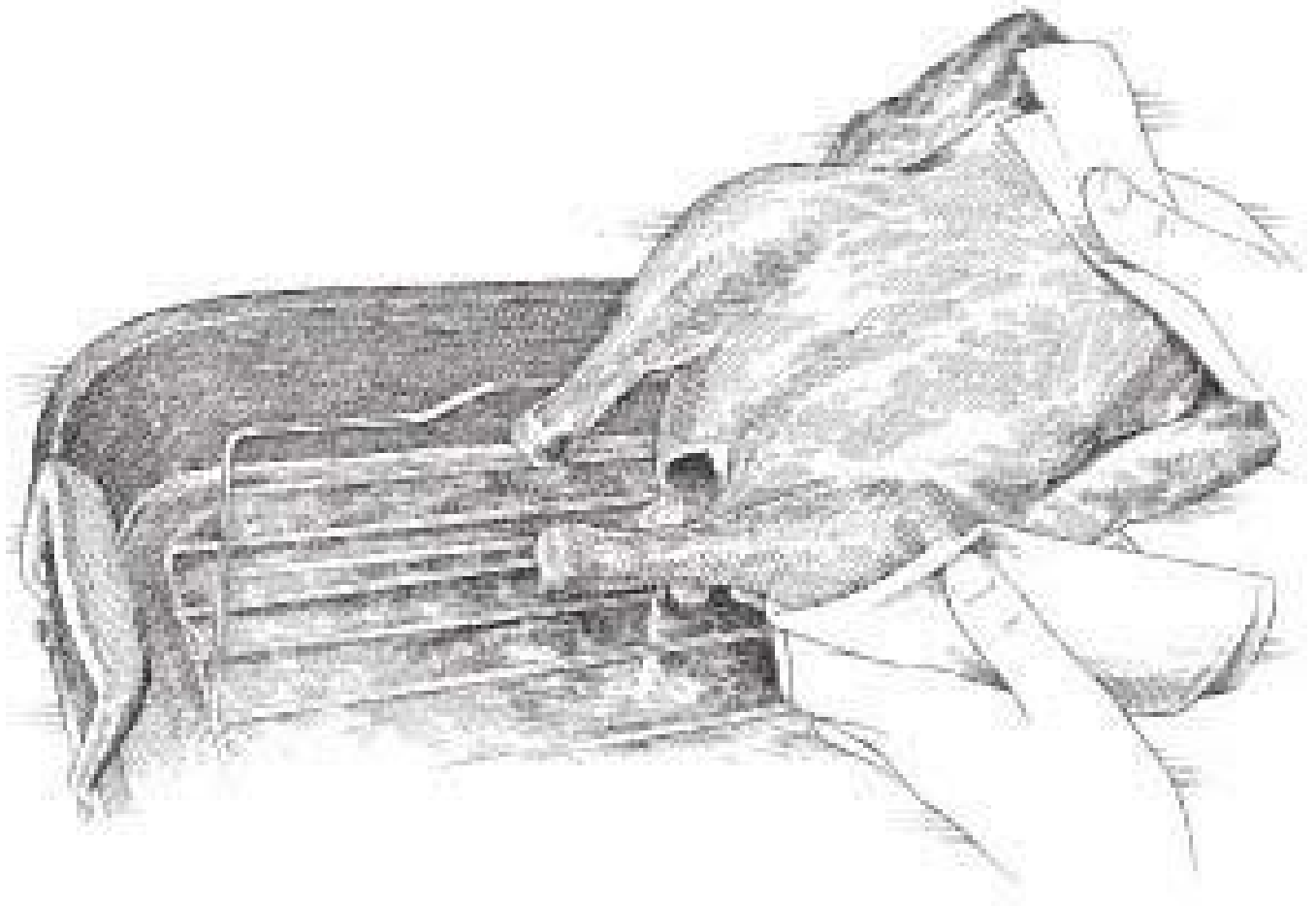

Figure 1.
As you remove the chicken from the roasting pan, tilt the bird so that all the juices flow from the body cavity into the pan.

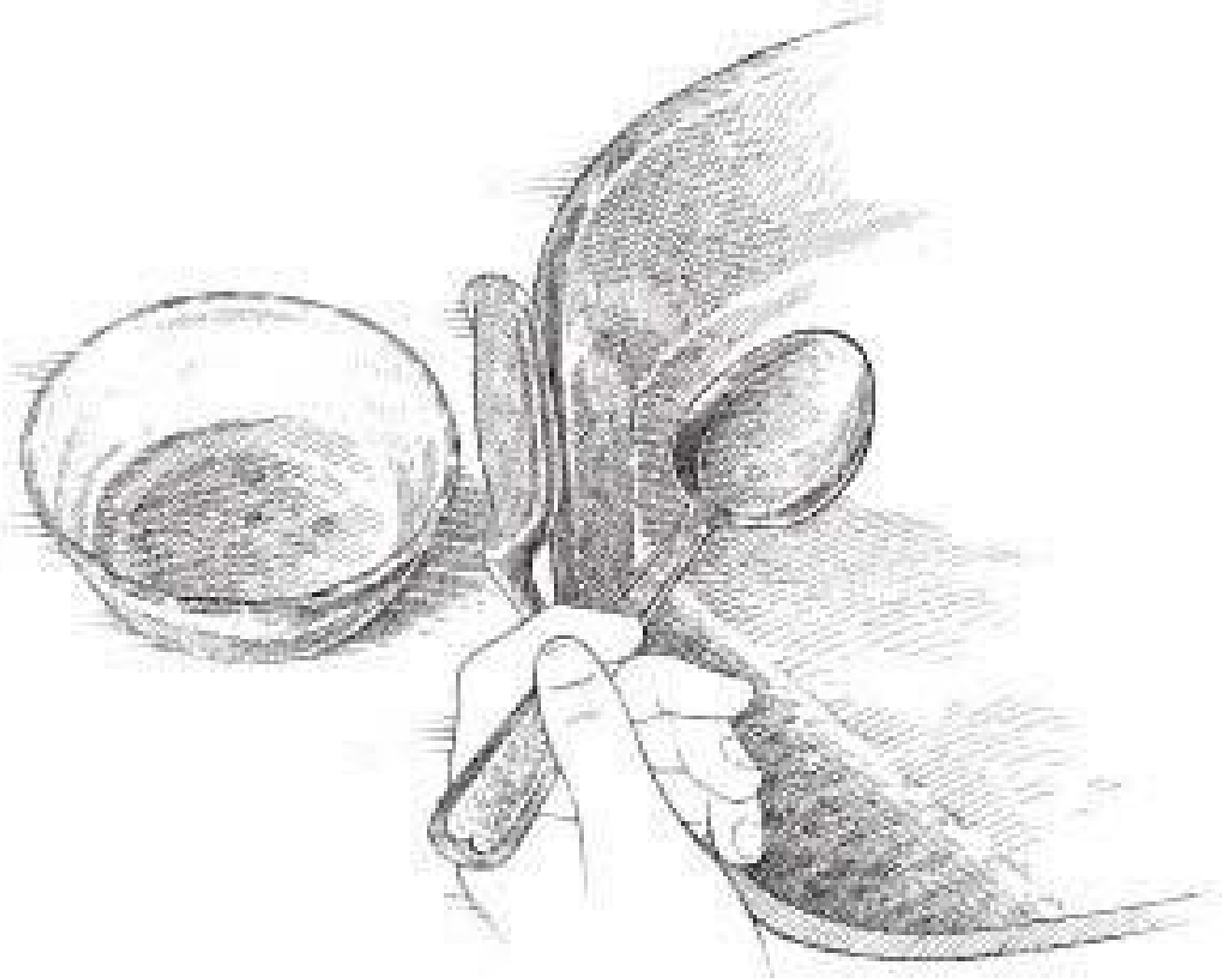

Figure 2.
Tip the pan so that juices and fat run into one corner. Use a small ladle or large dinner spoon to skim excess fat from surface of liquid, leaving behind about 3 tablespoons of pan drippings,

including all brown bits, dark liquid, and chicken juice.

Figure 3.
Place roasting pan over two burners to make the jus. Stir the onion into the drippings, cook for 30 seconds, then deglaze the pan with liquid of choice, scraping up the browned bits with a wooden spoon and incorporating them into the sauce.

TURKEY GRAVY

TO A TRADITIONALIST, THE THOUGHT OF A gravyless Thanksgiving dinner is culinary heresy. Good gravy is no mere condiment; it's the tie that binds. But too often gravy is a last-minute affair, thrown together without much preparation or thought. Many of us have experienced the result: either dull, greasy gravy or thin, acidic pan juices that are one-dimensional, lacking the body and stature that we expect from a good American gravy.

So we set out to produce a rich,

complex sauce that involved as much advance preparation as possible to avoid that last-minute time pressure, when counter space is at a premium and the potatoes need to be mashed, the turkey sliced, the water goblets filled, and the candles lit.

We began our tests by experimenting with thickeners. In a blind taste test we tried four different options, including cornstarch, beurre manié (a paste made from equal parts by weight of flour and butter), and two flour-based roux, one regular (a mixture of melted butter and flour stirred together over heat) and one dark (in which the butter-flour paste is cooked until it is dark brown).

Although most tasters were pretty sure

before the tasting began that the cornstarch-thickened gravy would have inferior texture and flavor, it actually turned out to be quite good. Admittedly, it was a bit thinner in body and more acidic in flavor than the roux-based sauces, but it was acceptable.

Overall, though, the dark roux proved to be the best thickener. It added a subtle depth and complexity to the sauce that the other options did not. It can also be made ahead of time, which gives it a slight edge over the other methods, which require last-minute whisking.

To this dark roux, we added turkey stock made from the neck and giblets. Cooking the sauce over low heat for half

an hour or more helped develop the flavor, but the resulting gravy was still pale and lacked punch. We then tried using a bulb baster to remove fat from the roasting turkey and using this as the base for the roux instead of the butter. This tasted fine but was not an improvement over the butter version. We soon discovered, however, that the trick was to take this basic brown sauce—prethickened—and enrich it with pan drippings.

Pan drippings are the source of gravy's allure and its challenge. That gorgeous mahogany-colored goo that congeals at the bottom of a roasting pan is one of the best-tasting things on earth, a carnivore's ambrosia. But we found that to get dark

brown pan drippings with a complex range of flavors, you need to roast your turkey over aromatic vegetables—chopped onions, carrots, and celery—as well as some fresh thyme sprigs. We also found it necessary to keep an eye on the pan, adding water or stock whenever things started looking too dry.

After deglazing the pan with wine and simmering off the alcohol, we strained the resulting wine sauce into the roux-thickened broth, crushing the remaining herbs and vegetables with a wooden spoon to extract their juices. The result was worth the effort. After a quick simmer and an adjustment of the seasonings, we had an intense and richly

flavored sauce that captured the familiarity and comfort of traditional American gravy but that also hinted at the sophistication of a fine French brown sauce.

Turkey Giblet Gravy

makes about 4 cups

NOTE: ***For the best flavor, scatter chopped onions, carrots, and celery as well as several sprigs of thyme in roasting pan with turkey. Cook the turkey in a V-rack and moisten the vegetables with water or broth as necessary to keep them from burning. The gravy is best made in stages. Complete step 1 up to a day in advance. Follow step 2 while the bird is in the oven. Finish the gravy (steps 3 and 4) once the bird has been removed from the oven and is resting on a carving board.***

1 tablespoon vegetable oil

Reserved turkey giblets, neck, and tailpiece

1 onion, unpeeled and chopped

$1^1/_2$ quarts turkey or chicken stock or 1 quart canned low-sodium chicken broth plus 2 cups water

2 sprigs thyme

8 parsley stems

3 tablespoons unsalted butter

$^1/_4$ cup flour

1 cup dry white wine

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oil in soup kettle; add giblets,

neck, and tail, then sauté until golden and fragrant, about 5 minutes. Add onion; continue to sauté until softened, 3 to 4 minutes longer. Reduce heat to low; cover and cook until turkey and onion release their juices, about 20 minutes. Add stock and herbs, bring to boil, then adjust heat to low. Simmer, uncovered, skimming any scum that may rise to surface, until broth is rich and flavorful, about 30 minutes longer. Strain broth (you should have about 5 cups) and reserve neck, heart, and gizzard. When cool enough to handle, shred neck meat, remove gristle from gizzard, then dice reserved heart and gizzard. Refrigerate giblets and broth until ready to use. (Can be refrigerated overnight.)

2. While turkey is roasting, return reserved turkey broth to simmer. Heat butter in large heavy-bottomed saucepan over medium-low heat. Vigorously whisk in flour (roux will froth and then thin out again). Cook slowly, stirring constantly, until nutty brown and fragrant, 10 to 15 minutes. Vigorously whisk all but 1 cup of hot broth into roux; scrape any roux around edges of pan back into liquid with wooden spoon. Bring to a boil, then continue to simmer until gravy is lightly thickened and very flavorful, about 30 minutes longer. Set aside until turkey is done.

3. When turkey has been transferred to carving board to rest, spoon out and discard as much fat as possible from roasting pan, leaving caramelized vegetables. Place roasting pan over two burners at medium-high heat (if drippings are not a dark brown, cook, stirring constantly, until they caramelize.) Add wine, scraping up any browned bits with wooden spoon and boiling until reduced by half, about 5 minutes. Add remaining 1 cup broth and reduce again by half, about 5 minutes.

4. Strain pan juices through fine-meshed

sieve and into saucepan with hot gravy, pressing as much juice as possible out of vegetables (see figure 4). Stir giblets into gravy; return to a boil and simmer briefly to blend flavors. Adjust seasonings, adding salt and pepper to taste if necessary. Serve with carved turkey.

Figure 4.
The pan juices are added to the gravy at the last minute. To extract as much flavor as possible from the vegetables, pour the pan

juices through a fine-mesh sieve and into the saucepan with the gravy. Press down on the vegetables to extract all of their juices and flavor.

BEEF GRAVY

GOOD BEEF GRAVY IS THICK, SMOOTH, RICHLY colored, and beefy tasting. It should be good enough to pour over the meat itself, not just the mashed potatoes. This kind of sauce was long a standard on many Sunday dinner tables. Unfortunately, many cooks have turned to jarred and packages versions, which are pale imitations of the real thing. Our goal was to develop a recipe that was easy to make and produced delicious results.

Our first thought was to follow the

model for turkey gravy—make a dark roux, thin it with stock, and then enrich it with pan drippings. Although this sounded like a good idea, it didn't really work. The flavor of the gravy was flat and not terribly beefy.

The problem here was stock. When making turkey gravy, the roux is thinned out with turkey stock made from the neck and giblets. Homemade beef stock is not an option for home cooks when making beef gravy. From previous tastings, we have found that canned beef broth has almost no beef flavor, and we don't recommend it. For instance, when the test kitchen developed a recipe for French onion soup, we found that a combination of canned chicken broth and

red wine did a better job than canned beef broth of replicating the meaty flavor of homemade beef stock. Unfortunately, we found that the combination of canned chicken broth and red wine doesn't have enough meaty flavor to work in a quickly simmered gravy.

At this point, we shifted tracks and figured we would start with the drippings and build a gravy in the pan. The process would be similar to making chicken jus, except that we wanted a thickened gravy. There are three common ways to thicken gravy: (1) make a roux with flour and the pan drippings and then add liquid; add liquid to the drippings to make a sauce and then

thicken with either (2) cornstarch or a (3) butter-flour paste at the end.

Turning the pan drippings into a roux was problematic. A beef roast produces minimal pan drippings, rarely more than 2 tablespoons. With so little fat, it's hard to make a decent roux. Supplementing the pan drippings with extra fat solved this problem, but the final gravy was muddy and opaque. Worse still, the flavor was not terribly meaty.

Since we decided not to thicken the pan drippings at the outset, we shifted to the gravy itself and decided to test the two remaining thickening options once our gravy testing was complete. We needed to figure out what liquid or liquids could transform pan drippings

into a sauce.

Although quickly simmered red wine and chicken broth created a mediocre gravy when added to a dark roux, we knew that they offered our best shot at creating meaty flavor. We started by throwing some onions into the pan drippings. We found that the onions burned because the drippings were so minimal. Adding some red wine with the onions solved this problem.

We continued cooking until the onions were tender and the red wine had reduced by half. At this point, we added chicken broth. Our first gravy made this way was good but still too bland. It was clear that the broth needed to reduce

more. In the end, we found it necessary to reduce the chicken broth by half. Gravy made with this way tasted rich and meaty. We found that the long simmering time breaks down the browned bits in the pan better, so they release their concentrated flavor into the gravy. The individual components have more time to blend, and the result is a more complex gravy.

Despite the long simmering time, our gravy was too thin. Having already ruled out the roux, we tested the two most common methods for thickening a completed sauce: a cornstarch slurry and a beurre manié (or butter-flour paste).

The beurre manié (made by working 2 tablespoons flour into 2 tablespoons

softened butter) gave the gravy a slightly thicker texture, but the butter competed with the meat flavor. The cornstarch-thickened sauce was definitely beefier. In addition, the slightly lighter texture of the cornstarch-thickened sauce was a better match for thin slices of beef. Cornstarch also gave the gravy a better sheen.

In the end, the simplest gravy proved to be the best. The key is to make sure to reduce the wine and chicken broth sufficiently to concentrate their flavors and to dissolve fully the browned bits left in the roasting pan.

Beef Gravy

makes about 1 cup

NOTE: ***To prevent excess evaporation of pan drippings, roast the beef in a pan just large enough to accommodate it. Also, cook the roast directly in the pan; if the roast is held on a rack, its minimal drippings are likely to burn. Even with these precautions, don't expect more than 2 tablespoons of drippings from most roasts. A particularly fatty roast might produce more drippings; if this happens, spoon off excess fat, leaving 2 tablespoons of drippings, including all brown bits and dark liquid. This gravy takes***

about 15 minutes to prepare, during which time the roast should rest so that juices can redistribute themselves.

Pan drippings, partially defatted if necessary (see note above)
1 small onion or 2 large shallots, minced
$^{2}/_{3}$ cup dry red wine
2 cups canned low-sodium chicken broth
$1^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons cornstarch
3 tablespoons cold water

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Remove roast from pan and place on

platter to rest. Place pan over two burners at high heat. Stir in onion and wine. Scrape up any browned bits with a wooden spoon, boiling until wine is reduced by half and onion is soft, about 3 minutes. Add broth and continue to cook, stirring until reduced by half, about 8 minutes. Add any accumulated beef juices and cook 1 minute.

2. Combine cornstarch with water in small bowl until smooth. Turn heat to low and slowly pour cornstarch mixture into roasting pan, stirring constantly (see figure 5). It will begin to thicken and darken in color almost immediately. Continue to cook, stirring well to blend,

about 2 minutes. Serve immediately.

Figure 5.
Cornstarch will produce a lump free sauce if you take a couple of precautions. First, combine cornstarch and cold water to make a smooth, thin paste, also called a slurry. Then, slowly add

the cornstarch slurry to the gravy, stirring constantly so that cornstarch dissolves immediately into sauce.

BÉCHAMEL & VELOUTÉ

BÉCHAMEL AND VELOUTÉ ARE BOTH WHITE sauces made by cooking butter and flour together to create a light roux. The roux is then thinned out with a liquid—milk to make Béchamel and stock to make Velouté.

These traditional white sauces are not as popular as they once were. Modern white sauces—as made in most American and French restaurant kitchens—rely on reduced cream. Traditional roux-thickened white sauces are not as refined as reduced cream sauces, but

they are less rich. We find that these old-fashioned sauces are superior to reduced cream sauces for most home cooking. Béchamel and Velouté are essential components in baked dishes, such as lasagne, pot pies, casseroles, and gratins. Cream-based sauces are too oily and heavy in these dishes.

White sauces are bland (they are meant to coat and moisten foods, not add flavor), so texture-not taste-is the real challenge for the home cook. Roux-based sauces are often lumpy. To be successful, white sauces must be silky smooth.

Our first tests concerned the roux. We found that a ratio of 4 tablespoons butter

to $3^1/_2$ tablespoons flour yielded an especially thick sauce—it dropped in blobs from a spoon and was thick enough to spread. Our first thought was to reduce the amounts of butter and flour so the sauce would be thinner. However, we found that in some instances (especially lasagne), you want a very thick Béchamel. (The liquid from the tomato sauce will thin out the Béchamel, so it must start out very thick.)

More often, though, a thinner sauce is wanted, one that will heavily coat a spoon but still fall in a thick ribbon. Rather than fiddling with the roux, we found it easiest to adjust the consistency of the finished sauce, whisking in a bit

more milk or stock once the sauce was done.

In our tests, we found that the flour needs to be cooked in the butter for two minutes to get rid of any floury flavor, but it should never be allowed to color or brown. Cooking the sauce a full 10 minutes once the liquid has been added also ensures that the bitter, raw flour taste has been erased. We also found that using medium heat was key. At higher temperatures, the roux can burn or darken and the starch granules harden and lose their ability to absorb liquid.

Some sources suggest adding cold liquid to prevent lumps from forming in the sauce. The problem with using cold liquid is that it takes a long time for the

sauce to thicken. Our tests revealed that boiling liquid will cause the starch to gelatinize and form lumps. However, we found that you could add hot liquid (and thus prepare the sauce more quickly) as long as you add the liquid gradually. As a further precaution, we take the saucepan with the roux off the heat when adding the first batches of liquid.

Whisking the liquid in gradually (rather than stirring it in with a wooden spoon, as many sources suggest) prevents the formation of lumps. Unfortunately, a wire whisk can't reach bits of roux stuck around the edges of the pan. For this reason, you must scrape the edges of pan with a wooden spoon

several times as you add the liquid.

Once all the liquid has been incorporated, constant stirring is necessary. Without it, the fully swelled starch can settle on the bottom of the pot and burn. For this reason, it's also necessary to use a heavy-bottomed saucepan. White sauces prepared in thin pans burned in our tests. If you must use a thin pan, reduce the heat a bit.

Béchamel can be used in baked pasta dishes (everything from lasagne to macaroni and cheese), soufflés, and vegetable gratins. We tested various seasonings and preferred salt and white pepper (flecks of black pepper are too noticeable in a white sauce). Nutmeg makes a nice addition for a sauce that

will used over vegetables, but it is not appropriate in a tomato-based lasagne. Add this ingredient as desired.

Velouté is a standard ingredient in chicken or turkey pot pies, chicken or turkey à la king, tuna noodle casserole, and turkey Tetrazzini. In general, we felt the flavor of the Velouté was improved by the addition of $^{1}/_{4}$ cup sherry or Marsala. Although we prefer Velouté made with fortified wine in most uses, tasters felt the flavor of sherry or Marsala was odd in a few instances (such as tuna noodle casserole), so we decided to make this ingredient optional.

Master Recipe

Béchamel Sauce

makes about 2 cups

NOTE: ***This recipe produces a thick sauce (the consistency of heavy cream, or slightly thicker), which is ideal for lasagne. For a vegetable gratin, the texture should be thinner, more like light cream.***

2 cups whole milk, plus more as needed to thin sauce

4 tablespoons unsalted butter

$3^1/_2$ tablespoons all-purpose flour

1/4 teaspoon salt

Pinch ground white pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat milk in small saucepan over low heat until hot but not scalded or boiling.

2. Meanwhile, melt butter in medium, heavy-bottomed saucepan over medium heat. When butter is foamy, whisk in flour. Whisk constantly for 2 minutes. Do not let flour brown.

3. Remove saucepan from heat. Add several tablespoons hot milk and whisk vigorously. Repeat, adding a few

tablespoons more milk. Use wooden spoon to scrape roux from edges of pan. Return pan to very low heat and slowly whisk in the remaining milk, stopping once or twice to scrape roux from edges of pan with wooden spoon.

4. Raise heat to medium-low. Add salt and cook, whisking often, until sauce thickens to consistency of thick heavy cream, about 10 minutes. Remove pan from heat and whisk in pepper. If necessary, whisk in more milk, a tablespoon at time, until sauce is thinned to desired consistency. Use immediately or place plastic wrap directly on surface of sauce (to prevent skin from forming)

and cool to room temperature. (Sauce can be refrigerated for up to 2 days. Reheat over very low heat, whisking constantly until smooth. Thin as necessary with a tablespoon or two of milk.)

VARIATIONS:

Sauce Mornay

Classic Mornay contains both Parmesan and Gruyère cheese. Use this sauce as you would Béchamel, in any dish where cheese is appropriate.

Follow master recipe, whisking in 2 ounces grated, shredded, or crumbled Parmesan, cheddar, blue, Swiss, and/or Gruyère cheese along with pepper.

Velouté Sauce

For a richer flavor, add $^1/_4$ cup sherry or Marsala with broth.

Follow master recipe, replacing milk with 2 cups canned low-sodium chicken broth.

MAYONNAISE

MAYONNAISE IS A THICK, CREAMY emulsion of egg yolk and oil with a little acid and some seasonings. An emulsion is a mixture of two things that don't ordinarily mix, such as oil and water or oil and vinegar. The only way to mix them is to stir or whisk so strenuously that the two ingredients break down into tiny droplets. Many of the like droplets will continue to find each other and recoalesce into pure fluid. Eventually, however, one of the fluids will disintegrate entirely into droplets so tiny

that they remain separated by the other fluid, at least temporarily.

The liquid that goes into this droplet form is referred to as the *dispersed phase* of an emulsion because the droplets are dispersed throughout. The liquid that surrounds the droplets is called the *continuous phase*. Because the continuous phase forms the surface of the emulsion, that's what the mouth and tongue feel and taste first. In mayonnaise, the egg yolk and lemon juice are the continuous phase (that's why something that is 95 percent oil doesn't taste greasy), and the oil is the dispersed phase.

Mayonnaise works because egg yolk is such a good emulsifier and stabilizer.

But sometimes mayonnaise can "break," as the ingredients revert back to their original liquid form. To keep mayonnaise from breaking, we found it first necessary to whisk the egg yolk and lemon juice thoroughly (the egg yolk itself contains liquid and fat that must be emulsified). It is equally important to add the oil slowly to the egg yolk. Remember, just a couple of tablespoons of yolk and lemon juice must be "stretched" around $^{3}/_{4}$ cup of oil.

We like the flavor of corn oil in our basic mayonnaise. It produces a dressing that is rich and eggy with good body. Canola oil makes a slightly lighter, more lemony mayo. Extra-virgin olive oil is

too heavy and assertive in mayonnaise, unless garlic is added to make a Mediterranean-style mayonnaise, such as aïoli.

Master Recipe

Mayonnaise

makes about $^{3}/_{4}$ cup

NOTE: ***Each time you add oil, make sure to whisk until it is thoroughly incorporated. It's fine to stop for a rest or to measure the next addition of oil. If the mayonnaise appears grainy or beaded after the last addition of oil, continue to whisk until smooth.***

1 large egg yolk

$^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoon salt

$^{1}/_{4}$ teaspoon Dijon mustard

$1^1/_2$ teaspoons lemon juice

1 teaspoon white wine vinegar

$^3/_4$ cup corn oil

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Whisk egg yolk vigorously in medium bowl for 15 seconds. Add all remaining ingredients except for oil and whisk until yolk thickens and color brightens, about 30 seconds.

2. Add $^1/_4$ cup oil in slow, steady stream, continuing to whisk vigorously until oil is incorporated completely and mixture thickens, about 1 minute. Add another $^1/_4$ cup oil in the same manner,

whisking until incorporated completely, about 30 seconds more. Add last $^1/_4$ cup oil all at once and whisk until incorporated completely, about 30 seconds more. Serve. (Can be refrigerated in airtight container for several days.)

VARIATIONS:

Food Processor Mayonnaise

Makes about $1^1/_2$ cups

Mayonnaise can also be made in a blender if you prefer.

Use 1 whole large egg, and double the quantities of the other ingredients in the master recipe. In workbowl of food

processor fitted with metal blade, pulse all ingredients except oil three or four times to combine. With machine running, add oil in thin, steady stream through open feed tube until incorporated completely. (If food pusher has small hole in bottom, pour oil into pusher and allow to drizzle down into machine while motor is running.)

Lemon Mayonnaise

Follow master recipe, adding $1^{1}/_{2}$ teaspoons grated lemon zest along with lemon juice.

Dijon Mayonnaise

Follow master recipe, whisking 2

tablespoons Dijon mustard into finished mayonnaise.

Tarragon Mayonnaise

Follow master recipe, stirring 1 tablespoon minced fresh tarragon leaves into finished mayonnaise.

Tartar Sauce

Follow master recipe, stirring $1^{1}/_{2}$ tablespoons minced cornichons, 1 teaspoon cornichon juice, 1 tablespoon minced scallions, 1 tablespoon minced red onion, and 1 tablespoon minced capers into finished mayonnaise.

Lime-Chipotle Mayonnaise

Follow master recipe, replacing lemon juice and vinegar with $2^1/_2$ teaspoons lime juice. Stir 1 tablespoon seeded and minced canned chipotle chiles in adobo sauce into finished mayonnaise.

Garlic Mayonnaise (Aïoli)

Use a chef's knife and $^1/_4$ teaspoon salt to mince 2 medium garlic cloves into smooth paste (see figure 6). Follow master recipe, adding garlic paste in place of salt. Replace corn oil with $^3/_4$ cup extra-virgin olive oil.

Saffron/Roasted Red Pepper Mayonnaise

Makes about $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups

Dollop this mayonnaise into bowls of fish stew, or use with a seafood salad. This sauce is very similar to rouille, the French roasted red pepper sauce typically served with bouillabaisse.

Mix $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon saffron threads and 1 tablespoon hot water in small bowl; let stand 10 minutes. Follow recipe for Food Processor Mayonnaise, pulsing saffron mixture; 1 roasted, peeled, and seeded red bell pepper; pinch cayenne pepper; and 1 medium garlic clove, minced to a paste with salt (see figure 6), with all other ingredients except oil. Replace corn oil with $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups extra-

virgin olive oil.

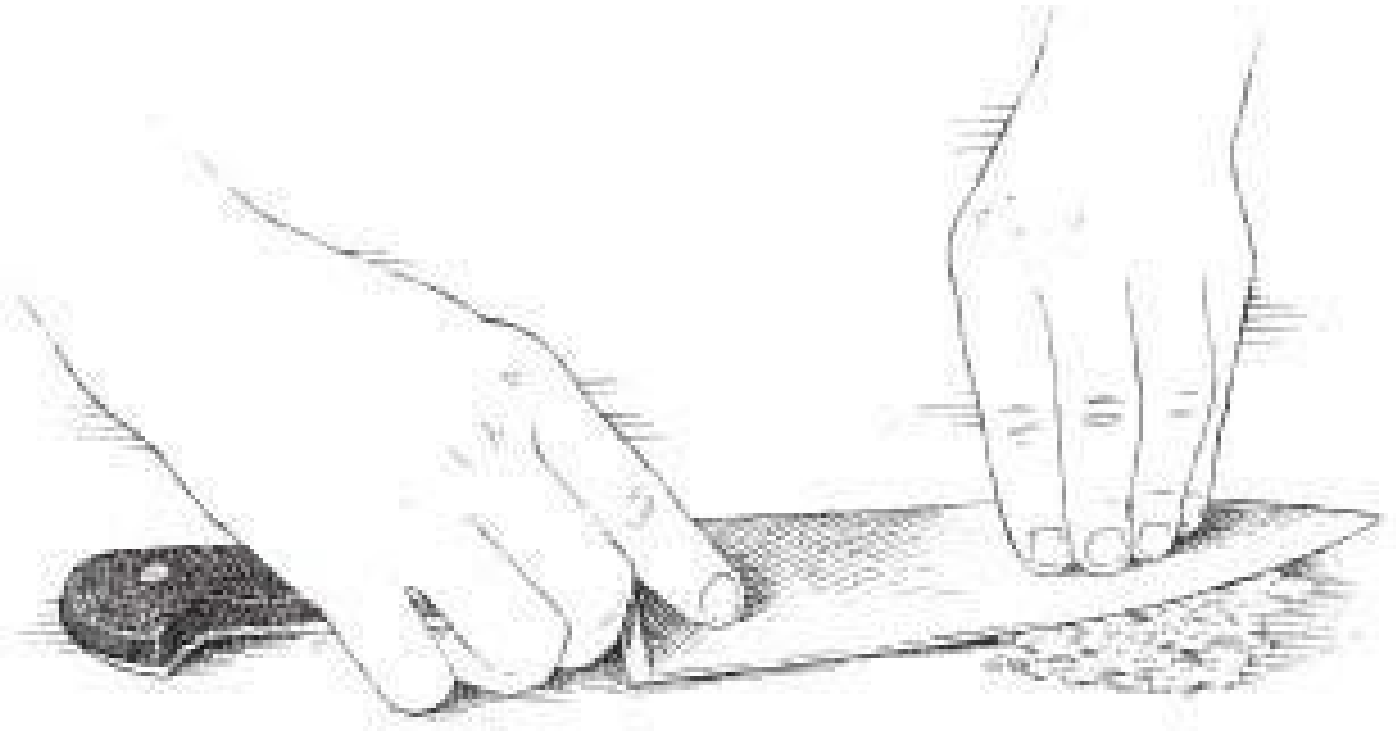

Figure 6.
To turn garlic into a smooth paste, mince it on a cutting board, then sprinkle the garlic with a little salt and use the side of a chef's knife to break down the pieces. Keep mincing and pressing the garlic with the side of the knife until a fine puree

forms. If you own a garlic press, simply put the clove through the press and then combine the garlic paste with the salt.

HOLLANDAISE & BÉARNAISE

HOLLANDAISE AND BÉARNAISE ARE WARM, emulsified sauces made with egg yolk. Essentially, these sauces are a warm mayonnaise in which egg yolk and a small amount of liquid emulsify a large amount of fat, typically butter. The only difference between hollandaise and Béarnaise is the acid used to flavor and help emulsify them. Hollandaise is made with lemon juice, and Béarnaise is made with a reduction of vinegar, white wine, and herbs. Béarnaise is considered a

more complicated sauce, but in reality the reduction is easy to prepare and can be done ahead of time.

Because they are warm, these sauces are more challenging to make than mayonnaise. Our goal was to create a foolproof master recipe that would produce delicious sauces. Too often these sauces separate, or break, and the cook must start over with fresh egg yolks and more butter. We wanted to make sure that this would not happen.

Classic hollandaise and Béarnaise are prepared in the following manner: the egg yolk and liquid flavorings are gently heated, then butter (either melted or clarified) is slowly incorporated. (Clarified butter is melted butter that has

had its water gently cooked off and its milk solids skimmed off with a spoon.) Repeated tests with this classic method showed that creating a warm, stable emulsion sauce by hand takes care and patience. Although no single step is complicated, it is a slow process. The yolks can scramble (we found that heating them in a double boiler reduced but did not eliminate this risk), or the sauce can break when butter is added too quickly.

When we got the sauce right, it was divine, with an incredibly light, almost ethereal consistency. Some sources suggest beating melted butter into warmed egg yolks. Other recipes take an

extra step and create a sabayon by whisking the egg yolks and some liquid into a light, airy foam. The latter method was key to achieving a superior texture, but occasionally something went wrong.

At this point in our testing, we decided to shift gears and test making these sauces in a blender. Many sources claim that the blender makes foolproof hollandaise and Béarnaise that is as good as the best traditional versions. After testing a number of blender recipes, we concluded that blender sauces are consistently very good. While they lack the sublime airy texture of the best handmade sauces, the blender saves time, is easy is to use, and, with its incredible centrifugal power, produces a

more stable, firm sauce that home cooks will find easier to manage. A handmade sauce may be slightly better, but the moderate risk that the sauce will break, coupled with the added work that would then be necessary, led us to conclude that the blender is the best place for home cooks to make these sauces.

Blender hollandaise is simple enough to prepare. The egg yolks and lemon juice are briefly blended. Adding a little water helps keep the sauce from becoming overly thick, a common occurrence with many blender recipes that we tested. We found that a little salt and cayenne pepper is needed for flavor. The main area of testing focused on the

butter: whether or not to clarify the butter, what the temperature of the butter should be, and how it is best incorporated into the sauce.

When making hollandaise by hand on the stove, we preferred clarified butter. Because butter is whisked into the sabayon, which is already light and airy, the addition of more water from nonclarified butter (whole melted butter contains about 20 percent water) thins the sauce too much; clarified butter, being pure fat, makes for a thicker, smoother sauce. The opposite proved true when making blender hollandaise, where the processed yolks are not as airy. Here the water in the whole melted butter is needed to help to thin out the

sauce and make it lighter.

We tested adding hot versus warm melted butter to the egg yolks in the blender. Warm butter worked fine but produced an overly cool sauce. Hot butter is preferred. We found that adding the butter slowly, especially at the beginning, ensures a thick and stable emulsion.

We explored how much butter to incorporate. Many recipes tested incorporated 4 ounces of butter into 3 yolks. We tried six ounces and were surprised at how much lighter and airier the sauce was. We then tested eight ounces of butter, and the sauce was perfect. The additional butter created a

lighter-textured sauce.

Finally, we tested the addition of the liquid (lemon juice for hollandaise, the reduction for Béarnaise) before and after the butter. When we added the liquid to the yolks in the blender at the beginning of processing, we found that the sauce emulsified more easily. We also concluded that adding the liquid with the yolks early on helps infuse the flavor of the liquid throughout the sauce.

A final note about the reduction used for Béarnaise. Some sources rely on vinegar alone; others on a combination of vinegar and white wine. We found that vinegar alone made a harsh-tasting sauce and preferred equal amounts of dry white wine and tarragon vinegar,

with white wine vinegar as our second choice.

In the end, we found that the blender produces great results with very little effort. Yes, the sauce is a bit heavier than a handmade sauce that starts with a sabayon, but a sauce made in the blender is also much more stable and can be prepared more quickly. Knowing you can rely on the outcome and count on it to hold up is a bonus.

Blender sauces do tend to thicken and look as if they may be curdling when being held over heat. (We found it most convenient to simply stick the blender into a pan of hot water off heat.) We discovered that whisking occasionally

and adding a tablespoon of water easily brings the sauce back to the desired consistency.

Master Recipe

Hollandaise Sauce

makes about $1^1/_4$ cups

NOTE: ***Hollandaise made in a blender is foolproof. This rich, pale yellow sauce heavily coats a spoon—like honey—and should fall from the spoon in a thick ribbon. A classic with eggs benedict, this sauce is also delicious with poached fish or steamed vegetables.***

3 large egg yolks, chilled

$1^1/_2$ tablespoons lemon juice

1 tablespoon water, or more as necessary

1/4 teaspoon salt

Pinch cayenne

16 tablespoons (2 sticks) unsalted butter

::INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Remove center cap on blender top. Place egg yolks, lemon juice, water, salt, and cayenne in blender and process at high speed for 15 seconds to blend well.

2. Meanwhile, melt butter in small, heavy-bottomed saucepan over low heat until bubbling. Butter must get very hot but should not brown. Immediately pour

butter into 2-cup glass measuring cup.

3. With machine running, very slowly add hot melted butter in thin, steady stream through hole in top of blender until incorporated completely, about $1\,^{1}/_{2}$ minutes. The mixture will be thick and pale yellow in color. If sauce is too thick, add water, a tablespoon at a time, until desired consistency is reached. Serve immediately or keep warm for up to 30 minutes.

4. To keep warm, place blender jar in large saucepan filled with hot (but not simmering) water. Keep pan off heat and

stir sauce occasionally with large fork to keep from thickening. When ready to serve, remove blender from water and blot dry exterior with kitchen towel. If necessary, whisk in water to thin sauce before serving.

VARIATIONS:

Herb Hollandaise Sauce

Follow master recipe, stirring 1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley or dill or 1 teaspoon minced fresh tarragon into finished sauce.

Mustard Hollandaise Sauce

Follow master recipe, adding 2 tablespoons Dijon mustard to blender

with egg yolks and other ingredients.

Horseradish Hollandaise Sauce

Follow master recipe, stirring 1 tablespoon prepared horseradish into finished sauce.

Béarnaise Sauce

Great with grilled or sautéed steak, liver, chicken, or fish.

Place $^1/_4$ cup dry white wine, $^1/_4$ cup tarragon or white wine vinegar, 1 small minced shallot, 1 tablespoon chopped fresh tarragon leaves and 2 to 3 tarragon stems (or 1 teaspoon dried tarragon), 8 lightly crushed black peppercorns, and

pinch salt in small, heavy-bottomed saucepan. Simmer over medium-low heat until reduced by two-thirds, 12 to 15 minutes. Strain liquid through fine-meshed sieve into bowl, pressing on aromatics to release liquid. There should be 2 to 3 tablespoons of liquid.

Prepare master recipe, substituting reduction liquid for lemon juice and water and omitting cayenne. Stir 1 tablespoon chopped fresh tarragon leaves (or 1 teaspoon dried tarragon) and pinch ground white pepper into finished sauce.

BUTTER SAUCES

BUTTER SAUCES ARE THE SIMPLEST AND SOMETIMES the most delicious embellishment to a piece of steamed fish, some grilled seafood, or poached chicken. This chapter focuses on brown butter (melted butter cooked until nutty brown) and white butter, or *beurre blanc* (cold butter emulsified into a white wine and vinegar reduction).

To makes these sauces successfully, it helps to understand some butter science. Simply put, butter is overwhipped or churned cream. In cream, globules of fat

protected by a phospholipid membrane float about in a suspension of water. When cream is agitated, or churned, the fat globules collide with one another, causing the membranes to break. The freed fat globules then begin to clump together, trapping little pockets of water along with the broken membrane pieces and some intact fat crystals. After the cream is churned into a semisolid mass of butter, any remaining liquid is drawn off as buttermilk. So what begins as an oil-in-water emulsion known as cream is reversed to a water-in-oil emulsion known as butter.

All butter must consist of at least 80 percent milk fat, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture standards.

Most commercial butters do not exceed this. (Some European butters and Hotel Bar's Plugra are exceptions, containing from 82 to 88 percent milk fat.) All butters contain 2 percent milk solids, and the remainder is water.

BROWN BUTTER SAUCE

Brown butter sauce is simply melted butter that has been heated long enough to cause the water to evaporate and the milk solids and fat to develop a nutty brown color and flavor. The key to this sauce is cooking the butter long enough to create that nutty flavor and color without causing the solids to burn. Seconds matter when making brown

butter.

We started our tests by making brown butter in a small (8-inch) skillet and a small (1-quart) saucepan. The skillet was more challenging because its wide bottom caused the water to evaporate and the solids to brown more quickly. Everything happens a bit more slowly in a saucepan and is easier to control. It's much easier to watch milk solids change color in a shiny saucepan.

Recipes call for melting and cooking the butter at various temperatures. Although there is a moderate risk of burning the solids when cooking over medium heat, lower flames often failed to color the liquid, and the sauce consequently failed to develop its

defining "nutty" characteristics.

We wondered just how far you could take brown butter before it would burn. Tests showed that if you stop the cooking process as soon as the solids turn light brown, the liquid itself is still yellow and lacks a nutty flavor. When you allow the solids to turn a deeper brown, the liquid shifts in color and flavor to the "nutty" stage.

Purists strain the finished sauce through cheesecloth to remove darkened milk solids. The solids do look unappealing, and we prefer to leave them out. A simpler approach is to let them settle and carefully pour off the liquid, leaving most of the solids behind.

Plain brown butter is bland and needs some seasoning. A little acid significantly enhances the flavor of the finished sauce. We prefer white wine vinegar, but lemon juice makes a delicious variation. We found that adding the acid as soon as the butter has browned sufficiently is dangerous since the sauce can splatter onto the cook. By waiting just 90 seconds you can minimize splattering without letting the butter sauce cool too much. Salt and a dash of pepper round out the flavors of this simple butter sauce.

WHITE BUTTER SAUCE

White butter sauce is a bit more complex

but still easy to execute. It is similar to Béarnaise sauce, but without the egg yolks. The idea is to create an emulsion with butter and a reduction of flavorful ingredients, usually white wine and white wine vinegar. The goal is to get the butter to soften into a cream so that it forms an emulsion rather than melting to liquid fat and separating. The reduction infuses flavor into the sauce and provides the liquid necessary to emulsify the butter.

Dry white wine, white wine vinegar, salt, and pepper are standard ingredients in the reduction for white butter sauce. A few recipes call only for vinegar, or only for wine, but we quickly dismissed these as tasting unbalanced. In the end,

we preferred a reduction made with 3 parts white wine and 2 parts white wine vinegar, with some shallots, salt, and pepper added for flavor.

Some sources suggest reducing these liquids until they have almost evaporated. We found that the sauces prepared with more reduction liquid were more stable and airy. For this reason, we suggest reducing the wine and vinegar by two thirds, but no further. Some sources quickly reduce the liquid, but we found that slow cooking provides for a blending of the flavors and gives the shallots more time to soften.

The biggest challenge when making white butter sauce is incorporating the

butter. Some sources argue that the butter should be at room temperature when added to the reduction, while others call for chilled butter. Sources also disagree on how the butter should be added (in small increments or all at once) and on whether the pan should be on or off heat.

Making the sauce off heat failed—neither cold nor room-temperature butter softened. Clearly, the pan would have to be over the flame. We then tested the addition of cold butter in increments over very low heat. These tests worked, but it took 8 to 10 minutes to incorporate all of the butter. Adding room-temperature butter in increments over very low heat reduced the time needed to incorporate the butter to 6 or 7

minutes, but the whisking was still tiresome. On several occasions the sauce broke, probably because we slacked off from the constant whisking.

At this point, we turned to a technique advocated by Jim Peterson in his classic book *Sauces* (Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1998). He keeps the pan over high heat and adds all the butter at once. This method proved easy (it takes less than a minute to whisk in the whole stick of butter) and foolproof, with three caveats.

First, you must use cold butter. Room-temperature butter overheats with this method and the sauce will separate. Second, you must whisk constantly. Third, we found it best to whisk a tiny

bit of heavy cream into the reduction before adding the butter. The liquid and acid in the reduction and the water and milk solids in whole butter can successfully emulsify the fat in whole butter. However, some sauces broke when made with only the reduction and whole butter. Our tests showed that heavy cream acts as an additional emulsifying agent. It helps to start emulsification and helps to stabilize the sauce. Our tests showed that without heavy cream the sauce is at greater risk of breaking, especially when the high heat method of adding butter is used.

One final warning about white butter sauce: Make sure that the sauce never reaches a boil, or it will break. If the

sauce does break, we have found that the best approach to fixing it is to put 3 tablespoons of heavy cream in a small heavy-bottomed saucepan and reduce it by half over high heat, about 30 seconds. Off heat, vigorously whisk the cream into the broken sauce. Because the sauce loses some of its delicate flavor and texture with this added cream, it's best to whisk constantly at the outset as the butter is added to prevent the sauce from breaking in the first place.

Master Recipe

Brown Butter Sauce

makes about $^{1}/_{4}$ cup

NOTE: ***Caramelizing the milk solids in whole butter gives this sauce its characteristic nutty aroma, color, and flavor. Once the butter foams, the solids brown quickly and can easily burn, so be prepared to act quickly. Adding the vinegar activates rapid bubbling, so swirl immediately to blend. Drizzle over fish, chicken, or vegetables.***

4 tablespoons unsalted butter,

cut into 4 equal pieces
Pinch salt
Dash ground black pepper
1 teaspoon white wine vinegar

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place butter in small, heavy-bottomed, shiny saucepan over medium-low heat. Swirl butter as it melts so it cooks evenly. Once melted (this should take about 2 minutes), the butter will begin to bubble rapidly. Keep swirling often until water in butter evaporates (remaining liquid will become clear) and butter begins to foam, about 2 minutes more. Swirl constantly and watch milk solids on bottom of pan carefully. In a matter of seconds they will begin to turn brown.

As soon as solids turn to color of dark toast and liquid turns golden brown, remove pan from heat.

2. Set pan aside for $1^{1}/_{2}$ minutes. Add salt, pepper, and vinegar and swirl immediately. Let milk solids settle to bottom of pan, about 10 seconds. Drizzle liquid over cooked food, leaving as many solids behind as possible. Serve immediately.

VARIATIONS:

Brown Butter Sauce with Lemon and Parsley

Follow master recipe, replacing vinegar

with 1 tablespoon lemon juice. Swirl in 1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley leaves after milk solids settle.

Brown Butter Sauce with Capers and Herbs

Follow master recipe, replacing vinegar and salt with 2 teaspoons small capers and 1 teaspoon caper liquid. Swirl in 1 tablespoon minced fresh dill or parsley after milk solids settle.

Master Recipe

White Butter Sauce

makes about $^{2}/_{3}$ cup

NOTE: ***The trick to preparing this rich, luscious sauce is to whisk vigorously as soon as the butter is added. Fast, continuous whisking ensures that the butter will soften and emulsify without breaking. This sauce is served lukewarm. If it gets too hot it will break. We prefer the texture of this sauce unstrained, with bits of shallot. For a more refined (and thinner) sauce, you can strain the***

finished sauce. Serve with fish, shellfish, chicken breasts, or steamed vegetables.

3 tablespoons dry white wine
2 tablespoons white wine vinegar
1 tablespoon minced shallots
Pinch salt
Dash finely ground black or white pepper
1 tablespoon heavy cream
8 tablespoons chilled unsalted butter, cut into 4 equal pieces

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Stir together wine, vinegar, shallots, salt, and pepper in small, heavy-

bottomed saucepan. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer until reduced by two-thirds, about 5 minutes.

2. Whisk in cream. Raise heat to high and add butter. Whisk vigorously until butter is incorporated and forms a thick, pale yellow sauce, less than 1 minute. Remove pan from heat and use sauce immediately. (Sauce can be held for 15 minutes by covering saucepan and nesting it in a pot with a few inches of warm water.)

VARIATIONS:

Red Butter Sauce

Follow master recipe, replacing white wine with red wine and white wine vinegar with red wine vinegar.

Lemon Butter Sauce

Follow master recipe, replacing vinegar with 2 tablespoons lemon juice. Add grated zest from 1 lemon (about 1 teaspoon) with cream.

Mustard Butter Sauce

Follow master recipe, adding 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard with cream.

BARBECUE SAUCE

KANSAS CITY—STYLE BARBECUE SAUCE IS THICK, sweet, spicy, and slightly tart. This tomato-based sauce is great when brushed on ribs, chicken, and brisket, as well as a number of other meats, in the last few minutes of grilling or just after they come off the grill. We set out to create a quick, thick, smooth sauce from pantry staples. (We ruled out any recipes that call for long simmering times or exotic ingredients.) We also wanted to achieve the right flavor balance of sweet, sour, spicy, and smoky.

After making a dozen barbecue sauces from various cookbooks, we determined that all the ingredients fit into a few basic categories: tomato product, sweetener, vinegar, aromatics, condiments, and spices. We began tackling each of these categories one at a time.

Using our favorite slow-cooking barbecue recipe as a blueprint, we began fooling with the tomato base, trying ketchup, tomato paste, tomato puree, canned tomatoes in juice, canned tomato sauce, chili sauce, and various combinations of tomato products. Ketchup was our favorite, producing a sweet but tart sauce that was thick and

had a glossy sheen. Sauces made from canned tomatoes didn't have enough time to cook down (all were too watery and bland) and were strangely reminiscent of marinara sauce

Next, we tested sweeteners. Granulated sugar and corn syrup were quickly dismissed as being too one-dimensional in flavor. Honey was distinctive, but a bit cloying, and brown sugar lost its character in the sauce. In the end, tasters preferred the sauce made with molasses, which added a singular richness as well as a slightly astringent, almost smoky sweetness. We also liked the way molasses colored the sauce.

Vinegar was the next piece of the puzzle, and apple cider vinegar made the

best fit—it tasted cleaner and brighter than the sauce made with malt vinegar, which tasted a little muddy, while the sauce with distilled white vinegar was merely tart, with no fruitiness.

Aromatic vegetables give barbecue sauce some backbone. Their flavors anchor the high notes from the acidic ingredients as well as the fruity flavor of tomato. From early tests, we ruled out green bell peppers and celery because tasters found their vegetal flavors to be distracting. Onions and garlic, however, were well liked.

At first we simply sautéed the onions and garlic and then added the other ingredients to the pot. The resulting

sauce was good, but we didn't like the chunks of onion floating in the sauce. So we took the next logical step and blended the finished sauce. Unfortunately, the sauce lost its glossy texture and turned into a thick, opaque mixture resembling pureed vegetables.

We were stuck until someone in the test kitchen suggested pureeing the raw onions in a food processor, straining out the juice, and then adding the juice to the sauce. We were skeptical at first, thinking that the process would be too labor intensive. But after trying it, we realized that it actually was quicker than chopping the onion, taking only few seconds to process and strain. This method added a heady onion flavor

without the unpleasant chunks.

For condiments, we chose items most cooks are likely to have on hand. Prepared mustard adds a radishlike sharpness; Worcestershire sauce combines tartness with an unusual tamarind flavor; and hot pepper sauce adds a lovely kick of pepper and acidity. We found that too many dried spices give the sauce a chalky texture. In the end, we chose to add black pepper and a touch of chili powder and cayenne for spiciness.

We were almost there, but a little something was missing—smoke. A touch of liquid smoke made the difference between a sauce that tasted good and a

sauce that tasted like barbecue.

Quick Barbecue Sauce

makes about $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups

NOTE: ***Owing to its high sugar content, this sauce will burn when brushed onto foods over a hot fire. To prevent burning, brush the sauce onto grilled foods during the last few minutes of cooking or right after they come off the grill.***

1 medium onion, quartered
1 cup ketchup
2 tablespoons cider vinegar
2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
5 tablespoons molasses

1 teaspoon hot pepper sauce, such as Tabasco

1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper

1 1/2 teaspoons liquid smoke

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

1 medium garlic clove, minced

1 teaspoon chili powder

1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Process onion and 1/4 cup water in workbowl of food processor fitted with steel blade until pureed and mixture resembles slush, about 30 seconds. Strain mixture through fine-meshed sieve into liquid measuring cup, pushing on

solids with rubber spatula to obtain $^{1}/_{2}$ cup juice. Discard solids in strainer.

2. Whisk together ketchup, cider vinegar, Worcestershire sauce, mustard, molasses, hot pepper sauce, black pepper, liquid smoke, and onion juice in medium bowl.

3. Heat oil in large nonreactive saucepan over medium heat until shimmering but not smoking. Add garlic, chili powder, and cayenne pepper; cook until fragrant, 30 to 45 seconds. Whisk in ketchup mixture and bring to a boil; reduce heat to medium-low and simmer gently,

uncovered, until flavors meld and sauce is thickened, about 25 minutes. Cool sauce to room temperature before using or serving. (Can be covered and refrigerated up to 7 days.)

ASIAN SAUCES

THERE ARE LITERALLY HUNDREDS OF ASIAN sauces. This chapter focuses on sauces American home cooks are most likely to use in their everyday cooking. We have included one glaze (teriyaki sauce), four dipping sauces (soy ginger, peanut, hoisin sesame, and a spicy Southeast Asian version with fish sauce and lime juice), as well as a host of stir-fry sauces.

Unlike Western sauces, which often add richness to a dish, Asian sauces are light and flavor-packed. Most Asian

sauces have a strong acidic component, relying on rice wine vinegar or citrus juices. Because these acids are about half as strong as red wine or white wine vinegar, they can be used in substantial quantities.

STIR-FRY SAUCES

Stir-fry sauces are added to a wok or large skillet (our preference on an American stove, with its flat heat source) full of cooked vegetables, protein (beef, chicken, pork, seafood, or tofu), and aromatics. These sauces must be strongly flavored to give the stir-fry its character.

In our testing, we found that cornstarch

makes sauces thick and gloppy. We prefer the cleaner flavor and texture of sauces made without any thickener. Without cornstarch, it is necessary to keep the sauce to a reasonable amount (about one-half cup) that will thicken slightly on its own with a minute or so of cooking. One-half cup of sauce will nicely coat the ingredients in a standard stir-fry for four—containing $^{3}/_{4}$ pound protein and $1^{1}/_{2}$ pounds vegetables—without being too liquid.

A caution about the use of sugar. Even sweet sauces, such as sweet-and-sour, should contain a minimum of sugar. Too much Chinese food prepared in this country is overly sweet. A little sugar is

authentic (and delicious) in many recipes; a lot of sugar is not.

Soy sauce is a common ingredient in stir-fry sauces. We generally prefer regular Chinese soy sauce. However, in sauces calling for a substantial amount of soy sauce, we use a light or reduced-sodium brand. In a pinch, you can dilute 2 parts regular soy sauce with 1 part water to produce your own "light" soy sauce.

Master Recipe

Stir-Fry Sauce

makes enough for 1 stir-fry, serving 4

NOTE: ***Each sauce will coat $^{3}/_{4}$ pound protein (beef, chicken, pork, seafood, or tofu), plus $1^{1}/_{2}$ pounds chopped vegetables and aromatics, such as garlic, ginger, and scallions.***

Hot-and-Sour Sauce

3 tablespoons cider vinegar
1 tablespoon canned low-sodium chicken broth

1 tablespoon soy sauce

2 teaspoons sugar

1 1/2 tablespoons minced jalapeno or other fresh chile

Garlic Sauce

3 tablespoons light soy sauce

4 teaspoons dry sherry

1 tablespoon canned low-sodium chicken broth

2 teaspoons soy sauce

1/2 teaspoon toasted sesame oil

1 tablespoon very finely minced garlic

1/2 teaspoon sugar

1/4 teaspoon dried hot red pepper flakes

Sweet-and-Sour Sauce

3 tablespoons red wine vinegar
3 tablespoons sugar
1 1/2 tablespoons tomato sauce
1 1/2 tablespoons orange juice
1/4 teaspoon salt

Ginger Sauce

3 tablespoons light soy sauce
2 tablespoons canned low-sodium chicken broth
1 tablespoon soy sauce

1 tablespoon dry sherry

3 tablespoons very finely minced fresh gingerroot

1/2 teaspoon sugar

Black Bean Sauce

3 tablespoons dry sherry

2 tablespoons canned low-sodium chicken broth

1 tablespoon soy sauce

1 tablespoon toasted sesame oil

1/2 teaspoon sugar

1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper

1 tablespoon Chinese

fermented black beans, chopped

Oyster Sauce

3 tablespoons dry sherry
2 tablespoons oyster sauce
1 tablespoon toasted sesame oil
1 tablespoon soy sauce
1/2 teaspoon sugar
1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper

Coconut Curry Stir-Fry Sauce

1/4 cup unsweetened coconut

milk

1 tablespoon dry sherry

1 tablespoon canned low-sodium chicken broth

$1^1/_2$ teaspoons soy sauce

$1^1/_2$ teaspoons curry powder

$^1/_4$ teaspoon sugar

$^1/_4$ teaspoon salt

Spicy Orange Sauce

3 tablespoons dry sherry

1 tablespoon soy sauce

1 tablespoon toasted sesame oil

2 teaspoons red wine vinegar

$^1/_4$ teaspoon sugar

1/4 teaspoon salt

1 tablespoon minced jalapeno or other fresh chile

1 tablespoon grated orange zest

Lemon Sauce

3 tablespoons lemon juice

1/2 teaspoon minced lemon zest

2 tablespoons canned low-sodium chicken broth

1 tablespoon soy sauce

2 teaspoons sugar

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. For each stir-fry sauce, combine all ingredients in small bowl and set aside until needed. (Sauces can be prepared a few hours in advance.)

2. Once all ingredients have been stir-fried, add sauce to pan along with any ingredients that have been stir-fried and then removed from pan. Stir-fry until ingredients are well coated with sauce and sizzling hot, about 1 minute.

GLAZING SAUCE

Teriyaki sauce is a Japanese sauce made from mirin (sweet Japanese rice wine),

soy sauce, sugar, and (often) sake. Teriyaki is typically used in two ways. Usually it is brushed on foods as they grill or broil. The sauce coats foods and forms a syrupy, crusty glaze. Teriyaki sauce can also be used as a finishing sauce in a hot skillet. In Japanese cooking, it is sometimes poured over a piece of beef or salmon that has been pan-fried. The sauce reduces briefly to coat the meat or fish with a shiny glaze.

Some sources suggest using just soy and mirin to make teriyaki. In our testing, we preferred sauces made with sake, which balances the salty soy and sweet mirin. We found it necessary to simmer the sauce—some sources suggest just mixing the ingredients together—to

dissolve the sugar and thicken the texture. If not reduced substantially, the sauce will run off foods and create flare-ups when grilling.

Teriyaki Sauce

makes about 1/4 cup

NOTE: ***This sweet and salty Japanese sauce can be used with fish, meat, or poultry. Because the soy sauce provides salt, do not salt the protein beforehand. This recipe yields enough sauce for 4 to 6 portions of protein.***

1/4 cup soy sauce
1/4 cup mirin
1/4 cup sake
1 tablespoon sugar

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Combine ingredients in small, heavy-

bottomed saucepan and cook over medium heat until sugar dissolves, about 1 minute. Raise heat to high and simmer until mixture is thick and syrupy and has reduced by two-thirds, 5 to 6 minutes. Remove pan from heat and cool. (Sauce can be refrigerated in airtight container for 1 month.)

2. To use, brush directly on grilled or broiled food during last minute of cooking. Brush again prior to serving.

VARIATION:

Teriyaki Pan Sauce

The pan sauce is prepared while the

fish, meat, or poultry is still in the pan.

Combine all ingredients for Teriyaki Sauce in small bowl. When protein is browned on both sides but underdone by about 3 minutes, pour off any excess oil and add teriyaki liquid and undissolved sugar. Cook over medium-high heat for $1^{1}/_{2}$ minutes. Turn protein and cook until liquid is thick and syrupy and just a few tablespoons remain, about 1 minute. Transfer cooked protein to platter and drizzle with pan sauce. Serve immediately.

DIPPING SAUCES

Dipping sauces are fairly easy to

construct. Since they are used on the table and most of the sauce will fall back into the bowl, they must be potent. A little sauce has to go a long way. The other main consideration is consistency. Thicker sauces adhere best to skewers of beef or chicken. Since more sauce ends up in our mouth, these sauces tend toward the sweet. A thinner sauce is fine for dumplings or spring rolls, which will absorb some of the sauce. Highly acidic or salty sauces are generally thin so that they don't overwhelm foods.

Soy Ginger Dipping Sauce

makes about 1 cup

NOTE: ***Serve this thin, salty sauce with dumplings or potstickers.***

1/4 cup soy sauce

1/4 cup rice wine vinegar

2 1/2 teaspoons sugar

1/2 medium scallion, minced

2 teaspoons minced fresh gingerroot

1/2 teaspoon toasted sesame oil

1/2 teaspoon hot red pepper flakes

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Bring soy sauce, vinegar, sugar, and $^{1}/_{4}$ cup water to boil in small saucepan over medium heat, stirring until sugar dissolves.

2. Pour mixture into bowl and stir in scallion, ginger, oil, and hot red pepper flakes. (Sauce can be refrigerated in airtight container for several days.)

Spicy Southeast Asian Dipping Sauce

makes about $^{1}/_{2}$ cup

NOTE: ***This tart, thin sauce is a common component of meals in Vietnam and Thailand. It can be used as a dipping sauce with rice paper spring rolls, grilled or poached seafood (especially shrimp), or grilled chicken. This refreshing sauce makes a wonderful dressing for salads or slaws containing napa cabbage, cucumbers, carrots, and the Southeast Asian trilogy of herbs—mint, basil, and cilantro. If using as a dressing, mince the garlic and use just half a***

clove; also, eliminate the grated carrot in salads with carrot.

1/4 cup lime juice
2 tablespoons fish sauce
1 tablespoon sugar
1 large garlic clove, thinly sliced
1/2 small carrot, peeled and coarsely grated
1/4 teaspoon hot red pepper flakes

INSTRUCTIONS:

Mix all ingredients for sauce together in small bowl. Set aside, stirring occasionally to dissolve sugar, until

flavors develop, at least 1 hour or up to 1 day.

Spicy Peanut Dipping Sauce

makes about $^{3}/_{4}$ cup

NOTE: ***Serve this thick sauce with grilled chicken, grilled shrimp, or Thai spring rolls. You can also thin this sauce with stock or cooking water and then toss with Chinese egg noodles. Soy sauce is traditional in Chinese versions of this sauce; fish sauce is characteristic of Thai cooking.***

5 tablespoons creamy peanut butter

$^{1}/_{4}$ cup unsweetened coconut milk

2 tablespoons lime juice

1 tablespoon honey

2 teaspoons soy sauce or fish sauce

1 tablespoon minced fresh gingerroot

2 medium garlic cloves, minced

$^1/_2$ teaspoon red pepper flakes

INSTRUCTIONS:

Place all ingredients in blender or food processor and process until smooth. (Sauce can be refrigerated in airtight container for several days.)

Hoisin Sesame Dipping Sauce

makes about $^{1}/_{2}$ cup

NOTE: ***This sweet, thick sauce works well with dumplings and grilled chicken wings as well as with skewered grilled chicken, beef, shrimp, or scallops.***

2 tablespoons hoisin sauce
1 tablespoon rice wine vinegar
1 tablespoon soy sauce
1 teaspoon toasted sesame oil
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
2 tablespoons minced fresh gingerroot

2 medium garlic cloves, minced

2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Mix hoisin sauce, vinegar, soy sauce, sesame oil, and 2 tablespoons water in small bowl; set aside.

2. Heat vegetable oil in small saucepan over medium heat. Add ginger and garlic and sauté until fragrant but not browned, about 30 seconds. Stir in hoisin mixture; cook until flavors meld, 2 to 3 minutes. Off heat, stir in cilantro. Serve warm or at room temperature. (Sauce can be refrigerated in airtight container for

several days.)

VEGETABLE PUREES & SAUCES

THESE MODERN SAUCES DERIVE THEIR TEXTURE and flavor from vegetables or from fruits used in savory cooking, such as tomatoes. Classic sauces rely on fat (in the form of butter, eggs, cream) or flour for body. In recent years, chefs have turned to "meaty" vegetables such as carrots and red bell peppers to create texture. The resulting sauces are packed with flavor and generally low in fat.

When pureeing ingredients to make a sauce, we find that the blender creates a

smoother texture, although a food processor can also be used. Some sauces in this chapter are not pureed; rather, they are "chunky," with most of the liquid cooked off so the sauce is not too runny. Recipes in this chapter yield enough sauce for four to six generous servings.

Red Pepper Sauce with Basil

makes about 1 cup

NOTE: ***Most pureed bell pepper sauces call for roasted, peeled peppers. In this recipe, diced raw peppers are sweated in a covered pan until very tender and then pureed to create a rich, thick sauce. Serve with pork, chicken, or white-fleshed fish.***

$1^1/_2$ tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 small onion, chopped
1 large red bell pepper, cored, seeded, and chopped

1/2 cup canned low-sodium chicken broth

1 medium garlic clove, minced

2 tablespoons minced fresh basil leaves

1-2 teaspoons balsamic vinegar

Salt and ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oil in small saucepan over medium heat. Add onion and sauté until softened, about 3 minutes. Reduce heat to low. Add red pepper, cover, and cook, stirring frequently, until very tender, 15 to 20 minutes.

2. Transfer mixture to blender or food

processor. Add stock and process until smooth. Return mixture to saucepan. Add garlic and simmer to blend flavors, about 5 minutes. (Sauce can be refrigerated in airtight container for several days.) When ready to serve, heat sauce and stir in basil and season to taste with vinegar, salt, and pepper.

Carrot-Ginger Sauce

Makes about $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups

NOTE: ***Pungent ginger juice and pureed sweet carrots combine to create this brightly colored and flavorful sauce. Serve with fish, chicken, or pork.***

1 tablespoon unsalted butter

$\frac{1}{2}$ small onion, minced

2 medium carrots, peeled and cut in 1-inch chunks

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup canned low-sodium chicken broth

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup dry white wine

1 tablespoon juice from 2-inch

piece fresh gingerroot (see figures 7 and 8)

1 teaspoon white wine vinegar

Salt and ground white pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat butter in saucepan over low heat. Add onion and sauté until softened, 3 to 4 minutes. Add carrots, broth, and wine; increase heat to high and bring to boil. Reduce heat to low, cover, and cook until carrots are very tender, 15 to 20 minutes.

2. Transfer carrot mixture to blender or food processor and process until smooth. Pulse in ginger juice, vinegar,

and salt and pepper to taste. If sauce is too thick, add hot water, 1 tablespoon at a time. (Sauce can be refrigerated in airtight container for up to 1 week.)

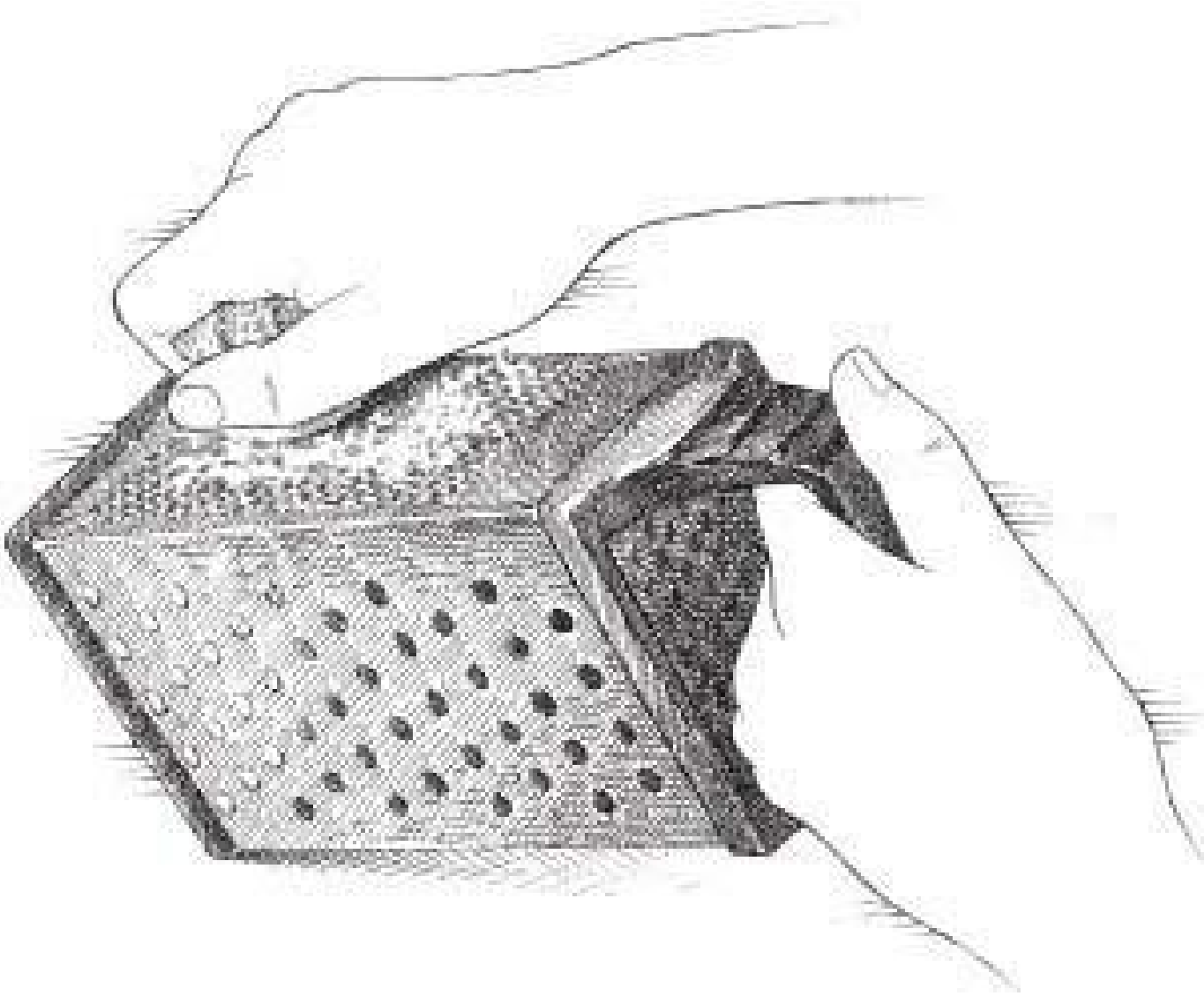

Figure 7.
Grate unpeeled knob of gingerroot against fine holes on a box grater.

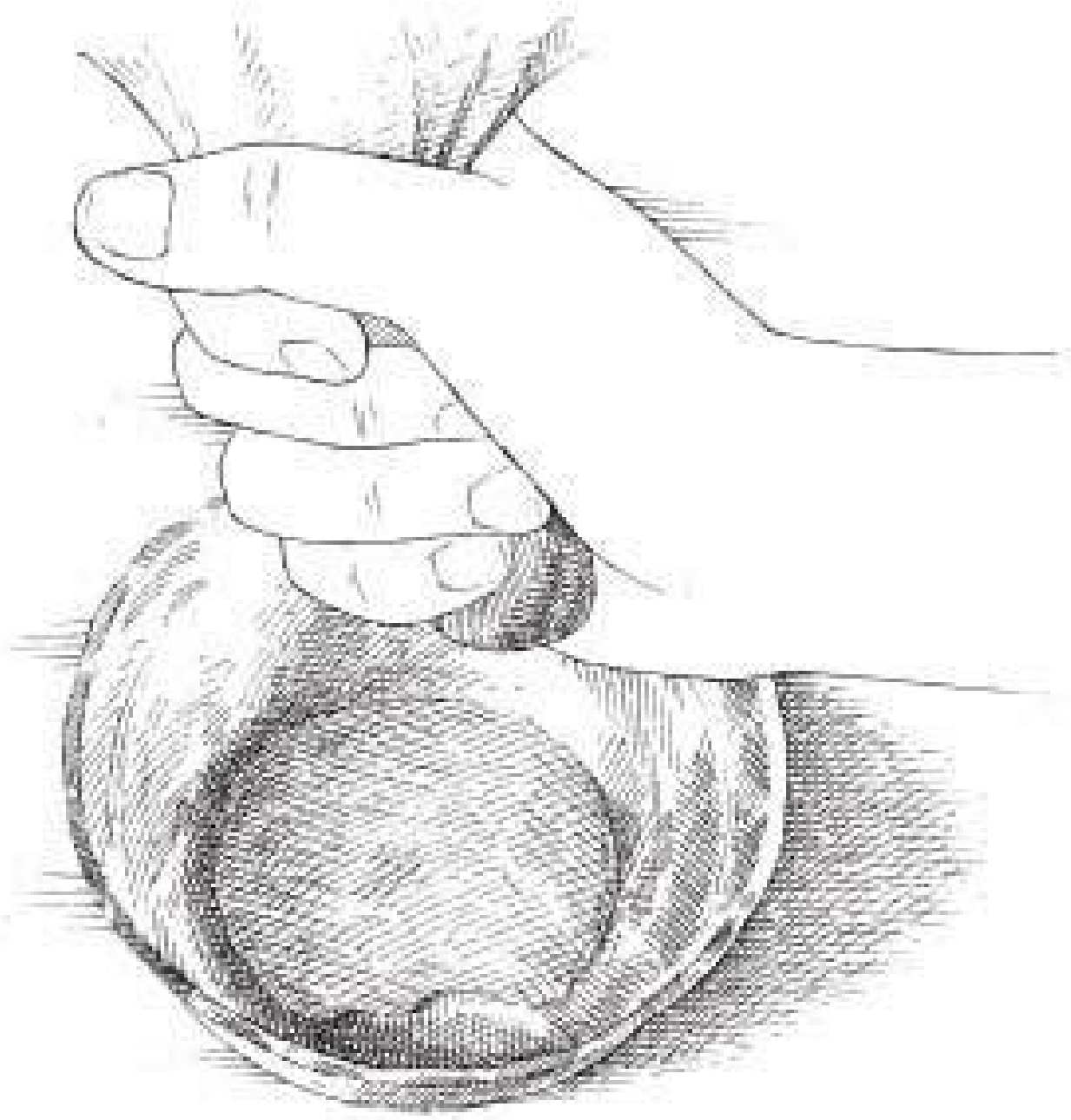

Figure 8.
Wrap grated ginger in a double layer of cheesecloth. Squeeze tightly over a small bowl to extract juice.

Porcini Mushroom/Red Wine Sauce

makes about 2 cups

NOTE: ***Use dried porcini that are large, thick, and tan or brown in color. Rehydrating the mushrooms takes some time and effort, but the reward is an intensely flavored liquid that is used to make this earthy, robust sauce. Serve with red meat and mashed potatoes or rice.***

2 ounces dried porcini mushrooms
2 cups hot water
2 tablespoons unsalted butter

1 small onion, minced

Salt and ground black pepper

1 tablespoon cornstarch

1 cup dry red wine

2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place porcini in small bowl, cover with hot water, and soak until softened, about 20 minutes. Lift porcini from water with fork. If they feel gritty, rinse under cold water. Trim any tough stems and chop porcini. Strain soaking liquid through sieve lined with paper towel and reserve separately.

2. Heat butter over medium-low heat in medium saucepan. Add onion and sauté until translucent, about 5 minutes. Add chopped porcini; sauté to release flavors, 1 to 2 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

3. Meanwhile, mix cornstarch with 2 tablespoons reserved soaking liquid in small bowl until smooth. Add remaining soaking liquid and wine to saucepan; increase heat to medium and simmer briskly until liquid has reduced by two-thirds, about 15 minutes.

4. Reblend cornstarch mixture and stir

into saucepan. Cook until liquid has thickened and darkened, 1 to 2 minutes. Stir in parsley, adjust seasonings, and serve. (Sauce can be refrigerated in airtight container for several days.)

Tomatillo-Chile Sauce

makes about 1 cup

NOTE: ***Serve this tart, fragrant sauce with seafood, grilled beef, pork, or even chicken.***

1/2 pound fresh tomatillos, husked and washed

1-2 fresh jalapeno or serrano chiles, stemmed (and seeded for a milder sauce)

2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro leaves

1/2 small onion, chopped

1 small garlic clove, chopped

1 1/2 teaspoons vegetable oil

1/2 cup canned low-sodium chicken broth

Salt

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place tomatillos and chiles in saucepan; add water to cover. Bring to a boil, cover, and simmer until barely tender, about 8 minutes. Drain and transfer to food processor or blender. Add cilantro, onion, and garlic and pulse to coarse puree.

2. Heat oil in medium skillet until shimmering. Add puree all at once and cook, stirring often, over medium-high heat, until mixture darkens and thickens,

about 5 minutes. Add broth and simmer, stirring occasionally, until mixture thickens, 10 to 15 minutes. Season with salt to taste. (Sauce can be refrigerated in airtight container for 2 days).

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Soups

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Quick-Cooked Tough Greens with Red Bell Pepper
Sautéed Tender Greens (Master Recipe)
Sautéed Tender Greens with Asian Flavors
Sautéed Tender Greens with Cumin, Tomato, and Cilantro
Sautéed Tender Greens with Indian Spices
Sautéed Tender Greens with Raisins and Almonds

Peas

Blanched Sugar Snap Peas or Snow

Peas (Master Recipe)
Peas with Ham and Mint
Peas with Hazelnut Butter and Sage
Peas with Lemon, Garlic, and Basil
Stir-Fried Snow Peas (Master Recipe)
Stir-Fried Snow Peas with Oyster Sauce
Stir-Fried Snow Peas with Spicy Orange Sauce

Peppers

Sautéed Bell Peppers (Master Recipe)
Sautéed Bell Peppers with Bacon and Caraway
Sautéed Bell Peppers with Black Olives and Feta Cheese

Sautéed Bell Peppers with Red Onion and Balsamic Vinegar

Tomatoes

Baked Tomatoes (Master Recipe)
Baked Tomatoes with Olives and Balsamic Vinegar
Sautéed Cherry Tomatoes (Master Recipe)
Sautéed Cherry Tomatoes with Brown Butter and Herbs
Sautéed Cherry Tomatoes with Curry and Mint
Tomato and Bread Salad with Garlic-Anchovy Dressing
Tomato and Cucumber Salad
Tomato Salad with Olives and

Capers (Master Recipe)

Zucchini and Summer Squash

Creamed Zucchini or Summer Squash
Grilled Zucchini or Summer Squash (Master Recipe)
Grilled Zucchini or Summer Squash with Capers and Oregano
Grilled Zucchini or Summer Squash with Tomatoes and Basil
Sautéed Zucchini or Summer Squash (Master Recipe)
Sautéed Zucchini or Summer Squash with Olives and Lemon
Sautéed Zucchini or Summer

Squash with Pancetta and Parsley
Sautéed Zucchini or Summer Squash with Walnuts and Herbs
Shredded Zucchini or Summer Squash and Carrot Sauté
Shredded Zucchini or Summer Squash Sauté (Master Recipe)

POTATOES

Potatoes

American-Style Potato Salad with Eggs and Sweet Pickles
Baked Potatoes (Master Recipe)
Boiled Potatoes with Butter (Master Recipe)
Boiled Potatoes for Salad (Master Recipe)
Boiled Potatoes with Butter and Chives
Boiled Potatoes with Lemon, Parsley, and Olive Oil
Boiled Potatoes with Mustard, Shallots, and Tarragon

Buttermilk Mashed Potatoes
French Fries (Master Recipe)
French-Style Potato Salad with Tarragon Vinaigrette
German-Style Potato Salad with Bacon and Balsamic Vinegar
Hash Browns (Master Recipe)
Hash Browns with Smoked Cheddar and Herbs
Home Fries
Home Fries with Bell Pepper and Cumin
Latkes
Mashed Potatoes (Master Recipe)
Mashed Potatoes with Garlic and Olive Oil
Mashed Potatoes with Parmesan

and Lemon
Mashed Potatoes with Pesto
Mashed Potatoes with Root Vegetables
Oven Fries (Master Recipe)
Oven Fries with Cheese
Oven Fries with Indian Spices
Oven-Fried Sweet Potatoes (Master Recipe)
Oven-Fried Sweet Potatoes with Indian Spices Potato Gratin
Potato-Beet Salad with Horseradish and Sour Cream Dressing
Potato Gratin
Quicker Baked Potatoes
Roasted Potatoes (Master Recipe)
Roasted Potatoes with Garlic and

Rosemary
Roasted Potatoes with Garlic, Feta, Olives, and Oregano
Roasted Potatoes with Spicy Caramelized Onions
Sautéed Potatoes (Master Recipe)
Sautéed Potatoes with Rosemary and Garlic
Southwestern-Style Potato Salad with Chiles and Cilantro
Spicy Fries
Spicy Home Fries
Steak Fries
Twice-Baked Potatoes (Master Recipe)
Twice-Baked Potatoes with Chipotle Pepper and Onion

Twice-Baked Potatoes with Pepperjack Cheese and Bacon
Twice-Baked Potatoes with Smoked Salmon and Chives

Sweet Potatoes

Baked Sweet Potatoes (Master Recipe)
Mashed Sweet Potatoes
Oven-Fried Sweet Potatoes with Indian Spices
Sweet Potato Casserole (Master Recipe)
Sweet Potato Casserole with Lemon and Bourbon
Sweet Potato Casserole with Maple

Sweet Potato Casserole with Orange
Sweet Potato Casserole with Pecan Topping

PASTA SAUCES

Dairy Sauces

- Alfredo Sauce
- Butter and Pine Nut Sauce
- Butter and Sage Sauce
- Gorgonzola Sauce
- Porcini Mushroom Sauce with Cream
- Ricotta and Parmesan Sauce with Peas
- Ricotta and Parmesan Sauce with Peas and Bacon

Meat Sauces

- Bolognese Sauce

Carbonara Sauce
Meatballs in Smooth Tomato Sauce
Quick Meat Sauce
Sausage-Mushroom Sauce with Tomatoes

Pesto and Other Oil-Based Sauces

Arugula Pesto
Classic Pesto
Mint Pesto
Olive Oil and Garlic Sauce
Olive Oil and Garlic Sauce with Lemon
Spicy Olive Oil and Garlic Sauce
Sun-Dried Tomato and Black Olive Pesto

Seafood Sauces

Fresh Clam Sauce
Scallop Sauce with Toasted Bread Crumbs
Seared Scallop Sauce with Wine and Cream
Shrimp Sauce with Basil
Steamed Mussel Sauce with Lemon and White Wine

Tomato Sauces

Fresh Tomato Sauce with Aromatic Vegetables
Fresh Tomato Sauce with Basil (Master Recipe)
Fresh Tomato Sauce with Butter and Onions

Raw Tomato Sauce with Basil and Garlic (Master Recipe)
Raw Tomato Sauce with Mozzarella
Raw Tomato Sauce with Olives and Capers
Raw Tomato Sauce with Pesto
Raw Tomato Sauce with Mixed Herbs
Simple Tomato Sauce (Master Recipe)
Spicy Raw Tomato Sauce
Spicy Tomato Sauce
Tomato Sauce with Anchovies and Olives
Tomato Sauce with Bacon and Parsley

Tomato Sauce with Vodka and Cream

Vegetable Sauces

Braised Fennel and Kale Sauce with Balsamic Vinegar
Broccoli-Anchovy Sauce (Master Recipe)
Broccoli Rabe, Garlic, Raisin, and Pine Nut Sauce
Cauliflower, Onion, and Bacon Sauce
Escarole and White Bean Sauce
Portobello Mushroom Ragù
Roasted Red and Yellow Pepper Sauce

SHRIMP & SHELLFISH

Clams or Mussels

Grilled Clams or Mussels
Mussels Steamed in Beer
Steamed Clams or Mussels (Master Recipe)
Steamed Clams or Mussels with Asian Flavors
Steamed Mussels with Cream Sauce and Tarragon
Steamed Clams or Mussels with White Wine, Curry, and Herbs
Steamed Clams or Mussels with White Wine, Tomato, and Basil

Crabs

Boiled Blue Crabs (Master Recipe)
Crab Boil with Vinegar and Old Bay
Crabmeat Salad (Master Recipe)
Crabmeat Salad with Chives and Horseradish
Crabmeat Salad with Lemon and Tarragon
Pan-Fried Crab Cakes
Pan-Fried Soft-Shell Crabs (Master Recipe)
Pan-Fried Soft-Shell Crabs with Lemon, Capers, and Herbs
Pan-Fried Soft-Shell Crabs with Orange and Soy
Spicy Crab Boil with Vinegar and

Old Bay

Lobster

Oven-Roasted Lobsters with Herbed Bread Crumbs
Steamed Lobsters

Oysters

Shucked Oysters with Champagne Dressing

Sauces

Creamy Dipping Sauce
Tartar Sauce

Scallops

Fried Scallops
Pan-Seared Scallops (Master

Recipe)
Pan-Seared Scallops with Lemon, Shallots, and Capers
Pan-Seared Scallops with Sherry, Red Onion, Orange, and Thyme

Shrimp

Brined Frozen Shrimp
Brined Shrimp (Master Recipe)
Broiled Shrimp
Curried Shrimp Salad
Fried Shrimp
Grilled or Broiled Shrimp with Asian Flavors
Grilled Shrimp with Spicy Garlic Paste (Master Recipe)
Herb-Poached Shrimp

Pan-Seared Shrimp (Master Recipe)
Pan-Seared Shrimp with Shallots and Tarragon
Pan-Seared Shrimp with Southwestern Flavors
Shrimp Cocktail
Shrimp Salad (Master Recipe)
Shrimp Salad with Chipotle Chile
Shrimp Scampi (Master Recipe)
Shrimp Scampi with Cumin, Paprika, and Sherry Vinegar
Shrimp Scampi with Orange Zest and Cilantro

CHICKEN BREASTS

Bone-In Breasts

Broiled Bone-In Chicken Breasts
Broiled Chicken Breasts with Garlic, Lemon, and Rosemary
Broiled Chicken Breasts with Jamaican Jerk Dipping Sauce
Charcoal-Grilled Bone-In Chicken Breasts
Chicken Salad with Hoisin Dressing
Creamy Chicken Salad
Curried Chicken Salad with Raisins and Honey
Deviled Chicken Breasts

Five-Spice Broiled Chicken Breasts with Ginger Butter
Gas-Grilled Bone-In Chicken Breasts
Grilled Chicken Breasts with Barbecue Sauce
Roasted Bone-In Chicken Breasts
Roasted Chicken Breasts for Salad
Roasted Chicken Breasts with Herb Crust
Roasted Chicken Breasts with Honey Mustard Glaze
Roasted Chicken Breasts with Lemon and Herbs
Roasted Chicken Breasts with Porcini Mushroom Paste
Waldorf Chicken Salad

Boneless Cutlets

Asian-Style Baked Chicken Cutlets with Tomatoes and Herbs

Baked Chicken Cutlets with Roasted Fennel and Tomatoes

Baked Chicken Cutlets with Roasted Onions and Mushrooms

Baked Chicken Cutlets with Roasted Peppers and Onions

Baked Chicken Cutlets with Tomatoes and Herbs

Baked Chicken Cutlets with Tomatoes and Porcini Mushrooms

Charcoal-Grilled Chicken Cutlets

Gas-Grilled Chicken Cutlets

Oven-Steamed Chicken Cutlets with Tomatoes and Herbs

Sautéed Chicken Cutlets
Sautéed Stuffed Chicken Cutlets
Stir-Fried Chicken and Bok Choy with Ginger Sauce
Stir-Fried Chicken and Broccoli with Hoisin Sauce
Stir-Fried Chicken and Green Beans with Garlic Sauce

Fillings, Glazes, Rubs, and Sauces

Asian Spice Paste
Broiled Asparagus and Smoked Mozzarella Filling
Citrus and Cilantro Spice Paste
Gorgonzola Cheese Filling with Walnuts and Figs

Ham and Cheddar Cheese Filling
Lemon-Caper Sauce (Piccata)
Maple Mustard Glaze
Marsala Sauce
Pantry Spice Rub
Smoky Orange Chile Glaze

SAUTÉ

Beef

- Brandy Peppercorn Sauce
- Dried Porcini and Rosemary Sauce
- Red Wine Sauce
- Roquefort Butter
- Rosemary-Parmesan Butter
- Sautéed Steak (Master Recipe)
- Steak Diane
- Tapenade Butter

Chicken

- Asian-Style Sweet and Sour Sauce
- Lemon-Caper Sauce
- Mustard and Cream Sauce with

Endive and Caraway
Peach Salsa
Sautéed Breaded Chicken Cutlets (Master Recipe)
Sautéed Breaded Chicken Cutlets with Cornmeal Crust
Sautéed Breaded Chicken Cutlets with Lemon and Herbs
Sautéed Breaded Chicken Cutlets with Parmesan
Sautéed Chicken Breast Cutlets (Master Recipe)
Sherry-Cream Sauce with Mushrooms
Tomato-Basil Sauce with Capers

Fish

Balsamic Basil Sauce

Chipotle Orange Sauce
Fresh Tomato and Rosemary Sauce
Lemon-Parsley Sauce with Capers
Mustard Dill Sauce
Sautéed Breaded Fish Fillets (Master Recipe)
Sautéed Fish Steaks (Master Recipe)
Sautéed Salmon Fillets (Master Recipe)
Sautéed Thick Fish Fillets
Sautéed Thin Fish Fillets (Master Recipe)

Pork

Asian-Flavored Sauce with Chile and Star Anise

Mustard and Tarragon Sauce
Port Sauce with Dried Cherries and Rosemary
Sautéed Pork Tenderloin Medallions (Master Recipe)

Shrimp and Scallops

Cuban Citrus Glaze
Curried Tomato Sauce with Basil
Garlic, White Wine, and Lemon Sauce
Lemon-Vodka Glaze
Sautéed Scallops (Master Recipe)
Sautéed Shrimp (Master Recipe)
Spicy Nectarine Salsa
Thai Curry Glaze

Turkey and Veal

Balsamic and Rosemary Sauce
Marsala Sauce
Olive, Anchovy, and Orange Sauce
Sautéed Breaded Turkey or Veal Cutlets (Master Recipe)
Sautéed Breaded Turkey or Veal Cutlets with Parmesan
Sautéed Turkey or Veal Cutlets (Master Recipe)
Tomato, Pancetta, and Caper Sauce

POT PIES & CASSEROLES

Bean Casseroles

Hoppin' John

Sausage, Corn, and Lima Bean Casserole with Cornbread Crust

White Bean Casserole with Ham

White Bean Casserole with Ham and Kale

Pasta Casseroles

"Baked" Macaroni and Cheese

Baked Ziti with Eggplant

Baked Ziti with Meatballs

Baked Ziti with Mozzarella and Tomatoes (Master Recipe)
Best Meatballs
Quick Lasagne with Meatballs (Master Recipe)
Quick Lasagne with Roasted Zucchini and Eggplant
Turkey Tetrazzini

Potato Casseroles

Hearty Scalloped Potatoes
New England Scalloped Fish and Potato Casserole
Shepherd's Pie
Shepherd's Pie with Ground Lamb

Pot Pies

Chicken Pot Pie (Master Recipe)
Chicken Pot Pie with Corn and Bacon
Chicken Pot Pie with Spring Vegetables
Chicken Pot Pie with Wild Mushrooms
Cornmeal Biscuits
Fluffy Buttermilk Biscuits
Herb Biscuits
Parmesan Biscuits
Rich, Flaky Pie Dough
Turkey Pot Pie
Vegetable Pot Pie (Master

Recipe)
Vegetable Pot Pie with Wild Mushrooms
Vegetable Pot Pie with Winter Root Vegetables

Rice and Grain Casseroles

Barley and Mushroom Casserole with Chicken
Barley and Mushroom Casserole with Sausage
Beef and Polenta Casserole
Chicken and Rice Casserole (Master Recipe)
Chicken and Rice Casserole with Anchovies, Olives, and Lemon

Chicken and Rice Casserole with Chiles, Cilantro, and Lime
Chicken and Rice Casserole with Indian Spices
Chicken and Rice Casserole with Saffron, Peas, and Paprika
Jambalaya with Chorizo and Shrimp
Sausage and Polenta Casserole

HOLIDAY ROASTS & BIRDS

Glazes, Gravies, Sauces, and Stocks

Brown Goose Stock
Giblet Pan Gravy
Mint Sauce
Mustard and Brown Sugar Glaze
Orange Juice and Brown Sugar Glaze
Piquant Caper Sauce
Red Wine Giblet Gravy

Roasts

Baked City Ham
Baked Country Ham
Best Roast Turkey
Large Roast Turkey
Perfect Prime Rib
Roast Goose
Roast Leg of Lamb
Roast Stuffed Turkey
Stuffed Roast Cornish Hens

Stuffings and Accompaniments

Bread Stuffing with Bacon, Apples, Sage, and Caramelized Onions
Bread Stuffing with Sausage, Pecans, and Dried Apricots
Couscous Stuffing with Currants,

Apricots, and Pistachios
Quinoa Stuffing with Lemon and Rosemary
Wild Rice Stuffing with Cranberries and Toasted Pecans
Yorkshire Pudding

GRILL

Beef

Grilled Burgers
Grilled London Broil
Grilled Strip Steak
Grilled Porterhouse or T-Bone Steak
Tuscan Steak with Lemon and Olive Oil

Butters, Rubs, Pastes, and Sauces

Asian Spice Paste
Barbecue Sauce with Asian Flavors
Barbecue Sauce with Mexican Flavors

Basic Barbecue Sauce
Basic Spice Paste for Chicken with Citrus and Cilantro
Basic Spice Rub for Chicken
Garam Masala Spice Rub
Herb Rub for Pork
Lemon-Parsley Butter
Parsley Butter
Parsley-Caper Butter
Peach Salsa
Pineapple Salsa
Roquefort Butter
Spice Rub for Pork

Chicken

Grilled Bone-In Chicken Breasts

Grilled Chicken Thighs or Legs

Lamb

Grilled Lamb Chops with Garlic-Rosemary Marinade
Grilled Lamb Chops with Soy-Shallot Marinade
Grilled Loin or Rib Lamb Chops
Grilled Shoulder Lamb Chops

Pork

Grilled Pork Chops
Grilled Pork Tenderloin

Seafood

Grilled Salmon
Grilled Salmon with Indian Flavors and Mango Chutney
Grilled Salmon with Mustard Glaze
Grilled Shrimp with Anchovy Butter
Grilled Shrimp with Garlic Paste
Grilled Swordfish with Lemon-Parsley Sauce
Grilled Swordfish with Salsa Verde
Grilled Tuna with Herb-Infused Oil
Thick-Cut Grilled Swordfish
Thick-Cut Grilled Tuna

Thin-Cut Grilled Swordfish
Thin-Cut Grilled Tuna

Vegetables

Grilled Asparagus with Almonds, Green Olives, and Sherry Vinaigrette
Grilled Asparagus with Peanut Sauce
Grilled Corn with Herb Butter
Grilled Italian Vegetables with Thyme and Garlic
Grilled Portobello Mushrooms, Red Pepper, and Garlic Croutons

BARBECUED & ROASTED ON GRILL

Beef

Barbecued Beef Brisket (Master Recipe)
Barbecued Beef Brisket on a Gas Grill
Grill-Roasted Beef Tenderloin (Master Recipe)
Grill-Roasted Beef Tenderloin on a Gas Grill
Grill-Roasted Beef Tenderloin with Garlic and Rosemary
Grill-Roasted Beef Tenderloin with Pepper Crust

Fish

Barbecued Salmon (Master Recipe)
Barbecued Salmon on a Gas Grill

Pork

Barbecued Pulled Pork (Master Recipe)
Barbecued Pulled Pork on a Gas Grill
Barbecued Ribs (Master Recipe)
Barbecued Ribs on a Gas Grill
Grill-Roasted Pork Loin (Master Recipe)
Grill-Roasted Pork Loin on a Gas Grill

Grill-Roasted Pork Loin with Garlic and Rosemary

Poultry

Grill-Roasted Chicken (Master Recipe)
Grill-Roasted Chicken on a Gas Grill
Grill-Roasted Chicken with Barbecue Sauce
Grill-Roasted Chicken with Spice Rub
Grill-Roasted Cornish Hens (Master Recipe)
Grill-Roasted Cornish Hens on a Gas Grill
Grill-Roasted Turkey (Master

Recipe)
Grill-Roasted Turkey on a Gas Grill
Grill-Roasted Turkey with Spice Rub

Rubs and Sauces

Aromatic Rub for Poultry
Basic Barbecue Sauce (Master Recipe)
Barbecue Sauce with Asian Flavors
Barbecue Sauce with Mexican Flavors
Dry Rub for Barbecue
orseradish Cream Sauce
Indian Spice Rub for Poultry
Mustard Dill Sauce

STIR-FRY

Rices

Basic Brown Rice
Fluffy White Rice
Sticky White Rice

Sauces

Black Bean Sauce
Coconut Curry Sauce
Garlic Sauce
Ginger Sauce
Lemon Sauce
Oyster Sauce
Spicy Tangerine Sauce
Spicy Tomato Sauce

Sweet-and-Sour Sauce
Szechwan Chile Sauce

Stir-Fries

Basic Stir-Fry (Master Recipe)
Stir-Fried Asparagus and Basil in Spicy Tangerine Sauce
Stir-Fried Beef and Eggplant in Oyster Sauce
Stir-Fried Beef and Snow Peas in Ginger Sauce
Stir-Fried Beef and Vegetables in Szechwan Chile Sauce
Stir-Fried Chicken and Bok

Choy in Ginger Sauce
Stir-Fried Chicken and Broccoli in Coconut Curry Sauce
Stir-Fried Chicken, Celery, and Peanuts in Szechwan Chile Sauce
Stir-Fried Chicken, Pineapple, and Red Onion in Sweet-and-Sour Sauce
Stir-Fried Green Beans in Spicy Tomato Sauce
Stir-Fried Pork and Red Cabbage in Hot-and-Sour Sauce
Stir-Fried Scallops and Asparagus in Lemon Sauce
Stir-Fried Sea Bass and

Vegetables in Spicy Tomato Sauce
Stir-Fried Shrimp and Fennel in Spicy Tangerine Sauce
Stir-Fried Shrimp and Water Chestnuts in Hot-and-Sour Sauce
Stir-Fried Shrimp, Scallions, and Peppers in Garlic Sauce
Stir-Fried Snow Peas and Shiitake Mushrooms in Garlic Sauce
Stir-Fried Spinach in Ginger Sauce
Stir-Fried Squid in Black Bean Sauce
Stir-Fried Tofu and Two

Peppers in Black Bean Sauce
Stir-Fried Tofu and Vegetables in Hot-and-Sour Sauce

CHINESE FAVORITES

Dumplings

Flavoring Mixture for Dumplings
Mixed Vegetable Filling
Mustard-Soy Dipping Sauce
Pan-Fried Dumplings
Pork Filling
Shrimp Filling
Soy-Ginger Dipping Sauce
Spicy Soy-Ginger Dipping Sauce
Steamed Dumplings

Noodles

Beef and Pepper Lo Mein

Cold Sesame Noodles (Master Recipe)
Cold Sesame Noodles with Chicken and Vegetables
Pork Lo Mein (Master Recipe)
Shrimp and Snow Pea Lo Mein
Vegetable Lo Mein

Rice

Curried Chicken Fried Rice
Fried Rice (Master Recipe)
Pork Fried Rice
Shrimp Fried Rice
Sticky White Rice

Soups

Egg Drop Soup
Hot-and-Sour Soup
Wonton Soup

Steamed Fish

Steamed Fish with Black Beans and Scallions (Master Recipe)
Steamed Fish with Garlic and Cilantro
Steamed Fish with Sizzling Ginger and Scallions

Stir-Fry Main Courses

Beef and Broccoli in Garlic Sauce (Master Recipe)

Bok Choy in Garlic Sauce
Kung Pao Chicken (Master Recipe)
Kung Pao Shrimp
Scallops and Broccoli in Garlic Sauce

PIZZA

Deep-Dish Pizzas

Classic Deep-Dish Pizza with Tomato Sauce and Mozzarella

Deep-Dish Pizza (Master Recipe)

Deep-Dish Pizza with Broccoli Ricotta, and Mozzarella

Deep-Dish Pizza with Roasted Vegetables

Deep-Dish Pizza with Sausage and Mushrooms

Doughs

Basic Pizza Dough (Master Recipe)
Cornmeal Pizza Dough
Deep-Dish Pizza Dough
8-Hour Pizza Dough
Garlic-Herb Pizza Dough
Semolina Pizza Dough
75-Minute Pizza Dough
24-Hour Pizza Dough
Whole Wheat Pizza Dough

Grilled Pizzas

Grilled Pizza (Master Recipe)
Grilled Pizza with Fennel, Sun-Dried Tomato, and Asiago
Grilled Pizza with Fresh

Tomatoes and Basil
Grilled Pizza with Grilled Eggplant and Goat Cheese
Grilled Pizza with Portobello Mushrooms and Onions
Grilled Pizza with Shrimp and Feta Cheese

Sauces

No-Cook Tomato Sauce
No-Cook Tomato Sauce with Basil
Spicy No-Cook Tomato Sauce
Thick Tomato Sauce

Thin-Crust Pizzas

Andouille Sausage and Onion Pizza

Caramelized Onion Pizza with Oil-Cured Olives and Parmesan
Classic Tomato Pizza with Mozzarella and Basil
Fresh Tomato Pizza with Arugula and Prosciutto
Lemon—Sea Salt Pizza
Pepperoni Pizza
Pesto Pizza
Pizza Bianca with Garlic and Rosemary
Red Clam Pizza
Sausage and Bell Pepper Pizza with Basil and Mozzarella
Thin-Crust Pizza (Master

Recipe)
White Clam Pizza
White Pizza with Spinach and Ricotta

MUFFINS, BISCUITS, & SCONES

Biscuits

Buttermilk Biscuits (Master Recipe)
Buttermilk Biscuits with All-Purpose Flour
Cream Biscuits (Master Recipe)
Cream Biscuits with Cheddar Cheese
Cream Biscuits with Fresh Herbs
Sweet Milk Biscuits

Muffins

- Apricot Almond Muffins
- Banana Walnut Muffins
- Basic Muffins (Master Recipe)
- Bran Muffins (Master Recipe)
- Corn Muffins
- Cranberry-Walnut-Orange Muffins
- Lemon Blueberry Muffins
- Lemon Poppy Seed Muffins
- Mocha Chip Muffins
- Raspberry Almond Muffins

Quick Breads

- American-Style Soda Bread with Raisins and Caraway

Banana Bread (Master Recipe)
Banana Chocolate Bread
Banana Coconut Bread with Macadamia Nuts
Classic Irish Soda Bread (Master Recipe)
Cornbread (Master Recipe)
Cornbread with Cheddar Cheese
Cornbread with Chiles
Cornbread with Corn Kernels
Cranberry Nut Bread
Irish Brown Soda Bread
Orange-Spice Banana Bread

Scones

Cakey Scones

Cranberry Orange Scones
Cream Scones (Master Recipe)
Ginger Scones
Glazed Scones
Lemon Blueberry Scones
Oatmeal Raisin Scones

COOKIE JAR FAVORITES

Almond Crescents (Master Recipe)
Almond Sandies
Black and White Chocolate Chip Cookies
Butterscotch Icebox Cookies
Chocolate Chip Cookies with Coconut and Toasted Almonds
Chocolate Chip Oatmeal Cookies
Chocolate Cookies (Master Recipe)
Chocolate Cookies with Orange Zest
Chocolate Cookies with White Chocolate Chips and Macadamia Nuts

Chocolate Icebox Cookies
Chocolate—Peanut Butter Sandwich Cookies
Chocolate Sandwich Cookies (Master Recipe)
Cinnamon-Sugar Icebox Cookies
Cocoa Chocolate Chip Cookies
Coconut Macaroons (Master Recipe)
Coconut Macaroons with Chocolate Chips
Date Oatmeal Cookies
Ginger Icebox Cookies
Ginger Oatmeal Cookies
Glazed Lemon Thins
Glazed Molasses-Spice Cookies
Jam Sandwich Cookies

Linzer Cookies
Marble Icebox Cookies
Mint Chocolate Sandwich Cookies
Molasses-Spice Cookies (Master Recipe)
Molasses-Spice Cookies with Orange Zest
Nut Oatmeal Cookies
Oatmeal Cookies (Master Recipe)
Orange and Almond Oatmeal Cookies
"Oreo" Cookies
Peanut Butter Cookies (Master Recipe)
Pecan or Walnut Crescents
Pecan Sandies (Master Recipe)
Snickerdoodles (Master Recipe)

Sugar Cookies (Master Recipe)
Sugar Cookies with Ginger
Sugar Cookies with Lime Zest
Thick and Chewy Chocolate Chip Cookies (Master Recipe)
Traditional Chocolate Chip Cookies (Master Recipe)
Vanilla Icebox Cookies (Master Recipe)
Vanilla Sandwich Cookies with Mocha Filling
Walnut Sandies

LAYER CAKE

Cakes

- Almond Layer Cake
- Almond Layer Cake with Maple Meringue Frosting
- Basic Chocolate Cake
- Basic White Cake
- Basic Yellow Cake
- Classic Devil's Food Cake with Whipped Cream Frosting
- Classic White Layer Cake with Vanilla Frosting and Lemon Curd Filling
- Classic White Layer Cake with Vanilla Frosting and Raspberry-

Almond Filling
Classic Yellow Layer Cake with Chocolate Buttercream
Country Buttermilk Layer Cake with Maple Meringue Frosting
German Chocolate Layer Cake with Coconut-Pecan Filling
Lemon Layer Cake
Lemon Layer Cake with Lemon Curd Filling and Vanilla Frosting
Marble Layer Cake with Chocolate Frosting
Old-Fashioned Chocolate Layer Cake with Chocolate Cream Frosting
Old-Fashioned Strawberry Layer Cake with Whipped Cream Frosting

Orange Layer Cake
Reduced-Guilt Chocolate Layer Cake with Meringue Frosting
Sour Cream—Fudge Layer Cake with Chocolate Butter Icing
Southern Coconut Layer Cake
Spice Layer Cake with Meringue Frosting
Velvet Devil's Food Layer Cake with Coffee Buttercream
Walnut Layer Cake with Maple Meringue Frosting

Fillings

Coconut-Pecan Filling
Lemon Curd Filling

Frostings

Almond Buttercream
Almond Decorating Frosting
Chocolate Butter Icing
Chocolate Buttercream
Chocolate Cream Frosting
Chocolate Decorating Frosting
Coffee Buttercream
Coffee Decorating Frosting
Lemon Buttercream
Lemon Decorating Frosting
Maple Meringue Frosting
Meringue Frosting
Orange Buttercream
Orange Decorating Frosting
Vanilla Buttercream
Vanilla Decorating Frosting
Whipped Cream Frosting

PIE

Crusts

American Pie Dough for Fruit Pies
American Pie Dough for Prebaked Pie Shell
Firm American Pie Dough for Decorative Edging
Graham Cracker Crust
Prebaked Pie Dough Coated with Graham Cracker Crumbs

Pies

Apple Pie
Apple Pie with Crystallized Ginger
Apple Pie with Dried Fruit

Apple Pie with Fresh Cranberries
Banana Cream Pie
Buttermilk Pecan Pie with Raisins
Butterscotch Cream Pie
Chocolate Cream Pie
Coconut Cream Pie
Custard Pie
Do-Ahead Fresh-Baked Apple Pie
Key Lime Pie
Key Lime Pie with Meringue Topping
Lemon Custard Pie
Lemon Meringue Pie
Maple Pecan Pie
Orange Custard Pie
Pecan Pie
Pumpkin Pie

Summer Fruit Pie
Blueberry
Cherry
Peach
Strawberry Rhubarb
Triple Chocolate Chunk Pecan Pie
Vanilla Cream Pie

SIMPLE FRUIT DESSERTS

Desserts

Baked Apples
Baked Apples with Walnut-Raisin Filling
Baked Peaches Filled with Cookie Crumbs
Brown Sugar Baked Apples
Brown Betty (Master Recipe)
Buckle (Master Recipe)
Citrus Salad
Cobbler with Butter Cookie Dough Topping (Master Recipe)
Cobbler with Dropped Biscuit

Topping
Cobbler with Flaky Pie Pastry Topping (Master Recipe)
Cobbler with Individual Biscuit Topping
Cobbler with Rich Shortcake Topping (Master Recipe)
Cornmeal Shortcakes
Dried Apricot Compote with White Wine and Vanilla
Dried Fig Compote with Port
Dried Fruit Compote (Master Recipe)
Fruit Crisp (Master Recipe)
Fruit Fool (Master Recipe)
Fruit Salad (Master Recipe)
Fruit Salad with Liqueur
Ginger Shortcakes

Grilled Bananas with Caramel Sauce and Nuts
Grilled Peaches with Caramel Sauce and Nuts
Grilled Pears with Caramel Sauce and Nuts
Grilled Pineapple with Caramel Sauce and Nuts
Mango Fool
Mixed Berry Gratin
Mixed Berry Salad
Mixed Melon Salad
Pandowdy
Peach-Berry Salad
Peaches Poached in Spiced Red Wine
Plate Cake

Plum Fool
Poached Fruit (Master Recipe)
Poached Pears with Vanilla and Star Anise
Prune Compote with Armagnac and Lemon
Rhubarb Fool
Shortcakes with Fruit and Whipped Cream (Master Recipe)
Strawberry Gratin
Summer Pudding

Sauces

Cold Sabayon or Zabaglione
Lemon Sabayon

Perfect Whipped Cream Zabaglione

HOLIDAY DESSERTS

All-Season Apple Pie
Apple Pie with Dried Fruit
Chocolate Soufflé
Classic Trifle
Cranberry Apple Pie
Crème Brûlée
Crystallized Ginger Apple Pie
Easy Chocolate Truffles
Fluffy Orange-Mace Hard Sauce
Fresh Raspberry Purée
Ginger Crème Brûlée
Lemon Whipped Cream
Make-Ahead Soufflé
Meringue Mushrooms
Mocha Soufflé

Modern Mincemeat Pie
Plum Pudding
Pumpkin Crème Brûlée
Rich Baked Custard
Sponge Sheet Cake
Yule Log Cake

ICE CREAM

Gelato

- Amaretti Gelato
- Cinnamon Gelato
- Fig Gelato
- Gianduja Gelato
- Hazelnut Gelato

Ice Cream

- Banana Chocolate Chunk Ice Cream
- Banana Ice Cream
- Banana Walnut Ice Cream
- Blackberry Ice Cream
- Butter Pecan Ice Cream

Caramel Almond Swirl Ice Cream

Cherry Chocolate Chunk Ice Cream

Cherry Ice Cream

Chocolate Chip Ice Cream

Chocolate Chocolate Chip Ice Cream

Chocolate Ice Cream

Chocolate Oreo Ice Cream

Chocolate Truffle Ice Cream

Coffee Ice Cream

Coffee Oreo Ice Cream

Ginger Ice Cream

Maple Walnut Ice Cream

Mint Chocolate Chip Ice Cream

Mocha Chip Ice Cream
Oreo Ice Cream
Peach Ice Cream
Pistachio Ice Cream
Raspberry Ice Cream
Rocky Road Ice Cream
Rum Raisin Ice Cream
Strawberry Ice Cream
Toasted Coconut Ice Cream
Vanilla Ice Cream (Master Recipe)

Sauces and Accompaniments

Best Butterscotch Sauce
Classic Caramel Sauce
Hot Fudge Sauce
Melba Sauce

Perfect Whipped Cream

Warm Bing Cherry Sauce

SAUCES & GRAVIES

Asian Sauces

Black Bean Stir-Fry Sauce
Coconut Curry Stir-Fry Sauce
Garlic Stir-Fry Sauce
Ginger Stir-Fry Sauce
Hoisin Sesame Dipping Sauce
Hot-and-Sour Stir-Fry Sauce
Lemon Stir-Fry Sauce
Oyster Stir-Fry Sauce
Soy Ginger Dipping Sauce
Spicy Orange Stir-Fry Sauce
Spicy Peanut Dipping Sauce
Spicy Southeast Asian Dipping Sauce

Stir-Fry Sauce (Master Recipe)
Sweet-and-Sour Stir Fry Sauce
Teriyaki Pan Sauce
Teriyaki Sauce

Barbecue Sauce

Quick Barbecue Sauce

Butter Sauces

Brown Butter Sauce (Master Recipe)
Brown Butter Sauce with Capers and Herbs
Brown Butter Sauce with Lemon and Parsley
Lemon Butter Sauce
Mustard Butter Sauce

Red Butter Sauce
White Butter Sauce (Master Recipe)

Egg Sauces

Béarnaise Sauce
Dijon Mayonnaise
Food Processor Mayonnaise
Garlic Mayonnaise (Aioli)
Herb Hollandaise Sauce
Hollandaise Sauce (Master Recipe)
Horseradish Hollandaise Sauce
Lemon Mayonnaise
Lime-Chipotle Mayonnaise
Mayonnaise (Master Recipe)
Mustard Hollandaise Sauce
Saffron/Roasted Red Pepper

Mayonnaise
Tarragon Mayonnaise
Tartar Sauce

Gravies and Jus

Beef Gravy
Chicken Jus (Master Recipe)
Chicken Jus with Mustard and Dill
Chicken Jus with Orange and Cumin
Chicken Jus with White Wine, Garlic, and Parsley
Lemon Chicken Jus
Turkey Giblet Gravy

Skillet Sauces

Balsamic Vinegar and Rosemary Skillet Sauce

Fresh Tomato and Basil Skillet Sauce
Herb Skillet Sauce (Master Recipe)
Lemon-Caper Skillet Sauce
Marsala Skillet Sauce
Port Skillet Sauce with Dried Cherries and Rosemary
Red Wine Skillet Sauce
White Wine, Mustard, and Tarragon Skillet Sauce

Vegetable Purées and Sauces

Carrot-Ginger Sauce
Porcini Mushroom—Red Wine Sauce
Red Pepper Sauce with Basil

Tomatillo-Chile Sauce

White Sauces

Béchamel Sauce (Master Recipe)

Sauce Mornay

Véloute Sauce