

Care of a Carbon Steel Knife

Carbon steel knives have a long tradition and are valued for their excellent edge retention. Their disadvantage, however, is their greater susceptibility to corrosion. Proper care therefore requires a few simple habits that will help keep the knife in good condition for many years.

Clean the knife after every use

After using a carbon steel knife, it is important to remove all dirt or food residue from the blade. Wash the blade with warm water and a mild detergent or soap, using a soft sponge or cloth. Never leave the knife soaking for a long time. After washing, dry it thoroughly with a clean towel.

When working with food, it is useful to keep one damp and one dry cloth at hand. The damp cloth can be used to remove residue as you work, while the dry cloth can be used to dry the blade immediately. This habit is particularly important when working with acidic foods such as onions or tomatoes.

Patina is not rust

Carbon steel naturally changes colour during use. A grey to black layer known as a patina gradually forms on the blade. This is a natural form of oxidation that can help protect the steel from destructive rust. Patina is therefore a normal and desirable part of using a carbon steel knife.

As a general rule: grey or black = patina, red or orange = rust. The patina may darken over time, especially when the knife is used on acidic foods or meat. Each blade can therefore develop a unique appearance.

Oil the blade

Carbon steel is sensitive to moisture, so it is advisable to regularly protect the blade with a thin layer of oil. For knives used in food preparation, use a food-safe oil suitable for this purpose. Apply a few drops to a clean, soft cloth and spread them evenly over the entire blade. Wipe off any excess oil.

Regular oiling is particularly important during the first few months of use and in environments with higher humidity. The aim is to reduce exposure to moisture and prevent the formation of red rust, while allowing the natural patina to continue developing.

Storage

Always store a carbon steel knife clean and completely dry. Never place it in a sheath or drawer if there is any moisture on the blade. Moisture trapped against the blade can significantly accelerate rust formation.

Store the knife so that the blade does not come into contact with other tools or hard surfaces. A knife block, magnetic strip or sheath designed for safe knife storage is suitable.

How to remove rust

If rust does appear on the blade, it does not mean that the knife is ruined. Rust can be removed using a suitable mild cleaning or abrasive product intended for this purpose. Always proceed carefully and use the gentlest possible method to avoid unnecessary damage to the blade surface.

When removing rust, it is also advisable to take care not to remove the patina. The aim is not to remove all discolouration from the blade, but only active rust. After removing the rust, wash the knife, dry it thoroughly and lightly oil it again.

Sharpening and honing

Regular sharpening and honing are essential for maintaining the knife's sharpness. Use a sharpening stone or a suitable knife-sharpening system to restore the edge. Honing with a honing steel or strop will help maintain the edge between sharpening sessions.

Use the appropriate sharpening angle for the specific knife and follow the manufacturer's recommendations.

Handle the knife with care

Use the knife only for the purposes for which it is intended. Do not use it for prying, twisting, chopping hard materials or other activities that may place excessive stress on the blade or cutting edge. Use specialised tools for more demanding tasks.

Why choose a carbon steel knife?

Caring for a carbon steel knife requires a little more attention than caring for a standard stainless steel knife, but the reward is excellent edge retention and the characteristic appearance of the blade, which gradually changes with use.

The patina that develops on the knife is a record of its use and a natural part of the life of carbon steel. With proper cleaning, thorough drying, regular oiling and sensible storage, a carbon steel knife can provide reliable service for many years and become a tool that can be used and passed down through generations.