

## Wizard Cooking Guide 1

I'm already sensing a problem with this guide, in that we're all of differing economic levels. This guide was written for people who don't have access to a microwave, oven, or refrigerator. Even if you have access to these things, though, this guide can be very useful, as much of it is just general knowledge about cooking in general.

**Food and Groceries:** You have two challenges here, lack of money, and lack of will. I'm assuming you own a hotplate, a pot, a knife, and a spatula. Boiling is the easiest way to cook anything. Most of what I eat is boiled. Look up your nation's peasant dishes. This is what you should be eating.

If you don't think that you can handle the people at the grocery store, try to go at night. If that's not an option, don't go the grocery store. As you begin to starve to death, the fear and awkwardness associated with being around other people will begin to seem less important.

<http://www.wikihow.com/Category:Recipes>

**Spices:** Spices are probably the most important thing that you can buy for cooking. At the very least, you need salt and pepper. I personally use curry and chili powder the most. If you can get cajun seasonings, do it. You can also cook 2 ramen packets at once, and save one of the seasoning packets to use later. Consider buying a pre-assembled spice rack. Spices are the difference between a satisfying meal, and a bland, dull, depressing meal.

**Rice:** Develop a taste for rice, it's cheap and filling. If you have access to asian stores, use them, rice seasoning can turn bland rice into a good meal. Remember the food pyramid. You need to eat either bread or rice in large quantities, so pick one to focus on. I picked rice. Don't buy the cheapest rice, it will turn into gruel when you cook it. Buy the second to cheapest rice. If you have no access to Asian rice seasonings, try curry and chili powder. Curry in general is an excellent rice dish to start with.

To cook a simple curry:

Boil the ingredients, drain the pot, toss curry/chili powder on top of the rice/ingredients, pour a small amount of oil on top of that, and mix thoroughly.

**Potatoes:** Did you know that unskinned potatoes contain every vitamin needed for human health and life? You should become a friend of the potato. Boiled potatoes with sour cream is easy and tasty. Cubed potatoes can be used as an ingredient in curry, or deep fried in the cheapest oil available for a treat. Latkes are also an extremely good dish to learn. If you have a metal can (like an old style coffee can), you can bake a potato by placing the can in boiling water for a while.

**Oil:** Oil must be used for many things. You need to coat a pan with oil in order to cook eggs, fish, and most meats. Note that you can also boil all three of the aforementioned foods. You need oil to deep fry things. Save the oil that you use to deep fry things in a large glass jar. It can be reused. Frying vegetables, like potatoes, "dirties" the oil much less than frying meats. Do not let boiling oil and water mix, you will end up with a nasty burn. You should cook with the cheapest oil possible.

Fish: You do not have enough money to buy fish filets. Gutting and cleaning a fish is hard at first, but it gets much easier. Start with smaller fish, or baby fish. Smaller fish have smaller bones, which makes them easier to clean. Smaller fish also have less developed scales, so you don't need to descale or skin them. For smaller fish, cut off the head (just behind the gills) and tail (just above the tailfin), and make a big cut along the bottom of the fish.

Open the fish up like a book. Yank out all the guts and get rid of them (toilet works well) If you can remove the spinal cord easily, yank that out too. Once all this is done, wash the fish in water until you can see a minimal amount of red. At this point, you can cook the fish however you like.

For bigger fish, you may not be able to rip out the spinal cord all in one clean piece. The easiest way that I have found to debone fish like this is to forget about getting the bones out of the fish, and focus on getting the fish off of the bone. This requires you to peel off the skin of the fish, and then pull the meat of the fish off the bones. This will make more sense when you are doing it. At the end of this, you will be left with a pile of fish meat suitable for making curry.

If you want fish filets, watch a youtube video.

Cabbage/Lettuce: Cabbage/Lettuce is probably the cheapest vegetable you will have access to. It can be eaten raw for a snack, or boiled for dinner. If you are boiling cabbage, try boiling it with a pepper (vegetable) or two. An entire head of lettuce will be too much for a single meal, so buy the head before lunch, and eat part of it raw as a snack. Boiled cabbage may seem dull, but it can be extremely satisfying when paired with meat and spiced correctly.

Beans: Don't buy canned beans, they're too expensive. The biggest problem with beans is that you have to soak them before you can cook them. You may want to keep an extra bowl around for this purpose. Lentils do not need to be soaked before use, and they're extremely cheap considering their nutritional value. Lentils are a staple of my curry.

Mushrooms: Consider mushrooms as an alternative to meat. Meat is expensive.

Dates and Olives: Dates and Olives are a good snack. Dates are relatively cheap. Olive prices fluctuate depending on the year, but can usually be had for relatively cheap as well.

Meats: You will need to control your meat intake, as meats are extremely expensive.

Different countries subsidize different meats, so figure out which one your country has taken a liking to. Sausages are probably the easiest and cheapest way to get meat.

They make a great addition to curry, and, generally, do not need to be refrigerated.

I do not have much experience with cooking chicken, but I do know that it can be boiled.

Beef and lamb are probably the most expensive meats available. If your country doesn't subsidize them, you're probably going to have a tough time finding them and staying inside your budget.

Eggs: Eggs are a cheap and tasty source of protein. They can be eaten hard boiled with black pepper, soft boiled with bread, scrambled with cheese, fried, or used in a multitude of other recipes. Boiling eggs is just like boiling anything else. You'll have to do it a few times to get the timing right. To fry eggs, you need to coat the pan with oil and heat it up. While the oil is heating up, break the eggs into a bowl.

If you want scrambled eggs, use a fork to whisk the eggs in the bowl. You can also add whatever you want to the eggs at this point. I often use ramen seasoning, curry powder, hot sauce, or soy sauce.

When the oil is hot and moving freely and swiftly around the pot, pour the eggs in. Take a spatula and "push" the cooked egg from the bottom of the pot. Keep pushing the uncooked egg around the pot, making sure that the egg doesn't overcook or get burnt. When the egg starts to become more solid, you can put them into your bowl and eat. Eggs go well with soy sauce.

The biggest challenge to learning to cook is getting discouraged. Nobody was born knowing how to cook, it's something that you learn with time. As you cook more, your skills will get better, and you'll be able to make better meals. Hopefully this guide is helpful to you.

## Wizard Cooking Guide 2

The original Wizard Cooking Guide was basically my personal ideas and experiences while cooking during my first year in Romania. For a while, I didn't have anything other than a pot, a Ka-bar, a fork, a spatula, and hotplate. Because of this, my cooking was extremely basic, and very much relied on dry foods and oils that didn't spoil quickly, or could be purchased and cooked immediately.

I also hadn't looked into the actual science of cooking, which is what this guide is about. The other guide teaches cooking, but is largely recipes and general information. This guide is much more in-depth, and goes into science a bit more.

Read them both, it's not like you've got anything better to do. Full disclosure, I was trained (by my mom) in the culinary doctrine of the "French/Cajun" style. More French than Cajun.

### Spices:

Spices are any dried part of a plant, other than the leaves, that are primarily used to flavor, color, or garnish a food. Finding specific spices can be difficult, and buying them can be expensive, but it truly is rewarding. If you can find a specific spice merchant, you can purchase spices in smaller, more manageable portions. You can also purchase spices online.

You should store spices in tins, away from light, air, moisture, and heat. Whole spices stored properly can keep for one year. Ground spices will keep for 6-8 months, depending on the spice. Whole spices require both heat, and a solvent, to release their flavor into food/water/oil/fat. The solvent should be matched to the dish, and the spice, but a few examples of common solvents are: lemon/lime juice, apple juice, and vinegar. Sometimes just the oils or fats can work, but it depends on the specific spice.

You can go out and buy ground spices, but it's really best to grind whole spices yourself. You can grind spices with a ceramic mortar/pestle, a ceramic hand grinder, or a coffee grinder. If you're going to purchase commercial spice mixes, make sure to read the contents before you use them. Many commercial spice mixtures contain salt. If this is the case, make sure you don't salt your dish, or you'll double up on salt, and end up with a disgustingly salty waste of food. There are many different spice mixture recipes available on the internet, often specifically designed for a certain dish. These spice recipes are best prepared in small batches immediately before the cooking process starts.

Remember to introduce spices early in the cooking process, so that they have time to mix with the food, and remember that oils and fats are the best carrier of spice flavors.

## Herbs:

Herbs are plants, used to flavor, color, or garnish a food, that have most of their flavor in their leaves. Herbs are very useful, and fat-free too. Herbs are dead easy to grow and dry, but can also be bought at most grocery stores.

There are 10 "big" herbs used in western cuisine.

Chives are good for potatoes, pasta, and white fish.

Mint is good for both savory and sweet dishes, but can overpower a dish, so be careful.

Thyme is great on meats and seafood.

Dill is used for potatoes, cheese/dairy based sauces, and beets.

Rosemary is used primarily for steaks, but can be used for red fish as well.

Oregano is a must for tomato sauces, but is great on chicken and red meats too.

Basil is good for cheese and tomato sauces, make sure you use it at the end of the cooking process.

Tarragon is useful for eggs, shellfish, and herb vinegars.

Sage has a very strong taste, but is useful for sauces \*in moderation\*.

Parsley can be used to garnish Italian dishes, and eaten in salads.

You should store herbs away from air, but with moisture. Many people will lightly spray a paper towel with water, wrap the herbs in the towel, then put that towel in a plastic bag, which goes in the fridge.

Herbs are used either in garnishes, or infusions.

To infuse, place the herbs, chopped or whole, in a tea or herb ball and steep in the cooking liquid.

Make sure you put the herbs in early if you're infusing them.

Garnishing with herbs basically involves mixing them into whatever you're cooking. You generally have to cut the herb up for this, and it is generally done immediately before eating.

When cutting herbs, cut across, not down, to avoid bruising.

Big leaves can be rolled into a cylinder and cut that way. Smaller leaves can be stacked and cut.

Herb vinegar is a great tool for salad dressings and any other task that vinegar is used for. It's best to make the herb vinegar yourself, by steeping the herbs (like tea) in the vinegar, transferring to a bottle, and letting sit for 2 weeks.

## Oils:

Oils are used in cooking for friction/stick reduction, browning of meats and vegetables, and also to "hold together" certain sauces, like salad dressings. There are a great many fruit, vegetable, and nut oils on the market today. It is important to understand the differences between different oils.

Obviously, the plant used in the oil contributes flavoring, so a walnut oil will be different from an olive oil. The flavor of the oil should be considered when picking which oil to use when cooking food, as the oil really does contribute its flavor to the dish.

You should always store oils in a cool, dark, place.

Another thing to consider is the production method and smoke point of the oil you're using.

Cold Pressed oils are produced with a large press, the olives go in, they get squished, and oil pops out. Cold pressed oils are very flavorful, but they have a very low smoke point, which means that they can't take much heat. You should never fry with a cold pressed oil. It's too expensive, and it ruins the flavor of the oil.

Refined oils have less flavor, but you should still match the oil to the dish. Refined oils are produced using heat and chemicals. They're perfectly safe to consume, but they shouldn't be used when you want the oil to contribute a lot of flavor. Their best use is frying, sauteeing, or anything else that requires a lot of heat.

When sauteeing with oils, you must move quickly. chop out all of your ingredients before putting the oil in the pan, you won't have time to do it later. Sautee your aromatics, like garlic and ginger, first, to let their flavors diffuse into the oil. Sautee the item that takes longest to cook first, and then add the second longest, and go down the line like that.

When deep frying with oils, you should use a frying thermometer to avoid smoking your oil or causing an oil fire. You should place the food that you're frying in the pot one at a time, so they don't stick to each other, and stir as needed. Fry until golden brown, but keep in mind that new oils don't brown foods very well. The first few fries will be a bit more pale than later fries. If you've got some old frying oil around, you can mix a little in with the new oil to mitigate this problem somewhat.

Deep frying oil can be reused, so keep it in a glass jar and store it in a cool, dark, place.

### Sauces:

Sauces are a massive topic, and there is no way that I can do this topic justice in a little guide like this. There are entire textbooks written on sauces, and entire schools of culinary art dedicated to the proper use and creation of sauces. I'll try and do my best here, but keep in mind, there is a hell of a lot more to sauces than I'm going to be able to cover in this guide. The first step to making sauces is having the right tools. I normally use a fork and a spatula to mix the sauces, and a small saucepan to cook them in. I normally collect drippings for blood sauces in a large pan if I'm broiling, or just in the cooking pan if I'm stovetop cooking. I always use what's called a "milk pan" to heat and mix my sauces, but some people prefer a dedicated saucepan. Whisks can be helpful when making sauces, especially egg and blood sauces, but you can use a fork too.

The different culinary schools have devised many different divisions of sauces, based on different criteria. I base my divisions on the "base" of the sauce, or what the sauce is primarily made out of. My divisions are: Oil based sauces, very light in taste, and largely designed to "hold together" either spice mixtures, or other foods, while not overpowering the "base" of the meal. Water based sauces, like tomato sauces; designed to either act as a condiment, or to hold larger foods, like meats or vegetables while providing extra taste. Coconut milk sauces fit into this category. Dairy based sauces, like alfredo sauce or cheese sauces, which are often very heavy, and can sometimes become the entire taste of the meal. I also place egg based sauces like Hollandaise into the "dairy sauce" classification. My last division is what I call "blood sauces", which are a massive part of the French and Cajun culinary doctrine, and, to make a ridiculous oversimplification, are made out of meat drippings/crusty meat residue and either thickened with a starch, or reduced on a stovetop. Gravy is an example of a blood sauce, but there are many, many, others. Don't worry, blood sauce isn't \*actual\* blood.

Oil Sauces should always be made with a relatively dark, cold pressed oil. These oils can be combined (at low heat) with any sort of spice or onion type vegetable you want. Many people use garlic, some people use shallots. Cumin and cloves get used a lot as well. These oils can be tumble mixed with juices or vinegars, or used straight. I normally use an empty

half liter water bottle for tumbling oils. Oil sauces can be tossed with things like: cheeses, dried tomatoes, capers, peppers, anchovies, olives, nuts, minced garlic, artichokes, brussel sprouts, smoked oysters, canned fish, dry herbs, or mushrooms, and then tossed again with cooked pasta and served.

Dairy sauces are often made with butter, cream or melted cheeses. Many of these sauces require double boilers, which can be improvised with a metal bowl and a regular pot. When using eggs in these sauces, you must whisk quite heavily in order to open up the protein molecules in the egg. Butter and other dairy should be integrated into whisked egg mixtures slowly, while continuing to whisk. Dairy sauces are usually seasoned later in the cooking process, after the butter has been added.

Blood sauces are made from drippings and "pan crust". The pan crust is actually one of the parts that adds the most taste to blood sauces, so don't skimp on it. You must "de-glaze" those crusty bits to integrate them into the sauce, and this can be done with a "water type liquid", such as broth, stock, or wine. Reduce the blood and broth, and then season with liquor, spices, or creams, and reduce again.

Next we'll learn about French sauces, but before we can do that, we need to learn about Roux. Roux is, at its core, fat and a thickener (flour). The French school traditionally uses butter, sometimes clarified butter, as the fat, and regular wheat flour as the thickener. The Cajun tradition, as we know, uses meat drippings (bloods) as the fat instead of butter. You can use any starch as a thickener, from flour, to cornstarch, arrowroot, and even potato starch. The color of the Roux depends on how long you cook it, and what you used as your fat. If you're using butter, the Roux will go from white, to brown, to dark brown. If you're using bloods, the Roux will most likely start brown and get darker brown as you cook it.

The French culinary doctrine lists 5 "mother" sauces that are the starting point of almost every sauce in the French school. The French mother sauces are:  
Bechemel Sauce, which amounts to White Roux cooked in milk, and is the basis for a great many cheese sauces.

Espagnole Sauce, which is a Dark Brown Roux which is combined with veal or beef stock and simmered/boiled until thick; it is most often used on red meat sauces.

Veloute Sauce combines a White Roux with chicken or fish stock, and is often used for seafood or poultry dishes.

Hollandaise is quite odd, it's a mixture of butter, lemon and whipped egg yolk, that is very labor intensive to make, as it requires almost constant whipping; You actually might need a whisk for hollandaise. Hollandaise is served on vegetables, seafood, and white meats. The final french mother sauce is a familiar one. Tomato Sauce, made from Roux (of course) and tomato puree, along with other seasonings. Some traditions suggest using pork belly or salo meat as the Roux fat when cooking Tomato Sauce. This adds a lot of flavor, but also fat.

It is important to remember that these sauces are generally not used on their own, they are made, and then further processed into other sauces, for use in specific dishes.

Different parts of the world have devised their own sauces, and it can be a lot of fun to try them out on different foods. French sauces are usually designed to be poured onto meatsteaks, or used as dipping sauces. They go quite well with french fries. Italian sauces have 3 styles, with pasta sauces being the most distinct. Asian sauces have a number of different varieties, but it's best to buy them until

you really know what you're doing with them.

Hispanic sauces are often quite thick, like salsas, but sometimes they mix water and dairy sauces to create new combinations. British sauces are generally quite heavy, and I'm not a personal fan of them, but they can be quite hearty and filling when made correctly.

### Curries:

My original guide contained a "curry" recipe, which was really just Jambalaya with curry seasoning on oil instead of stock and blood sauce. The most basic curry is made of rice, curry sauce, meat, and vegetables. The most basic curry sauce is made of curry powder mixed with unflavored yogurt and a little bit of cornstarch.

The Indian term for "curry" is actually "masala", so keep that in mind when you're looking for recipes. Keep in mind, also, that yogurt is a fat, so if you're watching your size, you can use oil instead. It won't be anywhere near the same, though. Whole spices for curry should be toasted before grinding.

Curry mix is best combined with the meat and yogurt and chilled for 2 hours, to allow the meat to marinate, and the spices to mix. If a curry recipe calls for coconut milk, you can substitute with heavy cream or whole milk, but it won't be the same.

Curry meats are best grilled (after marination) but can also be broiled in an oven, or even pan fried. Simmer the curry sauce with the meat and vegetables, and serve over rice.

### Rice:

There are rice dishes in every culture, and there are thousands of types of rice out there.

Like sauces, discussing "rice" as a monolithic entity is difficult, but it is made easier if you break rice up into grain lengths. Long Grain Rices generally don't release starches when cooked, are "fluffy" and separate easily, and crystallize when cooled.

Medium Length Rices generally release starches when cooked, are "creamy", and are sticky when cool. Short Grain Rices are generally come out sticky when cooked.

Brown rice is just rice that hasn't been "husked" yet. It's more filling and better for you, but it takes about three times longer to cook, and it goes bad quicker.

Rice cookers work well because they know the temperature inside the pot.

Consider buying one if you cook a lot of rice. They really do make a difference.

The amount of water that is on the package is a guideline, but you can't depend on it entirely.

Also keep in mind that the amount of water that you need to cook rice, actually decreases the more rice you're cooking, so you can't just multiply. Like all starches, you must add salt to the water that you're cooking your rice in. Once the rice is boiling, it no longer needs to be stirred.

Rice is very much a "set and forget" food. When your rice is done, get it onto a plate or bowl before "fluffing" it with a fork. You can't fluff in the cooking container.

If your rice comes out wrong, it can be fixed. If it's too wet, you can put it in an oven for a few minutes. If it's too dry, you can steam it.



## Pasta:

Pasta is very simple to cook, and it only requires a single pot and a heat source. Many people focus entirely on the pasta sauce, and don't really put too much thought into the pasta itself, which is actually the base of the dish.

There are many different kinds of pasta: Strings, like Spaghetti, are quite general purpose, but are very good with oil based sauces. Ribbons, like Fettuccini, are good for cream sauces. Tubes, like macaroni, are good for heavy sauces, like mac&cheese. Shapes, like Fusilli, have deep grooves, and are also good for heavy sauces. Micro pastas, like Orzo, should only be used in broths and soups. You can mix and match these in a dish, but be careful to time them correctly.

Pasta needs lots of water to cook. A half kilo of pasta requires about 6 liters of water. You should salt the water before putting the pasta in, but you shouldn't add any oil to the water, or your pasta won't be able to properly 'pick up' sauce, later. Even if you use an oil sauce, don't oil the water!.

When your water is boiling slightly, add the pasta. Fan it out around the pan, and push gently into the pot. Stir for the first 30 seconds, but be careful not to break the strands. Taste test your pasta often, it goes from "perfect" to "overcooked" very quickly. Drainage is actually a part of the cooking process, as wet pasta doesn't pick up sauces well. To rinse, you can either use a collander or a strainer. When you get most of the water out of the pasta, toss it as you would a salad until reasonably dry.

## Potatoes:

Potatoes are extremely versatile and nutritious. Cooked potatoes supposedly have a high Glycemic Index, meaning that they'll make you fat, but that isn't the whole story. Potatoes are often served in a meal, with proteins (meats) and fats (butter, sour cream). Those proteins and fats slow the rate of entry of the carbs from the potato, and change the GI. The thing about potatoes, though, is that they also have a high "Satiety Index", meaning, they make you feel full. If you're still worried, keep in mind that the lower starch potatoes have a lower Glycemic Index. You should still become a friend of the potato.

There are 3 different kinds of potato, divided by starch content. High Starch Potatoes are the "Russet" types, they are good for whipping, mashing, frying, and baking. Medium Starch Potatoes are the "Yukon" or "Yellow/White" types, they are good for Gratins and potato pancakes (latkes). They're pretty multi-purpose overall, though. Low Starch Potatoes are the "Red" types. They stay chunky after cooking, so they're good for adding consistency to mashed potatoes, and also for potato salads. As potatoes are a starch, we should add salt to our water before boiling.

Do not "rolling boil" potatoes, or boil them for too long, or the starch granules in the potato will rupture and leave you with a gluey mess. You also should avoid food processors when working with potatoes, they rupture the starch granules as well. "Crumbly" potatoes are "done" potatoes.

Potatoes are great for getting rid of different types of leftovers, or just random things you have in your refrigerator. Latkes, Boxty, and mashed potatoes are particularly good for this, but Gratins can be made with leftovers as well. If you want to make Gratins, either get a radial slicer, or be prepared to spend a long time cutting potatoes.

The starches in potatoes can keep certain dairies, like buttermilk, from curdling in heat, so keep that in mind if you're making a potato soup, or you need to boil some dairy.

Cold decreases starch in potatoes, so if you're making a salad, put the potatoes in the refrigerator for a night before using them. You can peel cooked potatoes with a (clean) tea towel, just wrap it up and rub the skin off, but keep in mind that the skin of the potato contains a lot of nutrients, so peel at your own risk.

### Onions :

Onions are a staple of a great number of dishes. Everything from potato latkes, to jambalaya, to curries, mujadarrah, and all sorts of other dishes, not to mention onion soups, feature onion as a main ingredient. It's one of the 'big three' elements of cooking.

There are two main types of onion that you'll encounter in your cooking adventure, storage onions, and fresh onions. Storage onions are what most people think of, when they think, "onion". These are the ones that have a sort of papery skin on them, they need to be peeled before use, and they'll often make you cry, when you cut them. Fresh onions are just what they sound like, fresh. Often times, they'll still have their green upper bits attached, and they'll often be rather small. You don't really need to peel these, just make sure you wash them before use.

Within the realm of "storage onion", you will find 3 separate types. Yellow onions, Red onions, and White onions. Each of these types of onion is important, and each has its own place in your kitchen.

Yellow onions are often quite intense in flavor, since they have such high sulfur content. They give off a great amount of this flavor when cooked, but it's a little rough to eat them raw. Use these in stews, soups, and stir-frys.

White onions are slightly less intense, flavor-wise, than yellow onions. They're used quite often in South American dishes, but unless the recipe specifically calls for it, or you \*really\* don't want an intense flavor, it's fine to stick to yellow onions. One example of when white onions would be better, is if the onion is only going to be partially cooked, to keep its texture, but you still want a relatively strong onion flavor for the rest of the dish.

Red onions are the best storage onions for more specialized purposes, especially those that don't actually involve heat-cooking. Red onions are the best storage onions for raw use, such as salads, or Chicago-Style hot dogs, relishes, or burgers. Red onions often (but not always) have a higher sugar content than other types of onions, so if you're trying to caramelize, go for red onions, if specific caramelization onions (Vidalias) are not available.

Green onions, or fresh onions, are best used as a type of garnish, or as an ingredient in salads. You can cut up into the green bits, but don't go all the way up. You may also want to toss the round onion slices in a tupperware container, in order to separate them. Green onions don't really cook so well, but you can sometimes use them in stir-fry, as long as you make sure to put them in last, and keep a close eye on them. They tend to burn quickly.

The shape that you cut your onions into actually matters quite a bit. I normally cut off the top and bottom, toss those bits, then chop the onion in half from the top, flip both halves on their flat sides, and then slice directly down, to get what appears to be a large capital "D" of onion, made up of progressively smaller "C" shapes. Hopefully that made sense. That works well for stews and stir-frys, but when I'm making things like latkes, or chopping for salads, I'll take it a step further and chop each "D" at 10 or 15 degree angles, to make little squares of onion.

People who aren't superautists would call this “dicing”. Diced onions cook fast, which means that they burn fast, so keep that in mind if you're sauteeing. Burnt onions taste like shit.

When caramelizing onions, all you really need to do is set and forget, for the most part. You chop the onions into those “C” shapes, and put them in an oiled pan. You cover that pan, and pretty much just let it do its thing. Caramelization relies on sugar, so onions with higher sugar contents will caramelize a lot better than ones with high sulfur content. This means red and possibly white onions, but what you really want is a specially sweet onion, designed (as much as onions are designed) for caramelization. These would be Walla-Walla and Vidalia in the west, but other nations might have their own versions.

Caramelizing is very set and forget, but the difficult bit is in the setting. You need to make sure that you chop your onions thick enough to where they won't burn, but not so thick that they can't reduce at all. Be as consistent as you can with the chopping, and understand that you'll probably fuck it up the first few times. You want these to be around 3mm (.125in) thick, but as long as they're all the same, it doesn't have to be perfect.

Put some oil in the pan, and if you've got clarified butter, you can mix some in with the oil, but remember, butter has a lower smoke point, and if it burns, you'll get a lot of bitterness in the dish. If you add too much oil, you'll be frying your onions, which can still be good, but it's not caramelization. Caramelizing onions takes a while. It's an annoyingly long process, but again, you're just setting it and then setting a timer. It takes around 30 to 45 minutes to caramelize a couple of onions, although depending on how you've chopped them, it could be more, or it could be less. You can't just jack up the heat, either. Onions do burn. At 30 minutes, you should probably be checking on them every 5 minutes or so, and stirring (or tossing), as well.

When your onions are done caramelizing, they should look very brown, and very, very, reduced. When you get them out of the pot, you'll see a bunch of crap at the bottom. You need this crap, it's very flavorful. So put about a swig's worth of beer or wine at the bottom of the pot, put the onions back in, and give it all a good stir. When you're done, the pot should be clean-ish. This is called, “deglazing”, and aside from making clean-up a lot easier, it adds tons of great flavor to the dish.