SAUTÉ: WIENER SCHNITZEL

Chef Thomas Keller / Chapter Four

MASTERCLASS

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"We want to have the breading separate a little bit from the veal—that's the sign of a well-prepared wiener schnitzel."

CHAPTER REVIEW

Chef Keller has fond memories from early in his career, when he worked at the the Clarke Cooke House, in Newport, Rhode Island, in a job that often required him to turn out copious quantities of thin, breaded, pan-fried veal cutlets, or wiener schnitzel. The work taught him an important lesson: when pounding cutlets, always cover the meat and the areas around it, the better to keep your kitchen clean.

Instead of buying pre-sliced meat, Chef Keller recommends slicing the veal yourself. It's better to cut thicker slices and pound them thin rather than cutting thin slices, as pounding tenderizes the meat. Because pounding veal for wiener schnitzel calls for a more forceful motion than pounding chicken breast for chicken paillard, Chef Keller puts the meat inside a sturdy, sealable kitchen bag rather than between layers of plastic wrap. From there, it's a matter of dusting the cutlets in flour, dipping them in an egg wash, dredging them in breadcrumbs, and sautéing them. While making your own breadcrumbs is an option, high-quality breadcrumbs are readily available in stores. Look for breadcrumbs that don't contain any added sugar or flavor. You can also use panko, but pulse it in a food processor to a fine crumb for this application because it is so flaky.

In addition to these core steps, Chef Keller offers you a few tricks of the trade. Seasoning the meat directly with salt pulls moisture from the surface, which means you'll get a thick and heavy coating of flour, so Chef Keller recommends you season the egg wash instead—and season it generously. And spritz the meat with water to help create an airy layer of separation between the meat and its crispy breadcrumb coating—the marke of a true schnitzel.

Different culinary traditions have given rise to different kinds of schnitzels, but Chef Keller's focus here is on wiener schnitzel, with a classic garnish of parsley and lemon, a preparation that he hopes will make his Austrian friends—and his former colleagues from the Clarke Cook House—proud.

PREP & COOK TIMELINE

- Bring veal to temperature
  Prep bowls for coating
- Pound veal
- Make egg wash
- Coat veal with flour, egg wash, breadcrumbs
- Sauté veal
- Drain, plate, and serve

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PROTEIN

Mise en place

Like the chicken paillard, if preparing larger quantities, prepare in subsequent batches or use multiple pans to avoid overcrowding—one schnitzel per pan. If you're working in batches, keep warm in oven on a wire rack so you don't lose the crispiness.

Ingredients

2 pounds trimmed veal top round, cut across the grain into 12 ½-inch thick slices (5-6 ounce slice of veal per person)
All-purpose flour
Breadcrumbs
3 eggs broken into a bowl, but not beaten (2 to 3 eggs is enough for most applications, enough for a ¼-inch layer at the bottom of a wide-bottom dish)
Water
Kosher salt
Canola oil
Lemon wedges
Parsley

Equipment

Cutting board lined with plastic wrap
Mallet (smooth side)
12-inch sauté pan

METHOD

Place a piece of veal in a large food-grade plastic bag and pound with the spiked side of a meat mallet until it reaches a uniform thickness of about ¼-inch. Transfer to a plate and repeat with the remaining veal. The cutlets can be wrapped and refrigerated for up to 12 hours.

Set up a breading station with three bowls. Put about ½-inch of flour in a shallow bowl wide enough to hold the cutlets. Lightly beat the eggs in a second bowl. Add water to dilute the egg wash—the egg wash should have the viscosity of cream, and season it generously with salt. Spread half an inch of breadcrumbs in the third. If you use panko, first pulse in a food processor until finely ground.

Heat the oil in the pan over high heat until it begins to shimmer. You can adjust heat as needed once you begin cooking.

Dredge the cutlets, working one at a time. First, spray the cutlet with water. Dip both sides of the cutlet in the flour, patting off any excess. Then dip both sides into the eggs, letting any excess drip back into the bowl. Finally, coat both sides with breadcrumbs.

Add the dredged cutlet to the hot oil and cook for about 1 minute on each side, until crisp and golden. Transfer to a paper towel-lined plate to rest. To plate, garnish simply with lemon and parsley.

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LEARN MORE

- Different culinary cultures have given rise to a wide variety of schnitzels, each inviting their own garnishes and sauces. Try different recipes and combinations, and find the ones that you like best. Jägerschnitzel, for instance, is traditionally served with a mushroom sauce, as is Jägerschnitzel's American sibling, chicken-fried steak (though in the United States, the mushroom sauce is also called a hunter's sauce). Zigeunerschnitzel, meanwhile, is often accompanied by zigeuner sauce, which is made with tomatoes, bell peppers, and onions. In Denmark, a breaded pork cutlet called skinkeschnitzel often lends itself to a garnish of lemon, capers, horseradish, and anchovy. The Finnish cutlet known as floridanleike is frequently enjoyed with a fried peach and béarnaise sauce, while veal Milanese, an Italian classic, is often garnished with nothing more than a lemon wedge.

- Like beef, veal comes in a variety of cuts, not all of which call for the same cooking method. A hindsaddle of veal, for instance, makes a wonderful roast, but stick to the loin, sirloin, and round for sautéing. While many of the names of veal cuts are similar to those used for beef, veal is leaner and more delicate than beef, so it often calls for gentler treatment, with lower temperatures and longer cooking times. Read the recipe you're working with before heading to the market to ensure you buy the appropriate cut. As with other meats, seek out the freshest, highest quality veal available. The color of veal can differentiate based on the age of the animal and how it was raised. Look for non-confinement veal—sometimes redder and lighter in color than confinement-raised veal—with little marbling. Excessive marbling is a sign that the calf was overfed. One of the best ways to ensure that you're getting the best meat is to cultivate a relationship with your local purveyor. Markets that offer attentive, personalized service to their customers also tend to treat their products in the same way. Whenever possible, buy meat directly from a butcher, as opposed to pre-wrapped meat in a supermarket aisle; it's a better guarantee of freshness. There are other benefits to getting to know your butcher, who can not only cut and trim the meat to your specifications but can also tell you about how the meat was sourced and raised.

- If you want to serve this with a side dish, look for something light, bright, and refreshing with good acid like German potato and cucumber salad—a classic accompaniment to wiener schnitzel. Try the recipe below.

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WHOLE GRAIN MUSTARD VINAIGRETTE

Mise en place

Ingredients

225 grams white wine vinegar
50 grams Dijon mustard
50 grams whole grain mustard
10 grams kosher salt
550 grams canola oil

Equipment

Mixing bowl
Whisk

METHOD

Combine the vinegar, mustards, and kosher salt in a mixing bowl. Whisk well until all ingredients are combined. Slowly drizzle in the canola oil while whisking vigorously. Continue whisking until well emulsified. Store refrigerated in an airtight container until needed.

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GERMAN POTATO SALAD

Mise en place

Ingredients

600 grams Red Bliss potatoes
1000 grams Yukon Gold potatoes
400 grams whole grain mustard vinaigrette (see recipe above)
200 grams cucumbers
100 grams shallots
30 grams parsley, minced
60 grams crispy cooked bacon, chopped
1 bunch watercress
Kosher salt

Equipment

Chef's knife
Cutting board
Mandolin
Mixing bowls
Whisk
Rubber spatula
Large sauce pot
Spider or skimmer

METHOD

Slice shallots on mandolin or with a chef's knife to ⅛-inch thick. Combine sliced shallots with the whole grain mustard vinaigrette in a large mixing bowl.

Slice the Red Bliss and Yukon Gold Creamers on a mandolin to 3⁄16-inches thick. Rinse the potatoes well and drain. Place the sliced potatoes into a large pot and cover with 1 inch of cold water. Set the potatoes over medium-high heat and bring to a simmer. Simmer lightly until potatoes are just tender, but not falling apart.

Transfer the potatoes using a spider or skimmer to the mixing bowl and fold in the vinaigrette and shallots until evenly distributed. Take care not to break the potatoes. Transfer the dressed potatoes to a container and cover. Cool in the refrigerator.

Slice the cucumbers ⅛-inch thick and transfer to a small bowl. Add 1% kosher salt, based on the weight of the sliced cucumbers and let sit for 10 minutes. Pat the cucumbers dry as they will release liquid and store refrigerated in an airtight container.

Let the dressed potatoes come to room temperature before serving. Fold in the salted cucumbers and minced parsley, taking care not to break up the potatoes. Garnish with chopped crispy bacon and watercress sprigs.