

The Perfect Cutlet

Many cutlet recipes direct you to simply slice the meat to the desired thickness—pounding is not necessary. Perhaps that may be true, but I still like to use a mallet to pound the cutlets to an even 1/4" thickness.

First, not all of us can always cut an even slice. It may be thicker at the top and taper off at the bottom. That unevenness is especially noticeable on a chicken breast that tapers naturally.

Pounding can take care of the unevenness on most meats. And while these cuts of meat are naturally tender, flattening breaks down some of the tougher

connective tissues to make the cutlet even more tender.

Covering

Before flattening the cutlets, cover them with plastic for better shaping and cleanup.



To help hold shape and prevent splattering, cover meat with plastic wrap.

Plastic wrap: Use a plastic wrap that is as thick as possible to prevent tearing. Regular wrap is okay but can tear after two or three cutlets. Freezer wrap is much better since it's thicker, stronger, and can hold up longer.

Shaping: This may be a slight stretch but think of a pair of stockings. Although they are sheer, stockings hold a leg's shape by displacing pressure evenly. The same thing happens with the plastic wrap. As the mallet hits the meat, the pressure is slightly displaced and less traumatic, preserving the cutlet's smooth appearance.

Gently pound pieces with glancing blows until cutlet is 1/4" inch thick.



Pounding

There is an art to pounding out a cutlet—it's not just whaling away at a piece of meat. The secret is gentle, glancing taps.

After covering, gently pound the meat with the flat side of your mallet (there's no point in using the waffled tenderizing end). Strike the meat with glancing movements until the cutlet is about 1/4" thick. This motion will preserve the meat's smooth appearance and when cooked, the 1/4" thick cutlet will be golden brown on the outside and remain moist on the inside.

MALLETS

There are all types of mallets. Some have handles which provide leverage, others are palm held for good control. And some are flat and heavy, up to eight pounds. No mallet? Try a sturdy bottle wrapped in plastic.

