

# Kunai

A kunai is an ancient kind of trowel, originated during the Tensho Era in Japan. The kunai was normally wrought of iron, not steel, cheaply forged and unpolished. The size of most kunai ranged from 20 cm to 60 cm, with the average at 40 cm. The kunai was used by common folk as multi-purpose gardening tools and by workers of stone and masonry.

The kunai is not a knife, but something more akin to a wrecking bar. The blade was soft iron and unsharpened because the edges were used to smash plaster and wood, to dig holes and to pry. Normally only the tip would have been sharpened. The uses to which a kunai was put would have destroyed any heat-treated and sharpened tool like a knife.

Kunai normally had a leaf-shaped blade and a handle with a ring on the pommel for attaching a rope. This would allow the kunai to be strapped to a stick as an expedient spear, to be tied to the body as a hidden weapon, or to use as an anchor or piton of some kind.

Contrary to popular belief, they were not designed as throwing weapons, though they can definitely be thrown and cause damage. Ninjutsu is very versatile in the way it employs weapons and non-weapons. A ninja could work as a gardener during the day and use a kunai without raising suspicion.

Some images of actual kunai are available on [The Virtual Museum of Traditional Japanese Arts](#) webpage.

The Ninja weapon Kunai

Just like with the shuriken and Ninjutsu, the exaggeration persistent in Ninja myths played large role in creating the current pop culture image of a kunai.

Currently, Kunai is commonly believed to be an ancient Japanese throwing knife. Designed as a weapon, larger than a shuriken offered increased accuracy, damage power and armour penetration when thrown, and could also be used in hand to hand combat more readily, and could even block sword blows. In addition, it could be used for climbing, as either a kind of grappling hook, or a piton.

The blade shaped like a squashed octahedron, a rod for the handle with a ring on the end, form an extremely simple yet effective design. It would be made of tempered steel, with sharpened edges, and polished to a shiny surface (For visual effect (metsubushi) or for aerodynamic abilities). Sometimes the clan symbol would be engraved on a side of the blade. The handle wrapped in fabric for better grip, sometimes with some strands hanging off the ring, to improve accuracy when thrown. (thus making it a kind of a throwing dart)

In Hatsumi Sensei's Grandmaster of the Togakure Ryu school of Ninjutsu collection there are examples of short kunai, long kunai, narrow bladed types, saw-toothed types, and wide bladed types. In some cases, the kunai and the shikoro are hard if not impossible to distinguish. A shikoro is a wide bladed saw with a dagger-type handle.

Many ninja weapons were merely adapted farming tools, not unlike many of the weapons used by Xaiolin (Shaolin) Monks in China. It is not hard to realize why a kunai, which is a standard farming implement, became a useful weapon to ninja. Many of the ninja weapons, including the swords, were cheaply made, as the ninja did not need master-quality weapons to carry out their duties, but rather simply the quantity of weapons at their disposal. And since Kunai were cheaply produced farming tools of a decent size and weight, and could be easily sharpened, they fit the bill perfectly.