

The background of the entire page is a close-up photograph of several hand-carved wooden spoons and spatulas. The items are arranged on a rustic, weathered wooden surface. Some pieces are finished with a rich, reddish-brown stain, while others are left in their natural, light-colored wood. The lighting is soft, highlighting the grain and texture of the wood.

WOOD CARVING FOR BEGINNERS

Includes 7 Easy-to-Make Projects

Stephen S. Johnson

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www.fouroakscrafts.com

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**Dedicated to the Master Carver
and the family He carved out for me.**

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Introduction

Overview

and

Safety

Welcome to Woodcarving

Welcome to the wonderful hobby of wood carving. This ebook will teach you the basics of wood carving: wood selection, safety, carving tools, techniques and how to finish your project. The book also includes 7 projects that will help you get started.

Our ancestors have been carving wood for centuries. I can just picture my great great grandfather sitting on his front porch and whittling something. Maybe he's just putting a point on a stick. Maybe he's making something practical, like a back scratcher.

Wood carving is something everyone can do. It's such an accessible and easy hobby to jump into. Talk about a minimal hobby. All you really need is a piece of wood and a pocket knife. Of course, you can expand on the type of knives and carving tools depending on what you want to make. Because you're using fewer tools, it can also make for a less expensive hobby.

The Joy of Woodcarving

To me there are many joys or benefits associated with wood carving. For one, it's a minimal woodworking pursuit. Just your hands and the knives or chisels do all the work.

I will turn to a few power tools from time to time but carving is about working with your hands to shape the wood directly. You get to explore the organic nature of wood and feel the shape forming under your fingers.

You connect more intimately with the wood and learn how your knives and chisels work best with the wood's texture and grain pattern.



Safety First



I always like to start with a word on safety. For the most part, wood carving is a relatively safe hobby. However, let's not forget that we're dealing with some very sharp tools, so keep these safety points in mind:

- Understand the hazards. Well, duh, the hazard is obvious—don't cut yourself. Most of us can survive minor cuts, but what if you cut into an artery? And what if you're on blood thinner medication. So, please take to heart the dangers you face. Consult your doctor if necessary. If you understand the hazards, you most likely will be able to control them.
- Always work with sharp tools. Dull tools can slip and easily end up hurting you.
- I hate to say it, but you'll probably cut yourself at some point, so have a good first aid kit on hand. Serious cuts might need medical attention.
- Use proper cutting techniques to minimize the hazards. I'll discuss some of those techniques later.
- Be mindful of what direction the blade will be going and don't have any parts of your body in that path. With proper techniques you can learn how to control the direction and the travel distance of the blade.
- Wear appropriate personal protective equipment: safety glasses, dust mask, carving glove. The dust mask will come in handy if you need to do a lot of sanding. For a beginner, I recommend using the carving glove.
- Understand the limitations of your carving (or power) tools. Make sure you've read operations manuals and understand proper tool use. Don't use tools beyond what they are intended to do.
- Don't do anything you're not comfortable doing. Common sense and your intuition can often be a good guide.
- Don't leave your sharp tools lying around where kids can access them.



Safety First



I would encourage you to use carving gloves, especially if you're a beginner. Carving gloves will give you some protection from your carving blades and possibly a nasty cut. I recommend getting a carving glove that will help you grip the workpiece. Some gloves don't do a great job of holding the workpiece. They're not always full proof either. They are usually good about preventing slicing cuts, but a very sharp knife can still jab through a carving glove.

I personally like the product shown in the right hand photo above. The material is designed for carvers and you can wrap it around your fingers and thumbs. It's works like Velcro but it's not Velcro. I found this at my local woodworking store here in Atlanta. The material is reusable and can last for many projects. Made by Woodriver, it's 1 inch wide and 15 feet long. Item # 140905 at Woodcraft stores.

Safety First



Believe it or not, I tend to have more accidents with my carving tools when I'm just carrying them around and not carving with them. It's easy to forget how sharp these tools are. So remember to put your tool back in its sheath and set it down, especially when you're not using it to carve.

Also, keep these knives away from children. All the carving in this book is intended for adults only!

You can teach children to carve, but I recommend even more basic projects than what is in this book.

BE SAFE and HAVE FUN!

Wood Selection

A lot can be said about wood selection, but I'll try to keep it simple here.

You can carve freshly cut wood (also referred to as green) or kiln-dried wood. You can elect to carve woods that are soft (like pine) or hard (like cherry).

Carving green wood is relatively easy because the wood fibers are much more pliable, but you'll be at the mercy of the wood as it dries. And who knows if it will develop cracks or morph into an odd shape. For some, an "odd" shape could become an artistic expression.

The good thing about green wood is that you can get it from your own backyard. However, I wouldn't cut down good trees just for carving. Rather, go for trimming a tree or finding a tree that's been blown over.

I personally like to use hardwoods like walnut, cherry, maple, mesquite, or mahogany. They are more difficult to carve, but you can make finer and more detailed cuts with your tools. And you generally don't have to worry about the wood cracking or deforming later.

Hardwoods are also more durable than softwoods. And for items like spoons that will encounter moisture, the closed grain hardwoods work best.

Basswood is a great wood for beginners. It's a hardwood, but relatively soft and easy to carve. I will use basswood for the spoon project in this book.

Woods I Recommend

Walnut Cherry Maple Mahogany Basswood Beech

Pine Poplar Mesquite Olive Birch Apple Alder

Sources of Green Wood

Saw mills

Backyard

Storm damage

Power company tree crews

Online forums

Sources of Kiln-Dried Wood

Home improvement stores

Specialty woodworking stores

Online forums

Hobby and craft stores

Lumber yards

Cabinet shops (scrap pieces)

Carving Tools and Supplies

Carving Tools

If you go to a specialty wood store like Woodcraft, you'll see a myriad of choices for carving tools. The tools you need kinda depend on the type of carving you are doing. I like to make kitchen items like spoons, spatulas, and butter knives, so I stick to a few tools that help me do that. Check out my [Resource Page](#) for information on ordering these carving tools.



- A. The Mora 120 straight blade comes in handy when carving long portions of the workpiece that follow the grain. I like to use it for handles on spoons or spatulas. You can easily use it to make push and pull cuts.
- B. The PFEIL "Swiss Made" 20 mm gouge 7 sweep and the PFEIL "Swiss Made" 10 mm gouge 7 sweep come in handy for hogging out wood for spoons, small bowls, or wooden trays. You can use bigger gouges for bigger projects and smaller gouges for smaller projects.
- C. The PFEIL "Swiss Made" 18 mm spoon gouge works really well for carving spoon bowls.
- D. The Mora 162 hook knife works well for making clean cuts in the bowl area of a spoon. This particular knife has a cutting edge on both sides, but you can purchase hook knives with just one cutting edge on either side.

Power Tools

I like to use a few power tools because they speed up certain tasks like cutting out a workpiece or sanding. It's also a lot more efficient to use an electric drill if you have to make a hole.



E. Battery powered drill. I use this to drill holes in the handles of spoons so you can hang them from a kitchen rack.

F. A rotary tool can also be invaluable for sanding and shaping the workpiece.

G. Jigsaw for cutting out your workpiece. Of course, you could also use a handsaw or a bandsaw if you don't have a jigsaw..

More Tools



H. A hatchet for rough carving / shaping green wood. Note that the hatchet I have pictured here is a standard hatchet and I've tried to alter the bevel so it will work better for rough carving. However, they do make hatchets with a wider bevel that works best for rough carving. For the projects in this book, I won't be using a hatchet, but it comes in handy if you're starting out with a log or tree limb.

I. A "C" clamp for holding your workpiece to a workbench or table.

Draw Knife



J. You won't see me using it in this book, but many carvers like to use a draw knife for rough carving. It's particularly good with taking large amounts of wood off. You must use both hands with the draw knife, so that means clamping the workpiece down while you use it.

Rasps



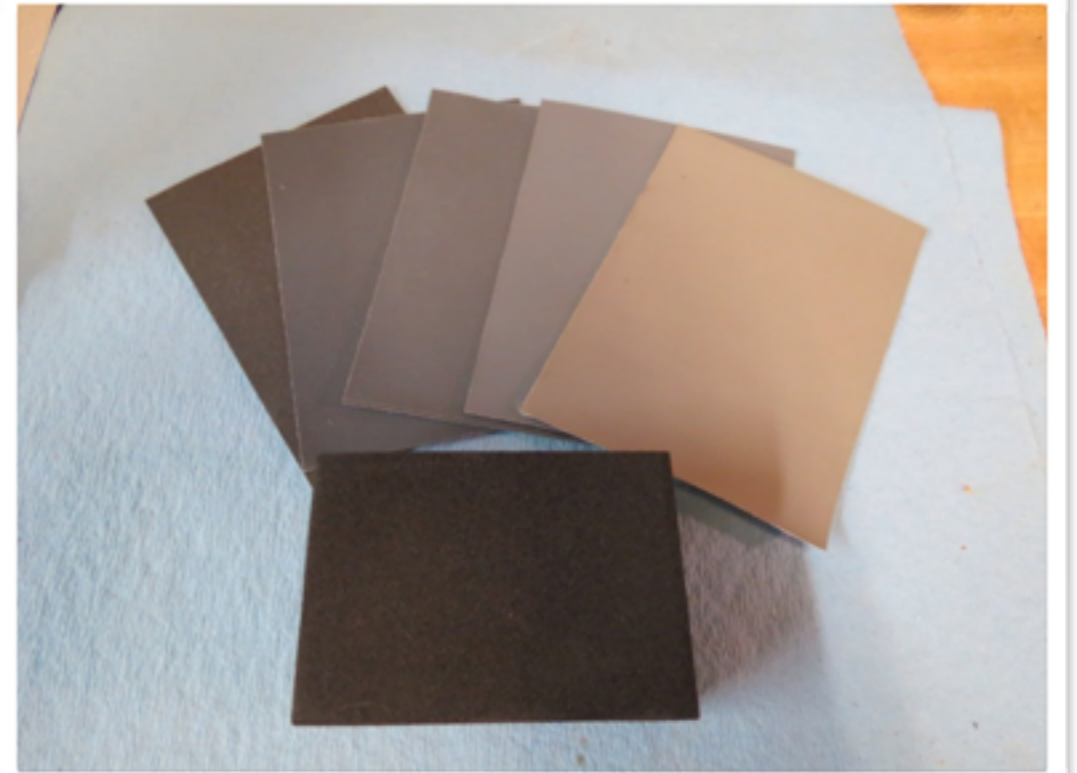
K. The Shinto rasp comes in handy for taking off lots of material or smoothing over areas (generally outside curves) that still have gouge marks from other carving tools. One side is course and the other side fine. These are available in woodworking stores. You can also go a cheaper route and use a regular wood rasp.

Scrapers



Scrapers are often handy because they come with different shapes or contours. You can often make the contour fit the shape of your project. As an example, these can work great for smoothing out the bowl of a spoon.

Sandpaper



You don't necessarily have to sand every carving project. Sometimes it looks great to leave the texture left by your knife or gouge. Some carvers like that rugged look. **If you do sand, wear a dust mask or respirator.**

I like to sand my projects because it's pleasing to the touch and it accentuates the grain patterns of the hardwoods.

I normally use the following grits of sandpaper: 80, 120, 220, 320, and 1000. The smaller the number, the coarser the sandpaper. The higher the number, the finer the sandpaper. Always start with a lower grit and work to a higher grit. As much as possible, try to sand with the grain. Sanding across the grain will often leave scratches.

I also like to use the micro mesh cloths that start at 1500 grit and go up to 12000 grit. But going beyond 1800 grit is probably overkill. I've found that the micro mesh leaves an ultra smooth finish. I usually take the extra step with the micro mesh because I finish my carvings with mineral oil or the beeswax / mineral oil mix.

Finishes



Mineral oil is usually the finish of choice for the projects I do, because I make a lot of kitchen utensils. A few years ago, I learned about a recipe for a mineral oil and beeswax mixture. That is now what I like to use for my projects. You can find the recipe on page 116 of this book.

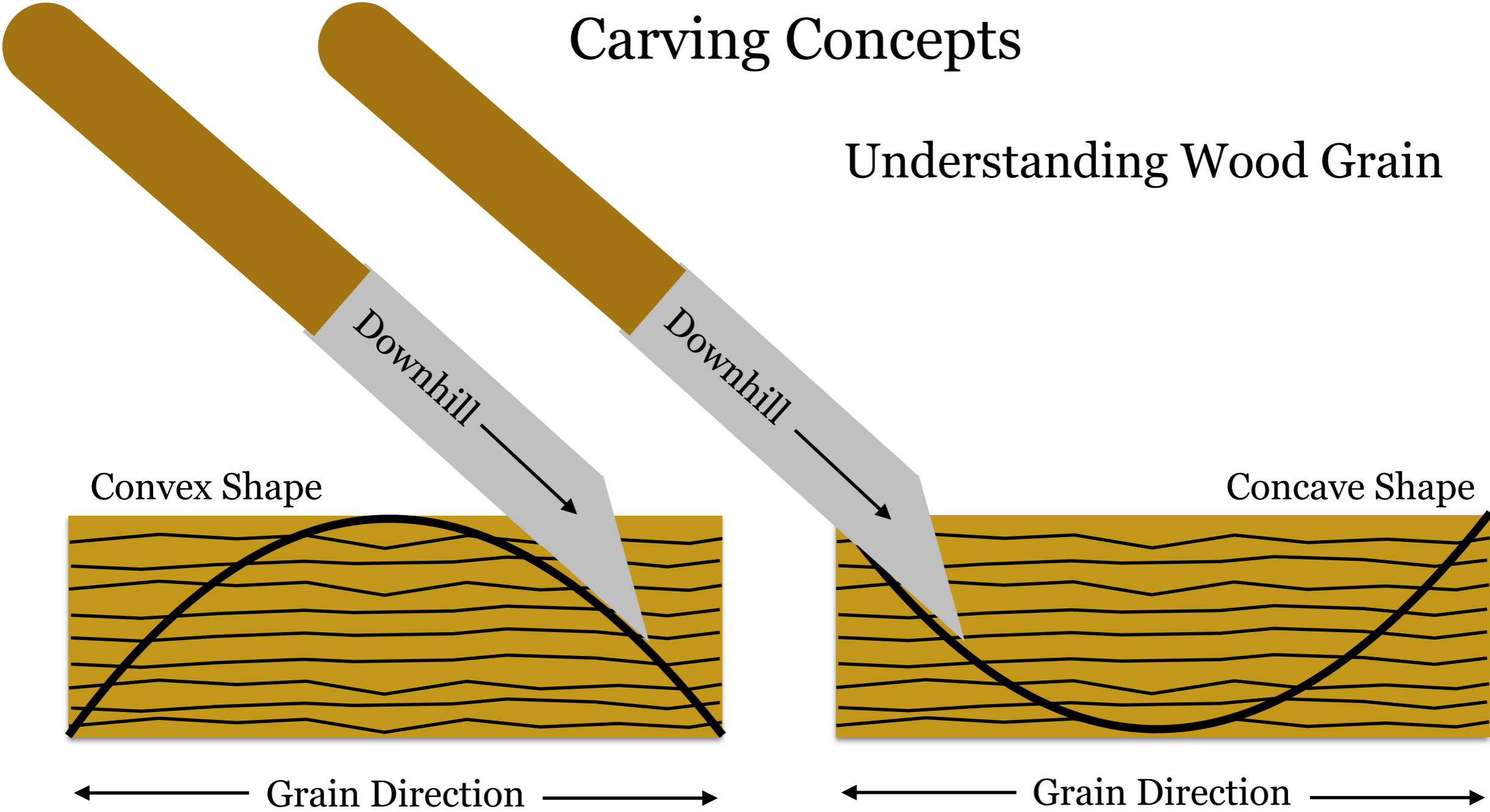
Both mineral oil and the beeswax butter are food safe and they protect your project against moisture. There are other finishes out there that are food safe once they've had time to cure. If you use another finish, just make sure you do the research and understand what the cure time is.

If you don't need a food-safe finish, a lacquer spray is a simple way to finish a project.

Carving Concepts

Carving Concepts

Understanding Wood Grain



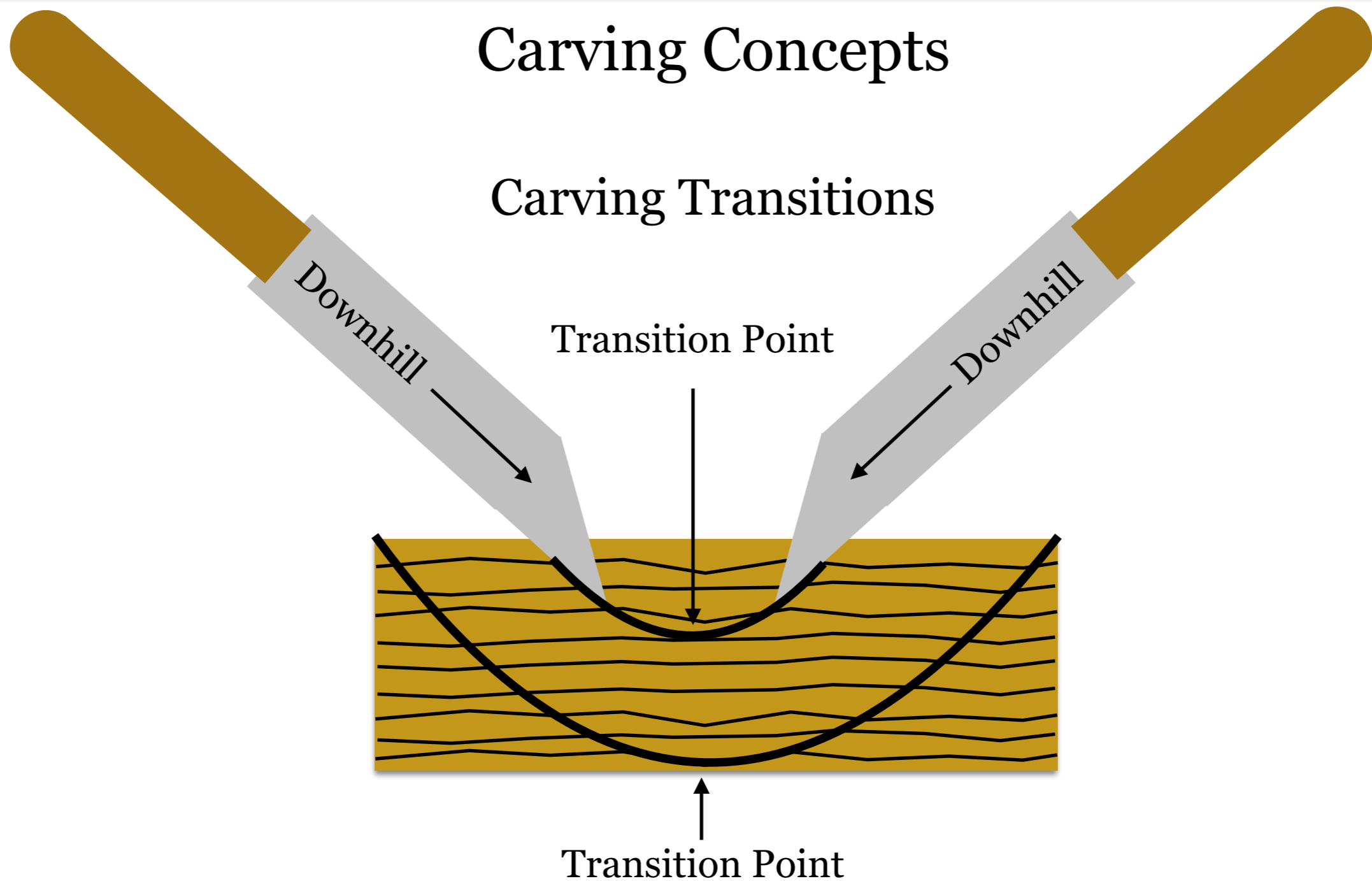
Carving, in general, is making a series of concave shapes, convex shapes or cutting parallel with the wood grain. These shapes will often transition together on the piece you're carving.

Most of the time you want your carving blade to be going with the grain and sometimes you'll be going across the grain. But in just about every case you want the blade going in the "downhill" direction. See the photos above to understand what I'm saying. If you cut in the downhill direction, it helps ensure the blade is supported by the wood and is slicing in a downward direction into the grain. The wood is simply easier to carve this way and smoother cuts are produced.

If you go "uphill" the blade tends to catch in the wood and creates splits or cracks. These splits or cracks can follow the grain direction and may take off wood you didn't want to remove. That could potentially ruin your piece or it may just change the dimensions you were shooting for.

Carving Concepts

Carving Transitions



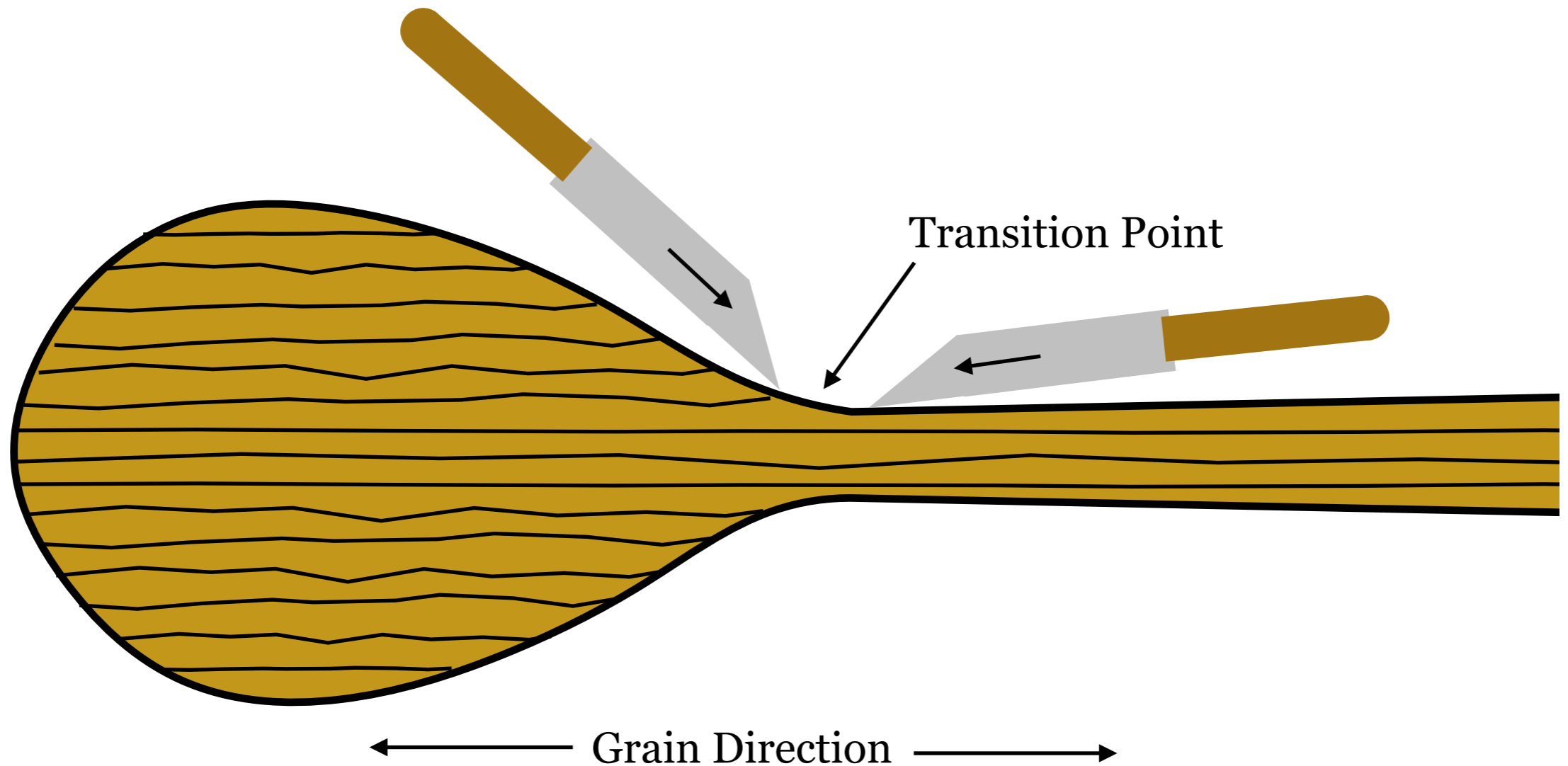
Carving generally involves moving between transitions. I think of it as the transition between downhill and uphill with the grain. A spoon bowl is a great example of what I'm talking about.

In the photo above, I'm trying to make cuts to hollow out the bowl for a spoon. The gouge comes down to the bottom of my cut, and you'll notice it will begin to catch the grain as you reach the bottom of the concave-shaped cut. So what you want to do is change the direction of the gouge. Move it to the other side of the cut and work back in the opposite direction. This way, you're continuing to move the gouge in the downhill direction.

Sometimes, you may be able to carve across the grain to clean up these transition points. Try to make it a slicing cut, because carving across the grain will often tear the fibers. The amount of tearing will depend on the grain type and the sharpness of your blade.

Carving Concepts

Carving Transitions



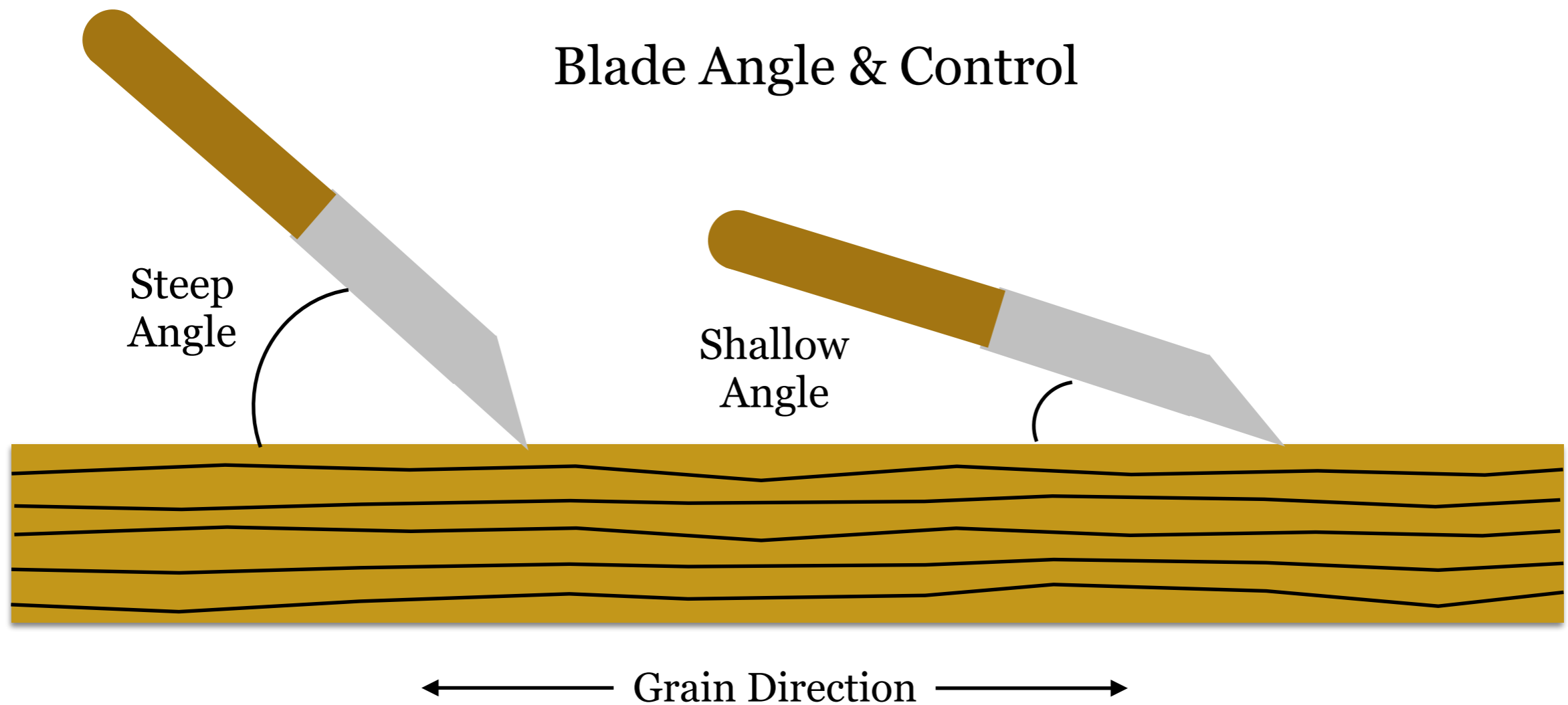
Here's another example of transitions. In the photo above, the transition is between the spoon and the spoon handle.

Again, you want to carve downhill until the blade begins to catch and dig into the grain. You'll probably notice at the point of transition that the blade begins to cause the wood grain to curl upward. When this happens, then bring the blade in from the opposite direction until it begins to catch in the new direction.

These transition points can be challenging to make smooth cuts. Sometimes it can help to slice across the grain to smooth these transition points out. Or you can generally use sandpaper to smooth out these transition points. Sometimes a rotary tool with a barrel drum attachment can help smooth out these transitions.

Carving Concepts

Blade Angle & Control



As you get into carving, you'll learn that you need to control your blade and the amount of material you remove throughout different stages of your project. At the beginning of a project, you're normally removing a lot of waste material. Therefore a steep blade angle (see above) and more powerful—and maybe longer—stroke is needed.

As you get closer and closer to the final shape of the project, you'll need to approach the wood with shallower blade angles (see above) and normally shorter, more controlled strokes.

Carving Techniques And Grips

Carving Techniques and Grips

Push Cuts



In this push cut, I have my non-dominant hand holding the workpiece and my dominant hand holds the Mora knife. I'm pushing the blade away from my left hand and my body.

This cut is helpful for making long cuts and taking off lots of material in the initial stages of carving. I like to call this the whittling cut.



Another variation of a push cut. This time I'm using the thumb of my non-dominant hand to push the blade through the wood. This is used for shorter and more controlled cuts.

You would likely use this cut further into the carving process.

Carving Techniques and Grips

Pull Cuts



In this pull cut I'm holding the workpiece with my non-dominant hand on one end and my chest on the other end. Notice how the blade faces away from my body.

I also tuck my right arm up against my body. My right wrist acts as a stop so I never pull the blade all the way back to my body.

This is a good way to take off a lot of material in a controlled manner.



Another variation of a pull cut, also called a paring cut. It's very similar to the same cut you use when peeling an apple. The workpiece is held by the non-dominant hand.

My right thumb is being used to anchor the piece, but notice how I have the thumb positioned so it's not in the path of the blade.

Carving Techniques and Grips

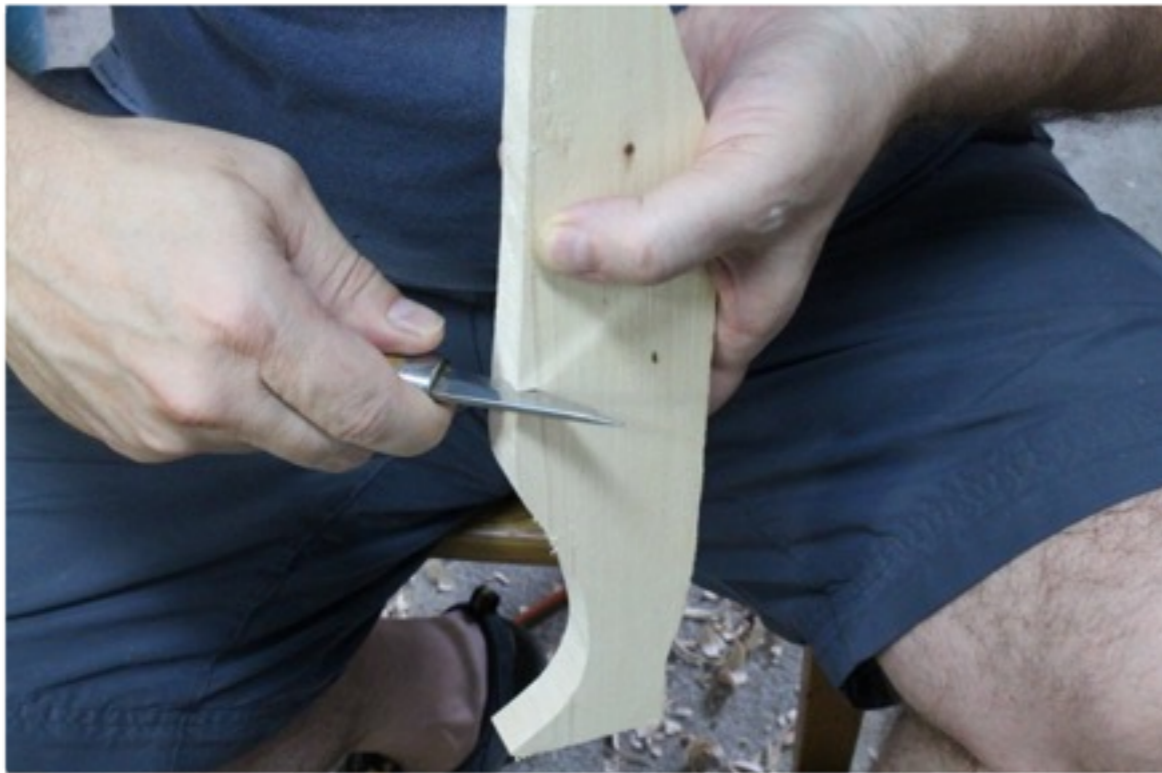
Scissors Cut



The scissors cut is somewhere between a pull or push cut. The position of the hands look like I'm holding scissors. Non-dominant hand is holding the piece. The dominant hand is pivoting the blade through the material. Both arms are tucked up close to my body and the blade is traveling away from my body and limbs.

Carving Techniques and Grips

Stop Cut



The stop cut allows you to fix a boundary or stopping point for your cut. You simply take the knife (or handsaw) and create a cut across and down into the grain (left-hand photo). This becomes your boundary or stopping point for the cut. Now you can carve the wood with the knife along the grain until you run into the stop cut (right-hand photo)

This cut will allow you to remove a lot of wood quickly and control the cut so the wood doesn't split into the area of the wood you want to preserve.

Carving Techniques and Grips

Spoon Gouge Cut



I like to start my spoon bowls with the spoon gouge. It's normally only necessary to use hand pressure to use the spoon gouge. However, you can also use a mallet and tap on the back of the gouge to speed up the process. I start from the center, work all the way around and gradually move outward to my pencil mark. Most of the cutting is downhill with the grain or across the grain. There's a transition at the bottom of the cut where the blade will start to dig into the grain.

Carving Techniques and Grips

Hook Knife Cut



Here I'm using the hook knife to work on the bowl area of a wooden spoon. This is a pull or paring cut, but it's also a scooping motion into the workpiece. Notice how I have my right thumb and left thumb positioned out of the blade's travel path. I like to use the hook knife to smooth out the marks made from the spoon gouge.

In my opinion, this knife is much easier to use on green wood as opposed to kiln-dried hardwoods. Exception might be kiln-dried Basswood.

Projects

Tips for Using the Templates

- Each project comes with a template.
- I'll suggest some approximate dimensions but your project may vary from mine.
- You may need to adjust your printer to enlarge or reduce the templates I've provided here. Don't worry about getting the dimensions of your project perfect. You can make them any size you like.
- You may want to use some heavier stock paper to make a more durable template. That way you can use them over and over again.
- I recommend using a #2 pencil to trace the template to the wood. Make your cuts to the outside of the line.
- Pay attention to some of the notes I've added to the templates.
- An alternative way to apply the templates to the wood is to use adhesive spray. Follow the directions on the adhesive can for proper use.



Basswood Stirring Spoon

Stirring Spoon



The stirring spoon is a classic carving project that will be excellent for your kitchen. A project that could very well become a family heirloom.

For this project I elected to use Basswood since it's the wood of choice for beginner wood carvers. It's a hardwood, but it's fairly easy to carve. It's a great project to learn just about all the basic cuts and techniques.

Follow the safety tips on page 6.

Enjoy!

Tools & Supplies

Basswood (or hardwood of choice)

Spoon Template

Jigsaw or coping saw or bandsaw

Mora carving knife (or carving knife of choice)

Hook knife

Curved spoon gouge

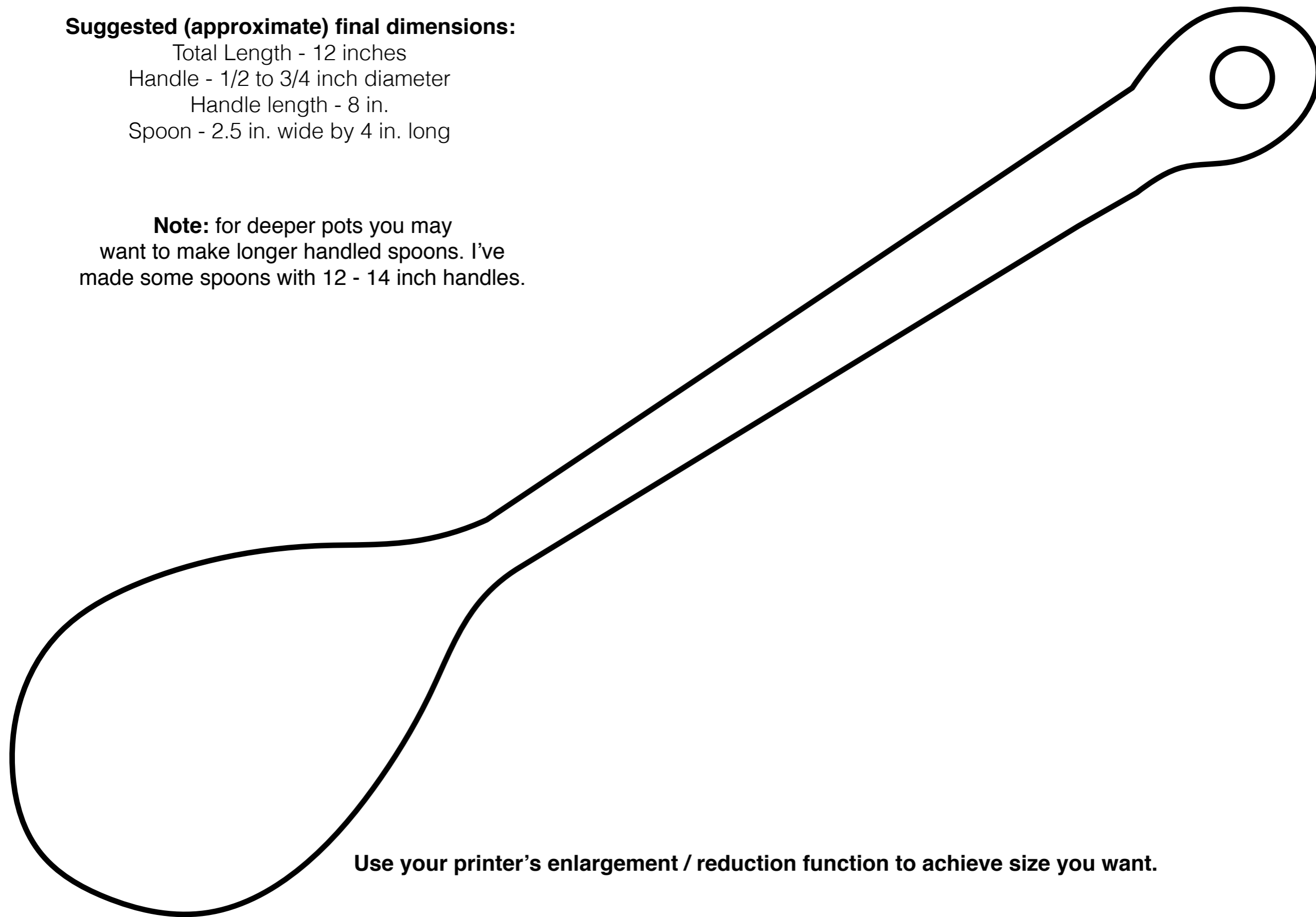
Sandpaper (80, 120, 220, 320, 1000 grits)

Mineral oil / beeswax mix (or just mineral oil)

Suggested (approximate) final dimensions:

Total Length - 12 inches
Handle - 1/2 to 3/4 inch diameter
Handle length - 8 in.
Spoon - 2.5 in. wide by 4 in. long

Note: for deeper pots you may want to make longer handled spoons. I've made some spoons with 12 - 14 inch handles.



Use your printer's enlargement / reduction function to achieve size you want.



Using the template to trace the spoon onto the Basswood.



Here I've freehanded the bowl area of the spoon. The inside circle is where I'll carve to with the spoon gouge.

This will give me about a 1/4 inch margin to work with around the outside rim of the spoon. I'll sand the rim down later in the process.



Here I'm using the spoon gouge to hollow out the bowl area. I like to start near the center of the bowl area and work back toward the edge of the spoon.

If you start in the center, you will continue to have wood fibers under your gouge supporting your cuts.

If you're new to carving, I highly recommend that you wear a carving glove.



I move the gouge, making "downhill" cuts all the way around the bowl area. Notice how I stop my cuts at that inside line.

You can bring the gouge across the grain also. This is a good way to clean up the transition cuts you made before.

I haven't cut the spoon out just yet. I like to do it this way, as it makes for safer and more stable carving of the bowl area.



I used my jigsaw to cut out the spoon's rough shape. Cut to the outside of your lines.

In this photo, I'm using the hook knife to clean up the bowl area. The curve shape of the knife allows it to conform better to the shape of the spoon bowl. This knife will also smooth out the gouge marks I created earlier.

This knife can be difficult to use for kiln-dried hardwoods. I does fairly well on the Basswood. It's easiest to use on green wood.



Here's a shot of the back or bottom of the spoon. I've made a few marks to show the grain direction and the arrow marks show the direction I'll carve with the Mora knife. By following the arrows, my knife will be carving in the downhill direction with the grain.



Using a paring cut. I'm pulling the knife downhill against the wood grain.



I'm continuing to carve downhill with the grain. This time I'm carving toward the handle, using a push cut.



Here's the bottom of the spoon after I've done most of the rough carving.

I've tried to carve the bottom of the spoon evenly until it looks like a real stirring spoon. You want the curves to look pleasing and transition well into the handle of the spoon.



For me, the trickiest part is the transition between the spoon bowl area and the handle.

Notice how the wood is beginning to curl upward. The carving blade is coming downhill and starting to bottom out into the handle area. So the blade is grabbing the grain and starting to split the wood. To fix this, I simply carve from the other direction.

You will also need to slow down at these transition points and make shorter, controlled cuts. Later on, I'll sand this transition point really well to get rid of the carving marks.



Now I move to the spoon handle. I'll do a series of pull and push cuts to shape the handle. For this spoon, I'm tapering the handle toward the bowl area. But don't make the taper to small or you could compromise the strength of the handle as it meets the bowl area.

The hardest part is knowing when to stop. Just use your eyes to make sure the spoon handle is as symmetrical as possible. Don't worry about getting everything perfect. The presence of some imperfections just tells the world that the spoon is handmade.



Here's a photo of the roughly carved wooden spoon. Although, I didn't show it, I've drilled a hole for the handle so I can hang it on a hook. But you don't have to add the hole if you don't want to. I simply used a hand drill with a 1/4 to 3/8 in. bit.

Take your time carving the end of the handle. Keep working the knife downhill with the grain and make short, controlled cuts. At the end of the handle, you'll be cutting more across the grain since this is the end grain of the board.

You may want to take the knife back to your strop and make sure it's very sharp for handling this end grain of the handle.



Now it's time to sand the spoon area. I start with 80 grit, move to 120 grit, then 220 grit and then 320 and 1000.

Sand with the direction of the grain.

You may have to spend a little more time on those transition points.

Wear your dust mask or respirator.



Now I'm sanding the spoon handle.

Continue to sand until everything is smooth and any potential splinters are removed.

Your fingers can be remarkable gauges and sensors for detecting big or small imperfections.



With the sanding complete, it's time to apply my beeswax / mineral oil mix

You can make your own beeswax wood butter. Check out page 116 for my recipe.

If you don't want to use the wood butter, just apply some food-safe mineral oil.

Some carvers even like to let the spoon soak in the mineral oil overnight.



I use a clean paper towel to apply the butter to all parts of the spoon. I work it in with my fingers and allow to set in overnight.

Next day, I clean off the excess with a clean cloth and buff.

If you have a buffing wheel, you can try that. You can also get buffing attachments for your hand drill. I normally buff with my hands.



The finished wooden spoon. As stated earlier, basswood is relatively easy and fun to carve. This is a great project for the beginner. And you may want to do many other projects using basswood.

This spoon turned out nice, but you will find other hardwoods that have even more stunning wood grain patterns, compared with basswood.

Because basswood is easy to carve and relatively plain looking, a lot of caricature or figurine carvers like this wood. And normally they will paint their caricature carvings. I don't recommend using paint for spoons, but I suppose you could paint the upper part of the handle that doesn't contact food.



Cherry Wood Butter Knife

Butter Knife



I love cherry wood, and it makes great kitchen utensils. That's why I just had to use it to make this beautiful butter knife.

The color and the grain pattern look stunning. Can't wait to butter some bread with this knife.

Follow the safety tips on page 6.

Enjoy!

Tools & Supplies

Cherry Wood (or hardwood of choice)

Butter Knife Template

Jigsaw or coping saw or bandsaw

Mora carving knife (or carving knife of choice)

Sandpaper (80, 120, 220, 320, 1000 grits)

Mineral oil / beeswax mix (or just mineral oil)

Suggested (approximate) final dimensions:

Total Length - 7.5 inches

Blade width - 1.25 in.

Depth - 3/8 in.

Butter Knife Template



Use your printer's enlargement / reduction function to achieve size you want.



Trace around the template and transfer the shape to the wood.



Notice how I placed the template toward the edge of the wood. This will minimize waste and allow me to get 3 or 4 more butters knives from this piece of cherry.



I used the jigsaw to cut out the knife. You could also use a coping saw, a bandsaw or a scroll saw. The C-clamp helps hold the workpiece while I cut.

I like to use a scroll or curve cut blade in my jigsaw. This type blade allows me to make some tight curves.



The rough cutout of the butter knife. The board itself is probably about 1/2 in. thick. When done with the carving, my knife will be about 3/8 in. thick.

Keep in mind that your rough cutouts of the workpiece are going to be slightly bigger than the finished piece.

Remember, it's easy to take off wood, but impossible to put it back.



In these two photos, I'm starting to remove a lot of the waste material. The left photo shows me doing a push cut. Notice how I'm using my left thumb to help push the knife through the wood.

If you're new to carving, I highly recommend that you wear a carving glove.



Again, I'm using a stronger push cut. The blade is oriented to the wood at a steep angle, and I'm trying to remove a lot of wood.

Got to be careful here and make sure you don't get too carried away and take off more wood than you should.

Remember that the final sanding step will bring everything to the dimensions you're shooting for. But the better you get at carving, the less sanding you'll have to do.



Working on the shaping the blade of the butter knife.

I'm using the scissor cut to get a more controlled cut. Notice how the blade is moving away from my left hand and my body.



Now I'm beginning to work my way from the butter knife blade to carving the handle. Here I'm coming up against a transition in the shape of the knife. The transition between the butter knife blade and the handle.

Notice how the wood is beginning to curl as I make the transition between the butter knife blade and handle.

The carving blade is obviously moving in the uphill direction and it's beginning to catch the wood grain.

To counter this, I'll need to change the position of the carving knife and carve from the other direction.



In the photo to the right, I'm beginning to shape the end of the butter knife handle. I'm making a controlled push cut and working my way all the way around.

The carving knife is moving "downhill" into the wood grain, which is the preferred way to carve. I'm dealing with end grain here, so I had to make sure my knife was very sharp.

To get clean cuts on this end grain, it's imperative that you use a sharp knife. So take it back to the strop if necessary.





Here is my rough cutout of the cherry butter knife. It's finally starting to look like a knife. Now, it's time to move on to the sanding.



Here's what the butter knife looks like after I've completed the sanding. I began with 80 grit sandpaper, then moved to 120 grit, 220 grit, 320 grit and 1000 grit.

I also used the micro mesh sanding cloths to get the shine you can see in the above photo.

Hardwoods (especially closed-grain) will do this the finer the sandpaper. Since I'll be using the beeswax butter for the finish, that is why I take more time with the sanding.

Wear your dust mask or respirator.



Here I'm applying my beeswax / mineral oil mix. I like to rub this on with a paper towel and massage it in with my fingers.

I'll allow this to set in overnight, then I'll wipe off the excess.

Once I remove the excess, I like to buff with a cotton cloth. I buffed it with my hand, but you can also use a buffing wheel.



Wine Bottle Stopper

Wine Bobble Stopper



The wine bottle stopper will make a wonderful gift for the wine lover in your life. If you're not a drinker of wine, you can also use these for other bottles — like olive oil.

I had a maple dowel on hand and decided to use it since it was already a cylinder. That made it much easier to carve the wine bottle stopper.

For the cork part, I glued a used wine cork on a 3/8 inch wood dowel and glued the other end of the dowel into the wooden bottle stopper. You can also buy corks that are pre-drilled for wooden dowels.

Follow the safety tips on page 6.

Tools & Supplies

Maple wood (or hardwood of choice)

Bottle Stopper Template

Jigsaw or handsaw or bandsaw

Mora carving knife (or carving knife of choice)

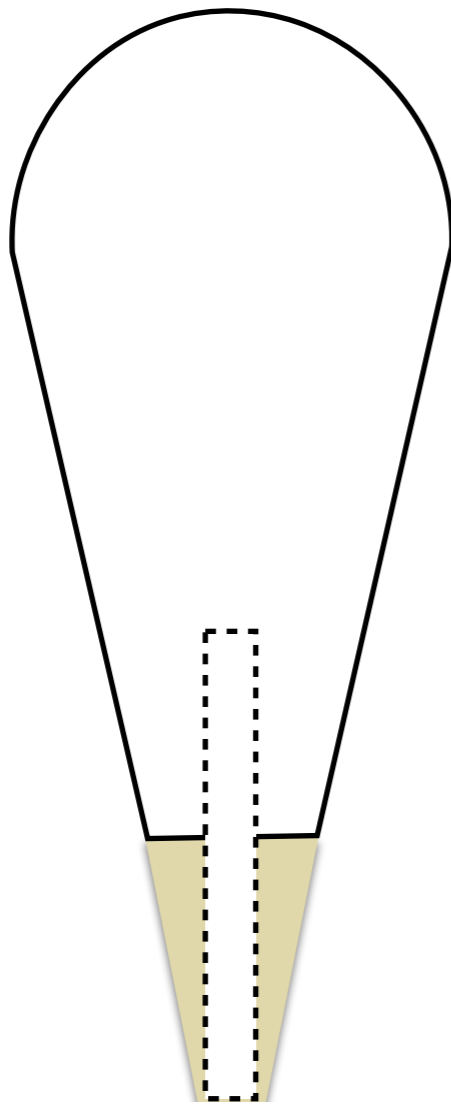
Wine cork (preferably plastic)

3/8 inch dowel, 2 inches long

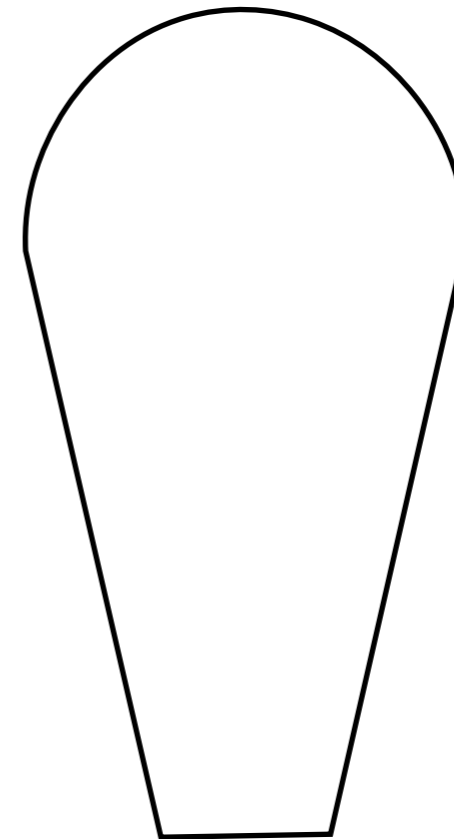
Sandpaper (80, 120, 220, 320, 1000 grits)

Mineral oil / beeswax mix (or just mineral oil)

Bottle Stopper Template



With cork attached



Suggested (approximate) final dimensions:

- Total Length - 3 inches
- Widest diameter - 1 3/8 in.
- Cork length - 1 in.
- Dowel diameter - 3/8 in.

Wooden portion

Use your printer's enlargement / reduction function to achieve size you want.



I had this maple dowel on hand so I decided to use it for the bottle stopper. Maple is hard to carve but makes for a great bottle stopper. Maple is very strong and durable.

For this project, you can transfer the template to the dowel or just take some measurements and eyeball it. Don't worry about getting the length exact. Shoot for 2.5 inches to 3 inches long or something close to that. The grain runs lengthwise with the dowel.



I chose to hold off on cutting the bottle stopper to length. This way I can get a firm grip on the dowel and work on carving the top of the stopper.

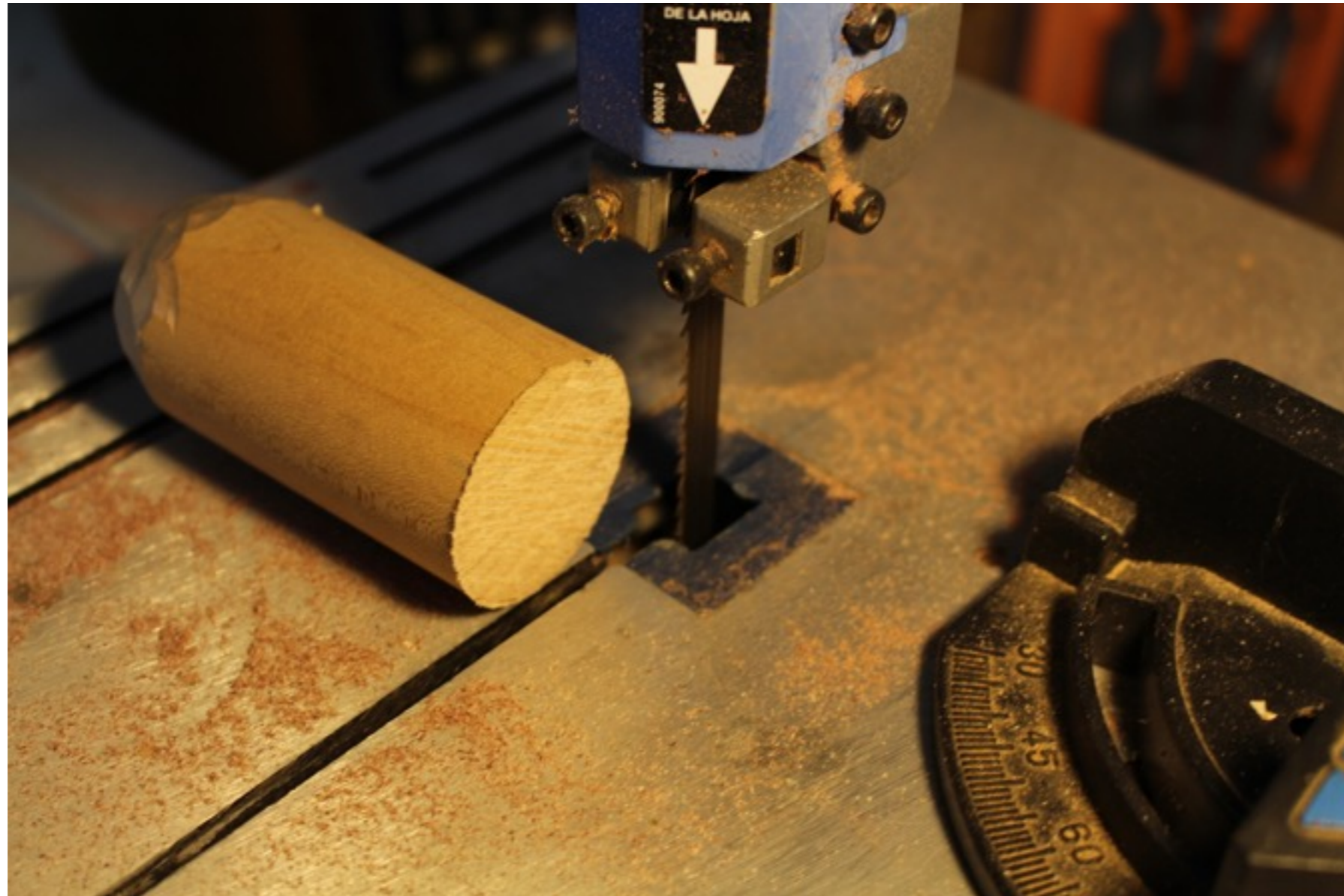
In the left-hand photo, I'm using the paring cut and carving toward the end of the dowel. I'm working around the wood evenly. The knife blade is going downhill with the grain and producing some nice cuts.

I'm encountering end grain here, so my knife must be ultra sharp.

If you're new to carving, I highly recommend that you wear a carving glove.



If I get tired of doing the paring cut, I swap over to the push cut (photo to left). Do whatever comes most natural to you and gives you the most control and comfort.



After rough carving the top of the bottle stopper, I used the bandsaw to cut it to length. You could also use a handsaw or a jigsaw. Try to make the cut as square as possible.

Rather than just glue a cork directly to the end of the wooden stopper, I decided to use a dowel to add more strength.

The “synthetic” corks seemed to work better than the regular corks. I recommend experimenting with this and seeing how it turns out. It was a bit of a challenge to get the hole to go straight through the cork. Just keep trying until you get it right. Have several corks on hand.

I have also cut the cork to a one-inch length.

If you don’t want to make your own, Woodcraft sells corks already predrilled and with the dowel.

If you don’t want to go with the dowel method, you could try glueing the cork directly to the end of the wooden stopper. I just don’t know how well that will hold up with time.



In the right-hand photo, I’m drilling a 3/8 inch hole to receive the dowel that will also be attached to the cork. If you have a different dowel size, just make sure you match the drill bit correctly.

It’s easier to drill the hole on the drill press. But if you don’t have a drill press, a hand drill will work. Either way, make sure you’ve secured the wooden stopper in a vise.

I used a piece of painter’s tape as a gauge to let me know how deep to drill. Approximately 1 inch depth.





In the left-hand photo, I'm tracing around the cork. I haven't glued the dowel in place yet. I'll do that a little later. I'm creating a reference point to know where to stop carving.



Next, I will carve to this line. I'll shoot for getting 1/16 inch shy of the line. That will give me some extra wood to sand later

In the photos here you'll notice a black smudge. I didn't show it in an earlier step, but I took the piece to my sander to square up the end a little more. The bandsaw will not always make a perfectly square cut. Part of the wood got a little over heated on my disk sander.

Next, I'm carving the other end of the stopper. The push cut worked well. I'm still carving downhill with the grain. I keep going until I'm just shy of my mark.

Here again, I'm working with end grain, so got to keep the knife sharp. You can also cut some across the grain here with a paring cut.



I'm continuing with the push cuts. Now I'm using my thumb to get a little more control. Remember, more controlled cuts as you get closer to the line.

I also carved down from the top of the stopper to give the body a more tapered contour — similar to the shape you see in the template.

However, you can make almost any shape you like.





Here's a photo of the stopper after I finished the rough carving. I gave the stopper a gentle taper from top to bottom. Left side (your left) of the photo is the top, and the right is the bottom.



Time to sand out the knife marks. I used the following sandpaper grits and in this order: 80, 120, 220, 320, and 1000.

Then I went over it with the 1800 micro mesh cloth. The micro mesh brings it to a soft shine.

Wear a dust mask or respirator.



With the sanding completed, it's time to glue the cork into place. It's easier to glue the dowel into the wood first. After the dowel has dried, then slip the cork over the dowel and glue it over the dowel.

If any of the dowel is sticking out, then just sand it down until it's flush with the cork.



Here's the finished bottle stopper. I'd recommend letting the glue cure overnight before using it in a bottle. You might notice that I slightly sanded the edge of the cork so it would fit easier in the wine bottle.



Now it's time to apply my beeswax butter. Check out the back section of the book for the recipe.



Lastly, I'm applying the beeswax butter. Allow to soak in overnight, then wipe off excess and buff.

A wooden leaf-shaped tray with a handle, resting on a wooden plank with dried leaves in the background. The tray is made of a reddish-brown wood and has a smooth, polished finish. It is shaped like a leaf with a pointed tip and a stem-like handle. The background consists of a weathered wooden plank and a pile of dried, brown leaves.

Leaf Tray

Mesquite Leaf Tray



The leaf tray project was fun to make, and I love how it turned out. You can use the tray to store jewelry or serve nuts and candies.

I built the template based on an actual white oak leaf from my yard. You could get creative here and use other leaves from different trees as your template.

Follow the safety tips on page 6.

Tools & Supplies

Mesquite wood (or hardwood of choice)

Leaf Template

Jigsaw & C-clamp

7/10 & 7/20 Carving Gouges

Mora carving knife (or knife of choice)

Rubber mallet

Shinto saw rasps (or rasp of choice)

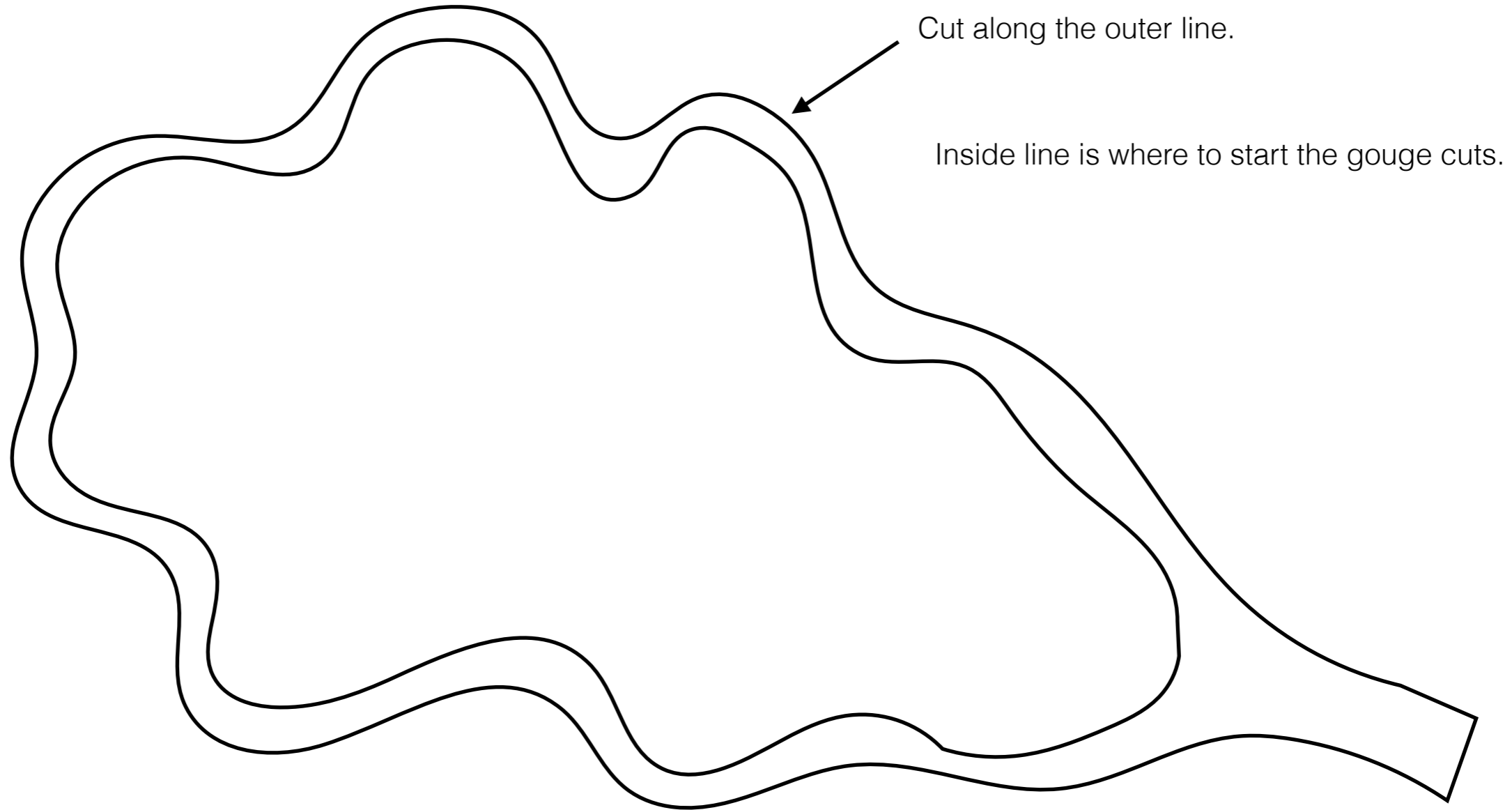
Sandpaper (80, 120, 220, 320, 1000 grits)

Mineral oil / beeswax mix (or just mineral oil)

Suggested (approximate) final dimensions:

Total Length - 10 inches
Maximum width - 6 inches
Depth - 1 in.

Leaf Tray Template



Use your printer's enlargement / reduction function to achieve size you want.



My wood of choice for this project is a hardwood named Mesquite. I love the color and the grain pattern of this wood.

If you're just starting out, you might want to start with basswood which is a little easier to carve.

Since the tray will not be handling liquids, you could also use a more open-grain wood like red oak. Red oak is pretty easy to get at your local home improvement stores.



I used an actual white oak leaf as the template for my wooden tray. I picked this leaf from a tree in my yard and then enlarged it on the copying machine.

You can get creative here and used many different kinds of leaves for your pattern.

Trace the leaf onto the wood, using a pencil or fine marker.



I used the 20mm gouge to hog out most of the material. To help speed the process up some, I used a rubber mallet to tap on the gouge.

I used the 7 mm gouge to make the transition from the edge down into the tray, but the 20 mm gouge did 85% of the work.

I used the gouges to cut with the grain and some across the grain. If you feel the gouge is digging in and going in too deep, then cut from the other direction to meet your first cut. Or make cuts across the grain with those transition points.

Make sure you cut away from your body or other body parts.

If you're new to carving, I highly recommend that you wear a carving glove.



Here I've done most of the rough carving and removed most of the wood for the tray.



Once I had most of the tray carved out, I used the jigsaw to cut out the tray. Make sure to use scroll style blades. They work better for cutting curves.

The C-clamp comes in handy for holding the workpiece down. Move the piece around and be careful not to cut into your workbench.

You could also use a bandsaw or a coping saw to cut out the tray.

Here's a picture of the tray after I cut around the leaf's outline. Notice how I left about a 1/4 inch for the top rim.



I used the straight blade and a paring cut to start working on removing material on the bottom of the tray.

Notice how I'm keeping my thumb clear of the blade's travel path.



After carving around the bottom edge of the tray, I used the saw rasp to take off more material. Start with the course side of the rasp and then flip it to the fine side. Be careful and don't take off too much material.

I created a bevel all along the bottom periphery of the tray. But most of the bottom I left flat so the tray will lay flat.



I primarily used sandpaper and sanded the tray by hand. I started with 80 grit, then moved to 120, 220, 320, and 1000.

I used the rotary sanding tool for some spots that were hard to get by hand alone.

This is totally optional, but I like to go one step further on the sanding and use something called micro-mesh cloths. So I used a 1800 grit and 3600 grit micro-mesh. I do this because I want to get as smooth a surface as possible. And I'm using a beeswax / mineral oil finish.

Wear a dust mask or respirator.





I like to finish most of my carvings with a beeswax / mineral oil mixture. I basically apply it with a paper towel and allow to soak in for a few hours.

Next, I'll take a lint-free cloth and buff it to a nice sheen.

Later in the book, I'll show you how to make your own beeswax / mineral oil mixture. See my recipe in the back section of the book.



The finished leaf tray. I loved how this turned out! Mesquite has such a stunning grain pattern.



Bread Board

Red Oak Bread Board



The bread board project is easy to make and will look great in your kitchen.

For this project I use red oak which is easy to find in your local home improvement stores. Or you might reclaim some oak from old, discarded furniture.

Follow the safety tips on page 6.

Enjoy!

Tools & Supplies

Red Oak Wood (or hardwood of choice)

Bread Board Template

Jigsaw & C-clamp

Mora carving knife (or knife of choice)

Shinto saw rasps (or rasp of choice)

Sandpaper (80, 120, 220, 320, 1000 grits)

Mineral oil / beeswax mix (or just mineral oil)

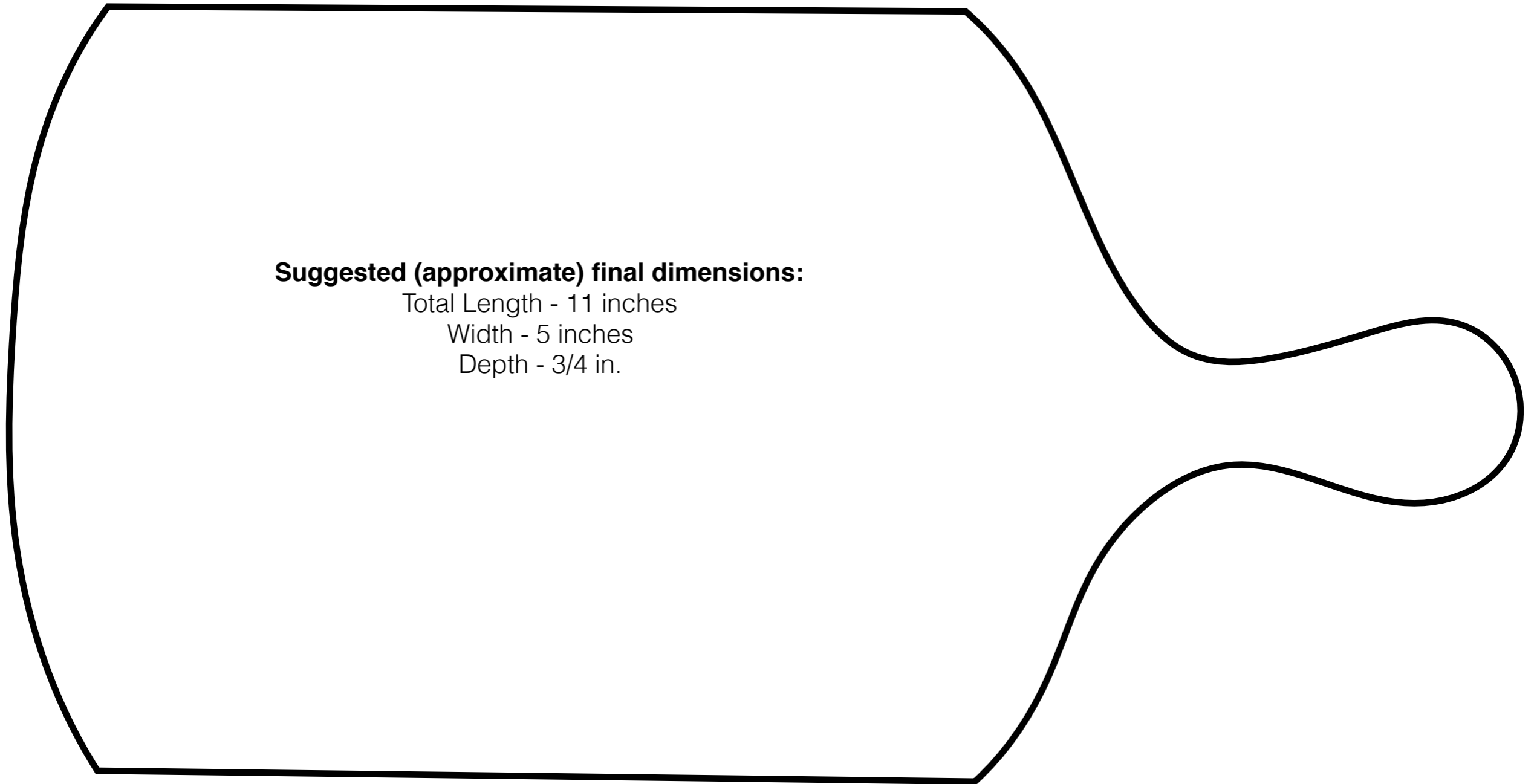
Bread Board Template

Suggested (approximate) final dimensions:

Total Length - 11 inches

Width - 5 inches

Depth - 3/4 in.



Use your printer's enlargement / reduction function to achieve size you want.



Here I'm using my template and tracing around it. If you print the templates out on a heavy stock paper, you can reuse them again for future projects.

I chose red oak for this project because the purpose will be for cutting or serving bread. Red oak is a very open-grain wood, so I don't generally use it for kitchen utensils that come in contact with liquids. But it will work fine for trays and bread boards.



I don't like to waste wood, so I placed the template close to one edge of the board. I've also oriented the template so it runs along the grain. And I chose some pleasing grain patterns for the bread board.



Once again, I'm using the jig saw to cut out this project. Just need a good table to clamp the board down and make sure it's secure. You could also use a bandsaw if you have one.



Here is the cutout of the bread board. I love the grain pattern for this project.



Basically, I just want to round the edges on this project. I start by doing a push cut along the long edges. You'll find the knife digging into and lifting the wood. Be careful and don't get too aggressive since you might take off too much on the ends. Try for light cuts.

For this project, I'm only going to carve the edges on the top side of the bread board. If you want, you could carve edges on top and bottom.

If you are new to carving, I highly recommend that you wear a carving glove.



Still working on the long edge. This is a pull cut. Notice how I'm keeping the blade pointed away from my body. My wrist acts as a stop so the knife doesn't come back into my torso.

Find a way to cut that's comfortable and safe for you.



In this photo, I'm cutting across the end grain which requires more force and a sharp knife. I'm doing a push cut, assisted by my left thumb.



Here I'm doing a paring cut. This gives me more control especially this close to the corner of the bread board. I'm keeping my thumb well out of the path of the blade.



At this point, I've finished with the carving knife. Now I'm going to use the Shinto rasp to even things out and get rid of the knife marks.

I start with the course side and then move to the finer side. The Shinto can remove a lot of wood so don't get overly aggressive with it.



Now the time-consuming part begins. The Shinto rasp left some marks of its own, so I started out using 80 grit sandpaper.

From the 80 grit, I moved to 120, then 220 and up to 1000 grit. Try to sand along the grain as much as possible.

At about 1000 grit, the red oak begins to take on a pleasing sheen.



I finally finished the sanding. **Don't forget to wear a dust mask.** I also like to get outside the shop when I'm sanding or I'll set up a fan so it blows the dust away from me. Another option is to set up your shop vac so it sucks the dust away as you sand.



Notice the sheen on the bread board. This comes just from sanding at 1000 grit. I haven't even applied a finish yet.

I recommend any food-safe finish. Here again my goto finish is the beeswax butter. You could also use mineral oil.



I'm applying the beeswax butter with a paper towel. And, I like to massage it into the wood with my fingers.

Allow the butter to set on the wood for several hours. Then wipe off the excess with a paper towel.

If you have a clean buffing wheel, you can use that to buff the bread board. Or use a clean cloth and buff by hand.



The finished bread board. This is going to look so nice in our kitchen.



Olive Wood Spatula

Olive Wood Spatula

The spatula is a great project to make and will be an excellent addition to any kitchen.

For this project I use olive wood which can be found in your local woodworking store. Olive wood is great for kitchen utensils, and I love the aroma of the wood when carving.

Follow the safety tips on page 6.

Enjoy!

Tools & Supplies

Olive Wood (or hardwood of choice)

Spatula Template

Jigsaw & C-clamp

Mora carving knife (or knife of choice)

7/22 Gouge

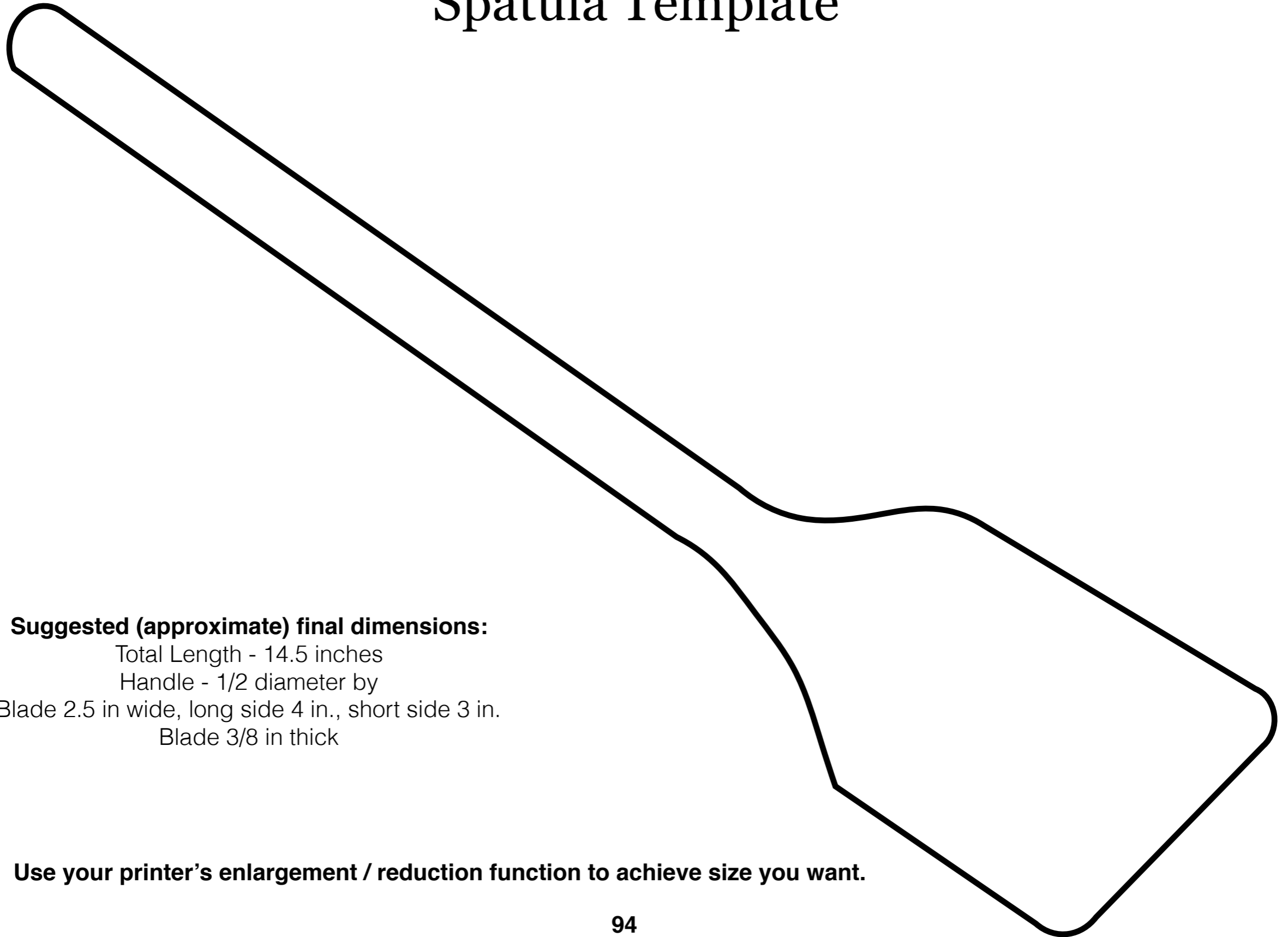
Shinto saw rasps (or rasp of choice)

Sandpaper (80, 120, 220, 320, 1000 grits)

Mineral oil / beeswax mix (or just mineral oil)



Spatula Template



Suggested (approximate) final dimensions:

Total Length - 14.5 inches

Handle - 1/2 diameter by

Blade 2.5 in wide, long side 4 in., short side 3 in.

Blade 3/8 in thick

Use your printer's enlargement / reduction function to achieve size you want.



Wood of choice for this project is olive wood. I love the grain pattern and color. Olive is very aromatic so it was a pleasure to carve, and enjoyed the nice fragrance of the wood.



Start by using a template and tracing the spatula outline to the wood's surface. Notice how I placed my template over the part of the board with the most stunning grain pattern.



Next, I used my jigsaw with scroll style blades to cut out the general shape of the spatula.

Use the C clamp and move the workpiece around so you don't cut into your workbench.

Rough cut out of the spatula.



I used my Mora 120 straight knife to carve the handle. I used pull and push cuts. **(If you're a new carver, I highly recommend wearing a carving glove.)**

For the spatula blade, I used a #7/22mm gouge.

A rasp was used for fine-tuning the shape.

A C clamp was used to hold the workpiece down.



The 22 mm gouge I'm using is normally used for making spoons, but it came in handy for getting the excess material off the spatula. Ultimately, I want the thickness of the spatula to be about 1/4 inch. This seemed to cut really well going across the grain of the wood.

Carving across the grain will sometimes tear the wood fibers, but with this olive wood it cut very cleanly across the grain.



I finally used the rasp saw to do the final shaping of the spatula.

This also worked great for putting a bevel on the end of the spatula.



Next, I sanded the spatula by hand. I started with 80 grit, then moved to 120, 220, 320, and 500 grit.

Final sanding was done with the micro-mesh cloths, 1500 to 3600 grit.

Wear a dust mask or respirator.



I used my beeswax / mineral oil mix for the finish. I applied with a paper towel and allowed a few hours to soak into the wood.

Then I buffed the spatula with a lint-free cloth.

I will show you later in the book how to make your own beeswax / mineral oil mix.

The finished spatula turned out great! Now, let's go stir fry something.

A close-up photograph of a wooden coffee scoop. The scoop is made of dark, polished wood with a smooth, rounded bowl and a long, tapered handle. It is resting on a light-colored wooden cutting board. The background is a dark, textured surface. The text "Coffee Scoop" is overlaid in white at the bottom center.

Coffee Scoop

Coffee Scoop



The wooden coffee scoop is a classic project.

For this project I use walnut for its dark, rich color and beauty. It's a great hardwood for utensils.

It is somewhat challenging to carve, but it's well worth the effort.

Follow the safety tips on page 6.

Enjoy!

Tools & Supplies

Walnut (or hardwood of choice)

Coffee Scoop Template

Jigsaw & C-clamp

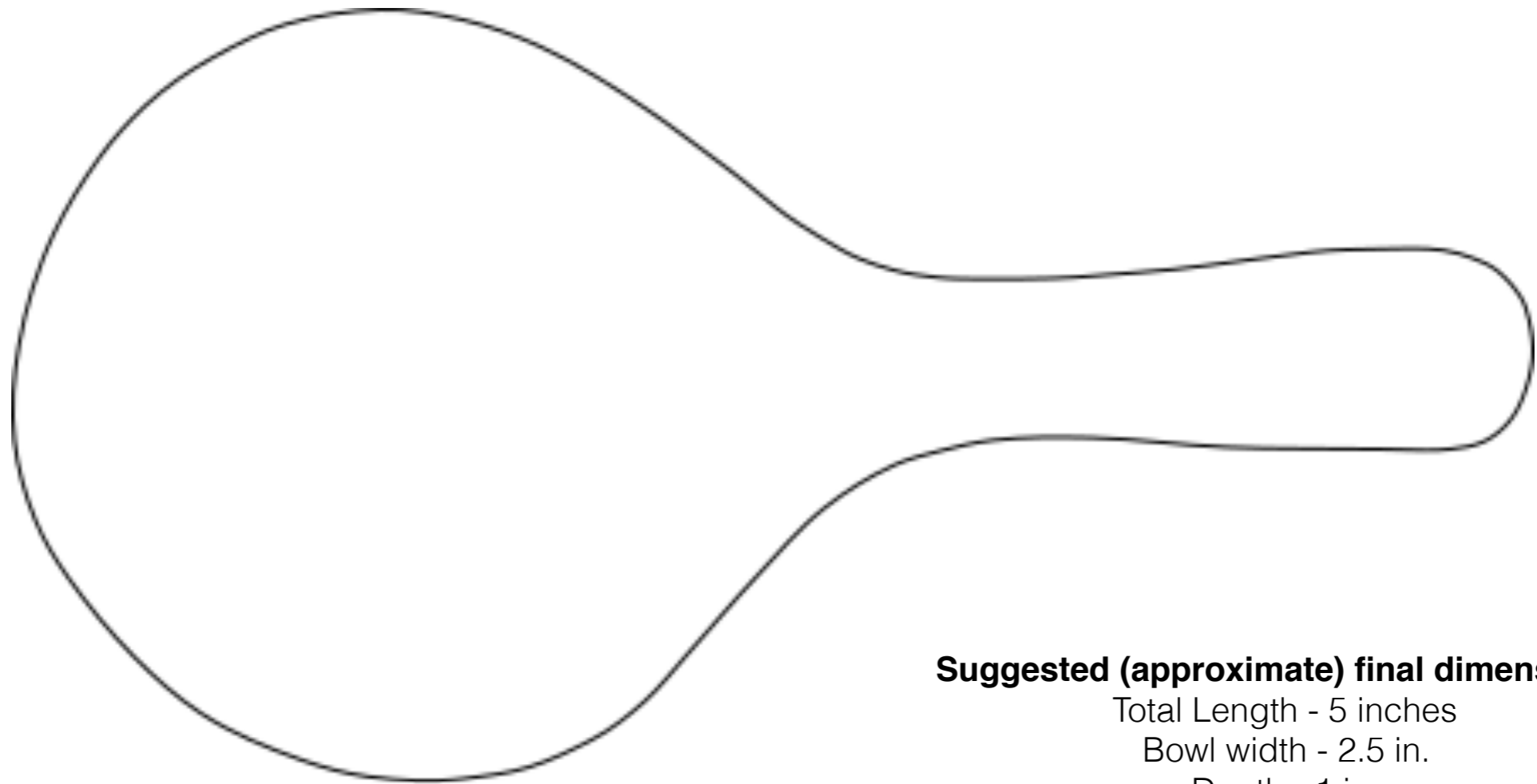
Mora carving knife (or knife of choice)

Spoon Gouge and Hook Knife

Sandpaper (80, 120, 220, 320, 1000 grits)

Mineral oil / beeswax mix (or just mineral oil)

Coffee Scoop Template



Suggested (approximate) final dimensions:

Total Length - 5 inches

Bowl width - 2.5 in.

Depth - 1 in.

Use your printer's enlargement / reduction function to achieve size you want.



I chose walnut for this project for its durability and beauty.

However, you could use just about any kind of wood for this project because the scoop will be used for dry coffee grounds rather than liquids.

If you're new to wood carving, you might want to start with a wood like basswood.



Use the template and trace the pattern to the wood, using a pencil or fine-tip marker.

When applying the template, I like to choose sections of the wood with the more stunning grain pattern. And I would like to use as most of the wood as possible.



The jigsaw comes in handy for cutting the scoop out of the board. Use scroll-style blades for this since they handle curves better.

Use a C clamp to hold the workpiece down and be careful not to cut into your workbench.



I started hogging out the material with my spoon gouge. I like to work across and along the grain as much as possible. Carving downhill predominately. You can experiment with different spoon gouges to get the curve or contour you want.

If the gouge goes too deep, then cut from the other direction to meet the first cut. Keep doing this until you get the rough shape of your bowl.

Normally, I start hollowing the bowl area by starting in the middle and working back toward the line. In this case I did the opposite, but working from the center to the outer line seems to be a better technique.



I like to use the hook knife to refine the bowl more and get rid of the marks made by the gouges.

The curve of the knife also helps refine the contour of the bowl.

This knife can be a little difficult to use on kiln-dried hardwoods, but it will work. Just takes a little patience.

If you're new to carving, I highly recommend that you wear a carving glove.



Here's a photo of the scoop after I've used the hook knife. It still needs to be sanded. Or you can use a scraper (see page 16).



Shown here, I'm using a push cut to remove material from the bottom of the scoop. You could also use a paring cut for this. Again, be careful with where you direct the blade.

If the knife starts to dig in and tear the wood, then cut from the opposite direction.

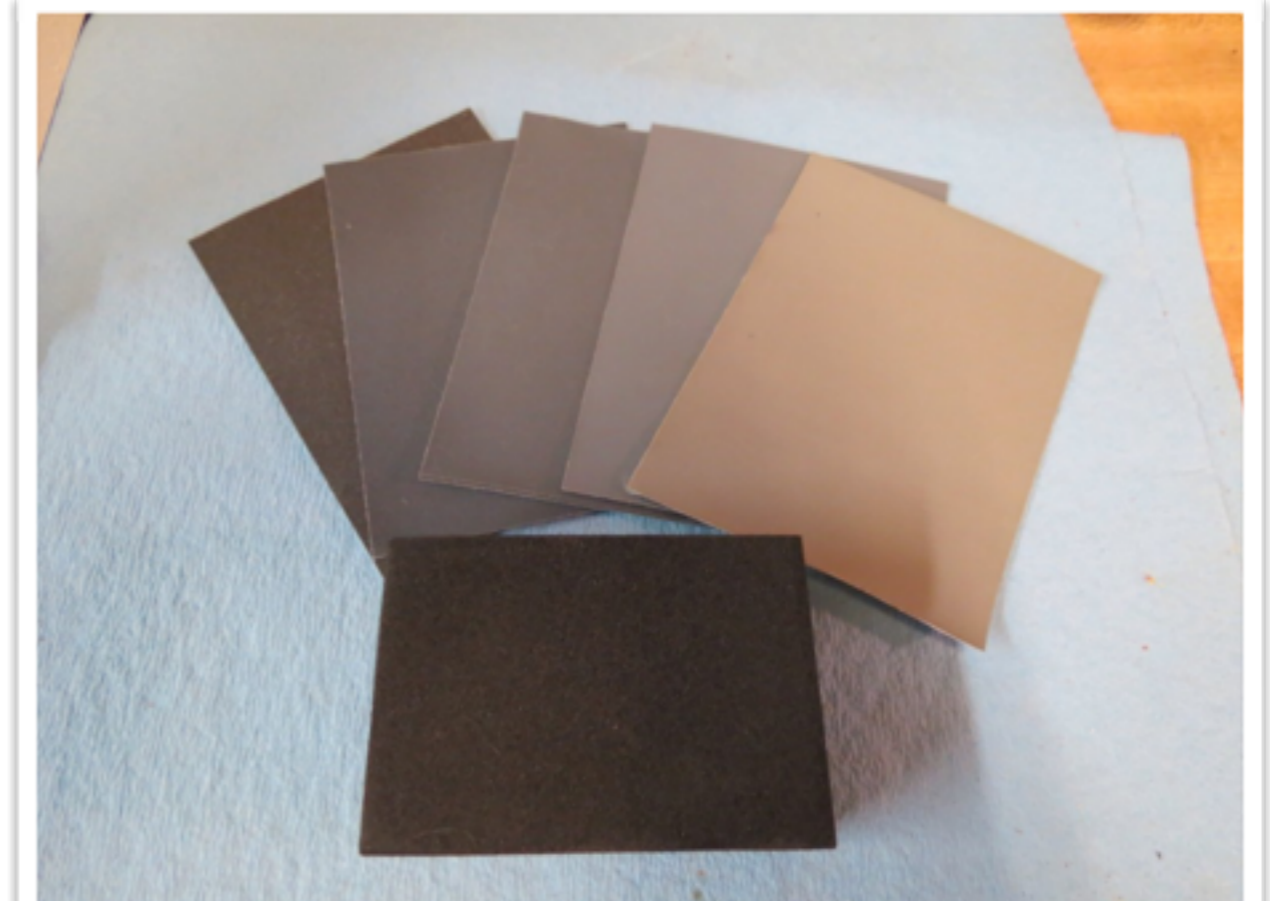


Here's a bottom view of the coffee scoop. I've rough carved the bottom and now it's ready for refinement.



I started sanding with with 80 grit and then 120, 220, 320 and 1000. Try to sand with the grain as much as possible.

Wear your dust mask or respirator.



This is optional, but I like to use micro-mesh sanding cloths for additional sanding. I usually go from 1500 grit to 3600 grit.

These micro-mesh cloths can be washed and reused multiple times.



Here's a photo of the finished scoop after all the sanding.



For this scoop, I decided to use mineral oil and butcher block conditioner for the finish. These are sample sizes I got from the woodworking store. You can get bigger bottles from you local home improvement store.

You could also use the wood butter mix that I like to use (see page 116).



Finished scoop turned out beautiful! Love the color and grain pattern of this walnut.

Sharpening Your Tools



I like to keep my tools sharp. And I like to keep the sharpening process simple. To the left, I've wrapped and taped 500 grit and 1000 grit wet/dry sandpaper to some 3 inch wide boards.

If it's been a while, and I haven't stropped my tools in a while, I'll do some touch up with the sandpaper.

For the hook knife you can use the sandpaper also. Just wrap it around a wooden dowel.

If your tools are very dull, then you may need to start with a sharpening stone. However, I find that the sandpaper and leather strop are enough to keep my tools ultra-sharp.



The leather strop is what I use most of the time. In fact, I'll try to strop my knives between each carving project (or during a project). The leather strop, along with the honing compound, will bring a razor-sharp finish to my tools. And I may not even have to use the sandpaper.

The strop is super easy to make. Just get a piece of leather from your local craft supply store. Cut it out and fit it to the same dimensions of the board. I like to use rubber glue to attach it to the board. My board is 15 inches by 2.5 inches.

You can get the honing compound from your local woodworking store or buy online. This stuff should last you a lifetime.



To resharpen my knife I simply wet the sandpaper and rest the blade on the sandpaper. I make sure the bevel of the blade lays flat on the sandpaper and then move the blade in circles. Maybe do this 10 to 15 times for each side.

Start with the 500 grit and then go to the 1000 grit.

Next, I'll go to the leather strop.



Side 1



Side 2

The leather strop is relatively easy to use. Apply more honing compound if it's needed.

Lay the bevel of the blade flat on the strop. You should be able to feel when the blade's bevel is in the correct position. Next, draw the blade back about ten times just for side 1. Note the arrows showing the direction you want to move the blade. Lift the blade straight up each time you do this. Do not rub the edge of the blade or make a flicking motion with the blade. This action will undermine your sharpening.

Switch to the bevel on side 2 and draw the blade back about ten times. Again, follow the arrows.

After stropping, you'll notice the blade takes on a mirror-like finish. The blade should be razor-sharp. You can test the sharpness on a scrap piece of wood. Cut across the end grain with a paring cut and if the cut is very smooth, the knife is plenty sharp.



Take good care of your carving tools and they should last a long time. I found this tool roll for about \$10. Makes for an easy way to store your tools and protect the cutting edge. If you spend just a few more dollars you can probably get a nice leather tool roll.

**Beeswax /
Mineral Oil
Mixture**

I started using the beeswax and mineral oil mix a few years back and love it. My dad is a beekeeper, so I'll probably have an endless supply of beeswax. When applying the butter to wood, I use a generous amount and work it into the wood with my fingers. Allow it to soak in overnight. The next day, wipe off the excess with paper towels and then buff with a clean cloth. The recipe below is 2 parts mineral oil to 1 part beeswax. I've seen other ratios in other recipes, so don't take this recipe as an absolute.

Here is the recipe:

- **8 Ounces (1 cup) of food-safe mineral oil**
- **4 Ounces of beeswax**
- **Small pot & burner**
- **12 oz wide-mouth Mason jar**
- **Paper towels (prefer Viva)**
- **Cloth towel**

- 1 Sterilize the mason jar with some boiling water (or run it through dishwasher). Be very careful here so you don't burn yourself.
- 2 Pour the 8oz of mineral oil into the pot and set for lowest heat setting.
- 3 Add 4oz of beeswax pellets or chunks. (Look for pellets in your local craft/hobby store)
- 4 Stir the wax around until it melts and the whole mixture is clear.
- 5 Set aside for 2-3 minutes to cool (or longer if it's hot)
- 6 Carefully pour the mixture in the 12 oz Mason jar. This recipe should almost completely fill the 12 oz jar.
- 7 Keep the lid off and cover the top with a paper towel and allow it to set overnight. Next day, it should look and fill like soft butter.
- 8 Apply the rubber-gasket lid to seal the jar. Store it in a cool, dark place. You may want label it so people know what it's for.



After the mixture has cooled and setup overnight the mixture will look and feel a lot like butter. See photo above. The mixture is often referred to as wood butter. Make sure to put the lid back on and store it in a cool, dark place. You may want to label it so no one mistakenly takes it for something else or tosses it out.

About the Author



Stephen S. Johnson is a woodworker, a writer and an engineer by trade. He grew up in a small town called Upatoi, Georgia. He now lives with his wife in the Atlanta area.

He's been a woodworker for over 25 years and enjoys showing others how to get started with a woodworking hobby. He considers hobbies to be underrated gifts from God. With our hobbies and talents we can serve others and feed our souls.

Stephen is the owner and editor of Four Oaks Crafts online woodworking magazine. He founded it in 2014. On his website, you'll find many free tutorials, woodworking plans and articles.

He is also on YouTube.

www.FourOaksCrafts.com

Thank You!

Thanks for downloading this ebook. I hope it was helpful and informative. This book has just scratched the surface on the types of wood carving you can do. Remember to be safe and have fun with this wonderful hobby. There are tons of books, YouTube Channels, clubs, and forums out there for wood carvers. Continue to practice and learn as much as you can.

Note: This book is for informational and demonstrative purposes only. It does not substitute for formal woodworking training.

Check out my [Carving Resource Page](#) to look at reviews and purchase carving tools and supplies.

Good luck on your wood carving endeavors. Drop me a line sometime and let me know how your projects are going. My email address: stephenjohnson713@gmail.com

Be on the lookout for future ebooks I have in the works.

Don't forget to check out my website: <https://www.fouroakscrafts.com>

My website has several informative articles, plus FREE tutorials and woodworking plans.

I'm also on YouTube: [Four Oaks Crafts on YouTube](#)

God bless!

