

**One Hundred and One**  
**WOODTURNING IDEAS**

"Borrowed" from Woodturners around the World

Compiled by Peter Robson



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## INTRODUCTION

After listening to Vic Wood at a recent talk on design at the Forest Hill Woodturners where he shared many of his ideas with the members, I was prompted to think how many ideas I have gained from listening and watching woodturners at various times. He also pointed out that we should be willing to share what we have gained with others to promote the craft of woodturning.

Many of the ideas in this book will not be new to you, but hopefully there will be something in it that you did not know about, or had forgotten. As the title indicates very few of these ideas are my own, but rather a collection of ideas that I feel are worth remembering for future use. I hope that no one is offended if I have used one of their ideas without acknowledging the source as I could not be sure where I first heard or saw each of the ideas included in the book.

Thanks must go to all those woodturners from around the world who have been prepared to share their ideas at seminars, workshops, over a cup of tea/glass of beer or in articles in one of the many magazines that cater for woodturners or woodworkers around the world.

The ideas are not organized into any special order but rather recorded as I thought of them. There is also a special section at the back where you can record any other ideas that you may know of or hear about at a later date. Perhaps you may even like to write them down and send me a copy for a future '101 ideas' or just to share the idea. I can be reached by writing to:-

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### 1. TEAR SANDPAPER

Don't cut your sandpaper into smaller pieces, but rather tear it into the smaller pieces. The sharp cut made by scissors will leave a sharp edge that will tend to scratch your work.

### 2. SOFTEN SANDPAPER

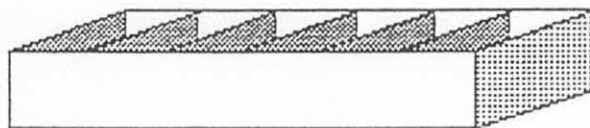
By dragging your sheets of sandpaper over the edge of your bench you will soften the glue that has been used and take that stiffness out of the paper, thus making it easier to use.

### 3. LABEL SANDPAPER

Mark all your pieces of sandpaper with the grade number or colour code them with coloured textas. e.g. red line for 180 grit, blue for 240, etc.

### 4. STORING SANDPAPER

A small box with partitions is easy to make and excellent for storing your pieces of sandpaper. You can mount it on the wall above your lathe and refill it when you are getting low in the various grades.

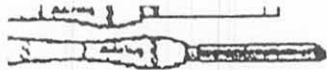


### 5. WET and DRY SANDPAPER

Wet and dry paper is very good for getting a high quality finish as the grades are a lot finer e.g. 600, 1000, 1200, etc.

### 6. USING SANDPAPER

When using your paper fold it in three and this will help to keep your fingers cooler and it will also help to keep the paper together.



## 7. BACKING FOR SANDPAPER

Use a thick piece of felt or foam rubber as a backing when sanding and this will also keep your fingers cool.

## 8. LATHE SPEED AND SANDING

Always use a low speed when sanding on the lathe. Try not to let the work get too hot as some timber will develop surface checks which are very difficult to get rid of later.

## 9. DIFFICULT ENDGRAIN

Difficult end grain can be moistened and then sandpapered and this will assist you to get a better finish.

## 10. REPAIRING DENTS

If you ever bump your work, or even worse drop it, and create a dent these can be removed by steaming the dent with hot steam from a boiling kettle. Take care as steam can give you a terrible burn.

## 11. USING FILES AS SCRAPERS

Old files can be used as scrapers provided you are careful. Always grind off the teeth of the file first as these tend to create break lines on the file.

## 12. SUPERGLUE

Although quite expensive it has often proved to be a life saver for woodturners. Use it to glue together small cracks that may appear in your work.

## 13. LOOSE BARK

Superglue can also be used to attach loose bark to natural edged bowls and save the overall effect of the piece.

## 14. "PITHY WOOD"

Very soft or pithy wood in spalted pieces can be hardened by squirting a little very fine superglue on the offending parts. Leave to dry and then you will find the pithy part will cut a lot better.

## 15. FILLING CRACKS/KNOTS

By mixing a little powder paint with five minute epoxy glue you can make a feature of an offending crack or knot hole. A little masking tape over the side where the mixture is likely to run through will also make it easier.

## 16. RINGS OF COLOUR

The above mixture can also be used to create rings of colour on the lid of a box or around the rim of a bowl or platter.

## 17. SAVE YOUR SCRAPS

No matter how small a scrap of wood is there is always a use for it, especially if it is attractively coloured. Small inserts in lids of boxes can really set the box off nicely. Bobbin makers and people who enjoy making miniatures will gladly take these scraps off your hands.



## 18. NAMING TIMBER

Always mark the name of timber on it with texta when you first get it, otherwise you will forget what it is. I often include the source of the timber and the date, as well.

## 19. CHEAP END SEALER

Use old paint scraps as end sealer on green wood. It is far cheaper than the commercial sealer.

## 20. SPLIT GREEN WOOD

By splitting logs lengthwise and then sealing you will save more wood as this relieves a lot of the tension in the wood which causes splitting and end checking.

## 21. STORING GREEN TIMBER

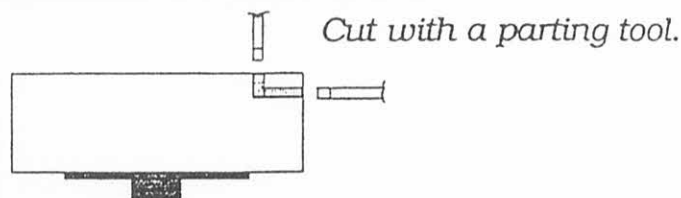
When you collect all that green wood you will find that it must be stored in a dry, cool area. It should be stacked so that it is off the ground and the logs should be arranged so that air can circulate around the logs.

## 22. BORERS IN TIMBER

There are lots of nasties that will bore into stored wood around your home. Some of these will also move into the timber in your home. Keep an eye on your stored timber for tell tale holes appearing in the bark. It is worthwhile getting rid of wood that you see is affected by these pests.

## 23. SAVING WOOD (Part 1)

Plenty of those wood shavings that appear on your floor could have been saved in the form of wood that can be used at a later date. When making a bowl from a circular disc of wood you can cut off rings of the timber that can be used for frames or inserts in other work.



## 24. SAVING WOOD (Part 2)

A Dennis Stewart Slicer is an investment that will pay for itself in no time at all, as you can make more than one bowl from a blank by taking out the inside of a bowl.

## 25. HANDLES ON TOOLS

If you make your own tool handles, use different coloured woods for the different tools. It will make them a lot easy to find amid the shavings on your lathe.

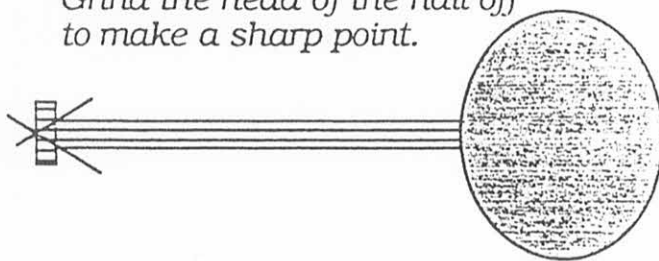
## 26. MASONRY NAILS AS TOOLS

Three or four inch masonry nails make ideal miniature scapers for very small work on highly detailed work on larger pieces. Make your handle first, then drill a slightly undersize hole and drive the nail into the handle. The head of the nail is then ground down to make the tool.

## 27. MAKE A "SPIKER"

Using the method above construct a "spiker" for making small holes in wood to start screws or hold spindle work between centres. A handle that fits snugly into the palm of your hand is very comfortable and easy to use.

*Grind the head of the nail off to make a sharp point.*







## 28. BUILDER'S SCRAPS

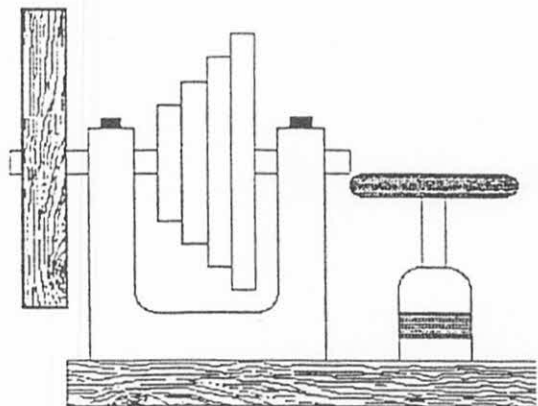
Collect scraps of 4" x 2" from building sites to use them for jam fit chucks. If you cut them into pieces 4" long you can quickly cut them into round with a large bowl gouge on the lathe.

## 29. CRAFTWOOD/CHIPBOARD

Scraps of this can also be used to make press fit chucks. If your press fit chuck is larger than the piece it is going to hold smooth over the edges so that you can slow the piece down with your hand after turning off the motor.

## 30. EXTRA HANDLE

If you are lucky enough to have a lathe with an outboard drive make a wheel about 12" diameter to go on it and then you can use this to slow down the work as in the above tip. It is also handy for turning your work without actually touching the work. If you have just applied a finish, for example.

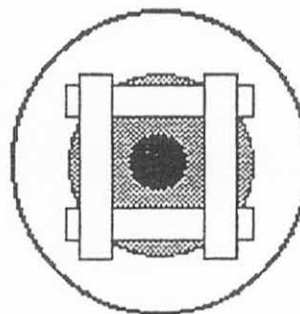


## 31. DOUBLE SIDED TAPE.

This tape is excellent for holding pieces of flat wood onto a wooden faceplate. It is not really expensive and you don't need to use a great deal of tape. The piece can be separated later by sliding a kitchen knife between the piece and the faceplate and twisting.

## 32. MASKING TAPE

Masking tape is handy if you make a press fit chuck that is a little loose. By placing the masking tape as shown below you will be able to hold the piece if you work carefully.



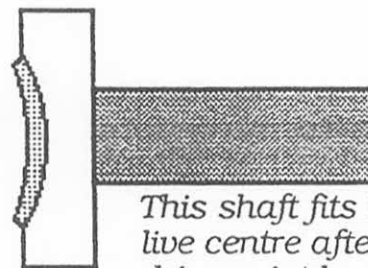
## 33. "BLACK" WOOD FINISH

Leave some nails in a bottle of white vinegar for a couple of weeks and the resulting solution can be used to stain wood a deep black. The actual shade of black will vary depending on the timber used.

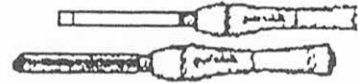
## 34. TAILSTOCK JIGS

Home made jigs for your tailstock can help you to hold and/or work on pieces while keeping the tail stock well back from your work. One such jig is shown below. On my lathe I can remove the pointed pin from the revolving centre and replace it with such a jig. This means that I have a secure hold on a bowl in a press-fit chuck without any holes appearing from the point of the live centre. As the jig is made from wood you can shape the head to suit your needs.

*Foam to protect your work.*



*This shaft fits into your live centre after the drive point has been removed.*

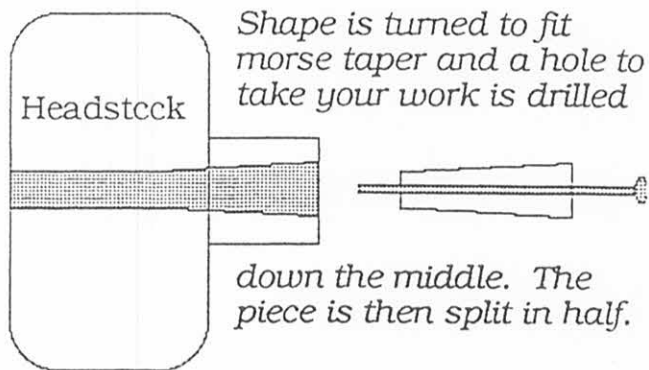


### 35. TENSION TURNING

If you have the above type of tailstock you can place super thin pieces on your lathe by holding the headstock end in a Jacobs, or similar chuck. Then you remove the pin from the live centre insert the previously prepared end of your piece and tighten the grub screw. You can then "stretch" your work. This will help to turn those very thin pieces as it reduces the whipping that you normally get with such pieces.

### 36. HOLDING THIN PIECES

If you have a Morse taper on the inside of your headstock you can use a jig, as shown below, and the hollow shaft to hold thin pieces while working on them or cleaning up the ends of such work.



### 37. QUICKER SANDING

Always wipe off old sanding dust before working on the next grade of paper or some of the coarser grit may remain on your work and make sanding take longer.

### 38. FURNITURE SCRAPERS

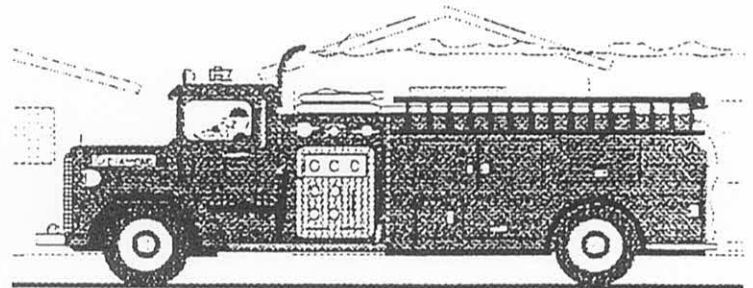
Cabinet makers scrapers made from cast off saw blades are excellent for scraping off difficult marks and end fibres on your work.

### 39. 0000 STEEL WOOL

Use 0000 steel wool to apply Danish Oil, or other finishes and follow the grain when applying. This will help to get rid of those very fine lines left by the last sandpaper that you used.

### 40. SAFETY AND STEEL WOOL

Take care when disposing of steel wool, or cloth, that has been used to apply finishes as they can cause fires.



### 41. LOOSE WOODEN CHUCKS

A sheet of paper between your bowl or platter and a slightly loose press-fit chuck will help you to cover up an error in judgement.

### 42. MAGAZINES

Read as many magazines as you can that have articles on woodturning. Most public libraries have one or two woodworking magazines that they subscribe to. Check out pottery and glass magazines at the same time as they can give you some very good ideas on various shapes and design.

### 43. WHY DO YOU LIKE IT?

When you see a finished piece try and work out why you like or dislike it. Is it the shape? Is it the finish? Is it the colour or the grain of the wood? By doing this you will be amazed by how much you will learn about design.



#### 44. CARRY A NOTE BOOK

Whenever you go to a meeting, exhibition or demonstration carry a small note book and a pen. (A small spiral bound book that will fit in your hip pocket is ideal.) After returning home you will be amazed at what you would have forgotten.

#### 45. USING SCRAPERS

Only ever make super fine cuts when using a scraper and keep it level with the centre of your work. Sharpen it regularly and remember it is a finishing tool rather than one you would use to remove large quantities of wood.

#### 46. FIRST AID KIT

Always keep a basic first aid kit in your workshop. Good clean bandages could help you solve a problem quickly without delaying while you run up to the house.

#### 47. IS IT DRY?

An easy and cheap method for checking the dryness of wood is to weigh it regularly and record the weight on the wood. Once it become fairly stable there is every chance that it is dry.

#### 48. LIDDED BOXES

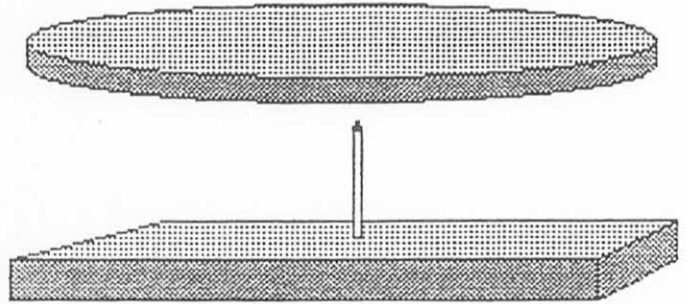
If you want to make lidded boxes part turn the top and bottom and then leave them for a while to further dry out. This will help stop any movement once the box is made.

#### 49. NASTY STAINS

Lemon juice is very good for removing those black stains that you often get on your hands while turning some green wood or several species of eucalyptus.

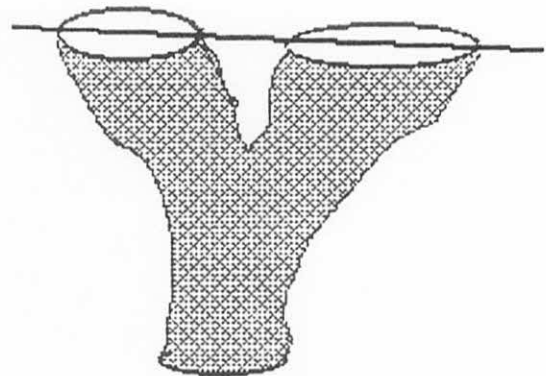
#### 50. WHERE IS THE CENTRE?

A nail through a solid piece of wood can be used to locate the centre of an irregular piece of wood like a burl. You merely balance the block on the nail and when it balances you have found the centre.



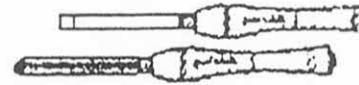
#### 51. DON'T THROW IT AWAY

Many woodturners throw away a crotch of a tree because they don't feel they are worth the effort. However if you split them down the middle, as shown below, you will often be surprised at the resulting figuring in the wood. Walnut in particular can often have a spectacular flame



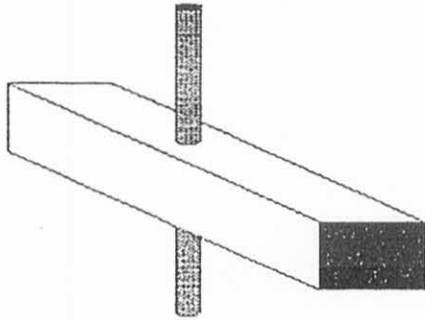
#### 52. USE ALL THE GRADES

When sanding always begin with the coarsest grit required to clean up your work. Then use all the grades in between as in the long run this will save you time and sandpaper. For example if you begin with 180, then move onto 240, 280, 320, 400, etc until you achieve the desired result.



## 52. DEPTH TESTER

Sometimes you need to know exactly how deep you have gone into a bowl. A piece of doweling that fits fairly snugly into a hole drilled through a board can give you this measurement.



## 54. WATER NEAR GRINDER

Keep a container of cool water near your grinder to cool down tools while sharpening them.

## 55. CHEAP FACE PLATES

Cheap faceplates can be made by purchasing nuts with the same thread size as your lathe and then welding a piece of flat circular steel to the nut. Four holes drilled through the steel and away you go.



## 56. SELF TAPPING SCREWS

Spend a little extra and purchase self tapping screws for fastening work to faceplates. They will save you time and effort and of course can be reused many times.

## 57. SCRAPERS - 1

When using a scraper you should only make super fine cuts. A scraper is not the tool for removing large amounts of wood.

## 58. SCRAPERS - 2

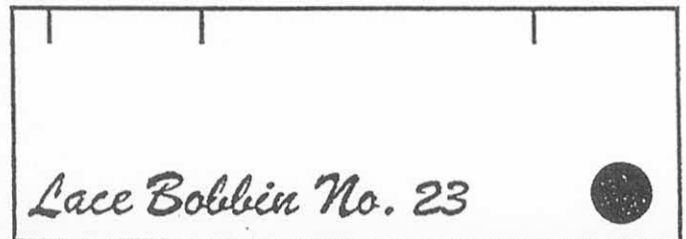
When scraping always have the very minimal part of the scraper possible, hanging over your tool rest. This will help to prevent chattering and will give you a better cut.

## 59. TOOL RESTS

For maximum stability when turning always try and keep the tool resting on the tool rest as close to the support underneath as possible.

## 60. TEMPLATES

When you make a piece between centres that you like always make a template to show the various sections. Label it, drill a hole in it and keep it for later use. I find it a good idea to write any notes about making the piece on the back of the template.

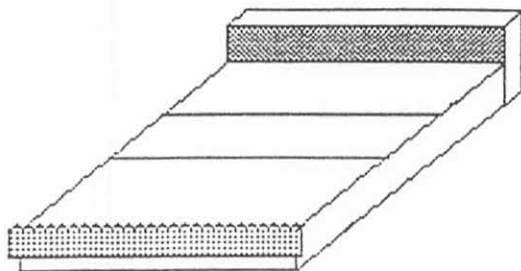






## 61. TEARING SANDPAPER

An old hacksaw blade mounted on a piece of wood as shown below is excellent for tearing sandpaper. draw lines on the wood for the various sizes you require. Make the jig wide enough to take a full sheet of paper.



## 62. SCREW CUP CHUCK

If you really want to hold work firmly I have found the best and cheapest method is a screw cup chuck. It actually tightens if you have a dig in. Woodfast make them to suit most lathes.

## 63. PHOTOGRAPH YOUR WORK

When you are prepared to sell your work, or give it away as a gift always take a photograph first. It will help you if you want to make a similar piece at a later date. Also if it sells that must have been something about it that appealed to the purchase that is worth trying to duplicate.

## 64. NAMING YOUR WORK

Permanent ink pens are the fastest and easiest method for naming your work and placing the names of the wood used on the bottom of a piece. I like the NIKKO Finepoint system 0.4 that sells for around \$3.50. They last for quite a long time and always keep a nice fine point.

## 65. FREE WOOD

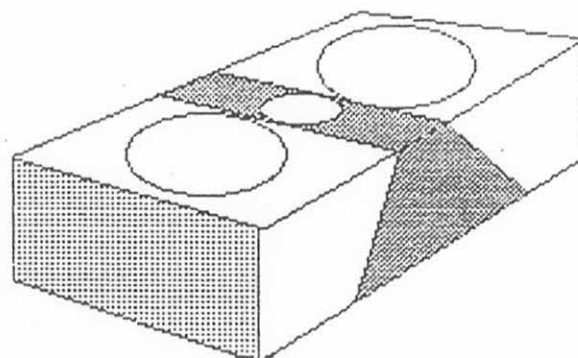
If someone gives you some wood from a tree they have chopped down try and make something nice from the wood. That way they will remember you next time they, or one of their friends, chops down a tree.

## 66. PACK WORK FOR SALE

If you are thinking of selling your top quality work, think about providing an attractive cardboard, or wooden box, to house the piece. You can buy them or make your own.

## 67. CUTTING BOWL BLANKS

When cutting bowl blanks from a plank of wood cut the blanks as shown below to save wastage of wood.

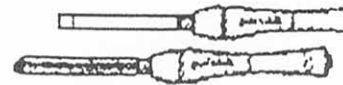


## 68. SPLIT TURNINGS

An efficient method for doing split turnings is to tape the waste ends of the two pieces together with masking tape and turn between centres. Later you just remove the tape and cut off the waste with a saw.

## 69. JEWELLERY FROM SCRAPS

Use your small scraps of attractive wood to make small jewelry items such as ear-rings, brooches, cuff links or key chain fobs.



## 70. DO YOUR EXERCISES

Find one of the above items or some other small item that you enjoy making and use them as a warm-up exercise before beginning work on your one-off pieces. I like to make finger tops or lace bobbins and I never have any trouble getting rid of the tops to kids who visit the house.

## 71. CORRECT SPEED?

A simple rule of thumb on turning speeds is the less the diameter of your work the higher the speed, the larger the diameter the slower your speed.

## 72. GLOVES

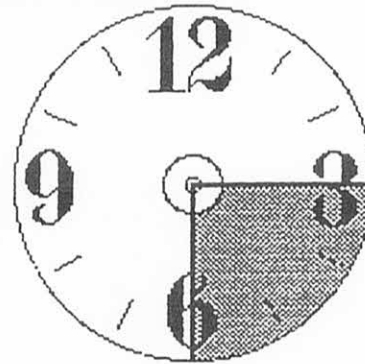
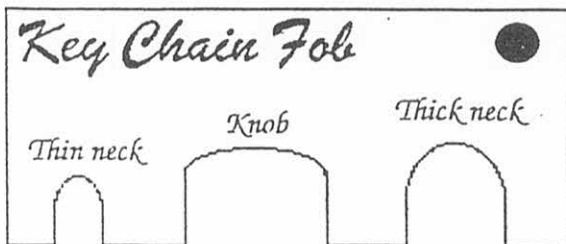
If you often use your left hand on your work, or use it to slow down your work, after turning off your lathe, try wearing a tight fitting soft leather glove to protect your hand from cuts or burns.

## 73. IS IT FLAT?

A short, 10 cm, steel rule is ideal for checking the flatness of platters, bases on bowls, boxes, etc.

## 74. MORE TEMPLATES

Small diameter templates made from plastic or wood are handy if you are going to make numerous identical items. If two or more parts have different diameters these can be included on the same template.



*Imagine this clock is your bowl on the lathe.*

## 75. SANDING AT 4 O'CLOCK

When sanding a bowl or a platter always work in the "3 to 6" area of the piece. It will be easier to hold the paper.

## 76. START A COLLECTION

Make a collection of small items turned from as many different timbers as you can find. Some people turn bobbins, eggs bud vases, etc. I prefer a simple two inch diameter disc about three-eighths of an inch thick with a slightly convex face. These I mount on card, name and keep in a binder. It is a good idea to write down anything special you find out about the wood when turning it. For example was it easy to turn? Does it smell? Did it cause any irritation?

*You can never have enough tools if you are a woodturner.*





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## 77. USING RAGS

When using rags to apply wax or polish don't wrap the rag around any of your fingers. If it suddenly wraps around your revolving work you could lose a finger or worse.

## 78. WATCH YOUR EYES

Take care when using polishes, glues, etc. on a piece on the lathe. If the glue is still wet it will fly up into your face when you start up the lathe.

Just imagine a drop of 30 second super glue lodging in your eye!

## 79. ALLERGIES AND TIMBER

If you suspect that a piece of wood you have turned lately is causing a rash but you are not sure which one it was make small, thin discs (about the size of a ten cent coin) and stick them on your back with a band aid, but not too close together. Leave them for a couple of days and then check them. The offending piece should then be easily detected. I have found that you can not go by what you read about timbers as different timbers affect different people.

## 80. GOOD LIGHTING

If you haven't already mounted one of those flexible reading lamps on your lathe do so now! They are excellent for lighting your work to let you see exactly what you are doing. It is also handy for back lighting pieces if you are into turning super thin pieces.

## 81. GRIPPING SPINDLES

If you want a good grip on your work when spindle turning, hammer the spur drive into your work while it is off the lathe rather than hammering it onto the spur while the spur is still on the lathe. Your bearings will last longer this way.

## 82. ACCURATE DEPTH

You can get a more accurate depth in your bowls, boxes, etc by drilling a hole into the inside of the piece while it is on the lathe. Simply place a mark on your drill bit to show the desired depth and then drill. This will also help you to remove the wood quickly, especially if you are working on end grain.

## 83. DUSTLESS SHIELDS

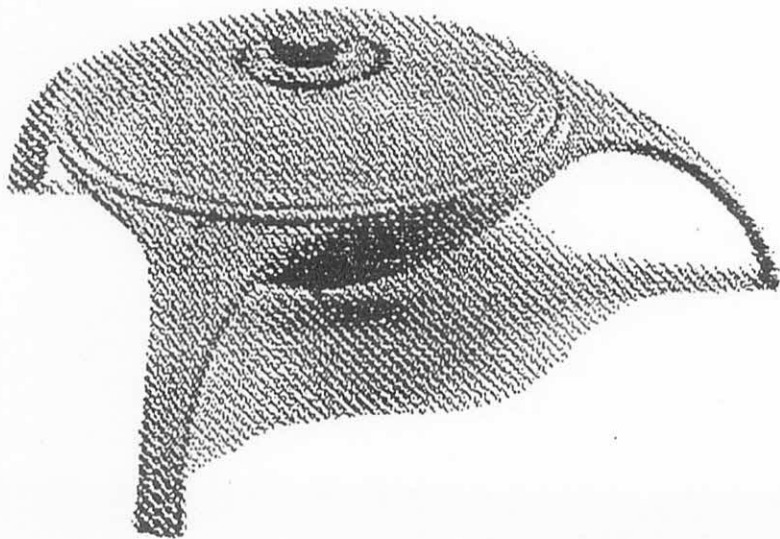
To keep wood dust off your face shield or glasses simply wipe them with one of those anti-static rags that you can buy for clothes dryers before starting work.

## 84. EAVESDROP

Enter your work in exhibitions and then hover around your work and eavesdrop on other people's criticism of your work. You will learn a great deal about your work, and people, while doing this!

## 85. FORGET IVORY

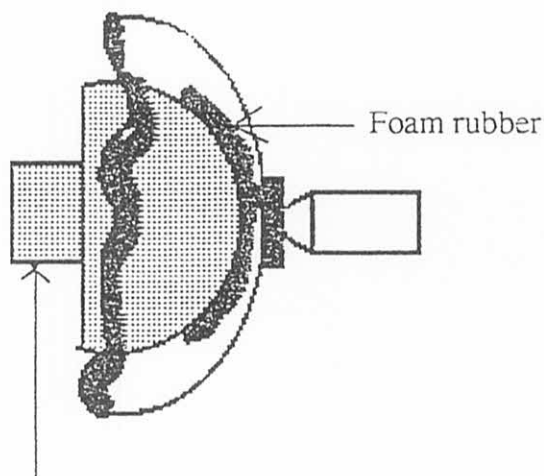
If you are environmentally conscious and won't turn pure ivory, try Tagua nuts which are a vegetable ivory substitute. These are available from Garret Wade or The Woodsmith.





## 86. GOOD BOTTOMS!

To get a good bottom on a natural edged bowl you need to leave a small mark in the centre of what will be your base when you first turn the outside of the bowl. This is to help you line the work up later when you have completed the inside of the bowl. You then use a mandrel and bring your tailstock up, as shown below to finish the piece. At the very end you can use a sharp knife to remove the very small spigot that is left after turning.



## 87. DIVIDING A CIRCLE

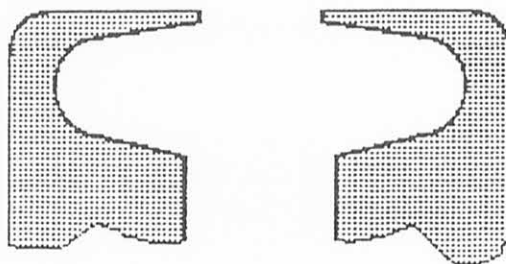
A simple method for dividing a circular piece of wood into sections, say for a clock face, is to wrap a strip of masking tape around the circumference of the piece. Then remove it lay it flat and divide it into the required number of sections. Reposition the tape and transfer the marks to the wood.

## 88. FINDING THE CENTRE

Use the above method to divide the piece into an even number of sections and join the opposite marks. Where your lines intersect will be the centre of your work.

## 89. ENCASED RINGS

To turn rings on a baby's rattle you will require two scrapers as shown below to undercut the rings. For smaller work, like bobbins, use masonry nails.



## 90. SANDING RINGS

Tape a thin piece of sandpaper to the shaft inside the rings and then sand the inside of the rings by turning on the lathe and revolving the ring with your fingers to get a smooth finish.

## 91. DUST GETS IN YOUR EYES

If dust in your eyes is a real problem try working while wearing a pair of swimming goggles. No good if you already wear glasses!

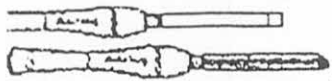
## 92. SQUARE TO ROUND

If you are making legs that require a sudden change from square to round tape the square section firmly with masking tape where the change will take place. This will help to prevent splintering on your work.

## 93. BE PREPARED!

Always carry at least a "Bushman's Saw" in the boot of your car. You never know when you will come across a piece of wood that is too big to fit in your boot.





## 94. CHECK OUT FACTORIES

Keep your eyes open when you are driving around an area where there are lots of factories. Packing crates, etc are often broken up and then thrown out in rubbish bins. Factories that import items from overseas often provide you with unusual timbers.

## 95. OLD STUMPS

Houses that are being restumped can provide you with heaps of good dry wood, usually red gum.

## 96. ONE MAN'S RUBBISH

Have a drive around localities that are having an indestructable rubbish collection. You will be amazed how much good wood is thrown away.

## 97. HAND SPIN FIRST

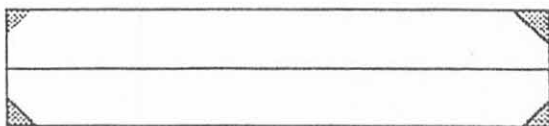
Always hand spin your work all the way around to make sure it clears the tool rest, etc. before actually starting the lathe.

## 98. CIRCUIT BREAKERS

Install a circuit breaker on your fuse box. It could save your life when you are working with electrical tools in your shed, usually on your own.

## 99. SMOOTH SKEWS

Take the sharp corners off your skewers or rectangular scrapers. This will allow them to slide more smoothly across your tool rest thus giving you a smoother finish on your work.



*Head-on view of your skew*

## 100. CHEAPER WOOD

You can often purchase wood at fairly cheap prices if you go to your local fuel merchant. They usually have good supplies of mallee roots, red gum and the red and yellow boxes. The red box in particular is a nice timber to work with but seldom used by woodturners.

## 101. FINISHING BONE

When you get around to turning bone lace bobbins or miniatures you may find that Brasso is excellent for getting a good finish.

## FREE ADVICE.

A wise woodturner named Mies van der Rohe, once said;

*"I don't want to be different,  
I just want to be good."*