

Southern Turners Project Sheet

Natural Edge Bowl



This project explains how to make a natural edge (or live edge) bowl. Ensure all safety equipment is used appropriately. The project is an excellent one for improving/refining your use of a bowl gouge.



Select a piece of branch wood approximately 180 mm diameter and 200 mm long. Branch wood often has one side flatter than the other due to stresses associated with gravity. If your blank has this characteristic consider making the flat side the top of your bowl. This will allow you to achieve a much flatter rim to your bowl and is easier to master for your first natural edge bowl.



Use a Forstner bit or some other method to ensure your drive centre can achieve a good grip on the timber. This should be in the centre of what will be the top of the bowl. If you don't do this the blank is likely to be thrown off the lathe and could result in injury to you or property damage.



Mount between centres with the top of the bowl toward the headstock (you can clearly see that this surface is flatter than the other side. I prefer steb drive centre and a cone live centre.

The cracks in this blank do not constitute as hazard ie they are not going to result in flying splinters or the blank coming off the lathe.



Use a bowl gouge to produce a tenon to suit your scroll chuck. Leave a substantial spigot for the live centre support because if this fails the blank will come off the lathe.

Use a saw or a chisel to remove the spigot.

spigot

tenon



Mount the blank in your scroll chuck and bring up the tailstock for support.

The camera angle makes it look like the bottom of the blank is much thicker than the top. This is not the case as can be seen in subsequent photos.



Use pull cuts from the headstock and tailstock ends to reduce your blank to a round. Cutting against the grain using gentle pull cuts from the tailstock end are needed to avoid bark separation and or splintering of the trailing edges of the cut. The black line is the point on the bowl where the entire circumference will be cut by the gouge. The arrow indicates the area where cutting against the grain produces best results. Remember be gentle – no aggressive cutting here please.



Remove the tailstock support.

Use whatever tool you are comfortable with to produce a mortice to suit your scroll chuck



Refine your tenon. Here you can see the tenon has been reduced from approx 85 mm to 50 mm to suit another scroll chuck as the original tenon was out of proportion to the likely diameter of the finished bowl.

You could also use a mortice to hold the piece for hollowing, but I like that a tenon/foot lifts the piece off the table and results in a more appealing item.



Refine the outside shape of your bowl. The photo shows a bowl with an asymmetrical ogee profile. A traditional or negative rake scraper can be used to remove ridges left by the bowl gouge.

A skew chisel on its side can be used as a negative rake scraper for convex curves.



Mount your bowl in the scroll chuck using the mortice and commence hollowing out your bowl. A bowl gouge is recommended as carbide tipped tools are usually scrapers and can damage the bark / rim. Present your gouge to the work with the flute fully closed ie the gouge is on its side and rotate slightly to produce the cut. Once again be gentle.

Note that the initial hollowing has gone deep enough to clear the irregular depth of the rim.



Decide on the wall thickness and continue hollowing in small sections. It is difficult to come back to work near the rim as you go deeper as chatter will occur and distortion of the walls is possible during the turning process. Use calipers to ensure an even wall thickness. Once again the use of a freshly sharpened scraper can assist with surface finish.



Use a depth gauge to ensure you don't turn through the bottom of your bowl

The photo shows a shop made gauge made from a piece of scrap wood and a small dowel.



Your finished bowl should look something like this one.

No sanding has been done on this piece as olive finishes off the tool very nicely. There are minimal tool marks and any sanding will result highlighting rather than hiding the imperfections. The minor tool marks match quite nicely with the cracks in this piece.



The finished natural edge bowl with cracks highlighted through the use of pyrography – the cracks cannot be hidden so emphasise them as a feature.

Natural edge forms can also be produced from end grain blanks but remember that hollowing end grain is much more difficult than cross grain. The use of a fixed steady can assist in reducing the lateral forces encountered when carrying out this operation.

Another variation of the natural edge bowl is the 'bird's beak bowl'. Look it up on the internet.