

Southern Turners Project Sheet

French Rolling Pin



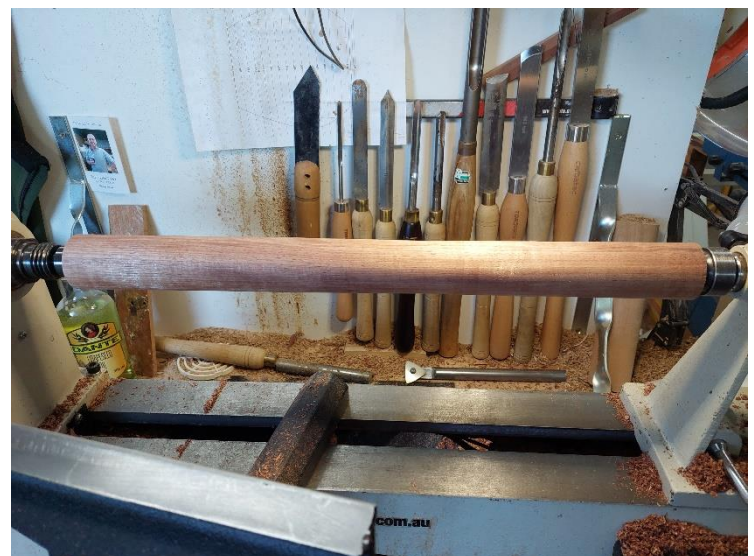
On the surface this appears to be a very simple project, but getting the dimensions right may not be as easy as it first appears. With the only support coming from drive/live centres on a piece of these dimensions, care must be taken at times to take very light cuts. A heavy-handed approach, particularly in the centre of the piece, can cause some flex in the timber that needs to be avoided.



Start by mounting a spindle blank that's 45-50mm square, and a little longer than your desired length of the finished piece. Typically, they are 400 – 550mm long, but there are examples at both ends of this range. In the case of the picture on the right, the aim was for 450mm long, so I started with a 470mm blank. On the lathe pictured, to accommodate the length, it was necessary to find the shortest combination of drive/live centres, and even then, the tailstock can be seen overhanging the bed of the lathe marginally.

The first step is to turn the blank round. At this point don't worry about any shaping, the focus is on getting a cylinder with the straightest possible sides, and a 40-45mm diameter.

Hint: It can be helpful in achieving this to visually line up your tool rest with a lathe bed rail as below.



Once you have it about right, put a (preferably backlit) straight edge against the piece to identify any low points. For the pin to operate well it's critical the middle section is as straight as possible. It can help to now mark with a pencil where the low points are and bring the rest of the timber to that thickness.

If you're very close to straight, it may be easier to wrap some sandpaper around a straight edge to take off the peaks. Try to make sure this always straddles the low points. That way, once your pencil marks start to disappear, you know it's at the right depth. Be careful not to go too thin, trying to maintain that 40-45mm diameter. The sanding will be easy, as it's all face grain at this stage. If the ends are a little thinner it's OK, as they'll be shaped in following steps.



Next step is to start marking out the final dimensions. In the picture to the left, you will see there's 10mm marked at each end for waste, followed by marks where the tapering will begin. The red centre line is for reference, and while it may make the other measurements easier is not strictly required. The best 'balance' for a French rolling pin is for the flat centre piece to represent 60% of the finished length, and each taper 20%. Hence for this pin at 450mm we're targeting a 270mm centre, and 90mm tapers.

Shape the taper on the tailstock end first to keep as much support as possible for the drive centre. Light cuts are the order of the day here to prevent any flexing in the piece. You will need to leave a piece of waste that will be dealt with later. Once you're satisfied with the shape sand through all your grits, but only go back to the point the other taper will begin.



Now it's a matter of repeating the last step (including sanding) for the headstock end of the piece. The challenge here is to achieve the same shape and dimensions as the first taper.



Once the shaping and sanding is complete, use a parting tool to reduce the diameter at each end. Remove the piece from the lathe, and then cut off the waste. Don't be tempted to twist them off, as you may end up tearing out grain from the end of the pin.

Finish sanding the ends of the pin using your preferred method. Keep in mind that a smooth surface is required all over the pin to avoid trapping any food particles. Traditionally they have quite rounded ends, but they can also be finished with more of a square end. The rounder ends provide more flexibility to the user.



Finishing the pin is a personal preference. Some bakers like them unfinished, but most prefer a finish. Keep in mind it must be food safe, and varnish type finishes won't last in usage. The best finishes are oil, or oil/beeswax blends that the user will need to re-apply as required. They should be hand washed and dried straight away, without being submersed in water.