



International Association of Penturners

How to make A Wooden Spatula

Author: Brad Cooper aka: Ironwood May 2, 2019

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Due to a request on how I make my spatulas, I have taken some progress pics of the process.

African Mahogany, AKA Khaya is my go to timber because I have found it lasts a long time and cops a lot of abuse, I have one spatula that has lasted nearly 20 years with trips through the dishwasher at least twice a week for that time.

Other timbers are fine to use as well, some might not be as durable though. It might be a good idea to research the timber you intend to use to make sure it is suitable for this use.

When I decided to make some more spatulas, I found a piece I had cut off the end of a slab, it is 28mm (1 1/8") thick, which is good for fairly straight spatulas, if you want to put more of a curve in the blade you will need thicker timber.

For this batch, I cut blanks to 300mm x 75mm x 28mm, (12" x 3" x 1 1/8")



I won't quote handle diameters or lengths, as it's a personal thing, make them to the size that feels good to you.

Mark out the handle and the start of the transition to the blade.



Now cut to your marks on the bandsaw.



I use my Nova chuck with 2 spigot jaws fitted, clamp tightly once you have the center of the handle lined up with your live center. I put a center punch mark on the end to help with alignment.



Turn the handle down to the greater diameter that you want, use a parting tool to define the end of the handle, if you want to put a bead on the handle like I do, mark where you want to put it.



Use your parting tool to plunge some cuts in to define the bead, and to have a guide for your minor diameter, so you can see how far to turn your handle down.



Turn down to your predetermined depth, try to make the handle look like it sweeps through the bead.



Use the skew to round over the bead, and the end of the handle.

It's a good idea to sand your handle now while it's still on the lathe. Because I was so engrossed in taking these photos, I forgot to sand on the lathe, so I will have to do it by hand at the end.



Mark the blade profile that you want to go with on the side of the blade.



Cut to your lines on the bandsaw cut the thinner piece off first so you still have the wider piece for stability on your second cut.



Now mark the shape of the blade.



Cut to your marks. Also cut the button off the end of the handle while you are at it. Leave a little bit of the stub on the end of the handle, you will sand it smooth later.



I use my 6" wide belt sander to refine the shape of the blade, on these spatulas I have put a slight curve in the blade. I have used a smaller belt sander held upside down in the vice, but these bigger ones are much better.

I have a 60 grit belt on here, it is a bit rough, but it's my last good belt so that's what I am using. Just need to be very careful as it can take a lot of material off in a hurry.



Now I use some 80 grit paper to finish refining the shape by hand and take the marks out from the belt sander, then progress up the grits to the smoothness you want.

After the 80 grit, I just use 150, then 220 Abranet. I find 220 is good enough for me.

The way I have been finishing these latest batch is a process developed and described by member "Robson Valley" over on the Aussie Woodwork Forums.

Liberally coat with Olive Oil, preheat the oven to 325F, place on a cake rack and put them into the oven for 3 and a half minutes, then take out to cool.

The air expands out of the wood, and as it cools, the oil is drawn in, sealing the wood. The results look pretty good, and they are a joy to use.





This is the one that has lasted nearly 20 years of use and regular trips through the dishwasher. Old and new are both made from Khaya.



I should add, after the first time in the dishwasher, the surface feels rough because the grain has raised. I have been using some 0000 steel wool to take the nibs off so they feel smooth again. After the second time through the dishwasher, they are coming out still smooth.

Brad

COMMENTS

donstephan said:

The high heat and humidity in a dishwasher are a harsh environment for wood. I have seen wooden bowls crack after one trip through a dishwasher, so we hand wash wooden spurtles, spoons, cutting boards, and such. But your instructions and photos are first rate. Made one today using poplar and coated with mineral oil to test drive my dimensions.

Hi Don, great news that someone has given it a try. How about a photo?

I agree that the dishwasher is not the ideal washing method for them, but in our household everything goes into the dishwasher, including wooden utensils. We don't use wooden bowls for food preparation luckily, I don't think they would last long if you put them in the dishwasher with so much end grain.

Brad

donstephan said:

When ripping the sides of the spatula blade, some additional stability can be had by having a square edged extra piece of wood alongside the spatula, as a moving auxilliary fence if you will.

The piece I used might have been 10" x 3" x 1 1/2", with the 1 1/2" wide edge on the bandsaw table. Extra attention and caution is essential to keep fingers from meeting blade. With left hand I steadied and pushed forward the extra piece as I used my right hand on the end of the spatula handle to apply some leverage lightly to push the blade against the upright piece of wood, as the pair is advanced to cut the blade's taper.

Ironwood said:

Thanks everyone for the great comments.

I should add, after the first time in the dishwasher, the surface feels rough because the grain has raised. I have been using some 0000 steel wool to take the nibs off so they feel smooth again. After the second time through the dishwasher, they are coming out still smooth.

mecompc said:

Might "feathering" the wood prior to finishing reduce the raising of the grain, even if simply hand-washed? Back in the day, refinishing gun stocks, after sanding I would dampen (not wet) the surface of the wood, then once dry, re-sand and repeat at least once more. Then, the multiple coats of Tru-Oil would be hand rubbed in. Just a thought--your spatula looks amazing.
