

Wet & Dry Turning - Part I

The Mad Woodturner

I was recently asked by a scurvy - looking fellow (Arrrrgghhh) what the difference was between turning "green"/wet and turning something dry. He wanted to know what advantage could be had either way. Since this question follows along nicely with our next Club meeting in August, I thought I would take a little space to tell the new woodturners what I told him. Now pull up a barrel and gather 'round for some fine story tellin'...

Let's say you are making a basic bowl for the yummy gruel you'll be eating while I eat YOUR food tonight. It could just as easily be a candlestick that you might need to walk around the heaving and rolling deck in the unending waves lashing at the sides of the ship Ooohhhh I'm making myself seasick (YES, a pirate can be seasick so pay attention before I throw you overboard).

We can wait for that bowl blank to dry if it isn't already and just turn it completely all at one time. We needn't fear that the drying process will introduce stresses into the wood and cause cracking (also called checks) because it's already dry (weren't you paying attention? Do we need to pull out the plank?! Arrrrgghh) We also don't really need to worry about movement of the wood or warping either. There are a number of turned items that should be turned dry but the best example is a woodturned box. You know, the ones with the lids? Those lids are the key. With dry wood, you can make a nice fit between the lid and the body of the box and it'll pretty much stay that way. If you use wet wood, there's no telling how that lid will fit afterwards when the wood finally does dry. Another advantage of turning dry wood is that it sands well. At least for that type of tree. Wet wood doesn't sand too well. You'll end up taking longer to get as clean a sanded finish with green wood than with already dry wood.

I often times can't wait (hey, I'm a Pirate and we move around a bit and usually in a hurry, ok?!) or don't want to wait to turn a piece of wood so I'll turn it "green". I also love turning green wood because it is far softer, less dusty, and keeps tools cooler. Remember that "dry" is a relative term and what is "dry" here in Missouri isn't "dry" in Arizona. With changes in average humidity, your wood pieces are going to change with it. You've been warned!

Anyway, you can do three things when you turn green wood.

First, you can turn it all the way down to final thickness all at once. And you better hurry too. Depending on the wood used, it can start cracking and warping on you before you get the thing hollowed out! That's why I do the outside first (sanding and finish) and then do the hollowing last. Turn it thin and make it very even all the way around. It's going to dry but you want it to dry evenly so it'll lessen the chance of cracks. You can also get some really nice warping going on if that's what you're after.

Second, you can rough turn it to a thickness of about 10% of the diameter of the bowl. So, you'd want about 1" of wall thickness for a 10" diameter bowl. Still, you want the wall thickness to be as even as possible so it'll dry evenly. That 1" of wall thickness is there to provide some "meat" for when you come back to final turn it. See, the piece is going to, more or less, warp as it dries. You want enough wall thickness there so that you can finish turning it and still have a round piece in the end. After the piece is dried, you remount the piece (you may have to put it between centers to begin with in order to make your tenon, as the case may be, round so it can be held by your chuck) and finish turn it. This is where the final shape is formed and the sanding is done. This is the method that Ernie used on the bowl he rough turned a few meetings back and is going to finish turn at the August meeting now that it is dry.

Third, you can do a slight modification of the 2 above methods. You can start out by turning the green piece as you would in the first method above. But, for some reason, you don't want to wait to let it dry and finish turn it later but you also can't completely finish the thing right now (maybe a few hours, days, weeks). What do you do? You "stabilize" it until you're ready to finish it as a green piece of wood.

More on this and actual ways to dry wood in the next issue....

News

Crafts Fair Thank You

A big thanks to all the members that came to the Show and Sale. We appreciate those that took it all in good humor that not much was sold that day. We give a special thanks to Ernie, Dennis, and Bill who were "guest" turners that day and kept the passersby amused. I was pleased that our 'booth' looked really neat. Thanks to Andy for that.

*Debra (Peg-leg)
Faulkenberry*



Woodturners Competition

We received the official Club Certificate from the (AAW) and decided that we would have a competition open to all woodturners to make a frame for it. A picture frame by woodturning? You bet! Check out the details of the competition and some examples of what can be done at the Woodworking—101 store.