

Gallery of our Pirates Conquests



Our Tools - Part III of a Few More

The Mad Woodturner

Chisels (cutters)

These tools have a sharpened and clean edge used to slice into the wood fibers and not (intentionally) rip out the wood fibers like a scraper mainly does. They also frequently have flutes running down the length of the tool; although in the case of the skew, for example, there is no flute. The flutes on different chisel types can be a variety of depths depending on it's use. "Bowl" gouges tend to have deeper and wider flutes than the "spindle" gouges. Skews and some hollowing tools, like ring-type or hook tools, have no flutes but are still intended to be used primarily in a slicing manner.

I'll mention here that I don't normally use the terms "Bowl" or "Spindle" gouges. A more correct term (in this pirates opinion anyway) would be a deep fluted gouge to mean a "Bowl" gouge and a shallow fluted gouge for a "Spindle" gouge. Some woodturners take these terms to heart and will only use a "Bowl" gouge on bowls and not spindle type work. They do the same thing with "Spindle" gouges and won't use them on anything else but spindle type work. Personally, I use both types of gouges on all types of work. Many times it is in how each tool is used that determines its effectiveness for the type of work. Each type has its uses in all kinds of woodturning and should be explored to maximize its unique characteristics in the work that you do. With that said, let's continue.

The flute of the gouge serves three purposes. First, the flute forms a sharp edge lower into the tool instead of high on the tool. This keeps the center of the cutting forces lower thereby increasing tool control during the cut. Second, the flute of the chisel stiffens the tool and aids in decreasing vibration as long as it's properly made and not malformed. Third and probably most importantly, the flute ejects shavings from the area of cutting. This is most apparent in hollowing out a deep bowl where a build up of shavings can obscure your view of what's happening as well as interfering with the cutting edge. A deep fluted ("Bowl") gouge ejects these shavings very effectively with proper use.

The bevel is very important to a chisel type of tool and should be carefully formed with a single flat (not hollow) ground facet. The actual angle of the bevel isn't as important as there being just one facet across the entire face of it. With each intended use, you'll develop an angle for each of your gouges that best fits your work, style and level of expertise. Many times, you'll change the bevel angle slightly on a gouge during the forming of your piece to account for shape and wood characteristics. The key is that the bevel be consistent so that you get repeatable results in your cutting. This is especially important for new woodturners as changing the tools' profile each time you sharpen them makes it difficult to develop your skill and feel. Many new woodturners purchase a gouge and have many problems with it straight from the package. It may have been sharpened sufficiently at the factory but it's still not working right. Putting aside any inexperience on the part of the woodturner, the problem is probably the gouge's grind. Most factory ground gouges are just simply not very useful for most woodturning use. You'll want to regrind these to be most useful. Generally, the factories grind these gouges too bluntly. In other words, the "wings" or sides of the gouge need to be ground back at least a little bit. This gets these wings out of the way of the spinning wood and cause far fewer catches. More on sharpening these chisels later.

Next time we'll dive into the Scraping vs Cutting debate