

Turning a Natural Edge Bowl (C. Waldroup 12Feb2013)

1) Types of Natural Edges

- Natural Edge with bark
- Natural edge without bark
- Factors impacting adherence of bark
 - Time of year wood is cut – cooler weather is better if you want to increase the likelihood to keep a bark edge
 - Damage to the tree when it falls or is hauled
 - Age of wood and how it's stored – you can usually age a log to remove bark
 - Species of wood
 - Turning process - Presentation of tool, care of cut, sharpness of tool
 - Murphy, bad-luck, etc.
 - Sometimes the bark comes off during drying
- The demo is for a basic NE, but you can get more creative when you've got a feel for the basics:
 - Deep folds, voids, etc. provide interest
 - Varying the shape – wide to narrow opening; shallow vs. deep bowls
 - Rim doesn't have to be balanced – a high rim on one side can create a pleasing shape
 - Thin wall thicknesses on some woods result in significant natural movement and scalloping
 - Water eroded edges out of a river or creek can yield a very unique item
 - I've heard of folks using logs with camp-fire burned edges, etc.
 - Other options - end grain, flat winged, crotch-winged, diagonal cuts across log, etc.
 - You don't need large logs to

2) Preparing the blank for Side Grain NE Bowl

- Remove some length 1-2" on the exposed ends of the log if it's been cut for a while (this will reduce the chance of your bowl cracking)
- Split the log
 - Eliminate the pith (>90% of cracks originate here)
 - Try to establish a balanced blank – even growth/material on each side of pith/center
- Get it as round as possible
 - Use a round template – cardboard, plastic, etc. attached to the blank
 - Use what you've got that works... Chainsaw, Bandsaw, handsaw, grinder, etc.
 - It's possible to start with a square/rectangular piece on the lathe, but it's much more challenging (and dangerous) to turn
 - Note: If you don't have a chuck you can use a face plate mounted on bottom of the blank – start with the bottom sawn flat and as parallel as possible to the face of the bark. Just remember that you can't adjust it (at least not easily) once it's on the plate!
- Remove bark in center of the blank to get solid wood for the drive spur to engage
 - Forstner drill bit provides a flat bottom
 - Using a Chisel, Chainsaw or grinder will work, too

3) Mounting on the lathe between centers

- Spur drive on bark side
- Live center of tail stock on bottom
- Balance visually between centers
- Assure firm mount – tighten and secure tail stock – periodically check it for tightness while turning

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4) Shaping the Outside of the bowl

- Position tool rest near bottom of blank
- Start slow, adjust to comfortable speed – periodically check tail stock for tightness
- Use pull cut for basic shaping
- Balance the sides visually when basic shape is evident – reposition as needed
- Finalize your shape and form a foot at the bottom to fit chuck to be used
- For bark edge, complete final cut from top-to-bottom of bowl so bark is supported by wood

5) Turning Inside of the bowl

- Secure foot/tenon in chuck – I always skim turn outside to assure roundness/balance after remounting the bowl (not everyone does this)
- Turn inside – approach is not too different from basic bowl
- Keep tool rest close to working surface of bowl
- Use care at bark – top to bottom for support (it can be done, but there's more risk of tear out or bark removal if you go from bottom up)
- Consistent wall thickness very important - I typically use ~ 3/8" or less for the finished bowl
- It's Ok to use a scraper in solid section of bowl, but do not recommended for bark contact
- Checking the depth – straight edge on top of wings with dowel, tool, etc. extended to bottom
- Use freshly sharpened tool for final cut – I prefer my smallest bowl gouge

6) Sanding

- When to sand? Item needs to be dry for effective sanding
- Storing for drying – many options (bagging, in shavings, inside cabinets) – do what works for you – limiting exposure to air is very important, particularly in warmer months
- I typically let it dry and use the foot to hold item in chuck while power and/or hand sanding to 320 grit
- What I do with heavy bark like walnut – sand while wet using 'used' disks (frugal approach)

7) Turning off the foot

- I typically allow bowl to dry and finish sand it just before turning off the foot
- Use scrap wood, jam chuck to drive the bowl – padding prevents damage to interior of bowl
- Return live center to 'dimple' originally made in foot and turn away the foot
- Use small saw, grinding tool, chisel, etc. to remove final 'button', then sand

8) Finishing

- Needs to be fully dry– amount of time depends on wall thickness, starting dryness of wood, wood type, time of year, etc.
- Finish is a very personal decision – I use spray lacquer, wipe-on polyurethane, oil/wax