Tips

Postal scale aids in drying wood

When I'm working with green (unseasoned) wood, I find it a challenge to know when the wood is actually dry enough for a second turning or for final finishing. One easy way to figure this out is by using a digital postal scale and weighing your piece periodically—maybe every couple days for a small thin piece or once a month for a large "once-turned" bowl. I keep a piece of paper next to my scale and record the date and weight each time I weigh a turning, so I can tell how much drying progress I'm making. Once the piece stops losing weight, it's ready!

In order to accurately track your drying progress, it is critical to use a digital scale that records tenths of an ounce. You don't need a fancy scale, just a simple one, generally available online for under twenty bucks. Bonus: you can also use the scale to figure out the postage for all of those finished turnings you're sending through the mail.

—Rich Sabreen, Connecticut

Lathe doubles as disk sander

If you have need of a disk sander in your shop but don't have the space or don't want to invest in the equipment, you can quickly make one to fit on your lathe. Adhesive-backed sanding disks come in a variety of sizes. I purchased a 9" (23cm) disk, which worked well for my needs. I turned a tenon on a piece of waste wood and glued it to a 1" × 10" (25mm × 25cm) piece of maple. After turning the maple to a 9" diameter, I simply affixed the sanding disk, and my shopmade lathe-mounted disk sander was ready for use.

—Dex Hallwood, British Columbia, Canada

Mirror aids in studying form

Have you ever found yourself not being able to achieve that perfect shape on a bowl or vessel? Have you spent hours taking light cuts just to realize that no matter where you cut, everything looks the same? If so, keeping a small mirror in your shop might be the solution you are looking for. I have a 10" (25cm) square mirror, and it works great.

If possible, remove the workpiece from the lathe and place it on a shelf at eye level. With your back towards the piece, hold the mirror in front of you, so you can see the reflection of the piece you are working on. Another option is to view the workpiece's reflection while it is still on the lathe. Place the mirror in a position that allows you to see the work in progress and take some time to study the shape in the reflection. Whether the piece is on the lathe or off, your brain will automatically perceive the shape differently. Using a mirror could help you find areas on your form that need to be refined.

—Roberto Ferrer, Illinois

Tailstock-mounted bowl support

When I need to touch up the outside of a bowl after I have finished turning the inside, I use a double-chuck method to add support. Attach Cole jaws (or jumbo jaws) to a four-jaw chuck and use a spindle adaptor to attach the chuck to the live center on the tailstock. Then expand the jaws into the open bowl, using a rubber mat to prevent marring (*Photo 1*). With this added support, the lathe can be run at a comfortable speed to do the finishing touches on the outside of the bowl—without the bowl flexing away from the tool.

1

2

If Cole jaws do not fit the inside the bowl, cut a piece of medium-density fiberboard (MDF) to fit and mount it in the tailstock-mounted chuck with a glue block (*Photo 2*).

—James Richardson, Texas