

MAKE IT YOURSELF
SPOON CARVING



Skill Development:
Spoon Carving

 Lee Valley



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Skill Development: Carving

This project provides you with the opportunity to develop one of the most time-honored woodworking skills: carving. You will transform two pre-cut spoon blanks into practical household objects using a few fundamental knife cuts and grips. As you become familiar with roughing and refining the spoon's bowl, neck and handle, you will discover ways to personalize your spoons and find your own form and style. This project will also show you how to keep the hook and sloyd knives sharp with basic tools: honing compound, a piece of leather and a wooden dowel. After sanding and the application of cutting board oil comes the hardest part of the project: whether to keep these for yourself or gift them to a special someone.

Skill Level: Beginner to intermediate. Appropriate for children 14 years and older when supervised by an adult.

***Tip:** The video and written instructions go hand in hand to both tutor and guide you through the steps. We suggest you watch the video first, especially if you are a visual person, and then read through the instructions before you start. At the very least, be sure to read all the product instructions to familiarize yourself with how to use each product. For best results, always follow the product directions and safety notifications.*

Time to Complete: 4 to 6 hours, plus 24 hours for drying and curing, for each spoon.

***Tip:** While the estimated time to complete this project is based on our tests, we encourage you to take your time. We want you to enjoy the therapeutic, meditative nature of carving. Since you will be using repetitive movements that might not be familiar to your hands, you may need to take several breaks along the way to give your hands a rest. In fact, we encourage you to take breaks to ponder the proportions, appreciate the design process and smell the wood shavings. Your first spoon might take you several hours over several days.*

KIT CONTENTS

- 1 Limewood spoon blank, 9 7/8" × 2 1/4" × 1/2" thick
- 1 Basswood spoon blank, 12" × 3" × 1" thick
- 1 Narex sloyd knife
- 1 Narex right-handed hook knife
- 1 Pencil
- 1 Roll of high-friction guard tape, 90'
- 4 Mirka sandpaper sheets, 9" × 11" (one of each: 120x, 180x, 220x, 320x)
- 1 Leather strop, 4 1/2" × 1 1/2"
- 1 Dowel, 12" long × 1/2" diameter
- Honing compound, 2 oz
- Walrus Oil® cutting board oil, 59 ml (2 oz)
- Cotton rag
- Vinyl gloves

Note: *Limewood is not the wood of a tree that grows citrus fruit. It is from the genus Tilia, of which there are about 30 species. The European species are more commonly known as linden, while the North American species are more commonly known as basswood. Whether the spoon blank is described as limewood or basswood tells you a bit about its origin. However you want to call it, this light-colored, medium-density wood is favored for carving. It's easy to work, with straight grain and a fine, even texture that takes detail well. It's also safe for food contact.*





Other items you should have on hand (not included):

- Safety goggles
- Respirator/Dust mask
- Apron
- Small drop cloth/tarp
- Small bowl of water
- Small soft-bristle paintbrush (to clear sanding dust from your spoon and sandpaper)

Tip: Feel free to use any other tools you have on hand that you think might be useful.

Note: You can use a chain mail glove or other cut-resistant gloves if you have them, but you may find it hard to maintain a good grip on the spoon blank while carving.

DAY 1: COVERS ALL THE STEPS, 1 TO 9, TO MAKE ONE SPOON, AND SHOULD TAKE APPROXIMATELY 4 TO 6 HOURS TO COMPLETE. ALLOW THE FINISH TO CURE FOR 24 HOURS.

1 SETTING UP YOUR WORKSPACE

- a. Find a comfortable place to sit. Many carvers like to sit outside in the warm sun. The best workbench for carving is your lap and your body as these offer a lot of control.
- b. Remove the contents of the kit from the box and set them aside, but close at hand. Unfold the empty box (or any empty box you have around the house) and place it on the ground to collect the wood shavings.

***Tip:** If you are carving indoors and don't want to use the box, a small drop cloth or tarp set under your chair will help to mitigate the mess and make cleaning up easier. When you are finished carving, pick the tarp up at the corners, and shake the wood shavings in your compost bin or outside (or keep them as firestarters). Otherwise, be prepared to sweep or vacuum the wood shavings.*

- c. If you haven't done so already, read all the product instructions to familiarize yourself with how each product is to be used.

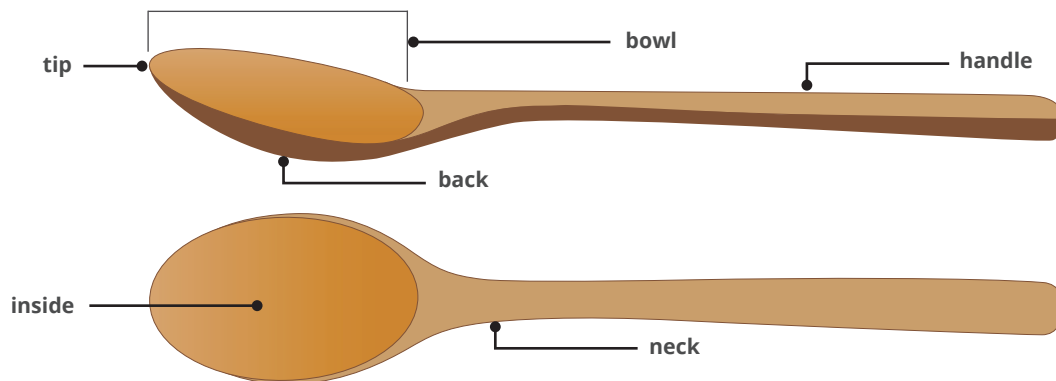
Note: While the hook and sloyd knives come sharp enough to use right away, it's a good idea to touch-up the knives before you start carving. A sharp knife works better and is safer. To keep the blades sharp, you will need to hone them several times throughout your carving session. You will know when it's time to use the honing compound and the leather strop when you start noticing a difference in how the knife behaves. When you start feeling some resistance, or when the blade seems to catch in the wood, then it's time to hone the blade. This should certainly happen before you have completed the first spoon, so it's best to take a moment to familiarize yourself with how to do this. The section titled "**Honing Your Carving Tools**" explains how to keep the hook knife and the sloyd knife sharp.

2 MARKING THE SPOON BOWL

There are as many ways to carve a spoon as there are people who carve them. The method presented here will show you one way to carve a spoon with a dried wood blank, using only basic tools. As you continue to carve, you will discover your own form and style. This kit includes two spoon blanks; the instructions will guide you through carving the small blank. The process will be the same for carving the second spoon.

No template is provided to encourage you to make a spoon of your own design; the basic shape of the spoon on the blank is mainly there to minimize the amount of material that you need to remove.

Anatomy of a Spoon



Tip: Before you start carving, take a moment to trace the outline of each spoon blank on a piece of paper. That way, if you decide that you want to continue carving spoons from a wood of your choice (and we hope that you do), you will have a handy template available for reference.



- a. Use the pencil to mark out the shape of the bowl you want on the small spoon blank. Leave at least 1/8" around the edge of the wood. In the next few steps, that edge will decrease and look more like the edge of a spoon.

3 HOLLOWING OUT THE BOWL

The hook knife is used for hollowing concave forms. Designed for making paring cuts, the pronounced curve (approximately 1/2" radius) of the blade allows rapid material removal and provides excellent control.

Tip: To increase your grip and protect your fingers against cuts and abrasions, wrap some high-friction guard tape around your fingers. Since the hook knife is a right-handed one, the instructions are written for right-handed carving. As such, wrap your right thumb, part of your palm nearest to your thumb, and your left index finger; you may also want to wrap your left middle finger.



Since the finish on the knife handles is smooth, you may find it hard to maintain a good grip on the knife. One solution is to wrap some high-friction guard tape on the knife handles themselves. The guard tape can also help reduce hand fatigue while carving because you won't have to hold the tools so firmly.

- a. Use your left hand to hold the spoon blank underneath the bowl. Observe the direction of the grain, which in a spoon blank should be running from tip to tip.



- b. With your hook knife in your right hand, put the knife edge on your pencil line at the far side of the bowl. For control, you can position the spoon's bowl on your lap. You can start with the thumb on your knife hand against the wood closest to you, but you will probably need to take it off as you make your stroke against the grain. Keep in mind where your hands and fingers are at all times.

***Tip:** When carving dried wood, you will be taking short strokes with your knife. If you keep the thumb of your knife hand on the wood somewhere, you control the cut simply because there is only so far your hand can then travel. The action is similar to that used for peeling potatoes or apples with a paring knife.*



- c. Pull the knife away from the pencil line towards the center of the bowl and start scooping the first shallow layer of wood out of the bowl. Work against the grain. While you will need to do more than scrape the wood, watch that you don't dig too deep.

Tip: If you find it difficult to work with the spoon in one hand and the knife in the other, either because your hands are too small or they are not strong enough to pull the knife through the wood, you can support the spoon blank on your lap or a work surface. This will allow you to hold the spoon steady with your left thumb and middle, ring and pinky fingers, while using your left index finger to help push and guide the knife.



- d. Turn the spoon blank around, and scoop a shallow layer of wood on the opposite side of the bowl, again working against the grain and towards the center.
- e. Continue to work the recess of the bowl, pulling your hook knife closer and closer into the center, until you meet the strokes from the other side. Be careful to keep the bottom of the bowl level at this time. Try not to dig deeper with each round; the goal is just to cover more ground each time.



- f. Once you have carved the first layer of the bowl out completely from edge to center, start again, and take out another level, deepening the bowl. Be careful to keep the sides and the bottom of the bowl an even thickness.
- g. As you carve the second and third layers, the first strokes from the edge may splinter the wood a bit. Don't worry, as this will easily be sanded out later.

***Tip:** This particular spoon blank is best suited for two or three layers carved out of the bowl. You can make the spoon bowl as shallow or as deep as you want it, but keep in mind that you are also going to carve the back of the bowl. If you leave the bowl shallow, you will have to take more off of the back. If you carve the bowl too deep, you may carve the back right through the bowl, causing holes in your spoon.*

- h. When you have taken the bowl as deep as you want it, spend a little bit of time smoothing out the bowl, making sure that the edges are even.

4

SANDING THE BOWL (OPTIONAL AT THIS TIME)

***Note:** Some carvers, especially those who work in greenwood, do not sand their spoons. They prefer to leave the knife marks to show that the spoon is hand carved, not machine made. Because greenwood is wet and soft, the knife strokes tend to be longer, which can be more aesthetically pleasing than the shorter, almost choppy strokes made in dried wood. Carvers who work in dried wood, such as the wood supplied in this kit, are more likely to sand off some or all of the knife marks. In the end, sanding is a choice each carver makes about how they want their finished product to look.*

***Tip:** If you wish to, you can sand the bowl now, before carving the back. The advantage to sanding the bowl now is that you know exactly how deep the bowl will end up being, which allows you to better judge how much wood you can or need to carve off of the back of the bowl to reach the desired thickness and shape.*



Caution: Be sure to wear a mask when sanding to reduce the risk of developing respiratory problems.

- a. Start with the 120x sandpaper. Cut a small piece, approximately 4" × 2 1/2", and fold it in half. Having grit on both sides makes it easier to hold the sandpaper. Sand in the direction of the grain as much as possible.
- b. You can sand the bowl completely smooth or sand the sharp tops to the knife marks and leave some of the marks showing.
- c. Once you have sanded as far down as you want to go, cut a piece of 180x paper and sand out any scratch marks made by the coarser grit. You do not need to go through all the grits at this time.
- d. Use a dry piece of the cotton rag to remove the sanding dust.

5 CARVING THE BACK OF THE BOWL

The sloyd knife (from the Swedish word for craft, *slöjd*) is a classic Swedish design useful for roughing out shapes and carving details. It has a full-tang construction and a high-carbon steel blade slightly thicker than most whittling knives, making it durable and good for removing wood quickly. The sharp point allows for some detail carving.

Tip: There are a number of things you need to keep in mind as you carve the back of the bowl.

1. The back of the bowl is carved with the grain, and grain direction tends to run downhill. Therefore, when you are carving the top half of the back, you will need to carve upwards, but when you do the bottom half, you will probably need to carve down towards the handle.
2. As you shape the bottom half of the back, you will also start to carve the top section of the handle, or the neck of the spoon.
3. Remember to pay attention to how much wood you are removing from the back. You do not want to go through to the front.

- a. Use the pencil to mark out the center of the back from side to side and top to bottom. These lines will guide you in keeping the back of your bowl round. It is also a good idea to mark the direction of the grain to remind you of the direction your knife should be going.
- b. Hold the spoon with the handle pointing towards your chest and the bowl pointing straight out. Carve a thin shaving from the top left-side edge of the blank with the sloyd knife, starting from the center line to the top of the bowl. Keep the bevel of the knife blade flat against the wood, and keep your right thumb on the wood. Use your left thumb as a pivot on which to move the knife; you can position your thumb against the handle near the blade or on the back of the blade itself.



- c. Carve the top right-side edge of the blank, starting from the center line to the top of the bowl. (Remember to keep in mind where your hands and fingers are at all times.)



Note: As you carve towards the top, you will increasingly be carving in end grain, which may feel more like scraping than carving.

- d. Turn the spoon around, so that the handle points away from you, and carve the bottom half of the back as you did the top half.
- e. As you carve down towards the handle, the grain will again change direction and come up from the handle. You will notice your knife trying to grab the wood, and you may get some tear-out. At the spot that you notice this happening, begin to take a knife stroke up from the handle for every one that you make down from the bowl back.



Tip: Be careful while carving at the mid-point where the grain changes direction. Make multiple thin cuts so that, if you do grab the grain and gouge the wood, it won't be so bad that you can't carve or sand the gouge smooth with the rest of the spoon back.

Work this way at any spot where you feel your knife grab the grain. Every piece of wood is different and sometimes grain does not go in the direction you think it should. If you tear a piece accidentally, just go back over that spot from the opposite direction, taking only thin slices of wood. Try to use the tip of the knife blade as much as possible; you will be less likely to take too much off this way.

- f. Keep carving from the edges so that you move both into the center of the spoon and around the sides. Don't go much past halfway along the sides towards the front of the spoon; however, do go all the way into the middle of the back of the spoon. Take thin slices at this point to make sure you don't inadvertently cut through to the front. Continue carving until all of your pencil marks are gone.



Tip: Carve the back of the bowl to match the shape of the bowl itself. For example, a deep bowl could have a rounder back, while a shallow one could have a flatter back.

6 SHAPING THE BOWL'S OUTER RIM AND SIDES

- a. Carve off the sharp edge on the front of the bowl. Take only a small piece away and, as you did with the back, go up from the middle to the top and down from the middle to the handle. And, where you feel the grain changing direction near the handle, take a stroke or two up from the handle to meet your downwards stroke.



- b. Carve the sides from the front to meet the back of the bowl, taking only a thin slice of wood off all the way around.



Tip: Refrain from carving the sides by coming forward from the back because you have already carved away the inside of the bowl, and there is little or no wood to support the edge. You can easily mar the front of the spoon by chipping out a piece, especially at the top where you are working in end grain. Keep in mind that you will also be sanding these areas later, so paring just enough to shape the outer rim might help prevent tear-out in this area.

- c. Once you have gone all around the bowl's rim and carved off the original wood from the sides, check the roundness of your spoon's back. Do you need to round the edges a bit more? Do you want to flatten the center a bit? Refine the edges as needed, but again, keep in mind that you will be sanding these areas later. Once you are happy with how it all looks, proceed to the next step.

7 SHAPING THE NECK AND THE HANDLE

- a. Mark the neck and handle on all sides with the pencil to show their general shape and provide guides while you shape the neck and the handle.



- b. Carve the edges away, moving down from the bowl and up along the handle in alternating strokes, and around all four sides of the handle.

***Tip:** You can either keep the handle one thickness, or, if you wish, you can carve the neck a bit thinner than the rest. However, be careful not to make the neck too thin; you do not want your spoon to break when you use it. Focus on using the tip of the knife so that you don't take away more than you want. This way, you also avoid tear-out.*



- c. As you thin out the neck, start each stroke further and further back along the handle so that you keep the neck in proportion with the handle.
- d. As you get about two thirds of the way down the handle, you will probably need to change your carving direction. Hold the bowl end of the spoon and take your knife strokes towards the end of the handle. Again, watch for tear-out. The grain direction may require you to pull towards yourself rather than push out to the end of the handle.

Note: *The final look of the handle is your choice, and may depend on how much work you want to do. You can leave the handle more on the flat side.*



Or you can try to get it as round as possible.



Or you can taper the end.



8 SANDING THE SPOON

Note: *If you sanded the inside of the bowl before you carved the outside, you are already partway through this stage. You can pick up the sanding where you left off... with the 220x. If you have not yet sanded the bowl, you can do this at the same time as you sand the neck, handle and back. This step actually goes much faster than you might think, but slow down and take all the time you need to appreciate the transformation from a rough carved spoon to its final form.*

- a. Start with the 120x sandpaper. Cut a small piece, approximately 4" x 2 1/2", and fold it in half. Having grit on both sides makes it easier to hold the sandpaper. Sand in the direction of the grain as much as possible. Sand as much or as little as you like. Sand it all completely smooth or sand the worst of the knife marks out.
- b. Sand the entire spoon with the 120x sandpaper before sanding with the next finer grit. Once you have sanded as far as you want with the 120x, switch to the 180x sandpaper and sand again. Switch to the 220x sandpaper and sand again. When you have completed sanding with the 220x paper, wipe the spoon with a damp cloth, and let it dry for about 30 minutes. This will raise the grain (torn fibers, in the case of carving) of the wood.

- c. Sand the spoon one more time with the 220x. This will make the spoon's surface as smooth as possible for finishing.
- d. Finish up with a buffing using the 320x.



9 APPLYING THE FINISH

The Walrus Oil cutting board oil offers a superb way to finish or recondition wooden food-contact items, such as a hand-carved wooden spoon. The blend of coconut oil, mineral oil and beeswax consists entirely of ingredients that comply with FDA standards for food safety. (Despite its name, no walrus oil is used to make this product.) A single coat is all that's needed to yield a protective matte finish; a second coat can be added for greater depth and color.

***Note:** For many woodworkers, the application of the finishing is the most satisfying step. The finish brings out the natural beauty of the wood and often reveals some characteristics that were previously hidden. Take a moment to let that sink in – both literally and figuratively. There's something quite delightful about watching the wood grain come alive right before your eyes.*

- a. Use a clean, dry rag to apply a thin coat of the Walrus Oil cutting board oil all over the spoon.

- b. Allow the oil to dry for 15 minutes or so, then buff the spoon to a shine in the direction of the grain with the cotton rag. You may need to use a little bit of elbow grease to buff the surfaces out to obtain a semi-gloss sheen.
- c. Allow the finish to cure for 24 hours.



END OF DAY 1

CARING FOR YOUR SPOONS

Your wooden spoons should last forever. To keep them beautiful, hand wash with warm soapy water and towel dry. Never wash them in the dishwasher nor let them soak in water. Too much water causes wood to swell, and as the wood dries, it not only shrinks, but may crack or warp. Repeated use and cleaning will remove the finish, so a periodic application of the Walrus Oil cutting board oil is recommended. If your wooden utensil becomes fuzzy (raised fibers) or stained, or if gets a few burn marks, lightly sand these off with sandpaper, then reapply the food-safe finish.

HONING YOUR CARVING TOOLS

The hook and sloyd knives come sharp enough to use right away, but it's a good idea to touch-up the knives before you start carving. A sharp knife works better and is safer. To keep the blades sharp, you will need to hone them several times throughout your carving session.

You will know when it's time to use the honing compound and the leather strop when you start noticing a difference in how the knife behaves. When you start feeling some resistance, or when the blade seems to catch in the wood, then it's time to hone the blade. This should certainly happen before you have completed the first spoon, so it's best to take a moment to familiarize yourself with how to do this.

To hone your sloyd knife, start by rubbing a thin layer of the honing compound onto one side of the piece of leather. It's best to use the compound sparingly. Frequent, light applications are better than less frequent, heavy applications. Set the leather on a flat surface and pull your knife along the leather, using trailing strokes, five to ten times per side (usually in a pattern of one side then the other, one side then the other, and so on), making sure to hold the blade against the leather at the angle of the blade's bevel. (A leading stroke will cause the blade to slice the leather.)



To hone your hook knife, begin by stropping the outside of the blade on the piece of leather charged with a thin layer of honing compound by pulling it along the leather and rotating it as you do. Then, rub a thin layer of the honing compound all around one end of the dowel. Place the hook knife on a flat surface (on top of the leather is fine). This time, rather than move the knife, you will move the dowel using a combined pushing and rotating stroke to strop across the inside of the hook, from the handle to the tip.

NOW WHAT?

The tools and supplies in this kit are reusable. We hope that you will be inspired to continue carving spoons and other practical kitchen utensils.

More limewood and basswood spoon blanks are available on our website; however, you can make your own from pruned branches or trees that were cut down for safety reasons. Maple, cherry, walnut, birch and poplar are good, food-safe options.

There are many ways to embellish the handle of your carved spoon to further personalize your design before you apply the cutting board oil finish. You can carve your initials on the back, add notches at the top of the handle, chip carve, paint, wood burn or use the kolrosing technique of rubbing charcoal into incisions carved into the wood.



Tip: *Jögge Sundqvist, a Swedish master spoon carver, and author of [Slöjd in Wood](#), argues that every spoon handle should have something at the end to differentiate it from the rest of the handle. This could be a simple tapering, or a groove around the handle just short of the end. Or something quite elaborate, such as carving a double-ended spoon. As you gain experience, you can start to have a lot of fun with your designs.*

You can use the cutting board oil to recondition any of your wooden kitchen utensils.

You can reassemble the box and store the tools and supplies in it so you know where to find them when the need for them arises. The more you make, the more the tools will be of continued service.



CREATED BY LEE VALLEY. MADE BY ME.

Now that you have completed your project, we would love to hear about your experience and see the finished project.

#LVMadeByMe #LVLetsDoSomething



MK105 Spoon Carving

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