

Whittling a Wooden Egg



Whittling is a time-tested hobby that is both relaxing and fun. However, starting out can be intimidating. This project illustrates the law of grain direction (*grain dynamic*), and allows you to make slicing cuts both with the grain, against the grain, and across the grain. It also teaches you how to round and shape a project while building hand-strength and confidences.

Materials and Supplies

To complete this project you will need the following:

- Bench knife (1)
- Pencil (1)
- Basswood block 1-1/2" x 1-1/2" x 3" long
- Appropriate finishing supplies (sand paper, paints, oils, wax, sealers, and such)

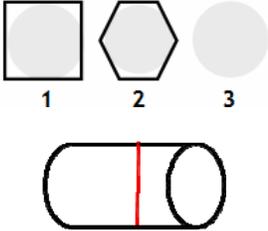
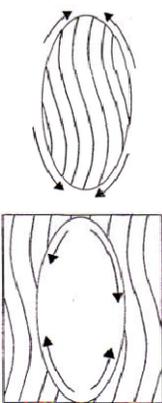
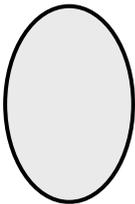
Task

Using the basic knife cuts, whittle an egg from a square block.

Steps

To carve a wooden egg:

Step	Directions	Image
1	<p>Layout your egg.</p> <p>Your block has the grain running the length of the block. Because an egg is not a perfect spiral, carve it off-center. Using your pencil, divide the block into thirds on all four sides.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Choose one end to be the "fat end" of the egg.■ Connect your marks on that end with a heavy pencil line.■ This line is your starting point and will remain the thickest part of your carving.	
2	<p>Round the thick end.</p> <p>Slice of the corners of the block.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Start your cuts at the pencil line, pulling your knife out to the end of the block.	

Step	Directions	Image
	<p>TIP: Use slicing cuts parallel to the grain.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Turn your block and repeat until all remaining corners are off. ■ Slice off all edges until the block begins to round up. 	
3	<p>Round the tapered end.</p> <p>Rotate your block end-for-end:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Start at the line, slice off the corners at the other end. ■ Your block should look like a cylinder at this point. ■ Redraw your line. 	
4	<p>Round over the ends.</p> <p>Your next cuts are at an angle to the grain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ As you pull your blade through the wood at an angle, the fibers of the wood are sliced, if your knife is sharp. This leaves two distinct surface on either side of the cut. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The cut, made with the grain, produces a solid and straight surface ◆ The other cut, made against the grain, peels -back and splits the surface <p>The clean, smooth surface is what you want for the remaining end surfaces of your egg.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Experiment with small slicing cuts, starting slowly. <p>TIP: If the cut splits rather than slices the wood, change the direction of your cut.</p>	
5	<p>Continue rounding each end.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Pause occasionally, holding your egg at arm's length to inspect your progress. ■ The closer you get to completing your egg, the finer your cuts should become. ■ As you near the tip (axis) of the egg, your cut should approach a 90° angle to the grain. Use delicate cuts with a sharp edge to leave a clean surface. <p>TIP: Stop and strop your knife.</p>	
6	<p>Clean up your carving.</p> <p>As you complete your egg, take time to clean up your cuts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Carefully carve away any torn grain, pencil marks, or knife marks. ■ Sand your egg—it is not cheating—unless you like to leave flat planes in your carving. 	
7	<p>Finish your egg.</p> <p>Protect your egg so that you can handle it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Spray a clear matte lacquer to seal the surface. –OR– ■ Paint the egg an appropriate color, sealing the paint after it dries. ■ Add a coat of wax a few days to give your egg a soft glow. 	

Tips

- Insert a pushpin in one axis. This makes a handle when finishing your egg.
- Strop your knife frequently.

If carving starts getting harder or your cuts are not coming out clean, it is probably because your blade is not sharp. Stop and strop every 15-30 minutes of carving.
- Keep a vacuum or small dustpan and broom on hand to keep your work area free of chips and other debris. Recycle the chips as mulch.
- Be patient, as this is not something that can be done in ten minutes. If something does not look right, just keep working at it, as it will probably come out fine.

Warnings

- Keep your hand out of the way.
 - The blades are sharp—if they can cut wood, they can cut you. Always ask yourself: "What if the blade slips?"
 - Try to keep the hand you use to hold the work piece behind or underneath the blade and cut away from yourself so that if you slip, you will not cut your hand.
 - The other excellent reason to use only a sharp blade is that dull ones require more force to cut.
 - This is not a problem in terms of the quality of your work, but of safety: the more pressure you are exerting, the less control you have if the blade slips. You do not want to be out of control of something that is not quite razor-sharp but still adequately sharp enough to cut a nice chunk out of you.
- Wear eye protection.

Though it might not seem like woodcarving is an eye hazard, there is a possibility that a blade might break and send a shard into your eye
- When applying a sealer, stain, petroleum distillates, or finishing products:
 - Remain in a well-ventilated area. The fumes are not good for your brain or lungs.
 - Read and follow the manufacture's user and safety instructions—**READ THE LABELS.**

NOTES

Adapted from: *Old Time Whittling*, Keith Randich, 1994

Reference: *Understanding Wood Grain*, class handout, 2008

WHITTLE DESIGNS

<http://whittledesigns.wordpress.com> ✕ <http://whittle.designs.tripod.com/> ✕ whittle.designs@gmail.com