

Cindy Drozda

"The Fine Art of Woodturning"

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Turning a Tool Handle

Turning handles for your tools is a great way to build skills. It is also very satisfying to use something that you yourself have made, and it is an opportunity to customize the shape and length to your preferences. There are many ways to make tool handles. Here is the method that I use:

1 – Start with an appropriately sized piece of wood.

A good place to start is: 1 ½" square x 12" long. Relatively straight grain works best, and I would recommend a fairly hard wood, but I've seen and made tools from all kinds of woods as well as other materials.

2 – Find or make a ferrule.

A short (¾" or 1" or so) piece of copper, brass, or aluminum tubing makes a good ferrule. There are also lots of options in the plumbing section of the hardware store (flare nuts, etc). And if you want to make it really easy, "official" ferrules are available at woodworking supply stores such as Woodcraft. David Nittmann makes a ferrule by wrapping string around the tenon and securing it with superglue.

3 – Mount the wood between centers with the end that you want the ferrule on at the tailstock.

4 – Rough the wood to a cylinder and make a tenon for the ferrule.

Trial fit the ferrule on by backing the tailstock away between cuts. The ferrule should fit up against a shoulder for best results.

5 – Shape the rest of the handle.

Anything goes! Personal preference for the shape where your hand will hold onto the tool is one guideline. David and I both have favorite 2-axis tool handle shapes that don't roll off the table. Use your imagination and add beads, coves, and other decoration anywhere that your hand won't be holding the handle as desired.

6 – Drill a hole for the tool of choice.

My favorite method for doing this is to start with a drill bit in a Jacobs chuck in the headstock. Then the tool's handle end is aligned onto the tailstock center and the ferrule end is aligned onto the tip of the drill bit. Hold onto the handle with one hand to keep it from spinning, turn the lathe on (not much spindle speed), and advance the tailstock to drill the hole. This method will give you a good shot at the hole being drilled along the center axis of the tool (as opposed to at an angle, which looks funny but functions just fine).

7 – Finish off the end.

Here's where I have some personal preferences, and you will too, no doubt.

I like to just round over the end at the headstock, leaving the center mark on in case I want to mount the handle back on the lathe in the future. I would have done this step between steps 5 and 6, and would be done by now. If I only had a big drive center, and wanted a lot of rounding on the end, I might have chosen to reverse the piece on the centers (put the drive where the tailstock was and vice versa) to finish off the end.

The reason I put this step in last is because some turners like the end of the handle to look finished, without the drive center mark. The tool can be re-mounted in the lathe after drilling, using a cone in the tailstock to center in the tool hole. At the drive end, shape the end of the tool, leaving a small tenon that gets cut and sanded off after removing from the lathe.

You're Done!