

from trees to turning blanks

If a tree falls in the forest (or your neighborhood), can you salvage it for turning stock? Here we'll show you how to make quality bowl blanks from a promising log.

What woodturner can drive by a downed tree without thinking, "Hmmm, turning stock?" In this article you'll learn how to cut up and preserve such finds for bowl blanks.

While experienced turners use features such as knots and eccentric growth rings of branches to great advantage, those features can cause blanks and finished turnings to crack or warp excessively. So when selecting wood for turning blanks, avoid limb wood and look instead for trunk logs with minimal knots.

Because the ends of a log start to dry immediately after cutting, seal them right



away to avoid checking. Use a commercial green-wood sealer. (Available from Packard Woodworks. Call 800/683-8876, or go to packardwoodworks.com.) These sealers clean up with water, dry clear, and are superior to paraffin, which can flake off, and paint, which may require several coats for a good seal.

If there is checking on an old unsealed end, make a fresh crosscut to expose an unchecked surface and seal it immediately. Leave the logs in long yet manageable lengths until you are ready to cut them into turning blanks. This limits potential checking (and waste) to just the two ends

of the log rather than both ends of multiple blank-length sections.

Leave tight bark in place. Bark slows moisture loss, helps prevent checking, and leaves the option of using the stock for a natural-edge vessel.

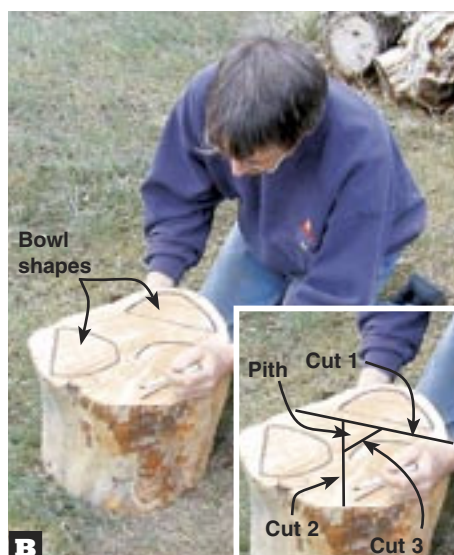
When ready to cut blanks, saw the log into sections about 4" longer than its diameter. This way, if you find any checking after sealing and storing the blank, you'll have ample stock to trim from both ends, exposing check-free surfaces.

When chainsawing a log section lengthwise to form bowl blanks, lay it on its side and support it to prevent rolling. Cut along the grain, as shown *above*. Do not stand the section on its end and cut across the end grain. Doing that takes longer and can overheat and dull the chain.

At the center of a log is the original tree stem, called the pith, surrounded by a zone of very unstable wood. You'll usually be able to recognize this unstable zone by a change in wood-grain color. The size of this zone varies more with wood species than log diameter. Because this unstable wood may cause uneven drying and splitting, remove it. When slicing log sections with a small-diameter unstable zone (1" or less) into turning blanks, make your cut through the pith. For log sections with a larger-diameter zone, remove additional wood adjacent to the pith, as shown in **Photo A**. To guide you when removing the unstable zone from a log section of irregular shape, draw potential bowl shapes on its end, as shown in **Photo B**.



A To remove the pith and a large-diameter unstable zone around it, draw lines with a permanent marker to guide your cuts. The slab marked here is about 1¼" wide.



B Irregular-shape logs often yield more than two bowl blanks. It is helpful to draw potential bowl shapes arrayed around the pith before slicing the log into blanks.

Continued on page 104

Not all log sections must be sliced lengthwise to make bowl blanks. You can leave some log sections whole for turning end-grain bowls, which allows you to get the largest possible bowl from a given diameter log. Be warned, end grain is more difficult to turn than face grain, and end-grain bowls have a greater tendency to crack than face-grain bowls.

Seal the end grain of blanks, as shown in **Photo C**. If the wood is particularly prone to drying stress, such as some fruitwoods, coat the entire piece. When the sealer dries, mark each blank, as shown in **Photo D**. Because the sealer leaves a waxy surface, mark blanks that will be completely coated before applying the sealer. Store blanks off the ground in a dry, well-ventilated area. 🌲



C Apply sealer to the blank ends with an inexpensive 3" brush. When processing large quantities of stock at the same time, speed the task by using a paint roller.



D When the sealer dries, use a permanent marker to label each bowl blank on an uncoated surface, identifying the species and the date it was prepared.

Written by **Phil Brennon**
Photographs: **Kara Brennon**
©Copyright Meredith Corporation 2006