

MAKING A SKEW

An easy way to make a versatile spindle tool

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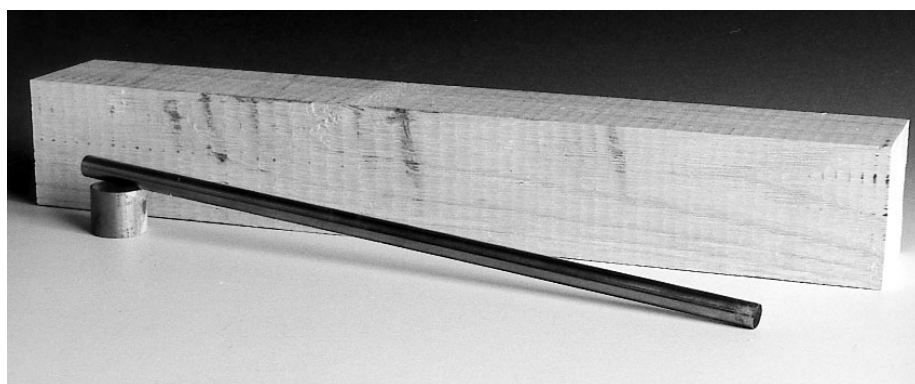
I MAKE MY LIVING MOSTLY BY TURNING small gift items that I sell at local craft fairs and consignment galleries. My best sellers include Christmas tree ornaments, pens, ring holders and bottle stoppers.

As I became more experienced at producing these spindle-turned items, I found that I was relying on fewer and fewer tools to do the job. One of the tools that I can't do without is a small round skew.

I don't remember how I discovered this skew. At one time I purchased $1/4 \times 1/4 \times 8$ -in. lengths of high speed steel from Enco manufacturing (5000 West Bloomingdale, Chicago, IL (800-873-3626) and turned them into skews for my Christmas ornaments. They worked OK, but it took more time than I wanted to soften the square edges, so that they would roll on the tool rest and not "bruise" it. Then I read something about oval skews in *Woodturning*, which included a reference to round skews. I went to my trusty Enco catalogue and, lo and behold, discovered 8-in. lengths of $1/4$ -in. round HSS (Part # 383-7015) for about \$2.30 apiece. I purchased a few, made rounds skews and have been using them ever since.

After seeing me use the tool, turners often wanted to buy them, so I started demonstrating this simple tool-making process, along with my techniques for ornaments and other items. Here I'll describe the process for a round $1/4$ -in. skew. I am often asked about larger round skews, usually $3/8$ -in. or $1/2$ -in., but I do not use them because they seem a bit heavy and cumbersome for my purposes. When I need a larger skew, I switch to my standard $1/2$ -in. rectangular skew and am very happy with that.

If you are going to make a round skew, you'll need a handle. When I conduct workshops, I am often sur-



The author's handy round skew, above top, looks like one straight from a catalog, but it's actually shop-built from readily available materials: a maple blank, a steel shaft and a section of copper pipe. Photos by Bob Rosand.

prised both by the number of people who have never made their own handles and also by the "Uhhh.....variety" of handle shapes they come up with after I finally get them to make their own handles.

Making a handle

The handles that I make are generally maple, ash, cherry or oak. I start with a blank about 10-in. long by about $1 1/2$ -in. square. The finished handles are not "heavy" in cross section. I keep them light because I consider this skew a "finesse" tool.

I mark out the centers and then chuck the handle blank between the headstock and tailstock of the lathe and use a roughing-out gouge to bring the blank to a cylinder.

Designing the handle is up to you. I prefer simple, comfortable shapes. You'll need to turn a tenon on one

end of the blank to accept a metal ferrule to reinforce the handle and prevent splitting. If you are unsure of what shape to make the handle, copy the one shown here or duplicate the handle of one of your favorite tools.

Begin by marking the length of the ferrule on the handle blank and put the metal piece aside. For a skew this size a $1/2$ -in. long section of copper pipe with an internal diameter of $1/2$ -in. works well.

Lay your regular $1/2$ -in. skew flat on the tool rest and use it as a peeling tool to bring the tenon that will accept the ferrule close to the diameter of the interior of the ferrule. I use my vernier calipers to determine the interior diameter of the ferrule and then transfer that to the tool handle. If you are a little unsure about using the skew to size the tenon, a parting tool will work fine. Once you have a snug