

EMBELLISH YOUR TURNINGS

“Artistic” talents not required for embossing

There are many ways to embellish your turnings, and in this article I will cover one method, embossing. Some individuals feel they are not “artistic,” so let me assure you that this technique does not require the ability to draw. This technique is actually quite easy and quick. It can be extended to more elaborate means if you wish.

My embossing started with a Christmas gift from my daughter-in-law. Previously I had no idea this technique even existed. The description of embossing said that it could be used on wood, so I felt that I should try to emboss woodturnings, also. To learn something about this technique, I searched YouTube for videos on embossing. There are many videos that show beginners' techniques, which are aimed mostly at scrapbookers. These are usually done on paper but the techniques are applicable for wood.

This is a simple and easy first step at embellishing. The materials needed for embossing can be obtained in the scrapbook sections of craft stores (e.g. Hobby Lobby, A.C. Moore, Michael's). Minimum needs are a stamp (\$5 to \$10), embossing powder (\$5), glue pad (\$10), and heat gun (\$22). The costs are modest and you may be able to get by with less, depending on what you have available. The range of stamps is large but most are aimed at individuals making greeting cards. I found many nature designs that were appropriate for what I wanted.



Photo 1: Preparing the base of a cherry plate with a recess to mount on a 4-jaw chuck.

You need a relatively flat surface for embossing. I haven't tried curved surfaces, but this might work on a gentle convex surface. Turn a platter or bowl with a wide rim for decorating with your pattern. Choose a stamp pattern sized for the width of the rim. I turned a small plate (about 7" – 17.5cm diameter) with a recess to fit my chuck (photo 1). The piece of wood was $\frac{3}{4}$ " - 1.75cm cherry, and it was held on the lathe with machine screws protruding $\frac{5}{16}$ " – 7mm into the wood. Since the wood is only $\frac{3}{4}$ " - 1.75cm thick, you don't have much extra wood when creating the plate since you have to remove at least $\frac{5}{16}$ " – 7mm on the top surface to remove evidence of the screws and the recess has to be about $\frac{1}{8}$ " – 3mm deep. This leaves you with $\frac{5}{16}$ " - 7mm thickness maximum for the bottom of your plate. You, of course, can make it thinner but you don't have much room for errors. You should finish sand the wood's surface before you start any embossing.

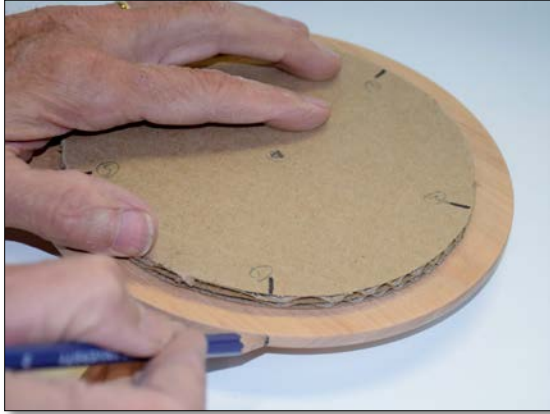


Photo 2: Marking the edge of the plate to guide placement of the stamps.



Photo 3: Placing the stamp with glue on the plate.

I lightly mark on the edge (photo 2) where I want to apply the embossing. When marking an index around the rim, use a cardboard circle with angle markings on it and mark with a pencil lightly on the edge to indicate where you will apply patterns. This makes it easier to clean up the markings without damaging your embossing (you can sand away or use denatured alcohol to remove pencil marks).

The first step, after choosing which stamp to use, is to apply glue from a stamp pad. Press the stamp onto the pad (photo 3), making sure to get an even coating of glue. I use colorless glue but you can get lots of different colors of glues on stamp pads. If you use a transparent embossing powder, then you will be able to see the colored glue lines. Apply the stamp to the wood with firm pressure to get an even application of the glue.



Photo 4: Sprinkling embossing powder on the glued area.

Sprinkle embossing powder (photo 4) over the glued stamped surface. You should be able to see the glue on the wood's surface. I do this over a paper plate to catch the excess powder. I tap the wood with my knuckles to gently vibrate the surface to make sure the powder covers the entire glue area. Shake or gently brush off the wood surface outside of the stamp area and catch the excess powder on the plate.



Photo 5: Brushing off excess embossing powder.

Use cheap artist paint brushes (photo 5) to brush extra embossing powder away. I find that a flat brush does most of what I want here. You can fold the paper plate to get the excess powder back into the jar. A piece of paper would also work well in place of a paper plate. If you get extra glue from the edges of the stamp, you can brush the excess powder off before you apply the heat to melt the powder.



Photo 6: Heating the powder to melt and bond it to the wood.

Heat the powder with a hot air gun (photo 6) until the powder melts and becomes glossy. Craft stores sell small heat guns for this purpose. It takes a few seconds to get the powder to melt. You will see the surface become glossy as it melts. Too much heat can cause bubbling of the powder. You may need to experiment with the distances from the heat gun to the wood's surface. Too close and the heat gun blows the embossing powder away before it can melt. Embossing powder is some type of plastic and comes in a size between granulated sugar and confectionary sugar. It takes a few seconds for the powder to cool before you can touch it.



Photo 7: Applying varnish to the plate.

To clean the stamp I use a slightly wet toothbrush (I wash old toothbrushes in the dish washer) and gently rinse away excess glue. You need to be aware that the stamp may have water soluble glue so don't let water sit where the stamp is glued onto the wood block.



Photo 8: Lightly rubbing the plate to remove dust nibs after a coat of varnish has dried.

All sanding should be done before embossing, since you can do only very light sanding after embossing. To produce a glossy finish, I use a clear gloss spar urethane varnish, diluted 50/50 with paint thinner. I wipe this on with paper towels (photo 7) while the turning is spinning on the lathe. I put on about 10 coats. Between coats I rub the finish lightly with Scotchbrite Grey pads (photo 8) or with 500 or greater grit sand paper to remove any imperfections on the surface.

If you didn't get the embossing powder to cover all the detail of the stamp or if you don't like the design, you can start all over. I use a paint scraper (photo 9) to remove bad embossing and then sand the area. Make sure you scrape and sand in the direction of the grain. This minimizes the amount of sanding needed.



Photo 9: Using a paint scraper to remove an embossed design.



Photo 10: An example of a dual-colored embossing showing two pine cones in black with pine needles in green.

I found that I can use one stamp for a design with more than one color. I first emboss the design with one color on heavy paper, then I cut the paper to mask one of the colors. In the photo (photo 10) I had a stamp that showed two pine cones and some pine needles. I wanted the pine cones black and the needles green. The photo shows the design done first in black, then done in green and black, and then the paper with the design cut in order to separate the color portions.



Photo 11: An example of a hand-carved design of a tree with stylized leaves

You can also make your own stamps by carving flexible rubber pads. A search of the internet will reveal many sources. I show a design (photo 11) carved in pink plastic and glued to a block of wood. I wanted to have a tree shape with separate leaves. The tree trunk is embossed with black powder and heated. After that, I carved a stylized leaf and glued it to a small wooden dowel. I use this to apply the glue and then sprinkle green embossing powder. I can apply the leaf stamp several times before applying the powder and heat.

Since I live in the high peaks region of the Adirondack Mountains of New York State, I wanted to create a design for a logo to be applied to the bottom of my turnings. A member of the Woodchuck Turners of Northern Vermont, Sean Murray of Wild Wood Vermont, volunteered to turn my design into a laser-engraved stamp. The photo (photo 12) shows the stamp after it has been glued to a flexible backing and a wooden block.

The finished design on a piece of cherry is also shown. The last two photos (photos 13 and 14) show examples of this technique on larger turnings.



Photo 12: Laser-engraved high-peaks logo design with my name on cherry wood with the stamp.



Photo 13: Maple shallow bowl with evergreen embossing on rim.



Photo 14: Cherry platter with snowflake design.

This technique is fun and easy to do. The tools needed are modest. The commercially available stamps are numerous. I encourage you to just try this on scrap wood and see if it fits your turnings.

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Dave Buchholz is a retired physicist living in the Adirondacks of New York State. He turns mostly local domestic woods in a variety of forms and styles with many types of embellishments.

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