

For Beginners

Amendment 01 effective 03 Sep 06

This question and answer page is designed to provide you, the beginner, with some basic answers.

Question: What type of woods should I use to carve?

Answer: Well, the best and cheapest wood would only have to be Basswood. Not to say this is the only wood you can use, but it's very readily available and at a very low cost. For example: I pick up basswood boards for about \$1 CDN dollar a board foot that's kiln dried as well. I also pick up Basswood logs for larger carvings for about \$80.00 CDN for a 14 ft length with a width of 18 inches. There are other woods available, but they may not be the best for carving. The list below contains the woods you, as a beginner, should consider using.

Basswood ----- Easy to find and easy to carve (very white wood with good grain)

Butternut ----- Hard to find and easy to carve (Brown wood with loose grain)

Sumac ----- Just look on the sides of the roads in Canada. No cost but needs to be dried and is easy to carve. (Green color wood with loose grain)

Cottonwood Bark ----- Easy to find in Canada and Northern US, and can be purchased on the net. Email me for more info. (Dark bark)

Pine----- Easy to find and medium difficulty to carve. (light color with loose grain)

Hardwoods such as Oak, Walnut, Cherry, Maple and so on, should not be used to learn how to carve. Wait till you get better.

Question: What type of tools should I be using?

Answer: Well, this is a hard question to answer, but here goes. I will break the answer down into four categories.

1. Chip Carving: Now there are lots of experts out there and most of them will tell you a simple chip carving knife and book is all you need to start to learn the fine art of chip carving. Go to the following sites to find reasonably priced chip carving tools.

- a. Lee Valley Tools: just type in "Lee Valley tools" on a search engine and you will find it. For most of Canadians Lee Valley tools is a household name.
- b. Next, I would go to Chipping Away. Again just do a search for "chipping away"

2. Chain Saw Carving: Now chain saw carving is a little more difficult to learn and with this I would say practice, practice and practice is a requirement. But, as for tools and to see if you're really interested in this, I would pick up inexpensive electrical chain saw

and safety equipment to start. The cost would be around \$300 to \$400 and you can find them at any hardware store or Canadian Tire store. I recommend trying it before looking for expensive specialized tools.

3. *Small figurines:* Now, with small figures I am talking about small faces, walking sticks, statues and small animals and chess sets. There are several tool companies that sell tools of this type of carving. What you will need is a small carving knife and medium carving tools or palm tools and a set of micro carving tools. What I've done is list some of the companies that supply this type of tools. I have all of the tools listed below and have used all of them. I do like some tools better than others and I will give you my personal and professional opinion on all of them. But it's your choice which one you wish to pick up.

- a. Flex Cut carving tools: This is a new type of carving tools on the market and for the longest time I refused to use them. However, I looked at the cost and decided to give them a try. Wow! They're an excellent medium carving tool - "outstanding". You will notice this is the only type of carving tool I sell on my webpage. It is the only one I use for my carving lessons. They're durable, small to medium in size, very low cost, and hold an edge for a long time. If you're looking for this type of tool, just look on my webpage. I will not be undersold. If you're looking at the same tool but want to shop around, check out Chipping Away, and or do a search on the net for "Flexcut tools". It's your choice. <http://www.flexcut.com>
- b. Next is Henry Taylor (HT) carving tools from Sheffield, England. Excellent but rigid type of tool. I also use (HT) tools quite a bit and find they are, again, excellent tools to use. However, with this comes a cost \$- you will pay a considerable amount more for this type of tool than others. If you plan on carving for the next 20 years or so, I would pick up a set. But, if your not sure you want to carve and you're just trying it out, I would recommend you not purchase them until you make that decision. Again, your call. <http://www.henrytaylor.com>



4. Relief carvings large and small: Okay, relief carving is an excellent way to start carving. It's not difficult to learn and is very rewarding. If you're just learning, I would use Basswood and Flexcut palm tools - about an 8-inch tool to start. Once you move on to larger and harder woods such as Oak, Cherry or Walnut, I would go to Henry Taylor type of tools and mallets. Now again, they are expensive tools but are excellent for harder woods.

5. Now, there are other things you will need such as sandpaper, and finishes such as Tung oil, paints and varnishes. But, most people can find these kinds of thing in just about any hardware store. One thing, do not take the recommendations of the 19 year old clerk in the store. He/she will not have the experience in woodcarving to be of any help. To be a good carver you're talking about years of carving experience and, in some cases, decades of carving experience.