Kurt's clinic

Kurt Hertzog answers readers' questions

Do you use green wood in your turning? How and when do you use it? Do you use a moisture meter? What should I be concerned about if I start to use it?

Lots of questions so let me tackle them in order as best I can. Yes, I do indeed use some green wood, but not that often. There are three reasons I use green wood. First and foremost, when the opportunity presents itself, green wood is free of cost, requiring only a bit of work with a chainsaw and some thank you to the downed tree's owner. Very often, they thank you or are willing to pay to have the tree downed or cut for removal. The best reason I have for using green wood is that the wood can be obtained in large sizes without cracking or checking. There are limits in size of dry wood that restrict the size and shape of your turnings, unless you can create segmented blanks. Another good reason for turning green wood is that it is just plain fun. Green wood cuts like soap, with 'chips' being long strings and moisture covering everything. Wet-enough wood sprays the turner, lathe, nearby walls and ceiling, making quite a mess, but is worth it based on the fun of turning it. I don't own a moisture meter, nor do I really feel the value of it for my own needs. You may find it helpful depending on how much, how wet, and what your turning end points are. I'm told a meter is helpful for those who are drying wood for use, particularly flat wood. As far as concerns go, there are a few things to consider. If you obtain green wood to turn, using it promptly before it begins to degrade is important. Cut green wood will bleed moisture though any exposed end grain, very quickly leading to cracking or checking. One solution is to not cut the wood until you are ready to use it. Leave trees in the longest lengths manageable with the exposed end(s) being a bit sacrificial when cutting off a piece to be used. The other helpful technique is to use an end-grain sealer, such as Anchorseal, or latex paint to dramatically reduce the moisture loss rate. Sealing it quickly and effectively will allow the green wood to be stored for quite some time before using. Keeping sealed green wood covered or shaded, particularly left outdoors, will help. Once you start turning green wood, cover it with a plastic bag such as a garbage bag to reduce moisture loss when you take a break in turning for more than a few minutes. If you decide to turn green, allow to dry with the attendant shape change and plan for material you'll need to remove when re-turning to round. Using a sealer after turning to slow the drying process while allowing the turning to dry will extend the time required to dry, but will help minimise cracking and checking. The turning can also be placed in a large trash bag with a liberal amount of the wet turning chips packed around it helping to slow the drying process. Accept the fact that there is sometimes loss during the drying process but the negligible cost and fun of turning green wood far outweighs the occasional loss.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KURT HERTZOG

1 One of the advantages of green wood is the ability to get blanks in larger sizes. Large, dry blocks of wood are difficult – read 'expensive' – to obtain
2 Whether freehand turning or using a hollowing bar, green wood is a joy to turn. Usually cuts like soap with long curls that spray sap all over the place

3 A piece of ambrosia maple I used to make a funeral urn. Turned and hollowed wet, allowed to dry, re-turned to true things up. Great result 4 A piece of Norfolk Island pine, debarked for no pest transport, waxed for storage until time for turning. Without sealing, it would self-destruct quickly 5 Anchorseal or equivalent works well for raw wood or in-process turnings. First turned, sealed, allowed to dry slowly, and then re-turned to finish

Are there effective alternatives to superglue for gluing pen tubes into blanks? I have developed a serious allergy to superglue, and I really don't want to give up pen-making.

There are several adhesives that work well for gluing pen blanks. The two that I use as alternatives to cyanoacrylate adhesives (CA) that you've called superglue, are epoxy and polyurethane. Both adhesives work well and will likely not aggravate your CA issues. There are also other advantages with each.

6 Epoxy is a very appropriate adhesive for gluing brass into pen blanks whether wood or plastic. Shown are laser cut kits where I always use epoxy

I've accidentally drilled a pen blank with a 3/8in drill instead of the required 8mm hole. The hole is obviously too big for the brass tube. Can I salvage the blank for the intended pen?

I fear you are out of luck to effectively use the mis-drilled blank for the kit you intended. Your hole is 0.375in versus the needed 0.312in. Sixty thousandths, or 0.030in, a side is a large gap to fill with adhesive effectively and expect the blank to be turned without failure. Barring failure on the lathe, the long-term outlook for any cobbled blank will likely be compromised. I suggest you set aside that blank for future use with a kit needing that or a larger drilling. Unless the problem blank is wildly expensive or has some sentimental value, accept the current loss and drill a replacement blank correctly for the best results. If you are bent on using the current blank, I suggest that polyurethane adhesive and the foaming that takes place will give you the best chance. Keeping the tube centred in the blank while curing might present problems, but it depends on the kit. You may get away with the brass being off-centre provided the finished turning wall thickness provides sufficient coverage. If I had to make it work, I'd shim the brass tube to the centre using a batch of toothpicks while using polyurethane adhesive. Sort of out there, but might just work if you are game.

7 The gaps between the tube and the inner diameter can range from a very slight press to a slip fit, depending on the adhesive being used

You seem to be selecting a lot of pen turning questions lately. Some of us have never, nor will ever, turn a pen. Why the favouritism towards pens?

It does seem like there has been a glut of pen-related questions lately. I'll offer what might seem to be excuses rather than reasons. While you may not be a penturner and seem to sound a bit proud of it, there are many turners who turn pens along with anything else they turn. There are many turners who turn nothing other than pens. Many years ago, I wrote a chapter for the AAW's 25th anniversary book that was titled something like: *Penturning – the gateway to woodturning*. For those woodturners who feel pen turning is 'beneath' them, there are many more who got their introduction into woodturning via pen turning. I'd suggest that those many penturners who only turn pens are just as proud of their creations as those who may have had a desire to add other turnings to their repertoire. Some woodturners mistakenly think that once you've banged out a few pens, there is nothing else to learn or to aspire to with pens. I think you can spend years refining your skills way beyond kit pens before attaining what I term a 'penmaker'. Since *Woodturning* caters to all aspects of woodturning, I think we at the magazine do well to include sufficient materials regarding pens to engage that part of the audience. While, of late, perhaps it seems too much about pens, overall I strive to balance within the many subjects and questions.

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8 For the penturners expanding beyond kits, the possibilities are endless. This pen and stand were a collaboration with the late Binh Pho 9 For those woodturners who tend to look down on penmakers and their craft, this pen and stand brought $800 at auction in 2012

I'm a new to woodturning and am curious about the grinder sizes. Some use 6in and some use 8in grinders. Is there a good reason to pick one versus the other?

The short answer is, not really. Either size is quite common with plenty of grinders, wheels and accessories to fit available. With the large number of both sizes in the marketplace, the volumes keep prices competitive and selections large. The choice really comes down to your preference. Personally, I'm more pleased with the radius of curvature of the hollow grind imparted by the 8in grinder. Just my own personal choice. Regardless of your choice, it is wise to always use that selected size grinder when sharpening your tools lest you unnecessarily waste a lot of steel grinding on a different size when sharpening.

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10 My preference for hollow grinds is the 'gentler' radius hollow grind that I get from an 8in grinder. Both 6in or 8in will work. You pick your favourite