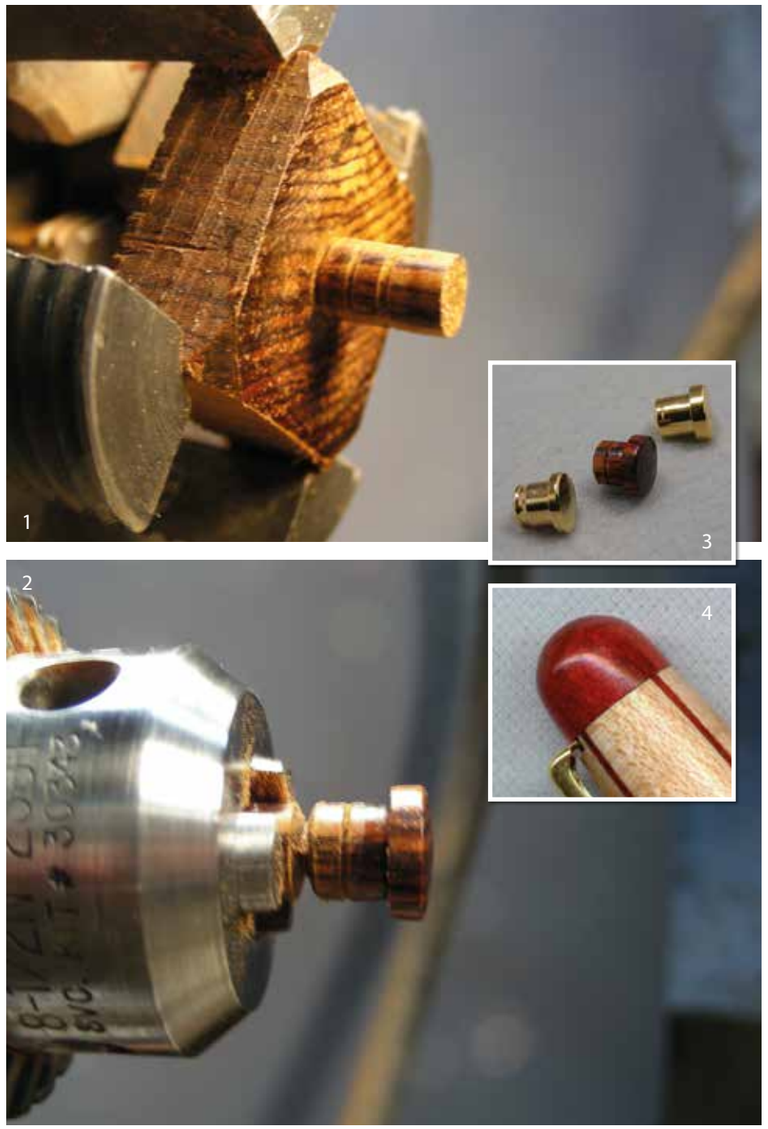
Kurt's clinic

Kurt Hertzog answers readers' questions

I have a can full of offcuts from pen blanks. The various pieces, usually less than an inch, seem too nice to throw away. Do you have any suggestions?

You have the same malady I have. I've been putting these small offcuts into coffee cans for years – as you say, too nice to trash. Problem is, what good are they? Most of the time I give them to students who say they want them and will use them. I'm not certain that they do get used and I've never gotten a good answer about what they think they are good for.

The three uses I've found for them, but not really winning use cases, are: create pieces for other kits making nibs, accent pieces, centre bands or end caps; gluing the pieces into 'collage' blanks for pens; and casting them into turning blanks for lidded boxes, birdhouses, ornaments and the like. The cast turning blanks are quite fun. Filling a throwaway, clean food service container with them, packing them in randomly and then casting can create some unique results. You can try these ideas and have fun with them since the alternative is pot belly stove fuel. If you come up with some winning ideas, please let me know and I'll share them with others.



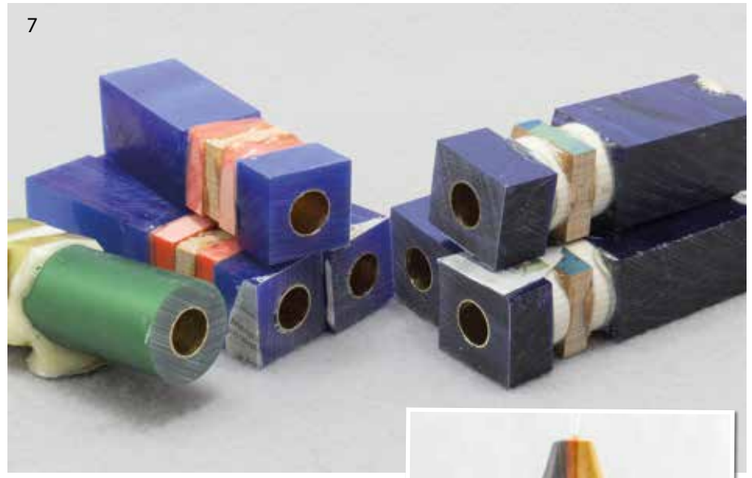
PHOTOGRAPHY BY KURT HERTZOG

1 Offcuts from pen blanks can be used to make component parts. Turning to correct ID and cutting in glue traps since it isn't a press fit 2 Sizes and shapes of custom end caps can vary based on your desired end pen style. Reverse mounted for sanding and finishing of visible end 3 Very easy to create and use exact replacements for the standard 7mm kit. No press fit. Just a slip fit with fastening using adhesive 4 This example is species selected to match the custom-made pen blank. The end cap of the same species is formed to make a pleasing shape.

I want to teach my grandchildren to turn on the lathe. How old should children be to learn and be safe?

Over the years I have taught youngsters to turn, I have found that chronological age usually isn't the most important factor. Properly outfitted with PPE, situated at a lathe where their stance and reach are correctly adjusted for them, and you in immediate attendance will be key to being safe. Your new turner(s) only need to be able to handle the tools and follow your guidance. I'm sure you know that some children are more mature than others at the same age, so don't be hung up on their numerical age. If you set up simple projects that you can step through, you can certainly have a great bonding experience.

The finished project, regardless of perfection, whether a rounded stick or a 7mm pen, will be a cherished memory for them. Be certain to set them up for success, so planning on simple turning, friendly wood species, and relatively short completion times are helpful as you begin. In teaching classes at the local woodturning retailer, we would take youngsters eight or older in the offered classes. A parent of any minor needed to be in attendance for the duration of the class(es). Since these are your own family and, in your shop, insurance and legal guardians aren't the same as a commercial operation, enjoy the opportunity to spend time with them and share the fun.



5 Small offcuts can be used for special blanks and assemblies. This desk pen is from shop offcuts and scraps 6 One of the more challenging components to make. This nib is done in walnut for the desk pen. No springs in pen. This example was done in 2010 7 Bits and pieces of various species and materials can be glued up to make unique blanks. These blanks are colours of sports teams 8 Pens done in sports colours. Suppose you are a fan of pinstripes. Match your favourite team without running afoul of licensing requirements 9 Jumbling up offcuts can be cast together or simply glued together to make blanks for small turnings like lidded boxes, ornaments, birdhouses, etc.

I am considering a lathe that is for sale nearby. It is being sold as is and onsite. It's a good buy but I worry about moving it. Ideas on how I should move it?

I don't know how big or heavy your lathe is, the situation for accessing it for transport, or how far you will be moving it. I assume that since you are asking about moving it, the lathe is pretty large and heavy. Your moving distance is also important. The differences in methods depend on a few miles' move or across your county. I can share my experience with moving lathes and other heavy equipment for thought starters. You didn't specifically ask about moving it around once you get it home, but I'll include that aspect as well. Two of my full-size lathes were delivered from the factory on trucks with power tailgates. Several years between them, in each case the drivers were kind enough to drop them at the front of my garage doors. Very nice since they are only required to drop them off on the street. Getting the driver to back their rig into the driveway and drop the lathe at the garage doors is way beyond their delivery rules. In each case, the machine was lagged to a custom-built pallet with protective enclosures over on top. Both were completely assembled and lagged down. Your lathe likely will not be lagged to a pallet, but you may want to consider using one depending on the size, weight and situation.

The comment about a power tailgate shouldn't be lost, either. Depending on how big and how heavy, and your packing or disassembly plans, a rental truck with a power tailgate or loading ramp might be wise. For my delivered new lathes, one was destined for downstairs in the basement workshop. Un-crating and disassembling the lathe into pieces, base, headstock and ways made the pieces manageable in size and weight to move with some muscular helpers. With the pieces located in the basement, the lathe was assembled in the final location (half my kingdom for a walk-out basement). Your purchased lathe, depending on the design, will most likely be disassembled into pieces for transit. In pieces, some strong backs can load them into a pickup truck bed, trailer, or rented truck. My other full-size lathe was left assembled and moved using an engine hoist. By building a crib of 4 x 4s to cradle the bed, the engine hoist was used to pick up the lathe and move it to the final location on the other side of the garage.

The castors on the engine hoist worked effortlessly and allowed for jockeying into the precise location. At nearly 900 pounds,

10 Just as an example, here is a photo showing how lathes are moved in the factory to load on the pallets. Taken on a visit to the Robust Lathe factory.

considerations for extension reach on the hoist were in order. Think of cantilever issues and hazards of too much overhang. Some lathes, perhaps the one you are buying, have wheel kits available to move the lathe around. Some wheel kits are permanently attached, and others are on/off as needed. Other times when I've purchased metal lathes, end mills, and large bandsaws, I've hired equipment movers. Locally, there are some moving companies that specialise in moving equipment. While not cheap, they have the knowledge, equipment and experience to get the job done safely. The keyword is 'safely'. Getting yourself or your helpers injured can easily happen when you tackle something beyond your capabilities. My equipment movers not only got my vertical mill and full-size metal lathe up from the lower-level location to the street level to load on their truck – they delivered everything inside my garage and spotted things exactly on my location markings. Well worth the cost since the job got done quickly and safely. I didn't put myself, my friends, or the equipment at risk of injury or damage as 'do it yourself' might have.

Another consideration you may be faced with. I have a workshop in my garage and one in my basement. Standard residential construction, at least building codes in my area, builds basement stairs for people and residential loads. They likely aren't sturdy enough for multiple people travelling simultaneously up or down stairs carrying additional hundreds of pounds of equipment. Rather than chance a failure, I reinforced the entire staircase from the concrete floor upwards. The load on the individual treads or staircase no longer relies on the individual treads, their inset and bracing into the stringers, or the stringer attachment to the floor joists.

With open riser construction, it was easy to brace each step individually directly to the basement floor. The stairway reinforcement also allowed for heavy-duty shelving to be constructed under the stairs for storage of mini-lathes, wood and metal lathe accessories, bed extensions, and other heavy items. Be certain that your internal route from delivery to the lathe's final location is capable of load-bearing for the lathe and your transport method. You won't need to worry about this if you aren't relocating the lathe up or down flights of stairs. When you get your lathe to your final location and reassemble it, pay close attention to alignments. You can find out more about locating, levelling, and aligning your lathe in my column in *Woodturning 254*.