



Chainsaw Carving for Beginners

Safety First!

Safety practices generally recommend that chainsaw users wear protective while operating chainsaws.

There is general agreement worldwide on what clothing is suitable, but local jurisdictions have specific rules and recommendations.

Personal protective equipment (PPE) includes:

- **helmet:** to protect against kickback to top of head.
- **visor or goggles:** to protect from chips reaching the eyes.
- **gloves:** to protect back of left hand and also to absorb vibrations.
- **hearing protection:** reduces temporary and permanent hearing loss.
- **protective pants/chaps:** layered with fabric that reduces injury to the surface of the leg.
- **boots:** normal steel toed safety boots.
- **first aid kit:** containing a large wound dressing.

Carving Logs

A soft grained wood log, maximum 12 inches in diameter, four feet tall, is recommended for beginners. "Green" (fresh cut) logs are generally easier to cut as well.

Support Base

The carving log should be secured at the base to a larger footprint to add stability.

Chainsaws

A smaller chainsaw has less weight and power, is easier to handle for long periods of time and when equipped with a narrow bar and low profile chain it has reduced "kickback" and is safer to use for chainsaw carving. A small nose carving bar has very little kickback.



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PRECAUTIONS!

Chainsaws are designed to “rip” through wood very quickly. It can be a dangerous tool and should be treated very seriously. Accidents with the chainsaw can occur and can lead to injury or fatality.

1. Chainsaws.

- **blocking/shaping** – bar length 2” longer than log diameter (e.g. 12” log = 14” bar)
- **shaping / detailing** – small nosed bar with “low kick back” chain.

2. Safety First!

Always wear protection: safety glasses, ear muffs, chainsaw chaps, gloves, safety boots, face-shield, hard hat.

3. Stabilize The Log.

Use ground stakes, sandbags, a larger diameter base or a carving stand. Secure the log with wedges or screws.

4. Secure the area.

Keep the area around your carving clear of clutter. Remove cut-offs to a safe distance to avoid stumbling while using the saw.. Spectators can distract and should be kept at a distance.

5. Be prepared!

Organize the tools and supplies that you will need. This can include:

- pre-mixed fuel / oil
- bar oil (without dye if available)
- chainsaw wrench
- brush (for cleaning around oil/fuel caps).
- file (file guide recommended)
- marking tool (grease pencil/ chalk)
- driver and screws (for screwing log to the base).
- power sander (angle grinder)
- extension cord



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Getting Ready to Carve

1. What You Will Need.

Paper, pencil, chalk or crayon, pictures, sandpaper, finishing oil, brush.

2. Planning and Design.

Study photographs or other carvings and do some sketches on paper or carve a model out of clay. Plan your "blocking cuts" carefully as they set the basic proportions of the carving.

3. Transfer your design to the log.

Mark the center lines on the top of the log first then continue the lines down the sides. Mark the middle of the height around the log. This will give you reference lines for the transfer of your design.

4. The Rough Out.

Chainsaw carvers call this "blocking" and should be done with a larger saw if available. Mark these very carefully as you do not want to remove too much material at this stage. Consider the path of the cut, the start and end points and the depth.

5. Position Yourself.

Before you begin any cut, make sure that you are in a stable stance and can reach the end of the cut without changing your balance. Stand slightly to the side of the cutting path.

6. Carve Away!

Once you have are blocked out, you are essentially going to "sculpt" away material. Do not go too deep at first. Stand back and evaluate proportions and symmetry.

7. Detailing

Some carvers will do all the details with the chainsaw. Others will use chisels and/or power carving tools. An angle grinder for evening surfaces, a flap sander for smoothing, hand chisels for fine details.

8. Finishing

The wood should be stabilized to reduce "checking" here are many products on the market that will do a good job. Minimum would be a linseed oil based wood sealer. Work it into any cracks, seal the bottom of the log as well.



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Technique

Good footing and stance results in better saw control and safety.

- Be sure to wear all the appropriate safety gear.
- Make sure the log is secure.

Blocking

These establish the proportions and general form for your subject. Beginners should work with a softer wood that will allow better saw control (less muscle fatigue).

- Mark out the cut lines carefully (chalk or marker).
- Use your biggest saw (consider log size).
- Do horizontal "stop cuts" first (cuts that determine the end point of another).
- vertical cuts.
- diagonal cuts.
- curved lines can be achieved by "sawing" back and forth while cutting along the line.

Plunge Cuts are cuts that start in the middle of the wood but can result in serious kick back.

- "Rock" the tip upwards as you plunge into the wood (creates larger space).
- Avoid plunge cuts with a powerful saw until you have developed more control.

Shaping

Cutting off corners and rounding is usually done with a smaller saw/bar. This will reduce the risk of "kickback" if the nose of the bar is in contact.

- plane flat surfaces moving the saw from side to side with gentle pressure.
- plane curved surfaces holding the bar almost parallel bottom of the bar in contact moving upwards (or top in contact moving downwards).
- Use the tip of the bar with a sideways motion for concave areas.

Detailing

- Use a small nose bar for detailing for better control and reduced kickback.
- Practice moving the tip of the saw with body motion or breathing.
- Watch videos or another carver for more techniques.



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Finishing your carving for display

FACTOR

Traditionally "Seasoned wood" is when "free water" in the wood has been allowed to escape slowly over a period of time.

FACTOR

Unseasoned wood exposed to open air will dry more quickly from the outside layers, resulting in shrinkage stress between the outer and inner layers. The result is "checking" (cracks).

Solutions:

- Reduce the water content of the wood in a controlled environment. - Air drying - Kiln drying **Solution:**
- Replace the water. - Polyethylene glycol (PEG) **Solution:** Control the rate of water escaping. - Use a protective sealer that allows moisture content to escape.

FACTOR

Sun and rain are potentially damaging to wood. Cycles of wet/dry, can destroy the outer cells of the wood, turning them soft and gray. FACT Exposure to extreme changes in temperature is potentially damaging to wood. If the wood is not "sealed" then water can penetrate, freeze and damage the cellular structure.

Solution: seal the outer most wood layer. - Oil finish with antifungal additive and UV inhibitors.

FACTOR

Exposure to extreme changes in temperature is potentially damaging to wood finishes. The wood and the finish will expand/contract at different rates and result in hair line "cracks" that will allow water to penetrate the wood behind. This often results in black mold forming behind the coating.

Solution: Do not allow sealers to form a "skin". - Brush on, allow to penetrate, wipe off excess.

FACTOR

Insects can still penetrate and damage the carving:

Solutions:

- Apply an insecticide prior to sealing the wood. **Solution:** Install "Borate Rods"
- Treat the log with "PEG" (stabilizes and makes the wood insect resistant).

Recommended Practices for "green" (unseasoned) wood:

- Allow the wood to "season" in a controlled environment.
 - Stabilize the log by in a "kiln" (numerous technologies available).
 - After carving allow to air dry in a shaded area, when "checks" form, apply a sealer allowing it to penetrate deeply into the cracks.
 - After carving, but before detailing, apply a sealer, allow to stabilize for a few days before "detailing".
 - Before carving or after roughing out apply PEG wood stabilizer generously allowing it to penetrate deeply and "replace" the water.
 - Apply a log stabilizing treatment.
- i.e. SIKKENS: Green, Wet, or Treated Logs: These logs may have moisture content greater than 18%. Therefore, it is recommended to apply Sikkens Log Pre- Treatment and allow a one (1) year drying period before applying Cetol Log & Siding.)



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Sealing Carvings

All wood carvings whether green or aged wood should be sealed to reduce the rate of water evaporation to reduce checking and to protect from moisture penetration.

Natural Oils

Boiled Linseed Oil (BOL), Tung Oil, etc. penetrate and form a protective coating that when dry, allows moisture to escape slowly.

Multiple layers offer the best protection.

Recommended Procedure:

Apply liberally, brush in and allow to sit for twenty minutes, wipe off excess.

- Repeat each day for seven days.
- Repeat monthly for one year.
- Repeat yearly.

Mineral Oil Based Sealers

There are many suitable wood treatments available that offer additional protection for carvings that will be outdoors. Look for a product that offers:

- Antifungal protection
- UV protection
- Water "borne" (often penetrate deeper)

Varnishes

Varnishes offer the best protection from moisture and stains. For outdoor carvings you want to use a "spar" varnish with UV inhibitors and antifungal additives. A spar varnish withstands temperature changes better than an indoors.

Recommended Procedure:

Apply liberally, brush in and allow to sit for twenty minutes, wipe off excess.

- Repeat to form several thin layers
- Maintain yearly with a fresh coat to fill hairline "cracks" in the varnish and any "checks" in the wood.