

# ANGEL CHRISTMAS ORNAMENT

## Lovely Christmas Project for Building Skills and Gifts

By *Eugen Schlaak*



Making one of these lovely Christmas ornaments as shown here does not take much skill on the woodturning lathe, although mastering one of the most dreaded woodturning tools, the "skew," helps to make these efficiently and in a short time.

Many methods and tools can be used to produce these "angels" but over the years I have found the method described here the most convenient.



**Photo 2**

Photo 2 shows the tools and materials needed to make an angel about 3" tall, but other sizes, smaller and larger, can easily be made by adjusting the dimensions of the raw material.

The item in this article was made from black cherry wood, but other woods which have a more pronounced grain, as shown in the examples in Photo 1, are just as suitable. Parts of the angel ornament can also be colored or textured.

The bottom part, or skirt, can be hollowed, although the procedure is slightly different. For this process, the skirt portion is located towards the headstock of the lathe and the ornament will be parted off the lathe at the skirt end of the angel after all the other shaping is completed.

The following items are used (Photo 2):

- Endgrain wood 2" x 2" x 4" long
- Scroll chuck
- Oval skew 1" or smaller
- Flexible cloth-backed sandpaper 220 and 400 grit
- Friction polish
- Yellow carpenter's glue
- A 1/16" drill bit, a small screw eye and thin ribbon



**Photo 3**



**Photo 4**

Mounting and quick rounding of the wood to about 1 3/4" diameter is quickly accomplished using the skew, but a roughing gouge would serve the same purpose.

Because the skew is used extensively in the next steps, a change to a different tool would take extra time.



**Photo 5**



**Photo 6**

After the wood is rounded, the diameter for the angel's head has to be turned. Using the long point of the skew, a V-groove to a depth of about 3/4" diameter is created. Using a peeling cut with the skew in the horizontal position, the remainder of the wood is reduced down to the required diameter, in this case about 7/8", as shown in Photo 7.

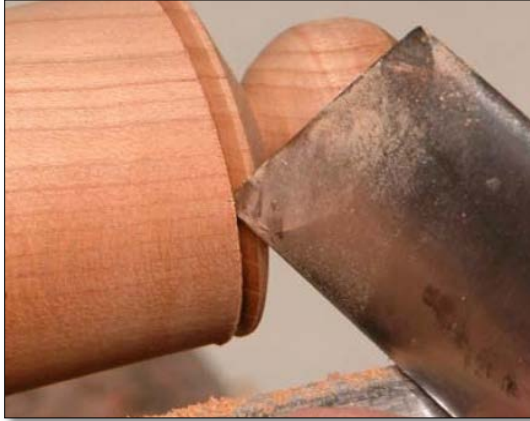


**Photo 7**

Using the short point of the skew makes it easy and fast to define the round shape of the angel's head as shown in Photo 8. Make sure the bevel is rubbing, otherwise a dreaded catch can occur faster than you can say....never mind!



**Photo 8**



**Photo 9**

After finishing the shape of the head and making a final smoothing cut on the top of the angel's collar, successive V-cuts with the long point of the skew down to the neck size at about 5/8" diameter are made, along with a final smoothing cut on the underside of the collar to complete the upper part of the angel's body.

Ensure that the long and short point of the skew are extremely sharp and not ground convex to ensure a clean cut at all times (Photo 9 and 10).



**Photo 10**



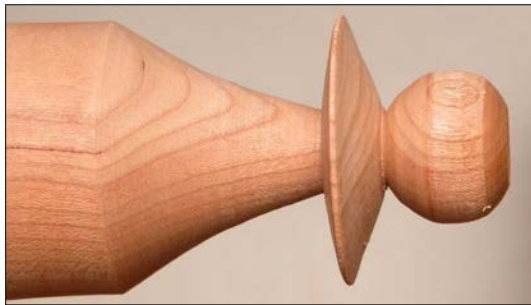
**Photo 11**

Rounding the lower "skirt" portion of the angel is the next step.

Successive steps using the short point and the cutting area just behind the short point make this part of the turning very fast and should leave an almost polished surface as the end result, as shown in Photo 12. Making the skirt part less convex is of course easier to achieve with the skew. To finish this area with a flawless and polished surface, the bevel of the skew must be rubbing the wood.

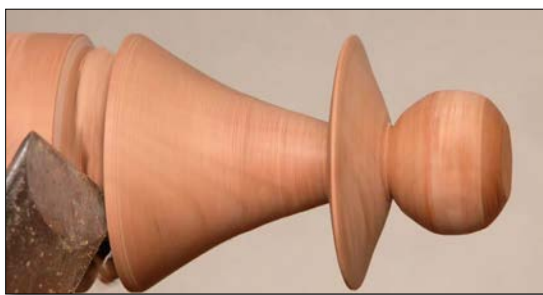
All throughout these last steps the revolution of the drive spindle of the lathe was about 1200 to 1600 rpm, a comfortable speed. I find higher speeds do not help in cutting cleanly because the sharp cutting edge of the tool tends to jump. Also, a lot of heat is created which has the tendency to quickly dull the tool's cutting edge.

Contrary to today's well-advertised theory about the quality and cutting ability of HSS tools, high carbon steel tools can be sharpened to a finer edge and consequently, make cleaner cuts, but the cutting edge does not stay sharp as long as those on HSS tools.



**Photo 12**

It's time to start parting off the item from the lathe, but not before some final touch-up sanding with 220 and 400 grit sandpaper has been done. The choice of grits depends entirely on the finish achieved by the proper use of the skew or other turning tools. If at all possible avoid the "80-grit tool;" too much dust is not good for your health (Photos 13, 14 and 15).



**Photo 13**



**Photo 14**



**Photo 15**



**Photo 16**

A couple of coats of friction polish are applied with soft paper toweling (Photo 16) before the angel is parted off.

Widen the gap a bit and use the long point of the skew and ensure there is a clean cut on the bottom part of the angel (Photos 17 and 18).



**Photo 17**



**Photo 18**



**Photo 19**



**Photo 20**

The remaining wood left in the chuck is used to produce the halo of the angel so the next step is to clean up the end of this wood and reduce the diameter to about 1 ½", the size of the angel's halo (Photos 19, 20 and 21).



**Photo 21**

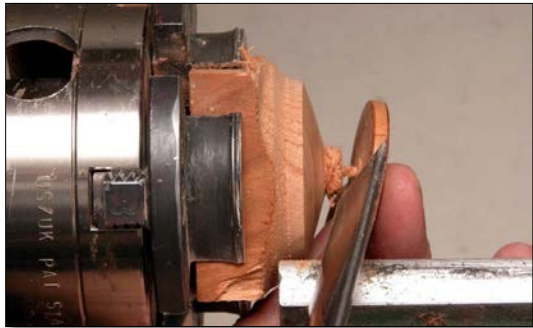
After slightly rounding over the sharp corners of this disk with 220-grit sandpaper, friction polish is applied (Photo 22) and the disk (halo) is parted off, using the long point of the skew, as shown in Photo 23.



**Photo 22**



**Photo 24**



**Photo 23**

If a clean cut at the center cut-off point (Photo 23) is not achieved at this time, there will be another chance to make a correction later on after the halo is glued to the angel's head (Photo 27).

A stationary disk sander makes it relatively easy to flatten the front part of the collar and the top of the head at an angle towards the back. If a separate disk sander is not available, sandpaper glued to a wasteblock and mounted on the lathe drive shaft will suffice. I use 150-grit sandpaper for this procedure, which will give a smooth enough surface for this step (Photos 24 and 25).



**Photo 25**

A drop of glue to secure the halo to the angel's head is all that is required to make the final assembly (Photo 26).



**Photo 26**



**Photo 27**

After the glue has set, the top of the halo can be lightly sanded (if required) as shown in Photo 27.



**Photo 28**



**Photo 29**

A couple of last steps are shown in Photos 28 and 29. Drill a 1/16" diameter hole for the small screw eye, attach a ribbon and sign the bottom. All done!

If the making of one of these lovely Christmas ornaments takes longer than 10 to 15 minutes, you need a bit more practice with the skew. But that, of course, only applies if you are in a hurry to make many of these ornaments!

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