

## Learning the Craft

As a novice carver it's always better to learn from the mistakes of others and avoid making them yourself. In other words enroll in carving workshops and seminars. Check out learning opportunities listed in *Manitoba Wood Carving Competitions, Instructors, Courses and Clubs*.



A great deal of reference material is available through public libraries, carving clubs, book store shelves and carving suppliers. *Wood Carving Basics* by David Sabol provides excellent instruction on tool selection, wood selection, sharpening and finishing.

Prairie Canada Carvers' Association sells a book of 34 traditional and bird carving patterns for

\$25. Check

out the

PCCA

website for

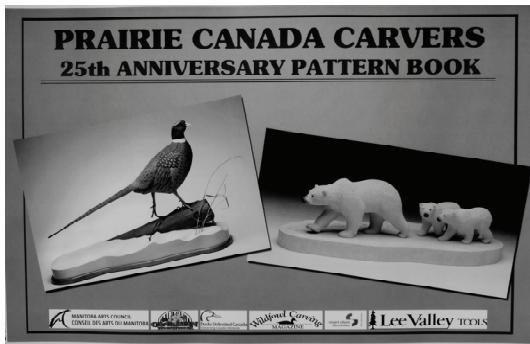
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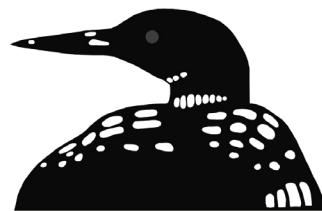


If you would like to receive the Prairie Canada Carvers' Association newsletter (published three times a year) contact [tedmuir@shaw.ca](mailto:tedmuir@shaw.ca). The newsletter is an excellent source of current information on the prairie Canada carving scene.

Good luck

# A Guide for Beginner Wood Carvers

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Compliments of Prairie Canada  
Carvers' Association Inc.  
([www.prairiecanadacarvers.com](http://www.prairiecanadacarvers.com))

# Getting Started as a Wood Carver

If you are seriously thinking about taking up wood carving this leaflet is for you. It is offered in the hope that it will get you started in the right direction and add to the enjoyment of your new hobby. It was produced by the Prairie Canada Carvers' Association with the help of members of the St. James Adanac Carvers Association who first floated the idea of such a publication and helped write some of the text.

## The Right Tools for Traditional Carving

First off you are going to need some decent cutting tools—knives and chisels are a necessity for any kind of carving be it traditional or wildfowl carving. Just to back up a bit, traditional carving encompasses things like caricature carvings, relief carvings, animal carvings, bark carvings, mythical characters, etc. Wildfowl carvings are often associated with miniature and life-sized carvings of bird life and hunting decoys. Most wildfowl carvers will shape their pieces with the use of power tools and bits. Check out the rules book on the Prairie Canada Carvers' Association website to get a sense of the variety of carvings entered in competitions.

In purchasing your first tools remember you get what you pay for. You would be well advised to begin with a modest set of quality tools until you know what type and complexity of the carving you wish to embark upon.

**Chisels:** Chisels come in three basic shapes: straight edges, gouges and V-tools.. A good selection of introductory chisels includes a #7-3/8" gouge, a #7-3/8" bent or spoon palm chisel and a #3-1/2 bent or spoon palm chisel.

**Knives:** Knives come in three basic shapes: straight, curved and pointed. Again these are the basics with many other knife shapes available for the more advanced carver. Knives may also be designated by size (3/8", 1/2" or in 10mm, 30mm) and by shape or curve (#7, #9).

A good starting combination is: 1) a 4-6" straight edge roughing knife such as the Flexcut roughing knife and the straight edge chip carving knife; 2) a small flexible straight blade detail knife and 3) a 5 piece small detail carver's chisel set.

**Other Useful Stuff:** You might want to consider purchasing a Kevlar glove to protect your holding hand when using sharp tools.



**Keeping Tools Sharp:** Sharpening is something that all first timers tend to forget. Yet it is essential that knives are kept sharp, both for safety and to make carving more enjoyable. A good initial system is to use micro-abrasive sheets (like fine sandpaper sheets, but for metal surfaces) on glass or carved surfaces that match your knife shape. You should also consider enrolling in one of the sharpening workshop offered by carving clubs or retailers listed in the brochure *Manitoba Wood Carving Competitions, Instructors, Courses and Clubs*. This brochure can be accessed on the PCCA website.

## Tool Suppliers

A number of reputable Canadian art and carving suppliers can be found on the Internet. Suppliers who sponsor Prairie Canada include Artists Emporium, Canadian Woodworker, Lee Valley Tools, Professional Grinding and Razertip Industries. They all have websites and catalogues so prices and products can be easily compared.



## Power Carving

Bird carvers make the most use of rotary tools, however just about every carver has a least one in his/her shop. Check out tool suppliers listed in this brochure and compare prices.

### Rotary Tools

Power tools are like knives and chisels— you get what you pay for. It is advisable to start power carving with a relatively inexpensive tool with a flexible shaft (brushes wear and need to be changed). Tool stores carry a wide selection— watch for sales. Most of them hang from a stand you can either make from a clamp or purchase from a tool supplier. They accept bits from 1/6, to 1/8 to 3/32 ins. They are adequate for detail work and smaller pieces.

Every power carver has at least one of these.

The micromotor is the next step up from the hanging rotary tool (a variety of types are available). These units deliver considerably more power and are designed to sit on the workbench (bits range from 1/6 to 3/32 ins.).



If you need to remove lots of wood you may want to purchase a 1/6 to 1/3 horse power tool like a Foredom which accepts 1/4 in. bits (along with 1/6 to 3/32).. They hang from a stand and controlled by a foot pedal. If you are left handed get a model that has a reverse speed.

### Tool Bits

Everyone who power carves has bits they seldom if ever use. Bits (cutters, burs, stones, etc.) can be expensive so at first purchase only bits recommended by workshop instructors to minimize the cost. As you become more experienced and knowledgeable you will broaden your selection.

## Dust Collectors

If you are going to power grind, sand or cut wood indoors dust control is imperative. A dusty workplace is unsafe and unhealthy. Always wear a dust mask and do highly dusty activities outdoors. Build/purchase an air cleaner/cleaning system that works best for your space. New power tools are fitted with vacuum hose vents— use them.

Most power carvers use a workbench box filtration system. Essentially you work in front of a box fitted with a filter that captures and holds the dust as it is sucked in by fans mounted in the back of the box. They are handy and portable, but clog with dust- filters need repeated cleaning and occasional replacement. They can be made or store bought (see above photograph).



A range of commercial dust collection units are available—from box filters which hang above work spaces to a network of hoses that attach to stand alone collection bags (hoses in above photograph run from bench top to an air bag and from bench top to box powered by an old gas furnace fan). Again plan ahead, shop around and see what others are doing to control dust.

## Sanding & Lighting

The best advice when power sanding (cushion sanders, discs or cones) or by hand is to start with coarse paper (100 grit) and work your way down in steps to fine paper (400 grit or finer) until the piece is glass smooth. Cloth backed sandpaper and sanding pads are recommended. Ensure that your workshop has adequate lighting to see fine blemishes. Once finished, inspect the piece in natural light (outside or indoors by a window). You'll be surprised what you find.