

## Make a Walking Stick

by Fred Holder

When I was younger and my wife and I did a lot of camping and hiking in the woods, I used to pick up a suitable stick around 5 to 6 feet long and about 1-1/2 inches in diameter at the largest end and use it for stability along the trail. It helped to push you up hill when you were climbing and it helped to put a brake on when you were descending a slope. I generally adopted this stick for the duration of the camping trip if it was a good one. I then discarded it when we went home.

Well we don't go camping anymore and I don't hike on hillsides, but I do still walk along side of the road and sometimes the uneven ground makes one a bit unsteady. I had thought of making a walking stick for several years. A couple of months ago, the bug got even stronger.

I selected some dogwood square stock that I had and began to work on my walking stick. I wanted it to be about 5 feet long and about 1-1/2 inch in diameter at the hand hold area, but I also wanted to be able to take it in the car should I wish to go hiking in the hills. This meant at least one join.

I didn't think that the brass joins available for canes would be heavy enough for my walking stick. Initially, I made up a join out of lignum vitae, but it didn't work out because as I got the female portion down to size, it was too thin to stand up to the pressure and cracked. It was redesign time! I decided that a 3/4" pipe coupling should be about the right size. I made up two male threaded pieces out of lignum vitae with 3/4" tapered pipe threads on one end and a tenon on the other to join to the walking stick. I had an insert out of a pipe threading machine, so I clamped this into a pair of vice grips and used it as a thread chaser to chase the threads. The iron coupling looked ghastly, according to my wife. So a visit to the hardware store turned up a brass coupling with a hex exterior shape. She didn't like that either.

I mounted a piece of Osage Orange in one of my Nova chucks and chased a thread for the coupling. Using a 1/8" parting tool, I faced off the end of the coupling until it was square with the threads, reversed it so the faced off end was against the shoulder on my holding chuck. Now, both ends were square to the threads. Using the 1/8" parting tool, I then turned away the hex shape of the coupling, sanded and polished. It looked great on the walking stick and my wife was happy with it too.



My join worked well and looked good and was strong. The only weak part was the glue and lignum vitae. It finally took epoxy to hold. I made two more walking sticks with somewhat improved joints using lignum, but I believe that I would settle for boxwood if I make anymore.

Because a lot of my walking is done on pavement, I chose to use a rubber crutch tip on the ground end. They come in black and blond--the blond looked better on the dogwood walking stick, black might look better on a different wood.

Rather than try to make the wood of the stick blend in perfectly with the brass coupling, I placed a bead on either side of the coupling. This gave the coupling a shoulder to butt against and gave a perfect fit. The wood above and below the beads was turned to look like a continuation right through the coupling. I also felt the stick should have some form of texturing for a better grip in the grip area. I toyed with a couple of different ideas, but finally settled on a section about 9-1/2" long made up of 1/4" beads. I have a Robert Sorby beading tool that made this job fairly easy. This worked very well and I've used it to good effect on the other two walking sticks that I've made.



Even though these pieces were only about 29-30 inches long, I had to use a steady rest to stabilize the wood for turning. On small things like lace bobbins and treen, one can normally stabilize it with their fingers. I simply couldn't do so on something this size.

The top part of the walking stick has no function other than decoration. However, the beaded section between the two large beads serves a very useful purpose of providing an excellent hand hold area. I made this section about 9-1/2" long because that was about right for my tool rest. I could bead the whole area without moving the tool rest. The join was made with two threaded pieces of lignum vitae and a 3/4" brass pipe coupling. The threads are 14 tpi chased with a die insert held with vice grips.



**Harold Swanson, a friend who was helping me demonstrate and tend the booth at my last craft show, shows off one of my walking sticks in front of our booth.**