

The Pot Maker

With the beginning of gardening season at hand, getting a head start on your seedlings should be a priority. Here's a time-tested appliance that makes seedling pots from ordinary newspaper. You could buy one on Amazon but shouldn't you be ecologically responsible and make one yourself from the recycled wood in the back of your shop?

The PotMaker recycles your newspaper into small pots ideal for starting seedlings. The pots are biodegradable, so when it's time your seedlings to go into the ground pot and all. Here's how easy the pots are to make, you can make enough for all your seedlings in about an hour.

Cut newspaper into 3-1/2" x 10" strips. Roll paper around the press leaving about an inch to fold under end. Press into form and twist gently. Remove pot from press and gently fill with soil. Transplant seedling or sow seeds directly. When the plant is established, the whole thing goes right into the ground. (Photo 1: of potmaker, newspaper, potmaker with newspaper wrapped and finished pots)



The pot-maker itself is almost as easy to make and can be done on almost any lathe with minimal tools.

To make the press, start with a spindle blank about 2-1/2 inches round and four six inches long. Turn round between centers, true the ends and establish a tenon on one end for your scroll or jam chuck. You can make a jam chuck

using a small faceplate and a chunk of firewood.

Mount in the chuck and turn down to 2-1/4 inches for about 2-1/2 inches on the free end. Now turn a 1-1/4 inch by 1/4-inch deep recess at the free end (even easier, use a Forstner bit, which you can do with the jam chuck). Use a parting tool to define a 3-inch long cylinder from the end with the recess. (Photo 2: forstner bit into recess)



Reverse the spindle again and expand scroll chuck jaws into the recess you just made or use a jam chuck with a tenon into the recess.

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Bring up the tailstock for security.

Starting from the mark you made with the parting tool and heading toward the tailstock, reduce the diameter of the spindle blank to a little over 2-inches for a distance of about 3/8-inch. Now, on the tailstock end, turn a sphere with what's left to make a handle. Doesn't really have to be a sphere but now is a good time to practice. Just make sure it's comfortable and fits your hand (Photo 3: Sphere on end with tailstock support).

Before you get ready to remove the blank, sand and decorate the piece with burned lines or a texture. Turn down the end at the tailstock until there is a nub about 1/8-inch in diameter before backing off the tailstock and removing the blank to cut off the nub and sand flush. Set aside. (Photo 4: Press ready to remove from lathe)

The form is made with either a face grain or end grain disc about 3-1/4 inches in diameter and a little over 1 inch thick. Find the center of one side and use the tailstock to push the disc against the closed jaws of the scroll chuck or the end of the spindle. Turn a tenon just big enough for the scroll or jam chuck to grab. Reverse and mount in the chuck.



True the face and sides of the form. Cut a doughnut shaped recess 1/4 inch deep in the face that the press will just fit into. If you are using a jam chuck at this point, bring up the tailstock and turn the recess around it. This should be not quite a tight fit, not a loose fit, both at the outside edge of the press and at the recess in the base of the press. Check it often. Sand and ease the edges of the doughnut recess just a bit. (Photo 5: doughnut recess)



Flip the form and grab it by expanding the chuck jaws into the doughnut recess or using yet another jam chuck (or skip the next step entirely, the potmaker will still work just fine). Turn away the tenon and the dimple from the tailstock. Sand and ease the edge. If you are into texture or embellishments now would be a good time to apply them.

The potmaker is ready to use. A hand rubbed Tung or Walnut Oil finish works nicely on these if you want to leave it on display in the shed between seasons.