

DRYING WOOD

It is possible to carve green wood; chances of success are greater if cured wood is selected. This is because heartwood (core) dries at a different rate from the sapwood (outer wood). Stresses and strains take place as the green wood dries out. These stresses cause logs to split and the ends to check (crack from the center of the log to the bark).

Air-drying of the lumber is suggested in order to slow the drying process down to a more even rate. Accomplish this by sealing the cut ends and openings in the bark where the side branches have been lopped off. Using a pencil, mark the starting date of the seasoning process.

Store the wood in a dry, airy place, away from the sun and rain. Position pieces of scrap wood positioned between the logs or timber to promote air circulation. Every six months turn the wood, inspecting the ends to see if checking has opened the sealant; if it has, apply more sealant. After eighteen months, the wood should have cured and will be ready for carving.

Some carvers claim that logs season better if they are stripped of their bark. If seasoning the logs in your garage or dry cellar, this may be advantageous. The bark usually plays host to many undesirable insects.

Home curing is more successful when the green log is trimmed out into beams and planks, since logs are more susceptible to checking and splitting. Logs also take longer to dry. Again, liberally coat the ends of each piece with sealant.

Most commercial woods are kiln-dried, a process whereby timber is placed in large ovens and dried slowly with controlled heat. Smaller pieces of wood may be cured chemically by immersion in PEG 1000 for twenty-four hours, which prevents checking and shrinkage. This water-soluble wood stabilizer is available from:

Craftsman Wood Service Co.,
1735 West Cropland Court
Adios, Illinois 60101

This process cannot be used on woods to be stained. The wood cells are sealed in such a manner as to prevent absorption of stains and penetrating finishes.

If working with green wood, the secret of carving it is to drill a hole completely through it from top to bottom. This allows for expansion and contraction of the

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wood as it dries out. Once drying has occurred, fit a wood plug into the uppermost hole and carve it to conform to the design. European carvers have often carved masks and plaques of green wood, hollowing out the reverse side to prevent cracks and splitting.

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Revised: 0000-00-00

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