

PYROGRAPHY BASICS
(AAW DEMO, JUNE, 2015)

BRIEF HISTORY:

Pyrography, literally “fire writing,” is an ancient art found in every part of the world. Originally, artists used hardwood sticks tempered in fire to mark on gourds and other natural surfaces. This technique is still used today in some countries, but I’m going to be using electric tools.

TOOLS AND EQUIPMENT: (Wood burners)

- Solid Tip Wood Burner
 - Temperature cannot be controlled,
 - Writing tip is usually heavier in size.
 - Shading is controlled by how quickly or slowly the line is burned.
- Variable Temperature Wood Burner—Temperature can be controlled, tips are either fixed or interchangeable.
- Soldering Iron
 - Some have temperature controls
 - Tips can be purchased or homemade
- Home Made Wood Burners—Burners can be made from battery chargers and dimmer switches.

(NOTE: I will primarily be demonstrating the variable temperature wood burner)

OTHER EQUIPMENT:

- Burning Tips—A variety of tips can be purchased. Tips can also be made from nichrome wire, available on line, or brass rod
- Graphite pencils—2B, 4B, 6B
- Graphite Paper
- 200-250 grit sandpaper, brass brush, or steel wool scouring pad—to clean the tips
- Needle Nose pliers—for one-temperature tools
- Metal ruler or straightedge
- Drafter’s triangle
- To add color, you can use:
 - Artist quality colored pencils, markers
 - Artist’s acrylic paint and brushes, dyes
- Polyurethane spray sealer, tung oil, Danish oil finish and Paste wax, water based urethane

WOODS TO SELECT:

- Soft woods (bass wood, white pine) can be burned to a very dark chocolate brown or black
- Hard woods allow for more variety in shading and are good for complex shading projects
- Fine grain woods show very little color change in lines and are generally preferred
- Light colored woods allow for more variety in color range of burning
- Dark colored woods result in a richness and depth of tone
- Avoid burning treated wood because of the preservatives
- End grain does not generally color as well as cross grain with the burner or with paints

SAFETY TIPS AND HELPFUL HINTS:

- Hold the burner pen the way you hold a pencil
- Hold the pen so the heat goes up, not back into the pen
- Do not breathe the smoke. Use a fan to pull the smoke away. If you point the fan toward the work, it tends to cool the tip.
- The work should not smoke excessively when burning. Do not burn too hot. Rather, go over the area several times to darken it.
- When making curved lines, use your little finger as a support and rotate your hand around your little finger
- Turn the work instead of your hand when possible
- Rapid drawing with the pen will leave a lighter line than slow drawing
- Shade away from hard lines
- Do not bear down on the pen. If the pen is not getting the result you want, turn up the heat ½ notch or slow down the movement.
- Apply pen pressure that mimics an airplane landing and taking off. Don't stab the tip into the wood, then draw it across the wood. This results in a dark area at the beginning of the line.
- Keep pen tips clean. Carbon builds on the tips. Clean with a stainless steel scouring pad or a soft brass brush
- Do not change tips when the pen is hot. You will risk damaging the pen's heat element. (This is especially true of solid tip burners and soldering irons)
- Use pliers or other appropriate tool to change the tips. (Translation: Do not use your fingers!)
- Store tips so that they are protected
- Turn off the burner when you leave the work area
- Use a heavy duty extension cord, if an extension cord is required

SELECTING AND APPLYING PATTERNS:

- Patterns can be applied using drawings and graphite paper.
 - Tape the graphite paper and pattern to the wood with low-tack masking tape and draw through the two thicknesses to leave the pattern on the paper.
 - To apply a flat pattern to a curved surface, cut slits in the pattern to get it to fit the wood.
 - Crumple the pattern then place over curved surface

Note: Do not transfer all the lines in the pattern to the wood or you'll have too much graphite on the surface.

- If using a leaf motif, real leaves can be outlined on paper. The leaf patterns can then be cut out and taped to the wood and drawn around with pencil. Double sided tape works well.
- Use a laser printer to copy a pattern. Then tape the pattern to the wood, and use a Xylene pen to saturate the paper. The ink will be transferred to the wood.
- Tape the pattern directly to the wood and burn through the paper.
- The pattern can be sketched directly onto the wood with a pencil.

AFTER BURNING THE DESIGN:

- To correct a mistake, use a knife to scrape away the burned area, then sand the area.
- If using graphite paper or pencil, a good art eraser works best to remove the lines from the wood after burning.
- After burning, use a fine grit of sandpaper to remove the rough texture left by burning.
- Remove over burn with fine grit sandpaper or 90-100% rubbing alcohol.

BURNING EXERCISES:

- Exercise #1 – Beginning & Ending a Stroke
 - To avoid dark spots at the beginning or end of a stroke, use the “touch and go airplane landing” technique.
- a. Straight lines
- b. Curved lines

- Exercise #2 – Shading
 - a. Hatch lines
 - b. Double/Triple hatch lines
 - c. Scrubbing circles
 - d. Dots
 - e. Dark to light solid shading

- Exercise #3 - Select a pattern to burn
 - a. Transfer the pattern to wood
 - (only draw in the outlines and major lines with graphite)
 - b. Select the most appropriate tip and burn the pattern

SELECTING BURNING TIPS AND TIP HOLDERS:

Most work can be done with the following **tips**:

- a) Writing tip—bent wire or ball
- b) Short skew
- c) Shading Tips—Several styles available
- d) Colwood “J” tip—good for thin lines and shading

Tip Holders:

- a) Fixed, or (May want this for the tip you use most often)
- b) Replacement (Less expensive. All pens do have a shelf life)

RESOURCES: (Equipment)

- Graphite Paper: Craft stores (comes in single sheet or two sheet packages, 18”X24”)
- Wood burners and tips
 - thewoodcraftshop.com
1-800-379-2278
- Craft Supply
 - woodturnerscatalogue.com
1-800-551-8876
- 90-100% rubbing alcohol
 - Local pharmacies
- Priddle Style Wood Vaporizing System
(build it yourself branding wood burner using car battery charger)
www.svwoodturners.org/TipsTricks/PriddleStyleWoodVaporizer

- Colwood Electronics
44 main St.
Farmingdale, New Jersey 07727
Phone No. 732-938-5556
Web address: woodburning.com

RESOURCES: (Books)

- ***Great Book of Woodburning*, Lora Irish**
- ***Woodburning with Style*, Simon Easton**
- ***Pen and Ink Techniques*, Frank Lohan**
- ***Pyrography Designs*, Norma Gregory**
- ***Gourd Pyrography*, Jim Widess**