

Turning a Tulip

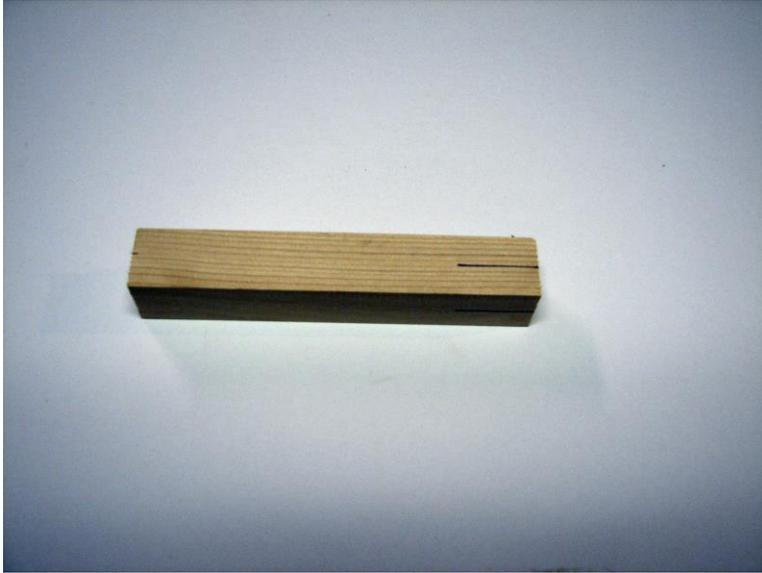
by John Wolf

I was visiting a woodworking store the other day and spotted a turned tulip sitting on a shelf. I don't recall seeing plans for turning one of these, so I hope you find this helpful.

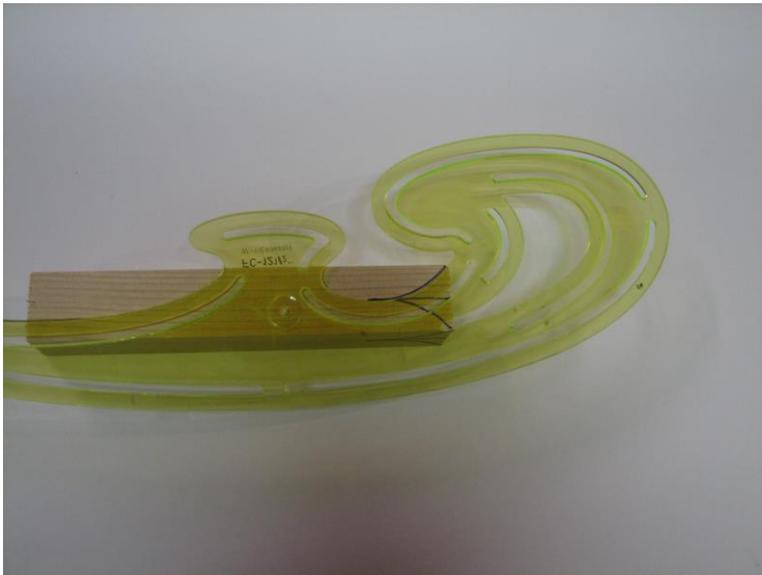
I start with a piece of square straight-grained wood. In this case I'm using stock ripped from a piece of scrap 2 X 4 construction lumber. I have made these tulips in several sizes, but I like those from 1-inch square stock the best. I cut the piece about 6 inches long. The jaws on my chuck will securely hold this size of square stock directly without having to turn a spigot first. Your chuck may require a different approach to hold the stock securely.



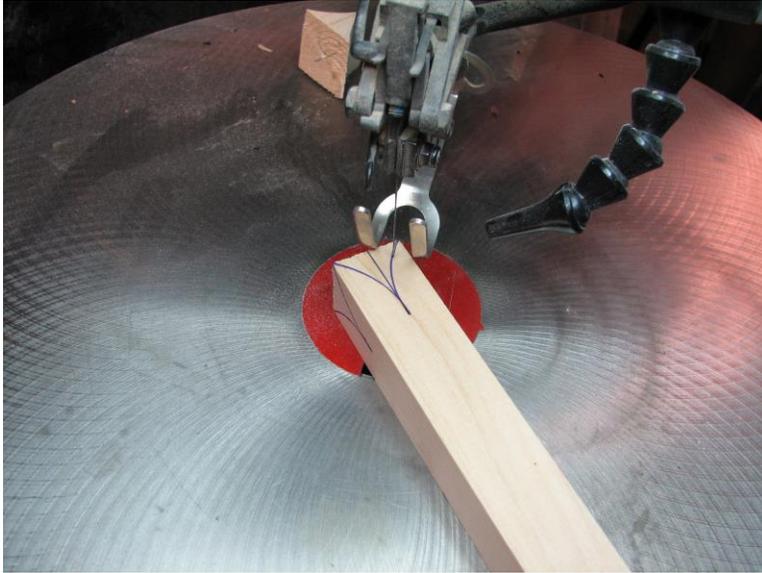
The end of the stock that will become the blossom end of the tulip must have a centerline marked down two adjacent sides for about 1 inch in length.



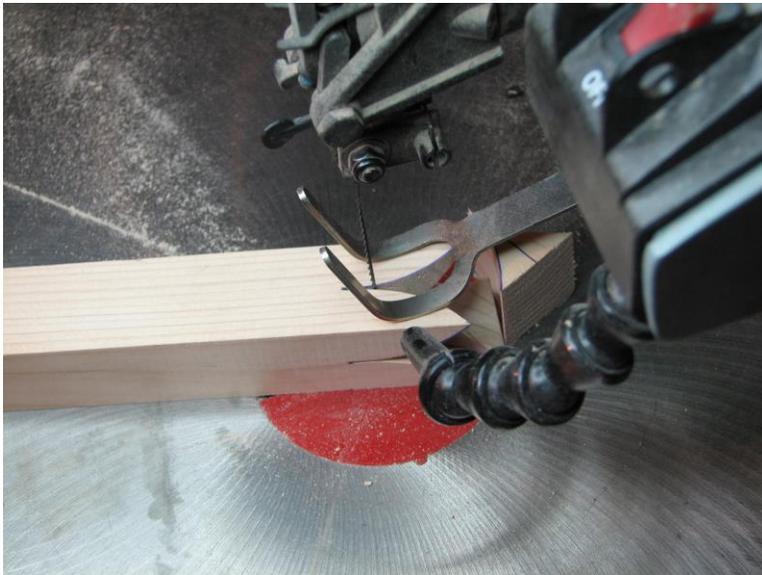
Use a French curve to draw a visually pleasing curve from one end of the centerline to the corner. Flip the French curve over to the other side of that same face of the blank and repeat the process. This forms a curved “V” shape centered on the side with the mouth of the “V” at the end of the blank. Repeat this layout process on the adjacent side.



Use a scroll saw, coping saw or similar tool to cut along the “V” shaped curves you have just drawn.



Flip the block and cut out the other “V.” This creates the mouth of the tulip flower.



Mount the blank in your chuck with the recently cut end on the tailstock side.

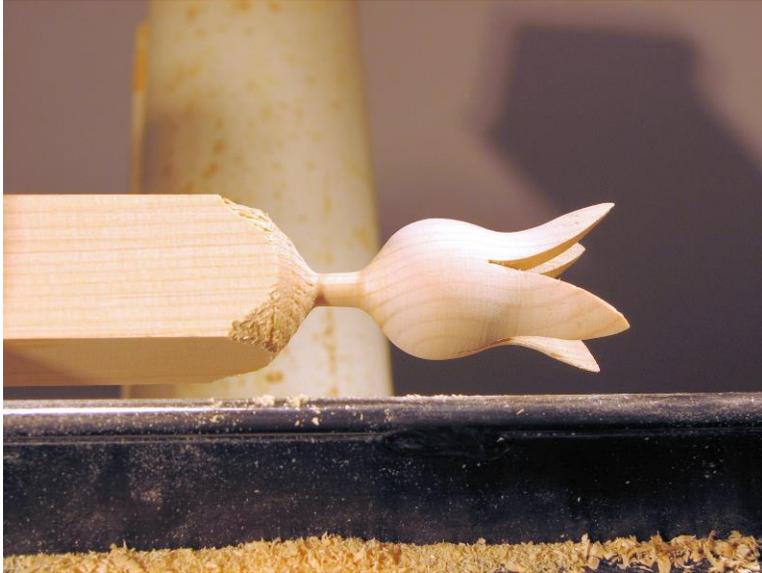


Using a sharp spindle gouge delicately turn the flower shape starting at the very tip of the flower. The tip has only a small amount of wood that needs to be removed. Proceed with care! Further down the flower there is more wood to be removed. With the wood spinning it is easy to see the cut out shape of the “V” that will help you gauge when the profile is “OK”.



Stop the lathe periodically to determine whether you have made the flower round without remaining flat spots.

Continue turning the flower until you have a shape that is approximately like a tulip. Gently sand the turned contour, and then stop the lathe to sand the saw-cut surfaces as well.



Turn the first 1/2 inch of the flower's stem just below the bowl. I reduce it to a diameter that looks appropriate rather than measuring it. That said, mine are generally between 1/8 and 3/16 diameter. Once you have done this first section of stem, proceed to turn the next 1/2 inch down to its finished diameter. Repeat this process until you have made all the stem you can without running into your chuck. Turning the stem in this step-wise fashion greatly reduces the risk of breaking it.



Remove your tulip from the chuck. You may find your tulip quite satisfactory and without need of further embellishment. I often color mine, however, typically with water based transparent stains. Some times I glue the bases of several together for a grouping. On other occasions I have cut the stems free from the turning base and placed them in a turned weed pot.

