

Embellishment of Lids

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Adding your own touch to the lid of a box or bowl takes it to another level. There are many different types of embellishments to try. We will only be able to cover a few in this demo.

This demo is not about lid shape or fit but those are important to a successful piece. A tight lid fit is something woodturners do mostly to impress other woodturners. You sometimes need a tight fit during the turning process so you can finish the shape of the lid by using the base as a jam chuck for the lid but if the lid is on a functional box, you might want to loosen the fit after the lid has been completed to allow for a one handed lid removal.

I will show you a technique that I use to hold the lid in the chuck to do final detail work so that a jam fit on the base is not needed.

Lid shape is another thing to consider. If the box is functional the lid has to have a gripping spot so it can be removed without a fight. If the box is small enough (under about 4") a flare or overhang is a good place to grab the lid. A knob or a finial (not a delicate finial) is also useful to lift the lid if the lid is not a tight fit. A lid over 4 inches wide really requires a strong knob for lid removal.

Some types of embellishments:

Beads or grooves...as an embellishment or as a frame for an inlay or textured band.

Inlays

- Cabochon-stone or wood
- Stone "donuts"
- Buttons
- Earrings
- Marbles
- String or cord
- Small beads
- Other found objects...not limited to round.
- Grommets

Textures

- Chatter work-with or without color
- Spirals with Sorby tool or Elf
- Lines made with threading tool
- Sandblasting
- Pyrography using burning pens or brands
- Carving
- Inset wire dots
- Paint

Knobs or finials

Added knob or finial

Knob included as part of the shape

Other materials used as a knob or finial

Making a wood cabochon:

Chose the wood for its color, grain or for something that makes it interesting, like a bark inclusion. Making a cabochon to inlay into a lid is a great way to use those very small pieces of beautiful wood that you can't bring yourself to throw away.

Burl is a great choice which will give an interesting pattern. A piece of wood with bark inclusions or voids is also very effective...just fill the voids with something. You can use crushed stone, sawdust, coffee (for a very dark color), cinnamon (for a reddish color), curry (for a yellowish color), etc. Keep filling the void with the filler material and flood with thin CA. Add the CA in a number of small fills and keep adding filler material as needed. Try to avoid using accelerator until you have totally filled the space. It will go off by itself eventually...just don't rush it. The accelerator could cause the CA to go off too fast and that will create a foamy appearance. Give the glue plenty of time to completely set.

Turn a waste block with a very flat face. Most cabochons will be less than 1" in diameter and the waste block doesn't need to be much larger than that. the waste block and be attached to a small face plate or held in a chuck with a tenon.

Flatten the back of the wood for the cabochon on a belt sander...a very flat surface is vital.

Attach the cabochon wood to the waste block with double stick tape. Be sure to use woodturners tape or carpet tape. It has to be very sticky and strong.

Use a tailstock live center without a point if possible and put some pressure on the wood so the tape really gets a good hold.

Turn the cabochon round and start shaping the top. Remove the tailstock when you need to finish the shape. Sand through the grits and use whatever finish you like.

Pry the piece off with a chisel or a skew.

Clean the sticky off (if you need to) with acetone...don't use mineral spirits.

You can leave the sticky residue on the waste block until it starts to build up in spots and makes an un-level surface. The sticky residue on the cabochon might interfere with the glue you use to inlay it, so remove that.

Design considerations:

Think about the proportions...the size of the inlay plus the framing bead or groove in relation to the size of the lid. Also consider the side profile. Your inlay should appear to be part of the flow of the shape...not look like something stuck on.

When you are planning to embellish a lid, leave a bit of extra wood in the top of the lid. That will give you some wiggle room in case you don't get the inlay right the first time. Don't forget the bottom of the box. You can create a texture, bead or groove on the bottom that will repeat something you did on the lid. You might also think about creating a small detail inside the top of the lid...give the eye a surprise!

Texturing:

Simple bands of texture can be very effective. Using a chatter tool is an easy way to get an unusual textural pattern on the endgrain of a box lid. If you are using a light wood and want to add some color, put a light base color down first, chatter through it then lightly touch other colors to the patterned areas to add depth and interest. Cut small v-grooves to set off areas of pattern.

Dark wood with chatter work gives an elegant texture and you can also add color to dark wood. It will give a subtle depth to the pattern.

If you don't like the chatter pattern you create...just erase with your gouge and try again. The density of the wood, speed of the lathe, type of tool you are chattering with, pressure on the tool and the speed you move the tool all change the pattern. You will never get two alike. A hard wood is the best material for chattering but try it on softer woods too. You might like it.

Spirals can be created using the Sorby spiraling tool or the Decorating Elf. You can add color or just let the texture speak for itself.

A band of small lines is easy to make with a point tool, small skew or a threading tool. A beading tool also makes short work of creating a nice bead or series of even beads.

Any texturing tool has a learning curve so chuck up a piece of hard wood and practice until you know you can do what you want on your finished box.

Carving

A carved design makes an excellent embellishment. You can carve using any tools you are comfortable with. I like to use a rotary tool with different sizes and shapes of burrs to create different lines and patterns. A reciprical carver or hand held carving tool will give another look to your carving.

Pyrography

You can add an interesting embellishment using a Pyrography pen to create lines, patterns, textures or something pictorial. You might also try using a brand for an over all pattern. Burning on a carved surface adds another level of interest.

Milk Paint

Milk paint over a textured surface is wonderful or you can cut through the paint. Try layering several colors...often with black as the last layer...then burnish the surface to expose some of the wood and the other colors. The burnishing also gives a lovely sheen to the surface.

Other kinds of inlays

Think about other materials that you can inlay into a lid. Make a groove and lay in cord, yarn, pine needles, metal shavings, a string of small beads, etc...try whatever you can think of. Some materials will work better with a large lid so think about how flexible the material is. A practice lid is small and easy to make and you can just cut away an experiment that didn't work. Finding the right glue to hold the material without changing the look is something to experiment with.

Inlaying crushed stone is very effective. Carve a pattern and fill with the stone to color the design. You can also use other materials like finely ground coffee, resin, spices, sawdust, glitter...anything that can be held in the groove or pattern you created in the wood. Use CA or epoxy to imbed the material then turn and sand to smooth the surface.

Drill various sizes of holes in a pleasing pattern in dark wood and inset silver, brass or aluminum wire into the holes. Clip the excess wire almost to the surface, file it, then turn, sand and finish so the wire ends will appear as shiny dots in the dark surface.

You can melt pewter, aluminum or solder into cracks for an elegant look. Hold the cooled material in the void with CA then sand and finish.