

So you think you can really turn a top? Here's your chance to prove it

Turn on to tops this month. Before May 11, spin yourself the best-looking, longest-turning spinner you can create, bring it to the meeting and we'll have a spin-off to see who really is the top-turning champ of them all.

While you're at it, how about turning a couple extra for our "tops for tots" program at the Ronald

McDonald House at Stanford? Over the past year, we've donated around a hundred tops which are eagerly seized on by the seriously ill youngsters (and their families) during their stay at the House.

Bring your spare tops to the meeting and we'll see that they get to the kids. — Peter Pipe

THERE'S no one right way to make a top. In fact, everybody seems to have his or her own way of making them. This is the way I do it, a fairly simple approach but challenging enough to be interesting. Most of my tops spin for a minute or more, some as long as two minutes. Kids seem to like the ones decorated with a touch of felt pens. If you're a little more ambitious, you might try out your chatter tool or other decorations.

For me, top-making is a spindle-turning project (grain running from headstock to tailstock) although some, notably Ron Newcomb, do beautiful things with the grain running the other way. For best results, use wood with a dense, clear grain. (Heavier wood makes a better-spinning top. Knots are no-no's since they tend to unbalance the top.) The diameter of the top should probably not exceed 2 inches for use by little people. Usually, I make a couple of tops from a single piece of wood about 4 inches long — but watch your knuckles finishing Top No. 2.

Begin with the set-up in Figure 1, using the tailstock if you feel the need in the early stages. (1) Rough turn your wood, including the cone, and also rough in a little way behind the cone so you'll have less to cut out after you lose the support of the tailstock. (2) Remove the tailstock, if used, and finish the cone and its point. (This is a critical step; if the cone isn't balanced and sharply pointed, the top won't work well.)

(3) If you want decoration (line or chatter) on the *underneath* part of the cone, now is the time. Hereafter, don't touch

this part of the cone. (4) Cut the top of the cone (See Figure 2). I usually leave some

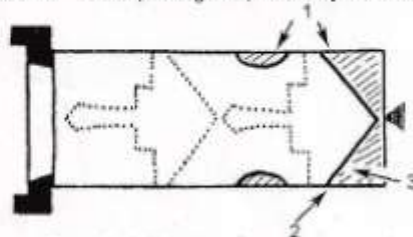


Figure 1. Initial set-up.

weight at the edge and hollow the top slightly, but see Figure 3 for more ideas. (5) If you want decoration of the *top* of the cone, again, this is the moment. Do it as soon as you have room to work and before you weaken the support as you reduce down to the stem.

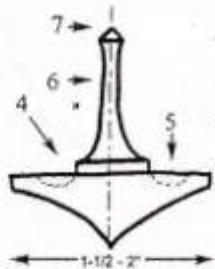


Figure 2. The shape I usually try for.

(6) Make the stem about 3/16-inch or so in diameter (a fatter stem is harder to spin, especially for little fingers). Make the stem sides parallel or slightly tapered (see Figure 2). (7) Part off the stem. (If the top of the stem has a good clean point, you'll be able to spin your top upside down. A good point takes a delicate touch. In com-

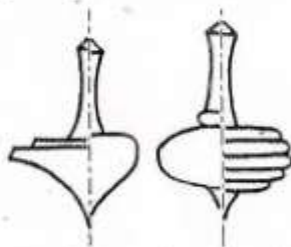


Figure 3. Other shapes suggested by Richard Raffan.

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pleting this step, it will help if you rough in the cone of the second top to give you a little working space.)

Typically, I use a gouge for most steps,

although a skew works nicely for shaping the cone and for the final parting off. — PP