

Turn a Lidded Canister

With a few basic turning tools, you can create beautiful storage for the kitchen

BY MIKE MAHONEY



Perhaps I'm biased, but I think every kitchen should have at least one wooden canister. In my own kitchen, there are wooden canisters that hold sugar, spices, flour, and even spaghetti. I prefer these canisters over store-bought ones because they have more character, and it's nice to have the kitchen counter decorated with beautiful and useful storage containers that I made.

Lidded canisters aren't difficult to make, and you don't need special turning tools. I'll show you how to make one with just a roughing gouge, bowl gouge, spindle gouge, skew, parting tool, and round-nose scraper. At my wife's request, this canister is sized for coffee grounds. It's made from highly figured cottonwood with a walnut pull. However, you can use any hardwood species you'd like.

Rough out the body and lid

You need a fairly large blank, 6 in. square by 9 in. long, for this canister. The best source for blanks this size is a log still in the round, but working with green wood requires that you allow the body and lid of the canister to dry for a while after roughing them out, so it doesn't warp out of shape.

To rough them out, mount the blank between centers (I use a 4-prong spur drive in the headstock), and turn the blank round with a 1-in. roughing gouge. Next, use a skew to turn a tenon on each end of the blank. After the tenons

Rough out, then wait

Green wood is the best source of blanks big enough for most canisters, but you'll have to turn it in two stages. Turn the lid and body rough and let them dry at least 30 days before completing the canister.



Turn two tenons. Do this with a skew after turning the blank round but oversize. The tenons are used to secure the body and lid in the chuck so that you can hollow and shape them.

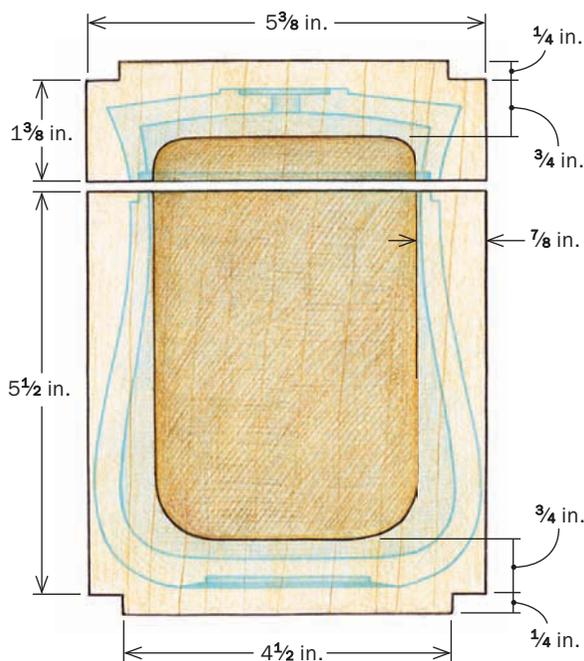


Separate the lid and body. Use a parting tool: The less material you remove at this step, the better the grain of the lid and body will match when the canister is completed.



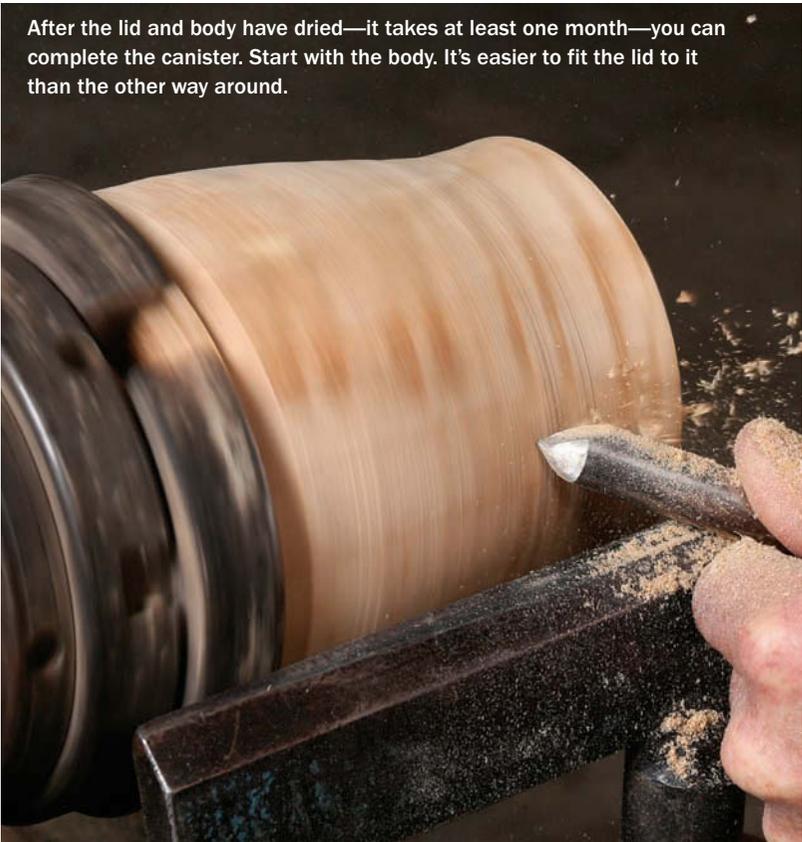
Hollow the body. Mahoney uses a long bit held in a turning gauge as a depth gauge (far left). He stops drilling about $\frac{1}{2}$ in. before he reaches final depth. Hollow the body in stages, starting with the top third (left), leaving the wall just thick enough to accommodate the final shape. Do the same for the middle third, then the bottom third.

ROUGH TURNING DIMENSIONS



Do the same for the lid. The goal here is to remove enough wood to speed up the drying process without getting too close to the final dimensions.

Shape and hollow the body

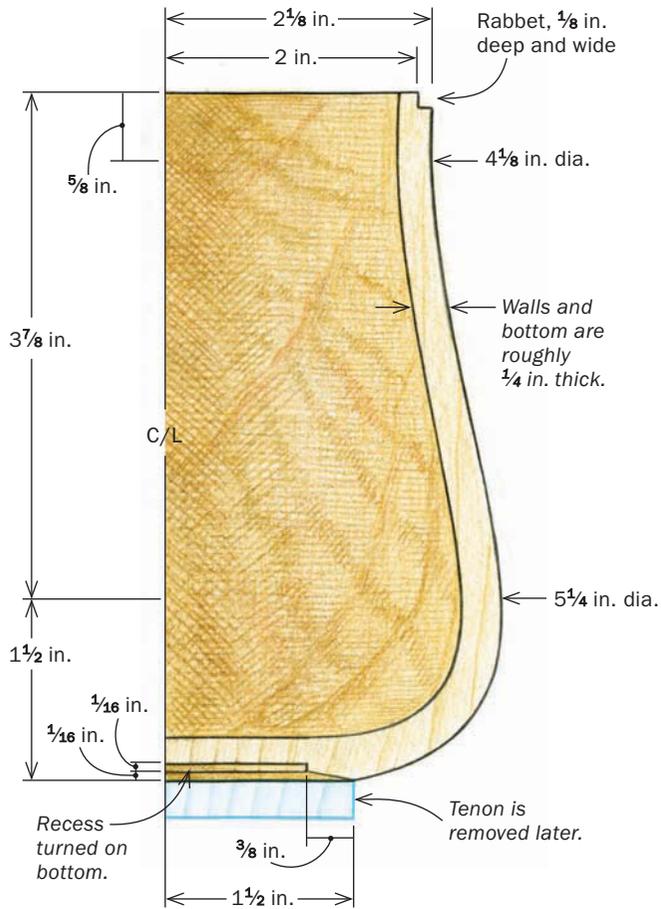


Shape the upper section. Using a $\frac{1}{2}$ -in. bowl gouge, refine the shape. With figured woods, Mahoney keeps the shape simple, allowing the figure to do its thing.



Rabbet the lip. Mahoney uses a skew to cut straight in and create a square corner.

BODY DIMENSIONS



are complete, use a narrow parting tool to separate the lid from the body. I make the lid's height one-fifth of the canister's overall length.

Now secure the lid in the chuck using the tenon you just turned, and slightly hollow the inside of the lid with a $\frac{1}{2}$ -in. bowl gouge. Take the lid out of the chuck and mount the canister's body. Drill a hole in the center of the blank, stopping $\frac{1}{2}$ in. above the final depth. Then, use the $\frac{1}{2}$ -in. bowl gouge to hollow the interior. When hollowing, work in stages. Hollow the top third, then the middle third, and finally the bottom third, stopping at the bottom of the drilled hole.

After taking the body from the chuck, tape the lid and body together with the open ends facing out. This helps speed up the drying. Write the date on the tape joining them and set the parts aside to dry. It takes between 30 and 120 days. The surest way to gauge



Complete the hollowing. Just as when roughing out, work down the interior in thirds, bringing the wall to its final $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. thickness.



Scrape the bottom. A round-nose scraper is the best tool to create a clean transition from the walls to the bottom, and to smooth the surface.

when the rough turnings are dry is to weigh them periodically. When they are no longer losing weight, they're dry.

Shape the lid and body after drying

After the body and lid have finished drying, you can safely turn them to their final shape and dimensions without worrying that they'll one day warp so badly that the lid gets stuck on.

Start with the body. Mount it in the chuck and use a $\frac{1}{2}$ -in. bowl gouge to refine the exterior shape. When using highly figured wood like this cottonwood, I keep the



Sand where you can. At this point, you can smooth the interior and top two-thirds of the outside. Start rough and work up to 400 grit.

Shape the bottom



Continue the body's curve into its lower section and then hollow the bottom to create a stable base.

Fit the body on a jam chuck. The lip of the chuck must fit snugly into the canister's body and the body should seat firmly on the chuck's shoulder.



Shape the bottom. A $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. spindle gouge works well to create an elegant transition from the sides to the bottom.

shape simple and let the figure shine. Because of the chuck, you can only turn the upper two-thirds of the body's exterior. The bottom third is turned after you've hollowed the inside and can flip the body to get access to the bottom.

When you're done shaping the upper body, use a skew to turn a rabbet into the top lip, then move on to the interior. The process is the same as when you roughed it out. Work down in thirds, turning the wall to its final thickness of about $\frac{1}{4}$ in., working on the top third before moving to the middle and then to the bottom third. The canister's bottom should be about $\frac{3}{8}$ in. thick. You can use a round-nose scraper to smooth the transition from wall to bottom. Now, sand both the inside and the outside of the body.

The next step is to take the body out of the chuck so you can turn the lower third of the exterior and the bottom. However, do not clamp the body in the chuck's jaws, which will mar the wood or even break it. Instead, mount a jam chuck in the jaws and pinch the body between it and the tailstock. The jam chuck should have a lip that fits snugly into the canister's body.



Remove the tenon. Take very light cuts with the $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. spindle gouge to completely remove the tenon.

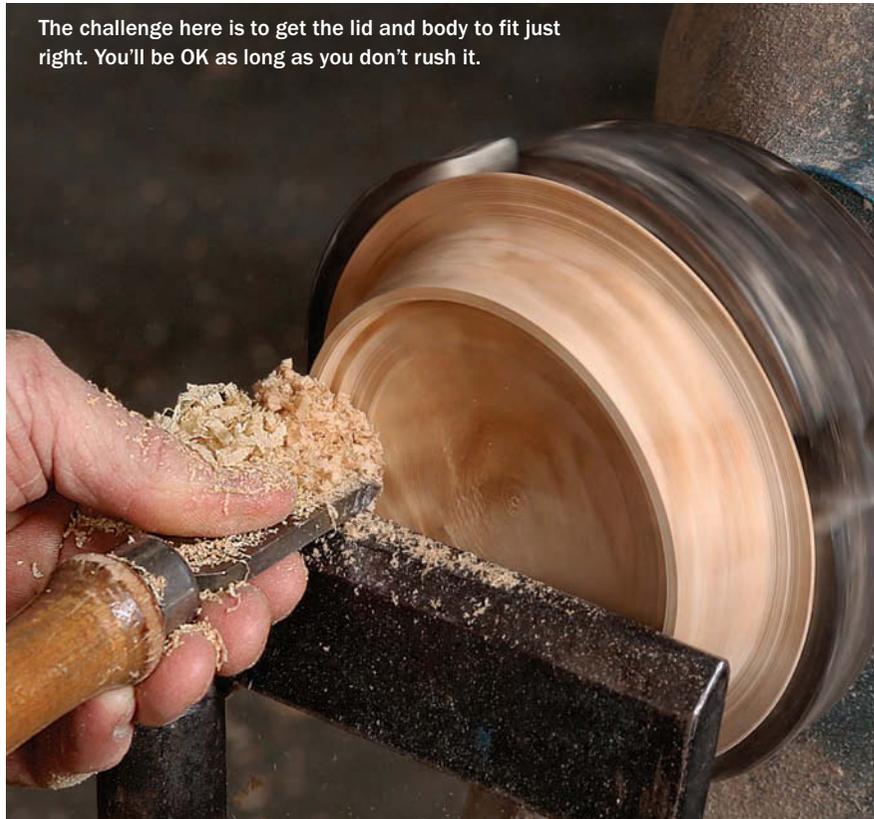


Relieved bottom is more stable. A truly flat bottom can be tough to turn. Instead, hollow the middle slightly to create a narrow lip, which acts like a circular foot.

Fit the lid to the body

After you have the body in place, turn the lower third of the sides. Then remove the tenon from the bottom by taking very light cuts with a 1/4-in. spindle gouge. Pull the tailstock away and relieve the bottom so that there's just a narrow lip for the canister to rest on. This is far easier than attempting to create a truly flat bottom. Sand these newly turned areas to match the rest of the body.

Now that the body is done, it's time to finish turning the lid. The process is the same as it was for the body. Remount the lid in the chuck using the tenon. Refine the exterior, leaving the section down by the chuck for later. Next, drill a hole through the center of the lid for a wooden tenon that

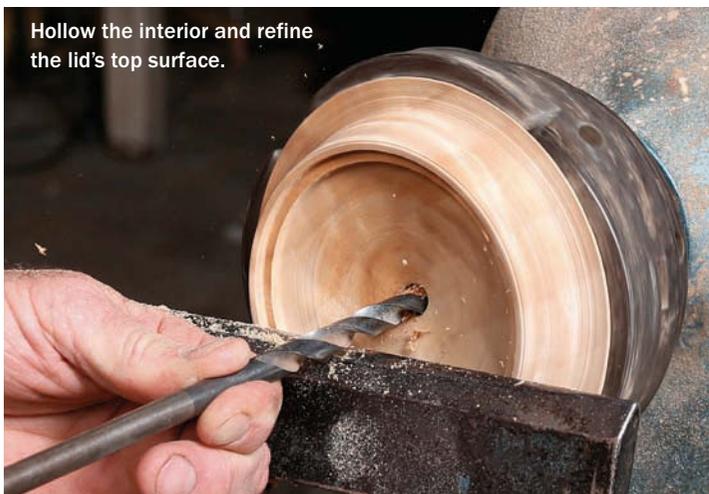


The challenge here is to get the lid and body to fit just right. You'll be OK as long as you don't rush it.

Cut a rabbet. After shaping the outside to match the body, use a skew to create a rabbet inside the lid (left). Move carefully and stop often to check the fit between the body and lid (below). You want it snug.

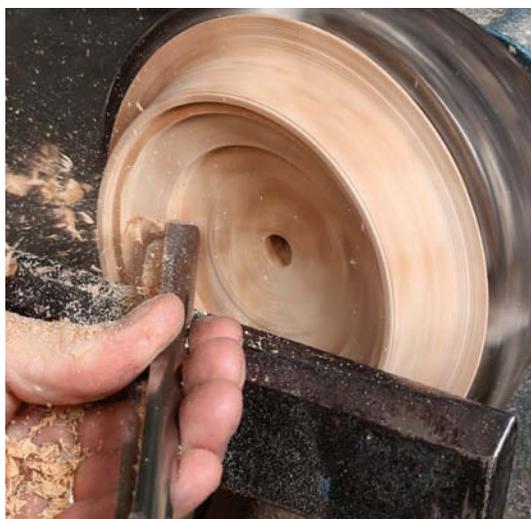


Turn the lid



Hollow the interior and refine the lid's top surface.

Drill for the pull. This $\frac{3}{8}$ -in.-dia. hole is for a tenon—it looks like a wooden bolt—that joins the pull to the lid.

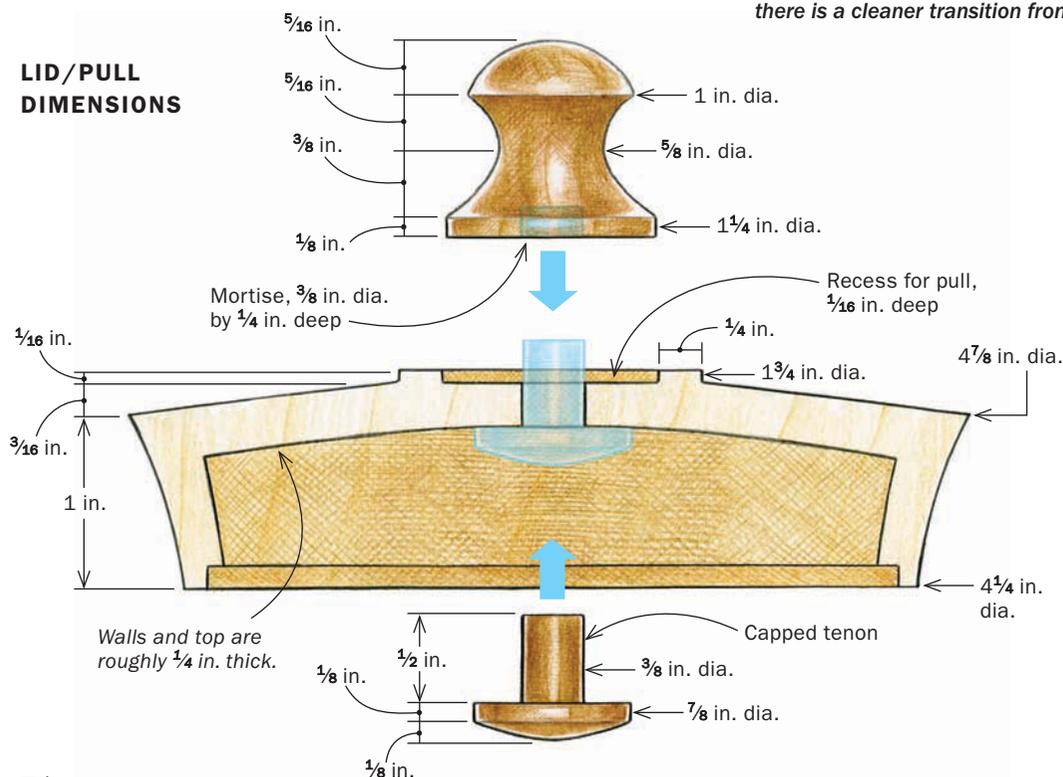


Clean up the inside. Work out from the center and get the lid to its final thickness before you go deeper.



Cut a shallow recess for the pull. With the pull sitting in this recess, there is a cleaner transition from lid to pull.

LID/PULL DIMENSIONS



will attach the pull to the lid. After the hole is drilled, turn the lip to fit over the body, then hollow out the interior. The sides should be $\frac{1}{4}$ in. thick and the top about $\frac{3}{8}$ in. thick. Sand the interior and as much of the exterior as you can.

Completing the exterior requires another jam chuck. After you've made it, mount the lid and finish it up. There is a shallow recess on the top that the pull fits into. After you're done with the recess, sand the exterior of the lid.

All that remains is to turn the pull. It's turned like a spindle, with the grain running the pull's length. Mount the blank in the chuck, turn it round, and clean up the exposed end. Drill a hole into the exposed

Add the pull

end for the tenon. Now shape the pull as far as you can while it is still mounted in the chuck. There will be a bit of the top that needs to be refined after you've parted the pull from the blank. To clean up this last bit, make a jam chuck that holds the bottom of the pull. Take very light cuts, as friction is the only thing holding the pull in the jam chuck.

A capped tenon joins the pull to the lid. It is shaped like a bolt with a thin, round head and slides in from below the lid and into the pull. The head registers against the

It needs to be strong enough to withstand years of use, so use a separate, capped tenon to secure it to the lid.



Start with the capped tenon. For strength, orient the grain like a spindle. After turning the round head and stud, part the tenon from the blank.



The pull needs a mortise. A tenon comes up through the lid and joins the two (far left). Use a narrow spindle gouge and do as much of the shaping as you can (left) before parting off the pull. Then mount it in a shallow mortise cut into a block of wood to finish off the top.

bottom of the lid. You can turn this between centers and part it off, or turn it as you did the pull, with one end of the blank in a chuck.

After it's turned and you've glued on the pull, apply finish to the canister, inside and out. I prefer a few coats of polyurethane that's been thinned with mineral spirits (three parts polyurethane to one part mineral spirits). When the last coat of finish has dried, put the canister to work in the kitchen and start making the next one. □

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Glue it to the lid. Align the pull's grain with the lid's. Spread glue on the tenon, the pull's bottom, and the lid to create a strong long-grain glue joint.