

Sanding Fids



These shop-made tools work like curved detail sanders, without a power cord

BY KING HEIPLE

A fid is traditionally a tapered wooden tool that's used by sail makers to stretch holes in canvas or to stretch and size rope grommets. In Italy, furniture makers developed a similarly shaped tool for sanding wood. I saw a picture of a sanding fid a few years ago, and I have since made several versions of this curiously named tool.

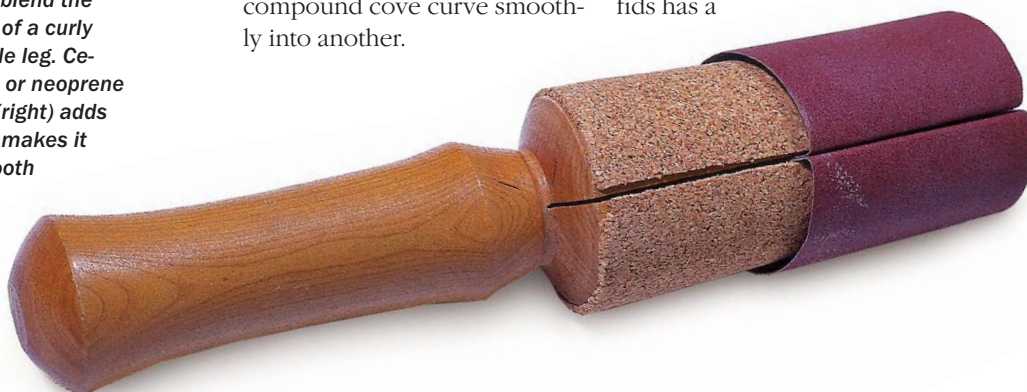
Fids turn out to be widely useful in the shop, and making one is a quick and straightforward project, even if you have only very basic wood-turning skills. Fids are particularly useful for sanding carvings, furniture legs and turnings with varying curves, as well as for fairing one compound cove curve smoothly into another.

As anyone who's used a drum or disc sander knows, supported sandpaper lasts two to 10 times longer than handheld sandpaper. Even better, with a fid you can use almost any sandpaper or sanding cloth, without the need for snap locks, hooks and loops or adhesive backing. And you can change from one grit to another in about 10 seconds.

My fids happen to be cherry, because I like tools to look good and feel nice, but even a construction-grade 2x2 would work fine. The handles can be of any design that meets your fancy, from a straight cylinder to something better than mine. Each of my two longer fids has a

A FID IS PERFECT FOR SMOOTHING ONE CURVE INTO ANOTHER.

The author (top) uses a fid to refine and blend the curved ankle of a curly maple cabriole leg. Cementing cork or neoprene on the taper (right) adds pliability and makes it easier to smooth curves.



MAKING A FID

You need only basic turning skills to make a sanding fid. The first step is turning the handle. It can be any design that suits you. Once you've turned the handle, work on the tapered portion with a large roughing gouge skewed at 45°. Take a light cut, starting at the tip and gradually backing up (photo 1).

No matter what your desired degree of taper, it's important that it be smooth. Any bump or curve will prevent a close fit of the sandpaper, and dips will create unsupported soft spots. As you develop the taper, check the flatness frequently using a straightedge (photo 2).

It helps to set the lathe's tool rest at the angle you wish to achieve. Then gradually develop your taper parallel to the rest. Take a finishing cut when the taper is essentially complete (photo 3) or finish smoothing with sandpaper.

Turn the corners at the base and tip with a spindle gouge (photo 4), then finish the fid while it's still on the lathe.

The next and last step is to cut the kerf on the bandsaw (photo 5). For safety, grip the handle of the fid with a parallel jaw clamp. Saw as straight as possible up the center of the taper from the tip to the base.



1



2



3



4



5

6½-in.-long tapered portion, and my shorter fid has a 3-in.-long tapered portion. The thicker of the long fids tapers from 1³/₁₆ in. dia. to ⁷/₁₆ in. dia.; the thinner one tapers from 1¹/₁₆ in. dia. to ³/₈ in. dia. The short fid is 2¼ in. dia. at its base and tapers ¹/₄ in. over its 3-in. length, about as close to a true cylinder as you can get and still lock on sandpaper tightly.

The degree of taper is not critical, and you may need to turn several variations, but the taper must be uniform—that is to say, flat—or your fid will not hold sandpaper tightly or support it well. Once you have turned the fid on the lathe, go to the bandsaw and cut a kerf exactly down the middle of the fid, from the narrow end of the taper to the handle. Keep the kerf as straight as possible. The kerf may have to be sanded a bit, but slightly rough inner surfaces will help it hold the paper.

A reusable sandpaper pattern is easy to make. Take a piece of paper at least as long as the taper and wrap it around the fid. Holding the paper snugly, run

your thumbnail up the kerf on one side of the taper, and also mark the length of the taper. Unwrap the paper, and you'll have the pattern for your fid, but you must add ³/₈ in. to each long side for the fold-in flaps. Now spray the paper pattern with adhesive and mount it on a scrap of plywood or pressboard. Cut this pattern out, sand its edges and label it. Use the

pattern to cut a set of sandpaper fid covers in varying grits, and you'll save time in the future. Very lightweight sandpaper (A weight) does not stay on a fid well, but heavier sandpaper and sanding cloth work beautifully.

Lately I've taken to cementing either a ¹/₈-in. layer of cork or a ¹/₈-in. neoprene sheet to the sur-

face to make the sanding of transitions from one curve to another smooth and easy. I suspect there will be those who say, "Just use a dowel or your finger." But I enjoy turning fids. And a fid makes a useful addition to your tool chest and to your vocabulary. □

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