

Tree to Bowl: Two bowl demos in one Program ...by Chuck Engstrom

MCW April 9, 2026 live at the Woodworkers Club and broadcast on Zoom by our a/v team.

MCW Member Chuck Engstrom will present a quick course in turning a mixed-grain bowl from a green blank rounded from a log. In general, the first step is “finding” the bowl in the log and removing the pith. Next is the removal of much of what is not wanted, either with the chain saw or, more precisely, with a band saw. Chuck will begin with such a green blank that is already prepared and demonstrate how it is roughed on the lathe into a thick bowl shape that will then need to be set aside for a lengthy period of slow drying, in hopes that it doesn’t crack. It is guaranteed to oval and warp. Here, he will switch to a second, similar roughout that has already dried and warped a bit and put it back on the lathe again to turn it to a final shape, ready to sand and finish. Tree to round bowl... that’s a great demo for our beginning turners and a good refresher for others.

Chuck will discuss a couple of ways of mounting each blank, which each presenting different issues (there are too many ways to cover them all), and a simple method for drying the green roughout (again, too many possibilities to cover them all). He’ll talk about appropriate bowl turning tools and will harass you relentlessly about the importance of frequent tool sharpening, which is critical to achieving the shape and surface you should want to end up with before you start sanding and finishing.

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Chuck Engstrom is an MCW Member who has demonstrated for us three times previously, his last being right before covid, when he showed us many ways for holding wood on the lathe. He has also served as a Panelist on two Panel Critiques, his last being in September of 2023. We appreciate Chuck’s membership and activities, particularly given that he lives far away in Chestertown, MD on the Eastern Shore.

Chuck is, perhaps, better known in Chesapeake Woodturners community in Annapolis, where is has been President and held other roles over the years, including his current position as Board Member at Large (an office of great respect). He has taught woodturning classes at Maryland Hall for many years. He is also a professional, well known for his huge, high-end (pun intended) chandeliers.



As Chuck tells it, he turned his first bowl in 1980 -- walnut with lots of tearout and one broken screw still in its bottom -- on a friend's Powermatic 90. He started turning “for real” in 2000 when he went to work for Deep Landing Workshop (www.deeplandingworkshop.com) and was invited to turn the spindles for the chandeliers they manufacture from scratch. By now, he has probably done well over fifty, in sizes up to nearly seven-feet tall.

He says he has tried most everything else in turning: bowls, boxes, pepper grinders, porch posts and columns, stairway balusters, spinning tops and wands for kids, etc. He is now retired from teaching woodturning classes for eight years at Maryland Hall for the Creative Arts in Annapolis, MD and occasionally at Woodcraft in New Castle, DE. He is a member of Chesapeake Woodturners, Montgomery County Woodturners, First State Woodturners, and AAW; he is headed for Raleigh this year. He has the usual turner's afflictions -- too much wood, too many tools.

Chuck offers a few words of guidance from David Pye:

“What I seek to achieve in my own work is to do a bit better. I set great store by the surface finish and the feel of the wood and also by the cleanness of the cutting: all the arises should be clean and all the curves should be fair, and so on. If you take enough trouble, endless trouble, that part turns out reasonably well – not every time, admittedly, but fairly often.”

And from Andy Warhol:

“Don’t think about making art, just get it done. Let everyone else decide if it’s good, or bad, whether they love it or hate it. While they are deciding, make even more art.”