



# Carving a Star Ornament

**Create colorful holiday ornaments with basic techniques**

*By Jim Sebring*

*Step-by-step photos by Jody Sebring*

Dress up your Christmas tree with handcarved stars! The stars are ideal for highlighting garlands or wreaths and make perfect stocking stuffers.

Carve the stars from a solid piece of basswood or butternut. To add interest, create laminated blanks by gluing together several thin pieces of colorful hardwood. The contrasting layers will be exposed as you carve the star.

I use an Automach reciprocating carver for the hardwood stars. I secure the blank in a homemade jig and use a  $\frac{3}{4}$ " straight chisel. If you are carving laminated stars without the aid of a reciprocating carver, use softer woods, such as cedar, basswood, or butternut, which are easier to carve.

Use spray adhesive to attach the paper pattern to a piece of stiff plastic, such as from a blister pack, to make a template. Cut the template carefully with a hobby knife and a straight edge to keep the size and angles accurate. Cut out the center so you can mark the chip carving lines on the blank.

Securely clamp hardwood stars in a vertical position before carving the points. Stars made from soft wood can be hand held, but be sure to wear a carving glove. I carve hundreds of stars each year and developed a holding fixture to speed production. Instructions for creating the custom holding jig are available at [www.woodcarvingillustrated.com](http://www.woodcarvingillustrated.com).



## STAR: PREPARING THE BLANK



1

**Glue up the blank.** (Optional) I use three different colors of wood. Sandwich the center layer between two matching pieces of wood. Then use a third color of wood for the outermost layers. Make sure the grain runs in the same direction on all of the pieces. Spread TiteBond II wood glue on both of the sides to be glued together and clamp the layers together overnight.



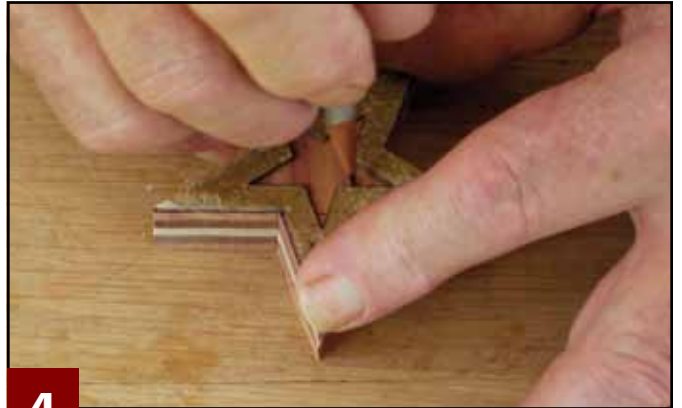
2

**Transfer the pattern to the blank.** Use a square to mark lines perpendicular to the direction of the grain. Make sure the top point of the star marked with an X runs with the grain of the wood. The grain runs from the point with the X toward the bottom of the star. Trace around the perimeter pattern with a pencil.



3

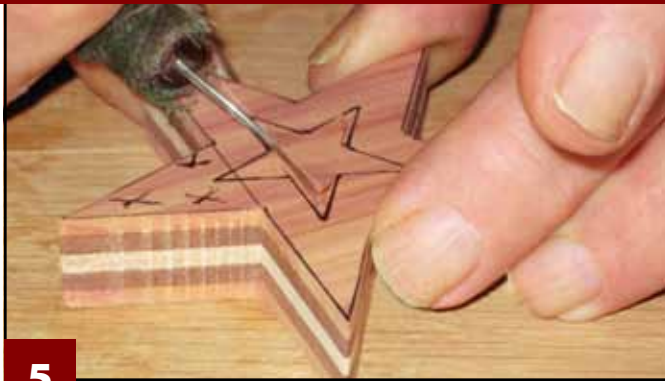
**Cut the blank.** Cut the V-shape from between the bottom two points. Cutting straight across the bottom points provides a flat surface to support the star during drilling. Use a #56 drill bit and drill a hole in the center of the top point for the hanger loop. Cut the remainder of the star outline.



4

**Trace the center star.** Align the X point on the pattern with the X point on the blank. Trace the center star design on to the blank. Flip the blank. Keep the template face up, align the X points, and trace the center design on the back of the blank.

## STAR: CARVING THE ORNAMENT



5

**Carve the center.** Use a bench knife or chip carving knife. Make angled cuts from the lines down to the center. It may take several cuts. The cuts converge at the center of the star, which should end up about 1/4" deep. Carve the center on both sides. Then draw a centerline around the perimeter of the blank.



6

**Make the stop cuts.** Securely clamp the star and use a small hobby saw. Make a stop cut at each intersection of the star's points. Angle the stop cut from the centerline along the perimeter of the star to the edge of the chip-carved design in the center. Make the cuts on both sides of the star.



7

**Begin carving the points.** Follow the suggested cut order and direction to avoid breaking off the points. Clamp the star and use a reciprocating carver or mallet and chisel for hardwood stars. Use a knife for soft wood stars. Hold the blade at an angle so the center of the point is highest. Make cuts 1, 2, and 3.



8

**Finish carving the points.** Flip the blank over and repeat cuts 1, 2, and 3 on the reverse side. Continue making the cuts in the order and direction suggested below. Turn and flip the star as required. Some of the cuts may feel awkward, but it is the best progression to avoid breaking the points.



9

**Finish the stars.** Sand the flat planes of the points with a piece of sandpaper glued to a flat piece of wood. Glue the hanger loop in place with cyanoacrylate (CA) glue. Apply two light coats of Deft lacquer, sanding lightly between coats.

**ONLINE BONUS**

Plans for the star holding jig are available on our website. [woodcarvingillustrated.com](http://woodcarvingillustrated.com)

**materials & tools**

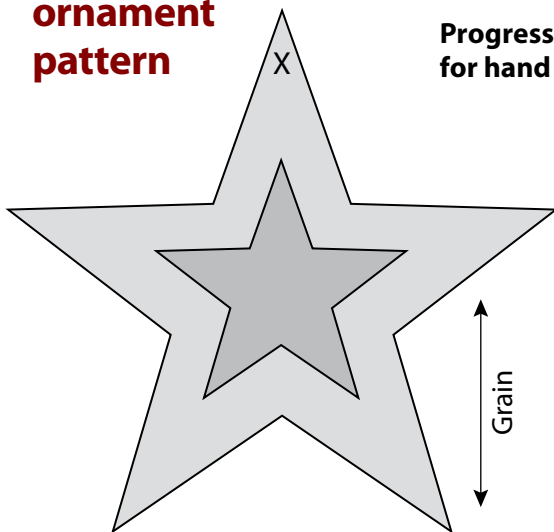
**MATERIALS:**

- 5 each 1/8" x 3" x 3" contrasting colors of wood (laminated star)
- 5/8" x 3" x 3" basswood, cedar, or butternut (solid star)
- Deft lacquer or finish of choice
- Tightbond II wood glue
- Eye hanger
- Sandpaper, 220 grit
- Cyanoacrylate glue

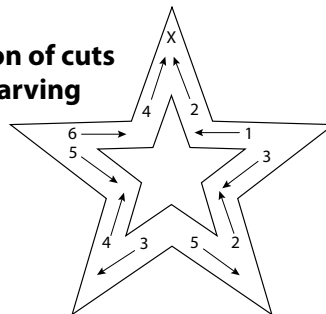
**TOOLS:**

- Chip carving knife or knife of choice
- Straight chisel and mallet or reciprocating power carver with straight chisel attachment (hardwood star)
- Saw of choice (to cut blanks)
- Hobby saw (to make stop cuts)
- Safety glove
- Drill with #56 twist bit

**Star ornament pattern**



**Progression of cuts for hand carving**



**About the Author**

*Jim Sebring lives in East Stroudsburg, Pa. He has been carving in the tramp-art style since 1995. His work has been on display in many historic venues and at the Northeast Woodcarvers Roundup in Honesdale, Pa.*

**Progression of cuts for power carving**

