

Straw-Stuffed Scarecrow

New technique creates unique straw texture

By Jim Hiser

You can't really call something a scarecrow if it's not stuffed with straw. For years, I struggled to find a way to create the look of straw texture in wood. I finally found a way to create a straw-like texture that was quick and easy to carve, but durable.

I also like this carving because it's easy to personalize. Add a fatter belly, change the shape of the hat, or add gloves to the hands. You can add a hatband to the hat, add a curl to the hat, or change the hat's shape altogether. Make the piece your own.

Getting Started

Transfer the pattern to the front and side. Cut both views with a band saw. Draw the major landmarks, such as the bottom of the hat, the hairline, the centerline on both arms and both legs, and the centerline of the body. Draw the bend in the scarecrow's left leg, and mark the wood to remove from the front of the right leg (the straight leg).

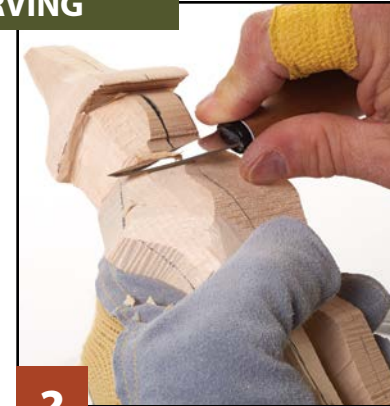


SCARECROW: ROUGHING OUT THE CARVING



1

Set in the hat. Carve along the hat lines with a V-gouge to separate the hat from the hair and face. Then, use a $\frac{3}{4}$ " (19mm) #3 gouge to remove the excess wood from alongside the face. Clean up the cuts with a carving knife. Repeat the process on the other side of the face. Round the corners of the hat and remove the saw marks with a knife.



2

Rough out the face and body. Remove the sharp corners and the saw marks with a knife. Round the face toward the centerline. Remove the wood from the front of the straight leg (the right leg) and carve the bend in the back of the left leg. Redraw the centerlines. Round the legs toward the centerline and to remove the saw marks. Work down toward the centerlines on the arms.



3

Rough out the head and neck. Draw the hat brim and use the $\frac{3}{4}$ " (19mm) #3 gouge to carve the brim to those lines. Use the knife to round the head under the hat a bit. Draw the collar and carve along the line with the V-gouge. With the V-gouge, refine the neck where it meets the collar. Finish rounding and shaping the legs with the knife.



4

Begin to separate the arms from the chest. Mark the width of the chest and the open areas between the arms and the body. Leave the arms heavy at this point; we can thin them later if needed. Use the knife to make three-sided chip cuts on the front to begin removing the wood between the arms and body.



5

Finish separating the arms from the chest. Mark the back of the openings, and carve from the back toward the front. Use $\frac{5}{8}$ " (16mm), $\frac{1}{2}$ " (13mm), and $\frac{1}{4}$ " (6mm) #5 gouges to hollow the chest or back as you carve the openings to make it easier to get the knife in. Carve from both directions until the cuts meet in the middle. Thin the arms as needed as you shape the openings.



6

Add the coat and hands. Mark the hands and the outline of the coat. Carve along the lines with the V-gouge. Use a knife to carve up to the V-groove to separate the coat and hands from the rest of the body and the legs. Then, mark the cuffs of the sleeves, and carve along the lines with the V-gouge. Use the knife to taper the hands up to the V-groove. Thin the arms with the knife.



7 **Shape the shoes.** Draw and refine the shoes. Then, use a V-gouge or knife to carve a groove to separate each shoe from the pant legs and straw.

SCARECROW: CARVING THE FACE



8 **Shape the outside of the face.** Mark the width of the face (the hairline) and use a V-gouge to carve the hair back so the face protrudes. Clean up the cuts with a knife. Repeat the process on the other side of the face, and match the depth of the cuts.



9 **Begin shaping the face.** Taper the forehead and eye sockets with the knife. Make a stop cut at the bottom of the nose and taper the mouth up to the cut. Mark the sides of the neck, and separate the neck from the hairline with wedge cuts. Round the face.



10 **Add the features to the face.** Draw the centerline and brow line. Carve along the eye channel under the brow with a 1/4" (6mm) #9 gouge. Use the knife to soften the sharp edges left by the veiner cut. Draw the triangular nose, and carve along the side up to the eye channel with the 1/4" (6mm) #5 gouge. Refine the shape of the nose with the knife. Deepen the eye channel with the 1/4" (6mm) #9 gouge, and soften the edges with a knife.



11 **Refine the nose.** Use the knife to make a stop cut around the wings of the nose, and then carve up to the stop cut to separate the wings from the cheeks. Round the tip of the nose slightly. Make a stop cut around the outside of the nostril with the tip of the knife, and then carve up to the stop cut to remove a chip. Draw the smile lines, make stop cuts on the lines, and carve up to these stop cuts to define the smile lines and start shaping the dental mound.



12 **Carve the mouth.** Draw the smile, and make a stop cut along the line. Carve up to the stop cut from below to start opening the mouth. Draw short lines at the corners of the mouth, make stop cuts on the lines, and carve up to the stop cuts to refine the smile. Use the knife to shape the lower lip and chin. Carve a shallow groove under the lower lip with the 1/4" (6mm) #11 veiner to separate the lip from the chin.



13 **Carve the eyes.** I make simple triangle eyes to keep the scarecrow feel. Draw the eyes in the eye channel. Use the tip of the knife to make stop cuts on the pencil lines. Then, use the tip of the knife to round the eyeballs up to the stop cuts. Carve the groove between the eyebrows with the 1/4" (6mm) #11 veiner.



14 **Finish shaping the hat.** I wait until I carve the face before I finish shaping the hat. That way it looks like the hat is sitting on the head, not floating. Use the knife to round and taper the hat to match the shape of the head.

SCARECROW: COMPLETING THE CARVING



15 **Carve the clothes.** Use a knife to shape the neck rope and collar. Then, use a rolling cut to add a wavy texture to the collar. Draw the bottom of the shirt and the belt. Use the knife to make a stop cut around the belt, and then taper the shirt to the stop cut to separate it from the belt. Make stop cuts along the bottom of the shirt, and taper the pants up to the stop cut. Use a small V-tool to add rope texture to the belt. Round the sharp corners of the V-grooves with a knife.



16 Add the details. Use the tip of the knife to carve grooves and three-corner chips where the fabric would wrinkle and fold at the neck, elbows, shoulder, knees, and where the belt cinches. Think about how the fabric would look if it were stuffed with straw. Carve a few grooves to show the wrinkly hat. Draw the hatband, stop cut along the outline, and taper up to the stop cut to separate the band from the hat. Draw the jacket pockets, make stop cuts, and taper up to them to shape the pockets.



17 Carve the straw hair. Use a $\frac{3}{16}$ " (5mm) V-tool. Start close to the hat. Stab the V-tool in and carefully lift it up to create a curl. As you carve, add drops of cyanoacrylate (CA) glue to the already-carved curls to reinforce the delicate wood. Don't worry when a curl breaks off; the change in texture adds character to the piece. Work your way down from the hat alongside the face. Use the same technique to carve the rest of the straw texture.



Painting the Scarecrow

CA glue darkens most light basswood to make a nice straw color. This is good, because the glue seals the wood so the paint will lay on top of the glue instead of soaking in. For the rest of the piece, I paint on raw wood because I can clean up fuzzies as I see them. After the paint is dry, I apply a light coat of acrylic sealer. *Do not try to antique the piece.* Antiquing products, such as boiled linseed oil mixed with oil paint or dark finishing waxes, stick to the glued areas and make a huge mess.



Paint guide



- Hat: black²
 - Hatband: tomato spice¹ mixed with brown¹
 - Hat highlights: soft black²
 - Face: parchment¹
 - Cheeks, mouth: highly thinned tomato spice¹
 - Shirt: tomato spice¹ mixed with brown¹
 - Coat: burnt sienna²
 - Dirt on coat and shirt: watered down brown¹
 - Rope belt, around neck, sleeve cuffs: brown¹
 - Trousers: soft black²
 - Shoes: asphaltum²
- 1 - Delta Ceramcoat
2 - DecoArt Americana

materials & tools

MATERIALS:

- Basswood, 2" (51mm) thick: 3" x 8" (76mm x 203mm)
- Cyanoacrylate (CA) glue
- Acrylic paints, such as Delta Ceramcoat: tomato spice, brown, parchment; DecoArt Americana: black, soft black, burnt sienna, asphaltum
- Acrylic spray sealer

TOOLS:

- Band saw
- Carving knife
- #3 gouge: $\frac{3}{4}$ " (19mm)
- #5 gouges: $\frac{1}{4}$ " (6mm), $\frac{1}{2}$ " (13mm), $\frac{5}{8}$ " (16mm)
- #9 gouge: $\frac{1}{4}$ " (6mm)
- #11 gouge (veiner): $\frac{1}{4}$ " (6mm)
- V-gouge
- V-tool: $\frac{3}{16}$ " (5mm)

The author used these products for the project. Substitute your choice of brands, tools, and materials as desired.



Jim Hiser of Carlisle, Pa., started carving in 2000. He is a member of Conewago Carvers, Lancaster County Wood Carvers, and the West Shore Woodcarvers.