

# Carve a Spatula

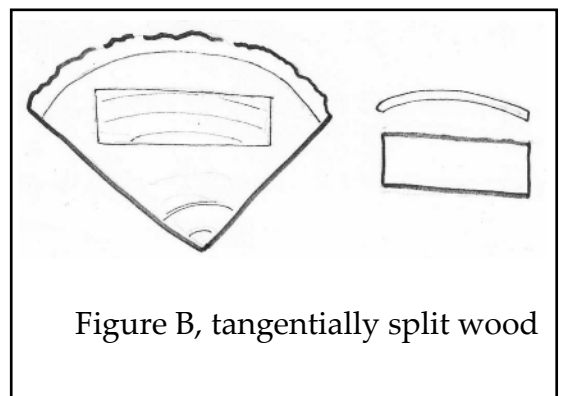
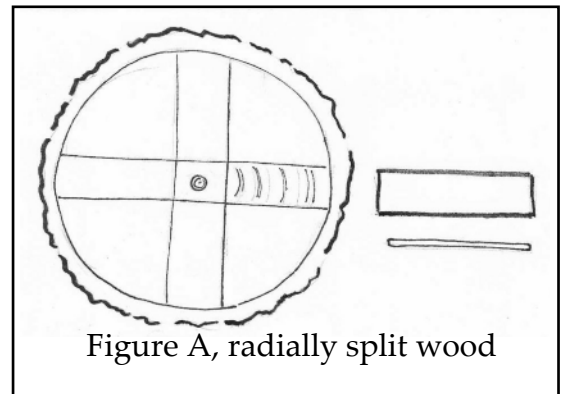
## Introduction

Scraping, flipping, stirring...spatulas have important, yet different roles in the kitchen from our spoons. The ergonomics may differ somewhat from spoons because of these differences. While you can use many of the same techniques that you use for carving spoons, there are a few tools and techniques that you may find helpful, especially in carving the flat surfaces. This document is not meant to cover basic knife grips (those you may find in another document) but to help ease the transition between spoon carving and spatula carving.

## Wood Selection

Wood selection is arguable much more important with a spatula than it is with a spoon. As a spoon dries, it may warp some and retain all of its functionality. If the flat surfaces of a spatula warp the tool may be rendered unusable. The easiest way to mitigate this is by using radially split wood. (See figure A) Radially split wood dries very evenly across the width causing little to no warping.

Sometimes you may want to use tangentially split wood (figure B). This may be because you do not have large enough wood for a radially split blank, or because you want to take advantage of a natural bend or crook in your wood. When using tangentially split wood the shrinkage causes the wood to warp in the shape of the growth rings. If you are using tangentially split wood, carve, but leave the blade of your spatula thick enough to carve it flat after it dries.



## Spatula Design

Spatulas all share some of the same characteristics, and have others based on need. Spatulas meant for flipping food over or removing food from trays are best carved with some crank (or lift from the plane of the blade) in the handle. That crank keeps the handle from disturbing the food around it. While serviceable spatulas can be made without any kind of crank, the user will find themselves lifting the spatula at a steeper angle to remove the food. This may cause the food to be pushed around rather than lifted.

Crank can be carved into your straight grained blank in basically two ways. The first way is illustrated in Figure C. In this illustration the blade runs parallel to the grain of the blank. This allows you to carve the blade thin while keeping the strength of the grain.

Figure D shows how you can increase the crank by elevating the blade in the blank. The compromise to this is that you have weaker grain structure the higher you go. You may still decide to add some crank this way, especially if you have a thin billet of wood you are working with. You can sometimes manipulate the leading edge of the spatula so that you can leave the blade a little thicker, maintaining that strength as well.

The transition of the crank on a spatula is a little further back than it is on a spoon. While a spoon may have the crank as far forward as the center of the bowl, I find spatulas best with the transition in the back quarter of the blade, as in figure E.

Figure F shows the crank forward on the blade. I like this on larger blades (for example, if I am going to make a spatula for flipping big pancakes) This can allow you a little extra area for carrying food.

Figure G shows the crank all the way back to the handle.



Figure C

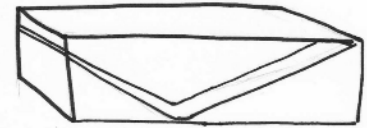


Figure D

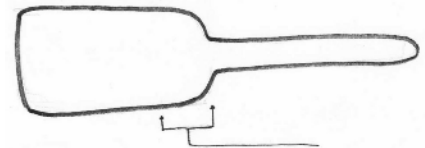


Figure E

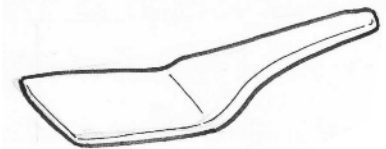


Figure F

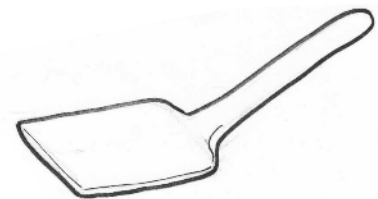


Figure G

## The Leading Edge

The leading edge of the spatula deserves some consideration of its own. The blade should not go down to a fine angled edge like a knife, but should have a slight flat about 1 mm wide. (Figure H) This lends strength to the blade so it will not chip or break. Additionally, a small chamfer may be added to the bottom to allow a little more initial crank. If you add a chamfer on the top you can keep your blade thicker over all. This may be important if you have short grain in the blade as in figure D.



Figure H

## The Leading Edge Continued

The shape of the leading edge can also be important. For bowl scraping operations a continuous curve around the side is nice to have, much like some cooking spoons. For spatulas that are used for lifting food I prefer an edge that is nearly straight, but has a slight curve. This allows the spatula to engage a smaller portion of the food at first, which I find makes it a little easier to lift.

### Tips

One of the main challenges of carving spatulas lies in the fact that you have a very wide surface that you are trying to get very flat. Probably the easiest way to achieve this is with a drawknife. The drawknife allows you to use your back and shoulders to engage a wide portion of edge at once. The disadvantage is the need for some kind of clamping system for the spatula. Typically a shave horse or spoon mule, but other types of vices work as well.

If you prefer to just use your knife, using the belly of the blade allows you to lift the other portions of the knife blade away from the surface of the spatula. This lets you take small, shallow bites of wood, effective for giving a flat, slightly textured surface to your spatula. Figure J.

Texture on the blade, so long as it is generally flat, is fine, functionally. For this reason, clean cuts across the blade with a hook knife or gouge can leave a somewhat textured, but still very functional surface.

Lastly, probably my favorite too for final finish on a spatula blade, is a card scraper. A card scraper is a piece of thin steel that is ground to an angle somewhere between 45 and 90 degrees, then a burnisher is used to put a hook on a sharpened edge. When pulled over the wood the hook will take very fine clean shavings off, leaving a beautiful finish.

When carving wood that follows the grain direction you always tend to run into trouble with grain tear out. What happens is the grain often varies in growth a little, causing it to wobble up or down some. While carving the grain may suddenly tear in a small spot because of this. Carving across the grain with your knife or hook knife should help with this. A scraper, though, is king for eliminating tear out.

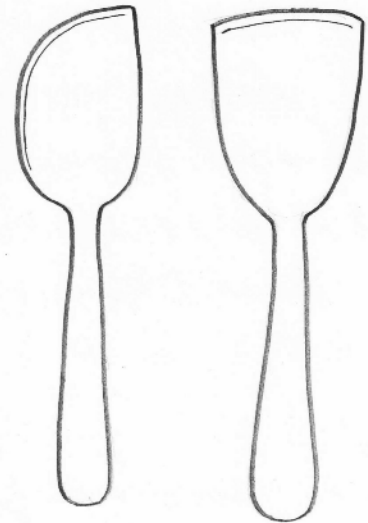
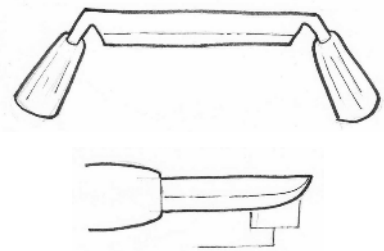
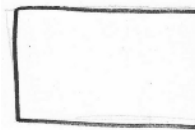


Figure I



Drawknife and Blade belly

Figure J



Card scrapers can come in any shape you need. While this is rectangular a slight belly on an edge makes for an excellent scraper.

After grinding and sharpening, use something like a carbide bit, or even a screwdriver shaft to roll a hook on the edge.



This hook is too large. You won't actually see it without magnification, but you should be able to feel it as you run a thumb up against it. Don't cut yourself!

Pull the hook into the wood. You may have to experiment to find the angle that works best for you.

