



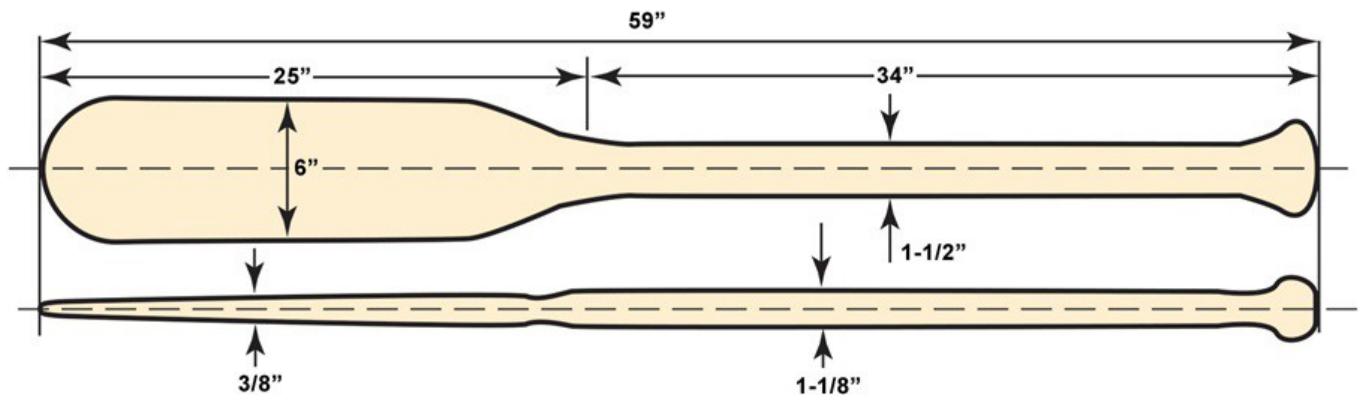
Make Your Own Canoe Paddle

A paddle is enjoyable to use when it is the right size and has the right fit for your handgrip, two things that are hard to get from a store-bought paddle. When making your own, not only can you get both of these requirements, you also achieve a sense of great satisfaction. Since all the shaping can be done with hand tools, making a paddle is a pleasantly quiet weekend project.

Few tools are required for making a paddle - a plane, a spokeshave (or drawknife) and a chisel. A standard paint scraper is a nice extra for smoothing out the handgrip. Although

you can use power tools, half the fun in making a paddle is watching it take shape as the shavings fly off the blank.

Woods suitable for paddle making include cherry, spruce, maple, pine, butternut and ash. The wood you choose can dictate your paddle's shape. With hardwoods you can obtain a paddle with a wafer-thin blade, while softwoods require a thicker blade surface. A basic paddle shape is shown below, but you can easily adapt it to suit your needs. You can widen the blade or square the tip off - whatever you wish. You may even laminate different species together.



Your blank should be about 1-1/4" thick by 6" wide by 5' long. (A paddle is the correct length if you can rest your chin on it while standing.) Mark your centers before cutting the blank to basic shape on a bandsaw. Mark the side centers to ensure you remove the same amount of material from each side of the paddle (for balance). Use a marking jig to mark the flat oval shape desired for the shaft (see below for how to make one). Secure your blank between dogs on a workbench. Use a plane to shape the shaft, taking care to keep shavings within your markings, and rotate the blank to maintain the center. Round out the shaft with a spokeshave.

With the shank completed, your next step is to shape the handgrip with a chisel. Start with V-cuts, then smooth out with sandpaper or a paint scraper. Try the grip out. If it's a good fit, then proceed to shape the blade. If not, keep chiselling and smoothing until the fit feels comfortable.

Keeping in mind the type of wood you have chosen for your paddle, taper the blade with a plane. To maintain strength where the blade meets the shaft, keep this area of the blade at full thickness. Also, the blade should remain slightly thicker in the center. Take shavings to achieve a taper from the center of the blade out to 1/4" at the tip and around the edges.

Once your paddle is of the desired shape, sand smooth and apply about 4 coats of spar varnish. Dilute the first coat of varnish with turpentine so the finish penetrates the wood. Subsequent coats should be full strength, but be sure to sand lightly between coats. Now that you know the rudiments of paddle making, bet you can't make just one paddle!

Marking Jig

The strategically placed nails on this simple jig make this a handy gauge for marking the desired shape of your paddle's shaft. The diagram shows you where to place the four nails on a scrap piece of wood. To use, straddle the outside nails on your paddle's shaft and scrape down the length of the shaft. The markings left on the blank will serve as guides when shaping the shaft.

