

Wood Inlay Tools & Techniques

Wood inlay can be done to add craftsmanship to wood. It's common on musical instruments, gunstocks, small furniture items, jewelry boxes and crafts. Anyone can do wood inlay. It's easier than it looks, requiring only hand tools and a bit of patience. Wood inlay is affordable, and you can get all the supplies at any hobby shop.

MOP Inlay Tools

Mother-of-pearl, or MOP, inlay often appears on the necks of musical instruments such as guitars, but it can be added to any wood. MOP inlay can be purchased in dots with perfect dimensions, which makes it easy to work with because you only need two tools to do the inlay. The first tool needed is a Forstner drill bit. This special bit has circular, knife-like cutting edges that cut clean, precise holes. The bit size matches the dot size. For example, a 3/8-inch dot inlay requires a 3/8-inch Forstner bit. The other tool needed for dot inlay is a drill press. A drill press is needed for stability and to cut a perfect 90-degree hole. For sanding, a rotary tool with a sanding accessory is used.

MOP Inlay Technique

To do MOP inlay, install the Forstner bit into a drill press. Mark the location on the wood where you want the dot inlay. Place the wood under the bit and drill to a depth of approximately 1/16 inch. Place the dot inlay into the hole. It can be slightly above or below the surface of the wood, as long as it is within 1/32 inch of being flush with the wood. Remove the dot and place a small drop of household cement or cyanoacrylate glue in the hole. Place the dot in the hole and tap it until it bottoms out. Use a handheld rotary tool with a sanding accessory to sand the wood and the dot flush. Follow by hand sanding parallel to the grain with a hand block.

Veneer Inlay Tools

You only need a few simple tools to do veneer inlay on a piece of wood. To begin, you need a knife with a razor sharp blade to cut the inlay design out of the veneer. The knife is also used to transfer the inlay design to the wood where it is to be placed. A 1/4-inch chisel is needed for cutting the inlay cavity once it's transferred to the wood. After the inlay is glued into the cavity, a handheld rotary tool with a sanding accessory is used to sand the inlay flush. From here, a hand sanding block is used to finish.

Veneer Inlay Technique

Draw a design for your inlay on a piece of wood veneer. The veneer should be between 1/16 and 1/8 inch in thickness. Place the veneer flat on a worktable. Use the razor knife to cut out the design. Place the cut-out veneer inlay on the wood where you wish to add it. Use the razor knife to trace around the inlay, cutting to a depth of about 1/16 inch. Remove the inlay. Use the 1/4-inch chisel to cut and shave a hole for the inlay out of the wood. Test-fit the inlay. If it doesn't fit, use a piece of sandpaper to sand off edges until it fits. Place wood glue in the hole. Tap the inlay into the cavity. When the glue dries, sand over the inlay with a handheld rotary tool with a sanding accessory.