

Woodworking Tools for Young Woodworkers

Safety is the priority with all tools use of any age. In my experience, children understand the honor and responsibility that comes with the permission to use authentic tools. That being said, band aids should be in everyone's tool kit. As children learn to use tools, what they make is not as important as the process they are learning. Beginning masterpieces may be piles of saw dust and wood chips. Send any questions to sean.shaffer@chicagoparkdistrict.com

Bow saw: These work best with the wood held in a vise or sat on by a helper. They allow the child to use one handle while an adult can hold the other side to help them learn proper technique.



Loppers: Children get incredible leverage to cut through a branch 1"-1 ½" thick depending on the handle lengths, the longer, the more leverage. To give the most leverage, place one handle on the ground and use both hands to bring down the upper handle. Adults can stabilize the handle on the ground with a foot while they learn the motion. They come in a variety of handle lengths, the longer, the more leverage. Bypass loppers (whose blades overlap when closed, like scissors) seem to cut better than Anvil style (a single blade that closes on a brass plate).



Hand Pruners: Pruners are great for sticks and twigs. Again, I'd recommend bypass pruners over anvil style blades. Unlike scissor work that children may have more experience with, pruners and loppers work best with the stick all the way under the back of the blade, closest to the fulcrum. Remind the kids, "Take a big bite, not just a nibble!"



Microplane Rasp: Microplane is the brand name for this tool that is as useful in the kitchen as the forest. They come in different shapes: square, round, flat and even double handled. They efficiently remove wood but do not work so well on skin. With just a little practice, children can carve grooves for stick music, decorate walking sticks, and carve figures. Rat tail rasps are also a safe tool. Holding a stick while rasping it can be a challenge. A vise to hold the stick or a table clamp can help.



Vegetable Peelers: How to make a knife safer? Make it inside out, with the blade in the middle. Choose an unserrated blade with a chunkier handle. These tools empower children to peel bark, sharpen sticks and learn the basics motions and techniques of knife use for when they are ready.



Tenon Cutter: When attached to a four brace bit drill (explained next), they operate like a pencil sharpener, turning the end of a stick into a dowel of any diameter you need. Then make a hole with a drill bit of the same diameter and dowels and holes can be fit together to make tinker toy-like constructions over and over or made permanent with glue for mallets or gavels or sculptures. Lee Valley (.com) seems to be the only vendor.



Four Brace Bit Hand Drill: These two handled drills provide lots of torque to bore holes of any size. Youngest wood workers can spin it while an adult works the other handle. Pressure does need to be applied through this handle to both stabilize and drill efficiently. These drills \ are a bit more of an investment when purchased new but garage sale finds work just as well.



Hand Drill: For smaller diameter holes, smaller drills work better. Fiskars makes a plastic one that does fine for small projects, but their plastic gears wear down with use. Search garage sales for older metal ones or invest in a new one. Coordinating two hands doing different motions is a great challenge for the youngest. Some metal drills have a third handle, allowing a third hand to support.



Drill Bits: There are many styles and prices of bits, each with their own attributes. Brad tips cut well and stabilize the drill well. Auger style are best for the four brace bit. Forstner bit work slower but leave the cleanest edges.



Froe: "Hit this with a stick as hard as you can", are words children seldom hear. It is also how to operate a froe. It can safely do the work of a hatchet or axe. Place the blade on the end grain (where you see the rings) of a log whose diameter is smaller than the length of the froe blade. The handle keeps your hand out of the whacking zone. Children whack the back of the blade with a baton (a stout stick, nothing metal) until it wedges the log into pieces. Small diameters and shorter lengths split more easily. Again new ones can be expensive, but they can still be found at flea markets.

