

# Christmas tree decorations

Walter Hall shares some ideas for festive decorations

PHOTOGRAPHS BY WALTER HALL

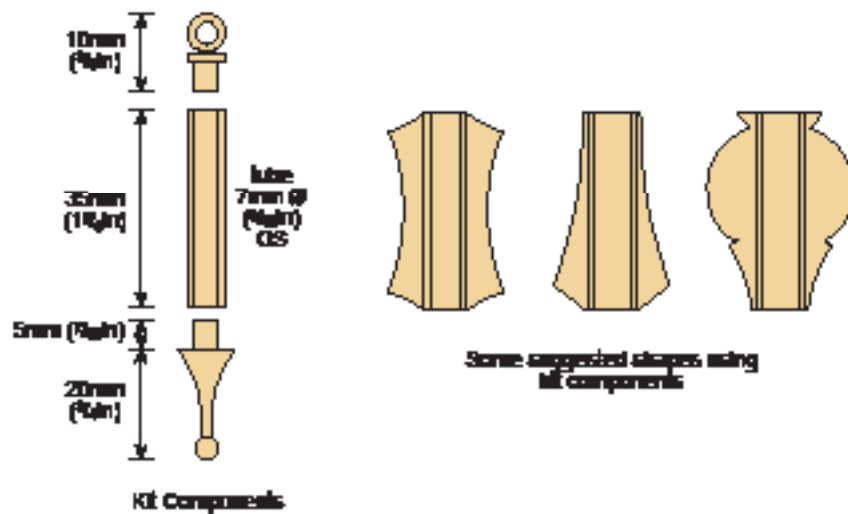
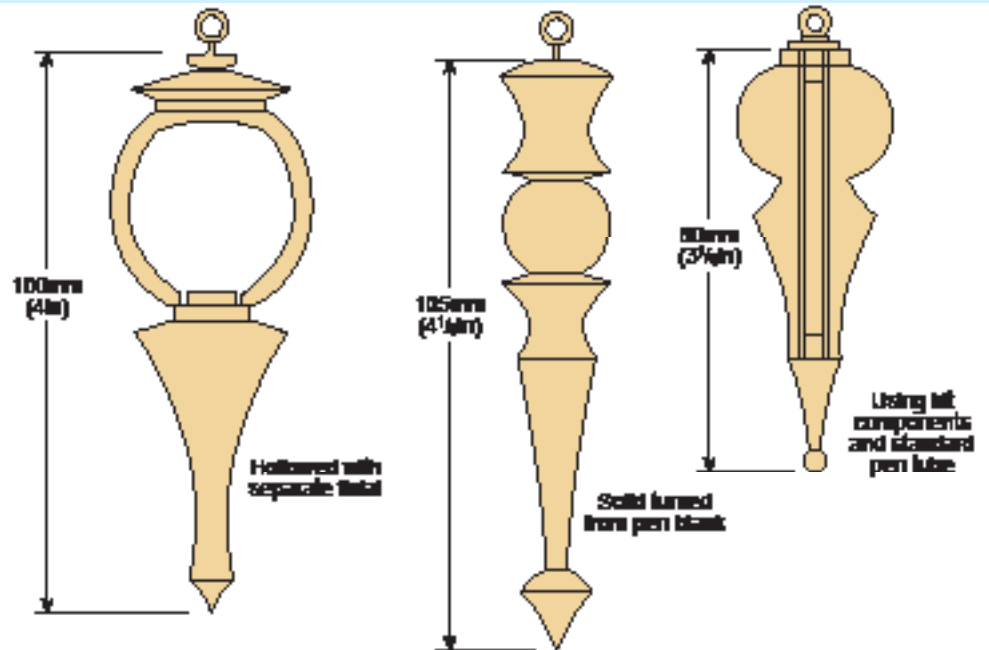


**Making your own Christmas tree decorations can be an enjoyable and satisfying project and they also make great items for craft fairs or to sell for your favourite charity.** The options available range from simply using readily available kits, using up small offcuts of wood and acrylic material that would be too small for anything else, through practising your spindle turning skills by turning icicle-shaped forms with a range of beads and covers all the way to making up segmented blanks to your own design and hollowing them out. The example I have made for this article falls somewhere in the middle and requires some spindle work

and a small amount of hollowing to make the finished article light enough to hang on the tree without bending the branches. You could use any hardwoods for this project and it is up to you whether you add colour as I have done or perhaps use contrasting woods for the body and finial. I chose oak as it is open grained and allowed me to use the grain-filling properties of gilt cream to add a touch of festive sparkle. Use your imagination to adapt the finish and make a range of different forms and finishes. A few additional ideas for shapes and types are shown in the drawings. ▶

## TOOLS AND MATERIALS

- RPE & PPE
- Dust extraction
- 20-25mm spindle roughing gouge
- 13-20mm skew chisel
- Thin parting tool
- Small bead forming tool
- Face shield/respirator
- Jacobs or keyless chuck
- Appropriately sized Forstner bit
- Hardwood spindle blank
- Abranet 240-600 grit
- Medium cyanoacrylate adhesive
- Red and gold acrylic spray paint
- Masking tape
- Gilt cream
- Tack cloth
- Paper towel or tissue



**1** Select a suitable piece of wood for your project, mount one end in a scroll chuck and support the other with a revolving centre in the tailstock. The method of holding shown in the photograph is fine for small, square pieces where the overhang when hollowing will not be too great, but for larger pieces a dovetail spigot should be cut between centres first to ensure secure mounting.

**2** Turn the blank down to a cylinder with a spindle roughing gouge, then mark the length of the finial and body sections. With a thin parting tool cut down to the size of the flats between the sections to determine the initial position and allow better access for the spindle gouge or skew chisel.





**3** Form the shape of the body of the piece with a spindle gouge or skew chisel. I used a spindle gouge with the wings ground back to provide better access. Just as with turning a bead, work from the centre 'downhill' to each side. Start with the flute horizontal and, using the tip of the gouge, move the tool forward while turning it so that it ends at the bottom of the cut on its side with the flute vertical.

**4** Once the shape of the body is formed use the parting tool to define the flat at its base and a spigot that will become the means of attaching the finial to the body. Remember to leave sufficient length for parting off the finial from the body later. Then form the initial shape of the top of the finial with a skew chisel

**5** After first turning away most of the waste material from the finial using a roughing gouge while the tailstock support is still in place, remove the tailstock support and begin to refine the shape of the finial. This may be as simple or complex as you choose, but do remember you are making a Christmas decoration, not a finial for a grandfather clock.

**6** Once the finial is formed sand through the grits and finish it to your preference. As it will not be subject to much handling, you could use friction polish, lacquer or even wax, but I chose to paint mine with gold acrylic to blend in with the gilt cream that will be applied to the body. When spraying paint or lacquer make sure to mask off anything you don't want covered with paint, including your lathe and chuck.

**7** Once the finish is dry and you are satisfied with the result, part off the completed finial. You can see in the photograph the respective sizes of the flat at the base of the body and the spigot.

**8** With the finial parted off you can now begin to hollow the body. Start by drilling to the depth of the body with a Forstner bit just a fraction smaller than the diameter of the finial spigot. Take care not to drill too deep, marking the shaft of the bit if necessary or using the graduations marked on your tailstock quill if it has them.

**9** First enlarge the entry hole to a snug fit for the finial spigot using a spindle gouge. Continue to hollow from the entry hole downwards. You can continue to use the spindle gouge, which will work perfectly well for a small form such as this or you could use any other small hollowing tool of your preference. We are not seeking to create wafer-thin walls, rather to reduce the weight of the piece, nonetheless they should be of even thickness and no more than 3mm. Measure your progress with callipers.

**10** Use a skew chisel or spindle gouge to form the shape of the top of the body then, using the parting tool, form a flat where the bead at the very top of the decoration will be cut.

◀ **11** If you are very careful you could form the top bead with a skew chisel or small spindle gouge, however because it is in a deep recess between the top of the body and the waste material it is much easier to do this with a small bead forming tool. Woodturning is not a competition to find the hardest way of doing things – if there is an easy way, why not use it?



**12** Sand the completed work through the grits to 600 using a tack cloth between grits. Do not skip or limit the sanding stage as the process of applying the gilt cream later will show up the slightest imperfection. Once you are happy with the finish, open up the grain with a brass wire brush. The ones for cleaning suede shoes are perfect for this.



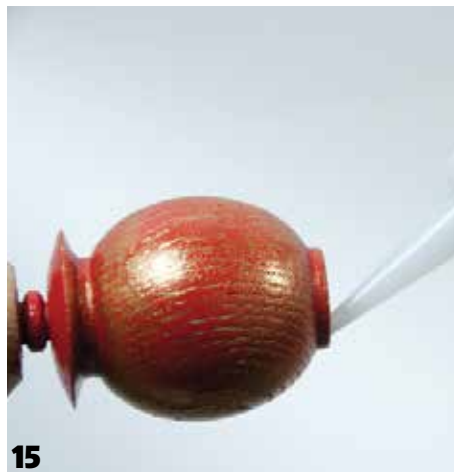
**13** Mask up the surrounding area again and spray the body with acrylic paint in a colour of your choice, I used a nice bright red left over from repairing my old Nova lathe. The paint may soak into the grain so leave it to dry and apply a second coat if required, but don't overdo it as the grain needs to be left open for the gilt cream.



**14** Once the paint is fully hard, it is best to leave at least an hour to be on the safe side. Apply the gilt cream using paper towel or a soft cloth. Work methodically all around the piece to ensure it is evenly worked into the grain and any excess is wiped away.



**15** The finial can now be re-attached to the body. There are many types of adhesive that would be suitable for this. I used an odourless cyanoacrylate as my spigot was a good fit and I wanted it to set quickly, but if you have a loose fit then epoxy or polyurethane glue (Gorilla glue) would be better. Ordinary wood glues would also suffice if you don't mind a longer setting time.



**16** Now part off the finished work from the waste. A fine saw (with the lathe turned off) will provide the cleanest cut with no torn fibres. The end can then be touched up with a drop of the red acrylic paint to finish the job.



**17** All that remains once the paint is finally dry is to fit a small brass loop to the top so that the decoration can be hung from the tree (Or perhaps used as an ear-ring after a few festive drinks). It is best to pre-drill for this with a fine drill to avoid snapping the fitting off as it is screwed in.



**18** Here is the finished decoration along with a few others made from kits and offcuts or turned from wooden pen blanks. ●

