



# Bird house ornament

by Michael Kehs

This bird house ornament is assembled from four easy-to-turn parts. Although you could certainly decide to turn only one bird house, this project lends itself to a production approach, so I will batch out a few dozen of these as the holiday season approaches.

When turning multiples of the same components, jigs make the stock preparation process move smoothly and ensure consistency among the elements. Starting a production run with identically sized blanks means that the cuts that I make end up being very similar among all the pieces. Using commonly sized drill bits also helps the finials fit consistently.

If you do decide to make a production run, turn all similar components before moving on.



**1. Prepare the blanks** — Sizing for the bird house is flexible; the tops are 2-1/2" square x 1-1/2" (6cm x 4cm) long, bodies are 1-1/2" square x 2-1/4" (6cm) long, finials are 1/2" diameter x 4" (13mm x 10cm) long. Here are enough tops, bottoms, and finials for 40 bird houses.



**2. Create a tenon** — Start with the roof, creating a tenon to fit the chuck jaws on what will be the top of the roof.



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**3. Undercut the roof** – Reverse the blank and secure the just-cut tenon in the chuck. Round the blank, true the face, and then create a concave recess that will overhang the body.

**4. Hollow the roof** – Drill a recess in two stages. Start with a 1-1/4" (32mm) Forstner bit and drill a hole about 1/8" (3mm) deep to receive the top of the body. Switch to a 1" (25mm) bit and continue advancing the hole. The object is to remove some of the weight from the roof, but leave material for shaping the slope on the exterior.

The difference in diameters between the two bits should leave a flat surface for referencing the spigot jaws.

**5. Shape the roof line** – Reverse the blank, using the spigot jaws in expansion mode, and shape the roof exterior. Remember the center is hollow, and you don't want to see that part from the outside. Avoid making the tip of the roof too pointy. A small flat spot on the top will serve you well at the next step.

Drill a hole for the wire hanger in that small flat spot at the peak of the roof. I have a bit holder that allows me to do this freehand, but a Jacobs chuck works too.

**6. Hollow the house** – With the roof complete, I chuck the body blank and use a Jacobs chuck to drill the bird house interior. I advance the hole to a depth of 1-3/4" (44mm). This leaves 1/2" of wood in the bottom.

I switch to a 1/4" (6mm) drill bit and finish drilling completely through the body. I will turn a 1/4" tenon on top of the finial to fit this hole.



**3. Undercut the roof**



**4. Hollow the roof**



**5. Shape the roof line**



**6. Hollow the house**



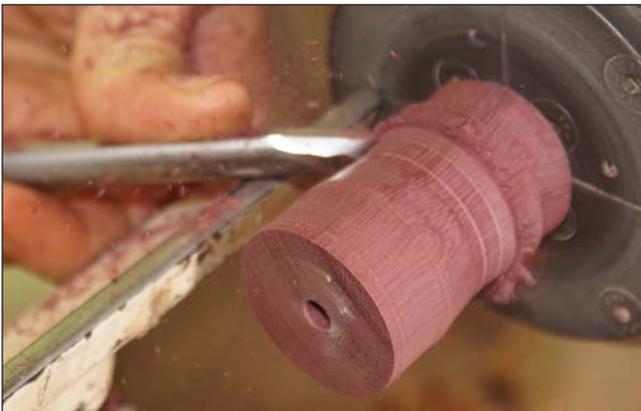
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**7. Tenon the body top**

**7. Tenon the body top** – Use a parting tool to cut a tenon on the top of the body to fit the recess in the roof. It is easy to over-shoot the diameter, so sneak up on the fit. Stop the lathe and check the roof recess against the tenon.

Calipers are handy for transferring measurements. Outside calipers can be used with the lathe running. Vernier, dial, and digital calipers should be applied with the lathe off or a nasty catch will result.



**8. Shape the body**

**8. Shape the body** – Reverse the blank in the chuck with the jaws in expansion mode and shape a shallow concave curve on the side of the house. A 3/8" spindle gouge works well for this task.

**9. Cut a tenon** – Create a tenon around the bottom opening with a parting tool.

Cut a sloping shoulder at the lower end of the house. The shoulder should meet the top of the tenon.



**9. Cut a tenon**

**10. Create a bead** – Convert the tenon into a bead. Roll the bead with the 3/8" gouge, working from the center of the bead and cutting downhill toward the bottom and the top.

**11. Drill an entry hole** – Drill the entry hole for the bird house. I make a jig for this step by turning a tenon on a short length of dimensioned scrap wood to fit the base of the bird house.



**10. Create a bead**



**11. Drill an entry hole**



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**12. Drill for the perch** – Drill a hole for a perch. The perch is a toothpick, cut to length and colored. A dowel placed in the bird hole helps me visually center the perch.

**13. Shape the finial** – Begin at the tip and work towards the headstock. A skew chisel leaves the best surface, but a spindle gouge works, too.



**12. Drill for the perch**

**14. Cut a tenon** – Cut a tenon on the base of the finial to fit the bottom of the bird house.

**15. Apply a finish** – I like to finish each component on the lathe with Mylands friction polish. This batch is ready for a flock of tiny birds, or a tree to decorate proudly.



**13. Shape the finial**



**14. Cut a tenon**



**15. Apply a finish**

*Michael Kehs, of Upper Bucks County, PA is mostly self taught and has been carving and turning wood since 1981. He demonstrates and teaches turning and carving, and has written widely.*

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