

## **Ebonizing with Rust Stain**

A fairly traditional method for ebonizing wood that has a high tannin content — such as red oak or walnut — is a recipe using steel wool and vinegar. [Joe Gorleski](#), woodworker and owner of , especially likes it because it is something he can make from supplies he has around the shop, and “because it’s natural and organic.”

This method works because of the chemical reaction between the rust stain and the tannin in the wood. Here’s the recipe Gorleski uses and his recommendations for applying the stain:

### **Ingredients:**

Steel wool pad (#0000 works real well)

Nails (not galvanized) or other rust-producing items

1 Tablespoon of salt

1/2 cup of water in a spray bottle

Apple cider vinegar

Unroll the steel wool pad and place it in the bottom of a non-corrosive bucket or container. Gorleski likes to use a long, narrow plastic plant holder, like one you would use as a window box or hang on a porch rail. You can also toss in a few nails or other rusty items.

Pour the salt into the water in the spray bottle and shake until the salt dissolves. Spray the steel wool and nails with the salt water until the spray bottle is empty.

Let the project sit for a few days. If the steel wool dries out, lightly spray it again with plain water to reactivate the salt and promote as much rust as possible. Wait a week or more — the longer the better, Gorleski says — until at least 75 percent of the steel wool pad has degraded. Then, let the project totally dry out before proceeding to the next step.

When you think you have enough dry rust, carefully mix in 1/4 to 1/2 cup of apple cider vinegar, depending on the size of your project. (Plain white vinegar doesn’t work as well, Gorleski reports.) Let this mixture sit for about 10 minutes, and then strain it through a paint strainer. You are looking for the stain to have a thin consistency. The vinegar provides a medium for the penetration of the rust mixture and enhances the chemical reaction.

Gorleski advises using a foam or bristle brush to apply the stain. The chemical reaction will occur almost immediately. Apply several coats of the stain; letting each coat dry and lightly sand with 200- to 220-grit paper in between applications.

Walnut contains more tannin, and so will require fewer coats than red oak, Gorleski explains.

The only disadvantage to this ebonizing method is “you have to wait — it’s not the same as opening a can,” Gorleski says. But, if you want to have some rust stain on hand, collect the dry rust and save it in a jar. When you want to use it, scoop out as much as you think you’ll need and only then add the apple cider vinegar. If you save it with the vinegar already mixed in it’ll go rancid, Gorleski explains.

Gorleski says he’s used this recipe time and time again, and it’s a recipe hard to get wrong.