

Finding & Making Walking Sticks

A fun hobby for forest landowners



By Tim Albritton, State Staff Forester, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Walking sticks are great. They are especially meaningful when you find one on your own property and make it yourself. Sure, you can buy one at a state park, roadside park, or even a Stuckey's Pecan Shoppe. However, those store-bought sticks don't compare to the ones you find on your own property. The pecan logs from Stuckey's are worth the drive, though!

You can find a good walking stick just about anywhere in the woods, but I always look for a unique one with a vine wrapped around it. You know, the ones that look like a snake. I find most of my best walking sticks down in the hardwood bottoms along a river or stream. This is also where you find a lot of vines growing around trees that help give this curved or twisted look.

My favorite species to work with is green ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica* var. *lanceolata* (Borkh.) Sarg.). The bark comes off easily, especially in late winter or early spring. Green ash has a nice white or ivory color to it when it is sanded. Best of all, it is abundantly available in the river bottoms.

I try to remove the bark as soon as I cut my walking stick. If you wait too long – I found out the hard way – the bark of some species is very difficult to strip off. After removing the bark, I

let the stick dry a week or so before sanding or working with it. If the walking stick is a real prize or I don't want it to be ruined from splitting or cracking, I soak it in sugar water. This prevents it from cracking which sometimes occurs in the drying stage. I will not elaborate on this process of wood shrinking and cracking as it dries, because my ignorance would be revealed ever so quickly. Just take my word for it – the sugar water works.

Once the stick has dried, you can begin the carving or sanding process. Carving is a tedious and difficult task. I have decided to just allow the God-given beauty of my walking stick to be the focal point. (In other words, I'm not a good carver.)

To sand the walking stick, I begin with a coarse-grit sandpaper and follow up with a fine-grit sandpaper. After the sanding is complete, I go over the walking stick with a fine steel wool pad. This prepares it for a polyurethane clear-gloss finish. Three or four coats of spray are necessary for the best results.

Well, that's it. It took less than 500 words to tell you everything I know about making walking sticks, and I have been enjoying this hobby for over 30 years. Maybe you will find it helpful. I know you will find it fun! ♪