



By gathering craft materials instead of buying them you can foster your connection to place and tell the stories of your surroundings.

Even if you choose to focus on only one material as you go out and harvest you will encounter all the other living things that exist around it. The time and effort it takes to gather the material might seem inconvenient at first, but what you might find is that there's a lot of value that gets transferred into the work you make with foraged material. For example you might appreciate and respect the material more if you can only harvest it for a few weeks out of the year. If you can learn to value the living thing that provides you with a craft material you can start to appreciate the rest of the living world around you that supports us all.

In order to keep this zine short in each section I am going to give some broad information and then more focused info on wooden spoon carving since that's the particular craft I've been into lately. Green wood carving has been a really fun way for me to get into foraging for craft materials.



STONE
CLAY
MINERALS

MATERIALS

I have roughly separated materials by Animal/Insect, Plant/Fungi, Earthen, and Human Waste categories. There's so much material that can be found all around you and will vary greatly based on where you are in the world. That's the fun thing about foraging for material it may lead to unique creations that can only be made in your specific location. Here's a short list just to get you started: carving materials, dye making ingredients, clay for sculpting and vessel making, basketry weaving materials, fibers for spinning thread, animal hides for tanning, paper making material, and so much moooooore.

Bone, Antler, Horn, and Wood were all common materials used in place of plastic. There's a ton of resources in books and online about how to work with these traditional materials. Reducing your reliance on the manufacturing of new plastic items is a great reason to forage for materials. Individual people of course are not the problem when it comes to plastic waste, large corporations are to blame, but the more we can divest personally the better.



SHELL
BONE
HIDE
ANTLER



WASTE
TRASH
SCRAP
JUNK



WOOD
BARK
SEEDS
FUNGI

TOOLS

Lots of people have intense opinions about tools online but I would suggest not over thinking which tools to buy. Whatever you can get your hands on will probably work for getting started, and you can always invest in better tools later. Pawn shops, thrift stores, online marketplaces, and garage sales are all great places to find inexpensive tools. I prefer hand tools as they tend to be inexpensive, aren't as noisy, and in the case of wood working tools they make less fine dust particles. Old rusty hand tools can be restored and with basic upkeep can be used for a lifetime.

To get started with spoon carving you might need a saw for cutting a branch off a tree, an axe for splitting bigger logs into smaller workable pieces, a hatchet for doing most of the material removal, a hook knife for scooping out the spoon dish, and a whittling knife for the rest of the carving.



SAWS



KNIVES



CHISELS



AXES

STORY TIME

My partner's family home was shaded by a big beautiful Sugar Maple tree. It had always been there as far back as she can remember. Besides it's cooling shade the tree also provided strong branches for hanging swings, joy at the sight of helicopter seed pods whirling down from the top of the tree, and their neighbor even tapped it for sap one spring and boiled it down to make sweet maple syrup. Last year the massive tree had to be cut down. Parts of it were dying and it was so close to the house they couldn't take any risks of it blowing over in a storm. So the tree was cut. They kept a fair amount of the giant tree's logs for fire wood. I snagged a few under the guise of using them for growing mushrooms (which I also did) But one branch in particular I wanted to carve into something nice for my partner's family. So I split the log a few times and tried my hand at carving a spoon for the first time. My initial attempts produced comically large awkward spoons that split as I dried them too quickly. I slowly began to understand the material better as I kept working. Finally I made an acceptable cooking spoon. I was pretty proud of it's elegant taper on the handle and smooth curves of the dish. I boiled it in milk (a traditional water sealing method) and finished it with a beeswax oil mixture I made. When I gave the spoon to my partner's parents they were so happy to have a little piece of that tree back in their home. To my dismay they keep it on a shelf and refuse to use it for cooking because they think it's too nice. Which just goes to show you how much of an impact using foraged materials can have on the things you make. The connection to place weaves a story that can be so personal and special to the people of that place, far beyond anything that could be purchased. So give it a try!

RESOURCES

- **Fireweed Woodshop** - Minneapolis based LGBTQ+ and BIPOC friendly woodshop that offers sliding scale cost workshops
- **North House Folk School** - Grand Marais based School offering courses on traditional crafts
- **MN Tool Library** - Twin Cities based organization offering access to tools and workshop space at a reasonable membership cost