

Tool Rolls

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Tools with sharp edges need to be kept separate to protect their edges and their neighbours. Boxes with dividers are one way to organise things, but they require a lot of effort to make and are inflexible when you want to add or change tools. Another way is to keep the tools in a roll that you can lay out when you are using them. Tool rolls are quite easy to make if you have rudimentary sewing skills and a sewing machine.

Here, you can find some pictures of tool rolls that others and I have made and some advice on making your own.

The types of tools that work well in a tool roll are straight, thin tools. Larger, and bulkier tools can be stored in a roll, but they don't roll up nicely and can make the roll bulky and awkward to store. Carving chisels are ideally kept in a roll. They have very fine, sharp edges that need to be protected. Your average wood-carver has many hours invested in those edges – watch how tense they get when someone fiddles with their gouges and chisels!

Mary May's tool rolls.

You may have come across Mary May who is an accomplished carver and on-line presence with more than 20 years of experience, having studied under several master carvers in her formative years.

In an episode of the Wood Wright's Shop (2009-2010 season), Roy Underhill hosts Mary May, who shows how to carve her signature carving of the Acanthus leaf. Then Mary May brings out her "babies", housed in a blue denim tool roll, made from an old pair of jeans, as shown in the pictures below.

The first screen grab shows it rolled up and the second, laid out on the bench. It is probably 1.5m long, and I count more than 40 gouges, each in a separate pocket. The handles are in the pockets and the ends are



exposed, but all protected and separate. The cutting edges are visible so the right one can be selected at a glance.



Here is another of Mary May's tools rolls, this one made from brown Corduroy. This is also a snapshot from another episode of the Wood Wright's Shop - season 37, episode 7 (See <http://www.pbs.org/woodwrightshop/watch-on-line/watch-season-episodes/2017-2018-episodes/>) . What is interesting about this shot is that it clearly shows how the pockets for the chisels are offset, so that the tools and their delicate edges are kept separate from each other. The handles are in the pockets, so that the edges are visible, and can be picked out as needed.

Ideally, tool rolls should be made from a thick material, cut to suit your tools. Canvas is good, but Denim is ideal, because it is quite thick, but soft and flexible, so it will conform to the shape of the tools and roll up easily.

If you need to transport and store your delicate tools, custom making your tool rolls is an ideal way to do so. I have quite a few, a couple bought and most made up to suit. Here are some pictures of these with comments about the suitability and what I could have improved.

Spoon carving set from Narex – supplied with a suede (leather) roll. You can see that the tools are well spaced and the roll is compact, held closed with two lengths of tape, tied together.





Commercial-made roll from Axminster

Bought many years ago, and not in use at the moment because I don't have anything to put in it at present. Made from stiff canvas, with a strap and buckle to tie it closed. It has a separate flap on the top and the pockets are graduated in size.



Auger bit roll

Made from brown denim, the widths of the pockets are graduated, but not by much as the bits are mostly similar widths. The flap at the top folds down and the roll closes up from the left. To increase security for the right-hand bit, I made a slot for the right-hand tape to feed through before being tied. The tapes are also denim and being quite stiff are just tucked under one another. This one is 50cm wide by 30cm high. The pockets vary from 2cm wide on the left, to 4cm on the right.



Masonry bit roll

I grew tired of scratching in the bottom of the drill case for masonry bits, so I made this roll from brown denim to keep them organised.



Carving Gouge Roll

Made from black denim, with pockets top and bottom, it is a bit crowded. Blue bias tape was used to trim the edges, and it is held closed using Velcro. The Velcro loops are sewn along the back and the hook strip is on the left. The pockets on this one are a bit narrow and close together, so it rolls up a bit awkwardly and looks over-stuffed. You can see from left-hand picture, that it is slightly too short for the longest tools. It is 80cm wide by 30cm high, with 5cm wide pockets.



Bench Chisel Tool Roll

This one is made from green canvas. The pockets are wider and it is quite tall, so it rolls up easily. The roll is held closed with Velcro, with a double width strip of loops on the back and the hook strip



on the left, so then the roll is rolled from the right. The Velcro will hold it closed, for a variety of contents, giving different diameters. This one is 70cm wide by 35cm high. The 6cm pockets comfortably accommodate bench chisels. There are some smaller pockets on the sides of 3.5cm.

Small tool roll



This is made from green canvas. Unfortunately, I didn't add a top flap to stop the tools from falling out the top. It is too short, with some longer tools inserted to show this. It is also a bit over-stuffed, and doesn't roll up nicely. Closure is with Velcro as above, which is quick and secure. It is 47cm wide by 18cm high, with 6cm wide pockets. This one needs reworking – I will make it taller and add a flap to fold down over the chisels.

Green wood-working tool roll

This one is a work in progress. There are pockets top and bottom, of varying sizes. Some of the tools are accommodated well, but the pockets will need to be reworked to accommodate the current set



of tools in use. Due to the bulky tools included, it doesn't roll up nicely and looks rather awkward and over-stuffed. Brown denim is used, with a Velcro closure, which works well to accommodate the range of tools that could be fitted. Some extra pockets could be added for the flat scrapers. The draw-knife doesn't fit well into the pockets at present.

The picture on the right shows the individual covers for the axe, adze and draw-knife. I made separate covers for those. The green covers are from leather off-cuts. The cover for the draw-knife is from brown denim with two Velcro pads top and bottom to hold it closed.



You can see in the picture, right, below, the double-width loop Velcro strip is sewn to the back and the single width hook strip is sewn onto the right of the



roll, so it rolls up from the left.



It is 70cm wide by 43cm high. The pockets vary somewhat to suit the individual tools.

I made some additional pockets to hold scrapers and small tools that tuck into a larger pocket.

Denim roll for pottery tools

Made from a pair of worn-out jeans, this roll is designed to hold a variety of tool sizes. Using one leg of the trousers, one seam was left intact and the other seam unpicked. The intact seam runs down the middle. The two sides were then folded over into pockets. The taper of the leg meant that longer tools could be stored in one end – the right hand in the pictures. A back pocket was reduced in size and sewn onto the face as well to hold sponges. The roll can roll up for storage, or for use, it can be draped over the edge of a plastic container, as shown below, making the tools available at a glance. Closure is with tapes. The length is the leg length of the donor trousers.



Conclusion

The point of this article is to show you ways to make tool rolls that can be custom fitted to hold a working tool set.

First, select the tools you want in the set. Perhaps allow for a couple of extra slots. Then start with a blank canvas on a large table and lay out your tools. Select the pocket sizes. Remember to be generous with the sizes and allow at least an extra centimetre or two for each pocket. This will help the roll to fold up easily, without looking over-stuffed. When laying out, try to avoid tools touching, although that may be unavoidable. Definitely make sure all the sharp edges are protected. Then cut out the material and seam all the edges. Double over all the exposed edges so that they don't fray, and so that they look better. I use two rows of stitching for strength on the edges for pockets for larger tools. The closure can be tapes, straps, Velcro or nothing at all, depending on where it is to be kept.

For material, any thicker canvas works well. I like denim, in darker colours, so as not to show the dirt. Even an old pair of jeans could be picked apart and repurposed, as Mary May did, and as shown for the pottery tool roll above.

I use an old Singer sewing machine from the 1950's that I inherited from my grandmother. It is strong and stiff, so it can cope with the multiple layers of thick material, but I treat it with respect, starting it by hand for more than three layers. It has a single stitch size and no reverse, so I have to turn the work around to end-off. I have some spare needles at hand, as I have broken a couple. An industrial machine would be better. I'm not sure how modern plastic sewing machines would cope with canvas/denim in multiple layers, so proceed with caution.

Try the tools in the roll and don't be afraid to use your un-picker tool to redo stitching, particularly where the pockets are too small. Unpicking and re-running a seam or two only takes another minute. If the seams are not all straight, don't worry – this is a functional item, not an item of fashion!

I hope I have inspired you to make up a tool roll or two – it is really not that difficult.