

# These Sticks are Made for Walking

Don Fikes



Not too early to think about making a walking stick to donate to our fall sale

Winter is the perfect time to find and harvest some great wood for walking sticks. Many of us trim trees and large shrubs this time of year. Or, it's just a great time to be out and about where we can see and access a potential award winner. Here are some tips for making a good walking stick.



Sample sticks I have drying. Cedar, privet & oak

1. It's all about the wood! Look for a relatively straight staff about 1 to 2 inches in diameter. Length should be about 45" to 60". Cut long. It can always be shortened later if needed. Any wood will work but hardwoods make the strongest and sturdiest. Last year we probably had sticks from 10 to 11 varieties of trees and shrubs. This week I cut 2 pieces of privet that I think are going to make great sticks.

After you have cut your material it is best to let it dry slowly from 2 weeks to 2 months. Best place to dry is in the garage, an outside shed, or a covered porch. Storing inside may dry the wood too fast and it will split. Also store as flat as possible. If you lean it against a wall it may warp as it dries. Remember, dried wood provides rigidity and durability.

2. Step two, whittle off the bark. This step is easier when the wood is fresh and green. But, if the bark is taken off at this stage, there is a greater chance of the wood splitting as it dries. I usually wait until my stick has dried before I remove the bark. This step is not hard it just takes time and patience. To me that's the beauty of making a walking stick, it is usually done when you are not busy and you can whittle away while you ponder the meaning of life. The tools I use are an old pocket knife and a utility knife that I can change the blade on when it becomes dull. Carpet knives also work well. You may also need a small toothed saw to remove side branches and bumps. You all know to whittle away from your body, right?

After the stick is cleaned of bark, bumps and blemishes, it is time to sand the finish. The way to know when you are done is when it feels right. During this entire process you will constantly be evaluating your stick as to how it feels in your hand. The top may be too fat to make a comfortable grip or the bottom too skinny to make a sturdy staff. Now you can make final adjustments to length. Our buyers will come in all sizes so make the stick to your height requirements and it will be perfect for someone else.



Don't need anything fancy. What I use. Reading glasses essential!

## Walking cont'd

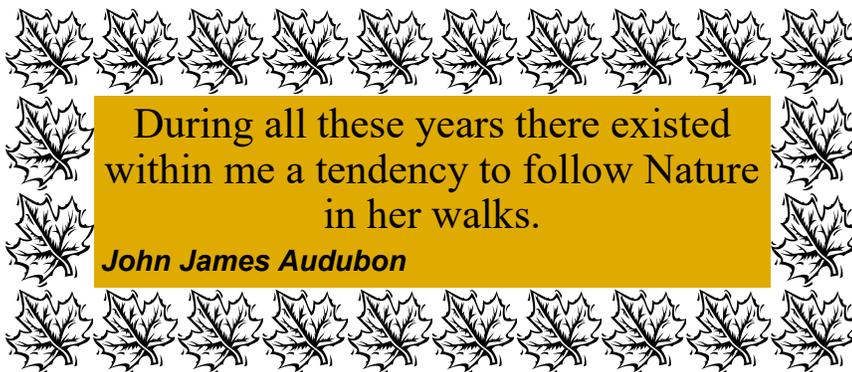
3. The creative touch. You are now ready to stain and finish. This step I will leave to your creative talents. There are many choices. I like a natural finish. I use boiled linseed oil on most of my sticks. I apply several coats over time, let them soak in, then rub with a soft cloth to finish. Many of our sticks last year were stained and then had polyurethane applied as a finish. Those made some great looking sticks.

Any small carving or graphic (like wood burning a dragonfly on the stick) will really enhance marketability. You can also add a leather strap but it is not necessary.

These are just a few things I have learned. I am not an expert by any means. Just think about quality over quantity. Make something you will be proud to show as a product from our Chapter. A good stick takes time. Enjoy the process and thanks again to all that participated in last year's sale.



*Photo courtesy Judi Elliott—booth at Fall Festival where an array of finished sticks were displayed for sale*





# From the Album

Jonathan Reynolds with mud turtle—*photo from Jon*



*Photo—Dorothy Thetford*

Here is our resident Mallard drake. He and his hen produced 10 ducklings during their visit and were exemplary parents. *Photo from w. odum*

## From the Album cont'd



These interesting little visitors are waiting for a free meal, no doubt—*from Dorothy Thetford*



*Eagle in flight at Lake Ray Roberts—*from Alex Lieban**

## Field Notes in Focus



## Reflections - Lake Brownwood State Park From gallery of Jonathan Reynolds

*Featuring Master Naturalist photographers—  
flora and fauna as you see them*