

Making a Simple Decoy

Please read and study this page in its entirety before starting this project. Obtain all reference materials possible.

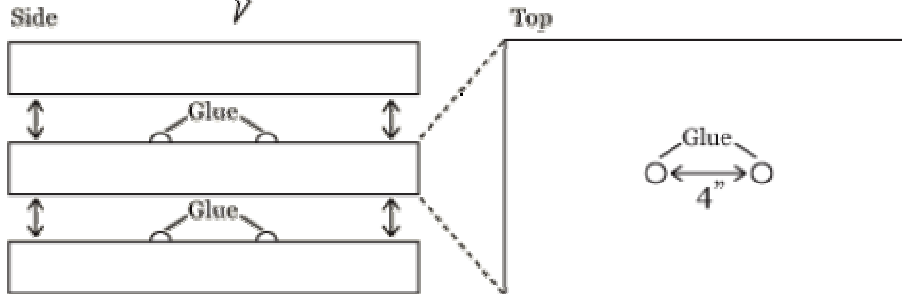


So you want to make a decoy duck. Do you have a piece of wood laying around that's 5" X 8" X 15"? Well, I didn't think so. Can you go down to your local lumber store and pick up a piece that size? I didn't think so.

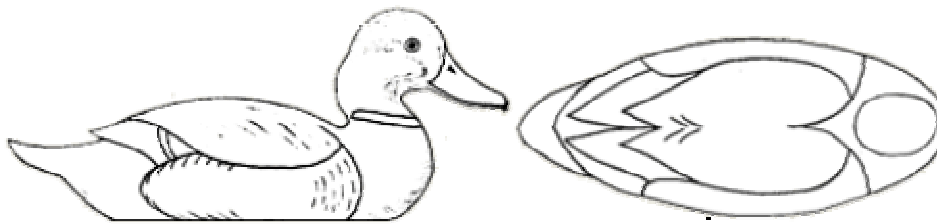
So go to your local lumber store and buy a piece of framing lumber 2" X 10" X 8 foot long. It must be straight, not bowed or warped. Most framing lumber is some type of pine. Sight down the length of it and then across the width of it. Is it bowed? If so pick another one. Find one that is pretty much free of knots and blemishes. While you're there pick up about 3 tubes of Devcon, 2 ton epoxy and 1 or 2 tubes of Devcon 5 minute epoxy (much more than you'll need). It is the kind that has a double barrel syringe that is supposed to dispense equal amounts of the glue so that you can mix them together. Other brands work ok to. Devcon is what I use and I know it does a good job. I have made a lot of decoys this way and have never had any trouble with any of them.

Saw off 3 pieces 16 inches long. Pick the best areas of the board to saw from. If you want your decoy to be hollow you need to temporarily glue the boards together as shown below. Use 5 minute epoxy instead of 2 ton for the temporary gluing. You may have to do a little experimenting with the size of the glue spots. If it breaks loose before you want it to, you may have to increase the amount of glue. If you want your decoy to be solid then completely coat the boards with the 2 ton epoxy then clamp them together in a vise or use C-Clamps. The glue has good filling properties so small voids will be filled.

These are the three 2" x 10" x 16" boards. Just glue two little spots about the size of a penny and about 4 inches apart near the center of the boards. Remember this is temporary. We will have to break them back apart later.



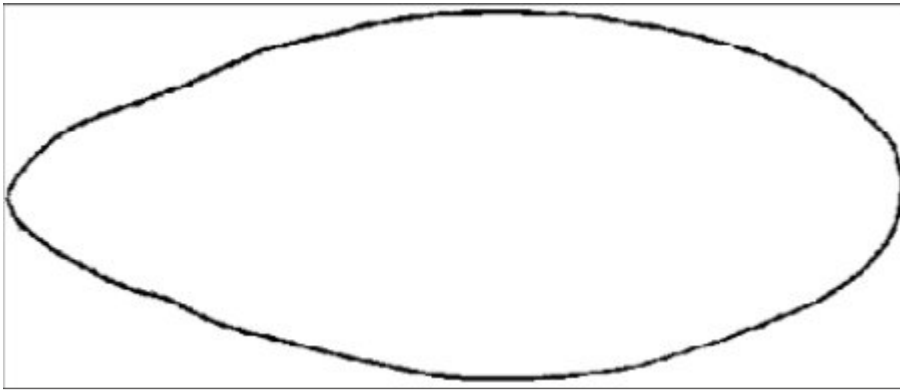
Here is the Mallard Pattern we will be using:



Decoy Pattern PDF

You may print these patterns and then enlarge it on a copy machine until the decoys body is 15 1/2 inches long. Increase others proportionately. Now get a piece of carbon paper, the pattern you have enlarged and the three pieces of wood you glued together. Using the carbon paper take the top view and transfer only the outline to the wood as illustrated below:

Top

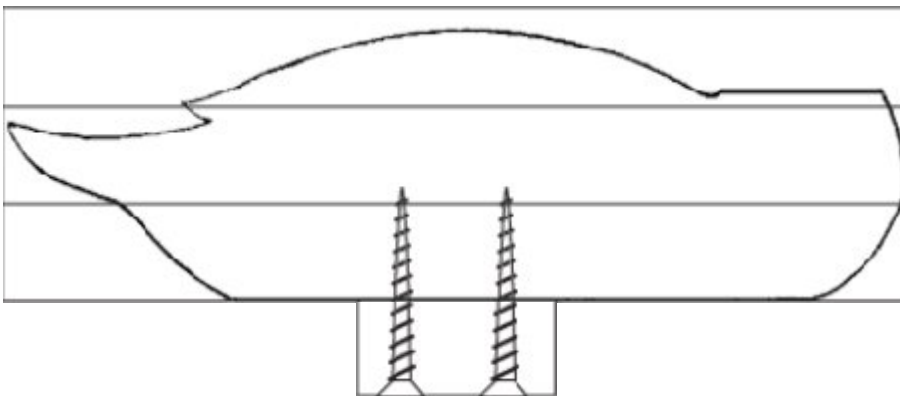


This is where we will start to depend upon the temporary glue spots to hold the wood together. If it breaks loose just re-glue it a little better this time.

Now we will saw or cut along line with whatever means you have make the cut. I use a band saw but the first one I did, I used a hand saw. It doesn't have to be a neat cut, as long as you don't cut inside the line. We will smooth it up later. Whatever you use, be careful and follow all safety procedures, a trip to the emergency room takes a lot of the fun out of this project.

After you have sawed out this piece you need to be able to hold it in a vise to do the next step. So find a small block of wood. A small piece of 2 X 4 will work ok. Drill a couple of holes in it and attach it to the middle of the bottom of your cut out as shown below.

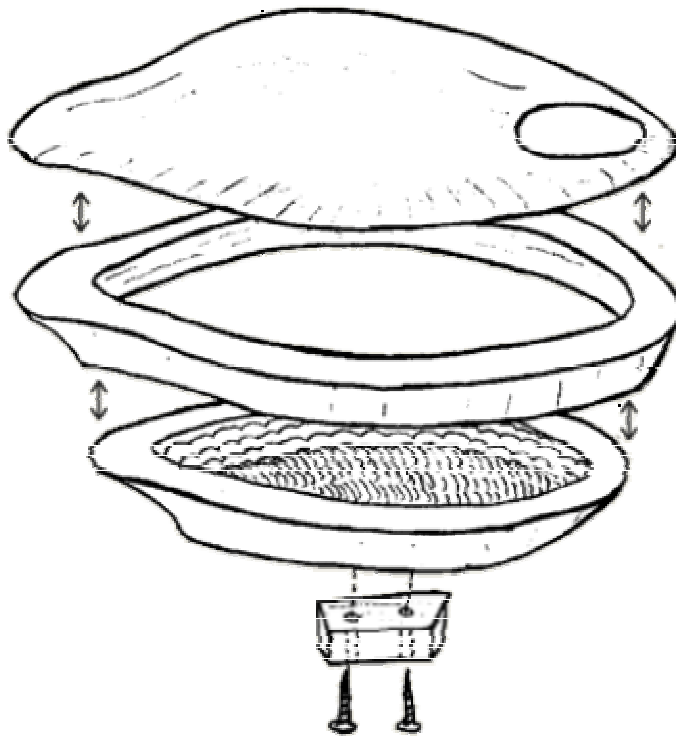
Side



After fastening the block to the bottom of the cutout you are ready to clamp the cut out in your vise and begin to carve away. As they say, cut away anything that is not a duck. You can use the pattern as reference. It might help to draw an outline on the side of the block to assist in your carving. You can use chisels, knives or whatever you have available to remove this wood. Some use power tools for this. I prefer to use a drawknife. Get the body to a rough shape of what you want.

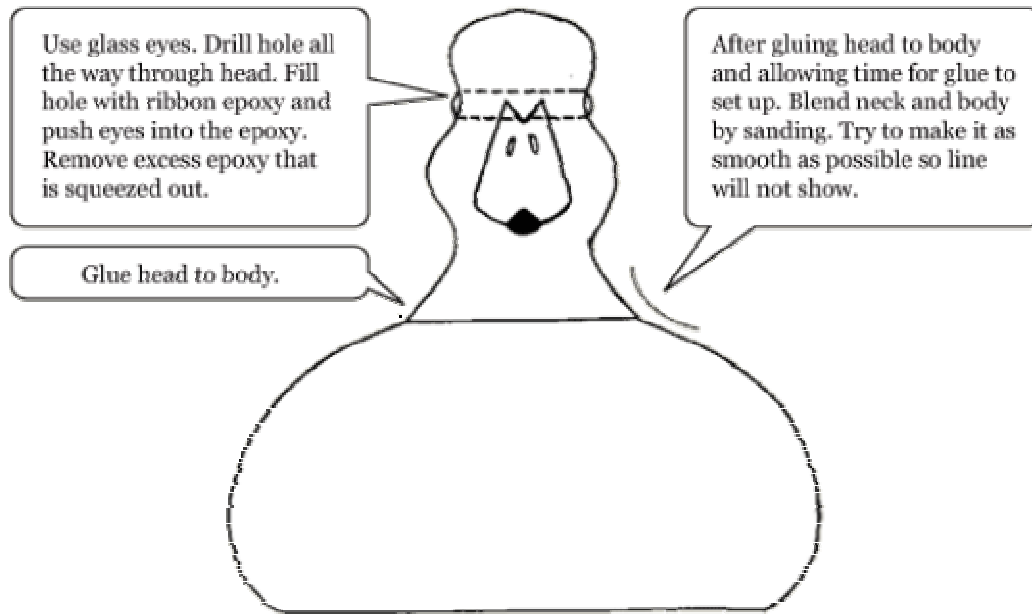
Now, if you made the decision earlier that you wanted your decoy to be hollow, taking a chisel or screwdriver, separate the three pieces of wood. Some of the wood will tear out where the glue had it fastened in the middle but it doesn't matter, you will be cutting this area out anyway. The screwdriver or chisel will leave some marks in the side but when you glue it back solid as I said earlier the glue has good filling properties and should fill in any tool marks. Take the middle piece and cut out all the middle leaving at least an inch of wood all around. When finished you will have a ring of wood like a donut. You will have to unscrew the holding block from the bottom for this part but will reattach it later. Now with the top and bottom layer scoop out all the wood you can without getting close to the outside. Leave 3/4 inch of wood top and bottom. Remember you will be taking more wood off the outside on top and you wouldn't want to cut into the hollow area. On the bottom you need a substantial amount of wood so you can reattach the holding block.

After you get the three pieces hollowed out you are ready to permanently glue them back together. Thoroughly coat all surfaces to be joined with the 2 ton epoxy. Place the pieces back together the way they were and clamp them together in your vise or use a couple of large C-clamps. You don't need to apply a lot of force, just enough to hold them together tightly. The pieces will slide around so check after clamping to make sure they stay where you set them. Experiment with the clamping before applying the glue to make sure your clamps are large enough. When you get the pieces clamped together check all around and apply a little extra glue to any tool marks or areas appearing to need filled. Allow the glue to set up.



At this point the glue should be set up and you are ready to do a little more finishing on the decoy body. I use a half round rasp to get closer to the finished product. The area of the neck where we will glue the head should be smooth and flat but do not finish up close to this area until the head is attached. Go ahead and carve the head. You can do that with a knife and then use sand paper if you like to smooth it up. The piece of wood you use should be about 2 1/4 inch thick. This will allow for a little waste on each side. Don't forget to pencil in a centerline to help you keep things uniform on each side of the head. Hold it out at arms length occasionally to check this. Of course the bottom should be smooth and flat to match up with the neck seat on the body. Refer to the illustration below and accompanying notes for placement of the eyes. I use 8 mm brown eyes for my decoys.

When finished glue the head to the body using the same 2 ton epoxy. The head may be turned in any direction to add realism. Allow the glue to set up then you are ready to blend the neck into the body.



After the head has been attached and the glue has set up you are ready to finish your decoy. Complete your rasping, sanding etc. until you feel you no longer need to hold the decoy in the vise. Remove the two screws and block from the bottom. You can now fill the holes in the bottom with a little of the ribbon epoxy you used to set the eyes. When set up sand smooth.

You now have a good start on your decoy. You can leave your decoy smooth or you can carve it to any degree of detail you desire. If this is your first you might want to paint it now. Don't forget to sign your name to the bottom. If this is your first try at a decoy don't get discouraged if it doesn't turn out just the way you would like. Practice makes perfect.

Click on the link below for photos of a step by step variation of this project. In this project instead of using the lumber mentioned above I use 6 layers of 1 inch popular for the body. The principal is the same however. Another variation here is that instead of using epoxy, I am using "Tightbond III" glue. This makes a very good and sturdy decoy.