

How To Make A Longbow



How to make a longbow is a rewarding and intricate process that combines traditional craftsmanship with an understanding of materials and physics. Longbows have been used for centuries, primarily for hunting and warfare, and mastering the art of crafting one can connect you to a rich historical legacy. In this article, we will explore the steps involved in making a longbow, including the materials required, the tools necessary, and the techniques to ensure your bow is both functional and aesthetically pleasing.

Materials Required

Before you start crafting your longbow, it's essential to gather all the necessary materials. Here's a list of what you'll need:

1. Wood: The primary material for a longbow. Common choices include:
 - Yew: Known for its excellent elasticity and strength.
 - Osage Orange: Offers good durability and a beautiful color.
 - Hickory: Readily available and very strong.
 - Black Walnut: Aesthetically pleasing and functional.
2. Bowstring: Often made from:
 - Dacron: A synthetic material that is durable and stretches less.
 - Linen: Traditional choice, though requires more care.
 - FastFlight: A modern synthetic string that is lightweight and strong.
3. Finish: To protect the wood, consider using:
 - Linseed oil: Traditional wood finish that penetrates well.
 - Varnish: Provides a harder surface finish.
 - Wax: For a simple, protective coating.
4. Adhesives: To bond any limbs or handle components if using laminated wood.

Tools Required

Having the right tools is crucial for making a longbow. Here's a list of essential tools:

1. Hand Saw: For cutting the wood to the desired length.
2. Drawknife: For shaping the bow limbs.
3. Rasp and File: For smoothing and refining the shape.
4. Sandpaper: To finish the surface.
5. Measuring Tape: For accurate measurements.
6. Bow Square: To check the limb angles and ensure proper tillering.
7. String Jig: To help create the bowstring.
8. Drill: For making holes if needed in the handle or limb tips.

Designing Your Longbow

Before you begin the actual crafting, it's essential to design your longbow.

Choosing the Length

The length of the bow is typically 6 to 7 feet, depending on the draw length and the height of the archer. A good rule of thumb is to choose a bow length that is about 1.5 times your height.

Deciding on the Bow Profile

Longbows can have different profiles:

- D-Shape: The traditional form, with a flat back and a rounded belly.
- Reflex/Deflex: Curved limbs that increase performance and stability.
- Straight: A simpler design, easier to make for beginners.

Preparing the Wood

Once you have your materials and design ready, it's time to prepare the wood.

Selecting the Wood

Choose a straight-grained piece of wood, free from knots and defects. The wood should ideally be seasoned (dried) for at least a year to ensure it is stable.

Cutting the Wood to Size

1. Measure and mark the bow's length on the wood.
2. Use a hand saw to cut the wood to the desired length.
3. If using a stave (a single piece), ensure it is roughly 1-2 inches wide and 1-2 inches thick.

Shaping the Limbs

1. Use the drawknife to taper the limbs, making them thinner towards the tips.
2. Shape the belly (the side that faces you when shooting) to create a smooth curve.
3. Maintain a consistent thickness along the limb, ideally around $\frac{3}{4}$ inch at the handle and tapering to about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch at the tips.

Tillering the Bow

Tillering is the process of adjusting the limbs to ensure they bend evenly when drawn.

Creating a Tillering Stick

1. Use a long, straight piece of wood (around 6 feet long).
2. Mark the center point and attach a string to simulate the bowstring.

Testing the Limbs

1. Attach the bowstring to the tips of the bow.
2. Place the bow on the tillering stick and pull the string gently to check the limb flex.
3. Use a rasp or drawknife to gradually remove wood from the belly of the limbs where needed.
4. Repeat this process until both limbs bend evenly.

Making the Bowstring

A well-made bowstring is crucial for the performance of your longbow.

Measuring the Bowstring Length

1. The bowstring length is typically around 3 inches shorter than the bow's full length.
2. For a 6-foot bow, cut the string to about 5 feet 9 inches.

Creating the Bowstring

1. Use a string jig to help make the bowstring.
2. If using Dacron, twist and loop the ends to create nocking points.
3. Ensure it is tight and even, as a well-made string will improve the bow's performance.

Finishing Touches

After the bow is shaped and the string attached, it's time to finish your longbow.

Applying a Finish

1. Use linseed oil or varnish to protect the wood.
2. Apply several coats, allowing each coat to dry thoroughly.
3. Lightly sand between coats for a smooth finish.

Adding Accessories

You may want to consider adding:

- Nocking Points: Where the bowstring will sit.
- Grip: Made from leather or cord for better handling.
- Sight: If you prefer aiming aids.

Testing Your Longbow

After finishing your longbow, it's time to test it.

Safety First

1. Ensure you wear protective eyewear.

2. Use an arrow that matches the bow's specifications (length and spine).

Initial Test Shots

1. Start with low draw weights to ensure the bow functions correctly.
2. Gradually increase draw weight and distance as you gain confidence.

Conclusion

Crafting your longbow is a journey that requires patience, skill, and a deep appreciation for the materials and techniques involved. With careful attention to detail, dedication, and practice, you can create a longbow that is not only functional but also a beautiful piece of craftsmanship. Whether you are using it for archery, hunting, or as a display piece, your handmade longbow will surely be a source of pride and connection to a timeless tradition. Happy bowmaking!

Frequently Asked Questions

What materials do I need to make a longbow?

To make a longbow, you will need a suitable piece of wood (like yew or osage orange), a saw, a drawknife or spokeshave for shaping, sandpaper, a tillering stick, and bowstring material (like Dacron or nylon).

What length should my longbow be?

The length of your longbow typically depends on your height and draw length, but a general rule is to make the bow about 6 to 7 feet long for optimal performance.

How do I choose the right wood for my longbow?

Select hardwoods that are flexible and strong, such as yew, hickory, or osage orange. Look for a straight-grained piece without knots or defects to ensure durability and performance.

What is the tillering process and why is it important?

Tillering is the process of shaping the bow to ensure that it bends evenly when drawn. It's crucial for achieving the right balance and performance, preventing the bow from breaking or twisting.

How do I make the bowstring for my longbow?

To make a bowstring, measure the length of your bowstring to be about 3 inches shorter than the bow's length. Use Dacron or nylon material and twist it to create the appropriate thickness and strength.

What safety precautions should I take while making a longbow?

Always wear safety glasses while cutting or shaping wood, ensure your work area is clear, and be cautious with sharp tools like knives and saws to prevent injuries.

How do I finish and protect my longbow after making it?

After shaping your longbow, sand it smooth and apply a finish like linseed oil or polyurethane to protect the wood from moisture and damage while enhancing its appearance.

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