



**Woodturner's Tips:**

***Turning Palm***

There has been some interest shown in methods of turning palm. Palm, being a grass (botanically), not a tree, behaves in a somewhat different manner than wood when turned, dried, and finished. I've had varying success with it, but found a method that worked quite well for me with the last piece turned. First, the stock should be reasonably freshly cut, healthy; no mold or checking. Mount between centers, cut to cylindrical shape, and cut to mounting dimension on one side for your chuck. For a fresh piece, chuck mounting will be secure enough.

(A word of caution while turning: The turnings will come off like wet sawdust. Oil the lathe ways liberally before starting, and clean frequently - the juice is corrosive. When done, I removed stains with 600 grit sand paper and WD-40)

Turn to the finished shape and thickness, taking modest size cuts, down to the chuck mount area. Mark jaw numbers on the piece next to the chuck for alignment when you remount. Remove, and proceed to microwave oven drying.

Put the piece on your microwave oven turntable, and dry in 1 to 3 minute intervals at full heat, allowing to cool between intervals. You could choose to weigh the piece on a kitchen scale to gauge progress after each drying interval (if you're an organized type of individual), or go by feel of the heat generated in the wall (I did). You can stop before the heavy area in the bottom which contains the chuck hold is completely dry. Your piece will now have the surface texture of a plucked chicken or a sheared porcupine, the fibrous portion standing out from the rest.

Remount on the lathe chuck. It will be slightly out of round, but no matter. Sand down progressively from 60 to 150 grit. Now liberally apply several coats of lacquer, thinned down almost water thin, with a brush. Allow to dry while rotating slowly, this will accelerate drying - it will be fairly fast. When dry, sand down progressively from 100 to 400 or 600 grit. Give 3 or 4 more coats of thin lacquer, smooth down with 0000 steel wool, and buff with a coarse cloth (an old white sock does a good job).

Part off the piece, holding your parting tool at a slight angle inward towards the base. Stop parting when you have about  $\frac{3}{4}$ " left. Widen the slot to the left, and cut off with a hack, dovetail or flush cut saw. Base surface will be quite rough. If damp, put aside to dry. If not, proceed to sand smooth and finish.

Good luck and happy turning! - Sy Plonsky