

Shopmade Rotating “T-Square”

Carl Ford

I like to turn and embellish off-center pieces, often square or rectangular works with a “bowl” turned in it. One challenge was how to lay out evenly spaced lines emanating from the bowl to make patterns for embellishment.

My solution was to make a circular rotating “T-square.” Unlike a traditional T-square, whose head registers on a straightedge, this one features a circle that registers in the bowl I’ve turned. This T-square allows me to draw evenly spaced lines and replicate patterns easily.

How to make one

I made my circular T-squares out of scrap ¼" (6mm) plywood and glued the straight leg, or blade, to the head using hot-melt glue or thick cyanoacrylate (CA) glue. The line of the blade should pass through the center of the circular head, and the head should be close in diameter to that of the bowl. A little too small is okay, but too big is no good. Thus, I make new ones with different head sizes as needed.

In use

I use my circular “T-squares” in one of two ways. Drawing a series of evenly spaced radial lines is easy (*Photo 1*). Simply rotate the square in regular intervals and draw your lines along the blade.

You can also draw curved lines or other patterns by taping a custom template to the blade (*Photo 2*). I make custom templates out of

Draw straight radial lines



To draw straight lines, simple trace along the blade of the “T-square,” rotating the unit at regular intervals.

Draw custom patterns



Add a custom template to the blade to add curved lines or patterns.

Lay out and embellish!



Embellish along and/or within the layout lines per your own creative impulse.



semi-clear template plastic used by quilters. Trace your desired curved line or pattern on the template material, cut it out, and tape it to the blade of the T-square. Rotate the square and draw the curved line or pattern by following the template with a pencil.

After you lay out the lines, you can add embellishments any way you can think of, including painting, carving, pyrography, etc. (*Photos 3, 4*). ■

A member of the Kaatskill Woodturners (New York), Carl Ford is an accomplished woodturner who loves teaching people how to turn. His website is carlford.us.