

Sitting Squirrel

Carve a cute backyard critter in a sitting

By Gene Messer



A favorite pastime of mine is drinking a morning cup of coffee and watching birds at the feeder. The neighborhood squirrels also like to join in on the fun. Although the feeders were set up to be 'squirrel-proof,' those clever critters still manage to snag a seed or two. This quick carve was inspired by the squirrels I see in the morning—nibbling on a nut they managed to steal.

Getting Started

Transfer the pattern onto the blank using graphite paper and a pencil, and then cut it out with a band saw. Before you begin carving, make sure your tools are sharp. Keep them sharp as you go with periodic stropping. *Note: Always wear a carving glove and thumb guard. The photos were taken without them to clearly show hand and knife positions.*

ROUGHING OUT



1 Rough out the tail. Use a carving knife to make a stop cut around the entire tail to separate it from the body. Then draw a centerline down the tail and begin removing wood evenly from both sides of the line with the knife. Taper the bottom of the tail slightly into the rump.



2 Refine the tail. Use the knife to make a stop cut at the curve, and then carve up to and down to this line. Round off the top of the tail and accentuate its curved shape. Leave more wood at the top to create the illusion of a bushy tail.



3

Keep rounding and shaping.

Continue working the knife over the tail from bottom to top until you are pleased with the shape. Deepen the separation between the body and the tail.



4

Rough out the body.

Use the knife to chamfer all edges. Then round the sides of the body into the tail. Make a stop cut along the neckline. Carve up to and down to the line, gently rounding the head into your cuts.



ADDING DETAILS



5

Separate the arms.

Using the knife, make two deep stop cuts: one under the chin and one above the belly. Cut into the lines with a series of V-cuts to separate the tops of the arms from the head and the bottoms of the arms from the belly. Cut them in just far enough to give them a round shape. Leave extra material on front for the nut in the squirrel's paws. Gently round the hands into the arms and the arms into the shoulders. Then taper the shoulders into the neckline and round the head into the ears.



6

Shape the belly.

Remove wood from under the arms and paws to deepen the separation between the arms and belly. Do the same for the bottom of the belly and the feet. Then use the knife to round the belly. Chamfer the edges of the feet and gently round them into the body.



7

Separate the ears. Make a series of V-cuts between the ears to separate them. Deepen the stop cut along the neckline, and then carve up to and down to the line. Round the front of the ears down into the forehead, and then gently taper the sides of the face into the nose. Smooth out the cuts and round the face into the head. Make two small cuts to mark the treats between its paws.



8

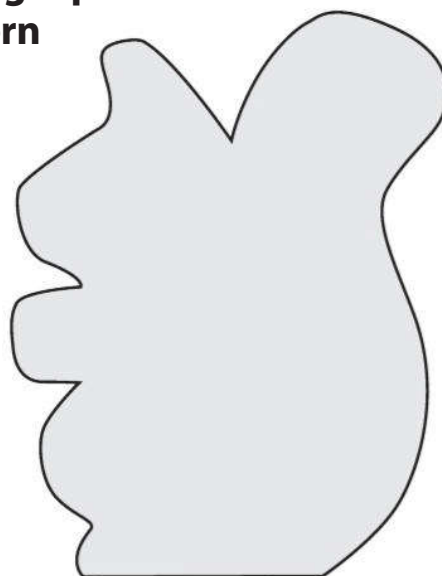
Shape the paws. Gently round the lines you marked in Step 7 to form a nut or small piece of fruit; then round the paws so they look like they're holding the treat. Use the tip of the knife to remove material from behind the paws and under the chin.



Finishing

Prepare the carving for finish. Lightly sand the squirrel smooth with 220-grit sandpaper. Wipe away excess dust with a tack cloth. Then apply three coats of clear semigloss finish, lightly sanding between coats.

Sitting Squirrel Pattern



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materials & tools

MATERIALS

- Butternut, 1¼" (3.2cm) thick: 2½" x 3" (6.4cm x 7.6cm)
- Graphite paper
- Pencil
- Sandpaper: assorted grits
- Tack cloth
- Finish, such as Minwax®: clear semigloss

TOOLS

- Band saw
- Carving knife

The author used these products for the project. Substitute your choice of brands, tools, and materials as desired.



Gene Messer of Groves, Tex., teaches carving to viewers from all over the world with his free videos. To see more of his videos, search for Gene Messer on YouTube.