

How to Make a Wooden Plug

Handmade wooden plugs are among the oldest and most popular baits in existence. For well over a century, anglers have been using look-alike bait fish whittled from blocks of wood to catch fish. Today, many commercial crankbaits are made of plastic, although some of the older tackle companies (i.e. Heddon) still manufacture the more impressive wooden baits.

How To Guide: Wooden Plug

The Result:

4" Topwater Plug



Step 1: Prepare Your Workspace*

Before you start, you will need to locate and prepare a suitable workspace. Choose wisely, as you will likely spill paint, shoot sawdust, chip the furniture, and operate loud and dangerous machinery. In other words, don't build wooden plugs on your nice dining room table next to your children.

Once you settle into your workspace, gather the necessary tools and materials and organize them on your workbench. Lock the door to prevent any disturbances.

Step 2: Choose the Wood and Cut the Body Block

The body block is a rectangle block of wood slightly larger than the dimensions of the lure you want to make. In this case, we will be making a 4" (inch) crankbait, so we will need to create a body block with the following dimensions:



Using a scroll saw, carpenter's saw, or other similar cutting device, cut a block of wood with the dimensions shown above. Be sure to wear your safety goggles during any cutting, sanding or carving of wood!

The type of wood you choose will affect the action of the lure. As a general rule, softer woods (balsa, pine, cedar, white cedar, basswood) are lighter and thus have faster action and a tendency to float. Harder woods (maple, oak, ash, and walnut) are more difficult to shape, but make excellent suspending lures with tighter action. These relationships are shown in the following diagram:



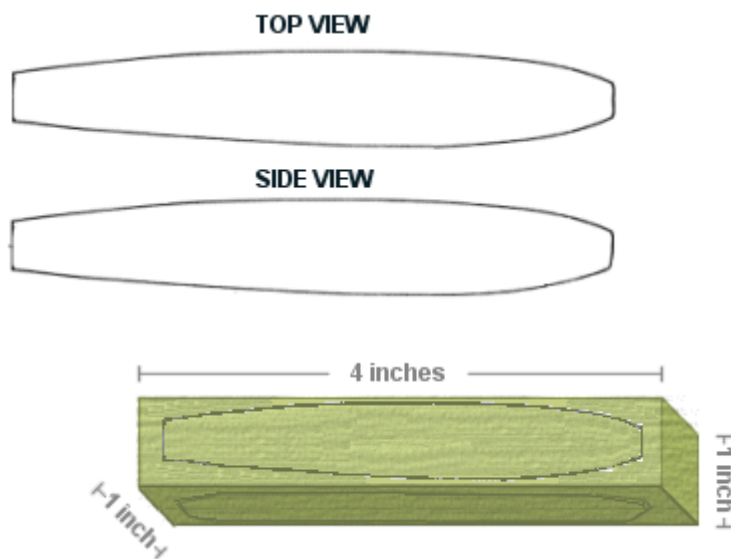
Each type of wood will catch fish. We suggest you experiment with different types of wood until you find one that produces the best action for the lure you are creating. (*Note: most commercial lures are made from basswood, cedar, white cedar or balsa*).

We will start with basswood because it is easy to saw, carve and finish.

Step 3. Draw the Lure Pattern onto the Body Block

You will need to draw the profile of your lure onto each of the four sides (not the ends) of the wooden body block. The profiles on the left and right sides must be mirror images of each other so the two sides are balanced. The top and bottom profiles can be different depending on the type of lure your are creating.

Although some skilled hobbyists can trace the shapes freehand, we prefer to trace paper patterns onto the block so that our measurements are precise and repeatable. Feel free to create your own lure patterns, or print and use the patterns below. These patterns will create a standard diving crankbait. Trace the side view patterns onto the sides of the wooden body block. Trace the top view pattern onto the top and bottom of the wooden body block. Do not trace anything on the ends of the block.

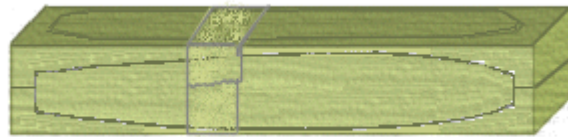


Step 4. Cut the Body Along the Pattern Lines

Using a scroll saw, cut the sides of the block along the pattern lines. When you are done, you should have three wooden pieces (see below diagram).



Tape the three pieces back together to prepare for the top-to-bottom cut.



Using the skill saw again, cut through the wooden block from top to bottom along the top view pattern lines. Remove the remaining tape and retrieve your rough cut plug.



Step 5. Carve the Plug

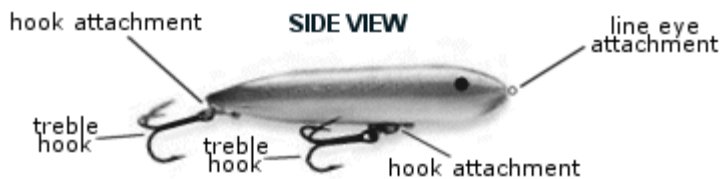
Using a sharp wood carving knife, shave the edges of the plug to round the lure into its approximate shape. This is also the time to customize the shape of the lure by carving unique features into the body (gills, fins, etc.). Be sure to always cut away from yourself to avoid injury!

Step 6. Sand the Plug

After you have carved the plug to its approximate shape, sand the plug to its final shape using 60 grit sandpaper. When the shape is correct, use the 120 grit sandpaper to smooth the plug. Finally, use the 400 grit sandpaper to give the plug a final surface for painting.

Step 7. Prepare the Plug for the Hardware

Mark the hardware locations with a fine felt tipped marker using the following diagram as a guide.



Drill a small pilot hole for the screw eye on the front (line tie) and the hook attachment on the rear. Be sure to use a drill bit that is slightly smaller than the width of the screw.

Using a larger drill bit, drill a hole in the area designated "weight" in the above diagram. Insert a lead weight or "BB" pellet. Seal the hole with wood glue or waterproof putty.

Step 8. Paint the Plug

Before you attach any hardware (screws, lips, eyes, etc.), you need to paint the plug. The painting process must happen in a specific order to protect the wood and highlight the colors.

First, paint the wooden plug with a clear sealer. This seals the lure and protects the wood against water corrosion.

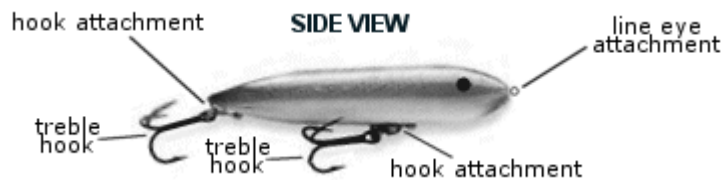
Next, apply a white primer coat. Allow the coat to dry and repeat until the white coat strongly covers the entire lure.

Now, paint the lure with any colors you desire. Allow the paint to dry.

Finally, seal the painted lure with a final waterproof clearcoat.

Step 9. Add the Hardware

After the paint has dried, you can add the hardware. Locate the holes you drilled prior to painting and mark any additional hardware locations with a fine felt tipped marker using the following diagram as a guide.



Insert a 1" closed eye screw into each hole that you drilled. (Note: if crankbait cups are used, insert the cup between the hook attachment screws and the plug prior to inserting the screw.)

Insert a 1/4" hook attachment screw into the bottom of the plug.

Attach any additional eyes, fins, rattles, stickers, weights, etc.

Attach treble hooks to the rear and bottom screws using split rings.

Step 10. Invent Your Own Plugs!

Now that you know the basics, you can invent your own plugs. Play around with body shapes, sizes, colors, and hardware until you find something that works for your fishing conditions.

**Always wear safety goggles and follow instructions provided by the manufacturer or supplier of the tools and components you are using.*