

A Classy Espresso Tamper

Joe Larese

I recently bought an espresso maker, and after using a spoon to pack down the coffee grinds, I realized I needed a tamper. Most commercially sold espresso tampers are made of metal, and some cost more than \$100. I was surprised to find that the woodturning supply companies don't offer a kit, so I decided to turn my own tamper, using a dense, close-grained wood for the tamping part and a contrasting wood species for the knob.

Turn the tamper section

1 Espresso makers have a metal filter basket that fits into a handled device called a portafilter, and the diameter of the filter basket can vary. Measure the inside diameter of your filter basket (*Photo 1*). Mine measured 2" (5cm).

2 Chuck and turn a blank 3½" (9cm) long to a diameter that will fit the filter basket closely (*Photo 2*). Be sure to keep the sides parallel or slightly tapered. Hard maple, apple, or birch would be a good choice for the wood.

3 Turn the end flat or slightly convex and sand to a fine grit. As this is the part that will be in direct contact with the coffee grounds, I finished the wood with just a little mineral oil, but you could also leave it unfinished.



Measure and turn



1 Measure the inside diameter of your espresso maker's filter basket, then turn the tamper to that size. Use a close-grain hardwood for this part of the project.

4 Turn a tenon and a slightly larger shoulder on what will become the top of the tamper part (*Photo 3*). The tenon, which I turned to ½" (13mm) diameter and about ¾" (19mm) long, will be glued into a hole in the knob section later. Sand and finish. I used wax for this part.

Turn the knob

5 Chuck and turn a blank of contrasting wood for the knob. Drill a hole sized to accept the tenon on the tamper portion. Glue the tamper to the knob, then blend the two sections for a smooth transition (*Photos 4, 5*).

Turn a tenon



3 The author uses a parting tool to turn a tenon and shoulder on the tamper.

Glue parts, turn transition



5 Rough-shape a contrasting species for the knob, then drill a hole to accept the tenon on the tamper. Glue the sections together, turn a smooth transition, and finish shaping the knob.

6 Continue shaping the knob, then sand, part, and finish as desired. I decided to finish the knob section with a spray lacquer for increased durability, masking the tamper portion to avoid getting overspray on it.

I can't guarantee your cappuccinos or lattes will taste better, but I'm pretty sure any home barista would be thrilled to receive a handcrafted tamper as a gift. ■

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