



Tuning Japanese Bench Chisels

Introduction

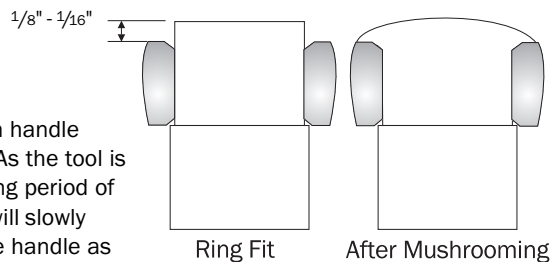
Japanese Bench Chisels are constructed in a different manner than traditional Western chisels and must be properly prepared before use. Follow these simple instructions and you can anticipate a lifetime of use from your tools.

Japanese Chisel Handle Preparation

Your chisels have a loose fitting metal ring around the striking end of the tool that should be properly secured. You'll need a flat wood file, sandpaper, a round metal file, hot water and a clear oil finish like Danish oil or camellia oil to complete this process.

Begin by removing the ring from the end of the chisel. Mark the top or bottom on the ring. Using a lacquer thinner, remove the lacquer from the tool's handle. With a round smooth cut metal file, remove any burrs or excess material on the inside of ring and file a slight bevel on the entire inside circumference of the top of the ring. Make sure there are no sharp edges on the interior or top edge of the ring. Using the flat wood file, gently and evenly remove enough of the handle's surface until the ring slips approximately $\frac{1}{8}$ " to $\frac{3}{16}$ " beyond the end of the tool handle. Put the ring back on the chisel and gently tap the ring down on the handle using a hammer with a rounded face. Hold the butt end of the chisel in a cup of hot water for about 3 minutes. Remove the chisel and with the round face of the hammer "mushroom" the protruding wood down and over the chisel ring. The chisel's end should look like a domed piece of wood. Soaking the wood in hot water prevents the destruction of the woodgrain during this process. Coat the tool handle with oil and rub it in until dry.

The ring allows you to hit this chisel with a metal hammer while preventing the wooden handle from splitting. As the tool is used over a long period of time, the ring will slowly move down the handle as the wood mushrooms over it.



Flattening & Sharpening Japanese Chisels

Because of their hollow ground backs and laminated construction, Japanese chisels have slightly different sharpening requirements than Western style chisels. While the instructions below call for Japanese water stones, Arkansas or man-made oil stones can also be used.

If using Japanese waterstones, make sure that your stones are flat. Also, flatten your stones often! Start by flattening the first 1" or so of the back of your chisels. Using an 800 or 1200 grit water stone, rub the chisel aggressively until you can see that the chisel back is flat and you can feel a burr along the entire front (bevel side) of the chisel. Do not flatten through the hollow that was forged on the back of the chisel! Continue this procedure on a 4000 grit and then a 6000 grit stone until you have a highly polished tool back.

Now take a 1200 grit water stone and start working the bevel edge of the chisel. Sharpen back and forth using the stone's entire surface. Remember to flatten your stones often. Use an even pressure and do not rock the tool or sharpen in a figure 8 pattern. When you have brought the burr to the back side of the tool, you are now ready to go to the next stone.

Using your 4000 grit stone, polish the bevel side of the chisel in the same fashion as before. When you have removed all of the marks from the 1200 grit stone, you are ready to move to the 6000 grit stone. Using the 6000 grit stone, sharpen both the front and back of the chisel. Begin with 40 strokes before alternating between the front and back. Reduce the number of strokes down to 6 on each before changing sides. You should now have an amazingly sharp tool!