

# A Sandpaper Hack

Abrasive Origami for Woodturners

Wells Shoemaker, May, 2020

Santa Cruz Woodturners recently circulated a virtual “panel discussion” with **John Wells** and **Raf Strudley** regarding **sanding**...that necessary but not necessarily delightful aspect of our craft. Much of Raf and John’s discussion centered on power sanding with H&L discs, which many of us use for the majority of our time in this phase of a project, especially for smooth contours on bowls.

Flat sheets of abrasive, while used for a minority of our total time spent sanding, still represent an important part of our “armamentarium.” That’s particularly applicable for spindles with their small radius coves and beads, as John mentioned. Same could be said for bowls with decorative contours, undercuts, and textures where power disc sanding can’t reach or, worse, damage the features we spent so much time creating.

While we use the generic term “sandpaper,” many of our members use abrasives bonded to cloth, foam, Mylar, screens, or fiber mesh pads. Every online vendor has a wide array of brands with different abrasive grits and backings, most of them superior to familiar hardware store products. Most of us have favorites by now, which might be another topic someday! Paper is usually the most economical, and it remains a go-to medium for lots of turners. We’ll focus on paper for the rest of this article.

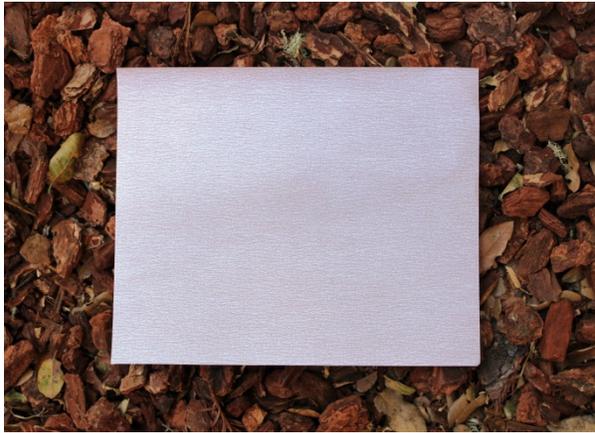
**Stiff paper backing** has some appealing virtues. It’s less prone to wrinkling and tearing, plus it’s easier to hold against moving wood with your fingers. On the other hand, it may not conform well to narrow contours, and it has a tendency to buckle when thrust into small diameter openings like the insides of cups, goblets, and boxes.

**Lightweight paper backing** conforms better to some of those delicate spaces, but when used in single thickness on a rotating surface, it tends to “squunch up.” The abrasive contact with the surface becomes impaired...and then the paper wears thin, loses grit, or tears. It’s hard to maintain abrasive contact with rotating wood using your fingers against smooth paper backing, and small pieces tend to “skip away” and fly off into the rafters. The user forfeits a fair amount of expensive material.

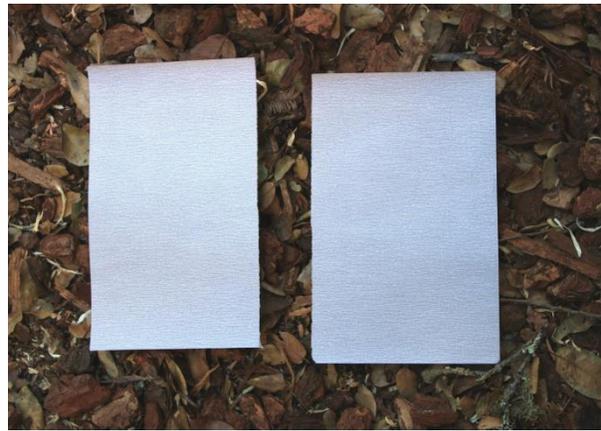
This is a “hack” I learned from Kirk deHeer at Craft Supply to more effectively use the lighter weight papers...and waste less. In this case, I’m illustrating with Finkat sandpaper, a Japanese product which I find cuts really fast and cleanly. It progresses through the grits without surprise “rogue” scratches appearing.

Tear a 9x11 sheet in half, and then tear each half into thirds (6 total). Then fold each strip into a 3-panel packet. It becomes stiff enough to resist wrinkling and won’t slip out of the fingers. Simply unfold the packet and you have a total of 3 fresh grit surfaces, and you aren’t obliged to waste time with tired abrasive. I use nearly 100% of that grit!

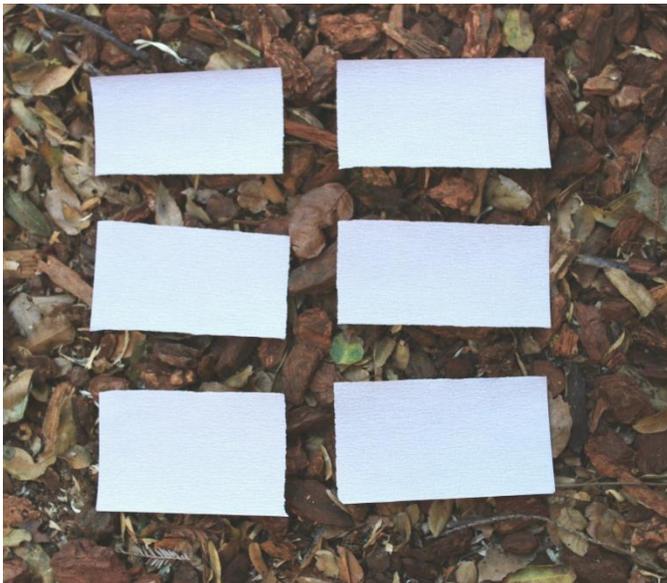
Photos next page→



Step 1: A fresh 9x11 sheet



Step 2: Tear in half over a steel straight edge



Step 3: Tear each half into 3 strips, making 6 total



Step 4: fold over into 3 panels