

Mouthpiece

Now to shape and sort the mouthpiece

Take your time and test everything as you go, this is where the didge starts to come to life. It's easy to take wood off but more difficult to put back on!



How to Make a Wooden Didgeridoo
Part 7 - Mouthpiece

With the didgeridoo cut and hollowed it is now ready for the exciting bit, making it sound good. I do this in stages and concentrate of each bit as I am doing it. I have a few principles, or guidelines that I tend to follow (written below). Mouthpiece is always fashioned first (so that when the didgeridoo is played I can assess the quality and particular pitch of sound).

Notes About the Mouthpiece

As with pretty much most of building a didgeridoo, the way a mouthpiece is fashioned is individual taste. Other factors come in to play such as whether the mouthpiece is plain or if beeswax or milliput is to be applied. I have experimented with different sizes and shapes of mouthpieces form

small apertures to large gaping holes. The shape of the internal walls of the mouthpiece is also important as the lips go part way into the bore when playing. As I have said it is personal choice, with the didgeridoos I make, the mouthpieces are plain, however they are coated with epoxy resin for strength and comfort.

The first three didgeridoos I purchased were made with beeswax mouthpieces and at first this was ok. I found that after playing for long periods of time caused the beeswax to soften and I would end up adjusting the wax every few minutes. I would also be forever fiddling with it, and with several didgeridoos that really became irritating. I am grateful though, as the beeswax allowed me to fashion mouthpieces in different shapes, very quickly and thus I was able to determine what the optimum size and shape was best for me. Beeswax is cheap and easily available from hardware stores in blocks. Be advised to buy pure beeswax as some companies have additives in them which may irritate the skin. I have encountered sheets of beeswax specifically for rolling up and making a mouthpiece, however these are difficult to find and there is never one to hand when you want one.



I started looking for a more permanent solution once I was happy with the shape of the mouthpiece. Milliput is the answer. Milliput is a two part resin, with a composition like clay. The two parts are mixed together by kneading it until a uniform colour is achieved (several colours are available). Once this is done the milliput can be fashioned in to the mouthpiece, like working with clay. It sets in 2-3 hours and can be sanded, drilled and worked on. It is also waterproof when set and easy to clean. If I have a mouthpiece that needs adjustment I use milliput. There is no mucking about and it is permanent.



Before I started making didgeridoos, I purchased several (traditional and contemporary) instruments that had no added mouthpiece i.e. plain wood. These felt fine and comfortable to play and I enjoyed not having to fiddle with the mouthpiece. One of the didgeridoos developed a split right on the edge of the mouthpiece and I had to repair it. I asked around and eventually repaired it using epoxy resin. The results were superb. The mouthpiece was totally smooth, comfortable to play, could be easily cleaned and so on. I soon adopted this technique when I started making didgeridoos.

Hygiene

When I started playing the didgeridoo I would play for hours. With several didgeridoos I found that the mouthpieces became dirty and needed a clean. Not just the external surface of the mouthpiece but immediately inside the bore. Playing produces moisture, the moisture is being blown from a warm human body so it heats up. The saliva we all have in our mouths can be quite destructive as it is more than just water, containing our own body's chemicals. Repeated playing can encourage all sorts of life to set up home in the bore of the didgeridoo (especially if a didgeridoo is played after eating. I regularly clean my mouthpieces and the inside of the bore where the lips vibrate to avoid any degradation of the didgeridoo and avoid transmission of any unwanted bacteria, or other horrible things such as cold sores. This is another reason I do not like beeswax, as it cannot be easily cleaned. The smooth chemically resistant surface of epoxy resin, or milliput, I find easy to clean.



Fashioning the Mouthpiece

I base the mouthpiece on a template, though every instrument is slightly different in girth, thickness of walls, type of wood being used etc. On the end of the wood I mark a 28mm diameter circle (1 1/8"). I mark another circle outside of this with approx 32mm diameter (1 1/4"). I then use a conical rasp bit on an electric drill to work the mouthpiece into a relatively smooth circular shape up to the edge of the 28mm line. As the rasp is conical there will be a slight (depending on how the bit is held) taper into the bore getting smaller. Using a sanding drum I work the mouthpiece gently to make the surface smoother and slightly larger than the 28mm line but within the 32mm line. I am aiming for a finished mouthpiece of 28-30mm, and have to bear in mind that the thickness of the resin, when applied, will narrow the diameter somewhat, so allow a little extra for this when widening the mouthpiece.



Once I am happy with the shape I use a detail sander to shape the outside of the didgeridoo so that it tapers in by the mouthpiece. I don't like a mass of wood in my face when I play and find it substantially more comfortable this way. This process is quick, and as soon as I have fashioned the mouthpiece I play the didge to see how it sounds and feels. Altering the internal diameter of the bell affects the pitch of the didge so I attend to that before doing anything else with the mouthpiece.

Most of my didgeridoos have a coating of epoxy resin on the mouthpiece. I do this for hygiene and comfort as well as to prevent any cracks occurring at the mouthpiece. It can alter the sound a lot as it will narrow the bore and diameter of the mouthpiece (backpressure increases). When sanding back to the lines I have marked I will sand just a little extra to allow for the resin. Through practice I like think I have a fair idea of how the sound and feel of the instrument can change.

[Back to top of page..>>](#)

[Back to How to Make a Wooden Didgeridoo Index...>>](#)

