

**Using a Waste Block
or
Life Without a 4-Jaw Chuck**

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Many beginning turners are under the impression that they must have a 4-jaw chuck to turn bowls. I own two 4-jaw chucks and seldom use them, preferring instead to use a waste block. One big advantage in using a waste block is that after the piece is completely finished inside and out, except for the area around the base or foot, where I've left "thick wood" for support, I can part away part of the waste block and form the foot. By using a waste block, after the piece is finished I can part it off at the glue line, utilizing all of the thickness of the wood in the bowl blank. To fasten the piece to the lathe I use a screw chuck, but a faceplate works as well.

When using a waste block, there are several "musts" to be observed. The surfaces of the blank and the waste block must be true and flat, as in any other glue joint. I use medium CA (cyanoacrylate) glue, but yellow glue or other glues could be used. I apply a heavy coat to both surfaces. After applying a light spritz of accelerator, I immediately apply the waste block to the blank. No clamp, just firm hand pressure for a few moments. I've found that if a waste block glue joint fails, it's usually because not enough glue was used. You aren't trying to make an invisible glue joint. Expect some glue squeeze-out. I've been using waste blocks for many years, and students regularly use them in my classes with great success.

I use alder for the waste block partly because it almost never warps, giving me a flat surface for the glue joint. Also, it's quite soft, making it easy to part off. Most any wood will work, however. I suggest that you never use plywood, as it may separate.

After the piece is completely finished, I part it off, using a parting tool. I part it along the glue line until the glue joint is about the size of a dime (for a small bowl), then just pop it off with the heel of my hand. I then reverse-chuck the piece and finish the bottom.