

GOOD OARS

for
Easy Rowing



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I can't emphasize enough, the importance of proper balanced oars to make rowing easy and more fun. Good oars make all of the difference in the world, given a good rowing boat to start with of course. When given a proper rowing boat and a good set of oars, it is in fact a most enjoyable experience as noted by the Water Rat's famed quote on the fun of simply messing about in boats. He was rowing at the time.

Good oars have specific characteristics, primarily in weight distribution that makes them easy to use. These characteristics are not available in commercially available oars. Most oars available on the market today are heavy bladed unbalanced oars that are difficult to use. You can make a properly balanced set of oars from scratch or find the right type of oar to modify.

Proper oars have light, but strong blades that are easy to lift out of the water on the return stroke. The inboard part of the oar, (loom) can be heavy, and in fact some oars are counter weighted at the handles. However, this additional weight is not necessary if the oars are properly proportioned to begin with. Length should be about 1.5 times the boat's beam for boats 14 feet in length and shorter, and about two times the boat beam for boats longer than 14 feet. The oar shaft can be shortened for oars to about six feet in length. Shorter oars can be proportioned below six feet.

Below are two oar patterns, one for ash and one for spruce. The ash pattern can be used to modify a stock set or ash oars or made from scratch. The spruce (or pine) pattern can be made from 1x8 stock generally available from lumber yards and shaped to the pattern shown. To start, step one is to draw the oar plan on the board. Step two is to cut two pieces away from the center oar board. Step three is to taper cut the cutoffs to the shape of the oar shaft and loom. Step four is to glue (epoxy) the cut away pieces top and bottom to the center cut piece.

Shaping the shaft and loom are done similar to making spars, where the shafts are tapered to the dimensions with a square section, next the corners are cut off to form an octagonal section. From octagonal, the shaft is planed and sanded round. The looms may be left octagonal if desired.

The blades are shaped with a rib protruding down the center. They may be slightly concave hollowed using a convex shaped plane, (also known as a backing plane) Surform tool or with a disc and belt sander.

The oar handle can be barrel shaped or slightly tapered toward the loom end if desired.

Modifying commercially available spruce or ash oars is possible. Many commercially available oars are made of poplar or other woods that are not generally suitable for modifying, so be sure to find spruce or ash oars if you are going this route.

The oars should be varnished or painted. The oar handle is never painted, but may be oiled with a 50/50 mix turpentine and boiled linseed oil.

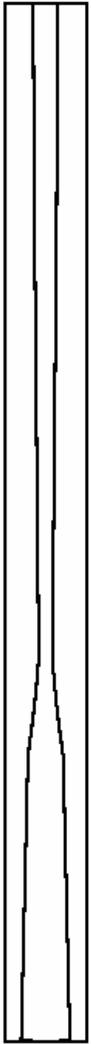
The oars should be leathered at the oarlock to protect the oar from chafing effects of the oarlock. Leathers and oarlocks are available from West Marine, Hamilton Marine or The WoodenBoat Store.

A hint to make rowing even easier, starting with a good oar of course: when rowing, the oar blade is submerged only as far as it takes to completely wet the blade. Any further or deeper in the water only causes a loss of leverage and power. Oarlocks should not have pins in them to allow feathering of the blades on the return stroke when needed in windy conditions.

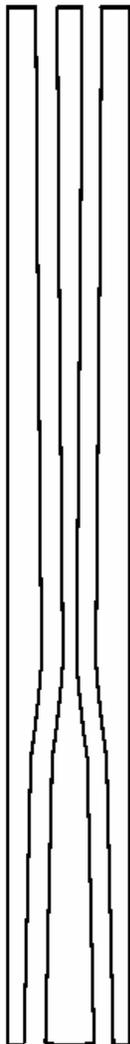
The oars I have just described are based on a type made by Pete Culler. More appears in his now out of print book "Boats, Oars and Rowing". Sections of this book have been republished in a new book. WoodenBoat magazine has a very nice write up on Culler oars in issue 71, July/August 1986, also available from the WoodenBoat Store. Mystic Seaport sells plans for Culler oars for a very reasonable price.

Custom oars of this type take a small amount of time to make relative to boat construction; however, are well worth the effort in ease of use. Good oars are the least you can do to make your time on the water most enjoyable.

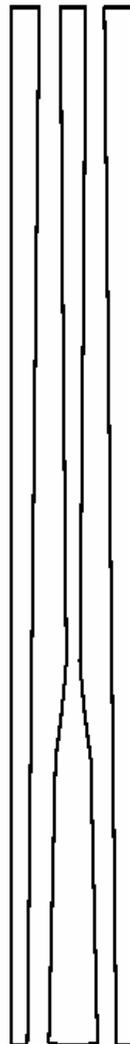
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