

## **AN HEIRLOOM TOOLBOX**

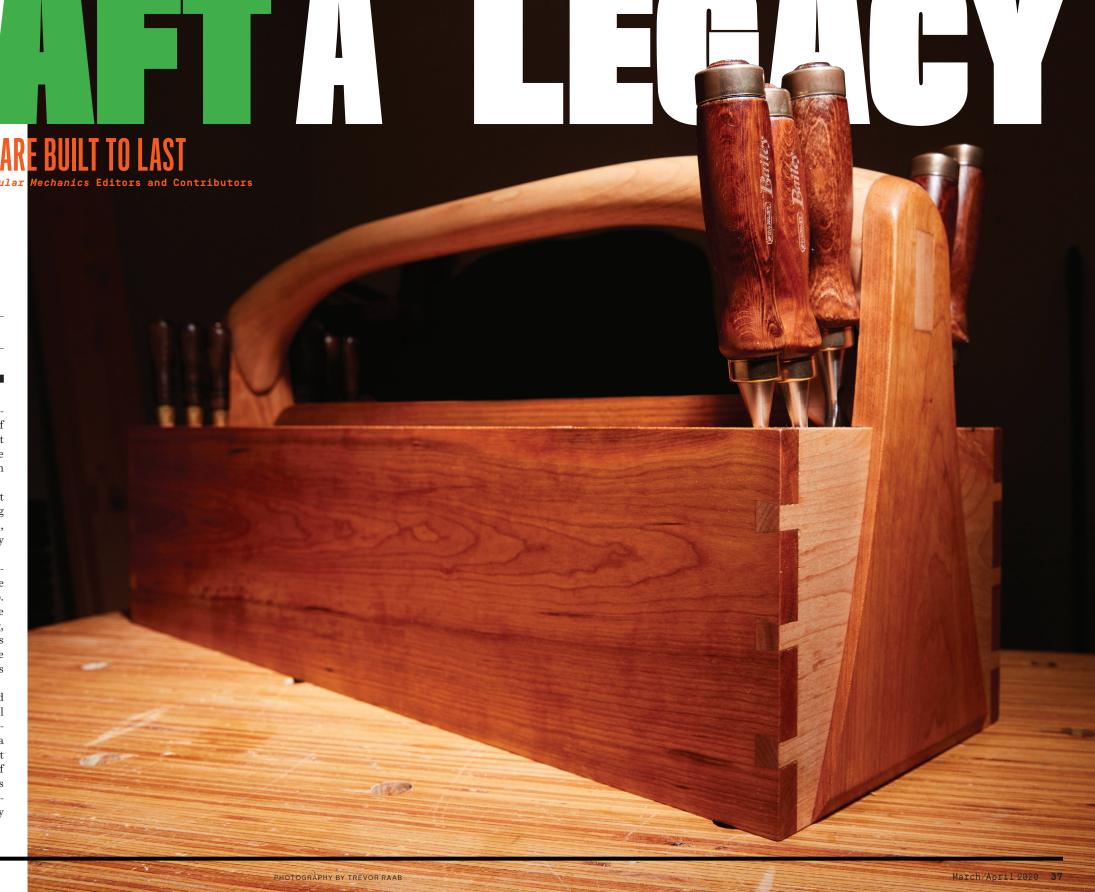
By Brad Ford and Roy Berendsohn

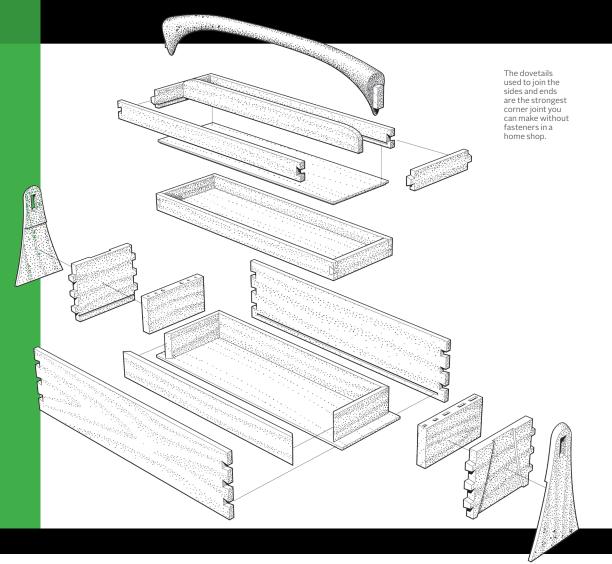
e designed this toolbox to be as attractive as it is durable, and capable of holding and protecting some of our most prized tools. But more than that, we wanted to build something our children might cherish long after we're gone.

To do that, we created a design that prioritizes precision and patience during construction. The joinery for the corners, handle, and uprights has to fit together tightly to be structurally sound.

The box sides and ends are joined with dovetails—the strongest corner joint you can make without fasteners or hardware in a home shop. The uprights are inset into the box ends. Done neatly, the wedging action of the joint is strong, especially when glue is added, and this holds the two pieces together firmly. Even more strength comes from the tenon that connects the handle to the uprights.

Lastly, note that the handle is composed of three pieces—a lamination. This crucial detail enables you to form an attractive compound curve without a weak boundary area created by the handle's shape. At the point where the grain is weakest, another piece of wood with a different grain pattern reinforces it. The difference between the two grain patterns interrupts the forces that would normally crack the handle.





We've outlined the trickiest parts here. To see the full instructions—including recommended wood types and measurements—go to popularmechanics.com/toolbox.

### ► How to cut dovetails

It's possible to hand cut the dovetails, but it takes a lot of practice to make them fit well together. We used a **Rockler dovetail jig** to cut the box corners. The jig will let you do it on your first try, and templates are available to make a variety of dovetail patterns (we

used Rockler's Distinctive Template A for this box).

If this is your first dovetail joint, practice by making two or three test cuts on inexpensive, **knot-free pine**. Then cut and dovetail together two pieces of **scrap hardwood**, of the same type you'll be using for the box. Once you're satisfied with the results, dovetail the box ends and sides.

Cut the box sides and ends to length and stand them up as they will fit together once assembled. Label them so that they go into the jig with matching corners routed together.

Cut the tails first (the part of the joint oriented on the long sides of the box), then the pins (the pieces of wood that will fit into the spaces of the tails). Cut the tails about  $\frac{1}{16}$ -inch longer than they need to be, allowing them to stick out of the joint. This ensures they won't be too short. You can trim them flush once the box is assembled.





### Making the handle

The handle is made from three pieces of wood glued together to form a single lamination. Rip and crosscut the pieces for the lamination slightly oversize, then **glue** and **clamp** them together. Drive **screws** into the lamination in areas that will be sawed off to pull the parts more firmly together. When the glue is dry, make one or more ripping passes on the **table** saw to ensure the long edges are parallel.

Mark the location of the handle tenons on the short edges of the lamination using a square, a marking gauge, and a sharp knife. Dry assemble the box sides, ends, and uprights. Rest the bottom edge of the lamination on the top edge of the box ends. Lean the lamination against the uprights with an equal amount of overhang at each end; using a sharp pencil simply draw a line on the lamination at the inside of each upright. Remove the lamination and scribe on the pencil line with a knife. That knife line will mark the inside corner where the handle tenon meets the upright. Mark the tenon's width, thickness, and shoulders on the short edge of the lamination and scribe with a knife.

Next, design the shape of the handle. Mark the center of the long side of the lamination this will be the middle of your handle. Create a curve you like, making sure it's high enough to remove trays or bulky tools if you'll be carrying those. Draw the curve on one side of the center, then trace and copy on the other side (or download our online handle template) to be sure that it's even.

To make the tenon, carefully remove the wood around the area you have scribed with a **table saw**, making it slightly oversize (by about <sup>1</sup>/<sub>64</sub>-inch). You'll want the mortise-andtenon to fit snugly together, and you should always fit the tenon to the mortise, not the other way around. (It's very difficult to trim wood evenly from inside the mortise.)

Complete each tenon by working down to the scribe lines using a **rabbet plane**, **block plane**, and a **chisel**.

Once the tenons are complete, cut out the rough shape of the handle on a **band saw**. Mark the shape of the handle on the shoulder of each tenon—this will give you a target as you remove material. Remove equal amounts of wood off the corners, until the handle profile is roughly octagon-shaped. (We used a variety of planes and chisels to shape the handles.) Remove material on the corners, down to the outline on the tenon shoulder. Sand by hand until smooth.

THE SIMPLIFIED Process

Prepare your stock

**2.** Out the dovetails. See instructions on facing page.)

**3.**Dry fit the box pieces together

When everything fits tightly, glue and clamp together the box sides and ends, and insert the bottom panel.

**5.** Glue the handle Jamination

**6.**Cut the uprights and fit to box end:

**7.**Shape the handle
(See instruction
on this page.)

Dry fit the uprights to the handle.

**9.**Glue and clamp the handle and uprights

10.
Build tray(s) and
blocks to fit the
nterior dimensions
of the box and the
tools you intend
to carry.

38 March/April 2020 ILLUSTRATION BY GEORGE RETSECK March/April 2020 39



# **HANDCRAFTED KNIFE**

By Alex Hollings

### **Getting started**

Knife making can be complex, but it doesn't have to be. You can create some incredible pieces using things you either already have lying around or that are available for cheap at your local hardware store.

While there are lots of companies out there that specialize in selling high-quality steel forged specifically for knife making, a more affordable place to start is at the bottom of your toolbox, says Paul Brach, a knifemaker

for more than 30 years. Old tool files, in particular, make for great knives because they tend to be made out of higher-quality steel and are already formed in a workable shape.

Plus, there's something special about working with what you have. "There is a certain satisfaction that comes from giving new life to these things rather than letting them go to waste," Brach says.

### **▶** Design your blade

For your first attempt, Brach recommends a standard survival knife shape similar to the Marine Corps Ka-Bar design. This shape's long cutting edge is bolstered by a tapered edge on the top of the blade, making it well suited for both cutting and piercing. The steel of the blade extends through the handle (commonly referred to as "full tang"), and it retains its full thickness along the spine of the blade, making it very strong.

Sketch out your shape to scale on paper by tracing an existing blade or drawing freehand using a reference image. The sketch doesn't have to be perfect, but it should resemble the profile of the knife you intend to make. Cut the drawing out and trace it onto your file using a permanent marker. Save the cutout—the marker will fade under heat, so you may need to redraw lines as you work.

### ► Grind the profile

Put on your safety glasses and either clamp the file to a sturdy table or place it in a vise. Use the cut-off wheel on your angle grinder to begin roughing out the basic shape of the knife. Cut straight lines that are slightly outside the curved shape of the blade.

Once you've removed as much material as you can, swap in the grinding wheel. Begin shaping the steel into the final profile of the

Lay the knife flat on your workbench or table and lay the drill bit next to the blade, with the tip of the bit facing what will become the knife's sharp edge. Leave the bit flat on the table as you press its tip into the edge of the metal, and scrape a line down the length of what will become the cutting surface of the knife.

Now flip the knife over and repeat, scratching another line down the length of the blade using the drill bit. If your bit is the same width as the metal, both lines will overlap. If the bit

isn't an exact match, there will be two lines. In that case, the space between the two lines will be your centerpoint when grinding out the blade's edge.

### ▶ Grind the edge

**HERE'S WHAT** 

YOU'LL NEED

of metal pipe wide

dryer through

Angle grinder with

a flapper wheel

Paracord or

leather strips and

slow-set epoxy

When shaping your blade's edge, Brach recommends holding the angle grinder tight to your sides and moving your body at the hips, rather than your arms, as you grind. Start near the handle of your knife and grind toward the tip of the blade, being intentional and careful not to slip the grinder off the blade and cut yourself. Leave the blade edge about as thick as a dime.

"It's important to keep your grind symmetrical, removing the same amount of material from each side," Brach says. Otherwise, you'll increase the chance of a significant warp during heat treatment.

This step will take some time, depending on the power of your angle grinder and how

detail-oriented you choose to be. It could take 20 minutes (for a rough-cut utility knife) or several hours (for a finer piece of cutlery).

When you're done grinding, you'll have a knife that could handle a number of jobs-but until you treat the steel properly, it won't offer the longevity or resilience you'd expect.

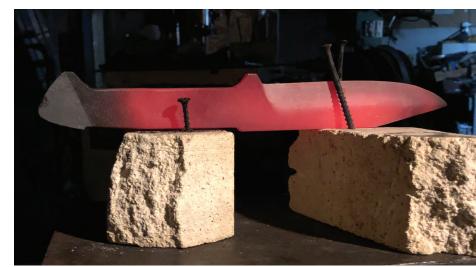
### ▶ Heat the blade in your DIY forge

Light the charcoal in your grill. Feed the nose of the hairdryer into one end of the pipe and stick the other end of the pipe next to the burning coals. The combination of high-temperature charcoal and forced hot air will create embers hot enough to heat-treat your blade. Hardwood lump charcoal will be hot enough to work with more than 1,500°F-in around 15 minutes and will burn at that heat for about an hour. (You'll have to add more charcoal once or twice during the process.)

Using your tongs or continued on page 82







blade and handle.

### ► Center-scribe the metal

40 March/April 2020 March/April 2020 41 Mortise-and-tenon joints

Brace beams

Sill

Tie beams

A 200-YEAR SHED

n 1989, my father-in-law taught me to smoke meats and cheeses. I was a timber frame builder—I have my own company, called OakBridge Timber Framing—and I wanted a home project to help me unwind in the evenings and on weekends. I combined my passion for building with the skills my father-in-law had given me and I built my family an old-fashioned timber-frame smokehouse.

My design is strong but simple. A timber-frame structure isn't just slapped up. Compared to a stick-built home, it uses more substantial cuts of wood and is fitted together with unique joinery like mortises, tenons, and wooden pegs as opposed to studs. The latter might not be able to withstand heavy winds or storms, but I've seen timber frames survive tornado hits. They just won't fall. My smokehouse shed will be around for my family and the younger generation after them. Plus, the timber-frame method isn't only for smokehouses—it can be the heart of almost any structure.

My smokehouse isn't just functional: It takes me back in time. I go in to check my bacons and it's a step back 100 years. Sometimes when I'm out there banking the smokehouse for the night, I wonder why I'm working so hard on something so old-fashioned, but it's worth all the time and effort once you have everyone enjoying the things you've made. —Johnny Miller, as told to Matt Allyn and Tyler Daswick

For a full list of steps and materials, visit **popularmechanics.com/timberframe.** 

### CONSTRUCTION STEPS

Decide what type of wood to use. A lightweight wood like poplar or pine will make it easy to lift the timber into place, but if your timber will be exposed to the elements in the absence of siding or roofing, opt for white oak, Douglas fir, or cedar.

Cut your beams, rafters, roof boards, and siding boards to size, then cut the joints. Start with the mortises and tenons. A standard mortise is 4 inches deep and 1.5 inches wide to accommodate a 3.75-inch tenon. A mortise should be a quarter-inch deeper than the tenon. The bird's-mouth joints on the rafters should be 1.5 inches vertical by 6 inches horizontal. You can use a circular saw for most of these cuts and a 1.5-inch drill bit for the mortises, but a corner chisel makes a nice tenon, too.

A timber frame's sill supports the walls and secures them to the foundation. To ensure stability, drill two **anchor bolts** up through the foundation into each beam of the sill (one at each end of each beam, for eight bolts total). The bolts should reach all the way through the sill so you can secure the nut, but if you'd like to hide the hardware, drill a 2-inch-deep hole in the sill to meet the anchor bolt before it peeks above the wood, attach the **nut**, then plug the hole with a **wooden peg**.

Assemble the frame for the front (the taller) and back (shorter) walls with your materials laid on the ground, rather than standing on the sill. Fit the horizontal tie beams between

the corner posts before locking in the diagonal brace beams between the tie beams and posts. Then, raise the completed walls onto the sill. Attach the front and back walls together by securing the tie beams that run the length of your structure. Lean the erected walls outward, brace them with conventional lumber, and align the ties before fitting the walls back together. Then peg the joints from the outside in (you'll need 36 pegs total) to accommodate any siding you'll use. Your pegs should have one sharp end so they'll pass through the tenons and secure the joints.

Miller's smokehouse has produced holiday turkeys, homemade deer jerky, and prize-winning cheeses. Attach the four rafters on top of the structure, then screw or nail down the 2x boards, then the **steel**, for the roof. If you'll be using your shed as a smokehouse, opt for tongue-and-groove boards—they're best to prevent smoke from escaping.

Screw or nail on 1x6 tongue-and-groove boards for siding, with a second layer on top if you'd like a better seal (ideal for a smokehouse). Or, if you can find them, use 1x12 tongue-and-groove boards and nail 3-inch battens over the seams between the boards to create a reliable one-layer seal.



42 March/April 2020 ILLUSTRATION BY GEORGE RETSECK PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREW SPEAR March/April 2020 43



# A HOME-BREWING PHILOSOPHY

eer is a catalyst for community building. At our brewery, Dogfish Head, my wife Mariah and I have tried to show our kids that we make fun, creative, off-centered ales that connect us to awe-some people such as the Grateful Dead and our coworkers. We hoped one of them might be interested in carrying on this tradition, but we didn't want to put that weight on their shoulders.

We expected our kids to get summer jobs by the time they were 14.
Our daughter, Grier, has chosen not to work at Dogfish Head, whereas Sammy started running food at our pub in 2015. After he told us he loved biology and chemistry, we arranged for him to brew a nonalcoholic birch beer at Boothbay Craft Brewery, which is near Dogfish

He apprenticed in the Dogfish brewpub's microbiology lab in 2017 and, the next summer, asked to apprentice at our brewery. My wife and I told him that it wasn't a budgeted position. He needed

Head, Maine, where I spent my summers growing up.

to make money. To his credit, he worked nights running food and cleaning tables, then apprenticed at our brewpub during the day. Last summer, he apprenticed at our production brewery. Believe me, it's heartwarming to show up for a brew day and have my son help me crush the grain.

We've not had any discussion about "What do you want to be when you grow up?" He's only a sophomore at Brown University. I try not to force anything, but if you go into his bedroom, he's dog-eared my homebrew books. Sitting in our kitchen for three hours and making an all-grain homebrew is super cool, but it's a means to an end. The end is spending quality time with the person you love. —Sam Calagione, as told to Joshua M. Bernstein

### **ELEVATE YOUR HOME BREWING**

Calagione is committed to unconventional flavor charges, from Icelandic kelp to China's intensely sweet monk fruit extract. Here's how you can apply his unique philosophy to your home brewing.

### ▶ Seek inspiration in the spice cabinet

Calagione assesses spices, herbs, or culinary ingredients by making teas or tinctures. To try it, put a small amount of your chosen spice into a bowl and pour a pint of hot water over it. "You can usually get a sense of the intensity and characteristics, which will inform how much you want to add" when you scale up to your five-gallon batch, he says. Less is best with spices such as cardamom seeds (one ounce), fresh ginger (two ounces), spruce tips (two ounces), and cinnamon sticks (two), all of which you'll want to add toward the last 10 minutes of the boil, the stage when you sterilize the wort and add the hops. Steep the spices in a muslin sack or specialty grain bag for easy removal. Also, consider how ingredients might create bridges to food. To create a perfect pairing for raw oysters, for example, Dogfish Head collaborated with Maine's Oxbow Brewing Company on Kelp! I Need Some Honey, a saison with brininess and minerality from dried, crushed Icelandic kelp that's added during the whirlpool, a step at the end of the brewing process that spins the wort to separate out hops and other solids. This maintains the oceanic aromatics and sterilizes the seaweed. "We don't pasteurize," Calagione says.





\*Suggested measures are for five-gallon batches. Feel free to experiment.

### Look to fruit for flavor

For stone fruit and berries, Calagione favors fresh produce or aseptic (contaminant-free) frozen purées added at the boil's finish and simmered for around 20 minutes at 160°F to 170°F, then strained out before fermentation. You'll use more fruit than you might think: around 10 pounds of crushed blueberries and sour cherries (or half that amount if you're using a purée).

The bright acidity of a kettle-soured German ale plays especially well with berries, as in Dogfish Head's SuperEIGHT gose, which contains blackberries and raspberries, among other fruits. If you're using citrus, peel the zest from the middle white layer (or pith). "I've never found a recipe where the pith adds positive characteristics," continued on page 82

44 March/April 2020 March/April 2020

# A SELF-SUSTAINING GARDEN

By Jessie Kissinger

trees-are the gift of someone else's foresight. A sapling in one generation becomes a landmark in the next. My parent's forest garden, a 25x25foot space behind the driveway, layered with trees, shrubs, and ground cover, technically started with the Holtzes. As the prior owners of the home, they planted cedars along the back fence. When my parents moved in 30 years ago, their neighbors had an enormous hackberry tree that dropped seeds into our yard. A few of those seeds grew into trees that ultimately stretched into a canopy above the cedars. Then 10 years ago, my mom dug up two redbud trees, the size of twigs, from her father's garden when he died and replanted them in her yard. Now, at 15 feet tall, they form the understory. And last year, we added witchhazel and a buttonbush, carved out short pathways, and laid a ground cover of shade-loving perennials—columbine, oak and palm sedge grasses, and ferns that will someday creep along the ground and cover the soil entirely.

o many plants that we enjoy—especially

We can't predict who will inherit the garden next, but in a way, the work we're doing now is for them. Just as the cedars and the redbuds were for us.

The key to a long-lived forest garden is biodiversity—and that goes beyond flora. You need to attract and feed beneficial creatures of all kinds, including insects and birds to pollinate plants, spread seeds, and regulate pest populations, as well as microbes and fungi to enrich the soil. Here, Jessi Bloom, owner of NW Bloom Ecological Services and author of *Creating Sanctuary*, shares some guidelines for designing your own forest garden.



Bloom designed this garden to grow food in Mill Creek, WA. ▶ Choose plants that like the current—and future—temperature and rainfall of your region as well as the light conditions and soil of your yard. Generally, this leads to indigenous plant choices. Check the USDA Plants Database to see if plants you like grow in areas with similar conditions to your area. Take into account the climate change projected for your region within your lifetime—be that higher temperatures, increased storm activity and rainfall, or drought. This will improve the garden's adaptability in the future.

Avoid plants that are susceptible to diseases or pests in your area. High-yield fruit trees such as apples tend to require fertilizers and often have pest issues and shorter lives. Best case scenario, they'll produce for about 40 years. If you want fruit, try lower-maintenance varieties like jujube, which likes a warm, dry climate with sandy soil, or species native to your area, such as serviceberry or wild plum in the Midwest and Northeast. Nut trees can live and produce for hundreds of years. When harvesting, take only what you need. Leave the rest for the critters.

Mimic forest ecology by selecting plants that occupy different layers of the forest.

- ▶ Space plants so that they capture as much sunlight as possible. Note the angle of the sun, especially at the summer solstice—the time when many plants are most active—to see how it could impact hours of light and shade. Then block out the plants according to their mature sizes (width and height). Place smaller, sun-loving plants south of taller ones so they'll get more sun access. Fill shadowy areas with shade-loving plants to take advantage of the leftover sun dapple. Catching as much sunlight as possible maximizes photosynthesis, which stimulates the soil biology, which in turn gives nutrients to the plants and improves their immunity.
- Work with the landscape as it changes over time. When you plant a sapling, it could take five to 10 years to cast significant shade. In the meantime, seed the area around the tree with a sunny pollinator mix of annuals and herbaceous perennials from a local native plant nursery. These plants can cover the ground, activate the soil biology to keep plants extra healthy, build biomass, and attract beneficial insects into the system. Once the shade arrives, layer in herbaceous woodland perennials as the sun lovers recede.
- Provide a constant source of food for pollinators. Make sure that at least three to four varieties of flowers are in bloom throughout the growing season. Add an insect hotel—a man-made shelter for bugs—to house beneficial insects, and a fountain or shallow birdbath for a reliable water source.
- Be prepared to nurture your garden for three to five years. "It's like having a baby," says Bloom. "The more work you put in up front, the more resilient it will be down the road." Most important: Know how many inches of water your plants need per week, track rainfall, and water supplementally when the rain isn't enough. You'll probably need to do some weeding. It can also be helpful early on to add mulches, compost, and compost tea to boost the soil's microbe population. After the establishment period—if you designed it well—the garden should sustain itself, like a wild forest.

46 March/April 2020 March/April 2020

HOME BREWING

continued from page 45

pliers (and gloves or an oven mitt for added safety), place the blade on its side in the coals (so the edge is facing up), with the forced air on and the embers burning.

### ► Normalize the blade

Normalizing your blade's steel helps relieve stress in the grain structure during the cutting and grinding processes. Heating the blade and allowing it to cool reorganizes the steel's microstructure, making it more consistent and strong throughout.

Leave the blade in the forge until it's glowing orange but not quite bright orange (with your forge at 1,500°F, this should take about 15 minutes). You can use a magnet at the end of a pole to see if your blade is hot enough. When the steel reaches a temperature called the "Curie point," it will no longer be magnetized. The heat disrupts the alignment of the atomic magnetic moments within the steel, causing them to stop reinforcing each other and eliminating the magnetic attraction.

"It is important to be sure the steel reaches an even color with no dark shadows present within the orange glow," Brach says. "Shadows will create soft spots in the steel."

Once your blade is hot enough, use the tongs to remove it and let it cool on its own until it reaches room temperature (about an hour). Repeat this heating and cooling process, but the second time, remove the knife when it's heated to a slightly dimmer shade of orange, after around 10 minutes.

### ▶ Harden the blade

Heat the blade to an even orange color one more time, but this time, immediately quench it in the metal pail of warm vegetable oil (between 100°F and 120°F).

Quenching the blade in oil rapidly reduces the temperature of the steel, trapping carbon in solution and making the steel harder. Make sure to completely submerge the blade while keeping a grip with your tongs; otherwise a fire could spark on the surface. (If a fire starts, don't panic: It will be small and contained—you can usually

just blow it out like a candle.)

Make a subtle cutting motion with the blade through the oil for 30 seconds. If you want to check its hardness, let it cool completely on a rack.

"If your blade has properly hardened, once it is cool you should be able to run a worn file along the edge and the file will skate on the surface of the steel rather than cutting," Brach says. "If the file bites into the steel, reheat it in the fire to the even orange temperature, let it soak at that temperature for 10 minutes, then quench it again."

### ▶ Temper the blade in your oven

Tempering the blade softens the metal slightly so it won't be too brittle. Take the knife from the oil bath or off the rack, and place it on the center rack of a 375°F oven. Bake for an hour, then remove the knife to let it cool completely. Repeat the baking process once.

### ► Sharpen the blade

You can now grind your blade edge down to that centerline using your angle grinder and the flapper wheel. Pay close attention as you sharpen the knife. Once burrs begin to appear on the edge of the blade, it's as sharp as you're going to get it with your angle grinder. At that point, switch to a knife sharpener to finish off the edge.

### Wrap the handle

Wrap the handle in paracord or in strips of recycled leather to add grip and comfort. A few feet of either material will suffice, but if you have some to spare, braiding the material before you wrap it around the handle will give your knife a more impressive look.

"If you use a cord-wrapped handle, it's important to secure it to the tang, preferably with slow-set epoxy, to ensure the grip does not slip forward onto the cutting edge during heavy use," Brach says.

Apply the epoxy to the handle of the knife and lay the first few inches of the cord along the handle. Then wrap the remaining cord tightly around the handle and over that first piece of cord until both are completely covered. Tie off the end with a secure knot.

Calagione says. Add an ounce or two of zest in the boil's final minutes for a citrusy pop. "The essential oils don't get fermented, so they stay on the top notes of the beer and contribute more aromatics."

### ► Try a barrel-aged shortcut

You likely can't age your beer in 10,000-gallon tanks hewn from fragrant Paraguayan wood like Dogfish Head does. (Those tanks produce the brawny caramel-accented Palo Santo Marron brown ale.) Instead, develop barrel flavor by dropping several oak chips in a mason jar with four to five ounces of a strong, neutral spirit such as Everclear to serve as a solvent. "Shake it every morning for a week to expose another layer of resin-rich wood," Calagione says. After the beer finishes fermenting, add drops of the tincture to taste before bottling.

### ► Treat sugar as a tasty addition

Dogfish Head uses molasses, maple syrup, and brown sugar to boost a beer's flavorful complexity. Calagione recommends keeping adjuncts to less than 20 percent of a beer's total fermentable sugars to avoid an unpleasant dryness. Retain maple syrup's delicate characteristics by adding it after the boil, during fermentation. "The brewer's yeast eats the sugars at the same time it's eating sugars from grains," Calagione says, leaving flavor and not sweetness.

Sometimes extra sweetness is essential, especially when brewing light, low-calorie beers with amyloglucosidase enzymes (try White Labs' Ultra-Ferm). They break complex sugars into simple sugars that yeast convert to alcohol, but the trade-off is no body. "That's why industrial light lagers taste so watery," Calagione says. One breakthrough ingredient is unfermentable, zero-calorie monk fruit extract, which is hundreds of times sweeter than table sugar. As with spices, assess monk fruit's intensity by making tea or tincture before adding it during the sterilizing whirlpool, and "recognize that a little goes a long way," Calagione says.