

Walking Sticks

Children and sticks just go together. Making a walking stick checks all the boxes as an activity. There's adventure in the search for just the right stick. There's creativity and crafting as the stick is modified, decorated, and personalized. And there's storytelling as adventures are relived and retold with reminders from marks and souvenirs added to the stick over time.

A walking stick is a practical tool. It improves your balance, steadies you in rough terrain, tests the depth of a puddle, clears away brush and more. Making a walking stick yourself can be a work of art and a point of pride.



Step 1—Find a good stick. Look for a straight stick or one with character. It should be as tall as your armpit, and thick enough that your thumb and index finger barely touch when wrapped around it. Look under deciduous trees (trees that drop their leaves in the fall) for freshly fallen, green sticks. Hardwoods like maple, oak, or ash, make the sturdiest walking sticks.

Be kind—never cut a stick from a living tree. Check carefully for holes or evidence of insects. Leave those sticks and the insects inside them in the woods.

You could stop at this point and have a fine walking stick. Or you can get busy and create an even more awesome walking stick. Here's how.



Step 2—Clean up the stick. Tools can help with this step and can provide an opportunity for children to learn how to safely work with them. Choose and use age-appropriate tools with children. Think safety first and always supervise the activity.

Quality woodworking takes time. Begin by trimming off twigs with a garden pruner or handsaw. Keep the bark on the stick if you wish or whittle off the bark to make a bare wood stick. First, smooth off any bumps or rough spots by shaving with a pocketknife, or a plane, or using a fine rasp or coarse sandpaper. Use short, shallow strokes to avoid digging into the wood. Make the stick smooth to the touch with fine sandpaper.

When whittling, shave away from your body and legs. A knot in the wood could cause the knife to jump and injure you. Bark can be a few layers thick, keep whittling until you see bright wood.

Step 3—Get creative. Personalize your walking stick with paint, colorful ribbons and special trinkets. Depending upon your skills with woodworking tools or a pocketknife, you can try carving and engraving. Using a round rasp is an easy way to make grooves around your stick. Try a wood-burning tool for a different effect. As above, be safe and use age-appropriate tools and adult supervision.

Make it a story stick by adding mementos of your adventures. For example, tie on a little item found on a hike, or paint a symbol to represent how you felt and so on. These additions tell the story of your adventures in nature.



Focusing on collecting only one small souvenir to put on their walking stick, teaches children how to make choices and to respect nature by leaving natural objects where they belong.