

Getting Started With Wax Carving

To get started you'll need...

- Wax
- Benchpeg and clamp
- Piercing Saw Frame
- Wax Saw Blades
- Dividers
- Wax Ring Sizer Stick
- Coarse Wax File e.g. Double ended wax file
- Scalpel
- Emery papers / Sanding Sponges
- Polishing Papers / Fine Wire Wool



Plus, depending on your design;

- Wax Needle Files
- Carving Tools
- Gravers
- Burrs / Rotary Tool or Pin Vice
- Hot wax tools / Spirit burner

For more info - see wax supplies list...



For cleaning up cast metal pieces, you will also need...

- grade 2 or 4 saw blades for cutting off sprues
- grade 2 or 0 half round file
- emery papers in 3 or 4 different grades
- polishing cloth / cream
- Alternatively you can use a series of equivalent burrs, sanding and polishing wheels on a rotary tool such as a dremel, a micromotor or a pendant motor.

If you don't want to also have these metalworking supplies - you can often pay extra for the casters to do this for you.

Workspace

You need a comfortable chair, a table - ideally a fairly high table, so you don't end up stooping over your work causing yourself back problems, and a good desk light. Ideally you want to work at chest height - you can raise your work surface (stack up some books) or find a lower chair if needed.

A benchpeg to support your work as you file or saw can be clamped to any table - you don't specifically need a jewellers bench, any table can be used. The advantage of a purpose built bench is the half circle cut out, so you can work in the centre and if needed support your arms on the edges, as well as hang a bench skin or tray below the benchpeg to catch dust and filings. If you don't have this - you can wear a big apron, or spread a cloth over your knees to catch the wax filings. If the wax is clean / uncontaminated, you can save it and use it again for hot wax work. It does get everywhere but at least is dry and easy to sweep or vacuum up!

Getting Going

Rings are often the easiest type of design to start on - either regular bands that you can

add texture and pattern to, or variations of signet type rings are good - carving a perfectly symmetrical signet ring is a good exercise in getting used to carving.

I recommend starting with a basic tool kit and getting used to working with that, and then thinking about the sorts of designs you want to work towards - and gradually add new tools to get used to.

Keep your off-cuts of wax to practice with different tools and to do tests of different ideas.

You can use sharp tools or gravers, or the point of a scalpel to experiment with carving engravings or more precise patterns.

Scalpels as well as needle files can be used to create more figurative shapes.

Burrs are cutting tools - basically shaped drill bits - and come in many sizes and shapes - these are great to use with an electric rotary tool, or in a basic handheld pin vice to carve away wax - for example thinning out the underside of a ring or pendant to reduce the weight, to create stone setting recesses or make decorative designs.

Heat can be used - either directly heating the wax to smooth surfaces, or to create runs and drips, or you can heat dental type tools using a spirit lamp, or a candle to create different ranges of effects.

Hot wax pens can be bought, either battery powered, or if you like their effects a lot, you can invest in higher grade mains powered tools.

These are used for creating decorative surfaces, as well as adding sections of hot wax to a base - either to create a granulation type effect, or to build more complex shapes.

Casting companies will cast your waxes, and make moulds, most will also offer a finishing service, plus various plating and stone setting services.

Search online for precious metal or jewellery casting companies - there are many about - particularly around the jewellery trade areas in London and Birmingham.

Suppliers for tools and wax - HSWalsh, Cooksons, Cousins, Suttons, Proops, you can also find dental tools and waxes which can be great to work with, on sites like Ebay.

Converting wax to metal

I aim for a regular wax ring to be under 2 grams of wax for a chunky ring, or towards 1 gram for more delicate rings.

Wax is deceptively lightweight and it is easy to end up with a much more expensive / heavier ring than you expected once it gets cast if you don't check before you cast - keep a digital scales handy if you have one, to check the wax as you work.

When you get items cast, there will usually be a casting fee, and then each piece will be weighed once cast and you will be charged a set fee per gram of your selected metal, then VAT will be added. Postage costs will also be added unless you visit the casters in person to drop off and pick up items.

For example, Bronze or Brass might be 30p per gram, Silver £1, 9ct Gold £18 per gram, 18ct Gold £35 per gram, Platinum £40 per gram. (prices approximate at around 2020)

1g of wax will weigh roughly 9g in Brass / Bronze, 10.5g in Silver, 11.5g in 9ct Gold, 15.8g in 18ct Gold, 21.5g in Platinum