

Cuttlebone Casting

The skeleton of the cuttlefish, a squid-like saltwater cephalopod, has been used to create simple, single-use moulds since ancient times. This technique offers immediate results at a low cost and with very little equipment. One disadvantage, however, is that the size and thickness of the object to be cast is limited by the dimensions of each particular cuttlebone. Most cuttlebones are about 3" (7.5cm) wide by 7" (17.5cm) long, although some may grow as long as 15" (38cm). The technique for using the cuttlebone is as follows...

1. Use two cuttlebones for larger castings, or saw a single one in half with a coping, jeweller's- or hacksaw.
2. Rub the soft sides together in a circular motion to flatten the faces.
3. Carve an indentation having the contour of the desired form and about 3/4" from the wide end of the cuttlebone. Remember that the depth of this indentation equals the thickness of the finished casting.
4. Align and carve a sprue and funnel into each side of the two halves.
5. If the woodgrain-like pattern of the cuttlebone is to be developed, a stiff paint brush can be used to dust away the alternating softer layers.
6. Scratch vents upwards and out to the edge on either side of the mould cavity to allow for the escape of hot gases.
7. Fix the two halves of the mould together with binding wire or masking tape and set in a container of sand for stability.
8. Melt the desired metal in a crucible or pouring ladle and fill the mould to the top of the funnel with a single, continuous pour.
9. Cut the binding wire, separate the two halves and remove the casting for clean-up with a soapy wire brush.

