An Easy Method for Sharpening Your Hand Plane
2012 by GH Productions Inc.
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The time has arrived. After months of service and dozens of rims, your hand plane needs to be sharpened and tuned. This simple method uses four different grits of wet/dry sandpaper and buffing compound on a leather strip. You should be able to find wet/dry sandpaper and red buffing compound at your local hardware store.

NOTE: There are many ways to hone/sharpen your plane, including this very good article from Fine Woodworking - How to Use a Honing Guide (Linked with permission).

When you sharpen your blade you are removing metal. The coarse grit sandpaper removes metal very fast, but it leaves scratches on the blade. Each successive finer grit also removes metal and leaves finer and finer scratches on the blade. The buffing compound will polish the blade and eliminate almost all the scratches making your blade razor sharp. Photo to the right shows the blade after buffing.

You'll need:
- 220 wet/dry sandpaper
- 320 wet/dry sandpaper
- 400 wet/dry sandpaper
- 600 wet/dry sandpaper
- Red buffing/polishing compound
- Leather Strip - an old belt works great
- Screwdriver
- Self-adhesive Labels
- Razor Knife
Loosen the screw and disassemble the hand plane. Scrub the blade clean and remove any traces of the paper shims (if any). The paper shims are used to close the gap between the blade and the plane body.

Place a strip of the 220 grit sandpaper on a flat surface. Note: The wet/dry sandpaper comes in 9" x 11" sheets. I cut the sandpaper into narrower strips with scissors.

Hold the bevel of the plane against the sandpaper and pull the entire length of your strip. The trick is keep the bevel flat against the sandpaper and apply gentle pressure as you pull. Do this four or five times.
Turn the blade over and with the bevel side up hold the tip against the sandpaper with the other end slightly raised. Now pull the entire length of the strip for four or five times. See video and photo below and to the right. This will put a micro bevel on the flat side of the blade. (Note: Video has no audio.)

Photo to the right shows the blade in position for the micro bevel.

Note: Most people like to keep the back side of the blade flat. I have found the micro bevel works well for sharpening a blade for basket making. However, you can keep the back side flat if desired. Repeat the above process using 320 grit, 400 grit and then 600 grit sandpaper.

Note: Wipe off any grit from the blade when you change to a new piece of sandpaper.

Rub some red buffing compound on a piece of leather. (Note: Video has no audio.)

Now hold the bevel of the plane against the leather and pull the entire length. Pull four or five times on the bevel and the back of the blade. Your blade should now be razor sharp. (Note: Video has no audio.)

Test the blade on a piece of newspaper. The blade should cut smoothly and cleanly. Photo shows a very ragged cut. This blade needs to be sharpened.
Now that's better. The cut in the newspaper is nice and clean.
If the blade does not cut smoothly, repeat the above process again starting with the 220 grit sandpaper.

Photo shows the micro bevel on the back (flat) side of the blade.
The edge of the blade is razor sharp - be careful.
Now to reassemble your hand plane starting with the paper shims on the blade. I use one-up self-adhesive paper labels for the shims. Cut four or five approximately 3/16" wide strips from a label.

Stick the shims on the end of your blade - one on top of the other - just behind the bevel.
Reassemble the plane with the bevel of the blade facing down.

Place the plane on a flat surface with the tip of the blade touching the surface.
Using a screwdriver gently tighten the screw until snug.

Test your plane by carving a scrap piece of rim material. I am using 3/8" half round reed. Most likely the blade is not in the correct position and either will not cut the rim or cuts too deeply.
To fix this, loosen the screw, hold the plane and adjust the blade until you can cut a thin shaving from your rim. To make the blade cut deeper hold the plane and blade with one hand and tap on the blade. Tighten the screw and test the plane again. This is my preferred way to ease the blade down a little at a time until it cuts properly. To make the plane cut less material slide it up into the plane. Tighten the screw and test the plane again. It may take ten or more tries until the plane will cut a nice thin shaving from your rim. It is important that the screw is snug during each test.

Once your hand plane cuts a nice thin shaving, you are done! Your hand plane is now ready for dozens more rims.

Get your hand plane today and start making the perfect scarf joint for your basket rims. Companion instruction: How to Make a Perfect Scarf Joint for Your Rims