

Care and Use of Japanese Chisels

As a first-time owner of a Japanese chisel, you might be concerned about several aspects of its construction. The purpose of this sheet is to allay such concerns and explain care and use of the tools.

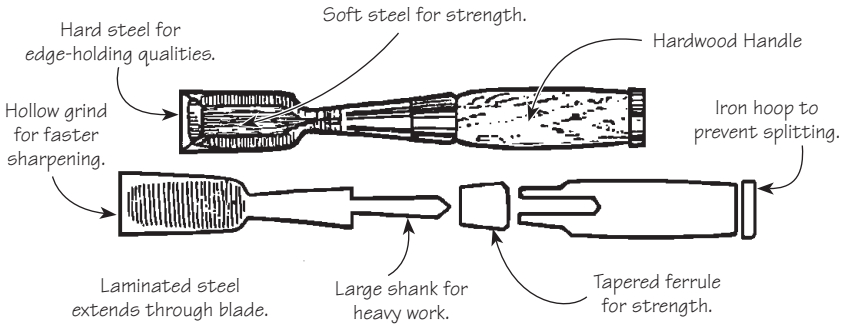


Figure 1: Parts of a chisel.

Although all chisels are ground and honed at the factory, some damage can occur in transit. Chisels are inspected before shipment, but minor nicks can escape us.

Many owners are concerned that the hollow-ground chisel backs will render the chisel useless after repeated sharpenings. This is not so if proper sharpening techniques are followed.

The first honing of a chisel should follow these steps:

1. The face of the chisel (the hollow-ground side) should be lapped on a flat, medium-grit stone to ensure that it is flat. This is done by rubbing the chisel along the stone with finger pressure constantly on top of the chisel, near the bevel (**Figure 2**).
2. After a flat bottom is ensured, the chisel can be brought to a final finish (we recommend Japanese water stones) by alternately honing the back and the bevel on successively finer grits.



Figure 2: Honing a chisel.

3. Subsequent honings require attention to the bevel only until the edge reaches the hollow grind. Once again, the face should be lapped until $1/32''$ of the flat area is re-established (**Figure 3**). Users will find that the hollow grind allows them to keep their chisels perfectly flat on the face and that there is almost no friction in use, two major advantages to the tools.

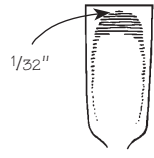


Figure 3:
Lapping the
back of a chisel.

Care should be taken to prevent chipping the edge. The laminated steel allows a superior edge to be put on the tool, but this necessitates greater care because the extreme hardness will result in chipping rather than nicking if the tool is dropped (especially on concrete). Similarly, careless prying can cause chipping. In either event, the blade face should be lapped to restore a flat area behind the edge and the edge reground to a straight bevel. If you are chopping with the chisel in a hard wood and are being careful not to pry but still seeing edge failure, consider increasing the bevel angle (30° works well for most situations).