

Bleaching Wood

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*******WARNING** Both bleaching agents are highly caustic and can cause serious burns. Mix and use only in a well ventilated space. **WEAR PPE** - specifically faceshield, safety glasses, rubber gloves and cover ALL exposed skin.

The wood bleach I use consists of two parts (Hydrogen Peroxide and Sodium Hydroxide) that when mixed, create a chemical reaction that removes tannin from the wood. The amount of lightening varies greatly among species depending on its tannin content. I have had good success bleaching oaks, maple, madrone, box elder and cherry.

You can purchase the two pint [Daly's 2-part Wood Bleaching Kit](#) for \$27. Or for about the same price, you can mix your own and make a lot more. This is how I make my own:

Part A is the Sodium Hydroxide solution. I use [Household 100% Lye Drain Opener](#). Measure **½ cup (125ml) of cold water** and pour it into a one cup-size **glass (not metal) container**. Put **1 ½ level teaspoons of the Lye crystals** into the water. Stir thoroughly to dissolve the solids, and then rinse the spoon with water. Pour the 125 ml of lye solution carefully into a clean glass or plastic storage jar or bottle with a plastic cap (**no metal contact**). Wipe up spills immediately. Clearly label the container: *"8% sodium hydroxide solution – caustic!"* It will last indefinitely.

Part B is the Hydrogen Peroxide solution. I bought a gallon of **Baquacil Oxidizer** for \$25 from [Apollo Pool Supply](#) (BioGuard SoftSwim C and AquaSilk Chlorine-Free Shock Oxidizer are different brand names with the same ingredient.) **27% Hydrogen Peroxide.**

You must keep each of the two bleaching components separate until you are ready to use them, just like two-part epoxy. Mix up only what you will need, as the solution will lose its potency over time. A little goes a long way.

Sand your piece to 300 or 400 before bleaching. **Mix equal Parts A and B** in a plastic or glass container. Apply with a chip brush, sponge brush or cotton swab. Let dry completely between coats. Do not expect to see the color change immediately. One coat is not enough for most applications. I've found that 3 or 4 coats usually bleaches the wood pretty well.

Once finished, the piece can be very lightly sanded if needed or just burnished with a paper towel or brown paper bag. You can leave it unfinished, finish with a few light coats of a spray fixative or buff with white diamond compound on the Beall system (Thanks for the tip, Kevin!)

Most of the above information I found online in a [detailed article](#) written by Montgomery County Woodturners club member, Gary Guenther.