

WOODWORK – SOFT START

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With young children – especially 3-4-5 year olds it makes a big difference to experience woodwork by initially starting with a soft material.

By starting with a soft material children can master skills and techniques easily and gain confidence. If we start with harder pine initially we may introduce too much challenge too soon and they could become frustrated and disheartened and quickly form an opinion that they don't like working with wood and tools...

(Note: Suppliers are listed at the bottom of the document)

For children under 3

I do not recommend woodwork with children under 3 due to safety issues with lower levels of maturity, less developed muscle grip, less agility with fine motor skills and the issues with the small parts involved (choking hazard) – and the fact that there are often even younger children in the proximity.

But younger children can still do many preparatory activities:



Becoming familiar with wood through loose part play



Using the peg hammer board....



They can also use a rubber mallet for making leaf and petal prints on paper or fabric – often referred to as 'hapa zome'.



Or they could hammer into pumkins.. this actually works best if you cut the pumkins in half so they are stable on the table. Use a wooden hammer and golf tees.



Another great option is to hammer into clay:



Another possibility is to hammer into cork boards, or pin boards. This is an example of a commercially available resource: Tap Tap.



And of course younger children could use glue to join wood together – but I’m less keen on this as glue is very hard to work with effectively – due to the long drying time and the hot glue gun is certainly NOT for those under 3!





For children 3+ - getting started with woodwork...

The best option by far is Balsa wood. So soft and so easy!

Comes in 3 grades – soft- medium- firm

Go for Medium – the soft is too soft!!

It's grown sustainably but imported so not ideal in term of carbon footprint. Comes from counties like Ecuador and Papa New Guinea

and it is very expensive, so we just give children very short pieces to work with, and for just a few times before moving on to pine

It is also in high demand globally for wind turbine blades – pushing up the price and also making it harder to source! But it is awesome and children love working with it – and they do become confident fast!



25mm box is ideal



and 3-4mm sheet



Balsa great for learning how to saw, hammer and screw!
Balsa being a 'real' wood helps with the transition to the harder pine

But if you can't get or afford Balsa wood what then???

Try foam building insulation blocks



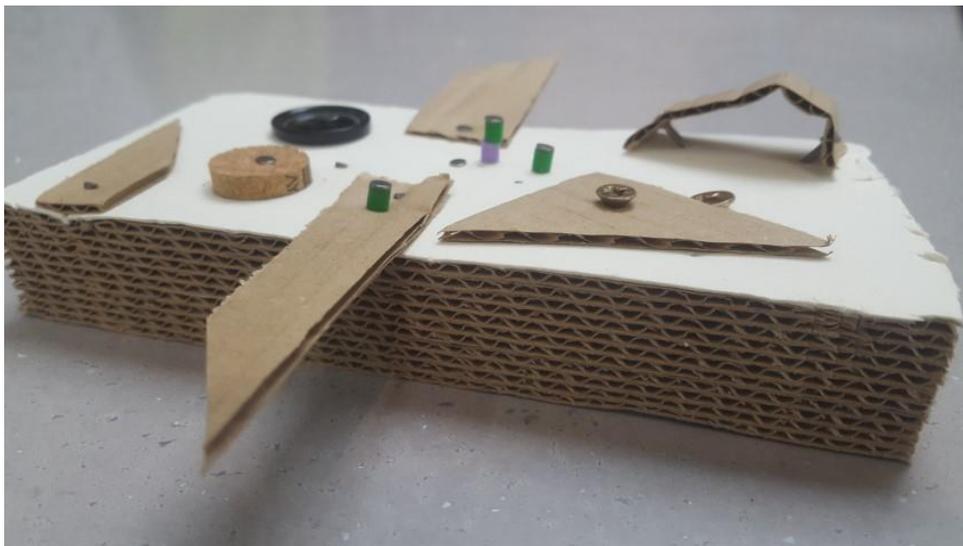
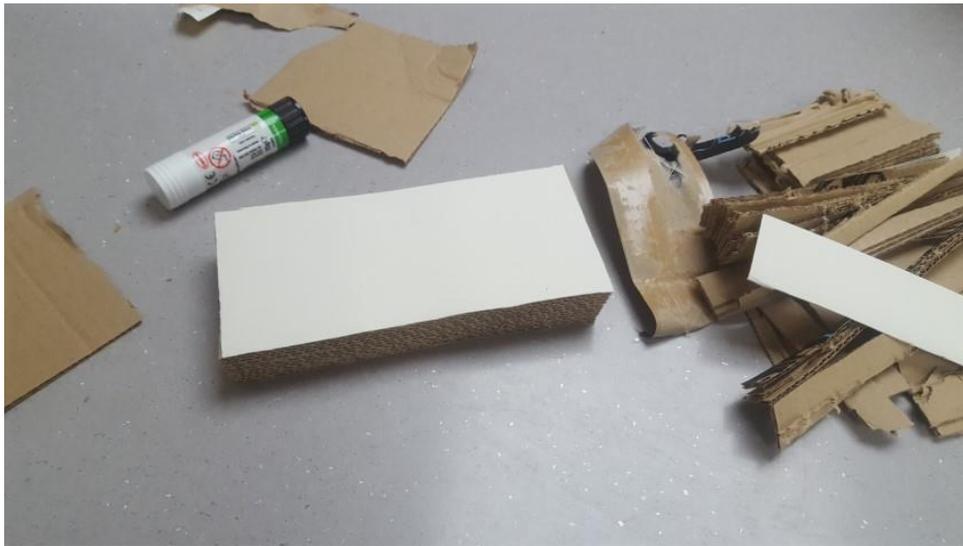
Try layered cardboard....

Really simple cheap and effective – my preferred alternative to balsa

Glue some layers of cardboard together – to about 30mm depth (as use 25mm nails)

Glue a layer of firmer card on the top

Cut up into blocks with a breadknife!



It really easy to hammer into

Really easy to screw into

You can also layer up cork flooring tiles....

(For sawing start with small thin sections of pine)



Thick felt

If you can get hold of some thick felt (25mm+) it's good for initial hammering!:



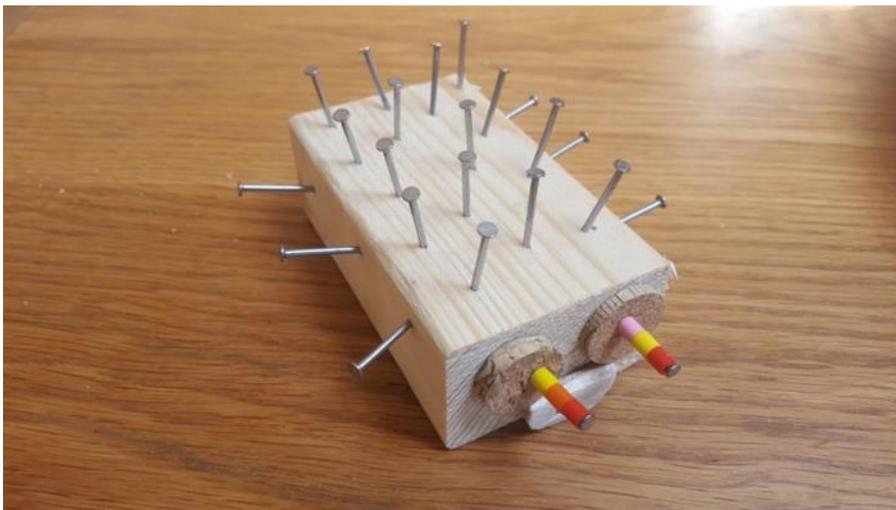
Again really easy to hammer into, great for early 3 years olds
but not good for screwing

Then when moving over to pine...

It can be easier to start on end grain as this is softer....



Then move to blocks.....before adding other wood.....slow progression, keeping confidence.....



After this soft start ,step up the difficulty incrementally – always be mindful not to introduce too much challenge too soon so it becomes too difficult.

And remember it's a lot easier to hammer in a small nail than a large one!! (and thin nails are much easier than wide nails)

And in no time at all... they'll be working with all shapes and sizes. See my progression hand out for more detailed information.



Suppliers of Balsa Wood:

The Balsa Cabin <https://balsacabin.co.uk>

balsacabin@hotmail.com 01621 859711

(ask for same stuff Pete gets!)

SLEC: <https://www.slecuk.com/>

Cosy Direct: www.cosydirect.com

Fred Aldous: <https://www.fredaldous.co.uk/collections/balsa-wood>

TTS: <https://www.tts-group.co.uk/standard-balsa-wood-packs/1000351.html>

Consortium <https://www.consortiumeducation.com/education/curriculum-resources/design-and-technology/wood>

GLS: <https://www.glsed.co.uk/product/curricular/design-and-technology/wood/pack-of-balsa-wood/g262060>

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