



Carve and Paint a Halloween Pumpkin on a Wall

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Montgomery County Carvers

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This Halloween Pumpkin is based on a carving by Kevin Johnson that appeared in Woodcarving Illustrated, Fall 2025 Issue. This version contains more detailed instructions for both carving and painting, and adds carved instead of painted facial features and more detail on the stone wall.

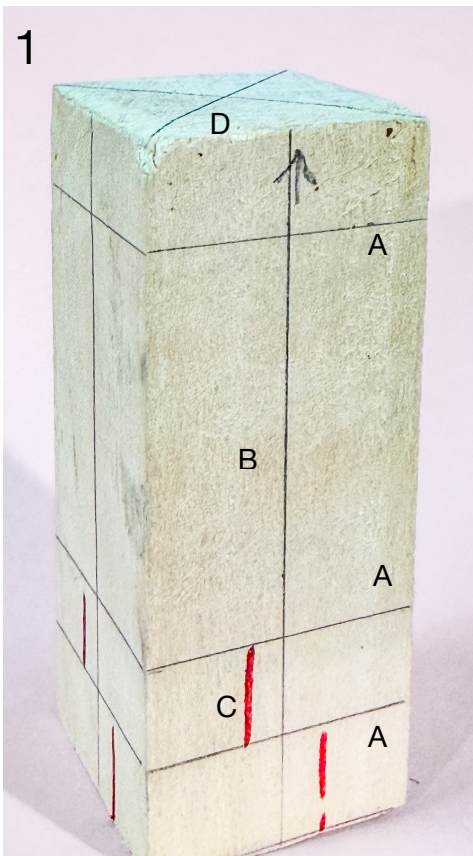
How to carve the pumpkin on the wall

Materials: Basswood blank, $3\frac{1}{4}$ " x $1\frac{1}{4}$ " x $1\frac{1}{4}$ "

Fine abrasive, such as 400-600 grit sandpaper or Abranet

Tools: Straight-blade carving knife, recommended blade length
~ $1\frac{1}{4}$ "- $1\frac{5}{8}$ " long

Optional: Small v-tool, ~ $\frac{1}{8}$ " width; micro veiner, ~ $\frac{1}{16}$ " width



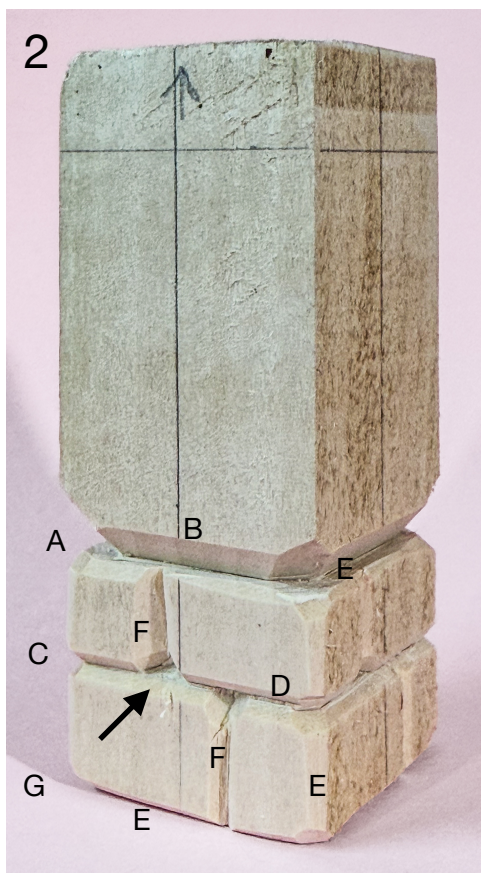
1. Mark basswood blank.

A. Draw lines around all four sides $\frac{1}{2}$ " above the base, 1" above the base, and $\frac{1}{2}$ " below the top.

B. Draw vertical guide lines down the middle of each side.

C. Mark the vertical joints between the stones, shown here in red.

D. On the top, define the center with an X from corner to corner.



2. Begin carving the stone wall.

A. At the top of the stone wall, make a stop cut straight into the wood on each corner. Pare back to it at an angle from above. Each notch should extend almost halfway from the corner to the center line.

B. With the knife or v-tool: Remove wood above top of stones to connect corner notches at a depth of about $\frac{1}{8}$ ".

C. Notch all four corners between the stone courses. These are not as deep as the notches at the top of the wall, but they are slanted from both above and below.

D. To separate the stone courses, connect notches from C by scoring and cutting grooves on all four sides.

E. Bevel the bottom of all four sides and all four corners of the wall. Bevel the top of the stone wall slightly.

F. Cut a groove at each of the vertical lines that separate the stones.

G. At all stone intersections, remove a triangular chip. Knock off the top and bottom corners of the wall, too.

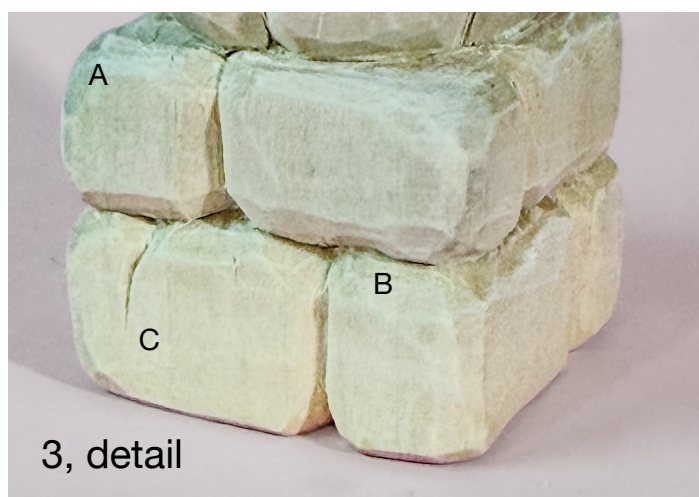


3. Add character to the wall by making the stones irregular.(See detail.)

A. Round corners of stones.

B. Eliminate straight lines and flat surfaces.

C. Add a crack or two, if you like.





4. Begin carving the pumpkin.

A. Round the pumpkin into a rough cylinder, using the vertical lines as guides.

B. Draw a circle ~ $\frac{3}{4}$ " diameter on top, centered on the X you drew in Step 1. Taper pumpkin top to match the circle diameter. You can adjust the width of the stem later.



5. Shape the pumpkin and the stem.

A. Continue to taper pumpkin at top and slightly at bottom to create a pleasing, rounded shape.

B. Cut a notch around the base of the stem, then taper the stem. Trim the stem top to a slight angle.

C. Cut lobe lines from top to bottom, starting with a vertical cut and then paring back to it from each side with a knife, or use a v-tool. Round over the edges of the lobe lines by trimming carefully. Your pumpkin may have as many or few lobes as you choose. I like to use five.

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6. Add eyes, a nose, and a mouth.

A. For eyes, make three slanting cuts that meet in the center of the eye, and remove the triangular chip. Do the same for the nose.

B. Simple mouth: Draw a smile and make slicing cuts on the top and bottom from corner to corner, slanting the knife toward the inside of the mouth. Eject the long chip. Toothy smile: (Note: Adding teeth increases the difficulty of the carving. One tooth is not too difficult, two teeth present a challenge.) Draw a mouth with one or two teeth, and outline all areas to be removed with a knife, slanting in toward the center. (If you cut straight into the wood, it will be difficult to remove chips.) Remove wood in sections as small, triangular chips. A small veiner (u-shaped gouge) is useful to remove material, if you have one.)

C. Clean up any fuzzies. Sand gently with very fine abrasive. I use 600 grit Abranet.

Your Halloween Pumpkin is now fully carved. The instructions that follow show how to paint your carving.

How to paint the pumpkin on the wall

The simplest way to paint your carving is to paint the stones gray, the pumpkin orange, the stem green, and the facial features either yellow or black. However, colors in nature are rarely pure colors, as shown in the variation in the color of a leaf, a flower, or a bird's wing. The instructions that follow show how to create variation.

Techniques: To achieve color variation with paint, two techniques are especially useful: painting in layers, and blending. We will use both of those techniques.

Supplies:

Plastic palette or something similar that contains small wells for holding paints.
Syringe or dropper for adding small amounts of water to paint.
Small stirrer stick for mixing paints with water.

Dish detergent or similar for cleaning brushes and palette.

Rags or paper towels for wiping brushes, etc.

Brushes: All of the painting on this project is done with round, synthetic-bristle brushes, with bristles that come to a sharp tip. These are the most useful brushes for painting carvings in general. They come in a range of diameters, from wide for quick paint application to very fine for detail work.

Paints: The paints used are liquid acrylic craft paints that come in two-ounce bottles, generally available in craft stores. They come in a wide range of colors,



and additional colors can be obtained by mixing. Straight from the bottle, the paints have varying degrees of fluidity. Some are very fluid, while others are so thick that they're difficult to squeeze from the bottle. To achieve good painting results, you must adjust the fluidity of the paint. Some instructions say to add a certain number of drops of water to a certain number of drops of paint, but this will produce erratic results, because the original paint may be quite thin or quite thick. The objective is to achieve the fluidity that you need. Below, you will see descriptions such as “milky” or “watery” as guides.

Paint the stone wall

If your carving is dirty, clean it as follows: In a container, make a solution of warm water and enough dish soap to make a good head of lather. Using a small, medium-stiff brush (e.g., a mushroom brush, fingernail brush, or similar), gently scrub your carving using only the wet lather. Then, quickly rinse with water and blot dry. You can begin painting while the wood is damp.

Before you begin painting, sand your carving gently with very fine grit abrasive, 400 grit or finer. I use 600 grit Abranet. Abranet is very flexible and can get into recesses better than most sandpaper, but sandpaper will work. You may find it helpful to crumple the sandpaper. Remove any fuzzies, and make sure that the carving is as clean as you can get it.



These are the colors that we will use. You need black and two shades of gray (you can adjust by mixing with black or white). Other colors are optional, and close approximations to those shown are fine. Or choose your own. For example, substitute rust or barn red for the terra cotta, grayish blue for the wedgewood green.



1. Thin your black paint until it is watery. Load your brush and apply paint to the joints and cracks in the stone wall. In the deepest areas, apply multiple coats until the recesses are fully black. It is not necessary, or even desirable, to be too neat at this stage.



2. Apply a coat of milky medium-to-dark gray over the entire stone wall. Use multiple coats. After the first one or two coats, coat only the stone surfaces to avoid over-lightening the cracks and recesses. Also, with the later coats, dab the gray paint along the edges of the black paint to blend these edges so that they aren't sharp.



3. Apply wash layers of lighter gray over the surfaces of the stones, using paint thinned to the consistency of milk. These layers shouldn't be too uniform — the goal is to start building variation into the stone. Continue to feather the edges between colors. Stop when the underlying wood is nearly obscured.



4. (Note: This step is optional. If you want your stone wall to contain only shades of gray, skip to step 5.) When the paint is damp or dry, apply a reddish or brownish paint thinned to a light milky consistency as wet dabs with a lightly loaded brush. Don't overdo this, as the stones should be mostly gray when you're finished. I used more red and green for this demonstration than I would normally use, so that the effect would stand out.

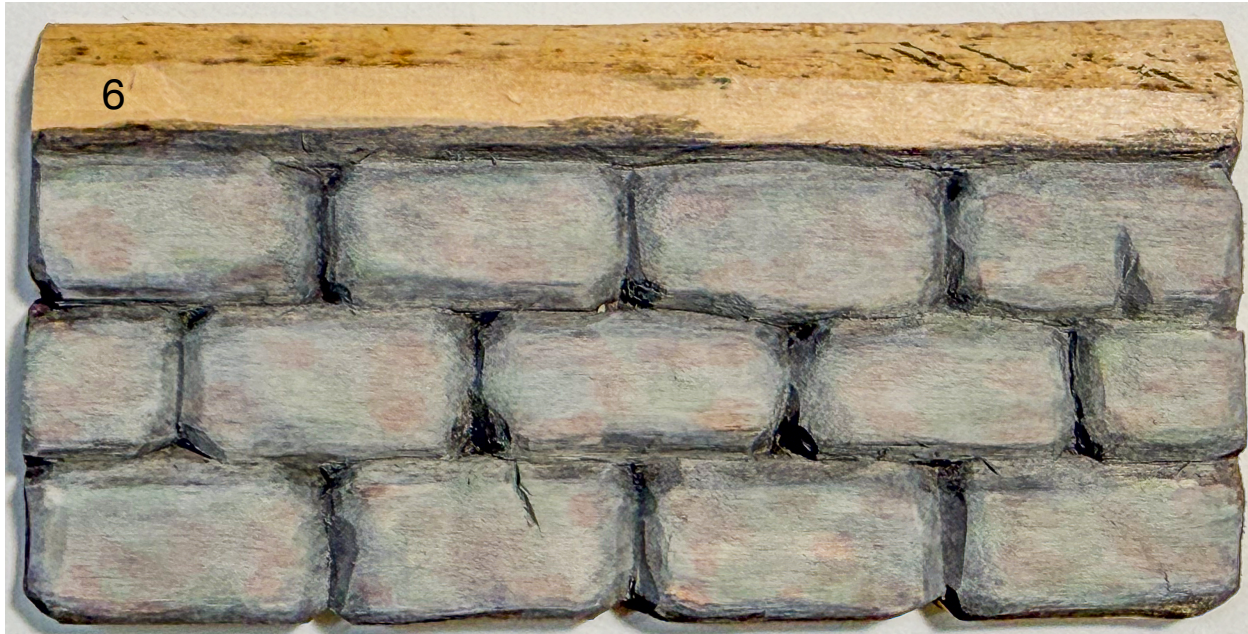
Now repeat the process above with a muted green or blue paint.



5. Apply a wash of milky light-gray, dabbing the paint to soften the edges of the color patches and mute them. Let the paint dry before proceeding.



6. Continue toning with dabbed watery washes of darker gray as used in Step 2 until you like the result. The process ends here, but you can continue to adjust the color of your stones until you get the effect you want. I added a final uneven wash of light gray.



Bonus Tip: The scrap piece of wood I used for this demo had an uneven edge along the top. I used a v-tool to make some wavy grooves in the wood to simulate a rough timber. I then applied watery black paint to the grooves, let it dry, and then applied three washes of dilute brown, covering the grooves as well as the surrounding area. This technique is good for painting trees, timbers, rustic doors, and other wood features.



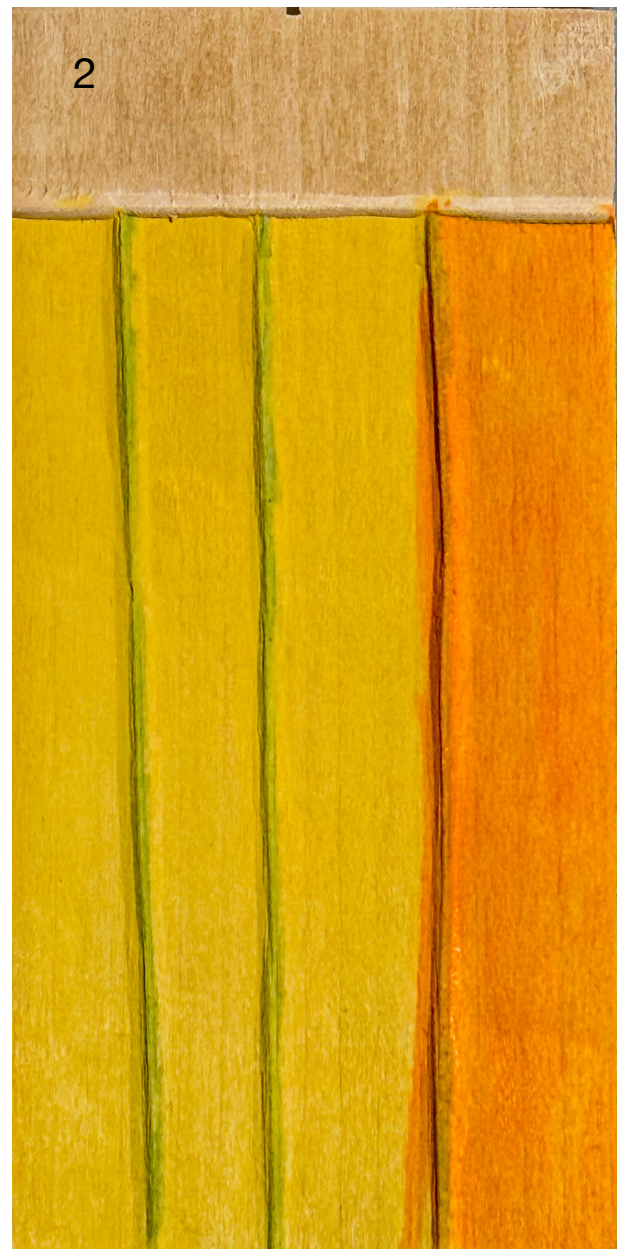
Paint the Pumpkin

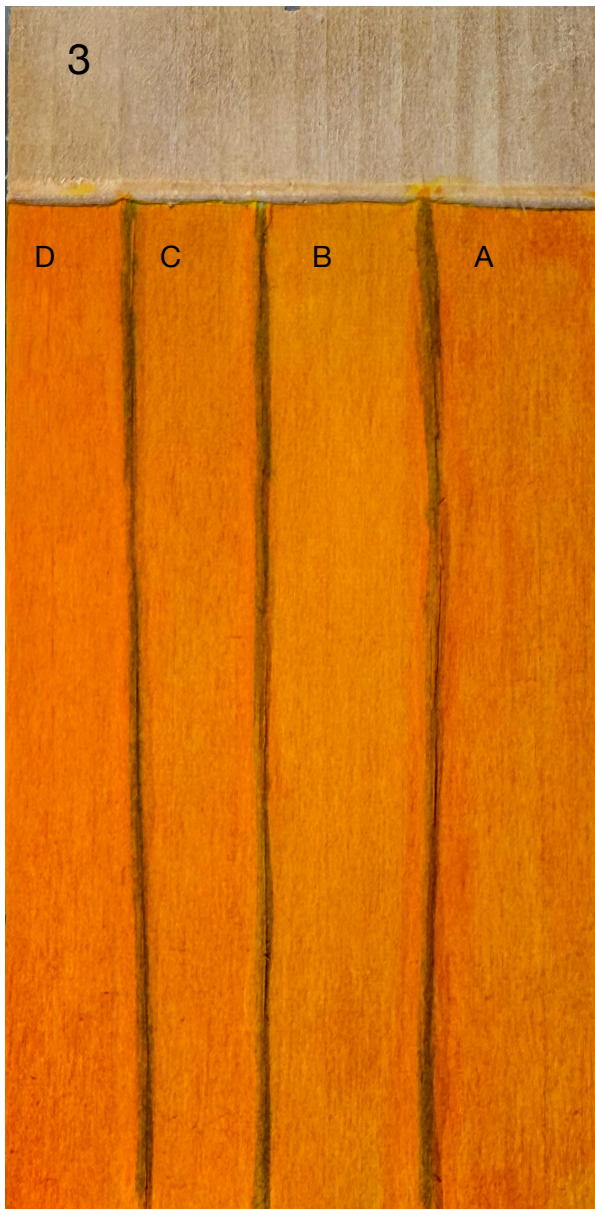
Note: For demonstration purposes, I am using a flat piece of wood.

1. Dilute muted green paint to a watery consistency. Paint a thin line of green in the bottom of each of the lobe lines.



2. Apply one or more watery coats of yellow over the entire pumpkin, except for the stem. Cover the lobe lines. The yellow should look like a medium-to-strong stain, not an opaque coating. Let the paint dry before proceeding. (Figure also shows orange on one panel, as described in step 3.)





3. Apply wash coats of watery to milky orange. Stop when you get the color that you want. From right: A. One coat milky orange plus one coat watery orange. B. One coat watery orange. C. Two coats watery orange. D. Three coats watery orange. The color build is very gradual and controllable. Tip: You may wish to achieve a shading effect at the top and bottom of the pumpkin by adding an extra wash of orange there.

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4. Paint the stem. Apply a wash coat of brown or orange to the stem. When nearly dry, overcoat with one or more thin wash coats of green until you get the effect that you like.

Seal and Protect Your Carving

When your carving is thoroughly dry, you may apply a clearcoat to seal and protect it. I used Krylon clear acrylic matte spray, #1311. Apply the clearcoat thinly, let it dry, and then apply another coat. Keep the sprayer moving, to avoid too much buildup. Multiple thin coats are better than one heavy coat, which may sag.

Optional: When the acrylic coating is thoroughly dry, you can apply a coating of wax. I use Howard Feed-N-Wax. Beeswax also works well. Other waxes can be used, but may contain solvents that soften acrylic and can ruin your paint job. (Briwax contains toluene and attacks acrylic finishes, for example.) Test your wax on a piece of painted and sealed scrap before you apply to your carving.