



CWCA NEWSLETTER

Oct.. 2026

Connecticut Wood Carvers Association

1976-2026
50TH ANNIVERSARY

Upcoming Events

- Oct. 4 - **CWCA Club Meeting** 10am-2pm - @ CFPA (usually CFPA on 1st Sun.).
- Oct 15 - **Evening Carving Night** 5-8pm - at Bristol Carousel Museum
- Oct. 17 - **Family Wildlife Day** - Walking Stick Demo Veterans Memorial Park,
570 Nova Scotia Hill Rd, Watertown 10 a to 3 p, we need volunteers!
- Oct 17-18 - **Spirit of Wood** Wilmington, MA 10 - 3 pm competition is Saturday visit
www.newc.org for more info
- Nov. 1 - **CWCA Club Meeting** 10am-2pm - @ CFPA (usually CFPA on 1st Sun.).
- Nov. 17 - **Berlin Memorial Library Makers Event** Berlin, CT 10am-3pm setup 9am
- Nov. 19 - **Evening Carving Night** 5-8pm - at Bristol Carousel Museum
- Dec. 6 - **CWCA Club Meeting and Holiday Party** 10am-2pm - @ CFPA
- Dec. 17 - **Evening Carving Night** 5-8pm - at Bristol Carousel Museum

Check the club calendar for updates & more info. Hold *control* & right click: [Calendar](#)

President's Report – October 2026

Fellow Carvers,

Welcome to the -ber months. As it gets colder and we prepare for the holidays, time to sharpen up our knives and get to work.

We are preparing for our 50th birthday. While we were officially incorporated in October, we are celebrating in December. Please come to our meeting for the festivities and fun.

Come on down to our events and meetings. Work on a novice project and learn a new skill.

Hope to see you there
Mark



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Beware the Jabberwocky

“’Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe...”

You know more or less how the famous Lewis Carrol poem goes. It spins a yarn from meaningless words, and actually seems to be saying something. In spite of the absence of legitimate content – it can have the effect of having you make assumptions and form an emotional reaction which can have real effect.

We’re all familiar with people working to manipulate us in a variety of different real life situations. I got a chuckle recently when visiting an upscale retail storefront of the New Hampshire Artist Guild.

A display of beautifully carved wooden spoons attracted the attention of my wife. She was especially impressed by cooking spoons made from mountain laurel, and wanted to know why I didn’t use that wood, since it has such a beautiful grain. I replied loudly enough for a hovering clerk to hear, that mountain laurel is toxic and can’t be safely used for anything that comes in contact with food or people’s mouths.

Predictably, the clerk came over and tried to assure me that was not true. I shook my head and walked away. She quickly fetched literature left by the artist; and read this verbiage: “... *These spoons are heated and treated with organic oil and wax. This process replaces the sap and ironizes the wood...*” I responded by saying that finishing processes the craftsman seemed to be referring to cannot make toxic wood safe, and walked away again when she insisted that I was wrong.

Afterward I thought maybe the artist knew something I didn’t. Maybe he boiled and coated it with something new; and maybe with that new process spoons can be made safe. So I did the right thing and researched it again (last time was years ago).

Sure enough, you can heat and stabilize or seal toxic woods to reduce leaching, but none of those methods make them food-safe, and they all fail once the spoon is used, washed, heated, or wears down. Mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*) contains grayanotoxins - potent neurotoxins found throughout the plant. These compounds will not be destroyed with heat; and they will leach out slowly over a long time.

Boiling may extract some surface-level water-soluble compounds, tannins, and sap; but does not remove grayanotoxins. Grayanotoxins withstand cooking temperatures, and are distributed throughout the wood. They are chemically resilient (not easily broken down by heat or water), and are bound within plant tissues (not just free-floating sap). Even if boiling removed some toxins, you cannot verify how much remains, and any remaining amount is still dangerous.

Complete encapsulation with epoxy or cyanoacrylic could in theory isolate the wood (you’re basically making a plastic spoon with wood trapped inside). But even then, resin coatings are not designed for repeated hot-liquid contact. Micro-cracks form over time. A spoon is a high-wear object — the finish will fail. There is no reliable, food-safe method to prevent toxins in mountain laurel wood from leaching out.

I love making things that have unique features, and it’s easier to have that happen with exotic woods; but when it comes to practical items that will be used with food, I prefer to look for a unique shape or grain in a piece of local maple, cherry, birch, beech, or walnut. These are non-toxic, durable, and behave well with food-safe finishes.

Bottom line: Safety for ourselves and users of our products is important. Making excuses for taking shortcuts or risks is foolish.

BTW: all of this about toxicity also applies to: oleander, yew, and laburnum wood. And many tropical hardwoods are known to have extra dangers for the wood worker:

- Rosewoods (*Dalbergia*) — sensitizers; can cause respiratory and skin reactions
- Teak — contains quinones; can irritate skin and lungs
- Padauk — dust can cause nose/throat irritation
- Purpleheart — dust can cause nausea and irritation
- Wenge — strong irritant; can cause dermatitis and respiratory issues
- Ebony — dust irritant; sensitizer

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Upcoming spring classes/monthly projects:

- Acorn - October
- Tree / Snowperson - November
- Penguin - January
- Heart - February
- Fish - March
- Elephant - April
- Mushroom - May
- Banana - June



September meeting at CFPA and Carving Retreat in Litchfield



President	Mark Austin	860-309-2227	Secretary	—	
VP	Camille Westfall	860-916-3324	Newsletter	Mike Schulde	Mikeschu62@gmail.com
Treas.& Membership	Lynda Zibbideo	203-306-3568	Web Liaison	Lynda Zibbideo	203-306-3568

CWCA Facebook page
CWCA Web Site
CWCA email address

Connecticut Woodcarvers Association | Facebook
HTTPS://ctwoodcarvers.org
ctwoodcarver@gmail.com