



AXE MANUAL



*A short guide to the
long and prosperous life
of your axe.*

BEST MADE COMPANY

ABOUT THIS MANUAL

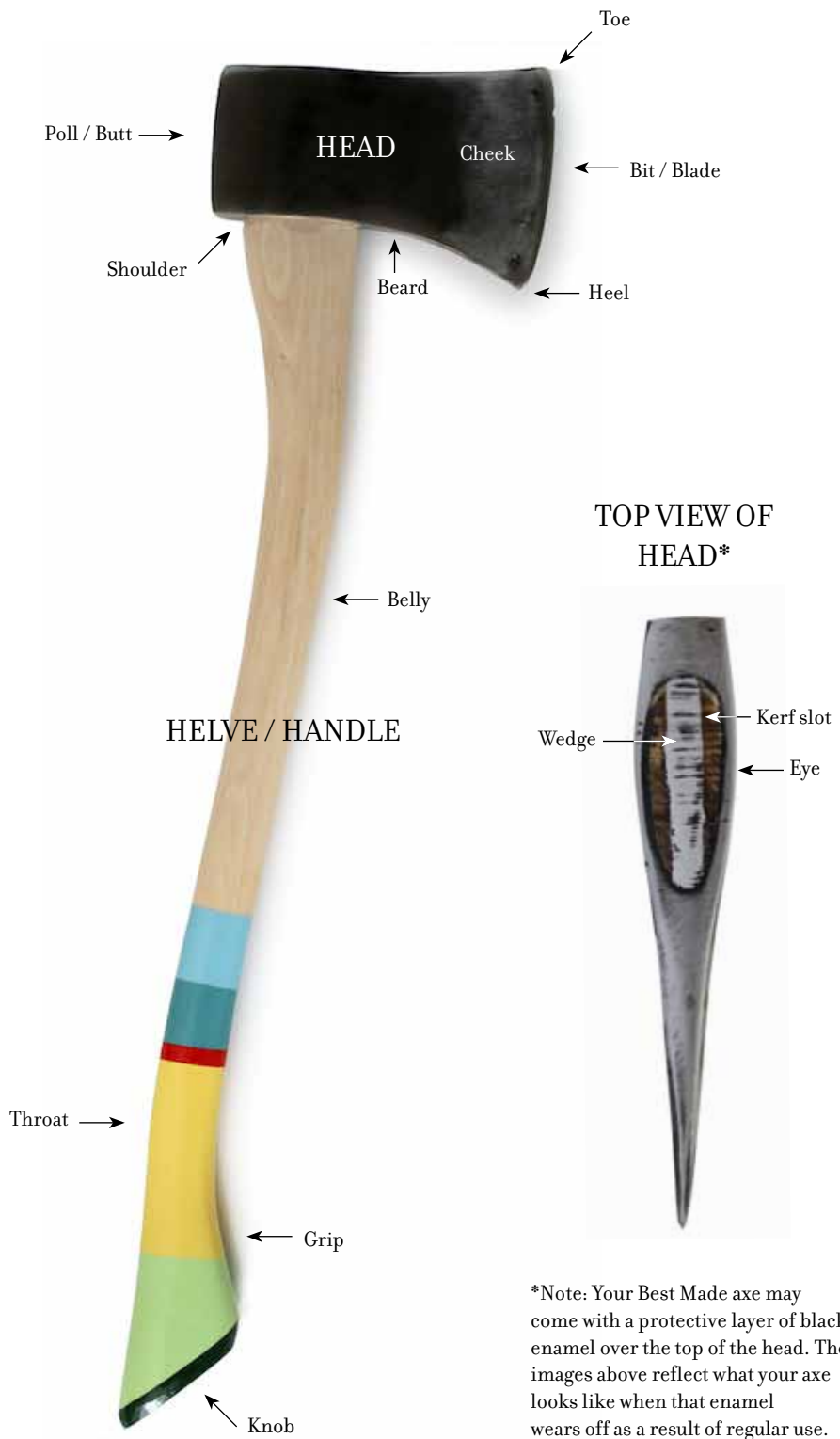
What follows is a set of suggestions relating to the care of your axe. We may sell axes but—much to our chagrin—that doesn't make us the authority on the topic. Indeed, for every type of axe out there, there's a different school of thought about exactly how it should be maintained. For such a simple tool, there are a mind-boggling array of opinions about its care and maintenance.

If you are new to the world of axes, we encourage you to read our suggestions, do your own research, and let us know what works best for you.

As far as axe safety goes, there is one point everybody can agree on: Always use common sense and caution when handling axe or other sharp objects, and, of course, store it out of reach of children.

Note: This manual consists of a short version and a long one. The short one goes like this: Keep your blade sharp, your helve moist, and everything clean. The following is the long version. Enjoy.





*Note: Your Best Made axe may come with a protective layer of black enamel over the top of the head. The images above reflect what your axe looks like when that enamel wears off as a result of regular use.

YOUR AXE

THE HELVE / HANDLE

The helve of your Best Made axe is made from 100% American hickory from Tennessee. Why hickory? It is the best type of wood for a striking tool. Its grain is straight, strong, consistent and light—the orientation of the grain in your Best Made Axe runs the length of the helve, from the “eye” to “swell knob.”

Keep the helve of your axe clean and free of dirt, grime, grease and sap. Store it in a cool, dry place, away from heat and direct sunlight. The upper portion of your helve (the unpainted part) has been coated with linseed oil, and it is recommended that you re-apply a fresh coat of oil once or twice a year (depending on frequency of use). To do this, apply a teaspoon of oil to a clean rag or paper towel and massage into the wood.

Throughout its life, the wood of your axe may become stained. Do not fear—to clean it, brush the stain with a fine-grain sandpaper and apply a coat of linseed oil immediately after.

The lower portion of your helve (the painted part) needs no maintenance. It has been coated with a varnish that will protect it from UV light and water damage. Avoid getting any oils or solvents on this area of the helve, as they could strip the varnish and damage the paintwork.



THE HEAD

After every use, use a soft cloth to remove all sap and dirt. After working with softer woods (pine, cedar, spruce and most evergreens) you may need to add a bit of kerosene to the cloth. For a more aggressive clean, use a brush with soap and water.

Once it is clean, apply a light coat of oil or beeswax to the head to prevent rusting. If rust does begin to form, remove it with steel wool or sandpaper and apply a coat of oil. (Gun oil is a good choice as it is light and acts as an all-in-one cleaner, lubricant and rust inhibitor.) Make sure the head is completely dry before storing it.

It is recommended that you restore your bit to proper edge after every use (see: “using a hand stone” in the following chapter). Indeed, if you neglect this important step, it takes much effort and care to get it back into healthy working condition. Keeping your axe sharp is also important for safety. A sharp axe bites wood squarely and deeply—and is a joy to use. A dull axe tends to glance or bounce off of wood, making chopping tiresome and potentially injuring you or someone else nearby.

To keep your axe sharp, it is recommended that you carry a stone with you whenever you use your axe. High-quality ‘pocket stones’ are readily available (see “resources” in back), and are perfect for quickly sharpening the bit after use.

Keep an eye on the wedge that sits in the kerf slot—this is a major factor in securing the head to the helve. If you notice any slippage or movement from the wedge, or if the head has any movement, pound the wedge back into place. A loose connection can be caused by slight shrinkage due to dryness, which is another important reason to keep the area tight.



USING A HAND STONE

Practice is required in order to become proficient with a hand stone. It is wise to avoid using the file too frequently—though it is useful in removing a nick or reshaping the grind angle. Do not be fooled into thinking that wood can't damage steel—knots in wood can be hard as rock, and certain grain patterns in the "root swell" area of the trunk can wreak havoc on an axe bit. We suggest wearing good leather gloves when sharpening your bit.

There are many schools of thought on sharpening an axe with a hand stone, but we prefer this one laid out by Bernie Weisgerber for the US Forest Service:

Use the stone in a circular motion, working into the edge, toward the middle of the ax head. Work one side of the ax with the coarse stone until it creates a metal burr, then flip the ax over and use the coarse stone until it pushes the burr back. Switch to the fine side of the ax stone and repeat the process until there's a very fine burr and both sides of the ax edge have been honed. Honing the edge removes very small particles of metal from the blade and causes the remaining ax metal to burr slightly. This is sometimes known as a wire edge or a feather edge. At this point you may want to move to one of the Arkansas stones like the Hard Arkansas finishing stone and work the burr back and forth until it breaks off or becomes very fine. I recommend stropping the edge by drawing the ax toward the edge (opposite the direction used during sharpening) on a piece of finished leather or a piece of soft, clear wood like pine. This stropping will remove the final burr or wire edge.



ETIQUETTE

When your friends and family see how proud you are of your new axe, there is little doubt that they themselves will want one. They may even ask if they can borrow yours. By all means, do not say yes. It has been our experience that once an item is lent to someone else—even a family member—it never returns in the same condition, if it returns at all. So when someone asks if they can borrow your Best Made axe to take to the cabin, it's best to politely decline and inform them that they can purchase their very own from Best Made Co. This will help lessen the tension at family and social gatherings, because, admit it, there's enough tension already.

USEFUL RESOURCES

For direct links to specific URLs please visit:
www.bestmadeco.com/features/axe_manual

Sharpening stones and linseed oil:
www.highlandwoodworking.com

Gun / metal oil:
www.midwayusa.com

SPECIAL THANKS:

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