Ebonizing Rust Stain

Joe Gorleski

It can be difficult for some craftsmen to stain a project made from a beautiful hardwood like walnut. Sometimes though, a wood requires stain to bring out its hidden beauty. As woodworkers, we appreciate the beauty of grain in wood and it's uncommon for us to hide it.

Wouldn't it be nice to see this inner beauty develop without a can of commercial stain?

A few household ingredients will create a potent chemical stain that will profoundly change the color of woods with a high tannin content: most notably, oak and walnut.

Don't forget to wear rubber gloves and eye protection!

Ingredients:

- Apple cider vinegar
- Steel wool pad
- 1 table spoon of salt
- Ordinary nails (not galvanized)
- ½ cup of water in a spray bottle

You will need a bucket for the mixture. I use a long, narrow plant holder.

Unroll the steel wool pad and place it in the bucket. Toss in old nails or any other rusted items you have.

Next, place 1 tablespoon of salt into a spray bottle and add ½ cup of water. Shake the bottle until most of the salt has dissolved. Spray the steel wool and nails with this mixture until the bottle is empty.

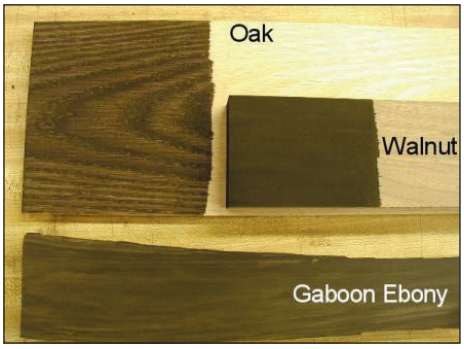
Allow the mix to sit for a few days. It may be necessary to lightly spray the steel wool and nails every other day with plain water to promote as much rust buildup as possible. Why plain water? As the water evaporates, the salt remains on the pad and nails.

You want the steel wool pad to lose at least 75% of its consistency before continuing. The longer you wait for rust, the better.

Let the water completely evaporate before doing anything with the rust. When you have an ample supply of rust, carefully mix in ½ cup of apple cider vinegar (ordinary vinegar won't work as well). Allow this to set for 10 minutes, then dump the mixture into a jar through a paint strainer.

Prepare your project

This stain tends to raise the grain of the wood. In certain situations, it



may be preferable to wipe down your project with a wet rag to raise the grain, allow the surface to dry, and sand it lightly with 220 grit sandpaper.

Apply the "Stain"

Apply the stain with a foam paint brush. Within seconds, you will see the chemical reaction. Walnut's brown will change to black almost immediately. On oak, the result will be interesting but less dramatic. After the coat of stain has dried, sand the project and apply another coat. Walnut typically requires 2 coats and oak may require

3 or more. Sanding will become less necessary with each additional coat as long as you do not sand too much from the surface.

The mixture will remain somewhat potent if kept in a sealed glass jar. Within a year though, the chemical will start to turn green and the results will not be as astounding. And though I hate to say it, a coat of Minwax "Ebony" stain on top of this mixture will further deepen the color and give you a very, very **deep black** color.

Wow! Walnut will now look like ebony. This tremendous change will open up a new world of wood combinations. How about a pedestal table made from ebonized walnut and unstained cherry? Or how about an ebonized walnut bowl or vase?

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