

I would like to try woodturning – how much do I need to spend?

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This is a common question asked by interested people at shows.

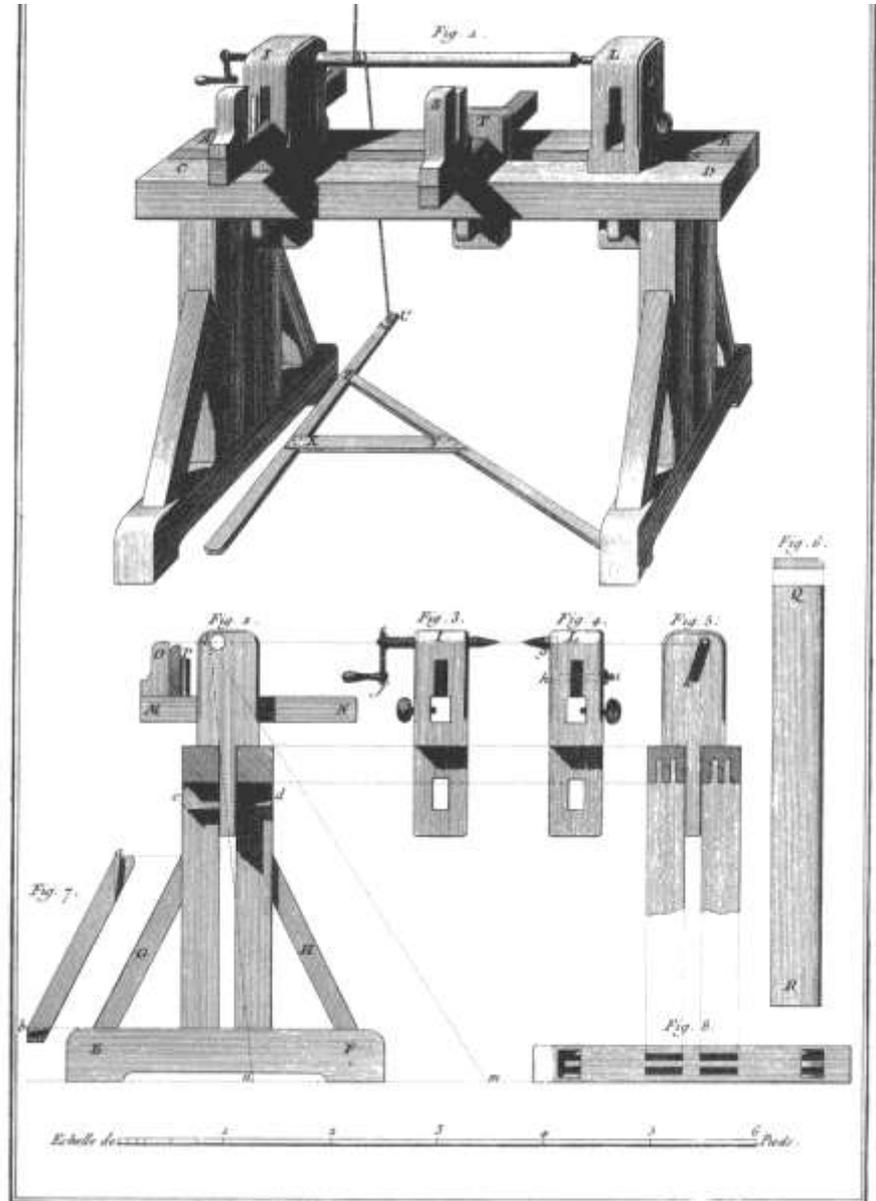
You can save a lot by buying second-hand, but this is largely a matter of patience and luck. For most people, buying new is the only option. The prices quoted below are all new, list prices (as of 2015). Shop around – you may find better deals than I have listed.

Pole lathes

If you have time and no money, you can make yourself a pole lathe. There are many designs on the Internet as well how-to videos on YouTube. Before you write off this option, watch a few video clips, and you will be amazed how quickly green wood can be turned into chair parts, albeit with some skill required.

If you can source some lengths of 2 x 4s in SA pine, then a few rand spent on hardware for the centres, and some cord for the drive will allow you to build a workable pole lathe. The design above is typical of what can be found using Google. Select a design that appeals to you and build it in a day.

Just three cheap carbon steel turning tools – a spindle gouge, a parting tool and a skew chisel, and an oil stone (R50-) for sharpening will allow you to make lots of shavings. Because you are providing the muscle power, you will quickly learn good habits, such as avoiding scraping. You can make chair legs, simple bowls, tool handles, etc, mostly between centers.



Before you buy any powered machinery, invest in a good, comfortable set of impact rated safety glasses. (R100-) Don't be a cheapskate with your eyes! They can't be replaced.

Cheapest Powered Wood Lathe:

Next up, the cheapest powered lathe with tubular bars can be had new for about R1700-. (Note that these are very basic, but they do work). They are readily available used, so visit some second-hand shops, and you may be able to save some money. If you find one with the out-board sanding disc on the left hand side of the headstock, this can be used for sharpening if you can't afford a small bench grinder (R550-) Small bench grinders are readily available used, but be sure to ask to see it running first. Inspect the wheels for signs of abuse, and leave it running for a couple of minutes, standing well clear in case of exploding wheels!



Add in a set of carbon steel tools (R600-) and you can make shavings. You will be rather restricted in what you can make, mostly between-centres and faceplate work, but you will be turning!

The main problem with these units is if you decide you like turning enough to upgrade, you will find the second hand value is very low. Also fitting a chuck may not be possible, due to the non-standard spindle thread.

Mini lathes

Next up the scale is a mini-lathe with a cast iron bed, such as these offered by Adendorf (R3500- see picture on right); Mr WoodTurner (Nova Comet II – R6400-); or Hardware Centre (Nova Comet II and Jet Mini). These are very capable machines, and can take a very basic chuck (R1200- from Adendorf) as well when you need to expand



your options. With a HSS set of turning tools (R1600- from Adendorf), and a small bench grinder (R550-) you can look forward to many productive hours of turning before you may feel restricted. Bed extensions are available for some lathes (Nova Comet – R1100- and the Jet Mini), so furniture spindle turning will also be possible.



Johan Kramer (083 251 0183 or Johankramer300@gmail.com) has a selection of the Adendorf mini-lathes that he uses. You can visit him and try out one before you buy, by attending one of his Saturday morning workshops The club has a Nova Comet II and a Jet Mini, which you can try out as well.



So, just to get going with eye protection, a mini-lathe, a set of HSS turning tools, a grinder and the simplest chuck from Adendorf, budget on about R7,000-. Don't think you can manage without some sort of grinder to sharpen your tools on a powered lathe – they go blunt quickly, and you can't work with blunt tools.

The mini lathe and tools are all durable kit, and will last you many years. They are also easy to resell, if you decide woodturning is not for you.

