

A Fancy Spindle turned Icicle Ornament

October 2026 Demonstration by Dan Brandner

A Fancy spindle turned icicle ornament looks nice on a Christmas tree and lets you demonstrate some of your spindle turning skills. These turn fairly quickly, attract the eye of those interested and sell well.

Start by selecting an appropriate piece of wood. A pen blank would work, but I cut square stock from a 3/4" maple board, about 7 inches long. I find a lighter color ornament looks better on a tree, and a hardwood like maple takes the fine detail of the spindle well. I've made different sizes and small ones in buckthorn are very eye appealing.



Mark the center of the ends and mount between centers and turn to a cylinder with a spindle roughing gouge. [2000 rpm for this small spindle]



We will be working with both ends in a collet chuck, so turn a 5/8" tenon on both ends after setting the size with a caliper and parting tool. If your blank is smaller, use a smaller collet size.

Select which end you want for the tip of the ornament, wanting the grain to be as straight as possible there. Mounting the tenon on the tip end into the collet chuck, aligning the opposite end in the live center before tightening. Then remove the live center and replace it with your drill chuck with a small drill bit.



I used a 1/16" drill for the hole to hold the fine wire loop and split ring I use for hanging. Make sure the drill starts in a cleanly marked hole to begin. You want no wobbling of this small drill bit. [500 rpm for drilling]. I held only a small part of the end of the bit in the chuck so I could drill the hole quite deeply into the blank. Since the end gets parted off later, I want to make sure the hole is deep enough.

Next, remove the stock from the collet chuck and turn it around so the drilled end is now in the chuck. Realign with a live center tip before tightening the collet to keep things as straight as possible.

Next are the primary turning steps.

Turn the cylinder into a tapered cone except for the end. Using a roughing gouge, move down the taper so you are cutting the end grain fibers as you form the taper. You want to leave the live center contact as long as you can and I leave a straight portion on the top of the taper, in which I later turn a ball. You can use your skew for this too, a good time to practice planing.



I usually mark off 3 different section down the taper, and will try to duplicate elements in each section. I find this is appealing to the eye. You can use whatever elements you desire. I've used quarter rounds (1/2 beads), three balls in a row of decreasing size, a captive ring element and even a 5-ring small Christmas tree.

After marking I define the sections with the parting tool. I will adjust the parting tool depths as I work on each element.



Start at the right (tail stock) end of the taper and work to the headstock end. But remember, cut downhill on all your tapers. I used a skew, but you can use a detail spindle gouge too. I added the grooves with the tip of the skew. Leave parting off the tip until later.

I selected the elements of a quarter round (1/2 bead) above each spindle element, the spindle elements each having 2 grooves for decorations. It is easy to space 2 grooves, but harder to space 3 evenly.



Above these 3 elements, I turned a ball at the top with two grooves to match. I had to loosen and move the tenon out of the collet chuck a little bit to cleanly turn the ball. I like the ball element on top, and a turner will recognize it as not as easy to turn as it looks. They do get easier to make the more you turn them.



Now, still supported on both ends, is the time to sand and finish. I mostly used the skew so I used a fine sandpaper to touch up the grooves and surfaces, then Aussie oil to give it a shiny finish.



Finally, we can carefully put a fine tip on the bottom of the ornament. I used a skew to narrow the tip down, then backed away the tailstock. Then supporting with your fingers aligned along a close tool rest, refine the tip as desired. Sand and apply the Aussie Oil finish carefully.



And last, loosen the collet and move the tenon out, all except for 1/8" or so. Align the tip of the final with the tip on a live center before tightening. Then with the lathe running a little slower, reduce the top portion of the ornament above the ball to the desired thickness, then begin to part off with a small spindle gouge. I sanded and applied the Aussie Oil to this portion just before the final part off. After it is completely off, hand sand and rub your Aussie Oil rag over it for a final touch.



All that is left is to apply a little E6000 glue to your wire and insert it into the drilled hole at the top. I picked up these black metal loops and matching small split rings which I think looked great as a final touch on these ornaments.

