"Getting Started in Blacksmithing"

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If you are interested in blacksmithing, the first step is to network with others who have the same interest. This can easily be accomplished by attending one of the regional or state meetings of the Saltfork Craftsmen Artist Blacksmith Association. Their web site www.saltforkcraftsmen.org will list meetings and demonstrations in the newsletter, and on the website calendar. One thing unusual about Saltfork is the member's willingness to help newcomers get acquainted with all forms of blacksmithing, and their sharing of techniques, equipment availability, and supply sources. Like most any hobby, blacksmithing can be very simple or very complicated. Getting all the fancy tools up front, as you already realize, will cost a fortune and may or may not work out as you planned. I've seen this same thing in the antique car / street rod hobby. Many good buys of old cars come from those who jumped in big time and lost interest or ran out of $. Below are ideas to help you Keep Things Simple in blacksmithing.

There are blacksmithing meetings or demonstrations on almost any weekend. In addition to the local organizations, there are conferences on a regional or national basis. You can even plan your vacation to take in a demonstration or a smithing conference. The national organization is the Artist Blacksmith Association of North America (ABANA). It is very beneficial to join ABANA to increase your exposure to outstanding work around the country. Go to http://www.abana.org; the ABANA publications alone are worth the cost.

Second, buy or borrow some basic blacksmithing books. Many show how to make tools. The Internet is a good place to find used (inexpensive) books. Take a look at www.bookfinder.com . Check out the local library for books or videotapes about metal fabrication and smithing.

Start slow in buying books; most cover the same basic information. Here are a few recommended books:

A Blacksmith's Craft, The Legacy of Francis Whitaker (V1) by George F. Dixon
The Backyard Blacksmith: Traditional Techniques for the Modern Smith by Lorelei Sims
New Edge of the Anvil by Jack Andrews
A Blacksmithing Primer by Randy McDaniel

There are hours of smithing information posted on the net – see: www.anvilfire.com , www.forgemagic.com, or , www.iforgeiron.com . All have getting started information and links to lots of other sites. The Blacksmith's Journal (http://www.blacksmithsjournal.com) is a great resource.

Third, keep things simple at first. Most blacksmithing tools can be made at home from scrap. Can you weld? No – get into your local Vo Tech welding class. You can learn to weld and fabricate steel there. Use their tools and equipment to make your blacksmithing stuff – forge, anvil stand, etc.

ANVIL: A basic anvil can be made from a piece of heavy steel I beam or railroad track. It's not a 300-pound Fisher, but it sure does work. You can cut a horn on it and cut the general shape with an oxy acetylene torch (Vo Tech) and grind it to finish. If you want, weld on a piece of 1" thick plate about 4" wide by 10 to 15" long for a top. It will last a long time. I have a friend who has a heavy fabricated anvil that shows excellent work; the horn is made from a piece of 3" solid bar cut and ground to shape. He has more time than money in this well made anvil.

A purchased anvil need only be in the 100 - 130# range for nearly anything you will make. Anything over 150# for starters is likely a waste of money. The 300# ones are like having a Dodge with a big diesel engine to drive to the store for milk – mostly bragging rights. Most anvils that are damaged can be repaired by people with welding skill. However, the special welding rod is expensive and hard to grind back to shape. I don't recommend buying high priced, unseen, stuff through E-Bay. Smithing tools are heavy; shipping costs can be very high.

FORGE: A basic coal forge is as simple as an old car or truck brake drum & some legs. The tuyre or firepot can be made from a 3" pipe tee. An electric blower can be scrapped out of many sources. A clothes dryer blower is Ok for a large shop size coal forge. Look on the net at some of the blacksmithing sites for plans. Anvilfire.com or iforgeiron.com are great places to start.

There are many plans / photos of simple gas forges on the net. A Harbor Freight weed burner ($20) can be turned in to a forge burner. The gas forge can be simple, and it heats quickly without the mess of coal. A gas forge can be especially good here in Oklahoma where coal is a hundred-mile-drive one way and costs nearly $100 per ton for stuff that may not be not all that good for smithing.

TONGS: Don't buy ***large*** high priced, worn out, and burned up, junk tongs through E-Bay, antique stores, or auctions. Recently there have been good quality, newly made, tongs for sale on E-bay; the prices of about $20 each look reasonable. You can use Vise Grips to get started. Large China / Taiwan pliers can be modified as well. Making your own tongs is a good project.

TOOLING: My first hardie cut off tool was made from an old wood splitting wedge and some welding / grinding work. The same goes for a home built bottom fullers or swage tools. Spend your time and money carefully; plan your tool gathering. Tools are heavy; shipping costs can be higher than the tools.

This likely is not a magic answer, but may help get you started. The key is <u>you</u> have to start and <u>you</u> have to put forth the effort. Smithing won't be handed to you without work on your part. This is a very enjoyable hobby. You have the opportunity to learn a craft and to meet a lot of good people and make special items for your family and friends.