

Forged Gum Leaf

a step-by-step guide by Paul Mills



Gum leaves are something that most of the guys who get along to demonstration events can produce with their eyes shut. As a giveaway, they're popular with young and old. They can be made from scratch and are quick enough to make so as to hold the attention of the spectators the whole way through.

As with most forging jobs, each person does it a little different from the other and this is one of the ways I do mine, and every leaf I do is a little different from the last. It doesn't matter what stock size you start with, the process is the same, and all that will vary is the size of the finished product. I'm using 12mm round bar here because that's what I had handy at the time.



Take a heat (about 80mm) on the end of the bar and set it on the anvil with around 40mm protruding over the front edge. Using half blows, forge a shoulder on one side of the bar to about half the original thickness of the bar. Where the narrow neck is formed, this is the start of the leaf stem.

(NB. A half blow is one that is struck with half of the hammer face over the face of the anvil and half off.)



Rotate the bar 90 deg. (either direction) without moving it forwards or backwards and forge a shoulder as per step 1. Rotate back and true up the shoulder. Be careful not to thin the stem too much at this stage. You should now have an offset shoulder on two sides only, with a 12 x 40mm block on the end of the bar.

Take another heat on the end of the bar and forge a gentle taper towards the tip, be careful not to go too small on the end.

At this stage, some 'smiths like to put "a bit of movement" in the leaf by hammering it into a flowing curve. I like mine straight(ish) so I'll leave it as is.



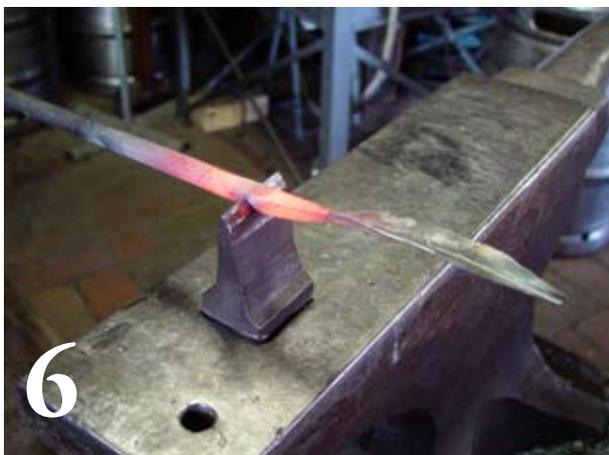
Carefully heat the tapered section (without burning the tip off) and forging on the anvil, flatten the entire length on the face of the anvil to a nice slender gum leaf shape. Refine the shape on edge if required.

At this point some 'smiths also like to put lateral veins across the leaf, this can be done with a thin cross-pein hammer or chisel. I like to leave mine plain and let the fire scale texture stand alone.

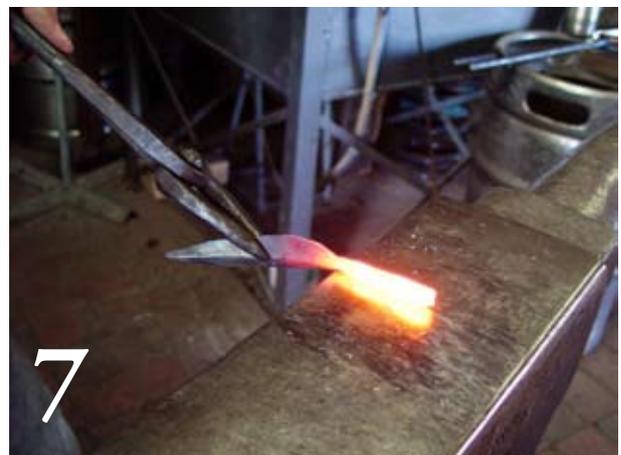


This step will vary depending on the tooling you have available to you. I have a veining tool so that's what I'll use here, but similar results can be achieved with a chisel and some patience.

Gently heat the leaf and forge a vein down the centre, working from the tip right up to the stem. Repeat until you have a neat impression along the entire length.



Take a heat on the stem section of the bar and hot cut with a hardy.



Holding the leaf, forge the stem to the desired thickness, first to square, octagonal then round, and curve it to suit the overall shape of the leaf.



You can't expect to get it right first time, like all blacksmithing, it only comes with practice!

For the *Tree Project*, leaves need to be made of stainless steel or copper. Actual gumleaves vary in length from around 60mm (2 ½") to over 250mm (10") and are long and flat. The larger leaves are generally no wider than 40mm (1½") at their widest point.

Ideally, the forged leaves can be about 1-2mm (1/16") thick. Stems need to be at least 6mm (¼") thick, no less and at least 50mm (2") long.

Gum leaves pictured on this page are actual size.

