

Backyard cutting

Backyard cutting: Proper grip of the sword

The grip on the katana is of paramount importance as it affects everything from the way you swing the sword to the way the force is conveyed from your arms to the cutting surface and into the target. Many people, myself included constantly underestimate the importance of the correct grip on the tsuka. This is one of the most fundamental parts of learning how to use the sword and it's one of the most neglected.

The right hand grips the sword so that the wrist and arm are at about 45 degrees to the angle of the tsuka. The little pinky and ring finger are going to be the most tightly wrapped of your fingers and secondly your middle finger and finally, just supporting the tsuka will be your index finger. Your thumb should wrap around and sit comfortably next to your middle finger. This sort of grip provides the strength needed to manipulate the sword whilst not choking the manouverability. How close you keep the grip of your right hand to the tsuba is a matter of preference but with your index finger almost touching is good.

The same sort of approach is used with your left hand which sits about 2 fingers distance from your right on the tsuka. The fingers closest to your pinky are gripping the tightest whilst the furthest away are more relaxed.

Now for the magic, which I feel has improved my cutting immensely. You roll your hands inwards so that your wrists are now sat above the line of the tsuka as you look down on it. This rolling should also tighten your grip. All of this positioning and finger posture is called te-no-uchi and means 'inside the hand'.

The rolling of the wrists not only puts your arms right behind the cut, supporting it throughout, but also encourages good edge alignment or hasuji. I found it feels a little odd at first but it's certainly improved my cutting. In freestyle cutting the rules on grip, posture and so on are a lot more relaxed and sometimes are broken altogether in pursuit of one particular trick cut. I am however a firm believer that good solid practice in how the sword should be held, can only make you a better cutter.

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Author: Shad - The Samurai Workshop

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