family handyman
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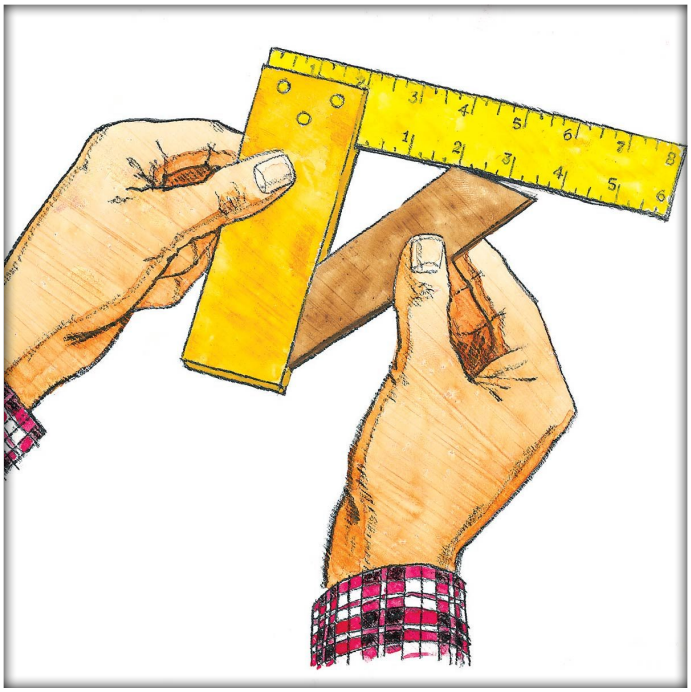
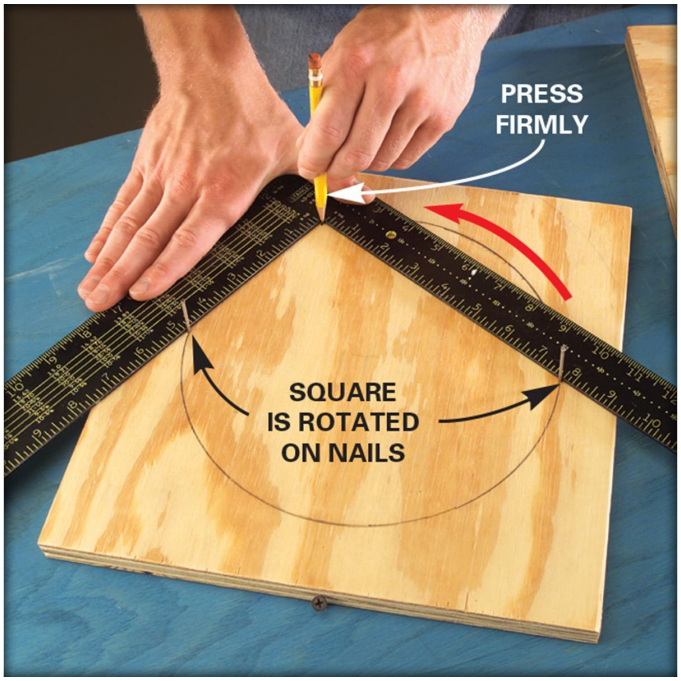
Tips and Techniques for DIYers



Testing Table Saw Mitre Cuts

An easy way to test whether your table saw is set to 45 degrees is to cut off a short length of your trim, then hold it to a square. A gap means your angle is off.



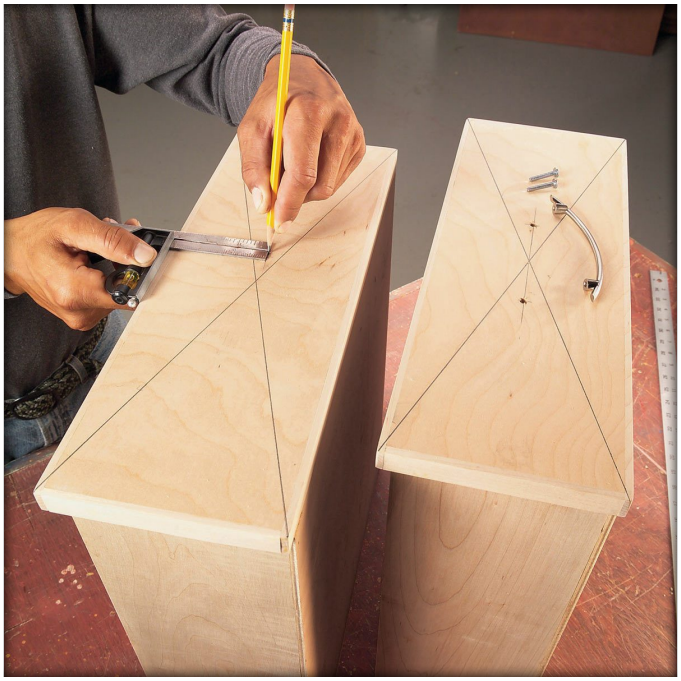
Circle Gets the Square

Here's a way to trace arcs and circles for project parts. Tap two finish nails at the ends of a desired diameter, then rotate a framing square against the nails while holding a pencil in the square's corner. Spray the underside of the square with silicone or rub on some paraffin so it'll glide smoother. Then practice a little to get the feel of the three-point contact technique

Quick Blade-Height Gauge

This gauge block is the quickest way to set the height of a table saw blade. This one is made from a 3-in. length of 4×4 cut to the settings used most frequently. If you need more settings, just create another block.

Then when it's time to reset the table saw blade, these blocks will help you get the job done quickly



Dead-Centre Drawer Handles

Here's a quick and easy way to perfectly centre drawer handles and pulls and mark them for drilling. Use a straightedge and light pencil lines to mark diagonals from the corners of the drawer face to pinpoint the centre. That's all you'll need for a single screw handle.

For handles with two holes, adjust a try square to the centre point and scribe the horizontal handle line. Divide the handle hole spacing (usually three or four inches) by two and mark the drill holes on the line on either side of the centre.

Improved Marking Gauge

Marking gauges come with a little metal pin that scratches a line on the wood, but it's hard to see the fine line when you're working. Family Handyman editor Ken Collier drilled out the pinhole and stuck in a pencil. Now it works great for tracing cutting lines on rough boards and laying out screw hole positions along cabinet edges.

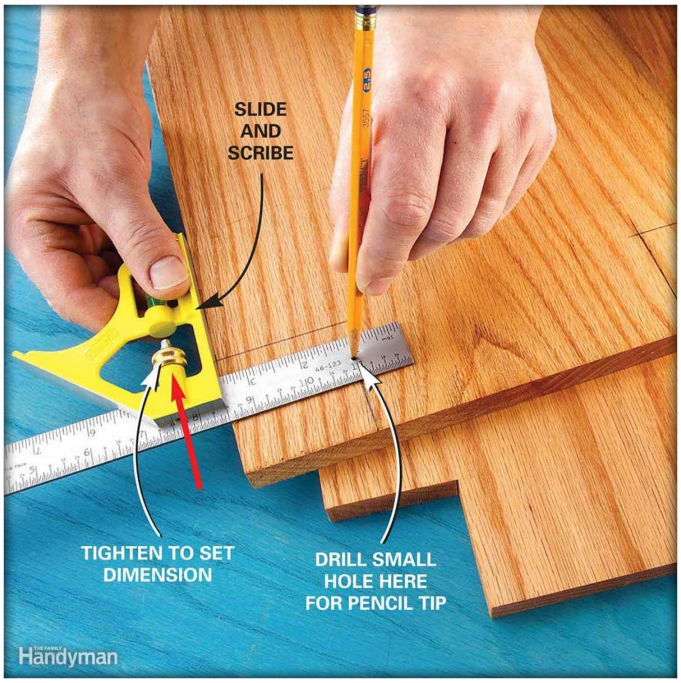
Flexible Sanding Block from the Office

Sanding curves is tricky. Sometimes you need a sanding pad that's both firm and flexible. A small notepad works great. Just wrap sandpaper around the pad and bend the pad to whatever arc you need. Slip the one end of the sandpaper between the pages to help hold it in place on the pad. Give this a try the next time you're working on a project that has curves and tough to reach spots.

Simple Circle Layout Tool

This simple jig makes laying out circles a breeze. Drill a 1/8-in. hole through every inch mark on a ruler or yard-stick. To draw a circle, place a pin through the number “1” into the centre of your board. Add 1 in. to the radius of the circle you wish to draw, and insert a pencil into this number. Using the pin as a pivot, rotate the pencil to mark the circle.

Edwin Constantino.

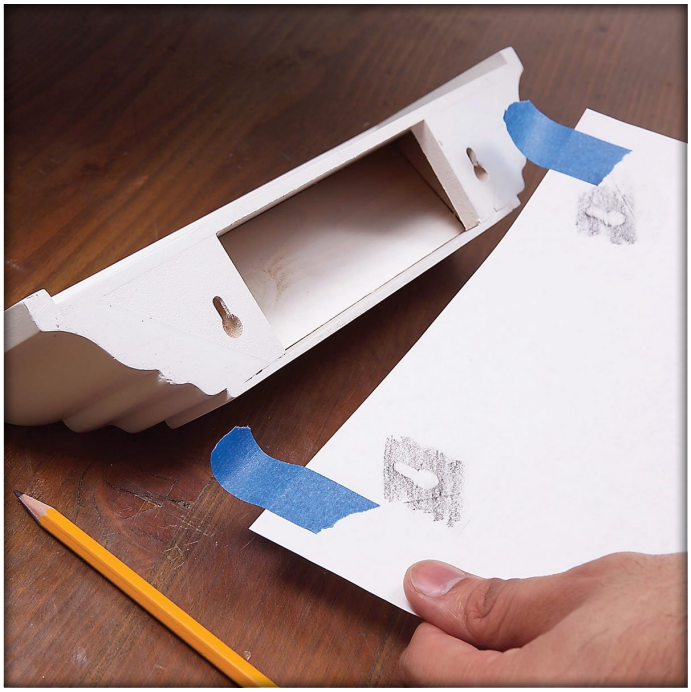


Marking Gauge

Here's a nifty way to trace cutting or drilling lines on work pieces: First drill a 1/8-in. pencil hole one inch in from the ruler end of a combination square and adjust the square to the desired dimension. Then stick in the pencil and pull the square along the board edge to trace the line. Be careful to drill a hole that's only a smidgen larger than the pencil point. You'll be able to speedily produce straight, crisp lines for all kinds of jobs.

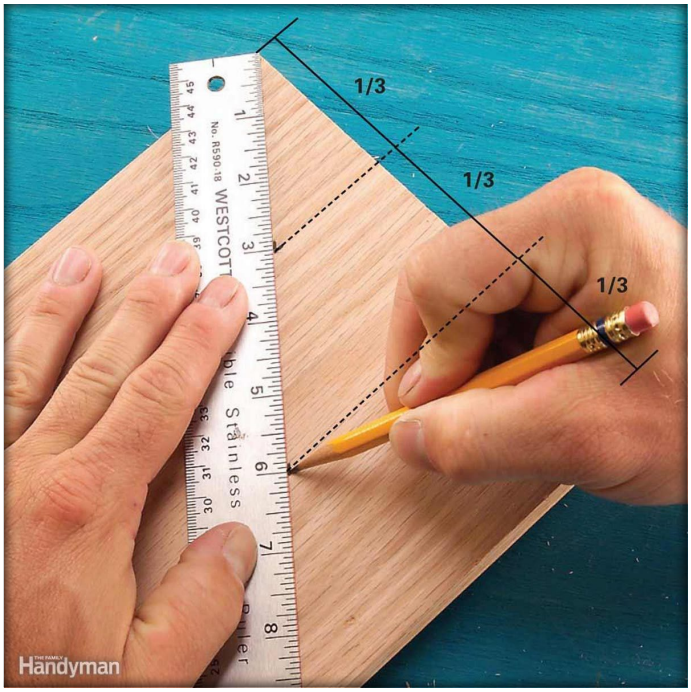
Memory (or Lack Thereof) Trick

Stick masking tape to your tape measure for jotting down shapes and numbers. That way you won't forget the length on the way to the saw.



Perfect Keyhole Template

When you're installing a wall hanging that has keyhole slots on the back, create a template to help you position the wall screws. Lay a piece of paper over the slots and do a pencil rubbing a la Sherlock Holmes. Level and tape the guide to the wall. Mark the top of the keyholes with a nail and your screws will be in perfect position.



Slant-Ruler Board Divider

Want to divide a board or sheet of plywood perfectly in half, into thirds or any other equal fractions? Here's a great old tip that's worth revisiting. To halve the board, line up the end of a ruler or tape measure on one side. Slant the tape to read 8-in. on the right edge and make your mark at 4-in. To divide it into thirds, slant the ruler to read 9-in. and mark the board at 3-in. and 6-in.

The key is to select a measurement that's easily divisible by the number of spaces you want. For example, if you want to cut a sheet of plywood into six sections, use the 60-in. mark on your tape measure. Measure at a 90-degree angle from one side to each mark to get the real numbers to transfer them wherever you need them.

Set the Blade Depth Before Cutting

Determine the blade depth by unplugging the saw and holding it alongside your board with the blade guard retracted. Then loosen the depth-adjusting lever or knob and pivot the saw's base until the blade extends about 1/4-in. to 1/2-in. below the board. Tighten the lever or knob and you're ready to saw.

Half Pencil Marks Exact Copies

While trying to trace an exact copy of the throat plate for my table saw, I came up with this nifty technique using an ordinary pencil. I just shaved my pencil into a half-pencil by carefully grinding it on my belt sander. The flat edge enables my modified pencil to ride straight up along the edge of the template. It also works great for marking and then shaping inlays for my woodworking projects.

Tim Reese

Make a Quick Mixing Surface

Instead of using a container to mix a small amount of epoxy, just make a mixing surface on your workbench using painters tape. Simply lay down strips, overlapping the edges so the epoxy doesn't get on your bench. When you're done, peel off the tape and throw it away. This mixing surface will work for more than just epoxy, you can use it for wood glue or any other material you need easy access to while working on a project.

Improvised T-Bevel

Not long ago, I needed to make some angled wood parts to build a new soffit on my garage. I didn't have the customary tool for the job, but I had some steel joining plates. I screwed through one of the holes in the plate, set my angle, then added another screw to lock the angle. I could then use it as a template to mark all the pieces at the same angle and cut them with my circular saw.

Ryan Bartsch

Bi-Fold Workbench

Old doors laid across sawhorses make great temporary workbenches, but they take up a lot of space when you're not using them. Instead of full-size doors, I use bi-fold doors with hinges so I can fold them up when I'm done working. They're also easier to haul around in the pickup for on-the-road jobs.

Harry Steele

Align Angles with Tape

Clamping mitred edges can be a real hassle because they never seem to line up correctly. The easiest way that I've found to get around this process is to use painter's tape as clamps. First set the pieces so that the outer edges are facing up and tape them edge-to-edge. The flip the pieces over so the bevelled edges are facing up and glue them together. Complete the process by taping the last two edges together and let sit until completed. The tape removes easily and the glue won't attach to the tape, making sanding and finishing very simple.

Make Your Own Super-Strong Sandpaper

I do a lot of finish-sanding freehand, without a sandpaper block, so I can smooth edges and get into nooks and crannies. But the finer grits are usually bonded to thinner paper and, at least for me, the paper is too thin and ends up tearing long before the grit wears out. So, I apply duct tape to the back of the sandpaper. The sandpaper is still flexible enough to sand a tight radius and it’s far more durable. You can use this super-strong sandpaper like a shoeshine rag.

Chuck Merchant

Use This Pencil Hack for Perfectly Flat Boards

Before face joining to make flat boards mark them with a pencil. Don’t just draw a squiggle down the board, use a pencil to draw straight horizontal lines.

The Pencil Trick for Planing Boards

Before face-joining a board, mark it up with a pencil. However, don’t just draw a squiggle down the board, use a pencil to draw straight horizontal lines from edge to edge all the way down the board. By doing so, you will ensure that the edges of the board are square as well. Each time you plane the board in the joiner you will be able to see how flat it is based on how many pencil markings are left. Continuing face joining until all of the markings are gone to make flat boards.

Elizabeth Flaherty
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