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Do you really need RV insurance on your travel trailer?

As RVers, we know the allure of the open road and the freedom it offers. However, with freedom comes responsibility, including the important decision of securing insurance.

What is RV insurance?

RV insurance is designed to cover various types of RVs, including travel trailers, toy haulers, motor homes, fifth wheels, and camper vans. While liability insurance is not required for most travel trailers, having RV coverage could benefit you and your adventures.

How can RV insurance protect you?

- **Protection against accidents:** May provide financial protection for repair costs, medical expenses, and liability in case of an accident.
- **Coverage for theft and vandalism:** Could help with repairs or replace your trailer with less out-of-pocket expenses if it's lost or stolen.
- **Natural disasters and weather events:** May cover the cost of damage from storms, floods, or other natural disasters.

Is your travel trailer covered under your home or auto insurance?

While your home or auto policy can protect your trailer in certain instances, it can also leave you with gaps in your coverage.

For example, your auto policy may only cover your trailer while you're on the road, not if you're parked or at a campsite. The same goes for home insurance—if you're on your home's property it might be covered, but damage from a storm at a campground wouldn't be.

What specialized coverages does Progressive offer?

Progressive offers a variety of specialized coverages that aren't included on a standard auto insurance policy like:

- **Roof Protection Plus[®]:** Covers repairs or replacements for RV roofs, including if the cause is wear and tear.*
- **Pest Damage ProtectionSM:** Covers the cost of repairs from pest infestations.*

Confidence on the road

Having RV insurance gives you confidence you're protected no matter where you roam. From remote national parks to bustling campgrounds, RV insurance ensures you have the support and financial protection you need if something goes wrong.

While insurance for your travel trailer may not be legally required, it's a crucial investment in protecting your RV, finances, and peace of mind.

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*Available for RVs less than 6 years old; and a \$250 deductible applies to any claim.

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Got Goofs?

Check out this hilarious reader blunder, then send us your own!

During our kitchen remodel, my wife was sensitive to the dust, so I installed plastic sheeting barriers and swept and vacuumed regularly. One day, I turned on the shop vac to suck up a big pile of debris. It was louder than normal, but I didn't think much of it. I had it on for only a minute or so, but when I turned it off, I could barely see across the room! It looked as if a heavy fog had rolled in. Dumbfounded, I pulled the top motor assembly off and saw the cylindrical press-on filter had fallen off its base. So while I was vacuuming, it had totally spewed out all that dust, filling the room. It was a colossal mess, but I cleaned up as much as I could. My wife came home and didn't notice anything out of the ordinary. Saved!

—Les Greene, Rancho Santa Margarita, CA

Share your funny Great Goofs with us at FamilyHandyman.com/submissions.



YOU BUILT THIS!

DIY Climbing Wall

A *Family Handyman* reader gave his grandson a much-needed way to burn energy outside

My grandson loves this outdoor climbing wall that I built for him. I found the plans by Bill Bergmann on the *Family Handyman* website and followed them exactly. They were easy to understand and implement, and I was able to finish the project in just one weekend! —Kevin Wallace, Elmwood Park, IL



Scan the QR code above to build your own climbing wall.



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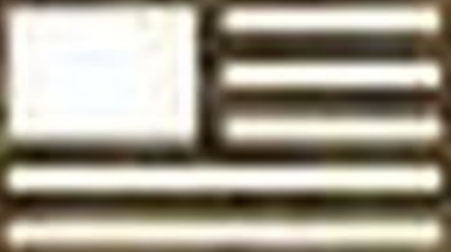


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Money-Making Advice from a Pro

Use these value-boosting tips from TV star and DIY expert Scott McGillivray when flipping or selling a home



On each episode of *Buyers Bootcamp*, Scott McGillivray offers amateur investors an opportunity to partner with him to buy—and profit from—investment properties. McGillivray puts up his own money and brings his years of real estate experience and know-how to each project. Together, he and his eager partners tackle full-scale home renovations.

Here are a few pointers McGillivray offers on the show:

Stay Flexible

When a city pushed back on a plan for a 6-ft. fence because it created traffic blind spots on a busy corner, McGillivray and his partners cut the fence on an angle. Finding a solution to fence in the yard was critical to the value of the home. “I know that if we want to get top dollar, it’s got to start from the outside in,” McGillivray says.

Stage the Property

McGillivray says that making a home as turnkey as possible is important for a quick sale. Staging is one of the last steps after renovating an investment property. “By spending 1% to 2% of the value of the home, I might get a 3% to 5% boost in the sale price,” McGillivray says.

Create Custom Pieces

In one home, McGillivray built and installed a custom bench to fill an awkward corner. “The best returns on investment are going to be the pieces that stay,” McGillivray says. “Because it’s a built-in bench, that’s built-in equity that stays with the home.” ●



Watch Scott McGillivray partner up with amateur home renovators on *Buyers Bootcamp* on *At Home with Family Handyman*. Find out where to stream the series for free at FamilyHandyman.com/tv.

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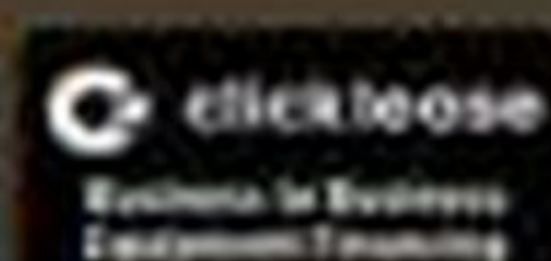
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Backyard Glow-Up

Add cozy lighting to outdoor gatherings with USB rechargeable lamps, such as these from the Kuka collection by Talenti. "You can move them around depending on where people are sitting, plus they have a glow that brings warmth to the space," says landscape designer Chris Turner. "They help make outdoor areas feel more functional and intimate." —Erica Young





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*A 60-minute warm-up is required when applying the sensor.

†Study was performed with the outside US version of the FreeStyle Libre 2 system. Data is applicable to FreeStyle Libre 3 system, as feature sets are similar.

‡Study was performed with the outside US version of the FreeStyle Libre 14 day system. Data is applicable to FreeStyle Libre 3 system, as feature sets are similar as FreeStyle Libre 14 day system, excluding alarms.

§Patients must meet Medicare eligibility coverage criteria.

References:

1. Leelarathna, Lalantha, et al. "Intermittently Scanned Continuous Glucose Monitoring for Type 1 Diabetes." *New England Journal of Medicine* 387, no. 16 (2022): 1477-1487. <https://doi.org/10.1056/nejmoa2205650>.

2. Evans, Mark, Zoë Welsh, and Alexander Seibold. "Reductions in HbA1c with Flash Glucose Monitoring Are Sustained for Up to 24 Months: a Meta-analysis of 75 Real-World Observational Studies." *Diabetes Therapy* 13, no. 6 (2022): 1175-1185. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13300-022-01253-9>.

3. Local Coverage Determination (LCD) L33822, Glucose Monitors, <https://www.cms.gov/medicare-coverage-database/view/lcd.aspx?LCDId=33822>.

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Built to Last

Some home essentials are made for the long haul. We tested four standout picks to see which ones you'll be happy using for years.

The Last Couch You'll Ever Need

When my husband and I bought our first home, we were ready to leave behind our budget furniture and invest in pieces we could love for a lifetime. At the top of my wish list was a LoveSac Sactional.

I was drawn to the couch's customizable design—the fabric, fill, layout and accessories can all be tailored to your space. Using the online build tool, I chose a six-seat setup, seashell polylinen covers and standard foam cushions. The flat-pack design made each piece easy to fit through doorways, and though assembly took around six hours, the steps were simple. Once assembled, the sturdy connectors keep everything firmly in place.

The quality is top notch, with hardwood seat frames, sinuous steel springs and Italian webbing. The washable cushion covers aced my stain test too, with no traces of coffee or tomato sauce left behind.

Most important, the couch is supremely comfortable and adapts as life changes, whether you're rearranging a room or adding a seat. It's one of the pricier modular sofas out there (the complete configuration I tested cost just under \$7,000), but after using our Sactional daily for over a year, I genuinely can't imagine ever needing another couch. —Katie Bandurski, senior shopping editor
LoveSac Sactionals, price varies; lovesac.com

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Power Up Your Laundry Routine

They say appliances aren't made like they used to be, but after three months with this Maytag washer and dryer set, I'd disagree. The Maytag Front Load Washer with Extra Power and 16-Hour Fresh Hold Option has handled bulky comforters, pet beds, dark clothes and workout gear with ease. Its 4.8-cu.-ft. capacity fits 30 towels, and the Extra Power button uses a dual-temp wash to fight tough stains.

If you can't transfer a load to the dryer right away, the Fresh Hold setting prevents musty smells by tumbling and circulating air for up to 16 hours. Wi-Fi connectivity also lets you remotely manage loads—a plus, since the alert is hard to hear from another room.

The matching dryer also left me impressed, with 12 cycles and options to reduce static and smooth wrinkles. The units are stackable too, making them ideal for small laundry spaces. Overall, the blend of old-school reliability and smart modern features makes this set a worthwhile upgrade. —*Caroline Lubinsky*, senior shopping editor *Maytag Front Load Washer with Extra Power and 16-Hour Fresh Hold Option*, \$949, and *Front Load Electric Dryer with Extra Power and Quick Dry Cycle*, \$849; maytag.com, Home Depot

More Than a Pretty Face

Smeg's Fab line of fridges brings 1950s flair to modern kitchens with retro-chic details such as rounded corners, a glossy finish and an aluminum handle. I tested the Fab 28, which pairs these vintage looks with practical features such as energy efficiency, adjustable shelves and a quick cooling system.

After a convenient white-glove delivery from Williams-Sonoma, setup was a breeze. I installed the shelves and bins and adjusted the cooling dial, and by the next morning everything was perfectly chilled. The compact size suits my smaller kitchen, though some larger items—such as my Brita pitcher—don't fit comfortably inside, even with shelf adjustments. The freezer space is limited, too, but that wasn't an issue for me since I use a separate ice maker. If you need more room or have a larger household, consider the Fab 50, which offers over 19 cu. ft. of capacity compared with the Fab 28's 9.9 cu. ft.

In terms of energy use, the Fab 28 uses just 230 kWh annually—well below the average for refrigerators. Its retro charm may be the star of the show, but this fridge backs up the style with solid performance. —*Caroline Lubinsky*, senior shopping editor *Smeg Fab 28*, \$2,500; williams-sonoma.com, Wayfair, Amazon



No Toxins, No Tossing

After years of waking up hot, stiff and exhausted, I decided to try the Happsy Organic Mattress—a hybrid bed-in-a-box with pocket springs and 2 in. of certified organic latex. Several months in, I'm sleeping cooler, breathing easier and finally waking up refreshed.

The king-size box is heavy (126 lbs.), and the mattress lacks side handles,

so I'd suggest enlisting a helper for setup. It expanded in a matter of minutes, and to my relief, there was no off-gassing smell—a big win for someone highly sensitive to chemical odors.

With the optional topper, the medium-firm mattress has been just right for me as a side sleeper. The latex adds a bit of bounce, and it doesn't trap heat like memory foam. If you share a bed, not having a split-firmness option might be limiting, but with a 120-night trial and free returns, trying it is a safe bet. —*Cathy Harms*, woodworker and writer *Happsy Organic Mattress*, \$1,699 for a king (\$2,198 with optional topper); happsy.com, Amazon •



Spirituality

Meets Artistry

"I never expected it to be so beautiful that it takes your breath away."

— Kaya C., on Stauer Opals

In a quaint village, nestled between rolling hills, lived a young woman with a deep appreciation for gemstones. Her grandmother gifted her a delicate cross pendant adorned with opals. The opals shimmered with a mesmerizing play of colors, reflecting hues of blues, greens, and fiery oranges. Her grandmother shared the legend of the opals, believed to bring hope, purity, and luck to those who wore them.

Using this story as inspiration, Stauer brings you the Opal Spirit Cross Pendant. With over 2 total carats of Kyocera lab-created opals set in .925 sterling silver encased in yellow gold, this pendant is a radiant celebration of beauty and craftsmanship. Each opal captivates with a kaleidoscopic dance of fiery oranges blending into oceanic blues, streaked with flashes of vibrant green that seem to come alive with every movement. The shimmering opals are skillfully arranged to create an enchanting, otherworldly glow, embodying the spirit of hope and harmony.

This breathtaking combination of color and craftsmanship is available as a limited availability of

only 930 pieces, making it a rare and treasured addition to your jewelry collection. Plus, when you order today, you'll receive the gold-finished sterling silver chain—a \$69 value—absolutely free!

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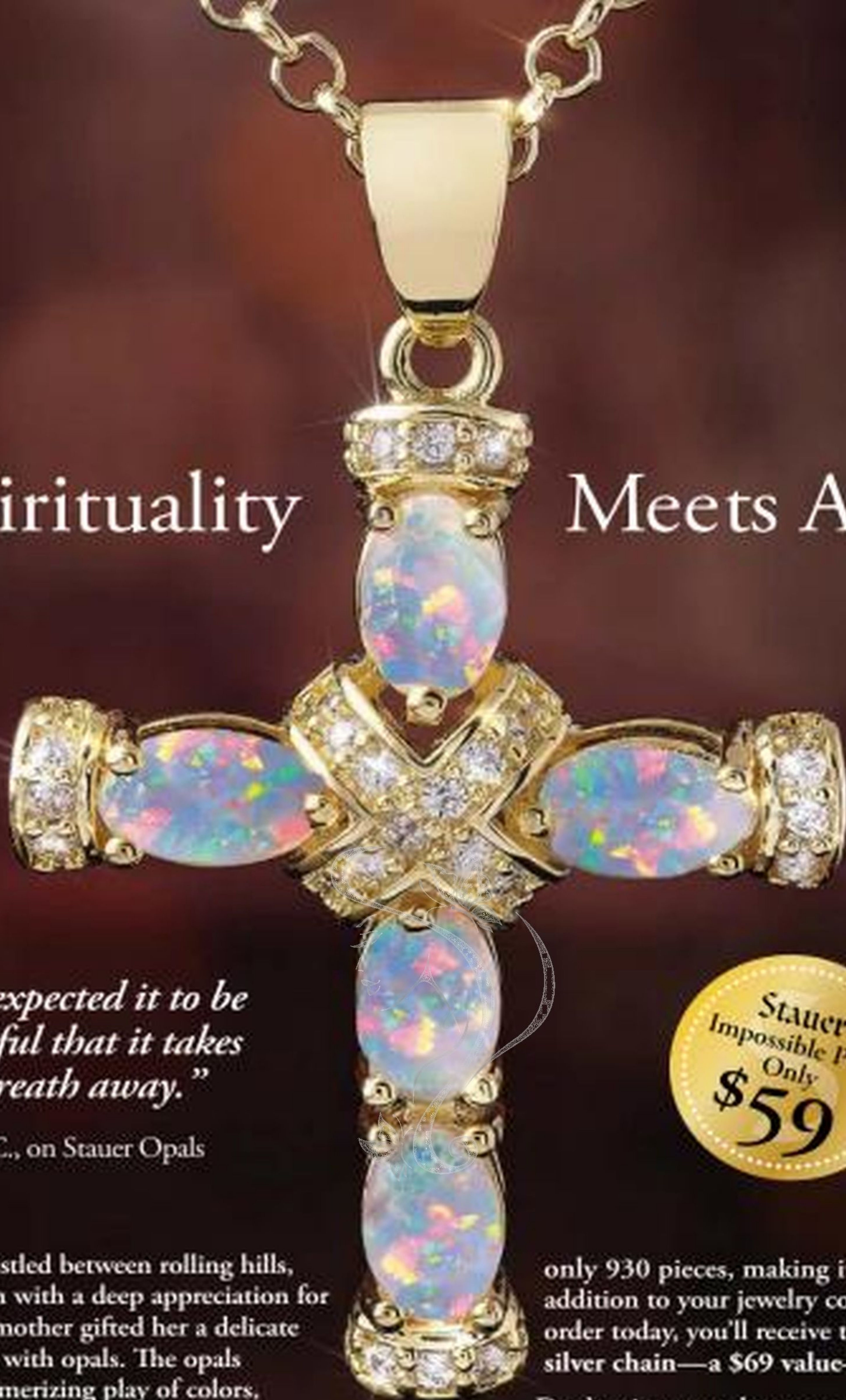
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TO DEFINE WINDOWS
(AND DOORS!)



ELEVATE IT

Fresh Takes on Trim

With a few tools and a free weekend, you can turn bare windows into bold design statements. We found standout trim treatments and creative ideas that will inspire you to rethink your windows. Whether your goal is to add new materials and textures, use bold pops of color or try something unexpected, these eye-catching approaches will help you get started.



ADD CURB APPEAL

Dress Up Your Windows

Give your home a fresh look by revamping your windows from the outside. These quick and effective upgrades add instant charm without a major renovation.

1. Window Boxes

Securely anchor window boxes into the wall studs or window framing—not just the siding or masonry—to ensure they can properly support the weight of soil, plants and water. Be sure to use a lightweight potting mix, and choose plants suited to the area's sun exposure. Consider adding a water reservoir to keep things lush with less fuss.

2. Shutters

Leave a small space (usually about ¼ in.) between the shutter and the wall to allow airflow and prevent water buildup. This gap helps keep the shutter from warping, swelling and rotting over time. Whether you prefer a classic board-and-batten look or sleek modern panels, focus on symmetry, scale and solid anchoring.

3. Grids

Extend the life and visual appeal of window grids with regular cleaning. Gently wipe them with a soft cloth and mild soap; avoid harsh chemicals that could loosen adhesive or warp vinyl or wood grids. For a low-commitment refresh with instant payoff, try easy DIY upgrades such as snap-in grids or peel-and-stick mullions.

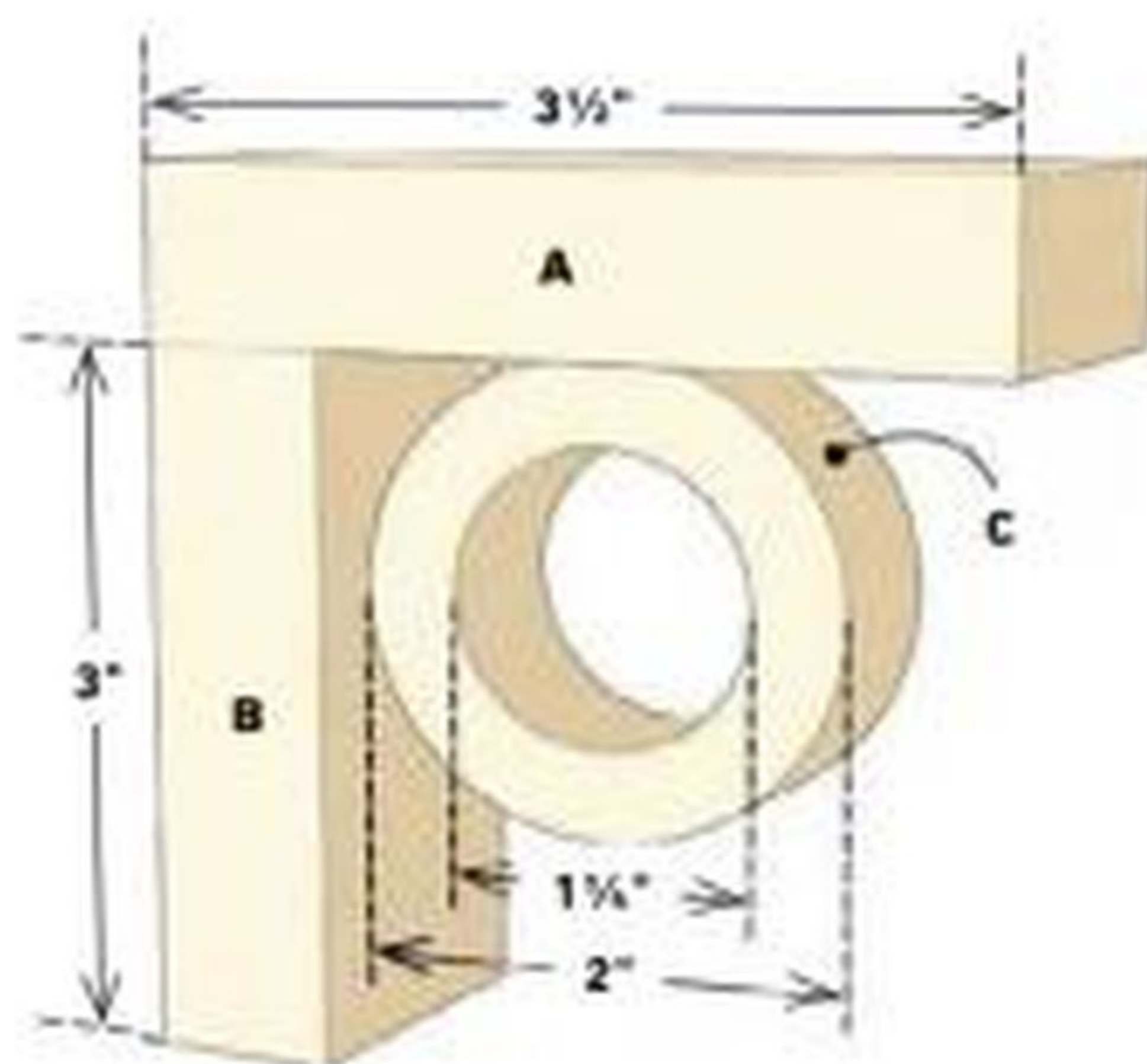


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Easy Curtain Rods

Personalize your windows with handmade curtain rods for a custom look at an affordable price

Framing your windows with the right curtains can pull a whole room together. And while fabric and length matter, curtain rods also play a key role in the overall style. Since window treatments can get expensive, we'll show you how to make your own rods for a personalized finish that looks great and saves you money.



Tools

- 1/2" drill bit
- 1 1/4" hole saw
- 2 1/4" hole saw
- 18-gauge brad nail gun
- Countersink drill bit
- Drill
- Drill press
- Level
- Measuring tape
- Miter saw
- Painting supplies
- Pyrography pen (optional)
- Stud finder

1 MAKE THE BRACKETS

Use wood glue and brad nails to assemble two L-shaped brackets from the top caps (A) and back legs (B). For rods over 4 ft. or for heavy curtains, make a third (center) bracket to prevent sagging.

2 MAKE THE RINGS

Use a 2 1/4-in. hole saw in a drill press to cut a circle from 1x3 material for each bracket, placing a sacrificial board underneath to prevent blowout.

Use a 1 1/4-in. hole saw to cut a centered hole through each circle, using the existing arbor hole for alignment. Before drilling, secure each circle to a sacrificial board with double-sided tape and stabilize it with wood scraps.

Sand the rings' edges smooth, removing any cutting marks.

3 BURN THE RING EDGES

If desired, use a pyrography pen to burn straight lines along the outer edge of each ring.

Perform a test run with the same species of wood and pen tip you plan to use. Slow down when burning against the grain to prevent skips in your burn line.

Materials

- 1" screws
- 1"-dia. dowel
- 1 1/2" brad nails
- Appropriate installation screws/anchors
- Assorted sandpaper
- Black paint
- Double-sided tape
- Metallic paint
- Scrap 1x2 and 1x3 lumber
- Tie rack pegs
- Wood glue

Cuts

Key	Qty.	Dimensions	Part
A	2	3/4" x 1 1/2" x 3 1/2"	Top cap
B	2	3/4" x 1 1/2" x 3"	Back leg
C	2	3/4" x 1 1/4" ID x 2" OD	Ring
D	1	1" dia. x 48"	Rod

*Cut to fit



4 CUT AND DRILL THE ROD
Cut the 1-in. dowel to the length you require, usually 12 in. wider than the window opening. Drill a $\frac{3}{8}$ -in. hole $\frac{1}{2}$ in. from each end, keeping the dowel in the same orientation so the holes are aligned and symmetrical.

5 PAINT
Apply two coats of black paint to all pieces, then build up coats of a metallic color. Metallic paints tend to show brush strokes, so more than two coats may be needed for even coverage. If you prefer a brushed metal look, lightly apply coats with a dry brush.

6 PREDRILL MOUNTING HOLES
Predrill mounting holes in each bracket's back leg (B) with a countersink bit, $\frac{1}{2}$ in. from the inner corner of the bracket and $\frac{1}{4}$ in. from the edges. Touch up the holes with primer and paint.

7 ATTACH THE RINGS
Align and center the rings on the brackets. With a countersink bit, predrill holes from the back of the top cap (A) and back leg (B), then use wood glue and 1-in. screws to secure the rings in place.

8 INSTALL THE BRACKETS AND HANG THE CURTAIN ROD
Mount the brackets wider than the window so the curtains fully cover it when closed. Choose a height that suits your curtain length, and use a stud finder to determine the proper hardware (screws for studs, anchors for drywall), also taking the curtain weight into account. Ensure the brackets are level before securing them.

Thread the curtains onto the rod, insert the rod into the brackets and insert a tie rack peg in the hole at each end to hold the rod in place when the curtains are drawn or closed. ●

Choose a Length

The right curtain length depends on a room's style and purpose. Here are a few common options:

Floor Length:

Hangs $\frac{1}{2}$ in. above the floor for an elegant, formal, tailored look

Float Length:

Sits about 1 in. above the floor for a relaxed, low-maintenance style

Puddled:

Extends 1-10 in. onto the floor for a luxurious, dramatic effect

Shorter Styles:

A practical choice for kids rooms, pet areas or above radiators; may make ceilings appear lower

BUILD YOUR OWN **Kitchen Island**

Transform basic Ikea
cabinets into a custom
kitchen centerpiece

BY ETHAN O'DONNELL

A well-designed island can completely change how you use your kitchen, becoming the go-to spot for meal prep, dining, entertaining and more. And if you're building it yourself, here's a secret: you don't need to splurge on high-end cabinetry to create something both stylish and functional.

Our version starts with three Ikea Sektion cabinets: two 30-in. base cabinets with doors and shelves, and one 24-in. base cabinet that holds pull-out trash or recycling bins. Add a few thoughtful touches—such as an arched rear panel, display ledges and a custom butcher block countertop (see page 30 for our how-to)—and you'll have a sturdy, spacious island that feels truly one-of-a-kind.

What It Takes

Time	Cost	Skill Level
Multiple days	\$1,500-\$2,000	Intermediate

Tools

- $\frac{3}{8}$ " plug cutter
- $1\frac{1}{4}$ " spade bit
- 18-gauge brad nailer
- Assorted drill bits
- Biscuit joiner
- Clamps
- Countersink drill bit
- Drill/driver
- Flush-trim router bit (bottom bearing)
- Hammer drill
- Jigsaw
- Level
- Narrow-crown staple gun
- Painting supplies
- Pattern router bit (top bearing)
- Rabbeting router bit
- Random orbital sander
- Router
- Screwdriver
- Table saw





THE STUDIO



1 ASSEMBLE THE CASEWORK

Assemble the case-work of the three Ikea cabinets according to the included instructions. Use wood glue and clamps along with the dowels to ensure a square and sturdy construction.

At this stage, don't worry about the doors or drawers. Just make sure the cabinet bottom, sides, back and top metal stringers are well assembled and square with no feet.



2 PREPAINT THE MDF SHEETS

Though touch-ups and finishing details are inevitable, prepainting the MDF panels (at least the 1/4-in. material) will save you time in the long run. Prepare both faces by priming the backs and painting the fronts with a paint/primer combo in advance. Sealing both sides ensures the panels won't warp before they are cut.

3 ATTACH AND REINFORCE THE CABINETS

Install a 3/4-in. melamine panel on the back of each cabinet interior. Cut these to the exact interior width of each cabinet and a hair under the height from the top of the cabinet bottom to the bottom of the plastic clips that attach the Ikea back to the top metal stringers. Using 1 1/2-in. screws, screw into the edge of the melamine panels through the sides and bottom of each Ikea cabinet.

Next, install six connector bolts through

Materials

Item	Qty.
3/16" x 2" bolts	
3/16" T-nuts	
3/16" washers	
1/2" pan head screws	
1/2" x 4 x 8 MDF	3
3/4" x 4 x 8 MDF	3
3/4" x 4 x 8 white melamine	1
1" 18-gauge brad nails	
1 1/4" 18-gauge brad nails	
1 1/4" screws	
1 1/2" screws	
1 1/2" staples	
2" screws	
2 1/2" screws	
3" screws	
3 1/4" concrete screws	
24" Ikea Sektion base cabinet with Nickebo drawer fronts	1
30" Ikea Sektion base cabinets with Nickebo doors	2
Assorted sandpaper	
Biscuits	
Bondo filler	
Cabinet connector bolts	
Construction adhesive	
Ikea Nickebo toe kick	
Paint/primer combo	
Painter's tape	
Primer	
Silicone	
Wood filler	
Wood glue	

Cuts - Toe Kick

Key	Qty.	Dimensions	Part
A	2	1/4" x 4 1/4" x 20 1/4"	Toe kick end cap
B	4	3/4" x 4 1/4" x 82 1/4"	Toe kick stretcher
C	2	3/4" x 3 1/4" x 19 1/4"	Toe kick mid support

Cuts - Stub Walls (Per Wall)

Key	Qty.	Dimensions	Part
D	2	1/4" x 3 1/4" x 34 1/4"	Stub wall side
E	2	3/4" x 3 1/4" x 14 1/4"	Stub wall stretcher
F	2	3/4" x 3 1/4" x 5"	Stub wall bottom plate
G	2	3/4" x 2 1/4" x 3 1/4"	Stub wall riser
H	1	1/4" x 16 1/4" x 34 1/4"	Stub wall panel

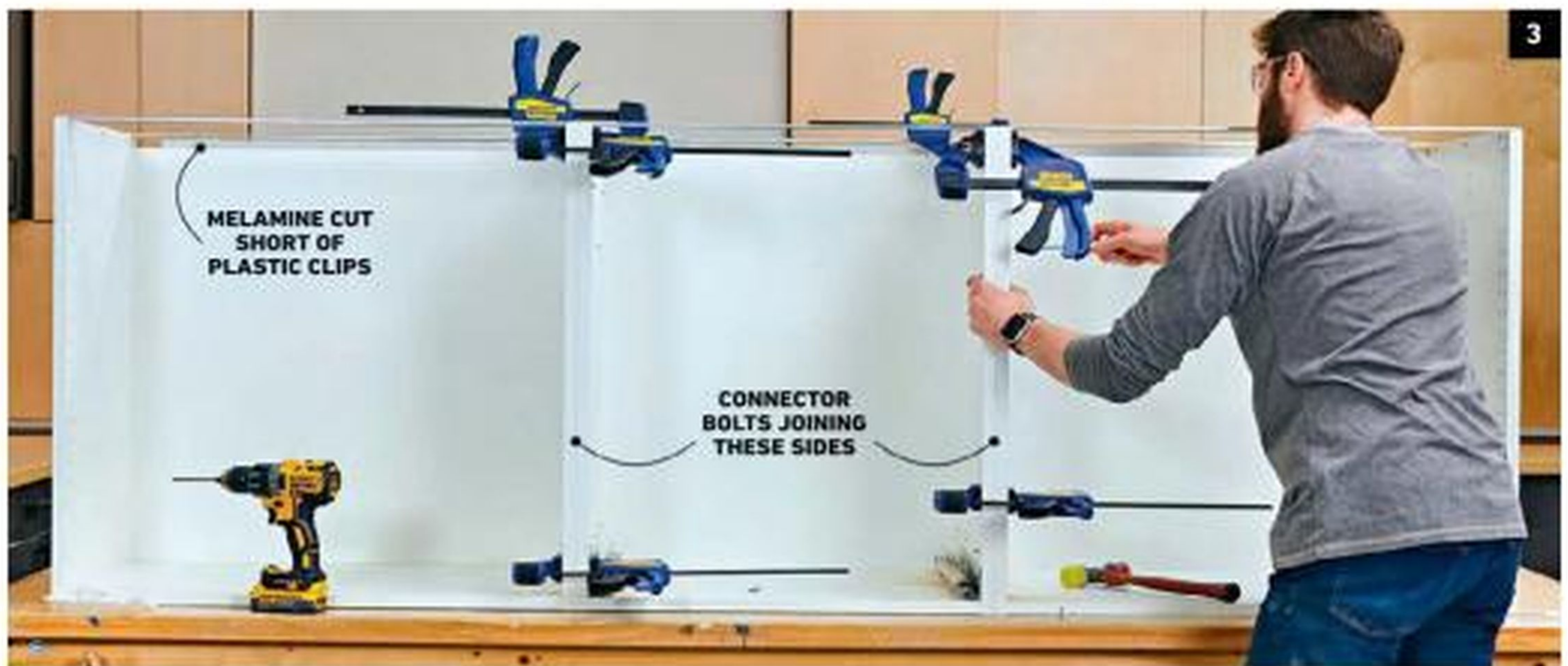
Cuts - Display Ledges (Per Ledge)

Key	Qty.	Dimensions	Part
J	1	1/4" x 1 1/4" x 31"	Ledge face
K	1	3/4" x 2" x 31"	Ledge bottom
L	1	1/4" x 2 1/4" x 31"	Ledge back

each side of the center cabinet and the inside sides of the two outer cabinets. Clamp the cabinets together and ensure that the front edges of the cabinets and their bottoms are flush. Drill through the shelf pin holes you do not intend to use, and tighten down the connector bolts down with a screwdriver.

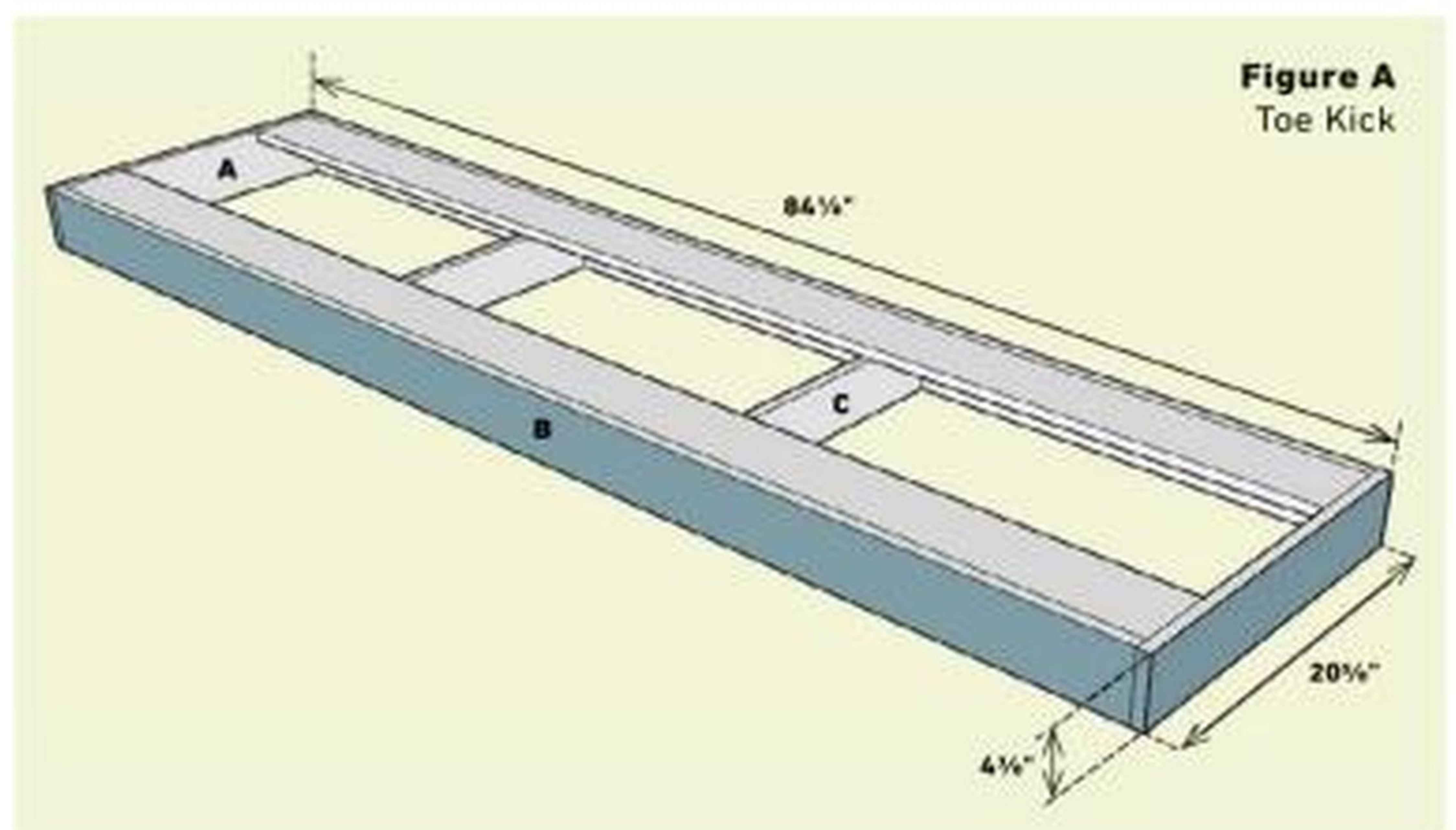
4 BUILD THE TOE KICK

Measure the length of the cabinet casework. Our casework measured 84 1/4 in., but the measurement may vary slightly from project



to project, so take your own measurement to obtain an exact length.

After determining the length, build a toe kick that spans the entire cabinet side of the island. Use construction adhesive, 1 1/2-in. staples and screws to assemble the toe kick (see Figure A). Prioritize it being rock solid and square. Don't worry too much about how the toe kick looks—finished panels on all sides will conceal it.





When the adhesive has dried, work with a helper to flip the casework assembly on its top so the toe kick can be attached to the bottom. Fix the toe kick to the bottom of the cabinets using 1 1/4-in. screws so it is flush with the back and sides of the casework.

5 BUILD THE ARCH
The arch panel is constructed from three layers of MDF the same width and height as the joined Ikea cabinets and toe kick. Laying out and cutting the first layer of the arch takes time, but once it has been cut, it can be used as a template to cut the other two layers.

Rather than cutting the arch corners on a full-size panel, make a jig from a scrap piece of material that has a 6-in.-dia. corner, a 5 1/2-in.-wide leg and a 4 3/4-in.-wide top rail.

On a 34 7/16-in. x 84 1/8-in. MDF panel, use a table saw to cut the first couple of feet of the 5 1/2-in. leg and the middle section of the 4 3/4-in. top rail. Be sure to end the cuts far from the corners where the radiuses will be.

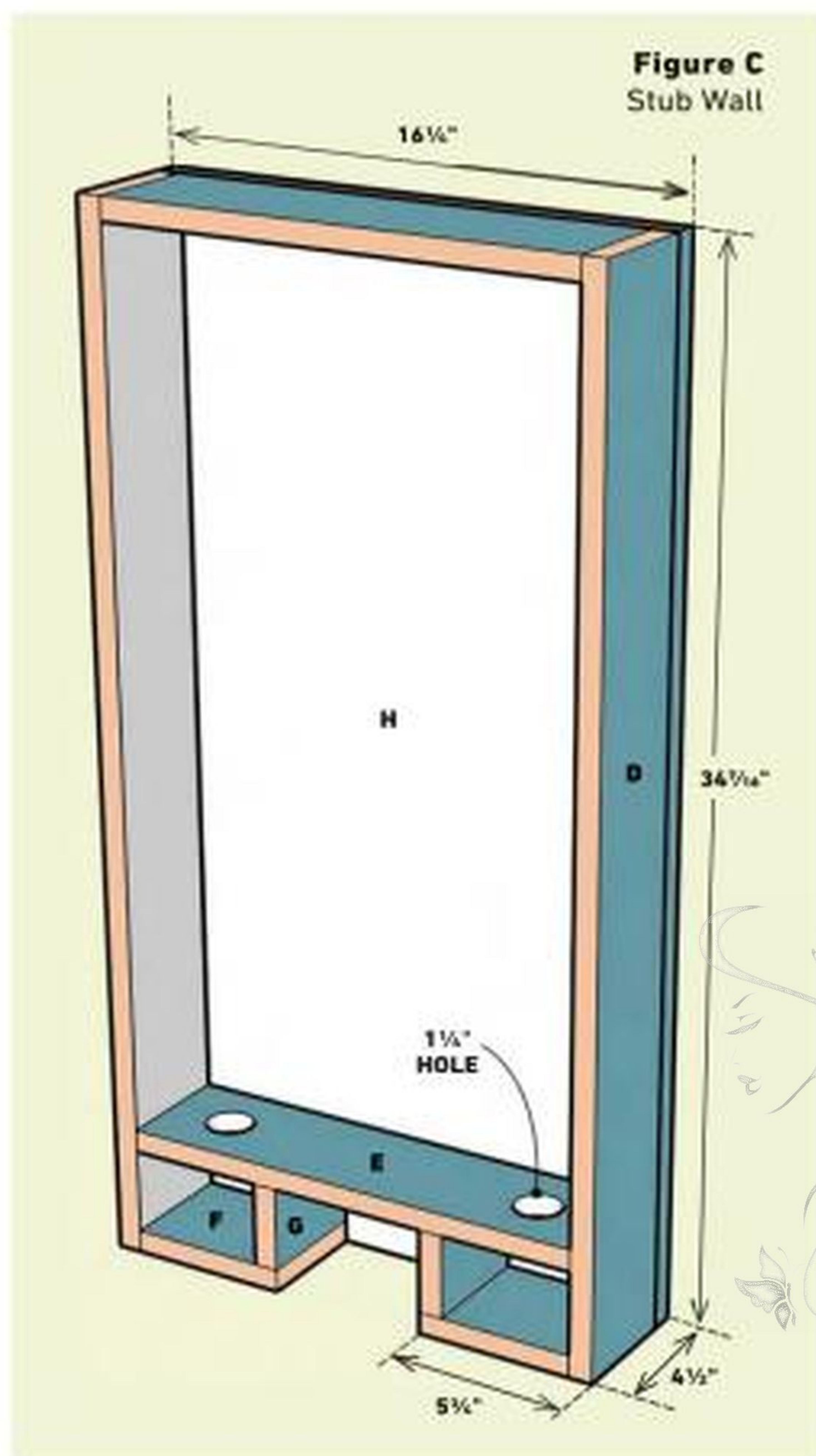
Use a jigsaw to trim away the unused center of the panel.

Clamp the jig on the large MDF panel so the leg and top rail align with the table saw cuts. With a router and top-bearing router bit, rout the radius on the first side of the arch by following the jig with the bearing. Do this in multiple passes.

TM& ©2020

Figure B
Arch





Then, unclamp the jig, flip it and clamp it to the other corner of the arch. Repeat the routing process.

When both radiuses have been routed, use the first layer as a router template to rout the other two layers. Build and rout each layer one by one, attaching the MDF layers together using construction adhesive and 1 1/4-in. screws.

NOTE: I used single 34 7/16-in. x 84 3/8-in. MDF

panels for the inside and outside layers of the arch and scabbed together three smaller MDF cutoffs for the middle layer.

6 DETAIL THE ARCH Rout a 1/4 x 1/4-in. rabbet along the front and outside edges of each arch leg. This small reveal both adds character to the finished piece and conceals any imperfections in the seam that may arise during the

alignment of the side panel edge with the face of the arch.

The flat, smooth surface of MDF makes it ideal for painting. However, MDF edges are porous and difficult to fill. To prepare the edges for painting, apply a thin, even coat of Bondo across the inside edges of the arch panel's MDF layers. Use a random orbital sander and 180-grit sandpaper to sand these until the Bondo

layer is smooth and so thin that it is transparent.

While you are at it, fill any visible screw heads on the back side of the top rail of the arch with Bondo and sand them smooth. Set the arch panel aside.

7 CONSTRUCT THE STUB WALLS Using the MDF offcuts from the arch, construct two identical stub walls (see Figure C). Assemble the



components with construction adhesive and 1 1/2-in. staples, then secure them with 2-in. screws. Use the identically cut back panels to square up the stub walls and ensure they are the same.

Before proceeding, drill two 1 1/4-in. access holes in the stretcher (E) above the bottom plates (F). You'll need these to secure the island to the floor.

8 BOLT THE CABINETS TO THE STUB WALLS

Clamp the stub walls to the back of the outside cabinets using long bar clamps so that the stub wall panel (H) aligns with the outside sides of the cabinets. For the stub wall to sit flush, you may need to nail 3/4-in. fillers on the back of the cabinets.

Temporarily drill three 3-in. screws through the melamine you installed to reinforce the cabinets and all the way through the side (D) of the stub walls from inside the

cabinets. These screws will keep the components aligned while you drill for bolts and T-nuts.

Remove the center screw and use the hole it created as a pilot hole to drill a 3/8-in. hole through the cabinet back melamine and the inside side (D) of the stub wall. Install a 3/8-in. T-nut on the inside of the stub wall. Tighten it with a 3/8 x 2-in. bolt and washer from inside the cabinet. Repeat this process for the other screws until both stub walls are securely fastened to the outside cabinets with three 3/8-in. bolts.

TIP: To prevent the T-nuts from being pushed out, screw 1/4-in. pan head screws around the lip of the back of the T-nut.

9 SCREW THE ARCH TO THE STUB WALLS

Using construction adhesive and 2 1/2-in. screws, attach the arch panel to the stub wall

from inside the stub wall to the back of the arch. Make sure the arch end is flush with the outside panel (H) of the stub wall.

10 SECURE THE ISLAND TO THE FLOOR

Level the island, then fasten it to the floor through the stub wall bottom plates (F) using the appropriate anchors for your floor. Our kitchen sits on a concrete slab, so we used a hammer drill and 3 1/4-in. concrete screws to secure it tightly.

11 CUT AND INSTALL THE PANELS

Install the cabinet doors, drawers and drawer faces on the Ikea cabinets. Adjust them so their face and edge profile gaps are consistent and uniform.

Cut the back, end and inside stub wall panels from the 1/2-in. prepainted MDF sheets. Take precise

measurements and cut these to fit, one by one.

Install the panel across the back of the cabinets first. Install 3/4-in.-thick filler strips on the back of the cabinets, a few inches below the top, so you have something to nail in addition to the back stretcher (B) of the toe kick and the back edge of the cabinet sides. Secure the back panels using construction adhesive and 1 1/4-in. brad nails.

Change to 1-in. brad nails and install the two end panels, again using construction adhesive. Ensure that the panel edges are flush with the arch's face on one side and the cabinet doors' faces on the other.

Lastly, install the two inside panels of the stub walls. In order to have easy access to the concrete screws in the future, I did not use construction adhesive and simply nailed these two panels on with 1-in. brad nails.



12 ADD FINISHING TOUCHES

Fill all visible brad nail holes with wood filler and sand or wipe the filler back.

Install the plastic Ikea toe kick against the front of the MDF toe kick box under the front of the cabinets. Use small dabs of silicone as glue and some painter's tape to hold it in place while the silicone cures. Leave a small gap between each end of the plastic toe kick and the end panels to accommodate expansion.

Touch up the paint on the entire piece, being careful not to overlook any brad nail holes or exposed edges.

Use the included shelf pins to place the adjustable shelves in the outer cabinets. Because we made the cabinets' inside depth $\frac{3}{4}$ in. shallower, you'll first have to cut $\frac{3}{4}$ in. off the back side of each shelf on a table saw.

Slide the garbage cans into the center cabinet.

13 MAKE THE DISPLAY LEDGES (OPTIONAL)

We made two display ledges using $\frac{3}{4}$ -in.-thick pieces of the same maple we used to build the butcher block countertop (see page 30).

Rip boards at $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. wide, 2 in. wide and $2\frac{1}{2}$ in. wide (see Figure D), then assemble them into ledges in a U shape using wood glue and countersunk $1\frac{1}{4}$ -in. screws to secure the back butt joint, as well as biscuits and wood glue along the front to avoid visible fasteners.

When the glue has dried, cut the ledges to 31 in. and sand down any sharp edges.

Apply a food-grade wood finish (to match the countertop), then center the ledges from side to side, with equal distance above and below both ledges. Use countersunk $1\frac{1}{4}$ -in. screws capped by $\frac{3}{8}$ -in.-dia. x $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. plugs made of the same maple to secure the ledges to the MDF end panels. •

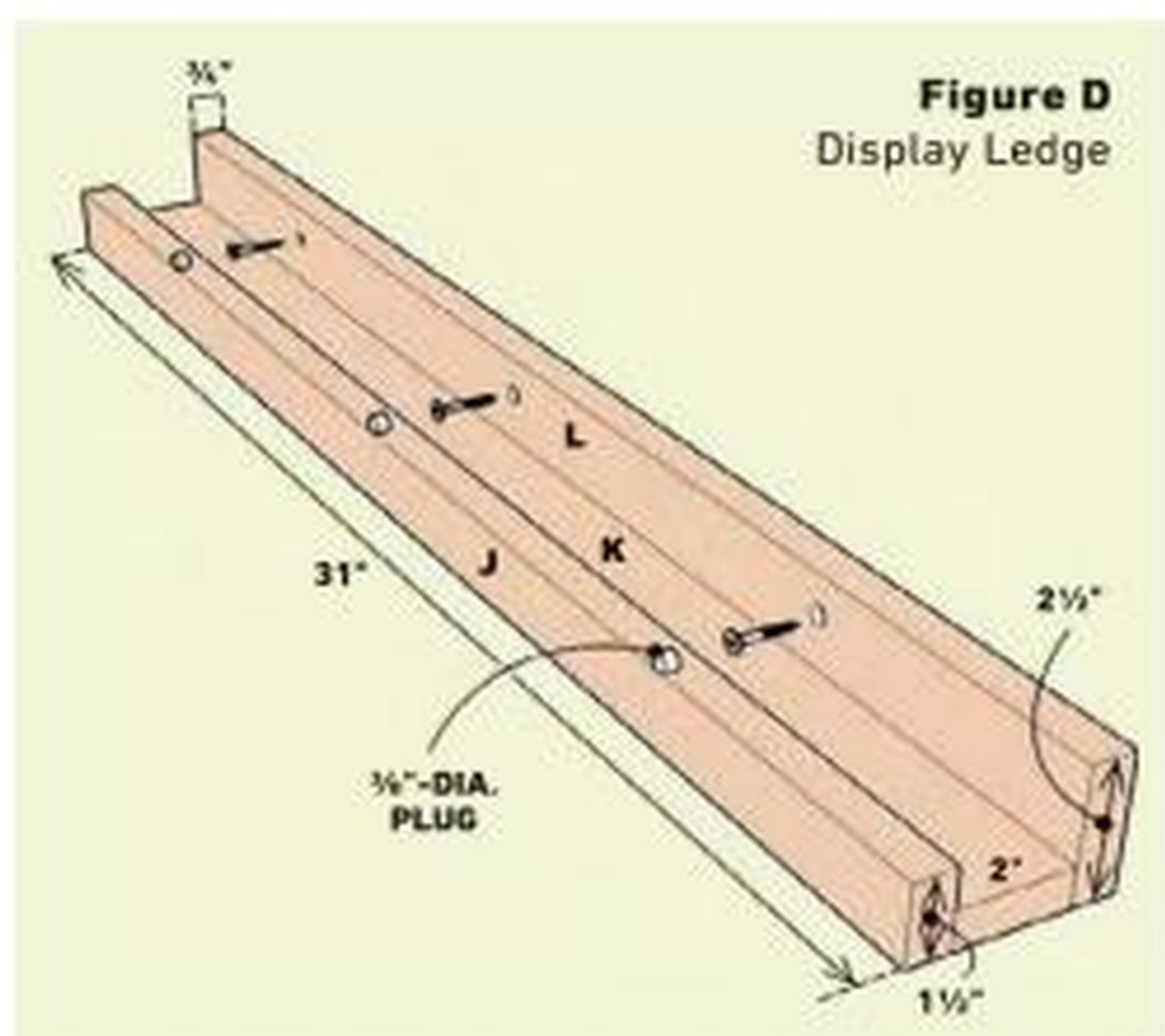


Figure D
Display Ledge

Butcher Block Countertop

Build and install this classic countertop to add character and craftsmanship to your kitchen—without breaking the bank

BY CARMEN DE LA PAZ





What It Takes

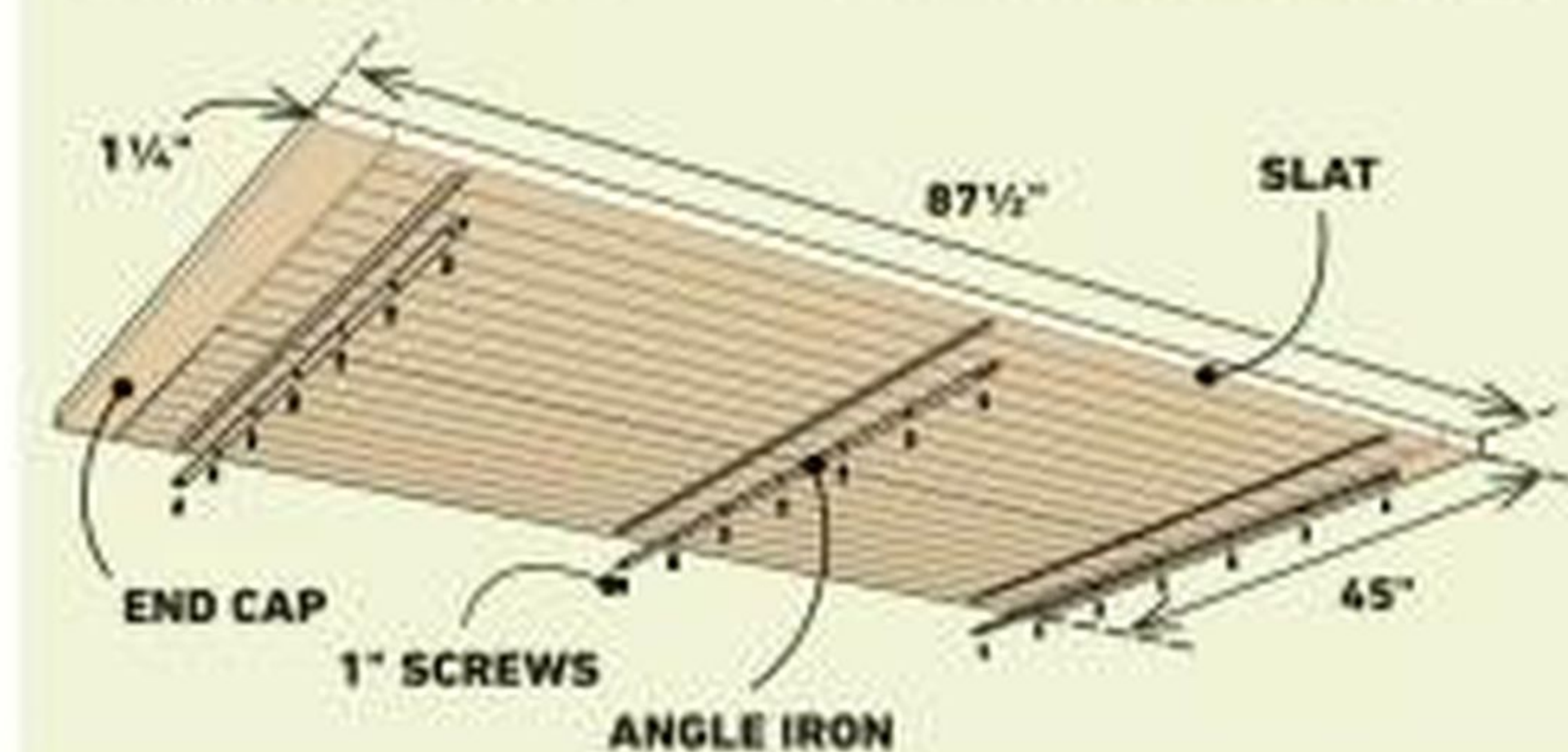
Time	Cost	Skill Level
Multiple days	\$500-\$750	Intermediate

Tools

- | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| • Assorted drill bits | • Miter saw |
| • Biscuit joiner | • Random orbital sander |
| • Clamps | • Round-over bit |
| • Detail sander | • Router |
| • Drill | • Table saw |
| • Drum sander or planer | • Track saw |
| • Electric car buffer | • Wood glue scraper |

Figure A
Project Overview

Overall Dimensions:
1 1/4" H x 45" W x 87 1/2" L



I've spent a lot of time researching countertop options for my new-to-me 1899 home, looking for something warm, classic and true to the house's character. Butcher block ultimately came out on top: It's affordable, timeless and satisfying to make yourself. It also brings both beauty and utility to a kitchen island (see page 22), especially if you enjoy woodworking. In the steps ahead, I'll show you how to create the perfect finishing touch for your DIY build.

Before you get started, keep these tips in mind:

- **Choose the right wood.** Hard maple is ideal—it resists dings and gouges, and its tight, closed grain makes it safer for food prep. Open-grain woods such as oak or ash are more susceptible to contamination.
- **Purchase thicker lumber.** You'll lose some material during sanding, so buy boards at least 1/2 to 3/4 in. thicker than the planned finish thickness.
- **Get help from the mill.** Consider saving yourself time, effort and sandpaper by having rough-sawn boards planed and/or sanded to your requested size before bringing them home.

1 CUT THE SLATS TO WIDTH

Rip six hard maple boards into eighteen 2 1/2-in.-wide slats on a table saw, making each one at least 2 in. longer than the final length. The slats will be cut to their final length—80 in. in our case—once glued together. Keep in mind that the two end caps will add 7 1/2 in. to the finished dimensions too.

2 MARK AND CUT THE BISCUITS

Lay the slats snugly next to each other on your work surface, and mark biscuit locations along each seam. Use two rows: A top row starting 2 in. from the end with slots spaced 13 in. apart, and a bottom row with slots staggered between them, spaced 26 in. apart. Cut the biscuit slots.

3 DRY-FIT AND GLUE THE SLATS

To ensure the biscuit

slots align, dry-fit the slats and biscuits before gluing (do not skip this step). Then glue up three six-slat panels—these will be easier to put through the drum sander. To keep the panels square, screw a sacrificial piece of wood to the side of your bench and keep the slat tops and bottoms as flush as possible.

Apply plenty of glue, ensuring complete coverage on the joining faces and glue in the biscuit slots. A bit of squeeze-out on the top and bottom indicates good coverage. Let the glue cure fully.

TIP: Tape a plastic drop cloth to your bench to prevent sticking and to ease cleanup.

4 DRUM-SAND THE PANELS

Remove excess dried glue with a scraper, being careful not to gouge the wood. Leave any thinner layers for the sander.

Run all the panels through a drum sander until smooth and equally thick. Our panels finished at 1 1/4 in.

5 GLUE THE PANELS Lay the three panels side by side. Adjust the biscuit joiner so the biscuits fall in the middle of the panels' thickness. Mark biscuit locations along each seam, starting 2 in. from the end and spaced 13 in. apart. Cut the biscuit slots.

Apply glue, install the biscuits and clamp for the finished width of your countertop. Let the glue cure fully.

6 CUT THE SLAB ENDS Use a track saw to cut the slab square on both ends, cutting the slab 7 1/2 in. shorter than the desired final length. This provides a smooth surface for the end caps.

7 CUT AND ATTACH THE END CAPS Cut 3 1/4-in.-wide end caps, also from hard maple, and sand them to match the slab's thickness with a drum sander or planer. Mark and cut biscuit slots in the end caps and slab ends, starting 2 in. from each end and centered on the thickness of the pieces.

Apply glue, install the biscuits and clamp the countertop together. Let the glue cure.

8 SCRAPE OFF GLUE Use a scraper to remove as much dried glue as possible from both the top and bottom of the countertop. Be careful not to damage the wood,

especially the top. Leave any thinner layers for the sander.

9 FINISH-SAND THE COUNTERTOP Sand the entire countertop and its edges to remove any remaining glue residue, starting with 80-grit sandpaper and working your way up to 220-grit.

10 ROUND OVER THE TOP EDGE Using a router and a 1/4-in. round-over bit, round over the top edge of the countertop. Sand any imperfections or burn marks from the router bit with 150-grit sandpaper and then 220-grit so they blend with the rest of the countertop.

11 INSTALL THE COUNTERTOP Apply a coat of food-safe beeswax finish to the underside of the countertop and let it dry. Position the countertop on the island with a 1 1/4-in. overhang all around. Secure it using screws from inside the cabinets and 1-in. angle brackets hidden on the seating side of the island.

12 APPLY A FOOD-SAFE FINISH Generously apply food-safe beeswax finish to the countertop with a clean microfiber towel or pad. Let it soak in for a few minutes, then buff with an electric car buffer with a towel pad cover. The wood will quickly absorb the finish. Apply and buff three to five coats of the finish. •

Materials

Item	Qty.
#10 wood biscuits	
1" angle brackets	
1" screws	
1 1/2" x 9" x 8' hard maple boards	7
Assorted sandpaper	
Food-safe beeswax wood finish	
Microfiber pad or towel	
Sandpaper for drum sander	
Waterproof wood glue	

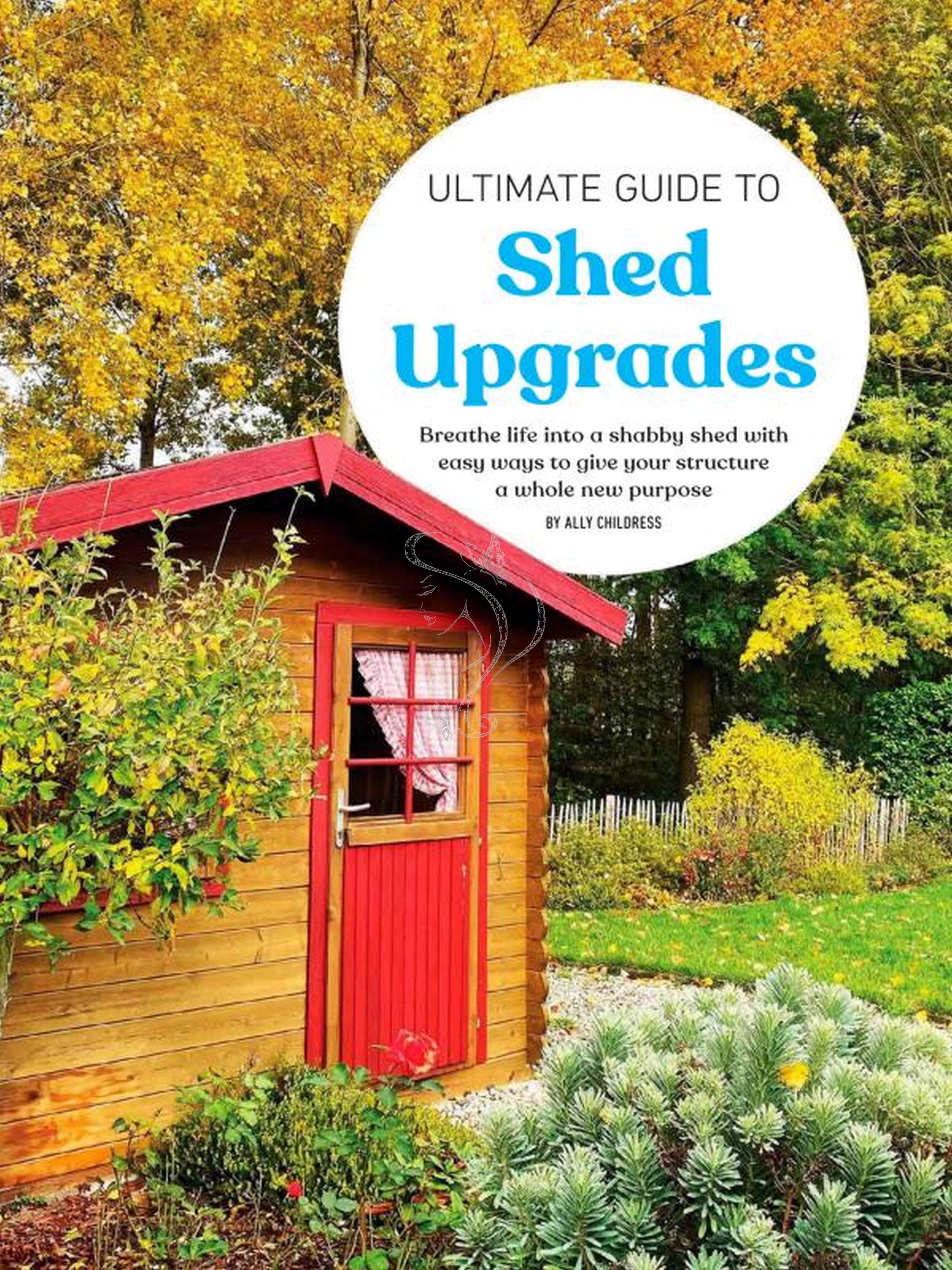


Reinforce Your Butcher Block

To keep the countertop as flat as possible, we embedded pieces of angle iron into its underside before installing it. An angle grinder with a cutoff wheel, a track saw and a router helped get the job done.



Scan the QR code above for more details about this optional step.

A small wooden shed with a red roof and door, surrounded by autumn foliage and a garden. The shed has a red corrugated metal door and a window with a pink and white checkered curtain. A large white circle is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the title and subtitle. The background shows trees with yellow and orange autumn leaves and a green lawn with some plants in the foreground.

ULTIMATE GUIDE TO **Shed Upgrades**

Breathe life into a shabby shed with
easy ways to give your structure
a whole new purpose

BY ALLY CHILDRESS

Start your renovation with structural fixes and roof repairs.



It's time to give that old shed a makeover. Sure, sheds are a great place to store lawn equipment and tools—or all of your garage overflow—but they can be so much more with a little planning and ingenuity. If you're ready to turn that eyesore into a backyard treasure, follow this advice.

Make a Plan for the Space

First things first: What do you want your shed to be? If you want to house a riding lawn mower, putting in a ramp and a big barn door makes sense. If it will be used to store boxes or furniture, you'll need insulation and drywall to keep out pests and moisture. Looking to create a backyard yoga studio? Ventilation and lighting will be key.

Inspect the Structure

No matter what updates you're planning, you'll first need to check your shed for soundness, rot and pests. Dilapidated wood framing or siding should be reinforced or replaced. If the foundation is crumbling or the shed leans or is unsteady, consider getting it professionally inspected or starting from scratch.

Add Skylights, Windows and Ventilation

Skylights are a great way to brighten up a dark shed, letting in natural light and making small spaces feel larger. Operable windows give you control over airflow when needed.

For passive ventilation, consider adding a ridge vent (if you're reroofing) or cutting in soffit or gable vents on opposite sides of the shed.

Frame in any new windows and doors before moving on to other upgrades such as rewiring, insulating or repainting. If you noticed any roof problems during your initial inspection, now is also a good time to reshingle.

Upgrade Wiring

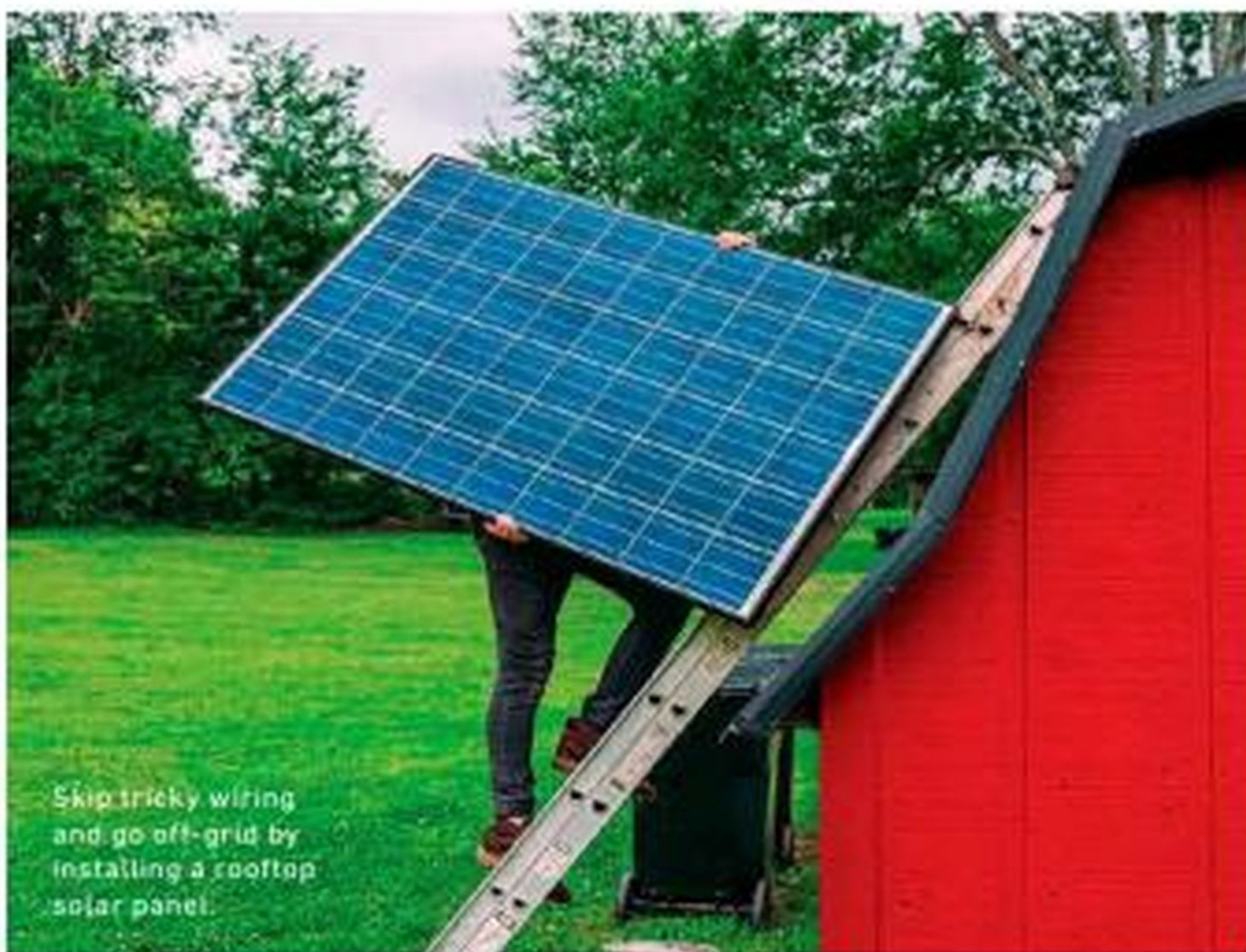
If your shed already has electricity, great! It's easy to extend the existing circuit to add new lights and receptacle outlets, but first check the size of the circuit. It's likely 15 amps, so if you're planning to use the shed as a workshop, bring in two or more 20-amp, GFCI-protected circuits for table saws and other high-amp equipment. An air conditioner or minisplit system might need a 240V circuit, so plan for that now.

To comply with the National Electrical Code, your shed needs a disconnect switch. Or add a subpanel. Get a permit for all electrical work, and have your shed inspected.

Procure the Proper Permits

Before taking up a shed renovation, visit your city's planning and permitting website to see what permits are required. Whether you need one usually depends on what you plan to do (new electrical work will definitely need a permit) and the square footage of your shed.

Municipalities often have setback and lot coverage requirements, so if you're planning to move your shed closer to the property line or significantly add to the square footage, your city will likely require a sign-off. Have a plan before you start the process.



Skip tricky wiring and go off-grid by installing a rooftop solar panel.

Add Solar Power

If upgrading wiring sounds like a lot of work or you won't be using high-amp tools, consider adding solar power. The easiest way is to buy a solar kit, which includes everything you need to get it up and running, including a solar panel, a storage battery, an inverter and a charge controller (which regulates the current). If you're looking to customize, you can also buy these parts separately.

Another option is a portable power station, which stores energy from the sun in a compact battery. While generally cheaper than permanently installed solar power, it will be more hands-on long term, since you'll have to recharge the battery.

Insulate the Shed

You can insulate your shed or not, depending on the climate and what you use it for. Lawn equipment and outdoor tools will likely be fine in any structure as long as it keeps out the rain. But if you're using the shed as extra storage for furniture or documents, even a rain-tight shed will allow mold to set in without insulation.

Paper-faced fiberglass insulation batts are easy and cheap, but they can invite pests unless you cover them with drywall. Another option is using foam sheets, which can be cut to fit your framing and won't provide critters with nesting material as fiberglass does.

Add Drywall, Paint and Finishing Touches

Once the guts of the shed are complete, finish the walls. (If you want ... it is a shed, after all.) Add drywall to cover fiberglass insulation, and if you plan to spend time inside, consider taping and painting to make it feel like a real room.

Spruce up the exterior by adding paint or stain, flower boxes, a walkway and path lighting. Enjoy your shed!



Add personality and protection with weather-resistant exterior paint.



Portable Shed Ramp

This simple, sturdy ramp makes moving heavy equipment a breeze

BY SAMUEL ROSENMAYER

A 4-in. rise from my shed to the ground may not seem significant, but it made maneuvering my lawn mower and snowblower in and out a serious hassle. So I decided to build a portable ramp that tucks away neatly when it's not in use. Your shed and ramp may have different dimensions than mine, but the basic process will be the same.

1 MEASURE AND PLAN

Start by measuring the rise—the vertical distance from the ground to the shed floor. This determines your ramp's height and helps you calculate its length.

To find the length, multiply the rise (in inches) by your chosen slope. For slip-resistant ramps, OSHA recommends a maximum slope of 1:3 (1 in. of rise per every 3 in. of run), but a gentler 1:8 or

1:12 slope is often more practical.

Using a 1:12 slope, my length calculation looked like this:
 $4 \times 12 = 48$ in.

Finally, measure the width of your shed door (mine is 32 in.), and you'll be ready to build.

2 CUT THE 2x4 COMPONENTS

Using a miter saw, cut the stringers (A and B), header (C) and blocking boards (D and E) to





length. Using a track saw or circular saw, cut the 1:12 ramp slope on the outside (A) and middle (B) stringers.

Set your table saw to roughly 4.7 degrees, and rip the top edge of the header (C) and vertical blocking pieces (D) so the longer side matches the cut list. Test the cut angle on a scrap piece

to make sure it aligns with the stringers' (A and B) angle.

3 DRILL POCKET HOLES IN THE BLOCKING BOARDS

Use a pocket hole jig to drill two pocket holes at each end of the vertical (D) and horizontal (E) blocking boards. These boards will be secured between

the outside (A) and middle (B) stringers.

4 ATTACH THE HEADER TO THE STRINGERS

Using predrilled 2 1/2-in. exterior screws, secure the two outside stringers (A) to the ends of the header (C). Next, use the same predrilled screws to attach the middle stringer (B), centered on the header (C). Use clamps and the blocking boards (D and E) as spacers to align the pieces and ensure their tops are flush.

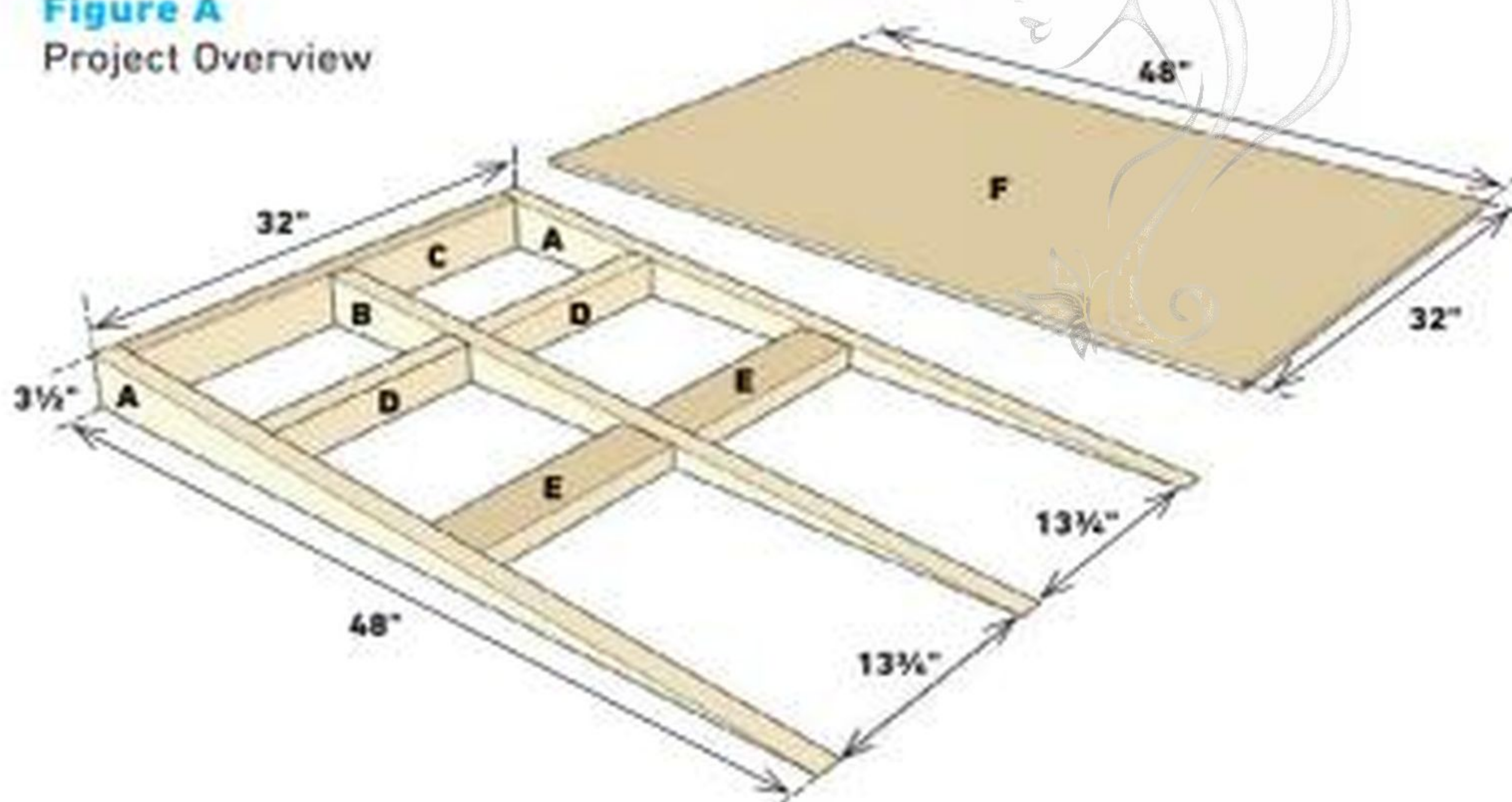
5 ATTACH THE BLOCKING

Fasten the blocking (D and E) between the stringers (A and B) with 2 1/2-in. pocket hole screws. Center the vertical blocking (D) 12 in. from the top of the ramp and the front edge of the horizontal blocking (E) 24 in. from the same.

6 CUT AND INSTALL THE RUNNER

Measure and cut the runner (F) from ground-contact pressure-treated plywood using a table saw.

Figure A
Project Overview



Tools

Assorted drill bits
Clamps
Countersink drill bit
Drill
Drywall T-square
Miter saw
Pocket hole jig
Speed square
Table saw
Track saw or circular saw
Utility knife

Materials

Item	Qty.
1/2" x 4' x 4' pressure-treated plywood	2
2x4x8' pressure-treated lumber	2
2 1/2" pocket hole exterior screws	
8" grip tape	
Assorted exterior screws	

Cuts

Key	Qty.	Dimensions	Part
A	2	1 1/2" x 3 1/2" x 48"	Outside stringer
B	1	1 1/2" x 3 1/2" x 46 1/2"	Middle stringer
C	1	1 1/2" x 3 1/2" x 29"	Header
D	2	1 1/2" x 2 1/4" x 13 1/4"	Vertical blocking
E	2	1 1/2" x 3 1/2" x 13 1/4"	Horizontal blocking
F	1	1/2" x 32" x 48"	Runner

*To long side of angled edge



Using a drywall T-square, draw lines on the plywood runner (F) that indicate the positions of the outside (A) and middle (B) stringers where you will secure it with screws. Drill mounting holes along these lines approximately 8 in. apart with a countersink drill bit. Attach the runner (F) to the

outside (A) and middle (B) stringers using exterior-rated screws. Use shorter screws as you approach the beginning of the ramp, since the stringers become shallower at that point. I used 2½-in. screws at the tall end of the ramp, and I gradually reduced their length to ½-in. screws at the short end.



7 APPLY GRIP TAPE Wood ramps can become slippery when wet, so it's vital to add something for traction. Clean the top of the ramp to ensure it is dust free, and apply grip tape to the surface of the runner (F). Use a utility knife to cut the grip tape to the appropriate width and space the pieces 1 ¼ in. apart. •

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Home Grown

Nurture your green thumb—
and get your hands dirty—with three
DIYs perfect for plant lovers

BY CARMEN DE LA PAZ





Kokedama Planters

This traditional Japanese technique turns everyday houseplants into living sculptures

Kokedama, or “moss ball” in Japanese, is a centuries-old garden art that’s enjoying a modern revival in Western homes. The technique involves wrapping a plant’s root system in a ball of soil, then covering it with moss to create an organic sculptural display. Suspended with clear fishing line, kokedama planters can appear to float—adding a unique touch of zen and artistry to any space.

When selecting a plant, look for varieties that prefer part to full shade. I used an elephant ear, a ficus tree bonsai and a ponytail palm; other great options include orchids, African violets, ivy and spider plants.

There’s a bit of a learning curve, but once you make your first moss ball, you’ll find it’s surprisingly fun (and easy) to keep making more.

1 MIX THE SOIL AND FORM A BALL

Mix 1 part bonsai soil, 1 part peat moss and ½ part potting soil. This combination creates good

drainage and aeration, which prevents root rot, supports moisture retention and allows the roots to stay moist between waterings. Add small amounts of water as you go and combine until the soil clumps together.

The mix is right when you press it in your hand and it stays together in a tight shape. Press and form the soil into a ball 5 to 6 in. in dia.

2 PREPARE THE PLANT

Clean off as much of the potting soil around the roots of your plant as possible so you can easily tuck the root ball into the soil ball in the next step. Do this over a tray or bucket for easy cleanup.

3 ADD PLANT TO SOIL BALL

Lay out a single layer of cheesecloth large enough to cover the entire soil ball. Transfer the ball to the center of the cloth. Use your hands or a trowel to gently excavate a hole large enough to accommodate the roots of your plant (and a few

Tools

Rubber gloves (optional)
Tray or bucket
Trowel
Water mister

Materials

Bonsai soil
Cheesecloth
Expanded clay pebbles
Fishing line (optional)
Jute twine
Moss sheets
Peat moss
Plant(s) of choice
Potting soil

expanded clay pebbles) in the center of the ball. Place the plant and clay pebbles in the hole, then gently pack and compress the soil around the roots. Make sure the roots are snug and completely covered by the soil but not so tight that they bulge out the top of the ball.

4 WRAP IN CHEESECLOTH

To help maintain the formed soil ball and ensure that it stays



snug around the plant's root ball, wrap the soil ball with the cheesecloth. Secure the cloth around the stalk of the plant with a bit of jute twine. You will remove this twine later when the moss has been secured. The ball's shape does not need to be perfect at this stage.

5 COVER WITH MOSS AND TWINE Before you begin to work with the moss sheets, mist them with water to make them pliable. Cover the cheesecloth-wrapped soil ball with moss, securing the sheets with jute twine to hold them in place and help create the desired shape. Tie knots in

the twine as you see fit to draw the ball together in a nice round shape and secure the loose ends before trimming them. Remove the twine you placed around the cheesecloth in Step 4.

6 HANG YOUR PLANT (OPTIONAL) You can make the kokedama appear to float by hanging it from a ceiling or a window with fishing line (make sure the weight rating can support your planter after a watering), or use twine or another hanging method. If you place your kokedama where sunlight will hit it directly, filter the light through a sheer curtain or shade.

7 CARE FOR YOUR PLANT Take down your kokedama ball once or twice a week and let it soak in a tray of room temperature water. The ball will draw the water up. Take the ball out of the water and let it drain for about 30 minutes or until it stops dripping. Or water from above with a watering can, making sure the ball is saturated. Between regular waterings, mist the leaves.



Video Online
Scan the QR code to see a video of this project.



Repotting Basics

Give your plant everything it needs
to thrive in a new home

As a plant lover, I'm amazed how often friends lose plants to simple mistakes, like using pots without drainage or watering on the wrong schedule. A plant will tell you what it needs—you just have to observe. Dropping leaves, or roots poking out of drainage holes or soil usually mean it's time to repot.

Before repotting, research your plant's moisture, light and soil needs, using a 3-in-1 soil meter to fine-tune its care routine. And a few days before the transfer, water your plant well to loosen the roots from the old pot and prepare the plant for a fresh, healthy start.

1 SELECT A POT

Terra-cotta pots are a great choice because they absorb moisture and breathe. Metal, plastic or

glazed ceramic can work too—just make sure there's a drainage hole. If there isn't, you can easily drill one with the right drill bit: masonry for ceramic or terra cotta, metal for metal, glass for glass, and acrylic or wood for plastic.

Mark the center of the pot's bottom, covering the area with painter's tape to prevent chipping or cracking, especially in glass or ceramic. Drill through the bottom or flip the pot and drill downward, using a sacrificial wood piece underneath to avoid blowout. For ceramic or terra cotta, add water to cool the bit and manage dust. For metal, add a few drops of oil to lubricate the bit and material.

2 PREPARE THE POT

Place a piece of landscape fabric over the hole to contain

pebbles and dirt when you water. Add a 1-to-2-in. layer of small pebbles over the fabric to help water drain away from the roots, then fill the pot about three-fourths full with potting soil.

3 PREPARE THE PLANT

Gently remove the plant and shake the compacted dirt around the roots to free them up and allow them to easily grow into the new soil. Cut back some of the outer roots to promote new growth and make fitting the plant in the new pot easier. Avoid cutting too close to the center of the root ball.

4 ADD PLANT TO NEW POT

Create a depression in the potting soil and set the plant in place. The top of the root ball should sit about 1 in. below the surface of the soil. Gently compress the soil around the roots.

Water generously, saturating the soil. This will release air pockets, settle the soil and give the plant's roots a strong start.

5 CARE FOR YOUR PLANT

Keep the plant out of direct sun for a few days. Even sun-loving plants need time to adjust.

If desired, sprinkle a bit of cinnamon on the soil—it's a chemical-free way to repel insects and prevent fungus and disease.

After a few waterings, you may need to add more soil. Cover the root ball fully, leaving about 1 in. between the soil and the top of the pot.

Tools

Assorted drill bits
Drill
Gardening gloves
Painter's tape
Trowel

Materials

Cinnamon (optional)
Landscape fabric
Plant of choice
Pot
Potting soil
Small pebbles



Hypertufa Planter

Mix up a few key ingredients to create your own perfectly imperfect container



Meet hypertufa: a DIY-friendly material made from Portland cement, perlite and peat moss. It's lighter than traditional concrete yet still durable enough to live outdoors and withstand harsh weather conditions. I've been experimenting with it for years now, making everything from water features to Buddha heads, and I'm still discovering new possibilities. Inexpensive and incredibly versatile, hypertufa is easy to mold into almost any shape, allowing you to achieve either a smooth, polished finish or a rough, rustic

texture, depending on the mold you use. This simple hypertufa planter is a great way to get you acquainted with the material and start creating your own one-of-a-kind pieces.

1 SELECT A MOLD

The mold you use determines the planter's final texture and finish. I lined a plastic tub with a sheet of plastic to create a textured look—the wrinkles in the liner imprint into the wet hypertufa as it cures. For a more polished appearance, use a smooth, shiny plastic tub without a liner.

2 MIX THE DRY INGREDIENTS

In a cement mixing trough, combine 2 qt. each of peat moss, perlite and Portland cement. To prevent the dry Portland cement and peat moss from clumping when you add water, sift them through a 1/2-in. steel mesh screen first.

Once sifted, mix the dry material by hand or with a garden shovel to blend well.

3 ADD WATER

Slowly add water as you thoroughly mix the materials. Don't overwet the mixture—it should have the consistency of a thick brownie batter and hold its shape when formed into a ball.

4 TRANSFER THE MIXTURE TO THE MOLD

Put on a pair of rubber gloves and transfer the wet mixture into the plastic-lined tub. Build up at least an inch of mixture on the bottom of the tub, then work your way up the sides to create walls at least 1 in. thick.

5 CREATE A DRAINAGE HOLE

To ensure proper drainage and prevent root rot, use a wood dowel or your finger to create a 1-in.-dia. hole in the bottom of the planter. For larger planters, make two holes 6 to 9 in. apart.

6 FINISH SHAPING

Smooth out the top lip of the planter, define any corners and make sure all four walls are about the same thickness. However you leave the planter at this stage is how it will cure.

7 CURE FOR 24 HOURS

Fold the plastic liner over the top of the hypertufa and let the mixture cure in the mold for 24 hours. If your mold has a lid, use this as well. The plastic liner and/or lid will prevent moisture from escaping too quickly. Slowing down the drying time helps prevent the hypertufa from developing cracks that can weaken the planter.

8 DE-MOLD AND CLEAN UP

De-molding is easy with a nonporous plastic tub. But for porous materials such as wood, you'll need to apply a lubricant such as vegetable or olive oil to the mold first.

When mixing Portland cement with perlite and peat moss, you may find small pieces of these elements attached to the outer surface but not fully embedded. While this won't impact the planter's durability, you can use a wire brush to remove the loose bits if desired.

9 COMPLETE THE DRYING PROCESS

Once the planter has been de-molded, it will need to continue drying. Wrap the whole planter in plastic and let it sit for five to seven days, misting it with water every 24 hours. The planter is dry when it looks even in color and no moisture is visible. Moisture can be detected by uneven, darker gray spots in the hypertufa.

While drying, the drainage hole may become glazed over with a thin layer of cement. Use a dowel or screwdriver to clean it out.

10 SUBMERGE THE PLANTER IN WATER

Lime from the cement can mix into potting soil and hurt your plants. To allow the lime to leach out, submerge the planter in a tub of water and let it sit for seven days.

11 RINSE OFF THE PLANTER

To ensure that any remnants of lime have been removed from the planter, rinse it well before adding dirt and planting. •

Tools

- Cement mixing trough
- Plastic tub for soaking
- Plastic tub for mold
- Screwdriver
- Small container for measuring
- Small garden shovel
- Spray bottle
- Wire brush

Materials

- 1/2" steel mesh screen
- 3-mil plastic
- Clean water
- Dowel
- Peat moss
- Perlite
- Portland cement
- Rubber gloves



Video Online

Scan the QR code to see a video of this project.



Cutting-Edge Trimmers

Whether you're cutting back shrubs, taming grass and weeds or tackling tree maintenance, the right tools make all the difference. This guide makes it easy to supercharge your landscaping routine with high-powered picks for every task.

BY FAMILY HANDYMAN EDITORS



Shape Your Shrubs

A hedge trimmer can transform your yard—if you choose the right one. Consider these key factors before you buy.

Tool Weight

Seasoned landscaping pro Brandon Barker of J. Barker Landscaping in Bedford, Ohio, says the best hedge trimmer is one you can comfortably hold and control. A manageable tool isn't just safer—it also helps you work longer without tiring out. For a lightweight option, consider corded or battery-powered models. These light-to-medium-duty trimmers typically feature shorter blades and more plastic components, making them easier to handle. Gas-powered trimmers pack the most cutting power but tend to be heavier and harder to maneuver due to their metal parts and longer blades.

Power Source

With longer running times and impressive power, gas-powered trimmers are ideal for large properties or cutting back dense, woody shrubs. Vince Christofora Jr., owner of Woodstock Hardware in Woodstock, New York, recommends them for homeowners who trim often and need all-season performance.

Battery-powered trimmers offer quieter operation and easier maintenance. While they don't match gas in raw cutting power, today's versions have come a long way and are more than capable of handling routine yard maintenance. If you already own battery-operated tools, choosing a compatible trimmer can save you money and simplify charging.

Cordless trimmers provide consistent power without the need for refilling gas or recharging batteries. They're best for small yards, since, as Barker points out, it can be a hassle to manage cords and they require an outdoor outlet.

Worx 20V Power Share Cordless 20-In. 2-in-1 Hedge Trimmer

TELESCOPING POLE

\$120 (tool only) • With a 12-ft. reach and 10-position pivoting head, this extendable trimmer allows you to conquer almost any job without a ladder.



Craftsman 3.8-Amp 22-In. Corded Hedge Trimmer with Power Saw

BUDGET-FRIENDLY

\$100 • Craftsman's corded trimmer offers impressive performance for the price, sporting a 22-in. blade and 3.8-amp motor. We especially like the built-in reciprocating blade for cutting thicker branches.



Milwaukee M18 Fuel 24-In. Hedge Trimmer

LONG BATTERY LIFE

\$279 (tool only) • Running two hours per charge, this trimmer cuts 30% faster than similar models and can handle branches up to ¾ in. thick.



Blade Length and Cutting Capacity

A hedge trimmer's performance depends heavily on the blade's length and tooth spacing. The tooth gap—typically ranging from ½ to 1 ½ in.—determines what branch thickness a trimmer can handle. Wider spacing means more cutting power; Barker suggests ¾ in. as a versatile, all-purpose starting point.

Longer blades help speed up work on wide or tall hedges but can be harder to control, while short blades are better suited for precision or decorative trimming. For most home landscapers, Barker recommends an 18-to-22-in. blade for the best balance of reach and maneuverability.



Whack Weeds Fast

In the market for a new string trimmer? Here's what to know about power types, performance and special features to find the right tool for you.

Comfort

Comfort during long trimming sessions comes down to the tool's weight, balance and design. If possible, test a few models in-store to find one that feels balanced and light enough for prolonged use. Gas trimmers are typically the heaviest, while cordless models vary in weight depending on battery size.

Shaft design also matters. Curved shafts are often more ergonomic and easier to maneuver, especially for shorter users, but are usually found on lighter-duty models. Straight shafts support more powerful motors, offer better reach under shrubs and fences, and often accept interchangeable attachments.

Convenience

The most convenient trimmer depends on your yard size and preferences. For large properties or tough brush, gas trimmers provide longer run times and more power, allowing for quick work with fewer stops. If you don't like mixing gas and oil or maintaining a small engine, cordless trimmers let you pop in a battery and go—great for most average-size yards. Corded trimmers suit small yards and don't require batteries, but their limited range and managing the cord can be drawbacks.

Performance

Gas trimmers are the most powerful, easily cutting through woody vegetation and thick weeds. Cordless models have improved in power and run time, especially at higher prices, but still don't match gas. Generally, 20V batteries provide less power but are lighter, while 40V or 60V batteries can tackle larger projects. Corded trimmers run continuously and are more affordable but are best suited for light-duty use.

Bonus Features

Look for features that boost versatility and ease of use. Some models come with edging or hedge trimming attachments, convenient bump-feed line systems or fast line-loading technology.

EASY LINE LOADING

Ryobi 40V 15-In. Attachment Capable String Trimmer

\$119 (tool only) • A high-capacity battery, dual-line head and variable-speed trigger help this trimmer chew through unruly grass with ease. Reload the line in less than a minute with Ryobi's proprietary winding tool.



LIGHTWEIGHT

Greenworks 40V 13-In. Gen2 Cordless Battery String Trimmer/Edger

\$100 (tool only) • Weighing under 7 lbs. fully assembled, this cordless trimmer is easy to maneuver. Its pivoting trimmer/edger head, adjustable ergonomic handle and 13-in. cutting swath seal the deal.



BUDGET-FRIENDLY

Black+Decker Electric String Trimmer with Auto Feed, 6.5 Amp, 14 In.

\$54 • Ideal for small spaces, Black+Decker's affordable corded trimmer easily converts from a trimmer to a wheel-guided edger and features a built-in cord retention system and automatic line feed.



FROM LEFT: VIA RYOBI, VIA GREENWORKS, VIA BLACK+DECKER

Tackle Tree Care

Find out when to reach for a chainsaw, pruning saw or electric pruning shears to get your tree-trimming job done safely and efficiently



1. Electric Pruning Shears

Pruning shears, or snips, are ideal for cutting small branches, deadheading flowers and shaping bushes. Electric pruning shears make these repetitive cutting tasks much easier, reducing hand fatigue and speeding up the work. Many models can also double as loppers, handling branches up to 1½ in. thick with minimal effort.

2. Pruning Saw

Also known as mini chainsaws, pruning saws are built for precision and small tree care tasks, typically handling branches under 4 in. in diameter. They're ideal for making detailed cuts, removing deadwood or shaping trees. Faster and less strenuous than manual saws, pruning saws remain lightweight, compact and easy to control.

3. Chainsaw

A chainsaw is the go-to tool for heavy-duty tree work, offering far more power and speed than manual tools. Use a gas-powered model for big jobs such as clearing trees or removing large limbs. For lighter tasks, such as pruning or cutting trees under 10 in. in diameter, an electric chainsaw is a good fit. ●

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Garage Rescue

Stalled out on how to keep your garage tidy?
Use this expert advice to declutter and reorganize.

BY KELLY AIGLON



Wall-mounted
pegboards keep
go-to tools visible
and within reach.



Between cars, bikes, tools, equipment and holiday decorations, the vast amount of stuff your garage can hold can feel endless. But as anyone who has ever had to squeeze out of their car to not topple over a box knows, without paring down and organizing, a garage can soon become a black hole.

"Garages are tricky," says Samantha Pregenzer, a Bay Area-based professional organizer. "They're really nothing like a closet, for example, that also gets messy but holds just one type of thing, such as coats or bedding. Garages are used for so many things that you have to be particularly thoughtful before you make your first move to rearrange anything."

Pregenzer offers tips for anyone on a garage rescue mission, whether it's a complete overhaul or simply tidying up.

Size Up Your Space

You may have specific intentions for your garage, such as grouping similar items together in bins, setting up a workbench or even creating space for a home gym. "Take a look at your entire area and understand what your goals are and what you have to work



with before coming up with a game plan," Pregenzer says.

One common pitfall in the early stages of a garage rehaul is buying products before you've truly sized things up. Those fancy shelves and racks you see at the hardware store may look useful, but you should invest in them based on what you know you'll put on them, not on what you just have lying around. That's where decluttering comes in.

"People tend to want to keep everything ... but you can't magically do that when you're on an organizing mission," Pregenzer says. "So you have

to ask yourself what may feel like tough questions: When was the last time I used this? Can I easily and affordably buy this item again if I ever needed it?" Pregenzer recommends that if you haven't used something for five years then it's probably time to say goodbye to it. "I've never met someone who regretted letting something go, especially once they imagine what could go in its place."

Get in the Zone

Garages are wide-open spaces, in that you have to create your own "zones" (that's pro speak for

categorized areas that address your needs). Some common zones include holiday decorations, overflow home decor, extra pantry supplies, sporting goods, tools, automotive stuff, memorabilia and kids' toys.

Once you identify your zones, it's important to systematically delegate specific places of the garage for them. Your backstock of pantry food or paper plates,

you get things on the shelves, you'll suddenly find yourself with newfound real estate for items you might even have inside that you've been meaning to put away, such as playroom toys or snow boots in your closet.

Labeling any bins can help both you and your family members to locate items, and it encourages everyone in the household to put things back in

"The simpler you arrange things, the easier it is to maintain. Aim for something uncomplicated."

for example, should find a home close to the door to your house. Those bikes and toys? Put them near the garage door. Holiday decor can go on a high shelf and the same goes for seasonal sporting goods, such as skis.

"It all comes down to common sense," Pregonzer says. "Keep things close to the house that you need quick and easy access to. Those high school sports trophies you've been accumulating? Those can be put out of the way."

Be Storage-Minded

At some point, bins, shelves and compartments will enter the picture. Ceiling-mounted storage systems are particularly worth the investment if you have a need, says Pregonzer. "They free up so much real estate from the walls or floors. They're great above where the garage door rolls up and are a great place for memorabilia or that Crock-Pot you only use at Christmas."

You can install wall-mounted shelves, such as those from Elfa. These can reach high on a wall, giving you more coverage. Once

the right spot. "I'm a fan of clear bins," Pregonzer says. "You know what's inside them, label or not."

Workshop It

If you want to make part of your garage into a place where you can do DIY projects, another layer of organization will be needed. Some simple solutions include installing wall-mounted pegboard systems on which you can hang tools that would otherwise be in a drawer, freeing up space.

For workshop spaces, Pregonzer recommends OmniWall, wall systems meant for accessories such as drills and drivers; they come with special attachments, plus mini shelves that you can mount, and LED lighting. She also suggests using slimline lights, which have thin and sleek casing, as opposed to clunky fluorescents that tend to dangle.

Whatever your mission in your garage, the most important thing is to not overthink things. After all, you want your hard work to be sustainable, and to not have to reorganize the entire space every few months. •



Maximize Your Above-Garage Storage Space

If you've pared down your belongings but your garage is still bursting at the seams, consider going up! If you have an attic above your garage, a lift may be a good solution for your garage-gear overflow.

But before hitting "add to cart" on a lift, make sure your garage has the right bones. Standard trusses or framing may not handle the weight of a loaded lift or all the items you want to store. Attic or storage trusses, on the other hand, are designed to support extra weight. If your garage attic has a floor (plywood or OSB) and enough space for you to stand up, chances are you have trusses suitable for an attic lift. If you're not sure whether your attic can bear the load, consult a structural engineer.



Scan the QR code here for step-by-step instructions for installing your own attic lift.



MEET THE PRO Samantha Pregonzer is a certified professional organizer based in San Francisco and founder of SO | Home. Follow her work on simplyorganized.me.

Easy Solutions for Toilet Troubles

Don't sit on toilet problems. Take action with these hints for everything from clogs to wobbles.

BY FAMILY HANDYMAN EDITORS



Q: I have a stubborn clog. Any last resorts before I call a plumber?

Try snaking it. It's easy to learn (albeit a little gross) and requires only one special tool: a drain snake (also known as a closet auger or snake). It consists of a long wire coil with a corkscrew-like tip that you feed into your pipes until it encounters obstruction. A drain snake is an excellent tool for unclogging toilets since the protective sleeve ensures that your toilet will not get scratched. Many drain snakes are available in the market, but if the snake is not specifically designed for a toilet, do not use it. Often a 3-ft. toilet snake will do the trick.



Q: How do I replace a toilet seat?

Before you buy a new toilet seat, measure the widest part of the toilet bowl and the distance from the seat mounting holes to the very front of the bowl. Then measure the old seat and compare the numbers. The seat should be the same shape as the bowl and the same size (or slightly larger). Locate the fasteners holding the seat to the bowl and loosen them with a wrench. If you see rust on the bolts, loosen with a rust-penetrant spray. Remove the old seat. Align the new seat with the holes for the fasteners, insert the new fasteners and snug them down with a screwdriver and wrench.



Q: How do I fix a wobbly toilet?

Loose bolts, uneven or rotting floors or damaged toilet flanges could cause a toilet to wobble. First, try tightening the bolts. Start by taking a putty knife and prying off the plastic caps that cover the bolts at the base of the toilet. Use a wrench to tighten them evenly. If uneven floors are causing the wobble, cut through any caulk around the toilet base and slide plastic or composite shims around the base until it sits firmly in place. Use a utility knife to cut away any exposed shim parts. For the next few weeks, keep an eye out for water leaking from the base. Old wax rings can crack if you shim a toilet too high.

Q: Is using a plunger the only way to unclog a toilet?

It's possible to try a few items you have at home if you don't have a plunger handy.

- **Hot water:** For smaller clogs caused by toilet paper backup, put hot water in a bucket and hold it waist high. Pour it in. The steady force of hot water from that level acts like a plunger.
- **Dish soap:** Pour ½ cup of dish soap into the toilet bowl. Let it lubricate around the blockage for 15 to 30 minutes. Pour hot water into the bowl and flush. Repeat as needed until the clog is cleared. If you're experiencing slow drainage, wait for the toilet water level to lower. Then add some soap and try flushing again. If the toilet is overflowing, turn off the water valve behind it before starting the process.
- **Baking soda and vinegar:** Mixing baking soda (a base) and vinegar (an acid) results in a chemical reaction that produces carbon dioxide gas. This bubbly gas helps to break down and loosen a clog. Pour 1 cup of baking soda into the bowl, followed by 2 cups of vinegar. Give the solution about 30 minutes to fizz in the bowl and then flush. •



Need to Remove a Toilet?

Whether it's outdated or not functioning properly, or you are replacing the floor underneath it, sometimes a toilet has to be removed. Before you start the process, make sure you are capable of lifting and moving a heavy toilet yourself, or arrange to have a friend or family member help. And it's best to get in touch with your local waste management facility to inquire about the proper disposal methods.

More Online

Scan the QR code to learn how to properly remove a toilet.



Household Hacks

Family Handyman readers share their favorite shortcuts for taming clutter, tackling messes and simplifying daily tasks



A Quick Fix for Smelly Shoes

When my sneakers start to smell less than fresh, I make a simple deodorizer that takes care of the problem quickly. I sprinkle some baking soda in a coffee filter, add a couple of drops of essential oil, gather the edges and secure the pouch with a rubber band. Then I drop a pouch in each shoe and let them sit overnight.

—Tiffany Fairchild





Bathroom Storage Solution

Rummaging through my messy bathroom drawers felt like searching for a needle in a haystack, so I repurposed a couple of kitchen utensil trays to get organized. Now I have one section for extra toothbrushes, and one for cotton balls, toothpaste, nail clippers—you name it. Everything is easy to see and grab when I need it. —Dominic Brown



Foolproof Picture Hanging

To hang a picture frame with a wire, grab a fork. Hold it upside down with the prongs facing you, and slide the prongs onto the nail. You can then hook the wire over the fork handle and gently slide it down until the wire catches on the nail. Carefully remove the fork, and you're all set! —Chris De Luca



Polish Up Your Key Ring

The older I get, the more keys I seem to carry: car, house, garage, shed—the list goes on. To quickly find my most-used keys, I paint the key heads with nail polish, using a different color for each key. The polish is extremely durable and lasts longer than spray paint. —Joseph Grayson



Spot-On Shelf Measurements

When measuring an enclosed space such as a cube shelf, I attach a business card or credit card to the end of my tape measure using a binder clip. I snug the card up to the wall of the shelf, then pull out the tape. Reading the tape at the edge of the card gives me a precise measurement—no need to estimate or risk creasing the tape! —Rodney Faulkner

“Scattered glitter can be a real pain to clean up. My secret weapon is a lint roller! It picks up even the tiniest flecks.” —Deborah Zietinski

Share your Handy Hints with us at FamilyHandyman.com/submissions.

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Special Delivery

Two friends partnered with a master carpenter to craft matching heirlooms for the next generation



David (left) and Michael

My friend Bruce Leder and I (both retired lawyers) have a shared interest in woodworking. When I retired in 2023, I built a workshop in my small garage. Around the same time, Bruce's daughter-in-law and my daughter were both expecting our first grandkids, so we decided to build identical changing tables.

I designed the tables and chose exotic woods (including wenge, mahogany, zebra and bubinga) for the drawer fronts. We asked our woodworking mentor, master carpenter David Feeney, to guide us through the build, which we completed over several weekends.

We started by assembling the frame with biscuit joinery, which

David taught us how to do. Then we added glides for nine of the 10 drawers and built the drawers using dovetail joints (also taught by David, using a jig). After installing the drawers and their faces, we added simple wood knobs and a changing pad on top.

The drawer setup was both beautiful and practical: a shallow top drawer for small essentials, a deeper one for disposable diapers, a large drawer for a diaper pail and laundry net, and others for clothes and blankets. The project was a great learning experience for us, and David's guidance was invaluable. These changing tables are now lasting family heirlooms.

—Michael Levine, Scarsdale, NY ●



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