

# 5 handy Chisel Tips and Techniques

- It's tough to think of a hand tool that gets more use in my shop than my set of chisels. They're a jack-of-all-trades tool that can tackle a wide variety of tasks in a short amount of time. And while it's tempting to just pick up a chisel and start working, you can get better, more consistent results by using the right technique. On these two pages, I've picked out five everyday shop tasks that give you a good overview of some basic chisel techniques.

## 1 Squaring up a Rabbeted Corner

I often use a router to create an opening for a cabinet back. But the router leaves rounded corners (photo at left). With a chisel, you can square them up in a snap. So this first technique — squaring up a corner — provides a good starting point for mastering your chisels.

The first step, though, is to define the corners with layout lines. In the left photo below you can see what I'm talking about.

**Chopping Cuts.** Cleaning up the corner is done in two steps. The first step consists of a series of vertical, chopping cuts to define

the corner. I use a wide chisel to provide a stable bearing surface to keep the cuts in line with the routed rabbet, as shown in the photo at left. I also hold the chisel on the blade for greater control.

**Paring Cuts.** The second cut is a horizontal, paring cut that removes the waste (right photo below). Here my left hand is steering the chisel and the right hand provides the power.

You can also see the chisel is positioned bevel up. This allows the wide, flat back to keep the cut even with the bottom of the rabbet.



▲ **Lay Out Corner.** Use a pencil and a combination square to mark the layout lines to guide the chisel.



▲ **Remove Waste.** After defining the corner with a vertical cut, clean out the waste with a paring cut.

## 2 Two Ways to Pare Plugs

Plugs are a good way to disguise the heads of screws. The challenge is trimming them flush. Here's a simple, three-step process that will guarantee great results.

The first thing to do is to cut off the plugs close to the surface with a hand saw. The second step is to use a chisel to trim the plug flush. And doing this depends on the type of plug you use.

**End-Grain Plugs.** A section of dowel can be used to make an end grain plug for a screw hole. But it's difficult to make a smooth chisel cut across the tough end grain.

To trim the plug flush, I start with scoring cuts around the perimeter (photo at right). Then gradually increase the depth until the plug is cut off nearly flush. A last bevel-up cut will trim it smooth.

**Face-Grain Plugs.** Face-grain plugs are a little simpler. The thing you want to avoid here is having the plug split off below the surface. To prevent this, I take thin cuts across the grain, working down to the surface (inset photo).

Finally, you can touch up the plug and surrounding wood with a little light sanding.



▲ **The Right Angle.** To trim end-grain plugs, make cuts from all sides to avoid breaking off the fibers. On face-grain plugs, a cross-grain paring cut will keep the wood from splitting below the surface.



**No More Glue.** To remove glue from corners, hold the chisel bevel down. Along an edge joint, a vertical, "scraping" cut eliminates glue and protects the surface (inset photo).

## 3 Versatile Glue Scraper

Even though removing dried glue squeeze-out is a common task, it's no picnic. The photos at left show two ways a chisel is the perfect tool for the task.

When glue has dried in a corner, like the drawer you see at left, I use a bevel-down grip to "pop" the glue out. The bevel acts as a "safety" to keep the cutting edge from gouging the workpiece.

Squeeze-out on edge joints call for a different approach. Here, you want to hold the chisel nearly vertical and pull it along the glue line (inset photo). This scraping action quickly shears off dried glue.

One more thing: To avoid having to spend a lot of time resharpening my best chisels, I bought an extra, inexpensive chisel just for this job.

## 4 Trim Edging Flush



Trimming edging flush to the end of a plywood panel may seem like a tricky task. But it's really not much different than trimming an end-grain plug.

Start by rough cutting the edging with a hand saw. Then with a horizontal cut, make several passes to bring the edging flush. To avoid tearout, trim from both edges toward the center. A final, light pass will level out the slight hump in the center of the edging. 🛠️

## 5 Marking Knife



▲ **Layout Tool.** To use a chisel as a marking knife, hold the back against the square and tilt it up so the edge won't catch.