

# Notes from the Shopsmith Wood-working Academy

## *Scrap Wood Secrets*

### **Tips & Secrets From Shopsmith Customers About Getting The Most Out Of Your Scrap Wood**

Part of the hull of an old boat left rotting in a storage yard finds its way into a beautiful mahogany coffee table. A dilapidated, overstuffed sofa chair gets torn down to its basic framework and used to build a graceful oak end table. Some *jetsam* from a ship resting in a Washington state harbor floats to shore and gets used to craft a melodious dulcimer. Send old pallets and wooden packing crates to the dump? **NEVER !**

These are just a few of the great stories our Shopsmith customers have shared with us about making the best use of “found” scrap wood. From the odds-and-ends box in the corner of your shop, to the old barn that stands creaking on the outskirts of town – usable scrap wood can be found everywhere. But be careful...because the joys of finding and using these “treasures” can quickly evaporate when your best sawblade is ruined cutting through a rusty nail or screw – or you notice that the china hutch you built from salvaged barn lumber has opened the doors and invited a nest of termites to set up housekeeping in **your** house !

### **Cutting into scrap wood**

One of the best (and least expensive) “secrets” to minimizing the hazards of working with scrap wood is to buy a stud finder and **use it** to avoid those ear-splitting meetings of saw blades (or planer knives) with hidden nails and screws. What may appear to be nothing more than an empty hole in a piece of scrap wood could be the mark of a lingering nail or screw shank that’s rusted off below the surface. These finders are available for \$20 to \$70 (depending on quality & sensitivity) and are well worth the investment. Just pass the device carefully over any salvaged wood before using it.

If you’re milling logs, remember that many fence-line posts were once living trees that could easily have pieces of wire fencing or staples embedded within the wood. Here’s another tip. If you use your bandsaw to do the initial milling work on a piece of found wood, hitting a nail and breaking a blade will cost you about \$15 – instead of the \$50 or more it would cost you for hitting that same nail with a carbide tipped circular saw blade ! Losing just a single tooth on a carbide blade can easily cost you \$30 or more to repair – not to mention the fact that pieces of flying carbide are dangerous projectiles that can easily cause serious injuries.

If you’re using old wood from concrete forms, or wood that’s been painted, it should be scraped clean prior to use. Failure to do so will cause your saw blades and planer/jointer knives to dull very quickly.

### **Keep the bugs out !**

Wood attracts a variety of diseases and insects that you just don’t want in your home. Termites, powder post beetles, other woodboring insects and carpenter ants are a few examples. While you’re

looking for nails, screws and other objects, be sure to keep an eye out for troublesome insects, as well. If your scrap wood is riddled with small holes or visible “curlycue trails”, don’t use it. These are the telltale signs of beetles, ants, termites, etc. And although there are a host of pesticides available to kill these insects, using wood that has been soaked with these pesticides is not a good idea. The best rule is...if the wood looks suspicious, don’t use it!

### **Working with scrap wood**

Here are a few tips that are worthy of your consideration when working with scrap wood:

- If you find a terrific piece of wood that you’d like to use, but it’s seriously cupped, try letting it sit overnight on the lawn with its cup-side down. Often, the moisture from the earth and the morning dew will eliminate this defect.
- Old wood can be extremely hard. Therefore, when using it, it’s a good idea to drill pilot holes for screws, and even nails if they’re located near the ends or edges of your stock. Maple, Oak and beech become particularly hard with age.
- When building with salvaged wood, some joints work better than others. If, as an example, you can substitute lap joints or lapped miters for straight mitered corners, you’ll avoid having your joints splay open after your project is completed.

### **Finishing scrap wood**

Removing old lead paint from the surfaces of scrap wood can be a dangerous task. If you’re planning to sand it off, use special care and wear a respirator that’s approved for this job, as lead paint dust is toxic and its fine particles can hang in the air for up to 72 hours after you’ve finished sanding.

If you’re planning to apply a stain to a piece of wood that was once finished, be sure to dress your wood down to raw fiber first. Any previously applied oil paint or stain may have penetrated very deeply into the pores of your wood. For best results, plan to take off at least 1/4" of the surface before applying a new finish.

### **Tips for working with scrap wood**

- A pair of carpenter’s pincers or a pair of pliers will help you grab even a tiny portion of a nail that needs to be removed. Use a wood shim as a back-up to protect your wood as you “lever” the nail out.
- Screws that just won’t come out can sometimes be “coaxed” out by first heating them with the tip of an electric soldering gun. This trick softens the hardened sap that could be surrounding the shank of the screw.
- A nail-puller or “cat’s paw” can dig right into the wood and extract stubborn nails. However, these tools can leave quite a gouge, so be prepared to effect some repairs when you’ve finished.
- Stubborn screws can be removed by using a plug cutter. Just bore down around the stubborn screw, remove the entire plug (with screw attached) and plug the hold with another piece of the same wood.
- Use a nail setter or *drift punch* to punch headless nails all the way through your wood planks, instead of digging into your wood in an attempt to pull them out.

**Final thoughts**

Working with scrap wood can be doubly pleasurable. First, you'll have a beautiful project to admire...PLUS...you'll save money by using wood someone else would have tossed into the trash...but you will have to be a bit careful