

Beginner Woodworking Workbook

Safe basics and three first projects you can finish.

01	Work safely	✓
02	A starter tool kit	✓
03	Choosing wood	✓
04	Measure, mark and cut	✓
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START HERE

Before You Begin

You don't need a big workshop or years of experience to build useful things. A few basic tools, some patience and simple projects are enough to start. This workbook walks you through the basics and three beginner builds.

How to use it

- Read Step 01 (safety) before you pick up a tool.
- Start with the smallest project. Finishing one simple piece teaches more than starting a big one.
- Measurements are in inches, using common U.S. lumber sizes.
- Use the planner on the last pages for your own ideas.

What's inside

STEP	TOPIC	YOU' LL FINISH WITH
01	Working safely	A simple safety checklist
02	Starter tool kit	A short, budget-friendly shopping list
03	Choosing wood	What to buy for your first projects
04	Measure, mark and cut	Habits for accurate cuts
05	Join and finish	Glue, screws, sanding and finish basics
06	Three first projects	A box, a wall shelf and a raised garden bed
07	Project planner	Pages to plan your own builds

STEP 01

Work Safely

Good habits from day one keep woodworking fun. Your tool manuals come first; these are the everyday basics.

HABIT	WHY IT MATTERS
Wear safety glasses	Chips and dust fly when you cut, drill or sand.
Use hearing protection	Saws and routers are loud enough to damage hearing over time.
Wear a dust mask when sanding or sawing	Fine wood dust isn't good to breathe.
Clamp your work	A piece that moves while you cut is a common cause of accidents.
Unplug before changing blades or bits	Prevents an accidental start.
Keep guards on and blades sharp	Dull blades need more force and are more likely to slip.
No loose sleeves, jewelry or dangling hair	They can catch in spinning tools.
Keep a tidy, well-lit space	Fewer trips, better cuts.

GOOD TO KNOW

Many hardware stores and community workshops run free or low-cost beginner classes. If you've never used a power saw, a short hands-on lesson is a great first step.

STEP 02

A Starter Tool Kit

You don't need everything at once. These cover all three projects in this workbook.

TOOL	USED FOR	TIP
Tape measure (25 ft)	Measuring boards and spaces	Pick one with a stiff, wide blade
Speed square	Marking straight 90° lines	Doubles as a saw guide
Pencil	Marking cuts	A carpenter's pencil won't roll away
Hand saw or circular saw	Cutting boards to length	Many stores will cut boards for you
Cordless drill/driver	Drilling holes, driving screws	One battery and charger is enough
Clamps (2 to 4)	Holding work steady	Bar clamps are the most versatile
Sandpaper (80, 120, 220 grit)	Smoothing	A sanding block makes it easier
Safety glasses, ear and dust protection	Protecting you	Buy these first

Many home centers will make a few straight cuts on boards you buy, which is handy if you don't own a saw yet. Tool libraries and rental shops are another way to try tools before buying.

STEP 03

Choosing Wood

For first projects, common pine is cheap, light and easy to work. Cedar is a good choice for outdoor builds.

Board sizes: nominal vs. actual

Lumber is sold by its nominal size, but the real size is smaller. Plan with the actual size.

SOLD AS	ACTUAL SIZE (APPROX.)
1 x 6	3/4" x 5-1/2"
1 x 8	3/4" x 7-1/4"
2 x 2	1-1/2" x 1-1/2"
2 x 6	1-1/2" x 5-1/2"
4 x 4	3-1/2" x 3-1/2"

Picking good boards

- Look down the length of the board: it should be straight, not twisted or bowed.
- Avoid big knots near the ends, where you'll put screws.
- Check for cracks ("checks") at the ends.
- For garden beds that touch soil, untreated cedar is a common choice. If you use pressure-treated lumber, check the label and follow the maker's guidance for its intended use.

STEP 04

Measure, Mark and Cut

Most beginner mistakes come from measuring, not cutting. Slow down here and the rest gets easier.

HABIT	HOW
Measure twice, cut once	Check every measurement a second time before cutting.
Use one tape measure	Two tapes can read slightly differently.
Mark with a V	Draw a small V with its point exactly on your measurement.
Square your line	Use the speed square to draw a straight line across the board.
Cut on the waste side	The blade removes about 1/8". Keep it on the scrap side of your line.
Cut matching parts together	Clamp identical pieces side by side and mark them at once.

Practise first

Before your first project, make a few practice cuts on a scrap board. Check each cut with the speed square: is it straight and square?

PRACTICE CUT	STRAIGHT?	SQUARE?
1		
2		
3		

STEP 05

Join and Finish

Glue and screws together make strong, simple joints. A light sanding and a finish make a project look and last better.

A basic glued-and-screwed joint

- Spread a thin line of wood glue on one surface.
- Clamp the pieces in place and check that they're square.
- Drill a pilot hole for each screw so the wood doesn't split (use a bit a little thinner than the screw).
- Drive the screws until snug. Wipe off extra glue with a damp cloth.
- Let the glue dry for the time on the bottle before putting weight on it.

Sanding and finishing

STEP	WHAT TO DO
Sand	Start with 80 or 120 grit, then finish with 220. Sand with the grain.
Dust off	Wipe with a dry cloth or vacuum before finishing.
Finish (indoors)	Clear polyurethane, wax or paint. Follow the can for drying time and ventilation.
Finish (outdoors)	Use an exterior-rated stain or sealer, or leave cedar to weather naturally.

STEP 06

Three First Projects

Each project builds on the last. Read all the steps before you start, and check your own measurements as you go.

Project 1: Simple storage box (about 12" x 12")

PART	MATERIAL	QTY	LENGTH
Sides	1 x 6 pine	2	12"
Ends	1 x 6 pine	2	10-1/2"
Bottom	1/4" plywood	1	12" x 12"

- Also: wood glue, 1-1/4" wood screws, small nails or brad nails for the bottom.
- Place the two ends between the two sides to form a square frame. Glue and screw through the sides into the ends.
- Check the frame is square by measuring both diagonals; they should match.
- Glue and nail the plywood bottom on. Sand the edges and add a finish.

Project 2: Wall shelf (24")

PART	MATERIAL	QTY	SIZE
Shelf	1 x 8 pine	1	24"
Brackets	Metal shelf brackets	2	To fit a 7-1/4" shelf

- Sand and finish the board first.
- Use a stud finder and fix the brackets into wall studs where you can. Otherwise use wall anchors rated for the weight you'll put on the shelf.
- Use a level to keep both brackets at the same height, then screw the shelf onto the brackets from below.

STEP 06

Three First Projects (continued)

Project 3: Raised garden bed (about 4 ft x 2 ft x 11")

PART	MATERIAL	QTY	LENGTH
Long sides	2 x 6 cedar	4	48"
Short ends	2 x 6 cedar	4	21"
Corner posts	2 x 2 cedar	4	11"

- Also: 2-1/2" exterior-rated screws.
- Build the two short ends first: screw two 21" boards, one above the other, to two corner posts.
- Stand the ends up and screw the 48" boards to the posts, two on each side.
- Check that the frame is square (equal diagonals), then place it on level ground and fill with soil.

This works out to a frame about 48" x 24" on the outside. The ends are 21" because the 1-1/2" thick long boards add 3" to the width.

What I learned

PROJECT	WHAT WENT WELL	WHAT I'D DO DIFFERENTLY
Storage box		
Wall shelf		
Garden bed		

STEP 07

Your Project Planner

Use this page for your next idea. Planning on paper first saves wood, money and frustration.

MY PLAN
Project name
Where it will go / what it's for
Finished size (L x W x H)
Wood and sheet goods
Screws, glue, hardware
Tools I need
Finish
Estimated cost

Cut list

PART	MATERIAL	QTY	LENGTH	CUT ✓

KEEP GOING

Next Steps

Pick the next project a little bigger than the last. Each one teaches a new skill.

WANT MORE PROJECT PLANS?

Ted's Woodworking is a large collection of downloadable woodworking plans. According to the seller, it includes around 16,000 plans with step-by-step instructions and cutting lists. Take a look at the seller's page and decide if it fits your projects.

[See Ted's Woodworking](#) →

Affiliate link: we may earn a commission at no extra cost to you.

Free ways to keep learning

Your local library has woodworking books and magazines. Many hardware stores host free beginner workshops, and community makerspaces often offer tool lessons.

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