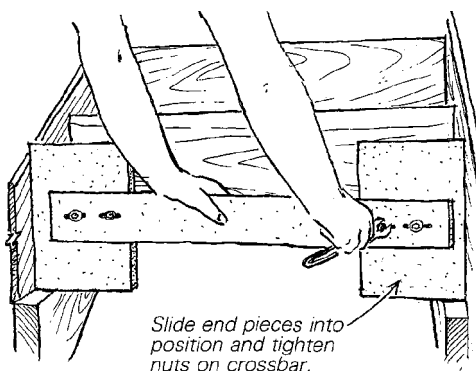


Tips and Techniques is a forum for readers to exchange the methods, tools and jigs they've devised. We'll pay for any we publish. Send details and sketches to Tips, Fine Homebuilding, Box 355, Newtown, Conn. 06470.

Riser and tread marking gauge

It would be nice if the treads and risers in a site-built stair could all be the same, but the vagaries of wood-frame construction usually mean that uniform lengths and 90° angles are as often exceptions as they are rules. To get accurate measurements for treads and risers that vary by just



a little bit, I use the marking gauge shown in the drawing. It consists of two end pieces and a crossbar, all made of 1/2-in. particleboard. The end pieces are secured to the crossbar with nuts, washers and four 1/4-in. flathead machine screws, which protrude through oblong slots in the crossbar. The slots allow the end pieces to be moved in and out until they make a snug fit with the skirt boards—even if they are a bit out of square. Once the fit is right, I tighten the nuts and transfer the entire gauge to the riser or tread stock, where I can mark the exact layout without making any tedious measurements.

—James M. Westerholm, Seattle, Wash.

Arch trammel

Here is a technique that I have found handy for laying out wide, shallow arches. I discovered it at a shipyard, where boatbuilders use it for laying out the rounded camber of boat decks.

On a clear, flat, wood surface, such as a sub-floor, draw a straight line as long as the arch will be wide, as shown below. Drive a finish nail at each end of this baseline, so that about 1 in. of the nail's shank projects above the floor. Find the center of the baseline, and draw a perpendicular line extending up from the center, making an inverted T. Decide the height of your arch,

measure along the perpendicular line from the baseline, and drive a third finish nail at the apex.

Now find two straight 1x boards, each one a little longer than the length of the baseline. Snug one board against one base nail and the apex nail, and lay the other board against the other base nail and the apex nail. Where the boards overlap, mark them for a half-lap joint. Then cut the joint and screw the boards together.

Pull out the apex nail, and hold a pencil in its place. Now slide the boards along the baseline nail guides from right to left to mark the arch. As a variation, you can mount a router at the apex and cut or mold arches of any size.

—Jerry Azevedo, Corvallis, Ore.

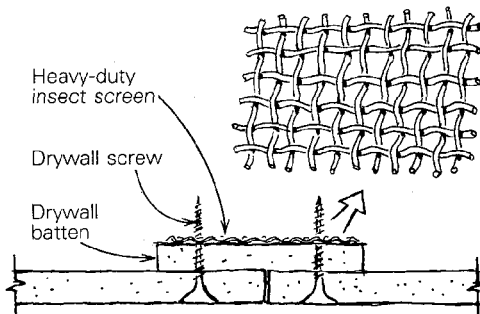
Wood filler

I've found that Bondo and other auto-body fillers like it make excellent wood fillers for exterior and interior painted surfaces. They adhere to wood better than most wood fillers. They don't shrink. They saw, drill and plane better than typical wood fillers. And best of all, auto-body fillers set up in just 30 minutes, no matter how large the cavity you are filling.

—Jim Stuart, Covina, Calif.

Drywall battens

When it's impossible to back the end joints of drywall on a ceiling, I use a batten of drywall about 6 in. wide, as shown below. I screw through both layers with drywall screws, and secure the screws with heavy-duty insect screen. When the sharp screw tip hits the insect screen

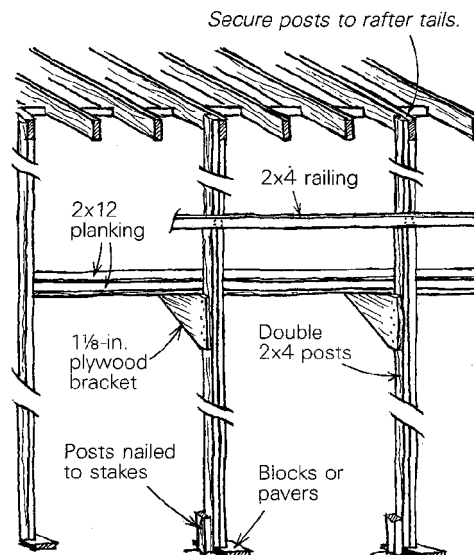


it finds the nearest void in the weave, spreading the strands apart until the shank can pass through the screen. The threads bear on the wire strands, giving me a solid purchase for the screws.

—Robert L. Kennedy, Grand Forks, N. Dak.

Freestanding scaffolding

I have seen many carpenters build scaffolding that is attached to the sides of the structure, which means it is useless when it comes time to



trim out and paint the building. The drawing above illustrates a simple design for a scaffold that doesn't rely on wall mounts. I use it when the structure has exposed rafter tails that project well beyond the walls.

The vertical supports for the scaffold are posts made of pairs of 2x4s. They are secured at the top by nailing them to the rafter tails. At the bottom, I stand the posts on wooden blocks or concrete pavers to keep them from settling and secure them to stakes driven into the ground. I install the posts 6 ft. to 8 ft. on center, depending on the type of planking I'm using.

For my scaffold brackets, I use 1 1/2-in. thick plywood. I make the brackets big enough to hold two planks side by side. I attach them at the desired height with plenty of 16d nails. After I lay down the planking, I usually add a 2x4 railing for increased security.

—Michael Gornik, Nevada City, Calif.

New soldering in old plumbing

One of the problems I have when remodeling a kitchen or bathroom occurs when I have to sweat-solder new fittings into an existing copper water-supply line. It is almost impossible to get all of the water out of the pipes, and that leads to poor solder joints.

My solution is to drain the pipes in the usual manner—being sure to open faucets at the highest point in the system—and then use my wet-vac to suck the remaining water out of the lines. This procedure requires a vacuum-nozzle reducer to ensure a tight fit and good suction (I use the plastic reducer that connects my orbital sander to its dust bag). Remember to vacuum both the uphill and downhill ends of the line. I find that after about two minutes the pipes are dry and ready to solder.

—Peter D. Ellis, Needham, Mass.

Spud fingers

If you are caulking a joint and running out of clean fingers to smooth the caulk with, try using a potato. Before a job, I carve spuds to the desired profile, and store them in a plastic bag. I've found that the acidic potato juice keeps silicone and other caulking materials from sticking to the spud fingers.

—Glenn Zahn, Fairbanks, Alaska

