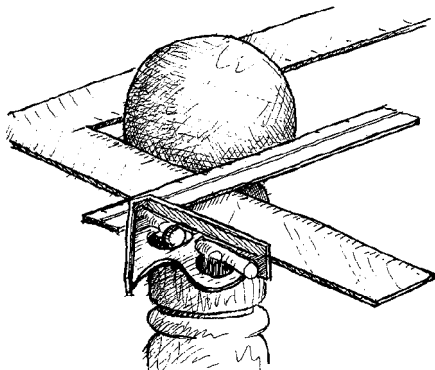


Tips and Techniques is a forum for readers to exchange the methods, tools and jigs they've devised. We'll pay for any we publish. Send details and sketches to Tips, Fine Homebuilding, Box 355, Newtown, Conn. 06470.

Caliper improvisation

I was laying out a stair rail and needed to find the exact diameter of the ball atop a newel post. My calipers, naturally, were enjoying a day off back at the shop. I improvised by using my framing and combination squares as shown in the



drawing above, and I read the diameter directly off the framing square.

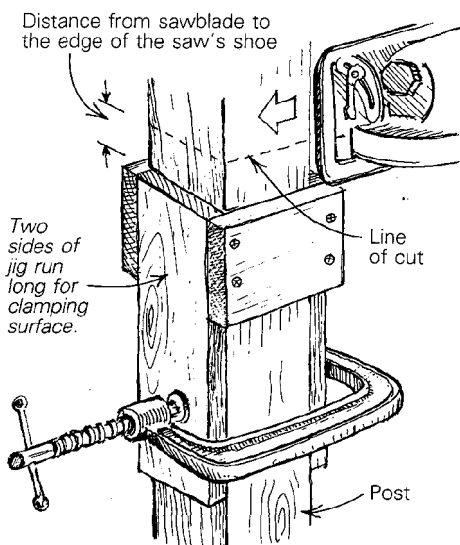
—Jim McConkey, Washington, D. C.

Post cutoff jig

This year we have been doing a lot of decks and fences, and to simplify leveling the tops of all the posts I devised the jig that is shown in the drawing below.

The post cutoff jig is a four-sided box with inside dimensions $\frac{1}{16}$ in. larger each way than the cross section of the posts. The four sides of the box meet in the same plane at the top, where they are secured with screws. The two long, narrow sides hang down about 10 in. for a clamping surface.

First we plumb and stabilize all the posts, letting their tops run wild. Then we mark the desired height on one post, and transfer that height to the rest using a water level. Below each mark we measure down and scribe a second mark. This measurement is equal to the dis-



tance from the sawblade to the edge of the saw's shoe.

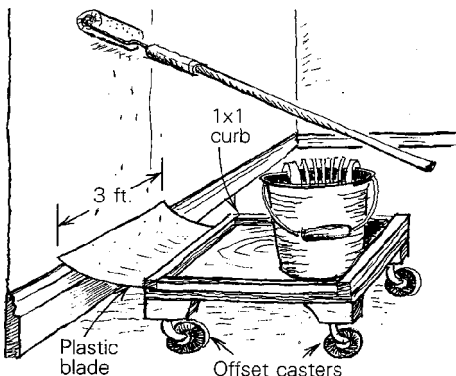
Now we drop the jig over the post, clamp it so the top edge is on the lower mark and use the top of the jig to guide the saw along all four sides of the post. If the piece that's being cut off is longer than 1 ft. or so, then have a helper lift up on it as you're finishing the cut so that it won't bind on the blade or fall on you.

—Timothy Pelton, Fairfield, Iowa

Paint caddy

I paint houses for a living, and there are three things about painting with a roller that really annoy me. One is masking the baseboard and spreading out a tarp to catch drips and speckles. Another is moving the paint bucket from station to station, and the third is moving the tarp again, which inevitably results in drops of wet paint smearing the carpet or floor.

Instead of this sequence, I now use a plywood platform on wheels both to carry the paint bucket and to protect the baseboard and floor from paint splatters. A plastic blade on one end of the platform butts up against the wall to catch drips, as shown in the drawing below. To make the



blade, I used a section cut out of an old plastic garbage can, and I attached it to the caddy so the curve points upward. This directs paint away from the wall, and accommodates the higher baseboards.

—Stan Lucas, Redmond, Wash.

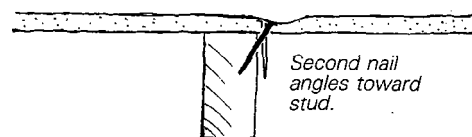
Fixing a leaky toilet

I had a toilet leaking around the rubber stopper at the bottom of the tank, which not only wasted water but caused pure annoyance at the sound of the tank endlessly filling at a trickle. Recalling that the life of rubber skin-diving equipment can be lengthened with applications of silicone spray, I decided to try some silicone on the rubber stopper. I drained the tank, and without removing the stopper I sprayed it with the silicone and worked the preservative into the rubber with my fingers. The spray evidently added some suppleness to the stopper, because when I refilled the tank, the library was once again quiet. Silicone spray is available at auto-supply stores as well as dive shops.

—Stephen Denton, Somerville, Tenn.

Errant drywall nails

Because of a crooked chalkline or a bad guess, I sometimes miss the stud or joist as I nail off the drywall. I used to remove these nails by plucking them out of the wall with my fingers, which is an annoying task, or I'd drive them through



(the sloppy solution). Then a friend showed me this simple trick: drive another nail right next to the misplaced one, but angle it toward the framing, as shown in the drawing above. When this nail is set it will pull the dud down tight, under its head. This takes little time, and the resulting dimple can be finished normally with mud.

—Kurt Lavenson, Berkeley, Calif.

Roof-gun tune-up

I use a pneumatic staple gun to install composition shingles, and every now and then the tool will clog up because roofing tar gets into the tip and the safety mechanism. Now I carry a can of Gum Out carburetor cleaner on the roof with me. Whenever the gun starts to get sticky, I give it a shot of the carburetor cleaner. It dissolves the tar without my having to disassemble the tool. Gum Out is available at auto-supply stores.

—Jeffery A. Oswalt, Kimmell, Ind.

Dust-mask filters

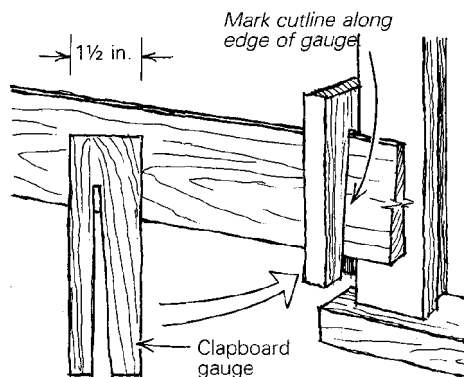
Disposable paper dust masks can be used to filter thinners and light finishing oils. To support the mask as the liquid is poured through it, I put the mask in a funnel. Now that I know what to do with the dust masks besides throwing them away, I change my masks more often and I feel less wasteful about it. The masks work better than paint filters, especially on expensive solvents like lacquer thinner.

—Michael R. Sweem, Downey, Calif.

Clapboard gauge

The marking device shown in the drawing below is used to establish cutlines for clapboards where they abut trim pieces. I find it to be especially handy for recladding old houses where the casings and cornerboards aren't plumb.

I make the gauge from a scrap of $\frac{3}{4}$ -in. thick pine, $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. wide. The slot in the center of the



gauge should fit the profile of your clapboards just tightly enough to hold a clapboard in place.

To use the gauge, hold your clapboard with the end to be cut running by the casing, and slip the gauge over the clapboard. Press the gauge tightly against the casing, and scribe along the edge of the gauge. Cut along the line, and the clapboard will fit tightly against the trim board.

—Duke York, Willimantic, Conn.