

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.

Remodeler's shim-box

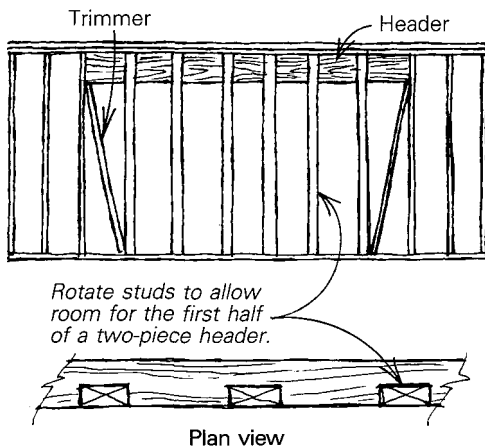
As I do remodeling work, I often need small pieces of wood of varying thickness to fill gaps. I need them around door and window frames, or when I have to furr out studs or joists to meet existing conditions. To find the right shim, I used to scrounge through debris bins, or custom cut something with the table saw. Now I go to my shim-box.

Over the past few years I've been assembling a collection of selected scraps of cedar shingle, Masonite, plastic laminate, plywood and solid wood ranging in thickness from 1/16 in. to 1 1/4 in. I keep them on edge in a box, grouped by thickness for easy identification and access. Although it looks to some people like I'm carrying a box of junk onto a job site, I'm certain that the shim-box has saved me a lot of time.

—Robert Castle Gay, Seattle, Wash.

Header retrofit

Try this trick the next time you put a built-up header into an existing wall. First, use a reciprocating saw to sever the nails at the top and bottom of all the studs to be removed. Now rotate the freed studs 90° and align them on one side of the bottom and top plates, as shown in the drawing below. Next, place trimmers (cut to their finished length) at an angle at either end of the opening. Raise one half of the header into place, and



tap the trimmers into their vertical position (depending on the span, a mid-support for the first half of the header may be required). Now you can remove the original studs and add the second half of the header. Spike the two halves together, and you're done. —M. Felix Marti, Monroe, Ore.

Nail pails

The boxes in which nails come from the lumber yard just don't hold up as I travel from job to job. Even if they don't break, they are awkward to carry, and since framing jobs inevitably require large quantities of different kinds of nails, I need a sturdy container for each type. My solution to this

problem is the ubiquitous 5-gal. plastic bucket—cut down to size.

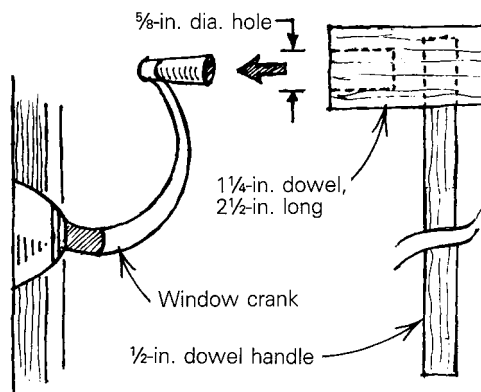
First I remove the handle from each bucket. Then I cut the bucket down to a height of roughly 10 in. I fit the handle into a pair of new holes and then add plywood partitions to isolate different nails. These nail pails are stackable, and their comfortable handles make them easy to carry.

—Jonathan P. Nehemias, Frederick, Md.

Clerestory window opener

Our solar house has nine clerestory windows, and four of them can be opened for ventilation. But opening them requires either a stepladder, a motorized opener or a 7 1/2-ft. tall assistant.

After pondering the problem, I made my own long-handled opener from a 4-ft. length of 1/2-in. dowel and a short piece of 1 1/4-in. dowel drilled and glued onto its end. I drilled a 5/8-in. dia. hole into the end of the larger dowel to accommodate the window crank. The device



looks like a comcob pipe with a long stem.

The opener worked the first time out, and it's still in use after five years. I can even use it in the dark, when the wind blows up in the middle of the night.

—Bill Stable, Green River, Wyo.

Electrician's carryall

An electrician has to carry a bewildering array of fasteners and other tiny components, and keeping them organized and close at hand can be frustrating. For me, the perfect way to carry these supplies is with a fly-fisherman's vest. Mine is a multi-pocketed affair that has touch-fastener pocket flaps. It has served me well for years, and it is comfortable enough to let me work in crawl spaces and on ladders.

—Joe Mullane, Redwood City, Calif.

Advice for fence painters

A three-story stone home in my neighborhood has stood in stately elegance for 80 years, surrounded by a 4-ft. high wrought-iron fence atop a 2-ft. stone wall. The iron pickets are about 6 in. apart, and they have always been painted black. Recently, the house changed hands and the new owner painted the fence white. The house virtually disappeared.

I think this illustrates a frequently ignored design principle. The impact of a fence or a latticework screen can be heightened or reduced by its color. If you want to see the

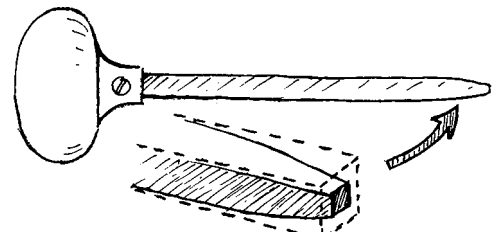
fence, paint it a light color. If you want to see what is behind the fence, finish it with a dark stain or paint. If you want to *eliminate* what's behind the fence, paint the fence white. This may seem obvious, but when you start looking at fences it becomes apparent that this is a poorly understood rule.

—Frederic E. Bishop, Farrell, Pa.

Square-tipped driver

Working on a faucet seat recently, I came up against a fitting that required a square-tipped driver. I didn't have one that fit, but I did have an old doorknob with a square shaft. I used a grinder to shape one end of the shaft to the right profile, as shown in the drawing, and I was back in business.

—Howard Furst, Bellingham, Wash.



Easy-peel masking tape

Rub well the edges of your masking-tape roll with paraffin, crayons or candle wax and you lessen the chance of paint being pulled up when the masking tape is removed.

—Robert M. Vaughan, Roanoke, Va.

Cord control

I tie an old boot lace or short length of heavy twine near the end of my extension cords. At the end of the day, I roll up a cord, wrap the two loose ends of the lace around the coil and tie them together. Then I've got a coiled cord that won't get snarled in the back of the truck.

—R. Francis, Napa, Calif.

Form-fit leather pouches

Years ago, I learned from a leather crafter that you can form leather with common rubbing alcohol. I recalled this when I was fixing up my last tool belt. For my work, I like to carry the old-style fixed-blade utility knife because of its positive, wiggle-free action. For safety's sake, this tool needs its own sheath.

My local supplier had a generic tool sheath that was a little tight for the utility knife, so I soaked the sheath in rubbing alcohol and jammed the knife into it. By working the leather with my fingers, I was able to custom shape the sheath to fit the knife and to roll down the top edge a little to make it easier to return the knife to its slot. Then I set the sheath aside to dry. Once the alcohol dried, the leather maintained its shape nicely.

Now I've got a sheath that fits my knife perfectly. The knife can be withdrawn easily, yet it is also held securely enough to keep it from falling out accidentally.

—Bruce Crooks, Chloe, W. Va.

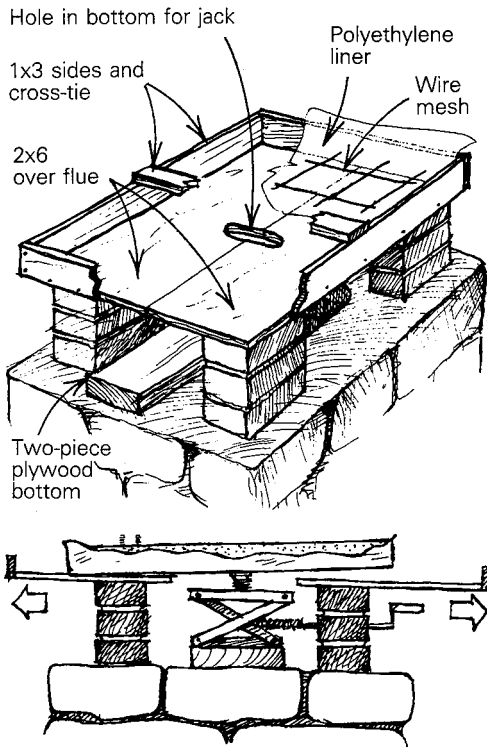
Poured-in-place chimney cap

We needed a chimney cap to keep the rain

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from pouring down our fireplace flue, but the estimate we got to install a 2½-ft. by 3½-ft., 2-in. thick piece of stone atop our chimney was outrageously high. I decided to pour a concrete cap for the chimney, knowing that the primary challenge lay in getting the thing to the top of our 2½-story house. My solution was to pour the cap in place, and then remove the formwork with the help of my car jack.

As shown in the drawing, I made a rectangular form with a two-piece, ½-in. plywood bottom and 1x3 pine sides. A cross-tie held the longer opposing sides together.



To remove formwork, pull 1x3 ends and lift cap with jack.

Near the center of the bottom I cut two U-shaped notches. They would eventually allow me to raise the cured cap enough to remove the formwork.

I supported the form with a stack of mortared bricks under each corner. Then I placed a 2x6 over the flue, and jockeyed the car jack around on it until it was under the holes in the bottom of the form. To make it easier to remove the formwork, I lined the form with polyethylene. The poly also kept the concrete from escaping through the hole in the bottom of the form.

When the form was ready, I mixed the concrete at ground level and hauled it up a series of ladders to the form. I reinforced the concrete with wire mesh, and placed anchor bolts in the wet concrete to secure the base of a lightning rod. I let the cap cure a few days under wet burlap bags, then used the jack to lift the cap enough to slip out the plywood. At the same time, I slipped a ping-pong-ball sized blob of epoxy under each corner to bond the cap to the bricks. Eleven years have gone by, the cap hasn't moved and the hearth remains dry.

—John D. Hallahan, M.D., Media, Pa.