

A Bench for all Seasons

One of the first things a new woodworker or a new gardener or any new crafter needs, is a place to work. Well I've got just the answer for each of them and at a price that won't break the bank! This bench is extremely sturdy, totally customizable, very versatile, very inexpensive and best of all, very easy to make.

I've seen ads in flyers and newspapers for garden benches for sale, for from \$75.00 to \$495.00.

GIVE ME A BREAK! My bench is twice as big and cost me the grand total of \$52.00 (Cdn) and that includes all screws and all taxes.

My wife Rita, needed an area for her hobby of gardening, so we decided to change our seldom used solarium into her gardening room due to it's proximity to our upper patio with it's access to our gardens. I made her this bench as her work table, but it could also be used as a bench for any number of purposes, so get out your tools and come on: let's make a bench and save money **BIG TIME!**

The beauty of this design is that it is totally customizable in that you can make it whatever height you want, to save the strain on your back, and whatever length you wish, to fit your space. It's made totally from 2 x 6's, so calculate how many you'll need, purchase the wood and start cutting it to your required lengths. Rita's bench was going to be 7 feet long and 34 1/2" tall. I decided to make the rails 59" long and the cross members 30" long. The wood's thickness was about 1 1/2", and the legs would have to be 33" tall. So I started cutting as follows:

MATERIALS LIST

10 - 2 x 6 x 8'L.
which I cut as follows:

6 top pieces 7' long
(1 was for the backer)

2 rails 59" long

4 cross members
30" long

4 legs 33" long





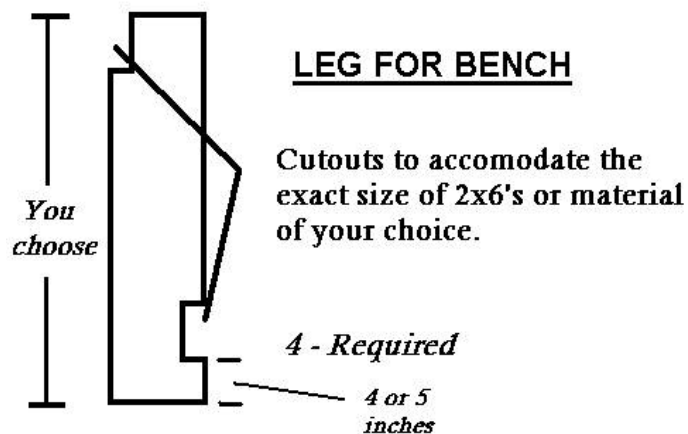
1 box of #7 screws 2 1/2". I used those black drywall screws because of their superior holding power.

That's it! With the prices being what they are in Canada, the total bill came to \$52.00 at Lansing BuildAll; a far cry from the \$500.00 some stores are asking, for a bench much less sturdy, and a lot smaller than this one!

CUSTOMIZING YOUR DESIGN

If you want a different height for your bench, after deciding on your desired height, cut your legs to the appropriate height, remembering to include the 1 1/2" thick top as part of the bench's desired height, when doing your calculations, and cut them accordingly. If you want a different length, cut the top pieces to your desired length, remembering that the rails will need to be appropriately shorter or longer. In general, the rails should be about 2 feet shorter than the length of your bench to allow for about 1 foot overhang on each end. **THIS IS NOT CRITICAL!** Whether it overhangs by 6", 10" or 14" on each end, is really of no consequence.

MAKING THE BASE



The most complicated thing about it's construction, is cutting the notches in the legs for the cross members, and that isn't very complicated at all. Use your jigsaw and refine or clean up the cut with a chisel, to assure that the cross members will fit well.

From the drawing, you can see exactly where to cut the notches. Each notch is the thickness of the wood deep, and the width of the wood wide. Each of the 4 legs is exactly the same, so just go ahead and prepare all four. They're just turned around for the other end.

The notch for the top cross member is located by measuring down from the top, and the bottom of the lower cross member notch, is located 5" up from the bottom, on the other side of the leg.

Screw the cross members into the notches. By checking first with your square, to make sure that you are attaching everything in a perpendicular fashion.



When everything looks good, attach with 2 screws at each joint. Each leg assembly is the same, so you can assemble them both.

Now attach each of the rails to the insides of your leg assemblies, with 2 screws at each joint, making sure that the top cross member is towards the outside of your bench, and that the top of the rails are at the same height as the top of the leg, and again, is square to the leg. Your base is now completed.

MAKING THE TOP

This bench will be a bit heavy when completed, so now is the time to position it into the place where you'll be using it. With that done, screw 1 of the lengths of the top to another so as to form an "L" shaped assembly. Use probably 5 or 6 screws evenly across the length. Position this assembly so that the side of it which has a full side of a board and the end of the other, goes down on top of the base.

Position it so that there is an equal amount of overhang on both ends, and that the back of the assembly is even with the back of the legs. Once you are satisfied this is in the appropriate position, drive a couple of screws into the cross members at each end. Lay the remaining 4 top pieces in place and position so that the ends all line up and spacing of these boards is to your liking. Then drive 2 screws into each end of these top pieces, into the cross members. You may wish to drive a couple of screws through the front and rear top pieces into the front and rear rails, for added stability.

ALTERNATE TOP

If you would like a smoother top, you could use a piece of 3/4" plywood as your top. If this is your choice, you might cut the plywood, so as to have a bit of an overhang. It's good if you want to clamp something to it. That's what I did on another bench I made for myself, and still use to this day in my shop. In this case though, I rounded off the corners with my jigsaw and belt sander to protect against catching things on those somewhat sharp corners, including myself! I also put in a couple of more cross members between the rails, to give added support to the 3/4" plywood top.

With your bench now done, you could give it a coat of varnish or lacquer if you desire. Varnished or not, you can expect long sturdy duty from your bench, AND,,,the extra bucks you saved by making your own, can be spent on more important things like more tools for your chosen passtime.