

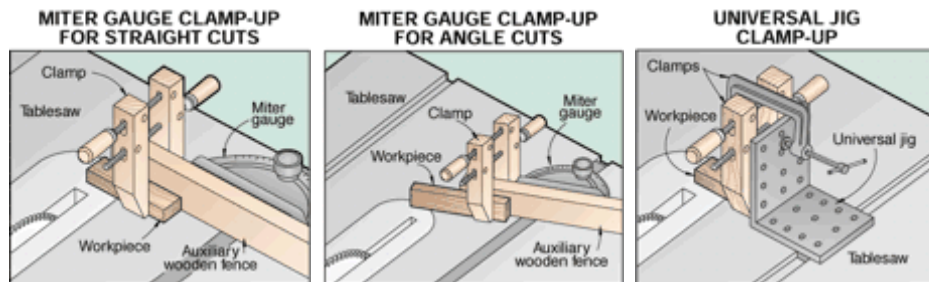
## Saw Small Pieces Safely

**Are you having a tough time cutting small chunks of wood? Safety man Mike Gililand offers some suggestions.**

It seems that whenever a discussion about safety pops up, much of it involves anecdotes (some of them scary) about cutting small workpieces—a task similar to yet unlike thin-strip ripping. A while back, I visited WOOD® magazine's web site and clicked on the general discussion group. Sure enough, there were postings on that subject there, too. One seemed to sum up many: "Every close call I've ever had involved making a small piece smaller. Now, I've learned to just say no."

Although there seems to be a general agreement among woodworkers that trying to saw small pieces of wood is dangerous, there's no consensus on exactly how to do it safely. The best method is to shape the piece while it's still part of a larger, more easily handled one.

But if you find that you must sometimes work with small pieces, I know that you can rip and miter them safely on a tablesaw. But, you have to give them firm support. I've found at least two sound ways which I'll share with you to do that. With either, you should install a zero-clearance table insert to keep from getting tiny scraps down into the blade.



### Combine a miter gauge and a hand screw

You'll be surprised at what you can accomplish by attaching a scrap board to your miter gauge to serve—not as a fence—but as a backing board for your small workpiece. As you can see in the drawings below, by clamping the workpiece to the scrap with a handscrew, you'll be able to make miters as well as straight cuts. Be sure, though, to always use a clamp, such as a wooden handscrew, that won't harm your tablesaw blade should you venture too close.

### Clamp up to a universal jig

A bit more complicated than the preceding technique, but sometimes far more accurate for straight cuts (ripping or crosscuts) only, is to pair up a universal jig and two clamps with your small workpiece. A universal jig (about \$50 in die-cast aluminum at Sears and elsewhere) slides along the miter slot in your saw table. As shown in the drawing below, it brings a small workpiece clamped to it past the blade with control.

As with the first technique, you'll want to use a wooden hand screw to hold the workpiece. But a C-clamp or other type works fine to secure the hand screw to the jig. Some universal jigs come with a pair of C-clamps attached, but stick with the hand screw for work close to the saw blade.