

Whip up a wardrobe

Melamine shelving makes it a breeze

While new wardrobes can cost a packet, you can build this open robe for around \$250. Build it in an alcove or against a wall and add a chest of drawers for smalls. It's a bulky project, so get the older kids to lend a hand. *By Dieter Mylius*

Here's how

Step 1 The crucial measurements are the opening where the unit will be built and the size of the chest of drawers you will use. As walls are often not quite square, subtract about 20mm all around – this will also allow for the thickness of skirtings if you are working between them. We made our unit in two sections for easy installation in a room with a ceiling height of 2.7m. Leave enough space above the chest of drawers to hang clothes. Our two units were 2100 and 550mm high, by 1630mm wide and 550mm deep, with an opening of 950mm for the drawers.

Step 2 Cut the three tall sides (A) and a base and top (B). Use a power saw for the cuts, setting the blade just deep enough to cut the panels. There is likely to be some minor chipping of the melamine on the saw side, so work with the good side face down. The good side is the one most likely to be seen in the finished article.

Step 3 To fix bottom and top to two sides, predrill for four screws per joint and countersink for the screw heads. Working with panels on their back edge, apply a thin bead of glue, then screw together, making sure front edges are flush. It's best to get help with holding panels.

Step 4 From the inside edge of one side, measure 950mm along the top and bottom of carcass. Square a line

across the board and use this as a guide to predrill and countersink the top and bottom. Glue and screw the divider in place.

Step 5 From the top, measure down both sides of the narrow opening at increments of 346mm, that is 346, 692, 1038, 1384 and 1730mm. Square a line from the back to within 50mm of the front. Cut the cleats (C) with an optional 45° mitre on front ends, and paint them to match if you wish. Glue and screw the cleats to the sides with the top edges on the lines and the back flush with the rear of the panels. Use the shorter 30mm screws.

Step 6 Cut the shelving (D) to suit. Ours is set back 10mm from the front. After predrilling, screw shelves to battens with two 30mm screws per cleat.

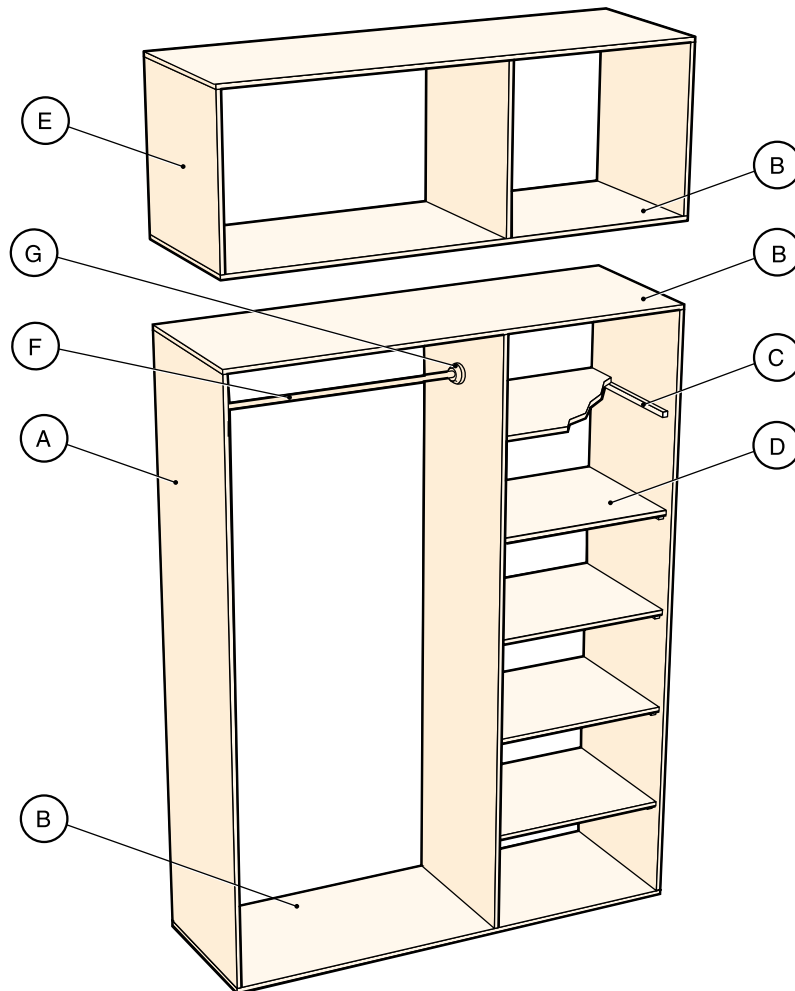
Step 7 Get help to stand the unit in place to check fit. It will be quite floppy as there is no bracing or back panel. Check with a spirit level to make sure the sides are vertical. Measure the gaps between the sides and the wall; measure the wall in three places and mark these positions. The gaps are likely to vary in size up and down the wall. Lay down the unit, and cut offcuts of shelving or plywood to make up the thickness of packing required, and nail to wall studs or plug into masonry. Carefully slide unit back in place and screw the sides into the packers to hold the unit snugly in place.

Step 8 Make the top unit the same way as the bottom one by screwing the top and bottom (B) to the sides and divider (E). Fit packing pieces to wall near where the top of the unit will be, then slide the unit in place. Screw the top unit into the top of the bottom one with 30mm screws, as well as to the packers.

Step 9 Cut the chrome hanging rail (F) with a hacksaw so it fits the wide opening. Smooth the ends and loosely fit on the rod sockets (G). Centre and space the rail from the underside of the top to allow easy removal of clothes hangers and mark screw holes at both ends. Predrill holes for the sockets, then install with screws provided. Finish off by pressing small snap caps into any exposed screw heads.

Step 10 Then it's just a matter of sliding in the chest of drawers, unless of course you want to add doors ... but that's another story.

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What you will need

Item	Part	Size	Material
A	Tall sides/divider (3)	2068 x 550 x 16mm	Melamine board
B	Bases/tops (4)	1630 x 550 x 16mm	Melamine board
C	Cleats (10)	19 x 19 x 500mm	Pine
D	Shelves (5)	632 x 540 x 16mm	Melamine board
E	Short sides/divider (3)	518 x 550 x 16mm	Melamine board
F	Hanging rail	940 x 19mm diam	Chrome steel rod
G	Rod sockets (2)	19mm internal diam	Chrome steel
H	Trim – optional (total)	19 x 19mm x 7.2m	Pine/maple

Standard 16mm thick x 600mm wide, melamine-coated particleboard shelving is available in sheet lengths of 1.8 and 2.4m. Our unit used eight 2.4m sheets. All joints are glued and screwed. You will also need 30mm and 45mm cross-head screws, plus white snap caps.

Helpful pointers

- If fitting the wardrobe around skirting boards, you will have to cut housings in the back of the side panels (A) and deduct the thickness of the skirting board from the depth of the bottom panel (B).
- If you have 2.4m-high ceilings, and decide to build a one-piece unit, reduce the height of the wardrobe by 75mm so it can be tipped and pushed into place.
- If you will prefabricate the wardrobe outside the room, make sure you can get the finished unit through the door.