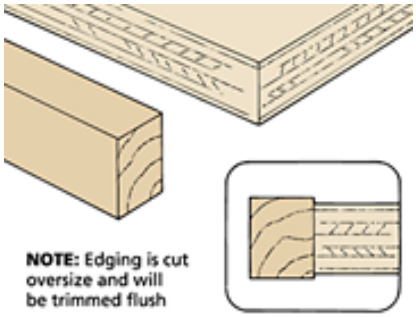
Solid Wood Edging for Plywood

Recently, I was adding some built-in shelves to my home, and I decided to use plywood. Using plywood saves me the trouble of gluing up panels, and the runs were short enough (30") that I knew the plywood wasn't going to sag much. However, as this wasn't a utility room, I did want to cover the exposed plywood edges.

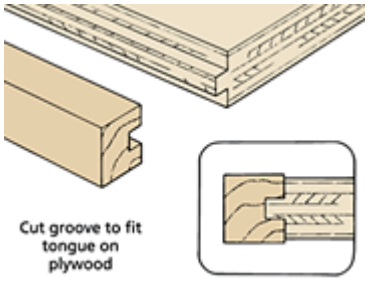
There are a number of ways you can edge plywood — from iron-on veneer to plastic T-moulding. But I generally have enough solid wood scraps lying around that I don't need to buy edging. I just have to decide how to apply the narrow strips to the edges.

The photo above shows three different methods for attaching edging to plywood. You can glue it directly to the plywood, cut a tongue and groove in the pieces, or use a spline to keep the pieces aligned.

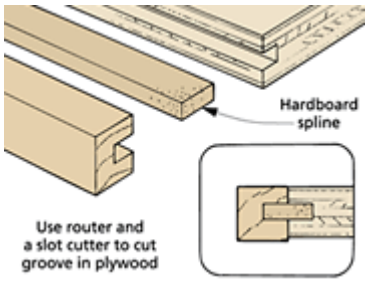


GLUE ON. By far the simplest method of installing edging (and the one I use most often) is to glue it directly to the plywood, see drawing at right. I like to cut the edging oversize so that it stands a little proud. This way, I don't have to worry about getting the edges perfectly aligned when clamping the strips in place. (It wants to slide around until you get the clamps tightened.) Later on, I can trim the edging flush to the plywood.

This method works fine for shorter pieces. But when you've got a longer piece of plywood, keeping the edges aligned can get a little tricky (even with oversized strips). One way to get around this problem is to nail the edging in place. (Note: Drill holes for the nails to prevent splitting.)



TONGUE & GROOVE. Another way to keep things aligned is to attach the edging with a tongue and groove joint, see drawing at left. A tongue cut on the plywood edge fits snugly into a groove cut in the edging. The length of the tongue doesn't have to be very long (or the groove very deep) to keep things aligned. But here again, I like to size the edging so it stands proud of the plywood so the edges can be trimmed flush.



SPLINE & GROOVE. There's actually a quicker way to do basically the same thing *if* you have a router and a slot cutter bit. This time, though you'll make two grooves and add a spline, see drawing below right.

To create the grooves, I use the slot cutter in my router table. Just make sure the top face of both the edging and the plywood is face down on the table. This way, the two grooves will align. (You might want to use a feather board to keep the thin strips tight to the table.)

For the splines, I like to use hardboard. Its uniform thickness makes it easier to fit the spline into the grooves. So all you have to do is rip the splines to width to fit the grooves.