Pattern Cutting on the Table Saw

With a simple jig, you can use your saw to cut duplicates of parts.

This complex shelf was traced, roughed out and trimmed to size in less than five minutes with only one clamping setup. Try that with your router.

Sure, I have a router and a handful of pattern-cutting bits. But many times when I need to make duplicates of an odd-shaped part, I turn to my table saw instead.

With a shamefully simple jig (it's two pieces of wood) clamped to my saw's fence, I can cut patterns all day long. I think it's faster than pattern cutting with my router for several reasons.

Once your jig is clamped to your fence, you need to align its edge with your sawblade. A square will get you close, but a follow-up test cut or two will get you exactly where you want to be.

First, when roughing out the shape of the blank on my band saw, I don't need to cut real close to my line like I do when pattern routing. I only have to get within 1-½" of the line instead of within 1/16" to 1/8".

One of the big advantages to cutting patterns with your table saw is you don't have to be real accurate when roughing out the stock. With a router, you need to cut pretty close to the line so the tool can handle trimming the last bit of stock flush. With this table saw setup, you have to be within 1-1/2" of your line — which means you're much less likely to accidentally cross it, too.

Second, there's less clamping involved with this table-saw method. Normally I screw or nail my template to the side of the part that won't show (the underside of a shelf, for example) and go. I can do this with pattern routing, too, but I'll still need to clamp everything to my bench, make part of the cut, readjust the clamps and then finish the cut. When I use the

table saw, I screw it and cut it.

Build the Jig

The jig should take five minutes to build. It is simply two narrow strips of ¾"-thick wood nailed and glued on one long edge into an “L” shape. One of the strips of wood should be as long as your table saw’s fence. Its width depends on how thick your project’s stock is. For cutting patterns in ¾" stock, rip this board to 1-5/8" wide. The second one should be 1-¾" wide and about 6" shorter than the first board. Nail and glue these two boards together using the drawing as a guide.

Set Up Your Jig and Use It

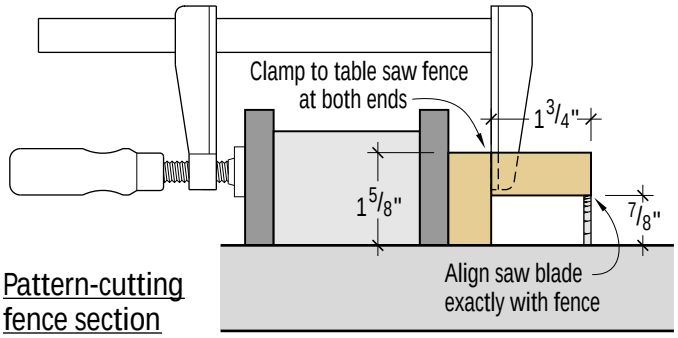
Install a quality combination blade in your saw. Clamp the jig to your fence with the jig flush to the table. Slide the table saw’s fence over so the jig overhangs the blade and raise the blade until it almost touches the jig.

Using a square, line up the edge of the jig with the edge of your sawblade’s teeth. Now wax the edge of the jig to make things slide more easily.

Screw a couple pieces of scrap together and test your setup. When the cut is complete, the two pieces should be perfectly flush. Adjust the fence until this is the case.

Now you’re set. Align the shortest part of the pattern with a jointed or straight-sawn edge. Trace the pattern on your stock using your template as a guide. Rough out its shape using your band saw and then screw the template to your stock. Push the pattern against your jig’s face and slide it forward. Be cautious when sawing short lengths. You’ll probably be surprised how accurate and easy this is, and give your router a rest every once in a while. **PW**

FOr this cherry corner cabinet, I screwed the pattern to the shelf on its sappy underside. A couple brad nails would also do the trick. Align the shortest part of the pattern flush with a jointed or straight-sawn edge.



Pattern-cutting fence section