

## Do It Yourself

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### Sanding Basics

From "[Ask DIY](#)"

episode ADI-208 -- [More Projects »](#)

**Q:** I sanded off the finish on an old dresser using my husband's sander. When I applied stain, little swirling scratches showed up in the wood. Is there something wrong with our sander?

**A:** (Bruce Johnson, *Ask DIY Woodworking Expert*) I don't think the sander is the problem. It probably has more to do with your sandpaper. Here are some guidelines to sandpaper and the many gadgets and attachments you can use to sand:

- Sandpaper is graded according to its grit (**figure A**), or how many granules it has per square inch. These numbers are listed on the back. Anything below 100 is considered coarse. It's designed to take off a lot of finish very quickly and you'll never need such coarse paper for furniture. Save the 60-grits and anything below 100-grit for working on floors.
- Sandpaper from 100- to 200-grit is considered medium grit and you'll use a lot of the medium grade for woodworking and refinishing. For furniture, you'll often start with 100-grit if the wood is extremely rough.
- Two hundred and higher grits are the fine and the super-fine sandpapers. They don't remove much wood, but they're great for that final sanding to achieve a satin-fine finish.
- Don't assume that you always need a belt sander (**figure B**) to power the sandpaper. They are fast and efficient and they do remove a lot of wood. But the swirling belt removes so much wood it can actually do more damage than good. If you took a belt sander to an antique mahogany table, for example, you'd ruin it. So save the belt sanders for projects such as refinishing wood floors or when you do want to remove enough wood on wide boards to make them smooth. Even then, don't use coarse sandpaper with



Palm sanders are light, inexpensive and easy to use.



Figure A



Figure B



a belt sander -- go for the medium grit. And make sure your wood is well secured before you start. Keep the sander moving so you don't wear a hole in your wood. And wear safety glasses and a dust mask while you work.

- There are safer sanders than the belt sander. I prefer the palm, or orbital, sander. It's lightweight, easy-to-use and affordable. It requires a fourth of an ordinary piece of sandpaper, held in place with spring clamps. Sometimes you can find a palm sander that holds the sandpaper with adhesive (**figure C**). Either model is great to use with medium sandpaper, but they will leave scratches if you use the coarse grit stuff.
- There are a lot of gadgets out there. I'm not too crazy about the ones that attach to a drill, because they're too hard to control. But I do like the detail sander (**figure D**). It has self-adhesive sandpaper on the end and vibrates like the palm sander. It's very good for sanding grooves.

Figure C



Figure D

### More Questions for Bruce:

**Q:** I just stained and finished some unfinished furniture but it doesn't fit in with my antique furnishings. How do I give it an aged appearance?

**A:** Find a can of dark paste wax. When you rub it on, leave it in the corners and the cracks and crevices. It will give your furniture that 100-year-old look.

**Q:** I've heard about biscuit joints. What are they?

**A:** They are a way of joining two boards together to give them more strength. There is a special machine that cuts a slot in each of two boards. Then you connect the slots by gluing in this flat, wooden disk shaped like a football, or "biscuit." That gives you a smooth, strong joint.

**Q:** I'm buying my husband a birthday gift for his workshop. He says he needs clamps. What do you recommend?

**A:** Your husband may not have a belt, or web, clamp. It goes around a piece of furniture, such as a chair, and you tighten it to hold pieces in place while glue dries.

### Web site resources for Sanding Basics:

[Sanding from HGTV.Com](#)

[Toolbox: Sanding from HGTV.Com](#)

**Book:**

*Wood Sanding Book*

by Sandor Nagyszalanczy

ISBN: 1561581755

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