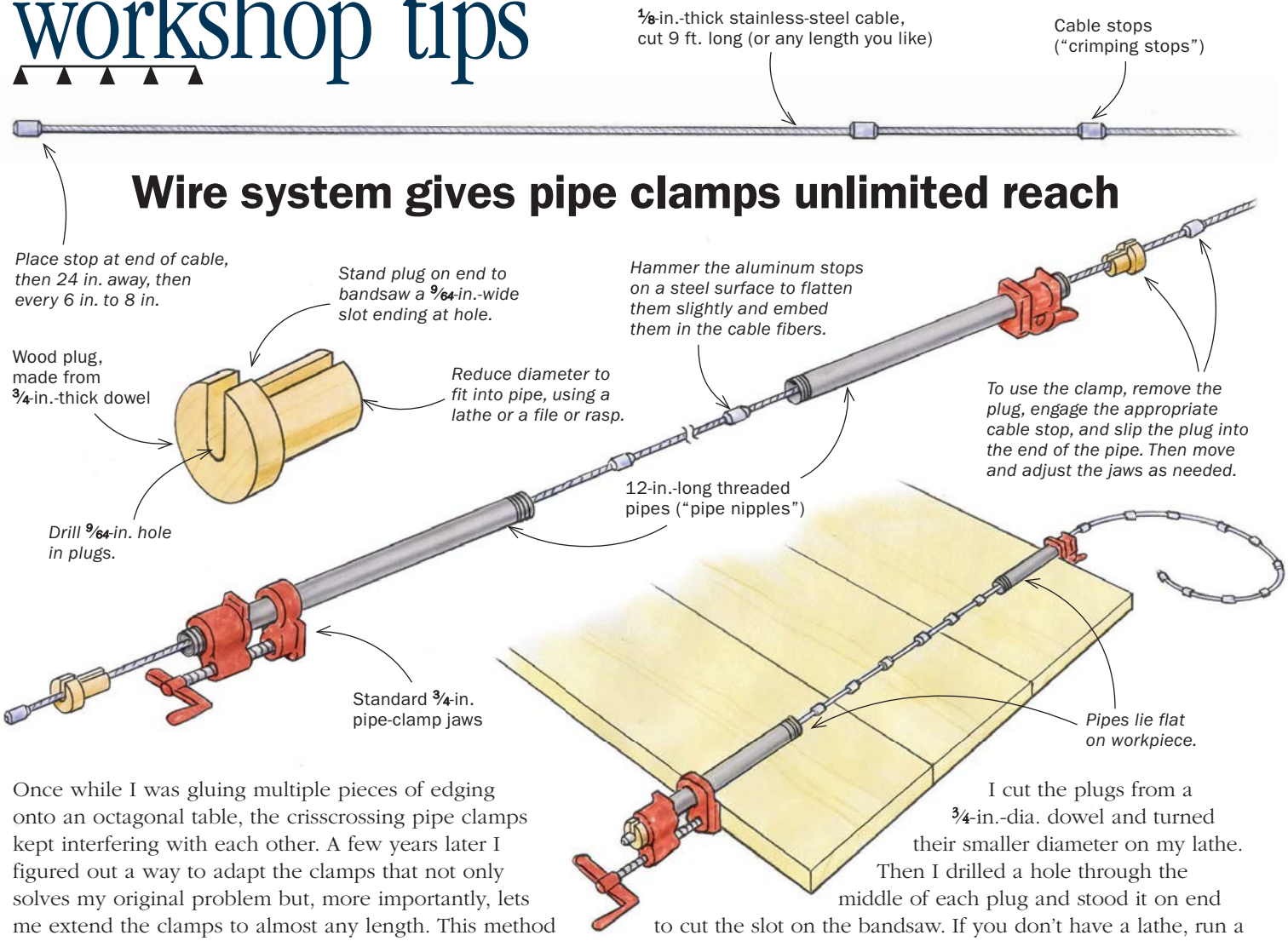
Wire system gives pipe clamps unlimited reach



Once while I was gluing multiple pieces of edging onto an octagonal table, the crisscrossing pipe clamps kept interfering with each other. A few years later I figured out a way to adapt the clamps that not only solves my original problem but, more importantly, lets me extend the clamps to almost any length. This method allows just a few clamps to replace a whole stack of pipes of different lengths. And the whole system fits into a shoebox.

I mounted the jaw assemblies from the original clamps on shorter pipe sections and connected those with ⅛-in.-thick steel cable. Then I attached cable stops at intervals along the wire, locking them in place by swaging them (flattening them slightly) with hammer blows. To capture the stops, I turned wood plugs that fit into the ends of the pipes. The length of the clamps is adjusted by sliding a cable stop behind a plug and then tightening the clamp screw as usual.

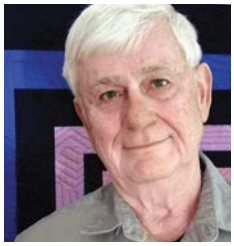
I cut the plugs from a ¾-in.-dia. dowel and turned their smaller diameter on my lathe. Then I drilled a hole through the middle of each plug and stood it on end to cut the slot on the bandsaw. If you don't have a lathe, run a centered screw into the end of the plug, cut off its head, chuck the screw in a drill press, and use a file to reduce the diameter.

I used old garage-door cable for my clamps, but I recommend that you use new stainless-steel cable. You can find it on Amazon, along with the "steel-cable stops," which are made of aluminum and are also called "crimping stops." The length of the cable is up to you.

The pipes are 12 in. long, threaded on both ends, and sold as "pipe nipples." The length gives you plenty of room to slide the fixed clamp jaw back and forth.

—RICHARD TENDICK, Lakeville, Minn.

Best Tip



After serving in the Air Force as an explosives disposal technician, Richard Tendick earned a degree in industrial education and went to work as a shop teacher. When the student population declined in his rural town, he worked as a plant engineer. After retiring, he took a job as a freelance editor for *American Woodworker* magazine. He also served on the board of directors for the Minnesota Woodworkers Guild for 23 years.

A Reward for the Best Tip

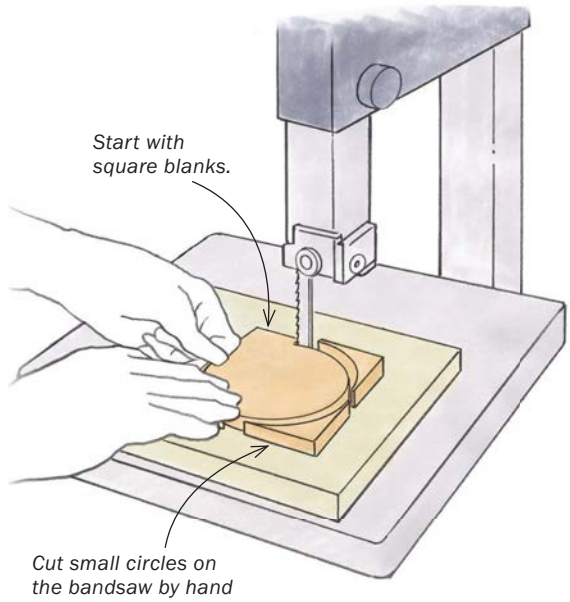
Send your original tips to fwtips@taunton.com. We pay $100 for a published tip with illustration; $50 for one without. The prize for this issue's best tip was an IBC Mortise Chisel set of 4 sizes: ½ in., ⅜ in., ¼ in., and 3/16 in.

Drawings: Dan Thornton

Circle scraps make interesting knobs

It's fun to make your own knobs for furniture or shop use. Here's one of my favorite approaches. Starting with square blanks, I use a simple bandsaw jig to cut circles in them. The jig is just a board with a nail or pin sticking up, which the blank pivots on. Instead of using the circles as knobs, I use the scraps, combining them as shown. To make the knobs more useful and attractive, I add sticks in the middle, joining them with a simple lap joint. Once the glue dries, I do some shaping to make the knobs more comfy and appealing. For shop and jig knobs, you can drill a hole through the middle and attach them with a bolt. To attach them to furniture, you can run a screw into the back of the knob. The center strips can be made with the same wood as the circle scraps, or the parts can be made from contrasting wood.

—JOHN BURKE, Northfield, N.J.

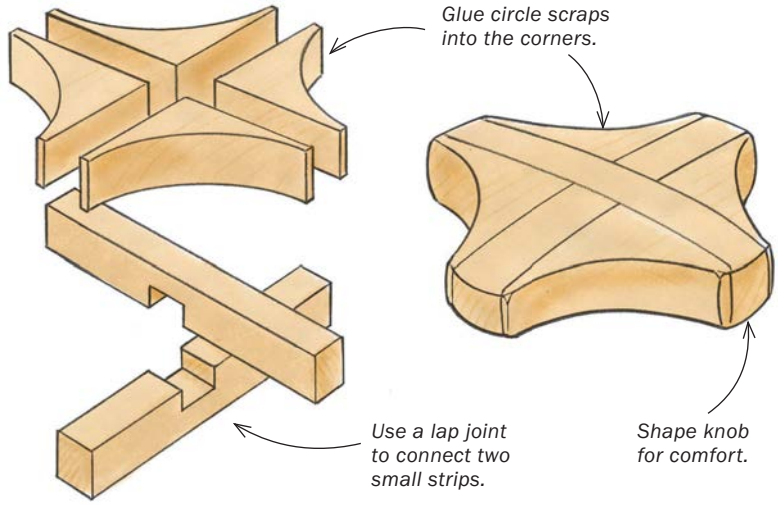


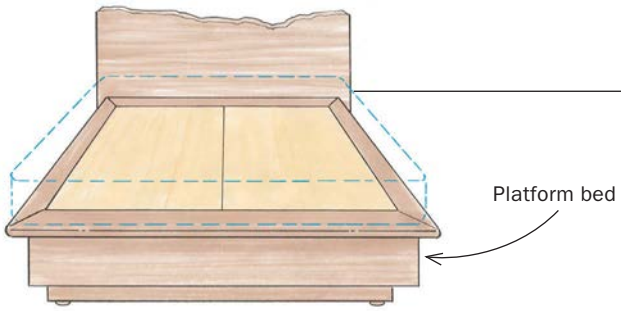
Quick Tip

Use an online optimizer for sheet goods

When breaking down sheet goods for cabinetry projects, I've found that an online optimizer helps a lot. Try the free one at cutlistoptimizer.com. The program lets you add the kerf thickness for the blade you are using, but I always use ½ in. for that value to leave me a little extra material for trimming the parts to final size.

—DAVID LEVENBERG, Elizabeth, N.J.

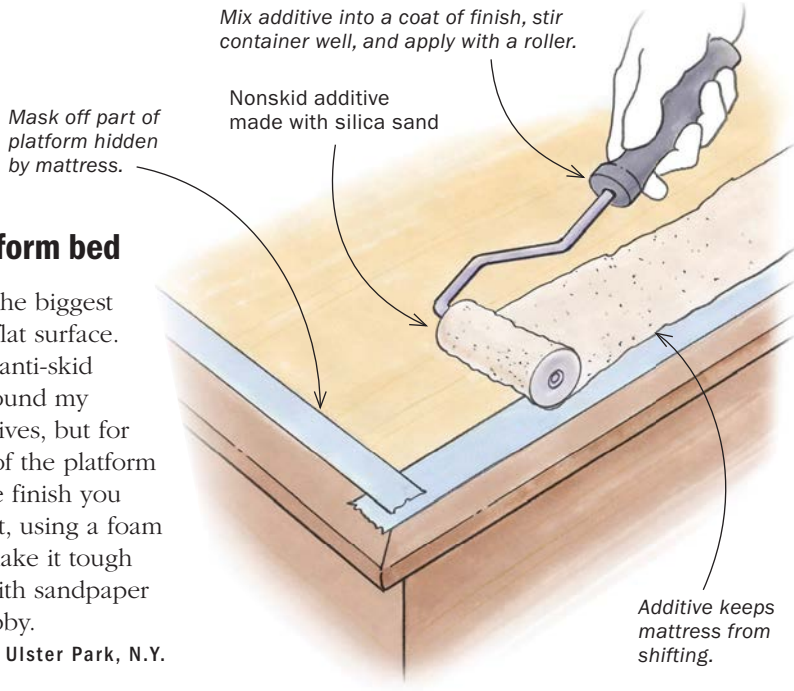




Mix sand into finish to stabilize mattress on platform bed

As a pro woodworker, I've made quite a few platform beds. The biggest problem has always been the mattress sliding around on the flat surface. One day when I was working on the deck of a boat that had anti-skid compound added to the painted finish, I realized that I had found my platform-bed solution. There are a few types of nonskid additives, but for beds I like the type made with silica sand. Mask off the area of the platform that falls under the mattress, mix the additive into some of the finish you used on the bed, stir the container well, and apply a final coat, using a foam roller. If the sand ends up feeling a little too sharp, it might make it tough for the customer to tuck in sheets comfortably. Hit it lightly with sandpaper and the surface will be more user-friendly but still plenty grabby.

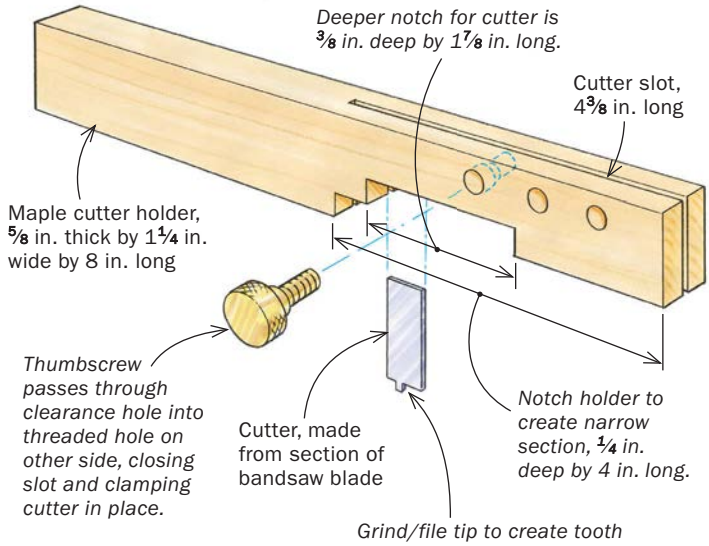
—ROB HARE, Ulster Park, N.Y.

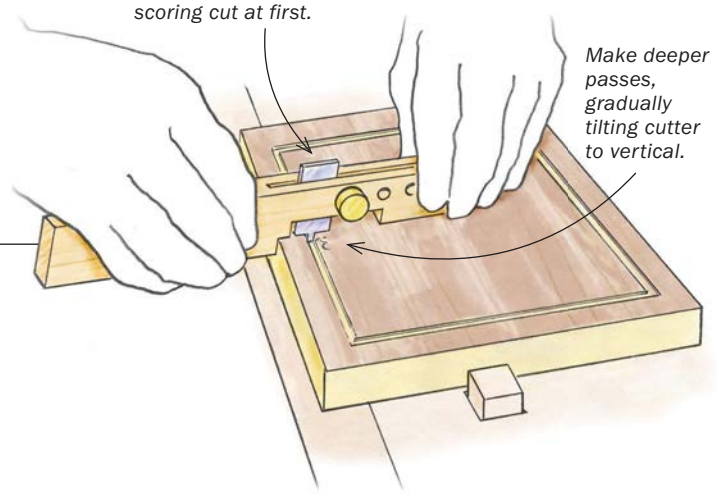


Make your own scratch stock

I use a simple scratch stock to cut grooves for stringing. It's especially useful on small table tops, table legs, and jewelry boxes, where a router might be unwieldy. Tiny router bits also have a tendency to break. I made the blade from a short section of an old bandsaw blade, which was about 1/32 in. thick, and used my bench grinder and a file to form the narrow tooth. It helps to color the blade with a marker and draw the tooth shape on it with a scratch awl before grinding. After shaping it, flatten the cutter on a sharpening stone to remove any burrs. The holder is made from maple, with a slot bandsawed into it. A small thumbscrew is used to tighten the slot, holding the cutter in place. I threaded the maple to hold the thumbscrew, but you could also screw it into a threaded insert, or simply use a common wood screw to apply the clamping pressure. To use the tool, tilt it backward at first, like a scraper blade, and lower it until it just scores the wood. Make additional passes as needed, gradually bringing the cutter up to 90°.

—CHARLIE JAMES, Williston Park, N.Y.

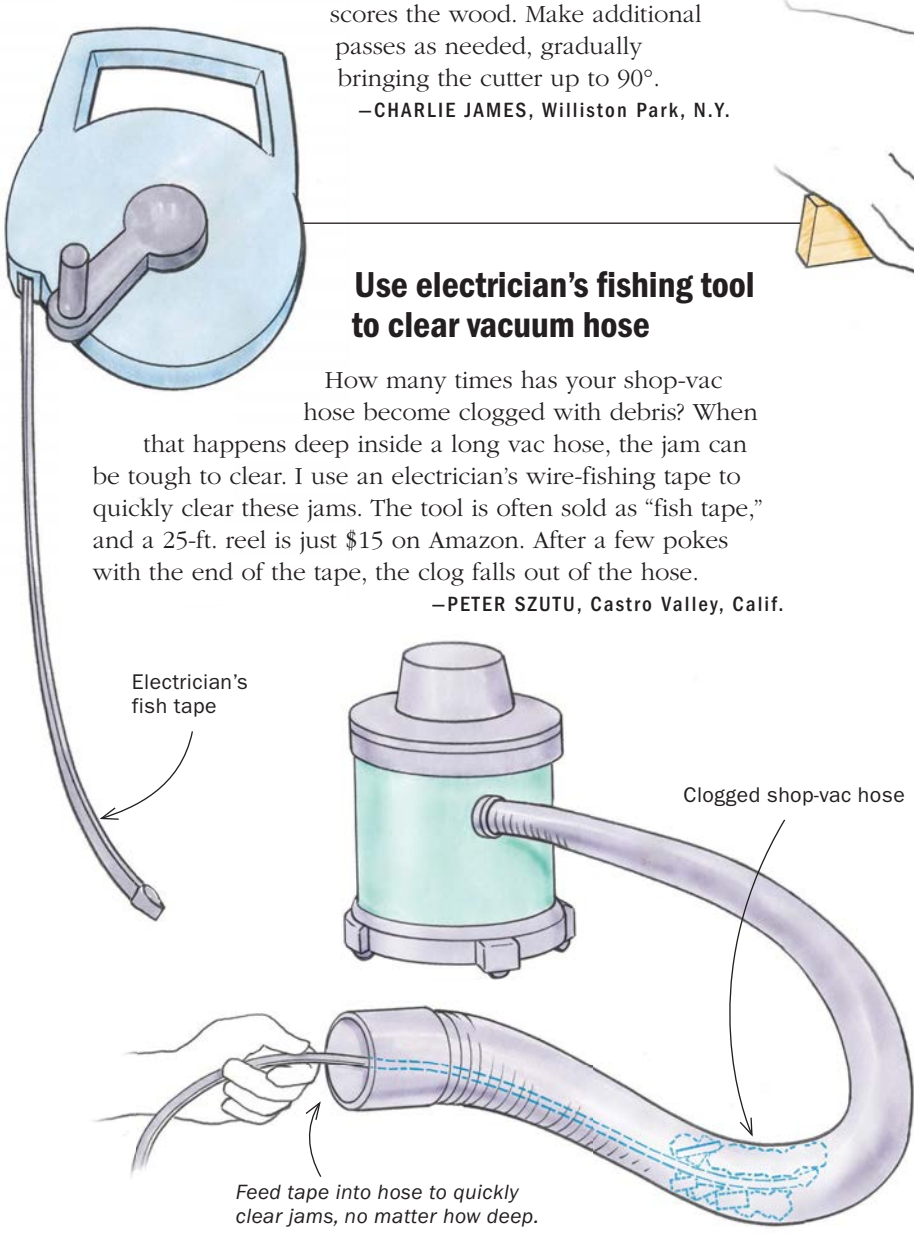




Use electrician's fishing tool to clear vacuum hose

How many times has your shop-vac hose become clogged with debris? When that happens deep inside a long vac hose, the jam can be tough to clear. I use an electrician's wire-fishing tape to quickly clear these jams. The tool is often sold as "fish tape," and a 25-ft. reel is just $15 on Amazon. After a few pokes with the end of the tape, the clog falls out of the hose.

—PETER SZUTU, Castro Valley, Calif.



Quick Tip

Save repair dust in test tubes

Like many woodworkers, I mix sawdust with a little bit of glue to create a filler for small gaps and nail holes and such. But most of the dust I make is sucked up into the shop vac or dust collector, or drops on the floor, where it gets mixed with chips from a variety of species. So I ordered 10 test tubes with screw-on tops, for less than $10 on Amazon, and labeled them for the woods I most commonly use. Whenever I sand any one of those woods by hand, I save the dust in one of the tubes. I made a little stand to hold the tubes, but you can buy such stands inexpensively online.

—TRICIA FIELDS, Liberty, Ind.