

Low-Fuss, Less-Dust Sanding

Though necessary, sanding is tedious and time-consuming. Cut to the quick with these pointers and you'll achieve smooth results in a hurry.

Sanding is like doing taxes. The payoff doesn't make the paperwork more pleasant. In both cases, you face big penalties for hasty mistakes or cutting corners. Of course, you sand more than once a year and you can't hire someone to do it for you.

So, what's to like about sanding? The repetitive movements? The dust? The suspicion that your first coat of stain will betray any little mistake? We can't make

sanding fun, but we can offer you ways to get top-notch results with no wasted effort.

For starters, picture what happens when sanding grit touches grain. Sandpaper abrasives work like a series of tiny plane blades, scraping off fine particles of wood with each pass. Coarse grits remove machining marks, medium grits obliterate the coarse scratches, and increasingly finer grits erase scratches made by the previous grit, ending with scratches too fine to detect.

Give yourself less to sand

Maintaining or adjusting your tools takes time, but not as much time as sanding off deep scratches, ridges, or burn marks left by dull or nicked cutting tools. Replace worn or low-cost saw blades with long-wearing carbide ones. Sharpen or replace dull or nicked jointer knives, and upgrade your most frequently used router bits. Each of these precautions brings you closer to starting with a smoother surface.

Time-saving tips:

As you machine workpieces, cut any curves as precisely as possible. If you bandsaw a curve to within $\frac{1}{32}$ " of your pattern line, you'll waste less time using your sander as a shaping tool.

On glue-ups, scrape away globs of squeeze-out while they're still pliable instead of sanding off dried chunks. Bits of dried glue can attach themselves to your sandpaper or break loose from the joint, as shown *next page*, turning into abrasive grits that will mar the surface of your work.



Glue globs can scratch the surface of your work either when they break loose or become trapped on your sanding pad.

Stock up on sandpaper

Now gather your sanding tools. For sanding flat surfaces, a random-orbit sander works best because its pad leaves behind small irregularly spaced swirls. Other types of sanders work better for curves or help preserve square edges. To help you sort out the best tools for your sanding needs, consult “Sander Types and Their Uses,” below.

With your sanding tools at hand, it's time to stock up on a broad assortment of coated abrasive papers, from 80 grit on the coarse side all the way through 320 grit for fine dry sanding and scuff sanding between coats of finish. If you'll eventually rub out your finish topcoats, add some 600-grit wet/dry paper to your shopping list. It shows the different grits in both major measuring systems and how abrasive grain sizes shrink as the grit number increases.

Time-saving tips:









Depending on the type and amount of work you'll be doing, save time and money by buying sandpaper in bulk packs or rolls instead of the 5-packs on many store shelves. That way, you'll be more likely to have the abrasive you need when you need it. Change sandpaper as soon as it ceases to remove stock efficiently.

In addition, bulk sandpaper packs save money two ways. For example, we bought a 5-pack of 9x11" aluminum oxide paper for 60 cents a sheet at a local store, compared to 28 cents per sheet for a 50-pack purchased by mail. The bulk pack provides more than twice the abrasive for the same price, and you've also avoided as many as 10 trips to the store. Don't need that much sandpaper? Buy sheets in bulk and split the cost and sandpaper with your woodworking buddies. 🍄

Bulk sandpaper saves money and time



Sander Types and Their Uses

type								
	belt	detail	finish	random-orbit	rotary tool	disc	drum	oscillating spindle
uses	Rapid stock removal; shaping wood	Reaches into corners and tight spots; some models have attachments for sanding contours	Fine sanding; reaches into corners of flat surfaces	Flat surfaces and large panels; random action helps lessen swirl marks on stained surfaces	Tight curves and hard-to-reach areas; valuable where light weight and portability are important	Flat surfaces and outside curves; preserves 90° angles or miters; fast and precise stock removal; can be used to bevel	Fine-tunes stock thickness; produces uniform scratch marks; excellent for thickening figured stock prone to tear out	Sands edges at 90° angle; handles inside curves; less prone to burning hardwoods; multiple spindle diameters
limitations	Hard to control for precise sanding; gouging is a risk if not carefully controlled	Not suited for large areas	Less aggressive than random-orbit sanders; more apparent swirl marks than with a random-orbit sander	Doesn't sand curved surfaces, inside corners, and profiled or narrow edges	Few grit options; loads with debris quickly; can gouge wood; less precise than a spindle sander; not for flat surfaces	Can't reach inside curves; burns hardwoods easily; limited to workpieces half the diameter of the sanding disc	Limited to flat surfaces up to twice the width of the drum (on open-ended models); high prices	Only suitable for sanding edges, not flat surfaces