

3 easy ways To Rip Thin Strips

When it comes to ripping thin strips, a sharp blade and an accurate setup are key.



▼ Use a combination blade (left) or rip blade to cut thin strips.

It seems like every time I'm in the shop, I need a thin piece of wood for something. Either as edging, a shim, or a spacer.

At first glance, ripping thin strips looks easy. You just set the rip fence, and push the workpiece through the blade. But if you haven't taken a few key steps first, you might not have a strip that's the same thickness from end to end.

If this happens when you're ripping thin strips for bent lamination, you'll see gaps in the laminated workpiece. For this reason, getting a thin strip that's cut straight and smooth is essential.

There are several ways to ensure that thin strips come off the saw as identical pieces. And the most important step before you make a cut, is to set up your table saw.

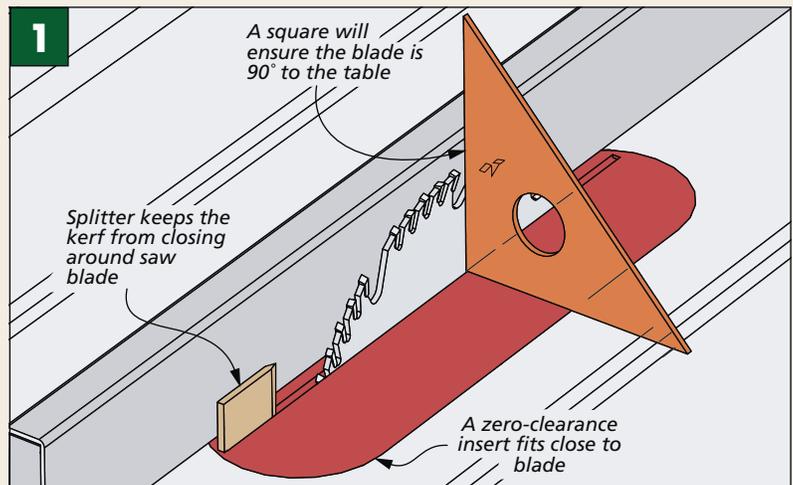
SAW SETUP

Before I even turn on the table saw to rip thin strips, I give it a quick check-up. This way, I know I'm getting consistent cuts. For more tips on tuning up your table saw, see our table saw tuneup guide at PlansNOW.com.

BLADE AND INSERT. The first step I take is to make sure I have a sharp combination or rip blade installed so that once the strips are cut I won't have to do a lot of sanding

(left photo). Then I install a zero-clearance insert. This insert prevents the strip from getting wedged in the throat opening and kicking back when it's cut free. You'll also want to add a splitter so that the strip doesn't pinch the back of the blade during the cut and kick back (Figure 1).

90° TO THE TABLE. There are just a couple more adjustments you'll want to check before you start ripping thin strips. Once the blade and insert are



installed, I check that the blade is 90° to the table. This ensures uniform thickness at the top and bottom edges of the strips. Finally, I adjust the rip fence so that it's parallel to the blade.

THREE OPTIONS

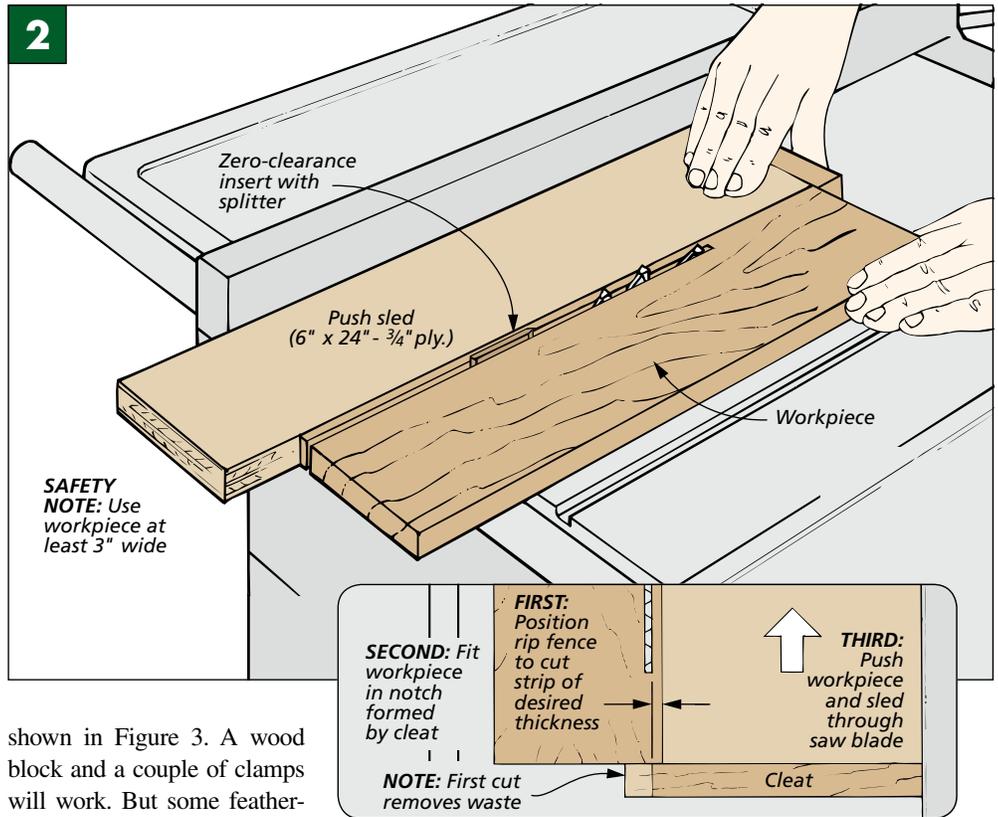
Now that you have your saw in top order, you can turn out perfect thin strips. And there are three ways to get the job done.

RIPPING SHORT STRIPS. One of the best ways to safely rip strips that are less than 30" long is to use a simple push sled that rides against the rip fence (Figure 2). It's just a piece of plywood with a hardwood cleat attached so it overhangs the edge. The workpiece fits into the notch formed by the cleat. Once you have the rip fence positioned to the width of the sled plus the thickness of the thin strip, just slide the sled and the workpiece through the saw blade.

LONG THIN STRIPS

The sled works great for shorter boards. But if you have longer strips to cut, like the ones for the box handle on page 16, you'll need a different setup. That's when I turn to a saddle push block that rides over the fence, or a stop block clamped to the waste side of the blade.

STOP BLOCK. If you prefer to have the strips come off the waste side of the blade, you can use a stop block as



shown in Figure 3. A wood block and a couple of clamps will work. But some featherboards can be turned around and mounted in the miter slot as well.

I clamp the block just in front of the blade at a distance that matches the thickness of the strip. You'll have to move your fence for each cut. Just move it until the workpiece butts against the stop block without binding the fence.

PUSH BLOCK. If you don't want to move the fence each time you make a cut, then the saddle push block is a

better option (Figure 4).

This is just a block the same width as your rip fence with a piece of 1/4" hardboard attached to each edge. One side of the block has a notch cut in it. The block straddles the fence as you push the workpiece through the saw blade.

So the next time a project calls for thin strips, turn to one of these methods. You'll get consistent strips ready for glueup. **W**

