

2019-12 Bevel Cut

Build vs. Buy? Where do you come down on gizmos?

I get catalogs from at least eight companies selling tools and accessories aimed at the woodworking community. I assume that I am not atypical for an EMGW member. I also get at least 20 emails a day trying to sell me something of value for my workshop, often at a “special” price, or to alert me to a “new” product that isn’t new at all. I would guess that 20 per day is at the high end for a guild member, probably a result of my doing too much shopping (or browsing) online, a byproduct of being retired.

What gets me, however, is how many shop accessories are not just expensive, but also unnecessary to purchase, but rather easily “built” by the woke wood worker. The top of my list of such items is the invaluable, critical, totally necessary for anyone with a table saw, including a sawstop saw, PUSH STICK. Yes, indeed, selling for up to \$50, a plastic push stick with a neat pad and fancy embossed handle to prevent slipping and to keep your fingers away from the spinning blade can be yours for just a small sum (plus shipping). I myself use a 12” 2x3 jewel-encrusted scrap with a screwed-on lip for most of my cutting and when the fence needs to be too close to the work piece for this, I use a thinner stock of scrap. This is perhaps an extreme example of a “build vs. buy” decision since the “build” option takes about 2 minutes to complete and costs nothing. Of course, you could spend a lot more time and make a fancy push stick with a neat handle to impress your woodworking friends or to practice your bandsaw skills. (I am assuming your non-woodworking friends don’t often visit your workshop).

Here are some other examples of shop & tool accessories for shop fools or lazy boys. Most of these have been the subject of numerous articles on how to “build your own.” There’s even a book with plans for 25 jigs you can build yourself (\$25 for the book), should you run out of jig and accessory ideas.

Bench cookie	Rockler has made bench cookies the foundation for an extensive product line – practically a whole industry. I have no idea who buys these or why.
Box joint jig	Very easy to DIY. But some of the buy options are very elegant and accurate if you’re making joints of different sizes.
Cross cut sled	Multiple articles show different versions of cross-cut sleds with various degrees of flexibility. I built my own but don’t use it as often as I thought I would.
Drawer organizer	If you can make cross lap joints you can make organizers to your heart’s content and fit them to any drawer in your shop. Use scrap plywood or scrap ebony or anything in between.
Push stick	See my comments above. However, I confess that a few years ago I fell victim to a Microjig GRR-Ripper special offer. The gripper is incredibly flexible and indispensable in a tiny number of table saw operations. I like it, but I find I don’t use it very often. An early lesson. I now make it a habit to wait 24-48 hours after reading some tool or accessory come-on before ordering anything. In other words, as I do for stocks and bonds, I lie down till the urge to purchase passes.
Router circle jig	How often will you need to use this, and will a purchased jig accommodate the size diameter you need? Lots of DIY articles on line.
Silicon project mat	I use wax paper. It’s disposable. It works great. Stop and Shop, however, is not listed on any woodworking source I know of.
Table saw blade savers	I hang circular saw blades on a peg when not in use.
Taper jig	I built my own a while back from some magazine plan. It works, but turned out to be harder to adjust than I liked. I very recently gave in to a “buy” option after watching an online video and replaced my DIY with a Micro Jig Microdial tapering jig. The video snagged me with a demo of the product’s flexibility and accuracy. I like it, to

be honest. Have table legs, will taper!

As I look around my shop and all the items stuffed into drawers, I find many examples of things I have purchased but used infrequently. I suspect I am not alone in this category. Well, as others have said, "A fool and his money are soon parted (Thomas Tusser, 1573). In theory, the "buy" option saves time, assuming the assembly and set-up are not onerous, while the "build" option saves money, assuming material costs are free (scrap) or at least not significant. But sometimes, what you get for free costs too much!

So, here's a riddle. Two woodworkers go into a store that has advertised a push stick marked down from \$20 to \$9, a one-day special sale. One woodworker buys the stick and tells his partner that he just saved \$11. The second woodworker decides not to buy, but to use scrap to build his own. He tells his shop assistant that he saved \$9. Who's saved more?

Comments welcome.