



Burning For It

The world's easiest table doubles as a workbench, a laundry counter, a project table and, in a pinch, a spare bunk bed.

If you're like me, you need more surface area. And I'm not talking about gaining a few pounds.

What you need is your very own utility table. It's cheap to build (roughly \$50), and it's a great beginner's project. The table measures 52" x 25", with 34" legs. I actually built three of these babies, because they're so darn useful.

You can fancy up your table with paint, stenciling or wood-burning, but it's noble just as it is, naked.

Materials:

- Cedar (see cut list below)

Approximately 30 each of:

- 2 - 1/2" zinc woodscrews
- Trim washers
- 1-1/2" zinc woodscrews

Tools

- Saw
- Clamps
- Measuring tape
- Square
- Drill

Cut List:

- Skirt: 1" x 6" cedar decking - two 46" boards, two 23" boards
- Blocking: 2" x 4" cedar - one 23" board
- Tabletop: 1" x 6" cedar - five 52" boards
- Legs: 2" x 4" cedar - four 34" boards
- Optional shelf: 1" x 6" cedar - three 46" boards
- Shelf supports: 2" x 4" cedar - two 23" boards

Steps:



Check the end of the board for squareness and splits



Cut off any bad ends and then cut the boards to length



A Japanese pull saw is the easiest to cut with

Start by building the 'skirt', the rectangle on which the table surface will eventually sit.



Clamp the apron or skirt frame together



Pre drill for screws at the corners



Choose screws that are long enough to have at least half their length in each pieces

Clamp the boards in place (short boards on the inside!) At the corners, pre-drill for the screws so that the boards don't split. Fasten the corners together using zinc screws paired with trim washers, which bite into the wood and add a huge amount of structural strength to the corners.



Use a trim washer to add strength and stability, plus they look attractive



Use at least two screws to attach each corner together



Pre-drill with a counter sink bit and attach the top boards



Use a center brace to help support the table top

Attach the decking to the frame, pre-drilling for the screws so the boards don't split. 'Countersink' the screws so their heads don't stick up and catch on things. If you don't have a fancy countersink bit, simply use a large drill bit to make a shallow dimple for the wedge-shaped head of a woodscrew.

Install the 2" x 4" blocking (short side up, for strength) in the middle of the rectangle. This board will support the surface decking so it doesn't bounce later.



Put the 2x4 legs in place and attach with staggered screws



Use both a square and a clamp to hold the leg while installing the screws

Attach the legs to the inside corners of the skirt, using zinc screws and trim washers. Work with the project upside down, so the skirt is down and the legs stick up in the air.

To make sure the legs are firmly attached, drive two screws into the wide side of each leg, and one screw into the narrow edge. Stagger the two screws on the wide side to prevent splitting the legs. Use clamps and a square to keep the legs in place while driving the screws. Once the legs are in place, eyeball them to make sure they're plumb. If they're all leaning in different directions, you can adjust them by releasing the tension on the screws and then re-tightening them selectively until each leg is vertical.



Install a horizontal support on the legs to hold a lower shelf



Attach the support with two staggered screws at each leg



Cut and attach three boards to the supports

Now your table is done, unless you want to go for the optional shelf, which is a great addition particularly if your table legs are wonky or the unit doesn't feel stable enough.

To make the shelf, attach two horizontal 2" x 4" shelf supports to the legs about 3" up from the bottom, and then screw cedar boards to the supports, spacing them evenly.



Decorate your table with woodburning



If you can, get a high quality wood burning unit - it's worth it



Different wood burning tips add variety

That's it. Your wonder table will go through thick and thin with you, a sturdy companion, a tranquil offering of surface area in the midst of life's turbulence.