



Bandsaw Puzzle Cubes

How's that scrap pile in the corner of the shop coming along? Getting any smaller? Here's one way to put some of your cherished chunks of thick stock to good use, producing casual gifts of irresistible appeal to young and old alike. Kids under ten can reassemble these puzzles in 30 seconds, grown-ups in only three or four minutes if they're sharp.

Make sure your bandsaw blade is square to the table, both left & right and fore & aft. The larger the puzzle cube, the less error you can get away with. Kerf width forgives some inaccuracy, but not much.

Start off by milling up a cube -- any size will do, but bigger is better: 3" x 3" or 4" x 4" makes a good puzzle blank. Put a 1/8" or 1/16" blade on your bandsaw, and don't think about any claims you might have seen that you can't cut thick stock with a very narrow blade. Cool Blocks lateral guides are essential for 1/16"s and mighty useful for 1/8" blades, too.

Orient the cube so you'll start cutting across the grain, and cut a randomly invented jigsaw puzzle pattern across the block. Make a fairly simple pattern. Push gently, using just your fingertips.

Let the saw take its time working through the stock, so the blade stays vertical and your curves are consistent throughout. You'll notice that sawing with the grain is much slower than across it; be ready for significant changes in speed and back pressure as you turn the block.

After completing the cut, slide the two pieces apart, blow out the dust and reassemble. Wrap the block with masking tape or duct tape to hold it together firmly. Now turn the block so you're sawing into an uncut face, and repeat the process of cutting a jigsaw pattern. Remember not to push too hard, especially if you're using a 1/16" blade! When you finish the cut, remove the tape and disassemble the puzzle. A few odd bits of wood may fall loose if your two patterns intersected to cut them free; no matter. Blow all the dust off and try putting your cube back together. Got it?

Optional enhancements include sanding all the corners round, and staining or painting each piece a different color. Come to think of it, you could saw wavy curves into every face of the cube, but that would be simply too diabolical, wouldn't it?