

Ripping Thin Strips

It's easy to rip a thin strip of wood — at least in theory. Just set the rip fence, turn on the saw, and push the workpiece through the blade.

But in practice, it's not always that easy to end up with a strip that's *exactly* the same thickness from one end to the other.

This is especially important when you're cutting a number of strips for a bent lamination project (like the serving tray and fishing net in this issue). That's because any variation in the

thickness will create a gap when the strips are glued together.

To rip thin strips that are uniform in thickness, I start by giving my table saw a quick checkup, see box below. Then, depending on the length of the strips, I use two different methods to rip them to the correct thickness.

SHORT STRIPS. One of the best ways I've found to safely rip short strips (less than 30") is to use a simple *push sled* that slides against the rip fence, see Fig. 1. It's just a piece of plywood with a


scrap of wood glued on so it overhangs the edge, see Fig. 1a.

The idea is to fit the workpiece into the notch formed by the scrap. After positioning the rip fence to cut a strip of the desired thickness, slide the sled and the workpiece through the saw blade.

Once you set the rip fence, the important thing is not to move it again. Just repeat the process for the rest of the strips, and each one will be identical in thickness.

LONG STRIPS. Although this sled works great for short strips, it's a bit awkward when ripping a long board.

So I use a push block that straddles the fence, see Fig. 2. It's just a wood block with two hardboard sides glued on, see Fig. 2a.

The side directly over the workpiece applies downward pressure as you make a cut. And a notch hooks over the end of the piece to push it safely through the saw blade. 

▲ Ripping thin strips of wood is easy. The trick is to ensure that each one is the exact same thickness.

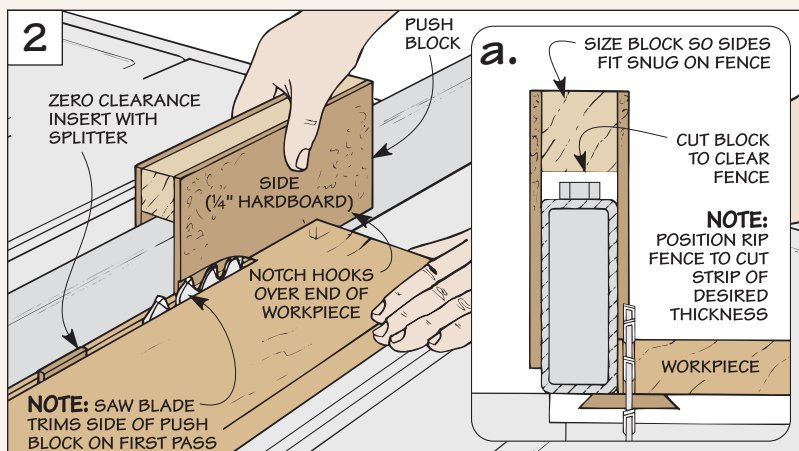
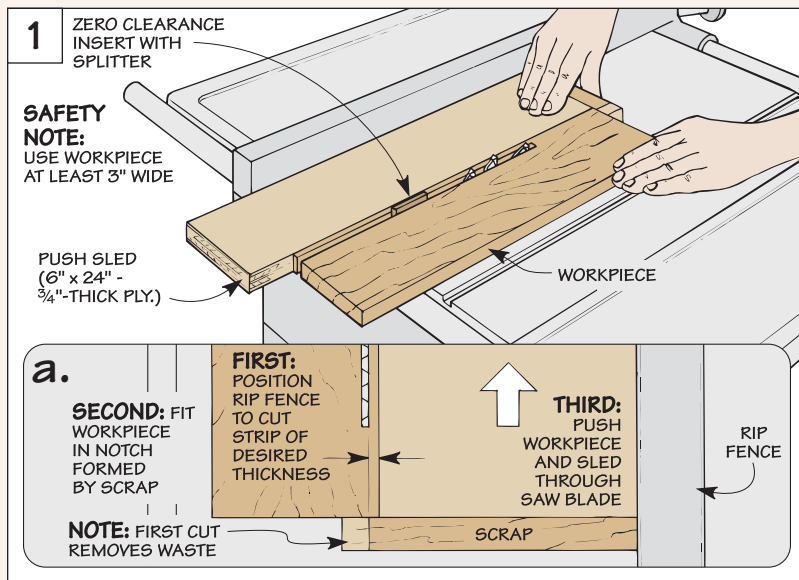


Table Saw Checklist

- Saw Blade.** Use a sharp, combination blade to produce a smooth surface that won't require any additional sanding.
- Table Saw Insert.** Install a "zero-clearance" insert in saw table to prevent strips from wedging in blade opening, refer to page 12.
- Square Blade.** Check that the blade is 90° to the table to ensure uniform thickness at the top and bottom edges of strips.
- Rip Fence.** Adjust fence parallel to blade to rip strips that are the same thickness from one end to the other.