

crosscutting Wide Panels

Cutting wide panels doesn't need to be a chore. These simple techniques guarantee great results.

■ After gluing up a wide panel for a tabletop, the task of cutting it to finished size with a square edge presents a couple of challenges. For one, you typically can't use your miter gauge. That's because the miter bar is often too short to securely engage the miter slot before the blade starts cutting. Another problem is the face of the miter gauge doesn't provide enough of a bearing surface to keep the panel square to the blade.

The key to getting a clean, square cut on the end of a wide panel is having a straight and

secure method of guiding the panel through the cut. Here are some simple ways you can make those cuts with confidence and without a lot of fuss.

STRAIGHTEDGE GUIDE

To get around the challenges of cutting wide panels, you can use the edge of your saw table along with a straightedge.

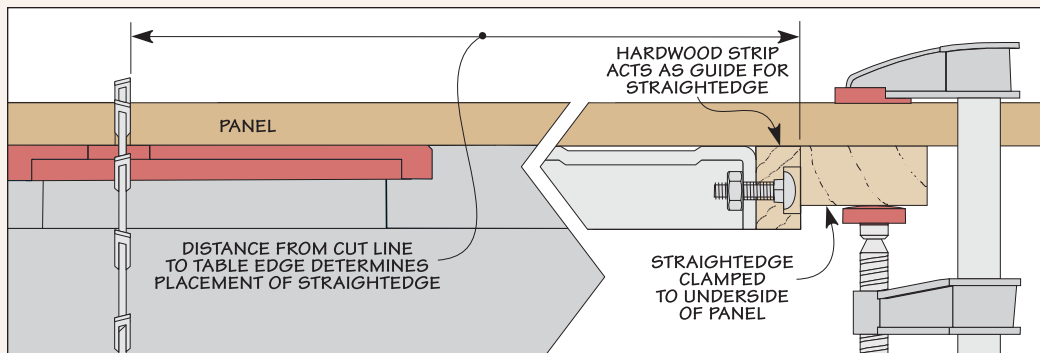
Reference Edge. If you look at the photo above, you'll notice a hardwood guide I fastened to the extension wing of my saw table. I did this for a couple of reasons.

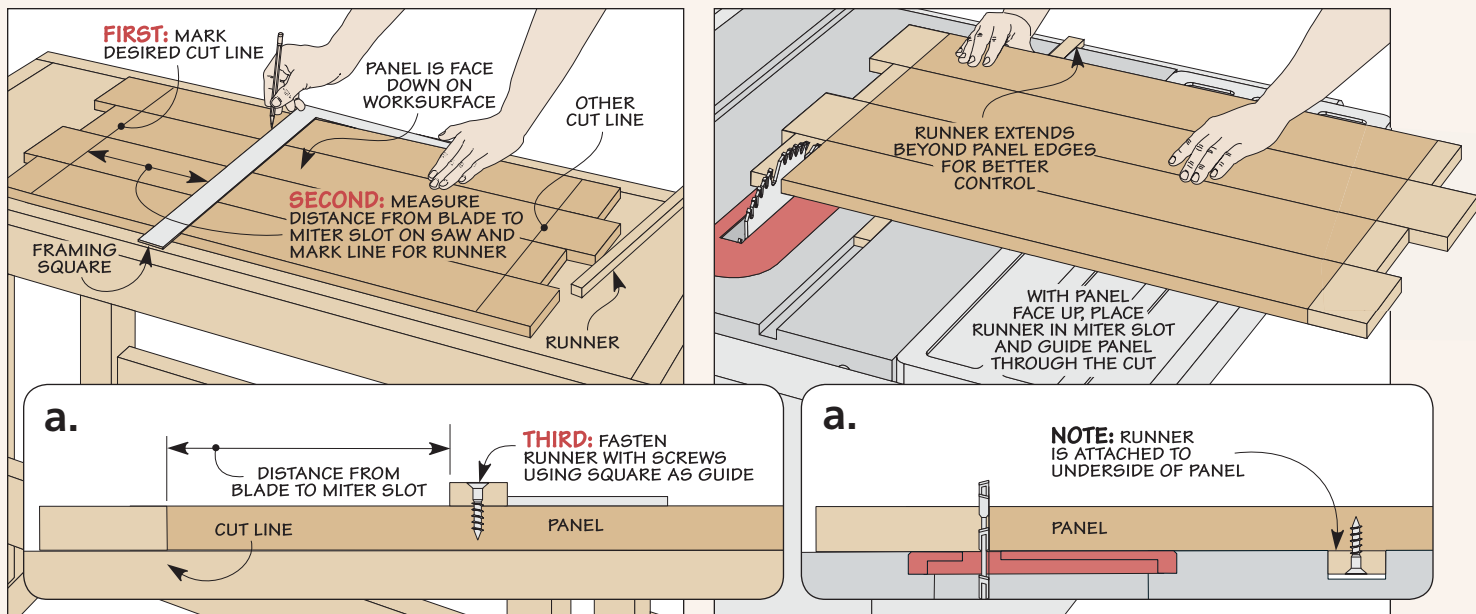
First, the hardwood strip provides a straight, smooth surface for the straightedge to ride against during the cut. Some extension wings won't have a smooth, straight edge on the outside edge.

Another reason for this guide is to make sure I have a reference edge that's parallel to my saw blade. (You may need to use shims.) This way, the cut will be straight and square.

Commercial Straightedge. In the photo above you can see how a self-clamping straightedge helps guide the wide panel across the saw. Just clamp the guide to the underside of the panel, making sure it's square with the edge of the panel. The straightedge is positioned to align the cut properly and runs along the hardwood edge of your saw table (main photo).

A Simple Board. If you don't have a straightedge like this, you can accomplish the same thing with a straight piece of hardwood and clamps (see drawing at left).





With this method, you can make the straightedge extra long to keep the panel square before, during, and after the cut.

Setup. With all that said, you need to know where to clamp your straightedge so the cut ends up where you want it. The drawing on the opposite page shows how to locate the straightedge.

Control. When it comes time to make the cut, it's important to keep the straightedge tight against the saw table as you slide the panel. (For extra help supporting longer panels, see the box below.)

RUNNER

There's another technique you can use. And that's to fasten a runner

with screws to the underside of your panel to act as a guide. (You'll want to locate the screws away from the finished edge of the panel so they won't be seen.) The runner rides in the table saw's miter slot and "locks" the panel square to the blade, as shown above.

To make the runner, use a long strip of straight-grained hardwood. What's important here is that the bar slides smoothly in the miter slot, but without any side-to-side movement or play.

And you'll want to be sure the runner is long enough to extend past the front and back edges of the panel. This way, it will engage the miter slot and keep the panel straight through the entire cut.

Positioning the Runner. The drawings above show you how to position the runner on the bottom of your panel. It's a similar process to how you locate a straightedge, except that here, you need to know the distance between the saw blade and the miter slot.

Preference. So when would you use a runner over a straightedge? I find that a straightedge works best with very wide panels. But for most panels and table tops, I like to use runners. Whatever method you use, the results are worth the effort. 🛠️

Helping Hand: Supporting the Panel

A long panel can be difficult to control while making a cut on the table saw. But adding some support to the "loose" end can make all the difference in the world in getting good results.

The important thing to remember is that the end of the panel should be supported all the way through the cut. That usually

means rigging up some sort of long support mechanism to the left of your table saw, like you see in the drawing. Something as simple as a piece of MDF or plywood clamped vertically to a saw horse will do the job nicely.

With proper support, you'll see the results in a panel that's easier to control for a cleaner cut.

