

Table Saw Makeover





improve performance with a **Table Saw Makeover**

A smooth, clean surface on your table saw is more than just cosmetic, it's a key factor in better cuts.

The table saw in my shop gets a pretty good workout. But honestly, there are some days I use my table saw without ever turning it on. In a small shop like mine, the extra workspace provided by the table is a big plus.

Depending on the task at hand, my saw table is often pressed into service as an assembly area, a sanding center, or even a finishing station. Unfortunately, this “moonlighting” has its consequences. The photo below reveals smeared glue and finish, scratches, and even some rust.

These are more than simply cosmetic blemishes. Rough spots on the table transfer “mystery” marks to the surface of a workpiece. And general grime prevents a board or jig from sliding smoothly. Besides making it harder to push, the added friction can lead to catches, noticeable blade marks, and inaccurate cuts. The cure is a little TLC. Here's an easy-to-follow process that I use to get my saw table looking as good as new — or even better.

File & Scrape. In this process, you'll work from coarse to fine, removing the largest blemishes first. So the first thing to do is go over the hard edges of the saw table with your fingers to find dings and burrs that could mar a workpiece. Be sure to include the blade opening and the miter

Hard Knocks. Everyday wear and tear can leave stains, rust, and nicks that may cause poor cuts and distress your work.





▲ **Scrape, First.** A carbide scraper easily removes dried glue and finish from the cast iron top.



▲ **Scrub the Rust.** Rubber blocks with built-in abrasives scour away rust stains and grime.



▲ **Sand It Smooth.** Lubricate silicon carbide sandpaper with WD-40 to smooth out scratches.

gauge slots, as well. You can soften the sharp edges with a few swipes of a file.

From there, turn your attention to the surface. The goal is to scrape away any spots of glue or finish. You can see a simple way of handling this in the upper left photo.

Eliminate Rust. If your shop is in an unheated garage or damp basement, you know it doesn't take much for rust to get a foothold. To scrub out rust spots, I like to use "rust erasers" impregnated with silicon-carbide abrasive grit, as you can see in the middle photo above. The blocks break down as you work exposing fresh abrasive. (For sources, turn to page 3.)

General Cleaning. With the big stuff taken care of, it's time to give the top a good cleaning. Use a degreasing cleaner to go over the entire surface. To break up any packed in grime in the nooks and crannies, use a brass brush or old toothbrush. A few blasts from a compressor (or canned air) helps knock the gunk out of the miter gauge slots.

Polish the Surface. By now, your saw table should be pretty clean. But it may not look that great. The next step is to smooth out and polish the table. This two-step task makes the surface look more uniform and it helps

a workpiece to slide across the table smoothly, too.

The first step is to sand the top with a sanding block and some 220-grit wet-or-dry sandpaper. After lubricating the sandpaper with WD-40, go over the whole surface working front to back to remove deeper scratches, as in the upper right photo. You can wipe away the slurry with a rag to check your progress. Cast iron is tough on sandpaper, so change to a fresh piece often.

The second step polishes out the scratches left by the sandpaper to create a uniform, dull sheen. For this, I attach a fine abrasive pad to my finish sander and go over the surface again, as in the far left photo. Here again, it pays to replace the pad often.

When you're satisfied with the top's appearance, wipe it down with lacquer thinner. This will pick up stray metal particles and any traces of the WD-40.

Protect It. Finally, to preserve your hard work and keep the top looking and working well longer, it's a good idea to add a protective coating. A spray-on sealant (near left photo) is a good choice. It also reduces friction and prevents glue or finish from sticking.

I think you'll be amazed at how the top of the saw table looks and feels. But more importantly, this small investment some simple maintenance will help your saw work better, too.



▲ **Polish.** An abrasive pad and power sander quickly make the surface smooth.



▲ **Protect.** A spray-on coating prevents rust, repels glue and finish, and makes the top slick.

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