

One-Hour Garden Bench

Make it with the simplest tools,
and get years of service

BY ROB WOTZAK

Every backyard could use a few more places to sit. Perhaps you have an out-of-the-way nook that could benefit from a simple perch for visitors, or maybe your neighborhood barbecues have outgrown your patio set. In either case, a simple homemade bench is a fitting solution.

This classic 4-ft.-long bench is inexpensive and easy to construct with a few basic tools. It costs less than \$30 in materials and will take about an hour to build. And I think that once you see the result, you'll want to make half a dozen more.

Rob Wotzak is a carpenter in New Milford, Conn.

What you'll need

TOOLS

- Tape measure
- Pencil
- Handsaw
- Circular saw (optional)
- Speed Square
- Electric drill
with screwdriver bit

MATERIALS

- Two 4-ft.-long 1x6s
- Two 16-in.-long 2x12s
- Two 11½-in.-long 2x2s
- Two 4-ft.-long 2x8s
- Twelve 2½-in.-long stainless-steel decking screws
- Eight 1¾-in.-long stainless-steel decking screws





Assembling the bench

This project is simple enough that it makes sense to cut all of your boards first and then move on to assembly. You could make the cuts with a handsaw, but a circular saw is faster. If you have a jigsaw or bandsaw, all the better. After you cut the boards to length, follow these steps to complete the bench:



1. MAKE THE SPECIAL CUTS

For the tapered ends of the face boards, use a Speed Square to mark off 45° triangles on each end of the 1x6s. To make the cutouts in the legs, mark a triangle in the center of the bottom edge of each 2x12. Using the Speed Square as a guide, cut out the triangles (left); if you're using a circular saw, you'll need to finish cutting the leg notches with a handsaw.



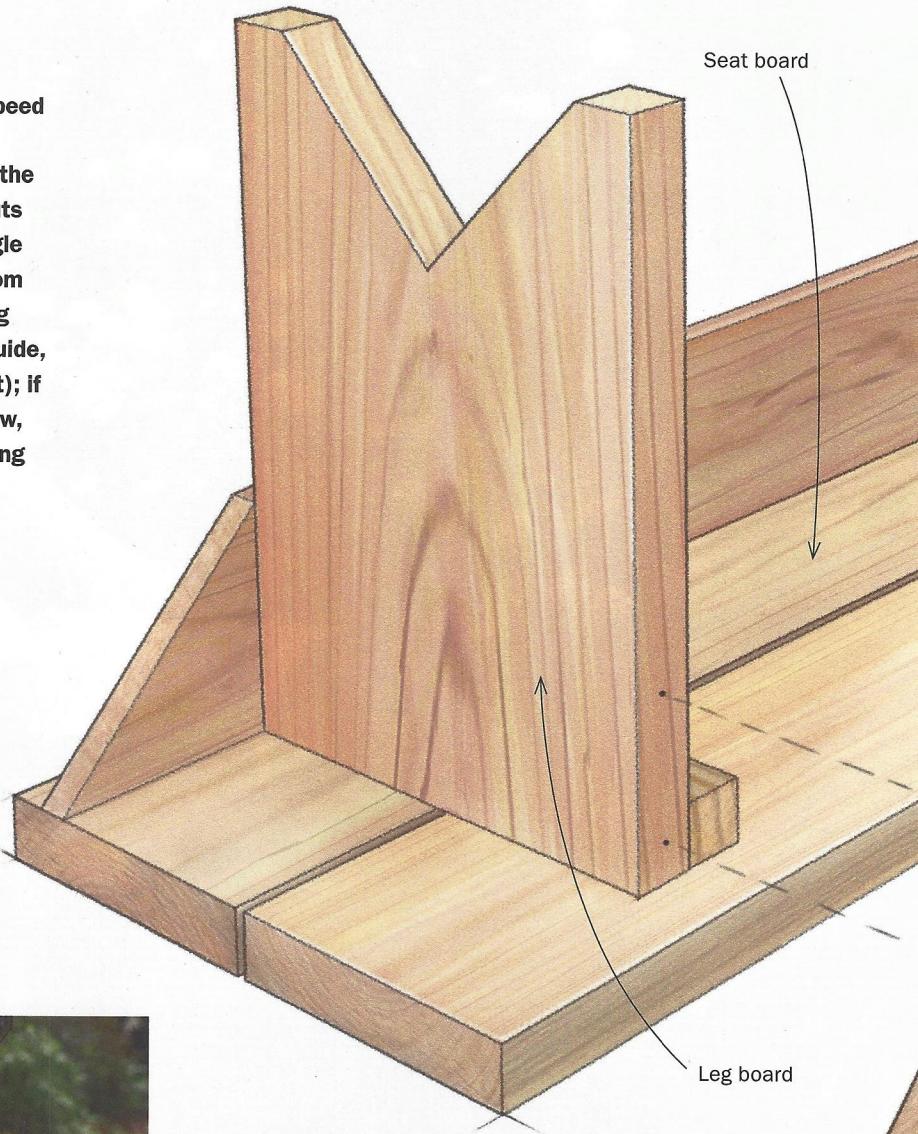
2. ATTACH THE FASTENING BARS

On one side of each leg, position a fastening bar flush with the top of the board, and attach it with two 2½-in.-long screws, approximately 1½ in. from each end.



3. SPACE THE LEGS, AND ATTACH THE FACE BOARDS

Rest both leg boards on their sides on a flat work surface, with the fastening bars facing each other. Place a face board on the side of the legs, and adjust the leg spacing so that the shorter edge of the face board is flush with the outside of each leg. Attach the face board to the legs with 1¾-in.-long screws. Flip the legs over, and attach the second face board in the same fashion.

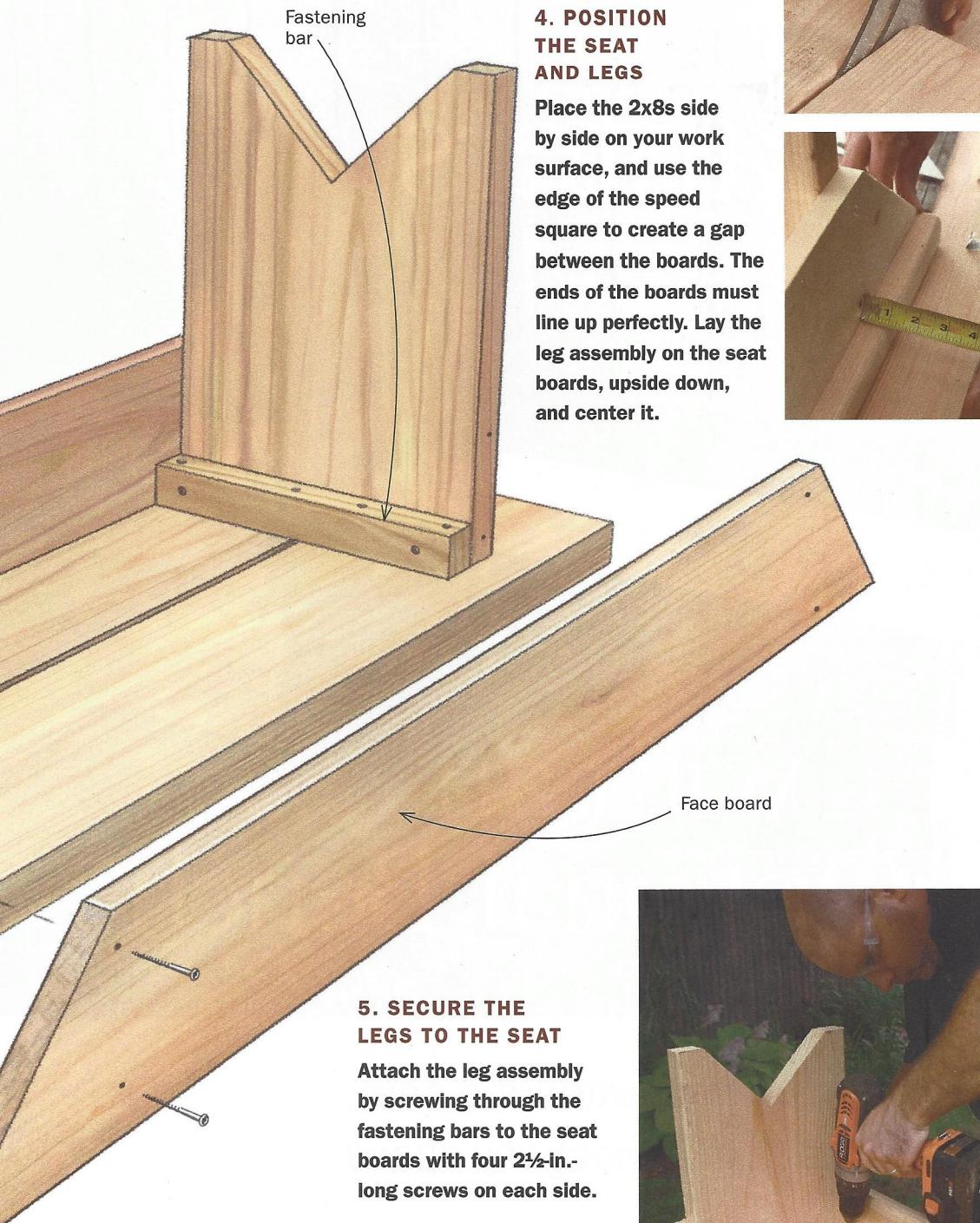


TIP

MAKE IT LAST

You should get years of use out of this bench without much fuss. But like all wooden outdoor furniture, it won't last forever; the wood will eventually deteriorate. Wood's worst enemy is moisture, and the bench is most vulnerable where the legs come in contact with the moist ground. To make the bench last longer, simply place small pavers under the legs.



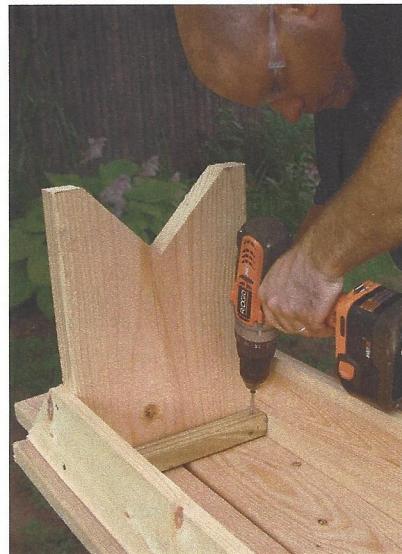


4. POSITION THE SEAT AND LEGS

Place the 2x8s side by side on your work surface, and use the edge of the speed square to create a gap between the boards. The ends of the boards must line up perfectly. Lay the leg assembly on the seat boards, upside down, and center it.

5. SECURE THE LEGS TO THE SEAT

Attach the leg assembly by screwing through the fastening bars to the seat boards with four 2½-in.-long screws on each side.



6. DRESS IT UP

I chose a semitransparent, weatherproofing, Bordeaux-colored stain to create a pop of color in my garden. Use any color you like, or let the bench weather naturally.

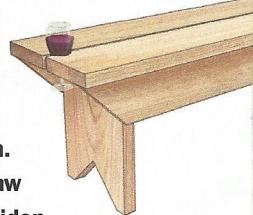


Ways to embellish your bench

You can personalize this bench in any number of ways. Here are some ideas:

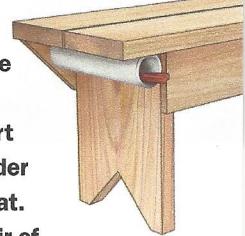
PROVIDE A PLACE TO REST YOUR BEVERAGE

Using a hole saw, drill a large hole about 2 in. from each end of the bench. Use a circular saw or handsaw to widen the space between the boards at the end of the bench to meet the hole. I find this little feature handy when I relinquish my wine glass for my turn at bocce.



ATTACH A HIDDEN NOOK FOR TOOLS

Forgo one tapered end of the rear face board, and attach a short length of pipe under the end of the seat. Stow an extra pair of gardening gloves and an inexpensive set of pruners here for an occasional bit of spontaneous pruning.



ADD A BIT OF WHIMSY

Use a variety of hole saws to create a pattern of circles in the center of the face boards. This detail will give your bench a quick jolt of style.

