



## Cutting Board: How To's #1: Zig Zag Cutting Board - How To:

Blog entry by [McLeanVA](#)

posted 10-04-2010 11:38 PM

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Part 1 of [Cutting Board: How To's](#) series

Part 2: [Zig Zag Cutting Board Patterns - Inspirational](#) »

For those of you who asked me for a tutorial on how to make the zig zag legless vegetable death table (cutting board), here is my best shot. I am far too impatient to take photos when I work, so I decided to illustrate the process using some good old Adobe PhotoShop. I hope you find this useful and informative.

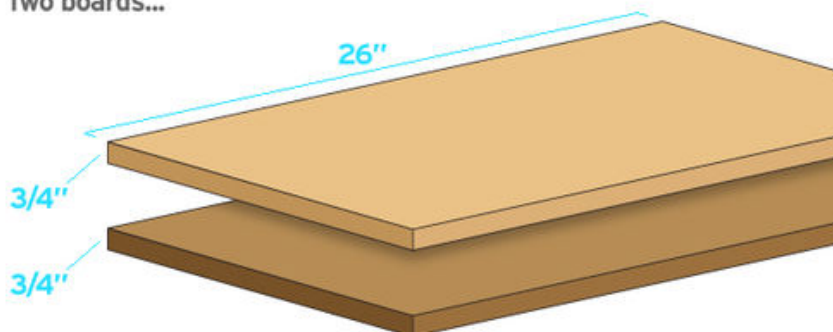
I will outline the process in 10 steps below. I have assumed that when viewing these steps that basic woodworking skills are familiar to you. If you have questions, or run into snags, PM me and I'll do my best to help out.

If you want to see what these boards look like, take a look at my projects. There are a few in there.

Keep in mind that because these are endgrain boards, you should ideally chose the original boards with interesting endgrain. Makes sense right?

### Step 1:

Two boards...



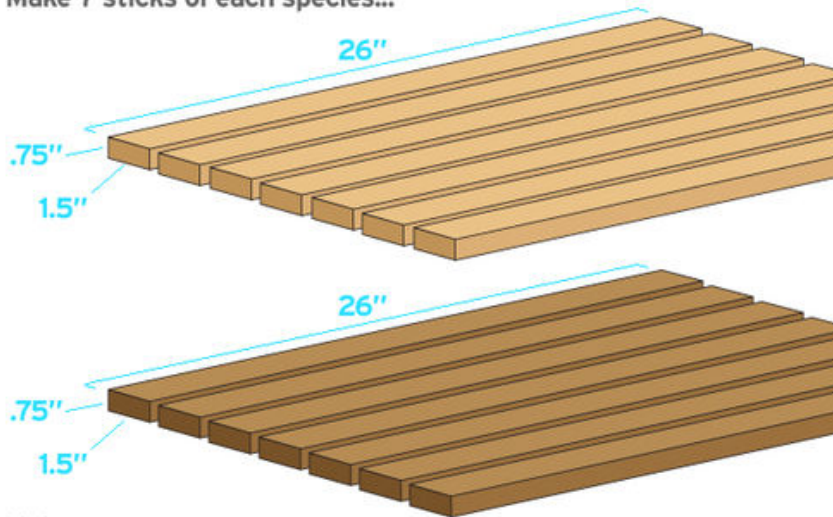
#### Notes:

- You can use any thickness boards you want (3/4" is used for illustration only).
- 26" is probably a bit long, but I play it safe and save my leftovers.

I typically measure all of my initial boards and add a few inches. I'd rather end up with scrap pieces, then a scrapped piece. I went big on the 26" length, but after you do a few of these you can create your own ideal measurements. I also try to start out with boards of thicknesses larger than 3/4", but it was easier math for the illustration to use 3/4" thickness.

## Step 2:

Make 7 sticks of each species...



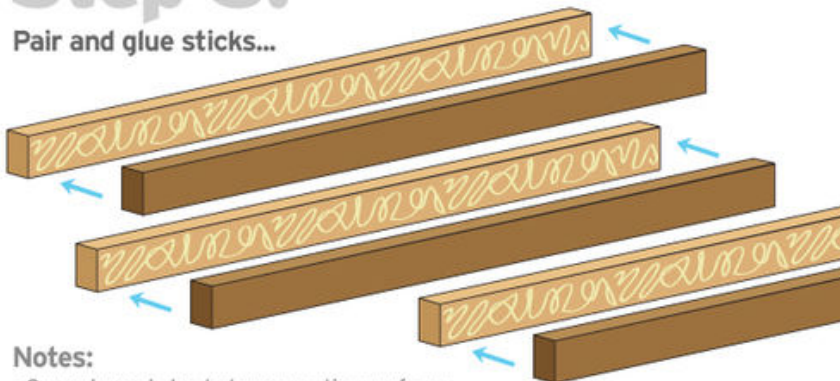
### Notes:

- Cut each stick slightly wider than double the thickness.
- This extra width on the boards will be planed off in Step 5.

You can make boards of all sizes. I'm limited to a 12" thickness planer, so that's why I am illustrating 7 sticks of each species. Again, experiment with different sizes, so long as the individual sticks are twice as wide as they are thick.

## Step 3:

Pair and glue sticks...



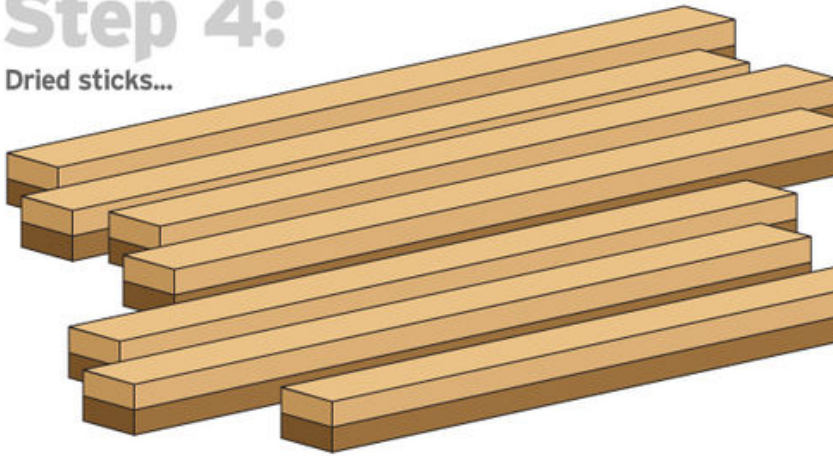
### Notes:

- Spread wood glue between mating surfaces.
- Make sure you get a nice even coat of glue between sticks.
- You are only gluing 2 sticks together here.
- You can batch-clamp these to dry.

I can't stress enough the importance of only mating two sticks at a time. No three sticks should be mated with glue. Use your preferred clamping methods, but make sure these are nice and tight. You don't want any gaps for bacteria to hide in.

## Step 4:

Dried sticks...



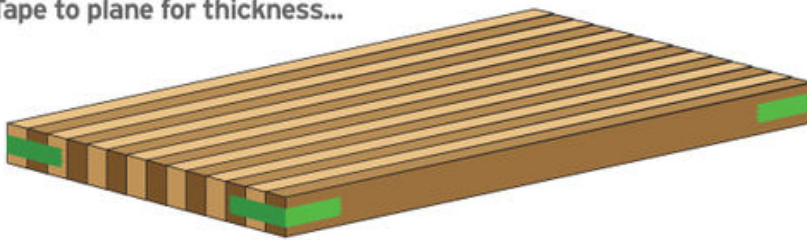
### Notes:

- You should now be left with 7 sticks neatly paired.
- These will likely have glue squeeze out. Don't fret.
- You will now thickness plane them to remove glue and square them up.

After these sticks dry, pull them out of the clamps. They are ready to be planed down a bit to make sure they are all even and dimensional. I tape them all (squeeze-out side up) together and run them through the planer.

## Step 5:

Tape to plane for thickness...



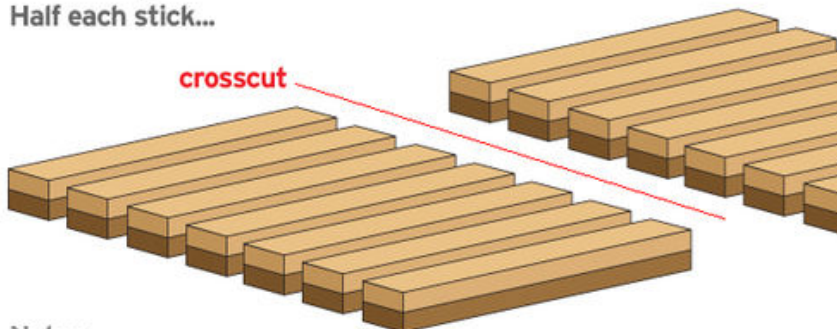
### Notes:

- Stack the mated sticks together and wrap edges with tape.
- Run them through the thickness planer until their height matches their width.

After these are planed, it's important to pull them apart and make sure they are dimensional (as wide as they are tall). If they differ, run them through the planer individually until they are square.

## Step 6:

Half each stick...



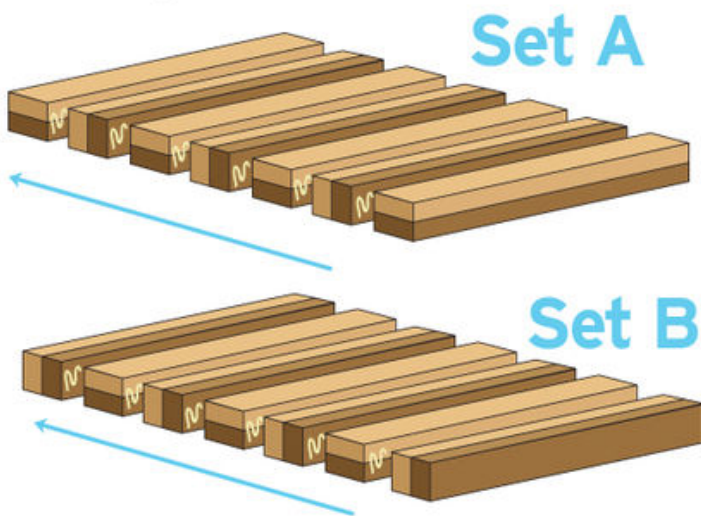
### Notes:

- Cut each mated stick in half.
- After you cut a stick, keep the order of the pieces and separate into 2 sets.

In order to get the zig zag pattern, you have to cut the original sticks in half so that you can make two sets of patterns. This is the tricky part that I was never able to show folks without illustrations. We'll call them Set A and Set B for this demo.

## Step 7:

Rotate and glue x 2



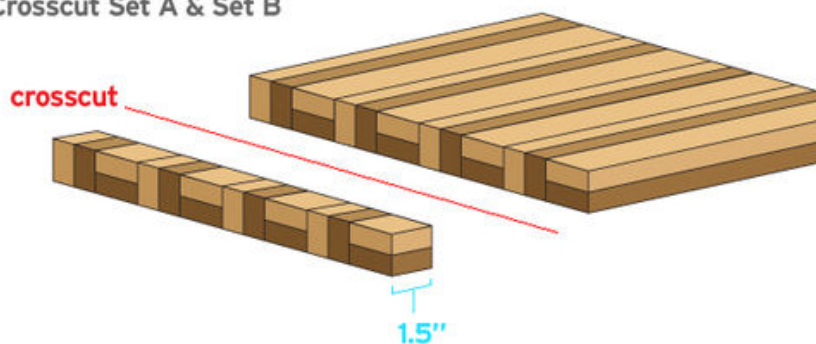
### Notes:

- Rotate every other board 90° in Set A and glue/clamp.
- Rotate every board 90° and then AGAIN rotate every other board in Set B.
- See illustration above. Note that Set A is different from Set B.
- Dark wood on right and dark wood on bottom in all cases.

Now, the reason I went with 26" as the original length is so that this next step allows you to be creative. You can make a very long (two maybe) board that is thin, or make a very heavy-duty board. Thickness is up to you.

## Step 8:

Crosscut Set A & Set B



### Notes:

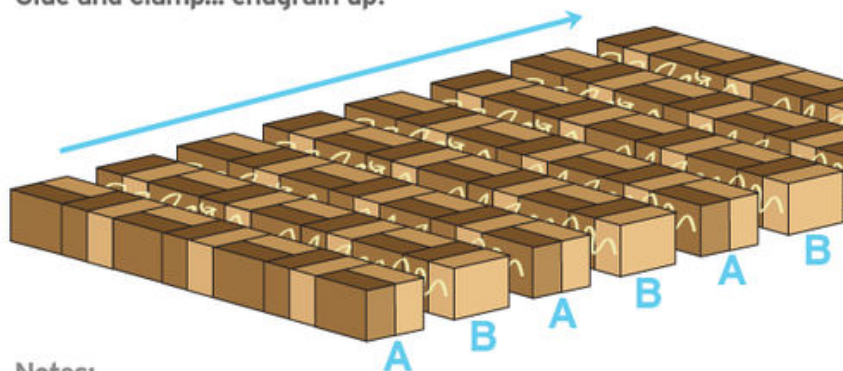
- Here is where your judgement comes into play.
- The 1.5" above will be the thickness of your final board.
- Experiment with different thicknesses. You have a total of 26" to play with.
- Cut the same thickness for each Set A and Set B.

Now you are ready for your final glue-up. Take your time and really see this board for what it will become. Look at the end grains and make sure they are uniform. I have flipped boards upside down and noticed this too late. And remember "ENDGRAINS UP!" Maybe I'll make a TShirt with that phrase on it one day.



## Step 9:

Glue and clamp... endgrain up!



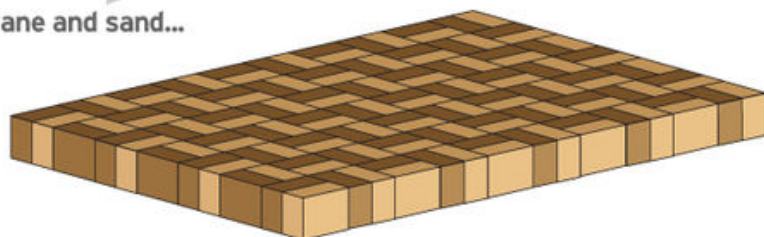
### Notes:

- Remember... ENDGRAIN UP!
- Alternate one strip from Set A and one set from Set B.
- Stare at your grain patterns to make sure you haven't placed a strip upside down.
- Apply glue between pieces.
- Before clamping, make sure your pieces line up when looking at the endgrain.
- Clamp to dry.

After the glue dries, you should be left with a not-square-yet board.

## Step 10:

Plane and sand...



### Notes:

- Run through the thickness planer to smooth out the top and bottom.
- Crosscut long edges to shave down uneven lines.
- Sand all surfaces to your preferred grit.
- Sand some more.
- These steps "should" leave you with a rectangular mass of wood.

### Options:

- You could try to recess handles on the bottom with a router and cove bit.
- You could round the vertical corners to any radius.
- You could ease the edges with a router or hand sander/block plane.
- Finish is up to you, just make sure it's food-safe.

Trim edges using any method you prefer. I run mine across my crosscut sled to make sure they are as true as possible.

I hope this tutorial was helpful and that you are inspired to try one of these boards out.

**UPDATE:** I have created an additional blog entry with some patterns to try out using the techniques listed above. Check out [Zig Zag Cutting Board Patterns - Inspirational](#)

-- Measure, cut, curse, repeat.

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**68 comments so far**



**degoose**

7276 posts in 4204 days

#1 posted 10-04-2010 11:44 PM

Very well detailed and explained... even I can follow this...

-- Don't drink and use power tools @ lasercreationsbylarry.com.au



**McLeanVA**

493 posts in 4283 days

#2 posted 10-04-2010 11:50 PM

Thanks Larry.

-- Measure, cut, curse, repeat.



**SASmith**

1850 posts in 3836 days

#3 posted 10-05-2010 12:32 AM

This looks to be one of the easiest to follow how to blogs I have seen. I will have to try this again. My first attempt at this pattern, <http://lumberjocks.com/projects/37671> (third pic) , did not turn out like this. I realised I had a problem after the 1st glue up and went another direction. I will have to give this another shot. Thanks. Scott

-- Scott Smith, Southern Illinois



**Woodwrecker**

4240 posts in 4425 days

#4 posted 10-05-2010 12:36 AM

Your Zig-Zag board is awesome, and if "Board Master Larry" thinks the blog is good, that is like having Sam Maloof like your rocker!

I'm putting this in my favorites for future use.

Thanks.



**mike5753**

23 posts in 3731 days

#5 posted 10-05-2010 12:40 AM

Thank you great detail

-- Mike, Illinois, <http://lumberjocks.com/mike5753>



**Porosky**

619 posts in 4214 days

#6 posted 10-05-2010 01:50 AM

A very clear how to and much needed. Here is how I messed up my attempt [pic #5](#) still not sure where I went wrong.... I'll get it right next time... Thanks

-- There's many a slip betwixt a cup and a lip.--Scott



**robert triplett**

1566 posts in 3954 days

#7 posted 10-05-2010 01:56 AM

Thanks. I printed this and will keep in handy in the shop. I have 9 different boards ready to cut for some cutting boards. This will be a design to try.

Robert

-- Robert, so much inspiration here, and now time to work!!!



**blackcherry**

3344 posts in 4672 days

#8 posted 10-05-2010 02:43 AM

Thanks for being a sharing LJ, bet we see some beauty soon. Nice blog well explained...BC



That was VERY WELL done! Thanks for taking the time and effort to lay that out for us. I know I'm keeping a copy in my file!

**FirehouseWoodworking**  
781 posts in 4123 days

#9 posted 10-05-2010 02:47 AM



**GaryD**  
623 posts in 4219 days

#10 posted 10-05-2010 03:02 AM

-- Dave; Lansing, Kansas

Pictures.....who needs stinkin pictures. Okay this is my shot at humor. This is very well done. Thanks for taking the time to put this together. I like others will be keeping it for the future. Thanks again.

-- Gary, Little River,SC I've Learned that the Lord didn't do it all in one day and neither can I



**CaptainSkully**  
1615 posts in 4408 days

#11 posted 10-05-2010 03:51 AM

Excellent! Can you glue the whole boards together first before cutting them into 7 sticks? That way you only have to align two boards during the glue-up instead of 14. Once they're glued, can't you just cut the lamination into 7 strips? I'm under the gun to make a cutting board for the monster-in-law, so your info is greatly appreciated.

-- You can't control the wind, but you can trim your sails



**Scott Bryan**  
27249 posts in 4671 days

#12 posted 10-05-2010 03:51 AM

This is a nice tutorial that **even I can follow**. I definately will have to favorite this blog as this looks like something I would like to try.

The only comment that I would have on this is that I, personally, would be hesitant to remove dried glue beads with my planer. I have tried that once with my jointer many years ago and succeeded in nicking all three knives. I would opt to remove the dried glue with scraping and sanding before using the planer to thickness the board.

-- Challenges are what make life interesting; overcoming them is what makes life meaningful- Joshua Marine



**McLeanVA**  
493 posts in 4283 days

#13 posted 10-05-2010 04:28 AM

Wow. I'm glad I put this together then. Thank you all for the comments. Replies to a few below.

CaptainSkully – yes you can, great point. You can totally glue the two original boards together. I haven't tried that but it sure makes a lot of sense. I tend to do something one way and never waiver. My only comment on that is that i haven't been able to get my hands on extra wide boards, so typically I'm not starting with two boards.usually a few cuts of the same board. Good luck on your board. Make sure to post it.

Scott Bryan – any method you prefer to use on glue. I don't claim to know a whole lot about planer blades, and that's probably the reason my blades are looking rough these days. I put all my tools through the ringer. Again, I am a very impatient woodworker. I have precious few hours in my shop between my crazy day job and little kids. You have an excellent point that should be noted. Thanks for the tip. I need to invest in a scraper.

As you can see from the comments above, there are most likely ways to improve the methods. Please keep the comments coming. Were paving a great path together for all LJs who stumble across this blog and are inspired to give this board a shot.

Thanks guys.

-- Measure, cut, curse, repeat.



**Bearpie**  
2601 posts in 3867 days

#14 posted 10-05-2010 05:13 AM

This is a very good tutorial! Concise and clearly explained. Thanks for posting. I favorited this post.

Erwin, Jacksonville, FL

-- Erwin, Jacksonville, FL



**fernandoindia**  
1081 posts in 3793 days

#15 posted 10-05-2010 05:16 AM

Thanks for taking the time to put this together. Great job on both the board and the tutorial.

For me is easier taking photos than editing this kind of stuff. I will need 100 tutorials on Photoshop to get something of this sort out !! LOL

-- Back home. Fernando

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