

Hanging Shelves

Get a period look with big box materials.

The inspiration for this small hanging set of shelves is a late 18th- to early 19th-century (circa 1775-1825) English dovetailed version in oak with a dark finish. I wanted to replicate the look as much as possible using the I Can Do That tool set and big-box stock, so I adjusted the dimensions to fit dimensional lumber, and, after the construction was done, sanded the edges heavily to impart a well-worn look. I then applied a somewhat distressed finish (more on that later).

Lumber Choices

The inspiration project is 8" wide and appears to be made of stock slightly thicker than 1/4". But at the big box store, the thickness choices are 1/4" and 1/2", and I dithered between 4"-wide and 6"-wide stock.



Perfect circles. If you can't find a compass, dividers work just fine for marking out circles – and the resulting tool marks add an air of period flair.

Because I knew I'd be using nails rather than dovetails for the box's joints, I opted for 1/2" stock to allow for a bit of forgiveness for slightly off-kilter drilling. And, I decided on the 4"-wide nominal lumber (which, as you know, is actually 3 1/2" wide) because 5 1/2" wide (the 6" nominal stock) simply looked too bulky. So, after crosscutting and gluing up two 19"-long pieces, the overall width of my back piece ended up 7" wide.

Add Curves

After the glue on the back dries, use the glue line as your centerline, and set your dividers (basically, a compass without a pencil) to a 7/8" radius, then scribe a circle at the center top of the back.

Then, measure down 4 1/2" from the top edge and mark a pencil line across the width. At either edge, that line locates the terminus of the arcs.

Now measure down 1 1/2" from that line, and at 7/8" to either side of the centerline, make a pencil mark.

Reset your compass or dividers to a 4 1/2" radius, set the point on one of those marks, then strike the arc from the bottom of the small circle to the edge of your back; repeat on the other side of the centerline. (This is not exact; please your eye.)

Use your jigsaw to cut the curves. Typically, we recommend the Bosch X-tra Clean for Wood blades, and I used that blade to cut the large arcs on either side. But when it came time to cut the tight circle at the top, I switched to the narrowest blade I could find, with lots of fine teeth, and cut slowly to overcome blade deflection. Once all the curves are cut, smooth them as needed with sandpaper.

Five Easy Pieces

The box is simply five pieces of 4" nominal lumber, nailed together. The two



Rustic display. These hanging shelves, based on a period English piece, are perfect for displaying your small treasures.

sides are each 14 1/2" in length; the three shelves are 5 1/2" in length. Make all the cuts at the miter saw, and set a stop so the two side pieces are exactly the same length. Set the stop again so all three shelves will match one another perfectly. While you can measure and mark each cut individually, why would you? That simply opens the door to error.

It doesn't matter if the sides are dead-on 19"; it does matter that they match – and the same is true for the shelves. If everything matches and is cut square, clamping up a square box is a breeze. But before assembly, sand all the pieces to #120 grit.

After you've clamped the five pieces in position, drill three pilot holes at each joint location, then hammer in 1" finish nails to hold the pieces together. (I rec-

omment checking twice to make sure your clamps are tight before you start to hammer.)

Attach the Back

On the back face of the back piece, center your shelf assembly side to side and flush with the bottom, and trace around the shelf assembly inside and out. (You'll drill your pilot holes centered between those lines.)

Now flip the back face up, and again center the shelf assembly side to side and flush to the bottom, then clamp the two workpieces together with a clamp or two – make sure to locate the clamps to leave access to drill your pilot holes. Now drill pilot holes through the back and into the shelf assembly. As always, drill pilot holes that are slightly smaller in diameter than the shaft of your nails, and be



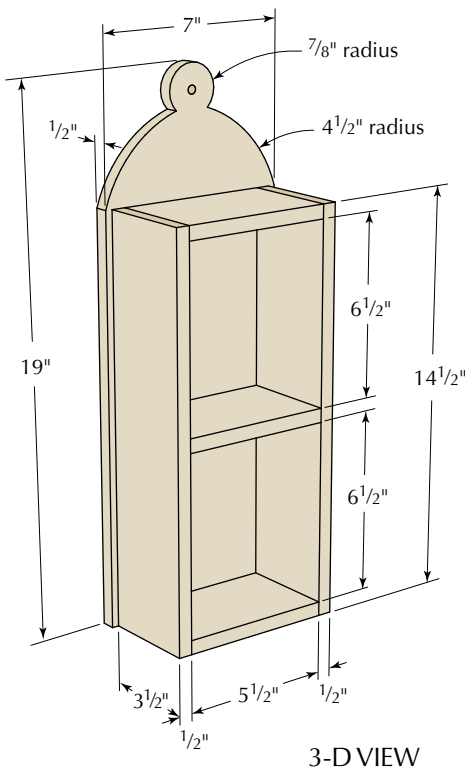
Clamp for success. While you could try to hold adjacent pieces in place while you drill pilot holes, it's much better to clamp everything together first – just be sure to keep the clamp pads clear of where you need to drill!



cognizant that the shelf assembly is only 1/2" thick; there's little room to wander off course with your drill bit.

To attach the back, I used roofing nails to add a little mechanical strength to the joints. Unlike finish nails, roofing nails have wide, flat heads that aren't easily pulled through – though it's unlikely anything small enough to fit on these shelves will impart enough weight to cause that problem.

Roofing nails. Typically, we use finish nails in our projects, but in this case, I chose roofing nails because their wide, flat heads will help keep the shelves firmly attached to the back for years to come (copper roofing nails are also available – and those would look great on a nice wood with a clear finish).



A Fun Finish

To give this piece a well-worn look, I attacked the edges with #80-grit sandpaper, creating a few divots to emulate a century or so of wear and tear, and I softened the crisp 90° angles of the shelves' butt joints the same way. I also hit the project a few times with the claw end of a hammer, and threw my keys at it repeatedly for a couple minutes.

After slaking my appetite for destruction, I went over the surface with #120-grit sandpaper, and painted on two coats of Benjamin Moore "Bittersweet Chocolate" latex. After the paint was completely dry, I sanded it almost all the way through in a few places. Then, I rubbed on a coat of ebony Briwax, making sure to fill the nail holes and purposeful imperfections I'd created (and perhaps some not-so-purposeful ones, too). **PWM**

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NO.	ITEM	DIMENSIONS (INCHES)			MATERIAL
		T	W	L	
1	Back	1/2	7	19	Poplar
2	Sides	1/2	3 1/2	14 1/2	Poplar
3	Shelves	1/2	3 1/2	5 1/2	Poplar