

HAND-CUT HINGE MORTISES

Unless you have a great many hinge mortises to cut, cutting them by hand is likely quicker than setting up a jig for your router. And, you really only need three common tools: a pencil, a wide chisel and a hammer (to hit the chisel). Of course, because we have a few fancier things around the shop, I used them, as it makes the job a bit easier: a cutting gauge and a small router plane. I also employed



From left: A 1" chisel, a gent's saw, a cutting gauge, a Glen-Drake #4 Tite-Hammer and a Veritas small router plane (and a mechanical pencil).

a gent's saw to saw down to the bottom of the mortise a few times as an alternate using a chisel for the same operation, just to show another option.

In retrospect, I really should have used a marking knife instead of a pencil to trace around the back and side edges of my hinge, as the knife would help to more sharply define the edges of my mortise. But, I came in on a day off over the holidays to shoot these pictures, and my mind apparently was still in my kitchen making Christmas cookies.

So, set the cookies aside, then simply follow these step-by-step photos. You'll be cutting perfect hinge mortises by hand in no time.

Step 1



Hold your hinge firmly in place on the workpiece and mark a line at the back edge and side edges. Better yet, scribe the lines with a marking knife.

Step 2



If you have a cutting gauge, set it to the depth of your hinge plate.

Step 3



Scribe a line along the edge to define the bottom of the mortise. If you don't have a cutting gauge, use a pencil to mark the bottom edge, or scribe a line with marking knife or X-Acto knife.

Step 4



Reset your cutting gauge to define the line at the back edge of the mortise (if you scribed the line with a knife instead of marking with a pencil, this step is unnecessary).

Step 5 – Option 1



Use a chisel define the sides of your mortise. Then, chop a series of shallow cuts in the waste area of the mortise, which will make the waste easier to remove.

Step 5 – Option 2



Use a gent's saw or other small saw to make a series of shallow cuts in the waste area of the mortise. Define the mortise sides with a chisel.

Step 6



Use your chisel (bevel-side up) to define a shallow trough along the back edge of the waste area. (This will help to avoid blowout when removing the waste, especially if the back of the mortise is near the edge of your workpiece.)

Step 7



Chisel out most of the waste. You may want to repeat Step 5 a few times to help ease waste removal. If you don't have a router plane, continue to remove the waste with your chisel until you've defined the flat bottom of the mortise.

Step 8 (Optional)



If you have a router plane, set the cutter depth to the bottom of your mortise and remove the remaining waste.

Step 9



Test-fit your hinge. After just a few practice runs, you'll be cutting perfect hinge mortises every time.

To reiterate, you don't need a bunch of fancy tools to cut perfect hinge mortises by hand. As long as you have a sharp chisel, a hammer and a pencil, you can perform these same operations (with just a little more work and attention to detail).

— *Megan Fitzpatrick,*
managing editor