



Board Stiff

Everyone needs a decent chopping board in the kitchen, but almost no one has one. So how about designing your own custom chopping board and hand-crafting it for the cool people on your Christmas list?

Materials:

- 25 - 1"x2" maple strips 32" long
- Carpenters glue
- Mineral oil or butcher block oil

Tools

- Bar clamps - two minimum
- Clamps - any others you may have
- Putty knife
- Circular saw
- Plane
- Belt sander

Tip:

- When shopping for maple, choose the straightest boards you can find, using the 'eyeballing' technique; pull a board off the rack, rest one end of it on the floor, then site down the length of the board with one eye. If the board is twisted, cupped, warped, or has knots in the edges, it will immediately register with your eye. Put that board aside and move on to the next candidate. Be picky. If you aren't picky you'll come home with wonky lumber, which will horrify you when you try to clamp it into a flat plane.

All you need is glue, a few tools and some maple, which is the wood traditionally used in butcher blocks. Maple is available in the 'project wood' section in most home centers. My all-purpose cutting board is huge at 20" x 30" because I chop with abandon and like lots of space. You might like your cutting board to be even bigger, or you might prefer to make little individual garlic chopping-boards, which are all the rage in upscale kitchen stores. Either way, it's going to be a glue carnival, so tie your hair back (I learned the hard way) and get ready to stick 'em up.

Steps:



Sort the boards putting knots down



The top should be even and clear of knots

Board Stiff

Start by cutting your boards to length and laying them out. Place them on edge, side by side. Arrange the boards so that they bow in the same direction, and number them from 1 - 25. If any of the edges have knots, turn the board over so that the clearest side is up.

Now take the first five boards and set the rest aside. You have to glue in units of five because the glue will dry faster than you can work.



Apply glue on each side that touches another



Place the boards in the pipe clamps and even up the ends



Snug the clamps up and adjust as necessary

Glue Love

Apply a bead of glue to the sides of each board, smoothing the glue into an even layer with a putty knife. Place the gluey boards in bar clamps, checking the numbers so they're in the right order. Check that the boards are lined up evenly at the ends. Now snug them together with clamps. Don't over-tighten the clamps yet. First, adjust the boards as necessary for height, pushing them up or down to achieve a level plane. When you're satisfied, thoroughly tighten up all the clamps and leave for at least twenty minutes.



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Glue the five larger pieces together and scrape off the excess glue

Repeat the process for each clump of five boards until you have five units of five. Now glue all five units together using the same clamping technique. Let the glue set up for at least twenty minutes, then unclamp your cutting board.

At this point it's probably not looking good. Some of the boards are sticking up and there are yellow rivulets of dried glue everywhere including on your shoes. This is normal.



08 - Starting with larger planes will provide a flatter surface



A large plane will provide the flattest surface



A jack plane will also do a great job

Plane Truth

Use a hand plane to take at least 1/8 of an inch off the surface of both sides, smoothing out the high spots. Planing is vigorous work. Take a wide stance and move the plane over the surface diagonally, using an even stroke. This will be nigh on impossible at first, because all the different little edges and glue rivulets trip up your blade. Persevere. You'll never be brave if you have a cushy life and this is one way to develop fortitude.



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Sharpen the blade of a new plane on an 800 grit water stone



Use a jig to hold the blade fixed while sharpening



Finish on a 1200 grit water stone



Apply honing compound to a leather strop to finish



Strop both sides of the blade



Use a circular saw to trim the ends



Use a square as a cutting guide

Once you've planed both surfaces, trim about 1/2" off each end using a circular saw (or a handsaw if you want nice deltoid muscles).



Sand using progressively finer sanding belts



Soften the sharp edge with an orbital sander

Now sand all surfaces with an orbital or belt sander. Start with coarse grit sandpaper, like 40 or 60. Once you've got the surface smooth, move up through the grits of sandpaper to 80, 100, 120 and up as high as you like. I went to 600 but I'm a sanding geek.



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Oil the finished cutting board
on both sides and ends

Oil all sides of the finished block with mineral oil, tie a bow around it, and put that baby
away until Christmas.



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