



Mag Ruffman's Anything I Can Do

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The Twig Easy

Anything I Can Do DVD Volume 5 – *Outdoor Projects*

Create a beautiful, all-season resting place in your garden. Best of all, a rustic bench costs almost nothing to make.



Materials:

- Galvanized spiral-shank nails in a variety of lengths from 1 ½ " to 3"
- Branches trimmed from trees and bushes. Lilac, maple, fruitwood or almost any kind of branches except sappy, runny pine. Pick up branches trimmed from trees by people in the neighborhood or by the public works department. You can also go into the woods and pick up windfall branches, or actually knock down standing dead trees.
- The seat is made of 1" x 10" fir that I had lying around.

Tools

- Hammer
- Safety glasses
- Saw
- Loppers
- Pruning shears
- Rasp Drill

Note:

If the arched bentwood look is what you want, you'll have to find swamp willow, which grows in low-lying wet areas in fields and woodlands.

Green wood is easier to shape and drive nails into but it will shrink as it dries. So, if you use green wood, be sure to go back and tighten joints with added nails or screws about six weeks after you finish your piece. Dry wood won't shrink but it's tough so you'll have to pre-drill holes for the nails.

Always collect way more wood than you think you'll need. That way you'll be able to make artistic choices in selecting branches, rather than improvising desperately.

Steps:



Set the back pieces approximately 55 inches apart



Clean up any pointy bits that will be uncomfortable



Use a rasp to remove nubs and smooth the bumps

Determine what size you want your rustic bench to be. The size of my bench is based on a board that I had lying around which happened to be 57" long. Choose a board that is sturdy enough to hold the weight of at least two people.

Choose two sturdy branches (diameter approximately 2") to be the vertical members of the H-shaped back frame. Cut them about 4' long and set them roughly 55" apart on their outside edges.

The back frame, which looks roughly like a ladder, consists of two joining pieces below the seat and two or more above the seat. The upper rungs should be chosen for their potential comfort and artistic attributes. Nubby branches won't be comfortable digging into the backs of those using the bench, so try to find clean ones or take down points with a rasp.

The pieces on the bottom should be sturdy because they support and distribute weight through the lower part of the frame.

The piece closest to the bench seat should be set about 16" off the ground.



Lay out the pieces to be attached



Joints can be butt joints or.....



.... lap joints

Lay out the chosen branches and mark for cuts by eye. Cut along those lines with a coarse garden saw (or use loppers if the branch isn't very thick). Place the newly cut pieces between the two larger ones to form the back frame. Adjust the lengths as necessary so that they all fit well.

Branches can be attached by overlapping them one on top of the other, or in butt joint fashion.





Pre-drill for the nails



Use galvanized nails with a spiral shank



Drive the nail in with a hammer



Using a framing hammer with a waffle face makes driving nails easier

Drill holes from the outside of the frame into the end of the smaller cross pieces. Drive a large nail into the hole attaching the two together. Attach all the pieces in a similar manner. Pay attention that the frame remains roughly square and that the pieces are attached in such a way that the 'feet' of the bench remain in a parallel line.

Be sure your nails are long enough. Check them by holding them on top of the joint and at the drilled angle. At least half of the nail should be going into each piece. If they go all the way through, just bend the point over so it doesn't stick anyone.



Be sure you nail first one way...



.....and then one the other way...

After everything has at least one nail, go back and angle drill (or 'toe' nail) for some smaller nails. Cross the nails so that they really lock the pieces in place. Each joint should have at least two nails that cross. The two crossed nails can be driven in from the outside or inside, whichever is easier. Be sure that the drill bit you're using isn't too big or the nails will have a loose, sloppy fit. The nails should really bite the wood, without splitting it.





The completed back frame



The completed front frame standing with the back



Attach the front to the back with some cross pieces

Build a similar 'ladder' frame for the front of the bench. It only has to be as high as the seat but should be sturdy as well. Cut the two front legs at 18" and lay them out at 57" outside dimension (or whatever dimension you are using).

Choose two branches to attach the front legs together. Set them in place, mark them and cut. Set the top of the one nearest the seat at the same 16" height as its mate on the back frame. Attach the other horizontal piece about halfway up between the ground and the first piece.

Stand the back frame up. Find a way to support it in place vertically, using either a helper or a bunch of clamps. Stand the front frame in position in front of the back frame and secure it in place.

Measure the distance between the back and front and cut four branches to fit across this span. The distance between the front and back frames should be just larger than the width of the intended seat. In this case, 10" is the seat depth, so the distance should be 13" or 14" between front and back frames. Choose two pieces, set them in place bridging the back and front, then mark and cut them.

Place two of the four connecting pieces on top of the front frame, and two on the bottom. Nail them in place.

Tip: At this crucial point of assembly, be sure you're working on a flat, level surface! If you put together your bench on crooked or undulating topography, it will never sit properly on level ground.





Attach pieces on the diagonal for lateral stability

Next, choose some smaller branches for cross bracing. Cross braces usually run from the bottom of one front leg to the top of the opposite (kitty-corner) back leg. There should be at least two of them that cross in the center and their purpose is to stop the bench from racking side to side. The branches don't have to be very thick but must be well attached. If possible, nail them together in the center for added strength. Other cross pieces can be added if the bench seems unstable or wobbly. Cross bracing greatly strengthens the bench.



Attach the seat with some screws

Finally, lay your bench seat in position and check that it's level. The seat should sit flat. If there is any discrepancy, a shim under the seat should solve the problem. In this case the discrepancy was quite large so another branch was added as a decorative piece. This is part of the improvised nature of building rustic furniture, and adds great value and character to the final outcome. Are you buying this?



Finished bench with Mag

Sit on your new bench, test it and add pieces either for more stability or for looks. Also, add nails if needed, bend over sharp points of nails and make sure they haven't worked loose. Move your bench to a scenic place in the garden and admire how your handiwork combines with Nature's.

