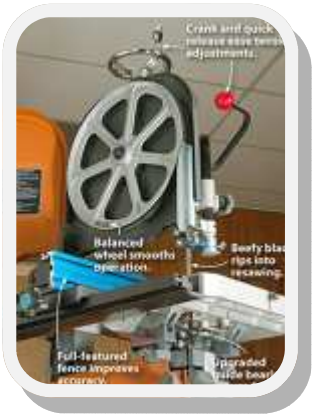
Woodworking Tips



Accessories that improve performance

The bandsaw may be one of the easiest stationary tools to "amp up" with numerous accessories that improve performance or convenience. Some do both. Not every saw needs all these improvements, but yours will probably benefit from at least a few of these upgrades.

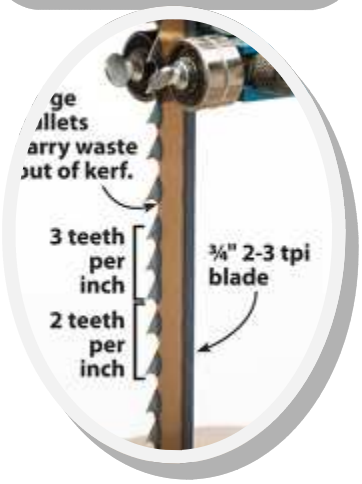
Boost power and performance

All the accessories in the world won't help much if your bandsaw stalls during demanding cuts or shakes like an over-caffeinated chihuahua. Smooth out the tremors and get as much cutting power as possible with these upgrades.

Cinch up your belt

When the V-belt that connects the motor pulley and drive pulley sits in one position too long, it can take on a permanent curve, or "set," where it wraps around the pulleys, causing a nasty vibration. Replace it with a link belt that stays flexible and absorbs vibration better than one-piece V-belts. Buy it by the foot, then adjust its length to fit your saw by adding or removing links.

Put some teeth into it



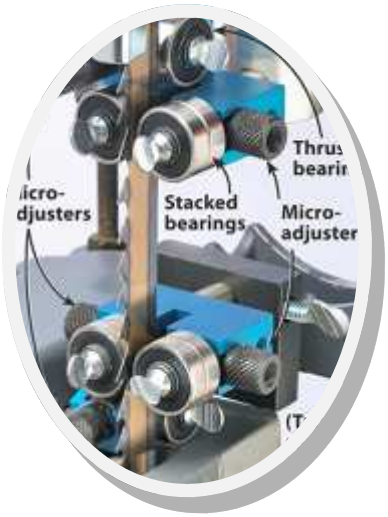
Resawing wide stock requires all the power a bandsaw has to give, so make the most of your saw's efforts by stepping up to the widest 3-tooth-per-inch (tpi) blade your saw accepts. A wider blade flexes less for truer rip cuts and its larger surface area dissipates heat better so the blade stays sharp longer. The aggressive hook angle of the teeth on a resaw blade cuts quickly, generating a lot of sawdust. The large gullets clear that waste faster.

A blade with variable pitch, alternates sections of 2-tpi and 3-tpi. The 2-tpi sections cut quickly, even through the widest stock your saw handles. The 3 tpi sections reduce vibration, giving a relatively smooth finish.

Checks and balances

If replacing the belt doesn't calm the jitters, check for out-of-balance wheels. To do this, remove the blade and drive belt so the wheels spin freely. Working on one wheel at a time, make a mark on the inside edge of the rim at its lowest point. Give the wheel a gentle spin, wait for it to stop, and make another mark at the bottom. Do this five times. Randomly-spaced marks mean the wheel is balanced. But a cluster of marks in one area points out a heavy spot and indicates the wheel needs to be balanced.

To do this, clean the wheel rim directly opposite the marks with rubbing alcohol and allow it to dry; then apply self-adhesive wheel weights to the cleaned area, starting with 1/4 ounce. Repeat the "spin test," this time making marks with a different-colored marker. Grouped marks again tell you to apply more weight, or change the amount or position of weights already in place. For small adjustments, divide the soft metal weights with an old chisel or knife.



Guidance counseling: Keeping the blade and workpiece on track

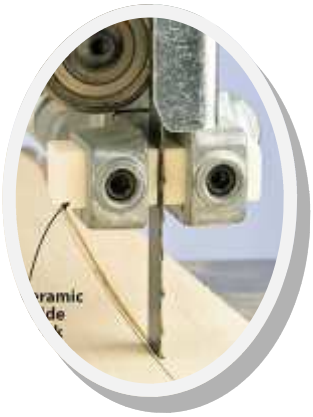
Without guide blocks or bearings above and below the table, a bandsaw blade would wander like a four-year-old on her first ride without training wheels. Like that child, bandsaw blades, and sometimes the workpiece, need guidance. Keep them on track with these enhancements.

Get your bearings

Guide blocks, with their large surface area, work especially well guiding wide blades, while roller bearings create less friction and heat buildup. Stacked roller-bearing guides from Carter Products, above, combine the best of blocks and bearings. They also have toolless adjustment: Twist a thumbscrew to loosen a bearing; then fine-tune its position with the microadjuster. Cinch up the thumb-screw to lock the bearing in position.

Specialized guide bearing

A specialized guide bearing helps narrow blades (1/8" and 1/16") track true dur-ing curved cuts. The rear of the blade rides in a groove in the bearing's edge. The groove provides side-to-side support and the bearing reduces friction.



Block party

If you don't have the budget for bearing guides, ceramic guide blocks provide an inex-pensive upgrade from the factory-supplied metal blocks. The large, flat faces provide the same solid blade support, but the ceramic material generates less friction, so they run cooler. That translates into longer blade life. Installation is as simple as loosening a bolt or thumbscrew to remove the steel blocks, then putting the ceramic blocks in place. They wear so well that the manufacturer guarantees them forever.

Fence me in

For resawing and straight-line rips, a good fence is essential, yet many saws come with no fence or a poor-performing one. The Kreg fence packs a lot of features in an affordable package. It pivots to account for blade drift (the ten-dency of a blade to pull to one side). For sawing thin, narrow stock, mount the fence with the wide face down on the table. It can then extend under the guide assembly, even with the assembly close to the tabletop. The fence eas-ily lifts off the rail for quick switching from straight cuts to freehand work. An optional micro-adjuster makes precise fence movements easy.

Tension is a good thing

Like any of us, a bandsaw occasionally needs relief from tension - the tension needed to keep its blade cutting true, that is. Relieving that tension extends the life of the wheel bearings and tires, and makes blade changes possible. These accessories simplify taking your saw from tightly wound to relaxed and back again.

Put the squeeze on

Bandsaw springs, like all of us, lose their ability to bounce back as they get older. If yours no longer has enough "oomph" to tension wide blades, replace it with a heavy-duty aftermarket spring. On most saws, installation goes quickly and doesn't require any special tools.

We found that after installing a stronger spring, it took fewer turns of the tensioning knob to properly tension a blade. With springs to fit most sizes of bandsaws, this inexpensive upgrade offers a lot of bang for your buck.

Take 'er for a spin

Small tensioning knobs prove difficult to grip, don't provide much leverage, and only allow half of a rotation before you need to change your grip. Turning them can literally be a pain. Mount a 6"-diameter cast wheel with a spinning handle, and adjusting blade tension becomes easy. The chrome finish prevents rust and looks nice, too.

Instant tension relief

A quick-release lever applies or removes blade tension in a snap. In the up position, the mechanism keeps the blade under tension, ready for use. Pivot the lever down toward the table to release all tension for blade changes and between work sessions. The middle position relieves stress on the wheels and saw frame, but provides enough tension to hold the blade in place while mounting a blade and checking tracking. This upgrade took about 15 minutes to install, a small investment quickly regained with faster blade changes.

Time to lighten up

No bandsaw add-on will help much if you can't see your work. So defeat the forces of darkness with a task light. The magnetic base on this one sticks to any steel or iron surface, and the gooseneck puts the light exactly where you need it. Eleven LEDs shine a bright spotlight without the heat of incandescent bulbs. Juice comes from four AA batteries in the base, or use the optional AC power cord.