

Woodworking tips

4 tips for safer routing

You've carved out some precious shop time for that long-awaited project, and now you're eager to get the job done. But slow down: Your rush could make you do something rash. One bad move can damage the workpiece -- or, even worse, you. Follow these four router safety tips, and you won't let haste make waste.



Tip 1: Know when to rout handheld



The router table is a great place to machine easy-to-manage, midsize pieces and narrow moldings. With the router fixed into a tabletop, you can focus your attention on the workpiece instead of the tool. And you always should "take it to the table" whenever you work with pieces so small that you wouldn't be able to see or grasp them beneath the base of a handheld router. But what about oversize tasks, such as rounding over the edges of a dining-room tabletop? That's when you take a handheld router to the workpiece. Perched on the edge of a workpiece, a handheld router can get tippy; but you can counter that. Simply rotate the router so the handles run perpendicular, not parallel, to the workpiece edge (as shown at right), and use one hand to exert pressure squarely over the workpiece while merely moving the router with the other



Before routing freehand or on the table, ask yourself which direction everything needs to move. To cut with more control and less chatter, rout so that the bit's cutting edges meet the wood head-on. (In the reverse, a technique known as *climb-cutting*, the cutting edges tend to ride along the workpiece, like wheels on a car, rather than digging in and cutting. This might cause the router to jerk away from you.)

So how do you know which direction is which? In a handheld router, the bit spins clockwise when viewed from above, so move the router counterclockwise when routing outside edges, as shown. For inside cuts, rout clockwise. When your router is mounted underneath a table, the bit spins counterclockwise, so always feed workpieces from right to left



Although you can't typically use a fence when routing irregular shapes on a router table, you still need a way to control the workpiece as you begin your cut. So install a removable starting pin in your router table -- the closer to the bit the better -- and use it as a fulcrum to ease the workpiece against the whirling cutter, as shown at right. After making contact with the bit's guide bearing, you no longer need to brace against the starting pin. You can make your own pin by cutting the head off a bolt and threading the shaft into a hole tapped into your router table or insert. Or clamp a pointed piece of scrap to your router table to act as a pivot point to start the cut.



No matter what you're routing, you need to maintain a firm hold on the workpiece while keeping your fingers in the clear. That proves especially difficult, though, with tiny pieces. For safer, cleaner cuts, follow these three steps:

First, always use a router table with the smallest reducer ring that fits the bit. **Second**, close up the bit opening in the fence as much as possible or create a zero-clearance sacrificial fence from scrap stock or MDF, as shown at right. **Finally**, keep a good hold on the workpiece by locking it into a handscrew clamp, *bottom photo*. It grips small, irregular shapes; it keeps your hands at



a safe distance; and its wooden jaws won't cause damage if they contact the router bit.

This Club/Guild aims to assist members to improve their working skills. Not all such activities occur in our Guild premises, and some activities or events are promoted through this Newsletter and others directly to members in some other ways, but are still Club/Guide activities, please support them. These activities may include personal and Group tuition of members by other members (we all try to help one another for the benefit of the Club/Guild in this way) sessions in members' workshops, wood-gathering, our activities to members of the public, and other such activities and events.

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Address:
469 Paratu Road, RD,
Walton 3475,
New Zealand

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