

Woodworking Tips

Touching-Up Router Bits

When I think about touching up my router bits, I like to use an analogy that makes the bits a part of my shop "wardrobe." Just like a sport coat or a sweater, an expensive bit may need to be sent to the cleaners occasionally. But there are a couple of things you can do at home to keep bits clean and sharp.

CLEANING. The first thing I do to a dull router bit is to clean it. I talked about cleaning bits back in tip No. 38, so I won't go over that again here. But basically the process involves using an old toothbrush to scrub the bit with de-natured alcohol. (Just don't soak the bearing.)

HONING. The next thing I like to do is touch up the cutting edges. For this I use a set of diamond honing files. (You've seen these files. They're colourful pieces of plastic about 1" x 6" with various grits of abrasive material adhered to one or both sides.) "Touching up" the edges of a router bit is not like sharpening. It's more like brushing your sport coat with a lint remover.

Note: Don't try to touch up or sharpen the bevelled edges of a router bit. Not only will this change the cutting profile, it can also affect the balance of the bit, which can be dangerous. I only touch up the flat surface (the front) of the cutters with honing files.

Usually it takes just a couple of stropps over a medium grit diamond file, followed by a couple passes over a fine-grit diamond file. To do this, I clamp the file along the edge of my bench. This way the flat part of the bit can be in contact with the file while the rest of the bit extends off the edge of the bench, out of the way.

Then I use my thumb to keep the flat surface of the carbide cutter perfectly flat on the honing file. After a couple passes on one of the cutters, I do the same for the other cutters on the same bit. To keep the bit "balanced," (both cutters taking an equal bite when routing), try to maintain the same amount of pressure on each cutter when filing. And make the same number of strokes across the file.



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