

SUMMER PROJECT OAK GARDEN TRAY

Takes: One weekend

Tools you'll need: Router, jigsaw, sander, drillstand



GOING POTTY

Phil Davy's tray is made from recycled oak which will now have a new life in his garden

During a major clear out last year I unearthed an old plans chest that had definitely seen better days. Although made from oak, it had been exposed to the elements and most of it had rotted away. Fortunately, I was able to salvage a few drawer fronts and sides, the timber displaying some lovely figure. It was limited in dimensions, and I wondered how best to use this attractive oak. The answer was this garden tray, compact enough not to take up too much space but with sufficient capacity for transferring plants to the garden or holding a few small tools.

Slats for the base mean drainage from damp plants or soil should not be a problem, though these could be fitted closer together to make a multi-purpose tray. Great for the home office or kitchen, though you may want to reduce overall size for indoor use, or adjust the divider spacings. As it is, you can just fit a 76mm-diameter plastic pot in each compartment. If you don't enjoy cutting dovetails, this project is ideal for finger jointing the corners. A dedicated finger-jointing router jig makes the technique straightforward, though if you have a decent router table, a sliding

fence and sacrificial board will still make it feasible. Dividers and handle fit into housings a third the thickness of the outer tray timber. To get a snug fit it's best to rout the housings first, then thickness the divider material so this is a sliding fit. That way you're thickening to match the router bit diameter exactly.

Stop the housings 5mm below the top edges of the tray. The handle and dividers are cross-halved so they slot together. Use brass or copper pins to secure them to the tray sides, though pre-drill holes first.

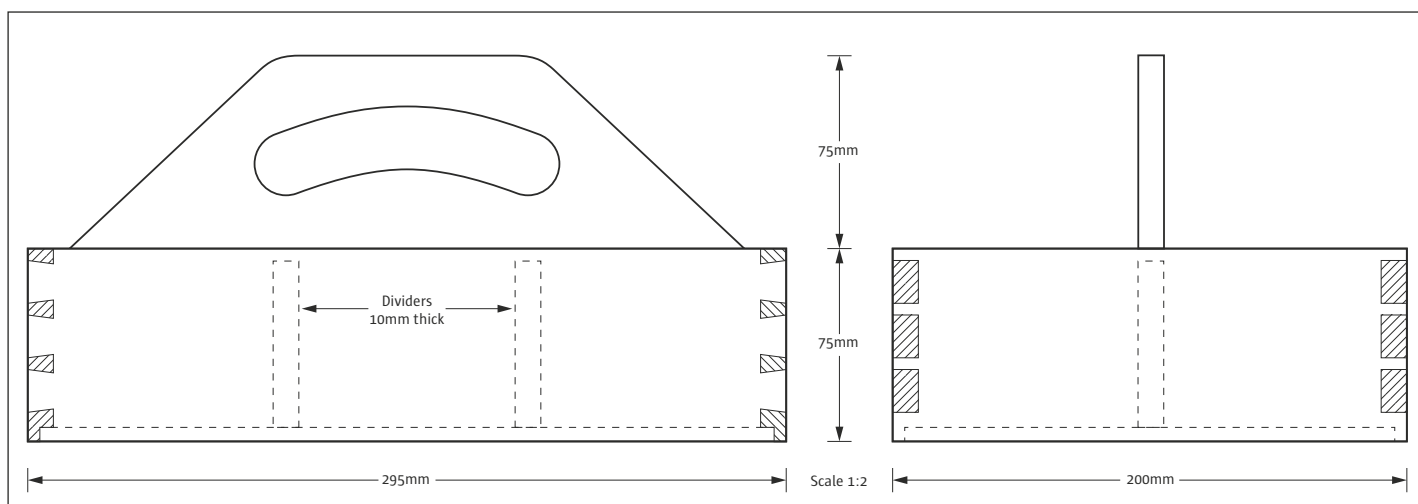


Fig.1 Garden tray dimensions



1 When recycling timber always remove old screws or nails first. If rusted, plan saw cuts to avoid defects



2 Inspect all surfaces closely for defects and cut off damaged ends. Thickness the clean timber to 10mm



3 True up the face edge of side and end pieces with a bench plane and shooting board. Check with a straightedge



4 Trim ends square on a shooting board. Cramp pieces together, face edge down, and plane to width



5 Mark each tray component for width and cramp together. Place on a flat surface and plane to width



6 Saw sides and ends 2mm over-length for trimming joints later. Scribe shoulder lines for dovetails with a marking knife



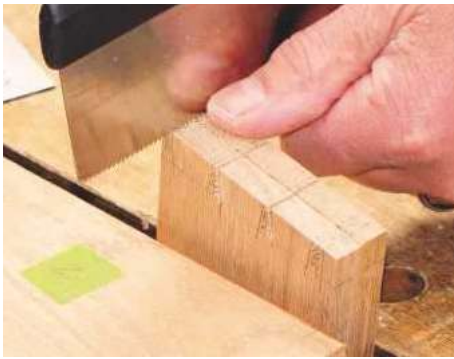
7 Space dovetails to allow for a 5mm rebate at the lower edge. Cramp boards together and square lines across



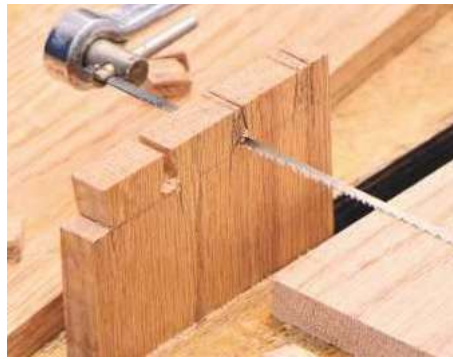
8 Mark out tails with a sliding bevel set at an 1:8 angle (for hardwood). Alternatively, use a dovetail marker gauge



9 Set a gauge to 5mm and mark a rebate for the bottom slats. Pencil in waste to be removed between the tails



10 Secure both tail boards tightly in a vice at an angle. Cut down sides of tails with a dovetail saw



11 Remove waste between tails with a coping saw, keeping the blade teeth clear of the shoulder line



12 Cramp the square timber block along the shoulder line to keep the chisel upright when paring back between tails



13 Cramp the pin board in a vice and lay the tail piece across horizontally. Carefully mark out pins from the cut tails



14 Pencil in waste between the pins. Saw down sides of the pins to form the sockets, keeping the blade level



15 Remove any waste with a coping saw as before. Pare back to the shoulder line with a bevel-edge chisel



16 Holding the chisel at the correct angle, trim sides of the pins (sockets) as necessary. Check joints fit, and adjust



17 Create a 5mm-deep rebate along the bottom edges for the slats. Cut this on a router table to ensure accuracy



18 Cramp parts together and cut 3mm-deep housings for the dividers. Run the router against a guide batten



19 Housings are stopped 5mm below the top edges. Square rounded ends neatly with a chisel



20 Clean up inner surfaces and check for fit. Glue and cramp up the tray, checking for square



21 Once the glue has dried, trim protruding dovetails flush with a finely-set block plane



22 If required, glue boards together to achieve sufficient width for the carrying handle. Thickness when dry



23 Draw the handle cutout with a flexible curve or arched steel rule. Allow enough width for the sanding drum



24 Mark hole centres and cramp the board to some backing material. Bore ends of the cutout with a 25mm flat bit



25 Remove remaining waste between holes with a jigsaw. Use this for sawing the tapered edges of the handle



26 Clean up the cutout with a 25mm sanding drum or rasp and file. Smooth edges with abrasives



27 The handle and dividers are slotted together. Mark out halving joints and carefully cut away the waste



28 Thickness slats to 24 x 5mm and saw to length. These can be pinned or screwed into the rebates



29 Rout a small decorative chamfer along the edges of the tray and dividers. Sand with 180 grit abrasive



30 Brush on two coats of finishing oil, wiping off after a few minutes. Alternatively, add wax if intended for indoor use