Woodsmith PLANS

TOP 10 ROUTER TABLE ACCESSORIES

TOTAL SUCCESS
SHOP TESTED
GUARANTEED

TOP 10 ROUTER TABLE ACCESSORIES

Get the most out of your router table. Here are our favorite accessories to do it right.

1. Insert Plate

Screwing a router directly to the top of a table is quick and easy. But if you'll be changing bits in and out fairly often, you might want to consider making a change.

INSERT PLATE. What I'm talking about here is upgrading your router table with an insert plate. The idea behind an insert plate is simple. With the router attached to the plate and slipped into an opening in the top of the table, you have a secure system for routing. But here's the really nice part — instead of having to work under the table to make changes and adjustments, you simply "pop" the plate (and router) out and work above the table.

The insert plates you'll find most often are made from phenolic and aluminum (photo in center of page). And depending on the material and thickness, the price can vary from $25 to around $100.

◄ *Custom Fit. A blank reducer ring (far left) makes it easy to customize the opening to any size bit.*

CUSTOM OPENINGS. Regardless of how the plate is made, most feature plastic reducer rings like the ones you see above. Having a set of reducer rings allows you to install (or customize) a ring to minimize the clearance around the bit. This makes for safer cuts and provides more support for the workpiece.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS. The one thing you'll need to keep in mind when choosing an insert plate is that most of them are sized to fit the router table made by the same manufacturer. So if you already have a router table, you may need to modify the opening to fit the plate.

2 & 3. T-Track & Miter Track

An insert plate makes it easy to get your router in and out of the table. But when it comes to taking your table to the next level, there are a couple accessories you'll want to add — the T-track and miter gauge track shown at the upper right.

START WITH T-TRACK. Of the two, I feel the more versatile is T-track. T-track is nothing more than a metal channel you install in your router table fence. This way, you can quickly and easily mount featherboards, bit guards, and stop blocks (more on these later), allowing you to work more accurately and safely.
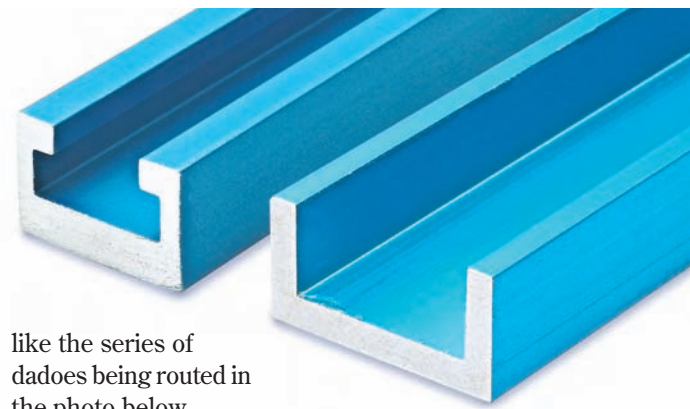
Regardless of the manufacturer, all T-track works basically the same. A slot in the track accepts the head of a bolt — either a flange (or toilet) bolt (as shown in the lower left photo) or a hex bolt. By slipping an accessory, like a stop block, over the bolt, you can position the accessory anywhere along the track. Locking it in place is just a matter of tightening the knob.

What T-track has going for it is that it's fairly inexpensive, starting at about $11 for a 2'-long piece and running up to $20 for a 4' length. You will need to keep in mind that T-track can vary from ⅜" up to ¾" in thickness. So be sure your fence design allows you to screw the T-track securely in place.

ADD A MITER TRACK. Besides T-track, another way to make your router table work harder is the miter gauge track you see at right. Instead of mounting to the fence, the miter track slips into a groove cut in the top of the table.

By doing this, you can use your miter gauge (or any other accessory with a miter bar) for operations that would be difficult or impossible to accomplish on a router table, like the series of dadoes being routed in the photo below.

And just like T-track, the miter track can be used for adding a featherboard to ensure your workpiece stays tight against the fence.

Miter track is available in different lengths and the pricing is similar to the T-track. I bought a 3'-long piece for $17. Both types of track are available at Rockler.com.

▲ *Simple Designs.* *T-track (left) and miter track are nothing more than simple metal extrusions. But they'll make it a snap to use and mount accessories.*

T-Track. *T-track allows you to use a flange bolt and knob to attach a wide range of accessories to your fence.*

▲ *Miter Track. Adding a miter track to your router table allows you to use other accessories, like the miter gauge and auxiliary fence you see here.*

4 & 5. Keep the Power Under Control

One of the problems you'll run across when working at a router table is the hassle of searching underneath the table trying to find the power switch. The first time you need to do it quickly, you'll appreciate the added safety of an auxiliary ON/OFF switch. The switch you see at left only costs about $25, and it's a pretty inexpensive way to get better control.

SPEED CONTROL. Another way to keep better control is to adjust the speed of your router to suit the task at hand. If your router doesn't have this capability, you can add it by installing the speed control unit at right. Using it is just a matter of turning the router on, adjusting the speed as necessary, and then routing. (You can expect to spend about $40.)

Control the Power. *An auxiliary switch mounted to the front of your router table provides quick and easy access to the power.*

Adjusting the Speed. *With a variable-speed control unit, you can match the router speed to the size of the bit and the type of material.*

6. Featherboards

Running a small piece of wood safely past a router bit spinning at 20,000 RPM can be a challenge. There's always the possibility the workpiece will kick out, lift up, or even kick back toward you. So it's a good idea to put that T-track on the fence and the miter gauge slot in the table to good use and add a featherboard or two.

THE BENEFITS. Whether you mount the featherboard to the table or fence, it applies pressure against the workpiece. The flexible fingers allow the workpiece to slide smoothly in one direction, helping prevent the workpiece from moving up, away, or kicking back at you.

You can make your own featherboard, but there are a number of manufacturers that make inexpensive models that are easy to use. One of my favorites is the *Bench Dog Feather-Loc* shown in the left margin. (It costs about $20 and is available at Rockler.com.)

Bench Dog has models you can mount to the fence or table. The table version has a short miter bar for locking the featherboard anywhere along the miter track with the turn of a knob.

▲ *Extra Hand.*
Featherboards work like an extra hand, keeping a workpiece tight against a table or fence.

TANDEM MODEL. If you plan to rout tall workpieces on edge, *Bench Dog* offers a version that stacks two featherboards together with a spacer in between. This tandem version provides additional pressure to ensure the workpiece stays flat against the fence.

STOPPED CUTS. If you need to start or stop routing a workpiece at a precise point along its length, then a stop attached to the fence of the router table is the accessory you need. A stop can be as simple as a wood block clamped to the face of the fence. But many manufacturers have made stops even more convenient by designing them as a separate accessory that attaches to the T-track they manufacture.

A manufactured stop is easy to adjust and clamp in place. And it's

a whole lot quicker than trying to deal with a wood block and separate clamp (or two).

COMPATIBILITY. But you might run into trouble trying to adapt some manufactured stops to the fence and T-track you're using. So I've found that an easy solution is to simply turn the *Bench Dog Feather-Loc* upside down and turn it into a handy stop, like you see in the photo above.

7. Corral the Dust

Whether it's hand-held or mounted in a table, a router tends to create more dust and chips than you can imagine — and it spreads the mess around the shop faster than you might think possible.

COLLECT THE DUST. To minimize this problem, the first thing you should do after attaching the fence to the router table is screw a dust hookup in place, like the one you see in the photo at right.

The nice thing about adding a dust hookup is that it doesn't cost a lot. They're available for as low as $15, and it makes hooking up your shop vacuum or dust collector hassle-free. You can find similar models at most online retailers or look for one at your local woodworking store.

Dealing with Dust.
An inexpensive dust hood makes routing more enjoyable by keeping your shop cleaner.

8. Guard Against the Bit

When you're focused on making a cut at the router table, it's all too easy to end up with your fingers too close to the bit. That's why it's a good idea to install a bit guard, like the one in the photo at right. The guard provides a constant reminder of where the bit is and where not to put your fingers.

The router bit guard I prefer to use is simply a tinted piece of shatter-proof plastic. I picked up the high-visibility model you see in the photo at right at the *Woodsmith Store*. But you can find similar router bit guards from other sources.

Regardless of the manufacturer, you'll find the design and function of most router bit guards is identical. A pair of vertical slots in the guard allows you to attach it to the T-track in the fence and adjust the position of the guard up or down with a pair of flange bolts, knobs, and washers.

Using the guard is just a matter of adjusting the height to match the thickness of your workpiece. The goal is to minimize the clearance between the workpiece and guard, preventing your fingers from inadvertently passing near the router bit.
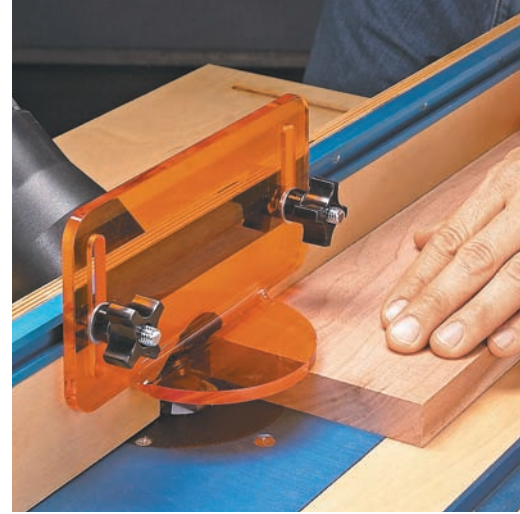
▲ *See-Through Guard. Using a clear, plastic bit guard is a constant reminder to keep your fingers away from the bit.*

9. Push Blocks for Safety

A bit guard attached to the fence is one way to ensure your fingers don't inadvertently find their way into a cutting edge. Another good way to keep them safe is to use a pair of push blocks.

PRESSURE & SECURITY. A pair of push blocks allows you to apply firm, even pressure to a workpiece. At the same time, the blocks prevent injury by keeping your hands away from the bit, as you see in the photo at left.

For a long time, I used an old grout float as a push block. But its large size and handle shape weren't always comfortable to work with — especially when I was working with a small workpiece. So I switched to a pair of *Shop Fox* push blocks, like the ones you see in the photo at right.

The bottom of the push blocks has a soft foam facing to grip the workpiece securely. And the angled handles place your hands in a comfortable position to apply pressure down and into the fence. This lets you focus on the cut — rather than the grip you have on the workpiece.

Push blocks are cheap insurance, so it makes good sense to keep a couple on hand. You can find the ones shown here at WoodstockInt.com.

▲ *Great Design. The angled handles of these push blocks provide a secure, comfortable grip.*

◄ *Get a Grip. Besides keeping your fingers away from the bit, a pair of push blocks provides a grip on your workpiece that can't be beat.*

## 10. Accuracy with a Set-Up Gauge

One of the biggest challenges when using a router table is accurately setting the height of the bit and the position of the fence. Sure, you can use a metal scale to try to get things right where they need to be. But I've found that I get the best results with a set-up gauge.

DUAL-USE GAUGE. A number of manufacturers make gauges for setting the height of a router bit. But they aren't very handy for positioning the fence. That's why I use a dual-purpose gauge. The model shown came from the *Woodsmith Store* (226555).

This gauge features legs that span wide insert plate and fence openings.

Plus, there's a hairline indicator for taking accurate measurements. A handy lock knob fixes the scale in place so you can remove the gauge for easy reading. This also makes it simple to return the fence (or bit) to a previous setting.

USING THE GAUGE. Although using a set-up gauge isn't too tricky, there are a couple things to keep in mind. First, be sure the scale is set against the cutting edge of the bit, as in the main photo. And second, the gauge measures to the outside edge of the bit, so allow for this when setting the fence.
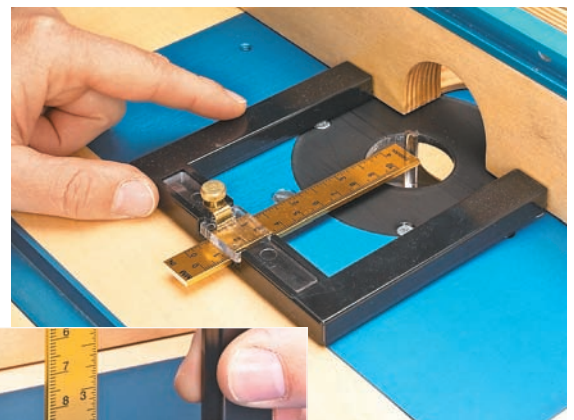
◄ *Dual-Use. With the gauge standing upright, setting the height of a router bit is a snap.*