

Woodsmith PLANS

EASY SPINDLE MORTISES



Easy Spindle Mortises

Whenever I have to add a row of spindles to a project, I know there's no way around having to make a lot of mortises. Drilling out and chiseling all of them square isn't something I look forward to doing. To save myself the time and hassle of cutting each mortise individually, I cut a groove in one edge of a workpiece and then glue in a "mortise strip." The drawings on the following page cover the entire process.

GROOVES. Cutting the centered groove in the edge of a workpiece is the easiest part of this technique, so that's where I like to start. You can see how to do this in Figure 1 on the next page by making two passes at the table saw.

EASY MORTISE STRIPS. As the name implies, the mortise strips are just narrow pieces of wood with notches cut in them. When the



Evenly Spaced.

A notched mortise strip fits into a groove in the stretcher, resulting in evenly spaced spindles.

strips are glued into the grooves, the notches create the mortises.

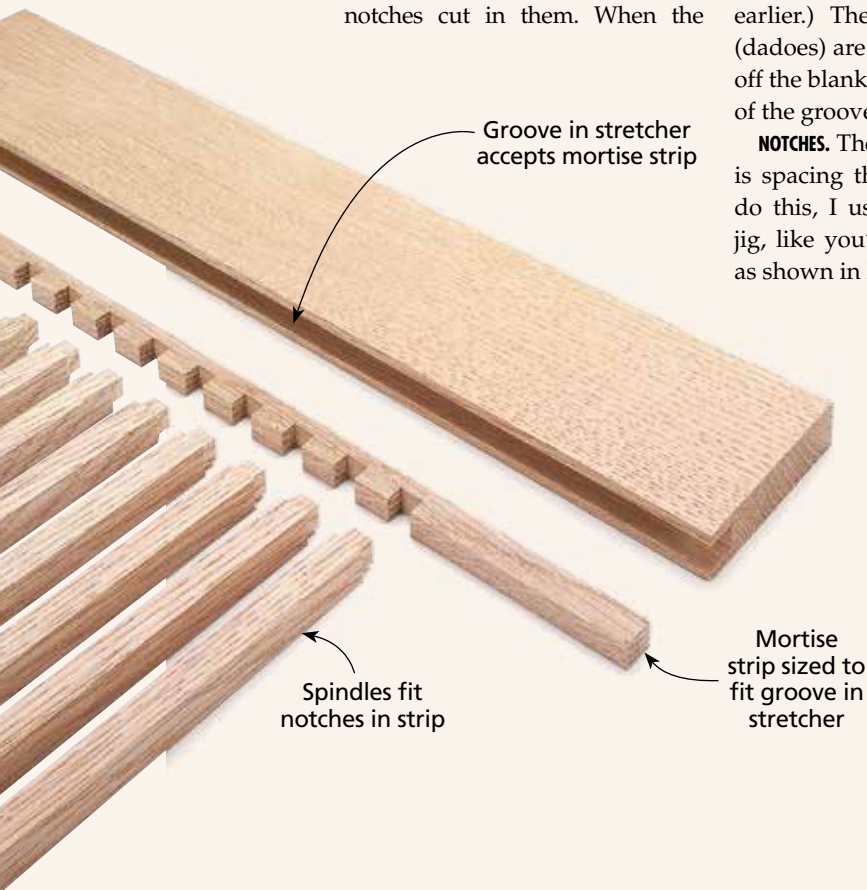
But instead of trying to cut the notches in a bunch of narrow, individual strips, you start with a wide blank cut to the same length as the grooved workpiece. (The thickness of the blank matches the depth of the groove you cut earlier.) Then once the notches (dadoes) are cut, simply rip strips off the blank that match the width of the groove.

NOTCHES. The key to good results is spacing the dadoes evenly. To do this, I use a simple indexing jig, like you'd use for box joints, as shown in Figure 2.

First, cut a centered dado and then glue an index key into the auxiliary fence (Figure 2a). This ensures that the remaining dadoes will be accurately spaced.

After that, all you need to do is readjust the auxiliary fence to position the key away from the dado blade so that it matches the desired spacing of the dadoes, as shown in Figures 3 and 3a on the following page.

The next step is to cut a series of dadoes on one side of the center notch. The actual number of dadoes will depend on your design, but the process for cutting them is identical. Simply place



Cutting the Dadoes. After you cut the first dado through the center of the blank face, you can shift the fence to make the next cut. Make sure the center notch is positioned over the index key.

each newly cut dado over the key to cut the next one.

With one side complete, just turn the workpiece around and cut the remaining dados on the other side of the centerline, following the same procedure, as illustrated in Figure 4.

RIP THE MORTISE STRIP. It's important that the mortises on the upper and lower stretchers line up after

the strips are ripped and glued in place. So it's a good idea to draw a reference line on one end of the blank before ripping the strips free, as shown in Figure 5. Then, just make sure the marks are at the same end of the stretchers when gluing the strips in place.

Note: Use a sparing amount of glue when you install the strips to avoid getting any in the mortises.

