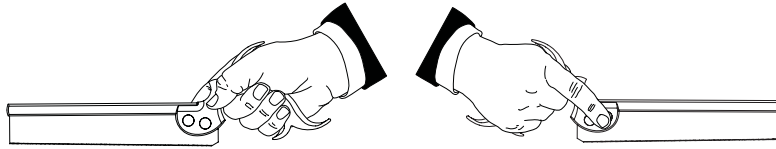


Using the Gramercy Tools Dovetail Saw

In our online article, "[The Design and Engineering of Dovetail Saws](#)," we dissect the design of the Gramercy Tools dovetail saw to show how each feature is optimal for dovetailing. When you use the Gramercy Tools dovetail saw with the right technique you will get the same advantages in cutting dovetails that enabled early 19th century craftsmen to work fast and efficiently, even when they were just starting out as apprentices.

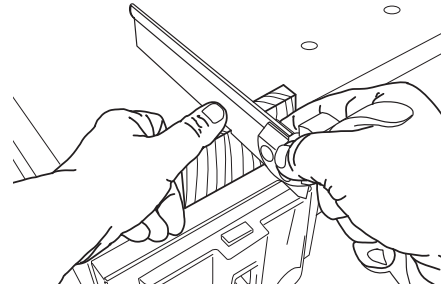


How to Hold the Saw

The first thing you will probably notice is that the handle is tiny. The handle is designed to ensure your hand is in the correct position for comfortable sawing, even for extended periods. Hold the saw like a pistol, with your index finger outstretched. Only three fingers actually curl under the handle. If you wrap all four fingers around a saw handle, there is a tendency to make a fist, which leads to cramping. You would also have less directional control. For these reasons, the handle is designed for the three-fingered grip shown above. At the same time, the smaller and lighter handle has less mass to move back and forth with each stroke, and less weight to influence the direction of an angled cut. The handle should sit snugly in the upper part of your hand so that you can easily control the saw with your thumb and forefinger. This is the key to accurate sawing.

Clamping the Work

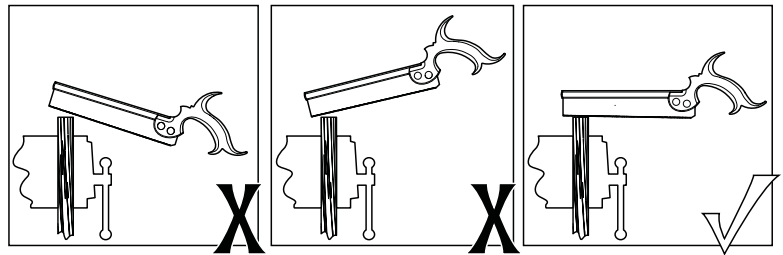
To minimize any chance of the wood vibrating as you saw, clamp the wood as close as you can to the top edge of the vise, leaving enough clearance to saw the entire depth of the joint without having to re-clamp the wood, or accidentally sawing into the vise. You want to be able to comfortably rest the saw so that the teeth lay evenly across top of the wood. With the handle geometry of our saw, you should find yourself standing comfortably, and fairly close to the work, so that you can easily check your progress on both sides of the wood as you proceed.



Starting the Cut

A lot of people have trouble starting a saw cut, so people have developed a lot of different methods to do this. Some pull the saw backwards to score a notch in the wood; others cut a notch with a sharp chisel to the waste side. We found that once we got out of our old habits, just holding the saw with the teeth on the wood worked consistently for great starting. Because our saw is has a canted blade, and is so finely toothed, the most frequent problem people have when starting our saw is **trying too hard**. We have also found that with people accustomed to other dovetail saws there is a tendency to use too much downward pressure and tense up on the saw. Here's a way of starting a cut that works well with our saw:

- Rest the toe of the saw (the tip away from the handle) where you want it to cut, usually on the waste side of a scribed line, just glancing the scribe. Hold the saw level, the teeth just resting flat all along the top surface to be cut.
- USE NO DOWNWARD PRESSURE. Relax and push the saw straight forward, starting the cut. If you tense up or tilt the saw up or down on the work, the saw will jam. This method doesn't work well with coarse toothed saws, but with our fine, 19ppi saw, it works great. The problem for us was unlearning all the tricks we had learned to start coarser saws.
- With the first stroke done, ease up even more, and return the saw to the starting position, keeping the saw in the kerf just made. Do another stroke the same way, easily, relaxed, with no pressure. The saw blade is thin, so if you start cutting askew, the blade will bend and bind in the cut. Be attuned to that feedback and you will quickly learn to saw straight. **Relax your hand and your body, and just pay attention to the saw.**
- If you have never cut dovetails before, go slowly and carefully. Try to remove a tiny bit, but not the entire marked line. With practice, you will gain speed, but it's important to give yourself and your muscles a chance to develop the correct technique.



ALWAYS WEAR EYE PROTECTION WHEN USING TOOLS

Finishing the Cut

The blade of the saw is slightly canted, so you should reach your target depth at the front of the board (the side facing you) first. Slow down, and tilt the saw into the cut a little to level off. Always take full, comfortable strokes. With a little experience, you should just graze your front and back scribe lines at the same time. Successful sawing for dovetails means learning to saw square to the wood and at a consistent angle. Consistency and speed come with practice. Since this document was not intended to be a definitive guide to dovetailing, we will leave instruction on layout and chiseling for a later article.

We hope you enjoy your saw. Please call or e-mail us if you have any questions.

A Note on Sharpening: Eventually, with enough use, a saw will dull and need sharpening. We recommend a long, triangular Swiss needle file for sharpening your Gramercy Tools Dovetail Saw. After repeated sharpening, the teeth will need to be set. Neither of these activities is hard to do, but on a saw with teeth this small we do not recommend it as a beginner's sharpening project. We offer a saw sharpening service at a nominal charge. See our website for more details.

