

Building a Replacement Manger



After about ten years of service, ice falling off the roof damaged the plastic manger that came with my plastic Nativity Scene midway through one Christmas season. Baby Jesus escaped unharmed-proof miracles still happen.

To complete the season, a temporary manger was quickly thrown together from some dowels sawed in half and scrap ¼ inch plywood I found in my parents' basement.

However, by the end of the next season, it was becoming obvious something else had to be done as the weather was already beginning to take its toll. Also, the solid sides made Baby Jesus very difficult to see.

Over the summer, plans were drawn up on my computer for a new manger, using remains of the old plastic one for reference. Two criteria were used in the design:

- It had to fold as flat as possible for off season storage.
- Naturally resistant materials had to be used where possible to avoid having to build another manger anytime soon. Thus cedar was chosen for the wood.

The plans were set aside until setup that year reminded me how sad the current manger was looking. Thus the plans were pulled out and built one afternoon.

Not thinking anyone would want to build one for themselves, the files were purged from my computer.

However, I've since heard of a website known as Planetchristmas.com where many Christmas decorating enthusiasts hang out and share ideas. For my contribution, I've attempted to recreate the plans from memory.

What may be surprising is that my total cost of materials here is less than \$10.00. Total time to build was about three hours.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

All wood cutting for this project will be performed using with the most versatile power tool in the woodshop-the table saw. Table saws can also be dangerous so be sure you know what you are doing.



MATERIALS

- 1x6x24 cedar (the actual thickness will be closer to 7/8 inch)
- 2 pan head screws
- Two hex nuts
- Six washers
- Two dozen brad nails

EQUIPMENT

- Table saw with a rip blade and cross cut blade or a combination blade. (even the little table top models will work here as the thickest board passing over the blade will be less than one inch thick.
- 1/8 drill bit
- Drill press

CONSTRUCTION

Legs (make 4):

Set the rip fence to 1 ½ inches and rip two pieces 24 inches long. Change over to cross cut mode and cut each of these pieces in half to form the four legs. Drill an 1/8 hole in the center of each leg centered on the 1 ½ side. These holes will server as pivot points.

Slats (make 6):

Cross cut what is left of the board to 16 inches-the eight inch section is scrap. Now set the rip fence to 1/8 inch. Carefully rip six pieces. The remaining two inches are scrap. **USE A PUSHSTICK FOR SAFETY!**

ASSEMBLY

Place a washer under the screw head and run the screw through through the holes in each leg in the pair with a washer in between the two legs. Place a washer and hex on the end. Repeat for the other set of legs. Fold both sets flat for assembly.

Place three slats on each leg. Place the top of the first slat even with the top of the first leg. Leave a gap of 1 ¼ inches between each row of slats. Overhang the slats by 1 ½ inches on the left side and 2 ½ inches on the right.

Secure each slat to each leg with two brad nails at each joint.

NOTES AND TIPS

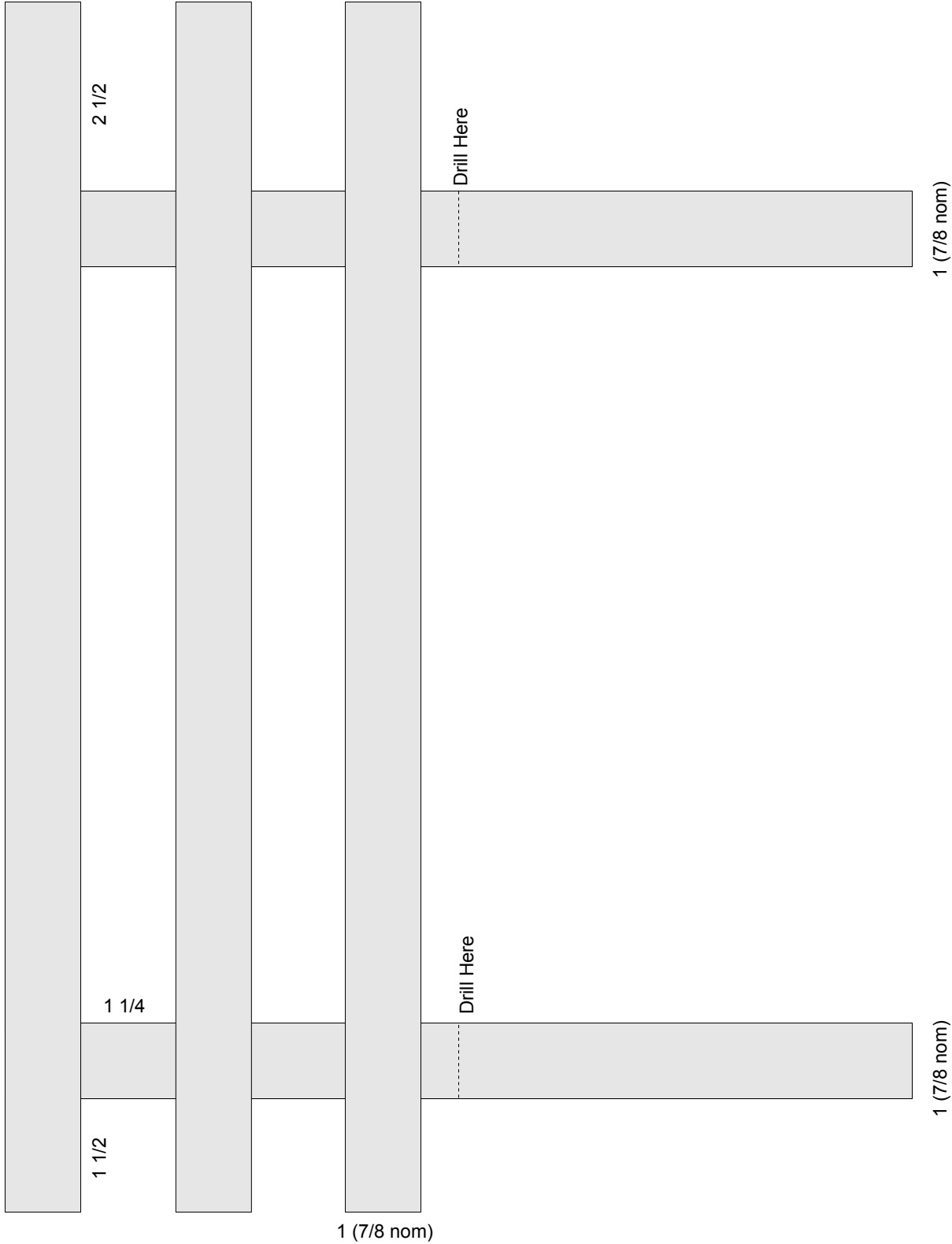
If your local home center's building supplies department has a bargain bin for short boards, check there before looking in the bin at 8 footers. This is how I was able to keep costs way down.

A bandsaw can be used instead of a table saw but keep in mind that a band saw blade may twist.

Predrilling the slats is optional to avoid splitting when securing to the legs. Use a 1/16 drill bit here.

You may want to use a small piece of scrap to form a atop block and attach near the pivot on each leg as accumulating snow in the manger does tend to flatten it. A stop block will keep the manger upright. Attach at one point so it can be swiveled out of the way to allow flattening for storage.

I did not apply any sealant. If you use a wood other than cedar, I highly suggest you do seal it to prevent deterioration from exposure to weather.



CEDAR NATIVITY MANGER

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SCALE: 50%

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