

Making a Bookcase Coffin

Materials:

- 3 1x8x8' pine
(#1 is almost clear and most expensive, #2 small knots,
#3 larger knots and costs the least)
- 4 1x8x10' pine
- 1 4x8 sheet 1/2" plywood (lauan or poplar would be the
best looking for the lowest cost)
- 24 2 1/2" screws
- 40 1 5/8" screws
- 1 pair 2 1/2" or 3" loose pin hinges
- 2 Chest latches
- 32 or 40 feet of 3/4" Outside Corner Molding (optional)

The sides of the bookcase coffin should be about 6" longer than the inside measurement of the length of the coffin (the coffin should be about four inches longer than the height of the person it is for. Standard coffin length is 6' 6".) Cut each of the four 1x8x10' pieces of pine into two pieces, one the length of the side of the coffin and the other 22 1/2" (the standard width of the inside of a coffin). The 22 1/2" pieces are the tops and bottoms of the boxes. Assemble two boxes by using 2 1/2" screws to fasten the tops and bottoms between the side pieces so that 2 1/4" of the side extends past the top or bottom. You'll then have two boxes with inside measurements 6" less than the length of the side pieces and 22 1/2" wide.

The 1/2" plywood is used for the back of the two boxes. Cut the 1/2" plywood right down the middle into two pieces just under 24" wide, then cut each piece to length, which will be 4 1/2" less than the length of the side pieces, which is also the distance between the outside of the ends of the coffin. When you put the plywood piece on the back of a box, it should just cover the box from side to side and from top to bottom. Screw it down using screws at least 1 5/8" long. You now have the two boxes which form the coffin. Put them together face-to-face and attach the hinges over the joint on one side. Attach the chest latches to the other side to hold the assembled coffin closed.

Cut the 3 1x8x8' pieces of pine into pieces just under 22 1/2" long to make the shelves for the bookcase. You can support the shelves in a number of ways, the quickest being to drive short screws into the sides of the coffin where you want the shelves to be. Or you can screw cleats to the sides of the coffin to support the shelves. Or you can buy a number of different shelf support systems. Look at an alternative below.

If you want to hide the screws in the back of the boxes and the edge of the plywood, buy enough 3/4" Outside Corner Molding to go around the plywood and nail it in place.

Now you have a blank canvas to decorate as you choose.

Questions? My phone number is 207-873-7854, my email is crlakin@colby.edu

The shelf support system I use is unobtrusive and inexpensive. I use a piece of $\frac{1}{4}$ " pegboard as a guide and a centering bit to drill a row of shallow holes in the sides of the coffin. You can see them in this picture if you look close;



Then I drill a $\frac{3}{8}$ " hole $\frac{5}{16}$ " deep right in the edge of the underside of each shelf so that a $\frac{3}{4}$ " #8 pan head screw driven into the hole so about $\frac{1}{4}$ " protrudes. When the shelf is put in place the viewer can't see the screw. When getting the bookcase ready to use as a coffin, the shelves and screws are readily removed and the holes are not noticeable.

