

How to Make a Toe-Pincher Coffin



Measure the length, width and depth of the body using pencil marks on a stick.



Lay out the coffin bottom on a board, adding two inches to the length and two inches to the width at the shoulder (the shoulder line is about 14 inches from the head end of the coffin). The head end is nine inches wide and the foot end eleven inches.

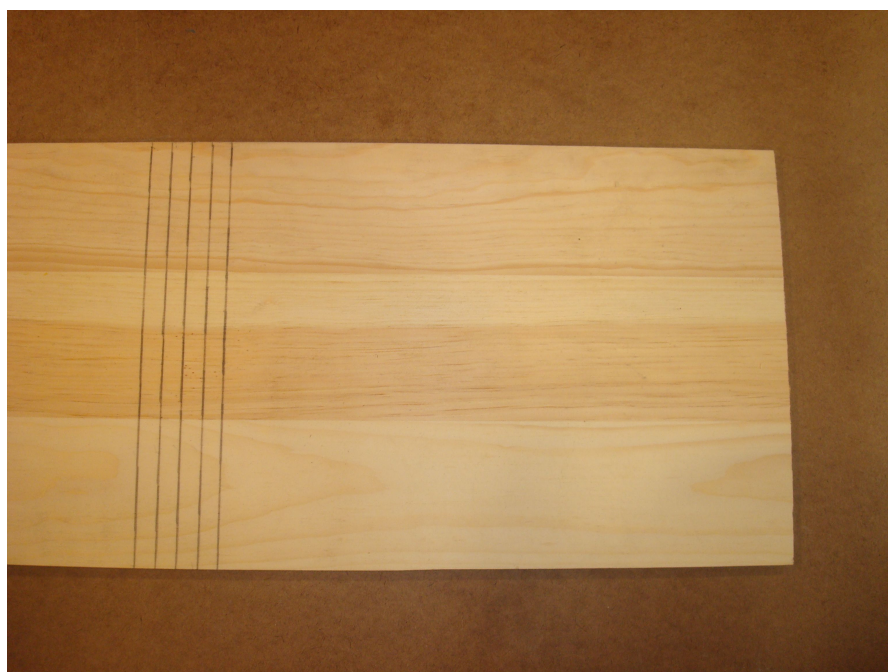


Saw just outside the pencil lines, then plane the edges smooth and form the shoulders into a gentle curve.





Saw the two end pieces to length and width (the grain runs vertically, so the length is the width of the side boards), attach the two end pieces to the bottom board and plane the edges to match the bottom.



Saw the two side boards to width, the depth of the body plus one and one half inches, then mark the location of the shoulder on the side boards. Draw a pencil line across the boards from that shoulder line, then draw two lines on each side of that line spaced three-quarters of an inch apart, five lines in all.



The sides will be bent around the shoulder curve using the kerf-bending method. Using a jig to guide the saw, saw one-half inch deep kerfs on each line (take care to avoid sawing all the way through). At this point, mark the bottom edge of the side pieces for the screws that will hold the side to the bottom. Put a screw several inches on both sides of the saw kerfs and several inches from the head and foot boards, then three or four evenly spaced between the kerfs and the foot board. Pre-drill the holes.



On the kerf side of the board, pour boiling water in the kerfs, then turn the board over. Spread a hand towel on the board and pour boiling water on the towel. Leave the towel in place for a minute or so, pouring a little more water on the towel to keep the temperature up. Alternatively, you can use an iron on the wet towel to heat the wood.



Set the bottom-plus-ends assembly on the workbench, position the side board so the kerf is centered on the shoulder curve, then put two screws in the bottom edge of the side board on the side toward the top of the coffin and drive them into the edge of the bottom board.



Gently bend the lower part of the side board around the shoulder curve, then use a clamp to hold it in place against the edge of the bottom board. Drive screws through the pre-drilled holes into the edge of the bottom board. Check to see that the end pieces are perpendicular to the bottom board and screw the side boards to the end pieces.



Trim the excess off the ends of the side boards and plane them smooth. I like the look of the sides running a half inch past the end.



Set the assembled coffin on the top board. Using a one-half inch thick piece of wood, draw a line around the coffin. Saw along that line, then plane the edges smooth.



Cut a cleat, two inches wide and shaped so that it will fit in the end of the coffin (each end will be different) but will be an eighth of an inch short. Screw them to the inside of the coffin top so that when you put the lid on the coffin there is just a little play.

To attach the top to the coffin, put screws or dowels through the top corners of the sides so that the screws or dowels go into the ends of the cleats on the coffin top.

To put rope handles on the coffin, drill half-inch holes six inches apart where you want handles. Tie an overhand knot in one end of a twenty-one inch piece of three-eighths inch natural-fiber rope, thread it out one of the pair of holes and into the other hole, then tie another overhand knot. (Wrap a piece of masking tape around the rope at the cut line before you cut to keep it from fraying).

- Chuck Lakin, November 2015