A Summer's Swing

An easy-to-build project for easy living

BY SPIKE CARLSEN

Build this simple porch swing in a weekend and enjoy years of relaxing summer evenings in its sway.

What better place to relax this summer than on a porch swing. No porch? Don't worry, you can still kick back. This relaxing ride can be suspended from an arbor, a swing stand, the joists of a second-story deck or even an old swing-set frame. Simply scout out the perfect location and think creatively about your hanging options.

The pine swing shown is protected by a porch; if your swing will be exposed to the elements, make it out of treated pine, cedar or another exterior-grade wood. The swing is 4 ft. long to make efficient use of standard (and easy-to-haul) 8-ft. lumber. "Sandwich construction" makes

PHOTOS BY TAD SADDORIS AND DAN CARY

PORCH SWING

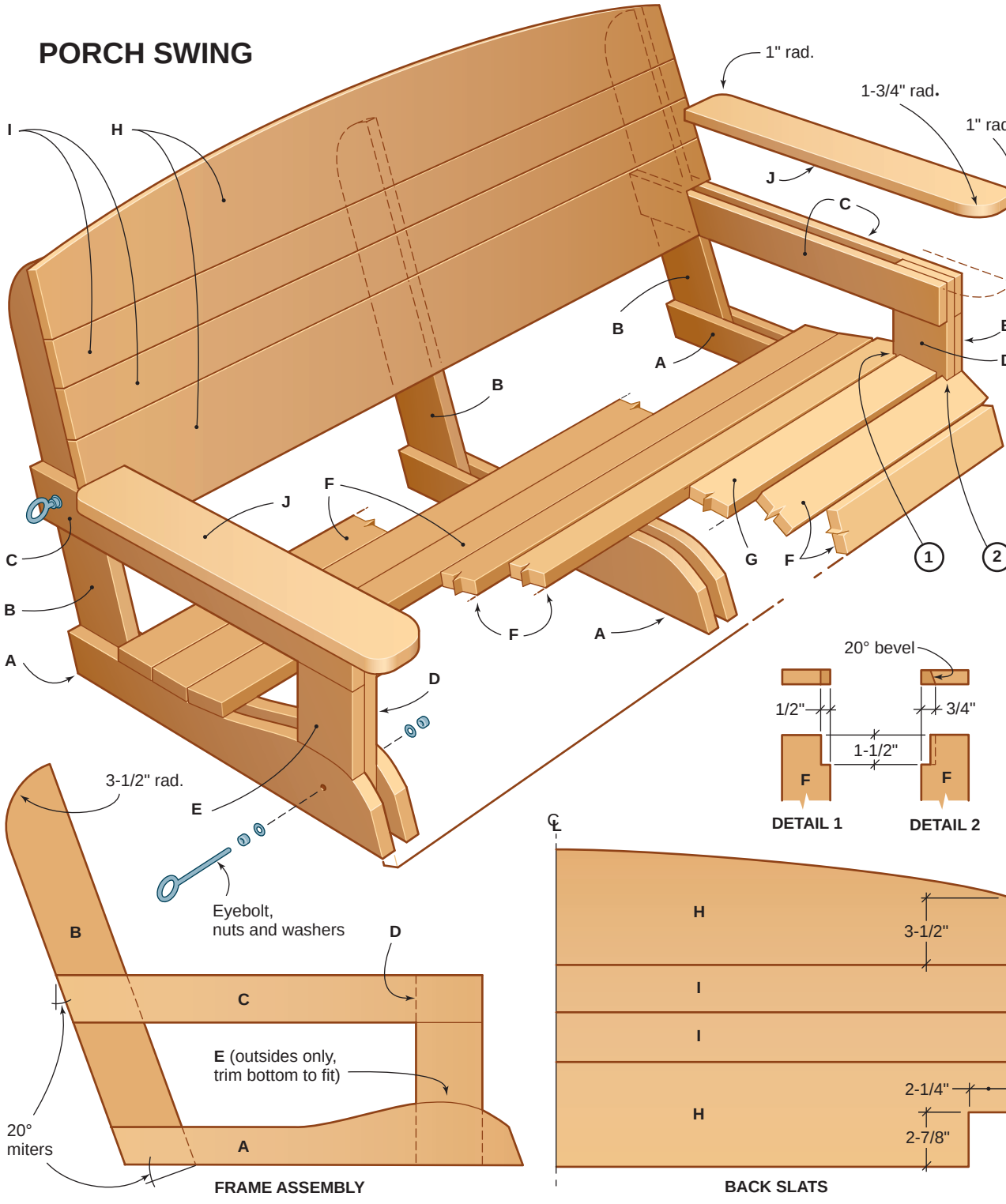


ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL GRAPHICS

it easy to build; the only tools you'll need are a circular saw, a jigsaw and a drill.

Cut out and prime the parts

Begin by cutting all of the parts to the lengths and widths in the cutting list (below). To make the seat supports, which are contoured for comfort, transfer the seat-support pattern (see illustration, p. 12) to a piece of 1x4. Draw a grid of 1-in. squares on the 1x4 to help lay out the pattern. Cut out one support (photo 1) and use it as a template to create five more.

The angles on the ends of the seat supports, back supports, arm supports and armrests are all 20 degrees. If you don't have a miter saw for cutting the boards to the correct angle and length, use a speed square to establish the 20-degree angle and a circular saw to make the cuts.

Use a flexible piece of wood to lay out the arched profile on the top back slat (photo 2). Drive a screw near the end and 2 in. from the top of a 1x6. Mark the center of the top of the board, and flex a thin strip of wood between the two points to establish half of the arch. Trace the arch and cut along the line. Then use the cutoff scrap as a pattern for the other half of the arch.

Cut 1-in.-radius curves on both front corners and the back outside corner of each armrest. Wait to lay out the curve profile on the bottom of the arm-post filler until after the frame supports have been constructed.

MATERIALS AND CUTTING LIST

KEY	NO.	DESCRIPTION	SIZE
A	6	Seat supports	3/4 x 3-1/2 x 22 in.
B	3	Back supports	3/4 x 3-1/2 x 22-1/4 in.
C	4	Arm supports	3/4 x 3-1/2 x 22-1/2 in.
D	2	Arm posts	3/4 x 3-1/2 x 10 in.
E	2	Arm-post fillers	3/4 x 3-1/2 x 4-3/4 in.
F	7	Full seat slats	3/4 x 2-1/2 x 48 in.
G	1	Short seat slat	3/4 x 2-1/2 x 45 in.
H	2	Wide back slats	3/4 x 5-1/2 x 48 in.
I	2	Narrow back slats	3/4 x 2-1/2 x 48 in.
J	2	Armrests	3/4 x 3-1/2 x 20-3/4 in.

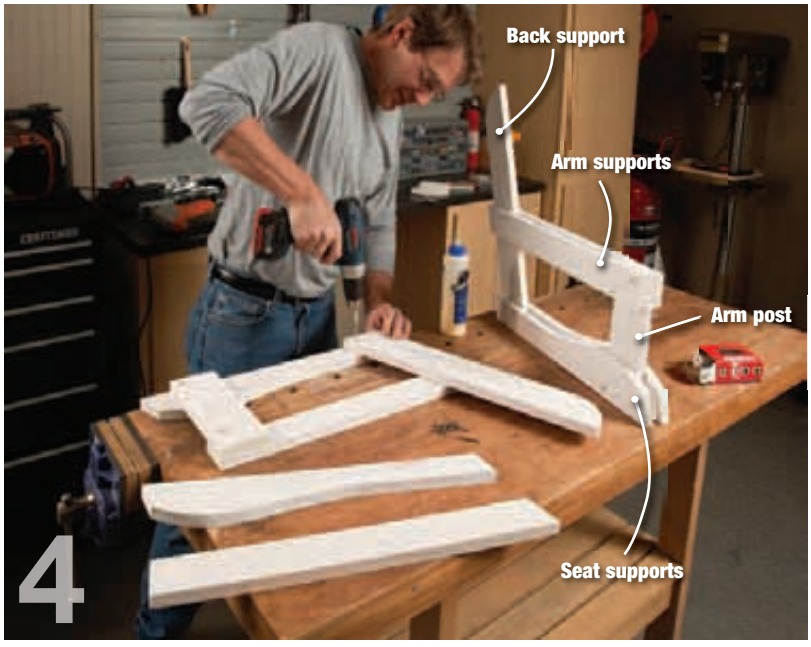
SHOPPING LIST

- 1x3 x 8-ft. pine (6)
- 1x4 x 8-ft. pine (4)
- 1x6 x 8-ft. pine (1)
- 1-1/4-in. exterior-rated screws
- 1-5/8-in. coated trim-head screws
- 3/8-in.-dia. x 5-in. eyebolts (4)
- 3/8-in.-dia. washers (8)
- 3/8-in.-dia. nuts (8)
- 1/2-in.-dia. x 6-in. lag eyebolts (2)
- Porch swing chain assembly (see SOURCES ONLINE)
- Exterior-rated wood glue
- Exterior-rated primer and paint

Make the seat supports. Lay out the seat-support pattern on one piece of 1x4. Cut out the first piece and use it as a template to lay out the remaining five supports.

Create the arched top slat for the seat back. Flex a thin strip of wood to lay out half of the arch. Cut along the line and use the cutoff as a pattern for the other half of the arch.

Prime all of the pieces after you've cut and sanded them. Use a small roller and exterior-rated primer, and coat the end grain twice for extra protection.



Build the three support frames — two with arms, one without — that create the structure for the swing. Attach the components with glue and screws.

Space the outer frames 4 ft. apart and center the middle frame. Install the first seat slat and the lowest back slat to hold the frames square; then install the remaining slats. Drill a 1/8-in.-dia. pilot hole for each screw.

Once you've cut out all of the parts, use sandpaper to soften the edges; then apply a coat of exterior-rated primer (photo 3). By priming first, you'll be able to protect those little nooks and crannies that would be difficult to reach after the swing has been assembled.

Make the frame sandwiches

Rather than relying on big fasteners or fancy joinery for strength, the support framework is made up of three sets of sandwiched parts: two outer frames and one center frame. The two outer frames are made by sandwiching one back support and one arm post between two seat supports and two arm supports.

Position one seat support and one arm support parallel to one another. Then place an arm post and back support on top, aligning the edges of the adjoining parts (see frame assembly illustration, p. 12). Attach the parts with exterior-rated glue and 1-1/4-in. screws (photo 4). Drill a countersink pilot hole for each screw. Complete the frame by attaching the second seat and arm supports on top of the back support and arm post with glue and screws. Avoid installing screws where the four hanging eyebolts will be installed later. Build the center frame the same way, but leave out the arm post and arm supports.

Add the slats and armrests

Position the two end frames so the outer edges are 48 in. apart; then center the armless frame between them. All of the seat and back slats are attached with 1-5/8-in. coated trim-head screws. Drill 1/8-in.-dia. pilot holes to prevent splitting the slats.

First, attach the front seat slat and bottom back slat to establish the support-frame positions and alignment (photo 5, p.16). Attach the front seat slat to the front edges of the outside and center seat supports, overhanging the bottom edge of the front seat slat about 1/2 in. below the bottom of the support frames. Cut notches in the bottom back slat to fit over the arm supports. Then check to make sure the frames are parallel to one another and attach the bottom back slat with trim-head screws.

Next, attach the rest of the seat slats, spacing them roughly 1/8 in. apart. Notch the second and fourth seat slats to fit around the arm supports (see Detail 1 and Detail 2, p. 12). Cut the third slat shorter to fit between the arm supports. Once the seat slats are in place, install the back slats.

Lay out and cut the arm-post fillers to fit on the outside of each arm post. Trace the slight curve along the top of the seat support onto the bottom edge of the arm-post filler. Coat the exposed end grain with primer and then attach

the fillers with glue and 1-1/4-in. screws. Finally, attach the armrests to the arm supports with glue and trim-head screws, overlapping the inside edge of the arm supports by about 1/4 in.

This porch swing hangs from four 3/8-in.-dia. x 5-in.-long eyebolts. The front bolts are positioned near the bottom of the seat, centered on the intersection of the seat support and arm post. The back bolts are positioned higher, centered on the intersection of the back support and arm supports. Installing the back bolts higher than the front bolts helps to prevent the seat from tipping forward.

Drill a 3/8-in.-dia. hole at each bolt location (photo 6). Install a nut so it's just short of the eye of the eyebolt, add a washer and then tap the eyebolt into the hole. Add another washer and nut; then use a wrench to tighten the outside nut so the swing frame is pinched tightly.

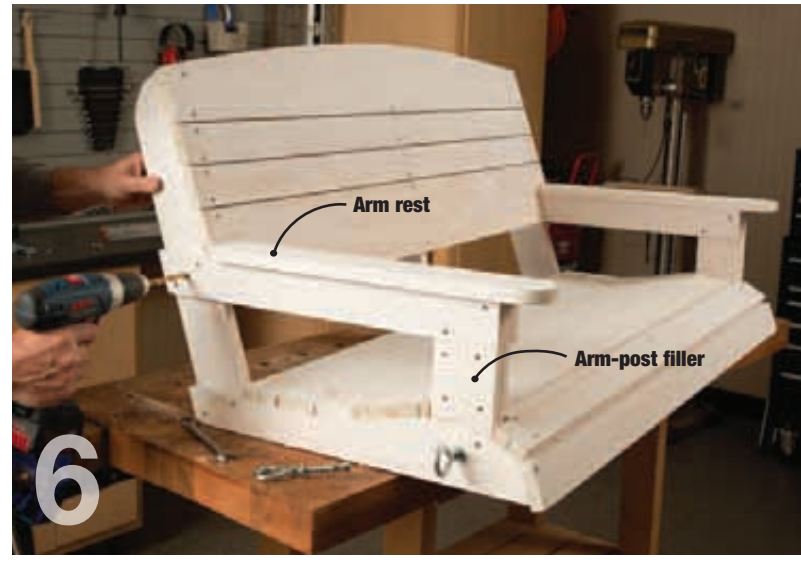
It's a lot easier to paint the swing before you hang it. First, remove the eyebolts and cover the screwheads with wood putty; then sand the dried putty smooth. Turn the swing upside down and paint the underside; then flip it over and paint the top. A foam brush works well for getting between the slats.

Hang the swing

We hung our swing using chain and a swing-hook kit (see photo 7 inset and SOURCES ONLINE) purchased at a home center. You can also devise your own hanging system, but be sure the components are rated to support the weight of the porch swing and occupants.

Install two swing-hook eyebolts in the ceiling at least 52 in. apart. Note: These bolts must be securely anchored in a piece of structural framing such as a ceiling rafter or crosstie. Because I planned to suspend a porch swing from my ceiling, when I built the porch I tripled the ceiling joist in that area before installing the ceiling boards.

Temporarily support your swing on a combination of buckets, sturdy boxes, boards and shims to establish the hanging height — a seat height of 16 to 18 in. is comfortable for most people. I placed shims under the front edge to add a slight backward tilt. If your supports are sturdy enough, do a "test sit" to make sure the swing feels comfortable. Connect the swing chain to swing hooks in the ceiling; then use chain-repair links to secure the four lower chains to the swing (see photo 7). ◆



After attaching the armrests and filler pieces, drill through-holes and install the four eyebolts for hanging the swing. Remove the eyebolts before you paint.

Temporarily prop up the swing at a comfortable height and angle. Use chain to connect the eyebolts to hooks that are securely anchored to framing in the ceiling (inset).

Handyman Club Life member Spike Carlsen is the author of A Splintered History of Wood: Belt Sander Races, Blind Woodworkers and Baseball Bats *(HarperCollins; ISBN 978-0-06-137356-5). Find more information at www.asplinteredhistoryofwood.com.*

SOURCES ONLINE

For online information, go to **www.HandymanClub.com** and click on WEB EXTRAS.

National Manufacturing Co.
(Swing Hook Kit, No. 264-069 V2038), (815) 625-1320