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STON

TOOL GUIDE



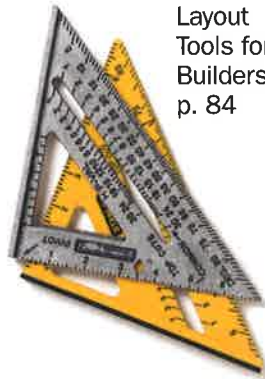
Best tools of the year



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214
tools
tested

Tool Guide - Winter 2015

\$9.99 \$11.99 Canada



Taunton Product #015012

14-in. Bandsaws

Great for curves and for resawing, these saws are the perfect fit for a home shop



The bandsaw may be the most versatile machine in the shop. You can use it to cut curves and joinery, to rip boards (rough and milled), and to resaw. Bandsaws come in a range of sizes, from benchtop models to industrial giants. But the perfect size for many woodworkers is 14 in. It's the first bandsaw most of us should get, and could be the only one you'll ever need. A 14-in. bandsaw has a small footprint, so it fits easily in most home shops.

We've tested a lot of bandsaws over the years, and we've never found one that couldn't rip or cut curves. The real test is resawing wide boards, because it requires a lot of cutting height, a strong

motor, and a guide post that doesn't flex. So we tested only saws that can resaw boards at least 10 in. wide without the addition of a riser block, and that have motors of 1½ hp or more.

During the test, we cut curves, made ripcuts, resawed wide boards, changed the blade, and adjusted the guides. We also checked features such as dust collection and the fence, which have a direct impact on the saw's performance. Read on to see which saws made the cut, and which ones fell short.

Roland Johnson contributed to this article.

Packed with power and user-friendly features

After all of the tests were complete, two saws stood out. The Powermatic 1500 and Laguna 14/Twelve are both great saws, and earn Best Overall honors. The Laguna also is a Best Value, sharing that title with the least-expensive saw in the test, Steel City's 50155G.



EDITORS' CHOICE
BEST OVERALL

POWERMATIC PM1500

Street price: \$2,900

This is a great saw all around. All of the important adjustments are made without tools, and the guides can be set accurately with ease. Tracking the blade is simple, too, due to the window in the upper housing and yellow tires on the wheels. The 3-hp motor easily handled the resaw test—better than all of the other saws.



EDITORS' CHOICE
BEST OVERALL EDITORS' CHOICE
BEST VALUE

LAGUNA 14/TWELVE

Street price: \$1,097

The Laguna is full of smart features. No tools are needed to install a blade and adjust the guides. It has the largest throat of the saws tested, making blade changes much easier, and the aluminum throat plate has leveling screws. The guides are ceramic, a welcome feature on a saw in this price range. The motor is wired for 110 volts, a plus for those without access to a 220-volt circuit.



EDITORS' CHOICE
BEST VALUE

STEEL CITY 50155G

Street price: \$700

This saw does an excellent job resawing, and has very good dust collection. Although blade changes and guide adjustments aren't as easy as they are on the Powermatic and Laguna 14/Twelve, they aren't difficult either. The 1½-hp motor is wired for 110-volt power, so this saw can be used on a standard house circuit. The lamp and mobile base are convenient additions.

Details that make a difference

HASSLE-FREE BLADE CHANGES

Unless your bandsaw is dedicated to a single type of cut, say for resawing, you'll need to change blades. It should be easy to install blades, and then to tension and track them.



Quick-release tension speeds up blade changes. Most saws have a lever that releases or engages tension on the blade. Flip the lever and the tension releases instantly. Without it, blade changes take longer.



Guards shouldn't get in the way. On the Oliver and General International (shown) saws, the blade slot pinches together at the top of the guard, making it difficult to install and remove the blade.



Window makes blade tracking easier. You can see when the blade is centered on the tire. The Hammer, both Laguna machines, and both Rikon saws have one. A light-colored tire, like the one on the Rikon 10-325 (shown), is a great aid, too.

Online Extra

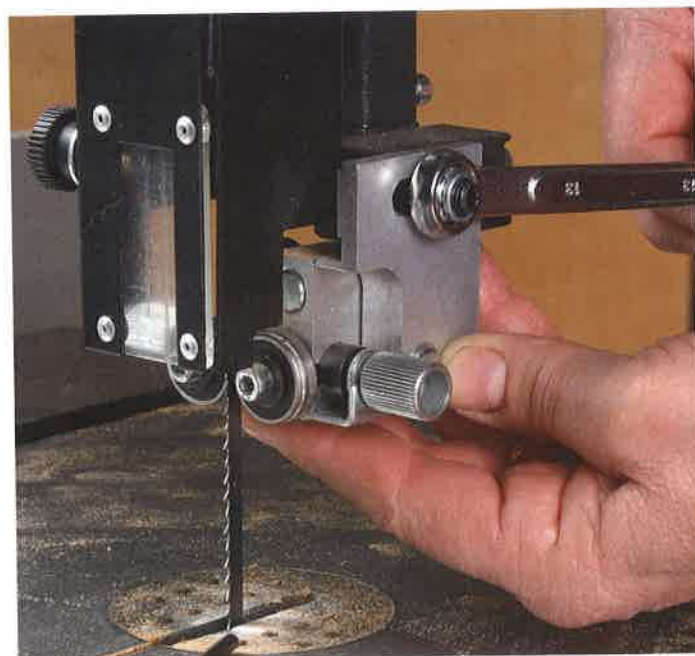
To watch a video on the right way to change a bandsaw blade, go to FineWoodworking.com/TG2015.

GUIDES THAT ARE A SNAP TO ADJUST

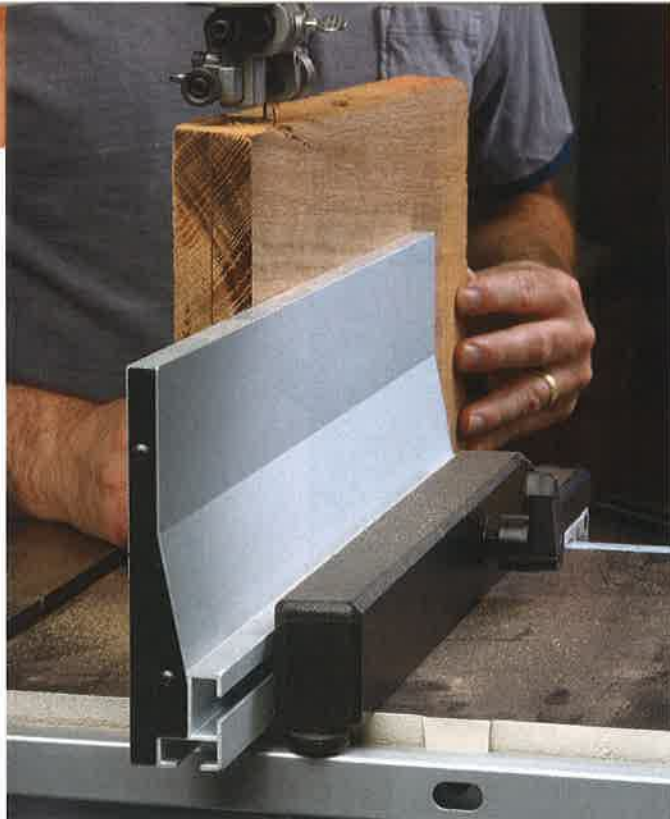
Setting the blade guides should not be a frustrating experience. Toolless adjustments make it a quick and stress-free job.



Tool-free is the way to go. The guides on the Powermatic PM1500 were the easiest to set up and adjust.



Tools slow you down. The guides on the Laguna 14 SUV require two different wrenches (one box end, one Allen), making adjustments more cumbersome.



FENCES THAT RIP AND RESAW

Two-position fences are convenient, especially when they can be adjusted without tools.



Two-position fences are safer. No matter how tall the workpiece is, you can always get the guide bearings close to it with this type of fence. The lower position also provides plenty of clearance for your hand or a push stick.

GOOD DUST COLLECTION

Bandsaws create a lot of dust quickly, especially when resawing, and you need a well-placed dust port to catch it.

Under the table works best. It pulls in the dust as soon as it's made, and gets nearly all of it. The Rikon 10-351 (shown) and both Laguna saws have a port there.



Lower ports miss too much dust. Falling dust is able to escape the port's reach. Both the Grizzly (shown) and Hammer saws have low ports.

FOOT BRAKE SPEEDS UP THE WORK

The brake brings the wheels and blade to a halt within seconds, allowing you to begin your next cut more quickly. Without a brake, it can take 30 seconds or more for the wheels to stop spinning.



Stop It with a step. The foot-activated brake frees up both hands to control the workpiece. Five saws have a foot brake: General International, Hammer, Laguna 14 SUV (shown), Powermatic, and Rikon 10-351.

14-in. bandsaws compared

We tested the bandsaws by resawing 10-in.-wide cherry, and cutting curves in 1-in.-thick poplar. Along the way we evaluated the ease of changing blades, adjusting the guides, and using the fence. Each saw was equipped with its own pair of Carter bandsaw blades—one for resawing, one for curves.



General Int. 90-170B



Grizzly G0457



Hammer N3800



Jet JWBS-14SF

MODEL	STREET PRICE	MOTOR (HP)	RESAW CAPACITY	EASE OF BLADE CHANGES	EASE OF GUIDE ADJUSTMENTS	GUIDE-POST ALIGNMENT
General International 90-170B	\$1,595	1½	12 in.	Poor	Good	Fair
Grizzly G0457	\$1,050	2	10 in.	Good	Good	Very good
Hammer N3800	\$2,075	2	12¾ in.	Good	Good	Poor
Jet JWBS-14SF	\$1,600	1¾	13½ in.	Very good	Excellent	Good
Laguna 14 SUV	\$1,700	3	14 in.	Good	Good	Excellent
BEST OVERALL CHOICE Laguna 14/Twelve BEST VALUE CHOICE	\$1,097	1¾	12 in.	Very good	Very good	Excellent
Oliver 4620	\$1,403	1½	12 in.	Fair	Good	Good
BEST OVERALL CHOICE Powermatic PM1500	\$2,900	3	14 in.	Very good	Excellent	Very good
Rikon 10-325	\$1,000	1½	13 in.	Fair	Poor	Very good
Rikon 10-351	\$1,500	2½	14 in.	Good	Good	Good
Steel City 50114	\$700	1¾	12 in.	Poor	Fair	Poor
BEST VALUE CHOICE Steel City 50155G	\$700	1½	12 in.	Good	Good	Very good



Laguna 14 SUV



Oliver 4620



Rikon 10-325



Rikon 10-351



Steel City 50114

GUIDE-POST RIGIDITY	DUST COLLECTION	FENCE	RESAW CUTS	CURVE CUTS	COMMENTS
Very good	Very good	Very good	Good	Good	Stout upper guide post provides solid support for resawing. Foot brake stops blade quickly.
Good	Fair	Excellent	Very good	Very good	Great two-position fence changes over quickly. Table height is perfect for detail work. Base cabinet provides convenient storage for blades and gear.
Fair	Very good	Very good	Very good	Good	Guides are adjusted without tools. Blade guard slightly obscures view of the cut line. No quick-release tension lever.
Good	Very good	Excellent	Good	Good	Has a great two-position fence with an etched scale and micro-adjust knob.
Good	Excellent	Good	Excellent	Good	Huge throat plate makes it very easy to get blades in and out. Motor easily handles massive resaw capacity.
Good	Very good	Very good	Good	Very good	Excellent two-position fence, big table, and plenty of power.
Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	Good	T-square fence has rollers for easy movement and T-slots in the fence rail for add-ons like a tall resaw fence.
Good	Good	Excellent	Excellent	Very good	Fence and guides are easy to adjust, and front brake stops the blade quickly. Every adjustment is made without tools.
Poor	Fair	Good	Good	Very good	Yellow tires and window in upper housing make blade tracking very easy. Base cabinet provides convenient place to store blades and gear. Includes lamp.
Fair	Excellent	Good	Very good	Very good	Tool-free blade-guide adjustments, big door on the blade guard, and unique blade tension lever make for quick blade changes. Includes LED light.
Poor	Poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Dust drawer in base catches dust that falls into cabinet. LED work light on upper cabinet is bright.
Good	Very good	Fair	Excellent	Fair	Includes casters for mobility, a circle-cutting jig, and a lamp. No quick-release tension lever.