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How to Make a Slit Drum

By [Andrew Breslin](#), eHow Contributor | updated June 10, 2011

The types of drums most familiar to the Western world are usually made from animal hide or synthetic material that vibrates to produce sound. Slit drums -- which have long been popular in Africa, Asia and South America -- produce sound through vibrating tongues of wood. With access to woodworking tools, you can make a slit drum yourself.



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Instructions

1 Prepare the top surface of your drum from a hardwood. Hardwoods produce clear, resonant tones in contrast to the more muffled tones produced by softer woods. Padouk, mahogany and cherry are all good choices for a drum top. Drill evenly spaced holes 2 1/2 inches in from each short edge. A four-tongued drum would require six holes. A six-tongued drum would require 8 holes.

2 Draw straight lines from the center of each hole to the corresponding hole on the other edge. Cut along these lines using a scroll saw. This will leave you with either two or three tongues of identical length, but they will not produce tones, because they are connected on both ends and unable to vibrate. You will need to cut your tongues, but don't cut them directly in half as each tongue would then produce the same tone. Ratios of sizes of tongues that produce good tones are 3:4, 2:3 or 4:5. If you are using an 18-inch-long piece of wood with 6 tongues total beginning 2 1/2 inches from the edge, you could cut your three tongues into 4- and 9-inch, 5- and 8-inch, and 7- and 6-inch sections to provide six tongues total, incorporating all the ideal ratios.

Things You'll Need

- 1 piece of 3/4 inch thick hardwood, 18 inches by 7 1/2 inches
- 2 pieces of 3/4 inch thick wood, 6 inches by 5 inches
- 2 pieces of 3/4 inch thick wood, 18 inches by 5 inches
- Scroll saw
- Wood screws
- Wood glue
- Sandpaper

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3 Assemble the box that this top piece sits on. The box does not have to be made of the same wood as the top; a cheaper, softer wood will do just as well. Use the two longer pieces of soft wood on the outside of your box, with the two shorter pieces on the inside to produce a box 18 inches long, 7 1/2 inches wide and 5 inches tall. The box can be secured with screws, and the screws countersunk and filled in with sanded-off dowels for a more attractive appearance. It is vitally important that the top edge of your box be as smooth and level as possible. Line the separate pieces of the box as carefully as possible before you screw it together, and sand it thoroughly afterwards so that there are no gaps when you rest the top piece on the box. Rest the top piece on the assembled box to see if there is any wobble. If there is, keep sanding.

4 Attach the top piece to the box with wood glue. Do not use screws. Place the assembled box with glued-on top into a vice overnight while the glue dries. To enhance tone and volume, you can add a piece of thin plywood cut to shape to cover the bottom of the drum, and cut a hole in the center of one of the long pieces of wood forming the box.

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Tips & Warnings

Routing the edge of the top piece achieves a more attractive look without affecting the sound of your drum. If you want to stain your wood, do this after cutting and routing but before assembling. Rounding off the tongues can also make your drum more attractive. Do this with a scroll saw and touch it up with sandpaper. Make sure you round off the tongues before you stain the wood or attach the top piece to the assembled box.

Always exercise caution when working with power tools. If you are not already experienced using a scroll saw, you should not attempt this project.

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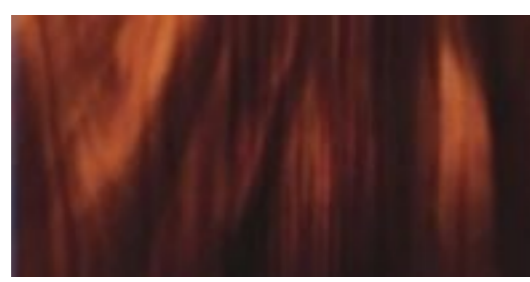
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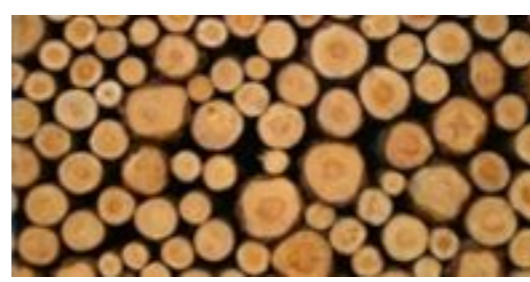
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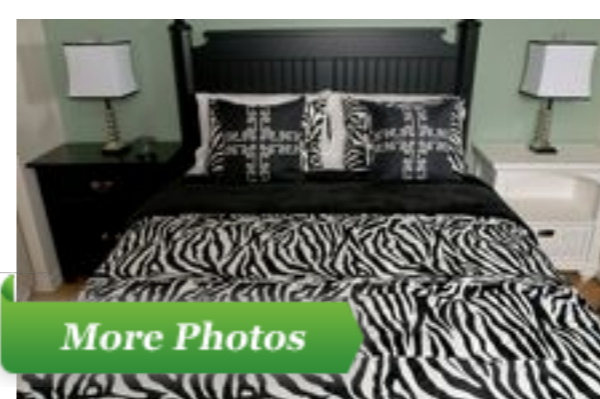
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