

# A Trestle Table for Under \$35:

## How I Built a 15th-Century-Style Table for Pennsic From an Old Door and Pine Boards

by Genoveva von Lübeck

If you're prone to dancing on tables, read no further. But if you want an authentic-looking, wooden trestle table that you can take to events, or even use as a craft table in your home, do I have some woodworking plans for you! Its lightweight tabletop is perfect for lugging about without breaking your back ... or your wallet!

How did these plans come about? This year I needed a table for camping at Pennsic, but I didn't want to spend a fortune on it. I could have bought a couple sheets of plywood, but I wanted to use this table year-round for crafts, so I preferred something that would look nicer. Alas, oak and even select pine is really pricey—\$100 and up for the project. My solution? I combined an old recycled door (for the table top) with inexpensive pine (for the legs and spacers) for a 15th-century, St. Jerome-style trestle table that comes in at under \$35.

### What You Need:

- 10 feet of 2" x 4" pine – \$3 from Fingerle Lumber (Ann Arbor)
- 10 feet of 2" x 12" pine – \$10 from Fingerle Lumber
- 8 feet of 2" x 10" pine – \$7 from Fingerle Lumber
- One 36" x 80" hollow door slab – \$5 at the Ann Arbor ReUse Center
- Dowels – \$1 from Lowe's
- Four 1"x 2" x 8" furring strips – \$3.20 from Lowe's
- One 12" x 24" x 1/2" oak board – \$3 from Lowe's
- Wood glue – \$2 from Lowe's

**Total for the Table: \$34.20**

### Optional Extras to Make Your Table Fancier:

- Stain – \$12 from Lowe's
- Moulding to put around the table edges – \$20 from Lowe's
- Wood burning tool to make designs – \$12 from Michaels

### Equipment Used:

Jigsaw, circular saw, drill with boring bit, sander, chisel, mallet, pipe clamp, spring clamps, sawhorse, ruler, knife, permanent marker, safety goggles

### Experience Required:

I'd say beginner-intermediate. I've only made a few things from wood (some benches, a two-step stair, some trellises), and I was able to create this table to my satisfaction.

So you may be wondering what in the Known World possessed me to use an old recycled door as a tabletop. I thought a door would be **both inexpensive and light enough for me to carry on my own**. I can't very well use this table at Pennsic if I can't even carry the tabletop to my camp site, now can I? A hollow door slab is really quite lightweight, but still strong enough to function as a great table. It's true, no table dancing, but how often does that really happen anyway (oh, right, I'm going to Pennsic...)



*Saint Jerome in His Study* – Albrecht Durer print, 1514. This was the inspiration for the project.



A door is the perfect size for a trestle table



Join the wood tightly and securely

As for finding an old door, the ReUse Center in Ann Arbor had about 50 of 'em, all for \$5-\$10. I was able to find one that hadn't ever had a door handle installed, too. And it was already stained a good color. It just needed a little dusting. And I'm convinced that doing something like this is period—our ancestors recycled wood, including old doors, whenever it made sense. Wood was never wasted.

As to whether you can actually use a hollow door slab as a tabletop—yes, you can! It won't bear huge loads, but otherwise it is quite strong and sturdy.

### The Table Plans

So here's how to make the trestle table. These plans are adapted from those posted by Charles Oakley (<http://www.livinghistory.co.uk/homepages/oakley/peacock.html>) and bits and pieces picked up from other online sources.

**1. Join the Leg Pieces:** Cut the 2" x 12" board into four 30" long pieces. Cut the 2" x 10" board into two 30" long pieces. Place one of the 2" x 10" boards on the floor or some other flat place, and flank it with two of the 2" x 12" boards, creating 34" x 30" of wood. Repeat with the other three boards. Drill holes in the edges of the boards where they meet, then insert dowels into them and glue them in place with wood glue. Clamp and allow to dry for 24 hours.

**2. Size the Tabletop (Optional):** If you want to use the full length of your door slab, just skip this step. I wanted my table to fit into a free space in my studio so I could use it as a craft table, however, so I shortened my door slab. Here's how to do it: Measure 58" inches on your door slab and score it with a knife (this prevents splintering when we cut it). Cut the door so it is 58" long (I used a circular saw). [Note: You can vary the length of your table, but be sure to change the length of your stretchers in step 3 accordingly.] Make room in the newly open end by pulling out/pushing in the reinforcements you'll find there. Cut your furring strips to about 34" long and place them just inside the open end of the door for support on the end, using wood glue to keep the strips in place. Clamp and allow to dry.



Plug the open end of your hollow door with strips of wood and glue

**3. Create the Stretchers:** Take the 2" x 4" and cut into two 51" lengths (shorten or lengthen this if you have a shorter or longer table than I do). Trim the end of each spacer according to the diagram below. To create the mortise (the hole in the end of the stretcher), use a boring bit on your drill to drill in two places (either end of the bit of wood you want to remove), then use a jigsaw and/or chisel to remove the extra wood and smooth it down.



One of the tenon keys

**5. Cut away the extra wood** in your table legs once the wood glue has dried. Here is the diagram I used for my table legs. Just flip the pattern over to do the other side of the wood. The pattern I used can be found at <http://honorbeforevictory.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/trestle-table-leg-design.pdf>.



Cutting the ends of the stretchers



Marking my pattern on the wood



Mortise in the end of a stretcher

**4. Create the tenon keys.** The tenon key is the tapered bit of wood that will fit into the mortise and hold the legs and stretchers in place. You need four of them. Use the oak board and cut the board into two 4" x 7" x 1/2" pieces, then cut each of those boards diagonally in half and round the ends. Each key should be 1" at the bottom and about 3" at the top.



Cutting out the design on the legs



**6. Assemble your table legs, stretchers, and tenons.** Now that everything is cut out, put your table legs and stretchers together. You may find that some tenons don't quite fit in some mortises, and now is the time to narrow/widen as necessary. Once it's all put together just the way you like, take a permanent marker and write indicators on each board so you know how to assemble it quickly and easily next time.



Assembled legs with tenons firmly wedged in mortises

was picked up or otherwise moved. So I attached simple 1" x 2" boards to the underside of the table, on either side of where the legs meet the table, to hold the table in place and prevent it from moving about when used. I attached the boards to the very sides of the door, where it is solid, for the most secure hold—this has the added advantage of strengthening the underside of the door a bit. Now the tabletop just rests on top of the legs, but doesn't slide or move thanks to the anchor boards.



Anchor boards attached to the underside of the door/tabletop

**7. Attach tabletop anchors.** As the tabletop is so light, I want to avoid actually attaching the tabletop to the legs, just in case the legs were a bit too heavy for it when it

And that's it... the table is done!



A functional trestle table for under \$35!

Now you can fancy it up, if you like. Since I'd saved so much in the construction of the table, I decided to put moulding around the edges and stain the moulding, legs, stretchers, and tenons. That cost an extra \$32, although I'd already bought the stain for another purpose. Here is my completed table:



My inexpensive but lovely trestle table

#### **Tips I Learned the Hard Way:**

- Buy dry wood. Wet wood is super heavy and hard to cut! And it won't take any stain until it dries anyway.
- If possible, smooth or otherwise plane the sides of the wood boards before you dowel and glue them together in step 1. This will really help the boards stay strong and stable. My legs aren't as tightly glued in places as I'd prefer because I didn't bother with this.
- When you apply any wood glue, put glue on all surfaces to be glued in a thin, even coat. And clean up any wood glue that beads or globs during the drying process—it's really hard to get this glue off once it has dried.
- When staining with tinted polyurethane like I did, keep a cloth handy to wipe drips—it gets tacky VERY FAST and is hard to wipe up later. Also, do not go back over previously stained areas (anything older than, say, 2-3 minutes) until it is absolutely dry because it will glob and gunk and look yucky. This happened with mine, but I got better at the staining thing as I went along.

**Comments, questions, or suggestions for improvements?** Feel free to e-mail me at [genovevavonlubeck@gmail.com](mailto:genovevavonlubeck@gmail.com) or visit me at <http://HonorBeforeVictory.com>.