# Build Your First Cutting Board

## A Beginner's Guide to Crafting a Beautiful Cutting Board

**Christopher Ingison**

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DEDICATION

*For my wife, Jennifer—*
*“If it were not for your constant belief in me, this book never would have been finished.”.*
*Thank you*

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# Build Your First Cutting Board

## No Fancy Workshop Required

## A Beginner's Guide to Crafting a Beautiful Cutting Board

Let me tell you a little secret.

You don't need a giant workshop, a $3,000 table saw, a wall of high-end power tools with laser guides and computerized fences, or even years of woodworking experience.

You need a willingness to learn, a small set of essential tools, and a bit of patience, and if you have those, I promise you can build a beautiful, functional cutting board that will last for years.

### Why Build a Cutting Board?

A cutting board is one of the best beginner woodworking projects out there. Why?

- It's simple but teaches valuable skills. You'll learn to measure accurately, make clean cuts, glue and clamp wood properly, and apply a food-safe finish, all essential skills for future woodworking projects.
- It's small and manageable. Unlike a big furniture project, a cutting board doesn't require a lot of space, tons of materials, or an advanced skill set. It's a project you can finish in a weekend.
- It’s something you’ll actually use. Unlike woodworking projects that collect dust, your cutting board will live in your kitchen, helping you prepare daily meals.

Nothing beats the feeling of slicing veggies on a cutting board you made with your own hands.

Making a cutting board might seem like a simple woodworking project, and in some ways, it is. But what makes this project so great isn't just that it's easy to start, it’s that it opens the door to so many possibilities.

A cutting board isn't just another kitchen tool. You made it with your two hands, turning an ordinary meal prep routine into a reminder of your own craftsmanship. Once you make your first one, there's a good chance you'll want to make another because this simple project can take you in different directions.

For some, it’s just about creating a practical, custom board that fits their kitchen better than anything store-bought ever could. Want a specific size? A particular type of wood? A design that fits your space perfectly? When you make it yourself, you get precisely what you want, not just whatever happens to be on the store shelf.

For others, it’s the gateway to learning new techniques. Once you’ve made a simple board, you might find yourself getting creative, adding juice grooves and handles or experimenting with

different wood combinations. Before you know it, you're moving into charcuterie boards, serving trays, or experimenting with end-grain designs.

And let's be honest, a handmade cutting board makes a fantastic gift. Whether for a wedding, housewarming, birthday, or Christmas, giving someone something you built carries much more meaning than anything you could buy. People love gifts that feel personal, and a handcrafted cutting board is something they'll actually use, and think of you every time they do.

Then, there's always the business side of things. If you enjoy making these, and your first one turns out great, you might wonder, "Could I sell these?" The answer is yes. Cutting boards are among the most popular handmade woodworking items people buy at craft fairs, online, or through word of mouth. Some woodworkers even start making boards for fun; before they know it, they take orders.

Whether you make just one or dozens, getting started is important. Once you finish your first cutting board, you'll have more than just a beautiful board, you'll have the confidence to build even more.

What You'll Learn

- Choosing the right wood for a cutting board, what works, what doesn't, and why.
- You can make a cutting board with minimal tools, whether you have a table saw or just a circular saw and a clamp.
- How to safely glue up wood without a planer and still get a smooth surface.
- How to cut, shape, sand, and finish your cutting board for a professional look.
- How to care for your cutting board so it lasts for years.

You'll also learn a few extra tricks, like adding a juice groove, smoothing the edges, or incorporating exotic woods for an artistic touch.

Sound good? Let's get started.

**Who Is This Book For?**

Let's get one thing straight, this book isn't for master woodworkers with years of experience. It's for you, the beginner, the hobbyist, the person who wants to learn how to build something without feeling like they need an entire workshop full of expensive tools.

Because here's the truth: you don't need a massive shop, a thousand-dollar tool collection, or years of experience to make an incredible cutting board.

All you need is:

- A little patience
- A willingness to learn
- A few essential tools (that you probably already have or can quickly get your hands on)

That's it.

What You Can Expect From This Book

This book isn't just about gluing wood together and calling it a cutting board.

This is about learning fundamental woodworking skills, skills you can take beyond this project and apply to dozens of others.

**So, what exactly are we going to cover?**

First, we'll talk about choosing the right wood. You might think any wood will do, but that's not true. Some woods are too soft and will scratch or dent easily. Others are too porous, meaning they'll soak up water and bacteria, precisely what you don't want in a cutting board. And then some woods are downright toxic. We'll go through the best and worst choices so that you'll know exactly what to look for when you head to the lumber yard.

Then, we'll cover tools and materials. You might have a fully stocked shop, or you might be working with a few basics. Either way, we'll go over what's absolutely necessary and what's nice to have. The good news? You don't need a table saw or fancy jointer to get this done. You can make it work if you've got a circular saw and a couple of clamps.

Once you have your wood and tools, we'll get into preparing and cutting the wood. This step is crucial because how well you cut and square your pieces will determine how good your final board looks. Uneven edges mean gaps, and gaps mean a weak glue joint. We'll walk through different methods, including how to get precise cuts even if you don't have top-of-the-line equipment.

Speaking of glue joints, we'll also deep-dive into the glue-up process. There's a right way and a wrong way to glue up your board, and getting this part wrong can lead to warping, weak bonds, or ugly gaps. We'll talk about how much glue to use, how to spread it evenly, and how to clamp everything together to get a perfect seam.

Once your board is glued up, it's time to move on to flattening, trimming, and sanding. This is where you take a rough, glued-up board and turn it into something that feels sleek and professional. We'll cover how to get a flat surface without a planer, how to square up your edges, and how to sand everything down so it's smooth to the touch.

Then, we'll get to the finishing stage, sealing and protecting your board. A good cutting board finish does more than make the wood look nice. It helps repel moisture, prevents bacteria from seeping in, and keeps your board looking beautiful for years. You'll learn the best food-safe oils to use, how often to reapply them, and a few tricks to keep your board from drying out or cracking.

Finally, once your board is finished and ready to go, we'll discuss maintenance and care. A properly cared-for cutting board can last a lifetime, but only if you treat it right. We'll cover everything from daily cleaning to long-term care and even how to restore a board that's starting to look a little rough.

If you get into this and want to take things further, there's a bonus chapter on charcuterie boards. They're a similar idea, but with a few key differences that make them a fun and creative next step in your woodworking journey.

This isn’t just about making a cutting board. It’s about learning a skill that you can use over and over again.

The Journey Starts Here

Before we jump into the first chapter, I want you to do one thing.

Picture the cutting board you want to make.

Do you see it? Do you see the wood grain, the color, the shape? You may be imagining something simple, classic, and functional. Maybe you've got visions of a thick, butcher-block-style masterpiece sitting proudly on your kitchen counter.

Whatever it is, hold onto that vision. Because in a short time, that imaginary board is going to be real. And by the time we're done here, you'll know precisely how to make it.

So grab your tools, grab your wood, and let’s get started. This is where your woodworking journey begins.

**Woodworking Safety: What You Need to Know Before You Start**

Woodworking is a rewarding hobby, but safety always comes first. Working with power tools, sharp hand tools, and heavy materials means a small mistake can lead to serious injury. The good news? With the proper precautions, woodworking is highly safe.

This section will guide you through the key safety rules you should always follow. These principles apply even if you're working with minimal tools.

**1. Wear Proper Safety Gear**

Before you start any woodworking project, make sure you’re protecting yourself.

Safety Glasses or Goggles, Your eyes are irreplaceable. Sawdust, wood chips, and flying debris are constant risks.

Hearing Protection, Many power tools, like routers and saws, exceed safe noise levels. Prolonged exposure can lead to hearing loss, so earplugs or earmuffs are a must.

Dust Mask or Respirator – Fine sawdust can irritate your lungs and cause long-term respiratory issues. Wear a good-quality mask if you're sanding or cutting for extended periods.

Work Gloves (When Appropriate), Gloves protect against splinters, but they should never be worn near spinning blades or power tools. Loose material can get caught and pull your hand in.

Closed-Toe Shoes, Dropped wood, falling tools, and sharp objects make flip-flops a bad idea. Wear solid work shoes or boots.

**2. Keep Your Workspace Clean & Organized**

A cluttered workspace increases the risk of accidents. Keep your area:

Well-Lit – You must clearly see your cuts, measurements, and tool positions.

Free of Obstructions – Loose tools, cords, and scraps can trip you up. Keep pathways clear.

Dry & Slip-Free – Avoid spills, and clean up sawdust frequently to prevent slipping or fire hazards.

**3. Power Tool Safety**

Power tools make woodworking faster and easier but require respect and careful use.

Unplug Tools Before Adjustments, Always unplug the tool or remove the battery before changing a blade or bit or making an adjustment.

Use a Push Stick or Push Block – Never place your hands close to a running blade or bit. Push sticks help guide wood safely.

Let Blades Stop Spinning Before Moving Tools, A still-spinning saw blade can unexpectedly catch wood or clothing. Wait for a full stop before setting the tool down.

Use Proper Stance & Grip – Keep both feet firmly planted, and grip tools securely to avoid losing control.

Avoid Distractions – Focus on the cut you're making. Even a quick glance away can result in a mistake.

**4. Hand Tool Safety**

Hand tools are often safer than power tools, but misuse can cause injury.

Keep Cutting Tools Sharp – A dull chisel, plane, or handsaw requires more force and is more likely to slip. Sharp tools cut cleaner and are safer.

Cut Away from Your Body – Never pull a blade toward yourself. Position yourself so if the tool slips, it won't injure you.

Use Clamps Instead of Holding the Workpiece – Clamping your workpiece keeps your hands clear of cutting edges and prevents shifting.

**5. Kickback: What It Is and How to Avoid It**

Kickback is one of the most dangerous risks in woodworking. It happens when a saw blade or router bit grabs wood and violently throws it back.

**How to Prevent Kickback:**

Use a Sharp Blade – A dull blade binds more easily, increasing the risk of kickback.

Keep the Wood Firmly Against the Fence or Guide. Never freehand cut on a table saw or router table.

Stand to the Side of the Cut – Never stand directly behind a table saw blade. If kickback happens, the wood will launch straight back.

Use a Riving Knife or Splitter. These prevent wood from pinching the blade, a leading cause of kickback.

Make Slow, Controlled Cuts – Rushing a cut increases the chances of losing control.

**6. Handling Wood Safely**

Watch for Splinters – Always sand rough edges before handling a workpiece.

Be Aware of Toxic Woods – Some woods (like walnut, cocobolo, and exotic species) can cause allergic reactions when inhaled or handled.

Clean Up Sawdust Regularly. Not only is sawdust a breathing hazard, but piles of sawdust can also be a fire risk.

**7. Glue & Finish Safety**

Wood glue and finishing products may seem harmless, but they can be toxic or hazardous if misused.

Work in a Well-Ventilated Area, Many finishes contain harmful fumes. Always use them in open spaces or with a ventilation fan.

Wear Gloves When Applying Finishes – Some oils and finishes can cause skin irritation.

Dispose of Rags Properly – Rags soaked in oil-based finishes can spontaneously combust. Lay them out flat to dry before disposing of them safely.

**8. Don't Work When You're Tired or Distracted**

Most woodworking injuries happen when people are:

Tired – Fatigue leads to bad decisions and careless mistakes.

Rushing – Slow and steady wins the race. It’s better to finish a project safely than to hurry and get injured.

Distracted – Never use power tools while talking on the phone, watching TV, or conversing.

**9. Have a First Aid Kit Nearby**

Even with careful planning, accidents can happen. Every woodworking space should have:

Bandages & gauze for minor cuts

Tweezers for removing splinters

Antiseptic wipes to prevent infection

Superglue or liquid bandage for small but deep cuts

Emergency contact info, especially if working alone

Final Thoughts on Safety

Woodworking is fun and rewarding, but taking a few extra seconds to follow safety rules can prevent serious injuries. Even professional woodworkers follow these rules every day, so should you.

Now that you're prepared and protected, let's choose the right wood for your cutting board!

Coming Up Next: Chapter 1 – Choosing the Right Wood

# Chapter 1

## Choosing the Right Wood for Your Cutting Board

*The One That Got Away*

I'll never forget the first cutting board I made. I had no clue what I was doing, I grabbed a piece of wood from the scrap bin at the hardware store, cut it into a rectangle, sanded it down, and called it a day. It looked great.

For about a week.

Then, the cracks started to form, and the edges began to warp. After a couple of washes, the surface felt rough, and I noticed something even worse, dark stains that smelled a little… funky. It turns out I had used the wrong type of wood.

See, woodworking is full of small decisions that make a big difference. And choosing the right wood for your cutting board? That's one of the most critical choices you'll make. Pick the wrong wood, and you'll end up with a warped, cracked, bacteria-filled mess (trust me, I've been there). But pick the right wood? You'll have a cutting board that lasts for years, looks incredible, and holds up to daily use.

So, let's ensure you start the right way, by picking the best wood for the job.

**Hardwood vs. Softwood: The First Big Decision**

Think of a cutting board like a house foundation. If you build a house on a weak, unstable foundation, it won't last long. The same goes for cutting boards, the strength and durability of your board depend on the wood you choose.

**Wood comes in two main types:**

- Hardwoods - strong, dense, ideal for cutting boards
- Softwoods - light, weak, not suitable for cutting boards

It's like comparing a brick house to a house made of cardboard. One can handle a storm, and the other… well, you don't want to be inside when it rains.

**So, what's the difference?**

- Hardwoods (like maple, walnut, and cherry) come from trees that shed their leaves in the fall. They grow slower, which makes their wood denser and more durable.
- Softwoods (like pine, fir, and cedar) come from evergreen trees. They grow quickly, which makes their wood lighter and more porous.

If you use softwood for a cutting board, it'll get scratched quickly. Worse, those deep scratches can trap bacteria, not exactly what you want when preparing food.

So, rule number one? Always use hardwood for your cutting board.

**Closed-Pore vs. Open-Pore Woods: The Hidden Trap**

Okay, so we know hardwood is the way to go. But not all hardwoods are the same! The next thing we need to talk about is wood grain and porosity.

Picture this: At a party, someone hands you a sponge instead of a plate to hold your snacks. You look down, and your chips and salsa are already soaking into the sponge. Gross, right?

That's precisely what happens when you use the wrong wood for a cutting board.

- Closed-pore (closed-grain) woods have tiny, tightly packed fibers, making them naturally resistant to moisture and bacteria.
- Open-pore (open-grain) woods have larger, visible pores that trap food particles, absorb moisture, and turn into a bacteria hotel.

**Good Closed-Pore Woods (Perfect for Cutting Boards)**

- Hard Maple – Extremely durable, used by professional chefs
- Cherry – A bit softer but has a warm color that deepens over time
- Walnut – Beautiful dark wood, strong but gentle on knives
- Beech – Affordable and resistant to moisture

**Bad Open-Pore Woods (Avoid These!)**

- Red Oak – Soaks up moisture like a sponge (not great for hygiene)
- Ash – Beautiful, but too porous and prone to stains
- Mahogany – Can contain natural toxins (plus, it's way too absorbent)

**Choosing the Right Wood for Your Style**

Now that you know what to avoid, let's discuss which wood is right for you.

| Wood Type | Overall Rating | Knife-Friendliness | Look & Style |
|---|---|---|---|
| Maple | ★★★★☆ | ★★★★☆ | Classic, professional |
| Cherry | ★★★★☆ | ★★★★★ | Warm, deepens over time |
| Walnut | ★★★★☆ | ★★★★☆ | Rich, dark, elegant |
| Beech | ★★★★★ | ★★★★☆ | Light-colored, affordable |

Go with hard maple if you want the safest, best all-around choice. If you want something fancy, a mix of walnut and cherry makes a great-looking board. Beech is affordable and still a solid option if you're on a budget. Once you master the basics, combine different woods for a stylish striped or checkerboard pattern!

**Adding Artistic Flair with Exotic Woods**

To make something eye-catching, consider using exotic woods like Purpleheart or Zebrawood. These woods add bold colors and striking patterns to your board, making it stand out.



***Purpleheart***

This wood is naturally purple (yes, really). It's durable and dense and makes a stunning accent piece in a cutting-board design. However, it can be challenging to work with and sometimes causes mild skin irritation when handled before finishing.



***Zebrawood***

Zebrawood has dark and light stripes, making it one of the most visually unique woods. It's tough, meaning it holds up well, but it also requires extra sanding to smooth out its coarse texture.

If you decide to use exotic woods, always double-check that they're food-safe, and be aware that some may require extra work to finish correctly.

**Lessons Learned from My First Cutting Board Fail**

Going back to that first cutting board I made, the one that cracked, warped, and smelled awful, I now know exactly what I did wrong:

- I used red oak, an open-pore wood that absorbed moisture like crazy.
- I didn't seal it properly, allowing bacteria into the grain.
- I didn’t notice wood movement, which led to warping.

Fast forward to today, and now I know better. My cutting boards look great, and are safe for food prep.

By choosing the right wood, you’re setting yourself up for success before you even start cutting or sanding.

**Understanding Face Grain, Edge Grain, and End Grain Cutting Boards**

When choosing wood for your cutting board, it’s not just about the type of wood you pick, it's also about how you plan to use it. Wood has three different grain orientations, and the way you cut and arrange your boards will determine your final project's durability, appearance, and function.

The three main types of cutting boards:

- Face Grain – The simplest to make, but least durable.
- Edge Grain – The best balance of durability, ease of construction, and affordability (this is what we’re building in this book).
- End Grain – The most durable but also the most complex to make.

Each has its own pros and cons, and it's essential to understand them before you start cutting your boards.



***Face Grain Cutting Boards: Simple, but Less Durable***

Face grain cutting boards are made by using a board's wide surface (face) as the cutting surface. This is the easiest type of cutting board to make because you flatten a single board or glue a few boards side by side to reach the desired width.

**Pros of Face Grain Boards**

- Easiest to make – No complicated glue-ups required.
- Showcases natural wood grain beautifully.
- Minimal cutting required – You just use the entire width of the boards.

**Cons of Face Grain Boards**

- Not very durable – Knife marks show quickly, making it wear out faster.
- Can warp over time due to moisture exposure.
- Limited thickness options – You're stuck with whatever thickness of lumber you buy unless you glue boards together (which requires a planer to flatten).
- Best Use: Face grain boards are great for serving trays, charcuterie boards, or decorative kitchen pieces, but they are not ideal for heavy-duty chopping.

**Edge Grain Cutting Boards: A Balance of Durability & Simplicity**



Edge grain cutting boards are made by cutting boards into strips, flipping them on their edge, and gluing them together to create a firm, stable cutting surface. This method gives you more control over the thickness of the final board and provides better durability than face grain boards.

**Pros of Edge Grain Boards**

- More durable than face grain – Fewer visible knife marks.
- Easier to flatten and maintain than end grain boards.
- You can control thickness – By cutting different strip widths, you can adjust the board's final thickness.

**Cons of Edge Grain Boards**

- More cutting required – You need to rip boards into strips.
- Slightly more glue-up complexity compared to face grain.

Best Use: Edge grain boards are a great all-purpose choice for everyday kitchen use. This is the type of cutting board we will build in this book!

**End Grain Cutting Boards: The Most Durable, but Complex**



***End Grain cutting boards with 3 design patterns***

End grain cutting boards are made by gluing strips together, cross-cutting them into blocks, flipping them upright, and gluing them again to expose the ends of the wood fibers as the cutting surface.

This method creates a checkerboard pattern, and because the wood fibers are facing up, the board is much more knife-friendly, when a knife cuts into an end grain board, the fibers "self-heal" rather than leaving deep grooves.

**Pros of End Grain Boards**

- Extremely durable – Lasts for years with proper care.
- Better for knives – Wood fibers don't dull blades as quickly.
- Unique visual appeal – Often features a checkerboard pattern.

**Cons of End Grain Boards**

- More complicated to build – Requires multiple glue-ups and precise cutting.
- Needs more material – Uses up more wood than face or edge grain boards.
- Difficult to flatten without a planer – The glue-up process can lead to uneven surfaces.

Best Use: End grain boards are great for professional chefs and heavy chopping, but they require more advanced woodworking skills.

**Why We're Making an Edge Grain Board in This Book**

For your first cutting board, we will focus on making an edge grain board because

- It is more durable than face grain but easier to make than end grain.
- It allows you to customize thickness and size while keeping construction simple.
- It doesn't require advanced tools like a planer or drum sander.

Now that we understand which type of cutting board we're making, let's talk about how much wood to buy and how to determine your board's thickness and size.

**Planning Your Wood Purchase: How Much and What Thickness?**

One of the biggest mistakes beginners make when starting a cutting board project is buying wood before deciding on a design. It's easy to walk into a store, see a beautiful piece of walnut or maple, and buy it, only to realize later that it's too thin, too short, or not enough material for what you actually want to build.

So before you buy your wood, you need to answer three questions:

- What type of board am I making? (Face grain, edge grain, or end grain?)
- What size do I want the finished board to be?
- How much wood do I need to buy to achieve that size?

**How Thickness Affects Material Selection**