

Building a Simple Period Table

A distinctive style of table appears in many period illuminations; each of the two trestles on which the tabletop rests has three legs made from planks, wider at the bottom than at the top. The table is easy and inexpensive to make and it comes apart, making it easy to transport. To make one, you will need the following materials:

2/29"x1x8 (legs)

2/22 ½"x2x4's for the tops of the trestles.

2/6'x1x12's for the table top.

Figure 1 shows how to cut three legs from each of the 1x8 planks, where to cut the sockets that the legs fit into in the top piece, and how the trestle goes together.

One tricky part is cutting the sockets for the legs, since they have to be angled into the 2x4's as shown in the end view of the assembled trestle. The way I did it was to draw the outline of the socket, drill two ¾" diameter holes as shown in Figure 2 (which shows the center socket—the end sockets are a little shorter, so I use one ¾" hole and one ½"), and chisel and file out the remaining wood until the narrow end of the leg fits tightly into the socket. Alternatively, you could do it with a drill and a saw. If you are using a drill press, you can angle the hole by putting a block under one edge of the 2x4 then drilling straight down, as shown in Figure 3. It's even easier with a mortising machine, if you happen to have one.

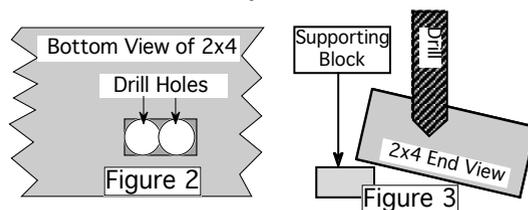
The other tricky part is fitting the legs into the sockets. You want to make the socket a little too tight, so that the end of the

leg doesn't go quite all the way in. Then you trim wood off the end of the leg or out of the socket until it goes far enough in to make its end flush with the top of the top piece. When you assemble the table, you may find a few narrow wooden wedges useful to make the fit tighter and the legs less inclined to wobble.

Once all the pieces are made, you assemble the two trestles and lay the two boards across them. A table cloth long enough and wide enough to hang over on all sides helps hold the planks together—but even without that, the table is reasonably stable.

When I made the table shown here I had access to inexpensive ¾" oak planks, which I used for the legs; in the figures I have made the legs a little wider than in my table, on the assumption that you will probably be using softwood.

The period pictures shown below are from a fifteenth century source; I do not



know how much earlier and later the same design was in use.

Reference: *Illuminated Manuscripts: Boccaccio's Decameron 15th Century Manuscript*, texts by Edmond Pognon, J. Petter Tallon tr., Miller Graphics.

