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Simple, effective, efficient sawbuck (sawhorse)

There are as many ways to hold wood for sawing as there are turners. Here's mine. If you're not happy with yours, perhaps you may find it useful.

For chain sawing turning blanks, it is important to have a simple, effective, efficient way to hold the pieces of wood. Ideally, it would be possible to use one device for a wide variety of shapes and sizes – everything from initial splitting to final shaping. This is particularly important if you, like I, use an electric chain saw for making octagons, rather than band sawing perfect circles.

I began by just nestling blanks in my log pile and hacking away at them. That worked so-so, but I got rid of the rotting, bug infested log pile! I then turned to a small wooden plant stand (like a small table) with a pipe clamp with long jaws to hold the blank in place for sawing. This worked well, for the most part, but it was not efficient – too much clamping and unclamping.

I basically wanted something with a 'V'-shaped trough to cradle the wood at waist height so I wouldn't strain my back. The theory was that the trough would hold small logs for sizing and halving and pith removal, and it would also hold half-rounds for trimming into octagons. For starters, I went to a hardware store and got a cheap metal frame kit. Then I got a 2x12 and cut it up to make a base for the top of the frame and a couple of boards for the V. This is easier to picture than to describe, so look at the photos.



The base has a couple dowels on the bottom that fit through the holes on the top of the metal frame. You could screw this base in place if you wanted. I prefer to use the metal frame for other things, as well. The V boards are supported by three sets of supports cut to fit and screwed firmly to the top of the base board with long, counter-sunk screws from underneath. The first V board is simply set in place and is held by the notched supports; the second V board is set in place and held by a couple of dowels in the first board. Everything goes together in seconds and comes apart equally quickly for cleaning or storage.

The question is, does it work? The answer is a resounding “yes”. I have found that with this arrangement, I can rip small logs (up to 12” or so in diameter) down the length of the trough to de-pith them, I can cross-cut small logs off the end of the trough, and I can cut octagons inside the trough with no clamping of any kind – it’s just a matter of finding the correct angles and directions for the saw. (I originally added a row of dowel holes near the top, figuring to use dowels as blocks to help hold the blanks in place, but I found these completely unnecessary and never use them.) As you can see from the photos, it shows the signs of being well used. When the V boards get scarred up too much, they will be very easy to replace.



Because everything near the saw is wood, the chain can never come near metal – that’s important. There are obviously many improvements that could be made. The V boards can slide around a bit now, and might be pinned for further constraint, but I haven’t felt the need to make the effort. When I upgrade this one, I’ll use larger dowels for holding the top V board in place – a really heavy log could shear the small ones I used in mod 1.

*Always use common sense. Things that work in one situation may not work in another.
Follow all Safety Rules. If it feels wrong, it probably is; stop and rethink.
Your Mileage May Vary*

