

Making a Seiza Meditation Bench



What you'll need

- A sheet of wood, $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch (2 cm) thick, and approximately 20 square inches wide by 20 square inches tall (or 52 square centimetres). Alternatively, you might use scraps of wood of various sizes, according to the actual sections required – see below for details.
- At least ten $1\frac{1}{4}$ -inch (3 cm) countersink woodscrews. I tend to lose screws, so I'd recommend more!
- A hand saw for wood (a cross-cut hand saw, if available, or possibly an electric table saw/rip saw)
- A drill (or powerdrill), a small drill bit for wood, and a countersink bit or a countersink tool
- Wood glue
- Two or more C-clamps
- Sandpaper (and perhaps a disc-sander)

Choosing the wood

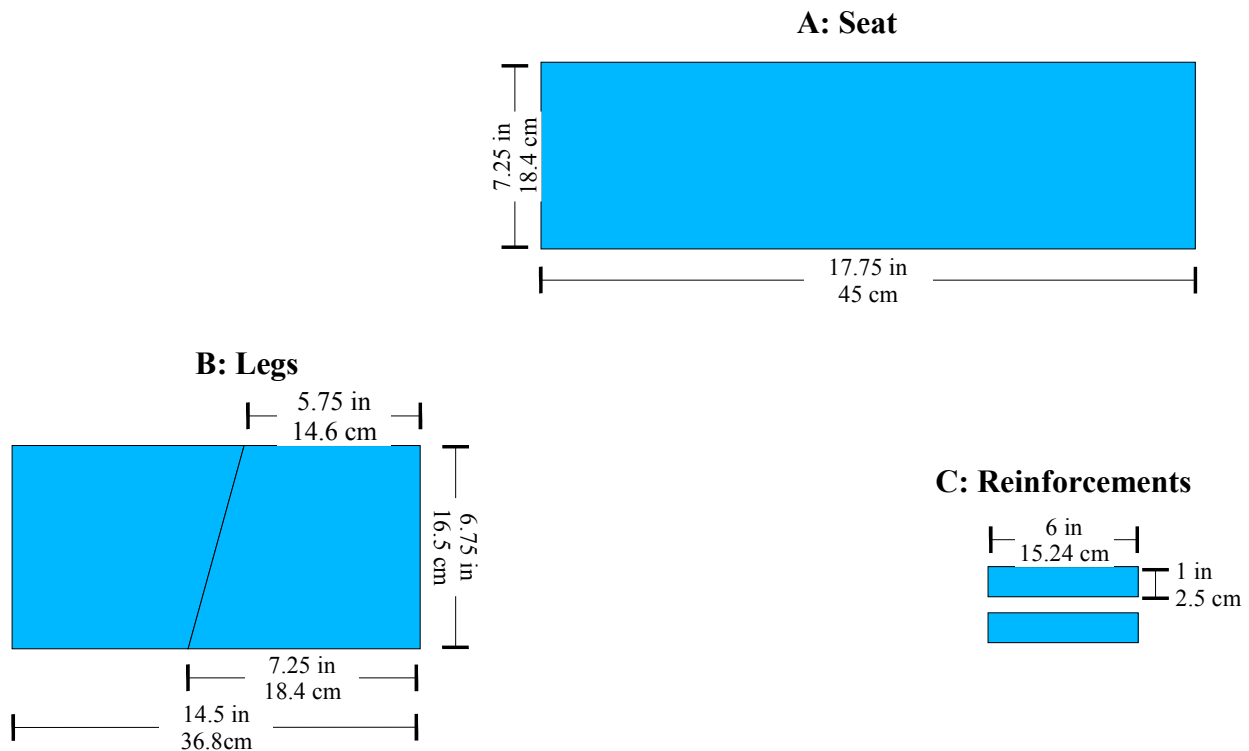
Any strong, solid wood that is used for furniture like cupboards should do. The main things to check are that the wood won't bend easily (you have to sit on this), and that it will hold fast without splitting when screws are put into the narrow sides.

I used blockwood, which I had lying around. It doesn't look as good as a solid wood, but if you get a good piece, composed of uniform blocks, it can be quite appealing. A solid, single piece of wood like pine or cedar will probably look better and be easier to work with – especially if you plan to varnish or stain the wood later.

Just be sure to avoid standard plywood and chipboard, which will probably bend, flake or disintegrate on you. Also, make sure that your wood is flat. Sometimes, wood will come with curves in it, and that's not what you want for a stable meditation seat!

Cutting the lengths

You need to cut five pieces of wood, like this:



Making the Legs

Ensuring symmetry

After cutting, the parts may be a little rough – one leg may not exactly match the other. Even with wood bought from a shop, edges are often not exactly straight. Not ideal for meditation!

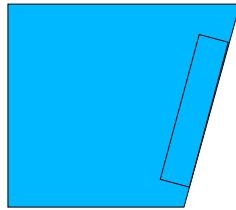
To fix this, you can simply clamp each of the legs together, and sand the edges until they all match. If you can get a few of the sides to line up before starting, do so – that will provide a good reference point. Otherwise, try to clamp the sides together in an 'average' position, so that you need to sand off as little as possible. Don't bother with fine sanding right now, such as rounding corners for aesthetic purposes. You just want things to line up for the moment.

Before long, you should have two identical legs.

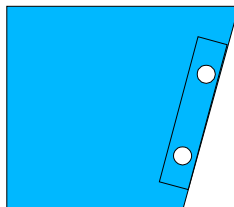
The first leg

Now, you can continue making the first leg.

What you want to do is attach the reinforcement to the **INSIDE** edge of the leg, in the center of the slanted edge. Like this:



To do that, line up the edges of the two pieces as best you can. Measure the distance to both edges, so that the little piece is in the middle of the leg's edge. Now, clamp the two pieces together with two C-clamps. Place one at each side, along the flat edges (not the slanted edge) of the leg, so that they're not in the way of your work. You need to **small** drill holes in the pieces. The holes shown here are bigger, for clarity.



With a drill, bore two pilot holes for screws, into both pieces of wood. The pilot holes are just to guide the screws, prevent the wood from splitting with the screws, and make the final screwing process easier. However, screws **need** to cut into the wood to work properly, so don't use a drill bit that's too big, or the screws will just fall in and pull out again, without any grip! If you use a drill bit around half the diameter of the woodscrews, or a little smaller, that should be fine.

After drilling the pilot hole, you need to make a countersink hole. If you got countersink screws as instructed, you'll see that they have a triangular head with a flat top. These are designed to sit flush with the surface of the wood. But to make that happen, you need to drill a similar triangular shape into the top of the screw hole, for the screw to 'hide' within:



Now that your pilot holes are ready, you can go ahead and join these pieces together. Release the C-clamps, add a little glue between the pieces, re-clamp, and screw the pieces together. Be careful to put the screws in from the outside – from the larger leg, into the smaller reinforcement:

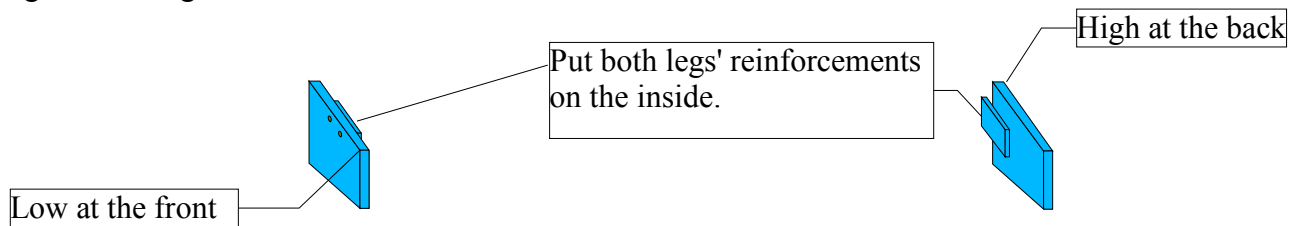
Well done. That's the first leg complete. Make sure the screws are tight, wipe off any excess glue, and leave it to dry for a few minutes.

The second leg

To make the second leg, do essentially the same thing again: line up the two other pieces, clamp, drill the pilot and countersink holes, unclamp, glue, clamp again, and finally screw the pieces together.

However, be careful about which **side** you attach the reinforcement to this time. It needs to be the

opposite of the other one. Take your first piece, and place it with the slant coming down from the back to the front. Whichever side the reinforcement is on will be the inside. Take the other leg, and place it further over, across the inside edge, and then place the second reinforcement on the new leg's inside edge:



Again, drill the holes and put the screws in from the outside edge, opposite the reinforcement, and when finished, allow some time for the glue to set before removing the clamps.

Finishing the legs

Again, when your legs are made, sand off the top slanted edge, to make sure that the reinforcement and the leg edge are even. You want your seat to be flat against the legs, with your weight spreading evenly, rather than becoming focused on a particular bump in the wood. When that's done, you're ready to attach the seat.

The seat

Okay. Now, set the seat on top of the two legs, making sure the reinforcements are on the inside edge. Line everything up, so that the edges of the seat are tight against the edges of the legs.

If you like, you could move the legs in a little, so that the seat overhangs the legs, creating a more interesting shape. Be aware that it would be more difficult to line up the seat screws, though, and that you need to make sure you have enough space for your feet underneath the bench. I'm assuming a simple square-ish shape.

You can clamp your seat down by placing the C-clamps around the seat and the reinforcement bars. If you have a limited number of clamps, place them diagonally opposite around the seat. Even two clamps will do, but four would be ideal.

Now, you need to drill three pilot holes in each side of the seat, along with countersink holes. Two should be go through the seat into the each leg, and the other should be further in, so that it goes into the reinforcement. Obviously, if you measure all the distances, so that the screws are centered and symmetrical on each side, it will look much nicer. Something like this:



It's particularly important to get the countersink holes right, since they're on the seat that you're going to sit on. If they're not deep enough, the screws will sit up and be rough.

Now that the holes are drilled, you're almost done, but don't rush. Release the clamps, and apply glue to the top of the legs. Re-clamp, and screw down. Leave the clamps for a while so the glue can dry. That's it!

Finishing

Finally, check once more that it sits well. Hopefully, you won't have any major problems with one leg an inch lower than the other (but don't feel bad if you do; it's easy to make such mistakes!) If you notice a little rocking, it should be easy to fix that by sanding off bumps on the bottom.

One thing you might want to do now is cover up the screw holes. I don't mind them, but if you prefer not to see the screws, and you've countersunk them a little further into the wood, you can cover the hole completely with a product called 'plastic wood'. You could also try just mixing some wood glue (some woodglues go clear when they dry) with some of the sawdust you made earlier, placing it into the recessed screw hole, and sanding it down when dry.

To finish off your seiza bench, you have a few options. You can stain it (to make it match your other furniture, or look like a more interesting kind of wood, perhaps), or you can varnish it to give it a professional, glossy finish that's easy to clean.

Personally, I like it simply sanded down to a smooth wood finish. It's important to sand the wood anyway -- you don't want to sit on, or even carry a seat that's rough -- splinters aren't much fun! And, if you are planning to varnish or something, sanding will be an important first step. Sanding by hand is pretty simple -- just keep going in a circular pattern, with **very** light pressure, until things feel smooth. Pay particular attention to corners and edges. It's nice to get those smoothly curved -- especially at the front where you legs will leave the seat.

Suggestions

It has been suggested by WildMind (<http://www.wildmind.org>) that seiza benches require more hand support than other meditation methods. You may want to use an extra pillow to support your hands more fully above your waist as you kneel. WildMind has lots of great guidance on posture, though -- I'd suggest referring to that site, if you're having difficulties.

About this guide

Most of this guide is based on more brief (but nonetheless useful) instructions from the michiganbuddhist.com website. I'm very new to seiza benches, myself. So any comments, criticisms, suggestions for improvements, or general requests are more than welcome. You can contact me (Lee Braiden) at lee_b@member.fsf.org

Enjoy your seiza bench!