

# 10 "Must-Have" Router Bits

Shopping for router bits? Here's a look at the ones that really get a workout in our shop.



Open any woodworking catalog, and you are likely to find several pages full of router bits. The number of profiles available can be overwhelming. But how do you separate the "must-have" bits from the not-so-necessary ones? To

help you out with that decision, here is a quick glance at ten of the router bits that we find the most useful in our shop.

The bits aren't in any particular order, but I've split them into two groups. In the first group are bits

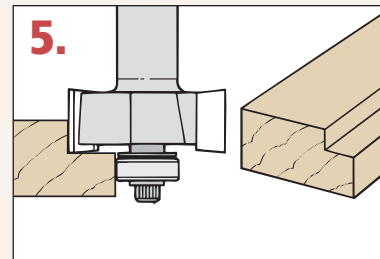
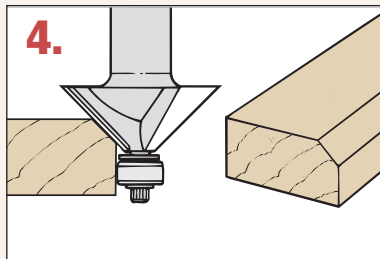
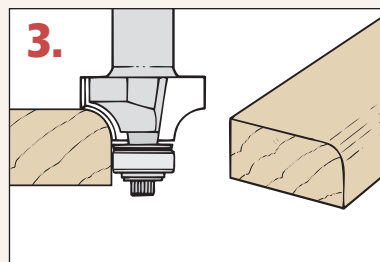
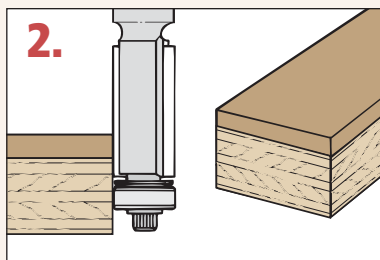
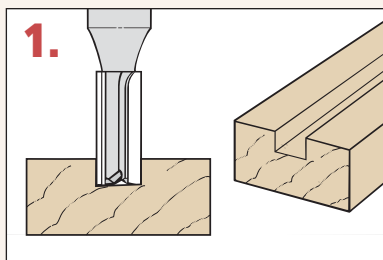
that we use all the time. These bits have a place in every shop. The bits in the second group are ones that we also use quite often, but I would probably buy them only as needed.

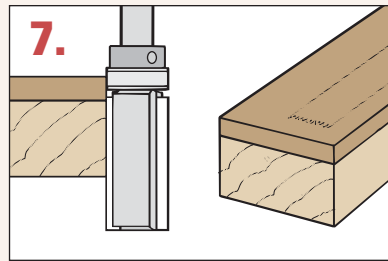
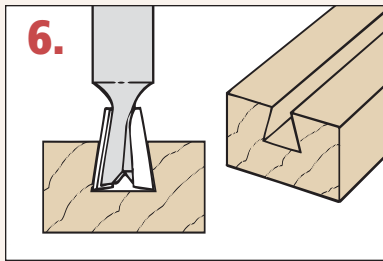
## GROUP ONE

**1 Straight Bit.** Straight bits are the utility players in your team of router bits. They can be used for routing grooves, dados, slots, rabbets, and tenons. With a simple jig, you can even use them for cutting box joints or finger joints.

Straight bits come in several different sizes (diameters). I find the  $\frac{1}{4}$ " and  $\frac{1}{2}$ " diameters to be the most useful. If you need to make a groove wider than  $\frac{1}{2}$ ", just do it in two passes. This allows you to custom fit the groove to match the thickness of the mating workpiece.

**2 Flush Trim Bit.** A flush trim bit is just a straight bit with a bearing mounted on the end. The





bearing rides against the edge of the workpiece while the bit trims a second piece flush with the first.

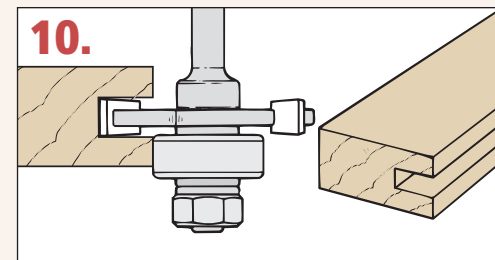
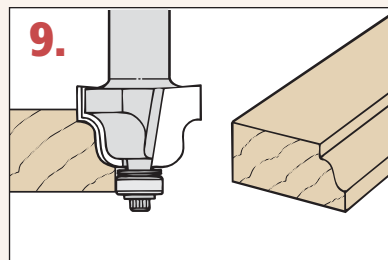
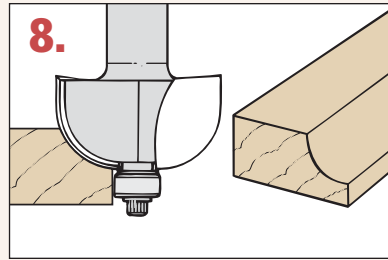
I use my flush trim bit for obvious tasks like trimming plastic laminate or hardwood edging on plywood. But I also use it whenever I glue up a workpiece with multiple layers. Just cut the first layer to exact size. Then cut the second layer slightly oversize and trim it flush after gluing the two layers together.

**3 Round-Over Bit.** Round-over bits are great for creating a soft, rounded profile on the edge of a workpiece. They have a bearing on the end so they can be used in a hand-held router. But by mounting them in a router table and using the fence as a bearing surface, you can round over both sides of a workpiece to create a round profile. Or create a “bullnose” profile by lowering the bit slightly to use just a portion of the cutting radius.

Round-over bits are available in a variety of sizes. I probably use the  $\frac{1}{4}$ " and  $\frac{3}{8}$ " sizes the most often. As you need them, you might want to add the  $\frac{1}{8}$ ",  $\frac{1}{2}$ ", and  $\frac{3}{4}$ " sizes as well.

**4 Chamfer Bit.** Another bit that is handy for relieving the edges of a workpiece is a chamfer bit. Since you can vary the size of the chamfer by simply raising or lowering the bit, you can get by with just one size of bit. And although chamfer bits are available with different angles for special purposes, the only one I really use is a 45° chamfer bit.

**5 Rabbeting Bit.** A rabbeting bit is one of those bits that, after you try it, you'll wonder how you got along for so long without one. Although you can use a straight bit and a fence to create rabbets, a rabbeting bit makes the job so much simpler. It has a bearing on the end



of the bit that automatically controls the width of the rabbet. And by changing the bearing you can cut rabbets of different widths.

## GROUP TWO

**6 Dovetail Bit.** A dovetail bit is a necessity for routing half-blind dovetails with a jig. But even if you don't own a dovetail jig, you can use a dovetail bit along with a fence or in the router table to create sliding dovetail joints.

**7 Patternmaker's Bit.** This bit is a close cousin of the flush trim bit. The difference is that the bearing is mounted on the shank of the bit rather than on the end.

I use a patternmaker's bit for routing with templates (usually when making multiple, identical parts). After cutting your workpiece to approximate size, just carpet tape the template to the top. The bearing follows the profile of the template while the bit trims the workpiece flush.

**8 Cove Bit.** A cove bit is the reverse image of a round-over bit. Instead of creating a rounded edge, it creates a concave profile. I use cove bits all the time when making built-up

moldings for picture frames or furniture projects. Like round-over bits, cove bits come in different sizes, so you'll probably want at least a couple.

**9 Ogee Bit.** If you really want to dress up a project, ogee bits are one way to do it quickly and easily. They can add style and elegance to an otherwise plain-looking project.

While there are different types of ogee bits (Roman, classical, reverse ogee), I find that I use the Roman ogee more than the others. Even so, it's best to buy ogee bits as you need them so you can be sure of getting a profile that suits the project at hand.

**10 Slot-Cutting Bit.** This last bit is one you might not expect to see in a list of top ten router bits. But I find a slot-cutting bit to be useful for routing the slots for the splines I use when gluing up panels. With a little ingenuity, you can even use a router and slot-cutting bit as a substitute for a biscuit joiner.

Slot-cutting bits are available in two or three sizes to cut slots of different widths. And like rabbeting bits, you can use different sizes of bearings to vary the depth of the slot.



▲ **Shank Size.** Most router bits are available in either  $\frac{1}{4}$ " or  $\frac{1}{2}$ " shanks. The  $\frac{1}{2}$ " shank is stronger and less likely to vibrate or chatter during heavy cuts.