

2015 Cigar Box Guitar Fretting Tips Contest

Sponsored by [C. B. Gitty Crafter Supply](#) and [Cigar Box Nation](#)

This is the full list of entries we received for this contest, unedited and as close as possible to the original format. We present it here in its entirety in the hopes that people can make good use of the collective wisdom and advice. Enjoy!

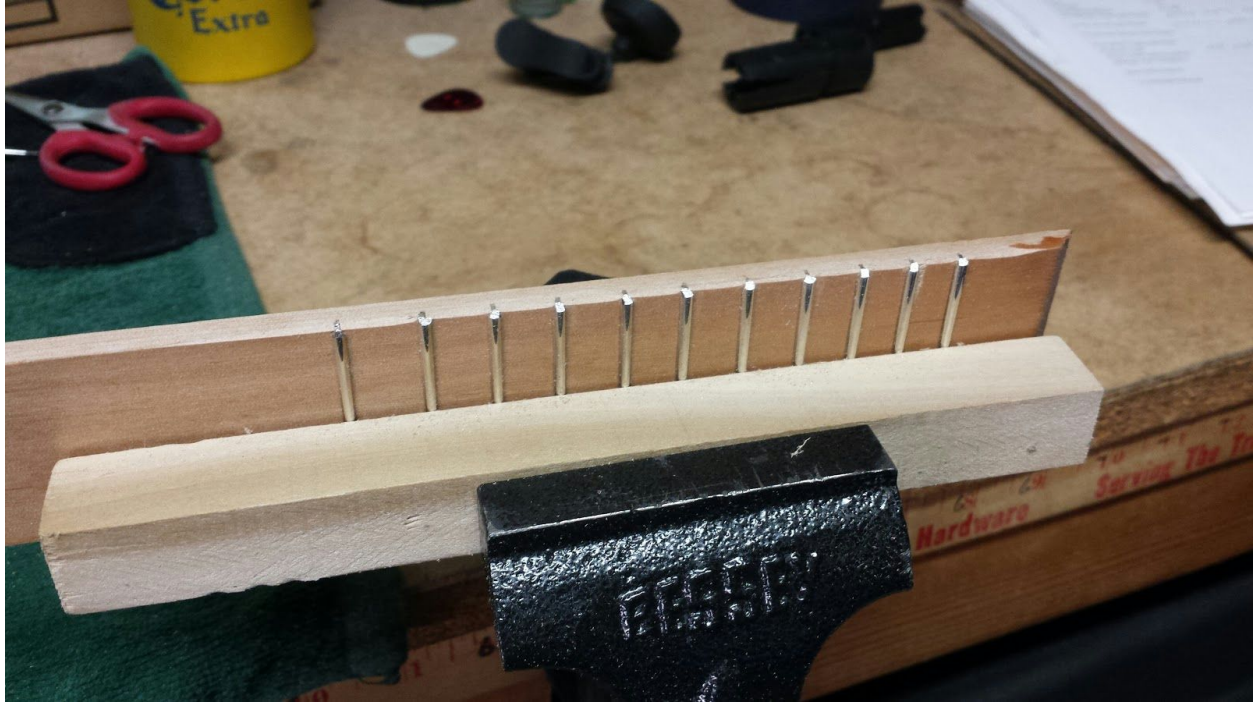
Name: Mike Dinicola aka Cigar Man Mike

Fret Tips: I take a little different approach to fretting. I cut and dress my frets before putting them on the fret board. This way, I can apply a nice finish to the fretboard without the worry of marking it up while trying to install the frets.

I use a simple jig that is just an 'L' shape wooden bracket and a scrap piece of fretboard. I cut slots in the piece of scrap that fit the frets firmly but loose enough to easily get out. Another piece of scrap is used to hold it all together in the vice. I can then file down the ends several frets at a time and also put on a nice bevel edge. I flip it over to do the other side.

The final step is a fine grinding ball on my drill press. I round off the frets so there are no sharp edges. Once the finish is applied to the real fretboard, the final step is to set the frets with a small hammer which is easy to do without damaging the fretboard finish. I adopted the method after having to redo a couple of fretboards and found it works well for my builds.





Name: George Granlund

Fret Tips: I made my own fret beveling file by cutting a slot in a piece of hardwood at a 35 degree angle and then inserting a mill file into the slot. The file is held in place by two screws and then I can bevel fret ends before hand dressing them.



Name: Jef Smith

Fret tips: after tapping in fret and before filing ends..I use a fret leveler(flat piece of steel about a foot long or more) with sand paper .(220grit).slid up and down the frets a few times it will show u the high and low frets sand till all the same..to take out the scrachs use a foam sanding block cross ways or with the fret to shine them up again..perfect fretting no buzzing from a high fret

Name: Drew Stafford

Fret Tips: My contest entry is something you're probably going to get loads of entries on, and it isn't even my design. Just a simple 35 degree fret bevel tool for uniformly beveling the ends of the fretboard: <http://www.projectguitar.com/tut/beveltool.htm> . It makes in a snap. But one tip that I think is important to know is that the exact kerf of the saw blade used to create a slot for the file doesn't quite matter...

I followed the instructions in the above link, but moved my table saw fence over slightly with each pass of the block so that the slot was big enough to accept the file with some wiggle room, and then all I needed to do was stick (uncorrugated) cardboard in that slot to wedge the file in there. That cardboard is already on hand from some of my recycling (cereal box, file's packaging, etc.), and is readily replaceable. I initially thought of holding the file in with set screws or some other elaborate design, but then thought why? The wedged pieces of cardboard hold the file securely, and allow for me to take the file out as needed, such as switching between the coarse and fine sides of the file, or when filing by hand. I initially beveled each fret of my first build individually with a careful Dremel, but am glad I made the bevel tool and went back to this build to finish it up. It definitely looks better than my first try, however painstaking and thorough that I was, and now the fret ends no longer catch my fingers when I play.

My wife is into all sorts of DIY stuff as well, and had some leftover green fleece I could use to protect the rest of the guitar (top of frets, etc.) from contact with the block. I'm sure an old sweatshirt or other soft cloth would work great as well. Since I had all of these things at my disposal--including the table saw, which may be the biggest obstacle facing those starting out with word working or guitar building--all I had to buy was a new file since I didn't want to cut the handle off my go-to file. This is a nice tempered metal file so it was quite hard to saw off the handle, but a half dozen Dremel cutting discs later and the handle was off with the corners rounded.

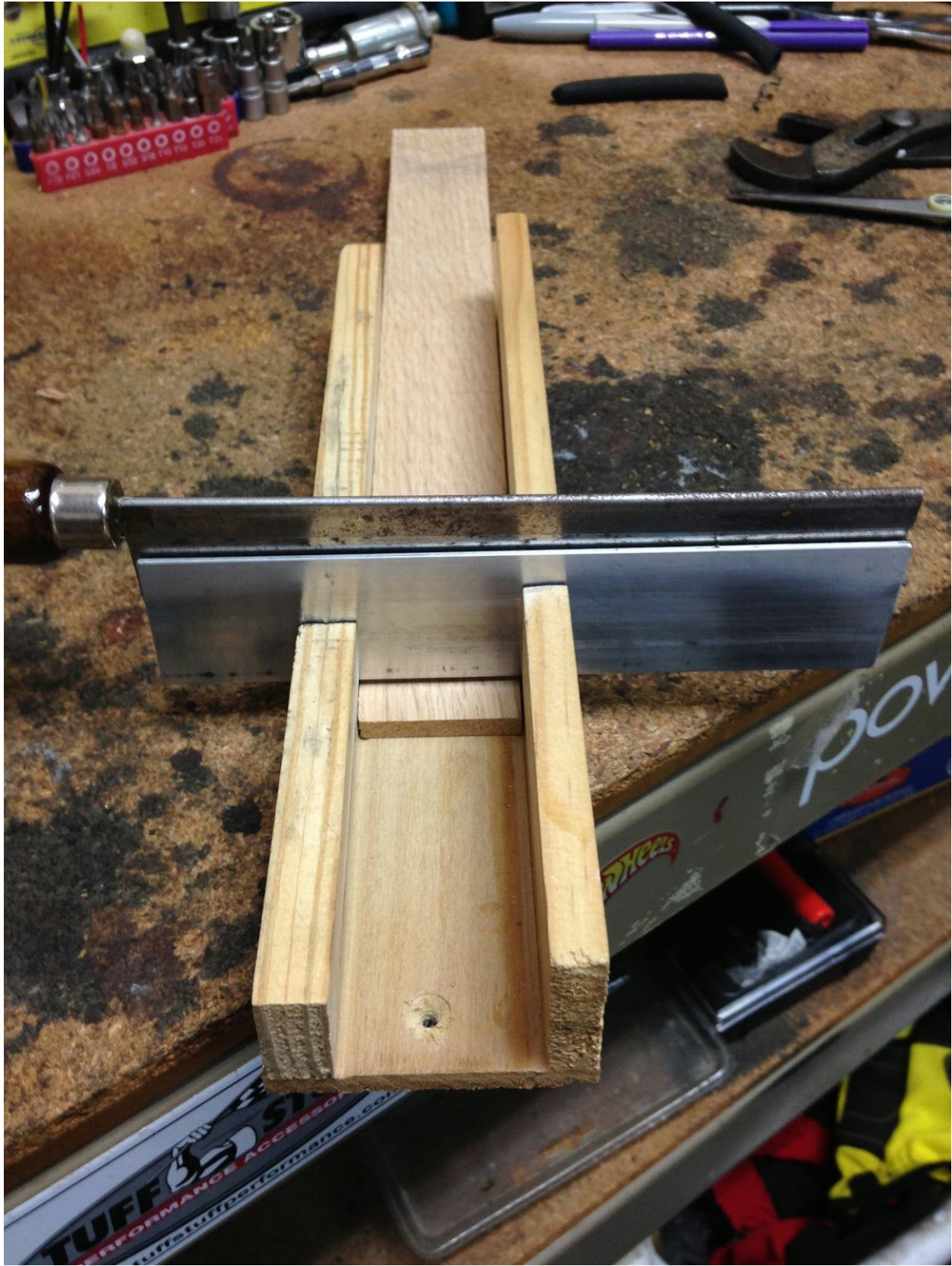
Whether installing frets to a flat or radiused surface, straight on the neck or onto a separate fingerboard, this is an essential tool that can be both made and used quite easily. A lack of precision when making this tool is easily compensated for with the use of the cardboard shims, which in turn allows precision when using this tool on the ends of the frets!

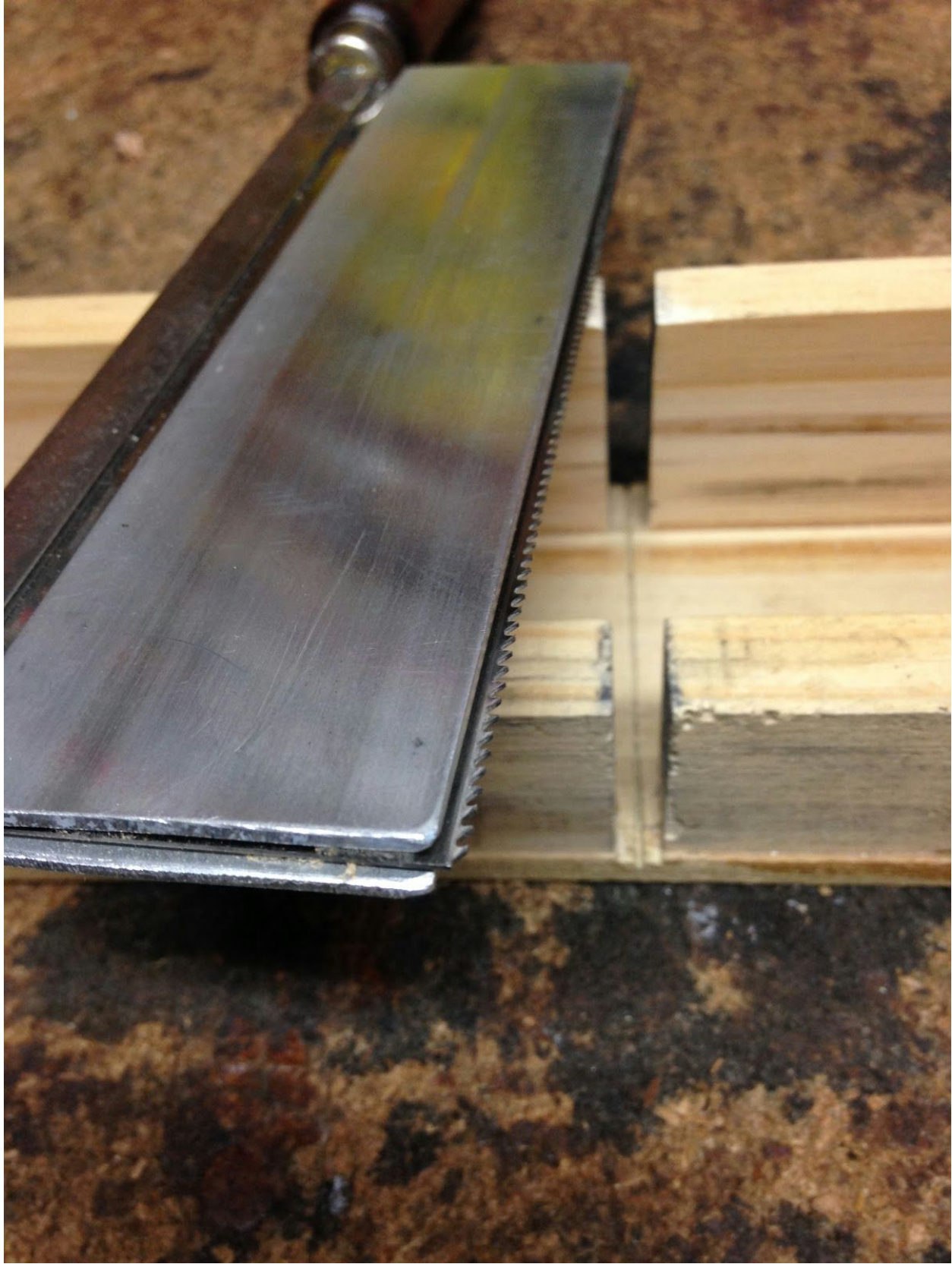




Name: Sammy Hupperich

Fret tips: The miter box and saw is like the one you sale. Glued together scrap pine makes the box. Double backed tape holes two pieces of thin aluminum in place to set depth guide. I've been using it for three years.





Name: Thomas MEfford

Fret tips: CB Gitty, Here is a link to my fretting systems video
<http://youtu.be/spuy15JdcAk> Thank-you for holding a contest so that we as
builders can glean helpful tips from each other!

Name: Brian Cotgrove

Fret tips: My method is by using a template which is logical....I then run the fret board under the Saw
to groove a series of 1.5mm slots.

Then I cut 2mm brass wire to suitable length glue them in with 24 hour Araldite.

When dry and ready for finish I file the Brass Wire Pieces & Sand The whole thing (down to 600 grit)
along the sides to smooth everything (no dags) then get ready to marry (Glue & Screw) it to the
sound box.

When everything is ready to finish prior to stringing up, I use Acrylic Clear (Automotive Quality) to
give it that Brand New Look.....!

Name: Russell Chalmers

Fret Tips: With the fret board glued to the neck and the scale lines marked and cut with a Stanley
knife, I put the neck into a mitre box and cut the scale lines to the fret guide depth. Then i get the
frets ready for installing,I then run a little supa glue gel on the fret guide, place the fret in scale cut, I
then place a small block of wood on the fret and another one on the back of the neck in the same
position.I the get a Irwin quip clamp and squeeze the two blocks together thus pressing the fret into
the cut and holding it there for a few seconds while the glue dries a bit. Release the clamp and wipe of
any glue that squeezes out. Make sure the clamp on the wood is in the middle of the fret before
clamping so the fret
goes in evenly. cheers

Name: Scott Griepentrog

Fret Tips: Press the frets in with an allen wrench in a drill press



Name: Dale Crombez

Fret Tips: My best tip for those that have tried fretting and have been disappointed with the result is "don't fret".

On a serious note, if you are new to fretting, start with a softer wood. It will be more forgiving for your first project. As an example, don't just start with an ebony fretboard. My personal favorite is cherry since it is easier to insert the frets (the softer wood will allow the fret wire barbs to insert easier) and I like the look of the oiled, aged cherry with the Mother of Pearl inlay dots. Granted, the softer woods may not be ideal for a fretboard, but they are much more forgiving when fretting. I can fret a cherry board about 4 times faster than an ebony with a tenth of the swearing.

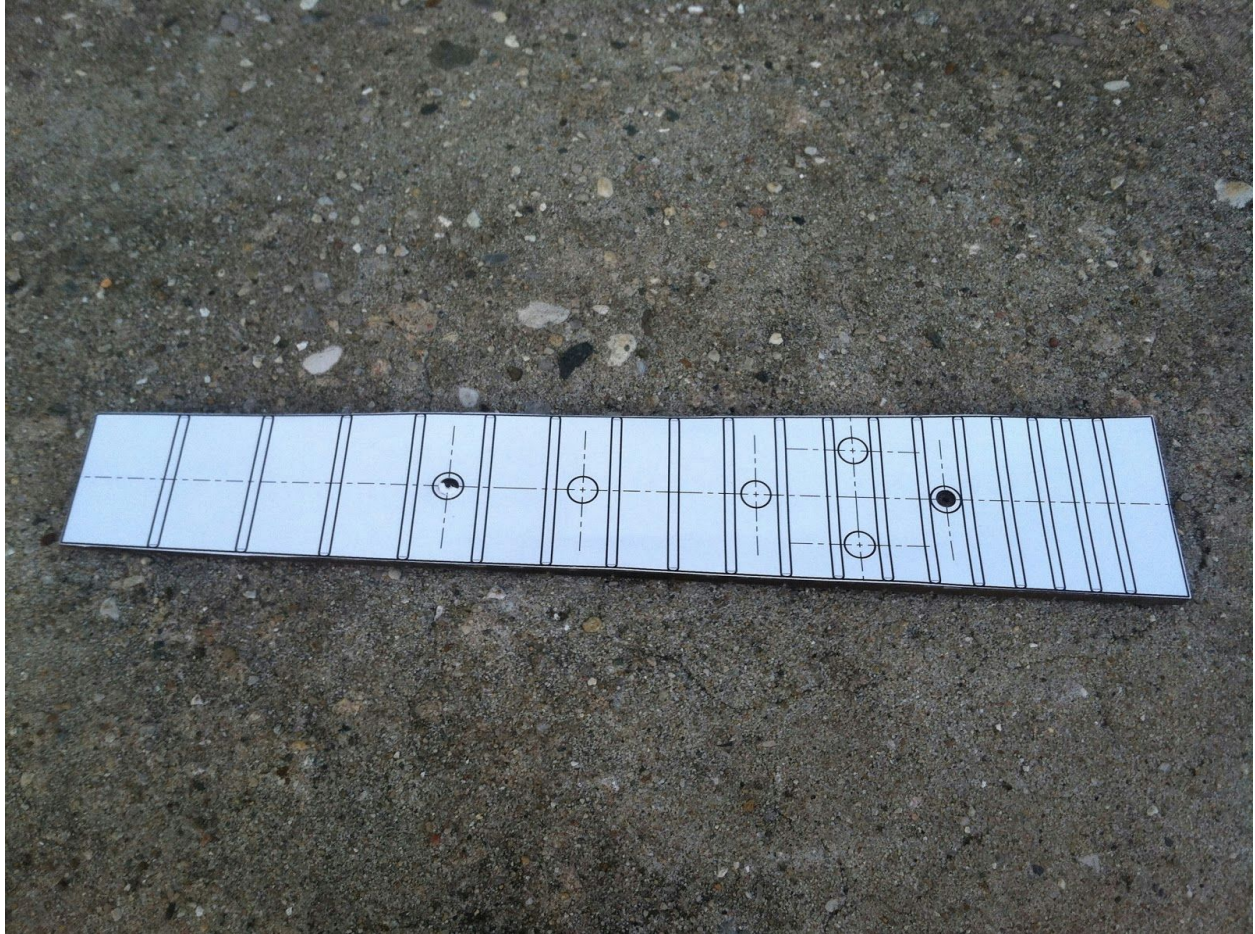
Name: Rich Briggs

Fret Tips: I was tired of always having to measure each fret placement on my finger boards. I took a metal yard stick, marked the fret placements of the scale lengths I usually use (24" and 17") and notched each fret placement with my dremmel tool on the edge. Now all I have to do is place the yard stick on the fret board and quickly mark each fret with a sharp pencil. No more squinting to read the measurements and always accurate.

Name: Tom Carrington

Fret Tips: Hi. First of all, I'm no expert, I only did this once because I wanted to learn. Second, it is infinitely more easy to fret a bare fretboard than it is to fret an assembled instrument. This is for a concert ukulele.

1. Make a small mitre box
2. Use this <https://www.stewmac.com/FretCalculator> to know where to place your frets.
3. I cut out a view of a drawing for a pattern for fret locations based on the fretboard you sell.



4. I temporarily spray glued this pattern to the rectangle fretboard
5. I borrowed a Stewmac Japanese fret slotting saw, what a lifesaver. Saw 3 or 4 pull strokes for all frets with the mitre box with the saw's depth gauge removed
6. Reinstall the saw's depth gauge and finish sawing all the slots to proper depth.
7. Now taper the fret board edges. Make just slightly wider than it is going to be. (Maybe a CBG fretboard remains rectangular)
8. I pressed the frets in with a regular bench vise with copper jaws. It did NOT mark the maple wood on the front or back. I did not use a hammer.
9. Now trim the fret ends with nippers as close the wood as you can without nicking the wood. I was a little too aggressive here.



10. Sand the edges of the board and frets on a belt sander. Put a slight chamfer on the fret ends.

11. Between steps 7 and 9, you can use an Irwin Quick-Grip with rubber jaws to seat any frets that are ridin' high, or just press them all in just a bit more.



12. After fretboard is glued to neck, hand sand the board, frets ends, and neck until you get a smooth beautiful finish.

I hope you find something you can use here. Thanks for having such useful parts available.

Name: Earl Gyselman - Courtenay British Columbia

Fret Tips: I found that smoothing and polishing the ends of the fretwire with a small file and then finer grades of sandpaper to be very tedious. I now flatten the ends of the fretwire after setting them on my 6" table sander then repeat at a 30 degree angle. To make the ends smooth and rounded I brush a fine drywall finishers sanding sponge back and forth along the edge of the fretboard at the same 30 degree angle. This smoothes them nicely and very quickly. Then I take the same sponge and wrap it in a linen cloth and repeat the same action. This polishes up the ends of the fretwire and sides of the Rosewood fretboard very nicely. Careful at the last stage! The cloth can sometimes catch a sharp corner where the crown of the fretwire meets the tang. If you snag a fret you could loosen it.

Name: Paul Monaco

Fret Tips: I use split bamboo skewers. I cut the fret lines with a back saw and glue them in. I sand them flush so my strings don't buzz. If you should stain your fretboard the bamboo won't take the stain. It really looks nice imbedded in a dark wood like mahogany.

Name: Scott McGilliard

Fret Tips: I cut my fret slots with a coping saw using: Vermont American Coping Saw Blades 6 3/8" long 162 mm 18 TPI .090 depth 2.3 mm .018 width .5 mm

I carefully saw straight and flat until I can barely feel the top of the blade above the wood.

I use Jescar Medium/Medium Nickel-Silver Fret Wire

I start my frets in the slot with a light tap with the plastic side of a fret hammer and then put a block of maple over the whole fret and strike it sharply about 3 times. With this method, I rarely have to make any further adjustment other than cutting and filing the ends.

Name: Peter Faris

Fret Tips: I would not pretend to be anywhere near as experienced as many of you but I found that my hacksaw cuts a good fret slot. Not a lot of kerf, and a nice rigid back which keeps the cut straight when I tension the blade.

Name: Greg Trapp

Fret Tips: I went completely in to re-purpose common items in my instrument. On the neck, I used a table saw's blade angled to 45 degrees, and a super shallow cut, to make the slots for the frets. For the frets, I used 2 inch finishing nails. A grinding wheel rounded off the tips and tops, after I used a hacksaw to cut them to the proper length. Some drops of carpenters glue, a few hours drying time, and it was complete. Really quite playable, but I'll probably order pre-fretted necks from CBGitty in the future, if I make instruments to sell.

Name: Seane Crews

Fret tip: I use the belt on a belt sander/disk sander to finish one side of the fretboard practically all at once. Do one side holding it at about a 45 degree angle, then flip it around and do the other. Then use fine sandpaper to finish it off.

Name: dakotadon

Fret Tips: I used to cut slots and use actual fret wire until I saw a tip from a talented cigar box guitar maker on Cigarbox Nation. She uses cotter pins. They work really well, because they have a flat side and a round side. You simply spread them out, clip them to size, and superglue them on.

Name: John Splitt

Fret tips: To start I mark with a small dot on each side of the fingerboard where the fret will go. Next I use a strait edge and an exacto knife to score a line connecting the dots across the fingerboard. Lastly I widen the slot as needed with an appropriately wide hand saw blade.

Name: Scott McGilliard

Fret Tips: Sand the top side of the shovel handle so it's slightly flattened. Mark the placement for each fret. Use a drill to groove the slot for each fret. It would help to use a drill press, but I don't have one. I guess you could use a round file, but that would be a lot of work. Drill a vertical hole at the end of each groove. Cut a sturdy coat-hanger into short pieces and bend each one in a squared U like a large staple to fit into the holes and slot. Use an exacto knife to adjust the depth for each fret to make them all level. Remove each fret and put a little epoxy in the end holes and re-insert the fret. This was for a shovel handle two string cigar box bass guitar.

