

# Trestle Table

by Baroness Genoveva von Lübeck



If you're prone to dancing on tables, read no further. But if you want an authentic-looking, wooden trestle table that you can take to events, or even use as a craft table in your home, do I have some woodworking plans for you! You won't be able to dance on this table, sure, but its lightweight tabletop is perfect for lugging about without breaking your back ... or your wallet!

How did these plans come about? In 2011 I joined the SCA and I needed a table for camping at Pennsic, but I didn't want to spend a fortune on it. I could buy a couple sheets of plywood, but I want to use this table year-round for crafts, so I preferred something that would look nicer. Alas, oak and even select pine is really pricey — \$100 and up for the project. My solution? I combined an old recycled door (for the table top) with inexpensive pine (for the legs and spacers) for a 15th-century, St. Jerome-style trestle table that comes in at under \$35.



## **MATERIAL LIST:**

10 feet of 2' x 4' pine - \$3

10 feet of 2' x 12' pine - \$10

8 feet of 2' x 10' pine - \$7

1 36" x 80" hollow door slab - \$5 at my local recycling center (or about \$30 if you buy one new at Lowe's)

Dowels- \$1

4 (four) 1" x 2" x 8' furring strips - \$3.20

1 12" x 24" x 1/2" oak board - \$3

Wood glue - \$2

Total for the Table: \$34.20

## **OPTIONAL EXTRAS TO MAKE YOUR TABLE FANCIER:**

Stain (Minwax Polyshades Antique Walnut Gloss) - \$12

Moulding to put around the table edges - \$20

Wood burning tool to make designs - \$12

Equipment Used:

Jigsaw, circular saw, drill with boring bit, sander, chisel, mallet, pipe clamp, spring clamps, sawhorse, ruler, knife, permanent marker, safety goggles

## **EXPERIENCE REQUIRED:**

I'd say beginner-intermediate. I've only made a few things from wood (some benches, a two-step stair, some trellises), and I was able to create this table to my satisfaction.



So you may be wondering what in the Known World possessed me to use an old recycled door as a tabletop. I thought a door would be both inexpensive and light enough for me to carry on my own. A hollow door slab is really quite lightweight, but still strong enough to function as a great table.

A door is the perfect size for a trestle table. As for finding an old door, my local recycling center had about 50 of 'em, all for \$5-\$10. I was able to find one that hadn't ever had a door handle installed, too. And it was already stained a good color. Just needed a little dusting! You might have one hanging around the house from a remodel (or know someone who does). And I'm convinced that doing something like this is period — our ancestors recycled wood, including old doors, whenever it made sense. Wood was never wasted.



As to whether you can actually use a hollow door slab as a tabletop, yes, you can! This is a common practice among folks who need furniture on a budget, model train enthusiasts who need a place for their layouts, drafters who need a desk, and crafters who want a large workspace.

## THE TABLE PLANS

Here's how to make the trestle table — these plans are adapted from those posted by Charles Oakley and bits and pieces picked up from other online sources.

1. Join the Leg Pieces: Cut the 2" x 12" board into four 30" long pieces. Cut the 2" x 10" board into two 30" long pieces. Place one of the 2" x 10" boards on the floor or some other flat place, and flank it with two of the 2" x 12" boards, creating 34" x 30" of wood.



Repeat with the other three boards. Drill holes in the edges of the boards where they meet, then insert dowels into them and glue them in place with wood glue. Clamp and allow to dry for 24 hours.

2. Size the Tabletop (Optional): If you want to use the full length of your door slab, just skip this step. I wanted my table to fit into a free space in my studio so I could use it as a craft table, however, so I'm shortening my door slab. Here's how to do it: Measure 58" inches on your door slab and score it



with a knife (this prevents splintering when we cut it). Cut the door so it is 58" long (I used a circulate saw). [Note: You can vary the length of your table, but be sure to change the length of your stretchers in step 3 accordingly.] Make room in the newly open end by pulling out/pushing in the reinforcements you'll find there. Cut your furring strips to about 34" long and place them just inside the open end of the door for support on the end, using wood glue to keep the strips in place. Clamp and allow to dry.



3. Create the Stretchers: Take the 2" x 4" and cut into two 51" lengths (shorten or lengthen this if you have a shorter or longer table than me). Trim the end of each spacer according to the diagram below. To create the mortise (the hole in the end of the stretcher), use a boring bit on your drill to drill in two places (either end of the bit of wood you want to remove), then use a jigsaw and/or chisel to remove the extra wood and smooth it down.



4. Create the tenon keys. The tenon key is the tapered bit of wood that will fit into the mortise and hold the legs and stretchers in place). You need four of them. Use the oak board (or just leftover pine) and cut the board into two 4" x 7" x 1/2" pieces, then cut each of those boards diagonally in half and round the ends. Each key should be 1" at the bottom and about 3" at the top. My tenon key pattern is at <http://honorbeforevictory.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/trestle-table-tenon-key.pdf>



5. Cut away the extra wood in your table legs once the wood glue has dried (wait at least 24 hours). Here is the diagram I used for my table legs. I drew the pattern in Adobe Illustrator, printed it out tiled, taped the pages together, cut it out, and drew the pattern onto my wood.



Just flip the pattern: <http://honorbeforevictory.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/trestle-table-leg-design.pdf>

6. Assemble your table legs, stretchers, and tenons. Now that everything is cut out, put your table legs and stretchers together. You may find that some tenons don't quite fit in some mortises, and now is the time to narrow/widen as necessary. Once it's all put together just the way you like, take a permanent marker and write indicators on each board so you now how to assemble it quickly and easily next time.



7. Attach tabletop anchors. As the tabletop is so light, I want to avoid actually attaching the tabletop to the legs, just in case the legs were a bit too heavy for it when it was picked up or otherwise moved. So I attached simple 1" x 2" boards to the underside of the table, on either side of where the legs meet the table, to hold the table in place and prevent it from moving about when used. I attached the boards to the very sides of the door, where it is solid, for the most secure hold – and this has the added advantage of strengthening the underside of the door a bit. Now the tabletop just rests on top of the legs, but doesn't slide or move thanks to the anchor boards. (Note: If I find the tabletop moves or tilts during use, I'll simply drill holes through the anchor boards and into the top of the legs, then slip a dowel through for stability.)



And that's it ... the table is done!

A functional trestle table for under \$35! Now you can fancy it up, if you like. Since I'd saved so much in the construction of the table, I decided to put moulding around the edges and stain the moulding, legs, stretchers, and



tenons. That cost an extra \$32, although I'd already bought the stain for another purpose (my cooler cooler and my benches).

## TIPS I LEARNED THE HARD WAY:

Buy dry wood. Wet wood is super heavy and hard to cut! And it won't take any stain until it dries anyway.

If possible, smooth or otherwise plane the sides of the wood boards before you dowel and glue them together in step 1. This will really help the boards stay strong and stable.

When you apply any wood glue, put glue on all surfaces to be glued in a thin, even coat. And clean up any wood glue that beads or globs during the drying process — it's really hard to get this glue off once it has dried.

When staining with tinted polyurethane like I did, keep a cloth handy to wipe drips — it gets tacky VERY FAST and is hard to wipe up later. Also, do not go back over previously stained areas (anything older than, say, 3 minutes) until it is absolutely dry because it will glob and gunk and look yucky. This happened with mine, and I got better at the staining thing as I went along (told you I wasn't that experienced at the time!)

All comments, questions, and suggestions for improvements most welcome!

Update 2/2014: This table continues to serve us very well and has survived six weeks at Pennsic so far. I am glad I used a hollow core door, especially now that we have quite a bit of stuff to bring to Pennsic and weight is an issue. The table gets near daily use at home, too, as my sewing table. Here are photos of the table in action:



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### About the Author, Contact Details, and Copyright Notice

Baroness Genoveva von Lübeck resides in the Barony of Cynnabar within the Kingdom of the Middle. I love to help anyone who in making things in the SCA! You can e-mail me at [genoveva.von.lubeck@gmail.com](mailto:genoveva.von.lubeck@gmail.com) and visit my web site at <http://HonorBeforeVictory.com> and <http://GermanRenaissance.net>, where you'll find tutorials, projects, photos, articles, and information!



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