FRAMING
Day One

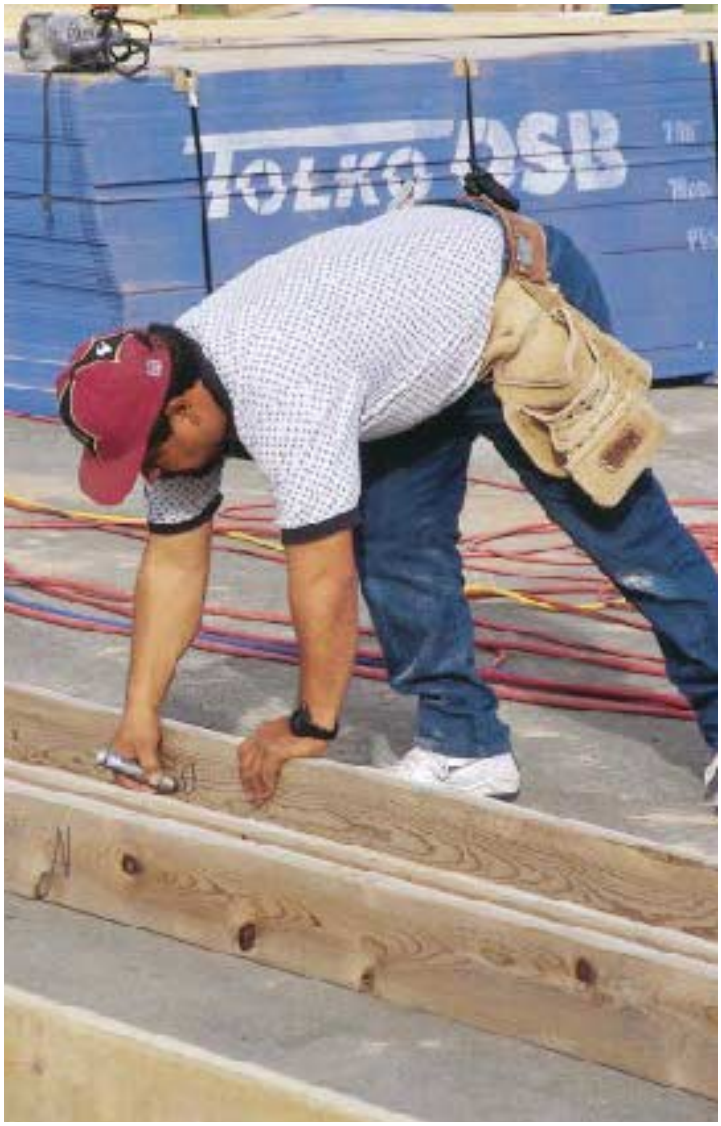
Get organized in advance for the first day of framing and the whole job will have a better chance of staying on schedule

by Don Dunkley

At its best, framing is a series of well-thought-out and coordinated steps. Of those steps, the first one can be the most important. I've learned that the ability to start off a project at full speed creates momentum that carries over throughout the entire job. Conversely, one that stumbles right out of the gate eats up a lot of valuable time that you may not recover.

As a framing contractor, some of my best time spent was the time invested in preparing and organizing for the first day of a job. In this business, time is money and neither is well spent when the first day at the job finds your crew mulling about waiting for you to figure out what to do with them while you're still trying to make sense of the plans. Nor is it a good use of daylight spending the first day or two laying out a floor with one other carpenter while the rest of the gang is on hold waiting for you to get it ready for them.

To start any job off with a bang, I organize my crew to be task specific the minute we get on site. My optimum choice in a crew size is five, including me. I set up two of the crew to break down the lumber package and one to cut the frame package, leaving two for layout, plating, and detail. First, I square the deck, then I snap, plate, and detail the garage, using one of the crew to help me pull diagonals and snap lines. By the time I have this done,



the rest of my crew will have broken down the package into usable sections and outfitted the cut man for his day with a radial arm saw.

With the garage set up for framing, I can now concentrate on the main house. The end of a good first day will result in the frame package cut, labeled and stacked, the garage framed or in frame stage and the main house laid out. But this kind of organization can't be done without some serious time spent studying and understanding the plans. Before I get to the site, I am already familiar with the plans (see "Framing Layout Rules of Thumb," 10/99), and I have prepared a cut list for the wall framing phase. I arrive at the job with *all* the proper tools and supplies, and all of the lumber already dropped off at a previously marked out location. Complete familiarity with the plans comes with good organization.

To make day one successful, I use the following procedure to organize the site and crew for this crucial first step.

What to Show Up With

I. Tools (other than usual carpentry tools)

Must have

- two 100-ft. steel tape measures
- transit and/or laser
- two dry lines minimum
- two chalk lines of different colors, spanish red mortar dye for permanent lines, blue or other color for changes
- keel for everyone on the crew, one color for marking crowns, two other colors for layout
- calculator (Construction Master IV is ideal)
- anchor bolt marker or combination square
- different sized auger or spade-style drill bits for anchor and hold-down bolts
- material to cover framing package (6 mil plastic is fine)

Nice to have

- spray paint, any color
- clear lacquer spray (keeps lines from being washed away in rain)
- masonry chisel
- two-pound hammer
- electric demo or chipping hammer
- extra sawhorses

II. Information

Prints. If you are the builder, you should have read every word on the prints by now. At the very least, right now you need:

- rough openings for all doors and windows
- head heights for every opening
- all wall heights, plus drop for every opening
- note any unusual details: holddowns, beam pockets and posts, transom windows, etc.
- note location of openings or rough-in for plumbing, HVAC, and electric
- have complete understanding of roof frame, rake wall requirements, exterior elevation needs, staircase layout such as radius for site-built circular stairs.

Materials takeoff list or your order for the framing package (what's supposed to be there and what it's being used for)

A cut list for rough openings which shows:

- header sizes and the total number of each size
- the number of jack (trimmer) studs required of each length
- the number of king studs required of each length
- the number of sills of each size
- the number and length of cripples and studs for special height walls, tall or balloon-framed walls, pony walls, rake walls

An assembly list that shows:

- the number of openings of each R.O. size and the wall height if this varies anywhere
- the number of channels for wall intersections
- the number of corner posts that need to be made up

III. People

Five crew members: two for layout, two to break down package and frame, one cut man

Prepping the Job

I. Be there before the lumber package is dropped to direct the driver or make sure you have marked clearly where the package is to be dropped. Give yourself enough room to break the package down without crowding yourself, get it close enough to the building that you don't have to walk too far, but not so close that it's in your way. The package will usually be stacked for the driver's convenience, not yours. Most often, the plate material and the floor joists will be under the plywood. While you are snapping lines with one of your helpers, the other two workers should be breaking down the package and sorting it out.

II. Sort out lumber by size into separate stacks.

Pay attention to what it's going to be used for as you do this.

- As you work, cull out unsuitable materials, restack near driveway for lumberyard pickup. At the end of the day, make a list of bad materials to be picked up so they can bring the replacements with them from the yard.
- As you handle each board, crown it now. Make big, visible crown marks with keel, arm's distance from the ends of the board. This is so you don't cut the crown mark off, and so you can see it from either end.

- Stack boards with crowns facing the same way. I crown all studs, too, especially 2x6s.
- Stack all materials on stickers 4 feet apart, off the ground. This helps keep the lumber in better shape, makes it easier to handle, and keeps the job site neater.
- After the lumber is sorted, check it against the delivery ticket and the takeoff.

III. Set up a cut station right next to the pile.
I prefer a radial arm saw with roller tables on each side.

- Cut all headers. Make a clear crown mark on each header. Write the length with keel as you go. Stack each size separately. We use 4-by header stock on the West Coast. If you're using 2-by lumber, you'll want to assemble headers at this point.
- Cut all jacks (trimmers).
- If different lengths, mark them and stack separately.
- If using solid-sawn 4-by header stock, cut all trimmers in place during framing to account for variations in width.
- Cut all sills, mark length as you go.
- Cut all cripples, throw in separate piles as you go.
- Cover anything you aren't going to use right away — sun is just as bad as rain on lumber.

Framing Begins

I. Two carpenters start to load the cutting bench while you square up the deck and snap, plate, and detail the garage. Once the load is broken down, the garage area can start being framed up.

- Cut man should be prepping all R.O. packages, including headers, sills, and cripples. These should be clearly marked so they can be spread to proper location during framing.
- As the R.O. packages are completed, the cut man marks the headers clearly across the exterior side of the header with the door or window callout that matches the prints (Window A, Door 7, etc.)

II. Layout. During breakdown, the layout crew should go around and knock all the concrete chunks off the anchor bolts and sweep slab or deck clean.

- Check the slab or deck for elevation, level, and square.
- Check the overall dimensions of all the concrete at this point, too. Make sure they're the right length and width.

III. Snapping. If it's all good, square up the slab/deck and snap out all garage walls. If the weather is even a little bit shaky, spray clear lacquer over the lines to keep them in place.

IV. Detailing the plates. Plate and detail the garage. This can be done by the frame crew if they break the package down early.

Full Steam Ahead

At this point, the framing team can start on the garage walls. I move on with my helper to snap out the main house. The cut man continues prepping R.O. packages for the main house, while the framers work on the garage. By the time the garage is framed, I'll often have the main house snapped out and detailed so the framers can move over and keep working.

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