

# Making Backer Boards for Drywall Butt Joints

BY AARON MILLER

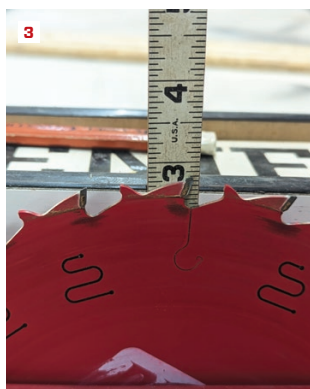
**Drywall butt joints**, or what we call “drywall butts,” can be time-consuming to finish, and even if you feather out a wide area of joint compound, they can still cause humps in the final surface. To overcome those problems, we started using commercially available drywall backers, which are installed behind butt joints that are laid out to fall between studs or joists (over the cavity, not the framing member). Fastening the drywall to the backer board forces the joint inward, creating a slight depression along the joint that speeds up the finishing process tremendously. The only problem is, backer boards are not always readily available and can also be pricey. For those reasons, we began making our own.

We start with ripping  $\frac{7}{16}$ -inch-thick sheets of OSB into  $5\frac{1}{2}$ -inch widths. We prefer ripping 4x9 sheets, when they are available at our local lumberyard, because we can chop the OSB strips into 54-inch

lengths without creating a lot of waste. This length is greater than the width of a sheet of drywall so that each end of the backer board can lap behind adjacent drywall panels, which helps strengthen and support the joint. If 4x8 sheets are our only option, we still cut the boards 54 inches long, and then piece together the leftovers into backer boards. This works well but takes longer. We also save scraps that are long enough, to add to our savings.

The photos that follow show our process of making drywall backer boards. It's quite simple, and once we landed on this solution, it became a regular part of every job with new drywall.

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Start by ripping a sheet of  $\frac{7}{16}$ -inch OSB into  $5\frac{1}{2}$ -inch widths (1). Set the fence to  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch (2) and adjust the height of the saw blade to  $2\frac{13}{16}$  inches (3). Next, set the bevel of the table saw to 3 degrees. It is important that the blade is tilting toward the fence. If everything is set correctly, the table saw should look like this (4).

Photos by Aaron Miller



Run one side of the ripped OSB through the saw (5). Then flip the board over and run it through the saw again (6). Feather boards help to hold the board straight and in position. The completed backer board has a recess a little over 1/4 inch deep (7).



With the backer board positioned between framing members (8), the butt end of a sheet of drywall is pulled in slightly, providing the perfect amount of recess for fast finishing (9).