

Why Make Columns Hollow?

Making columnar forms over a couple of inches in diameter can result in external 'checking' or cracking. Even 4x4s used to support porches, trellises and the like will eventually crack because the outside wood loses moisture content before the inner part. When that happens, the wood splits because the inside is too big for the outside!

How to make hollow columns, though is the big question. The method I use is sometimes called 'birdsmouth' joinery.

Here's a sample of that showing the cross section. These are plain 2x4s cut at 30° and 60° to form the 'birdsmouth'. I included a square to give some idea of scale.



The cuts were made of the tablesaw. depending on your saw and skill level, work out the procedure on scraps. Having a zero clearance insert will help on the second cut so the pieces will pass through without catching on the insert.

Assembly can get tricky, especially for longer pieces. A trick many use is to use box sealing tape on the pieces, but for the figure above it doesn't work well. I used a plywood form that holds the first three pieces and then the others are held in place by gravity until the band clamps are in place. Use a glue with long open time. My selection was Titebond III because it's claimed to be waterproof.

Happy woodworking!
Don

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