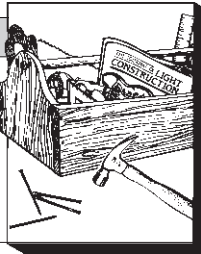


Boxes for Today's Tools

by Clayton DeKorne



Carpenters take pride in the toolboxes they make. A well-made toolbox not only stores and protects an investment in tools; it's a badge of the trade. But hand-made boxes have drawbacks that may cause this tradition to wane.

Open box designs don't protect tools from the dust or weather. And it's difficult to make a closeable case that is not impractically heavy. Because of this, many carpenters have begun looking at metal and plastic toolboxes.

Like many other carpenters, I use one major box to hold my belt and my most often used hand tools. In addition I have a truck full of minor boxes to hold individual power tools and small job-specific tools. Below are a few of the pre-fab boxes I looked at when I decided to give up my collection of old plywood boxes.

Major Boxes

Kennedy has been around since the turn of the century and is the undisputed standard in the industry. There's good reason for this. To begin with, Kennedy rivets its handles to the lids, uses stainless steel continuous hinges, and provides rugged side handles that can withstand much more weight than you could ever put in the box. Kennedy makes two metal tool chests—the Contractor's Chest and the Carpenter's Chest—that are long enough (32 1/8 inches) to hold hand saws and a 2-foot level.

The Contractor's Chest (model K32X) is 8 5/8 inches wide and 9 5/8 inches high. It has a 4 1/2-inch-wide, full-length tray that slides from side to side. This tray is a bit small but with some fancy arranging I've managed to fit everything I need. I now prefer it



Figure 1. The Kennedy Carpenter's Chest (top) has knockout slots positioned where a framing square can be inserted while the box is full of tools. The Kennedy Contractor's Chest (bottom) features a sliding tray and side handles.

to a full-width tray that has to be removed to get at the rest of the box.

The Carpenter's Chest (model K32) is 8 1/8 inches wide and 10 1/4 inches long. It's a bit higher than the Contractor's chest to allow for a pitched lid. Only one side of this lid folds back. Leaving a small fixed return that has two knockout slots for framing squares (see Figure 1). To allow the square to be inserted sideways while the box is loaded with tools, I widened the slot by banging down its bottom edge with a hammer and punch.

The Contractor's Chest also has these knockout slots on the lid, but to insert a square you have to swing the end out to meet the arc of the closing lid. This reduces the amount of usable space inside the box.

The Carpenter's Chest doesn't have any side handles. But it has a nylon web shoulder strap that you can knot up and use as a side handle. This box doesn't have a tray. However, Kennedy makes a small Utility Box (No. 80875), measuring 16 9/16 inches long by 4 15/16 inches wide by 1 11/16 inches high, which can fit inside this chest.

Both chests have a bracket for holding a short level and a small wooden block with a few saw kerfs in it to hold hand saws. I replaced this block with plywood after the original split out. I reshaped it so the framing square could slide into it, as well, which wasn't possible before.

The Contractor's Chest sells for about \$60 and the Carpenter's Chest for about \$45. The Utility Box sells for \$9. For information contact Kennedy Manufacturing Co., P.O. Box 151, Van Wert, OH 45891; 419/238-2442.

Greenlee makes Portable Storage Boxes that are closer in size to a car-



Figure 2. Plastic toolboxes, such as these made by Contico (left) and Plano (right), are surprisingly durable, yet lightweight.

porter's major box than to a full size job storage box. These boxes are big enough to pile a few power tools in, have casters (as you might expect to need), side handles, and chain supports to hold the lid upright. The two large ones measure 31 inches long by 18 inches wide by 15 inches high and 30x16x12 inches. The larger model (No. 1531) costs about \$130 and the smaller model (No. 1230) costs about \$70. For information contact Greenlee, 4455 Boeing Dr., Rockford, IL 61109; 800/435-0786.

Minor Boxes

On the other end of the spectrum, Contico makes a line of polypropylene Tuff Boxes that are surprisingly rugged. The plated steel clasps and steel and plastic handles are riveted on. The hinge is integrally molded with the case and in over a year of constant use, it has not failed. The bottom has become abraded from sliding in and out of the truck, but it hasn't cracked or dented in sub-zero weather.

Tuff Boxes are specified according to their length and are available in 17-, 20-, and 26-inch sizes. These boxes are very light (the 16-inch box weighs 6-1/2 pounds with the tray) and they can be modified easily. You can screw through the side without predrilling to add dividers or supports where needed. They all have a full-width plastic tray. I usually end up taking this out and use the whole box for individual power tools. For example, I use a 20-inch Tuff Box for my worm-drive saw (see Figure 2) and a 17-inch box for my power plan. I have enough space in my saw box for a 12-inch Speed-square and in my planner box there's room for a small vise.

Tuff Boxes are priced from about \$15 to \$35. For information, contact Contico Manufacturing Co., 1101 Warson Rd., St. Louis, MO 53132; 314/997-5900.

Plano has recently introduced a similar line of plastic toolboxes that are quickly finding their way to a lot of job sites. These are also made of polypropylene but with a different "mix" than Contico's. It is smoother, thinner, and more flexible. Plano boxes bend when you sit on them at coffee break but they won't break. In fact, these boxes have a lifetime guarantee against breakage. They seem less resistant to abrasion than the Tuff Boxes but the plastic and brass clasps don't seem as durable.

Plano has a huge variety of styles and sizes. For power tool boxes, models TNT II 641 and TNT 441 seem the most practical. The 641 measures 20x9 3/8 inches long by 10 3/4 inches high and weighs just 4 1/2 pounds. The 441 is 16 5/8 x 9 inches by 9 inches high and weighs 3 1/2 pounds. The handles on these models are recessed in the lid so they stack easily. They sell for \$16 and \$19, respectively. For information, contact Plano Molding Company, 431 E. South St., Plano, IL 60545-0189; 312/552-3111. ■