

## How to build a closet using melamine

### What is melamine?

While real wood is strong and beautiful, building a closet organizer with it is expensive and time-consuming. Melamine products are an attractive and inexpensive alternative to wood or plywood. These boards, panels and sheets are made of particleboard with a tough, factory-applied melamine finish similar in appearance to plastic laminate. A 4 x 8-ft. melamine sheet is about half the cost of cabinet-grade plywood .

### Example Closet:

Overall dimensions: 77-1/4' wide x 96' tall x 15-3/4' deep

- This closet has a 9-ft. ceiling, so we built 8-ft. cabinets. If your ceiling is lower, adjust the cabinet height as necessary.

### Choose your hardware first

If you're planning to install accessories, be sure to buy them before you build the cabinets. Some wire baskets for example, may require a 24-in. opening, while the shoe shelf rails might need a 29-1/2-in. opening to allow for the width of the shoe shelves (with rails installed) plus the shelf pins.

### Prevent chip-out

You can cut melamine with a circular saw and regular woodcutting blade, but its brittle faces are prone to chipping out. To minimize this problem, use a 60-tooth, carbide-tipped blade and apply masking tape to the top side of your workpiece wherever you make a cut.

### Make perfect cuts every time

One of the challenges of using a handheld circular saw is making perfectly straight and square cuts. For our project, we used a self-squaring crosscut jig for cuts across panels, and a longer jig for cutting long, narrow pieces like the hanging strips. These jigs also help reduce chip-out. The jig shown here is just a narrow piece of 3/4-in. plywood glued on top of a wider piece of 1/4-in. plywood, and it has a squaring fence on the bottom. Learn how to make similar jigs.

### Edge banding hides the ugly

The finished faces of melamine panels look great, but the raw edges don't. You might be able to build your organizer without having to apply any edge banding at all if you orient the raw edges so they're not visible once the organizer is installed. If that's not possible, you'll need to apply iron-on edge banding, which is available at any home center. Be sure to buy an edge trimmer.

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### Drill pilot holes

We assembled each of the three cabinet boxes for our closet organizer by first drilling pilot holes with countersinks and then driving 1-3/4-in. coarse-thread screws. These screws are designed to be self-drilling, but the particleboard in melamine has a tendency to crumble and blow out easily, so drilling pilot holes is worth the effort.

### Hide the screw heads

Be sure to purchase bags of screws-labeled 'melamine screws' – that are packaged with white plastic caps to hide the screw heads. You just press them on with a finger, then give each one a light tap with a hammer.

### Connector bolts tie it all together

With the boxes screwed to the wall, drill holes and use connector bolts and nuts to join the sides of the cabinets. This will close any gaps between the boxes and stiffen up the entire assembly. Be sure the front edges of the cabinets are flush with each other before joining. If they're not, loosen the wall screws and adjust as needed.

### A ledger board makes installation easy

Once assembled, each cabinet box weighs about 100 lbs. To make hanging them easier, screw a 1×4 or 2×4-called a ledger board-to the back wall of the closet down near the floor. Make sure it's perfectly straight and level. Mark the stud locations with masking tape. Then get somebody to help you lift each box onto the ledger board, which will hold it in position until you can screw it to the wall. Drive 3-in. washer-head screws through the hanging strips of all three boxes and into the wall studs.

### Accessorize!

Search for 'closet accessories' or 'closet hardware' online and you'll find a huge variety. We also installed oval closet rods with brackets that you insert into the cabinets' shelf-pin holes, which makes for super-easy height adjustments.