EASY DIY

Striking Outdoor Accents

(that anyone can build!)

Forget the birdhouses and birch boxes of woodshop class. We've assembled three projects from **Jennifer Largesse, editor of TOH's House One,** that show that even the greenest of do-it-yourselfers can create something stunning using entry-level tools, basic cuts, and inexpensive home-center supplies.

By **Katelin Hill**

To Jennifer Largesse, even the most impressive projects she designs for *This Old House*'s House One (www.house.one) aren't hard—they just have more steps and use bigger pieces of lumber. "When you look at something that seems complex, it's not necessarily more difficult," Jenn says. "You're just building upon the same basic techniques."

Every project Jenn designs relies on a starter set of tools most people should have in their kit, including a miter saw, a circular saw, a jigsaw, and a drill/driver. The price of materials is important to Jenn, too; she knows that beginners will be more comfortable risking mistakes with a $20 piece of pine than with a $200 slab of walnut. All of the supplies in her materials lists are easy to find at the local home center or hardware store.

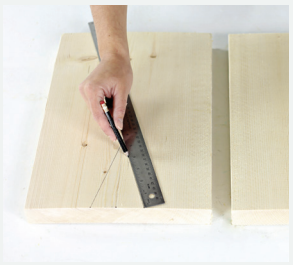
Here, Jenn shares three projects to enhance your outdoor space. Despite the sophisticated results, they're designed for DIYers of every level to tackle.

PROJECT #1

Rustic Garden Bench

Inspired by a French antique, this colorful bench has a modern simplicity—and easily seats two. Solid stain gives the stock pine lumber an added layer of protection from the elements. Its soft green blends in with verdant surroundings, but you could also go bolder with red or yellow to add contrast.

1. Cut the parts to length. Download the cut list from www.house.one. Using a miter saw, cut the seat, stringer, and legs. Then cut the seat's two trim pieces.



2. Mark a decorative notch in each leg. Draw a centerline 5½ inches up from the bottom, and mark 4 inches in from each side. Connect the lines for a triangle cutout.

3. Cut out the leg notches. With the pencil lines as a guide, use a jigsaw to cut out the decorative notch in each of the leg pieces.

4. Prep the stretcher. Using a circular saw, rip 3¼ inches from the width of the 2×12 stretcher board. Spread wood glue on each end.

5. Assemble the base. Place the stretcher on edge and center it between the legs, cut edge flush with the work surface and the tops of the legs. Make two pilot holes in the face of each leg and drive 3-inch deck screws through them to secure the stretcher.

6. Prep the seat trim pieces. Measure and mark each end of both trim pieces 1½ inches down from the top edge. Using these marks as a guide, clip the four bottom corners at a 45-degree angle using the miter saw.

7. Add the seat and trim. Spread wood glue on the tops of the legs and center the seat on top. Glue on the front and back trim pieces flush with the top of the seat. Distribute three pilot holes along the length of each trim piece; fasten with 2-inch deck screws.

8. Apply the finish. Fill the screw holes with exterior-grade wood filler. Sand the assembly smooth. Apply one coat of exterior solid stain, let dry, and repeat. Place the finished bench amid greenery, and prepare to take a seat.

PHOTO: (BENCH) MARK LOHMAN

WATCH AND LEARN!
See the video tutorials at **www.house.one**

PROJECT #2

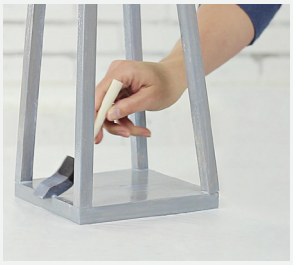
DIY Solar Lantern

Outdoor solar lights can create some major ambience without the cost and hassle of hard-wiring low-voltage landscape lighting. Plus, since they're portable, you can change up how you use them—to line a walkway, brighten porch steps, or add soft lighting for alfresco dinners. Finishing just three of the four sides with hardware cloth allows you to easily swap out the solar bulb over time as needed.

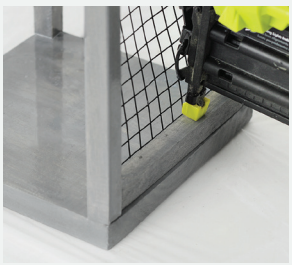
1. Cut the parts to size. Download the cut list from www.house.one and prep the parts, using a hole saw to drill a hole in the center of the lantern top for the solar bulb.

2. Assemble the lantern frame. Drill pilot holes through the top and bottom pieces and into the square dowels. Secure the dowels with wood glue and screws.

3. Size the hardware cloth. Use a permanent marker to trace the inside opening of the assembled frame onto the hardware cloth. Using wire cutters, cut three panels from the hardware cloth.



4. Sand the parts and apply your finish. Wipe on a coat of stain and let set for 2 to 3 minutes. Wipe away excess stain, let dry, then seal with a coat of polyurethane. Spray the hardware cloth with two coats of flat black spray paint.



5. Assemble and attach the hardware cloth panels. Using a staple gun, secure the top and bottom of the hardware cloth panels to the filler strips. Then nail the panels inside the lantern frame.

6. Attach the solar lightbulb. Insert a lightbulb that has a built-in solar cell into the hole in the top of the lantern. Secure with weather-resistant hot glue.

PROJECT #3

Tall, Tapered Planter

Like many of Jenn's projects, these sleek containers came about when she challenged herself to create a budget-friendly version of a store-bought item. She got to sketching and found she could make each one from two 10-foot boards at a cost of less than $25. To mimic her resin inspiration piece, she devised a textured finish that also helps hide any imperfections.

1. Cut the boards to size. Download the cut list from www.house.one. Using a miter saw, cut the pieces to length. Each wall of the planter will consist of five pieces that decrease in length to create the tapered shape.

2. Drill the pocket holes. Line up the boards for each wall, from longest to shortest. Using a pocket hole jig, drill two pocket holes a few inches in from each end on one side of the four longest boards for each wall of the planter.

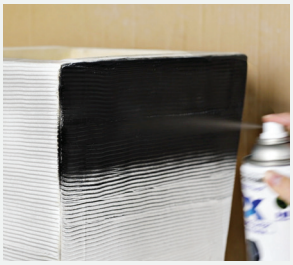
3. Join the boards. With the bottom board clamped to your worktable, glue the boards' adjoining edges to create the four walls. Then use a drill/driver and 2½-inch pocket hole screws to attach the boards for each wall.

4. Draw cutlines. On the front and back walls, mark the width of the bottom boards at 9 inches (centered), then draw a line to the top corners. Mark the side pieces 7 inches wide at the bottom and 2 inches narrower at the top (centered) to fit inside the front and back walls.

5. Trim and join the walls. Following cutlines, trim the walls with a circular saw. Lay down a back wall and run glue along the long edges; add two side walls on edge. Glue a front wall on top. Drill pilot holes on the front and back wall edges; secure with 2½-inch screws.

6. Create a pot ledge. To allow you to set a plastic nursery pot in the planter, mark its depth on the inside. Measure between the front and back walls at the mark; cut two scrap blocks to that length and bevel both ends. Wedge in the blocks, tapered side down.

7. Skim-coat the walls. Apply flexible spackling to the exterior of the walls using a wide putty knife. Then pull a notched putty knife across the surface to create a ribbed texture, wiping the blade off after each pass and dipping it in water.



8. Paint the planter. After the textured coating has dried completely, apply several light coats of spray paint. Add a potted plant and place the planter in a protected area, like a front entry porch.

ILLUSTRATION: ISTOCK