

Article for Blade Magazine

By John Bailey

My neck muscles were as tight as a tow-strap between two bulldozers and my butt had taken a substantial bite out of my BVD's. Once again Mom had me in her crosshairs; and had that finger of her's chopping away inches from my nose. Through crossed eyes all I saw was a blur of nail and knuckle "How many times have I told you not to throw those things at the trees?" Keep your mouth shut (I told myself...) it's a trick question. How did she get that all out in one breath and in perfect cadence with her finger? She continued "You're going to kill them." Then I really pushed her button when I rolled my eyes with a muffled groan. "DON'T GIVE ME THAT LOOK!" "If I catch you throwing at ANY trees standing in our yard or the neighbors; they won't be the only things standing." "Do you understand me?" Mom could veil a threat of a spanking better than anybody I had ever known. With an appropriate; "Sorry" I turned and shuffled away. Sorry I got caught and sorry I couldn't practice my own version of "plucking a dagger from a belt and flipping it into a tree." I had just seen, "Robin Hood" (the 1950s TV series) do it and this nine year old would have no peace till he could do the same. I was hooked. Well Mom laying down the law on "letting fly into trees" and Dad banding me from the proverbial "broad side of a barn" and "any other structures" left me feeling pretty low.

Over the years I solved the target problem. Still too many people give up the sport of knife throwing because they have not. After my demonstration, someone always asks "How can I make a throwing knife target?" "One I can move when I need to mow the lawn and store in the garage." Most people who live in apartments, condos or some subdivisions can't just plop a sawed off tree trunk into the side lot or the public park. My suggests are to try to find a slice of log you can move without jeopardizing your chances of fathering children. These 32" wide by 8" thick slices weigh about 125 pounds each. The slice has to be at least (5)" thick or it will splinter and crack easily. The safe area on the face of a log wafer, is where 2/3 of the length of the knife (if struck flat) would still be on the target face. If your knife hits on either the right or left edge you might see your knife and a piece of the wafer fly off somewhere. If the knife hits high or low at 90° with half of the knife hanging over the edge; the knife can spin back at you or sail high over the back of the target. So a 10" knife has a safe spot of about 15" in the center of a 30" log slice. Throwing 5 knives in a 10" circle is bad medicine for your knives; leaving burrs that will cut you as sure as the sharpest edge.

The "Pallet Target" is made from scraps found at building sights and consist mostly of:(2x4's and a pallet.) Multiple aiming points can be tacked all over its larger surface. Some examples are: (plastic coffee, butter and 35mm film containers lids; or archery photo targets.) You can paint characters or a game board for "dagger darts." Beginners love it because of less "bounce backs" and even a miss at a bullseye by 20" will let you stick the knife. To get started, find the nearest building site and ask the supervisor if you can have some of the 2x4 piece in the scrap pile. Tell him you need the pieces to make a "NEW throwing knife target." It's a great ice breaker. Other then for safety or liability reason (i.e., broken glass nails, or whatever) I have always been allowed to pick up what I needed. Don't worry about the length of the pieces, you can trim them when you get home. Anything from 1 to 4 feet will do. If you can find at least (4) 4 foot 2x4s for the side frame, legs; and (1) 3

or 4 foot 2x12 for the lip; it will save you from having to buy them. I have found most of my pallets in the same pile. Either covered or gaped top pallets will work; make sure it has: (side and center supports) sandwiched between the top and the bottom boards.

When you get home sort all the pieces by length. The plan is to arrange the 2x4 pieces from the center of the pallet.. The target can be set up many different ways but for this article we will configure it for the center bullseye. Bullseye's get chopped up a lot and need to be rotated or replaced more often. Place the (pallet) with the support boards vertical, (the 3 or 4 boards in between the top and bottom.) Nail or lag bolt 2 x 12 to the bottom edge through the supports to create a lip for 2x4 groups to set on. Allow room for the legs to pass between it and the sides. Now line up the 2x4s on their edges; with the bottoms against the right angle of the lip. Line them all up in groups of five, six or seven; shorter pieces can be made in wider groups. Mark the surface to set them apart from other groups. Repeat this with the remaining groups. Take each group and nail them together face to face. Make sure surfaces (edges) are flush and are 90° square. Alternate your nailing pattern between boards to keep from hitting the previous nails. Pair up your groups to cover the pallet from side to side. If you have 48" or taller 2x4s, go ahead and nail them together but remember the idea is to keep the target portable. If you are fortunate, at the sites; you may have found a large piece of decorative rough sawed cedar or composite board 4 x 12", used for mantels or porch supports. They make fantastic center section groups. Leave room for a 2 x 4 frame on the sides. When the pallet is raised, all the groups are stacked on each other with the vertical edges of the 2 x 4's facing the thrower. They will be wedged together between a 2 x 4 frame. Then nail a 2 x 4 on the bottom lip, to keep the bottom groups from kicking out. The finished target with all the groups weighs the sum of its parts and is cumbersome. The groups can all be pulled out, then you have just the size of the pallet, which is easier to handle. The pallet is now setting up off the ground 8-20". With a 4 to 6 foot, 2 x 4 leaned up against the back where the laths come together the whole assembly supports itself.

In a year or so, an unpainted, untreated, standard stud quality 2 x 4 will deteriorate if exposed to the weather. Tomahawks obviously will tear up any target faster. However, you can triple the life of these targets by painting them. I recommend you go down to your neighborhood "Home Depot," "Builders Square", or other large site where paint is sold. They discount unclaimed "custom" mixed paint. You can buy it considerably cheaper than the list price. Anything "oil base" is Ok but latex is best. With the biggest paint brush you can mop the targets from top to bottom. This will guarantee your target for at least a couple of years if not four or five. I have one that has been out in the weather for over two years. It is still holding up very well considering the boy's club use it every other week. A flap of canvas or old poncho nailed to the back can be flapped over when not in use will do. Practice and learning to throw from different positions at more challenging targets are great fun and you will Enjoy the sport to its fullest. The sport it is here to stay. In future articles I would like to cover trick target construction. Step by step, from contest types to the "Devil's Doorway" and "Wheel of Death."