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CHOOSING METAL DRAWER SLIDES



CHOOSING METAL DRAWER SLIDES

When it comes to building drawers for a shop cabinet, or any drawer that will be carrying a lot of weight, I like to incorporate metal drawer slides into the design. Their solid construction guarantees a smooth rolling drawer regardless of changes in temperature or humidity.

Metal slides can reliably handle loads up to 100 lbs. without binding or sticking. And they're available in several different designs, with options for partial or full extension (and even beyond). Metal slides are also pretty easy to install and even allow you a little "wobble room" to adjust for a perfect fit.

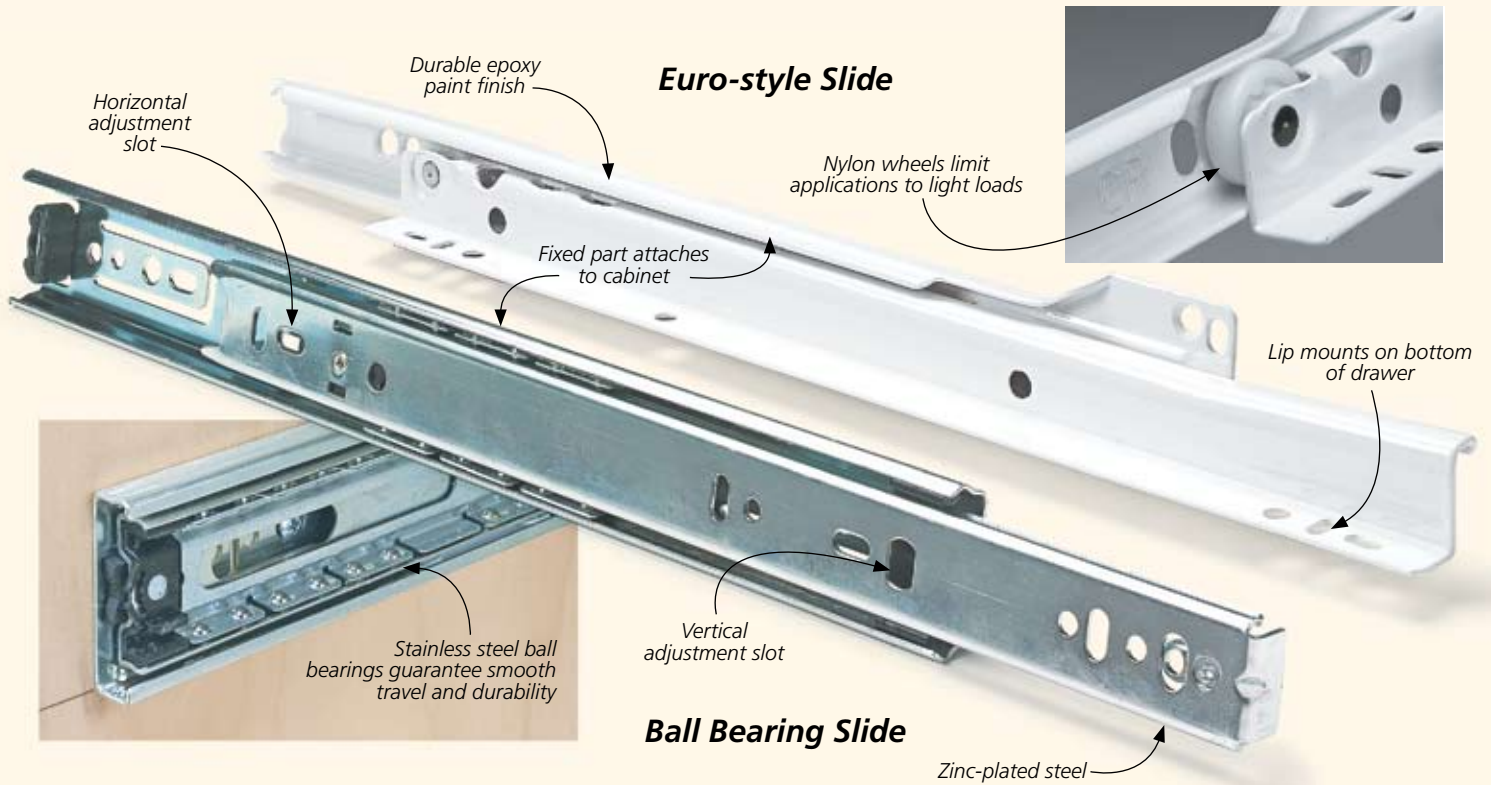
SLIDE SELECTION. With so many different styles available, however, you'll need to determine which style is best suited for your project before you begin. Fortunately, most metal drawer slides require $\frac{1}{2}$ " clearance on each side for installation. That makes it easy to figure



drawer sizes and openings. And they can accommodate either face-frame or frameless cabinet design.

On the next few pages you'll see

a few of the choices available. These slides are available from *Rockler*, but you can probably pick up similar ones at your local hardware store.



EURO-STYLE. For drawers that won't be supporting a lot of weight, the epoxy-painted, Euro-style slide is an inexpensive answer. At \$5 to \$6 a pair, they may be all you need.

Chances are you already have some of these in your house. They're the standard, two-piece slide used on kitchen drawers. Euro-style slides are popular not only for their low cost, but also for ease of installation. As you can see in the illustrations and photos on page 1, they have a lip on the edge, making alignment with the drawer bottom automatic. To top it off, they're available in a variety of colors.

NYLON WHEELS. The downside of this type of slide is that it travels on nylon wheels. And while they're advertised to handle loads up to 75 lbs., they won't have a very long life under that load. Another limitation of the Euro-style slide is that it only offers $\frac{3}{4}$ travel. That is, it only opens far enough to expose part of the inside of the drawer.

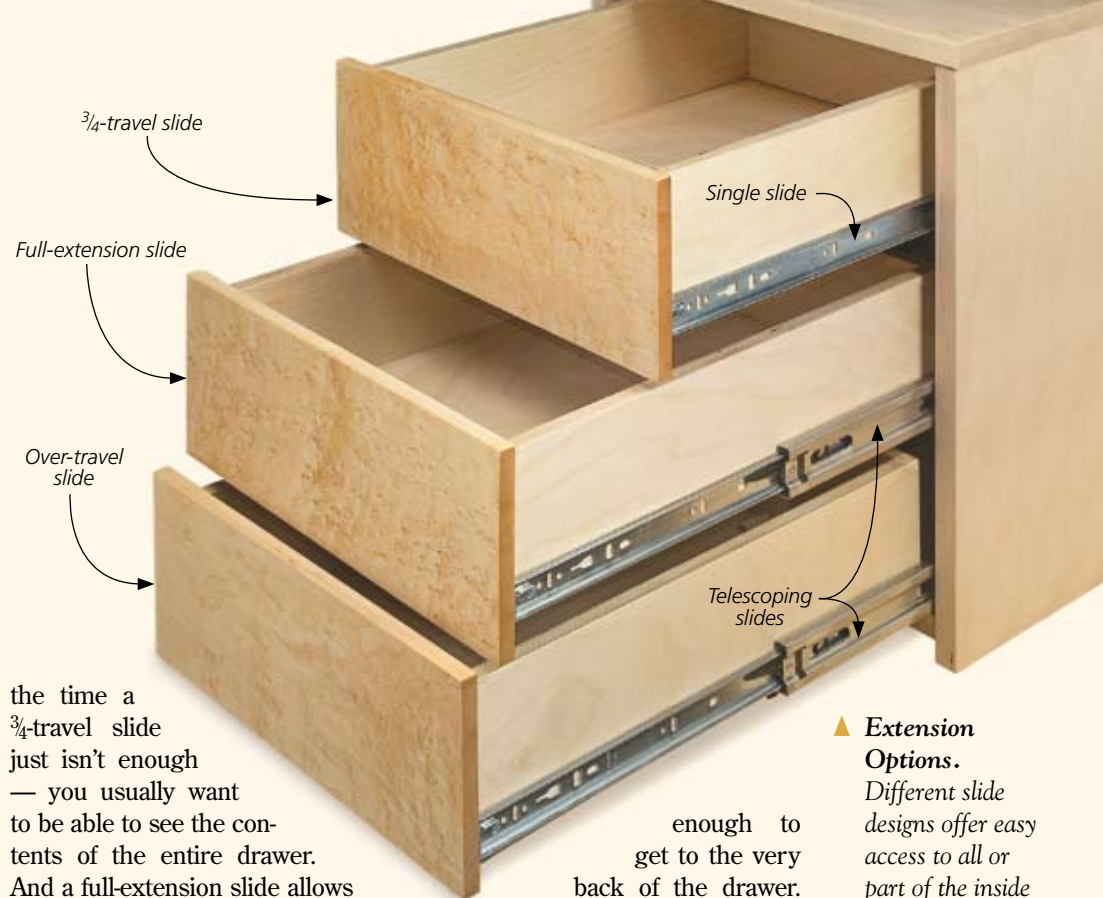
BALL BEARING SLIDES. For some applications, a $\frac{3}{4}$ -travel slide may be enough. But the problem comes when the drawer needs to support a lot of weight, like those in most cabinets in a shop. In that case, I turn to side-mounted, ball bearing slides. Commonly available in zinc-plated steel, black, or white enamel paint finishes, these slides are about twice the cost of the Euro-style slides. But the steel ball bearings can handle up to 100 lbs. for many years to come.

FULL-EXTENSION. Let's face it, most of

the time a $\frac{3}{4}$ -travel slide just isn't enough — you usually want to be able to see the contents of the entire drawer. And a full-extension slide allows you to do just that.

This is possible because the slide is a three-piece assembly that telescopes out to the full length of the drawer. You can compare this design to the Euro-style slide in the drawings below. Stainless steel ball bearings make for smooth travel and ensure solid performance over the years. You can expect to pay \$12 to \$15 per pair.

OVER TRAVEL. For some applications, a full-extension slide doesn't go quite far enough. For instance, if you have a cabinet with a top that extends past the front face of the cabinet (like with a typical countertop), a full-extension slide still won't pull out far



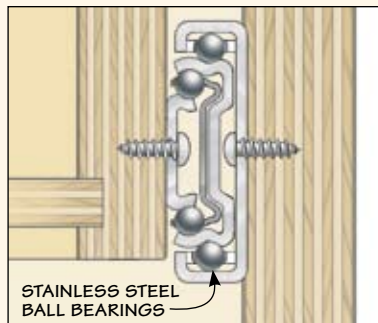
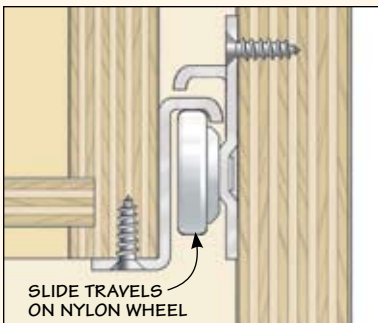
▲ **Extension Options.** Different slide designs offer easy access to all or part of the inside of a drawer.

enough to get to the very back of the drawer.

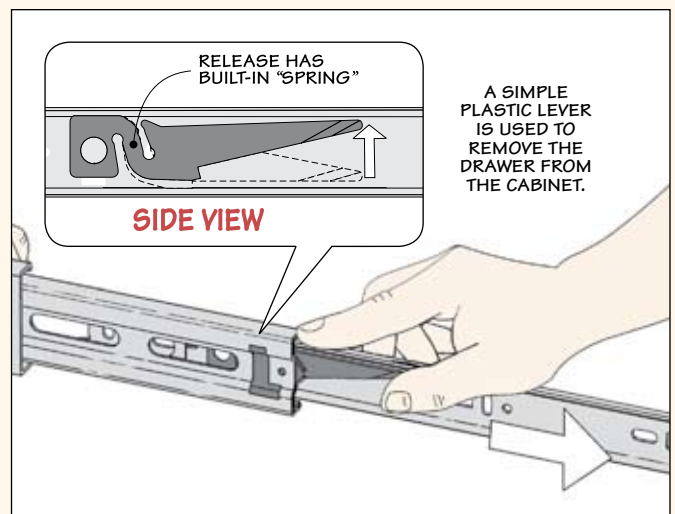
Over-travel slides solve this problem by extending past the front of the cabinet. They only offer an extra inch of travel, but that may make a difference for some applications. For example, file drawers often feature an over-travel slide. They can handle the weight and offer access to the very last file.

Once again, the construction here is a three-piece steel body with steel ball bearings. And they're priced between \$17 and \$20 per set.

After you've chosen the right slide, you're halfway home. On the following pages, I'll show you an easy technique for installing them.



▲ **Design Differences.** The Euro-style slide (left) uses a nylon wheel rolling on the cabinet-side track. The ball bearing slides (right) support the weight of the drawer on a set of stainless steel bearings.



Installing metal drawer slides can seem a bit intimidating. The box on page 4 shows a couple of commercially available jigs to help you out, but I've found a simple shop method that eliminates complicated measuring for each drawer slide. For this I like to use the drawers themselves to mark the position. The idea is to use an MDF spacer to install the slide accurately, and keep both sides level. The photos below show this procedure on a frameless cabinet, but it works for face frame cabinets as well. I'll discuss the differences a little later.

GETTING STARTED. The first step is to install the slides on the drawers. For convenience, I usually place them on the lower edge of the drawer. Here, I use the slotted horizontal holes to attach the slide. Using these holes allows me to make small

adjustments as needed. Then, I assemble the slide so both pieces are attached to the drawer. Now, with the cabinet turned on its back, I put each of the drawers in position, as shown in the photo at right. The drawers simply rest on the back of the cabinet.

MARK THE LOCATION. Once the drawers are in place, I mark the bottom of each of the slides on the side of the cabinet, using a square. With this done, I remove the drawers and cut a spacer to the length of the mark for the top drawer.

USING SPACERS. After clamping the spacer in position for the top drawer, you can use it to support the slide while you attach it to the cabinet side, as shown in Step 1 below. For this, I use the slotted vertical holes.

Now, using the same spacer, you can attach the slide to the



Drawer Location. Locating the drawer slides starts by placing the drawers and slides in the cabinet and marking their positions.

opposite side. Once both slides are in place, insert the drawer and test it for a smooth-rolling fit. You can then make small adjustments horizontally (on the drawer piece) and vertically (on the cabinet piece) to fine-tune the position.



◀ **Using a Spacer.** Rest the drawer slide on the spacer and install the screws. After transferring the mark for the lower drawer slide to the spacer, cut it to length and repeat the process.

ATTACHING FALSE FRONTS

Adding false fronts to drawers is an easy way to conceal the slides. To make sure the fronts are properly aligned, first position them using thin shims to maintain even spacing. Use some carpet tape to temporarily attach the fronts to the drawers. Then permanently attach them with screws from the inside of the drawers.



Once you're sure of the placement, you can add a couple of screws in the round holes to fix the position.

CUT THE SPACER. The next step is to transfer the mark for the next drawer onto your spacer (Step 2 on page 3). Using that mark, you can cut it to the correct size and repeat the installation process for the next set of drawer slides (Step 3).

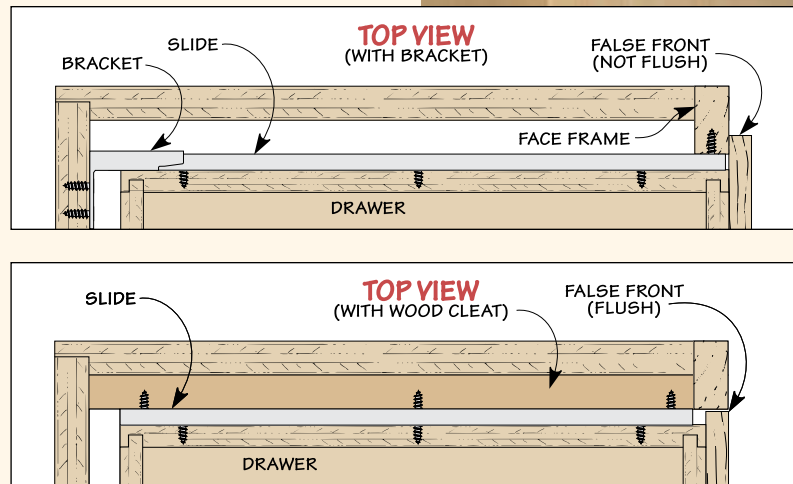
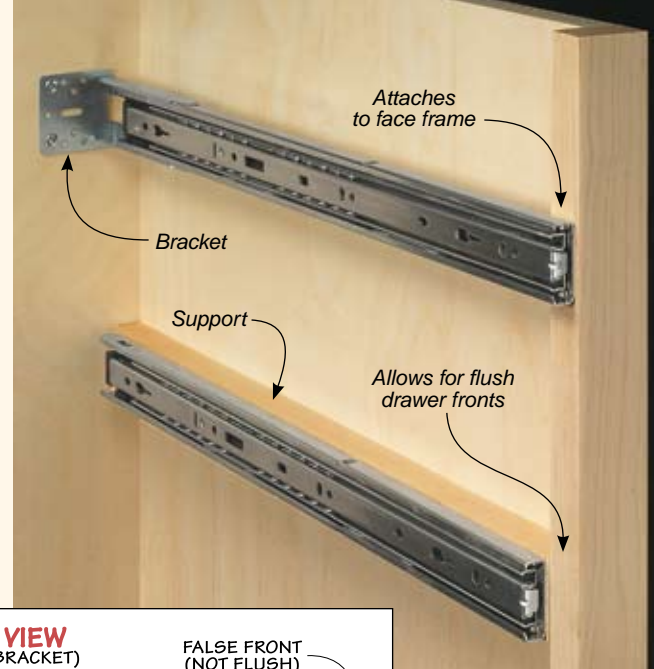
FACE FRAME CABINETS. The procedures up to this point have all used a frameless cabinet. The same techniques can also be used with face frame cabinets, but there are a couple of different options for mounting the slides.

FACE FRAME HARDWARE. One way to add slides to face frame cabinets is to buy a mounting bracket to match the slide. The bracket attaches to the back of the cabinet and allows you to align the slide to match the overhang of the frame. The front part of the slide attaches directly to the inside of the frame, like you see in the photo (upper right).

SHOP-MADE SUPPORTS. There's also an easy, shop-made solution. All you really need to do is plane a piece of

stock to match the overhang of the frame. Then you can use it as a support by attaching it directly to the cabinet side. Once it's in place, you can follow the same procedure I outlined earlier to position and mount the slide hardware to the support.

FALSE FRONTS. If you're going to add false fronts to the drawers, now is the time. You'll find a handy tip for aligning them on the bottom of page 3. Now you can enjoy the easy operation that only a metal drawer slide can provide.



▲ **Face Frame Solutions.** A hardware kit is one way to mount a drawer slide (top). Another way is with a support attached to the side of the cabinet (bottom).

SLIDE INSTALLATION: HANDY JIGS

For every installation task in the shop, it seems like there's a jig to help you. Drawer-slide installation is no exception. The two jigs shown at right both do the same job, but in very different ways. To use either jig, however, you'll first need to determine the placement of the slide and mark a centerline. Note: Both jigs are available through Rockler.

The *Kreg* jig holds the cabinet portion of the drawer slide in place with a magnet. With the slide attached, you simply clamp the flat face square to the cabinet, as shown in the top photo at right. Then, all you need to do is add the screws. (The jig is designed to allow access to the holes in the slide.) The nice thing about this jig is that it's easy to use and it will work with most types of metal drawer slide hardware.

Rockler's Jig-It for *Accuride* slides features an acrylic panel that's marked for positioning slides of the most commonly used lengths. After aligning the guide, you use a self-centering bit to drill pilot holes based on the length of the slide. With the holes in place, it's a simple matter to position the hardware and add the screws.

