



I've always thought of wax as a furniture and floor polish. It was only when a friend showed me how wax makes driving screws easier that I started to consider it a shop "tool." It turns out there are quite a few shop uses for wax. But not all waxes are ideal for every application. I keep three types in my shop: paraffin, paste, and beeswax. While any one of them will work for the ideas shown here, I've found some are better than others in certain cases. And they're all inexpensive, so you won't spend much to get just what you need.



Paraffin (canning) wax is a solid bar that's slippery and forms a medium hard film. You'll find it at most grocery stores. Besides making screws easier to drive, I use a bit of wax on adjustment rods like the threads on a workbench vise. Then run the vise in and out a couple times to work the wax in and you'll quickly notice a difference.



Other than keeping blades sharp, applying some wax may be the easiest thing to help cutting tools work better. Many old-time woodworkers kept a chunk of wax nearby as they used their hand planes and saws. A few "scribbles" of wax on the bottom of a hand plane makes it slide easily across a workpiece.



Another wax you'll find in my shop is paste wax. It's actually a blend of several types of waxes. They're mixed with solvents in a creamy consistency. Once it's buffed out, it forms a hard film. In my basement shop, it doesn't take long for rust to gain a foothold. Thankfully, a thin coat of paste wax on all my cast iron and steel tables and fences does the trick. As a bonus, the wax provides a slick surface that allows workpieces to slide easily. I also apply a coat to the bottom of sliding jigs. Don't worry about the wax causing finishing problems. A slippery, buffed out coat won't leave a residue on your projects.



The third wax in my shop is beeswax. It forms the softest film of the three. A little goes a long way, though. Too much beeswax can feel tacky rather than slick. So it's a good idea to buff it out well.

When dissolved in equal volumes boiled linseed oil and mineral spirits, beeswax makes a great workbench finish. (Add a little more mineral spirits if it seems too thick.) To apply it, first wipe on a wet coat. After letting it soak in for a few minutes, buff it out to a soft sheen. The finish seals the bench from spills and makes it easy to "pop" dried glue off the top.