



Sandtray Advice From A Sandtray Builder

By: Sean Flaherty

Well, we recently had our first cohort of 2021 attend Amy's ICST training and I got to meet with an amazing group of ladies. During our "library side" chats, some of the attendees asked me my thoughts on sandtrays...

I'm probably the worst person to ask anything if you have to be somewhere in fifteen minutes, but since I'm typing, it won't take that long to give you my thoughts and directions on how to make your own sandtray. So, here we go! Take some notes - you'll see why at the end. I believe sandtrays should be esthetically pleasing for you and your clients.

When I build sandtrays I like to have thick-rimmed edges, all the trays I build have a 1-inch thick edge (actual is 3/4 inches, but if you go to the store, it's considered 1 inch thick). I like these thicker edges because I believe it allows smaller children to rest their hands and arms on the edges of the tray without digging into the arm creating discomfort, which in turn distracts from a potential client breakthrough. You can actually do this to see what I'm talking about. Find a 90-degree edge in your office, put your wrist on the very point of the 90-degree angle. Now, take your wrist and press it against the surface of your flat desk... it feels different! So, enough with my observational sandtray data, let's get building. Okay, so I usually build one hundred trays at a time (it's like a recipe), so I'm going to give you my **one-serving sandtray recipe**.

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Items You'll Need:

- Measuring tape
 - Wood
 - Pencil
 - Miter saw
- Table saw/circular saw (table saw is recommended for the straightest lines)
- Nails (pneumatic brad or nail gun is highly recommended)
 - Paint
 - Stain
- Caulking and caulking tool
- Sandpaper (150 grit and 220 grit)
- Paint brush/Stain brush/Shop rags...
it's going to get messy!
- A willing significant other to build it,
that's why you need to take notes!

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Okay, now we have our shopping list, that's the easy part. Now you need to take all the stuff, and turn it into a sandtray! If you have more than novice carpentry skills, please stop reading and skip to the technical drawing below. For EVERYONE else, here is what I would recommend when building a sandtray:

1) Ask your significant other to build it for you (hint: flowers just die, they are pretty, but sandtrays last forever - well almost);

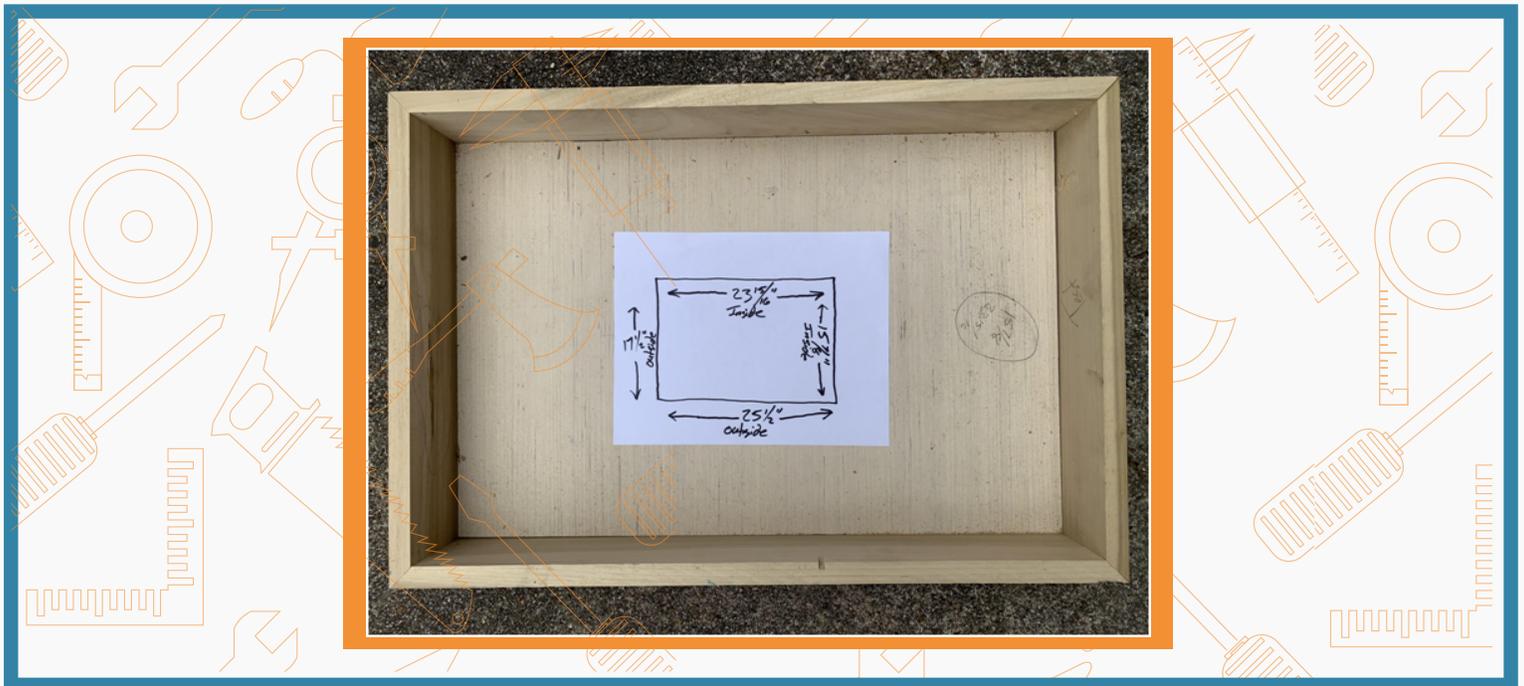
2) Ask a neighbor! There may be a lot of individuals in your neighborhood willing to help you with your project. Plus! You can also spread the word of sandtray when trying to explain to them why you need help making a "cat litter box". I'm seriously laughing right now, because the first time Amy asked me to make her a sandtray, that's what I called it, a litter box with sand!!!

3) Buy one, because if you don't have the equipment and knowledge, you will just stress yourself out. Several individuals sell very good quality sandtrays online (I don't have a dog in this fight, because I don't sell my sandtrays anymore; they are only given away during Amy's trainings).

4) Well, until I wrote number three, I didn't realize there was a fourth option... You can pick one up in person, and meet me to discuss the subject? Or just meet and discuss business, gardening, cooking, the birds that visit our feeders, etc...

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Now, for what I consider the fun part, building something that benefits others...



Size

You can build your sandtray as big or small as you see fit. My standard size tray has the following dimensions: outside length 25 ½ inches, outside width 17 ½ inches; inside length 23 15/16 inches, and width 15 7/8 inches. The boards used for the sides have a 1 inch thick by 4 inches tall (actual $-\frac{3}{4}$ inches by 3 ½ inches). The bottom of the box is ½ inch thick furniture grade plywood. The bottom plywood should be cut the same size as internal dimensions, thus when displaying the tray, you will not see the edges of the plywood, it's a little more work, but it looks so much better.

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Wood

Hardwood lumber is highly, highly recommended. Hardwoods don't warp or twist as easily as softwoods (e.g., pine, spruce, cedar). Softwoods are easier to cut, and sand, but hardwoods are going to be more resilient when considering scratches and dents. And because hardwoods keep their shape, and are denser, your sandtrays will have less expansion and contraction cycles which can cause the joints to expand and allow sand to leak from the tray on to the floor. I usually make my trays using Poplar, it's a hard wood that is not as expensive as Oak.

Caulking

A premium caulking is the best option, because as mentioned wood breathes, and it causes cracks. Find a caulking that has a 20-30 year rating and that is PAINTABLE. Non-paintable caulking is something that is going to contain a high percentage of silicone. And as the name suggest, paint will not adhere to the surface. I use a DAP DynaFlex 230 white.

Paint

I paint all my trays with Glidden Premium exterior paint, semi-gloss. By using an exterior paint, the tray paint will be less likely to chip or crack, and it provides mold and mildew resistance. The color is: Clipper Ship. You can get all this at Home Depot.

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Stain

Some of the first trays that I built for Amy took on a more traditional stain look, like cherry, oak, mahogany, but as I started thinking about trays differently, I started building them not just for functionality, but for esthetics. Because, why not? People respond to things that are esthetically pleasing. I use Minwax Wood Finish Penetrating Stain, and the color is: Classic Gray 271.

Nails

If at all possible, use a pneumatic gun. You can use brads/nails; however, the wood is more likely to split, and then you have to start all over. I use a pneumatic nail gun, with 16-gauge brad/nails. The length brad/nail needs to be 1 ½ inches long.

Assembly

Steps:

- 1) Get all the materials required.
- 2) Cut sides and bottom of tray to dimensions.
- 3) Nail sides to bottom plywood, and nail corners to each other;
- 4) Sand all the wood, start with 150 grit, and then finish with 220 grit paper.
- 5) Caulk only internal joints, a caulking tool can be used to smooth out the caulking bead.
- 6) Paint the interior of the tray.
- 7) Stain the exterior of the tray.
- 8) Leave the tray in a shed or garage for about a week to help the VOCs dissipate.
- 9) **Enjoy your new sandtray!**

Oh, and for a little behind the scenes action, check out what **102 brand new sandtrays look like...**

