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Dave Campbell
Editorial Content Chief, *WOOD* magazine



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Choosing Shop Casters

Long live lock 'n' roll.



In any shop, putting machines, tool stands, clamp racks, assembly tables, and workbenches on casters gives you maximum flexibility in shop layout and usage. Roll it out when needed; then roll it back out of the way for storage. But with a mind-boggling assortment of casters available on websites and in catalogs and home centers, how do you pick the right ones for your projects? Read further to learn how.

Start with weight rating, then choose material

Each caster has a maximum weight limit it will support and still function properly. Begin by calculating the approximate weight of your project, using the chart at *right* as a basis for material weights. (For products or wood species

TYPICAL WOOD WEIGHTS (LBS)	
1x12x12" pine (1 board foot)	1½
1x12x12" red oak (1 board foot)	3
¼"x2x4' hardboard (¼ sheet)	7
½"x2x4' plywood (¼ sheet)	9
¾"x2x4' plywood (¼ sheet)	16
¾"x2x4' particleboard (¼ sheet)	18
¾"x2x4' MDF (¼ sheet)	20

not listed, compare them with a similar species from the list or weigh a sample of your own.) Divide the project's weight by the number of casters you'll use, and that figure tells you the minimum

weight rating you should consider; buy casters that meet or exceed that number.

Next, select a tire material:

► **Plastic or nylon** tires provide no "give" when passing over an extension cord or uneven crack in a concrete floor—sometimes hanging up rather than hopping over—and lack the durability of beefier casters.

Best use: lightweight projects (under 200 lbs) on smooth, crack-free floors.

► **Rubber/PVC** tires conform to small obstructions, so they roll easily over power cords, debris, and floor cracks. But that softness creates extra drag when used on projects over 300 lbs, and the wheels can develop flat spots if not moved regularly. These can also come loose from their rims as they roll over wide or uneven cracks.

FOR STURDINESS CHOOSE PLATE-MOUNT VERSUS STEM-MOUNT

Best use: Light- to medium-weight projects (300 lbs and under).

► **Steel** tires are tough and durable, but unforgiving, so they hang up easily on small objects and cracks. They tend to scratch and dent wood floors.

Best use: Heavyweight projects (500 lbs and up) that you don't move often or far, such as a big workbench, lumber storage rack, or cabinet table saw.

► **Polyurethane** tires, our favorite, provide the best of all worlds. They're firm enough to support projects up to nearly 1,200 lbs without flattening, yet pliable enough to easily pass over nearly anything in their path.

Best use: Everywhere.

Now look at size and mounting options

In general, the larger the diameter of wheels you select—most types come in 2–5" sizes—the better your casters will maneuver over obstructions. But larger casters also raise the height of your project. So be sure to consider caster height when designing projects.

Next, choose between plate-mount casters and stem-mounted ones. Plate-mount casters attach with screws or lag bolts and require flat mounting surfaces typically at least 3" wide. These tend to be more durable than stem-mounts.

A stem-mount caster has a threaded stem you insert through a hole in your project and then secure with a nut. For these you need a horizontal surface, such as a stretcher or foot, but not as wide as for a plate-mount. You can also attach a stem-mount to a vertical leg or side panel using right-angle brackets.

Finally, choose between fixed, swiveling, or locking

Castors typically come in all three styles for each size, and each has its advantages. On projects with four casters, at least two must swivel so you can steer them around the shop. For the other pair, it will depend on the situation: Fixed casters on the opposite end allow you to better control the direction you push the project, but you might have to "parallel park" it into spaces. Four swiveling casters maneuver easily in tight quarters, but make long projects, such as workbenches, harder to steer.

Each style of caster comes with or without a locking mechanism. As a rule, if you'll need your project to hold in place, get locks on the swiveling casters (but not on fixed ones). We prefer over-wheel locks you can step on with your

Plate-mount caster



Stem-mount caster



MORE CHOICES: FIXED, SWIVELING, OR LOCKING

Fixed caster



Swiveling caster



Over-wheel locking caster



Side-wheel locking caster



foot and press into the wheel, and then lift with the toe of your shoe to unlock. Side-wheel locks prove more difficult to operate with your foot—you might have to stoop and use your hand. 🌿

Produced by **Bob Hunter**

Source

Castors, assorted sizes and styles: Rockler Woodworking and Hardware, 800-279-4441 or rockler.com.

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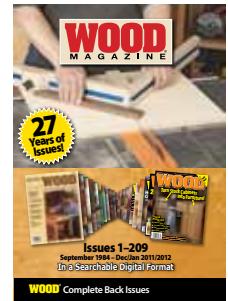
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