

Removing Stubborn Screws

There are several things you can do to take out old screws.

Firstly, the screwdriver must fit the slot exactly. Scrape out the slot with a hard steel point to remove corrosion, dirt, varnish, etc. Then the screwdriver blade must be exactly the same length as the slot. Then you will find that the blades of most modern screwdrivers are too thick. Try to find old screwdrivers with carbon-steel blades, not chrome-vanadium. Grind the tip to exactly the right thickness - it needs to be quite tight in the slot. Grind it concave, not convex or rounded, otherwise it will slip out. Remember that if it gets too hot in grinding, you will have to re-temper it.

Now try to undo the screw with firm pressure. You need to learn to judge how much force you can use before giving up. Do not allow the screwdriver to slip, or you will damage the head, and make the job more difficult.

If this doesn't work, put the screwdriver in the slot and tap it firmly with a mallet. Try again. (N.B. if the screws are in an unsupported piece like a hammer-rail cover, you must arrange firm support, as firm as possible, so that the impact is effective.)

If this doesn't work, get a soldering-iron, hold it on the head of the screw until it gets hot. It's OK if the wood just begins to burn. Try again.

If this doesn't work, tap again, and try again.

If this doesn't work, and the screw is fairly big, you can use a screw-extractor. These are a sort of hardened gimlet with a left-hand thread. You need to drill a pilot-hole in the screw, and hence they are not available in small sizes.

If this doesn't work, grind off the head of the screw and try to grip it with pliers. This is also the method to use if half of the head has snapped off.

If this doesn't work, use the smallest size hollow drill you can get (possibly 6 mm overall) and drill out the remains of the screw. You then plug the hole with new piece of wood, and drill for a new screw.

Good Luck!

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