

How to mount a set of deer antlers on a plaque to save your memories



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Equipment needs

- Hand saw or Sawzall
- Turkey fryer burner, propane bottle, lighter and pot with water
- Sharp knife
- Nylon brush
- Small handheld propane burner with lighting source or paint brush and desired stain (to work on your plaque)
- Clear lacquer or varnish for finishing wood plaque (unless you stain versus burning)
- Aluminum foil
- Quick dry glue (such as super glue)
- Plaster of Paris, water, plastic spoon, plastic fork, plastic knife and solo cup
- Two wood screws approximately 2 ½" in length (may need longer too)
- Drill with appropriate tip for wood screws and one drill bit to drill holes through skull plate

Equipment needs continued

- Hanger or way of hanging plaque on the wall
- Piece of desired leather to go over skull plate
- Set of sharp scissors
- Thumb tacks (your preference) to go around leather when finishing mount
- Borax (may not need, but I like using on skull plate to help cure)
- Grinder (may need to grind down screws if they come through the back of the plaque after mounting the antlers)
- Wet coffee grounds and paper towels (only if antlers have bleached some from the sun)
- Rope of choice
- Lighter
- Hot glue gun (to put rope around base of antlers)

Have your legally harvested buck



After you have harvested your animal this is a neat do-it-yourself project for mounting a deer rack onto a plaque. There are many ways to do this and kits can be purchased. Research and find what method you would like to try. Here is one method that was shown to me and I like to do. Be safe and have fun with this project. This is one way to save the memories of your successful deer hunt.

Angles for cutting

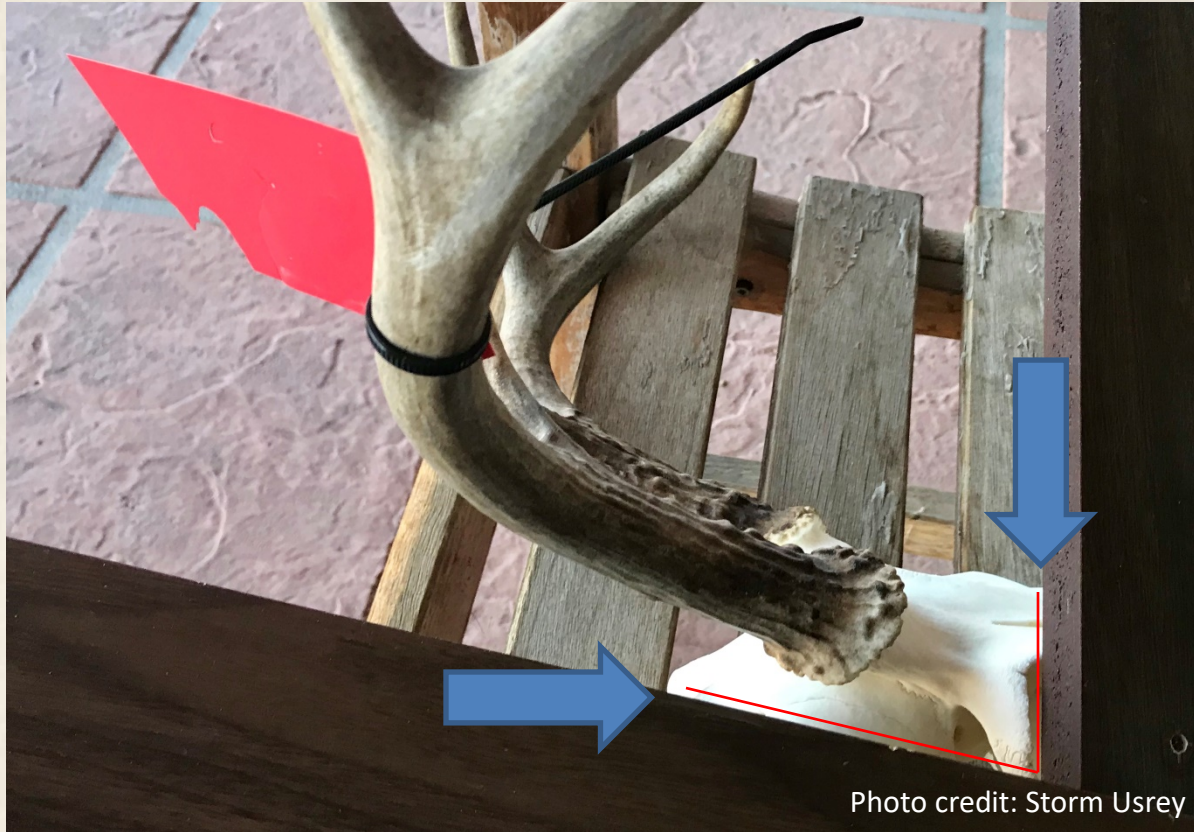


Photo credit: Storm Usrey

The inside edge of the two boards represent acceptable angles for sawing off the antlers from a deer skull for mounting. Pay attention to the cut on the back of the skull as this angle will affect how the antlers will look on your plaque or their angle (this is a personal preference).

Skull plate has been removed with a hand saw



The weakest point of the skull plate is right in the center where there is a suture. Take your time when boiling and cleaning, drilling and screwing down your antlers. It's important when you get to the stage of screwing down the skull plate on your plaque to not over tighten the screws. Younger bucks' skull plates are generally more fragile.

Plaque of choice



Photo credits: Storm Usrey

Purchase or make your own mounting plaque. I find a plaque size of 10x12 inches is more than sufficient in most cases. You can either carefully burn the wood with a hand held propane burner and varnish or you can simply stain your plaque. The choice is a personal preference.

Boil skull plate



Photo credits: Storm Usrey

Make sure to boil the skull plate and remove all tissue and hair so you won't attract bugs. I like to place the skull plate in Borax too (for approx. 1 week) after boiling and after it has dried, to help preserve it a little more. A large burner, boiling pot, water, propane and ignition source is all you need. I like to use a nylon brush too to help in removing flesh and hair near the base of the antlers, along with a sharp knife.

Use wet coffee grounds to darken



You can use wet coffee grounds to rub on a set of antlers to darken them back up (if they had velvet and it was stripped or ones that sat out in the sun too long). Stay clear of the antler tips so they keep their natural white appearance. I did this on the set I have been working with for this educational piece (see above picture).

Set-up to hang and varnish



At this stage I like to make a way to hang my plaque unless there is already a keyhole cut in the back of your plaque. I like to use picture hanging cable and two wood screws. After this I will varnish the wood and this may take between 5-10 coats depending on the wood. I used a spray can (versus the canned lacquer with paint brush) and the secret is to use it evenly and not in heavy coats to keep the lacquer from running. And don't get the tip of the spray can too close to the wood.

Wrap plaque with aluminum foil and mount antlers to plaque



Photo credit: Storm Usrey

I wrap the plaque in aluminum foil and drill two holes into the skull plate. Utilize two wooden screws to secure or mount your deer rack to the plaque. Make sure to not over tighten the screws and if the screws go through the back of the plaque you can always grind them down. You just don't want to use screws that barely go into your plaque. The aluminum foil will protect your wood when you use plaster of Paris in the next step.

Mix Plaster of Paris and make base around skull plate & let dry



Photo credit: Storm Usrey

I mix my plaster of Paris and fill the brain cavity and then start to shape the mold around the skull plate. It may take at least two batches to have enough to cover the skull plate. I mix water and plaster of Paris in a solo cup and use plastic fork, plastic spoon and plastic knife for mixing and putting plaster of Paris on the skull plate. I'd give it at least three days to cure.

Once dry tear off extra aluminum foil and glue hanger



After the plaster of Paris has dried tear off the “extra” aluminum foil. I like to put a dab of glue on the hanger that I have put in the back of the plaque at this time. I will put it on the screws, where they go into the wood and where the cable is wrapped around the screws.

Prepare piece of leather



Photo credits: Storm Usrey

I will use a piece of 8 ½" x 11" piece of leather. Use a color that you like. Once placing the leather over the plaque, pick an antler to start with and trace from the edge of the leather and cut with a sharp set of scissors. I like to cut a small circle where my cut ends as this will go or fit around the base of the antler. I will start thumb tacking the one side at this point and keep the leather tight around your plaster of Paris mold as you work around to the other side. Once you get close to the other side of the antlers cut it out as you did your first side and finish thumb tacking. This takes practice and time. The leather may have a fold here and there, but this adds to the rustic look.

Trim leather around outside of thumb tacks



Trim the outside edge of the leather with your sharp scissors. This edge will have an old time rustic look. Feel free to use paper or cardboard between the plaque and leather when you cut your leather to protect your wood from being damaged.

Put rope around base of antlers



Photo credit: Storm Usrey

I used an old team roping rope around the base of the antlers. I cut one end of it and took one strand of the rope out which makes it more pliable. Cut the pieces long enough to wrap around each base and burn the rope ends. Use your hot glue gun to glue the rope ends at the back of each antler. I like to put a dab of quick dry glue as well after the hot glue has dried. Clean up any of the hot glue strings with your hands, after drying and you are done!

Finished product



Photo credit: Storm Usrey

Thank you!



Photo credit: Storm Usrey

And please enjoy the outdoors responsibly