

Taking a Dowel Joint Apart

To turn a wobbly chair into a sturdy one, first you have to disassemble it. Use these methods to conquer dowels that don't want to budge.

Furniture repair would be much easier if dowels worked loose at both ends at the same time. Unfortunately, they tend to stay solid at one end while wiggling at the other. So even when a chair is one the critical list, digging the dowels out for replacement usually poses a major challenge.

The photographs on this page will lead you through a useful sequence of tactics. If one method fails, move on to the next. You'll get those dowels out.



1) Break the joints apart. In many situations, you can disassemble a dowel joint with nothing more than a bar spreader and a non-marring mallet.



2) Then try drops of alcohol. If dowels remain in some holes and won't budge, try to loosen them with a few drops of alcohol. Let it soak in for a few minutes to dissolve the glue.

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3) Drill a hole. If alcohol around the outside of the dowels has no effect, drill a hole into each one, and squirt alcohol inside. Wait a few minutes while it soaks through the wood, then try to yank out the dowel with pliers or side cutters.



4) Add a screw. A dowel that's broken near the surface is tough to grip with pliers. So drive a small screw into the dowel, then pull it with a claw hammer.



5) Clean up the holes. After removing the dowel, take a twist drill the same diameter as the hole and turn it by hand to clean out any remaining glue or chips. You're almost certain to change the hole's shape if you use an electric drill.

You may notice that the old dowels failed because they were sitting in a little glob of glue at the very end of the hole. Let's not repeat that mistake.

Replace the old ones with fluted dowels that you've coated with glue. Daub glue all around the inside of the holes, too. You'll form a solid bond that should make the joint last a few years longer this time.
