

# How to Buy the Best Home-Center Lumber

Most DIYers shop for lumber at the home center, but with so many choices in multiple aisles, how do you know what boards to choose? Here's an overview of the boards you can get, plus some helpful tips for selecting the best ones.

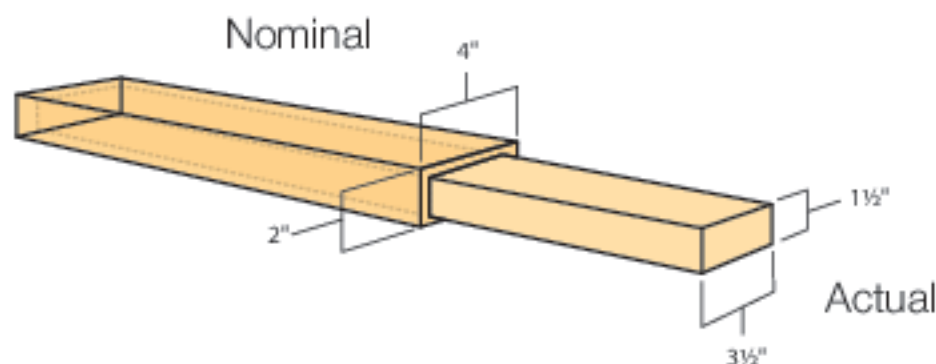
## What sizes of boards can I buy?

Lumber sold in a hardware store is all milled to standard thicknesses and widths. It's commonly referred to as "1-by" or "2-by" for the thickness in inches, followed by the width in inches. So, you'll hear lumber referred to as 1x6 (one-by-six), 2x4 (two-by-four), etc.

This can be confusing because those numbers don't describe the true dimensions of the boards. 1x6 or 2x4 refers to the "nominal" thickness and width, which are greater than the "actual" thickness and width. The chart below shows the difference between nominal and actual sizes of common boards.

Here's why that's important for your projects:

- If you're using a project plan, the materials list might say you need a 1x4 board (the nominal size), but the dimensions in the plan will show  $\frac{3}{4}$ " x  $3\frac{1}{2}$ " (the actual size).
- If you're drawing up your own project, be sure to use the actual dimensions. If you accidentally design your project using the nominal dimensions, it may not come together as you had planned.



Nominal	Actual
1" x 2"	$\frac{3}{4}$ " x $1\frac{1}{2}$ "
1" x 3"	$\frac{3}{4}$ " x $2\frac{1}{2}$ "
1" x 4"	$\frac{3}{4}$ " x $3\frac{1}{2}$ "
1" x 6"	$\frac{3}{4}$ " x $5\frac{1}{2}$ "
1" x 8"	$\frac{3}{4}$ " x $7\frac{1}{4}$ "
2" x 2"	$1\frac{1}{2}$ " x $1\frac{1}{2}$ "
2" x 4"	$1\frac{1}{2}$ " x $3\frac{1}{2}$ "
2" x 6"	$1\frac{1}{2}$ " x $5\frac{1}{2}$ "
2" x 8"	$1\frac{1}{2}$ " x $7\frac{1}{4}$ "
4" x 4"	$3\frac{1}{2}$ " x $3\frac{1}{2}$ "
6" x 6"	$5\frac{1}{2}$ " x $5\frac{1}{2}$ "

