Framing Windows With Less Lumber

By following the best framing techniques when installing windows in the home, you can save time and money. Framing takes up a good part of your lumber costs; if done incorrectly, it can lead to expensive mistakes and rework. Fortunately, there's a better way to frame windows than the conventional method.

If we use what's known as "optimum value engineering," we can frame windows using fewer studs. This method lets us keep the structural support of the window frame, increases its performance, and creates a better shield from cold and heat.

The average home loses 25% of its heat through windows. By using optimum value engineering, we can reduce the loss of heat and save one stud per window frame.

Here's how you do it!

- First, we need to look at the floor plan for the home to decide where to build the frame for the window. Then measure 3" back from where we want the window to start on each side lengthwise and mark it. This will allow for the correct spacing for the window opening.
- Next, nail the "king studs" into place using these marks. These studs are important because all of the other studs for the window frame are built off of them.
- The cripple studs, which make up the bottom portion of the stud window frame, come next. You must center these 16" or 24" on center within the window frame so that a standard sheet of 4' x 8' drywall will fit over it properly.
- Once this is completed, nail the sill stud to the cripple studs. This forms the bottom outer portion of your window frame.
- The next set of studs are called split trimmers. Butt these studs up against the inside of the king studs and above the sill.
- Next, attach the header stud and nail the top cripple studs into the king stud, spacing them the same as the bottom cripple studs.

The common way of building a window frame is to use what are called "jack studs" in addition to the cripple studs. These additional studs take up more space, reducing the area where insulation can be placed. The jack studs also add to the overall cost because of the extra lumber involved. This may not seem like a big concern, but the cost savings and added insulation value can be significant depending on the number of windows in the home.