

Backyard cutting

Double cuts - Getting started

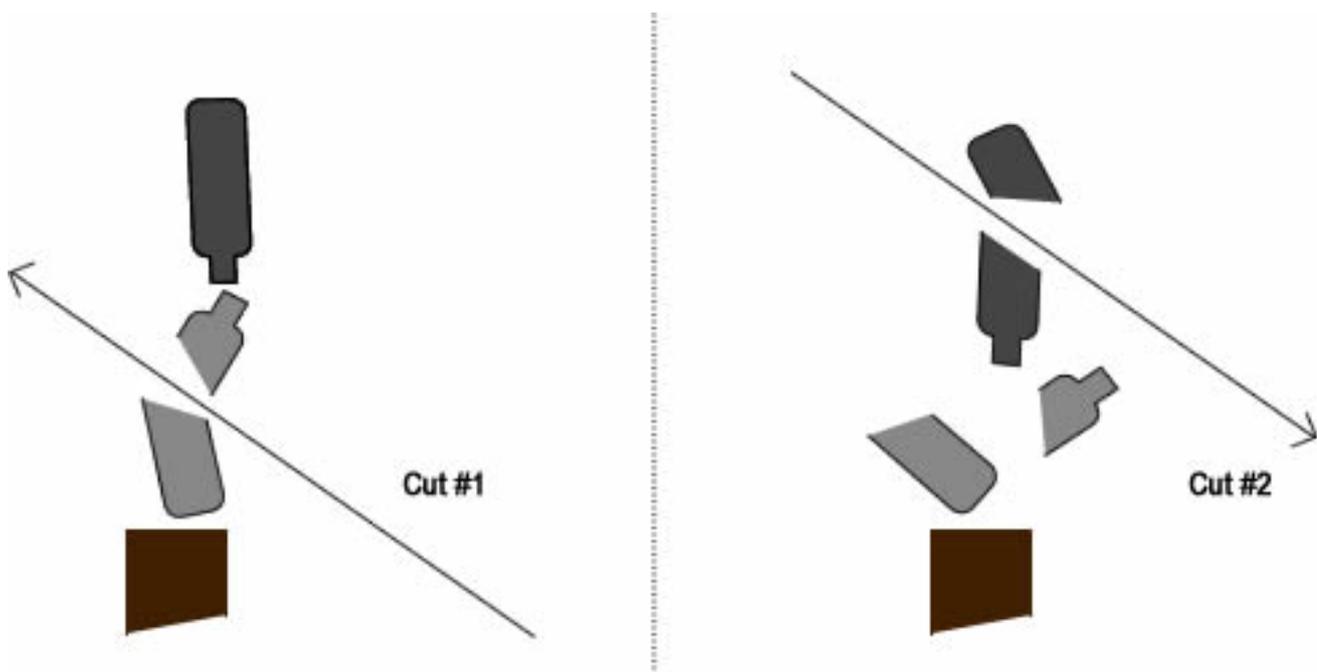
Double cuts can be plain and simply, bloody daunting to look at.

The speed the cuts have to be made at, the sudden changes in direction, not to mention the accuracy that has to be demonstrated whilst performing these movements can look almost impossible at first. There are however a number of things that you can do in order to better prepare yourself for the inevitable moment when you land your first double. (and cheer. you'll probably cheer)

Right, hold on. Whats a double cut?

Ok then, before we continue, a double cut with bottles...Two bottles are stacked on top of each other. The bottom bottle is then cut, causing the top bottle to drop and before it hits the ground, it's cut into two pieces as well. So bottom bottle, then top bottle are cut. It doesn't matter what direction the cuts come from for it to be counted as a double although if both cuts start from the same side then it is called a returning double cut or a returning cut for short.

Double cuts are the first genuinely difficult cuts you're likely to learn, basically put, this is where trick cutting begins.



This is an example that shows the basics of the double cut.

Setting up

To start with, you will of course need your appropriate cutting stand i.e. something that isn't going to damage your blade if you hit it, a safe area to cut in with no people running around and your sword of course. Common sense really. In a perfect world you'll also need nice weather and flat ground.

Finally, you will need two bottles stacked on top of each other. Easy enough you think right? Well I'll save you some time and frustration. If you're trying to balance the two bottles with the

Backyard cutting

bottom one being the right way up and the top one being upside down, the best way to get them to balance is to remove the cap from the bottom bottle. You see the tops of most fizzy drinks bottles aren't flat, they have a very slightly angled tip to them which makes balancing one of top of the other virtually impossible.

Preparing yourself.

Take a step back from the stand and take a look at the bottles. You will need to pay attention to the height of the first bottle. This is where your two cuts are going to be made because as soon as you've cut the bottom bottle, the top one will fall. By the time you've turned your blade around and come back for the second bottle, it will be where the first one is. Decide what double cut it is that you're going to be practicing and without stepping up to the target, but keeping them in front of you for reference, practice those two cuts.

Making these cuts without an actual target is called dry cutting and it's a good place to start because you can practice those two cuts over and over again without using up your bottles. It also helps to wake up those muscle groups you'll need to train if you're really going to get good.

It's important that you start at a comfortable speed and don't worry about overdoing it at the moment. Speed will come with practice but weirdly enough, the more practice you do, the less movement you will find yourself needing to make. It is however perfectly natural to start off with big sweeping, almost flamboyant swings but with time you will find that you learn how much or rather how little you need to move into order to perform these cuts meaning you won't actually need to be lightning fast anyway. Some of the best cutters speed up their technique by trimming down on the movements they make. You'll find there is a 'sweet spot' where the mix between movement and speed sits but everyone's mix appears to be different.

Actually attempting the cut

Remember to adjust your footing so that if you're attempting a diagonal cut, the leg that's in the way is the one that's shifted back. By this I mean, if your cutting from your left upwards to your right and then back again, taking a step backwards with your left leg will keep it out of the way. A step forward with your right will accomplish the same thing of course. Doing this will angle the body correctly into the cut as well as reducing the risk of accidentally lodging your blade in your leg.

Next you will need to check your distance. The top of the blade is the important part so if you hold out the blade as if you were cutting, the top 8-9 inches needs to be able to touch the target. If you're at this distance then perfect.

You will find that if you're too close or too far away from the target, it will be much more difficult to get the blade to pass through the target. This method of gauging the optimal distance seems clumsy at first but as you progress you'll find that you're able to tell this optimal distance by eye, without the additional faffing about. I mean a lot of this is common sense and will become second nature.

When you come to actually making the cuts, I believe that the best approach is to pretend that there are no targets and you are just dry cutting at full speed. Make the two cuts as if the bottles aren't on the post and 'see what happens'. You will get a feel for how easily the bottles cut, not just on the first cut but just as importantly on the second as this will be the cut that suffers the

Backyard cutting

most from the addition of the physical targets.

Once you've made your first cuts on the targets you can then review the carnage :) It is unlikely that you will manage this cut on your first attempt and if you do then give yourself a pat on the back. The thing to take away from your first attempt(s) is not that you failed but *how* you failed. e.g. I cut too slowly and missed the second bottle. I managed to 'bat' the second bottle across the yard so my hasuji is off. And then correct this. I've found though that it's usually that you underscoop the falling bottle because the second cut comes through too fast, or you overcut it because your swings are too wide or your cuts too slow. Whatever it is, work it out. Watch exactly *how* you fail the cut and fix it. And remember what I said. If you get it first time, well done you're in the minority.

In the interests of being encouraging, heres a quick video from a while ago of my first proper attempts at double cuts. Theres overswing, theres 'concentration face'. As much as I'd like to say these cuts were easy for me, I was trying. ;) But trust me, train for a week or two and they get a lot easier.

A few pointers

Dry cutting

Something that can occur even with experienced cutters when faced with a difficult cut and real targets, is that they tense up, their swings get more powerful and wider, the speed increases and of course, the accuracy of the actual cuts drops significantly. *one of my failings.

This is normal but it's something you have to work on.

Regardless of the amount of dry cutting you do, it takes a certain state of mind to be able to reproduce those dry cuts but with real targets. Be calm, but mean business. A quiet and focused mind will get you better results.

So, Remember when you dry cut at full speed, that should be your best technique and there should be no difference between it and your target cutting.

Timing

I found that to get me started I needed to adjust my timing. I truly believed that I needed to be stupidly fast with my return cut in order to catch that falling bottle. For ages I trained, I was a blur. My return cut was stupid-fast. The fact that I wasn't catching that bottle was beginning to seriously bug me though.

So I stopped and thought about it. I took a bottle, held it up above the cutting stand exactly where it would be balanced if it were on top of another bottle and I let it drop.

I swear I counted almost a whole second before it actually bounced off the stand and dropped too low to cut.

I was making these cuts in about half a second. I videoed it to check and found I was undercutting the falling bottle. The point I'm making here is that if you know how fast the bottles fall and you can picture the cuts in your head then you can help your timing.

Making the second cut faster

Backyard cutting

Sometimes you will however find that your second cut isn't coming back fast enough and it can seem like the speed required is far too fast. Heres a little trick you can use to help.

You restrict the movement of the top of your body slightly by turning away from the direction of your first cut. This helps to prevent overswing and keeps your core engaged.

For instance, if you are cutting from 1) left to right and then 2) back from right to left then you can begin the cut with your body turned a little to the left. This sounds a little weird but bear with me. The purpose of this starting position is to restrict the movement of the first cut. It stops you from overswinging because you simply cant move that far. Then, because your body is twisted to the right you will find that the second cut can be pulled into play simply by aligning your blade, engaging your core and twisting back into a more comfortable position.

Types of bottle.

When starting out with a new cut I've found it helpful to think about the type of bottle that you're going to be cutting. Theres nothing fun about not being able to make a trick cut because the bottles you're using are too thick. When you've got a trick cut down then you should be able to cut almost any bottle you put on the cutting stand but to begin with, cut yourself some slack. Get some easier to cut water bottles. Not only are they cheaper and therefore mistakes less costly but you'll learn faster if fewer things are holding you back. Whilst we're on the topic of different bottles, remember that not only are smaller bottles harder targets to hit but they're also lighter which makes them harder to slice. Think about making it easier for yourself when you're starting out. This is just a minor point but it's a valid one.

So, this should be enough to get you started with doubles. As usual I will point you towards youtube for examples of double cuts. There are plenty of people doing them with wildly different styles and theres plenty to check out.

Remember some key points:

- You should be trying to cut with the top of your sword. Theres no middle of your sword. just the monouchi or the 'top and tip' 8-9 inches.
- If you can keep the movements of your cuts smaller then you wont have to be as fast, but don't try stupidly efficient tiny movements at the cost of fun ;)
- If you think you should be cutting the second bottle but you're not, try adjusting your timing.
- Target tracking, i.e. watching the target fall through the air and adjusting your aim to catch it is the end goal here but youre not expected to be able to do it to start with.
- If you think the bottles you're using are too tough or small, change them for another type.
- Dry cutting! Practice, then take your game to the cutting stand with real targets. Do not adjust your technique once you get there.
- Getting frustrated? take a break. trust me.

Unique solution ID: #1088

Author: Shad - The Samurai Workshop

Last update: 2014-05-10 11:40