

Tombstone Gun Grips

PO Box 2171, White City, OR 97503 USA

541-826-8669 (Fax) Dave@TombstoneGrips.com www.TombstoneGrips.com

Fitting Grips to Handguns with their own grip screws

Grips which attach with a short screw on each panel that screws into the gun frame need to be used with the screws which come with your gun. There are just too many special lengths, sizes and shapes of screws to try and stock them for the tens of thousands of variations of auto pistols that have been made over the past 100 years or so. In the case where the originals are lost, and no one has replacements, it may be possible to either find and shorten the same thread size screw, obtained from Brownell's or another gun parts house, or to modify the threaded hole in the gun by drilling and tapping it for the next larger standard diameter and using a standard screw that can be adjusted to length.

Tombstone does not have screws for this kind of grip. We depend on using the originals. The screw kits available from Tombstone are long, universal, through-the-handle kind of screws where one panel is held by the screw head and a brass ferrule, and the other panel is secured by the same screw going into a nut in that panel.

Fitting the grips to the gun means first that you sand the backs flat and adjust the thickness to your liking, by securing a piece of 180 to 220 grit sandpaper to a flat board (contact cement works well for this) and then moving the grip in circles with light pressure to hold the grip back against the sandpaper. Do this until the back is perfectly flat and fits nicely on the frame. Remember that as you reduce thickness, beveled or sloped edges also become shorter and thus the width or height of the grip can become less.

Usually, having the grip the same size or slightly less wide and high than the actual metal grip frame looks much nicer than having the grip slightly too large. The grips are made a little large, usually, so that you can adjust them to perfect fit with your particular gun. Guns vary in size with the same brand and model, because of manufacturing tolerances and changes in the tooling over the life of the product. There is no good way to assure that any grip made without the same gun in hand would fit perfectly, so the next best thing is to send a pencil tracing or the original grips. And the bottom line is that a slightly larger set of grips lets you fit them to the gun rather easily, using an ordinary fingernail sanding board.

Sanding boards are available at cosmetic counters and beauty shops. The best ones for this are the "foam core" larger size, with one side "coarse" and one side "medium" grit. Use the coarse side to shape the grip carefully to the size of your gun and finish it with the medium grit side.

Many autoloaders have one single screw, and require attachment of a small spacer block on the back side to keep the grip from rotating. This is done after the grip has been fitted. The spacer can be sanded to fit inside the frame or magazine well cut-out. It does not have to fit all around, if you locate it so that between the screw hole and the edge of the block, the grip cannot move. A small pin put into a little hole drilled in the back of the grip can also be used to keep the grip from rotating (this was routinely done by several after-market grip companies instead of doing expensive and elaborate routing on the back).

Other autoloaders have two screws per panel and do not require any pins or blocks to secure the grips. The 1911 Colt is an example. But many other guns also use two screws per panel. Often the back of the grip will be relieved for controls, such as the safety bar, disconnecter, trigger extension bar, or other components. This is most easily done by using a small dental burr in a Dremel tool.

Dremel or "Moto-Tools" are small rotary electric hand-held devices that look somewhat like a small drill motor, but turn at high speed. They usually are sold with a small assortment of burrs and cutters, sanding wheels and cutoff wheels. A square-ended right cylinder type of burr seems to be the best kind for routing out the relief slots and holes on the back of a set of grips. Work slowly and carefully, without trying to force the bit to cut quicker than it wants to. Secure the grip if possible by fastening it to a board and clamping the board to your work bench top. This gives you both hands free to guide and control the tool. When making holes for pins, a small pointed burr is usually safer to use than a drill bit. The drill bit can pull itself through the grip panel unless used in a fixed drill press with the grip clamped in place. Burrs have a rough surface but do not have a twist or spiral that would tend to pull the bit into the work.

If you do use a twist drill to make small holes in the back, you can turn the bit by hand or hold it in a pin vise rather than a power drill. This keeps the bit from pulling into the work in a moment's inattention. If you should drill through a grip, or mis-locate a hole, you can fill the hole with 5-minute epoxy, let it harden overnight, and then try again. Fill from the back, not the front. Surplus material can be wiped off with acetone before it becomes completely hard, and the acetone will not harm the grip material.