

Training for Mass, Second Edition

Squats

This is the best mass-building exercise for the thighs and glutes, and probably the best mass-building exercise ever devised. Squats have more than once been referred to as the “king of exercises.” Two points must be kept in mind with this exercise:

1. They must be performed with correct form.
2. They must be performed with immense intensity of effort.

More so than with any other exercise, your performance with a set of squats is dictated by the amount of pure effort—of energy and determination—that you’re able to unleash. Nothing else in the gym is comparable to heavy, intense squatting. With squats, greater effort can always result in more reps and therefore better results. This is unlike the case with most other exercises, where pitched intensity—though *always* having a good deal of worth—has a more limited value. For example, with the highest levels of motivation, a set of squats can be performed with a heavy weight for 20 reps—where you feel spent by the time the 12th rep is completed. When squatting with the right motivation, you can dig deep into your psyche and find the power to push on, and on, and on. And if you are able to do so, you *will* be rewarded.

It’s common to see squats being performed with bad form. Apart from the high risk of injury, bad form will also greatly limit the effectiveness of the exercise. Your back must be kept tightly arched throughout the movement, with your head up. Apart from that, you need to descend all the way to, or slightly above, the *parallel* position where, as the name implies, your thighs are roughly parallel to the floor. Also, it’s important to drive the weight with your heels, not with the balls of your feet. Raising your heels off of the floor will cause a break in form and will add a great deal of stress to your knee joint.

A few other points:

1. Squats can be performed on a Smith Machine to good effect.
2. High-rep squatting is very effective. Many bodybuilders famous for excellent thigh development frequently perform sets of more than 20 reps.
3. The width of stance should be determined by personal preference, essentially whatever is most comfortable. The notion that a particular stance should significantly influence the end result of pressing-type leg exercises has enjoyed a level of popularity that has far surpassed the value of the idea. Stance isn’t that important.
4. Very hard leg training sessions, especially workouts that feature squatting, tend to have an overall anabolic effect on the body. Some research has shown that hard leg training will cause the body to release higher levels of testosterone and growth hormone, resulting in larger muscles everywhere. Quite a few bodybuilders will testify to significantly increasing their overall mass once they began training their lower bodies in earnest. Every gym on the planet has a large number of members that

do not train their legs, or that do so without a respectable level of effort. You might think that the extra energy that these people are conserving by avoiding leg training could be channeled into more productive upper-body workouts, and that their physiques would reflect this. Unfortunately for them, it rarely works that way. Hard leg training is necessary, and due to its extremely taxing nature, it can come about only through superior character and work ethic—with a superior overall physique as the reward. If you're not willing to endure brutal leg workouts, don't expect much success in bodybuilding.

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