



## In the Homeowner's Toolbox

One important responsibility of owning a home is maintaining your investment through regular maintenance and care. Like many things in life, the right tool can make your maintenance tasks easier and quicker. Following is a list of the basic tools that homeowner's should have on hand to take care of routine maintenance around the house.

**Claw hammer:** The claw hammer, used for driving and pulling nails, is generally the most common hammer. Look for one that is comfortable in your hand.

**Rubber mallet:** Also known as a soft-face hammer, a rubber mallet is used to strike wood-handled chisels or to tap into place soft materials that would be marred by a metal hammer face.

**Set of screwdrivers:** Be sure your toolbox contains both slot head and Phillips head screwdrivers in a variety of sizes. Always use a screwdriver that fits the screw head. If it doesn't, you can damage the slot or strip the screw.

**Drill and drill bits:** Whether you buy a hand drill or a power drill, a good drill will last you a lifetime. Make sure your choice is based on the types of projects you expect to work on in your home. Don't forget to get a variety of drill bits, since you'll want to drill precision holes. If you choose a power drill, you can grind, sand, polish and accomplish other jobs with the correct accessories.

**Paintbrushes:** Brushes ranging from one-to-four inches wide and made of synthetic material or animal hair are adequate for the average homeowner. Be sure to match the brush you use to the job at hand, and if you are using latex paint, don't use natural-bristle brushes. Typically, the brushes packaging indicates what paint works best with them. Cut-in work is best done with a chiseled brush, and a one-inch brush is good for trim. To find a good-quality brush, look for one with a lot of bristles of varying lengths and flagged (or split) ends so the paint goes on more smoothly.

**Medium-sized adjustable wrench:** General-use wrenches are used to turn any type of hex or square nut or bolt, or an object with flat surfaces. Plumbing wrenches are used to turn objects with round surfaces, such as pipes. Invest in the best quality you can, since this will be a well-used tool.

**Pliers:** Pliers are scissor-like tools that are usually made of drop-forged steel with jaws to grip small objects. You'll likely want a variety of sizes.

**Needle-nose pliers with wire cutter:** One of several specialty pliers, needle-nose or long-nose pliers have thin, tapered jaws for reaching into tight spots or to hold and bend wire. This tool is especially helpful in electrical projects.

**Crosscut saw:** Saws come with various-sized teeth and specific numbers of teeth per inch (tpi) designated by "points." The higher the number of points, the finer and slower the cutting. Look for taper-ground blades to reduce binding. The 8-point size is a good choice for general crosscut work.

**Measuring tape:** Choose a coated tape that has a solid case and a reliable return mechanism. Keep in mind that a wider tape is easier to read at a distance.

**Assorted nails, brads, screws, nuts, bolts and washers:** Choose a variety of fasteners to have on hand for projects that spring up unexpectedly. You may want to take a visual inventory of the items in your house that will need repair in the future and stock up in advance.

**Level:** A level is a wood or wood and metal tool, usually 24-to-48 inches long, that contains a set of small, glass tubes each with an air bubble. Levels come in a variety of sizes depending on the need. Check their accuracy by testing a perfectly level surface.

**Plane:** This tool is used to shave wood from boards. When using a plane, cut with the grain, use both hands and work at a slight angle. Be sure to keep the blade sharp.

**Safety Goggles:** Keep in your toolbox plastic goggles with front and covered sides large enough to fit over regular eyeglasses. Don't take any chances with your eyes and vision when working around the house.

**Heavy gloves:** Use gloves for handling rough items such as brick or scrap lumber with exposed nails. Gloves not only protect your hands but also secure your grip.

**Utility Knife:** Also known as a trimming knife or carpet knife, this handy tool is for cutting soft materials such as carpet, drywall, tape and string. Be sure to keep the blades sharp.

**Caulking gun:** A metal device with a trigger handle and a notched rod that extends from the back. It is used to apply caulk (which you'll need in a variety of types and colors) and other sealants from standard 10.5-ounce cartridges.

**Putty knife:** Also known as a spackling knife, this tool has a narrow blade with a squared-off end and is used primarily to apply glazing compound or for small scraping or spackling jobs.

This basic set of tools is enough to get you going. If you have more specific needs, visit your local hardware store or take a trip to your library for reference material. In the long run, it is better to buy the right tool for the project you are working, rather than make do with what you have on hand. Be sure you buy the best-quality tools you can afford since quality tools will last you a lifetime.

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