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Introduction

This is intended for an aspiring yet-to-be new homeowner with limited experience when it comes to tools. The purpose is to make a well rounded set to tackle most things while keeping the expenses as low as possible.

With that being said it is very important to note that quality beats quantity. So spending a little bit extra will be worth the price paid with time. Building on this principle it is essential to take one's time in finding the best prices, acceptable quality of tools and perhaps even putting off the purchase until a discount action can be found.

Some high quality tools might be even found at swap meets, garage sales, pawn shops or with friends and family who work, have worked or know someone who is selling such tools. While power tools suffer from the plight of all machinery – limited working life, some could very well be usable for a number of years. This however is not true for hand tools as they can easily be usable for over a century if given adequate maintenance.

The format of this document will be a list of essential tools in the author's opinion followed up by additional commentary mentioning other tools that could be considered in that category.

While the main focus will be on tools, other essentials or near essentials such as gadgets and shop gear, safety and carrying equipment.

It should also be noted that this is meant only as a reference for starting. Depending on personal needs some tools might be discarded and others might be of a higher priority on your shopping list.

Versions

Version 0.1 – Working document that includes Introduction, Versions, Power tools and Additional comments on power tools

Version 0.2 – Added Hand tools section, Gadgets and shop gear section and Table of contents

Power tools

- Oscillating tool
- Belt sander or orbit sander
- Cordless drill
- Reciprocating saw
- Circular saw

Additional comments on power tools

Tools with a cord will serve you better than cordless tools, with the exception of the **cordless drill**. Sure you could add a **corded drill** but for the most part I don't see you doing anything where the extra power would be so highly advantageous. A **cordless drill** is also a **cordless powered screwdriver** so that's the big thing. Just don't forget to add a variety of **bits** for screws and for drilling different materials.

You should be well covered with the **oscillating tool** so a **jigsaw** doesn't even need to be high on the list. Actually you could even squeeze by not having a dedicated **sander** as the **oscillating tool** will have you covered as well although it is not nearly as efficient.

The **reciprocating saw** could be replaced by a **bandsaw**, and it could also do most of the things a **circular saw** does. But only most, and it is a lot bulkier than a **reciprocating saw**. So while it is an extremely useful tool, it's also a bit of a toy and should be considered maybe somewhere down the line since hand tools will have you covered at a lower price.

One of my favorite power tools is a **drillpress**, but it, just like bigger **belt sanders** demands money and need. Buying it without the need for one is wasting money and space away.

Another 3 power tools that can seem fairly important are a **nail gun**, **rotary tools** and a **heat gun**, but their justification is regular use, otherwise they will become expensive dust collectors.

Hand tools

- Bastard file
- Small round file
- File card
- Claw hammer
- Tape measure
- Screwdriver set of 6 or 8 individual screwdrivers
- Allen or hex key set (imperial or standard and metric)
- Crescent wrench (8” and 10” or 12”)
- Socket wrench set
- Vise grip pliers x2
- Needle nose pliers
- Regular or slip joint pliers
- Diagonal pliers (alternative names are side cutters, dikes and sometimes snips)
- Level
- Utility knife
- Cat’s paw
- Crosscut handsaw
- Tongue-and-groove pliers (also known as pump pliers)
-

Additional comments on hand tools

These are the basic tools that you might need. They will have a lot of things covered and with a bit of creative thinking they will substitute most of the power tools that have already been mentioned.

Eventually you will get different advices and some will differ from the list made here. By no means are those bad advices if they come from experience. However that also creates a pit trap when it comes to hand tools. It can become rather easy to start hoarding different tools for similar applications based exactly on the specialty of whoever is giving the advice. A personal example is my own grandfather. As an old electrician the majority of his tools are suited for his very specialized work.

When it comes to hand tools it is hard to go wrong. It is true that a quality tool could very well outlast you, but even budget tools can last a fairly long time. So try to look for simplicity in construction.

This is one of the parts where a bargain hunter’s dreams come true. The majority of these tools can be found at yard sales, flea markets or their Internet alternatives. Most of those finds will require some work in regards to cleaning them, fixing minor issues or even some major ones. It is up to you how much work you want to put into it but it should be no more than to sharpen the tools that require it, remove rust, lubricate the parts that need it and at most put a new handle on an old **hammer** head.

Speaking of **hammers**, the **claw hammer** will probably be the most useful all around design to start with. It could give you the luxury of putting the purchase of a **cat's paw** for some better days. By no means should you settle on one **hammer** and eventually you will end up with a few different ones so don't be afraid to substitute them from the get go. **Ball pein** and **German pattern cross pein hammers** would probably be the best alternatives at the start, but don't forget that it is only a **hammer** after all.

The same could be said for the **regular** or **slip joint pliers** as **electrical pliers** could substitute them effectively. I will even admit that I only own **electrical pliers** which further demonstrate the hoarding of professionals having a special soft spot for tools more specific to their own field of expertise.

When it comes to **files** it is a fairly different story. Eventually you will end up with a few more but a **bastard file** and a **smaller round** or **triangular file** will give you the most versatility. **Saws** would fall into this category as well. There is a plethora of different **saws** and it can get confusing very fast. It might even seem that you need 6 or more different ones just to get the basic tasks done. The truth is that **specialized saws** have their place and can be truly remarkably efficient. But for the most part a **crosscut saw** will serve you well. Interesting alternatives could be **pull saws** and even **pruning saws**, although the latter can give you even more headaches than solutions.

Wrenches can become a tricky thing. Some prefer **socket wrenches** and some prefer **combination wrenches**. They both have their place and for the most part they can do the same things. However **socket wrenches** can give you some advantages when it comes to tighter areas, thus why they were placed above **combination wrenches**. If you decide to go with **combination wrenches make sure you get them** rather than entirely **box wrenches** or **open ended wrenches**.

Whichever road you decide to take with the **wrenches**, the most important thing is to start with your national standard. That can be standard (imperial) or metric. You will eventually end up getting the other one as well because manufacturers can't seem to agree on what they will use. Without further complicating things, in case you go with **socket wrenches** just note that eventually you will also need to get a fitting **breaker bar** at one point.

The last 2 things worth noting are that **allen key**, **allen wrench**, **hex key** and **hex wrench** are all the same thing just under different names. The second thing is the infamous **monkey wrench**. This tool should be able to substitute a **crescent wrench** and a pair of **pump pliers**. The downfall is that a **monkey wrench** if a heavier tool that might be hard to maneuver for all the needed tasks.

Gadgets and shop gear

- 4-in-1 or 6-in-1 screwdriver
- Pliers based multitool
- Torx key set
- Chisel
- Small hacksaw or mini hacksaw
- Pocketwrench 2
- Vice
- Rite in the rain notebook
- Wire stripper pliers
- Carpenter's pencil
- Aluminum speed square
- Carpenter square
- Pocket flashlight or headlamp
- Plastic or wooden mallet
- C clamps x2
- 4-in-1 rasp
- Metal snips
- Sharpening equipment
- Coping saw
- Scribe

Additional comments on gadgets and shop gear

Most of the things in this section falls under the maybe category. Only real reason to say most is that eventually there will be a need for a **vice,** a **chisel** and a **soft mallet**.

So these are simply the things to make your life easier. From having a **metal carpenter square** and **speed square** that won't break and get cut to having a **piece of paper** and a **pencil** to write down what you need either for your next project, to do or anything else that is worthy of writing it down.

Flashlights and **multitools** can be the most frustrating things in this section. There are a lot of makers and models. Don't worry about which one is the best, just think about your uses and which one will suit you best. They could prove useful in saving your head from bumps and even putting things such as **small files**, **coping saw**, **hacksaw** and **wire stripper pliers** on the back burner.

Pocketwrench 2 and **4-in-1** or **6-in-1 screwdriver** might seem very redundant at this point. And they are. Where they truly shine is when you have to carry your tools, especially for smaller jobs. Just imagine how convenient it is to save weight and have a couple of tools as opposed to lugging around a big, heavy tool box. They won't take care of your every need and they will hardly replace the

designated tools, such as actual **wrenches**, but they will find their place very fast. Also a **4-in-1** or **6-in-1 screwdriver** can get you by for a while so purchasing a **screwdriver set** can wait.

One thing that is an imperative is to learn how to **sharpen** the tools that need it. You don't need to spend a lot of money on equipment and it will save you money on buying new tools.

Safety and carrying equipment

- Tool belt with a pouch
- Extensive first aid kit
- Electrical checker
- Safety glasses or goggles (plastic or mesh)
- Respirator mask
- Hearing protection
- Gloves
- Ground check
- Fire extinguisher

Additional comments on safety and carrying equipment

An old carpenter once told me that less than 8 fingers are not acceptable for a skilled craftsman to have. Please, take the proper safety precautions and try to keep all of them. Quality leather **gloves** can be found for a rather low price. There are also brands like Mechanix and Ironclad which are higher prices but also make exceptional **gloves**. So don't start to save on yourself. Ask around and if you don't get a proper answer stop at a construction site, farm or any other place where manual labor is the dish of the day everyday and ask for an advice on safety equipment.

As **gloves** protect your hands so do **shoes** protect your feet. And often your entire body as well. But in this situation **safety footwear** is not an imperative.

Some older handymen and guys who worked with their hands all their lives could laugh at all the Safety Sally tone here. Most of those people also have serious health issues with their respiratory system, eye sight and hearing. The same can be said with "walk it off" attitude. While some have a predisposition to be overly sensitive, that might not be such a bad thing. At the age of 20, I nearly lost my left leg because I tried to walk off a serious injury. A year later I tried to walk off a hernia. Both could have been prevented by thinking how to do the job I was given. And the leg injury could have been minimized by some basic first aid and medication, in which case it wouldn't have required an ER surgery. All I am trying to point out in this part is **do not take your health for granted**.

Safety glasses and **goggles** come in various different shapes, sizes, forms and materials. Find the ones you like and you feel comfortable with. In some cases you could be wearing them for a few hours so make sure they don't irritate you (green mesh can irritate some people).

Hearing protection is the same in its variety. Personal recommendation is to get an **earmuffs** style of **hearing protection** as it is often more comfortable and easier to take on and off.

The same goes for **respirators**. Find what you are comfortable with and don't forget to use it.

Ground check and an **electrical checker** can be lifesavers. And home savers. If you decide to work on electrical installations, these will make sure that you don't get electrocuted and that nothing goes up

in flames. But just in case you might want to add a **fire extinguisher** or 2. A bigger substantial one can be left in your shop, garage or shed, while a smaller one can be at hand for any “field” work you’re doing.

How you will store your tools is up to you, but try to keep them organized. That will keep you efficient and will lover your stress. It can be quite frustrating trying to find that one tool you need at that moment and encountering chaos. A **tool pouch** or something integrated with in a **tool belt** on the other hand is a handy thing to have. You will encounter a lot of different products and find something that you like. Just keep in mind that synthetics might be easier to tear and leather will require a bit more maintenance as it will retain water and might rot.

An inexpensive pro tip is to find an **old messenger bag**, **satchel** or **gym bag** and use that as a makeshift **tool bag** for on the go. Size might be a bit of an issue that will also mean that you can’t always have the tools at hand. But on a tight budget it is a welcome change.