

Ten Essential Tools

By: TrainedMonkey

These ten tools are essential to anybody's garage or basement. With them, you will be able to do basic carpentry and home repairs. As far as hand tools go, there's no need to spend hundreds of dollars - many less expensive brands offer a lifetime warranty. Most of my basic hand tools are Sears Craftsman - a good blend of value and quality.

1. Hammer. I prefer a hammer with a wood handle - it softens the jarring impact of the blow. I think mine's a Craftsman, but it's so old the paint is gone. The weight is important - too heavy and you'll tire quickly, too light and you're wasting effort on many swings. You should spend more time picking it out than any of your other tools.

2. Screwdrivers. 3 slot, 3 phillips, 3 Robertson. I use Craftsman. For those who don't know what a Robertson screw is, you're missing out. They're a square drive screw that has been the Canadian standard for many years, and are starting to gain acceptance in the US - I can't speak for Europe. The square head allows insane amounts of torque, and the screw will stay on the driver upside down. While you're looking at screws, you may as well throw out all of your slot head fasteners. I only include the slot drivers on the list as you may need to remove a slot screw once in a while. I use mine mostly for prying. Oh yeah - don't ever use one of your 'good' screwdrivers for prying.

3. Rubber mallet. Get one with some weight. This here tool is for bashing. Cheap works, just make sure it has a sturdy handle.

4. Socket and socket driver set. Lifetime warranty is a must. A dozen or so standard SAE socket sizes (up to 3/4" at least) should do you nicely. I use Mastercraft Maximum or Professional (Canadian Tire house brand). Cheap sockets and drivers will leave you cursing.

5. Cordless drill and drill bits. Higher voltage usually means more torque, but don't buy a discount brand. I recently got a Black&Decker 18V, and I love it. If you can afford a DeWalt or Milwaukee, more power to you.

A word on Drill bits your first bits should be a set of decent quality wood bits - some type of HSS or Titanium coated twist bits. As you get into the swing of things, your bit supply will bloom. A bit of advice - use the right bit for the job. Do not try and use a wood bit on concrete or steel, or use a masonry bit on wood. The first combination will ruin your bit, the second will ruin your patience. Also pick up a few screwdriver bits - this is where the Robertson bit really comes into its own.

6. Good quality hand saw. Stanley has worked for me here. You'll quickly learn that the hand saw is probably the reason Edison discovered electricity. Sawing by hand sucks, but is necessary from time to time, and it sucks even more if you buy a cheap saw.

7. Tape measure. Pretty self explanatory. Look for a strong spring, and NEVER force the tape all the way out - it may not go back in.

8. Combination square. This is a neat tool I got by accident. It's like a 12" metal ruler, with a sliding square and a set screw. Mine's a Craftsman, and has 90 and 45 degree angles and a little bubble level. It's great for transcribing lengths, drawing lines perpendicular to a board, and about a thousand other things.

9. Wrench set. A set of SAE wrenches, open on one end and closed on the other. Anything drop-forged will most likely do yeoman service.

10. A good set of pliers. No one plier is perfect, but the standard slip-joint pliers are a good start. Lineman's pliers offer decent gripping power and a wire-cutter. Get something with an insulated grip.

There will be more tools in your future, but these are the ones you will use forever, if you keep them away from moisture and try not to drop them on the floor too often.