

HOMESTYLE

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Upgrade Your

Heavy-duty home maintenance projects require better, more specialized tools. Take these recommendations from home improvement experts for a toolkit that would make Bob Vila proud



BY JULIA HASKINS
CTW Features

When you've moved beyond assembling cheap furniture for your first home, that second-rate toolkit won't cut it anymore. A proper renovation, DIY project or home maintenance task requires heavy-duty equipment.

Those who plan more ambitious home projects can go beyond the standard screwdriver and hammer to make completing them a breeze.

"It's worth it to invest in the higher quality tools because they're going to last you for a lifetime," says Alex Roberts, president of Mr. Handyman International LLC in Ann Arbor, Mich.

Even when a high-end tool is out of your price range, "I really recommend people buying a mid-grade tool that isn't cheap plastic," says Mag Ruffman of the ToolGirl blog.

Read on for recommendations that will take your tool collection to the next level.



Stash Your Stuff ▲

First things first – if you're making a commitment to nice tools, invest in a sturdy toolbox. Whether it's canvas, metal or strong plastic, it will keep tools organized and in good shape.

The junk drawer or flimsy plastic bags are poor storage solutions for important tools. A real toolbox can save you time instead of wondering, "Where did I leave that?" Roberts says.

◀ On the Level

Even the nicest framed art can be ruined by a crooked wall-mount, but it's difficult to determine evenness with the naked eye. Fortunately, "a level can be the deciding factor," says Lisa Shapot of The ThinkTank, an art, construction and design firm in Garnerville, N.Y.

Forget the chunky level with hard-to-read bubbles in neon yellow liquid. Use a laser level to hang an assortment of items, such as picture frames, shelves and flat-panel TVs. Roberts recommends a laser level for both its usefulness and compact storage.

Hack | YOUR TOOLS

No room for specialty tools? These multi-purpose tools have uses that you never imagined

Most homeowners don't have the space for a huge assortment of tools. Save space and get more out of your toolbox with these multipurpose objects you probably already have laying around.

- The screwdriver, hammer and pliers are the trifecta of multipurpose toolbox basics. A screwdriver turns into a putty scraper or mini pry bar. Both a hammer and

pliers pull out nails, while the latter keeps them in place.

- A paintbrush is great for more than just touch-ups.

Sweep up debris around your workspace and use the end to poke through small spaces.

- An underrated addition to your toolbox is a pencil. Small markings (easily erased) can be the difference between hanging a shelf correctly or doing it twice. Use it as a general tool to scoop, scrape and prod.

- There's almost no end to duct tape's uses. Patch up

holes, reinforce binding and make a number of temporary repairs.

- A ball of string or twine can be a lifesaver. Lay out pieces of string to outline your project or measure objects that don't neatly fit around a ruler. Bring out the rope for planks of wood and larger materials.

- Cut, file, clip, sharpen and perform dozens of other actions with a real "multi-tool" like a Swiss Army knife.

— Julia Haskins

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Protect Your Walls

"People put a lot of holes in walls," Roberts says, from hanging shelves to pounding picture frames into place. An electronic stud finder can take the guesswork out of the process.

Plus, you can avoid of unsightly pockmarks from a few too many blows from a hammer.

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Stay Safe ▲

No toolbox would be complete without the right safety products. Protect your eyes with high-quality goggles, your ears with earplugs, your hands with thick but pliant gloves and your nose and mouth with a mask, depending on the project.

Think ahead for which safety supplies you'll need in a bind – electrical tape, for example. “Very often you see a live wire you don't know what to do with. The best thing to do is take the electrical tape to cover it up,” says Sindi Landman, Shapot's partner at The Think Tank.

Have a little one at home? Keep chemicals, blades and pointed edges tucked away with child-safe locks, and always have a first-aid kit nearby.

Odds and Ends

Don't forget to stock your toolkit with the vital bits and pieces to complete your projects. Always keep enough fasteners, nails, screws and bolts on hand, and place them all in separate compartments to keep them neat.

Shapot calls Elmer's Glue an indispensable tool, but your project might call for rubber cement, which is perfect for paper, or heavy-duty super glue that can bind materials like metal and wood.



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See the Light

Whether the power goes out in a storm or a project calls for investigating a hard-to-see corner, a good flashlight is crucial. Especially in the event of an emergency, you don't want to find yourself without a reliable light source.

Reliability is one reason that tool experts say you shouldn't skimp on a cheap flashlight.

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Pry It Open

Got a stubborn door that won't stay shut or open wide enough? A good pry bar should do the trick. Its skinny flat blade gets into the toughest spots around the home.

"You always have a door sticking where you have to pry something off," Ruffman says. The same goes for tricky cabinets and drawers. A pry bar also does double-duty by removing nails from objects.



Power to the People

Home improvement blogger Mag Ruffman knows that many people fear power tools.

But as an expert well versed in all things home improvement and renovation, she encourages everyone to give power tools a shot.

An electric drill gets the job done faster, and it also can be used for more than one purpose. Shut off the power and it becomes a manual screwdriver. Add a paddle attachment, and mixing paint becomes a breeze.

When used properly, electric saws need not be feared, either. Neither will break the bank for most DIYers.

Ruffman especially likes cordless tools for the freedom that they allow users. "You're not tethered to a workbench," she says. — Julia Haskins

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