

# Power Tools

## for the small shop



**F**itting a full complement of power tools into a small shop can be like packing a dozen sardines into a small tin. But it doesn't have to be that way. If the tools are selected and organized properly you can have the tools *and* still have room to work.

The key to selecting a power tool is to first determine how much use it'll get. If it's used a lot, go with a full-size stationary tool. If it'll only be used now and then, go with a bench-top tool that can be stored out of the way when not in use.

Shown here are the power tools I'd buy (in order) if I were outfitting a small shop today. Note: For those working in a really tight space, you might consider a multipurpose tool, see box on next page.

**1. Table Saw.** If I could only have one power tool in my shop, it would be a contractor's table saw (refer to the table saw review starting on page 24).

The table saw in our shop is used all the time to rip, crosscut, and miter workpieces. It's great for cutting rabbets and dados. And the large table top makes it easy and safe to cut a full-size sheet of plywood.

Note: From time to time you may need to move the saw around to make certain cuts. So it's a good idea to also invest in a set of castors or a mobile base.



**2. Dust Collector.** When working in a small, enclosed shop, you should be concerned about protecting your lungs from sawdust. Since a table saw kicks up a lot of dust, your next purchase should be a two-stage dust collector to hook up to the saw.

Most small two-stage dust collectors come with a quick-disconnect hose that makes it easy for you to connect to other tools with the same mated connector. And many dust collectors also come with castors so you can easily roll it out of the way when it's not being used.



**3. Router Table.** I never realized how much of a necessity a router table was until I started using one. The router table in our shop gets used every day.

Not only is it used for routing decorative profiles, but it's also great for routing rabbets, dados, and box joints. And with special router bits, you can even rout raised panels.

Although in many cases a hand-held router could also get the job done, I'm more comfortable with the control the router table offers with its larger table top, adjustable fence, and miter gauge.



**4. Drill Press.** The next tool I'd buy would be a drill press. And there are a couple of ways to go here.

If you're only going to use a drill press for drilling holes, you might consider a small, bench-top model. When it's not in use, you'll be able to store it out of the way in a corner or down under a workbench.

But if you're going to drill a lot of holes, mortises, or use it for sanding, you might consider a larger, full-size model. It won't take up much more space, and you'll have a large table top and bigger motor to handle the extra work.



**5. Thickness Planer.** In the past few years, the cost of owning a thickness planer has dropped like a tackle box sinking in a lake.

For less than \$400, you can choose from a number of quality 10" and 12" bench-top thickness planers that should handle most of your planing needs.

A planer in the shop means you won't be limited to the lumber thicknesses available at your local lumberyard. And you can save money by buying rough stock directly from a sawmill and planing it to thickness yourself.



**6. Compound Miter Saw.** A radial arm saw is a great power tool for crosscutting and mitering. But they take up a lot of space. And they're not portable.

A compound-miter saw on the other hand is both portable *and* compact. Miter saws have been used primarily by trim and finish carpenters because of their portability and accuracy. But they're starting to find their way into many workshops — for the same reasons. Although smaller, you'll find that a compound-miter saw will cost about the same as a radial arm saw.



**7. Band Saw.** My final tool of choice for the small shop is the band saw. A band saw is great to have around if you're going to cut a lot of curves and circles. Or resaw lumber — which can save you money when you're working with thin stock.

Again, like the other power tools, determine how much use a band saw will get. If you think you'll use one a lot, go with a full-size model with a mobile base. If it's only going to be used occasionally, a bench-top model will work just fine, and it will cost a lot less than a full-size band saw.



## Multipurpose Tools

Another space-saving measure when you're working in a small shop is to select a power tool that does multiple jobs.

Many of these machines, like *Robland*, *TotalShop*, *Shopsmith*, and *Kity*, combine five tools into one, see photo at right.

They all provide a lot of wood-working in a small space. But setting up the different operations isn't as efficient as it can be with individual power tools.

Another small shop option that's worth considering is a combination tool, see far right photo. With this type of machine, you'll typically find a jointer combined with a planer. Or a disk sander combined with a belt sander.



▲ A multipurpose tool such as this Kity K-5 combines a table saw, edge jointer, thickness planer, shaper, and mortiser. It has many of the advantages that similar stationary tools have, but takes less space. (Farris Machinery: 800-872-5489)



▲ This Hitachi P12RA planer/jointer combines a 12" thickness planer with a 6" edge jointer. A combination tool like this takes up less space than two similar, separate bench-top power tools. (Hitachi Power Tools: 800-362-7297)