

Selecting Hand Tools



Power Tools. When outfitting your shop with power hand tools, plan each purchase ahead of time and shop around for the best deal.



Hand Tools. A chisel set, a few hand planes, and a square or two are just a few of the hand tools that should be in every woodworking shop.

Like many woodworking shops, my shop started out as a collection of hand tools used mainly for home improvements. When a bedroom door no longer closed, I bought a plane to make it fit again. To build a fence, I bought a circular saw and built a pair of sawhorses to help get the job done, see box on next page.

After a while, I had acquired enough tools to tackle my first woodworking project. In hindsight, I wish I had given more thought to the tools I had purchased — a little more planning could have saved some money.

The following hand tools are those I'd recommend to anyone getting into woodworking. To keep costs down, plan ahead and watch for sales at hardware stores and home improvement centers.

You might also consider purchasing from mail-order catalogs, see sources at left. These tools may cost less than those at a retail outlet. And some catalogs don't charge for shipping. Also, if you're not living in the state where the catalog is located, you might not have to pay state sales tax.

One other thing, I recommend buying the best tools you can afford — better tools last longer. And they'll out perform their less-expensive competitors.

POWER TOOLS

Most woodworkers begin their collection with power tools. And the most practical one to start with is the circular saw.

CIRCULAR SAW. A circular saw is great for cutting up plywood. And with the help of a straight-edge, it can be used to rip or crosscut softwood and hardwood.

Most circular saws fall in a price range of \$30 to \$150 — with the better saws costing over \$65. So it's a good idea to compare them closely and base your decision on how it will be used, and how much you'll use it.

Once you've made your pick, check to see what type of blade it comes with. If it isn't carbide-tipped, invest in a quality combination-tooth blade (\$10 to \$15). What you'll get is a blade that cuts smoother with less chipout. This means the motor won't work as hard and will run cooler—which

should make the saw last longer.

ELECTRIC DRILL. My next tool of choice is an electric hand drill with a $\frac{3}{8}$ " chuck. It's good for drilling pilot holes for screws and other fasteners. They're great for assembly work or things like dowel joinery, see page 22.

When looking for a hand drill, there are two roads to follow. You can buy a corded drill (around \$30). Or a cordless, rechargeable drill (\$100 and up). The advantage of a corded drill is they cost a lot less than a cordless drill.

The advantage of a cordless drill is its portability. No more hassle with tangled extension cords. And you won't have to drag one through the house every time you want to hang a picture.

RANDOM-ORBIT SANDER. Since most projects need some sanding, I'd buy a random-orbit sander. They're hard to beat for removing planer marks, chipout, and scratches. Expect to pay around \$75 for a good one. (For more on these, see the tool review beginning on page 14.)

ROUTER. I use a router in just about every project I build —

Sources

Constantines
(800-223-8087)
Garrett Wade
(800-221-2942)
Tool Crib
(800-358-3098)
Tools on Sale
(800-328-0457)
Trendlines
(800-767-9999)
Woodcraft
(800-225-1153)
Woodworkers' Store
(800-279-4441)
Woodworkers Supply
(800-645-8232)

whether it's routing a groove, a dado, or just a decorative profile. This versatile tool can even be mounted upside down in a shop-made or purchased table for use as a small shaping tool.

My first router had a $\frac{3}{4}$ hp motor with a $\frac{1}{4}$ " collet. But now I use a $1\frac{1}{2}$ hp router with interchangeable $\frac{1}{4}$ " and $\frac{1}{2}$ " collets. The two different collets allow me to use my old $\frac{1}{4}$ " bits, but any new bit I buy has a $\frac{1}{2}$ " shank.

There are a number of good routers to choose from. Prices range from \$70 to \$200. And you can find good-quality, carbide bits for around \$20 each.

SABRE SAW. When you need to cut a curve or a circle, you can use a coping saw (\$15). But a sabre saw is quicker. And it can cut through thick stock much easier.

If you're only going to use a sabre saw every now and then, I don't recommend spending more than \$50. But if you think it's a tool you'll use a lot, especially with a stand (like the one shown on page 16), consider spending more for a higher-quality tool.

HAND TOOLS

In addition to the basic hand tools (like hammers, pliers, and screwdrivers), you'll need a few others

for woodworking.

CHISELS & Mallet. My favorite hand tool is the chisel. I use it all the time to cut joinery (like dovetails and mortises) or to fit parts together during assembly.

A quality set of chisels isn't cheap. It'll cost about \$40 to \$50 — but like everything else, you could spend more to get more. While you're at it, pick up a wood mallet (\$20) or make yourself one, see page 8. (A wood mallet is easier on the handles of your chisels.)

PLANES. You'll also need a couple of good hand planes. A jack plane (\$70) is good for edge jointing, smoothing, and flattening lumber. A low-angle block plane (\$45) is useful for trimming and fitting parts. Also, a low-angle block plane is the perfect tool for trimming end grain.

CABINET SCRAPER. A cabinet scraper is an excellent way to obtain glass-smooth wood. Unlike the large, thick curls a hand plane produces, a cabinet scraper produces micro-thin shavings.

In fact, some woodworkers don't even use sandpaper. They'll scrape an entire project smooth, then apply the finish. A cabinet scraper can last a lifetime, and best of all, they cost less than \$10.

JAPANESE SAW. To cut wood

The Essentials

Power Tools

- Circular Saw (with carbide blade)
- Electric Drill ($\frac{3}{8}$ " chuck)
- Random-Orbit Sander
- Router (with carbide bits)
- Sabre Saw

Hand Tools

- Chisel Set & Mallet
- Block Plane & Jack Plane
- Cabinet Scraper
- Japanese Saws
- Combination or Try Square

by hand, I prefer a Japanese saw (\$30 to \$60). These saws are designed to cut wood quickly, cleanly, and accurately. They have razor-sharp teeth and cut on the pull stroke for better control. (This is especially useful when cutting dovetails and tenons.)

SQUARES. Finally, no shop is complete without an accurate square for checking inside and outside corners. For most projects, a small try square (\$15 to \$50) with a 5" blade is all you'll need. But a combination square (\$50) is also nice for checking set-ups and mitered corners.

A Place to Work

Even though they're not considered hand tools, a solid workbench and a pair of sawhorses are essential tools to have in the shop, see drawings.

Quite often they're one of the first things you'll build for your shop: the workbench for general woodworking, and the sawhorses to support and work on oversized projects. (And along with a sheet of plywood, sawhorses can even be used to create a quick temporary work surface.)

