

FIX IT UP!

Bruce Turner

The Handyman's – er, Handyperson's – Starter Kit

So you've just moved into your new house, and right next to the water heater in the garage is a workbench, built in by the previous owner. Suddenly, although you've never done anything handier than changing a light bulb, you feel the urge to start doing those little household repairs yourself. Problem is, that workbench is emptier than SBC Park in October. How do you know what to buy?

Well, purchase number one is a pair of safety glasses. Never do any household repair work, ever, without goggles.

As to tools, the best way to stock your starter's kit without going into hock is to choose versatile tools that do multiple jobs. The most indispensable is a cordless, rechargeable drill/screwdriver, which will come with a full set of drill bits and a couple of standard and phillips-head screw bits. You'll use the cordless a thousand times for a thousand little jobs, and it eliminates the need for a set of screwdrivers, although a small rubber-handled screwdriver can come in very handy.

Get a four-inch adjustable crescent wrench for basic plumbing needs, like tightening leaky pipe fittings, and a smaller one that will handle most of the nuts and bolts you'll encounter. I'd suggest four pairs of pliers – a channel-lock adjustable pliers, a needle-nose pliers with an insulated handle (for electrical work and fishing small items out of tight places), a wire-cutting pliers to strip insulation, and a locking pliers for holding onto stuff you can't grip with your fingertips.

You should have a hand saw, two hammers – a standard or framing hammer for “rough” work and a finish hammer for finer work around finished wood – and a large rubber mallet for the times when whatever you're doing just requires a big old thump.

If you plan to do any of your own interior painting, you'll need two decent brushes, a couple of paint buckets, a paint scraper and some sandpaper. If all you'll be doing is touching up marks in the walls, those little foam paintbrushes and maybe a small Tupperware container to hold the paint will be fine. And you'll want a couple of putty knives for small wall repairs.

Other absolute necessities:

- electrical tester, for determining whether that socket or wire is hot;
- utility knife with a changeable razor blade for cutting almost anything;
- caulking for sealing everything from bathtub tile to windows (your leak fighter);
- good portable light for working under the sink;
- assortment of nails, screws, nuts, bolts, washers, molly bolts and anchors (for wall mounting);
- sturdy tape measure;
- duct tape and blue painter's tape, for temporary repairs and protection;
- glue – I love Gorilla Glue, a polyurethane-based glue that holds just about anything just about forever.

How do you store your stuff? If you already have a workbench, it probably has a wall-mounted pegboard backing that will let you hang your tools on metal hooks. If not, the hardware stores sell tool chests of all sizes, from lunchbox to eight-foot monsters with wheels. But the simplest

solution is an ordinary five-gallon bucket – they actually make organizers that turn those buckets into efficient tool storage bins.

And for carrying your tools around the house, a tool belt comes in handy – and it makes you look like a pro to your admiring spouse. Have fun.

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