

COLUMN FOR MARCH 5, 2005.

HEADLINE; FIRST TIME HOMEOWNERS TOOL KIT

*Q; We have just bought our first home and after a couple of trips to the big box stores I can see where you can spend a lot of money for a basic tool kit. What do you suggest for a starter kit that will not break the bank!*

A: This is a question I get a lot from first time buyers and the reader is correct, you can go thru a lot of money for tools you likely will only use once or twice over the years. Number one on the list is a decent tape measure. Buy a 16-foot tape with both metric and standard measure on it with the  $\frac{3}{4}$ " blade. They stay more rigid when laid out measuring for carpets or wallpaper. The next item is a laser level and these have really come down in price recently. Buy one that will attach itself to the wall easily. Great for keeping pictures or posters in line, especially if there is more than two. Buy a set of screwdrivers and look for a set that has the magnetized tips. The set should have a slot head, Phillips head or star as some call it and two sizes of Robertson or Square drive, as it is also known. The Red handle or number 8 and the green handle or number 6 are the two most popular sizes. Stay away from the multi-tip in the handle screwdrivers. The tips are often not very hard, the handle is often bulky and when you loose a tip it is usually the one you need the most. If you have a number of bathroom towel bars to install, look for a set of Allen wrenches. Allen wrenches are small octagon shaped or six sided formed steel wrenches that are used a lot in bathroom accessories and hardware. Try and find a set that is both metric and standard. Some bathroom fixtures also use a tiny slot screwdriver. Invest in a reasonably good set of pliers or buy the following individually. Include a pair of channel lock or slip lock, as they are also known, 10 inch is a good size. A pair of needle nose pliers, a pair of side cutters and two sizes of regular pliers. A 6-inch and an 8-inch pair should do. If you have any extra to spend, a pair of vice grips would be a wise choice. Buy pliers that have properly insulated handles. There are all kinds of socket sets around but a pair of adjustable or crescent wrenches will more than suffice. Buy a 6-inch and a ten-inch size. Buy drop forged, stay away from the cast heads here. A hammer is always part of any tool kit and a good 16 ounce one should do. This is how hammers are rated, a frame hammer can go to 20 ounce and are difficult to control if you are not used to one. Buy one with a cushioned handle; they have a much better grip than a wooden one. The next tool is a stud finder and for every picture you hang, every towel bar this will help. Spend the money for an electronic one and not one of the magnetic ones, worth the difference here. A good quality utility knife or Exacta knife with a replaceable/retractable blade is a must. Make sure its retractable, they give a nasty cut when you are rummaging around in a drawer or toolbox. If you have bought an older home, invest in a circuit tester. This is a grounded plug with three lights on the end. It will tell you if the plug is actually live, properly grounded and if the polarity is correct. This is important for some appliances, computers and refrigerators. Unless you are handy electrically, any further here calls for an electrician. Invest in an inexpensive plastic toolbox with an upper tray and keep everything together. The only power tool I suggest is a rechargeable drill and have these ever come down in price. I can remember the first ones I bought for my crew were 9.6 volt and the charge only held for about an hour and cost me over 200.00 each. Today a private brand big box store 14.4 drill is often on sale for less than a 100.00. Go for the 14.4 volt, they are a little heavier than a 9.6 volt but pack a considerably greater punch, especially if you are building that deck next summer. My last suggestion is a good plunger. There are two common kinds, the old style force cup and the extension horn type. The extension horn type has a fold-in portion and it works much better than the older horn type. I walked a local big-box store with my list and buying reasonable tools, not cheap and not deluxe I was able to gather up the entire list for under 350.00 plus the drill and here I saw one on special for 79.00 and others around 125.00 that looked respectable. If you buy decent hand tools they will last a lifetime!

Now the answer to last week's question. What is a Bay? This was a trick question as most would pick the Bay window but actually the answer I wanted was B) the space between two adjacent trusses is also called a bay. Now this week's question. What is a ledger strip? Is it A) a type of concrete support for windows B) an

expansion strip used between two different materials in home construction C) a wooden strip attached to a centre beam where floor joists rest. The answer in next week's column.

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