

ASK THE INSPECTOR COLUMN FOR JULY 22, 2015
HEADLINE: TOOLS FOR 'MS' HOMEOWNER

The number of single ladies that we see buying homes has risen significantly over the past 2 to 3 years. I get a number of e-mails like this one, "I recently moved into my own home. As a single lady I know there will be some "tool necessities," but it is hard to know what a basic set of tools for a home are and not waste a lot of money, any suggestions?"

In order to save some maintenance costs and hang your own pictures, some basic tools are valuable. Number one on the list is a good tape measure and there are multiple choices available. Unfortunately, most of the cheap ones lack the ability to stay straight. My suggestion is a 16-foot tape; buy the wide blade style. 16 feet is a comfortable size that will do most work around a home. The wide blade will extend out and not collapse as quickly. Try and find one with metric on one side and imperial on the other edge. Expect to spend around \$20 to \$30.00 for a decent tape and it should last you a lifetime.

If you have a lot of pictures or wall hangings, then the laser-levels that are on the market now may be a good idea. I can remember when these things were in the hundreds of dollars; now a decent one can be bought for under \$60.00. Spend the money for one that easily attaches to the wall. It also works for shelving and closet hanger installations. One of the best screws for hanging pictures, or a reasonable sized mirror into drywall, are called "Wall-Dogs." They eliminate the need for those fussy expandable plugs.

No tool kit is complete without a hammer and, here again, there are multiple choices. Hammers come in different weights; a 16oz should be more than ample. As with the tape measure, it pays to spend a few extra dollars for a good hammer, one that is balanced, has a comfortable grip and a properly machined head. Find one with a curved or hook shaped claw; it will give you a better grip for pulling out nails and staples. You will see a lot of hammers under \$15.00. Walk by and spend \$25.00 to \$30.00; you will be glad you did.

You will quickly find that there are numerous kinds of heads used in screws; Robertson, Slot and Phillips are the most common. There are a number of innovations in multi-tip screwdrivers available today. The two I have tried are the Picquic screwdriver and the "retract-a-bit." The old fat handle with the screw end containing the tips that constantly get lost has been taken over by these new designs. The Picquic driver holds its tips in the side and the tip is magnetized. The Retract-a-bit actually holds the individual tips in a slide within the handle. They both have the most common tips included. Expect to pay \$15.00 to \$20.00 for one or the other.

If you plan to hang any amount of wallpaper or do your own renovations, then a hand level should be in your toolbox. You will not use this as much, so here a few dollars will do. The poly-cast levels are lightweight and accurate; a 24" level should be less than \$15.00.

A pair of pliers is also a must and. Over the past few years, the "flip grip" style of pliers has improved in quality and I actually use a pair on inspections. One tip, buy a

good pair, expect to spend \$15.00 to \$20.00. I use the set with the side cutter on one side and the needle nose on the other. This makes it handy to cut wire and then hold a picture screw. Standard pliers are too fat for holding screws. The handgrips in most “flip-grip” pliers are formed for better grip and comfort.

No tool kit is complete without some form of cutting tool and the retractable blade utility knife is invaluable. The original maker was Olfa and there are dozens of copies on the market now. The fixed blade style knife is strong, but, for home use, the Olfa style is the best. Here again, spend the money and buy a good one. Expect to pay \$15.00 to \$20.00 for one with a padded handle and a good lock. This design allows you to break off the blade tip when it gets dull and continue working. Buy a package of blades too; they are very reasonable in cost.

If there is one power tool to buy, it’s a cordless drill. Look around and find one that has multiple uses. Over the past couple of years a number of power hand tool makers have made their cordless tool batteries universally adaptable to fit other tools like a jig saw or a small skill saw. If you decide on a portable hand drill, try one of the store brands. Most of these are made by brand manufacturers like Black and Decker. Expect to pay anywhere from \$40.00 to \$80.00 for something decent. Take your time and hold each one in your hand. You will be amazed how out of balance some portable drills are. Some companies offer a starter package that includes the drill, a light, a package of drill bits and two batteries. This allows you to have one in the charger while you are using the other one. Watch the big box sale flyer; they often have a package deal that contains two or three rechargeable portable hand tools. A 12V rechargeable package is ample for a homeowner; buying up to the 18V or higher could be a waste of money here.

Don’t get caught in the “guy thing,” in regard to the big fancy toolbox. A reasonable sized poly tool box, with the removable trays built into the lid, will allow you to hold an assortment of picture hangers, screws and nails. These are commonly available in the \$10.00 to \$15.00 range. While you are wandering around the tool section, pick up a flex putty knife, the 1.5” width is handy; buy a budget set of the slip lock style pliers; a reasonably priced hack saw with an assortment of blades, and don’t forget a carpenter’s pencil.

Over time, you will add a hand saw or maybe even a portable jig saw, probably a pair of vice grips, an assortment of drill bits and tips and a collection of wall hangers and self-threading picture screws, as you need them. If you add this all together, including the drill, you should be able to walk out of the store having spent around \$400.00. This quality of tool kit should last you a lifetime.

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