

THE HOME WORKSHOP QUICK-START GUIDE

Essential tools, space requirements
and safety gear — by budget.



BEFORE YOU BUY ANYTHING

The biggest mistake beginners make is buying tools before planning the space. Tools adapt to a good space. A bad space sabotages every tool in it.

SPACE REQUIREMENTS

- ☐ **Minimum floor area:** 10×12 ft (120 sq ft). Workable, not comfortable. 12×20 ft is the real target.
- ☐ **Ceiling height:** 8 ft minimum for vertical cuts and overhead clearance.
- ☐ **Floor surface:** Concrete ideal. Wood frame workable. Carpet: no — fire risk and debris trapping.
- ☐ **Tool clearance:** 3 ft minimum around every stationary tool. Not optional.

LIGHTING

- ☐ **50+ foot-candles** for detail work. LED shop lights at 4000K or higher — avoid warm tones that distort wood color.
- ☐ **Shadow elimination:** Two fixtures at 90° angles to your main work surface removes shadows from cuts and layouts.

ELECTRICAL

- ☐ **Dedicated circuit:** 20A minimum from the panel. Add a 240V circuit when you plan a table saw.
- ☐ **Outlet spacing:** Every 6 ft along walls. Extension cords are trip hazards, not permanent wiring.
- ☐ **GFCI protection:** Required by code in garages. Install before powering any tool.

VENTILATION

- ☐ **Air exchange:** At least one window that opens + one exhaust fan. Non-negotiable for dust and finishes.
- ☐ **Exhaust placement:** Fan at the far end from your main entry — pulls air across the shop, not out the door you're using.

Order of operations: Measure and map the space before researching tools. The space determines which tools fit — not the other way around.

Common mistake: Buying a table saw for a 10×10 ft space. You need 4–6 ft of outfeed clearance. That's the tool, not the room.

SAFETY: NON-NEGOTIABLES

This page is short on purpose. Safety is not nuanced. Either you have this gear before you turn on a tool, or you don't.

PERSONAL PROTECTION (PPE)

- ☐ **Safety glasses** — ANSI Z87.1 rated. Every power tool, every time. Not sunglasses.
- ☐ **Hearing protection** — NRR 25+ earmuffs or plugs. Hearing damage is cumulative and permanent.
- ☐ **Dust mask / Respirator** — N95 minimum for sawdust. P100 half-mask for MDF, finishing, or spray painting.
- ☐ **Work boots** — Steel-toe preferred. Dropped tools fall at 9.8 m/s².

Gloves + rotating tools = serious injury. No gloves near drill bits, saw blades, or router bits. Gloves catch and pull hands in.

SHOP SETUP

- ☐ **Fire extinguisher** — Class ABC, mounted within reach of the door. Check charge annually.
- ☐ **First aid kit** — Visible, stocked, and not locked away. Include wound closure strips.
- ☐ **Clear floor** — Zero trip hazards. One bad foot placement near a running saw ends projects permanently.
- ☐ **Blade storage** — Dedicated case or wall rack. Never loose in a drawer.
- ☐ **Know your breaker** — Know exactly which breaker controls your shop. Test the label before trusting it.
- ☐ **No distractions** — No phones, no headphones with music (hearing protection only), no multitasking near running tools.

Total cost for complete PPE kit: \$40–60. The most important money you'll spend before buying any tool.

THE ESSENTIAL 8

Every home workshop, regardless of budget or size, needs these eight tools. Everything else is expansion.

01 **CORDLESS DRILL / DRIVER**

The most-used tool in any shop. 18–20V platform. Buy the combo kit (drill + impact driver) — more value, same battery ecosystem.

02 **CIRCULAR SAW**

Sheet goods, dimension lumber, long rips. Replaces a table saw for 80% of beginner projects. 7-1/4" blade, 15A corded.

03 **JIGSAW**

Curves, cutouts, irregular shapes. The tool a circular saw can't replace. Corded is fine at the entry price point.

04 **RANDOM ORBITAL SANDER**

5-inch pad. Hook-and-loop sandpaper. The difference between "looks handmade" and "looks finished."

05 **WORKBENCH + VISE**

A stable, dedicated work surface is infrastructure, not a tool. Without it, everything takes longer and goes wrong more often.

06 **MEASURING TAPE (25 FT) + SPEED SQUARE**

"Measure twice, cut once" requires tools that actually measure accurately. The square verifies 90°. Non-negotiable on both.

07 **CLAMPS — MINIMUM 6**

Start with 4× F-clamps (assorted: 6", 12", 24") + 2× quick-grip. You will always need more. Every project proves this.

08 **CHISEL SET (4-PIECE)**

1/4", 1/2", 3/4", 1". Mortises, cleaning joints, paring. Keep them sharp — a dull chisel requires more force and causes more slips.

STARTER TIER

\$500-\$800

A functional workshop. Not comfortable, not complete — but capable of delivering real projects. Buy in this order.

Cordless drill/driver combo kit (18-20V, 2 batteries)	\$140-\$200
Circular saw (7-1/4", 15A corded)	\$60-\$90
Random orbital sander (5", corded)	\$40-\$70
F-clamps assorted (4× pack: 6", 12", 24")	\$35-\$55
PPE kit (safety glasses + earmuffs + N95 box)	\$35-\$50
25 ft tape measure + combination square	\$25-\$40
Extension cord (14 AWG, 25 ft, grounded)	\$20-\$30
Pencils + utility knife + marking awl	\$10-\$15

STARTER TOTAL

~\$365-\$550

Remaining budget (\$150-\$435): Build clamp inventory first — you'll use them on every project. Then add a jigsaw. Leave the workbench for Builder tier unless you have nothing to work on; an old door on sawhorses works.

Skip for now: Miter saw, router, table saw. Buying them before you need them ties up cash that goes further as clamps, bits, and sandpaper.

BUILDER TIER

\$1,200–\$2,000

Starter kit is in place. You've used it on real projects. Now you add precision and speed — not replacing what you have, expanding what you can do.

Jigsaw (orbital action, variable speed, corded)	\$80–\$150
Compound miter saw (10", sliding preferred for cross-cuts)	\$250–\$450
Heavy-duty workbench (steel frame, 2,000 lb rated)	\$180–\$350
Shop vac + dust separator (2-stage bucket lid)	\$80–\$180
Router (fixed base, 1-3/4 HP) + starter bit set (6 pcs)	\$120–\$220
Pipe or parallel clamps (4× additional)	\$60–\$130
Chisel set (4-piece, quality steel — upgrade from entry)	\$40–\$80
Marking gauge + layout knife	\$30–\$60

BUILDER ADDITIONS

~\$840–\$1,620

Priority order: Workbench first if you don't have one — every tool works better on a stable surface. Then miter saw. Everything else follows the demand of your next specific project.

Don't buy the router until you know what joint or profile you need it for. A router without a specific task is an expensive paperweight with sharp bits.

SERIOUS TIER

\$3,000+

Builder setup is maxed out. You know what you build. These tools don't expand capability — they expand precision, speed, and the complexity of what you can execute.

Contractor or hybrid table saw (10", 30" rip capacity min)	\$500–\$1,200
Bandsaw (14", 6" minimum resaw capacity)	\$400–\$700
Drill press (benchtop, 12-speed, 5/8" chuck)	\$200–\$400
Air compressor + brad nailer + finish nailer kit	\$200–\$450
Bench grinder (8", variable speed — for sharpening)	\$80–\$180
2-stage dust collector (1.5–2 HP, 4" ports)	\$300–\$600
Router table (benchtop or freestanding cabinet style)	\$150–\$350

SERIOUS ADDITIONS

~\$1,830–\$3,880

Table saw first, always. It unlocks more capability than any other Serious-tier tool. Everything else depends on what you actually build: bandsaw for curves and resaw, drill press for joinery precision, dust collector when your lungs protest the shop vac.

Don't buy on speculation. A bandsaw bought "because I might resaw someday" is money parked in the corner. Buy when a specific project demands it.

TOOL PRIORITY MATRIX

Use this before every tool purchase. Gut feel is not a buying criterion.

TOOL	BUY FIRST	BUY LATER	RENT FIRST	SKIP *
CORDLESS DRILL / DRIVER	●			
CIRCULAR SAW	●			
RANDOM ORBITAL SANDER	●			
JIGSAW		●		
MITER SAW		●		
ROUTER		●		
TABLE SAW		●		
BANDSAW			●	
DRILL PRESS			●	
JOINTER / PLANER			●	
LATHE				●

● Buy First = Starter tier essential | ● Buy Later = Builder+ | * Skip = unless a specific project demands it

Rent before you buy for any Serious-tier tool. One weekend rental (\$80–\$120 at Home Depot) tells you more about fit than three hours of YouTube research. Bandsaw and drill press are the highest-priority "rent first" candidates.

The lathe trap: Woodturning is its own craft. If you're not building round things, a lathe is corner furniture. Skip entirely unless turning is specifically what you're after.

THE SHORTCUT

YOU HAVE THE FRAMEWORK. HERE ARE THE *TESTED PICKS.*

Every tool in this guide — reviewed, ranked, and linked.
Exact models we tested, at every budget tier. No filler.

[SEE THE FULL GUIDE →](#)

homeworkshopguide.com/setup/blueprint

START HERE. THESE SHIP TOMORROW.

Four vetted picks — one for each core category. All Prime-eligible. Click any card to view on Amazon.

CORDLESS DRILL DEWALT 20V MAX

Combo kit · 2 batteries included · our top pick for first-workshop builds

[VIEW ON AMAZON →](#)

CIRCULAR SAW MAKITA 7-1/4"

Best power-to-price ratio · 5,800 RPM · lightweight magnesium shoe

[VIEW ON AMAZON →](#)

SAFETY STARTER KIT 3M PPE BUNDLE

Glasses + earmuffs + N95 respirator · complete PPE under \$45

[VIEW ON AMAZON →](#)

WORKBENCH SEVILLE CLASSICS HD

2,000 lb rated · adjustable height · solid welded steel frame

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