

Your starter toolkit

Easy · 1 shopping trip · \$-\$\$

About ten tools handle most first-apartment jobs: Phillips and flathead screwdrivers (or one multi-bit driver), a claw hammer, a 25-foot locking tape measure, pliers, an adjustable wrench, a utility knife, a small level, hex keys, a flashlight, and safety glasses marked ANSI Z87.1. Add a plunger, tape and a few screws and wall anchors. Buy decent basics, keep them in one box, and add tools only when a job calls for one.

YOU'LL NEED

- ☐ A small toolbox or soft tool bag
- ☐ The checklist below
- ☐ A budget, and a willingness to start with basics and upgrade later

WHAT TO KNOW

- 1 **Start with screwdrivers.** Consumer Reports calls them the one must-have set above all other hand tools. Get Phillips (cross-shaped tip) and flathead in a few sizes, or one multi-bit screwdriver if space is tight.
- 2 **Add a claw hammer.** The curved claw pulls out nails you put in the wrong place.
- 3 **Get a 25-foot tape measure with a lock, for curtains, furniture and anything you hang.**
- 4 **Get pliers: needle-nose for tight spots and slip-joint for gripping and turning.** Locking (vise-grip) pliers clamp things so your hands are free. Add an adjustable wrench for nuts and bolts of different sizes.
- 5 **Add a retractable utility knife with spare blades, a small torpedo level, a set of hex (Allen) keys for flat-pack furniture, an LED flashlight, duct tape and painter's tape, and a small stash of nails, screws and wall anchors.**
- 6 **Get safety glasses.** Every household should have at least one pair of ANSI-approved protective eyewear. Look for "ANSI Z87.1" on the lens or frame. Regular eyeglasses don't protect you from impact or debris.
- 7 **Keep it all in one place: a small portable toolbox with compartments, or a soft-sided tool bag or drawer organizer if space is tight.**

Watch out About half of all eye injuries happen at home. Screws, nails and hand tools can fly into the air and into your eyes, but only about three in 10 people wear protective eyewear during home projects. Wearing it can cut your risk of eye injury by 90 percent. Keep your tools in good condition, and repair or replace damaged ones.

DAD NOTE *Buy the tool the second time you need it. Then put it back where it lives.*

Full lesson: aptkeys.com/tools/hand-tools-and-quick-fixes/your-starter-toolkit/

Checked October 2, 2026. Sources: Consumer Reports; American Academy of Ophthalmology; Electrical Safety Foundation International.