

Tools required

When it comes to plumbing, a bigger hammer won't do the job

By Homes & Land Staff

Every home should have a few plumbing tools, even if you consider the essential one to be a phone — for calling a plumber. Here's a rundown on basic equipment for DIYers of varying skill levels.

IN THE GROOVE: Tongue-and-groove pliers, often called by the brand name Channellocks, are handy for grabbing, pulling, tightening or loosening plumbing components. Both do-it-yourselfers and experts cite them as the "go-to" tool for basic plumbing tasks.

THE PLUMBER'S FRIEND: A plunger is the first helper to call on for clogs in sinks, tubs, toilets and showers. A home should have a couple — one reserved for sinks and one for toilets. Plungers vary in construction, so get the right type for the intended use.

A WRENCH IS A WRENCH? Plumbing work uses a suite of wrenches, some quite specialized. There's the adjustable wrench for working on parts with hex-shaped nuts. Then there's the very large pipe wrench, or monkey wrench. With a stationary end jaw and an adjustable lower jaw, the pipe wrench is used to tighten and loosen threaded pipes,

fittings and nuts. Popular Mechanics' DIY Guy notes that you actually need two pipe wrenches: one to hold and one to turn. Add to the collection a long-handled basin wrench, essential for reaching into the tight space behind a sink.



Quick tip

Keep it pretty

Stop! Don't get in a hurry and grab a shiny metal fixture with a hard metal tool without first wrapping either tool or fixture with a cloth. For lack of a rag, you may leave ugly and permanent scars. Also be aware that some chemicals, such as drain cleaners, will permanently mar fixture finishes.

MAKE THE CUT: A hacksaw comes in handy for all sorts of tasks, including cutting copper or plastic pipe. Stock extra blades.

THAT'S HOT: Propane torches are used to "sweat," or join and seal, copper pipes and fittings. If you're not comfortable with the idea of working with high, intense heat, let a pro handle it. For making cuts on copper pipes, there's the tubing cutter, which resembles a C-clamp with cutting wheels.

THIS 'AUGERS' WELL: A hand auger is a hand-cranked gizmo, aka "plumber's snake," with a long flexible steel cable for clearing drain obstructions. A closet auger is for toilets. Professional models are much more powerful than those marketed for home use.

THE LITTLE STUFF: A basic plumbing kit also needs small items such as Teflon tape, aka plumbing tape, for sealing pipe threads and plumber's putty for sealing around drains.

Inspect now to prevent problems later

Theses tasks should be performed regularly, at least annually.

- Check to make sure that exposed pipes aren't leaking or corroding. Watch for signs of mildew or mold, which can indicate a slow leak or problematic condensation.
- Check rubber washing machine hose

for cracks or signs of leakage.

- Tank water heaters should be drained periodically to remove sediment.
- If you own a gas water heater, check its burner chamber for rust and note the flame color, which should be blue. Any yellow could mean jets need cleaning.

Get ahead of plumbing mishaps with preventative maintenance

