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# Finding Your Way Around A Toolbox

BY CARRIE SMOOT

**TRACY MORRIS LEARNED** to work with tools and fix things around the house. "My dad taught my sister and me the basics," Morris recalls. "He gave me my first toolbox and tool set," she says. "Metal fishing tackle boxes have storage compartments that can be color-coordinated for easy organization."



"Women do home repairs, but there is still a big disconnect in knowledge and comfort level," Morris says. "Keep home repair manuals handy. Leave major plumbing or electrical problems to professionals."

Lowe's and Home Depot can be overwhelming, Morris admits. "Follow aisle signs. What home improvement project would you like to work on? Painting a room with certain techniques or color mixes, or dealing with drywall and minor electrical repairs? Big-box store classes are great!"

Morris owns Tracy Morris Design in Bethesda, MD. "Logistics, problem solving and space planning are in every project," she says. Morris frequents mom-and-pop hardware stores like Frager's in Washington, D.C., Hunter Hardware in Centreville, VA and Strosniders in Bethesda, Potomac and Silver Spring, MD. "They have everything, including knowledgeable staff. Ask questions and describe specific problems."

## Essentials

You'll need a set of screws, nuts and bolts, a set of screwdrivers, a wrench, a medium hammer and assorted nails. "A flat head screwdriver has a slash line across its tip," Morris says.

"Use it for repairing door handles. The head of a Phillips screwdriver is star-shaped, ideal for fixing appliances," she says. "A level and a professional-quality tape measure are great when building or hanging anything. Stud finders aren't needed. Knock lightly on the wall. When you hear a dense sound, there's the stud. Keep assorted 10- to 50-pound picture hooks and picture and floral wire."

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Tracy Morris is owner of Tracy Morris Design in Bethesda, MD. Visit [www.tracymorrisdesign.com](http://www.tracymorrisdesign.com) or call 240-482-0586 for more information.

Hansen bought both products from CableOrganizer.com in Fort Lauderdale, FL. She's the company's product specialist. "Contractors are our biggest customers, but everyone comes to us," she says. The Milwaukee tool line is the newest, and they offer replacement parts and customer support. An online home-repair learning center is available.

Hansen mentions deerskin work gloves with a good grip for smaller pieces. Microfiber fabric gloves are great for yard work. A tape measure with a magnetic tip allows more accurate measuring, and various utility knives and levels have many uses. A template for installing electrical outlet boxes is new. "We carry labor-saving devices that you won't find in most other stores," she says.

## A Neighborhood Resource


Brown's Hardware has been in Falls Church City, VA, since 1883 and in its current location since 1960. Whatever the project, manager John Taylor and his staff of six provide personalized service Monday through Saturday. "We may not have blockbuster items, but our prices are as low or lower than big-box stores," Taylor says. "We don't carry many power tools, but we do carry well-known brands like Leatherman and Black & Decker. Nails and other items are sold in bulk, and we have a full line of light bulbs, including compact fluorescents, which will eventu-

ally be the only type available. We offer lots of little things for lawn and garden, plumbing and housewares that aren't available anywhere else. Spray & Forget is a roof-cleaning product that hooks up to your garden hose that gets rid of moss, algae and dead leaves from your roof and gutters."

Although not electricians, Brown's Hardware staff will repair windows, screens, lamps and old tools. They make keys while you wait. "Tools made in the 1970s are far more durable than ones built today. It may be worth getting them fixed," Taylor says.

"People are far more knowledgeable about home repair today than they were 10 to 15 years ago," he continues. "An old joke says it takes at least three trips to the hardware store to finish something. Advice depends upon the project. People come in with digital cameras and pictures. Women are taking the lead. We get plumbing questions. Ninety percent of the time, a flapper or fill valve needs replacing. It's easy, and we have kits for that purpose.

"In addition to hammers, screwdrivers, a utility knife and a level, an adjustable wrench is very useful," Taylor says. He also likes Channellock 10- to 12-inch groove-joint pliers.

"You'll never feel intimidated at a hardware store, so don't be afraid to ask questions. Advantages are reasonable prices and getting in and out quickly." 

Carrie Smoot is a Northern Virginia freelance writer.