

10 Tips for the Weekend Handy Person

Extracted and updated by

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from Bernard Gladstone's 1960 book

'Hints and Tips for the Handyman'

Tool Use & Care:

For a Keen Edge

Chisels are usually kept sharp by regular honing on an oilstone, or on the new diamond stones. However, the blades can get damaged and nicks must be grounded out, or when extreme re-shaping of the edge is needed, a grinding wheel must be used.

Make sure you have a cup of water handy and always grind carefully, taking off only a little at a time, otherwise the blade may be quickly ruined.

Dip the blade in the water to cool after every three or four passes across the face of the wheel as hot metal has a tendency to lose its temper. If the blade gets too hot, the temper will be totally lost from the blade so that it will not hold a sharp edge at all.

Refreshing Oilstones & Diamond Plates

Oilstones, used to put a final razor-sharp edge on knives, chisels and other tools, eventually become clogged with dirt, oil and old metal particles.

To restore their original abrasive qualities, fill a shallow pan with water and boil the stone in this till the old dirt is loosened up. If necessary, scrub with a stiff fibre brush and repeat the process several times until the stone is clean.

Diamond plates can be simply washed in warm water and scrubbed with a nylon scourer.

Plane Blade

A properly sharpened plane blade can be easily nicked or dulled if the blade is left exposed when the plane is not in use.

To protect the razor sharp edge from damage, the blade should always be retracted into the plane body when the plane is put away. Also keep a scrap of timber handy when putting the plane back on the bench after use and sit either the toe or heel on the timber block to protect the protruding blade.

Claw Hammers

When the claws of a claw hammer show signs of slipping every time a small-headed nail is pulled, try renewing their grip by filing the notch between them with a triangular file.

Use a corner of the file to slightly deepen and sharpen the crevice between the claws. This improves their grip so they will "bite" the nail head more firmly.

When pulling nails, place a thinish piece of scrap timber between the hammer head and the timber beside the nail you are pulling to protect the timber from bruising.

Tricks of the Trade:

Slipping Hammers

Ever had a hammer seem to slip off the side of the nail when driving a nail? Hammers build up an unseen coating on their face, particularly from the modern coated and galvanized nails, so keep a piece of fine abrasive paper handy and give the hammer head a good clean with it, the hammer will now stay on the nail.

Nails Splitting the Timber

When nailing fine timber with bullet head nails, the nail can often spilt the timber and wreck the good work you are producing.

To minimise this happening, turn the nail so the point is up and hit the point firmly with the hammer causing the point to flatten and the head to dimple the timber where the nail is to go. Now turn the nail the correct way up and drive home. This won't necessarily work every time, but you will minimise the splitting.

Testing a Square

Squares are often not as accurate as they should be, even when brand new!

When shopping for a new square take a small piece of scrap ply with you with one good straight edge. Before you pay for the square, lay it on the ply against the good edge and mark a square line along the blade, then flip the square, keeping the heel on the good edge of the ply and see if the line you marked still matches the blade. You should check a square periodically for accuracy by using the same technique.

Testing a Level

If you are in doubt about the accuracy of your level, place it on the surface which you believe to be close to level, mark where the ends of the level are positioned and then note the location of the bubble in the glass. Now turn the level end-for-end, locate between your marks and check the position of the bubble again. It should be in exactly the same position, in other words, it should have moved to the other side of the glass vial by exactly the same amount as it did the first time. If the surface used for testing is actually perfectly level, then the bubble should be precisely in the centre no matter which way the level is placed.

Removing Jammed Screws

Old screws can be almost impossible to remove. A simple trick is to fit the screwdriver into the slot, and give it a sharp blow with a hammer. This will jar the screw, fracture any binding rust and embedded paint and the screw should be much easier to remove. Sometimes it takes a couple of blows to get things started.

If you can find screwdrivers that have the steel shaft running right through the handle, these are more effective and you won't damage or break the handle. All my screwdrivers have through shafts for this very reason.

Applying Silicone Sealants

When using Silicone Sealants achieving a clean feathered edge can be tricky. The way to get a really neat job is quite simple.

First thoroughly clean the surface and remove any of the old Silicone, then apply 1 inch - 25mm masking tape to each side of the joint area where you want the joint to finish. Gun just enough of the sealant into place to do the job and smooth with a damp or soapy finger. Now before the sealant starts to set, carefully remove the tape, pulling away from the joint at a sharp angle. Hey presto; a smooth joint with beautifully straight edges.