

What's the Best Multibit

The \$80 one, of course, but you can do pretty well for \$10

BY ROB YAGID

When I buckle my tool belt, I make sure it has the basic, essential items: a hammer, a pencil, a tape measure, a knife, nailsets, and, finally, a multibit screwdriver. Often underappreciated, this tool has lots of value and uses on the job. But is a screwdriver just a screwdriver? Not at all. Not all multibit screwdrivers are designed the same, or even well. Having a quality one on your hip can have a real impact on your next job.

There are dozens of multibit screwdrivers available, ranging in price from \$2 to \$80. Of the 30 drivers I reviewed, I found six that I'd consider slipping into my tool bag and one that actually made it in. They range from basic models designed to deliver reliable use in rugged conditions to innovative designs that let you swap bits without even having to touch them.

Rob Yagid is an assistant editor. Photos by Krysta S. Doerfler.



1 Go ahead, hit it with a hammer

The first thing I noticed when picking up the 9-in-1 Multi-Tool is how solid it felt. There's so little play between the mating parts that the tool feels more like a conventional driver than a modular one. I'm drawn to the Irwin because of its rugged design. Of all the screwdrivers I reviewed, it is one of the few that I feel comfortable hitting with a hammer to cut through layers of old paint to contact a screw or to use as a small pry bar when in a bind.

9-in-1 Multi-Tool

Manufacturer: Irwin
www.irwin.com
Price: \$13

Bits: #1 and #2 Phillips, 1/4-in. and 3/16-in. slotted, #1 and #2 square
Nut drivers: 3/8 in., 5/16 in., 1/4 in.

2 More bits, more uses

With a total of 10 bit types and a shaft that serves as a 1/4-in. nut driver, the Megapro is arguably the most versatile of the group. Similar to the Felo, the Megapro's bits are stored in its handle, where they're clipped to a revolving magazine that makes bit selection easy. The ratcheting action is handy, but the handle doesn't provide as sure or as comfortable a grip as on the other drivers.

Ratcheting Bit Driver

Manufacturer: Megapro
www.megapro.net
Price: \$35

Bits: #1 and #2 Phillips, 5/64-in., 1/8-in., 5/32-in., 13/64-in. slotted, #1 and #2 square, screw starter
Nut drivers: 3/16 in., 1/4 in.

3 Long bits for tricky fasteners

The X-7 from Picquic has 3-in.-long bits instead of the 1-in. bits found on most other drivers. These bits enable me to connect with deep pocket screws and other hard-to-reach fasteners easily. Their length also plays an integral part in how they are stowed and changed. Pushing a bit into the butt of the handle ejects a new one. I like the hex-shaped shank, too. It accepts a 7/16-in. wrench for a major increase in torque when trying to turn stubborn screws.

X-7

Manufacturer: Picquic
www.firehawktech.com
Price: \$10

Bits: #1 to #3 Phillips, 1/4-in. and 3/16-in. slotted, T15 Torx, #2 square

4 Switch bits without touching them

At first I thought the bit-changing system on this Craftsman driver was a gimmick. After testing it, though, I can't deny its simple, reliable action. To change a bit, pull down the handle and rotate it so that an arrow aligns with the bit you need; then slide the tool back together. A rod pushes the bit into the shank. The many plastic parts make me question this driver's longevity. That's OK, though. I can change out six bits in nearly as many seconds.

Autoloading Multi-Bit Screwdriver

Manufacturer: Craftsman
www.sears.com
Price: \$20

Bits: #1 to #3 Phillips, 1/4-in., 3/16-in., and 1/8-in. slotted

Screwdriver?

THE TOP CHOICE

Not just for mechanics

Snap-on is a brand that evokes images of big-block V8s and vintage cars, not cabinet drawer slides and electrical boxes. But this screwdriver earns its keep in a builder's tool bag, mainly because of its articulating handle, which can be adjusted 30° and 60° both right and left. I can't put this screwdriver in a position that isn't comfortable, and I can turn screws in areas where other drivers won't fit. The ratcheting mechanism is super smooth, and the handle holds up to seven standard bits. I wouldn't pay \$80 for it, but it's the best driver I've used.

5-Position Handle Ratcheting Screwdriver

Manufacturer: Snap-on

www.snapon.com

Price: \$80

Bits: #1 Phillips ribbed, 1/4-in. slotted



This driver is adjustable and versatile. If any one of the five handle positions can't get you in line to turn a screw, the butt cap surely will. It's a miniature single-bit driver.

5 An electrician's best friend

This trade-specific screwdriver from Ideal Industries holds a pair of double-ended bits in a shaft that also serves as a double-ended nut driver. Electricians will appreciate the wire-nut wrench on the butt of the handle. This recess fits wing-nut, B-cap, wire-nut, and twister-type wire connectors and is designed to relieve hand fatigue if you make wire connections frequently. The driver's handle also has two holes for bending wire to slip over screw terminals.

7-in-1 Twist-a-Nut

Manufacturer: Ideal Industries

www.idealindustries.com

Price: \$11

Bits: #1 and #2 Phillips, 1/4-in. and 3/16-in. slotted

Nut drivers: 1/4 in., 5/16 in.

6 Small in size, big in performance

Measuring a mere 6 in. from bit to butt, the Bit-Boy fits nearly wherever my hand can. The egg-shaped handle is comfortable, and the flared collar allows me to put maximum pressure on a screw. This driver has eight bits perfectly organized in a spring-loaded, revolving magazine that pops out of the handle. The bits are easy to see, and the magnetic magazine helps to avoid lost bits. Also, the magnetic shank is removable and fits conveniently in a drill chuck.

Bit-Boy 373

Manufacturer: Felo

www.felo.com

Price: \$16

Bits: #1 and #2 Phillips, #1 and #2 Pozidrive, 7/32-in. slotted, T15, T20, and T25 Torx

BIT KIT



Phillips bits are among the most widely used in the world and were created for production-line work. They are designed to slip out of a fastener under excessive torque resistance. (See "What's the Difference?" p. 104.)



Pozidrive bits have added wings to prevent bit slippage. Although they look like Phillips bits, they are intended to be used on Pozidrive fasteners only, which are much more popular in Europe than they are in the United States.



Slotted bits are often referred to as flat-head bits. They are not self-aligning like Phillips-head or Pozidrive bits, and require more effort to connect with a fastener. They are a necessity, though, due to the popularity of slotted screws.



Torx-head bits have a star shape intended to reduce slipping or stripping out of the screw. These fasteners are often used in the automotive industry, but have growing applications in residential construction.



Square-drive bits are also known as Robertson bits and are designed to stay in a fastener under extreme torque. This makes them popular for use with hardwood materials and outdoor-decking products.

