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Buying Guide: Choosing the Right Nails for Your Project

Homeowners and commercial workers alike understand the importance of durability and structural integrity in their projects. But did you know the type of nail you use can actually make or break your creation's longevity? You must choose the correct material, size and finish of nail to ensure projects hold up for years to come. Learn more about Tractor Supply's variety of hardware, including numerous types of nails, to give any job the strength you need.

Considering General Nail Types

Nails act as a fastener to hold two pieces of material together, with many options designed to fit certain applications, such as outdoor use or adding support to other hardware components. However, the kind of nail you choose can also impact the look and feel of your project, giving you the choice to add rustic design elements or make hardware invisible.

For commercial applications, the type of nail you pick may be affected by specific building codes, meaning you must follow your area's regulations as to the type of fastener you use with certain projects. It's important to know and understand these rules, as well as your manufacturer's instructions, to allow for correct and accurate repairs.

The various types of nails include:

Common Nails

Great for general projects, common nails can be used for many tasks, anything from framing to adding structure to woodworking. They also work well in carpentry and construction work, with a sturdy shank and round head completing their design. The heavy weight of the shank gives projects enhanced support, and the round shape of the head is visible on project surfaces. These nails are ideal for when you need a strong nail rather than a nice-looking one.

Framing Nails

When you require efficient means for securing framing, rely on framing nails, which feature clipped or round heads, as well as different shank types. Spiral and ring shaft options come with twisted shapes and multiple rings, meaning they'll secure better to certain materials for durability. We also have collated framing nails, allowing for convenient use with nailers.

Finishing Nails

Use finishing nails to complete cabinetry and carpentry jobs, as well as installing molding. Featuring a smaller shaft diameter, these nails are suitable for nailing into wood materials without worrying about splitting.

The smaller head shape allows you to nail fasteners completely into materials, giving your project structural integrity without the appearance of harsh hardware. While they have a thinner shaft size, they're still durable enough to keep trim, such as crown molding or door jambs, where it needs to be.

Brad Nails

Brad nails look similar to finishing nails but in a smaller size. However, unlike finishing nails, these fasteners don't have the same holding strength. This means you should use brad nails for crafts and cabinetry applications, including woodworking tasks such as installing trim and other decorative projects. The smaller, round head size allows for complete countersinking and concealment in materials, giving your project a clean, smooth finish.

Wire Nails

For carpentry and construction applications, use a wire nail, which comes with a flat head and thin, tapered shank. The tapered shape of the shaft provides better, easier driving into wooden materials. What's more, the wide head shape of these nails also gives materials enhanced holding capabilities.

Choosing Specialty Nails for Specific Tasks

Some projects may require specialty nails, which feature specific designs to accommodate certain tasks. You want to find a nail that not only has the proper material and construction, but also one that works precisely with whatever job comes your way. Specialty nail types include:

Siding Nails

Use siding nails to install a variety of different siding materials, such as wood and fiber cement. Because siding is exposed to the elements, these nails are made with corrosion-resistant materials and finishes, adding durability and integrity to your building's exterior. Find options with smaller heads, which allow for deep drives and an invisible head appearance, as well as spiral shanks for more durable holding power.

Roofing Nails

Indicated in their name, roofing nails are ideal for securing roofing materials to buildings, including sheathing, shingles, decking and felt. Similar to siding, the roof of your home endures much moisture, meaning these types of fasteners are made with corrosion-resistant materials and finishes, such as aluminum, to resist eroding and rust.

Featuring a longer head size and a ring or spiral shank, these nails are designed for easy driving into roof materials. Roofing nails may also include a gasket under the head to deliver enhanced weather resistance, keeping elements from entering roof interiors and preventing long-term damage.

Drywall Nails

Built for easy, convenient installation into drywall, drywall nails go below the wallboard's surface, allowing for better concealing and reducing the risk of tears in drywall paper materials. This is due to their large, round head shape, with many options featuring dimpled or countersinking-compatible designs to make tasks easier.

Depending on the type of hold you need, drywall nails are available with ringed or smooth shanks. You can also find options with diamond points, which are sharp to drive into materials and decrease the likelihood that you'll split wall studs as you install them.

Box Nails

Designed to look just like common nails, box nails have a narrower shank design and smaller diameter. Their small width means you're less likely to split wood materials as you nail them. However, you shouldn't use these nails if you need a structurally-sound project, as they're not as reliable as other nail types.

Joist Hanger Nails

Joist hanger nails are used to secure joint hangers into wooden studs. Built with a sturdy shank, these allow for a stronger hold when fastening materials together. Many joist hanger nails feature galvanized finishes, meaning they're suitable for outdoor use, as well as with treated lumbers.

Duplex Nails

For temporary applications, such as making building forms or scaffolding in concrete jobs, use a duplex nail. These fasteners feature two heads – one on the end of the nail and another just slightly below. The lower head works to attach materials against others, while the upper head remains above the surface, keeping it visible and accessible for easy removal.

Finding the Correct Nails for Your Application

Now that you understand the different types and uses for various nails, it's time to decide on the size, material and design, as these factors may work better for some uses over others. When shopping for the right nail, you should make considerations such as:

Nail Material

The type of nail material and finish you need for your project is based on the material you're working with and where you intend to use it. While steel is a common choice, it may be susceptible to rust when exposed to moisture. It also can't be used on pressure-treated wood, as the material will contribute to corrosion.

When you need something durable enough for the elements, go with a steel nail with a corrosion-resistant plating or coating. But if you're planning to keep your project indoors, untreated steel and carbon steel options will do the job.

Other choices, such as galvanized nails, feature a thick zinc coating, making them ideal for the outdoors and rust-resistance, as well as for use with pressure-treated wood. You shouldn't use these fasteners on redwood or cedar wood, as the zinc will react with the oils, leading to staining. However, you can use stainless steel nails with these materials, allowing for safe and secure installation.

Head Style

The head style of your nail is just as important to consider as the size and material, with many types working better for specific projects. General-purpose tasks only require a traditional round head nail, giving you the strength needed to get the job done. Flathead nails are designed with round heads, allowing for easier contact with hammers and keeping materials together without letting them slip through.

When you want to give projects a less noticeable hardware appearance, opt for a countersunk nail. This type creates holes within materials as you drive them, allowing nail heads to sit flat against surfaces. We also offer fasteners with checkered flat heads, featuring a raised, checkered pattern for traction with hammers and to prevent slipping.

Nail Size and Gauge

Nails come in many diameters and lengths, and choosing the correct option depends on the material of your project and the kind of hold you need. Their diameter is measured by gauge, indicating how thick your fastener is. The smaller the gauge size, the smaller the diameter. We offer a range of nail gauge sizes, anything from #4 to #20, so you can find the most compatible option.

Length, on the other hand, is measured from the tip of the point to the head. You may see nail lengths labeled with a number, following by the letter 'd' – this tells you the length of the nail. For example, a '2d' size indicates a 1-inch nail, while a '50d' size equates to a 5-1/2-inch length. You won't typically find nails longer than six inches, as these would then be considered spikes.

Nail Shanks and Points

Nails typically feature one of two point types – dull or sharp. Sharp points, also called diamond points, come with a sharp end akin to a needle, and they are ideal for use with drywall and other soft materials that won't split.

Dull points are designed to drive into materials and prevent the chances of them splitting and becoming damaged, such as with wood, making them suitable for hardwood flooring. You can also find diamond points with slightly blunted tips, which are better for general projects.

Alongside the point, think about the shank type of your nail. For instance, standard shanks (also referred to as bright shanks) offer a smooth finish with no ridges or threads, while others come with knurled or fluted threads, making easy work of drilling into masonry materials without worrying about cracking.

Other shank types include:

- **Spiral:** These have a twisted shape, allowing for easy rotating into wood, and the helix design securely locks nails into place.

- **Ring:** Ideal for soft- or medium-density woods, these feature many raised rings along the shaft to compress wood components.
- **Barbed:** These have a patterned shaft for secure installation on dense hardwood materials.

Frequently Asked Questions About Nails

Should I drill a pilot hole before driving nails?

While you don't have to drill a pilot hole for many projects, some materials may require you to do one to ensure jobs come together smoothly. For example, pilot holes are ideal for working with wood materials, as they allow enough space for nails to go through without putting pressure in wood, causing it to split. This is especially true if you're driving a nail into the wood piece's end.

Pilot holes provide many other benefits, such as guiding you as to where nails should go. They also help to keep fasteners sturdy, stable and straight as you nail them in, meaning you can benefit from using pilot holes even if you aren't working with wooden materials.

What's the best way to drive nails into materials?

In terms of nailing fasteners, the best way to drive them starts with how you hold your hammer. You should always grasp hammers by the end of their shaft, ensuring balance and a controlled swing. When holding nails against materials, you must hold them from the top by the head. This prevents fingers from becoming crushed by missed hammer swings. For smaller nails, you can use other tools, such as needle-nose pliers, to hold nails in place.

You also want to ensure you choose the right hammer type, as some will work better for certain nails over others. For instance, curved claw hammers are used for versatile, general projects. However, they may not have the strength you need to complete more heavy-duty jobs.

When nailing into wood, you should pay attention to the wood grain of the material. If you want a secure hold, you must drive nails through or against the wood's grain, allowing for better grip. Driving nails with the grain can cause them to slide out, decreasing the structural integrity of your project. Additionally, you must always wear the right safety gear, whether working with wooden materials or not. Consider purchasing eye protection, such as goggles or glasses, as well as work gloves, to keep yourself protected.

Find the Tools and Hardware You Need at Tractor Supply

Whether you're a professional contractor needing durable, reliable parts or a homeowner looking for a quick fix, rely on the nails and other fasteners at our store and online. Our range of products are designed to give you the strength needed to give your project a long-lasting, durable finish. To learn more about the types of fasteners we carry, visit your local Tractor Supply today or browse online.