

Do it yourself, danger-free

That drill calling your name? Read this rule book first.

By Arianne Cohen

YOUR INNER MARTHA STEWART is itching to install new shelves and reupholster a few old chairs before the holiday season arrives. If you proudly call yourself a do-it-yourselfer (two-thirds of us do), you may be eager to break out the toolbox. Just make sure you're schooled in safety first. With more and more amateurs trying to act like pros, injuries are on the rise: Emergency room nail-gun visits tripled between 1991 and 2005, according to Duke University researchers. Here's how to get everything done—no stitches required.

Nix the multitasking. Using tools and power equipment demands undivided attention, a sort of single-mindedness we don't practice much these days. "Every accident I've seen has been less about skill and more about not paying attention," says Norm Abram, host of *The New Yankee Workshop* on PBS. So lay

down the cell phone and put all conversations on hold.

Treat your ladder like a razor. It seems benign, but a ladder can be the most dangerous tool in your house. In fact, in the past 15 years, injuries from falls have doubled. Here are a few rules of thumb: Set your ladder up only on a level surface, have a spotter hold it steady, and climb no higher than the third rung from the top on a straight ladder or the second on a step ladder. "You should feel as stable as you do on the ground," says Carmen de la Paz, carpenter and co-host of *Hammer Heads* on HGTV. And remember: Ladders and power tools *never* mix.

Study up before you power up. "An electric or cordless drill or a sander is pretty safe for most people to use," Abram says, as long as you follow the instructions and wear safety goggles.



What's wrong with this picture? On ladders, avoid flip-flops and power tools.

But before going solo with a saw or nail gun (the cause of about 15,000 accidents per year), you should practice with a pro or take a short, hands-on course. Home-improvement shops like Home Depot and Lowe's offer workshops; check their Web sites.

Bigger is not necessarily better. Stick to tools with smaller handles; they'll fit your hand better and are easier to use. In the store, "try on" some models to make sure your fingers are comfortably spaced when gripping the handle.

Don't stretch yourself. "Position yourself so the tool is between waist and chest level, never over your head," de la Paz says. Simple ceiling work, like installing a plant-hanging hook, should be done with manual tools—screwdrivers, hammers, and the like. For anything more complicated, call in the pros.

Keep tools in top shape. Dull blades and drill bits are a recipe for disaster, because you'll push harder to make up for the dullness. "Forcing tools makes them more likely to accidentally come into contact with limbs," Abram says. Keep tools sharpened and well-maintained by wiping them off after each use and periodically lubricating them with basic tool utility oil found at hardware stores. 🛠️

Must-wear safety garb

PONYTAIL AND BASEBALL CAP. "A little piece of hair could block your vision at the worst possible moment," says HGTV home-improvement-show host Carmen de la Paz. Wear your hair up instead of loose to keep this from happening.

STURDY FOOTWEAR. Try hiking boots, leather work boots, or steel-toe shoes.

LONG SLEEVES. They'll protect your arms against any sparks or splatters.

SAFETY GOGGLES. Try Milwaukee Heavy Duty Impact Anti-Fog Goggles (\$13.90;

available at hardware stores), which fit over eyeglasses.

WORK GLOVES. A must-have, except when you're working with a circular saw (the gloves can catch). Try Ironclad Evolution Women's Work Gloves (\$19.95, www.charmandhammer.com); they're machine-washable and have reinforced fingernail guards—all the better to keep your manicure safe.

