

Random-Orbit Sanders

Choose from three styles to suit the work you do

Random-orbit sanders can be divided into three groups: small, light palm sanders; versatile pistol-grip models; and heavy-duty right-angle sanders. Combining orbital motion with rotation, these tools create satiny, swirl-free surfaces, and the larger ones also can remove stock like a belt sander. We tested 19 fully loaded models to help you choose the one that suits your needs.

Look for a comfortable grip

Ergonomics is crucial because of the long hours that sanders typically are used. All of the palm sanders could be grasped comfortably with either palm resting on top, but the best ones accommodated a hand wrapped around the waist of the body. The on/off switches could be accessed handily, although the slide-through controls on the Ridgid and the Ryobi were too easy to turn on accidentally. The variable-speed dial on the Bosch was the easiest to adjust.

As a group, the pistol-grip sanders were the most comfortable to use for long periods of time. Exceptionally stable, they could be controlled by their main handle alone, or in combination with the top or front grips. All of the models tested have an on/off trigger under the handle, but the locking button is prejudiced in favor of right-handers. The Bosch and both Makita models have the best speed-control dials, placed within reach of either thumb.

The most powerful sanders, the right-angle models, were the most tiring to use. Inherently unbalanced, they required a firm grip with both hands to control; given that, we were surprised that none had an easily accessible variable-speed dial. These sanders generally have on/off switches that are locking slides.

Pistol-grip sander is a great all-around performer

For small-scale tasks, for work in confined areas, and for preparing furniture for finishing, a lightweight 5-in. palm sander might be all you need. Our favorite model was the Porter-Cable 333VSK.

For larger surfaces and finish-carpentry tasks, a 6-in. pistol-grip sander is the best choice. The Festool ETS 150/3 EQ stood out in this excellent field. For aggressive stock removal, grab a right-angle sander. Although these machines are capable of fine results, we would call on their significant size, power, and price tag only for heavy-duty work. Among these tools, we preferred the Bosch 1250DEVS. □

Andy Beasley contributed to this article.

Palm sanders

Light, maneuverable, and easy to control, palm sanders are ideal for light-duty finish work.

PORTER-CABLE 333VSK

800-487-8665
www.porter-cable.com
Price: \$80

Pros: Ergonomic grips; wide speed range; effective pad brake; minimal vibration; excellent location of controls.

Cons: Dust-canister fit was too tight, which made emptying a hassle.



RIDGID R2600

800-474-3443
www.ridgid.com
Price: \$70

Pros: Price; dust collection; pad brake; 12-ft. cord; excellent top grip; case with both hook-and-loop and PSA disks included.

Cons: On/off switch prone to accidental contact; variable-speed dial recessed too deeply; waist too fat.



FESTOOL ES 125 EQ

888-337-8600
www.festool-usa.com
Price: \$165

Pros: Comfort; minimal vibration; wide speed range; 13-ft. detachable cord.

Cons: Price; dust collection without vac attached.

READERS' RATINGS

The Festool palm sander was the clear favorite among readers. The editors' choices—the Ridgid (best value) and the Porter-Cable (best overall)—came in second and third.

PALM SANDERS	
FESTOOL ES 125 EQ	4.79
RIDGID R2600	4.39
PORTER-CABLE 333VSK*	4.30
BOSCH 1295DVSK	4.22
MAKITA B05012K	4.10
MILWAUKEE 6019-6	3.92
RYOBI RS281VS**	3.50

*We originally tested model 333VS; the model number has changed, and the tool now comes with a carrying case.




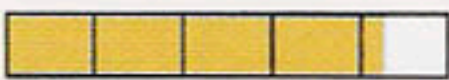


**We originally tested model RS280VS; the model number has changed.

Pistol-grip sanders

Ideal for finish carpentry and woodworking, pistol-grip sanders are the most comfortable to use and are exceptionally stable.

READERS' RATINGS

PISTOL-GRIP SANDERS

FESTOOL ETS 150/3 EQ		4.76
METABO SXE 450		4.52
BOSCH 3727DEVS		4.42
MAKITA B05012K		4.28
RIDGID R2610		4.16
MAKITA B06030		3.99

In this category, readers and editors saw eye to eye: They both made the Festool their top choice. In fact, Festool sanders were the readers' top choices in all three categories. As for the editors' best-value pick, the Ridgid, readers ranked it fifth out of the six surveyed.



EDITORS' CHOICE
BEST OVERALL

READERS' CHOICE

FESTOOL ETS 150/3 EQ

888-337-8600
www.festool-usa.com

Price: \$250

Pros: Our favorite sander of all 19 tested; power; balance; dust collection, light weight; easy-access controls; numerous accessories available.

Cons: On/off locking switch could be pressed accidentally; price.

EDITORS' CHOICE
BEST VALUE

RIDGID R2610

800-474-3443
www.ridgid.com

Price: \$140

Pros: Power; comfort; dust collection; 12-ft. cord; rough and fine modes; less-than-average vibration.

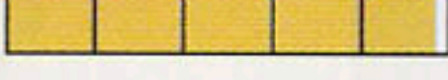



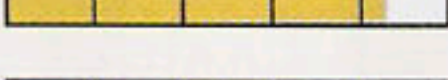

Cons: Awkward mode changes; dust obscured mode indicator; a bit heavy for extended vertical use.

Right-angle sanders

Right-angle sanders require two-handed operation and are best suited to rough applications and smoothing large surfaces.

READERS' RATINGS

RIGHT-ANGLE SANDERS

FESTOOL RO 150 E		4.88
FEIN MSF 636-1		4.68
PORTER-CABLE 97366		4.37
BOSCH 1250DEVS		4.31
MILWAUKEE 6125		4.18
MAKITA B06040		4.09

Just as it did in the readers' ratings for palm and pistol-grip sanders, Festool leads the pack here. Editors, meanwhile, chose the Bosch as the best overall, and the Porter-Cable as best value.



EDITORS' CHOICE
BEST OVERALL

BOSCH 1250DEVS

877-267-2499
www.boschtools.com
Price: \$300

Pros: Excellent dual-mode switching; great grips; powerful motor; 13-ft. cord.

Cons: Large size hampers fine work; no vacuum hose or adapter included as standard equipment.

EDITORS' CHOICE
BEST VALUE

PORTER-CABLE 97366

800-487-8665
www.porter-cable.com
Price: \$150

Pros: Stability; switch access; dust collection with included hose; case.

Cons: Tool motor discharges annoying airstream.

READERS' CHOICE

FESTOOL RO 150 E

888-337-8600
www.festool-usa.com
Price: \$420

Pros: Comfort; dual mode with convenient changeover switch; dust collection; case.

Cons: Price.