

The best & worst stuff to buy at home centers

Lowe's, Sears, Home Depot, or Walmart? What to buy where.

Say you need to buy a new lawn mower or a vacuum cleaner—pronto. Before you jump into your car and head to the closest home center, check out our lists below. They'll tell you where to shop for what.

Big-box retailers such as Home Depot, Lowe's, and Sears carry many of the same items. But they also offer private-label brands that you won't find anywhere else. Some exclusive items are made

by the same companies that manufacture big brands, including Behr, GE, and John Deere. We've tested a slew of those exclusive products and found big differences in performance. Home Depot, for example, is your best bet for paint, and Sears has the widest selection of top-rated vacuum cleaners. Below is our full list of winners and losers, plus a roundup of great store-brand everyday products.



Valspar paint, Kobalt tools, and Troy-Bilt outdoor power and lawn equipment are among the private labels you'll find at Lowe's. Some are great buys, but others got low scores in our lab tests.



PICK IT

Heavy-duty snow blowers

TROY-BILT STORM 3090XP 31AH55Q, \$1,100

This competitively priced two-stage gas model (shown) obliterates snow quickly, even those tough piles that plow trucks leave at the foot of your driveway.

TROY-BILT VORTEX 2890 31AH55Q, \$1,300

Paying \$200 more for this Troy-Bilt model gets you the same powerful performance and slightly easier handling.

Generator

TROY-BILT XP7000 30477, \$900

A portable generator is your best friend during a blackout, and this 7,000-watt Troy-Bilt delivered more than enough wattage to power a bunch of big appliances. Its 9-gallon tank should give you about 15 hours of run time.

Interior paints

VALSPAR SIGNATURE, \$34

This well-priced Lowe's exclusive is one of our highest-rated paints. Its semigloss formula offers superb scrubbing and mildew resistance, making it a good choice for bathrooms. Paying \$10 more per gallon for the Valspar Reserve gets you top-notch coverage, so you'll probably be able to get away with just one coat.

SKIP IT

Light-duty string trimmer

Troy-Bilt TB57, \$170

This battery-powered string trimmer lagged far behind 17 others we tested; it was subpar at cutting through tall grass and weeds.

Air purifiers

Idylis IAP-10-280, \$300

The best air purifiers are great at filtering dust, smoke, and pollen at both high and low speeds. This one did the job at its high setting, which is noisy, but it struggled in the low mode. There are more than a dozen better models.

Leaf blower

Troy-Bilt TB125QS, \$85

None of the six Troy-Bilt handheld and backpack leaf blowers we tested made our testers' picks list. This electric handheld model, which was dinged for subpar sweeping and loosening, is tied for dead last out of the 17 electric handheld leaf blowers we tested.





Home Depot is the exclusive retailer of Behr paints, a winner in our tests. Its EcoSmart lightbulbs are another smart buy, and it's the only home center that carries exclusive lines of Honda and Ego lawn gear.

PICK IT

Light-duty snow blower

TORO POWER CLEAR 721E, \$570 Very easy to handle, this top-rated single-stage gas model is great for climates that rarely get more than a foot of snow at a time.

Lawn mowers

HONDA HRR2169VKA, \$400

Self-propelled mowers take some grunt work out of lawn care. This one offers stellar mulching—another way to ease the job.

EGO LM2000, \$500

This top-rated, battery-operated push mower (shown) is super-easy to handle.

Tractor

JOHN DEERE D125, \$1,800

Got a lot of lawn to mow? This John Deere, exclusive to Home Depot, is easy to use, and it costs hundreds of dollars less than top competitors.



Cordless drill

RIDGID R86008K, \$180

Combining speed, power, and run time, it beat out almost 20 other drills and will help you power through lots of household tasks.

Lightbulbs

ECOSMART 12-WATT (60W)

A19 BRIGHT WHITE, \$20;

ECOSMART 14-WATT (75W)

A19 SOFT WHITE, \$35

Both LED bulbs aced our tests, delivering bright, evenly diffused light, and they'll last for years. The 12-watt casts white dimmable light; the other casts warm yellow light.

Behr interior paint

BEHR PREMIUM PLUS

ULTRA ENAMEL, \$34

The paint that Behr produces for Home Depot dominates our tests in all categories. Choose satin for most walls, matte if you want to hide imperfections, and semigloss for trim work and kitchen cabinets.

SKIP IT

Glidden interior paint

Glidden Duo, \$28

We love Home Depot's Behr paints, but we can't say the same for its Glidden line, even though you'll save \$6 or so per gallon. It's not as stain-resistant, plus it tends to stay a bit tacky even after drying.

Flooring

Home Legend Lisbon Natural

HL9311LN, \$3.50 per square foot

With poor resistance to fading, denting, and scratching, this engineered floor didn't measure up to the 10 others we tested.

Home Legend

Jatoba HL89,

\$3 per square foot

This laminate flooring couldn't stand up to heavy foot traffic. Plus it was susceptible to dents.



Home Legend Horizontal Solid Bamboo

Toast BAFL24TO, \$2 per square foot

This flooring has a tempting price, but it was also prone to denting, and its resistance to foot traffic was subpar.



Craftsman and Kenmore are Sears brands that often do well in our tests, but Sears' paints and stains don't. Behr (from Home Depot) and Valspar (from Lowe's) paints offer better quality.

PICK IT

Laundry appliances

KENMORE ELITE 41073 WASHER, \$1,450

Sears has several models on our recommended list of laundry appliances, especially if you spring for the upscale Kenmore Elite line. Among front-loading washers, this unit combines great washing performance and efficiency, plus its jumbo drum can handle 24 pounds of laundry.

KENMORE ELITE 61623 DRYER, \$1,050

It was super at drying laundry quickly. This Kenmore was also one of the quietest models we tested.

Refrigerators

KENMORE ELITE 72193, \$4,150

Solid temperature control and excellent energy efficiency and quietness helped make this 36-inch-wide Kenmore one of our highest-rated French-door bottom-freezers.

KENMORE 7160[3], \$1,900

For half the price, Kenmore's 36-inch-wide French-door model offers great temperature control and a temperature-controlled meat/deli compartment, though it lacks an external ice and water dispenser.

KENMORE 69313, \$700

This 30-inch bottom-freezer is ideal for small kitchens and tight budgets. It provides solid temperature performance and efficiency.



Walmart's house brand is Great Value. It also carries exclusive products from big brand names like Bissell and Char-Broil. Some did well in our tests, but others didn't.



PICK IT

Lightbulbs

GREAT VALUE 60W SOFT WHITE A19 LED DIMMABLE, \$10

It has a great price for an LED, will last for years, and gives off a bright, warm yellow light evenly in all directions.

GREAT VALUE 14W 60W SOFT WHITE CFL, \$1.25

It casts a bright, warm yellow light and has a claimed life of about nine years when used 3 hours per day.

Gas grill

CHAR-BROIL TRU-INFRARED PERFORMANCE SERIES 463434313, \$260

This Walmart exclusive outcooked grills that cost four times as much.

SKIP IT

Vacuum

Bissell Rewind CleanView Pet 18M9W bagless upright, \$90

You can't beat the price, but given the vacuum's poor emissions score (which means it doesn't hold on to all of the dirt it sucks up), you can do better.

Coffeemaker

Bella Linea Collection, \$45

This 12-cup drip coffeemaker comes in bright colors such as red and purple, but it didn't shine in our tests. The coffee is just so-so, mainly because the water doesn't stay hot long enough in the machine to make a strong, tasty brew.

Humidifier

ProCare PCCM-840, \$27

The price is right on this Walmart humidifier, but the moisture output isn't. In fact, it was one of the worst models in our tests at emitting moisture into the air.

Vacuums

KENMORE ELITE 31150 UPRIGHT, \$350

Whether you're looking for an upright or a canister, bagged or bagless, Kenmore is a brand to consider. This bagged upright was impressive on both carpets and floors, plus it sucked up stubborn pet hair.

KENMORE ELITE 21814 CANISTER, \$500

This model is also a standout in carpet, bare-floor, and pet-hair cleaning; it's our top bagged canister vac.

Snow blowers

CRAFTSMAN 88396, \$1,200

Craftsman gets high scores in our snow-blower tests. Among two-stage gas models, this blower almost beat out the top-rated Cub Cadet, and it costs hundreds less.

CRAFTSMAN 88173, \$680

This smaller model cleared snow quickly and efficiently in our tests.

SKIP IT

Cordless drill

Craftsman 11834, \$60

Of the nine Craftsman cordless drills we tested, only model 17310, \$100, made our Smart Pick list. This one had a particularly rough go of it because of subpar power and a dismal run time.

Interior paint

Sears Easy Living Ultra Flat interior paint, \$31

It missed our picks list by a wide margin, in part because its finish isn't as smooth as others.

Exterior stain

Sears Weatherbeater Deck, Fence & Siding Solid, \$32

It didn't hold up as well as others.



THE SMALL STUFF

When it comes to paper towels, detergents, and other everyday products, some warehouse clubs' and mega-stores' in-house brands are better than others.



PICK IT

KIRKLAND SIGNATURE FREE & CLEAR LIQUID LAUNDRY DETERGENT, 11 CENTS PER LOAD

It's tough on blood and grass stains plus ring around the collar.

SKIP IT

Kirkland Signature toilet paper, 12 cents per 100 sheets

It's soft but not especially strong.



PICK IT

UP & UP FULL SHEET PUDDLE BUSTERS PAPER TOWELS, \$2.31 PER 100 SQUARE FEET

It soaks up most spills.

SKIP IT

Up & Up dish packs, 17 cents per load

It did the job on dishes, but it left behind water spots.



PICK IT

GREAT VALUE POWDER PACS, 17 CENTS PER LOAD

This dishwasher detergent cleans well without leaving water spots.

SKIP IT

Great Value tissues, 92 cents per 100 tissues

It's not as strong as other tissues.