

Do I Need a Hammer Drill?

QUICK REFERENCE | REGULAR DRILL vs HAMMER DRILL vs SDS ROTARY HAMMER

Quick answer: If you ever drill into concrete, brick, or block — yes, you need a hammer drill. A regular drill will overheat and stall without progress. For wood, metal, and drywall only, a regular drill is fine. Step up to an SDS-Plus rotary hammer if you drill holes 1/2" and larger regularly.

Quick Decision Guide

Your Project	Need a Hammer Drill?
Mounting a TV on drywall	No
Shelves on a concrete wall	Yes
Deck framing (wood only)	No, unless anchoring to concrete
Ledger board to concrete	Yes
Brick for a hose bib	Yes
Installing Tapcon screws	Yes
Wood, metal, drywall only	No
Electrical boxes in concrete block	Yes

Regular Drill vs Hammer Drill vs SDS Rotary Hammer

Feature	Regular Drill	Hammer Drill	SDS Rotary Hammer
Drills wood, metal, drywall	Yes	Yes	Not designed for it
Drills concrete / brick / block	No	Yes, up to 1/2"	Yes, up to 1-1/8"
Best for	Wood & metal only	Occasional masonry holes under 1/2"	Frequent masonry, holes 1/2" & larger
Impact energy	None	Baseline	5–10x more
Price range	\$40 – \$150	\$80 – \$250	\$150 – \$400

Recommended Tools by Category

Category	DeWalt	Milwaukee	Bosch	Makita
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Hammer Drills	DCD996B	2804-20	HDH183B	XP112Z
Impact Drivers*	DCF887B	2656-20	GDR18V-1860CB25	XDT16Z
SDS-Plus Rotary Hammers	DCH273B	2912-20	GBH18V-26DN	XRH06ZB

*Impact drivers do not drill concrete — listed here for reference only, since they're often mistaken for hammer drills.

Common Mistakes

Forgetting to switch to hammer mode

Most combo drills default to regular drill/driver mode. Check the mode selector collar and set it to the hammer icon.

Using an impact driver on concrete

Impact drivers add rotational impact for driving screws, not the forward-back hammering needed for masonry.

Using a worn or wrong bit

Even with hammer mode engaged, a dull or non-carbide bit won't cut concrete. Use a sharp carbide-tipped masonry bit.

Drilling without enough pressure

Hammer drills need firm, steady downward pressure to keep the hammering action engaged with the material.