

Weigh In!

Want to test a new tool or share a tool-related testimonial, gripe, or technique? Contact us at tools@hanleywood.com.



The angle of the Crescent Bull Bar's (1) jaws can be adjusted by depressing the pin on the head and rotating the handle. When the pin is released, the jaws are locked in their new position.



The head on the Deck Demon (2) is fixed, with nail-puller slots on the tip of each prong. The tool is designed to “pop” deck boards loose from the framing, and can be used with decking that was installed with nails, screws, or hidden fasteners.

Wrecking Bar Roundup

Anyone who builds new decks for a living knows that demolishing an existing deck is often part of the job. This is tough work, and because no two decks are perfectly alike, it helps to have a variety of deconstruction tools at your disposal. Here are some of the specialized wrecking bars that the pros keep in their arsenals of digging irons and pry bars to make this job go more efficiently. *[Editor's note: These reviews originally appeared in Professional Deck Builder.]*

CRESCENT BULL BAR

Crescent Tool's Bull Bar (1) is heavier than a few of the other tools that we own, and it has an indexing head that rotates 180 degrees, allowing the user to select the best angle for maximum leverage and access. In the open position, the head can generate leverage to pop large planks from joists, while the closed position provides for shorter pulls and faster action when you're working in confined spaces.

The gap between the double forks is wide enough to straddle a pair of 2-by joists, and at the center of the jaw is a built-in nail puller, which comes in handy for initially working over a deck before pulling up any boards.

The tool's greatest drawback might be its shorter, 44-inch-long handle—but in tight spaces, that short handle is also a tremendous advantage, especially when coupled with the adjustable head.

Price: \$50. crescenttool.com

Matthew Breyer, CGR, owns Breyer Construction and Landscape, in Reading, Pa. breyerconstruction.com

DECK DEMON

The Deck Demon (2) features all-steel composition—including the handle—akin to a traditional crowbar, except for the welds that attach the head to the shaft. As a result, the shaft applies 100% of the power and leverage to the task at hand, instead of flexing. Barring a weld snapping, the Deck Demon seems nearly indestructible and should last a long time even under heavy use.

The tool has nail-puller slots on the tip of each prong, presumably for removing straggling nails and screws from joists. This feature works but is awkward to use because the handle is offset from the prying point. For this phase of the job, we have another tool that works faster.

Operation is simple: Rest the head of the tool on a single or double joist and apply pressure upward directly under the deck board's connection to the joist. The effort required to “pop” the board off depends on the type of decking being removed, its thickness, and the fasteners used to install it.

During our testing, some in my crew wished that the handle were longer. An extra foot would let the user remain more upright and gain even more leverage when popping boards. It is not a deal breaker, but a similar tool we use for de-boarding that has a longer handle is definitely more comfortable. On the other hand, the longer handle can make that tool tough to use in tight spaces.

The head on the Deck Demon is rigid, so prying can be done in only one direction. This means the operator is usually standing on joists filled with

Photos: 1, Matthew Breyer; 2, Greg DiBernardo

bent nails or screws, which isn't as fast or safe as working from existing deck boards. Sometimes, if the boards are easy to pop off the joists, we can work the tool backward and remain standing on the deck, but it's difficult to get significant leverage that way. Still, the Deck Demon works as advertised and is well-built, earning it a place in our arsenal.

Price: \$70. angelguardproducts.com

Greg DiBernardo owns *Peachtree Decks & Porches* in Alpharetta, Ga.

GUTSTER

The Gutster (3, 4) has been through several design incarnations since its initial release. The original was extremely durable; we've demoed hundreds of decks with our first Gutster, though it's now beat-looking and bent. Then the manufacturer switched to an oval-tubed design, which wasn't nearly as reliable. We had a couple of them, and the head welds cracked after one or two jobs. The manufacturer has since gone back to a 48-inch-long round handle, which seems to have fixed the problem.

This tool provides excellent leverage for prying apart framing and removing the first couple of deck boards. It fits over single or double joists and has two pointed "fangs" you can jam into cracks and joints to gain purchase. The tool is ergonomic but heavy enough to split a 5/4x6 cedar deck board in half if used in a downward stabbing motion.

It also has nail-pulling slots—much like those on a roof shovel—that are useful for quickly de-nailing joists during resurfacing projects. Since the design of the tool requires that the user stand on the joists while prying up deck boards, we don't like to use it for board removal—but we use it for everything else. Sometimes we even dig with it.

Price: \$100. gutstertools.com —G.D.

DUCKBILL DECK WRECKER

To remove deck boards, we rely mainly on the Duckbill Deck Wrecker (5, 6). That's all it's designed to do—and without a doubt, it's one of the fastest ways to get this job done. The long handle provides plenty of prying power, and the head spans the joists and presses up from below in such a way that the user can stand on the deck while levering off boards with amazing speed.

The tool works on boards that are nailed or screwed. Although I've never timed it, I would guess that a two-man crew can de-board a 250-square-foot nailed-down deck in about 15 minutes. The boards come off so quickly that a helper can stay busy clearing and stacking deck boards as they're removed.

We like that we can reverse the head by pulling a pin and flipping it around, because where there isn't enough room for the handle to be levered, we can still get into tight spaces. It's a highly specialized tool that is worth every penny.

Price: \$85. duckbilldeckwrecker.com —G.D.

3



4



With two 1 1/4-inch-wide sharpened steel plates separated by a 2-inch gap, the Gutster (3, 4) can be used to slide behind siding, roofing, flooring, and drywall as well as decking.

5



6



The Duckbill Deck Wrecker (5, 6) has a long rubber-gripped handle for maximum leverage and a reversible head for forward or backward decking removal.



GREENTEK DEMO-DEK

Another quick deck removal tool is the Demo-Dek (7), a hybrid design consisting of an alloy steel 5140 jaw and an ultra-durable laminated bamboo handle. While other deck-board removal tools use the underlying deck joist for prying leverage, the Demo-Dek uses the deck board itself. I was skeptical when I first heard the claims of inventor Ben Weinreich, who is a licensed contractor in Maryland, but putting it into action made me a believer—quickly.

The U-shaped jaw of the standard Demo-Dek, which is the one we tested, is fixed and can accommodate standard 5/4 and 2-by decking. The Demo-Dek can be used at any point on the decking—we didn't have to locate the head of the tool over a joist as with most other decking removal tools we've tried. This feature makes an even bigger difference on decks with doubled joists or wider framing members that can hamper tools—to the point of making them useless—that rely on a joist for leverage.

The Demo-Dek generates a large amount of prying torque. We used the tool on both nailed and screwed pressure-treated 5/4 and 2-by decking, and it didn't slow down a bit. To prevent soft or rotted boards from splitting lengthwise between the fasteners, we found that it was cleaner to work down the length of the board and pry incrementally, even though the tool provided so much torque that we were tempted to break the board free in one big pull. We used this approach more often on 5/4 boards than on 2-bys.

In addition to appreciating the power the Demo-Dek provides, we liked the way the tool can capture a deck board in its jaw. This allowed us to hold onto a removed board and move it around, on or off the deck. Other tools break the board free, but then the user has to bend down to grab the board or kick it to move it out of the way. Being able to swing the removed board to wherever it made sense and flick it out of the jaw without missing a beat was a huge time-saver. And for any fasteners left behind, the Demo-Dek has a built-in nail puller.

Price: \$120. greentektools.com —G.D.

The Demo-Dek (7) has a beefy laminated bamboo handle and an alloy steel jaw design that allows the tool to remove deck boards without relying on a joist or a beam for leverage.



A PAIR OF JOIST TAMERS

I frame decks with southern yellow pine, which tends to go a little wild at times, especially when left sitting in an unrestrained pile. Straightening out twisted joists during installation used to be a pain until I happened upon a couple of specialty pry bars.

Mayhew Tweaker. The business end of the Tweaker (8) has a C-shaped jaw that grips the edge of a joist. The in-line foot-long handle gives plenty of leverage to “right” an errant joist end. After I secure one end of the joist in a hanger, or with a few more nails than usual, I use the Tweaker to adjust the opposite end upright—then nail it.

Price: \$30. mayhew.com

Stanley FuBar. The F-shaped head of Stanley's multipurpose 30-inch Fat-max FuBar utility bar (9) grips around joists the same way as the Tweaker, and an offset design gives you a little more leverage. The back of the “F” has a striking face for pounding, and the handle end is a pry bar with nail-pulling slots—making it a good all-around tool for demolition and construction. Stanley manufactures shorter versions of this tool, and other manufacturers offer similar variations that can be used the same way.

Price: \$70. stanleytools.com



The jaws of the Mayhew Tweaker (8) and the Stanley FuBar (9) are designed to grip the edge of 2-by framing so that twisted joists can be easily leveraged into position with one hand.

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Photos: 7, Greg DiBernardo; 9, Mike Guertin