A PLANNING WORKBOOK

The Home Gym *Buying* Checklist

Plan the space, set the budget and buy the right equipment in the right order — with worksheets for comparing real options and the checks to make before anything is delivered.

01 Start with the lifter
02 Measure the space
03 Set a realistic budget
04 Build in stages
05 Evaluate the equipment
06 Safety and compatibility
07 Make the decision
08 The final checklist

Decide what you need before you decide what to buy

Most home gyms go wrong in the same way: equipment bought one appealing product at a time, before anyone measured the room or decided what the gym is for. This workbook reverses the order. Work through it with a pencil (print edition) or alongside your browser (digital edition, where every reference is a link).

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01 **Start with the lifter**
Goals, experience and the movements your gym must support

02 **Measure the space**
Room, ceiling, access, floor and the footprint in use

03 **Set a realistic budget**
The full cost, phased over the first year

04 **Build in stages**
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05 **Evaluate the equipment**
Category worksheets for comparing real options

06 **Safety and compatibility**
The checks that keep a home gym safe to train in alone

07 **Make the decision**
Compare alternatives on what matters, not on marketing

08 **The final checklist**
Research, measure, order, install

How to read the labels

EVIDENCE Supported by research or an official guideline. The number links to the source on the last page.

MANUFACTURER A figure only the manufacturer can confirm. Check the current listing or manual before you order — capacities and dimensions vary between models and change between versions.

EDITORIAL LiftEvidence's recommendation, from our published buying guides. Reasoned, not measured: we have not tested these products ourselves.

Three rules worth keeping

The gym serves the programme. Volume, effort and consistency drive results far more than specific equipment [2] EVIDENCE

Buy the core, train, then expand. A few months of training tells you what is missing better than any list. EDITORIAL

Spend on what bears load. Rack, safeties, bench and bar; save on accessories. EDITORIAL

What you already own

ITEM	CONDITION	KEEP, REPLACE OR SELL — AND WHY

Companion guide. The ranked buying order, with the current top-rated and value pick for each step, is in Best Home Gym Equipment: What to Buy First.

01 Start with the lifter

Write down what the gym is for before you look at a single product. The answers decide whether you need a barbell setup at all.

Primary goal (tick one or two)

- ☐ Build muscle
- ☐ Get stronger on the barbell lifts
- ☐ General fitness and health
- ☐ Conditioning and endurance
- ☐ Sport or rehabilitation support

Who and how often

People using the gym

Heights / body weights

Sessions per week, each

Session length

Heaviest lift now (and in a year)

Experience

☐ New to lifting ☐ 1–3 years ☐ 3+ years

Movements the gym must support

PATTERN	EXAMPLES	EQUIPMENT THAT COVERS IT EDITORIAL	NEEDED?
Squat	Goblet or barbell squat	Dumbbells or kettlebell · rack, bar and plates	☐
Hinge	Romanian deadlift, deadlift, swing	Dumbbells · bar and plates · kettlebell	☐
Single-leg	Split squat, lunge, step-up	Dumbbells and a bench	☐
Horizontal push	Bench press, push-up	Bench + dumbbells · rack with safeties for a barbell	☐
Vertical push	Overhead press	Dumbbells · rack and bar (check ceiling)	☐
Horizontal pull	Rows	Dumbbells and a bench · cable machine	☐
Vertical pull	Pull-up, lat pulldown	Pull-up bar or station · rack bar · cable machine	☐
Carry & conditioning	Carries, swings, intervals	Kettlebell or dumbbells · one cardio machine	☐

WHAT THE EVIDENCE SAYS

Adults should do muscle-strengthening activity on two or more days a week, plus regular aerobic activity [1] EVIDENCE Plan for every person, every session.

Free weights and machines produce similar muscle growth; strength gains are more specific to the equipment you train with [3] EVIDENCE A barbell matters most when barbell strength is the goal.

Muscle grows across a wide range of loads when sets are taken close to failure [4] EVIDENCE Lighter equipment stays useful longer than most buyers expect.

Result of this step: if barbell strength is *not* a goal, you can probably skip the rack, bar and plates — and most of the cost.

02 Measure the space

Measure twice, and measure the equipment *in use* — loaded, unfolded, with you on it — not the box size or the storage footprint.

MEASUREMENT	WHAT TO INCLUDE	YOUR FIGURE
Room length × width	Wall to wall, at floor level	
Usable floor area	Minus doors that swing in, radiators, storage you keep	
Ceiling height	At the lowest point over the training area	
Lowest obstruction	Beam, light fitting, garage door and opener when open	
Doorways and route in	Narrowest door, stair turns, lift or hallway corners	
Floor type	Concrete slab, timber, upstairs room, rented flooring	
Neighbours and noise	Who is below or next door; training times	
Ventilation and climate	Window, fan, humidity (basement, garage)	
Power and lighting	Sockets near cardio machines; light over the rack	

Footprint in use

EQUIPMENT	STORED (L × W)	IN USE (L × W)	HEIGHT + CLEARANCE	FITS?
Rack or stand				
Bench (in use)				
Barbell + plates loaded				
Dumbbells + stand				
Cable machine				
Cardio machine				
Storage				

CLEARANCE CHECKS EDITORIAL

- **Width for a barbell:** a 7 ft Olympic bar is about 86 in long, plus room to load plates on both ends — see rack dimensions.
- **Height for a rack:** the rack's height plus head clearance for pull-ups and room for overhead pressing — ceiling height.
- **Behind a treadmill:** leave the clear space the manual specifies; our guide covers space and power. MANUFACTURER

FLOOR AND NEIGHBOURS EDITORIAL

- Concrete is forgiving; upstairs rooms need rubber flooring and weights lowered under control rather than dropped.
- Flooring is not designed for repeated drops: add a platform or drop pads for heavy deadlifts — flooring thickness.
- Check wall fixings before buying anything wall-mounted; many apartment walls are plasterboard.

03 Set a realistic budget

Price the whole setup, not the headline product. Then split it into phases, so the first purchase is the core you will use every session — not a complete gym on day one.

COST LINE	INCLUDE	ESTIMATE	ACTUAL
Equipment	The pieces themselves, at today's price		
Delivery	Freight for heavy items; curbside vs room of choice		
Assembly and installation	Your time, a second person, anchors or fixings		
Flooring and protection	Mats, tiles, platform or drop pads		
Accessories	Collars, attachments, chalk, bands		
Storage	Plate tree, bar holder, dumbbell rack		
Maintenance	Lubricant, rust care, replacement cables or pads		
Total			

Phase it

PHASE 1 · NOW

The core for your goal. Train with it for a few months.

Budget

PHASE 2 · IN 3–6 MONTHS

What your training has shown is missing.

Budget

PHASE 3 · LATER

Comfort, variety and storage.

Budget

WHERE TO SPEND EDITORIAL

- On load-bearing equipment: a stable rack with safeties, a solid bench, a bar you trust.
- On flooring before the first heavy session, not after the first dent.
- On warranty and replacement parts for anything with cables, mechanisms or motors.

WHERE TO SAVE EDITORIAL

- Accessories and attachments — add them when a programme calls for them.
- Capacity far beyond your needs: see what bench capacity and rack capacity actually mean.
- Machines that need a monthly subscription to be useful.

04 Build in stages

Pick the route closest to your situation. Every route is a starting point, not a shopping list: not every reader needs a rack, a cable machine or a treadmill. EDITORIAL

Minimal-space apartment gym

A corner of a flat, a rented home, neighbours below.

BUY FIRST Adjustable Dumbbells · Weight Benches · Gym Flooring

ADD NEXT Pull-Up & Dip Stations · Kettlebells

CAN WAIT A rack and barbell (noise, floor loading and space), large cardio machines.

WHY Dumbbells and a bench cover a complete full-body programme in a few square metres, and higher-rep sets keep lighter dumbbells productive for longer.

CHECK Wall fixings before any wall-mounted pull-up bar; lower weights under control.

Apartment setup →

Budget-conscious starter gym

Any room; the aim is the most training for the least money.

BUY FIRST Adjustable Dumbbells · Weight Benches

ADD NEXT Pull-Up & Dip Stations · Gym Flooring

CAN WAIT Cable machine, specialist bars, a second cardio option.

WHY The first two steps of our buying order: together they cover most exercises in very little space. A pull-up station adds vertical pulling.

CHECK Dumbbell weight range and increments against your heaviest lift; bench stability before features.

Buying order →

Dedicated spare-room gym

A spare bedroom, office or basement you can give to training.

BUY FIRST Adjustable Dumbbells · Weight Benches · Gym Flooring

ADD NEXT Squat Racks · Cable Machines · Rowing Machines

CAN WAIT Heavy dropped-barbell work upstairs; storage until plates accumulate.

WHY A room changes what is possible — if ceiling height and floor allow it. Measure for the rack before choosing the barbell route.

CHECK Ceiling height first; humidity in basements (bar and plate finishes).

Spare-room setup →

Serious garage gym

A concrete slab, room to load a bar, heavy barbell goals.

BUY FIRST Squat Racks · Barbells · Weight Plates · Weight Benches · Gym Flooring

ADD NEXT Adjustable Dumbbells · Lifting Platforms · Gym Storage

CAN WAIT Cable machine and lifting belt until the basics are in regular use.

WHY A rack with safeties is what makes heavy squats and presses safe without a spotter; the bar, plates and bench complete one system.

CHECK Clearance under the open garage door; temperature and humidity swings.

Garage setup →

Not sure which route fits? Three of the four start with adjustable dumbbells and a bench. The barbell route is the exception: choose it only if steps 01 and 02 say barbell strength is a goal and your ceiling and floor allow it.

Equipment that only works as a system

Some purchases depend on each other. Buy them as a set, and check the connections before ordering any one of them. EDITORIAL

IF YOU BUY…	YOU ALSO NEED…	CHECK THAT…
Barbells	A rack or stand with safeties, plates, collars, flooring	Plate holes match the sleeves (Olympic 2 in plates for Olympic bars); the bar fits the rack's width with room to load. MANUFACTURER
Squat Racks	A bar, plates, a bench that fits inside, safeties	Safeties are included in the listing you buy; the bench fits between the uprights; the rack fits under the ceiling. MANUFACTURER
Weight Plates	A bar with enough sleeve length, storage	Bumper thickness against sleeve length — bumpers run out of sleeve space long before iron: sleeve space.
Weight Benches	Dumbbells or a rack and bar	Bench height and pad width suit barbell pressing inside your rack; stated capacity includes you, the bar and the plates. MANUFACTURER
Cable Machines	Attachments, flooring, ceiling height	The cable ratio — the weight you feel is not always the stack weight: cable ratio. MANUFACTURER
Treadmills / cardio	A suitable socket, clearance, a mat	Power requirements and clearance in the manual; deck size for runners: running deck. MANUFACTURER

Your plan

STAGE	EQUIPMENT	DEPENDS ON	BUDGET	DONE
Buy first				
Add next				
Can wait				

Floor plan sketch — one square = 1 ft (or 30 cm). Mark doors, windows and each piece's footprint in use.

05 Evaluate the equipment

One worksheet per category, in rough order of importance for most home gyms. Fill in only the categories your plan needs. Record where every figure came from: a specification you cannot source is a specification you cannot rely on. MANUFACTURER

Adjustable Dumbbells

CORE FOR MOST HOME GYMS

WHAT MATTERS MOST EDITORIAL

1. Weight range covers your heaviest lift, with room to progress
2. Increment size — small jumps help on lighter exercises
3. Mechanism: speed of change vs robustness; plastic parts
4. Length at maximum load — comfort in presses and curls
5. Drop guidance, warranty and replacement parts

	OPTION A	OPTION B	OPTION C
Product / model			
Verified dimensions			
Capacity / range			
Compatibility			
Warranty			
Total price (delivered)			
Advantages			
Trade-offs			
Spec source (link)			
Decision			

Weight Benches

CORE FOR MOST HOME GYMS

WHAT MATTERS MOST EDITORIAL

1. Stability first: wide base, rigid back pad, no wobble reports
2. Flat/incline or FID — which positions you will really use
3. Pad width and gap between seat and back pad
4. Bench height for barbell pressing and foot position
5. Capacity covers you + bar + plates (manufacturer figure)

	OPTION A	OPTION B	OPTION C
Product / model			
Verified dimensions			
Capacity / range			
Compatibility			
Warranty			
Total price (delivered)			
Advantages			
Trade-offs			
Spec source (link)			
Decision			

Barbells and weight plates

CORE ONLY FOR BARBELL STRENGTH

WHAT MATTERS MOST EDITORIAL

1. Bar type for your lifts: power, multipurpose or specialty
2. Shaft diameter, whip and knurl for your grip
3. Sleeves: bearings or bushings; length vs plate thickness
4. Finish and corrosion resistance for your room
5. Plates: bumper vs iron by what you do; accuracy

	OPTION A	OPTION B	OPTION C
Product / model			
Verified dimensions			
Capacity / range			
Compatibility			
Warranty			
Total price (delivered)			
Advantages			
Trade-offs			
Spec source (link)			
Decision			

Squat Racks

CORE ONLY FOR HEAVY BARBELL TRAINING

WHAT MATTERS MOST EDITORIAL

1. Safeties included and set just below the bottom of each lift
2. Stability: footprint, upright size, anchoring options
3. Height, width and depth against your room
4. Rackable and safety ratings, not only “total” capacity
5. Hole spacing and adjustability for bench and squat

	OPTION A	OPTION B	OPTION C
Product / model			
Verified dimensions			
Capacity / range			
Compatibility			
Warranty			
Total price (delivered)			
Advantages			
Trade-offs			
Spec source (link)			
Decision			

Cable Machines

OPTIONAL — AFTER THE BASICS

WHAT MATTERS MOST EDITORIAL

1. Cable ratio and real resistance at the handle
2. How much resistance you need for rows and pulldowns
3. Smoothness and pulley quality
4. Footprint, height and ceiling clearance
5. Weight stack vs plate-loaded; included attachments

	OPTION A	OPTION B	OPTION C
Product / model			
Verified dimensions			
Capacity / range			
Compatibility			
Warranty			
Total price (delivered)			
Advantages			
Trade-offs			
Spec source (link)			
Decision			

Treadmills and other cardio

OPTIONAL — ONE CARDIO MACHINE YOU WILL USE

WHAT MATTERS MOST EDITORIAL

1. Treadmill: continuous (not peak) motor rating
2. Treadmill: running deck length and width for your stride
3. Rower: resistance type, rail length and capacity
4. Bike: type, resistance system and fit range
5. Subscriptions: is the machine useful without one?

	OPTION A	OPTION B	OPTION C
Product / model			
Verified dimensions			
Capacity / range			
Compatibility			
Warranty			
Total price (delivered)			
Advantages			
Trade-offs			
Spec source (link)			
Decision			

Gym Flooring, storage and platforms

CORE WHEREVER WEIGHTS ARE USED

WHAT MATTERS MOST EDITORIAL

1. Rubber or foam: rubber for weights, foam for bodyweight
2. Thickness for what you do; platform for dropped barbells
3. Odour and ventilation, especially indoors
4. Storage: plate trees or horizontal racks, wall fixings
5. Platform or drop pads for heavy deadlifts

	OPTION A	OPTION B	OPTION C
Product / model			
Verified dimensions			
Capacity / range			
Compatibility			
Warranty			
Total price (delivered)			
Advantages			
Trade-offs			
Spec source (link)			
Decision			

Essential accessories

BUY WHEN THE PLAN CALLS FOR THEM

ITEM	NEEDED FOR	FITS / COMPATIBLE WITH	NOW	LATER
Barbell collars	Any loaded barbell work		☐	☐
Rack attachments (dip, landmine)	Extra exercises on a rack you own		☐	☐
Cable attachments	Rows, pulldowns, pushdowns		☐	☐
Lifting belt	Heavy squats and deadlifts — optional		☐	☐
Mats under cardio machines	Floor protection, less vibration		☐	☐
Chalk, bands, timer	Grip, assistance, conditioning		☐	☐

Before you fill these in: each category's buying guide compares the current options on the same published criteria and flags where manufacturer and Amazon figures disagree — start from the buying guides and copy the figures with their source.

06 Safety and compatibility

Home lifters usually train alone. These checks separate the safeguards that only the manufacturer can confirm from our general recommendations. We do not set universal thresholds: the figures that matter are the ones in your equipment's manual.

CHECK	CONFIRM THAT…	BASIS	DONE
Rack safeties	Safeties are included with the exact listing you buy, and you set them just below the bottom of each lift.	EVIDENCE Most weight-training injuries treated in US emergency departments involved free weights, most often a weight dropping on the person [5]	☐
Load ratings	Rackable, J-cup and safety ratings cover your heaviest planned load; bench capacity covers you, the bar and the plates.	MANUFACTURER Ratings have no shared test standard — when sources disagree, use the lower figure	☐
Rack and bench	The bench fits between the uprights; the pad height lets you set your feet; J-cups reach your unrack height.	MANUFACTURER Rack and bench manuals	☐
Bar and plates	Plate holes match the sleeve diameter; total plate width fits the sleeves; collars fit the bar.	MANUFACTURER Bar and plate specifications	☐
Anchoring	The rack is bolted if the manufacturer requires it, into a suitable floor or platform; wall-mounted kit goes into studs or masonry.	MANUFACTURER Installation manual	☐
Clearance	Space to load and walk out of the rack; the clear area the manual specifies around moving equipment such as treadmills and rowers.	MANUFACTURER Manual; our space checks on page 4	☐
Floor	Rubber flooring where weights are used; a platform or drop pads before any dropped barbell.	EDITORIAL Flooring guide	☐
Maintenance	Bolts re-tightened after the first weeks; cables, pulleys and belts inspected as the manual schedules; steel wiped down in humid rooms.	MANUFACTURER Manual maintenance schedule	☐

READ BEFORE BUYING

- Safety features that matter — squat rack guide
- Anchoring — when bolting matters
- Why bench stability matters most
- Storage safety — keeping plates off the floor

WHEN THE MANUAL IS MISSING

- Ask the seller for the manual before ordering; many manufacturers publish them on their support pages.
- If capacity, dimensions or included safeties cannot be confirmed, treat the figure as unknown — not as the best case.

07 Make the decision

Score each shortlisted option from 0 to 3 on every line, multiply by the weight, and add up. Change the weights to match your priorities — the point is to decide on the same criteria for every option.

EDITORIAL

CRITERION	WHAT IT MEANS	WEIGHT	A	B	C
Suitability	Supports the movements and goals from step 01	×3			
Fit	Fits the room in use, including clearance (step 02)	×3			
Verified specs	Key figures confirmed by the manufacturer, with a source	×2			
Compatibility	Works with what you own and plan to buy (step 04)	×2			
Durability	Construction, warranty, parts, consistent owner feedback	×2			
Total cost	Delivered, installed and maintained (step 03)	×1			
Long-term use	Still useful as you get stronger; no subscription lock-in	×1			
Total					

SIGNS OF REAL VALUE

- Specifications published in full, and consistent between the manufacturer and the store listing.
- Owner feedback that repeats the same strengths over time, from verified buyers.
- A warranty with a named term, and replacement parts you can actually order.
- It does the job your programme needs, at the size your room allows.

SIGNS OF ATTRACTIVE MARKETING

- Very high capacity figures with no stated basis — a bigger number is not evidence of a more stable product.
- A high star rating from few reviews, or reviews about delivery rather than use.
- “Replaces a whole gym” claims; features you will not use; a subscription to unlock basics.
- Missing dimensions, motor ratings or cable ratios.

Record the decision

Chosen option

Runner-up

Why it won

What would change my mind

Total delivered price

Order date / return deadline

How LiftEvidence scores products on published criteria: methodology · editorial policy.

08 The final checklist

Keep this page next to you while you research, measure, order and install.

Research

- [ ] Goal and movements written down (step 01)
- [ ] Starting route chosen (step 04)
- [ ] Shortlist of 2–3 options per category
- [ ] Every key figure has a source

Measure

- [ ] Room, ceiling and lowest obstruction
- [ ] Doorways and the route in
- [ ] Footprint in use marked on the floor
- [ ] Floor type and noise checked

Compare and order

- [ ] Decision table completed (step 07)
- [ ] Compatibility checked as a system
- [ ] Total delivered price, delivery option and returns policy
- [ ] Warranty terms saved

Install and first session

- [ ] Flooring down before the equipment
- [ ] Assembled per the manual; anchored if required
- [ ] Safeties set and tested empty
- [ ] Bolts re-checked after the first weeks

Keep going. What to buy first, with current picks · All buying guides · Compare products side by side · Exercise guides · Training tools

Sources

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