SNOW REMOVAL EQUIPMENT GUIDE

EXTENSIVE GUIDE TO THE BEST SNOW REMOVAL EQUIPMENT FOR YOUR BUSINESS

- TOP 3 TIRE BRANDS
- BUYING A GREAT SNOW PLOW
- 6 BEST TRUCKS
- BEST SHOVELS FOR EVERY USE

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GETTING YOUR EQUIPMENT READY FOR THE SEASON...

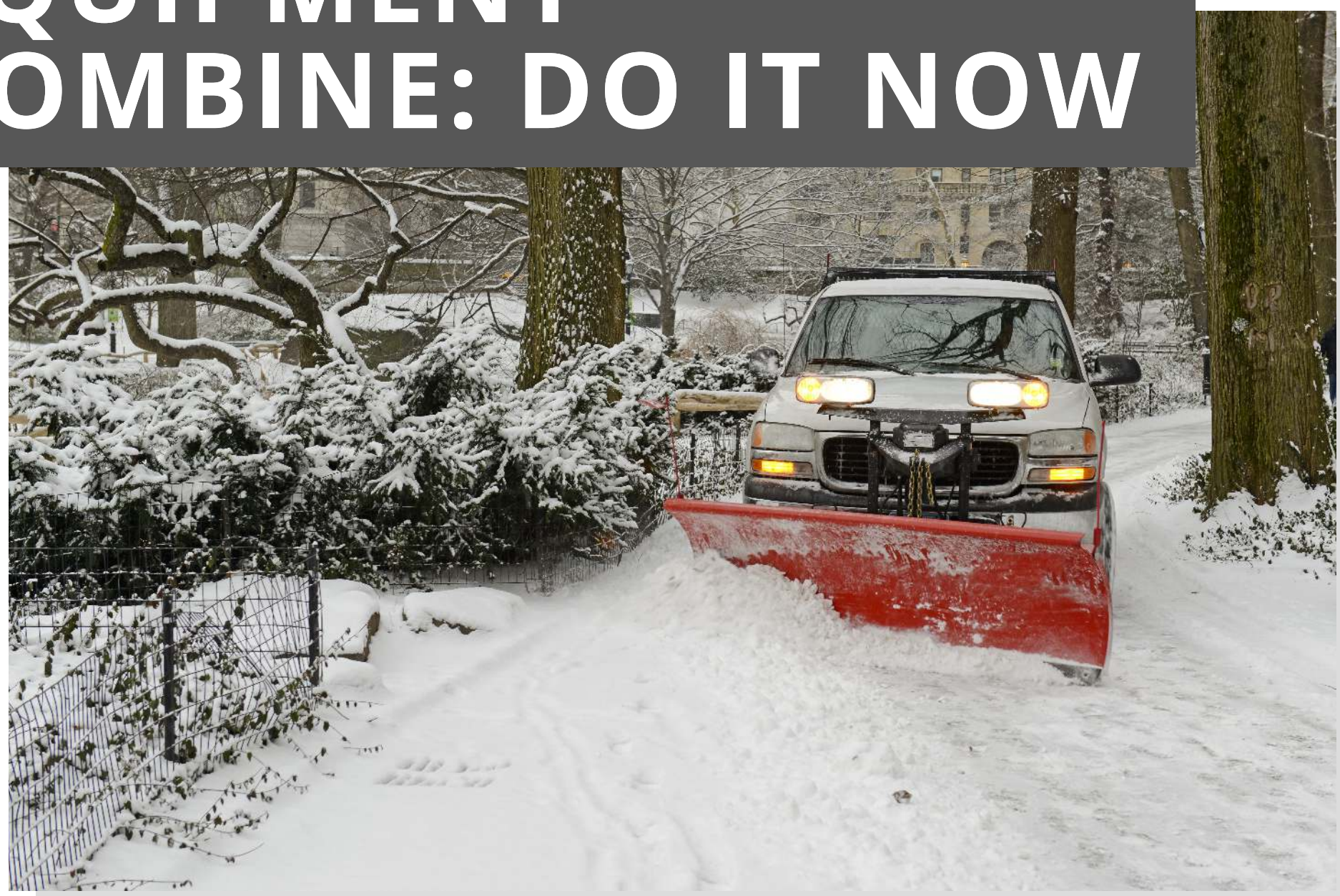
The first event of the season is rolling in. Everyone else sees inconvenience, but you see dollar signs. You think you're ready to tackle it.

As your crew leaves the shop, their plow drops to the ground and starts scraping the pavement. Ugh. Should've replaced the hydraulic fluid and checked the seals.

Now the crew has to move from one truck to the other, wasting valuable time. As they drive past, you notice a couple of gouges in the plow, speckled with rust. Should have been sanded down and painted last season. The rust is only gonna get worse.

"Don't forget to inspect before the season starts."

EQUIPMENT COMBINE: DO IT NOW



You should begin your equipment inspections at least 2 months ahead of season. The earlier you start, the sooner you can address issues.

Conduct visual inspections:

- ☑ Check welded points for integrity
- ☑ Check hoses for corrosion or leaky seals
- ☑ Check plow edges for excess wear and tear
- ☑ Look for tiny patches of rust, then sand or file and touch up with enamel paint.

Then start on seasonal maintenance:

- ☑ Clean electrical connections
- ☑ Tighten trip and return springs
- ☑ Flush and replace hydraulic fluids
- ☑ Test/charge batteries that were left sitting
- ☑ Re-torque fasteners (once plows are installed)

SHOVELS: WHY YOU SHOULD BUY THE BEST SHOVELS

Snow shovels are not the same. Just because a shovel is passable for a homeowner to shovel their drive once a week doesn't mean that it'll work for your crews.

The right shovel is one that limits the impact on your employees' bodies. Some shovels are designed with this in mind: they have ergonomic handles and are made of lightweight materials. These shovels are more expensive. However, they will improve your employees' well-being AND your profitability.

BLADE SIZE AND SHAPE

30” Plow-style

Best for pushing or scraping.

24” Plow-style

Biggest for true shoveling, can do double-duty as a pusher. Good for shoveling powder.

18” Plow-style

Best for shoveling packed, wet snow. A smaller, lighter shovel-load helps protect employees from trying to lift too much snow.

Aluminium

It won’t rust. Not really good for pushing or serious shoveling, good for breaking up big drifts or riding down a hill.

Square Nose

Good for scraping frozen layers of snow off of sidewalks and driveways.

Round Nose

Good for breaking up the frozen berm at the base of snow plow drifts.

Scraper

When a square-nosed shovel can’t break the ice, pull out the big guns (or in this case, the smaller, blade-like gun).

SHAFT AND HANDLE DESIGN

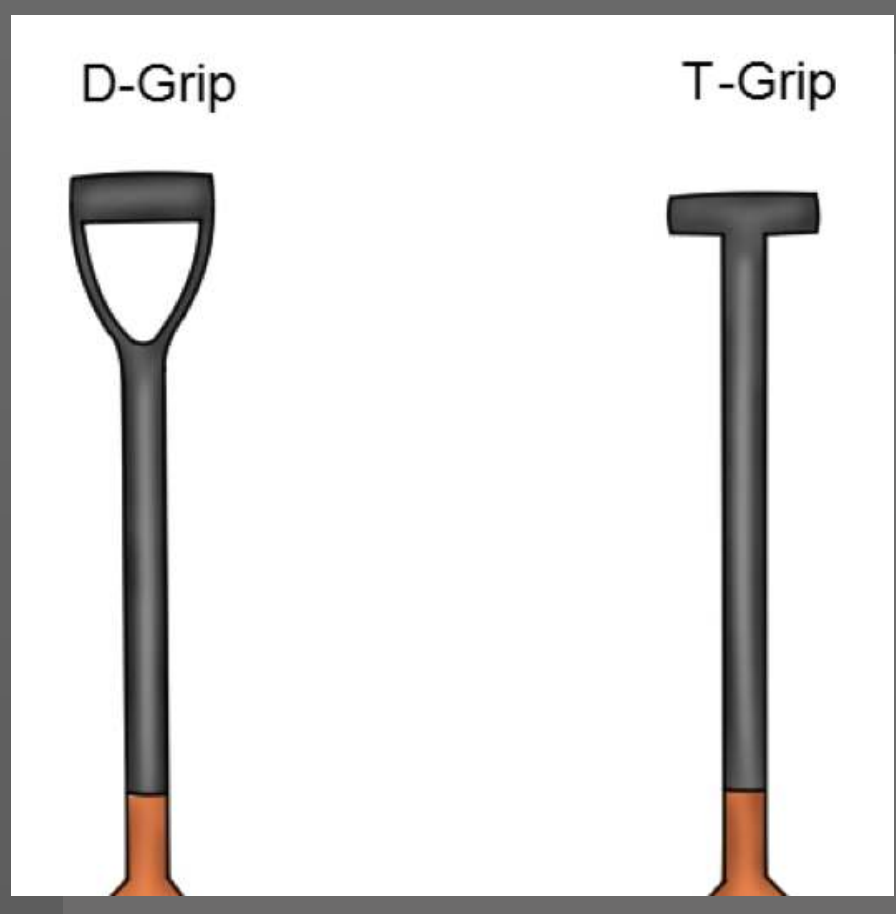
From left to right Gooseneck, Straight, and Curved shafts. Via TheSweetHome

Straight : The traditional shaft. Good for pushing and minimal usage tools (scrapers, square/round nose, 30”, etc.) Not ideal for lifting.

Gooseneck : A straight shaft that curves like a goose neck. This is good for medium-use equipment. You can do some shoveling with it, though it gets hard on the wrists. It keeps you from hunching over when pushing or scooping.

Curved : A shaft that curves in the middle. This reduces hunching and is ergonomically easier on your back. Your heavy-use shovels should use

D-Grip : Available on any of the above shafts, a D-Grip lets the user absorb the shock of shoveling into their palm and gives them greater control over the load of snow. D-Grip shovels allow your hands to absorb shocks



SHOVEL MATERIALS

WOOD

Heavy, commonly used in cheaper shovels.

ALUMINIUM

Doesn't rust, lightweight, rigid. Watch out for scraping decks and other soft surfaces, if you're using an aluminum-bladed shovel.

PLASTIC

Lightweight, rigid, expensive. It has less give than plastic and is lighter than metal, making an ideal, if expensive, material for handles.

FIBERGLASS

Lightweight, but less rigid. Common in plow-style shovels. Plastic-bladed shovels will not scratch or gouge softer surfaces.

THE BEST SNOW SHOVELS FOR YOUR SNOW BUSINESS

There's an extensive write-up (complete with links to academic research into the ergonomics of shoveling) on TheSweetHome that justifies the following recommendations:

BEST ALL-AROUND SHOVEL

- True Temper's 18" Ergonomic Mountain Mover
- The handle is metal, curved and features an oversized D-Grip for gloved hands.
- The blade is plastic with a nylon strip; it starts flat for pushing and falls into a scoop for, well, scooping. The shovel is decently light at 3lbs

THE ALL-AROUND RUNNER UP

- Bully Tools' Combination Snow Shovel
- The handle is fiberglass, straight (but extra long) and features a D-Grip. The blade is plastic and definitely lends itself to pushing, rather than scooping. It lacks any leading edge, but TheSweetHome's extensive testing found the shovel to be exceptionally durable even without one. It's heavier than the True Temper at 3.6lbs but if you need to replace a shovel midseason, these will be easier to locate than the True Tempers.

THE PUSHER

- Bully Tools' 92813 Snow Pusher
- The handle is fiberglass, straight (again, extra long) and features a D-Grip. It has a 27" plastic blade with no leading edge. It weighs 4.85lbs but that's less of a factor with a pushing shovel (you're not lifting it as often).

Expect to spend around $30 per shovel. Consider the cost-benefits of a more efficient, less strained crew. Happy employees are faster. Faster employees are more profitable.

BONUS: HIGH-USAGE SHOVEL TIP

You can purchase an additional handle for high-usage shovels. It may not be necessary for powder, but with heavy, wet snow you may find it a lifesaver.

Image via The Home Depot.

Hardware stores sell bolt-on assist handles that go midway down the shovel handle. They keep you closer to upright which reduces back strain. TheSweetHome's analysis recommended TrentCo's ProHandle as the most durable solution. It's designed for straight-handled shovels but fits on the True Temper curved handle recommended above. They go for ~$20, though you may be able to find cheaper alternatives.

SNOW PLOWS

How to Find the Right Plow for Your Snow Removal Company

Picking a snow plow for your snow removal business isn't as hard as forums and Facebook groups make it seem. You only need three facts/decisions:

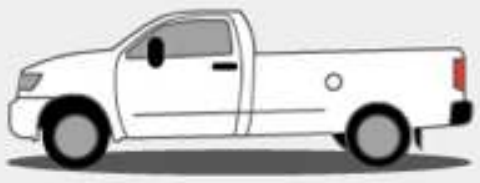
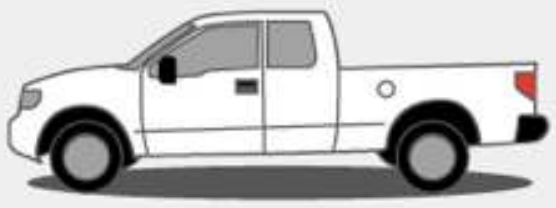
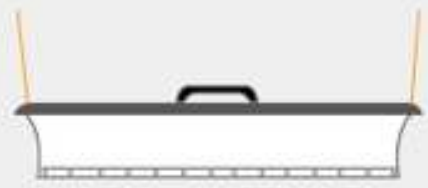
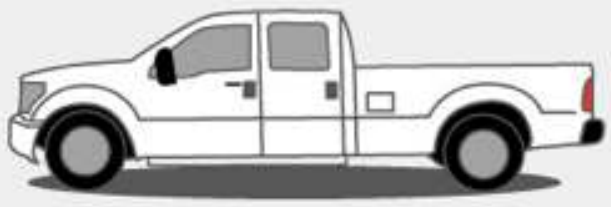
- How much weight can your truck carry on the front axle?
- What kind of plowing will you be doing (residential/commercial)?
- What trade-off are you willing to accept for the material the blade is made of?

Once you answer those three questions, you can go find the right snow plow for your business.

HOW MUCH PLOW CAN YOU HANDLE?

This is a pretty straightforward question. Find the Front Gross Axle Vehicle Weight Rating (FGAVWR) for your truck. You should be able to find it with a quick Google search or by consulting your owner's manual.

In general, a standard pickup can carry a plow that's 6' to 7 ½'. A ½ ton pickup can carry 7' to 7 ½' and a ¾ or full-size pickup can carry a plow 7 ½' to 8

Truck	Plow Size
 Standard Pickup	 6 - 7'
 1/2 Ton Pickup	 7 - 7 1/2'
 Full-Size Pickup	 7 1/2 - 8'

WHAT SHOULD YOUR PLOW BE MADE OF (STEEL OR POLY)?

Plows are made from three materials, each has strong pluses and drawbacks:

STAINLESS STEEL - A BALANCE OF STRENGTH AND UN-STICKINESS

Stainless steel is the most tried-and-true plow material but it will be the most expensive option.

CONS:

- Generally more expensive

PROS:

- Finer finish than regular steel.
- Less susceptible to rust and corrosion.
- Usually coated to help snow slough off more easily.

TRADITIONAL STEEL - THE BUDGET FRIENDLY OPTION

Traditional steel is typically strong, but not necessarily the most durable. If the budget is not your primary concern, this is probably not the right snow plow for your business.

PROS:

- Pushes snow effectively
- Moderately less expensive than stainless or poly

CONS:

- More susceptible to collecting frozen snow
- More likely to succumb to rust and corrosion
- More frequently it will need to be replaced

POLY PLOWS – NATURAL UN-STICKINESS

Plastic? For a snow plow? It’s not a joke. Poly plows are being made in droves.

PROS:

- Slightly less expensive
- Don’t have to be coated to slough off snow (they do it naturally)

CONS:

- Plastic is weaker than steel
- Heavier than a similarly sized steel plow (due to reinforcing with steel frames)

You’re weighing the added efficiency of snow not sticking to the plow against the fuel costs of a heavier plow. It’s approaching a wash (a plow covered in snow is also heavier than a dry plow).

WHAT BLADE SHAPE WORKS BEST?

YOU HAVE TWO OPTIONS HERE: STRAIGHT OR V-PLOWS

Doing mostly residential work?
You'll want a straight blade. Straight blades:

- Easily clear driveways
- Require a few minutes of training
- Are cheaper because they are less complicated to produce

Working commercial jobs or plowing complete neighborhoods with giant circle drives? Choose V-plows. V-plows are:

- Efficient at cutting through caked - on snow in large areas
- Have less wear - and - tear in storm situations
- More complicated (employees will need to be trained)

Depending on the kind of service you provide, you can determine the right snow plow blade-shape for your business.

TRUCKS

The Best of the Best: Trucks that'll Scare the Snow into Neat Berms

All of these trucks can be fitted with a plow. They have a minimum of 300 HP and either had...

- Editor's Choice status with Car and Driver
- Or were on the Top Consumer Rating list at Kelly Blue Book 2017

Chevy Colorado

GMC Sierra

Chevy Silverado

Ford F-150

Nissan Titan XD

Ford F-250

Chevy Colorado

Base Price: $20,000

MPG: 16/18

Horsepower: 308

A good beginner truck with just enough power to keep you going. It can easily become a $40,000 to $50,000 monster with factory options.

GMC Sierra

Base Price: $29,700

MPG: 15/21

Horsepower: 365

Full disclosure: This is one of the trucks with better fuel economy in the list.

**Not given by the manufacturer*

Chevy Silverado

Base Price: $29,080

MPG: 15/21

Horsepower: 365

A powerful Chevy with more (luxury) interior options. Less likely for a fleet, but a definite upgrade option for owners.

Ford F-150

Base Price: $28,675

MPG: 17/21

Horsepower: 375

This is the best-selling truck. Not in America. In the world. All those billions of people can't be wrong.

**Not given by the manufacturer*

Nissan Titan XD

Base Price: $31,950

MPG: *

Horsepower: 390

The EPA numbers aren’t reported by the manufacturer. Presumably because they’re not stellar. Included because of its status on both the Car and Driver and KBB lists.

Ford F-250

Base Price: $33,830

MPG: 17/21

Horsepower: 385

EPA numbers also not reported by the manufacturer (again, probably because of terrible MPGs). This is the stronger, faster father of the F-150. A great option when you need more than the base level of power.

**Not given by the manufacturer*

TIRES

BEST SNOW TIRES FOR MAXIMUM TRACTION

Car and Driver tested 6 top brands of snow tires, here are their top 3 brands:

- **Nokian – 144/150 points.**
- **Michelin – 143/150 points.**
- **Continental – 138/150 points.**

If you're regularly battling thick snow and ice and slush, you'll want to consider studded tires (the Nokian Hakkapeliitta can be procured with studs) for maximum traction. These Nokians are highly reviewed everywhere we could find information about them online.

The Michelin Latitude X-Ice Xi2 is the heavy vehicle version of the tire Car and Driver rated so highly in their tests. It's also highly recommended by Consumer Search.

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MAKE THE BEST DECISION FOR YOUR BUSINESS

Ultimately, the best vehicle and tires for your snow removal business are judgment calls that you have to make. This is based on the financials of your business and how useful the equipment will be to you during the snow season (and year-round).

Consult your accountant about the sort of debt service you're comfortable taking on in your business. Always weigh the opportunity and cost of buying a vehicle outright (or financing).

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