

Five-Step Guide to Handgun Selection

What to ask when shopping for a handgun



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 BERETTA

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Intermediate

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Introduction

Buying a handgun can be a daunting process for a prospective gun owner. With hundreds of models, variants, calibers, and multiple companies, a new gun purchaser can be overwhelmed with choices. Here are five simple questions that anyone interested in owning a handgun should answer before they jump in to help narrow down their choices.

Question 1

What is it for?

The intended purpose of the handgun is going to strongly influence what type of handgun gets selected. A shooter looking for a first gun to learn the fundamentals of marksmanship would be best served by a .22 LR handgun like the Beretta Neos, where a shooter looking for a deep concealment handgun for self defense should consider guns like the Beretta Nano.



Learn about
the Nano

Learn about
the Neos



Caliber: A pellet gun might be sufficient for insurgent rodent control. Those who live in bear country often prefer the .44 Magnum. The .22LR is ideal for plinking. For concealed carry and self defense, many prefer small guns chambered in .380 ACP or 9mm. Others want more lead and opt for a .40S&W or a .45ACP.

Bullets are measured in *grains*. Higher grain weights have more mass. The amount of powder behind the bullet will influence how fast the bullet travels.

Larger calibers often produce more felt recoil. Small-framed shooters might not be able to manage heavy recoil. If you're concerned about matters of personal defense, find that balance between enough and too much: enough punch without excessive recoil.

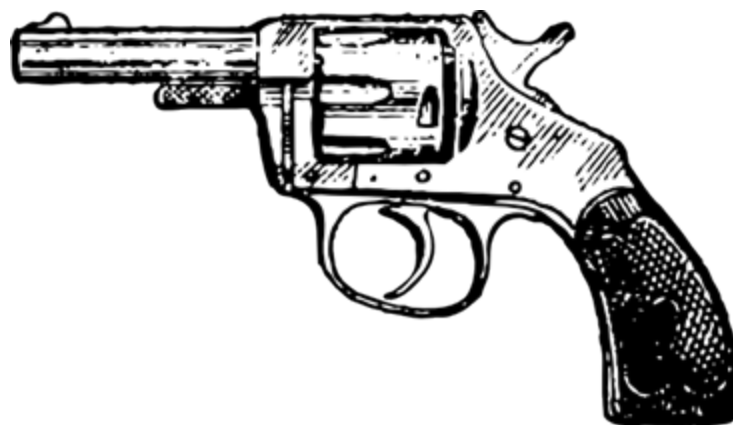


Action Type: Revolver or semi-automatic? Revolvers are very intuitive and easy to use. Double action revolvers fire when the trigger is pulled. Single action revolvers won't fire unless the hammer is cocked manually.

Semi-automatics offer the most design variety. Because there are more mechanical operations designed into the guns, semi-automatics require more training and more careful use. Like revolvers, some will fire when the trigger is pulled (double action). Others need to be cocked manually (single action).

Size matters: A longer barrel may make a gun harder to conceal. On the positive side, a long barrel will often influence accuracy, as greater length allows a bullet to spin more and stabilize before it leaves the gun.

A large handgun may be heavy and cumbersome, but it might not be as jumpy. The weight will eat up some of the recoil energy.



Materials and Style: There are three distinct styles of handguns. Some, like the classic 92FS, are made of blued steel. Most pistols, and some revolvers, now mix blued steel with advanced polymers and/or aluminum. The rest are stainless steel.



Blued steel requires regular maintenance and care. Polymer and aluminum are lighter. Stainless guns are flashy, but durable and easy to care for.

Style is more open to interpretation. Some guns are ugly and incredibly effective. Others are painfully beautiful, and hard to use. Are you looking for an investment piece or a functional tool or something that combines these ideas?

Question

What features do I want?

Once you've decided the purpose of your new gun, you need to figure out what sort of features your handgun should have.

This may be the most confusing set of questions. But don't stress.

Though they're important considerations, most gun owners don't form some opinions until they've spent some serious time with their guns.

This is where shooting ranges with rental guns are great, because you can try before you buy.

Again, there are meaningful features designed specifically for plinking, concealed carry, competition shooting, home defense and any of the other great purposes of handguns. For example, a .22 LR pistol for marksmanship might have a rail on top that's able to accept red dot sights, which are great for new shooters.

If you're selecting a handgun for home defense, you might want a higher capacity, or a manual safety, or a larger caliber.

Revolvers are known for their ease of use and fail-proof design. Small automatics are easy to conceal. Larger automatics offer higher magazine capacity and fast reloads. Competition guns often have radical design features like long barrels and compensators that make them ideal for target shooting, but limit their usefulness for everyday carry.



Do you want interchangeable back-straps for your small (or large) hands?

Will you want a threaded barrel for a suppressor? Maybe not now, but will you later?

Would you be comfortable carrying a single action pistol (which is carried with the hammer cocked and round in the chamber), or would you rather have a double action?

Will you want to mount a light or a laser below the barrel?

Would you like a red dot or a scope on top of the gun? Will you need three-dot sights for everyday carry, or night sights for low light situations, or target sights for maximum accuracy?

Do you want any manual safeties on the gun? A slide mounted safety that can decoct the gun, too? A grip safety? A safety on the trigger itself?



“Spend some time getting to know guns and features so that your selection is exactly what you want”

Would you like to be able to see if the gun is loaded by glancing at the gun? If so, a loaded chamber indicator is handy.

Would you like an exposed hammer on the gun? Should the hammer be internal, so there is less chance it will snag on clothes?

Will you need a gun that is easy to draw from concealment, or from a holster on your hip? If so, look for small sights and a snag-free exterior.

Spend some time getting to know guns and features so that your selection is exactly what you want. Visit an actual gun store and talk to the most knowledgeable staff. Read reviews in magazines and online. And talk to your friends about what works for them.

Question **3**

What gear do I need?

Part of the purchase process that's frequently overlooked is accessories. Holsters, magazines, sights – all of these extras make up an important part of the purchase process.

A pistol for IDPA or USPSA competition is going to need a lot of spare magazines, magazine pouches, a good holster and belt.

A concealed carry handgun like the Beretta Nano might only need a good holster.

Selecting the right accessories and extra gear will ensure that you're happy with your handgun purchase because you'll be able to use your handgun for its intended purpose.

Question **4**

Where can I buy it?

This might seem straightforward, but it's something you need to consider. Some guns might not be in stock in your local gun shop, but are available through online retailers.

Shop around to make sure you're getting a fair price when you buy, and understand all the hidden costs of buying such as sales tax, shipping, and transfer fees.



And consider the availability of ammunition. Some expensive varieties of hollow point ammunition offer incredible ballistic performance. Ball ammunition is less expensive and ideal for practice.



There are numerous varieties of 9mm available, but other calibers are harder to find. 10mm, for example, isn't always available in sporting goods stores. And some big-bore calibers for handgun hunting are even harder to come by.

The internet has made finding ammunition much easier, but the market is still very volatile. Be sure you can afford to practice with the gun you choose.

Question **5**

What else should I consider before I buy?

The last questions are also the most important. Before you order your new handgun, you need to know what legal requirements should be met before you buy! Different states have different laws regulating handgun purchases from dealers. Some states require only a NICS check, some states require a concealed carry permit to waive a mandatory waiting period, etc.

And where will you keep your new gun? On your hip? In a tool box? In your truck? Your purse?

How will you transport it? Some states require guns to be visible in your vehicle, and kept separately from ammunition.

If you're going to carry, will you carry open or concealed? What licensure will you need for carrying you gun?

If you know the local laws before you hit “buy” or visit your shop, there won't be any unpleasant surprises.

But there are other things to think about.



How will you secure it once you're home? Will you need to keep your gun loaded and accessible? Will a cable lock be enough to secure it? Should you have a small safe? Would you prefer to have a lock built into the gun itself?

And you will probably want to clean it well after each trip to the range. But that's easy, and a great way to learn your way around a gun.

***“Thinking through these things
before you buy will help keep you out
of trouble.”***



Conclusions and additional resources

Now you're prepared to purchase your first handgun. Asking yourself these five questions before any handgun purchase will make the transaction and ownership experience easier, more valuable, and most importantly even more fun.

To continue staying in contact with us and for additional tips, make sure you follow our blog, Facebook, Twitter or YouTube accounts, or visit our website.

To check out our complete line of firearms and accessories personally, visit a Beretta authorized dealer in your area.

