

SHOTGUN BIBLE



American Gun
ASSOCIATION

SHOTGUN BIBLE

EVERYTHING YOU
NEED TO KNOW ABOUT
SHOTGUNS FOR HOME
DEFENSE

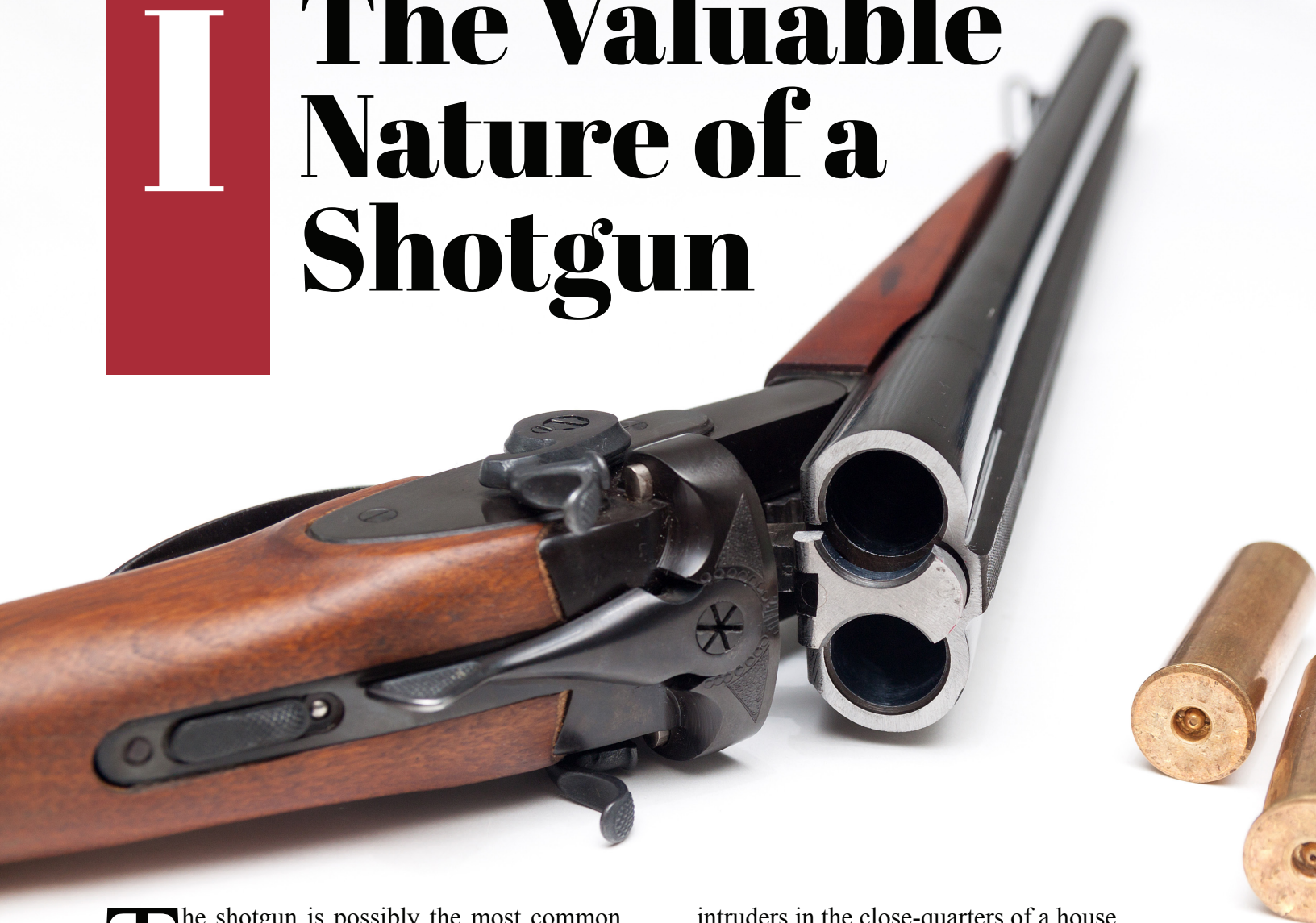
THE ARSENAL OF SHOTGUN KNOWLEDGE

A straightforward look at everything you need to know about
shotguns for home defense

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I

The Valuable Nature of a Shotgun



The shotgun is possibly the most common element in [home defense plans](#).

While rifles and handguns certainly have their place, most households prepared to protect their property and loved ones have at least one shotgun as part of their home defense arsenal.

Some might even have a shotgun as their only weapon!

Shotguns earned their popularity as a home defense weapon from the versatility of shotgun ammunition, their ease-of-use, and the fact they boast effective stopping power; especially against

intruders in the close-quarters of a house.

Their low-tech nature and affordability (when compared to rifles and handguns) only add to their appeal.

The high level of practicality helped to sustain the manufacturing of this type of firearm, which has added to its widespread availability.

With so many options to choose from, you can be sure there are many shotguns not appropriate for use in home defense.

Many of these shotguns are used in various

sporting applications and are not the ideal choice for close-quarters self-defense against an attacker intent on harming you and your family.

As an example, you might already have a birding gun as a multipurpose sporting/home defense gun, or be thinking of getting one for that reason.

However, birding guns have a choke – which is great for hitting a sports target – but make the weapon practically useless in defensive situations. Additionally, the barrel of a birding gun is generally 22 to 24 inches (sometime longer).



This length is geared in favor of hunters, who have the time to line up their shot. Meanwhile, time is not usually a luxury you'll have in a home defense situation.

This book is designed to help you ensure you have the right type of shotgun for home defense by going through basic, but important, details regarding shotgun characteristics and actions.

By the end of this book, the goal is for you to be well-informed about exactly what you do and do not need in a shotgun for home defense, and to be in a better position to investigate such topics further to better enhance your self-sufficiency and security.





The Shotgun Shell



Before we get into different kinds of shotguns, it bears focusing on one of the most important features of the shotgun as a home defense weapon: [the shell](#).

The shell is a plastic hull that contains small pellets (shot) or a lead ball (slug), wadding, and powder. Understanding how the shell's contents affect the way you can use a shotgun loaded with them is very important.

Depending on those contents, the shells might be better suited for aiming to kill or wound, to be exact or hit a broader target, hit a distant target or one in close proximity.

Knowing these differences will help you plan ahead by getting the right kind of shells, as well as allow you to use your shotgun in various situations where these different firing options are ideal.

Shells can contain a wide variety of projectiles.

For example, there are flechettes, birdshot, rock salt, rubber pellets, bean bags, sabots, buckshot, slugs, and many other options.

It's important to recognize this is not a complete list – it's meant to act as an indication of the wide

variety available to choose from as a shotgun owner.

Not least because you'll need to ensure you buy the right kind of shells for home defense use!

Generally speaking, you'll be focusing on shells with slugs or buckshot for use in home defense. We'll go into more detail on these two options in Section VIII. Ammunition.





UNDERSTANDING THE GAUGE



Even if you haven't got any previous experience with shotguns, chances are you're already familiar with the term "gauge."

After all, shotguns are often referred to in relation to their gauge in movies, TV shows, and the news. "Gauge" refers to the barrel's bore size – in other words, the barrel's inside diameter.

It's a common mistake to think this means a shotgun's gauge is exactly the same thing as a rifle or handgun's caliber, as "caliber" refers to the bore size and the diameter of a rifle, handgun, and even machine gun's ammunition.

However, the gauge number doesn't actually refer to the size of the bore itself!

Instead, it denotes the weight (in fractions of a pound) of a solid sphere of lead with a diameter equal to that of the bore.

So, for example, a 12 gauge shotgun doesn't have a 12-inch diameter (imagine that!).

Instead, a 12 gauge shotgun's barrel has the same diameter as a lead ball that weighs 1/12th of a pound. The actual diameter is 0.725-inches.



Confusing? You're not alone!

Shotgun gauges can be very confusing when you first learn about them, especially because it's our natural tendency to think of things in relation to something similar.

In the case of gauges, the caliber of other firearms is what we naturally want to compare them to. As mentioned earlier, however, this isn't an accurate comparison to make.

Gauge simply isn't relatable to how rifles and handguns are measured by caliber, even though both practices rely on the barrel's inner measurements.

Adding to the confusion is the fact the smaller the gauge number, the larger the shotguns bore. Again, our natural tendency is to think big number equal bigger bores.

Just remember gauge refers to weight as a fraction of 1 pound.

Another way to think of it is to imagine having a handful of lead balls with the same diameter as the shotgun's bore. The gauge refers to how many of those balls you need to make a pound.

So a 20 gauge shotgun requires 20 lead balls, while a 12 gauge shotgun only needs 12. The smaller the bore's diameter, the more balls you'll need.

Does this make more sense?

So why do we measure shotgun gauges like this instead of using the same system as rifles and firearms?

To understand this, we need to take a quick look at history.



From Hand Cannons to Cannons to Muzzle-Loaded Shotguns

In the early 900s, toward the end of the Tang Dynasty (618 - 907 CE), the Chinese [started using gunpowder as a military asset](#).

By the Yuan Dynasty (1279 - 1368 CE), they were using small bombards that used gunpowder to propel a projectile (typically small stones and pieces of pottery and metal).

They were also being made large enough to be considered cannons, which had to be placed on a wheeled cart.

The smaller bombards are sometime cited as the first handguns, but they're more accurately referred to as miniature or hand cannons and compared to shotguns.

Because of this close history between cannons

and shotguns, we adopted the gauge measurement from the way cannons are classified.

Cannons were (and still are) classified according to their projectile's mass.

Thus a 12 pound cannon, or 12 pounder, shot cannonballs that weighed approximately 12 pounds. The weight of the cannonball obviously depends on its diameter – in other words, the wider the cannon's bore, the heavier the cannonball it fired.

But that's not all!

When shotguns were first developed as a weapon distinct from the hand cannon, they were still muzzle-loaded and used black powder.

They were basically cannons fired from the shoulder, so it made sense to continue using the same classification system.

However, these shotguns fired projectiles that weighed less than 1 pound, so they had to come up with a different name – imagine having to describe your shotgun as a 12th pounder because its projectiles weighed 1/12th of a pound!

This is [how we came up with gauge](#) as a way to classify shotguns according to their bore!

Common Shotgun Gauges

Luckily, you don't need to worry about remembering (or even thinking about) as many shotgun gauges as you would if you were memorizing rifle and handgun calibers.

There are far fewer gauges to consider and only 2 or 3 of them are common enough to warrant focusing on when starting out with a shotgun for home defense.

Here are the 6 most popular shotgun gauges you're likely to come across:

- **.410** – notice something funny about this gauge? That's right; it looks similar to how calibers are described. The .410 gauge is the only one where this happens, and it's not by coincidence.

This gauge is so small it's easier to classify it by diameter than mass, the same way rifle and handgun calibers are.

Being the smallest option for shotguns, the .410 is generally favored by younger shooters because it has a more forgiving nature and low recoil (the spring back from the force of being fired).

This makes it unsuitable for home defense use though, even for young shooters. It's better



used as a small sporting shotgun where your targets are fowl and/or small game.

- **28 Gauge** – this is probably the least used gauge, as it's also rather small. For this reason, you're better off leaving the 28 gauge alone unless you're looking for a slightly stronger sporting shotgun than the .410.
- **20 Gauge** – the next largest gauge after the 28, a 20 gauge shotgun will pack a decent punch while still being forgiving to the shooter thanks to its relatively light recoil. Generally speaking, it's a good entry-level shotgun gauge for young or diffident users looking for a home defense weapon, especially as there are a variety of shell options available.

However, shotgun experts such as Bob Brister still recommend using the 20 gauge as a sporting firearm rather than as a home defense weapon.

- **16 Gauge** – if you're looking for a better mid-point between the lighter feel and recoil of the smaller gauges above and the power of the more popular 12 gauge, then the 16 gauge might be the shotgun for you.

The 16 gauge was more popular in the first half of the 20th century, mainly as a bird gun. Even though it does offer a decent mid-point, it's not ideal as a home defense weapon for 2 very important reasons.

First, its drop in popularity means there's a relatively low selection of shells available to choose from. Second, and more important, most 16 gauge shotguns are single shot designs.

For home defense, you'll need something

capable of firing a few successive shots before needing to reload.

- **12 Gauge** – the 12 gauge is arguably the most popular (and certainly best known) shotgun, so it should come as no surprise to hear it's also the shotgun of choice for home defense needs.

Its popularity as a favorite for the military, law enforcement, and citizens alike means the majority of shell sales are for 12 gauge shotguns. It also has the widest variety of gun styles, shell varieties, and accessories available.

- **10 Gauge** – finally, we have the 10 gauge. Although 10 gauge shotguns have a bigger barrel than those listed above, it isn't necessarily a more powerful weapon.

It certainly isn't a common gauge to see manufactured anymore either, mainly due to its bulkiness and overall weight.

While the 10 gauge shotgun does still have a purpose, they aren't an appropriate weapon for home defense for those same reasons.



Nominal vs. Actual Bore Size by Gauge

While it isn't an important consideration, you might find yourself interested in how the different gauges translate into bore diameter.

Rather than sit trying to figure out what kind of mathematical equations you'll need to use to do so, you can just reference this handy list:

- **.410 bore = 0.410 inches**
- **28 gauge = 0.545 inches**
- **20 gauge = 0.615 inches**
- **16 gauge = 0.665 inches**
- **12 gauge = 0.725 inches**
- **10 gauge = 0.775 inches**

These are based on the [Sporting Arms and Ammunition Manufacturers' Institute \(SAAMI\)](#) standards.

It's also important to note these are for a smooth barrel bore and have a deviation tolerance of +0.020 inches.

So the actual diameter of your shotgun's bore might be slightly different, especially if you're comparing different shotgun brands to each other!



Length of the Shell

Because it's the most popular (and best-recommended) for home defense, all the information in this book from here to the conclusion will be given in reference to the 12 gauge shotgun.

It's important to remember gauge only describes the bore diameter of your shotgun. Shells have many other characteristics you should keep in mind, including their length.

The length of the shell is usually given in inches and describes the length of the fired case, not the unfired case.

It's very important for you to be familiar with this distinction, as you want to be sure your home defense shotgun can accept all available shell lengths.

Shotguns will generally have their gauge number and chamber length stamped onto the barrel. This chamber length tells you the maximum shell length that can be safely fitted into your shotgun's chamber.

Remember: the shell length given on the box is how long the shell's casing will be after being fired. Before being fired, it will actually be a little shorter, sometimes by up to 0.5-inches.

It is extremely important to never use a longer shell than what is marked on the barrel, but a shorter shell is generally safe to use.

Firing or attempting to fire a shell longer than your shotgun's chamber can and will generate pressure in your firearm that's dangerously higher than it was designed to handle.

This creates a significant safety risk and will damage your shotgun, potentially injuring yourself and others around you.

With that very important warning out of the way, here are the most common lengths for 12 gauge shells:

- **2 ¾"** – the tried, tested, and true option; has been around the longest and offers the most choice for combination of loads for buckshot and slugs
-
- **3"** – the 'magnum load' before the 3 ½" came out; longer more powerful load than the 2 ¾", with a good selection of loads
-
- **3 ½"** – the largest of the 12 gauge shells; powerful, contains a lot of shot, and offers lots of load options

Bear in mind bigger is not always better.

The strong kick-back from a 3 ½" shotgun shell makes it harder to take a properly placed second shot right away, which can often be crucial in a home defense situation.

Our best recommendation for a home defense shotgun is a 3" chambered 12 gauge shotgun, using mostly 2 ¾" shells for better recoil control.





IV

TYPES OF SHOTGUNS

There isn't just one shotgun with different gauges and chamber length to choose from – there are also different shotgun styles to consider.

Below, we outlined the styles (and their qualities) you should be most aware of:

- **Over and Under** – these shotguns have 2 barrels of equal length, one on top of the other. Some have 2 triggers (one for each barrel), while others have one trigger that needs to be pulled farther back to fire the second shell. The “over and under” shotgun is an excellent choice for skeet shooting, but not for home defense.
- **Side by Side** – these shotguns also have 2 barrels of equal length, but they're placed side by side, hence the name. The trigger set

up is similar to that of the “over and under” shotgun. “Side by side” shotguns are also known as a “coach gun,” due to their glory days in the Old West and Civil War.

- Their popularity has waned since, especially in recent years. They aren't an appropriate choice for a home defense shotgun, for the same reasons as the “over and under.”
- **Single Shot** – the single shot is a common long-barrel bird gun. In fact, all “over and under” and “side by side” shotguns are single shot and are usually break action shotguns too!

Break action refers to shotguns that have a hinge between the barrel/s and stock so you can “break” or open the barrel to load. Single barrel break action shotguns are always single shot. While they're great

for sporting, they put you at a dangerous disadvantage in home defense situations.

- **Pump Action** – pump actions are single barrel shotguns equipped with a tubular magazine beneath the barrel, which can hold multiple rounds. The pump mechanism is a moveable fore end that's held for stability while handling the shotgun.

You pull it toward yourself to eject spent shells and chamber a fresh round, then push it forward again into its original position. Pump action shotguns are favored by law enforcement around the world, in part thanks to their superior mix of firepower, reliability, and a fast follow-up.

Many are also able to chamber shells like the less-than-lethal rounds autoloaders aren't able to reliably cycle. Essentially, the better skilled you are, the faster you can cycle between rounds to deliver quicker follow-up shots.

Pump actions also feature an open feeding port at the bottom of the gun, which



allows you to reload with one hand while keeping the muzzle on-target.

On top of all that, pump actions are also generally very budget-friendly, even for respectable brands, especially compared to the other styles. For all these reasons, the pump-action is a great all-round shotgun perfect for home defense.

- **Autoloader** – the autoloader is a gas operated semi-automatic shotgun that fires one round each time the trigger is pulled, until the magazine is empty. Most models have tubular magazines (like that of the pump action), though some use a box type magazine.

Autoloaders use the force of gases released when a shell is fired to push the bolt down, ejecting the spent shell and chambering a fresh round. These are highly reliable shotguns with sound operating systems, so if you feel the need for a semi-automatic shotgun, it's a good investment.

However, autoloaders are markedly more





expensive than pump actions, without offering much in the way of higher firepower or faster reloading speed. This makes them a less suitable choice for a first home defense shotgun, but by no means a poor one.

This doesn't cover the full range of shotgun styles available, of course.

Instead, the above list focuses on the main ones so you can get a better idea of what they have to offer and how suitable they are (or aren't) as a home defense weapon.

As a shotgun owner, current or prospective, it's always good to have this kind of general knowledge.

Features and Characteristics for a Good Home Defense Shotgun

There are a couple of features that separate shotguns suitable for home defense from those good or even great for such a purpose.

We've already talked about some of them, but it's worth repeating a few points briefly and going into greater detail in others.

18 1/2" Barrel

In the US, the shortest length shotgun allowed by law is 26-inches in overall length, with a barrel no shorter than 18-inches.

It is technically possible to legally own a shotgun with a shorter barrel and/or overall length, but you need to have a special permit and pay extra taxes. Generally speaking, the shorter the barrel, the more powerful they are, which is why you may want one with a shorter barrel.

To cater to this need without coming dangerously close to being illegal, manufacturers produce the 18 1/2" shotgun barrel.

Don't worry if you already have a 20-inch barrel shotgun and think you'll need to get an 18 1/2" model for home defense. Most shotguns are equipped with interchangeable barrels.





If your model can accommodate interchangeable barrels, you can still buy an 18 ½" to use with it. The extra ½" isn't likely to make too much of a noticeable difference, though of course you do want to enjoy even the slightest of advantages when it comes to defending your home.

Having a shorter (18 ½") barrel certainly is more appealing for a close-quarters weapon.

Pump Action vs. Autoloader

It's pretty clear the top choices for a home defense shotgun are the pump action and the autoloader.

In the list above, we mentioned one of the main drawbacks to an autoloader when compared to a pump action is the price. If cost isn't an issue for you, you might benefit from considering the human error factor.

With a pump action, the biggest way human error is likely to affect you is through short-stroking.

Short-stroking is what happens when you don't push the pump handle all the way forward into its original position.

As a result, you won't properly eject the spent shell and chamber a fresh round when you next engage the action, and will have to push the handle forward properly before trying again.

Autoloaders, on the other hand, have a far more complex design that makes them more prone to jamming failures than a pump action.

This kind of failure takes a lot longer to sort out, which can be fatal in a self-defense situation. The added complexity also means there's added risk of accidentally damaging your shotgun while cleaning it.

At the end of the day, pump actions and autoloaders alike remain the most suitable options for home defense.

Ultimately, the decision is up to your preference, desire (or lack thereof) to fire semi-automatically, and how much you're willing to spend.

If you're still undecided, the next two chapters will provide some of the top examples of Pump Action Home Defense Shotguns and Autoloading





Tactical Shotguns, respectively.

By comparing these, you'll be in a better position to make the right choice.

3" Chamber

As mentioned in the previous chapter, getting a shotgun with a 3" capacity chamber will allow you to keep your options open.

You'll likely still be firing mostly 2½" rounds, but since you can generally fire a smaller round but never a larger one, having a 3" chamber allows for greater versatility.

The only other shell size available for 12 gauge shotguns is, of course, the 3½" shell. However, these produce a much stronger kick-back than what is recommended for home defense use.

No Choke Cylinder Bore

When we say a good home defense shotgun has a no choke cylinder bore, we're referring to the design of the interior of the barrel (the bore) and whether or not it has a choke.

We haven't spoken about chokes yet and this is a good time to do so.

When firing a shell loaded with shot, the pellets spread after leaving the muzzle. Once they hit your target, they leave a spread pattern.

The closer you are to your target, the tighter (more compact or dense) the spread pattern will be, and therefore more lethal. Barrel length also affects spread pattern.

For example, when comparing a 20" and an 18½" barrel while standing the same distance from your target, the extra 1½" the shot from the shorter barrel has to travel before reaching that target allows it to spread a little wider.

The choke creates a slight restriction in the barrel



diameter – literally “choking” it. This forces the shot pattern together, creating a tighter spread when you fire your shotgun.

A choke (or choke tube) is great for hunting when you want to aim carefully and hit the target without having shot pellets scatter about uselessly.

You might think this is a good thing for home defense too – after all, the tighter your spread pattern, the more lethal it can be.

In a home defense situation, however, you’ll be in close quarters.

You also have to bear in mind in any self-defense situation, the law is always going to be against shooting to kill. Your goal must be to shoot to stop. This also means you can’t simply shoot to injure, for example by aiming at the knee, as a jury will almost certainly consider doing so a sign you weren’t really fearful for your life.

So shoot to stop, but do so with the knowledge you are likely to kill, even if that isn’t your primary intention.

Even though most states recognize Castle Doctrine (the right to defend your property with lethal force against an intruder), it’s always your responsibility to ensure you’re up to date with your local laws regarding using a firearm for self-defense.

Coming back to the issue of whether or not to use a choke on your shotgun, it’s worth remembering the wider spread pattern is what makes a shotgun more ideal for home defense when compared to a rifle.

Just bear in mind you do still need to aim your shotgun properly!

A 12 gauge shotgun loaded with buckshot has an



average spread pattern of about 8 to 10 inches only, without a choke. This is certainly narrow enough to miss a target in a time of urgency.

However, it’s better to have those 8 to 10 inches and barely hit your target than to miss completely because your choke narrows the spread too much. So be sure to stack the odds in your favor by opting for a no choke cylinder bore barrel.

Plastic vs. Polymer Furniture

The stock and fore end (the fixture under the barrel that serves as a grip and, for pump action shotguns, the pump handle) are called the furniture of the shotgun.

In the past, this section was made of wood, but a good modern tactical shotgun usually uses black polymer for its furniture.

Cheaper models might use plastic and some hunting shotguns still use wood, but polymer is a much stronger, more durable material.

The finish is usually matte (especially for black, tactical shotguns), which has the added benefit of not reflecting light.

Parkerization

Parkerization refers to the finishing process on the metal parts of a shotgun, most notably the barrel but also the trigger and trigger guard, that give it a matte black finish with non-reflective properties.

It also makes these parts highly durable. Pretty much all shotguns (especially tactical ones) have this process done.

With these features and characteristics in mind, you'll be in a better position to find yourself a suitable shotgun for home defense and be aware of what the different features are for.

Fortunately, there are several options available that will have everything you need – no modifications required – at a decent price.



**V**

PUMP ACTION HOME DEFENSE SHOTGUNS

In this chapter, we'll introduce you to a few of our top recommendations for a 12 gauge pump action home defense shotgun.

We'll also list a few of the "discount" companies that produce cheaper clones of the better name brands.

Mossberg 500 and 590 Series

The Mossberg 500 and 590 Series has stood the test of time over the past 50+ years as a top-quality shotgun serving the U.S. military and countless police forces.

A hammerless pump action repeater, the weapons from either series boast a simple design that lends itself well to the high versatility of shells, accessories, and parts available for shotguns.

They are one of the top produced in the market, which means there are lots of used ones available for sale and great aftermarket parts.

Features:

- Accepts 3" magnum shells
- 18.5" barrel holds 5 shells in the magazine + 1 in the chamber
- 20" barrel holds 8 shells in the magazine + 1 in the chamber
- Parkerized finish
- Synthetic polymer stock
- Comes with or without a pistol grip
- Ambidextrous thumb operated safety mechanism



Remington 870 Series

The Remington 870 Series can be (favorably) compared to the Mossberg 500 and 590 Series above, and have also been favored by law enforcement and military.

There's a large selection available in 870 Series, with the 870 Express Tactical being the ideal option for home defense.

You'll also benefit from a wide range of accessories and upgrade parts for this model.

Features:

- 18.5" barrel
- 7 shot capacity with factory magazine tube extension
- Accepts 3" magnum shells
- Parkerized Finish
- Synthetic polymer stock

Mossberg's 500/570 Series and Remington's 870 Series really are the top of the range and offer as much variety as you need to pick the best home defense shotgun.



Collectively, they also make up about 80% of the market share and are practical, reliable answers to every home's defense needs.

However, if you have a compelling reason to look beyond these two, here are the next best options:

Benelli Nova Tactical

The Benelli Nova Tactical is a true gem from the Italian manufacture, being one of the most solidly built and thoughtfully designed shotguns in the world.

It certainly earns its place on our list of pump action shotguns for home defense, but there are a few drawbacks worth mentioning.

Being an Italian import, the Benelli Nova Tactical costs more than the other two while offering virtually the same features and level of reliability.

This also means there are few aftermarket parts available and you'll pay more for any you are able to find. Compared to the other shotguns



mentioned, the Benelli also has a lower magazine capacity.

It also features a 3 ½” chamber, which – while not a negative – does mean you’ll have to be a little more wary when using 2½” shells.

Features:

- 18.5” barrel
- Tubular magazine that holds 4 shots with 1 more in the chamber
- Accepts 3 ½” magnum shells

Winchester SXP Tactical

Winchester isn’t really a strong contender against Mossberg and Remington when it comes the tactical shotgun market, as the manufacturer focuses primarily on sporting shotguns.

However, the Winchester SXP Tactical is a decent option for home defence. Just be aware there’s a limited aftermarket for parts.

Features:

- 18.5” barrel
- accepts 3” magnum shells
- 5 shot tubular magazine + 1 in the chamber
- Parkerized finish
- Black synthetic furniture



Discount Shotguns

As with most markets, there are a wide range of cheap replicas to be found when shopping for a pump action shotgun.

This is good news if your budget is really tight and you need a cheaper selection to pick from.

You’ll easily find clones of the Mossberg and Remington models especially, but bear in mind they won’t be up to the same standards as those quality brands.

Most of these discount guns come from countries like China or Turkey, where the main focus is mass producing goods using cheap labor and parts.

Below is a list of company names you’re most likely to come across while looking for discount pump action 12 gauge shotguns:

- European American Armory (EAA)
- Harrington and Richardson (H&R)
- Weatherby Arms
- Maverick Arms
- Century Arms
- Savage Arms
- Charles Daly

Let's say you're not in the market for a discount shotgun.

You'll certainly find other name brand options on the 12 gauge pump action shotgun we haven't included here.

The simple reason for this is while several of these major firearms manufacturers do produce models that fit this type and gauge, those models aren't ideal for a home defense shotgun specifically.

This is why our top recommendations are the

Mossberg 500/590 Series and the Remington 870 Series. We do feel these are the options you should be considering above all others.

Buying new is always the better choice, but this isn't always feasible from a financial point of view. This is another reason these two are a superior option, as you'll have a much bigger aftermarket for used models.

Remember: even though having a discount shotgun for home defense is better than having nothing at all, this is certainly an area where most consumers are concerned with having the best possible quality.

This is why the Mossberg and Remington models dominate the market for professional and civilian tactical use alike.



VI

AUTOLOADING TACTICAL SHOTGUNS



If you find you're leaning more toward an autoloading tactical shotgun, you'll have a much wider variety of top performing options to choose from (compared to pump action tactical shotguns).

As it's a much newer technology, semi-automatic shotguns have enjoyed some cult status, which many manufacturers have taken advantage of by catering to this segment of the market.

To keep things on a more or less even keel, we've narrowed it down to the 4 autoloaders we find to be the best of the best.

Before we introduce these models, however, it's worth repeating an earlier warning.

As a result of their semi-automatic function,

autoloaders are great at firing rapidly, but this is their only true advantage over their pump action counterparts.

In the hands of a skilled shotgun user (which all shotgun owners should strive to be), this advantage becomes increasingly smaller, even negligible.

Still, as mentioned before, any slight advantage is great to have in a home defense situation.

However, you should also remember this same advantage brings with it a host of disadvantages. Autoloaders have a far more complex operating system than pump actions, which makes them [more prone to jamming](#).

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, if your shotgun jams in a home defense situation, it can be fatal, as



you'll need to manually eject the offending shell.

Autoloaders also tend to cost at least twice as much as their most comparable pump action counterparts and generally won't hold more shells.

You'll also be more limited when looking for additional accessories (some of which we'll discuss in the next chapter).

Ultimately, when choosing an autoloader over a pump action, you're paying a lot extra just for the ability to fire successive rounds more quickly and (potentially) more of a maintenance headache.

However, if that semi-automatic loading feature is one you desire, here are our top 4 recommendations for you:

Remington Model 1100 TAC 4

Another quality product from Remington, the Model 1100 TAC 4 has pretty much all the same bells and whistles you get with their pump action shotguns – with the added benefit of faster firing rate.

Unfortunately, it's only available with a 22-inch

barrel, which can be a bit much for a home defense shotgun.

That said, the Remington Model 1100 TAC does have an 8-shot capacity and a positive track record spanning over 40 years of service.

Remington Versa Max® Tactical

The Remington Versa Max® Tactical is a newer model than the Model 1100 TAC 4 and has a unique design, but has already earned a good reputation.

However, it has the same potential negative in that it's only available with a 22" barrel.

Even so, it holds 8 rounds in the magazine plus 1 in the chamber, which accepts 3" shells. It also comes with a picatinny rail (one of the accessories we'll cover in the next chapter), forward barrel-clamp rails, and an extended magazine.





Mossberg 930 Tactical

As can be expected, Mossberg also makes the best of top recommended autoloaders.

Their 930 Tactical is a great choice at a great price and has the distinct advantage (for home defense use) over the Remington models in that it comes with an 18.5" barrel.

While the capacity is a little lower than the Remington Versa Max Tactical, it matches that of the Model 1100 TAC 4: 7 rounds in the magazine and 1 in the chamber.

Added to that is the fact it's cheaper than both Remingtons, comes with excellent sights, a pistol grip, and is well regarded as a light, fast firing weapon you can rely on.

Saiga 12

The Saiga 12 is a Russian semi-automatic shotgun that comes at a great price and has an entirely unique look for a shotgun.

Its operating system is derived from the other famous Russian firearm, the AK rifle, which is a dependable and virtually trouble-free pattern.

As a result, the Saiga 12 looks more like a rifle than your traditional shotgun, in part thanks to its box type magazine.

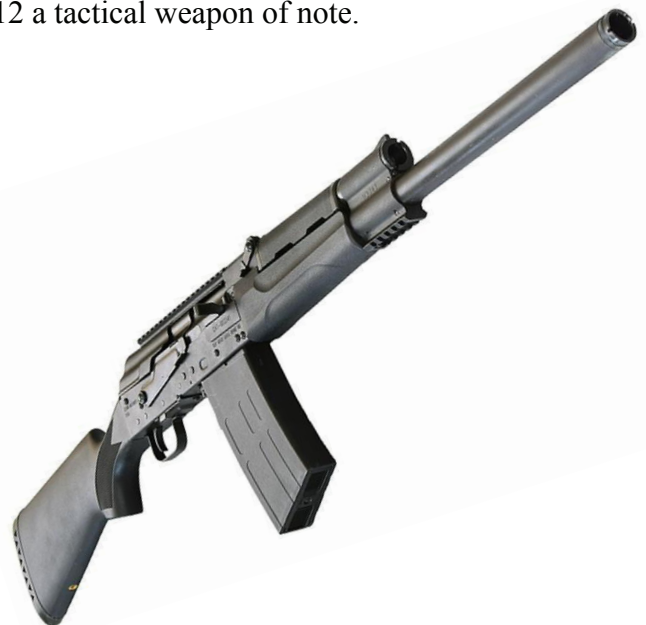
This magazine design is also quicker and easier to load and unload than the tubular magazine type usually used with shotguns.

Looking like a rifle has a startling visual effect, which can be another great benefit to using the Saiga 12 over almost any other shotgun.

After all, you would appear to be much more heavily armed (i.e. with an automatic rifle) than you actually are, especially in the tight quarters common to home defense situations.

Another major advantage worth mentioning is the box type magazine has a 10 rounds capacity and there are also magazine drums available, which can hold 20 rounds.

This far surpasses the holding capacity of any other shotgun on the market and makes the Saiga 12 a tactical weapon of note.



VII

ACCESSORIES



With the vast number of accessories available, especially for the most popular models, it can be quite easy to overindulge with [useless add-ons](#) that only serve to make your shotgun impractical for home defense due to the extra bulk and weight.

That said, there are some truly useful accessories that add benefit to your shotgun's use as a home defense tool.

We've included an overview of such accessories below.

Sling

A shotgun necessity – a full length firearm shouldn't be without one.

The sling isn't just for carrying your weapon; it provides added stability when aiming and added security for weapon retention if you wrap a section around your wrist, making it more difficult for an attacker to gain possession of your gun.

Don't go cheap and low-quality for a sling!

Remember: it's providing added stability and security, so the material, swivels, and other hardware should be as high-quality as you can get.



Mounted Light

A mounted light is vital for a home defense shotgun.

Using a shotgun for home defense especially, you will definitely want to be prepared for encounters in the dark.

After all, those with criminal intent (as well as dangerous wildlife that wander onto your property, especially in rural settings) tend to favor the night, as the low light conditions give them an advantage over their prey.

To take that advantage away from them, you should be prepared to make use of artificial lighting.

More specifically, you need a weapon mounted light – not a flashlight fastened to your gun in some impractical manner or held in your forward hand.

There's a lot of research that's gone into developing tactical lighting.

Use this to your advantage by becoming as knowledgeable about its benefits as possible, especially with regards to weapon mounted illumination for firearms.

Weapon mounted lights (or at least the type you want to get) have a pressure switch, or paddle switch, that are quick and easy to operate. In tense situations you want to be able to turn on and off your light with the least amount of hassle.

Although you're able to see better in dark or poorly lit environments with your light on, you don't want your target to know where you are all the time.

Pressure pad type switches are triggered by

pressure on and off the fore end of the gun.

It may take a bit of practice to get used to the applying the right pressure, but it won't take long to subconsciously turn on and off your tactical light with ease.

There are two (correct) ways to mount a tactical weapon light on your shotgun.

Some models have mounting brackets specifically designed for them, which you can install on the forward of the magazine.

These can typically be attached and removed with relative ease.

Other models use a picatinny rail, which we referenced earlier with regards to the Remington Versa Max® Tactical.



These are typically permanently mounted onto the magazine tube and allow you to attach and remove a light and other accessories.

The picatinny rail has the added benefit of a quick release lever that facilitates the removal of the light, which can come in handy if you find your target is no longer a threat (or maybe wasn't a real threat to begin with), but you still need to use the light itself.

Remember: one of the most important gun safety rules is to never let your firearm point toward anything you do not intend to destroy!

Shell Holder

Most shotguns aren't magazine fed, so the shells usually have to be carried loose and loaded one at a time. That is, unless you have a shell holder.

Shell holders are typically made of molded plastic racks, which can be mounted to your shotgun's stock on the opposite side to where you would mount your cheek while taking aim.

Alternatively, some shell holders are designed to be mounted on the side of the receiver, opposite to the rejection port.

Regardless of where it's mounted, a shell holder will allow you to have another 4 to 6 shells.

Depending on the native capacity of your model, this means you can easily be stocked with a total of 12 to 16 rounds – all on or in your weapon itself.

Another invaluable advantage to using shell holders is they allow you to carry different ammunition types.

For example, in home defense you'll usually only need buckshot for using in close quarters, but you might find yourself in a sticky situation where your target is 100 yards away.

In this case, you would want to use a slug rather than shot.

Being well prepared for the possibility of such scenarios, you can load your shotgun with shot and keep slugs in your shell holder against the unlikely event you need to take a long-distance shot.



Sights

When it comes to home defense, sights aren't always the kind of accessory one usually thinks of.

After all, sights are for placing distant shots, which aren't typically necessary or even possible inside a house.

However, considering it's always better to eliminate a threat from as far away as possible, sights are an invaluable accessory to have if you ever find yourself in a situation that warrants some fine-tuning to hit your target.

For tactical shotguns, there are two sighting systems available:

- **Iron Sights** – A front post sight, designed for easy target acquisition, works together with a rear sight, which can usually be adjusted for elevation and windage.

- **Holographic Sights** – These are the “top dog” of shotgun sighting systems, and for good reason. Holographic sights are superior to iron sights thanks to their ability to provide a wide field of view, with a red ring to assist in quickly zoning in on your target.

The top-quality models can cost as much as your shotgun itself, so holographic sights might be a bit of an overindulgence for most.



VIII



AMMUNITION



As mentioned earlier, the versatility of a shotgun is greatly influenced by the variety of shells available.

Knowing about and understanding these various types of ammunition and their effects will equip you with the information you need to best prepare yourself to defend your home against threats.

When it comes to home defense, there are essentially two types of shells to choose from: slugs and shots.

However, within each of these two categories (which are by no means the only categories available), there is a varied and extensive list of options.

We've included the basic need-to-know details for each of them below.

Slugs

Slugs aren't going to be the top choice for home defense ammunition, but it's still advisable to have some at hand for certain situations.

While we generally associate shotguns with shot (hence the name), slugs consist of a single projectile housed in the shell, almost like a giant bullet.

They have incredible stopping power at close range and can easily punch a sizeable hole through your target.

One of the more likely situations you might need to use a slug rather than shot, in the context of home defense, is when neutralizing a target from further away, as mentioned earlier.

In the right conditions, a slug extends the effective range of a shotgun up to around 100 yards, so you won't have to switch weapons.

Another major advantage is slugs are effectively rifled, so they'll spin (or, to be more accurate, rotate) as they leave the barrel of your shotgun. This makes them more accurate and gives them greater stability in-flight.

There are a few drawbacks you should be aware of, though. For starters, they can dangerously over-penetrate your target, especially at close range.

This means they can easily travel through your target, walls, furniture, and anything else in its immediate path.

When firing a shotgun loaded with slugs, it's doubly important to remember one of the primary gun safety rules: to always know your target, what's between yourself and your target, and what lies behind your target.

Additionally, because slugs are single projectiles

that have no spread pattern, there's less room for error when aiming.

You should always strive to aim exactly where you intend your shot to land and not rely on any spread pattern to compensate, but this can be especially difficult in high-stress situations.

Compensating for a small margin of error is, after all, one of the reasons shotguns are generally considered the best choice for a home defense weapon.

Shot

Shot is the gem of the shotgun's ammunition options – once again, hence the name!

This is also where we see the greatest versatility in the types of shotgun shells there are to choose from.

There are literally thousands of options available, so it's important to have a general idea of what they're capable of.

The following table will help you understand the way the most commonly used shot sizes are classified:

SHOT SIZE	PELLET DIAMETER (IN INCHES)	PELLET WEIGHT (IN GRAINS)
#4 Buck	0.24	20.6
#3 Buck	0.25	23.4
#2 Buck	0.27	29.4
#1 Buck	0.30	40.0
#0 Buck	0.32	48.3
#00 Buck	0.33	53.8
#000 Buck	0.36	68.0

Here are the best loads for your home defense shells:



- **#1 buckshot** – .30 caliber pellets ~11 pellets per shell
- **#0 buckshot** – .32 caliber pellets ~9 pellets per shell
- **#00 buckshot** – .33 caliber pellets ~8 pellets per shell

Notice the number of pellets decrease as the size of each shell increases?

Be sure to keep this in mind when choosing your shot!

The fewer pellets shot at a target, the less chance there is for contact; especially after accounting for spread rate and the distance between yourself and your target.

This is why a #0 or #1 buck is the best recommended load for home defense use, with #00 coming in at a close third.

They offer a great combination of stopping power and spread, especially considering a #0 buck fires nine .32 caliber balls at the same time!

It's also worth briefly mentioning the other kind of shot, namely birdshot.

Birdshot is significantly smaller than buckshot, with the pellets all being smaller than 0.20 inches each (remember: the #4 buckshot's pellets are 0.24 inches in diameter).

As the name implies, birdshot is primarily used for bird hunting. It's not recommended to try using birdshot for home defense.



IN CONCLUSION

The shotgun has a long history and has only gotten better through the years.

A pump-action shotgun with a sling and tactical light, loaded and stocked with #1 buck is a must for your home defense preparation.

However, you should also remember a weapon is only as useful as the person using it.

Don't simply purchase a shotgun to have in your home – get proper training to make sure you know how to use it!

As a bonus, look for ranges and other companies in your area that offer tactical training for civilians and sign up for a shotgun class.

This is where you'll receive the best professional instruction on how to properly use your shotgun for home defense, including how to clear a room.

Don't stop there, though.

You should practice regularly to improve your skills and develop muscle memory that can kick in when you're feeling too stressed to think as clearly as you normally do.

A home defense situation, no matter how well you think you're prepared for it, is always going to be high-stress.

The last thing you want is for it to negatively affect your performance when your life, and your family's lives, depend on your ability.

You should also make sure other household members are familiar with how to use a shotgun properly and – most especially – understand gun safety.

Don't forget to practice in a variety of conditions, including low-light, and at different distances from your targets to adequately prepare for the various conditions you might find yourself in if you ever have to use your shotgun for home defense.



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