Shop Vac Sizing & Filter Chart

Ignore peak HP. Size by the job, judge CFM and water lift, set the filter up right — one page.
From vitaldwelling.com — "5 Best Wet/Dry Shop Vacuums for New Homeowners (2026)".

1 — THE FIVE PICKS, SIDE BY SIDE

	CRAFTSMAN 16 ★	DEWALT 9	VACMASTER BEAST 5	STANLEY 6	MILWAUKEE M18 2
Role	Best overall	Most garages	Compact power	Best budget	Best cordless
Price	~$130–170	~$120–170	~$100–120	~$70–90	~$99–149*
Tank	16 gal	9 gal	5 gal	6 gal	2 gal
Airflow	Top of test group	Not published†	102 CFM (test)	85 CFM (mfr)	45 CFM
Water lift	Not published†	85 in.	82 in.	50 in.	32 in.
Hose	2-1/2" × 7 ft	1-7/8" × 7 ft	1-7/8" × 7 ft	1-1/4" × 6 ft	1-1/4" × 6 ft
Emptying	Oversized drain	Tank drain	Lift & pour	Lift & pour	Lift & pour
Reach	Corded	10 ft cord	18 ft / 25 ft reach	10 ft / ~16 ft	Cordless

** Milwaukee is tool only — no battery or charger in the box. † Maker doesn't publish a comparably measured figure; we say so instead of guessing.*

2 — SIZE BY THE JOB (your worst mess, not your average one)

TANK	BEST FOR	WHY
2–6 GAL	Cars, spills, small messes	Portability wins — you'll actually carry it to the mess.
9–14 GAL	Garage + renovation weekends	The homeowner sweet spot: a full cleanup without three emptying trips.
14–16+ GAL	Floods, big shops, heavy debris	Capacity and a 2-1/2 in. hose — at the price of storage space.

Gallons on the box are drum volume — on water, a float stops suction before the drum is truly full. Judge power by CFM (airflow) and water lift (suction under load), never by "peak HP": ~100–150 CFM is the garage sweet spot; 75+ in. of lift is strong.

3 — FILTER CHEAT SHEET (what stays in, what comes out)

JOB	SETUP
DRY DEBRIS	Cartridge filter IN — plus a filter bag for anything fine. The bag is the cheap consumable that protects the cartridge and keeps suction up as it fills.
FINE DUST	Bag + fine-dust / HEPA-class cartridge, always BOTH. (Drywall, concrete, cold ash — and the dust-collection setup for a sander or miter saw.)
WET PICKUP	REMOVE the paper filter and bag; fit the FOAM SLEEVE. A soaked paper filter chokes airflow, mists out the exhaust, and dies. (A small spill can pass with the standard filter in.)
EXCEPTION	Milwaukee M18 2-gal: its HEPA filter is a washable wet/dry design — it can stay in for water. Just let it air-dry afterwards.

When the float cuts suction on a full drum, that's the vac protecting its motor — not a defect.