

Ask Jon Eakes

# Speciality Ladders

Last Updated: Wednesday, September 15th, 2021, Created: Tuesday, December 9th, 2008

Aren't we all tempted by all the speciality ladders we see? Two of the ladders below I showed on my TV show a long time ago. Checking out these ladders sent me on quite a study of ladders, and updating this article over the years shows how some things die and get reborn.

Ladders sold for home use have no standards that they have to meet. That surprised me. There are strict standards for safety and durability of ladders for all commercial, industrial and professional use, but no requirements for the home. Buyer beware! However, most ladders sold in stores do meet those professional standards, partially because of the risk of using ladders and the liability if they fail. More than one ladder company with basic good products but some quality control questions has gone bankrupt over law suits. So retail stores don't get too creative with their ladder selection – and some unsafe ladders are available on the web.

The LADDER-AIDE – painting on stairs

The most recent addition to this article is not a ladder, but a stand to hold a standard ladder in a stairwell, usually for painting. I have tested the light weight Ladder-Aide for a year now and they have just (2019) come out with the larger heavy duty Ladder-Aide Pro. Both of these stair levellers exceed all commercial requirements. They are well designed and solidly built.

That little foot comes compact and portable and in less than a minute can be set up to perfectly fit almost any staircase.

You simply assemble it on the steps and set your ladder into the top tray. It can't slide off, and the physics of the angles and pressures mean that the base cannot tip, whatever you do up on the ladder. Now, if you lean too far over to the side, the ladder can tip over, but that even happens out on level ground when you hang your centre of gravity out too far to the side. (Click here for details on ladder use safety.) There is less of a tendency to reach far out to the side with the Ladder-Aide simply because it is so simple to move it to the next step. Once a contractor realizes that he cannot tip it over, he will use it on every staircase painting job – that is why their website is [www.PaintOnStairs.com](http://www.PaintOnStairs.com) .

The Ladder-Aide is designed to be used with any fixed or extension ladder although the Pro model can handle larger ladder foot pads. (It is not intended for use with step ladders, telescoping, multiple-folding or other ladders.) The Ladder-Aide bases were designed and are distributed in Canada. This one gets an enthusiastic recommendation from me.

The PRO BASE outdoor ladder leveller

For a heavier and more expensive but very simple infinite leveling base for outdoor work on constantly uneven terrain, see my article on the Pro Base. Here you adjust the base every time you move the ladder, with just a touch of your toe.

Collapsible ladders

The 'double sided contractive ladder' in the photos, or what I call the 2x4 ladder because of its compact size, is a very interesting ladder. Its primary claim to fame is its compact size for storage.

It folds out in one direction and then you have to make sure that the four locking clips do lock into place. That is probably its greatest weak spot, they don't always click in by themselves.

Then you open it like a regular A frame ladder. Aside from its light duty construction, it has so many moving parts that I am not sure of its long term reliability. Also the steps are uncomfortable because they are not horizontal when the ladder is open. I have used this one satisfactorily in my own kitchen and shop for many years, but I watch it like a hawk. 2008 note: I can no longer find this ladder available anywhere - probably too many moving parts for it to survive US lawsuits. 2019 note: I just rediscovered it. It is now called the STIK ladder and is sold by the same company that makes the telescoping ladder at the end of this article. The Stik comes in single (foot rails on one side) in 5' and 6' lengths, or double (foot rails on both sides) in 6' and 7' lengths. Nice to see this one back because it can be stored with the brooms in the pantry.

#### Multi-Position or Multi-Fold Ladders

Many variations of the multi fold ladders are available and they are very useful. You should realize that they are quite heavy and never as easy to fold correctly like the guy in the home show does like a magician. Some of the joint mechanisms eat fingers, and others take three arms to manipulate. I have found them more trouble than useful in a stairwell even though they do provide a walking platform – I now prefer the Ladder-Aid above. They are also a lot of trouble to level on uneven ground. Mine sits proudly in the back of the shed.

#### Telescopic ladders

The most impressive of the speciality compact ladders that I have found to date is called the TeleStep, now commonly available in renovation stores. Although expensive, it is a great ladder. The legs slide into themselves like a telescope but click into place solidly. The claim to fame here is its compact size, it will fit easily into the truck of a small car although not really light weight. It has proven itself so well that building inspectors and firemen are buying it around the world. [www.TeleSteps.net](http://www.TeleSteps.net). The only catch is to keep it clean. If you gum up the pipes with too much mud, you may have trouble sliding them and more trouble locking or unlocking them. They have a lot of internal hidden mechanisms that you don't want to mess up.

jon

#### Keywords:

Ladders, Stairs, Alternative, Security, Safety, Tools