

Home GYM MUSCLE

Your In-House Solution ● ●
for Maximum Mass ● ● ● ●

by Steve Holman • Photography by Michael Neveux

It was almost like slow motion. I vividly remember the time I nearly split open my head doing flyes in my home gym. I was clanging my adjustable **dumbbells** together at the top of each rep—I hadn't discovered Arnold's continuous-tension technique yet—when one of the collars came loose and sent a plate plummeting toward my cranium. Luckily, only the 2 1/2-pounder on the end slipped off with the collar. It left a small red-and-purple impression on my forehead, but no stitches were necessary.

It also gave a whole new meaning to the term "drop set."

That was years and years ago. I haven't had to use adjustable **dumbbells** in a long time—even if I choose to train at home—thanks to recent innovations in selectorized dumbbells like the **PowerBlock**. The entire set takes up only a two-square-foot area and replaces an entire wall of fixed dumbbells. It's truly an extraordinary piece of equipment, and it may be the most revolutionary advance in home training in the past 20 years.

Model: Dan Decker



These futuristic rectangular **dumbbells** sit on a sturdy three-foot-high stand and look like something Captain Kirk would train with on the Starship *Enterprise* (“Spock, spot me on some **X Reps**, you unemotional bastard!”). But don’t let that throw you. The **PowerBlock** is heavy-duty, hardcore weight-training equipment, and you can do any dumbbell exercise in the book without fear of collars and plates reeling toward your noggin.

The safety factor is only one of the advantages of using the **PowerBlock**, though. The biggest benefit is the selectorized feature. To change the poundage, you simply return the dumbbells to their racks and move a U-shaped pin on each to select the weight. When you pull the **dumbbells** away from the stand, the poundage you choose comes along for the ride, and the rest of the plates stay on the stand. So it’s not just an ingenious space-saving innovation but a rapid-fire weight-change solution.

That’s extremely important from where I sit, and rep, because I’m a firm believer in drop sets for building more mass. A drop set has nothing to do with that plate dropping on my head I mentioned earlier. It’s doing a set to nervous system exhaustion, quickly reducing the poundage and then doing another set to exhaustion, a key mass-building technique that’s pretty much impossible with a standard adjustable dumbbell set unless you’re overdosing on ephedrine.

Do you really need drop sets? I say absolutely, if you want to max out your muscle size. They are ideal for isolation exercises that you do after your big compound, or multi-joint, mass move. Drop sets are almost mandatory for taking your muscularity to the next level. Let me explain:

Let’s say you train a big, heavy, multijoint exercise like upright rows for delts with two sets, and on the second you include **X-Rep** power partials at the max-force point at the end of the set. That does a number of good things that will contribute toward your packing on more fiber size, including max-force overload. Now you move to drop sets on a continuous-tension

isolation exercise, like dumbbell laterals, which will stress a few more pure fast-twitch fibers but, more importantly, also hit loads of intermediary fibers for extra potential growth.

That’s why a good mass strategy is to finish off a muscle with drop sets. After you blow out your big exercise, you want to go for serious occlusion along with fatigue and more fiber activation. Occlusion, or blocking blood flow, and fatigue create a secondary level of growth, with capillary bed enlargement (and engorgement) and unique muscle fiber stress.

So here’s the drill: After your upright rows you go to lateral raises and rep out, hitting failure at around nine reps. You reduce the weight as quickly as possible and immediately rep out again, getting about six reps. If you’re really brave—and motivated—you may want to decrease the weight one last time and go for a third set immediately after the second. But even with only two back-to-back sets you should feel an incredible burn (if you didn’t, do another round). That helps trigger growth hormone release and signifies that you’ve occluded the muscle and attacked that important next level of growth.

Unless you have an entire rack of

Why You Should Have a PowerBlock Minigym at Home

1) You can train on a split routine at a commercial gym during the week and do a full-body workout at home on the weekends. (All you need is a PowerBlock set and an adjustable bench.)

2) You can split your program so you train your big bodyparts at a commercial gym and work your arms and delts at home.

3) If you don’t feel like coping with the commercial-gym crowd, you can opt for a private home-gym workout to keep the muscle-building machinery fired up. (It’s much better than skipping a workout just because you don’t feel social.)

4) You can give stubborn bodyparts extra work in your home gym on the weekends.

5) It may motivate your spouse or other family members to start training and set the tone for a healthful lifestyle. (It’s always good for kids to see Dad and/or Mom hitting the weights regularly; it helps get the exercise habit ingrained in them.)



Powerblock selectorized dumbbells are secure. No chance of collars and plates coming loose and falling from the sky like with adjustable 'bells (those should come with a crash helmet).

varied-weight **dumbbells**, the drop sets on laterals will be impossible and your mass stimulation will be far less efficient. With drop sets you get a bit more fast-twitch-fiber activation at the end of the first set to failure, but the real size stimulation occurs during the second reduced-poundage set, when your delts are screaming for mercy. That hits the endurance-oriented fibers, expands the need for more capillar-



You can change the poundage in seconds, which is indispensable for drop sets.

ies to fuel the muscle and can increase the supercompensation effect (you'll end up with bigger, fuller muscles, as you'll load more glycogen to suck up fluid during recovery). It's one of the most efficient mass-boosting techniques around. The ability to do drop sets alone is a reason to own a **PowerBlock** set.

You say you train in a commercial gym and don't need this type of equipment at home? Think again. The **PowerBlock** could be your secret weapon for more muscle. With an adjustable bench and a **PowerBlock** set—a veritable home minigym—you can schedule home-training sessions along with your commercial-gym workouts during the week. That way you'll look forward to the change of scenery on specific days.

For instance, you can do commercial-gym workouts during the week, be they full-body programs on Tuesday and Thursday or a split over three or four days, and then on Saturday do a special workout at home, in which you only train the bodyparts that need extra work.

Another option is to do your upper body on Monday, your lower body on Wednesday and then a full-body workout at home on Friday with your selectorized **dumbbells** and bench. Mixing up split training with full-body workouts is a tremendous boredom-breaking muscle-making strategy.

If you're a **beginner**, a

PowerBlock-and-bench setup is an ideal place to learn the ropes and build some respectable muscle before you start repping in public.

Yes, commercial gyms can be motivating, and they pulsate with excitement. Sometimes, though, you just want to focus on you, your effort and getting a burn in the target muscles, not on distractions like the overweight guy sweating all over the flat bench you were going to use.

On a personal note, we have two **PowerBlock** sets in the *IRON MAN* Training & Research Center—no more individual fixed dumbbells—and they're all we use for every dumbbell exercise. We have much more space and drop sets on dumbbell exercises are but a pin move away.

The **PowerBlock** comes in three models, the **Elite Trainer (\$349 plus shipping)**, which goes from five to 50 pounds per dumbbell in five-pound increments. Or go heavier with the **Elite Set 1 (\$588 plus shipping)**, which goes from five to 90 per dumbbell or **Elite 2 (\$848 plus shipping)**, which goes from five to 130. That's not bad, considering you'd pay in the neighborhood of \$2,000 to \$3,000 for a rack of fixed dumbbells.

Full-Body PowerBlock Minigym Home Workout

Dumbbell squats, one-leg squats or lunges	2 x 10
Dumbbell stiff-legged deadlifts	2 x 10
One-leg calf raises	2 x 15-20
Seated calf raises	1 x 20
Dumbbell bench presses	2 x 10
Incline dumbbell flies (drop set)	1 x 10(6)
One-arm dumbbell rows	2 x 10
Dumbbell shrugs	2 x 10
Dumbbell upright rows	2 x 10
Lateral raises (drop set)	1 x 10(6)
Lying extensions	1 x 10
Kickbacks (drop set)	1 x 10(6)
Dumbbell curls	1 x 10
Concentration curls (drop set)	1 x 10
Incline kneeups	1 x max
Full-range crunches	1 x max

The appeal of these dumbbells is obvious. What home-gym enthusiast wouldn't want to have 4,000 pounds of dumbbell power in a two-by-two-foot area? The **PowerBlock** set is one small footprint for home gyms, one giant step for home trainees. Put it on your equipment shopping list pronto, or get on the phone right now and call **(800) 447-0008** to take advantage of the *IM* Research Team **PowerBlock Special** and all those free gifts. **(Note: optional stand for any of these sets is \$119.)**

PowerBlock Pluses

- It takes up a small, two-by-two-foot area, as opposed to a rack of fixed dumbbells.
- The dumbbells' rectangular shape prevents them from rolling.
- The unit is fairly inexpensive when compared to an entire set of fixed dumbbells.
- The 'bells are sturdy and safe—the plates can't fall off, as they can with adjustable dumbbells.

PowerBlock Minuses

- Captain Kirk and Spock may want to work in with you. **IM**