

Are you **new to gold prospecting**? You know you'd like to give it a try, but don't know where to start? Most people begin with the most basic of all [prospecting equipment](#) — the gold pan. We recommend a plastic pan instead of a metal one, but it's really a matter of personal preference. Plastic, of course, is light weight and nearly unbreakable, so it'll last forever and your arm won't get tired as quickly. Remember, you are adding water, dirt, and gravel to your pan, so it can get heavy quickly. You might want to begin with a couple different sizes of [gold pans](#) (10 inch, 12 inch, and 14 inch are the most popular) until you know which feels the most comfortable in your hand.

Plastic pans generally come in green, black, and blue. The color doesn't effect performance, but green is the most common. Color is a matter of personal preference. Some swear gold flakes show up better against a black pan, others say they like green or blue because the magnetic black sand that usually accompanies gold blends into a black pan, whereas they want it to stand out for easy removal. Some pans are round, others are square, or even hexagonal in shape.

Before using a brand new plastic pan that still has some "shine" to it, remove that shine to stop fine gold from potentially floating out of your pan. The shiny surface is a releasing agent (mostly oil) from the manufacturer. A good liquid dish detergent, water, some dirt or sand, or a scouring sponge is all you need to "season" your pan. Just scrub the insides of your pan until water no longer beads up, and you are ready to go!

Practice makes perfect in just about everything and it is no different when it comes to [gold panning](#). Luckily you can practice in your kitchen or laundry sink so that when you head outdoors, you'll already have your technique down and panning will go faster. All you need to practice is your pan and gold bearing dirt. Watch the video below to see an example of [how to pan for gold](#). Then, try it yourself. One of the best things about gold panning is that it can be exciting for all ages — kids and adults!

The most economical way to get started gold prospecting is to purchase a gold pan kit. A [gold panning kit](#) contains all your must-have gold panning basics and a few extras: a couple different sizes of pans, classifiers, tweezers for picking up pieces of gold, a snuffer bottle to suck up tiny pieces of gold, vials to put your finds in, and instructional, how-to information. A [rock pick](#) and a [treasure scoop](#) also come in handy to first break up soil and rocks, then get it into your pan. Gold panning champion [Don Robinson's DVD](#) is an excellent resource for learning the proper technique of gold panning.

Classifiers, also called sieves or screens, go hand in hand with a gold pan. Designed to fit on the top of 5 gallon plastic buckets used by most prospectors, and over most gold pans, the classifier's job is to screen out larger rocks and debris before you pan the material. [Classifiers](#) come in a variety of mesh sizes. The mesh refers to the screen size. For example, a 1/2 inch mesh is about 4 holes per square inch; a 1/4 inch mesh has about 16 holes per square inch; 1/8 inch contains about 64 holes per square inch and so on. 1/100 inch is the smallest mesh that is commonly used for microscopic gold recovery and ultra fine gold dust and flakes.

After learning to gold pan, prospectors usually step up to a sluice. Sluices can process a lot of material in a day and provide really efficient gold recovery. After your basic gold pan, it can't be beat among non-powered, hand-fed equipment. A sluice uses the force of running water to do the same thing a gold pan does — just quicker and in much larger volume. The idea is to position a [sluice box](#) in running water so that the force of the water does the work of separating the dirt and rocks away from the gold. Since gold is heavy, it will stay in the bottom of the sluice, trapped in the miner's moss or matting. A [power sluice](#) or [highbanker](#) really ramps up your ability to recover gold even more!

After mastering panning, classifying and sluicing, many prospectors want to recover gold easier and faster so they step up to an [automatic spiral panning machine](#), a [Gold Cube](#), a [highbanker/dredge](#). A [drywasher](#) is used in arid and desert areas where water is not readily available. These items recover gold in different ways, but are more efficient and effective at getting the shiny stuff than what you can generally do panning by hand. Although these items are a few hundred dollars each, at today's gold prices, you don't need to find very much to completely pay for your equipment (which is built to last), and the rest is pure profit! Gold miners who do this more for a living than just a hobby invest in [gold trommels](#).

## **Where to Find Gold**

After wondering about how to get started gold prospecting, your next question might be, "Where can I find gold?" The simple answer is if you know where gold has been found in the past (the Mother Lode area in California, for example) that usually means you'll find gold there again. Since streams are always changing, gold washing down from mountains or other gold bearing areas is always changing, too. Storms, floods, or man-made changes to a waterway all affect where you'll find gold. A great number of topo maps and [books](#) have been written on how and [where to find gold](#), so doing a little research on the state where you live or where you plan to prospect will greatly increase your chances. The western US has seen many gold rushes over the decades, from the California '49ers and Colorado strike in 1859, to the Yukon in 1897, and since the 1980s it's still going strong!

Modern day prospectors have better equipment than the '49s of yesteryear, so even if an area was worked 100 years ago, those old-timers probably didn't get every bit of gold. And again, Mother Nature is always moving boulders, tearing up tree roots, and otherwise moving gold around. After a storm or following the spring snow melt are some of the best times to look for gold because the increased volume of water can move a lot of things around and cause "stuck" gold to get "unstuck" and flow down a river, stream, or creek where you can now recover it.