

How To Shop For A Washer and Dryer

By Audrey Johnson

When you are shopping for laundry appliances it's important to coordinate the capacity of your dryer with that of your washer. If you have a large capacity washer, you will also need a large sized dryer to accommodate the big loads. Appliance experts recommend that you allot twice as much capacity for the dryer. For example if you have a 3.5 cubic foot washer, you should buy a seven cubic foot dryer. A larger dryer will allow clothes to dry more quickly, which helps save money on your energy bill.

Your clothing will look better and last longer if you choose a washer and dryer with a range of temperature settings designed to handle everything from delicates to cotton and synthetic knit fabrics. Most washers and dryers now have permanent press settings, which help to minimize wrinkles and reduce the need for ironing. The cool-down cycle available on many models keeps the dryer drum spinning for a period of time after clothes are dry to prevent wrinkling.

Dryers have a significant effect on your clothes' appearance and lifespan. Older dryers used thermostats and timers but today's models have moisture sensors that stop the cycle when humidity in the dryer falls to a certain level. This feature prevents over drying, saves energy, and helps keep your clothes looking newer longer. Some models also offer a drying rack that allows you to dry heavy items such as tennis shoes without tumbling.

Temperature settings and controls on washers and dryers have become more sophisticated than ever. Clunky knobs have been replaced with digital displays and one-touch selection options. Other features you may find on dryers include a drum light, which makes it easier to find smaller items like socks, and a lint filter alarm, which alerts you when the lint filter becomes blocked.

Your main considerations when choosing a dryer should be the energy source (gas or electric) and capacity. Gas dryers are a little more expensive than electric dryers but they are more energy efficient, costing about 30 cents less per load to operate. When you are comparing the capacity of different washers and dryers use cubic foot measurements rather than manufacturer's terms such as extra large. If space is limited, you may want to consider a stackable washer-dryer unit.

Your washing machine is one of the most frequently used appliances in your home and choosing the correct model can make a big difference in your energy bill. Consider buying an Energy Star rated washer. Models that receive the rating could save you more than \$100 per year on utility bills. Most full-sized Energy Star qualified washers use 18-25 gallons of water per load compared to 40 gallons used by a standard machine.

Today you can choose between a front-loading or top-loading washer. (Front-load machines may also be referred to as H-axis.) They can be stacked with a dryer on top to save space. Since more water is extracted during the faster spin cycle, your clothes require less time in the dryer, which saves both time and energy. Front-load machines use an undulating motion that is gentler on clothes and they use less water than a top-loading machine. Most also require a special detergent made for front-load machines and they cost 30 to 40 percent more than a top-loading washer.

Top-loading machines come in a broader selection of models and colors with a variety of features. They cost less than front-loading machines but also require more water and energy to operate. Most models include settings for delicates, regular loads, and permanent press as well as different water levels from mini to oversize. Some machines offer extra rinse cycles, a choice of spin cycles, and other options to allow you to wash clothes in a manner safest for the fabric. You should also be able to choose from several water temperatures for washing and rinsing. Different models also offer varying types of bleach and fabric softener dispensers. For safety, many front-loading and top-loading machines have an automatic lock function that prevents the door from opening if the drum is spinning.

Your local appliance dealer can provide you with manufacturers' brochures and explain the features of different models. Before you make a final choice, inquire about the terms of the warranty and local repair service.