

How to Shop For Appliances

By Angela London

Appliances consume about 20 percent of your household's energy, with refrigerators and clothes dryers using the most. When shopping for new appliances you should not only look for the best features and prices but also the operating cost and energy efficiency ratings. Replacing a refrigerator more than 12 years old with a new model will save up to \$100 in annual electricity bills. Switching to an energy-efficient clothes washer could save up to \$1000 over the washer's life span.

Appliances with the Energy Star label from the U.S. Department of Energy and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency exceed federal efficiency standards by 13-20 percent and as much as 110 percent for some models. The label is only given to products that have been rated high performance with reduced operating costs.

Before you begin shopping for appliances measure the space that you have available taking care to leave a little extra space for moving the appliance in and out, and taking into account space for opening doors.

When you are shopping for washers keep in mind that top-loading models are usually less expensive to buy than front-loading machines but may cost more to run since they use more water and electricity. Washers increase in price based on the number of cycles, temperature choices, spin speeds, and fabric care extras.

Gas dryers cost more to buy than electric models but are less expensive to operate. Some models use dual temperature heating elements, while others may have energy efficient features such as moisture sensors and timers.

Don't buy a refrigerator larger than your family needs. Appliance salespeople often recommend 10 cubic feet of food storage for a family of two and adding an extra cubic foot for each additional person. The freezer should be 40 to 50 percent as large as the food storage section. A family of four should choose a model between 16.5 and 17.5 cubic feet while a larger family might need 20 cubic feet. (Your family's food storage needs may require that you need a larger model). Refrigerators with the freezer on top are the most common type and offer a wider selection of styles. Many new styles offer more spacious interiors, adjustable door storage, full-width freezer compartments and larger crisper drawers.

Electric ranges are less expensive than gas ranges and available with standard coil burners or smooth-top ceramic glass cook tops with electric elements sealed beneath. The smooth-top range is easier to clean and offers more advanced radiant elements for heating foods quickly and evenly. Many ranges offer programmable timers and delay and time-bake cycles making it easy for families to multitask while they cook

meals. Some models also include safety features such as an oven control lockout, hot surface indicator lights, and 12-hour automatic shutoff. Convection ovens bake 30 percent faster than conventional ovens since a fan in the rear of the oven cavity circulates heated air over, under and around foods to cook them quickly. A few range models also offer warming drawers to keep cooked foods table-ready with warm, circulated air.

Newer dishwasher models feature improved sound insulation, smart loading designs and soil removing technology that virtually eliminates the need for pre-rinsing.

A recent study by the U.S. Department of Energy showed that consumers could save money and help their communities save energy by switching to water and energy efficient appliances. When consumers in the study switched to a front loading washer, a water and energy efficient dishwasher and an energy efficient clothes dryer, they attained a 38 percent reduction in water consumption and a 37 percent reduction in electricity. Results of the study show that a typical family with a home more than 10 years old could save \$200 per year in electricity and water bills and 18,600 gallons of water by switching to energy and water efficient appliances.

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