

# How to Shop For A Refrigerator

By Audrey Johnson

Buying a new refrigerator is not a task you should take lightly. Not only is it one of the more expensive appliances, it also consumes approximately 20 percent of the electricity your family uses each month. Before you shop for a refrigerator it's important to analyze your family's food storage needs. Some families need lots of freezer space for frozen foods and microwaveable convenience foods, while others need the flexibility of adjustable refrigerator shelves to accommodate a variety of fresh foods, drinks, and leftovers.

Experts recommend that you allow 10 cubic feet of fresh food storage for two people and add an extra cubic foot for each additional person. You might think that a little extra space wouldn't hurt, but if you select a refrigerator that is too big and don't keep it filled, it will cost more to operate and you'll end up wasting energy. And if you buy a refrigerator that is too small, you will have to constantly be rearranging things to make everything fit.

The amount of space you have available in your kitchen is equally important. Measure the width and depth of the refrigerator with the doors open and make sure you have enough room for the unit to fit. (Some models take up less space with the doors open.) It is important to allow at least two inches of airflow around the refrigerator for it to operate most efficiently.

Refrigerators are available in bottom-mount, top-mount, side-by-side, and compact models. Bottom-mount models have the refrigerator compartment on top and the freezer below, while top-mount models are designed with the freezer on top and refrigerator below. Side-by-sides are designed with the refrigerator and freezer adjacent to each other. Some models also offer reversible doors allowing for left or right-handed access. Compact models range in size from small cubes perfect for a dorm room to scaled down refrigerators designed to fit under a kitchen counter or in an efficiency kitchen.

Modern features to look for include spill proof shelves and energy-saving in-door refreshment compartments that allow you to access snacks and beverages more conveniently without having to open the main door. Some models have storage bins and vegetable crispers with separate controls to keep foods at their optimum freshness.

If maximizing freezer space is important to you but you still want the convenience of an icemaker, look for a model with an icemaker in the door. Ice and water dispensers in the door are one of the most sought after features in modern refrigerators but they do cost more. Some models also feature a choice of cubed or crushed ice and water filtration.

When calculating the cost, remember that you will probably operate the refrigerator for 10 years or more, so a \$25 - \$50 difference in price between models to get an additional convenience feature is probably worth the cost difference over the lifetime of the appliance.

Refrigerators come in a choice of colors and finishes to coordinate with your kitchen decor. Along with white, black and stainless steel finishes, you can choose wood paneled versions to complement your cabinetry.

Check the refrigerator's Energy Guide label to determine how much energy is needed to operate the model you are considering. Compare the energy use of similar models. The most energy-efficient refrigerators are usually in the 16-20 cubic foot size. Refrigerators with top-mount freezers use 10-25 percent less energy than side-by-side models. Be sure to ask the salesperson if rebates are available for purchasing a particular model. Some utilities offer savings to customers who purchase energy-saving appliances.

If you are on a limited budget, you can reduce the purchase price from \$100-\$200 by choosing a model without an icemaker or water dispenser. Automatic icemakers and through-the door dispensers also increase energy use by 15-20 percent.

Consult your phone directory and visit several local stores to compare brands and features. Ask friends and family to recommend appliance dealers they have used in the past. Scan your local newspaper for stores offering sales and rebates. Be sure to ask about the store's delivery policy and if they will cart away your old refrigerator at no extra charge. Many stores offer free delivery and some offer financing if you can't afford to pay the full price all at once. Take a look at the warranty and what it covers before you complete the deal.