



Major Appliance Selection

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Appliances are major investments for a home. In addition to the initial cost, the typical American homeowner pays up to \$1500 per year to use, care for and maintain major appliances. Since appliances have relatively long life expectancy, a poor choice can be irritating--even costly if replaced due to dissatisfaction.

SHOPPING DECISION

* **Family Needs:** One of the most important factors to consider when shopping for a new appliance is the family needs. What model would be most useful for your family? Does any family member have special needs? For example, is a family member short, blind, or need to use a wheelchair?

* **Convenience Features:** It is important to determine what you will use and what you will not use. Paying for features that will never be used can be very costly. Are extra features worth the added cost over that of the basic appliance? Will the added feature save time, energy, or work? Will you use the extra features? Can you afford them?

Does the model have energy saving features? Be sure to compare the energy efficiency of refrigerators, freezers, and dishwashers because they often use a lot of energy. Other appliances vary little in energy use between models and brands. Appliances should be designed to permit ease of use and maintenance. Safety is another critical issue as more children are using appliances.

* **Installation:** Take into account power, space and size of the new appliance. How much space is available for the appliance? Are doors and passageways wide enough to move the appliance in and out of the room? What fuel source is required, available, and most cost-efficient? What additional wiring, plumbing, or other hookups are required for the new appliance? What is the cost for this? Are there additional charges for delivery, installation, and service calls?

* **Cost of operating:** The cost of operating an appliance depends on the cost of energy, the appliance design, frequency of use, number of hours used and the user's work habits. Often energy-efficient appliances cost more than less efficient models, but usually the energy cost savings will repay the difference in purchase price fairly quickly.

* **Warranty:** When you buy a major appliance, you are also buying a warranty. It costs the manufacturer to fill the warranty terms and that cost is included in the price you pay for the appliance. Make certain each major appliance you purchase has a warranty that provides you with meaningful protection. Become familiar with warranty contents and terminology. Treat the warranty just like a feature on the appliance.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS:

- Does the warranty cover the entire product or only certain parts?
- Is the labor included in the warranty? (Sometimes you have to pay labor).
- Who is responsible for repairing the product? The dealer? A service agency? The manufacturer?
- Who pays for what under the warranty? Parts? Labor? Shipping charges? Travel charges?
- How long does the warranty last on the entire product? On the individual parts or assemblies?
- If the product is out of use because of a service problem, or if it has to be removed from the home for repair, will a substitute product or service be provided? By whom?

Keep your warranty contract and the sales check for future reference. Insist that the sales slip fully describe the product and any terms of the sale. Record the date of purchase, model and serial number. Also, record in detail any service or repair work done after purchase. A good storage location for these records might be in a file cabinet labeled "Household Appliances."

*** Service Help:** Nearly one-fourth of all home service calls are unnecessary. Paying a service person to plug in the appliance or trip the breaker switch is expensive. The care and use manual that comes with appliances lists items to check before calling for service assistance. If the appliance manual does not help solve the problem, consult with the dealer from whom the appliance is purchased. Explain the problem, being sure to have the model number and serial number for the appliance. The dealer may be able to help or may direct you elsewhere for help from the manufacturer.

Several manufacturers of appliances provide a toll-free number for location of parts and service their products. In addition to service help, some hotlines also handle consumer inquiries about the company's products, plus general questions on the appliance selection, use and care.

*** Life Expectancy of Different Appliances:** Often consumers ask about the life expectancy of new appliances. In the following chart you will see the life expectancy of the most common appliances found in the home.

House Item	Life expectancy	Replacement Costs
Dishwasher	12 years	\$600-\$1000
Oven/stove	20 years	\$800-\$1200
Refrigerator	14 years	\$600-\$1200
Washer and Dryer	13 years	\$650-\$ 800
Microwave	11 years	\$ 99-\$ 250
Television (color or black & white)	8 years	\$150-\$1500
Water Heater	10 years	\$350-\$ 800
Garbage Disposal	10 years	\$150-\$ 400

Source: Thompson, C.J. (1985). *Major Appliances*. Cooperative Extension Service Montguide publication MT-8509, Montana Cooperative Extension, Bozeman, Montana.

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