

# Money Saving Tips For Home Appliances

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By Rebecca P. Lovingood

Household tasks of preparing and storing food or keeping clothing, furnishings, and the living environment clean and neat have changed little over the years. Although Cornell University researchers have found much the same time spent in home-making, household appliances certainly make those tasks easier.

For example, compare washing clothes with a washboard or wringer washer to using a modern automatic washer which only requires the user to select the proper controls for water temperature, wash time and speed after putting the clothes into the washing machine. Or contrast preparing food on a cookstove of your great-grandmother's day with cooking on a modern gas or electric range or microwave oven.

Household appliances represent an initial expense of several thousand dollars, usually the largest single household investment after the purchase of a house and an automobile. According to U.S. Department of Agriculture research, the life expectancy of new major appliances, or number of years of ownership by one household, ranges from 11 to 20 years.

Purchase prices are increasing as are costs of ownership, due in part to the cost of energy.

Besides the money involved, other factors must be weighed in making the decision to buy an appliance.

First off, what are your needs? Your family has its own set of needs and wants which must be weighed in developing a family spending plan.

Don't buy just to "Keep up with the Joneses." Whether to buy or not to buy; what to buy first; what to add later — these are questions your family must decide.

Consider YOUR OWN needs, wants and resources. Be sure you will be sold on the appliance a year from now.

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Ask such questions as these, of yourself or others:

- What do we really want the appliances to do?
- How much are we willing to pay? Should we buy a new or used appliance?
- What are the desirable features of this equipment?
- Which features will be most desirable and which “nice to have” or not necessary?
- Will the appliance be easy and safe to use, especially by those likely to use it most frequently?
- Will it be easy to care for?
- Will the appliance be economical to operate and maintain?
- Will it fit into the space available for it in our home?

You can get information to help answer these and other questions from many sources — appliance salespeople or service representatives, Extension or utility home economists, or your friends.

Keep an equipment reference file for items such as Extension bulletins, magazine articles, catalog descriptions, advertisements, and other available materials. A trip to your local library or to exhibits at county fairs or home shows may be helpful. Using the telephone instead of the automobile to get information will save time, energy and money.

### **Make Sure There's Room**

Every appliance requires space in your home. Before you start to shop, measure the space you have and the doors, windows, or stairways through which the appliance must be moved. Don't forget space for yourself, if you are to use your equipment with ease.

Check fuel, power, and water supplies of your home. Is your supply of fuel and power dependable and adequate? Will your present wiring system carry the equipment safely and satisfactorily? Will you need to have new wiring, or add new outlets?

Will this equipment cause water and disposal problems? Will you have enough water, and is the water pressure adequate? Is your septic tank large enough? Should you change your selection or modify these facilities?

Learn to read and “interpret” appliance labels and other point-of-purchase information. For example, frozen food can be stored much longer in the “true” freezer of a refrigerator-freezer than in the frozen food compartment of a household refrigerator.

A nameplate stamped into the appliance or inscribed on a separately affixed plate gives operating conditions of the appliance as well as the model number and manufacturer's name and

location. Sometimes special operating instructions are given such as "Connect to wall outlet only" or "Dry only items washed in water."

Look for the Underwriters Laboratory (UL) symbol, which indicates an electrical appliance has been manufactured according to a set of standards approved for safety by UL. In existence for over 80 years, Underwriters Laboratory is a private organization to which manufacturers voluntarily submit products for examination and testing.

The American Gas Association (AGA) Laboratories' blue star emblem on a gas appliance signifies that the design and manufacture of the appliance comply with national safety standards for construction and performance.

Yellow and black EnergyGuide labels affixed to refrigerators, refrigerator-freezers, freezers, clothes washers, water heaters, dishwashers, room air-conditioners, and furnaces are meant to provide shoppers with energy information that will be useful in appliance selection.

EnergyGuide labels are required by law on any of these appliances manufactured after mid-May 1980. Information on the labels is based on laboratory tests approved by the Department of Energy, and

**Be a careful shopper when looking for appliances. Most major appliances manufactured after mid-May 1980, are required by law to have an EnergyGuide label affixed to them. Be sure to read that label.**



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varies in content, depending on the appliance.

Room air-conditioners have an energy efficiency rating based on the amount of output energy — Btu's of cooling — you get for a given amount of input energy measured in watt-hours. The higher the number, the more efficient the air-conditioner.

### **Furnaces Have Labels Too**

Furnaces have generic labels with general energy information along with an energy factsheet developed by the manufacturer.

The remaining products have energy cost labels which show an estimated annual energy cost of operation based on estimated average use and a national average gas or electric rate.

Labels on clothes washers and dishwashers show estimated yearly energy costs when operated with water heated in an electric water heater or a gas water heater.

When comparing energy costs, be sure to compare costs for appliances of the same style and size. For example, operating a 19 cubic foot frost-free refrigerator-freezer quite likely would require more energy than operating a 16 cu. ft. cycle defrost model.

Be a careful shopper. Don't buy the first thing you see, but "shop the field." Get some idea of styles and models available. What brands are common in your community? After you have decided on a style and the features you want, make comparisons of the same piece in several shops to discover differences in brands or in prices from one shop to another.

Carry a notebook to record brand names and model numbers to assure comparison of exactly the same items in several shops. Note price, materials, and finishes; your estimate of quality of workmanship, size, and shape; plus any special features or qualities of the product.

All models of appliances are manufactured to meet certain basic standards of performance. That is, all ranges provide a source of heat for top surface cooking, for baking, and for broiling. Some models have added features which make those operations easier or more automatic.

Features do increase the purchase price. Some features are valuable "servants." Some are largely for "show." You may find certain features worth the price; your neighbor may not. But be sure the model you select has the features you want and will use.

Read the warranty carefully before you buy, and see that you understand the terms. It is your legal protection against poor workmanship and materials.

## **Full, Limited Warranties**

Written warranties will be labeled "full" or "limited." Under a full warranty, the manufacturer promises either to repair a defective product within a reasonable time or period of usage without charge, or to give a refund or replacement if the product cannot be repaired. If any restrictions are placed on coverage, the warranty must be labeled as "limited."

Warranties mean nothing unless you report failures to the dealer or the manufacturer, whichever is specified. To speed processing of your complaint, be sure to include all the information requested on the warranty along with a specific description of the problem, your name, and complete address.

Is the manufacturer dependable? Over a period of years, has the manufacturer earned and kept a good reputation by producing quality equipment and carrying out terms of the guarantees?

Is your dealer well established in the community? Does the dealer have a reputation for standing behind the equipment? Do the salespersons understand the construction, installation, operation and care of each appliance? Do they help you select an appliance to fit your needs and pocketbook, or are they more interested in selling the most expensive model on the floor?

As appliances become more automatic, service gets more important. Is service available from the dealer who sells the appliance? Or is there an independent service agency that specializes in servicing the brand of appliance you have chosen? If you move to another community will you be able to get service?

Look for a service agency that has a reputation for promptness, dependability, and integrity.

## **Tips on Service Contracts**

The service contracts sometimes offered by dealers are much like a term insurance policy — the holder benefits only if a problem develops that requires service. In deciding whether to buy a service contract, consider points such as:

- What is covered by the appliance warranty and for what period of time? Coverage of the service contract and the warranty may overlap.
- Does the contract cover the whole appliance or just a specific part?
- Are exclusions listed in the warranty or the contract? Some cover parts but not labor; repairs but not travel time; repairs done in the home but not in the service agency's shop.
- How many calls are covered? Who is responsible for unsatisfactory work? If you

find service unsatisfactory on the first call related to a problem, is the callback covered by the contract?

- If you move out of the area before expiration of the contract, can you get a refund in proportion to the time remaining on the contract?
- Does the contract guarantee prompt service? Service on weekends or after hours without extra charge?
- Is the cost of the service contract reasonable in relation to the probable cost of service that may be required? Contract prices generally increase as appliances get older.

There are many costs — of the equipment itself, of installation, of operation, and of upkeep. When considering costs, divide the original cost by the number of years you expect to use the equipment. This may help you decide if you want certain pieces of equipment, or certain features on that equipment.

When figuring cost of operation, think of the “servants” you buy for that cost. Your time and energy may be hard to evaluate in dollars but you might consider the other tasks or activities you prefer to be doing while the appliance handles routine, repetitive tasks such as dishwashing.

Consider also the cost of the time spent in learning to use the appliance and to keep it in good condition.

An instruction booklet giving full directions for operation and care should come with each piece of equipment. Read it carefully before you use the appliance. Keep it handy and refer to it often. Record the model number of the appliance, date of purchase, and dealer’s name and telephone number in the booklet.

The manufacturer’s recommendations for use and care of the appliance are intended to increase your satisfaction in using the appliance and to reduce the amount of service required. Many booklets contain a list of common problems and solutions or “things to check before you call the serviceman.”

**Send  
Complaint  
to MACAP**

If you cannot get satisfactory resolution to a problem with a major appliance through the dealer or the manufacturer, write to the Major Appliance Consumer Action Panel. The address is: MACAP Complaint Exchange, 20 North Wacker Drive, Chicago, IL 60606.

MACAP professionals are specialists in consumer education and communication, and attempt to view a problem from all angles before

making a recommendation about settlement.

Through labels on an appliance itself and in the instruction booklet, a manufacturer attempts to communicate the intended use of an appliance. Using the appliance for other purposes may cause service problems that will not be covered by the warranty, permanently damage the appliance, or be dangerous to the user.

Appliance users need to be aware of potential safety hazards in operating appliances. How would you rate on these points:

- Do you use the “one-hand rule” when connecting or disconnecting electrical appliances? That is, avoid holding on to two electrical appliances or an appliance and a water faucet (connection to ground) at the same time.
- Do you routinely check to see that the continuous burning pilots on gas appliances are burning? That the burners are lighting and operating correctly?
- Do you disconnect electrical appliances by pulling on the plug, not the cord?
- Do you keep flammable materials away from gas flames or hot electric units?
- Do you help children learn the potential hazards of appliances and teach them how to avoid accidents?

Appliance manufacturers are increasing the energy efficiency of their appliances. Gas ranges and clothes dryers are now available with “pilotless” ignition systems that eliminate the need for continuous burning pilots. Ranges, refrigerators, and freezers have increased amounts of insulation and operating components that are more energy-efficient.

Although microwave ovens use less energy in cooking some foods, the time saving may be greater than the energy saving in cooking large quantities.

However, even appliances designed with the greatest energy efficiency can become less efficient under certain conditions. For example, researchers at the National Bureau of Standards have found as much as a 50 percent difference in energy use among homemakers preparing exactly the same menus on identical ranges.

### **Tips for Energy Savers**

#### *Cooking: Range or Microwave*

- Cook foods only as long as necessary; over-cooking wastes energy *and* nutrients.
- If you have an electric range, learn to use the retained heat that remains in the electric oven or surface unit after the control has been turned off.

- Cook an entire meal in the oven rather than using both oven and surface units or burners.
- Use portable appliances or the microwave oven when cooking small quantities of food.
- Cover pans when cooking.
- Use the HIGH heat setting only when necessary.
- Fit the pan size to the heat source.
- Preheat the oven no longer than necessary. For some foods, such as meats and casseroles, it is not necessary to preheat the oven at all. Broilers usually do not require preheating.

#### *Refrigerator or Freezer*

- Allow space around unit for good air circulation. Heat trapped around the appliance makes the cooling system operate less efficiently.
- Open the refrigerator or freezer door only when really necessary, especially during hot weather, and keep the door open no longer than required.
- If the refrigerator or freezer is not automatically defrosted, defrost the freezer coils before ice builds up to more than  $\frac{1}{4}$  thick (about the thickness of a lead pencil).

#### *Dishwashing*

- Operate the automatic dishwasher with a full load to conserve hot water. Using a no-heat drying period is one way to use less energy, but the cost of heating the water to wash the dishes is several times greater than the cost of drying them.
- In hand dishwashing, wash a number of items, not just a few, with a sink full of hot, sudsy water. When rinsing, fill one half of a double-bowled sink with hot water for rinsing dishes rather than rinsing them under a running stream of hot water.
- Pre-rinsing dishes may not be necessary; if it is, use cold water rather than hot.

#### *Laundrying*

- Wash and dry full loads or adjust water level to match size of load.
- Use warm wash, cold rinse water for most loads. For lightly soiled clothes, use cold wash (minimum 80° F) and rinse water; for heavily soiled clothes, hot wash, cold rinse.
- Remove as much water as possible from clothes in the washer by proper selection of speed and length of spin cycle. (Spinning water out takes less energy than evaporating it in the clothes dryer.)
- Avoid overdrying articles in the automatic dryer.

To sum up, major appliances represent a sizable investment and have a relatively long period of service in the household. Because of the increasing



cost of energy, cost of operation is a factor to be considered in choosing and using appliances.

For satisfaction and economy, follow the guideposts in this chapter which recommend that you weigh your needs, ask questions, consider space and installation needs, read labels, shop the field, compare features, know the reputation of the manufacturer and dealer, consider service, count all the costs of ownership and operation, ask for and use the instruction booklet, use the appliance as the manufacturer intends and according to recommended safety practices, and be a good energy manager.

For additional information, contact your local Cooperative Extension agent.

**When laundering, wash and dry full loads or adjust water level to match the load size.**



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