



AUGUST 2013 | CONSUMERREPORTS.ORG

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MODELS

## TOP Tablets Phones Cameras Laptops

Plus wireless speakers,  
e-readers, sports cams,  
headphones & more



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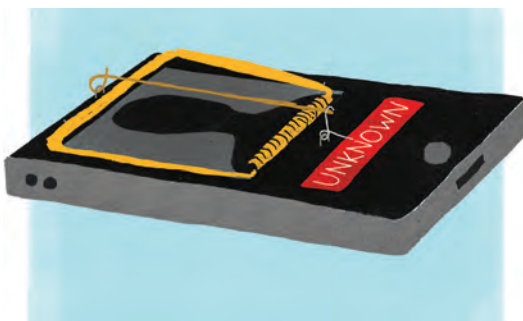
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# 35

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### Savings this issue

## \$300

Try **haggling** for furniture and you could save this much on average, our latest survey found.

## \$146

Buy your **eyeglasses** at LensesRX.com and you could save this much over the same prescription at LensCrafters.

## \$30

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## Coming in September

Drug savings, health care, breakfast cereal, 401(k) advice, pod coffeemakers, tablet computers, and streaming media players.

### Check out our iPad app

Look for expanded Ratings, videos of road tests and lab tests, plus more photos and interactive navigation. Now included with your paid magazine subscription.



## Who we are

### Consumer Reports

is the world's largest independent consumer-product-testing organization. We also survey millions of consumers about their experiences with products and services. We're based in Yonkers, N.Y., and are a nonprofit organization.

**What we do** We buy all of the products we rate. **What we don't do** We don't accept paid advertising; we get our money mainly through subscriptions and donations. We don't accept free test samples from manufacturers. And we don't allow our name or content to be used for any promotional purposes.

**How to reach us** Write to us at Consumer Reports, 101 Truman Ave., Yonkers, NY 10703-1057, attn: Customer Service.  
• To send a letter to the editor, go to [ConsumerReports.org/lettertoeditor](http://ConsumerReports.org/lettertoeditor).  
• For news tips and story ideas, go to [ConsumerReports.org/tips](http://ConsumerReports.org/tips).  
• E-mail submissions for Selling It to [SellingIt@cro.consumer.org](mailto:SellingIt@cro.consumer.org).  
• For subscription information, go to [ConsumerReports.org/magazine](http://ConsumerReports.org/magazine) or call 800-666-5261. See page 61 for more details.

**Ratings** We rate products using these symbols:

● Excellent ● Very good ○ Good ● Fair ● Poor

**✓ CR Best Buy** Products with this icon offer the best combination of performance and price.

**✓ Recommended product** Models with this designation perform well and stand out for reasons we note.

**✓ Recommended car** These tested well, are reliable, and performed adequately if crash-tested or included in a federal rollover test.

**✗ Don't Buy** We label products with this icon when we judge them to be safety risks or to have serious performance problems.



## ON YOUR MIND

## Auto insurance

Concerning "Save on Auto Insurance" in your June 2013 issue, here's another way to typically save 5 percent a year for three years on most auto-insurance policies:

Attend an AARP Driver Safety Program. It's a great return for a 6-hour investment, and you can do it again in three years.

—*Al Homan* Pilesgrove, NJ

I've been insured for almost 15 years by one of your top-rated companies. I just found out that the company's repair policy uses aftermarket non-crash parts after 12 months



information to have when choosing an insurance company.

—*V.N. Shastri* Oneonta, NY

## Choosing a nursing home

I want to add two things that caregivers should do to your suggestions in "Nursing-Home Rights and Wrongs" in the June 2013 issue. First, interview the management. How

or 15,000 miles, whichever comes first, and that claim repairs are under warranty only if performed in one of its preferred shops. That would be useful

do they treat the staff? How do they handle mistakes? How managers treat people under them can greatly influence care of the elderly. Second, how involved will adult children of the patient be with him or her? If the answer is not very involved, the patient needs a high care-staff-to-patient ratio or their care may be negatively affected.

—*Gabe Berg* Chico, CA

**Correction** The Hot List in July included wide-deck lawn tractors, not zero-turn-radius models. Our chart label was incorrect.

**SEND YOUR LETTERS TO**  
[ConsumerReports.org/lettertoeditor](http://ConsumerReports.org/lettertoeditor).

## Ask our experts

**Q** Ads suggest that there's a difference between sea salt and regular table salt. I know there's a difference in flavor between plain and iodized salt, but is the origin of salt also significant?

—*Arthur Peters* Oroville, CA

Sea salt comes from evaporating sea water, with little or no processing. It's more coarse than table salt and can have an odor or flavor due to mineral residues such as magnesium. Table salt comes from underground salt deposits and is processed to remove other minerals and nutrients. Additives are needed to prevent clumping, and iodine is often added for thyroid health. Sea salt is promoted as having more health benefits than table salt, but there's nothing it offers that you can't easily get from other dietary sources.

**Q** I'm 20 years old and have a part-time job. I've never applied for a credit card or anything like that. What's the best way to establish credit?

—*Rebekah Lewis* Raleigh, NC

The Credit Card Act of 2009 made it more difficult for people under 21 without an older cosigner or proven income to get a credit card. Easier than applying for your own credit card is to get added as an authorized user on someone else's card. As an authorized user, the account is added to your credit record. Provided the primary cardholder pays bills on time and doesn't run up a balance too close to his or her credit limit, you can build credit fairly quickly. You aren't liable for the primary cardholder's debt, and the cardholder can decide whether or not to give you a card.

**Q** A grill dealer recently cautioned never to use a wire brush to clean the grate, as bristles break off and get into the food. Is it unsafe to use a wire brush?

—*Roberta Goldenberg* Bayside, NY

It can be. There have been recent reports of injuries, some requiring emergency surgery,



**GRAINS OF TRUTH?** The health benefits of sea salt (left) over table salt may be overblown.

when wire bristles were accidentally swallowed. Consider oiling grates to prevent sticking, and to clean grates, use high heat, crinkled aluminum foil, or other tools. If you use a wire brush, check the grates for stray bristles. If you find some, throw the brush away.

**Q** We have cell phones and a landline. We're considering dropping the landline since we rarely use it. But friends have suggested that it's good to keep in case of a natural disaster. Is that good advice?

—*Paul Smith* Moultonboro, NH

It depends in part on your phone service. If it reaches your home with old-fashioned

copper wire and you own a simple corded phone, a power outage shouldn't affect your ability to make calls. But if you're connected via Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) and you lose power, you'd lose phone service unless you have a battery backup from your provider.

Incidentally, when we surveyed readers about their experiences during Superstorm Sandy, many indicated that cell-phone service stood up better than landline service, and making 911 calls on their cell wasn't a problem.

**SEND YOUR QUESTIONS TO**  
[ConsumerReports.org/askourexperts](http://ConsumerReports.org/askourexperts).

This page highlights efforts of Consumers Union, the policy and action arm of Consumer Reports, to improve the marketplace.

## WHERE WE STAND

### Fueling the debate

**THE ISSUE** Opponents of new fuel-economy standards are ignoring the evidence and contending that they'll lead to unaffordable, unsafe vehicles.

**OUR TAKE** We disagree, and we support the standards. Fuel-economy targets set by the government last year bump the required average from 35.5 mpg by 2016 to 54.5 mpg by 2025. Consumers Union just released a report examining the effects that the standards will have on the safety and cost of vehicles. (To download the report and learn more about fuel economy, go to [ConsumerReports.org/fuel](http://ConsumerReports.org/fuel).) It found that the standards will save consumers thousands of dollars in fuel costs over the life of a vehicle and that safety



advances won't be compromised. The standards are popular with the public and major stakeholders, but opponents will probably continue to try to weaken them—to no avail, we hope. Fuel economy is at an all-time high, and car companies are making innovative, more-efficient vehicles. We advise shoppers to factor in the total cost of owning a vehicle for years, including fuel.

# 43%

That's the percent of Minnesota lakes that harbor bisphenol A (BPA), according to a study released in May by that state's Pollution Control Agency. The reasons aren't clear. BPA poses risks to the brain and the reproductive and immune systems. It's now banned from baby bottles and sippy cups; Consumers Union wants it out of infant-formula and other food cans, and register receipts.

## STATE LINES

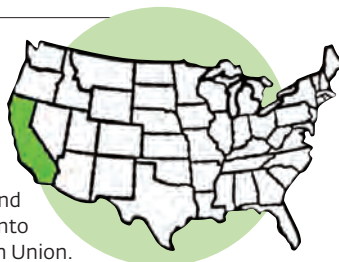
### Consumers lose funds to fees

People in certain California cities may be getting a raw deal. Los Angeles, Oakland, and Richmond are in the process of issuing prepaid debit cards. That may help people who don't have bank accounts, but the cards come with steep charges and don't have the same guaranteed federal protections that accompany traditional debit cards.

Oakland's municipal ID card, coupled with a prepaid card, for example, costs consumers a \$2.99 monthly fee, 75 cents per transaction up

to \$12.50 a month, \$1.75 to call customer service, \$1.50 at an in-network ATM, and \$1 to load money onto the card at Western Union.

Consumers Union is calling on municipalities to make card fees fair and transparent and to provide strong protections against mistakes and fraud.



## FROM OUR PRESIDENT

### Basic rights for all

"Consumers, by definition," said John F. Kennedy in 1962, "include us all." That year, he issued the first-ever declaration of fundamental rights consumers should (but didn't yet) have: the right to safety, to be informed, to choose, and to be heard.



In 1985 the United Nations adopted its first consumer-protection guidelines based on Kennedy's list, and it expanded them in 1999.

The U.N. guidelines serve as a model for countries as they develop protections for their own consumers. But they haven't been universally adopted or enforced. That's why Consumers International, a federation of 240 consumer organizations in more than 115 countries, continues to campaign to expand consumer protections.

CI, of which I'm privileged to serve as volunteer president, is formally recognized by the U.N. and other international bodies as the global voice for consumers. It has committed to work with the U.N. to update the existing guidelines and, more important, to push for those rights to cover all consumers around the world, even the poorest and most vulnerable.

### Enact and enforce

CI recently surveyed member organizations about the state of consumer protection in their countries. Among the findings: Lower-income countries were far less likely than higher-income nations to have a national policy on consumer protection; not all countries that pass consumer-friendly legislation update it to keep it viable (Brazil's hasn't changed since 1990); and far too many fail to enforce it. (India's organization reported that "consumer protection remains on paper and is often illusory.")

So as the U.N. works to position consumers' rights in an increasingly complex financial, digital, and environmentally tenuous world, we must not lose sight of the fundamental protections that all consumers deserve. That's why CI believes that it's essential to include access to food, water, energy, and shelter in the new U.N. guidelines. To learn more, go to [consumersinternational.org](http://consumersinternational.org).

*Jim Guest*  
JIM GUEST  
President

## WEB WATCH

### Cure or snake oil?

The Food and Drug Administration has a handy online resource to help educate consumers about health-related scams that can waste money, lead to delays in getting proper diagnosis and treatment, and even cause serious injuries. The consumer-friendly site, at [www.fda.gov/healthfraud](http://www.fda.gov/healthfraud), has a range of resources to evaluate products and treatments that claim to prevent, treat, or cure health conditions but have not been proved safe and effective for those uses.





# Up front

Tips, trends, everyday products



## ▲ Nature Made melatonin

"A friend recommended this to help me get to sleep ... I was too angry to sleep after opening the bottle!"



## ▲ Phillips Colon Health

"The package is nearly twice as big as the bottle, and the bottle is two-thirds empty."



## ▲ New Chapter Bone Strength

"You can see that the pills included fill up not even half the bottle. The other more-than-half of the bottle was filled with cotton. Sigh."



## ▲ Bayer Low Dose aspirin

"When I poured all tablets into one bottle," said a buyer of three Bayer bottles, "it still wasn't full."

# Pill bottles with air to spare

**SOME READERS NEED** a chill pill, and for good reason: The pill bottles they've bought recently are half-full at best. Four such bottles, with readers' complaints, are shown above. Another gripe was prompted by a three-bottle pack of the

heartburn pill omeprazole, bought at CVS. "Each bottle contains only 14 tablets," a reader told us. "This has to win an award for wasteful packaging." Right you are.

Why the waste? "We try to use the same size bottle for different products, for cost-saving," a customer-service rep from supplement maker Nature Made told us. "Sometimes the pills are bigger, so the bottle will be full." A Bayer rep blamed the size of that company's low-dose-aspirin bottle on the amount of information the Food and Drug Administration requires it to convey. Curious, because the Bayer bottle above is pretty puny—and still mostly empty.

Larger packages and bottles can grab a shopper's attention, says Dave Wendland,

vice president of Hamacher Resource Group, which designs how products are organized on drugstore shelves. "That could turn into more sales for the manufacturer," he adds.

The number of pills is stated on the package, and yet, "I know I'm buying 100 tablets and not a serving of something that I might expect to fill the box," a Bayer buyer wrote. "But really, it does create an expectation. And what about wasted space/cost in shipping and packaging?"

One plus for big bottles: They're easier to recycle than small ones, which may not survive the sorting process, says David Cornell, technical consultant for the Association of Postconsumer Plastic Recyclers.

## ▶ DID YOU KNOW?

Some bottles must accommodate moisture-absorbing synthetic cotton, says a representative at the Consumer Healthcare Products Association. But why so much?

# Waffle winners

**YOU MIGHT WANT** to leggo your Eggo. Although that brand sells far more frozen waffles than any other does, some of its rivals came out on top in our tests. Trader Joe's Multigrain, a CR Best Buy, and 365 Organic from Whole Foods are slightly better than Eggo Nutri-Grain Honey Oat and Eggo Homestyle, and far better than Eggo Thick & Fluffy Original Recipe, which has an artificial-tasting vanilla flavor.

Trader Joe's and 365 have a big sweet, nutty grain flavor. They come within shouting distance of the mix we tested for comparison—Aunt Jemima Original, which is slightly sweet and eggy, crisp outside and moist inside. And they score higher than Aunt Jemima Original for nutrition. Most nutritious of all is Kashi 7 Grain, which has fewer calories and more fiber than the others. Eggo Nutri-Grain, Kashi, Trader Joe's, and 365 all contain some whole-wheat flour.

If you are concerned about calories and fat, go easy on the butter (100 calories and 12 grams of fat per tablespoon) and

syrup (about 95 calories and 9 grams of sugars per two tablespoons).

The lower-rated waffles tend to be slightly astringent, a bit bitter, or simply less flavorful. Two gluten-free waffles, Nature's Path and Van's, cost the most

and taste worse than most.

**Bottom line.** A mix produced the cheapest and best waffles, but if you're short on time, try one of the very good choices. Trader Joe's costs just 50 cents per two waffles, half as much as some others.



## Step on the gas? Not so fast!

**You know that driving** at 75 mph rather than 55 wastes gas, but how much? We did the math, driving a steady 55, 65, and 75 mph in a Honda Accord, a Toyota RAV4, and three versions of a Ford Fusion. The penalty for speeding, even in those relatively fuel-efficient cars: a loss of up to 14 mpg.

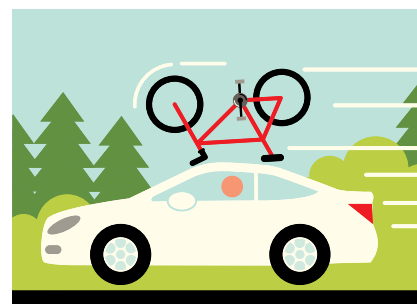
True, driving 200 miles at 75 instead of 55 shaves an hour off your trip. But in the cars we used, it also wastes 1½ to 2 gallons and costs about \$5 to \$7. For every thousand miles at 75 mph, you're increasing your

carbon footprint by 7 to 10 gallons and throwing away about \$30. Need more motivation? High speeds increase the likelihood of a crash and slash the odds of surviving one, says the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

**Other gas-saving tips.** Drive smoothly when possible, avoiding hard acceleration and hard braking. Combine short trips to avoid driving with a cold engine, and keep tires properly inflated. Turn the car off if it will be idling for more than about 30 seconds.

### The penalty for speeding

	55 mph	65 mph	75 mph	mpg drop: 55-75
Honda Accord LX 4-cyl.	49 mpg	42 mpg	35 mpg	29%
Ford Fusion Hybrid	49	41	36	27
Ford Fusion 1.6 4-cyl.	41	36	30	27
Ford Fusion Titanium 2.0 4-cyl.	41	34	28	32
Toyota RAV4	37	33	27	27



### ❖ Rack and ruin your mileage

Riding bikes is a great way to save gas, but driving bikes isn't. As we cruised at 65 mph in a 2013 Honda Accord with a pair of bicycles on a roof rack plus wind deflector, our fuel economy plummeted by more than a third, from a miserly 42 mpg to a miserable 27. The rack alone wasted 5 mpg.

#### Bike racks and fuel efficiency

No rack	42 mpg
Empty rack	37 mpg
Empty rack and wind deflector	35 mpg
Rack with two bikes and deflector	27 mpg





Aunt Jemima



Trader Joe's



365 Everyday Value

## Ratings Waffles

All tested products In taste order.

☒ CR Best Buy  
☒ Recommended

● Excellent  
 ● Very good  
 ○ Good  
 ● Fair  
 ● Poor

Rec.	Product*	Nutrition	Per serving						
			Cost	Calories	Fat (g)	Sodium (mg)	Sugars (g)	Fiber (g)	
<b>VERY GOOD</b>									
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Aunt Jemima Original Pancake & Waffle Mix	●	\$0.29	220	9	600	8	1	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Trader Joe's Multigrain	○	0.50	230	9	330	7	2	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	365 Everyday Value Organic Homestyle (Whole Foods)	○	1.00	200	7	290	5	3	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Eggo Nutri-Grain Honey Oat	○	0.67	190	6	380	7	3	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Eggo Homestyle	○	0.58	190	7	370	2	<1	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Kashi 7 Grain	●	0.98	150	5	340	3	7	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Aunt Jemima Homestyle	○	0.40	170	5	330	2	<1	
<b>GOOD</b>									
	Great Value Homestyle (Walmart)	○	0.70	180	7	430	2	1	
	Eggo Thick & Fluffy Original Recipe	○	0.48	160	7	300	3	<1	
	Market Pantry Homestyle (Target)	○	0.38	180	7	430	2	1	
	Nature's Path Organic Homestyle Gluten Free	●	1.07	210	7	450	4	<1	
	Van's Wheat Gluten Free	○	1.08	230	7	400	4	1	

\*All are frozen except for Aunt Jemima Original, a mix whose nutrition is calculated as prepared with 2% milk, egg, and canola oil. Serving size is two waffles for all except Eggo Thick & Fluffy, which is one.

## CLAIM CHECK

### Two breakfast-makers

**The claims.** "Prepare a 5-minute breakfast sandwich with your own fresh ingredients," says advertising for the Hamilton Beach Breakfast Sandwich Maker. "Cooks every layer of your breakfast sandwich to perfection." The Rollie EggMaster is "the fast, easy, pan-free way to make perfect eggs every time! Just crack your egg, pour it in, and watch it pop up in minutes!" Burritos, pizza rolls, and cinnamon rolls are other Rollie options. Each device costs \$30 plus shipping and handling.

**The checks.** In the Sandwich Maker, we assembled and cooked combinations of English muffins and mini bagels, meat, cheese, and eggs. In the Rollie, we cooked eggs (alone and in various meat combos), cinnamon rolls, and other staples.

**Bottom line.** Neither was eggs-cellent. Sandwich Maker sandwiches were good, but not as good as those from a toaster and frying pan, or as quickly made—the process took about 9 minutes. The bread was toasted only on the outside, the cheese became very



melted and goopy, and the egg extended beyond the bread. (We cooked other breakfast foods and found that pancakes came out great.)

The Rollie fared worse. Watching it eject food can be fun, but it often did that too early, leaving us with runny eggs. Also worrisome: Its conical top isn't heated and may retain raw egg, which could contact cooked items. Rollie is underpowered at 210 watts, which is not much more than some large lightbulbs, so cooking two eggs (and most other dishes) took about 10 minutes. A single Rollie would take hours to make the lavish spread of rolled food shown in the infomercial.

## Tissues to ah-choose

The differences among facial tissues are nothing to sneeze at. Overall scores in our tests, based on strength (tested by a machine) and softness (judged by human hands), ranged from fair to excellent. We found:

- Five products were worth recommending, including Kleenex Lotion Aloe & E, a CR Best Buy.
- You can't rely on a name's claim. Ology Soft & Strong was one of the least soft; Total Home Soft & Strong was among the least strong; Great Value and 365 Everyday Value were not the best values.

- Tissues with lotion did well overall, but some without it are very soft. Kleenex Ultra Soft (no lotion) was a bit softer than Puffs Plus Lotion and Kleenex Cool Touch (both with lotion).

- The number of plies may not matter. Puffs Ultra Soft & Strong, two plies, bested all three-plies.
- Scotties claims it's dye-free, and Ology claims it's biodegradable, but neither performed very well.
- Kleenex Cool Touch tissues do feel cool right out of the box. "Body heat activates the formula [including moisturizers and aloe] to release cooling comfort to soothe a sore nose," says the website. Do you need cold Kleenex? Up to you.

**Bottom line.** The highest-rated products can be welcome company during allergy season. Lotion tissues may keep your nose from getting irritated, but remember not to use them to clean eyeglasses.

## Ratings

All tested products In performance order.



☒ CR Best Buy  
☒ Recommended

● Excellent ● Very good ○ Good ● Fair ● Poor

Rec.	Product	Lotion	Ply	Cost per 100	Overall score	Strength	Softness
					0 100 P   F   G   VG   E		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Puffs Ultra Soft & Strong		2	\$1.69	87	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Kleenex Lotion Aloe & E	yes	3	1.36	81	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Puffs Plus Lotion	yes	2	2.52	75	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Kleenex Ultra Soft		3	1.39	73	○	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Puffs Basic		2	1.21	71	●	●
	Kleenex Cool Touch	yes	3	2.65	70	●	●
	Up & Up Aloe & Vitamin E Lotion (Target)	yes	3	1.87	69	○	●
	Total Home Ultra Soft Lotion Aloe & Vitamin E (CVS)	yes	3	2.65	66	○	●
	Great Value Lotion (Walmart)	yes	3	1.12	62	○	●
	Kirkland Signature (Costco)		2	1.23*	60	○	●
	Kleenex		2	1.04	55	●	●
	Up & Up Everyday (Target)		2	0.99	46	●	●
	Total Home Soft & Strong (CVS)		2	2.21	46	●	●
	Nice (Walgreens)		2	1.00	43	●	○
	Scotties		2	0.83	42	●	●
	365 Everyday Value (Whole Foods)		2	0.93	37	○	○
	Great Value (Walmart)		2	0.92	32	●	○
	Ology Soft & Strong (Walgreens)		2	1.08	30	○	●

\*Sold in a 12-pack.

# Best bets in beers

In blind taste tests of 23 ales and lagers, our experts found 13 that were excellent or very good. All are members of the growing category of "craft" beers, though that term is somewhat squishy. (For definitions, see Talk the Talk.)

And no, our tasters didn't guzzle all the merchandise.

■ **The best ales have intense, complex, and balanced flavors. Among them:**

- **Stone** is very fragrant, with floral, fruity, and juniper notes from the added hops. Strong, lingering bitterness rounds out the flavors but might be too much for some people.
- **Dogfish Head** has a great mix of malt and hop notes, with fruity and floral flavors, and is more intense than most.
- **Samuel Adams** has fruity and malty notes but might also be too bitter for some.
- **Shock Top**, a CR Best Buy, has big malty flavors of molasses, caramel, and honey with relatively low bitterness and some sweetness.

■ **The best lagers are very tasty but not quite complex or intense enough to be excellent:**

- **Samuel Adams, Brooklyn, and Anchor Steam** (a lager/ale hybrid) have nicely balanced malt and hop flavors and lingering bitterness. Brooklyn has a bit of fruit flavor.
- **Coney Island** has molasses and licorice notes. The 10 beers that didn't make our top picks are decent but not as balanced, complex, or intense as the others, and some have off-flavors—hinting of cheese, soda water, or even paint. One taster compared the lowest-rated ale, Magic Hat, to a peach tea drink.

**Bottom line.** We found a range of excellent and very good choices. Most are sold nationally. With intensely flavored, bitter beer, eat bold, fatty foods. (Fat helps to temper a beer's bitterness.) A steak, ripened cheese, or a flavorful dessert works well. Lighter, simpler beers pair well with a wide range of foods. Keep any beer cold and out of light (even fluorescent light can create a skunky off-flavor).

■ **The also-rans.** Ales rated **Good**, in order of taste: Long Trail, Goose Island 312 Urban Wheat, Shiner Wild Hare Pale, Kirkland Signature Pale (Costco), Blue Moon Belgian White, Sierra Nevada Kellerweis Hefeweizen, Magic Hat #9 Not Quite Pale. Lagers rated **good**, in order of taste: Kirkland Signature German (Costco), Kona Brewing Co. Longboard Island, Shiner Bock.

## Craft beer

In taste order within types. Except where noted, prices are per six-pack.

### Ale **Excellent**



**Stone  
IPA**  
\$10.74

**Dogfish  
Head 60  
Minute IPA**  
\$10.71

**Samuel  
Adams  
Hopology  
Collection  
Latitude  
48 IPA**  
\$8.50

### ■ TALK THE TALK

**Craft beer.** According to the Brewers Association, an American craft brewer is "small, independent, and traditional" and produces at most 6 million barrels of beer a year. The beer is generally made with traditional ingredients such as malted barley, although the brewers may be "innovative," adding "interesting ingredients ... for distinctiveness." Craft beers are supposed to be free from substantial ownership by a non-craft brewer. Some beers that call themselves

craft don't actually adhere to that description. Of the more than 2,400 breweries in the U.S., the Brewers Association notes, only several dozen aren't defined as craft brewers.

**Ale.** It's typically fermented warm, using a strain of yeast that rises to the top of the brew. It ferments faster than lager and is more strongly flavored. Esters produced during fermentation lend a slightly fruity and floral taste. Hefeweizen is a wheat beer. IPA stands for India Pale Ale, which

long ago was high in hops and alcohol content, to survive a voyage from Britain to India. It still tends to have an intense hop flavor. Hops impart fruity, floral notes and often add bitterness.

**Lager.** This is another basic type of beer. It's usually fermented cold, using yeast that sinks to the bottom during fermentation and works slowly. Long, cold fermentation inhibits the production of esters, and lagers have a cleaner, crisper taste than ales.



## Ale **Very good**



## Lager **Very good**



\*For one 22-ounce bottle. Ounce for ounce, about twice the cost of others.

### ▣ CLOSE-UP

## How did home brew do?

We asked three staffers to brew Classic American Light beer using Mr. Beer Premium Edition Home Brewing Kit. Prices vary; we paid \$40. The kit includes a plastic keg, bottles, hopped malt extract, sanitizer, and yeast. You add the malt extract to boiling water; put cold water in the keg, add the malt/water mix, stir, add yeast, close the lid, and store the keg in the dark for about two weeks. You then sanitize the bottles, add sugar, fill the bottles with beer mix (yeast consumes the sugar and creates CO<sub>2</sub>, and therefore fizziness), cap the bottles, and store them for a week or two.

The process wasn't bad, but the beer wasn't good. It had a yeasty, cidery character and would have been at the bottom of the Ratings.



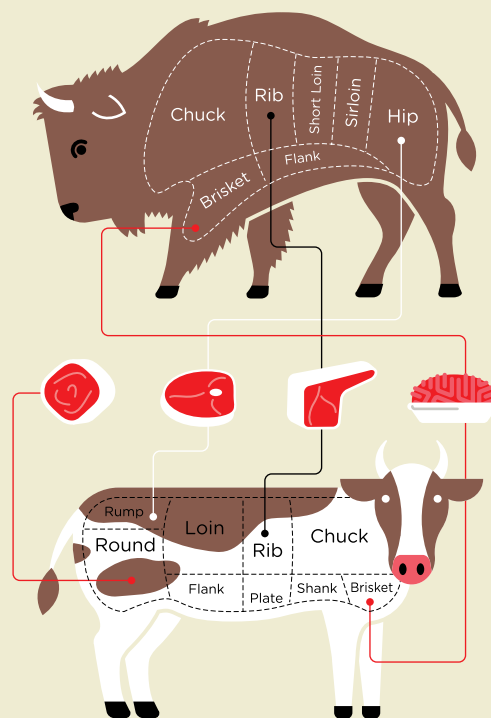
## Bison: A beefy alternative

If, like us, you're seeing bison meat in stores, you may be tempted to try grilling it this summer. To see how it compares with beef, our trained tasters tried strip steaks, medallions, and burgers made from each type of meat. The tests were blind: Tasters thought that all the samples were beef.

Differences were subtle, and the texture of beef and bison was similar. But in a few of the bison samples, tasters noticed a slight liver or organ taste or a slightly sour or metallic taste. And one bison medallion was somewhat chewy and tough. Beware of overcooking, says the National Bison Association.

Per pound, ground bison cost us far more than lean ground beef: about \$13.50 compared with \$6.25. And the bison strip steaks we bought online cost three times as much as beef steaks from a local store. Beef and bison tenderloins were about equally pricey.

The good news for anyone who wants to try bison: For the same cuts, bison tends to have less fat than beef. According to the Department of Agriculture, a 3-ounce patty of grass-fed bison has 152 calories and 7 grams of fat; a broiled 90-percent-lean beef burger, 184 calories and 10 grams of fat. All of the bison products we bought were labeled "no added hormones" and "no antibiotics" or "raised without antibiotics."



### ▣ DID YOU KNOW?

## Buffaloed by 'bison'

The correct name for the largest terrestrial animal in North America is bison. (Although many are from the Dakotas, they're raised in every state in the U.S., says the NBA—that's the National Bison Association.) True buffalo, in the same family but a different species, include the water buffalo in Asia and the cape buffalo in Africa.

# Food labels to look for (or ignore)

Organic. Fresh. Natural. They all sound healthy enough, but when it comes to claims on food labels, you practically need a glossary to keep track of what means what (and what means nothing). Here's a guide to a few of the best and worst food labels now in rotation.

## A few good labels

### ■ USDA Organic

This easy-to-spot seal means that at least 95 percent of the ingredients in a given item are certified organic—for example, they're produced without the use of synthetic fertilizers, most synthetic pesticides, or genetically engineered crops. And meat that's certified organic comes from animals raised without antibiotics or genetically modified feed. The Department of Agriculture has no organic standard for fish.



### ■ No antibiotics (plus USDA Process Verified)

The widespread use of antibiotics in farm animals encourages the growth of drug-resistant "superbugs" that can infect humans. A "Raised Without Antibiotics" or "No Antibiotics Administered" claim on meat and poultry indicates that the animal from which the food came received no antibiotics during its lifetime. Ideally, that statement should be accompanied by the "USDA Process Verified" seal, which means the agency has confirmed that the producer is doing what it says it is. Beware of sound-alike labels that aren't approved by the USDA, like "antibiotic-free" and "no antibiotic residues." To learn more, go to [NotInMyFood.org](http://NotInMyFood.org).

### ■ Animal Welfare Approved

This label ensures that chickens, cows, goats, rabbits, sheep, turkeys, and other animals raised for meat, dairy, or egg products were

treated humanely from birth to slaughter—for example, by being given access to pasture. Only family farmers and cooperative groups of family farms can be AWA certified. Another good (though slightly less rigorous) option is "Certified Humane Raised and Handled." Like the AWA label, it was developed by a team that included animal scientists and veterinarians, and it applies to more than family farms. Both labels guarantee that the animals didn't receive antibiotics unless they were sick.



### ■ Grass-fed

The "USDA Process Verified" grass-fed claim (labels vary) requires that meat came from an animal that was raised on a lifetime diet of 99 percent grass and forage, such as legumes, and had access to pasture during most of the growing season. Studies suggest that meat from such animals may provide more health benefits than meat from grain-fed, grain-finished animals. But these claims don't always mean antibiotics were prohibited. So ideally, also look for the "USDA Organic" seal or USDA-verified "no antibiotics administered" claim. Or you can look for the American Grassfed logo, which certifies that the animal was fed only grass and didn't get antibiotics.



## Beware of the health halo

### ■ American Heart Association Heart-Check mark

Foods are allowed to bear claims about heart health if they meet certain standards such as minimal saturated fat or a set percentage of whole-grain ingredients. But make sure you also check the nutrition facts. Welch's 100% Grape Juice bears the American Heart Association's Heart-Check mark alongside a statement that diets low in saturated fat and cholesterol may reduce the risk of heart disease. But an 8-ounce serving has 36 grams of sugar, more than a standard-sized Snickers bar.



## Two claims that don't mean what you think

### ■ Free-range (poultry only)

"This label is so sad," says Urvashi Rangan, Ph.D., director of our Center for Consumer Safety and Sustainability. It invokes images of happy, free-grazing animals, but in fact producers only have to allow them some access to open air for an unspecified amount of time each day—even if it's only 5 minutes.

### ■ Fresh (poultry only)

Chicken that's frozen solid can be sold as "fresh" as long as its temperature doesn't dip below 26° F—yes, a full 6 degrees below the freezing temperature for water. (To demonstrate that point, advocates from the California office of Consumers Union, the policy and advocacy arm of Consumer Reports, once bowled "fresh" chickens down the state capitol steps to show how rock-solid they were.) For fruits and vegetables, "fresh" is defined by the Food and Drug Administration and is closer to what you might expect: a food that is raw, has never been frozen or heated, and contains no preservatives.

## And one we wish would just go away

### ■ Natural

This ubiquitous claim is essentially meaningless. It does have a definition for meat and poultry, but it has to do only with how the meat was processed, not how the animal was raised. For everything else—cereal, snacks, you name it—it has no standard definition whatsoever. And manufacturers can, and do, use it on all sorts of processed foods, including products made with high-fructose corn syrup or genetically modified ingredients.

A lawsuit filed in Colorado in November 2012 against Pepperidge Farm alleges that the "natural" claim on its Goldfish is misleading because the crackers contain genetically engineered soybeans. The company has stated that it is confident of the accuracy of the labels and stands behind its products. (The case is pending.)



## ■ DID YOU KNOW?

### Become a label sleuth

You can find free information on more than 120 labels found on food, personal-care products, and household cleaners—including our experts' take on whether or not they're meaningful—at our website [GreenerChoices.org](http://GreenerChoices.org) (click on the Eco-Labels tab). iPhone, iPad, and iPod Touch users can also download the Eco-Labels mobile app (99 cents at the iTunes store).



# These new scams target seniors

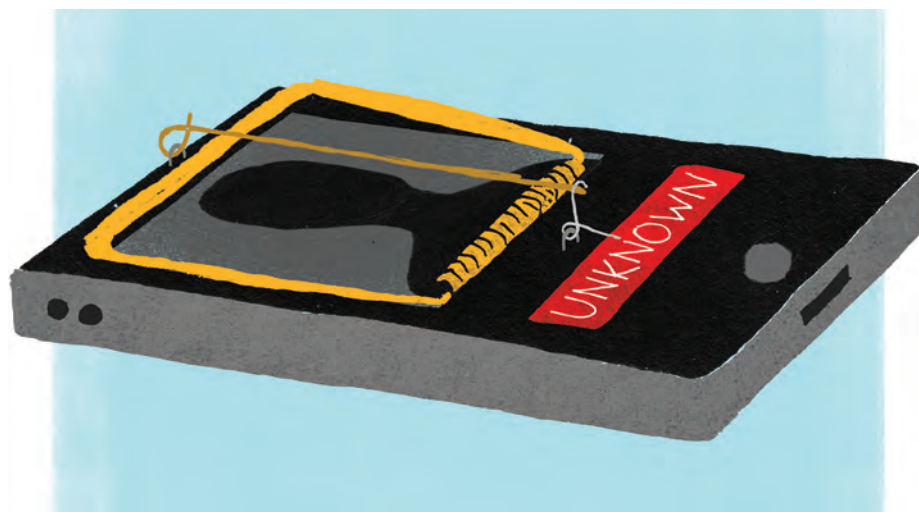
**SCAMMERS** are out there, and unfortunately retirees are often their targets. According to the Government Accountability Office, seniors lose several billion dollars a year to financial fraud. Government and law enforcement efforts to stop them have tended to be scattershot, with little coordinated effort. And banks, which are supposed to be on the lookout for suspicious transactions, have not been sufficiently vigilant.

Below are some of the more recent scams aimed at seniors, although anyone is a potential target. In many cases, the frauds masquerade as perfectly legal, though unconventional, financial transactions.

**Reverse mortgage fraud.** A reverse mortgage is a legitimate financial tool available to people 62 and older. Also known as a home equity conversion mortgage, it allows you to convert the equity in your home into cash—useful to seniors who may be house-rich but cash poor, living on a fixed income but facing decidedly unfixed expenses like health care. Sadly, some of the most vulnerable retirees—those having trouble making mortgage payments or looking for a less expensive home—are those most susceptible to reverse mortgage fraud.

Mortgage guarantor Fannie Mae has noted a striking increase in reverse mortgage fraud since the 2008 financial crisis. The most common types include “Turn Around Mortgages,” where reverse mortgage programs falsely promise to stop foreclosure, and “Equity Theft Schemes,” where seniors are sold a new residence and given a property deed, and then are later requested by the criminals to obtain a reverse mortgage. The scammers abscond with the proceeds.

**What to do:** Always be suspicious of the free lunch, such as being able to own a home without a down payment, and don’t



sign documents for a property you didn’t purchase. Seniors considering a reverse mortgage can check the Housing and Urban Development website at [hud.gov/ll/code/llslcrit.cfm](http://hud.gov/ll/code/llslcrit.cfm) for a list of lenders approved by the Federal Housing Administration.

**Self-directed-IRA scams.** Investment Retirement Accounts can legally hold a wide variety of assets, which may be appealing to those who’ve soured on stocks.

## If it sounds too good to be true, just hang up.

But placing unconventional assets, like real estate and physical gold, in self-directed IRAs requires extra paperwork, and a custodian that specializes in these IRAs is usually needed.

But the custodians aren’t required to evaluate the quality of an investment, according to the North American Securities

Administrators Association. A fraudster, targeting an elderly person, will probably say otherwise, paving the way for an investment in an unaudited, illiquid asset, or in worst cases, a Ponzi scheme. Last year the NASAA named self-directed-IRA fraud one of the top four new investor threats.

**What to do:** Victims of self-directed-IRA scams are pressured to send money immediately, because the opportunity is fleeting. What they should do is precisely the opposite: talk to a trusted financial adviser or relative, check the references of the seller and the investment offer, both of which should be registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission or the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority. To find an adviser, use FINRA’s Broker Check at [finra.org](http://finra.org).

**The 876 scam.** You won! No, you didn’t. Last year many seniors in New England were victimized over the phone by what is known as the Lottery or 876 scam, named after the Jamaican area code from which many of the calls originate. The criminal tells the victim he just won a huge sum in a lottery, then tries to gain his trust through repeat phone calls and by using Google Earth to feign familiarity with his community. When trust is established, the victim is encouraged to wire a “process fee” to the criminal. The Federal Trade Commission received 30,000 complaints about the scam last year.

**What to do:** Scams and frauds may have new wrinkles over time, but they share one common denominator: They’re unsolicited. Just hanging up is the best move.

## Hype or help? How to evaluate financial credentials

The alphabet soup of financial designations like CFP, for Certified Financial Planner, is tough enough for consumers to navigate. Now there’s a new slew of financial designations, many of which have the word “Senior” attached to them, presumably to appeal to retirees who are seeking financial counsel. Certified Senior Adviser, Chartered Senior Financial Planner, and Registered

Financial Gerontologist are a few of the more than 50 designations you might come across.

Other than to attract business, the value of some of these designations is questionable. Becoming a CFP takes at least two years of supervised financial planning experience. But some of the less common designations require no coursework, or merely a training course of less than a week.

# \$987,500

That's the fine Williams-Sonoma has agreed to pay to settle charges by the Consumer Product Safety Commission that it failed to report problems with hammock stands that could break and injure the users. About 30,000 hammock stands were sold.

## CONSUMER NOTES

### Tea tumblers can shatter

Teavana is recalling almost a half-million glass tea tumblers because of concerns that the beverage containers could shatter unexpectedly.

The company, in its recall notice with the Consumer Product Safety Commission, says it had 302 reports of the glass breaking. The beverage containers are made of double-walled glass, and most models have a stainless-steel tea infuser basket and decorative etchings.

The tea tumblers being recalled, 11 models that were sold in Teavana stores and online from August 2007 through May 2013, cost about \$15 to \$33. They were imported from China. You can see them at [cpsc.gov](http://cpsc.gov).

The company will provide a free metallic replacement tumbler and complementary tea upon return of the product. For more information, call the company at 877-261-1509 or go to [teavana.com](http://teavana.com).



## RECALLS

### AUTOS

#### '12-'13 Ford Explorer, Taurus, Flex, Fusion, Interceptor Utility and Sedan, and Lincoln MKS, MKT, and MKZ

The fuel tank might have a marginally sealed side seam and might not be strong enough to withstand an impact. The tank might also leak. Either event could lead to a fire.

**MODELS** 465,000 vehicles manufactured from July 19, 2011, through March 15, 2012.

**WHAT TO DO** Dealer will inspect the fuel tank and replace as necessary, free. If you smell a fuel leak or see fuel on the floor, take the vehicle immediately to your dealer. Call Ford at 866-436-7332 for more details.



#### '05-'10 Jeep Grand Cherokee and '06-'10 Jeep Commander

A transfer case electrical failure could cause unintentional shifting into neutral, allowing the car to roll away. Chrysler says the problem has caused 26 crashes and two injuries.

**MODELS** 468,700 '06-'10 Jeep Commander and '05-'10 Jeep Grand Cherokee vehicles.

**WHAT TO DO** Dealer will update the final drive controller, which controls the transfer case, with new software, free of charge. Call Chrysler at 800-247-9753 for more details.



## Five essential summer accessories

With summer yard work and home chores in full swing, use these basic precautions.



#### Buy goggles

Wear them every time you use machinery or tools, or when handling pesticides or toxic liquids.

#### Protect your lungs

Depending on the job, use the proper equipment (a respirator or dust mask). Apply paint in an area that's well-ventilated.

#### Save your hearing

Wear ear plugs or earplugs when you use a lawn mower, leaf blower, chain saw, or any other loud machinery.

#### Wear gloves

Look for a pair with double leather-reinforced palms to guard against a wide variety of hazards around the yard and home.

#### Check cords and outlets

Make sure all outside electrical receptacles are GFCI-protected. Check extension cords for damage. Keep cords out of the way of your feet and machinery.

## HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS

### Giada De Laurentiis ceramic lasagna pan

Pan can break, leaving sharp edges that could cause cuts.

**PRODUCTS** 148,700 9x13-inch ceramic lasagna pans sold individually and as part of a six-piece set at Target and [target.com](http://target.com).

from January 2009 through October 2012 for \$22 and \$35 to \$50. Target has had 39 reports of the pan or its handles breaking or cracking in normal use.

**WHAT TO DO** Stop using the pan and return it to any Target for a full refund. Call Target at 800-440-0680 or go to [target.com](http://target.com) for more details.







# Let's make a deal

If you're bold enough to bargain, you can reap big bucks

**H**ATE TO HAGGLE? You're not alone. Our new national survey found that just 48 percent of shoppers tried bargaining for a better deal on everyday goods and services in the past three years, down from 61 percent in 2007. But if you're chicken, you lose. Eighty-nine percent of those who haggled were rewarded at least once. Successful furniture hagglers saved \$300 on average, as did those who questioned a health-related charge. Those who challenged their cell-phone plans saved \$80.

Clearly, people who don't haggle are leaving money on the table. Among the success stories we've heard:

- Karen Wessel, a teacher's aide from Tuckahoe, N.Y., needed cataract surgery but lacks medical insurance. The receptionist at her optometrist's office, in a wealthy town, gave her an estimate of \$10,000. But the optometrist also has an office in a small city and suggested a colleague there. "I ex-

plained I had no health insurance, mentioned I understood the surgery would cost around \$10,000, and asked if I could get any kind of break," Wessel says. The doctor agreed to operate at a lower-cost clinic instead of a hospital and accepted \$1,000 for his fee. The facility fee was \$1,100; anesthesiology, \$300. The total: \$2,400. "The health insurance field is like a giant house of smoke and mirrors, and you can easily get lost or sidetracked if you do not pay attention," the

relieved patient says. "I have a slightly apologetic demeanor, always have my checkbook in hand, and offer to pay on the spot."

- Retired banking executive Ed Detwiler and eight of his Columbus, Ohio, neighbors faced a bill of about \$40,000 to have 35 diseased ash trees removed from their properties. The neighbors were acting individually, but Detwiler persuaded them to join forces and let the contractor move heavy equipment across their lawns, mak-

## Who enjoys pinching pennies?

Haggling is second nature in many countries and cultures, but Americans have mixed feelings.

**35%**

told us they refuse to bargain, period.

**20%**

of women say haggling makes them uncomfortable (vs. 10 percent of men).

**18-29**

This age group tends to enjoy the practice. Those over 60 are more turned off by it.

**43%**

who earn less than \$50,000 a year said they haggle, compared with 58 percent of higher earners.

ing the job easier—and cheaper. That saved the group a total of about \$8,000.

•Angela Harman wanted to upgrade the central air conditioning in her Crestview, Fla., home and thought she'd replace an old furnace at the same time. She had second thoughts about her first-choice A/C unit and wanted to trade up, but the \$6,636 price tag didn't sit well. "I said we'd really like to have the better model but asked if they could come down on the price," Harman says. The salesman agreed to \$6,400, but Harman wasn't done. "It would be great if you could throw in a new thermostat"—an additional \$100—she told him. Harmon got her thermostat, and because of the total system upgrade, the salesman lopped off another \$140 as credit for the service contract on the old unit.

### 13 ways to get to yes

Savvy negotiators know that politeness, friendliness, and a smile are harder to resist than tough talk. "A my-way-or-the-highway approach limits you, because if you then reduce your demands, you run the risk of losing face," says Steven Cohen, president

## When they bargained, what they saved

The Consumer Reports National Research Center surveyed 2,000 American adults about their haggling habits. Results are in order of the success at negotiating a monetary discount.

Goods/service	Negotiated	Successful at least once	Saved	
			\$100+	Average
Appliances	39%	94%	81%	\$200
Jewelry	32	94	68	150
Furniture	43	91	87	300
Collectibles or antiques	48	89	72	100
Personal electronics	27	89	75	200
Cell-phone plans	33	76	50	80
Bank or credit-card fees	32	73	64	100
Medical or dental bills	19	69	85	300

of Massachusetts-based Negotiation Skills, which teaches corporate clients how to sharpen their bargaining techniques. "Negotiation isn't a competitive sport." Here are other tips for smart bargaining:

**Assume everything is fair game.** Retailers drop prices all the time and call it a sale. "It's not in the seller's best interest to charge one price to all customers," says Stephen Hoch, a marketing professor at the Wharton School of the University

of Pennsylvania. "You charge different prices to different people based on their willingness to pay. As long as you sell something for more than your cost, you are making a profit."

**Don't be intimidated by a title.** Hoch says that many people are reluctant to confront doctors or lawyers. But John Santa, M.D., director of the Consumer Reports Health Ratings Center, says that almost everyone in health care—whether physicians, hospitals, labs, or imaging departments—will eventually accept less if you dispute an out-of-pocket charge. That said, he adds, they'll try to wait you out, make you feel responsible, and drown you in information. Abbie Leibowitz, M.D., co-founder of Health Advocate, which specializes in health care advocacy and assistance, says his company can often cut charges in half for uninsured patients.

**Be willing to bargain for big bucks.** You can't win if you don't try. A 23-year-old college grad (he didn't want his name used) was accepted into several law schools and was offered generous scholarships by some. As his commitment deadline loomed, two of the schools increased their offers, but his first choice didn't. He approached the admissions officers of his top pick, told them that another school had upped the ante, and asked for more (\$40,000 a year), knowing it would never agree to that amount. The school, which had initially offered \$30,000, countered with \$33,000, and they sealed the deal.

**Give sellers a reason to negotiate.** If you're a loyal customer, say so. If you're at a mom-and-pop store because you like to shop locally, say that. Tell the car dealer if you intend to bring your vehicle back for servicing. Alice Osner of Denver, Colo., forgot to make a credit-card payment. She contacted customer service to acknowl-

## Why we're haggling less

Since our 2007 survey, haggling rates have fallen for every product and service category except appliances. The steepest drop involved bank and credit-card fees: Twenty-five percent fewer Americans challenged them than in 2007. There was also a big dive in the number and success rate of those who tried to negotiate for medical charges.

There could be a positive reason for less haggling over financial fees. The Credit Card Act of 2009 put in place sweeping pro-consumer rules, including the requirement that banks give 45 days' notice of fee changes.

As for the falloff in medical negotiation, CONSUMER REPORTS' associate medical editor, Orly Avitzur, M.D., suggests it might be due in part to the ongoing shift from small medical practices to large ones affiliated with hospitals. "It may have been easier to negotiate with your physician who owned the practice than with someone who is an employee of a large health care system," Avitzur says. And doctors in large groups often have no authority to negotiate financial issues.

But it's hard to explain the decrease in haggling for other products and services. After all, the economic downturn should have spawned an army of bargain



hunters. Stephen Hoch, a marketing professor at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, attributes the reluctance in part to fear of embarrassment, looking cheap, or hearing the word no. "It's like going out on a date," Hoch says. "Some people just won't ask out of fear of rejection."

Steven Cohen, president of Negotiation Skills, bargaining strategy consultants, wonders whether Americans are taking their cue from today's negative political tone. "People see that negotiating isn't working among their elected officials in D.C.," he says. "The polarization of side A vs. side B is such that if side B negotiates with side A, they end up with egg on their face."



edge the oversight, pointed out her track record of on-time payments, apologized, and asked the rep to waive the \$25 penalty plus interest. He did.

**Ask open-ended questions.** It's easy to be turned down if you ask a yes-or-no question. Say you want a 60-inch television but can afford only a 52-inch model. Cohen suggests: "I've got the perfect space for a 60-inch TV, but the financial issue is a challenge. How can you help me?"

**See whether the seller is anxious.** Anxious sellers might include someone who has bought a new house but hasn't sold the old one or a car dealer with a car that has sat on the lot for months. In cultures where bargaining is common, there's a price in the morning, when hope springs eternal, and another that kicks in close to closing, when reality sets in.

**Decide on a fair price.** Research the cost of any product before buying, and use it to determine what you're willing to pay. Print out or take screen shots of website pages or request written quotes from competitors. Call the store to confirm that it will match the lowest price you've found. Ask about a refund of the difference if there's a drop within a reasonable period of time. If you can't get a discount, ask about free shipping, delivery, or installation.

**Be willing to walk away.** When it's expensive to attract new customers, companies may work hard to retain existing ones. Experience taught Susan Glasspiegel of Simsbury, Conn., that if she didn't renew her contract with SiriusXM satellite radio, the company would bombard her

with offers to return at a lower, albeit temporary, rate. The price of the service was \$195 per year, but Glasspiegel had seen promotions for a six-month subscription for \$25. When she mentioned those better offers to a Sirius rep, her call was bumped up to several supervisors. Initially, each said that no special deals were available for renewing customers, but she persisted, and the company relented, offering a one-year, \$99 contract.

**Show your knowledge.** If you're versed in Federal-style furniture, are geeky about gaming systems, or know the ins and outs of foreign coins, share that expertise and curiosity with the seller. You'll come across as a qualified buyer.

**Stay mum.** Because it creates awkwardness, silence can be golden. Cohen advises

remaining poker-faced after sellers give you their initial proposition. "They'll wonder if they've offended you," he says. "They'll think, 'Maybe what I said didn't sound appealing,' and they may repack-age the offer into a more attractive one."

**Find flaws.** If you see a sweater with a smudge or a dishwasher with a ding, point it out. It's easier to negotiate with independent stores than with chains, says retail consultant Jack Abelson, and for private-label products than for big brands, because the seller can't return flawed products to their maker for credit.

**Seek a discount for cash.** That way, sellers won't need to pay transaction fees to a credit-card company.

**Be discreet.** Sellers may not want to make your great deal public.

## A tightwad's tale: How negotiating pays off



**PINCHING PENNIES**  
Tod Marks, who writes for CONSUMER REPORTS as Tightwad Tod, bargains for almost everything he buys.

I am such a persnickety shopper that I once returned a watermelon that wasn't sweet enough. No surprise that haggling is part of my daily routine. By mixing moxie and humor with a laid-back style, I seem to win more often than not, even if it's a minor victory. My guidelines:

Nothing is off limits, be polite, and know what constitutes a fair price. Here are some recent wins:

**Eyeglasses.** My wife and I visited an independent shop and found her a pair of frames for \$500, beyond our budget. Doing our best "good cop, bad cop" routine in front of the salesperson, we lamented that a few cheaper frames weren't as nice. After about 15 minutes of back and forth, my wife concluded that she wanted the pricey pair. Rather than press the salesperson, we said we wanted time to think and wandered the store so that the salesperson could talk to the owner. When we returned, they offered a 50 percent discount.

**Rental car.** To save money, I booked a compact car from Hertz, but the rental wasn't a bargain: The transmission worked so poorly that I was worried the car would conk out on the interstate. When I returned and a service rep asked how everything went, I responded, "Horribly." He apologized, but I said that didn't cut it. The car had been sputtering,

I told him, and that made me nervous. Hertz credited me \$25 for a partial tank of gas.

**Mail-order food.** Catalog merchant Harry & David offered a discount based on the amount of an order. I wanted two gift packages at \$35 each, \$5 off the regular price. But shipping was \$19.90. I e-mailed Harry & David, said the fee was a deal breaker, and asked whether the company would waive or reduce it because I was buying two items. It didn't acknowledge the request but sent a coupon code for 20 percent off my next order.

**Insurance.** The cost for my combined home and auto insurance kept rising. Aside from decreasing coverage, a bad idea, my agent offered few suggestions to reduce the bill. So I consulted a highly rated competitor, who slashed the premium by \$1,100. I presented my current agent with the counterproposal and told her I was ready to walk. The agent suddenly perked up and within 24 hours matched the quote.

**Perishables.** Late in the day, supermarkets may cut the price of foods that have reached their "sell by" date or that look past their peak. (That doesn't necessarily mean they're unsafe or inedible.) At an A&P, I noticed a \$2-off sticker on a bag of rolls that felt hard as rocks. I joked with an employee that the rolls were perfect because I was off to play baseball. When she chuckled, I politely asked whether there was any way I could get a similar discount on the same number of loose, fresher rolls, since it was after 6 p.m. and they were unlikely to be sold. She said yes.

## Shopping tactics

Here are the strategies used by successful hagglers during the past three years. A tactic's success differed with the item bought. Schmoozing with a salesperson proved effective for haggling over collectibles and antiques, but people looking for a deal on a cell-phone plan were best served by comparison shopping.

Strategy	Used by
Told salesperson I'd check competitors' prices	57%
Looked for lower prices at a walk-in store	57
Chatted with salesperson to make a personal connection	46
Used other store circulars or coupons as leverage	44
Checked user reviews to see what others paid	39

# Gear to go

What you need to know to make great choices in smart phones, tablets, cameras, e-book readers, and more

**T**HINK YOU and your family are major multigadgeters now? The mobile wave is still cresting: More than 240 million smart phones and tablets will be sold in the U.S. this year, according to the Consumer Electronics Association. Add in millions more cameras and other handheld devices, and America is on track in 2013 to acquire a new gadget for roughly every man, woman, and child over the age of 12.

This special section begins with coverage of eight trends that cut across multiple categories of mobile devices and explains what each means for your choice and use of that gear. The Ratings detail models that aced our tests and should meet your needs.

## INSIDE

**Smart phones** page 22

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**Basic cameras** page 26

**Advanced cameras** page 28

**Action camcorders** page 30

**E-book readers, headphones, and wireless speakers** page 30

**Plus Tablet-like laptops** page 39

**NOTABLE** The Samsung Galaxy Note 8.0 is a leading rival of the iPad Mini.







**CAMERA CONVERGENCE** The LG Optimus G Pro takes great photos, for a phone; the Panasonic Lumix DMC TS5 is highly connected, for a camera.

## 1 Phones, meet cameras. Cameras, meet phones.

More new phones, and even some tablets, can shoot pretty decent photos, giving stand-alone cameras serious competition. At the same time, some cameras are taking on phone-like characteristics, such as photo sharing through wireless connectivity and built-in photo editing.

**Phones.** Despite their tinier lenses and image sensors, the best new smart-phone cameras can capture images as good as those from highly ranked basic cameras, but only under optimal conditions. Eight- to 12-megapixel resolution, enough for most kinds of photos, is now common, and most phones shoot HD video in 720p or 1080p. But only a few have very good video quality. You can easily share photos from any smart phone, and top-of-the-line models can enhance photos in ways few cameras can, such as assembling a group shot using the best face of each subject from a series of shots.

**Tablets.** Their cameras aren't as advanced as those on phones, though some (including the latest iPads and Galaxy Note tablets) offer flash, panorama modes, and rudimentary manual exposure settings. And more than two-thirds of our recommended tablets

have a rear camera with 5 to 8 megapixels of resolution, up from a norm of 3 to 5 megapixels just a year ago.

**Cameras.** Stand-alone cameras are getting more connected, with features such as built-in Wi-Fi (and even 4G access on the Samsung Galaxy camera) for phone-like sharing of images. A few have an Android-based operating system that lets you download apps from Google Play. More cameras also have built-in editing features, though not yet as sophisticated as those in some phones. But cameras are still the best choice for shooting in low light, thanks in part to their larger image sensors. Their optical zoom—even 3x on a basic camera—is much more effective than the digital zoom used on tablets and almost all current phones, which yields images so flawed that you're better off enlarging and cropping them after the fact. The optical or mechanical image stabilization on many advanced cameras reduces blur caused by camera shake.

**Bottom line.** The best phone cameras take better images than their predecessors, fine for casual use such as posting to Facebook. But a dedicated camera is still a must if you want top quality and maximum flexibility.

## 2 E-book readers are down—but not out

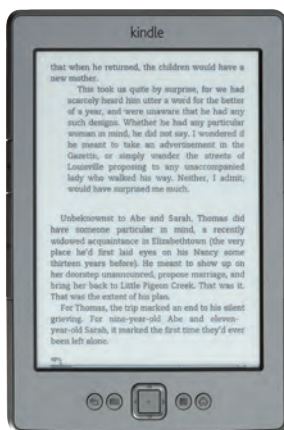
You love e-books and digital magazines, but you might be tempted to read that summer sizzler or special grilling issue on your tablet

or phone rather than on an e-book reader. With e-reading, like most other mobile activities, migrating to tablets and phones, you may see less need for a dedicated e-book reader such as the Barnes & Noble Nook or Amazon Kindle. And you'd be right. Improved LCD screens on tablets and phones display sharper type, and their color screens suit e-magazines. New slimmer and lighter tablets are easier to hold for reading. And Nook

and Kindle e-reading apps sync across platforms, so you can resume reading on a phone where you stopped on your tablet.

So why consider an e-book reader? Because the best are lighter and cheaper by half than even a small, light tablet. They're also much better for reading in bright light (say, at the beach), and they run for weeks—in some cases even months—on a charge.

If you already own an e-book reader, it should still meet your needs; the newest models have few innovations. If you're a serious digital-book reader, consider buying one, even if you already own a tablet. For more on the two main choices, the Kindles and Nooks, see page 30.



## 3 Displays get sharp and wide

Manufacturers are packing more pixels into each square inch of phone and tablet displays. The result is sharper type and better-looking images, including videos that meet the 1080p resolution spec of “full HD” television screens.

Most of the newest phones and tablets also have wider (16:9) displays that better suit video viewing, e-mail, and many apps. The iPad is one of the few tablets with a squarish (4:3) shape.

The trend toward less-square 16:9 displays is helping phones fit more easily into palms and pockets even as their displays grow in size. About a dozen models in our Ratings have screens 4.5 inches or larger, compared with only two last year. Yet, with their differing proportions, these big-screen models are little if any wider than their predecessors.

Another slimming factor in some big phones, including models from HTC, LG, Motorola, and Samsung, is a display that runs nearly all the way to the edge of the device. That design minimizes the outer area of glass that widens the phone but isn't usable.



**HOLD THE PHONE** Despite its big display, the HTC One is easy to handle.

# 4 Apple holds an edge in apps ...

iPhones and iPads are the way to go for the most, and most varied, apps. In a recent survey of 8,119 ConsumerReports.org subscribers by the Consumer Reports

National Research Center, 71 percent of iPhone users and two-thirds of iPad owners rated the selection of apps for their devices as excellent. That compares with four in 10 Android phone or tablet users, one in five owners of Amazon tablets such as the Kindle Fire, and fewer than one in 10 BlackBerry or Windows phone users.

When we looked for a few dozen popular apps (such as Instagram, Groupon, and Spotify), Google Play had almost all of them, and most were available from Amazon. Selection was spottier for Windows and BlackBerry.

Though Google Play and even Amazon's Appstore carry most major apps, Apple usually has them first. It also offers many titles that never make it to other platforms. And if you're looking for the most innovative apps, you still can't beat Apple.



**MAKE YOUR MARK** Samsung's S Pen (shown with Galaxy Note II phone) lets you scrawl and share.



# 5 ... but no longer in design innovation

Apple all but invented the smart phone and tablet, at least in their current incarnations. And iPhones and iPads remain high performers in our Ratings and by far the most-owned brands of mobile devices among CONSUMER REPORTS readers.

But more phones and tablets than ever are matching or beating Apple's models in our Ratings. Among the most dominant alternatives to Apple devices: a slew of superb phones and tablets from Samsung. The distinctions of the newest Samsungs include innovations that cut across phones and tablets, such as the S Pen stylus and its apps, found on the Galaxy Note phones and tablets.

The Android platform currently offers the greatest diversity of hardware, including phones with bigger displays than Apple's and the ability to expand storage with a memory card or USB stick, which you can't do with an iPhone or iPad. Even recommended phones that use the new Windows Mobile and revamped BlackBerry platforms show the kind of innovation that was once Apple's hallmark.

Still, Apple retains unique strengths, including its elegant iOS operating system, largely unchanged for a few years and familiar to many. (The new, significantly different iOS 7 is expected this fall.) But the availability of compelling designs on other platforms might tempt Apple fans to consider other options.

# 6 Don't be afraid to mix or switch platforms

When it comes to gadgets, familiarity can be reassuring. One in five of the tablet owners we surveyed said they bought the model they have because it uses the same operating system (or "platform") as gear they own. Most of those respondents were "Apple people" who wanted an iPad, most likely because it uses Apple's simple interface and could easily share their existing content.

Adding a new OS to the mix, or even switching entirely, isn't as daunting as you might fear. Today's operating systems are quite intuitive and easy to learn, and chances are you can easily transfer much of your content. Given that Apple has dominated sales of both phones and tablets, most users who are switching platforms, or mixing them within the home, are likely to be moving from iOS, so we've geared our advice in that direction:

**Music.** With the exception of some older (DRM-protected) iTunes purchases, music ripped or downloaded from the iTunes store in MP3 or Apple's favored AAC formats and played on an iPhone or iPad can be transferred to a new non-Apple device attached to your computer via USB. You drag and drop it to the device from

the music folder on your computer. If you use a Windows PC, you can, for more flexibility, switch your computer's music app from iTunes to Google Music Manager for Android.

However, if you're switching from Apple to another platform, you won't be able to use iTunes on the device itself; the app is available only for iOS. Instead, use the music manager that's pre-installed on the other device.

**E-books.** If you're reading e-books from either Barnes & Noble or Amazon on one platform, just download the app for the new

one to read those titles. (No such luck with Kindle or Nook e-book readers. Each accepts books only from its own platform.)

**Movies.** Hollywood movies have so much copy protection that a title you bought on iTunes for an iOS device won't play on an Android device. Likewise, movies purchased on Google Play or Amazon for an Android device won't play on an Apple gadget.

**Apps.** Games and some other apps bought for one platform won't transfer to another, so you'll have to rebuy them. But our readers used mostly free apps. You'll have to download them again, but they won't cost anything.

Virtually all of the most popular account-based apps (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, e-mail, and messaging) are available free on all platforms. Data and account preferences are stored remotely, so they'll be the same no matter what device you're using. But features may differ by platform.

Content stored on Apple's iCloud can't be accessed on mobile platforms other than iOS. You can pull the content down to a computer, though, and upload it to a platform-neutral service such as Dropbox, Google Drive, or Microsoft SkyDrive.

**Bottom line.** Becoming a multiplatform household might be easier than you think.



**SIDE BY SIDE** Apple and Android devices can peacefully coexist.



## 7 Built-in speakers are better but not great

Looking for a smart phone or tablet with speakers that do a decent job with music and video soundtracks? Several new models are billed as offering enhanced sound quality, but they're not as good as the ads might lead you to believe.

**Phones.** We listened to two smart phones touted for their audio prowess—the HTC One and Pantech Discover—both of which have dual speakers providing stereo sound. We compared them with a few widely owned models, including the Apple iPhone 5 and Samsung Galaxy S 4. The HTC One sounded better, but the Pantech Discover was unremarkable.

**Tablets.** The Barnes & Noble Nook HD+, advertised as having superior sound, did sound better than the iPad Mini, 8- and 10-inch Samsung Galaxy Note, and 10-inch Google Nexus. But so did the 10-inch Apple iPad, which makes no claim of better sound. Like the Nook HD+, the iPad has a rear-facing mono speaker.

**Bottom line.** "Better" is relative. Even the three phones and tablets that stood out didn't sound as loud or as rich as even a low-cost speaker such as the small Satechi speaker we tested (shown at right; \$40). That speaker can't compare with the pricier wireless speaker on page 30. For solo listening, any decent headphones would sound better than phone or tablet speakers.



**LISTEN TO THIS** Satechi BT Wireless Bluetooth Portable Speaker System provides superior sound.

## What you do with your gadgets



Here are some of the most common uses for mobile devices, based on what more than 7,000 smart-phone owners and more than 5,500 tablet owners who subscribe to ConsumerReports.org told us they did at least daily.

### Smart phones Tablets

#### E-mail

73%

49%

#### Texting

72%

10%

#### Checking weather

62%

39%

#### Gaming

27%

36%

#### Reading books and magazines

11%

38%



## 8 Battery life gets longer

With more people using smart phones and tablets, and in more ways, manufacturers are tweaking batteries, circuitry, software, and more to maximize run time. Our tests confirm that they're succeeding.

A few years ago, consumers carped about battery indicators turning red before the workday was done. It's still easy to drain a phone or tablet battery in a few hours if you engage in energy-hogging pursuits such as streaming video or serious gaming. But the newest generation of phones—including the Apple iPhone 5, Motorola Droid Razr Maxx, and Samsung Galaxy S 4—all run much longer than their predecessors. So do new tablets from Apple, Samsung, and others. In our 2011 tests, 7- and 8-inch tablets had 7 or 8 hours' worth of juice. Better models of that size now run 10 to 11 hours, and larger ones as long as 13 hours.

**Bottom line.** If you're among the one-third or so of readers who bought a tablet or phone two or more years ago, battery life alone could be reason to upgrade.



**MORE JUICE**  
New devices squeeze out more run time per charge.

### ■ DID YOU KNOW?

If your phone or tablet delivers you to a limited mobile version of a website, with an address starting with "m," you can click on a link at the bottom of the page to see the full website. Better browsers on many new models make it less likely you'll go to a mobile site.

# Ratings & recommendations Smart phones



**KEY TESTS** We evaluate virtual and physical keyboards for usability. The best physical ones were on two Motorolas (A13 and B8) and a Samsung (A16).

The recommended models in the chart illustrate how much today's best phones can do, and how well. We've grouped phones by the major carrier that sells them and added a brief description of each company, based on the most recent satisfaction survey of readers by the Consumer Reports National Research Center. Some models are also available from the smaller carriers we list below the phone's name.

The phones are ranked by overall score, which considers the test results shown and a number of other attributes.

**Voice quality.** It still counts, since 83 percent of readers make daily phone calls on their smart phone. Most were good, a few only fair.

**Displays.** All were excellent or very good, in part because they're sharper and more legible in bright light than the phones of even a few years ago.

**Speed.** The combination of 4G data networks and multicore processors has made phones faster, improving usability, even when you run several applications at once.

**Camera.** As the chart below shows, many phones take fine photographs, but few do as well with video. You may enjoy features such as smile detection, which enables you to capture the best facial expression. Some let you choose the best expressions from several photos and combine them into a single "perfect" shot.

## Recommended models only From 84 tested.

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price <sup>1</sup>	Overall score	Test results				
		Models offered by other carriers are listed in small type.			Messaging	Web browsing	Battery life	Camera image quality <sup>2</sup>	Display size (in.)
				0 100	P   F   G   VG   E				

### A VERIZON The most satisfying major carrier.

✓	1	<b>Samsung Galaxy S 4</b> (16GB) U.S. Cellular \$100	\$200	<b>79</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	5.0
✓	2	<b>Motorola Droid Razr Maxx HD</b>	200	<b>79</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.7
✓	3	<b>Motorola Droid Razr HD</b>	100	<b>77</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.7
✓	4	<b>Samsung Galaxy S III</b> (16GB) U.S. Cellular \$50	100	<b>76</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.8
✓	5	<b>Motorola Droid Razr M</b>	0	<b>75</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.3
✓	6	<b>Apple iPhone 5</b> (16GB)	200	<b>75</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.0
✓	7	<b>Samsung Galaxy Note II</b> (16GB) U.S. Cellular \$200	200	<b>75</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	5.5
✓	8	<b>BlackBerry Z10</b>	200	<b>74</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.2
✓	9	<b>LG Spectrum 2</b>	80	<b>74</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.7
✓	10	<b>HTC Droid DNA</b>	200	<b>73</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	5.0
✓	11	<b>LG Lucid 2</b>	0	<b>73</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.3
✓	12	<b>HTC Windows Phone 8X</b> (16GB)	100	<b>73</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.3
✓	13	<b>Motorola Droid 4</b>	100	<b>73</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.0
✓	14	<b>HTC Droid Incredible 4G LTE</b>	0	<b>71</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.0
✓	15	<b>Samsung Ativ Odyssey</b>	50	<b>71</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.0
✓	16	<b>Samsung Galaxy Stratosphere II</b>	50	<b>70</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.0

### B SPRINT Unlimited data plans, but 4G service was subpar.

✓	1	<b>Samsung Galaxy S 4</b> (16GB)	150	<b>79</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	5.0
✓	2	<b>LG Optimus G</b>	100	<b>77</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.7
✓	3	<b>HTC One</b> (32GB) Credo Mobile \$200	200	<b>77</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.7
✓	4	<b>Samsung Galaxy S III</b> (16GB) Credo Mobile \$50, Metro PCS \$450	100	<b>76</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.8
✓	5	<b>Apple iPhone 5</b> (16GB)	200	<b>75</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.0
✓	6	<b>Samsung Galaxy Note II</b> (16GB) Credo Mobile \$200	300	<b>75</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	5.5
✓	7	<b>HTC Evo 4G LTE</b>	100	<b>73</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.7
✓	8	<b>Motorola Photon Q 4G LTE</b>	100	<b>73</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.3
✓	9	<b>Samsung Galaxy Victory 4G LTE</b> Virgin Mobile \$185	50	<b>71</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.0
✓	10	<b>Kyocera Torque</b>	100	<b>68</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.0

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price <sup>1</sup>	Overall score	Test results				
					Messaging	Web browsing	Battery life	Camera image quality <sup>2</sup>	Display size (in.)
				0 100	P   F   G   VG   E				

### C T-MOBILE Flexible, no-contract plans, but otherwise undistinguished.

✓	1	<b>Samsung Galaxy S 4</b> (16GB)	\$150	<b>81</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	5.0
✓	2	<b>HTC One</b> (32GB)	100	<b>79</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.7
✓	3	<b>Samsung Galaxy S III</b> (16GB)	70	<b>78</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.8
✓	4	<b>Apple iPhone 5</b> (16GB)	150	<b>77</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.0
✓	5	<b>Samsung Galaxy Note II</b> (16GB)	200	<b>77</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	5.5
✓	6	<b>Google Nexus 4</b> (16GB)	20	<b>76</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.7
✓	7	<b>LG Optimus L9</b>	50	<b>76</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.5
✓	8	<b>BlackBerry Z10</b>	100	<b>75</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.2

### D AT&T A 4G standout but lower-rated for value and support.

✓	1	<b>Samsung Galaxy S 4</b> (16GB)	200	<b>81</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	5.0
✓	2	<b>LG Optimus G</b>	100	<b>79</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.7
✓	3	<b>HTC One</b> (32GB)	200	<b>79</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.7
✓	4	<b>Samsung Galaxy S III</b> (16GB)	100	<b>78</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.8
✓	5	<b>Apple iPhone 5</b> (16GB)	200	<b>77</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.0
✓	6	<b>Pantech Discover</b>	50	<b>77</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.8
✓	7	<b>HTC One X+</b>	200	<b>77</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.7
✓	8	<b>HTC One VX</b>	50	<b>77</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.5
✓	9	<b>Samsung Galaxy Note II</b> (16GB)	300	<b>77</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	5.5
✓	10	<b>LG Optimus G Pro</b>	200	<b>77</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	5.5
✓	11	<b>HTC Windows Phone 8X</b> (16GB)	100	<b>76</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.3
✓	12	<b>LG Escape</b>	0	<b>76</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.3
✓	13	<b>Nokia Lumia 920</b>	100	<b>76</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.4
✓	14	<b>Motorola Atrix HD</b>	50	<b>75</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.5
✓	15	<b>BlackBerry Z10</b>	200	<b>75</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.2
✓	16	<b>Sony Xperia TL</b>	0	<b>73</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.6
✓	17	<b>Pantech Flex</b>	0	<b>72</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.3
✓	18	<b>Samsung Galaxy Rugby Pro</b>	100	<b>72</b>	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	• • • • •	4.0

<sup>1</sup> Price is with a two-year contract as of June 2013, including rebates, except for T-Mobile, where price is first installment based on two-year payment plan. <sup>2</sup> Because of testing differences, scores for image quality are not directly comparable to those for cameras, which are judged at a higher standard.



## TOP CHOICES

These are the best performers on the two leading platforms: Android (flexible, with a range of display sizes, including the largest; used by all but the iPhone in this group) and Apple's iOS (easily learned interface and unrivaled selection of apps and content). All have fine, full-featured cameras.



### SAMSUNG GALAXY S 4

- A1** Verizon \$200  
**B1** Sprint \$150  
**C1** T-Mobile \$150  
**D1** AT&T \$200

A plethora of features is balanced by great help menus and friendly design. Biggest display of the group.

#### Highlights

- 5-inch display.
- Multi window shows two apps on screen at once.
- Takes excellent photos.
- Screen responds to gestures and gloved fingers.
- Screen won't time out when you're looking at it.



### MOTOROLA DROID RAZR MAXX HD

- A2** Verizon \$200

A great phone, with excellent battery life, for the carrier that most satisfied readers in our latest survey. Its sibling, **A5**, offers much the same in a smaller size.

#### Highlights

- 4.7-inch display.
- Handy onscreen widget.
- Smart Actions adjusts settings to stretch already long battery life.



### APPLE IPHONE 5

- A6** Verizon \$200  
**B5** Sprint \$200  
**C4** T-Mobile \$150  
**D5** AT&T \$200

The flagship iPhone (at least at press time), still among the easiest to learn.

#### Highlights

- 4-inch display.
- Compact size.
- Camera takes excellent photos, very good video.



### HTC ONE

- B3** Sprint \$200  
**C2** T-Mobile \$100  
**D3** AT&T \$200

Sophisticated but easy to master with practice.

#### Highlights

- 4.7-inch display.
- Can control TVs and set-top boxes.
- Two front speakers produce better-than-average audio.

### LG OPTIMUS G

- B2** Sprint \$100  
**D2** AT&T \$100

The least expensive in this group, yet with a smorgasbord of state-of-the-art controls and apps.

#### Highlights

- 4.7-inch display.
- Can use a finger to scribble a note on the screen, then e-mail or text content and note.
- Screen won't time out when you're looking at it.

## BIG-SCREEN STARS

Jumbo 5½-inch displays are great for reading and surfing but are a lot to hold and carry.

### SAMSUNG GALAXY

**NOTE II** (shown)

- A7** Verizon \$200  
**B6** Sprint \$300  
**C5** T-Mobile \$200  
**D9** AT&T \$300

The biggest Galaxy has an even better camera than its siblings. You can use a finger or S Pen stylus to jot notes or sketches on content.

### LG OPTIMUS G PRO

- D10** AT&T \$200

This supersized version of the Optimus G has all of its features and adds some, including the ability to control TVs and to accentuate voices when you zoom in during a video.



## BEST WINDOWS AND BLACKBERRY

Smaller (4.2- to 4.4-inch) screens than on the top Android phones. Fewer apps in stores. Simple interface sends new content to Live Tiles on the Windows home screen or BlackBerry Hub.

### BLACKBERRY Z10

(at right)

- A8** Verizon \$200  
**C8** T-Mobile \$100  
**D15** AT&T \$200

The most innovative BlackBerry in years, with intuitive virtual keyboard and first-rate predictive text.

### HTC WINDOWS PHONE 8X

- A12** Verizon \$100  
**D11** AT&T \$100

Thin and light, with easy-to-grip rubbery surface.

### NOKIA LUMIA 920

- (at right)  
**D13** AT&T \$100

Advanced features include wireless charging and one of the best image stabilizers of any phone camera. Runs Windows. But heavy, at 6.6 ounces.



## SKIP THIS ONE

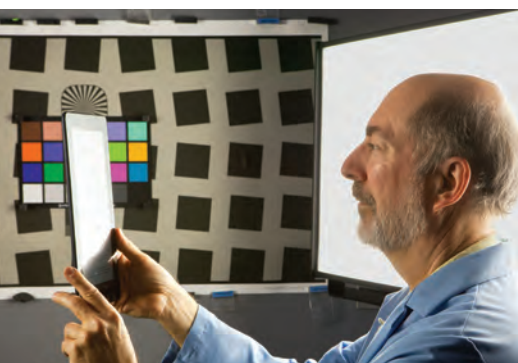
**Jitterbug Touch** \$150

(no contract, from Great Call)

This Kyocera phone (not in chart) is targeted at users who find other phones

hard to see and hard to use, but its 3-inch display and low resolution impair legibility. The tiny, slit-like buttons are hard to use, and some main functions are buried in menus. Try D6, the Pantech Discover.

# Ratings & recommendations Tablets



**LIGHT READING** We assess readability in various conditions. Standouts in bright light were A1 Samsung, two Amazons (C1, C2), and D7 Microsoft.

The recommended tablets in the chart offer some of the most advanced features and robust performance available. Because tablets are used at home 80 percent of the time, according to the readers we surveyed, we highlight Wi-Fi-only models on page 25. Most have a pricier 3G/4G version in the chart, though you'll have to pay for 3G/4G service.

The tablets are ranked by overall score, which considers the attributes shown as well as others, including touch response (all the recommended models were excellent) and ease of use (all were excellent or very good).

Versatility, also considered, varied more. Top-scoring models were excellent or very good. Others scored only Good, usually because they didn't have GPS function (for

Wi-Fi-only models) or a camera. A majority have a webcam; we note the models that don't on page 25. Other factors to consider are:

**Storage.** We buy each tablet in a version that has a reasonable 16GB of storage unless one isn't offered. More models than ever have a memory-card reader that allows you to add storage inexpensively.

**Operating systems.** In addition to iOS (Apple) and Android tablets, there are now tablets that run either the Windows 8 computer OS or Windows RT for mobile devices. We also tested Windows 8 tablets connected to their optional keyboard docks (see page 39). Such "detachables" tend to be underpowered as laptops unless they have an Intel Core processor.

## Recommended models only From 59 tested.

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Test results	Features
				0 P   F   G   VG   E 100	Portability Display Battery life (hr.)	Operating system Memory-card reader

### A 7- TO 8-INCH-SCREEN TABLETS, WI-FI-ONLY Weight: 0.7 to 0.8 lb.

✓	1	<b>Samsung Galaxy Note 8.0</b> (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	\$400	84	● ● 10.0	A ●
✓	2	<b>Apple iPad Mini</b> (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	330	81	● ● 10.5	i
✓	3	<b>Google Nexus 7</b> (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	200	75	● ● 9.5	A
✓	4	<b>Samsung Galaxy Tab 2</b> (7.0) (Wi-Fi, 8GB)	200	71	● ● 8.3	A ●
✓	5	<b>Kobo Arc</b> (Wi-Fi, 32GB)	250	68	● ● 9.3	A

### B 7- TO 8-INCH-SCREEN TABLETS, 3G/4G+WI-FI Weight: 0.7 to 0.9 lb.

✓	1	<b>Apple iPad Mini</b> (Wi-Fi, 4G, 16GB)	460	85	● ● 11.3	i
✓	2	<b>Samsung Galaxy Tab 7.7</b> (Wi-Fi, 4G, 16GB)	350	78	● ● 8.3	A ●
✓	3	<b>Google Nexus 7</b> (Wi-Fi, 4G, 32GB)	300	76	● ● 8.9	A
✓	4	<b>Samsung Galaxy Tab 2</b> (7.0) (Wi-Fi, 4G, 8GB)	300	72	● ● 8.3	A ●
✓	5	<b>T-Mobile SpringBoard</b> (Wi-Fi, 4G, 16GB)	390	71	○ ● 6.1	A ●

### C 7- TO 9-INCH-SCREEN SPECIALTY TABLETS Weight: 0.7 to 1.2 lb.

✓	1	<b>Amazon Kindle Fire HD 8.9</b> (Wi-Fi, 4G, 32GB) ②	410	78	● ● 9.1	A
✓	2	<b>Amazon Kindle Fire HD 8.9</b> (Wi-Fi, 16GB) ②	280	75	● ● 9.1	A
✓	3	<b>Amazon Kindle Fire HD</b> (Wi-Fi, 16GB) ②	210	75	● ● 10.7	A
✓	4	<b>Barnes &amp; Noble Nook HD+</b> (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	270	66	● ● 9.0	A ●
✓	5	<b>Barnes &amp; Noble Nook HD</b> (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	230	66	● ● 8.8	A ●

### D 9- TO 12-INCH-SCREEN TABLETS, WI-FI-ONLY Weight: 1.2 to 1.6 lb.

✓	1	<b>Google Nexus 10</b> (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	400	83	● ● 11.0	A
✓	2	<b>Apple iPad</b> (Wi-Fi, 16GB) (4th gen.)	500	83	● ● 12.9	i
✓	3	<b>Asus VivoTab RT TF600T</b> (Wi-Fi, 32GB)	500	82	● ● 10.7	WR ●
✓	4	<b>Samsung Galaxy Note 10.1</b> (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	500	81	● ● 11.1	A ●
✓	5	<b>Samsung Ativ Smart PC</b> (Wi-Fi, 64GB)	700	80	● ● 13.4	W8 ●

☒ CR Best Buy ☒ Recommended  
 ● Excellent ● Very good ○ Good ● Fair ● Poor

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Test results	Features
				0 P   F   G   VG   E 100	Portability Display Battery life (hr.)	Operating system Memory-card reader

### D 9- TO 12-INCH-SCREEN TABLETS, WI-FI-ONLY continued

✓	6	<b>Samsung Galaxy Tab 2</b> (10.1) (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	\$350	80	● ● 12.4	A ●
✓	7	<b>Microsoft Surface</b> with Windows RT (Wi-Fi, 32GB)	500	80	● ● 10.6	WR ●
✓	8	<b>Dell Latitude 10</b> (Wi-Fi, 64GB)	650	79	● ● 11.5	W8 ●
✓	9	<b>Dell Latitude 10 Essentials</b> (Wi-Fi, 32GB)	500	79	● ● 12.6	W8 ●
✓	10	<b>Asus Transformer Pad</b> Infinity TF700T (Wi-Fi, 32GB)	500	78	● ● 8.0	A ●
✓	11	<b>Dell XPS 10</b> (Wi-Fi, 32GB)	450	78	● ● 10.9	WR ●
✓	12	<b>Apple iPad 2</b> (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	400	77	● ● 11.6	i
✓	13	<b>Acer Iconia W510</b> (Wi-Fi, 64GB)	580	77	● ● 10.0	W8 ●
✓	14	<b>Lenovo IdeaTab Lynx K3011</b> (Wi-Fi, 64GB)	500	77	● ● 10.9	W8 ●
✓	15	<b>Asus Transformer Pad</b> TF300T (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	350	76	● ● 8.9	A ●
✓	16	<b>Acer Iconia Tab A700</b> (Wi-Fi, 32GB)	450	76	● ● 9.5	A ●
✓	17	<b>Toshiba Excite 10 SE</b> (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	350	75	● ● 10.5	A ●

### E 9- TO 12-INCH-SCREEN TABLETS, 3G/4G+WI-FI Weight: 1.2 to 1.5 lb.

✓	1	<b>Apple iPad</b> (Wi-Fi, 4G, 16GB) (4th gen.)	630	85	● ● 11.7	i
✓	2	<b>Samsung Galaxy Note 10.1</b> (Wi-Fi, 4G, 16GB)	600	83	● ● 11.4	A ●
✓	3	<b>Asus VivoTab RT TF600T</b> (Wi-Fi, 4G, 32GB)	700	83	● ● 10.7	WR ●
✓	4	<b>Samsung Galaxy Tab 2</b> (10.1) (Wi-Fi, 4G, 16GB)	500	81	● ● 11.5	A ●
✓	5	<b>Dell Latitude 10</b> (Wi-Fi, 3G, 64GB)	750	81	● ● 11.3	W8 ●
✓	6	<b>Apple iPad 2</b> (Wi-Fi, 3G, 16GB)	530	80	● ● 11.6	i
✓	7	<b>Samsung Galaxy Tab 10.1</b> (Wi-Fi, 4G, 16GB)	500	77	● ● 8.9	A

### F 10- TO 12-INCH-SCREEN CONVERTIBLE TABLET WITH KEYBOARD Weight: 2.7 lb.

✓	1	<b>Lenovo IdeaPad Yoga 11</b> (Wi-Fi, 32GB)	550	71	○ ● 15.2	WR ●
---	---	---	-----	----	----------	------

① A=Android; i=iOS; WR=Windows RT; W8=Windows 8. ② Price includes optional wall charger, \$10.



## TOP CHOICES

These models are the most versatile, perfect for watching movies, looking at photos, Web surfing, and playing games.



**A1 Samsung Galaxy Note 8.0**  
16GB, \$400

Excellent overall and loaded with features, including a stylus and software for various tasks, and handwriting and voice recognition.

### Highlights

- Lightweight.
- Can multitask using two windows at the same time.



**A2 Apple iPad Mini** 16GB, \$330

Packs most of what's best about the full-sized iPad into a thinner, lighter tablet. Lacks GPS function.

### Highlights

- Very long battery life for a smaller tablet.
- Very thin and light.
- Apple's selection of apps, movies, and music is unrivaled.



**A3 Google Nexus 7** 16GB, \$200

It's not always easy to find a low-cost tablet that really delivers. This one (and its larger sibling, **D1**) does. But there's no camera.

### Highlights

- Lightweight.
- Uses the latest Android version.



**D2 Apple iPad** 16GB, \$500

Still among our most highly rated tablets, with a long battery life and an excellent display with great colors. But it lacks GPS function.

### Highlights

- Very high-resolution display.
- Apple's selection of apps, movies, and music is unrivaled.



**A4 Samsung Galaxy Tab 2 (7.0)** 8GB, \$200

You get lots for the money, even if storage is scant at 8GB.

### Highlight

- Low-priced for a model with a memory-card slot.

## GREAT FOR READING AND MOVIES

These have great content for readers plus high-resolution displays for watching movies and other videos.



**C2 Amazon Kindle Fire HD 8.9**  
16GB, \$280 (shown)

Will appeal most to Amazon Prime subscribers, with an easy interface for Prime's free Instant Video and free Kindle book loans, as well as personal content uploaded to Amazon Cloud. But Amazon's app market is smaller than Apple's and Google's, and this Kindle has no camera or GPS.

### Highlight

- Very high-resolution screen.

**C3 Amazon Kindle Fire HD**  
16GB, \$210

A bit more portable than the larger Fire HD 8.9, this has a 7-inch screen and a slightly longer battery life. But it has no camera or GPS function, and Amazon's app market is smaller than Apple's and Google's.

### Highlight

- High-resolution screen.

**C4 Barnes & Noble Nook HD+**  
16GB, \$270

Magazine readers will enjoy this tablet. But it lacks a webcam, camera, and GPS function.

### Highlights

- Very high-resolution screen.
- Excellent for magazine fans.
- Full access to Google Play store.

## BEST FOR WORK

These run either Windows RT or Windows 8, with access to the Windows Store for apps. RT includes a version of Microsoft Office but isn't compatible with standard Windows programs.

**D5 Samsung Ativ Smart PC**  
64GB, \$700

This is a great tablet for those who want to run their Office apps on a mobile device, though it falls short when used as a laptop. (It fits into an optional keyboard dock.)

### Highlights

- Full version of Windows 8.
- The longest battery life of all the tablets we've tested.
- High resolution for its size.



**D7 Microsoft Surface with Windows RT** 32GB, \$500 (shown)

This excellent tablet includes a built-in stand that makes it easy to read or to watch videos. It's one of the few large models

with an excellent display. But there's no GPS function.

### Highlights

- High resolution for its size.
- Optional keyboard is thin and very good.

## SKIP THESE

These are inexpensive but undone by their short battery life and a display that makes them challenging to use.

**Archos GamePad** 8GB, \$180

As a tablet, battery life was short and the display only fair; placement of controls made it awkward for gaming.

**Coby MID7065-8** 8GB, \$130

The display was only fair and battery life paltry.

# Ratings & recommendations Basic cameras



**GETTING IT STRAIGHT** Each model is tested at various zoom settings to see how faithfully it reproduces a set of geometric patterns.

All of the recommended cameras are fine performers that can take pleasing shots in a wide variety of shooting conditions.

Models are ranked by overall score, which considers the attributes shown as well as others. (The scores below aren't comparable to those for advanced cameras, which are tested using a higher standard.) Attributes that aren't shown include:

**Ease of use.** This includes our assessment of the controls, start-up time, shutter delay in both regular and low light, and more. Most models are good or very good.

**LCD size.** Most models have a display that measures roughly 3 inches, and only a few are touch screens. Several of the

superzoom models have swiveling displays.

**Weight.** Subcompacts are the lightest type, at 4 to 7 ounces. Rugged and compact models weigh less than 10 ounces, as do most of the superzoom models except those that feature 30x or higher zooms.

**Battery life.** Subcompacts and compacts typically shoot 150 to 250 shots per charge; rugged and waterproof models, 250 to 350 shots; and superzooms, 250 to 400 shots.

**Wide angle.** Most offer lenses that can shoot as wide as 24 or 25 mm. Most rugged models can shoot only as wide as 28 mm, although a few can go wider. A few superzoom models offer angles as wide as 22 or 23 mm, which are wide enough for you to capture panoramic landscapes.

**Recommended models only** From 134 tested.

✓ CR Best Buy    ✓ Recommended

● Excellent    ● Very good    ○ Good    ● Fair    ● Poor

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Specs	Test results
				0 100	Megapixels Optical zoom Image quality Flash photos Video quality LCD quality	
				P   F   G   V   E		

## A SUBCOMPACT Fits in a purse or pocket.

✓	1	Nikon Coolpix P330	\$380	63	12 5x	● ● ● ● ●
✓	2	Nikon Coolpix S800c	300	60	16 10x	● ○ ● ● ○
✓	3	Sony Cyber-shot DSC-WX70	230	59	16 5x	● ● ● ● ○
✓	4	Nikon Coolpix S6500	200	57	16 12x	● ● ○ ○ ○
✓	5	Canon PowerShot ELPH 110 HS	180	57	16 5x	○ ○ ○ ● ○
✓	6	Panasonic Lumix DMC-3D1	400	56	12 4x	● ○ ● ● ○
✓	7	Panasonic Lumix DMC-SZ1	180	56	16 10x	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
✓	8	Panasonic Lumix DMC-SZ5	200	56	14 10x	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
✓	9	Panasonic Lumix DMC-FH8	150	55	16 5x	○ ○ ○ ● ○

## B COMPACT Simple to use, with advanced features.

✓	1	Olympus Stylus XZ-10 iHS	400	65	12 5x	● ● ● ● ○ ●
✓	2	Nikon Coolpix P310	230	60	16 4x	● ● ● ○ ○ ○
✓	3	Nikon Coolpix S8200	250	57	16 14x	● ○ ○ ○ ○
✓	4	Fujifilm XF1	450	57	12 4x	● ○ ○ ○ ○
✓	5	Nikon Coolpix L610	150	57	16 14x	● ● ● ● ○
✓	6	Canon PowerShot S110	450	55	12 5x	● ○ ○ ○ ●

## C SUPERZOOM Has an extremely versatile zoom lens.

✓	1	Panasonic Lumix DMC-ZS30	350	64	18 20x	● ○ ○ ○ ●
✓	2	Olympus Stylus SP-820UZ iHS	330	62	14 40x	● ○ ○ ○ ○
✓	3	Olympus SZ-31MR iHS	500	60	16 24x	○ ● ● ○ ○
✓	4	Nikon Coolpix S9500	330	59	18 22x	● ○ ○ ○ ○
✓	5	Nikon Coolpix P520	430	59	18 42x	● ● ○ ○ ●

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Specs	Test results
				0 100	Megapixels Optical zoom Image quality Flash photos Video quality LCD quality	
				P   F   G   V   E		

## C SUPERZOOM continued

✓	6	Nikon Coolpix L820	\$260	59	16 30x	● ○ ● ● ●
✓	7	Leica V-Lux 40	700	59	14 20x	● ○ ○ ○ ○
✓	8	Panasonic Lumix DMC-ZS8	260	59	14 16x	● ○ ○ ○ ○
✓	9	Panasonic Lumix DMC-FZ60	350	58	16 24x	● ● ● ● ●
✓	10	Panasonic Lumix DMC-ZS20	300	57	14 20x	● ○ ○ ○ ○
✓	11	Fujifilm FinePix F770EXR	330	57	16 20x	● ● ● ● ○
✓	12	Samsung WB850F	380	56	16 21x	● ○ ○ ○ ○
✓	13	Sony Cyber-shot DSC-HX20V	300	56	18 20x	○ ○ ○ ● ●
✓	14	Pentax Optio RZ18	190	56	16 18x	● ○ ○ ○ ○
✓	15	Leica V-Lux 30	650	56	14 16x	○ ○ ○ ● ○
✓	16	Panasonic Lumix DMC-ZS15	230	56	12 16x	○ ○ ○ ● ○
✓	17	Olympus SP-620UZ	165	55	16 21x	● ○ ○ ○ ○
✓	18	Sony Cyber-shot DSC-HX10V	300	55	18 16x	○ ○ ○ ● ○
✓	19	Sony Cyber-shot DSC-HX200V	480	55	18 30x	○ ○ ○ ● ●

## D RUGGED AND WATERPROOF Designed to resist water and shocks.

✓	1	Panasonic Lumix DMC-TS5	400	58	16 5x	● ○ ● ● ●
✓	2	Olympus Stylus TG-830 iHS	250	57	16 5x	● ○ ○ ○ ●
✓	3	Nikon Coolpix AW110	350	56	16 5x	● ○ ● ● ●
✓	4	Panasonic Lumix DMC-TS4	300	56	12 5x	● ○ ○ ○ ○
✓	5	Olympus Stylus TG-2 iHS	380	53	12 4x	● ○ ○ ○ ○
✓	6	Canon PowerShot D20	320	53	12 5x	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
✓	7	Olympus Tough TG-1	400	52	12 4x	● ○ ● ○ ●
✓	8	Olympus Stylus TG-630 iHS	200	52	12 5x	○ ○ ● ● ○
✓	9	Panasonic Lumix DMC-TS20	180	50	16 4x	○ ○ ○ ● ○



## TOP CHOICES

Take your best shot with these high-rated models. All have very good image quality and displays.



**A1 Nikon** Coolpix P330, \$380

A basic camera that could appeal to advanced users. Its high-quality lens has the widest angle among the top models (24 mm), plus an f/1.8 maximum aperture for more professional-looking images.

### Highlights

- Very good image stabilizer (better than many cameras) for blur-free photos.
- Very good full-HD video quality.
- Fast start-up time.



**B1 Olympus** Stylus XZ-10 iHS, \$400

Includes a hybrid control ring built around the lens, which lets you assign various functions, including zoom or exposure adjustments.

### Highlights

- Shorter next-shot delay than many models.
- Very good touch-screen LCD.
- HDR (high-dynamic range) settings can help capture shots in difficult lighting.
- Wide-angle (26 mm) lens.



**C1 Panasonic** Lumix DMC-ZS30, \$350

Wireless, with a 20x zoom. It can fire off 10 frames per second.

### Highlights

- Relatively thin, considering its long 20x optical zoom (including 24 mm-wide angle).
- Touch-screen LCD.
- Built-in Wi-Fi, plus near field communication (NFC) features.

## FOR EXTREME CONDITIONS

These allow anxiety-free shooting at poolside, at the beach, or on a hike.



**D1 Panasonic** Lumix DMC-TS5, \$400

Wireless and rugged. NFC (near-field communication) lets you quickly upload images and video to your smart phone. Panasonic claims it can be submerged to a depth of 43 feet and withstand a 6.5-foot drop.



**D2 Olympus** Stylus TG-830 iHS, \$250

Olympus claims it can be submerged to a depth of 33 feet and withstand a 6.5-foot drop.



**D8 Olympus** Stylus TG-630 iHS, \$200

This CR Best Buy is easy to use. Olympus claims that it is waterproof to a depth of 16 feet and can withstand a 5-foot drop.



**D3 Nikon** Coolpix AW110, \$350

Has lots of features. Nikon claims it can be submerged to a depth of 59 feet. Available in three colors, plus camouflage.

## BEST VALUES

These offer high performance at a low price. They're well-suited for young, active family members.



**B5 Nikon** Coolpix L610, \$150

This CR Best Buy has a very wide-angle (25 mm) zoom. It uses AA batteries, which can be convenient when traveling.



**A9 Panasonic** Lumix DMC-FH8, \$150

Thin and lighter than most subcompacts, this CR Best Buy has a very wide-angle (24 mm) zoom. It can be charged with a USB cord connected to a computer.

## FOR SHARING PHOTOS

All of these can connect wirelessly via a Wi-Fi hot spot.



**A2 Nikon** Coolpix S800c, \$300

Has a very wide-angle (25 mm) zoom, plus a touch screen. Runs Google's Android operating system, so you can customize features and download photo apps from Google Play, the Android app store.



**C12 Samsung** WB850F, \$380

Lightweight and nearly as thin as a large subcompact, it has a long (21x) optical zoom with very wide-angle (23 mm) capability.

## MODELS WITH LONG ZOOMS

Relatively large and heavy, these let you get closer to sports and wildlife, or use their wide-angle capability to shoot landscapes.



**C2 Olympus** Stylus SP-820UZ iHS, \$330

Has a long (40x) zoom with very wide (22 mm) capability. Uses AA batteries, convenient when traveling.



**C5 Nikon** Coolpix P520, \$430

Loaded with features, it has a very good image stabilizer, which is helpful with its long (42x) zoom. It can shoot as wide as 24 mm.

# Ratings & recommendations Advanced cameras



**MATCHING COLORS** Our camera testers measure how accurately each advanced model captures a set of reference colors.

The recommended models offer robust performance and some of the most sophisticated camera features available.

Models are ranked by overall score, which considers the attributes shown as well as others. (The quality of still images isn't comparable to that of basic cameras, which are tested to a lower standard.) Attributes that aren't shown include:

**Ease of use.** This is our assessment of controls, start-up time, and shutter delay in regular and low light. We check manual and autofocus systems, and how easy it is to insert and remove a memory card and battery. Most models we tested were good or very good.

**Flash photos.** These were mostly good or very good when using a built-in flash. We tested how powerful the strobe was and how evenly it illuminated the subject and scene.

**LCD size.** This is roughly 3 inches on most

models. A few have touch screens and swivel, as noted for models at right.

**Through-the-lens viewfinder.** The SLRs all have one that's very good or excellent.

**Image stabilization.** For most models that accept removable lenses, it's built into select lenses only. Some Olympus, Pentax, and Sony SLR-like and SLR models house it in the camera's body, so it works with all compatible lenses. All stabilizers of both types that we've tested were very good or excellent.

**Weight.** Point-and-shoots typically weigh 20 ounces or less. SLR-like models weigh 20 to 30 ounces; lower-ranked models with fewer features weigh less. SLRs weigh 25 to 50 ounces.

**Battery life.** Except for a few point-and-shoot models, you can expect at least 300 shots on a charge. Some SLRs and SLR-like cameras offer several times as many.

## Recommended models only From 73 tested.

☒ CR Best Buy ☒ Recommended

● Excellent ● Very good ○ Good ● Fair ● Poor

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Specifications	Test results
				0 100	Megapixels	Image quality
				P   F   G   VG   E	Test lens and magnification	Video quality
						LCD quality

### A POINT-AND-SHOOT Has a built-in lens and SLR-like features.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Nikon Coolpix A	\$1,100	71	16	28 mm	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Panasonic Lumix DMC-FZ200	600	69	12	25-600 mm	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Panasonic Lumix DMC-LX7	500	66	10	24-90 mm	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Canon PowerShot G15	500	65	12	28-140 mm	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Fujifilm X20	600	65	12	28-112 mm	●	○	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Pentax MX-1	450	65	12	28-112 mm	○	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	Olympus Stylus XZ-2 iHS	600	64	12	28-112 mm	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8	Sony Cyber-shot DSC-RX100	650	62	20	28-100 mm	●	●	●

### B SLR-LIKE Smaller and lighter than an SLR; uses removable lenses.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Panasonic Lumix DMC-GH3	1,300	72	16	12-35 mm (2.0)	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Panasonic Lumix DMC-G5K	800	69	16	14-42 mm (2.0)	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Olympus OM-D E-M5	1,000	68	16	12-50 mm (2.0)	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Sony SLT-A57K	600	68	16	18-55 mm (1.5)	●	○	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Samsung NX300	750	68	20	18-55 mm (1.5)	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Sony NEX-3NL	450	67	16	16-50 mm (1.5)	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	Nikon 1 J2	700	66	10	11-27.5 mm (2.7)	○	○	○
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8	Samsung NX20	1,000	66	20	18-55 mm (1.5)	●	○	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	9	Sony SLT-A65VK	800	65	24	18-55 mm (1.5)	○	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	10	Sony NEX-7K	1,150	65	24	18-55 mm (1.5)	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	11	Sony NEX-F3K	500	65	16	18-55 mm (1.5)	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	12	Sony SLT-A37K	500	65	16	18-55 mm (1.5)	●	●	○

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Specifications	Test results
				0 100	Megapixels	Image quality
				P   F   G   VG   E	Test lens and magnification	Video quality
						LCD quality

### B SLR-LIKE continued

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	13	Sony SLT-A77V	\$1,000	65	24	18-55 mm (1.5)	○	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	14	Olympus Pen Mini E-PM2	600	64	16	14-42 mm (2.0)	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	15	Sony NEX-6L	900	64	16	16-50 mm (1.5)	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	16	Panasonic Lumix DMC-GF5X	750	63	12	14-42 mm (2.0)	○	○	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	17	Samsung NX210	900	63	20	18-55 mm (1.5)	●	●	●

### C SLR Has the most advanced features and removable lenses.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Nikon D7100	1,500	72	24	18-105 mm (1.5)	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Canon EOS 60D	1,050	71	18	18-55 mm (1.6)	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Olympus E-5	1,700	70	12	14-54 mm (2.0)	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Nikon D7000	1,100	70	16	18-105 mm (1.5)	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Canon EOS Rebel T3i	650	70	18	18-55 mm (1.6)	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Canon EOS 7D Digital	1,700	69	18	18-135 mm (1.6)	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	Canon EOS Rebel T4i	750	69	18	18-55 mm (1.6)	●	○	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8	Canon EOS Rebel T3	600	67	12	18-55 mm (1.6)	●	●	○
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	9	Canon EOS Rebel T2i	650	67	18	18-55 mm (1.6)	●	○	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	10	Nikon D5200	900	66	24	18-55 mm (1.5)	●	○	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	11	Nikon D3200	600	66	24	18-55 mm (1.5)	●	○	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	12	Nikon D3100	450	65	14	18-55 mm (1.5)	●	●	○
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	13	Pentax K-30	850	65	16	18-55 mm (1.5)	●	○	○
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	14	Pentax K-5	1,050	65	16	18-55 mm (1.5)	●	○	○
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	15	Nikon D5100	750	65	16	18-55 mm (1.5)	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	16	Pentax K-r	650	65	12	18-55 mm (1.5)	●	○	●



## TOP CHOICES

These three models have at least very good image quality and performance across the board.



**A2 Panasonic Lumix DMC-FZ200**, \$600

Has better battery life than most in its class, a very powerful zoom, and a better image stabilizer than many, which can help prevent blurry shots in low light.

### Highlights

- Has a 24x zoom, very long for a point-and-shoot.
- Can also fire off 12 frames per second when capturing photos.
- Can shoot 3D images.



**B1 Panasonic Lumix DMC-GH3**, \$1,300

An SLR-like model that lets you focus and shoot by touching the display. It also has excellent controls and an electronic viewfinder.

### Highlights

- One of the few that can shoot excellent video.
- Very good-quality swiveling touch-screen LCD.
- It can capture 3D photos and video (with the optional 3D lens).



**C1 Nikon D7100**, \$1,500

This SLR is easy to use, powerful, and has lots of options but is big and heavy. It has an excellent viewfinder and flash.

### Highlights

- Can shoot six frames per second for up to 100 shots.
- Has slots for two SD cards.
- Has many in-camera editing features and shooting modes, such as an HDR mode.

## FOR THE MOST CREATIVITY

These models are equipped with many physical controls, extensive features, and special modes for advanced photographers.



**B10 Sony NEX-7K**, \$1,150

This SLR-like is packed with features, such as the ability to capture 3D panoramas. Easy to use, it has a very fast start-up time and can capture sharp low-light shots without a flash. It can shoot 10 full-resolution photos per second.

## BEST VALUES

Even among the CR Best Buys, these offer a lot of performance at a low price.



**A6 Pentax MX-1**, \$450

Has a body with a retro look reminiscent of film cameras, plus an excellent LCD.



**B6 Sony NEX-3NL**, \$450

Unique features for an SLR-like, include auto-framing modes that analyze a subject, crop it, and save the image for a more pleasing composition. Has a very good swiveling LCD.

**C12 Nikon D3100**, \$450

Offers a longer battery life than most advanced models in its price range and a guide mode to help you shoot better.

## SHARING ON A BUDGET

These well-priced models can go online or connect to a mobile device via Wi-Fi. They can also download apps with features such as the ability to control the camera from a phone or tablet.



**B5 Samsung NX300**, \$750

Has many dynamic features, including an excellent 3.3-inch swiveling LCD and wireless capability. You can also shoot 3D photos and video with a special 3D lens.



**B15 Sony NEX-6L**, \$900

This small but powerful SLR-like has Wi-Fi capability. It can also fire off 10 full-resolution frames per second in burst mode.

## FOR SHOOTING ON THE GO

Both are lightweight for advanced point-and-shoots, yet image quality and performance are on par with much weightier and pricier models.



**A4 Canon PowerShot G15**, \$500

This CR Best Buy is smaller than most advanced models, yet still matched most SLRs and SLR-like models in image quality for regular and flash photos.



**A8 Sony Cyber-shot DSC-RX100**, \$650

One of the thinnest and lightest advanced cameras we've tested, it still maintained very good performance.



**C7 Canon EOS Rebel T4i**, \$750

This CR Best Buy has a very good-quality swiveling touch-screen LCD, rare on SLRs, and very good through-the-lens viewfinder. Can shoot five photos per second. Takes fewer shots per charge than most other SLRs.



**C10 Nikon D5200**, \$900

Its high (24 megapixel) resolution is great for extreme cropping or very large prints. The kit lens has an excellent image stabilizer to minimize blurring due to hand shake.

**HEADS UP**

Mount a waterproof camcorder on a helmet and shoot your way through the rapids.

## Action camcorders

Want video of snorkeling, snowboarding, or wind-surfing? Enter action (aka sports) camcorders. They're compact, rugged, and often waterproof, and they attach to clothes, helmet, or handlebars for hands-free use. Just don't expect many features; even viewfinders and LCDs are rare among the dozen or so models we tested.



### GoPro Hero3 White Edition, \$200

This recommended model weighs just 2.6 ounces (5.5 with case), captures good-quality high-def video and photos, and has a long battery life. With built-in Wi-Fi and an optional remote, you can send video to a smart phone or tablet.

# Portable picks

## E-book readers

Amazon Kindles and Barnes & Noble Nooks are leading choices; they offer fine performance and access to an extensive selection of titles. Unlike Nooks, which require a corded connection, Kindles wirelessly accept most e-books borrowed from public libraries. From among our recommended models, we've selected the lowest-priced Nook and Kindle readers with a built-in light, along with a lower-priced, non-lit sibling.



### Nook Simple Touch with Glowlight, \$120

The original lit reader, this comes with antiglare coating that slightly improves readability in bright light.

### Kindle Paperwhite with Special Offers, \$120 (at right)

Outstanding contrast and resolution make this the best e-ink screen we've tested. But it carries ads and offers on the screen saver and along the bottom of the library screen. (An ad-free version costs \$140.)



### Nook Simple Touch, \$80

This is essentially the Glowlight Nook minus the light. The antiglare coating is a \$20 option that's worth considering but not essential.

### Kindle with Special Offers, \$70

This CR Best Buy is the least expensive Kindle and a fine performer that carries ads. (An ad-free version costs \$90.)

## Headphones

Just about any headphones will work with your tablet or phone. We've picked two in-ear models with very good sound that are also sensitive enough to provide adequate volume even from low-powered portable devices.

### Klipsch Image S4i, \$100

These are cool-looking and have a three-button inline remote control that lets you answer and end calls on most smart phones and some cell phones.



### Sennheiser CX215, \$30

Offered in five funky colors, this CR Best Buy has unusual contoured shells that can be easily gripped by your fingers.

## Wireless, portable speakers

Pipe music into a battery-powered speaker via a wired or wireless Bluetooth connection and you'll enjoy better and louder sound from your smart phone or tablet. Most new smart phones and tablets support Bluetooth.

### TDK Life on Record, \$150

This Bluetooth speaker costs less and sounds better than the trendy Beats by Dr. Dre Pill and Jawbone Jambox, though it's a bit larger. It's easy to use and is designed to resist dust and water. You can use it as a speaker phone with a Bluetooth-compatible phone, and its USB port will charge an iPod or iPhone.







# Save big on eyewear

You can find deep discounts if you know how to shop

**I F YOU'RE LIKE** many of our readers, you're buying prescription glasses from your eye doctor's office or an independent shop, and you're happy with the results.

But you're probably paying much more than you would if you comparison shopped at different types of eyewear stores, including discounters such as Costco and online retailers. Doing just that, we were able to shave more than 40 percent off the prices of frames and lenses. And that's good news considering that a pair of eyeglasses with just basic prescription lenses can cost you hundreds.

The almost 19,500 readers who responded to a recent CONSUMER REPORTS survey spent a median of \$244 out-of-pocket on their last pair of prescription specs. Perhaps not surprisingly, they gave one of the least expensive retailers, Costco, the highest overall satisfaction score among chains and other discounters, including BJ's Optical, LensCrafters, and Pearle Vision. Costco's score was on a par with independent shops and doctors' offices.

One reason glasses cost a lot is they are part fashion accessory. You may even

think paying more will improve not just the view you'll see but the image you'll project. And there are so many choices for lenses and coatings, it's easy to be confused about what's worth buying.

It doesn't help that the industry is dominated by just a couple of players, including Italy-based Luxottica, which owns LensCrafters and Pearl Vision, the vision centers at Sears and Target, and vision insurance provider EyeMed. It also licenses many popular eyewear brands and owns

Ray-Ban, Oakley, and others.

Another is California-based VSP Global, which owns, among other eyewear-related enterprises, VSP Vision Care, the nation's largest vision insurance plan; and Marchon Eyewear, producer of eyewear labels such as Calvin Klein, Fendi, and Flexon.

## Where to shop

The best place to shop depends on your needs and preferences. Your options include:

**Eye doctors and independent shops.** If

## Same frames, different prices

We comparison shopped for this Polo men's frame online and at a walk-in retailer. After adding polycarbonate lenses and antireflective coating, we saved 43 percent online, despite LensCrafters's 30 percent discount at the time. Online orders qualify for free shipping.

Store	Frame	Lenses	Antireflective coating	Total <sup>①</sup>
LensCrafters	\$207	\$195	\$85	<b>\$341</b> <sup>②</sup>
FramesDirect.com	155	89	45	<b>259</b> <sup>③</sup>
SimplyEyeglasses.com	121	59	39	<b>219</b>
Eyeglasses.com	138	59	20	<b>217</b>
LensesRx.com	120	40	35	<b>195</b>

**MAXIMUM SAVINGS \$146**

<sup>①</sup> Some prices are promotional. <sup>②</sup> Total after 30 percent discount. <sup>③</sup> Total after \$30 discount.



Polo PH2015 men's frame

money's no object or you have a generous vision plan, you might consider buying from either of those sellers, both of which received top marks from readers for merchandise quality and customer service.

**Chain retailers.** Readers were essentially pleased with their purchase experience at retailers like Eye Masters, Pearle Vision, and Sears Optical, but results were mixed. LensCrafters was singled out as the place to get eyewear fastest—almost half of readers who shopped there had their glasses the same or next day.

**Discount stores.** When it came to cost and just about everything else, readers gave Costco high marks, with BJ's Optical, Sam's Club, and Walmart close behind.

During a recent trip to Costco, we found a Fendi women's frame for \$110—\$120 to \$250 less than at other retailers. Add lenses at Costco's rock-bottom prices and you'd be all set. But readers weren't that impressed by Costco's selection of frames.

And you may have to wait a week or more for your glasses. Some discounters accept few, if any, insurance plans, so you might have to pay up front and seek reimbursement if your plan allows it.

**Online shops.** If you can't find a suitable frame at a discounter, try online shops, where the selection often is huge and the prices low. Many eyeglass sites have lots of general information about selecting the right frames, lenses, and coatings. You might even be able to upload your photo and try on frames virtually.

A new segment of online shop, including Zenni Optical ([zennioptical.com](http://zennioptical.com)), Warby Parker ([warbyparker.com](http://warbyparker.com)), and Classic Specs ([classicspecs.com](http://classicspecs.com)), offers a complete single-vision pair of glasses for less than \$100. Depending on the site, frames can be mailed to you to try on at no charge. But most of those sites sell only their own brands, so you're unlikely to find that designer frame you fell for elsewhere.

That's not the case at most online shops, where we had success finding the same frames we saw in walk-in stores, and at cut-rate prices. For example, a men's Polo frame priced at \$207 at LensCrafters was available at LensesRx Online Optical ([lensesrx.com](http://lensesrx.com)) for \$120. When we added single-vision polycarbonate lenses and a basic antireflective coating, the online total came to \$195, almost \$300 off LensCrafters' price. After taking into account a 30 percent-off special LensCrafters had at the time, we still were ahead by \$146.

But there are things to consider when using eyeglass websites. And because only 2 percent of our survey respondents have shopped online, we don't have a lot of data on customer satisfaction—although eight of 10 readers who shopped for glasses on the Web said they would do so again.

Another concern is that buying online means having to wait for your glasses to arrive in the mail and shipping them back if there's a problem. And online retailers can't give you the in-person service you'd get at a walk-in store, a problem if your frames need adjusting, for example.

Many online eyeglass stores offer prescription lenses; you simply enter the measurements on your prescription into an online form. But if you have a complex prescription requiring additional measurements, ordering online isn't the best choice, says Jeffrey Rohlf, instructing optician at the Ohio State University College of Optometry and president of the state board that licenses opticians in Ohio.

One option is to buy only the frames online and order the lenses locally. Walmart charges \$10 to add lenses to frames you bring in; Costco's fee is \$18. (Of course, you'll also pay for the cost of the lenses.) But don't expect an online shop to take your vision insurance, though you may be able to obtain reimbursement from your provider.

## How to choose

**Research online.** Even if you plan to buy locally, consider reading the how-to information on such websites as Eyeglasses.com and LensesRx Online Optical. Knowing something about the types of frames, lenses, and coatings can help you understand your options and sense whether a store or website is trying to sell you more than you need. When we ordered glasses with a simple, single-vision prescription, one online shop automatically checked the box for \$40 polycarbonate lenses,

## Lenses and coatings: The lingo

**CR-39.** Inexpensive plastic lenses with good optics, and easy to tint. Less impact-resistant than some others. Can look thick with stronger prescriptions.

**Polycarbonate.** Highly shatter-resistant plastic lenses that are thinner and lighter but usually more expensive than CR-39. Recommended for children and athletes. Not as good optically as others, especially in strong prescriptions. Easily scratched, even with scratch-resistant coatings.

**High-index.** Lenses of a lightweight material that refracts light more, allowing them to be thinner. Enables people with strong prescriptions to have more comfortable glasses and a greater choice of frames. Not as impact-resistant as polycarbonate but better optically. More expensive than other options.

**Progressive.** Provides a gradual change in power for different viewing distances without a visible border separating them. Usually more expensive than standard bifocals and trifocals. Can take days to weeks to get accustomed to using.

**Photochromic.** Lenses that are almost clear indoors but darken automatically in sunlight. The best-known brand is Transitions. Many photochromic lenses don't darken as well as dark sunglasses.

**Trivex.** Lightweight, impact-resistant lenses that are optically superior to



polycarbonate though generally pricier. The best choice for people with rimless or semi-rimless frames.

**HD (digital) lenses.** Precision, diamond-cut lenses with improved optics. Most beneficial for progressive lenses. Adds 30 percent or more to the lens cost.

**Antireflective.** Improves clarity and reduces reflections, improving vision under strong light and at night and making eyes more attractive to others. Especially useful or included automatically on high-index lenses. Smudges can be more noticeable.

**Scratch resistance.** Protects lenses. Standard on all lenses but some CR-39.

**Ultraviolet protection.** Blocks ultraviolet light. Consider only for some lower-cost CR-39 lenses, which, even without the coating, block far more UV light than wearing no glasses at all.



when \$10 CR-39 lenses were just fine. And the site auto-selected a \$19 extended warranty, which we don't recommend. Also, check whether the Better Business Bureau ([bbb.org](http://bbb.org)) has a report on the store or website where you plan to make your purchase. Some of the lowest-priced retailers we found also had F ratings at the BBB, including the online shops Go-Optic and EZContacts.

**Get your doctor's recommendation.** If your current prescription is more than a year old, have an optometrist or ophthalmologist check your eyes before you order new glasses. Ask your eye doctor for advice on the types of lenses you should choose. Also request that the doctor measure and record your pupillary distance, which you'll need if you order lenses online.

**Try frames on in person.** Nothing beats seeing and feeling the frames on your face. Keep in mind that the strength of your prescription can affect which frame and lenses you should select, something a professional can help you with. If you plan to comparison shop, record the frame brand, model, and size, marked on the frame's temples.

**Ask about your benefits.** Find out whether the retailer accepts your vision insurance. If not, ask your plan administrator whether you can use an out-of-network provider and, if so, how that affects your coverage. Ask what proof of purchase you'll need to be reimbursed, and verify

that the retailer can provide it.

**Look for promotions.** Walk-in stores and websites often have special deals, but check the fine print. You may not be eligible if you're using insurance or not buying both frames and lenses.

**Negotiate.** Don't hesitate to try dickering on price, especially if you're not using insurance. If you tried on frames locally and found them online for less, it's only fair to give the walk-in store a chance to

## Costco gets high marks for price and just about everything else.

match or at least come close to your best online price. Remember that a walk-in shop can provide frame adjustments and other post-purchase service that can be difficult or impossible to get online, so it may be worth paying extra.

**Check warranties and return policies.** A good retailer should have at least a one-year warranty against defects in frames. For instance, Eyeglasses.com says most of its frames are covered by the manufacturer for one or two years and that it will process claims on the customer's behalf. We found some walk-in stores and web-

sites with much shorter time limits.

Even if your glasses aren't defective, you may decide you don't like them. Many retailers have a certain return period, even if you ordered lenses. LensCrafters will replace frames and lenses or provide a refund within 90 days. SimplyEyeglasses.com will let you choose a new pair once within seven days. Eyeglasses.com and FramesDirect.com give you 30 days to return frames. If you also ordered lenses, you'll get a credit of 50 percent of the cost.

**Check out your new specs.** Report any problem with your glasses to the retailer immediately. If you bought them online and have a problem with the lenses, have your eye doctor verify that they match your prescription. If they don't, the retailer should remake the lenses at no cost.

If the frames need adjusting, as they did for 17 percent of our survey respondents, your local eyeglass shop may be willing to do it for you, especially if you bought your lenses there. But there could be a charge. Eyeglasses.com has instructions for adjusting fit yourself, though that could be risky. Classic Specs offers to reimburse you for whatever an optical shop charges to perform a post-purchase adjustment.

**Buy another pair.** If you found a good deal, consider getting an extra pair in case your primary glasses get lost or damaged. Then you won't have to pay a premium for a rush job at a retailer.

## Ratings Eyeglass stores

In order of reader score.

Retailer	Price	Reader score	Survey results						
			Quality of frames and lenses	Employees' knowledge	Cost	Time to make glasses	Care taken to fit frames and lenses correctly	Frame selection	Follow-up service
		0 100							
Costco Optical	\$186	87	●	●	●	●	●	○	●
Private doctor's office	300	85	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Independent eyeglass shop	295	84	●	●	○	●	●	●	●
Kaiser Permanente	266	83	●	●	○	●	●	●	●
For Eyes Optical	181	82	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
BJ's Optical	176	80	●	●	●	○	●	○	●
Sam's Club Optical	225	80	●	●	●	●	●	○	●
Shopko Eyecare Center	223	80	●	●	○	○	●	○	●
Walmart Vision Center	204	78	●	●	●	●	●	○	●
LensCrafters	298	77	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Sears Optical	220	77	●	●	○	○	●	○	●
Pearle Vision	305	75	●	●	●	●	●	○	●
EyeMasters	219	74	●	○	○	○	●	○	●
JCPenney Optical	213	72	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Visionworks	200	72	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
America's Best Contacts & Eyeglasses	210	71	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Better ← → Worse  
● ● ○ ● ●



### Guide to the Ratings

Ratings are based on 19,489 reader responses to the 2012 Consumer Reports National Research Center Annual Questionnaire regarding eyeglass purchase experiences from January 2010 through June 2012. **Price** reflects the median out-of-pocket cost paid for a pair of eyeglass frames and lenses with little or no insurance coverage. It includes both regular and progressive lenses.

**Reader score** reflects overall satisfaction with the retail experience and is not limited to the factors listed under survey results. A score of 100 would mean all respondents were completely satisfied; 80, that respondents were very satisfied, on average; 60, fairly well satisfied. Differences of fewer than 6 points are not meaningful. The Ratings under **survey results** represent respondent satisfaction with the retailers on each factor. Ratings are based on the experiences of CONSUMER REPORTS subscribers, who may not be representative of the general U.S. population.

GETTING HEALTH CARE RIGHT ONE IN A SERIES

# Dr. Who?

The next 'doctor' you see might be a nurse practitioner

**F**OR A COUNTRY that has managed to outspend every other developed nation in the world on health care, the U.S. is oddly short on doctors, especially primary-care ones. We have about 30 primary-care physicians per 100,000 people, far fewer than any other industrialized country, including the United Kingdom (80), Germany (157), and France (159). You may have seen the headlines about U.S. physician shortages and how they're poised to get even worse, with baby boomers entering retirement and millions of previously uninsured people about to enter the health care system as the Affordable Care Act kicks in. Who's going to take care of all of those people?

Enter a growing population of nurses and other clinicians who've obtained advanced clinical and academic training (most hold a master's or a doctoral degree) and are licensed to do many of the same

things that physicians are, either as part of a team that includes a doctor or, in some cases, on their own or at a clinic in a retail pharmacy. Physicians and policy analysts often refer to them as "physician extenders" but they prefer to be called "advanced practice providers."

The best-known alternative clinicians are nurse practitioners and physician assistants. They've worked routinely in hospitals, clinics, and other settings for a number of years but are now also working in doctors' offices along with other non-M.D. clinicians with specialized training: dietitians, podiatrists, pharmacists, and mental-health practitioners. And walk-in clinics in retail stores, whose usage has almost tripled since 2008, are usually staffed by nurse practitioners. (For details on types of providers, see the chart on page 36.)

Can these providers improve your health care or save you money? We reviewed the

evidence and spoke to researchers and clinicians to tackle important concerns about the burgeoning role of nonphysicians.

## Questions of quality

To put it mildly, opinions vary on whether the proliferation of nonphysicians threatens the quality of health care.

Highly trained clinicians such as certified nurse midwives and nurse practitioners believe they should be allowed to practice independent of physician supervision, including prescribing medication on their own, as 16 states and the District of Columbia currently allow them to do. (The others require some level of physician involvement or supervision.) But physician groups such as the American Medical Association and American Academy of Family Physicians have lobbied on grounds of patient safety and quality of care against relaxing state "scope of practice" rules to allow nurse practitioners to do more without M.D. supervision.

Nursing advocates point to a 2010 report by the Institute of Medicine that recommended, among other things, that nurses should be free to "practice to the full extent of their education and training."

"There's an important element of professional pride and professional defensiveness on both sides," says David Blumenthal, M.D., president of the Commonwealth Fund, a private groups that funds independent health-policy research.

Physician assistants by definition practice alongside doctors in hospitals or offices, so the question of their going it alone doesn't arise. As for advanced practice nurses, a review by the Cochrane Collaboration, an independent international research group, found that they performed comparably to physicians on health outcomes and cost. And the nurses got higher grades on communication with patients seeking urgent attention.

And on an individual level, doctors and nonphysicians may be getting along better than their professional-society squabbles suggest.

"I personally see a nurse practitioner for my own gynecologic care," says Christine Mackey, M.D., an internist at Allegheny General Hospital in Pittsburgh. "Since this is what she does all day, she has tremendous experience."

"Physicians like and respect the nurse practitioners they work with, and vice versa," says David Auerbach, Ph.D., a health economist at RAND, a nonprofit re-



search organization. “A recent study confirmed that nurse practitioners do tend to defer certain types of complex patients or disease groups and diagnoses to physicians, and both N.P.s and physicians seem fine with that.”

Doug Hood, a physician assistant who specializes in stroke treatment in the neurology department at Yale-New Haven Hospital in Connecticut, describes his relationship with physicians as “absolutely harmonious.... A lot of people forget their particular levels, everyone works together. And it’s exciting to see, like a little MASH unit.”

### Targeted training

Nurses’ training might also make them more qualified than doctors to handle aspects of care for certain common problems, such as wound care for diabetics and helping people manage high blood pressure and other chronic conditions, according to Melinda Abrams, the Commonwealth Fund’s vice president of patient-centered coordinated care.

Other duties that primary-care doctors are currently saddled with might also be performed more competently and efficiently by practitioners with more targeted training. For instance, dietitians can be far better informed about nutrition than doctors because medical school tends to give the subject short shrift. A small survey of internal-medicine interns at a Pennsylvania hospital, published in the April 2008 *Journal of the American College of Nutrition*, found that only 14 percent believed physicians were adequately trained to do nutrition counseling.

A podiatrist, is probably more qualified for the critical task of caring for a diabetic patient’s feet. And a mental-health professional can provide counseling plus a more-nuanced evaluation of a patient’s need for, say, antidepressant medication or sleep drugs. People often receive those drugs from their primary-care doctor without ever having to see a behavioral-health expert.

Of course, patients should have some say in who treats them, and a study published in the June 2013 edition of *Health Affairs* probed that question. When asked in general which type of provider they would prefer to get care from, consumers tend to pick the M.D. But given a theoretical choice of seeing the physician assistant or nurse practitioner today or a physician tomorrow for an acute condi-

tion such as a worsening cough, 60 percent chose the alternative provider.

### Skyrocketing need

The changes are happening for several reasons. Physicians are projected to be in short supply, especially in primary-care specialties such as family practice, pediatrics, and general internal medicine. Those specialties have become increasingly less attractive to debt-laden medical-school graduates be-

## Nonphysicians get high grades for outcomes and communication.

cause they pay less than others.

Against that backdrop, the need for primary-care services is taking off. A December 2008 government report estimated that demand will rise 22 percent by 2020 just to meet the demands of aging baby boomers, whereas supply would grow by only 14 percent, leaving a shortfall of about 50,000 doctors. And that estimate doesn’t take into account the previously uninsured patients who are about to enter the

system because of health reform.

Some primary-care doctors have coped by turning their offices into “concierge” practices that charge patients an annual fee for easy access to appointments and the doctor’s time. But that doesn’t solve the problem of access for people who can’t afford the extra fee.

The health-reform law includes student-loan breaks and other incentives to increase the supply of doctors. But that won’t be happening overnight. A medical education takes at least seven years and often longer. Even if more students graduate from medical schools, there is a limited supply of primary-care residency slots.

By contrast, “between 3 and 12 nurse practitioners can be educated for the price of educating 1 physician, and more quickly,” according to a 2011 article in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

Alternative providers are filling some of the gap. An analysis by David Auerbach at RAND published in the July 2012 issue of the journal *Medical Care* projected that the number of nurse practitioners in the U.S. will roughly double from 128,000 in 2008 to 244,000 in 2025. The population of physician assistants is likewise expected to rise, from 83,600 in 2010 to 108,300 in 2020. That may be in part because the new



**WALK-IN CARE** Nurse practitioner Julie Melia examines patient Darren Page at a MinuteClinic inside a CVS store in Northvale, N.J.

health-reform law provides stipends and tuition assistance to increase the number of physician assistants in the primary-care workforce.

So in theory at least, increasing reliance on non-M.D. providers is a win-win: more accessible care from nonphysicians, leaving more time for doctors to perform the complex diagnostic and treatment tasks that only they are trained to do.

## The financial bottom line

Will the trend toward nonphysician providers save you money? It depends. Advanced practice nurses and physician assistants earn lower salaries than doctors, so it costs less for hospitals, clinics, and medical practices to employ them.

Nurse practitioners who practice alone get paid less on average than doctors do for the same services. And staffing retail clinics such as MinuteClinic (at certain CVS stores) and Take Care Clinic (Walgreens) with nurse practitioners rather than doctors is one reason those clinics are able to offer lower prices than doctor's offices for basic services such as vaccines.

If you see a nurse practitioner in your doctor's office for strep throat, you'll probably be billed the same as if you saw the doctor. But in the long run, the increased use of alternative providers to coordinate care and provide preventive services such as nutrition advice could lower health care costs overall, resulting in slower-growing insurance premiums.

## How to get the best care

Strategies include the following:

- Become familiar with the kinds of health personnel and what each is most qualified for, using the chart at right as a guide.
- If someone you haven't met before comes in to treat you, ask him to introduce himself if he doesn't do so right away. Research shows that patients are more satisfied with their care when providers communicate who they and the other members of the team are.
- If you're shopping for a new primary-care practice, consider looking for a "medical home" that uses a team model in which physicians work side-by-side with nurse practitioners, physician assistants, or other types of clinicians rather than shouldering everything themselves.
- If you feel uncertain about or unsatisfied with the care you've received from any provider, say so. And don't hesitate to ask for a second opinion.

# Who's that in the white coat?

The professionals you see at doctors' offices and hospitals nowadays are not necessarily physicians or nurses. Here's a rundown of the varieties of health care practitioners:

Providers	What they do	Training/credentials/licensing
<b>ADVANCED PRACTICE CLINICIANS</b>		
<b>Nurse practitioner (NP)</b>	Assess patients; order and interpret diagnostic tests; diagnose and treat illness; prescribe medications, in some states with doctor supervision.	RN plus master's or doctoral degree and advanced clinical training. National certification exam and state license.
<b>Certified nurse midwife (CNM), certified midwife (CM)</b>	Deliver prenatal, delivery, and postpartum care, family-planning services, and gynecological care; prescribe medications.	Nursing or bachelor's degree plus completion of an accredited graduate nurse-midwifery course. National certification exam and state license.
<b>Physician assistant (PA)</b>	Examine patients, diagnose and treat illness, order and interpret lab tests, perform procedures, assist in surgery, provide patient education and counseling, make rounds in hospitals and nursing homes, prescribe medications.	Bachelor's degree, followed by completion of an accredited P.A. program modeled on the medical-school curriculum (average length of program is 27 months, and most grant master's degrees). National certification exam and state license.

## SPECIALIZED PROVIDERS

<b>Podiatrist (DPM), also known as podiatric physician or podiatric surgeon</b>	Diagnose and treat conditions of the foot, ankle, and related structures of the leg; prescribe medications. May specialize in surgery, sports medicine, wound care, pediatrics, or diabetic care.	Four years of podiatric medical school plus three years of hospital residency training. With advanced training and experience, can obtain board certification from the American Board of Podiatric Medicine or the American Board of Podiatric Surgery. State license.
<b>Clinical psychologist (Ph.D., Psy.D.), licensed clinical social worker, licensed professional counselor (LPC)</b>	Diagnose and treat mental illness and emotional and behavioral problems in individuals, couples, groups, and families.	Ph.D. and Psy.D.: doctoral degree. Licensed clinical social worker and LPC: master's or doctoral degree plus two or more years of supervised post-graduate experience. State licenses. Counselors can also be certified by National Board of Certified Counselors.
<b>Dietitian (RD)</b>	Food and nutrition counseling for general health, nutritional deficiencies, or disease management.	Bachelor's degree with courses approved by professional organization, plus completion of an internship. National examination.
<b>Pharmacist (Pharm.D.)</b>	Dispense medication and immunizations, check for potential drug interactions, provide counseling on how to take medication and limit side effects.	Doctor of pharmacy degree from an accredited school, plus internship. Two licensing exams, one covering pharmacy skills and knowledge and the other covering pharmacy law.

## PHYSICIANS

<b>M.D. (medical doctor)</b>	Diagnose and treat illness and injury, including surgery, examinations, testing, and prescribing medication.	Bachelor's degree followed by four years of medical school plus up to six years of residency training. Optional clinical fellowships and specialty certification. National licensing exams. State license.
<b>DO (doctor of osteopathic medicine)</b>	Practice as medical doctors do in any specialty area. Some osteopaths also perform musculoskeletal manipulation.	Four years of osteopathic medical school, followed by medical or osteopathic residency training. Optional specialty certification. National licensing exam. State license.

## NURSES

<b>Registered nurse (RN)</b>	Provide patient care and education, care coordination, physical exams, and health histories.	Diploma or associate or bachelor's degree from an approved nursing program. National licensing exam.
<b>Licensed practical nurse (LPN), licensed vocational nurse (LVN)</b>	Provide basic nursing care under the direction of registered nurses and doctors.	Completion of a state-approved educational program (usually one year) and passage of a licensing exam.



# The Hot List

**A monthly guide to the top products our testers recommend**

**The heat is on.** With summer in full swing, we hope these recommended models help you kick back and relax in comfort—or at least make your work a little easier.

Your cheat sheet to the best models

## Big TVs

MODEL	SCORE
<b>60-INCH AND LARGER PLASMA</b>	
Panasonic Viera TC-P65VT50, \$2,800	81
Samsung PN60E8000, \$1,900	79
Panasonic Viera TC-P60GT50, \$1,800	77
Panasonic Viera TC-P60ST50, \$1,700	77
LG 60PH6700, \$1,200	72
Samsung PN64E550, \$2,000	71
LG 60PM6700, \$1,200	70
LG 60PA6500, \$900	67
<b>55- TO 59-INCH</b>	
Panasonic Viera TC-P55VT50, \$1,900 (plasma)	79
Panasonic Viera TC-L55WT50 (LCD/LED), \$1,650	74



Panasonic Viera TC-P65VT50



Snapper NXT2346

## Lawn tractors

MODEL	SCORE
Snapper NXT2346, \$2,800	76
John Deere X310, \$4,000	75
John Deere X304, \$3,600	75
John Deere D110, \$1,700 (and similars D120, \$1,800, and D130, \$1,900)	74
Husqvarna YTH21K46, \$1,600	73
<b>WIDE-DECK</b>	
John Deere D140, \$2,000 (and similars D150, \$2,300, and D160, \$2,600)	69
Craftsman 28861, \$2,800	68
Craftsman 28858, \$2,000	68

## Dishwashers

MODEL	SCORE
Kenmore Elite 12793, \$1,350 (and similar 12803, \$1,450)	85
Kenmore Elite 12783, \$1,200 (and similars 12763, \$1,020, and 12773, \$1,100)	82
Bosch Ascenta SHX3AR7[5]UC, \$700 (and similars SHE3AR7[ ]UC, \$600; SHE3ARF[ ]UC [Lowe's], \$650; and SHX3AR5[ ]UC, \$600)	81



Kenmore Elite 12793

## Lawn mowers



Honda HRX217VKA

MODEL	SCORE
<b>SELF-PROPELLED MULTIPLE SPEEDS</b>	
Honda HRX217VKA, \$600	83
Honda HRR2169VLA, \$500	83
Toro 20381, \$520 (and similar 20382, \$570)	82
Honda HRR2169VYA, \$480	82
Honda HRR2169VKA, \$400	81
<b>SELF-PROPELLED SINGLE SPEED</b>	
Toro 20370, \$280	66
Toro 20371, \$300	65

## Ranges

MODEL	SCORE
<b>30-INCH ELECTRIC SMOOTHTOPS</b>	
<b>Kenmore</b> 92163, \$1,550 (and similar 97103, \$1,650)	<b>87</b>
<b>GE</b> JB705STSS, \$1,000	<b>86</b>
<b>LG</b> LRE3023S, \$1,000	<b>86</b>
<b>GE Café</b> CS980SNSS, \$2,800	<b>86</b>
<b>LG</b> LRE3025S, \$1,250	<b>86</b>
<b>30-INCH GAS</b>	
<b>LG</b> LRG3097ST, \$1,900	<b>74</b>
<b>LG</b> LRG3095ST, \$1,500	<b>72</b>
<b>Frigidaire</b> Gallery FGGF3032MW, \$775	<b>71</b>
<b>LG</b> LRG3091SW, \$1,000	<b>71</b>
<b>Electrolux</b> EW30GF65SS, \$2,200	<b>70</b>



Kenmore 92163



LG LRG3097ST



## String trimmers

MODEL	SCORE
<b>GAS</b>	
<b>Husqvarna</b> 223L, \$260	<b>83</b>
<b>Stihl</b> FS 45, \$150	<b>81</b>
<b>Stihl</b> FS 40 C-E, \$190	<b>81</b>
<b>Echo</b> SRM-225, \$220	<b>80</b>
<b>Stihl</b> FS 56 RC-E, \$240	<b>78</b>
<b>Echo</b> GT-225, \$160	<b>77</b>
<b>LIGHT-DUTY ELECTRIC</b>	
<b>Green Works</b> 21142, \$90	<b>71</b>
<b>Stihl</b> FSE 60, \$110	<b>70</b>
<b>Black &amp; Decker</b> GH2000, \$70	<b>68</b>

## Coffeemakers

MODEL	SCORE
<b>DRIP, 8 TO 14 CUPS</b>	
<b>Cuisinart</b> Crystal SCC-1000 Limited Edition Perfec Temp, \$200 (and similar DCC-2800, \$100)	<b>89</b>
<b>Mr. Coffee</b> BVMC-SJX33GT, \$40 (and similar BVMC-EHX33CP [Costco], \$30)	<b>84</b>
<b>Kalorik</b> CM25282, \$80	<b>79</b>
<b>Waring</b> Pro CMS100, \$60	<b>77</b>
<b>Kalorik</b> CM38933, \$60	<b>77</b>
<b>Black &amp; Decker</b> , CM4000S (Target), \$40	<b>73</b>
<b>Kenmore</b> Elite 06906, \$100	<b>73</b>
<b>Kalorik</b> TKM-20208, \$45	<b>73</b>
<b>Mr. Coffee</b> JWX27, \$40	<b>73</b>



Cuisinart Crystal SCC-1000



Mr. Coffee BVMC-SJX33GT

Zwilling J.A. Henckels  
Twin Professional "S"

## Kitchen knives

MODEL	SCORE
<b>FINE-EDGE BLADE SETS</b>	
<b>Zwilling J.A. Henckels</b> Twin Professional "S," \$315	<b>87</b>
<b>Zwilling J.A. Henckels</b> Twin Protection #33049, \$600	<b>86</b>
<b>Wüsthof</b> Classic Ikon #8347, \$400	<b>86</b>
<b>Wüsthof</b> Trident Classic #8418, \$350	<b>85</b>
<b>Ginsu</b> Chikara, \$75	<b>85</b>
<b>Zwilling J.A. Henckels</b> Four Star, \$260	<b>85</b>
<b>Miyabi</b> D 7000 (Zwilling J.A. Henckels), \$430	<b>84</b>



## Reports

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# Lab tests

## Chameleon computers

**INSPIRED BY** the touch capabilities of Windows 8, manufacturers are coming out with devices that combine a tablet's touch screen with a laptop's keyboard. It's a great idea, but our tests show that the results are a mixed bag.

The devices have 11- to 13-inch screens and full Windows 8 access—even when you're using them as tablets. There are two radically different designs:

**Detachables.** These can be pulled from their keyboards, so when you're using them as a tablet they're much lighter than convertible models. They're best for those who want a longer battery life. **A3 HP** and **A6 Acer** have the longest battery life we've seen in a laptop or tablet. But to squeeze out long hours from most of them, you need to keep them plugged into the keyboard, which has a second battery. And watch out for those with less powerful processors. Some, like **A3 HP**, **A4 Lenovo**, **A5 Samsung**, and **A6 Acer**, use Intel Atom processors, with slower performance but better battery life. They cost less, but we don't recommend them as computers. We do recommend **A4 Lenovo** and **A6 Acer** as tablets.

**Convertibles.** These use clever hinges to twist and turn from laptop to tablet. **B1 Dell** flips top-to-bottom on a pivot. **B2 Lenovo** twists into four positions. **B3 Asus** has a double-sided screen. Convertibles are best for those who frequently move between a tablet and a laptop. The screens tend to be larger, a plus, but that also makes the devices heavier. All of those we tested use Intel Core i5 processors and were excellent performers.

### ■ DID YOU KNOW?

Windows 8 will be upgraded to version 8.1 this summer, via a free download. It's expected to bring back the Start button, which many users liked for its easy access to several functions.



A3 HP Envy

## Ratings

All tested product in performance order, within types.

CR Best Buy  
Recommended

● Excellent  
● Very good  
○ Good  
○ Fair  
● Poor

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Test results				Features & specs				
				<div><div></div><div>0100</div></div>	Ergonomics	Portability	Performance	Display	Battery life (hr.)	Weight (lb.)	Display size (in.)	Memory (GB)	Storage (GB)
				P   F   G   V   E									

### A 10- TO 12-INCH DETACHABLE LAPTOPS All run Windows 8 and have touch screens.

✓	1	Microsoft Surface Pro	\$1,020	67	○	○	●	○	5¼	2.5	10.6	4	64
✓	2	Samsung Ativ Smart PC Pro XE700TIC-A01US	1,200	67	○	○	●	○	7¼	3.5	11.6	4	128
✓	3	HP Envy x2 11t-g000*	650	65	○	●	○	○	15¼	3.1	11.6	2	64
	4	Lenovo IdeaTab Lynx K3011*	700	62	○	●	○	○	13¼	2.9	11.6	2	64
	5	Samsung Ativ Smart PC XE500TIC-A01US	750	60	○	●	○	○	11	3.2	11.6	2	64
	6	Acer Iconia W510-1422*	625	59	○	●	○	○	18½	2.8	10.1	2	64

### B 11- TO 13-INCH CONVERTIBLE LAPTOPS All run Windows 8 and have touch screens.

✓	1	Dell XPS 12 Convertible Touch Ultrabook	1,100	73	○	○	●	○	8	3.3	12.5	4	128
✓	2	Lenovo Yoga Ideapad Ultrabook 13-59340248	1,050	71	○	○	●	○	7½	3.4	13.3	4	128
✓	3	Asus Taichi 21-DH51	1,200	66	○	○	●	○	4¾	2.8	11.6	4	128
	4	Toshiba Satellite U925t-S2300 Ultrabook	1,050	64	○	○	●	○	6	3.3	12.5	4	128
	5	Sony Vaio Duo 11 Ultrabook	1,200	62	○	○	●	○	6½	2.8	11.6	6	128
	6	Lenovo Thinkpad Twist-33474HU	850	59	○	○	●	○	4½	3.4	12.5	4	500

\*Includes a second battery.



#### THRIFTY PRINTER

The Brother DCP-J140W, a CR Best Buy, did well at conserving ink.



## The case of the disappearing ink

Printer ink may be one of the most expensive liquids you buy, costing anywhere from \$10 to \$70-plus an ounce. That's more than, say, great Champagne or a 15-year-old single-malt Scotch.

But our latest tests of new inkjet printers have found that many use ink even when they're not actually printing. With some models, that can get expensive.

Readers told us that ink seemed to be disappearing faster than expected with light printer usage. So we started measuring how much excess ink is used to print pages intermittently compared with printing the same number of pages at once. And we figured out the cost of this extra ink usage per year (see the chart below).

#### Where the extra ink goes

Many printers gobble up ink for cleaning print heads and other maintenance chores, especially if they're preparing to print after sitting idle for some time. Our tests confirmed that some printers use much more ink than others. Only one brand, Brother, has models that were consistently frugal with ink during

maintenance. Most other brands varied widely depending on the line of products.

For example, with HP, the Envy series of printers used relatively little ink for maintenance tasks, but the Photosmart series used a lot more. The two machines with the highest excess usage, a Lexmark and an HP, used about five times more ink in occasional use compared with continuous printing.

**Bottom line.** If manufacturers can make some frugal printers, we think they should design all their models to use ink efficiently, no matter how often they're used. Several all-in-one inkjet models from our latest tests fit the bill and are also fine performers overall. The \$80 Brother shown above is one of them, along with two Epsoms: the XP-800, \$180, and XP-600, \$100.



#### BEHIND OUR TEST OF PRINTER INK

Use your smart phone to download the RedLaser or ShopSavvy app and scan the code for video.



## The extra cost of occasional printing

Printer	*Estimated annual cost of excess ink
Brother DCP-J140W	\$ 0
Epson XP-800	14
Brother MFC J4510DW	15
Brother MFC-J4410DW	16
HP Envy 120	18
Canon Pixma MX522	20
Epson XP-600	20
HP Officejet Pro X451DN	23
Epson Workforce WF-2530	25
HP Officejet Mobile 150	25
Canon Pixma MX392	28
Canon Pixma MX452, MX455	31
Epson Workforce WF-3540	35
Epson Workforce WF-3520	36

Printer	*Estimated annual cost of excess ink
Canon MG4220, MG4250	\$ 40
Canon MG2220, MG2250	43
Canon MG3220, MG3250	47
Canon MG5420, MG5450	61
Canon iP7220, iP7250	62
HP Photosmart 6520	82
Canon Pixma MX922	86
Epson Expression Photo XP-850	100
HP Photosmart 7520	108
Lexmark OfficeEdge Pro4000	122
HP Officejet Pro 8600	126

\*Estimate is based on printing 30 pages (20 pages of text and 10 pages of graphics) intermittently over three weeks and comparing the ink used (and ink costs) with printing 30 pages continuously. Printers were turned off between jobs.

## How to save on repairs

When faced with a washer that won't wash or a similar appliance affliction, CONSUMER REPORTS readers are a brave bunch. More of them tried to fix the appliance themselves rather than call a manufacturer or retailer for help, according to our survey results. Owners who took that route saved more than those who tried a different approach.

The survey, conducted by the Consumer Reports National Research Center, analyzed people's experiences getting help for 21,107 appliances between January 2011 and June 2012.

Half of the time the appliance was working, according to our readers in the survey, but improperly. In 31 percent of the cases it was out-and-out broken.

#### How did they cope?

- 29 percent said that they tried to solve the problem themselves.
- 24 percent contacted the manufacturer.
- 22 percent contacted the retailer that sold them the appliance.
- 13 percent used a local independent repair shop.
- 3 percent used social media to solicit help from someone else.



#### How successful were they?

About half of the do-it-yourselfers ultimately fixed the appliance. Most turned to the owner's manual for help, and 40 percent relied on their own experience. About a third searched Google, and 15 percent used YouTube or other online video for repair tips.

Owner-repaired appliances were more likely to be fixed at no cost than other methods. And when an expense was involved, owner repairs had the lowest median cost: \$99 vs. \$193 for a manufacturer's solution. But it's possible that the problems the owners took on were relatively simple.

## Repair costs

What appliance owners paid varied by how they solved their problem*	Amount paid	% with no cost
Owner	\$ 99	43
Local shop	135	7
Multiple sources	146	22
Retailer	190	19
Manufacturer	193	17

\*For broken or malfunctioning appliances up to three years old with no warranty.



# Best hand and stick vacs

**THESE SMALL, LIGHTWEIGHT** pickers-uppers are meant for spilled cereal, dirty car interiors, and other messes too small to require lugging out the heavy equipment. They're also designed for quick surface pickup rather than the deep cleaning that uprights and canisters are known for. We found eight top picks that start at \$35.

**A value pick for pet-free homes.** Hand vacs tend to be lightest and can handle car cleaning. Strong carpet and floor cleanup, even along edges, helped put the corded **A4 Bissell**, \$35, on our winners' list. But for cleaning up after pets, we suggest the corded **A2 Eureka** or cordless **A1 Shark**; both get very good scores.

**A versatile new stick-vac champ.** Stick vacs take up more space but usually free you from bending. The corded **B1 Hoover**, a CR Best Buy at \$60, cleaned impressively. Paying another \$100 or so for the **B2 Hoover** or **B3 Shark** buys cord-free convenience; choose the Shark if carpets trump floors and edges on your list.

**Three pricey also-rans.** Despite their heady prices, the cordless **A7 Dyson**, \$200, and **B7 Dyson**, \$400, delivered mixed results. Both were also low on run time. And the **B7** stick vac trapped Cheerios in the brush housing when vacuuming. The \$200 **B10 Electrolux** was long on run time but short on the cleaning that counts.

**Convertibles didn't cut it.** Six stick vacs we tested can double as hand vacs, but with mostly unimpressive results. The corded **B6 Eureka**, \$30, did better overall as a hand vac than as a stick, but its fixed brush head makes handheld use awkward. And turning the same-priced **B11 Dirt Devil** on or off in stick-vac mode requires a long reach down.

Keep these other tips in mind:

- A motorized brush tends to boost cleaning, especially for pet hair; all of our picks except the **A3 Black & Decker** and **A4 Bissell** have one. The **B1 Hoover** has a useful quick-release cord-wrap hook.



**B1 Hoover**



**A1 Shark**



**A2 Eureka**

## Ratings

**All tested models** In performance order within category.

☒ CR Best Buy  
☒ Recommended

● Excellent  
 ● Very good  
 ○ Good  
 ○ Fair  
 ● Poor

		Brand & model	Price	Overall score		Test results						
Recommendation	Rank				Weight (lb.)	Carpet surface	Bare floors	Edges	Noise	Pet hair	Run/charge time (min./hr.)	Low emissions
				0100								
				P   F   G   V   E								

### A HAND VACS These are best for spot-cleaning small spaces.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	<b>Shark</b> Perfect Pet II SV780	\$ 80	<b>79</b>	4	●	●	●	○	●	19/16	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	<b>Eureka</b> Easy Clean 71B	50	<b>71</b>	5	○	○	●	●	●	NA	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	<b>Black &amp; Decker</b> DustBuster HV9010P [1]	65	<b>65</b>	5	●	●	●	●	●	NA	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	<b>Bissell</b> Pet Hair Eraser 33A1 [1]	35	<b>65</b>	4	●	●	●	○	●	NA	
	5	<b>Dirt Devil</b> Classic M0100	60	<b>63</b>	5	○	○	●	○	●	NA	
	6	<b>Black &amp; Decker</b> DustBuster CHV1510 [1]	45	<b>57</b>	3	●	○	●	●	●	17/24	●
	7	<b>Dyson</b> DC34 [1]	200	<b>55</b>	3	○	○	●	○	●	8/4	
	8	<b>Hoover</b> Platinum LiNX BH50030	130	<b>54</b>	4	○	○	●	●	●	15/3	●
	9	<b>Black &amp; Decker</b> Flex FHV1200 [1]	60	<b>54</b>	4	○	○	●	○	○	15/21	●
	10	<b>Dirt Devil</b> Gator BD10175	60	<b>47</b>	4	●	○	●	●	●	17/24	

### B STICK VACS These corded and cordless vacs are fine for short-pile carpets and floors.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	<b>Hoover</b> Flair S2220	60	<b>77</b>	8	●	●	●	●	●	NA	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	<b>Hoover</b> Platinum LiNX BH50010	150	<b>69</b>	7	●	○	●	●	●	18/3	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	<b>Shark</b> Navigator Freestyle SV1100	140	<b>67</b>	8	●	○	○	○	●	17/6	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	<b>Dirt Devil</b> Accucharge BD20035RED	70	<b>66</b>	6	○	○	●	●	●	21/6	●
	5	<b>Bissell</b> FeatherWeight 3106 [1] [2]	30	<b>63</b>	3	○	○	●	●	●	NA	●
	6	<b>Eureka</b> Easy Clean 2-in-1 169B [2]	30	<b>60</b>	4	○	○	●	○	○	NA	
	7	<b>Dyson</b> DC44 Animal	400	<b>60</b>	5	○	○	●	○	●	11/5	
	8	<b>Electrolux</b> Ergorapido EL1014 [1] [2]	100	<b>56</b>	5	○	○	○	●	●	17/20	●
	9	<b>Bissell</b> Lift Off Floors & More Pet 53Y8 [2]	70	<b>54</b>	5	○	○	○	●	●	18/16	●
	10	<b>Electrolux</b> Ergorapido Ion EL1030 [1] [2]	200	<b>52</b>	5	○	○	○	○	●	22/4	●
	11	<b>Dirt Devil</b> Simpli-Stik SD20000RED [1] [2]	30	<b>35</b>	4	○	○	○	○	○	NA	

"NA" means not applicable, corded model. [1] Lacks an electric-powered brush head. [2] Convertible model.

- Check noise. Vacs that scored poor for noise were above the 85-dBa level where we recommend hearing protection.

- Don't assume that models with lithium-ion batteries are better; only one cleaned well enough to make our picks.

### ■ DID YOU KNOW?

Cordless vacuums with lithium-ion batteries tend to operate at full power until they run out, then they stop completely. Models with older battery technologies will rev down gradually.



**CLEANING TEAM** The Maytag Maxima XL machines, \$1,150 each, are quick, quiet, and spacious.

# Washers & dryers

## Spend less time on laundry

**TWO NEW FRONT-LOADERS** are the best washers we've tested in years, and they're fast. The Maytag and Whirlpool machines that top our Ratings took only 45 minutes to do our 8-pound load. That's less than half the time of many front-loaders and a half-hour quicker than our top top-loader.

But not all washers are getting faster. Frigidaire's Affinity high-efficiency top-loaders took almost 2 hours—the longest of the 131 washers we tested. They did clean well but left our loads a little worse for the wear. Smaller capacity means those Frigidaires wash less per load. Plus water extraction wasn't great, so you'd spend even more time waiting for stuff to dry.

Here are the details:

**Made in the U.S.** Seventy-eight percent of Americans would rather buy a U.S.-made product than an identical one made abroad, according to a recent nationally representative survey by the Consumer Reports National Research Center. That's getting easier

since washers and dryers from GE, Maytag, and Whirlpool are now made here. We've footnoted them in the Ratings.

**Free apps, for a price.** Wondering whether your laundry is done? Some

higher-priced LG, Samsung, and Whirlpool dryers we tested let you monitor your laundry's progress, extend tumbling, or stop the dryer using your computer, tablet, or smart phone. Whirlpool's app sends an e-mail or text when the laundry is done. The Samsung and Whirlpool apps also let you start the dryer remotely, though you have to load the dryer, turn the power button on, and select cycles before leaving home. But why would you want wet laundry sitting in a dryer for hours? It's also not a good idea to have these appliances running when you're not around.

That said, the apps were easy to download and use. You'll need to register with the manufacturer by supplying an e-mail address, cell-phone number, or both, so that the appliance and app can communicate. Whirlpool also asks for a home address because the app provides energy-use info. That feature lets you time your drying to when energy rates are lower, if your utility offers that option. But before you can register with LG, you'll need to provide lots of personal information. The company claims it's only using it for "product improvement purposes," though it's hard to figure out how knowing your birthday, gender, and even interests is going to make LG's appliances better.

**"High-efficiency" dryers?** Drying laundry uses far more energy than washing it, but previous attempts at "eco" and energy-saving cycles saved only pennies per load in our tests. So we were interested when GE, Maytag, and Whirlpool started promoting on their websites HE dryers that could save energy, time, and money. When we pressed the manufacturers, they

### ■ CLOSE-UP

## Sleek or silly?

The sloping lid and top-mounted control panel of the LG WT1101CW high-efficiency top-loader, \$700, caught our eye. The design eliminates the back panel typical on most top-loaders, makes the controls easier to reach, and looks good. The machine also cleans very well. But as with all washers without a back panel, it's easier for laundry to get "lost" if it falls behind the unit.



LAUNDRY ROOM: GETTY IMAGES; LAUNDRY BASKET (BOTTOM): GETTY IMAGES



said their comparisons were based on dryers that use thermostats instead of more accurate moisture sensors. But these sensors aren't a new technology—your current dryer might have them even if it's not labeled HE. So simply look for a dryer with a moisture sensor, and don't be dazzled by HE claims.

Specifications are being developed for the first Energy Star dryers. Meanwhile, we've begun to test dryer energy use.

**Blocked-vent indicators improve.** Dryer vents clogged with lint extend drying time and increase energy use. Lint is also the leading cause of an average of 4,400 reported dryer fires a year, according to the National Fire Protection Association. Earlier versions of blocked-vent indicators were unreliable in our tests, but the new Airflow Alert and Check Vent indicators on Maytag and Whirlpool dryers, LG's FlowSense, and Samsung's Vent Sensor detect fully blocked vents more reliably. LG's sensor even stopped the dryer, and the Whirlpool dryer app can send you an e-mail or text if there's a problem. But they weren't as good at detecting partially blocked vents.

## How to choose

If your laundry is near bedrooms or other living spaces, look for models that scored Very Good or better in our noise and vibration tests. You'll know they're working, but they shouldn't disturb you. The machines that scored Good or lower make annoying, sustained sounds or vibrate noticeably, and are better suited for remote spaces or basements.

**Compare washer types.** Top-loaders remain the big seller. High-efficiency, or HE, models don't have a center-post agitator, so they hold more or larger items. They also use less water and extract more of it, so drying time is cut. Conventional top-loaders with center-post agitators cost the least but performance is unimpressive, despite using lots of water. None are recommended.

Front-loaders have large capacities and the best ones typically clean better than the best HE top-loaders. They use even less water and spin faster, so more water is extracted, reducing drying time. But front-loaders usually cost more and have longer wash times. And though vibration isn't a problem with our most highly rated models, a front-loader's spin speed might cause it to vibrate too much for it to be placed near a main living space.

## A laundry list of features

Pricey washers and dryers don't necessarily clean or dry better than those that cost \$700 to \$900. But they do have the latest features. Here's our take on 10 of them. Keep in mind that features are often bundled, so to get one you might end up paying for several.



### WORTH IT

**Large-capacity machines** let you do more laundry in a single load so you can get done faster. Washers earning excellent capacity scores in our tests fit 17 to 24 pounds of laundry, or about 9 to 13 pairs of men's jeans.

**Auto-load sensing** matches water used to the load size, saving you a step and possibly saving water.

**Automatic temperature control** adjusts the hot and cold water to the appropriate temperature for each cycle. Washers without this feature just mix hot and cold water in preset amounts. So a "hot" wash will be hotter in the summer than in the winter because the temperature of water from your main is higher.

**Automatic dispensers** release liquid or powder detergent, bleach, and fabric softener at the right time in the cycle. Some washers have reservoirs that can hold months' worth of liquid laundry products, and the bleach dispensers also prevent spattering.

**An extra rinse cycle** may help if you're sensitive to detergent residue.

**Moisture sensors** are a must on a dryer. Compared with a thermostat, these sensors are better at determining the moisture level in laundry and will turn off the dryer when clothes are dry. That's easier on your utility bill and on fabrics.

### SKIP IT

**Steam options** on dryers left our shirts wrinkled, though they did remove more odors from fabrics than conventional dryers. On washers we found that steam settings only slightly improved stain cleaning.

**Custom programming** on washers and dryers may be a laundry lover's dream because you program your own cycles and can save them for future loads. But for everyone else, standard cycles and settings should do. Electronic controls make selection even easier.

**Overnight cycles** that let you wash and dry while you sleep. After the wash cycle, the washer spins laundry dry, but this cycle is limited to just a few, often lightweight, items at a time.

**Smart washers and dryers** offer the possibility of saving energy and money by letting you schedule use when energy rates are lowest. But these smart appliances won't save you a cent unless you have a compatible smart meter and your utility cuts rates during nonpeak periods, such as weekends or weekdays from 10 p.m. to 10 a.m. Not that many utilities do. And even if yours does lower rates, you don't need a smart machine to save; just wash and dry your laundry during off-peak hours.

## Overview

Impressive or even superb cleaning and water and energy efficiency help make these washers top picks. They held 17 to 24 pounds of laundry in our tests and are Energy Star qualified, so look online for rebates. These large-capacity dryers are also impressive and have moisture sensors. All are quiet enough to be placed near living areas.

✓ **CR Best Buy** These washers and dryers offer the most performance for the price. All are recommended.

✓ **Recommended** These high-performing models are all fine choices and include CR Best Buys.

## QUIET WASHER AND DRYER PAIRS

**A1 Maytag** \$1,150, **C25 Maytag** \$1,150

**A2 Whirlpool** \$1,000 **CR Best Buy**, **Whirlpool** WED88HEAW similar to **C19** \$1,000

**B1 LG** \$700 **CR Best Buy** and **C24 LG** \$700

**B2 Samsung** \$800 **CR Best Buy** and **Samsung** DV422EWHD[WR], \$750

All can be placed near a family room or bedroom. The washers have automatic temperature controls, load sensing, and detergent and bleach dispensers, features we consider worthwhile. **A1** and **A2** are the fastest of all top picks; **A1** was better in our vibration tests. Those models and their matching dryers are made in the U.S. Among top-loaders, **B1** offers excellent cleaning and has a front control panel. **B2** excelled at cleaning but wasn't as gentle. Its matching dryer isn't a top pick but was superb at drying and was relatively quiet.

## OTHER FINE CHOICES

**A11 LG** \$900 **CR Best Buy**

**B5 GE** \$800 **CR Best Buy**

**C15 Kenmore** \$720 **CR Best Buy**

These are also relatively quiet. The washers have auto-temperature controls and auto-load sensing.

**A11** aced our cleaning tests and has an auto-dispenser. Its TurboWash option offers comparable wash performance in less time. **B5** is gentle on clothes. Among dryers, **C15** is one of the quietest. Also consider the Maytag MEDE200X[W], \$600. It didn't make our top picks because its capacity isn't quite as big, but it was very good at drying.



A1 Maytag



C25 Maytag



A2 Whirlpool



C19 Whirlpool

# Ratings Washers & dryers

**Recommended models only** From 316 tested.

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Test results					Features		
		Similar models, in small type, are comparable to tested model.			Washing	Energy efficiency	Water efficiency	Gentleness	Noise	Vibration	Cycle time (min.)	Stackable

## A FRONT-LOADERS All have large capacities. As a category, front loaders are energy efficient.

✓	1	Maytag Maxima XL MHW7000AW [1]	\$1,150	90	•	•	•	•	•	•	45	•	•	
✓	2	Whirlpool Duet WFW88HEAW [1]	1,000	90	•	•	•	•	•	•	45	•	•	
✓	3	Samsung WF457ARG5[GR] WF455ARG5WR	1,550	89	•	•	•	•	•	•	100	•	•	•
✓	4	LG WM8000H[V]A [2]	1,350	89	•	•	•	•	•	•	100	•	•	
✓	5	LG WM3470H[W]A	1,100	88	•	•	•	•	•	•	85	•	•	
✓	6	Whirlpool Duet WFW96HEA[W] [1]	1,300	87	•	•	•	•	•	•	50	•	•	
✓	7	Samsung WF435ATGJ[WR] WF433BTGJ[ ]	1,300	87	•	•	•	•	•	•	105	•	•	
✓	8	Whirlpool Duet WFW94HEX[W] WFW95HEX[ ], WFW97HEX[ ]	1,100	87	•	•	•	•	•	•	75	•		
✓	9	Kenmore Elite 4147[2]	1,100	87	•	•	•	•	•	•	85	•	•	
✓	10	Kenmore 4137[2]	1,050	87	•	•	•	•	•	•	85	•	•	
✓	11	LG WM3070H[W]A	900	87	•	•	•	•	•	•	85	•	•	
✓	12	Samsung WF511AB[W]	1,300	86	•	•	•	•	•	•	80	•	•	
✓	13	Kenmore Elite 4157[2]	1,200	86	•	•	•	•	•	•	90	•	•	
✓	14	Samsung WF405ATPA[WR]	1,100	86	•	•	•	•	•	•	100	•	•	

## B TOP-LOADERS All are high-efficiency and have large capacities.

✓	1	LG WT1101CW	700	82	•	•	•	•	•	•	75			
✓	2	Samsung WA422PRHD[WR]	800	82	•	•	•	•	•	•	75			
✓	3	LG WT5070C[W]	1,000	81	•	•	•	•	•	•	65			
✓	4	Samsung WA484D5HA[WR]	1,000	81	•	•	•	•	•	•	75			
✓	5	GE GTWN7450DWW [1]	800	80	•	•	•	•	•	•	60			
✓	6	Maytag Bravos XL MVWB750Y[W] [1]	850	79	•	•	•	•	•	•	65			
✓	7	Samsung WA400PJHD[WR]	700	78	•	•	•	•	•	•	75			
✓	8	LG WT5170H[W]	1,100	78	•	•	•	•	•	•	70			
✓	9	Samsung WA456DRHD[WR]	850	78	•	•	•	•	•	•	75			
✓	10	GE Adora GHWN8350DWS (Home Depot) [1] GTWN8250DWS, GTWS8450DWS	1,000	77	•	•	•	•	•	•	60			
✓	11	LG WT4870C[W]	800	77	•	•	•	•	•	•	75			•
✓	12	Maytag Bravos XL MVWB950Y[W] [1]	1,000	76	•	•	•	•	•	•	70			•
✓	13	Whirlpool Vantage WTW7990X[G]	1,700	75	•	•	•	•	•	•	80			

[1] Made in the U.S. [2] Wider than most machines.





B1 LG



C24 LG



B2 Samsung



C15 Kenmore

☒ CR Best Buy 
 ☒ Recommended

● Excellent 
 ● Very good 
 ○ Good 
 ● Fair 
 ● Poor

	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Test results	Features
Recommendation	Rank			Drying Convenience Noise	Stackable Custom programming Steam option Wi-Fi enabled
	Similar models, in small type, are comparable to tested model and have moisture sensors.		0 100 P   F   G   Vg   E		

## C DRYERS All have large capacities and moisture sensors.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Samsung DV50F9A8EVP Gas: DV50F9A8GVP	\$1,100	83	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Maytag Maxima XL MED8000AG <sup>[1]</sup> Gas: MGD8000AG	1,450	79	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	LG DLEX3470[W] Gas: DLGX3471[W]	1,000	79	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Samsung DV456EWH[W] DV456GWHDR	900	78	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Whirlpool Duet WED96HEAW <sup>[1]</sup> Gas: WGD96HEAW	1,300	78	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Maytag Bravos X MEDX700AG <sup>[1]</sup> Gas: MGD700AG	900	78	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	Kenmore Elite 6152[2] Gas: 71522	1,000	78	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8	LG DLEX8000[V] <sup>[2]</sup> Gas: DLGX8001[V]	1,350	78	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	9	LG Smart ThinQ DLEX6001V Gas: DLEX6002V <sup>[2]</sup>	1,500	78	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	10	LG DLEX5170[W] Gas: DLGX5171[W]	900	78	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	11	Kenmore 8137[2] Gas: 9137[2]	950	78	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	12	Whirlpool Cabrio WED5700AC* Gas: WGD5700AC	900	78	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	13	Samsung DV457EVGS[GR] Gas: DV457GVGS[GR]	1,550	78	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	14	Whirlpool Duet WEL98HEAL <sup>[1]</sup>	1,500	77	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	15	Kenmore 8117[2] Gas: 9117[2]	720	77	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	16	LG DLEX3360[W] Gas: DLGX3361[W]	900	77	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	17	LG DLEX4070W Gas: DLGX4071W	1,200	77	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	18	Kenmore 6800[2] Gas: 7800[2]	800	77	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	19	Whirlpool Duet WED94HEAW <sup>[1]</sup> WED88HEAW Gas: WGD94HEAW WGD88HEAW	1,100	77	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	20	Samsung DV520AE[P] Gas: DV520AG[P]	1,400	77	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	21	LG DLE4870W Gas: DLG4871W	800	77	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	22	LG DLE2250[W] Gas: DLG2251[W]	800	76	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	23	GE GTDS850EDWS <sup>[1]</sup> Adora GHDS830EDWS (Home Depot), GTDS820EDWS Gas: GTDS850GDWS	1,100	76	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	24	LG DLE1101W Gas: DLG1102W	700	76	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	25	Maytag Maxima XL MED7000AW <sup>[1]</sup> Gas: MGD7000AG	1,150	76	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	26	LG DLEX2650[W] Gas: DLGX2651[W]	900	76	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	27	Whirlpool Duet WED86HEBC <sup>[1]</sup> WED80HEBW Gas: WGD86HEBC	1,000	76	●	●	●	●	●

## Can't find a rated model?

We've analyzed washers and dryers we've tested during the past three years to see which brands have performed best over time. A strong performance history doesn't guarantee that all of a brand's models will be winners, but it boosts the odds.

### Front-loaders

**Safe bets** Electrolux, Kenmore, and Maytag models have performed very well. Samsung front-loaders performed similarly, though some of its lower-priced models scored a bit lower.

**Relatively safe bets** LG and Whirlpool had some top-scoring models, though generally had fewer higher-scoring models or more lower-scoring models. Though even their worst performers were OK. GE front-loaders have generally performed similarly, but our latest Product Reliability Survey shows that its front-loaders have been repair-prone, so we suggest that you avoid them.

**Less steady** Frigidaire front-loaders performed inconsistently, and our latest Product Reliability Survey shows that they have been repair-prone, so we suggest that you avoid them.

### High-efficiency top-loaders

**Safe bets** All LG and Samsung models have scored Very Good or Excellent for performance.

**Relatively safe bets** GE, Kenmore, Maytag, and Whirlpool generally had fewer high-scoring models or more low-scoring models.

### Dryers

**Safe bets** LG and Samsung dryers have scored Very Good or Excellent.

**Relatively safe bets** Electrolux, Kenmore, Maytag, and Whirlpool dryers generally had fewer high-scoring models or more low-scoring models. Frigidaire gas dryers have performed similarly, but our surveys show that it has been repair-prone, so we suggest that you avoid them.

**Less steady** GE dryers have been less consistent in our drying tests.

# Laundry detergents

## Wisk and Kirkland rival Tide for value

**T**IDE IS SO POPULAR that it earned a place on the National Retail Federation's list of most shoplifted items. It's also a winner in our tests, though Wisk beats it among conventional detergents and is a close second in the high-efficiency arena.

Ads for Wisk Deep Clean Free & Pure HE tout the detergent's ability to vanquish sweat and body oils. Wisk met that claim for stubborn ring around the collar. And at almost 10 cents less per load than the top-rated Tide, Wisk is, well, a steal.

Tide is also feeling the heat among single-use pods. In our last tests, Tide Pods were the only ones that made our picks. This time, Costco's Kirkland Signature Ultra Clean Pacs did better (and cost far less).

Our latest tests also yielded a sea of less-impressive laundry detergents and certain packages that could prove tantalizing to children. (See "Pods That Look Like Candy," on page 48.) Here are the details:

**Our losers' list gets longer.** Martha Stewart Clean 2X remains our lowest-rated detergent, but others come close. Unimpressive cleaning on grass, blood, and body oils helped send All 2X Ultra Stainlifter and Just the Basics 2X Concentrated to the bottom among conventional detergents.

**Few green cleaners cut it.** There's no federal standard for terms such as "natural" and "earth friendly," but marketers still use them. Rockin' Green Classic Rock even calls itself "vegan" and "gluten-free." But it flubbed our grass and body-oil tests. A better green bet: Seventh Generation Natural Laundry Detergent, which is certified to contain at least 95 percent renewable ingredients.

**Packaging gets less convenient.** Kirkland Signature Ultra HE's cleaning power is recommended, though the flimsy handle on its box could lead to messy spills. Member's Mark Wind Fresh from Sam's Club is a bargain bulk buy, but it proved lighter on cleaning, and at more than 32 pounds, it requires heavy lifting.



A1 Wisk



B1 Tide

## Ratings

All tested products In performance order, within types.

	Rec.	Rank	Product	Type	Dual-use	Price per load	Overall score	Test results
							0 100 P   F   G   V   E	Cleaning Grass Blood Collar ring

### A CONVENTIONAL For standard top-loading washers.

✓	1	Wisk Deep Clean ①	liquid	17¢	63	● ● ● ●
✓	2	Tide Plus Bleach Alternative Vivid White + Bright ①	liquid	18	61	● ● ● ●
	3	Tide for Cold Water ②	liquid	18	58	○ ● ● ●
	4	Cheer Stay Colorful for Darks	liquid	13	58	○ ● ● ●
	5	Tide Ultra Free & Gentle ③	powder	28	58	○ ● ● ●
	6	Tide TotalCare ①	liquid	30	57	○ ● ● ●
	7	Gain Icy Fresh Fizz Oxi Boost 2-in-1 FreshLock	liquid	19	55	○ ● ● ●
	8	Gain Plus a Touch of Softness Concentrated ①	powder	15	52	○ ● ● ●
	9	All Oxi Active Concentrated ①	powder	15	51	○ ● ● ●
	10	Tide Plus a Touch of Downy ①	powder	18	50	○ ● ● ●
	11	Cheer Stay Colorful Concentrated ①	powder	15	47	○ ● ● ●
	12	Arm & Hammer Plus Oxi Clean Stain Fighter ①	liquid	9	46	○ ● ● ●
	13	Era Active Stainfighter HE	liquid	9	41	○ ● ● ●
	14	Arm & Hammer 2X Concentrate ①	liquid	8	40	○ ● ● ●
	15	Arm & Hammer 2X Ultra for Sensitive Skin ①	liquid	6	38	○ ● ● ●
	16	Xtra Lasting ScentSations ①	liquid	5	37	○ ● ● ●
	17	All 2x Ultra Stainlifter ④	liquid	14	35	○ ● ● ●
	18	Just the Basics 2X Concentrated (CVS)	liquid	8	31	○ ● ● ●

### B HIGH-EFFICIENCY For front-loading or high-efficiency top-loading washers.

✓	1	Tide Ultra Plus Bleach Vivid White + Bright ③	powder	23	82	● ● ● ● ●
✓	2	Wisk Deep Clean Free & Pure ③	liquid	• 14	80	● ● ● ● ●
✓	3	Kirkland Signature Ultra Clean Pacs (Costco) ③	pods/packs	• 14	74	● ● ● ● ●
✓	4	Tide Ultra HE ①	powder	16	74	● ● ● ● ●
✓	5	Tide HE Plus Bleach Alternative Vivid White + Bright ①	liquid	18	73	● ● ● ● ●
✓	6	Kirkland Signature Ultra (Costco) ③	powder	• 9	73	● ● ● ● ●
✓	7	Tide Pods ③	pods/packs	• 22	72	● ● ● ● ●
	8	Wisk Deep Clean HE ①	liquid	17	69	● ● ● ● ●
	9	All Free Clear Oxi Active ④	liquid	• 14	69	● ● ● ● ●
	10	Tide Plus Febreze HE ①	liquid	18	68	● ● ● ● ●
	11	Up & Up HE Fresh Breeze (Target) ③	liquid	• 13	67	● ● ● ● ●
	12	Tide HE ①	liquid	18	66	● ● ● ● ●
	13	Nice Power Pacs (Walgreens)	pods/packs	• 34	65	● ● ● ● ●
	14	Seventh Generation Natural Laundry Detergent ①	powder	26	65	● ● ● ● ●
	15	Kirkland Signature Ultra HE ①	liquid	• 12	62	● ● ● ● ●
	16	Sears Ultra Plus Concentrated 9879 ③	powder	• 13	61	● ● ● ● ●
	17	All Oxi Active HE ④	liquid	• 14	60	○ ● ● ● ●
	18	Legacy of Clean SA8 plus Bioquest HE ①	powder	• 28	60	○ ● ● ● ●
	19	All Mighty Pacs 4X Concentrated ③	pods/packs	• 18	59	○ ● ● ● ●
	20	Gain Island Fresh Scented HE	liquid	14	57	○ ● ● ● ●

① Has not been tested in cool water. ② Tested in cold water (60° F), not cool water. ③ Did well in new cool-water cleaning (75° F) compared with our standard warm-water wash (90° F). ④ Formulation has changed since testing.





**B2** Wisk



**B3** Kirkland



**B6** Kirkland

☒ CR Best Buy   ☒ Recommended  
☒ Excellent   ☐ Very good   ☐ Good   ☐ Fair   ☐ Poor

Rec.	Rank	Product	Type	Dual-use	Price per load	Overall score	Test results
						0 100 P   F   G   V   E	Cleaning Grass Blood Collar ring

## B HIGH-EFFICIENCY Continued

21	Seventh Generation 2X Concentrated Natural Liquid Free & Clear HE <sup>[1]</sup>	liquid	•	20¢	57	○ • •
22	Great Value Original Clean (Walmart) <sup>[3]</sup>	liquid	•	13	57	○ •
23	Purex Plus Oxi	liquid	•	21	57	○ •
24	Cheer Stay Colorful HE	liquid	•	13	56	○ •
25	Legacy of Clean SA8 Triple Liquid HE	liquid	•	30	56	○ • •
26	Arm & Hammer Crystal Burst Plus OxiClean	Pods/packs	•	15	56	○ •
27	Gain Ultra Original HE Concentrated <sup>[1]</sup>	powder	•	13	56	○ • •
28	Member's Mark Wind Fresh (Sam's Club)	powder	•	8	55	○ •
29	Caldrea Sweet Pea HE	liquid	•	56	55	○
30	Fuller Brush Plus Concentrated (HE)	liquid	•	20	54	○ •
31	Member's Mark Fresh Clean HE (Sam's Club) <sup>[3]</sup>	liquid	•	10	53	○ •
32	Purex Complete with Zout <sup>[1]</sup>	liquid	•	10	52	○ • •
33	Purex Triple Action UltraPaks	Pods/packs	•	15	52	○ •
34	Dynamo Toss-Ins 4X Concentrated Tablets	Pods/packs	•	20	51	○ •
35	Mrs. Meyer's Clean Day HE <sup>[1]</sup>	liquid	•	25	51	○ • •
36	Home Fresh Scented 2X Ultra Biodegradable (Rite Aid)	liquid	•	16	50	○
37	Arm & Hammer Toss 'N Done Power Paks	Pods/packs	•	13	50	○ •
38	Ecover Zero 2.5X Concentrate HE	liquid	•	18	49	○
39	Rockin' Green Classic Rock	powder	•	25	48	○ •
40	Ajax Toss-Ins 4X Concentrated Pods	Pods/packs	•	15	47	○ •
41	Seventh Generation Natural 4X Concentrated Free & Clear	liquid	•	26	46	○
42	Ology 2X Suitable for HE (Walgreens)	liquid	•	21	46	○
43	Nice 2X Ultra (Walgreens)	liquid	•	16	46	○
44	Purex Complete 3-in-1 Laundry Sheets <sup>[1]</sup>	sheets	•	23	45	○ •
45	Method Ultra Concentrated	liquid	•	24	45	○
46	All 3X Ultra Small & Mighty HE <sup>[1]</sup>	liquid	•	11	45	○ • •
47	Woolite Complete <sup>[1]</sup>	liquid	•	26	44	○ •
48	Vaska 2x Concentrated Herbatergent HE <sup>[1]</sup>	liquid	•	22	43	○ •
49	Purex Triple Action	liquid	•	7	42	○
50	Vaska 4X Concentrated HE	liquid	•	29	39	○
51	Dropps 6X Concentrated <sup>[1]</sup>	Pods/packs	•	28	37	○ • •
52	Ajax Ultra Stain Fighter & Color Booster	liquid	•	6	36	○
53	Seventh Generation Natural Laundry Packs Advanced Triple Enzyme	Pods/packs	•	30	35	○
54	Sun Triple Clean	liquid	•	5	34	○
55	Oxydol 2X Concentrated Fresh 'N Clean HE	liquid	•	12	33	○
56	Ecos 2X Ultra Magnolia & Lily HE	liquid	•	14	33	○
57	Green Works Natural	liquid	•	11	33	○
58	GreenShield Organic Elite Care 3X Concentrated	liquid	•	33	30	○
59	365 Organic Everyday Value 3X Concentrated Organic (Whole Foods)	liquid	•	9	28	○
60	Martha Stewart Clean 2X	liquid	•	18	25	○

## Overview

Top detergents did best against stains in warm water. Cool-water winners are footnoted. Dual-use detergents tend to do better in HE machines, which don't use as much water to dilute the detergent. Among picks, we focus below on those with special strengths, value, or both.

☒ **CR Best Buy** These blend top cleaning and value. All are recommended.

☒ **Recommended** These top-scoring detergents perform well. Models below stand out for the reasons noted.

## FOR CONVENTIONAL WASHERS

**A1** Wisk 17 cents per load

**B3** Kirkland 14 cents per load

**A1** is tops in this category. **B3** offers the ease of pods and works in all machines. Also consider **A3** if you prefer cold-water washing.

## FOR HIGH-EFFICIENCY WASHERS

**B1** Tide 23 cents per load

**B2** Wisk 14 cents per load **CR Best Buy**

**B3** Kirkland 14 cents per load

**B6** Kirkland 9 cents per load **CR Best Buy**

**B1** cleaned best overall. **B2** is a liquid that costs less and works in all machines. **B3** is our top pod, and **B6** is a top-value powder. Also consider **B14** if you want a green detergent.

## Moxie for oxi?

You'll find lots of claims for "oxi" or "oxy" cleaning power. But however it's spelled, having it doesn't ensure better cleaning.

Made from sodium percarbonate, oxi is a color-safe bleach found in many powder detergents. That includes our top Tide HE detergent, though oxi isn't on the package or listed in the ingredients. You'll also see it under the trademark OxiClean, the additive owned by Church & Dwight, which makes Arm & Hammer.

Certain liquid detergents also come with oxi claims, even though they don't use percarbonate. "With our liquids, oxi stands for added whitening, brightening, or cleaning power," says Wendy Saladyga, senior manager for research, development and engineering at Sun Products, which makes All detergents, including All Oxi Active HE.

**Bottom line.** Pick a detergent that cleaned up in our tests, even if it's oxi-free.

## Guide to the Ratings

**Overall score** is performance in warm water (90° F). **Cleaning** reflects ability to remove blood, clay, chocolate ice cream, grass, red wine, ring around the collar, and tea from heavily soiled cotton swatches. Displayed scores are rounded; products are listed in order of precise overall score. **Price per load** is based on recommended amount for a regular load and largest available package size.

## SAFETY ALERT

## Pods that look like candy

More laundry detergents look as if they belong in the snack aisle, with sometimes-dangerous results. Pods are a glaring example: Poison-control centers have logged more than 9,500 reports of ingestion and other contact involving children 5 years or younger since early 2012, when pods went mainstream. Eye contact can result in serious injury, and ingestion can lead to vomiting and has caused some victims to stop breathing suddenly.

Two pod detergents from Tide and Costco happen to be top performers in our tests. Market leader Procter & Gamble is replacing the clear container for its colorful Tide Pods with an opaque version that has a double-latch lid, a resealable sticker over the lid, and warning icons on the package. (The company says it expects the original clear container to be unavailable by year's end.) We hope those changes will make a difference, but we're still concerned that the tasty-looking pods will find their way into children's hands. What's more, there's no plan to phase out the easy-open pouches, also used for Tide Pods, which P&G says some consumers prefer.

Costco's Kirkland Signature Ultra Clean Pacs come in a clear plastic tub that resembles the containers for some of the brand's snack foods. Though the lid has a prominent warning label, it's easy to open. Costco told us that, like P&G, it is introducing an opaque container with enhanced safety icons in August, with a child-deterrent lid to follow in early 2014.

We continue to urge detergent manufacturers to adopt child-resistant packaging for all pods—and stop making them look like candy. Retailers should improve in-store signs to better alert consumers to the dangers of pods.

Always keep pods out of children's reach. And call the poison-control help line immediately (800-222-1222) if a child comes in contact with them.



# You washed what?

**PENS, CRAYONS, AND CHOCOLATE** are some of the things that people have accidentally left in pockets, according to our Facebook followers and staff. The results weren't pretty. Couple that with the fact that fabrics and washers have changed, and your laundry routine may need an update. So we asked manufacturers and our laundry and fabric experts for their latest tips. Start by following the instructions on garment labels, then try the following:

### Chocolate-covered laundry.

Use your machine's soak cycle and one of our higher-rated detergents that's very good at removing chocolate, such as Wisk Deep Clean Free & Pure, a detergent that can be used in HE and conventional machines. Then wash. Don't put the item into the dryer until you're satisfied with the stain removal. If the stained clothes have already been in the dryer, it will be even more difficult to remove stains, so you might have to repeat this process.

### Clothes with spandex.

Skip the chlorine bleach; it can damage spandex. (So can a very hot iron.) If you paid extra for jeans with special fading or a distressed finish, turn them inside out before washing and pull up the zipper; its teeth can get caught on other clothing.

### Ink and crayon marks.

To tackle ballpoint-pen marks, place a clean white paper towel under the stain, then blot a small spot with rubbing alcohol and another piece of paper towel. Keep blotting the stain with a clean part of each paper towel over and under the stain until it is gone, then launder. For crayons, Crayola suggests scraping off as much as possible, then working liquid dish soap into the stain. (Do that and the following steps on an inconspicuous spot first.) Wait several minutes, then rub the fabric under warm water to remove the stain. Machine-wash using the heavy-soil setting, with the hottest water the care label recommends, and OxiClean. Air-dry the item and repeat if necessary.

### Rogaine-stained pillowcases.

A reader alerted us that Rogaine, an FDA-approved topical treatment used to help regrow hair, stains his pillowcases after he applies it at bedtime. Try soaking pillowcases in white vinegar for 15 to 30 minutes, then toss them in the washer with detergent but no bleach. Repeat if needed. Line dry.

### Small stuffed animals.

If there are no glued-on parts, wash using the gentle cycle in cold water and with a mild detergent, then put in the sun or another warm place to dry.

### Sneakers.

Nike and Keds say on their websites not to machine-wash or machine-dry their shoes. A Converse online video shows how to clean your sneakers by hand. Given the high price of sneakers, be sure to follow the manufacturer's cleaning guidelines.

### Waterproof items.

Consult your manual or call customer service if you have an HE top-loader. The sticker on our top-rated high-efficiency Samsung top-loader said not to wash or spin waterproof seats, mats, or clothing. That's because waterproof or water-resistant items increase the chance of loads becoming unbalanced, which can cause excessive shaking and can damage the dryer and laundry area. In December LG recalled about 457,000 LG and Kenmore Elite HE top-loaders made by LG after it received at least 343 reports of washers that vibrated excessively. More than half caused minor property damage, and one minor injury was reported, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission.

### Wool sweaters.

First check for any decorations—water can damage them. Some HE models have a wool cycle. If the garment label says you can hand-wash, you might be able to use a wool-wash cycle. Then lay flat to dry.







Road tests, auto products, hot topics

## Reports

Repair satisfaction 49

We test fuel-efficiency claims 50

SUVs 52

Hybrids 57

# Owners prefer independent shops

**A** **COMMON MISCONCEPTION** is that you have to take your car to a dealer for maintenance and repair work to keep its warranty valid. In fact, not only can you take your car to an independent mechanic, but most car owners say they prefer those shops for repairs, often because they're less expensive than dealers.

That's what we found in our latest service satisfaction survey, conducted by the Consumer Reports National Research Center, and those results are consistent with our survey findings in recent years. The results are based on subscribers' experience with 145,000 vehicles that were taken to a dealer or independent shop over the previous 12 months for a repair.

Overall, we surveyed owners of 32 brands, including makers of moderately priced models and luxury nameplates. Regardless of brand, the repair cost was often a significant factor in the higher scores for independent shops. Hyundai and Kia dealers received the highest rating for price, and Mercedes-Benz owners rated their dealers the lowest.

We found relatively little difference in satisfaction among the brands, although Acura, Buick, Cadillac, Lexus, Lincoln, and Porsche owners were among the more satisfied. Owners of Jeep, Land Rover, Mitsubishi, Nissan, and Volkswagen models were less satisfied.

Generally, the lower a brand scored for dealership repairs, the greater the difference between satisfaction scores for dealers and independent shops.

### TOP FIXERS

Buick and Lexus owners gave high marks to dealers and independent shops.



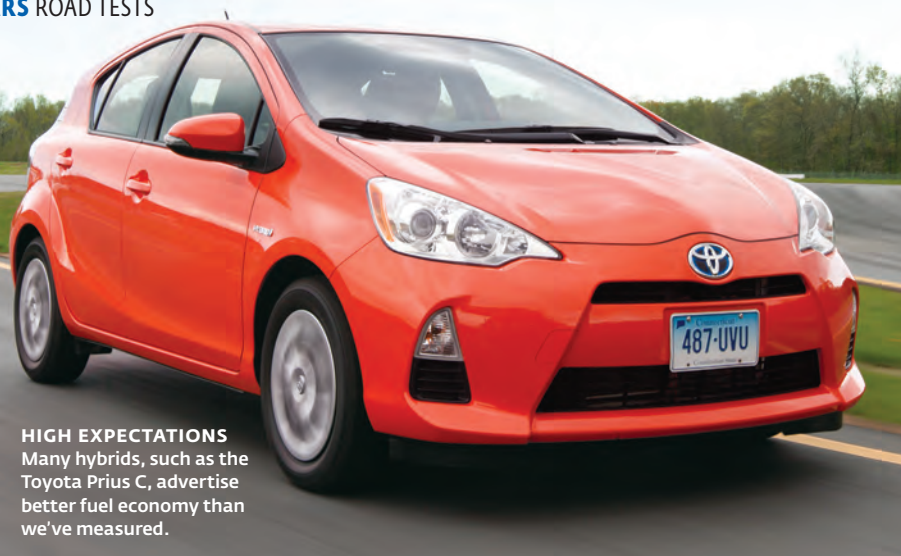
## Ratings Repair satisfaction

The chart below shows respondents' overall satisfaction with repairs and the corresponding rating for price. A reader score of 100 means all respondents were completely satisfied; 80, very satisfied on average; 60, fairly satisfied. Differences of fewer than 5 points aren't meaningful.

In order of dealer score.

Make	Dealership		Independent		Make	Dealership		Independent	
	Reader score	Price	Reader score	Price		Reader score	Price	Reader score	Price
Buick	84	●	89	●	Ford	80	●	87	●
Lexus	84	○	90	●	Mercury	80	○	89	●
Acura	83	○	89	●	Saab	80	○	86	○
Cadillac	83	●	87	○	Scion	80	●	91	●
Lincoln	83	●	86	●	Subaru	80	○	88	●
Porsche	83	○	86	○	BMW	79	○	87	○
Infiniti	82	○	88	●	Kia	79	●	86	○
Audi	81	○	84	○	Chrysler	78	○	88	●
Chevrolet	81	●	88	●	Dodge	78	○	86	●
GMC	81	●	88	●	Mazda	78	○	86	●
Honda	81	○	88	●	Mercedes-Benz	78	●	87	○
Hyundai	81	●	87	●	Jeep	77	○	87	●
Jaguar	81	○	87	○	Mitsubishi	77	○	85	○
Mini	81	●	84	○	Nissan	77	○	86	●
Toyota	81	○	88	●	Volkswagen	77	○	85	○
Volvo	81	○	86	○	Land Rover	76	○	—	—

A dash (—) indicates insufficient data.



**HIGH EXPECTATIONS**  
Many hybrids, such as the Toyota Prius C, advertise better fuel economy than we've measured.

# The mpg gap

## Some window stickers promise too much

**W**HEN COMPARING the fuel economy of cars, consumers often rely on window stickers that display mpg estimates from the Environmental Protection Agency. But in our testing, we've found that the figures for certain vehicles can be far higher than many drivers will actually get. And the largest differences involve some of the most fuel-efficient cars, particularly hybrids. So the people who care most about gas mileage could feel the most shortchanged.

When we compared the EPA estimates of 315 vehicles with the results of our real-world fuel-economy tests, we also found notable gaps in cars that use small turbocharged four-cylinder engines, intended to provide the power of larger engines and the gas mileage of smaller ones.

### Sticker shock

In our testing, hybrids generally get some of the best overall gas mileage in their classes, led by models such as the Toyota Prius (44 mpg) and hybrid versions of the Honda Civic (40), Ford Fusion (39), and Toyota Camry (38). But an owner expecting to get the same mpg shown on the window sticker and in advertising for some of the cars might be disappointed.

Of the hybrids we've recently tested, 55 percent fell short of their EPA combined city/highway estimates by 10 percent or more, with hybrids built by Ford showing the largest discrepancies.

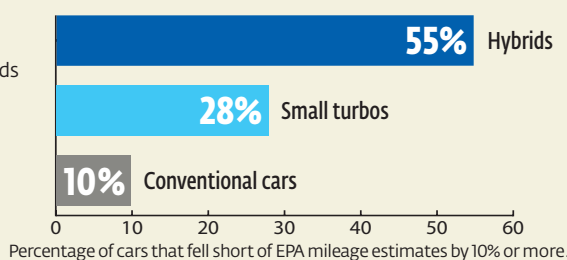
At 34 mpg overall, the Lincoln MKZ Hybrid is invitingly thrifty. But it gets 11 mpg less, or 24 percent lower, than its 45-mpg EPA figure. The C-Max and Fusion hybrids fall 10 and 8 mpg, respectively, below their advertised 47 mpg. Similarly, the Volkswagen Jetta Hybrid (see page 56) also falls 8 mpg short. For consumers who buy the MKZ, for example, that can amount to paying \$1,510 more in gas over five years than they might have expected (assuming gas costs \$3.50 per gallon and the car is driven 12,000 miles annually).

"We believe the current testing regulations account for some variability of driving styles, patterns, and environmental conditions," Ford spokesman Todd Nissen told us in an e-mail. "The latest-generation hybrids may be more sensitive to driving consistently outside of these factors."

Similarly, we found that 28 percent of cars with small turbo engines also fell short of their EPA estimates by 10 percent or more. Those include models such as the Buick Encore, Ford Fusion, and Nissan Juke.

### Missing the mark

In our tests, 55 percent of hybrids and 28 percent of cars with small turbocharged engines fall short of EPA estimates by 10 percent or more. That compares with only 10 percent of conventional vehicles



### What's going on?

EPA estimates don't always reflect real-world driving performance largely because they are based on outdated tests designed to measure vehicles with conventional powertrains in particular driving situations rather than today's increasingly sophisticated gas/electric systems. In fact, according to Mike Duoba, a research engineer at Argonne National Laboratory who works on keeping the tests up to date, the EPA tests "were originally designed to test emissions, not fuel economy. They wanted to test a variety of speeds and accelerations."

The EPA test for city fuel economy is conducted at very low speeds, with gentle acceleration and minimal idling. The highway test includes quite a bit of stop-and-go driving, with a maximum speed of 60 mph and an average speed of 48.

Hybrids are most efficient in those conditions. With a light foot on the throttle, the latest models can often cruise in electric mode up to about 60 mph, so they can perform portions of the EPA tests without consuming a drop of gas. By contrast, CONSUMER REPORTS' highway mpg tests are performed by driving at a steady 65 mph, reflecting a driver cruising on an interstate highway. In that situation, a hybrid is constantly running its gas engine, so it doesn't get the full benefit of using its electric power. Thus, it gets fewer mpg than in the EPA test.

Similarly, small turbocharged engines rarely need to spool up their turbos to develop sufficient power for the EPA tests. Our test calls for larger throttle openings so that cars can accelerate from, say, 20 to 40 mph within 500 feet, which results in more turbo use and more air and fuel being pumped into the engine.

### Closing the gap

Overall, fuel-efficiency shortfalls have narrowed considerably over the years. When CONSUMER REPORTS conducted a similar study in 2005 that compared our gas-



mileage results with the EPA estimates, we found that most cars got significantly fewer mpg than their window stickers promised. Conventional gas-powered vehicles missed their EPA estimates by an average of 9 percent, and hybrids by 18 percent.

For 2008 models, the EPA updated its testing formula, which brought most vehicles closer in line with our measurements. Now we find that, on average, conventional cars missed their EPA estimates by only about 2 percent in our tests, and hybrids by about 10 percent.

Enesta Jones, an EPA spokeswoman, says that the 2008 revision reduced the mpg estimates for hybrid vehicles by up to 30 percent for city driving and 25 percent for highway use. "This is a significant reduction that clearly better reflects real-world operation."

In our tests, most cars exceed their EPA highway estimates but fall well short in

## Models fell short of EPA mileage estimates by as much as 11 mpg.

city mpg. That is especially true for hybrids, which have fallen an average of 28 percent short of EPA city estimates.

Of course, automakers try to put their best foot forward in the EPA tests, taking advantage of any variables that might improve their results. Duoba notes two ways to get the best result: using the best car, optimized for the test, and driving efficiently. "How much the driver can improve the mpg can vary a lot from car to car," he says. "Some hybrids are very sensitive to how they are driven."

Those factors can further increase the difference in a vehicle's performance between the EPA estimates and real-world driving. "Many times, your average car off the lot will not perform as well as a certification test car," Duoba adds.

We have discussed our findings with the EPA, and the agency says it is reviewing its tests and is considering updating them. In the meantime, consumers should be aware that they might not get the efficiency promised on the window sticker. You can see our fuel-economy test results in our monthly road-test reports and in the Annual Auto Issue.



**AT THE TRACK**  
Our city fuel-economy test, performed on our track, reflects suburban driving.

## The government's tests vs. ours

### Lab measurements

The EPA estimates you see on a car's window sticker are the result of fuel-economy tests run in a lab on a rolling treadmill called a dynamometer.

They are performed by the automakers, using test protocols formulated by the EPA. The agency then spot-checks about 15 percent of the models in its own lab.

The automakers pick the cars they test. Protocols require test results for every major variation of engine, transmission, and drivetrain, but minor variations such as different axle ratios on pickups and a special performance version of a model are often lumped into the results of higher-selling versions.

On the dynamometer, cars are driven on precise simulated routes. But maximum speed and acceleration in the tests are slow by the standards of modern traffic. To help bring the results for most cars in line with real-world driving, three new "routes" were added in 2008, reflecting higher speeds, more use of air conditioning, and driving in colder temperatures.

But automakers are allowed to comply with the new ratings for many models using mathematical simulations of the new tests. And because those simulations

were developed before many modern hybrids were on the road, they might be inaccurate for today's drivetrains.

### Road tests

CONSUMER REPORTS' fuel-economy tests are conducted on our track and on public roads. Testers splice a precise fuel meter into each test car's fuel line to measure how much gas is consumed. Each car is then run through highway and city drive loops, with each performed multiple times by two drivers.

The city test is conducted on a loop that's set up on our track to reflect driving in a suburban area. It's marked so that a driver must maintain specific speeds in certain sections and stop the car at specific points for set idling times. Highway mpg is measured by driving on a particular stretch of sparsely used freeway near our test track at a steady pace of 65 mph. Each driver runs the test in both directions to compensate for wind and the slight difference in grade.

Our raw results are corrected for temperature using a formula established by the Society of Automotive Engineers. But we don't test if it's too hot, too cold, too wet, or too windy. Our overall mpg is a weighted composite of city and highway mpg measurements.



Lincoln MKZ Hybrid



Ford C-Max Hybrid



Volkswagen Jetta Hybrid

**A CONUNDRUM** Many models provide excellent gas mileage, but owners may be disappointed if they expect EPA results.

## Miles apart

Below are models whose overall gas mileage in our tests fell 3 or more mpg below what the window sticker promises.

Model	CR overall mpg	EPA combined mpg	Difference
Lincoln MKZ Hybrid	34	45	11
Ford C-Max Hybrid	37	47	10
Ford Fusion Hybrid	39	47	8
Volkswagen Jetta Hybrid	37	45	8
Toyota Prius C	43	50	7
Toyota Prius	44	50	6
Honda Civic Hybrid	40	44	4
Infiniti M35h	25	29	4
Lexus ES 300h	36	40	4
Toyota Avalon Hybrid	36	40	4
Buick La Crosse (eAssist)	26	29	3
Honda Insight	38	41	3
Hyundai Sonata Hybrid	33	36	3
Lexus RX 450h	26	29	3

# Small & midsized SUVs

The Jeep Grand Cherokee shines in a group of fresh models

**A**S AUTOMAKERS PURSUE better fuel economy, performance, and interior accommodations, we've seen several revamped SUVs introduced in recent months. For this issue, we tested three freshened midsized models: the Chevrolet Equinox, Jeep Grand Cherokee, and Kia Sorento. We also tested a new luxury subcompact, the Buick Encore.

The Grand Cherokee was significantly improved when it was redesigned three years ago. And the 2014 update has made it still better, thanks to a slick, new eight-speed automatic transmission, which helps responsiveness; improved controls; and better interior fit and finish.

Updated for 2014, the Sorento is very functional and family-friendly, scoring high among midsized, three-row SUVs. It received a new, refined V6 engine; a re-

worked suspension; comprehensive new electronics; and about a \$6,000 bump in price compared with the last Sorento EX V6 we tested. You still get a lot for your money, but this Kia is not the enticing bargain that it once was.

The Equinox now has a larger V6 engine, but despite some strong attributes, it's beginning to show its age. The peanut-sized Buick is nicely trimmed but a bit cramped.

As-tested prices for this group ranged from \$30,555 for the Encore to \$41,375 for the Grand Cherokee.

The Equinox and the Grand Cherokee are the only two here that we recommend. The Sorento's revised V6 is too new for us to have reliability data, although the EX with the old V6 was below average. The Encore is also too new for us to recommend, but its test score of 64 doesn't meet our threshold anyway.

## How they compare

Rec.	MIDSIZED SUVs	0	100
		P	I   G   V6   E
✓	Toyota Highlander Limited (V6)	81	
✓	Nissan Murano SL	78	
✓	Jeep Grand Cherokee Limited (V6)	77	
	Kia Sorento EX (V6)	76	
	Nissan Pathfinder SL	69	
✓	Chevrolet Equinox LTZ (V6)	66	
	Ford Edge SEL (3.5)	63	
<b>LUXURY COMPACT SUVs</b>			
	Ford Escape Titanium (2.0T)	79	
	BMW X1 xDrive28i (2.0T)	74	
	Mini Cooper Countryman S	66	
	Buick Encore Leather	64	

### GRAND UPDATE

A new eight-speed automatic transmission greatly improves responsiveness.





# Jeep Grand Cherokee

 Recommended

**ROAD-TEST  
SCORE**  
**77**

The Grand Cherokee is an especially versatile model in a category already known for versatility.

Though it provides an upscale environment and delivers well-rounded performance and functionality, appropriately equipped it's also capable of tackling tough off-road terrain or towing a hefty 7,400-pound load, capabilities that many competitors lack.

Also setting the Jeep apart is its wide range of powertrains and prices. Buyers can choose from V6 and V8 gasoline engines or a new turbodiesel. Each comes with the new eight-speed automatic transmission and is available with either rear- or four-wheel drive.

## A buffet of options

Most Grand Cherokees are equipped with the 290-hp, 3.6-liter V6 engine that we tested. It provides adequate power and gets 18 mpg overall, the same as the 2011 model we tested and about 3 mpg higher than the 5.7-liter V8. For better fuel economy, you can opt for the 240-hp turbodiesel engine. Or for a lot more oomph, choose the high-performance SRT model, with a 470-hp Hemi V8. It's quick and capable, although it has a harsh ride.

With the eight-speed transmission, our Jeep took just 18.1 seconds to tow a 5,000-pound trailer from 0 to 60 mph, which is a second quicker than before. Our V6 tows 6,200 pounds.

The electronic 4WD system has programmable modes for different terrains and conditions and quickly transfers power to whichever wheels have grip. Our vehicle had no problem climbing our rock hill, but its ground clearance may limit it in more challenging conditions. Adjustable ride height is an option.

The Grand Cherokee delivers responsive handling, with prompt turn-in response and little

body lean. It was secure when pushed to its handling limits and posted a decent speed in our avoidance maneuver. But the new electric steering system is vague on center and less communicative than the previous one. The ride remains firm yet steady and compliant.

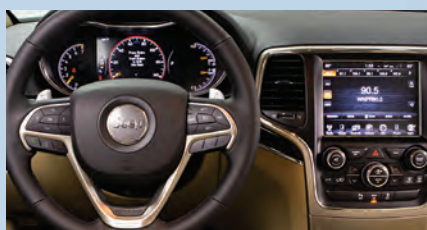
## Refined cabin

The interior in our Limited is nicely finished, with padded surfaces, woodgrain, and chrome trim. Drivers will find plenty of room behind the tilt-and-telescopic steering wheel, but the wide center console intrudes a bit. The front seats are roomy and well contoured, and have a full range of power adjustments, including lumbar. The rear is comfortable for three, and the seatback reclines.

Controls and gauges are straightforward, except for the newfangled electronic shifter, which annoyed everyone. The optional Uconnect infotainment system is well designed and includes an easy-to-reach touch screen. It's simple to wirelessly pair a phone via Bluetooth, and the system allows for voice controls. You'll find physical buttons and knobs for common adjustments, as well as easy-to-use steering-wheel-mounted controls.

A Uconnect Access subscription lets you use audio apps and perform voice-controlled texting. A smart-phone app can control the door locks and allows for remote starting.

Heated seats and a heated steering wheel are controlled through the touch screen. A power liftgate is standard on higher trim versions. And cargo room can be expanded by folding the rear seatbacks.



## SIMPLE SCREEN

The Uconnect infotainment system, which is well organized and easy to use, is one of the best we've tried.

## Tested vehicle

<b>HIGHS</b>	Quiet cabin, ride, off-road and towing capability, seat comfort, fit and finish, easy-to-use Uconnect system
<b>LOWS</b>	Fussy shifter
<b>TRIM LINE</b>	Limited 4x4
<b>DRIVETRAIN</b>	290-hp, 3.6-liter V6 engine; eight-speed automatic transmission; four-wheel drive
<b>MAJOR OPTIONS</b>	Towing package, sunroof, Uconnect 8.4N with navigation
<b>TESTED PRICE</b>	\$41,375

## The Grand Cherokee line

<b>OTHER TRIMS</b>	Laredo, Overland, SRT, Summit
<b>OTHER DRIVETRAINS</b>	240-hp, 3.0-liter turbodiesel V6; 360-hp, 5.7-liter V8; 470-hp, 6.4-liter V8; rear-wheel drive
<b>BASE PRICES</b>	\$28,795-\$62,995

## More test findings

<b>BRAKING</b>	Short stopping distances and good pedal feel.
<b>HEADLIGHTS</b>	Good distance from low and high beams, but the light is somewhat uneven.
<b>ACCESS</b>	Big doors and flush sills help, but it's a bit of a step up.
<b>VISIBILITY</b>	Upright styling and large windows aid visibility.
<b>CABIN STORAGE</b>	Lots of easily accessed storage.
<b>HEAD RESTRAINTS</b>	Rear-center restraint must be raised to provide protection.
<b>CHILD SEATS</b>	Installations are secure, but top tethers are hidden under the cargo flap.



Scan for video.



# Kia Sorento

ROAD-TEST  
SCORE  
**76**

The Sorento is a little smaller than many midsize SUVs, which helps make it easy to maneuver. Yet it provides plenty of interior space and functionality, including an optional third-row seat. Its 2014 update brought a refined V6 engine, electric power steering, suspension tweaks, and a comprehensive infotainment system. With the new engine, we measured 20 mpg overall in our tests, which is above average for this class.

## Slick power, rough ride

The Sorento's cabin is a good deal quieter than that of many small SUVs. Though the ride has been improved, it remains stiff. Handling is very secure but not really agile. The new steering system is responsive, but it conveys scant feedback. When we pushed the Sorento to its handling limits, the stability control system intervened early, keeping things in control, and it performed well in our avoidance maneuver.

We suggest you choose the slick and powerful 3.3-liter V6. The base LX version comes with a raspy 2.4-liter, direct-injected four-cylinder engine that delivers less power while getting roughly the same overall fuel economy. Both engines come with a smooth six-speed automatic transmission.

The all-wheel-drive system is unobtrusive. You can lock the center differential for extra traction on sand and mud, but the Sorento

is no boulder-hopper. Towing capacity is 3,500 pounds, which is average for this class.

## Open atmosphere

The cabin feels airy thanks to the optional panoramic sunroof. Wood and leather details are nice, but most surfaces are hard plastic. Drivers sit up high with plenty of room, and everything is within easy reach. But some of our drivers wanted the steering wheel to telescope closer to their bodies.

The big front seats are supportive and have many power adjustments, including lumbar. The second row is comfortable and slides forward to accommodate third-row passengers. But that third row is tight and suitable only for small kids.

Gauges are straightforward, combining analog and digital displays, and controls are clear. Radio and climate functions are big and mounted high, with knobs and buttons for basic functions. Radio presets are located on the well-designed touch screen.

Bluetooth pairing is easy, and audio streaming works well. But if you want song details such as the artist, album, or title, you'll need to connect through an iPhone or iPod.

Kia uses Microsoft's UVO voice-recognition system, which can help in trip planning. If you register for UVO's eServices, for example, you can plot your destinations on a computer and input the route and points of interest into the car's navigation system.

Our EX came with automatic dual-zone climate control and heated and cooled front seats. But the steering wheel isn't heated.

Cargo space is generous, and there's a flush rear sill for easy loading. The versatile second-row bench splits 40/20/40 so that you can fold just the center section, leaving two seats available for passengers. The liftgate is powered.



**SMALL ADDITION** The tiny third-row seat expands the Sorento's functionality.

## Tested vehicle

<b>HIGHS</b>	Powertrain, fuel economy, optional third-row seat, lots of features, access, controls
<b>LOWS</b>	Ride, agility
<b>TRIM LINE</b>	EX
<b>DRIVETRAIN</b>	290-hp, 3.3-liter V6 engine; six-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive
<b>MAJOR OPTIONS</b>	Navigation, ventilated front seats, blind-spot detection, panoramic sunroof, power liftgate, third-row seat, trailer hitch
<b>TESTED PRICE</b>	\$37,950

## The Sorento line

<b>OTHER TRIMS</b>	Limited, LX, SX
<b>OTHER DRIVETRAINS</b>	191-hp, 2.4-liter four-cylinder engine; front-wheel drive
<b>BASE PRICES</b>	\$24,100-\$39,800

## More test findings

<b>BRAKING</b>	Very good.
<b>HEADLIGHTS</b>	Low beams provide good visibility but a streaky pattern. High beams shine an adequate distance but aren't as good as many others.
<b>ACCESS</b>	Easy to the front and rear.
<b>VISIBILITY</b>	Good; big windows but thick roof pillars intrude a little.
<b>CABIN STORAGE</b>	Convenient nooks and bins.
<b>HEAD RESTRAINTS</b>	The second-row center restraint is too low for adequate protection.
<b>CHILD SEATS</b>	Kia's seatback positioning requirement for LATCH installation can hamper the fit of some forward-facing seats.



Scan for video.







 Recommended

# Chevrolet Equinox

**ROAD-TEST SCORE**  
**66**

Despite a mild freshening for 2013, the Equinox comes across as outdated compared with the best models in this class. It still has several strong points, including a roomy interior and comfortable ride. But even with the newly available 3.6-liter V6 engine, it feels underpowered and gets a mediocre 18 mpg overall. Handling is sound, but it doesn't stand out.

Along with its GMC Terrain twin, the Equinox scored a 66 in our tests, just over the cutoff for being recommended. A better bet is the Kia Sorento, which has slicker powertrains and an optional third-row seat.

## Lethargic cruiser

Though the Equinox got quick acceleration times at our track, it feels sluggish in routine driving. To squeeze out the best fuel economy, the transmission tends to choose higher gears and is reluctant to downshift. And it's not particularly smooth when shifting.

We got a thrifty 21 mpg overall from the carryover 2.4-liter four-cylinder engine, but it sounds somewhat rough and feels overworked.

The Equinox's pliant suspension provides a smooth ride. And the cabin is reasonably quiet, although the V6 can sound coarse.

The steering provides appropriate feedback, but the Equinox is not very agile. When pushed to its handling limits, it exhibited significant body lean and was short on tire grip, but it proved ultimately secure, posting a decent speed in our avoidance maneuver.

## Big interior

Our LTZ's cabin is eye-catching, with two-tone, heated leather seats and red accents. But it's constructed of cheap-feeling materials and hard plastics. At this price, we expect a padded dashboard and door panels.

Most people will find plenty of room and

a good driving position behind the tilt-and-telescopic steering wheel. The front seats are wide, well padded, and supportive, with a power lumbar adjustment. Even three adults will fit in the roomy rear, which provides generous leg room.

Our top-trim Equinox LTZ came standard with electronic safety features such as forward-collision and lane-departure warning systems, and a backup camera. But it also lacks some expected amenities, such as a push-button ignition, dual-zone climate control, and blind-spot monitoring.

The center touch-screen display is rather small and is a long reach away. A hood positioned over the display is intended to reduce glare, but it also blocks part of the screen. The touch screen's radio controls are reasonably intuitive.

You have to take your hand off the wheel to scroll through trip computer functions. Center dashboard controls are jumbled together. And climate controls use big knobs but small buttons.

The MyLink system makes it easy to wirelessly pair a phone with Bluetooth and use it hands-free. It also provides a voice-command interface and Pandora Internet radio. When used along with a satellite radio subscription, MyLink can provide local fuel prices, weather forecasts, and movie times.

In the LTZ trim, the Equinox comes with a standard power liftgate. The cargo area has tie-downs, a cargo net, and two handy bins in the side to contain smaller items.



**LUXURY LOUNGE** Six-footers can stretch out in the rear seat.



**GATE CHANGE** You can set the height of the power liftgate, which is standard on LTZ versions.

## Tested vehicle

<b>HIGHS</b>	Acceleration, ride, roomy rear seat, access
<b>LOWS</b>	Visibility, sluggish feel, value
<b>TRIM LINE</b>	LTZ AWD
<b>DRIVETRAIN</b>	292-hp, 3.6-liter V6 engine; six-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive
<b>MAJOR OPTIONS</b>	18-inch chrome wheels, sunroof
<b>TESTED PRICE</b>	\$36,925

## The Equinox line

<b>OTHER TRIMS</b>	LS, 1LT, 2LT
<b>OTHER DRIVETRAINS</b>	182-hp, 2.4-liter four-cylinder engine; front-wheel drive
<b>BASE PRICES</b>	\$24,225-\$32,735

## More test findings

<b>BRAKING</b>	Short stopping distances.
<b>HEADLIGHTS</b>	Reach is only fair, reducing driver's ability to react in time.
<b>ACCESS</b>	Easy, with a flush door sill and large doors.
<b>VISIBILITY</b>	Very thick windshield and rear-window pillars. Small rear window. Most trims have a standard backup camera.
<b>CABIN STORAGE</b>	Lots of large and convenient storage bins.
<b>HEAD RESTRAINTS</b>	The rear-center position has no restraint, and the seatback is not tall enough to provide adequate protection.
<b>CHILD SEATS</b>	Non-removable head restraints can interfere with the fit of forward-facing child seats.



Scan for video.



# Buick Encore

ROAD-TEST  
SCORE  
**64**

The Encore is a luxurious subcompact SUV that's notably smaller than models such as the Honda CR-V and Toyota RAV4.

Based on the Chevrolet Sonic, its footprint is about the size of a Volkswagen Beetle. That's great for parking and tight maneuvers, but it makes for a narrow, cramped interior. And even with a small 1.4-liter, four-cylinder engine, the Encore only gets 23 mpg overall, which is the same as the CR-V and notably less than the Subaru Forester's 26 or the Mazda CX-5's 25.

The Encore has some commendable traits, including a quiet, well-equipped cabin and a smooth ride. But it's slow and has a tight driving position. And the ovoid design, with its small, high rear windows and thick pillars, creates numerous blind spots. Those and other demerits weigh down its test score, keeping the Encore just below our cutoff for being recommended.

Compared with the price of loaded leather-lined versions of small SUVs that are larger than the Encore, the \$30,555 we paid for it seems too much for what you get. Despite some upscale features such as a heated steering wheel, it lacks other expected items, including power seatback recline.

## Pokey powertrain

The Encore's engine is adequate for loafing around, but it falls short when more power is demanded. Mated to a six-speed automatic transmission, the engine often struggles, and its 11-second 0-to-60-mph sprint time is well off the pace. Downshifts come reluctantly, making power delivery a bit uneven. Lighter front-wheel-drive versions might fare better.

Routine handling is sound though unexceptional, as the tall, narrow stance compromises agility. But turn-in response is reasonably prompt, body lean is fairly well contained, and the steering is well weighted and conveys decent feedback. In our avoidance maneuver, the Encore posted a high speed and felt surefooted, and stability control kicked in appropriately.

Unlike many small SUVs, the Encore mutes road imperfections quite well and cruises smoothly on the highway. The interior is notably quiet overall, but the gruff engine can make its presence known.

## Chichi cabin

The interior is eye-catching, with contrasting colored stitching, padded panels, faux wood, chrome accents, and a trendy brown and terra-cotta color scheme.

Drivers sit high and upright behind the tilt-and-telescopic steering wheel, but the narrow cabin practically makes the driver and passenger rub shoulders. Front-seat cushioning might be too soft for long trips, and thigh support is scant. Sitting in the rear seat feels like holing up in a cave, making it very hard for kids to see out, though two adults will manage to fit.

The displays can be improved. Sparse speedometer markings can make it hard to read your speed, and the center screen display is too far away from the driver.

Pairing a phone via Bluetooth is easy, and the navigation system works well. But the radio and climate control buttons are tightly clustered, and the Encore's screen is not touch-activated. You must make selections through a central knob that doubles as the radio's tune control. The infotainment system can stream Pandora and Stitcher Internet radio from your mobile phone. And voice commands work well.

Two suitcases and a duffel bag will fit in the rear cargo area. The rear bench splits 60/40 to make more room, but you'll need to slide the front seats forward to fold them. The front passenger seat also folds flat for longer items.



**TUNNEL VISION** Small windows and thick pillars hamper the rear view out.



**WIRED UP** Connectivity options are plentiful and easy to use.

## Tested vehicle

<b>HIGHS</b>	Ride, quietness, braking, maneuverability, upscale features
<b>LOWS</b>	Acceleration, driving position, narrow cabin, rear visibility, value
<b>TRIM LINE</b>	Leather
<b>DRIVETRAIN</b>	138-hp, 1.4-liter turbocharged four-cylinder engine; six-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive
<b>MAJOR OPTIONS</b>	Sunroof, navigation
<b>TESTED PRICE</b>	\$30,555

## The Encore line

<b>OTHER TRIMS</b>	Base, Convenience, Premium
<b>OTHER DRIVETRAIN</b>	Front-wheel drive
<b>BASE PRICES</b>	\$24,200-\$29,690

## More test findings

<b>BRAKING</b>	Excellent, with very short stops.
<b>HEADLIGHTS</b>	Low and high beams provide very good levels of visibility.
<b>ACCESS</b>	Easy to the front and tighter to the rear.
<b>VISIBILITY</b>	Restricted to the rear by thick pillars and a small rear window. Side door mirrors have wide-angle sections to help spot cars in blind zones.
<b>CABIN STORAGE</b>	Generous, with two glove boxes and many bins.
<b>HEAD RESTRAINTS</b>	The center-rear restraint is too short to provide protection.
<b>CHILD SEATS</b>	Rear-facing seats can be hard to secure with the seat belt alone. LATCH anchors are available but hard to access.



Scan for video.



# Volkswagen Jetta Hybrid & Toyota Prius Plug-in

One delivers economical fun, the other underdelivers

**I F YOU'RE EYEING** a hybrid as a way to stretch your fuel dollars, your choice has gotten a lot more complicated in recent years. Roughly 25 conventional hybrids are now on the market, with more showing up regularly. They include the new 2013 Jetta Hybrid, one of the most engaging hybrids we've driven.

In addition, a new wave of plug-in hybrids can further cut your driving costs if they fit your driving habits. But even these models vary significantly. For example, the Chevrolet Volt, the first plug-in hybrid, runs entirely on electricity until the battery becomes depleted and a small gas engine kicks in. We averaged about 35 miles in electric mode, which would let many people commute gas-free by charging every night.

The Toyota Prius Plug-in operates differently. With a full charge it runs on electric power for a limited number of miles under most driving conditions, but it isn't gas-free. Heavier acceleration, hills, and hot or cold ambient temperatures typically cause the gas engine to kick in even when the car is in electric mode. We got about 12 miles in

the electric mode, during which we measured the equivalent of 67 mpg. But in normal hybrid mode, fuel economy dropped to 43 mpg, one less than the regular Prius.

The Plug-In starts around \$32,000, about \$5,000 more than a similarly equipped Prius, before a \$2,500 federal tax rebate. The Advanced trim we bought was \$40,510,

prompting one tester to sum it up as "too little, too late, and for too much money."

Still, the Prius Plug-in is practical and efficient, and with its excellent reliability, we recommend it. Although the Jetta Hybrid's test score was higher, it's too new for us to have reliability data, so we can't recommend it.

## Ratings Fuel-efficient cars

All tested models In performance order.

Recommended

● Excellent  
● Very good  
○ Good  
● Fair  
● Poor

Rec.	Rank	Make & model	Price as tested	Overall road-test score	Predicted reliability	In this issue	Overall mpg
				0 100 P   F   G   VG   E			
✓	1	Toyota Prius Four	\$29,230	79	●		44
	2	Volkswagen Jetta Hybrid SE	28,055	79	new	●	37
✓	3	Toyota Prius Plug-in Advanced	40,510	71	●	●	67 <sup>1</sup> / 43 <sup>2</sup>
✓	4	Volkswagen Jetta TDI	25,100	68	○		34
✓	5	Chevrolet Volt	43,700	68	●		99 <sup>1</sup> / 32 <sup>2</sup>
✓	6	Honda Civic Hybrid	25,140	66	●		40

<sup>1</sup> Miles-per-gallon equivalent (MPGe) in electric mode. <sup>2</sup> Miles per gallon while running on gas engine.



Volkswagen Jetta Hybrid



Toyota Prius Plug-in



# Volkswagen Jetta Hybrid

ROAD-TEST  
SCORE  
**79**

The Jetta Hybrid may not be the most efficient gas/electric car we've tested, but it is one of the most enjoyable and engaging to drive. Its thrifty 37 mpg overall is the same as we measured in the Ford C-Max Hybrid, but it's not quite up to the Toyota Prius' 44 or the Honda Civic Hybrid's 40. Still, it's a nicer all-around car to drive than the Prius or Civic, with responsive handling, a comfortable ride, a quiet interior, and a spacious rear seat with generous leg room.

But the Jetta has drawbacks. Its regenerative braking system results in a touchy brake pedal. The battery pack eats into the trunk space. Premium fuel is required, which cuts into the cost savings. And our \$28,055 Jetta Hybrid SE lacks some features we expect for that price, such as a full-power driver's seat and heated front seats.

If you're comparing this model with the diesel-powered Jetta TDI, here's the scoop. The Hybrid gets 3 mpg more than the TDI's 34 overall and is nicer to drive. The TDI costs about \$3,000 less and has a roomier trunk.

For about the same price as the Jetta Hybrid, you could get a roomier midsize car, such as the Ford Fusion Hybrid (39 mpg overall), Toyota Camry Hybrid (38), or the diesel-powered Volkswagen Passat TDI (37).

## High-tech showcase

The Jetta Hybrid sports a lot of cutting-edge technology. Its electric motor is powered by a lithium-ion battery, and it's coupled with a 1.4-liter turbocharged, direct-injected engine and a smooth seven-speed, dual-clutch automated manual transmission.

To save fuel, the Jetta easily runs on electric power alone up to about 35 mph and shuts off the gas engine when coasting. The start/stop system turns off the engine when the car comes to a stop, but it restarts with a slight shudder.

The transmission's operation feels more



"natural" than that of the continuously variable transmissions used in other hybrids. But when starting on an incline, it may let the car roll back a bit, which is disconcerting.

The Hybrid rides very comfortably and handles better than any Jetta sedan we've tested, except for the GLI sporty version. When pushed to its handling limits, the Hybrid was well balanced and posted a commendable speed through our avoidance maneuver.

Noise is kept to a minimum in the hushed, well-isolated cabin.

The interior is fairly basic, with leatherette seats that are cold in the winter and sticky in the summer; real leather isn't available. But the cabin offers generous head, leg, and foot room. The wide front seats provide good support and include a manual lumbar adjustment. Some drivers felt that the telescoping steering wheel took more fiddling than usual to get the correct position.

Gauges are big and legible, and controls are simple. SE and higher trims use a touch-screen radio with a large display, big onscreen buttons, and easy-to-read letters. It also includes a colorful energy-flow diagram. There are separate knobs for volume and tuning.

Pairing a phone via Bluetooth is overly complicated, and voice commands weren't always recognized. "Aux" and "media in" jacks let you connect a smart phone or music player. You can also play media through an SD card slot. We think it's worth the \$1,995 upgrade to get an SE version for the touch-screen radio and USB interface, among other upgrades.

## Tested vehicle

<b>HIGHS</b>	Fuel economy, quietness, ride, transmission, roomy rear seat
<b>LOWS</b>	Touchy brake pedal, requires premium fuel, small trunk, can roll back on hills
<b>TRIM LINE</b>	SE
<b>DRIVETRAIN</b>	170-hp, 1.4-liter turbocharged four-cylinder engine with electric motor; seven-speed automated manual transmission; front-wheel drive
<b>MAJOR OPTIONS</b>	None
<b>TESTED PRICE</b>	\$28,055

## More test findings

<b>BRAKING</b>	Performance was sound, but the brake pedal is very touchy, especially at lower speeds and in stop-and-go traffic.
<b>HEADLIGHTS</b>	Low-beam lights provide only fair levels of forward and side illumination. Brightness and reach are modest. High beams improve intensity and illuminate far forward.
<b>ACCESS</b>	Large front doors provide easy access to the front seats. Rear access is fairly good despite a tall sill.
<b>VISIBILITY</b>	Very good, thanks to the generous glass area and thin windshield pillars. Rear roof pillars and head restraints intrude somewhat into rear visibility. A backup camera is available only on the SEL Premium.
<b>CABIN STORAGE</b>	Moderate, with a medium-sized bin between the front seats. The glove box is cooled.
<b>HEAD RESTRAINTS</b>	The center-rear head restraint must be raised to provide adequate protection.
<b>CHILD SEATS</b>	To install some forward-facing seats, the rear head restraint may need to be removed, which requires a special tool.



Scan for video.



**LIMITED SPACE** The hybrid battery takes up some trunk room but leaves a well to hold items.



# Toyota Prius Plug-in Recommended

**ROAD-TEST  
SCORE**  
**71**

The Toyota Prius, at 44 mpg overall, has been our Top Pick in green cars for 10 straight years because it combines excellent gas mileage with a roomy, versatile interior and excellent reliability. The new Plug-in model, with a larger battery, is intended to crank up the efficiency another notch by letting the car run on electric power more of the time. It does that for a short distance, but unlike the Chevrolet Volt, it doesn't operate as a pure-electric car. Even in its "electric" mode, the gasoline engine can kick in if you apply more than a light touch on the accelerator or if you're climbing a moderate grade.

With a full charge, which takes about 3.5 hours through a common household outlet or 1.5 hours on a 240-volt connector, we've been able to drive the Prius Plug-in only about 12 miles before it reverts to normal hybrid operation. In the EV mode, we got the equivalent of 67 mpg, counting both the electric energy and gasoline. But when the car reverts to normal hybrid operation, gas mileage dropped to 43 mpg overall, still excellent but slightly less than the regular Prius because of the extra battery weight.

That extra weight, along with the use of different tires, may have also accounted for differences in handling performance, which helped drag down the Plug-in's test score from a 79 to a 71.

Overall, the token increase in efficiency isn't worth the higher price. If you want a car that truly benefits from plug-in capability, consider a Chevrolet Volt or Ford C-Max Energi, which are nicer cars that let you drive gas-free for longer distances.

## Not much flash

Overall, the Prius Plug-in is very similar to the regular Prius. It rides well enough, but underlying firmness is notable. It handles soundly but isn't particularly agile. The steering is responsive but devoid of feedback, and some testers likened it to a video game.



At the mid-\$20,000 price of a regular Prius, we're willing to put up with the car's fairly basic interior. But when you hit the \$40,000 tag of our Plug-in Advanced, the interior quality is unbecoming. On the plus side, interior components are well assembled and most panels fit together nicely.

Drivers will find ample room. A power seat is welcome, but the steering wheel didn't telescope far enough out for most people. The rear seat is very accommodating.

Digital displays mounted high on the dash are fairly large and easy to read. And an optional heads-up display can show speed and other info on the windshield. Most controls are straightforward. But some onscreen buttons are small and crammed together. The electronic shifter takes some getting used to. The touch screen shows a colorful power-flow diagram.

Pairing a phone via Bluetooth is simple, and you can operate an iPhone or iPod with buttons on the steering wheel. When Toyota's Entune infotainment system is connected with a compatible smart phone, it lets you use apps such as iHeartRadio, Open Table, Pandora, and others; some features are locked out when the car is moving to reduce distraction.

Voice commands are convenient for using navigation, phone functions, and SiriusXM Travel Link, which lets you check gas prices, weather, traffic information, and more. The navigation system can also guide you to charging stations.

## Tested vehicle

<b>HIGHS</b>	Fuel economy, rear seat, access, reliability
<b>LOWS</b>	No true electric-only propulsion, agility, fit and finish, rear visibility
<b>TRIM LINE</b>	Plug-in Advanced
<b>DRIVETRAIN</b>	134-hp, 1.8-liter four-cylinder engine with electric motor; continuously variable transmission; front-wheel drive
<b>MAJOR OPTIONS</b>	None
<b>TESTED PRICE</b>	\$40,510

## More test findings

<b>BRAKING</b>	Short stopping distances and a normal pedal feel from the regenerative braking system.
<b>HEADLIGHTS</b>	Standard LED low beams are super-white and bright but do not illuminate far enough ahead to give drivers enough time to react.
<b>ACCESS</b>	Large door openings, high seats, and shallow sills make access to the front seats very easy. Assist grips are mounted above each door.
<b>VISIBILITY</b>	Thick pillars limit the view all around, and a horizontal bar divides the rear window. A backup camera is standard.
<b>CABIN STORAGE</b>	Moderate, including two glove boxes and a large, shallow bin under the center console.
<b>HEAD RESTRAINTS</b>	Active front restraints move forward in a rear collision to reduce head travel and whiplash injury. The rear-center restraint must be fully raised.
<b>CHILD SEATS</b>	Rear outboard seats have two lower LATCH anchors, but they can be awkward to reach.



Scan for video.



## MODE SELECTOR

A button lets you defer the use of electric power.



# Compare



VERSION	Volkswagen Jetta	Toyota Prius	Jeep Grand Cherokee	Kia Sorento	Chevrolet Equinox	Buick Encore
<b>TRIM LINE</b>	Hybrid SE	Plug-in Advanced	Limited	EX	LTZ	Leather
<b>PRICE: BASE/TESTED</b> <sup>①</sup>	\$26,990/\$28,055	\$39,525/\$40,510	\$37,795/\$41,375	\$31,700/\$37,950	\$32,665/\$36,925	\$28,210/\$30,555
<b>DRIVETRAIN</b>	1.4-liter 4-cyl. (170 hp) hybrid	1.8-liter 4-cyl. (134 hp) +electric	3.6-liter V6 (290 hp)	3.3-liter V6 (290 hp)	3.6-liter V6 (292 hp)	1.4-liter 4-cyl. (138 hp) turbo
Engine						
Transmission	7-speed sequential	CVT	8-speed automatic	6-speed automatic	6-speed automatic	6-speed automatic
Drive wheels	Front	Front	4WD	AWD	AWD	AWD
<b>TIRES TESTED</b>	Continental ContiProContact E, size 195/65R15 91H	Goodyear Assurance Fuel Max Technology, size P195/65R15 89S	Michelin Latitude Tour, size P265/60R18 109T	Kumho Venture Premium, size 235/60R18 103H	Michelin Latitude Tour, size P235/55R18 99T	Continental ContiProContact, size 215/65R18 94H
Model & size						
<b>RATINGS</b>						
<b>PERFORMANCE</b>						
Acceleration	⊖	○	⊖	⊖	●	○
0 to 60 mph, sec.	8.1	10.6	8.0	7.6	7.1	11.0
45 to 65 mph, sec.	4.8	6.4	6.0	4.8	4.8	6.7
Quarter-mile, sec.	16.3	18.1	16.2	16.1	15.4	18.3
Transmission	●	●	⊖	●	●	●
Routine handling	⊖	○	○	○	○	○
Emergency handling	○	○	○	○	○	●
Avoid. maneuver, speed, mph	52.5	50.0	50.0	51.5	50.5	55.0
Braking	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	●
From 60 mph, dry/wet, ft.	138/150	139/144	134/146	135/145	138/148	127/134
Headlights	⊖	●	○	○	⊖	○
<b>COMFORT AND CONVENIENCE</b>						
Ride	⊖	○	⊖	○	⊖	⊖
Noise	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖
Driving position	⊖	○	⊖	⊖	⊖	○
Front-seat comfort	⊖	⊖	●	⊖	⊖	○
Rear-seat/Third-seat comfort	⊖	⊖	⊖	●/●	●	○
Access	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	●	⊖
Controls and displays	⊖	⊖	⊖	●	⊖	⊖
Interior fit and finish	○	○	●	⊖	⊖	⊖
Trunk/cargo area	⊖	⊖	○	○	○	⊖
<b>PREDICTED RELIABILITY</b>	New	●	○	New	⊖	New
<b>FUEL</b>						
Overall mpg	37	67 <sup>②</sup> / 43 <sup>③</sup>	18	20	18	23
City/highway mpg	29/45	69 <sup>②</sup> / 34 <sup>③</sup> , 66 <sup>②</sup> / 52 <sup>③</sup>	12/24	13/28	12/25	16/32
Type	premium	regular	regular	regular	regular	regular
Capacity, gal./Cruising range, miles	11.8/440	10.6/500	24.6/435	17.4/340	20.9/370	14.0/325
Annual cost, 12K mi. at \$3.50/gal.	\$1,190 @ \$3.70/gal.	\$890	\$2,370	\$2,140	\$2,365	\$1,820
<b>SAFETY</b>						
<b>CRASH TESTS</b>						
IIHS frontal offset	Good	Good	Good	NA	Good	Good
IIHS side	Good	Good	Good	NA	Good	Good
IIHS rear	Good	Good	Good	NA	Good	Good
IIHS roof strength	Good	Good	Good	NA	Good	Good
NHTSA front, driver/pass.	●/●	●/●	NA/NA	NA/NA	●/●	●/●
NHTSA side, driver/rear	●/●	●/●	●/●	NA/NA	●/●	●/●
NHTSA rollover 2WD/4WD	●/NA	●/NA	○/●	NA/NA	●/●	●/●
<b>AIR BAGS</b>						
Side, front/rear	std./no	std./no	std./no	std./no	std./no	std./std.
Head protection	standard	standard	std. w/rollover	std. w/rollover	std. w/rollover	standard
<b>SPECIFICATIONS</b>						
<b>DIMENSIONS AND WEIGHT</b>						
Length/width/height, in.	183/70/57	176/69/59	190/77/68	184/74/67	188/73/66	168/70/65
Wheelbase, in.	104	106	115	106	113	101
Turning circle, ft.	37	37	40	38	42	38
Ground clearance, in.	5.0	4.0	8.5	6.0	6.0	7.5
Curb weight, lb. (% front/rear)	3,190 (54/46)	3,225 (58/42)	4,900 (52/48)	4,235 (55/45)	4,155 (57/43)	3,355 (60/40)
Maximum load, lb.	1,050	825	1,050	1,120	1,040	945
Luggage, suitcases+duffels/ Cargo volume, cu. ft.	2+1	3+0	36.5	37.5	33.5	26.0
Towing capacity, lb.	NR	NR	6,200	3,500	3,500	NR
<b>INTERIOR ROOM</b>						
Front shoulder room, in.	55.0	55.0	58.0	58.5	55.0	53.0
Front leg room, in.	43.0	41.5	41.5	40.5	43.5	42.0
Front head room, in. <sup>④</sup>	4.5	5.0	4.0	3.5	4.5	4.0
Rear shoulder room, in.	53.5	52.0	57.0	57.5	55.0	49.0
Rear leg room, in.	30.0	28.0	27.0	26.5	32.0	25.5
Rear head room, in. <sup>④</sup>	2.0	2.0	4.5	2.5	4.5	4.0
Third-row shoulder room, in.	—	—	—	53.0	—	—
Third-row leg room, in.	—	—	—	25.0	—	—
Third-row head room, in.	—	—	—	0.0	—	—

<sup>①</sup> Based on sticker price at time of purchase. <sup>②</sup> Miles-per-gallon equivalent (MPGE) in electric mode. <sup>③</sup> Miles per gallon when running on gas engine. <sup>④</sup> Above a person 5'9" tall.





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## Mall? What mall?

The message on this stone fabricator's truck was clear, but the photo's sender revealed that "just like me, it was leaving the mall."

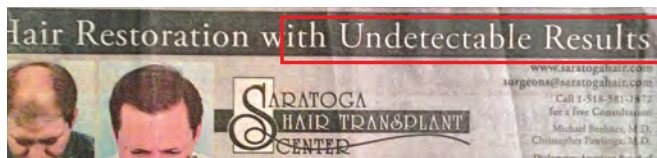


### Cooking Instructions:

Bring 2½ quarts of water to a rolling boil over high heat. Add salt to taste, if desired. Add contents of package and stir gently. Return to a boil and cook uncovered for 3-4 minutes to an internal temperature of 165°F.

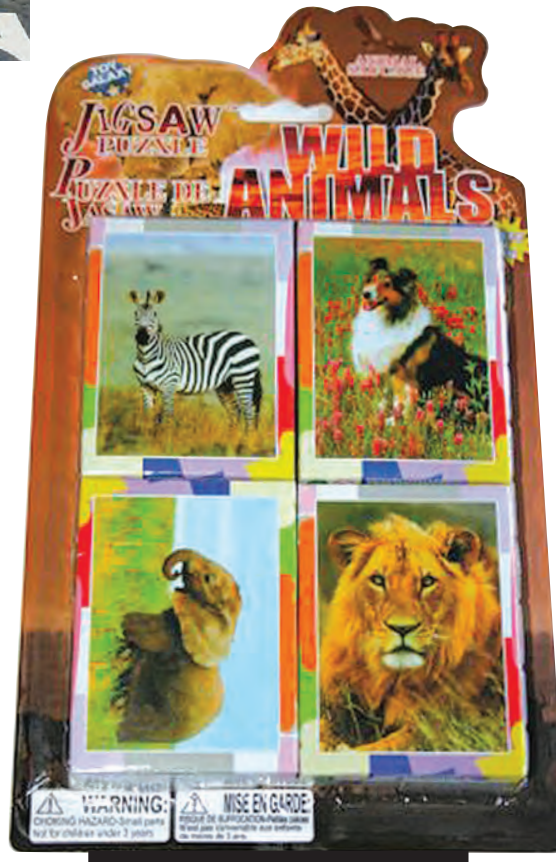
## Half-baked idea

First, buy a really teeny thermometer.



## Take a stab at it

"Sometimes the pin pricks of a voodoo doll won't do," notes Fab.com, which sells this knife holder. Still, we're not sure we'd want to dine with a chef who owns one.



## Grrrrrr

In a contest among these wild animals, we'd say Lassie loses.



## O say can you see ...

... where this shirt was made? China, it says inside.

## Step Into Your Own Fountain of Youth!



## About time, Doris!

"Bet her husband enjoyed it more!" a Tennessee reader writes.



## Speak Spanish? Sit in the dark.

Asked to shed light on these claims, a GE lighting specialist said, "I'm not sure why it would say a different amount in Spanish." He assured us the bulb would last 22.8 years.

## Hair, barely there

"Undetectable results," a New York reader points out, "might not be worth the price."

# Find out **how much to pay for a new car** with our expanded local pricing information

**The Consumer Reports New Car Price Report** shows you what others really paid, regional dealer marketing fees, and other information to help you get a great deal on a new car.

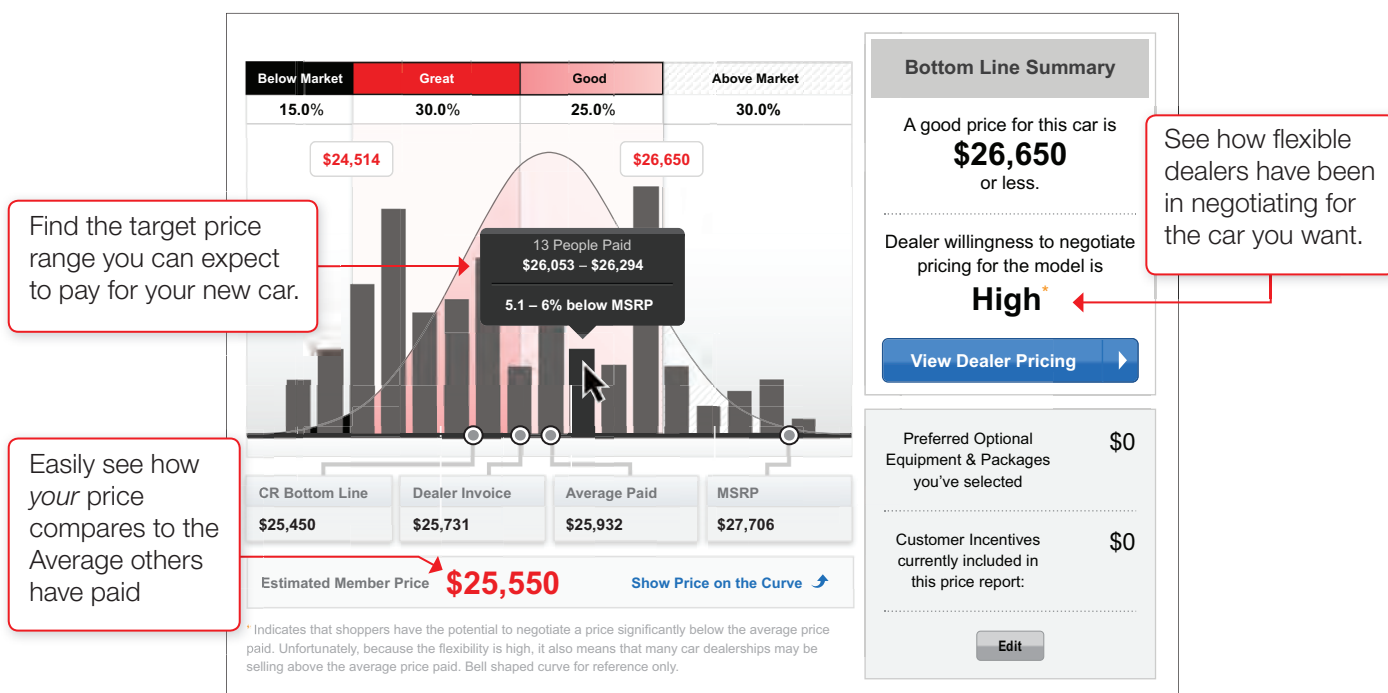
**The enhanced Report now features an easy-to-read price curve that includes:**

- Great, Good, and Above Market price ranges for your area
- The average price others paid for the same car
- The Build & Buy Service, providing a transparent car-buying experience through a network of pre-qualified dealers
- A rating of a dealer's willingness to negotiate on the model you've chosen



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CURVE813B



# Canada Extra

Information from CONSUMER REPORTS® for Canadian readers

## In this special section

Washers	32A
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## How to use the Canada Extra section


Every month, Canada Extra provides Canadian pricing and availability information about products tested for that issue. The Ratings in this section are based on this month's reports, but they narrow your choices to the products that are sold in Canada.


You can use this section in either of two ways: Start with the main report, read about the products that interest you, and turn to this section to find whether they're sold—and for what price—in Canada. Or start here, find products sold in Canada whose price and overall score appear promising, and read more about them in the main report and full Ratings chart; page numbers appear with each Canadian report. (For some products, the Canadian model designation differs slightly from the one used in the U.S.)

In most cases, the prices we list here

are the approximate retail in Canadian dollars; manufacturers' list prices are indicated by an asterisk (\*). Check marks identify CR Best Buys or recommended products in the U.S. Ratings. "NA" in a chart means that information wasn't available from the manufacturer. We include, in the Contact Info list on page 32D, the manufacturer's phone number and Web address in Canada, so that you can call or go online to get information on a model you can't find in the stores. (Many products that aren't available in Canadian stores can be bought online.)

We appreciate your support, but we don't take it for granted. Please write to [CanadaExtra@cu.consumer.org](mailto:CanadaExtra@cu.consumer.org) and tell us what you think. We can't reply to every e-mail message or implement every suggestion, but with your help we'll try to keep growing to serve your needs.

 **CR Best Buy** Products with this icon offer the best combination of performance and price. All are recommended.







 **Recommended** Models with this designation perform well and stand out for reasons we note.

## Washers Report and Ratings, pages 42-45

Recommended models only, from 131 tested.










Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score
				0 100 P   F   G   V   E

**A FRONT-LOADERS** All have large capacities. As a category, front-loaders are energy-efficient.

	1	Maytag Maxima XL YMHW6000AW	NA	90
	2	Whirlpool Duet WFW88HEAW <sup>1</sup>	\$1,200	90
	3	Samsung WF457ARGS[GR]	1,800	89
	4	LG WM8000H[V]A <sup>2</sup>	1,700	89
	5	LG WM3470H[W]A	1,300	88
	6	Whirlpool Duet WFW96HEA[W] <sup>1</sup>	1,500	87
	7	Samsung WF435ATGJ[WR]	1,600	87
	8	Whirlpool Duet WFW94HEX[W]	1,200	87
	11	LG WM3070H[W]A	1,200	87
	12	Samsung WF511AB[W]	1,300	86
	14	Samsung WF405ATPA[WR]	1,400	86

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score
				0 100 P   F   G   V   E

**B TOP-LOADERS** All are high-efficiency and have large capacities.

	1	LG WT1101CW	\$ 850	82
	2	Samsung WA422PRHD[WR]	900	82
	3	LG WT5070C[W]	1,100	81
	4	Samsung WA484DSHA[WR]	1,200	81
	6	Maytag Bravos XL MVWB750Y[W] <sup>1</sup>	1,000	79
	8	LG WT5170H[W]	1,200	78
	9	Samsung WA456DRHD[WR]	1,000	78
	10	GE GTAN8250DWS <sup>1</sup>	NA	77
	12	Maytag Bravos XL MVWB950Y[W] <sup>1</sup>	1,200	76

<sup>1</sup> Made in the U.S. <sup>2</sup> Wider than most machines.

# Dryers

Report and Ratings, pages 42-45

Recommended models only, from 185 tested.

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score
				0 100 P   F   G   V   E
✓	1	Samsung DV50F9A8EVP	\$1,200	83
✓	2	Maytag Maxima XL YMED8000AG ①	1,400	79
✓	3	LG DLEX3470[W]	1,300	79
✓	4	Samsung DV456EWH[WR]	1,000	78
✓	5	Whirlpool Duet YWED96HEAW ①	1,400	78
✓	6	Maytag Bravos X YMEDX700AG ①	900	78
✓	8	LG DLEX8000[V]	1,700	78
✓	10	LG DLEX5170[W]	1,200	78
✓	12	Whirlpool Cabrio YWED5700AC	800	78
✓	13	Samsung DV457EVGS[GR]	1,800	78

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score
				0 100 P   F   G   V   E
✓	17	LG DLEX4070W	\$1,400	77
✓	18	Kenmore 6801[2]	700	77
✓	19	Whirlpool Duet YWED94HEAW ①	1,200	77
✓	22	LG DLE2250[W]	800	76
✓	23	GE GTMS855EDMC ①	NA	76
✓	24	LG DLE1101W	850	76
✓	25	Maytag Maxima XL YMED6000AW ①	1,100	76
✓	26	LG DLEX2650[W]	1,000	76
✓	27	Whirlpool Duet WED86HEBC ①	NA	76

# Tablets

Report and Ratings, pages 24-25

Recommended models only, from 59 tested.

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score
				0 100 P   F   G   V   E

## A 7- TO 8-INCH-SCREEN TABLETS, WI-FI-ONLY Weight: 0.7 to 0.8 lb.

✓	1	Samsung Galaxy Note 8.0 (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	\$430	84
✓	2	Apple iPad Mini (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	330	81
✓	3	Google Nexus 7 (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	240	75
✓	4	Samsung Galaxy Tab 2 (7.0) (Wi-Fi, 8GB)	200	71
✓	5	Kobo Arc (Wi-Fi, 32GB)	250	68

## B 7- TO 8-INCH-SCREEN TABLET, 3G/4G+WI-FI Weight: 0.7 to 0.9 lb.

✓	1	Apple iPad Mini (Wi-Fi, 4G, 16GB)	460	85
---	---	-----------------------------------	-----	----

## C 7- TO 9-INCH-SCREEN SPECIALTY TABLETS Weight: 0.7 to 1.2 lb.

✓	2	Amazon Kindle Fire HD 8.9 (Wi-Fi, 16GB) ②	285	75
✓	3	Amazon Kindle Fire HD (Wi-Fi, 16GB) ②	215	75

## D 9- TO 12-INCH-SCREEN TABLETS, WI-FI-ONLY Weight: 1.2 to 1.6 lb.

✓	2	Apple iPad (Wi-Fi, 16GB) (4th gen.)	500	83
✓	3	Asus VivoTab RT TF600T (Wi-Fi, 32GB)	500	82

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score
				0 100 P   F   G   V   E

## D 9- TO 12-INCH-SCREEN TABLETS, WI-FI-ONLY continued

✓	5	Samsung Ativ Smart PC (Wi-Fi, 64GB)	\$700	80
✓	6	Samsung Galaxy Tab 2 (10.1) (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	350	80
✓	7	Microsoft Surface with Windows RT (Wi-Fi, 32GB)	500	80
✓	9	Dell Latitude 10 Essentials (Wi-Fi, 32GB)	525	79
✓	10	Asus Transformer Pad Infinity TF700T (Wi-Fi, 32GB)	500	78
✓	11	Dell XPS 10 (Wi-Fi, 32GB)	450	78
✓	12	Apple iPad 2 (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	400	77
✓	13	Acer Iconia W510 (Wi-Fi, 64GB)	600	77
✓	15	Asus Transformer Pad TF300T (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	350	76
✓	17	Toshiba Excite 10 SE (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	400	75

## E 9- TO 12-INCH-SCREEN TABLETS, 3G/4G+WI-FI Weight: 1.2 to 1.5 lb.

✓	1	Apple iPad (Wi-Fi, 4G, 16GB) (4th gen.)	630	85
✓	6	Apple iPad 2 (Wi-Fi, 3G, 16GB)	530	80

② Price includes optional wall charger, \$10.



# Basic cameras

Report and Ratings, pages 26-27

Recommended models only, from 134 tested.

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score
				0 100 P   F   G   VG   E

## A SUBCOMPACT Fits in a purse or pocket.

✓	2	Nikon Coolpix P330	\$400	63
✓	3	Nikon Coolpix S800c	330	60
✓	5	Nikon Coolpix S6500	230	57
✓	6	Canon PowerShot ELPH 110 HS	190	57

## B COMPACT Simple to use, with advanced features.

✓	1	Olympus Stylus XZ-10 iHS	400	65
✓	4	Fujifilm XF1	300	57
✓	5	Nikon Coolpix L610	200	57
✓	6	Canon PowerShot S110	430	55

## C SUPERZOOM Has an extremely versatile zoom lens.

✓	1	Panasonic Lumix DMC-ZS30	400	64
✓	2	Olympus Stylus SP-820UZ iHS	300	62

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score
				0 100 P   F   G   VG   E

## C SUPERZOOM continued

✓	5	Nikon Coolpix P520	\$450	59
✓	6	Nikon Coolpix L820	280	59
✓	7	Leica V-Lux 40	700	59
✓	9	Panasonic Lumix DMC-FZ60	400	58
✓	15	Leica V-Lux 30	800	56

## D RUGGED AND WATERPROOF Designed to resist water and shocks.

✓	1	Panasonic Lumix DMC-TS5	400	58
✓	2	Olympus Stylus TG-830 iHS	280	57
✓	3	Nikon Coolpix AW110	380	56
✓	5	Olympus Stylus TG-2 iHS	380	53
✓	6	Canon PowerShot D20	350	53
✓	8	Olympus Stylus TG-630 iHS	200	52

# Advanced cameras

Report and Ratings, pages 28-29

Recommended models only, from 73 tested.

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score
				0 100 P   F   G   VG   E

## A POINT-AND-SHOOT Has a built-in lens and SLR-like features.

✓	2	Panasonic Lumix DMC-FZ200	\$ 600	69
✓	3	Panasonic Lumix DMC-LX7	480	66
✓	4	Canon PowerShot G15	530	65
✓	5	Fujifilm X20	600	65
✓	6	Pentax MX-1	450	65
✓	7	Olympus Stylus XZ-2 iHS	600	64
✓	8	Sony Cyber-shot DSC-RX100	700	62

## B SLR-LIKE Smaller and lighter than an SLR; uses removable lenses.

✓	1	Panasonic Lumix DMC-GH3	1,300	72
✓	2	Panasonic Lumix DMC-G5K	800	69
✓	3	Olympus OM-D E-M5	1,300	68
✓	5	Samsung EV-NX300ZBSCA	900	68
✓	6	Sony NEX3NLB	500	67
✓	8	Samsung EV-NX20ZBSCA	1,100	66
✓	10	Sony NEX7KB	1,250	65

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score
				0 100 P   F   G   VG   E

## B SLR-LIKE continued

✓	13	Sony SLT-A77V	\$1,000	65
✓	14	Olympus Pen Mini E-PM2	500	64
✓	15	Sony NEX6LB	900	64
✓	16	Panasonic Lumix DMC-GF5X	800	63

## C SLR Has the most advanced features and removable lenses.

✓	1	Nikon D7100	1,550	72
✓	2	Canon EOS 60D	1,330	71
✓	4	Nikon D7000	1,300	70
✓	5	Canon EOS Rebel T3i	700	70
✓	6	Canon EOS 7D Digital	2,200	69
✓	8	Canon EOS Rebel T3	550	67
✓	10	Nikon D5200	930	66
✓	11	Nikon D3200	650	66
✓	12	Nikon D3100	530	65
✓	13	Pentax K-30	730	65
✓	15	Nikon D5100	650	65

# Autos

Report and Ratings, pages 52-60

All of the tested vehicles are available in Canada.

Make & model	Price range	Acceleration (sec.)				Fuel economy (liters per 100 km)		
		0-50km/h	0-100 km/h	80-100 km/h	500 meters	City driving	Highway driving	Overall
MIDSIZED SUVs								
Jeep Grand Cherokee	\$39,995-\$62,995	3.1	8.5	4.2	18.6	19.1	9.8	13.3
Kia Sorento	28,695-41,795	3.1	8.0	3.5	18.5	18.0	8.4	12.0
Chevrolet Equinox	26,935-36,005	2.6	7.5	3.7	17.6	19.4	9.6	13.3
LUXURY COMPACT SUV								
Buick Encore	27,130-34,455	4.0	11.7	4.5	21.1	15.1	7.3	10.2
FUEL-EFFICIENT CARS								
Volkswagen Jetta Hybrid	14,990-28,990	3.4	8.6	3.5	18.7	8.1	5.3	6.3
Toyota Prius Plug-in	26,100-35,700	4.0	11.4	4.8	20.8	6.1	4.3	5.0

# Smart phones

Report and Ratings, pages 22-23

Here are recommended and rated phones that are available in Canada, listed by their Canadian carrier. Performance and features might vary from tested models.

## Bell Mobility

- ✓ Apple iPhone 4S (16GB), \$80 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ Apple iPhone 5 (16GB), \$180 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ Apple iPhone 5 (32GB), \$230 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ Apple iPhone 5 (64GB), \$280 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ BlackBerry Q10, \$200 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ BlackBerry Z10, \$150 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ HTC One (32GB), \$150 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ LG Optimus G, \$50 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ Samsung Galaxy Note II (16GB), \$150 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ Samsung Galaxy S III (16GB), \$100 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ Samsung Galaxy S 4 (16GB), \$200 <sup>1</sup>

## Fido Solutions

- ✓ Apple iPhone 4S (16GB), \$80 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ Apple iPhone 5 (16GB), \$180 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ Apple iPhone 5 (32GB), \$230 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ Apple iPhone 5 (64GB), \$380 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ BlackBerry Q10, \$350 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ BlackBerry Z10, \$350 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ Samsung Galaxy S III (16GB), \$150 <sup>2</sup>
- ✓ Samsung Galaxy S 4 (16GB), \$450 <sup>2</sup>
- Rogers Wireless**
- ✓ Apple iPhone 4S (16GB), \$80 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ Apple iPhone 5 (16GB), \$180 <sup>1</sup>

- ✓ Apple iPhone 5 (32GB), \$230 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ Apple iPhone 5 (64GB), \$280 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ BlackBerry Q10, \$200 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ BlackBerry Z10, \$150 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ HTC One (32GB), \$150 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ HTC Windows Phone 8X (16GB), \$30 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ LG Optimus G, \$0 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ Motorola Droid Razr HD, \$0 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ Nokia Lumia 920, \$20 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ Samsung Galaxy Note, \$0 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ Samsung Galaxy Note II (16GB), \$150 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ Samsung Galaxy S III (16GB), \$100 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ Samsung Galaxy S 4 (16GB), \$200 <sup>1</sup>

## Telus Mobility

- ✓ Apple iPhone 4S (16GB), \$80 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ Apple iPhone 5 (16GB), \$180 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ Apple iPhone 5 (32GB), \$230 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ Apple iPhone 5 (64GB), \$280 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ BlackBerry Q10, \$200 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ BlackBerry Z10, \$150 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ HTC One (32GB), \$150 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ HTC One X+ (64GB), \$0 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ LG Optimus G, \$0 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ Samsung Galaxy Note II, \$150 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ Samsung Galaxy S III (16GB), \$100 <sup>1</sup>
- ✓ Samsung Galaxy S 4 (16GB), \$200 <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 3-year contract. <sup>2</sup> 2-year contract.

# Contact info

How to reach manufacturers in Canada.

**Acer**  
800-565-2237  
acer.ca

**Amazon**  
amazon.ca

**Apple**  
800-692-7753  
apple.com/ca

**Asus**  
888-678-3698  
ca.asus.com

**Canon**  
800-828-4040  
canon.ca

**Dell**  
800-999-3355  
dell.ca

**Fujifilm**  
800-263-5018  
fujifilm.ca

**GE**  
888-261-2088  
geappliances.ca

**Google**  
855-836-3987  
google.com

**Kobo**  
855-732-3662  
kobo.com

**Leica**  
800-222-0118  
leica-camera.com

**LG**  
888-542-2623  
lg.ca

**Maytag**  
800-688-2002  
maytag.ca

**Microsoft**  
855-575-5142  
microsoft.com

**Nikon**  
800-645-6689  
nikon.ca

**Olympus**  
800-622-6372  
olympuscanada.com

**Panasonic**  
800-561-5505  
panasonic.ca

**Pentax**  
pentax.ca

**Samsung**  
800-726-7864  
samsung.ca

**Sony**  
877-899-7669  
store.sony.ca

**Toshiba**  
800-867-4422  
toshiba.ca

**Whirlpool**  
800-807-6777  
whirlpoolappliances.ca