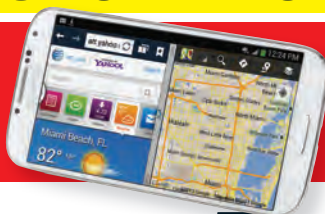


► SPECIAL 25-PAGE SECTION ► TOP KITCHEN VALUES

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The Kitchen of Your Dreams

► Best & worst deals in appliances,
countertops, flooring & more



Plus Don't fall for useless credit scores PAGE 15

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▶ Savings this issue

\$1,600

Buy a Thermador Freedom Collection T36BB820SS **built-in refrigerator** instead of a \$9,000 Sub-Zero BI-36UFD to save this amount.

\$750

Buy a Kenmore Elite 12783 **dishwasher** for \$1,200 instead of a Viking Professional VDB451 and save this much.

\$30

Fly on Southwest for your next **airline trip** instead of Spirit and save at least this much on your standard checked-baggage fee.

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Coming in August

Tablet computers, cameras, smart phones, and other mobile devices; how to haggle; eyeglass chains; handheld and stick vacuums; washers and dryers; and laundry detergents.

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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.

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 • To send a letter to the editor, go to ConsumerReports.org/lettertoeditor.
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 • For subscription information, go to ConsumerReports.org/magazine or call 800-666-5261. See page 65 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

Info, please

In "101 Secrets From Our Experts" (May 2013) you say you should never wash or rinse raw chicken in the sink so that germs don't contaminate other items. So where do you wash it?

—Ray Failor Wadsworth, OH

Editor's note Washing poultry doesn't necessarily remove all bacteria. They're killed only by cooking chicken to the proper temperature. Remove chicken from the package and put it directly on a cutting board or in a cooking dish.

One of your 101 tips recommended avoiding the Arial font, as it uses more ink than Times



New Roman and others. I don't particularly like Times New Roman. Are there other economical fonts?

—Robert Sutherland Whitman, MA

In our tests, Calibri and Century Gothic also used less ink than Arial.

No comparison

One has to wonder about drug pricing when one chain sells a drug for \$17 and another sells it for \$150 ("Same Generic Drug, Many Prices," May 2013). Drive-through windows, auto-refills, and 24-hour service don't justify the difference. I don't advocate price controls, but the government should examine this, as

it affects seniors who fall into the Medicare Part D prescription doughnut hole.

—John Ngai Rego Park, NY

Pet peeves

In "10 Ways to Get More Shut-eye" (Mattresses, May 2013), I was amused to read the reasons that pets disrupt sleep: snoring, getting on and off the bed, taking up space—everything humans do! Maybe we should all sleep alone.

—Sheila Richardson New York

Correction In Safety Alerts in May 2013, we should have advised to check CO (carbon monoxide), not CO₂ (carbon dioxide), detectors.

SEND YOUR LETTERS TO
ConsumerReports.org/lettertoeditor.

Ask our experts

Q Is it possible to overcharge a laptop?

—James Maxim Cuba, NY

Laptops we've tested have "smart chargers" that monitor the battery level and stop charging when it's full. What's more, it's good practice to keep your laptop connected to its charger when possible. Laptop processors usually slow down when running on battery power to extend the battery time, cutting performance.

Q When I signed up in 2001 for my checking account, they offered "free checking for life." In 2012, they started charging fees. How can they do that?

—Gary Bortner Plymouth, MN

Bank fees are generally governed by the account-opening agreement, which usually states that the terms, including fees, may change at any time. Banks aren't prohibited from changing or adding fees as long as consumers get at least 30 days' notice. Check your original paperwork carefully. Many credit unions and small banks offer free checking and excellent deals. They frequently offer a lot of ATM options through networks with other institutions, often free of charge.

Q My new dryer recommends that lint be removed from inside the dryer cabinet every two years by a qualified servicer. I never had to do this with my 20-year-old dryer. Is it really necessary?

—Mary Ann Mack Phoenixville, PA

Your old dryer manual probably recommended removing lint from the cabinet. That's to reduce buildup that the filter doesn't trap, which can catch fire. But getting to the lint isn't easy. If you don't want to call a professional, you might try Lint Lizard, an \$11 device we tested that was effective at removing built-up lint.



JUST ENOUGH Laptops we've tested use "smart chargers" that stop when the battery is full.

Q I'm buying a new car soon, and the carmaker, Tesla, asked if I want to trade in my current Mercedes using AutoNation. Should I do that, or will I make more money selling my car myself? Is there any tax advantage?

—Enrique Saggese Sammamish, WA

You usually get more money if you sell your car yourself. But consider the value of your time in showing the car and doing paperwork. Car superstores such as AutoNation and CarMax make it easy to trade in; it's worth getting a quote. Some states have a tax advantage for trading in a car, but only if you buy your new car from the dealer that buys your trade.

Q My new freezer cools to 9° F at the recommended setting. If I change the setting, I can get to 0° F, but it runs more often and, presumably, uses more electricity. Is it safe to keep food at 9° F?

—Marcia De Leon Edgewood, NM

We recommend using whatever setting yields 0° F in the freezer. You're right that the unit will run more often and will use more energy, but that is to be expected. Frozen-food labels say to store products at 0° F or colder; warmer temperatures reduce quality and shelf life.

SEND YOUR QUESTIONS TO
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

Cutting produce risks

THE ISSUE Proposed regulations that carry out a new food-safety law need to be tough and comprehensive.

OUR TAKE When spinach and peanut butter started causing illnesses and deaths across the country several years ago, Consumers Union began working with other groups and victims to improve the situation. It was a major victory for consumers when in January 2011, the president signed the ground-breaking Food Safety Modernization Act into law.

But such laws are not an instant fix; the next step is to set regulations. The first round of regulations proposed by

the Food and Drug Administration would set higher standards for sanitary conditions in the growing and handling of produce, which we support. Farmers would be required to provide hand-washing facilities for their workers and ensure that the irrigation water used on crops is clean.

The FDA says its produce regulations will cover all fruits and vegetables that people eat raw. (Cooking kills most disease-causing bacteria.) But the agency has left kale and figs—which are often eaten raw—off its list of regulated produce. We believe the method for deciding which fruit and vegetables to regulate for safety needs improvement.

To comment on the proposed regulations or read what others are saying, go to Regulations.gov and enter “produce rule” in the search box.



▶ Flyers face less choice

Just three major full-service airlines will control the U.S. market—down from 10 in 1985—if the Department of Justice allows American Airlines and U.S. Airways to merge. Consumers Union testified to a Senate subcommittee in March that a merger could lead to higher fares, lower quality of service, and fewer flights.



▶ TAKING ACTION

Her mission: Fewer drugs

In the past few years, Diane Birmingham, a nurse from Fort Collins, Colo., has become increasingly worried about the constant feeding of antibiotics to food animals to make them grow faster or prevent disease in crowded, unsanitary conditions.

“The way that many meat producers regularly dose animals is contributing to the growing problem of antibiotic resistance,” Birmingham says, making the drugs less effective in humans.

A public-health professional with a drive to effect change, Birmingham joined 50 other activists who traveled to Washington, D.C.,

in April. They urged Congress to take action on antibiotic overuse on large industrial farms. Birmingham was so enthusiastic about the experience that she has pledged to do more.

Want to get involved? Go to Consumers Union's website NotInMyFood.org.



Diane Birmingham

▶ HEALTH CARE COSTS

‘It’s like getting practitioners to switch from a \$3.50-a-day latte habit to a cheaper \$1-a-day cup of regular coffee.’

DANIEL J. BROTMAN, M.D., senior author of an April study from Johns Hopkins showing that doctors ordered 9 percent fewer tests or looked for less-expensive alternatives when they were aware of the cost. Charges dropped over six months by more than \$400,000, with no apparent negative effect on patients.

▶ FROM OUR PRESIDENT

What’s the score?

Let’s see whether we’ve got this straight: You go about your life buying stuff on your credit cards, paying your bills, whittling down your mortgage, and the record of all those transactions—your record—is scooped up by credit-reporting agencies and put in a file.



Then a secret algorithm is layered on to create ... ta-da! ... your three-digit credit score. Well, typically it’s not yours until you pay for it, and the number you get might not be the same as the one lenders use to make decisions about you. (See *Money*, on page 15.)

The score that lenders really use may factor into your chances of getting a car loan, a mortgage, or a job, and into what you’ll pay in interest, as a deposit for rent and utilities, and, in many states, for insurance.

The numbers don’t add up

Ten years ago, consumers won the right to a copy of their credit report from each of the three major credit-reporting agencies once every 12 months, free. That has allowed consumers to check their files before they apply for loans or credit and to correct errors to get the best terms.

But the free credit report doesn’t come with a free credit score. It should, and we strongly support a bill now before Congress. The Free Access to Credit Scores Act would also ensure that the score is the one actually used by lenders and not an “educational score” of—as the bill’s sponsors say—“unknown reliability.”

Since January, we’ve been engaging consumers through e-mail and social media, and close to 52,000 have sent messages to their lawmakers in support of this effort. To join them, go to DefendYourDollars.org.

For now, don’t sign up for costly credit-monitoring services or be tricked into buying scores that are useless in the marketplace. For your free credit reports, go to AnnualCreditReport.com; steer clear of the other websites, no matter how legitimate they may sound. For more information, go to ConsumersUnion.org.

Jim Guest
JIM GUEST
President

Up front

Tips, trends, everyday products

STAY SAFE

Readers' experiences during Superstorm Sandy can help you in bad weather.

When a storm strikes

CLIMATE CHANGE has made extreme weather the new normal. A rise in sea level, combined with coastal storms, has increased the risk of flooding and damage along the coast, says a recent draft of the U.S. National Climate Assessment. Inlanders can expect more frequent or intense heat waves, downpours, floods, and droughts.

Five months after Superstorm Sandy struck the East Coast, we asked more than 8,000 of our online subscribers in the most affected areas of Connecticut, New Jersey, and New York about their experiences. The findings led to this checklist.

Storm is forecast

Charge electronic devices. Have enough chargers to handle more than one device at a time. In our Sandy survey, cell-phone users were most likely to retain service,

followed by phone-company landline users, then cable-company landline users. A corded phone (unlike cordless) might work without power. Consider buying a headlamp flashlight, which leaves hands free.

Fill cars with gas. Seventy-one percent of respondents faced closed stations or long lines, and 28 percent reported price gouging during or after the storm.

Consider a generator. Stationary types, using propane or natural gas, proved more effective than portable, which were more likely to run out of gas and didn't always power what people wanted to run.

Get cash. Twenty percent of respondents couldn't make banking transactions during or after Sandy. Stores may not have much change, so stock up on small bills.

Have enough food. Sounds obvious, but 21 percent of respondents ran short

due to closed supermarkets. Set the freezer at 0° F and the fridge at or below 40° F. Freeze containers of water and gel packs to help keep food cold or to use in coolers.

Storm hits

If you can't make a voice call, send a text.

It's more likely to be received than a call. If devices lose their charge, do what our readers did: 65 percent charged in their cars, others at work, friends' homes, or stores.

Keep fridge doors closed. That should help, though the federal Food Safety and Inspection Service says to toss perishable food after 4 hours without power.

The aftermath

Photograph damage. Report a loss ASAP, but don't toss or repair anything until an insurance adjuster has visited. Keep receipts if you've paid to prevent further losses. The median claim for major property damage cases settled after Sandy was \$17,000; the median payout, \$12,000. The median claim for rejected cases: \$30,000.

Deal with insurers. If an insurer says your policy doesn't cover damages or the amount is low, ask to see the exclusions or limits in writing. Seek out your state insurance department, which may have a system to handle storm-related inquiries.

For more tips, go to ConsumerReports.org/cro/sandy0413.

What our survey respondents said

76%

lost power for at least one day (median: seven days)

54%

sustained damage to home

25%

had medical hardships, including inability to get prescription drugs

11%

of homes weren't habitable for three or more days

23%

with a job lost earnings (median: \$2,000)

20%

of homeowners filed insurance claims

69%

of claims were settled within five months

54%

of claimants were highly satisfied with claim handling

Tasty chardonnays for as little as \$3 a bottle

IF YOU LIKE to boast about scoring a bargain, feel free to give Trader Joe's Charles Shaw chardonnay a place of honor on your dinner (or picnic) table. In blind taste tests, our wine experts deemed this \$3 wine very good—and better than a bottle costing \$34. The rest of you can hide “Three-Buck Chuck” in a decanter.

In all, our experts tasted 19 chardonnays. They found seven that are very good, including five CR Best Buys, and three that are good: generally less balanced, less complex, or less intense than the others, with generic fruit flavors. All of those are in the Ratings.

The nine wines not good enough to make the cut included two that cost more than \$20: Mer Soleil and Newton. Others were Alamos, Catena, Chamisal, Kirkland Signature California—not to be confused with the very good Kirkland Signature Sonoma—Louis Jadot, and Novellum Rosemount Diamond Label.

Bottom line. Use the Ratings comments to choose among worthy wines. Most of them are fine whether you drink them soon or wait a couple of years, but Kirkland Signature, Casillero del Diablo, and Jacob's Creek should be consumed soon.

Chardonnays are delicious on their own but can be hard to pair with food. In general, as richness increases in the wine, it should increase in the accompanying food. Simple, tart, fruity chardonnays go well with sushi, finger foods, or simply prepared seafood. Woody, buttery chardonnays are best with rich, creamy, smoky, or spicy dishes.

■ DID YOU KNOW?

Once known for oakiness, chardonnay, the nation's top-selling varietal, may now be produced with little or no exposure to wood. “Unoaked” chardonnays have been aged in steel tanks instead of oak barrels.



Gotcha! You have (not) won \$2 million!



The letter, from the Award Notification Commission, said, “Congratulations—you are the two million dollars winner.” It sported a “seal of record and validation” and offered a detailed payout schedule.

The “lucky winner” was suspicious. “I’m sorry, but they can’t fool me,” said Kathy Winger, of Franklin, Pa. “I’ve supposedly won

cars, computers, a five-carat diamond. The list never ends.”

Legitimate sweepstakes may be entertaining (even Consumer Reports runs one). But others are problematic, leaving you with minuscule chances of winning and high chances of landing on marketing lists—guaranteeing more unwanted mail, spam, and telemarketing calls. The worst offenders steal money and personal information from their victims, who are often elderly.

The Federal Trade Commission, postal authorities, and state consumer agencies can investigate complaints about sweepstakes outfits, but more pop up all the time. In survey results released in April, the FTC found that prize promotions were the second most common type of fraud (behind

weight-loss products), with an estimated 2.4 million victims in 2011.

These are among the methods fraudulent sweepstakes use:

- Certified checks you’re told to deposit before sending part of the proceeds to a third party to cover taxes or other charges. Comply

and you find that the check is bogus.

- Promotions that seem to be from government agencies. In December a Maryland man was sentenced to nine years in prison for his role in a sweepstakes in which scammers had the nerve to pretend they were from the FTC.

Those who have been fooled once may be not be off the hook: Some scammers have recontacted their victims, claiming to be law-enforcement officials trying to recover the losses—for a fee, of course.

As for Winger’s document, fine print showed that she had to reply for a chance to win \$2 million and send a “premium offer acquisition fee” of \$11.89—even though, the mailing said, “purchase will not increase chance

Provisional Payment Schedule WINNER OPTION A — 30 Year Distribution

Award	Payment Amount	Cumulative Total	Award	Payment Amount	Cumulative Total
Check #01	\$66,667.00	\$66,667.00	Check #16	\$66,667.00	\$1,066,672.00
Check #02	\$66,667.00	\$133,334.00	Check #17	\$66,667.00	\$1,133,339.00
Check #03	\$66,667.00	\$200,001.00	Check #18	\$66,667.00	\$1,200,006.00
Check #04	\$66,667.00	\$266,668.00	Check #19	\$66,667.00	\$1,266,673.00
Check #05	\$66,667.00	\$333,335.00	Check #20	\$66,667.00	\$1,333,340.00
Check #06	\$66,667.00	\$400,002.00	Check #21	\$66,667.00	\$1,400,007.00
Check #07	\$66,667.00	\$466,669.00	Check #22	\$66,667.00	\$1,466,674.00
Check #08	\$66,667.00	\$533,336.00	Check #23	\$66,667.00	\$1,533,341.00
Check #09	\$66,667.00	\$600,003.00	Check #24	\$66,667.00	\$1,600,008.00
Check #10	\$66,667.00	\$666,670.00	Check #25	\$66,667.00	\$1,666,675.00
Check #11	\$66,667.00	\$733,337.00	Check #26	\$66,667.00	\$1,733,342.00
Check #12	\$66,667.00	\$800,004.00	Check #27	\$66,667.00	\$1,800,009.00
Check #13	\$66,667.00	\$866,671.00	Check #28	\$66,667.00	\$1,866,676.00
Check #14	\$66,667.00	\$933,338.00	Check #29	\$66,667.00	\$1,933,343.00
Check #15	\$66,667.00	\$1,000,005.00	Check #30	\$66,667.00	\$2,000,000.00



Ratings Chardonnays

Very good and good wines only From 19 tested. ✓ CR Best Buy ✓ Recommended

Rec.	Product ¹	Price ²	Comments

VERY GOOD

✓	Trackers Crossing 365 (Whole Foods)	\$7	Refreshing mix of clean, tart fruit flavors balanced by wood and butter notes.
✓	Bogle	9	Complex; big wood and butter flavors; creamy texture with enough fruit for balance. More intense and a touch sweeter than most.
✓	Frank Family	29	Complex, well balanced; lively ripe fruit, including banana, layered over subtle butter and wood.
✓	Charles Shaw (Trader Joe's)	3	Clean, intense, citrusy flavors with a touch of butter and wood on the finish.
✓	Kirkland Signature Sonoma (Costco)	7	Attractive but simple blend of ripe fruit with butter and toasty wood notes.
✓	Wine Cube (Target)	6	Full flavored with complex wood and butter notes balanced by clean fruit flavors.
✓	Sonoma-Cutrer	23	Fruity and moderately complex, with crisp, food-friendly acidity.

GOOD

	Rombauer	34	Wood-heavy with notes of butterscotch and some fruit, but not enough. A bit sweeter than most.
	Casillero del Diablo	9	Decent acidity, simple and fruity.
	Jacob's Creek	6	Simple, light-bodied but well balanced, fruity.

¹ All are 2011 vintage except Jacob's Creek, is 2012. Wines in this price range aim for, and often achieve, consistent quality from one vintage to another. ² Prices are for 750-milliliter bottles except for Wine Cube, calculated from a 1.5-liter box.

▶ CLOSE-UP

Sweet reds miss the mark

Retail sales of sweet red wines were up 58 percent during the year ending Jan. 5, most likely goosed by beginner drinkers accustomed to quaffing soda. Our taste tests found that none is very good. Three from big names are just fair: Cupcake Red Velvet, \$11, has a heavy, burnt-oak taste that overpowers lighter fruit notes and leaves a flavor of cream soda concentrate; Barefoot, \$6, has a cloying sweetness reminiscent of confectioner's sugar; Woodbridge, \$6, is simple, with generic fruit and some odd flavors.

If you still want to try a sweet red wine, choose from five that rated Good overall. Yellow Tail Sweet Red Roo has loads of intense red and black fruit with black-pepper notes that add a bit of complexity. Sutter Home has an assortment of intense berry fruit with interesting vegetal and coconut notes. Gallo Family Vineyards is lighter and fruity, with some acidity. All three cost \$5 or \$6. Other good choices are Jam Jar Sweet Shiraz, \$11, and Sweet Bliss, \$9.

Less tannic and astringent than other reds, these go with lots of foods, including chips, wings, and pizza; deli meats and cheeses; cookout foods like burgers and grilled vegetables; pasta with sauce; and chocolate desserts.



of winning." That chance? One in 300 million.

There's no evidence that anyone has scored the \$2 million, even though Kansas-based Next-Gen has been running the promotion worldwide since at least 1999, says Aaron Reese, spokesman for the Better Business Bureau of Greater Kansas City. In fact, the mailer's fine print says there's no guarantee that anyone received the winning number. In the 2011 sweepstakes, the company appears to have approved a payout of \$4,350 to 33 people, but only to those who confirmed their address.

The BBB has awarded Next-Gen a prize of its own: a rating of F. Next-Gen's customer service manager said the company wasn't interested in answering our questions.

What you can do. Answer sweepstakes offers only if you know the company, and verify that the offer isn't from a scammer using the company's name or a look-alike website. Ignore solicitations that appear to be from the government, use "official" seals, request an up-front fee, or tell you that you're already a winner. And be aware that in a legitimate sweepstakes, buying something does not increase your chances of winning.

▶ CLAIM CHECK

Should you Pluck an egg yolk?

The claim. Pluck is "the yolk extractor you'll have to see to believe," says Quirky.com, where it's sold. "Simply place it over the yolk of an already cracked egg, squeeze the silicone chamber, and release to suck the egg yolk up into it." We paid \$12.99 for the device, plus \$7.50 for shipping.

The check. We broke eggs from medium to jumbo, then separated some by hand and others with Pluck. We also timed experts separating eggs both ways.

Bottom line. Pluck lays an egg. At best it saved our experts just a few seconds per half-dozen eggs; it sometimes sucked up a bit of egg white along with the yolk; and it was less effective than manual separation at removing the little cord, which is suggested for delicate dishes such as flan. You also have to wash the gadget afterward. Use the eggshell (a wonder of packaging) or use the Pluck technique to suck the yolk into an empty plastic bottle (just as effective and as entertaining for kids), and save yourself \$20.





Don't get burned by your sunscreen

SOME SUNSCREENS don't keep sunburn at bay for as long as they promise. Our tests of 12 products showed that you can't always rely on the SPF number, a measure of protection from burning UVB radiation. As a result, it's especially important to check our Ratings for a sunscreen that did the job. Our key findings:

- Against UVB rays, All Terrain AquaSport SPF 30 and Badger Unscented SPF 34 were poor. Against UVA rays, All Terrain was just fair. UVA penetrates deeper than UVB, tanning and aging skin, but both types can cause skin cancer.
- Six sunscreens were very good overall.

They guarded against UVB before and after 80 minutes under water and were very good against UVA when tested on people.

- Four tested products contain nanoparticles of titanium dioxide and/or zinc oxide. Those tiny particles help white lotion disappear on skin, but scientific studies continue to raise questions about their safety.
- Paying more may not buy more protection. The least effective sunscreens were among the priciest.

How effective? All things being equal, if you sunburn in 20 minutes without sunscreen, an SPF 30 product should protect your skin for about 10 hours (20 min-

utes times 30). In reality, the amount applied, sun intensity, your location, and your skin type make SPF simply a relative measure of protection. And as we found, it's one you can't always trust.

Our current tests found a bigger gap between many products' claimed SPF and their actual SPF than we've found in the past. (In fact, a top-rated sunscreen from last year was All Terrain, the lowest-rated this year.) It's hard to explain the changes. New labeling and test requirements from the Food and Drug Administration could have led sunscreen makers to tweak ingredients, but All Terrain and several other manufacturers told us they hadn't changed formulations since our last tests. In any case, changes are difficult to pinpoint because formulas are proprietary.

How safe? Skin cancer is the most common cancer in the U.S., and the benefits of sunscreens outweigh potential risks from their ingredients. That said, animal studies have raised some concerns.

Nanoparticles of titanium dioxide and zinc oxide have been linked to reproductive and developmental effects in animals. All Terrain AquaSport SPF 30, Badger Unscented SPF 34, and Kiss My Face SPF 40 claim to have no nanoparticles, but our tests showed that all had some. So did California Baby SPF 30+, whose website mentions "coated, micronized" particles.

Retinoids, part of the vitamin A family and an inactive ingredient in some sunscreens, have caused an increase in skin cancers in mice. There's also a risk of birth defects in people taking oral acne medications containing retinoids, though they differ from the retinoids in sunscreens. As a precaution, pregnant women may want to choose a sunscreen without the ingredient retinol or retinyl palmitate.

Animal studies have indicated that oxybenzone, which is in many sunscreens, may interfere with hormones in the body.

The jury is still out on any harm from inhaling spray sunscreens. Until the FDA releases results of an ongoing study, avoid using sprays on kids, and spray sunscreen onto your hands before applying it to your face. Sprays are flammable, so let them dry before going near an open flame.

Slather it on

Apply sunscreen 15 to 30 minutes before your day of fun in the sun. Use at least 2 to 3 tablespoons of lotion to cover your body, or spray as much as can be rubbed in, then repeat. Sunscreen can rub off or wash off during the day, so whatever its SPF, reapply it every 2 hours and again after you swim or sweat. Limit your time in the sun, and if possible, wear protective clothing, a hat, and sunglasses.

Most of the tested products have a classic "beachy" or floral aroma. Most creams take more than 30 seconds to rub in; some, including All Terrain, leave a residue. Most sunscreens left stains that didn't wash out of cotton, polyester, and rayon/spandex.



Up & Up

Equate

Coppertone



HOW WE TEST SUNSCREENS

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



Ratings Sunscreens

All tested products in performance order.

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

Rec.	Product	Cost per oz.	Type	Overall score	UVB	UVA	Staining
☑	Up & Up (Target) Sport SPF 50 ^①	\$1.16	spray	80	●	○	○
☑	Equate (Walmart) Ultra Protection SPF 50	0.47	lotion	77	●	○	○
☑	Coppertone Water Babies SPF 50	1.38	lotion	75	●	○	○
☑	Walgreens Continuous Spray Sport SPF 50 ^①	1.33	spray	75	●	○	○
☑	Hawaiian Tropic Sheer Touch SPF 30 ^①	1.38	lotion	67	○	○	○
☑	Coppertone Sport High Performance SPF 30 ^①	1.67	spray	64	○	○	○
	California Baby SPF 30+ ^① ^②	6.90	lotion	50	○	○	●
	No-Ad with Avobenzone, Aloe and Vitamin E SPF 45 ^①	0.63	lotion	49	○	○	○
	Neutrogena Wet Skin SPF 45+	3.67	lotion	49	○	○	○
	Kiss My Face with Hydresia SPF 40 ^② ^③	5.33	lotion	41	○	○	●
	Badger Unscented SPF 34 ^① ^② ^③	5.52	lotion	33	○	○	○
	All Terrain AquaSport SPF 30 ^②	4.33	lotion	14	○	○	●

① Has retinol or retinyl palmitate, which pregnant women may want to avoid. ② Has nanoparticles of titanium dioxide and/or zinc oxide. ③ Water resistance claimed for 40 minutes; others claim 80. ^④ Discontinued but may still be available.

How we test sunscreens

Alas, there are no trips to Tahiti for our sunscreen testers—panelists go to a lab. In UVB tests, five spots on one unscreened area of their back are exposed for a set time to rays from a sun simulator. After panelists have soaked in a tub of water, five spots in a second unscreened area of their back are exposed. About a day later, the 10 spots are examined for redness. The resulting **UVB** Ratings reflect each product's actual effectiveness, not how close it came to meeting its SPF claim. To test for **UVA** protection, we also use people but check for tanning instead of redness. And we use a test based on the Food and Drug Administration's "critical wavelength" test, required for sunscreens that claim broad-spectrum protection. It assesses how well UV rays are absorbed by clear plastic plates treated with sunscreen. All products passed this test. Overall scores are based mostly on results of UVB and UVA tests. To test for **staining**, we apply each sunscreen to cloth swatches, let those dry, put them through two wash cycles, and air-dry them.

Bottom line. If you can't find a recommended sunscreen, buy one that claims broad-spectrum protection and has a claimed SPF of at least 40. We used to recommend 30, but given the performance of this latest batch, a claim of 40 makes more sense.

The FDA requires manufacturers to provide an expiration date or show that a prod-

uct will remain stable (but not necessarily maintain its SPF) for at least three years. If you buy an undated sunscreen, mark the purchase date on the container and, to be prudent, toss it once it's two years old.

Don't store sunscreen in a hot car—it may degrade faster. And skiers take note: Once frozen, sunscreens may lose effectiveness.



Fasta pasta? Just wait

From our "what's the point" department comes news about Ronzoni pasta that cooks in—ready?—3 minutes, instead of 8 to 10. This faster type comes in single-serving pouches (Pasta Portions) or loose in a box (Quick Cook). Following directions, we prepared rotini-shaped regular and faster pastas and tasted the results.

Regular Ronzoni is very good; the other products are smaller and thinner; lack the springy, chewy texture of conventional pasta; and are a bit bitter. Pasta Portions is crumbly, astringent, and starchy.

Bottom line. Cook regular pasta. If you're using a stove, you have to wait for water to boil in any case. Can't spare 5 minutes? Try Quick Cook. It costs about the same per ounce as regular Ronzoni. Pasta Portions costs more and tastes worse.

■ DID YOU KNOW?

Ronzoni told us that quicker cooking is possible because "the walls of the pasta are extremely thin, like angel hair pasta."

■ BY THE NUMBERS

Keep your money safe

More than 3,000 adult Internet users in the U.S. told the Consumer Reports National Research Center about problems with online financial security during the previous 12 months. Numbers are projected from survey results.

19.5 million

consumers had charges placed on an existing credit card by an unauthorized person. **Protect yourself** Report fraudulent charges immediately. If credit was used instead of debit on a bank card, you're probably liable for up to only \$50. (That limit doesn't apply to debit charges.)

18.4 million

consumers were notified by a company, government agency, or other organization that their personal info had been lost, hijacked, or stolen. **Protect yourself** If notified of a data breach, use the free credit monitoring that's usually offered. Add a fraud alert to your credit reports. Close affected accounts and change passwords on others. Check for incorrect charges or withdrawals after the breach.

10 million

consumers lost money from an account (other than credit card), had personal data used for a fraudulent purpose, or had a new credit account opened in their name by an unauthorized person. **Protect yourself** Don't click on links or open attachments in e-mail purporting to be from government agencies. Have your bank alert you to possible fraudulent activity.

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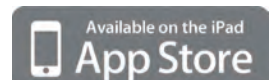
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- If you're already an online subscriber, enter your user name and password in those fields. Then enter your account number and ZIP code on the subsequent page and tap "continue."

CONGRATULATIONS! Follow the steps on the confirmation page to begin downloading your issues.



Snack bar taste-off

OUR TRAINED TASTERS tried 24 snack bars in chocolate, peanut, and strawberry flavors. Four taste very good, two fair, the rest in between. We also rated the nutrition of each bar. Our experts' conclusions:

Don't buy by brand. Although the two Nature Valley bars we tried are very good, two Clif bars varied. One is very tasty; the

other is bitter, has chemical and vitamin flavors, and is gritty and chalky inside.

Don't spend too much. The two bars rated just fair cost at least \$1.15 per serving, more than twice as much as many others, though they also weigh more.

Read labels. These bars—whether called cereal, granola, or health—may

seem healthful, but there are big differences in nutrition. Calories range from 90 to 270 per serving; fat, from 2 to 9 grams; sugars, from 2 to 20 grams; fiber, from less than 1 gram to 9 grams. If you're looking for fiber, as many people do at breakfast time, pick a bar with "fiber" in its name.

► Very good



► Clif Crunch Granola Chocolate Chip

GOOD NUTRITION

Per serving: 62 cents, 190 calories, 8 grams fat, 12 grams sugars, 3 grams fiber

Dense, crispy, crunchy, crumbly; toasted grain with honey notes; a few chocolate chips.

► Nature Valley Crunchy Oats 'n Dark Chocolate

FAIR NUTRITION

Per serving: 48 cents, 190 calories, 7 grams fat, 12 grams sugars, 3 grams fiber
Dense, crunchy, crumbly; toasted grain with cocoa and honey flavors.



► Market Pantry Peanut Sweet & Salty (Target)

FAIR NUTRITION

Per serving: 35 cents, 170 calories, 8 grams fat, 11 grams sugars, 1 gram fiber

Big roasted-peanut flavor with honey and toasted grain; sweet; waxy bottom coating.

► Nature Valley Sweet & Salty Nut Peanut

FAIR NUTRITION

Per serving: 49 cents, 170 calories, 9 grams fat, 12 grams sugars, 2 grams fiber

Sweet, salty; big roasted-peanut flavor with honey and toasted grain. Lots of peanuts.

► Good

Chocolate bars. Most chocolatey, highest fiber: Fiber One 90 Calorie Chewy, Kellogg's Fiber Plus Antioxidants Chewy, Nice Oats & Chocolate Fiber Chewy. Others tested: Cascadian Farm Organic Chewy, Kashi Dark Mocha Almond Chewy, Quaker Chewy 90 Calories Low Fat.

Peanut or peanut butter bars. Slightly stale or sweet like a boxed cake mix: Fiber One, Great Value High Fiber, Kellogg's Special K Protein & Fiber, Quaker Chewy. Tough, chalky, or slightly bitter: Kashi Chewy, Luna Nutz Over Chocolate, Zone Perfect Nutrition.

Strawberry bars. Soft, cakelike outside: 365 Everyday Value, Kashi Ripe Strawberry, Kellogg's Nutri-Grain, Market Pantry. Like a Pop Tart: Kellogg's Special K. Prune or artificial strawberry innards: all but 365.

► Fair

Chocolate peanut butter bars. Crispy and nougat layers; bitter, chalky, chemical taste: Clif Builder's 20g Protein. Gritty, chalky, pasty, chemical taste: Pure Protein High Protein.

Black Hole Award

Snack bars may be smaller than their packaging would suggest. No wonder this one has 90 calories per bar.



'Low T': Don't fall for the hype



KEEP YOUR SHIRT ON Testosterone users must prevent treated skin from touching others.

“FEELING LIKE A SHADOW of your former self?” “Lost your appetite for romance?” If you believe the ads, the problem could be “low T,” and a daily dose of testosterone could restore your lost libido.

Drugmakers spreading the word of testosterone’s supposed wonders have spent lavishly on ads in recent years, from \$14.3 million in 2011 to \$107.3 million in 2012, mostly for two drugs, AndroGel 1.62% and Axiron. And the ads are working: Testosterone prescriptions—and drug company revenue from them—have skyrocketed, as shown at right.

But our medical experts aren’t sold. They say the benefits of testosterone are overblown and the risks underappreciated. Those risks include breast enlargement, reduced fertility, heart attacks, and possibly faster-growing prostate cancer. Women accidentally exposed to the hormone can develop male characteristics, and children can enter an early puberty. And the drugs can be expensive—up to \$570 a month.

The American Urological Association is so concerned by the trend that it recently added testosterone therapy to a list of overused and potentially dangerous medical treatments. (For details, go to ConsumerReports.org/cro/choosingwisely.)

Real risks

The ads do describe the risks. But they are spoken as you watch a vibrant middle-aged man cruising in a convertible with his lady friend, or a peppy guy canoodling with his wife in the kitchen. So it’s

easy to focus instead on the prospect of feeling like a teenager again.

That’s a mistake, says John Santa, M.D., director of the Consumer Reports Health Ratings Center. “The risks are substantial,” he says. In a 2010 New England Journal of Medicine study, for example, men 65 and older with low testosterone and obesity or other conditions were treated with Testim 1%. After six months, they had increased physical strength compared with men not

on the drug—but they also had more heart attacks and other cardiovascular events.

Other research suggests that the hormone might fuel the growth of prostate cancers. Established risks include blood clots in the legs, sleep apnea, an enlarged prostate, enlarged or painful breasts, and swollen feet or ankles.

Another concern is reduced sperm counts. “I see men every week who are infertile thanks to testosterone therapy,” says Craig Niederberger, M.D., head of the department of urology at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

The gel forms of testosterone, applied under your arm or on your upper arm and shoulder, can be transferred to others if you don’t wash the area after applying it. Children exposed to the hormone have experienced enlargement of the penis or clitoris, growth of pubic hair, increased libido, and aggressive behavior. Women can experience acne and the growth of body hair and, if they are pregnant or breast-feeding, can transfer the hormone to their babies.

Finding the cause

Still want a testosterone boost? Don’t expect too much. For one thing, a modest decline in testosterone as you age is normal, but there’s little correlation between that decline and sex drive or performance, and little evidence that extra doses improve sexual satisfaction.

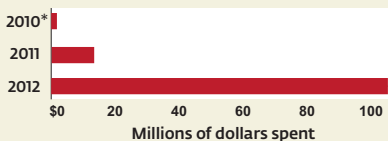
The Food and Drug Administration has approved the hormone for men with levels well below normal. That condition, called hypogonadism, is linked to fatigue, depression, and the loss of libido, bone, muscle, and facial and pubic hair.

Even then you shouldn’t rush to treatment. Stress, lack of sleep or exercise, and feelings about your partner can also sap your vim and vigor. Plus, diabetes, obesity, and pituitary tumors can contribute to low testosterone, as can some drugs. So they should be ruled out first.

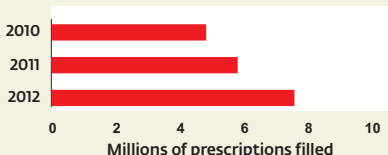
Our advice. There’s nothing romantic or age-defying about a drug that comes with long-term risks to you and the people you live with. Try safer ways to bring back that lovin’ feeling: Eat right, exercise, reduce stress, and have a long talk with your partner and your doctor. If you do start treatment, reassess after a few months and watch for worrisome side effects in you and those around you.

Selling testosterone

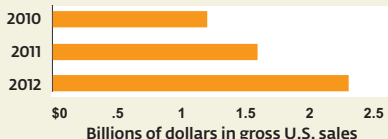
As advertising has increased ...



so have the number of prescriptions ...



and drug company sales



*Based on averages from 2004 through 2010.

Source: Source Healthcare Analytics, Kantar Media, and Bloomberg Industries.

Don't buy useless credit scores

FAIR ISAAC, the company that invented FICO credit scores in 1958, derides its competitors as “FAKO” imitators because their scores aren't the ones used by lenders in their credit-making decisions.

But the FICO scores that millions of consumers buy each year for \$20 a pop are also not the scores that car dealers, auto-finance companies, mortgage lenders, and others use. Moreover, after reviewing material that Fair Isaac provides only to lenders, we think the scores consumers can buy are inferior.

Legislation introduced in March would require the free annual disclosure of scores that lenders actually use, which are now typically kept secret. Consumers Union, the advocacy arm of Consumer Reports, endorses it, as do other consumer groups.

Getting the law passed isn't expected to be a slam dunk. So for now we recommend taking steps such as requesting the credit score an insurer or lender has used before agreeing to any deal. You can also press for proof of any credit problem that raised your cost of borrowing money or getting insurance, or insist on a refund if scores you've purchased prove to be wrong. Or you can just decide not to buy the scores in the first place. Here's what you need to know.

Unreliable information

Last fall, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau concluded that “consumers should not rely on credit scores” when considering how lenders view their creditworthiness. That's because the agency found that in 20 to 32 percent of the cases it studied, the consumer and lender scores rated the same credit file differently enough that the scores

were one or more credit-quality categories removed from each other. The discrepancies were much greater for the half of consumers with above-median scores.

A similarity rate of 68 to 80 percent seems like good odds, but “consumers can't know ahead of time whether the scores they purchase will closely track or vary moderately to significantly from a score sold to creditors,” the CFPB report said.

Unfortunately, the study only scratched the surface of a perplexing problem. It examined just five scoring systems, some of which were already outdated. But “there are hundreds of different scores,” says Steve Wagner, president of Experian, one of the three big credit bureaus. (Equifax and TransUnion are the others.)

VantageScore credit scores, created by the three credit bureaus in 2006, are used by 1,300 lenders, and that brand of score

sold to consumers can be the same one that lenders use. But there are three versions of VantageScore, which can produce significantly different scores, concedes Sarah Davies, a VantageScore executive. That's a problem if you buy, say, the new version 3.0 and your lender is still using 1.0 or 2.0.

Experian mostly sells consumers a VantageScore and its own invention, a PLUS score, which has fine print that says it's “not the score used by lenders.” Auto- and home-insurance companies use still other credit-based scores, usually designed from in-house models.

FICO or FAKO?

Fair Isaac alone sells 49 different FICO scores to lenders. But a subsidiary, myFICO.com, sells consumers only two of those, claiming that they're the “industry standard” used by 90 percent of the top lenders.

Isn't that misleading? No, says Anthony Sprauve, a Fair Isaac spokesman, because the variations among scores “are not as dramatic as you might think.”

But that's not what Fair Isaac tells lenders. For example, its sales literature for creditors says the FICO Mortgage Score 1.0 is “more comprehensive and accurate” and “7.5 percent more predictive than the general-purpose FICO score.” The difference is “substantial,” Fair Isaac says.

The various scores carry the FICO brand name, but they're clearly not the same and produce significantly different results—according to their creators' own claims. Saying otherwise is like handing someone a Diet Coke and calling it Classic.



Protect yourself in the credit-score shell game

1 Demand to see the actual proprietary score used before you agree to a loan or an insurance policy. You have the most leverage to get the truth before the deal is sealed.

2 We see no point in buying any consumer credit scores, given that they're not the same ones used by lenders. But if you do, and a lender or insurer later tells you your real

score is lower or higher, do what you'd do with any product that doesn't deliver: Demand a refund.

3 Always shop for credit at multiple lending sources to find the best rate. Even if lenders won't divulge their secret scores, getting rate quotes from several will reveal the best deal based on the numerous—and probably different—

scoring systems used by prospective creditors.

4 Be sure to get your free annual credit report from each of the big three credit bureaus so you can look for and dispute errors. (Go to AnnualCreditReport.com.) We recommend that you stagger your requests and get one report from a different bureau every four months.

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SAFETY ALERTS

RECALLS

AUTOMOBILES '01-'03 Honda Civic, CR-V, and Odyssey



Front-passenger air bag might deploy with too much pressure, which might rupture the inflator casing and cause injury.

MODELS 426,000 '01-'03 Civic, 43,000 '02-'03 CR-V, and 92,000 '02 Odyssey vehicles.

WHAT TO DO Go to recalls.honda.com or call 800-999-1009 to determine whether your vehicle requires a repair.

'01-'03 Toyota Corolla, Corolla Matrix, Sequoia, and Tundra, and Lexus SC430



Front-passenger air-bag inflators could have propellant wafers that were made improperly, causing the air bag to deploy abnormally.

MODELS A total of 170,000 air-bag inflators are in this recall, and about 510,000 vehicles might have to be inspected to find the faulty devices.

WHAT TO DO For details go to toyota.com/recall or call Toyota at 800-331-4331 or Lexus at 800-255-3987.

'13 Nissan Pathfinder and Infiniti JX



Front brake torque member was improperly cast, leading to structural weakness. If it fails, braking might be reduced, increasing the risk of a crash.

MODELS 19,258 Nissan Pathfinder and Infiniti JX vehicles.

WHAT TO DO Dealers will check the manufacture date of the torque member and replace it if necessary, free of charge. Call Nissan at 800-647-7261 for details.

OUTDOOR APPLIANCES

OWT Industries and Homelite electric blower vacuums



Objects drawn into the blower in vacuum mode can break through the plastic housing.

PRODUCTS 241,000 Homelite vacuums sold at Home Depot stores and online from February 2012 through December 2012 for \$40, and 131,500 OWT Industries vacuums sold at Walmart stores and online from January 2012 through December 2012 for \$40.

WHAT TO DO Stop using the blower vacuum and call 800-597-9624, or go to homelite.com or expertgardentools.com to check on your model and get replacement information.

Best & worst airlines

Virgin America makes its debut at the top of our list

I F YOU'RE TIRED of airline flights that leave you too frazzled to enjoy your trip, we have a new recommendation for you. Virgin America, a newcomer to our Ratings, got a clear thumbs-up from readers in our latest survey, with some of the highest scores we've seen in years.

At the other end of the runway was Spirit Airlines. It was at the bottom of our list, with poor scores across the board for check-in, cabin service, and more.

In an era of airlines changing, merging, and inventing new fees, getting the best deal hasn't gotten any easier. But we'll tell you how to search for the best fares and

what you'll pay in fees from the major carriers. We also have insights from more than 16,000 readers who told us about a total of 31,732 domestic flights in our survey, conducted in February by the Consumer Reports National Research Center.

One of the things they told us was that they really liked flying on Virgin America. "The leather seat cushions are so nice in coach, there's no reason to fly first class," says Janice Dunn, who answered the survey and lives in Palm Desert, Calif. The airline, which started in 2007, has recently expanded the number of cities it serves to 21. Its main hub is in San Francisco. It flies to most major American cities, as well as certain vacation destinations in Mexico. And it plans to add Anchorage, Alaska, and Austin, Texas, this spring.

Virgin America says it emphasizes "top-notch services and a host of innovative

amenities." Cabins feature mood lighting (magenta strips of lights along the sides and violet along the middle of the ceiling), Wi-Fi throughout the planes, and seat-back entertainment systems that allow you to order food and beverages, watch free movies and television, play games, and listen to more than 4,000 songs. Our readers gave those cabin services and in-flight entertainment top scores.

Although Virgin America charges \$25 each for the first and second checked bags, it was the only airline to get the top score for baggage handling.

Free baggage

Two other highly rated airlines, JetBlue and Southwest, receive high marks for baggage handling. But even more important, they're the only carriers on our list that let you check one (JetBlue) or two (Southwest) bags free on domestic flights. The free bags help explain why they're among the top airlines we rated.

Check-in was a breeze on Southwest, and readers enjoyed the staff's onboard service. But it was dinged on in-flight entertainment, an area where Virgin America and JetBlue (which also offers programming on seatback screens) shined. Southwest offers

BY THE NUMBERS

\$100

That's how much Spirit Airlines may charge you to check a bag at the gate. Standard baggage fees for online booking range from \$35 to \$90.

AIR CUSHION
Virgin America, which has expanded to 21 cities, has comfy seats even in coach.



wireless entertainment on your device. JetBlue outscored Southwest on cabin cleanliness and seating comfort; it gives all passengers a couple of extra inches of leg room compared with most other airlines.

Hawaiian Airlines received high marks for check-in ease, cabin service, and cleanliness. And readers liked the way it handled their bags. Not-so-hot: Hawaiian's in-flight entertainment.

On the other end of the spectrum, bottom-ranked Spirit Airlines received one of the lowest overall scores for any company we've ever rated. "Spirit is the only

no-frills airline left with fares that can be 90 percent less than other carriers," says George Hobica, founder and editor of Airfarewatchdog, which tracks airline deals. But it also charges a wide array of fees, including \$10 to \$19 to book a flight; \$3 for a soda, a juice, or a bag of M&Ms; and \$35 to \$100 per carry-on bag.

Readers were also sore about Spirit's seats; it has the tightest seating space in the industry. "I'm 6 feet 1 inch, and Spirit is the only airline I've flown where my knees hit the seat in front of me when it was upright, not just reclined," says sur-

vey respondent Paul Barrett, a retired airline pilot who lives in Orinda, Calif.

Consumers told us about other airlines' strengths and weaknesses. Passengers were very happy with Alaska's check-in, and they liked its cabin staff and baggage handling. But they weren't so happy with the airline's seats and entertainment options. Delta and Frontier were awarded very good marks for check-in ease, but otherwise things were mostly middling. Low marks for seating comfort hurt Delta. Lower-rated carriers, such as American, United, and US Airways, all received the lowest rating pos-

Airlines are feasting on fees

The airlines call them ancillary revenue. You probably call them annoying. One thing is certain—it's getting harder to purchase an airline ticket without paying for extras.

Since Spirit Airlines became an "Ultra Low Cost Carrier" in 2007 and most domestic carriers followed by charging for checked bags, there has been no turning back from the nickel-and-diming.

There isn't much good news for passengers. But when it comes to fees, the most consumer-friendly airline is Southwest, the only U.S. carrier that allows your first and second bags to be checked gratis. JetBlue allows only the first bag free; most airlines charge \$25. Low-cost Southwest also stands alone in not imposing ticket-change fees. (Many airlines give 24 hours to change a flight free.) And along with Frontier, it does not charge for telephoning reservations.

But you shouldn't automatically equate low fares with a lack of fees. Some of the

biggest charges are levied by two low-cost carriers, Allegiant and Spirit. Their business models are based on à la carte pricing, with a charge for carry-on bags (in Spirit's case, up to \$100). Frontier starts charging for carry on bags when the flight is booked through a third party. Spirit even charges for booking online, and it imposes an "Unintended Consequences of DOT Regulations Fee."

Do Allegiant and Spirit offer low fares? Absolutely. But obtaining a true apples-to-apples comparison among multiple airlines on your bottom-line ticket price can require a lot of time and work these days.

Hard-to-find fee info

Be warned: If you're searching for fees on an airline's site, it's often a cumbersome process. Southwest and Virgin America provide easy access to complete fee information, we found. Many other carriers

offer detailed online guides to fees, but they include unhelpful points such as charges of "from \$4 to \$99" for preferred seats. United doesn't even provide a range of prices for two critical fees: checking your first and second bags. Charges are doled out on a flight-by-flight basis only after you enter your itinerary.

We obtained United's fee information by contacting its media relations department, an option not available to the average passenger.

For most travelers, it's difficult to avoid the fees in our chart, and we didn't even include categories such as the cost of oversized or overweight luggage, additional bags, paper tickets, and for amenities and extras such as drinks, snacks, meals, larger seats, and headsets or entertainment.

Unaccompanied minors and pets also incur fees, as do many frequent-flyer-program transactions.

And to think that when we reported on airfares in 1964, we said, "Unless something is done to uncomplicate the situation, the day may soon arrive when only a computer will be able to match the traveler's need to the most suitable flight and fare."

How about a supercomputer?



HOW MUCH? Online info on airlines' fees, if you can find it, is often vague and incomplete.

Airline	First checked bag	Second checked bag
In alphabetical order. (All fees are one-way economy-coach, unless otherwise noted.)		
ALASKA	\$20	\$20
AMERICAN ①	\$25 (U.S., Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, Canada); free (international)	\$35 (U.S., Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, Canada); free/\$40/\$60/\$70 (international)
DELTA	\$25 (U.S., Canada, Caribbean); free (intl.)	\$35 (U.S., Canada); \$40/\$75/\$100 (intl.)
FRONTIER	\$20 if you check in online; \$25 at the airport	\$20
HAWAIIAN	\$17 (inter-island); \$25 (mainland U.S.); free (international)	\$17 (inter-island); \$35 (mainland U.S.); free (international)
JETBLUE	free	\$40
SOUTHWEST ②	free	free
SPIRIT	\$30/\$35/\$45/\$100 ③	\$40/\$45/\$55/\$100 ③
UNITED (includes CONTINENTAL)	\$25 (domestic); free (international)	\$35 (domestic); \$100 (international)
US AIRWAYS ①	\$25 (most of North and South America); free (transatlantic/transpacific/Brazil)	\$35 (most of North and South America); \$100 (transatlantic); free (transpacific/Brazil)
VIRGIN AMERICA	\$25 (domestic); free (international)	\$25

NOTE: Baggage fees are based on standard pricing and are current as of press time. ① American and US Airways are seeking government approval to merge operations. ② AirTran's operations are being merged into Southwest. ③ Depending on when you pay for checked bag.

sible for cabin cleanliness, seating comfort, and in-flight entertainment.

Airlines' fees are now coming in packages, whether or not you want all of the services. At American, one itinerary example put Choice Essential at \$68, allowing a free flight change, one free checked bag, and early boarding. The Choice Plus bundle, for \$88, would provide bonus frequent-flyer miles, free same-day standby and flight-change options, and a "premium" beverage. Exact costs vary by itinerary. So expect more turbulence ahead given that according to our survey, unexpected fees are a leading cause of dissatisfaction with an airline.

Track down the best fare

You'll have to shop around a bit to get a good ticket price. As you may have noticed if you've flown in the past year, fares are up, rising seven times in 2012 according to FareCompare, a travel-planning website. Rick Seane, co-founder and CEO of the site, predicts that the trend will continue through 2013.

Work the Web. Almost all of the respondents (94 percent) who booked their own flights did so online. Of those respondents, 59 percent compared fees on other websites before they chose an airline. To uncover the best deal, we suggest you cast that wider net.

Check prices on third-party sites. Expedia, Kayak, and Travelocity may list identical prices for flights, but they have different electronic reservation systems and add and remove fares at different times. Be sure to check airline sites, too, because sometimes they have sales that they don't share with third-party sites. If you don't have to book immediately, the airlines and price-comparison sites (add Airfarewatch-

dog, Hotwire, and Priceline to those above) might let you set price alerts; you'll get an e-mail or text when prices drop.

Dodge the fees. Try to travel light or fly a low-fee airline, such as JetBlue or Southwest. If you need to check a bag or pay for a carry-on, see whether there's a discount for prepaying on the airline's website.

Check your airline's weight limits. For example, United charges \$100 to \$200 (depending on your destination) for a checked bag weighing from more than 50 pounds to less than 100. Overweight fees kick in at more than 40 pounds on Spirit.

You might avoid certain fees if you charge your travel to the airline's credit card. The cards often carry annual fees of \$40 to \$100, but the perks they usually offer—priority boarding, free checked luggage, and access to airport lounges—can more than make up for the charge.

Be flexible. Shifting your travel dates by a day or two will often allow you to nab a much lower price. Tuesday, Wednesday, and Saturday are generally the cheapest days to fly, Seane says. Check prices at 3 p.m. EST on a Tuesday, he adds; it's when the greatest number of cheap seats are available. But bargains can appear at any time, so keep searching and set up those alerts, Hobica stresses.

Check other airports. When you use price-comparison sites, specify the city you want to depart from, not the airport. Most sites will then show you the flight options for any of that area's airports.

Put it on hold. Thanks to regulations that went into effect last year, you can hold a reservation for 24 hours without paying for it (as long as it's at least a week from the scheduled departure date) while you check around for a lower fare.



Ratings Airlines

In order of reader score.

Better ← → Worse
● ● ○ ● ●

Airline	Reader score	Survey results					
		Check-in ease	Cabin-crew service	Cabin cleanliness	Baggage handling	Seating comfort	In-flight entertainment
Virgin America	89	●	●	●	●	●	●
Southwest Airlines ¹	85	●	●	○	●	●	●
JetBlue Airways	85	●	●	●	●	●	●
Hawaiian Airlines	82	●	●	●	●	○	●
Alaska Airlines	81	●	●	○	●	●	●
Frontier Airlines	78	●	○	○	○	○	●
Delta Air Lines	71	●	○	●	○	●	●
US Airways ²	66	○	●	●	●	●	●
American Airlines ²	66	○	●	●	●	●	●
United Airlines	63	○	●	●	●	●	●
Spirit Airlines	50	●	●	●	●	●	●

¹ AirTran's operations are being merged into Southwest. ² Merger of US Airways and American Airlines is pending.

CLOSE-UP

About that kid in 4B

Only 8 percent of readers complained about loud children or crying babies on flights. But they said that only about a third of the children younger than 2 had their own seat, and 17 percent of them didn't sit in it for most of the flight. Thirty-six percent were being protected simply by the airplane seat belt, not in a car seat or other FAA-approved child-restraint system. That concerns us. Since 1990 the National Transportation Safety Board has asked the Federal Aviation Administration to ban children from sitting on laps for safety's sake, but the FAA has refused to do so.

Guide to the Ratings

Based on the experiences 16,663 CONSUMER REPORTS subscribers' overall satisfaction with their most recent flight(s) and is not limited to the factors listed in the survey results. Respondents rated each leg of their round-trip flight when applicable. A score of 100 would mean all respondents were completely satisfied; 80 would mean very satisfied, on average; 60, fairly well satisfied; 40, somewhat dissatisfied. Differences of fewer than three points are not meaningful. Scores for **check-in ease**, **cabin-crew service**, **cabin cleanliness**, **baggage handling**, **seating comfort**, and **in-flight entertainment** are relative. Survey results represent the experiences of our subscribers but might not reflect the U.S. population as a whole.

**FAMILY HOME**

Timothy Buckley, D.O., takes care of the entire Campagna family at his medical-home practice in Higganum, Conn. From left: Colton, 3, Jody, 37, Collin, 5, and Matthew, 39.

GETTING HEALTH CARE RIGHT FIRST IN A SERIES

A doctor's office that's all about you

More than 25,000 doctors commit to patient-centered care

REMEMBER WHEN bankers kept, well, banker's hours, and you couldn't cash a check after 4 p.m. or on weekends? Banks finally woke up to their customers' needs for convenient hours. Today customer-focused service is making itself felt in some of America's medical offices.

In these reorganized practices, evening

and weekend hours are only part of the difference. When you visit your doctor you won't feel you're getting the bum's rush before you have a chance to get your questions answered. If you've had a blood test or a CT scan, you won't have to call the office half a dozen times chasing down the results. And if you leave the hospital with an incomprehensible "discharge plan,"

someone from your doctor's office will help you arrange your follow-up care.

If you're already getting this type of service, you may be part of a "patient-centered medical home," the fastest-growing innovation in medical care. More than 10 percent of primary care practitioners—about 27,000 U.S. doctors in 5,560 offices—are now recognized as "patient centered medical homes" by the main accrediting group, the National Committee for Quality Assurance. Many thousands more are transforming their practices under other umbrellas. And major national insurers, such as Aetna and Wellpoint, are paying qualified practices an extra few dollars per patient per month to defray the additional costs involved in the switch.

The idea of patient-centered medical homes has been germinating for years among primary care practitioners. The

How to find a medical home

You may already be in a medical home and not know it because not all practices use the term with their patients. Expanded hours, same-day appointments for acute illnesses, use of nurses or care managers to coordinate your care for chronic diseases, requests for your feedback about care, and online access to your medical

records are good signs that a primary care practice is functioning as a medical home.

If you're interested in finding a medical-home practice, start with your health plan's provider directory, which may have a special designation for such practices. You can also find an NCQA-recognized practice near you at recognition.ncqa.org.

Affordable Care Act gave them a boost by funding pilot programs to strengthen and reform primary care; the most ambitious pilot is paying 500 practices in eight states to turn themselves into medical homes for more than 300,000 Medicare beneficiaries. If any of those pilots, funded by the new Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation, turn out to effectively improve care and lower cost, Medicare and Medicaid can roll them out nationwide without additional congressional approval.

This report on medical homes is the first in a series about the reforms afoot in how you will receive your medical care in the months and years ahead. The series is funded in part by a grant from Atlantic Philanthropies.

A way to cut costs

Health care spending, long a cause of fiscal hand-wringing, is now a looming emergency. Within the next three years more than 25 million Americans are expected to sign up for health insurance (or pay a fine) as the Affordable Care Act rolls out. And tens of millions of Americans born during the baby boom are heading into their medically expensive sunset years. With more people, and more older people, needing care, it's becoming obvious that a health care system that produces below-average national health and costs 50 to 60 percent more than the systems of the most free-spending industrialized nations is unsustainable.

Other countries have solved the problem of costs by fiat. The prices that health care providers can collect for their services are established by the government (in Canada, France, Japan, and the United Kingdom) or national cartels of insurers (in Germany). For many political and historical reasons, that hasn't happened in the U.S., with the exceptions of Medicare and Medicaid.

Instead of national price controls, the U.S. is laying its bet on reforming the way health care is delivered and paid for. In the case of medical homes, in addition to the usual per-service fees for office visits and procedures, primary care doctors receive a little extra to defray the costs of setting up and running patient-centered care and may also share in any resulting savings if they succeed in keeping patients healthier and in less need of expensive care.

It will be years before we know whether these reforms really do save money and

Doctors will be judged on how well their patients fare.

reduce deaths and disability from chronic illnesses. Meanwhile, it's important that you know how these changes will affect what happens to you in the doctor's office or during a hospital stay.

Who's in charge here?

One of the major ideas for saving money is to put someone firmly in charge so that patients aren't getting duplicative or contradictory treatments from a legion of specialists and so that doctors aren't overlooking important inexpensive preventive measures that can save misery and money in the long run. The person in charge will usually be a primary care doctor: a family physician, general internist, or pediatrician.

If this reminds you of the hopes for HMOs in the reforms of the 1990s, well, in some ways it is back to the future. But the lesson of the '90s has been registered: The new role for the primary care physician is not a "gatekeeper" preventing you from seeing a specialist but a facilitator of all your care who will be judged (and eventually paid) on how well you do rather than how many tests and procedures you get or don't get.

Turning a conventional doctor's office into a patient-centered office involves substantial reengineering to make delivering care less time-consuming and more organized for everyone involved. For a start, the 9-to-4 medical practice is going the way of banker's hours. "One thing patients want is more access," says Christine Bechtel, who works with the National Partnership for Women and Families and has extensively studied patients' perspectives on medical homes. If we want consumers to avoid using the emergency rooms for non-emergencies, she says, they need to have off-hour alternatives. Jody Campagna, 37, a homemaker from East Haddam, Conn., says that "most of the time I don't have a problem getting in" for a same-day visit to her medical-home practitioner, Timothy J. Buckley, D.O., in nearby Higganum when her chronic sinus infections, or her sons' frequent ear infections, kick up.

Other hallmarks of a medical home are efficient teamwork, "smart" medical records, and motivating patients to do their part to stay as healthy as possible.

The care team is ready

In old-style medical practices that are organized around the physician, patients may be stuck half-naked in a paper gown in the examining room while the doctor and staff gather essential information or wait for the results of a blood test.

But in patient-centered practices, like Bon Secours Medical Group in suburban Richmond, Va., the process has been reengineered, according to Andrew Rose,

How France does it

To put our country's health costs in context, it's useful to compare them with those of France, which is generally acknowledged as having one of the world's best health care systems.



The French government sets the prices that health care providers can charge. France spends 11.6 percent of its gross domestic product on health care, while the U.S. spends 17.6 percent. Here are some details.

SPENDING & COVERAGE (2010)		
Total health spending per capita	\$3,974	\$8,233
Government health spending per capita	\$3,061	\$3,967
% uninsured	0%	15.7%
HEALTH OUTCOMES (2010)		
Life expectancy at birth (2011)	81.3 yr.	78.7 yr.
Infant mortality per 1,000 births	3.6	6.1
COSTS PER EPISODE (2012)		
Doctor's office visit	\$30	\$95
Hospital day	\$853	\$4,287
Angioplasty	\$7,564	\$28,182
Appendectomy	\$4,463	\$13,851
Childbirth delivery (normal)	\$3,541	\$9,775
Hip replacement	\$10,927	\$40,364
Heart bypass	\$22,844	\$73,420
TESTS (2012)		
Abdominal CT scan	\$183	\$630
Angiogram	\$264	\$914
MRI	\$363	\$1,121
NAME-BRAND DRUGS (30-day prescription, 2012)		
Cymbalta	\$47	\$176
Lipitor	\$48	\$124
Nexium	\$30	\$202

Sources: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and International Federation of Health Plans.

M.D., a family physician in one of its practice locations. First thing in the morning, the care team of doctors, nurses, and medical assistants “do a daily huddle where we look at our schedule for the day and identify any particular needs the patients who are coming in may have,” he says. If a patient needs blood or urine tests, the nurses and assistants will take care of those before the doctor even enters the exam room.

“For instance, our nurses ask our diabetics 11 questions and put the answers into the computer,” Rose says. “When I go in, I can concentrate on the answers that indicate a problem.”

For patients with serious medical needs, more members, such as specialty physicians, case managers, and therapists, may be assigned to the care team, and appointments are organized so that the patient can see everyone in one visit. And the whole team meets with the patient, and with the family, as needed.

Rosemarie Salomone, 75, of Clifton Heights, Pa., had become very forgetful about taking her medications and had shed an alarming amount of weight. The family consulted a new physician, William Warning, M.D., who practices in a medical home with Crozer-Keystone, a primary care practice network in suburban Philadelphia.

“We were able to assess her whole medical situation,” Warning says. The diagnosis was Alzheimer’s disease. “We brought in a behavioralist and a geriatric physician to do multigenerational counseling and coordinate her care,” Warning says. “They are embedded in our practice.”

“It’s like one-stop shopping,” says Salomone’s daughter, Michele Schumacher. “You don’t have to go through the whole history again and again. At one point we had me, my mom, my dad, my sister, my brother, the psychologist, the geriatric doctor, and Dr. Warning all in the same room,” she recalls. “We got the answers to all our questions right on the spot.” The family also got the phone number of an Alzheimer’s support group, which they have found very helpful.

Smart medical records

Today “the average full-time primary care practitioner might take care of 2,000 people,” notes Christopher Campanile, M.D., who practices in a medical home at Coastal Hillside Family Medicine in Pawtucket, R.I. He believes you cannot do this work



TEAM EFFORT Rosemary Salomone with William Warning, M.D., at his medical-home practice in suburban Philadelphia. Others from left: Cathie Gorzalski, practice manager; Julian Salomone, husband and caregiver; and Barry Jacobs, Psy.D., a geriatric psychologist.

right without electronic medical records. They prompt the doctor to deploy needed tests, enable doctors to see a patient’s history at a glance, and help avoid unwelcome drug interactions.

For years U.S. doctors lagged behind the rest of the developed world in computerizing their medical records, but that changed dramatically in 2009 when the federal stimulus bill brought forth more than \$19 billion in funds to help practices

Electronic systems send reminders for follow-up care.

go digital. The percentage of doctor’s offices with electronic medical records shot up from 42 percent in 2008 to 72 percent in 2012. There have been complaints that doctors are asking questions needed more “for the record” than relevant to the particular patient visit and paying more attention to entering data into the computer rather than looking patients in the eye. It’s hoped that professionals will become more facile as they adjust to the systems. Meanwhile, patient-centered care is benefiting in many ways:

Prevention and checkup reminders. “We don’t wait for you to remember it’s time for a screening mammogram,” says

Christine Sinsky, M.D., who practices in a medical home at Medical Associates in Dubuque, Iowa. “We’ll reach out to you.”

Many physician practices have for decades tried to prompt patients to get needed tests and checkups, but the effort is vastly simplified by the use of electronic medical records. In the suburban Philadelphia medical home, Warning recalls that before the advent of electronic records, “If we told a diabetic patient to come back in a month so we could check their blood pressure, we didn’t have a robust tracking mechanism for knowing if they didn’t come in.” But today the records can automatically flag patients who need to be checked.

Easier communication with patients. Of course patients still have to be willing to participate in their own care. Witness Robert Eley, 58, who has diabetes and says he “would basically ignore” all those checkup reminders the Bon Secours medical home had been sending until he had a heart attack last March. A couple of angioplasties and a hospital stay later, he was ready to play ball. Now he checks his blood sugar three times a day and e-mails the results every evening to his primary care physician, Andrew Rose, M.D., through the practice’s electronic patient portal. “He tells me whether to adjust the units of insulin I’m taking, whether they look good, what’s the reason for a spike,” Eley says. “I’ve lost 20 pounds and I’m trying to get more exercise in.”

Under the old system, Rose says, that

wouldn't have been possible. "You'd tell patients to call in their numbers every week. The nurse would write it down, and it would sit on my desk for a week," he says. "Now, it's in my e-mail inbox. It's made life so much easier."

Now that Eley will actually keep his appointments for those checkups, he'll be able to look up his lab results at the online patient portal as well, Rose says.

Managing care transitions. At a minimum, all providers within a health system are generally able to access patient records. In some cases, practices may be able to communicate with local hospitals, either directly or through the intermediary of an insurance company.

"In our practice, everything's electronically connected, so we know when a patient goes into the hospital," Rose says. "When a patient gets discharged, our nurse navigators get in touch within 24 hours. We eliminate any confusion about medicine changes or discharge instructions, and prevent readmission."

The system still has an important gap. The goal of true "interoperability," in which all providers anywhere can see a patient's record, remains more a dream than a reality. For example, a doctor isn't likely to receive electronic notice for patients seen in an out-of-town emergency room.

Giving doctors feedback. Pro Health Physicians, a primary care practice with about 340 providers scattered around Connecticut, uses its electronic records to prepare monthly report cards letting each practice know where it stands on various quality measures.

Timothy J. Buckley, D.O., in Pro Health's Higganum location, says the first report showed that his office was prescribing too many costly name-brand drugs and not enough affordable, and equally good, generics. Today his office's generic prescribing rate is better than the average Pro Health practice's.

"Doctors are smart and have egos," Buckley says. "And when you hand me a report that says I'm below average, you can bet I'm going to work harder."

Coordinating care. Garry Pape, a 66-year-old retired factory worker from Rickardsville, Iowa, ruefully describes himself as "one of the 5 percent of people who use 95 percent of the insurance money." A Vietnam veteran, Pape has a host of medical conditions, including, most recently, recurrent lung cancer.

His primary doctor, Christine Sinsky,

Patients are encouraged to make needed lifestyle changes.

has sent him to specialists aplenty to take care of his catalog of ills but never loses the thread of his treatment.

"We don't leave anything to chance," she says. "We make the appointments for patients to see the cardiologist, rheumatologist, or pulmonologist. They leave with the appointment card in hand, not just a recommendation."

Since most of the specialists are part of Sinsky's large medical practice, she says, "if I make a change in Garry's medications, the oncologist will see it at the next visit and be working off an accurate list."

Pape keenly appreciates what Sinsky and her colleagues do in part because for four years, when his employer dropped Sinsky's practice from its health plan, he had to switch to another doctor. "I didn't get any of the follow-ups," he says. As soon as he retired and went on Medicare, he went back to Sinsky.

Patient involvement

"Approximately 70 percent of all medical costs are from bad patient behavior," says Robert Fortini, a nurse practitioner and vice president of clinical operations for Virginia's Bon Secours group. "People

aren't exercising, they're not eating right, they're not getting their labs done or taking their meds," says Fortini, who feels it's the practice's job to help get people motivated. It has already hired a pharmacologist and nutritionist, and soon will be adding social workers.

"At some of our practices we schedule asthma or diabetes days," he says. "On a diabetes day, people can come in and go to different stations to receive aspects of care." They might see a pharmacist, a podiatrist, an eye doctor, and a nutritionist.

But ultimately patients with chronic illnesses must participate in their own wellness, and medical homes are trying to make that happen.

Connie Susa, 67, of Warwick, R.I., received a diagnosis of type 2 diabetes more than a decade ago. The executive director of a support and advocacy network for people with disabilities, she knew the key to controlling her disease was in her own hands. But she was frustrated because her doctor at the time didn't "consider me a partner in my health care," she says, and didn't communicate essential information. So she switched to Coastal Hillside Family Medicine, where a mainstay of her diabetes management is a monthly support group that the practice sponsors.

"The people are very different, but we encourage one another in our efforts to manage our symptoms and break through denial and self-justifications," Susa says. "The group keeps me going."

Doctor's office: Then and now

MEDICAL NEED	THAT WAS THEN	THIS IS NOW (or coming soon)
Appointments	"We can fit you in in three days."	Same-day attention for acute illness.
Sick or injured at an inconvenient hour	Go to urgent-care center or emergency room to see someone who does not know your history.	Clear arrangement for after-hours care. Your medical history available electronically.
Prescription renewal	Call office and wait for doctor to call you back.	Nurse handles immediately.
Preventive care	Remember to make appointments for checkups, screenings, vaccines.	Electronic record tracks preventive measures and reminds you and professionals.
Test results	Play phone tag with the doctor.	Available at online portal.
Follow-up care	Up to you to make timely appointments.	Office tracks and reminds you of needed follow-up.
Specialist appointments	Specialists and primary care doctors may not communicate.	Primary care physician coordinates with specialists.
Hospital release	Doctor has no idea you're in the hospital unless you initiate contact.	Knows when you are hospitalized and takes initiative to follow up.



The kitchen of your dreams

Make it happen with these top trends and products

HOUSING'S STEADY recovery has put kitchen remodels and their relatively high payback on investment and enjoyment back in the spotlight. This 25-page remodeling guide is where to start, whether you're selling or staying put.

We've skipped the fads and the come-ons and focused on trends with staying power. Appliances that do more and serve you in

new ways are among them, including more ranges with double ovens along with the roomiest refrigerators we've ever tested. And since there's no one-size-fits-all kitchen, you'll find specific advice for specific needs, whether you're serving a crowd, creating a kitchen where money's no object, or simply want a dream kitchen at a down-to-earth price.

Ever had a gripe with a contractor?

You're not alone: About 10 percent of respondents to a nationwide CONSUMER REPORTS survey said they were disappointed by their remodeler's promptness, cost management, or ability to problem-solve. Our tips on working with pros are based on some savvy moves and common goofs gleaned from the survey of more than 5,000 readers. We also gathered a wealth of kitchen "likes" and pitfalls from

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See more kitchen makeovers Check out our iPad app for photos of three other remodels.

PHOTOS: KARYN R. MILLET; KITCHEN DESIGN: BONESTEEL TROUT HALL



BRIGHTEN UP White painted cabinetry and abundant natural light, including a sun-soaked corner banquette, make for a warm, welcoming kitchen.



our Facebook fans, including the story of a remodeler who saved thousands by buying gently used cherry cabinets and appliances from a home-salvage shop.

You'll find our detailed test reports on appliances, countertops, do-it-yourself flooring, and more. Here's how to start planning the kitchen of your dreams:

Open it up. Separate kitchens are becoming as antiquated as parlors and rumpus rooms. An open kitchen makes the home feel bigger and warmer, says David Davison, certified kitchen remodeler and owner of Realty Restoration in Austin, Texas.

But an open plan can lead to chaos if the space is poorly organized. Think about what you'll do most in your kitchen—cooking, baking, eating, entertaining, homework, bill paying, and so on. If the room isn't big enough for everything, strip away the nonessentials, or relocate them to an adjacent area. For instance, do you really need a kitchen desk if you pay bills online using your tablet?

Stretch your storage. Fewer walls often

mean less space for cabinets. A kitchen island provides room for multiple base cabinets, plus additional seating and work surfaces. Drawers or pullout shelves make storage more accessible.

Depending on the island size, you might even add a prep sink or cooktop with dedicated range hood. Just don't overdo the dimensions: "No matter how gorgeous, a massive island in a not-so-massive kitchen will be a problem," says Julie Eller, Lowe's director of trend strategy and communication. Figure on 42 inches of clearance on all sides or 48 inches if it's a two-cook kitchen. If space is tight, consider a peninsula instead.

Pantries are also ideal for stowing bulk items from the warehouse club and small appliances, which might otherwise clutter the countertop. A walk-in pantry pro-

vides the best storage and access, though an oversize wall cabinet with rollout shelves will also do the trick.

Try a cleaner look. Transitional design straddles the line between the warm, detailed look of traditional style and the sparse minimalism of modernism. Its clean, uncluttered look isn't likely to feel dated a decade down the road. Almost 70 percent of kitchen designers said they specified the new look on recent projects compared with 60 percent who chose traditional styling, according to the National Kitchen & Bath Association, an industry trade group.

Simple cabinetry is a hallmark of transitional design. That means ditching the arched panels, applied moldings, and furniture-like feet of traditional cabinets without going ultramodern with curved corners or high-gloss finishes. Flat-panel, European-style units, without visible door frames, are a popular middle ground. They also minimize the nooks and crannies that collect dirt and grease.

Neutral hues, such as white cabinets and sophisticated grays on the walls, are another key element of transitional style. The calm palette has driven interest to quartz countertops, whose solid colors, light tones, and subtle patterns often work better than the dark, grained granites that have dominated kitchens for decades.

Grab efficiency gains. Appliances that meet the government's Energy Star standards are the most coveted home feature, beating out other wants like table space in the kitchen and a walk-in pantry, according to a recent survey of new-home buyers by the National Association of Home Builders. Check our dishwasher and refrigerator Ratings throughout this section for models that combine top-notch energy efficiency and performance.

LED lighting is another way to save energy and money. While LEDs still cost more than other bulbs, prices are plummeting. And with their claimed life span of 20,000 to 50,000 hours, you may not have to change them for decades. If electrical work is part of your plan, consider recessed canisters, undercabinet lights, and hanging fixtures designed for LEDs, rather than incandescent fixtures that are just LED compatible. LED-specific fixtures offer improved light quality, dimmability, and adjustability, including the ability to change the color of their light output, says Terry McGowan, director of engineering and technology at the American Lighting Association.

► The kitchen you've always wanted

Maybe you've downsized from a big house to a smaller one or a condo. Or this is the year you'll finally have the money and energy to tackle a major remodel. Even with a big budget, careful planning is key. Here's how:

Splurge smartly. Kitchens have moved on from over-the-top trophy spaces. "Now the emphasis is on products and materials that are beautiful and also easy to maintain," says Adam Kois of WengerKois Architecture + Design in Fanwood, N.J.

Cabinets are often the costliest component, and they set the tone in terms of style. Choosing semi-custom over custom units can save you thousands. Just don't skimp on construction. Solid-wood or plywood doors, full-extension glides, and boxes made of half-inch to three-quarter inch plywood held up best in our tests.

Mixing countertop materials is another way to save, for example with pricey stone counters on the island and less expensive laminate for the surrounding work surfaces.

Size it right. Design your kitchen for how you'll use it most of the time, rather than for large crowds if you rarely entertain. A smaller space means fewer square feet of pricey cabinets and countertops, freeing up your budget for materials and finishes you love.

Prepare for the future. That goes for people of all ages and abilities, though it's especially important for aging boomers. "Consumers are raising the height of the dishwasher, choosing easy-to-access wall ovens, and putting shelving and other storage at shoulder height," says Sarah Fishburne, Home Depot's director for trend and design.



HIGH DESIGN An island with Carrera marble extending down its sides is the showpiece of a kitchen that also features a metal tile backsplash and reclaimed-wood floors.

How to hire a reputable pro

While there are plenty of honest remodeling contractors out there, the field has its share of bad apples. We asked our Facebook fans to tell us the craziest thing their contractors told them. "Well, all windows leak a little," a poster wrote. "Don't worry about water coming through the electrical fixture," another wrote. Our favorite: "It would save time just to send you a court transcript." This checklist will help you avoid similar experiences with your kitchen remodel:

► **Don't chase lowball bids.** Tough competition is inducing some pros to lower their profit margins with low bids and then make up the difference with shoddy work. Gauge the going rate for your project by getting at least three estimates, rather than jumping at the lowest estimate.

► **Check references.** Reputable contractors are glad to provide names and contact information for satisfied customers. Try to check past jobs in person to talk with customers and see how the work is holding up. And always check the Better Business Bureau and your state's attorney general's office for complaints before making your pick.

► **Get a written contract.** It should spell out in detail what will be done to complete the job, all associated costs, and a payment schedule. Don't sign a contract with a lot of open-ended amounts, or "allowances," for products and materials. Once the work is underway, stick to the terms, since contract changes can blow any budget.

► **Review the paperwork.** That includes up-to-date license and insurance and

workers compensation policies. (The Contractor's License Reference Site has information on licensing requirements in your state, plus a list of licensed contractors.) The contractor, not you, should get permits and give you a lien waiver when the job is done to keep suppliers from knocking on your door for unpaid bills. You'll need to get the final certificate of occupancy.

► **Don't pay cash.** Write out the check to the contracting company, not an individual. Paying by credit card also adds a layer of protection. A reasonable down payment is 30 percent of the total project cost to be paid upon initial delivery of materials. Make final payments only when work is completed to your satisfaction. A reputable contractor won't pressure you if the job is not finished properly.



▲ The high-traffic kitchen

This kitchen is your command center if you're part of a large family or among the growing number of multigenerational households, or if you simply entertain a lot. With all those bodies in motion, good traffic flow and abundant work surfaces are essential. To keep things moving:

Organize the space. Think of the range, refrigerator, and sink as three points of a triangle, each with an adjacent counter space. This oft-quoted work triangle remains the best design principle for maintaining traffic flow in the kitchen. In busy two-cook kitchens, think

outside the triangle by adding a second prep sink or choosing a cooktop/wall-oven combo instead of a single stand-alone range.

Look back to banquettes. This staple of 1950s architecture is making a comeback, says Lita Dirks, an interior designer in Denver. Essentially a built-in bench with a table, a banquette provides streamlined seating plus built-in storage for tablecloths, place mats, and other items. A cushioned bench enhances comfort and lets you add a splash of style with colorful fabric.

Match upkeep to your lifestyle. Got a dog? One solid-wood floor and several vinyl

OLD AND NEW A contemporary color palette is juxtaposed with traditional elements, including a sculptural range hood and furniture-style, ceiling-height cabinets.

products scratched easily in our tests. (See our flooring report, on page 28, for smarter options.) And if you have small kids, you may want to consider an alternative to stainless appliances, which show fingerprints. Manufacturers have rolled out glossy white and black finishes, as well as matte grays. If your budget is generous, you can also get built-in appliances with integrated panels that coordinate with the surrounding cabinetry.



▲ The budget-priced but beautiful kitchen

The average kitchen remodel cost about \$47,000 in 2013, according to the National Kitchen & Bath Association. But you don't have to spend anywhere near that, especially if you're a first-time homebuyer or a home seller looking for cost-effective spruce-ups. Here's how save without sacrificing:

Refinish, don't replace. Assuming the basic layout works, a fresher look can be as easy and

inexpensive as new paint. "Consider painting the cabinets or removing upper cabinet doors and painting the back of the cabinet to introduce a fun, fresh pop of color," says Sarah Fishburne at Home Depot. Replacing floors and countertops and adding new lighting can also have a transformative effect for a few thousand dollars.

Do some work yourself. Comfortable with a sledgehammer and a paintbrush? "You can

BARGAIN BEAUTY Simple white appliances and a freestanding island controlled costs in this kitchen without compromising style.

reduce costs by doing your own demo work and the finish painting," says Kevin Anundson, owner of Owner Assisted Remodeling, a design-build firm in Elm Grove, Wis., that specializes in client collaborations. But leave electrical and plumbing work to the pros.

Don't write off inexpensive products.

"There are some gorgeous vinyl floors out there that look just like wood, stone, and other natural materials," Anundson says. The same goes for laminate countertops, which also include bright colors and retro geometric patterns. (See page 31 for winning countertop picks that begin at just \$10 per square foot.) Even budget-friendly appliances are available in stainless steel.

REMODELING MISTAKES TO AVOID

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





SIMPLE STONE SnapStone's ceramic tile is one of 11 recommended floors you can "float."

Flooring

We found more types you can install yourself

FLOORS THAT SNAP together and "float" without glue, nails, or staples aren't limited to Pergo and other plastic laminates. Our latest tests include solid-wood, vinyl, and even ceramic-tile floors designed for do-it-yourselfers.

Ceramic-tile floors from SnapStone and Dal-Tile are two that made our winners list. They're installed without the usual mastic or mortar. And as with other floating floors, they can go over slightly imperfect subfloors and even in basements. At \$5 per square foot, Dal-Tile Clicks could save you roughly \$400 to \$500 for an average-sized kitchen compared with a regular ceramic floor if you do the work yourself.

Our tests of 51 floorings yielded 16 other top choices that stood up to our simulated kitchen abuse. But weeks of scuffing, scratching, and dropping weights on other

floors, and exposing them to intense UV light, showed that some of them, including a pricey Brazilian teak, could let you down in a busy kitchen. The details:

Bamboo still tops wood—usually. Strong performance in our foot-traffic and scratch tests helped EcoTimber's Woven Honey

and Teragren's Portfolio Naturals Wheat bamboo earn top scores for solid-wood flooring. But among engineered woods, slightly better stain and UV resistance helped put a Harris Wood Traditions oak floor a notch above the Teragren bamboo. And if you thought teak was tough, think again: Mullican's MeadowBrooke Cumaru Natural, \$8 per square foot, was no better than most other engineered woods at fending off wear under our abrasion machine. That's a concern because many engineered-wood floors can be sanded and refinished just once.

Some DIY floors fall short. Lumber Liquidators Virginia Mill Works Butcher Block is the first solid-wood floor we tested that is installed without nails. It resisted wear in our foot-traffic tests but was also the most scratch-prone floor in this group. Opt for the brand's Tranquility Antique Oak vinyl, which you can simply click together and lay it down. But don't expect the wear and dent resistance you get with the best vinyl floors.

Two laminates are less robust. Laminates use photos of wood, stone, and other natural materials beneath a plastic wear layer. The best offer easy installation and durability. Pergo Accolade Rustic Oak, \$3, and Mannington Restoration Collection Chateau Sunset, \$4.30, lost points in our foot-traffic test. And as with other laminates, once the wear layer is gone, so is the floor. Two better bets: Hampton Bay Enderbury Hickory, \$2.60 per square foot, and Surface Source Winchester Oak, a CR Best Buy at just \$1 per square foot.

How to choose

Even floating floors require careful prep that includes removing any nails and staples from the subfloor. You'll also need to lay down a leveling compound for dips deeper than three-eighths of an inch over 8 to 10 feet. (Use a straight edge to check.)

Three ways to fix the floor you have

Got scratches, dents, and dings? Minor damage may even enhance the rustic look of distressed or hand-scraped floors by blending in with other patina. Check the manufacturer for any special instructions. Then try these fixes for more visible flaws:

- ▶ **Mark it.** A color-matched felt marker can hide small scratches in any floor. Some hardwood manufacturers offer color-blended filler for chips and grooves.
- ▶ **Sand it.** Badly worn or damaged wood

floors must be refinished. But you can do spot repairs of wear or damage with light buffing or sanding, followed by staining. Be especially careful with the thin veneers on engineered-wood floors.

- ▶ **Replace only what's damaged.** Heavy damage or a cracked stone tile typically requires chiseling out the damaged section and gluing in a new piece. But that's still easier than removing an entire row of tiles or planks if you've floated the floor.

Here's what else to consider:

Weigh your needs. Check the scores for denting if you have children or entertain often. The ceramic-tile floors we tested didn't crack until we dropped the equivalent of a heavy pot on them. But as with other floating floors, replacing a damaged piece involves chiseling it out and gluing in a new one or, with the Dal-Tile, removing the entire row and adjacent molding.

Choose a factory finish. Prefinished wood and bamboo floors cost about 40 percent more than unfinished floors. But you'll

probably save overall because factory floor finishes tend to last longer.

Check for certification. Vinyl floors with the industry's FloorScore certification emit relatively low levels of volatile organic compounds, which are linked to health problems and pollution. (The vinyl we recommend has it.) For wood, certification by the Forest Stewardship Council and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative offers assurance that it's from responsibly managed forests. Check packaging to be sure both product and manufacturer are certified.



Overview

Our top picks typically resisted wear in our foot-traffic, scratch, and stain tests better than others in their category. We focus below on those with specific strengths and value. Prices are per square foot.

- ✓ **CR Best Buy** These blend overall durability and value. All are recommended.
- ✓ **Recommended** These highly scored products stand out for the reasons below.

TOP SOLID FLOORING

- A1** Teragren \$7.50
- A2** EcoTimber \$5.90
- A3** Mullican \$6.30
- A4** Bruce \$5.70

The **A1** bamboo can float; **A2** is comparable, for less. For oak, pick **A3** for its scratch and UV resistance, **A4** for its wear resistance.

REAL VENEER, EASY INSTALLATION

- B1** Harris Wood \$5.50
- B2** Teragren \$6

These floors can float. Choose **B1** if you want an oak veneer, **B2** for bamboo.

WINNING LAMINATES

- C1** Armstrong \$3.50
- C4** Surface Source \$1 **CR Best Buy**

These can float. **C1** is best overall for toughness; **C4** scored comparably for less.

FOR A SOFTER FEEL

- D1** Congoleum \$5
- D2** Armstrong \$5.50
- D4** Armstrong \$5.50
- E1** Armstrong \$4.50

Among vinyls, choose **D1** or **D2** for their stonelike looks, **D4** for a floating floor. Choose **E1** if you want linoleum.

SIMPLER CERAMIC TILE

- F1** SnapStone \$7.65
- F2** Dal-Tile \$5

These are designed to float without glue or cement. **F1** uses real grout, so you can chisel out a damaged tile without removing the entire row. **F2** has integrated grout lines for easier installation.

Ratings Flooring

All tested products In performance order, within types.

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price (sq. ft.)	Overall score	Sq. ft. (box)	Resists				
						Foot traffic	Scratches	Stains	Dents	Sunlight (UV)
		Many of these floorings can be floated without nails or glue; those that can't are footnoted below.		0 100						
				P F G VG E						

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

- ✓ **CR Best Buy**
- ✓ **Recommended**

A PREFINISHED SOLID WOOD Usually nailed to a subfloor at grade or above.

✓	1	Teragren Portfolio Naturals Wheat TPF-SYN-WHT-126-DL ¹	\$7.50	80	20	●	●	●	●	●
✓	2	EcoTimber Woven Honey WBH061 ^{1 2}	5.90	76	23	●	●	●	●	○
✓	3	Mullican St. Andrews Solid Oak Strip 10930 ²	6.30	69	24	○	●	●	●	○
✓	4	Bruce Dundee Plank CB1210 ²	5.70	62	22	●	○	●	●	○
	5	Natural Floors by USFloors Bamboo Woven Strand 602WSS ^{1 2}	4.00	58	23	○	●	●	●	○
	6	Mullican Cumaru Natural 17711 ²	8.50	57	15	○	●	●	●	○
	7	Noble House Solid Oak Gunstock FC3410 ²	3.50	56	21	○	●	●	●	○
	8	Mohawk Rockford Red Oak Natural WSC58-10 ²	5.00	56	19	○	●	●	●	○
	9	Lumber Liquidators Virginia Mill Works Butcher Block Sunset Mountain Oak 10022504	5.00	56	12	●	○	●	●	○
	10	Lumber Liquidators Bellawood Natural Red Oak ²	4.40	54	40	○	●	●	●	○
	11	Lumber Liquidators Morning Star Strand Natural ^{1 2}	3.90	51	17	○	●	●	●	○
	12	Lauzon Classics Northern Red Oak Natural R0020225 ²	6.40	50	20	○	●	●	●	○
	13	The Woods Company Eco-nomical Antique Oak ²	8.00	49	³	○	●	●	●	○

B ENGINEERED WOOD Can usually be floated anywhere in the house.

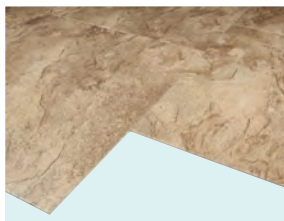
✓	1	Harris Wood Traditions SpringLoc Red Oak Bridle HE25050K48	5.50	73	33	○	●	●	●	○
✓	2	Teragren Synergy Strand with Xcora Java ¹	6.00	73	23	○	●	●	●	○
✓	3	Armstrong Century Farm Hickory Natural GCH452NALG	6.00	61	28	○	●	○	●	○
	4	Home Legend Hand Scraped Oak Gunstock Click-Lock HL16 (Home Depot)	3.40	59	21	○	●	●	●	○
	5	Mullican MeadowBrooke Cumaru Natural 17107	8.00	56	29	○	●	●	●	○
	6	Armstrong Premier Performance Red Oak Natural EHP3000	8.00	53	28	○	●	●	●	○
	7	Mannington American Hardwoods American Oak Plank	4.00	51	36	○	●	●	●	○
	8	Mohawk Pastoria Red Oak Natural HCC27-10 (Home Depot)	4.30	50	29	○	●	●	●	○
	9	Natural Floors by USFloors Bamboo 609LS ¹	3.30	43	17	○	○	●	●	○
	10	Wicanders Corkcomfort Series 100 WRT Natural 0801007 ³	7.00	41	23	○	○	●	●	○
	11	Duluth Timber Company Engineered Mixed Grain Douglas Fir	11.00	38	⁴	○	○	○	●	○
	12	Home Legend Lisbon Natural HL9311LN (Home Depot) ³	3.50	34	23	○	○	○	●	○
	13	Lisbon Cork Evora ⁴	4.00	32	13	○	○	○	○	○

¹ Bamboo product. ² Can't be floated. ³ Cork product. ⁴ Not applicable; custom-milled to order. ⁵ Not applicable; comes in sheets.

Ratings continued on next page



B2 Teragren



D1 Congoleum

All tested products In performance order, within types.

 Excellent
 Very good
 Good
 Fair
 Poor

 CR Best Buy
 Recommended

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price (sq. ft.)	Overall score	Sq. ft. (box)	Resists
		Many of these floorings can be floated without nails or glue; those that can't are footnoted below.		<div><div></div><div>0100</div><div>P F G V G E</div></div>		Foot traffic Scratches Stains Dents Sunlight (UV)

✓	1	Armstrong	Coast Living L3051 White Wash Walnut	\$3.50	87	14	●●●●●●●●●●
✓	2	Hampton Bay	Enderbury Hickory 367551 (Home Depot)	2.60	78	25	●●●●●●●●●●
✓	3	Quick-Step	Perspectives Ansel Oak UF1259	4.00	75	16	●●●●●●●●●●
✓	4	Surface Source	Winchester Oak 2765 (Lowe's)	1.00	74	24	●●●●●●●●●●
	5	Pergo	Accolade Rustic Oak PJ2627	3.00	62	18	●●●●●●●●●●
	6	Pergo	XP Grand Oak LF000326 (Home Depot)	3.50	60	20	●●●●●●●●●●
	7	Mannington	Restoration Collection Chateau Sunset 22300	4.30	59	17	●●●●●●●●●●
	8	SwiftLock	Plus Acappella Jatoba LX60300842 (Lowe's)	3.00	56	13	●●●●●●●●●●
	9	Home Legend	Jatoba HL89 (Home Depot)	3.00	53	13	●●●●●●●●●●
	10	DuPont	Real Touch Elite Sand Hickory 635350 (Home Depot)	3.40	44	19	●●●●●●●●●●

[illegible]

✓	1	Armstrong Marmorette Oak Brown LP066 ⁽²⁾	4.50	62	[5]	○	●	○	○	●
	2	Forbo Marmoleum Click	8.00	41	7	●	●	●	●	○
	3	Nova Linoleum Klick 6615	6.00	35	18	●	●	●	○	○

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	SnapStone Beige 11-001-02-01	7.65	<div><div>94</div></div>	5	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Dal-Tile Cliks Campisi Alabaster CP651212HD1P1 (Home Depot)	5.00	<div><div>87</div></div>	7	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>

Overall score is mainly resistance to foot traffic, scratches, dents, stains, sunlight, moisture, and slips. Moisture resistance (not shown) is based on a damp sponge left overnight and soaked samples (longer exposure). **Foot traffic** is how quickly surface wear was noticeable using an abrasion machine. **Scratches** denotes ability to resist damage from a simulated dragged object. **Stains** is resistance to marring from grape juice, mustard, and other liquids left overnight. **Dents** is resistance to blunt and pointed objects dropped from different heights. **Sunlight (UV)** is resistance to color change after more than 300 hours of high ultraviolet levels. **Price per square foot** is approximate retail. **Square feet per box** is as claimed.

*Prices include installation.

Countertops & sinks

Combining beauty and durability is easier than you think

STONE IS STILL the countertop material most desired by new-home buyers and remodelers, with granite and quartz leading the pack, according to recent industry surveys. Besides the obvious differences in appearance, our tests found huge differences in performance among granite, limestone, marble, quartz, and soapstone. Some can take lots of abuse, and others need lots of TLC to keep them looking good.

Tile and laminate countertops have lost favor. Tile did fine in most of our tests, but it can chip, and grout stains and mildew are hard to prevent. You may not want to write off laminate, though. It looks better than you may remember, and it's durable and budget-friendly.

Bamboo companies often tout their "green" credentials, but bamboo counters were easily stained, scratched, dented, and scorched in our tests and can warp and darken over time. Recycled glass countertops offer some of the same environmental benefits with better performance.

We stained, sliced, scratched, scorched, and nicked 14 materials from leading brands. Except for recycled glass, we found little difference among competing brands of each type of material. That's why we rate materials, not brands. Use our snapshots and Ratings to find which counter material is right for you.

If you're also replacing your sink and faucet, read our tips on page 33 before you do. Remember that drop-in sinks, which sit on top of the counter, can be used with any material. Undermounted sinks should be installed with counters made of a waterproof material. Stainless steel and solid surfacing can be used for a counter and sink for a seamless look.

Avoid costly surprises

No matter what material you pick, have the fabricator take final measurements so that he bears responsibility for accuracy. And insist that the estimate and the contract specify the material's thickness and finish, and fees for sink, faucet, and cooktop cutouts, edges, backsplash, and removal of existing counters.



Quartz

COST \$2,240 to \$5,600*

Quartz's popularity is growing. Hot pots, serrated knives, abrasive pads, and most stains were no match for this material, whether polished or matte finish. Quartz is easy to maintain and doesn't require sealing like granite or other natural stone. It comes in a range of colors and styles that mimic natural stone, and in vibrant colors such as yellow, blue, and red. Because it's a synthetic material, the color you see on the sample is the color you'll get.

BUT edges and corners can chip, and only a pro can repair them. Rounded edges help.

TIP See a dozen different edges from various angles with the edge-options tool at caesarstoneus.com.



Granite

COST \$2,240 to \$5,600

Each granite slab looks different. So don't rely on the store sample; go to the stone yard. Have workers spray slabs with water to make the coloring stand out. If you find one you like, put a deposit on it. Heat, cuts, and scratches didn't damage granite in our tests, and when properly sealed, polished and matte-finish granite resisted most stains.

BUT granite needs to be resealed periodically to maintain stain resistance. And like quartz, its edges and corners can chip and will need a pro to repair them.

TIP Pick whichever finish you prefer, polished or matte. They performed similarly in our tests.

*Prices are for a typical kitchen with 56 square feet of counters, and they include installation.

▶ Laminate

COST \$560 to \$2,240

Inexpensive, stain- and heat-resistant, and easy to install, laminate is also better-looking thanks to new printing technology. Formica's Anniversary Collection features 12 patterns with a midcentury modern flair. Formica and Wilsonart now offer decorative edges, such as bullnose or ogee, if you don't like the dark lines along the edge of the counter.

BUT cutting directly on laminate easily and permanently damages it, so use a cutting board.

TIP Seams between pieces of laminate should be no wider than one-sixteenth inch or they will look sloppy.



Formica's Anniversary Collection



▶ Recycled glass

COST \$3,360 to \$6,720

The look depends on the size of the pieces of glass. Large shards create a fun, contemporary look; finely ground glass makes it less busy. Most glass counters we tested resisted stains, cuts, scratches, and heat.

BUT this is the only material where we found a difference among brands. Cosentino's Eco counters were the only ones that developed a thin crack during our heat tests.

TIP Ask about maintenance. Some manufacturers suggest resealing and rewaxing every six to 12 months.

▶ Solid surfacing

COST \$1,960 to \$5,600

One of the few materials that can be used for counters, sink, and backsplash, solid surfacing creates a seamless appearance because joints are virtually invisible. It's available in a variety of colors and patterns, and is stain-resistant. Small nicks and scratches can be repaired. As with quartz, its color won't vary much from the store sample.

BUT it scratches and cuts easily.

TIP Online design tools such as myroomdesigner.dupont.com and apps such as mySurface can help you visualize a new counter in your kitchen. But as fun as these tools are, you should always see the material in person and bring home as large a sample as you can, even if you have to pay for it.



◀ Soapstone

COST \$2,800 to \$5,600

Used less often than granite, soapstone is superb at resisting heat damage. Small scratches can be repaired by sanding finely and applying mineral oil.

BUT soapstone nicks, cuts, and scratches easily, and some stains are too tough to be washed away.

TIP Install soapstone in low-use areas and choose complementary yet more durable materials for other places.



◀ Concrete and stainless steel

COST \$3,360 to \$6,720 (concrete); \$2,800 to \$8,400 (stainless steel)

They complement the industrial look of professional-style appliances. Concrete can be dyed or textured, though finishes affect performance. Topical sealers guard against stains but not heat. Penetrating sealers protect against heat but not stains and need to be reapplied. Matte or grain finishes are better at hiding damage to stainless counters.

BUT concrete nicks easily and can develop cracks. Stainless shows fingerprints, and it dents and scratches easily.

TIP It's important to get references for concrete fabricators, because many counters are made from scratch. Check recent jobs and counters made a couple of years ago to find out how well they have held up.



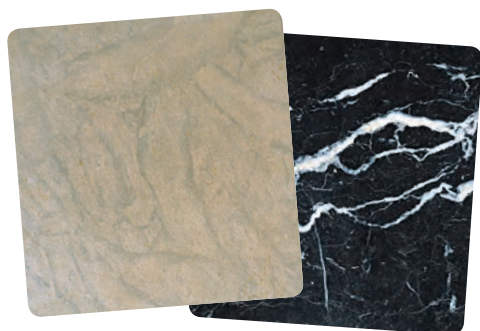
Butcher block

COST \$2,240 to \$5,600

Wood adds warmth to any kitchen, and butcher block is easy to install and repair. As with concrete, the finish matters. Varnish improved stain-resistance, and penetrating oils diminished it.

BUT butcher block can be nicked and scratched easily. So think about your tolerance for signs of wear and tear. Do you think of them as a patina or a problem?

TIP Clean up stains as they happen, before they have time to set.



Limestone and marble

COST \$2,800 to \$5,600 (limestone); \$2,800 to \$8,400 (marble)

They're classic beauties available in a wide variety of creamy whites and yellows, dark browns and grays, and other colors. Hot pots didn't mar the limestone we tested.

BUT They're easily scratched, nicked, cut, and stained, even when properly sealed. Heat damaged our marble.

TIP Put a few drops of water on stone that's near the sink or another high-use area and let it stand for 15 minutes. If the water doesn't stay in a bead, it's time to reseal it, which makes the surface more resistant to stains.

Selecting your sink and faucet

We rolled up our sleeves and stained and scoured 18 double-bowl sinks and 16 single-handle pullout faucets. We also dropped blunt and sharp objects into the sinks, which were made of six different materials, and put hot pots in them. The results may surprise you.

MYTH Sink brand matters most.

REALITY The manufacturer wasn't as important as the material. We tested big brands, including American Standard, Elkay, Franke, Kohler, and Moen.

Stainless-steel sinks aced most tests and were best of all. Solid-surface sinks came close, but a hot pot or a sharp knife that slips out of your hand can do damage.

MYTH Spend more to get more.

REALITY We didn't find much difference between a \$115 stainless-steel sink and one for \$420, or between an \$80 faucet and one for \$600. Expensive, thicker-gauge stainless didn't necessarily perform better than thinner models. All fended off stains, heat, and dings, though they did dent. Sound-absorbing pads on the bottom of the sink's exterior hushed the noise of running water better than



spray-on coatings, and matte or grain finishes hid scratches and stains better than glossy or polished surfaces. Better valves, tougher finishes, and lifetime warranties against leaks and stains are available on all but the cheapest faucets.

MYTH Color adds the right punch.

REALITY Colorful sinks made of solid surfacing, enameled steel, enameled cast iron, or fireclay were dented, dinged, or chipped in our tests. Acrylic sinks melted slightly when we left a hot pot in them, leaving a mark. Fireclay was the worst, cracking after our toughest drop test.

Ratings Countertops

All tested materials In performance order.

● Excellent
● Very good
○ Good
○ Fair
● Poor

Material	Price per sq. ft.	Overall score	Test results					
			Resists					
			Stains	Cutting	Heat	Abrasion	Impact	
Quartz (engineered stone)	\$40-\$100	84	●	●	●	●	●	
Granite	40-100	81	●	●	●	●	●	
Recycled glass (penetrating sealer) ¹	60-120	69	○	●	●	●	●	
Laminate	10-40	68	●	●	●	○	●	
Tile (ceramic and porcelain)	5-30	67	●	●	●	●	○	
Solid surfacing	35-100	53	●	●	●	●	●	
Soapstone (mineral-oil finish)	50-100	46	○	●	●	●	●	
Concrete (penetrating sealer)	60-120	40	●	○	●	●	●	
Concrete (topical sealer)	60-120	39	●	●	●	○	●	
Stainless steel	50-150	39	○	●	●	●	●	
Butcher block (varnished)	40-100	37	●	●	●	●	●	
Paper composite ²	30-100	34	●	●	●	●	●	
Limestone	50-100	27	●	●	●	●	●	
Butcher block (oil finish)	40-100	24	●	●	●	●	●	
Marble	50-150	14	●	●	●	●	●	
Bamboo (beeswax/mineral-oil finish)	40-100	10	●	●	●	○	●	

¹ Unlike other brands, Cosentino's Eco line of recycled-glass counters developed a thin crack during our heat tests and was excluded from the Ratings. ² Only Richlite's product was tested. Results for other brands may vary.

Guide to the Ratings

Overall score summarizes performance in all tests. **Stains** shows resistance to 20 common foods and household products. **Cutting** reflects resistance to damage from weighted chef's and serrated knives used in slicing and chopping motions. **Heat** gauges how well materials resisted damage and discoloration from a pot filled with oil heated to 400° F. **Abrasion** is resistance to damage from a weighted sanding block. **Impact** reflects ability to withstand blunt and pointed weights dropped from up to 3½ feet. **Price** is the usual range per square foot, including installation.



COUNTERTOP BUYING GUIDE

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





SCREEN GRAB Online purchasing is growing, with QVC a top-rated destination for small-appliance shoppers in our latest survey.

Buying appliances

23,000 readers rate the best stores for price, selection, and more

MORE SHOPPERS are clicking the “buy” button for appliances: Roughly twice as many subscribers bought coffee-makers, food processors, and even some large appliances online as in 2007, according to our latest Appliance Retailer Satisfaction Survey.

Low prices and strong service helped put QVC, which sells mostly online and via TV and phone, up there with Amazon.com among the top stores for small appliances. Twenty percent of small-appliance buyers made their purchase online, our survey shows. But walk-in stores dominate even more for the big stuff. Only 7 percent bought major appliances online, up from 3 percent in 2007.

Even if you don’t buy online, you can browse your way to a deal. More than a third of major-appliance shoppers who successfully haggled for a better price had trolled the Web for bargaining power.

Superb selection is among the pluses that landed Chicago-based Abt Electronics and

its 80,000-square-foot showroom on our large-appliance winners’ list. Abt is the only store in that category that matched independent local retailers for service—an area where mom-and-pop stores still win for small appliances. Indeed, service heavily influenced how satisfied subscribers were with major-appliance stores overall.

The experiences of the subscribers in 30,000 shopping trips can help you get

Three-quarters who haggled for a big appliance succeeded.

more than just great prices and friendly service. We also found winners in a separate survey on service and support after you buy. Here are more ways you can succeed in your shopping:

Go online to prepare. More than 90 per-

cent of our readers who researched online said doing so was helpful. Price-comparison websites topped their list of strategies, followed by retailer sites with buying advice and discount coupons.

Shopping tip: Register an e-mail address with manufacturers and retailers you’re considering. In addition to discount coupons, benefits include invitations to members-only events such as the “family and friends” sales common at Macy’s, Sears, and other stores. Discounts on store credit cards and rebates on Energy Star appliances are other perks.

Feel free to haggle. People in our survey who tried this tactic had something to show for it: a 74 percent success rate for a major appliance and 66 percent for small appliances. The median savings was \$95 for major appliances and \$58 for small ones. A top strategy of successful hagglers was searching for better prices at other stores, despite stores’ efforts to keep consumers from “showrooming,” or shopping at one place and buying elsewhere.

Shopping tip: All major stores in our survey offer a price policy to “meet or beat” other retailers, usually from a list of competitors. The policies are often good up to 30 days after purchase. Downloading apps from stores can boost discounts further.

Don't get lured into extra coverage. P.C. Richard & Son, which received mediocre selection and service scores, was among the pushiest when it came to extended warranties, which almost 25 percent of our large-appliance buyers purchased. Sears and HHGregg stores were also more likely than other retailers to push added coverage, and independent stores were least likely to bring it up.

Shopping tip: Our extensive research has shown that repairs during the extended-warranty period are likely to cost roughly the same as the warranty. Check our brand-repair data for appliances we test, and choose a model that comes from a reliable brand.

Who provides the best support?

What happens if you get your new appliance home and it starts acting up?

Subscribers who reported on experiences with more than 21,000 appliances were much more satisfied when they called an independent repair shop than other choices, such as the manufacturer or retailer. The reports involved appliances serviced since January 2011 and overwhelmingly were for products readers had bought, rather than those left behind by a previous owner.

Though satisfaction was higher for independent repair shops, most outlets got average scores for solving the problem. LG was below average, and Frigidaire, Maytag, and Whirlpool got our lowest ratings.

Refrigerators and washing machines together accounted for about half of all appliances serviced.

Ratings

In order of reader score.

Company	Reader score
	0 100
Independent local repair shop	82
Independent local retail store	76
Lowe's	71
Sears	69
Kenmore	68
GE	66
Samsung	65
Frigidaire	64
Maytag	63
KitchenAid	61
Whirlpool	61
LG	61

Source: Spring 2012 Appliance Support and Service survey. Differences of less than 7 points are not meaningful. Reader score reflects satisfaction with the service experience and is computed as explained in the guide to the Ratings below.

Ratings Appliance stores

In order of reader score, within types.

Better ← → Worse
● ○ ○ ○ ○

Order	Retailer	Reader score	Survey results
		0 100	Price Selection Product quality Service Checkout ease Shipping Installation Haul-away

A MAJOR APPLIANCES

1	Abt Electronics	93	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
2	Independents	91	○ ○ ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
3	Pacific Sales	88	○ ○ ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
4	Lowe's	87	○ ○ ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
5	Home Depot	86	○ ○ ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
6	HHGregg	84	○ ○ ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
7	Sears	84	○ ○ ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
8	Best Buy	83	○ ○ ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
9	P.C. Richard & Son	83	○ ○ ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

B SMALL APPLIANCES

1	Amazon.com	94	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
2	QVC	92	○ ○ ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
3	Independents	91	○ ○ ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
4	Costco	91	○ ○ ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
5	Kohl's	88	○ ○ ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
6	Bed Bath & Beyond	88	○ ○ ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
7	Macy's	87	○ ○ ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
8	Sam's Club	85	○ ○ ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
9	Lowe's	85	○ ○ ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
10	Target	83	○ ○ ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
11	Home Depot	83	○ ○ ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
12	Sears	83	○ ○ ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
13	Best Buy	82	○ ○ ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
14	Walmart	78	○ ○ ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●



Overview

Appliance shoppers were relatively satisfied overall, but no retailer earned perfect marks across the board. And survey respondents who bought small appliances were more critical about selection and service for several of the retailers.

BEST FOR PRICE

- A1 Abt Electronics
- A6 HHGregg
- A8 Best Buy
- B1 Amazon.com
- B2 QVC
- B4 Costco
- B5 Kohl's
- B8 Sam's Club

BEST FOR SELECTION

- A1 Abt Electronics
- A3 Pacific Sales
- B1 Amazon.com

BEST ALL-AROUND EXPERIENCE

- A1 Abt Electronics
- A2, B3 Independents
- B1 Amazon.com
- B2 QVC

Guide to the Ratings

Charts are based on 22,888 CONSUMER REPORTS subscribers who reported on 30,243 appliance-purchase experiences in the 2012 Consumer Reports National Research Center Appliance Shopper Satisfaction survey. (Respondents may not be representative of the U.S. population.) Major appliances include ranges, refrigerators, washers, and dryers; small appliances include coffeemakers, grills, and vacuum cleaners. **Reader score** reflects readers' assessments of their overall buying experience and is not limited to factors under **survey results**. A score of 100 would mean all respondents had been completely satisfied; 80, very satisfied, on average; 60, fairly well satisfied. Differences of fewer than 4 points aren't meaningful. Displayed scores are rounded; stores are listed in order of precise reader score. **Price, selection, product quality, service, checkout ease, shipping, installation, and haul-away** were rated on a scale from very poor to excellent. Scores for service are based on contact with company staff except for Amazon.com, which reflects customer ratings of website customer support. Small-appliance and major-appliance results aren't directly comparable because of differences in methodology. A dash (—) means not applicable or insufficient sample size.

Cooking appliances

High-performing models offer time-saving features

FAMILIES ARE EATING more meals and snacks at home, 61 more per person per year than a decade ago. That's a total of 902 breakfasts, lunches, dinners, and snacks per person, according to research company the NPD Group. We found many ranges, cooktops, wall ovens, and microwaves that make cooking easier and more fun, especially if you're the one making those meals.

The almost 250 cooking appliances we tested have more features than ever. And manufacturers aren't shy about promoting them. We put five claims to the test.

They say: Double-oven ranges and wall ovens let you cook multiple dishes at the same time at different temperatures.

We found: They're a multitasker's dream. Double-oven ranges come in two configurations: a smaller top oven paired with a larger one below and two ovens that are the same size—all in 30-inch-wide models. They do let you cook different dishes at different temperatures. There are so many double-oven ranges and wall ovens that they now have their own categories in our Ratings.

No matter how your range is configured, that lower oven is low, and if you're using the lowest rack inside that oven, then it's really low. When shopping, borrow a roaster from the housewares aisle and place it in the lower oven, imagine it filled with food, then pull out the rack and lift the roaster from the oven. How's your back? With double-oven ranges, that's something to consider because some of the larger ovens can fit a 26-pound turkey.

They say: Five burners offer the ultimate flexibility.

We found: More 30-inch gas ranges and cooktops have five burners instead of four. Some of the fifth burners are small and are just for simmering; others are oblong and can be used with griddles for added functionality. Using all five at the same time could require some careful maneuvering.

They say: A new style of infrared broiler cuts more than 20 percent off cooking time.

We found: Not so fast. Our tests of the LG range with that new infrared broiler found that it broiled burgers about a minute faster using its speed-broil setting than did the standard broiler on a similar LG range.

Both turned out seared and juicy burgers, but the infrared's speed-broil option is meant for broiling only a few burgers or steaks. When we cooked larger quantities on regular broil, the infrared model wasn't as good as the standard broiler.

They say: Induction heats much quicker

than conventional electric and gas.

We found: Induction cooktops and ranges, which use electromagnetic coils under the cooktop's glass-covered surface, do deliver the fastest heating we've tested, about 25 percent faster than electric smoothtops and even faster when com-

Focus on features

Electronic touchpad controls

should be easy to reach and visible when you're cooking. Setting and monitoring the precise temperature is easier with a digital display than with a knob. Front-mounted pads are easy to bump and accidentally reset and are within a child's reach; look for models with a control lock-out.

Self-cleaning features

typically use high heat to slowly burn off grime. An automatic safety lock prevents the oven door from being opened until the oven has cooled and, typically, a display shows the time left in the cycle.

Convection can cut cooking time, especially for large roasts, by using one or more fans to circulate the oven's hot air. Use a pan with low sides and skip the lid so that the circulating hot air can nicely brown the meat.

Oven rack positions numbering five or more in single ovens add flexibility when cooking on more than one rack.

A large oven window lets you keep an eye on the food without opening the oven door.





► **Hot-surface warning lights** indicate when elements are still hot. They're especially useful on smoothtop models because the surface can remain hot long after the element has been turned off. Ideally there's a warning light for each element.

► **Double ovens** pair a smaller top oven with a larger oven below or two ovens of the same size. Frigidaire's Symmetry Double Oven ranges (shown) have two same-sized ovens that are large enough to fit the biggest turkeys we could buy—26-pound birds—in each oven.

► **Oven capacity** varies by model; ours is based on usable space. A roomy range or wall oven comes in handy when cooking for a crowd or baking. For double-oven ranges, we add the usable space of both ovens to determine total capacity.

► **Elements or burners** such as expandable elements on electric smoothtop ranges and cooktops allow you to switch between a large, high-power element and a small, low-power element contained within it. An elongated "bridge" element spans two burners to accommodate rectangular or odd-shaped cookware. Five burners are popping up on more 30-inch gas ranges and cooktops. But using all five at the same time can be a challenge.

► **Btu/hr.**, or British thermal units per hour, indicates the amount of gas used and heat generated. But higher Btu didn't guarantee faster heating in our tests. High-heat gas burners are superb at searing, stir-frying, and heating large quantities. Look for a model with at least one high-power burner or element, around 12,000 Btu/hr. or 2,500 watts and higher.

Maytags and two Whirlpools with AquaLift. Though the technology can effectively clean the bottom of the oven, you may have to run more than one cycle or manually clean the oven to remove grease from the walls and window. But don't apply an oven cleaner. The owner's manual warns that it can damage the cavity's surface.

How to choose

Ranges remain the big sellers and usually cost less than a cooktop and wall-oven combo. Ranges are also easier and less expensive to install. But the combo offers more design flexibility and could be helpful in households with more than one cook.

Weigh your options. Electric or gas models can deliver fine performance. Electric elements usually heat faster and maintain low heat more precisely; gas burners provide faster temperature response and visual feedback. Dual-fuel ranges pair a gas cooktop with an electric oven, but our tests haven't found that the configuration offers advantages.

Electric smoothtop ranges are the most popular and blend high performance and value. They're sleeker and easier to clean than coil-top models. The recommended induction ranges and cooktops outperform all tested models and are faster at bringing liquids to a boil, but they cost more than most. Pro-style gas and dual-fuel ranges are the most expensive. Style, not superb performance, is the draw here.

Microwave or range hood? Over-the-range microwaves free up counter space and can be vented to the outside. But even an effective OTR vent won't match the smoke-clearing ability of a capable range hood that extends over the front burners. If you mostly use your microwave for reheating and making popcorn, stick with a countertop model and get a range hood.

Most OTR microwaves have a sensor that bases cooking time on the amount of steam the food emits, helping to prevent under- or overcooking. Easy-to-use controls, a large usable capacity, and a wire rack for cooking two foods at once help to get the job done faster. Some models even have convection, grilling, and broiling options.

Continued on next page

pared with gas models. Induction also provides precise simmering and control, but those ranges and cooktops usually cost more. They require magnetic cookware, which is readily available. (You may already have some. Here's how to tell: If a magnet sticks to the cookware, it

will work with induction.)

They say: AquaLift cleans your oven in less than an hour with odor-free, low-temperature technology.

We found: The only self-cleaning ranges that scored poorly in oven cleaning out of the more than 140 we tested were five

HOW TO BUY THE RIGHT RANGE

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



Overview Ranges

Ranges that make our list provide superb simmering, impressive baking, and a generous capacity. Fast cooktop heating and great broiling were challenges for some gas and pro-style models.

ELECTRIC DOUBLE OVENS

A1 GE \$2,800

A3 Frigidaire \$1,400

A4 Frigidaire \$1,800

All are smoothtops that offer fine broiling. **A1** is a sleek slide-in with convection in the lower oven. **A3** has large ovens that are the same size. **A4** has convection in each oven. So-so broiling kept the GE JB850DTWW, \$1,150, off our list, but it offers fast cooktop heat, superb simmering, and impressive baking.

ELECTRIC SINGLE OVENS

B2 GE \$1,000

B3 LG \$1,000

B6 GE \$1,800

B8 Kenmore \$850

C2 Kenmore \$430 **CR Best Buy**

D3 Samsung \$2,000

All smoothtops have high-power elements and convection. **B2** adds a warming drawer. **B3** has a cooktop warming element for keeping a side dish warm. **B6** has a warming drawer but only one high-power element. **B8** costs much less. **C2** is a basic coil range with superb performance. **D3**, an induction model, delivers the fastest cooktop heat. The Frigidaire FFEF3018LW smoothtop, \$600, provides super simmering and impressive baking, but mediocre broiling helped keep it off our recommended list.

DUAL-FUEL DOUBLE OVEN

E1 KitchenAid \$2,000

It pairs a gas cooktop with five burners and two electric ovens, one with convection. Baking and broiling are impressive.

GAS SINGLE OVENS

F1 LG \$1,900

F2 LG \$1,500

F3 Frigidaire \$775 **CR Best Buy**

All have five burners, including two high-power ones, and convection. **F1** adds a warming drawer. **F2** isn't as fast at bringing water to a near-boil. **F3** has a smaller oven.

PRO-STYLE OVENS

G1 KitchenAid \$4,000

H1 KitchenAid \$6,000

Each pairs a gas cooktop with an electric oven that has convection. **G1**, the only recommended 30-inch, simmers superbly and offers fine baking and boiling, but the oven is small and broiling is mediocre. **H1** is 36 inches wide, has more oven space, and broils well. The 30-inch dual-fuel Kenmore Pro 79523, \$3,400, didn't make the cut but was impressive in all tests.

Ratings Ranges

Recommended models only From 160 tested.

CR Best Buy
 Recommended

Excellent
 Very good
 Good
 Fair
 Poor

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Test results						Features	
		Similar models, in small type, are comparable to tested model. Bracketed letters or numbers are color codes.			Cooktop high	Cooktop low	Baking	Broiling	Oven capacity	Oven cleaning	Convection	Cooking drawer
				0 100								
				P F G V G E								

A 30-INCH SMOOTHTOP DOUBLE OVENS

✓	1	GE Profile PS978STSS ¹	\$2,800	86	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
✓	2	Maytag MET885XS	1,700	83	●	●	●	○	●	○	●	●
✓	3	Frigidaire FGEF302TNF	1,400	82	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
✓	4	Frigidaire FGEF308TNF	1,800	81	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
✓	5	LG LDE3015ST	1,300	81	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

B 30-INCH SMOOTHTOP SINGLE OVENS

✓	1	Kenmore 92163 ⁹⁷¹⁰³	1,550	87	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
✓	2	GE JB705STSS	1,000	86	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
✓	3	LG LRE3023S	1,000	86	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
✓	4	GE Café CS980SNSS	2,800	86	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	●
✓	5	LG LRE3025S	1,250	86	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
✓	6	GE PB920STSS	1,800	85	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
✓	7	Electrolux EI30EF35JS	1,600	85	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●
✓	8	Kenmore 92803	850	84	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
✓	9	Electrolux EW30EF65GW	2,200	83	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
✓	10	GE JB650DTWW JB655DTWW	800	81	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
✓	11	LG LRE3012ST	850	81	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

C 30-INCH ELECTRIC COIL SINGLE OVENS

✓	1	GE JBP35SMSS	750	82	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●
✓	2	Kenmore 90212	430	81	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●

D 30-INCH INDUCTION SINGLE OVENS

✓	1	GE Profile PHB925SPSS	2,700	90	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
✓	2	Kenmore Elite 97203	2,200	89	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
✓	3	Samsung FTQ307NWGX	2,000	89	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

E 30-INCH GAS AND DUAL-FUEL DOUBLE OVENS

✓	1	KitchenAid KDRS505XSS ²	2,000	71	○	●	●	●	●	○	●	●
✓	2	LG LDG3016ST	1,800	70	○	●	●	○	●	○	●	●

F 30-INCH GAS SINGLE OVENS

✓	1	LG LRG3097ST	1,900	74	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	●
✓	2	LG LRG3095ST	1,500	72	○	●	●	●	●	○	●	●
✓	3	Frigidaire Gallery FGGF3032MW	775	71	○	●	●	○	●	○	●	●
✓	4	LG LRG3091SW	1,000	71	○	●	●	○	●	○	●	●
✓	5	Electrolux EW30GF65GW	2,200	70	○	●	●	●	●	○	●	●

G 30-INCH PROFESSIONAL DUAL-FUEL SINGLE OVEN

✓	1	KitchenAid KDRS407VSS KDRU707VSS	4,000	72	●	●	●	○	○	●	●	●
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H 36-INCH PROFESSIONAL DUAL-FUEL SINGLE OVENS

✓	1	KitchenAid KDRU763VSS KDRS463VSS, KDRS467VSS, KDRS462VSS, KDRU767VSS	6,000	74	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
✓	2	GE Monogram ZDP364NDPSS	7,500	72	○	●	●	○	●	●	●	●

¹ Slide-in model. ² Dual-fuel model.



A3 Frigidaire

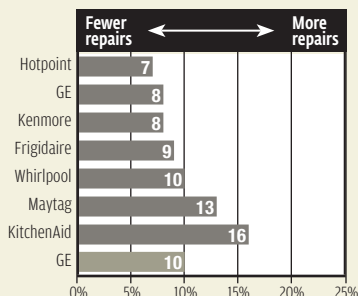
B2 GE

Most and least reliable

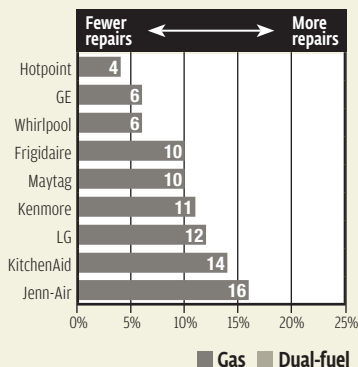
67,000 readers sound off

Choosing a brand with a good repair history can improve your odds of getting a reliable model. So each year we survey thousands of our readers about their experiences. General Electric, Hotpoint, and Whirlpool were the least repair-prone brands of electric ranges, and KitchenAid and Jenn-Air were among the more repair-prone brands of electric ranges. KitchenAid was the most repair-prone brand of gas ranges, and Maytag was also repair-prone. Though we lacked enough data to include Kenmore dual-fuel and Jenn-Air ranges in the repair graphs, data we have indicate that Kenmore dual-fuel ranges have been reliable and Jenn-Air dual-fuel and gas ranges have been repair-prone.

GAS RANGES



ELECTRIC RANGES



■ Gas ■ Dual-fuel

Source: Annual Product Reliability Survey. Our findings are based on the more than 67,000 electric, gas, and dual-fuel ranges readers bought new between 2006 and 2012. Differences of fewer than 3 points aren't meaningful. Data are adjusted to eliminate differences linked solely to the range's age. Note that models within a brand may vary, and design or manufacturing changes may affect future reliability.

Overview Wall ovens

These top picks have large capacities and were Very Good or better at baking and broiling.

DOUBLE OVENS

A1 Whirlpool \$2,500

A4 Maytag \$1,700

They have large windows that let you keep an eye on what's cooking. A1's top oven has convection. A4 costs less than most.

SINGLE OVENS

B1 Whirlpool \$1,500 CR Best Buy

B2 Maytag \$1,400 CR Best Buy

B5 Maytag \$1,000 CR Best Buy

B1 and B2 have large windows and convection.

B5 outperformed models that cost two to three times as much.



A1 Whirlpool

Ratings Wall ovens

Recommended models only From 26 tested.

● Excellent
● Very good
○ Good
● Fair
● Poor

✓ CR Best Buy
✓ Recommended

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Test results				Features		
					Baking	Broiling	Capacity	Self-clean	Convection	Covered element	Temperature probe
				0 100							
				P F G V E							

A 30-INCH ELECTRIC DOUBLE OVENS

✓	1	Whirlpool WOD93ECOAS	\$2,500	80	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
✓	2	Maytag MEW9630A	2,700	80	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
✓	3	Whirlpool WOD51ECOAS	2,000	72	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
✓	4	Maytag MEW7630A	1,700	72	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
✓	5	Bosch HBL5650UC	2,805	72	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
✓	6	Bosch HBL8650UC	3,115	72	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

B 30-INCH ELECTRIC SINGLE OVENS

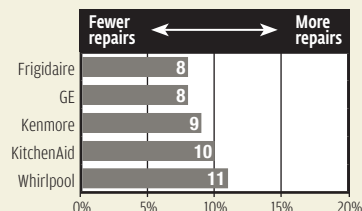
✓	1	Whirlpool WOS92ECOAS	1,500	80	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
✓	2	Maytag MEW9530AW	1,400	80	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
✓	3	KitchenAid KEB5109BWW	2,000	79	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
✓	4	Whirlpool WOS51ECOAS	1,300	72	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
✓	5	Maytag MEW7530AW	1,000	72	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
✓	6	Bosch HBL5450UC	1,900	72	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

Most and least reliable

13,000 readers report

Choosing a brand with a good repair history can improve your odds of getting a reliable model. So each year we survey thousands of our readers about their experiences. Whirlpool has been less reliable than Frigidaire and GE. Although we lacked sufficient historical data for all years to include Jenn-Air in the graph, our data indicate that it has been a repair-prone brand.

ELECTRIC WALL OVENS



Source: Annual Product Reliability Survey. Our findings are based on the more than 13,000 wall ovens readers bought new between 2007 and 2012. Differences of fewer than 3 points aren't meaningful. Data are adjusted to eliminate differences linked solely to the wall oven's age. Note that models within a brand may vary, and design or manufacturing changes may affect future reliability.

Continued on next page

Overview Cooktops

Most top picks offer superb simmering. Electric models also deliver heat quickly for faster boiling.

SMOOTHTOPS

- A1 KitchenAid** \$900
A4 Kenmore \$640 **CR Best Buy**
A5 Frigidaire \$950
B1 Maytag \$830

All 30-inch models have high-power and expandable elements. **A1** delivers top performance. **A4** and **A5** add stainless trim. **B1** is 36 inches wide and has five elements, including two that are high-power.

INDUCTION

- C3 Kenmore** \$1,300
C7 Whirlpool \$1,200 **CR Best Buy**

Induction offers the fastest heat we've tested. **C3** has three high-power elements. Both have touch controls.

GAS

- D3 LG** \$1,100
E1 Thermador \$1,900
E6 LG \$1,300

D3 is the only 30-inch model that's impressive at simmering and providing fast heat. Among 36-inch models, **E1** is better at simmering, and three of its five burners are high-power. **E6** has five burners, and two are high-power.

Can't find a rated model?

We analyzed ranges we've tested over 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.

► ELECTRIC RANGES

Safe bets Electrolux, GE, Kenmore, and LG have consistently been top performers in our Ratings. Frigidaire and Samsung have mostly had overall scores of Very Good or even Excellent. But a few models from Samsung scored slightly lower, and Frigidaire lacked top-scoring models. **Relatively safe bets** Maytag and Whirlpool have performed reasonably well, but not consistently.

► GAS RANGES

Safe bets Electrolux and LG. **Relatively safe bets** Frigidaire, GE, Kenmore, and Whirlpool. A few models from those brands have scored very well in our Ratings, and others scored lower but still reasonably well.

Ratings Cooktops

Recommended models only From 52 tested.

✓ CR Best Buy
 ✓ Recommended

● Excellent
 ○ Very good
 ○ Good
 ○ Fair
 ● Poor

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Test results		Features				
					Cooktop high	Cooktop low	High-power burners	Medium-power burners	Low-power burners	Touch controls	Expandable elements/continuous grates
		Similar models, in small type, are comparable to tested model.		0 P F G V E 100							

A 30-INCH ELECTRIC SMOOTHTOPS

✓	1	KitchenAid KECC604BBL	\$ 900	94	●	●	2	0	2	●	
✓	2	Maytag MEC7430WS MEC7630W	800	94	●	●	2	0	2		
✓	3	Kenmore 44273	1,150	93	●	●	2	1	1	●	●
✓	4	Kenmore 42733	640	91	●	●	2	0	2	●	
✓	5	Frigidaire Professional FPCC3085KS*	950	90	●	●	1	3			●
✓	6	GE Cafe CP350STSS	1,200	90	●	●	1	1	3		●
✓	7	Electrolux Icon E30EC65ESS	1,200	88	●	●	1	2	2		●
✓	8	LG LCE3081ST	1,000	87	●	●	1	1	2	●	●
✓	9	Whirlpool G7CE3034XP	700	86	●	●	2	0	2		●
✓	10	GE Profile PP9458MBB	950	86	●	●	2	0	2	●	●
✓	11	Bosch NET5054UC	900	85	●	●	1	2	1	●	●

B 36-INCH ELECTRIC SMOOTHTOPS

✓	1	Maytag MEC7536W*	830	94	●	●	2	0	3		
✓	2	Maytag MEC7636W*	1,100	94	●	●	2	0	3		●
✓	3	Frigidaire Professional FPCC3685KS	1,000	90	●	●	1	3	1		●

C 30-INCH INDUCTION

✓	1	Kenmore 43820	1,600	99	●	●	3	1		●	
✓	2	GE Profile PHP900DMBB	1,400	99	●	●	2	2			●
✓	3	Kenmore 43800	1,300	97	●	●	3	1			●
✓	4	Bosch NIT5065UC	1,800	97	●	●	2	0	2	●	
✓	5	Electrolux Icon E30IC75FSS	2,000	97	●	●	3	1			●
✓	6	KitchenAid KICU500XB	1,400	95	●	●	2	2			●
✓	7	Whirlpool GC13061XB	1,200	95	●	●	2	0	2	●	
✓	8	LG LCE30845	1,800	93	●	●	1	2	1	●	

D 30-INCH GAS

✓	1	Bosch NGM8054UC	1,100	79	○	●	1	2	2		●
✓	2	Kenmore 32353	1,200	76	○	●	2	2	1		●
✓	3	LG LSCG3065T LCG3091ST	1,100	73	●	●	1	3	1		●

E 36-INCH GAS

✓	1	Thermador SGXS365FS	1,900	81	●	●	3	2			●
✓	2	GE Monogram ZGU385NSMSS	1,400	80	○	●	3	2			●
✓	3	GE Profile JGP975WEKWW	1,200	80	○	●	1	2	2		●
✓	4	GE Cafe CGP650SETSS	1,300	77	○	●	1	3	1		●
✓	5	Electrolux EW36GC55GS	1,300	74	○	●	2	2	1		●
✓	6	LG LCG3691ST	1,300	74	●	●	2	2	1		●
✓	7	Bosch NGM8654UC	1,200	70	○	●	4	0	1		●
✓	8	Kenmore 32313 32333	1,100	69	●	●	2	2	1		●

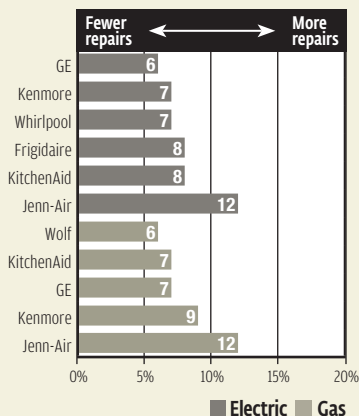
*Performance is based on tested model in other size category.

Most and least reliable

12,000 readers weigh in

Choosing a brand with a good repair history can improve your odds of getting a reliable model. So each year we survey thousands of our readers about their experiences. Jenn-Air was among the more repair-prone brands of electric and gas cooktops.

COOKTOPS



Source: Annual Product Reliability Survey. Our findings are based on the almost 12,000 cooktops readers bought new between 2008 and 2012. Differences of fewer than 5 points aren't meaningful. Data are adjusted to eliminate differences linked solely to the wall oven's age. Note that models within a brand may vary, and design or manufacturing changes may affect future reliability.

Guide to the Ratings: Ranges, cooktops, and wall ovens

Overall score reflects cooktop performance, oven capacity and cleaning, baking, and broiling. Displayed scores are rounded; models are listed in order of precise overall score. Note that scores for previously tested models may have changed because of changes in test methodology. **Cooktop high** is how quickly the highest-powered element or burner heated water to a near-boil. **Cooktop low** is how well the lowest-powered element or burner melted and held chocolate without scorching and how well the highest element or burner, set on low, held tomato sauce below a boil. **Baking** reflects even browning of cakes and cookies on two oven racks. **Broiling** is even browning of a pan of burgers as well as high-heat searing. **Oven capacity** is our evaluation of usable space. **Oven cleaning** is the ability to remove our baked-on mix of cheese, eggs, pie filling, and other ingredients on the self-clean setting. **Price** is approximate retail.

COOKTOPS AND WALL OVENS

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



Cookware picks and pans

Rachael Ray and Guy Fieri are among the celebrity chefs hawking cookware. Neither set was terribly impressive, nor were Le Creuset and Lodge cast-iron skillets. Swiss Diamond and Calphalon were the stars of our tests of 17 cookware sets and 18 frying pans that can be bought individually.

Mediocre cooking evenness and nonstick coating durability and fair handle durability kept Rachael Ray's Porcelain Enamel II 10-piece nonstick set, \$140, and her 10-inch skillet, \$30, off our recommended list. Though Guy Fieri's pots and pans topped our Ratings of uncoated cookware, they weren't good enough to recommend. The stainless-steel cookware was mediocre at evenly heating food. And cleaning it was so much work, it might make your hair stand up on its ends.

At \$140, Le Creuset's Signature 10 $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch frying pan cost as much as some cookware sets. But heating evenness was so-so and eggs needed some coaxing off its coated surface. The Lodge Pro-Logic 10-inch skillet, \$25, was much worse at heating food evenly. Both cast-iron pans were difficult to clean and had uncomfortable handles.

Recommended nonstick cookware.

Swiss Diamond's Reinforced 10-piece set, \$575, and its Classic 10-inch skillet, \$90, were the best we tested. Food cooked



Calphalon's Simply Nonstick 10-piece aluminum set

evenly and eggs easily slid off the frying pan's nonstick coating. The pots' and pan's sturdy handles didn't get hot, and the nonstick coating withstood our tough durability test: We rub steel wool over a pan 2,000 times. Both were also easy to clean. One drawback: It took water longer to come to a near-boil in the stockpot than in most others we tested.

Calphalon's Simply Nonstick 10-piece aluminum set, \$200, and its Simply Nonstick 10-inch Omelette Pan, \$40, both CR Best Buys, were better at evenly heating food than Swiss Diamond, and the nonstick coating was more durable. But Calphalon's handles weren't as sturdy or as comfortable. Also consider the Scanpan Classic 10 $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch nonstick aluminum skillet, \$90. It performed similarly overall to the Calphalon and has a sturdier handle.



WHY BUY GUY? Unimpressive performance kept this cookware from being recommended.

And the worst from our tests

Models with overall scores of 40 or less earn a spot on this list. Poor simmering, unimpressive baking or broiling, or small oven capacity helped put the gas ranges at the bottom of our Ratings. The gas cooktops had unimpressive simmering. For over-the-range microwaves, it was uneven defrosting and subpar venting. A similar model, in small type, hasn't been tested, but we believe it's enough alike in specs and features that the same results apply.

Ranges

- **KitchenAid** Architect Series KGRS807S, \$1,700 (30-inch gas)
- **American Range** ARR304, \$3,600 (30-inch pro-style gas)
- **Blue Star** RNB304BSSV1, \$3,700 (30-inch pro-style gas)

Cooktop

- **KitchenAid** KFGS306VSS, \$1,100 (30-inch gas) KFGU706VSS

Over-the-range microwaves

- **Bertazzoni** Professional Series KO30PROX, \$700
- **Sharp** R-1514, \$330

Refrigerators

Two roomy French-door models join our picks

SPACE RANKS right up there with style on most shoppers' refrigerator wish lists. With almost 23 cubic feet of usable capacity, the Kenmore Elite 72093, \$3,400, and similarly designed LG LFX33975ST, \$3,000, are roomier than any fridge we've ever tested. They're also among a growing list of models designed to keep food fresher and make it easier to organize.

Those 36-inch-wide models have dual evaporators, which maintain optimal humidity levels in the fresh-food section and help keep odors from migrating into the freezer (no more salmon-scented ice cubes). Vacuum-insulated panels with ultrathin insulation allow slimmer walls and added storage space, and extra-tall water dispensers (including one that provides hot water), are among the innovations hitting retailers.

French-door refrigerators are a growing category because they combine a top-mounted fridge section for easy access with split doors that save space yet open full-width for pizzas and other large items. More are now available in 33- and 30-inch widths for tighter spots. We're also seeing more fridges made in the U.S. as GE and Whirlpool bring the bulk of production back home. But as we found, certain refrigerators aren't so hot no matter where they're made. Our latest tests found models that gobble energy and a Korean newcomer that stumbled out of the starting gate. Here are the details:

Daewoo gets dinged. Two new models are part of the Korean giant's segue into

the U.S. appliance market. But temperature control on the French-door RFE-26A1D, \$1,500, was erratic enough to prompt a repair call. And the FRS-Y22D1A side-by-side, \$1,350, used more energy than many we tested.

GE side-by-sides slip. GE's new GSH22-JDSS, \$1,400, replaces a model that was tops among side-by-sides. But less consistent temperatures helped yank the new one more than 40 points lower overall. Dismal results in our temperature and energy tests also put GE's \$1,200 GSHF6NG-BWW dead last among side-by-sides before it was discontinued.

Some pricey models underwhelm. The Fisher & Paykel bottom-freezer E522BRXU2, \$1,850, costs plenty, and with its high energy costs, you'll keep paying at home. Wave-Touch technology on the French-door Electrolux EW28BS85K, \$3,200, might sound impressive, but the hand wave merely turns on the light for touch-screen controls. Sub-Zero's BI-36UFD built-in refrigerator costs \$9,000 for just 14.4 cubic feet of usable space—or about \$625 per cubic foot.

How to choose

Pick a type that fits your needs. Top-freezer refrigerators are best for small spaces and tight budgets. Bottom-freezers, including French-door models, keep fridge items at eye level. Side-by-sides have the narrowest door swings, but their full-length refrigerator and freezer sections usually require lots of reaching and bending on each side. Built-in models sit flush with base cabinets and often accept



LEFTOVERS This stack of food is roughly how much extra you can fit in Kenmore's Elite 72093 (above) compared with the smallest 36-inch-wide French-door model we tested (right).

matching panels, but they cost the most and hold the least overall.

Check the fit. Width is the most critical dimension in determining whether a fridge will fill an existing opening, though height is also important under overhead cabinets. Also factor in door swings relative to other appliances, walls, and an island countertop.



Beyond the basic door

Refrigerator doors are a bastion of innovation. Here are four features you'll see more of this year:

▶ **Enhanced water dispensers.** Several fridges from GE, Kenmore, and LG have extra-tall dispensers that let you fill large containers. GE's French-door Café CFE29TSDSS, \$3,000, also dispenses water you can set from tepid to piping hot for tea or soup. Samsung's soon-to-be-tested

four-door RF31FMESBSR, \$3,900, serves seltzer using cartridges from Sodastream.

▶ **Doors within the door.** Compartments on the French-door LG LFX31945ST (shown left), \$3,400, and Kenmore Elite 72063, \$3,600, let you grab drinks and condiments without opening the main door.

▶ **Four doors.** More French-door fridges have a middle drawer that adds refrigerator or freezer



Save with cabinet-depth models. They give the built-in look and protrude only a little more than true built-ins for a lot less. They're footnoted in our Ratings.

Choose a finish. Stainless is still king when it comes to style. For a fresh look with fewer fingerprints, consider Whirlpool's Ice Collection in glossy white and black, or GE's Slate, a gray-toned metallic

with a bit less sheen than stainless.

Don't buy capacity claims. Claimed space is 32 percent more on average than the usable space we measure. That's because companies often include tiny nooks and crannies to boost those numbers. Even the mega-sized fridges we tested from Kenmore and LG proved roughly 10 cubic feet smaller than claimed.

space at an easy-to-reach height. Versions from KitchenAid, Maytag, Samsung, and Whirlpool store fresh food and drinks.

Interactive screens. An 8-inch display on Samsung's RSG309AARS, \$2,200, lets you see recipes from Epicurious, check news and weather, and plan events with Google Calendar. GE Café French-door models let you upload photos via USB port.

▣ CLOSE-UP

Roomiest—for 1936

Just 7 cubic feet of space was enough to make General Electric's V-7 the capacity king in our first fridge test in July 1936. That refrigerator cost \$244 in Great Depression dollars, or almost \$4,100 today.

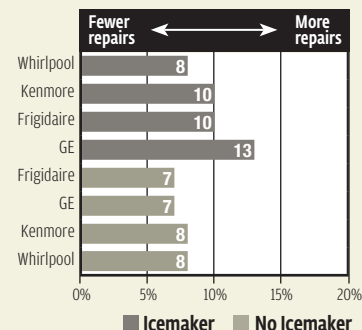


Most and least reliable

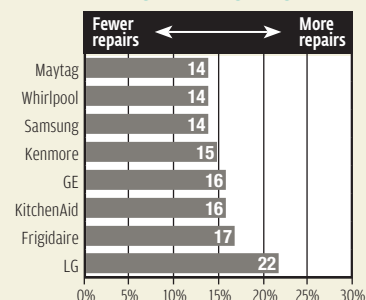
82,000 readers sound off

Choosing a refrigerator with a good repair history can improve your odds of getting a reliable model. So each year we survey thousands of readers about their experiences. Though no top-freezer or bottom-freezer brand stood out, LG has been the most repair-prone brand of side-by-side refrigerators with icemakers.

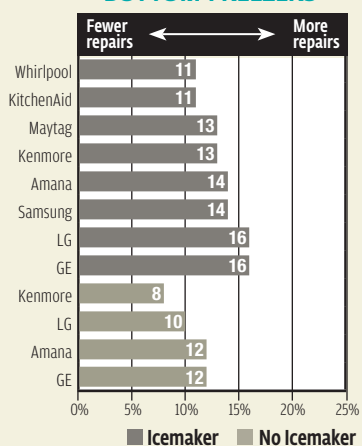
TOP-FREEZERS



SIDE-BY-SIDES



BOTTOM-FREEZERS



Source: Consumer Reports Annual Product Reliability Survey. Our findings are based on more than 82,000 freestanding refrigerators that readers bought new between 2008 and 2012. Differences of fewer than 4 points aren't meaningful. Data are adjusted to eliminate differences linked solely to age. Models within a brand may vary, and design and manufacture changes may affect future reliability.

Overview

The top picks scored at least Very Good for temperature performance and, for most, energy efficiency. Models highlighted below offer special strengths, value, or both.

✓ **CR Best Buy** These blend top performance and value; all are recommended.

✓ **Recommended** These high-scoring models stand out for the reasons below.

TOP-FREEZERS

A1 GE \$1,400

A2 Whirlpool \$1,100

A4 Frigidaire \$800

A5 Frigidaire \$700

Among 33-inch models, choose **A1** for its temperature performance, **A2** for its space, quietness, and external water dispenser. Both 30-inch Frigidaires are low-priced picks; **A5** is slightly roomier and quieter.

CONVENTIONAL BOTTOM-FREEZERS

B2 Amana \$1,350 **CR Best Buy**

B4 Maytag 1,150

The 33-inch **B2** is a roomy value pick but doesn't offer stainless; **B4** is tops among 30-inch models. Also consider the 32-inch Samsung RB195ACPN, \$1,250, if you want a cabinet-depth fridge at a reasonable price.

FRENCH-DOOR BOTTOM-FREEZERS

C3 Kenmore \$1,700 **CR Best Buy**

C4 LG \$3,000

C5 Whirlpool \$1,700 **CR Best Buy**

C12 GE \$3,000

C18 LG \$3,400

C19 Kenmore \$1,920

Among 36-inch models, choose **C3** for its quietness, **C5** for its internal water dispenser, **C12** for hot-water dispensing. **C4** has space similar to **C2's** for less. Pick **C18** if you want cabinet depth, **C19** for smaller spaces.

SIDE-BY-SIDES

D1 Samsung \$1,300 **CR Best Buy**

D3 Bosch \$2,700

D7 Frigidaire \$1,200 **CR Best Buy**

All three are 36 inches wide and have external water dispensers. Between regular-depth models, choose **D1** for its quietness and added space, **D7** for its better temperature control and lower price. **D3** offers the built-in look of cabinet depth.

BUILT-INS

E1 Thermador \$7,400

E2 Jenn-Air \$7,200

E5 Sub-Zero \$8,000

The bottom-freezer Thermador tops this group and is tops among 36-inch models. **E2** and **E5** are 42-inch side-by-sides; **E2** is especially quiet and energy-efficient, **E5** has better temperature performance and a flat, dispenser-free door that can accept integrated panels. Also consider the cabinet-depth, bottom-freezer **E8** if price is more important than capacity.



A2 Whirlpool



B2 Amana



C3 Kenmore



C5 Whirlpool

Ratings Refrigerators

Recommended models only From 250 tested.

	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Test results	Capacity (cu. ft.)	Features
Recommendation	Rank	Similar models, in small type, are comparable to tested model.		Temp. performance Energy efficiency Noise Ease of use	Claimed Usable	Water dispenser Energy cost HxWxD (in.)
			0 100 P F G V E			

A TOP-FREEZERS

✓	1	GE Profile PTS22LHS[WW] Profile PTS22SHS[]	\$1,400	69	● ● ○ ○	21.7 17.1	int.	\$64	68x33x32
✓	2	Whirlpool WRT771REY[W]	1,100	67	● ● ● ○	21.2 17.7	ext.	54	66x33x34
✓	3	LG LTC22350[SW]	1,000	65	● ● ○ ●	22 17.3		55	68x33x33
✓	4	Frigidaire Gallery FGHT2144K[F] Gallery FGHT2134K[]	800	64	● ● ○ ●	20.6 16.7		57	70x30x33
✓	5	Frigidaire LFHT2117L[W] (Lowe's) FFHT2117L[W]	700	62	● ● ● ●	20.5 17.1		55	69x30x34
✓	6	Maytag MITXEGMY[W]	770	62	● ● ○ ●	20.4 16.7		59	66x33x31

B CONVENTIONAL BOTTOM-FREEZERS

✓	1	Whirlpool Gold GB2FHDWX[Q]	1,200	73	● ● ● ●	21.9 15.3		52	70x33x31
✓	2	Amana ABB2221WE[W] [ABB2224WE[]]	1,350	73	● ● ○ ●	21.9 16.5		56	70x33x32
✓	3	Maytag MBF2258XE[W] [MBL2258XE[]] MBR2258XE[]	1,100	73	● ● ○ ●	21.9 15.4		52	70x33x31
✓	4	Maytag MBF1958XE[W]	1,150	72	● ● ○ ●	18.5 12.8		50	67x30x31

C FRENCH-DOOR BOTTOM-FREEZERS

✓	1	LG LFX28991[ST]	3,000	85	● ● ● ●	27.6 18.4	ext.	54	69x36x34
✓	2	Kenmore Elite 72093	3,400	83	● ● ● ●	32.5 22.5	ext.	71	69x36x35
✓	3	Kenmore 7160[3]	1,700	83	● ● ● ○	25 17.5		52	69x36x32
✓	4	LG LFX33975ST	3,000	83	● ● ● ●	32.5 22.3	ext.	71	69x36x35
✓	5	Whirlpool Gold GX5FHTXV[Q] Gold GX5FHDXY[]	1,700	82	● ● ○ ●	24.8 16.2		60	70x36x33
✓	6	Samsung RF6298HD[RS] (Lowe's) RF6297HD[] , RF6296HD[]	2,800	81	● ● ● ●	28.5 18.6	ext.	74	69x36x35
✓	7	LG LFC25776[SW]	1,750	81	● ● ● ○	25 18		51	70x36x33
✓	8	Samsung RF323TEDB[SR]	3,300	80	● ● ● ○	31.6 21.8	ext.	73	69x36x36
✓	9	LG LFX28979[ST]	2,850	79	● ● ● ○	27.6 18.2	ext.	66	69x36x34
✓	10	Kenmore Elite 7103[2]	2,500	79	● ● ● ○	25 16.9	ext.	67	70x33x33
✓	11	LG LFX31925[ST]	3,200	79	● ● ● ●	31 19.4	ext.	73	69x36x34
✓	12	GE Café CFE29TSDSS	3,000	78	● ● ● ●	28.6 19.6	ext. [1]	72	69x36x36
✓	13	Samsung RF261BEAE[SR]	2,100	78	● ● ○ ●	25.5 18.6	int.	57	69x36x35
✓	14	Kenmore 7201[2]	1,550	78	● ● ● ○	24.8 16.9	int.	60	70x36x33
✓	15	LG LFC25765[ST]	1,900	78	● ● ● ○	25 17.9		60	69x33x34
✓	16	Kenmore Elite 7205[3]	3,200	78	● ● ● ●	31 19.4	ext.	75	71x36x35
✓	17	LG LFX28978[SW]	2,700	78	● ● ● ○	28 18.3	ext.	66	70x36x33

[D] Discontinued but similar model available; price is for similar model. [1] Dispenses hot water. [2] Cabinet-depth.



C16 Kenmore



D1 Samsung



D3 Bosch



E1 Thermador

☒ CR Best Buy
 ☒ Recommended

● Excellent
 ● Very good
 ○ Good
 ● Fair
 ● Poor

	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Test results	Capacity (cu. ft.)	Features
Recommendation	Rank			Temp. performance Energy efficiency Noise Ease of use	Claimed Usable	Water dispenser Energy cost HxWxD (in.)
			0 100 P F G VG E			

C FRENCH-DOOR BOTTOM-FREEZERS continued

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	18	LG LFX25991[ST] ²	\$3,400	77	● ● ● ●	24.5 14 ext.	\$60 69x36x29
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	19	Kenmore Elite 7230[3]	1,920	76	● ● ● ○	24.9 17.5	64 69x33x33

D SIDE-BY-SIDES

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Samsung RS267TD[WP] RS267TD[]	1,300	76	● ● ● ●	25.5 18.1 ext.	73 70x36x34
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	KitchenAid KSF26C6X[YY]	1,950	75	● ● ○ ●	25.8 18.6 ext.	75 69x36x34
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Bosch Linea 800 B22CS80SN[S] ² B22CS80SN[]	2,700	74	● ● ● ●	21.7 14.5 ext.	75 69x36x28
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Maytag MSD2559XE[W]	1,250	73	● ● ● ○	25.8 15.9 ext.	67 70x36x33
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	DCS RX215PJX1 ²	2,500	73	● ● ○ ○	21.5 15.7	62 70x36x28
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Kenmore Elite 5118[3]	2,000	72	● ● ● ●	29.1 21.2 ext.	72 69x36x35
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	Frigidaire Gallery FGUS2676[P] ^D Gallery FGUS2632L[] Gallery FGUS2647L[] Gallery FGUS2645L[] Gallery FGUS2642L[]	1,200	72	● ● ○ ●	26 16.9 ext.	72 70x36x33

E BUILT-INS

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Thermador Freedom Collection T36BB820SS	7,400	80	● ● ● ●	20 14.3	59 84x36x25
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Jenn-Air JS42PPDUB[SS]	7,200	80	● ● ● ●	25.3 17.3 ext.	73 84x42x26
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Thermador Freedom Collection T36BT810NS	8,000	78	● ○ ● ●	20 13.8	64 84x36x25
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Thermador KBUDT4265E[S]	8,750	77	● ● ● ●	25.2 16 ext.	78 84x42x26
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Sub-Zero BI42S[S]	8,000	76	● ● ● ●	24.1 18.3	79 84x42x26
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Miele KF1901Vi	7,200	76	● ○ ● ●	18.3 14	65 83x36x24

Can't find a model?

We analyzed refrigerators we've tested over 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.

TOP-FREEZER MODELS

Relatively safe bets LG and Frigidaire have performed very well, with many models among our top-scorers.

Less steady Kenmore, Whirlpool, GE, Hotpoint, Amana, and Maytag have been less consistent, with more lower-scoring models. For those brands, stick with models that score well in our Ratings.

BOTTOM-FREEZER MODELS

Safe bets Amana, KitchenAid, Whirlpool, Electrolux, Frigidaire, Samsung, and Kenmore have consistently been top performers in our Ratings.

Relatively safe bets LG and Maytag have usually scored Very Good or Excellent overall in our tests, but they've had a few more lower-scoring models.

Less steady GE, Haier, and Fisher & Paykel have been less consistent, with more lower-performing models.

SIDE-BY-SIDES

Safest bet KitchenAid is a top performer.

Relatively safe bets Maytag, GE, and Frigidaire have many models among our top-scorers. LG has performed very well overall in our tests, but our latest Product Reliability Survey shows that its side-by-sides with icemakers have been repair-prone.

Less steady Whirlpool, Kenmore, Samsung, and Electrolux have been less consistent in our performance tests, with more lower-scoring models.

Guide to the Ratings

Overall score is mainly **temperature performance** and **energy efficiency**, plus **noise** and **ease of use**. Displayed scores are rounded; models are listed in order of precise overall score. **Temperature performance** is how uniformly models maintained 37° F in the fridge and 0° F in the freezer at different room temperatures. **Energy efficiency** is electricity use based on our measurements of usable space. **Noise** is measured with compressor running. **Capacity** includes **claimed** (from maker) and **usable** (our measurements). **Energy cost/yr.** is based on our energy tests and may differ from EnergyGuide label. Height, width, and depth (**HxWxD**) are without handle, rounded to nearest inch. Bracketed letter under **brand & model** is color code. **Price** is approximate retail, including icemaker if available.

THE RIGHT FRIDGE FOR YOUR NEEDS

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



And the worst from our tests ...

These models were subpar in our tests, with overall scores of 40 or lower. Similar models, in small type, haven't been tested but are alike enough in our judgment that the same results apply.

Top-freezers

- Frigidaire FFTR2126L
- Whirlpool WRT311SFY
- Maytag M9BXXGMY
- Estate T8TXNGFW, T8RXNGFW, T8TXNWWF
- Maytag M1BXXGMY
- Maytag M8RXEGMX
- Amana A8RXNGMW
- GE GTH21KCX, GTH21KBX

Conventional bottom-freezers

- Blomberg BRFB1450

Side-by-sides

- GE GSH22JSDSS
- Electrolux EW23CS65G
- Whirlpool Gold GSC25C4EY
- Samsung RSG257AA
- GE GSHF6NGBWW

French-door bottom-freezers

- GE Profile PGSS5RKZ
- Fisher & Paykel RF201ADUX
- GE Profile PFC51RKZ, PFC1RKZ
- GE Profile PFSF6PKX
- GE Profile PGCS1RKZ



CLEANING CHAMP Kenmore's Elite 12783, \$1,200, puts the Sears brand at the top of our list.

Dishwashers

A quiet new model is our latest champion

A **WINNING BLEND** of cleaning and quietness helped Kenmore's new Elite 12783 knock Bosch from the top of our Ratings as consumers clamor for less noise. Dishwashers are also dialing back on water and energy use to meet stricter standards.

All new models must now use roughly 14 percent less energy and 23 percent less water per load than the maximum previously allowed. Those we recommend meet the new federal standard; the \$1,200 Kenmore is one of seven that aced our tougher energy tests, which include washing more place settings with dirtier dishes.

Work-saving features at a reasonable price are also high on shoppers' wish lists, and that's where Bosch stands out. All of our picks have adjustable racks and ample

flatware slots for easier loading. Three models from Bosch, including the Ascenta SHX3AR7[5]UC, \$700, a CR Best Buy, deliver them for well under a grand. Our challenging tests also found unimpressive models at both ends of the price scale, plus some misleading claims. Here are the details:

Two pricey also-rans. Viking claims its Professional VDB451, \$1,950, matches water temperature, pressure, and speed to what you're washing. But we found that 57 models did better overall and take far less time than the Viking's 205 minutes. And most of those dishwashers cost less. Dacor's Renaissance RDW24S, \$1,700, uses mysterious symbols for its hidden controls and came with a stick-on guide that was in French. And neither model has adjustable racks, despite those prices.

When paying less buys less. Amana's ADB1100AWW might seem a bargain at \$300, given its capable washing. But it's noisy, has no easy-loading features, and takes a leisurely 160 minutes per load. Frigidaire's FDB2400KS, \$310, was similarly loud and just mediocre at washing.

Claims we set straight. A large, leaf-shaped label on the Amana says it "helps use 39 percent less energy and 65 percent less water." But read the small type: Those comparisons are with dishwashers made before 2006. And though Viking touts the "sound-absorbing insulation" and "cushion-mounted components" on its D3 Series RDDB301, this \$1,450 model was far from the quietest in our tests.

How to choose

Tougher standards for the government's voluntary Energy Star program are expected next year. Wash performance will be added to Energy Star labels to help identify models that are efficient but ineffective. Here's what else to consider right now:

Look for smart features. Along with adjustable racks and plenty of flatware slots, helpful ones include fold-down tines for fitting odd-shaped dishes. More machines have a delayed-start setting, useful if, say, you don't want to hear the machine when guests are over. But fire and flooding risks are two reasons to avoid running any dishwasher unattended. And if you like quiet, note that most self-cleaning filters add noise as they grind what they trap.

Check the controls. Some dishwashers have interactive touch controls, but the usual touchpads are fine if they're clearly marked. Want the sleeker look of hidden controls? Consider a visible cycle-status indicator, especially with quiet models.

Match your cleaning habits. Our picks clean well enough for you to skip prerinsing. If you prerinse, don't pay extra for power-scrubbing modes because you'll be doing the extra scrubbing yourself.

Get cleaner dishes from the dishwasher you have

Simple tricks can help any dishwasher serve up more-sparkling loads:

▶ **Load by the book.** Some dishwashers, including Whirlpool's, have changed loading schemes to match multiple spray arms and adjustable racks. Check the owner's manual.

▶ **Adjust for hard water.** Pricier models from Bosch, KitchenAid, and Miele have a built-in water softener. For others, consider

installing a home water softener (about \$500 to \$1,000). A rinse aid can also help prevent spotting. To remove buildup from dishware or the tub, Lemi Shine Original was among additives that did best in our tests.

▶ **Use a good detergent.** The best clean without leaving film



on glassware or discoloring aluminum. Cascade Complete With Dawn ActionPacs, 29 cents per load, topped other detergents in our tests, cleaning even baked-on macaroni and cheese without water spots or food deposits. Other good choices: Cascade Complete All in 1 Powder, 21 cents, and Walmart's Great Value Powder Pacs, 17 cents.



A2 Bosch

Overview

The best dishwashers scored Excellent in our tough washing tests, meet Energy Star requirements, and come from reliable brands. They also have a sensor that adjusts cycle time to the soil level. The models highlighted below offer special strengths, value, or a combination of both.

CR Best Buy These blend top performance and value; all are recommended.

Recommended These high-scoring models stand out for the reasons below.

QUIET AND CONVENIENT

A1 Kenmore \$1,200

A3 Bosch \$1,550

A4 KitchenAid \$1,500

These models combine top quietness with a wealth of conveniences. **A1** and **A4** offer the best blend of washing and energy saving; the KitchenAid adds a cycle-time display but costs more and takes slightly longer. **A3** is fastest but uses a bit more energy.

A BIT NOISIER FOR LESS

A2 Bosch \$700 **CR Best Buy**

A5 Bosch \$900

A11 Bosch \$850

All three machines blend superb energy efficiency with relatively short cycle times. **A2** is fastest and costs the least but trades a stainless-steel tub for plastic. Paying a bit more for **A5** buys a cycle-time display.

DID YOU KNOW?

Loud means LOUD

At roughly 70 decibels, the noisiest dishwashers we tested aren't as loud as a typical garbage disposer but could be annoying—especially during the drain portion of the cycle, when volume tends to spike. Our top picks are notably quieter.

HOW WE TEST FOR DISHWASHER NOISE

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



Ratings Dishwashers

All tested models In performance order.

CR Best Buy Recommended
Excellent Very good Good Fair Poor

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Test results	Features
		Similar models, in small type, are comparable to tested model.			Washing Energy use Noise Ease of use Cycle time (min.)	Adjustable top rack Self-cleaning filter Cycle-time display Ample flatware slots Stainless-steel tub
				0100 P F G V E		
✓	1	Kenmore Elite 12783 12763, 12773	\$1,200	82	● ● ● ● ● 135	● ● ●
✓	2	Bosch Ascenta SHX3AR7[5]UC SHX3AR5[1]UC, SHE3AR7[1]UC, SHE3ARF[1]UC (Lowe's)	700	81	● ● ● ● ● 95	● ● ●
✓	3	Bosch SHX98M0[9]UC	1,550	81	● ● ● ● ● 115	● ● ● ●
✓	4	KitchenAid KDFE454CSS	1,500	81	● ● ● ● ● 140	● ● ● ●
✓	5	Bosch 800 Series SHE68R5[2]UC SHV68R5[3]UC, SHX68R5[1]UC	900	80	● ● ● ● ● 115	● ● ● ●
	6	LG Steam LDF7932[ST]	1,000	80	● ● ● ● ● 130	● ● ● ● ●
✓	7	Miele Futura Dimension G5575SCSF Plus G5705[1], G5505[1], G5575SCVi, Plus G5775SC[1]	1,950	80	● ● ● ● ● 150	● ● ●
✓	8	KitchenAid KUDE50CX[SS] KUDE48FX[1], KUDE20IX[1], KUDE20FX[1], KUDE40FX[1]	1,350	79	● ● ● ● ● 125	● ● ●
✓	9	KitchenAid KUDE50FBSS	1,500	79	● ● ● ● ● 145	● ● ● ●
✓	10	Bosch 800 Plus Series SHX9ER5[5]UC SHE9ER5[5]UC, SHV9ER5[3]UC	1,800	79	● ● ● ● ● 120	● ● ● ●
✓	11	Bosch Evolution 500 SHE55M1[2]UC	850	79	● ● ● ● ● 110	● ● ●
	12	LG LDF6920[WW]	700	79	● ● ● ● ● 125	● ● ● ●
	13	Whirlpool WDF735PABB	600	78	● ● ● ● ● 130	● ● ●
	14	Kenmore 1328[3] 1304[1], 1327[1]	650	77	● ● ● ● ● 120	● ● ●
	15	Bosch 500 Series SHX55R5[5]UC SHV55R5[3]UC, SHE55R5[1]UC	900	76	● ● ● ● ● 110	● ● ● ●
	16	Thermador DWH651JFP DWH640JFM, DWH640JFP, DWH6650JFP, DWH6651JFM, DWH6650JFM	2,200	76	● ● ● ● ● 120	● ● ●
	17	KitchenAid KUDE70FX[SS] KUDE60FX[1], KUDE60HX[1]	1,600	76	● ● ● ● ● 115	● ● ●
	18	Maytag MDB8959SBS	800	75	● ● ● ● ● 115	● ● ● ●
	19	KitchenAid KUDS30SX[SS]	950	75	● ● ● ● ● 115	● ● ● ●
	20	GE GDT550HSD[SS]	650	75	● ● ● ● ● 155	● ● ●
	21	Bosch 300 Series SHX33RL[5]UC SHX43R5[1]UC, SHX43RL[5]UC, SHE43R5[1]UC, SHX33RF[1]UC (Lowe's), SHE43RF[1]UC (Lowe's), SHE43RL[1]UC	720	74	● ● ● ● ● 110	● ● ●
	22	Kenmore I5693	850	74	● ● ● ● ● 130	● ● ● ●
	23	Miele Futura Crystal G5105SC G5175SC	1,530	74	● ● ● ● ● 145	● ● ●
	24	Kenmore Elite 1396[3]	1,000	73	● ● ● ● ● 135	● ● ● ●
	25	LG LDF7551[ST] LDF7561[ST]	900	72	● ● ● ● ● 145	● ● ● ●
	26	Bosch Integra 800 Plus SHX58E2[5]UC SHX8ER5[1]UC, SHE8ER5[1]UC, SHV7ER5[1]UC, SHE7ER5[1]UC, SHX7ER5[1]UC	1,500	72	● ● ● ● ● 125	● ● ● ●
	27	LG LDF8072[ST] LDF8574[ST]	1,100	72	● ● ● ● ● 145	● ● ●
	28	Samsung DMT800RH[W]	750	72	● ● ● ● ● 120	● ● ● ● ●
	29	LG LDS5540ST	800	71	● ● ● ● ● 145	● ● ● ● ●
	30	Dacor Renaissance RDW24S Distinctive DDW24S	1,700	71	● ● ● ● ● 150	●
	31	GE GDF540HSD[SS] GDF540HGD[1]	600	71	● ● ● ● ● 150	● ●
	32	GE GDWT668V[SS] GDWT368V[SS], GDWT308V[1], GDWT608V[1]	800	70	● ● ● ● ● 135	● ● ● ● ●
	33	GE Profile PDWT580V[SS] Monogram ZBD8900V[1], PDWT500V[1], PDWT480V[SS], Café CDWT980V[SS], Monogram ZBD6900V[1], Monogram ZBD6920V[SS], Monogram ZBD7920V[SS], Monogram ZBD8920V[SS]	1,450	70	● ● ● ● ● 110	● ● ● ●
	34	KitchenAid KUDS30FX[SS] KUDS30CX[1], KUDC10IX[1], KUDC10FX[1], KUDS30IX[1]	850	70	● ● ● ● ● 115	● ● ● ●
	35	Miele Futura Classic G4205SC	1,000	70	● ● ● ● ● 145	● ● ●
	36	GE Profile PDWT200V[WW] PDWT180V[SS], PDWT100V[1], PDWT280V[SS], Café CDWT280V[SS], PDWT380V[SS], PDWT300V[1]	850	69	● ● ● ● ● 140	● ● ● ● ●
	37	Asko D5894XXL[HS]	2,400	69	● ● ● ● ● 130	● ● ●
	38	GE GDF520PSD[SS] GDF510PGD[1], GDT530PSD[SS], GDF520PGD[1], GDF510PSD[SS], GDF510PMD[SA]	500	69	● ● ● ● ● 150	● ●
	39	Asko D5634XXL[HS]	1,350	68	● ● ● ● ● 150	●

Discontinued but similar model available; price is for similar model.

Ratings continued on next page

Ratings Dishwashers

All tested models In performance order.

CR Best Buy Recommended

Excellent Very good Good Fair Poor

Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Test results	Features
	Similar models, in small type, are comparable to tested model.			Washing Energy use Noise Ease of use Cycle time (min.)	Adjustable top rack Self-cleaning filter Cycle-time display Ample flatware slots Stainless-steel tub
			0 100		
			P F G V E		

Continued

40	Whirlpool Gold WDT770PAY[M]	\$ 700	68	● ● ● ●	115	●	●
41	GE GDF100V[W] GDF160V[], GHD108V[] (Home Depot), GHD168V[SS] (Home Depot)	600	67	● ● ● ●	110	●	● ●
42	Frigidaire Gallery FGHD2465N[F] Professional FPHD2485N[F]	600	66	● ● ● ●	130	● ● ●	
43	Jenn-Air Trifecta JDB8700AW[P]	1,550	66	● ● ● ●	170	●	● ●
44	Frigidaire Gallery FGBD2431K[W]	350	66	● ● ● ●	155	●	
45	Frigidaire Gallery FGBD2432K[W] BBBD2432K[] (Best Buy), LGBD2432K[] (Lowes), DGBD2432K[]	400	66	● ● ● ●	145	● ●	
46	Scholtes LFD53XL60HZ	1,400	66	● ● ● ●	105	●	● ●
47	Frigidaire Gallery FGBD2445N[F]	550	65	● ● ● ●	120	● ● ●	
48	Kenmore 1326[3] 1325[], 1329[]	750	65	● ● ● ●	130	●	● ●
49	Smeg STA8614XU	1,000	65	● ● ● ●	120	●	● ●
50	Maytag MDB4709PA[M] MDB6769PA[]	550	64	● ● ● ●	105	●	●
51	Whirlpool Gold WDF530PAY[W] WDT710PAY[]	440	63	● ● ● ●	105		●
52	GE Monogram ZBD9900R[II]	1,800	62	● ● ● ●	180	●	●
53	Samsung DW7933LRA[SR]	600	62	● ● ● ●	150	● ● ● ●	
54	LG LDF9932[ST]	1,300	62	● ● ● ●	140	● ● ● ●	
55	Jenn-Air Trifecta JDB8200AW[S]	1,200	61	● ● ● ●	170	●	● ●
56	Whirlpool Gold WDF730PAY[M]	600	61	● ● ● ●	115	●	●
57	Viking D3 Series RDBB301[SS] RDBB201[], Professional VDB301[]	1,450	61	● ● ● ●	155		●
58	Viking Professional VDB451[SS] FDB451	1,950	61	● ● ● ●	205	● ● ● ●	
59	Frigidaire Gallery FGHD2433K[F]	450	61	● ● ● ●	135	● ● ●	
60	Samsung DMT300RF[W]	500	60	● ● ● ●	170	● ● ● ●	
61	Frigidaire Professional FPHD2491K[F]	650	60	● ● ● ●	180	●	● ●
62	Electrolux Wave-Touch EWDW6505G[S]	1,200	59	● ● ● ●	135	● ● ● ●	
63	Jenn-Air JDB3200AW[W]	1,100	59	● ● ● ●	125		● ●
64	Maytag MDB4409PA[W]	380	58	● ● ● ●	115	● ●	
65	GE GLD5766V[SS] GLD5708V[], GLD5604V[], GLD5606V[], GLD5666V[SS]	520	58	● ● ● ●	140	● ●	
66	Electrolux IQ EIDW5905J[S]	1,000	57	● ● ● ●	90	● ●	●
67	Fagor LFA-086XL	1,300	55	● ● ● ●	120	●	● ●
68	Amana ADB1100AWW	300	54	● ● ● ●	160		
69	Electrolux Icon EDW7505HP[S]	1,400	54	● ● ● ●	125	● ● ● ●	
70	Blomberg DWT57500[SS]	1,000	53	● ● ● ●	125	● ● ● ●	
71	Frigidaire Gallery FGBD2435N[W]	400	53	● ● ● ●	135	●	
72	Frigidaire FFBD2409L[S]	380	52	● ● ● ●	125	●	
73	Ikea Nutid	650	52	● ● ● ●	125	●	●
74	Summit DW2432SS	650	48	● ● ● ●	110	●	● ●
75	Haier DWL3225SD[SS] DWL2825DD[]	480	45	● ● ● ●	120	● ● ● ●	
76	Haier DWL7075MC[SS] DWL4035MC[]	750	44	● ● ● ●	120	● ● ● ●	
77	Viking Professional VDB450E[SS] Designer Series DFB450E	1,650	44	● ● ● ●	170	● ●	
78	Blomberg DWT55100[SS]	850	44	● ● ● ●	125	● ● ● ●	
79	Kenmore 15112	300	43	● ● ● ●	110		
80	Whirlpool Gold WDT910SAY[M] WDT790SAY[], WDF750SAY[]	800	43	● ● ● ●	125	●	● ●
81	Blomberg DWT24100[SS]	600	43	● ● ● ●	110	● ● ● ●	
82	Ikea Renlig 802.222.43	500	43	● ● ● ●	120		●
83	Hotpoint HDA3600DWW	380	38	● ● ● ●	110	●	
84	Whirlpool WDF310PAA[W] WDF310PLA[], WDF310PCA[]	350	35	● ● ● ●	115		
85	Frigidaire FBD2400KS	310	34	● ● ● ●	90		
86	Amana ADB1400PY[S]	380	34	● ● ● ●	115		●
87	Amana ADB1000AWW	260	23	● ● ● ●	80	●	



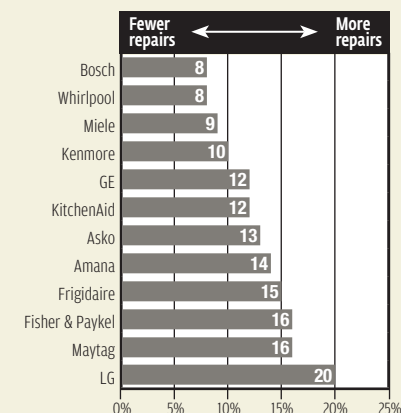
A4 KitchenAid

Most and least reliable

86,000 readers sound off

Choosing a dishwasher with a good repair history can improve your odds of getting a reliable model. So each year we survey thousands of our readers about their experiences. LG was the least reliable dishwasher brand in our latest survey. We lacked enough data to include Samsung and Electrolux in the chart, but our analysis shows both brands have been repair-prone.

DISHWASHERS



Source: Consumer Reports Annual Product Reliability Survey. Our findings are based on more than 86,000 dishwashers readers bought new between 2008 and 2012. Differences of fewer than 4 points aren't meaningful. Data are adjusted to eliminate differences linked solely to the dishwasher's age and use. Note that models within a brand may vary, and design or manufacturing changes may affect future reliability.

Guide to the Ratings

Overall score is mostly washing performance and includes energy and water use (not shown), noise, cycle time, and ease of use. Displayed scores are rounded; models are listed in order of precise overall score. Scores for previously tested models may be different because of changes in scoring methodology. **Washing** is normal-cycle results with very dirty full load; it includes temperature-boost option and, if available, heated dry. **Energy use** is energy and water use for normal cycle. **Noise** covers listener judgments and sound-level measurements. **Ease of use** includes convenience factors and loading. **Cycle time** (rounded to nearest 5 minutes) is based on wash-performance test. Under **brand & model**, bracketed letters or numbers mean color code. **Price** is approximate retail.

The Hot List

A monthly guide to the top products our testers recommend

These pages feature the top recommended models in many categories, updated every month. So no matter when you're buying appliances or electronics, you'll find good choices in every issue.

Your
cheat sheet
to the best
models



Panasonic Viera TC-P65VT50

Big TVs

MODEL	SCORE
60-INCH AND LARGER PLASMA	
Panasonic Viera TC-P65VT50, \$3,000	81
Samsung PN60E8000, \$1,900	79
Panasonic Viera TC-P60GT50, \$1,825	77
Panasonic Viera TC-P60ST50, \$1,700	77
Samsung PN64E550, \$2,000	71
LG 60PM6700, \$1,200	70
LG 60PA6500, \$900	67
Samsung UN60ES6100, \$1,500	65
55- TO 59-INCH	
Panasonic Viera TC-P55VT50, \$1,900 (plasma)	79
Panasonic Viera TC-L55WT50 (LCD/LED), \$1,700	74



Canon
EOS 60D

Digital cameras

MODEL	SCORE
SLR	
Canon EOS 60D, \$1,050	71
Olympus E-5, \$1,700	70
Nikon D7000, \$1,200	70
Canon EOS Rebel T3i, \$650	70
ADVANCED POINT-AND-SHOOT	
Panasonic Lumix DMC-FZ200, \$600	69
Panasonic Lumix DMC-LX7, \$500	66
Canon PowerShot G15, \$500	65
Olympus Stylus XZ-2, \$600	64

Lawn mowers

MODEL	SCORE
SELF-PROPELLED, MULTIPLE SPEEDS	
Honda HRX217VKA, \$600	83
Honda HRR2169VLA, \$500	83
Toro 20381, \$520 (and similar 20382, \$570)	82
Honda HRR2169VYA, \$480	82
Honda HRR2169VKA, \$400	81
Toro Recycler 20333, \$400	73
Troy-Bilt TB-280ES, \$340	73
SELF-PROPELLED, SINGLE SPEED	
Toro 20370, \$280	66
Toro 20371, \$300	65
Yard-Man 12A-18M7, \$250	60



Snapper
NXT2346

Lawn tractors

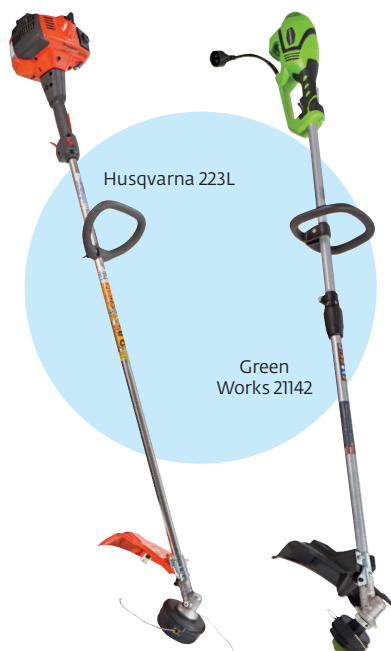
MODEL	SCORE
ZERO-TURN-RADIUS RIDERS	
Snapper NXT2346, \$2,800	76
John Deere X310, \$4,000	76
John Deere X304, \$3,600	75
John Deere D110, \$1,700 (and similar D120, \$1,800, and D130, \$1,900)	74
Husqvarna YTH21K46, \$1,600	73
SELF-PROPELLED, SINGLE SPEED	
John Deere D140, \$2,000 (and similar D150, \$2,300, and D160, \$2,600)	69
Craftsman 28861, \$2,800	68
John Deere D160, \$2,600 (and similar D140)	69

Midsized laptops

MODEL	SCORE
15- TO 16-INCH	
Apple MacBook Pro with Retina display MC975LL/A, \$1,900	75
Samsung NP780Z5E-S, \$1,200	71
Vizio CN15-A5, \$1,000	68
Apple MacBook Pro MD103LL/A, \$1,800	67
Sony Vaio SVT15112CXS Ultrabook, \$950	66
Dell Inspiron i15Z-2300SLV, \$950	66
Sony Vaio SVS15125CXB, \$1,000	65
14-INCH	
HP Envy 14-3010NR Spectre Ultrabook, \$850	70
Lenovo ThinkPad X1 Carbon Touch Ultrabook, \$1,600	69
Lenovo ThinkPad X1 Carbon Ultrabook, \$1,360	69



Apple MacBook Pro with Retina display MC975LL/A



String trimmers

MODEL	SCORE
GAS	
Husqvarna 223L, \$260	83
Stihl FS45, \$150	81
Stihl FS40 C-E, \$190	81
Echo SRM-225, \$220	80
Stihl FS 56 RC-E, \$240	78
Echo GT-225, \$160	77
LIGHT-DUTY ELECTRIC	
Green Works 21142, \$90	71
Stihl FSE 60, \$110	70
Black & Decker GH2000, \$70	68

Tablets

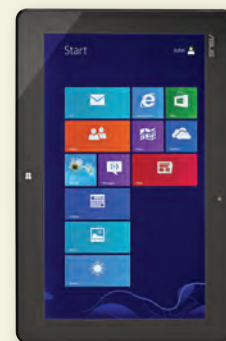
MODEL	SCORE
9- TO 12-INCH WI-FI ONLY	
Google Nexus 10 (16GB), \$400 (and similar 32GB, \$500)	84
Apple iPad (16GB, 4th gen.), \$500 (and similar 32GB, \$600; 64GB, \$700; and 128GB, \$800)	84
Asus VivoTab RT TF600T (32GB), \$550 (and similar 64GB, \$600)	83
Samsung Galaxy Note 10.1 (16GB), \$500 (and similar 32GB, \$550)	82
Samsung ATIV Smart PC (64GB), \$750	81
Samsung Galaxy Tab 2 10.1 (16GB), \$350	81
Microsoft Surface with Windows RT (32GB), \$500 (and similar 64GB, \$600)	80
Dell Latitude 10 (64GB), \$650	80
Asus Transformer Pad Infinity TF700T (32 GB), \$500 (and similar 64GB, \$600)	79
7- TO 8-INCH WI-FI ONLY	
Apple iPad Mini (16GB), \$330 (and similar 32GB, \$430, and 64GB, \$530)	81
Google Nexus 7 (16GB), \$200 (and similar 32GB, \$250)	76
Samsung Galaxy Tab 2 7.0 (8GB), \$200	72
Kobo Arc (32GB), \$250	69



Google Nexus 10



Apple iPad



Asus VivoTab RT TF600T

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Lab tests

Latest Galaxy sparkles

Every generation of Samsung Galaxy smart phones has showcased new features, but the latest Galaxy, the S 4, delivers more than any of its predecessors. We'll report our full test results in a future issue, but here's a rundown of what you can expect based on our favorable first impressions:

Two views, one screen. A feature called Multi-View splits the 5-inch HD display so that you can use two apps at once, such as Google Maps and Messaging.

Touch-free features. You can use the Galaxy S 4 touch screen without actually touching it, speeding up some activities. Air View lets you peek inside e-mail, calendar appointments, and more by hovering your finger above them. A Web page magnifier does just that when you hover your finger over the page you're viewing.

With Air Gestures, you wave your hand in front of the screen to accept a phone call, move to another Web page, flip through photos, or skip a song. That's handy, but response might be hit or miss until you get the hang of it. Another interesting feature is the cursor control on the virtual keyboard, which makes it easier to change text.

Camera editing. The main 13-megapixel

► Samsung Galaxy S 4

\$200 with two-year contract from AT&T or Verizon, and \$250 with two-year contract from Sprint (after rebates). \$150 down plus \$20 a month for 24 months with T-Mobile.

SCREEN 5 inches.

CAMERAS

13 megapixels, rear; 2 megapixels, front.

DIMENSIONS

5.4x2.7x0.3 inches; 4.6 ounces.

OPERATING SYSTEM

Android.

HD camera allows you to edit your photos on the fly and even delete objects or people who stray into your shot.

TV remote. Equipped with an IR blaster, similar to the one in a TV remote, it can control HDTVs, set-top boxes, and other devices.



Bottom line. The Samsung Galaxy S 4 is extremely capable and has advanced features that will appeal to savvy users. But it also offers intuitive help menus and thoughtful design that should attract those who seek a simpler smart-phone experience, too.

How to keep your cameras clean—and your photos spotless

The lighting was perfect, you employed the best settings and features, composed the shot carefully—and yet your photos or video seem blurry. The culprit may well be a dirty or scratched lens. Here are simple ways to keep crud from messing with your photography:

► **Wipe off dust and dirt.** No matter what device you're using, regularly clean the lenses (and on cameras, the LCD you use to compose shots), especially before important shots. Use a clean microfiber lens cloth and lens-cleaning fluid to gently wipe them off.

► **Cover up.** Done shooting? If your camera lens doesn't retract, cover it with a lens cap

to safeguard it from dirt and damage. With a tablet or smart phone, use a case to minimize contact between your fingers—and their oil and dirt—and the lens on the device. Never use abrasives or solvents, particularly alcohol-based solvents. With detachable lenses, be sure to clean both ends of the lens.



► **Don't forget the camera body.** With SLR and SLR-like cameras, removing a lens can allow dust to enter the camera and reach its sensor, creating spots on photos. Try not to change lenses in windy or dusty settings. That's wise even with models that have built-in sensor cleaning such as Canon's EOS Integrated Cleaning System, used on a number of advanced models.

If dirt has already gotten into a camera that's still under warranty, send it to the manufacturer to be cleaned. If it's no longer covered, you could try to clean the sensor yourself—but only after consulting the manual, and being careful never to touch the sensor. In general, it's safer to have a professional do the job.

Best auto batteries

RELYING ON a brand name alone can be a big mistake in terms of performance and cost when you choose an auto battery.

Batteries from DieHard, EverStart, and Interstate top our Ratings in some sizes but are at or near the bottom in others.

For example, the **C1 DieHard** tops the list in Group size 24 and 24F, which fits many Japanese models. But two DieHard Advanced Gold 50748 batteries for Group 48, which fit many European models, failed early in our life test, an important measure of how long a battery will last in your vehicle. Two more purchased for retesting also failed early.

During a previous test, case cracks appeared in two samples of the DieHard Advanced Gold 50765 in Group size 65, fitting many large Ford vehicles. The cracks caused no loss in performance but resulted in a lower test score. Retested samples showed no evidence of cracking, and that battery model now leads the Group 65 category, listed in the Ratings at **A1**.

The life test involves repeatedly draining and recharging batteries while they're immersed in 167° F water, and is designed to simulate the taxing cycles batteries go through while subjected to high temperatures under the hood.

Bottom line. If you're shopping for a battery, the best bet is to check your owner's manual for the size and refer to our Ratings for one that suits your needs and budget—regardless of brand.

Ratings

Recommended models only From 41 tested.

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Test results			
				0 P F G V E 100	Life	Reserve capacity	Cold-cranking amp	Warranty



A2 NAPA



B1 DieHard

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

A GROUP 65 Top terminal; fits many large Ford vehicles.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	DieHard Advanced Gold 50765 ¹ ²	\$175	84	●	●	●	36
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	NAPA 8465 ³	85	74	○	○	●	24/84

B GROUP 34, 78, AND 34/78 Dual terminal; fits many Chrysler and GM pickups, SUVs, and sedans.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	DieHard Advanced Gold 50778 ¹ ²	165	92	●	●	●	36
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Optima Yellow Top 3478DT ² ⁴	190	90	●	○	●	36
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	DieHard Advanced Gold 50734 ¹ ²	155	89	●	●	●	36
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Duralast 34-DL ⁵	100	80	●	○	○	24/84
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Duralast 78-DL ⁵	100	75	●	○	○	24/84
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Kirkland Signature 12877 ⁶	80	73	○	○	○	36/100

C GROUP 24 AND 24F Top terminal; fits many Acura, Honda, Infiniti, Lexus, Nissan, and Toyota vehicles.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	DieHard Gold 50523 (South) ⁷	120	78	○	●	●	36/100
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	DieHard 50424 ⁷	95	67	○	○	○	18/72
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	DieHard Gold 50624 (North) ⁷	120	67	○	○	●	36/100

D GROUP 35 Top terminal; fits many Japanese models.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	EverStart Maxx-35N (North) ⁸	90	86	●	○	●	36
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Duralast 35-DL ⁵	100	69	●	○	○	24/84

E GROUP 75 Side terminal; fits some GM midsize and compact models, and a few Chrysler models.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Interstate Mega-Tron II MT-75 ⁴	110	71	●	○	○	24/60
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	EverStart Maxx-75N (North) ⁸	80	69	○	○	○	36
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	DieHard Gold 50575 (South) ⁷	105	68	○	○	○	36/100

F GROUP 48 Top terminal; fits many European and some GM models.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	EverStart Maxx-H6 ⁸	110	73	○	○	●	36
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¹ At Sears only. ² Absorbed glass mat technology. ³ At NAPA only. ⁴ At independent stores. ⁵ At AutoZone only. ⁶ At Costco only. ⁷ At Sears and Kmart only. ⁸ At Walmart only.

Roku 3 streaming box is a video all-star

Roku models have been among our top choices in streaming media boxes, in part because they offer a dizzying selection of content—more than 750 channels in all, including the Amazon, Netflix, and Hulu Plus video services and music apps from Pandora and Spotify. The company's newest offering, the \$100 Roku 3, makes a good thing even better, with faster operation, a more graphically rich menu, and a special feature that let's you listen without disturbing others. Here's what we like about it, based on a preliminary review:

▣ **Speed.** The Roku 3 has a new dual-core processor that provides almost instant response whether you're searching for content, moving through channels, or loading Netflix videos.

▣ **Remote.** The controller—a game-centric model that lets you use gestures to play the preloaded version of Angry Birds Space—is also a winner. Its built-in headphone jack automatically shuts off the volume from a TV or A/V receiver when it's used, a plus if you want to watch TV but not disturb someone else in an adjoining space. The included earbuds are so-so, but the standard jack accepts any headphones.



▣ **Connections.** As with the XS model it replaces, the Roku 3 has Wi-Fi and an Ethernet port for a wired connection to a home network, which has the potential to give you faster, more reliable streaming. It also has an HDMI output and a USB port, plus a microSD card slot for playing personal media, such as music and photos. One difference: The Roku 3 doesn't have a composite A/V output, so it won't work with older HDTVs that lack HDMI inputs.

Bottom line. The Roku 3 is a very appealing video streaming device. But if you own an older Roku player, it might not be worth buying the new model. By the time you read this, Roku should have updated your software with the new tile-based interface, which we found more intuitive than the scrolling-list-style menus.

Stay cool for less

Higher costs for materials and shipping have bumped up prices for room air conditioners this year. But don't sweat it: Six CR Best Buys can keep you cool and comfy for as little as \$170. Our latest tests of almost 30 models also show that some can be noisy and harder to adjust. And one could make you feel relatively clammy in its energy-saver mode.

▶ A new winner for small spaces

Small air conditioners cost the least and cool up to about 300 square feet. Consistent cooling and low noise helped make the **A3 Frigidaire**, \$170, a new CR Best Buy. Its brandmate, the **A8 Frigidaire**, cooled comparably but was noisier. Instead of a simple lever to adjust their vents, you get slower, less intuitive thumbwheels.

▶ Strong, midsize values

At about \$200 apiece, the **B2 Sharp** and **B3 LG** cool a larger space than smaller models for about the same price. Both are quiet, but the Sharp, at about 11 pounds less, is easier to install and remove. We suggest thinking twice about the relatively noisy **B7 Fedders** and **B8 GE** if you're a light sleeper or often keep your A/C on high.

▶ Two new picks for larger rooms

A strong showing in our latest tests also put the **C2 Frigidaire** and **C4 Sharp** among our picks for spaces up to 650 square feet. Poor performance in our simulated-brownout test put last year's Sharp AF-S120MX at the bottom of our Ratings. This year's model, **C4**, aced that test, though the Frigidaire beats it for quiet and value.

Here are other points to consider:

See what you need. Use the Energy Star calculator (energystar.gov) to match the A/C size to the area you're cooling. Models too large won't cool better and tend to cycle on and off more frequently.

Check the features. Helpful features include magnetic remote controls with displays for temperature and other modes. An energy-saver setting trades some comfort for efficiency by turning off the fan and compressor as the A/C cycles on and off. The **C8 GE** let temperatures and humidity vary more widely than most in that mode. The **A5 Friedrich** has a thermostat you can set for different days of the week but no energy-saver setting.

Assess the airflow. Our Ratings show which A/Cs are better at directing air to the left or right when you're facing the unit.



A3 Frigidaire

Ratings Air conditioners

All tested models in performance order, within types.

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- CR Best Buy
- Recommended

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Specifications			Test results				
					Btu/hr.	Energy-efficiency ratio	Window widths (in.)	Comfort	Brownout	Indoor noise, high	Indoor noise, low	Ease of use

A SMALL (5,000 TO 6,500 BTU/HR.) Cools roughly 100-300 square feet; weighs 38-70 pounds.

✓	1	Kenmore 70051	\$190	78	5,200	11.0	22-39	●	●	●	●	L
✓	2	Friedrich Chill CP05G10	210	77	5,450	10.7	22-36	●	●	●	●	L
✓	3	Frigidaire LRA067AT7	170	75	6,000	10.7	22-38	●	●	●	●	LR
✓	4	Haier ESA406J-L ESA406K	175	75	6,000	10.7	24-37	●	●	●	●	R
	5	Friedrich Kuhl SQ05N10 [1]	550	74	5,400	11.2	25-43	●	●	●	●	R
	6	Soleus Air SG-WAC-06ESE-C (BJ's)	240	74	6,300	10.7	23-38	●	●	●	●	L
	7	GE AEM05LQ	190	73	5,350	10.7	22-38	●	●	●	●	L
	8	Frigidaire FRA054XT7	175	73	5,000	10.7	23-37	●	●	●	●	L
	9	Friedrich Chill CP06G10 [1]	280	73	6,000	10.7	22-35	●	●	●	●	L
	10	GE AEW06LQ (Walmart) AEM06LQ, AEL06LQ (Home Depot)	170	72	6,400	10.7	22-38	●	●	●	●	L
	11	LG LW5011 LW5013 [2]	100	37	5,000	9.7	21-34	●	●	●	●	L

B MIDSIZED (7,000 TO 8,200 BTU/HR.) Cools roughly 250-400 square feet; weighs 47-70 pounds.

✓	1	Friedrich Chill CP08G10 [1]	330	78	7,800	10.8	22-37	●	●	●	●	L
✓	2	Sharp AF-S85RX (Costco) AF-S80RX (Costco)	200	76	8,000	10.8	22-38	●	●	●	●	L
✓	3	LG LW8010ER LW8013ER	200	75	8,000	10.8	23-37	●	●	●	●	R
	4	Frigidaire LRA087AT7 FRA085AT7 (Best Buy), FRA086AT7	230	72	8,000	10.8	23-39	●	●	●	●	L
	5	Kenmore 79081	210	71	8,000	10.8	22-38	●	●	●	●	L
	6	Haier ESA408K-E (BJ's) ESA-408K-L (Walmart), Amana ACB08KE	140	70	8,000	10.8	23-37	●	●	●	●	R
	7	Fedders AZ6R08F2A	270	69	8,000	9.8	23-39	●	●	●	●	L
	8	GE AEW08LQ (Walmart) AEM08LQ, AEL08LQ (Home Depot)	205	68	8,000	10.8	22-38	●	●	●	●	L

C LARGE (9,800 TO 12,500 BTU/HR.) Cools roughly 350-650 square feet; weighs 60-85 pounds.

✓	1	LG LW1210ER LW1213ER [1]	325	76	12,000	10.8	28-41	●	●	●	●	R
✓	2	Frigidaire FRA106CV1	320	71	10,000	10.8	23-37	●	●	●	●	L
✓	3	Kenmore 70101	370	71	10,000	10.8	23-37	●	●	●	●	L
✓	4	Sharp AF-S125RX	450	70	12,000	10.8	23-37	●	●	●	●	R
	5	Frigidaire LRA127CT1 (Lowe's) FRA125CT1, FRA126CT1	330	69	12,000	10.8	23-37	●	●	●	●	L
	6	Kenmore 70121	380	67	12,000	10.8	23-38	●	●	●	●	L
	7	Haier ESA412J-L ESA412K	295	66	12,000	10.8	25-37	●	●	●	●	R
	8	GE AEL10AQ (Home Depot) AEM10AQ, AEW10LQ (Walmart)	280	65	10,150	10.8	23-37	●	●	●	●	L

[1] Slide-out chassis. [2] No remote control.

AIR CONDITIONER BUYING GUIDE

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



The Consumer Reports New Car Price Report includes access to the Build & Buy Service. Purchasers have saved over \$100 million vs MSRP using this program*.



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Cars

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LOSS OF CONTROL If your key fob's buttons stop working, you can often find an inexpensive substitute on the Internet.

Replace your key for less

CAR KEYS have gone high tech, and replacing one is no longer a quick, inexpensive trip to the hardware store. A CONSUMER REPORTS electronics engineer found that out the hard way. While at the beach, he forgot that the key to his Toyota Prius was in his pocket, went for a dip in the surf, and never saw the key again. The cost of a replacement: \$600.

Like many new cars, his Prius uses a proximity key that electronically unlocks the car when you touch the door handle and lets you start it by pressing a button on the dash. But even less sophisticated keys don't come cheap.

Most ignition keys now have a transponder that electronically communicates with the vehicle to prevent theft; the car

won't start if the key isn't programmed to match it. The systems also include a separate or integrated fob with buttons for locking and unlocking the doors.

If you lose the key and fob, you can expect a dealer replacement and programming to cost \$200 or more, depending on

By buying online, we saved almost \$70 off the dealer's price.

the vehicle and the key's design. A Lexus dealer quoted \$374 for a new key, fob, and programming, and a BMW dealer said replacement keyless fobs could be as much as \$500, depending on the model.

If you don't need the key right away, one way to save is to buy a replacement over the Internet. A Honda dealer, for example, told us it would cost \$200 to replace the key for a 2005 Accord. At KeylessRide, one of several sites that advertise keys at discount prices, we bought a Honda key for that car for \$54; an off-brand version was listed for about \$40. Having a locksmith

cut and program the key added \$80, for a total of \$134.

Depending on the make and model, you might even be able to do the programming yourself, saving more money. Instructions and videos can often be found online. Try searching for your car along with the words "key programming."

Another common problem is when the buttons on your fob stop working but the key still starts the car. First try replacing the fob's battery. They are often available at drugstores and retailers such as RadioShack for less than \$10. Look for a small screw or a slot along the fob's seam where it can be pried open to access the battery. Make a note of any identifying numbers and take the old battery with you to the store.

If replacing the battery doesn't help, you might need to replace the fob's electronics. A Honda dealer quoted us \$80 for that task. But we were able to simply open our \$54 online key, remove the electronics assembly (with buttons), and transfer it to the original key. We followed the easy programming instructions that came with our key and saved \$26.

You can even go cheaper. Online we also saw replacement fobs and electronic assemblies for as little as \$35.

■ DID YOU KNOW?

If you lock your key in your car or trunk and have no way of getting to it, a dealer can often make an inexpensive key that will open the doors but not start the engine. That will allow you to retrieve the original key. You'll probably need the vehicle identification number and proof that you own the car.

LUXURY CARS

Tesla Model S

An electric sports car from an American startup earns our top test score

ROAD-TEST
SCORE
99

Slipping behind the wheel of the Tesla Model S is like crossing into a promising zero-emissions future. This electric luxury sports car, built by a small automaker based in Palo Alto, Calif., is brimming with innovation, delivers world-class performance, and is interwoven throughout with impressive attention to detail. It's what Marty McFly might have brought back in place of his DeLorean in "Back to the Future." The sum total of that effort has earned the Model S the highest score in our Ratings: 99 out of 100. That is far ahead of such direct competitors as the gas-powered Porsche Panamera (84) and the Fisker Karma plug-in hybrid (57).

The Tesla rivets your attention from the start. Simply touching the flush aluminum door handles causes them to slide outward, welcoming you inside. With the car-shaped fob in your pocket or purse, a tap of the brake pedal brings the Model S to life. There's no need to insert a key or press a button. You're immediately greeted by the glow of a huge 17-inch video display that dominates the center of the dash

and allows you to control everything, such as adjusting the suspension's ride height and setting up a new Slacker Radio channel. And as you dip into the throttle, you experience a silent yet potent surge of power that will make many sports cars weep with envy.

With its hefty 85-kWh lithium-ion battery, our Tesla is easily the most practical electric car we've tested. Though the Ford Focus Electric and Nissan Leaf can go about 80 and 75 miles, respectively, before needing a charge, our Model S has been giving us around 200 miles: ample for commuting, running plenty of errands, and still being able to take the long, winding way home. Those results have ranged from roughly 180 miles on cold winter days to about 225 in more moderate temperatures. Moreover, our car has delivered the energy equivalent of 84 mpg. With a full charge costing about \$9 (at the national average of 11 cents per kWh), it's like running a conventional car on gasoline that costs \$1.20 per gallon.

The Tesla not only leaps beyond all normal expectations of electric cars but it also shines

STREAMLINED

The Model S has sleek, coupelike styling that belies its roomy interior.



CONTROL CENTRAL Most functions are performed through a huge 17-inch touch screen that's fairly easy to use.



KIDS' SPACE This \$1,500 rear-facing third-row seat holds two small children and folds into the floor when it's not needed.

in several areas compared with conventional cars. From a standstill, it catapults from 0-to-60 mph in a mere 5.6 seconds, rivaling the V8-powered BMW 750Li and Jaguar XJL. Its pinpoint handling is reminiscent of a Porsche. The beautifully crafted interior calls to mind that of an Audi. And it's the quietest car we've tested since the Lexus LS.

Even the buying experience is innovative; you can order your car online directly from Tesla, with no dealer interaction.





ROOM TO SPARE Under the hood there's a modest front trunk, called a "frunk" by Tesla, that adds to the Model S' practicality.

Reality check

Though the Tesla doesn't come with the usual range anxiety of other EVs, you still need to plan ahead to avoid running out of juice. And charging our battery, which is the largest available, takes a long 12 hours on a standard 240-volt electric-car charger. That's why Tesla offers a dedicated high-power wall connector, \$1,200, that replenishes the battery in 5 hours. Still, that requires the \$1,500 Twin Chargers option and an 80-amp circuit at your home or workplace. We've been charging in standard mode because Tesla advises against frequently using the max-range mode.

If you're driving on a major highway in California or the Northeast, you may be able to use one of Tesla's free Supercharger stations, which let you fill the battery halfway in about 30 minutes.

When it's left unplugged, we noted a parasitic loss of energy that amounts to 12 to 15 miles of range per day. That could be a concern if, say, the car is parked at an airport for an extended period. Tesla has promised a fix for that.

The Model S also lacks some high-end features that are expected at this price, including a lane-departure warning system.

Another concern is investing in a new car and startup company with no track record for reliability or resale value, and a skimpy (although growing) service network. So, yes, despite its stratospheric road-test score, we can't recommend the Model S until we have sufficient reliability data.

All of its goodness comes at a price of \$89,650, which is competitive with other luxury cars. Still, even if you factor in the federal tax credit of \$7,500, for about the same amount you could satisfy your urges for luxury performance and green frugality by buying both an Audi A6 and a Toyota Prius, two of our 2013 Top Picks.

You could opt for a smaller 60-kWh battery, which drops the price by \$10,000. But if you're buying a Model S, you'll want the added power and range of the larger battery.

It also grants free access to Tesla's Supercharging stations, which is otherwise a \$2,000 option.

High-tech luxury

With no engine over the front axle and the battery mounted low on the chassis, the Tesla provides lithe, agile handling that makes it invigorating to drive.

You're also treated to a luxury-car ride. With 19-inch wheels and the optional air-suspension system, our Model S feels taut but supple over bumps, and it glides serenely on the highway. But the larger 21-inch summer tires provide less isolation.

Braking is excellent. In standard mode, lifting off of the throttle causes the regenerative braking system to rapidly decelerate the car to recapture energy. Initially that can feel like, well, you left the emergency brake on. But the system can easily be set to feel more normal.

Inside, the Tesla's seats are supportive but frills-free. The rear seat provides good leg room but is too low for optimum comfort. Three adults will fit back there, but it's crowded.

The all-digital instrument cluster is colorful, crisp, bright, and easy to use. All except a few functions are controlled through the giant touch screen. Icons, fonts, and virtual buttons are large, clear, and easy to use. And the screen is very responsive. You can split the display between two functions—the navigation map, say, and the media player—or you can have one big display. Some functions are performed by swiping, like on an iPad.

But the system has several downsides. Most functions can't be performed without looking at the screen, even if briefly. Some simple tasks that require only one button in other cars take an extra step or two in the Model S. And some features, such as Internet surfing, can be very distracting while driving. The screen is easy to read, but it can wash out in direct sunlight. On the plus side, Tesla can download software updates and new features down the road.

With a handy smart-phone app, you can remotely control the charging, monitor battery level, and heat or cool the cabin while the car is plugged in to maximize range.

The Model S has no spare tire, no air compressor, and no run-flats. If you have a flat, you'll have to call Tesla's roadside assistance.

Tested vehicle

HIGHS	Energy efficiency, acceleration, quietness, ride, handling, braking, easy-to-use touch screen, luggage capacity, fit and finish
LOWS	Limited range, long charging times, access, visibility, some controls
TRIM LINE	Base, 85 kWh
DRIVETRAIN	362-hp electric motor, single-speed direct-drive transmission, rear-wheel drive
MAJOR OPTIONS	85-kWh battery, panoramic roof, leather, technology package, air suspension, third-row seat, twin chargers
TESTED PRICE	\$89,650

The Model S line

OTHER TRIM LINES	60 kWh, 85 kWh Performance
OTHER DRIVETRAINS	302-hp, 416-hp electric motors
BASE PRICES	\$69,900-\$94,900 (without the \$7,500 federal tax credit)

More test findings

BRAKING	Short stops on all surfaces.
HEADLIGHTS	Standard xenon lamps provide good all-around visibility. The intensity was good but not as bright as in other xenon lamps.
ACCESS	Impeded by low stance; short, thick doors; and tall sills.
VISIBILITY	Coupe-like styling, small windows, and thick pillars impair the view. The rear-view camera is excellent.
CABIN STORAGE	There's a large open enclosure on the floor but no enclosed storage other than a modest glove box. A center console is available.
HEAD RESTRAINTS	Rear ones are not tall enough to provide adequate protection.
CHILD SEATS	It's difficult to secure child seats. A rear-facing, third-row jump seat is available.



Pennies per mile

The Tesla Model S costs far less to operate per mile than gasoline-powered cars, even hybrids, and can go farther than other electric cars before needing a charge.

Vehicle	Price as tested	CR overall mpg/MPGe ①	Cost per mile (cents)	Total cost for trips:	
				50 miles	200 miles
Nissan Leaf (electric)	\$ 35,430	106	3.5	\$ 1.74	NA ②
Tesla Model S (electric)	89,650	84	4.4	2.22	\$ 8.87
Toyota Prius (hybrid)	26,750	44	8.0	3.98	15.91
Mercedes-Benz E350 Bluetec (diesel)	57,525	26	15.4	7.69	30.77
Infiniti M35h (hybrid)	58,665	25	14.8	7.40	29.60
Porsche Panamera S	105,110	20	18.5	9.25	37.00

Costs are based on \$0.11 per kWh for electricity, \$3.50 per gallon for regular gas, \$3.70 for premium, and \$4.00 for diesel. ① MPGe is miles-per-gallon equivalent using the standard EPA conversion factor of 33.7 kWh/gal. ② Beyond the Leaf's range on a single charge.



SMALL SUVs

Subaru Forester

With a 2014 redesign, this fuel-efficient vehicle now tops its class

ROAD-TEST
SCORE
88

The small-SUV category is like a rugged, rocky mountain that has proved difficult to scale for many hopeful models. For the past decade, the Toyota RAV4 and Subaru Forester had maintained a vigorous rivalry while scrambling for the top spot. But recent redesigns to the Ford Escape, Honda CR-V,

Mazda CX-5, and RAV4 have reshuffled the class. Now the Forester has undergone its own redesign for 2014, and its lofty road-test score of 88 has left it alone at the summit with its competition far below.

What's its secret? Sticking to the basics. This new Forester embodies the saying "a steady pace wins the race." It has always been a sound, practical vehicle, although its plain, unpretentious demeanor hasn't helped it stand out to car shoppers in this crowded field.

With its redesign, Subaru has continued putting function in front of form. It resisted the contemporary trend toward making SUVs look like sports coupes with descending rooflines and curvaceous bodies, instead focusing on the fundamentals with a space-efficient design, large windows, and big square doors. That recipe has resulted in the easiest access and the best view out of almost any vehicle, and one of the roomiest rear seats in the class, with copious head and leg room.

By adapting various fuel-efficient technologies, including moving to a new continuously variable transmission in place

of its dated four-speed automatic, the Forester now delivers quicker acceleration as well as a class-leading 26 mpg overall and 35 on the highway. We also like that our mid-trim Forester 2.5i Premium has a power seat and a backup camera, handy features that some similarly priced competitors lack.

For all its virtuous simplicity, however, the Forester's redesign has also brought trade-offs. The ride, which used to be calm and cushy, is now rather firm and jittery. Handling is responsive and very secure, but the Forester isn't as agile as, say, the Ford Escape, Mazda CX-5, or Toyota RAV4.

The interior trim was modestly upgraded but remains quite austere, with a few cheap-looking touches. More notable, the Forester's in-car electronics and infotainment connectivity are a little behind the curve, especially in the areas of wireless Bluetooth phone pairing and audio streaming.

Overall, if you're looking for a small SUV that's very functional and fuel-efficient, the Forester is hard to beat. We expect its reliability to be above average, based on previous models.

How they compare

Rec.	SMALL SUVs	0	100
		P	F G V G E
✓	Subaru Forester 2.5i Premium	88	
✓	Honda CR-V EX	77	
✓	Mazda CX-5 Touring (2.5L)	76	
✓	Toyota RAV4 XLE	75	
	Ford Escape SE (1.6T)	75	
✓	Mazda CX-5 Sport (2.0L)	74	
✓	Kia Sportage LX	70	
✓	Hyundai Tucson GLS	70	



✓ Recommended

Pleasingly practical

Most Foresters come with a 170-hp, 2.5-liter four-cylinder engine mated to a CVT, which delivers acceleration that's on a par with most competitors. More impressive is the fuel economy, which is the best we've recorded in any non-diesel, non-hybrid SUV and just edges out the Mazda CX-5's 25 mpg.

Moreover, the CVT, a weak point for many other models, is largely unobtrusive. Ratio changes are quick and responsive. Still, hard acceleration kicks up the revs, creating a lot of engine noise. For more effortless power, you can opt for the lively 250-hp, 2.0-liter turbocharged four in the 2.0XT trim. But that will boost the price by about \$4,500 and you'll have to use premium gas.

The Forester's formerly excellent ride has deteriorated with its redesign. Though the suspension absorbs single bumps and ruts fairly well, the ride is never settled. Even on smooth roads, passengers experience a small, incessant jitter that some of us found annoying. If you put a premium on ride comfort, consider a Honda CR-V instead.

As is typical for this class, cabin noise is fairly pronounced. At highway speeds, wind noise dominates and hard acceleration brings a howl from the otherwise quietly humming engine.

The steering is well weighted but short on feedback. When pushed to its handling limits at our track, the Forester was very secure and unflappable, with mild, predictable understeer. It posted a respectable speed through our avoidance maneuver, and we felt confident hustling it through the cones.

Subaru's EyeSight safety system, available on Touring versions, includes active cruise control, auto braking, and lane-departure warning.

It would be hard to improve on the Forester's driving position. The cabin feels airy, and the power seat with adjustable lumbar is supportive. Big windows and thin roof pillars contribute to outstanding visibility. But a blind-spot monitor isn't available.

The gauges are big and legible, including a high-mounted center display for the onboard computer and rear camera. Controls are basic but simple to operate. Large buttons and knobs manage the radio and climate system—not fancy but functional. To get automatic climate control, opt for the Limited or Touring version.

Unfortunately, when a phone is paired via Bluetooth, voice commands are cumbersome and unintuitive. Inexplicably, the system supports only one device at a time. When streaming Bluetooth audio, the dash display shows song info if you're using an iPhone but not an Android device. And the system doesn't support an iPhone 5 being used as a music player when it's plugged into the USB port.

Subaru's navigation system displaces the simple radio with a touch-screen unit that has small, fussy, and cryptic controls with tiny onscreen fonts and "buttons." Plus, you have to opt for the navigation system to get satellite radio and Aha Internet radio, features that are common on other cars.

The 60/40-split rear seatbacks fold flat, creating a fairly generous 35.5 cubic feet of space. A handy power liftgate comes with the Limited version.



WIRELESS GAP Radio controls are simple, but Bluetooth pairing and streaming fall short.



Tested vehicle

HIGHS	Fuel economy, visibility, braking, roomy interior, access, controls
LOWS	Unsettled ride, noise, antiquated connectivity
TRIM LINE	2.5i Premium
DRIVETRAIN	170-hp, 2.5-liter four-cylinder engine; continuously variable transmission; all-wheel drive
MAJOR OPTIONS	All-weather package (heated seats and mirrors)
TESTED PRICE	\$26,814

The Forester line

OTHER TRIM LINES	2.5i, 2.5i Limited, 2.5i Touring, 2.0XT Premium, 2.0XT Touring
OTHER DRIVETRAINS	250-hp, 2.0-liter turbocharged four-cylinder engine; six-speed manual transmission
BASE PRICES	\$21,995-\$32,995

More test findings

BRAKING	Excellent on dry pavement, OK on wet.
HEADLIGHTS	Good overall, but the low-beam pattern is a bit dimmer toward the edges than in the center.
ACCESS	Big square doors; flush sills; and a low step-in height make getting in and out very easy.
VISIBILITY	Excellent. Most versions come with a backup camera.
CABIN STORAGE	Numerous nooks and bins help make the interior very functional.
HEAD RESTRAINTS	The center-rear restraint is too low to provide adequate protection.
CHILD SEATS	Securing some forward-facing seats requires removing the head restraint. Subaru recommends against putting a child seat in the center rear.



Scan for video.

INNER SPACE

The roomy interior includes a generous, easy-to-access cargo area.



UPSCALE SEDANS

Toyota Avalon & Lincoln MKZ

Redesigned models with different characters

How they compare

Rec.	UPSCALE SEDANS	0 P F G V6 E	100
✓	Hyundai Genesis 3.8	92	
✓	Toyota Avalon Hybrid Limited	86	
✓	Toyota Avalon Limited (V6)	85	
✓	Chrysler 300 Limited (V6)	83	
✓	Lexus ES 300h	82	
	Lincoln MKZ Hybrid	82	
	Lincoln MKZ (2.0 EcoBoost)	81	
✓	Lexus ES 350	80	

ON PAPER, the Toyota Avalon and Lincoln MKZ, each redesigned for 2013, look similar. Their external dimensions are about the same, they're priced in the low \$40,000s, and they have well-crafted interiors with plenty of features. Each also is now available in a hybrid version for drivers who want to stretch their fuel dollars further.

But once you're behind the steering wheel, it's clear that the two models have very different DNA. The Avalon is largely about getting from point A to point B with plenty of comfort and convenience. It provides a better driving position and a more spacious,

stretch-your-legs-out rear seat.

The MKZ, on the other hand, is much more fun to drive, with taut, agile handling that rivals that of many European sports sedans. But you might not expect the MKZ to also provide a steadier, more comfortable and compliant ride and a somewhat quieter cabin—traits that have long been associated with the Avalon.

That's partly a byproduct of the Avalon's redesign, which has given Toyota's large car better handling at the expense of its previously plush ride comfort.

Where the MKZ loses points is in its complicated MyLincoln Touch control system, tighter rear seat, and so-so visibility.

The Avalon and MKZ hybrids join the Lexus ES as the only gas/electric models available in this price range. And here, the Avalon Hybrid has a slight edge, delivering a frugal 36 mpg overall—the same as the ES 300h—compared with 34 for the MKZ Hybrid. Even the 24 mpg of the conventional Avalon's V6 edges the 23 of the MKZ's turbocharged four-cylinder engine.

Overall, the Avalons scored slightly higher than the MKZs in our Ratings, below the Hyundai Genesis and close to the Chrysler 300 and Lexus ES. The Avalon is recommended, but the MKZ is too new for us to have reliability data.



Toyota Avalon
Hybrid Limited



Lincoln MKZ
Hybrid

Toyota Avalon
Limited



 Recommended

Toyota Avalon

ROAD-TEST SCORE
86
Hybrid Limited

ROAD-TEST SCORE
85
Limited

Much of the Avalon's appeal has always been based on its comfortable, pillow-soft ride and quiet, spacious interior. With its 2013 redesign, Toyota's top-of-the-line sedan has retained its roomy cabin while becoming more stylish and engaging to drive. It has strong, efficient powertrains that deliver very good fuel economy. And its

improved handling helps round out the car's performance. But the ride has lost its impressive plushness, eroding a signature element of the car's luxurious nature.

We tested two Avalons, one with a 268-hp, 3.5-liter V6 engine and the new hybrid version. Both powertrains operate with silky smoothness and provide quick acceleration.

Efficient power

The super-slick V6 is mated to a responsive six-speed automatic transmission. Acceleration is effortless, with speedy response and abundant power when needed. Its 0-to-60-mph acceleration time of 7 seconds is actually quicker than many "sporty" cars.

Powering the Hybrid version is the same 2.5-liter four-cylinder engine, electric motor, and continuously variable transmission that's used in the Lexus ES and Toyota Camry hybrids. That drivetrain can propel the Avalon solely on electric power at low speeds as long as you keep a light touch on the throttle. Power delivery is smooth, and the CVT performs well. Transitions between electric, gasoline, and combined modes occur seamlessly. And the start-stop system, which shuts the engine off when you come to a standstill, operates unobtrusively.

Though hybrids usually provide the most benefit in low-speed driving, the Avalon's 43 mpg on the highway is very impressive.

The Avalon's handling is now more responsive, thanks to the redesign, although we saw it more so in our V6 than in the hybrid. The body doesn't lean much while cornering, and turn-in response is prompt. Steering effort

is well weighted but short on feedback, particularly on center. When pushed to their handling limits at our track, both Avalons were predictable, displaying benign understeer.

Touring and Limited trim versions, with their large 18-inch wheels, have a stiff ride that results in pronounced impacts over bumps and ruts. Hybrids and lower-trim V6 models have 17-inch wheels that help make the ride noticeably less harsh.

Luxury liner

The interior is roomy, plush, and rich with amenities. Drivers will find plenty of space, but the range of the telescoping steering wheel is short and the footwell is a bit narrow.

The comfortable front seats are wide and supportive. The high cushions can adjust for length, and the power lumbar bulge can be adjusted for height and firmness. The rear seat is very comfortable but not quite as wide as before, and the seatbacks no longer recline.

All trim versions have a touch-screen radio supplemented with physical knobs. Most climate and some audio controls use annoying, touch-sensitive controls that are easy to inadvertently activate. Phone pairing and Bluetooth audio streaming are easy. Uplevel Avalons use the Entune infotainment system, which links to smart phones for using apps such as Bing, OpenTable, and Pandora.

The dual-zone automatic climate control works well, and the optional heated and cooled front seats have several temperature settings. The Limited has rear-seat heaters.

The trunk is very spacious, but the Hybrid gives up some room to house the battery. Neither version has folding rear seats.



LINKED IN The Entune system connects to a smart phone to let you use several apps in the car.

Tested vehicles

HIGHS	Fuel economy, powertrain, roomy interior, seat comfort, quietness
LOWS	Ride, some controls; touchy brake pedal for the Hybrid
TRIM LINES	Limited, Hybrid Limited
DRIVETRAINS	Limited: 268-hp, 3.5-liter V6 engine; six-speed automatic transmission; front-wheel drive. Hybrid: 200-hp, 2.5-liter four-cylinder engine with electric assist; continuously variable transmission; front-wheel drive
MAJOR OPTIONS	None
TESTED PRICES	Limited: \$40,670 Hybrid Limited: \$42,501

The Avalon line

OTHER TRIM LINES	XLE, Premium, Touring, Hybrid Premium, Hybrid Touring
BASE PRICES	\$30,990-\$41,400

More test findings

BRAKING	Very good performance. It took some time to get used to the Hybrid's touchy pedal feel.
HEADLIGHTS	High-intensity low beams have excellent brightness and visibility but a sharp upper cutoff. Halogen high beams reach farther out.
ACCESS	Large doors help make it easy in the front and rear.
VISIBILITY	Good but inhibited by short windows and a high rear deck.
CABIN STORAGE	Spacious bins and nooks.
HEAD RESTRAINTS	The center-rear restraint is too low to protect an adult.
CHILD SEATS	Most child seats can be easily secured using seat belts. LATCH anchors work well but are hard to access.



Scan for video.

Lincoln MKZ
2.0 EcoBoost

Lincoln MKZ

ROAD-TEST
SCORE
82
Hybrid

ROAD-TEST
SCORE
81
2.0
EcoBoost

Solid, substantial, and sophisticated, the MKZ is the most appealing Lincoln in memory. One of our testers summed it up by saying that if you drove it with your eyes closed, you might mistake it for an Audi. (But don't try that at home.) If it weren't for the frustrating MyLincoln Touch controls, compromised visibility,

and other shortfalls, the MKZ might have been one of our highest-scoring upscale sedans.

The cabin is quiet and has comfortable seats, but rear-seat room is so-so. The push-button shifter is a modern interpretation of a design tried and abandoned by various carmakers decades ago. And it drew complaints from some staffers for being a long reach and not allowing drivers to shift by feel.

Buyers can choose from four- and six-cylinder engines with front- or all-wheel drive, or a hybrid powertrain. Of the two MKZs we tested, we'd choose the frugal Hybrid because it delivers much better fuel economy without a price premium over the conventional version.

Surefooted handling

The MKZ is agile, with sharp steering and prompt turn-in response. At the track, it carved through corners with eagerness and was enjoyable and predictable at its limits.

Supple and composed, the suspension mutes road imperfections, and the highway ride is steady and serene. Drivers can choose Normal, Sport, or Comfort ride settings, but we found only slight differences among them.

Most MKZs come with the 231-hp, 2.0-liter turbocharged four-cylinder engine that's mated to a mostly smooth six-speed automatic transmission. It provides decent response, good performance, and 23 mpg overall, which is nothing special for this class.

The 188-hp, 2.0-liter four-cylinder hybrid powertrain gets 34 mpg overall. Though that's 11 short of the 45-mpg EPA figure you'll see on the window sticker, it's still excellent. Power is adequate, and the continuously variable

transmission is smooth. If you use a light touch, you can drive on battery power alone up to about 40 mph, and the gas engine will shut off when coasting below 62 mph.

If you want the extra punch of a V6, you'll have to pay \$1,200 for the optional 300-hp, 3.7-liter engine.

Interior compromises

The interior is mostly plush and inviting. Despite generous steering wheel and seat adjustments, the MKZ's driving position feels confining because of the wraparound console, sweeping roofline, and close windshield pillar. And the footwell is a bit narrow.

Seats are well padded and supportive. Power adjustments, including a lower-back support, are standard. But the lumbar control doesn't adjust for height. Two adults can fit with reasonable comfort in the MKZ's backseat, but it's tight for three.

Conventional versions have less complex gauges than the Hybrid, but instruments are complicated in each and have tiny fonts. The Hybrid's panel lets you choose which gauges and information are displayed, but scrolling through the menus is cumbersome.

The MyLincoln Touch infotainment system has a center touch screen and touch-sensitive buttons on the dash that can be distracting and frustrating to use. Voice and steering-wheel-mounted controls help somewhat. The dual-zone automatic climate control works well, and heated front seats are standard.

The trunk is spacious, but the Hybrid loses room to the battery. Each has a fold-down seatback and a power-operated lid. But the exterior release is too low and is hidden above the license plate.



GEAR CHANGE The unusual push-button shifter may be a long reach for some people.

Tested vehicles

HIGHS	Handling, ride, quietness, fuel economy in the Hybrid
LOWS	Controls, visibility, snug interior, hidden exterior trunk release
TRIM LINES	2.0 EcoBoost, Hybrid
DRIVETRAINS	2.0 EcoBoost: 231-hp, 2.0-liter turbocharged four-cylinder engine; six-speed automatic transmission; front-wheel drive. Hybrid: 188-hp, 2.0-liter four-cylinder engine and electric motor; continuously variable transmission; front-wheel drive
MAJOR OPTIONS	Both: Rear camera, navigation, blind-spot monitor, ventilated seats, moonroof, rear inflatable seat belts
TESTED PRICES	2.0 EcoBoost: \$41,365 Hybrid: \$41,915

The MKZ line

OTHER TRIM LINE	3.7
OTHER DRIVETRAIN	300-hp, 3.7-liter V6 engine; all-wheel drive
BASE PRICES	\$35,925-\$39,045

More test findings

BRAKING	Very short stops overall.
HEADLIGHTS	Standard LED headlights are very bright but provide only fair forward visibility.
ACCESS	Getting in requires ducking under the windshield pillar.
VISIBILITY	The windshield pillar, small windows, and high rear deck obscure the view. A rear camera is optional.
CABIN STORAGE	Convenient storage up front.
HEAD RESTRAINTS	The center-rear restraint must be raised to provide adequate protection.
CHILD SEATS	The automatic locking retractor on the lap belt portion of the inflatable belt works well for getting a secure installation.



Compare

✓ Recommended

✓ Recommended

✓ Recommended



VERSION	Tesla Model S	Subaru Forester	Toyota Avalon	Toyota Avalon	Lincoln MKZ	Lincoln MKZ
TRIM LINE	85 kWh	2.5i Premium	Hybrid Limited	Limited	Hybrid	2.0 EcoBoost
PRICE: BASE/TESTED ^①	\$69,900/\$89,650	\$24,995/\$26,814	\$41,400/\$42,501	\$39,650/\$40,670	\$35,925/\$41,915	\$35,925/\$41,365
DRIVETRAIN						
Engine	Electric (362 hp)	2.5-liter 4-cyl. (170 hp)	2.5-liter 4-cyl. (200 hp) hybrid	3.5-liter V6 (268 hp)	2.0-liter 4-cyl. (188 hp) hybrid	2.0-liter 4-cyl. (231 hp) turbo
Transmission	1-speed direct	CVT	CVT	6-speed automatic	CVT	6-speed automatic
Drive wheels	Rear	AWD	Front	Front	Front	Front
TIRES TESTED						
Model & size	Goodyear Eagle RS-A, size P245/45R19 98V	Yokohama Geolandar G91, size 225/60R17 98H	Bridgestone Turanza EL400 02, size P215/55R17 93V	Michelin Primacy MXM4, size P225/45R18 91V	Michelin Primacy MXM4, size 245/45R18 96V	Michelin Primacy MXM4, size 245/45R18 96V
RATINGS						
PERFORMANCE						
Acceleration	●	●	●	●	○	●
0 to 60 mph, sec.	5.6	8.7	8.2	7.0	9.2	7.4
45 to 65 mph, sec.	2.6	5.8	5.1	3.9	5.3	4.6
Quarter-mile, sec.	14.2	16.8	16.4	15.2	17.1	15.8
Transmission	●	●	●	●	●	●
Routine handling	●	●	○	○	●	●
Emergency handling	●	●	○	●	●	●
Avoid. maneuver, speed, mph	53.5	52.0	52.5	53.5	53.0	53.0
Braking	●	●	●	●	●	●
From 60 mph, dry/wet, ft.	128/137	127/140	138/147	132/142	129/139	124/133
Headlights	○	○	●	●	●	●
COMFORT AND CONVENIENCE						
Ride	●	○	○	○	●	●
Noise	●	○	●	●	●	●
Driving position	●	●	●	●	○	○
Front-seat comfort	●	●	●	●	●	●
Rear-seat comfort	○	●	●	●	○	○
Access	○	●	●	●	●	●
Controls and displays	●	●	●	●	●	●
Interior fit and finish	●	○	●	●	●	●
Trunk/cargo area	●	○	○	●	○	●
PREDICTED RELIABILITY	New	●	●	●	New	New
FUEL						
Overall mpg	84 MPGe (2.48 mi./kWh) ^②	26	36	24	34	23
City/highway mpg	65/102 MPGe ^②	18/35	29/43	16/34	29/38	16/34
Type	Electricity	regular	regular	regular	regular	regular
Capacity, gal./Cruising range, miles	85 kWh/225	15.9/410	170/620	17.0/410	13.5/460	16.5/385
Annual cost, 12K mi. at \$3.50/gal.	\$530 @ 11¢/kWh	\$1,630	\$1,150	\$1,735	\$1,225	\$1,795
SAFETY						
CRASH TESTS						
IIHS frontal offset	NA	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
IIHS side	NA	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
IIHS rear	NA	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
IIHS roof strength	NA	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
NHTSA front, driver/pass.	NA/NA	NA/NA	●/●	●/●	●/●	●/●
NHTSA side, driver/rear	NA/NA	NA/NA	●/●	●/●	○/○	○/○
NHTSA rollover 2WD/4WD	NA/NA	NA/NA	●/NA	●/NA	●/●	●/●
AIR BAGS						
Side, front/rear	std./no	std./no	std./std.	std./std.	std./no	std./no
Head protection	standard	std. w/rollover	standard	standard	standard	standard
SPECIFICATIONS						
DIMENSIONS AND WEIGHT						
Length/width/height, in.	196/77/57	181/71/66	195/72/58	195/72/58	194/73/58	194/73/58
Wheelbase, in.	117	104	111	111	112	112
Turning circle, ft.	41	37	40	41	40	40
Ground clearance, in.	5.0 (standard mode)	7.0	5.0	5.0	4.5	4.5
Curb weight, lb. (% front/rear)	4,695 (47/53)	3,370 (57/43)	3,640 (58/42)	3,555 (61/39)	3,870 (57/43)	3,755 (59/41)
Maximum load, lb.	920	900	930	930	850	875
Luggage, suitcases+duffels	4+3	—	3+1	3+2	2+2	3+2
Cargo volume, cu. ft.	—	35.5	—	—	—	—
Towing capacity, lb.	NR	1,500	NR	NR	NR	1,000
INTERIOR ROOM						
Front shoulder room, in.	57.0	56.0	57.5	57.5	57.0	57.0
Front leg room, in.	42.0	41.5	41.5	41.5	41.5	41.5
Front head room, in. ^③	6.0	3.5	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
Rear shoulder room, in.	53.0	55.0	56.5	56.5	54.5	54.5
Rear leg room, in.	29.0	30.0	31.0	31.0	28.0	28.0
Rear head room, in. ^③	0.0	3.5	3.0	3.0	2.0	2.0

^① Based on sticker price at time of purchase. ^② Miles-per-gallon equivalent, based on the EPA formula in which 33.7 kWh of electricity equals 1 gallon of gasoline. ^③ Above a person 5'9" tall.

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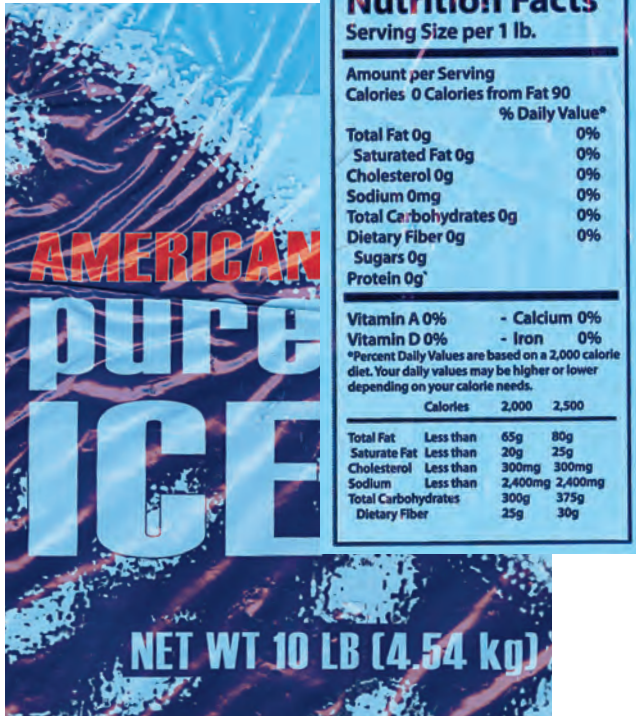
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AMERICAN pure ICE

NET WT 10 LB (4.54 kg)

Nutrition Facts
Serving Size per 1 lb.

Amount per Serving
Calories 0 Calories from Fat 90

	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 0g	0%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Cholesterol 0g	0%
Sodium 0mg	0%
Total Carbohydrates 0g	0%
Dietary Fiber 0g	0%
Sugars 0g	
Protein 0g	

Vitamin A 0% - Calcium 0%
Vitamin D 0% - Iron 0%

*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.

	Calories	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Saturated Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrates		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

Labeling overkill

Happy to hear that a serving of ice (1 lb.!) has no cholesterol, sodium, or sugars, though we're still wondering how it gets 90 calories from fat.



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— Curtis Lukow, Tabernash, CO



As young as you feel

The brochure says that All Day Energy Greens melts belly fat, makes aches vanish, improves memory ("never forget your keys again!"), and does lots of other neat stuff. Nevertheless, an Indiana reader was curious about the claims. "Did Mr. Lukow go from 87 to 58 or 87 to 40, or was it 58 to 87?" she asks. "How old is he anyway?"

47 Years Younger! 87-Year Old says "It makes me feel like I'm 40 years old!"

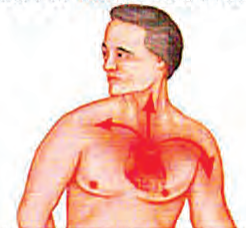
— Curtis Lukow, Tabernash, CO



Salmonella special?

A reader spied this sign at a New Jersey market.

Weird Pill Kills Blood Pressure



Shocking video reveals why America's top doctors claim this weird ingredient may stop Heart Disease dead in it's tracks[video]

Weird is the word

A reader was surprised by an ad he found online. "On the upside," he writes, "no more heart disease to worry about, right?"



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Departs: June - September 2013

Travel agent to seek new career

"In Wyoming," this travel-agency ad says, "you will visit Deadwood, and drive through the Black Hills to Little Big Horn Battlefield." No, no, and no. The first two are in South Dakota. And the battlefield? In Montana. The ad goes on to suggest that you "head west" from the Great Salt Lake to visit Dinosaur National Monument and Rocky Mountain National Park. Do that, a Montana reader notes, "and you are in for a long trip...both are east of Salt Lake City."

The Consumer Reports New Car Price Report includes access to the Build & Buy Service. Purchasers have saved over \$100 million vs MSRP using this program*.



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- Unpublished Dealer Incentives and Holdbacks
- Equipment Cost and Recommendations
- Current Safety Ratings
- Negotiating Tips and Traps
- Reliability Ratings

by selecting vehicle equipment options that work for you. Not only do we supply you with key pricing information, but we also display it in an easy-to-read presentation.

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- **Dealer Invoice Price.** It's the dealer's maximum cost to acquire the car from the manufacturer.
- **Incentives.** These include dealer incentives, customer cash incentives and finance incentives.
- **Consumer Reports Bottom Line Price.** This is the place to start negotiating, taking into account regional marketing fees, dealer incentives and holdbacks.

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Information from CONSUMER REPORTS® for Canadian readers

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 34D, 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 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.

Six of the tested air conditioners are available, including 3 of the recommended models.

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score
				0100 P F G VG E

A SMALL (5,000 TO 6,500 BTU/HR.) Cools roughly 100-300 square feet; weighs 38 to 70 pounds.

B MIDSIZED (7,000 TO 8,200 BTU/HR.) Cools roughly 250-400 square feet; weighs 47 to 70 pounds.

1 Friedrich Chill CP08G10  \$460  **LARGE (9,800 TO 12,500 BTU/HR.)** Cools roughly 350-650 square feet; weighs 60 to 85 pounds.

✓	2	Frigidaire CRA106CV1	NA	71
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1 Slide-out chassis.

Refrigerators

Report, page 42, and Ratings, pages 44-45

Recommended models only, from 250 tested.

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score
				0 100 P F G V E

A TOP-FREEZERS

✓	1	GE Profile PTS22LHS[WW]	\$1,400	69
✓	2	Whirlpool WRT771RWYW	1,200	67
✓	4	Frigidaire Gallery FGHT2134KW	850	64

B CONVENTIONAL BOTTOM-FREEZERS

✓	1	Whirlpool Gold GB2FHDW[Q]	1,400	73
✓	2	Amana ABB2224WEW	1,000	73
✓	3	Maytag MBF2258XE[W]	1,300	73
✓	4	Maytag MBF1958XE[W]	1,200	72

C FRENCH-DOOR BOTTOM-FREEZERS

✓	4	LG LFX33975ST	3,500	83
✓	5	Whirlpool Gold GX5FHDVQ	1,800	82
✓	6	Samsung RFG297HD[RS]	2,800	81
✓	7	LG LFC25776[SW]	NA	81
✓	8	Samsung RF323TEDB[SR]	3,700	80
✓	9	LG LFX28979[ST]	NA	79
✓	10	Kenmore Elite 7103[2]	2,500	79
✓	11	LG LFX31925[ST]	3,600	79
✓	12	GE Café CFE29TSDSS	3,000	78
✓	13	Samsung RF261BEAE[SR]	2,200	78

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score
				0 100 P F G V E

C FRENCH-DOOR BOTTOM-FREEZERS continued

✓	15	LG LFC25765[ST]	\$1,900	78
✓	16	Kenmore Elite 7205[3]	3,700	78
✓	17	LG LFX28978[SW]	3,000	78
✓	18	LG LFX25991[ST]	4,000	77

D SIDE-BY-SIDES

✓	1	Samsung RS265TD[WP]	1,500	76
✓	2	KitchenAid KSF26C6X[YY]	2,600	75
✓	3	Bosch Linea 800 B22CS80SN[S]	3,000	74
✓	5	DCS RX215PJX1	NA	73
✓	7	Frigidaire Gallery FGUS2632LP	1,400	72

E BUILT-INS

✓	1	Thermador Freedom Collection T36BB820SS	NA	80
✓	2	Jenn-Air JS42PPDUB[SS]	NA	80
✓	3	Thermador Freedom Collection T36BT810NS	NA	78
✓	4	Thermador KBUDT4265E[S]	NA	77
✓	5	Sub-Zero BI425[S]	NA	76
✓	6	Miele KF1901Vi	NA	76

ⓘ Dispenses hot water.

Canada Extra on the Web

Canada Extra information can be found on ConsumerReports.org, our website, along with the current issue of the magazine and more. The address is ConsumerReports.org. Once there, click on the "Canada Extra" link on the opening screen. There you can see which reports have Canadian information available.

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LISTED BY CATEGORY

Canada Extra turns 10

- Cars
 - Road series
 - Budget cars
 - Compact pickups
 - Convertibles
 - Crew-cab pickup trucks
 - Family sedans
 - Hatchbacks
 - Large sedans
 - Luxury coupes
 - Luxury sedans
 - Luxury SUVs
 - Mercedes-Benz B200
 - Midsize SUVs
- Video
 - Camcorders
 - Conventional tube TVs
 - DVD recorders

FREE HIGHLIGHTS

- Cars & transportation
We list government, industry, and manufacturer auto information and resources.
- Better Business Bureaus
These non-profit organizations handle complaints, settle disputes, and more.
- Government consumer offices
Here, federal and provincial offices that can help with a range of consumer concerns.
- Government safety offices
These offices handle consumer issues including product safety and bankruptcy.

CONSUMER REPORTS CANADIAN RATINGS

Dishwashers

Report, page 46, and Ratings, pages 47-48

Sixty-two of the 87 tested dishwashers are available, including 9 of the recommended models.

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score
				0 100 P F G VG E
✓	2	Bosch Ascenta SHX3AR7[5]UC	\$1,000	81
✓	3	Bosch SHX98M0[9]UC	NA	81
✓	4	KitchenAid KDFE454CSS	NA	81
✓	5	Bosch 800 Series SHE68R5[2]UC	1,200	80
✓	7	Miele Futura Dimension G5575SCSF Plus	NA	80
✓	8	KitchenAid KUDE50CX[SS]	1,400	79
✓	9	KitchenAid KUDE50FBSS	NA	79
✓	10	Bosch 800 Plus Series SHX9ER5[5]UC	2,200	79
✓	11	Bosch Evolution 500 SHE55M1[2]UC	1,150	79
	12	LG LDF6920[WW]	700	79
	14	Kenmore 1328[3]	800	77
	15	Bosch 500 Series SHX55R5[5]UC	1,200	76
	16	Thermador DWHD651JFP	NA	76
	17	KitchenAid KUDE70FX[SS]	1,650	76
	18	Maytag MDB8959SBS	NA	75
	19	KitchenAid KUDS30SX[SS]	1,200	75
	20	GE GDT550HSD[SS]	750	75
	21	Bosch 300 Series SHX33RL[5]UC	890	74
	22	Kenmore 15693	1,000	74
	23	Miele Futura Crystal G5105SC	NA	74
	24	Kenmore Elite 1396[3]	1,200	73
	25	LG LDF7551[ST]	1,000	72
	26	Bosch Integra 800 Plus SHX58E2[5]UC	1,500	72
	27	LG LDF8072[ST]	1,500	72
	28	Samsung DMT800RH[W]	900	72
	29	LG LDS5540ST	800	71
	31	GE GDF540HSD[SS]	650	71
	32	GE GDWT668V[SS]	1,000	70
	33	GE Profile PDWT580V[SS]	1,500	70
	34	KitchenAid KUDS30FX[SS]	1,100	70
	35	Miele Futura Classic G4205SC	NA	70
	36	GE Profile PDWT200V[WW]	900	69

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score
				0 100 P F G VG E
	37	Asko D5894XXL[HS]	NA	69
	38	GE GDF520PSD[SS]	\$ 500	69
	39	Asko D5634XXL[HS]	NA	68
	40	Whirlpool Gold WDT770PAY[M]	NA	68
	41	GE GDWF100V[WW]	750	67
	42	Frigidaire Gallery FGHD2465N[F]	600	66
	43	Jenn-Air Trifecta JDB8700AW[P]	NA	66
	44	Frigidaire Gallery FGBD2431K[W]	500	66
	45	Frigidaire Gallery FGBD2432K[W]	500	66
	46	Scholtes LFD53XL60HZ	NA	66
	47	Frigidaire Gallery FGBD2445N[F]	600	65
	48	Kenmore 1326[3]	900	65
	50	Maytag MDB4709PA[M]	650	64
	51	Whirlpool Gold WDF530PAY[W]	600	63
	52	GE Monogram ZBD9900R[II]	NA	62
	53	Samsung DW7933LRA[SR]	650	62
	55	Jenn-Air Trifecta JDB8200AW[S]	NA	61
	56	Whirlpool Gold WDF730PAY[M]	750	61
	61	Frigidaire Professional FPHD2491K[F]	800	60
	62	Electrolux Wave-Touch EWDW6505G[S]	1,800	59
	64	Maytag MDB4409PA[W]	450	58
	65	GE GLD5766V[SS]	650	58
	66	Electrolux IQ EIDW5905J[S]	NA	57
	69	Electrolux Icon EDW7505HP[S]	1,900	54
	71	Frigidaire Gallery FGBD2435N[W]	400	53
	79	Kenmore 15112	350	43
	80	Whirlpool Gold WDT910SAY[M]	900	43
	84	Whirlpool WDF310PAA[W]	450	35
	86	Amana ADB1400PY[W]	400	34
	87	Amana ADB1000AWW	300	23

Autos

Report and Ratings, pages 56-63

All of the tested vehicles are available in Canada.

Make & model	Price range	Acceleration (sec.)				Fuel economy (liters per 100 km)		
		0-50 km/h	0-100 km/h	80-100 km/h	500 meters	City driving	Highway driving	Overall
SMALL SUV								
Subaru Forester	\$25,995-\$37,995	3.6	9.2	4.1	19.3	13.0	6.8	9.1
UPSCALE SEDANS								
Toyota Avalon Hybrid	Not yet available	3.6	8.7	3.8	18.8	8.2	5.4	6.5
Toyota Avalon V6	36,800-38,900	3.0	7.4	2.9	17.4	14.4	6.9	9.7
Lincoln MKZ Hybrid	38,350-45,650	3.9	9.6	3.8	19.5	8.0	6.2	6.9
Lincoln MKZ EcoBoost	38,350-41,700	3.1	7.8	3.3	18.0	15.1	7.0	10.1
LUXURY CAR								
Tesla Model S	77,800-103,000	2.8	5.9	1.8	16.2	3.7	2.3	2.8

Contact info

How to reach manufacturers in Canada.

Amana

800-843-0304
amana.com

Asko

800-898-1879
askousa.com

Bosch

866-442-6986
boschappliances.com

DCS

888-936-7872
usa.fisherpaykel.com

Electrolux

800-896-9756
electroluxca.com

Friedrich

210-353-8748
friedrich.com

Frigidaire

800-668-4606
frigidaire.ca

GE

888-261-2088
geappliances.ca

Haier

888-764-2437
haieramerica.com

Jenn-Air

800-688-2002
jennair.ca

Kenmore

800-267-3277
sears.ca

KitchenAid

800-807-6777
kitchenaid.ca

LG

888-542-2623
lg.ca

Maytag

800-688-2002
maytag.ca

Miele

800-643-5381
miele.ca

Samsung

800-726-7864
samsung.ca

Scholtes

416-784-2004
scholtesamerica.com

Sub-Zero

800-222-7820
subzero.com

Thermador

800-735-4328
thermador.com

Whirlpool

800-807-6777
whirlpoolappliances.ca