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JULY 2014 | CONSUMERREPORTS.ORG

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## YOUR SECRETS AREN'T SAFE

Data thieves are after your most private info.  
How to protect yourself on Wi-Fi, online, and in the cloud



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## ISSUE BY THE NUMBERS

### What's the score?

99

GE Profile  
30-inch  
induction  
cooktop



10

Nutra Nail  
Gel Perfect  
#12760  
Passion

## TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

### Notice something different?

We've been busy improving the look of Consumer Reports and want to know what you think. There will be additional changes in the coming months—but no change in our mission to protect consumers and empower their lives. We'd love to hear your feedback. Go to [CRresearch.org/july14](http://CRresearch.org/july14)

### COMING IN AUGUST

Fast-food restaurants; tablets, smart phones, digital cameras, and laptops; washers, dryers, and laundry detergents; plus hospitals and heart surgery.

## CONSUMER REPORTS

We are the world's largest independent, nonprofit, consumer-product-testing organization, based in Yonkers, N.Y. We survey millions of consumers about their experiences with products and services. We buy all of the products we rate. We don't accept paid advertising. We don't accept free test samples from manufacturers. We do not allow our name or content to be used for any promotional purposes. **How to reach us:** Write to us at Consumer Reports, 101 Truman Ave., Yonkers, NY 10703-1057, Attn: Customer Service. To **send a letter** to the editor, go to [ConsumerReports.org/lettertoeditor](http://ConsumerReports.org/lettertoeditor).

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

● Excellent ● Very good ○ Good ● Fair ● Poor





## ON YOUR MIND

### Bundle of savings

I enjoyed reading "Untangling the Bundle" (May 2014). After doing so, I upped my ISP speed for only \$10 extra per month, removed the voice mail option I did not need, and changed my long-distance cost. I was already receiving a \$5 monthly credit for a year for direct payment through my checking account. And when I contacted my cable company because of a rate increase, I was able to reduce my bill to save about \$13 per month and got HBO for a year. So it does help to call your providers to see whether you can save money.

—Walter Garris Jr. Murfreesboro, NC

### Tricky pricing

"Shop Cheaper" (in "Getting More from Your Store," May 2014) recommends comparing unit prices. The idea does sound great, but there is no consistency in unit pricing. One sign is "each" and another is "by the ounce," and I don't have the time and don't want to block the aisle while attempting to calculate which is the better choice. It looks like whoever decided that the shelf tags would be helpful probably never set foot into a grocery store.

—Karen Hadrick Henderson, NV

**Corrections** In our evaluation of exterior trim restorers for cars ("Spruce Up Your Trim," May 2014), we listed the price we paid for the Turtle Wax Premium Grade Trim Restorer as \$35 for a 10-ounce bottle. The correct price is \$10. We paid \$35 for a six-pack.

In "Getting More from Your Store" (May 2014), a sidebar on organic foods should have said that because some fruits and vegetables can carry pesticide residues, it's worth buying the organic versions, which are less likely to have them. Also, the Market Basket chain cited in the main article and chart operates in New England, not in Texas and Louisiana.

## ASK OUR EXPERTS

**Q. You advise against using antibacterial soaps. What about those 'sanitizers' (such as Purell) that you see in a lot of public places, including hospitals?**

—Michael Konover Bonita Springs, FL

Though we feel you should not bother at all with antibacterial soaps and lotions (those containing triclosan), we do feel that if soap and water are not available to you, alcohol-based sanitizers such as Purell and others are a very good choice. Just be sure you select a product that contains no less than 60 percent alcohol (ethanol or isopropanol), because that's the level where it's effective at killing germs.

**Q. When the federal government calculates inflation in the cost-of-living adjustment for various programs, such as Social Security and the consumer price index, do the number crunchers adjust for product "downsizing" without a price increase? Prices have not decreased correspondingly. In my book, that's inflation by any other name.**

—Susan Rosenthal Oakland Park, FL

Yes, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, which calculates and keeps track of the consumer price index, adjusts for shrinkage. The BLS, which collects about 80,000 prices per month from all over the U.S., also factors in meaningful changes in product quality (for example, a faster personal computer) and gives more weight to the price of products that more people are buying. "We always try to capture what comes out of the consumer's pocket," says Steve Reed, an economist in the Information Analysis Branch of the CPI Program.

**Q. As of April 8, 2014, Microsoft no longer supports Windows XP. For users of XP who cannot upgrade to higher programs and who like**

**XP and don't want to upgrade, what are the alternatives? Who makes a product that will keep XP updated along with products that will provide good protection against viruses, spam, and the like?**

—Robert Cleaves Los Angeles

It's unlikely that third parties will support XP, with good reason: Nobody can guarantee that a new vulnerability won't be discovered, and only Microsoft can patch XP, which they say they won't do anymore. But any good anti-malware program will continue to block known malware and will presumably continue to be updated by the supplier. An alternative is to use a newer PC or mobile device for Internet

work and keep the XP machine only for offline productivity work.

**Q. I live in Houston—flat as a pancake, and no snow or ice most years. Does it make sense for me to purchase a vehicle with all-wheel drive? Is there a safety benefit that would outweigh increased maintenance costs?**

—Rick Warner Houston

There is no reason to get an AWD vehicle in Houston. Even for the once-in-a-blue-moon ice storm, AWD may not help. In the days before standard electronic stability control, one could argue that AWD versions of RWD cars brought an added safety margin, but not anymore.



## Cleaning up the credit agencies

**THE ISSUE** Millions of Americans have errors on their credit reports that could result in higher interest rates and pricier insurance, and possibly even missed job opportunities. Trying to fix those mistakes often adds to the nightmare.



**OUR TAKE** Policymakers and regulators must rein in those harmful abuses. Thankfully, change is on the horizon.

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau recently told financial firms that it would take action if they fail to fix errors on credit reports. It also called on banks to voluntarily provide reliable credit scores at no cost. It turns out that the scores consumers purchase are usually different from what lenders see—a murky tactic.

In April, Sens. Brian Schatz, D-Hawaii, and Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio,

introduced legislation endorsed by Consumers Union that would require credit bureaus to follow tight rules for ensuring accuracy while mandating free access to consumers' actual scores.

"That's especially important for those without bank accounts or credit cards who don't qualify for current voluntary programs," says Maureen Mahoney, public policy fellow for Consumers Union. Go to DefendYourDollars.org to read Mahoney's investigation into the impact of faulty credit reporting.

## 'Though his own life was short, Cameron inspired a regulation that will save the lives of countless others.'

—Greg Gulbransen, a pediatrician whose 2-year-old son was backed over by an SUV and killed, on the newly issued rule that effectively requires rear-view cameras in vehicles by May 2018. In a 2008 law named for Cameron, Congress directed the Department of Transportation to issue a rear-visibility standard by 2011. But the DOT didn't issue it until this spring, after Gulbransen and a coalition of advocates, including CU, sued the agency.

### UPDATE

## A menacing merger

Consumers stand to lose big if Comcast and Time Warner Cable join forces. While the government weighs its decision on whether to approve the merger, more than 130,000 Consumers Union activists signed a petition at HearUsNow.org in opposition of the move.

Comcast and TWC already rank toward the bottom of the barrel in our surveys on customer satisfaction, and a merger would leave little incentive to improve. It's a bad deal, and we'll keep fighting against it.

### STATE LINES

## College is free in Tennessee

The Volunteer State is living up to its nickname as Tennessee legislators have passed a plan that provides in-state high school graduates with two years of free tuition to local community colleges and technical schools.

Consumers Union believes students shouldn't have to mortgage their future for an education. That's why we're working to bring relief to students already struggling with loans, while helping to create fairer options.

## On the record



In March 2011 the Consumer Product Safety Commission—with our strong support—launched a public, searchable online database, SaferProducts.gov, so that people could file and re-search reports of harmful products.

To work, the database has to be accurate, so before the CPSC posts a report, it must give manufacturers a chance to respond, and inaccurate information must be corrected. Companies can post a response to the complaint.

In October 2011 "Company Doe" sued the CPSC to block publication of a report submitted by a local government agency that attributed the death of an infant to a product made and sold by the company.

"Company Doe" persuaded a federal trial court to seal the court records, so the company, product, alleged injury, and reason the court ultimately ruled in favor of the company were hidden from the public. No national-security or privacy concerns and no trade secrets, just the company's desire to keep a shiny reputation. The judge agreed.

Last fall CU joined other consumer groups in appealing the secrecy order. In April the three-judge panel on the appeals court ruled in our favor, citing "the public's interest in open judicial proceedings."

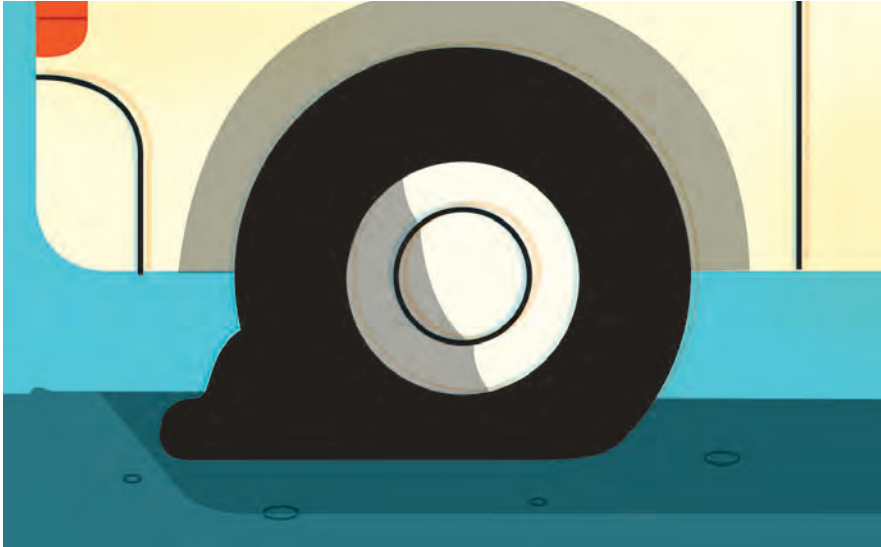
We now know the name of the company: Ergobaby, which makes baby carriers. And we'll likely know the facts of the case soon and why the lower court ruled for the company.

It boils down to this: Companies can't litigate in secret to keep reports out of the database, and fear of injury to corporate reputation is not enough to justify sealing court records. The decision is a victory for consumers and the First Amendment. It shows that secrecy in court is not an option when it comes to product safety.

*Jim Guest*  
Jim Guest  
President

# Up Front

## On-the-road emergencies



**THERE ARE PLENTY** of ingredients for a bad summer road trip in addition to rain and cranky kids. You could be driving along when the engine stalls (the reason for GM's recent recall of 1.6 million cars) or the car accelerates suddenly and unintentionally (the reason for Toyota's recalls in 2009 and 2010) or a tire blows out. Here's what to do in those situations:

**Stalled engine.** A car can lose power for many reasons, from running out of gas to having a faulty fuel pump or alternator. (In the recalled GM cars, the problem was an ignition switch that was flimsily made and easy to switch off inadvertently.) If you're driving and the ignition key moves to the accessory position accidentally, try shifting into neutral and restarting the engine. Then shift back into drive and you're good to go. If the engine won't restart or has stalled for another reason, apply the brakes and steer gradually to the side of the road. You'll lose power steering, so steering will feel heavier, but it will still be possible. Expect the power boost for brakes to disappear after one or two applications, so try to stop as soon as you can, using the emergency brake if necessary.

**Sudden acceleration.** Our tests have shown that brakes may not be enough to stop a car with a stuck throttle while traveling at highway speeds. Brake firmly, but don't pump the brakes. And don't turn off the engine, because doing so disables the power assist for your steering and brakes. Shift into neutral. Some modern gear selectors are

unconventional enough to cause confusion about where neutral is; if yours is one of them, you can practice sliding your gear lever into neutral while driving in an empty parking lot at low speed. Don't worry if the engine revs up alarmingly—most modern cars have rev-limiters, and that will keep the engine under control. Steer to a safe location and come to a full stop. Shut off the engine with the transmission still in neutral. Lastly, shift the transmission into park or, with a manual transmission, set the emergency brake.

**Blown tire.** Don't stop in the travel lane; take a firm grip on the wheel and limp the car to a safe location. A new wheel is less important than your safety. Do what you can to prevent flats from happening in the first place by keeping all tires, even the spare, properly inflated to the automaker's recommended pressure. Check air pressure at least monthly—many tire problems result from underinflated tires that overheat—and inspect the sidewalls for bulges or cracks.

For any of those emergencies, once you're safe take a deep breath, then turn on the hazard flashers and summon help.

## Keep these in the car

**In addition to a basic first-aid kit, have the items below on hand. If applicable, check them periodically to ensure that they're in working order—and be familiar with how each works before you need to use it in an emergency.**

- Cell phone and car charger
- Fire extinguisher (multipurpose, dry-chemical compact unit labeled 1A:10B:C or 2A:10B:C)
- Warning light, hazard triangles, or flares

- Jack and lug wrench (if your car lacks run-flat tires)
- Nonflammable foam tire sealant (for minor punctures; not a permanent fix)
- Spare fuses (check owner's manual for correct type and how to replace)
- Bright, weatherproof flashlight
- Gloves, hand cleaner, clean rags
- Auto-club card or roadside-assistance number



- Jumper cables or a portable battery booster (eliminates the need for a second vehicle)
- Pen and paper (to leave a note on a windshield or jot down accident info)
- Escape device (for example, Resqme, a key chain with a blade to slice seatbelts and a spike to shatter windows)



SUMMER  
FOOD  
SPECIAL

## Cool wine for hot days

In a search for great summer sippers, our experts tasted 31 white wines and found five that were very good and 10 that were good. (The rest were OK but not as well-balanced or intense.) All of the very good choices cost \$20 or less; one is a CR Best Buy at \$6 per bottle.

**The types.** Pinot grigio (in Italy) or pinot gris (in France) tends to be simple, as wines go. White blends are, for the most part, lean, delicate, and more subtle than other fruity white wines. Both types are refreshing, thirst-quenching, and palate-cleansing, which makes them a perfect choice for a summer day. They're often consumed alone or paired with light snacks such as cheese and crackers or veggies and dip, or with simply prepared seafood, sushi, or lighter pasta dishes.

Our recommended pinot grigio, Ca Montini, has floral, apple, and grassy flavors and is dry. Among the four recommended white blends, 14 Hands has hints of tropical fruit, juicy fruit, apple, and ripe peachy notes; Conundrum has hints of citrus and tropical fruit; Banfi Centine has citrus, tropical fruit, apple, and a creamy texture; Piccolo Fiore has tropical fruit and apple. 14 Hands and Conundrum are a bit sweeter than the other two.

**Bottom line.** Check the Ratings for a wine that sounds good to you. As you read, note that "structure" in white wines is a combination of alcohol, sweetness, and acid; "nose" is what you smell; and "palate" is what you taste, which can be very different from nose.

All of the wines are 2012 vintage. A newer vintage of the same wine should taste quite similar, but be careful when buying an older one because most whites are best consumed within a year or so.



14 Hands  
Hot to  
Trot White



## Greek yogurt dips

Greek yogurt is selling like hotcakes, so it's no surprise that it has migrated into other products, including dips. Our tasters found three Greek yogurt dips that are very good. Per 2-tablespoon serving, they have 25 or 30 calories and 1 to 2.5 grams of fat—far less of both than three sour-cream-based dips we checked. Those had at least 100 calories and 10 or 12 grams of fat per serving.

### VERY GOOD

#### Cucumber dill

**Cedar's Tzatziki**, 42 cents per serving. Smooth, with plentiful crunchy cucumber bits, dill, and garlic. Great as a topper for baked potatoes, a dip for pita and vegetables, or a sandwich spread.

**Oikos**, 25 cents per serving. Smooth and mild. Tastes freshly made and seems lower in fat than others. Its mildness makes it a good base for additional ingredients.

### Spinach

**Trader Joe's Reduced Guilt Spinach and Kale**, 25 cents per serving. Very thick, with lots of crunchy green veggies. Mild dairy, herbs, and spices. Best as a spread for a cracker or sandwich.

### GOOD

#### Cucumber dill

**Sabra Marzetti Otria Feta Herb**

**Heluva Good Herb Ranch**  
**Oikos Vegetable and Herb**  
**Spinach**  
**Cedar's**

## Ratings White wines

All are very good In order of taste, within types.

Product	Cost	Comments
<b>PINOT GRIGIO</b>		
Ca Montini (Italy)	\$15	Subtle fruit notes that become more intense on the palate. More complex and balanced than most, but sulfites detract a bit.
<b>WHITE BLENDS</b>		
14 Hands Hot To Trot (Wash.)	12	Delicious and diverse array of fruit on the nose and ripe peachy flavors on the palate, with enough acidity to balance it all.
Conundrum (Calif.)	20	An attractive blend of tropical fruit dominates the nose and palate. Floral notes and hints of lychee add to complexity. A bit bitter.
Banfi Centine (Italy)	12	Intense fruit aromas against a toasty background, all highlighted by a creamy texture and a bright acid structure. A bit bitter.
Piccolo Fiore (Whole Foods) (Italy)	6	Restrained scents become rich flavors on the palate. Light, toasty notes complement apple and pear flavors.

# Dressing that makes a splash

**YOUR BEST BET** for salad dressing? It could be to make it yourself. None of the 50 bottled ranch, Caesar, and Italian dressings that our experts tasted came close to our homemade versions (see the recipe for Italian dressing, below). It may take a few minutes of preparation, and the cost may be about the same as that of bottled dressing if you use high-quality ingredients, as we did.

## Taste-off

We did find nine Very Good dressings, listed in the Ratings. The also-rans include dressings from big names such as Hidden Valley, Kraft, and Wish-Bone. All lack the fresh taste of homemade. The lowest-rated dressings have a stale off-note, harsh flavors, or worse. Walden Farms Calorie Free Ranch, for instance, made us think of chalky raspberry vinaigrette mixed with a dairy substitute. Kraft Classic Caesar is overwhelmed by black pepper; Whole Foods 365 Everyday Value Organic Caesar is sour and thin, with a strong taste of dehydrated garlic. Here's how the best of the bottled dressings did:

**Italian.** Ken's has a simple and clean taste—no harsh, dehydrated notes—and a very slight garlic flavor. It separates quickly, so you'll need to give it a good shake. Olive Garden is flavorful but quite salty. It has cheese and herb flavors and slight citrus.

**Ranch.** Walmart's Great Value Classic is well-balanced, with subtle herb flavors and a taste like that of real buttermilk. Light

dressings, which have about half the calories and less than half the fat of the regular versions, generally don't taste nearly as good as regular, but Walmart's Great Value Classic Light Ranch is an exception. It's fairly well balanced, with some buttermilk flavors. Marie's has real buttermilk, oregano and dill flavors, plus a slight mustard impression. Hidden Valley has a clean, real dairy flavor.

**Caesar.** Trader Joe's is a bit like a vinaigrette, with cheese, plus black-pepper and citrus flavors. Marie's is somewhat like ranch dressing, but it's balanced, with high-quality ingredients.

**Bottom line.** Homemade dressing tastes best, but we found at least two very good store dressings in each category.



## Italian dressing recipe

- |                                      |                                    |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil | ½ teaspoon fresh chopped oregano   |
| 2 tablespoons white wine vinegar     | 2 teaspoons grated Parmesan cheese |

- In a small bowl, whisk together oil, vinegar, lemon juice, garlic, salt, and pepper. Stir in fresh herbs and cheese. Makes ½ cup; serving size: 2 tablespoons. Per serving: 200 calories, 21 grams fat, and 85 milligrams sodium.
- |                                  |
|----------------------------------|
| 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice   |
| 2 cloves garlic, minced          |
| ¾ teaspoon each salt and pepper  |
| 1 teaspoon fresh chopped basil   |
| 1 teaspoon fresh chopped parsley |

## Ratings Salad dressings

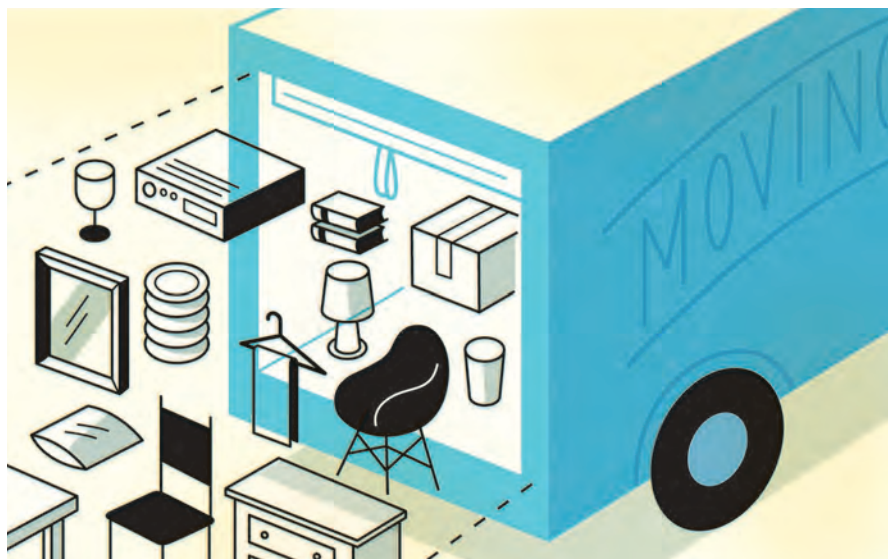
Recommended products only, from 50 tested

In taste order, within types.

☒ CR Best Buy ☒ Recommended

	Product	Per 2 tablespoons			
		Cost	Calories	Fat (g)	Sodium (mg)
ITALIAN					
VERY GOOD					
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ken's	19¢	150	17	450
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Olive Garden Signature	18	80	8	520
RANCH					
VERY GOOD					
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Great Value Classic (Walmart)	10	130	14	270
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Marie's Creamy (refrigerated)	33	170	19	150
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Hidden Valley The Original	22	140	14	260
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Marzetti Classic (refrigerated)	20	160	17	200
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Great Value Classic Light (Walmart)	10	80	7	300
CAESAR					
VERY GOOD					
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Trader Joe's Romano	21	180	20	150
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Marie's Creamy (refrigerated)	29	120	13	180





## Moving? Pack like a pro

**EVERY DAY 130,000** Americans move into a new home, the U.S. Census Bureau estimates, and they're often moving during summer. Whatever their destination, people who want to move at least some items themselves have a common question: What's the best way to pack?

First, says John Bisney, director of public relations at the American Moving and Storage Association, have a yard sale. "Not only does that bring in some cash," he says, "it will lower your moving expenses by having fewer possessions to move." Once you're packing, "use pillows, towels, and bedding where possible," he says. "Not only do

linens, sheets, etc., provide reasonably good packing materials, they would need to be packed up anyway."

Here are more tips for packing common household goods yourself:

**China.** Wrap pieces individually in sheets of clean paper. Then wrap bundles of three with a double layer of paper. Stand the bundles upright, and carefully place them in a carton that has crumpled paper at the bottom.

**Stemware.** Crumple clean paper and stuff it inside goblets. Then wrap the outside of each item. Place each piece stem-up in a tiered moving box called a dishpak.

**Electronic equipment.** First, photograph the wiring in back of electronic devices and save the photos to your phone for easy reference when making attachments in your new home. Pack each device in its original box, if possible. If not, pad the bottom of a box with packing material, then wrap the item with paper and place it in the box. Add extra padding to the top of the box before firmly sealing it and writing "fragile—top load."

**Books.** Lay them flat, alternating the spine and the open side of the book. Place a sheet of clean paper between books to prevent sticking. Use small boxes to avoid heavy lifting.

**Figurines.** Wrap them in bubble wrap, then in clean paper.

**Mirrors.** Wrap them in clean paper and place them in a thin box marked "fragile." Stand mirrors, glass, and pictures upright, never flat.

**Clothes and shoes.** Leave clothes on hangers and pack them in wardrobe boxes. Pack shoes in their original boxes, or wrap each shoe in clean paper to prevent scuffing.

### What you'll need

Gather these materials before packing:

- Boxes of various sizes
- Blank newsprint paper
- Acid-free tissue paper
- Packaging tape
- Bubble wrap
- Permanent markers
- Trash bags
- A moving dolly
- Cargo, sisal, or tie-down rope



## Internet rules could put you in the slow lane

The era of the wide-open Internet may be coming to an end, and it's not good news for consumers.

The idea that all traffic on the Internet should be treated equally, an idea known as Net neutrality, was dealt a serious blow in January when the Federal



Communications Commission's Open Internet rules were struck down in federal court. The FCC promised to revise and update those rules to comply with the court's decision, but when reports first leaked out in April about the commission's new Open Internet proposal, consumer advocates—including Consumers Union—cried foul.

The proposed standards would bar Internet service providers from blocking or discriminating against any traffic traveling across their networks. But ISPs would also be allowed to charge online content providers, such as Amazon, Google, and Netflix, a fee for preferred access to customers. According to Delara Derakhshani, policy counsel for Consumers Union, that kind of

Internet fast lane doesn't bode well for consumers. "This move is likely to favor the companies with the deepest pockets and hurt the scrappy start-ups," she said in April. "It could create a tiered Internet where consumers either pay more for content and speed, or get left behind with fewer choices." There are a few more rounds in this fight, so stay tuned—or logged in.





## Ratings

In order of overall score, based on wear.

CR Best Buy

	Product	Color	Price	Set	Polish	Overall score
Rec.						
✓	Sinful Colors Professional	#852 GoGo Girl	\$10.00	\$2.00	70	
	CND Vinylux Weekly Polish	#158 Wildfire	19.80	9.90	67	
	Revlon Colorstay Longwear	#120 Red Carpet	18.60	6.20	63	
	Sally Hansen Complete Salon Manicure	#470 Red My Lip	7.10	7.10	50	
	Covergirl Outlast Stay Brilliant	#180 Lasting Love	5.30	5.30	48	
	Chanel Le Vernis	#475 Dragon	79.00	27.00	23	
	Nutra Nail Gel Perfect	#12760 Passion	12.00	12.00	10	

\*Set includes polish plus base and/or top coat, if needed.

## Nail polish: \$2 beats \$27

For \$27 per bottle, Chanel Le Vernis nail polish had better be spectacular, especially if adding bottles of top coat and base coat brings the total cost to \$79. But that “exclusive formula” was bested by five other polishes, including one that costs just \$2 per bottle. Check our Ratings to avoid making a pricey mistake.

**How we tested.** We hired a professional manicurist to apply the tested polishes to 10 volunteers in our Yonkers, N.Y., headquarters. The panelists wore two products simultaneously, each on every other fingernail of both hands. On the seventh, 10th, and 14th days after each manicure, two trained testers evaluated the panelists’ fingernails and scored wear. We recruited 10 additional volunteers to apply and remove the polishes at home and assess ease of use.

**What we found.** Sinful Colors, which is a CR Best Buy; CND Vinylux; and Revlon looked very good at day 7 and good at day 10. In our home-use tests, CND Vinylux also took less time to dry. No products looked good at day 14. Sally Hansen and Covergirl looked good at day 7 and fair at day 10.

As for Chanel, four of 10 home-use panelists said it chipped the day they applied it. And Nutra Nail gel polish was poor, despite its claim of “ding-free protection.” Seven of 10 home-use panelists said it chipped the day they put it on. It was hard to apply, taking three coats of “activator” and two coats of gel color. And it had a bothersome aroma (“I would never apply this inside again,” said one panelist).

**Bottom line.** Sinful Colors is top-rated and a CR Best Buy. It takes longer to dry than the other polishes, so if quick drying is important, choose CND Vinylux. It’s sold online and in nail salons; the others are sold online and in stores. If the convenience of one-step application appeals, try Sally Hansen or Covergirl.

## Walmart slashes prices of organics

**ORGANIC FOOD** can be expensive, but a new partnership between Walmart and Wild Oats, an organic-food pioneer, is likely to make many organic goods available at rock-bottom prices. We know because we did our own reality check.

The product line, Wild Oats Marketplace, is beginning to trickle into Walmart’s 4,000 stores, and within a few months it’s expected to consist of about 100 packaged items, including salsa and pasta sauces, dried

spices, and olive oil. The goods will also be sold at [walmart.com](http://walmart.com). Walmart claims that each item in the Wild Oats line will cost at least 25 percent less than other organic goods sold at their own store (Walmart carries about 1,600 organic items).

We compared prices that Walmart provided for 15 of those organic products against prices for similar organics at other stores—several supermarkets near our Yonkers, N.Y., headquarters—and found that average savings were even higher than 25 percent. Walmart charged 8 to 71 percent less for the 15 products whose prices we examined. Moreover, the Walmart organics not only cost less than national organic brands but also cost less than store organic brands.



Walmart now sells Wild Oats products, which had lower prices.



### How much we saved

Product	Walmart	Local markets	Walmart cheaper by
Basil leaves	\$42.24/lb.	\$145.16	71%
Cinnamon	19.84/lb.	63.89	69
Ketchup	1.19/lb.	3.42	65
Peanut butter	2.27/lb.	4.99	55
Chicken broth	1.98/qt.	2.50	21
Kidney beans	0.94/lb.	1.02	8

# 9 strategies for a safer, healthier journey

**TRAVELERS LAY A LOT OF** groundwork for summer vacations by researching locations, airfares, and the best hotel deals. But planning how to stay healthy (and what to do if they happen to get sick) usually isn't part of their preparation. It should be. "There are several travel-related health concerns to think about no matter where you're going," says Orly Avitzur, M.D., medical adviser for CONSUMER REPORTS. Follow these strategies to stay well while you're away from home:

## 1 Check your insurance coverage

Emergencies such as broken bones or heart attacks are usually covered outside of your network or area, but doctor visits may not be. In foreign countries, you might have no coverage at all. If you have a chronic health condition or you'll be doing something that could conceivably lead to injury, consider buying travel health insurance. Avoid commission-driven policies sold by tour operators, cruise-line representatives, and travel agents. Instead, check out an online broker, such as InsureMyTrip, that sells coverage from multiple companies.

## 2 Download your health records

If your doctor has a patient portal, you can access portions of your medical record, such as medications, allergies, and other vital pieces of information. Download it to a thumb drive and take it with you to give doctors instant access in case of an emergency.

## 3 ID where to get medical help

Knowing the quality of health care you'll have access to is especially important if you have a chronic condition, are traveling outside of the U.S., or will be taking a cruise. "Contrary to popular belief, cruise ships are not floating hospitals," Avitzur says. According to international maritime law, they aren't even required to have a doctor onboard; a crew member with medical training

is sufficient. Basic treatment such as stitches or IV fluids may be available, but for anything serious, you probably will have to disembark at the next port of call.

## 4 Stash meds in your carry-on

Even if you don't have to take a dose during your flight, it's best to have medications with you instead of in your checked bags, in case the luggage is lost. Be sure to pack enough of any prescription medication to last the entire trip, plus a little extra.

## 5 Outsmart germs

From norovirus to colds and flu, certain infections spread easily where large numbers of people congregate—planes, hotels, cruise ships. Your best defense is to wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds as often as you can. If soap and water aren't available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol.

## 6 Don't sit still

Research shows that long-distance air travel can increase your chances of developing a blood clot in your leg. A similar risk has been found with traveling by car, bus, or train. It's called deep vein thrombosis and can be very painful—and even life-threatening if the clot breaks off and travels to your lungs. If you can't get up from your seat, flex and extend your feet (like you're pushing the gas pedal of a car) at least once per hour. When driving, stop the car every 2 hours or so to take a walk or to stretch.

## 7 Drink a lot of water

That sluggish feeling you get while flying may have nothing to do with jet lag. Being dehydrated, even mildly, can cause fatigue. The air in planes is very low in humidity. That can lower fluid levels in the body and dry out your eyes, skin, mouth, and nasal passages. Not only is that uncomfortable, but a dry nose is the perfect incubator for a cold virus.

## 8 Watch what you eat and drink

Enjoy the local cuisine, but don't overdo it. Studies have identified that the highest likelihood of sudden cardiac death occurs on holidays associated with overindulgence, such as Thanksgiving. Triglycerides—a type of fat that becomes elevated in your blood after a large meal—can cause coronary artery inflammation, a common prelude to a heart attack, Avitzur says. Eating your way through Italy, for example, could create the same conditions in your body.

## 9 Prevent travelers' diarrhea

Sticking to bottled water and hot, freshly prepared foods is your best defense. But bismuth subsalicylate (Pepto-Bismol and generic) has a mild antibacterial effect, and taking it may cut your odds of getting diarrhea in half. Take two tablets four times per day throughout your trip. Cut back if you become constipated, and stop taking it if you experience ringing in your ears. It contains salicylate, an ingredient in aspirin, so check with your doctor if you have ulcers or other medical conditions.





# How to save on cell service

**T-MOBILE SHOOK UP** the cellular industry last year when it joined upstart prepaid and no-contract carriers and dropped the traditional two-year service agreement from its lineup. AT&T and Verizon now also offer contract-free service plans alongside those that come with a two-year commitment.

But can you really save money with no-contract service? Our study of 78 plan combinations offered by 12 carriers found that in some cases you can.

It can be difficult to get the types of service plans to line up for easy comparisons. That's because no-contract deals, which usually have lower monthly service charges than traditional plans, can also come with hefty price tags for their phones, and major contract carriers hide handset costs in the overall monthly fee.

We looked at different plans and levels of service across carriers for an individual user, a couple with minimal use needs, and a family of four.

## Best ways to save

Our study, using the iPhone 5 and 5c, found that you can save a bundle by bringing your own phone to a new carrier with a no-contract plan instead of choosing a traditional two-year contract plan that comes with new phones. On average, the two-year savings on the cost of the phone plus the service were about \$770 for an individual user, roughly \$1,160 for a low-use couple, and almost \$2,000 for a family of four.

To get those savings, your phone must work with the new network. You'll need to switch out your phone's SIM card (a small expense) for a new one. Top-rated carriers that let you bring your own phone include Consumer Cellular, Net10, and Straight Talk; AT&T is noted for reliable 4G service.

Most carriers offer the bring-your-own-phone option, but all phones don't work with every network, so you might need to consider the cost of buying a handset.

## Figure the cost of phone and plan

To compare carrier costs, multiply the

monthly service charges and smart-phone installment payments by 24 months and add any up-front payments and activation or other start-up fees. Use the carriers' online shopping cart to figure monthly costs.

Among service providers offering no contracts and a phone installment plan, Consumer Cellular had the lowest cost for a low-use couple and an average individual user. T-Mobile was best for a family of four, costing \$5,599 over two years. U.S. Cellular was the most expensive, costing \$8,100, and Verizon Edge was second most expensive at \$7,239.

Verizon had some of the most costly plans overall. Its no-contract deal, which involves buying a phone at its full \$550 price up front, was worse than its two-year contract plan, which requires you to pay \$100 up front for the phone. The total cost was \$4,050 (no contract) vs. \$3,150 (contract) for our couple, and \$8,340 vs. \$6,540 for our family of four.

AT&T's no-contract, bring-your-own-phone plan over two years offered savings ranging from \$460 for the individual to \$2,800 for the family of four compared with its two-year service contract with new phones.



## T-Mobile vs. Verizon

**For a hypothetical family of four\* that needs four smart phones, 1,800 talk minutes, 7,600 text messages (thanks, teenagers), and 8GB of data per month, here's how T-Mobile and Verizon compare costwise.**

	T-Mobile	Verizon
Two years of cell service, no contract	\$3,360	\$5,040
Cost of 4 iPhone 5c's (installment plan)	2,239	2,199
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,599</b>	<b>7,239</b>
Total cost with a two-year contract, phones included	NA	<b>6,540</b>
Total cost if you bring your own iPhone 5 handsets from another carrier instead of buying new 5c phones.	<b>3,364</b>	NA

\*The total monthly needs of the two other scenarios in our study:

**Low-use couple:** Two smart phones, 400 voice minutes, 200 texts, 1GB of data.

**Individual user:** One smart phone, 600 voice minutes, 600 texts, 2GB of data.



## Going beyond recall notices

The recent recalls of millions of cars from manufacturers such as General Motors, Nissan, and Toyota highlight the importance of keeping track of problems that may involve your car—even if you don't get a recall notice.

For more than 40 years, the federal government has operated the recall system to bring in defective vehicles for free safety-related repairs.

But common problems that aren't considered to be safety issues, ranging from peeling paint to serious mechanical flaws, usually aren't announced to the public. Usually they are addressed in technical service bulletins (TSBs), which automakers send to their dealers' service departments to tell mechanics how to perform the repairs. But sometimes a problem cited in a TSB



Chevrolet Cobalt

is a safety issue, as was the case with the failure of GM's ignition switches in 2005 to 2010 Chevrolet Cobalts, among other GM cars. The problem has been linked to 13 deaths going back several years. So be aware of any TSBs related to your car.

### Here's what you need to know:

#### Recalls

- If you get a recall notice, be sure to act on it as soon as you can. You can contact the dealer to make an appointment or find out when parts will be ready to make the repair.
- Follow the advice in the recall

notice. For example, in the General Motors case, the company recommended using only the vehicle key in the ignition but not a key chain with other keys attached.

- Sometimes carmakers will remedy a problem without initiating a formal recall by conducting service actions. As with recalls, the company will contact you directly about how to have a problem fixed at a dealer.
- If you are considering a purchase of a used car, you should check to see whether all recall work has been performed. A dealer's service department will be able to check using the vehicle identification number (VIN).

#### Technical service bulletins

- A TSB indicates the automaker is aware of a common problem, but it doesn't mean the manufacturer will pay for the repair. But it can help isolate a specific problem. In some cases, you might be able to use it to negotiate a price break.
- You can search for summaries of bulletins at the website of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, at [nhtsa.gov](http://nhtsa.gov). Once you locate the bulletins related to your vehicle, you can order the full texts free.

#### To report a safety problem

If you have experienced a safety problem, you can report it on NHTSA's hotline: 888-327-4236. You will need to provide information such as make, model, year, and the VIN. The date of manufacture can also help. In addition, you can also make a report through [SaferCar.gov](http://SaferCar.gov).

# \$600,000

That's the fine that Forman Mills of Pennsauken, N.J., has agreed to pay to settle charges from the Consumer Product Safety Commission staff that the company sold children's hooded jackets and hooded sweatshirts with a drawstring in the hood. The CPSC says that the drawstrings can pose a strangulation hazard to young children.



## RECALLS

### GARDENING PRODUCTS

#### Troy-Bilt and Remington electric leaf blowers

The blower's impeller can break during use and hit you, posing a risk of cuts.

**PRODUCTS** 134,000

Troy-Bilt blowers sold at Lowe's stores and online at [troybilt.com](http://troybilt.com) from May 2011 through November 2013 for about \$34, and 24,000 Remington blowers sold nationwide and online at [mtdproducts.com](http://mtdproducts.com) from May 2011 through December 2013 for \$30 to \$40. The importer, MTD, has had 18 incident reports, including 13 of injuries that resulted in cuts requiring stitches, and bruises.

**WHAT TO DO** Stop using the blower. Return the Troy-Bilt to Lowe's, or if you bought it at [troybilt.com](http://troybilt.com), call Troy-Bilt at 888-848-6038 for a free replacement. Remington customers can call 888-848-6038 or go to [mtdproducts.com](http://mtdproducts.com) for a free replacement.

### EXERCISE EQUIPMENT

#### ISO7X Isometric exercise device

The handle grips on each end can break during use and parts can be ejected from the shaft, posing a risk of injury.

**PRODUCTS** 170,000

ISO7X isometric exercise devices sold nationwide and online at [buyironbow.com](http://buyironbow.com), [buyiso7x.com](http://buyiso7x.com), [getiso7x.com](http://getiso7x.com)

, and [iso7x.com](http://iso7x.com) from October 2009 through August 2011 for about \$30. There have been 10 reports of handles breaking and ejection of internal parts, including five reports of cut and puncture injuries. **WHAT TO DO** Stop using the device. Call Ontel Products at 800-245-0511 or go to [ontel.com](http://ontel.com) for details about how to get a refund.

### HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS

#### Dyson portable electric heaters

The heater can develop an electric short and overheat, posing a risk of fire.

**PRODUCTS** 338,000

Dyson Hot and Hot + Cool heaters sold nationwide and online from September 2011 to March 2014 for about \$400.

**WHAT TO DO** Unplug the heater, and call Dyson at 866-297-5303 or go to [dyson.com](http://dyson.com) for a free repair.

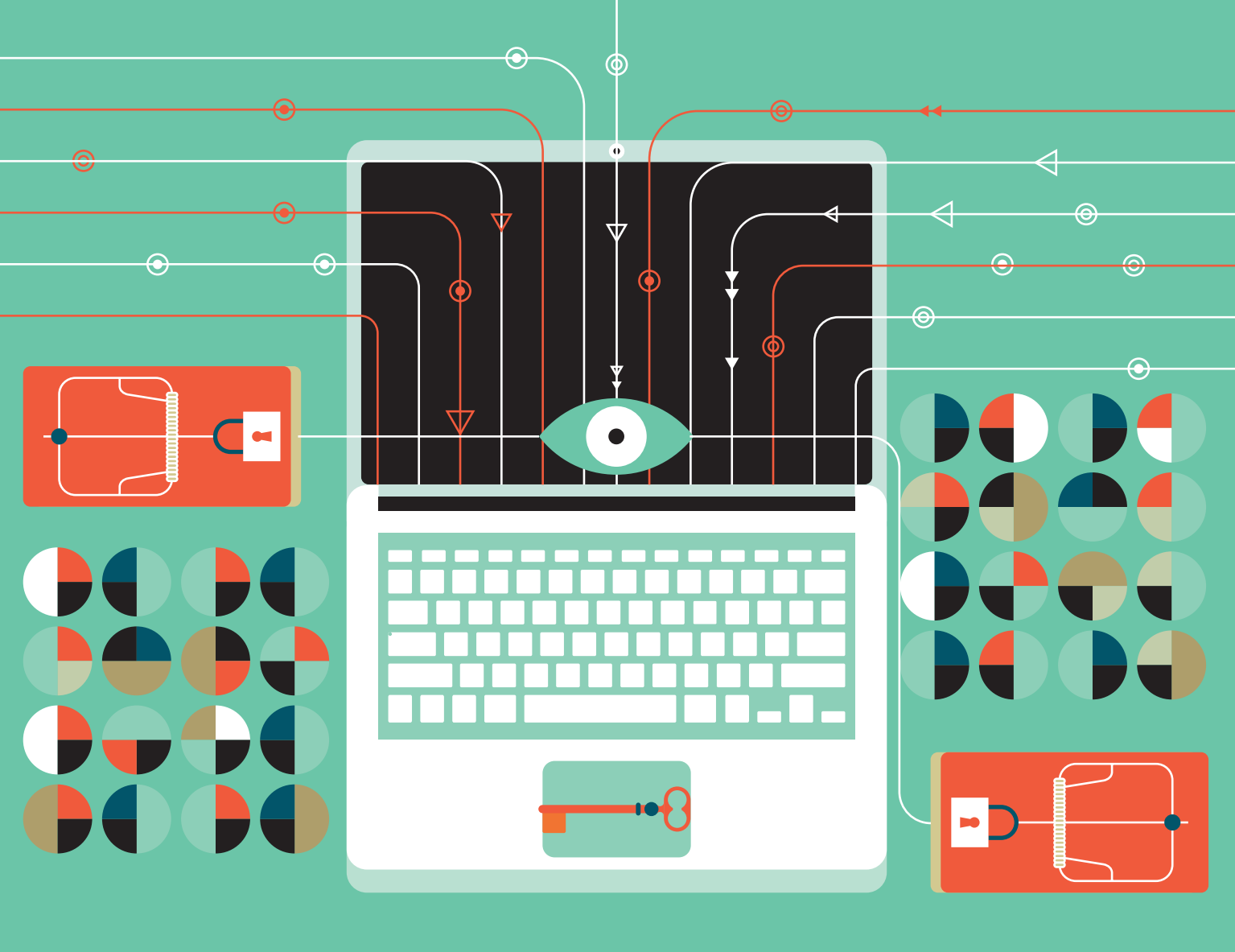
#### SATCO KolourOne LED lightbulbs

Metal housing/lens assembly can separate from the bulb's base and fall, posing a risk of injury.

**PRODUCTS** 119,000

KolourOne Panel Array 2.0 and Duo 2.0 PAR 30 and 38 LED bulbs sold nationwide and at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) from December 2012 to February 2014 for \$35 to \$45.

**WHAT TO DO** Remove the bulb from the fixture. Call SATCO Products at 888-770-7125 or go to [satco.com](http://satco.com) for a replacement bulb.



# Your secrets aren't safe

Data thieves are after your most private info—when you use Wi-Fi and shop online, and even when you store files in the cloud

**T**HE PAST YEAR has brought a cold splash of digital anxiety to the American consumer. A seemingly endless onslaught of high-profile data breaches and online vulnerabilities has left us feeling susceptible to harm from cybercriminals and spies. And the threats have become so pervasive, nebulous, and prone to popping up in unexpected places—from the credit-card readers at Target to the Heartbleed bug exploiting the basic security of more than 60 percent of sites on the Internet—that the typical reaction is a combination of fatalism and paralysis. Perhaps that's why 62 percent of respondents in a recent national Consumer Reports survey of 3,110 online consumers said they have done nothing to protect their privacy on the Internet.

Which is not to say that people don't care. A recent Associated Press poll found that 58 percent of people have "deep worries" when

spending online, and 58 percent of respondents to our survey said they were worried about government spying by the National Security Agency. For most people, the problem is simply not knowing how to attack a problem that seems so wildly out of their control.

It turns out, though, that the most effective defense against an international onslaught of shadowy hackers is a well-informed and vigilant individual. When the institutions that are supposed to protect your valuable, private information have fallen down on the job, it's up to you to make yourself a hard target.

This special report will help you recognize your points of vulnerability and toughen your defenses. We'll also describe some of the ingenious methods cybercriminals have been using to prey on consumers. And we'll help you tame your password problem (we all have one), as well as introduce you to some tools that can help you shut the door on the bad guys.

# Your info: At risk everywhere

In the world of technology, the vulnerability of a computer system is known as its “attack surface”—all of the points at which an attacker can gain entry and make off with valuable data. These days, as the threat of malicious software and sophisticated cybercriminals reaches every corner of modern life, each consumer has vulnerabilities, too. They extend from the laptop in your home to the doctor’s office where you get your yearly checkup. And the first step in protecting yourself is to know where you are exposed.

## On your computer

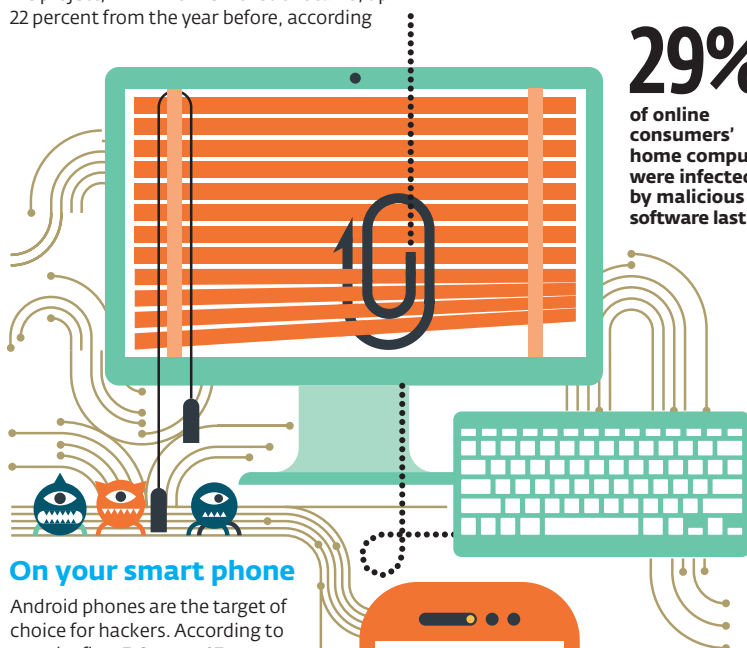
The arsenal of scams and attacks aimed at your computer is truly breathtaking. It includes websites that push “drive-by download” malware onto unsuspecting visitors and “ransomware” that encrypts the data on your computer, then charges you to get it back. And every year, e-mail phishing gets more sophisticated. Gone are the badly spelled blasts from Nigerian princes. Newer targeted messages appear to come from legitimate companies such as UPS, PayPal—even the company you work for. Last year, we project, 11.2 million fell for such scams, up 22 percent from the year before, according

to the latest survey conducted by the Consumer Reports National Research Center.

**How it hurts you** Certain malware can disable your computer. Some attackers infect your machine without your knowledge, then integrate it into vast “botnets” of hijacked computers to launch more attacks. Aside from using security software (many free programs work just fine) and keeping your computer up to date, the best defense is to be a skeptical surfer. If a link on a Web page or in an e-mail seems suspicious, don’t click on it.

**29%**

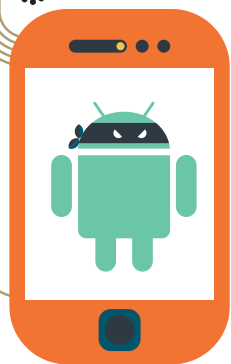
of online consumers’ home computers were infected by malicious software last year.



## On your smart phone

Android phones are the target of choice for hackers. According to security firm F-Secure, 97 percent of new threats were aimed at Android phones, though most mobile malware exists in third-party marketplaces outside of the Google Play store. Those sites can harbor nasty code such as the Geinimi Trojan, which piggybacks on widely downloaded games and apps. Even Apple’s famously locked-down iPhone can be vulnerable. The company had to patch a serious bug in its encryption code in February.

**How it hurts you** Mobile malware can take over your whole phone, steal your contact list, and run up charges for premium services. Most of it can be avoided by installing phone apps only from the most reputable app stores, such as Google Play, the iTunes App Store, and the Windows Store.



**3.1 million**

people are projected to have had their smart phones stolen in 2013—almost double the number in 2012.

## At the doctor’s office

Hackers love health care facilities because they routinely collect patients’ Social Security numbers. According to the Identity Theft Resource Center, 260 breaches affecting more than 8 million data records occurred (or were made public) in health care facilities in the first four months of 2014. In March, a hospital in Orlando, Fla., reported that a flash drive containing the last names, medical-record numbers, and birth dates, but no Social Security numbers, of hundreds of child patients had gone missing.

**How it hurts you** Medical forms with a patient’s Social Security number, home address, and e-mail



address are gold mines for identity thieves. Don’t provide your Social Security number directly to a doctor or health care facility. If they really need that information, they can get it from your insurer.

## On social media

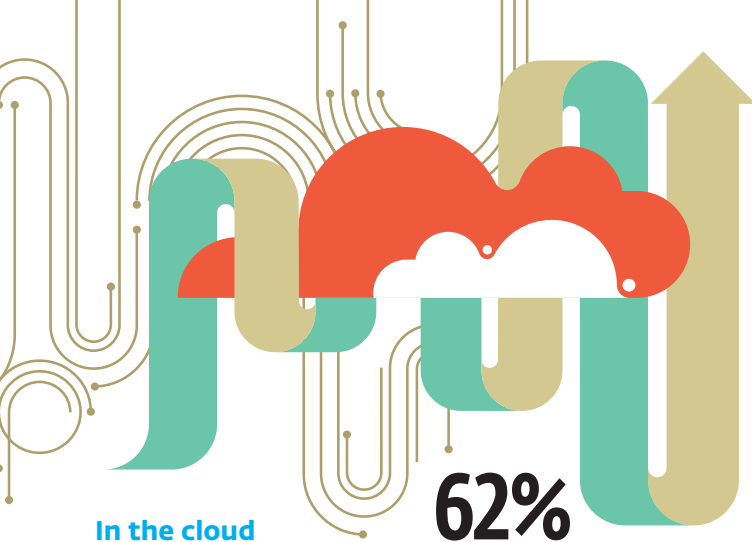
If you post and share information about an upcoming trip on Facebook, Google Plus, Instagram, LinkedIn, or Twitter, you might have just set yourself up to be burglarized while you’re away. Information you share on social networks can reach tens of thousands of people you don’t know. Social networks themselves are also vulnerable to hackers. Last fall, 42 million passwords were exposed when hackers hit Cupid Media dating sites.

**How it hurts you** Social networks are a rich repository of personal data that

can help criminals figure out where you live and who your friends are, and can disclose much of the data required to fill in those password-reset forms. (Does your mother go by her maiden name in your list of friends?) Limit the amount of personal info you share on social networks and check your privacy settings—restrict everything to just friends. Also, periodically review your lists of online friends and remove any that you don’t know all that well.







## In the cloud

Widely used cloud services such as Dropbox and Evernote are great for storing files and organizing tasks, but they have a spotty security record. Dropbox has had several breaches over the past few years; and in 2013, a hack of Evernote exposed the user names and e-mail addresses of about 50 million users.

**How it hurts you** Information stored in the cloud is only as secure

# 62%

**of U.S. consumers took no measures to protect their privacy online.**

and accessible as the cloud provider makes it. If you store private information on a cloud-based service, encrypt it with a free encryption program such as TrueCrypt ([truecrypt.org](http://truecrypt.org)) before you upload it. If a breach occurs, hackers won't be able to easily read your data.

## Where you shop

The highly publicized data breaches at Target and Neiman Marcus in late 2013 exposed the vulnerability of the magnetic-strip credit-card readers found in many retail stores (at least when combined with lax corporate security procedures). And smaller merchants have their own risks. A CONSUMER REPORTS editor recently had his credit card processed by a merchant who photographed the card using a smart phone. Within days, he found thousands of dollars of fraudulent charges on his account.

**How it hurts you** Credit-card losses are limited by law to \$50, although that doesn't account for the incredible inconvenience. Debit cards are more complicated. If you don't report unauthorized charges within 60 days of a statement, you



could potentially lose everything in your account. The lesson: Check your statements frequently and report any suspicious charges quickly. Also, avoid any transaction where a vendor asks you to type or photograph your card data into a mobile phone.

## While having coffee

Coffee shops and other public places with open Wi-Fi networks have become fertile territory for a variety of cybercrimes. Software such as Wireshark can let miscreants sniff the traffic of users on open networks and look for account numbers and passwords. Some criminals have been known to leave malicious USB drives in coffee shops or use the cameras on their phones to make video recordings of others entering an account number or password.

**How it hurts you** Logging on to banking or even social-networking sites on a public network can expose your credentials and password to anyone within Wi-Fi range. If you're using your phone, access the cellular network, which is more secure. If you

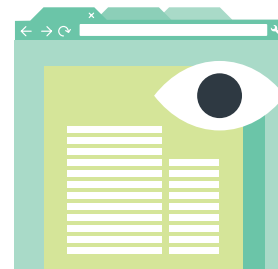


routinely use a laptop away from home, consider paying your cellular provider for the ability to create a "tethered" connection through your phone. You can protect all of your communications, even on open networks, by first installing a personal virtual private network app on your phone or computer, such as the one we describe on page 20. And never plug in a stray USB drive that you find in a shop or anywhere else.

## When you pay taxes

In April, a hacker took advantage of the Heartbleed software bug to steal about 900 Social Insurance numbers from the Canada Revenue Agency. Although the agency took its website down as soon as it learned about the vulnerability, a hacker was able to steal the information during a 6-hour window of opportunity. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police have arrested and charged a resident of London, Ontario, with the crime.

**How it hurts you** When encryption standards become compromised, huge sections of the Web become insecure. Use one of the



many available free tools to check the vulnerability of any site you do business with. Such tools include DirectPass ([directpass.com/heartbleeddetector](http://directpass.com/heartbleeddetector)), McAfee's True Intelligence Feed ([mcafee.com/heartbleed](http://mcafee.com/heartbleed)), and Heartbleed Test ([filippo.io/Heartbleed](http://filippo.io/Heartbleed)). None of those is perfect, but they are helpful.

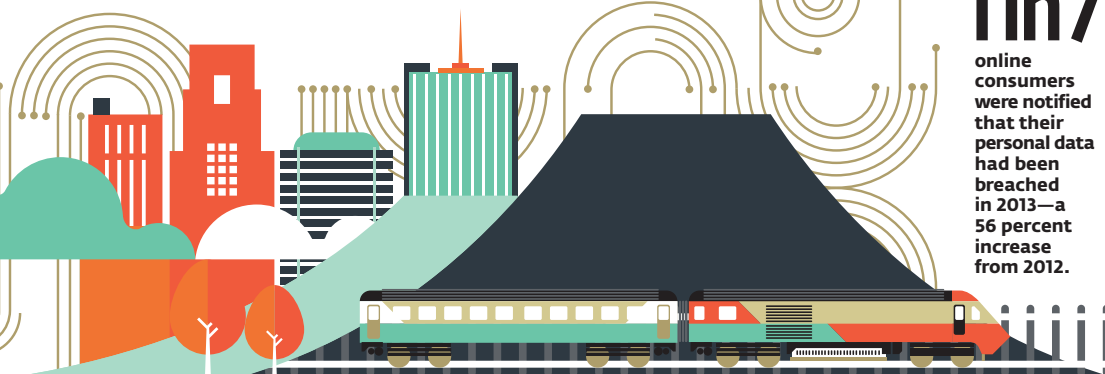
## When you travel

In April, police found card-skimming devices on ticket machines at a Long Island Rail Road station, although no one appeared to have lost money. Last fall, skimmers were found on ticket machines at several New York area stations, with bank losses reported. The devices, which also attach to the card readers of ATMs, are surprisingly common. Thieves often remove them after just a few hours of capturing data.

**How it hurts you** A skimmer grabs the account information from the magnetized strip on your card and can record your personal identification number using a camera. When entering a PIN, cover the keypad with your hand.

# 1 in 7

**online consumers were notified that their personal data had been breached in 2013—a 56 percent increase from 2012.**



# They were hacked

What it feels like to be in the crosshairs of a data thief

Chad Isch spent months dealing with the fallout of having his identity stolen.



## The \$1,000 Lego scam

When Chad Isch arrived home from work to watch the 2012 Summer Olympics, he found three large boxes of Legos in his foyer. The packages had been retrieved from his front lawn earlier that afternoon by a friend. But Isch, a 43-year-old sourcing manager from Marietta, Ga., was confused by the delivery because he hadn't ordered anything of the kind.

Isch learned later that he'd been the victim of an online impersonation in which someone had ordered the Lego sets in his name, shipped them to his home, and arranged for PayPal's Bill Me Later service to charge him almost \$1,000 for the merchandise. The perpetrator must have had personal information about him, Isch learned from PayPal, including his address, birth date, and at least the last four digits of his Social Security number. He says the sheriff's office told him that this type of fraud usually involves arranging for a home delivery while the occupant is at work, collecting it before the victim returns, then selling it online.

The sheriff's office speculates that someone had been watching his house and learned his usual arrival time, according to Isch. What the

crooks hadn't counted on was the earlier arrival of his friend. Isch eventually returned the merchandise without incurring charges, though not without hours on the phone with Toys "R" Us and a trip to the sheriff's office.

"The whole fiasco took about three months," he says. To this day, Isch can't fathom how anyone was able to get enough details about him to pull this off. "That's the thing that's scary," he says. "I have no idea. I finally just let it go."

## Breach hits church and state

In March of this year, the Archdiocese of Seattle announced that it had suffered a data breach that exposed the information of some employees and church volunteers. Ursula Reutin, a radio news anchor, had been covering the breach for KIRO 97.3 FM when she discovered that the breach had affected the Catholic schools that her two sons attend. Reutin and her husband, Mark Saltvig, had submitted to a background check when they did volunteer work for the schools, which are affiliated with the archdiocese. When they called an information line the church supplied, they found that Mark's Social Security information from that background check had been used to file a fake tax return and collect a refund from the IRS. "Ironically, he had just filed our tax return and we owed the government money," she recalls.

The hackers had also filed a false return in Ursula's name, marking the second time in six months that the couple had their data stolen—she was also a victim of the 2013 Target breach. At press time, the FBI, IRS, and archdiocese were still investigating the breach but had not determined its cause. The diocese has arranged for two years of free credit monitoring with the three credit bureaus for those affected. And Reutin now combs through the details of every bank and credit-card statement. "I hate being a victim," she says. "I want to think this is a one-time deal, and they got their refund, and now they're happy, but I don't know that. I can't be assured that something isn't going to happen down the road. I always have to worry about it ... and that stinks."



Radio anchor Ursula Reutin was caught up in a data breach at the Archdiocese of Seattle.

## Two ways data security could be improved

**Better payment cards.** One lesson from the recent breaches at Michaels, Neiman Marcus, and Target is that the magnetic-stripe, swipe-and-sign payment-card system used in the U.S. is a security nightmare. Such cards are easy to duplicate using stolen credentials and inexpensive card printers. Retailers and card issuers throughout much of the rest of the world use payment cards with an embedded chip that requires a personal identification number at the point of sale. The cards are not

foolproof, but they are more secure. Target announced in late April that it'll use MasterCard chip-and-PIN technology in its Red payment cards. Visa and MasterCard are in the process of converting to chip security (with chip-and-PIN or chip-and-signature security). Merchants must convert to the new system in 2015 or be held liable for the cost of fraud.

**National standards for data protection.** Today, 47 states have laws governing how and when companies must inform

customers of a data breach. That's confusing and offers uneven levels of protection to consumers in different states. Several bills before Congress propose national standards for data protection and notification, but legislators will have to reach a consensus on what that means. Until federal standards are developed, consumers should check with the National Conference of State Legislatures ([ncsl.org](http://ncsl.org)) to see what their states' breach-notification laws say.



# 7 security disasters

## 1. The Target debacle

**What happened?** Hackers breached Target's security systems, according to a congressional report, through a connection with an outside vendor, then installed programs that scooped up payment-card data from cash registers. They also obtained customer data stored in Target's servers.

**How bad was it?** At the height of the 2013 holidays, they obtained payment-card data for 40 million people who shopped between Nov. 27 and Dec. 15, plus personal data for 70 million more. Banks then placed drastic limits on debit-card withdrawals.

**What now?** Financial institutions issued new cards, warning millions of fraud risk. Target offered a year of free credit monitoring, although that wouldn't prevent the misuse of stolen information. Target said it will speed up the adoption of more secure point-of-sale technology.

## 2. Heartbleed havoc

**What happened?** In April researchers discovered Heartbleed, a bug in the software that's used by an estimated two out of three Web servers, which lets hackers obtain passwords and other data that people submit online.

**How bad was it?** Researchers say that Heartbleed dates to March 2012, so a lot of data may have been compromised.

**What now?** Popular sites quickly fixed the bug. Some urged users to change passwords.

## 3. Adobe's password problem

**What happened?** Hackers breached Adobe Systems' security and obtained payment-card numbers for 2.9 million customers and an estimated 38 million user names and encrypted passwords. Affected customers were notified directly by Adobe.

**How bad was it?** Researchers said the thieves decoded some passwords by drawing on unencrypted password hints.

**What now?** Adobe required affected customers to change their passwords.

## 4. Tinder: Dating app kisses and tells

**What happened?** Tinder told users it would reveal their location only to the

nearest mile. But in February security firm Include Security reported that last fall the app had let users locate each other to within 100 feet. It told Tinder about the problem in October. Tinder says it enhanced the app's security soon after. But Include's time line shows that on Dec. 2, Tinder was still trying to resolve the problem, and that it was fixed by Jan. 1, 2014.

**How bad was it?** Other Tinder users could pinpoint your exact location. How many people were affected isn't known.

**What now?** Tinder says it has beefed up security of its users' location data.

## 5. Advocate Health Care's millions of lost patient records

**What happened?** Last July thieves stole four unencrypted laptops from Advocate Health Care's office in Park Ridge, Ill.

**How bad was it?** Four million patients were affected, with medical record numbers, diagnoses, names, addresses, birthdays, and Social Security numbers leaked.

**What now?** Patients affected have filed a class-action suit against Advocate.

## 6. Living Social's raw deal

**What happened?** Last year deals site Living Social reported that hackers had obtained user names and encrypted passwords but not payment-card information.

**How bad was it?** 50 million were affected.

**What now?** Living Social strengthened its password security and required users to create new passwords.

## 7. A worm in Apple's core

**What happened?** Researchers reported in February that a security flaw in software placed users of iPhone 4 and later, iPad 2 and later, and iPod Touch (5th gen.) at risk of hacker attacks.

**How bad was it?** A moderately sophisticated attacker could monitor communications with even very secure sites, including passwords, e-mails, and financial information.

**What now?** Apple released a new version of iOS to fix it. Within days, one in four affected users had reportedly updated to it.

## Field guide to passwords

Passwords are your first line of defense. "A password is rather like a key that opens a door," says Matt Bishop, professor of computer science at the University of California at Davis. "If you pick a poor password, then anyone can get access to your accounts." To be strong, it should be long, complex and use symbols, letters, and numbers. That can make a password tough to remember, but a few tricks can make it easier. Here's a guide to help:

### Just plain lazy

**Password** 123456

**Analysis** According to SplashData, which makes password-management tools, the word "password" was unseated last year as the most widely used password online by the equally insecure "123456." Numbers in sequence are easy to crack, but just about any ordinary word is subject to a "dictionary" attack, wherein hackers use software to try almost every known word.

### Far too personal

**Password** Joe64

**Analysis** Combining your name and birth year is easy pickings for someone who can do a minimal amount of research on you. Ditto for the names of kids and pets. Using an uppercase letter as the first character makes a password more vulnerable because hackers know that's very common.

### Complex ... maybe too complex

**Password** mC497Xv!

**Analysis** This one is tough to crack. It means absolutely nothing but has at least eight characters and a mix of punctuation, numbers, and uppercase and lowercase letters. But it's almost impossible to remember one for each account you own.

### Memorable yet

**almost impenetrable**

**Password** ,,,,m@StEr10ck,,,,1

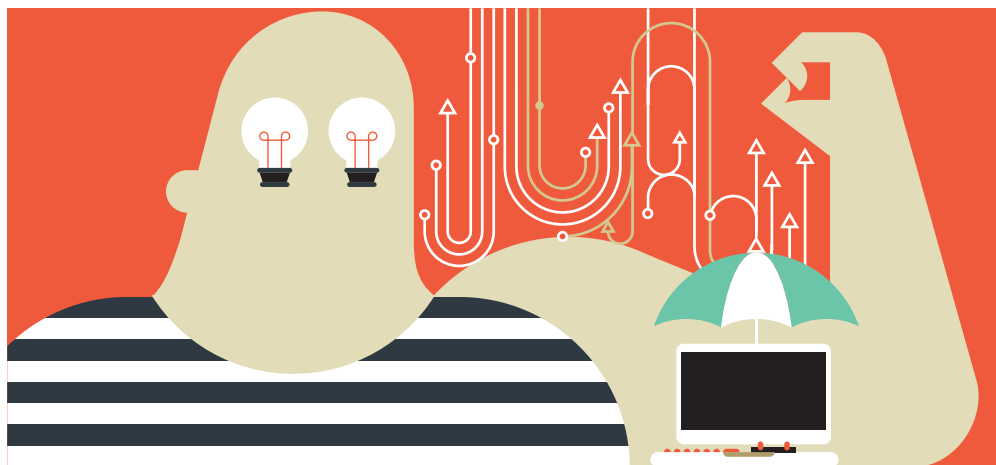
**Analysis** This one pads your password—a real phrase spelled with symbols—with easily remembered punctuation and a number. It's easy to vary from one site to another. Now go create a few of these for your own accounts. (But don't reuse ours!)





# Software to keep out info thieves

A sinister world of criminals is trying to steal your valuable information, so it helps to have a few cloak-and-dagger tools of your own to fight back. We tested five products that are claimed to let you surf anonymously, encrypt your chats and e-mails, and come up with ironclad passwords.



## ChatSecure

**Price** Free

**The claim** ChatSecure's maker says the app will keep your mobile communications private by scrambling them on your device once you hit send, then putting them back together on the other end so that your pals can read them. You can attach photos to messages, take pictures within the app, and chat with groups. ChatSecure Voice is a voice version that lets you record an audio message.

**Did it work?** Yes, but it's more complicated than we think it should be. No plain-text info was transmitted when we sent messages with ChatSecure. But it was somewhat finicky and contained a lot of geeky settings that won't be of interest to most users. Voice messages were intelligible but not high quality.

## Hotspot Shield

**Price** Free; Hotspot Shield Elite, \$30 annually

**The claim** Hotspot Shield is a virtual private network (VPN), which logs your PC or mobile device in to a remote server and lets you surf the Web from there without being eavesdropped on or tracked. It also hides your Internet Protocol address to protect you from hackers and encrypts your passwords and other data.

**Does it work?** Yes, but it's annoying. Installation on a PC

was lengthy, but once you're finished you can easily turn it on or off. Before installing it, make sure you're OK with providing access to all of the permissions it seeks. We were met with a long list—including the ability to read your contacts—when we installed the Android version. If you choose the free version, you'll have to deal with frequent pop-up ads. (The pay version eliminates the ads.) The number of ads on the free version prompted user complaints on the app's download page, as did a limitation on the length of streaming video. We found that Internet speeds using the free PC version dropped by about 40 percent when downloading and 20 percent when uploading while the VPN was active. When we captured data being transferred over the network while Hotspot Shield was on, we saw no vulnerable plain-text info transmitted.

## LastPass

**Price** Online version, free; mobile, \$12 per year

**The claim** The company says this is "the last password you have to remember." You get started by downloading a version of LastPass that's compatible with your browser, then you must come up with a master password. Browse the sites and services you use, and let LastPass create secure

passwords as you go. LastPass can also fill in forms and use other types of authentication, such as fingerprint readers.

**Does it work?** Yes. LastPass was easy to use and set up. It keeps an encrypted copy of your password vault on a secure server and backs it up on your device. We searched the local copy for any plain-text strings that matched our stored passwords and found nothing, confirming that the stored passwords are encrypted. We also verified that it didn't transmit our user name or password in plain text when it logged us in to a website protected with our password.

## Safeplug

**Price** \$49

**The claim** Every time you go online, you're sharing your Internet address with data brokers, corporations, and others. You're also exposed to hackers and cybercriminals. Safeplug is a piece of home-network hardware that keeps your Internet traffic anonymous by bouncing your communications among a series of random servers around the world—using a clandestine network called Tor. When you're using Tor, no one is supposed to see where on the Internet you are. It also encrypts your data along the way.

**Does it work?** Kind of. Setup was not as easy as it should

have been. Safeplug did indeed send and receive encrypted text via Tor servers, but it's up to you to make sure you are browsing in protected, or proxy, mode. It requires several clicks to activate and deactivate proxy mode. Also, because of Safeplug's circuitous routing of your Internet traffic, Web pages take several seconds longer to load when it is activated

## ShazzleMail

**Price** Free

**The claim** Web-based e-mail services such as Gmail and AOL use a remote server as a go-between for you and your contacts. So everything you send and receive is stored on your e-mail provider's computers. ShazzleMail, which requires you to use a special e-mail address and special software, skips the server, routing mail directly to the recipient. You can send e-mail to someone not signed up with ShazzleMail. They receive a link that opens a secure Web page and retrieves the e-mail directly from your device. You can send and receive from any computer or mobile device, but you need either an iOS or Android device to use ShazzleMail.

**Does it work?** Yes. We played National Security Agency and spied on our own test messages by capturing the e-mails between the tablet and laptop we were using. None of the traffic between the devices had any readable plain text, and most messages arrived at their destinations in 1 to 3 minutes. But you'll need to be careful about keeping ShazzleMail actively running on your device. It caused heavy battery drain because the process keeps the Wi-Fi connection live in the background. The product was in beta testing when we tried it out, and we don't recommend unfinished products. But if ShazzleMail doesn't change much before final release, it could be a good choice for protecting your e-mail communications.



# The truth about sunscreen

Saving your skin means getting the facts straight

**W**HEN YOU SHOP for sunscreen, what do you look for? If you're like half of the sunscreen wearers in a recent survey of 1,000 adults in the U.S. by the Consumer Reports National Research Center, SPF (sun protection factor) is the feature that influences your decision most. You can't always rely on that claim, however. We tested 20 sunscreens, and though we found seven to recommend, only two—BullFrog WaterArmor Sport InstaCool SPF 50+ and Coppertone Sensitive Skin SPF 50—provided the SPF protection promised on their packages after water immersion. Beyond Coastal Natural SPF 30 came in at less than half of its claimed SPF, and we weren't able to get a reading on Banana Boat Kids SPF 50. The others came in 4 to 40 percent below their claims. That doesn't mean the sunscreens aren't protective. Even an SPF 30 sunscreen that comes in, say, 40 percent below its claim gives you an SPF of 18. And we can't say why our test results differ from the manufacturers' claims, but they

show that SPF isn't always carved in stone. That's just one of many misconceptions people have about sunscreen. Our report debunks some other commonly held myths.

## **Myth The FDA tests sunscreens before they hit store shelves.**

The Food and Drug Administration requires sunscreen manufacturers to test their products, but it doesn't verify the testing, require manufacturers to report results, or do pre-market testing itself. "If the FDA suspects a problem with a certain manufacturer, they can ask for their results," says David C. Steinberg, president of Steinberg & Associates, a personal-care-products consulting company in Plainsboro, N.J. "But for the most part, it's a self-regulated industry."

The FDA does require sunscreen manufacturers to meet certain standards for the use of three terms on labels: SPF, broad spectrum, and water-resistant. SPF refers to a sunscreen's ability to shield you from ultraviolet B (UVB) rays, which can cause sunburn and skin cancer. Sunscreens that protect against

both UVB rays and the more deeply penetrating UVA rays—which can cause skin aging and contribute to skin cancer, including melanoma, the most deadly type—are called broad spectrum. In our tests, we found a wide variability of effectiveness against UVA rays (see Ratings, on page 23). The FDA says that a sunscreen must have a critical wavelength of at least 370 nanometers to be labeled broad spectrum. Alba Botanica Very Emollient Sport SPF 45 and Up & Up (Target) Kids SPF 50 came in slightly below that in our tests. Although we can't say that the products we tested are incorrectly labeled, we're submitting our critical-wavelength and SPF results to the FDA.

Our findings underscore the importance of choosing from our seven recommended sunscreens. If none are available, a product rated Good will provide adequate protection. Using any sunscreen is better than using none, but it's just one part of a smart sun-protection strategy. "We tend to rely too much on sunscreen," says Sophie J. Balk, M.D., a professor of clinical pediatrics at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New



York City and a former chairwoman of the American Academy of Pediatrics' Council on Environmental Health. "We need to rely more on clothing and hats to cover ourselves."

### Myth Kids need a special formula.

Our survey found that 30 percent of sunscreen users and parents of young children who wear sunscreen buy kids' sunscreen. Of those, about half thought that it was "safer" and "gentler" than others, and 20 percent assumed it was regulated by the government. But the FDA doesn't make a distinction between kids' sunscreen and others, or hold it to a higher safety standard. Manufacturers use the same active ingredients, sometimes in the same concentrations, in both types. "There's only a short list of active ingredients that can be used," say Dennis Lott, president of Florida Suncare Testing in Bunnell, Fla., which tests sunscreens. In fact, when we asked Coppertone and Banana Boat what makes a kid's sunscreen a kid's sunscreen, they confirmed that the active ingredients they use are the same as those used in adult products. (Neutrogena declined to be interviewed.) Kids' sunscreen may be formulated to be tear-free or sting-free, however. But in some cases, a side-by-side comparison of ingredients lists shows the same active and inactive ingredients.

In our survey, 18 percent of people who bought kids' sunscreen did so because a

doctor recommended it. And some products carry such claims as "#1 pediatrician recommended brand" (Coppertone) and "pediatrician tested" (Banana Boat) that imply an extra level of safety. Those terms aren't regulated by the FDA, however, and they aren't necessarily meaningful in terms of safety. Coppertone surveys pediatricians to ask which brand they recommend, and they recommend Coppertone products most, according to Patricia Agin, Ph.D., director of scientific affairs and research and development leader for Merck, Coppertone's manufacturer. But many sunscreen manufacturers market heavily to dermatologists and pediatricians. "They give them samples, take them to events, and set up displays at medical conferences," Steinberg says.

As for "pediatrician tested," a doctor may be involved, but he doesn't conduct the study. "Our testing is monitored by clinical professionals, such as dermatologists, pediatricians, and ophthalmologists," says Grace Riccardi, a manager in Sun Care R & D at Energizer in St. Louis, the company that makes Banana Boat. "They are part of the team making the conclusion that products are mild, sting-free, and tear-free."

Some sunscreens for children (and adult sunscreens for sensitive skin) contain only the minerals zinc oxide and/or titanium dioxide as the active ingredients, because they may be less irritating to skin than sunscreens containing chemicals, such as

avobenzone. Some kids' products do, however, contain chemical sunscreens.

### Myth A little goes a long way.

It takes an ounce (about 2 tablespoons) to cover your face and body adequately. Most people apply about half that much. According to our tests, using half the sunscreen gives you half the SPF. Timing matters, too. Our survey found that 29 percent of people using sunscreen waited until they were in the sun to slather it on. But you should apply it 15 to 30 minutes before then for full protection and reapply it every 2 hours.

### Myth 'Natural' sunscreens are safer than 'chemical' sunscreens.

As it is on food packaging, "natural" is meaningless on sunscreen labels. Generally, it's used when a product's only active ingredients are titanium dioxide and/or zinc oxide (though some also contain chemical sunscreens, such as octinoxate). But those minerals aren't pulled out of the earth, ground into a powder, and mixed into a lotion. They're refined and sometimes coated with compounds in processing. "There's nothing natural about them," Steinberg says. "If manufacturers used zinc or titanium in their natural form, they'd be pitch black and contain high amounts of lead."

People think that mineral-based sunscreens are safer because they sit on the surface of the skin and aren't absorbed the way chemical sunscreens are. But that's not always true. Titanium dioxide and zinc oxide are often broken down into nanoparticles so that they go on clear instead of as the thick, white paste you used to see on lifeguards' noses, and nanoparticles may be absorbed. Some experts are concerned about the health effects of those compounds.

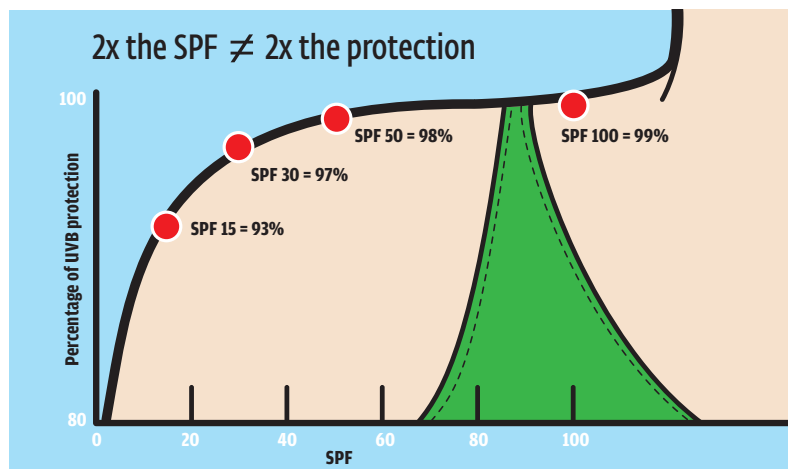
When it comes to sun protection, minerals are no better than chemicals. In fact, in some cases they perform less effectively. "Sometimes the particles of titanium dioxide and/or zinc oxide clump together," Steinberg says. "That can lower their SPF." Beyond Coastal Natural SPF 30 and Banana Boat Kids SPF 50, which each contain zinc oxide and titanium dioxide, received Fair and Poor Ratings, respectively, in our tests. California Baby Super Sensitive 30+ with titanium dioxide was rated Good.

### Myth Spray sunscreens provide the best coverage.

They're protective if used correctly; four sprays are at the top of our Ratings. But it can be hard to judge the amount of sunscreen you're using, and that could lead to much less protection. Spray pattern makes

## Is ultrahigh SPF really any better?

In our survey, almost one-third of adults and almost 60 percent of children used sunscreens with an SPF of 50 or more. Some products worked well; two of our highest-rated sunscreens have very high SPFs—Banana Boat Ultra Defense Max Skin Protect SPF 110 and Neutrogena Ultimate Sport SPF 70+. But that doesn't mean you're getting twice the benefit of an SPF 30 or 50—or that you can stay in the sun longer without reapplying it. As the illustration shows, the difference in the protection provided by an SPF 15 and SPF 50 is very small. No sunscreen blocks 100 percent of the rays, and remember that SPF only refers to UVB rays, not UVA.





# 3 sunscreen fixes we need now

When it comes to sunscreen, there's room for improvement. On our wish list:

## 1. Better ingredients.

There are ingredients used in European countries and elsewhere that aren't available in the U.S. The FDA has received applications for many of them. In 2006 it approved one, ecamsule (used only by L'Oréal). Recently, the agency requested more information about the safety and effectiveness of two sunscreens, and it is reviewing other applications.

## 2. Information on spray safety.

In 2011 the FDA requested additional information regarding the safety and effectiveness of sprays. It has received new information about them and is currently evaluating it.

## 3. Answers about high-SPF products.

In 2011 the FDA proposed limiting the maximum SPF to 50+. The agency has received numerous comments on the proposal, but it hasn't yet made a determination. Consumers continue to perceive high-SPF sunscreens as more effective than lower ones.

a difference, too. In our tests, Banana Boat Ultra Defense Max Skin Protect SPF 110 and Banana Boat Sport Performance CoolZone SPF 30 covered the most targeted area, so they would be best for specific body parts, such as arms or legs. Products with a wide spray pattern—such as Up & Up (Target) Sport SPF 50, Coppertone Sport High Performance SPF 30, and Well at Walgreens Sport SPF 50—might be better for your back, but they're more likely to disperse into the air, especially if it's windy. To make sure you're getting good coverage, hold the nozzle 4 to 6 inches away from your body, spray, then rub the product into your skin. Spray each body part twice in case you miss an area. Better yet, spray the sunscreen into your hand, then rub it onto your body.

Inhaling spray sunscreen could cause lung irritation and, when inhaled, titanium dioxide is a possible carcinogen. Flammability is another danger; last year, more than 20 sunscreen sprays were recalled because of reports of people being burned while wearing it when they got close to an open flame—such as a grill—before the product dried. The FDA is investigating the potential risks of spray sunscreens, but because of the concerns, we don't recommend sprays for children. The products might not be cost-effective anyway, because you should spray yourself twice—and some of it might escape into the air.



## Ratings Sunscreens

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

All tested products In performance order, within types.

	Product	Price	Cost per oz. (\$)	Overall score	UVA	UVB
Rec.				0 100 P   F   G   V G   E		

### LOTIONS

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Coppertone Water Babies SPF 50	\$11.00	1.38	81	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Equate (Walmart) Ultra Protection SPF 50	9.00	0.56	80	●	●
	No-Ad Sport SPF 50 <sup>[1]</sup>	10.00	0.63	69	○	●
	Coppertone Sensitive Skin SPF 50 <sup>[2]</sup>	10.00	1.67	68	●	●
	Well at Walgreens Baby SPF 50 <sup>[2]</sup>	8.00	0.80	63	●	●
	Coppertone Water Babies Pure & Simple SPF 50 <sup>[2]</sup>	10.50	1.31	59	●	●
	California Baby Super Sensitive SPF 30+ <sup>[2]</sup>	20.00	6.90	53	○	○
	Alba Botanica Very Emollient Sport SPF 45 <sup>[2]</sup>	11.00	2.75	40	●	●
	Up & Up (Target) Kids SPF 50 <sup>[1] [2]</sup>	6.70	0.64	39	●	●
	Beyond Coastal Natural SPF 30 <sup>[2]</sup>	16.00	4.00	25	●	●
	Banana Boat Kids SPF 50 <sup>[2]</sup>	10.00	1.25	16	●	●

### SPRAYS

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	BullFrog WaterArmor Sport InstaCool SPF 50+	10.00	1.67	95	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Up & Up (Target) Sport SPF 50 <sup>[1]</sup>	8.00	0.80	90	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Well at Walgreens Sport SPF 50 <sup>[1]</sup>	9.50	1.58	87	●	●
	Coppertone Sport High Performance SPF 30 <sup>[1]</sup>	10.00	1.67	58	●	○
	CVS Sheer Mist SPF 30 <sup>[1]</sup>	9.00	1.80	58	●	○
	Banana Boat Sport Performance CoolZone SPF 30	8.50	1.42	49	○	○
	Neutrogena Ultra Sheer Body Mist SPF 30 <sup>[1]</sup>	9.50	1.90	44	○	●

### ULTRAHIGH SPF

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Banana Boat Ultra Defense Max Skin Protect SPF 110 (spray) <sup>[1]</sup>	10.50	1.75	99	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Neutrogena Ultimate Sport SPF 70+ (lotion)	11.00	2.75	93	●	●

<sup>[1]</sup> Contains retinol or retinyl palmitate, which pregnant women may want to avoid. <sup>[2]</sup> Contains zinc oxide and/or titanium dioxide.

## How we test sunscreens

To check for **UVB** protection, a standard amount of each sunscreen being tested is applied to small areas of our panelists' backs. Then they soak in a tub of water. Afterward, each of those areas are exposed to six intensities of UVB light from a sun simulator for a set time. About a day later, the six spots are examined for redness. The resulting **UVB** ratings reflect each product's actual effectiveness after water immersion. (All of the tested sunscreens carry a claim of water resistance for 80 minutes.) Measured SPF, not how close a sunscreen comes to meeting its SPF claim, is used to calculate our UVB scores. To test for **UVA** protection, we use different panelists and check for tanning instead of redness. And we conduct a critical wavelength test similar to the one required by the Food and Drug Administration for sunscreens with broad-spectrum claims. It assesses how well UV rays are absorbed by clear plastic plates treated with sunscreen. (Results can vary depending on the nature of the plates used.) The critical wavelength results are not used in the UVA ratings. Overall scores are based on the results of our UVB and UVA tests.



# The heart of your home

Today's 'social kitchens' are built for entertaining, digital networks, and yes, cooking. How to get one on any budget.

**THE OPEN KITCHEN** is more popular than ever—but with a twist. It's now designed to accommodate parties, homework, and even multiple cooks. And many electronic devices are finding a new home in the kitchen.

Despite all of the benefits of the social kitchen, creating one can be a challenge. That's where our 2014 Kitchen Remodeling Guide comes in. Want to know which floors hold up best to heavy foot

traffic? Our flooring report on page 31 can help. Looking for a whisper-quiet dishwasher that won't drown out the after-dinner conversation? See our Ratings on page 44.

Before you delve into the product reports, read our essential steps to creating a truly social kitchen, along with our advice for hiring professionals, planning the budget, and sidestepping those trends that haven't stood the test of time.

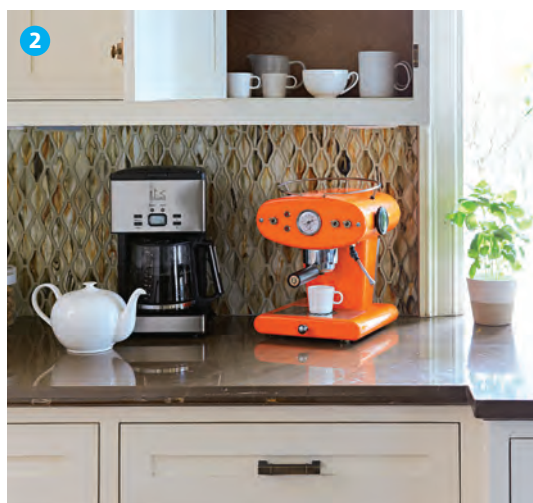
PHOTOS: MARK LUND; PROP STYLING: KARIN OLSEN; KITCHEN DESIGN: DUNLEAVY CONSTRUCTION, INC.





**1. Open up the space—with care.** Be judicious about how many barriers you eliminate. “Too many pathways moving through the space will lead to chaos,” says Sharon Olsen, a certified kitchen designer in Portland, Ore. Using half-walls or arched openings can create a sense of openness while maintaining traffic flow.

It’s also important to visually integrate the kitchen with the rest of the home. “The latest iteration of the open kitchen sees it as an ‘interior design’ feature within a larger living/dining space,” says Erica Broberg Smith, an architect based in East Hampton, N.Y. Color can be a great connector. Repeat a hue from the living room in your choice of artwork on the kitchen walls, for example, or the color of your countertop appliances.



#### **2. Create activity areas.**

Establishing zones will help organize the space, especially in multicook kitchens. The layout should steer children away from the main work triangle, formed by the refrigerator, range, and dishwasher and sink.

Put a beverage and snack station toward the public-facing edge of the kitchen. That helps keep kids—and guests—away from the hot stove and sharp knives. The station might take the shape of a wet bar, with a wine chiller and sink. Or the emphasis could be on coffee and snacks, with a coffeemaker, a cabinet for cups and mugs, and a refrigerator drawer for milk and juice boxes.

If you love to bake, add a baking station. Unlike the other zones, this one should be near the oven, with room for baking supplies and equipment, and a marble countertop for rolling out dough.

#### **3. Contain the mess.**

Some homeowners resist an open kitchen because they don’t want guests staring at messy pots and pans. But there are ways around the dilemma. In the kitchen featured here, a peripheral cleanup zone, with sink, dishwasher, and expansive landing area for dirty dishes, helps keep the mess off to the side during dinner parties; a second island prep sink serves the main work triangle. Another strategy is to add a raised bar to the “public” side of a kitchen island. That will give guests a place to perch during meal prep, then homeowners can hide the mess from view once dinner is under way. An island bar also provides seating during casual meals.



#### **4. Create a drop zone.**

When the kitchen is the nucleus of the home, it can become a dumping ground for papers, bags, jackets, and the like. A well-appointed “drop zone,” usually located just off the kitchen, will provide a place for those items so that they won’t enter the kitchen in the first place. If space permits, consider a full-sized mudroom with a durable flooring material, such as stone or ceramic; open shelves with baskets assigned to each family member; and plenty of hooks. A hallway closet can also be converted into a functional drop zone, especially in smaller households.





**5. Bring back the eat-in kitchen.** Casual dining is integral to the social kitchen, and it's good for resale value too. In fact, the eat-in kitchen was among the most desired features in a 2013 survey of homebuyers by the National Association of Realtors. Built-in banquettes are making a comeback. "Children love them, and they are great for cozy informal dining," says Broberg. They're also a place to pay the bills and do the homework (or at least see that it gets done). And the base of a banquette can provide additional storage space for napkins, tablecloths, and other accessories.

**6. Add an island.** This central counter will give people a place to sit while you're preparing the meal. Just don't let it clog traffic. There should be 42 to 48 inches of clearance on all sides.

When entertaining, an island can function as an interactive buffet. "Food has gone from something you serve at a party to something you do at a party," says Steven Raichlen, author of *Man Made Meals: The Essential Cookbook for Guys*. Mindy Weiss, a party planner based in Los Angeles, likes to arrange salad bars, panini stations, and other dishes on the island that bring guests into the food-prep experience. Another crowd pleaser: Fill an island prep sink with ice and use it for a raw bar or a place to serve chilled drinks.

**7. Build in charging stations.** For many people the kitchen is where their electronic devices live. Charging stations can be tucked into a cabinet or drawer that's fitted with docks and electrical outlets. If you need to charge only a couple of devices, Leviton and other manufacturers make electrical outlets with built-in USB ports that can be installed in a kitchen backsplash, letting you power your smart phone while running the blender or stand mixer.



## Other measures to consider

**Pay attention to acoustics.** The drawback to open kitchens is noise. "With the hardwood floors and stone countertops that everyone wants, it can sound like a restaurant on Saturday night," Olsen says. Soft layers, such as an area rug in the adjacent room, will help absorb the sound. Also pay attention to the appliances. A dishwasher that scores an excellent for noise will be less distracting than one that's average or worse. And many wall ovens have a cooling fan that runs for a few minutes after the unit is turned off, a gripe with some consumers.

**Let your devices talk to each other.** In the last year Dacor and GE have introduced wall ovens and ranges that you can control and monitor from your smart phone, for example preheating the oven from the backyard or checking the status of a roast chicken while you're doing laundry. "In that sense technology is actually freeing up the cook from being in the kitchen," says Shelia Schmitz, editor of Houzz.com, a home design website. Given how much time we're spending in today's social kitchen, an occasional break might be a good thing.

IN

OUT

Contemporary  
and transitional  
styles

European-style  
frameless cabinets

Steam ovens

Gray, white, and  
off-white color  
schemes

Quartz  
countertops

Pullout faucets  
and polished  
chrome finishes

Pull-out trash/  
recycling bins

LED lighting

Tuscan and  
country  
styles

Traditional cabinets  
with ornate detail

Countertop microwaves

Red, bronze, and  
terra-cotta color  
schemes

Solid surface  
countertops

Pot fillers and  
oil-rubbed bronze  
finishes

Appliance storage com-  
partments, aka "garages"

CFL and incandescent  
lighting

## The pros and cons of matching appliances

Seven in 10 respondents to our recent kitchen survey said that if they could replace all of their kitchen appliances, they'd like the coordinated look of a single brand. In addition to style, appliance "suites"—which include a dishwasher, range, and refrigerator—can simplify the purchase and maintenance processes, because you're dealing with a single manufacturer and retailer. Plus rebates and discounts often sweeten the deal on suites.

The big downside: It's tough to find brands that combine top performance and reliability across all three categories. Kenmore and Whirlpool are relatively safe bets, based on our latest data. If you have to go off-brand on any one appliance, the dishwasher probably makes the most sense, because it has the least visual impact on the kitchen.

## A kitchen for every budget

About 1.5 million homeowners will remodel their kitchen in 2014. Costs vary, but here's a snapshot of four budgets, based on the Remodeling 2014 Cost vs. Value Report ([costvsvalue.com](http://costvsvalue.com)) and our own analysis of what you might get.

### Budget do-it-yourself

**COST** About \$5,000

**TIME IT TAKES** One month

**FEATURES** DIY-painted cabinets and walls, and DIY-installed vinyl floor, laminate counter, entry-grade appliances, top-mount sink, two-handled faucet.

**RETURN ON INVESTMENT**

Depends on what your time is worth!

### Minor midrange

**COST** About \$19,000

**TIME IT TAKES** Three months

**FEATURES** Professionally installed standard wall oven and cooktop, vinyl floors, laminate countertop, midpriced sink and faucet; refaced cabinets; painted walls.

**RETURN ON INVESTMENT**

About 83 percent

### Major midrange

**COST** About \$55,000

**TIME IT TAKES** Six months

**FEATURES** Professionally installed semicustom cabinets, standard appliances, vinyl floors, laminate countertops, stainless-steel double-tub sink, single-lever faucet; painted walls.

**RETURN ON INVESTMENT**

About 74 percent

### Major upscale

**COST** About \$110,000

**TIME IT TAKES** Six months or more

**FEATURES** Professionally installed custom cabinets, stone counters, pro-style appliances, cork floor, backsplash, undermount sink with designer faucet, new lighting.

**RETURN ON INVESTMENT**

About 64 percent

## Do's and don'ts for choosing a contractor

It's arguably the most important decision you'll make, especially on major remodels. Here are the rules to live by:

**DON'T** rely solely on user reviews. Online ratings services of pros can be convenient, but they're not always impartial. For example, contractors on Angie's List who buy advertising get increased exposure. For the site Porch, reviews are selected for posting by the professionals themselves.

**DO** use word of mouth. It's always the best way to find reputable pros. If possible, inspect past projects in person to see how the work is holding up. And check the Better Business Bureau and your state's attorney general's office for complaints before making your pick.

**DON'T** fall for the lowball. Even if he's not playing fast and loose, a contractor who underestimates project costs will have to make up the difference elsewhere—maybe on the installation.

**DO** shop around. Interview multiple contractors to gauge the going rate for your project. That will also help you find someone with whom you'll have good rapport and communication.

**DON'T** allow for "allowances." Those are open-ended amounts in the contract that could end up blowing the budget. Once the work is under way, stick to the terms.

**DO** get everything in writing. The contract should include a complete description of the project, all associated costs, and a target completion date.

**DON'T** apply for your own permits. That is the job of the contractor. If he asks you, it could be a sign that he's in poor standing with the local building department.

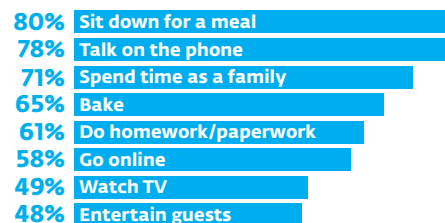
**DO** check the paperwork. That includes up-to-date license and insurance and workers compensation policies. Go to the Contractor's License Reference Site, at [contractors-license.org](http://contractors-license.org), for more information.

**DON'T** pay cash. That is a common tactic used by fraudulent contractors, who take the money and run. A reputable pro will accept a check made out to his contracting company or a credit card.

**DO** set up a payment schedule. It's common to put down 30 percent upon initial delivery of materials. Make the final payment only when you're fully satisfied with the work.

## Beyond meal prep

In April 2014 the Consumer Reports National Research Center asked 1,012 Americans what activities they do in the kitchen at least once in a typical week. Here's what they told us:







# Counters that last

Quartz is almost impossible to stain and easy to maintain

**QUARTZ WITHSTOOD** almost everything in our tests—stains, hot pots, abrasive pads, and knives—and unlike granite, it doesn't need to be resealed. Its combination of beauty, durability, and easy maintenance makes it a great choice for busy kitchens. Granite performed almost as well.

Both materials are a bit pricey. Laminate is still the budget-friendly choice. Its looks have improved, thanks to better printing.

But those aren't your only countertop options. We stained, sliced, scratched, scorched, and nicked 14 materials from leading brands and found huge differences in performance. Almost everything stained bamboo counters, and although tile itself is stain- and heat-resistant, the grout between the tiles stains even when sealed and can mildew. Except for recycled glass, there was little difference among competing brands of each material. That's why we rate materials, not brands. So you can pick the material, then get the brand that offers the color or pattern you prefer at the best price.

Here's what else is new:

**Martha does quartz.** Designed to offer the look of marble without the high price and low performance, Home Depot's Martha Stewart Living line is adding a selection of quartz counters in seven colors that mimic marble. They cost \$65 to \$80 per square foot installed, or about \$3,600 to \$4,500 for a typical kitchen. We couldn't buy samples in time for this story, but we expect it to perform similarly to the brands we've tested.

**Better than quartz?** Also brand-new to the market is Dekton, a blend of the materials found in quartz, glass, and porcelain. Its manufacturer claims the thinner, lighter material is completely stainproof, won't scorch or crack under extreme heat, and is more scratch-resistant than any other material on the market. It costs \$80 to \$95 per square foot installed. We're buying it now and testing its claims. For other products, use our Ratings to choose a material, and if you're replacing your sink and faucet, see our tips below.

## Sinks and faucets: 3 things you need to know

### Material matters more than brand or price.

Stainless steel did best in our tough tests. But expensive, thicker-gauge stainless sinks didn't necessarily perform better than thinner ones. Sound-absorbing pads on the bottom of the sink's exterior absorbed noise better than spray-on coatings. And matte finishes masked scratches better than polished surfaces.

**Get an undermount sink.** They're installed underneath the counter and offer a sleek look and easy cleanup. Spills and crumbs can be wiped directly into the sink. But the sinks should be installed only in waterproof counters.

**Don't spend a fortune on a faucet.** As long as it has a lifetime warranty against leaks and stains (all but the cheapest usually do), pick the style you like. Gooseneck models have higher clearances, so it's easy to fit a big pot underneath. But they could cause splashing if your sink is shallow. Make sure the faucet is proportional to the size of the sink.



# Do-it-yourself granite?

Love the look of granite but not the price? Ditto beautiful handcrafted cabinetry? Rust-Oleum claims its DIY coatings for countertops and cabinets can help transform stained laminate counters and worn wood cabinets. But can you really get the kitchen of your dreams from a box?

**Countertops.** Using Rust-Oleum's Countertop Transformations to give a laminate counter the look of granite wasn't easy. The process involves plenty of manual sanding using the diamond mesh sander that comes with the kit, applying an adhesive base coat, spreading color chips, sanding the chips, which was a tedious task, and adding a top coat. With a lot of practice, time, and attention to detail, the result was a good-looking, glossy, and dimpled surface that was softer than laminate. So it was less resistant than laminate to cuts, scratches, and chipping in our tests, but it resisted stains and heat well.

**Bottom line.** You wouldn't mistake it for granite, but if your laminate is marred yet structurally sound, the kit is cheaper than having new laminate counters installed. Two small kits cover 60 square feet—a typical kitchen has 56—for \$296. The \$235 large kit covers 50 square feet. Always use a cutting board for food prep and a trivet for hot pots to protect the softer surface.

**Cabinets.** We used Rust-Oleum's Cabinet Transformations in Pure White. The small kit costs \$100 and covers 100 square feet, enough for the average home's 17 cabinets. The process starts by removing the doors and drawer fronts from cabinets and removing hardware. Using a deglosser and scrub pad on exposed surfaces to give them a thorough cleaning was next. Typical furniture refinishing followed, taking care with the paint and avoiding drips. We applied the optional glaze, but it was the last step that was the most difficult. The top coat is a clear layer meant to protect the base coat and glaze. Even our paint expert wasn't able to get a smooth, bubble-free surface.

**Bottom line.** Skip the kit and use a high-quality paint applied with good brushes to transform your worn cabinets.

## Countertop choices

### 1. Quartz

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

**PROS** It mimics the look of stone yet needs less maintenance. Hot pots, serrated knives, abrasive pads, and most stains were no match for quartz, which is a combination of mineral, color, and resin. It comes in vibrant colors in addition to patterns that look like granite and marble.

**CONS** Edges and corners can chip, and you'll need a pro to repair them. Rounded edges help.

### 2. Granite

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

**PROS** Each slab of this natural material is unique; rare colors and veining cost more. Heat, cuts, and scratches didn't harm granite in our tests. Polished and matte finishes resisted most stains when properly sealed, so pick the look you prefer.

**CONS** Periodic resealing is needed to fend off stains. Like quartz, edges and corners can chip and must be professionally repaired.

### 3. Soapstone, limestone, and marble

**COST** \$2,800 to \$5,600 (soapstone or limestone), \$2,800 to \$8,400 (marble)

**PROS** Soapstone isn't as common as granite, and it's superb at resisting heat damage. Small scratches can be repaired by sanding finely and applying mineral oil. Limestone (pictured) and marble are classic materials. Limestone also has a natural-stone look without heavy veining or grain-ing, and it resists heat.

**CONS** Soapstone nicks, cuts, and scratches easily, and some stains are too tough to be washed away. Limestone and marble also have those drawbacks, and heat damaged our marble.

### 4. Laminate

**COST** \$560 to \$2,240

**PROS** Inexpensive, easy to install, and so much better-looking than you probably remember, thanks to new printing technology and decorative edges. Stains and heat didn't damage the laminates we tested.

**CONS** Cutting directly on it easily and permanently damages laminate, so use a cutting board.

### 5. Solid surfacing

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

**PROS** Available in a variety of colors and patterns, it can be used for counters, sink, and backsplash, creating a seamless look because joints are almost invisible. And like quartz, its color won't vary much from the store sample. Solid surfacing is resistant to most stains, and small nicks and scratches can be repaired.

**CONS** It scratches and cuts easily, so a cutting board is a must.

### 6. Recycled glass

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

**PROS** Large shards give it a fun, contemporary look; finely ground glass makes it less busy. Most glass counters we tested resisted stains, cuts, scratches, and heat.

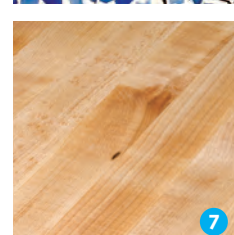
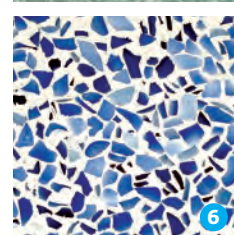
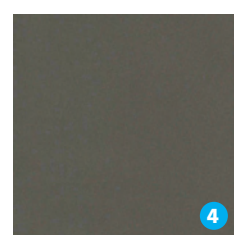
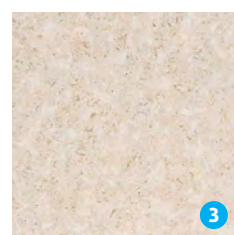
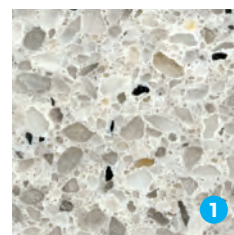
**CONS** It's the only material for which we found a difference among brands. Cosentino's Eco counters were the only ones that developed a thin crack during our heat tests.

### 7. Butcher block

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

**PROS** It adds warmth and is easy to install and repair, but the finish makes a difference. Varnish improved stain resistance, but penetrating oils diminished it.

**CONS** Nicks and scratches can easily happen, though they can be sanded out.



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

# The guests are gone, but the stains linger

The more people in a kitchen, the more opportunity for spills. Except for quartz and granite, stone counters had a hard time fending off stains in our tests. It's best to deal with stains immediately, but what if you don't notice that wine spill until the next day? Follow the installer's care instructions, and if those don't work, try these tips from our experts and from the Marble Institute of America for granite, limestone, and marble:

**Blot, don't wipe.** Use a paper towel to blot the spill—wiping will spread it. Then clean the spot with a solution of water mixed

with a clear dish detergent, and rinse several times. Never use products that contain lemon, vinegar, or other acids because they can etch or mar the surface. Dry with a soft cloth.

**Take action.** Stain still there? Oil-based stains darken the stone. Clean with a solution of mild dish detergent and water. Then try a water-and-ammonia solution. For coffee, tea, and non-oily foods, mix a few drops of hydrogen peroxide—12 percent maximum strength—with a drop or two of ammonia, then clean. To remove water rings, buff with dry 0000 steel wool.

**Test.** Always try cleaning solutions on an

inconspicuous spot first and check for damage.

**Apply a poultice.** Stubborn stains might need a poultice to draw out the stain. You'll find instructions for a variety of stains at the Marble Institute's website. If nothing works, call in a pro.

**Reseal regularly.** Sealer makes the surface of granite, limestone, and marble more stain-resistant. Put a few drops of water on stone and let it stand for 15 minutes. It should bead up. If it doesn't, it's time to reseal. Soapstone doesn't need sealing; applying a mineral oil darkens the stone but doesn't protect it from stains.

## SHOPPING TIPS FOR COUNTERS

### Think big.

Tiny samples make it difficult to visualize what the material will look like in your kitchen. Though you'll want to play with online design tools, such as the ones at DuPont, Lowe's, and Silestone, always see the materials in person and take home large samples, even if you have to pay for them.

### Mix materials.

There's no rule that says all of your counters need to be the same. Save money by using pricey materials on visually prominent areas such as the island or peninsula and less expensive materials on the perimeter. Or consider buying a remnant if your island or counter area is small.

### Get an edge.

Rounded edges on stone counters are less likely to chip. Straight and beveled edges give a modern look, and an S-shaped ogee curve offers a traditional feel. Add an ogee or bullnose edge to laminate counters, and that unappealing dark line disappears. Certain edges add cost, so ask.

### Wander the stone yard.

Natural stone's color and veining can vary widely even within a slab, so if you find the slab you like, reserve it. Otherwise it might be gone when you return.

### Be precise.

Have the fabricator take final measurements, making accuracy his responsibility. Insist that the estimate and contract specify the material's thickness and finish, and fees for cutouts for sink, faucets, and cooktop, edge treatments, and cost of the backsplash and removal of old counters.

### Factor in finishes.

Granite and quartz are sold with polished or matte finishes. In our tests both finishes were about the same at resisting stains that were left to dry overnight. Granites with proprietary sealers, such as Stonemark, performed no better than regular granite. There were real differences in butcher block depending on the sealer used. Matte and random-grain finishes conceal scratches better on stainless-steel counters than on polished ones, but fingerprints are a given.

## 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) <sup>1</sup>	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 <sup>2</sup>	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	○	○	○	○	●

<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> 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.





# High-traffic floors

## 15 top picks that can take a pounding

**HAND-SCRAPED, GROOVED,** and other distressed floors are more than just a style statement: Those prefab dents and dings help hide and blend the real-world wear and tear of today's busy kitchen. Even vinyl floors are capturing the rustic look and feel of vintage wood, without the expense. And many of the best within all types literally make do-it-yourself installation a snap by clicking together and "floating" in place without glue or nails. Here are some standouts from our latest tests:

**Faking it in style.** Like other laminates, Armstrong's Coastal Living L3051 White Wash Walnut, \$3.50 per square foot, includes a photo of natural material beneath a clear wear layer. Its weathered look evokes the feel of an airy shore house, and its toughness under our scratching, staining, fading, and other simulated abuse earned it a place at the top of our scores. Vinyl is an even harder option: Tarkett's PermaStone vinyl tile, \$4.70, offers a marbled-sandstone look that stood up to everything we threw at it, including grape juice, mustard, and other common spills.

**Wood that can handle wear.** Superb resistance to stains and

scratches helped Armstrong's Century Farm Hickory Natural, \$6.50, join the Mullican St. Andrews Solid Oak Strip, \$6.30, and Harris Wood Traditions SpringLoc Red Oak Bridle, \$5.50, among our wood picks. But even those woods couldn't match the toughest bamboos, including Teragren Synergy Wide Plank Java, \$7, which was among the few natural floorings that resisted the dents you'd expect from dropped objects in a busy kitchen.

**Floors that go down with less fuss.** Most of our picks can be floated without glue or fasteners, including Teragren's Portfolio Naturals Wheat, \$7.50—the top-scorer among solid flooring.

Want the lower cost and higher dent resistance of vinyl? Shaw's Matrix Regency Gunstock Oak, \$2 at Lowe's, is among a growing number of vinyl floors that you simply snap together, rather than glue down. Less scratch and dent resistance kept Style Selections' Antique Oak WD4712, \$3, off our list of top vinyls. But it's among the first that offer peel-and-stick installation. And its rustic, hand-scraped look of reclaimed wood should hide at least some of the scuffs and scrapes that can show up after the party's over.



## Overview

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

✓ **CR Best Buy** These blend durability and value. All are recommended.

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

### TOP SOLID FLOORING

**A1 Teragren** \$7.50

**A2 EcoTimber** \$6

**A3 Mullican** \$6.30

The **A1** bamboo can be floated; **A2** bamboo scored comparably. For oak, pick **A3** for its scratch resistance. Also consider the Bruce Dundee Plank CB1210, \$5.70, which offers long wear but less scratch resistance.

### REAL VENEER AND EASY INSTALLATION

**B1 Teragren** \$7

**B2 Harris Wood** \$5.50

Both can be floated. For bamboo, choose **B1** for its dent resistance. For oak, pick **B2** for sunny kitchens.

### WINNING LAMINATES

**C1 Armstrong** \$3.50

**C3 Project Source** \$1 **CR Best Buy**

Both can be floated, like other laminates. **C1** offers a more authentic look; **C3** scored comparably for less.

### FOR A SOFTER FEEL

**D1 Tarkett** \$4.70

**D2 Congoleum** \$5

**D5 Shaw** \$2

All are vinyl. Choose **D1** or **D2** for a stonelike appearance, or **D5** for a wood-look vinyl that you can float.

## Guide to the Ratings

**Overall score** is mainly resistance to foot traffic, scratches, dents, stains, sunlight, moisture, and slips. Moisture resistance (not shown) is based on exposure to a damp sponge (overnight) and soaked samples (longer exposure). Slip resistance (not shown) is a measurement based on friction. **Foot traffic** is how quickly surface wear was noticeable after an abrasion machine; some scores for previously tested models have changed because of changes in testing. **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.

## Ratings Flooring

**Recommended models only** From 57 tested.

✓ **CR Best Buy** ✓ **Recommended**

● Excellent ● Very good ○ Good ● Fair ● Poor

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

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

✓	1	<b>Teragren</b> Portfolio Naturals Wheat TPF-SYN-WHT-126-DL <sup>[1]</sup>	\$7.50	75	20	●	●	●	●	●
✓	2	<b>EcoTimber</b> Woven Honey WBH061 <sup>[1]</sup> <sup>[2]</sup>	6.00	74	23	●	●	●	●	○
✓	3	<b>Mullican</b> St. Andrews Solid Oak Strip 10930 <sup>[2]</sup>	6.30	65	24	○	●	●	●	○

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

✓	1	<b>Teragren</b> Synergy Wide Plank Java <sup>[1]</sup>	7.00	76	23	○	●	●	○	●
✓	2	<b>Harris Wood</b> Traditions SpringLoc Red Oak Bridle HE25050K48	5.50	69	33	○	●	●	●	●
✓	3	<b>Armstrong</b> Century Farm Hickory Natural GCH452NALG	6.50	67	28	○	●	●	●	●

### C LAMINATE Can usually be floated anywhere in the house.

✓	1	<b>Armstrong</b> Coastal Living L3051 White Wash Walnut	3.50	79	14	●	●	●	●	●
✓	2	<b>Hampton Bay</b> Enderbury Hickory 367551 (Home Depot)	2.60	76	25	●	●	●	●	●
✓	3	<b>Project Source</b> Winchester Oak 2765 (Lowe's)	1.00	74	24	●	●	●	●	●

### D VINYL Can usually be glued anywhere in the house.

✓	1	<b>Tarkett</b> NAFCO PermaStone Collection—Natural Slate-Sand Stone NS-660 <sup>[2]</sup>	4.70	96	27	●	●	●	●	●
✓	2	<b>Congoleum</b> DuraCeramic Sierra Slate SI-74 Golden Greige <sup>[2]</sup>	5.00	95	17	●	●	●	●	●
✓	3	<b>Armstrong</b> Alterna Mesa Stone Canyon Sun D4112 <sup>[2]</sup>	5.50	91	25	●	●	●	●	●
✓	4	<b>Mannington</b> Sobella Omni HD Ares Monument Beige SHD123 <sup>[2]</sup> <sup>[3]</sup>	3.60	83	<sup>[4]</sup>	●	●	●	●	●
✓	5	<b>Shaw</b> Matrix Regency Gunstock Oak LX90100706 (Lowe's)	2.00	81	28	●	○	●	○	●
✓	6	<b>Armstrong</b> LUXE Plank Timber Bay Barnyard Gray A6861	5.50	80	24	●	○	●	●	●

<sup>[1]</sup> Bamboo product. <sup>[2]</sup> Cannot be floated. <sup>[3]</sup> Loose lay installation; requires some adhesive or tape at edges and seams.

<sup>[4]</sup> Not applicable; comes in sheets.

## SHOPPING TIPS FOR FLOORING

### Consider your kitchen.

All of our top picks scored Good or better in our slip-resistance tests, a plus for busy kitchens. But foot traffic and dropped objects are a challenge for most wood and bamboo—another reason to consider distressed finishes or opt for tougher laminate or vinyl.

### Pick certified wood.

Certification by the Forest Stewardship Council and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative offers assurance that the wood is from responsibly managed forests. Check packaging to be sure that the product and manufacturer are certified.

### Think twice about vinyl and babies.

Vinyl floors with the industry's FloorScore certification (such as our picks) emit relatively few VOCs, which are linked to health concerns and pollution. Still, we suggest choosing another flooring if your household includes young children who play on the floor.

### Choose a factory finish.

Prefinished wood and bamboo cost about 40 percent more than unfinished floors. But prefinished floors can help you save overall, because factory finishes tend to last longer than finishes that are applied later, which also add to the total cost.

## How to float a floor

Laminate, engineered wood, and several other floors can “float” without the usual nails or glue. First, be sure that applies to your flooring (check the footnotes in our Ratings). Then follow these steps:

**Prep the site.** Sand down high spots and fill in low areas on the subfloor (use wood filler as needed). Then sweep it clean.

**Measure the square feet needed.** Multiply the room's length by its width. Measure odd areas separately and add to the total. Then add 10 percent to account for any surprises.

**Let the flooring acclimate.** Typically, you should leave wood flooring for two to four days in the room where it's going so that it can expand or contract as needed before it's installed.

**Trim edges as needed.** Remove wall moldings. Use a piece of flooring and the underlayment that goes beneath it to measure where to trim doorjamb to fit the new floor.

**Decide where you'll put the short strips.** Chances are that one edge of the room won't fit the whole width of a strip, tile, or plank. Measure and cut planks as needed using a circular saw with a fine-tooth blade.

**Spread the underlayment.** Some require overlapping; others should butt each other.

**Put it down.** Lay lengths parallel with the longest wall, and leave a gap between edges and where the wall molding will go. Lock pieces together, staggering the edge location for a neater look. Then replace the molding.

**Leave room for carpeting.** If you need to transition to carpet, leave an inch between the floated floor and the carpet, and install a molding track with glue or nails.

## The worst from our tests

Subpar wear resistance and other flaws ranked some models lower overall. These scored 40 or less out of a possible 100 (prices are per square foot):

### Prefinished solid wood

- **Lauzon** Classics Northern Red Oak Natural RO020225, \$6.40

### Engineered wood

- **Millstead** Red Oak Natural Click PF9356 (Home Depot), \$3
- **Natural Floors by USFloors** Bamboo 609LS, \$3.30
- **Home Legend** Lisbon Natural HL9311LN (Home Depot), \$3.50
- **Wicanders** Corkcomfort Series 100 WRT Natural O801007, \$7
- **Lisbon Cork** Evora, \$4

### Laminate

- **Innovations** Sand Hickory FL904072 (Home Depot), \$4

## Options underfoot

### 1. Solid wood

**INSTALLED COST** \$5 to \$10 per square foot. This includes bamboo, offers a natural look and feel, and can be sanded and refinished many times.

**BUT** It tends to dent easily and is challenging to install. Several products changed color under UV light, and some can be damaged by flooding.

**TIP** Bamboo often costs more than wood but has been tougher in our tests.

### 2. Engineered wood

**INSTALLED COST** \$4 to \$9 per square foot. Engineered wood and bamboo cost less than solid-wood flooring but offer the same natural warmth. They can often be floated without glue or fasteners.

**BUT** Most dent easily and can be damaged by flooding. And because they're a veneer over substrate, most can be refinished just once.

**TIP** Wide planks are in vogue and tend to make a small room look bigger.

### 3. Laminate

**INSTALLED COST** \$3 to \$7 per square foot. Laminates offer toughness, can mimic a variety of natural materials, and can usually be floated.

The best wear well and resist stains and UV color change.

**BUT** Most dent easily, and laminate can't be refinished.

**TIP** For floating floors, save work down the line by chiseling out any damaged pieces and gluing in new ones, rather than removing an entire row of tiles or planks.

### 4. Vinyl

**INSTALLED COST** \$2 to \$6 per square foot. Vinyl is tough yet soft underfoot. Today's products look more like real stone or wood. Some tiles and planks can float without glue.

**BUT** Even the best still look like what they are up close. And off-gassing brings VOC concerns for households with young children.

**TIP** Do-it-yourselfers should pick tiles or planks over a sheet that must be cut precisely.

### 5. Linoleum

**INSTALLED COST** \$4 to \$8 per square foot. These mimic stone and other materials like vinyl does but are made of tree bark and linseed oil. The best offer superb resistance to scratches, stains, and fading from UV light.

**BUT** The best vinyl offers better wear resistance and easier installation for about the same price.

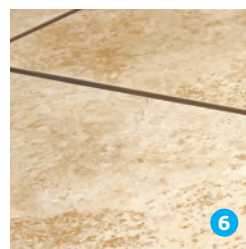
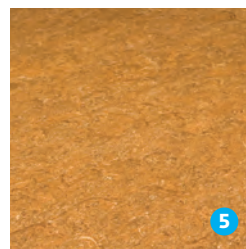
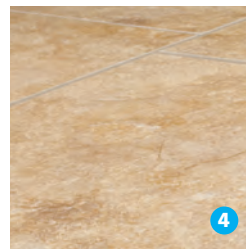
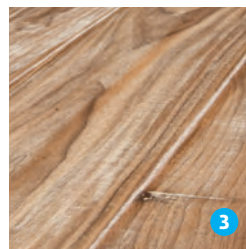
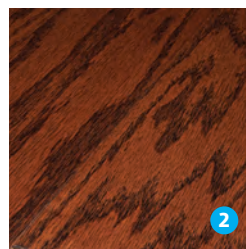
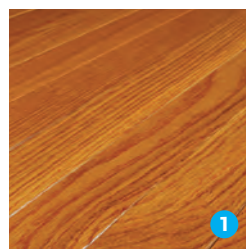
**TIP** Consider Armstrong's Marmorette Oak Brown LP066, \$4.50, which topped other linoleum floors in our tests.

### 6. Ceramic tile

**INSTALLED COST** \$8 to \$15 per square foot; \$5 to \$8 for products that can float. This mineral-based material offers authenticity. Floating products cost less and are easier to install.

**BUT** Dropped items can crack traditional and floating tiles.

**TIP** SnapStone's Beige 11-001-02-01, \$8, aced most of our tests and can float without glue.





# Ranges & more

Follow our decision tree to get one that suits your needs

**NEW RANGES, COOKTOPS,** wall ovens, and even microwaves offer a dizzying number of features and finishes, and come in many sizes and configurations. So when it comes to choosing, you're faced with a lot of decisions in addition to budget and space constraints. Use our guide to help you home in on what's best for you. Then check out our Ratings and choices.

START  
HERE

I LOVE  
TO COOK



One cook or  
two in the  
kitchen?

**One** Look for a gas range with at least one high-power burner (about 15,000 Btu/hr.) or an electric range with at least one high-power element (about 2,500 watts) to deliver heat quickly. Continuous grates let you slide cookware between gas burners without lifting. Expandable electrical elements let you match the pot size to the element. Generous oven capacity with five or more rack positions lets you cook multiple dishes. Not all ranges are great at broiling, so check our Ratings.

**Two or more** A separate cooktop and wall oven gives each of you space to work without bumping into each other. Plus wall ovens put food at eye level, so less bending and lifting are required.



Cooking for  
a crowd?

I WANT  
A PRO-  
STYLE  
RANGE



Gas or  
electric?

**Gas** Most pro-style ranges use gas or propane. Dual-fuel models pair a gas cooktop with an electric oven and top our Ratings. But with all of these high-powered burners, you need to pay attention to ventilation, so check out "Don't Neglect Ventilation," on page 37.

**Electric** You can find a slide-in electric range with a glass cooktop and stainless finish with a sleek built-in look. Induction ranges, which use electromagnetic coils under the glass cooktop, deliver the fastest cooktop heat we've seen and offer precise simmering and control.



Pro or 'faux pro'?

I'M  
PRESSED  
FOR  
TIME



Do you cook  
most meals  
from scratch?

**Yes** Induction cooktops and rangetops bring water to a boil about 25 percent faster than electric smoothtops in our tests and even faster than gas models, though high-power burners or elements help. Convection can trim cooking time by using one or more fans to circulate the hot air in the oven.

**No** Skip the fancy features and go for a basic range with fast cooktop heating. Then get an impressive microwave for reheating, fast cooking, and steaming.



Are you cooking  
for a family?







**Yes** Double-oven ranges let you simultaneously cook different dishes at different temps. Larger, 36-inch cooktops also have more burners or elements; pair one with a double wall oven.

**No** A single-oven range should be fine.

**How important is styling?**

**Very** Check out our advice on pro-style ranges.

**Not crucial** Read our "faux pro" advice.

**Pro** You'll have fun choosing among the stunning colors available (and stainless), knobs that are chunky and others that are red status symbols, and ranges that are 30-inch, 36-inch, and wider. But don't expect top performance; most 30-inch models we tested have small ovens, and baking and broiling were unimpressive; 36-inch models did better. The best offer superb simmering, fast cooktop heat, and impressive baking.

**Faux pro** Many mainstream brands mimic the pro look with stainless steel and beefy knobs and grates; others offer sleek styling in stainless or glossy black or white. Another option is a slide-in range, which has a built-in look and doesn't have a back panel. The controls are up front, so you can show off your backsplash.



**What's your budget?**

**\$4,000 to \$8,000** Lots of choices, but you might have to compromise a bit on performance at the low end of the range.

**\$2,000 to \$4,000** Plenty of options are on page 36.



**Yes** Get into multitasking mode with a double-oven range with convection. Some pair a smaller oven on top with a larger one below; others have two same-sized ovens. Read the manual to make the most of the time-saving convection feature. It's usually in the bottom oven, but some have convection in both. Fast-heating burners help, too. Look for them on a cooktop if you're pairing it with a wall oven with convection.

**No** You can still choose a double-oven range and primarily use the smaller oven for everyday cooking and both for holidays, or get an induction range with for very fast cooktop heat and a convection oven.

**Are looks important?**

**Yes** Stainless remains popular, but you'll also see lots of gray finishes and glossy white and black. Handles are sleeker, and knobs are nicer.

**No** There's a reason white is still a big seller.



**GO TO RATINGS** ➔



## Overview

All of these ranges, either electric or gas, offer features that dedicated cooks will love but can also help speed up cooking when you're pressed for time. But fast cooktop heat and great broiling were a challenge for certain gas and pro-style ranges.

### LOVE TO COOK (ELECTRIC)

**A1 LG** \$1,300  
**A2 Maytag** \$1,700  
**A3 Frigidaire** \$1,400  
**A4 Frigidaire** \$1,800  
**B1 LG** \$1,000  
**B5 Electrolux** \$1,600  
**D1 Samsung** \$2,000

Among double-oven ranges **A1** was the only one to ace all tests. It has two high-power elements for fast heating. **A2** does, too, but broiling and self-clean were mediocre. **A3** has two same-sized ovens. So does **A4**, and it adds convection to both. Super simmering and broiling helped put **B1** on top. **B5** was among the few smoothtop ranges to excel at baking. **D1** is an induction range, and its cooktop heats liquids much faster than standard smoothtops.

### LOVE TO COOK (GAS)

**E2 KitchenAid** \$2,000  
**F1 LG** \$2,000  
**F4 Frigidaire** \$780 **CR Best Buy**

**E2** has a gas cooktop with five burners and two electric ovens. The lower one is larger and has convection. **F1** was one of the fastest gas ranges heating up a big pot of water, and simmering is superb. **F4** has two power burners, convection, and a temp probe for gauging doneness, and costs a lot less than most top picks.

### WANT A PRO-STYLE?

**G1 KitchenAid** \$4,000  
**H1 KitchenAid** \$6,000

Each has a gas cooktop and an electric oven with convection. **G1** is 30 inches wide and offers excellent simmering and impressive baking, but it has a small oven and broiling is so-so. They didn't make our list, but the dual-fuel Kenmore Pro 79523, \$3,800, offered fine baking, broiling, boiling, and simmering, and at \$2,000 the NXR DRGB3001 gas model is worth a look but was mediocre in most tests. Among 36-inch models **H1** was one of the few that did well at broiling. Electric pro-styles aren't common, but **B3**, a \$2,800 smoothtop slide-in range, comes close. It's big on style and excellent overall.



## Ratings Ranges

**Recommended models only** From 163 tested. ✔ CR Best Buy ✔ Recommended

		Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Test results						Features	
Rec.	Rank	Similar models, in small type, are comparable to tested model.		<div><div></div><div>0100</div><div>P   F   G   V   E</div></div>	Cooktop high	Cooktop low	Baking	Broiling	Oven capacity	Oven cleaning	Slide-in model	Convection

### A 30-INCH SMOOTHTOP DOUBLE OVENS

✔	1	LG LDE3037SB	\$1,300	89	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
✔	2	Maytag MET8885XS	1,700	83	•	•	•	○	•	○		•
✔	3	Frigidaire FGFE302TNF	1,400	82	•	•	•	•	•	•		
✔	4	Frigidaire FGFE308TNF	1,800	81	•	•	•	•	•	•		•
✔	5	LG LDE3015ST	1,300	81	•	•	•	•	•	•		

### B 30-INCH SMOOTHTOP SINGLE OVEN

✔	1	LG LRE3083W	1,000	86	•	•	•	•	•	•		•
✔	2	LG LRE3023S	1,000	86	•	•	•	•	•	•		•
✔	3	GE Café CS980SNSS ①	2,800	86	•	•	•	•	•	○	•	•
✔	4	LG LRE3025S	1,250	86	•	•	•	•	•	•		•
✔	5	Electrolux EI30EF35JS	1,600	85	•	•	•	○	•	•		•
✔	6	Samsung NE58F9500WS	1,800	84	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
✔	7	GE P5920SFSS	2,500	83	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•

### C 30-INCH ELECTRIC COIL SINGLE OVEN

✔	1	Kenmore 94142	430	81	•	•	•	○	•	•		
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### D 30-INCH INDUCTION SINGLE OVEN

✔	1	Samsung FTQ307NWGX	2,000	89	•	•	•	•	•	•		•
✔	2	Frigidaire Gallery FGIF3061NF	1,800	81	•	•	•	○	•	•		•

### E 30-INCH GAS AND DUAL-FUEL DOUBLE OVENS

✔	1	LG LDG3037ST	1,900	75	○	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
✔	2	KitchenAid KDRS505XSS ②	2,000	71	○	•	•	•	•	•	○	•
✔	3	GE PGB950SEFSS	2,500	70	•	•	•	○	•	•	•	•

### F 30-INCH GAS SINGLE OVEN

✔	1	LG LSRG309ST	2,000	74	•	•	•	•	•	○		•
✔	2	GE PGS920SEFSS	2,800	73	•	•	•	○	•	○	•	•
✔	3	LG LRG3095ST	1,500	72	○	•	•	•	•	○		•
✔	4	Frigidaire Gallery FGGF3032MW	780	71	○	•	•	○	•	○		
✔	5	Samsung NX58F5500SS	1,000	71	○	•	•	○	•	○		
✔	6	LG LRG3091SW	1,000	71	○	•	•	○	•	○		
✔	7	Kenmore 74132	700	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 OVEN

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

① Has warming drawer. ② Dual-fuel model.

PHOTOS (PREVIOUS SPREAD): COOKING PAN: LISA HUBBARD/GETTY IMAGES; HERBS: SCOTT & ZOE/GETTY IMAGES; OTHERS: GETTY IMAGES



E2 KitchenAid



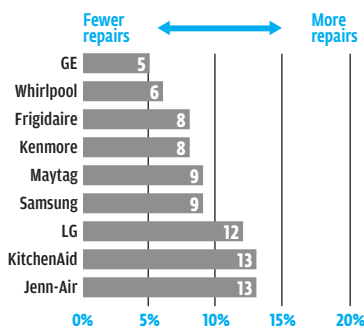
F1 LG

## MOST AND LEAST RELIABLE

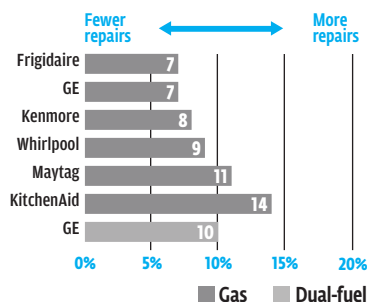
### 45,000 readers sound off

We survey thousands of readers each year about their range experiences. GE was among the less repair-prone brands of electric ranges, and KitchenAid and Jenn-Air were among the more repair-prone brands. KitchenAid was also among the more repair-prone brands of gas ranges.

#### ELECTRIC RANGES



#### GAS RANGES



Source: Consumer Reports Annual Product Reliability Survey. Our findings are based on about 27,000 readers who bought an electric range between 2009 and 2013 and about 18,000 readers who bought a gas or dual-fuel range between 2008 and 2013. 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.

## Don't neglect ventilation

Nothing clears a kitchen full of guests faster than smoke or fish fumes. A range hood is the solution, especially over high-powered pro-style ranges and cooktops. The best range hoods look good and excel at containing and venting smells and smoke, according to our past tests. Prices range from \$150 to \$3,000, with island hoods the priciest, but the most expensive weren't the best. Some have a thin slide-out canopy—an easy way to streamline a space.

Although over-the-range microwaves are multitasking space savers, even the best ones we tested can't eliminate smoke, fumes, and steam as well as a range hood.

Here's what to consider:

### Size matters.

The hood should be at least as wide as the cooking surface below, and 6 or more inches wider if it's an island hood, which doesn't have a wall or cabinets next to it to help funnel fumes.

### Vent it outside.

Keep duct runs short and straight for best results. If an under-cabinet hood will be on an exterior wall, ductwork can be routed through the cabinet and outside, or directly through the back of the hood. Otherwise ductwork must be routed through the cabinet. Wall-chimney hoods are mounted with exposed vent stacks on the wall. Island hoods are mounted to and vented through ductwork in the ceiling.

### Focus on features.

Most hoods have three to six fan speeds; some have variable speeds. You'll want at least two speeds, high for when you have several burners going at once or when using the range-top and oven simultaneously, and a very low, very quiet setting for removing lingering odors. An exhaust timer is handy because it automatically shuts off the fan when it's no longer needed.

### Keep airflow claims in check.

More airflow results in faster venting but doesn't guarantee better capture and removal of fumes and smoke—something to keep in mind when manufacturers' airflow claims tout cubic feet per minute.

## Best brands

We analyzed the 30-inch-wide ranges, both single- and double-oven, that we tested over the past three years to see which brands have performed best. A strong performance history doesn't guarantee that all of a brand's models will be winners, but it boosts the odds.

**Safe bet** Electrolux, GE, LG, and Samsung electric and gas ranges, and Kenmore electric ranges have consistently been top performers in our Ratings, though LG electric ranges have been more repair-prone than GE or Kenmore.

**Relatively safe bet** Frigidaire, Maytag, and Whirlpool electric and gas ranges, and Kenmore gas models have performed well but not as consistently.

**Avoid** KitchenAid electric and gas ranges and Jenn-Air electric ranges have been repair-prone.

## The worst from our tests

Models with overall scores of 40 or less earn this dubious distinction. Poor simmering was a problem for all of the bottom-rated gas ranges and cooktops—chocolate burned on low heat, and tomato sauce bubbled even on the simmer setting. Some of the ranges also were unimpressive at baking or broiling, or had a small oven capacity. The over-the-range microwave was uneven at defrosting, and venting wasn't good. Similar models are noted in small type, and though they haven't been tested, we believe the models are enough alike in specs and features to the tested model that the same results apply.

### Ranges

- **KitchenAid** Architect Series KGRS807SSS, \$1,700 (30-inch gas)
- **American Range** ARR304, \$3,600 (30-inch pro-style gas)
- **Blue Star** RNB304BV1SS, \$3,700 (30-inch pro-style gas)
- **Bertazzoni** A30 4GGGVXE, \$2,400 (30-inch pro-style gas)

A30 4GGVXS

### Cooktop

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

KFGU706VSS

### Over-the-range microwave

- **Sharp** R-1514, \$330





A9 Whirlpool



E3 Thermador

## Overview

These duos offer speed and flexibility.

### LOVE TO COOK (ELECTRIC)

**A9** Whirlpool cooktop, \$700, and

**B1** Whirlpool wall oven, \$1,500

**CR Best Buys**

**A9** has two high-powered, smoothtop elements for quick heating and one expandable element that lets you customize the element to the cookware. **B1**'s large convection oven offers very good baking and superb broiling.

**C2** GE cooktop, \$1,400, and

**A4** GE double wall oven, \$3,600

**C2** uses induction to deliver fast heat and precise simmering. **A4** has two large convection ovens.

### WANT PRO-STYLE?

**E3** LG cooktop, \$1,100

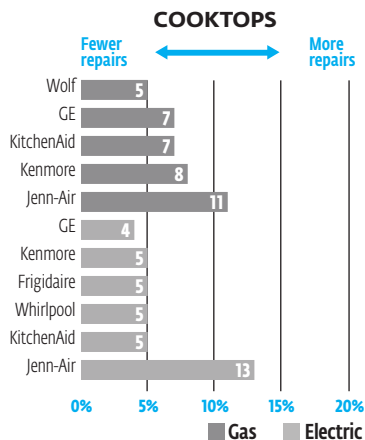
**F1** Thermador cooktop, \$1,900

Both top-performers offer the pro look and have five burners. **E3**, a 30-inch model, has one high-power burner, and **F1**, a 36-inch cooktop, has three. Pair either with any of the recommended wall ovens.

### MOST AND LEAST RELIABLE

## Almost 9,000 readers sound off

We survey thousands of readers each year about their cooktop experiences. Jenn-Air was the most repair-prone brand of electric cooktops. No brand of gas cooktops stood out as most or least reliable.



Source: Consumer Reports Annual Product Reliability Survey. Our findings are based on almost 9,000 readers who bought an electric or gas cooktop between 2009 and 2013. Differences of fewer than 6 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.

# Ratings Cooktops

**Recommended models only** From 56 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

## A 30-INCH ELECTRIC SMOOTHTOPS

✔	1	KitchenAid KECC604BBL	\$ 900	94	●	●	2	0	2	•	•
✔	2	Maytag MEC7430WS MEC7630W	700	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	0	•	•
✔	6	GE Café 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 PP945BMBB	950	86	●	●	2	0	2	•	•
✔	11	Frigidaire FFEC3024LB	500	85	●	●	2	0	2	•	•
✔	12	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	•	•
✔	4	Viking VEC536BSB	2,200	88	●	●	1	3	2	•	•

## C 30-INCH INDUCTION

✔	1	Kenmore 43820	1,700	99	●	●	3	1	0	•	•
✔	2	GE Profile PHP900DMBB	1,400	99	●	●	2	2	0	•	•
✔	3	Kenmore 43800	1,400	97	●	●	3	1	0	•	•
✔	4	Bosch NIT5065UC	1,800	97	●	●	2	0	2	•	•
✔	5	KitchenAid KICU500XB	1,400	95	●	●	2	2	0	•	•
✔	6	Whirlpool GCI3061XB	1,200	95	●	●	2	0	2	•	•
✔	7	LG LCE30845	1,800	93	●	●	1	2	1	•	•

## D 36-INCH INDUCTION

✔	1	Thermador CIT36XKB	5,000	92	●	●	2	1	1	•	•
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## E 30-INCH GAS

✔	1	Bosch NGM8054UC	1,100	79	○	●	1	2	2	•	•
✔	2	Kenmore 32353	1,200	76	○	●	2	2	1	•	•
✔	3	LG LSCG306ST LCG3091ST	1,100	73	○	●	1	3	1	•	•

## F 36-INCH GAS

✔	1	Thermador SGSX365FS	1,900	81	○	●	3	2	0	•	•
✔	2	GE Monogram ZGU385NSMSS	1,400	80	○	●	3	2	0	•	•
✔	3	GE Profile JGP975WEKWW	1,200	80	○	●	1	2	2	•	•
✔	4	Viking VGC536BSS	2,200	80	○	●	3	2	1	•	•
✔	5	GE Café CGP650SETSS PGP986SETSS	1,400	77	○	●	1	3	1	•	•
✔	6	Electrolux EW36GC55GS	1,300	74	○	●	2	2	1	•	•
✔	7	LG LSCG366ST	1,300	74	○	●	2	2	1	•	•
✔	8	Bosch NGM8654UC	1,200	70	○	●	4	0	1	•	•
✔	9	Kenmore 32313 32333	1,100	60	○	●	2	2	1	•	•

# Ratings Electric wall ovens

Recommended models only From 32 tested. ☒ CR Best Buy ☒ Recommended  
 ● Excellent ● Very good ○ Good ○ Fair ● Poor

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Test results				Features		
		Similar models, in small type, are comparable to tested model.			Baking	Broiling	Capacity	Self-clean	Convection	Covered element	Temperature probe
				0 100							
				P   F   G   VG   E							

## A 30-INCH DOUBLE OVENS

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Whirlpool WOD93ECOAS	\$2,500	80	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Maytag MEW9630A	2,700	80	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	KitchenAid KEBS209BSP	3,500	79	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	GE PT9550SFSS	3,600	73	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Whirlpool WOD51ECOAS	2,000	72	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Maytag MEW7630A	1,700	72	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	Bosch HBL5650UC	2,805	72	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8	Bosch HBL8650UC	3,115	72	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

## B 30-INCH SINGLE OVEN

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Whirlpool WOS92ECOAH	1,500	80	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Maytag MEW9530AW	1,400	80	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	KitchenAid KEBS109BWW	2,000	79	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	GE PT9050SFSS PT7050SFSS	2,600	73	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Whirlpool WOS51ECOAS	1,300	72	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Maytag MEW7530AW	1,000	72	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	Bosch HBL5450UC	1,900	72	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

## 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. The performance of double-wall-oven models is based on the electric single-wall-oven category.



A1 Whirlpool

B1 Maytag

## Recommended microwaves

Over-the-range-microwaves free up counter space and can be vented to the outside, though none will vent as thoroughly as a dedicated range hood. We tested more than 50 and have recommended three models, all from GE. They performed impressively and similarly. The models have about the same amount of usable space but differ in features and price.

The \$550 **GE Profile PVM9215SFSS**, which is top-rated, has the programmed settings and four-speed exhaust fan found on the \$400 **GE JVM7195SFSS**. It has a knob as well as touchpad controls. But turning the knob to reach the settings adds an extra step to the programming. The \$250 **GE JVM3160RFSS** is among the least expensive we've tested and is ideal for the basics.

Among large countertop models consider the **GE Profile PEB2060DM[BB]**, \$270, and the Kenmore Elite 74229, \$180.



GE Profile PVM9215SFSS

## SHOPPING TIPS FOR RANGES, COOKTOPS & WALL OVENS

### Dual-fuel ranges.

These pair a gas cooktop with an electric oven. Manufacturers tout more even heating compared with gas ovens. But our tests have found no clear advantages.

### Electronic touchpad controls.

Look for ones that are visible and easy to reach when cooking. A digital display makes it easier to set and monitor the precise temperature.

### Hot-surface lights.

A must on electric ranges and cooktops, they alert you that an element is still hot. It's best if each element has its own light.

### Smoothtop ranges and cooktops.

Easier to clean than coils, but use a non-abrasive cooktop cleaner and a special pad to avoid scratching the surface.

### Induction cooktops and ranges.

These require magnetic cookware, though it's readily available.

### An oven's usable capacity.

It can be a lot less than a manufacturer claims because some manufacturers include nooks and crannies. If you have a favorite large roaster, take it along when shopping.

### Double-oven ranges.

Convection is usually in the lower oven; some have it in both. Double wall ovens usually have convection in the upper oven.

### Double-oven ranges with the oven on bottom.

Imagine yourself lifting a turkey or large roast out of the lower oven. Does it feel too low?



Samsung T9000

# America's most-wanted refrigerators

The newest models go far beyond cooling—and look sleeker than ever

**REFRIGERATORS AREN'T** just where you store the goodies for your next party. Some of the latest models are part of the party, with Bluetooth-enabled sound systems, wine-chilling compartments, and even café-worthy dispensers that serve more than just water. Here are some of this year's top trends:

**Built-in music.** Whirlpool's \$2,900 WRF991BOOM and \$2,700 WRF990BOOM French-door bottom-freezers, which went on sale in June exclusively at Lowe's, can fill your kitchen with dance music on Saturday night—and late-breaking news over Monday morning coffee—via built-in Wi-Fi speakers. Called CoolVox, the feature may be expanded to additional retailers later this year.

**Beyond ice and water.** Superb temperature control and energy efficiency helped put Samsung's four-door RF31FMESBSR, also \$2,900, among our top picks. Care for a wine spritzer? The Samsung can serve sparkling water from its on-the-door dispenser. GE's Café CFE29TSDSS, \$3,000, and CYE23TSDSS, \$3,100, add to those choices with hot water for coffee, tea, or soup. Hidden door-within-a-door compartments, such as those on LG's high-scoring French-door LFX32945ST, \$3,000, and the Kenmore 72193, \$4,150, can also hold an extra six-pack on game day. Expect to see more of those extra doors on side-by-side models, including the ones in Samsung's Showcase series, which we're currently testing.

Forgot to chill that bottle of chardonnay before your guests arrived? The "blast chiller" compartment on LG's LFX31935ST French-

door fridge, about \$3,000, comes with a promise to do that in just 8 minutes. Opt for the newly tested Whirlpool WRX988SIBM four-door model, \$2,600, and you get a middle drawer with adjustable temperature controls for everything from lettuce to beer. This latest Whirlpool narrowly missed our winners' list but did well overall.

**Go big.** For \$3,500, Samsung's four-door T9000 offers almost 23 cubic feet of usable space—the most ever in our tests. And unlike most four-doors, it lets you switch one of those compartments from freezer to fridge to cool extra beverages or hors d'oeuvres.

**Or go slim.** Column refrigerators, which range from about 18 to 30 inches wide and don't include a freezer, fit spots too narrow for most refrigerator-freezers. You can also pair one with a column freezer, available in similar widths, for added flexibility. You'll see several this year from such tony brands as Miele, Sub-Zero, and Viking for about \$6,000 and up—more than most refrigerator-freezers.

You don't have to pay a cool six grand for slimmer storage, however. Kenmore's new Elite 79023, a \$1,450 top pick, squeezes a bottom-freezer design into a svelte 30-inch width. GE's retro-looking Artistry ABE20EGWS bottom-freezer, \$1,100, adds 1960s-style horizontal handles, chrome trim, and an old-school logo plate. It didn't make our Recommended list because it lacks adjustable shelves, among other modern features. But consistent temperature control and impressive energy efficiency make it worth considering if you're after the "Mad Men" look.



## How much will it cost you to run? Decoding the new energy labels

New refrigerators are more energy-efficient than ever. That's important, because they run constantly and use more electricity than any other home appliance. But the black and yellow EnergyGuide labels you'll see at stores—the ones that tell you how much it costs to run an appliance each year—have changed. The way that costs are calculated is different, and that might cause some confusion. The label reflects a tougher new federal energy standard for units made after Jan. 1, 2014.

The new EnergyGuide label is based on a tougher test, plus running costs are based on an average of 12 cents per kilowatt-hour compared with 10.65 cents for labels on pre-2014 models. So if you're considering a leftover 2013 fridge in a showroom, its older EnergyGuide label could lead you to think it uses less energy than a 2014 model, which is probably not the case.

What to do? If you really like an older model—especially if it's on sale—multiply its estimated annual kilowatt-hour use by 1.14 to estimate its true energy consumption based on the updated standard. And check our Ratings for refrigerators that combine top efficiency and performance.



## Get the most from your fridge

### • Check temperatures.

To keep food fresher longer, be sure that your fridge compartment is at 37° F and that the freezer is at 0° F. (Use a refrigerator thermometer; they're available at home centers and online for as little as \$5 or so.)

### • Consider your meal timetable.

Do you have a temperature-controlled drawer? Set it at 42° F if you're storing hors d'oeuvres to keep them cool while unlocking their flavor.

### • Rethink door storage.

Door-mounted milk and butter bins might look convenient, but temperatures can be up to 5° F warmer there. Use door storage for soft drinks, ketchup, and other less spoilable food.

## Can't find a model?

We analyzed Ratings during the past four years to see which brands fared best—and which had multiple models with subpar temperature control, high energy costs, or another flaw. A strong track record raises the odds of getting a good model. For less steady brands, stick with models that scored well in our Ratings.

### SIDE-BY-SIDES

**Relatively safe bets** Frigidaire, Hotpoint, and Maytag

**Less steady** Amana, Electrolux, GE, Kenmore, Samsung, and Whirlpool

**Avoid** Though KitchenAid and LG side-by-sides have performed well in our tests, you should avoid models with icemakers, because our Product Reliability Surveys have found them to be repair-prone.

### TOP-FREEZERS

**Safe bets** Haier and LG

**Relatively safe bets** Frigidaire and Kenmore

**Less steady** Amana, GE, Hotpoint, Maytag, and Whirlpool

### BOTTOM-FREEZERS

**Safe bets** Amana, Electrolux, Frigidaire, Kenmore, KitchenAid, Samsung, and Whirlpool

**Relatively safe bets** LG and Maytag. Though it has had some underperformers in our tests, LG has also had some of the highest-scoring and most energy-efficient models

**Less steady** Fisher & Paykel, GE, and Haier

## SHOPPING TIPS FOR REFRIGERATORS

### Decide: side-by-side, bottom-freezer or top-freezer models.

Bottom-freezers put the most used compartment at eye level. French-door and four-door versions save space with narrow door swings for the upper fridge and, with four-door models, two separate freezer doors below. Side-by-sides also have narrow door swings but require more reaching and bending. Top-freezer fridges cost the least but are also the least stylish. Built-in fridges sit flush with cabinets, but they cost the most and hold the least overall; cabinet-depth models offer the look for less.

**Check the features.** Adjustable shelves can make room for tall items, and temperature-controlled drawers offer cooler temperatures for fish and other delicate fare.

**Check the dimensions.** Width is usually the most critical one, because most fridges fit between counter space. Also be sure that a new fridge will fit through halls and doorways en route to your kitchen.

**Choose a finish.** Stainless still tops the charts because of its neutral, unifying look. Some versions resist fingerprints. Black or white appliances, including Whirlpool's Ice Collection, can also complement many kitchens. Built-in models usually offer panels that can blend in with cabinets.

**Factor in noise.** It's a big deal in open-plan kitchens. Kenmore, LG, and Samsung stand out for quietness among standard refrigerators; Jenn-Air and Thermador are among the quietest built-ins.

## Overview

Our top picks scored at least Very Good for temperature performance. Models highlighted below offer special strengths, value, or both.

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

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

### TOP-FREEZERS

**A2 GE** \$1,400

**A7 Haier** \$600 **CR Best Buy**

The 33-inch **A2** combines superb temperature control with ample capacity. Go for **A7** if you want exceptional value in a unit that's 30 inches wide.

### CONVENTIONAL BOTTOM-FREEZERS

**B1 Kenmore** \$1,510

**B8 Maytag** \$1,150

The 33-inch **B1** combines superb temperature control and efficiency with a spacious interior. Choose **B8** if you want exceptional value in a 30-inch-wide model. Also consider the GE Artistry ABE20EGWS, \$1,100, if you like the retro look.

### FRENCH- AND FOUR-DOOR MODELS

**C3 LG** \$3,000

**D1 Samsung** \$3,500

Choose **C3** if you want a superb French-door model with a door-in-door compartment. **D1** is a true four-door model with maximum usable capacity. Also consider the GE Café CFE29TSDSS, \$3,000, if you want a very good French-door model that dispenses hot water.

### SIDE-BY-SIDES

**E1 Samsung** \$1,300 **CR Best Buy**

**E2 Bosch** \$2,700

The 36-inch **E1** combines value and performance, plus dual evaporators will help maintain freshness. Paying more for the **E2** gets you a cabinet-depth model.

### BUILT-INS

**F2 Jenn-Air** \$7,200

**F4 Thermador** \$8,000

Choose the 42-inch **F2** if you want a built-in with ice and water dispensers. The **F4** offers superb temperature control and French-door styling.



A2 GE



A7 Haier



B1 Kenmore



B8 Maytag



C3 LG

## Ratings Refrigerators

Recommended models only From 205 tested.

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

### A TOP-FREEZERS

✓	1	<b>Frigidaire</b> FKCH17F7HW1	\$ 770	74	● ● ○ ●	16.7 12.7	31 66x32x27
✓	2	<b>GE</b> Profile PTS22LHS[WW] GE Profile PTS22SHS[ ]	1,400	69	● ● ○ ○	21.7 17.1	int. 64 68x33x32
✓	3	<b>Whirlpool</b> WRT771REY[W]	1,100	67	● ● ● ○	21.2 17.7	ext. 54 66x33x34
✓	4	<b>Haier</b> HT21TS45SW	800	65	● ● ● ●	20.7 17.5	53 67x32x32
✓	5	<b>Frigidaire</b> FFHT2126PS	850	64	● ● ○ ●	20.5 16.9	55 69x30x32
✓	6	<b>Haier</b> HT21TS77SP	700	63	● ● ○ ●	20.7 17.6	47 67x32x32
✓	7	<b>Haier</b> HT18TS77SP	600	63	● ● ○ ●	18.2 15.4	41 66x30x31
✓	8	<b>Frigidaire</b> Gallery FGHT2132PF Frigidaire Gallery FGHT2148PF, Frigidaire Professional FPH2188PF	950	63	● ● ○ ●	20.5 16.2	52 70x30x32
✓	9	<b>Frigidaire</b> LFHT2117L[W] (Lowe's)	700	62	● ● ● ●	20.5 17.1	55 69x30x34
✓	10	<b>Kenmore</b> 79433	1,400	62	○ ● ● ●	23.5 19.4	int. 54 69x33x32
✓	11	<b>Kenmore</b> 78892	600	62	● ● ○ ●	18.2 15.1	52 66x30x31
✓	12	<b>Maytag</b> MITXEGMY[W]	770	62	● ● ○ ●	20.4 16.7	59 66x33x31

### B CONVENTIONAL BOTTOM-FREEZERS

✓	1	<b>Kenmore</b> Elite 79043	1,510	83	● ● ● ○	23.8 17.1	59 69x33x33
✓	2	<b>LG</b> LDC24370ST	1,650	83	● ● ● ○	23.8 17.1	59 69x33x33
✓	3	<b>Kenmore</b> Elite 79023	1,450	81	● ● ● ○	21.8 15.8	58 69x30x34
✓	4	<b>Whirlpool</b> Gold GB2FHDWX[Q]	1,200	73	● ● ● ●	21.9 15.3	52 70x33x31
✓	5	<b>Amana</b> ABB2221WE[W] Amana ABB2224WE[ ]	1,000	73	● ● ○ ●	21.9 16.5	56 70x33x32
✓	6	<b>Maytag</b> MBF2258XE[W] Maytag MBL2258XE[ ], Maytag MBR2258XE[ ]	1,100	73	● ● ○ ●	21.9 15.4	52 70x33x31
✓	7	<b>Amana</b> ABB2224BRM	1,250	72	● ● ○ ●	21.9 15.3	56 69x33x31
✓	8	<b>Maytag</b> MBF1958XE[W]	1,150	72	● ● ○ ●	18.5 12.8	50 67x30x31

### C FRENCH-DOOR BOTTOM-FREEZERS

✓	1	<b>LG</b> LFX28991[ST]	2,800	85	● ● ● ○	27.6 18.4	ext. 54 69x36x34
✓	2	<b>Samsung</b> RF261BIAESR	2,100	84	● ● ● ●	25.5 18.8	int. 48 70x36x33
✓	3	<b>LG</b> LFX32945ST	3,000	84	● ● ● ●	32.0 21.6	ext. 71 69x36x35
✓	4	<b>Kenmore</b> Elite 72093	3,400	83	● ● ● ●	32.5 22.5	ext. 71 69x36x35
✓	5	<b>Kenmore</b> 7160[3]	1,700	83	● ● ● ○	25.0 17.5	52 69x36x32

## 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.



D1 Samsung



E1 Samsung



E2 Bosch



F2 Jenn-Air



F4 Thermador

☒ CR Best Buy ☒ Recommended

● Excellent ● Very good ○ Good ● Fair ● Poor

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

### C FRENCH-DOOR BOTTOM-FREEZERS continued

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	LG LFX33975ST	\$3,000	83	● ● ● ●	32.5 22.3 ext.	71 69x36x35
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	Whirlpool Gold GX5FHTXV[Q] Whirlpool Gold GX5FHDV[ ]	1,600	82	● ● ○ ●	24.8 16.2 int.	60 70x36x33
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8	LG LFX29927ST	2,350	82	● ● ● ●	29.2 19.3 ext.	79 70x36x34
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	9	Samsung RFG298HD[RS] (Lowe's) Samsung RFG296HD[ ], Samsung RFG297HD[ ]	2,800	81	● ● ● ●	28.5 18.6 ext.	74 69x36x35
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	10	LG LFC25776[SW]	1,650	81	● ● ● ○	25.0 18.0	51 70x36x33
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	11	Samsung RF323TEDB[SR]	3,300	81	● ● ● ○	31.6 21.8 ext.	73 69x36x36
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	12	Kenmore Elite 72193	4,150	80	● ● ● ●	32.0 21.7 ext.	77 69x36x35
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	13	Kenmore Elite 7103[2]	2,600	79	● ● ● ○	25.0 16.9 ext.	67 70x33x33
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	14	LG LFX31925[ST] LG LFX31915ST, LG LFX31935ST	2,900	79	● ● ● ●	31.0 19.4 ext.	73 69x36x34

### D FOUR-DOOR FRENCH-DOOR BOTTOM-FREEZERS

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Samsung T9000 RF32FMQDBSR	3,500	83	● ● ● ●	31.8 22.9 ext.	70 72x36x36
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Samsung RF31FMESBSR	2,900	79	● ● ● ●	30.5 19.0 ext.	69 69x36x36

### E SIDE-BY-SIDES

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Samsung RS265TD[WP] Samsung RS263TD[ ], Samsung RS267TD[ ]	1,300	76	● ● ● ●	25.5 18.1 ext.	73 70x36x34
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Bosch Linea 800 B22CS80SN[S] Bosch B22CS50SN[ ]*	2,700	74	● ● ● ●	21.7 14.5 ext.	75 70x36x28
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	DCS RX215PJX1*	2,500	73	● ● ● ○	21.5 15.7	62 70x36x28
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Frigidaire Gallery FGUS2676L[P]	1,200	72	● ● ● ○	26.0 16.9 ext.	72 70x36x33

### F BUILT-INS

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Thermador Freedom Collection T36BB820SS	7,400	80	● ● ● ●	20.0 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	Bosch Integra 800 Series B36BT83ONS	7,500	78	● ● ● ○	20.0 13.8	64 84x36x25
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Thermador Freedom Collection T36BT81ONS	8,000	78	● ● ● ○	20.0 13.8	64 84x36x25
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Thermador KBUDT4265E[S]	8,750	77	● ● ● ●	25.2 16.0 ext.	78 84x42x26
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Sub-Zero BI42S[S]	8,000	76	● ● ● ●	24.1 18.3	79 84x42x26
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	Miele KF1901Vi	7,200	76	● ● ● ○	18.3 14.0	65 83x36x24

\*Cabinet-depth.

## The worst from our tests

These models proved to be subpar, with overall scores of just 40 or less (indicating a "fair" rating) out of a possible 100:

#### Top-freezers

- Frigidaire FFTR2126L
- Whirlpool WRT31T5FY
- Maytag M9BXXGMY
- Maytag M1BXXGMY

#### Side-by-sides

- GE GSH22JSDSS
- Whirlpool WRS325FDAM
- Samsung RSG257AA

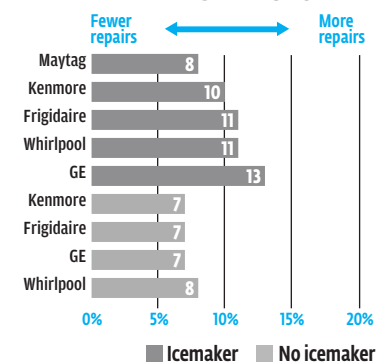
#### Built-in

- Fhiaba Series MG Stand  
Plus MG899TST6/3U

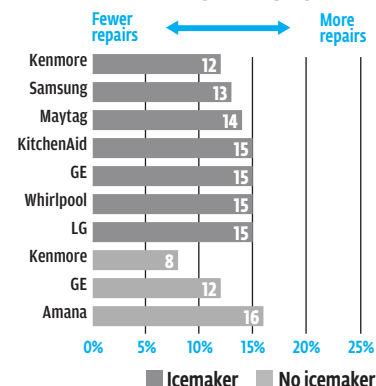
## MOST AND LEAST RELIABLE 68,300 readers sound off

We survey thousands of readers each year about their refrigerator experiences. No top-freezer or bottom-freezer brand stood out, but LG and KitchenAid have been among the more repair-prone brands of side-by-side refrigerators with icemakers.

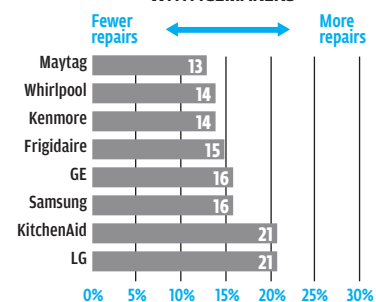
### TOP-FREEZER REFRIGERATORS



### BOTTOM-FREEZER REFRIGERATORS



### SIDE-BY-SIDE REFRIGERATORS WITH ICEMAKERS



Source: Consumer Reports Annual Product Reliability Survey. Our findings are based on more than 68,300 freestanding refrigerators that readers bought new between 2009 and 2013. Differences of fewer than 5 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. Still, choosing a reliable brand can improve your odds of getting a reliable model.





Bosch's  
Ascenta  
SHX3AR7[5]UC

# Dishwashers fit for a crowd

Faster, quieter cleaning lets you focus on dinner, not the dinnerware

**FASTER CYCLES** and an arsenal of grime-fighting features help the latest dishwashers handle surprise guests and impromptu parties. Our latest tests of more than 90 models show that some do their work much less noisily, a plus for open kitchens. But you can also pay a lot and get a middling machine. Here's how to navigate the options:

**Speedier cleaning.** Most normal cycles take at least 125 minutes. At 85 minutes, Blomberg's DWT54100SS, \$750, is among the fastest we've tested and just missed our recommended list. A better bet: Bosch's Ascenta SHX3AR7[5]UC, which was quieter, took only 10 minutes longer and costs \$20 less. You can also pay \$2,700 for Miele's Futura Diamond G5975SCSF and get a 50-minute express cycle—though less-than-stellar washing.

**Quieter running.** Less noise ranks right up there with washing performance, space, and speed on shoppers' wish lists. Most of our top dishwashers proved reasonably quiet in our sound-level tests. The top-rated Kenmore Elite 12793, \$1,350, is one of five on our winners list that's exceptionally quiet. It

also aced our washing and energy tests and holds 12 place settings. And as with our other picks, you can load it before dessert and set it to start after the party's over.

**Better grime-fighting.** The best dishwashers should free you from hand-scraping and prerinsing, which slurps up more than 4,000 gallons of water per household each year. GE's Profile PDT750SSFSS, \$1,100, has water jets designed for bottles. It's a top performer. But the side without the jets washed bottles almost as well in a similarly equipped model. We also tested the Storm Wash feature on Samsung's DW80F800UWS, \$800, which sprays extra water on heavily soiled items. It worked well, though a poor ranking in our reliability surveys helped keep that model out of our picks.

Our advice for after-party messes: Choose the \$1,200 Kenmore Elite 12783, which washes impressively and has a jet-spray "turbo zone" that worked well. Or opt for the brand's Elite 12793, which has a motorized spray arm that keeps moving—and spraying—if something blocks its path.

## SHOPPING TIPS FOR DISHWASHERS

**Look for smart features.** More machines have quick-wash cycles for lightly soiled loads. A height-adjustable upper rack and fold-down tines for odd-shaped dishes help you tailor the machine to the load. Delay-start settings let you load the dishwasher at night and run it in the morning, a plus for noisy models. More machines also use manual-clean filters (figure on twice a year) without the grinding noise of self-clean filters.

**Consider the controls.** Hidden controls look sleeker, but you might want a visible cycle-status indicator, especially for quiet models.

**Save water.** Prerinsing wastes water. But if you insist on doing it, don't pay extra for tough power-scrubbing features.

## Four steps to cleaner dishes

**1. Load it right.** Face the dirtier sides of dishes toward the spray. Put items with baked-on food on the bottom rack, angled toward the spray. Use silverware slots if your dishwasher has them. And put plastics on top.

**2. Use a good detergent.** Top performers: Cascade Complete ActionPacs, 29 cents per load; Finish Powerball Tabs, 18 cents; Finish Gelpacs, 21 cents; and Finish Quantum Powerball Capsules, 24 cents.

**3. Add a rinse agent.** Even if your detergent is a "complete" or an "all in one" product, a rinse agent promotes better drying, less spotting—and less work.

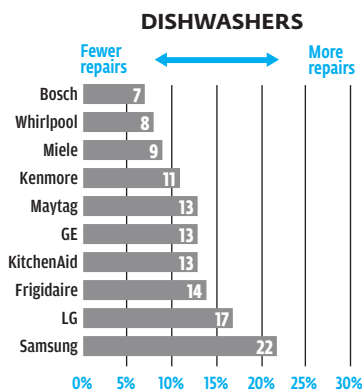
**4. Factor in hard water.** With the wrong detergent, hard water can leave a white film after six cycles. To remove it: Lemi Shine Original, 31 cents per ounce, or Finish Power Up Booster Agent, 40 cents.

## MOST AND LEAST RELIABLE

### 70,000 readers sound off


We survey thousands of readers each year about their dishwasher experiences. Bosch, Miele, and Whirlpool have been among the more reliable dishwasher brands. Samsung has been the most repair-prone brand of dishwasher, with LG close behind.

Source: Consumer Reports Annual Product Reliability Survey. Our findings are based on almost 70,000 dishwashers that readers bought new between 2009 and 2013. 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. Still, choosing a reliable brand can improve your odds of getting a reliable model.



## Ratings Dishwashers

**Recommended models only** From 92 tested.

Brand & model		Price	Overall score	Test results				Features						
Recommendation	Rank	Similar models, in small type, are comparable to tested model.			Washing	Energy use	Noise	Ease of use	Cycle time (min.)	Adjustable upper rack	Self-cleaning filter	Displays remaining time	Ample flatware slots	All-stainless tub
			0	100										
			P   F   G   V   E											
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	<b>Kenmore Elite 12793</b> Kenmore Elite, 12803 Kenmore Elite 12833	\$1,350	<div><div>85</div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	145	<div><div></div></div>			<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	<b>Kenmore Elite 12783</b> Kenmore Elite 12763, Kenmore Elite 12773, Kenmore Elite 12813	1,200	<div><div>82</div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	135	<div><div></div></div>			<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	<b>Bosch Ascenta SHX3AR7[5]UC</b> Bosch Ascenta SHE3AR7 [UC, Bosch Ascenta SHE3ARF [UC (Lowe's), Bosch Ascenta SHX3AR5 [UC	730	<div><div>81</div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	95	<div><div></div></div>			<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	<b>KitchenAid KDFE454CSS</b>	1,500	<div><div>81</div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	140	<div><div></div></div>			<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	<b>Thermador Topaz Series DWHD640JFM</b> Thermador Sapphire Series DWHD650JFM, Thermador Sapphire Series DWHD650JFP, Thermador Topaz Series DWHD640JFP	1,500	<div><div>80</div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	125	<div><div></div></div>			<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	<b>Bosch 800 Plus Series SHX7PT55UC</b> Bosch 800 Plus SHX8PT55UC, Bosch 800 Plus Series SHE7PT55UC, Bosch 800 Plus Series SHP7PT55UC, Bosch 800 Plus Series SHV7PT55UC	1,300	<div><div>80</div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	125	<div><div></div></div>			<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	<b>Bosch 500 Series SHP65T55UC</b> Bosch 500 Series DLX SHP65TL5UC, Bosch 500 Series SHE65T55UC, Bosch 500 Series SHX65T55UC	900	<div><div>80</div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	125	<div><div></div></div>			<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8	<b>Miele Futura Dimension G5675SCSF</b>  Miele Futura Dimension G5675CSF, Miele Futura Dimension G5605SC, Miele Futura Dimension G5670SCVI	1,900	<div><div>80</div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	150	<div><div></div></div>			<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	9	<b>Bosch 300 Series DLX SHX53TL5UC</b> Bosch 300 Series DLX SHE53TL5UC, Bosch 300 Series DLX SHP53TL5UC, Bosch 300 Series DLX SHV53TL3UC, Bosch 300 Series SHE53T55UC, Bosch 300 Series SHP53T55UC, Bosch 300 Series SHV53T55UC, Bosch 300 Series SHX53T55UC	850	<div><div>80</div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	125	<div><div></div></div>			<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	10	<b>Bosch 800 Series SHE68T55UC</b> Bosch 800 Series DLX SHE68TL5UC, Bosch 800 Series DLX SHX68TL5UC, Bosch 800 Series SHV68T55UC, Bosch 800 Series SHX68T55UC	950	<div><div>79</div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	125	<div><div></div></div>			<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	11	<b>GE Profile PDT750SFFS</b>	1,100	<div><div>79</div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	140	<div><div></div></div>			<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	12	<b>Blomberg DWT55300SS</b>	850	<div><div>79</div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	130	<div><div></div></div>			<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>

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

## 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 a load of 10 very dirty place settings; 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.

## Overview

Our top dishwashers scored Excellent for washing tests, meet Energy Star requirements, and come from reliable brands. Models 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.

## QUIET AND CONVENIENT

- Kenmore** \$1,350
- Kenmore** \$1,200
- KitchenAid** \$1,500

All three also offer the best blend of washing and energy saving. **1** and **2** have foldable tines and other convenience features. **4** adds a cycle-time display. Also consider KitchenAid's Architect Series II KDTE554CSS, \$1,600, which slashes water use by using filtered water from the end of one cycle to prerinse the next.

## FASTER AND CHEAPER

- Bosch** \$730 **CR Best Buy**
- Bosch** \$900
- Bosch** \$950

**3** has a 95-minute normal cycle and costs the least, but it has a tub that's only partially stainless. Paying a bit more for **7** buys a cycle-time display; **10** projects a red dot on the floor while the machine is running. Also consider the Blomberg DWT54100SS, \$750, which polished off a normal load in just 85 minutes.

## The worst from our tests

These models proved subpar in our tests, with overall scores of 40 or less out of 100:

- **Frigidaire** FBD2400KS, \$310
- **Hotpoint** HDA3600DWW, \$380
- **Amana** ADB1000AWW, \$260
- **Whirlpool** WDF310PAA[W], \$350
- **Amana** ADB1400PY[S], \$380





# Best places to shop

For appliances, go online—or to your local mom and pop

**HOME DEPOT, LOWE'S, AND SEARS** may sell the most large appliances in the U.S.—and Walmart the most small ones—but they aren't necessarily customer favorites. Our latest survey of more than 22,000 readers shows that Amazon.com and local independent retailers meet or beat the big boys on selection and leave them in the dust when it comes to good old-fashioned service.

Savvy shoppers rated Chicago-area Abt Electronics best overall for large appliances for the fourth year, and for good reason. Abt topped our scores for selection, service, and checkout ease, among other areas, which can mean the difference between a satisfying experience and a shopping nightmare. It was also among the best for low prices, which are the biggest draw for most shoppers. Don't live near the Windy City? Abt ships anywhere within the lower 48 states and sells online from its site and on Amazon.

Online buying is growing fastest for small appliances: Roughly 25 percent were bought that way in 2013 compared with 16 percent the year before. Amazon.com topped most small-appliance retailers and outdid QVC.com for selection. Relatively low prices for both online retailers and better service this year from Amazon are probably part of that strong showing.

Here's how the stores—online and off—compare when judged on price, selection, and service based on almost 30,000 purchases.

**Lowest prices.** Think Best Buy and Costco. Big-box stores such as Home Depot and Lowe's offer one-stop shopping if you're buying lumber along with your fridge. But when it comes to the best large-appliance deals, Best Buy beat them and matched both Abt Electronics and a regional player, HHGregg. Shopping for smaller stuff? No one matched Costco on price; the warehouse club edged out Sam's Club and even Amazon.com and QVC.com.

**Best selection.** Hit Abt, HHGregg, and Pacific Sales. For variety, none of the largest chains matched those three regional retailers for large appliances or Amazon.com for small ones. But if you want to buy food with your food processor, you're likely to get more choices at Target than at Costco, Sam's Club, or Walmart.

**Service and easy checkout.** Shop the locals. As our Ratings show, it's hard to beat your neighborhood mom and pop retailer if you want attentive, knowledgeable salespeople and you prefer a physical store over a virtual one. And when it comes to small appliances, our shoppers gave Kmart, Sam's Club, Target, and Walmart our lowest marks for service. Common complaints included inexpert, hard-to-find sales help. Hate long waits? Then consider skipping Sears, which got mediocre scores for checkout ease. For small appliances, choose Bed Bath & Beyond, Costco, and Kohl's—and steer clear of Kmart, Sam's Club, and Walmart.



## Overview

No appliance retailer earned perfect scores in all areas, though shoppers were relatively satisfied overall. Here are the stores from all categories that offered the lowest prices, the best selection, and the most satisfying shopping experience:

### BEST FOR PRICE

- A1 Abt Electronics
- A6 HHGregg
- A7 Best Buy
- B1 Amazon.com
- B2 QVC.com
- B4 Costco
- B5 Kohl's
- B7 Macy's
- B9 Sam's Club

### BEST FOR SELECTION

- A1 Abt Electronics
- A3 Pacific Sales
- A6 HHGregg
- B1 Amazon.com

### BEST ALL-AROUND CHOICES

- A1 Abt Electronics
- A2, B3 Independents
- B1 Amazon.com
- B2 QVC.com
- B4 Costco

# Ratings Appliance stores

Better ← → Worse

Order	Retailer	Reader score	Survey results							
			Price	Selection	Product quality	Service	Checkout ease	Shipping	Installation	Haul-away
		0100								
A MAJOR APPLIANCES										
1	Abt Electronics	94								
2	Independents	90								
3	Pacific Sales	88								
4	Lowe's	87								
5	Home Depot	86								
6	HHGregg	86								
7	Best Buy	85								
8	P.C. Richard & Son	84								
9	Sears	83								
B SMALL APPLIANCES										
1	Amazon.com	94								
2	QVC.com	93								
3	Independents	91								
4	Costco	91								
5	Kohl's	88								
6	Bed Bath & Beyond	88								
7	Macy's	86								
8	Lowe's	85								
9	Sam's Club	84								
10	Target	84								
11	Sears	83								
12	Home Depot	82								
13	Best Buy	81								
14	Kmart	79								
15	Walmart	77								

## Guide to the Ratings

The charts are based on 22,030 CONSUMER REPORTS subscribers who reported on 29,969 appliance-purchase experiences in the 2013 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 that 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 Excellent to Very Poor. Scores for service are based on contact with company staff except for Amazon.com and QVC.com, which reflect 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.

## SHOPPING TIPS FOR APPLIANCE STORES

**Haggle.** Shoppers who did typically saved \$100 on major appliances and \$50 on small ones. Here's a winning tactic from one of our Facebook followers: See whether you can buy a floor model or one that's slightly blemished for less. And try to get any fees for shipping, installation, and haul-away waived.

### Skip extended warranties.

Eighty-five percent of our large-appliance shoppers were encouraged to buy one; P.C. Richard & Son, a New York-area regional chain, proved to be the pushiest.

But our research shows that repairs during the extended-warranty period often cost roughly the same as the warranty. A better bet: Check out our brand-repair Ratings elsewhere in this special section.

### Compare prices online.

Most shoppers who checked prices before buying online or at a store got a better deal overall. Taking advantage of online coupons and e-mail offers also helped.

### Shop at a 'real' store.

One in three shoppers who bought a major appliance online checked it out at a walk-in store first—and then saved roughly \$75, on average. But don't rule out walk-in stores when it comes to buying: All of the major ones in our survey offer "meet or beat" price policies. Stores may also sweeten the deal in other ways (including free shipping and installation).

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# Lab Tests

## A hot new way to watch TV

**AMAZON, ALREADY A BIG** name in streaming video services, has waded deeper into the stream with a device to help you watch TV more easily. In our tests we found its Amazon Fire TV, \$100, to be a fast, easy-to-use media player with some unique features, including voice command.

Media players let you pick and choose TV shows and movies from a library of titles and watch them whenever you want. Fire TV streams video from Amazon's Instant Video (pay-per-view) and Prime (subscription) services, as well as from Hulu Plus, Netflix, and a few others. The small set-top box plugs into your TV's HDMI input and connects to your home network via Wi-Fi or a wired Ethernet connection. Here are some of its key features:

**Search by voice.** You can look for movies and TV shows using voice commands rather than tediously choosing letters from an on-screen keypad. Just hold the search button and speak a title, actor, director, or even genre into the remote's microphone. When you find what you want, there's an option to see which content providers have that title and what it costs. (The feature worked only with the Amazon and Hulu Plus services at the time of our test, but Amazon says it now works with Crackle, Showtime Anytime, and Vevo.)

**Viewing-habits monitor.** A feature called ASAP keeps track of your viewing and can predict what you're likely to watch so that content is cached and ready to play. Videos and movies from Amazon Prime and Instant Video loaded almost instantly. Other services, such as Hulu Plus and Netflix, didn't appear to use the ASAP feature, but operation was still on par with the Roku 3 and other better-performing players.

**Game time.** Fire TV has a more advanced casual gaming platform than what we've seen on other players. Right now the number of games is limited, but the one we tested had better graphics and more involved game



### TALK, DON'T TYPE

A unique feature of Amazon Fire TV is the ability to use voice commands spoken into the remote control's microphone to search for TV shows and movies. It's much easier than typing letters using an onscreen keypad.

play than we've seen from other streaming devices. You can play simpler games using the remote (provided), but die-hard gamers will probably opt for an optional Fire Game Controller (about \$40). More advanced games are expected later this year.

**Just for kids.** Another unique feature that's coming soon is a dedicated area called Free Time, for kids ages 3 to 8. Parental controls let you choose what your kids can watch and set time limits for viewing. Kids can't exit this space without a password.

**Second-screen capability.** Fire TV works in tandem with a Kindle Fire HDX tablet. (Amazon says it will support other Android phones and tablets and Apple devices in the future.) Using Miracast technology, Fire TV displays whatever is shown on the Kindle's screen, including videos, on the TV. You can search for a title on the Kindle Fire HDX and "fling" it to your TV with a push of a button. You can also use the X-Ray feature to get more information on a program. Stay tuned for full test results on Fire TV soon.

## Other good choices

Here are a few other streaming media players that we like. All can stream Netflix and several other services.

- **Apple TV, \$100.** This is a solid choice for Apple-centric households with lots of iTunes content. A new version is expected shortly.

- **Roku, \$50 to \$100.** Roku has the most content of any tested player. The Roku 2 (\$70) hits the sweet spot for price and features. The remote's headphone jack is handy for late-night listening.

- **Google Chromecast, \$35.** This stick-styled player plugs directly into a TV's HDMI input. It's the lowest-priced player we've tested.



# Great tablets for gaming

You might not think you need big processing power in a tablet. But we were surprised by the differences we found among them when we tested performance.

Take games. When you think of playing games on a tablet, you probably think of Candy Crush Saga or Angry Birds. But more complex games with demanding graphics have been showing up in app stores, and they actually require more processing power.

The chart at right shows some of the best-performing tablets that cost \$500 or less. All have excellent performance and are top-notch in other ways. Their very high-resolution displays are great for viewing movies and looking at photos. They get at least 10 hours of battery life and are lightweight, so they're easy to tote.

To get an idea of how much difference performance makes, we tried a few games on a Samsung Galaxy Tab Pro 10.1 and on an HP Slate 10 HD, whose performance score was only fair.

First up was Smash Hit, a game where you "fly" quickly through rooms smashing glass shapes. It looked great on the Samsung tablet, but it wouldn't download at all on the HP model.



We were able to play Beach Buggy Blitz with no glitches on both, but the HP tablet didn't pick up graphical elements such as the drops of water that splattered the Samsung screen when we drove a buggy over bridges.

We also took Modern Combat 4 for a spin. That battlefield game has lots of action that taxes the processor. It worked on both tablets, but it was harder to shoot accurately on the HP because it responded more slowly. It also dropped graphical elements such as the flying sparks that show up on the start screen on the Samsung tablet.

## Ratings

Brand & model	Price	Overall score
		0 100
		P   F   G   V   E

### 7- TO 8-INCH SCREENS, WI-FI ONLY

Samsung Galaxy Tab Pro 8.4	\$400	86
Apple iPad Mini with Retina display	400	84
Google Nexus 7 (2nd gen.)	230	80

### 9- TO 12-INCH SCREENS, WI-FI ONLY

Samsung Galaxy Tab Pro 10.1	500	88
Apple iPad Air	500	87
Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 8.9	380	82



## Samsung soups up new smart watch

We're now testing Samsung's Gear 2 smart watch, \$300, and our first impression is that it seems to offer improvements over the original Galaxy Gear watch. Whether the changes are enough to make its high price palatable to more buyers—and to persuade them that they need a smart watch—is still a question.

The new version shares a few cool features with its older sibling. That includes Dialer, which lets you dial and conduct a phone call right on the watch as long as it's connected to a compatible Samsung phone. You can also accept or reject an incoming call; if you reject it, you can send a canned message to the caller, such as "I'm driving" or "I'm in class."

The Gear 2 looks a lot like its predecessor, but Samsung made some smart changes. For one, the microphone was moved from the clasp to the watch's body, so the clasp is less bulky. Even better, the camera—which takes both photos and video—is now in the body rather than the strap.

The Super AMOLED display is impressive: The colors pop, and it's easy to see fine details. We got a little more than three days of battery life in our informal tests, and we used it quite a lot. And like the other new Gear watches, the Gear 2 includes a heart rate monitor, gyroscope, and accelerometer for tracking exercise. We'll have full results in a future issue.

# New rules for cool

Room air conditioners just got cheaper to run, thanks to stricter standards that require Energy Star models to use at least 15 percent less energy than the minimum allowed. That can save you roughly \$90 over the life of the unit. Even tougher standards will affect all models manufactured for next year's cooling season. Meanwhile, our new comfort tests show that this year's best A/Cs can help you chill more quickly and quietly right now:

## Two new picks are tops for comfort.

Our new tests now include how well the models cool the area they're sized for. The small **A1 GE**, a CR Best Buy at \$210, and large **C1 LG**, \$350, aced those comfort tests. So did the **C4 GE**, \$390. But failure to restart itself after we reduced the voltage in our brownout test makes it a bad choice where power is iffy.

## A quiet model has smart-phone control.

Most of our picks on the low setting were roughly as quiet as a running dishwasher. The **A3 Friedrich**, \$575, proved whisper-quiet. It's also the first we've tested that let's you turn it on from your phone or tablet before you get home. Noisiest of this bunch: The \$270 **B3 GE**, which made the most racket on low and high.

**Two others are worth a look.** Nearly all we tested meet the latest Energy Star specifications. Three exceptions: the **A5 Friedrich**, **C2 Sunpentown**, and **C3 Frigidaire**. But consider the large Sunpentown and Frigidaire models for their strong cooling and low prices.

## SHOPPING TIPS FOR ROOM A/Cs

**Get the right size.** A smaller A/C that hums steadily along is more efficient and better at dehumidifying than a larger one that cycles on and off. Figure on 20 British thermal units (Btu/hr.) for each square foot you're cooling.

**Look for smart features.** All of these models add convenience with remote controls, built-in timers, and, except for the **A5 Friedrich**, dirty-filter indicators.

**Check for sales on leftovers.** Even the best of last year's models don't meet the new Energy Star specifications. But six we liked last year—the Kenmore 70051, \$170, and 70101, \$280; Friedrich Chill CP05G10, \$230, and CP08G10, \$340; and Frigidaire LRA067AT7, \$190, and FRA106CV1, \$270—are relatively efficient and still available, possibly at reduced prices.

**Put it in right.** Follow installation instructions so that the unit drains properly. Installing it correctly may help reduce noise.



A1 GE

C1 LG

## Ratings Room 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. EER Max window width (in.)	Comfort Brownout Indoor noise high Indoor noise low Ease of use
				0 100 P   F   G   V   G   E		

### A 5,000 TO 6,500 BTU/HR. (Cools 100-300 sq. ft.; weighs 42-72 lb.)

✓	1	GE AEM05LS	\$210	82	5,450 11.4 38	● ● ● ● ●
✓	2	GE AEM06LS GE AEH06LS (Sam's Club), GE AELO6LS (Home Depot)	230	79	6,050 11.2 38	● ● ● ● ●
✓	3	Friedrich Kuhl SQ05N10B [1]	575	75	5,200 11.2 42	● ● ● ● ●
	4	Frigidaire FFRE0533Q1	205	74	5,000 11.2 37	● ● ● ● ●
	5	Friedrich Chill CP05G10A [2]	220	74	5,450 10.7 36	● ● ● ● ●
	6	LG LW6014ER [3]	180	70	6,000 11.2 34	○ ● ● ● ●

### B 7,000 TO 8,200 BTU/HR. (Cools 250-400 sq. ft.; weighs 48-54 lb.)

✓	1	LG LW8014ER [3]	240	79	8,000 11.3 36	● ● ● ● ●
✓	2	Friedrich Chill CP08G10A [1]	380	76	7,800 11.2 43	● ● ● ● ●
	3	GE AEM08LS GE AELO8LS (Home Depot), GE AEH08LS (Sam's Club)	270	74	8,100 11.4 40	● ● ● ● ●
	4	Frigidaire FFRE0833Q1	265	70	8,000 11.3 37	● ● ● ● ●

### C 9,800 TO 12,500 BTU/HR. (Cools 350-650 sq. ft.; weighs 58-81 lb.)

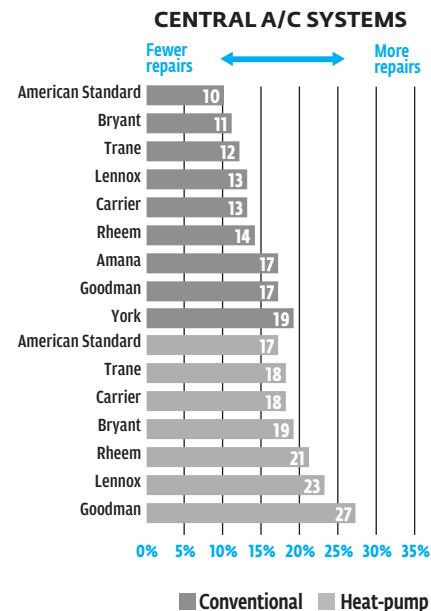
✓	1	LG LW1214ER [1] [3]	350	80	12,000 11.3 39	● ● ● ● ●
	2	Sunpentown WA-1211S [2]	315	69	12,000 10.8 37	● ● ● ● ●
	3	Frigidaire FFRA1022Q1 [2]	300	60	10,000 9.8 38	● ● ● ● ●
	4	GE AEM12AS	390	55	12,000 11.3 38	● ● ● ● ●

[1] Slide-out chassis; eases installation. [2] Not Energy Star qualified. [3] Pre-retail sample tested; we'll check-test retail sample when it's available.

## CENTRAL AIR CONDITIONERS: MOST AND LEAST RELIABLE

These cost thousands to buy and install. But that didn't keep some brands from breaking more often and leaving readers sweating for at least a day, according to our latest reliability survey of almost 34,000 subscribers. York was among the more repair-prone brands for conventional systems, Goodman for systems with heat pumps, which exchange hot air for cool air in summer and cool air for hot in winter, and are a popular option in warmer climes. A better bet: American Standard, which is among the brands with the lowest repair rates for both types.

Source: Consumer Reports Annual Reliability Survey. Findings are based on responses from almost 34,000 readers who bought a conventional or heat-pump central A/C system from 2007 through mid-2013. Graphs show percentage of models for each brand that were repaired; differences of fewer than 5 points aren't meaningful, and data are adjusted to eliminate differences linked solely to age and use.



# The Hot List

A monthly guide to the top products our testers recommend



**75**  
Samsung  
PN51F8500

**72**  
Samsung  
PN51F5500



## TVs

Model	Score
<b>46- TO 52-INCH</b>	
Samsung PN51F8500, \$1,800	75
Samsung PN51F5500, \$850	72
Samsung UN46EH5300, \$650	68
LG 47LA6200, \$700	68
Samsung UN50F6300, \$900	67
<b>32-INCH</b>	
Samsung UN32F6300, \$600	65

Model	Score
<b>29-INCH</b>	
Samsung UN29F4000, \$270	60
Vizio E29i-A1, \$250	58
LG 29LN4510, \$280	58
Toshiba 23L1350, \$200	58
Samsung UN22F5000, \$200	57
Vizio E24i-A1, \$200	56



**87** Cuisinart  
Crystal  
SCC-1000  
Limited Edition  
Perfec Temp

## Coffeemakers

Model	Score
<b>8- TO 14-CUP DRIP MODELS WITH CARAFES</b>	
Cuisinart Crystal SCC-1000 Limited Edition Perfec Temp, \$200 (and similar Perfec Temp DCC-2800, \$100)	87
Mr. Coffee BVMC-SJX33GT, \$40 (and similar BVMC-EHX33CP at Costco, \$30)	83
Kalorik CM 38933, \$60	78
Kalorik CM25282, \$80	75
Black & Decker CM4000S (Target), \$40	74
Frigidaire Professional Programmable Drip FPDC12D7MS, \$90	73



**81**  
Stihl MS 180 C-BE

## Chain saws

Model	Score
<b>GAS</b>	
Stihl MS 180 C-BE, \$230 (and similar MS 181 C-BE, \$270)	81
Husqvarna 435, \$280 (and similar 440E, \$290)	75
Echo CS-352-16, \$270	75
<b>CORDED-ELECTRIC</b>	
Worx WG303.1, \$100	68
Worx WG304.1, \$130	66



**83**  
Stihl FS 38

## String trimmers

Model	Score
<b>GAS</b>	
Stihl FS 38, \$130	83
Stihl FS 45, \$150	82
Husqvarna 223L, \$260	82
Echo SRM-230, \$290	82
Stihl FS 40 C-E, \$190	81
Echo SRM-225, \$220	80
<b>LIGHT-DUTY ELECTRIC</b>	
Green Works 21142, \$90	71
Stihl FSE 60, \$110	70
Black & Decker GH1100, \$70	68
Black & Decker GH2000, \$70	68



# Great for You Great for Us



**76** HP LaserJet  
Pro P1606dn

## Printers

Model	Score
-------	-------

### INKJET

Canon Pixma iP8720, \$250	74
Canon Pixma iX6820, \$200	73
Epson Workforce Pro WP-4010, \$200	72
HP Officejet Pro 251dw, \$230	69

### BLACK-AND-WHITE LASER

HP LaserJet Pro 400 M401dw, \$400	81
HP LaserJet Pro P1102w, \$100	78
Samsung ML-2165W, \$70	77
HP LaserJet Pro P1606dn, \$200	76
Samsung Xpress M2825DW, \$160	75

### ALL-IN-ONE INKJET

Epson Expression Premium XP-810, \$230	73
Canon Pixma MX922, \$200	73
Canon Pixma MG7120, \$150	72
Epson Expression Premium XP-610, \$100	72
Canon Pixma MG5550, \$150	72

### ALL-IN-ONE BLACK-AND-WHITE LASER

Canon ImageClass MF5950dw, \$400	80
Samsung SCX-3405FW, \$200	79
Canon ImageClass MF4890dw, \$300	78
HP LaserJet Pro 400 MFP M425dn, \$500	78
Canon ImageClass MF4770n, \$200	78

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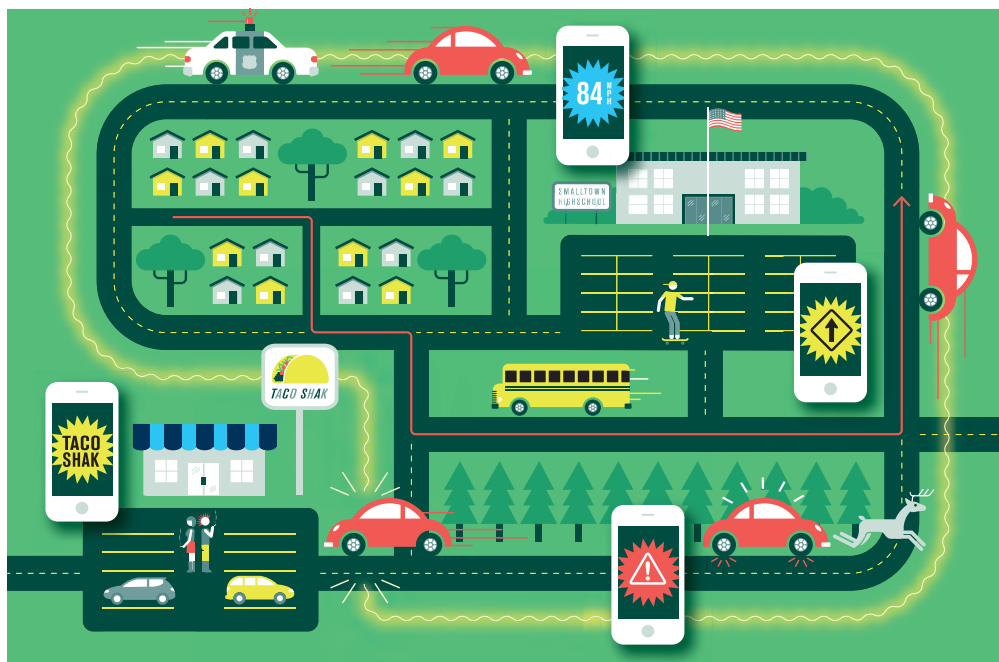
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# Cars



## Track your teen drivers

Car crashes are the No. 1 cause of teenage deaths. But rather than just fretting at home, concerned parents can now monitor their teens while they're driving, checking on such things as the car's speed and location or even its acceleration and braking. It can be done with a small, GPS-enabled device that's plugged into the car's diagnostic port, which is usually under the left side of the dashboard.

We evaluated three models: Mastrack, MobiCoPilot, and Motosafety. They range in price from about \$80 to \$150 and require a monthly subscription fee of \$15 to \$20. We installed them on several test vehicles and had staff members drive them. Then we reviewed online reports of their driving activity. All three models performed well in our evaluations. They work on any vehicle built after 1996.

The devices work similarly overall. With each, you go to a website that lets you set limits for the driver and view a map that shows the vehicle's location and route. If the car exceeds a set speed or other limit, the devices send you an e-mail or a text alert, or both.

On the map, you can also set up a geo-fence around a geographic area, such as a school or workplace, or an entire region. Once set, you'll get an alert every

### What we tested

#### Mastrack

**Price** \$100

**Monthly subscription**

\$15 to \$34 (one month free)

#### MobiCoPilot

**Price** \$150

**Monthly subscription**

\$20 (one month free)

#### Motosafety

**Price** \$80

**Monthly subscription** \$20

time the car crosses a boundary.

You'll also receive an alert if the device is disconnected or reconnected. And you can run a detailed report for a specific time period that can even show where the car was stopped and for how long

### Choose your features

For simple tracking, the \$80 Motosafety might be all that you need. In addition to the options above, it lets you set a separate top speed for highway and secondary roads as well as set the hours of use. It also provides Android and iOS apps that let you see the car's location and driving history.

Moving up to the \$100 Mastrack or \$150 MobiCoPilot gets you some other handy extras. Both will notify you if the car's ignition is turned on or off, so you can see when the teenager arrives at or leaves a location. And they alert you if the car is towed or has engine trouble or a low battery, which could require a quick response. MobiCoPilot also lets you set the hours of operation, and Mastrack shows the vehicle identification number, so you can tell if the teen tries to, well, do a switcheroo.

Of course, before using any of these devices, be sure to explore the privacy practices of the companies. Make sure that you're comfortable with how they treat the information that their products collect.

## Keeping tabs on seniors and others

In addition to monitoring teenage drivers, tracking devices can also help adults stay on top of the location and activities of their elderly parents when behind the wheel.

Being able to find a car on an online map, get a geo-fence notification, or know when a car arrives at or leaves a location can be especially valuable if the parent has health concerns or car trouble, or if he's missing.

Similarly, if a baby sitter or nanny is shuttling your children around, a tracker can keep tabs on their whereabouts and give you an early warning of any trouble.

Companies also use these types of devices to monitor their cars and employee driving behavior.

Be sure to get the consent of anyone that you're considering tracking.



# Four new fuel-efficient cars

The latest hybrids and diesels bring mixed results



**PUMPED UP**  
Hybrids and  
diesels provide  
great fuel  
economy, but be  
sure to look at the  
whole package.

**WHEN CAR BUYERS** think of fuel efficiency, many automatically think of hybrid models. Hybrids we've tested often lead their classes in gas mileage. And they can be ideal for lower-speed urban and suburban driving, when the vehicle can optimize its electric power.

But not all hybrids are created equal. With some, the trade-off for a high miles-per-gallon figure is performance that's less smooth and refined. With others, it's a smaller cargo area or less flexibility in carrying gear. Many automakers also load up their hybrids with extra features, which adds to their already higher sticker prices. And in a few cases, the hybrid's added fuel economy isn't much better than a conventional version of the same model.

Another option for stretching your fuel dollars is a diesel-powered vehicle. Diesels usually provide about 30 percent better fuel

economy than similar gasoline cars. They're commonplace in Europe, but most American drivers haven't warmed to them, perhaps remembering the noisy, smelly, and sooty models of yesteryear.

But today's modern diesels are so much more refined that some can be hard to distinguish from regular gasoline vehicles. Moreover, diesel cars are usually super-efficient while cruising on the highway, so they can be a better option than a hybrid for longer-distance commuters and other frequent freeway travelers.

On the downside, there are relatively few diesel models from which to choose, they generally cost more to buy than their gasoline counterparts, it can be harder to find diesel fuel in some areas, and the fuel is usually more expensive than even premium gasoline. So when comparing vehicles, carefully run the mpg and pump-price numbers

in your area to see which type of car is best for your situation.

## Underachieving hybrids

For this issue, we tested new hybrid versions of the Honda Accord and Subaru XV Crosstrek, as well as new diesel versions of the BMW 3 Series and Jeep Grand Cherokee.

The Accord Hybrid delivered an impressive 40 mpg overall in our combined city and highway fuel-economy tests, which makes it the most efficient midsize sedan we've tested. That said, buyers who are expecting the EPA figure of 47 mpg that's posted on the window sticker may be disappointed. We've found that the EPA tests often exaggerate the fuel economy of hybrids.

Miles per gallon aside, the Accord Hybrid doesn't measure up to the standard Accord in such areas as ride comfort, emergency handling, and quietness. As a result, it scored lower in our tests than the four-cylinder Accord. It costs about \$6,500 more.

The XV Crosstrek Hybrid also left us underwhelmed. In this case, the hybrid version improves slightly on the drivability of the regular one, but it averaged only an additional 2 mpg overall in our tests. Considering it costs about \$3,000 more than the regular version we tested, the hybrid might not be worth the extra money.

## Diesels to delight

The Jeep and BMW diesels turned in a more impressive showing. Compared with their gasoline counterparts, they boosted fuel economy by a significant 6 and 7 mpg overall to 24 and 35 mpg, respectively—without a huge compromise in performance or refinement. And with their excellent highway efficiency of 32 and 49 mpg, they provide lengthy cruising ranges of 785 and 735 miles. You'll pass by a lot of filling stations over that distance.

Both vehicles scored near the top of their classes in our testing.

We can't recommend any of the four models, however, because their powertrains are too new for us to have reliability data.

ROAD-TEST  
SCORE

86



## BMW 328d

**EVEN WITH ITS 240-HP**, 2.0-liter turbocharged four-cylinder gasoline engine, the BMW 328i delivers surprisingly frugal fuel economy. The 28 mpg overall we measured is among the best in its class. For 2014, though, BMW bolted in a new 180-hp, 2.0-liter turbodiesel, changed the “i” to “d,” and left that gas-mileage figure in the dust.

The 35 mpg we averaged in the 328d, even with all-wheel drive, is terrific. In this class, that’s eclipsed only by the 40 mpg of the Lexus CT 200h hybrid, which doesn’t come close to the 3 Series in luxury and sportiness. And the 328d’s 49 mpg highway mileage gives the car a lengthy driving range of 735 uninterrupted miles.

Trade-offs? The 328d’s acceleration isn’t exactly speedy; its 8.5-second 0-to-60 time is more than 2 seconds slower than the 328i’s. But with 280 pound-feet of torque on tap, the diesel packs a nice punch for merging or passing. With some diesel clatter, the 328d is a little noisier than the 328i, but we didn’t find it offensive.

As with other modern diesels, you need to periodically add a urea-based diesel exhaust fluid (DEF) for the car to remain emissions-compliant. BMW covers that, free, for the first four years or 50,000 miles of ownership. Otherwise, DEF is readily available at auto-parts stores.

The diesel engine is matched with the same smooth and seamless eight-speed automatic transmission used in the 328i. No stick shift is available, however.

The ride is firm yet supple and composed. Handling is agile, making the car enjoyable to drive. The cabin is quiet, and interior fit and finish is impressive. The firmly padded front seats are comfortable and

supportive, even for the long haul.

Gripes? The rear seat has received a little more breathing room over the years, but it’s still tight. Some controls remain needlessly complicated. Many functions are managed through the iDrive controller, a knob on the center console that lets you make selections on a big, bright center dashboard screen with large, easy-to-read fonts. But it takes some practice.

As with other 3 Series models, the 328d is an excellent car that boasts high quality, attention to detail, and a long list of high-tech features. Sure, the 3 Series is a bit less engaging to drive than it used to be, but it still delivers a very satisfying and balanced overall driving experience.

The 328d comes equipped with run-flat tires, so there is no spare.

**Best version to get.** Most BMWs come with the Premium package. Adding more options, however, causes the price to climb quickly. Getting blind-spot monitoring requires at least \$5,000 in options. Wow! Still, we’d also get the backup camera, included in an expensive \$950 Driver Assistance package. And if it snows where you live, you’ll probably want the \$2,000 xDrive all-wheel drive and the \$950 Cold Weather package.



### Tested vehicle

<b>HIGHS</b>	Handling, ride, fuel economy, transmission, front seats, fit and finish, visibility
<b>LOWS</b>	Tight rear seat, some complicated controls, diesel-engine noise, pricey options
<b>TRIM LINE</b>	xDrive
<b>DRIVETRAIN</b>	180-hp, 2.0-liter four-cylinder turbodiesel engine; eight-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive
<b>MAJOR OPTIONS</b>	Cold Weather package (heated seats and steering wheel); Driver Assistance package (backup camera, parking sensors); Premium package (moonroof, leather); Technology package (navigation, enhanced Bluetooth)
<b>TESTED PRICE</b>	\$50,475

### More test findings

<b>BRAKING</b>	Short stopping distances.
<b>HEADLIGHTS</b>	Short on forward distance.
<b>ACCESS</b>	Reasonably easy through large doors, but the car is rather low.
<b>VISIBILITY</b>	Thin pillars and a large glass area help. But a backup camera is an expensive option.
<b>CABIN STORAGE</b>	Only a few small compartments.
<b>HEAD RESTRAINTS</b>	Rear-center restraint must be raised to provide protection.
<b>CHILD SEATS</b>	Seat belts that are mounted forward of the seat bite can make it difficult to install child seats.



### GHOST IMAGE

A head-up display projects speed, radio stations, or phone contacts on the windshield for easy viewing.





# Jeep Grand Cherokee diesel

**EVEN AMONG SUVs**, the well-rounded Grand Cherokee stands out for its impressive versatility. When properly equipped, it's capable both off-road and on. The ride is comfortable, and the interior is quiet and well-finished. It's a good choice for trailer towing. And it offers Chrysler's easy-to-use Uconnect infotainment system.

A 2014 freshening brought improved controls, better fit and finish, a slick new eight-speed automatic transmission, an electric steering system, and an available 240 hp, 3.0-liter turbodiesel V6.

Overall, this modern diesel brings a new level of fuel efficiency to the Grand Cherokee while retaining a mostly civilized driving experience. We averaged an impressive 24 mpg, which is a 6-mpg boost in overall fuel economy compared with the 3.6-liter gasoline V6. That ties the Grand Cherokee with the diesel-powered Volkswagen Touareg TDI as the most efficient nonhybrid midsize SUV. With 32 mpg highway fuel economy, the Grand Cherokee can also go a bladder-busting 785 miles without a fuel stop.

The diesel's 0-to-60-mph time of 8.6 seconds is slightly slower than the gasoline V6's 8 seconds. But its whopping 420 pound-feet of torque delivers plenty of midrange grunt for pulling a trailer.

The diesel is barely audible when cruising, but you can hear quite a bit of diesel clatter when it's idling and a distinct thrum when you apply the throttle; it's most noticeable

when starting the engine cold.

The diesel doesn't come cheap, though, adding \$4,500 to \$5,000 to the sticker price depending on the trim line.

You'll need to add diesel emissions fluid (DEF) periodically, but it's easily done through a filler port next to the fuel filler and usually costs only about \$6 per gallon at auto-parts stores.

Pairing the eight-speed automatic with the diesel results in a happy driving combo. Having all that torque on tap means that the transmission doesn't need to downshift much. But quick, responsive, and imperceptibly smooth shifts come when more power is needed. Trailer towing is particularly smooth and effortless.

All of that earned the turbodiesel-powered Grand Cherokee a high test score of 82, which places it solidly near the top of its class. The diesel engine is too new for us to have reliability data, however; reliability for the gasoline version has been well below average.

**Best version to get.** The diesel is available only with the higher-end Limited, Overland, and Summit trim versions. We'd stick with the Limited, which includes such desirable features as a backup camera, a power liftgate, and heated leather seats and steering wheel. If you're pulling a trailer, you'll also want the optional towing package. Unless you plan to do some serious off-roading, stick with the regular four-wheel-drive system and conventional suspension.



## Tested vehicle

<b>HIGHS</b>	Fuel economy, off-road and towing capabilities, seat comfort, fit and finish, easy-to-use Uconnect infotainment system
<b>LOWS</b>	Fussy shift lever
<b>TRIM LINE</b>	Limited
<b>DRIVETRAIN</b>	240-hp, 3.0-liter turbodiesel V6; eight-speed automatic transmission; four-wheel drive
<b>MAJOR OPTIONS</b>	Towing package; Luxury Group II package (HID headlights, Uconnect 8.4, ventilated seats, panoramic sunroof); navigation system; Advanced Technology Group (adaptive cruise; forward collision, blind-spot and lane-departure warnings)
<b>TESTED PRICE</b>	\$49,780

## More test findings

<b>BRAKING</b>	Short stopping distances, with good pedal modulation.
<b>HEADLIGHTS</b>	Low and high beams provide plenty of distance, but the light is somewhat uneven.
<b>ACCESS</b>	Large doors and flush sills help, but it's a bit of a step up.
<b>VISIBILITY</b>	Large windows make it easy to see out.
<b>CABIN STORAGE</b>	There is a lot of easy-to-access storage.
<b>HEAD RESTRAINTS</b>	The rear-center restraint must be raised to provide adequate protection.
<b>CHILD SEATS</b>	Installations are secure, but top tethers are hidden under the cargo flap.



**SOCIAL CLIMBER**  
The Select-Terrain system adjusts the SUV for different off-road conditions.



# Honda Accord Hybrid

**THE ACCORD STANDS OUT** as a comfortable, roomy sedan that's nice to drive and easy to live with. But the last time Honda sold a hybrid version, it was an unconvincing effort that didn't deliver the stellar fuel economy that hybrid buyers are looking for.

This new model remedies that. At a time when many car models are boasting 40 mpg on the highway, the new Accord Hybrid hit that magic mark in our testing for overall mpg—city and highway combined. That ties it with the Honda Civic Hybrid as the most fuel-efficient sedan we've tested, falling shy of the smaller Toyota Prius hatchback by only 4 mpg. That's impressive, but buyers looking for the EPA estimated 47 mpg may be disappointed.

Overall, this is a very impressive hybrid system. Transitions between battery and engine power are very smooth. If you're gentle with the gas pedal, you can drive on battery power alone up to about 25 mph. And even at highway speeds, the engine willingly shuts off as soon as you lift your foot off the gas pedal.

Instead of a conventional transmission, the Accord Hybrid uses a direct-drive system that's similar to those in electric cars. The Hybrid accelerates as quickly as the regular four-cylinder Accord. And it's very quiet when driven gently. Hard acceleration, however, brings a wail from the engine.

Other aspects make the Hybrid less pleasant to drive than other Accords. Instead of the taut yet compliant ride of regular Accords, the Hybrid's ride is choppy, plagued by constant, quick motions. And our car was a bit

sloppy when pushed to its handling limits at our track, oversteering in the sharp turns of our avoidance maneuver and compromising driver confidence.

Braking was also marginal, with relatively long stops, especially for a sedan. As with most hybrids, the brake pedal is a bit touchy and takes some getting used to.

To stretch your fuel dollars even further, you can opt for the Accord Plug-In hybrid, which has a larger battery and, when fully charged, is claimed to go 13 gas-free miles on electric power before reverting to normal hybrid operation. But it costs about \$10,000 more than the basic hybrid, before the \$2,500 federal tax incentive. And monitoring your fuel economy with the car's onboard computer can be a tedious and distracting affair.

In either hybrid, the battery robs some trunk space, although even the larger Plug-In battery leaves adequate room. More limiting is the rear seatback, which doesn't fold for expanding cargo capacity. And there's no spare tire, just a tire-repair kit.

**Best version to buy.** The basic Hybrid provides the best balance of features and price. An EX-L version adds leather and comprehensive electronic safety gear, including forward-collision and lane-departure warnings. But it also comes with the complicated and unreliable HondaLink infotainment system with dual touch-screen displays. We'd stick with the friendlier non-touch-screen system. The top-of-the-line Touring version adds a navigation system and active cruise control, but we'd skip that one.



## Tested vehicle

<b>HIGHS</b>	Fuel economy, hybrid drivetrain, roomy interior, visibility, driving position, lots of features, IIHS crash-test results
<b>LOWS</b>	Choppy ride, complicated trip computer and infotainment system, engine moan when revved, limited trunk space
<b>TRIM LINE</b>	Hybrid
<b>DRIVETRAIN</b>	196-hp, 2.0-liter four-cylinder hybrid engine; one-speed direct-drive transmission; front-wheel drive
<b>MAJOR OPTIONS</b>	None
<b>TESTED PRICE</b>	\$29,945

## More test findings

<b>BRAKING</b>	Relatively long stops.
<b>HEADLIGHTS</b>	Low beams provide good visibility to the front and sides. Halogen high beams provide very good forward visibility.
<b>ACCESS</b>	It's easy to get in and out.
<b>VISIBILITY</b>	Large upright windows, thin pillars, and a standard backup camera provide some of the best visibility of any sedan.
<b>CABIN STORAGE</b>	A good variety of covered and uncovered storage options in various sizes.
<b>HEAD RESTRAINTS</b>	The rear-center restraint is not high enough to provide adequate protection.
<b>CHILD SEATS</b>	Outboard tether anchors that are close to the seatback might make it difficult to fully tighten some tethers.



**TIGHT QUARTERS**  
The hybrid battery robs trunk space and eliminates the folding rear seat.



## Subaru XV Crosstrek Hybrid

**THE XV CROSSTREK** is basically an Impreza hatchback with a higher ride height and more rugged-looking styling. This compact vehicle doesn't provide as much cargo room as most small SUVs. But its 148-hp, 2.0-liter four-cylinder engine helps it deliver a frugal 26 mpg overall, which makes it among the most fuel-efficient vehicles in the class.

For those looking for even better gas mileage, Subaru introduced a hybrid version for 2014. But in our testing, we averaged only 2 mpg more—28—than in the regular XV. For the \$3,000 bump in sticker price over the XV Crosstrek Premium we previously tested, we don't think it's any bargain.

This is a halfhearted hybrid. When we applied the gas pedal gingerly, we managed to creep up to 20 mph on electric power, but only if the outside temperature was above 50° F and we didn't have the heat or air conditioner on. Moreover, this hybrid isn't particularly refined. As with others, a start/stop system shuts off the engine when you come to a stop, but it restarts with a shudder when you're ready to go again.

In addition, the drivetrain sometimes

takes a second to sort out what to do and how to route power at a particular moment, bumping and lurching as it dithers.

At times, the engine also shuts off when cruising to save fuel, but that leaves you without engine braking on steep hills unless you engage it manually with the steering-wheel paddle shifters.

The hybrid does provide some advantages in drivability over the regular XV. The added midrange torque helps reduce engine noise. And the hybrid's ride is more compliant and a bit more comfortable.

With its standard all-wheel drive and 8 inches of ground clearance, the XV can tackle moderate off-road conditions.

The interior comes across as plain vanilla, but it's sensible, reasonably roomy, and highly adaptable, with a spacious rear seat. The hybrid's motor and battery don't protrude into the modest cargo area.

The basic radio and climate controls are among the simplest on the market. But they don't work very well for controlling music players or smart phones. Pairing a phone via Bluetooth is more complicated than in most cars, and the phone often won't reconnect when you restart the car.

**Best version to get.** The base Hybrid trim comes well-equipped with a standard backup camera, automatic climate control, and heated front seats. But overall, the regular XV Premium is a better value. And if scrambling over rocks isn't part of your cross-training regimen, the regular Impreza Sport hatchback makes more sense than either Crosstrek. It rides and handles better, it's quieter, it gets 26 mpg overall, and it costs considerably less.



### Tested vehicle

<b>HIGHS</b>	Visibility, fuel economy, hybrid reduces engine noise, better ride and handling than regular XV, IIHS crash-test results
<b>LOWS</b>	Modest fuel-economy gain for a hybrid, infotainment and connectivity systems are behind the times
<b>TRIM LINE</b>	Hybrid
<b>DRIVETRAIN</b>	160-hp, 2.0-liter four-cylinder hybrid engine; continuously variable transmission; all-wheel drive
<b>MAJOR OPTIONS</b>	None
<b>TESTED PRICE</b>	\$27,132

### More test findings

<b>BRAKING</b>	Short stopping distances, especially on wet surfaces.
<b>HEADLIGHTS</b>	Good low-beam distance and very good high beams.
<b>ACCESS</b>	Very easy up front; easy enough to the rear under the slightly sloping roofline.
<b>VISIBILITY</b>	Very good, with thin windshield pillars and big windows. A backup camera is standard.
<b>CABIN STORAGE</b>	There isn't as much interior utility as you would expect from an SUV.
<b>HEAD RESTRAINTS</b>	Center-rear restraint isn't high enough for protection.
<b>CHILD SEATS</b>	Easy to install in the outboard rear positions.



**EASY GOING** It takes an extremely light touch on the throttle to keep this hybrid in electric mode.



**SUV LITE** Based on the Impreza Sport hatchback, the XV Crosstrek offers decent rear-seat room for its size.



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# Updates to popular sedans

Most models get a major redesign only about every six years, but they often benefit from ongoing improvements and updates in between those big revamps. The updates can fix bugs and help remedy notable criticisms that plagued the cars out of the gate. We've recently tested three widely sold

models that got significant updates for 2014: the Dodge Dart, Honda Civic, and Volkswagen Passat. Each entered the new model year with powertrain changes that help fuel economy and/or performance, as well as other tweaks. Here are our takes on their latest versions:

## Volkswagen Passat

ROAD-TEST  
SCORE  
**82**



**TWO YEARS AGO** Volkswagen's midsize sedan was redesigned and optimized for the American market; that is to say, it grew larger than most competitors, lost some of that crisp European driving feel, and became less expensive.

For 2014, VW replaced the unrefined and thirsty five-cylinder engine with a smooth and responsive 170-hp, 1.8-liter turbocharged four-cylinder. The new engine provides readily available power and boosts gas mileage by 3 mpg to 28 overall, which is commendable for such a large sedan. The six-speed automatic transmission works well enough but isn't quite as refined as the better ones in this category.

On the road, the Passat feels solid and satisfying, with fairly agile handling, a comfortable ride, and a very quiet cabin.

Inside, drivers will find oodles of space, simple controls, good outward visibility, and a comfortable driving position. But the fit and finish isn't that impressive, and the car is a bit stingy with standard features. The seats are large and supportive, even over the

long haul, but some staffers found them to be too hard. The power-operated driver's seat has a handy power-lumbar adjustment.

Rear-seat and trunk room are as generous as in some large sedans. And the Passat's upright stance provides easy access.

The audio system lets you control an iPod or iPhone through the car's controls, but connecting one requires buying a separate cable from VW. And although our Passat SE came with heated seats, a backup camera,

### How they compare

Rec.	MIDSIZE SEDANS	0	100
		P	F   G   VG   E
✓	Toyota Camry Hybrid XLE	86	
✓	Honda Accord LX (4-cyl.)	85	
✓	Toyota Camry LE (4-cyl.)	84	
✓	Hyundai Sonata GLS (2.4)	83	
	Volkswagen Passat SE (1.8T)	82	
	Ford Fusion SE (1.5T)	81	
	Ford Fusion SE Hybrid	80	
✓	Mazda6 Sport	79	
✓	Volkswagen Passat TDI SE	77	
	Nissan Altima 2.5 S	77	
	Honda Accord Hybrid	77	
✓	Kia Optima LX (2.4)	77	

and an up-to-date infotainment system, it skimped on automatic climate control, which should be standard in a car that costs almost \$28,000.

The Passat's reliability has been average, but we lack data on the new engine, so we can't recommend the car yet.

### Auto Ratings update

You might notice that this issue's auto-test scores don't match those in our recent Annual Auto Issue. That's because we've recently modified our scoring system so that the individual ratings we give to certain aspects of a vehicle's performance align better with our testers' assessments and our written reviews. For example, we're now giving more weight in our scoring

to ride comfort and quietness, which are important to many car buyers. And with the acceleration and braking performance of many vehicles improving in recent years, we've raised the bar in those areas. We think the scoring modifications better reflect the preferences of today's consumers and provide a more realistic perspective of how today's vehicles stack up with one another.

ROAD-TEST  
SCORE  
**71**

## Honda Civic

**THIS PERENNIAL** top-selling model has been through a lot lately. After its questionable 2012 redesign, the Civic plummeted in our Ratings, hurt by a choppy ride, cheap interior trim, and a noisy cabin. A quick 2013 revamp that addressed those weaknesses brought it back to respectability. And another update for 2014 brings more incremental changes. A responsive continuously variable transmission helps boost fuel economy slightly to 30 mpg overall and 40 on the highway. And a new uplevel touch-screen infotainment system provides more connectivity features, although it's much less user-friendly.

Those upgrades keep the Civic competitive in a hotly contested segment, although it still scores only midpack in our Ratings.

The Civic's handling, though sound, isn't as agile as that of a Ford Focus or Mazda3. And road noise is reduced, but competitors such as the Chevrolet Cruze and the Focus are quieter and feel more substantial.

Still, the Civic gets kudos for livability. It has one of the most comfortable rides of any compact sedan and a spacious interior, with



✓ **Recommended**

one of the roomier rear seats in the class. And the new CVT works very well with the spirited 1.8-liter, four-cylinder engine.

Even the base LX version comes with plenty of standard features, including a backup camera. EX and higher trims have a push-button start, automatic climate control, and Honda's LaneWatch blind-zone camera, which displays the area to the car's right in the dash screen.

The new infotainment system is new-media friendly, but our testers found it unintuitive and exasperating to use. In lieu of a volume knob, for example, there's a frustrating slider on the touch screen. Also, the onboard computer is frustrating to use.

Regardless of its pros and cons, the Civic's strong resale value and above-average reliability are sure to keep it on the best-seller list.

### How they compare

Rec.	COMPACT SEDANS	0	100
		P	F   G   V   E
✓	Subaru Impreza Premium	79	
	Kia Forte LX (1.8L)	78	
✓	Hyundai Elantra SE (1.8L)	75	
✓	Mazda3 i Touring (2.0L)	72	
	Ford Focus SE	72	
✓	Toyota Corolla LE Plus	71	
✓	Honda Civic EX	71	
	Volkswagen Jetta SE (1.8T)	70	
	Chevrolet Cruze LS (1.8L)	69	
	Dodge Dart SXT (2.4L)	68	
	Nissan Sentra SV	65	

## Dodge Dart

**UPDATED JUST ONE** model year after being launched to a lot of fanfare, the Dart still falls well short of competing with the best models in the class. It has a solid feel and a relatively quiet interior, and it offers certain upscale features that aren't usually found in a compact sedan. But the Dart's Achilles' heel is its powertrains; none of the three available delivers the refinement, performance, or fuel economy of higher-rated competitors.

The biggest change for 2014? The 184-hp, 2.4-liter four-cylinder engine and six-speed automatic transmission are the primary powertrain. That combination is considerably more responsive than the other choices, but it returned a so-so 27 mpg overall in our testing and emits an annoying clatter at idle. Other available engines are the notably underpowered 160-hp, 2.0-liter four, which gets the same 27 mpg overall,

ROAD-TEST  
SCORE  
**68**

and a 160-hp, 1.4-liter turbocharged four-cylinder, which makes the car stumble at low speeds when paired with the optional automated-manual transmission.

The Dart corners responsively and securely, whether cruising on a two-lane backcountry road or being pushed to its limits at our track. The ride is steady, if firm. And you can get a wide variety of optional features that aren't available on many competitors, including a blind-spot warning system, automatic high beams, and a heated steering

wheel. Controls are mostly simple, and the easy-to-use Uconnect 8.4 infotainment system is among the best.

2014 has also brought revisions to the dashboard and seats. But overall, the Dart's interior accommodations still don't measure up well. The front seats aren't supportive enough. Despite the car's generous dimensions, the rear seat is rather tight. And a low roof and thick pillars hinder visibility and access. The Dart also gets rather expensive when you start adding options.

# Cars \ Compare



VERSION	BMW 3 Series	Jeep Grand Cherokee	Honda Accord	Subaru XV Crosstrek
<b>TRIM LINE</b>	328d xDrive	Limited	Hybrid	Hybrid
<b>PRICE: BASE/TESTED</b> <sup>①</sup>	\$40,600/\$50,475	\$38,095/\$49,780	\$29,155/\$29,945	\$25,995/\$27,132
<b>DRIVETRAIN</b>				
Engine	2.0-liter 4-cyl. (180 hp) turbodiesel	3.0-liter V6 (240 hp) turbodiesel	2.0-liter 4-cyl. (196 hp) hybrid	2.0-liter 4-cyl. (160 hp) hybrid
Transmission	8-speed automatic	8-speed automatic	automatic	CVT
Drive wheels	AWD	4WD	Front	AWD
<b>TIRES TESTED</b>				
Model & size	Michelin Primacy MXM4 Zero Pressure, size 225/50R17 94V	Michelin Latitude Tour, size P265/60R18 109T	Michelin Energy Saver A/S, size 225/50R17 94V	Yokohama Geolander G91, size P225/55R17 95H
<b>RATINGS</b>				
<b>PERFORMANCE</b>				
Acceleration	○	○	●	○
0 to 60 mph, sec.	8.5	8.6	7.7	10.1
45 to 65 mph, sec.	5.1	5.3	5.3	6.6
Quarter-mile, sec.	16.8	16.7	16.1	17.9
Transmission	●	●	●	○
Routine handling	●	○	○	●
Emergency handling	●	○	○	○
Avoidance maneuver, speed, mph	54.0	50.5	52.5	53.0
Braking	●	●	○	●
From 60 mph, dry/wet, ft.	132/139	132/145	137/142	131/135
Headlights	●	○	○	○
<b>COMFORT AND CONVENIENCE</b>				
Ride	●	●	○	○
Noise	●	●	●	○
Driving position	●	●	●	●
Front-seat comfort	●	●	●	●
Rear-seat comfort	○	●	●	●
Access	●	●	●	●
Controls and displays	○	●	●	●
Interior fit and finish	●	●	●	●
Trunk/cargo area	●	○	○	●
<b>PREDICTED RELIABILITY</b>	New	New	New	New
<b>FUEL</b>				
Overall mpg	35	24	40	28
City/highway mpg	24/49	17/32	32/47	21/35
Type	diesel	diesel	regular	regular
Capacity, gal./Cruising range, miles	15.0/530	24.6/590	15.9/635	13.7/380
Annual cost, 12K miles	\$1,360 @ \$4.00/gallon	\$2,005 @ \$4.00/gallon	\$1,140 @ \$3.80/gallon	\$1,645 @ \$3.80/gallon
<b>SAFETY</b>				
<b>CRASH TESTS</b>				
IIHS moderate/small-overlap frontal	Good/Marginal	Good/Marginal	Good/Good	Good/Good
IIHS side	Good	Good	Good	Good
IIHS rear	Good	Good	Good	Good
IIHS roof strength	Good	Good	Good	Good
NHTSA front, driver/passenger	●/●	●/●	●/●	●/●
NHTSA side, driver/rear	●/●	●/●	●/●	●/●
NHTSA rollover 2WD/4WD	●/●	○/●	●/NA	NA/●
<b>AIR BAGS</b>				
Side, front/rear	std./no	std./no	std./no	std./no
Head protection	standard	standard	std. w/rollover	std. w/rollover
<b>SPECIFICATIONS</b>				
<b>DIMENSIONS AND WEIGHT</b>				
Length/width/height, in.	183/71/56	190/77/68	192/73/58	175/70/62
Wheelbase, in.	111	115	109	104
Turning circle, ft.	38	39	40	37
Ground clearance, in.	5.0	7.5	5.0	8.0
Curb weight, lb. (% front/rear)	3,705 (51/49)	5,365 (52/48)	3,565 (59/41)	3,445 (60/40)
Maximum load, lb.	905	1,050	850	900
Luggage, suitcases+duffels/cargo volume, cu. ft.	2+1	36.5	2+2	23.0
Towing capacity, lb.	NR	7,200	NR	NR
<b>INTERIOR ROOM</b>				
Front shoulder room, in.	54.5	58.0	58.5	55.0
Front leg room, in.	42.0	41.5	40.5	41.5
Front head room, in. <sup>②</sup>	4.0	4.0	4.0	5.5
Rear shoulder room, in.	54.0	57.0	55.0	53.0
Rear leg room, in.	28.5	27.0	30.0	29.0
Rear head room, in. <sup>②</sup>	2.5	4.5	2.0	3.5

<sup>①</sup> Based on sticker price at time of purchase. <sup>②</sup> Above a person 5'9" tall.



Recommended



Volkswagen Passat	Honda Civic	Dodge Dart
SE	EX	SXT
\$26,395/\$27,485	\$21,090/\$21,880	\$18,495/\$22,025
1.8-liter 4-cyl. (170 hp) turbo	1.8-liter 4-cyl. (143 hp)	2.4-liter 4-cyl. (184 hp)
6-speed automatic	CVT	6-speed automatic
Front	Front	Front
Continental ContiproContact, size 235/45R18 94H	Continental ContiproContact, size P205/55R16 89H	Yokohama Avid S34, size 225/45R17 91H

○	○	○
8.6	9.6	9.3
5.5	6.1	5.9
16.6	17.5	17.2
●	●	●
○	○	●
52.5	53.5	54.5
●	●	●
129/139	128/136	127/134
○	○	○

●	○	○
●	○	○
●	●	○
●	●	○
●	○	○
●	○	○
●	○	●
○	○	○
○	○	○
New	●	New

28	30	27
19/39	21/40	18/37
regular	regular	regular
18.5/525	13.2/400	14.2/380
\$1.615 @ \$3.80/gallon	\$1.505 @ \$3.80/gallon	\$1.705 @ \$3.80/gallon

Good/Acceptable	Good/Good	Good/Acceptable
Good	Good	Good
Good	Good	Good
Good	Good	Good
●/●	●/●	●/●
●/●	●/●	●/●
●/NA	●/NA	●/NA

std./no	std./no	std./std.
standard	standard	standard

192/72/59	177/69/57	184/72/58
110	105	106
38	37	38
4.5	4.5	4.5
3,320 (59/41)	2,830 (61/39)	3,260 (62/38)
1,115	850	825
3+1	2+3	3+1
1,000	1,000	1,000

56.5	56.0	57.5
43.5	41.0	42.0
4.0	3.0	4.5
56.0	52.5	54.5
33.5	27.0	27.5
2.5	2.0	2.0

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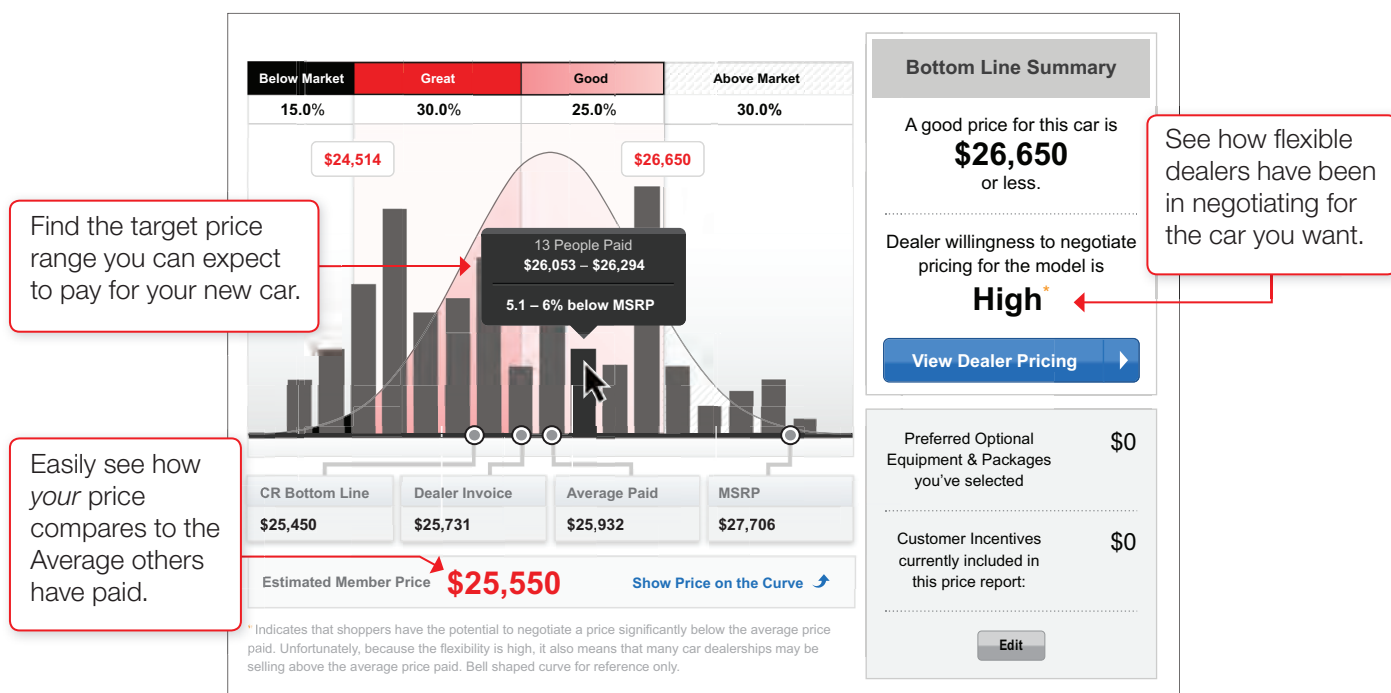
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PE44CURVES1

# Canada Extra

Information from CONSUMER REPORTS® for Canadian readers

## In this special section

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## How to use the Canada Extra section

Every month, Canada Extra provides Canadian pricing and availability information about products tested for that issue. The Ratings in this section are based on this month's reports, but they narrow your choices to the products that are sold in Canada.

You can use this section in either of two ways: Start with the main report, read about the products that interest you, and turn to this section to find whether they're sold—and for what price—in Canada. Or start here, find products sold in Canada whose price and overall score appear promising, and read more about them in the main report and full Ratings chart; page numbers appear with each Canadian report. (For some products, the Canadian model designation differs slightly from the one used in the U.S.)

In most cases, the prices we list here

are the approximate retail in Canadian dollars; manufacturers' list prices are indicated by an asterisk (\*). Check marks identify CR Best Buys or recommended products in the U.S. Ratings. "NA" in a chart means that information wasn't available from the manufacturer. We include, in the Contact Info list on page 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](mailto:CanadaExtra@cu.consumer.org) and tell us what you think. We can't reply to every e-mail message or implement every suggestion, but with your help we'll try to keep growing to serve your needs.

☒ **CR Best Buy** Products with this icon offer the best combination of performance and price. All are recommended.

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

## Room air conditioners

Report and Ratings, page 51

Nine of the 14 tested room air conditioners are available, including four of the recommended models.

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score
				0 100 P   F   G   VG   E

**A** 5,000 TO 6,500 BTU/HR. (Cools 100 to 300 sq. ft.; weighs 42 to 72 lb.)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Friedrich Kuhl SQ05N10B <sup>1</sup>	\$640	75
	4	Frigidaire FFRE05C3Q1	230	74
	5	Friedrich Chill CP05G10A <sup>2</sup>	310	74
	6	LG LW6014ER <sup>3</sup>	NA	70

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score
				0 100 P   F   G   VG   E

**B** 7,000 TO 8,200 BTU/HR. (Cools 250 to 400 sq. ft.; weighs 48 to 54 lb.)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	LG LW8014ER <sup>3</sup>	NA	79
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Friedrich Chill CP08G10A <sup>1</sup>	\$500	76
	4	Frigidaire FFRE08C3Q1	290	70

**C** 9,800 TO 12,500 BTU/HR. (Cools 350 to 650 sq. ft.; weighs 58 to 81 lb.)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	LG LW1214ER <sup>1</sup> <sup>3</sup>	NA	80
	3	Frigidaire FFRA1022Q1 <sup>2</sup>	310	60

<sup>1</sup> Slide-out chassis; eases installation. <sup>2</sup> Not Energy Star qualified. <sup>3</sup> Pre-retail sample tested; we will check-test retail sample when it's available.

# Dishwashers

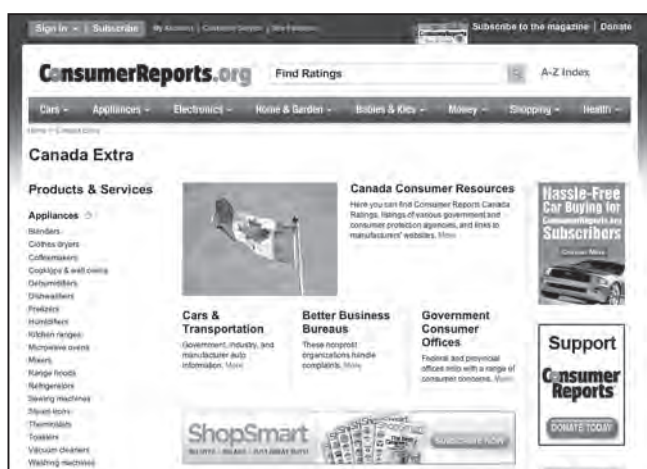
Report, page 44; Ratings, page 45

Recommended models only, from 92 tested.

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score
				0100 P   F   G   VG   E
✓	3	<b>Bosch</b> Ascenta SHX3AR7[5]UC	\$ 900	81
✓	4	<b>KitchenAid</b> KDFE454CSS	1,500	81
✓	5	<b>Thermador</b> Topaz Series DWHD640JFM	NA	80
✓	6	<b>Bosch</b> 800 Plus Series SHX7PT55UC	1,500	80
✓	7	<b>Bosch</b> 500 Series SHP65T55UC	1,250	80
✓	8	<b>Miele</b> Futura Dimension G5675SCSF	NA	80
✓	9	<b>Bosch</b> 300 Series DLX SHX53TL5UC	1,140	80
✓	10	<b>Bosch</b> 800 Series SHE68T55UC	1,100	79
✓	11	<b>GE</b> Profile PDT750SSF55	1,200	79
✓	12	<b>Blomberg</b> DWT55300SS	1,100	79

## 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](http://ConsumerReports.org). Once there, click on the "Canada Extra" link on the opening screen. There you can see which reports have Canadian information available.





# Refrigerators

Report, page 40; Ratings, pages 42-43

Recommended models only, from 205 tested.

	Brand & model	Price	Overall score
Recommendation	Rank		0 100 P   F   G   VG   E

## A TOP-FREEZERS

✓	3	Whirlpool WRT771REY[W]	\$1,120	67
✓	5	Frigidaire FFHT2126PS	900	64
✓	8	Frigidaire Gallery FGHT2132PF	1,000	63

## B CONVENTIONAL BOTTOM-FREEZERS

✓	2	LG LDC24370ST	1,700	83
✓	3	Kenmore Elite 79023	1,600	81
✓	4	Whirlpool Gold GB2FHD[XW][Q]	1,500	73
✓	5	Amana ABB2224WEW	1,200	73
✓	6	Maytag MBF2258XE[W]	1,200	73
✓	7	Amana ABB2224BRM	1,300	72
✓	8	Maytag MBF1958XE[W]	1,200	72

## C FRENCH-DOOR BOTTOM-FREEZERS

✓	2	Samsung RF261BIAESR	NA	84
✓	6	LG LFX33975ST	3,300	83
✓	7	Whirlpool Gold GX5FHTXV[Q]	2,100	82
✓	9	Samsung RFG298HD[RS] (Lowe's)	2,800	81
✓	10	LG LFC25776[SW]	1,900	81
✓	11	Samsung RF323TEDB[SR]	2,500	81
✓	13	Kenmore Elite 7103[2]	2,500	79
✓	14	LG LFX31925[ST]	3,200	79

	Brand & model	Price	Overall score
Recommendation	Rank		0 100 P   F   G   VG   E

## D FOUR-DOOR FRENCH-DOOR BOTTOM-FREEZERS

✓	1	Samsung T9000 RF32FMQDBSR	\$3,300	83
✓	2	Samsung RF31FMESBSR	3,200	79

## E SIDE-BY-SIDES

✓	1	Samsung RS265TD[WP]	1,500	76
✓	2	Bosch Linea 800 B22CS80SN[S] [1]	3,200	74
✓	3	DCS RX215PJX1 [1]	NA	73

## F BUILT-INS

✓	1	Thermador Freedom Collection T36BB820SS	NA	80
✓	2	Jenn-Air JS42PPDUB[SS]	NA	80
✓	3	Bosch Integra 800 Series B36BT830NS	NA	78
✓	4	Thermador Freedom Collection T36BT810NS	NA	78
✓	5	Thermador KBUDT4265E[S]	NA	77
✓	6	Sub-Zero BI425[S]	NA	76
✓	7	Miele KF1901Vi	NA	76

[1] Cabinet-depth.

# Autos

Report and Ratings, pages 56-65

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
FUEL-EFFICIENT CARS								
BMW 328d xDrive (diesel)	\$47,700-\$51,445	3.6	9.0	3.5	19.2	9.8	4.8	6.7
Jeep Grand Cherokee (diesel)	63,040-68,040	3.3	9.2	3.8	19.2	14.1	7.3	9.8
Honda Accord Hybrid	29,645-35,745	3.3	8.1	4.1	18.5	7.3	5.1	5.9
Subaru XV Crosstrek Hybrid	29,995	4.3	10.7	4.6	20.5	11.4	6.7	8.5
MIDSIZED SEDAN								
Volkswagen Passat	23,975-35,475	3.2	9.1	4.2	19.0	12.2	6.0	8.3
COMPACT SEDANS								
Honda Civic	15,690-27,045	4.1	10.1	4.2	20.0	11.0	5.8	7.8
Dodge Dart	15,995-22,995	3.5	9.9	4.2	19.7	12.9	6.3	8.8

## Contact info

How to reach manufacturers in Canada.

### Amana

800-843-0304  
amana.com

### Blomberg

800-459-9848  
blombergappliances.us

### Bosch

866-442-6986  
boschappliances.com

### DCS

888-936-7872  
usa.fisherpaykel.com

### Friedrich

210-546-0500  
friedrich.com

### Frigidaire

800-668-4606  
frigidaire.ca

### GE

800-626-2000  
ge.com/canada

### 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

### Sub-Zero

800-222-7820  
subzero.com

### Thermador

800-735-4328  
thermador.com

### Whirlpool

800-807-6777  
whirlpoolappliances.ca