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RELIABLE  
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**THE TRUTH  
ABOUT DOLLAR  
STORES**

NOVEMBER 2021

# CR Consumer Reports®

✓ **REVIEWS & RATINGS**

Winter/Snow Tires

Multi-Cookers

Air Fryers

WiFi Routers

Pillows Under \$20

Cordless Drills

Portable Pizza Ovens

Toaster Ovens

+ More

**TOP-RATED  
HOME GYM  
BUYS**

**TRANSFORM  
A TINY  
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**CREATE AN  
OUTDOOR  
OASIS**

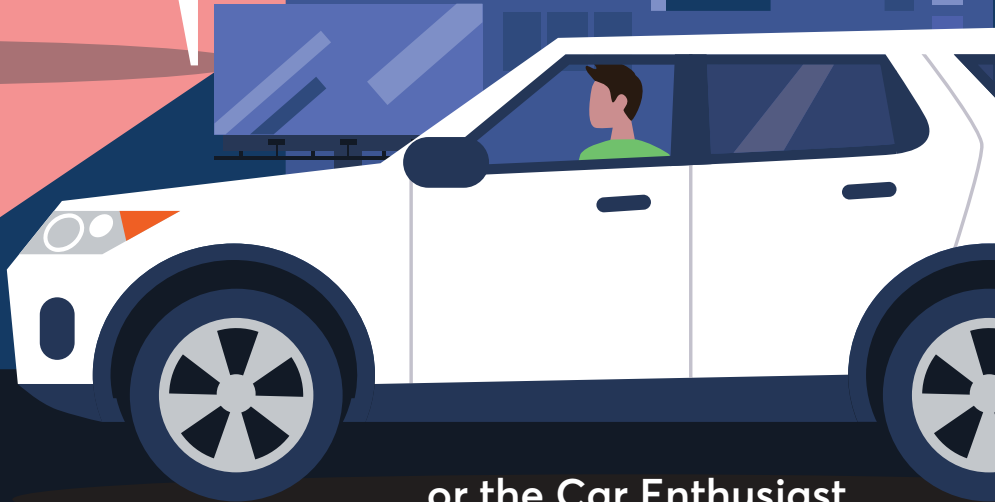
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Consumer Reports is an independent, nonprofit organization founded in 1936 that works side by side with consumers to create a safe, fair, and transparent marketplace. To achieve our mission, we test thousands of products and services in our labs each year and survey hundreds of thousands of consumers about their experiences with products and services. We pay for all the

products we rate. We don't accept paid advertising.

In addition to our rigorous research, investigative journalism, and consumer advocacy, we work with other organizations, including media, consumer groups, research and testing consortiums, and philanthropic partners. We also license our content and data, as well as work with business partners to offer shopping and other consumer services, and may

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See page 67 for more details.

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**RATINGS** Overall Scores are based on a scale of 0 to 100.

We rate products using these symbols:

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✅ VERY GOOD    ⚡ EXCELLENT





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# CR's Fight for Fairness



FOR 85 YEARS, Consumer Reports' committed and science-driven testers, advocates, researchers, and journalists have worked to build a fairer marketplace for all. That work is made possible by our members, who value not only the mission but also our dedication to independence, transparency, and facts.

So I hope you'll join me at this year's Annual Meeting, "Fighting for

Fairness Since 1936: Together We Are CR," on Wednesday, Oct. 20. This virtual event will celebrate our collective achievements, preview the exciting work on the horizon, and feature timely conversations with CR staff on the future of cars, broadband expansion, and CR's newest app.

Car reviews have been foundational to CR's work for decades. But more than ever, we want to both help you find the right vehicle today and shape the auto market of tomorrow. Jake Fisher, from CR's Auto Test Center, will give a look behind the scenes of our test track, and David Friedman, CR's vice president of advocacy, will highlight recent advances in safety and sustainability.

In July, CR and more than 50 partners launched Let's Broadband Together, a crowdsourced investigation of what people really pay for internet access—and what they get for their money. More than 35,000 people have already signed up to help. CR's Jon Schwantes, Leah Fischman, and Ben Moskowitz, who have led this initiative, will share our plans to help millions get better, more affordable internet access.

We know homeowners struggle to keep up with home maintenance, whether it's fixing appliances or keeping their HVAC systems running smoothly. So we will highlight Upkept, a new app CR created just for that. Ted Bongiovanni and Rosaline Bernstein, from CR's new ventures team, will give an overview of Upkept—and what users are saying about it.

If you want to share your thoughts with CR experts on how to build on our legacy and power up for a future that puts consumers first, please RSVP at [CR.org/annual2021](https://www.consumerreports.org/annual2021).

*Marta Tellado*

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## Stopping Furniture Tip-Overs

Every 60 minutes, a child is treated in an emergency room for injuries from furniture that tipped over onto them. Many manufacturers say families should “anchor” their furniture—but that’s not always a viable solution.

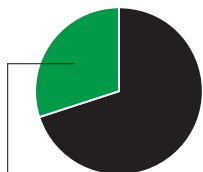
In fact, two-thirds of Americans don’t do that, according to a new, nationally representative CR survey. Reasons include uncertainty about how to find wall studs, and other aspects of installation. And many just say their furniture already seems stable.

But the onus to make these products safe should not be on consumers: CR tests show that it’s possible to design furniture that resists tipping, across a range of prices. So we’re urging Congress to pass the Stop Tip-overs of Unstable, Risky Dressers on Youth (STURDY) Act, which cleared the House in June and awaits a Senate vote. If it passes, the Consumer Product Safety Commission will have to mandate more rigorous testing.

Go to [CR.org/sturdy1121](https://www.consumerreports.org/sturdy1121) to tell your senators to pass the bill, and to [CR.org/anchor1121](https://www.consumerreports.org/anchor1121) for a video guide to anchoring.

351

people have been killed following a furniture tip-over incident, including **286 children**, since 2000.



Only **30%** of people have anchored their furniture to the wall.\*

ILLUSTRATIONS: JOHN RITTER



CALL TO ACTION

When CR members helped test drinking water across the country, the results were deeply troubling: Almost every sample contained measurable levels of PFAS, a group of toxic compounds known as “forever chemicals” because they don’t break down easily in the body or the environment. In July—spurred in part by more than 16,000 emails from CR members—the U.S. House passed the CR-endorsed PFAS Action Act, which would require the Environmental Protection Agency to set a new federal standard for PFAS in drinking water. Help us urge the Senate to do its part, at [CR.org/pfas1121](https://www.consumerreports.org/pfas1121).



## Making Cars Fuel-Efficient

### WHAT’S AT STAKE

In August, President Joe Biden committed to stronger auto pollution standards, issuing an executive order that aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from new passenger vehicle sales by more than 60 percent by 2030, compared with vehicles sold in 2020.

A nationally representative summer 2020 CR survey of 3,879 U.S. adults found that 9 in 10 agree automakers should continue to improve fuel economy for all vehicle types.

But CR advocates feel the proposal by the Environmental Protection Agency to implement Biden’s order doesn’t go far enough, even though

it would represent a big improvement over the rolled-back standards of the previous administration. Unfortunately, the proposal includes loopholes for automakers that make it weaker than it looks on paper. And CR’s analysis shows that it would deliver only 75 percent of the benefits of the fuel efficiency standards established—and agreed to by the auto industry—in 2012.

### HOW CR HAS YOUR BACK

CR advocates are trying to strengthen the new rules before they’re finalized later this year.

In particular, we’re encouraging the Biden administration to adopt a better plan that the EPA included in the same proposal: This “Alternative #2” would eliminate some of the loopholes, strengthen efficiency standards, save consumers up to \$2,100 over the life of the average new vehicle, and put us on track to meet the goals the president has committed to.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

Sign CR’s petition asking the EPA to go with Alternative #2, at [CR.org/epa1121](https://www.consumerreports.org/epa1121).





Our September 2021 investigation “**Danger on Wheels**” revealed that risky tires may still be in use on recreational vehicles on U.S. roads today, and gave important precautions RV drivers need to take to stay safe. To learn more and join the discussion, go to [CR.org/rvtires1121](https://CR.org/rvtires1121).

I JUST READ your article on tire safety. While it is frightening how long the manufacturer got away with using these faulty tires, the problem with trailer/camper tires is much deeper. We have a camper that is only 2 years old and had to replace all the tires before we took our first (delayed) trip! We read an alarming number of stories on a users group for our specific model of camper about tires that blow out for no apparent reason. Two campers on the forum had the spare tire go flat while still in the

bracket on the back bumper. If manufacturers continue to put cheaply made, dangerous tires on every new rig, more folks are going to get hurt.  
—Jean Golden, Millville, MA

YOUR ARTICLE was truly the tip of the iceberg regarding recreational vehicles and safety. With the high demand for RVs continuing due to the pandemic and interest in glamping, they represent a safety concern. Various RVing magazines document monthly numerous safety-related recalls from manufacturers throughout the RV industry. Some of these defects are significant and easily can cause crashes or injuries. I currently own a 2018 Class C motorhome that was

purchased new. Within the first two months of ownership, we had a significant mechanical failure directly related to poor design that could have been disastrous. I believe CR should continue to look into safety and quality concerns within the RV industry, because RV ownership has increased.  
—Howard Gordon, Boulder, CO

**EDITOR’S NOTE** Just like cars, trucks, and SUVs, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration routinely posts recall notices for RVs and tires, at [nhtsa.gov/recalls](https://nhtsa.gov/recalls). We recommend that all RV owners periodically check for recalls. Have your VIN and build date handy when you check.

YOUR “9 Tips for Safer RV Travel” were good, but you should have added a 10th: Stay well back from the vehicle you’re following. It’s easy and cost-free, and improves safety with a heavy vehicle that’s hard to maneuver and stop.  
—Richard Andrews, Springfield, VT



## EXERCISE TIPS

REGARDING your article “The Best New Ways to Work Out at Home” (September 2021): My wife and I depend on Consumer Reports for product insights and ratings. When I saw that the cover of the issue promoted an article on exercise equipment, I raced to read it for ways we might improve our home gym. While readers surely appreciate your thoughts on how to create an online aerobic training experience and your trustworthy treadmill ratings, the lack of attention to resistance training equipment disappointed us. Resistance training becomes increasingly important as one ages, and there seems to be quite a range of options for home resistance training equipment. Learning CR’s scientific take on various options would be very helpful.  
—Paul Chamberlin, Woodbridge, VA

**EDITOR’S NOTE** You are absolutely right that strength training is important. The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans recommend at least two muscle-strengthening workouts weekly. The good news: We now have ratings for adjustable dumbbells, a popular option that works well for small spaces. (Turn to “Create Your



WRITE

Go to [CR.org/lettertoeditor](https://CR.org/lettertoeditor) to share your comments for publication.



Personal Gym,” on page 32, for a CR Best Buy pick.) And for help developing a weekly routine, go to [CR.org/strength1121](https://www.consumerreports.org/strength1121).

IN SEPTEMBER’S “Build Your Own ‘Peloton’ System,” both of the bikes that you recommend lack an essential feature: calibrated resistance, usually a digital readout. Both models appear to use an uncalibrated knob to change the resistance. Without a way to determine the actual resistance selected, it’s all guesswork based on how you happen to feel that day.  
—Pete Matthews Jr., Canton, MA

**EDITOR’S NOTE** The bikes we selected performed very well overall, even though they don’t replicate all Peloton features. Knowing the exact resistance level can certainly be helpful if you want to keep track of your progress. If that’s a feature you want, we suggest the Schwinn IC4, which shows the resistance level as well as numeric values of speed, distance, time, and an estimate of calories burned. (Turn to page 32 for price and rating details.)

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—Richard Siegelman, Plainview, NY



## SMART WAYS TO DECLUTTER

SEPTEMBER 2021’S ARTICLE “How to (Finally) Get Rid of Stuff” was filled with useful information. Two more points that I think are worth mentioning. First, in NYC, there is a useful resource called Materials for the Arts ([mfta.org](https://mfta.org)). MFTA will accept a wide range of items that are often not wanted by other reuse groups, and will find a home for the items with artists and educators. MFTA could be a model for other areas. Second, the article says “donating can also earn you a charitable tax deduction.” This is true, but in my experience the non-cash/in-kind portion of the tax code is mostly useless. Unless one has third-party documentation of the value of a donated item, which usually applies to or is available only for high-end items, the donor estimates the value of the items, and then this deduction is capped at a fairly low number. And even then, this would benefit only people who itemize their taxes.  
—Robert Abrams, PhD, Carmichael, CA



## BETTER WFH SETUP

It’s not necessary to tether yourself to a fixed location to get the benefits of a spacious display screen (regarding “New Reasons to Get a Desktop,” Insights, September 2021). You can get a large external monitor and HDMI cable that plug easily into your laptop. The external monitor can serve as an extension of, rather than a replacement for, your laptop’s screen. The convenience of having both screens open is considerable. You get the best of both worlds—a portable computer plus a large display.  
—Jim Newman, Freeland, WA

**EDITOR’S NOTE** Using an external monitor is a great way to boost not only display size but also the ergonomics of working on a laptop. In this issue, we recommend ways to optimize your home office (on page 32)—including a top-rated monitor, a keyboard, a mouse, and headphones—to improve both your posture and your productivity.



## CHICKEN SAFETY

YOUR SEPTEMBER 2021 article “The Quest for Safer Chicken” was extremely informative. The tips for the safe handling of meat are crucial to avoid disease. Handling chicken as toxic waste is not new: I remember many a Thanksgiving with my mother timing to the minute how long to defrost the bird and cleaning literally everything she could with a bleach spray after. Nothing she used on the turkey was allowed to touch anything else, and all dishes and utensils were washed thoroughly. None of us ever became ill from food poisoning. I certainly learned from my mom.  
—Karlla Smith, Tampa, FL



## CAR TALK

YOUR ARTICLE on preventing car thefts (“How to Prevent Car Thefts,” September 2021) didn’t mention one feature my 2019 Volkswagen has that makes it less likely to be stolen: a 6-speed manual transmission. A smart thief may be able to manipulate the keyless entry, but I’d be willing to bet that many thieves wouldn’t know how to depress the clutch to make the push-button start work and how to drive a standard shift. I bought a manual because that’s what I love to drive, but the reduced likelihood of it being stolen is a nice bonus.  
—Kevin Corbett, Syracuse, NY

# What We're Testing in Our Labs ...

*In our 63 labs, we continually review and rate products. Here, timely picks for this month.*

## WiFi Routers

**WE TESTED:** 56 models  
**WE TEST FOR:** Speed, or "throughput," from 8 to 55 feet away; how well the router protects your privacy; and more.

### ABOUT THE SCORES:

#### INDIVIDUAL

Median: 65, Range: 32-90

#### MESH

Median: 69, Range: 56-85

### BEST INDIVIDUAL ROUTER

**Synology RT2600ac**  
\$200



**90**  
OVERALL  
SCORE

### EXCELLENT MESH ROUTER SET

**Netgear Nighthawk AX1800 (3-Pack)**  
\$210



**82**  
OVERALL  
SCORE

### BARGAIN BUY (INDIVIDUAL)

**Linksys Max-Stream AC1750**  
\$90



**77**  
OVERALL  
SCORE

## Cordless Drills

**WE TESTED:** 47 models  
**WE TEST FOR:** How powerful the drill is and how quickly it can drive in screws and drill holes, how long it will run on a single charge, how noisy it is, and more.

### ABOUT THE SCORES:

Median: 62

Range: 33-86

**HEAVY-DUTY HERO**  
**Milwaukee 2805-22**  
(18 volts, brushless motor)  
\$330



**86**  
OVERALL  
SCORE

**GOOD VALUE FOR GENERAL USE**  
**DeWalt DCD701F2**  
(12 volts, brushless motor)  
\$150



**74**  
OVERALL  
SCORE

**EASY DIY PICK**  
**Worx WX176L**  
(20 volts, 1/4-inch fixed-hex chuck, brushed motor)  
\$80



**62**  
OVERALL  
SCORE

## Ask Our Experts

**I need a cordless drill. Should I get a brushless or a brushed-motor model?**



IF YOU NEED a heavy-duty drill, going with a brushless model is a good bet because it's more powerful and energy-efficient than a brushed-motor model, says CR drill tester Chris Regan. Instead of using small metal contacts called brushes to keep the drill's shaft spinning (the way brushed motors do), brushless models use an electronic circuit board and a sensor. This allows you to automatically adjust the speed, torque, and power supply to match the task at hand. But brushless drills are also more expensive, so if you have only the occasional light-duty task to accomplish, you may be fine with a less expensive brushed model, such as the Worx above.

For the latest ratings of these and other product categories, readers with a Digital or All Access membership can go to [CR.org](https://www.consumerreports.org).

## Winter/Snow Tires

**WE TESTED:** 32 models  
**WE TEST FOR:** Braking performance on dry, wet, and icy roads; traction in snowy conditions; resistance to hydroplaning; and more.

**ABOUT THE SCORES:**

Median: 67  
Range: 54-78

TOP PICK FOR SPORTS CARS  
**Vredestein Wintrac Pro**  
\$180

**78**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



EXCELLENT FOR ALL CARS  
**Bridgestone Blizzak WS90**  
\$130

**73**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



BEST FOR TRUCKS & SUVs  
**Michelin Latitude X-Ice Xi2**  
\$190

**72**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



## Budget Pillows

**WE TESTED:** 18 models  
**WE TEST FOR:** How the pillow maintains its shape after extended use, how well it supports side and back sleepers, how well it dissipates moisture, and more.

**ABOUT THE SCORES:**

Median: 67  
Range: 54-90

GREAT SUPPORT FOR LESS  
**Ikea Lundtrav High Pillow**  
\$13

**68**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



SUPER FOR BACK & SIDE SLEEPERS  
**Beckham Luxury Linens Hotel Collection**  
\$40

**67**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



BARGAIN BUY  
**Mainstays Huge Bed Pillow (Walmart)**  
\$8

**59**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



## Snack Bars for Kids

**WE TESTED:** 10 models  
**WE TEST FOR:** The nutrition benefits/drawbacks of each bar, checking on ingredients and the amount of fiber, sodium, added sugars, and more.

**ABOUT THE SCORES:**

Median: 57  
Range: 47-65

ORGANIC & LOWER IN SODIUM  
**MadeGood Chocolate Chip Granola Bars**  
\$0.75 each

**65**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



FAIRLY LOW IN ADDED SUGARS  
**This Bar Saves Lives Chocolate Chip "Dino" Mite Kids Bars**  
\$1.30 each

**57**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



LOWER IN SATURATED FAT  
**Kind Kids Chewy Chocolate Chip Granola Bars**  
\$0.68 each

**57**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



## Garbage Disposals

**WE TESTED:** 19 continuous-feed models  
**WE TEST FOR:** How quickly and completely the disposal grinds up beef bones and vegetable scraps, how noisy it is during use, and more.

**ABOUT THE SCORES:**

Median: 44  
Range: 24-78

BEST PERFORMANCE OVERALL  
**GE GFC1020N**  
\$215

**78**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



NICE PRICE & LONG WARRANTY  
**Moen EX75C**  
\$150

**74**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



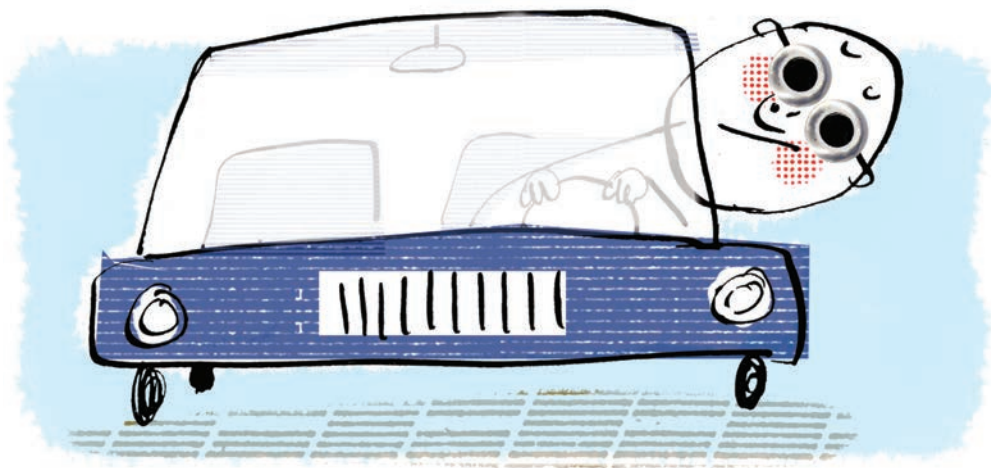
QUICK & QUIET GRINDING  
**InSinkErator Evolution Compact**  
\$260

**63**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



**Note:** We rate different products according to different testing protocols; as a result, Overall Scores of one product category are not comparable with those of another.

COMING NEXT MONTH **Ovens & More**



## What's the best way to defog a car windshield?

ON A COLD DAY, the moisture in the air inside your car quickly turns to condensation and fogs up your windshield. In most cars, the first thing to do is hit the defrost setting on your dashboard. This directs dry, warm air toward the interior of the windshield, which helps melt any ice on its exterior. But it can also turn on your air conditioner, which acts as a dehumidifier, removing moisture from the air in the car and thus helping defog the interior side of the windshield. This process usually takes a few minutes. To speed things up, it may help to crack your windows slightly, especially if you have passengers; their breathing adds moisture to the air. (And be sure recirculation mode is shut off.)

Resist the urge to rub gloves, a napkin, or your hands on

the windshield. This can leave streaks that obscure your view in direct sunlight or when there are oncoming headlights.

### My laptop is 10 years old. Should I replace it?

THERE COMES a time when it's smarter to buy a new laptop rather than struggle to get the old one to do what you want it to. Antonette Asedillo, who oversees CR's computer testing, says there are a few signs that suggest it's time for a new laptop. These include reduced battery life, error messages saying you're running low on disk space, and general sluggishness.

When your battery's health drops to 80 percent of its original capacity, it's a sign that the battery is dying. (To measure battery health, download an app that can gauge battery capacity, such as BatteryInfoView for Windows or Battery Health 2 for macOS.) Newer laptops usually have the ability to stay charged for longer than 12 hours, with some surpassing 20 hours.

As for storage, you may find that your digital needs have outgrown what your old laptop can handle. First, free up space by moving local files and photos to a cloud storage system, such as iCloud or OneDrive. "But keep in mind that a 256-gigabyte solid state drive (SSD) and 8GB of RAM are the minimum many users now require," Asedillo says. If your computer's specs are well below that, it's probably time to get a new one. For a new laptop that should take you through the next 10 years, "you may want to aim for an SSD model with around 512GB of storage and 16GB of RAM, especially if you keep many tabs open in the browser and save files locally," Asedillo says.

New laptops also have multicore processors, which are better suited to handle the complexity of today's websites and apps. If you can't upgrade to the latest operating system (OS), which has the newest security updates, you're putting yourself at risk. "If you're stuck using an old OS or a browser that's no longer supported, your laptop should be replaced," Asedillo says. Microsoft stopped supporting Windows 7 in early 2020. Windows 11 is due to be released this fall, making now a good time for a new laptop.

### Is an organic turkey healthier to eat?

ORGANIC TURKEYS are fed grain that isn't grown using synthetic pesticides (some of which can be harmful to people) and that contains no genetically modified ingredients or foods. The USDA Organic seal from the Department of Agriculture also guarantees that the birds weren't given antibiotics after their first day of life. In conventional farming, these drugs are often administered to healthy food animals to prevent the diseases that crop up, partly because of the crowded conditions in which they're raised. "This kind of use is a big contributor to the development of antibiotic-resistant bacteria," says Michael Hansen, PhD, senior scientist at CR. "That's when the bacteria, including those that cause illness, stop responding to some of the drugs designed to kill them, not just in animals but also in people."

Organic turkeys do tend to be smaller—and cost more—than conventionally raised ones. The difference in price can be about \$1 or more per pound, but near the holidays keep an eye out for better deals. For example, last year Whole Foods reduced the price of organic turkeys from \$3.49 to \$2.99 per pound for Amazon Prime members.



We have more than 140 in-house experts who research, test, and compare. Submit your questions at [CR.org/askourexperts](https://www.consumerreports.org/askourexperts) ... and watch for the answers.



# CR Insights

IN THE KNOW

## Healthier (and Tasty) Fries

AIR FRYERS CAN cook up great-tasting french fries with far less oil than what's required with a deep fryer—which means you get that deep-fried flavor for fewer calories. To make fries that are even healthier than (and just as delicious as) french fried potatoes, try switching to root vegetables like sweet potatoes, parsnips, or yuca (aka cassava), which offer additional nutritional benefits. What follows: easy, healthier air fryer recipes using these fall veggies.



**\$** GoWise USA  
GW22731  
Air Fryer\* \$80

**73** OVERALL  
SCORE



### DIRECTIONS (4 servings)

- 1. Preheat.** Set the air fryer to 380° F or the closest setting.
- 2. Cut.** For sweet potatoes, cut in half lengthwise; then cut each half into even-sized wedges. For parsnips and yuca, cut in half crosswise, then in half lengthwise, then into even rectangular pieces.
- 3. Parboil.** Skip this step for sweet potatoes. For parsnips and yuca, cook the pieces in boiling water, 3 minutes for parsnips, 5 minutes for yuca.
- 4. Season.** In a large bowl, toss the vegetable pieces

with oil, salt, and pepper, and for sweet potatoes, cinnamon.

- 5. Air-fry.** Place pieces (flesh side down for sweet potatoes) in a single layer in the fryer basket. Cook sweet potatoes for 8 minutes; parsnips and yuca, 7 minutes. Using tongs, flip the pieces. Cook sweet potatoes for 8 more minutes, until browned and cooked through. For parsnips and yuca, sprinkle with garlic after flipping and cook for 7 more minutes, until browned and cooked through. Sprinkle parsnip fries with rosemary and yuca fries with parsley.

### Sweet Potato-Cinnamon Fries

(shown)  
2 medium sweet potatoes, scrubbed (leave skin on)  
2 tsp. olive oil  
¼ tsp. salt  
¼ tsp. black pepper  
½ tsp. cinnamon

**Calories:** 110, fat 2 g, fiber 3 g, sodium 200 mg

**Nutrition bonus:**  
Packed with the antioxidant beta carotene

### Rosemary Parsnip Fries

1 pound parsnips, peeled  
2 tsp. olive oil  
¼ tsp. salt  
¼ tsp. black pepper  
2 cloves garlic, chopped  
1 tbsp. chopped fresh rosemary

**Calories:** 115, fat 2.5 g, fiber 6 g, sodium 160 mg

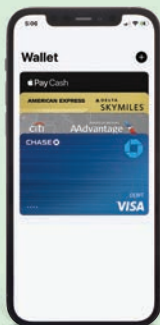
**Nutrition bonus:**  
Twice the fiber of regular potatoes

### Garlicky Yuca Fries

1 large yuca root, peeled  
2 tsp. olive oil  
¼ tsp. salt  
¼ tsp. black pepper  
2 cloves garlic, chopped  
2 tbsp. chopped fresh parsley

**Calories:** 185, fat 2.5 g, fiber 2 g, sodium 160 mg

**Nutrition bonus:**  
About 20 percent of the daily need for vitamin C



## CR TIME SAVER

## SET UP QUICK & SAFE SMARTPHONE PAYMENTS

MOST STORES offer the convenience of making “contactless payments” with your smartphone. You simply hold the back of your phone close to a designated spot on the checkout machine to transmit your credit card payment. There’s no need

to fumble for your wallet, punch in a PIN, or even sign your name, which saves time and helps you avoid germs, too. But many shoppers haven’t gone “contactless,” perhaps because they don’t know how to set it up or are concerned about security. Here are the facts about contactless payment and how to set it up right now.

### FIRST, HOW SAFE IS IT?

Apple Pay and Google Pay, two common branded smartphone apps, are safe forms of encrypted payment—and even have some security advantages over swiping a physical credit card. That’s because your card number is never stored on your smartphone or shared with the store; instead, the app transmits a unique transaction code that is essentially useless to thieves. Your physical credit card, on the other hand, has your data printed on it, which means it’s easily accessible to others if it’s lost or

stolen. What if you lose your phone? No worries there because your digital wallet can’t be accessed unless you unlock the phone via PIN, Face ID, or fingerprint.

### IS IT TRICKY TO SET UP?

Not at all. Most phones have Apple Pay or Google Pay preinstalled, and setting up contactless payment takes a few minutes, says Richard Fisco, who oversees electronics testing for CR. **On an iPhone**, go to Settings, tap “Wallet & Apple Pay,” then “Add Card.” From there, follow instructions to add your credit card. **On an Android phone**, search for Google Pay in your apps. If it’s not preinstalled, you can download the app from the Google Play store, then sign in and follow steps to “Add a Payment Method.”

The next time you’re at the checkout counter, unlock your smartphone and simply hold it where you see the four-wave logo.

## PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

## The Right Mat for Your Workout

YOGA MATS ARE useful for all kinds of workouts—from push-ups to Pilates. But no matter what activity you’re pursuing, there are a few key things for any mat shopper to consider: the amount of cushioning (thickness), how sweatproof the mat is (judged by how quickly it dries), how well it grips the floor (so that it doesn’t slide around underneath you), and how easy it is for your hands and feet to grip its top surface. One last thing: If you’ll be toting a mat to the gym or a park, you’ll want one that’s easy to carry. To help you find your perfect match, our lab tested 19 yoga mats—including three smart picks, at right. (Check out an additional mat, along with advice on setting up a home gym, in “Your Home Revival Guide,” on page 26. Digital and All Access members can also go to [CR.org/mats1121](https://www.consumerreports.org/mats1121) for our full ratings.)

PHOTOS, BOTTOM LEFT TO RIGHT: CONSUMER REPORTS; JAMES WORRELL. PHOTOS, TOP: JOHN WALSH/CONSUMER REPORTS

## CR Time Traveler ENTERTAINING

**1936** Ads advise serving three wines at dinner, which most hosts find too complicated. CR offers simple tips and rates wines for readers.

Domestic Wines	
Since domestic wines are sold under innumerable brands on the market, it is impossible to do more in this report than list some of the large distilleries.	
<b>Best Buys</b>	<b>Also Acceptable</b>
K. Anderson, Inc.	Stewart Jones, Inc.
Fine Industries, Ltd.	Stearns Brothers
	United Wineries, Inc.
<b>Not Acceptable</b>	
Eastern Wine Corporation	
Gallo Industries, Inc.	
Imported Wines	
BORDEAUX	
<b>Best Buys</b>	<b>Also Acceptable</b>
Grise & Co., France	Lucas-Lafont
Sichel & Co.	Beckford Price & Co.
Ed. Roussier & Co.	Thomas Moore
<b>Also Acceptable</b>	
Schmidt & Schuler & Co.	Chateau Pinot de Co.
J. Cabot & Co.	J. Cabot & Co.
Beckford Price & Co.	Lucas-Rigault
Bonnamy & Co.	Jaeger
<b>Not Acceptable</b>	<b>Also Acceptable</b>
Batten & Gossard	Beckford Price & Co.
Chateau	Beckford Price & Co.
Sichel & Co., France	F. Chateau
	Batten & Gossard



**1948** Sharp carving knives are hard to come by, we report. After testing 18 sets, we find that a Universal Stainless Steel set is a good buy for under \$15.

**1954** New deep-fat fryers are handy for buffet-style entertaining, CR says; they keep foods warm. Of the 21 we test, this Presto model is tops.



**1962** CR publishes a new Wines & Spirits Guide for the holiday host—just \$1 for CR members—with some 160 pages of drinks rated by our expert tasters.



## CUSHY CHOICE

The plush HemingWeigh mat has a nonabsorbent top surface that dries quickly and is easy to clean. Because of its soft foam material, it provides a not-as-stable platform for standing poses, but it is good for those who prefer more floor-based exercises, such as mat Pilates. A more cushioned mat can also be preferable for those with back trouble or those who find it painful to lie on the ground.

**HemingWeigh 1 Inch Thick Yoga Mat**  
From \$30

**MATERIAL**  
Nitrile butadiene rubber foam

**THICKNESS**  
17 mm\*

■ 5/5	DRYING
■ 5/5	CUSHIONING
■ 3/5	BOTTOM GRIP
■ 3/5	DRY GRIP

## VERSATILE FOR HOME WORKOUTS

This mat is pricier than most, but it offers very good cushioning with an excellent bottom grip, making it a smart choice for most kinds of workouts on either hard or carpeted surfaces. One drawback: It's slow to dry—so it's not the best choice for workouts where you perspire a lot. It also gives off a strong chemical odor at first, though this faded over time.

**Lululemon Take Form Yoga Mat**  
From \$130

**MATERIAL**  
Natural and synthetic rubbers, and polyurethane

**THICKNESS**  
6 mm

■ 2/5	DRYING
■ 4/5	CUSHIONING
■ 5/5	BOTTOM GRIP
■ 5/5	DRY GRIP

## PORTABLE PICK

This light mat is easy to travel with, and its rubber material provides great grip and quick drying (perfect for sweatier workouts like hot yoga). It does have less cushioning than standard mats. But if you're borrowing a mat from a gym or studio that's used by other patrons, this mat can be rolled out on top—that way, you'll avoid contact with the surface of the shared mat and get extra cushioning.

**Jade Travel Mat**  
From \$65

**MATERIAL**  
Open cell natural rubber

**THICKNESS**  
3 mm

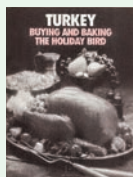
■ 5/5	DRYING
■ 2/5	CUSHIONING
■ 5/5	BOTTOM GRIP
■ 5/5	DRY GRIP

\*CR's lab measurement found the thickness of this mat to be less than the 1 inch claimed in the product's name.

**1973** We label the electric West Bend tabletop meat broiler with rotisserie "Not Acceptable." The drip pan became so hot that fat splattered on users.



**1982** To help speed up food prep, CR's testers suggest a Moulinex La Machine II (below) to blend, grate, grind, and mince foods faster.



**2012** Our testers try 11 packaged stuffings, rating nutrition and taste. Pepperidge Farm Herb Seasoned stuffing is tops for "fresh-tasting" flavor.

**Ayesha Curry Covered Dutch Oven \$70**



**76**  
OVERALL SCORE



**1979** We test new "hot air corn poppers" and tell readers that Native Americans may have brought popcorn to the first Thanksgiving feast. This Wear-Ever rates best.



**1994** CR's experts assess the flavor of roasted turkeys bought either frozen or fresh—and find frozen birds tend to yield juicier meat.



**2021** Our testers say a Dutch oven can pull double duty, moving seamlessly from stovetop to table trivet, no serving bowl required.

## SAFETY UPDATE

# 8 Ways to Prevent Kitchen Fires

MOST HOUSE FIRES start in the kitchen, according to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), and the peak day of the year for a kitchen fire to happen is—you guessed it—Thanksgiving Day. As you multitask like crazy, it's all too easy to get distracted by family, friends, and pets while you try to get your feast on the table. Here are smart ways to ensure your kitchen stays a fire-free zone.

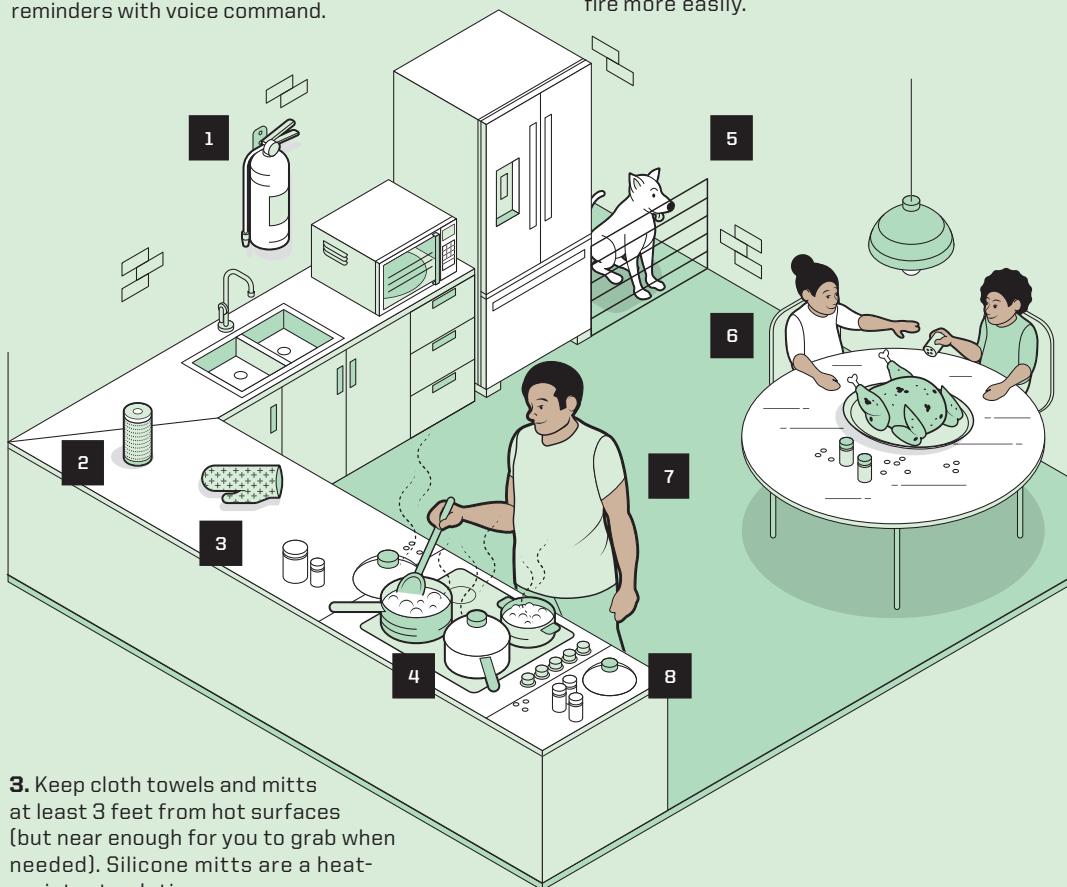
**1.** Keep a class K fire extinguisher mounted in an accessible place in the kitchen. Know how to use it, too. (CR doesn't test fire extinguishers, but the Kidde RESSP, \$50, is UL-certified for residential cooking.)

**2.** Never leave the kitchen with the stove on, and set timers for each dish. Smart assistants, such as Siri and Alexa, can handle multiple reminders with voice command.

**5.** Keep pets gated outside the kitchen to avoid distractions and trip hazards as you cook.

**6.** Keep children at least 3 feet away from a hot stove to prevent burns.

**7.** Wear a shirt with short or close-fitting sleeves. Loose clothing catches fire more easily.



**3.** Keep cloth towels and mitts at least 3 feet from hot surfaces (but near enough for you to grab when needed). Silicone mitts are a heat-resistant solution.

**4.** Turn pot and pan handles toward the back of the stove when you aren't using them. This prevents passersby from knocking into those handles and spilling scalding food that can cause burns.

**8.** Keep a lid that fits your pan nearby as you cook so that you can cover it quickly and put out a small fire. (See "In Case of a Fire, Do This," at right.) No lid? Use a cookie sheet instead.

## IN CASE OF A FIRE, DO THIS

### Flames in a Pan

Small fires in a stovetop pan can be smothered with a fitted lid. With your hand in an oven mitt, carefully slide the lid over the pan. Then turn off the burner. Don't move the pan or lid until they've cooled completely.

### Fire in the Oven

Quickly turn off the oven and keep the oven door closed to prevent fresh air from stoking the fire.

### Flames on Your Clothes

"Stop, drop, and roll." When you drop, cover your face with your hands if you can, then roll over and over or back and forth to put out the fire. Cool any burns with cold water for 3 to 5 minutes and don't hesitate to seek medical attention.

### Flames Elsewhere

First, call 9-1-1. You can try to use your fire extinguisher, but be sure others leave the house and that you have a clear path to exit.



# How to Negotiate a Better Car Lease Deal

VEHICLE LEASING CONTRACTS contain some confusing language—thanks to their unique terminology—and a host of fees that you, the lessee, may or may not have to pay, depending on your up-front negotiations with the lessor or dealership. Before you shop around to get the best lease deal, you should understand these six important terms so that you can negotiate them and avoid surprises. Doing so will save you money down the road.

## Capitalized Cost

This is a financial term for the price of the vehicle, which you should negotiate just as if you were buying the car instead of leasing it. The lower the price of the “cap cost,” the smaller the portion of it that you will be financing. This will include taxes, registration fees, and service contracts or extended warranties you decide to add. It’s usually better to lower this number, which will in turn lower your monthly payments, than to lower your monthly payment by extending the lease term over more months.

## Money Factor

It’s akin to the interest rate you’ll pay when leasing a car, and it can vary widely. Do your research to find out current interest rates for a new car purchase. During negotiations ask for the dealer to provide you with the money factor it is using. Then multiply this by 2,400 to get the interest rate you’ll be paying, and compare that with your researched rates; you can use this info to help negotiate a lower rate.

## Disposition Fee

Also called a “turn-in” fee, this is usually \$350 to \$500. It’s agreed to up front but charged

at the end of the lease to defray the cost of preparing the vehicle for sale after you return it. Look closely to see whether this term appears on your contract (some dealers don’t charge one). This fee is often waived if you opt to buy the car at the end of the term, because there’s nothing to prepare then. (Turn to page 56 for our advice on buying a leased car.) If you lease another vehicle, you can ask for this fee to be waived as a repeat customer courtesy.

## Excessive Wear and Tear Fee

This is charged at the end of a lease to cover any damage on the vehicle beyond “normal” wear and tear, which is often loosely defined in a contract. Dings smaller than the size of a credit card, for instance, may not count, but bald tires probably do. Ask the dealer for an explanation of what is considered “excessive” before you sign the lease.

## Mileage Allowance

Leases stipulate how many miles you can drive over the full term, broken out into a yearly average. Advertised leases tend to be low, such as 10,000 miles or less per year. But most people drive between 12,000 and 15,000 miles per year. Aim to negotiate a higher limit for little or no change to your lease price. Your contract will also state an “excess mileage” charge—usually 10 to 25 cents per excess mile—if you go over the agreed mileage; the more miles you’re allowed, the less likely you’ll have to pay this.

## Security Deposit

This is an amount that can be used by the lessor in case you default or to offset any money you owe at the end of the lease. Sometimes this fee can be negotiated or removed completely, so always ask whether it can be waived.

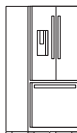


**NOVEMBER  
IS THE  
BEST TIME  
TO BUY ...**

### MULTI-COOKERS



### REFRIGERATORS



### SMART SPEAKERS



### COFFEE MAKERS



## CR COOK-OFF

# Portable Backyard Pizza Ovens

CR IS INTRODUCING “Outside the Labs,” a new evaluation program in which product reviews are performed outside of our testing center by staffers who have deep expertise in that product’s category.\* So Paul Hope, CR’s grilling expert who’s also a culinary school grad, tried out four outdoor tabletop pizza ovens in his backyard to see how well they cook up a homemade pizza. These small steel appliances, most of which run on some combination of wood, charcoal, or propane to get above 700° F, offer the promise of restaurant-quality pies, ready in 4 to 8 minutes. Hope made cheese pizzas using the same store-bought dough, sauce, and shredded mozzarella in every oven. Here’s what he found. Go to [CR.org/pizza1121](https://www.crisp.org/pizza1121) for his full method.



## EDITOR'S CHOICE

**Ooni Karu 12 Multi-Fuel Pizza Oven**  
 \$349

**Heat source:** Charcoal, wood

**Pros:** With very sturdy construction and a chimney damper, the Ooni lets you adjust airflow to control the temperature of the fire. It turned out beautiful 12-inch pies with bubbly (but not burned) cheese and a lightly charred crust around the perimeter. The fuel basket was easy to remove and was large enough to add pieces of charcoal and wood easily during cooking.

**Cons:** Even though it was one of the priciest models we tried, the Ooni comes with no extras (the pizza peel, \$60, and a carrying case, \$40, are sold separately). There is no built-in thermometer—though our chef found that “the Ooni always seemed to hum along at the ideal temperature, so it isn’t a deal breaker.”

## GREAT VALUE

**WPPO Le Peppe**  
**Portable Wood-Fired**  
**Pizza Oven** \$250

**Heat source:** Charcoal, pellets, wood

**Pros:** This stylish model has a peephole in the oven door to see the pie while it bakes, and the price includes a metal pizza peel. All 12-inch pizzas cooked quickly and well.

**Cons:** There’s no chimney damper, which makes it harder to control the temperature (so watch the built-in thermometer closely). A compact fuel basket means you’ll need to refuel frequently.



## EASY FOR BEGINNERS

**BakerStone Original**  
**Series Portable Gas**  
**Pizza Oven Box** \$350

**Heat source:** Propane

**Pros:** Starting up at the press of an electric ignition button, the BakerStone offers even heat that can easily be controlled via dials. There’s also less messy ash than with wood-fired models.

**Cons:** Every 14-inch pie emerged evenly cooked with a crisp crust and nicely melted cheese. But there’s no smoke-kissed wood-fired taste, which the other ovens provided.



## NICE FOR A CROWD

**Gyber Fremont**  
**Wood-Fired Pizza Oven**  
 \$260 to \$358

**Heat source:** Pellets, wood chips

**Pros:** The Fremont holds a 13-inch pie and has the largest fuel basket, which means you can build a bigger fire and cook pizzas back to back, without needing to top off the fuel in between. It also has a built-in handle.

**Cons:** The oven lacks the polish and sturdier construction of the other models. The oven door is flimsy and tough to keep on—it fell out frequently while in use.





## RECALLS

TO STAY INFORMED ABOUT RECALLS FOR YOUR VEHICLES, READERS WITH MEMBERSHIP CAN USE OUR FREE CAR RECALL TRACKER AT [CR.ORG/MORE](http://CR.ORG/MORE).



### GENERAC PORTABLE GENERATORS

Generac Power Systems is recalling about 321,160 Generac- and DR-branded 6,500-watt and 8,000-watt portable generators due to an unlocked handle that can pinch consumers' fingers against the generator frame when the generator is moved, posing finger amputation and crushing hazards. The company reports seven finger amputations due to the hazard. The generators were sold at hardware stores and other retailers nationwide and online, including Ace Hardware, Amazon, Costco, Home Depot, Lowe's, Napa Auto Parts, and True Value, from June 2013 through June 2021 for \$790 to \$1,480.

**What to do:** Stop using the recalled portable generators immediately, unless the locking pin has been inserted to secure the handle in place before and after moving the generator. Contact Generac for more information and a free repair kit, at 844-242-3493 or [generac.com/handleguard](http://generac.com/handleguard).

### ZEN MAGNETS AND NEOBALLS

This mandatory recall involves all Zen Magnets and Neoballs high-powered 5 mm spherical magnets—about 10 million

magnets—due to child ingestion hazards. The magnets were sold online at [zenmagnets.com](http://zenmagnets.com) and [neoballs.com](http://neoballs.com), and at certain Colorado retailers, including Botanico and Lyon's Finest, beginning in January 2009 for \$12 to \$264 per set, or individually for 6 to 10 cents per magnet. The Zen Magnets were sold individually and in sets of 72, sets of 216 with 6 spares, and sets of 1,728 with 8 spares. The Neoballs were sold individually and in sets in the following colors: silver, gold, red, orange, green, blue, and purple. "Zen Magnets" or "Neoballs" is printed on the packaging.

**What to do:** Immediately stop using the recalled magnets and contact Zen Magnets at 844-936-6245 for a refund.

### NEW WIDETECH DEHUMIDIFIERS

New Widetech is recalling about 2 million dehumidifiers with brand names AeonAir, Amana, ArcticAire (Danby), Classic (Danby/Home Hardware Stores), Commercial Cool, Danby, Danby Designer, Danby Premiere, DeLonghi, Edgestar, Friedrich, Generations (Danby), Haier, Honeywell (JMATEK/AirTek), Idylis, Ivation, Perfect Aire, SuperClima, Whirlpool, and Whynter sold at Costco, Lowe's, Menards, Walmart, and other retailers

nationwide from February 2009 through August 2017 for \$120 to \$430. New Widetech reports 107 incidents of models overheating and/or catching fire. The models involved include 25-, 30-, 35-, 45-, 50-, 60-, 65-, 70-, and 74-pint dehumidifiers manufactured before Sept. 1, 2017. The brand name, model number, and pint capacity are printed on the nameplate sticker on the back of the dehumidifier.

**What to do:** Stop using the dehumidifier and contact New Widetech at 877-251-1512 or [www.recallrtr.com/nwtdehumidifier](http://www.recallrtr.com/nwtdehumidifier) for a refund (prorated based on the age of the dehumidifier).

### RAVIN CROSSBOWS ARROW NOCKS

Ravin Crossbows is recalling about 220,000 Ravin white arrow nocks after reports of finger injuries, including 21 that were serious. The company found that if the white nock is not fully engaged with the bowstring, the crossbow can fail to discharge when the trigger is pulled and can result in the bow discharging while re-nocking the arrow, posing an injury hazard to users. The nocks were sold at Bass Pro Shops, Cabela's, Dick's Sporting Goods, and other stores nationwide from October 2016 through November 2017 for \$8 to \$15. The arrow nocks were also included as original equipment with Ravin crossbows sold for \$1,500 to \$2,000 and Ravin arrows sold for \$75 to \$110.

**What to do:** Stop using the white nock and call 888-298-6335 or go to [ravincrossbows.com](http://ravincrossbows.com) and click on "Safety & Instruction," then "Notices" for more information about obtaining a replacement.

### TRUE LIVING SLING LOUNGERS

Shanghai Worth Garden Products is recalling about 155,000 True Living white-framed with solid blue or green fabric sling loungers sold at Dollar General stores nationwide from January 2019 through September 2019 for about \$20. The recalled loungers can collapse, posing amputation, laceration, and pinching hazards if a finger gets caught in the metal folding joints. Three incidents have been reported. The 12-digit UPC number 430001047344 is located on the receipt.

**What to do:** Immediately stop using the recalled sling loungers. Cut the fabric of the chair, rendering it unusable, and contact Dollar General at 800-678-9258 or go to [dollargeneral.com](http://dollargeneral.com) (click "Help" at the bottom of the page, then "Product Recalls") for more information and to obtain a full refund.

### INTERTEX BLOWER FANS

Intertex is recalling about 29,500 VP-33 blower fans sold under the B-Air Brand, following five reports of the capacitor overheating in the fan and causing fire-related property damage. The recalled air mover, 1/3-hp fans were made before Jan. 1, 2018, and were sold in blue, red, or green in a neon yellow-colored box in Home Depot stores and online, Menards nationwide, and online at Amazon from February 2013 through December 2017 for about \$200. The B-Air logo is on the vent and product label.

**What to do:** Stop using the fans and contact the company for a free repair kit, including installation instructions, at 800-465-7300, or go to [b-air.com/VP33recall](http://b-air.com/VP33recall).



# PRODUCT UPDATE



THE LATEST  
RATINGS FROM  
OUR LABS

## Get a Bigger, Better TV for Less

Many TVs are larger than ever, with better screens, but it can still be tricky to find the best set at a great price.

by James K. Willcox

### THE BIG MIDDLE: 55 TO 65 INCHES

These TVs occupy the sweet spot for most shoppers. The sets have high-resolution screens and can connect directly to WiFi for streaming.

### JUMBO: 75 TO 85 INCHES

Very large sets may help immerse you in a movie, but they can overwhelm some rooms. They have high-resolution displays and can connect to WiFi.

### SMALL: UNDER 43 INCHES

Small sets usually don't have the newest technology, and you may need to buy an inexpensive device like a Roku Streaming Stick to watch services like Netflix.



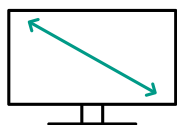
If

**YOU'RE SHOPPING FOR A TV** for the first time in a few years, you'll find that a lot has changed. Large-screen TVs are bigger than ever. You can find a number of 75-inch sets in our ratings now, and even a few 85-inch models. And the technology has improved. Your new TV will probably look better than any set you've owned before, with a more realistic, vibrant picture.

But another thing that's new for 2021 is that TV prices have gone up on some screen sizes for the first time in several years because of supply-chain problems stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Industry analysts say that shoppers will need to work a bit harder this holiday shopping season to find great deals.

Below, we walk you through the key decisions you'll have to make—and a handful of tech terms you'll want to know—to get a great set for your home. Along the way, we offer strategies for getting the best deals in the lead-up to Black Friday and throughout the holiday season.



## The Best Size

**REMEMBER WHEN** a 50-inch TV seemed gigantic? No longer.

"By the end of 2020, 65-inch models overtook 55-inch sets as the most common screen size consumers saw in stores," says Scott Peterson, senior analyst at the retail market research firm Gap Intelligence. Those sets are sometimes sitting next to TVs with even bigger 75- or 85-inch screens. All you need is some chewing gum stuck to your shoes to feel like you're at the local multiplex.

Jumbo-sized televisions can provide an immersive experience, but bigger isn't always better. A lot depends on the layout of the room. If your sofa or favorite chair is placed too close, a huge TV can be distracting. And a 75-inch model that looks fine on a living room wall might feel overwhelming in a small bedroom or office.

One way to see what you might like is to tape off the dimensions

of a couple of TV sizes on a wall, or create cardboard cutouts. TV sizes are given in diagonal screen measurements and don't include the bezel, or frame, but you can look at a set's specs to find the height and width. (A typical 65-inch set is about 57 inches wide and 35 inches tall.)

You can also go to a store to get a sense of how big a certain set looks. Stand back about as far as you'll be sitting at home. And if you buy a really big TV in a store, it may not fit in your car, so ask if the retailer will deliver it free and maybe even set it up.

Many people also shop for small TVs, 32 inches or so, say, for an office or a bedroom. Unlike bigger sets, some of the smallest models aren't smart TVs with built-in access to streaming services. That's not a big deal. You can always add a streaming media player, such as a Chromecast or Roku device, for as little as \$40. Just make sure to choose a set with enough HDMI inputs to also connect a cable box or game system if you'll be using them.

Many smaller TVs have mediocre sound quality. That can be remedied by adding a sound bar (see the ratings in "Your Home Revival Guide," on page 34) or a wireless speaker.



## Decoding 4K, UHD, and HDR

**WHEN YOU SHOP** for TVs either online or in a store, you'll notice that the terms 4K, UHD, and HDR pop up repeatedly. This jargon is important, and you should know what it means. (Also see "More TV Jargon to Know," on page 23.)

Two of the terms, 4K and UHD, amount to the same thing. (Technically speaking, there's a small difference, but not one to worry about.) They both describe the TV screen's resolution, or how many pixels—aka dots—make up the picture. More pixels generally mean a sharper, more detailed image.

Until a few years ago, many televisions were "high-definition," or HD, with about 2 million pixels. That's certainly a big number, but most of today's sets have four times as many pixels. These 4K or "ultra-high definition" sets dominate the ranks of the midsized and big televisions. (A huge 4K screen has the same number of pixels as a little 4K screen, but the bigger screen's pixels are also bigger.)

Nowadays, you'll find a lot of HD televisions only if you're shopping for a small set, say, 43 inches or less. And that's just fine. To most people, a 4K set of that size won't really look sharper than a plain HDTV.

At the other end of the spectrum, you'll also see a few 8K TVs this year. They have nearly 33 million pixels. That can produce very finely detailed images, but most people won't be able to see the difference between 4K and 8K unless they're watching a very large screen. So we don't think



getting an 8K TV makes sense unless it's 75 inches or bigger—and you have a jumbo-sized budget, too. These sets are pricey right now.

The third acronym, HDR, stands for “high dynamic range.” When a movie that's shot in HDR is shown on a high-performing television, you'll see brighter, more vivid images with greater contrast. They will look more like real life, from the nuanced shadows on the bricks in a darkened walkway to subtle shapes in a bank of bright clouds. You'll also see more realistic “specular highlights,” such as the sun's

reflection off a car's chrome bumper or an airplane wing. With HDR, those flashes of light really pop.

HDR movies and TV series are now easy to find on many streaming services, including Amazon Prime Video and Netflix.

TVs with HDR typically produce more vibrant colors, too. That's because HDR is often paired with another TV feature called wide color gamut, or WCG. (But that's not an acronym you'll see too often.) Think of it as giving your TV a larger box of crayons to play with. While regular HDTVs can display about

17 million colors, sets with WCG can display up to a billion.

HDR can make a big difference in your enjoyment of a TV. But there's a caveat with the technology: Consumer Reports finds that many TVs that do a fine job with other aspects of picture quality fall down here. The benefits of HDR are often lost when you're watching these televisions, says Claudio Ciacchi, who heads our TV labs.

That's one reason HDR performance has become a key differentiator among the TVs in our ratings, which start on page 24.



## Save Money on Your Next TV

Shoppers may find it challenging to score great deals on TVs this holiday season, in part because prices are starting at unusually high levels. According to Paul Gagnon, senior director at Omdia, a market research firm, that's because strong demand early in the year has left retailers with low levels of stock, and the COVID-19 pandemic has interfered with supply chains. There are sure to be some good deals out there, however. You just need to approach the TV shopping season with a game plan.

### Look for deals early.

It's always tough to decide whether to jump on great-looking deals during the lead-up to Black Friday or wait until mid-December, when retailers may cut prices even more on some of the remaining models.

This year, Scott Peterson, senior analyst at Gap Intelligence, a retail market research firm, recommends jumping on early promotions.

“I don't think merchants will be holding out,” he says. “They actively want to give shoppers reasons to get an early head start. And if they're successful, there could be shortages later.”

But not all experts agree. It's a volatile year, and if you decide to wait, prices could fall even further in December, especially if retailers don't sell as much in November as they hoped.

### Use websites and apps.

Sites such as PriceGrabber and Shopzilla as well as smartphone apps such as Shopkick and ShopSavvy can help you compare prices, get coupons, and score deals. You can get Black Friday ad scans and deal alerts from BestBlackFriday.com, DealNews.com, and TheBlackFriday.com. And we

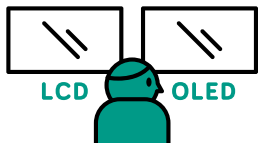
track many of the best deals at [CR.org/holidaydeals1121](https://www.consumerreports.org/holidaydeals1121).

### Get social.

Retailers promote special deals for their followers on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Click “like” on their posts and retailers might respond with alerts about special Black Friday discounts and incentives. (In exchange, expect a privacy trade-off. Your clicks and “likes” on social media are recorded for ad targeting.)

### Check store policies.

Make use of price-match guarantees, in which retailers promise to meet the prices of many of their competitors. But check the policies ahead of time; guarantees don't always apply to all items during the Black Friday weekend. Also review return and exchange policies on Black Friday sale items to make sure you won't be turned away or charged a restocking fee if you take something back.



## Decide Between LCD and OLED

**ALL TELEVISIONS** you'll see when shopping use one of two basic screen technologies—and yes, this means more jargon stamped on boxes and listed in ads. The two types are LCD TVs (which are sometimes called LED TVs) and OLED TVs.

First thing to know: There are cheap and expensive LCD sets, but there are no cheap OLEDs. These televisions start around \$1,300 and climb steeply from there.

Second, while OLED sets occupy the very peak of CR's TV ratings, the top-performing LCD TVs are also great, and they've been improving every year.

So what's the difference between the technologies? In an OLED TV, every one of the millions of pixels produces its own light and can be turned on and off individually. That means the deepest shadow in a picture can remain completely dark even if it's right next to a bright object. (In TV parlance, OLEDs are said to have awesome "black levels.")

In an LCD television, there's an LED backlight that shines behind the pixels. And the pixels essentially open and close to let more or less light shine through. Even when pixels are closed, however, some light tends to bleed through, making dark parts of an image look more gray than black.

On the other hand, LCD TVs tend to be brighter than OLEDs, a good thing if you're watching TV in a room with a lot of windows or other hard-to-block sources of ambient light. And LCDs are quite capable of producing excellent picture quality, with vibrant colors and

beautiful HDR performance.

What's more, some of the top-performing LCDs are delivering much improved black levels these days. These sets tend to advertise their use of "full-array" backlights, meaning they have LEDs arranged across the entire back of the screen rather than just along the edges, like older and less-expensive sets. That design is combined with a feature called "local dimming," where the LEDs are divided into a dozen or more zones that can be illuminated or darkened separately. That can improve black levels on darker scenes.

Some forward-looking sets take this concept to an extreme with Mini LEDs, which are so small that the TV might have thousands of them crammed into the backlight, divided into as many as 2,500 zones that can be lit up or darkened individually. That can improve black levels and contrast, and reduce faint halos that can appear around bright objects on dark backgrounds.

Right now, Mini LEDs are found mainly in pricier LCD sets, but they're starting to become more available in less-expensive models from a few brands, including TCL.

As a final distinction between the two screen types, OLEDs look equally vibrant from just about any angle. Their nearly unlimited viewing angle helps if you're sitting off to the side of a room because other people are hogging the couch. Most LCDs have more limited viewing angles, but some of the best are nearly as good as an OLED TV's.

How to decide which technology is best for you? An OLED is a great choice if you can pay a premium for a top-performing set and may need to watch from extreme angles. LCDs, on the other hand, can be much less expensive, offer a wider choice of brands and screen sizes—all small sets are LCDs—and can do somewhat better than OLEDs in rooms with a lot of ambient light.

## More TV Jargon to Know

### Contrast Ratio

The ratio between the brightest and darkest shades a TV can display. Higher contrast ratios are better.

### Refresh Rates

How frequently a TV updates an image. Most sets are 60Hz; they refresh 60 times a second. Sets working at 120Hz can produce less blurring during fast-moving scenes.

### Mini LED

A new type of LCD backlight that uses ultra-small LEDs divided into thousands of precisely controlled zones for better black levels and contrast.


### Micro LED

These LEDs are even tinier than Mini LEDs. Each Micro LED operates as a pixel, just like an OLED. For now, Micro LEDs are next-gen tech that's prohibitively expensive.


### Quantum Dots

In brief, quantum dots are used in some LCD TVs—often called QLEDs—to produce rich colors even at very high brightness levels. That's tricky to do.

**Ratings** ➤ **From Big to Small** These TVs are new for 2021. When shopping, you may see similarly named 2021 sets in warehouse clubs as well as leftover 2020 sets. Both categories can yield good deals.

Brand + Model		Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results						
				Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	HD picture quality	UHD picture quality	HDR	Viewing angle	Sound quality	Data privacy	Data security
70-INCH AND LARGER TVs												
✔	LG OLED77C1PUB	<div>84</div>	\$3,500	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆
✔	Samsung QN75QN85A	<div>82</div>	\$2,800	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆
✔	Samsung QN75QN90A	<div>82</div>	\$3,300	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆
✔	Samsung QN75Q80A	<div>79</div>	\$2,700	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆
✔	Sony XR-75X90J	<div>74</div>	\$2,100	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬆
	Samsung QN75Q70A	<div>69</div>	\$2,300	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬆
	Samsung QN70Q60A	<div>68</div>	\$1,350	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬆
	LG 82UP8770PUA	<div>67</div>	\$1,700	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬆
	Samsung QN75Q60A	<div>66</div>	\$1,400	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬆
	Hisense 75U6G	<div>62</div>	\$1,050	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬆
	LG 75NANO75UPA	<div>60</div>	\$1,300	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆
	Sony XBR-75X81CH	<div>60</div>	\$1,300	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬆
	TCL 85S435	<div>60</div>	\$1,815	⬇	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬆
65-INCH TVs												
✔	Sony XR-65A90J	<div>84</div>	\$3,800	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆
✔	LG OLED65C1PUB	<div>84</div>	\$2,100	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆
✔	Samsung QN65QN85A	<div>82</div>	\$2,000	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆
✔	Samsung QN65QN90A	<div>82</div>	\$2,400	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆
✔	Samsung QN65QN800A	<div>77</div>	\$3,000	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬆
✔	Samsung QN65Q80A	<div>73</div>	\$1,400	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆
✔	LG 65NANO90UPA	<div>71</div>	\$1,300	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆
✔	Samsung QN65Q70A	<div>71</div>	\$1,400	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬆
✔	Sony XR-65X90J	<div>71</div>	\$1,400	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬆
	Samsung QN65LS03A	<div>66</div>	\$1,800	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬆
	Hisense 65U6G	<div>62</div>	\$700	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬆
	LG 65NANO80UPA	<div>62</div>	\$1,000	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆
	Samsung QN65Q60A	<div>62</div>	\$1,050	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬆
	Samsung UN65AU8000	<div>61</div>	\$800	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬆
	Sony XBR-65X81CH	<div>60</div>	\$850	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬆
55- TO 60-INCH TVs												
✔	Sony XR-55A90J	<div>84</div>	\$2,800	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆
✔	Sony XR-55A80J	<div>83</div>	\$1,700	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆



Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results						
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	HD picture quality	UHD picture quality	HDR	Viewing angle	Sound quality	Data privacy	Data security

#### 55- TO 60-INCH TVs *Continued*

✓ Samsung QN55QN90A	81	\$1,700	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
✓ Samsung QN55QN85A	81	\$1,600	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
✓ Samsung QN55Q80A	77	\$1,250	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
✓ LG 55NANO90UPA	74	\$1,100	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
✓ Samsung QN60Q60A	72	\$1,000	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
✓ Samsung QN55Q70A	70	\$1,100	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
✓ Samsung QN55Q60A	70	\$850	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Sony XBR-55X81CH	61	\$700	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Sony KD55X80J	59	\$750	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Hisense 55A6G	51	\$430	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆

#### 46- TO 52-INCH TVs

\$ LG 50UP8000PUA	69	\$500	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
✓ Samsung QN50Q60A	67	\$700	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Samsung QN50LS03A	65	\$1,200	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Sony KD50X80J	64	\$700	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Hisense 50A6G	55	\$360	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆

#### 39- TO 43-INCH TVs

✓ Samsung QN43Q60A	67	\$600	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
✓ Sony KD43X80J	65	\$600	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
✓ LG 43UP8000PUA	63	\$420	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Samsung UN43AU8000	61	\$430	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
TCL 40S334	56	\$290	⬆	⬆	⬆	NA	NA	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆

#### 32-INCH TVs

✓ Samsung QN32Q50R	66	\$500	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
✓ Samsung UN32N5300	65	\$240	⬆	⬆	⬆	NA	NA	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
✓ Samsung UN32M4500	62	\$250	⬆	⬆	⬆	NA	NA	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆

> Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at [CR.org/TVs](https://www.consumerreports.org/tvs).

**HOW WE TEST:** Overall Score combines test and survey results. Predicted reliability reflects the likelihood that a TV will have problems in the first five years of ownership. Owner satisfaction

reflects the proportion of members extremely likely to recommend their TV. HD picture quality encompasses detail, color accuracy, and contrast using test patterns and videos.

UHD picture quality is evaluated similarly, using 4K content. HDR shows how well the TV reproduces the enhanced quality of HDR content. Viewing angle reflects picture quality at

various viewing angles. Sound quality is for the set's built-in speakers. Data privacy and security indicate how the TV and its service providers collect, share, use, and protect your data.

# YOUR HOME REVIV GUID





## IT HAS BEEN

a long haul for you and your home during the pandemic. But through it all, we've also learned a lot, and our appreciation for our homes has never been greater.

Whether you like it or not, you might still find yourself spending more time at home than normal this winter—but this time, you and your home will be ready. We have top-rated products that have proved their worth during these trying times. Plus, we offer expert advice on performing essential safety checks, making the most of the space you have, and prepping your home for whatever comes next.

by  
**PERRY  
SANTANACHOTE**

Photo illustrations by  
**C.J. BURTON**



The past year has taught us to be prepared for extreme weather—no matter where we live. Don't get caught off guard the next time Mother Nature throws you a curveball.



## Secure the Perimeter

■ **Buffer windows and doors.** To identify drafts that drive up heating bills, look for damage to the rubber or foam gaskets around doors and gently shake windows. “A rattling sound or light coming through edges indicates leaky gaps,” says John Galeotafiore, CR’s lead product tester. Seal gaps using caulk or weatherstripping. If you have thin single-pane windows, install glass storm windows, which slow

down heat loss and reduce air leaks but cost less than upgrading to thick double-pane windows. They’re great for renters because some can be put on the interior of windows.

■ **Get rid of leaves.** Jammed gutters overflow, causing water to seep into your house. You can buy a curved-nozzle attachment (\$20 for most leaf blowers) that lets you blow leaves out of gutters from the ground—making this task quicker and safer. Also consider installing a plastic mesh gutter guard, about \$5 for 20 feet, to keep debris out.

■ **Be your own watchdog.** Installing a DIY security

system can help give you peace of mind. For your whole home, we recommend the Abode kit on the facing page; it has door and window sensors, a motion detector, and a key fob to control it all. But if you need to cover just one dark entrance, consider buying a motion-detecting LED floodlight camera, such as the Arlo Pro 3 Floodlight Camera, \$250. “In addition to illuminating dark areas at night, the Arlo has a built-in siren that can potentially scare off intruders,” says CR home editor Dan Wroclawski. “Plus, installation is quick and easy because it doesn’t need to be hardwired like many other cameras—shaving off at least 45 minutes of setup time.”



## Clear the Air

■ **Breathe easier.** Swap out flimsy filters in your heating, ventilating, and air conditioning system. Use filters with at least a MERV 10 rating, such as the Aprilaire on the facing page. They provide high filtration of fine particles, such as smoke. On days with poor air quality, shut windows and turn the HVAC fan on to filter the air.

If you don’t have a ventilation system, buy a portable air purifier with a HEPA filter (see our picks on page 34). We find that large models—for 350 square feet





## CR-RATED HOME MAINTENANCE HEROES

### POWER SNOW SHOVEL



89

✓ **GREENWORKS**  
2600602 \$300

### SECURITY SYSTEM



86

✓ **ABODE**  
**ESSENTIALS**  
**STARTER KIT\*** \$250

### DEHUMIDIFIER



81

✓ **HONEYWELL**  
TP70WKN \$300

### AIR FILTER



75

✓ **APRILAIRE**  
**HEALTHY HOME**  
213 MERV 13 \$40

or more—are often best at filtering smoke.

■ **Fend off mold.** Place a dehumidifier in a muggy basement or laundry room to help keep humidity levels between 30 and 50 percent and allergy-triggering mold at bay. The Honeywell at left is big enough to remove as much as 50 pints of water per day. Clean your dehumidifier if you spot any mildew on it.



## Stay Ahead of Storms

■ **Power up.** Don't wait until days before a storm to buy a portable generator; models

might be in short supply then. A typical house needs one with about 5,000 watts (see top-rated picks on page 35). Make sure you have enough stabilized gasoline to last for at least 24 hours. Larger portable generators can use up to 20 gallons per day.

If you live in a condo, you may want a portable power station—a large battery that stores electricity. It's very costly, but it's the only type of generator that can be safely used inside. The best model in our tests, a Goal Zero Yeti, \$3,000, powers a fridge for 44 hours on one charge.

■ **Protect pipes.** Burst pipes are one of the most common causes of property damage and can easily cause \$5,000 or more in water damage. The pipes most at risk are those in unheated interior

spaces, such as basements (where 37 percent of bursts occur), attics, and garages. Cover pipes yourself with foam insulating tubes for as little as 33 cents per foot. "On extremely cold days, open cabinet doors that are along outside walls," Galeotafore says. "This allows heat from the house to get further toward the piping."

■ **Strategize snow removal.** Even if you have a snow blower, lay down a thin layer of ice melt before a storm, and again during the storm, to make removal easier. If you don't get much snow, try a battery-powered snow shovel, such as the Greenworks at left, which has a spinning auger to discharge snow—a worthy upgrade from a cheap plastic snow shovel (and easier to store than a blower).

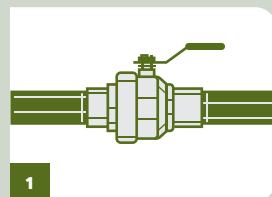
### EASY DIY REVIVAL

## How to Install a Water Leak Detection System

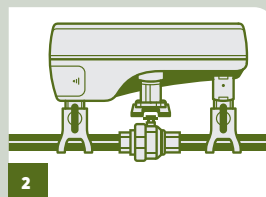


30-60  
MINUTES

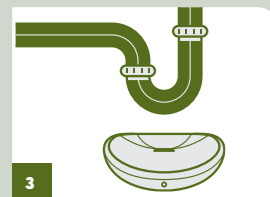
Leak detector systems alert you of leaks and turn off the water before damage occurs, which could save you thousands in repair costs. Kits like this well-rated **Guardian by Alexa Leak Prevention System GVD3**, \$350, are easy to set up.



**SPEC CHECK** Your pipes should be ½ inch to 1 inch wide, with a quarter-turn ball shutoff valve and 4½ inches of space around it.



**SECURE THE SHUTOFF** Clamp the shutoff unit onto the pipe so that the center fork fits on the valve. Plug the power adapter in.



**PLACE THE SENSORS** Connect to the app and WiFi, then place water sensors by sinks, toilets, and water heaters.

# HOW TO HIT REFRESH



There has been so much wear and tear on the stuff we've been using all day long. Here's how to brighten some things up—and replace what has seen better days.



## Utility Rooms

■ **Refresh key kitchen filters.** Keep your tap water crisp and clear by replacing your filter—whether you use a carafe, the refrigerator dispenser, or an undersink unit to filter your water. If you have a range hood and/or an over-the-range microwave, soak the filter in hot soapy water at least every two months to remove grease and other flammable debris. Some dishwashers also have a filter that needs to be cleaned every few months.

■ **Trick out your toilet.** Give your bathroom a luxe makeover for a few hundred dollars

by installing a bidet seat on an existing toilet. A spray wand on the seat cleanses your undercarriage, reducing the need for toilet paper. Many electric models, including the Brondell on the facing page, heat up the seat and water—comforts you'll appreciate on cold mornings. Some even have a heated air dryer.

■ **Give the laundry room some TLC.** Minimize mold in the washer by cleaning it once a month: Run an empty load on the hottest setting with a bleach-based washer cleaner. On a front-loader, gently pull back the gasket to wipe away residue; regularly clean the drain pump filter if it's accessible. Clean out lint buildup in and around your dryer duct to

prevent fires. Unplug the dryer and disconnect the duct. Use a dryer-duct brush to remove lint, and vacuum it up using a hose and crevice attachment. A \$15 Lint Lizard extension tube attaches to the hose on a vac, such as the Kenmore on the facing page, and tunnels into the duct, making this task easy.



## Living & Working Spaces

■ **Optimize your TV picture.** TVs have a lot of menu presets, such as Vivid, Sports, and Dynamic. But those tend to increase or reduce a TV's

brightness and colors too dramatically—and might not give you the best picture for your favorite fall shows and football games. Use CR's free TV Screen Optimizer at [CR.org/TV1121](http://CR.org/TV1121), which has lab-tested picture settings for specific TV models. Need a new TV? Turn to our Product Update on page 20 for the latest rated models.

■ **Boost sound quality.** Add oomph to your TV's audio by hooking up a sound bar, placing it above or below your TV. Advanced models offer surround sound and integrated access to streaming music services. But even a basic model with a Good score in our testing is often better than a TV's built-in speakers. See sound bar ratings, on page 34.



## CR-RATED REVITALIZING TOUCHES

### ■ Declutter your desk.

A tidy work-from-home desk can save your sanity. Wrangle tangled cords using a “cable sleeve” or adhesive cord holders, around \$10 online, or simply use twist ties to group cords together. And, as we all do more online—from banking to buying groceries—invest in a password manager to auto-generate and store a different strong password for each of your accounts. (See CR’s top-rated pick, at right.)



## Every Room

### ■ Regulate temperatures.

When you’re home in the winter, set your thermostat

to 68° F. When you’re asleep or away, keep it 7° to 10° F lower to maximize heating bill savings. And if you don’t have a smart thermostat (such as the Honeywell at right), install one to remotely control your HVAC system. Setting a schedule can save around \$83 per year on energy.

Another cool trick: Set fans so that the blades rotate clockwise. (Do this by flicking a switch on the housing or via remote.) Run the fan on a slow speed to pull up cool air from the room, which sends the warm air that collects near the ceiling back down to where it’s needed.

### ■ Repaint dull walls.

One of the least expensive improvements you can make to any room is a

new coat of paint. “Even if your refresh budget is small or you’re in a rental, painting an accent wall or a room can make your home feel fresh again,” says Rico de Paz, who runs the Consumer Reports paint lab. “A top-rated paint will also cover old stains and prevent new ones from soaking in.” (See ratings on page 35.)

■ **Get smart with lighting.** Smart lightbulbs, such as those from Cync by GE Lighting, start around \$10. They can be controlled remotely via an app or a digital assistant. You can set all the lights in your home to turn on and off with your security system or just customize color and brightness for different rooms.

#### PASSWORD MANAGER



**88** ✓ **1PASSWORD**  
FAMILIES \$60

#### BIDET SEAT



**BRONDELL**  
**SWASH 1000\*** \$600  
■ **5/5** INSTALLATION  
**6** USABILITY

#### SMART THERMOSTAT



**73** ✓ **HONEYWELL**  
**HOME T9**  
**RCHT9510WF** \$170

#### VACUUM

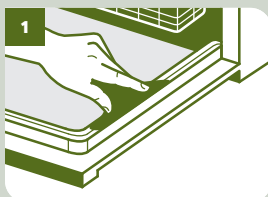


**70** \$ **KENMORE 200**  
**SERIES BC4002**  
\$230

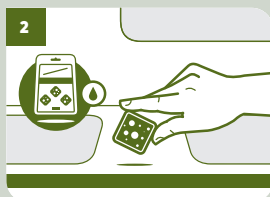
#### EASY DIY REVIVAL

## Three Ways to Degunk a Dirty Appliance

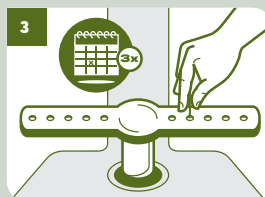
Hanging out at home for three meals a day every day creates more dirty dishes, which means your dishwasher might be the worse for wear. It’s time to show this workhorse some love.



**EVERY FEW MONTHS** Use a damp rag to wipe the seal between the door and tub, where residue and food collect and cause odors.



**AS NEEDED** Remove hard-water residue on the inside of the dishwasher with a dishwasher cleaner, such as Affresh or Finish.



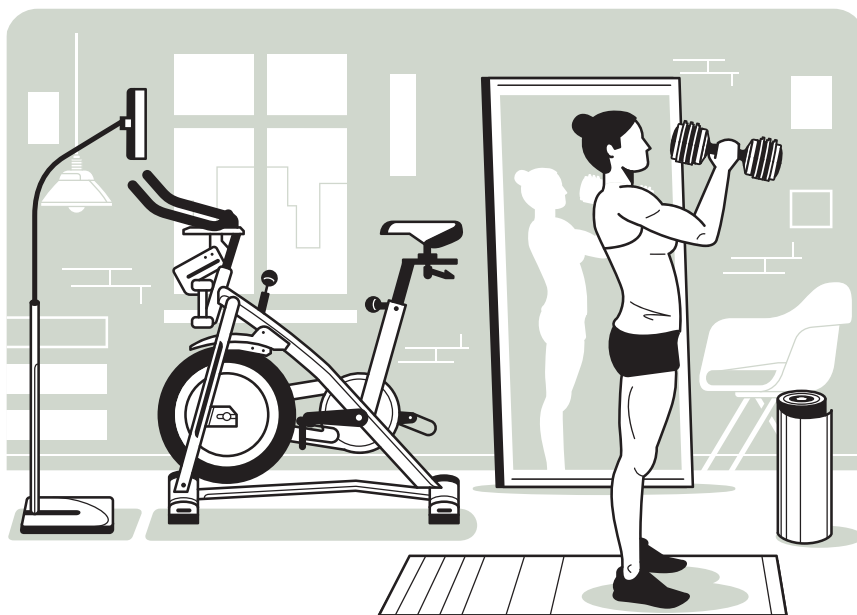
**ONCE A YEAR** Gently use a pipe cleaner to unclog the holes in the wash arms. (Check your manual for how to remove them.)

# TRANSFORM

A few easy additions can help you get more use out of the square footage you have—whether you live in an apartment or a sprawling house. Get started with the essentials, and if you have a larger area or budget, consider a few key extras that will boost the enjoyment and utility of your space.

CREATE YOUR ...

## Personal Gym



If you're not ready to head back to a public gym, you can set up a satisfying home workout space in any room or nook with just a few key items. In an apartment, place your exercise mat on top of a rug to

help protect your knees—as well as your relationship with downstairs neighbors. Adding a large mirror lets you check your posture, and an adjustable tablet stand is a boon for virtual classes.

OPTIMIZE YOUR ...

## Home Office



It might be time to make your temporary home office more permanent. Whether you're in a dedicated study or the corner of a bedroom, your priority should be an ergonomic setup. These tools help make

### ESSENTIALS

#### EXERCISE BIKE

**78** **SCHWINN IC4** \$1,000

#### DUMBBELLS

**72** **FLYBIRD ADJUSTABLE DUMBBELLS** \$140 EACH

#### YOGA MAT

**GAIAM PERFORMANCE LONGER/WIDER DRY-GRIP** **5/5** DRYING & GRIP \$75

### BONUS BUYS

#### MIRROR

**NEUTYPE FULL-LENGTH FLOOR MIRROR** \$130

#### TABLET STAND

**SAHARACASE PHONE AND TABLET FLOOR STAND** \$80

### ESSENTIALS

#### MONITOR

**79** **ASUS PROART PA248QV** \$230

#### MOUSE

**ADESSO IMOUSE E1** **5/5** ERGONOMICS \$40



# YOUR SPACE

## (NO RENO REQUIRED)



sure each body part is in its right place—including forearms parallel to the ground while typing, straight wrists, eyes looking straight ahead—and ears well-buffered from noisy distractions.

### BONUS BUYS

#### KEYBOARD

**KINESIS FREESTYLE2** <sup>1</sup> \$90

■ 4/5 **ERGONOMICS**

#### HEADPHONES

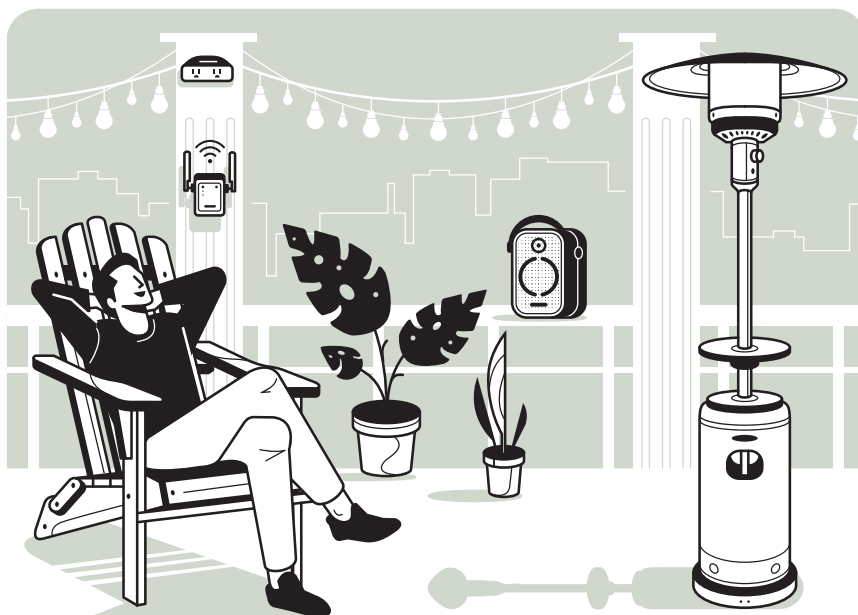
**SENNHEISER PXC 550-II NOISE-CANCELING HEADPHONES** \$160

#### ADJUSTABLE-HEIGHT DESK

**JARVIS BAMBOO ADJUSTABLE STANDING (AND SITTING) DESK** \$570

### UPGRADE YOUR ...

## Outdoor Areas



Extend the seasonal usability of your backyard or balcony by making it like an extension of your living room. An easy-to-install WiFi extender ensures that you can stream music to a waterproof wireless

speaker while reclined in your lounge chair. Timed lighting (enabled by an inexpensive smart plug) can beckon you to step out for fresh air at sunset. A few plants and a heater make your oasis extra-inviting.

### ESSENTIALS

#### ADIRONDACK CHAIR

86

**IKEA KLOEVEN DECK CHAIR** <sup>2</sup> \$100

#### SPEAKERS

60

**ANKER SOUNDCORE RAVE NEO** \$110

#### WIFI EXTENDER

**NETGEAR Nighthawk EX7000** \$90-\$140

■ 4/5 **WIFI RANGE**

### BONUS BUYS

#### PATIO HEATER

**DYNA-GLO ROUND PATIO HEATER** \$175

#### SMART PLUG

**TP-LINK KASA SMART OUTDOOR PLUG** \$30


#### PLANT

**BLOOMSCAPE PARLOR PALM** \$80

<sup>1</sup> Product was rated as part of our user experience test or another test program and did not receive an Overall Score.


<sup>2</sup> Score is based on 2020 CR member survey of furniture purchased at walk-in locations; score represents the rating of the furniture retailer, not the specific item.

**Ratings** ➤ **Refresh and Renew** These top-performing air purifiers, dishwashers, sound bars, portable generators, and interior paints from our tests make breathing new life into your home a cinch.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results				Features + Specs									
			Dust, pollen, smoke removal (low speed)	Dust, pollen, smoke removal (high speed)	Noise (low speed)	Noise (high speed)	Ease of use	Room size	Annual cost	Product type	Weight (lb.)	Energy Star	Number of fan speeds	Filter-life indicator	Remote control	Auto fan speed


AIR PURIFIERS

✓ <b>Alen</b> BreatheSmart 75i Pure	91	\$750	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬆	L	\$140	HEPA	27	•	5	•		•
✓ <b>Blueair</b> Classic 605	88	\$830	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆	L	\$261	HEPA/carbon	30	•	3	•	App	Opt.
✓ <b>Blueair</b> Blue Pure 211+	85	\$300	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇	L	\$199	HEPA	16	•	3	•		
✓ <b>Blueair</b> HealthProtect 7470i	77	\$640	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬇	L	\$141	HEPA/carbon	28	•	3	•		•
✓ <b>Blueair</b> Blue Pure 211+ Auto	77	\$340	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬆	L	\$167	HEPA/carbon	15	•	3	•		•
✓ <b>Samsung</b> Cube	76	\$550	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬇	L	\$107	HEPA/carbon	27	•	3	•	App	•
✓ <b>Honeywell</b> InSight HPA5300B	74	\$290	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆	L	\$200	Multiple pleated filters	20		4	•		•
✓ <b>Alen</b> BreatheSmart Classic	72	\$650	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬆	L	\$202	HEPA/ion	22		4	•		•

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results	Test Results				Features + Specs							
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Washing	Drying	Energy use	Noise	Cycle time (min.)	Ample flatware slots	Adjustable upper rack	Adjustable times	Remaining-time display	Interior material	WiFi

24-INCH DISHWASHERS

💰 <b>Bosch</b> Ascenta SHX3AR75UC	89	\$700	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	95	•	•	•		Stainless steel and plastic	
✓ <b>Bosch</b> 300 DLX Series SHS863WDSN	85	\$900	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	150	•	•	•	•	Stainless steel	
✓ <b>Bosch</b> 100 Series SHXM4AY55N	84	\$800	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	150	•	•	•	•	Stainless steel and plastic	
✓ <b>Thermador</b> DWHD660WFP	84	\$1,800	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	155	•	•	•	•	Stainless steel	•
✓ <b>Thermador</b> DWHD770WFM	83	\$2,300	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	150	•	•	•	•	Stainless steel	•


Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results				Features + Specs								
			Sound quality	Ease of use (TV)	Ease of use (features)	Versatility	Surround sound	Internet streaming	No. of speakers supplied	Active subwoofer	Wireless subwoofer	Wireless surround speakers/amps	Optional multi-room sharing	Simulated surround sound	Virtual surround sound

FULL-FEATURED SOUND BARS

✓ <b>Bose</b> Soundbar 700	72	\$800	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	Optional	•	1	NA	Optional	Optional	•	Optional	•
💰 <b>Sonos</b> Beam	69	\$400	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	Optional	•	1	NA	Optional	Optional	•	Optional	
💰 <b>Samsung</b> HW-Q65T/ZA	64	\$450	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆			3.1	•	•	•		•	•

BASIC SOUND BARS

💰 <b>Yamaha</b> SR-B20A	60	\$180	⬇	⬆	⬆	⬇			1	NA	NA			NA	•
💰 <b>Creative</b> Stage 2.1	57	\$80	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬆			1.1					NA	•


Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results					Features + Specs							
			Power delivery	Power quality	Noise	Ease of use	Run time (hr.)	CO safety technology	Claimed output (watts)	Fuel type	Weight (lb.)	Fuel shutoff	Low-oil shutoff	Electric start	Fuel gauge

#### PORTABLE GENERATORS (7,000 TO 8,000 WATTS)

✓ Generac XT8500EFI	75	\$1,000	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	9-15	⬇️	8,500	Gas	244		•	•	•
✓ DuroMax XP10000HX	73	\$1,300	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	10-17	⬇️	Gas: 8,000 LP: 7,600	Gas or propane	154	•	•	•	•
✓ Champion 100416	73	\$1,320	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	10-18	⬇️	Gas: 8,000 LP: 7,200	Gas or propane	246	•	•	•	•
✓ DeWalt PMC168000	71	\$1,050	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	9-17	⬇️	8,000	Gas	254	•	•	•	•

#### PORTABLE GENERATORS (5,000 TO 6,900 WATTS)

✓ Generac 7680	73	\$800	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	9-15	⬆️	6,500	Gas	219	•	•		•
✓ Briggs & Stratton 30728	72	\$1,300	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	9-17	⬆️	6,250	Gas	240	•	•		•
✓ Generac 7683	71	\$850	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	8-15	⬇️	6,500	Gas	219	•	•		•

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results		Features
		Per gallon	Hiding	Resists staining	Self-priming

#### INTERIOR PAINTS

✓ Behr Marquee (Home Depot)	88	\$45	⬆️	⬆️	•
✓ HGTV Home by Sherwin-Williams Infinity (Lowe's)	85	\$46	⬆️	⬆️	•
✓ Benjamin Moore Aura	83	\$72	⬆️	⬆️	•
✓ Valspar Reserve	83	\$45	⬆️	⬆️	•
✓ HGTV Home by Sherwin-Williams Showcase (Lowe's)	82	\$39	⬆️	⬆️	•
✓ Behr Ultra (Home Depot)	81	\$36	⬆️	⬆️	•
💰 Behr Premium Plus (Home Depot)	79	\$31	⬆️	⬆️	•

➤ Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at [CR.org](https://www.consumerreports.org).

#### HOW WE TEST: AIR PURIFIERS:

The **Overall Score** is based on the performance of the products in all our tests. **Dust/pollen/smoke removal** is how well models capture cigarette smoke and fine clay dust at low and high speeds. **Noise** is a measurement of decibels at low and high speeds. **Annual cost** combines filters and electricity.

**DISHWASHERS:** The **Overall Score** includes information on **predicted reliability** and **owner satisfaction**

from our member survey. **Washing** is assessed by running the normal cycle to clean a full load of dishes with baked-on food. **Drying** judges how thoroughly a model dries plastic items, the most stubborn in any load. **Energy use** is based on the electricity required to run the machine and heat the water. **Noise** is judged during filling, washing, and draining. **Cycle time** is measured cleaning a full load on high temperature.

**SOUND BARS:** The **Overall Score** is based on the performance of the products in all our tests. **Sound quality** judgments are made using the speaker's auto setup function. **Ease of use** assesses how easy it is to set up with TV settings and how easy the sound bar's own settings are to use.

**GENERATORS:** The **Overall Score** is based on the performance of the products in all our tests. **Power delivery** indicates the unit's handling of a

demand surge. **Power quality** measures consistency of voltage. **Noise** is sound intensity at 23 and 50 feet. **Ease of use** is maneuverability and certain features.

**INTERIOR PAINTS:** The **Overall Score** is based on the performance of the products in all our tests. **Hiding** is a measure of how well a paint covers a contrasting color mainly with one coat. **Resists staining** is resistance to water- and oil-based stains.

# Entertain With E

## HOSTING A HOLIDAY

get-together may feel more challenging right now, given the uncertainties with the pandemic. You may feel a bit out of practice—and a little stressed out by that—as well. “But there’s an awful lot that can be done in advance,” says Jodie Watson, an organizing pro. And the truth is, you don’t have to do everything yourself. “No one wins awards for making their own piecrust,” Lilly Jan, a food and beverage expert, points out. In fact, time-savers abound. As Leslie Lampert, a chef, notes, “You can supplement a homemade menu with a handful of takeout items.” Here, you’ll find a bounty of simple tips and CR-tested tools to help you get ready for—and enjoy—a special meal with those you love.

by  
**TANYA CHRISTIAN  
AND PAUL HOPE**





# ase This Season



# PLANNING

■ **Pin down the menu.** This allows you to get a jump on everything else. A simple one to consider: Butternut squash soup, roast turkey or boneless ham, mashed potatoes, stuffing, roasted brussels sprouts, and pie.

■ **Choose truly easy appetizers.** To whet appetites without filling guests up, “stick to something simple and light, like spiced nuts or olives,” says Amy Keating, a registered dietitian at Consumer Reports. Or skip the formal soup course and serve soup shooters in espresso cups or shot glasses instead. Soups like butternut squash and potato leek can be served warm, at room temperature, or chilled.

■ **Gauge portions.** Consider how much food you’ll need. This loose guide is for eight to 10 people:  
A 12- to 15-pound turkey or an 8- to 10-pound

boneless ham (both before cooking).

For sides, plan for about **1½ large serving spoonfuls per person**. “That’s enough for each guest to try everything, knowing some will take seconds while others may pass entirely,” says TJ Delle Donne, assistant dean in the College of Food Innovation & Technology at Johnson & Wales University. This requires 3 to 4 pounds of white and/or sweet potatoes, 3 pounds of brussels sprouts or greens such as broccoli or green beans, and enough stuffing to fill two 9x13-inch casserole dishes.

Two pies for dessert will provide about 1½ slices for each person. Buying premade sides? Two quarts of each should feed eight to 12 people, says Lampert, who owns the Ladle of Love food shop in Bronxville, N.Y. The calculator at [savethefood.com/guestimator](http://savethefood.com/guestimator) can also help you with portion calculations.

■ **Shop early.** Go shopping for some of the food at least a couple of weeks ahead so that you don’t run into shortages of popular items. You can even make certain dishes on your menu now and store them in the freezer. “Most items can be safely frozen, then thawed, without affecting quality,” Delle Donne says. This includes bread, cookies, gravy, pie, and soups, but not fresh produce, which

he advises buying the week of the meal. Remember to include time for defrosting. If you purchase a frozen turkey, for instance, “plan on at least one day of refrigerator thawing for every 5 pounds,” says James E. Rogers, PhD, director of food safety research and testing at CR. “Check the bird periodically while it’s thawing. And never wash a turkey—it can contaminate other items in your kitchen.”



PHOTO, PREVIOUS SPREAD: GETTY IMAGES.  
PHOTO, THIS PAGE: JILL CHEN/STOCKSY

## A Safer Gathering

Expert answers to key questions on COVID-19.

**How can I keep up with advice for my area?** City and state health department websites may provide

guidance. The latest federal advice is at [cdc.gov/masks](http://cdc.gov/masks); find local illness levels under COVID-19 County Check.

**Should I ask guests if they’re vaccinated?** It’s reasonable, says

Joshua Barocas, MD, an associate professor of medicine at the University of Colorado. The best way to protect those who are unvaccinated (like young kids) is to ensure that other guests are vaccinated.

**What precautions should we consider?**

Ask guests to mask up in indoor public spaces the week before. Know that gathering outside is far safer than inside.





# PREPPING

■ **Be appliance savvy.** If more than one menu item requires a seldom used (and bulky) appliance like a stand mixer—think piecrust and cookies—prep them all at once so you can stash the

mixer away instead of pulling it out multiple times.

■ **Chop in bulk.** You'll probably use the same staple veggies in more than one recipe, so cut up, say, all the

garlic, onions, and carrots you'll need at once. (A food processor can speed this up.) Store strong-smelling items in airtight containers, Keating says, "otherwise, foods like chopped onions can stink up the fridge, or worse, migrate into foods like butter."

■ **Spread out your cooking.** Cook some menu items a few days beforehand. "Dishes like sweet potatoes or stuffing can be made two to three days ahead," Lampert says. (Soup, too.) Just reheat and serve on the day of the event. It's best to cook turkey on the day of your gathering.

■ **Use this go-to pot.** Large, lidded, and versatile, Dutch ovens can be used to cook dishes in the oven or on the stove and then go into the fridge for storage. For your holiday meal, simply transfer the pot back to the range for reheating. Plus, "in our tests, Dutch ovens also retain heat, making them a great choice for serving, too, since your sides will stay warm on the table," says Tara Casaregola, who's in charge of CR's cookware testing. "Use a trivet if you're transferring directly from oven to table."



## CR-RATED ENTERTAINING TOOLS

### DUTCH OVENS



**83** ✓ **LE CREUSET SIGNATURE DUTCH OVEN, 5½ QUARTS** \$340



**80** ✓ **LODGE DUTCH OVEN, 6 QUARTS** \$60

### FOOD PROCESSORS



**81** ✓ **BREVILLE SOUS CHEF BFP800XL/A** \$400



**78** ✓ **OSTER VERSA PRO SERIES BLSTVB-104-000 FOOD PROCESSOR** \$150

Indoors, open windows to enhance airflow. If some guests are unvaccinated, consider asking them to take a rapid test before they visit, says James Dickerson, PhD, chief scientific officer

at CR. In this instance, it's also safest for everyone to stay socially distant and wear masks indoors, he adds, especially if

people at high risk, like older adults, attend.

### Can I serve food family-style? How much do I need to clean surfaces?

Gathering indoors with others is the greatest

risk. Cleaning often isn't likely to make a big difference, nor is the way you serve food, Barocas says. —Kevin Loria



## ABCs of Ordering

Want the ease of a precooked dinner?

### GO SOUP TO NUTS

Consider reheatable takeout meals. Cracker Barrel, for instance, is selling Thanksgiving dinners for eight to 10 people starting at \$140. Ditto food stores; Texas-based Central Market, for example, charged \$140 last year for a turkey

meal with fixings for six to eight people. Near CR's headquarters in Yonkers, N.Y., Stew Leonard's sold a similar dinner for eight for \$175 last year. With mail-order, factor in delivery costs. Harry & David's complete turkey dinner for eight to 10 is \$240 this year; delivery to, say, central Ohio adds \$50.

### OR PICK UP ITEMS

"Order the labor-intensive prepared sides," says CR dietitian Amy Keating. And if a guest who promised an appetizer bails, a store-bought starter is your ace in the hole.

### BE MINDFUL OF SPACE AND TIME

Budget enough for any thawing and reheating. *—Tabie Stanger*

# THE GATHERING

■ **Organize all your nonfood items.** At least a day before the meal, bust out any dishes, glasses, utensils, and serving platters you'll need, says Kathi Lipp, a home-organizing expert and author. Wash anything you haven't used in awhile, and "match" each food to cookware and serving pieces. And "check to see if the pots and pans you'll need will all fit on the burners at once," Casaregola says. In addition, be sure to have a dependable meat thermometer, like an instant-read digital model. CR tests have found that the pop-up thermometers that often come with turkey may pop up before the bird reaches a safe temperature, says Sana Mujahid, PhD, manager of food safety research and testing at CR.

■ **Neaten counters.** Stash whatever you won't need for the get-together, like canisters, advises Jodie Watson, owner of Supreme Organization in California. "Those sorts of items can be put away to give you more space to work in the kitchen and cut down on clutter," she says.

■ **Do a table test run.** Put the empty serving pieces you're planning to use on the table to make sure everything will fit, suggests Lilly Jan, a lecturer on food and beverage management at the School of Hotel Administration at the Cornell SC Johnson College of Business. Once the arrangement is to your liking, snap a quick photo. That will help you place platters

quickly and surely during the meal or let you pass the task on to someone else.

■ **Put countertop appliances to work.** These efficient devices can make cooking and reheating easier while freeing up oven and stovetop space, Casaregola says. Instead of roasting veggies in the oven, for instance, try an air fryer, which can quickly turn out tasty sides like cauliflower or asparagus. Use a toaster oven to warm up sides or breads and a slow cooker or multi-cooker for warming soups or hot dips. Bonus: The latter two can keep food warm for hours. Chafing dishes are also an easy way to keep food at the right temperature throughout your meal, Jan notes.



## CR-RATED ENTERTAINING TOOLS

### AIR FRYERS



80

✓ GOURMIA  
GAF686 DIGITAL  
\$70



75

NUWAVE  
6 QT. 37001 \$130

### TOASTER OVENS



75

✓ BREVILLE  
BOV650XL OVEN  
\$190



74

✓ BREVILLE  
SMART OVEN AIR  
CONVECTION  
BOV900BSSUSC  
\$400





# Organize Your Fridge

Simple steps can maximize storage space and ensure that everything stays fresh for a festive meal. The week before, try to use up what you already have. Then adjust the refrigerator shelves to hold the food you'll need to store, like that turkey. "Don't block fridge air vents with large items," says Larry Ciufu, who oversees CR's refrigerator testing. "It can make the items freeze and cause other parts of your fridge to run too hot." Here's where to store holiday foods:

**1 TOP SHELF**  
Items that won't be cooked or heated, such as prepped but undressed salads, platters of cold appetizers, and desserts, go here. "Remember, while a French-door model can accommodate a large tray, you may not be able to store a large platter in a side-by-side refrigerator," Ciufu notes.

**2 MIDDLE SHELF**  
Covered made-ahead dishes that you'll heat up at the last minute, such as roasted veggies, sweet potatoes, and stuffing, go here.

**3 BOTTOM SHELF**  
Thawing a turkey? Use this shelf so the bird can't leak onto ready-to-eat items like salad greens. Also, keep the turkey in its original plastic packaging or cover thoroughly with plastic wrap or foil, and place it

in a pan with high sides to prevent liquid spills. Follow the same safety rules for other raw meat items.

**4 DOOR**  
As the warmest spot in the fridge, this is best for less perishable items, like cranberry sauce or relishes, and drinks that don't require refrigeration to stay fresh (beer, wine, soda).



## PRO TIP

If you're short on refrigerator space on the big day, a cooler can supply the extra storage you need. In very cold areas, a cooler outside your home can help keep even perishables fresh. In warmer climates, use it for drinks to leave more room in the fridge for other holiday meal items.



## CR-RATED ENTERTAINING TOOLS

### SLOW COOKERS



**87** ✓ **HAMILTON  
BEACH TEMP  
TRACKER 33866**  
6 QT. \$70



**86** **BLACK+DECKER  
DIGITAL WITH  
TEMPERATURE  
PROBE +  
PRECISION  
SOUS-VIDE**  
SCD7007SSD \$60

### MULTI-COOKERS



**82** ✓ **ZAVOR LUX  
LCD: ZSELL02**  
\$160



**81** ✓ **BREVILLE  
FAST SLOW PRO**  
6 QT. BPR700BSS  
\$250

## Extend the Party Outside

As long as the weather isn't frigid or stormy, you might be able to hold at least part of your holiday dinner outdoors. Three tips:

**SET THE SCENE.** Add string lights, music, and cozy blankets, and if you have a fire pit, put it to use.

**HAVE COCKTAILS ALFRESCO.** If you don't

want to do the whole meal among the stars, "putting the wine and beverages outside gives you time to finish up [meal prep] without guests interfering," says Lilly Jan, a food and beverage expert.

**ADD A SPECIAL TOUCH.** "Set up a hot chocolate bar where people can fill up their

mugs," says Kathi Lipp, a home-organizing expert. Or have the fixings for toasting s'mores. For a casual meal, serve slow-cooker chili or have your guests make pizzas in an outdoor pizza oven (see page 18). "All of these things could be so fun," Lipp says, "and might start your next tradition."

■ **Attend to last-minute concerns.** Missing an ingredient? See if a food store is open nearby or if you can use something else instead. (Check [food.unl.edu/article/ingredient-substitutions](http://food.unl.edu/article/ingredient-substitutions).) If you forgot to defrost the turkey, you can roast it frozen. (It will take more time, at least 50 percent longer.) Carefully remove the bag of giblets inside the bird about 2 hours into cooking, says CR's Rogers.

■ **Add some music.** Use multiroom speakers to create ambience. Allen St. John, CR's guru on smart speakers, suggests linking a few WiFi-enabled Ikea Symfonisk speakers (starting at \$99 each). For Bluetooth capability, sync them with a Sonos Roam (\$170).

■ **Let others pitch in.** Lilly Jan suggests creating a list of the tasks you don't necessarily need to tackle

yourself. Kathi Lipp advises having someone make a playlist, for instance, or do the vacuuming. This can add to the holiday gathering in more than one way, she points out: "Everybody wants to help—and these are things that can make them feel involved and get excited about chipping in. It makes for a much better atmosphere and will give the host more time to enjoy the event, too."

# CLEANING UP

■ **Deal with spills.** Mop up spills on floors and countertops promptly, CR experts say. Liquid on a floor “presents a slipping hazard for you and your guests,” says Rico de Paz, Consumer Reports test engineer for flooring. And red wine can leave a tough stain on some counters, says Chris Regan, CR’s senior test project leader for countertops.

■ **Start your dishwasher early.** Ciufu, who also heads CR’s dishwasher testing, suggests running appetizer dishes through

an express cycle right after the first course so that you’ll have fewer dirty dishes at night’s end. Consider a high-performing detergent. Cascade Platinum ActionPacs with Dawn is one of CR’s top-rated ones.

■ **Hand-wash right.** For fragile items, like those made of brass, bronze, crystal, or sterling, or anything with gold leaf, hand-washing is best. Use the two-basin method: Wash items gently in a sink full of hot, soapy water, then rinse in a basin of clean water. (Use a plastic

bin if your sink has only one basin.) Add clean water to the second basin as needed.

■ **Store leftovers.** Put away those that need refrigeration within 2 hours of cooking or reheating. “Letting food sit out longer increases the chance that bacteria will multiply and make you sick,” says Rogers. Eat leftovers within four days or freeze them at any point within that time frame. Cranberry sauce, gravy, soup, turkey, stuffing, and sweet potato casserole freeze well.

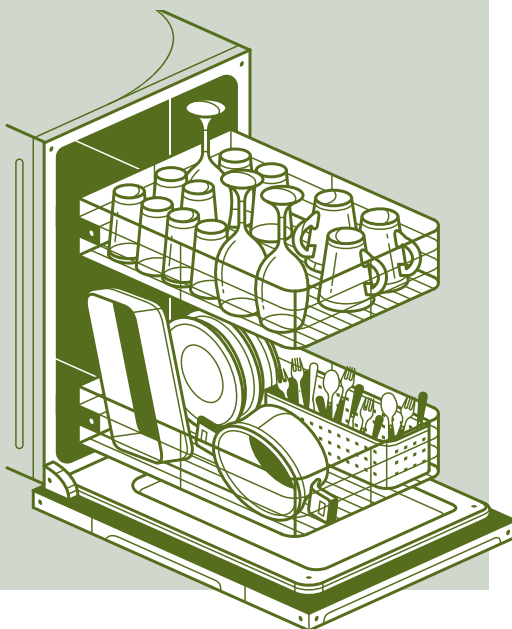
## STEP BY STEP...

## Load Your Dishwasher

**1 FILL THE TOP RACK.** Place drinking and wine glasses, as well as coffee cups, here, upside down, along with dishwasher-safe plastic, and large serving utensils. Have a third rack? Put utensils there.

**2 MOVE TO THE BOTTOM RACK.** Place large platters and other flat items along the rack’s outer edges so the spray arm can move freely. Put plates closer to the center. Dishwasher-safe pots and pans can also go on the bottom rack, but it’s best not to wash them in the same load as fragile china.

**3 DO CUTLERY RIGHT.** Place forks and spoons in the cutlery basket with handles facing down and knives with their handles up.



## Erase Stains Easily



### WINE, JUICE, OR SODA

Act quickly to gently blot the liquid with a white cotton cloth. Then mix 4 cups of water, a tablespoon of dish soap, and  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of white vinegar. Apply the mixture to the soiled area with a clean sponge, and allow 5 to 10 minutes for it to work. Blot again—don’t rub—with a clean cloth. Repeat these steps until the stain has lifted.



### OIL/GREASE

Some grease marks can be erased with a dab of mild dish detergent. Apply with a white cotton cloth, then blot dry. If that doesn’t eliminate the stain, use another cloth to apply a small amount of a dry-cleaning solvent. (You can buy it online.) Blot, then rinse. If any residue remains, sprinkle a bit of baking soda on the spot. Vacuum once it appears that the baking soda has absorbed the stain.



# THE SAFER WAY TO DO ONLINE BANKING

NEW DIGITAL TOOLS CAN MAKE IT EASIER TO MANAGE YOUR MONEY WHEREVER YOU ARE—BUT CHOOSING THE RIGHT KIND OF BANK (THAT OFFERS GOOD CUSTOMER SERVICE) IS KEY.

BY  
**OCTAVIO BLANCO**

ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
**ISRAEL VARVAS**



**YOU MAY ALREADY** use the online tools your bank offers to manage your bank accounts—including depositing checks and wiring funds without having to step foot inside your local branch. In fact, in an August 2020 survey of 2,236 U.S. adults, Consumer Reports found that 75 percent of American adults always or often conduct their banking online.

Some newer banks have taken the online banking model one step further by doing away with walk-in branches altogether. These online-only or “branchless” banks, such as Chime, Ally, and Discover Bank, often offer impressive benefits, such as lower account fees and higher interest rates

on checking and savings accounts than traditional banks might offer.

These perks are attractive, and as long as they’re insured by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. (FDIC), your money is as safe with these banks as it is in walk-in institutions. But there are differences to consider. One of the biggest is that some online banks may offer less in the way of customer service than traditional banks do.

## THE BENEFITS OF ONLINE-ONLY BANKS

A few years ago, online-only banks drew customers in with the promise of significantly higher annual percentage yields (APY) than traditional banks could offer. Today’s interest rates are

lower at most banks, but you still tend to get a better rate at an online-only bank. Most offer savings accounts with an APY in the range of 0.40 and 0.55 percent, whereas the average APY for a traditional bank is 0.06 percent. It’s not a huge difference, but if you’re adding to your savings every month over several years, it can add up.

Online-only banks can also help you avoid the plethora of fees many traditional banks charge. You won’t be charged, for example, if you don’t maintain a minimum balance or if you move or withdraw money. And they don’t typically charge those \$30 overdraft fees.

Another plus: Some online-only banks let you access some of your pay a day or two before you actually get paid, if you have a direct deposit account.





0%  
fee

24/7

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## THE DOWNSIDE OF ONLINE-ONLY

Online-only banks are able to keep their interest rates higher and fees lower because they save on real estate and personnel, so there's no teller to deposit a large check with and no banker to ask for advice.

Some may not offer the variety of accounts that most traditional banks do: You might not be able to have your checking, savings, and investment account at the same online bank, for example. And though you can withdraw cash from a branchless bank's network of ATMs, it's not always easy to deposit cash when you need to.

When it comes to customer service, "online-only banks lean more heavily on self-service," says Greg McBride, chief financial analyst at the personal finance website bankrate.com. "The ability to reach a person on a weekend or late into the evening is probably going to be much more limited." And although consumers are highly satisfied overall with their online-only banking experiences, according to a 2021 study by the consumer insights company J.D. Power, they experience slightly longer call wait times than those who use traditional banks. They also report higher incidences of being transferred to another customer service agent during the call and have more difficulty understanding the agents they're talking to. Because they have smaller staffs, online-only banks may take longer to respond to your email or chat, and you might receive an automated response. "Often, when you're tempted to use a digital financial product, customer service is going to be one of the biggest shortfalls," says Lauren Saunders, associate director at the National Consumer Law Center.

The biggest difference is that if you use an online-only bank and its chat, email, or phone customer service

doesn't resolve your problem, you won't have the option of heading to a branch to get help. That means it could be difficult to get an error fixed quickly—or, in rare cases, to access your money.

That's what happened to James Kopps, a 35-year-old insurance account manager in Milwaukee. He opened an account with Chime, one of the largest online banking companies, in January 2021, depositing his \$1,700 fourth-quarter bonus. But when he logged on less than a week later, he found that his account had been suspended. Kopps couldn't access his money for more than six months, despite his attempts to contact Chime's customer service.

Kopps isn't alone. A recent report from the nonprofit investigative reporting group ProPublica described how other Chime customers had been

frozen out of their accounts. Like Kopps, they said they got no support from the company. (Chime resolved Kopps' issue after Consumer Reports contacted the firm on his behalf.) The chairman of the Senate Banking Committee has asked the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau to look into the complaints against Chime.

"When consumers open up bank accounts, they naturally expect to be able to quickly get access to their own money," says Chuck Bell, a Consumer Reports financial policy advocate. "Without fast redress by the bank, customers could very likely be unable to pay for essential needs."

Online banks say they're trying to improve their customer service. Gabe Madway, Chime's head of communications, says that the



company will offer full 24/7 coverage 365 days a year “in a matter of weeks.”

## GETTING HELP WHEN YOU NEED IT

Whether you use a traditional banking institution’s website or an online-only bank, it’s vital to check your statements for errors. According to J.D. Power’s survey, 16 percent of online-only banking customers and 13 percent of traditional banking customers have had problems. Among the most common problems noted are incorrect customer information, such as a wrong home address; a fee charged in error; and a problematic website or mobile app.

If you encounter an issue like the first two, start with the app or website’s

customer service tools. If you can’t resolve the problem by chat, email, or phone, try the following tactics from Shep Hyken, a customer service expert who works with companies to build loyal customer relationships:

- If your bank has branches, stop in to discuss the problem with a teller.
- If you can’t get to the branch, your bank has no branches (i.e., it’s online-only), or the problem is with the app, reach out to the bank on social media. Instead of complaining publicly on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram, send a private direct message. Don’t threaten; simply say, “I thought the best way to reach you would be through social media, and I thought, even better would be to direct message you, so I can get a quicker response,” says Hyken.

- If you don’t get a response via social media, head up the corporate ladder. Search online for the phone number of the bank’s corporate headquarters. Call the main company phone number and ask to speak to the office of the CEO. You’re not actually trying to get the CEO, says Hyken; most chief executives have a team to handle problems, so you should be able to talk to someone. Then, explain your situation, staying as polite as you can, Hyken says.
- If you can’t reach the CEO’s office by phone—or can’t find the number—Hyken suggests trying LinkedIn. Search for the CEO and send them an Inmail message through the platform. The CEO might not see the message, but a staffer will and may respond. “Both the phone and LinkedIn approach work for small and large banks,” Hyken says.



## When It’s Time to Switch Banks

It goes without saying: If you’re unhappy with your bank’s service (whether it’s a traditional bank or an online-only company), close your account and go elsewhere—after you’ve resolved your problem, of course. Here’s how to choose a new bank.

- **Match your bank to your financial personality.** “If you have a safe deposit box, if you need somewhere to get a cashier’s check, or if your job pays you in cash and you need to go into a bank to deposit it, an online bank won’t work that well for you,” says Greg McBride of bankrate.com. “But keep in mind that it’s not all or nothing. You can have your checking account at a local bank and your emergency savings fund at an online-only bank that has higher interest rates,” he says.

- **Make sure walk-in branches are convenient.** “If you’re placing a premium on service, local branch access is something consumers highly value,” McBride says.

- **Consider your service needs.** If you prefer to bank in person, consider a community bank or credit union; these types of banks often pride themselves on the level of personal service they offer their community.

- **Read reviews.** As you might for any product or service, check online reviews on Google or at a site that publishes reviews of banks, like bankrate.com. Check the reviews on the Apple App or Google Play store to see whether users like the mobile app and which problems they complain about. You can download the app to test drive it yourself, but you may not be able to use the features without an account login, says McBride. Last, check with the Better Business Bureau

at bbb.org to see what consumers are saying about the company.

- **File a complaint.** If you feel wronged by your bank, file a complaint with the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), the agency in charge of enforcing banking and financial technology consumer fairness practices. Go to consumerfinance.gov or call 855-411-2372. The CFPB will work to get you a response, generally within 15 days.



# The Truth About Those Dollar Stores

Stores with “dollar” in their name are everywhere these days, offering low prices but also raising concern in communities that feel choked by them. What does their rise mean for how we shop—and how good are the deals, anyway?

BY BRIAN VINES

## “I’m too poor to buy cheap things”

was a refrain I heard a lot in my childhood. But the wisdom of the maxim never stopped my grandmother from spending hours exploring our local dollar store. I would follow her, aisle by aisle, as she searched for dollar store diamonds hidden with the other merchandise.

We were not alone on our treasure hunt. Along for the adventure were serious bargain hunters mixed with casual browsers, kids spending their allowance, and people who couldn’t afford more than a few dollars on food or other essentials. The store was all things to all people, and the price of admission—a buck—was just right.

The no-name dollar stores of my childhood, with kitty litter displayed next to rolls of paper towels, adjacent to recently expired cans of corn, were more mom-and-pop than corporate

outpost. With ever-changing and sometimes oddball inventory, they were a world apart from today’s dollar giants.

Dollar General, Family Dollar, and Dollar Tree are billion-dollar brands taking over the discount/value retail space, as the category is called, and are sweeping the country. About 75 percent of us live within 5 miles of one of Dollar General’s 17,683 stores, the company says. Only about 60 percent of us live that close to a hospital.

Family Dollar and Dollar Tree (the two have the same corporate owner) operate more than 15,000 stores.

Counting just those three brands, dollar stores in this country outnumber Starbucks and McDonald’s combined.

And more are coming. Dollar Tree and Family Dollar plan to open 600 new stores by early 2022, the company says. According to Coresight Research, which tracks retail trends, more than 40 percent of announced store openings in the U.S. this year, as of the end of August, are for dollar stores.

With so many stores, it’s no surprise

that a lot of us shop at them: Eighty-eight percent of Americans shop at dollar stores at least sometimes, according to a June 2021 Consumer Reports nationally representative survey of 2,280 adults. The most common reasons people said they shopped at dollar stores: They’re inexpensive, and they’re convenient.

But a dollar store on almost every corner also raises concerns. For some people, especially those who have low incomes or live in rural areas, these stores are the only option, or one of the only options, CR’s survey found.

Food access advocates worry that the stores’ skyrocketing growth means businesses with broader offerings—more fruit and vegetables in addition to dollar store mainstays such as candy, soda, and other heavily processed packaged foods—get squeezed out. Some communities are now pressuring the big three dollar stores to better serve the areas they operate in.

What critics and fans can agree on: Dollar stores are changing the way we





shop. And given that they appear to be here to stay, it pays to know how to shop there, whether they are your only option, or one of many. Our six-month investigation provides insights that can help you navigate their aisles.

## Are the Savings Real?

Dollar stores, of course, play up their low prices. Dollar Tree sets prices for most things at a dollar or less, in part by selling items in travel or other smaller-than-usual sizes. Dollar General and Family Dollar, which do sell things for more than \$1 and in larger sizes, still try to keep prices low.

Dollar General spokesperson Crystal Luce says the company aims for neighborhood stores with merchandise curated to make shopping simpler and more affordable. All three chains say their stores are best described as “fill in” shopping options that supplement weekly trips to the grocery store. Dollar General underscores the point, telling CR that pre-COVID-19, the average shopping tab was just \$12.

But how good are the savings, really? To investigate, I teamed up with other CR staffers and secret shoppers in eight locations across the country to go to



CR reporter **Brian Vines** shops the lightbulb aisle at Dollar General, consulting CR experts via videochat for tips on making the most of a trip to the dollar store.

nearby outposts of each of the three leading national dollar store chains, as well as two local supermarkets. We all had the same basic shopping list of common household items.

As a “cherry picker” who shops store to store based on price, I keep a mental spreadsheet of the best deals from week to week. But this exercise was a real eye-opener for me. Even as a third-generation dollar store shopper, I’ve been dubious about these stores being places to save. So I was surprised that all of us CR shoppers found that a dollar store was less expensive, on a unit-cost basis, than supermarkets for our items.

At least, that is, for those items we were able to find. And that is a big caveat. While we all live near a branch of each dollar store chain—the Dollar Tree I go to most often is a 13-minute

walk from my Brooklyn, N.Y., home—they weren’t exactly convenient. We had more trouble at dollar stores finding what we needed. For example, many of us found that a dollar store might have only one brand of dish soap, or just single-serving containers of popular breakfast cereals.

## From Humble to Huge

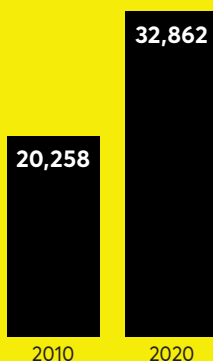
Dollar General is now the biggest of the mega dollar store chains, but its beginnings were humble.

During the Great Depression a man named James Luther Turner bought merchandise liquidated from bankrupt general stores and sold it to retailers. According to family lore, one day he bought a massive shipment of women’s underwear dirt cheap. Unable to persuade retailers to buy the underwear, he and his son Cal opened their own store in 1939.

That was the forebear of Dollar General, the store the pair opened in Springfield, Ky., in 1955. In his book “My Father’s Business,” Cal’s son, Cal Turner Jr., says the idea was to sell “good stuff to rich folks,” but because that market turned out to be saturated, they wound up “selling the cheap stuff to the poor folks.” Two years and 29 stores later the company was raking in \$5 million annually.

### The Rise of Dollar Stores

THE NUMBER of Dollar General, Dollar Tree, and Family Dollar stores across the U.S. has risen by 62 percent in the past decade. And more are coming: Four of 10 store openings this year are expected to be dollar stores, according to Coresight Research.



**Over 10 years, the number of dollar stores in the U.S. skyrocketed.**

Source: Dollar General, Dollar Tree, and Family Dollar stores annual reports.

Dollar General, like the other chains, now has shareholders, marketing departments, and Instagram accounts. The dented cans and off-brand products have largely been replaced by the same national brands that fill the shelves of full-service grocery stores.

Yet contemporary dollar chains are a class of their own, not quite grocery, housewares, or hardware store because their inventory in each category is far thinner than you'd find in a store with a more singular focus.

Even from the point of view of size, they occupy their own niche. The typical Walmart Supercenter clocks in at around 178,000 square feet, housing general merchandise, a full-service supermarket, and sometimes a tire and lube service, a vision center, and even a bank. On the other end of the spectrum, 7-Eleven stores—home to the Big Gulp and 2,500 other items—average between 2,500 and 4,000 square feet. Dollar stores are in the middle, with footprints ranging from 6,000 to 10,000 square feet and approximately 7,500 products for sale.

## What About Mom & Pop?

Some consumer advocates say the growth of dollar stores reminds them of an earlier retail game changer: the meteoric rise of Walmart. It began as a single store in Rogers, Ark., in 1962. By 1990, it had blanketed the nation's suburbs and larger towns with stores and proclaimed itself the country's leading retailer. Independent and family-owned stores nearby couldn't compete, and many closed.

As a result, people in many places had to travel farther to buy groceries, says Stacy Mitchell, co-director of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, a research and advocacy organization that champions community businesses. And now, Mitchell believes, dollar stores are threatening the stores that

survived the Walmart invasion.

In CR's recent survey, 7 percent of Americans who shop at dollar stores said the dollar store is the only shopping option—or one of the only options—in their community. And that number jumped to 19 percent for people in rural areas who make less than \$30,000 a year.

Luce, at Dollar General, takes exception to the idea that its stores push out other businesses, especially grocers. And, she says, many large supermarket chains had chosen not to enter some communities “long before Dollar General's entrance into the market.”

A Dollar Tree and Family Dollar spokesperson says that the stores actually help fight food insecurity by “helping alleviate the effects of ‘food deserts’” and that they “operate side by side with grocery stores and bring economic development to every community we enter.”

## Pressing Pause

But in what has become a trend, lawmakers in numerous towns and cities across the country are putting the brakes on dollar store expansion, convinced it is more a detriment than a benefit to their communities.

Cyndi Nguyen, who represents East New Orleans on the New Orleans City Council, is one. Her district houses one-third of the city's 36 chain-run dollar stores. A dollar store shopper herself, she says she thinks “they're great. But to saturate a community, they kind of went overboard.”

In 2018, Nguyen and two other council members directed the city planning commission to study “small box discount stores,” such as dollar stores. The agency's report found that dollar stores in New Orleans were prolific, that they tended to cluster, and that only one provided fresh fruit and vegetables.

The report included the account of a

## Who Shops at Dollar Stores, and Why

9 OF 10 AMERICANS  
Shop at Dollar Stores

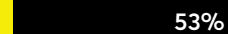


at least a few times per year.

### Top Reasons People Shop There



Products are less expensive.



It's convenient.



They enjoy browsing.

### Top Things They Buy



Household goods/cleaning supplies



Home décor/party goods



Food

**Note:** Out of 1,987 Americans who ever shop at dollar stores.

**Source:** June 2021 Consumer Reports nationally representative survey of 2,280 adults.



shopping center owner who could not find a grocery store operator willing to occupy vacant space. He said that another grocery in the area had closed after a Dollar General opened next to it.

As a result of the report, New Orleans restricted new dollar stores from opening within 2 miles of an existing one in East New Orleans and in the city's Westbank neighborhood. Elsewhere in the city, new stores can open no closer than a mile from another one.

Luce, at Dollar General, says restricting the stores' growth is not in the best interest of consumers: "We are disappointed that policymakers considered measures that could limit consumer choice."

Other cities—including Atlanta; Birmingham, Ala.; Cleveland; Fort Worth, Texas; Oklahoma City; and

## **Some towns and cities are putting the brakes on dollar store expansion, convinced it is more a detriment than a benefit to their communities.**

Mesquite, Texas—have also taken steps to restrict the growth of dollar stores, according to the Institute for Local Self-Reliance.

### Seeking Alternatives

Some communities are taking different approaches to meet local needs.

In Baldwin, Fla., a town of 1,600 about 20 miles west of Jacksonville, a Family Dollar and an IGA supermarket coexisted for years, just a 3-minute walk from each, says Sean Lynch, the city's mayor. Then in 2017 the IGA closed, leaving residents with only two options for fresh food, one 10 miles and the other 20 miles away.

The town of Baldwin owned the 10,000-square-foot former IGA space but

#### **DOLLAR STORES**

## **Deal or No Deal?**

**IMPLICIT IN THEIR** very names—Dollar General, Dollar Tree, and Family Dollar—is a low-price promise. But are the deals real? Are the savings significant enough to warrant making a trip?

To find out, we recruited eight CR staffers and secret shoppers—in Arizona, Arkansas, Connecticut, Florida, Michigan, New York, Ohio, and Texas—and gave them a shopping list of 14 everyday items, from pasta sauce and toothpaste to breakfast cereal and floor cleaner.

Because not all stores carry all brands, we did not specify which brands to buy. So our Ohio shopper bought Honey Nut Cheerios, for instance, and our Michigan shopper bought

Honey Bunches of Oats.

We did, however, ask each shopper to make sure their comparisons were apples to apples—to buy the same brand for each product category, if they could find them, at each of three chain dollar stores and the two supermarkets.

For our test, we calculated unit prices for each product, then standardized those prices to hypothetical, identical-sized products from each store.

Although our findings don't represent national averages or what you might find when shopping, they do provide a window into the pluses and minuses of the dollar store shopping experience.

Here's what we found.

#### **Dollar stores were cheapest for entire purchases.**

Counting the total of the items each shopper bought, at least one dollar store beat both supermarkets every time. In most cases, savings were a few bucks or less. But our Michigan shopper would have saved more than \$12 on his hypothetical mix of like-sized products, comparing the priciest supermarket with the cheapest dollar store.

#### **Grocery store prices can be competitive with dollar stores'.**

In some instances, individual items cost no more at supermarkets than at dollar stores. For example, some supermarkets were comparable to dollar stores for unit price on Hunt's pasta sauce, Lysol wipes, and Snack Pack chocolate pudding.

#### **Dollar stores don't always have what you're looking for.**

Our shoppers weren't able to find the exact same item for each of the 14 product categories across the five stores where they shopped. But some had better luck than others. Our Ann Arbor, Mich., shopper found the same items across stores for 12 products; another, in Austin, Texas, just three.

#### **You could save more by buying in bulk at supermarkets.**

Because we deliberately asked shoppers to try to find like-sized items, it is possible that if you were to buy giant containers of, say, cereal, you'd realize bigger savings at supermarkets because they are more likely to stock those large sizes.



failed to find a national chain or mom-and-pop grocer to occupy it, Lynch says. So in July 2019, the city decided to open and operate the Baldwin Market.

“It’s not the kind of business I’d get into to make money,” says Lynch, who adds that the store just breaks even. But, he says, Baldwin’s residents—including its seniors—have a place in town to buy fresh food.

Some other communities are turning to food co-ops. Those member-owned ventures have long attracted mainly health-conscious consumers seeking alternatives to corporate-run supermarkets, but increasingly, the people involved with them are not just wealthy people hungry for kale.

“We’re getting a lot of inquiries from historically disenfranchised communities—many of them

communities of color looking for access to healthy food,” says Stuart Reid, executive director of the Food Co-op Initiative, which helps the organizations get started. And because co-ops often source much of their produce from local suppliers, Reid believes they can improve the diets of residents while also transforming local economies.

For their part, dollar stores are also evolving. As of last March, only about 1,300 Dollar General stores nationwide carried fresh produce. But the company plans to add up to 10,000 more “in the coming years,” though it did not provide a date.

The company has also started a program, called “DG Better for You,” in which a registered dietitian creates meal suggestions and recipes for

items you can source at the store.

Family Dollar is also offering some fresh produce and frozen meat at select stores in neighborhoods where shoppers have few grocery options.

My neighborhood has plenty of other choices. Though its dollar store has yet to benefit from the changes some chains are making, my grandmother probably still wouldn’t recognize it as a dollar store.

I shop there navigating the boxes of yet-to-be-shelved inventory, seeking out my regular buys—Chex Mix, Texas Toast, hand soap—and keeping an eye out for gems like the 2 pounds of frozen blueberries I recently scored for a buck. So the pleasure of the treasure hunt endures—especially for those, like me, who can choose whether to fill in or fill up there.

## Where Our Shoppers Got the Best Bargains

**HALF OF THEM** found the lowest cost for their basket of products, based on unit prices and standardized sizes, at Dollar Tree; the other half, at Dollar General.

	DOLLAR TREE	DOLLAR GENERAL	FAMILY DOLLAR	SUPER-MARKETS
Eric (Ohio)	✓			
Janice (N.Y.)	✓			
Lisa (Texas)	✓			
Marc (Conn.)	✓			
Richard (Ark.)		✓		
Ryan (Mich.)		✓		
Sandy (Ariz.)		✓		
Stuart (Fla.)		✓		



## A Close Look at One Shopper's Basket of Items

**HERE'S THE AVERAGE** cost that Marc, a CR secret shopper in Connecticut, paid at the three dollar stores and at the two supermarkets where he shopped.

### DOLLAR STORES

Honey Bunches of Oats	\$2.52
Campbell's Tomato Soup	\$0.98
Barilla Elbows	\$1.60
Hunt's Pasta Sauce	\$0.96
Palmolive Ultra	\$1.01
Colgate Total	\$2.40

**TOTAL \$9.47**

### GROCERY STORES

Honey Bunches of Oats	\$2.94
Campbell's Tomato Soup	\$2.17
Barilla Elbows	\$1.76
Hunt's Pasta Sauce	\$1.44
Palmolive Ultra	\$0.92
Colgate Total	\$2.88

**TOTAL \$12.11**

# HOW TO BE A SMART DOLLAR STORE SHOPPER

## Tips From 3 CR Experts

**THERE MAY BE** no shortage of dollar stores coast to coast, but what they carry can sometimes be pretty limited. So when you shop in one, forget about taking a list—what you really need is a strategy. We asked CR experts, all dollar store shoppers themselves, to share their best ideas for navigating the aisles.



**Food**  
Amy Keating  
registered dietitian  
and food safety  
and testing  
program leader

**CHECK THE FREEZER.** Not many dollar stores carry fresh fruits and vegetables, but they often stock frozen versions of each. And those can be as nutritious as fresh. Look for veggies with no added salt or other ingredients and for unsweetened fruit.



### SCAN THE CAN.

Canned veggies are often high in sodium, and canned fruits tend to be packed with extra sugar. But if that's your only option, choose those with the least sodium. For canned fruit, look for products packed in juice or light syrup, then drain it. And don't buy cans with deep dents or bulges, which may compromise their safety.

### AVOID PROCESSED MEALS.

Dollar stores carry lots of packaged food, but much of it is heavily processed pasta mixes or chilis, lunch meat, frozen meals, and canned soups. Those tend to be high in sodium and sometimes added sugar. But you can make healthy meals by choosing items such as dried or canned beans, brown rice, pastas, and jarred spices.



### THE MILK AND EGGS CAN BE

**GRADE A.** These staples might not

be organic, but they can be perfectly nutritious. Note that you can check product dates, though "sell by" is simply meant to help stores manage inventory; "best used by" and "best before" indicate when an item is at peak flavor or quality.

### DON'T JUDGE A JUICE BY ITS

**PICTURE.** Dollar stores often stock lots of fruit drinks—but a picture of fruit on the label doesn't mean the container is full of real juice. Look for drinks that say "100 percent fruit juice" on the front, whether from concentrate or not.



### GO NUTS.

A lot of shelf space is devoted to snacks such as candy, chips, and cookies. But the stores also have healthy snacks: Look for unsalted nuts, sunflower seeds, or dried fruits, like raisins and cherries, that don't have added sugar.



### OTC Drugs & Supplements

Lisa Gill  
pharmaceuticals  
reporter

**SAVE WITH GENERICS.** Dollar stores, like supermarkets and drugstores, often carry generic or store-brand versions of over-the-counter drugs (such as the painkillers ibuprofen and acetaminophen), as well as branded versions of those meds (Advil and Tylenol).

Generics are chemically identical to branded versions, so they are just as safe and effective—and much less expensive. Gill found generic ibuprofen for 2.5 cents per pill at Dollar General, while the branded version, Advil, cost 16.7 cents per pill. Bottle sizes tend to be small at dollar stores, which is fine if you need the products only occasionally. Otherwise, larger bottles from big box stores may be more convenient and less expensive.



### DO BUY PERSONAL-CARE ITEMS.

Gill says she sees many familiar brands of soap, shampoo, and toothpaste at dollar stores for good prices, but variety may be limited and stock low. She is especially wowed by prices on tampons and other feminine care products.

**BE SUPPLEMENT-SAVVY.** These products aren't regulated as carefully as OTC drugs, so buying them always requires extra vigilance. Check to see whether they bear the USP (U.S. Pharmacopeia) seal or the seal of another independent testing group, such as NSF International.



### Home Goods

John Galeotafiore  
associate director of  
product testing

**STOCK UP ON THE BASICS.** CR's survey found that a

majority of people who shop at dollar stores typically buy household goods there—things such as paper towels, toilet paper, and cleaners. You may be able to get them cheaper in bulk at big box stores, but in an emergency or if you just need a little, dollar store offerings are a good bet.



### Beware of SLIM HARDWARE PICKINGS.

When it comes to tools, dollar stores may offer only standard items—pliers, claw hammers, two-pack screw-driver sets. That's fine if you're caught short when you're hanging a picture or curtain rod, but if your task is more complicated, you might want to head straight to the hardware store.

**DO A BULB PRECHECK.** Dollar stores may be more likely to stock incandescent bulbs, not the newer LED ones that tend to be more expensive in the short term but use less energy and last much longer. To save time and money, note the details of the bulb you're replacing, so you don't end up with something that isn't quite right.



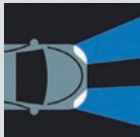
### MAKE AN AUTOMOTIVE PIT STOP.

Run out of windshield wiper fluid? Spill coffee on your car seat? Dollar stores often carry products that can help you through those minor mishaps. Many also stock motor oil, in case you notice that your level is running low. But make sure oil carries the American Petroleum Institute's certification mark. Even if it's a brand you don't recognize, that mark means it meets the latest industry standards.



NEWS & EXPERT  
ADVICE TO  
KEEP YOU  
AHEAD OF  
THE CURVE™

# ROAD REPORT®



## TIP FROM THE TEST TRACK

### How to Keep Headlights Clear

Unlike halogen headlights, LED lights don't get warm enough to melt away snow or ice. That can be a problem, particularly when driving in winter precipitation, which can freeze on contact with the headlight housing and limit the lights' effective range. Jen Stockburger, CR's director of operations, manages our headlight testing. She suggests spraying the headlight housing with a rain repellent or de-icing product before you head out. Avoid oil-based DIY hacks like cooking spray or lubricants, which can get foggy and opaque when cold and limit headlight range.

## ASK OUR EXPERTS

Is it safe to charge my EV at home when it's raining or snowing?



Yes, most wall chargers are outdoor-rated. But be sure the outlet or home charging station is professionally installed. The standardized SAE J1772 connector that attaches to the car is designed to **protect against water** intrusion or shorting. If you're using the 110-volt charger cord that came with the car, **plug it directly into the wall outlet**, not into a power strip or extension cord, which might not be rated to handle the strength of the current. And make sure that any outdoor outlet you use is protected from the elements.

## THE VITAL STATISTIC

# 56%

Reduction in front-to-rear crashes resulting in injuries when cars are equipped with forward collision warning and automatic emergency braking.

Source: December 2020 summary of IIHS/HLDI findings.

## RECALL



### Chevrolet

General Motors is recalling all Chevrolet Bolt and Bolt EUVs from the 2017-2022 model years because of the risk of a battery-related fire. Until the repair is done, GM is advising owners to park their vehicle outside, avoid charging it indoors overnight, limit charges to 90 percent of battery capacity, and avoid depleting the battery below about 70 miles of remaining range.

**WHAT TO DO:** Dealers will replace five defective lithium-ion battery modules in the battery pack at no charge. For more information on this recall, contact Chevrolet customer service at 833-382-4389.

FIRST  
DRIVE

### Toyota Corolla Cross



Positioned below the Toyota RAV4, the Corolla Cross is a small, sensible SUV with easy access and good visibility, a choice of front- or all-wheel drive, and lots of safety features. Its three trim levels (L, LE, and XLE) share a single four-cylinder engine paired to a continuously variable transmission. The fuel-efficient

169-horsepower engine has to work hard when merging or passing on the highway.

**CR'S TAKE:** The Corolla Cross is well suited for buyers who favor smart packaging and value over flash and performance.

**BASE PRICE RANGE** \$22,195-\$27,625  
**DESTINATION CHARGE** \$1,215  
**PRICE AS DRIVEN** \$28,840



# How to Buy a Used Car

Our tips and expert picks will help you find a reliable pre-owned vehicle at a price you can afford.

**by Benjamin Preston**

**U**SED-CAR PRICES have soared this year, and according to market analysts, they're likely to remain high for a while. The reasons are complicated. In short, a global microchip shortage has meant that automakers can't

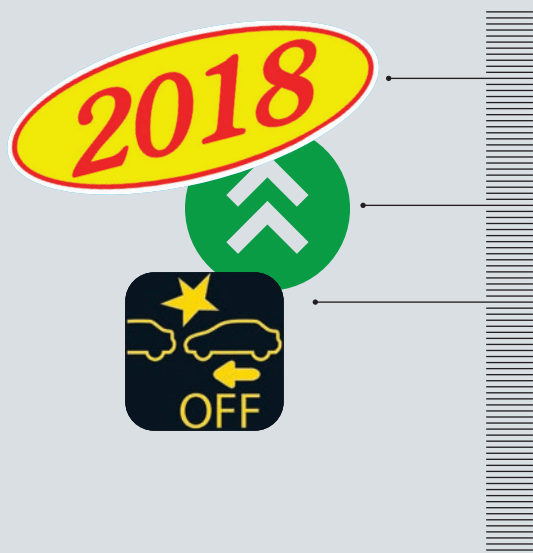
build new cars fast enough to meet demand. Fewer new cars for sale has increased demand for used cars, pushing prices up more than 40 percent above normal levels this past summer. "With financial stakes so high, it's more important than

ever to do careful research," says Jake Fisher, director of CR's Auto Test Center. Our strategies and model profiles on the following pages will help you find quality used cars at the best prices in this unusual market, no matter what your budget is.



# 01

## CONSIDER THESE KEY FACTORS



### ■ SAFETY EQUIPMENT

In recent years, a growing number of new cars have included advanced safety and driver assistance technology as an option, if not standard equipment. That means used cars are more readily available with features ranging from automatic emergency braking (AEB) to adaptive cruise control. Among those features, Consumer Reports highly recommends AEB with pedestrian detection and blind spot warning. "We think it is worth the extra effort to ensure your next car has these key safety features," Fisher says.

### ■ STRONG RELIABILITY

Narrow your field down to models that stand out for reliability in CR's surveys. But remember, every pre-owned car has its own history of use—and sometimes abuse—so it's always a good idea to have any used vehicle you're considering inspected by a trusted mechanic before buying it. "Because cars are selling so quickly, it might be difficult to get

a seller to agree to a mechanical inspection," says John Ibbotson, CR's chief mechanic. "But having a trusted mechanic inspect any used car you're considering buying is a good way to ensure that it will be both safe and reliable in the future."

### ■ AGE

Due to the current market, cars that are only a year or two old will not have depreciated much, and may even cost the same as they did when they were new. For that reason, you're likely to find better values in cars that are 3 to 5 years old. Many of these are just coming off lease and have been well-maintained. In today's highly unusual market, you may need to consider an older model than you normally would to meet your budget goals. "Try not to get stuck with something that's going to be worth less than the amount you owe on the loan in a few years," Fisher says. "Paying a higher-than-normal price now could mean that the car will depreciate faster as time passes."

# 02

## WEIGH ALL OF YOUR OPTIONS



### ■ SEARCH ONLINE

Look at websites like the CR Used Car Marketplace (CR.org/usedcarmarketplace) and Vroom. If you're willing to buy from an individual rather than a business, you can find listings on Craigslist and Facebook Marketplace. Be prepared to act, because sellers aren't likely to hold on to cars very long in this market. "Deals might disappear fast, so you may need to move quickly," Fisher says. "But don't rush so fast that you overlook important details and end up with a purchase you regret."

### ■ BUY OUT YOUR LEASE

Almost all lease contracts come with a buyout clause, so consider buying the car you're leasing when the term ends. If the buyout price for your car

was set before the pandemic, it's likely to be far lower than the car is currently worth on the open market. "Buying the car you've been leasing could be your best bet in the current market," Fisher says. "You'll be able to maintain the level of features and comfort you're used to and might have to give up if you bought another car at today's elevated prices."

### ■ CHOOSE A LESS POPULAR MODEL

As always in recent years, SUVs and pickup trucks are very popular, which means there will be fewer of them that current owners will want to part with. You're likely to find better availability—and maybe even a deal—on less popular models, such as sedans, hatchbacks, minivans, and front-wheel-drive SUVs.

## 03 | BE SMART ABOUT FINANCING

**SIGN  
HERE**

### ■ COMPARE OFFERS

Determine a budget, looking at both the monthly and overall costs, and get a preapproved offer from your bank or credit union before you go to the dealership. If the dealership can't beat the offer, you can be confident that you secured a good loan rate. "Walking into a dealership with your financing set up gives you a big leg up in the negotiations," Fisher says.

### ■ BE WARY OF EXTENDED WARRANTIES

Extended warranty programs generally aren't worth the money: On average, it costs less to pay for repairs out of pocket than to buy a plan that you might never use. If you can't purchase a used car that's still covered by its factory warranty, your best bet is to buy a model with a good history of reliability, or maybe a certified pre-owned vehicle, which will often come with some type of warranty. If you decide you want to buy warranty coverage, say, for a gotta-have model with a

dubious reliability record, make sure you know what the plan does and doesn't cover. "Most people are better off saving for unexpected repairs, because extended warranty contracts contain complex legal language that can be difficult to understand," says Chuck Bell, programs director for CR's advocacy division. "Also, dealers can mark up warranty coverage at different rates for different people."

### ■ DON'T LEASE A USED CAR

There are significant financial risks to leasing a used car, including the potentially high cost of repairing a vehicle you don't even own. On the off chance you do lease a used car, try to get one still under factory warranty or consider purchasing extended warranty coverage if there are not a lot of exclusions. It's also possible to take over someone else's lease through a company like Swapalease. In this case, the car is likely to still be under warranty and have a better maintenance history.

## 04 | KNOW WHAT YOU'RE BUYING

### ■ CHECK THE CAR'S HISTORY

Reports from Carfax or another reputable agency can reveal a car's accident history and whether it has been serviced regularly.

### ■ WALK AROUND THE CAR

Visually inspect the car on a dry, sunny day to better see imperfections and potential problems. Eyeball the underside for rust, fluid leaks, and signs of collision repair. Turn every knob and press every switch to make sure everything works as it should. If you smell mildew, the car may have been in a flood or there may be a leak somewhere, which could mean unseen water damage.

### ■ TAKE A TEST DRIVE

Before you even start driving, make sure the car is sized appropriately

to meet your needs, that the seats are comfortable, and that its controls won't drive you crazy. While driving, look for visible exhaust smoke, feel for abnormal vibrations, and smell for burning fluids. After driving, check under the car for oily leaks, keeping in mind that if the air conditioning is on, there will be a puddle of clean water under the car.

### ■ GET A MECHANICAL INSPECTION

This advice is so important that we think it's worth repeating: If you can, have the car inspected by your mechanic or, in a pinch, a friend skilled at auto repair. Unless the car is covered by a warranty or service contract, any problems it has are yours once you drive it home.



# USED CARS YOU CAN COUNT ON

These used-car picks (with a focus on SUVs, due to their popularity) are likely to satisfy buyers based on CR's ratings and reviews. Smart Choice models are consistent consumer favorites; Under the Radar models are not as popular but have a strong reliability record and had a good overall road-test score when CR tested them as new.

OVER \$40,000



SMART  
CHOICE

## 2019 LEXUS RX

The RX is the best-selling midsize luxury SUV. And no wonder: It's reliable, quiet, and comfortable; comes with all the latest advanced safety equipment; and is available with a powerful V6 or an efficient hybrid powertrain.

\$40,400-  
\$47,775

PRICE RANGE

22/29 mpg  
V6/HYBRID

FUEL ECONOMY

RELIABILITY

## 2019 AUDI Q7

There's a lot to like about this three-row SUV, including a comfortable, luxurious interior; standard automatic emergency braking; a pleasant powertrain; and an impressive 7,700-pound towing capacity. Far fewer new Q7 models are sold than Lexus RX models, so you won't find as many used Q7s on the lot.

\$41,650-  
\$54,625

PRICE RANGE

20 mpg

FUEL ECONOMY

RELIABILITY

UNDER  
THE  
RADAR



## \$30,000 TO \$40,000

SMART  
CHOICE



### 2019 TOYOTA HIGHLANDER

You can't go wrong with a well-maintained Toyota Highlander—either the V6 model or the fuel-sipping hybrid. The 2019 models will be coming off lease soon, which means there should be quite a few rolling onto the used-car lots. The Highlander is a dependable, relatively fuel-efficient model that comes standard with advanced safety features and is known for its high resale value.

**\$31,025-  
\$42,550**

PRICE RANGE

**22/25 mpg**

V6/HYBRID

FUEL ECONOMY



RELIABILITY

UNDER  
THE  
RADAR



### 2019 BUICK ENCLAVE

The roomy Buick Enclave has proved to be a worthy competitor to more sought-after three-row SUVs from Honda, Hyundai, Kia, and Toyota. A powerful V6 engine, good handling, and an easy-to-use infotainment system are just a few of the many things to like about the Enclave. But if you're looking for advanced safety features, you'll find them only on more expensive trim levels.

**\$30,050-  
\$40,275**

PRICE RANGE

**18 mpg**

FUEL ECONOMY



RELIABILITY

## \$20,000 TO \$30,000

SMART  
CHOICE



### 2019 MAZDA CX-5

Mazda's entry in the popular compact SUV segment stands out for being attractive and fun to drive. It also sports a more luxurious interior than you're likely to find in other cars in the same price range. CR members report high levels of owner satisfaction with the reliable, stylish CX-5. Automatic emergency braking and blind spot monitoring are standard on this model.

**\$22,450-  
\$30,750**

PRICE RANGE

**24 mpg**

FUEL ECONOMY



RELIABILITY

UNDER  
THE  
RADAR



### 2018 FORD EDGE

CR's testers were taken with the clean styling and upscale interior of the Edge when it was new. It also has a roomy, easy-to-access interior, ample cargo space, and an easy-to-use infotainment system. Unfortunately, some safety features are not easy to come by: Automatic emergency braking is not available, and forward collision warning is an option only on certain trim levels.

**\$21,325-  
\$32,625**

PRICE RANGE

**21 mpg**

FUEL ECONOMY



RELIABILITY



## \$10,000 TO \$20,000

SMART  
CHOICE



### 2015 HONDA CR-V

There are many reasons why the CR-V is one of the best-selling compact SUVs: It's functional, reliable, roomy, and enjoyable to drive. Although advanced safety technology was only optional in 2015, this model got top marks in IIHS crash testing. Well-maintained CR-Vs of this vintage are an especially good value, sitting at the intersection of not too old and not too expensive.

**\$15,975-  
\$21,475**

PRICE RANGE

**24 mpg**  
FUEL ECONOMY

↑ RELIABILITY

UNDER  
THE  
RADAR



### 2017 CHEVROLET EQUINOX

Chevrolet sells a ton of Equinoxes, often at a significant discount, helping make them an attractive used-car value. The engines offered could be more powerful and fuel efficient, but the Equinox is roomy and has a quiet interior, easy-to-access seats, and generous cargo space. The top-end V6 versions are more likely to include advanced safety features.

**\$16,800-  
\$20,525**

PRICE RANGE

**18/21 mpg**  
V6/4-CYLINDER  
FUEL ECONOMY

↑ RELIABILITY

## UNDER \$10,000



These cars are all at least a decade old. But if you're on a tight budget, they cost less than \$10,000 and

have held up remarkably well, according to our reliability data. Still, we recommend checking the

vehicle history report and having a mechanical inspection before you decide to buy.

### 2010-2012 HONDA FIT

Good reliability, 30 mpg overall fuel economy, and a surprising amount of interior and cargo space make this diminutive wagon a smart buy.

PRICE RANGE \$7,150-\$9,350

### 2010-2012 TOYOTA PRIUS

A spacious interior, hatchback versatility, and 44 mpg overall fuel economy are all good reasons most anyone would consider this car a good buy.

PRICE RANGE \$7,400-\$10,625

### 2009-2011 TOYOTA CAMRY

Although handling isn't particularly exciting, above-average reliability and fuel economy and a roomy interior make the Camry a good option.

PRICE RANGE \$7,800-\$10,025

### 2011-2012 INFINITI G

The G sedans are fun to drive, with agile handling, very good reliability, and decent fuel economy, albeit on premium fuel. But the interior and trunk are a bit tight.

PRICE RANGE \$9,050-\$10,800

### 2010-2012 TOYOTA COROLLA

This small sedan has long been a good value, offering 32 mpg overall fuel economy; a roomy, quiet interior; and top-notch reliability.

PRICE RANGE \$7,725-\$10,000

### 2009-2011 HONDA ACCORD

Though light on amenities, Accords of this vintage are reliable and fuel efficient, and ride nicely.

PRICE RANGE \$7,000-\$10,325

### 2008-2010 HONDA CR-V

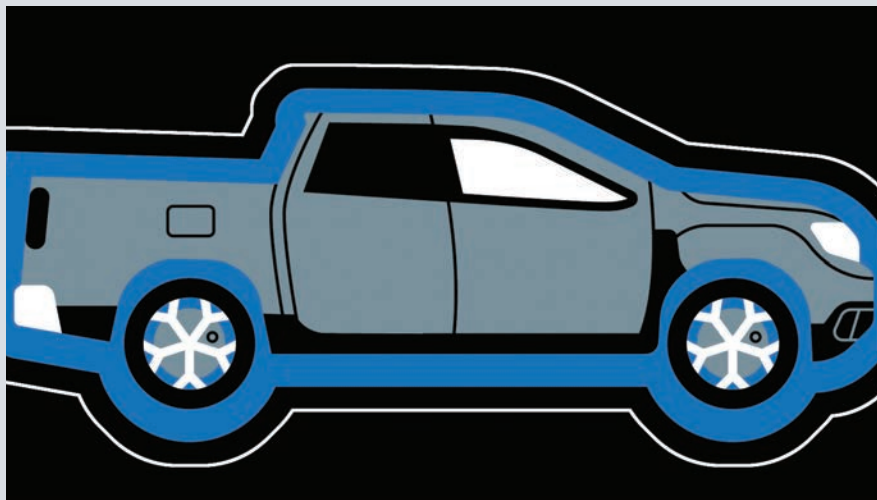
A perennial favorite, this earlier vintage of CR-V still offers good reliability and fuel economy, as well as a roomy interior and plenty of cargo space.

PRICE RANGE \$7,075-\$10,200



## The Small-Truck Revolution

**SMALL PICKUP TRUCKS** are a big trend this season, with three new models to look for. "These all offer truck versatility at a lower price and in a size that makes them more suitable for daily use," says Jake Fisher, CR's senior director of auto testing. Ford's new Maverick shares a platform with the Escape and Bronco Sport SUVs and is the first pickup to come standard as a hybrid. Hyundai's Santa Cruz brings the best of the impressive Tucson SUV to a truck. And after 16 long years, Nissan has finally redesigned the Frontier pickup, with an updated interior and powerful engine that make it a compelling alternative to the established body-on-frame models from Chevrolet, GMC, Ford, and Toyota. Read on for a preview and our first impressions.



### PREVIEW

#### FORD MAVERICK

Serving as the entry point into the Ford lineup, the four-door-only Maverick is roughly a foot shorter bumper to bumper than a Ranger crew cab. The game-changing base 191-hp, 2.5-liter hybrid four-cylinder is linked to a continuously variable transmission that drives the front wheels and delivers a claimed 37 mpg combined and a range of 500 miles per tank. There's an available 250-hp, 2.0-liter turbo four-cylinder paired with an eight-speed automatic that can tow up to 4,000 pounds. All-wheel drive is optional with the 2.0L. Numerous accessories and Ford's truck heritage add to the appeal.



**BASE PRICE RANGE** \$19,995-\$29,880  
**DESTINATION CHARGE** \$1,495  
**ON SALE** Fall 2021



#### HYUNDAI SANTA CRUZ

The dramatic lines of the Hyundai Santa Cruz are a departure from the blocky shape of most trucks. But beneath that skin you'll find its chief appeal: a comfortable ride and smooth powertrain combined with truck versatility that includes lockable in-bed storage. The base engine is a 191-hp four-cylinder that we found dull in the Tucson. The Santa Cruz we purchased for testing has a 281-hp, 2.5-liter turbocharged engine that's strong and smooth, and all-wheel drive, allowing it to tow up to 5,000 pounds. Overall, this is a refined daily driver that's ready for pint-sized weekend adventures.



**BASE PRICE RANGE** \$23,990-\$39,720  
**DESTINATION CHARGE** \$1,185  
**PRICE AS DRIVEN** \$37,290



#### NISSAN FRONTIER

The new Frontier is built on the bones of the previous version, with upgraded road manners and a peppy powertrain among the many improvements. The 310-hp, 3.8-liter V6 and nine-speed automatic provide good acceleration and more power than rivals, and handling and ride also shine (though steering is oddly heavy at low speeds). Controls are simple and easy to use. The driving position is mixed, with a supportive seat but lacking some steering wheel adjustments. Downsides: The rear seat is rather tight and the tall hood hinders forward visibility.



**BASE PRICE RANGE** \$27,840-\$37,240  
**DESTINATION CHARGE** \$1,150  
**PRICE AS DRIVEN** \$35,140



## ROAD TEST

EXCLUSIVE RATINGS & REVIEWS  
BASED ON TESTING AT CR'S  
327-ACRE AUTO TEST CENTER



MID-SIZED SUVs

### Hyundai Santa Fe Hybrid

Quicker and Quieter

84

OVERALL  
SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 86

**HIGHS** Secure handling, braking, interior room, fuel economy

**LOWS** Gear selector, some controls

**POWERTRAIN** 226-hp, 1.6-liter turbocharged 4-cylinder hybrid engine; 6-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive

**FUEL** 30 mpg on regular

**PRICE**  
\$33,650–\$39,950 base price range  
\$39,280 as tested

**THE HYBRID VERSION** of the Santa Fe transforms Hyundai's mid-sized SUV into a quicker, quieter, and more refined family vehicle. It comes standard with all-wheel drive and is clearly the pick of the Santa Fe's three powertrain options.

The hybrid was nearly 2 seconds quicker from 0 to 60 mph (at 8.3 seconds) than the base 2.5-liter gas-only Santa Fe we tested in July, thanks to the hybrid's combined 226 hp from its 1.6-liter turbo four-cylinder and electric drive.

It returned 30 mpg overall, an improvement of 6 mpg over the gas-only version, although it significantly trails the Toyota Venza hybrid's 37 mpg overall.

The Santa Fe hybrid can glide on electric power up to about 30 mph, making it ideal for city driving. But there are slight downsides. There can be a delay when you hit the

accelerator pedal to get going again after a rolling stop, and the six-speed automatic transmission doesn't always shift smoothly.

Ride quality is markedly better in the hybrid compared with the gas-only version. The hybrid's suspension soaks up potholes and other big hits with more poise than the regular model. And its powertrain contributes to a quieter cabin, because the deeper well of power means there's less need to rev up the engine noisily in search of more thrust.

The comfortable interior is marred slightly by too many similar-looking controls on the center console, and the push-button gear selector is difficult to operate by feel, which could distract the driver.

FCW, AEB with pedestrian and cyclist detection, BSW, and RCTW with rear automatic braking come standard.



SMALL SUVs

### Hyundai Tucson Hybrid

Frugality With Flair

84

OVERALL  
SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 92

**HIGHS** Handling, ride, braking, roomy interior, fuel economy

**LOWS** Gear selector

**POWERTRAIN** 226-hp, 1.6-liter turbocharged 4-cylinder hybrid engine; 6-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive

**FUEL** 35 mpg on regular

**PRICE**  
\$29,050–\$37,350 base price range  
\$33,194 as tested

**THE TUCSON HYBRID** possesses all of the best qualities of its gas-only counterpart: sharp handling, a roomy interior, and easy-to-use controls. But like the hybrid version of the Santa Fe, it's also quieter and more fuel-efficient. It's our top-scoring small hybrid SUV.

Its 1.6-liter turbo four-cylinder with electric drive puts out 226 hp and delivers a healthy mid-rpm thrust, unlike its rather sluggish gas-only cousin. With standard all-wheel drive, the hybrid is nearly 2 seconds quicker from 0 to 60 mph (at 7.7 seconds) than the regular Tucson and managed 35 mpg overall in our testing, 9 mpg better than the conventional version and just 2 mpg shy of the class-leading Toyota RAV4 hybrid.

The Tucson hybrid can drive on electric power only for up to about 35 mph—provided you use a light foot

on the pedal—making it ideal in urban settings.

The six-speed automatic isn't quite as smooth as the regular Tucson's eight-speed, with an occasionally bumpy downshift. There's also a slight power delay when accelerating out of a rolling stop.

As with the gas-only version, the Tucson hybrid nicely balances ride and handling. The steering has a natural, well-weighted feel, and it's engaging on twisty back roads. It's one of the more comfortable-riding small SUVs we've tested, though its firm suspension can transmit jiggle over rough roads. Braking distances are a touch longer than the regular Tucson, but the pedal feels pretty normal, unlike the sponginess of some hybrids.

FCW, AEB with pedestrian and cyclist detection, BSW, RCTW, LDW, and LKA all come standard.


**COMPACT CARS**

## Honda Civic

Fun Through Corners,  
Loud on the Highway

**71**
**OVERALL  
SCORE**

**WE LIKE THE** redesigned Civic's handling, braking, and fuel economy, but it has a noisy cabin and an uncomfortable ride. Our Civic also lacked heated seats, wireless phone charging, and BSW, features found in some comparably priced rivals.

The standard 158-hp four-cylinder engine moves the Civic off the line with an initial burst, but acceleration is tame after that, clocking 9.7 seconds from 0 to 60 mph, slow for the segment. It registered 33 mpg overall in our testing, an impressive figure that matches the Hyundai Elantra and Toyota Corolla. Upper trims offer a more powerful and quieter turbo four-cylinder engine.

Handling is nimble, with quick steering and little body roll. The Civic was super-capable and secure around our road-course test track, but the stiff ride can send big jolts into the cabin on rougher

**ROAD-TEST SCORE 71**

**HIGHS** Handling, fuel economy, braking, controls

**LOWS** Stiff ride, noise, difficult to get in and out

**POWERTRAIN** 158-hp, 2.0-liter 4-cylinder engine; continuously variable transmission; front-wheel drive

**FUEL** 33 mpg on regular

**PRICE**  
\$21,700–\$28,300 base price range  
\$24,095 as tested

roads. And road noise gets so elevated at highway speeds that occupants have to raise their voices during a conversation, which can get tiring on long drives. The top Touring trim has added sound insulation.

The low-slung cabin is difficult to get in and out of, but there's plenty of headroom and comfortable, supportive seats. Still, the plastic center console intrudes into the driver's right knee space. On the plus side, the rear seat is reasonably roomy for this compact class. The honeycomb dashboard vents look cool, and we love the high-quality "click" of the climate control knobs. The infotainment screen is easy to use, and Android Auto and Apple CarPlay come standard.

FCW and AEB with pedestrian detection are standard, but BSW is available only on the top two trims.


**MIDSIZE THREE-ROW SUVs**

## Nissan Pathfinder

Improved Version  
With a Nostalgic Twist

**65**
**OVERALL  
SCORE**

**WITH THIS LATEST** Pathfinder redesign, Nissan has invoked the squared-off styling of the original late-1980s version while giving the midsize SUV a better powertrain, an updated infotainment system, and sharper handling.

The Pathfinder's punchy and pleasant 284-hp V6 is mated to a smooth-shifting nine-speed automatic, replacing the continuously variable transmission that sapped driving enjoyment from its bland predecessor. Fuel economy is commendable for a roomy three-row SUV, at 21 mpg overall in our testing.

In our driving, handling was responsive, with quick steering and well-controlled body roll. But the ride was overly firm, often a trade-off for improved handling. Although the Pathfinder's ride quality is acceptable, it's no match for the Toyota Highlander or Subaru Ascent.

**ROAD-TEST SCORE 85**

**HIGHS** Powertrain, interior room, controls

**LOWS** Overly firm ride

**POWERTRAIN** 284-hp, 3.5-liter V6 engine; 9-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive

**FUEL** 21 mpg on regular

**PRICE**  
\$33,410–\$48,090 base price range  
\$46,375 as tested

The interior is roomy, and the driver has an elevated, commanding view of the road. The front seats are wide and mostly comfortable, though some CR testers thought the back support was a bit lumpy.

There's generous second-row room whether buyers opt for the three-passenger bench or two captain's chairs. Even the third row is hospitable, aided by the effortless way the second-row seats slide out of the way for better access.

The main controls are mostly a carryover from the compact Rogue, which is a good thing. There are plenty of physical buttons and grippy knobs, and unlike many modern vehicles, the Pathfinder's simple, intuitive controls allow you to figure things out on the fly.

We also like that FCW, AEB with pedestrian detection, BSW, RCTW, and LDW come standard.



**Ratings** ➤ **Hybrid Benefits** The Santa Fe and Tucson show that hybrids can enhance the entire driving experience. The Pathfinder is improved; the Civic is fun but loud.

Make + Model		Overall Score	Survey Results		Road-Test Results														Active Safety Features					
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Overall mpg	Seat comfort, front/rear	Usability	Noise	Ride	Fit + finish	Routine handling	Avoidance-maneuver speed, mph	Acceleration, 0-60 mph, sec.	Dry braking, 60-0 mph, ft.	Suitcases + duffels/ Cargo volume, cu. ft.	FCW	AEB, pedestrian	AEB, highway	BSW				
SEDANS UNDER \$25,000																								
✔	Nissan Sentra 2.0L	<div><div></div>77</div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	81	32	<div><div></div> / <div><div></div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	55.5	8.5	129	3+2	S	S	S	S				
✔	Toyota Corolla 1.8L	<div><div></div>77</div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	68	33	<div><div></div> / <div><div></div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	53	10.4	134	3+1	S	S	S	0				
✔	Subaru Impreza 2.0L	<div><div></div>75</div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	85	30	<div><div></div> / <div><div></div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	56	9.5	124	2+2	0	0	0	0				
✔	Mazda3 2.5L	<div><div></div>75</div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	75	30	<div><div></div> / <div><div></div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	54	7.7	125	3+1	S	S	S	0				
✔	Hyundai Elantra 2.0L	<div><div></div>74</div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	76	33	<div><div></div> / <div><div></div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	55.5	7.9	128	2+3	S	S	0	S				
✔	Honda Civic 2.0L	<div><div></div>71</div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	71	33	<div><div></div> / <div><div></div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	56.5	9.7	129	3+1	S	S	S	0				
	Volkswagen Jetta 1.4T	<div><div></div>50</div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	78	34	<div><div></div> / <div><div></div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	52	9	135	3+2	0	-	0	0				
HYBRID SUVs \$25,000 - \$35,000																								
✔	Hyundai Tucson 1.6T+H	<div><div></div>84</div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	92	35	<div><div></div> / <div><div></div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	53	7.7	132	38.5	S	S	0	S				
✔	Honda CR-V 2.0H	<div><div></div>81</div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	80	35	<div><div></div> / <div><div></div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	53	8.5	133	34	S	S	S	0				
✔	Toyota RAV4 2.5H	<div><div></div>72</div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	76	37	<div><div></div> / <div><div></div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	52	7.8	139	30.5	S	S	S	0				
	Ford Escape 2.5H	<div><div></div>50</div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	82	34	<div><div></div> / <div><div></div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	51	8.3	128	30.5	S	S	S	S				
HYBRID SUVs \$35,000 - \$45,000																								
✔	Hyundai Santa Fe 1.6T+H	<div><div></div>84</div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	86	30	<div><div></div> / <div><div></div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	51	8.3	130	35.5	S	S	S	S				
✔	Toyota Highlander 2.5H	<div><div></div>83</div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	84	35	<div><div></div> / <div><div></div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	49.5	8	141	41	S	S	S	0				
✔	Toyota Venza 2.5H	<div><div></div>78</div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	75	37	<div><div></div> / <div><div></div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	51	7.8	137	26.5	S	S	S	S				
3-ROW SUVs \$35,000 - \$45,000																								
✔	Kia Telluride 3.8L	<div><div></div>97</div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	97	21	<div><div></div> / <div><div></div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	53.5	7.2	127	47.5	S	S	S	S				
✔	Hyundai Palisade 3.8L	<div><div></div>85</div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	88	21	<div><div></div> / <div><div></div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	52.5	7.1	132	47.5	S	S	S	S				
✔	Toyota Highlander 3.5L	<div><div></div>84</div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	86	22	<div><div></div> / <div><div></div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	50	7.3	132	41	S	S	S	0				
✔	Mazda CX-9 2.5T	<div><div></div>80</div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	79	22	<div><div></div> / <div><div></div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	50	7.9	139	34	S	S	S	S				
✔	Kia Sorento 2.5T	<div><div></div>77</div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	83	25	<div><div></div> / <div><div></div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	52.5	6.5	133	39.5	S	S	S	0				
✔	Honda Pilot 3.5L	<div><div></div>72</div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	80	20	<div><div></div> / <div><div></div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	49.5	7.5	136	48	S	S	S	0				
	Chevrolet Traverse 3.6L	<div><div></div>69</div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	95	20	<div><div></div> / <div><div></div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	50.5	7.3	130	54.5	0	0	0	0				
	Nissan Pathfinder 3.5L	<div><div></div>65</div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	85	21	<div><div></div> / <div><div></div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	52.5	7.6	138	44.5	S	S	S	S				

➤ Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at [CR.org/cars](https://www.cars.com). When you're ready to buy, configure the vehicle and find the best price in your area by clicking the green "View Pricing Information" button on the model's dedicated page.

**HOW WE TEST:** Recommended models did well in our **Overall Score**, which factors in **road-test results**, **predicted reliability**, **owner satisfaction**, and **advanced safety**, which includes crash-test results and the availability of crash-prevention features, such as forward collision warning, automatic emergency braking, pedestrian detection, and blind spot warning. — means no such safety system is offered; 0 means that it's optional on at least some trim levels;

S means that the feature is standard on all trims. We deduct points if a model's gear selector lacks fail-safes to prevent the vehicle from rolling away.

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# Turkey Day Fowl-Ups

Everything you *don't* need for your Thanksgiving meal this year

## Here's Some Bird-Brained Pricing

We're guessing this turkey isn't stuffed with gold.  
Submitted by Neal Steiger, Lakeland, FL



## Is Chicken the New Turkey?

Poultry is poultry ... right?  
Submitted by Ross Miller, Los Angeles



## Where Else Would You Grow Those Apples?

We're in big trouble when this fruit needs to be concocted with a chemistry set.  
Submitted by Muffy and David Vhay, Carson City, NV



## A Not-So-Hot Deal

This is where you roast that \$123,199.88 turkey (see above left).  
Submitted by Benjamin Slagter, via email



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