

## BUYING MICROWAVE OVENS AND MICROWAVE/CONVECTION OVENS

Microwave ovens can be used by people of most age levels, from school age children to the oldest cooks in the family because there is no flame or heating element, lightweight cooking utensils are available, and the easy to use controls are located at the front of the oven. Braille overlays for the vision impaired can be purchased. They range in price from \$90 to over \$750.

### **Basic Choices: Narrowing The Field**

**Size:** Begin by measuring the amount of space you have available for a microwave oven. Select a location that is convenient for use. Countertop height is best for many people. People in wheelchairs and children will be able to reach an oven that is installed below the countertop. There are a variety of sizes of ovens to fit on the countertop or to install in a wall or cabinet, and ovens to fit under a cabinet or over the range. Large ovens allow you to prepare a larger quantity of food and are slightly higher priced than the small ovens. They have the advantage of having extra features and cooking faster than smaller ovens.

#### **Size of ovens available**

	Width	Depth	Height	Watts
large	22-27"	15-21"	13-16"	650-over 1000
medium	20-24"	13-18"	13-16"	600-800
small	18-20"	12.5"	10-12"	400-700

**Over the range units:** These ovens are usually in the mid-size range and could have many features. They may have fans and venting systems which can serve a double purpose as a range hood.

**Power:** Food heats up to one-third faster in a more powerful oven. Small amounts of food can be defrosted and reheated with 400 to 500 watts. If you plan to do more extensive cooking, a mid-size or a large oven may better suit your needs. Check to see if the oven has a variety of power levels. Five power levels are enough to cook most foods. Some ovens have only one power level while others have up to 100 possible power settings. Most microwave ovens need to have a separate electric circuit.

**Amount of food to be cooked in microwave at one time:** Measure the "floor space" inside the oven to determine if there is enough room for containers and the amount of food you will be cooking at one time. Manufacturers measure the inside of the oven in cubic feet. Ovens range from .5 cubic feet to 1.6 cubic feet. Ovens with the same cubic feet can have big differences in the amount of floor space. Small ovens may be fine for heating leftovers, warming food and popping corn. However, there may not be enough space for a dinner plate in the smallest ovens.

**Microwave convection ovens** are higher priced than most microwave ovens. However, they can roast, brown and crisp food like a conventional oven (with temperatures ranging from 200°-450°F), as well as cook food quickly with microwaves. New cooking methods are required with this appliance. It is possible to cook food with either the convection or microwave method separately or to combine them. A conventional oven still gives the best results for most baking and broiling.

### **Other Considerations**

**Controls:** There are two types of controls available. **Mechanical controls** may have a timer dial to turn, plus an on/off switch. The dial may be difficult to set for a specific number of seconds, which could result in overcooked food. **Touch pad controls** are used on most microwaves. Look for models that have well-lit large number displays that are easy to read. Also look for models that are easy to program or have display prompters that guide you as you set the appropriate cooking stages.

As you comparison shop, ask for a demonstration to see if it is easy to set programs on the oven for proper cooking temperatures. Some models make cooking very easy by pushing one button to cook certain foods. Pushing only one key to begin cooking is a great convenience. Some models allow a person to store cooking instructions of various foods and to retrieve those instructions and cook the food with a press of one button.

**Automatic Defrost:** Consumers find this feature timesaving and convenient although food can be defrosted in any microwave.

## **Basic Features To Look For**

It is helpful to have a window that permits a good view of the food as it cooks. A shelf increases the amount of food that can be prepared at the same time. Some models have a tray that can prevent the spread of spills. Look for a model with a clearly written and well-organized cookbook and owner's manual. They can help you make the best use of your appliance. Check these publications before you buy to decide if your family will be able to understand the instructions.

## **Other Features**

You will find models available with several other features. These may include: a temperature probe, moisture sensor, multi-stage cooking programs and a turntable. Some models even count calories in food portions and keep track of the total calories consumed. These are not as widely used as the previously listed features. Decide if the cost of these features is worth the extra cost of the unit.

## **Warranties**

Read the warranty carefully. Warranties differ among manufacturers. It is common to see warranties that cover parts and labor for one year. The magnetron tube is often under warranty for 5 to 10 years. You may see a limited two-year warranty on parts on some microwave ovens.

## **Safety**

Microwave ovens are safe to use. They are tested to meet federal standards of emission levels so any radiation leakage will be very small. For maximum protection, stand a few feet away while the oven is on. If the door does not fit snugly, have the oven checked for microwave leakage. Contact a local microwave dealer or the local health department for information on testing.

## **Care**

Follow the manufacturer's instructions for use and care. In general, wipe the oven with warm water that contains hand dishwashing detergent. They wipe dry to prevent rusting.

## **Sources**

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