

## BUYING DISHWASHERS

Dishwashers all look about the same. Virtually all models are the standard width of 24 inches. They all have two racks and a door that makes up the entire front of the unit. And now almost all have plastic liners. Porcelain or stainless steel interiors are the exception. But these similarities do not mean that there are not significant differences. With prices ranging from around \$200 to over \$500, the wise consumer will do some homework before making the final decision. The main factors to consider are built-in or portable, performance, economy of water and energy usage, and noise.

### ***Built-in Or Portable***

Built-in dishwashers fit under the kitchen counter top, like part of your kitchen cabinetry, and are permanently attached to the water supply. The preferable location is next to the kitchen sink. While you may mourn the cabinet space you lose to a built-in dishwasher, it far exceeds the portable in convenience. Portable models are designed to be rolled to the sink and attached to the faucet and electricity. Many portable models are called convertible, since they can be adapted for use as a built-in.

### ***Washing Ability/Performance***

Today's dishwashers are designed to provide clean dishes without excessive use of water or energy. However, each household has slightly different needs: you will want a model that allows you to put all of **your** household's dishes and eating utensils in the dishwasher--or as many as reasonably possible. You may decide not to place fragile items, sharp knives, wooden items, and other utensils in the dishwasher. Not all dishwashers accommodate dishes of the same size, and you may have an extra large platter or tall plastic tumblers that you use frequently. You'll need to check that the dishwasher you are considering will accommodate your unique items.

The internal configuration of a dishwasher determines the size and types of items you can load. A washer arm attached to the "ceiling" of the dishwasher will limit the height of glasses or pots that you can wash in the top rack. An arm under the top rack will limit the size of plates or platters that you

can load in the lower rack. Some models use towers to shoot water to the upper rack; these towers take up space in the middle of the lower rack and reduce the space for dinner plates and other items.

Some models offer adjustable upper racks that can be raised, lowered, or tilted to make space for taller items in either the top or bottom rack. Racks may have dividers that fold down. Some top racks are the same depth all the way across; others are deeper along the sides, allowing taller items to be placed in the center of the lower rack and along the sides of the upper rack.

Dishwashers also offer different cycles. These may include light, regular, and heavy wash cycles as well as a rinse/hold or sanitizing cycles. These differ in the number or length of washes and rinses in the cycle. A sanitizing cycle will boost the temperature of the rinse or wash water. Your household size, cooking style, and consciousness about energy and water usage will determine which of these options are important to you.

Performance cannot be accurately assessed in the showroom, even if you are able to learn about the number of spray arms, "wash levels", type of filter, and number of cycles. So, after determining which washers will accommodate your needs (special dishes, cycles, etc.), you may wish to examine comparisons of performance in a publication such as Consumer Reports. The October 1993 issue noted that dishwasher performance varies more than does the performance of other types of major appliances.

### ***Conserving Water And Energy***

Dishwashers vary in the amount of water they use. To conserve water, you may choose a model that uses a minimal amount of water per wash or rinse, and a model that offers a light cycle consisting of fewer washes and therefore less water usage. A rinse-hold cycle will also encourage you to run the dishwasher only when it is full, thereby saving additional water. These choices will also lower energy consumption by reducing the amount of water that must be heated.

Choosing "air dry" rather than drying with heated air also conserves some energy. Dishwashers and

their detergents perform best at water temperatures higher than those required for other household uses. Therefore, a dishwasher that includes a heating element to boost water temperature may allow you to lower the setting on your hot water heater and reduce the energy it consumes.

### **Noise**

While dishwashers as a group have become quieter over the years, the noise level can still be distracting. The noise may be a special problem if your kitchen opens into a family room where your family watches television or enjoys conversation.

Your visit to the showroom will probably not give you any information about noise levels. You may want to check published comparisons of dishwashers for ratings on noise levels.

### **Other Options**

You may choose models that have manual or electronic controls. Some models may accept custom fronts. A delay-start option is another choice that may appeal to you.

### **Making The Purchase**

Inquire about delivery fees and installation charges before making the purchase. Do not be pushed into buying an extended warranty. Compare prices between stores before making your decision.

### **Sources**

Consumers Union. (1993). Dishwashers, Consumer Reports, 58(10), 637-641.

Wilson, A., & Morrill, J. (1993). Consumer guide to home energy savings (3rd ed.). Washington, D.C.: ACEEE.

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