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NF97-333 Making Decisions: Buying a Dishwasher

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Making Decisions: Buying a Dishwasher

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Adapted by Shirley Niemeyer, Extension Specialist, Environment of the Home/Housing*

More than one-half of U.S. homes have a dishwasher. Buying a dishwasher is buying convenience. To get satisfaction from a dishwasher what should you think about when shopping?

Do you have hard water? Does your water have iron in it? You may need to solve these problems before you buy a dishwasher. If you are on a city water system, ask the water company what the water hardness is. Usually, municipal water is treated to keep iron levels low. If you have your own well, it might be wise to have your water tested for hardness, iron and manganese before buying a dishwasher. High levels can leave your dishes and dishwasher stained and spotted. You may want to investigate reliable water conditioners or softeners that will take out what you have if it is a problem. See NebGuides G89-946, *Water Treatment Equipment: Water Softeners*, G96-1280, *Drinking Water: Iron and Manganese*, and G96-1274, *Drinking Water: Hard Water*.

Do you have space for a built-in dishwasher or will you need a portable model? A built-in is more convenient. A portable must be moved to the sink, attached to hot water and plugged in each time you use it. Can the portable be built in or converted later? A portable can usually be taken with you if you move.

Will the dishwasher racks hold your dishes? Take some plates and bowls with you before you make your final choice. Some dishwasher racks are flexible and can be adjusted to accommodate tall glassware or different cookware.

What is the capacity? Dishwasher capacities are given in numbers of place settings the unit can hold. Ask the dealer or salesperson for unit capacities to help you compare different models.

What dishwasher liner is best? Stainless steel and porcelain liners are very durable but also more costly. Plastic liners are less expensive and usually last as long as the dishwasher, and are quieter.

How much noise can you deal with? Do you want a quieter model and one well insulated for sound?

What cycles do you need? Most families use the normal cycle most of the time, but if you must wash loads with heavy soil, you may want a pots and pans or heavy duty cycle. A "rinse and hold" setting lets you hold dishes until you have a full load. Do you need special settings for "china/crystal," "light wash," "temperature boost," "energy saver," "start delay," "plate warmer," or "short wash?" Think about what you will really use.

Is the silverware basket large enough? Is it removable and easy to reach for unloading? Where is it located? Will the spray/water get to the silverware? Will the silverware you use fall through the bottom grid? Can additional baskets or racks be ordered if the original wears out? A covered basket is useful if you wash small items.

Are both detergent and rinse aid dispensers provided? Are they easy to use?

Do the racks roll out easily? They should stop securely when pulled out and when pushed back in. Are there fold-down trays or removable or adjustable racks for larger items?

Should you select electronic or electro-mechanical controls? A rotary dial is used with electro-mechanical controls. You must rotate the dial to choose the cycle you want. Electronic controls will have push buttons for various cycle settings. Electronic controls are quite reliable at this time, but can be expensive if they must be replaced.

What type of spraying mechanisms are present? Will they spray all sides? Will they get caught on large items? Will larger items block the spray action if placed on top, bottom or sides?

What type of dials are easier for you to use and to have fixed? Do you need child-resistant controls? What are the costs for repairs of the electronic control panel vs. the regular panel? Are there service persons available in your area to repair either panel type?

Does the dishwasher have a mechanism to grind up larger food particles or a filter? How is the filter cleaned if plugged? Filters or soil separators take food particles out of circulation. Keep dishwasher drains and filters clean of debris. Reverse flow of water flushes food particles down the drain.

What is the repair history? Discuss the reported repairs on various models with the salesperson or service person. Search out information on repair records.

Does the dishwasher have a built-in heater to raise the water temperature if you turn your water heater down? Compare water conserving vs. energy conserving models.

How much energy will the dishwasher use? The Energy-Guide label on the product shows the range of energy consumption in kwh/year or therms/year. The most energy efficient models would have labels showing energy consumption at or near the left-hand end of the bar range, closest to the words, "uses least energy."

Many dishwashers have energy-saving cycles. Look for features that will help keep operating costs down.

- Low water requirements. Water requirements vary from 9 to 20 gallons per load. Check specification sheets for the amount.
- Low wattage fans. Some of the newer models have economical fans instead of heaters to dry the

dishes.

- Air dry controls. These are special controls that allow you to eliminate the heat drying cycle. This can save up to 30 percent of the electricity used by the dishwasher.
- Short cycle selections. Shorter cycles use less hot water and can be used for lightly soiled dishes. Short cycles can save up to 25 percent of your water heating energy costs.
- Water heater booster. If you have an automatic dishwasher with a thermostat and heater unit it will heat incoming water to approximately 140°F. This allows for a lower setting on your home's water heater. At 140°F, the water more thoroughly dissolves greasy food and soils, and also reduces spotting and adds safety.
- Extra insulation. Insulation helps maintain water temperature throughout the cycle, as well as minimizes noise.
- An Overflow Protector. Prevents overflow of water should the unit malfunction. If water does leak, where will it go? Is it contained within the dishwasher or a container underneath?

Does the dishwasher have a metered pressure-fill or a timed-fill? If water pressure is low, choose a metered or pressure-fill mode to assure adequate water will pump into the dishwasher.

Energy Tips

- Always wash full loads. It takes as much water and energy to wash a few dishes as it does to do a full load, unless your unit has partial-load cycles.
- Load dishwasher according to manufacturer's instructions. Be careful not to block spray arms or detergent dispenser, to avoid having to rewash dishes.
- Most dishwashers do not require you to prerinse dishes. However, if you do, rinse them soon after meals so you can use cold water instead of hot.
- Avoid placing a dishwasher next to a refrigerator. The heat and humidity the dishwasher gives off will make your refrigerator run longer and use more energy.
- Use the rinse-hold feature on the unit only when absolutely necessary. It uses three to seven gallons of hot water each time the cycle is run.

Contact a consumers' magazine or book for comparison studies about dishwashers. Check with your library or local Cooperative Extension office.

Dishwasher Information			
Space for dishwasher in my kitchen: Height _____ in. Width _____ in. Depth _____ in.			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Dishwasher machine make and model			
Retailer			
Dishwasher size (cubic feet)			
Dishwasher dimensions (H x W x D)			
How well dishes fit in racks			
Adjustable racks and holders			
Replacements			
Other features I want (list)			

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rinse and hold cycles • Heavy duty cycle • China and crystal • Sani-cycle • Rinse additive dispenser 			
Other features in each model			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plate warming 			
Availability of repair			
Water efficiency			
Control type - rotary, push buttons, or computer panel			
Insulation/sound			
Water heater to bring water temperature up to capacity?			
Energy efficiency			
Repair history			
Overflow protector			
Materials			
Safety			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motor overload • Water overflow • Safety switch 			

Other NebFacts in this series include:

- *Making Decisions: Buying a Microwave Oven*, NF97-334
- *Making Decisions: Buying Home Appliances*, NF97-335
- *Making Decisions: Buying a Refrigerator*, NF97-336
- *Making Decisions: Buying a Range*, NF97-337
- *Making Decisions: Household Water Saving Equipment*, NF97-338
- *Making Decisions: EnergyGuides and Major Home Appliances*, NF97-345
- *Making Decisions: Buying a Washing Machine*, NF97-346
- *Making Decisions about Service Contracts and Appliances*, NF97-347
- *Making Decisions: Buying a Clothes Dryer*, NF97-348
- *Handling Wastes: Household Appliances (White Goods)*, NF94-189

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