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## NF97-334 Making Decisions: Buying a Microwave Oven

Virginia Peart

Shirley Niemeyer

University of Nebraska--Lincoln, sniemeyer2@unl.edu

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## Making Decisions: Buying a Microwave Oven

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*Original author - Virginia Peart, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Florida*  
*Adapted by Shirley Niemeyer, Extension Specialist, Environment of the Home/Housing*

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Over the last few decades microwaves have become increasingly prevalent in many families' cooking habits. During hot weather, microwave ovens can reduce air-conditioning costs, since they produce less heat than a conventional oven. Also, because a microwave can be easy to use, youth and people who are disabled can more safely prepare food. (Youth should be trained to microwave first.) Microwave ovens have changed through the years, and if you are shopping for a replacement for your microwave, these are some features to make decisions about:

**What oven wattage do you need?** The output wattage available now is higher than a few years ago. Full size microwaves (larger than 1.2 cu. ft.) are available in wattages of 650 to 1,000 watts; intermediates (.8 to 1.1 cu. ft.) have 600 to 800 watts; and compacts (less than .8 cu. ft.) 500 to 700 watts. Most microwave instruction times on packages and in recipes are based on a 600-watt oven. Remember, a higher wattage oven heats more quickly; a lower wattage oven cooks more slowly.

**Do you need a choice of power levels?** High setting will provide 100 percent power and will heat beverages, small casseroles and bacon. Foods that you want to cook more slowly do best on a medium setting (50 percent power level). Lower levels can be used for thawing, melting and keeping foods warm.

Microwaves may have five or more stages of cooking power. Some have a full circle wave distribution that distributes waves more evenly.

**Do you plan to cook foods that require several steps?** A programmable microwave will let you do several steps with one setting. For example, with a programmable microwave you might set the microwave to thaw a casserole slowly, cook it quickly and keep it warm while you are waiting for other foods to cook. Is this the way you typically cook?

**What special settings or features would you find useful for the foods you heat/cook?** Some microwaves have one-button controls for items such as beverage reheat or popcorn. Determine how you

now use a microwave, if you have one, and what features you really need.

**Would special sensors or devices help to prepare foods in your microwave?** Consider:

- A moisture sensor is useful for accurately cooking some foods and helps eliminate guesswork. When the food is heated enough that it steams, the microwave's sensor can determine how much longer it should cook based on how long it took to reach the steam stage. The sensor measures the food's moisture levels.
- A temperature probe will stop the cooking process when meat or other food has reached the desired "done" temperature. (This feature may be hard to find, since many people didn't use temperature probes when provided.)
- A turntable allows dishes to rotate for even cooking. The size of the dish is then an important consideration so that it has room to turn.

For people who like to experiment when they cook, some manufacturers offer combination conventional oven/microwave and convection oven/microwave ovens. Convection ovens cook faster than conventional, as air is circulated continually around the product by a fan system.

**Where will your microwave be installed?** Companies offer versatile design features for installation above conventional ovens and/or grills. Find out how much space is needed for air circulation and where vents are. If mounted above an oven, be sure the microwave is designed to withstand the heat, moisture and grease.

Refer to consumer magazines or books for more information or comparison studies about microwaves. Check with your library or local Cooperative Extension office for resources they may have available.

## Safety

Some people use odd types of containers, such as plastic leftover containers, to heat food in the microwave. Use only containers safe for both foods and microwaves. Do not use plastics or any other type of container unless it is microwave safe.

Microwave Information			
Placement: Over oven/range _____   On counter top: _____   Shelf: _____   Microwave with oven: _____			
Space for microwave in my kitchen: Height _____ in.   Width _____ in.   Depth _____ in.			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Washing machine make and model			
Microwave make and model			
Retailer			
Size (full-size, intermediate, compact)			
Microwave dimensions (H, W, D)			
Output wattage			

Features I need (list) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• timer</li> <li>• defrost setting</li> <li>• variable power setting</li> <li>• temperature probe</li> <li>• programmable options such as delayed start</li> <li>• turntable</li> <li>• heat and hold to keep food warm</li> <li>• sensors that calculate time and power levels</li> <li>• shelf</li> <li>• cycle or stage cooking for more than one power level</li> </ul>			
Other features in each model			
Type of controls - Simple knob control, push buttons, or electronic sensor pad control?			
Are repair persons available in the area for this model/brand name or electronic units?			
Will I use all of the features?			
When repairs need to be made to any electronic units, does the whole sensor unit have to be replaced?			
Do I have sufficient electrical circuits to plug the microwave into?			
Can it be built in and still vent?			
If you are placing the microwave oven above an oven or oven with grill, is the microwave suited for that use?			
Are the microwave and controls easy to clean inside and out?			
Do I understand how to operate it? Is there a toll-free information line?			

**Other NebFacts in this series include:**

- *Making Decisions: Buying a Dishwasher, NF97-333*
- *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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