

■ EnergyGuide Label ■ Options

Today's home appliances offer consumers a dizzying array of options from designer colors to automation. While the choices can be overwhelming, it is important to keep cost in mind. The true cost of an appliance is both the purchase price and the cost for energy and water to operate it.

Be a Smart Shopper

Federal law requires that a bright yellow EnergyGuide tag be attached to many home appliances, including refrigerators, freezers, dishwashers, and clothes washers. The EnergyGuide tag provides an estimate of how much the energy to operate a particular appliance will cost. The tag also shows a range of energy use, from the lowest rated to the highest, for appliances of comparable size and type.

Choose a model that has a low operating cost. For example, an EnergyGuide tag for an electric refrigerator may show the most thrifty energy user requires 700 kilowatt-hours of electricity each year to operate, while a less efficient model requires 1,200 kilowatt-hours. Both are the same size and color, and have identical features. However, the more efficient model will cost less than \$70 a year to operate, while the other will be over \$120.

Food Storage

Refrigerators and freezers typically use the most energy of all kitchen and laundry appliances, especially if you have older units. Recent federal regulations have led to dramatic improvements in their efficiency which means much lower operating costs. The most efficient 20 cubic-foot refrigerators, complete with automatic defrost, cost less than \$50 a year to operate.

If you have an older refrigerator, it may be worthwhile to trade it in on a new, high efficiency model. *Do not* plug in that old clunker in the utility room. The \$120 or so it costs to operate yearly can make the food it stores expensive. Plugging a second refrigerator in only when you need the extra storage can save on electricity costs and does not harm the unit.

Cooking

There are many new types of burners for electric cook-tops, including solid disk elements, radiant elements under glass, or high-tech halogen or induction elements. While several of these save energy, their main advantages are ease of cleaning, greater control and other amenities. The cost of electric cooking with standard coils is usually so low for a family that it is difficult to justify these more expensive options solely on the value of the energy saved.

Other appliances, such as microwaves and convection ovens, can reduce the energy required for cooking by more than one third. By releasing less heat into the home, they can also help lower air conditioning needs.

Dishwashing

Over 80% of the energy used by a dishwasher can be for heating water. Models that use less water not only save this precious resource, but energy, too. A model with a booster heater will allow you to set the temperature on your water heater to 120°F yet still have water temperatures in the dishwasher of 140°F. The lower temperature setting for the water heater reduces the risk of scalding and saves you money. Using the air dry feature and operating the unit only when full saves even more.

Laundry

The energy used by clothes washers is also primarily for water heating. Models that use less water use less energy. The horizontal axis machines, which are popular in Europe, are entering the U.S. market. Since they tumble the clothes, they do not have an agitator. They use less water and detergent and spin the clothes faster resulting in less need for drying.

To save energy on drying clothes, buy a clothes dryer that has a moisture sensor to prevent overdrying. Eliminate energy costs altogether with a solar clothes dryer. You can buy a clothesline at any hardware store for just a couple of dollars. Be sure to hang it away from overhanging trees!