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Do You Have Some Tips For Selecting Major Appliances?

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A weekly question/answer column

Do You Have Some Tips For Selecting Major Appliances?

Leona K. Hawks answers:*

Appliances are major investments. In addition to the initial cost, the typical American homeowner pays up to $1500 per year to use, care for and maintain major appliances. Since appliances have relatively long life expectancies, a poor choice can be irritating—even costly if replaced due to dissatisfaction. Here are some things to consider:

- **Family needs:** What model would be most useful for your family? Does any family member have special needs? For example, is a family member short, blind or using a wheelchair?
- **Convenience features:** Determine what you will use and what you will not use. Paying for features that will never be used can be very costly. Ask yourself if extra features are worth the added cost. Will the added features save time, energy or work? Will you use the extra features? Can you afford them? Does the model have energy saving features? Be sure to compare the energy efficiency of refrigerators, freezers and dishwashers because they often use a lot of energy. Appliances should be designed to permit ease of use and maintenance.
- **Installation:** Consider power, space and size of the new appliance. How much space is available for the appliance? Are doors and passageways wide enough to move the appliance in and out of the room? What fuel source is required, available and most cost efficient? What additional wiring, plumbing, or other hookups are required? What is the cost for this? Are there additional charges for delivery, installation and service calls?
- **Cost of operating:** The cost of operating an appliance depends on the cost of energy, the appliance design, frequency of use, number of hours used and the user's work habits. Often energy efficient appliances cost more than less efficient models, but usually the energy cost savings will repay the difference in purchase price over the life of the appliance.
- **Warranty:** When you buy a major appliance you are also buying a warranty. It costs the manufacturer to fill the warranty terms and that cost is included in the price you pay. Make certain each major appliance has a warranty that provides meaningful protection. Treat the warranty just like a feature on the appliance. Does the warranty cover the entire product or only certain parts? Is the labor included? Who is responsible for repairs: the dealer, service agency or manufacturer? Who pays for what under the warranty including parts, labor, shipping charges and travel charges? How long does the warranty last on the entire product or individual parts or assemblies? Keep your warranty contract and the sales slip for future reference. Insist that the sales slip fully describe the product and any terms of the sale. Record the date of purchase, model and serial number. Also, record in

detail any service or repair work done after purchase.

- **Service help:** Nearly one-fourth of all home service calls are unnecessary. Paying a service person to plug in the appliance or trip the breaker switch is expensive. The care and use manual that comes with appliances lists items to check before calling for service assistance. If the appliance manual does not help solve the problem, consult the dealer. Explain the problem, and be sure to have the appliance model number and serial number. The dealer may be able to help or may direct you for help from the manufacturer.

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