

Your Guide to Buying Household Appliances



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Things to consider when buying a TV

With technology changing so rapidly, it is important to understand the terminology when buying a TV.

Different types of televisions

Do you need a Plasma, an LCD, a HD TV or a CRT? Below are a few definitions that will hopefully help you to make the right choice when purchasing a new television.

TV Types	
CRT	Cathode Ray Tube televisions are a good all-rounder, cheap, reasonable quality and are available in various screen sizes. The drawback is their size and weight. Very heavy and deep, they require a lot of room space.
Plasma	Plasma televisions, being the next generation, are thin and very light. As a result, they can be wall mounted. The quality of picture is also greatly improved and as the screen is flat, it can be viewed from a greater range of angles. These televisions use a matrix of tiny gas plasma cells to create a crystal clear image.
LCD	Liquid-Crystal Display televisions are very similar to Plasma. The only "slight" difference is that they can lose some definition if being viewed from very wide angles. LCD TVs work through a network of miniature liquid crystals sandwiched between a backlight and a plate of glass.



High Definition (HD) Televisions

HD TV is not a further addition to the television family. It can be either a Plasma or an LCD.

HD is the best available picture for TV viewing. It provides an even greater enhancement of quality. HD gives very clear, crisp pictures with vivid colours and up to five times more detail than ordinary standard definition TV.

The number of pixels contained per inch of a viewable screen determines its resolution. Therefore, the more pixels, the larger the resolution or quality of detailed images.

Picture quality displays best at a higher resolution. 1280 pixels x 720 lines (1280x720) and 1920 pixels x 1080 lines (1920x1080) are formats of resolution measurement and are the most common ones on the HD market.

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Technology is changing so rapidly in the manufacture of televisions and understanding the terminology that goes with this isn't easy.

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Things to consider when buying a TV (Continued)

Alternative functionality of your TV and a guide to the screen size

Alternative Functionality of your TV

If you intend to make full use of your television's functionality by plugging in various external devices such as a computer, games console, camcorder or DVD, be sure to check the number and type of inputs/outputs it has.

Most modern televisions now come with SCART, HDMI, SD Card and an additional external port, allowing you to use a variety of leads and connectors. However it is worth checking prior to buying that the model you are looking at has the compatibility that you require.



Screen Size

In order to get the optimum benefit that both Plasma and LCD televisions offer in terms of image quality, you should be a certain distance away from the screen.

Below is a guide to the screen size that you should be looking for:

Screen Size Guide	
Distance (sofa) from Screen	Screen Size
6-8 ft	17-26 inch
8-10 ft	28-36 inch
10-12 ft	36-42 inch
12 ft or more	42 inch +

Prices will vary greatly depending on screen size, manufacturer and also additional functionality. The information above will hopefully give you a starting point in your quest to purchase your ideal television.

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Whilst the idea of having a television the size of your living room might seem like heaven, it could actually impair your viewing experience.

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The right DVD player for your new TV

DVD players, like TVs, have also experienced the rapid change in technology.

Entry level DVD players

An entry level DVD player will simply allow you to watch a DVD and it is likely that the DVD must also be from the local "Region". The "Region" relates to compatibility, for instance the UK and mainland Europe is categorised as "Region 2" and the United States and Canada is categorised as "Region 1".

This means that if you were to purchase a DVD film in America, it is unlikely that your entry model DVD player in the UK will play it. A more expensive DVD player will allow "Multi Region" compatibility.

Another element to consider is picture quality. You will generally find that picture and sound quality is better with the more expensive DVD players.

More sophisticated DVD players

These allow for integration with other audio equipment that will enable more of a surround-sound environment. This type of connectivity is usually via SCART leads or HDMI cable and you need to check which one it is prior to purchase to ensure compatibility.

They will also allow you to play audio and video files, as well as being able to show digital photos that might have been copied to disk from a digital camera.

A "jukebox" functionality can also be found on the more expensive models. This will enable you to load up to 30 DVDs into the player at once and then choose which one to watch from the comfort of your sofa.

If you want to be able to record on to DVD, then you will have to reach even deeper into your pocket. This functionality, only present on the more expensive products, allows you to record your favourite TV programmes and films.

For those on the move, you may want to consider portable DVD players. These are lightweight units that incorporate a screen and allow you to watch your favourite film wherever you are.

"Blu-Ray" is the latest in the evolution of DVD players and allows the user to enjoy films in high-definition via HD TVs. "Blu Ray" players are the only products on the market capable of playing HD films. However, the TV must also be HD.



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As with many electronic products, the price and specification of DVDs varies greatly. To get the right one, there are various elements you need to consider.

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Buying the right Cooker

Gas, Electric, or a combination of the two?

Cooker functionality

The choice is often determined by what type of cooking you'll be doing, how often and for how many people.

Dual fuel cookers provide the greater flexibility for most people as they combine the speed and convenience of an electric oven with the benefit of a gas hob for instant heat and increased temperature control.

Irrespective of the fuel type you choose, since 2003 cooking appliances have to be rated for energy efficiency (A to G). Most good quality ovens are rated 'A' for energy, although the difference in energy consumption between an A and B oven is very small. Double ovens will have two ratings, one for the top and one for the bottom oven.

Below is a simple overview of the various elements of a cooker and the benefits of each.

Electric Ovens

Electricity is clean and can be controlled using sophisticated technology, which allows you to use pre-set programmes for cooking favourite foods. Conventional electric ovens have heating elements in either the side or the top and bottom, and are hotter at the top.

Fan Ovens

An electric fan oven (with a heating element around the fan) cooks faster and at lower temperatures than a conventional electric oven. Also, there's no need to pre-heat before cooking. When using this sort of oven, remember to decrease both the temperature and cooking time (details can be found in the manufacturer's instruction booklet).

Gas Hobs

Gas is the ideal fuel for a hob as it is fast and easy to control.

Standard gas hobs have four burners, usually made up of one large, rapid burner (around 2.8kW), two medium burners (around 1.8kW) and a smaller burner (around 1kW) for gentle simmering. The higher the kW (or BTU) of the burner, the more gas is used and the quicker it will heat.



“ Many people comment that Gas cookers give greater control of the heat source. Others say that an Electric one is much easier to clean. ”

Buying the right Cooker (Continued)

A close look at the different types of electric hobs

Hobs

There are 3 different types of electric hobs

Hob Types	
Solid Plate	These hobs are particularly slow to heat up and cool down, but very easy to clean. Faster versions of this type often have red dots in the centre.
Ceramic	This type of hob has a flat black surface made from a special glass-like material. Tightly coiled elements beneath each cooking zone heat up when the power is switched on. Ceramic is faster than a solid plate hob.
Halogen	Heated by halogen lamps, the heat is directed upwards by reflectors and glows when the hob is switched on. Halogen is fast, responsive and easy to control - the next best alternative to gas. Some more expensive hobs have dual-circuit cooking zones, so you can heat up a large or smaller area within it.



Ceramic and halogen hobs must have a residual heat indicator light to show that the plate is still hot after it has been switched off. If you choose one with touch controls, make sure that these can be locked to prevent children turning it on.



Buying a Washing Machine

The number of washing machines on the market is huge but there are a few key things to consider before making a purchase.

Elements to consider

You need to consider the volume of washing that you will be doing. If you live on your own, then a 5kg load capacity should be more than enough. However, if you have a large family, you may wish to buy a washing machine that will take 12kg loads.

You then need take into account consider the space that you have available to put the washing machine. It will need to be sited close to a water and electricity source. Most tend to be plumbed in near the kitchen sink. Washing machines are approximately the same size. However, larger capacity ones tend to be larger in physical size too. You will need to measure up effectively to ensure the new washer will fit in the space allocated.

Finally, you need to look at the machines energy efficiency rating. Washing machines costs a lot to buy and you don't want them to be expensive to run.

All models are now rated by the EU to let people know how much energy is needed to run them. The energy ratings go from A++ to G, with A++ being the best. For their benchmark tests, they look at how much energy is used based on a 60 degree cotton wash.

Costs

The cost of a washing machine can vary greatly; a basic one will simply have one or two wash programmes and allow for a set spin cycle. This type of machine is ideal for smaller wash loads of items made from a similar material.

Extra features naturally come at extra cost. Washing machines with multiple / faster spin cycles will help to ensure your washing is drier when it comes out of the machine.

Technology also adds to cost. "Fuzzy Logic" is a sensor system that constantly monitors the conditions inside the washing machine, adjusting the programme to ensure best results using as little water and energy as possible.

A further consideration is a washer dryer. A cheaper option than buying a separate washing machine and tumble dryer and also a space saving within the kitchen. However, you are unable to wash another load while drying another and it is unlikely that you can dry the full volume of washing that you have just done – drying capacity is typically less than washing capacity.



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A machine with a high energy rating will save you water, electricity and will save money on your energy bills.

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Buying a Dishwasher

Volume and frequency of washing up will be the key considerations when choosing a dishwasher.

Dishwasher types and features

“Small service” dishwashers are ideal for household of four, while portable types are great for renters. There are also twin-drawer dishwashers to consider. These allow you to wash one draw at a time - perfect when you need to do just a few pieces.

Washing capacity is often determined by place settings. A place setting includes a dinner plate, soup plate, dessert plate, cup and saucer, tumbler, knife, fork, soup spoon, teaspoon and desert spoon.

- A standard dishwasher should accommodate around 12 place settings.
- Slim-line dishwashers have the same depth and height as a full-sized dishwasher, but are not as wide, and can take around 9 place settings per cycle.
- Compact dishwashers are smaller in size and usually half the height of standard ones. They have a smaller volume, with space for around 4 place settings. Compact dishwashers are suited to smaller households. Larger households may also find them convenient if space is limited.



Checklist

- The shelf and track sizes of dishwashers vary. So, remember to measure the size of your crockery and cutlery to make sure they will fit.
- Check that any items you wish to wash are dishwasher-proof as they can be damaged by the dishwasher if not.
- Dishwashers need to be sited close to a source of water and electricity, usually close to the kitchen sink.

Research findings

Recent research (appliancesonline.co.uk) suggests that there is a common misconception that using a dishwasher wastes more water than washing up by hand.

The average household will do up to three hand washes a day using 21 litres of water each time, while a new dishwasher only uses 15 litres per wash. Hand washing consumes around 23,000 litres of water per year compared to 3120 litres for a dishwasher.

Energy efficiency will also impact on the running costs. Like washing machines, the energy ratings on Dishwashers run from A++ to G, with A++ being the most efficient.

“ Washing up by hand accounts for about 10% of a household's daily water needs, but using a modern dishwasher could reduce this to less than 2%. ”

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Buying a Fridge Freezer

There is a variety of choices available when considering a fridge-freezer.

Features

Fridge freezers are measured in volume. This describes how much food the appliance will hold in litres. As this can be quite confusing to picture how many items this will hold, to give you an indication of size, 1 litre represents 10cm x 10cm x 10cm. All fridge freezers will have a maximum volume. Large volume appliances, such as American-style fridge freezers, will suit larger households.

Both the fridge and freezer units will come with a number of shelves. For maximum flexibility, look out for fridge freezers that let you remove shelves. These are more versatile for storing foods of different sizes. Some fridge freezers come with safety glass shelves for peace of mind.

A reversible door is another feature to consider. This enables you to choose which side of the fridge freezer the doors will open from, which is very useful in small kitchens.

Some appliances also detail a “power cut safe time”. This is the amount of time for which the contents of your fridge freezer will stay usable, after a loss of power to the appliance. This is a key consideration for large volume appliances.

Another feature that may not be top of your list is the noise level. A noisy fridge can be really irritating, so it is worth considering. The noise level is measured in decibels and you can find out this information from retailers or manufacturers.



Fridge Freezer types

The different types	
American Style	They are the biggest on the market and usually have 2 doors side by side.
Combi-freezers	These split-compartment fridge freezers are the most common on the market.
Top-mount fridge freezers	These have the fridge element at the bottom with a small freezer compartment on top.

“ Power cuts can cause significant wastage of food in fridge freezers. To minimise the risk, opt for the ones with long 'power cut safe time' as the power is likely to be restored before any damage is done. ”

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Buying a Fridge Freezer (Continued)

Other functions you might want to consider.

More features

Fridge freezers have numerous added features and it really comes down to personal preference. The most common features include: Salad Crisper, Deep Door Holders, Dairy Compartment, Ice & Water Dispenser and a Cooler/Chiller compartment.

Features	
Auto defrost	Automatically defrosts the fridge freezer while in use, so there's no need to defrost it yourself, thus saving time.
Anti-bacterial protection	A built-in anti-bacterial system that improves food safety and stops bacteria from contaminating the fridge contents.
Fast freeze	A special compartment in the freezer freezes the contents rapidly.
Temperature display	This shows the present temperature of the inside of the fridge.
Temperature warning light	This feature lets you know if the temperature is too high. This is a worthwhile feature if you have young children where food safety is paramount.

Running Costs

In terms of running costs, fridge freezers are very similar to washing machines. They also have efficiency ratings. All models, rated by the EU, let people know how much energy is needed to run them. The energy ratings go from A++ to G, with A++ being the best.



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Water and ice dispensers are a convenient feature if you enjoy chilled water and ready to use ice. However, with this feature, you'll need to place it within one metre of a suitable plumbing connection, as it will need to be plumbed in.

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Protect Your Investment

Every new appliance comes from the manufacturer with a basic factory warranty.

What is a manufacturer warranty?

A manufacturer will repair or replace the appliance for a limited period (usually 12 months) if it breaks down. But once this warranty expires, you become liable for sourcing and paying an engineer for any repairs.

When an electrical appliance such as a toaster breaks down, it's merely a nuisance. However, if it is your cooker or freezer, it causes real inconvenience and could cost a lot to get repaired.

Your first course of action would be to try and find a repairer who was reputable and offered good value for money. But how would you know? Often, the first indication you get of the cost is when you are handed the bill. Therefore, can you be sure that the job has been done professionally?

Extended Warranty

Extended Warranty cover can offer a solution to this problem.

There are two types of policy available:

- A single appliance warranty just covers the item you have bought. This type of policy is usually offered to you in-store and offers cover for up to 3 years.
- A multi-appliance policy can cover up to 8 of your household appliances under a single policy. These policies are not normally available in stores. (Please see the following page for more details on this).

Did you know?

- It can cost up to £240 to replace a washing machine drum
- An average television will need repairing after 3 years
- Repairing a microwave circuit board can cost up to £175

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An extended Warranty policy will cover the costs and sourcing of repairs, or even pay for a replacement appliance if it is beyond repair.

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Appliance Warranty from helpucover

Appliance Warranty from helpucover allows you to cover up to 8 items under one policy.

Benefits of helpucover Appliance Warranty

Appliance Warranty cover is available for a wide range of items from Cookers and Washing Machines to Plasma TVs and Digital Cameras. The policy is flexible so you can add more items to your cover as you buy them, up to 8 items per policy. You can choose which of your appliances are the most important to cover.

You don't have to worry if your appliances aren't brand new either. If you are only covering one appliance then as long as it's less than 4 years old, you can protect it. If you are taking advantage of covering more than 1 appliance, then the maximum age increases to 7 years old!

Appliance Warranty from helpucover also offers manageable monthly premiums.

- The premium is payable until your appliances reaches 8 years old or you decide to remove them from cover.
- With cover being available on appliances up to a value of £2,000, you can be confident that even your most prized items can be protected under this policy.
- With no store overheads or commission for sales people, you will find the price of Appliance Warranty from helpucover highly competitive.

When you protect your household appliances with helpucover:

- If one of them breaks down, you just call us and we will put you in touch with a local, qualified engineer from our national network to arrange a convenient time to call and inspect your faulty appliance.
- Furthermore, once the repair is complete we will arrange payment for the work that has been done.
- Protection against excessive call-out, parts and labour charges.



“ helpucover Appliance Warranty offers great value for money. From around £10 a month, you can cover 3 of your most important appliances. ”



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Our call centre is open every weekday, from Monday to Friday, from 8am to 8pm. On Saturday, from 8am to 6pm.

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