

Your Guide to Buying a Refrigerator

Information courtesy of Whirlpool

Homeowners have less time for shopping, so refrigerators are getting bigger. But size isn't the only factor when it comes to choosing a refrigerator.

The first piece of good news: refrigerators on average use a whopping 42 percent less electricity than they did in 1972. So even if you buy a bigger appliance, it will probably be more efficient than that old unit.

What size do you need?

As a rule of thumb, a family of two requires 8-10 cubic feet of fresh food space in a refrigerator. Add an extra cubic foot for each additional family member. Refrigerators can last 10, 15 years, or more, so remember to plan for expansion or contraction of your family. Other factors that might figure in determining the best size refrigerator for your needs:

Is your grocery store near or far?

Do you freeze food from your garden or meals in large quantities?

Do you entertain frequently?

A one- or two-person household might find a single-door refrigerator to be adequate, especially if space is very limited. These units do contain true freezers; however, they are only suitable for ice-cubes and very short-term storage of foods. Most require manual defrosting.

The most popular configuration is the two-door, top-freezer design. Bottom-freezer units do put the fresh-food compartment at eye level, but the user must bend over to get at the freezer compartment.

Side-by-side refrigerators generally offer more storage capacity than top- or bottom-freezer designs, and they offer the advantage of extra eye-level storage space. Side-by-sides are recommended for older users and the disabled, because the narrow doors are easy to manage. In general, these designs are less energy efficient than other refrigerator styles because they use less insulation between the freezer and refrigerator compartments.

Defrost Systems

Refrigerators are available with three types of defrost systems.

Manual defrost requires the user to turn the refrigerator off and to remove the ice and water by hand.

A partial automatic defrost system defrosts the refrigerator

automatically, but the freezer requires manual defrosting. Automatic defrosting keeps the refrigerator and the freezer frost-free automatically. (Although automatic-defrost models use more electricity than manual-defrost models, manual-defrost models are only energy efficient if defrosted frequently.)