

Electric cooktops with coiled elements are still available. Gas cooktops come with sealed gas burners. This means that the burners are part of the cooktop frame. Spills remain on the cooktop and do not run down below the burner to another surface. This makes cleanup much easier. Grates on gas ranges can be individual or continuous.

Exterior finish and color: Most ranges have a porcelain enamel exterior finish. Porcelain enamel holds up to the food and heat better than some painted surfaces, which stain and wear down easier. However, when objects fall on or strike the porcelain enamel surface, it can chip. Some ranges have a glass front on the oven door. The most common exterior finishes are white, black, and stainless steel.

Controls: Many range/oven controls today are electronic and are operated by a touch pad. Be sure you understand how they are used. If the range has knobs, try out the ones on the floor model to see how easy they are to operate. Some ranges/cooktops have lock-out controls for a safety feature.

Another thing to consider is whether the control panel is easy to clean. If there are knobs, are they easily removed for cleaning behind and around them?

- The life expectancy of a range is 12 to 16 years. However, many ranges last much longer. Either way, your purchase will be with you for several years.
- Ranges do not have energy labels to help you compare the energy costs of one range with another. This is because the energy use on a range is determined mostly by the user's cooking habits.
- Find out if there is extra lighting included with the range. Is there a light in the oven? Is there a light for the range top? How easy will it be to change a burned-out light bulb?
- Compare the added features and costs of ranges that fit your cooking needs. Bypass features you will not use.
- Use a good range ventilation system with your range or cooktop.

Purchasing a Range, Oven, or Cooktop



For more information, contact your county Extension agent for Family and Consumer Sciences, or visit the Web site for Family and Consumer Sciences, College of Agriculture, University of Kentucky, at www.ca.uky/agcollege/fcs

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Ranges, ovens, and cooktops come in all shapes and sizes and with a variety of great features. Before purchasing these appliances, consider your personal cooking needs. Here are some things to think about.



Type of fuel needed for the range:

Do you have gas and electric utilities already available in your home? Decide whether you need to add a gas line, natural gas or a propane gas tank for a gas range or to install a 240-volt electrical circuit for an electric range before you buy a range/oven. This utility work can add to the overall costs of your purchase. The best heat control comes from a gas cooktop and an electric oven. Some freestanding dual fuel ranges offer this combination.

Style of range: If your new range will replace an old range, you may be limited to the same style and size. If you have flexibility, decide whether you want a freestanding range, a drop-in or slide-in range, or a separate built-in cooktop and oven(s). Drop-in and slide-in ranges have no finished sides because they fit between two cabinets. The drop-in range rests on a cabinet base.

You will need to know the width of the space you have available for the range. Ranges come in various widths, from 20 inches to 60 inches. While 30-inch ranges are the most common, wider ranges are gaining in popularity.

Types of cooking: What types of cooking are most common in your home? Do you bake every week or only two to three times a year? Do you frequently prepare meat roasts in the oven? Is most of your cooking in pans on top of the range? What size pans do you use? The answers to these questions will guide you in determining the features you want in a new range.

For example, if you frequently roast meats and bake cookies, pies, and cakes, you might want to consider a convection oven. It allows the user to bake multiple racks of cookies, pies, or cakes at the same time. It also shortens the time for roasting meats. Ranges with convection ovens are more expensive, so if you use these features less than once a month, you probably do not need the added cost. Convection ovens will operate in a regular mode also.

Oven capacity: Some ovens are narrow and deep. Others are wide and shallow. When you shop for an oven, take the dimensions of your cookie sheets, rectangular cake pans, and roasting pans with you to be sure that your baking/roasting utensils will fit in your new oven.

Oven cleaning: Many ovens come with either a self-cleaning or a continuous cleaning feature. A self-cleaning oven has a cleaning cycle during which the oven is locked and heated to a high temperature to burn away all the food spills on the inside.

Continuous clean ovens have a very dull porous surface. They clean by burning the soil as the oven is used. It is a slower process. Consumers are often disappointed with this type of oven cleaning system and opt to pay more for a self-cleaning oven.

If you choose an oven without a self-cleaning feature, check for removable oven doors. Removing the oven door makes it easier to reach all corners of the oven for manual cleaning.

Cooktop style: Most electric ranges today have a smooth, ceramic glass top. This feature makes cleanup much easier. Spills are noticeable immediately. Darker cooktops do not show stains as much as white cooktops. Check to see if special cleaners are needed for the ceramic glass surface you wish to purchase.

If you plan to cook using big pots and pans, check to see if the cooktop has heating elements large enough to accommodate them. If not, the surface could crack and break.

The average life of a gas or electric range is 12 to 16 years.