

Refrigerator Buyer's Guide

A comprehensive guide to buying the perfect refrigerator





Overview

Most households can't live without a refrigerator, but when your old workhorse starts to fail, shopping for a new model can be overwhelming. We want to save you some time and effort by giving you all of the information you need to choose a new model!

We'll cover everything you need to know, including...

- ⇒ The types of refrigerators
- ⇒ How to choose the features and capacity you need
- ⇒ Measuring your space for a perfect fit
- ⇒ Comparing different brands, models, and pricing

Enjoy! We know you'll learn a lot.

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Types & Styles of Refrigerators

One of the most basic questions you'll have to answer is what type of refrigerator you need. There are four main categories to consider:

- Top freezer
- Bottom freezer
- Side by side
- French door

As well as styling options:

- Premium built-in models vs freestanding models
- Counter depth models vs full depth models
- Panel ready models

Let's start with top freezer models and go on from there! We will focus mainly on standard size models that are 18 cubic feet and up rather than niche compact models, but the same concepts usually still apply (except for dimensions and pricing).

Refrigerator Types: Top Freezer



This classic refrigerator style is found in many small homes, older homes, and apartments, due to their small footprint and low cost.

In terms of dimensions, a top freezer refrigerator will tend to fit in a smaller space both in terms of height and width than many of the larger French door and side by side models that have become popular.

Features like spillproof glass shelves and icemakers are commonly available. Higher-end models are available at up to around \$1,200 with large capacities, sleek exterior styling, and more, but you can easily spend less than \$1,000 on a great model.

Capacity Range: 10-24 cubic feet

Typical Width: 30-33"

Typical Price Range: \$500-900

Good For: Tight budgets, small spaces

Refrigerator Types: Top Freezer... cont'd



Advantages	Disadvantages
Inexpensive	Lower aesthetic appeal
Ideal for small spaces (tend to be shorter and narrower than other	Need to bend over to access fresh food section
Broad size range to suit anything from single-person households to	No ice or water dispenser in the door
10-25% more energy efficient than other styles while cooling effectively	Maximum capacity is around 24 cubic feet (XL capacities can reach
	Less likely to be ADA compliant

Refrigerator Types: Bottom Freezer



A bottom freezer refrigerator places the fresh food section on the top, so you have better visibility and access to your most-used items without bending over. The freezer is on the bottom. It is usually a pull-out drawer style freezer with two tiers of drawers, but some models have a swing-out door with shelving inside. A basic bottom freezer refrigerator will be about \$300-500 more than a top freezer model.

These models are a great alternative to French door refrigerators since they tend to cost less. There are fewer options available overall in this category, but you can easily find models around 18-22 cubic feet starting at \$1,400.

Capacity Range: 19-28 cubic feet

Typical Width: 30-33"

Typical Price Range: \$1,000-1,900

Good For: Convenience and value

Refrigerator Types: Bottom Freezer... cont'd



Advantages	Disadvantages
Good value compared to French doors and side by sides	Fewer models available from manufacturers
Convenient access to fresh food section	Require space in front of the refrigerator for a wide door swing
Wide door storage area offers plenty of room for large bottles and more	No ice or water dispenser in the door
Typically have a shallower depth and are narrower than French door models (more space-efficient)	Counter depth options are rare if you want a high-end feel
ADA compliant models are available	

Refrigerator Types: Side by Side



Side by side refrigerators are very stylish and were popular in the 1980s-90s before the French door style took over as the most popular premium option in the freestanding refrigerator market. The narrow door swing works well for kitchen islands and other obstacles. They also offer quite a bit of freezer space—the capacity is split about evenly in most cases rather than skewing towards the fresh food section. If you like to stock up on frozen goods, this style might be for you!

Side by sides have been around for decades, so the technology is solid and efficient. You can get a large, well-featured model easily starting at around \$1,300.

Capacity Range: 20-28 cubic feet

Typical Width: 33-36"

Typical Price Range: \$1,100-2,200

Good For: Style and high capacity

Refrigerator Types: Side by Side... cont'd



Advantages	Disadvantages
Good value compared to French doors with plenty of models available	Typically wider (36") than top freezers and bottom freezers
Both fresh and frozen foods are at eye level	Narrower shelves may not fit wide items like holiday platters or frozen pizzas
Narrow door swing ideal for some kitchen designs	In-door ice and water dispensers can eat up freezer space
Counter depth options are widely available	Not ideal if you don't use your freezer often
ADA compliant models are available	

Refrigerator Types: French Door



French doors combine the best design features of bottom freezers and side by sides: fresh food on top, plus a narrow door swing. They are a popular option for new home packages and kitchen remodels. There are tons of great models available with some of the latest and greatest features.

You can get a smaller 18 cubic foot model for around \$1,400, while a model in the 20+ cubic foot range will generally be at least \$1,800. Models with smart capabilities and premium styling can be \$3,000 or more.

Capacity Range: 18-30+ cubic feet

Typical Width: 33-36"

Typical Price Range: \$1,400-4,000+

Good For: Style and new features

Refrigerator Types: French Door... cont'd



Advantages	Disadvantages
Stylish exterior design available in the latest premium colors and styling	Will cost more than comparable side by side or bottom freezer
Good side by side replacement since they take up a similar amount of space	Tend to be deeper than other styles—will stick out more from counters
Narrow door swing ideal for some kitchen designs	Wider fresh food shelves than side by sides
Counter depth options are widely available	Counter depth models max out at around 20-22 cubic feet of capacity
XL capacities in the 25+ cubic foot range are available	

Refrigerator Types: Comparison

	Typical Pricing*	Capacity	Features & Options
Top Freezer	\$500-900	10-24 cu. ft.	★★
Bottom Freezer	\$1,000-1,900	19-28 cu. ft.	★★★
Side by Side	\$1,100-2,200	22-28 cu. ft.	★★★★
French Door	\$1,400-4,000+	18-30+ cu. ft.	★★★★★

**Note that the pricing here is the typical retail price before taking sales/promotions, rebates, and package deals into account.*

...Now that you have hopefully narrowed down what type of refrigerator you want, we'd like to mention some specialty designs and options that you may want to consider as well.



Exterior Styling Options

Counter Depth

Counter depth models have a shallower depth than a typical refrigerator—about 24-25 inches for the case or main body of the refrigerator, plus 5 or so inches for the doors and handles. These models won't stick out from the surrounding cabinetry. They tend to be 36" wide and have lower capacities than full depth models. The upcharge compared to a standard depth model can be around \$100-300. Ask about integrated style models if you want the doors to be completely flush to the cabinetry.



Left: A standard-depth refrigerator in a built-in cabinet.

Right: A counter-depth refrigerator in a built-in cabinet.

Exterior Styling Options... cont'd

Panel Ready

Panel-ready refrigerators are designed to have custom panels and hardware installed on the exterior to match your kitchen cabinets. If you've never purchased this type of refrigerator, it can be a pretty intensive project and you'll need to pay attention to the dimensions of the refrigerator, its doors, the door swing, and more. Having an experienced professional to handle the panels and the custom cavity is crucial!



Built In

Built-in refrigerators are made to be built into an opening in the kitchen cabinets so they do not protrude from them. These high-end appliances are usually "front breathing," with the compressor at the top of the unit, and don't have finished sides. Pricing is much higher than freestanding models. If you need to replace a built in model in a 64" width or wider on a budget, Frigidaire offers column refrigerators and freezers that can be installed side by side for a significantly lower cost than a large built-in model.



Exterior Styling Options... cont'd



Hardware & Colors

Some homeowners are very particular about having a complete appliance suite with matching handles. All manufacturers, including their sub-brands, have distinctive handles. In addition, new appliance colors like black stainless steel offer an alternative to stainless steel if you want a unique look for your kitchen.

(Pictured above, left to right: KitchenAid, GE Slate, LG, and Bosch Black Stainless Steel.)

Dimensions & Capacity

Measure Your Space for a Perfect Fit!

In particular if you're replacing a refrigerator in a designated built-in compartment in your cabinetry, you'll have to measure the height, width, and depth of the compartment. Today's refrigerators still follow standard widths of 30", 33", and 36" for full-size models, but the depth and even the height can vary significantly.

Don't forget to measure doorway openings as well. If a refrigerator won't fit through a door into your home, it won't be a good match for you!

Remember to Measure...

1. The height, width, and depth of area where refrigerator will be installed
2. The distance to doorways, kitchen islands, and other obstructions that could impede the refrigerator door swing
3. Any doorway openings that the refrigerator will need to be carried through for installation

Dimensions & Capacity... cont'd



What Capacity Do You Need?

In general, you'll want around 4-6 cubic feet of capacity for each adult in your household. Typically a refrigerator around 20-22 cubic feet has enough room for the average family of four.

Of course, one of the best metrics is to consider the refrigerator you have now —is it big enough for your needs, or is it constantly overflowing? You can estimate the cubic footage of your refrigerator by multiplying the width, depth and height together, then dividing the answer by 1,728. Or you can look up the model number online, which is listed on a tag that is typically located somewhere inside of the fresh food compartment. Don't feel pressured to go for XL capacities if you don't need the space—refrigerators perform their best when they are evenly filled, not stuffed full or half-empty.

Terms & Features You Should Know

Ice & Water Dispensers

Icemakers and water dispensers are common features on today's refrigerators. They often require filters that need to be replaced regularly, which is an ongoing cost to consider. If you're concerned about reliability, avoid models with icemakers in the fresh food section, since leaks can be an issue. There are a lot of options for dispenser setups, including:

- In-freezer icemaker with no dispensing system
- External ice and water dispenser, or water dispenser only
- Internal water dispenser in fresh food section for aesthetic appeal

If you are considering purchasing a refrigerator with ice or water, make sure you have access to a cold water line or are able to install one.



Dual Evaporators

Dual evaporators help improve the climate control and temperature management in the fresh and frozen sections of your refrigerator.

Terms & Features You Should Know... cont'd

Shelving & Storage Layouts

You'll spend a lot of time with the interior of your refrigerator. Check out the interior organization! Lower-end models have wire shelves, while mid-range and high-end models usually have tempered glass spill-proof shelves. Pay attention to the number of shelves and their location, as well as any storage bins or drawers and the door compartments.



Crisper Drawers

Crisper drawers for storage of fresh fruits and vegetables typically allow you to control the humidity by opening or closing a vent in the drawer. A closed vent creates a high humidity environment to preserve leafy veggies and things that wilt, while an open vent will create a low humidity environment ideal for fruits and things that rot.

Variable Speed Compressors

Variable speed compressors are more energy efficient and tend to be quieter than single-speed compressors, which can be handy in open floor plans. Different brands have different names for them, e.g. "inverter compressor," "digital inverter compressor," or something along those lines.

Terms & Features You Should Know... cont'd

Four Door Refrigerators

These refrigerators are typically a French door style but with an extra drawer sandwiched between the fresh food and freezer sections. You can adjust the temperature of this drawer to suit different items, from kids' snacks to wine or raw meats.



Door in Door Refrigerators

Door in door models create another layer of storage in the righthand fresh food door. You can find French doors and occasionally side by sides with this feature. It's a great place to store items that you access on a daily basis. It's not just convenient—it also saves energy since you'll lose less cold air from the fridge interior when you use this compartment!



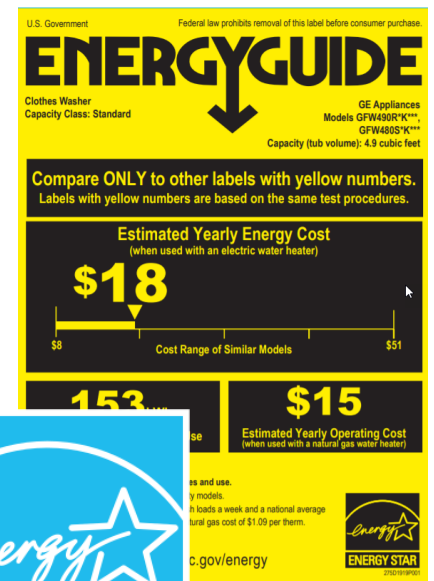
Terms & Features You Should Know... cont'd

Connectivity

Wifi connected refrigerators are a high-end option to streamline your life. Some models integrate with virtual assistants like Amazon Alexa while others offer touchscreens to help you plan menus and keep track of everyone's calendar. You'll need a strong wifi connection in your home to get the most out of these models!

Energy Star Rated

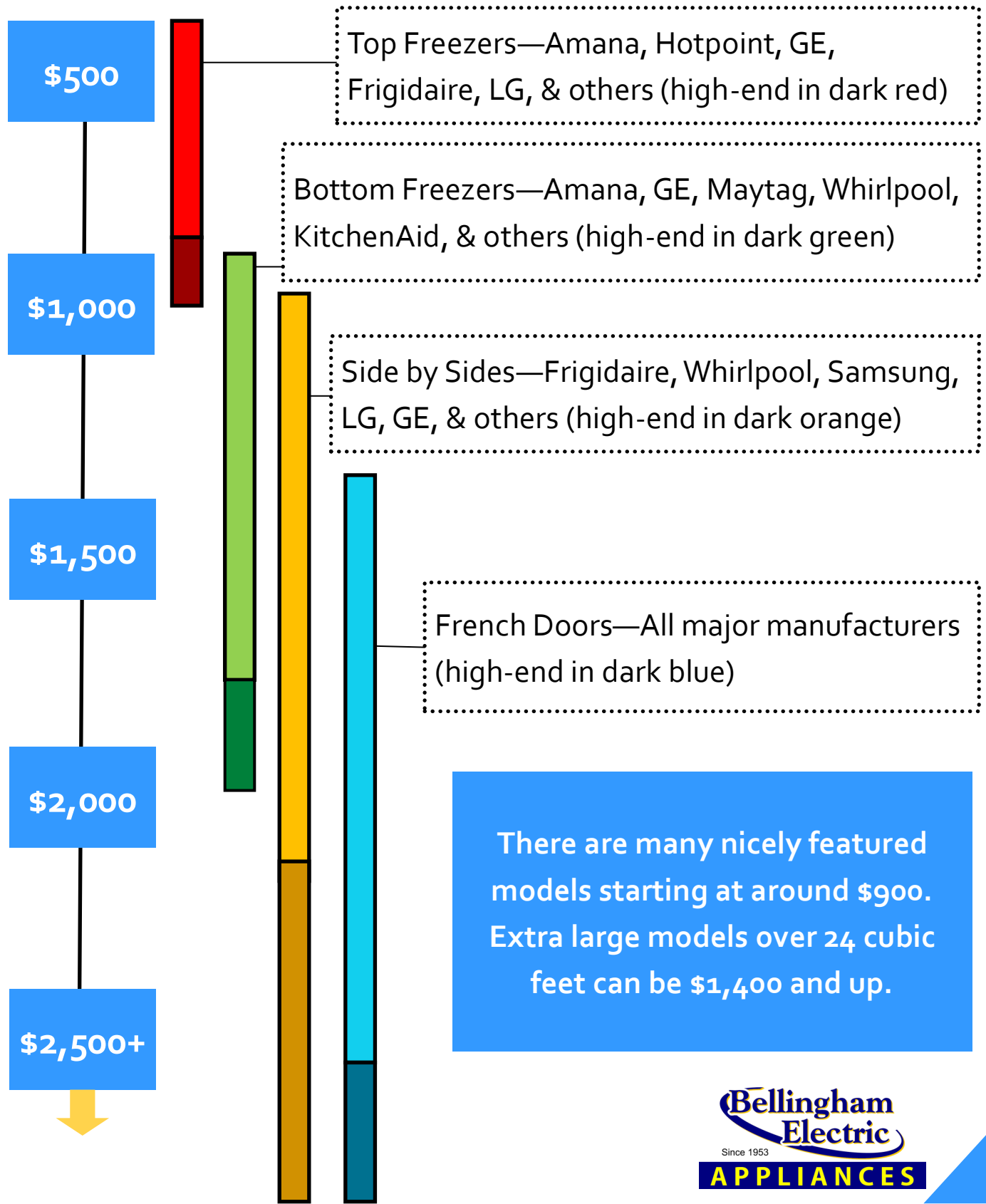
As well as being a rebate opportunity, Energy Star fridges are usually about 9% more efficient than today's non Energy Star models*. You can save hundreds of dollars by replacing a refrigerator that's 10+ years old with an Energy Star model!



*Energy Star Refrigerators Overview, Official Energy Star Website. (<https://www.energystar.gov/products/appliances/refrigerators>)

What Can You Get for Your Budget?

(Based on product MSRP, not including sales and promotions)



Before You Go Shopping...

Bring the following information with you into the store:

1. Measurements of the area where the refrigerator will go—the height, width, and depth—plus a few extra inches to spare on either side and in the back.
2. Measurements of the doorways the refrigerator will have to fit through when it is delivered. On occasion, older homes may have narrower doors that won't allow an XL fridge to pass!
3. The type(s) of refrigerator you prefer, the capacity range you need, and any features you'd like to explore
4. How much you are willing to spend—ask about rebates, package deals, and holiday sales to get the best bang for your buck!
5. Have a plan in place for how you'll dispose of your old model. If needed, many appliance retailers offer services to pick up and recycle your old model!

How to Compare Different Models

Hopefully you now have an idea of what you want in your new refrigerator. But how do you compare different models that fall within your budget? Here are a few ideas...

Exterior Styling

How does it look on the outside? Is there an external dispenser? How do the handles feel? Try pulling open the doors. If you're considering a new color, take a color swatch home with you if available and see how it looks.

Interior Design

Pull open any interior drawers and play with any other adjustable storage features inside of the fridge. Do the drawers pull in and out smoothly? Are the temperature controls easy to access? If you're choosing a model with an icemaker, how much space does the icemaker take up? Would you prefer clear bins and frameless glass shelves for a higher-end look?

Ask an Expert!

A good appliance salesperson knows their products and the differences between them, so they can be a great resource. You can also check out online review sites that test refrigerators for their performance to see what they have to say.

In Conclusion...

Refrigerators will usually last between 7-10 years depending on the model and the way you take care of it. There are many full-featured models in the \$900-\$1,500 range. Most major brands are reliable and have service available should you need it.

Consider brands like GE, LG, Whirlpool, Samsung, and Maytag on your search for a new refrigerator.

A Little About Us



- **Bellingham Electric** has been in the same location for over 70 years and is family-owned and operated.
- Our average salesperson has been selling appliances for over 10 years and has a wealth of product knowledge.
- On top of that, we have an in-house service team.

Keep reading to find out why in-house warranty service is a huge benefit!

Bellingham Electric Offers Easy Warranty Service

Forget about calling a 1-800 number and hoping a technician shows up in a week or two. Instead...

1. Give us a call
2. We'll come out and see you in the next 1-2 business days
3. We bill the manufacturer
4. That's it! You'll barely have to lift a finger!

On top of that, we can take care of multiple appliances with small nagging issues all in one call—No need to schedule individual appointments for each brand or type of appliance. Our in-house parts department makes repairs even easier.



Thanks for Reading!

For product recommendations, questions, or anything else, don't hesitate to get in touch!

Store Hours:

Mon, Wed, Fri: 8:30AM-5:30PM

Tues, Thurs: 8:30AM-8PM

Sat: 8AM-4PM

Contact Us

250 Pulaski Blvd, Bellingham MA

(508) 883-7235

sales@bellinghamelectric.com

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