

CUT YOUR UTILITY BILLS

Which Appliance Should I Upgrade?

Q: I can only afford to replace one appliance. Which is best to increase efficiency and save on our power bill?

A: You are smart to consider energy use as you look at replacing appliances because most new appliances use much less energy than they did in the past. Manufacturers have found innovative ways to reduce appliance energy use without sacrificing performance.

The federal government began tightening appliance standards in the 1980s and has continued as technological innovations became more cost-effective.

It may seem like the oldest appliance should go first. That makes sense if you want the looks and features of a newer oven or dishwasher. But with most appliances, the energy savings you get from a new one will take several years to pay for itself with the energy saved.

The appliance replacement most likely to produce the greatest energy savings is your refrigerator. An older fridge can cost about \$20 a month to run. Replacing an old fridge with a new Energy Star-rated model can cut that down to less than \$5 a month.

The Energy Star label certifies that the appliance saves energy. New refrigerators will include an additional label—the Energy Guide label, which shows how much energy it uses annually and compares that to the most-



ABOVE: Replacing an old fridge with an Energy Star-rated model can cut the monthly cost to operate from \$20 to less than \$5 a month.
PHOTO BY SCOTT VAN OSDOL **RIGHT:** The Energy Guide label helps consumers estimate their annual energy costs for appliances.

least-efficient models available.

It's also possible to measure how much energy your fridge uses with a kilowatt-hour meter. Energy auditors use these meters to measure energy use for common household appliances. The energy use of an older fridge can sometimes be reduced by replacing the seal around the door.

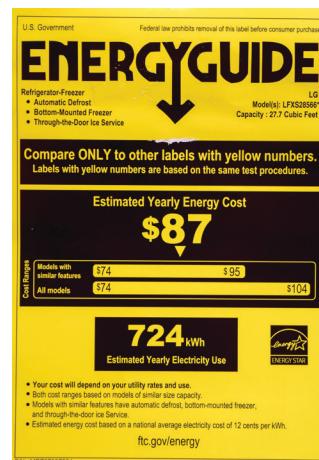
When looking to replace an old fridge, style counts. A top-freezer setup is the most efficient. A lower-freezer unit offers medium savings, and a side-by-side style is the least energy efficient.

If your goal is to save money on your energy bill, resist the urge to keep the old fridge in the basement or garage—that won't help you reduce your energy use. An

old fridge in an uninsulated garage on a hot summer day can use a lot of energy. Maybe you just need more freezer space. If so, we recommend the most efficient freezer you can find. Get recommendations at www.energystar.gov.

If your current fridge is in good condition, another appliance you may want to consider upgrading is the dishwasher. With most of us spending more time at home these days, chances are you're using your dishwasher more than you used to.

As with any major purchase,



be sure to read customer reviews for any brands and models you're considering, and look for additional opportunities to save money, like an upcoming Presidents' Day appliance sale. ■



This column was co-written by Pat Keegan and Brad Thiessen of Collaborative Efficiency. For more energy tips, go to collaborativeefficiency.com/energylife.