



Grains of truth about PURCHASING BREAD MACHINES

Definitions

Operating on computer chip technology, the automatic bread machine is an appliance that performs all the steps involved in making fresh, homemade bread. The machine consists of a heavy nonstick pan with a mixing and kneading blade nestled inside an electronically controlled heating unit. All that is required is measuring the ingredients into the pan and programming the machine. The average time it takes to produce bread in a bread machine ranges from 2 to 5 hours.

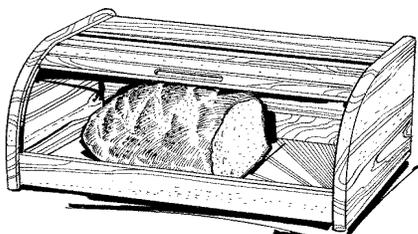
All bread machines on the market will produce quality bread. Different models contain different features, and, like purchasing an automobile, purchasing a bread machine is a matter of personal choice. The right machine for each individual depends on budget and circumstances of usage.

Considerations

Budget: As sales have increased, bread machines have become less expensive. Costs vary from \$40 to \$250. Comparison-shop and watch for sales in department, appliance, kitchen, discount department and hardware stores, as well as warehouse clubs, mail-order catalogs, shopping networks and on the Internet.

Manuals and customer support: Most bread machines have thorough, user-friendly manuals that include a variety of recipes. Many also come with a free instructional video. Some are available in French and Spanish.

Some manufacturers offer customer assistance hotlines—some toll-free—to answer questions or concerns. These numbers are usually contained in the manuals.



Warranty and servicing: Most models have one- to two-year limited warranties, but inquire how the servicing is handled. Check to see if a local appliance repair shop will handle bread machines, or if the machine will need to be returned to the manufacturer for repairs. Keep the receipt and box in case it does.

Features

Pan features: Bread machines can yield traditional, square or round shaped loaves. Whatever the shape, the taste remains the same. All have removable nonstick pans that allow for easy cleaning and in most, easy preparation of the recipe. Some, however, do require the pan to be locked in place before the ingredients can be added.

Bread machines have different pan capacities. A family may need a machine that produces a larger, 1.5-, 2-, or 2.5-pound loaf, but a single person or retired couple may choose a smaller machine that makes a 1-pound loaf. Machines with larger pan capacities in many cases will be able to produce the smaller 1-pound loaves. A 1-pound loaf provides about eight large slices; a 1.5-pound loaf, 12 slices; a 2-pound loaf, 16 slices; and a 2.5-pound loaf, about 20 slices. Typically, a 1-pound recipe has about 2 cups of flour, a 1.5-pound recipe has 3 cups, a 2-pound recipe has 4 cups, and a 2.5-pound recipe has 5 cups of flour.

Display and control panel: Some models have large display buttons and simplified instructions for easier operation.

Delayed bake timer: This popular feature is standard on almost every machine. It allows the operator to delay the start of the process for up to 12 to 24 hours so fresh bread can be enjoyed in the morning or after work.

Convection fan: This provides for even browning.

Cool-down feature: This cools the bread after baking to retain a crisp crust.

Crust color selection: Most bread machines provide a light, medium or dark crust color setting.

Keep-warm feature: This keeps bread warm for one to three hours of baking.

Power failure safeguard: Look for machines that have the ability to recover after short power failures of five to 10 minutes.

Viewing window: A window provides a limited view of the dough so the operator can check the process.

Yeast dispenser: Some machines have a small compartment in the lid that dispenses the yeast before the second kneading phase rather than adding it in the beginning with the rest of ingredients. The yeast dispenser guarantees that the yeast will remain dry and not activate prematurely when using the delayed bake timer.

Cycles

Dough/Manual Cycle. This feature signals when to remove the dough at the stage where it is ready to be hand-shaped, allowed to rise, and then baked in a conventional oven. It is a cycle that bread machine owners can use to make such things as cinnamon rolls, pizza crust and dinner rolls.

French Bread Cycle. French breads have little, if any, sugar. Therefore, they require longer rising times and higher baking temperatures. This cycle is best suited for breads low in fat and sugar. Usually, less time is spent on kneading and more time is devoted to the rising cycle. This results in breads with crisp crusts and open-grained, chewy interiors.

Preheat Cycle. Some machines will warm the ingredients either prior to mixing or during the kneading phase. There is no need to spend the extra time bringing ingredients to room temperature if your machine does it prior to mixing.

Regular Bake Cycle. The duration of this cycle varies widely from machine to machine. Some are 3 ½ to 4 hours; others, as short as 2 ¼ hours.

Raisin/Nut Cycle. The machine will signal late in the kneading phase when it is time to add the raisins, chopped dried fruit, or nuts. It prevents them from being pulverized, which sometimes happens if they are added in the beginning with the rest of the ingredients.

Rapid Bake Cycle. This cycle has a shorter kneading and raising time and produces bread about one hour faster than the Regular Bake Cycle. Some machines list no Rapid Bake Cycle because their Regular Bake Cycle may be a Rapid Bake Cycle, which is usually anything under 3 hours.

Sourdough Starter Cycle. A sourdough starter cycle which allows you to prepare a starter for future loaves. Only on certain machines.

Whole Wheat/Whole Grain Cycle. This cycle extends the kneading and rising time of whole grain breads to achieve taller, lighter breads. Whole grains refers to whole wheat, oatmeal, multi-grain, rye or any other breads that use specialty flours and are of a heavier nature. Often, this cycle will have either a longer kneading time, longer rising times, or both, to encourage better dough development.

Sweet Bread Cycle. This cycle is for breads that have sugar and fat content. Also, it can be used for breads that burn easily, such as egg, cheese and some whole grain breads. Bread machines with this cycle have adjusted their baking temperature to prevent dark crusts.

Additional Cycles

Many bread machines are capable of doing more than just yeast breads.

Jam Cycle. The machine will produce jam in about 1 hour and 20 minutes.

Rice Cycle. A few machines offer a rice-cooking feature that cooks rice in 40 to 52 minutes.

Quick Bread Cycle. A very limited number of machines offer the Quick Bread Cycle that bakes non-yeast-raised breads such as banana nut bread and pumpkin bread.

Butter Cycle. The machine will churn fresh butter from cream in 30 minutes.

Pasta Setting and Extruder Accessory. This allows the machine to double as a pasta maker.

Sandwich Bread Cycle. Produces a fluffy sandwich loaf with soft, thin outer crust.

Bread Stick Cycle. The dough is first prepared in the bread machine, removed and placed in special breadstick tubes provided by the manufacturer, then returned to the machine for baking.

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