Bellingham Electric Appliances | 250 Pulaski Boulevard, Bellingham, MA 02019

Dishwasher Buyer's Guide

A comprehensive guide to buying the perfect dishwasher

Overview

The dishwasher is an amazing time-saver, while also using a fraction of the water of handwashing *and* doing a much better job at cleaning our dishes. If it's been a while since you last purchased a dishwasher, or if this is your first time buying one, you might be wondering about what features are important and what you can get for your budget. In this guide, we cover:

- ⇒ Designs and types of dishwashers available
- ⇒ Decibel (dB) ratings for quiet operation
- ⇒ Terms and features you should know
- ⇒ How to compare different models

We typically use MSRP/retail pricing since these don't vary as much as promotional prices, so keep in mind that what you may actually pay can be at least 20% lower than the retail price depending on a variety of factors.

Enjoy! We know you'll learn a lot.

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Dishwasher Dimensions

In a perfect world, the rough opening for a dishwasher is:

- ⇒ 24" wide
- ⇒ 24" deep
- ⇒ 34" high

However, this isn't always the case in older homes or homes with a raised subfloor. ADA compliant dishwashers are slightly shorter and can be an option for homes that lack the necessary height clearance. Dishwasher height can be adjusted somewhat using leveling legs that are hidden behind a toekick.

New dishwashers are typically:

- ⇒ 23 7/8" wide
- ⇒ 24 1/2" deep to the front of the door
- ⇒ 33 7/8" tall

Dishwashers that are 18" wide are also available for small kitchens. European brands (namely Bosch) are known for offering flush installation, so the dishwasher door does not stick out past your cabinet doors.

Dishwasher Designs & Types

Most people are shopping for a built-in dishwasher, but there are a few factors to consider when it comes to the exterior design of a dishwasher. We'll also touch on portable dishwashers and drawer dishwashers.

Let's start with whether you should choose visible front controls or controls hidden on top of the door.

Dishwasher Design: Control Placement

If you're buying a built in dishwasher, one major aesthetic decision to make is whether to go for hidden ("integrated") top controls or visible front controls.

Top control dishwashers have the controls on the top rim of the door, so they're not visible when the dishwasher door is closed. They usually have a handle that matches other kitchen appliances made by the same brand, although some also have **pocket handles** so they can match with any suite of appliances.

Front control dishwashers are the traditional look with the controls on a panel on the front of the dishwasher. They typically have a pocket handle or pull latch rather than a bar handle. Front controls are common on budget models, but there are some mid-range dishwashers with sleek smooth touch front controls rather than basic plastic buttons.

Dishwasher Design: Control Placement …cont'd

Front Controls	Top Controls
Pocket handle matches with any suite of appliances	May have a brand-specific handle that won't match with appliances from other brands
Can look "cheaper" (but mid-range models can have sleeker controls that look a lot nicer)	Have a more premium feel, blend in; panel ready models available
Pricing starts at around $360 MSRP; sleeker models start at around $580	Pricing starts at around $500 MSRP
Can easily check on the time remaining in a cycle	Cycle time indicators may be limited to a light that shines on the floor while the dishwasher is operating
Controls can be bumped into and are easily accessed by children	Controls may be easier to view from a standing position

Dishwasher Design: Portable

If you live in an apartment or are looking for a dishwasher for an RV or other small space, you may be interested in **portable dishwashers.** They can also be a good option for small kitchens and older homes where cabinet space is at a premium.

Portable dishwashers hook up to a threaded faucet spout and plug into a nearby outlet. Some types of faucets may not be compatible—look into this before buying! Also, check that you have a nearby outlet (extension cords are a hazard).

Full-size portable dishwashers roll around on casters and may have butcher block tops so you can use them as additional counter space. They're typically louder during operation than built-in dishwashers (easily twice as noisy).

* Typical Dimensions: 24"W x 26"D x 36"H
* MSRP: $800-$900

Countertop dishwashers are much smaller and can't handle pots and pans. They can weigh 50-80 pounds.

* Typical Dimensions: 22"W x 20"D x 17"H
* MSRP: $450-$500

Dishwasher Design: Panel Ready

For a very high end look, you may want to look into **overlay** or **panel ready dishwashers**. Your cabinet maker designs a panel for the front of your dishwasher that matches the rest of your cabinetry. Panel ready dishwashers are specially designed to handle the weight of the custom panel.

Consider **the depth of the dishwasher** when you're comparing your options. To accommodate the custom panel without extending past the cabinetry, you will usually want a shallower depth dishwasher. European brands like Bosch and Miele have these shallower depths for a perfectly flush installation. With other brands, you'll want to doublecheck the product specs. MSRP starts at around $900.

Dishwasher Design: Drawer

Drawer dishwashers are a niche option offered by Fisher & Paykel. They come in single and double drawer units, and the double drawers have the same total capacity as a full-sized dishwasher. You can install single drawers side by side so you don't have to bend over to reach them when loading and unloading, or you can buy just one drawer if you have light dishwashing needs.

These models fit in shallower countertops and also don't need as much room in front of the dishwasher to fully open the drawer as a typical built-in dishwasher. They can be a good option for condos and galley kitchens. However, tall items like big pots may not fit.

Pricing starts at around $1,200 MSRP for a single DishDrawer, and $1,200 for a double DishDrawer.

Dishwasher Decibels Explained

A **decibel** is a way of measuring noise intensity. A **dishwasher decibel rating** takes the *average* of the dishwasher's noise level during operation. Most dishwashers now have a "**dBA**" rating. Bosch pioneered this trend in America in the early 2000s, and now all major brands list a decibel rating.

Overall, dishwashers today are easily much quieter than a dishwasher purchased in the 1990s or early 2000s before Bosch's trend caught on.

Dishwashers around 44 dBA and under are considered "whisper quiet," and typically retail at $800+. There are many dishwashers in the $500-$800 range around 46-55 dBA that will be significantly quieter than an older dishwasher from the early 2000s!

What You Need to Know:

- A 10 decibel increase is functionally "doubling" the noise level
- The rating is an **average** taken across the cycle, so some parts of the cycle may be louder
- Don't worry too much about a 1-2 decibel difference between models—differences of 8-10 decibels are more significant

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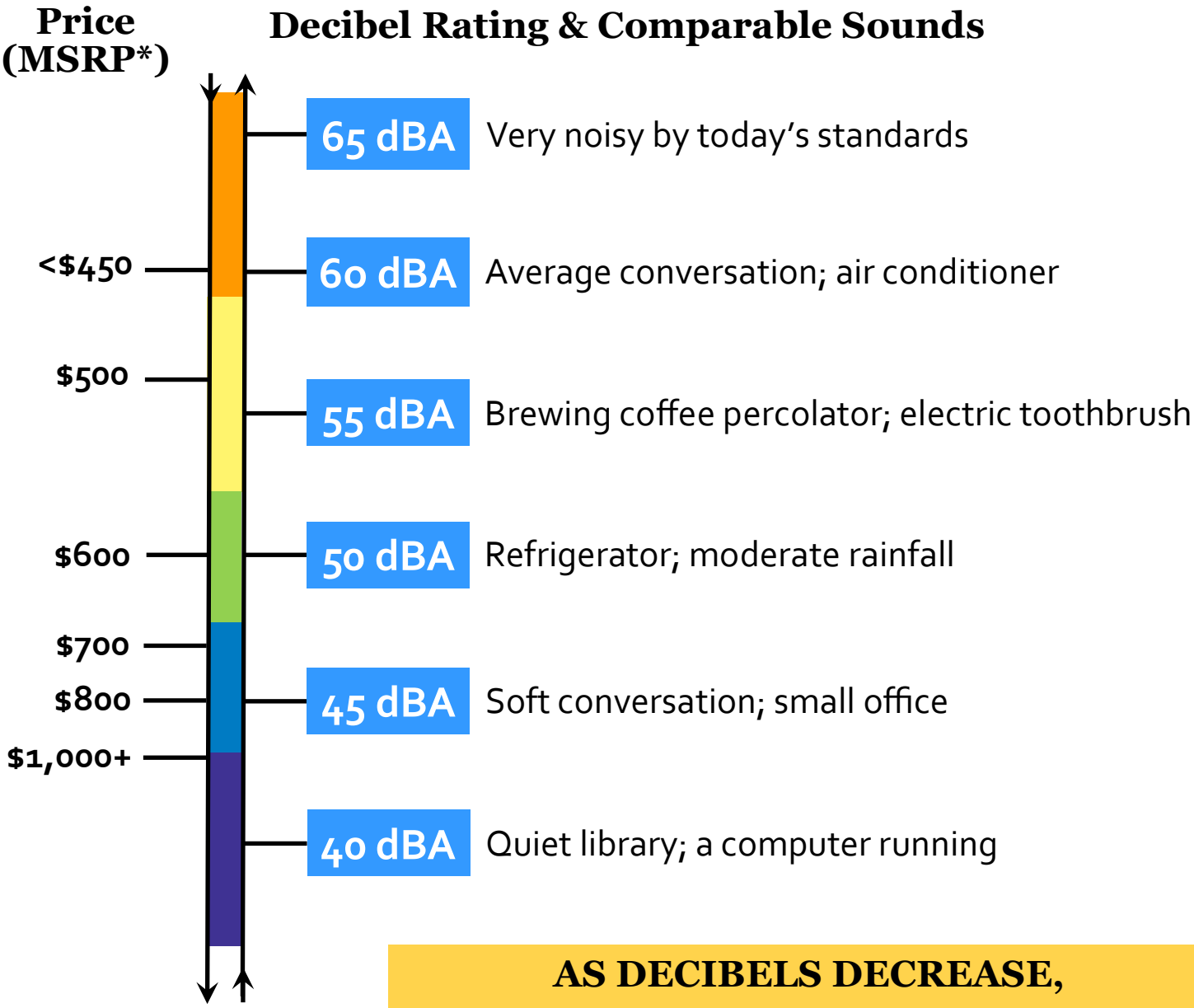
Dishwasher Decibels Explained… cont'd



AS DECIBELS DECREASE, PRICE INCREASES

But some brands/models offer louder models at higher prices and vice versa. E.g., Bosch offers basic 50 dBA dishwashers starting at ~$499.

*The price you actually pay could be 20-40% off the retail price depending on holiday sales, manufacturer promotions, and rebates.

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Dishwasher Drying

Dishwasher drying methods have changed a lot over the years. Part of what makes today's dishwashers so cheap to run (about $35/year!) is improved drying efficiency. Most people find that a new dishwasher doesn't get their plastics bone dry—this is due to changes in drying technology as well as because plastic is a porous material that's harder to dry than glass or metal. On the bright side, this also means your plastics won't melt if placed on the lower rack!

Stainless steel tubs allow **condensation drying,** which pulls moisture away from your dishes to condense on the steel tub. Heated dry cycles don't necessarily perform better. Ask a knowledgeable salesperson about the different types of drying and which brands and models seem to offer the best performance.

Dishwasher Drying… cont'd

Drying performance varies depending on the brand and model, and even choosing a dishwasher with heated dry doesn't guarantee good drying performance. Here are some innovations different brands offer:

Fan assisted drying

Improves air circulation with a fan.

Pop-open doors

The door automatically pops open at the end of a cycle, venting the moist air very quickly (this has been a very effective way to improve drying).

High heat final rinse

This improves the performance of condensation and fan-assisted drying.

Heat-releasing minerals

Select dishwashers from brands like Bosch use a volcanic mineral that releases heat when exposed to moisture—improving drying performance without using electricity.

Next up, let's dig into the terms and features you should know!

Terms & Features: Materials

Stainless Steel Tub

Dishwashers with stainless steel interior tubs are quieter and typically have better energy-efficient drying performance than plastic tubs. Stainless steel tubs are also more resistant to staining, more durable, and don't retain odors. You can find stainless steel tubs starting at around $500-600 MSRP.

Ball Bearing Rack Glides

Available on high-end dishwashers, ball bearing glides allow the racks to slide in and out smoothly even when loaded down with heavy dishes.

Vinyl/Nylon Racks

Older dishwashers with PVC or vinyl coated racks were more prone to rusting and cracking over time, and in many cases, they didn't last the life of the dishwasher. Nylon racks are more durable and don't crack or rust. Vinyl racks are only found today on very cheap dishwashers. On high-end models you can occasionally find stainless steel racks as well.

Terms & Features: Racks

Adjustable Racks

Adjustable top racks can be raised or lowered to make more space in the top rack or lower rack for tall items. See how the height adjustment works for yourself in the store—most models have a very easy height adjustment.

Third Racks

AKA flatware racks. These are very popular in new dishwashers, especially high-end models. These third racks are shallow racks located above the top rack that are great for cutlery, measuring cups, knives, bowls, and glasses, and so on. They can markedly boost capacity!

Terms & Features: Racks… cont'd

Fold Down Tines

Making room for large bowls and pans is easier with fold down tines. These tines fold down flat to accommodate large items. In some cases you can also adjust the pitch or angle of the tines as well as the spacing to accommodate different items.

Stemware Holders

Stemware holders are fold-out holders on the upper rack that hold wine glass stems in place so they don't fall over during a wash cycle. This reduces the risk of breakage during a wash cycle.

Terms & Features: Other Features

Soil Sensors

Many dishwashers today now offer sensor or automatic wash options. Soil sensors monitor the soil remaining on the dishes, and the dishwasher can adjust the wash time and temperature accordingly. Instead of running a cycle based on a set time, your dishwasher can run until your dishes are clean! The benefits are similar to sensor drying in clothes dryers: it saves you time and energy.

Self/Manual Clean Filter

Dishwashers filter food particles out of the wash water so the water can be reused. Older dishwashers typically had a self-cleaning filter with a hard food grinder. Today's quieter dishwashers are more likely to have a manual clean filter. Depending on the model and how often you run your dishwasher, you may need to clean the filter about every 3-6 months with a quick rinse and scrub with a brush. You can still find self-cleaning filter models today if you would prefer.

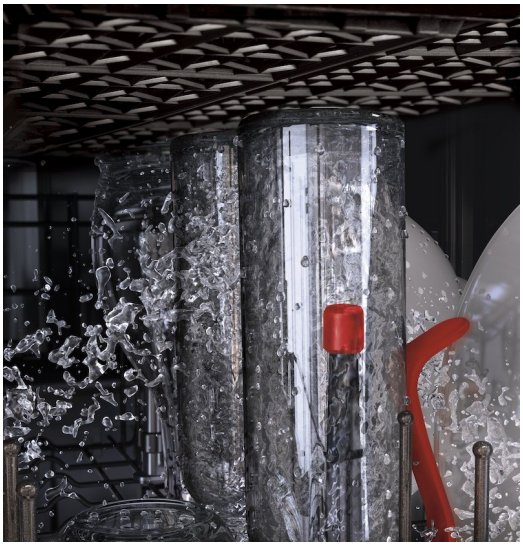
Terms & Features: Other Features… cont'd

Wifi Connectivity

It's true that today's dishwashers have longer cycles, although the benefits of very clean dishes and low water usage outweigh this. If you want to be able to check on the progress of a cycle, receive notifications when a cycle is complete, and more, all through your smartphone, then a smart dishwasher might be for you!

Bottle Jets

Some higher-end dishwashers now come with special jets in the upper rack that are perfect for cleaning inside tall, oddly shaped items like vases or water bottles. You can position the jets inside of the items to thoroughly clean hard-to-reach spots.



Getting the Best Performance

How do you get the best washing and drying performance out of your new dishwasher? Here are a few tips:

Avoid rinsing dirty dishes: Just scrape and load!

Today's dishwasher soaps need residue to "stick" to and do their jobs. Plus, dishwashers with automatic cycles (most mid–range and high-end models) use a sensor to "read" the debris left on your dishes and adjust cycle times and wash temperatures. If dishes appear to be too clean, it can throw off the washing and drying performance. Save yourself the time and water—quit rinsing!

Use the right cycle for the job.

Beyond the Auto/sensor cycle, different cycles have different strengths. A quick wash cycle likely won't work well on heavy soils and doesn't dry as thoroughly. A China/Crystal cycle uses less heat as well. Read your owner's manual for more details on cycle uses, cycle times, and more!

Consider Rinse Aid to boost drying performance.

Rinse aid helps keep water from sticking to your dishes. It's often advertised as a way to prevent water spots, but it improves drying performance as well.

What Can You Get for Your Budget?

Your budget will determine what features and styles you can afford. We're using MSRP here because it remains relatively stable, while promotional pricing can change quite a bit depending on the brand, model, and the time of year.

$350-$500	Basic dishwashers with plastic tubs, front controls, and noisy operation. Less likely to be Energy Star rated. Unlikely to have soil sensors/automatic cycles.
$500-$800	Good basic dishwashers start here. More Energy Star models, soil sensors/automatic cycles, and stainless steel tubs. Nicer styling and quieter operation available.
$800-$1,200	Quiet, fully-featured dishwashers with third racks, hidden top controls, plus great cleaning and drying performance.
$1,200+	Premium models with great feature combinations from brands like Bosch, KitchenAid, LG, and more.

Remember that holiday sales and package deals can shave 20% or more off of the retail price!

What Brands Can You Get for Your Budget?

Individual brand MSRP starts at… (approximate)

$300

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AMANA

Hotpoint

FRIGIDAIRE

$400

Whirlpool

$500

SAMSUNG

$600

LG Life's Good

MAYTAG

BOSCH Invented for life

$900+

KitchenAid

Feature Price Points (MSRP)*

~$500: Hidden top controls

~$620: Stainless steel tubs

~$700: 3rd-level racks, quiet operation, nice extra features

~$900: Whisper quiet operation

**Note*: *This is a general guideline. E.g., Bosch offers partial stainless steel tub 50 dBA models starting at $499 MSRP.*

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Before You Go Shopping…

Bring the following information with you into the store:

1. Measurements of the area where the dishwasher will go (height, width, depth), in particular if you have a non-standard space.
2. The interior setup features you'll want for your dishware (adjustable racks, fold-down tines, third racks, etc).
3. How much you are willing to spend—ask about rebates, package deals, and holiday sales to get the best bang for your buck!
4. An idea of the features and cycles you want that will benefit you the most.
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!

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How to Compare Different Models

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

Exterior Styling

How does it look? Do the controls make sense to you? Does it have a bar handle or a pocket handle? Front controls or top controls?

Interior Configuration

Pay attention to rack options and tine spacing. European brands like Bosch have tighter tine spacing that doesn't work well for stone/earthenware dishes.

Decibel Level

A difference of 8-10 decibels will likely be noticeable, but a 1-2 dBA difference is too subtle.

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 our dishwasher reviews as well as reviews by organizations like Consumer Reports, Reviewed, and Digital Trends.

In Conclusion...

Dishwashes will typically last around 10-12 years depending on the model and the way you take care of it. There are many full-featured models in the $600-$1,000 MSRP range. Most major brands are reliable and have service available should you need it.

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

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!

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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:	Contact Us
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