

REFRIGERATORS

Cool choices that work

Keeping the milk cold and the Tater Tots frozen apparently isn't enough. Makers are betting consumers will pay more for models that also keep them entertained. But six CR Best Buys do better at delivering the cooling that counts.

Samsung's new \$3,500 Wireless ICE side-by-side is among the latest multimedia models. Short for Interactive, Communication, Entertainment, it includes a removable LCD screen fed by a transmitter wired to an existing TV, DVD, VCR, or radio. But we found some of the fridge's features more annoying than entertaining. (See More Hype, on the facing page.)

LG's \$2,300 side-by-side LSC27970[ST] takes a different tack on technology. Instead of TV and video, its nonremov-



SVELTE STYLE LG's LFD22860, \$1,800 in stainless, is one of the few French-door fridges that fit a narrower 33-inch-wide space, rather than the usual 36 inches.

able screen offers recipes, digital photos, and a five-day weather forecast, as well as a programmable calendar. You'll also find other refrigerators with cooler ways to get a cold one, along with models that

bring higher style to narrower kitchen spaces.

Some innovations raise the bar. But months of tests in our refrigerator labs show that some new-tech perks didn't deliver enough to make our Select Ratings. We also found that dialing the service number on the LG's screen brought "assistance" we didn't expect. Here are the details:

French doors that fit. French-door fridges, which meld a bottom freezer with split refrigerator doors on top, are the fastest-growing style. While most are 36

inches wide and cost at least \$2,000, two Quick Picks from GE and LG span just 33 inches and cost \$1,600 to \$1,700.

Big chill costs bigger bucks. GE's cabinet-depth, side-by-side Profile

First things first Choose a refrigerator type and style that fits your kitchen space, needs, and budget.



TOP-FREEZERS

Best for small spaces. They cost the least, use the least energy overall, and offer the most storage space for their size. Typical width: 30 to 33 inches.

But you must bend to reach frequently used refrigerator items. Few offer a water dispenser. Wide-swinging doors require clearance.

Price \$500 to \$1,200.



BOTTOM-FREEZERS

Best for keeping fridge items at eye level. Many provide lots of storage. French-door models are becoming more common. Typical width: 30 to 36 inches.

But you must stoop for some items in the freezer. Few have an in-door ice/water dispenser, and dispensers steal space.

Price \$700 to \$1,500; \$1,600 to \$2,200 French doors.



SIDE-BY-SIDES

Best for kitchens that can't fit wide-swinging doors. Most offer in-door ice and water dispensers. Typical width: 33 to 36 inches.

But they're relatively pricey and aren't very space efficient. They've also been more repair-prone than top- and bottom-freezers. Most shelves are too narrow for large pizza boxes.

Price \$800 to \$2,500.



BUILT-IN STYLE

Best for a unified look. Cabinet-depth models mimic built-ins but protrude a bit past cabinets; true built-ins align with cabinets. More of both now offer French doors. Typical width: 36 inches or wider.

But true built-ins are pricey and have been repair-prone.

Price \$1,500 to \$3,200 cabinet-depth; \$4,000 to \$7,000 true built-in models.

PSC25PSW[SS] has a door-mounted beverage compartment that chills cans and bottles cooler than the rest of the fridge, along with a larger drawer that express-chills and thaws foods. A blue-lighted LCD touch screen also lets you dispense a measured amount of water. But at \$3,350, this capable fridge is a bit pricey even for a cabinet-depth model.

Forecasts send mixed signals. LG says its side-by-side's Weather & Info screen covers five surrounding cities. At about 10 miles south of our Yonkers headquarters, New York City was a natural for that list. But some major cities were left out. And at 123 miles away, Springfield, Mass., seemed far afield.

You can also get ZIP-code-specific weather forecasts for \$7 a month. But when we dialed the number on the screen, we were referred to another number that turned out to be a sex chat line. LG says it has fixed the problem by transferring the number. Separately, the model has been discontinued.

HOW TO CHOOSE

Our Select Ratings include only models that combine top performance and

value. Once you've settled on a style you like, keep these shopping tips in mind:

Size up your space. Width is most critical because that space is often limited by counters and cabinets. Also measure the doorways and the route the fridge will travel when delivered, along with the space needed for door swing.

Know what you're getting. As our Select Ratings show, claimed capacity and the usable fridge and freezer space we measure often varies widely, because manufacturers typically include inaccessible areas. Top- and bottom-freezers were closest to their claims as a group, while side-by-sides were furthest.

Be realistic about energy. Refrigerators consume more electricity than any major kitchen appliance. Models that scored higher in energy efficiency use less for their capacity. But you're likely to use even less with a smaller model.

Know that stainless needs cleaning. Some stainless smudges easily and requires frequent wipe-downs with hot water, dish detergent, and a sponge. Or try Weiman Stainless Steel Cleaner & Polish or Magic American Stainless Steel Magic Wipes. Both cost \$6 and worked best in our tests.

morehype

SAMSUNG'S WIRELESS ICE PROVES LUKEWARM

Multimedia refrigerators might be the wave of the future, but our tests of Samsung's Wireless ICE RH269LB[SH] show that this new \$3,500 side-by-side may not be ready for prime time.

Annoyances include subpar sound quality and a small, 10.4-inch screen that delivered an unimpressive picture compared with most stand-alone TVs. The screen is hard to see from the side when attached. And its battery lasts just over an hour with the screen detached and takes a day to recharge. You'll also have to find space for the 2x10.5x8-inch wireless transmitter that sends the fridge signals.

Samsung says this model's management software "not only revolutionizes the way you store food, but also how you organize your kitchen and your life." Don't throw out those Post-it Notes yet, however. While the calendar lets you store anniversaries, it isn't likely to save any marriages, because you

have to remember to check the calendar. And while its food-management program tells you what's in your fridge and when you put it there, it's up to you to enter each item into the system when it goes in and out.

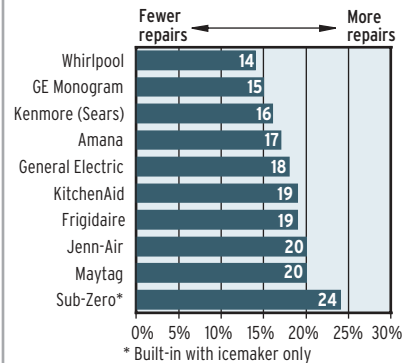
A final gripe: This multitasking fridge proved mediocre at keeping temperatures consistent, a refrigerator's primary job.



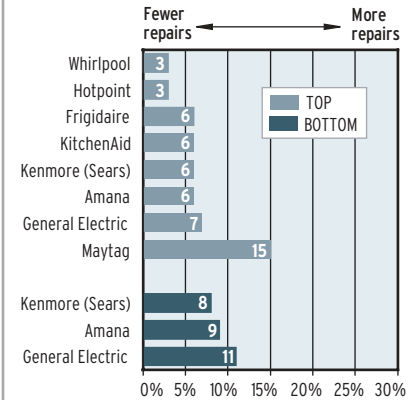
Brand repair history

The graphs show the percentage of refrigerators bought from 2002 to 2006 that underwent repair or had a serious problem. Differences of less than 5 points aren't meaningful. Maytag was the most repair-prone top-freezer. Sub-Zero has generally been repair-prone. Built-in bottom-freezers were more repair-prone than freestanding types. Models within a brand can vary, and design or manufacture changes could affect reliability. Improve your odds of getting a reliable model by buying a brand with a good repair history.

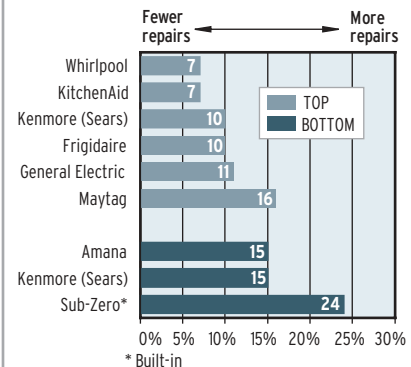
SIDE-BY-SIDES WITH ICEMAKER AND OUTSIDE DISPENSER



TOP-/BOTTOM-FREEZER WITH NO ICEMAKER



TOP-/BOTTOM-FREEZER WITH ICEMAKER



Based on Annual Product Reliability Survey. Data are adjusted to eliminate differences linked solely to the age of the product.

SELECT Ratings refrigerators

Best choices from our tests of 80 models.

• **Availability** Most models in stores through December 2007.

● Excellent ● Very good ○ Good ○ Fair ● Poor

Within types, in performance order. **Blue** key numbers indicate Quick Picks.

Key number	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Test results			Capacity (cu. ft.)			Features		
				Temp. performance	Energy efficiency	Noise	Claimed	Usable fridge	Usable freezer	Stainless available	Water dispenser	HxWxD (in.)
			0									
			P F G VG E									

TOP-FREEZERS *Relatively low-priced and roomy for their size; typically 30 to 33 inches wide.*

1	Whirlpool ET1FTEXS[Q]	\$850	77	●	●	○	21	12	6			67x 33 x30
2	Kenmore (Sears) 7425[2]	850	76	●	●	○	22	11	6	●		66x 33 x31
3	Kenmore (Sears) 7495[2]	800	73	●	●	○	19	10	5	●		66x 30 x31
4	Whirlpool ET1FHTXM[Q]	750	72	●	●	○	21	11	6	●		66x 33 x30
5	Hotpoint HTS22G6P[WW]	650	69	●	○	○	22	11	6			68x 33 x32
6	Frigidaire Gallery GLRT183TD[W]	550	63	●	○	○	18	10	4			67x 30 x31
7	Frigidaire FRT18S6A[W]	550	62	●	○	○	18	11	4			67x 30 x31

BOTTOM-FREEZERS *These put often-used items at eye level; typically 30 to 36 inches wide.*

8	Amana AFD2535DE[W] ①	1,700	77	●	●	○	25	12	6	●	●	70x 36 x32
9	Amana ABB1921DE[W]	850	77	●	○	○	19	9	4			69x 30 x31
10	Maytag Ice2O MF12568AE[W] ①	2,200	77	●	○	○	25	11	4	●	●	70x 36 x33
11	Amana ABB2221FE[W]	950	76	●	○	○	22	9	6	●		70x 33 x32
12	Kenmore (Sears) 7500[2]	870	75	●	○	○	20	10	5			68x 30 x32
13	LG LFD22860[SW] ①	1,700	73	●	○	○	22	11	4	●	●	69x 33 x32
14	Maytag MFC2061HE[W] ① ②	2,250	72	●	○	○	20	10	4	●	●	71x 36 x27
15	GE Profile PFS22MIS[WW] ①	1,600	69	●	○	○	22	11	4	●	●	69x 33 x32

SIDE-BY-SIDES *Ideal for spaces too small for wide doors; typically 32 to 36 inches wide.*

16	Amana ASD2627KE[W]	1,350	79	●	●	○	26	11	6	●	●	71x 36 x32
17	GE GSH25JFT[WW]	1,100	75	●	○	○	25	11	5	●	●	70x 36 x32
18	Whirlpool ED2GHEXN[Q]	950	70	●	○	○	22	10	4	●		67x 33 x31
19	Whirlpool Gold GC3SHEXN[Q] ②	2,300	70	●	○	○	23	9	5	●	●	69x 36 x28
20	Kenmore 5678[2]	1,200	62	●	○	○	22	10	3	●	●	67x 33 x31

BUILT-INS *Sleek but pricey; typically 36 inches wide or wider.*

21	GE Monogram ZICS360NR[SS]	6,400	75	●	○	○	21	11	4	●		85x 37 x26
22	Sub-Zero 650F	5,700	75	●	○	○	21	12	3	●		84x 37 x26
23	KitchenAid KBFC42F[SS] ①	6,800	75	●	○	○	23	12	4	●		84x 43 x28
24	Jenn-Air JS42FWD[W] ③	4,650	69	●	○	○	26	10	5	●	●	84x 42 x27

① French-door model. ② Cabinet-depth model. ③ Side-by-side; others, bottom-freezers.

Guide to the Ratings

Overall score is based mainly on temperature performance and energy efficiency. Noise and ease of use are also considered. Displayed scores are rounded; models are listed in order of precise overall score. **Temp. performance** denotes performance at different room temperatures, including high heat, and on how uniformly each maintained 37° F in the refrigerator and 0° F in the freezer. **Energy efficiency** is electricity use based on the EnergyGuide label and measured cubic-foot capacity. **Noise** is with the compressor running. **Claimed capacity** is the manufacturer's total cubic-foot measurement. **Usable fridge** and **usable freezer capacity** are our measurements of usable space for each. **Stainless available** denotes a stainless-finish option. **Water dispenser** means the feature is standard. **Height, width, depth** are without handle, rounded to the nearest inch. Under **brand & model**, bracketed letters or numbers are color codes. **Price** is approximate retail and includes an icemaker, if available. Prices for built-ins do not include exterior panels.

CR Quick Recommendations

Our Select Ratings include only tested refrigerators with the performance and value required to make our Quick Picks list. Models that have higher energy efficiency scores use less electricity for their capacity. And if your household isn't large, remember that a smaller refrigerator is likely to use less electricity overall than a larger model.

Once you know which refrigerator type you want and how much space you have, especially the width, check our **Quick Picks** below for competent models that best fit your space.

QUICK PICKS

TOP-FREEZERS

30-inch models: Consider the **Kenmore** (3) for its performance and efficiency, the **Frigidaire** (6, 7) for their low price.

33-inch models: The **Whirlpool** (1) and **Kenmore** (2) are quietest and the **Whirlpool** (4) is best-equipped for the price, while the **Hotpoint** (5) offers the most value.

BOTTOM-FREEZERS

30-inch models: Between the **Amana** (9) and **Kenmore** (12), choose the Amana for its lower electricity use, the Kenmore for its added space.

33-inch models: The **Amana** (11) performed best and costs the least, while the **LG** (13) and **GE** (15) offer French doors.

36-inch models: The **Amana** (8) offers French doors and space at a relatively low price. The French-door **Maytag** (10) adds through-the-door ice and water, while the French-door **Maytag** (14) adds cabinet-depth styling for a built-in look.

SIDE-BY-SIDES

33-inch models: Choose the **Whirlpool** (18) for its low price, the **Kenmore** (20) if you want stainless.

36-inch models: Consider the **Amana** (16) and the **GE** (17) for their value, the **Whirlpool** (19) if you're willing to pay extra for cabinet-depth styling.

BUILT-INS

Large models wider than 36 inches: As a group, built-in refrigerators have been repair-prone in our surveys. But if you like their style, consider the 37-inch **GE** (21) for its quietness, the 37-inch **Sub-Zero** (22) and 42-inch **Jenn-Air** (24) for their lower price (and a water dispenser for the Jenn-Air), and the 43-inch **KitchenAid** (23) for its French doors.