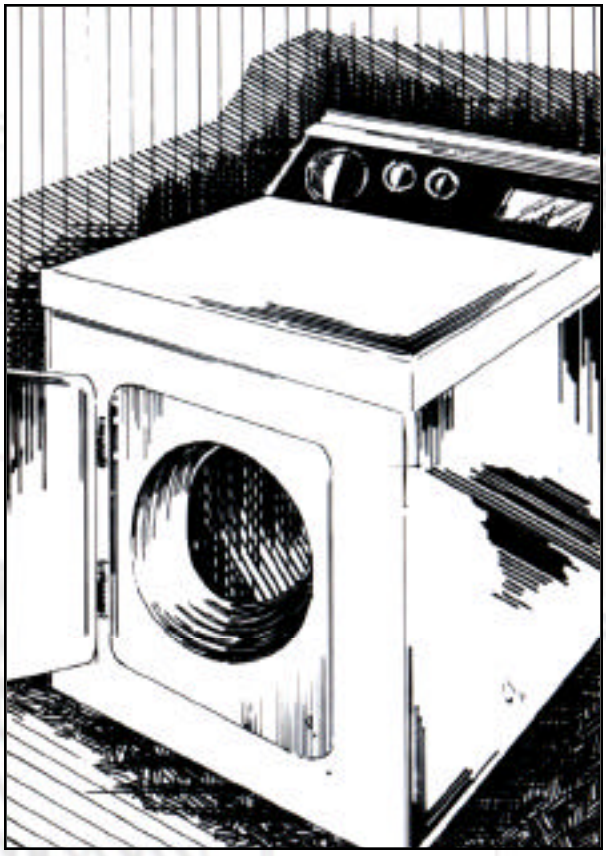
Buyer's Guide
Natural Gas Clothes Dryers



Natural gas clothes dryers cost about half as much to operate as a comparable electric dryer, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. So if you are buying a new clothes dryer, choosing a natural gas dryer will save you money and give you years of reliable service. This publication will help you find a natural gas clothes dryer that is right for your family.

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Introduction

Natural gas clothes dryers work by moving warm air through the clothes inside. The main part of the dryer is a rotating drum. The dry, heated air from a natural gas burner flows through the clothes as the drum tosses them through the air. The moist air coming off the clothes is then exhausted through a lint filter to the outdoors and replaced by more warm air.

According to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), the cost of drying a typical load of clothes in a natural gas dryer is 15 to 25 cents, compared with 30 to 40 cents for an electric dryer. Gas dryers may cost a little more to buy than electric dryers, but you will be paid back quickly in energy savings.

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As an energy conservation feature, today's gas dryers don't use a continuously burning pilot light to ignite the gas burner. They've been replaced by electronic ignition systems. This feature alone could save you money in energy costs, if you replace an old gas dryer with a new one.

Because natural gas clothes dryers are very efficient, they are not required to have an EnergyGuide label like many other appliances. And, according to DOE, the amount of energy used by natural gas clothes dryers does not vary much from one model to another.

When choosing a clothes dryer, you should know the answers to the following questions and then read the section below on special features to find out what will work for your family.

- Where will the dryer be located?
- What are the dimensions of the space where it will be installed?
- Where will the dryer be exhausted?
- How much dryer capacity do I need?
- Which direction should the door swing?
- Will a stacked washer and dryer unit fit into the required space?

When you are shopping for your new natural gas dryer, always be sure the models you are considering are design certified by International Approval Services or another nationally recognized laboratory that tests to national standards.

Features Of Natural Gas Clothes Dryers

Automatic Shut-Down

Older dryers had controls that required the user to set a time clock for the drying cycle. These controls were relatively inefficient, wasted time and were hard on clothes because the clothes frequently got too much drying or not enough.

Since 1994, federal regulations have required that clothes dryers have an "automatic termination cycle." There are two types. One uses a sensor that measures the moisture left in the clothes. The other measures the temperature of the air being exhausted to the outdoors.

The moisture sensor is the more sensitive kind, but may add a little to the cost of the dryer. DOE estimates that the moisture sensor type of automatic shut-down saves about 15 percent in energy costs, compared with the old-style time-clock controls. The temperature sensor reduces energy costs by about 10 percent. Both will reduce the wear and tear on your family's clothing by not overdrying them.

Clothes dryers with either type of sensor may also include the traditional time-clock controls, so owners can use them in combination.

Capacity

You can choose three different drum sizes in a natural gas clothes dryer: compact, regular/large and extra large for as much as 14 pounds of wet clothes. Almost all are loaded from the front. Some dryer doors swing down; others swing to the left or right.

A compact dryer is stacked with a companion washer. These units are ideal for small laundry rooms or for consumers who might have a problem bending over to put in and remove clothes. Compact units require only about five square feet of floor space.

Regular or large dryers are designed to handle average-size loads, but are generally less efficient at handling extra large loads and bulky household items. They usually have a drum volume of 5-1/2 to 7 cubic feet.

Extra large gas dryers match the capacity of extra large size washers. These units are designed to handle average to very large loads and bulky household items.

Natural gas clothes dryers range in size from 24 inches to 29 inches wide.

Select the dryer size that best meets your family's needs. The wrong choice can result in excessive wrinkling, poor operation of moisture sensors and wasted energy. A dryer that is too small will be slow and inefficient. One that is too large may not tumble small loads properly.

Temperature and Drying Cycles

The simplest dryer has only one heat level, but most clothes dryers have from three to six different drying cycles for different types of fabrics and the desired dryness . For example, a "permanent press" cycle uses cool air during the last period of drying so that clothes will wrinkle less. Some dryers also offer a feature that continues to tumble the clothes periodically to keep wrinkles from setting in. An adjustable end-of cycle signal is available on many dryers.

A "delicate" cycle uses lower temperatures for delicate fabrics, while the air fluff cycle uses no warm air at all. This cycle can freshen items that have not been laundered, such as pillows and stuffed toys.

On many dryers you can also select the level of dryness you want. For example, if you want to iron clothes while they are slightly damp, the dryer can be set at that level. On the other hand, if you want to make sure that your jeans are completely dry, you can set the appliance to produce a very dry load. Natural gas dryers shut off automatically and the heat stops immediately.

Exhausting

Like all natural gas appliances, gas dryers produce some byproducts from combustion, primarily water vapor and carbon dioxide, the same elements we exhale when we breathe. These combustion byproducts should be exhausted to the outdoors, along with the wet air that is produced as the dryer operates. Dryers should never be exhausted into the home, because the wet air could cause condensation in a building that might damage the structure.

Some dryers can be exhausted from the side, back or bottom. For the most flexibility in installation, choose a dryer that exhausts from more than one direction. This make installation easier and lets you move the dryer to a different home or location later.

The end of the exhaust should be located so that the wet air coming out doesn't harm the area around it.

The technician who installs your natural gas dryer should use the straightest, shortest duct pipe for exhausting. Rigid, metal duct piping traps the least amount of lint and lets the air flow freely. You should check the outside exhaust hood monthly to make sure the exhaust lid opens and closes properly. An exhaust lid that remains open allows heated air to escape and cold drafts to enter the home.

The end of the exhaust should be located so that the wet air coming out doesn't harm the area around it.

The lint filter is an important part of the exhausting system. Be sure to select a dryer with a lint filter that is easy to reach, because with most dryers you should clean it after every load of clothes. Some gas dryers have a signal that will go off if the lint filter is blocked. Even a light buildup of lint on the filter can lengthen drying time by restricting the flow of wet air to the outdoors.

Other Features

Some other features you might want to look for in a new natural gas dryer are:

- a light inside the dryer drum or on the control panel
- an air fluff cycle of an hour or more
- a door that can be changed to open from left or right
- raised edges on the top to contain spills
- controls that are easy to use
- a drying rack that fits into the drum to provide flat drying for special items, such as tennis shoes or stuffed toys, that shouldn't be tumbled
- quiet operation
- control graphics and back panel labels with technical service information in Spanish
- large graphics and controls for customers with vision problems

You should also check on the following:

Does the equipment look well-built?
Do parts fit and match well?
Does the door close securely?
Are knobs, dials and push buttons easy to grip, turn or set?
Are they arranged in a logical manner?
Does the dryer have good instructions?
What is the manufacturer's reputation for quality?
What kind of rust protection is used?
How durable are the top and the drum finish?
Does the dryer have leveling legs with rust protection?
Are there seals around the dryer drum?

Warranty And Service

Read the dryer warranty before you buy and compare with the warranties of other brands you've looked at. Find out who will service the dryer, and whether authorized factory service and parts are available in your area. Good warranty coverage and availability of parts and service at competitive prices are as important to consider as the purchase price.

Installation

Dryers must be installed in compliance with local codes by a qualified technician. Select a well-known and capable dealer who will provide installation and service. Ask about the experiences of others or contact the Better Business Bureau to confirm a dealer's past performance.

The dryer must be level to prevent the rotating drum from causing damage. It's a good idea to have some kind of locking mechanism on the leveling legs to hold them at the right height. It's also desirable to have some type of rubber pad on the foot of the leg to protect against marks on the floor if the dryer is moved.

Manufacturers' Customer Assistance Programs

As you shop, ask about each manufacturer's or retailer's customer assistance programs. Some manufacturers have factory-sponsored programs; others work only through local dealers.
Some types of customer assistance include:

- local or regional factory representatives who can provide assistance if there is a problem with a product
- the name and address of a factory person to whom you can write and receive an answer
- toll-free telephone assistance from trained consultants who answer questions about use and care, provide names of authorized local service companies, and provide parts and service assistance for dryer owners who want to do minor repairs

These types of consumer services can be important if you move and need to find a qualified dealer, installer or service company in your new location.

Drying Tips

- Separate lightweight fabrics from heavyweight ones for faster, more even drying.
- Don't overload the dryer. The load must tumble freely for the fastest, most wrinkle-free drying. Generally, one washer load is a dryer load.
- When possible, dry only full loads. Drying many small loads wastes energy.
- If drying only one or two items, add several compatible items to ensure proper tumbling and faster drying.
- Wash and dry several loads consecutively. A dryer that's already warm shortens drying time.
- Don't over dry. This causes increased wear on the clothes. Use the automatic cycle, if your dryer has one, and remove the load as soon as the dryer stops.
- Don't add wet items to a partially dried load.
- Don't open the dryer door unnecessarily. This lets warm air escape into the room.
- Clean the lint screen after each load. Even a light buildup of lint on the screen can lengthen drying time.
- Periodically check for lint accumulation around the gas burner as instructed in the owner's manual.
- Install the dryer in a warm area. Drying time is longer in unheated garages or utility rooms.