

Toaster Ovens

We have all had days where we just want one little piece of toast browned to perfection—and not have to turn on an entire oven and heat up the whole kitchen in the process. Or the times when you have a houseful coming over, and it seems as if you need just more oven rack to bake the rolls on or to keep a dish warm while the meat finishes up cooking. Or perhaps it is a summer evening and a pizza sounds amazing—except the kitchen is still blazing from a record-setting heat wave blasting through, and the last thing you want to do is generate more heat in your home.

The list of examples could go on and on as to why a toaster oven is an extremely helpful—if not essential—kitchen appliance to own along with your conventional oven. Its small size, versatile uses, and money-saving qualities make a toaster oven worth looking into, if not running out and purchasing this evening.

A toaster oven either fits right on your countertop or can be hung from an attachment underneath your cabinets, depending on the amount of space you have. They usually range in size from under a foot to two feet. When looking at sizes, be sure to double check if the measurements refer to the actual size of the oven, or if it is the interior size. This can make an impact on what you can fit inside. Obviously, the size you choose dictates what items you can cook inside.

The larger the toaster oven, the larger the price tag. However, considering you can use your toaster oven in much the same way you can use a conventional oven, investing in a larger toaster oven quickly pays off.

Toaster ovens have various cooking elements depending on what you are looking for. Many toaster ovens are convectional. This means generated heat is continuously circulated through out the oven by means of a fan. The movement creates an even cooking environment, ensuring that the top and the bottom are cooked evening. That means heat spots are eliminated: one area of a pan of cookies does not cook more than another. Convection ovens also cut cooking down by almost a third, saving you not only time but also electricity.

Other toaster ovens cook traditionally using coiled heating elements. Some are on the top, others are the bottom, and some are on both. This is how your conventional oven usually heats. These elements can be made from different materials, but the best are quartz on both the top and bottom, creating the most even cooking possible. If you get a traditional toaster oven, it is best to get a tallest one so the coils are not right on top of the food you are cooking.

A newer type of heating element is becoming popular in toaster ovens. Infrared heating sends rays into the food to cook them, similar to a microwave.

This provides fast cooking time. However, you can only use metal pans, and the risk of fires inside your oven is higher.

All toaster ovens come with at least one rack that you cook your food on. Depending on the size, some come with 2 racks, which allow you to fix more than one item at a time or to vary the height of the food away or towards the heating elements. It is helpful to have racks that are removable or at least hinge to make for easier cleaning. Adjustable racks are perfect for making more room in your toaster oven.

Included with toaster ovens are also drip trays, which catch any crumbs or spills. This helps keep your oven clean, as well as preventing fires. Removable, non-stick drip trays are the best, as they are easy to take out and clean. If they are not, you either have to manage to clean it out in a smaller area or pick the whole oven up and hold it over the trashcan to empty the crumbs out.

One of the great advantages of toaster ovens is they're many options. Not all toaster ovens are created equal. Some come with the very basics. A dial to set the temperature and a rack inside to hold the food. Others more elite and come with touch screens and rotisserie hooks. Whatever level of oven you choose though, the majority come with a perfectly sized pan to fit inside the oven. That way you can place most of your cooking items on it rather than directly on the rack. Pizza

pans and cookie sheets are made to fit inside the differently-sized toaster ovens. Others have stones you can set inside that your pizza can sit on top of for the ultimate taste. Brick inserts can make the food taste as if it has come from a brick oven.

Many toaster ovens have temperature settings that go below two-hundred degrees and as high up as 500 degrees, along with broiling options. The wide temperature range is sometimes more than a conventional oven. This is particularly helpful if you want to avoid using a microwave, but you obviously cannot set a your plate inside a conventional oven.

An additional warming advantage with some toaster ovens is a heating element on top of the toaster oven. Simply set your plate or a dish you need to keep warm while another cooks on the warming section. Then your food will be kept a toast temperature—without further cooking. Perfect for those times you cannot get all your dishes ready at the same time.

Because a toaster oven is smaller than a traditional oven, you can save energy and money. Not only are you helping the environment, but you are also helping your pocketbook. Plus, because of the small size the heat is contained and can consequently cook your food faster. By having to heat up fewer space for a

shorter amount of time, you can keep your kitchen cooler, which does not leave you sweaty or run off your kitchen help.

A toaster oven can also help you cut back on expenses by encouraging you to cook at home more. Knowing your cooking time will be faster and you do not face a hot kitchen can motivate you to start making more homemade meals instead of relying on the closest fast food restaurant. Eating out pushes expenses up—and your family's and your health lower. By cooking at home, you can put together meals where you know what ingredients you are using and where you can incorporate fresh, nutritious options. Not only are you cutting back on unhealthy substances, you are also getting a good start on managing your weight and setting a good example for your kids.