

Best for your bread



■ Cuisinart CPT-420, \$80

Cuisinart's new two-slice toaster claimed the top spot in our Ratings from its older brandmate, the Cuisinart CPT-170, \$70. Both turn out evenly browned toast with almost every batch, and they feature bagel, defrost, and reheat settings, as well as brushed stainless-steel housings. Paying more for the updated model gets you a motorized lift that raises and lowers bread with the push of a button, instead of the traditional push lever.

Bottom line. The new Cuisinart costs more than many toasters, but its solid performance and sleek design might be worth the investment, especially if you plan to use it every day.



■ Hamilton Beach Digital 22502, \$35

Hamilton Beach's two-slice toaster performs almost as well as the Cuisinart for less than half the price. This CR Best Buy's defrost and bagel settings, as well as its extra-wide slots, are helpful if you toast more than thin-sliced bread. And its slide-out crumb tray eases cleaning. While many inexpensive toasters resort to plastic housings, the Hamilton Beach has the same brushed-metal exterior of pricier models.

Bottom line. There are even less expensive toasters on the market, but when it comes to balancing value and performance, this one was second to none in our tests.



■ Breville BTA840XL, \$180

If you're often toasting for a crowd, this Breville is the only four-slice model that makes our recommended list, popping out successive batches of evenly browned toast. It uses an automated lift instead of a push lever, and its "a bit more" setting automatically provides extra toasting time. Measuring about 12x11x8 inches, the toaster is a formidable addition to any countertop, and its brushed die-cast metal housing gives it a professional look.

Bottom line. This is a serious toaster with a hefty price tag to match, but you get plenty for the investment.

Two from TV-land are, um, toast

■ **Gordon Ramsay Everyday 16117 (Kmart), \$25**

■ **Food Network 18010 (Kohl's), \$60**

The potty-mouthed British restaurateur Gordon Ramsay is known for skewering incompetents on programs like "Hell's Kitchen" and "Kitchen Nightmares." So you'd think that he would hold his toaster to a higher standard. But lackluster performance, especially in our successive batch testing, dropped it to dead last in our Ratings. The Food Network's two-slice toaster was a little better at successive batches, though it was just as bad at toasting a single slice as the Ramsay toaster.



Gas furnaces you can count on

Dreading a furnace replacement? Today's more-efficient gas furnaces can save you around \$17 for every \$100 you spend on fuel compared with older models. They are also, on average, less likely to need repairs, according to our survey. But you might want to think twice about gas furnaces from York, which broke down almost twice as often as other brands.

That's what subscribers told us about 32,251 furnaces they bought between 2007 and early 2012. Reliability is especially important because when a furnace failed, 75 percent needed significant work. A majority of those broke down completely, with nearly a third producing no heat for more than a day. For 38 percent, the repair cost \$150 or more.

If a key part such as the heat exchanger or control module fails, you're better off replacing the furnace if it's more than about 15 years old. Otherwise, repairing rather than replacing a furnace might make more sense.



If your furnace is on the fritz, try the following before you call a contractor or start shopping:

Check the filter. If you're getting low airflow, check the air filter on the furnace. A clogged filter could cut airflow down to a trickle. The

top-rated 3M Filtrete Elite Allergen 2200MPR, \$24, traps dust better than the usual furnace filter, so it can also help clean the air. Check it monthly, and replace when dirty.

Inspect electrical parts.

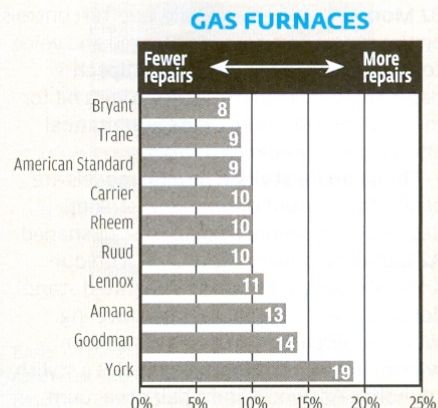
Loose wires or a thermostat malfunction could also cause heat problems. If your thermostat runs on batteries, try changing them. And make sure that burned-out fuses or tripped breakers haven't

shut power to the fan or circuit board.

Every home with a gas or oil furnace should have a CO alarm on each floor and near (not inside) an attached garage. One we recommend is the First Alert CO615, \$40. Test the alarm weekly, vacuum it monthly, and replace it every five years. Don't remember how old the alarm is? Look on the back for the manufacture date.

Most and least reliable

Choosing a brand with a good repair history can improve your odds of getting a reliable brand. Models within a brand may vary, and changes in design or manufacturing may affect future reliability. Differences of fewer than 4 points aren't meaningful, and we've adjusted the data to account for the age of the furnace.



Source: Annual Product Reliability Survey, Consumer Reports National Research Center.