AGGRAVATING APPLIANCES

Before buying appliances that are to help make our lives easier, ask yourself do you really need it, where are you going to store it and is there something else you already have that will do the same job? Will a simple plain model be as effective and efficient as one with all the bells and whistles? Just because they can design it does not mean that you need it. Some are so complicated with more buttons than an airplane cockpit. After trying to use them, you feel the manufacturer owes you a refund for all the aggravation.

For instance, Breville makes a toaster with six different settings. When did toast become so complicated? Toast! When did a toaster need to cost nearly two HUNDRED dollars? My toaster is a hand me down from a co-worker’s grandmother. It was made in 1969 by Proctor Silex in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Forty-four, years later it’s still making fabulous toast and I get variable browning by just moving the lever. Thankfully grandma and I have similar opinions about how brown our toast should be and she marked where to put the lever with fingernail polish. It works better than the last toaster I bought which broke within a few years. I plan to keep it until it dies just to see how long it will last and then donate it to the Baltimore Museum of Industry. It’s an example of American made at its finest.

When I do need to purchase an appliance I do some research before purchasing via Consumer Reports. “Consumer Reports is an expert, independent, nonprofit organization whose mission is to work for a fair, just, and safe marketplace for all consumers and to empower consumers to protect themselves. The organization was founded in 1936 when advertising first flooded the mass media. Consumers lacked a reliable source of information that they could depend on to help them distinguish hype from fact and good products from bad ones. Since then, Consumer Reports has filled that vacuum with a broad range of consumer information. To maintain its independence and impartiality, Consumer Reports accepts no outside advertising and no free samples and employs several hundred mystery shoppers and technical experts to buy and test the products it evaluates.”

You can access a subscription of their monthly magazine on-line or have it delivered hard copy via the US post office. It also publishes general buying guides. Your local library has a copy and for a few hours of your time you can make a wise product choice.
As an example, I pursued the January 2013 issue to evaluate single-serve coffeemakers. These have become increasingly popular as consumers look for ways to save time and clean-up. In truth they don’t deliver the same taste as fresh brewed and your coffee costs a whole lot more. However, if you get your java at the local coffee house, then single-serve made at home can bring significant cost savings. I prefer to spend my money on high quality coffee, not pods to dispense it. According to product testing by Consumer Reports, one of the most popular brands – Keurig, and one of the most expensive, does not pass the test. Three other models are recommended and thanks to on-line shopping you can have them shipped to your home if your local store does not stock it. To get the facts check out the January 2013 issue at www.consumerreports.org

There are good appliances that make our lives easier and healthier, without aggravating us. Try any version of the indoor grills that will cut down on fat consumption, but make sure you get the removable plates that you can put in the dishwasher. Otherwise, you will spend too much time cleaning it. A crockpot can prepare dinner while you are at work, but a simple style will do the same as one that is digital or that has many settings.

Don't give in to appliance fads, and instead rely on tried and true standards. Here are two recipes using the blender and crock-pot.

**BLENDER COLE SLAW**

1 medium-sized cabbage  
1 carrot, peeled  
1/2 green pepper  
1 slice of onion  
3 tablespoons salad oil  
1/3 cup vinegar  
2 tablespoons sugar  
1 teaspoon salt  
1/4 teaspoon pepper  
1/2 teaspoon dry mustard  
1 teaspoon celery salt

Quarter & core cabbage. Cut cabbage, carrot and green pepper into chunks. Place all veggies in blender container. Cover with water & turn blender on High for about 5 seconds. Drain off water. Repeat until all ingredients are chopped; put in separate bowl. Combine remaining ingredients & blend until thoroughly mixed. Pour over vegetables and toss. Makes 6 to 8 servings.

**SWISS STEAK**

2 pounds round or Swiss Steak, 3/4” thick, cut into serving pieces  
Salt & Pepper to taste  
Worcestershire Sauce
1 onion sliced
1 (16 ounce) can tomatoes

Season meat and place in slow cooker (wipe meat well before seasoning). Cover with onions and tomatoes. Cover; set low for 8-10 hours. Serve over rice.

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