

# Today's laundry systems do the dirty work in style

BY BOBBI IGNEZI  
Copley News Service

It's doubtful anyone really enjoys doing laundry. But for a chore that inspires so little enthusiasm, we sure do a lot of it.

Americans each year wash about 35 billion loads weighing 100 million tons, according to a survey by Lowe's. That's nearly 300 times the weight of the Empire State Building, the home-improvement company says.

Fortunately, recent high-tech washer and dryer options have made the task easier and more efficient — and, for some folks, maybe even a little enjoyable.

The newest ones load, clean and dry differently than your mother's laundry-room pair. Offering from 10 to 15 cycles to handle everything from health-club grunge to the finest silk, these smart appliances are not only easier on your clothes and energy bill, but thanks to clever ergonomic design, they're also gentler on your aching back.

Some of the latest washers and dryers, like the General Electric Harmony Clothes Care System (\$2,000 for the pair), are so intelligent that they can talk to one another

— and they're not just airing dirty laundry.

The washer communicates electronically with the dryer, letting it know what type of garments (knits, playwear, swimwear, etc.), fabrics, colors or special loads (towels, pet bedding, throw rugs) are being washed.

Once the dryer gets the message, it automatically programs the appropriate setting. All you have to do is move the load from the washing machine into the dryer and press the "start" button.

"This isn't a gimmick. It just makes laundry easier," said GE spokeswoman Cynthia Fanning, who explained that most people automatically use the dryer's highest heat setting and longest drying time.

"There's a lot of wear and tear happening in the dryer. We knew if we could get the washer to communicate information about the laundry load, we could give the consumer better dryer performance and longer clothing life."

In addition to automatic sensors that know the correct water level for each laundry load, the GE Harmony washer also has a

"stain inspector" function that allows you to select a cycle based on 65 common stain problems. The fabric and garment color are factored into the equation. Just let the washer know that you have red wine stains on a blue cotton shirt and it will do the rest.

Don't like relinquishing so much power to an appliance? Not to worry. You can always override all of this technology and select your own settings.

No matter how many bells and whistles an appliance offers, energy efficiency is still a high priority for today's consumer.

The Whirlpool Duet front-loading washer puts the emphasis on water and energy savings. The washer uses 68 percent less water (17,000 gallons saved a year) and 67 percent less energy (800 kilowatt saved annually per household) than conventional washers, for savings up to \$150 a year, according to Whirlpool brand manager Ericka Wietecha.

In the world of washing machines, high-tech also means high capacity. And, bigger laundry loads mean fewer loads per week. The GE Harmony's king-size 4-cubic-foot washer has the

largest capacity on the market, able to hold 24 towels or 50 T-shirts. Whirlpool's Duet washer isn't far behind, at 3.7 cubic feet of clothes, or 22 towels.

While newer front-loading washers have been popular with consumers for their gentle cleaning and energy efficiency, some people aren't crazy about stooping over to load or unload the machine.

The folks at Whirlpool have gotten around — or under — this problem by offering an optional pedestal drawer on their Duet washer (\$1,000 to \$1,300) that raises the front-loading unit an ergonomically correct 13 inches off the floor and at the same time gives some handy storage space.

To solve this dilemma from a different direction, the GE Harmony and Whirlpool Calypso (\$919) washers offer top-loading machines with front-loading agitator-less systems. The Harmony washer uses centrifugal force to pull detergent and the clothes through the water, while the Calypso bounces laundry around in a shower of concentrated detergent lather. Both minimize wear and

tear on the fabric.

New Zealand appliance manufacturer Fisher & Paykel wanted to do its part to reduce back strain, so it designed its Smart Load dryer (\$699) to load from the top instead of the front.

Featuring a reverse-tumbling system, the dryer is supposed to reduce creasing and tangling, since clothes aren't constantly rolled into a ball. The drum is set at a 45-degree angle and rotates for four minutes in one direction, then 45 seconds in another direction to untwist the load.

New moisture-sensing dryers detect the amount of water remaining in fabrics so they don't overdry clothes or waste energy.

The Whirlpool Senseon drying system promises to dry fabrics in the same amount of time it takes to wash them. Internal thermostats control drying temperatures and reduce heat as clothes dry to help prevent scorching and fabric damage. The electronic control measures the rate of drying and turns off the heat as soon as the load is dry.

The GE Harmony dryer offers dual motors, one that maintains airflow and

another that controls tumbling action to enable you to operate the functions independently. It also features dual thermostats, one to monitor incoming air temperature and the other to measure outgoing air temperature for drying consistency.

Whirlpool's Personal Valet (\$700 to \$1,900) is the next best thing to dry cleaning. The appliance, which can be free-standing or built into your laundry room wall, freshens clothes using a fragrant heated mist.

Although the latest laundry appliances are gentle on your clothes and energy bill, they may be tough on your pocketbook. The newest washers and dryers can cost double the amount of traditional machines.

But, according to Fanning from GE, consumers say it's worth it.

"People say they're willing to pay extra for appliances that save them time," she said. "More and more people are becoming energy and water conscious. Plus, people are interested in appearance. They want a washer and dryer that look good. And, all of that costs extra."

## New product clears clogs

BY MORRIS AND JAMES CAREY  
The Associated Press

Got a clogged drain? Reaching for a plunger or a "snake" auger? Perhaps there's a better way.

A brand new product blasts right through tough drain clogs with a burst of compressed air. Kleer Drain uses mini CO2 cartridges similar to those used for carbonating seltzer water bottles. They are inserted in a specially designed system that includes an air chamber and rubber cup adapter that fits most sizes of drain openings — from toilets and floor drains to sinks and tubs.

It also includes a pressure release mechanism that shoots a powerful burst of air down and through drains and pipes to instantly clear even the toughest clogs and obstructions. Now, while others struggle to plunge and snake, you can "have a blast" and be on your way faster than a speeding bullet.

For more on Kleer Drain: [www.kleerdrain.com](http://www.kleerdrain.com).

## Automatic faucet in 5 minutes

BY JAMES AND MORRIS CAREY  
The Associated Press

A running faucet wastes thousands of gallons of water annually when it runs longer than actually needed, or if it runs unattended (even briefly.)

One solution is the slick automatic "motion-sensor" faucet you see in hotels, restaurants, and airports that only runs when motion is sensed directly below.

While a nice feature (that reduces water usage by up to 70 percent), the cost has been prohibitive for home use — until now. The new E-Z Faucet adapter makes any home faucet automatic and hands-free in just five minutes. Just remove the existing aerator tip, screw on the E-Z Faucet head, and the compact infrared sensor unit is ready to flow.

## Increase energy savings with your computer

Computer equipment "is the fastest-growing electric load in the world," according to the Alliance to Save Energy, a coalition of business, government and consumer groups.

Here are some tips from industry and environmental groups that can help reduce your portion of that load:

■ Turn off the computer when you're not using it.

The notion that it's more efficient to keep the computer on for long periods of time (such as overnight) to save wear and tear on the equipment is no longer true, particularly with

newer computers and monitors.

As long as you're being reasonable about how many times you turn it off and on (say, once, twice, three times a day), that's fine.

If you're turning it on and off every 15 minutes, then it's probably best to just leave it on.

■ Set and use your computer's "sleep" mode for periods of inactivity. By doing this, you can reduce your computer's energy consumption by 60 percent to 70 percent.

■ Don't turn on your printer until you're ready

to print. This is especially true for laser printers, which use a lot of electricity even when they're "idling."

■ Buy a monitor only as large as you really need; a 17-inch monitor uses 40 percent more energy than a 14-inch monitor.

■ Turn off your monitor if you're not using the computer.

■ If you don't use all of your equipment when you work on your computer, don't put it all on the same power strip.

You may want to put your scanner, for example, on a separate strip, and keep

that strip turned off except for when you use the scanner.

■ Keep your computer clean and cool, because dust and heat will wreak havoc on your computer's circuits.

All electrical devices generate heat, which is why computers include internal fans or have cases designed to boost air flow. Heat is an enemy because it causes things to expand or to respond differently to electricity.

— Copley News Service

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