

How we test



Our testers munched their way through a mountain of bread to pick the Best Buys

The taste test

Using a bread maker might be fun, but if the bread's no good, even the small effort involved in weighing ingredients and pressing buttons will soon feel like a waste of time. To judge the quality of the bread produced by the machines on test, our panel of assessors baked and tasted nearly 220 loaves. That took 120kg of flour – the weight of a hefty rugby player – and each loaf was then rated for taste, smell, appearance, crust and texture, both when it was fresh and 24 hours later.

We found that results can be very good indeed. The white loaves we made in the Best Buy Panasonics looked and tasted better than supermarket bakery bread. They were also cheaper.

At the other end of the scale, the Breville BR10's white breads were too yeasty and salty and were quite underdone. The bread we made in the Morphy Richards 48280 was burnt.

Easy to use?

Our testers checked how easy each machine was to use and keep clean. All proved easy to use, though the Team International was not as easy to clean as the others. In our noise tests, the Best Buys produced nothing louder than a contented purr, but the Russell Hobbs 11775 was more vocal. Avoid this one if you prefer appliances to be seen and not heard.

Bread winners

Fancy waking up to a freshly-made loaf? Bread makers are half the price they were a decade ago, so let the baking begin

A decade ago, buying a bread maker was an expensive business. One of our 1997 Best Buys cost £200 and you had to shell out £100 for even the cheapest models. The good news is that prices have dropped rapidly since then – our three Best Buys all cost less than £100 this time around – and they're far from being one-trick ponies. As well as making a range of loaves, many modern bread makers can also be used to make cakes, jam and pasta. One of the models we tested for this report can even make butter for you – albeit a little slowly.

We loved the taste of the bread we made in our three Best Buys and reckon it compares well to shop-bought equivalents (see 'The taste test', left), though the lack of preservatives in home-made bread means it doesn't tend to stay

as fresh. Baking your own bread should save you money, too, if you normally buy unsliced loaves – a home-made white loaf costs only about 40p to 80p, depending on size. What's more, all the machines we tried are easy to use and clean – despite only one offering dishwasher-proof parts.

If you think baking bread is an all-day job, you're in for a pleasant surprise. Our Best Buys produced high-quality white loaves in four hours or less, and most of the machines on test also had a 'rapid-bake' setting for even quicker results.

Two of them produced decent white loaves in under one hour, but reducing baking times so drastically does mean there is less time for the dough to rise and it's no surprise that some quick-bake loaves were over a third smaller than those made normally.

Our three Best Buys all cost under £100 and make really tasty bread

What you should look for

VIEWING WINDOW

All the machines we tested, except the Panasonics, have windows that allow you to check how your bread is baking. The Breville BR11 has a viewing light, too

RAPID BAKE

This setting cuts baking times substantially on most models. It's a handy feature, but the loaves tend to be smaller and denser and can be less tasty than those baked normally

LOAF OPTIONS

We found programming the machines was easy. You can specify which size loaf you're making and also choose your preferred crust colour

DELAY TIMER

Delay timers let you program your machine to start after you've gone to bed, so you can wake up to the smell of freshly baked bread each day



Making jam, cake and pasta

The new generation of bread makers is nothing if not versatile. As well as making bread, most machines can be used to make other things such as cake, jam and pasta. We tried them out

■ **CAKE** Virtually all the bread makers we tested can make some form of cake. It's hard to make direct comparisons between machines, as each comes with its own set of recipes, but overall we were pleased with the cakes we made. If you are a keen baker, the range of options will feel limited as no mechanical bread maker can hope to mimic the range of methods a good home baker would use, but if you rarely make your own, we think you'll enjoy experimenting.

■ **JAM** Bread makers provide a great environment for boiling fruit and sugar at very high temperatures. The finished product has a pleasant home-made feel which proved very popular with our testers. Best on test was the Russell Hobbs Breadman Junior.



■ **BUTTER** The Team International bread maker also features a butter-making option, but it proved to be a time-consuming job, as we had to run the program three times before it worked. It was worth persevering, as we eventually succeeded in making yellow, creamy, soft butter.

■ **PASTA** Three of the bread makers on test can also make pasta (see table), but we weren't too impressed with the results, given the effort involved. All the machines do is make the pasta dough – you still have to roll it out and flatten it, using a pasta machine, and then cook it. We would have liked to see better instructions and tips and aren't convinced it's worth the effort. Pick of the bunch was the Russell Hobbs 11775.

OUR VERDICT The bread makers we tested made some great jam, some decent butter (eventually) and some edible cakes, but their pasta was more miss than hit.

Both the
Panasonics
made bread
that tasted
better than
good-quality
shop-bought
loaves



83% Panasonic SD-253 £99

Panasonic has been making top-class bread makers for years, clocking up Best Buys in all our recent tests. This machine and its predecessor, the SD-252 (see right), keep that run going, producing bread that is far superior to the other machines on test – and better tasting than good-quality, shop-bought, unsliced loaves. The crusts are nice and flaky and the bread light and fluffy.

The SD-253 is available from Argos, Comet and John Lewis.

WE LIKE The raisin and nut dispenser cleverly stores and drops in any delicate ingredients after the main mix to stop them getting squashed.



Cheapest stores Argos, Comet, John Lewis
Maximum height with lid up 54cm **Crust settings** Dark, medium, light **Extra functions** Cake baking **Maximum delay** 13 hours **Colour** White

PHOTOGRAPHY JOHN TRENHOLM

USING THE TABLE

We tested the most widely available bread makers. The more stars the better.

Specification

Price For Best Buys, we give the cheapest widely available high-street price. Prices for other models are a guide to what you should expect to pay.
Size The height given is with lid closed.
Loaf size Approximate weight of finished loaf.
Cake/Jam/Butter/Pasta A ✓ indicates that this item can be made in the machine.

Baking time

This can vary according to loaf size and crust colour.

Test performance

White normal/Wholemeal Our panel's verdict on the quality of bread made using the machine's recipe.
White rapid The panel's verdict on white bread baked using the 'rapid bake' programme.
White delay We made and rated loaves using the maximum delay setting for each machine.
Ciabatta We used a packet mix to make

ciabatta. **Non-bread items** Combined ratings for the quality of cake, jam, butter and pasta made, as relevant. **Noise** This is a subjective rating based on how noisy each machine sounds. **Cleaning** Our testers rated how easy it was to clean each machine after baking bread.

Score

Ignores price and is based on:
Quality of bread **45%**
Convenience **30%**
Features **15%**
Quality of non-bread products **10%**

MODEL		SPECIFICATION			
		PRICE (£)	SIZE (cm) (h x w x d)	WEIGHT (kg)	LOAF SIZE (g)
1	PANASONIC SD-253	99	37x34x25	7.5	500; 750; 1,000
2	PANASONIC SD-252	80	35x33x26	6.9	500; 750; 1,000
3	RUSSELL HOBBS Breadman Junior 10882	60	32x26x33	4.7	500; 750; 1,000
4	MORPHY RICHARDS Fastbake 48268	70	33x35x30	5.9	680; 900
5	KENWOOD Rapid bake BM200	50	31x33x25	6	900
6	TEAM INTERNATIONAL Rapido BBAB 7	70	34x34x26	6.2	450; 680
7	BREVILLE Antony Worrall Thompson BR11	100	32x44x27	6.1	750; 1,000; 1,200
8	MORPHY RICHARDS Compact 48245	35	29x35x28	5.3	450; 680
9	RUSSELL HOBBS 11775	80	28x30x32	4.8	500; 750; 1,000
10	BREVILLE BR10	70	28x26x41	7.2	750; 1,000
11	MORPHY RICHARDS Fastbake 48280	45	30x27x40	6.4	680; 900

a Also has a super-rapid option which takes 59 minutes (not tested)



83% Panasonic SD-252 £80

The SD-252 has been around for a few years but makes bread that is every bit as good as its successor, the SD-253 (see left). We got good results with this one on all types of bread – and outstanding wholemeal and white loaves. It lacks some of the program options you'll find on the SD-253

WHICH?
BEST BUY

but that is reflected in the price. It relies on a 'raisin beep' warning, for example, which means you have to hang around to add your own fruit and nuts to the dough at the right moment, whereas the SD-253 does this for you. You can buy the SD-252 at John Lewis. **GOOD FOR** The shape of the tin gives an attractive, traditional-looking loaf.

Cheapest store John Lewis **Maximum height with lid up** 54cm **Crust settings** Dark, medium, light **Extra functions** Cake baking **Maximum delay** 13 hours **Colour** White



78% Russell Hobbs Breadman Junior 10882 £60

With a price tag of just £60 (or less if you buy it online), this Russell Hobbs is great value. It's the lightest machine we tested and is also narrower than our other Best Buys, so is a good choice if you have limited work space in the kitchen. This model bakes loaves 'end on', which looks odd at first but makes for nice square slices once you've removed the top crust.

WHICH?
BEST BUY

If you fancy home-made toppings for your bread, this one produced the best jam. It is sold by Currys.

WORTH KNOWING It comes with handy, wipe-clean recipe cards.

Cheapest store Currys **Maximum height with lid up** 47cm **Crust settings** Dark, medium, light **Extra functions** Cake, jam, pasta **Maximum delay** 13 hours **Colour** White

Worth tracking down

This excellent Kenwood has been discontinued but you may find it on offer at a reduced price

■ **KENWOOD RAPID BAKE BM300 £50**
The Kenwood Rapid Bake would have been a Best Buy if it hadn't been discontinued, so it's well worth tracking down if you can still find one for sale.

The machine also has a few extra features – such as a progress monitor which tells you what stage of the baking process has been reached.

It makes great bread in two sizes and can also turn its hand to jam-making with some success. In our tests it produced a hard-set jelly containing some lovely big pieces of strawberry. The overall flavour was tasty but sweet.



Contacts

Breville
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www.breville.co.uk

Morphy Richards
0870 060 2614
www.morphyrichards.co.uk

Team International
0121 693 1959
www.teamuki.com

Kenwood
0239 247 6000
www.kenwood.co.uk

Panasonic
08705 357357
www.panasonic.co.uk

Russell Hobbs
0845 658 9700
www.saltoneurope.com

				BAKING TIME			WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE										SCORE %
CAKE	JAM	BUTTER	PASTA	WHITE (hr:m) NORMAL	WHITE (hr:m) RAPID	WHOLEMEAL (hr:m)	WHITE NORMAL	WHITE RAPID	WHITE DELAY	WHOLEMEAL	CIABATTA	NON-BREAD ITEMS	NOISE	CLEANING			
✓				4:00	1:55	5:00	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	83	
✓				4:00	1:55	5:00	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	83	
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✓	✓		✓	3:25	0:58	3:48	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	64	
✓	✓			2:55	2:10	3:40	★★★★	★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	62	
✓	✓			3:00	0:58	3:40	★★★★	★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	61	