

The big chill

Large freezers can have low running costs. We show you how to choose an energy-efficient model

Frozen food is a trend that's hotting up, thanks to Delia Smith's *How to Cheat at Cooking* book and TV series. And that means more of us are craving roomy freezers to store everything from frozen mash to iced aubergines.

Happily, larger freezers don't necessarily mean higher running costs. The AEG-Electrolux (14) has a sizeable 224-litre capacity and costs £19 a year to run. Contrast this with the Beko (16) which holds only 150 litres but still costs £19 a year to run (see 'Energy explained', p62).

To find the best freezers we put the models through rigorous tests. We also considered their ease of use – a freezer might perform brilliantly in the lab, but if it's tricky to use in your home, it won't be a Best Buy.

Two chest freezers missed out on our accolade because of poor design. The thermostats on the Zanussi-Electrolux (21) and the Kelvinator (23) are inconveniently tucked away at the back of one side of the machines, but the Norfrost (24) is even more ridiculous – its thermostat is hidden at the very back of the freezer behind a metal pipe that obscures the dial.

If you can't adjust the thermostat to fast freeze, you won't be able to freeze food as fast as we do in our tests. To adjust the fast freeze you'll have to drag a heavy appliance out of its usual spot, then wrestle with a small dial – not once, but twice (you'll need to switch it off again). None of the machines with a poorly located thermostat is fitted with castors.

What you should look for

■ FAST-FREEZE COMPARTMENT

This box, normally at the top of the freezer, is for fresh food. Food will freeze quickly here and, once frozen solid, it can be stowed in the appropriate drawer. Fast freezing protects the texture of your food and prevents nutrients from being lost.



■ ICE CUBES

Keep an eye out for space-saving ice-cube trays built into drawer fronts. Hands can tremble when carrying an ice-cube tray, so these sealed ones are a help. Plus your ice won't be tainted by food in your freezer.



■ SOFT-FRUIT TRAY

A shallow, lift-out tray that's perfect for freezing berries – you can spread them out in a thin layer, which will stop them clumping together as a frozen lump. Alternatively, use it for storing trays of ice cubes or freezer packs for picnic lunches.



■ PIZZA POCKET

If you like your fast-food fast, this will speed up proceedings even further. You can grab a pizza in an instant as it's stored in its own convenient compartment, set flush into the freezer door.



How we test



We measure more than 30 million temperature readings, one every eight seconds, to find the Best Buys

Recommended settings

In a climate-controlled chamber, we set up the freezers and record how quickly the temperature drops to the recommended -18°C. Using temperature probes inserted into 1kg gel packs placed in different parts of the freezer, we check how well the temperature is maintained. As the gel packs simulate food such as meat, this is more accurate than assessing the air temperature.

Temperature stability

As well as testing the freezers at room temperature (about 20°C), we look at how well they cope with fluctuations in temperature. The climate-controlled chambers are lowered to 10°C to simulate an unheated utility room, then raised to 32°C to recreate a hot kitchen. The best freezers stay stable at -18°C, while the worst vary widely.

OUR RESEARCH

When selecting freezers to test, we consult manufacturers, market intelligence reports and industry experts, then check availability on the high street and online. Tested models include top sellers from the most popular brands, models from some lesser-known brands, a selection of bargain brands and widely available Best Buys from previous tests.



1 WORKTOP HEIGHT

80% John Lewis JLUCFZW6002 £249

This model has an 80-litre capacity and is quick at freezing. It's easy to set up and maintain at the correct temperature. The freezer is frost-free and easy to clean, and has an alarm and warning light that tell you if it gets too warm.

It's available exclusively from John Lewis.

WORTH KNOWING The matching fridge (JLUCFW6003) scored a lowly 55% and failed to impress.

Cheapest store John Lewis **Capacity** 80 litres **Fast freeze** Yes **High-temperature alert** Yes, audible and visible



2 WORKTOP HEIGHT

79% Hotpoint RZA36 Future £216

At only £12 a year, this freezer has the lowest running costs of those on test.

It isn't cheap to buy, but your money will get you an easy-to-operate freezer that can freeze twice as much fresh food as models of similar capacity. It is capable of freezing 18kg of fresh food in 24 hours.

Available from independents and online.

WE LIKE Controls are on the outside, so it's easy to adjust the temperature or fast freeze.

Cheapest store Independents and online **Capacity** 80 litres **Fast freeze** Yes **High-temperature alert** Yes, visible



The RZA36 can freeze twice as much fresh food as similar models



3 WORKTOP HEIGHT

76% Hotpoint RZA34 £220

This Hotpoint performs well at the recommended settings and maintains a steady -18°C during room temperature fluctuations. It needs defrosting, but help comes in the form of a tube that fits to the front of the freezer and makes draining the water easier. The two top drawers can be removed if you prefer to store food on the shelves. Available from Comet and Currys.

WORTH KNOWING Controls are on the outside for easy access, but could be reached by a child.

Cheapest store Comet and Currys **Capacity** 86 litres **Fast freeze** Yes **High-temperature alert** Yes, visible



10 BUILT-IN WORKTOP HEIGHT

81% John Lewis JLBIUCF01 £399

Running costs for this John Lewis model are a snip at £13 a year, even though it's quick to freeze fresh food.

Visible and audible alerts let you know if the internal temperature rises, saving food that could spoil. During defrosting, water collects in the bottom of the freezer so it won't flood your floor. The clear drawers mean you can locate food fast. It's available exclusively from John Lewis.

WORTH KNOWING The matching fridge (JLBIUCL01) scored 65% in a previous test.

Cheapest store John Lewis **Capacity** 85 litres **Fast freeze** Yes **High-temperature alert** Yes, audible and visible



11 BUILT-IN WORKTOP HEIGHT

81% Zanussi- Electrolux ZUD 9100 FA £300

This end-of-line model costs only £13 a year to run. The recommended thermostat setting is perfect and the machine has a stable internal temperature, so you won't need to use the supplied thermometer.

It's quiet, unless you leave the door open for more than a few minutes – this triggers an alarm, helping to safeguard your frozen food from inadvertent defrosting. As this is a discontinued model, it has limited availability.

WATCH OUT Opaque plastic drawers obscure your frozen food.

Cheapest store Currys **Capacity** 85 litres **Fast freeze** Yes **High-temperature alert** Yes, audible and visible



12 BUILT-IN WORKTOP HEIGHT

78% Bosch GUD 15A40 £370

This Bosch freezer can hold up to 82 litres, which isn't bad for a built-in model.

It maintains a stable temperature and performed well in our freezing tests, but isn't as easy to use as other Best Buys. To adjust the thermostat you'll need to slot in and twist a tool or coin, which is fiddly.

The fast freeze doesn't switch off automatically, but this model does have audible and visible high-temperature alerts. Available from Comet.

WE LIKE A recess under the bottom drawer collects water for mess-free defrosting.

Cheapest store Comet **Capacity** 82 litres **Fast freeze** Yes **High-temperature alert** Yes, audible and visible





4 WORKTOP HEIGHT

75% Miele F1313S £257

The fast freeze on this model switches itself off after 60 hours, so it's a good choice if you're forgetful. Only a few freezers have this automatic cut-off, which saves you electricity and money. Available from independents and online.

WE FOUND The manufacturer's recommended temperature setting freezes at -23°C. For smaller electricity bills, pop in a thermometer and adjust the thermostat until it reaches -18°C.

Cheapest store Independents and online **Capacity** 73 litres **Fast freeze** Yes **High-temperature alert** Yes, visible



5 WORKTOP HEIGHT

74% Beko ZA630 £170

This Beko is an inexpensive freezer that performed well across all our freezing tests and has a useful fast-freeze compartment and setting. But even without using these, we found it froze 11.5kg in 24 hours – that's more than the claimed capacity. Available from Argos.

WORTH KNOWING The matching fridge with ice box (RA610) scored a respectable 62% in our recent test, but isn't a Best Buy. The matching fridge is the untested LA620.

Cheapest store Argos **Capacity** 79 litres **Fast freeze** Yes **High-temperature alert** Yes, visible



6 WORKTOP HEIGHT

74% Zanussi-Electrolux ZUT113 £179

If you want to maximise the amount of food you can store, but have only a small space, this is a good choice. It holds a substantial 94 litres and in a power cut will keep food frozen for 43 hours. Clear drawers make finding food easy.

Available from John Lewis.
WORTH KNOWING The matching fridge (ZRT163W) scored 56% in our recent test, but isn't a Best Buy.

Cheapest store John Lewis **Capacity** 94 litres **Fast freeze** Yes **High-temperature alert** Yes, visible



13 TALL FREESTANDING

74% Hotpoint FZ150 Future £320

Automated and easy-to-use settings on the Hotpoint FZ150 save you the hassle of adjusting buttons or dials on a regular basis.

The manufacturer's thermostat setting is spot on, so setting up the machine is easy. It also coped well with fluctuations in room temperature, staying bang on -18°C. Even the fast-freeze setting is automatic, switching off 48 hours after being activated. Available from John Lewis and Comet.

WE LIKE Versatile storage – there are five drawers and two are extra deep for storing awkwardly sized food.

Cheapest store John Lewis **Capacity** 156 litres **Fast freeze** Yes **High-temperature alert** Yes, visible



14 TALL FREESTANDING

73% AEG-Electrolux 75320-GA £750

A capacity of 224 litres makes this AEG-Electrolux the biggest freezer on test.

It can freeze 22.5kg of fresh food in 24 hours, which is more than enough to satisfy the keenest chef. No defrosting is needed, and there are removable shelves and drawers to open up space inside – a bonus when catering for events or parties. Available from independents and online.

WE LIKE One of six models on test with an audible high-temperature alert. An alarm also sounds if the door is left open.

Cheapest store Independents and online **Capacity** 224 litres **Fast freeze** Yes **High-temperature alert** Yes, audible and visible



18 CHEST

71% Beko CF392 £150

If you don't like getting your fingers trapped or your head bashed (and let's face it, who does?), this model is a good bet.

Unlike several of the chest freezers on test, this one has a counterbalanced lid. The lid will stay open at less than 90 degrees, which means you can delve into its depths with both hands. The thermostat dial on this chest freezer is located on the front of the machine, if a little low down. Available online.

NEED TO KNOW The fast freeze needs to be activated three hours before you add fresh food – so switch it on before you go to the shops.

Cheapest store Online **Capacity** 97 litres **Fast freeze** Yes **High-temperature alert** Yes, visible



Even the fast-freeze setting on the Hotpoint FZ150 Future is automatic

Energy explained

How to find a freezer with low running costs

Freezers with the same energy labels don't always cost the same to run – that's why we give each model's running costs.

We calculate running costs from the energy a freezer uses in a room heated to a stable 20°C over 24 hours. From this we calculate the overall running costs for a year.

European Energy labels (A++ to G) are calculated differently. They take into account the volume of a freezer. This is why two models with the same rating can cost substantially different amounts to run.

To take two models rated C, the Kelvinator (23) costs only £16 a year to run, while the

Proline (22) costs almost double at £29 a year. The former holds 103 litres, the latter 208 litres.



Kelvinator and Proline

GREAT SAVINGS WITH HUGHES DIRECT

This July Hughes Direct is offering exclusive discounts for Which? members on Best Buy freezers from this month's report. There are savings of up to 15% off these models – all special-offer prices include delivery.

To find out more about this and other offers from Hughes Direct log on to www.hughes

direct.co.uk/which or call 01473 321883. Offer valid until 31 August 2008 and is subject to availability.

Each month thousands of Which? members take advantage of the great deals from Hughes Direct. All goods are guaranteed to be a minimum of 10% below high-street prices published

in Which? product reports (even when delivery charges are taken into account). In the unlikely event you find the same product cheaper elsewhere (including delivery) within seven days of purchase, Hughes Direct will refund 110% of the difference. Call or go online to see what you can save!

MODEL		PRICE (£)	SIZE (cm) (hxxxd)
WORKTOP HEIGHT			
1	JOHN LEWIS JLUCFW6002	249	85x60x63
2	HOTPOINT RZA36 Future	216	85x60x62
3	HOTPOINT RZA34 Future	220	85x60x62
4	MIELE F1313S	257	85x55x64
5	BEKO ZA630	170	85x55x62
6	ZANUSSI-ELECTROLUX ZUT113	179	87x55x65
7	LEC U5026W	160	84x49x64
8	PROLINE PFZ115WA	130	85x55x58
9	COOLZONE CZ51059	132	85x51x53
BUILT-IN WORKTOP HEIGHT			
10	JOHN LEWIS JLBUCF01	399	82X60X57
11	ZANUSSI-ELECTROLUX ZUD 9100 FA	300	82X60X57
12	BOSCH GUD 15A40	370	82X60X55
TALL FREESTANDING			
13	HOTPOINT FZ150 Future	320	150x60x67
14	AEG-ELECTROLUX 75320-GA	750	184x67x74
15	ELECTROLUX EUC29291 Intuition	338	180x60x66
16	BEKO TZDA627F	280	155x60x66
17	HOOVER HZF6163 nextra	340	162x60x68

Which? online

Freezers

Search

At www.which.co.uk/freezers you'll find reviews of more than 76 freezer models and 26 Best Buys.

The information on our website is regularly updated with new models, prices and

product availability.

On our website you will also find tips on getting the most from your machine, owners' views and information on product reliability for top brands.

Contacts

AEG-Electrolux
0870 535 0350
www.aeg-electrolux.co.uk

Beko 0870 774 1050
www.beko.co.uk

Bosch 0870 241
3381 www.bosch-appliances.co.uk

Coolzone
0844 871 0011
www.coolzone-appliances.co.uk

Electrolux
0870 595 0950
www.electrolux.co.uk

Hoover
0870 950 2943
www.hoover.co.uk

Hotpoint
0870 150 6070
www.hotpoint.co.uk

John Lewis
0845 604 9049
www.johnlewis.com

Kelvinator (Comet)
0870 542 5425
www.comet.co.uk

LEC
0871 222 2505
www.lec.co.uk

Miele 01235 554455
www.miele.co.uk

Norfröst
01847 822200
www.norfröst.co.uk

Proline (Comet)
0870 542 5425
www.comet.co.uk

Swan (Littlewoods)
0844 822 2321
www.littlewoods-direct.co.uk

Zanussi-Electrolux
0870 572 7727
www.zanussi-electrolux.co.uk

USING THE TABLE

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. See p51 for full pricing information.

Size Dimensions of the model, including hinges, with door/lid closed. You must add several cm on each side and at the rear for air circulation.

Volume Our measurement of usable space.

Energy label

Manufacturer's rating.

Frost-free These models don't need defrosting.

Room temp Working range of the appliance as stated by manufacturer.

Counterbalanced lid (chest freezers only)

A counterbalanced lid leaves you with both hands free. Without it, you'll need to prop the lid open beyond 90 degrees.

Drain (chest freezers only) Water drains through a sealable plughole for easy defrosting.

High-temp alert

Aud (audible) = alarm sounds when internal temperature is too high.

Vis (visible) = light comes on when internal temperature is too high.

Basket (chest freezers only) P=plastic basket, M=metal basket.

Colours A=aluminium,

MODEL	
CHEST	
18	BEKO CF392
19	HOTPOINT RC17
20	SWAN SR4010
21	ZANUSSI-ELECTROLUX ZFC35C
22	PROLINE PLC218W
23	KELVINATOR KCFH43B
24	NORFROST C4CBW

B=black, G=graphite, S=silver, SA=silver aluminium, W=white

Test performance

Running cost Estimate based on current

SPECIFICATION							WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE						SCORE %
VOLUME (litres)	ENERGY LABEL	FROST-FREE	ROOM TEMP (°C)	HIGH-TEMP ALERT	COLOURS	MATCHING FRIDGE	RUNNING COST (£/YR)	FREEZING POWER	INSULATION	EASE OF USE	FLEXIBLE STORAGE	RELIABILITY	
80	A	✓	10 to 43	aud, vis	W	JLUCLFW6003	15	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	Average	80
80	A+		10 to 38	vis	W, G, SA	RLA36	12	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★	Average	79
86	A		10 to 38	vis	W, G, SA	RLA34	15	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★	Average	76
73	A		10 to 43	vis	W	K2202S-1, K2204S-1	15	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	Average	75
79	A		10 to 32	vis	W, S	LA620	14	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★	Average	74
94	A		10 to 43	vis	W, S	ZRT163W	16	★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★	Above average	74
66	A		16 to 32		W	L5026W	13	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★	Average	71
65	A		16 to 32		W	PL166GWA	14	★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★	Average	71
69	A		16 to 32		B, S	n/a	18	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★	n/a	65
85	A		10 to 38	aud, vis	n/a	JLBIUCL01	13	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	Average	81
85	A		10 to 38	aud, vis	n/a	ZUD9154A	13	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	Above average	81
82	A		10 to 38	aud, vis	n/a	KUR15A40	15	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	Above average	78
156	A	✓	10 to 38	vis	W, G	RL150	20	★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	Average	74
224	A+	✓	10 to 38	aud, vis	W	n/a	19	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	Average	73
220	A		10 to 43	aud, vis	W, S	ECR39292	21	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	Average	70
150	A	✓	10 to 32	vis	W	TLDA625	19	★★★★	★★	★★★★★	★★★★	Average	65
182	A	✓	10 to 43	vis	W, A	HL56163	34	★★★★	★	★★★★★	★★★★	n/a	56

SPECIFICATION									WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE						SCORE %
PRICE (£)	SIZE (cm) (hxxwxd)	VOLUME (litres)	ENERGY LABEL	ROOM TEMP (°C)	COUNTER-BALANCED LID	DRAIN	HIGH-TEMP ALERT	BASKET	WEIGHT FROZEN IN 24 HOURS (kg)	RUNNING COST (£/yr)	FREEZING POWER	INSULATION	EASE OF USE	RELIABILITY	
150	86x54x61	97	B	10 to 32	✓		vis	P	5.0	16	★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	Average	71
155	84x55x62	101	C	10 to 38			vis	M	9.0	18	★★	★★★★★	★★	Average	68
143	84x64x67	105	C	16 to 32	✓	✓		M	11.5	18	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	n/a	64
149	85x55x60	101.4	C	10 to 32				n/a	12	14	★★★★	★★★★★	★★	Above average	62
160	88x82x59	208	C	10 to 38	✓	✓	vis	n/a	12.0	29	★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	Average	60
100	85x55x59	103	C	10 to 32				n/a	12.0	16	★★★★	★★★★★	★★	n/a	58
120	84x55x59	104	C	16 to 32				n/a	4.5	22	★	★★★★★	★	Above average	48

electricity prices.

Freezing power How much fresh food the machine can freeze relative to its size.

Insulation How quickly

the freezer temperature rises when the power goes off.

Ease of use How easy it is to clean and use controls.

Flexible storage How

easy it is to rearrange the shelves and compartments.

Reliability Based on results from Which? member survey.

Score

Ignores price and based on:

Temperature stability **20%**
Freezing capacity **20%**
Ease of use (including

convenience, defrosting, noise and vibration) **20%**
Running costs **15%**
Insulation **15%**
Recommended thermostat setting correct **10%**