

Great value microwaves

We pick seven great value ovens that produce excellent results – whether you're heating ready meals or trying something more ambitious

Many of us use our microwave simply for heating convenience food or snacks. But, as microwave-cooking whiz Jan Parry explains (right), with a bit of practice you can cook a wide range of food in your microwave, from cakes to pasta dishes and chicken (see 'Thinking outside the box', opposite, for more).

Like Jan, you'll find that cooking this way can save you time, and, in some instances, money, as microwaves can use less energy than electric ovens or hobs.

This month, we've picked models in all three categories: microwave only, microwaves with grills, and combination microwaves, which feature a microwave, a grill and convection heating.

We have three new Best Buys: a Sanyo (3), an LG (8) and a Whirlpool (13).

We have another four Best Buys from previous tests that are still widely available.

Two of our Best Buy microwave-only models are exceptional value – the Swan SM2050 (£59) and the Sanyo EM-S1567S (£54). If you were to buy the Sanyo instead of the Best Buy Panasonic (1), you'd save £96.

We've also tested a range of accessories that aim to help you get more out of your microwave (see below).

If none of the microwaves in this report takes your fancy, head to www.which.co.uk/microwaves for another 72 reviews and more Best Buys.

Finally, it's worth noting that many manufacturers of microwaves with grills recommend that you use both functions



With a bit of practice you can cook a wide range of food in a microwave

at once to cook a chicken. Makers of combi microwaves also recommend this 'multifunction cooking' method for getting great results with poultry. We already test this function on combi machines, and we'll be testing grill microwaves this way for our next report.

MICROWAVE COOKING MADE EASY

These gadgets are designed to make microwaves a real alternative to cooking on a hob – but do they work?

Fasta pasta

WHAT IS IT? A plastic box that doubles as a spaghetti-measuring guide. Available from Amazon.com (\$14.99/around £10).

WHAT DO YOU DO?

Put pasta into the box, fill water up to the required level then cook without the lid. We cooked it for 14 minutes on an 800W high power setting.

OUR VERDICT

It's quick and easy and used 26% less energy than traditional methods. Our testers thought the cooked pasta looked and tasted good. We found it best to rinse the pasta after cooking. The box is quite large, so it won't fit easily into smaller microwaves.



Fish steamer

WHAT IS IT?

A lidded dish that steam cooks fish. Available from lakeland.co.uk (£8.80).

WHAT DO YOU DO?

Place the fish inside the dish and put on the turntable. We followed the steamer instructions and cooked the fish for four minutes on an 800W high power setting.

OUR VERDICT

After four minutes the fish was raw in the centre, but with another two minutes in the microwave it was evenly cooked. It didn't look as nice as fish cooked in a conventional steamer, but our testers said it tasted good and the microwave method was quicker and easier.



Rice steamer

WHAT IS IT?

A non-stick dish that can be used for rice or veg. Available from lakeland.co.uk (£7.82).

WHAT DO YOU DO?

Place rice in the bowl, add cold water, put the lid on and place on turntable. We cooked top-quality, long-grain white rice for 15 and a half minutes on an 800W high power setting, stirring after 10 minutes as directed.

OUR VERDICT

We found that cooking rice this way is much easier than using an electric hob, but it used more energy. However, the finished product looked as good as rice cooked on a hob and tasted really good, too.



THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

Jan Parry *civil servant*

Which? reader Jan Parry wouldn't be without her six-year-old Panasonic NN-T553 microwave. She uses it to cook everything from cupcakes and omelettes to lasagne, chilli con carne and roast chicken. Jan worked as a microwave demonstrator for local electricity boards in the eighties, and she's cooked with a microwave ever since, using it in combination with other methods, such as browning under a grill.

Jan finds cooking in hers uses little energy, making it cheaper to use than other cooking methods. She also sees it as a healthy alternative, as she uses hardly any fat when cooking. She thinks microwave cooking isn't more hassle than conventional cooking, just different – you open a door to stir food rather than taking a pan lid off.

She advises to cook in your microwave the way you do in an oven. 'You wouldn't cook everything on the highest level, so don't do it in a microwave,' Jan says. For instance, starting off high then reducing power is just like boiling then lowering to a simmer. She also recommends learning about your own microwave's wattage and power settings, so you cook at the right level and achieve good results.

GREAT SAVINGS WITH HUGHES DIRECT

Hughes Direct is offering Which? members an exclusive discount on our Best Buy microwaves until 31 March 2009: the Panasonic NN-ST477SBPQ for £104.99, Sanyo EM-S1567S for £38.99, Panasonic NN-GD566M for £96.50, the Whirlpool JetChef JT 369 for £197.99 and the Sharp R959(SL)M for £138 (delivery will be £5).

To find out more about this offer and other member-only discounts from Hughes Direct, log on to www.hughesdirect.co.uk/which or call 01473 321883. This offer is subject to availability.

Each month, Which? members can take advantage of the great deals offered by Hughes Direct. All goods are guaranteed to be a minimum of 10% below high-street prices published in Which? product reports.

If you find the same product cheaper elsewhere (including delivery) within seven days of purchase, Hughes Direct promises to refund 110% of the difference.

**1 MICROWAVE ONLY****81% Panasonic NN-ST477SBPQ** £150

This is one of the best microwaves for manual defrosting, and, unlike many models, the manufacturer's recommended defrost settings work well. It has a good range of functions, including the 'multi-stage' program that lets you vary power settings over specified durations without interrupting the cooking. It didn't cook jacket potatoes very well in our test, though, and we were surprised to note below-par results for cooking several meals in succession. It's cheapest at John Lewis.

WORTH KNOWING The controls are close together, so could be hard to see if you have poor vision.

Available Comet, John Lewis Power levels 6 Automatic programs 13 Childproofing Yes

**2 MICROWAVE ONLY****73% Swan SM2050** £59

We test microwaves for their ability to cook at the right temperatures once they get hot – essential when you're cooking one dish after another. The Swan is very good at this. It produces good-quality food that's an even temperature all over, without drying it out or burning it. The clock and timer are very clear, and the large door button is easy to use, but the small start button could be positioned more helpfully. It's cheapest at Littlewoods.

WORTH KNOWING The door surface is reflective, so you won't be able to see your food while it's cooking.

Available Great Universal, Littlewoods Power levels 5 Automatic programs 5 Childproofing Yes

**3 MICROWAVE ONLY****70% Sanyo EM-S1567S** £54

This Best Buy from Sanyo cooks quickly and at just the right temperature – ready meals and jacket potatoes are nicely cooked all the way through. The only real letdown is the auto-defrost program, but thankfully the manual defrost works very well. It has several useful features, including auto-cook buttons that take the guesswork out of heating food and drink. The programs are complicated, though, so you'll need to use the instructions at first. It's cheapest online. **WORTH KNOWING** It's being replaced at the end of March 2009, so it's worth tracking it down while stocks last.

Available Online and independents Power levels 11 Automatic programs 5 Childproofing Yes



ONLINE
Are you a fan of supermarket ready meals? Find out about their nutritional content at www.which.co.uk/takeawayfood

MODEL	SPECIFICATION			WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE						
	PRICE (£)	SIZE (cm) (h x w x d)	MAX PLATE SIZE (cm)	REHEATING	CONTINUOUS USE	MANUAL DEFROST	AUTO DEFROST	MULTIFUNCTION COOKING	GRILL	JACKET POTATO
MICROWAVE ONLY										
1 PANASONIC NN-ST477SBPQ	150	30x52x39	34	★★★★★	★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	n/a	n/a	★★
2 SWAN SM2050	59	28x47x38	30	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	n/a	n/a	★★★
3 SANYO EM-S1567S	54	29x46x36	28	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★	n/a	n/a	★★★★
4 SAMSUNG MW89M-B	80	28x49x36	30	★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	n/a	n/a	★★★
5 DAEWOO KOR-63MDC	55	28x47x35	28	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	n/a	n/a	★★★★
6 HITACHI MSE23	60	29x49x37	30	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	n/a	n/a	★★★★
7 KENWOOD KEN-SJ/SS28	80	32x52x40	33	★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	n/a	n/a	★★★★
GRILL MICROWAVE										
8 LG MH6347GR	70	29x51x40	33	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	n/a	★★★★	★★★★
9 PANASONIC NN-GD566M	130	31x51x39	33	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	n/a	★★	★★★★
10 B&Q MG23SS	120	31x52x38	32	★★★	★	★★★★	★★	n/a	★★★★★	★★★★
11 RUSSELL HOBBS HOB-GTS23	130	28x49x36	31	★★★	★★★	★★	★	n/a	★★	★★
12 LG MH5847C	60	29x46x34	29	★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	n/a	★★★	★★★
COMBINATION MICROWAVE										
13 WHIRLPOOL JetChef JT 369	229	38x49x51	39	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★
14 SHARP R959(SL)M	160	37x55x54	36	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★
15 PANASONIC NN-A 554W	130	31x52x40	35	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★
16 PANASONIC NN-CD748BBPQ	200	31x52x48	35	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★
17 LG MC8087 ARS	166	32x53x43	34	★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★
18 PANASONIC NN-A883	240	34x53x51	34	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★
19 SAMSUNG CE107B	150	31x52x47	32	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★
20 SANYO EM-C8787B	136	32x52x48	33	★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★

USING THE TABLE

The more stars the better.

Specification

Price See p55. **Size** Our measurements. These can differ slightly from manufacturers' claimed dimensions and don't include recommended clearance space. **Max plate size** The largest diameter plate that fits through the door without tilting.

Test performance

Reheating We cook a 'ready meal' made from a food substitute and assess how long it takes

to reach a minimum safe temperature of 70°C, whether it shrinks during heating, and whether there are any hot or cold spots. **Continuous use** Shows if the reheating performance of the oven deteriorates after 15 minutes' use. **Manual defrost** How evenly the microwave defrosts 500g of mince when programmed manually. **Auto defrost** As for manual defrost but using the auto programs where available. **Multifunction cooking** Using a combination

setting we test how well the oven roasts a whole chicken. **Grill** How evenly the grill browns. Fewer stars indicates that sections were left unbrowned or overbrowned. **Jacket potato** How well the oven cooks a jacket potato (manual program). **Ease of use** How clear instructions are, and how easy it is to program and use the control panel, to see inside when cooking, and to clean the inside and outside of the oven.

Score

Ignores price and is based on:

Microwave only

Reheating 50%
Defrosting 25%
Ease of use 25%

Grill microwave

Reheating 40%
Grill 25%
Ease of use 20%
Defrosting 15%

Combination microwave

Reheating 30%
Ease of use 20%
Multifunction cooking 20%
Grill 15%
Defrosting 15%



Which? online Built-in

Looking for a microwave that'll integrate with the design of your kitchen? Head to www.which.co.uk/microwaves for reviews of built-in models.

Don't Buy

38% KENWOOD KEN-SJ/SS28 £80

We expect a microwave to be good at its main function, but we found this model is very slow, dries food out and doesn't heat evenly. To ensure food is cooked you'll need to stop and stir it more often than with other microwaves.



	SCORE %
EASE OF USE	
★★★★★	81
★★★★★	73
★★★★★	70
★★★★★	66
★★★★★	56
★★★★★	54
★★★★★	38
★★★★★	76
★★★★★	67
★★★★	63
★★★★★	47
★★★★★	46
★★★★★	73
★★★★★	68
★★★★★	64
★★★★★	64
★★★★★	63
★★★★★	62
★★★★★	59
★★★★	52



8 GRILL MICROWAVE

76% LG MH6347GR
£70



This Best Buy grill microwave from LG is a good all-rounder – the microwave cooks quickly and reheats well, and the grill is excellent. We found that the auto defrost was more accurate than the manual setting, although both work well and defrost fairly evenly. Our jacket potatoes came out quite well, with no overcooked areas, although we did notice some slight undercooking on one test run. We also noted that there is a drop in performance when the oven is used for long periods. It's cheapest at independents.

WORTH KNOWING It's being replaced in the second half of 2009, so it's worth tracking down before then.

Available Independents Power levels 5
Automatic programs 14 Childproofing Yes



9 GRILL MICROWAVE

67% Panasonic NN-GD566M £130



The Panasonic NN-GD566M did exceptionally well in our key performance tests of heating and defrosting. It cooked jacket potatoes well, too, but its grill function was disappointing – browning unevenly and leaving outer areas barely done. We did like the 'turbo reheat' function, which gives a short injection of high power to speed things up when you reheat liquidy foods, and the helpful instruction book, which includes recipes. It's cheapest online.

WE LIKE The multi-stage function lets you program a chain of commands, including high or low power and pauses.

Available Comet, online and independents
Power levels 7 Automatic programs 6 Childproofing Yes



13 COMBINATION MICROWAVE

73% Whirlpool JetChef JT 369 £229



Whirlpool has packed loads of features into this combi microwave – and they work well. We did see some slight overcooking, but overall it cooks quickly and evenly (our chicken and jacket potato tests produced good results) and the grill browns evenly all over. Manual defrost is excellent. It has lots of accessories, such as a kitchen timer that you can use without activating the microwave, and a catalytic back wall that helps with cleaning. On the downside, the small controls on the reflective surface are hard to see. It's cheapest at John Lewis and independents.

WATCH OUT The child lock on the door can be deactivated easily.

Available Independents, John Lewis Power levels 8
Automatic programs 1 Childproofing Yes



14 COMBINATION MICROWAVE

68% Sharp R959(SL)M £160



The grill on this microwave is first rate – browning is very even. Our challenging roast-chicken test wasn't a problem either: the cooked chicken was juicy and succulent, although we'd have liked the skin to be crispier. The microwave cooks quickly and evenly, ensuring that ready meals are heated through, with no cold spots. Useful extras include a delayed-start option, a recipe book, two shelves and two grill racks. It's cheapest at John Lewis.

WE LIKE The large protruding door handle makes it easy to open.

Available Comet, John Lewis Power levels 5
Automatic programs 9 Childproofing No

Which should you choose?

Best for a budget

EXCEPTIONAL VALUE The Swan (2), available from Littlewoods, is a good budget choice and produces great results, as does the Sanyo (3).



Best for removing smells

ODOUR EATER The Samsung (4) has a nifty deodorisation function.



Best for steaming

HEALTHY CHOICE The Whirlpool (13) comes with accessories for steaming food, so you won't have to buy them separately.



Contacts

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

B&Q 0845 609 6688
www.diy.com

Daewoo 0870 100 2525
www.daewooelectronics.co.uk

Hitachi 0844 561 7000
(home delivery helpline)
www.dixons.co.uk

Kenwood 023 9239 2333
www.kenwoodworld.com

LG 0844 847 5454
www.lge.com

Panasonic 0844 844 3852
www.panasonic.co.uk

Russell Hobbs 0845 658 9700
www.russellhobbs.co.uk

Samsung 0845 726 7864

www.samsung.com
Sanyo 01923 246363
www.sanyo.co.uk

Sharp 0800 262958
www.sharp.co.uk

Swan 0844 822 8000
www.littlewoods.com

Whirlpool 0844 815 8989
www.whirlpool.co.uk

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