Laundry machines are tough on clothes. They have to be tough to get the clothes clean and dry efficiently. The [dryer](http://www.ebay.com/sch/Dryers-/71254/i.html) can be particularly hard on clothes, especially when garments are left in the dryer after they are already dry. The excess heat deteriorates the fabric fibers, especially the fibers of many synthetics, which become crisp and brittle when overheated. Some fabric fibers, fasteners, and adornments can even melt when left in a hot dryer for too long. Because dryer heat can be harsh, some garment labels recommend not using the dryer at all.

Clothes must get clean and dry on a regular basis, however, so that means buying laundry machines that will do the job efficiently without putting undue wear on clothes. When it is time to outfit the laundry room with a new dryer, besides choosing one that will treat the laundry as gently as possible, do not forget to keep a few other key points in mind, such as the basic features that are available, the advanced features that some models offer, and the dryer’s energy efficiency.

**Basic Features of a Dryer**

Most dryers, regardless of cost, type, or brand, come with some key features that allow the user determine how the clothes will dry, for how long, and at what temperature. These features can be used to help protect the clothes from over drying, to keep them as wrinkle-free as possible, and to make sure that the dryer is running at its most efficient level.

A very common basic feature are settings that allow the user to select the type of clothes that are in the load being dried, such as Cotton, Permanent Press, or Delicate. Simply choosing one of these settings tells the dryer what temperature to dry at and for how long. Another basic setting feature allows the user to determine how long the drying cycle lasts based on how dry the items should get.

**These settings include:**

* Normal Dry: Gets the clothes just dry but not over-dry
* More Dry: Can overheat many fabrics and should be used cautiously
* Damp Dry or Less Dry: Clothes are not heated hot enough or for long enough to pull all the moisture out of them; very gentle on the fabrics; just the right dampness for ironing
* Air Fluff: Tumbles the clothes while blowing unheated air on them

An owner can use these features to get basically the same effect accomplished by many of the advanced settings featured on more current or high-end models.

**Advanced Dryer Features**

Dryers have not changed significantly over the years, and many of today’s models still contain the same basic features from 10 to 20 years ago. Many experts tend to advise upgrading appliances to models that are more energy efficient. Newer dryers, however, are not significantly more energy efficient than many older models. This fact is one of the main reasons why experts recommend only replacing a dryer when it really needs replacing.

Also, buying a new dryer just to have a matching set will not generally provide the user with an abundance of more usability over the model they already had. That said, there are some advanced features that the consumer who is in the market for a new dryer may want consider. Chief among them is a moisture sensor.

**Importance of a Moisture Sensor**

The moisture sensor is considered the biggest advancement in dryer technology in recent years. The moisture sensor measures the level of humidity inside the dryer to determine how dry the clothes are and when to turn down the heat. It turns off the heat when there is no more moisture in the air. This not only helps the consumer to save on energy costs, it also keeps the clothes from being damaged in the dryer due to overheating.

It is so beneficial that it is standard on many makes and models today. Older dryers that do not have this feature utilized thermostats, temperature settings, and timers to get the clothes appropriately dry without over-drying. The moisture sensor is much simpler and more efficient. In terms of helping the consumer save money on energy and replacing clothes, the moisture sensor wins the prize as the most important advanced feature.

**Other Useful Features**

The following chart gives a brief description of some of the other useful features that are available on certain dryer models on the market. Some users consider these features very valuable, while other consumers and experts consider many of them to have only limited usefulness.

| Feature | Description |
| --- | --- |
| Lint Filter Warning Light or Alarm | A light on the display or an audible alarm that alerts the user when to clean the lint filter. Tests indicate that this is not always effective at alerting when the lint filter needs to be cleaned. Because this feature is not always trustworthy, most experts agree that it is best to develop a habit of cleaning the filter after every load. |
| Drying Rack | A stationary rack that can be placed in the dryer and creates a drying environment for items that should not be tumbled. This is great for drying bulky items like washable shoes. This feature can be very useful to people who often dry bulky items. |
| [Steam](http://www.ebay.com/sch/i.html?_nkw=steam&_sacat=71254&_odkw=&_osacat=71254) | An additional cycle that uses steam to remove wrinkles and odors within minutes, which can be great for getting a garment presentable between washings. Unfortunately, tests reveal that the treatment has only limited effectiveness. Also, it requires that the dryer be hooked into a water supply or that the user adds the needed water each time. Either of these may make the feature not as appealing for some users. |
| Digital Display | An LCD display that takes the place of knobs and buttons for selecting options. The look is stylish and modern. However, for some users, it can be more difficult than necessary to navigate to an option that was a simple push button on an earlier model. |
| [Condensation Dryers](http://www.ebay.com/sch/i.html?_nkw=condensation&_sacat=71254&_odkw=&_osacat=71254) | A new way to remove the moisture from inside the dryer by condensing it out of the air and draining it, instead of venting it to the outside. Because the moisture is not vented, these dryers have much more versatility as far as where they may be placed in the home. Unfortunately, they can be expensive and they are not widely available. |

It is clear that some of these features may be useful for certain consumers. Many, however, add a significant amount to the price of the dryer while not providing much of an advantage over less expensive models. It is wise to determine ahead of time how useful the feature may be.

Several of these features are only available through select manufacturers. Others are more widely available, but the usability of the feature may vary greatly between the manufactures that offer it. The best way to determine if the feature is worth the added cost is to find out which manufacturers sell models that offer the feature and gage how well the feature operates on those models based on expert and user reviews. The Internet has many resources that offer thorough reviews by both consumers and experts.

**Energy Efficient Dryers**

In general, there are two main types of dryers: gas or electric. Of these two, gas is by far the most energy efficient, and because of this it is highly recommended that consumers who can use gas choose this version. Most dryers come in both gas and electric models, which make this decision even easier. However, the gas version typically costs much more than the electric. Rather quickly, the energy savings should make up much of that difference.

Of course, the moisture sensor increases energy savings by only keeping the dryer going until the clothes are dry and then shutting off or switching to a cool down cycle. Among gas dryers with moisture sensors, there is not a significant difference as far energy efficiency between different brands and models. In fact, dryers do not include Energy Star labels because they all use essentially the same amount of energy.

This does not mean that the consumer cannot make wise choices that help to increase the energy savings. These choices include:

* Setting the cycles properly to avoid over-drying
* Keeping the dryer’s lint filter and the exhaust hose clean
* Not overfilling the dryer; break large loads into smaller ones
* Not over-taxing the dryer by filling it with garments that are too wet; set the [washer’s](http://www.ebay.com/sch/Washing-Machines-/71256/i.html) spin cycle to high-speed, or run the cycle a second time
* Not using the dryer for items that should be hung up; this damages the items and wastes energy.

**Measure Twice, Buy Once**

Width: Keep in mind that washers and dryers need one inch of space between and on either side of the appliance for proper air circulation.

Depth: Add six inches of space for door clearance, dryer vents and hookups.

**Good to Know**

If space is at a premium, consider going vertical with your washer and dryer. There are many viable compact laundry centers. And don’t forget that some front-loading washers and dryers stack for space savings.

**Check Your Connections**

All dryers use an electric motor to tumble clothes and an electric fan to distribute heated air. The difference is heat generation: with natural gas or electricity. The decision to purchase gas versus electric depends on whether you have a gas line in your laundry area. If you want to change your dryer’s fuel source, you’ll need the help of a professional contractor.

Electric: Electric dryers use twice the strength of an ordinary household electric current. Most run on a 240-volt current to heat up coils and require a special 240-volt outlet in your laundry area.

Gas: The purchase price of gas can be slightly higher than that of an electric dryer, but it’s typically less expensive to operate. It usually takes only a year or two to make up the purchase-price difference due to energy savings.

**Good to Know**

Before you leave home, take note whether your outlet requires a plug with 3- or 4-prongs and pick up a new power cord when you’re buying your dryer

**Conclusion**

Taking care of the laundry is serious business. Mishandling can result in either ruined clothes or clothes that just do not stay looking nice and new long enough. The choice of what machines to purchase for keeping the laundry clean and dry can greatly affect this outcome. The best dryer for the job does not have to be a top-of-the line, new model. It just has to include the necessary features that allow the user to get the clothes dry in a timely manner without over-drying them.