



## CHAT WITH THE PROS

As we settle back into routine now we need to think about restocking our refrigerators and freezers. We spoke to Shirley Hood, a knowledgeable sales expert at Abt Electronics, who provided us with information on purchasing and maintaining these units. This article is the first in a mini-series on household appliances.

### When shopping for a refrigerator and/or freezer what features should people look for?

The first thing you'll want to look for is capacity. If you only have room for a single unit, make sure to research the fresh food and freezer storage on the model you are looking at to ensure that you are getting the maximum amount of storage from your single unit. The key to maximizing space is organization, so make sure you choose a model with **extra-deep door bins**, which are designed to hold large containers and drink bottles on the door, allowing for extra storage space on the shelves; **humidity-controlled crispers**, to keep your fruits and vegetables separate, which not only gives you more room on the shelves, but also keeps produce fresher longer, and **adjustable shelves**.

If space is not an issue in your main kitchen area, the best way to get the maximum amount of storage is to have a built-in refrigerator and freezer. These units can be placed together or separately and are installed flush with the cabinetry; this will save you from having to go to a second refrigerator or freezer in a basement or garage

### Is a frost-free freezer better than a manual-defrost freezer?

Better? No! Easier? Maybe. It depends on what you are looking to get from it and how you plan to use it. **Frost-free freezers** are pretty much maintenance-free, but they aren't able to keep food fresh as long, because the units are constantly cycling on and off, causing frost to build up on your frozen goods, which can lead to freezer burn.

On the other hand, **manual defrost freezers** require at minimum annual defrosting, but because there is no cycling on and off your frozen foods will last months and even years longer than they would in a frost-free unit as long as they are stored properly.

### How should we prepare food for freezing long term so it doesn't suffer from freezer burn?

Always store foods at 0 degrees or lower. Make sure that foods are completely cooled before freezing (foods like soups and stews take much longer to cool). The fresher foods are when frozen, the better they will taste when

they thaw. If storing in a freezer bag, try to remove as much air as possible (this is what causes foods to lose color and flavor and spoil).

### How often should a refrigerator or freezer be cleaned, and what is the best way to do that?

Refrigerators should be cleaned weekly. During your weekly cleaning, check for spills and old or rotting food, particularly in the crispers, door bins or any place where fluids can leak. Any cleaning solution or soap and water will do the trick — just be sure to include the door seals. Getting into the habit of cleaning the refrigerator weekly will keep it clean and smelling fresh, ensure the food is safe for consumption and well organized, and will help it last longer.

If you have a manual-defrost freezer, at least once a year it must be defrosted and thoroughly cleaned. With frost-free models it's best to check periodically for leaks or spills. Mild soap and water will do the trick without having to defrost the whole unit, but make sure to clean quickly because frozen foods will start to thaw with the door open.

### Can you provide us with tips on how to maintain refrigerators and freezers?

Don't overload your refrigerator and freezer. Refrigerators and freezers need free airflow to properly maintain temperatures — overloading these units can cause the compressors to work extra hard to keep items cool, which can shorten the life of your refrigerator/freezer. Also, if your model is built into an enclosed area make sure your refrigerator/freezer has enough air flow to prevent it from overheating.

Periodically check the gaskets and door seals and keep them clean. Food and debris in a door seal can prevent a door from sealing properly, which will allow cold air to escape and warm air to get into your refrigerator, causing the compressor to kick on unnecessarily. ■

