

## **CATEGORY TO STUDY: BLENDERS**

### **Overview**

Blenders are countertop appliances that can whip up smoothies and soups and even make nut butter. As the name implies, this small appliance is great for “blending” foods together, but it does much more. It can chop, grind, crush, puree, emulsify, and pulverize food, beverages, and other substances. While there are different types of blenders, the key feature they all have in common is a spinning blade connected to a motor.

### **A Brief History of Blenders**

The blender is considered a revolutionary kitchen gadget that led to the development of many future electric kitchen appliances and tools. The blender received its start in Racine, Wisconsin, where Stephen J. Poplawski invented this appliance in 1919 as a drink mixer. Patented in 1922, this small appliance was initially used commercially in drug store soda fountain counters to make malted milkshakes (Blender Adviser, n.d.).

In the 1930s, Fred Osius, a founder of the Hamilton Beach Company, created his version of a new and improved blender. In need of money to support his venture, Osius sought out Fred Waring, a popular big band leader, for financial backing in 1933. Waring not only provided the cash but also promoted Osius’s “Miracle Mixer” while he was on tour with his band. Waring was no ordinary bandleader or financier. He fascinated gadgets and was a former Penn State architectural and engineering student. He found some technical problems with the appliance, redesigned it, and relaunched it under his own company name in 1937 at the National Restaurant Show in Chicago. The “Miracle Mixer” was eventually renamed the Waring Blender. This blender not only became a popular tool in the kitchen but also made its way to hospitals and labs. For example, Jonas Salk used the Waring Blender in developing the polio vaccine in the 1950s. Conair eventually bought out Waring, but the Waring blender can still be found on store shelves (Blender Adviser, n.d.; FoodReference.com, n.d.; TheInventors.org, 2006)

Another prominent figure in the history of the blender was John Oster. Oster wanted to diversify his company (a maker of motorized barber tools) into electric kitchen appliances. He trademarked his new, more powerful version of the blender as the “Osterizer” in 1946. Oster’s company was bought by Sunbeam Products, with the Oster blender continuing to be a popular brand today (Blender Adviser, n.d.; Wills, 2019).

Blenders have continued to evolve, and several other brands have entered the marketplace as this small kitchen appliance continues to be a mainstay in today’s home kitchen.

## **Selection Features**

(Consumer Reports, 2021; Papantoniou & Quinn, 2021)

There are several factors to examine when deciding which blender to purchase.

### *Type:*

1. Premium or High-Performance—higher horsepower and better blade strength elevate the blending power of these units above traditional models. These models have the power to transform a variety of ingredients to a smooth consistency or grind to a fine powder.
2. Conventional—less expensive than premium models; best for lower-intensity, traditional blending tasks such as making milkshakes or smoothies.
3. Personal—newer blender category; compact and usually makes one to two servings. With the mixing container doubling as a travel jar, this blender type aims to meet the needs of people who want to make on-the-go smoothies or other drinks. Not intended for hard-core blending.
4. Immersion—a specialized blender where the exposed blades are submerged into food or drink in another container, like a saucepan. Has limited power/functions (i.e., best for blending, not chopping). Considered a complement to traditional blenders rather than a replacement.

*Container:* Container options typically include glass or plastic. The downside of glass is that it is heavy and has potential for breakage. If glass is preferred, look for one that has been thermal shock tested to withstand heat extremes of ice to heat. Plastic containers are lighter, and the risk of breakage is less; however, plastic can absorb odors and stains. Whether glass or plastic, choose wide-mouth containers (i.e., wide at the top) for easier loading of ingredients and cleaning. Easy-to-read measurement markings may also be significant. Availability of replacement containers may be important; especially for personal blenders (Immersion blenders do not have containers). Size of the container may also vary. Be sure to purchase one that is large enough to meet your needs.

*Controls:* Touchpad controls are the easiest to clean. Push buttons make it easy to switch from one speed to the next, but cleaning is challenging. Dial controls wipe down easily, but can be a challenge to switch speeds. Flip switches have limited blending options but easy cleaning.

*Blades:* Strong blades are important to withstand tasks such as pulverizing and last for a long time.

*Speed:* Blenders can have 2 to 17 speeds. Three speeds are considered adequate. Speeds are difficult to distinguish when there are more than 12 speeds. A pulse setting is usually desirable precision is better – a nice feature when blending delicate ingredients. High-performance blenders may come with preprogrammed settings.

*Power:* Blender power ranges 300 to 1,000+ watts, with manufacturer claims that higher wattage equals better performance. However, some evaluators indicate the overall design of the blender (i.e., blade assembly and shape of the container) affects performance more than the wattage.

*Warranty:* Ranges 1 to 7+ years

*Size Specifications:* Including weight (ease of picking up/moving) and height, width, and depth (for countertop placement).

*Accessories:* May include additional containers, scrapers, cups, lids, recipe books.

## **References**

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