

CATEGORY TO STUDY: Multi-Cookers

Overview

Multi-cookers are countertop appliances that can "do it all." No more need for a separate slow, pressure, rice, or steam cooker or sauté pan--this appliance handles all these tasks. It frees up space on your countertop as well as your time. Sales of multi-cookers have skyrocketed over the past several years as families have learned about this appliance's versatility. Some models are pressure cookers, all have a slow-cook function. Additional appliance functions could include air-frying, crisping, dehydrating, and sous vide.

Additional convenience factors could include clarity of the touch controls, multi-cooker programming ease, and cooking surface durability.

A Brief History of Multi-Cookers

While multi-cookers have several functions, they are well known for their pressurized cooking and slow cooking features. The first pressurized cooking pot was believed to have been made in the 17th century by Denis Papin, a French physicist. Alfred Vischer advanced pressurized cooking by introducing his Flex-Seal Speed Cooker in 1938--the first pressure cooker designed for home use on a stove. Electric rice cookers, another form of pressurized cooking, were developed in Japan in the 1950s and moved pressurized cooking from the stovetop to the countertop. Interestingly, the first electric pressure cooker patent wasn't until Chinese scientist, Yong-Guang, obtained it in 1991.

The first slow cooker was created in 1936 by Chicago-based inventor Irving Naxon. However, it wasn't until the 1950s when Naxon introduced his invention to the marketplace as the Naxon Beanery. However, this small appliance did not become popular in home kitchens until the 1970s after Rival Manufacturing bought the rights to the Nixon Beanery, updated it, and rebranded it "Crock-Pot." While it continued to be a common kitchen appliance, the slow cooker's popularity experienced a resurgence in 2005 when a new generation of cooks looked for ways to serve "from scratch" meals that didn't take time away from other family activities.

The electric multi-cooker for home use was first introduced in 2010 via Amazon as the Instant Pot[®]. Robert Wang was credited with inventing this hybrid of slow and pressurized cooking. Initial units were marketed as a cooking powerhouse that had functions of six appliances. The multi-cooker popularity has brought other companies into the mix, with units now being produced by companies other than Instant Pot[®]. Functionality has continued to advance, with some models touting ten or more different cooking functions -- with many performed in half the time it traditionally takes -- making this appliance one of the most prized appliances in today's kitchen. In fact, these multi-function wonders are now the tops of wedding registry gift lists, with a Facebook following of 1.3 million members in the Instant Pot[®] Community alone.

Selection Factors

Due to the nature of the appliance, there are several factors to examine when deciding which multi-cooker to purchase.

Cooking Methods:

Pressure Cooking: High-temperature steam and pressure results in cooking times up to 50% faster while retaining nutrients. Pressure cooking also tenderizes cheaper cuts of meat. This function is typically considered the most important, with a Cook's Illustrated survey indicating that 93% of respondents reporting pressure cooking was their primary use of this appliance.

Slow Cooking: **Slow-cooking** involves searing meat well in oil or butter at a relatively high temperature before the **cooking process** is finished off slowly and gently in the oven at a lower temperature. Slow cooking helps to tenderize less expensive cuts of meat, which saves money.

Rice Cooking: Multi-cookers use pressure to cook rice in a fraction of the time it takes to cook in a covered pot on the stove.

Sautéing: Instead of dirtying another pan on the stove, recipes that call for browning meat or sautéing vegetables before cooking can be done directly in the multi-cooker. Some multi-cookers may use the terms searing or browning for this function. Different temperature levels such as low, medium, or high may be included, with some models indicating an exact temperature (i.e., 350F).

Steaming: Gentle heat prevents foods from drying out and minimizes the risk of burning or scorching food. Steam-cooked foods retain more flavor, texture, and color with less vitamin, minerals, and nutrient loss.

Other food preparation methods: Some multi-cookers have additional food preparation functions such as sous vide, ferment, air-fry, baking, yogurt-making, and more.

Size: Models are available in 3-, 6-, and 8-quart sizes. The 8-quart model provides more surface area for functions such as sautéing, but the tradeoff is a comparatively heavier, larger unit.

Convenience: In addition to offering multiple cooking methods, additional convenience features include a delay start timer that allows food to be put into the multi-cooker in advance and selecting a later time to start cooking the meal. Some multi-cookers have buttons for specific dishes such as meat, fish, or rice. The keep-warm function automatically kicks in after the food is cooked and keeps it warm until it is ready to be served. Some multi-cookers may also include accommodating cooking adjustments for high-altitude locations such as Colorado. Manufacturers have also introduced units with "Smart WiFi" to control the appliance from a smart device (i.e., phone or tablet).

Alerts: Alert systems "beep" or provide a sound to alert the user when the unit is ready to perform certain functions.

Pots: Pots may be non-stick or stainless steel. While non-stick is easier to clean, stainless steel provides more even cooking.

Dishwasher Safe Insert and Lid

Accessories: Could include a stainless steel steam basket, trivet, temperature probe, and/or condensation collector.

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

Warranty: Length of time the product is covered for product defects.

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SAMPLE CLASS MULTI-COOKERS:



1.

Zavor LUX LCD : ZSELL02

Features

PROGRAMMABLE [i](#)

Yes

OF PRESET COOKING MODES [i](#)

10

NONSTICK POT [i](#)

No

DISHWASHER SAFE INSERT [i](#)

Yes

DISHWASHER SAFE LID [i](#)

No

ACCESSORIES [i](#)

Stainless steel steam basket, trivet, condensation collector

Specs

TOTAL WEIGHT (LBS.) [i](#)

12

EXTERIOR HEIGHT (IN.)

14

EXTERIOR WIDTH (IN.)

14

EXTERIOR DEPTH (IN.)

12

WARRANTY (YRS.) [i](#)

1

\$159.95

In stock

Home Depot

\$159.95

In stock

Sur La Table

Free Shipping on Orders \$75+.

\$159.95

In stock

Walmart

Big Summer Savings - Over 1,000 Rollbacks and More Low Prices.

\$159.95

In stock

Wayfair

\$159.99

In stock

Bed Bath & Beyond

Featured functions: Pressure Cook (high and low), Slow Cook (high and low), Steam, Saute, Flex (that allows to Sous Vide), Simmer, Yogurt, Grains, Eggs, Dessert, Keep Warm and Time Delay to program cooking time at your convenience
Over 33 programmable settings include: Hard Boiled Eggs, Meat, Beans, Soup, Risotto, Vegetable, Omelette, Cheesecake and more!

2.



Wolf Gourmet Multi Cooker WGSC100S

Features

PROGRAMMABLE [i](#)

Yes

Specs

OF PRESET COOKING MODES [i](#)

6

TOTAL WEIGHT (LBS.) :

22

NONSTICK POT [i](#)

No

EXTERIOR HEIGHT (IN.)

12

DISHWASHER SAFE INSERT [i](#)

Yes

EXTERIOR WIDTH (IN.)

18

DISHWASHER SAFE LID [i](#)

Yes

EXTERIOR DEPTH (IN.)

15

ACCESSORIES [i](#)

Sous vide rack, temperature probe

WARRANTY (YRS.) [i](#)

5

\$599.95

[In stock](#)

Best Buy

\$649.95

[Prime Eligible](#)

Amazon

\$812.99

[In stock](#)

Macys.com

PROGRAM: Select one or two heat settings and cooking times for customized cooking, or insert the temperature probe into the food and set the temperature to your preferred doneness
RICE: Cook 6-18 cups of white or brown rice
SAUTÉ & SEAR: Precise sautéing and searing on low, medium, and high temperature settings
SOUS VIDE: Gently bring foods to a precise temperature in a warm water bath using the probe



3.

Instant Pot Duo Evo Plus 10-In-1 Multi-Cooker

Features

PROGRAMMABLE [i](#)

Yes

OF PRESET COOKING MODES [i](#)

8

NONSTICK POT [i](#)

No

DISHWASHER SAFE INSERT [i](#)

Yes

DISHWASHER SAFE LID [i](#)

Yes

ACCESSORIES [i](#)

Steam Rack, Condensation Collector

Specs

TOTAL WEIGHT (LBS.) [i](#)

13

EXTERIOR HEIGHT (IN.)

13

EXTERIOR WIDTH (IN.)

13

EXTERIOR DEPTH (IN.)

13

WARRANTY (YRS.) [i](#)

1

Price: **\$130.89**

Instant Pot Duo Evo Plus is the latest evolution of the all-time bestseller Instant Pot Duo Series; With 20 plus enhancements, it is the fastest in the class, the easiest to use for new users and the most customizable for experienced Instant Pot owners

Cooks fast & saves time: Cooks up to 70 % faster; New 1400w heating element reduces preheating time allowing you to make meals faster; Pressure release time is shortened with our new QuickCool technology

Consistently delicious as you like it: 48 customizable presets for soups, beans, rice, ribs and more;

Takes the guesswork out and makes cooking dishes everyone will love easy; Programs like sous vide and bake make preparing chef quality entrees and desserts easy



4.

Black+Decker PR100 11-In-1 Cooking Pot Multi-Cooker

Features

PROGRAMMABLE [i](#)

Yes

Specs

OF PRESET COOKING MODES [i](#)

8

TOTAL WEIGHT (LBS.)

11

NONSTICK POT [i](#)

Yes

EXTERIOR HEIGHT (IN.)

11

DISHWASHER SAFE INSERT [i](#)

Yes

EXTERIOR WIDTH (IN.)

18

DISHWASHER SAFE LID [i](#)

No

EXTERIOR DEPTH (IN.)

11

ACCESSORIES [i](#)

Rice Spoon, Trivet, Measuring cup

WARRANTY (YRS.) [i](#)

2

Faster Cooking! - Pressure cooking gets dinner on the table faster*! Enjoy the full flavor of all your favorites in a fraction of the time

7-in-1 Cooking Pot - The 7 dedicated pressure cooker functions make it easy to prepare a variety of foods in an instant*. Functions include: white rice, brown rice, beans, meat, steaming, soup, and manual programming

4 Non-Pressure Functions - Go beyond pressure-cooking for even more one pot meals with settings for traditional slow cooking (high or low heat), browning, and keeping food warm

9 Added Safety Features - Carefully designed with a system of safety checks for peace of mind every time you use the pressure cooker

Cookbook and Accessories Included - Delicious recipes

\$74.98

Prime Eligible

Amazon

\$79.99

In stock

Walmart

Big Summer Savings - Over 1,000 Rollbacks and More Low Prices.

Scenario

Monique's dad is finding he has less and less time to cook for dinner every night. Most weekday afternoons are spent transporting Monique and her brothers to various after-school activities. By the time they're ready to go home, everyone is tired and hungry, so they end up grabbing dinner from fast-food restaurants. Dad knows that's not good for their budget or their health. He's been hearing about these multi-cookers, where he has the option of either slow-cooking a meal to be ready when they get home or pressure-cooking items in half the time of using an oven. He's decided it's time to invest in one of these appliances, but he doesn't want to spend over \$175. He loves having the slow cook/pressure cook option as well as having the option to program the meal to be cooked by a certain time. The kids are in charge of cleaning up after dinner, so ease of cleaning is important. Finally, Dad doesn't want to leave this appliance on the countertop--it just adds to kitchen clutter. Therefore, it has to be easy to move from cabinet to countertop and back.

STANDARDS

ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS	COSTS \$175 OR LESS	PROGRAMMABLE	EASY CLEAN UP	ABILITY TO BE MOVED
1. Zavor LUX LCD: ZSELL02	\$160.00	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2. Wolf Gourmet Multi-Cooker WGSC100S	\$600.00	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Instant Pot Duo Evo Plus 10-In-1 Multi-Cooker	\$131.00	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4. Black+Decker PR100 11-In-1 Cooking Pot Multi-Cooker	\$75.00	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Placement: 3-4-1-2

The Instant Pot Duo Evo Plus was ranked first because it meets all of the criteria. For easy clean-up, the insert and lid are dishwasher safe. While the pot does not provide the easy-to-clean non-stick pot, the pot may be stainless steel, which is a better cooking surface and still relatively easy to clean. Monique's dad will want to confirm this before purchasing. Additional information for the Instant Pot indicates it provides 70% faster cooking than previous models; however, it is unclear how the Instant Pot's cooking speed compares to the other three models evaluated. Since speed is an important factor for Monique's dad, he may want to check into this before making a final decision. The price for #4 (Black+Decker PR100) is attractive, and it is 2 pounds lighter than the Instant Pot, making it a bit easier to move. However, clean-up may be a greater challenge as only the insert is dishwasher safe and not the lid, plus the width is 18 inches (compared to 13 inches for the Instant Pot), meaning more counter space is needed. The Zavor LUX LCD (#1) is still within budget, but the clean-up concern is similar to the

Black+Decker model. Weight and width for this brand are similar to the Instant Pot. The Wolf Gourmet unit is not financially feasible as it exceeds the budget by \$425. Also, it comes in as the largest at 22 pounds with a width of 18 inches, making moving the unit a challenge and uses more counter space than the Instant Pot.

Add information on the quality of brands can be obtained from *Consumer Reports*
www.ConsumerReports.org