

I'd like a bread machine for Christmas. Which machine do you recommend?

The best choice of bread machine depends on you – the size of your household, the type and amount of bread you consume and the space available in your kitchen. Following is a guide to refer to when making your decision.

Loaf Size and Shape

- ◆ Loaf size commonly ranges from 1 to 2½ pounds; some machines will make two or more loaf sizes and one makes two 1½-pound loaves at once!
- ◆ A 1-pound loaf suits single-person households and older adults with small appetites.
- ◆ Families and folks who entertain generally prefer at least a 1½-pound size.
- ◆ A loaf in the shape of a square, rectangle or cylinder may seem unusual at first, but you adapt quickly once you slice and taste the fresh bread!
- ◆ Confirmed traditionalists should look for a traditionally shaped loaf.

Convenience

To fully enjoy your machine it must be convenient to use. Measure the height, depth and width of the place in your kitchen where you can accommodate a machine. Be sure to select a model that fits in that space with the lid open. If you are short on counter space, look for a narrow, trim model. If height is a concern, select one with a door that opens in the front.

Cost/Features

Finding a machine to suit your budget and bak-

ing preferences should not pose a problem. Prices range from about \$89 to \$300.

Features include:

- ◆ specialty cycles: French, whole grain, sweet and raisin (a “beep” tells you when to add dried fruits and nuts so they remain intact).
- ◆ crust color selection: light, medium or dark crust.
- ◆ dough cycle: handy for making dough for pizza, coffeecakes, rolls and other shaped breads.

Ask Lorelle

IT'S YOUR CHOICE

- ◆ delayed-bake option (timer): allows you to program when you want the bread done so you can wake up or come home to fresh bread.
- ◆ keep-warm feature: has largely replaced the “cool down” on machines today; the machine keeps bread warm for an hour or longer so the butter will still melt into your first slice!
- ◆ additional features: going beyond yeast bread, some machines make quick breads, jam or rice; one even churns fresh butter to go on your bread.

What is the best way to store my homemade bread and how long will it stay fresh?

Shelf life of homemade bread varies, depending on how it is handled and the ingredients it contains. Most breads will keep at room temperature for a day or two. To improve the keeping quality of homemade bread, remove the loaf from your

bread machine immediately after baking and cool thoroughly on a wire rack. Once cool, wrap bread promptly to minimize drying. I use 1- or 2-gallon size plastic bags with a zipper lock or twist-tie; large loaves may need to be halved to fit in the bags. You can also use a large plastic storage container with a tight-fitting lid or a bread box.

Refrigeration hastens staling so do not refrigerate homemade bread unless, like pizza, it has a topping or filling that could spoil. Freezing is better

suited for longer storage. To freeze, wrap loaves in large freezer bags with zipper locks. Press as much air from the bag as possible before sealing. Large loaves can be halved or pre-sliced for toast and sandwiches to fit in a bag. Or, wrap the whole loaf in heavy-duty plastic wrap and foil.



Thaw frozen loaves at room temperature for 2 to 3 hours or in the microwave oven on the defrost setting (30% power) for 4 to 8 minutes. Sliced bread can go from the freezer to the toaster.

To refresh day-old or thawed, frozen bread, wrap in foil and reheat in a 350°F oven for 15 to 30 minutes. Unwrap during the last 5 minutes to re-crisp the crust.

DELECTABLE CHOCOLATE WREATH This recipe evolved when we set out to make the quintessential holiday coffeecake. Of course, it had to include one the world's greatest flavor combinations – chocolate and raspberries. We think it is a holiday dream come true!

DELECTABLE CHOCOLATE WREATH

Makes 1 wreath.

- 1/2 cup milk (70° to 80° F)
- 1/4 cup water (70° to 80° F)
- 3 tablespoons butter or margarine, cut up
- 1 large egg
- 1/3 cup sugar
- 1/4 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 2½ cups bread or all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons FLEISCHMANN'S Bread Machine Yeast
- White Chocolate, Raspberry and Pecan Filling (recipe follows)
- Frosting (recipe follows)

Measure all ingredients except filling and frosting into bread machine pan in the order suggested by manufacturer. Process in dough/manual cycle.

When cycle is complete, remove dough from machine to lightly floured surface. If necessary, knead in enough flour to make dough easy to handle. Roll dough to 22- x 6-inch rectangle. With sharp knife, cut in half lengthwise to make two 22- x 3-inch strips. Spread one-half filling down center length of each strip. Fold long sides of dough over filling; pinch seams and ends to seal. Place ropes, seam sides down, on greased baking sheet. Twist ropes together. Form into wreath; pinch ends to seal. Cover; let rise in warm, draft-free place until risen slightly, about 1 hour.

Bake at 350°F for 35 to 40 minutes or until done. Remove from baking sheet and cool on wire rack. Drizzle with Frosting. Garnish with candied fruit if desired.

WHITE CHOCOLATE, RASPBERRY AND PECAN FILLING:

Combine ¾ cup white chocolate morsels, ½ cup chopped pecans, toasted, and 2 tablespoons seedless red raspberry jam.

FROSTING:

Combine 1 cup sifted powdered sugar, 1 to 2 tablespoons milk and 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract.