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Range Hoods

THE RIGHT VENTILATION WILL KEEP THE AIR IN YOUR KITCHEN CLEAR

Sure, it's tempting to save space and cut costs by relying on the built-in ventilation of an over-the-counter (OTR) microwave. But if you care about venting smoke and fumes, you're better off with a separate range hood, especially if you cook on a higher-powered stove or cooktop.

We no longer test range hoods, but none of the over-the-range microwave ovens we tested in the past could match the smoke-capturing or fume-clearing abilities of a good range hood.

Range hoods have become as stylish as they are practical. Most now offer the commercial look of stainless steel,

or choose from the lighter look of glass or an integrated look with a canopy matched to your cabinetry. Some manufacturers offer hoods in finishes that match their ranges.

The best hoods we tested in the past excelled at exhausting smoke and fumes. Some were quieter than the others and better at delivering high and low levels of lighting. Try those features in the showroom if you can. Our recent tests of microwaves focused on cooking evenness, automatic defrosting ability, speed of heating, noise, ease of use, and venting. For the results of those tests, see our Ratings on page 116.

Steps to Success

1 DECIDE: VENTED OR DUCT-FREE

We do not recommend a ductless hood because it will take the smoke and odors and disperse them throughout the kitchen and the rest of the house. Venting the hood to the outside is better but more complicated to install.

2 DON'T DOWNSIZE

This is one time when bigger often is better. Any hood you consider should be at least as wide as the cooking surface it will be installed above. And avoid downdraft hoods, which have been unimpressive in our past tests. Keep in mind that cubic feet per minute (CFM) isn't everything. Manufacturer airflow claims tout CFM of air exhausted. More airflow does mean faster venting, but it doesn't guarantee better smoke capture and removal.

3 INSTALL IT PROPERLY

Whether you opt for a hood or an OTR microwave oven, be sure it's installed according to the manufacturer's directions—usually 18 to 30 inches above the burners or elements. That gives you working room while helping to prevent steam from escaping to the sides. Vent outdoors, if possible, using the largest-sized solid, smooth-walled metal ducting that fits. Keep duct runs short, and minimize bends to maximize airflow. A wall or roof cap outside prevents back drafts. Wash or replace the filters every one to three months—more often if you cook frequently.

PHOTO, LEFT: ALEX HAYDEN



ZEPHYR

Details That Count

Select a model at least as wide as the cooking surface underneath. These are some range hood features to keep in mind as you shop:

AIRFLOW

Manufacturers tout the cubic feet per minute (CFM) of exhausted air. More airflow means faster ventilation, but it doesn't guarantee better smoke capture and removal in your kitchen.

NUMBER OF FAN SPEEDS

We recommend a minimum of two speeds: a high-speed setting to use when cooking and a very low and very quiet setting to use after cooking to continue to ventilate the space while eating. Any more than three set speeds are too many. If the manufacturer wants to provide more than three speeds, we believe it should just use a

variable speed switch that the user can easily set to any speed desired.

THERMOSTAT CONTROL

A built-in temperature sensor automatically turns on the fan if the temperature below the hood gets too high. That feature is available mainly on over-the-range microwaves and is intended to protect the microwave electronics from being damaged by high heat. But we do not recommend that feature because if you are cooking with oil and your pan catches fire, the exhaust fan will come on, adding air to the fire, fanning it, and perhaps making matters worse.

EXHAUST TIMER

This convenient feature turns off the fan after a period of time—so you can set it and forget it.

WHAT'S NEW

Low-profile designs.

Cooktops and ranges are popular options in kitchen islands. The only concern is that the overhead vent hoods, necessary for sucking up smoke and odors, can block sight lines. Zephyr claims to solve the problem with its Lux Island, a \$2,100 hood that mounts discreetly into the ceiling above the island. It works with a wireless remote control, and the tri-level LED lights help illuminate the work surface.



ZEPHYR



WOLF

On the Market

UNDER-CABINET

These mount under the bottom of a wall cabinet. Ductwork inside an adjoining wall, chase, soffit, or ceiling can exhaust smoke and fumes to the outside. In a few models, a shallow hood slides out of the upper kitchen cabinet when you need it. Typical kitchen cabinets extend only about halfway across the stove, so that extension routes steam and smoke away from cabinet faces and back toward the suction end of the range hood. The design steals cabinet space but

might be the only choice for those who cannot achieve the recommended stove-to-hood clearance with a standard design.

WALL-CHIMNEY

These work where there are no cabinets over the range and mount with exposed vent stacks on the wall to vent to the outside.

ISLAND

Mounted to and vented through ductwork in the ceiling, they lack a wall or cabinets alongside them to

help funnel fumes, so they should be wider than the cooking surface.

DOWNDRAFT

These try to reverse the direction of rising smoke and fumes, and exhaust them through ducts running beneath the floor. Our past tests found that they were among the least effective at removing smoke and steam. Though they can be used anywhere in the kitchen, their main application is in islands where it might not be possible to route ductwork through the ceiling.