

CHOOSING AN EXTRACTOR FOR YOUR KITCHEN



Extractors are a lot more than a decorative accessory in the kitchen, they have an important function. Many people purchasing an extractor are ill advised and end up with the wrong product for the job. An extractor should effectively remove steam and cooking odours as well as airborne grease from the kitchen. If you have not purchased the correct unit or have it installed incorrectly your extractor will become nothing more than a glorified noise maker.

When choosing your extractor you must consider five things: your kitchen size and volume, your culinary habits, your method of installation, your budget and your aesthetic preferences.

Kitchen size & volume – if the extractor does not have a powerful enough motor to cope with the volume of air in your kitchen it will be ineffective. To calculate the volume of air in your kitchen and hence the m³/hr capacity you need in an extractor motor; you apply the following formula for a closed kitchen with a wall mounted extractor: volume = kitchen length x kitchen width x kitchen height =m³. This formula will ensure the extractor motor is capable of changing the air in your kitchen ten to twelve times in an hour. For an island extractor you will need a higher rate of air flow than indicated by the formula. If your kitchen is open plan you must work out the total volume of the open space and not just the kitchen area.

Culinary habits – the extractor you choose will be determined by how often you cook, the type of food you cook and the type of hob you have. If you rarely cook and then only plain foods with minimal frying and grilling then a basic unit will be fine but if you cook regularly with fatty foods and a lot of frying and grilling then a unit that can duct to outside with a higher capacity motor is vital.

Method of installation – Firstly, what can you accommodate, a wall mounted or island unit. Once this is ascertained you need to consider if you can duct the unit to the outside or not. Ducting is always preferable as it expels the odours from the home. To duct your extractor either needs to be:

- on an external facing wall so the duct pipe can go straight through the wall to outside
- be able to reach the ceiling so it can duct out through the roof space
- be situated a maximum of five meters from an external wall so that a length of duct pipe can be run, without more than one bend to the outside either in cupboard space, a bulkhead or in the ceiling space.

If opting to duct out you will have to order a ducting kit as an extra which will consist of pipe (ordered by the meter), clamps and a non-return vent.

If you cannot duct then you will have to recirculate. You must factor in that you will lose about 25% of your motor capacity by recirculating. The extractor will also be noisier if you recirculate. You must also remember to order a recirculating kit which consists of charcoal filters that must be fitted into the extractor body and a t-piece that directs the filtered air out of the flue vents. If you do not order this as an extra over and above your extractor the unit will be totally ineffective. It is vital for effective operation that the airflow back into the kitchen has no obstacles in the way of cupboard units, etc. Cupboard units either side of the hood should not be too close as this can create turbulence under the hood stopping effective operation.

Your budget – As in all things you get what you pay for with an extractor. The bigger the motor capacity, the quieter the motor, and the more aesthetically pleasing the extractor, the



more it will cost. Remember to factor in the cost of installation. Not many people are qualified to install an extractor and it is recommended to get a list of registered installers from the manufacturer of the unit or the company you have purchased it from. The installation costs of a recirculated unit are not too bad as the installation is fairly simple, however, you will have to factor in the added cost of the recirculation kit and the fact that you will have the ongoing cost or replacing the charcoal filters every few months. The installation of a ducted unit must ONLY be undertaken by a trained professional particularly if it is an island unit or a unit ducting through the roof. This will be more costly as it requires the installer to break through walls, ceilings and in some cases the roof.

Aesthetical preferences – There are a huge variety of extractors on the market now from the most basic box unit, to integrated, to stainless steel canopies, to glass units and most recently retro styled and coloured units. Remember, this unit can be a focal part of the kitchen design. If you like the idea of something more extravagant then ensure your kitchen designer knows what you are purchasing so they can make the unit a feature in the kitchen. A good looking extractor can finish off a kitchen perfectly and add value to the room.

There are a few other very important facts to remember when choosing and installing your extractor. Your extractor should be wider than your hob to ensure all steam and odour is captured. Your unit should be 65cm above an electric hob or 75cm above a gas hob. The higher you go the less effective the unit becomes. Many people worry about the noise level of an extractor. Most extractors are fairly noisy but only on a high speed setting and this should only be used for short periods of time. Units that have a very low decibel rating are usually very costly as their motors are insulated.

Many people don't use their extractors properly. In order to get maximum results the unit must be well maintained and properly used.

- Turn your unit on five minutes before cooking to develop the airflow needed to capture and remove the grease and odours.
- Close the kitchen door if you can.
- Keep the unit on a low speed while cooking and only turn it up to a higher speed if there is excessive smoke, grease or steam.
- Finally leave the unit on for five to ten minutes after cooking to expel left over odours and grease.

To maintain your unit properly clean your grease filters every two months. Many of these can go in the dishwasher. Failure to clean them can stop the unit being effective but can also lead to a build-up of foul smells and unhygienic grease above your stove which can also be a fire hazard. If you are recirculating then replace your charcoal filters approximately every six months. When cleaning the body of the extractor consider the material it is made from. If it is stainless steel it is a good idea, particularly if you live at the coast, to wipe it down with a silicone based product to stop spot rust.

To summarise, be an educated shopper. Don't just look at cost, remember to order your extras, and ensure the installation is done by a professional.

With thanks to Eurafrican for their help with this article.

