

**W**ith a coffee bar on nearly every corner, we've come to expect exceptional taste from each and every cup, including the ones we make at home. "We have to credit Starbucks for the fact that there is a good cup of coffee out there, and people are looking for ways to bring that home," says Jeff Malkasian, VP of sales at Bodum.

Sadly, my 10-year-old automatic drip just isn't cutting it anymore. Before I start my search for a machine to match my new tastes, Malkasian fills me in on the three key things to look for in a brewer:

- Water must reach 195°–205°F (just under the boiling point of 212°). Anything hotter burns the coffee grounds; anything cooler won't extract enough flavor.
- Grounds must be thoroughly and uniformly saturated by the hot water.
- Grounds and water must be in contact for four to six minutes. Less time results in weak coffee; more time results in a bitter taste.

Unless you have an extremely well-informed sales associate, you're unlikely to know whether your coffeemaker meets these criteria until you get it home. That's where SHOP Etc. comes in. We've rated the five most common types of coffee-makers on a scale of 1–5 (1 being the worst and 5 the best).

**> French Press**

**Ease of use:** 2

**Taster's choice:** 5

**You'll pay:** \$11.95–\$60

Place coffee grounds in the carafe, heat water in a kettle, add it to the grounds and stir. Let it brew, then press the plunger, forcing the grounds through the water to the bottom.

**The smooth:** Great saturation of the grounds, plus you can make up to four cups at a time and still get great results.

**The bitter:** It can be tricky knowing when the water in your kettle has reached the magical 195°–205°F range. You also have to watch the clock and push the plunger at the proper time. And you're left with a carafe full of grounds, which may need to be washed by hand.

**Get brewing:** The most important thing is that the plunger fit tightly in the pot so

grounds can't escape into your morning cuppa. To keep your coffee warm for an extended period, choose a model with an insulated carafe. We like the 32 oz. Bodum "Eileen" Coffee Press, \$59.95 (bottom right; Bodum Cafe and Home Store, 800-232-6386, or bodumusa.com), which is as sturdy and stylish as the models used in cafes and restaurants.

**> Manual Drip**

**Ease of use:** 3

**Taster's choice:** 4

**You'll pay:** \$2.99–\$220

Put a paper filter in the carafe, add your grounds, cover them in hot water, and brewed coffee drips into a carafe below.

**The smooth:** Aside from having to boil the water, the manual drip offers a lot of convenience and the grounds get well saturated. Cleanup is easy, too, since the filter can be tossed out and the glass carafe can go in the dishwasher.

**The bitter:** Manual drips work best for brewing small batches. In larger quantities, grounds don't get properly saturated and the water cools before it passes through them.

**Get brewing:** Buy a manual drip that brews the number of cups you need since using a cone that's too large for the amount of grounds will result in poor flavor extraction. We love the looks and performance of the 50 oz.

**Chemex 10-Cup Classic Series Glass Coffeemaker**, \$36.90 (p. 128, top; Chemex, 800-243-6399, or chemexcoffeemaker.com).

**> Automatic Drip**

**Ease of use:** 4

**Taster's choice:** 2

**You'll pay:** \$19.99–\$299.99

According to the National Coffee Association, automatic drip is the most popular method of brewing coffee in the US, largely because of the convenience. Just pour cold water into the maker, put grounds in a paper filter, and the machine does the rest. Some models also grind the beans, filter the water and can be set to automatically brew at any time you choose.

**The smooth:** Auto drips are able to make just one cup or a pot large enough to wake up the whole family. Cleanup is as simple

**\*Americans drink 300 million cups of coffee every day, and 75% of those cups are home brewed.**



Corona Espresso Cup and Saucer, \$35.95/set of 6; 800-232-6386 or bodumusa.com.

\*SPECIALTY COFFEE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

Which Machine Makes the Best Coffee for Your Cash >

as tossing out the used filter, wiping the machine and occasionally running vinegar through a cycle to clean the insides. **The bitter:** “The biggest problem with drip makers is they brew too long,” warns Kevin Sinnott, an independent consultant to the coffee industry.

**Get brewing:** Look for a machine with a minimum of 1,000 watts of power to ensure that the water reaches 195°F, the low end of the acceptable range. For proper saturation, says Lisa Willey, global director of beverage marketing at Mister Coffee, “a shower-head-style spigot gives you good placement of water, so you’re really soaking the grounds.” Also look for one with a flavor-control switch, which guarantees that you’ll get the same taste whether you brew one cup or many. The **Krups 10-Cup FMF5 Thermal Coffeemaker, \$129.95** (right; Krups, 800-526-5377 for stores, or williams-sonoma.com), meets all those requirements and has a built-in ion filter to remove chlorine from water.

**> Single-Serve Units**

**Ease of use:** 4

**Taster’s choice:** 3

**You’ll pay:** \$49.95–\$229

Introduced about two years ago, this type uses ground coffee in prepackaged single-serving “pods” or “filterpacks” that are placed in a tray. Press a button, and hot



coffee streams into your mug. **The smooth:** These machines are convenient and incredibly easy to clean since grounds are contained in the pod or filterpack, which gets thrown out after use. And most models are able to heat water up to 200°F without any problem.

**The bitter:** Some consumers complain that lower-end models clog frequently, and the pods and filterpacks themselves are expensive—from 38 cents to 74 cents each. And the quality of the coffee varies depending on what brand you use. Plus, if you’ve got more than one cup to make, the whole process has to be repeated for each serving.



**Get brewing:** Pressure speeds up the flavor extraction process, allowing a pod maker to brew a cup of coffee in less than a minute. Most pod makers offer one to one-and-a-half bars of pressure, which will produce your standard cup of coffee. But extra pressure is needed to create foam, so fans of frothy drinks should opt

for a model that offers two bars. If you like your coffee strong, look for a tray that can accept one large pod or two regular pods. The **Flavia Fusion Drinks Station, \$99.95** (above, right; Sharper Image, 800-344-5555, or myflavia.com/fusion), offers 1,450 watts of power to ensure water will

be the right brewing temp; a large 42 oz. water reservoir so you can make multiple cups without refilling; and a filterpack system that requires no cleanup.

**> Coffee Centers**

**Ease of use:** 5

**Taster’s choice:** 4

**You’ll pay:** \$950–\$3,200

These elaborate, highly pressurized contraptions make any kind of coffee, from a regular cup of joe to espresso and cappuccino, at the mere touch of a button. Internal chambers hold water, milk and coffee beans that are ground and heated to order. Some coffee centers will even remember exactly how each sipper likes her coffee.



**The smooth:** Comes closest to replicating a coffee bar.

**The bitter:** Price. And these machines aren’t small, so if you have limited space in your kitchen, beware.

**Get brewing:** Choose a center with a water and coffee reservoir that’s large enough to suit your consumption, and be sure to ask how the machine needs to be cleaned before you buy. The best coffee centers have a light indicating when it’s time for a cleaning, and the process simply involves adding a cleaning tablet to the water and running it through a cycle. We like the 64 oz. **Jura-Capresso Impressa F7 Automatic Coffee Center, \$1,399** (p. 127; Capresso, 800-767-3554, or capresso.com). —CAROLE NICKSIN

**Would you like cream with that? Four extras to make your next cup your best cup.**



**OXO Good Grips LiquiSeal Travel Mug in blue, \$9.99** Just one hand works the clever lid and it keeps 13.5 oz. of coffee hot for more than three hours. Also in gray, green and red and in brushed stainless steel (\$19.99); OXO, 800-545-4411, or oxo.com.



**Kate Spade Demitasse Cups and Saucers in collins stripe, \$75/set of 4** A chic way to sip, and the modest size means coffee won’t go cold. Also in blue/green; Neiman Marcus, 888-888-4757, or katespade.com.



**Crate & Barrel Coffee Brush, \$4.95, and Coffee Spoon, \$5.95** The stainless steel bean-scoop spoon lets you choose “bold” or “mild,” and the brush keeps grinders clean; Crate & Barrel, 800-996-9960, or crateandbarrel.com.



**Kitchen Aid Model A-9 Coffee Mill in tangerine, \$129.99** To keep the beans’ aroma and taste, use a “burr” grinder. It crushes without a blade for a consistent grind and better flavor. Also in five other colors; Kitchen Aid, 800-541-6390, or kitchenaid.com.