

The Best Stand Mixers

A stand mixer is an investment, but it's essential for serious home bakers. We find the best options at every price and size.

■ Lisa McManus



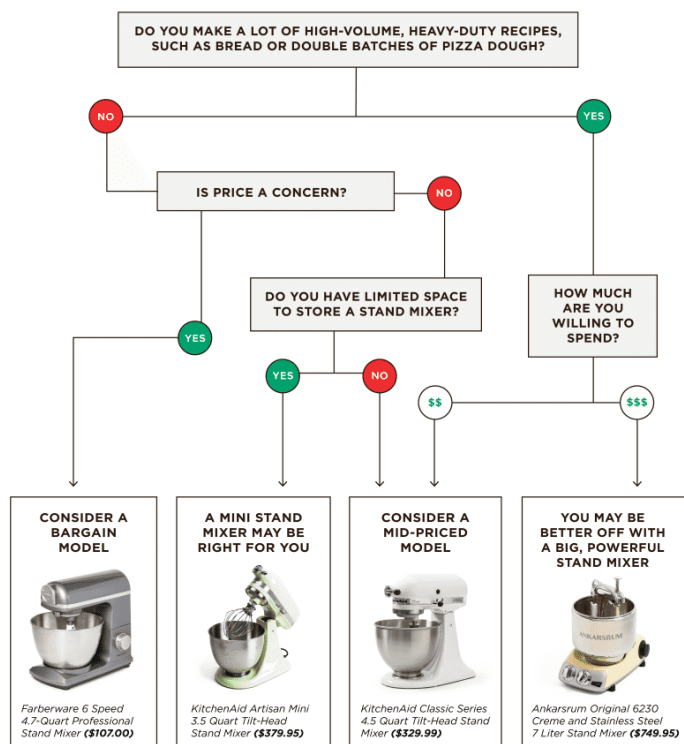
What You Need To Know

We tested stand mixers of nearly every size and price to make recommendations that truly suit your needs. If you often do a lot of heavy-duty, large-batch baking, especially breads, we suggest investing in the Ankersrum Original 6230 Creme and Stainless Steel 7 Liter Stand Mixer. For solid performance at a moderate price, we suggest the KitchenAid Classic Series 4.5 Quart Tilt-Head Stand Mixer. If space constraints are a concern, consider the petite KitchenAid Artisan Mini 3.5 Quart Tilt-Head Stand Mixer. On a tight budget? We recommend the Farberware 6 Speed 4.7-Quart Professional Stand Mixer, which was slightly underpowered on tough doughs but otherwise performed very well at a fraction of the price of other mixers. Finally, if you only occasionally bake a cake or a batch of cookies, consider skipping a stand mixer altogether and choose a hand mixer.

A stand mixer is essential for serious home bakers. It should be able to do tasks large and small, from whipping a pair of egg whites to kneading double batches of dough. But deciding which to buy has never been more complicated. KitchenAid dominates the market, but other manufacturers offer machines that promise to knead, whip, and mix with even more ease, sometimes at lower prices. Newer features include

bowl-scraping beaters, stainless-steel tools, timers that automatically shut off mixing, lights that illuminate the action, extra bowls and covers, and accessories that expand the versatility of this appliance. Before you choose, it's important to consider what kind of baking you plan to do: You'll need plenty of power (and may need to spend more) if you do frequent, heavy-duty, big-batch projects but perhaps less pow-

Which Size Stand Mixer Should You Buy?



er for occasional baking. Given the dizzying range of features and considerable cost of stand mixers, we shop carefully—and test exhaustively—to ensure you can choose from our winners with peace of mind.

What to Look For

- Mixing Power:** The main reason anyone buys a stand mixer is powerful, hands-off mixing; kneading is where it matters most. Very wet or dry doughs are nearly impossible to work by hand and can call for up to 10 minutes of kneading. Dough develops gluten and stiffens, pushing against the machine and increasing the load on the motor. How can you tell if a mixer can handle it? Wattage seems like the answer, but it's deceptive, experts say. The true measure is torque, said Bridget Smyser, mechanical and industrial engineering professor at Northeastern University. Torque is rotational force—how powerfully the motor pushes batter or dough. With a hand mixer, beaters rotate quickly, but they can't budge stiff dough because the mixer lacks torque. A good stand mixer's attachments put a lot of torque behind each rotation, Smyser said. **Why don't all mixers have lots of torque?** For manufacturers, it's not always cost-effective to provide plenty of power, said Michael Borgen, lead mechanical engineer at Metis Design in Boston. "There's a balance to be struck. A motor with superfluous power will unnecessarily increase the cost,

size, and weight of a mixer." But an underpowered mixer doesn't just deliver undermixed dough. When it slows or stalls, the strain makes the motor more likely to burn out, said Ruqiang Feng, emeritus professor of mechanical and materials engineering at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. Experts agreed that torque—or lack thereof—is easy to spot while mixing dough: In our testing, some mixers visibly struggled, while others stayed cooler, quieter, and steadier. Since you can't test this before you buy, read our chart of models tested to see which mixers have the right amount of power for your needs.

- No Time or Speed Limits:** If you do a lot of heavy-duty baking, including breads and pizza doughs, this is an important consideration. We recently learned that KitchenAid has placed a restriction on all of its stand mixers for kneading: Don't exceed speed 2 when kneading dough with the dough hook, don't knead for more than 2 minutes at a time, and the total mixing and kneading time should not exceed 4 to 6 minutes. Many dough recipes call for longer kneading times (and higher speeds). While we didn't experience problems kneading longer in this testing, KitchenAid says that exceeding these speed and time limits will damage the mixer and void the warranty. The Ankarsrum has no such limitations and is a great choice for kneading dough. This is why it is our ultimate winner.
- Style:** Tilt-Head versus Bowl-Lift: Typically, stand mixers come in two styles: tilt-head or bowl-lift. On tilt-head models, the entire horizontal top of the mixer lifts up from the bowl, tilting back. Bowl-lift models just use a crank to raise and lower the bowl. Here's why this matters: Tilt-head mixers are smaller, lighter, and less powerful. They tend to max out at 5-quart size. You also need a lot of clearance to lift the head; usually you have to pull it out from under cabinets. The plus? It's easier to get at the bowl because the top lifts out of the way. Bowl-lift models are bigger, heavier, and more powerful. Their size ranges from 5 to 8 quarts (commercial models can be even bigger), but they don't need any additional space overhead since only the bowl moves. Their weight means they're less likely to rock and "walk" during heavy mixing. However, it is harder to get at the bowl's contents. (We found it best to crank down the bowl, reach in and remove the tool, drop it in the bowl, and then remove the bowl from the mixer.) These days, there's another mixer design to consider. In these, the motor is in the base and the bowl is on top, offering excellent access to ingredients. It is featured in European mixers that have recently become available in this country, including the Ankarsrum, which we reviewed here. We like models in all three styles; choose whichever works best for you and your kitchen space.



	KitchenAid Artisan Mini 3.5 Quart Tilt-Head Stand Mixer	KitchenAid Classic Series 4.5 Quart Tilt-Head Stand Mixer	KitchenAid 7 Quart Bowl-Lift Stand Mixer with Redesigned Premium Touchpoints
WEIGHT:	16.05 LB	21.5 LB	25.6 LB
HEIGHT:	12.3 IN	13.9 IN	16.5 IN

Consider the weight and height of these three models of KitchenAid stand mixers: the lightest and smallest is a good choice if you need a compact model, but a bigger, heavier mixer will be less prone to walking and rocking when it's working hard.

- **Adjustable Tool Height:** When whisks, paddles, and dough hooks rode closer to the bowl's bottom and walls, mixers worked faster and more thoroughly. But not all mixers came with tool distances perfectly set; on these, we often found unmixed pockets of ingredients and constantly had to stop and scrape. We preferred mixers that let us manually change the bowl-to-attachment distance. This distance can shift over time and with use, so adjustability is a desirable trait. Several mixers—at every price—lacked that option and fell short.
- **Heavier Weight:** In our years of testing, we've found that heavier stand mixers rock and walk less during heavy-duty mixing; the motor power goes into moving the dough, not the machine. Unless you need a lighter machine for maneuverability reasons, heft, within reason, is a good thing in a stand mixer.
- **Capacity:** We measured each mixer bowl's usable capacity—the volume of the space between the top of the attachment and the bottom of the bowl—and discovered that no model made use of its bowl's total volume; some used barely more than half. Bottom line: A stand mixer's stated capacity may not only be misleading but also may not be a good indication of its ability to handle large loads. (For a rough estimate, subtract about 2 quarts from any stated capacity.) Mixers with a stated capacity of 5 quarts (that actually held about 3 quarts) could tackle double batches of dough, but smaller models could not.
- **Distinct Speeds:** Some mixers didn't change much from one speed to the next. Slow starts were important to avoid sending ingredients flying. The number of speeds mattered less than if they progressed, something that's hard to discern without testing.
- **Stainless-Steel Tools:** We liked uncoated stainless-steel whisks, paddles, and hooks. Steel is nonreactive and durable. Coated aluminum parts often chip over time, and we'd



We kneaded the stiff, dry dough of Bagel Bread to see how our lineup of stand mixers held up to difficult mixing jobs, then compared the height and texture of baked loaves.



Paddles and dough hooks from KitchenAid stand mixers, made of aluminum with a food-safe white coating, become chipped after frequent use in our test kitchen.

rather not find bits in baked goods. Uncoated aluminum tools can oxidize if left wet and form a grayish residue that can come off in food.

- **Intuitive Controls and Handling:** We appreciated simple controls. Some models always took extra steps to get going. Bowls and tools should go on and off without a fight. Tilt-head releases should work smoothly.

Nice to Have

- **Big Vertical Bowl Handles:** Vertical handles made bowls easier to control while scraping or pouring batter. Tiny horizontal handles (or none) strained hands.
- **Scraper Beaters:** All models had mixing paddles, but some included extras with silicone fins that scraped the bowl, making mixing faster and easier, which was especially nice when mixing cake batter and cookie dough for which overhandling the dough is not desirable.



On the Ankarsrum, the vertical white silicone blade at left continually scrapes the bowl while the dough is kneaded between the ridged rolling tool and the bowl wall.



We whipped egg whites while adding hot sugar syrup to make Italian Meringue to test mixers' speed, performance, and how easy it was to add ingredients while mixing.

What to Avoid

- **Weak, Walking Mixers:** If your mixer can barely manage when the going gets tough, it's not worth it. A mixer that moves across the counter while working is dangerous and potentially catastrophic if it were to walk off the edge. While heavier mixers are less likely to walk, it's no guarantee of power. Again, since you can't tell this in the store, read on for our testing results.
- **Key Pieces Made from Plastic:** Plastic parts are lighter and easier to handle, but when key pieces, like the hub to attach a whisk, are thin plastic, we worry about durability.
- **Suction Feet:** If you need a very light mixer, suction feet are a saving grace, anchoring it to your countertop. Otherwise, skip mixers that come with them. Even to scoot it a few inches, you have to wrench the whole mixer up to release suction. When cups got floury, they lost grip, and mixers skated away.

Minor Flaws and Quibbles

- **Noise Level:** We used a decibel meter while whipping egg whites. Most were moderate (mid- to high-70s, equivalent to the sound of a dishwasher), but a few were loud (low-80s, like a busy city street). While no mixer is silent, we've noted which ones were especially loud in the chart describing each model we tested.

Other Considerations

- **Controls Location:** There's clearly no consensus about where mixer controls should be (up high, down low, in the back, on the left or right side) or where manufacturers expect the cook to stand in relation to the mixer—we saw every configuration. Bear this in mind if you have strong preferences or a specific spot

where you'll need to place your mixer. Controls located at the top and rear were hard for shorter testers.

- **Glass versus Stainless-Steel Bowls:** Glass bowls are much heavier and more fragile than metal bowls, making them harder to handle and potentially short-lived. In the test kitchen, we use them in videos to provide a view inside the bowl, but unless you love the look of glass and don't mind its weight, we'd recommend sticking with lightweight, durable steel bowls.
- **Fingerprint-Concealing Finishes:** Choosing your stand mixer's color is fun. Dark, matte finishes looked dusty when flour wafted over and showed every buttery fingerprint. Glossier finishes were more forgiving.
- **Dishwasher-Safe Parts:** Dishwasher-safe parts are convenient, but after dishwashing we've found that coated tools (such as paddles and dough hooks) had often become chipped and damaged, and uncoated aluminum oxidized and blackened in the dishwasher. We preferred plain stainless-steel tools that were dishwasher-safe, but it may be best to wash all parts by hand to keep them in good condition.

- **Optional Accessories:** Some brands offer extra accessories (purchased separately) that attach to a hub on the mixer's motor to use it for power, including pasta rollers, ice cream makers, meat grinders, blenders, citrus presses, grain mills, and more. All KitchenAid mixers work with about 10 accessories. Others, including Ankarsrum and Cuisinart, also make proprietary attachments; a few brands include a universal hub that can take attachments from other brands, including the KitchenAid accessories. We've noted in the chart which mixers give you these options.



Some models came with glass bowls, but they are heavy, cumbersome, and comparatively fragile compared to lightweight, durable steel bowls. We use glass bowls in the test kitchen only while making videos so the camera can show you what's happening.