

Toaster Ovens Overview

Long before there were microwave ovens, the modern household's corner-cutting appliance of choice was the toaster oven.

Toaster ovens are aptly named counter-top appliances that resemble both a tiny oven, and a big toaster. Handy substitutes to energy-gobbling full-size ovens, toaster ovens can crisp up your waffles, toast your bread, and re-heat just about anything.

Unlike normal ovens, a toaster oven is small and takes up very little kitchen space. These wee wonders are simple to use: just set the heat control to achieve the desired temperature, open the door, place the food to be baked or toasted on the inner shelf, and then close the door. Most toaster ovens have a little window so you can watch the toasting process and make sure you're food doesn't burn.

If the food on the shelf has been set for toasting, the toaster thermostat will be activated. The thermostat, in turn, causes the built-in heating elements to kick in to gear. These heating elements are found both at the top and bottom of the inside of the oven, providing a balanced source of heat. Your toaster oven will also have a heat control to set the desired temperature. If, on the other hand, your dial has been set for baking, the baking thermometer then gets activated. Like the toasting thermometer, this will activate the same heating elements.

However, the baking process involves an additional function: a timing mechanism to control the baking time. Of course, the baking abilities will depend upon wattage and capacity, and are often related to the quality and price of the toaster oven.

Like any manufactured product, toaster ovens have their fair share of mechanical problems. The most common complaint of toaster oven owners are that the electrical cord has burned out. The only remedy for this is to buy a new cord. Sometimes, the thermostat will become faulty, or can suffer minor errors. All is not lost, as toaster oven thermostats can be recalibrated. Check the manual or seek professional advice to perform this repair.

Other parts of the toaster oven's electrical systems are the main switch, the thermal fuse and the solenoid, all of which can become faulty with regular use. If your toaster oven is less than a year old and needs repair, check your warranty to see if you qualify for a replacement or refund. When the time comes to repair your toaster oven, you may be better off retiring it altogether and just buying a new one. Though think about the environmental consequences before you choose to buy new, when repairing might be good enough, even if expensive.

Take good care of your toaster oven, and it will take good care of you. Choose a reputable brand, and you will enjoy perfectly toasted mini-pizzas and hors d'ouvres for years to come.