



Espresso Coffee Machine Buying Guide

Which type of espresso machine do I need?

Automatic or manual? What are we talking about?
Before you go out buying a coffee machine,
there are a few things you need to know...

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Super Automatic versus Semi Automatic



The first thing to decide when buying an espresso machine is whether to buy a super automatic, a semi automatic or a pod machine. A super automatic will grind the coffee, extract the espresso and even froth the milk with the touch of a button.

machine and finally texture the milk with the espresso machine.

So choose super automatic for convenience or choose Semi Automatic if the quality of the coffee is the most important requirement.

A semi automatic is the type used by baristas in coffee shops. When using a semi automatic, the barista must grind the coffee using a separate coffee grinder then prepare the portafilter with the freshly ground coffee, extract the espresso using the semi automatic espresso



Single Boiler, Heat Exchanger or Dual Boiler?



An espresso machine has two main functions, to create espresso and steam milk!

Heat exchanger and twin boiler machines can extract espresso and steam milk simultaneously. A single boiler machine can do one or the other and then must be switched to the other function - which usually takes about a minute. If the machine is only required to make one or two coffees at a time or only ever black coffees a single boiler machine will be adequate. However, to make several milk coffees in quick succession, a heat exchanger or dual boiler machine will be required.

Heat exchanger and dual boiler machines are both able to make espresso and steam milk simultaneously. The choice of heat exchanger versus dual boiler usually comes down to personal preference. Some prefer heat exchanger machines because the water used for brewing does not make direct contact with the boiler element and does not sit in the boiler for an extended amount of time. Others prefer the twin boiler configuration because the temperature of the brew water can be controlled and they generally heat up faster.



Volumetric or manual?



A **volumetric machine** will deliver a pre-programmed volume of water through the coffee grounds. With the touch of a button, the machine will start brewing and then stop automatically when enough espresso has been brewed.

To brew an espresso on a **manual machine** the barista must start the brewing process and stop it when enough espresso has been brewed. In practice, this is a reasonably simple process.

This is where there really is a choice to make. The answer will depend on your preferences,

bench space available, decor to some extent and budget.

There are three general types of espresso machines on the market and these are explored in the pages following.



Pod & capsule machines



Pod and Capsule machines have made quite an impact on the coffee machine market in the last few years, and now make up the bulk of espresso machines purchased Australia. Some machines can cater for both pods and ground coffee by providing a separate filter basket and possibly a different shower head.

Capsules are the size and shape of a single-serve UHT milk holder. They're not compressed like pods but rather hermetically sealed, giving them the added advantage of staying fresh for about nine months. Infuse Coffee also offer pods with our coffee.

How they work:

A pod or capsule of coffee is

inserted into the machine, it then pierces the capsule to allow hot water to flow through and the shot is poured.

Pros

The machines are very simple and convenient to use. There are many flavours of coffee available. They require very little cleaning up.

Cons

Enthusiasts may find coffees from these machines lack depth or intensity of flavour. Some capsules can be recycled, but usually end up in landfill.

Cost

They range in price from \$99 to \$500.



Automatic espresso machines



These are a small but significant part of the market; while most people prefer to either work a manual model or enjoy the convenience (and cost savings) of a capsule machine, the automated machines definitely have their fans and can be very handy in a small office kitchen.

How they work

Your cup goes under the spout, then you press the button and it grinds the coffee beans to make the espresso. Many models also automatically froth the milk for a cappuccino or latte.

Pros

Easier to use than the semi-automatic and manual machines. Use freshly ground beans rather than a capsule.

Cons

Can be much more expensive than the other types of machines, and their higher price isn't a guarantee that they'll make particularly good coffee.

Cost

They range in price from around \$500 to \$3000+.





Semi-Automatic espresso machines



These allow you to experiment and get more hands on with your coffee. They require a bit more knowledge – and practice – of coffee making techniques such as grinding, dosing and tamping techniques.

How they work

You manually put the required amount of ground coffee into the group head, then set the machine to pour. A semi-automatic machine will automatically cut off the flow of coffee once a pre-set amount has been poured into your cup, while a manual machine will require you to cut the flow of coffee yourself.

Pros

The depth of flavour from using fresh coffee.

The satisfaction of making your own cup of coffee the way you like it.

Cons

Difficult for beginners with no coffee-making experience.

Ground coffee needs to be prepared before use.

Cost

Semi-automatic and manual machines range in price from around \$500 to \$2500.



The final word and what to look for...



Clear and simple controls – digital displays are generally easier to understand than indicator lights, especially when programming the machine.

An **adjustable grinder** (automatic machines have built-in grinders) lets you adjust the grind to suit the bean and machine.

Variable coffee strength allows you to adjust the intensity of the coffee to your taste.

Space – a big espresso machine is fine if you have plenty of bench space in your kitchen, but you may want one that takes up less space.

Some machines come with a **froth enhancer** on the milk-frothing wand. This is supposed to make frothing easier, but it often produces large bubbles rather than the fine foam that's suitable for lattes and cappuccinos. If the enhancer is removable you may find it easier to produce fine, velvety foam.

A **cup-warming tray** can help keep your cups at a warm, constant temperature, which stops the coffee from cooling down too quickly.

Double shot – many models can make two espressos at once, but they often just grind one dose of beans for this, usually about the same amount they'd make for a single cup, which leads to weaker coffee. If you often make two cups, look for models that make them in quick succession rather than at the same time; these models grind a fresh dose for each cup, which is the best way for a good, strong cup of coffee.

Other useful features include a 'water tank empty' reminder, a height-adjustable spout to accommodate larger cups, and adjustable coffee volume.





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