

Natural Gas Water Heater Buying Guide

The life expectancy of a tank-type water heater is just 8-10 years. So if your old unit is starting to show its age, now's the perfect time to plan ahead and find the right replacement. We've put together some simple questions to help you select the right natural gas water heater, and get it installed, before your showers turn cold!

Step 1

Check if natural gas is available to your home.

If your home does not currently have natural gas, visit sceg.com/getgas to check for gas availability in your area. Once gas availability has been determined, an SCE&G representative will meet with you to discuss the conversion process and available rebates.

Step 2

What type of water heater do I want?

There are two main types of natural gas water heaters: tank and tankless. Each type has its pros and cons.

TANK Water Heater

PROS

- Lower initial cost in most cases
- Can install inside or outside (if properly covered)
- Many models keep working even during a power outage

CONS

- Available hot water is limited by tank size
- Constantly heats and reheats the water in the tank, even when you aren't using it
- Average life expectancy is about 8-10 years
- Takes up a lot of floor space

TANKLESS Water Heater

PROS

- Heats water on-demand. Only pay for hot water when you need it.
- Provides endless hot water
- Average life expectancy is 20 years or longer
- All parts are replaceable
- Small size (about the size of a carry-on suitcase)
- Can install inside or outside
- Precise temperature controls can prevent scalding
- No pilot light for added efficiency

CONS

- Needs electricity to run
- Higher initial cost, but saves money in the long run (especially for larger families)

Step 3

How much hot water do I need?

Properly sizing your water heater is the most important decision you'll make because you need to make sure it can keep up with demand. Using the following information will help you make sure you get the right size water heater for your hot water needs:

- How many full and half bathrooms do you have?
- How many people live in your house?
- Do you frequently wash clothes or dishes when people are taking showers?
- Do you have a large soaker or jacuzzi tub?
- Do you have any unique hot water needs?

Step 4

Where do I want to install my water heater?

It's usually easier and cheaper to install your new water heater in the same location as your old water heater, but for one reason or another, you may want to change the location. If you want to change the location, here are some things to consider:

- If having a tank full of water in your attic (or on the second floor) makes you nervous, maybe you should switch to a tankless unit, or consider putting your new tank water heater somewhere else.
- What venting requirements does your water heater need if it's installed inside?
- What are the pros and cons of installing the unit inside vs. outside?
- If your water heater requires electricity to run, is there electric wiring or a plug available at the install location, or will it need to be installed?
- If this is your first natural gas water heater, your installer will need to run a gas line.
- Does it make sense to install the water heater closer to the bathrooms?

Step 5

What other factors should I consider?

Cost and Efficiency

While it's tempting to purchase the cheapest water heater you can find, those are usually the most expensive to operate because they aren't very efficient. A more efficient unit may cost a little more up front, but it will more than pay for the difference in lower operating costs.

A water heater's Energy Factor (EF) is an indication of how efficient it is

The higher the EF, the more efficient the unit is. Mid-range efficiency natural gas tank water heaters have an EF of between .58 and .62. Tankless units usually have an EF of .82 or higher.

Don't just look at tank size when selecting a tank water heater

While most people select a tank water heater based on the size of its tank, it's actually the First-Hour Rating (FHR) that will tell you how much hot water it can supply in an hour. This number is printed on the yellow Energy-Guide label.

Tankless water heaters may require a new gas meter

Tankless water heaters require higher gas pressure and volume than tank units. As a result, you may need a different gas meter to handle the extra load. So make sure your meter size is checked before the install starts. There is no charge for the new meter, but only SCE&G can install it.

Tankless water heaters have unique installation requirements

Like the gas pressure and volume requirements mentioned above, tankless units have many other unique installation requirements including water pressure, cold water pipe size, electrical requirements, etc. To prevent disappointment down the road, your installer will need to come to your house to make sure a tankless water heater will function properly in your home.

Step 6

What do I look for when selecting an installer?

Are they Licensed, Bonded and Insured?

Installers should be licensed, bonded, and insured to ensure they know what they are doing and have coverage to protect you and your home if something is damaged during the installation or someone gets injured. And, in most cases, if a licensed installer does not install your water heater, the warranty will be voided. In the case of Rinnai tankless water heaters, the installer must also be a Certified Rinnai Installer, or the warranty will be voided.

Do they follow all building codes and pull required permits?

When installing any type of water heater, if your installer does not follow building codes or fails to pull the proper permits, he is putting you and your family at risk.

How long have they been in the business?

You want your installer to have a long and positive track record for installing water heaters in your area. If you are getting a tankless installed, the installer needs to have extensive tankless experience (and be Rinnai Certified if you're installing a Rinnai). You want to make sure the installer you use will be around for many years to come so they can provide maintenance and repair for your water heater if you need it.

Will the installer dispose of the old water heater?

Some installers will not dispose of the old unit, while others will charge an extra disposal fee. Make sure you know what to expect up front, or you may end up having to pay someone else to dispose of the old water heater for you.

Call 877-835-0537

or visit sceg.com/waterheater to learn more about water heaters available from SCE&G!



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