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Even conventional storage tank water heaters have become more innovative, for example with the addition of a condensing technology that repurposes previously wasted energy, saving big on water ...

There are plenty of high-performing gas and electric water heaters to choose from, including tank and tankless versions. Picking the best water heater depends on your hot water usage, existing installation requirements, and budget. A 40-gallon water heater is typically the right size for a household of two or three people.

Having written thousands of product reviews and how-to articles on all aspects of home ownership, from routine maintenance to major renovations, Dan (he/him) brings more than 20 years of industry experience to his role as the director of the Home Improvement & Outdoor Lab at the Good Housekeeping Institute. A one-time roofer and a serial remodeler, Dan can often be found keeping house at his restored Brooklyn brownstone, where he lives with his wife and kids.

The 900 series, available in 50-, 66- and 80-gallon tanks, is also loaded with smart technology, like the Wi-Fi-connected leak detector that will alert you via smartphone app if it springs a leak. That's unlikely given the high-quality construction, including durable copper elements and ceramic fused tank, but the peace of mind is a nice bonus. There's even a built-in shut-off valve that will automatically turn off the water supply any time a leak is detected.

One thing to keep in mind: as with all heat pump water heaters, the A. O. Smith needs to be installed in an area with at least 1,000 cubic feet of air space so that it has enough available energy to maintain peak operating efficiency.

While heat pump water heaters represent the category's leading edge, most homeowners still choose to install traditional storage tank water heaters, since they're good value and get the job done. Through years of testing, our experts have been consistently impressed with the overall quality of Rheem water heaters, including this no-nonsense gas model from the Home Depot.

The 50-gallon unit provides plenty of hot water for households with up to five people. With a uniform energy factor, or UEF, of .63, it's far from the most efficient water heater on the market, so don't look for any drop off in energy costs. But our experts say you can expect at least a decade of reliable service, thanks to the water heater's enamel-lined tank and premium anode rod, which protects against rust and corrosion.

Looking for a top value electric storage tank water heater? Rheem's 50-gallon Gladiator has most of the same performance and durability features as its gas counterpart. It costs about \$100 more, but that comes with several smart upgrades, including Wi-Fi connectivity for remote operation and monitoring, plus leak detection with automatic shutoff.

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Tankless water heaters are another energy-saving technology that's transforming the category. Besides their superb efficiency, consumers like the fact that they deliver instant hot water (i.e. no standing around in a towel waiting for the shower to heat up).

We recently had the A.O. Smith Signature Series model tested by a pair of outside experts, a Boston-based contractor and Houston-based homebuilder. Both pros gave it perfect marks for ease of installation, performance and overall satisfaction. "The one-gallon-per-minute internal recirculating pump ensures fast delivery of hot water to fixtures," one noted.

Another feature that impressed our engineers and outside experts alike is the scale-prevention technology, which keeps the system running smoothly without annual descaling by a professional. In the past, this maintenance requirement was a pain point with consumers, since it typically cost about \$250 a year, and not doing it could void the manufacturer's warranty. For added peace of mind, A. O. Smith's generous 15-year warranty covers scale-related failures should they occur. Wi-Fi connectivity with companion app enable remote monitoring of the water heater.

During extensive field tests carried out by one of our outside experts, installation and set up were both straightforward. That's thanks to convenience features like the unit's hanging wall bracket and its compatibility with standard 1/2-inch gas lines. "Another feature that I found highly beneficial is the internal recirculation pump, which ensures fast and efficient delivery of hot water to fixtures throughout the home," our tester noted.

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