**What to Know About Tankless Water Heaters**

**How Much Do Tankless Water Heaters Cost?**

Prices range from about $170 for small gas-fired units to more than $2,000 for high-output heaters that can supply two showers at the same time; $1,000 is about average.

Tankless electric heaters run between $90 and $900. First-time installation costs run more than a simple tank replacement. (See slide 9 “Install It Right”)

**How Long Do They Last?**

Gas-burning tankless water heaters should operate for 20 years or more, two or three times longer than tank-type heaters. Tankless electric units have shorter life spans, on the order of 7 to 10 years.

**Where Can I Buy a Tankless Water Heater?**

Plumbing-supply stores, big-box stores, and online retailers all carry these heaters. Or order one through your plumber.

**How do I Install it?**

This is definitely a job for a pro, as it involves making leak-free water, vent, and gas connections, in the case of gas or propane units, or upgrading the wiring and circuit-breaker panel, in the case of electric units.

**Do Tankless Water Heaters Need Maintenance?**

Sign up to have a pro provide annual service, including cleaning or changing water and air filters and checking the burner. In areas with hard water, a vinegar flush every 500 hours keeps mineral buildup—scale—from clogging the heat exchanger. That 20-minute task can be done by either a pro or a homeowner.

**PRO: They’re Compact**

Newer tank-type water heaters have grown bigger as federal regulations now require thicker insulation to reduce standby heat loss.

So they may not be able to fit into spaces where an old heater of the same capacity could go. Tankless gas heaters are about the size of a suitcase and hang on the wall.

**PRO: They’re Safer**

Unlike a tank-type heater, they won’t spill gallons of water if they spring a leak, or harbor Legionella bacteria, or tip over in an earthquake. And because the air-supply and exhaust vents are sealed, carbon monoxide can’t leak into the house due to backdrafting.

**PRO: They’re Easy to Winterize**

Owners of vacation homes know well how long it takes to drain a water-heater tank before closing up a house for the winter. A tankless heater takes a few seconds to drain; then you just unplug it.

**CON: They’re Sensitive to Slow Flow**

If there’s too much scale buildup in the pipes, or faucet and showerhead aerators are clogged, or a turned-down faucet reduces water flow to about 0.3 gpm, these units automatically shut off.

**CON: The Payback Takes Awhile**

Compared with a tank-type heater costing $400 or so, a $1,000 tankless gas heater may save a household only about $100 per year, depending on how efficient it is and how much hot water is used.

But because these tankless gas units last longer, the savings kicks in after six years, about when many tanks are nearing their demise.

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