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Open & Shut

BEST BUYS IN STEEL & WOOD GARAGE DOORS

Garage-door manufacturers add more insulation to their products to lure consumers who want to control energy costs in their home. But experts tell us that paying extra for models that have the most insulation won't deliver benefits for most people.

By Drew Vass

Today's garage-door manufacturers add enough insulation to their most expensive doors to make them as energy-efficient as your home's walls. That might sound like a good thing, but for most homeowners, it isn't. In short, you won't realize any additional energy-saving benefits by adding the most insulated garage door, independent experts tell Consumers Digest.

But that hasn't stopped manufacturers from introducing high-performance garage doors that rate as high as R-20.4. (*R-value* indicates how well that a product prevents the transfer of heat and is based on tests by each manufacturer.) The 21 garage-door models that have R-values that are equal to or greater than what's mandated for the walls in most homes

(R-13) are nearly twice as many as existed 4 years ago.

Yet home-energy experts tell us that upgrading to an insulated garage door will do nothing to lower your home-energy costs and will do little to improve the comfort level that's in your garage.

Unfortunately, the price of all garage doors, regardless of whether they include insulation, has gone up by at least 6 percent and by an average of 15 percent compared with 4 years ago. The increase is because of a rise in materials costs—particularly steel.

INSULATION OVERKILL. The steep increase in R-values among steel garage doors primarily is because more manufacturers are adding high-performance polyurethane insulation to their doors, which often doubles the R-value. For in-

stance, Clopay, which had a maximum R-9 rating on any of its doors 4 years ago, now has an industry-high R-20.4 rating on one of its models because of the addition of polyurethane insulation.

But all seven independent home-energy experts whom we interviewed insist that the extra \$213–\$536 that you'll pay to get a steel garage door that has polyurethane insulation isn't worth the added expense in most situations.

"An attached garage is a space that's outside of the home's thermal boundary, so an insulated garage door isn't going to make an impact on your home's heating and cooling costs or its comfort," says Anthony Stonis, who is the owner of Building Energy Experts, which is a home-energy audit company.

Building codes require that the walls and ceiling that separate your home from an attached garage must be air-

sealed and insulated. For this reason, independent energy experts say, little, if any, heat transfers from the house to the garage, so in the winter, your garage has little or no warm air for an insulated garage door to retain. The reverse is true in the summer when an insulated garage door can slow the transfer of heat into your garage from outside, but it can't cool the air that's inside of it. Consequently, independent experts tell us that an insulated garage door will make your garage only a few degrees warmer or cooler than the outside air at any time of year. And because your house is insulated from your attached garage, that nominal difference will have no effect on your heating and cooling bills.

"The tiny impact that this would make on energy consumption means it would take you decades to realize any return on your investment," says Chris

Laumer-Giddens, who is chief design officer for Energy VanGuard, which is a home-energy rating, consulting and design company.

And before you reach for the phone to call a technician to add heating and cooling equipment to your garage, experts tell us that you should think twice.

"Every time you open a garage door, you're letting so much of the inside air out and the outside air in, that you're essentially starting from zero all over again," Laumer-Giddens says, adding that the energy that must be expended to overcome these losses can be enormous.

According to experts, the only people who should consider shelling out for an insulated garage door are consumers who use the garage as a workshop or a man cave and plan to heat or cool the space only while he/she uses the space. In those cases, experts say,

✓ Best Buys in Garage Doors

Best Buy Categories

- [P]—Premium selection
- [M]—Midrange selection
- [E]—Economy selection



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Best Buys in sectional garage doors were selected based on construction, materials and appearance.

All Best Buy selections offer windows as an option. You can expect to pay at least 15 percent extra to add windows.

A lifetime warranty applies only to the original owner of the door.

R-value indicates how well the insulation prevents the transfer of heat and is based on tests by each manufacturer. Higher numbers indicate better insulation. No R-value is listed for steel or wood doors that

don't have insulation.

Steel gauge represents the thickness of the steel. A lower steel-gauge number reflects thicker steel.

Steel garage doors have one to three layers. A one-layer door has a steel face. A two-layer door has a steel face and insulation. A three-layer door has a steel face, insulation and a steel or vinyl backing.

Pricing is based on an uninstalled 8-by-7-foot door that has a standard panel design, standard mechanical hardware and no exterior decorative hardware. You can expect to pay about 65 percent more for a 16-by-7-foot door that's used for a two-car garage.

MSRP is based on estimates that were provided by manufactur-

ers and represents the national average for each product. MSRP for each product varies by region and market.

Best Price is a reflection of the lowest retail price that was available at press time and is subject to change. Prices vary widely by region.

STEEL GARAGE DOORS

[P] **Garage Innovations**
Garage Doors
 MSRP: \$1,310; Best Price: \$800

>> The **Garage Innovations** is a repeat Best Buy selection, because it's the least expensive three-layer model that has carriage-house style designs as standard and a lifetime warranty for the door and hardware. The **Garage Innovations** (\$985), which is a single-layer garage door, and the **Garage Innovations** (\$1,095), which is a double-layer model, are also Best Buys.

Features:

- * Steel gauge: 25 face, 27 back
- * Panel-design options: 7
- * R-value: 13.35
- * Colors: Almond (beige), Dark Woodgrain (dark brown), Medium Woodgrain (light brown), Sand-tone (light brown), True White
- * Warranty: Lifetime

[P] **Garage Innovations**
Garage Doors

MSRP: \$900; Best Price: \$625

>> The **Garage Innovations** is the least expensive three-layer garage door that has 24-gauge steel on the face and the back and a lifetime finish warranty. It has the heaviest steel that you can get, which helps this model to resist dents as well as any door does.

Features:

- * Steel gauge: 24
- * Panel-design options: 14
- * R-value: 13.08
- * Colors: Almond (beige), brown, Clay Tone (light brown), white
- * Warranty: Lifetime finish; 3 yrs. hardware

[M] **Garage Innovations**
Garage Doors

MSRP: \$412; Best Price: \$317

>> The **Garage Innovations** is a repeat Best Buy selection, because it's the least expensive two-layer garage door that has 25-gauge steel, polystyrene insulation and a lifetime finish warranty. Other two-layer models that are in this price range use steel that isn't as strong as this model has.

Features:

- * Steel gauge: 25
- * Panel-design options: 2



insulation will help to conserve energy by preserving the hot or cold air that your space heater or air-conditioning unit produces, although it's anyone's guess as to exactly how much energy that it will save.

FINISHING TOUCH. If you like the look of wood but prefer the lower cost of a steel garage door (in general, you can expect to pay \$1,000 less for a steel door that has a comparable design), you should know that manufacturers have a new technique to replicate the look of wood.

FrenchPorte is the first manufacturer to print high-resolution images of real wood doors on the surface of standard-panel steel garage doors. The company was scheduled to introduce doors that are made by using this printing technology in June 2012. No price was available at press time, but company officials say you

can expect to pay around \$200 more for these garage doors than you would for a model that has a traditional finish.

The high-resolution image that's on the door is sealed and protected with a coat of varnish. But the image and finish carry a 7-year warranty, which pales in comparison with the warranties for the traditional baked-on polyester finishes that are found on steel garage doors (15 years to lifetime). The warranty for the rest of the FrenchPorte door is from 10 years to lifetime, which is typical of other steel garage doors.

At press time, FrenchPorte hadn't revealed any production samples of the door, so it's unclear how well the door replicates the look of wood. Similar imaging techniques have been used for fiberglass entry doors since 2010, and experts say the look of those doors is nearly indistinguishable from that of

doors that are made of real wood.

Nonetheless, we wouldn't be surprised if other manufacturers take a similar approach to finishing their steel garage doors in the years ahead. For instance, Overhead Door tells Consumers Digest that it might apply a similar high-resolution-image finish on select models starting in late 2012. In other words, the competition to create a better garage door might be a photo finish. ●

Drew Vass has covered replacement windows and doors, garage-door openers and exterior building products for Consumers Digest and has covered the glass industry and window and door products as an editor and writer for several magazines.



Go to ConsumersDigest.com to read why it's possible that glass-panel garage doors can break your bank—and more.



- * R-value: 3.56
- * Colors: Almond (beige), brown, Desert Tan (light beige), Sandstone (light brown), white
- * Warranty: Lifetime finish; 3 yrs. hardware

[E] *Energy Efficient Wood Grain Series*
MSRP: \$324; Best Price: \$224
 >> The *Energy Efficient Wood Grain Series* is a repeat Best Buy selection, because it's the least expensive single-layer model that's made of 25-gauge steel. Less expensive single-layer garage doors have a higher (thinner) steel-gauge number, which will make them more prone to dents. A version that has 24-gauge steel and a lifetime warranty and that

costs \$386 is also a Best Buy.

- Features:**
- * Steel gauge: 25
 - * Panel-design options: 3
 - * R-value: No insulation
 - * Colors: Almond (beige), Chocolate (dark brown), Desert Tan (dark beige), Sandstone (light brown), white
 - * Warranty: 15 yrs. finish; 3 yrs. hardware

WOOD GARAGE DOORS

[P] *Energy Efficient Wood Grain Series*
MSRP: \$2,263; Best Price: \$2,335
 >> The *Energy Efficient Wood Grain Series* is the least expensive wood garage-door model that has a 5-year warranty on the panels

and the hardware. No other models have more than a 1-year warranty on hardware, and you would have to spend an additional \$1,162 to get another wood model that has a comparable panel warranty. This series also offers a wider selection of wood species (six) than any other series does.

- Features:**
- * Construction: Paint- or stain-grade luan plywood face, wood trim, polystyrene insulation, luan plywood back
 - * Panel options: 8
 - * R-value: 5.90
 - * Thickness: 2-3/8 in.
 - * Warranty: 5 yrs. panels, hardware

[M] *Energy Efficient Wood Grain Series*
MSRP: \$1,500; Best Price: \$1,750
 >> The *Energy Efficient Wood Grain Series* is the least expensive four-layer wood garage door that's on the market, and it's the thickest model that we found among models that are in this price range. If you're replacing a garage door, the manufacturer offers packages that are designed to provide an even trim pattern that's based on the exact size of your garage's door opening.

- Features:**
- * Construction: Stain-grade kiln-dried rail-and-stile Douglas fir frame, mahogany plywood siding face, clear Western red cedar trim, mahogany plywood back
 - * Panel options: 12
 - * R-value: 6.00
 - * Thickness: 2-5/8 in.
 - * Warranty: 1 yr.

[E] *Energy Efficient Wood Grain Series*
MSRP: \$1,108; Best Price: \$920
 >> The *Energy Efficient Wood Grain Series* is the least expensive wood garage door that's on the market, yet its rail-and-stile construction and standard raised-panel design provide the type of aesthetics that you would expect to get from midrange or even premium models.

- Features:**
- * Construction: Rail-and-stile frame, hemlock slide-in panels
 - * Panel options: 6
 - * R-value: No insulation
 - * Thickness: 1-3/8 in.
 - * Warranty: 1 yr.

For more information about the above Best Buys, contact the manufacturers directly. See page 66.