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Laundry On the Go

Is a Portable Washer/Dryer Worth the Money?

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When tenants move out of an apartment and into a single-family home, one common perk is the opportunity to skip communal washers and dryers. There's no more waiting a few minutes (or hours) for other renters to take their clothes out of the laundry appliances. The worries about disappearing coins, mysteriously broken machines and locked sliders can become a thing of the past. Days of dragging heavy bags from the car to the local laundromat are long gone.

But what happens when the tenant(s) find out that there is no washer or dryer included in the home? Or, the laundry appliances are broken mid-lease? A portable washer and dryer may be the easiest way to resolve this obstacle quickly and conveniently. In this post, find out the pros and cons of these machines, how to install them, and how to negotiate pricing details with the landlord.



Check the Lease Before Buying New Laundry Machines

A responsible landlord will have already signed up for **home appliance insurance** or kept tabs on the warranty. A **well-written lease** will also include access to the washing machine and dryer throughout the duration of the tenant's stay.

If either of these are true, then the first step is to report the broken washer and dryer to the landlord. If the repair is due to covered parts and service, then the **property owner will likely have them fixed**. However, if the appliances have bypassed their warranty and the property owner never promised laundry appliance use in the lease, this presents a gray area. Try to negotiate with the landlord to see if both parties can split the cost for a new machine. If the landlord agrees, make sure to get this agreement in writing, including who will own the machines **when the lease expires**.

But if the machines were in working order and the tenant is responsible for broken machines, the landlord will likely hold the renter financially responsible. In that case, a renter could owe estimated expenses ranging from \$1,200 to \$4,400 in the average home improvement retail store. This is where negotiating comes in again. As long as the landlord is willing to allow it, a portable washer and dryer costs a fraction of the price and is simpler to set up. For do-it-yourselfers, portable versions are fairly simple to hook up alone.

When a Trained Professional Is an Option Versus Requirement

Unless the rental had no washer and dryer from the time the tenant moved in, replacing appliances should be straightforward—although costly. If the renter is starting from scratch with a non-portable washer and dryer, a trained professional will know how to install the waste pipe, set up any necessary water lines, add an electrical socket and then test the machines.

Installing a dryer from scratch should also be left to trained professionals, primarily due to the need to be an expert in gas lines, installing a vent system and drilling a hole into the exterior wall. If there is already a washer and dryer (broken or not) in the home, replacing the two may significantly lower the labor costs.

However, portable washers and dryers require far less time for installation and setup—no extra pipe lines, drilled holes or working near gas lines. Instead, all a tenant needs is a working bathroom or kitchen sink, and enough room for the portable machines to operate. (Mini washing machines and countertop machines are also an option. Ideal for campers or residents who may need to wash small loads such as diapers, they operate by electricity or foot pump. However, they are not the best option for the average laundry load.)



How Does a Portable Washer and Dryer Work?

Depending on the size of the portable washer or dryer, both appliances can easily fit underneath a bar table, kitchen table or slide into the pantry. (Unless this portable washer is going to have a permanent spot, buy an adjustable dolly with locked wheels to avoid scratching the floors.)

If the tenant decides to buy a combo portable washer/dryer, then that means less room is needed for two machines. When the washing cycle ends, the same machine can immediately switch to dryer mode. After the load(s) is complete, slide the machine back into its hideaway location.

Simple Setup for Portable Washers

For the enthusiastic do-it-yourself, setup should be minimal:

- Unscrew the faucet's aerator (the small piece of the faucet with the mesh screen disk inside)
- Insert the already-included setup adapter onto the end of the faucet
- Connect the hose from the faucet to the specified location on the portable washing machine area where water flows through
- Plug in the appliance(s)

If there are leaks when the sink water runs into the portable washing machine, plumber's tape (Teflon tape) can usually resolve this. If the portable washer adapter doesn't fit at all, an extra trip to the hardware store for a new adapter may be necessary.

In the worst-case scenario, the portable washer may have to be used in another room (with working plumbing and a sink) unless the tenant wants to purchase a new faucet. Portable dryers plug in like a hair dryer. Just make sure to clean the vents on them as would be the case with larger machines. Ignoring the cleanup process of lint vents can become a **fire hazard**.

What Should New Users Be Aware of With Portable Washers and Dryers?

One of the most common questions regarding portable washers is whether tenants can still use sink water while the portable washing machine is running. Yes and no. When the washing machine is not filling up the tub or rinsing off clothes, the adapter can temporarily be removed to use sink water for other reasons (ex. wash dishes, wash hands).

If unscrewing and re-screwing the setup adapter becomes a nuisance (and a lot of Teflon tape), a permanent two-way adapter is ideal. These adapters stay on the sink. With one water inlet, there will be two water outlets. One of the outlets can connect to the portable washer. The other can be used for everyday chores.

Other questions about portable machines include the following:

- Does a portable washer and dryer actually clean clothes? Yes.
- How many clothes can they wash? It depends on the size of the tub or drum.
- Will the machines get in the way? That can only be answered after choosing the size of the appliance and the room it'll be stored in.

Depending on the purchasing agreement and return policy, tenants will have some wiggle room to test an appliance to make sure it works for their needs.

What Happens If the Landlord Wants to Keep the Portable Washer and Dryer?

Depending on why the washer and dryer needed to be replaced or added, the property owner may find this portable option to be a handy amenity for the next set of tenants. And if the current tenants will be moving into another home with laundry appliances included, these portable versions may get in the way.

This agreement should have been negotiated pre-purchase (unless the current tenants broke previously working machines and the portable versions are necessary substitutes). Chances are the portable machines cost as much as, if not more, than the **security deposit**. If the tenant knows of any property damage, offering these appliances may be a bargaining tool to pay the landlord back.

If the single-family home is free of property damage and a no-conflict move-out, the property owner may just offer to buy the used appliances outright. And if the landlord doesn't want them and the tenant doesn't need them, consider donating them (or selling them) on e-commerce sites such as Craigslist or Freecycle.

Portable, Usable and Convenient

Depending on the amount of laundry, the size of the family and everyday expenses (because a portable washer will certainly be included in the electricity bill), portable laundry appliances may be the most convenient way to scratch a chore off the tenant's to-do list. Or, it may prove to only work for smaller loads and the tenant ends up needing a much larger machine anyway. Investing in portable appliances is often based on convenience versus luxury. For some, that's totally worth it. For others, not so much. And both tenants may be right.