

Here to Help with Garbage Disposals

Grist for the Daily Grind

Here is a hard-learned lesson: discovering that woody asparagus shafts should never be thrust down a garbage disposer. For me, that particular tutorial included a jammed sewer pipe, a flooded basement and a \$200 plumbing bill. (Not to mention the \$25 I had to slip the garbage guys to haul away the wet rug.) It's the kind of mistake you make only once, but that clog-weary plumbers see all the time.

Ever since the first garbage disposers went to market in 1938, when a Racine, Wis., architect named John W. Hammes introduced his 1927 invention as the InSinkEerator, people have been using them improperly, accidentally dropping in bottle caps that jam up the mechanism, stuffing in foods and miscellanea that, even if they miraculously make it through the disposer, are not small or smooth enough to pass through the pipes.

The garbage disposer is arguably the least understood of all kitchen appliances and certainly one of the most intimidating. (At least a microwave can't amputate your finger.) But there's a reason that they're still around: They make cooking cleanup so convenient. And in these environmentally conscious times, it makes good sense to reduce the amount of waste we pack off to the landfill.

New models are definite improvements over their forebears and offer many features that make them more convenient and easier to use. Look for larger capacities; bone-grinding ability; corrosion-resistant parts; noise reduction; overload protection; reset buttons; and safety features that allow you to reverse the direction of the mechanism to free jammed items.

And here's a bit of advice from the Web site of Silver Spring-based Thomas E. Clark Plumbing, Heating & Air Conditioning:

Don't take the term "garbage disposal" literally. "Garbage cans are for garbage....Remind your teenagers and little ones of this, and you will likely never have to call us again....except when you really need a new garbage disposal."

To keep the appliance running smoothly and safely, be sure to follow these disposer do's and don'ts.

DO:

- **Run your disposer with cold water only, and allow the water to continue running for at least 15 seconds after grinding foods.**
- **Run the disposer every so often to eliminate food scraps that might have fallen in unintentionally. Even the smallest bits of food can cause buildup and odors.**
- **When you're not using the disposer, cover the drain with a lid or screen to prevent cutlery or small objects from dropping inside.**

- **Shut off the disposer immediately in the event of a jam to avoid overheating the motor.**
- **Feed items into the disposer slowly.**
- **Grind ice inside to scour the interior.**
- **Grind citrus peels in the disposer to freshen the drain, or pour a solution of baking soda and water through to clear odors.**
- **Follow all manufacturers' instructions for your particular appliance.**

DON'T:

- **Run the disposer without water.**
- **Pour grease into the disposer or drain.**
- **Grind large amounts at once.**
- **Grind fibrous foods including artichokes, celery, cornhusks, rhubarb and, of course asparagus.**
- **Grind starchy foods including potatoes or rice, which can clog pipes.**
- **Grind anything hard or sharp, including fruit pits or bones.**
(Some say small bones or eggshells are okay to clean out the mechanism. Check your owner's manual to be sure.)
- **Let food sit in the disposer.**
- **Use a disposer that leaks or is rusted.**
- **Use your hands to remove jammed objects.**
- **Pour drain cleaners or other heavy chemicals into the unit.**