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# Reader's Digest

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# smart shopping

RD's best picks: what to buy new, what to buy used | BY CHRIS TAYLOR

**E**RAY HAS taught us that you can find anything—and we do mean anything—you could ever want to buy. From Elvis-inspired jumpsuits to locks of celebrity hair, it's all out there, and it's all for sale. Just name your price.

But not every secondhand purchase is a good deal. Some categories of consumer goods are perfectly fine when used; others are best to buy new. The trick is knowing the difference. A general rule: Buying used items that are certified by a dealer and come with a warranty vastly reduces the risk you're taking on.

To help you navigate these waters, we talked to experts and assorted shopaholics. So warm up those credit

cards and lace up your shopping shoes, because here's what they had to say.

## 5 Things to Buy Used

**Golf clubs** Sure, it may feel nice to hit the links with shiny new clubs. But pro shops also stock "pre-owned" sets at up to 50% off. You can get 10-point inspections, 90-day buyback guarantees—even free head covers. Chances are the clubs will be well maintained; they're hard to damage (unless you're buying from a duffer with a temper). Find out what clubs are worth at [valueguide.pga.com](http://valueguide.pga.com). Then shop around. You can find great deals, such as Big Bertha 2004 irons at [callawaygolfpreowned.com](http://callawaygolfpreowned.com) from as low as \$400, versus \$760 for a new set.

82

RD | JUNE 2005

## 5 Things to Buy New

**Cribs** Listen to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, which says that buying used cribs can be a really dumb idea if you're not extremely careful. Each year 16 kids die because of cribs that break down, or simply have unsafe designs. Is the risk worth the few bucks you'd save? Same goes for other kid-related merchandise like strollers and car seats. Be smart and buy new; cribs can be found on [babyuniverse.com](http://babyuniverse.com) for \$120.

**Computers** Dell offers a Dimension 3000 desktop system (CPU, keyboard, monitor, mouse—the works) for under \$400, so why even consider buying used? Yes, you can get a refurbished model for even less, but you won't get up-to-the-minute technology and you can't customize it to your exact specs. "Computers change so fast that it just doesn't pay to get an old one," says Suzy Gershman, author of *The Born to Shop* series.

**Digital cameras** Electronics are delicate, and even small hiccups in the mechanism could affect your photos. A Canon PowerShot 3.2-megapixel—which used to be the height of definition—goes for \$179 at B&H Photo in New York City. Sometimes you can

test-drive them in-store. "If you buy a new four- or five-megapixel model now, that should be good for at least three years," says Dimitrios Delis of the Photo Marketing Association International. "Picture quality, speed—everything is getting better."

**Plasma screens** Older models sometimes come with major baggage: images that have been burned over time into the screen. "New technology is much better, so you won't have the CNN logo permanently in the corner," says Mendelsohn. If you can bear to wait, price points for new models are likely to come down significantly, by up to 10% a year. A good site to get you started is [plasmaplanet.com](http://plasmaplanet.com).

**Appliances.** It may be tempting to look online for washer/dryers, dishwashers or fridges. But think twice about buying used. Warranty, for one. Energy efficiency, too, tends to be much better on new models, thereby chopping monthly bills. And shipping something that large can be an expensive proposition. When you're buying new, take advantage of shipping deals; Sears, for instance, sometimes offers it free on any appliance over \$399.

**Also buy new:** DVD players, mattresses, in-line skates, microwaves, hot tubs and cell phones.

### TECH

Looking for the best deals in tech? It's [techbargains.com](http://techbargains.com). For instance, a new palmOne Tungsten T5 handheld ranged from \$315 to \$400.

JR.com is the online site for a New York megastore. Computers, cameras, iPod, HDTV—you get the picture. An Onkyo home theater receiver was \$200, down from \$300.

Cnet.com has price comparisons and product reviews. A Sony VAIO laptop—rated better than average but still pricey—ranged from \$1,599 to \$1,899.

**Home gyms** Also known as extremely expensive clothes hangers, since many are used only a few times. But even if they got a constant workout, high-end modern models are so finely constructed—with industrial-strength cables and multi-year or even lifetime warranties—that you'll get terrific merchandise at bargain prices. "Lots of sites that sell new stuff have a used section as well," notes Hillary Mendelsohn, author of shopping guide [thepurplebook.com](http://thepurplebook.com). Try [gymcor.com](http://gymcor.com), where we found a remanufactured StairMaster for \$1,545, down from \$2,999—with free shipping thrown in.

### Designer accessories

You can find fabulous discounts on scarves, bags and much more by going pre-owned. Even luxury items from Prada, Ferragamo or Gucci are "insanely priced," says Mendelsohn. At [luxuryvintage.com](http://luxuryvintage.com) we found a \$980 white Gucci shoulder sac for \$449. Just watch out for fakes. And make sure you secure authenticity guarantees and know return policies. A neat twist: You can borrow the trendiest handbags for as low as \$19.95 a month at the hot new site [bagborroworsteal.com](http://bagborroworsteal.com).

**Hand tools** Hammers, wrenches and the like are built to withstand a torrent of abuse. Power tools can be trickier. To be on the safe side, check out factory-reconditioned tools, like those from top manufacturer Bosch, at [bosch.cptools.com/reconditioned](http://bosch.cptools.com/reconditioned). You can get anything from a circular saw to belt sander at 20-30% off retail.

**Musical instruments** Unless you're a legitimate musical god like Joe Perry of Aerosmith, your old guitar probably doesn't get a whole lot of use. That's exactly why secondhand

instruments can be such a bargain. You can find violins, pianos, banjos and more at [musiciansbuyline.com](http://musiciansbuyline.com).

**Also buy used:** Boats, books, camera lenses, furniture, DVDs and estate jewelry.



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83