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SMART PHONES**

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MAY 2012 | CONSUMERREPORTS.ORG

# ConsumerReports®

## Your Supermarket

# Are You Paying Too Much?

- ▶ We rate 52 chains (that's 42,000 trips!)
- ▶ 10 secrets of smart shoppers



Chevrolet  
Sonic

## Small cars, big savings

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### ▶ RocketFish iPad2 Keyboard, \$100

The RocketFish has an integrated case and stand that can close like a laptop. It also has a built-in battery that is rechargeable by USB cable.

**PROS** The keys are almost as large as those on a typical laptop or desktop keyboard, with tablet-specific buttons and shortcuts. The tablet can easily be taken out of the stand, and it has a built-in sleep mechanism when it's closed.

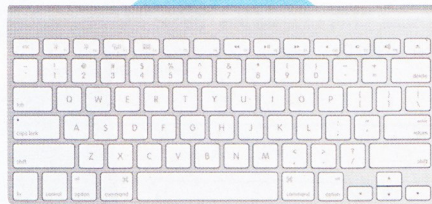
**CONS** At 2.3 pounds, this is the heaviest keyboard we tested, weighing more than an iPad. The stand can be used only in a horizontal orientation, and it covers the iPad's rear camera.

### ▶ Apple Wireless Keyboard, \$70

This device can be used with iPads or Mac computers and requires 2 AA batteries.

**PROS** The keyboard is small and light at 0.7 pounds, which makes it good for traveling. Its keys are full size, like those you would find on a typical laptop or desktop keyboard. It includes shortcut buttons for brightness and media playback.

**CONS** The keyboard buttons aren't customized for iPad use, so some (such as the Launchpad and Dashboard buttons) serve no purpose. Also, it lacks useful tablet functions, such as Home and Lock buttons.



## Battery update

Two highly rated Energizer lithium AA batteries trade places in our Ratings as a result of new testing. The excellent Energizer Ultimate is now our top-scoring lithium battery. It took 1,286 shots in a digital camera and cost \$6 a pair, or 23 cents per 50 shots. The Energizer Advanced, also rated excellent, is now No. 2, taking 957 shots and costing \$5.40 a pair, or 28 cents per 50 shots.

## Central A/C: Brands that keep their cool

**Big energy savings** over earlier central air conditioners is one more reason to install a new one or replace an old one that broke. But you may want to give Amana, Goodman, and York the cold shoulder. All three brands logged the most repairs in our latest reliability surveys of more than 40,000 readers who bought a central A/C system.

Goodman, along with Rheem and Lennox, was also among the more repair-prone brands of central heat pumps, which exchange hot air for cool air in summer and do the opposite in winter. The added complexity of these systems and the fact that they're used for more of the year may help explain why 20 percent of them needed repair compared with just 13 percent for central air conditioners.

The surveys, from the Consumer Reports National Research Center, also show that fixing any central A/C system can be a real headache. Some 39 percent of subscribers who repaired either type were left without cooling for at least a day. Ten percent reported repeated repairs during the first year after installation, and 18 percent said their system broke down completely. What's more, the roughly 30 percent who had problems shelled out \$150 or more for the repair.

The good news: Choosing one of the more reliable brands in our survey can boost the odds that you will be comfortable. Here are some other steps that will help you minimize repairs and trim your cooling bill:

**Hire your own installer.** Our research showed a strong correlation between repairs and installation. For central A/Cs, 19 percent of

systems installed by new-home builders failed compared with 12 percent installed by homeowners. The gap was even wider for heat-pump units, where 28 percent of the builder-installed units failed compared with 18 percent for owner-installed systems.

**Keep it clean.** Be sure hedges and plants

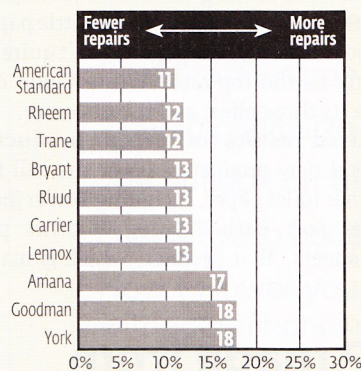
are at least 2 feet away from the outside unit. Clean grills and filters monthly. Clear debris and dirt from condenser coils and check for blockages in the drain pipe.

**Seal and insulate ducts.** Up to 30 to 40 percent of energy can escape through leaks or when ducts aren't insulated.

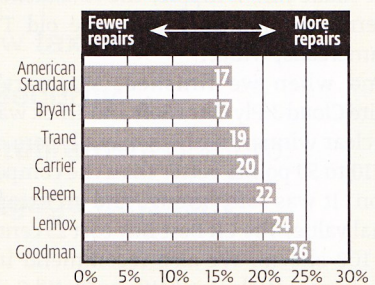
American Standard



### CONVENTIONAL CENTRAL AIR CONDITIONERS



### CENTRAL HEAT PUMPS



Data are based on responses from over 40,000 readers who bought a central air conditioner or heat pump from 2005 through mid-2011. The graphs show the percentage of models for each brand that were repaired; differences of less than 4 points aren't meaningful, and we've adjusted the data to eliminate differences linked solely to age and use. The graphs aren't directly comparable, since heat pumps have higher usage rates. Models within a brand may vary, and changes in design or manufacture may affect future reliability. Still, choosing a brand with a good repair history can improve your odds of getting a reliable model.