



## Inexpensive Instant-Read Thermometers

*Are inexpensive brands any good?*

In the test kitchen we use an instant-read thermometer to determine when meat, poultry, and even bread are optimally cooked. We also use it to check the temperature of sugar syrup when making meringues, caramel sauce, and candy and to test of temperature when frying.

Our favorite instant-read thermometer is the ThermoWorks Super-Fast Thermapen, a test kitchen workhorse that quickly provides accurate readings across a broad range of temperatures. But at \$85, the Thermapen isn't cheap, (for a full discussion of the Thermapen, click [here](#).)

In the past, the only inexpensive instant-read thermometers available were mediocre dial-face models. Dial-face thermometers are hard to read, and their sensors are in the wrong place--more than an inch up the stem. In contrast, digital instant-read thermometers have their sensors on the very tip of their probe, making them easy to use in both shallow liquids and deep roasts.

In recent years, cheaper digital instant-read thermometers have become available. Could any of them approach the performance of our trusty Thermapen? We purchased eight digital instant-read thermometers, all priced under \$25, and put them through their paces in the kitchen. Thermometers are listed in order of preference below.

**ON THE MONEY:** A thermometer must be accurate; otherwise, what's the point? Three of the models we tested (Cooper-Atkins, CDN Candy, and Polder 363-90) weren't perfectly accurate in boiling water and/or ice water. What's more, none of the offenders featured a calibrating function.

**SPEED MATTERS:** When you're taking the temperature of hot oil, you want a reading as soon as possible. When using the thermometers in hot oil, testers' hands became uncomfortably hot with the slower models. Fast response time proved to be an especially important factor in our ratings.

**IS BIGGER BETTER?** Bigger is better, but only to a point. With its mammoth 8 1/4-inch probe, the CDN Candy thermometer had no trouble finding the center of our biggest roast, but it was cumbersome with smaller items. At the other end of the spectrum, the probes on the CDN Q2-450, Cooper-Atkins, and Polder 371 were too short (just 2 3/4 inches) to reach the center of a big roast. The ideal probe length is 4 to 5 inches.

**DESIGN DETAILS:** Most of the "extra" features--including auto shut-off and minimum/maximum temperature memory--were deemed nonessential, but testers did value thermometers that could be calibrated. They also liked thermometers that registered a wide range of temperatures, from below zero (for frozen items) to 400 degrees.

**SUMMING UP:** None of our cheap contenders could match the speed, temperature range, or accuracy of the Thermapen, but a few--notably the CDN DTQ450 and the Maverick--came pretty close, and for a fraction of the price.

### Highly Recommended

*THERMOWORKS Super-Fast Thermapen 211-476*

Price: \$85.00

Average Response Time: 5 seconds

Comments: Simply the best: fast, accurate, and easy to use. The Thermapen also has the widest temperature range (-58 to 572 degrees).

*CDN ProAccurate Quick Tip Digital Cooking Thermometer DTQ450*

Price: \$17.95

Average Response Time: 9 seconds

Comments: The CDN Quick Tip was fast and accurate and had every feature we deemed necessary, including a calibration button. Not quite as fast as the mighty Thermapen, but fast enough.

**Recommended**

*MAVERICK Redi-Chek Professional Chef's*

*Digital Thermometer DT-01*

Price: \$12.95

Average Response Time: 14 seconds

Comments: While this no-frills model is rated to only 302 degrees, it accurately registered the temperature in 350-degree frying oil. While every reading was accurate, the lack of a calibration function might spell trouble down the road.

*CDN ProAccurate Quick Tip Digital Cooking Thermometer on a Rope Q2-450*

Price: \$16.95

Average Response Time: 11 seconds

Comments: The short (23/4-inch) stem is a problem with big roasts and large loaves of bread. Otherwise, a top-notch thermometer, with a wide temperature range (-40 to 450 degrees) and a calibration function.

*POLDER Instant-Read Thermometer 371*

Price: \$19.99

Average Response Time: 15 seconds

Comments: This looks exactly like the CDN Q2-450 (complete with short probe), but its response time was four seconds slower. Otherwise, very serviceable.

*CDN ProAccurate Candy & All-Purpose*

*Thermometer DTC375*

Price: \$24.99

Average Response Time: 18 seconds

Comments: The oversized probe

(81/4 inches long) was handy with a big roast and in hot oil, but it left a large exit wound in a steak. Programmed candy alarms and clip are handy.

**Recommended with Reservations**

*POLDER Digital Instant Read Thermometer 363-90*

Price: \$19.99

Average Response Time: 20 seconds

Comments: A relatively slow average response time and lack of calibration function are flaws. The side-oriented display is no better (or worse) than the classic top-oriented design.

*TAYLOR Classic Instant Read Thermometer 9840*

Price: \$16.99

Average Response Time: 21 seconds

Comments: Slow response time is the biggest concern with this thermometer. No calibration function.

*COOPER-ATKINS Waterproof Digital Thermometer DPP400W*

Price: \$24.00

Average Response Time: 28 seconds

Comments: Its relatively poor showing in accuracy tests is a minor practical flaw; a calibration function would help. The short (2 3/4-inch) stem is a more serious drawback, as is the slow response time. The tiny buttons can be hard to manipulate.



Thermoworks Super-Fast Thermapen 211-476



CDN ProAccurate Quick Tip Digital Cooking Thermometer