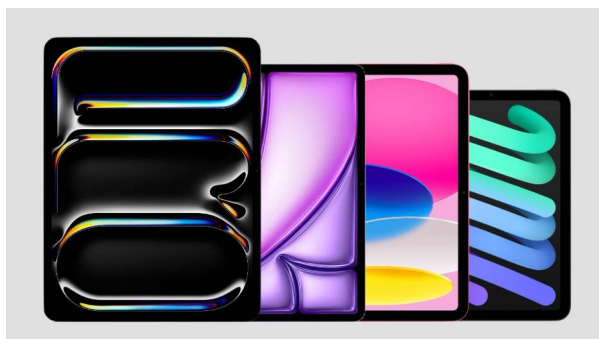


BY ED HARDY • 7:00 AM, NOVEMBER 24, 2024



With a variety of models to choose from, what the best iPad for you?

Photo: Apple/Cult of Mac

Shopping for an iPad can be overwhelming. Apple sells six iPad models in a wide range of sizes, prices and capabilities. Each tablet has its strengths and weaknesses. You don't want to get one that doesn't have all the features you want, but you also don't want to pay too much for features you won't use.

Here's some straightforward advice on picking the right iPad for you.

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## Which iPad should I get?

Rather than getting stressed by too many choices, think instead of the advantages of the wide range of Apple tablets available. The smallest is the iPad mini with an 8.3-inch display. The largest is an iPad Pro or iPad Air with a 13-inch screen. Prices range for \$349 to \$1,299 (and up). Somewhere in there is the right iPad for you.

But before we get into the differences, let's consider the strengths they all share. Any of these computers can use an Apple Pencil for taking notes or drawing, and do it very well. (Alternatively, you can use a third-party stylus.)

Plus, you can add a click-on keyboard and trackpad to turn an amazing tablet into a highly capable laptop. Then, at the end of the day, pull the keyboard back off and lean back to enjoy games or video.

Every iPad that Apple sells today includes a USB-C port. This means it can charge from the same cable as a MacBook or recent iPhone, and use accessories meant for Mac, like external drives.

Let's do a quick summary of the options:

- iPad 10: 10.9-inch screen, Apple Pencil USB-C, \$350
- iPad mini 7: 8.3-inch screen, Apple Pencil Pro, \$499
- iPad Air: 11-inch screen, Apple Pencil Pro, \$599
- iPad Air: 13-inch screen, Apple Pencil Pro, \$799
- iPad Pro: 11-inch screen, Apple Pencil Pro, \$999
- iPad Pro: 12-inch screen, Apple Pencil Pro, \$1,299

## iPad 10 is a powerful computer at a low price



iPad 10 has a USB-C port and works with the Apple Pencil USB-C.  
Photo: Apple

The 10.9-inch iPad is popular for an obvious reason: It costs only \$349. That's less than a third the price of the cheapest MacBook. Even adding a click-on keyboard and trackpad to let the tablet convert to a laptop still puts it about half the cost of a MacBook.

And the budget iPad is a very capable computer — all a young student needs. Heck, it can do everything most adults need for their personal life.

The 10.9-inch display gives plenty of screen space to work on – about as much as some more expensive iPads. Its A14 Bionic processor is powerful enough to handle iPadOS 18 and follow-up versions.

Unlike Apple's earlier budget tablets that use Lightning, this newer version includes a USB-C port so it can use charging cables and plug-in accessories designed for MacBooks.

iPad 10 downsides: The screen isn't laminated so it doesn't look as good as pricier models. And while the A14 is no slouch, the processor is from 2020 so this is far from Apple's most powerful tablet. The iPad 11 with a faster chip is expected in spring 2025

The 10.9-inch iPad is popular for an obvious reason: It costs less than a third the price of the cheapest MacBook. Nevertheless, the budget tablet is a very capable computer — all a young student needs. Heck, it can do everything most adults need for their personal life.

### Pros:

- Inexpensive
- Very portable
- Great for video, ebooks, gaming and social media
- Add an optional keyboard and it becomes very productive

### Cons:

- Replacement iPad 11 expected in early 2025.

## iPad mini 7 is so very portable



iPad mini 7 fits in your hand.  
Photo: Apple

The best computer is the one you have with you. A 16-inch laptop isn't very useful if it's so bulky you don't carry it around much.

Consider the size advantage of the iPad mini 7, which measures just 7.7 inches at its longest dimension and weighs a bit over half a pound, yet it still boasts an 8.3-inch screen. iPadOS makes it a powerful computer, and it beats even the largest iPhone for watching video or playing games.

Where it really shines, though, is as an ebook reader. There's no better iPad than this one for leaning back and enjoying a novel.

On the opposite end of the scale, you can add a click-on keyboard to make the mini laptop of your dreams. Sorry, there's no Stage Manager support, however.

iPad mini downsides: Anyone planning to use an iPad mini as their everyday tablet needs good eyesight for the 8.3-inch screen. Plus, lack of Stage Manager limits its usability. And at \$500, it's a bit pricey if all you're looking for is an ebook reader.

iPad mini 7 is tiny but boasts an 8.3-inch screen. iPadOS makes it a powerful computer, and it beats even the largest iPhone for watching video or playing games.

### Pros:

- So very portable
- Great ebook reader

### Cons:

- Kind of pricey

## M2 iPad Air is the Goldilocks of tablets

We all grew up with the story of "Goldilocks and the Three Bears." Well, the iPad Air is like her third bowl of porridge. It's just right because it offers a better set of features than the cheaper models but is more affordable than the top-tier ones.

Still, the iPad Air's speedy M2 processor makes it ready for anything most need, from watching video to playing games to writing a novel. It's almost as powerful the iPad Pro series.



Compatibility with the new Apple Pencil Pro is one reason to buy the M2 iPad Air.

Photo: Apple

The USB-C port lets you plug in Mac accessories so you can, for example, use an external SSD and display — including support for Stage Manager.

If you have been using a basic iPad for a while and are ready for a newer, better model, the iPad Air might be your best option. Especially if you don't have the money for a Pro.

There are two versions that vary only by screen size.

### 11-inch M2 iPad Air

The smaller iPad Air variant has an 11-inch screen, the same size as the smaller iPad Pro. That makes it a bit more portable than larger tablets if a bit more cramped to work on. Note that this is not the 120Hz ProMotion display from the Pro tablet – its max refresh rate is 60Hz instead.

### 13-inch M2 iPad Air

There's also a 13-inch iPad Air version of the for those who want more room to work or watch video. This also tops out at 60 Hz, though.

**iPad Air downsides:** There are few drawbacks to Apple's Goldilocks tablet. Just note that even the cheapest version it costs nearly twice what the 10.9-inch iPad does — be sure you need the additional capabilities.

Apple's "Goldilocks" tablet offers a better set of features than the cheaper models but is more affordable than the top-tier ones. And the iPad Air's speedy M2 processor makes it ready for anything most need. There are 11-inch and 13-inch variants.

### Pros:

- Better features than iPad 10
- Choice of 11-inch or 13-inch screen sizes

### Cons:

- Not a powerful as iPad Pro

## M4 iPad Pro is ready for professionals



The M4 iPad Pro is surprisingly slim and light.  
Photo: Apple

People who make a tablet their primary computer generally choose iPad Pro because it's Apple's most powerful, with the best-looking display. Someone using a computer all day doesn't want to make compromises. And it's not just professionals: this is the best-selling iPad model by a wide margin.

It is built around the powerful Apple M4 processor, the same chip used in the latest Macs. That gives it performance on par with Apple notebooks.

That said, Apple deliberately made iPadOS simpler than macOS. That often makes it easier to use, a benefit for average users. On the other hand, there are some advanced capabilities missing, and that frustrates some long-time Mac users.

With the tablet's USB-C port, it can connect to almost any accessory a Mac can. And there's Thunderbolt support for very high-speed file transfers, too.

This model also comes in two sizes. Choosing which of these is right for you is as important as deciding between the iPad Pro and the iPad Air.

### 11-inch iPad Pro

As noted, tablet buyers gravitate to the Pro models because they offer the best performance. And the 11-inch iPad Pro provides that in a more portable design than its larger sibling. If you expect to very frequently carry the computer around, this might be the version for you.

### 13-inch M4 iPad Pro

There's no better option than the 13-inch iPad Pro for someone who is going to make a tablet their primary computer. The screen is large enough to be used all day, and the processor can easily handle anything you ask of it.

The full-size display makes it well-suited for people who must frequently refer to large drawings, images or databases. Or show videos and images to clients.

Attach a keyboard/trackpad and you have a powerful convertible computer.

**iPad Pro downsides:** No matter the size, the iPad Pro is an amazing device. It's also very expensive. Think hard whether an iPad Air might be enough for you, especially if you are eyeing the 11-inch version. As for the 13-inch version, think over whether a MacBook might be a better option.

iPad Pro is Apple's most powerful, with the best-looking display. It's a no-compromises tablet for those ready to get things done.

**Pros:**

- Gorgeous screen
- As powerful as a MacBook

**Cons:**

- Pricey

**Which one should you get? Don't panic.**

While it's important to put some thought into choosing the right iPad, don't overthink it. Really, there's not a bad tablet in Apple's lineup.

The worst that's likely to happen is that you'll buy more tablet than you need. And you might feel differently about that decision in a couple years when you and your iPad are inseparable.