



10 Features That Would Make Me Buy the Apple Watch Series 11

The next Apple Watch is coming soon. These are ways for Apple to make it shine and keep up with the competition.

Vanessa Hand Orellana. Aug. 4, 2025 4:00 a.m. PT



Apple

Apple released the first public beta of [iOS 26](#) on July 24, more than a month after the company announced the next iOS version at its [Worldwide Developers Conference](#) in June. That means [developers and public beta testers](#) can try the upcoming [iPhone](#) features before others get them this fall.

And this is an important iOS version for Apple. According to [Bloomberg](#), some Apple investors are frustrated with the company's delay in artificial intelligence features. Apple is also facing an [antitrust lawsuit from the Department of Justice](#) that alleges the company leveraged the iPhone's dominance to enrich itself while smothering competition. So in order to bolster confidence in the company and shore up investor funding, Apple really needs iOS 26 to be a slam dunk.

I've lived with the developer betas of iOS 26 for more than a month -- checking out new features, including the [customizable snooze timer](#). Here are my thoughts on the update so far.

Before we go any further, remember that this is a beta version of iOS 26. Because this isn't the final version of iOS 26, the update might be buggy for you, and your device's battery life may be affected, so it's best to keep those troubles off your primary device. If you want to try the beta out, I recommend downloading it on a secondary device.

Plus, being a beta version, it's also possible that Apple could add more features to the update before the final version of iOS 26 is released this fall.

Liquid Glass design is impressive -- mostly



After Apple tweaked the design during the beta process, Liquid Glass looks great.
Apple/Screenshot by Jeff Carlson/CNET

When Apple first introduced iOS 26's [Liquid Glass](#) at WWDC, people [online](#) were [torn](#) about the design. Some were excited about it, but others were concerned about readability with the new design -- myself included.

But after Apple tweaked iOS 26's [Liquid Glass](#) design during the beta process, it's now a pretty nice display scheme. The way color and images refract through the glass-like panels on my home screen is impressive, reminding me of glass block designs. It's kind of like when a movie

renders CGI liquid really well. You know it's not real, but it can be hard to tell the difference between the digital and real thing.

In early beta versions of the software, I had a hard time reading some menus when they were in front of other text. The glass was *too* glass-like, making all the words look jumbled together. At the time, I toggled on both Reduce Transparency and Increase Contrast to dull the glass effect. But now, the glass design looks good without turning on additional settings to make things legible. The "glass" menus in apps such as Messages are also much better and easier to read now.

My one complaint about the design is the new option to turn your apps Clear. This option is like the Tinted one introduced in [iOS 18](#) and it removes all color from the app icon. Every app icon and widget turns semi-translucent, too. But since every app is the same color, as soon as I take my glasses off, I can't tell which is which without touching my homescreen to my nose.

I don't use the Tinted option for a similar reason, but the Clear option could make it difficult to recognize apps if your background is particularly busy. If you have a visual impairment, you might have trouble with the Clear option.

Messages keeps getting better

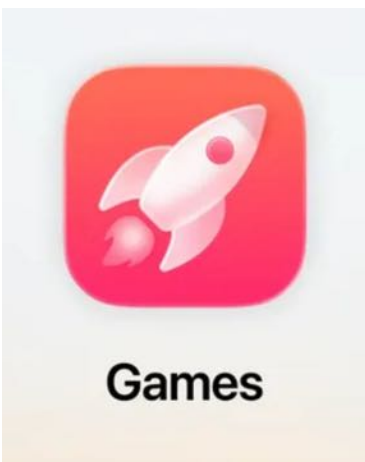


Message backgrounds are an easy way to distinguish between texting groups.
Apple/Screenshot by Joseph Maldonado/CNET

When Apple launched iOS 18 in 2024, it brought new features to Messages, including [RCS messaging](#), more [Tapbacks](#) and a [Send Later](#) function, which I really enjoyed and thought made texting more fun. The iOS 26 beta adds even *more* fun enhancements to Messages.

The new chat backgrounds are a great way to differentiate between chats, and typing indicators in group chats are a nice way to see who is and isn't active at any given moment. Plus, message filters are nice to have; they filter out spam and scam messages without notifying you. That way, any messages from "recruiters" or the "IRS" don't even hit my inbox. You can change the settings to allow notifications from certain unknown numbers, too, such as messages with verification codes or receipts, so you aren't blocking all unknown senders.

The Games app is a nice touch, but could use some work



Games is a step in the right direction.
Apple/Screenshot by Joe Maldonado/CNET

I cover [Apple Arcade](#) and some other mobile gaming services such as [Netflix Games](#), and sometimes I like to play [Xbox Cloud Gaming](#) on my iPhone. So when Apple said it would have a dedicated [Games](#) app in iOS 26, I was pretty excited. But it fell short in a few areas for me.

The main thing I like about the Games app is that it acts as a hub for all the games attached to your Apple ID. So while I deleted certain games such as *Downwell* from my device to make room for others, I can still find those games in the app if I ever want to download and revisit them. (And I totally want to revisit *Downwell*.)

However, the app isn't always helpful with some older games attached to your account. For instance, I downloaded [Crazy Taxi](#) onto an older iPhone before Sega removed the game from the App Store, and the game appears in Games on my newer device. But since *Crazy Taxi* was removed from the App Store, if I try to download the game onto my new device, I get a continuously-rotating pinwheel, like it's trying to load. So now, despite

Apple attaching Crazy Taxi to my account, I can't play it. Instead, it taunts me with its inaccessible soundtrack full of the Offspring and Bad Religion.

And while Games stores information about all the mobile games attached to your account, it isn't integrated with other gaming services such as Xbox Cloud Gaming or Steam. I use a shortcut to open Xbox Cloud Gaming on my iPhone, so I understand it not registering as a gaming app -- but Steam is clearly a gaming app, and yet Games doesn't recognize it. In the future, I'd like for Games to recognize these other services, or at least have the option to add them to the app so everything gaming related is in one neat spot.

The beta is packed with features... but it has room for improvement



It's a beta, so bugs aren't that surprising.
Jeff Carlson/CNET

While Liquid Glass, Messages improvements and the Games app are a few of the new features in the iOS 26 beta you can try now, I came across a few issues in the beta, which is to be expected. Some of these problems were more noticeable than others, and these are the ones I hope Apple will address first.

The most prevalent issue I ran into was that after unlocking my iPhone with Face ID, my lock screen would stay in place for a split second before switching to my home screen. When I slowly swiped up on my lock screen after unlocking it, I could see the Liquid Glass layer slide up over my lock screen background but not pull my background with it. In past iOS versions, when you swiped up on your lock screen after unlocking it with Face ID, your lock

screen background would roll up your screen to reveal your home screen. But in the beta, the Liquid Glass layer moves while your background doesn't. While this never caused my iPhone to crash, it was really annoying.

I also had issues with Visual Intelligence -- both the new screenshot search and the previous way of searching for images. Apple Intelligence-enabled iPhones can use Apple's AI to perform a Google Image search for items in screenshots and photos. I used it to look up some home decor items and shoes from images on Instagram. The search function usually found what I was looking for, but dismissing the search menu felt clunky. After performing a search, I'd try to swipe the menu down -- like dismissing a keyboard in Messages -- but it would bounce back, even after dragging it all the way down the screen. Only after dragging it down again would it finally disappear, and having to do that multiple times was frustrating.

I bring up these issues to remind you that iOS 26 is still in beta, so running into these hiccups isn't that unusual. Betas are meant to test features, make improvements and

find bugs so they can be patched out. Apple said it will release iOS 26 to the general public this fall, so there's plenty of time for the company to address these issues and any others that might appear in future betas.

For more on Apple, here's what you need to know about [iOS 26](#) and everything the company announced at [WWDC 2025](#).