

ZDNET Buy the iPhone 16 or wait for iPhone 17? Here's how I help friends and family decide

Here's what to know before the new iPhones arrive in September to help you make your next buying decision.

Written by [Kerry Wan, Managing Editor, Reviews](#) Aug. 14, 2025 at 10:17 a.m. PT



Jason Hiner/ZDNET

Like clockwork, a new [iPhone](#) has made its way through the rumor mill in August, and users are beginning to wonder if they should buy what's currently available or wait until fall to see how things play out.

Based on past trends, there's a good chance Apple will unveil the [iPhone 17](#)

[series](#) in September. So, should you pick up an iPhone 16 from your local Apple store today or play the long game?

Also: [Best iPhone 2025: I tested the top models and found the best options for you](#)

Having tested every [major smartphone release](#) over the past several years and helped numerous family and friends overcome this exact dilemma, here's the decision tree I use that works every single time.

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1. Do you need a new phone right now?



Elyse Betters Picaro/ZDNET

Pretty simple, right? If you're currently using a handset that's severely damaged or defected in a way that prevents it from completing your daily tasks, then it's time to buy a new phone right now.

I've had friends say that they'd be willing to power through another month with a heavily cracked iPhone if it meant they could just buy the next-generation model. However, that doesn't take into consideration the fact that Apple typically sells its newest iPhones weeks (if not longer) after they're officially unveiled to the public.

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So, what's expected to be a month's wait time can easily become two months or more, depending on which configuration and model you buy. That's to say, if you need a new phone today, don't wait -- buy one ASAP.

2. How much are you looking to spend?



Jason Hiner/ZDNET

Every new iPhone launch has a big unknown: pricing. So, your current (and expected) budget should also be considered as you decide which model to buy. Apple's done a commendable job stabilizing iPhone prices over the years, with the base model typically starting at \$799, the Pro at \$999, and the Pro Max at \$1,199, so most people would assume the iPhone 17 series will cost about the same.

But there are a few more variables factoring into this year's iPhone launch. First, Apple is expected to release a new iPhone 17 Air (or Slim) model that features a thinner and lighter design than the standard variant. If it follows Samsung's price strategy with its ultra-thin [Galaxy S25 Edge](#), we can be looking at an iPhone that's priced just below the Pro models.

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Ongoing tariff and trade talks have also led market analysts to believe that Apple will raise the price of iPhones starting this September. According to [Jefferies analyst Edison Lee](#), the iPhone 17 Air, Pro, and Pro Max may see a \$50 price increase, or a 4-5% bump from last year, in order to offset the cost of new components and exports. Here's a snapshot comparison to the iPhone 16 series.

	iPhone 16 prices	iPhone 17 prices (expected)
Standard	\$799	\$799
Air/Slim	-	\$949
Pro	\$999	\$1,049
Pro Max	\$1,199	\$1,249

If the potential price increase gives you pause, then it may make more financial sense to buy an older iPhone model like the 16 or 15, or even the new but accessible [iPhone 16e \(starting at \\$599\)](#). Apple typically reduces the price of the last-generation iPhone model by \$100 when a new one is released, so there's a good chance you'll be able to buy the iPhone 16 for as low as \$699 later in September -- should you choose to wait things out.

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Lastly, while carriers and retailers typically offer aggressive trade-in and buy-one-get-one deals when a new phone is released, these deals are not without their catches and fine print.

Most "free phone" offers by major carriers usually come in exchange for locking into a long-term contract or upgrading to a pricier data plan. That's not to say that the deals aren't worth it; for the right customer, they can really net you a new iPhone without much extra work. Just remember to do your due diligence before agreeing to anything.

3. Do the rumored iPhone 17 features excite you?



Kerry Wan/ZDNET

While none of these rumored features have been confirmed or made official by Apple, they give us a glimpse of the next iPhone's potential. Here's a list of expected changes this year, pulled from industry experts, supply chain analysts, and more.

- The iPhone 17 Air will feature the thinnest and lightest design, with a new display size, a titanium frame, and a revamped camera bar.
- Apple will likely replace the iPhone 17 Plus with the iPhone 17 Air, as consumers have shown the least interest in the former model.
- The iPhone 17 may adopt a smaller "metalens" technology that allows the Face ID sensor and Dynamic Island module to take up less space on the display. This also allows Apple to shrink the phone's bezels and increase the screen size to 6.3 inches.
- Only the iPhone 17 Pro models will have a new scratch-resistant, antireflective display panel. Like Apple's nanotexture offerings for MacBooks and iPads, it may come at an extra cost.

- The iPhone 17 Pro models will feature a new 48-megapixel telephoto camera that can capture at 8x optical zoom (up from 5x).

Also: [iPhone 17 Rumors: Latest News and Leaks - CNET](#)

The expected color options are:

- iPhone 17: Black, White, Steel Gray, Green, Purple, and Light Blue
- iPhone 17 Air: Black, White, Light Blue, and Light Gold
- iPhone 17 Pro: Black, White, Gray, Dark Blue, and Orange
- iPhone 17 Pro Max: Black, White, Gray, Dark Blue, and Orange

Bottom line: Buy now or wait?

If you need a new phone immediately and cannot wait up to two months, you should buy an [iPhone 16](#) (or other existing model) right now. The iPhone 16's current features, including an A18 chip that can power Apple Intelligence tools, Action Button, Camera Control, and Wi-Fi 7 support, will remain relevant for years to come, so you're not missing out on much by opting for last year's model. There's also a good chance that you'll find a deal or price drop on the iPhone 16 today.

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If you're in less of a hurry, wait until September to see what Apple has to offer with the iPhone 17 series. Perhaps the iPhone 17 Air/Slim model will appeal to you more than expected, or Apple introduces a camera feature that solves one of your biggest pain points. Just be prepared for anything to happen, including a higher price across the board -- or none at all.

When is the iPhone 17 event?

Apple has traditionally held its iPhone launch event on the second Tuesday of September, the week after Labor Day. If that holds true this year, we can expect the keynote to happen on September 9, with preorders and public availability soon to follow. **[Editor's Note: This date has been confirmed.]**