

# Macworld Best cloud or online storage service for Mac and iPhone

By Lloyd Coombes Contributor, Macworld DEC 12, 2024 2:27 AM PST

Apple's cloud service, iCloud lets you store and sync data, but it isn't the only option. We round up the best cloud storage options for users of Macs and other Apple devices.

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Image: Foundry

These days cloud storage is all the rage, offering the convenience of access to your digital files without having to clog up your mobile devices' storage. It's also particularly useful now that so many of us work from home and need to be able to access our data outside the office.

Provided you've got internet access, everything is hunky-dory.

A good cloud storage solution backs up your important documents, photos, and videos, but it also helps keep all your devices in sync. It's a great way to make sure your desktop, laptop, phone, and tablet all have instant access to all your digital content. It should also allow you to access and edit documents from a web browser and easily share files and folders with others.

Another reason to use a cloud service – or any service that offers offsite back up for your Mac – is that it protects your data if something happens at the location where your Mac and backup are located.

## Secure Cloud Storage for Growing Businesses

Get ample space for all your files with Google Workspace. Enjoy up to 5 TB of secure cloud storage, plus business versions of Gmail, Calendar, Meet, and more. Now with Gemini for Workspace to boost productivity with AI.

Owners of Macs, iPads and iPhones will naturally tend to favour iCloud, Apple's own cloud service, because it's so well integrated with those devices' operating systems. Here's our full guide to using iCloud and here is iCloud's current pricing structure. However, iCloud only really syncs your data and it isn't a way to back up your Mac. If

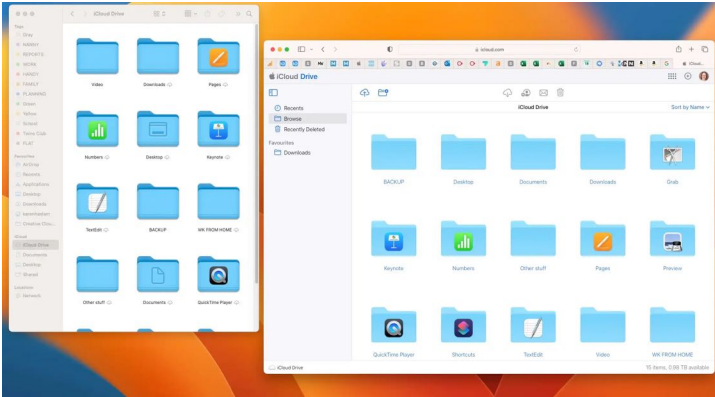
you want to back up your Mac to the cloud you need to look at options like Backblaze, Carbonite and Acronis included below and in our guide to the Best Mac backup software.

You may only be looking for a way to store a few items so you can access them anywhere, or so you can share them with others, in which case iCloud and other options like Google Drive and Microsoft One Drive could meet your needs.

In this article, we round up all the best iCloud alternatives: the cloud storage services for Mac, iPhone and iPad that offer the most appealing combination of price, features, security and reliability. If you use Apple products, we think these are the best cloud storage solutions to which you should subscribe.

We are starting with iCloud because Apple's service is simple to use and mostly intuitive. It's available on all Apple products and syncs all your data – as long as you have enough iCloud storage. It doesn't act as a backup for your Mac, but you can access a backup of your iPhone or iPad via iCloud. Read: Time Machine vs iCloud: Do you need to use both and can one back up to the other? Read on to find out what the alternatives offer.

## Apple iCloud Drive – Best for Apple fans



Price When Reviewed: Free (5GB), 99c (50GB), \$2.99 (200GB), \$9.99 (2TB), \$29.99 (6TB), \$59.99 (12TB) a month

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As an Apple user, you'll have heard of iCloud, but we don't blame you if you find it confusing. It's Apple's own cloud-based storage system, and if you own an iPhone or iPad and have an Apple ID, you'll already have 5GB free storage.

It's the easiest way for those bought into the Apple ecosystem (users of iPhone, iPad and Mac) to sync contacts, notes, files, photos and more across devices and access them on all their devices. For example, you can use the Files folder on an iPhone or iPad to view all your files stored in the cloud.

Because it integrates so seamlessly with all of Apple's products and services, iCloud really is the best cloud storage solution for someone who is all-in with Apple. And I do mean *all-in*: All your computers are Macs, your mobile devices are iPhone or iPads, you work in Apple's productivity software (Pages, Numbers, Notes), and so on.

Frustratingly, Apple only provides a paltry 5GB of free iCloud storage, which isn't so bad if all you want to do is store some Pages and Numbers documents, but is grossly inadequate for photos and videos. Apple is years overdue for increasing this limit (Google offers 15GB free), but at the very least, it should stop counting iOS backups against it. Since the fall of 2021, Apple has offered to “loan” you as much iCloud storage space as you need to backup and restore your data onto a new device, for up to two weeks. It's a good feature for those buying a new Apple device, but it won't help you protect your data if your iPhone gets lost/stolen/damaged.

From there, it's \$0.99/£0.99 per month for 50GB, \$2.99/£2.99 for 200GB, \$9.99/£8.99 for 2TB, \$29.99/£26.99 for 6TB and \$59.99/£54.99 for 20GB. See: [iCloud storage plans](#). You can enable family sharing on the 200GB and above plans—if you do, it doesn't mean your family members can see all your cloud stuff. It just means your whole family's iCloud usage will count against the same storage limit.

These paid tiers are branded “iCloud+” and include several benefits. There's iCloud Private Relay, free storage for HomeKit enabled security cameras, a Hide My Email feature, custom domain names for iCloud email accounts, and additional contact options for recovering your account. These are all excellent features that help solidify our view that iCloud is by far the best choice for those who are all-in on Apple devices.

The main benefit of paying for more iCloud storage is that nearly all of Apple's apps can seamlessly sync through it. Photos, productivity apps, Mail, Calendar, and anything you drop into your iCloud Drive folder in Finder on a Mac are immediately available across all your Apple devices. A significant number of iOS apps optionally back up and sync through iCloud, too.

If you use non-Mac computers or non-iOS mobile devices from time to time, Apple provides a full suite of web apps at [iCloud.com](#), but they're sort of mediocre. Apple also provides an iCloud Windows app that syncs data and integrates your iCloud mail with common Windows apps like Outlook, but there are no native productivity apps for Windows or Android: If you want to edit a Pages document, you have to use the web interface.

We like using iCloud, but we also pay for it. Most decent cloud services require you to pay a small fee.

If you're a heavy Apple user, you might consider the Apple One service bundle. It's much more than a cloud storage solution, and thus beyond the scope of this article, but the value offered may tip the scales in iCloud's favor for you.

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## **Google Drive – King of Cloud**

Price When Reviewed: Free (15GB), \$1.99 (100GB), \$2.99 (200GB), \$9.99 (2TB) a month. If you don't see the 200GB deal select 100GB and upgrade from that.

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While the idea of using Google's tools on Apple hardware may make some squirm, it's deep integration with Google Docs, Sheets, and other popular Google tools means it's never been easier to share a document with a colleague, collect feedback, and make amendments.

Google's system, alongside Dropbox and OneDrive, is arguably one of the most common file-sharing options. It's much more prevalent than, say, iCloud Drive, making it much more useful across multiple platforms.

If your workflows and job require any degree of rapid sharing of files back and forth, it's a perfect fit. Outside of work, Google Photos may also appeal as a nice backup option to have, but it'll start to eat into your storage pretty quickly.

That said, Google Drive does come with a whopping 15GB of free storage – that's triple what Apple offers for free on iCloud Drive. 15GB is plenty generous, but you can enjoy 100GB for just \$1.99/£1.59 a month, 200GB for \$2.99/£2.49, and 2TB for \$9.99/£7.99 per month. There's even a massive 30TB for \$150 a month.

You can use Google Drive on Mac through a dedicated app, or via the web interface.

Whether you're on Mac, iPhone, iPad, or just about any other platform, Google Drive remains the best option around.

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## **Microsoft OneDrive – Cloud storage home workers**

Price When Reviewed: Free (5GB), \$1.99 (100GB), \$6.99 (1TB) a month

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If you need a cloud plan for a family or small team, and you're already leaning on Microsoft's Office apps, then OneDrive is a great option.

One of the best parts of OneDrive is that it opens up the Office ecosystem, both for Mac and iPhone or iPad. With access to Microsoft mainstays like Word, Excel, and with those apps using OneDrive to sync across platforms, it's got potential for the workplace – or for families with kids working on school projects.

If you're not keen on Google Docs or Sheets, or Apple's Pages and Numbers, having Word and Excel documents spread across your devices could be a huge boon.

The 5GB base storage is painfully low for free users (although still better than Dropbox's 2GB). Microsoft clearly wants to nudge you to one of its paid plans. You can spend \$99.99/£79.99 per year to get access to Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook and more, with 1TB storage per person for up to six people (6TB total). Alternatively, the Microsoft 365 Personal version with 1TB storage costs \$69.99/£59.99 a year, and Microsoft 365 Basic is \$19.99/£19.99 a year for 100GB cloud storage.

Whichever option you go for, OneDrive is a model citizen when it comes to macOS. The app is lightweight and sits in Finder for you to drag and drop as you see fit.

While it's not as intuitive as Google Drive, if you're using Microsoft Office to any degree you'll find a lot to like.

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## **IDrive – Online backup**

Price When Reviewed: Basic: Free; IDrive Mini: \$2.95 (100GB) | \$9.95 (500GB) a year; IDrive Personal: \$69.65 (5TB) a year

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IDrive is another online backup service. However, it differs from both Backblaze and Carbonite in a number of ways.

Firstly, it has a free tier – you can back up 5GB without paying anything. After that, though, it's more expensive than either of its competitors featured here.

Currently, the annual charge for the Personal tier is \$59.62 (approx £46) for the first year and \$79.50/year (approx £61) after that, but that only allows you to backup 5TB of data, while Backblaze and Carbonite allow unlimited data. However, that 5TB can be spread across multiple computers, whereas Backblaze and Carbonite limit you to one computer.

Also, if you prefer to restore by having data physically shipped to you, IDrive provides that for free for the first restore each year – though if you're outside the US you'll have to pay for the shipping.

Like Backblaze, IDrive also allows you to back up external hard drives. Even with external drives backing up, it's unlikely most people will breach the 5TB limit – bearing in mind that you're not backing up applications or system files.

Features like Rewind and Snapshots allow you to restore from earlier versions of files or snapshots of the complete data set. And all data is encrypted, with the option to set your own private encryption key.

IDrive's user interface makes using it very straightforward. Your Desktop, Documents, Music and Pictures folders are automatically selected for backup, along with the contents of ~/Library/Mail.

To add other folders, click 'Change' at the bottom of the window – that's not exactly intuitive. You can add videos to the backup, but locating them in IDrive's interface takes a great deal of doing.

Both scheduling and restoring are straightforward, however. As is choosing a local drive as the destination for a backup in place of IDrive's servers.

IDrive's free tier and the ability to spread your data allocation in the paid tiers across multiple computers makes it attractive. Overall, though, it's expensive for a single machine.

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### **Box – Best for businesses**

Price When Reviewed: Free (10GB, limited to 250MB files), \$14 (100GB) a month

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One of the best cloud storage options for businesses, Box, has a whole host of excellent tools and is probably the most slick and well-supported cloud-based storage service we've tested, but it might go beyond a general consumer's needs.

Box's incorporates a host of security options, API calls, and over 1,500 integrations across office mainstays like Slack, Google Workspace, Microsoft Office apps and Zoom, so it's an easy pick for anyone looking for a "plug-and-play" solution for file-sharing across larger teams.

It's essentially a menu bar app that can pop out into a handy search bar to trawl through anything inside your Box folder, which will also appear in your Finder sidebar. A keyboard shortcut brings up the search bar, so Box is always just a keypress away.

There's a note section that syncs across devices and a document signing tool that's very handy if you're exchanging a lot of contracts.

It's secure, too, with encryption standard across all plans and end-to-end encryption offered via Box KeySafe so users can issue their own encryption keys.

The web app is fast and stable (unlike some rivals) making shifting files between folders when away from the Mac much simpler.

Box offers a very generous free plan offering 10GB of storage and a 250MB file upload limit, but the next tier up is \$14/£11 monthly for individuals (\$10/£8 per month if you pay annually), which is a steep increase compared to the likes of Google Drive.

Box nails just about anything you could want from a cloud storage service in 2025. It's fast, secure, and gets out of the way when you need it to, making it an easy pick for businesses.

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## **Backblaze – A good solution for offsite backup**

Price When Reviewed: \$99 a year, \$9 a month

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Offerings like OneDrive, Google Drive, and even Apple's own iCloud Drive offer a cloud-based storage area that can also be used to share files between users, usually with a link to a specific spot.

Others, like Backblaze a storage service in the strictest term – it takes your data, ferries it off-site, and backs up your Mac to its servers. It's not for quickly sharing a document or collaborating on a piece of work, it's for recovering data you may lose if something happens to your local machine. While you could share a file with Backblaze, doing so requires using Backblaze's separate B2 Cloud Storage service which, admittedly, comes with flexible, pay-as-you-go options.

Backblaze backs up the contents of your Documents, Pictures, Movies and Music folders, but excludes your Applications folder. You can view and share backed up files on an iPhone or iPad with the Backblaze mobile app.

Backups are incremental so only files that have changed since it last ran are copied. Backups are encrypted and kept for 30 days.

When it comes to restoring your data you can restore via Backblaze's web interface or you can have files sent to you on a USB stick or hard drive for an additional (refundable) fee.

A Find My-like Locate your Computer service tracks your Mac's location to help you find it if it's stolen. The Mac can tell you its current IP address and show you recently backed-up data.

If you need an offsite back up of your Mac, Backblaze's simplicity and price give it the edge over Carbonite and IDrive.

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## **pCloud – Budget-friendly cloud storage**

Price When Reviewed: Free (10GB), \$4.99 (500GB), \$9.99 (2TB) a month

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pCloud might not be as familiar a name as some of the others on this list, but trust us, it's one you should definitely learn.

The service handles all kinds of files with ease and uses 256-bit AES encryption to ensure that they remain safe while online. The basic tier comes with 10GB of free storage, albeit with the need to unlock 3GB of this via a few tasks, such as informing friend about the joys of pCloud. To be honest, this is not much of a drag, as your friends will probably thank you in the long run.

There are no pesky file size restrictions, and 30-day versioning is standard, so if you accidentally delete a file you'll be able to recover it even after a few weeks.

If 10GB isn't enough then you can move to 500GB for \$4.99/£4.99 p/m (\$49.99/£49.99 a year right now) or there's 2TB available for \$9.99/£9.99 (\$99.99/£99.99 a year right now).

Like pretty much all the services in this roundup, there's a free trial available that lets you see if the service fits your needs. We recommend you give each one a spin, and if you don't mind a bit of file juggling then you might find that using the combined free tiers of all of them gives you enough storage for all your data needs.

## **Dropbox – the original cloud syncing service**

Price When Reviewed: Free (2GB), \$9.99 a month for a year (2TB, \$119.88 paid up front), \$11.99 a month (2TB, paid monthly)

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No discussion of cloud storage solutions would be complete without discussing the company that popularized consumer cloud syncing: [Dropbox](#). Dropbox is the app that kickstarted the cloud storage arms race, but in recent years it has been usurped somewhat.

A stalwart for many modern workflows, Dropbox remains a reliable way to sync data and files to the cloud, but it gets harder to recommend if you are looking to share files

with others, as a backup solution, or as a means to access your content from wherever you are.

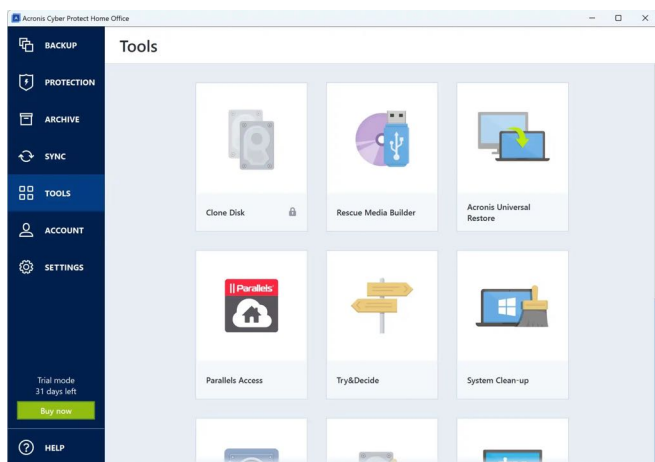
It just doesn't offer any must-have features and rivals have much more generous free tiers. The paltry 2GB starting offering is way behind Google's 15GB. The next tier up is 2TB for \$11.99/£9.99 per month (billed monthly), or \$9.99/£7.99 a month if you pay for a year upfront. It's a big leap with no options in between.

There is some good. Dropbox offer a sizeable drop-down window so you can see more information about recently uploaded and updated files, compared to the basic menu bar apps of the competition. Features like PDF signing are useful additions.

Unfortunately, Dropbox just doesn't feel as straightforward to use as many other cloud storage services.

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## Acronis Cyber Protect Home Office



Price When Reviewed: From \$49.99 a year 1 Mac, no cloud storage; Advanced: \$57.99 a year, 1 Mac 50GB cloud storage; Premium: \$124.99 a year, 1 Mac, 1TB cloud storage

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*Note December 2024: This review is of Acronis Cyber Protect Home Office, which was previously known as True Image. The latest version of the service reverts to the old name: True Image. We are in the*

*process of reviewing the new version of the software.*

Cyber Protect Home Office is a personal backup solution that supports backing up your data to a local disk, to Acronis' cloud-based service, or to a network-attached storage device. The latter makes it a good option for anyone with a NAS that doesn't support Apple's Time Machine.

You'll need to set up an account with Acronis to use it, but you can give it a spin without signing up for its paid-for service or even providing payment details, by using the free trial to back up to a local drive or network disk.

If backing up files is one part of the data protection equation, then the other is protecting those files, wherever they reside, from cyber-attack, and that's what

Cyber Protect Home Office was designed to do. It will scan existing data for malware, monitor files you interact with online, detect ransomware and cryptojacking attacks, and perform assessments of the vulnerability of your data to being compromised.

In addition to the security features, Cyber Protect Home Office allows you to backup Office 365 files to Acronis Cloud, clone your startup disk (either a bootable clone or a compressed image), and synchronise files locally or with cloud storage. It also allows you to create what it calls a Survival Kit – a bootable disk with all your system, or a partition, and file backup.

Cyber Protect Home Office is very straightforward to use. Its interface is about as straightforward and friendly as they come. The first time you open it, your Mac is selected as the source. Click the Destination button to choose whether to back up to Acronis Cloud, a local drive or a NAS box.

If you don't want to create an image of your entire Mac, click on the source box to choose files and folders to back up. From here, you can also back up external disks, a mobile device to your Mac, or your social media accounts to Acronis Cloud.

Click on the settings icon and you can schedule regular backups, exclude files, encrypt backups or delete old backups.

Pricing starts at \$49.99/£42.99 per year per computer, but that doesn't include cloud storage. If you want to use Acronis Cloud, you'll pay a yearly subscription ranging from for Advanced cover at \$57.99/£62.99 for one computer and just 50 GB of cloud storage to \$124.99/£106.99 for Premium cover for one computer with 1TB storage. Additional storage costs around £30/\$30/year/TB.

Acronis Cyber Protect Home Office combines the best of local and online backup tools and offers lots of other features, such as protection from malware and other online threats. It's not cheap, and the removal of the one-off payment option makes it more expensive to get started. However, it's comprehensive, easy to use and well-worth considering.

## **Carbonite Safe**

Price When Reviewed: \$71.99 per year (Basic)

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Carbonite is very similar to Backblaze in that it allows you to back up your Mac to remote servers and recover files when you need to. Like Backblaze, you sign up for an account and download a Mac application, and it automatically selects files to download.

Also like Backblaze, Carbonite doesn't back up applications or system files. One key difference is that Carbonite's basic plan doesn't automatically back up the contents of your Movies folder either – although you can select videos manually to be backed up. Neither does Carbonite back up the contents of external drives.

Files are protected with 128-bit encryption, but there's no option to add your own password.

Restoring data is done online, using the Carbonite application – the option to ship media containing your data is only available within the US. And you can restore from any backup run within the last 30 days, allowing you to roll back to earlier versions of files.

The Carbonite mobile app allows you to view and download files to an iPhone or iPad.

Carbonite is very simple to use. In fact, it almost feels too simple. Download the app, install it and launch it, and Carbonite starts backing up your Documents and Pictures folders straight away.

In the left-hand sidebar, there's a list of volumes and the main user folders (Desktop, Documents, Pictures, Movies and Music). By clicking on those you can select files to be backed up or excluded.

Restoring files is just as easy. If you want to restore a complete backup, click the Restore option in the sidebar and choose whether to download files to a folder or put them back where they were originally.

To restore individual files and folders, navigate to them using the folders in the sidebar and choose the download option.

Carbonite, at the time of writing starts at \$71.99 (approx £55) per year for a single computer. If you want to back up external drives and back up videos automatically, that jumps to \$111.99 (approx £86). That makes it expensive compared to its nearest competitors.

## Cloud storage for Mac: Prices compared

The cloud storage option you should choose depends largely on how much you're willing to pay. If you want free space, Google crushes the competition with 15GB—Microsoft and Apple both need to up their game. The 100GB for \$1.99 level is a good deal for most people and equals the capacity Microsoft gives you with OneDrive.

Apple's iCloud gives you 200GB for \$2.99, which is the minimum you're going to have to spend if you plan to back up iOS devices to the cloud along with photos and videos. Google matches Apple's price and storage at this level. There's a \$0.99 tier below that, but even 50GB will fill up fast when you're backing up your iPhone and all its photos and videos.

If you want to spend ten bucks a month, you'll get 2TB from either Google or Apple, but Microsoft will give you *six accounts* with 1TB each, *plus* Office apps. That's a sweet deal.

Dropbox's 2GB is the worst free tier, and its cheapest paid tier is \$11.99 a month and doesn't even include all of Dropbox's features.

Tier	iCloud	Google One	Microsoft One	Box	pCloud	DropBox
Free	5GB	15GB	5GB	10GB	10GB	2GB
50GB	99c / 99p					
100GB		\$1.99 / £1.59	\$1.99 / £1.99	\$4.50 / £5.50		
200GB	\$2.99 / £2.99	\$2.99 / £2.49				
500GB					\$4.99 / £4.99	
1TB			\$6.99 / £5.99			
2TB	\$9.99 / £9.99	\$9.99 / £7.99			\$9.99 / £9.99	\$9.99 / £7.99

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