

Smart home starter pack: Top 5 devices you need

Looking to start building out a smart home setup? We've got all the best products and devices you'll need for a smart home setup this holiday season.

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These days, it's easy to automate your entire life: You can buy a car that can drive and park itself, a [smartwatch](#) that can [detect if you've fallen](#) and call for help, and a [robot vacuum](#) that can map out where your home needs a sweep. And thanks to [smart home](#) setups, you can even automate your [lights](#), the [temperature](#), and even how you get your news.

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Maria Diaz

As a tech reporter, I'm a little ashamed to admit I do not have a [smart home automation system](#). If you're like me -- someone who could benefit from the luxuries and ease of a smart home, but isn't quite sure where to start -- I set out to create a guide that

can help us all take the plunge into the smart home world.

Also: [The best smart home devices \(and how they can make your life easier\)](#)

And, if you are wondering why you should even take that step or why you'd need a smart home setup, ZDNET's resident smart home guru, Maria Diaz, has the answer.

"Setting up a smart home sounds intimidating, but it's much easier than most think, and the added convenience of using smart devices is enough to make it worth it," Diaz said. "The great thing about smart home products is that there's something for everyone, no matter what phone they have or what voice assistant they prefer."

I've rounded up everything you need to start building out your smart home from scratch--whether it's smart speakers, smart lights, smart locks, or a smart thermostat.

A smart speaker

The [best smart speakers](#) are a smart staple, with a ton of abilities like playing music, setting reminders, making phone calls, answering questions, and acting as a control hub for other smart devices via voice command capabilities. Here are a few of our favorites.

The Amazon Echo speaker is a great smart speaker with Amazon Alexa voice assistant capabilities, but it can also act as a smart hub. Through Zigbee and [Matter integration](#), it can work as a smart home hub to connect to other compatible smart home

devices like light bulbs, a doorbell, and more so you simply have to ask Alexa to turn on the living room lights.

Also: [Echo Pop vs Echo Dot: Which Amazon Alexa smart speaker should you choose?](#)

The speaker can also connect to several available services, like Sirius XM, Spotify, and Fire TV devices. Of course, you can also simply ask it questions like "What's the weather today?" or set yourself reminders like "Add toilet paper to the grocery list."

A video doorbell

One of the most subtle yet effective smart home measures you can add to your home is a video doorbell, as they provide insight into who -- or what -- is at the door without you ever leaving your couch. Our top picks for the [best video doorbells](#) have HD video and motion detection and connect to a mobile app as well as other smart home devices, so you can ask Alexa, "Who is at the door?"

This video doorbell has two useful cameras: One camera gives you the traditional visibility of who's at your front door, and another is pointed downwards to let you know when a package has been delivered. It can also correctly determine what motion is a person, animal, vehicle, or just the wind, with very few false alerts.

Read the review: [This no-fee video doorbell can guard your packages](#)

Although the doorbell comes with 8GB of built-in local storage

(enough for up to 60 days of event recordings), you need to add a Eufy Security HomeBase to get the most out of it.

A smart lock

Another way to protect the entryways of your home is to install a smart lock. Today's [top smart locks](#) use fingerprint technology and customizable key combinations, making it easier to go keyless and say goodbye to the day of forgetting your overcrowded keychain.

The Yale Assure Lock 2 has a sleek and attractive design fit to match any household style. It features a touchscreen keypad that you can set up with different codes--everyone from your in-laws to your dog walker. The lock also can be set up with auto-lock, so you have peace of mind that you didn't forget to lock the door.

With the Wi-Fi module, it works with Amazon Alexa, Google Assistant, and Apple HomeKit, and you can even use your Apple Watch to unlock your door.

Read the review: [Yale Assure Lock 2 review: A genius lock... once you get it installed](#)

Smart lights

Ever dream of having those old clapper lights? Smart lights function in a similar but tech-savvier way. The [best smart lights](#) let you set lighting schedules throughout the day based on when you need light the most, as well as create cool and ambient lighting effects to match a room's vibe and purpose.

Philips may be the biggest name in the smart light game--and for good reason. The brand has a reputation in creating reliable, easy-to-use, and customizable smart lights. You can enjoy up to 16 million different colors (including 50,000 shades of natural white light) as well as dimming capabilities to instantly change the mood in the room with just a tap of your phone.

While you'll need a Philips Hue Hub to enjoy most of the smart perks and automations, one single hub can manage up to 50 Philips Hue bulbs, and is compatible with IFTTT, Alexa, HomeKit, SmartThings, and Google Assistant.

Also: [The best Philips Hue smart lights you can buy](#)

A smart thermostat

Another way to add smart home tech into your home is a smart thermostat, a device that can actually save you money on your electric bills -- [one study](#) showing about \$50 per year in savings. By creating automated schedules, the [best smart thermostats](#) adjust themselves to your climate schedule and offer voice control with geofencing technology.

This smart thermostat from Google actually learns your habits and adjusts itself accordingly to match your preferred schedule. It has a wide range of compatibility, even with homes that are old with outdated heating and cooling systems.

An app lets you control the thermostat from anywhere in your home, and you can also receive alerts and notifications through it. Look for the Nest Leaf to know when your chosen temperature

is energy efficient.

Read the review: [Google Nest Learning Thermostat review: Can new tech work in an old house? We've got answers](#)

You might also need...

Smart speakers, video doorbells, smart lights, and thermostats are some of our favorite smart home staples, but there are other options you and your home could benefit from. Check out our picks for smart plugs, displays, robot vacuums, and more.

[Kasa Smart Plug Duo](#)

[View now at Target](#)

[Sony A95L 65-inch Google Smart TV](#)

[\\$2,998 at Amazon](#)

[Samsung SmartThings Station](#)

[\\$107 at Amazon](#)

[Amazon Echo Show 8](#)

[\\$129.99 at Amazon](#)

[Whisker Litter-Robot 4](#)

[View now at Whisker](#)

[iRobot Roomba S9+](#)

[View now at Best Buy](#)

[Serena Smart Shades](#)

[View now at Home Depot](#)

Do I need a smart home hub?

While having a [smart home hub](#) is nice for connecting multiple devices, it isn't always necessary. Diaz said that if you have little devices like motion sensors for a security system or smart bulbs, they're typically not able to connect to W-Fi on their own, so they will need a hub to connect to.

You don't always need to go out of your way to buy a hub, either. For example, the Amazon Echo 4th generation is already a hub for smart home devices, so be sure to check if the device you want or have can double as a hub.

How much does a smart home cost?

The cost of a smart home depends if you want one single device, or are looking to incorporate many devices in your home. If you want just a doorbell or a smart speaker, for example, you'll pay about \$100. However, entire systems can cost you in the hundreds, and also depend on how big your home is and what products/brands you choose.

Can you mix and match smart home devices?

Nowadays, many smart home products are compatible with

different hubs and/or smart assistants. When building out your smart home, it's a good idea to choose which smart assistant/brand you want to use and stick with it so it's easier for you to keep track of and control.

What are Zigbee and Matter integration?

Zigbee and Matter are two wireless technologies that allow different kinds and brands of smart home devices to connect within a single smart home automation system. Each acts as a way to connect smaller devices to a larger system.

When can I find smart home deals?

The best time to find deals on all things smart home is during the Black Friday/Cyber Monday shopping weekend. This year, Black Friday kicks off on Friday, Nov. 29, with Cyber Monday happening Dec. 2 for exclusive online deals.

Also: [The best Black Friday security camera deals](#)

In the past, we've seen up to 50% discounts on Ring, Blink, iRobot, Arlo, Philips, and other smart home brands during Black Friday sales.