

## Smart Devices

We have been waiting for years ever since the "Jetsons" house. They are changing our lives for the better with prices dropping and features added all the time. A smart device is an electronic device that connects to other devices or networks to create the Internet of Things (IOT). Setting up a lamp to turn on and off at your command is simple and relatively inexpensive, but others, like surveillance systems, can require a serious investment of time, money, and monthly subscription. Over 90% of people in the US have at least one smart device.

### Before You Buy

Devices come with their own app to setup, but if you want to smarten them up it takes planning on what devices to buy and how to connect. Some devices only operate by themselves while others interact with multiple manufacturers.

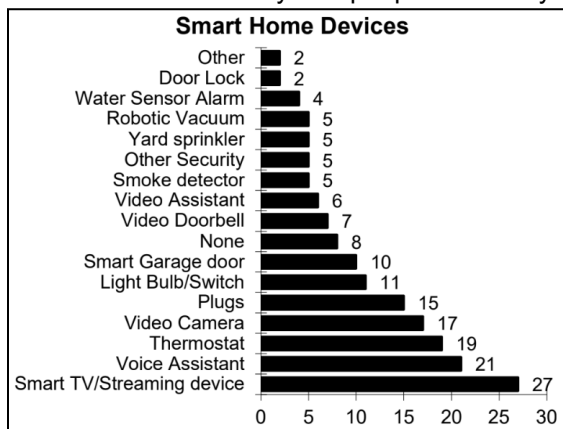
- Most devices work with assistants like Amazon's Alexa, Google Assistant, or Apple's Siri. The assistants can be used to turn your lights on and off, view camera video, control TV, change thermostat temp, open doors, and many other tasks. A single command can trigger multiple tasks on multiple devices.
- Most people setup the devices themselves while others hire professional installation.
- Some devices require a monthly fee like video storage, cell phone connection, or monitoring.
- Power (plug in, battery, rechargeable, solar).

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Prices continue to come down to as low as \$5 and new devices are added all the time. Consider buying a smart device when an old "dumb" device dies. Search the Internet for the latest devices, features, and prices.

- Smartphone - The most common smart device with 90% of people in the US owning one.
- Car - Come standard with multiple smart systems to connect to your phone, log errors, safe driving alerts, etc.
- Smart TV & TV boxes (Roko etc.)
  - Apps for paid live or on demand streaming services like Netflix, Hulu Plus, HBO Max, AT&T TV, Disney+, and many others. Also, free ad supported free streaming services like Peacock, PlutoTV, Tubi, and Crackle.
  - Apps to stream music and podcasts like Spotify, Pandora, YouTube Music, and Apple Music.
  - Apps for social media like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram.
  - Apps to video Chat like Skype, Teams, FaceTime, or Zoom through the TV.
  - Mirror/share pictures/video from a smartphone/tablet on the TV like Google Chromecast or Apple AirPlay.
  - Web browser. Browsing can be challenging unless you add on a wireless keyboard or voice.
  - Voice or video assistant built into the TV, like Amazon Alexa and Google Assistant. Usually with a mike in the remote and/or a mike/camera built into the TV.
  - Control the TV using a voice or video assistant. Example: Power On, Mute, Volume Up, Change Channel, Playback (fast forward, rewind, pause, etc.), Change Input, and more.
  - On-screen universal search engine or guide. This will save you time when you're looking for a program but don't know which channels/apps offer it. Voice works best and is the easiest for input.
- Speaker/Voice Assistant - Amazon Alexa, Google Now, or Apple Siri. Play music, radio, podcasts, answer questions, order anything, weather, time, create a shopping to-do list, set alarms & reminders, connect to other smart products in your home, phone calls, send messages, and thousands of other tasks. Prices \$20-\$300. Monthly subscription for Care Hub and professional monitoring services.
  - I have 7 Amazon dots, I paid \$1 to \$25 ea in my house. I also put one in my Dad's apartment. I use it to turn on lights, heater to turn on for time and turn off, TV on and mute, my calendar, grocery list, my parents as a pill reminder three times a day, radio, music, questions, time/date, weather, sports scores, and much more. My dad can "Call for Help" that calls my cell phone number and sends an emergency text to me.
- Display/Video Assistant – Everything voice assistants can do plus video calls, stream TV, security camera view/notifications, screens 5"-12", camera follows sound, touchscreen, and more. Amazon Echo Show \$49, Google Nest Hub \$229, Facebook Portal \$200, and many others. Can act like a tablet, but is not exactly a tablet. Prices \$50-\$300
  - I have an Echo Show 5" and put one in my Dad's apartment. I can drop in any time on my dad to talk for check on him. View my home security cameras, family photo slideshow, and much more.
  - My sister has a Facebook Portal for video chats with grandchildren that works great.
- Light Bulb – On/off remote, schedule, dimming, brightening, color change, group lights, outdoor, and more. Smart bulbs will not work well with most old light switches (dimmer or standard). Price \$6-\$30.
  - I use a smart plug for my lights. Cnet rated the \$8 Wyze bulb the best value. Works with Alexa, Google and IFTTT, and doesn't need a hub. The app includes useful features like scenes, shortcuts and a vacation mode. It doesn't - dim down quite as low as others, support Siri, or schedule sunrise or sunset.

- Electric Plug - The simplest smart device to setup. Plug into an electrical outlet, then plug something into it and you can use an app or voice commands to turn that device on and off. Indoor or outdoor, on/off remote, schedule, countdown, manual on/off button, track energy consumption, outdoor use, size of unit (mini to large), USB charger included, etc. Price \$5-\$30.
  - I use EufyHome for several lights using voice and schedule. Does not support sundown or sunrise in timer, so I created an Amazon Alexa "Routine" to turn it on 30 minutes before sundown. I use one to turn a heater timer on for X minutes then off. The EufyHome shows energy consumption. I use 6 Menards Feit plugs for Christmas lights indoor and outdoor. Wyze plug two-pack \$15 does the basics well.
- Video Camera – Indoor or outdoor, cloud vs local storage, security/notifications, sound, movement, face recognition, night vision, quality (1K, 2K, 4K), zoom, pan, 2 way audio, time lapse, or power (plug, battery, solar). Monitor doors, kids, pets, parents, etc. Price \$20-\$400 plus monthly cloud storage and features if needed.
  - I have had 4 Wyze \$20 cameras for over 8 years. I get notifications of people and movements. I get false notifications from snow, rain, bugs, cats, raccoons, rabbits, etc. You can customize what notifications you see. I can view a live feed at any time online. Wyze provides free storage of 12 second notification clips for the last two weeks. Advanced features and storage starts at \$2 a month per camera. I use a micro SD card for local storage that I can view at any time online for free. I put a Wyze camera in my Dads living room apartment to do safety checks and notifications. PC Mag review of Wyze Cam v3 - This weather-resistant camera stands out with solid performance, color night vision, and an extremely low price. The main limitation is 1080p (1K) resolution falls short of the ultra-sharp 2k or 4k offered by some pricier units. Price: \$35.
- Thermostat – Control the temp remotely, schedule, learn routine, built-in assistant, geofencing, track energy consumption, motion occupancy sensors, humidity sensors, reminders for maintenance, remote room sensors, etc. Furnace features must match device compatibility. Price \$70-\$300. I don't use one. My furnace does not have a "C-wire" power source required by most thermostats.
- Door Lock – Open/close remotely, camera, geofencing, touchpad, notifications, voice activation, auto-lock, etc. Price \$100-\$300. I do not use one, I have an older electronic code lock.
- Video Doorbell – Camera, 2 way voice, cloud storage, notifications, night vision, power battery vs doorbell wire, motion zones, face recognition, etc. Price \$80-\$300 plus cloud storage costs. I do not use one, I have a camera facing my door.
- Security Kits - Motion, leak/water detector, smoke/fire, panic button, sirens, base station, keypad or touch-screen panel, contact sensors for doors and windows, etc. Self or professional monitor \$10-\$50 a month. I do not use.
- Outdoor lights - Floodlights, pathway, spotlights, and step lights. Motion detection security, camera integration, on/off schedule,
- Tracking devices - Tile, Apple AirTags. Use to find or track whatever you put them on. Price \$20-\$50. St Farm Drive & Save, I save \$400 a year on car insurance.
- Other - Robot vacuum, garage door, watches, washing machine, refrigerator, oven, appliances, water leak detector, window shades, pet feeders, grill, cooking, vacuum, sprinkler system, bed, scale, gym equipment, Xcel Ting, and thousands of others.
- Results 3M PCC Survey - 46 people what they own:



**Additional Links and Information**

See past meetings on Smart TV, Voice & Video Assistants, AI, Cars.  
 Carondelet Tech Help Resources: <https://carondeletvillage.org/tech-help-resources/>  
 Questions or comments can be sent to: [TCKreuzer@gmail.com](mailto:TCKreuzer@gmail.com)