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Ted Lasso, Mosquito Coast, Mythic Quest: WTF is Apple TV Plus?

Its shows have big stars and big budgets -- but what is Apple TV Plus? Here are the important things to know.



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Apple TV Plus launched Nov. 1, offering a yearlong free trial to people who purchased Apple gadgets.

Sarah Tew/CNET

Apple TV Plus is Apple's subscription video service to take on the likes of Netflix, Disney Plus and HBO Max -- but unlike them, it doesn't have a deep library for you to dive into. Instead, Apple TV Plus features original TV shows and movies -- and *only* original shows and movies. It has a relatively small -- but growing -- lineup of high-end originals, like Ted Lasso, Mythic Quest and The Mosquito Coast.

It's among the cheapest big-name services out there, but many people can unlock it free for as long as a year -- and for a lot of people, Apple TV Plus has been free as long as it's existed. Since launching in late

2019, Apple TV Plus has repeatedly extended its already extensive free trials for people who bought an Apple gadget. One analyst estimates that 62% of Apple TV Plus accounts are freeloading with a promotion. The latest extension to Apple TV Plus' free trials is set to end July 1.

With a reported budget of \$6 billion to rope in some of Hollywood's biggest stars, Apple TV Plus was the first to the battle lines in the so-called streaming wars, a period of more than a year when media giants and tech titans released a raft of new streaming services to take on Netflix. These battles -- pitting rookies like Apple TV Plus, HBO Max, Disney Plus and NBCUniversal's Peacock against heavyweights like Netflix and Amazon Prime Video -- have spurred huge corporations to pour billions of dollars into their ambition to shape the future of television. The wave of new services has supersized the selection of shows and movies you can stream, but it's also made streaming more complicated and, sometimes, more costly too.

Here's the most important things to know.

Wait, where do I get these shows like Ted Lasso, Mosquito Coast and Mythic Quest?

Unlike Netflix and other subscription streaming services, Apple TV Plus doesn't have its own dedicated app. The Apple TV Plus programming resides inside Apple's TV app, which also serves as a hub to watch programming from other video subscriptions and to rent or buy movies and shows a la carte.

Some users can be (understandably) confused when the same app presents them with Apple TV Plus shows and movies, included in a subscription, alongside programming they need to rent or buy, all mashed together in the same interface. But the Apple TV app for iPhones, iPads and many streaming devices like Roku has a tab dedicated to Apple TV Plus originals.

However, if you want to watch on an Android phone, or any mobile device besides an iPhone or iPad, you'll have to watch on a web browser. The Apple TV app isn't available beyond iOS for mobile devices.

How much does Apple TV Plus cost?

Apple TV Plus costs \$5 a month, or \$50 for an annual subscription. By comparison, Disney Plus is \$8 a month, with a library of movies and shows that dwarfs Apples. And Netflix, the world's biggest subscription streaming service, prices its most popular plan at \$13 a month in the US; it offers other tiers at \$9 and \$16 a month.



Apple TV Plus talent gathers with CEO Tim Cook in the lobby of the Steve Jobs Theater.

Art Streiber/Apple

Apple is also including [Apple TV Plus](#) with its [Apple Music student-discount plan](#), now offering both streaming services in the \$5-a-month deal at no extra cost.

Apple TV Plus is also available as part of a discount bundle of services called [Apple One](#). Long expected since Apple began making subscription services a bigger strategy, Apple One ranges in price from \$15 to \$30 a month for different combinations of subscriptions. Apple TV Plus is included in all tiers of Apple One; depending on the tier, Apple One bundles may also include Apple Music, [Apple Arcade](#), Apple News Plus, storage service [iCloud](#) and the coming guided-workout service [Apple Fitness Plus](#). ([Disney Plus](#) had offered something similar by packaging that service with both [Hulu](#) and [ESPN Plus](#).)

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Does Apple TV Plus offer a free trial?

Apple TV Plus has a seven-day free trial standard for any new subscriber.

Apple TV Plus also offers an extended, one-year free trial to people who buy an iPhone, iPad, Apple TV, iPod Touch or Mac qualify. Though these free periods were supposed to last a single year, Apple has repeatedly extended the expiration. Some people who first started watching Apple TV Plus with the extended free trial have never paid for the service as long as Apple TV Plus has existed.



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For anyone whose free trial has been extended once or more, the deal is currently scheduled to end July 1 -- which happens to be two weeks *before* the second season premier of *Ted Lasso*, one of Apple's most popular shows, on July 23. Apple hasn't yet indicated whether it will kick the can down the road again with another extension.

The free-year offer applies to both new and refurbished models, including devices from the iPhone Upgrade Program, and it's not restricted to any specific sales channel, so it applies to both Apple Store purchases and those at resellers. It's available in all countries where Apple TV Plus is operating.

That one-free-year deal, though, has some terms that raised a few eyebrows. Your service is set to automatically renew at the end of the free period -- if you cancel it before the end of that term, the service will shut off for you immediately. You must wait until the day before the deal runs out to cancel or you forfeit any remaining free viewing time.

Free trials have long been the industry standard: Most streaming video services offer introductory free periods for new members, though that has begun to change for services like Netflix and Disney Plus, which no longer do. But Apple's one-year free period for gadget owners is atypically long. That tactic worked well for Apple Music -- Apple launched its music service with an extended, six-month free trial, and Apple Music quickly became the world's second most popular music service by subscribers behind only Spotify.

What shows and movies does it have?

Apple's shows run the gamut of drama, comedy, documentary -- even undefined deals with a single big star attached. It's also spending big to get top Hollywood names: Oprah Winfrey, Steven Spielberg and J.J. Abrams and other heavy hitters are on board. Apple also struck an exclusive deal with Alfonso Cuarón for the famed director's first television projects.

Since Apple TV Plus resides in Apple's TV app, you can check out the selection there before signing up. You can also browse the catalog through third-party services like Reelgood.

Apple's press site also rounds up all Apple TV Plus original titles, including some that have been announced but aren't released yet.

Apple planned to give theater runs to some of its films before streaming them on Apple TV Plus, but the coronavirus pandemic has halted nearly all theatrical releases for the time being.

Apple came under early scrutiny because of reports that it's restricting its creators from making edgy content and aiming to keep all its programming family friendly. Family friendly programming isn't necessarily a bar to success -- Disney built one of the reigning media empires on it -- but edgy shows have led other streaming services to


awards recognition that helps drive interest. Apple's strategy could crimp it competitively on that front.

How does Apple TV Plus compare with Netflix, Disney Plus and other subscription video services?

Apple TV Plus is a [subscription streaming service](#) to watch the company's original series and movies exclusively. Like Netflix, it doesn't have ads.

Unlike Netflix, it doesn't have a big library of licensed shows or movies, nor will it release full seasons of its shows all at once in a binge-able bunch (for the most part). Most Apple TV Plus series premiere a small cluster of episodes, often three, followed by one new episode every week. Full seasons of some series drop all at the same time, though.

Apple TV Plus is available in more than 100 countries and is also part of Apple's family-sharing feature, which allows you to add up to five family members to share a plan. Apple originals are available in 4K, HDR and Dolby Vision, and most titles also offer Dolby Atmos sound, according to this [Apple support page](#).

Watch this: Apple unveils new 4K Apple TV with A12 Bionic chip  4:41

How do I sign up?

Apple TV Plus is associated with Apple ID, which is the same log-in you'd use for iCloud or downloading apps from its App Store. If you don't already have an Apple ID, you can [create one here](#).

If you already have Apple's TV app on an iPhone, iPad or Apple TV, you simply need to open the app and navigate to any of the places where Apple is prominently promoting its original shows. On newly purchased iPhones, for example, the app already knows you've purchased a new gadget to qualify for the deal. Whether you're starting Apple TV Plus with a year free or just the standard one-week trial, the shows start playing in the app after a few taps.

You can also sign up and watch online with a web browser at the [Apple TV Plus site](#).

When did it launch?

Apple TV Plus launched Nov. 1, 2019, in more than 100 countries and regions.

The company said its originals will be subtitled or dubbed in nearly 40 languages, including closed captions for people who are hearing impaired, and Apple TV Plus series and movies will also be available with audio descriptions in eight languages.

What devices can stream Apple TV Plus?

Apple's programming is available on all its devices with the Apple TV app.

In addition, Apple TV Plus is available on some competitors' devices. Apple's TV app is available on Roku and Fire TV, two of the most widely used streaming devices in the US, and for

Reese Witherspoon (left) and Jennifer Aniston revealed the name of their Apple TV Plus series, The Morning Show, at Apple's event in March.

Claudia Cruz/CNET

smart TVs from Samsung and LG. You can watch it on Sony and Vizio smart TVs via AirPlay, and the TV app should be available for those smart TVs now.

Apple widened support for Apple TV Plus to game consoles in the fall. In October, Sony said its Playstation 5 would support Apple TV Plus at launch. A couple of weeks later, Microsoft said Apple TV Plus would be supported on the Xbox One, Xbox Series X and Xbox Series S.

Subscribers will also be able to watch Apple TV Plus on the web at tv.apple.com.

But the Apple TV app isn't available on any mobile devices except iPhones or iPads. That means Apple TV Plus subscribers with non-Apple phones -- meaning, the huge population of people with Android phones -- need to stream to their mobiles via the web, rather than in an app.

Apple is a gadget giant. Why does it want to become Netflix?

Apple is taking aim at original video because it could be a crucial enticement for people to buy more iPhones and other gadgets. You can't overstate the importance of the iPhone to Apple. The phone, one of the most popular in the world, still accounts for more than half its sales and was critical to Apple's march to become the first US company worth \$1 trillion.

Celebrities show off their new series on Apple TV Plus




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Apple quickly established its bona fides in subscriptions businesses with Apple Music. But the content on Apple Music is essentially the same as every other music service. They all have tens of millions of songs. Apple Music has been successful largely because of its presence on the iPhone, already in the pockets of millions of people. It hasn't been nearly as successful working the other direction, acting as a lure to buy the latest Apple gadget.

Original video from big-name stars and creators you can't watch anywhere else, however, could be different.

Apple clearly has a hunch it will be.

Apple reveals its streaming service 
by CNET

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