

# Fairphone 5 review: could this be the first phone to last 10 years?

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The Dutch smartphone company Fairphone has achieved something remarkable – a handset that could last a decade. The ethical pioneer, which leads the way in repairable devices, has just released the Fairphone 5. It is a thinner, lighter and more refined device compared with its predecessors and one that makes leaps and bounds in terms of longevity, repairability and quality. With a £649 (€699) price tag, it is more expensive than those before it but it offers up to 10 years of software support – unheard of in the smartphone industry and a significant step in addressing tech waste. The most noticeable upgrade in the new device is the screen, now a crisp OLED running at 90Hz for smooth scrolling and bright enough for most situations, though it struggles a bit in bright sunlight. The device feels solid and durable but looks a little dated compared with the most modern designs. It has IP55 water resistance, which means it can handle rain, spray or splashes just fine but not drops into a swimming pool. The stereo speakers are fine but cannot match an iPhone or Samsung. The vibration motor is fairly strong but sounds a bit hollow for keyboard taps and alerts. Call quality is good and you can use a nano and e-sim at the same time for two lines in one phone. Specifications Screen: 6.46in QHD+ OLED (460ppi) Processor: Qualcomm QCM6490 RAM: 8GB Storage: 256GB + microSD card slot Operating system: Fairphone OS based on Android 13 Camera: dual 50MP rear, 50MP selfie camera Connectivity: 5G, esim + nanosim, wifi6E, NFC, Bluetooth 5.2 and GPS Water resistance: IP55 (spray/splash) Dimensions: 161.6 x 75.83 x 9.6mm Weight: 212g Long-life chip and removable battery The latest Fairphone has an unusual chip at its heart. The Qualcomm QCM6490 is designed primarily for a wide range of commercial systems, not phones, but works just as well in the Fairphone, with roughly the same performance as a mid-range Snapdragon 782 phone chip from last year. That means it won't win any performance awards but it is faster than its predecessor, feels snappy for daily tasks and is capable of mild gaming. Its big advantage is long-term support, enabling at least five Android version updates and eight years of security updates, with Fairphone intending to stretch that to a full 10 years from release – something no other manufacturer offers, the best maxing out at about six to seven years. The Fairphone also has a microSD card slot so you can easily and cheaply add storage. Battery life is middle of the road, lasting about 36 hours between charges, including actively using the screen for more than five hours at 90Hz (the faster of two available speeds) and two hours spent on 5G. That means it will generally need charging every night or every other day for lighter usage. The battery takes 66 minutes to fully recharge using a 30W or greater power adaptor (not included), hitting 50% in 21 minutes. However, you can also swap the battery out in seconds, so it is possible to carry a spare if you need the phone to last longer. Sustainability Fairphone says the battery will maintain at least 80% of its original capacity for more than 1,000 full-

charge cycles and a replacement or spare costs £36. The Fairphone 5 has a five-year warranty. Users can repair the phone themselves with 10 modular spare parts available, requiring only a standard screwdriver to install. A replacement display costs £90, the back £22, while other components range between £18 and £62. Fairphone recycles the equivalent weight (212g) of electronics for each phone sold, making it e-waste neutral. It uses fair trade gold and silver, ethically sourced lithium and tungsten, and recycled aluminium, copper, indium, magnesium, nickel, plastic, rare earth elements, tin and zinc. The firm also tops up the pay of its contract manufacturing workers to a living wage. Fairphone OS The phone ships with standard Android 13 without unnecessary added elements, beyond a pre-loaded My Fairphone app for service and support. That means it is pretty fast in operation, but lacks the bells, whistles and extensive customisation options you might get on a Google or Samsung phone. It has full access to the Google Play store and Google's various services, so it doesn't want for apps, and should be familiar to anyone who has used an Android device in the last five years. With eight to 10 years of security updates, you will be able to safely use Android on the Fairphone for longer than any other device. But Fairphone also allows users to install another operating system should they want – such as Linux or other versions of Android – which may appeal to tinkerers or those looking to free themselves from Google services. Camera The phone has a pair of 50-megapixel cameras on the back and a 50MP selfie camera. The main camera is the best, shooting reasonable images in good light, but it can sometimes struggle with colour inconsistency compared with rivals. The ultrawide camera is decent but lacks detail, particularly around the edges of photos. Both struggle in low light, producing shots that can be bright enough but blurry and soft on detail. It is a similar story with the selfie camera, which captures solid images in good light but can be bleached out in bright or backlit conditions and struggles in low light. The phone has a macro photography mode using the ultrawide camera (which is fun), a pro mode with manual controls, slow mo video up to 240 frames a second and standard video up to 4K at 30 frames a second. But the camera is the weakest area of the Fairphone. It is possible to get good shots with it, but generally it can't match mainstream rivals with large leads in the software needed to get the best out of the hardware. Price The Fairphone 5 costs £649 (€699) and will be in store on 14 September across Europe. For comparison, the Fairphone 4 costs £479, the Nothing Phone 2 costs £579, the Google Pixel 7a costs £449, the Nokia G22 costs £139 and the iPhone 14 costs £849 Verdict The Fairphone 5 is another big step forward in addressing the waste of the smartphone industry, with the Dutch outfit showing other manufacturers that long-term support is possible. Up to 10 years of software updates is simply unheard of, gaining it an extra star. And the Fairphone is simple enough to repair that the hardware should be able to last just as long with an occasional quick and cheap battery swap. It also comes with a five-year warranty and is made with as many recycled and ethically sourced materials as possible. Other than a slightly bulkier design and plastic back, it doesn't look out of the ordinary. My main worry is how the chip at the heart of the Fairphone will fare: something that is fine now may be achingly slow in a decade. Only time will tell. The camera is also a weak point. It will be fine for the odd snap but simply cannot match even significantly cheaper mainstream competitors, which have a massive software advantage. The premium associated with buying the most ethical, repairable and long-lasting phone on the market is roughly £200 compared with direct rivals, which cost in the region of £450. Though if you factor in longevity and the low cost of repairs, the Fairphone is better value. The Fairphone 5 is an important device and great for those looking to support the company's ethical and repairable movement, as long as they are prepared accept compromises to do so. Pros: Eight to 10 years of software support, truly repairable at home, ethical manufacturing, recycled and sustainable materials, good screen, 5G, microSD card slot, removable battery, bloat-free, five-year warranty. Cons: mid-range performance, a bit chunky, expensive for the specs, average camera, cannot be submerged in water, software lacks bells and whistles, no headphone socket, fingerprint scanner hard to reach left-handed.