

Samsung Galaxy Z Fold 5 review: the most powerful folding phone-tablet

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Samsung's latest folding phone-tablet sets new standards for the most hi-tech of gadgets – and with it comes a very high price tag. The Galaxy Z Fold 5 is an important update for Samsung in the face of stiff new competition from the Google Pixel line. The new folder costs £1,749 (\$1,799.99/A\$2,599), making it £100 more than last year's excellent Fold 4 and the same eye-wateringly expensive price as Google's Fold. These bleeding-edge devices are best thought of as more than just phones. Samsung pitches the Fold 5 as full PC, tablet and phone you can fold up and put in your pocket, and it is certainly the most multitasking Android device you can buy. The design has been refined since last year's model, ditching the wedge shape and folding flat when closed owing to the same new hinge design as the Z Flip 5 – a big improvement. The device is thinner and 10g lighter than its predecessor, and the crease along the screen fold is less visible. It is still thicker than a regular phone, but it is only 13g heavier than an iPhone 14 Pro Max. It certainly feels less of a burden carried in the pocket and is significantly lighter than its key rival. The external 6.2in display is a little narrow, making the keyboard slightly cramped, but it is good-looking and works well enough for phone-related activities such as messaging, music and other quick things. For everything else, the 7.6in internal display remains a wonder to behold when unfolded. It is brighter than last year, which helps overcome glare outdoors. Samsung says a new design makes it 25% more durable than before, but like every other folding screen it is still softer than regular tablet glass so must be treated with care. Specifications Main screen: 7.6in QXGA+ 120Hz AMOLED flexible display Cover screen: 6.2in HD+ 120Hz AMOLED Processor: Qualcomm Snapdragon 8 Gen 2 RAM: 12GB of RAM Storage: 256, 512GB or 1TB Operating system: One UI 5.1 based on Android 13 Camera: 50MP wide, 12MP ultrawide, 10MP 3x telephoto; 10MP and 4MP selfie cameras Connectivity: 5G, dual sim, esim, USB-C, wifi 6E, NFC, Bluetooth 5.3, GNSS Water resistance: IPX8 (1.5 metres for 30 minutes) Dimensions folded: 154.9 x 67.1 x 13.4mm Dimensions unfolded: 154.9 x 129.9 x 6.1mm Weight: 253g Rapid and long-lasting The Fold 5 has Qualcomm's top Snapdragon 8 Gen 2 chip from the Galaxy S23 Ultra with 12GB of RAM, making it one of the most powerful Android devices you can buy. Unlike most other phones, you might actually use all the power – running eight apps on screen at the same time will require all it has to offer. The battery lasts about 48 hours between charges when using a mix of the outside and inside screens for about six hours. This is better than last year's model, much longer than the main competition and similar to the best regular phones. Sustainability Samsung does not provide an expected lifespan for the battery but it should last in excess of 500 full-charge cycles with at least 80% of its original capacity. The phone is generally repairable. Inside screen repairs cost £514, while the battery is replaceable by authorised service centres. Samsung offers a self-repair programme in the UK

and US, as well as Care+ accidental damage insurance that reduces the cost of repairs to £115. The Fold 5 is made from recycled aluminium, glass and plastic. Samsung offers trade-in and recycling schemes for old devices. The company publishes annual sustainability reports but not impact assessments for individual products. Powerful software With key competition from Google's Pixel Fold, software is Samsung's big differentiator. Samsung's One UI 5.1, based on Android 13, allows you to run three apps split screen at once, plus floating windows on top if you choose, which is a boon for productivity power users. The taskbar at the bottom of the screen makes it easy to put multiple apps on screen. The Fold 5 supports, but does not come with, Samsung's excellent S Pen stylus for drawing and note taking, something no other foldable can manage. Apps can also be forced to fill the screen, not relying on the letterboxing with black bars on either side, which some rivals demand. Some apps, such as Gmail or Kindle, still require you to rotate the Fold 5 into landscape orientation to enable their two-pane view, however. There are also many more options to pick how things work compared with the Pixel Fold. For instance, you can have a separate home screen layout for the outside and inside displays, so you can put phone-related apps on the small screen and tablet-related apps on the large one. You can also choose which apps remain open and appear on the small screen when you shut them on the main screen, handy for maps on the go. The new "Flex Mode" panel allows you to push an app to the top half of the screen when it is folded in an L-shape and is a definite improvement. For most video apps, it shows playback controls such as a progress bar and skip buttons at the bottom half with the video above. With other apps it can turn into a trackpad for a mouse cursor – a bit like a tiny laptop. Samsung's longstanding Dex mode, which produces a full Android desktop computer, can be used when the phone is plugged into a monitor, keyboard and mouse. For some, the Fold 5 could be the only computer they need. The foldable will receive at least five years of software updates from release, including four major Android version updates and monthly security patches. Camera The Fold 5 has five cameras in total, which are essentially the same as its predecessor. The combination is useful, with three good cameras on the back, a standard selfie camera in the outside screen and 4MP camera hidden under the folding screen, which is only good for video calls. The main cameras, including the 3x telephoto, shoot good images across a range of lighting conditions. The night mode is noticeably quicker than older models and the images are slightly sharper too. The Fold 5 still has plenty of tricks, such as shooting selfies with the main cameras and the ability to prop it up and capture hands-free photos and video. Overall, the cameras are good and about the same as those on Samsung's S23, but cannot match the Pixel Fold for best cameras on a foldable. Price The Samsung Galaxy Z Fold 5 starts at £1,749 (\$1,799.99/A\$2,599). For comparison, the Z Flip 5 costs £1,049, the S23 Ultra costs £1,249, the Google Pixel Fold costs £1,749 and the Honor Magic Vs costs £1,399.99. Verdict For its fifth generation, Samsung's folding phone-tablet is lighter, thinner, feels better built and is a more mature device than ever. The Z Fold 5 is still extremely expensive – the price you pay for the still cutting-edge technology that makes the folding screen work – and it must be treated with more care than a standard phone. But it is one of the fastest and most adaptable devices you can fit in your pocket, with long battery life and the best folding display on the market. Samsung's powerful software sets it apart, making it more productive and taking better advantage of the folding form even when apps are not specifically designed for it. The cameras cannot quite match the Google Pixel Fold and the thinner outer display makes the keyboard a bit more cramped for messaging. It is close, but overall the Fold 5 is the best folder you can buy, if you can stomach the wallet-emptying price. Pros: a phone and tablet in one, powerful multitasking abilities, phone-like outside screen, fantastic tablet screen, top performance, great battery life, water resistance, gap-free when closed and lighter. Cons: extremely expensive, more fragile than a regular device and costly to repair, no dust resistance, thicker than a normal phone, not a big leap over the previous generation.