

Apple TV Plus Review: Small Library but the Quality Is Topnotch

With high-quality original TV shows and movies, a low fee and no commercials, the company's star-studded streaming service is holding its own.

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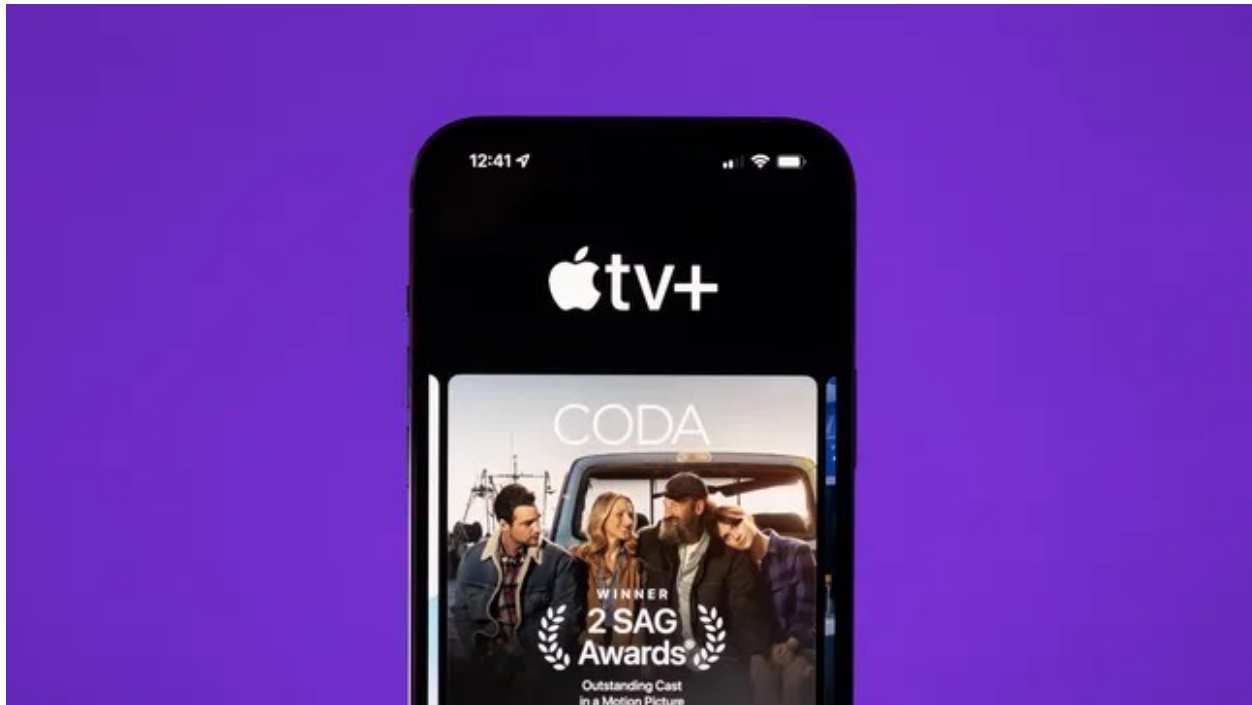
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Apple made its official entry into the streaming wars in November 2019. Apple TV Plus debuted weeks before Disney Plus, putting both streaming services in the competitive spotlight. At \$5 a month, Apple TV Plus is the lowest-priced premium, ad-free streaming platform around, but it still packs high-end features like 4K resolution, HDR and mobile downloads -- as well as some of Hollywood's biggest stars, such as Jennifer Aniston, Jason Momoa, Tom Hanks and Samuel L. Jackson.

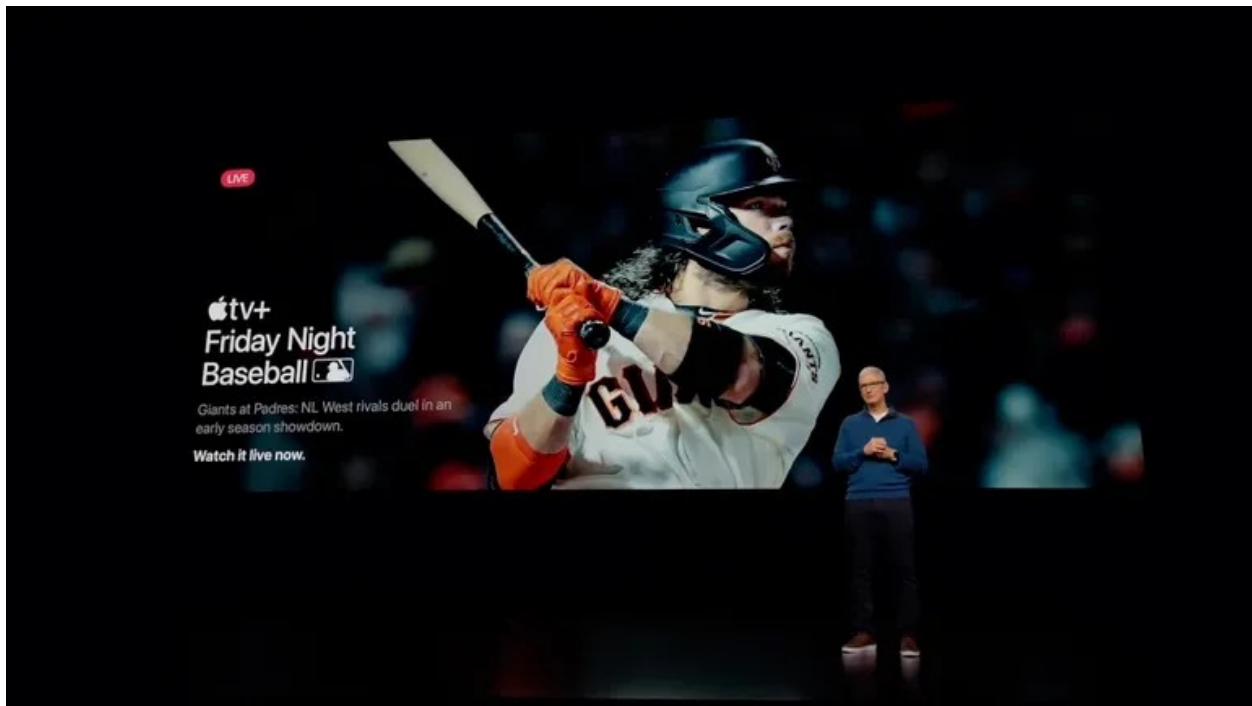
One of the youngest streamers in the game, Apple TV Plus produces high quality, award-winning content. Its feature film CODA earned an Oscar,

making it the first streaming service to win Best Picture. While the popular comedy show Ted Lasso has garnered multiple honors, other releases such as The Morning Show, Pachinko, The Tragedy of Macbeth and Severance showcase how Apple TV Plus invests in premium content.

The platform now has more than 60 original exclusive TV shows and movies and began streaming its first live sports events with Friday Night Baseball for Major League Baseball's 2022 season. But in some ways, the service is still an underdog. The number of titles on the streamer is tiny compared to Netflix, Disney Plus or HBO Max, in part because Apple TV Plus has almost no back catalog of shows and movies.

Whether the service is worth \$5 a month for you -- or less, depending on whether you get it for free with a new Apple device or a discount as part of Apple's Apple One bundle -- depends on how excited you are to watch those originals. Its biggest breakout hit so far has been Ted Lasso, the Jason Sudeikis dramedy about an American football coach who gets hired to coach an English Premier League soccer team. Shows like Mythic Quest, Severance and

Schmigadoon! have also garnered critical praise, but few have made cultural waves the way that, say, The Mandalorian did for Disney Plus.



All original content, nothing familiar to binge

Apple's current slate of original shows and movies includes comedies, dramas, documentaries and talk shows. At launch in 2019 it had only nine titles on the whole platform, with a strategy that seemed to be focused on keeping it small and high-quality. Its

marquee drama, *The Morning Show*, which stars Reese Witherspoon, Jennifer Aniston and Steve Carrell, had a huge, \$300 million reported budget.



For a while, that was the closest the platform had to a real breakout -- until *Ted Lasso* premiered in August 2020 and made the title character the world's midwestern sweetheart. Though Apple doesn't report viewership data, *Deadline* reported that *Ted Lasso* became the most-watched show on the platform in 2021 across all top 50 countries and that it greatly increased subscriptions. Other originals at launch included the postapocalyptic thriller *See* starring Jason Momoa, the alternative retelling of the space program *For All Mankind* and the Hailee Steinfeld-

starring comedy Dickinson about poet Emily Dickinson.

New additions include the sci-fi spectacle Foundation, book adaptation The Last Days of Ptolemy Gray, historical drama Pachinko and the genre-bending series Severance. You'll find a few selections for kids, like Snoopy in Space, Luck, Amber Brown, and Hello, Jack! The Kindness Show but the catalog is definitely more adult-oriented.

Though you won't find a treasure trove of blockbuster films on the service, Apple Original Films partners with the studio A24 for theatrical and streaming productions. For example, The Tragedy of Macbeth debuted in movie theaters in December 2021 and landed on Apple TV Plus the following January. During Apple's Peek Performance event in March, the company announced a slate of new upcoming films and series. Viewers can soon watch Killers of the Flower Moon from Leonardo DiCaprio and Martin Scorsese; the star-studded Argylle, featuring Henry Cavill, Dua Lipa and Samuel L. Jackson; and the Christmas comedy Spirited, starring Will Ferrell and Ryan Reynolds.

Most Apple TV Plus series initially premiere a few episodes at once, followed by one new episode each week to keep you hooked. But sometimes the service drops a full season in one go, similar to Netflix. Ultimately the platform is hurt by its lack of a back catalog -- especially compared with NBC's streaming service, Peacock, which has a free tier with 13,000 hours of shows that include bingeable favorites like Parks and Recreation and 30 Rock.

Apple's strategy appears to be shifting. The company started acquiring older movies and TV shows to round out the service, but this remains very limited. So far, all we have is the 1980s Jim Henson TV series Fraggle Rock, as a complement to its own new series of shorts based on the show. But there hasn't been any other news about what an expanded back catalog will look like, or how it'll compare to those of competitors.

After adding Friday night games from Major League Baseball to its service earlier this year, the company seems to be leveling up its live sports offerings. In June, Apple struck a 10-year deal with Major League Soccer to stream matches on the Apple TV app. The

catch? Only selected games will be available for Apple TV Plus subscribers.



Severance scored 14 Emmy nominations this year.

Apple TV Plus

Top-tier features at a low price, but no Android phone or tablet support

You can't really beat Apple TV Plus in terms of the features. Its originals are available in 4K, HDR, Dolby Vision and Dolby Atmos sound. Like Netflix, it's completely ad-free. You can share your

subscription with up to five other people on your Apple Family plan and stream on up to six devices at once. You can download all shows to your mobile device to watch offline as well. It's available in 100 countries.

You can watch Apple TV Plus on any Apple device (iPhone, iPad, Apple TV or Mac), via AirPlay or SharePlay. You can also watch on your PC, Roku devices, Amazon Fire TV devices, Samsung, Panasonic, LG and Vizio smart TVs, as well as on the web at tv.apple.com.

Device support is narrower than most other major services, however. Apple TV Plus isn't available on any mobile devices except for iPhones and iPads, so owners of Android phones and tablets are out of luck. Since launch, Apple has added support for the PlayStation and Xbox -- and it does support some Android-powered TV devices, namely Chromecast with Google TV and Sony smart TVs.

Small selection, small price

Besides offering first-rate content, Apple TV Plus is attractive due to its low monthly price. For less than the cost of your average McDonald's combo meal, you can access every title on the platform for \$5 per month. There are also a few ways to use the service for free.

New users can hop on a free seven-day trial or try out the service for free for 30 days with an Apple One bundle. The Apple One package allows you to have up to six Apple services depending on your account type. Additionally, if you purchase a new Apple device, you can receive Apple TV Plus free for three months, as long as you redeem the offer within 90 days. And if you have a T-Mobile Magenta wireless plan, the service is included for free for one year.

With the \$5 monthly subscription to Apple TV Plus, up to six people can stream from one account and you can hold watch parties on FaceTime. Content is what will hold your attention, but compared to the

world's other top streaming services like Netflix and Disney Plus, the price is right.

Streaming Services Compared

	Apple TV	Netflix	HBO Max	Disney Plus	Hulu	Amazon Prime
Monthly price	\$5	Starts at \$10	\$10 for basic with ads,	\$8	Basic \$7 with ads, ad-free Premium	\$9 (or included with \$120-per-year
Ads	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
Top titles	Ted Lasso, The Morning Show	Stranger Things, Squid Game, Bridgerton	Game of Thrones, Dune, The Last of Us	The Mandalorian, Loki, Encanto, The Mandalorian	Handmaid's Tale, Pen15, Lost, The Handmaid's Tale	Marvelous Mrs. Maisel, The Boys, The Handmaid's Tale
Mobile download	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
4K HDR	Yes	Yes (on Premium)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of streams	6	1 (2 for Standard, 4 on Premium)	3	4	2 (Unlimited with Premium)	2

A confusing app experience

Apple TV Plus differs from other streaming services in that it doesn't live in its own app. Instead, you'll find the service inside the Apple TV app, alongside programming from other video subscriptions, as well as Apple iTunes movie and TV rentals and purchases.

In practice we found this arrangement confusing. When you enter the Apple TV app, the format is similar to other streaming services, letting you search by movies, TV shows, sports or kids. Though Apple TV Plus content is highlighted at the top of the screen, you'll see Apple TV originals mixed in with a ton of content available a la carte to buy, as well as stuff from other streaming services. At first glance, it looks like Apple TV comes with all of these shows and movies -- until you click on them and are taken to a purchase page.



You have to click on the Apple TV Plus "channel" to actually see the streaming service's offerings, which is a little confusing.

Sarah Tew/CNET

To see only Apple TV Plus content, you'll have to scroll to the Channels section of the app and click Apple TV Plus, which you'll find alongside others like Showtime, Starz and many others.

Within the channel, you'll see every show, but navigation isn't perfect. You'll find the following categories: latest originals, book adaptations, entire seasons, drama and comedy series, feature films, nonfiction series, kids and family... and that's it. No search bar, and no bar across the top where you can

scroll between TV shows, movies and kids' programs that are strictly the Apple TV Plus brand, as you typically see with other streaming services. However, if you're using a mobile device such as an iPad or iPhone, there's an "Originals" icon at the bottom of the screen you can click to find branded content in that category.

You'll find the latest available trailers in the Coming Soon section, which is nice to give you an idea of what to look forward to. You'll also see a section called More From the Stars of Apple TV Plus, with black-and-white tiles of some of the big names on the platform (like Tom Hanks and Denzel Washington). Clicking one of those will take you to the Apple TV Plus show you can watch them in, as well as all of their other shows and movies on other platforms. Sort of handy, but ultimately not doing much more than IMDb in terms of connecting you to someone's body of work -- and then asking you to pay for it.

Once you select a show you'll see a large photo and the option to play the first episode or add it to your list. Underneath this section, you can scroll through

the list of episodes for each season with or without having to use the drop-down menu.

The Apple TV Plus voice experience worked best on Apple TV and Roku. When on the home screen of either streaming box, when we said something like, "Watch Defending Jacob," the device would automatically open the Apple TV app and start the pilot episode, no second action needed. On the Amazon Fire TV stick, the voice command took us to another menu, where we'd have to manually select the show to watch. Otherwise, the experience was very similar across platforms.

Being a part of the Apple ecosystem can enhance your experience with the iPhone version: Under a More to Explore tab, you'll find show soundtracks and playlists in Apple Music and related books in Apple Books.



Apple TV Plus Originals feature big stars like Tom Hanks.
Sarah Tew/CNET

Should you get Apple TV Plus?

If you've bought an Apple device over the past year, or plan to do so once the iPhone 14 is released this fall, you're eligible for the free trial of Apple TV Plus -- and you should definitely take advantage of it. You (or your family) will likely find something you'd like to watch among the original shows and movies.

I'd recommend the free trial to see if any of Apple's originals strike your interest. (We can confirm that

seven days is long enough to finish the first season of Ted Lasso.) If they do, \$5 a month really isn't much to pay for high-quality content -- especially when most streaming services like Netflix are implementing price increases.

original article:

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