

Review: Netgear's new Arlo security camera system is a winner

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Anyone who has bought a security camera system knows they can be

pricey and a pain to set up.

You have to worry about how to get power from the nearest outlet to the camera. You have to worry about connecting them to your network or to a recording device. If you want to place cameras outdoors, you frequently have to buy more expensive models or waterproof cases. Not to mention figuring out how to program when and what they will record.

Netgear has come up with a [security camera](#) system that's designed to address many of these problems. Dubbed Arlo, the system is relatively inexpensive and much easier to set up than most rivals.

What makes Arlo different from other security camera systems is that it is completely free of external wires. The cameras are powered by batteries, which Netgear says should last at least four months, so you don't have to plug the cameras into a wall socket. And they transmit video via Wi-Fi, so you don't have to connect it to an Ethernet jack or run extra coaxial cable through your house.

That means that you don't need to hire a professional installer or an electrician to set up an Arlo system. The cameras attach magnetically to dome-shaped magnetic mounts that can be hung with one screw or, theoretically, with double-sided tape. If you're at all handy with a drill, you can install an Arlo camera in less than 5 minutes. As an added bonus, all the Arlo cameras are weatherproof, so you don't need to buy an extra case or a more expensive outdoor version if you want to place them outside.

The cameras are also easy to get up and running. The Arlo system includes a special wireless [base station](#) that's dedicated to the cameras. After you connect the base station to your router via an Ethernet cable and create a Netgear account, you can connect cameras to it by pressing a button on the base station and one on each of your cameras.

To conserve power, the Arlo system records or transmits video only when it senses motion or when you ask it for a live view from one of the cameras. As with other camera systems, you can adjust how sensitive the system is to movement. You can also set a schedule for when the camera will and won't record video at all; if you know you will be home during certain hours of the day, you can set the system so that your indoor cameras won't record video every time you walk through a room.

Unlike some security camera systems, the Arlo cameras record in 720p high-definition and are able to take videos in the dark using infrared light. I found the video to generally be clear, albeit a bit fuzzy.

When the Arlo cameras record video, they transmit it to the base station, which then relays it to Netgear's servers. That's similar to the way Dropcam, which is owned by Google's Nest division, works, but it's different from older security camera systems that typically record video on a device stored in the home or to memory cards in the cameras themselves. The advantage of the Arlo system is that it's a simpler system to configure and maintain and the video is available via apps or a Web browser wherever you have an Internet connection.

Netgear offers free storage for seven days worth of videos taken from up to five Arlo cameras, or 1 gigabyte total. If you want more storage, you can get 30 days for video from up to 10 cameras (10 GB total) for \$100 a year, or 60 days from up to 15 cameras (100 GB total) for \$150 a year.

That compares favorably with other cloud-based camera services. Dropcam, for example, charges \$100 a year for seven days worth of video storage from one camera.

As much as I like about the Arlo system, it does have some shortcomings. The mount that Netgear provides with the system has limited usefulness and isn't terribly secure. You can't use it to hang a

camera under one of your eaves or in your window so that it's pointing outside. And if a camera is within arm's reach, it would be simple to pull it off the mount and steal it. Netgear is planning to release two new styles of mounts next month that should be more secure and give users more flexibility in where and how they place the Arlo cameras.

Netgear also gives users limited ability to configure when the cameras will record video. You can't exclude areas in a picture - such as a row of plants that frequently wave in the wind - from triggering the cameras' motion sensors. And unlike Dropcam, you can't configure Arlo to start sensing motion when a Nest thermostat detects that you've left the house.

Also, unlike other camera systems, Arlo will only record video when it senses motion during a period when you've asked it to be on the lookout. If something happens that doesn't trigger the motion sensor or occurs during a period when you've turned the motion sensors off, you won't have a record of it.

You also might be uncomfortable with having your videos stored in the cloud. Sunnyvale-based Netgear says that it encrypts videos during transmission and on its servers and has no access to them. But they are potentially available to government surveillance services. And in the cloud, they are only as secure as your password.

Despite such shortcomings, the Arlo system compares favorably with Dropcam and rival systems. If you are looking for a low-cost, easy-to-use-and-configure security camera system, it's a great choice.

What: Netgear Arlo security camera system

Likes: Wireless; easy to install and set up; good video quality, including at night; weatherproof without need for extra case; relatively inexpensive; offers free cloud-based storage for videos.

Dislikes: Limited ability to customize rules for motion detection; doesn't talk with other smart home devices; doesn't record video continuously; only stores video in the cloud; included mounts inappropriate for some potential locations.

Price: \$200 for kit with one [camera](#) and a base station; \$350 for base station and two cameras; \$450 for base station and three cameras.

Web: arlo.com

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