

## Gift Guide: Six ways to get streaming video to your big screen

November 17 2015, by Anick Jesdanun

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This photo provided by Amazon shows the Amazon Fire TV with voice remote and controller. The Fire TV is a great device for streaming video—especially video from Amazon. Video available as part of Amazon's Prime loyalty program integrates nicely. For other services, you must launch an app first. (Amazon via AP)

Watching video on a phone or personal computer can sometimes feel less than awesome—not to mention kind of lonely, given the limited viewing angle of the small screen.

There are plenty of ways to get [streaming](#) video onto your big living-room screen. Internet-connected "smart" TVs and gaming consoles such as the Xbox or PlayStation can do the trick. But stand-alone devices tend to offer more features and more [video services](#) to choose from.

These six leading devices all stream Netflix and YouTube, and most also handle Hulu, PBS and several others. Only Apple TV has iTunes, while only Roku has both Amazon and Google Play. Whichever device you choose, you'll still need subscriptions to watch most of the 12 services we checked.

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TIVO BOLT (starts at \$300, plus \$15 a month for service after the first year)

The TiVo is first and foremost a [digital video recorder](#), offering many features that cable-company DVRs can't match.

TiVo recordings have many advantages over streaming services such as Hulu. One tap of the remote skips over the entire commercial break for many prime-time shows. Hulu won't let you skip commercials at all unless you pay more. TiVo can also play back shows 30 percent faster using its "QuickMode." Use both, and an hour-long show takes less than 35 minutes.

As a streaming device, though, TiVo is more limited. It offers only four of the 12 leading streaming services we checked—Netflix, Amazon, YouTube and Vudu. Hulu is coming soon. Apps for many specific channels, including HBO and Showtime, are unavailable, nor is baseball's MLB.TV. TiVo figures you can simply record those channels or use your cable company's on-demand service, but that doesn't help if you have only an antenna.

The Bolt offers 75 or 150 hours of recording. A 450-hour TiVo is available for \$600, but it's an older model, without QuickMode or commercial-break skipping.

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## GOOGLE CHROMECAST (\$35)

The Chromecast is an odd hybrid—a gateway to relay streaming video from your laptop, phone or tablet to the TV. Choose a video source—say, the Netflix app or website—and make a few taps to "cast" it to the TV. The Chromecast then picks up the video stream directly.

Chromecast doesn't work with every video app, but has 10 of the 12 services we looked for; iTunes and Amazon are no-shows, at least from mobile devices. It has no remote; you control playback through your phone or tablet. The Chromecast is cheap, but it's not as versatile as a stand-alone device.

For music and podcasts, the \$35 Chromecast Audio can "cast" to speakers.



This photo provided by Roku shows the Roku 4. Roku joins TiVo, the Shield and Fire TV in supporting super-sharp video in an emerging format known as ultra-high definition, or 4K. Roku goes further in creating a special app to point you to what little 4K content is out there. (Courtesy of Roku via AP)

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#### NVIDIA SHIELD ANDROID TV (\$200)

The Shield's strength is as a video-game console. It's fast and powerful, and it has a good selection of converted PC games. The device also supports Nvidia's GeForce Now streaming-game subscription. Games run on distant servers, yet feel as though they are directly on the Shield.

The Shield uses Google's Android TV streaming service, which offers eight of our 12 streaming services. There's no Amazon, iTunes or Watch ESPN app. With Chromecast-like casting, you can get Vudu. You can

get ESPN with a Sling TV subscription and app.

The Shield is expensive for a streaming TV device, but it's cheaper than a game console. It comes with a game controller.

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#### AMAZON FIRE TV (\$100)

The Fire TV is a great device for streaming video—especially video from Amazon. Video available as part of Amazon's Prime loyalty program integrates nicely. For other services, you must launch an app first. The Fire TV has nine of the 12 services checked; it's missing iTunes, Google Play and Vudu.

The Fire TV is cheap for a full-fledged streaming device. For an even cheaper option, Amazon's \$40 Fire TV Stick has fewer features but runs the same services.

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#### ROKU 4 (\$130)



This photo provided by Nvidia shows the Nvidia Shield Android TV with Controller and Optional Remote Control. The Shield's strength is as a video-game console. It's fast and powerful, and it has a good selection of converted PC games. The device also supports Nvidia's GeForce Now streaming-game subscription. (Courtesy of Nvidia via AP)

Talk about choice. Roku has nearly 3,000 apps to choose from. If there's something you're looking for, however obscure, it's more likely to be on Roku than any other device. Of the dozen services we looked for, iTunes was the only one missing.

Roku joins TiVo, the Shield and Fire TV in supporting super-sharp video in an emerging format known as ultra-high definition, or 4K. Roku goes further in creating a special app to point you to what little 4K content is out there.

Another nice touch: A button on the Roku will make your remote beep if

you lose it.

Roku also offers cheaper options with fewer features, all the way down to its \$50 Streaming Stick.

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This image provided by Google shows the Chromecast. The Chromecast is an odd hybrid gateway to relay streaming video from your laptop, phone or tablet to the TV. (Google via AP)

APPLE TV (starts at \$149)

The app store on the new Apple TV has a good selection of video

services and games. As with Fire TV and Roku, many of these are casual games, not the hardcore games common on the Shield. Apple is the only device with iTunes, although it currently lacks Google Play, Amazon and Vudu from the 12 services on our list.

Although Apple TV isn't the only gadget here to offer voice search, it does so without interrupting video playback. A slide-up box appears in response to commands for specific titles or actors, as well as general queries for weather, sports or stocks. (Fire TV and the Shield also offer informational voice searches, while Roku is limited to searches for shows and movies.)



This photo provided by Apple shows AppleTV-4G with remote. Although Apple



TV isn't the only gadget offer voice search, it does so without interrupting video playback. A slide-up box appears in response to commands for specific titles or actors, as well as general queries for weather, sports or stocks. (Courtesy of Apple)

Apple TV also offers a range of apps beyond [video](#) and games, including Airbnb and Zillow for housing listings and QVC and Gilt for shopping.

Apple still sells its older Apple TV model for \$69. That model won't give you voice search or any apps beyond streaming media.



This product image provided by TiVo shows the new TiVo Bolt digital video recorder. The TiVo is first and foremost a digital video recorder, offering many features that cable-company DVRs can't match. TiVo recordings have many advantages over streaming services such as Hulu. (TiVo via AP)

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