

Epson EcoTank can print for years before you need to refill the ink

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I've gone through almost every brand of inkjet printer over the last 15 years.

Every time print quality starts to degrade, usually from heavy use, I start looking at what's new and then jump to another model or brand.

Luckily, [printer](#) manufacturers use the same business model as razor manufacturers: Printers are pretty affordable. It's the ink cartridges - like replacement blades - that are expensive.

My wife is a teacher and spends many nights printing photos of her kids and their classroom activities. So trust me, I know how expensive it can be to keep an [inkjet printer](#) churning out photos.

My current printer at home is an Epson Expression Home XP-420 all-in-one. Epson is now selling that printer's new model, the XP-430, which sells for \$59.99. A full set of ink cartridges costs \$59 from Amazon.

It's not hard to see where the profit is.

But Epson has meanwhile done something unheard of in the inkjet printer market: It's introduced a line of printers that use refillable ink tanks instead of ink cartridges.

I've been testing the Epson Expression ET-2650 EcoTank All-in-One (\$299, epson.com), which is a printer, copier and scanner.

The 2650 pumps ink from tanks instead of cartridges. The tanks hold enough ink to print up to 4,000 pages black and 6,500 pages color, which is about two years' worth of use or 20 sets of ink cartridges, according to Epson.

The company also says users can save up to 80 percent on ink.

So what does the ink cost?

The 2650 uses four colors (black, cyan, magenta and yellow), and each 70-milliliter bottle costs around \$12, meaning it's \$48 for the set.

If the page yields are accurate, using an EcoTank printer will bring significant savings to my house.

FAMILIAR DESIGN

The 2650 looks like previous Epson all-in-one printers except for the ink tanks, which are visible on the right side.

It has a 100-sheet capacity and can print up to 10 pages per minute in black or 4.5 pages per minute in color.

The 2650 allows users to connect and print from a computer through USB or wirelessly from their computer, iPad, iPhone, or Android tablet or phone. The printer also does Wi-Fi Direct for network-free printing.

Interacting with the printer is done through buttons on the adjustable front panel, which has a 1.44-inch color display.

The front of the printer also has an SD card slot for printing photos directly from your camera's memory card.

SETUP

The two big steps to setting up the 2650 are getting it configured on your wireless network and filling the ink tanks.

You'll fill the tanks first. There is great potential for mess here, so take the time to put the printer down on some newspaper and put on a pair of rubber gloves. There are warnings about the ink permanently staining surfaces and clothing, and I'm guessing it'd take awhile for it to wash off your skin.

The ink tanks are small plastic reservoirs with rubber stoppers. The sides of the reservoir are visible on the right side of the printer, so you can check the ink levels at a glance. There are easy-to-see lines for full and empty.

Four ink bottles are included. There isn't really a trick to filling the tanks; you just peel the foil from the bottles, screw on the plastic tip and carefully tip the bottle upside down without making a mess.

When the ink bottles are upside down, the ink doesn't exactly flow out; I had to gently squeeze the sides of the bottle to squirt the ink out into the tank. Be gentle so ink doesn't go everywhere.

It takes 30 seconds or so for the ink to fill the tank. You empty the full bottle into the tank.

I started from empty tanks, and they were pretty close to the top when the bottles emptied. Subsequent refills will need to be watched to make sure ink doesn't overflow.

Make sure you put the right color ink into the appropriate tank or you'll really mess things up. And keep a tissue handy to wipe up any ink that

gets on the lip of the tanks.

The ink then needs to be charged. If you look inside, you'll see there are white hoses running from the ink tanks to the print heads. The ink needs to be pumped to the print heads. This takes about 20 minutes.

You'll then need to attach the printer, using either USB or a wireless network.

The on-screen wireless setup wizard will walk you through scanning for available wireless networks and entering your password.

HOW DOES IT PRINT?

I was able to print without issue from my Mac, a PC, my iPhone, an Android phone and an iPad.

I found the 2650 as easy to use as my home printer.

Pages of text were sharp and sufficiently speedy, and photos on glossy photo paper looked crisp, clear and vibrant.

I think the key to keeping the 2650 or any inkjet printer happy and printing for a long time is to use it on a regular basis. Sitting idle for weeks at a time isn't good for inkjets. Run a few pages through it at least once a week, if not more often, and you'll keep it in good shape.

Once things are up and running, it should be pretty effortless. If the ink lasts as long as Epson claims, you should be adding ink once every year or so.

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Epson Expression ET-2650 EcoTank All-in-One

Pros: Easy to set up, great-looking output, ink is cheap.

Cons: \$299 is a high entry point for an inkjet printer.

Bottom line: If you print more than the average home user, the EcoTank printer is your friend.

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