

Review: Why wait for iPhone X? iPhone 8 has most of the features for hundreds less

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iPhone 8 and iPhone 8 Plus. Credit: Apple

As expected, Apple announced this year's updated iPhones on September 12, but the iPhone X gathered most of the headlines.

The iPhone X is Apple's latest salvo in the flagship phone wars with Google and Samsung.

I'll have plenty to say about the iPhone X when I actually get my hands on one in November.

Apple also introduced the iPhone 8 and 8 Plus, built on the familiar iPhone design that started with the iPhone 6. Indeed, until the iPhone X was announced, Apple had not significantly changed the iPhone design in three years.

I was not surprised at all to see the iPhone 8 and 8 Plus introduced alongside the iPhone X, but I can't help but wonder why Apple stuck with the old design for one more year.

Actually this was supposed to be an 'S' year, as Apple has traditionally followed a new iPhone with an S model the following year. This is the first non-S year since the iPhone 3.

Not that I'm complaining.

Usually when I review a phone, it's sent by the manufacturer or a PR agency or from a wireless carrier, but in this case I'm reviewing the iPhone 8 Plus I purchased on release day.

People who read my reviews know I'm an iPhone user, but I also pay for my own phone, so I can't justify a new phone every year. The iPhone 8 Plus is replacing my trusty iPhone 6S, which was handed down to my wife.

Decisions ... decisions ...

I thought long and hard about which phone to buy.

Apple introduced the iPhone 8 and then made it obsolete about half an hour later.

The gadget reviewer in me wanted to have the latest and greatest, but the iPhone X starts at \$999, and that's a price threshold I'm not ready to cross. Plus I'm not yet ready to give up my fingerprint authentication in favor of Face ID. I'll be happy to let others be the guinea pigs for that technology. I use Apple Pay almost every day, so I'm not keen on anything getting in the way of those easy transactions.

I was glad to see most of the technology inside the iPhone X is also inside the iPhone 8 and 8 Plus.

I have never owned a smartphone with a screen larger than the 4.7-inch screen on my iPhone 6S, and I'm really into photography, so I decided now was the time to go with the 5.5-inch screen of the iPhone 8 Plus.

So what's new?

The first thing you'll notice about the iPhone 8 and 8 Plus is the back of the phone, which is now made of glass. Previous years have seen the iPhone's back made of aluminum, but Apple decided to include [wireless charging](#) in the iPhone 8 and glass makes that possible.

Wireless charging is hardly new.

Samsung, LG and Motorola all make handsets that have wireless charging, but now that Apple has thrown in with the Qi standard for wireless charging, hopefully we'll see some fancy new chargers or public charging stations at coffee shops and hotels. Apple also introduced a wireless charging pad that can charge an iPhone, Apple watch and AirPods all at the same time, but it won't be available until next year.

For now, iPhone 8 owners will have to buy a Qi charger from another company.

I like Samsung's line of fast wireless chargers.

Right now, iPhones capable of wireless charging can only take advantage of 5 watts of charging power (not very speedy). Apple says 7.5 watt (faster) charging is coming with a software update.

Speaking of fast, this is the first iPhone with fast charging, but you won't get it with the charger and cable included in the box.

To fast charge the iPhone 8, 8 Plus and iPhone X, you'll need a USB-C to Lightning cable and a USB charger that features Power Delivery. A quick check of Amazon shows several adapters from different companies that should be able to fast charge. You'll want to spend \$20 for the official Apple cable. There are other brands, but early word is Apple's cable will provide the fastest charging.

With the faster charger and Apple cable you'll be able to charge the phone to 50 percent in just 30 minutes.

Faster processor

It was no secret Apple would be bumping the processor in the new iPhones. Every iPhone I can remember has had a better or faster processor than the previous model. This year it is called the A11 Bionic processor.

Apple started building its own processors five years ago, and they really have a speed advantage because they control the hardware and the software.

Apple has put the Bionic chip in both iPhone 8 models and the iPhone X. The term "bionic" really doesn't have a technical meaning - it just sounds cool.

Early speed testing shows the A11 Bionic is faster than some of the low end Macbook Pros and they're much faster than any other phone currently on the market.

The A11 has six cores - two high performance cores and four high efficiency cores. It also has the first Apple graphics processor. Every aspect of the iPhone 8's operation feels very snappy.

Camera improvements

The iPhone 8s main cameras have 12-megapixel sensors that are larger and faster than last year's iPhone 7. Optical image stabilization works on still pictures and videos.

The iPhone 8 Plus has dual cameras, one wide-angle (f/1.8) and one telephoto (f/2.8). They work together along with the new image sensor to form the best smartphone camera I've used.

Last year's Portrait mode now has more options to adjust an image's lighting to provide for several new effects.

The iPhone 8 has only the wide-angle camera.

Video capture of 4K resolution at 60 frames per second provides smooth and sharp playback, while slow motion video is captured at 1080p at 240 fps.

That new A11 Bionic processor really helps all the camera features work quickly and flawlessly.

HDR mode used to be optional, but with the new iPhones, it's turned on by default and there is really no reason to turn it off. HDR stands for High Dynamic Range. It works to balance the shadows and highlights of a photo so that neither are being favored or ignored. The processor improvements mean those HDR pictures are processed seamlessly and in real time.

Other improvements

The iPhone 8 screen sizes are the same (4.7-inch and 5.5-inch), but this year the displays have a technology called True Tone that adjusts the brightness and color balance of the screen to provide better viewing in all lighting situations. Indeed, I turned on my iPhone 8 Plus in the middle of the night and was pleased to see a very readable screen that was dimmed so it didn't blast my eyes with very bright light.

The iPhone 8 models have stereo speakers. The speaker you put up to your ear can get loud enough along with the main speaker in the phone's bottom edge to hear some stereo separation. The sound is 25 percent louder with the new phones.

Pricing and availability

The iPhone 8 and 8 Plus are available in three colors - silver, gold and

space gray - and with 64 or 256 gigabytes of storage. The iPhone 8 costs \$699 and \$849, while the 8 Plus costs \$799 and \$949.

Of course wireless carriers all offer payment plans of some sort. Check with your carrier for details.

Should you buy one?

So, let's say you're in the market for a new iPhone. Should it be the iPhone 8 or wait for the iPhone X?

It depends on a few things.

How much do you have to spend?

How long do you want to wait?

Is the lack of a home button and a larger screen with a smaller bezel important to you? How about having the latest technology?

Are you just wanting something rock solid and totally familiar? I guess I was.

Choosing the iPhone 8 Plus was easy for me, but when I put it in its case, nobody will ask me if it's a new iPhone because it looks just like my old one.

Apple was very careful to make sure the iPhone 8s have the exact same form factor as last year's models. All your iPhone 6 or iPhone 7 cases will fit.

I was very happy to choose the phone with the same processor as the iPhone X, along with the same cameras and wireless charging.

All I'm missing out on is the edge-to-edge screen and Face ID. I'm not sure those differences are worth several hundred more dollars.

If I owned an iPhone 7, I'd likely skip the iPhone 8, as I can't see it being that big of an upgrade.

Owners of iPhone 6S (like me) have a bit easier time making the choice. If your iPhone is more than two years old, you'll likely be happy with the iPhone 8.

I am, so far. I'm sure I'll have some buyer's remorse when I get an iPhone X in my hands, but I'll get over it.

Pros: Faster, great camera, wireless charging

Cons: Design is already obsolete

Bottom line: The iPhone 8 is the safe choice, and an easy choice for me.

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