

Tamagotchi virtual pets to return to Europe and North America

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The original Tamagotchi toys were introduced in the 1990s, with 40 million sold between 1996 and 1999

Tamagotchi, the egg-shaped virtual pet beloved of schoolchildren in the 1990s, is making a comeback and is set to hit the shelves of European shops in time for Christmas.

The tiny toy character, which owners have to nurture to maturity, was a worldwide smash the first time around, with maker Bandai selling 40 million units between 1996 and 1999.

Now a new, updated version, called Tamagotchi Friends, is scheduled for release in Europe next month and in North America some time in 2014.

"Tamagotchi" is a portmanteau of the Japanese word for egg (tamago) and the Japanised version of the English "watch", but it also denotes a certain eggy cuteness.

A spokesman for Bandai in Tokyo said the new version is primarily aimed at children aged 7-9, and allows players to raise up to 24 different creatures.

The character of the virtual pet is determined by the way in which it is looked after—it needs to be fed, exercised, entertained and cared-for when it is sick.

Owners can also encourage their pets to form friendships with other virtual pets by bumping their egg with another.

"The new version of the Tamagotchi will be released in Europe, mainly in Britain, France and Spain in late December," said Bandai spokeswoman Tomomi Washizu. "It is scheduled to hit North America as early as June next year."

It will be sold at \$19.99, Bandai said.

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