

# Review: Tablo DVR and Winegard Flatwave antenna make cutting the cord a little easier

15 January 2015, by Jim Rossman, The Dallas Morning News

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If there's a lesson I've learned from my cord-cutting experiments, it's that there are many types of over-the-air TV antennas, and finding the right one can be a challenge.

Lately I've been testing a new [antenna](#) from Winegard called the FlatWave Amplified Indoor Antenna (\$64.99, [winegard.com](#)). It doesn't look like it would work well, but I was wrong.

The FlatWave looks more like a place mat than a TV antenna. It's a 12-inch-by-13-inch sheet of flexible plastic with the antenna molded inside.

The antenna is white on one side and black on the other and is designed to sit or hang just about anywhere.

It connects to your TV with a thin 18.5-foot coax cable and has a small amplifier near the TV connector. The amplifier is powered by a USB cable. A wall plug is included, but if your TV has a USB port that provides power, you can use it.

Once you connect the coax to your TV's antenna input and plug in the USB cable, you're ready to scan for channels. I was able to find more than 50 channels, most of which were very clear.

The FlatWave ships with a few 3M mounting strips that leave no residue, so you can hang the antenna on the wall or in a window.

I found the FlatWave easy to set up and was happy with the reception.

There are other FlatWave models, depending on how far away you are from the TV towers. One is smaller and has no amplifier, and one is made to be mounted outdoors.

To see the different models, go to [winegard.com/flatwave](#).

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Pros: Small and thin. Can hang anywhere. Good reception.

Cons: Not many. Might not be the right choice for every situation.

Bottom line: A pleasant surprise. A small antenna that can hang behind your TV or in a window that works very well.

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Cord cutters don't need much hardware.

Just an antenna and a TV are all that are required, but we've become accustomed to recording content for later viewing, so DVRs aimed at cord cutters are getting some attention.

The Tablo DVR is different from other DVRs I've tested - it doesn't connect to your TV.

So how does it work?

Wirelessly.

The Tablo takes the signal from your antenna and lets you watch it live or record it.

The Tablo has Wi-Fi to stream the video to a tablet or smartphone.

If you'd like to watch the Tablo's content on your TV, you'll need an intermediate streaming box like an Apple TV, Roku or Chromecast, because you have to push the content from your phone or tablet to the TV wirelessly.

It's not the simplest process to watch TV, but it works. I was able to reliably play the content from the Tablo to my iPad and then through AirPlay to my Apple TV and onto my TV.

It worked surprisingly well.

There is no remote with the Tablo; your mobile device is the remote.

The onscreen guide is easy to use, and recordings are easy to set up, retrieve and play.

The Tablo is designed to stream to your mobile devices even if they're not connected to your home network.

You will probably need to manually configure settings on your Wi-Fi router to get the stream to work out to the Internet, but once set up, it works pretty well.

My AT&T U-verse Internet has an upload speed of 1.5 megabits per second, which should be enough, but I did get some drops. Faster Internet uploads would be better, but that's not Tablo's fault.

When you first connect the Tablo to your network and an antenna, you have to download the free Tablo app to set things up.

You've walked through the network setup (wired or wireless) and then a scan of the channels your antenna can receive.

Once you get the channel list, you can pick the ones you're interested in watching, and then guide data is downloaded.

You see the guide and tune to shows or call up recordings from your mobile device.

The Tablo (\$219.99, [tablotv.com](http://tablotv.com)) has two tuners for recording two shows at once. There is also a four-tuner model for \$299.99.

The Tablo box is small because it doesn't have a hard drive - you have to add your own USB storage. You can use a hard drive, but I used a large flash drive. (Tablo has asked me to tell you NOT to use a flash drive).

The Tablo connects to the Internet (wired or wirelessly) for guide data and streaming.

The first month of guide data is included, but be prepared to pay \$5 per month for a guide data subscription. I realize cord cutters want to eliminate monthly subscription fees.

I found the Tablo worked as advertised, but that doesn't mean with the best quality on my TV. The Tablo is a streaming box first. If it had an HDMI output, the output on my TV would be better.

I recorded the Cowboys' game last Sunday, and during playback, the signal was very clear but not quite as good as the signal from my set-top box.

If you really only watch your TV content on a computer, tablet or smartphone, the Tablo is a slick solution. If you want to get that content to your TV, I think there are better ways to go, like ChannelMaster's DVR+.

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Pros: Easy to set up. Good guide data. Nice interface.

Cons: Expensive. Need your own storage. Cumbersome to watch the signal on TV.

Bottom line: An interesting solution. Maybe not the best for everyone.

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