

Review: Apple Nanoleaf Smarter Kit has nice bulbs, but the hub is key

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I'm becoming more and more convinced that voice control is going to be the future of home automation.

I guess those Jetsons cartoons really did show us the future.

A few years back, Apple introduced us to Siri, its virtual assistant.

Since then, Microsoft has brought us Cortana and Amazon has trotted out Alexa to obey our voice commands.

I guess it was just a matter of time before [home automation devices](#) began using those systems to make things happen around the house.

Early home automation products were largely individual endeavors. They worked well, but one system was not necessarily compatible with another.

Companies like Wink introduced hub-based systems that allowed the control of multiple systems with one app.

I have a Wink hub connected to my home network, and its app can see and control my [light bulbs](#) (from several manufacturers), smart outlets, my Wi-Fi thermostat, my touch-screen deadbolt and my security cameras.

Of course, once I committed to the hub, I looked around for compatible products to use with it, which were not always the best product in the category, just the one that was easiest to use with my hub.

Apple saw an opportunity to bring multiple products under its own system, called Homekit.

Apple wants Homekit to be a catch-all for [home automation](#) devices. It's

common protocol for the devices to be able to talk to one another and to be voice-controlled by Siri.

But for all its promise, Homekit had remained in the background until recently. There aren't any Apple-branded Homekit products. There isn't a Homekit hub or Homekit app.

I think it would be easier if there were, but for now, Apple is content to let other manufacturers develop the products, make them Homekit-compatible and submit them for approval, much like developers do for apps in the iTunes app store.

Once the devices are Homekit-approved, you can use the product's own app to set it up and iOS will connect it to Siri and let it work with other Homekit devices on your network.

If you have a third- or fourth-generation Apple TV, you can use that as a Homekit connection to the outside world - meaning you can be away from home and tell Siri to turn on the front porch light.

I've tried several brands of bulbs, but none were Homekit-compatible.

This week I've been testing the Nanoleaf Smarter Kit with two Smart Ivy connected LED bulbs and a Homekit-compatible Nanoleaf Smart Hub (\$99 at nanoleaf.me).

This was my first experience with a Homekit device, and setup could not have been easier.

You connect the Nanoleaf Smart Hub to your router via Ethernet and download the free app from the iOS app store. Android support is coming this year.

The hub has a code on the bottom, and during the setup in the app, you'll be asked to point your iPhone or iPad's camera at the code. The app quickly recognizes the code and pairs the hub. You're then walked through the process of putting the bulbs in their fixtures and getting them paired.

You can give each bulb its own name (living room lamp, front porch light, etc.), and then you can use the app or Siri to control the lights.

The app also has scenes you can program, such as "good morning" or "I'm leaving," so that you can use a verbal command to turn on or off the lights or even dim them.

I was able to set up and command the Smart Ivy bulbs with my voice with almost 100 percent accuracy. Siri had no problem understanding my voice, and the reaction was fast.

The only issues I had were with invoking the iPhone's "Hey, Siri" feature, which allows you to call up Siri without pressing the phone's home button.

Occasionally I had to repeat "Hey, Siri" before she'd wake up and listen to me.

I could make a wife joke here, but my lovely spouse does occasionally read these reviews.

The design of the bulbs is unique. They're made of black circuit boards cut into pentagrams and put together like puzzle pieces. The LEDs are spaced evenly around the sides and top of the bulb.

Because the bulb is black, you might want to consider whether you'd like to use it where it's visible in the fixture. You'll either want to show them

off or you'll want to hide them completely.

Installed in a fixture with a shade or cover, the Smart Ivy's light looks like any other bulb's. The bulbs emit warm 3000K light at 800 lumens. The 60-watt-equivalent bulbs are quite energy-efficient - they use just 7.5 watts.

If you'd like to purchase extra Smart Ivy bulbs, they're available for \$25 each, which is more expensive than other connected bulbs like those from Cree or GE, which cost \$15 each.

Here's a money-saving tip - you can use the cheaper Cree or GE connected bulbs with the Nanoleaf Hub.

The hub extends the Homekit voice control to the third-party bulbs.

There are more than a few brands of hub and connected bulbs on the market. They all use the Internet and a smartphone [app](#) to control the lights. If the thought of [voice control](#) is important to you, the Nanoleaf Smarter Kit is a unique-looking hub and bulb combo that brings the convenience of getting Siri to do your bidding.

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Pros: Stunning design, Homekit compatible, energy-efficient

Cons: Extra bulbs are expensive.

Bottom line: The bulbs are great, but the real reason to buy this kit is for the Homekit [hub](#).

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