

Review: Neato Botvac Connected vacuum expensive, efficient

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My mom loves to vacuum. She shops for vacuums like most people shop

for cars. She does her research and takes a test drive before she buys. Mom even had a Roomba robot vacuum for a while, but I haven't seen her use it in a few years. I suspect she doesn't think it does a good enough job.

I also own a Roomba vacuum from a few years back, and it sits unused in my laundry room.

My robot is an early model. There's really not much to using it: set it down, push a button, and it zooms around the room to suck up dirt.

Watching the Roomba makes me a little crazy. I try to figure out how it decides to tackle cleaning a room, but it seems to bounce around like a pinball for a while until it decides it's finished.

The results are mostly good, but I think it just runs long enough to get to most of my floor before it finishes.

If I stick around to watch it work, I'll get fixated on some dirt or a small scrap of paper I want it to pick up and watch helplessly as it goes in every direction except the one where I want it to go.

Technology has caught up with robot vacuums, and I've been testing a robot vacuum from Neato called the Botvac Connected (\$699, neatorobotics.com).

Where the Roomba vacuums are round, the Neato Botvac Connected is D-shaped, which I find gets into corners better.

This is Neato's first foray into a connected robot vacuum, and I like the connected features. I also like the way the Botvac Connected goes about cleaning a room. The Botvac Connected uses a rotating laser to continually map your rooms so it knows where things are and where it

has already cleaned.

When you press the start button, the laser gets a read of the space, and then the vacuum takes a lap around the edges of the room to clean against the walls.

It then moves back and forth across the room, much like you do in your yard with a lawn mower.

Neato says the vacuum's method finishes up to four times faster than other robot vacuums, and I believe it.

The Botvac Connected has two cleaning modes - eco and turbo. Turbo uses the maximum power and suction but at the expense of battery life. It's best for carpeted floors.

Eco mode uses less power and is much quieter. It's better for hard-surface floors.

Neato says the runtime of the Botvac Connected's lithium-ion battery is 120 minutes in eco mode and 90 minutes in turbo mode.

Runtime is really not too relevant, as the vacuum will return to its base to recharge when the battery is low.

The Botvac Connected will run from room to room in your house, if you like, and if it runs out of power before your rooms are finished, it will return to the base for a charge and then pick up where it left off until the job is done.

Charging can take two to three hours.

If you'd like to confine the vacuum to one room, close the door or use

the included magnetic boundary marker, which is a roll of rubber with an embedded magnetic strip. You get 13 feet of boundary marker, which you can cut to fit.

The Botvac Connected comes with two brushes - a spiral blade for hard floors and a combo brush (rubber blades and brushes) for carpet and homes with pet hair.

Debris is sucked into a plastic container that is easily emptied without picking up the vacuum.

I found I had to empty the dirt at least once a day.

You'll want to get your floors ready before you start. The Botvac can get stuck on exposed electrical cords, or it might just yank your lamp right off the table.

You'll want to tidy up stray cords and perhaps pull your chairs out from under the table. If there are places you know are too narrow for the Botvac to run, make some adjustments. Perhaps move the coffee table a few inches away from the couch.

Neato recommends tucking bed skirts up and out of the way.

The Botvac got stuck three times in my testing - once under a four-legged stool (it looked like it was in jail), once on an electric cord and once on a rubber doorstep.

It pays to watch it go around your house once so you can make adjustments to the environment so it won't get stuck when you run it while you're away from home.

APP CONTROL

The Botvac has a [free app](#) available from the iOS and Android app stores. You'll need to download the app and set up an account with Neato. You'll then log in and begin to set up your Botvac Connected.

The app walks you through the steps to join the vacuum to your home's Wi-Fi network.

Once it's connected, you can control the vacuum remotely. You can start a whole-house or spot-cleaning session from anywhere.

The app also allows you to steer the vacuum with arrow buttons on your phone's screen, but only if you're at home on the same network.

When the cleaning is finished, you can get a notification on your phone.

You can also use the app to set up a cleaning schedule and check on the Botvac's battery status.

My super-geeky wish is for an onboard camera, so I can watch remotely - but that's just a bit over the top.

CONCLUSIONS

This is a very good vacuum. My mom would approve.

I've reviewed a few vacuums over the years and find the good ones are not cheap.

Yes, I realize \$700 is a lot for a vacuum, and the price puts it out of reach for many.

I paid around \$200 for my refurbished Dyson upright, and it's likely all the vacuum I'll ever need.

But if you're busy (who isn't?) and your time could be better spent doing something else (duh), I can see getting a Botvac Connected to let the robot do your floors while you're away.

Pros: Great intelligence, very efficient cleaning, remote control.

Cons: Expensive.

Bottom line: Robot vacuums are cool. Connected robot vacuums are the future.

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