

How To Choose A DVD Player

A good DVD player is the biggest bang-for-the-buck improvement you can make to your home entertainment system. Compared to VHS videos, DVD movies look amazingly crisp, clear, and detailed — only HDTV delivers a more realistic viewing experience at home. And the Dolby® Digital soundtracks on DVDs provide theatre-quality surround sound.

Whether you're shopping for your first player, or replacing one that's a few years old, today's DVD players can add a lot to your home theatre. In addition to the usual tape-free convenience, newer players offer high-quality audio and video connections, as well as progressive-scan capability, for amazingly crisp, clear images and absorbing surround sound. They can handle your home-burned MP3 mix discs, as well as your regular CDs. Some current players even have SACD or DVD-Audio decoding, for high-resolution multi-channel music that brings that live-performance feel right into your living room. Your ideal player will include the features that matter most to you, plus the right connections for your current (or future) A/V setup. Below we'll discuss the features and functions that make today's DVD players so versatile, and what to look for to fit your needs.

What type of player do you need?

"I watch a lot of DVDs and listen to a lot of CDs."

Solution: Multi-disc changer. Many DVD fans are satisfied with a single-disc player, but a multi-disc DVD changer



gives you the same great picture and sound quality while expanding your entertainment options. DVD players are so good at playing music CDs that you'll no longer need a separate CD player. And a multi-disc DVD changer lets you keep several discs "on deck." Choose from carousel models that hold a handful of discs, or larger mega-changers with room for up to 400 discs. They also have handy memory and search functions that make it easy to find the disc you want. You can save a lot of shelf space by simply storing your CDs and DVDs in a mega-changer.

"I still have a lot of VHS tapes."



Solution: DVD/VCR combo unit. Combo players are perfect for people trying to bridge the gap between their VHS and DVD collections. At affordable prices, these popular 2-in-1 components offer all the familiar conveniences of a VCR, with the stunning movie and music quality of a DVD player. Use the timer to record TV shows to VHS, enjoy crystal-clear DVD movies, then jam to your collection of audio CDs — all with one simple component. For more information, check out our DVD/VCR combo article.

"I want to archive my VHS tapes."



Solution: DVD recorder. DVD recorders offer convenient tape-free recording, along with all the functionality of a DVD player. Record your favourite sitcom at the touch of a button, or back up home movies on durable, high-quality DVDs. And with a variety of write-once and rewriteable formats available, it's easy to find the right disc for the right job.

"I have a High-Definition TV."



Solution: DVD player with video up-conversion. These players are the perfect complement to any high-def TV. They use sophisticated internal processing to create an up-converted HD digital video signal, for DVD images that take full advantage of your high-res display. The signal remains digital as it travels through digital video connections to your compatible high-def TV. (For more information, see "Digital Video and Up-conversion" below.)

"I travel a lot."

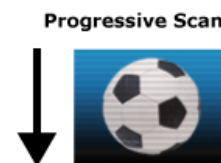
Solution: Portable DVD player. Portable DVD players offer home entertainment on the go — perfect for frequent travellers, or those with young, impatient passengers on long family car trips. Compact and lightweight, a lot of portable players also offer dual headphone jacks, allowing more than one person to enjoy the show. In addition to rechargeable batteries, features like cigarette lighter power adapters and car

mounting kits make some portable players very car-friendly.

Other considerations

What is progressive scan?

DVD players with progressive-scan capability used to cost *over \$1000*. Today, even the most modestly priced players have progressive-scan capability. Unlike interlaced scan, which splits each video frame into two sequential fields, progressive scan displays the entire frame in one sweep. Since the whole picture is displayed together, it has less flicker, better detail, and a more film-like appearance.



To view progressive-scan signals, you need a progressive-capable TV. But if you don't have one, don't worry: all of our DVD players let you select either 480i interlaced-scan output, for use with a conventional TV, or 480p progressive-scan output for compatible TVs. Keep in mind that even if your current TV isn't progressive-capable, your next one probably will be. You'll get a great picture now, and an even better one when you upgrade your TV.

All those audio disc formats: CD-R, CD-RW, MP3, DVD-Audio and SACD

In addition to playing regular CDs, many DVD players can also play music discs you record yourself on a CD recording deck or computer CD-R/W drive. Current DVD players can play CD-R (recordable CD) and CD-RW (rewriteable CD) discs, including MP3 files burned to CD-R/RW. Some can also play WMA (Windows Media Audio) files.

A lot of new models are also able to play either DVD-Audio discs or Super Audio CDs (SACDs) — and a few "universal" models can play both. These competing high-resolution formats capture subtle details that make music sound richer and more real. Both are capable of delivering 5.1-channel music that surrounds you. There are now almost 3,000 SACD titles available, and well over 700 for DVD-Audio. For more information, see our SACD and DVD Audio article.

Making the right connections

A big part of choosing the right DVD player is making sure it has all the necessary video and audio connections to perform to its full potential with your other A/V gear. Below, we'll discuss the connections you'll find on current players.

Video

Nearly all current DVD players include at least three types of video jacks (from basic to best quality): composite, S-video, and component. Component connections provide the best picture quality, but you typically only find component inputs on mid-priced to high-end TV models made in the last few years. If your TV lacks any type of direct A/V input and only has an antenna-style RF input, you'll need to install an RF modulator between the DVD player and TV. You also might want to consider a DVD/VCR combo, since some combos can pass DVD signals through their RF output.

Digital Video and Up-conversion

Some DVD players can up-convert DVD signals to HD or near-HD quality, and send them to a compatible TV via digital video connections. DVI (Digital Visual Interface) and HDMI (High-Definition Media Interface) both offer high-quality digital transmission of standard- and high-definition video signals. HDMI can also carry multi-channel audio, and is backwards compatible with DVI (video only).



Audio

Current players include a digital audio output — optical, coaxial, or both. This connection enables them to send Dolby Digital or DTS signals to your A/V receiver for decoding into multi-channel surround sound.

Some models also have built-in decoding, with 5.1-channel analog audio outputs to connect directly to any "5.1-ready" receiver (frequently, these models also play multi-channel DVD-Audio or SACD discs). A few high-end players are equipped with IEEE 1394 jacks (also known as FireWire or i.LINK®); these single-cord connections can carry 5.1-channel music to a compatible receiver. All DVD players also include standard stereo audio jacks for connecting to stereo receivers and stereo TVs.

AudioTrends Showroom

10 Argent Place, Ringwood, VIC 3134

Phone 9874 8233

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