

Ditch the soundbar with new Amazon Echo speakers

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Besides sporting a new round look, Amazon's updated fourth generation Echo speakers have something else going for them. Buy a pair for \$200 and they make fabulous TV speakers.

Without wires spread across the room from the TV.

TV's have gotten way thinner and cheaper over the years, and a big casualty has been the tinny [speaker](#), sending many consumers to soundbars that fit near the TV and connect directly.

The advantages to two Echo speakers instead are huge. Instead of paying anywhere from \$100 to as much as [\\$1,800 \(which includes a multi-speaker soundbar setup\)](#) and having the sound coming from the other side of the room, you can put the little Amazon devices in your bedroom by the bed, and have the sound by your ears.

Beyond just playing music and podcasts, operating your [smart home](#) and answering trivia questions, you get a more versatile speaker and can hear movie soundtracks and dialogue the way audio engineers intended, with fine clarity.

Granted, the \$200 speakers won't be as great as a full surround sound 5.1 or 7.1 multiple speaker system, but they're a whole lot better than the first choice—awful sound from the TV speaker. Again, you won't have have wires spread across the floor or your bedroom or living room, which many soundbars require when you plug in accessory speakers. And you can ditch the soundbar remote. Just use your voice instead.

Competition

Amazon's new fourth generation Echo speakers sport way better sound than last year's model and have the clear TV sound advantage over rivals. Google's Nest Audio speakers don't offer the TV connection, and while Apple's HomePod Mini speakers, coming on Nov. 13, are consumer priced, at \$99, a pair of them won't connect to the TV either. The more expensive original \$299 HomePod speakers will soon do the trick with a software update.

So \$600 or \$200, which will it be?

What you need

But before we get started, just one more caveat. Beyond the Echo speakers, you're going to need one more Amazon device to make this work. The most economical is the Fire TV Stick, Amazon's streaming players, which start at \$29.99, and also sell for \$39 and \$49. But do know that they are heavily discounted during the holidays, so look for big savings in a few weeks. The other device that works with the speakers is the one I used, the \$119 Fire TV Cube, the device that brings in voice control of the TV.

On the Cube, you can say, "Alexa, turn on the TV," without clicking a remote control or ask for specific shows on Netflix and shows you get through an antenna. (It won't do voice control with cable boxes.) You can use the new Echo or Dot speakers, or older models. Here's a complete [list of Amazon devices that are compatible](#).

(Note: An alert Facebook reader, Michael Markman, pointed out that the sound has to come from Amazon's Prime Video platform, which includes Netflix, Hulu, Disney + and local channels, if they're connected to an antenna. But missing in action: three big ones. HBO Max, Peacock and Apple TV +.)

Another reader, Paul Rippington, pointed out on Twitter the workaround he did with Roku to get TV sound from that platform. "I use the Roku app on my phone which has a headphone feature. So I can transfer the TV audio to a really good bluetooth speaker or headphone."

[Roku also sells](#) wireless TV speakers for \$199, but they only connect to Roku branded TCL TVs or to Roku soundbars. They don't work with Roku streaming players. Meanwhile, to get started with Amazon:

Setup

Setup takes place in the Amazon Alexa smartphone app, where you're asked to:

- * Select the Devices tab at the bottom of the screen.
- * Select the + tab on tap and then "Set up Audio System," at the bottom of the page, then "Home Theater."
- * Here is where it could get tricky. You are asked to select your Fire TV device (Streaming Stick, Cube) and then the two "compatible" Echo speakers you want to pair and associate as the TV speakers.
- * If it works, you can name the [home theater](#) ("Jeff's Home Theater") and assign it to a specific room (Bedroom, say.)

Help

In my case, I had so many Echo speakers spread across the house that Amazon had a hard time deciphering which was which. At first I could only get one speaker to play TV sound, not two. Then I had no sound at all.

That's where I found a mostly hidden godsend within the Alexa app: one-click tech support.

Click the question mark on the Alexa app home screen and you're offered the opportunity to either chat or speak, by phone to a human rep. First I tried Chat, but got hung up in translation issues, and never got the answer to the questions. On the second day, I clicked "Speak with a representative" and got a call back from an Amazon rep within 60

seconds.

The caller, who said he was based in the Philippines, had complete access to my Alexa setup, via the app, which is either really creepy, or useful. I chose the latter, as he was able to tell me which speakers to disassociate and get them working correctly with the TV.

And now I've got great [sound](#) coming from the left and right of the bedroom. I could add one speaker, a bass heavy Echo subwoofer, which sells for \$129, but I'm good with the two speakers.

And Alexa, it's great to be doing all this wires free.

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