Amazon’s new Fire HD 8 tablets: Higher prices, higher specs, out today

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- The new Fire HD 8 comes in four colors—White, Black, Twilight Blue, and Plum.
- The upgraded Fire HD 8 Plus model comes in one exclusive color—Slate—and offers additional RAM, optional wireless charging, and a six-month included subscription to Kindle Unlimited.
- This Fire HD 8 Plus is resting in the optional made-for-Amazon wireless charging dock.
- This year’s Fire HD 8 Kids Edition comes with a new and improved case, including adjustable stand for hands-free viewing.

Amazon is updating its eight-inch line of Fire HD tablets today, including a Fire HD 8 ($90), Fire HD 8 Plus ($110—or $140, with optional wireless charging dock), and Fire HD 8 Kids Edition ($140).

All three versions are available for pre-order today, with shipping beginning on June 3.

Base model—Fire HD 8, $90

The base Fire HD 8 doubles the internal storage of the prior generation, going from 16GB to 32GB, and offers later expansion of up to 1TB with an additional microSD card. It also bumps up the RAM a touch, going from 1.5GB in the last generation to 2GB with the new edition. Charging is USB-C, like 2019's Fire HD 10—which is a blessing for both adults and small children, since there is no "upside-down" orientation for USB-C.

The processor in the Fire 8 gets a significant bump from the prior generation, replacing its 1.3GHz quad-core processor with a 2.0GHz. Amazon claims a 30-percent speed boost—but it's still probably not as fast as the larger, more expensive Fire HD 10, which offers an octa-core CPU. Screen resolution remains unchanged, at 1280×800—enough to watch a 720p movie at full resolution.

Battery life also takes an uptick, with Amazon rating the new model at "up to 12 hours" of use, compared to the last generation's "up to 10." These ratings are pretty loose and are described as time spent "reading, browsing the web, watching video, and listening to music"—playing games will generally result in considerably less battery time, as will keeping the screen at full brightness.

Amazon is also offering a new "Game Mode" feature in its Fire OS ecosystem, which allows the user to disable notifications from other apps while playing games—no word yet on whether this new Fire OS feature will be backported to older models or kept exclusive to the new models only.

The new Fire HD 8 models also joins last year's Fire HD 10 in offering Wi-Fi 5 (802.11ac) support—a welcome change from the Wi-Fi 4 (802.11n) only networking of previous HD 8 models. There is no Wi-Fi 6 (802.11ax) support, but we don't think that's a deal-breaker. Very few people have Wi-Fi 6 routers or

mesh kits so far—and in its current state, Wi-Fi 6 is unlikely to be an enormous upgrade for those few who do.

The new model is launching at $90—which is $10 more than the off-sale price of last year's model. The hardware upgrades are worth the extra $10, in our opinion—particularly the shift from micro USB-B to USB-C charging. We wouldn't recommend going for last year's model unless you can find it at truly fire-sale prices—$50 or less—and don't mind getting a minor downgrade all the way around.

The Fire HD 8 is available in White, Black, Twilight Blue, and Plum—and optional cases, which fit either the HD 8 or the upgraded HD 8 Plus, are available for another $30 in Twilight Blue, Charcoal Black, Sandstone White, and Plum.

Upgraded model—Fire HD 8 Plus, $110

For $20 more than the base model, Fire HD 8 Plus offers an extra GB of RAM, wireless charging capability (wireless charger not included), and a 20-percent faster USB-C charger than the base model. It also includes a six-month pre-paid subscription to Kindle Unlimited, an otherwise $10/mo Amazon service offering all-you-can-read consumption of a large but limited set of books and magazines.

The Fire HD 8 Plus comes in an exclusive Slate color not available on the base model, and the same $30 accessory cases for the base model fit the Plus as well. The Fire HD 8 Plus is $110 or can be purchased in a bundle with a made-for-Amazon wireless charging dock for $140.

For the kids—Fire HD 8 Kids Edition, $140

As with previous generations, the Fire HD 8 Kids Edition isn't actually different hardware—it's the base Fire HD 8 plus a rugged, kid-friendly case, a two-year "if they break it, we'll fix it" guarantee, and a year's prepaid subscription to Free

Time Unlimited, Amazon's rotating firehose of kid-friendly game and media content.

The price premium for the Kids' Edition is steeper than it used to be—the ruggedized case, hardware guarantee, and subscription bumps up the price $50 this year, to a total of $140. The case is a significant upgrade from years gone by, with a new stand allowing hands-free viewing.

Even with the increase in price, in our opinion the Kids' Edition is worth it for parents of small children. The FreeTime Unlimited ecosystem offers good parental controls and access to a seemingly never-ending safe and curated stream of content that small children enjoy, with brands and characters they recognize.

Although Amazon describes FreeTime Unlimited as offering "all the content kids age 3-12 want," with profiles configurable to three separate age ranges, in our experience kids tend to "age out" of the FreeTime Unlimited system somewhere around six or seven. Until then, however, it's an excellent service that allows kids to "shop" safely for new apps and content, in a simple environment free of spammers and scammers.

While you could buy a less-expensive Fire HD 8 base model and add a separate FreeTime Unlimited subscription, the first year's subscription already brings you to $126—or $150, for non-Prime customers—and you don't have either the case or the two-year "they break it, we'll replace it" guarantee.

One cautionary note—Amazon says FreeTime Unlimited is currently only available to customers in the United States. Customers in the UK instead get access to Fire for Kids Unlimited—a similar service that we have not seen or tested and was not mentioned in today's press release. We're not certain what, if any, kids' content options are available outside the USA and UK.

The new Kids Edition Fire HD 8 cases with adjustable stands

are available in blue, pink, or purple.

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