Apple’s iPad plans for next year could be a lot less confusing

Apple is reportedly making some changes next year that it hopes will make it easier for people to fit a specific iPad to their needs. For instance, *Bloomberg* reporter Mark Gurman wrote in his *Power On* newsletter today that the next iPad Air will get an M2 chip in addition to the larger second model that’s been rumored.

One of the other ways Apple is reportedly tackling the issue is to drop the 9th-generation model that’s been dangling off of the front of the lineup since last year’s pricier 10th-generation iPad redesign launched. Gurman says sending the 9th-gen iPad out to pasture will let the company “slowly phase out some of its older Pencils.” Presumably, the 2015 Apple Pencil will be the first to go, once there’s no Lightning port iPad to awkwardly plug it into.

Gurman has pegged March for the launch of the new 11-inch and 12.9-inch iPad Air, which would keep Apple’s mid-level on a two-year upgrade cycle. His report today that the Air will get an M2 chip while the Pro models get the M3 nod would firmly put the Air one processor generation behind. But that doesn’t mean the iPad Air will suffer for it, nor that Apple even should give it an M3 chip. Barring any drastic changes in how iPadOS functions that turns iPads into practical laptop replacements for more varied and compute-intensive tasks, the OLED screen that’s rumored for the iPad Pro will be a bigger differentiator for most people than which Apple silicon chip is doing the work.

Gurman also wrote that the new 12.9-inch Air will work with the same Magic Keyboard that’s available today for the iPad Pro. If that’s true, it would make sense if Apple gives the next iPad Air models iPad Pro-like camera arrays. After all, I doubt we’ve phased into an alternate dimension where it wouldn’t drive the company bonkers to see a keyboard case with a big square camera hole on the Air’s single tiny, round camera.

These are good moves for Apple, even if the updates don’t fully sort out the iPad’s awkward situation. Today’s iPads are just too different from one another. Picking based on power needs and hardware features is so much easier if certain other features, like screen size, are the same or at least close enough. But if you really want a big tablet and don’t give a hoot about high refresh rate or high-contrast displays, it’s been annoying that only the iPad Pro offers it — the bigger Air fixes that. Now, if only the company could rectify the iPad accessory situation.

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