

Facebook dating is now available in the US. Here's how it works

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Facebook has long been the place where everyone from college students to divorcees scope out their romantic interests. Now Facebook users in the United States can *officially* use the social network as a dating service—complete with specialized profiles, a matchmaking algorithm, and more. Facebook Dating, which began rolling out in other countries last year and launches in the US today, gives users ages 18 and up access to a suite of features designed to help them find a meaningful relationship. Plenty of them will be familiar to anyone with experience on other dating apps, but a few options take unique advantage of Facebook's biggest asset—its extensive cache of data on you and all your friends.

Facebook Dating lives within the existing Facebook app, but to use it you need to set up a separate profile. The only information carried over is your name and age. The service will present you with potential matches based on your location, indicated preferences, and other factors. You can also choose to match with people who attend the same Facebook events or are part of the same Facebook groups. One thing it won't show you are your existing Facebook friends—that option is turned off by default.

Facebook is also using Dating's US debut to launch several new privacy and security features within the service. And, of course, it's integrating Instagram into Dating. Which is not surprising since the company has been bringing its platforms closer together in various ways all year.

On most dating apps, "people are forced to make a decision off this one profile that never changes and is extremely curated," says Charmaine Hung, a Dating product manager at Facebook. The social network wants to create a more dynamic and authentic experience. Starting today, users will have the opportunity to feature their permanent Instagram posts in their Dating profiles. By the end of the year, Facebook says it will also allow you to share Instagram or Facebook Stories. They won't be Dating-*specific* Stories, but the same ones you already upload for your friends or followers; they will also still erase after 24 hours. The social network isn't the first to have the idea: Tinder announced it would begin integrating Snapchat Stories in April.

Instagram will also become part of Secret Crush, an existing Facebook Dating feature that lets users select up to nine Facebook friends they want to express an interest in—as long as that person indicates they have a crush back. Now your Instagram followers can be Secret Crushes, too—no choosing celebrities or influencers unless they follow you, sorry! If someone adds you to their Secret Crush list, you'll receive a notification. If you then pick the same person for *your* list, Facebook will match you together and reveal your names. If the feelings are one-sided, nothing happens.

Unique safety features

Dating apps like Hinge have historically marketed themselves on their ability to match you with friends of friends—people

with whom you already have existing social ties. Facebook Dating also allows you to do the opposite: you can preemptively *turn off* matching with friends of friends, which may be a welcome option for anyone who wants to date outside their network. The feature may also help LGBTQ+ people who are not out to their communities. You can also block people from seeing your Facebook Dating profile, even if you want them to still have access to your Facebook or Instagram accounts.

Enlarge / Facebook Dating shows you matches (left) and also lets you message a friend about your location when you meet someone (right).

Facebook Dating's most exciting new feature builds upon a well-established safety practice for online dating. Before meeting someone in person for the first time, many people—especially women—tell a friend or family member where

they're going and when they expect to be back, in case something happens. More recently, people have been sharing their location using tools like Apple's Find My Friends. Facebook will allow you to automatically open Messenger from Dating and tell a friend the name of the person you're going on a date with, as well as the time and place where you plan to hang out. Fifteen minutes before your date happens, that person will receive a notification reminder and access to your live location. But unlike Find My Friends, your location is only shared for up to an hour, at least for now.

"We're definitely playing around with the timing," says Hung. "We did want to make sure that people weren't accidentally sharing their live location longer than they intended to."

The basics of Facebook Dating

Facebook Dating will live as a tab within Facebook's main menu on mobile. When you first set up your profile, Facebook will ask you to specify your gender and the gender(s) of the people you're interested in. According to a preview shared by Facebook, the options are "cis woman," "trans woman," "cis man," "trans man," and "non-binary person." Your gender identity won't be shared with potential matches. You can express interest in "everyone," "women," "men," "trans women," or "trans men." You can also fill in details like your height, religion, job title, where you work, where you went to school, and whether you have children.

You can complete your profile with up to a total of nine photos and ice-breaker questions provided by Facebook, like "What does the perfect day look like?" For now, you can't write your own. Once your profile is set, Facebook says it will start matching you with potential dates based on "your preferences, interests, and other things you do on Facebook." The company says this includes factors like where you're from, the Facebook groups you're in, and where you say you went to

school. You also can only match with people who are located within roughly 100 miles of you. Dating doesn't require you to continuously share your location with Facebook, but you do need to turn on location services in order to verify you are where you say you are—whether that's just once, when you're home, or if you update it if you move or travel.

Facebook Dating presents matches one at a time, but it doesn't have a certain famous right-or-left swiping mechanism. Instead, to start a conversation, you need to like a person's profile or respond directly to one of their questions, photos, or Instagram posts, similar to dating app Hinge. For example, you can click on a picture of their dog and send a message saying, "He's cute!" To turn someone down, you tap "Not Interested." You can also re-review someone's profile using a feature called "Second Look."

Facebook Dating messages live in their own separate inbox, and they're strictly text-only. You can't send links, photos, or payments for security reasons. (So-called romance scams have been a problem online for years, including on Facebook.)

Will Facebook Dating find love in the US?

Facebook is entering a crowded online dating market in the United States, but the company also has certain advantages weighing in its favor. It's already a unique player, since many competitors rely on its API to power their own apps. The company says it has no current plans to cut off data access to apps like Bumble and Tinder, which rely on Facebook to tell users information like whether a match has friends in common. Facebook Dating also leverages other parts of the social network that apps like Tinder can't access. You can "unlock" any Facebook event you were invited to or Facebook group you're in and begin matching with people who also opted in to find potential dates on the guest list or membership roll. All

events and groups are fair game—even that concert you attended five years ago. No other dating service has that.

Facebook Dating could be a significant boon for the social network. It will provide Facebook with a trove of new information about how people connect with each other, which could be lucrative for its advertising business in the future. But for now, the company says it has no plans to monetize Dating. There are no ads in the service, and advertisers can't use information from it to target you.

Even if it doesn't inform advertising, Dating may prove valuable in other ways. Growth on Facebook's core app has slowed, and many people in their 20s say they've deleted it recently. That demographic is already more likely to be single, and maybe they'll be more likely to use Facebook if it has an official dating service. That's especially true now that Dating is integrated with Instagram, a platform already popular with younger generations. And no matter what age you are, checking out your latest matches, honing your dating profile, checking whether your crush likes you back—these are all potentially powerful boosters of engagement.

In addition to the US, Facebook Dating is available in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Laos, Malaysia, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, the Philippines, Singapore, Suriname, Thailand, Uruguay, and Vietnam. Europeans will have to wait until early 2020 to gain access to the service.

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