The best cheap wireless earbuds to buy in 2020

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Spending a little on any of these picks will get you a lot

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As good as products like the Bose QuietComfort Earbuds and AirPods Pro can be, it doesn’t take spending over $200 to get a perfectly good set of wireless earbuds. You can even drop below the price level of Samsung’s Galaxy Buds Plus and Jabra’s 75ts and still find something that’ll do the job just fine. For this set of recommendations, I’m going to stick under an MSRP of $100.

You can find an endless list of true wireless earbuds under that price on Amazon from random brands you’ve probably never heard of. But I’m sticking with some tried and true companies that can be found in stores and have established customer service operations. Just because you’re being sensible about money doesn’t mean you should be left in the lurch if something goes wrong.

These picks won’t fully match the audio fidelity or deep bench of features of premium earbuds. You’ll give up things like active noise cancellation and wireless charging, but they’re still plenty enjoyable in their own right — and retain a lot of the convenience factor that makes true wireless buds so appealing to begin with.

The best cheap wireless earbuds for 2020

Okay, so maybe the blue / yellow / red combo looks like it came out of a Happy Meal, but at least there’s also a black option.

1. Skullcandy Jib True

Best cheap wireless earbuds for $30

Skullcandy just recently put out its most affordable pair of true wireless earbuds yet. The $29.99 Jib True — available in black or this very attention-getting mix of blue, red, and yellow — manage to deliver a solid mix of specs and serviceable sound quality. Battery life lasts up to six hours, they've got the status quo IPX4 sweat resistance rating, and you can use either of the earbuds independently. That last part is something that many more expensive earbuds (hi, Jabra) still don't offer.

The earbud controls aren't customizable, but Skullcandy packs in pretty much all of the functions you'd want (track skip / back, volume, voice assistant, and play / pause) into the large single button on each earbud. They've been easy to memorize in my time testing the Jib True buds.

If there's one hangup with the Jib True, it's that Skullcandy hasn't really optimized them for use with multiple devices. Whereas pricier earbuds tend to remember a handful of pairing sources, the company recommends that you delete these from their current device's Bluetooth list before repairing with another. It's not the end of the world, but it's also fairly inconvenient.

As for how they sound, I found that the Jib True made for a solid seal in my ear with the included large-sized tips. This always helps with bass response, and the Jib True definitely put most of their sonic weight behind the bass. It's to the point where the low end is overemphasized and takes away from the mid- and high-range frequencies. I'm guessing that's partly intentional since a more neutral sound signature would reveal the inherent weaknesses of $30 earbuds. Acoustic guitars lack warmth, and everything here feels like it's

happening in the middle of your head, so the soundstage is quite narrow.

But… 30 bucks, folks. The Jib True earbuds never made me want to rip them out of my ears from audio agony, and I consider that a win. Nor did I run into sync issues when watching videos, and their connectivity proved robust and dependable when walking around busy Brooklyn streets. Perhaps most surprising of all, Skullcandy backs these $30 earbuds with a two-year warranty. If I do have one gripe, it’s that they use a Micro USB connector. We’re supposed to be long past that now, but I can forgive it for the price point. If you’re willing to spend more, stepping up to Skullcandy’s pricier earbuds like the $50 Evo Sesh will get you improved audio and other features like integrated Tile tracking.

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Skullcandy Jib True

Prices taken at time of publishing.

Skullcandy’s Jib True prove it’s possible to make enjoyable true wireless earbuds for $30.

Unlike the original OnePlus Buds, the OnePlus Buds Z have silicone tips for an in-ear seal.

2. OnePlus Buds Z

Great cheap wireless earbuds for $50

Jokes about their troubles with customs aside, I wasn't enthralled with the original OnePlus Buds. Hard plastic one-size-fits-all earbuds never work out well for me, and these weren't an exception. But the newer (and less expensive) OnePlus Buds Z, on the other hand, are a much better fit. These ones have traditional silicone tips and sit way more securely in my ears.

Despite their $49.99 price, the OnePlus Buds Z include convenience features like auto-pause when an earbud is removed, and they also support Android's NFC-based Fast Pair for quick setup. And they're rated a surprisingly durable IP55 for dust and water resistance, making them a good pick for workouts — as long as you're okay with no ambient sound mode.

Battery life is likely their biggest weakness. OnePlus estimates they can last up to five hours of continuous playback, but I've averaged a bit over four hours so far. But you at least get several full recharges from the case, which the company says has 20 hours worth of juice.

The controls are also a bit rudimentary. Out of the box, all you can do is double tap to skip tracks. If you use an Android phone that *isn't* made by OnePlus, you can install the HeyMelody app to configure the earbuds' tap controls a bit more; OnePlus phones will let you do this once the earbuds are connected.

I've been quite pleased with how the OnePlus Buds Z sound. They've got smaller drivers than the regular OnePlus Buds but still output a nicely rounded audio profile. Again, the emphasis is on bass (and the treble is boosted), but it's not quite so blatant as with the $30 Skullcandys. Watching videos across a few devices worked fine, and I didn't have any

connectivity problems. Also, unlike the Skullcandys, the OnePlus Buds Z work nicely with more than one device. You can long-press either earbud for three seconds to switch back and forth between the two most recently paired devices.

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OnePlus Buds Z

Prices taken at time of publishing.

The OnePlus Buds Z get the basics right if you can tolerate their limited controls.

1More's ColorBuds combine very good sound quality with a splash of style that many earbuds at this price range lack.

3. 1More ColorBuds

Best cheap wireless earbuds for style

1More is one of those companies that's quietly been making great audio products for a long time. With the ColorBuds, the focus is on comfort – each bud weighs only 4.1 grams, barely more than an AirPod – and looks. Sound quality is also a clear step above the previous two picks, with greater clarity, a wider soundstage, and more nuance in general. (There's still plenty of bass kick, though.) You'd hope for good sound at their $100 price, and these do come through.

Battery life is up to six hours of continuous listening (22 with the case), and the ColorBuds are rated IPX5 for water and sweat resistance. While most of the picks on this list support the standard AAC and SBC Bluetooth codecs, 1More adds Apt-X to the mix on Android.

The ColorBuds are available in a handful of attractive colors which, combined with the price and excellent performance, might be enough to sway some people toward them instead of AirPods.

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1More ColorBuds

- $100
- $100
- 0% off

Prices taken at time of publishing.

The 1More Colorbuds combine standout style with very good sound quality.

The long stems on Anker's Soundcore Liberty Air 2 earbuds help the four microphones pick up your voice.

4. Anker Soundcore Liberty Air 2

Best cheap wireless earbuds for voice calls

Though they press right up against our $100 price ceiling, Anker’s Soundcore Liberty Air 2 remain one of the best pairs of “budget” true wireless earbuds on the market. They’re somewhat AirPods-like in design, thanks to the long stems, but this results in the best microphone performance of anything in this price bracket.

The Liberty Air 2s also have lengthy battery life, lasting for up to seven hours of straight playback. (With the case, you get 28 hours of battery life in total.) Sound quality is enjoyable but falls short of what you’d get with the 1More buds — and Anker’s tap controls can prove a bit finicky at times.

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Anker Soundcore Liberty Air 2

- $85
- $100
- 16% off

Prices taken at time of publishing.

Anker’s Soundcore Liberty Air 2 earbuds do a lot right and have great mics for voice calls.

The Beats Flex are the first earbuds from the company to use a

USB-C connector.

Best neckband-style cheap wireless earbuds

Not everyone loves the concept of earbuds without a wire connecting them, and if that’s you, the recent Beats Flex are a great option – and that still applies for people with Android phones. These $50 “neckbuds” improve upon the older Beats X in several ways: they charge over USB-C instead of Apple’s Lightning connector, they have long-lasting battery life of up to 12 hours, and the built-in microphone is a reliable performer for voice and Zoom calls.

The Beats Flex sound better than AirPods and many earbuds at this price range and beyond. They’ve also got a convenient auto-pause feature when you attach the two earbuds together via their magnetic connection. Connectivity is free of any dropouts or other issues, and iPhone owners can expect the usual instant setup process just by bringing the Beats Flex close to their phone. But Beats also has an Android app that lets you customize settings and shows the remaining battery percentage.

One downside is that the Flex buds aren’t rated for water or sweat resistance, so I can’t recommend them for the gym. But outside of that, they’re a great pick. Sometimes it’s nice to just let earbuds hang around your neck when not in use instead of fussing with a charging case.

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Beats Flex

Prices taken at time of publishing.

The Beats Flex neckband wireless earbuds are a great choice regardless of what phone you use.

Sony’s WF-XB700 are the best budget wireless earbuds if you can find them on sale. They offer terrific performance, a steady fit, and lengthy battery life.

6. Sony WF-XB700 earbuds

Best cheap wireless earbuds if you can find a deal

I’m a big fan of Sony’s entry-level true wireless earbuds, the WF-XB700s. I’ve owned a pair for several months now, and I’ve never once had to put up with connection problems, battery frustrations, or other bugs. They also fit better and seal more tightly in my ears than pretty much anything on this list. Your results may vary, but there’s something about the design that works tremendously well with my ears.

The XB700 buds last for up to nine hours of continuous listening and have all the oomph you could ever want. It can border on too much, but Sony does a nice job of not letting the bass take away from everything else. The mids and high frequencies aren’t drowned out. These earbuds stick out of your ears a bit more than most, and they lack any kind of ambient sound mode – which some might see as a negative considering how good the passive noise isolation is.

I quite like the matte finish on the XB700s and their charging case, and the buds lock into the case with a stronger magnetic pull than is typical; this has always ensured they juice up as expected. They use physical buttons on each earbud for

controls, which I prefer over touch gestures.

Technically, the Sonys retail for over $100, but they’re on sale for less so regularly (recently as low as $68) that they’re still worth a mention. There’s a ton to like about them, even if there’s nothing flashy about them. They’re a great example of Sony keeping things simple and doing it right.

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Sony WF-XB700

- $68
- $128
- 47% off

Prices taken at time of publishing.

Sony’s WF-XB700 true wireless earbuds have a terrific, secure fit and offer lengthy battery life.

Photography by Chris Welch / The Verge

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